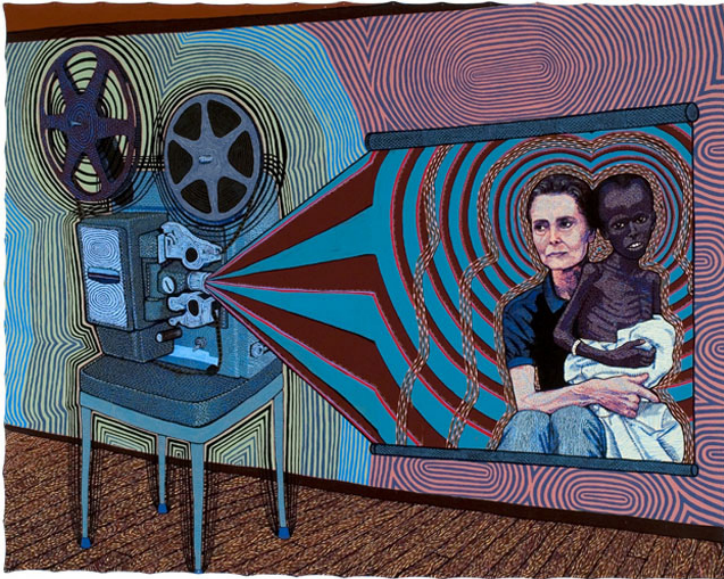


Patrick Lundeen: The Lundeen Effect

One of the most endearing qualities of Patrick Lundeen's art is that he's clearly amused by what he paints. This is far from a bad thing. On the contrary. It gives the work a genuine quality that feels as though he's taking us into his confidence. He paints the pictures he can't see anywhere else and that appeal to his quirky sense of humor. I think that this is why most artists are driven to create, that is, to fill a vacuum that somehow aids in making sense of it all. Lundeen is of the global media generation, growing up on popular north American TV and the surfeit supply of



soft entertainment and accompanying advertising. Perhaps as a coping mechanism his art provides a means to somehow exert control over this constant flow of images, affording the opportunity for some personal commentary about what amounts to an assault on the senses. Everywhere visual information fights for our attention, crowding into all available spaces and yet still managing to feel somehow mute. Face it, images no longer hold much power on their own. One event poster put up in the street is rarely enough these days and must now be accompanied by dozens. No doubt the result of image saturation, our brain copes

with this visual spam by fire walling the input. Lundeen's paintings take all this as a source palette from which he clips and pastes images together to pump up their impact, to tweak what we might expect, creating a moment of rupture and confusion which is rich terrain for both change and discovery. He destabilizes the viewer, causing us to momentarily shut down our defenses, while inviting us to share, for a moment, in his joke. .

These paintings convince you to look. The obsessive and fussed over surfaces tell the viewer that the artist has made a serious time investment and that he's genuinely committed to what he's trying to say - or he's insane. Subconsciously we react to this. Without the worried surfaces we might not get drawn into the process which is so essential to understanding the work. Like the outsider art of the mentally unstable, with its obsessive compulsive patterning of the world, Lundeen's application style spreads across the surface of the canvas like a virus, a rash of texture and color. You can walk up close to these works so that your nose is almost resting against the surfaces to see the build up of mark making. Like everything else about these pictures the colors are odd, just a little bit off. They pop and clash with each other, some rising off the surface while others sink, flat and opaque, almost dull. Add to the mix mangled perspectives that push and pull in contradicting directions that assault the picture plain, derailing any hope for illusion, and you have a dynamic fusion of discordance.

The clip art Photoshop aesthetic apparent in the picture construction informs the work with

a software sophistication. When the artist has decided on the combination of images he then moves in close, gets out a brush that dictates laying on small stabs of paint, and begins to work. Imagine that he selects the image, goes to the filter menu, and clicks on Lundeen. The process of painting is a matter of setting the filter parameters – how course are the strokes, what colors, and what direction. Image processing software, like Photoshop, has radically changed how we relate to our constructed visual environment. This has had as much effect on painting as on any other kind of image making. In a lot of ways it's beginning to normalize what we see accord-



ing to certain arbitrary decisions made by code writers. After working with Photoshop for a few years I remember starting to notice the various filters and effects being used in the advertising around me. It became more and more annoying every time I saw a billboard and could identify the exact Adobe background texture. Even though images are everywhere they have all become the same. Do we even see them any more? That's the question Lundeen is asking us. He's putting something in front of us and asking – Do you see this?

