



06 Apr Jeff Gillette: An OC Artist Playfully Exploring Our Urban Blight

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While baby boomers are the first generation raised with television as a major life influence, [Jeff Gillette](#) surpasses most of his contemporaries with his fascination for TV images, particularly for animated characters. The Costa Mesa-based artist recalls his earliest major artistic influence to us in an interview, “I grew up in Michigan in the 1960s through ‘80s, often watching *The Wonderful World of Disney* and I loved the shows especially the cartoons ”

Yet when Gillette first visited Disneyland in 1978 in his teens, he hated the experience and left after only 30 minutes. This impression changed his vision of the cartoon characters he thought he enjoyed, as he later began illustrating Mickey Mouse and friends in dark, dismal settings. These surreal depictions eventually propelled him to fame as an artist.

Soon after visiting Disneyland, Gillette planned to attend art school. But he says, “My parents who grew up during the Great Depression acted like they were poor their whole lives. Art school was out of the question, so I settled for a junior college, receiving a two-year degree in commercial illustration. I ended up at a print shop as a plate preparer, and although I used my creativity for finding shortcuts in this job, this work had nothing to do with art.”

He went back to school, this time to become certified as an English Teacher at Michigan's Oakland University. After receiving his degree in 1985, he followed his wanderlust and traveled to Nepal, India, Europe and South America. "Seeing the slums in Calcutta, Lima and Rio de Janeiro initiated my fascination with third-world slums," he says. Gillette's interest in slums later became the genesis for his series, "Slumscapes," which he began creating in 1992, and has exhibited in several venues over the years.

Gillette subsequently traveled to California to land a teaching gig, but he received no offers. So he volunteered for the Peace Corps and spent 1987 to '89 teaching English in Nepal, often exploring the slums of India and Bangladesh. When he returned home, he was disillusioned with teaching English, and decided to finally pursue his dream to teach art. He enrolled at Wayne State University in Detroit, working toward an Art Teaching Credential. Afterwards, he returned to California, and was offered a one-year art teaching position at Foothill High School in Tustin. That one year turned into 28 years. "I feel blessed that this long-shot, unlikely position worked out for me at such a great school," he says.



From 1994 to 2001, while teaching art, Gillette worked on his MFA in drawing, painting and printmaking at Cal State Fullerton. During that time, he began creating unsolicited Pop-Up shows for Santa Ana's Art Walks. "I continued to show up with a shopping cart full of my collages, or with a mini-gallery displaying my early Slumscape artworks," he says. "I later rented out empty storefronts and staged my first shows of paintings, irreverent collages, videos and installations."

His MFA show, "Architecture and Fertility," in 2001 included 300-plus small hand-sewn dolls of multi-ethnic colored fabric; viewers had to walk on the fabric to see his Slumscape themed art. For his subsequent exhibition, "I've Accepted Jesus Christ as My Personal Savior – But Still Feel Crappy," he created 400 Christian-themed irreverent collages.

Hassold chimed in about their artistic connection as their starting point in love and life, "As art was our main connection, we began collaborating right from the start. I was asked to do a solo show at Meta Gallery in downtown Santa Ana, and saw the opportunity to collaborate [with him]. Our show 'Mutual Submission' revolved around the physical, psychological and political nature of male/female relationships, and the not-so-delicate balance among cooperation, ego and differing artistic processes. Much of the work was close-up videos of our physical interactions," she said.

They later moved in together. Gillette introduced Hassold to third-world travel "on-the-cheap," taking her to Kenya to do Safaris and to beaches. "Although it was one of our favorite trips," he explains, "there was lots of strife, including a break up as the lights went out on the island we were staying at, getting stranded in the middle of Masai Mara Game Preserve, and having to hitch-hike back to Nairobi. We married in 2001 and have continued traveling extensively."

As Gillette and Hassold continue to make art from their home-based studios, they see common themes in their work. In particular, they both suffer from "horror vaccui." This term from medieval manuscript illumination, describes books encrusted with every form of decoration to the exclusion of negative space.



In graduate school in 1996, Gillette met Laurie Hassold, who was working on her MFA in sculpture. "We had an instant, overwhelming attraction. It was almost like recognizing someone you've actually never known," he says. "Our common taste in atypical music was also uncanny, and she was a graduate from the high school where I was teaching."

However, they have different approaches to the creative process. Hassold – who teaches sculpture and three-dimensional design at Orange Coast College and Irvine Valley College – explains: “I love to brainstorm over ideas and prefer conceptual, thematic discussions. I start with inspiration, research and development, planning, and then go to production. Jeff however wants quick mechanical, formal input.”

Hassold’s highly detailed hand-wrought sculptures are rooted in her fascination with fossils, skeletal remains, and her lifetime romance with science fiction and fairy tales. She is interested in the aftermath, a place that makes her feel warm and cozy, where there are no humans, where the surviving plants and animals proliferate and evolve on their own terms without our toxic influence.



Gillette is interested in, as he explains, “the precipice just before the denouement and fall of humanity as we achieve our penultimate worst.” This vision has inspired him to create his Slumscape paintings and assemblage sculptures of Disney characters, sometimes with tattered clothes and features, often residing in the world’s worst slums. His work has evolved from illustrations of frightened Mickeys and Minnies, to Disney buildings, such as the original Disneyland castle, oftentimes in disrepair or in ruins. He originated the title “Dismayland” in 2010 for an exhibition of post-apocalyptic landscapes at Greg Escalante’s Copro Gallery in Santa Monica.

Gillette has also exhibited Slumscape and Dismayland artworks at Bert Green Fine Art, Chicago, Gregorio Escalante Gallery, L.A. and Laguna Art Museum, where his “Slum” exhibition featured decrepit, weathered structures, some with real estate signs, others with Disney characters peering out.

In 2015, he received a message from the manager of the English street artist Banksy, requesting six “Dismayland” paintings for an exhibition in England. Soon after, Banksy invited Jeff and Laurie to help install his “Dismaland” (different spelling than Gillette’s) subversive bemusement park in the English countryside. Upon returning home, Gillette began creating his own paintings based on Banksy’s Dismaland.



Gillette’s subsequent work includes exhibiting: *Dismayland Norde* with a Castle Façade in Nuart Gallery, Norway; *Slum Rehabilitation Authority*, street art project on slum walls in Mumbai, India; and *Dhisneyland [sic] Castle* façade, also in the Mumbai slums. Sitting in his home during the Covid-19 pandemic, he ruminates about his murals in India. He remarks, “With the lockdown happening there, my Slumscape paintings of urban blight without people around the outside of them is now a realistic view!”

“My most modest and first goal,” he adds, “is to fuse my love for world travel, especially to India, with my art endeavors. I have been doing this in some capacity almost every year since my Peace Corps service. My more significant goals are to expand my present success of showing in art galleries, art fairs, online and hopefully in even more museums.”

*Jeff Gillette and Laurie Hassold are slated to be in “**Terra Incognita**” at OCCCA June 6 27 2020 Exhibition dates are subject to change*

LA Art Show: Faux Bobo Nostalgia vs. Authentic Artistic Ingenuity

Michael Pearce / MutualArt

FEBRUARY 18, 2020

Michael Pearce takes an unapologetic look at the art fair, drawing excruciatingly sharp lines between trite imitation targeted at wealthy collectors and agents of beauty and creativity.

The 25th Los Angeles Art Fair saw 120 galleries representing artists from all over the world gathered in the cavernous space of the Convention Center. It's an expensive proposition for them – leasing a booth can cost tens of thousands of dollars, and many struggle to make ends meet.

Consequently, following the money, many targeted the rich but bored bourgeois-bohemian boomer market for nostalgia, either in the form of superficial gift-store psychedelia built up to grand scale, or as repetitive, recycled, tenth generation pap-pop. Artist Alvaro Barrios revisited Roy Lichtenstein with his faux pop painting *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, referencing the famous old Rolling Stones song and Marcel Duchamp's Bottle Rack *readymade*, thus blending three strands of corny 1900's cultural reminiscences into one. Bobos yearned for their hepcat youth while others only yawned at Todd Gray's re-run of Warhol's *Brillo* boxes tediously redecorated with Facebook icons. Scott Froschauer's trite self-help messages resembled over-sized fridge magnets. Pastiche memories of Pollock and the abstract expressionists were revived in Jose Luis Zuno's painted canvases, literally sold by the roll in racks like discount wallpaper.

Former friends of Owsley revisiting their hallucinogenic past could indulge themselves with extravagant flashbacks to their favorite head-shop in up-scaled and expensive eye-candy gee-jaws, like Anthony James' eternally reflective geometric mirror prisms, cleverly built from one-way glass and glowing neon strips, providing retro carny access to a personal hall of mirrors. These trippy, psychedelic sideshows for monied old hippies and people easily distracted by shiny things feigned significance, but they were just enjoyable amusements, like hopped-up lava-lamps.

The glorified gift-shop theme continued with a repetitive abundance of paintings and sculptures of old pop-culture icons. By far the best of them were Kazu Hiro's fantastically detailed sculptures of Salvador Dalí, Jimi Hendrix and Frida Kahlo. His creepily hyper-real decapitations of dead bobo heroes lie deep in the uncanny valley, as an unnerving perfection of Madame Tussauds' waxworks, born of the guillotine.

Like Kazu, Lucio Carvalho transcended the trite tone with his luscious glossy prints of his paintings of grand dames wrapped in shining satin ballgowns crowned with absurd and polished motorcycle helmets decorated in floral scrolls and the sheer-wrapped fabric horns of faux-medieval head-dresses.

Ohata Shintaro blended painting and sculpture in his cleverly delightful, if dystopian, anime-inspired *Parallel Lines*. The sculpted girl on the railing in front of the store front was painted in the same acidic insta-greens and blues of the procreate palette as the softened storefront of the canvas background, and seamlessly blended the three dimensional figure with the flat world she came from. But Ohata faced tough competition for attention from booth-mate Du Kun, whose ingenious oil painting, *Jing Yun Temple Under Moonlight*, combined architecture and broken rock with portraiture, like a digitally inspired 21st century Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

Perhaps imagining themselves acting out the clever parts of 20th century anti-art radicals, some galleries showed kitsch gimmick pictures that were deliberately difficult to look at. Several favored lenticular prints – those cheap plastic-covered double images that shift and flicker as you move across the plane of vision – with the tedious and stereotypical pop-culture imagery of death and beauty still found in roller-rink end of the pier gift shops, amplified here to a grand scale, with a grander ticket price attached. Neither radical nor anti-art, this was a pretentious scene of performers. Among them, Hiroshi Mori produced a horrible vibrating pastiche of Klimt's *Kiss* – an unbearably out-of-focus monstrosity whose hideous appearance is not done justice in an online still. Perhaps masochist connoisseurs of repugnance might want to seek it out as a marker of the place where overheated artistic self-hatred lies.

