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MINDY BRAY

DECODING THE VISUAL EXPERIENCE

WORDS: ASHLEY BEYER
STUDIO IMAGES: PAUL WINNER

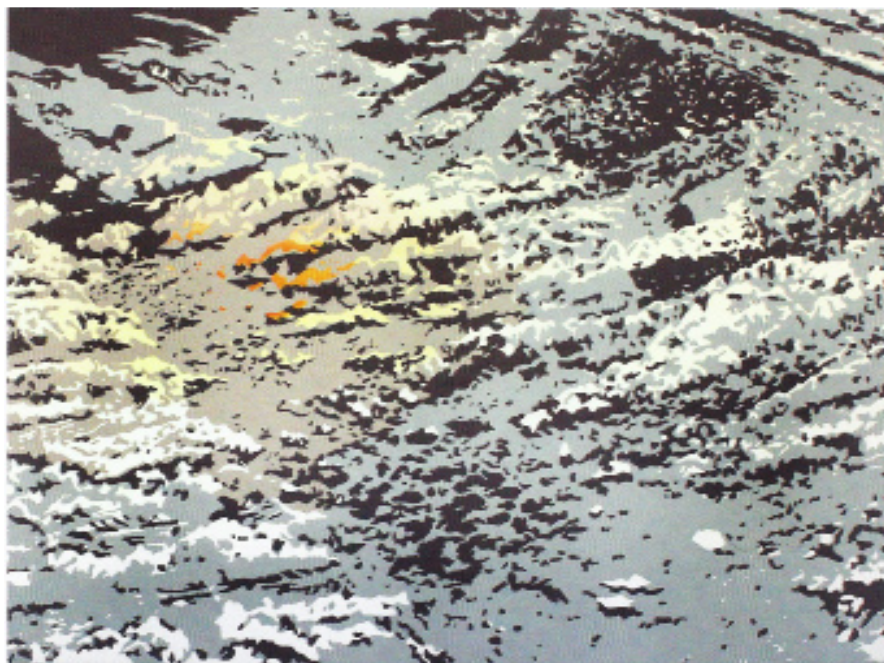


UNTIL RECENTLY, Mindy Bray's work was entirely uncollectable. You could snap a photo, maybe try to sketch it out in your Moleskine, or simply count on remembering the impact it had on you, but no one could take one of Mindy's works home at the end of a show. Much of Mindy's works were installations directly on gallery walls – large, yet momentary additions to their contiguous surroundings. Until recently, the majority of her work was short-lived: at the end of each exhibition each piece would be painted over.

Mindy spent most of her young adult life in Phoenix, where she attended Arizona

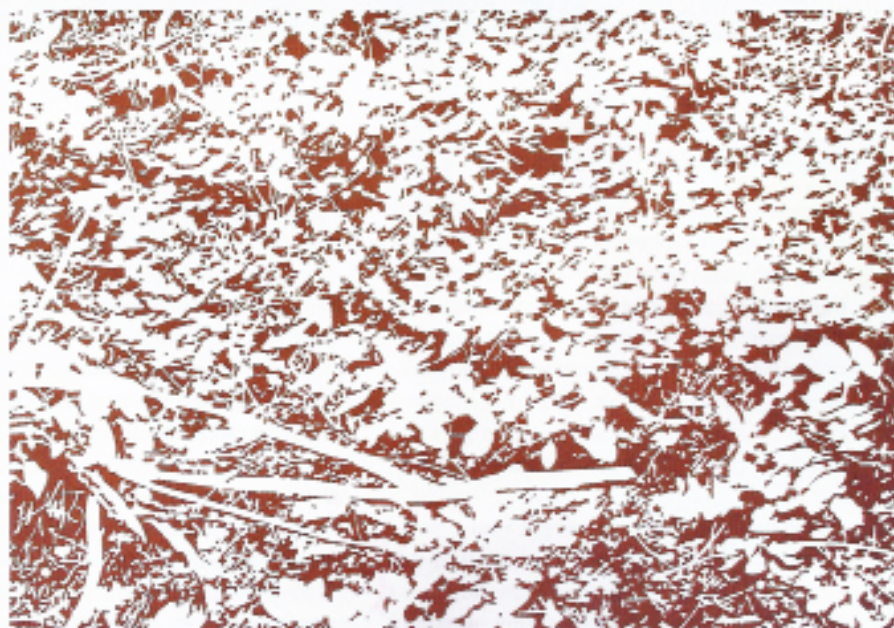
State University and worked at the ASU Art Museum for a few years post-graduation. Although her initial focus was photography (she had even set up a darkroom in her bedroom closet during high school), upon entering college she found herself growing increasingly interested in drawing and painting, and after earning her BFA in the latter, she relocated further east to earn her MFA in painting from the University of Iowa. In 2006, Mindy and her then fiancé moved to Denver after completing their graduate programs for many of the same reasons most transplants do: the easy access to nature, a vibrant art scene, and a progressive culture.

“When there is a sense of recognition in the images, it adds the déjà vu feeling I am interested in—something familiar presented in an unfamiliar way. It is like an epiphany.”



During her second year of graduate school Mindy began to take influence from minimalist artists working in large-scale wall paintings. Including Sol LeWitt, Arturo Herrera, and Ingrid Calame. Mindy's work began a transformation as she shifted from a traditional style of oil on canvas to compositions painted directly on the walls of her graduate studio using latex paint.

