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You Are Some Other Thing

Victoria Hoyt

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, victoria.hoyt@gmail.com

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YOU ARE SOME OTHER THING

by

Victoria Hoyt

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Aaron Holz

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2012

YOU ARE SOME OTHER THING
Victoria Hoyt, M.F.A.
University of Nebraska, 2012

Adviser: Aaron Holz

There is only one book I reread on a regular basis. Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson, published in 1980, is a story about drifting and loss and longing, of women existing in the world in an uneasy, awkward way. The idea of living in a house is foreign to the transient Aunt Sylvie and when she suddenly has to take care of her nieces, she manages to bring all her homeless habits indoors. She eats in the dark and sleeps on top of her covers and throws rocks at the neighbors' dogs. My favorite is her collection of tin cans and newspaper stacks invading the living room— instead of sweeping, her idea of housework is accumulation, small measurements of time. Housekeeping reminds me that difference lies in the most ordinary of things. No single thing Sylvie does is very strange, but taken together her habits set her apart; her dedication to impermanence has no place in the concrete, didactic world of the ordinary. And so, she doesn't stay. She keeps moving and finding new places to live, happy to keep shifting what she wants as she finds it. I think of this show similarly. Each painting is a place of rest from a world that is otherwise.

Much of my work is influenced by literature because I can connect characters and moods from various stories in a non-linear way. Reading builds the continuity of women's experience I draw from and think about when I'm painting. Interviews with feminist authors and artists are just as influential. I am interested in how women can push

back and question their roles in the wider world through announcing difference and separation. I think the writer Ursula K. Le Guin said it best: “On the maps drawn by men there is an immense white area, *terra incognita*, where most women live. That is all yours to explore, to inhabit, to describe.”^[i] And this is where I’m coming from, my little Antarctica of female collective presence. It’s a world I know by feeling only, a place I discover and create simultaneously.

This exhibition is a marked contrast to my previous work that included disparate components together in one painting. I’d use abstraction, landscapes, figures, collage, ornamentation and text all at once. The term “horror vacui” or “fear of open space” was used regularly to describe this earlier, smaller work. Shifting to a much larger scale I see space differently, both mentally and physically. I pull things apart to see how fragments, given room to breathe, can be full of possibility. When painting I seek a balance of certainty and ambiguity so the work carries the fluidity of thought and interpretation is not fixed. I am interested in the inclusive nature of “both/and” rather than the exclusive “either/or.” Creating the work, I set up various formal problems for myself by thinking about language. I dwell on words rendering women the lesser sex—passive, receiving, emotional, nurturing, domestic, decorative—in order to complicate the imagery. An oval lying on its side is full of vitality, not waiting, but scheming. A crocheted blanket becomes the grid. A barren field seduces like a cool blue pool. The undesired transforms into a graceful presence, with a new voice of authority and belonging.

^[i] Le Guin, Ursula (1989) *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, New York: Grove.

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