Meanwhile, Sungjae Lee's gorgeous lacey installations drifted serenely, gently swayed by the subtle movements of cooler air. They were just one exhibit among the many rich sanctuaries of beauty that were distributed among the booths. Arcadia Contemporary's exceptional show of figurative realism was another, including Jeremy Lipking's lovely *Turquoise Poncho*, a new piece delivered to the gallery in time for the show. Lipking has come a long way and deserves accolades. The ancient gods of the palette have touched him. Samuel Salcedo's grimacing sculptures revisiting Messerschmidt's heads were entertaining and dramatic, and Odd Nerdrum's luminous new post-modern oils were as stunning and apocalyptic as ever. Roger Dean and his fabulously imaginative paintings were among the stars of the show. Dean is immune to accusations of plagiarizing the hippy past – he's the real thing, an authentic original of the same degree of cultural importance as his friend Syd Mead, the genius designer of *Bladerunner* who died last month.

Some collectors seek absolution for their wealth by buying art that speaks of social justice, an uncomfortable, tedious, and didactic kind of art that squats like Fuseli's stunted incubus on the chest of the more honest products of luxury. Such moralizing art often smells of hypocrisy. A huge cloth patchwork train of pastel shades titled *Diversity & Pride* was supposed to draw attention to the intersectionalists' plighted troth, but it only evoked poignant memories of the magnificent tribute of the gigantic and deeply moving AIDS quilt made for and by the people who suffered and died from that hideous epidemic. The bourgeois organizers of the show tried to make the event a conventional celebration of the various themes of social justice, but failed to impress, and thankfully there was little of that brand of self-righteousness among the booths – whose owners were more enthusiastic about celebrating honest capitalist success.



Jeff Gillette, *Hollywood*, Archival Pigment Print, 11.25 x 19" Courtesy of Bert Green Fine Art

While virtue-signaling colored the complaints of the social justice warriors, a quietly remarkable exhibit of Jeff Gillette's Disney-inspired oils stood out as a collection of sharp and direct paintings that truly addressed the desperate reality of the plague of Californian homelessness, and captured this crudescent corner of Western civilisation at the moment of its downward transformation. Gillette painted his *Hollywood* fifteen years ago, showing it at Bert Green Fine Art's downtown location. Then, it seemed an especially cynical vision of the negative consequences of Western capitalism. Now, as the expanding slums of gimcrack shanties sheltering Los Angeles' homeless embellish the embankments of the 101 freeway as it winds through the Hollywood hills, it seems that prescient Gillette saw the sordid third-world future that was coming to the city. Haunted, he stabbed the spectral tornado of indigence spiraling in the glitter of Angelino wealth in its heinous heart.

Banksy pranks auction by shredding million-dollar painting. Now it may be worth even more

By AUGUST BROWN
OCT 06, 2018 | LONDON



The spray-painted canvas "Girl with Balloon" by artist Banksy, which was part of his latest prank. The work by the elusive street artist self-destructed in front of startled auction-goers on Oct. 5, 2018, moments after being sold for \$1.4 million to an unidentified buyer. (Associated Press)

The U.K. street artist Banksy is no stranger to provocation. But on Friday, his antagonistic streak reached beyond his painting and into its frame.

At a London Sotheby's auction of his 2006 spray-paint work "Girl With Balloon," the artist rigged a secret shredding contraption into the base of the frame that destroyed the work via remote control. The painting had sold moments before for \$1.4 million to an unidentified buyer, who purchased the painting via telephone.

Banksy posted video of the event on Instagram, which showed stunned auction-goers watching as an alarm sounded before the painting slipped through the frame and shredded roughly half of the canvas into ribbons.

A representative for Banksy, when reached, cited the artist's quotation of Picasso that "the urge to destroy is also a creative urge." A representative for Alex Branczik, Sotheby's head of contemporary art in Europe, said he was unavailable for comment.

The painting, which was auctioned off as part of Sotheby's "Frieze Week" contemporary art sale, had fetched more than three times its initial estimate and set a record sale price for the artist.

Banksy — whose identity still has yet to be confirmed — often incorporates political messaging, anti-capitalist ideas, and art world satire into his work.

In 2013 he even set up a pop-up stand in New York's Central Park, where original canvases of his work were sold to customers for \$60 a piece, far below the large sums his work usually demands.

In March 2005, he sneaked his own artworks into four of New York's most prominent museums, including the American Museum of Natural History, where he left a beetle with missiles on its wings in the "Hall of Biodiversity."

In September 2006, Banksy installed an inflatable version of a Guantanamo Bay prisoner near the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride in Disneyland.

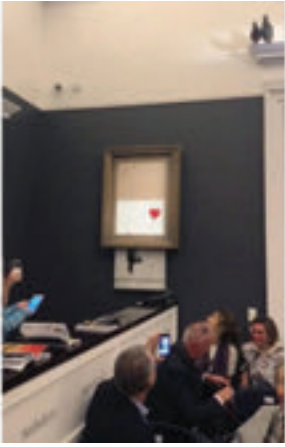
His 2006 debut in America took place in a warehouse in downtown L.A., which featured a live elephant painted like wallpaper standing in a faux living room.

His new stunt, perhaps his most tangible critique of the art market yet, has instantly become the talk of the U.K. art world.

An art world disrupter

Artist Isaiah King, who is exhibiting at The Other Art Fair in London, said the event was abuzz with news of Banksy's antics.

"I keep waiting for him to be irrelevant, and then he goes and does something like that," King said. "If he was a lesser artist, he would have destroyed the art's value. But because it's Banksy it will only be worth more now."



People watch as the spray-painted canvas "Girl with Balloon" by artist Banksy is shredded at Sotheby's in London. (Pierre Koukjian via Associated Press)

Dan Chrichlow, creative director of the creative management agency Dutch Uncle, had a more skeptical view. "I think the auction house knew it was going to happen. I think the whole thing was created. They check everything," he said. "I like the fact that Banksy did it and created a whole story, which is a very Banksy thing to do. But it doesn't feel authentic."

It's unclear if Sotheby's was in on the artist's intent to destroy the work. In a statement, the auction house said it knew the elaborate gilt frame was "an integral element of the artwork chosen by Banksy himself," but Branczik told the Associated Press that "we have not experienced this situation in the past where a painting is spontaneously shredded, upon achieving a record for the artist.... We are busily figuring out what this means in an auction context."

Shepard Fairey, the popular L.A.-based street artist — most well known for his Obama "Hope" posters — said that "I do agree with the underlying sentiment of it. This is an ephemeral art form that street artists who come from the street art world understand: 'It's not gonna last.' Then, ironically, there becomes a demand for it.

"I think Banksy's idea here is that an appreciation for the concept is more important than an appreciation of the object," he added.

Roger Gastman, the street-art expert and curator for MOCA's popular 2011 "Art In The Streets" exhibition and this year's "Beyond the Streets" show in Chinatown, said in an email that with this latest move, Banksy remains one of today's preeminent art-market critics. "Banksy continues to amaze me. The king stays the king," Gastman said.

Ron English, the New York-based street artist whose surreal work frequently comments on capitalism, said that Banksy's antagonism toward his own work is like "Duchamp on steroids."

"Is the work now 10 times as valuable? Or is it worth nothing?" English asked. "He's created this really unique situation for himself."

"Girl With Balloon," which depicts a child reaching upward toward a heart-shaped balloon, was first stenciled on a wall in East London. It has since become one of Banksy's most identifiable images in a career that, despite his anonymity, is meant for maximum public view.

Sotheby's said that it was discussing how to move forward with "Balloon's" buyer, who now owns a shredded but historically significant work by one of contemporary art's most famous figures.

I think Banksy's idea here is that an appreciation for the concept is more important than an appreciation of the object.

— SHEPARD FAIREY

Becoming Banksy

Banksy began his career in the Bristol graffiti scene, tagging buildings with politically trenchant pieces critiquing police violence, Western imperialism and consumer capitalism. He frequently turns to elaborate, clandestine pranks to needle the high-end gallery and museum scene which, while making him rich, has also served as foil for his satirical work.

In 2005, he secretly hung on a wall at the British Museum a piece depicting a prehistoric human pushing a shopping cart. The work remained in the museum for several days before staff noticed it. In 2015, he built "Dismaland," an entire theme park in an abandoned swimming resort, as a comment on British depression and entertainment culture in modern capitalism.

Orange County-based artist Jeff Gillette, whose 2010 “Dismayland” works portraying a slum surrounding the theme park were included in Banksy’s similarly titled project, calls Banksy’s newest prank “brilliant.”

“He’s Banksying the establishment,” Gillette says, “the art world, museum [world] — he’s getting at ’em.”

Though he is one of the world’s best-known contemporary artists, Banksy has always had a mixed relationship with fame, even anonymously. The 2010 documentary “Exit Through The Gift Shop” took a somewhat jaundiced view of the booming street art scene at the time, which made global celebrities out of artists like himself and Fairey.

Fairey likens Banksy’s “Girl With Balloon” prank to performance art: ephemeral but everlasting, regardless of how the auction house ultimately proceeds regarding the work’s new buyer.

“Once he realized that media would latch on to what he was doing, he thought less about the viability of the piece for long-term exposure, [and] more about if the concept and the context was strong enough, it would live forever,” Fairey said. “He’s always thinking in a multi-layered way, and that’s part of his genius.”

He’s Banksying the establishment: the art world, museum [world] — he’s getting at 'em.

— JEFF GILLETTE

Prototypical pranksters

Banksy’s latest stunt has precedence in the art world. The German artist Gustav Metzger coined the genre “auto-destructive art” in the 1960s, and used the inherent ephemerality of his work as a commentary on the post-World War II collapse of the geopolitical order.

English cited Robert Rauschenberg’s “Erased De Kooning Drawing” — where the artist bought and obliterated the work of a peer — as somewhat of a precedent for Banksy’s actions.

But Scott Hove, a California artist who collaborated with Banksy on his “Dismaland” installation, said Banksy broke new ground in demolishing his own work at auction with no advance warning.

“He really ramped it up in a spectacular way. People were aghast,” Hove said. “It’s a moment of clarity to see someone devalue something worth millions. It’s kind of refreshing to see this destruction of contrived value.”

However, he also expected that, given all the media attention on the Sotheby’s stunt, Banksy probably only added to the shredded piece’s allure.

“If I were the buyer, I’d probably have been shocked, then I’d want to preserve it exactly as it is,” Hove said. “Ironically, this will only escalate its value.”

Staff writer Deborah Vankin in Los Angeles and special correspondent Christina Boyle in London contributed to this story.

