



CRAFTING & CURATING: “RE-CRAFTING HISTORY” AT TAYLOR DE CORDOBA

by New American Paintings
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I was recently asked to curate a show for Taylor De Cordoba, a gallery in LA's Culver City art district. “Recrafting History: History, Nostalgia, and Craft in the American Memory” opened on October 29th and since then, I have had a lot of people ask me what exactly curating entails.

In Latin, *curatus* means “to take care of.” The later noun derivative curation/curator means “spiritual guide” and “overseer, manager, guardian.” This hits close to home as I think about the responsibility imbued in the hands of a curator, gallery owner, art collector, museum personnel, and art historians. As I saw it, my job as curator was four-fold—first: brainstorm a theme, second: scout artists (or perhaps vice versa), third: install and organize the show, and fourth: ensure that the aesthetic, flow, and feel speaks to the chosen theme and desired energy. Thinking of the curator as something of a spiritual guide is a bit of a stretch, but he/she is certainly a guide and it is definitely a journey we wish to take viewers on. And as I saw it, this guidance part falls under all four steps of the curating process.

Brainstorming: In this particular case, brainstorming a theme came quite easily, as memory has always been something that fascinates me, particularly in relation to art. American-specific memory is also interesting to me, given our newer history in relation to say Europe, and also given our seamless ability to forget with something of a cultural amnesia. Frohawk Two Feathers (NAP #73) and Eric Beltz were the first to join the line up, and their work really helped to lead the theme. Both can be seen as a sort of craft in terms of Beltz’ painstakingly detailed trompe l’oeil needlepoint graphite drawings and Frohawk’s hand drawn and faux-aged maps and advertisements.

Scouting: To continue the theme, I wanted to expand the notion of crafting to also include a recrafting. All of the artists in the show are revising history in a sense, so this became central. I had interviewed Jen Pack (NAP #73) in the fall and her three-dimensional woven sculptures seemed perfect. They speak to history, using craft as both the medium and subject. Her colorful patchwork aesthetic conjures conflicting memories of familiar cloth from many different places and cultures: patchwork quilts, Ghanaian kente cloth, Korean hanboc dresses, Mexican blankets etc. As such, she plays with the fluidity of cultural or national identity in addition to memory.



Stephanie Washburn, Margaret Thatcher’s Garden II – detail, Courtesy of Taylor De Cordoba



Stephanie Washburn, Margaret Thatcher's Garden II, Courtesy of Taylor De Cordoba



Washburn viewer at opening, Courtesy of Taylor De Cordoba

Karen Spector's "A Surplus of Light" spoke to crafting and recrafting in a different sense. Her work falls under what I consider to be the current category of crafting in the new millenium: visual culture. Her video installation also speaks to appropriation and identity, taking an existing video clip, tweaking it, and making it her own. She is quilting with a modern medium. And **Stephanie Washburn's** "Margaret Thatcher's Garden" is about imagining and re-envisioning history, contemplating what it would be like in the personal and private garden of this political body. These latter two pieces helped to create a dialogue between pieces, creating a visually distinct and varied flow.

Installing: In the installation process, the gallery owners and I wanted to reflect the visual dialogue between the artists by creating a physical conversation between the art. Color choice, content, and theme played into these decisions. Variation also became key, as we knew that we wanted the artists with multiple pieces to have their work spread out and interacting with one another, rather than being concentrated and isolated.

To do this, we started propping the art down where we thought it would go, one wall at a time. This process takes more time than one might think, as the pieces really do have something to say to one another and it is important to capture this conversation and energy, to make it more palpable. Once we had a loose layout of the gallery space, the hanging began. I am no mathematician and this part seemed like a slight impossibility. Thankfully, Alex De Cordoba has a measurement calculation formula that saved the day and made this process manageable.

Ensuring & Guiding: The last step is probably the hardest or the easiest, depending on the prior three steps. In this show's case, we finished hanging the show and the space felt magical. We had a corner with a lovely, warm glowing yellow vignette, then another nook with Frohawk's satirical colonial rum advertisement gazing down at Spector's eerily patriotic video. The black and white of Beltz's graphite drawings was a stark contrast to Washburn's opening eyecatcher with the thickest application of bright acrylics. We were more than satisfied and we hoped that viewers would be too.