When I look at these paintings I see traces of the naivety of folk art and the mysticism of Australian Aboriginal dream paintings. The artist is the 21 century shaman telling the story of his last walk-about through a vast, saturated, land where images leer out at him and smart ass jokes wait on the tip of his tongue. Collectively the work creates an image landscape that seems both awkward and comfortable at the same time. There is also a sharp edge to the wit underlying these works. What appears at first to be clunky, ill-fitting, paste-ups reveal themselves to be pointed critiques of a society on the verge of collapse. But it's not only society that is targeted here. Lundeen may be the jester in the court of contemporary painting poking fun at it's high art pretenses. The oddly over worked surfaces, the garish colors, and the quirky choice of low and high culture images, are like the uncultured cousins who crashed the cocktail party. They talk too loud, have no manners, and insult the guests. That's what I like about these works. They are unapologetically what they are. Lundeen isn't trying to make work that appeals to anybody but himself. Unlike Martin Kippenberger, who also created unruly cousins, Lundeen's works are trying to be aesthetically pleasing but are too eccentric to be easy. Kippenberger, on the other hand, was the master of ugly things. The large works in this show are painted on canvas tarps which physically undermine the authority of the stretcher, making a break with the history of easel painting. It's an expedient solution as to how to manage a large piece, having more connection with display and advertising than fine art. It's the best method for the job at hand.

The images the artist has placed together resonate with a particular meaning for him, often they come from a memory or the source is a dream. However like everything else that's set adrift in the world it's not absolutely necessary that we arrive at the same conclusions about what particular combinations mean. Woody Allan, a dogs head, an Alpha Romaro car, an image of Audrey Hepburn sitting with a sick African child, all have a kind of generality about them in that they are like freeware, everybody can use them. The painting entitled Sad Movie has the image of Hepburn and child projected by a noisy old 16 mm projector, like the kind that used to be in schools. This pop pieta puts a spin on Michaelangelo's masterpiece of Mary holding the dead Jesus in her arms. The paint is applied in obsessive strokes and lines wrapping around the forms causing ripples and puddles that seem to vibrate or shimmer. The skewed perspective is all wrong, but all right too. It works because in the end it doesn't matter. We get it.

Today you have to ask - what can a painting be? If you're adhering to an avant-garde agenda you could say that there is nothing left for painting to accomplish but to rehash ideas over and over again. In some ways this is true, but we have to remember that what makes each painting unique is the individual artist that made it. So the challenge isn't so much to break new ground or establish another ism but rather to develop a constituency, a following or audience for the work to address. Lundeen is recruiting viewers to share in a laugh with him.

Lundeen considers film to be the highest art form today and as such it plays a central role in how he approaches his painting. He is both the director and cinematographer as he constructs these single frame scenes. This could also be responsible for his move to larger works that start to feel more like the big screen. The Fancy Burning Car is a freeze frame in an action where an Alpha Romao is burning. We don't know why, where, or how. All we see is a frozen moment implying a narrative we are left to create. In The Midnight Creeps double images of Woody Allen leer out windows of a log cabin at a bikini clad blonde. The dirty old man can't keep his eyes off her. The painting is dark, dreamy, and odd. The door to the building is painted with concentric red circles, like a target or vortex, that draws you in. Is Woody emanating some kind of force that will eventually lure the unsuspecting woman into his domain? The woman has a glow around her, the object of desire, or an angel.

In terms of the best paintings being done today Lundeen's work is well situated. He's carving out a territory that sets his work apart. By default his quirky humor and eclectic interest in popular imagery strike a note with everyone. We're all familiar with the sources because of what we have in common: we are all a part of a growing cultural hegemony spreading around the planet. I heard someone say that every ten minutes a language disappears. I'm not surprised by a statement like that. What replaces culturally specific and significant imagery are the kinds of pictures that populate Lundeen's paintings. But it would be a mistake to say that he is a "Pop" artist, far from it. His work is a part of a critical discourse that obliquely comes at the issues, raising a few questions without the arrogance of purporting to have answers. There is something humble about that and by looking we can feel included. I can't put my finger on exactly why this works, which is probably one of the artist's successes. He's left the work open while managing confu-

sion, raising a smoke screen that we have to feel our way through, penetrating into a world of unknowable knowns.

In the end we're left with a body of work that speaks to the artist's engagement with his world. He's working his way through it and the art is what's left behind as he moves on in his search to both make sense and to feel that he's an active part of the process with something unique to say. Art making affirms the maker's voice, even if it can barely be heard above the din of every day. These paintings shiver with the artist's presence in every brush stroke. What strikes me most is that I feel Patrick Lundeen's paintings want to be looked at and in doing so we see the artist.

Randall Anderson