SLUMSCAPES: POST-APOCALYPTIC PAINTINGS OF A DEVASTATED DISNEYLAND

08.03.2018
08:31 am
Topics:
Amusing
Art
Tags:
Disney
Banksy
Jeff Gillette



Looking at Jeff Gillette's post-apocalyptic paintings of shanty towns and garbage strewn slums juxtaposed with a ruined and decrepit Disneyland kinda makes you think he must have been mighty pissed off he never got to Mickey Mouse's cartoon theme park when he was a kid. But that ain't quite how it goes. In fact, it was almost the other way around. Gillette was a college dropout when he volunteered for the Peace Corps and traveled to Nepal in India, where he witnessed great beauty and wonder, alongside a grim world of poverty, exploitation, and slums as far as the eye could see. "No pictures," one guide told him, but Gillette sneaked off a few snaps.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal for two years, every couple of months I would travel to India and immerse myself in the urban chaos of all the major cities. There I would engage in self-guided tours of the slums, either by taxi, train or foot. I was overwhelmed by those experiences, so much so that I still try to make it there every year. Back then, when you asked a taxi driver to take you to the slums, they would look at you funny. Now there is an industry of slum-tourism.

He eventually returned to the States and set up home in Orange County, home of Disneyland. Looking back at his photographs and rerunning his memories, the two worlds kinda merged. But still, Gillette does freely admit that maybe not getting to Disneyland as a kid threw him off or maybe:

...my own crappy childhood makes me want to tarnish the feigned joy of a pre-pubescent wonderland for others, or tap into the suspect view of others that see the whole system askance, with the Disney corporation being emblematic of society's attempt to mask over the overwhelming ills. Maybe me seeing so much of the real world of polluted, overpopulated, impoverished cities has made me feel that a place that proclaims itself to be the 'The Happiest Place on Earth' is painfully absurd.

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- [Extreme Record Collecting: Confessions of an analog vinyl snob](#)
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“Too-Realism”—images of the what the world is really like for millions of people while the rest of us are caught up in our own little private Disneylands.

Born in Michigan in 1959, Gillette has been painting his Slumscapes featuring Disney characters since 1990. His work was the [main inspiration](#) for Banksy’s own theme park exhibition *Dismaland* in 2015. Gillette’s first Slumscape painting featured Calcutta slums with an image of Mickey Mouse screenpainted upside down on top of the canvas. His work is part satire, part [comment](#):

“I iconoclise stuff. I take stuff, pick at it and f**k with it. When I start messing with something, I see it as an homage. The worst dig at someone is to ignore them. If I bring something up — Disney or Dismaland — it’s a form of flattery in some way, otherwise I wouldn’t bother with it.”

See more of Gillette’s work [here](#).



Is it art, or is it trash? Jeff Gillette wants you to stomp through his 'art landfill'



A detail from Jeff Gillette's painting "Slum Rehabilitation Authority," (2017). (Deborah Vankin / Los Angeles Times)



By **Deborah Vankin**

Los Angeles Times

MAY 30, 2017, 6:00 AM

Jeff Gillette invites you to trash his artworks — to step on them, kick them, wade through the hundreds of drawings and prints littering the floor of Gregorio Escalante Gallery in L.A.'s Chinatown. This is where Gillette's solo show "Total Dismay" opened on Saturday. It's where the artist has created what he calls "an art landfill."

Gillette — who was among those featured in British street artist Banksy's month-long 2015 installation "Dismaland," a dystopian amusement park in Somerset, England — brings that same sardonic tone to his solo show. More than 200 works include large-scale paintings, ink drawings, sculptures and shadow box works.

Disney imagery prevails. The art on the floor, which visitors must walk over when perusing works on the gallery walls, was created by Gillette and his students at Tustin's Foothill High School, where he teaches, during the last year. The

concrete floor is blanketed with hundreds of variations on Mickey Mouse, ink-drawn, pencil-sketched, finger-painted, collaged. While Gillette's pieces on the gallery's walls are priced into the thousands of dollars, the paper works on the floor are \$5 apiece. That they're strewn on the ground and presented as trash is the point, he says. Gillette is juxtaposing art and garbage to make a statement about the subjective nature of the art market.

"Who sets the value on art? It's pretty arbitrary," Gillette says. "I'm a little cynical on who dictates that. It has nothing to do with the artist or the art, I think, especially when you get into the blue chip stuff. It's more to do with commerce and people flipping art and making money. I'm working on the far bottom end of that spectrum. Is it garbage or art? You decide."

Over the last year, Gillette has traveled to residential slums in Mumbai, India, for what he calls "art interventions." He was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal in the late 1980s and has visited India more than 20 times in the last three decades, so the area is close to his heart. A fine artist who's also experimented with political street art, Gillette paints peppy Disney imagery on the walls surrounding these ramshackle shanty towns, vast landfills and outdoor toilets. He photographs the scene where his public art hangs, then he paints photo-realistic versions, adorning the canvases with sculpted latex to give the oil and acrylic works a three-dimensional quality.

The idea, he says, is to turn a spotlight on the poverty and suffering that some people might otherwise ignore.

"I always use Disney, the supposed happiest place on Earth, with what I would consider the heaviest place on Earth," he says. "There's realism, and then there's 'too-realism' — my work — it's too realistic, stuff that people don't really want to look at."

Gillette plans to return to Mumbai for a month to erect a large-scale Disney castle sculpture in the slums. It's a tricky installation.

"You gotta get permission not from the city, but from the mafia lords," he says. "They kinda control the slums."

Gillette also made hundreds of small shack sculptures for the Gregorio Escalante Gallery exhibition. Some are made of cardboard and wood, adorned with found objects and commercial imagery, such as a Twinkie box cutout or a Coca-Cola logo. Others are made from beer cans or 12-pack boxes.

Among the most pointed works in the exhibition are large-scale paintings of slums based on his art interventions. Gillette digitally collaged or re-created with paint images of the works of Jackson Pollock, Roy Lichtenstein and Mark Rothko. Lichtenstein's bright comic-book imagery adorns the roof of one shack; Pollock's chaotic black-and-white paint drippings adorn another.

"It's like if they took Rothkos and used them to build their houses with them," Gillette says. "Like if things go really, really bad, that stuff just becomes architecture materials."



Disney-Inspired Dystopian "Art Landfill" Features Mickey Mouse in a Trash Dump

8:00 AM PDT 5/25/2017 by Sharon Swart

Source URL: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/disney-inspired-dystopian-art-landfill-features-mickey-mouse-a-trash-dump-1006572>



Courtesy of Jeff Gillette

'Bandra Mickey Flyover' sets Disney's mouse in an Indian slum, juxtaposing "the happiest place on earth and the heaviest place," says Gillette.

"Initially, it's a little hard to look at," says actress Joanna Cassidy of Jeff Gillette's dark work, which goes on view Saturday at L.A.'s Gregorio Escalante Gallery.

Two years ago, Jeff Gillette's work — dystopian shantytowns juxtaposed with cartoonish (often Disney) images — caught the eye of elusive U.K. artist Banksy, who invited the SoCal painter to participate in his 2015 abandoned-theme-park project, *Dismaland*, in the English coastal town of Weston-super-Mare. "My work was so dreary and miserable that he thought it was a good fit," says Gillette.

Gillette was flown over to the U.K. with his wife, artist Laurie Hassold. Both were quickly enlisted to make mouse ears out of paint-can lids for *Dismaland's* workers. And Gillette's work, still relatively unknown internationally, was used in an official *Dismaland* poster and exhibited next to a Damien Hirst piece in the project's gallery.

Years before Banksy's *Dismaland*, Gillette had used "Dismayland" to label his ironic dark visions. Exposure in L.A.-area galleries brought admirers from the art world and the entertainment industry, from Tobey Maguire to attorney (and former MOCA interim director) Maria Seferian.

"It's very cleverly done," says actress Joanna Cassidy (*Odd Mom Out*), who owns three Gillette works. "Initially, it's a little hard to look at, but he has an amusing element to it."

Now *Total Dismay*, a new iteration of Gillette's dark vision opens May 27 at DTLA's Gregorio Escalante Gallery.

A self-described late starter in painting (he cartooned before), Gillette developed his preoccupation with dilapidated cities and slums during his time serving in the Peace Corps and his travels to India in the 1980s. The Disney fascination came in part from growing up in the 1960s and '70s with *The Wonderful World of Disney* and the lure of Disneyland, which was beyond his reach as a kid in the Detroit suburbs with parents of modest means. "It was a dream that I could never, ever realize," he says.

When he moved to Orange County in the 1990s to teach, Disney iconography became a way "to give people a foothold" with work that depicts extreme poverty and environmental decay. "Around here, all the kids have a season pass to Disneyland. Everyone has their ear turned to it. So it's accessible for me as a social satirist." The result: works like *Bandra Mickey Flyover*, which places the iconic Disney mouse in the slums of an Indian city. "It's the juxtaposition that I happen to find fascinating: the happiest place on earth, and the heaviest place on earth."

In Gillette's new show, Mickey Mouse sits atop a massive trash dump, and slums are strewn with Xbox packaging. Gillette also plays with the question, "How do we choose what and how we ascribe worth to things?" he says. If you look closely, some of his worlds are patched together with priceless mid-century art, including Pollocks and Lichtensteins. "I'm going to cover the gallery floor with signed and numbered prints, and some originals," he says. "Like walking through an art landfill."

Says gallerist/collector Greg Escalante of Gillette's work, "It's not totally idyllic nor horrific, but it's two extremes: the yin and yang of wealth and poverty. It makes you kind of appreciate the beauty in both situations."

The opening reception for *Total Dismay* is scheduled for May 27 from 7-10 p.m.; the exhibit runs through July 2.

A version of this story first appeared in the May 24 issue of The Hollywood Reporter magazine. To receive the magazine, [click here to subscribe](#) [2].

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[1] http://pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?url=www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/disney-inspired-dystopian-art-landfill-features-mickey-mouse-a-trash-dump-1006572&media=http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/news_landscape/2017/05/jeff-gillette_bandra-mickey-flyover-sm_2017_acrylic-and-collage-on-canvas_30x48in_-_h_2017.jpg&description=Disney-Inspired Dystopian "Art Landfill" Features Mickey Mouse in a Trash Dump

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An American artist shows the darker side to the Disneyland fantasy

ART-AND-CULTURE ([HTTP://WWW.HINDUSTANTIMES.COM/ART-AND-CULTURE](http://www.hindustantimes.com/art-and-culture))

Updated: Dec 10, 2016 08:49 IST



Nidhi Choksi



Transition Dismaland by Jeffery Gillette (Photo courtesy: Jeffery Gillette)

Cartoon character Mickey Mouse painted upside down on a shanty in Dharavi, Disney Castle in utter ruin, Mickey as Satan — an American art teacher's 'Slumscapes' find beauty in contrast.

Most of us have fond memories of watching the cartoon character, Mickey Mouse, or of visiting Disneyland as a child. And we often associate Mickey Mouse and other Walt Disney characters with happy surroundings. But USA-based artist Jeffrey Gillette hasn't had the best of experiences with the characters and his artwork reflects that.

