Artist Profile: Michael Guidetti

Ceci Moss | Wed Feb 22nd, 2012 9:35 a.m.

Michael Guidetti, *Bell, Book, and Candle*, 2010

You originally studied painting as an undergraduate. How did this spark or inform your interest in perspective? How and when did you begin to investigate 3D digital imaging software (like Maya) and its use of perspective?

When studying painting I became interested in the viewer's physical relationship to the image and that naturally led into thinking about perspective. Since then, a lot of my paintings have been composed from a one-point perspective with the idea that the scene is drawn from the perspective of the viewer as they are standing in front of it. This began to dovetail with my longstanding interests in computer graphics and virtual environments, which due to their dependence on the user's subjective viewpoint, most often use this same visual perspective. With an image drawn from this type of perspective, one may feel as if they are no longer looking at an objective depiction of a space, but are looking into or

existing inside it.

I was also interested in the relationship between abstract and representational imagery in painting, a pretty common painting concern. I was particularly curious about how the context of a semi-representational setting could influence the reading of an abstract shape. My early paintings were trying to smash these two types of representation together. I was then intrigued by the possibility of expanding this idea further into the work's form and I began layering projected 3D computer graphics on top of the mixed-media paintings I was doing.

A few of your pieces, such as *[Untitled (Standards)](.)* (2009), *[Bounce Room 1](.)* (2009), and *[Bounce Room 2](.)* (2009), depict standard figures and shapes used in digital animation, such as balls and the Utah teapot. Why are these ubiquitous and recognizable figures featured so prominently in your work?

Untitled (Standards) may be the most intentional in acknowledging these standard objects' historical roles like you mention. The objects in the piece are shown as some type of archetypical virtual object reverently being preserved in a timeless environment. Most of the models on the pedestals in that piece are rendered with the actual data from Stanford where they were originally digitally scanned (all but the teapot). It's interesting to think of these early models as an origin story for computer graphics and the starting point for a new kind of visual experience. When a new 3D graphics technology is developed, out of some sense of lineage or tribute, the creators make sure that rendering a teapot or a clay bunny work nicely. I find something funny and compelling about that.

On the other hand, *Bounce Room 1* and *Bounce Room 2* are using that aesthetic for more economical reasons. I think both of these works are attempting to embody something basic about their form in order to make the co-operative relationship between the two separate elements as evident as possible; a one-point perspective painting with a projected digital image overlaid. The digital projection represented as three red, green, and blue spherical lights; and the painted environment as five flat planes receding in perspective. That's about as far as I could boil them down to. Separately they are elementary and flat, but when they come together, the simulated light and physics of the spheres bouncing around in the space becomes illusionistic. *Bounce Room 2* complicates things a little further by adding the wood structure and lights.

"The study" has a long history in painting, where drafts or sketches help to develop the final painting or certain aspects within it. The study is unfinished, and is seen as less significant than the ultimate, complete product. It suggests a fixed point in time and space, where the artist labors to perfect that representation. *The Bounce Room* pieces, however, seem to exist in this liminal space between "study" and finished "work" – an aspect that is perhaps related to software. In contrast to the complete work or the finished masterpiece, we now have layers that can mutate easily, and a work's fixity becomes displaced. With *the Bounce Room* series (and more recently,

with _Snare_), I feel you're juxtaposing these two approaches: the painting of the room on the wall suggests a "study" through its use of rough strokes of paint, but the projection signals a digital "study" by the use of Maya's shapes, defaults, and formats. I'm wondering if you can comment on this.

I don't consciously separate a study from the final work that much. I usually have a some vague idea or direction for a work before I begin, but I think my process works similar to how some painting practices might, where one starts with nothing and builds an image up and tears it down repeatedly until it somehow comes together to feel "finished". I will do drawings around ideas, but it's more of a conceptual stage rather than planning for a specific outcome like I see a study being. I do have a lot of false starts and sharp turns along the way though, so there is some residue left in the work of edits and changes, maybe that is part of what you are seeing. I guess I see it more of an evolution of a whole work, rather than a study being a separate thing from the final piece. It's all incorporated in. A piece like Snare makes that more apparent, where there is a designated image area in the middle of the composition, and then this other external sketchy kind of information around the outside, but they are both informing each other.

Digital processes, like you mention, are quite conducive to a fluid way of working like this. It's so simple to undo something or branch off from a certain point to try something new and then easily come back to a previous state. So, perhaps the risk software removes from experimentation relieves the need for as much initial study or planning.

