

## DEJA ZING: PATRICIA CRONIN TAKES A VIEW FROM ABOVE IN “LUXURY REAL ESTATE PAINTINGS”

Where is the boundary between art and voyeurism? Patricia Cronin launched a career based on the inquiry of power and gaze when she first showed her “**Erotic Polaroids**” at David Zwirner in a group exhibit in 1993. The photos depicted various X-rated scenes including men subjugated as erotic objects in S&M games in one sequence as well as queer women engaged in sexual acts with a Madonna cardboard cutout, from the perspective of the artist herself as a participant.

In another iteration of Cronin’s project of the politics (and aesthetics) of desire, in 2000, she made a series of paintings that are best referred to as “real estate porn” (Cronin deemed the source material, “Yuppie porn”). Originally exhibited at Yale University Art Gallery in 2002, a group show titled “Looking at America” featured Cronin’s oil on linen paintings sourced from photographs of luxury properties published in marketing magazines by Sotheby’s International Realty.

“When I think about them historically, they conjure up images of Dutch 17th-century landowners, their houses and the portraits they commissioned of their homes,” Cronin wrote in an artist statement. The aerial perspective of the paintings emphasizes more than the relationship between power and gaze. These are landscapes that expose the historical narrative of economic stratification as well. In the Twitter spectacle of mercenary bankers, Kayne West, and feline meme-making, it’s easy to forget that the most fundamental tug of war occurs over land ownership. (And it’s worth remembering that a cornerstone of the Twitter-induced people’s movement known as #Occupy was the literal occupation of public land).

Each painting in the “Luxury Real Estate Paintings” series is titled simply to indicate location and listing price (the latter of which is 12 years later, greatly inflated), and is approximately the size of a sheet of computer paper. The gaze depicted, however, is one of quixotic yearning for what is out of reach rather than that of capitalist covetousness. This sort of reverie is distinctly American. The Twitter account @OccupyWallSt recently retweeted the famed **Steinbeck quote**, “... the poor [in America] see themselves not as an exploited proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires.” With enough hard work, we’ll all get our very own summer home in Cape Cod, just you wait. And for the rest of ‘em, let them eat Google Maps.

“My feet are on the ground,” Cronin writes, “these properties are otherworldly and beyond reach. In all my work I construct a critical vision of a life and lifestyle that are beyond the means of most Americans, but desired by many.” The self-awareness with which Cronin approaches the project as an artist, exposes the only (if still very tight) loophole in status in the United States. That is, artists possibly have the only profession in America that allows an individual to move in every socioeconomic class: among the lowlifes and vagrants, among the bourgie and the hipsters, and among the plutocrats and corporate robber-barons.

“Luxury Real Estate Paintings” were featured in issue 16 of zing as a project titled “Classified,” and thus a full arc of commodification was achieved: high end catalogue became fine art became art magazine.

**View the project.**

— *Rachel Cole Dalamangas*

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Posted on Wednesday 30 April 2014.

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