The 57-year-old, who has been a public secondary school art teacher for 25 years, lives in Costa Mesa, California — within earshot of the nightly fireworks at Disneyland. His childhood was spent in Detroit — a relatively poor city. Gillette never got to go to Disneyland as a child. When he finally got a chance to meet the characters, he was unimpressed.

While working on his Master in Fine Arts, from California State University, he started painting slums with Disney symbols. "Disney is such a big deal in southern California, so I felt the need to parody it. I wanted to vent some of the disappointment I felt," he says.



Bandra Green at [Lawrence Alkin Gallery](#) June 2016.



'Original/ Altered Prints' available through Bert Green Fine Art: <http://bgfa.us/artists/gillette/lml.html>

There is a lot of symbolism associated with Mickey Mouse, the Disney Castle and the Disneyland signs: they represent childhood, innocence, fantasy and American culture. By taking those elements and placing them in a scene that is “too real”, Jeffrey gives weight and awareness to both — Disney and poverty.

AVENGING THE PROMISED LAND

Since Disneyland claims to be the ‘happiest place on earth’, Gillette likes juxtaposing it with scenes of poverty. He places symbols of the entertainment giant in compromising situations, in slums or landfills (think of Mickey Mouse defecating in a sewage area, shattered Disneyland signboards, the iconic Disney Castle in ruins, or Mickey as Satan). “I find the slums and the impromptu architecture of shacks to be visually arresting. Apart from the reality of the economic and political situation, there is a strange kind of beauty there,” he says, explaining his fascination for slums.



From the twelve pieces in the 'Minnie Hiroshima' series, #1 sold at Lawrence Alkin Gallery!

Gillette terms his paintings as ‘Slumscapes’ and paints with oil and/or acrylic on canvas. His art depicts impoverished areas in developing countries such as Mumbai (Dharavi), Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Thailand and Nepal —all of which he has visited. “Some are a bit frightening to be in, others are really difficult to have access to. I’ve been told by residents to ‘get the hell out’ in some areas, and warned that it wasn’t safe in others,” he says. The people in Dharavi are disinterested at worst or welcoming and friendly at best, he adds.

Gillette has been to India over 20 times. During his first visit in 1987, he travelled through India extensively, and was fascinated by the slums. When a local tour operator offered to show him around Dharavi, he agreed. “Soon, I befriended my now Dharavi resident guide, Hashim Abdul. He takes me around and gives me access to wherever I want to visit.”



"Disneyland Castle Slum Landfill Telephone Poles" Acrylic and Collage on canvas, 31" x 50." At [Reedprojects Gallery](#) for my show [Dismayland NORD Jeff Gillette \(US\) Solo Exhibition / NUART FESTIVAL](#)

Ask him if Disney has raised any objection to his artwork yet, and he says, "Thank Vishnu, no! But they know of me." He admits that people often ask him if he is a disgruntled former Disney employee. The kids at his school love him for poking fun at something that has been so important to them in their upbringing, but the management ignores him.

Lately, he has painted stencils of Mickey Mouse, the Disney Castle and his character 'Minsky' (Mickey + Banksy — the face of Mickey, upside down) in Dharavi and Bandra.

Last year, when the popular England-based graffiti artist, Banksy, invited him to take part in his satire of Disney with his Dismaland Project, it boosted his exposure, and allowed him to exhibit his work in Europe (Lawrence Alkin Gallery, London; Nuart Gallery, Norway). He doesn't have any plans of showcasing his work in a gallery in India as yet.

As for the future, Gillette wishes to get hold of hundreds of Mickey Mouse dolls and "litter the area (Dharavi) with them. Maybe print hundreds of Mickey Mouse T-shirts (upside-down) and distribute them throughout a community as well."

Check out the Urban Canvas artist profile series on:

The Creators Project

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Meet the 'Slumscape' Painter Who Inspired Banksy's Dystopian Theme Park

Kevin Holmes (/author/kevinholmes) — Jun 28 2016



Dismaland Calais by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

Last year Banksy opened art exhibition *Dismaland* in the form of a subversive theme park in the UK coastal town of Weston-super-mare. Not only did it draw sellout crowds but it was estimated to have generated an extra £20m (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-34347681>) for the local economy. One of the main inspirations behind the slum-Disneyland aesthetic tone of the park is considered to be American artist and painter Jeff Gillette

Gillette has been painting scenes of Disney characters juxtaposed with post-apocalyptic landscapes, landfill sites, and slums for over 20 years. He now has a new show in London at the Lawrence Alkin Gallery called *Post Dismal*, trading on the success of Banksy's *Dismaland* and bringing new audiences to his work.

The show features a collection of 15 paintings which, in a meta chain of influence, are in turn inspired by Banksy's *Dismaland* project. "I would like to think that I had a part in the inspiration for Banksy's satirization of the magic kingdom," Gillette explains to The Creators Project, "but I've maintained, even to Banksy in an email, that I felt that we have 'similar sensibilities.' *Dismaland* itself had some strong similarities to the real Disneyland: long lines, and unhappy workers. It also had the excellence that Disney maintains in its productions and presentations."



Mickey Nagasaki Orange by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

In Gillette's new paintings we see Disney icons like Mickey Mouse on a billboard in the middle of a devastated post-nuked Nagasaki or the Cinderella Castle in the 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais—looming large, looking tatty and disheveled, with migrants, pop culture figures like Beavis and Butthead, Cookie Monster, and *Dismaland* workers wandering among the tents and ruin.

"When I was 32 years old, I purged myself of my old art, burned it all, then moved out of Michigan to start over," says the artist. "I moved to Orange County, home of Disneyland. I began to paint *Slumscape Paintings*, embellishing them with different out-of-place elements, most often the most beloved Disney icons."



Mickey Slum Shack One by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

The settings of the *Slumscape* paintings also hold a journalistic or "photo-documenting" element, because Gillette often visits the places he depicts, capturing these transient shanty towns and settlements in places like Mumbai, India and elsewhere, before they're destroyed and the inhabitants

are moved on—documenting their evolution and ever-changing sizes. "Since the shacks are often, illegal, informal settlements, they are subject to being razed by authorities. So in some ways they are documents of transitory environments," Gillette says.

Disney themselves have never taken any legal action against Gillette's work—he says it's more mild parody than anything too threatening. Plus it's the sanitized capitalist symbol of what corporate Disney stands for rather any of their particular artistic output that Gillette is satirizing.



London Eye by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

"Maybe not being able to go to Disneyland as a child threw me off," Gillette explains. "Or perhaps my own crappy childhood makes me want to tarnish the feigned joy of a pre-pubescent wonderland for others, or tap into the suspect view of others that see the whole system askance, with the Disney corporation being emblematic of society's attempt to mask over the overwhelming ills. Maybe me seeing so much of the real world of polluted, overpopulated, impoverished cities has made me feel that a place that proclaims itself to be the 'The Happiest Place on Earth' is painfully absurd."

He does, however, have a favorite Disney movie—or Pixar movie anyway—and that's *Wall-E*, which is fitting. "It is a harsh satire in its own right on contemporary civilization," he notes.

It's not just Disney that influences Gillette's paintings, though; he also takes a lot of inspiration from the thoughts and writings of 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer is a pessimist, resigned to the fact that the world is senseless, lacking meaning and reason. It's all just mindless, inescapable chaos and destruction. (The nihilism of Rust Cohle's character in *True Detective* is influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy.)

Gillette came to the philosopher's work when he was a volunteer in the Peace Corps in the late 1980s travelling in Nepal and India. While there he spent a lot of time reading and some of the texts he brought with him that really struck a chord were by Schopenhauer. "It was like a breath of distilled



Disneyland Sign 'Disrupt' by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

lucidity, confirming to me the perpetually miserable state that everything is in," Gillette notes. "To Schopenhauer, irrationality controls the universe, flung along by a blind, flailing will-to-live instinct, mired in pain, wanting or ennui."



Bandra Green by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

Along with the teachings of Buddhism that life is suffering, it resonated deeply with the artist. It's not all doom and gloom though, because in Buddhism, relinquishing the ego and desire can end suffering. For Schopenhauer, a way to end both is through aesthetic and artistic contemplation. So Gillette's art is both an acknowledgement of the crappiness of the world and his own salvation.

"Being in Nepal for two years, I was mired in a mystical sense of a simple life surrounded by natural beauty and wonder," Gillette says. "Often, I would leave and submerge myself into India's megalopolises and visit the immensely oppressive, ugly slums. Somehow the two opposites merged where the cacophony of visual chaos of the slum became my beautiful muse. My *Slumscape* paintings have become visual representations of what Schopenhauer describes as the worst of all possible worlds. The post apocalyptic landscape paintings are an even more dire representation of the idea of a world gone wrong."



Dismal Aid London by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist



Gates by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist



Transition Dismaland by Jeff Gillette. Image courtesy of the artist

The Telegraph

Jeff Gillette: in the studio



American artist Jeff Gillette in his studio in California



Bandra Green (detail), Jeff Gillette

By [Rupert Hawksley](#)

27 JUNE 2016

In 2010, American artist Jeff Gillette, 56, created a series of paintings called Dismayland. This body of work is thought to have inspired Banksy's major 2015 installation project Dismaland. Gillette's post-apocalyptic oil paintings juxtapose the manufactured joy of Disney and symbols of consumer culture with imagery from slums and shanty towns, including Mumbai and the Calais jungle. Inspired by the writing of German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, Gillette's art is, in his words, about "taking the things people love and imposing the worst-case scenario [on them]". Post-Dismal, Gillette's first UK solo show, features 15 paintings, spanning 20 years of his career. It is on display at London's Lawrence Alkin gallery until July 23.

Every weekday morning, I get up at 6am. I plan for the day in the shower. I am up so early because I teach art to teenagers at a local high school. This can be as challenging as it is rewarding. I've learned so much about the perplexing psychology of adolescents, which maybe inspires the sophomoric humor and mischief in my work.

The high school is 15 miles away, along the Southern California freeways. I feel as if I'm swimming in a metallic river battling against all the other drivers who are usually texting, in a hurry or pissed off. I get distracted as well, though, flipping through morning talk show radio stations, while changing lanes at 78 miles-per-hour.

By late afternoon, I'm free to work on my own art. But if it's a weeknight, I'm in bed by 10pm. I have somehow managed to juggle the two careers successfully – so far, anyway...

My studio is one of the three bedrooms in our Orange County house. It looks as if a bomb has gone off in there. Books, paints, paintings, papers, laundry – dirty and clean – are all over the floor. There is an easel with a painting on it and a computer hooked up to a flat-screen TV. All the walls are covered in paintings that I am working on. Along one wall are sheets covering vertically-stacked paintings. Since we don't have kids of our own, my wife, the sculptor Laurie Hassold, uses another bedroom as her studio.

