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Polar night

Jeffrey Allen Trueblood
University of Iowa

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POLAR NIGHT

by

Jeffrey Allen Trueblood

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Art in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2013

Thesis Supervisor: Professor John Dilg

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Jeffrey Allen Trueblood

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in Art at the May 2013 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____

John Dilg, Thesis Supervisor

Ron Cohen

David Dunlap

Rachel Williams

To my mom Carol Trueblood, dad Howard Trueblood and brother Joseph Trueblood
who have taught me what is important in the world and given me the strength to
pursue it.

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INTRODUCTION

For my thesis I am exploring the concepts and reasons that I make my art. I will discuss how I explore the night as my subject and the emotional response I hope to evoke with my work, as well as my influences and inspirations while exploring this topic. I will discuss my attempt to show how, in the modern world, we try to drive back the dark with artificial lights, intending to duplicate the world of daylight. Instead, we create stages of normalcy in between the depths of the night allowing the individual imaginations of the viewers to *dream into* the darkness and bring their own experiences and emotions to the images. This is the basis of an interactive viewing experience. By recreating the mental state in which our minds revert to the most primal instincts of “fight or flight” in the face of the unknown- despite our knowledge of what exists in the daylight- I hope to attain a more essential work of art that goes beyond my early influences of western Romantic art and shows how these instincts still deeply affect us in the modern world.

THE NIGHT

When the sun sets and the night swallows the world we know our minds also mirror the change of the landscape. When we walk outside at night we see the same thing our ancestors saw- darkness. In our modern world we have created safe havens with electric lights, showing us exactly how much of the world we truly inhabit. Our paths are illuminated before us and in our feeble attempt to mimic daylight the night creeps back into our minds. We stare into the darkness and our instinctual fears of the unknown are reflected back upon us. Our brains spur us forward with the haste of prey and our senses become sensitive to every howl of the wind, every broken twig, reminding us of all the possible dangers at our backs. Our primeval notions of fight or flight are triggered and our rationality is suppressed, letting our emotions run wild. We have been fighting this notion since our ancestors first lit up the night sky with fire and in my paintings I hope to capture the nature of what it is to experience the night. By combining the oppressiveness of darkness with the beacons of light illuminating modern day life I hope to allow the viewer to contrast the worlds of light and dark in their minds and the connotations of each: the known against the unknown, safety versus danger, the rational versus the irrational, and comfort versus discomfort. The uncanniness of my scenes is meant to strike an immediate response in the viewers and to then let them dream into the scene, projecting their own experiences and thoughts onto the darkness. With this I hope they begin to surmise what is intriguing about the scene. While they dream into the space, the elements within the darkness begin to reveal themselves as the viewer's eyes adjust to the subtle details. The time invested in viewing by the

viewers brings more and more elements into play, forming a more sinister landscape or calming a racing mind, permitting them to make sense of what they bump into in the darkness.

THE NOCTUREN

Much like the Romantic artists of the 1800s I'm exploring the topic of the "Romantic Sublime" and how true beauty and true terror invoke almost the same awe-inspiring feelings to bubble within our minds. Unlike Delacroix or Gericault, I don't seek to simply depict the feeling of terror but to explore how modern people find themselves dealing with this concept of primal fear. I hope to create more of an unease or sense of foreboding than to shock the viewer with gruesome subject matter. I try to focus on a subtler place, striking a balance between letting the viewer know what they are looking at and being lost in the world of night. I tend to shroud my paintings in veils of darkness, letting layers of paint give atmosphere and depth to the marks of the underpainting while embracing the difficulties the viewer faces while looking at the image. I do not intend to depict a single scene with my images; rather, the feeling of remembering a place, the feel and what it meant to be surrounded in darkness and out of our natural element. It is important for me to try to reconstruct these memories and pick out the details that I could sense not just with my eyes, but also with my being, and to express what a photograph can't capture. This means I often work with a limited palette trying to make my gestures and colors stand for more than just a moment. I try to convey what is captured out of the corner of my eye as I turn around and strain to adjust to the world around me. Some elements become blurred and painterly while others become focused; space flattens, and lights act as guides through the sea of darkness. I try to reach into the

collective psyches of society to find the moments that tear us out of our modern realm, forcing the most ancient part of our brains to take control and bring these moments into the light. To rationalize these scenes aesthetically with paint and canvas I hope to come to terms with these feelings and find a place of understanding through which, I myself, can be located.