

ART SPIEL

Fine Arts Blog

POSTED ON MAY 22, 2018 BY ETTYANIV

Peter Gynd – Studio on the Road



Peter Gynd, Blanketed 15-003, 2017, archival inkjet print on Hahnemulhe photo rag 308gsm, 15.875 x 23.75 inches framed, Edition of 5 +1AP , photo courtesy of the artist

Peter Gynd is a prolific artist, curator, and gallery director. As a Canadian artist who has been well immersed in the New York City art world, Gynd has a vista on both worlds

from a unique perspective. We have been in dialogue for several years and this is a compilation of the issues we have touched upon in our conversations.

AS: Peter, let's start with some background basics.

Peter Gynd: I was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. Both my parents were immigrants. My mother's family is from Germany by way of Colombia and my father was a Vietnam draft dodger from the US.

AS: You are familiar with the art scene in both NYC and Vancouver. How do you see the difference between the art worlds?

Peter Gynd: I have always found the New York art scene to be extremely competitive, yet very welcoming. I felt at home in the artworld here right away. Here, people are very willing to take a look at your work or try to point you in the right direction. Vancouver, surprisingly tends to be more cliquey. I don't think I ever fully felt that I belonged there. Having said that, I do still feel strong connection to the artworld there. There are many artists and galleries in Vancouver I still follow closely and a lot of my collectors are still back in Canada.

AS: I hate to put you on the spot – but can you share some of your thoughts about aspects of the NYC art scene that you would wish to change?

Peter Gynd: I think being an artist who works as a curator and a gallery director gives me some insights that others may not be privy to. Overall, I would love to see the art fairs diminish in importance. A lot of artists think they are important to be in, but I really do feel that it is detracting from the cultural dialog that happens in brick and mortar galleries.

As I said before, NYC is a very competitive art scene, but the paradox is that it is also incredibly supportive. There are places to show for people of all levels and styles, and a corresponding audience for each – this is pretty unique. But space is becoming an major issue. In fact I would actually discourage new MFA grads from moving here: go somewhere you can afford a studio without working yourself to death paying for it. Or if you do come, find a way to live as cheaply as possible so that you have the time and energy to take advantage of the community here.



Peter Gynd, Blanketed 17-002, 2017, archival inkjet print on Hahnemulhe photo rag 308gsm, 25.5 x 19 inches framed, Edition of 5 +1AP, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: We have worked together on several projects. You have consistently impressed me not only as a top notch serious art professional, but also a genuine art enthusiast, with real passion towards all facets of art from making to exhibiting others – what aspects you love most?

Peter Gynd: First of all thank you Etty, your words mean a lot. I feel all aspects of what I do inform each other. When I first moved here I was very focused on curating and I feel that really left an impression on how I approach my own work. I started thinking more critically about my own work, and as a result it became more layered and acquired additional depth.

Also, I write a lot about the work. I have always disliked drawing and I generally don't do it. Instead, I write pages and pages about the work – on each individual piece and what is behind it. By the time it comes to actually creating the work, there is usually a fairly well formed image in my mind of what it will be.

But I love all the the facets I'm involved in: creating, curating, and working as the gallery director at Lesley Heller Gallery. Somehow they all come together to inform and shape my overall practice.



Peter Gynd, Blanketed 17-005, 2017, archival inkjet print on Hahnemulhe photo rag 308gsm, 27 x 19 inches framed, Edition of 5 +1AP, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: You paint and photograph. Tell me about these two disciplines in your artwork and how do they relate to each other?

Peter Gynd: I grew up learning old masters oil painting techniques from my mother and then went on to get a degree in glassblowing from the Alberta College of Art and Design. Photography is relatively new for me. In fact, many of the images in the blanket series were taken years ago, but it's just taken me some time to mentally process what they mean and how they fit in with my practice.

Photography was a natural evolution in my work as I had a job that had me constantly flying around the world for about two years, and I just didn't have time to be in a studio painting. I needed to be able to take my studio on the road with me, so carrying around a camera and a blanket became a practical solution that worked with my lifestyle at the time.