One of your most ambitious installations to date is the piece _Bell, Book, and Candle_ that was shown at Jancar Jones Gallery in 2010. For the work, you installed a green screen 3D animation studio that took up the entire interior space of the gallery. This studio then was then used recursively to produce an animated rendering of the gallery as a green screen animation studio. What was the idea behind this artwork? Why the title "Bell, Book, and Candle"?

The impetus for that installation came from a fascination with the production environments used for green screen and other digital video compositing processes. As a formal device, the green screen itself functions in a unique way. A white surface can be in stasis as "blank" or "empty", like a blank wall or a blank page, but a chroma-key green surface is never stable in this way. It's never simply blank, but always in the process of being replaced either in real-time from a separate viewpoint or later in post-production. When you see an object or a scene in front of a green screen, it's an odd experience where you see that a specific context exists, but not what it is. "A man is standing on _____ while holding _____, staring into the distance at _____." I was curious to see what would happen when changing the formal elements of a space like a gallery away from a blank neutral state into a something more unstable like this; and further how a viewer in that space would locate themselves. There's something interesting about how our mind's work when we are confronted with an incomprehensible experience or a lack of context.

The title comes from an old phrase that has lost some of its original meaning, but is generally associated with the occult. It is a list of tools and is loosely being related to collection of electronic environmental measuring equipment on a table in the center of the installation, which is loosely based off the gear a paranormal investigator would use. The installation was partially inspired by a film called, The Stone Tape, where I originally heard the phrase.

One of your latest pieces _Superimposed_ features a small digital photograph of a room-overlaid on top of a drawing of the same interior. It immediately reminded me of the perspective one has within augmented reality. Is this the effect you were going for in this work? If not, what was the idea behind the piece?

I was not explicitly thinking about augmented reality technology, but that's an interesting way to look at it. It does have a sort of HUD thing going on with that window in a window. My works often seem to involve some type of comparison of two elements, multiple perspectives or mediums. In this case you see the original image and its painted interpretation together at once. The low-res image quality of that video still gave it a painterly look to me and that was a simple starting point to make the complimentary watercolor painting. The source image is from an old "screamer" internet video, where a seemingly harmless video gets interrupted with a loud noise and/or scary image. Translating that into the stillness of a painting seemed interesting to me.

Age:

27

Location:

San Francisco, CA

How long have you been working creatively with technology? How did you start?

Hard to say. I was interested in computers and technology at a young age and was lucky enough to have parents who supported my curiosity.

Describe your experience with the tools you use. How did you start using them?

I liked to draw very much when I was younger and was always excited to experiment with computers, but I never considered any of that in the realm of art. I went to art school with only a vague direction of what I was looking for. I was studying drawing and painting at the time, and only towards the end of education did really computers start to creep back into that. I don't think I had really that much about "Art" in the traditional sense until school and it was only later that I discovered I may be able to also employ my interests in computers for that purpose. Now I go back and forth between the computer and physical mediums, whatever works.

Where did you go to school? What did you study?

The California College of The Arts in San Francisco & Oakland, CA. I studied in the Painting / Drawing Department.

What traditional media do you use, if any? Do you think your work with traditional media relates to your work with technology?

My practice often seems to revolve around painting and drawing, which is probably symptomatic of my time in school. Drawing can be a useful and quick way to work out ideas. Ultimately though I try not to make distinctions between mediums like that and let the work decide the best medium to convey itself. Any kind of technology is just another medium available like a pencil or paint.

Are you involved in other creative or social activities (i.e. music, writing, activism, community organizing)?

I currently play drums in a band called Dimples, a project of my friend Kevin Parme.

What do you do for a living or what occupations have you held previously? Do you think this work relates to your art practice in a significant way?

I work for a gallery in San Francisco called Ratio 3, doing admin type things. I'm able to

see a lot of art through my job so I'm sure that has had an influence on me. I treat my day job and art practice separately though.

Who are your key artistic influences?

There are many, not sure.

Have you collaborated with anyone in the art community on a project? With whom, and on what?

I haven't done much collaboration.

Do you actively study art history?

I try to, it's definitely interesting to me. I try to cast a wide net though, and not let "art history" be my only influence though.

Do you read art criticism, philosophy, or critical theory? If so, which authors inspire you?

Again, I try to read a wide variety of things and treat them all with the same level of consideration. Whatever comes across and sticks.

Are there any issues around the production of, or the display/exhibition of new media art that you are concerned about?

Each work brings up different production/display issues, there's always a new challenge. I wouldn't say my concerns are limited to "new media art" alone.

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