



Faux-tography

MARTY WALKER GALLERY MAY - JUNE 2006

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Ted Kincaid
Seascape 418, 2006
Digital photograph
43 x 55 inches



Ted Kincaid
Everything and Nothing, 2006
Digital photograph
24 x 24 inches

Ted Kincaid invents unrealities through photography, and in the process he reinvents the medium. If the photograph has always been about a negotiation between the original and the copy, reality and the ersatz, Kincaid's re-embodiment of the photographic image takes heed of only part of the equation. He shears this dyad of half of its load, making photographs that merely suggest reality. His *Seascapes* showing at Marty Walker Gallery are false: they are computer-generated purple-gray surfaces based on nothing real. The camera is still the prevaricator of the real, but what it prevaricates — the stuff of its picturing — is up for grabs.

It is no small feat to rip asunder reality from photography and still call the image a photograph. When Jean-Luc Godard declared 'photography is truth' in 1960, he implicitly laid claim to the ability of the camera, both photographic and motion picture, to construct environs, identities, and thought patterns. At the same time, it was an utterance that literally has a history going back to the very birth of the camera, to the experimental light-and-shadow of Joseph Niépce, deadpan macabre of Matthew Brady and grungy reformism of Jacob Riis. Whether or not intentional, Godard's pithy phrase reminds us that the camera was born to dance with reality.

Though originally propounding the bona fide certainty of the real, ultimately the camera would bear its unraveling. Godard was not the only one advocating such technological doubling, that the photograph captures reality as thing and construction, as truth and opinion. What Gilles Deleuze described in terms of the 'overthrow of Platonism' was the mainstay of the philosophical movement called French Post Structuralism in the 1960s. In keeping with this intellectual coup d'état, Kincaid's *Seascapes* are 'phantasmatic simulacra' or 'semblances.' Rather than being copies of an original, or 'iconic copies,' they have very little, if any, relation to origins or an original. Kincaid's shiny, tight Plexi panels revel in the absolute degradation of any such origins resulting from new technology.

What is remarkable about his images is that they reflect a new condition of the putative revolution. What once marked a rebellion has become normative. The Internet, along with its great-great-great-great grandparent the printing press, made locating 'origins' and 'the original' a rather moot point. Questions of origins and originality are the dangerous Kinderspiel of the rightwing, toys of brainwashing and power grabbing for Constitutional Originalists and Christian fundamentalists. Kincaid makes hay out of the folly of this so-called reality, playing in a field of digital bits and shards and using his computer to fashion soothing fields of undulating striations.

This show debuts a promising shift, and thus also a healthy vibrancy, in Kincaid's work. The artist's last phase of picture making was a matter of dandying-up clouds on the computer in an Abba-esque palette of purple, pink and baby blue. Works from this phase, such as *L.A. Sky 723* and *Thunderhead 21*, are hung in the back room at Marty Walker. Such virtuoso foppery has given way to subdued rippling form. Clouds are still present but they are no longer bright and cheery. Few are the billowy cumulus type; many are the more ominous thin stratus. The color palette has shifted into a russet-blue-gray spectrum and there is now a defined horizon line, where sky meets plumb-line watery basin. While in fact more fake than the last batch in that they are not based on any original photographic image, these photos seem real. They do not wear their fakery overtly.

Though Kincaid is wont to deny the Conceptualism of his work, it is altogether present. Like the successes of contemporary painting, the powerful punch of Kincaid's work is largely driven by its provocative doubt. What I am getting at here is the way in which the images propose a questioning of not just reality but of the medium. Yes, they query 'What is reality?' More profoundly however, and in a turn toward medium-specificity, they also wallop 'What is photography and what can photography be?' There is also the implicit political critique in this work. Whether you like it or not, to make fakery is to pull the rug out from under the power-brokers of reality — those who told you long ago to 'stop doing art and get a real job.' It is also to markedly reject the backward glances so ungallantly fostered by the abovementioned Originalists and fundamentalists and to, in turn, confirm in altogether Nietzschean fashion a healthy forgetting of any such origins.

In addition to the series of images lining the wall variously numbered and titled *Seascape*, the nine-paneled *Everything and Nothing* is more evidence of the change in the artist's oeuvre. Here we find Kincaid having fabricated a different kind of scenery: snow-covered forest bottom. Kincaid digitally manipulates in funky muted colors and odd-cropped cuts nine different photographs of 'nature.' He shoots images of winter-dead tress emerging from piles of snow through sepia-toned filters in green, orange, and pink. The nine pictures are mounted in a grid on the wall in white square frames set in circular cutouts. The piece brings to mind the critical-minded work of Jeff Wall, in particular his distillation of the rape of nature by the Vancouver logging industry and his collaborative piece with Dan Graham, *The Children's Pavilion* (1989). The color filters bestow an odd patina of falseness on the images that is also akin to color postcards of the Victorian era.

James Bidgood's photographs from the late 1960s hanging in the small adjacent gallery pose a figural complement to Kincaid's abstraction. In four titillatingly homoerotic shots we find yet another, earlier chapter in the history of photography as a dance with the real. Also bearing similarities to Jeff Wall and even more so to David LaChapelle, the photographs of Bidgood are profoundly unreal. *Blue Boy (Bobby Kendall)* shows a young boy languorously lolling on a bed, pants pulled ever so slightly down, in a campy would-be theater set. The swan-shaped headboard is made out of gold-colored foil and seams are legible in the pink paper wall. In *Valentine (Tommy Coombs)* we find a puckish fair-cheeked boy sitting suggestively in a screen-scale cutout heart, the package between his legs omnipresent.

The invocation of belief systems is subtle if not vaguely unintended in the work of both artists. One nevertheless cannot avoid bodies politic when pushing the envelope of the real and celebrating sexual difference.