I also work in the garage. It has a big door facing the sunny backyard and I use it for painting in oil. The garage is a mess as well and a bit filthy with kitty-litter carpeting the floor. Within arms-reach of the easel is a refrigerator with cold, carbonated adult beverages.

In all three studios are stereos that play different music – sometimes all at the same time. I still listen to self-recorded cassette tapes. Inside the house, I listen to obscure and alternative music from the Eighties and Nineties, such as American Music Club, Flying Saucer Attack, The Legendary Pink Dots, Brian Eno, Joy Division, Boards of Canada and lots of stuff recorded from college radio.

In the garage I play louder music – Nirvana, Echo and the Bunnymen, Public Image Limited, Industrial Music, that sort of thing. My neighbour is a contractor, so when he breaks out the power tools, I *blast* my music so loud that when he is sawing sheet metal, he asks me to turn it down. My wife shares new music, such as A Place to Bury Strangers, Mogwai and True Widow.

Everything is a distraction when I'm working. But the work is most enjoyable when I get into "the zone" and I'm concentrating on fine details. Learning Vipassana meditation has given me the ability to focus. I learnt Vipassana meditation during a 10-day, silent retreat in Kathmandu. Dealing with loud classrooms of school kids has also honed my ability to block out most unwanted noise.



Mickey Nagasaki Orange, Jeff Gillette

When I lived near Detroit, I used to bike to college through some funky parts of the city. Lately, with the advent of "Slum Tourism", the impoverished parts of the world are much easier to access. I now have a guide in Mumbai and have recently made some artist friends in Mumbai and Delhi. Presently, we are discussing some plans to bring art to the slums.

When I think that a work is finished, I ask my wife if to look at it. She teaches part-time at college and is nice to her students in critiques, so I ask her not to be nice to me. She too easily obliges. After her observation, I resist, grumble, stare, and go back to work.

I always feel the need to record what I'm experiencing. Life is an aesthetic experience. I'm always engaged in art. Whether or not these experiences manifest themselves into actual artwork is another story, though.

I never feel as if I have artists' block. In fact, I have too many ideas to physically create all the work. What I do have is periods where I'm discouraged. The last period happened right before I was invited to participate in Dismaland. At that point I quit painting seriously for a while and instead worked on fun, *plein aire* abstract landscapes, which I then burned. Since my Dismaland debut, I have been working long hours, painting almost daily with lots of engaging ideas.



Dismal Aid London (detail), Jeff Gillette

The whole house is full of mine and my wife's art, as well as stuff we have collected. We actually fight over wall space, especially when I start using the walls for storage.

Art is a solitary endeavour. I don't have assistants. I used to stretch my own canvases until I blew my chest out. Now I buy them or have them custom made. Recently I've experimented a tiny bit by having college students prepare work with under-paintings for oil work.

I work on half a dozen pieces or more at once. I switch off and choose which studio I want to use, depending on the paint or the weather (the garage gets pretty cold). When I am further along with a work, though, I will focus on just one piece and charge through to finish it. Some are easy, and flow nicely, others require more work. Some are given time to "cure", where I hang them up so I can study them over longer periods of time and find things to refine.

I travel to developing countries for artistic inspiration. Since my first solo trip to India way back in 1982, I've been travelling to the world's big cities, get off the beaten track and into the slums, either walking, on a train or in a taxi. I have been to Jakarta, Bangkok, Cairo, Nairobi, Lima, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Manila, and South Central LA.



Transition Dismaland 1 (detail), Jeff Gillette

I keep ongoing sketchbooks as illustrated journals. I write down ideas, observations, travel plans and keep progress on my paintings. I work in these journals most often in the afternoon, when I take a break from painting. I go outside, sit by the pool, sunbathe in my birthday suit, sip on a cold one, think, write and draw.

To relax, one of my favorite things to do is to camp out in the desert alone. I drive my 4x4 pick-up truck out into the Mojave desert. I often go out during a full moon and go as far from any sign of civilization as I can get. In the vast desert wasteland, I appreciate the silence, the solitude and awesome beauty. The contemplation of a tranquil, windless desert sunset on the middle of dry lake bed is the closest I ever get to spirituality. I often find myself drawn to the ugly, though. Lately, I have been exploring illegal desert dump-sites.

EveningStandard.

June 23, 2016

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Jeff Gillette: the man who inspired Banksy

Jeff Gillette's subversive paintings were the source of the street artist's Dismaland theme park, he tells Frankie McCoy

FRANKIE MCCOY | 6 hours ago | [0 comments](#)



Dark take: Minnie Hiroseries

How do you get the attention of the fiercely anonymous Banksy? You “Banksy Banksy”. That’s the advice of California-based art teacher Jeff Gillette, who is in London for the opening tomorrow of his exhibition inspired by the graffiti artist’s apocalyptic Dismaland theme park.

The origins of Gillette’s Post-Dismal show date back to 2006, when Banksy staged his Barely Legal exhibition in LA. The headline act was a live, painted elephant, and Gillette’s friends insisted he get

involved. "I had some collectors egg me on, saying 'You gotta go Banksy Banksy. You gotta go put one of your pieces in his show'." Gillette got around the stringent security by sticking his painting down his shirt. "And I went into the room with all his stencil paintings, so I just stuck it in between two of them and got my picture taken."

It's the kind of move of which you imagine Banksy —famous for leaving his trademark stencilled graffiti as a calling card, most recently at a Bristol primary school —would have approved. The same holds for the subject of Gillette's illegal addition to Barely Legal: a subversive take on Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe*. In Manet's original painting a naked woman poses between two clothed men at a picnic. In Gillette's version these men are Taliban fighters, the woman is wearing a burka and their feast of fruit and cheese is a McDonald's meal. Now Gillette, 56, fantasises that Banksy stole the work for himself. "The painting disappeared half an hour later," he grins. "Ever since then I've kidded that he's my collector!"

Why would the globally renowned Banksy be interested in a little-known Orange County art teacher, a dead ringer for a lesser-haired Jeff Lebowski? Because Gillette's work happens to be the principal inspiration behind Banksy's biggest project to date: last summer's Weston-super-Mare-based Dismaland. Gillette put on a show called Dismayland in 2010 —five years before Banksy's theme park was announced. Then last year Banksy got in touch with Gillette, asking him, along with other artists, to come and help on the project. Gillette and his artist wife Laurie Hassold made the Mickey Mouse ears worn by the Dismaland workers. A canny way of Banksy preventing a lawsuit from Gillette, perhaps. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, imitation followed by incorporation of the original is an ingenious legal manoeuvre. Because it's not just a case of similar names. Gillette has been satirising Disney and its characters since 1990: think dead Mickey Mouses imposed upon apocalyptic landscapes, and bestiality involving Pluto the dog. It's far from PG-rated.



Satire: Gillette's take on Disney

A visit to the slums of Calcutta in 1982 was the first call to subversive arms for Gillette, a proud pessimist. The idea of painting the scenes he saw in Calcutta "incubated" until he moved to

California from Michigan and found himself drowning in cutesy cartoon animals. “Disney is saturated, it’s on billboards everywhere,” he says. Yet Gillette thinks Disneyland’s self-promotion as “the happiest place on earth” is “absurd”. “You know, you talk to the people who spend \$100 to get there, parking, and then it’s crowded, like the subway here. I hate it; I went back a couple of weeks ago and I was miserable.” I suggest all the people inside the character costumes are alcoholic depressives and he guffaws. “God knows what’s inside there!”

Gillette’s first dabbling with Mickey and co was a painting of a Calcutta slum on which he screen-printed upside down Mickey Mouses. Another, Minnie Hiroshima, formed part of an exhibition at Dismaland after Banksy bought it via his agent, having apparently come across it in a long-ago show. Soon after, Gillette was recruited for Dismaland.



Burnt out: an ice cream van at Banksy's Dismaland Bemusement Park (Lucie Lang/Alamy)

Scenes of chirpy cartoon animals imposed on a site of atomic attack might be in-your-face provocation but the question of taste doesn’t trouble a man who put on a graduate show that mixed Disney, porn and the Bible. So Gillette has no qualms about updating his apocalyptic landscapes to reflect news stories —such as adding the ticking crocodile from Peter Pan with a small child protruding from its mouth to his Disneyworld Landfill painting, a dark reference to the recent tragedy in Orlando. “Hey, four alligators died for that kid!” he protests.

One line Gillette won’t cross, though, is American politics —indeed he insists “I’m not political”. That means Donald Trump — admittedly a political caricature to begin with —is off limits. “I iconoclose stuff. I take stuff, pick at it and f**k with it. When I start messing with something, I see it as an homage. The worst dig at someone is to ignore them. If I bring something up —Disney or Dismaland —it’s a form of flattery in some way, otherwise I wouldn’t bother with it.” Gillette thinks his work is more “psychological” than political, although if that’s the case then it’s a satire on our obsessive analysis of our own psyches: “You know, maybe I had a shitty childhood”, he smirks.

“I never got to go to Disneyland so I’m just crapping on something everybody loves.”

Disney is legendary for being fiercely protective over its trademarks —how has Gillette got around that? He invokes “fair use” —the US legal doctrine that permits limited use of copyrighted material without acquiring permission from rights holders —but confesses that really, “I have no idea! I’ve just slipped through. No one has said anything. I think maybe, if they go after people, it gives them a little bit of attention so they’ve backed off.”

Gillette even got around a decree from Banksy himself, who commissioned him to paint a new picture (Ferris Wheel, the rides ruined and half buried in trash) for Dismaland. “Banksy emailed saying, ‘I put an official ban: no Mickey’s. None.’ But when you say no to an artist, he’s not going to stick to it. That’s a green light.” Gillette slipped in a tiny mouse figure among the debris, it passed Banksy’s approval, and sold at the theme park.



Subversive: Jeff Gillette

Gillette might have smuggled a Mickey past Banksy but Banksy couldn’t evade him in Dismaland. At 1am in the ruined Cinderella castle, he and Hassold were asked “if we’d met ‘The Princess’ yet. It was just us in there and the workers, and he was the only guy without a security jacket on.” Although too awestruck to speak to the great man himself —“We messed up,” Hassold laughs —a picture they’ve seen since confirms it was the artist who simultaneously imitates and inspires Gillette. But maybe they’ll have another chance. Banksy has been invited to Gillette’s show, providing him with the perfect opportunity for a decade-old revenge, and the ultimate flattery: sneak his own work into the show, and Gillette Gillette.

Jeff Gillette’s Post-Dismal is at Lawrence Alkin Gallery, WC2 (020 7240 7909, lawrencealkingallery.com) from tomorrow until July 23

[@franklymccoy](https://twitter.com/franklymccoy)



Before Banksy, Painter Jeff Gillette's 'Dismayland' Took on Disney

Liz Goldner



Jeff Gillette, "DISYLAND." | Image: Courtesy of the artist.