“I was feeling unhappy with my oil paintings, feeling they were hermetically sealed, that there was no air flow in them,” Mindy explains. “I think this was a frustration with creating illusionistic space, rather than addressing the real space – the architectural space – that they, and the viewer, inhabited.”



After graduating, Mindy needed a way to bring her new practice back to her personal studio. Upon realizing paper would allow for the same media and scale in her work, she began a daily practice of producing paintings on large sheets of paper.

Although she's an experienced painter, Mindy's work is still very much dependent on (and ultimately products of) her photographs, taken with a standard digital camera and altered in Photoshop until it is a series of fragmented shapes.

“Photography is a very important part of my practice,” she says. “I use photography like a sketchbook and carry my camera everywhere I go, whether that is to the grocery store or camping in the mountains.”

Many of Mindy's subjects are found in nature and, even when reduced

TOP: “Dusk”, ink and gouache on stretched paper, 22” x 28”, 2011
BOTTOM: “Forest Floor”, ink and gouache on stretched paper, 46” x 35”, 2011



to the point that the original subject is no longer immediately apparent, possess a clear organic quality. Be it a muddled mound of trash or an autumn forest floor, the original subject retains significance even after being reduced to solid shapes.

"The subject of the photograph adds a layer of meaning to the paintings, as well as a particular shape quality," Mindy explains. "When there is a sense of recognition in the images, it adds the *déjà vu* feeling I am interested in – something familiar presented in an unfamiliar way. It is like an epiphany."

Using a digital projector, she enlarges the

image to the chosen scale. She then begins the meticulous process of transferring the image by hand in pencil and then painting (currently in ink wash gouache, or opaque watercolor) the shapes using small rollers and even smaller brushes—sans the use of tape or other masking materials. This allows her to create the edges with her brush and improvise on the original shapes.

"As an art dealer, it is the intuitive and personal work of the artist's hand that is the most satisfying aspect of their work," Rule Gallery owner Robin Rule says. "This tradition, spanning back to the minimalists such as Agnes Martin, in which the hand can be used

to produce systems – yet always imperfectly – is why her work is so compelling."

Mindy has created paintings in this fashion – both on paper and walls – in a range of sizes, the smallest being a mere 5 x 7 inches and the largest scaling nearly 32 x 110 feet. For the larger paintings, she uses a process similar to stretching canvas. Taking paper that has been soaked in water (in her bathtub), she stretches it over aluminum stretcher bars (traditionally used for canvas and linen) and staples the edges as one would with canvas. As the paper dries, it tightens like an animal hide would when stretched to create a drum. This allows Mindy to present her large-scale



"Forest for the Trees": Latex paint on wall, approx. 110 ft. x 22.5 ft., 2011, installed at the Urban Institute for Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, MI.

work unframed to show the matte texture of the paper and gouache. For the smaller pieces, she works on unstretched paper and can display the work framed or unframed.

In her effort to create imagery relating to its surrounding environment, Mindy's work is always site-specific, and thus, temporary. Although her work may be documented through photography, until recently the life of her work ended when the exhibition closed. Now that Mindy works in two modes—on paper and on walls—she is able to create pieces that can be collected, as well as those that cannot.

When a piece, especially a large-scale piece, is temporary, the viewer naturally confronts the fact it will eventually be painted over. This creates a sort of recognition of loss; we realize the experience is transitory, and it elicits a sense of longing and reflection of the passing time. Mindy is currently most interested in creating works unable to be collected—works truly ephemeral.

In her upcoming spring exhibition—her first solo show in a commercial gallery in Denver, Mindy will showcase several pieces derived from photographs of nature and landscapes in Colorado, Utah and Arizona. Lured by the traditional backdrops of the West and

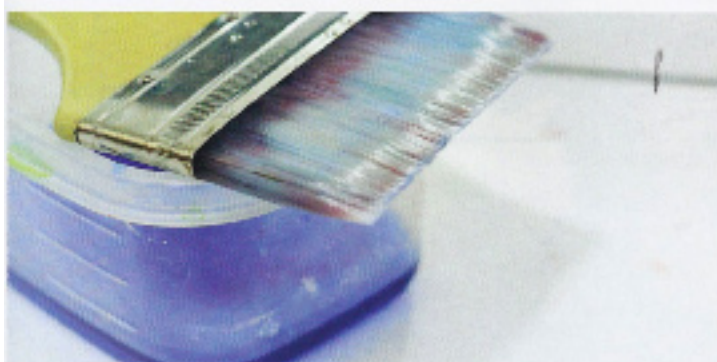
the romantic connotations of urbanization, Mindy's work blends the bittersweet relationships between urban settlement and nature's ability to evoke the strongest of nostalgia.

"Being an artist, I feel, is about engaging in a conversation, and picking up lines of thought from a variety of sources and then contributing my particular viewpoint to it."



ABOVE: "This Dewdrop World", latex paint on wall, approx. 62 ft. x 12 ft., 2010, installed at Foothills Art Center, Golden, CO. (Part of the exhibition Stark, curated by Michael Chavez.)

LEFT: "Large vertical: Water Feature", latex paint on wall and floor, approx. 20 ft. x 8 ft., 2009, installed at Anderson Ranch Art Center, Snowmass, CO. (Created during residency at Anderson Ranch.)



TOP: Mindy uses a staple gun to stretch wet paper onto a wood and aluminum frame.

ABOVE: A variety of large brushes, plastic containers, and opaque watercolors are used to apply an ink wash onto the stretched paper.

BELOW: Mindy applies the initial ink washes to a newly stretched paper piece.



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