

Sasha Bogojev, *Labor Day: Matt Bollinger Explores the Intimacy of Lost American Dreams*, Juxtapoz Magazine, 10 November 2020

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Labor Day: Matt Bollinger Explores the Intimacy of Lost American Dreams

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Art as the great communicator, the bridge to expressing what is difficult to explain in words, is powerfully achieved in *Labor Day*, Matt Bollinger's first show at LA's M+B Gallery, showing through November 28, 2020. The stock market soared today, but that doesn't change the lives of the blue collar Americans Bollinger depicts in subtle vignettes. Drawing from his own encounters growing up in Missouri, he paints an American Dream that looks more Walker Evans than Norman Rockwell.

The narrative is a series of simple vignettes about the car mechanic or Wal-Mart employee that tell a bigger story. "While making the last and largest painting for the show, which is also called *Labor Day*, I initially had painted figures inside of the auto repair shop" he tells Juxtapoz, "but I couldn't make it work. Finally, I removed all of the figures except for the one passing by outside. I thought the shop could be out of business or closed for the holiday. Since *Labor Day* is intended as a time to reflect on work, it seemed like an apt title for this group of paintings, but also an ironic one with so many people out of work and in such economically precarious positions."

A quiet atmosphere of loneliness and lassitude imbues many of the paintings where a single subject is captured in moments in between, what? Maybe the next customer? Simply drawn, they are reminiscent of cartoon characters waiting for the action to begin. "I imagined that all of the people and places in the show exist in the same small town in central Missouri, similar to the area near the Lake of the Ozarks where my grandmother lived and I visited during the summers growing up. Some of the figures appear in animations I've made, where their relationships are made more explicit. Paintings go about telling stories differently from my videos, so it interests me to show them on their own as well as with the animations. In this case, I've chosen just to exhibit the paintings."

The work captures the mix of hope and resignation as someone who truly knows the terrain feels like thorough documentation of such an archetypal place and people living there. "Sorry We're Closed" signs are drawn from memory, often painted multiple times before arriving at the fullness. "I stopped working with photography directly more than a decade ago," the artist tells us, "This change marked an important shift in the work that made

painting and drawing a lot more like my experiences writing poetry. Pushing the paint around became a way to construct a world, develop a character, and tell a story. The primacy of image-making emerged from the painting process rather than a staged photographic approach. I want to open up the space of the painting to exist beyond what I can see. This is why I paint the same figure several times and why I make animations in order to look into the blind field. I want to live in the world of the work and return there again and again.”

The content is deeply emotional, heightened by his ability to create light that, in suggesting possibility, instead, can pierce with pathos. “I paint very freely, pushing the color around, dragging it across the surface, spilling and splattering, until the color and shape relationships begin to emerge,” he explains. America is a big country with many poignant stories to tell. Matt Bollinger shares a slice of empathy with the apple pie. —*Sasha Bogojev*