Jeff Gillette grew up in the suburbs of 1960s Detroit enamored with "The Wonderful World of Disney" TV show. Yet, this vision was shattered in his late teens in 1978, when he finally visited the Orange County amusement park and discovered that he actually detested the place for its utopian artificiality. "I went with a friend and we hated it and we stayed for only 30 minutes," he said. Subsequently, however, with a growing interest in Pop art, he began drawing Disney characters, particularly Mickey Mouse, which he liked for its simple circular features and graphic possibilities.

After high school, Gillette attended art school in the Detroit area, but adventure soon called, and he spent two years in the Peace Corps in Nepal, often visiting nearby Calcutta's sprawling shantytowns in his spare time. When queried about his attraction to these slums, which he says "have the most horrible living conditions on Earth," he explains that he is attracted to the fundamental architecture and survival mentality. He has subsequently visited impoverished communities in many parts of the world, and has painted numerous versions of their harsh realities.

With these perspectives, it seems ironic that Gillette (who eventually received his bachelor's degree and MFA) moved to idyllic Orange County in 1993, living in Costa Mesa, with its moniker, "City of the Arts." But his deeper desire was to make a living to support a home and studio to feed his art addiction. The job that enabled him to move here was a teaching position at Foothill High School in Tustin, where he still teaches art today. An interesting aspect to this eventuality is that he now lives and works in the shadow of nearby Disneyland in Anaheim, and his students frequent that fantasy realm.



Jeff Gillette, "Crows." Disney book collage painting. | Image: Courtesy of the artist.

Within a year of moving here, this county's obsession with Disney culture helped inspire Gillette to play around with the cartoon and movie images in his studio, sometimes besmirching them with tattered clothes and features; he later began adding these characters to his detailed paintings and assemblage pieces of slums. "I was trying to find the absolute opposite of the happiest place on Earth," he remarked. He has gradually segued from including frightened Mickeys and Minnies in his landscapes, to re-creating archetypal Disney buildings such as the iconic Castle, turning them into Gothic monstrosities that still resemble the original structures. Gillette first used his "Dismayland" title in 2010 to describe his expansive series of paintings and assemblages, which depict a post-apocalyptic third world wasteland and include the Disney structures and characters.

The artist has seen great interest and sales of these artworks, which are carried by Copro Gallery in L.A. and by Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago. Then in the spring of 2015, he received a message via Facebook from the manager for Banksy, the omnipresent yet invisible English street artist known for exploring war, political corruption, hope and revolution. Banksy, through his manager, asked Gillette to provide him with six large "Dismayland" paintings for an exhibition he was mounting in England, which also included works by British art provocateur Damien Hirst. Gillette worked laboriously on the requested pieces, sent them off to the UK in the early summer, and all of them sold very quickly.



Jeff Gillette, "Bunnies." Acrylic, collage and pencil on canvas. | Image: Courtesy of the artist.

Soon after, he received an invitation from the British artist's manager to visit and help install a large, secretive installation that Banksy was setting up in Weston-super-Mare, UK, three hours from London. Gillette's wife, Laurie Hassold, was invited to go along. The talented sculptor creates intricate pieces addressing, "the dichotomous themes of life/death; art/science; mind/body and order/chaos," as she explains.

Arriving in that small town in late August 2015 was an epiphany for the couple. After Gillette's two plus decades of laboring over his slum dwellings juxtaposed with Disney characters, they witnessed Banksy's life-size "Dismaland" bemusement park -- which featured rides and displays, evocative of Gillette's own "Dismayland." The "Dismaland" Castle, particularly, appeared derivative of Gillette's castles. But the OC artist quickly adds that he and Banksy share similar sensibilities. However, a commentator on the UK's Channel 4 International remarked on August 21, 2015 -- at the bemusement park's opening -- that "Dismaland was in part inspired by the work of Jeff Gillette, who's been subverting Disney for years."



Jeff Gillette, "Dead Landfill." Acrylic and birds collaged from Disney books. | Image: Courtesy of the artist.

The park also featured a scary carousel and Ferris wheel, a boat carrying immigrants with nowhere to go, and the installation, "Cinderella Crash," within the Castle. In this piece, a dead Cinderella hung, arms and face first, from a crashed pumpkin carriage while the paparazzi were madly taking photos. Hassold said that the artwork reminded her of Princess Diana's death scene. The couple was enchanted by the morose theme park. As part of CNN's reporting on the park, Gillette remarked, "You gotta go in there and experience and think, and wonder, and maybe get mad or laugh. That's a deeper entertainment than I think any other theme park would have."

Gillette returned home from Dismaland stoked and ready to paint a new series of Disney-infused paintings, but this time he turned the tables, using Banksy's park as inspiration. He soon painted "Dismaland Castle," a post-apocalyptic Banksy-style castle among rubble and decrepit constructions. He also created "Dismal Sign," with its dilapidated Disneyland sign rising above a huge pile of trash with colorful birds flying overhead. Banksy would likely be pleased with these paintings and with Gillette's use of his own visual material. Copro Gallery brought them to SCOPE, as part of Miami Art Week in early December, and both pieces sold quickly.

Where does Gillette go from here? He wants to live near the shantytowns of the developing world for a few weeks to paint *en plein air*, in the tradition of the California Impressionists. His desire is to immerse himself in the setting, remarking that he finds a universal human spirit and strange kind of beauty within the chaos and desperation. Will he still include Disney images in these paintings? He has not yet decided.



Jeff Gillette, "Shadow City Minnie." Oil on canvas



Jeff Gillette, "Slum Landfill 7." Acrylic on canvas.



Jeff Gillette, "MicWorlds." Acrylic on canvas.



Jeff Gillette, "Murakami II ." Oil on canvas



Jeff Gillette, "Southern California (Bunnies & Bees)." Acrylic on canvas.



“STAGE,” 2012, **Jeff Gillette**
 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 20" X 36"
 PHOTO: COURTESY BERT GREEN FINE ART

CHICAGO

**Jeff Gillette: “Slumscapes”
 at Bert Green Fine Art**

Jeff Gillette is to the decrepit ambiguity of third-world Shantytowns what Cézanne was to the brooding profile of Mont Sainte-Victoire. Both found in their source material something so central to their psychology as to provide them an idiosyncratic lifetime of sustenance—in Gillette’s case, a lifetime so far!—in images of seemingly endless malleability and variegation. For Gillette, these dense warrens of closely packed shacks cobbled together from found pieces of metal and wood—a true collage architecture—that often appear in the poorest neighborhoods of tropical cities are mesmerizing and teeming with an energy that seems to crackle. This energy creates a kind of confetti of horizontals and verticals that, particularly in a work such as *Caracas/Tree Park 2* (2012), seems to proliferate in a cellular, organic manner. People are never present in Gillette’s work (or, for that matter, in Cézanne’s MSV images), and there’s little interest in narrative or in some kind of social commentary here; it’s more of a beehive effect, the sense that life courses through these places. Gillette’s palette is somewhat upbeat, and he sprinkles these pretty much realist works with little allusions to

Disneyana or to some high art images making their way to these shacks. The slums are extremely interesting visually, and as presented are not without allure; rather, it is the allusions to Mickey or Daisy or Murakami’s Mr. DOB that end up evoking a morose feeling, a sense that something is askew, out of place. But on the whole there is a kind of chastened nobility to how Gillette perceives these places, which in reality must be hellish. Like Gauguin sometimes representing the Polynesia of his dreams, no matter what his eyes told him as he looked about, here too the inclination is not to judge, but to enhance certain visual elements that end up driving Gillette’s image far more than its narrative or social content does.

Gillette shared the exhibition with some intriguing urban scenes by Carl Ramsey, and the two artists indicate that the cityscape is nowhere near exhausted as a wistful and complex metaphor for the people who live within them, and that place has not been homogenized into irrelevance.

—JAMES YOOD



AUG 07 2012

Review: Jeff Gillette/Bert Green Fine Art

[Michigan Avenue, Painting](#)



Jeff Gillette likes to go slumming in our planet's most congested sites of improvisational housing, and then he returns back home to paint them. His studio is in Orange County, California, home of Disneyland, as well as some of the wealthiest suburbs in America. So it's no surprise that he sees slums as theme parks of depravation, occasionally enhanced with some cartoonish relics of Mickey Mouse. All of this sounds rather depressing, but actually these paintings feel upbeat, perhaps in response to the irrepressible, universal human ability to adapt to adverse circumstances, and we might recall that many first-generation Americans lived in shacks or tenements.

Gillette doesn't show us how it feels to live in these places. Rather, they set a hyper-real stage for some kind of fantasy, with dramatic gestures provided by the haphazard protrusions of colorful, recycled materials. In other words, he's

telling a story, but unlike animated cartoons or the Social-Realist depiction of hovels, no cast of colorful characters has been provided. The overcrowded neighborhoods are as desolate as early Sunday morning, leaving the viewer to meditate in isolation. But what is there to meditate about? These pieces have the entrepreneurial energy of well-made storyboards, but not the beauty of well-made paintings, and there is no story, except perhaps for those who live in the cultural shadow of Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. (Chris Miller)

Through August 18 at Bert Green Fine Art, 8 South Michigan, Suite 1220.



May 9, 2012

Slumscapes



(http://favelaissues.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/mondrian_new.jpg)

Jeff Gillette, "Mondrian," image courtesy of the artist

The title of this post is taken from a series of paintings by Jeff Gillette, a Southern-California-based mixed-media artist and painter. Gillette, in his artist's statement, writes of his visits to several slums in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Delhi: "Aside from the seething humanity, the suffering, the unfairness and cruelty of the slum was a strange beauty. The cacophony of filthy debris rising from oceans of garbage comprises an architecture of poverty and necessity. What emerges is a living environment of aesthetic wonder, of spectacular variations of color, form, and texture."

Gillette's paintings (<http://www.copronason.com/gillweb/index.htm#1>) display a high level of artistic control. Building materials, topography, and structural forms are clearly specified and arrayed in rhythmic compositions. The kaleidoscopic colors and textures are just bright enough to signal that the viewer is in a hyperrealistic environment, and to call attention to the consumer-waste origin of the building materials. Human inhabitants are absent (though human and Disney characters are sometimes included in order to make a visual pun on "squatting.")

I wanted to focus on Gillette's work here because it is a good reference point for discussing representations of urban informality and aestheticization of poverty, topics we frequently address here in *FavelIssues*. As Gillette expressed to me, the visual and aesthetic are the primary content of his work, and his approach is basically objective. In that sense his images are the ultimate aestheticization of slums, as he is occupied with problems central to art and philosophy, not policy.



<http://favelaissues.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/caracas2.jpg>

Jeff Gillette, "Caracas," image courtesy of the artist

But Gillette's paintings can stand in for a tendency in our own minds to let an image or the "skin" of an informal settlement push aside a fuller understanding of the complexity of urban informality. It's so much easier to hold an image in our minds than a complex set of political, social, and economic relationships. In looking at these images it is clear how far an image can take us from not only the daily life of a slum but from an understanding of the political economy of urban informality.

