

PATTI OLEON

By Todd Camplin

Two years ago, I visited a show of photographs by Andrew Williams at the Magnolia Art Gallery. I first thought that the work was digital, but it turned out his images used traditional photography. I was fooled because Williams was reflecting in his work a kind of reaction against digitally manipulated photography. Recently at Cris Worley Fine Arts, I happened upon another artist tackling the digital photograph dilemma, only instead of reacting against this the digital divide, Patti Oleon embraces and even celebrates the manipulated image. However, her images are not photos, but paintings.



Helix

If you download many camera phone apps, you will get the ability to split your screen and take an image and make an opposite image in the same frame. Digital editing tools have been able to do this for years so now the effect has become a bit cliché in its overuse. Instant and a bit silly, I thought I had seen all I wanted to see of this kind of manipulation. Then Patti Oleon came along and gave this old tool new life. I was forced to reevaluate my dismissive attitude. After all with a click of a button, a reverse image can just magically appear. It reminds me of a bit by comedian Louis C.K. about how the commonplace of having a bad time at the

airport should be trumped by the miracle of people flying. Oleon slowed down this amazing technology and likely takes more time than someone working in traditional photography. Oleon had to paint both sides identical in order to create the same effect. Any mistake and illusion would be blown. The painting *Helix* gave me shivers just thinking about her process.

Patti Oleon chooses themes of color in each of her works. Her paintings are interiors where the light seems to push its way into the picture, but held at bay by architectural elements. This creates darker, sometimes cool tones or earthy colors. Because her paintings are so symmetrical, you can start to see illusions to faces. This pareidolia effect made me see eyes, a nose, and a mouth in several of her paintings. Of course, these are illusions, just like the world she is depicting. She described her scenes as “layering of artifice.” I see Oleon using Jacques Derrida’s method to deconstruct her subject revealing the false constructs of past definitions of beauty and value in these places. However, Oleon likely reinforces our fetish with the symbols of wealth by the fact that she is creating a symbol of that world, an oil painting. Which has its own history and cache.

Oleon is well aware of the traditions of the past masters, because she employs some these methods. I would love to see a show of her work in various stages of production, including her research and digital approach. Although it was a real treat to see all these finished products. “Patti Oleon: Parallel Space” at Cris Worley Fine Art will be down on January 3rd. And in case you were wondering, Andrew Williams is producing strong narrative photography which doesn’t seem to be a reactionary, but rather lyrical, sublime, and a little journalistic in nature.