But I really see the work as one series even though they are separated by different mediums. To date I've worked with painting, photography, textiles, and video with the work. I'm sure it will evolve further and into other media the more I work with it.



Peter Gynd, Blanketed Gesture #2, 2018, acrylic on board, 10.75 x 7.75 inches framed, photo courtesy of the artist



Peter Gynd, Blanketed 18-005, 2018, oil, acrylic, and marker on canvas, 39.5 x 27.75 inches, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: Tell me more about the genesis of your blanket series.

Peter Gynd: The series started gradually. Initially in 2009 I began looking more critically at landscape and what my own personal cultural connection to a place was. As a first born generation Canadian, I was interested in the connection my family's history had to the landscape of British Columbia. This led me to look at icons and images of Canadiana, which the Hudson's Bay Blanket is of course a central part of.

I received an HSBC blanket from my family for Christmas later that year, and began with what was a very straight forward series of self portraits in the blanket, in poses taken or referencing historical images.

AS: And how is this body of work evolving?

Peter Gynd: The work is continually taking me in new directions. The addition of the background pattern is something very new. It references patterned textiles and their meanings within different cultures, which I'm still very much unpacking.

AS: You are having a solo show at Ground Floor Gallery May 18th – June 3rd – Congratulations! What can you tell me about the body of work you are showing there?

Peter Gynd: Thank you! Yes, I am very excited for this show; it's my first New York solo exhibition. Most of the work being presented is brand new. All of the paintings are from 2018. The photographs range from works taken in 2013 to 2017 — as I mentioned I sometimes sit on images for years before they see the light of day.

I'm showing a mixture of the larger paintings on raw canvas with the photographs, and some new small-scale acrylic paintings on panel. The paintings are all brand new I'm still very much in this exciting stage of getting to know them. As I mentioned before, I've started incorporating the patterning into the backgrounds which I'm also viewing as a form of landscape in itself. The figures float above these patterned landscapes, giving them an undefined relationship to the space they occupy, much as in early Byzantine icon painting. Even though the works are vertical too, I've been painting the patterning while the works are horizontal, in the landscape position.

I think of the paintings in terms of sculpture, and the photographs in terms of painting. The smaller works on panels are probably the closest thing I would do to drawings.

Symbolic references to water are also playing an important role in the new paintings. The water—represented by a circular, dripping pool, lake, bowl, or puddle—draws on notions of purity, cleansing, and the passage of time; water as the slow but powerful shaper of landscape



Peter Gynd, Blanketed 17-003, 2017, archival inkjet print on Hahnemulhe photo rag 308gsm, 26.5 x 19.5 inches framed, Edition of 5 +1AP, photo courtesy of the artist

AS: For your site-specific work at the In Case Project in Bushwick you created an elaborate imagery which played in some surprising ways with our perception of foreground / background. Tell me about that tension in your work.

Peter Gynd: That's a good question. That installation was focusing heavily on the American flag and notions of nationalism. I think there is a real tension that exists in nationalism and identity so it came out naturally when I was thinking about what that piece would be. The background of the case was posterized with flyers I had printed featuring an alternating blanketed figure in front of the American flag.

Installed on top of that was a framed photograph of a male figure wearing an officer's uniform, standing alone in a white desert with a flag draped over his shoulder as a child would drape their blanket. Upon closer look, it becomes apparent that the officer is also not wearing pants.

The site of the photo, White Sands National Monument, is also just a short distance from where the first atomic bomb was detonated, and is still an active missile testing range. Below this photo at the bottom corner of the case was the American flag from all the images, folded as it would be in a memorial case. The work evokes a sense of disorientation which I think is how we all feel at this time.



Peter Gynd, Blanketed, In-Case Art Projects, installation view, 2017

AS: What are you working on now?

Peter Gynd: Other than continuing new work along the lines of what is in my solo exhibition at Ground Floor Gallery, I'm planning my wedding in Mexico and trying to convince my partner to wear a blanket on our wedding day. Seriously.

Yaniv, Ety. "Peter Gynd - Studio on the Road." *Art Spiel*, 22 May 2018. [online]