Two aspects of the work are, for me, particularly striking. The title *Slumscapes* brings up issues related to naming and labeling informal settlements. The style and content of the work impairs one's ability to name the subject matter anything other than "slum." We can't call it an informal settlement, as that carries connotations of economic interdependency, for which there are no markers. We can't call it a squatter settlement, with its connotations of poor people's political agency, for there are no people. The word "slum," which occupies a deep place in the historical memory for English speakers, is unique in its ability to call up negative connotations about inhabitants (slum dwellers), not just their living conditions.

Gillette chooses not to include people in his paintings as a way of focusing our attention on that which he admires, the physical objects and settings. But for some viewers, the absence of inhabitants along with their laundry, furniture, and stored building materials will signify an abandoned city, reinforcing the idea that slums and informal settlements are only about constructed form. Yet in another sense, the exclusive attention to the materiality of post-consumer constructions and garbage-filled canals calls our full attention to environmental degradation which otherwise might not receive it.

In Ananya Roy's essay addressing the "[politics of representation \(http://books.google.com/books?id=RxAGdfEiXEC&lpg=PP1&dq=ananya%20roy&pg=PA289#v=onepage&q&f=false\)](http://books.google.com/books?id=RxAGdfEiXEC&lpg=PP1&dq=ananya%20roy&pg=PA289#v=onepage&q&f=false)", she argues that there are different "genealogies of representation", one which arises from an aesthetic relationship with urban informality and another from a political one. Roy argues for a genealogy of representation that "views the city not as a unique ecology but as a mundane articulation of production and social reproduction; not as a magical precartographic realm of vernacular authenticity but as a mapping and unmapping of interests and power; not as a separation of First and Third Worlds but as the constant interpenetration of these geopolitical axes." The challenge is to imagine what such a representation would actually contain, and how to create it.



<http://favelaissues.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/jeffgilletedismayland1-600x592.jpg>

Jeff Gillette, "Shadow City Minnie," image courtesy of the artist

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Published: July 16, 2010
Updated: July 17, 2010 9:41 a.m.

Art lives in shacks in Laguna Beach

By RICHARD CHANG
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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According to the United Nations, more than one billion people – one-sixth of the world's population – live in shacks.

Shacks have become synonymous with slums, ghettos and the lowest classes. But they serve other purposes – including recreational, utilitarian and artistic.



"Mickey Jakarta," a 2006 oil and acrylic on canvas by Costa Mesa artist Jeff Gillette. The artist juxtaposes cartoony images with makeshift residences of squalor. On view at Laguna Art Museum through Oct. 3.

TEXT BY RICHARD CHANG, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER; IMAGE COURTESY OF LAGUNA ART MUSEUM

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'Art Shack'

- **Where:** Laguna Art Museum, 307 Cliff Drive, Laguna Beach
- **When:** Through Oct. 3
- **Hours:** Summer hours (through Sept. 6) are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sundays-Wednesdays and Fridays, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursdays and Saturdays; regular hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. daily
- **How much:** Unlimited summer passes are \$15 adults, \$12 seniors, students and military, free for children under 12
- **Call:** 949-494-8971
- **Online:** lagunaartmuseum.org

Through Oct. 3, the Laguna Art Museum is presenting "Art Shack," an exhibition of 33 artists who combine art, architecture and installation. Most have built shacks out of various materials, including wood, steel, trash and mixed media.

[See photos of artworks from 'Art Shack'](#)

Many of the shacks contain artworks, and all are showcased as works of art themselves.

It's an engaging concept, but not entirely new. Installation art already has a pretty long history, dating back formally to at least the 1970s and probably before then, to Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" of 1917.

Over the years, many artists have housed art in structures of their own making – shacks, if you will. The California Assemblage movement gained prominence in the 1950s and '60s and provided many examples of installations within shack-like constructions.

Even at Laguna Art Museum, several exhibits during the past decade focusing on popular culture – cars, surfing, skateboarding, "lowbrow" art – have featured large, three-dimensional installations by the artists.

The current "Art Shack" show starts with a snowman shack by Marnie Weber, a freeway-inspired shack by James P. Scott and a series of slum shacks by Jeff Gillette.

The Gillette series, "Slum" (2010), stands out as the strongest, with its third-world appearance, videos of Mickey Mouse, Sponge Bob and Beavis and Butthead, and voluminous collection of trash and discarded objects.

Positing tiny real estate signs – Remax, Newport Realty, Century 21 – amid the slums, Gillette conveys a real feel for irony. His work is a commentary on class, inequality, and the detritus culture that we are immersed in.

Travis Somerville has two shacks in this exhibit,

Story Highlights

Review: The Laguna Art Museum is showcasing 'Art Shack' as its newest exhibit, which runs through Oct. 3.

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"Great American Letdown" and "1963" (both 2009). "Letdown," made from wood, metal and painted vintage photographs, tells a mysterious, intriguing tale of ancestry and nearly forgotten faces.

Somerville's other shack, "1963," is a fascinating, almost overwhelming commentary on race and this nation's sordid history, with vintage pictures of black cotton pickers viewable through 3D viewfinders. Meanwhile, a cross burns on a black and white TV – the sounds crackling through an old radio – and a pair of Ku Klux Klan hoods top the white view boxes, amid wallpaper of 1963 newspaper stories. It's a chilling installation, yet searingly effective.

Costa Mesa artist Laurie Hassold has contributed one of her signature skeletal works, "Reading the Bones (Post-Extinction Fossil Grotto)" (2010). It's finely wrought and a bit eerie, but the shack reference doesn't quite come across.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is Mike Shine's "Shine Shack" (2010). It's a large wooden shack, stretching 18 feet wide and 30 feet long, meant to resemble the artist's own shack/studio in Bolinas.

Shine has constructed a fake furnace, bookshelves and decorations that illustrate the artist's own quirky, fun-loving tastes. A couple of

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vintage TV sets broadcast off-the-wall horror-movie scenes, while one modern TV features an interview with the artist by Stacy Peralta.

There's a book that visitors are free to doodle in, and wheels to spin for "Aegir's Surf Report" and other fortune-related outcomes. A visitor could literally spend a couple hours in "Shine Shack" and not get bored.

Nearby is a nifty '50s-style shack by Josh Agle (also known as SHAG), complete with miniature patio furniture, shag carpet and prints of his work. It's a living representation of SHAG's relaxed, loungey aesthetic.

Other strong works in "Art Shack" are Esteban Bojorquez's "Shelter Shock" (2010); Gregg Gibbs' wacky "The R. Biggs Institutional Restoration Foundation" (2010); Don Ed Hardy's "Tat Cat Shack (Tattoo Hut)" (2010), a realistic tattoo parlor with a real, operating tattoo machine; and tiny peephole collaborations by Sandow Birk and Elyse Pignolet.

Marion Peck and Mark Ryden have constructed the clever, cute and bizarre "Sweet Wishes Theater" (2007). Press a button and one can peep into a miniature theater and see an animated short play on the screen. The mini-film is not recommended for folks who easily get queasy.

An exhibit-specific iPhone application offers artists' bios, video interviews, bonus videos, and information about the museum and the show's sponsors. The app is free if you have an iPhone, or you can rent an iTouch with the app for \$5 at the front desk. It's a dynamic and welcome addition to the exhibit that one can enjoy outside the confines of the museum.

Overall, "Art Shack" is a hit, with occasional patches for quizzical head-scratching. It's an intriguing, interactive concept, one brought to engaging reality by Greg Escalante, guest curator for the exhibit.

And perhaps most importantly, it's a *pièce d'résistance* in the old-fashioned sense, a show that defies art market rules determining what's commercially viable and what "ought" to be made to satisfy the whims of the marketplace.

Contact the writer: 714-796-6026 or rchang@ocregister.com

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Going Into Detail



Bert Green Fine Art Presents Two Solo Shows of Intricate Thoughtfulness

by Julie Riggott

No one can accuse Jeff Gillette or Valerie Jacobs of making rushed, shallow art. The two artists with solo shows at Bert Green Fine Art both have a keen

eye for detail and an even sharper wit.

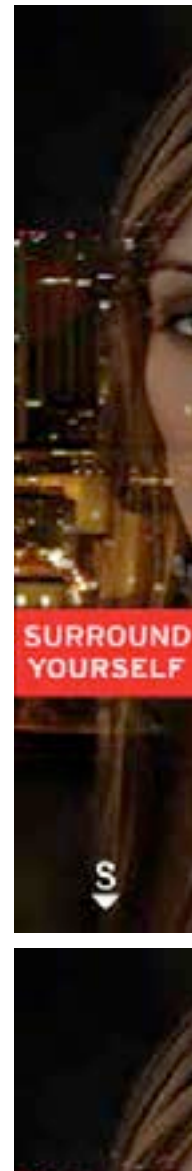
Gallery owner and curator Bert Green planned the exhibits as two entirely separate shows with “no deliberate connections,” but the artists’ paintings and drawings harmonize in a conversation about aesthetics and society that is difficult to overlook.

The paintings in Gillette’s *Desert Interventions* capture real scenes of natural beauty, but instead of editing out eyesores like an unsightly pile of rusted metal and debris by the roadside, Gillette makes it the focal point - in effect ruining a beautiful landscape like the thoughtless human intruder before him.

Everything from “No Trespassing” signs and cars (evidenced by a dead rabbit on the road) to discarded tires and other detritus encroach on beautiful mountains rising up from vast stretches of shrubs, rocks and sand.

“I either painted stuff as I saw it (dumps and plastic bags in the wind) or I arranged stuff in them (adding plastic in the wind, setting up frames of discarded, dilapidated furniture to see through) or I created composites of two separate scenes,” the Orange County schoolteacher explained in an email.

Gillette paints in the plain air

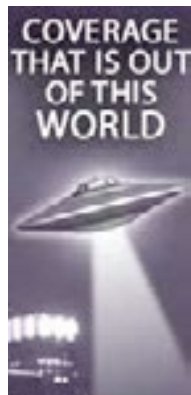


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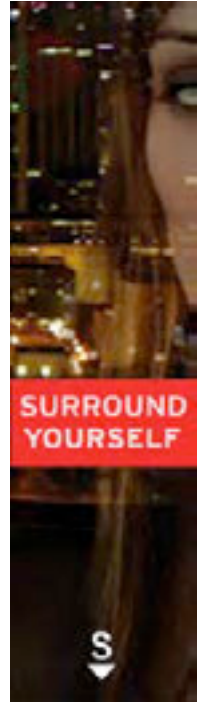
tradition and works quickly to capture the light and shadows in the desert. His palette is seemingly infinite.

