

NIGHT GALLERY

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David Duncan, "Cynthia Daignault," *Art in America*, March 2016.

Art in America



Cynthia Daignault:
Light Atlas (detail),
2015, oil on linen,
360 panels, each 8
by 10 inches; at Lisa
Cooley.

burgeoning interest in the "authenticity" of outsider art and the concomitant romanticization of less professionalized art-making spheres have led MFA-trained painters to affect a self-taught folksiness. But most faux-outsider art trades in small scale and precious daintiness. Kabakov, on the contrary, works with big canvases, spoiling a lot of expensive oil with his sloppy mixing.

"The Two Times" eschews the relatively minor genres of portraiture and landscape in favor of pompous historical subjects, juxtaposing the grandeur of the Western European canon—the sort of masterpieces found in the Hermitage—with the treacherous heroism of late Soviet Socialist Realism. In *The Two Times #4*, a philosophe in a powdered wig gazes at the viewer from the left of the canvas, while on the right a stolid surveyor makes notes on an oil derrick. In *The Two Times #2* Christ's body is carried across an Italianate escarpment, while an incongruous wedge-shaped intrusion, hovering in treetops shadowed in poor imitation of Poussin, shows one red-kerchiefed Young Pioneer clapping a congratulatory hand on the shoulder of another. The choice of subjects suggests the impersonality of a roving, fragmented gaze. The artist has no identifiable character here. But there is a story about seeking aesthetic value in the historic glories of foreign nations, and seeing the present more poorly for it. The Kabakovs don't express the perspective of a single artist; rather, their position in these paintings seems to evoke the collective outlook of a self-taught culture, an outsider civilization.

—Brian Draitcourt

CYNTHIA DAIGNAULT

Lisa Cooley

Inspired by American travelogues of the past—and realizing that the canon consisted solely of works by men—Cynthia Daignault set out in 2014 to travel the United States for a year by car. She followed a back-roads route around the perimeter of the lower 48, avoiding interstates, and stopped every 25 miles, at each point recording the scene before her with paint or with a camera, the latter providing source material for paintings she made later in the studio. The 360 oil-on-linen paintings in the resultant body of work, titled *Light Atlas*, share a compact, uniform size (8 by 10 inches) and combine impressionistic strokes with vivid photographic tonality. Together, the paintings offer a kind of portrait of America, as seen in her recent show at Lisa Cooley, which featured 155 of them hung side by side at eye level.

As Daignault progressed through her journey—which started from her Brooklyn stoop, continued up the northeastern coast and proceeded westward—her eye repeatedly wandered toward man-made things, like those favored by painter and photographer Charles Sheeler. A stone wall runs through a Connecticut scene; in several other paintings, old barns and clapboard

houses are portrayed frontally, parallel to the picture plane, which makes them appear modernist; rustic farm silos materialize elsewhere, and, on one canvas, we see a distant grain elevator and concrete silo complex beside a stream, the image recalling Sheeler's *American Landscape* (1930), which depicts the Ford Motor Company plant along the Rouge River outside Detroit.

Daignault's evocation of Sheeler in this series, whether intentional or not, is interesting. The New England artist depicted distinctly American subjects—primarily objects and architecture, never people—in ways that seem to glorify industry and notions of progress. While Daignault's images likewise portray American subjects, they have an elegiac quality rarely seen in his work. Her paintings not only offer mundane scenes but also—particularly with images of isolated roadside structures, dilapidated buildings and graffiti-strewn walls—attest to a complicated notion of contemporary America, to a place that bears the effects of time, of class struggle. Daignault's series, then, serves as both a portrait of America today and a commemoration for an American optimism of the past, one that today seems far too simplistic.

The rear gallery held Daignault's 2014 slideshow collaboration with photographer Curran Hatleberg, *Somewhere Someone is Traveling Furiously Toward You* (titled after a line from a John Ashbery poem), which features a musical score by composer William Morisey Slater. Two 35mm projectors advance through road-trip snapshots (windshield views showing roadside signs, barren landscapes and the like) from the two artists' synchronized drives, over the course of one week, from opposite sides of the country on the same coast-to-coast route: Daignault left from New York, Hatleberg from Los Angeles. The artists stayed in the same motels and used the same kind of photographic equipment. When their paths intersected in Lebanon, Kans., as planned, they drove right past each other, continuing toward their destinations. Daignault and Hatleberg's act of foregoing a mid-country, face-to-face interaction serves as a poetic portrayal of two ships passing in the night.

—David Duncan

BALTIMORE

VAN HANOS

Rowhouse Project

Van Hanos's exhibition came at the midpoint of a three-year series of site-specific shows at Rowhouse Project, a venue in Baltimore's rapidly gentrifying Remington neighborhood. Prior exhibitions took place concurrently with the extensive process of gutting the house. Subsequent exhibitions will accompany renovations of the property, culminating in its sale, the proceeds from which will (ideally) fund the entire project.