



VISUALIZING THE UNCANNY: SCOTT ANDERSON

Claude Smith

Sitting huddled around an electric space heater in [Scott Anderson's](#) (NAP#35, #53) studio located in the rural township of La Cienega—about 20 minutes south of Santa Fe—he confessed, “I had these aspirations to be in New Mexico even before I had ever been to New Mexico. My wife and I had this 10 year plan to eventually get to Santa Fe, and drop off the face of the earth—or at least we thought so.” On a day in early March, New Mexico had just seen record snowfall for the year and my drive north from Albuquerque was punctuated with unusually grey skies and the vague threat of new precipitation. Anderson preempted my visit, warning that his enormous studio—originally built to accommodate the large sculptural works fabricated by the building’s previous occupant—would be slow to warm up.

Originally from Illinois, Anderson spent the latter part of his childhood in the Kansas City area where he remained, eventually earning a BFA from Kansas State University. Upon completion of his undergraduate course studies, he returned to Illinois to attend graduate school at the University of Chicago Urbana-Champaign. His talent as a painter didn’t go unnoticed, when shortly after moving to Chicago, he made connections with gallerist Kavi Gupta whose relationship lasted long enough to yield three solo exhibitions of Anderson’s work—two in Gupta’s Chicago gallery and the other at his Leipzig, Germany location.

At that particular time, Anderson’s paintings could have been characterized by their hallucinatory narratives that deftly blended sci-fi, surrealism, religious iconography, landscape and bizarre architectural structures. Anderson toiled over laboriously detailed, hyper-realistic subjects that often dissolved seamlessly into imaginative or ambiguous surroundings. “With the older work it was really about creating this idea of narrative or subject but ultimately, not totally being able to recognize or place it,” Anderson said. These open-ended narratives and experiments in the “uncanny” served to activate the imagination of the viewer, and proved particularly enticing with their neon colors and provocative or ominous subject matter.

In 2009 Anderson left Chicago to accept a teaching job at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, and since arriving, has noticed a shift in his work. “I felt that making paintings—and the paintings themselves—needed to be more emblematic about how I felt about painting,” he said.

Back in Anderson’s studio, when the conversation shifted to discussing his most recent work, he admitted his reluctance to continue making the kind of work that he had been doing while in Chicago. “There were these things I’d do to make those paintings because I wanted them to look a certain way,” Anderson said. Adding, “Thinking about going back and doing those same crazy perspective shifts, sounds like so much work to me,” he said laughing. “Now it’s the process—not just the end result—that has become so much more important to me.” A closer look at the surfaces reveal Anderson’s desire to foreground the act of painting, a textural archive of sorts in which marks, erasures and decisions are outlined and recorded. This gritty transparency was something that he often denied the viewer in older work, or at the very least, went to great strides to conceal it.

In April, Anderson, along with Albuquerque-based artist [David Leigh](#) will exhibit work together in an exhibition entitled “Kansas” at Philspace in Santa Fe. Having both spent significant portions of their adolescence in Kansas, each began to wonder if there wasn’t something about their respective experiences growing up there that might be general enough to talk about how it informs their work. “There was something about Kansas that was to us, nothing and something at the same time.” Anderson said. For Anderson in particular, it was suburbia—most importantly however, the mall. “It’s like this weird blend of nostalgia and good memories. It was this place where we’d go and socialize, not really to buy anything, but it became something more, something about friendship and becoming an adult.” Adding, “Then of course my memories about it are equally complicated, and in a lot of ways, I think it mirrors the ways in which my paintings function—and maybe even the role of painting in general.” For Anderson, it will be one of just a handful of times he will have exhibited his work in New Mexico since moving to the state.

Standing in front of a table littered with preliminary sketches of mall interiors, I ask him how he likes La Cienega. He glances around his cavernous studio, and shakes his head incredulously; “I could never have a place like this in Chicago.” Having lived in New Mexico now for over half a decade, he tells me it is finally feeling a bit more like home. “Whenever I travel, I look forward to coming back,” he adds. “I’m content, I really am.”