The studio work is much more meticulous. "I spend weeks sometimes, tightening up the desert ground, with the plants, rocks and twigs," he said.

In some of the "interventions," Gillette arranged boulders to look like animals, smashed his iMac computer ("We've all been angry enough at technology to do this for real, haven't we?"), or added his own artwork to the landscape.

"My most ambitious piece was 'Sign Sign' where I painted a 4-by-8-foot piece of plywood and stuck it in an empty billboard frame on the old highway 20 miles south of Vegas. I put it up during the cover of night, wearing all black, and dodged cars going by, jumping behind bushes," he recalled.

In his most incongruous and playful image of man's intrusion on nature, Gillette put a painted canvas of SpongeBob SquarePants at the site of artist Michael Heizer's "land art." "In the case of SpongeBob, I chose him for instant recognition," he said. "Maybe the jarring displacement of an annoying, high-pitched-voiced cartoon character into a terrain that is almost devoid of sound was part of the reason. Maybe knowing this character would either be blasted by beer-swilling gun enthusiasts, blown away by the wind or in the case of 'Sponge/Heizer South,' be buried by tons of rock, is a way of venting my anger."



Mesmerizing Illusions

Jacobs' detailed paintings and drawings have a similarly surreal feel. Her oil and acrylic "Where the Money Is, There Lies the Heart" is layered with symbolism. A multi-armed deity dangles computer mouses, as rats drop coins from ruby slippers and beastly human creatures (also featured in two "Hungry Ghosts" drawings) watch the rain of money.

Most of the works on display by the septuagenarian San Francisco artist are graphite drawings, in which she achieves an extraordinary photorealism. The storm-tossed water, boxing gloves and rose-colored glasses in "Untitled Self-Portrait" are mesmerizing illusions, appearing more real than it would seem possible with the medium.

Jacobs said she does research before putting pencil to paper and sometimes makes her own models. That research packs her works with meaning. More accurately, she intends for them to be "visual metaphors": "images that are available to us from history, culture, politics and media."

A mosquito ready to draw blood and magnified many times beyond its true size holds an eerie sense of foreboding, as does a gorgeous painting of a pink rose against a background dripping with dark, almost black paint ("Chicago Peace Rose 1945"). An insect lurks behind a petal.

"The insect is a cockroach, a pest that is from a period between 354 and 295 million years ago," Jacobs explained. "It is very long-lasting, destructive and invasive."

"Chicago Peace Rose 1945" was the first in a series of drawings and paintings exploring insinuations of violence. In her work, the rose appears as a symbol of peace, and the fedora, co-opted by Chicago gangsters like

Al Capone, recurs as a symbol of corruption. Jacobs explained her inspiration: "Peace has been struggling for a long time."

Jeff Gillette: Desert Interventions and Valorie Jacobs: New Paintings, Drawings and Prints continue through June 29. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday noon-6 p.m. Bert Green Fine Art, 102 W. Fifth St., (213) 624-6212 or bgfa.us.

Contact Julie Riggott at julie@downtownnews.com.

Published on: May 16, 2008

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VALERIE JACOBS and JEFF GILLETTE

May 8 - June 30, 2008 at [Bert Green Fine Art](#), Downtown

by Ray Zone

This tandem show at first glance might seem an unlikely pairing. However, these two bodies of work reveal some compelling affinities. Jeff Gillette is a gifted plein air painter who takes the California desert as his subject and context. His paintings have a deceptive realism that mirrors the quiet beauty of the desert. But this figurative celebration of nature is invested with ironic commentary. Using what he calls "interventions," Gillette depicts encroachments both ecological and cultural upon the natural environment.



Jeff Gillette, "Whales," 2007,
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 60".



Jeff Gillette, "Bell Mountain," 2007,
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 60".



Jeff Gillette, "Sponge Heizer South," 2007,
acrylic on canvas, 20 x 36".

In "Bell Mountain," for example, he mountain of the same name is painted with quiet dignity below a serene blue sky in a verdant panorama. It would be an idyllic view except for the fact that in the lower left corner we see a variegated mound of trash with shelving, empty buckets and wood planks scattered amid other human rubble that appears to have been at the location for quite some time. Nature takes no notice of this spoilage, but the viewer of the painting might. The matter of fact presentation by Gillette of the indignity of such debris reinforces the power of a political statement free of hyperbole.

The painting "Whales" also includes human debris in the desert vista. But just behind the scattered trash are piles of rocks that the artist has rendered as whales swimming in the variegated scene. Gillette has also made similar interventions in other locations to create "big foot" cartoon characters out of rocks on site before making the plein air painting. Call this strategy "humor versus despair" if you will, but it's a way to allude to the human encroachment on the natural setting without invoking volatile feelings.

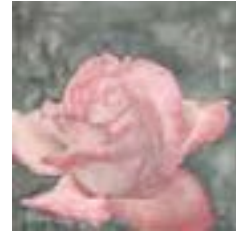
In "Sponge Heizer South" Gillette depicts artist Michael Heizer's large earthwork "Double Negative" (1969) in the Nevada desert gashed out by a bulldozer. In the trench, however, Gillette inserts the "Sponge Bob" cartoon character as if to humorously suggest it is he who has made the trench. As a satirical answer to Heizer's monumental earthwork, Sponge Bob may be seen as a representative in miniature of the delights of popular culture, a co-habitant of the common sphere of even high conceptual art.

The paintings and drawings of Valerie Jacobs are more subtle in their observations and paradoxes. You have to wait for the realizations of their irony to dawn on you. "Chicago Peace Rose 1945" might at first look be a botanical work of simple beauty. But wait, there's an insect on a petal off to the side making its way to the heart of the rose. No human intervention is necessary here for the artist to drive her ironic commentary. Nature itself can be destructive of simple beauty.

In "Concertina" a spiraling web of razor wire is painted white against a pure azure. The wire circles upon itself and, in its musical configuration suggests to this writer the other type of concertina, a hand-held instrument similar to an accordion. Of course, no human hands can touch this material without suffering injury. Pondering the title and looking at the image, one is disturbed by the possibility of this ironic juxtaposition.

Jacobs makes delicate graphite drawings that are highly realistic. One, "Untitled (Mosquito)," depicts an extreme close-up of a mosquito feasting with its lance of a proboscis deep in human skin. Quiet intricacy is beautifully rendered here but painful to consider. As with other works of Jacobs' in this show, the delicacy of the style stands in counterpoint to the ultimate effect of the image.

Representational art in paintings and drawing for quite some time now has subsumed the lessons of modernism, conceptual art, performance art and post-modernism. Figuration may well subvert itself, question and reinvent itself as it builds new forms of paradox and irony that are quite subtle. Such antinomies are invested in the art of Gillette and Jacobs. Giving voice to sensibilities that are distinctly of the historical moment, representation continues to be renewed.



Valerie Jacobs, "Chicago Peace Rose 1945," 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30".



Valerie Jacobs, "Concertina," 2008, oil on canvas, 30 x 30".



Valerie Jacobs, "Untitled (Mosquito)," 2007, graphite on paper, 8 1/2 x 6 1/2".

LA WEEKLY *Art+books*

TWO THREE-FERS

BY PETER FRANK

Wednesday, June 21, 2006



All three painters showing (appropriately) downtown belong to the dystopian wing of the “newbrow” aesthetic, conflating surrealism, classicism, Pop, movie-poster illustration, and a skin-crawly kind of humor into an ecstatic apocalypse. This is least apparent in Scott Siedman’s knowingly overblown renditions of overly attractive people — ancient Romans, apparently — rendered (in eye-wrenching detail) in the act of mutual seduction. But you get the feeling the fiery glow enveloping these bacchantes is more Vesuvian than crepuscular, and that they’re rehearsing the fall of an empire — again. Jeff Gillette imagines what decay already exists on the empire’s periphery, conjuring shantytowns, shack parks and other festering slums teeming with unseen life in the middle of some sort of palmy pondside paradise. It’s more Rio or Manila than L.A., but, in spirit and atmosphere, not much more. Many of Jeff Britton’s furiously painted landscapes are very much L.A. (and the rest might as well be), but an L.A. enmeshed in at best a fever dream of destruction. Freeways collapse in an earthquake inferno, a wild dog snarls in the Hollywood Hills night, tornadoes roar down country lanes — Britton should illustrate Mike Davis’ next book.

Things are rather more sanguine in the Westside precincts, where Stas Orlovski shows painting-size drawings concatenating disparate elements, representational and abstract, into unlikely landscapes, the more compelling for their very incompleteness. For her part, Ilene Sunshine does drawing-size paintings in which colorful, entirely nonobjective elements intertwine with similar playfulness — a low-key antic maintained by her sinewy Tinkertoy wall construction. And maintaining an elegant aloofness, the shimmering unframed paperworks of Marietta Hoferer take classic minimalism to new levels of near-invisible sensuality, their identical horizontal bands defined with pencil and transparent tape.

Scott Siedman, Jeff Gillette and Jeff Britton at Bert Green, 102 W. Fifth St., dwntwn.; Tues.-Sat., noon-6 p.m.; thru June 24. (213) 624-6212. Stas Orlovski, Ilene Sunshine and Marietta Hoferer at Overtones, 11306 Venice Blvd., Mar Vista; Fri.-Sun., noon-6 p.m.; thru June 25. (310) 915-0346

Jeff Gillette

Gillette rivals only the great Llyn Foulkes as L.A.'s most trenchant political artist. His bitterly funny works skewer the shibboleths of religion and commerce that have made the Bush era so heinous and dumb. Casually disregarding any semblance of a careerist path, this Orange County high school teacher and former Peace Corps volunteer is the ruling anarchist of Dirt Gallery, the brainchild of artist Rhonda Saboff.

Gillette's beautifully articulated paintings of Bombay and Calcutta slums deliver a dark satiric bite: Vast landscapes of shanties extending into a distant horizon are interrupted only by single small signposts, a shimmering banner for Kentucky Fried Chicken or a McDonald's arch. Other recent works update traditional Orientalist themes of desert exoticism with accouterments of Imperialist Pop: an Afghan camel rider sets off to deliver a Domino's pizza; a turbaned insurgent sips a Starbucks double latte.

Gillette augments the paintings with off-the-cuff collages stuck in thrift-store frames — simple interventions of Sunday-school illustrations with cut-out cartoon characters. His grinning Mickey cast as Judas, Peter Rabbit denying the dead Christ, and the Grinch leering at a stolen crucifix skewer the myths of both Bible thumpers and the Disney Channel.

Gillette is a sanctimony-seeking missile, and in other collages he hilariously tweaks the sacrosanct values of art history, leveling the playing field. Playboy cartoon nudies pose alongside Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*; Archie and Veronica explore "gender issues" inside an installation by Barbara Kruger. As incisive and tough as Raymond Pettibon's early drawings, Gillette's work takes no prisoners.

Michael Duncan, LA Weekly, Thursday, October 27, 2005