



William Betts, "Botafogo"

## WILLIAM BETTS: SURVEILLANCE

Holly Johnson Gallery, Dallas  
On view through February 13

William Betts rethinks the acting of making a painting. His "making" is hands off and, because of technological mediation, several cycles removed. The machine is central to Betts' process of painting. In the past, Betts made big brightly colored moiré patterned and striped paintings from a large computerized painting machine. He has tweaked the software and changed the data. The information is now photographs of highways, cities and interiors of package stores downloaded from the Internet.

With Betts' painting machine, the surveillance camera and the photographic still, machine meets machine meets machine. They are, for the most part, images taken surreptitiously by cameras — surveillance shots stolen twice over, first by the camera and then by Betts. "Skinhead" (2006) shows a man taking a bottle from a crowded shelf in a small package store. Tiny round globs of paint render a space distorted and bowed by the fisheye lens of the surveillance camera mounted in the corner of a small mart. The thousands of perfectly circular little dots that make up disarticulate abstraction up close and articulate form from afar place Betts in a lineage of painters, which includes Georges-Pierre Seurat, Paul Signac, Roy Lichtenstein and Chuck Close.

While stealth courses through all of the paintings, Betts did not, in fact, steal all of the images. Betts gained permission from the Texas Department of Transportation for satellite shots of highways, which are the basis of *US54 Hondo Pass, El Paso, Tx, November 15, 2006, 6:12pm* and *I-10 and Los Mochis, El Paso, Texas, May 31, 2007, 6:09 pm*. While all of the work in this show is a visual delight, the most conceptually provocative are the three photographs of Amber, which, unlike the pilfered or borrowed images, were staged — but look caught on the sly. *Black, white and grainy, Amber, 03/19/04, 20:30:45, Amber, 03/19/04, 22:25:12 and Amber, 03/19/04, 22:31:04* show a naked woman in a hotel room presumably anticipating or post-coitus. They bring to mind the ambivalent voyeurism aroused by French artist Sophie Calle's photoconceptualism.

While remaining focused on the parameters set by the algorithm of the machine, Betts has opened up to new ideas and form in this elegant, new body of work.

— CHARISSA TERRANOVA