

The Creators Project

Have Some Surveillance Fun in the Sun with 'SPLASH'

Giacco Furino — Jun 20 2016



William Betts, Untitled Elafonisi, Crete, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 27 x 36 inches (69 x 91.5 cm).

Sunbathers enjoying a midday tan, friends goofing off in a pool, a few swimmers hanging by the rocks... these idyllic images take on an entirely different meaning when presented by painter [William Betts](#). In his new show, *SPLASH*, up until mid-July at [Margaret Thatcher Projects](#), Betts uses photography at a distance to capture his subjects at play, and then converts those images into pointillated works using a CNC machine. The result is a happy moment captured through a hidden lens, in which the artist calls into question everything we take for granted while out enjoying a sunny day. Phoning in from his home in sunny Miami Beach, Betts tells us about the illusion of privacy and mixing the mundane, the cheerful, with the sinister.



William Betts, *Sunbathers, Miami Beach*, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 52 x 70 inches (132 x 178 cm).

Betts describes the foundation of his work, since 2004, as being technology-based, “using machines and computer-controlled painting apparatuses that I designed and built to make my paintings. And my subject matter has primarily been different aspects of surveillance and a technology-based way of seeing things.” With the work, Betts dives into “issues of privacy and personal liberty haven’t really been resolved yet. It’s kind of an ongoing dialogue.”

Betts says *SPLASH* is about “the idea of privacy, how everywhere we are we’re kind of on camera somewhere. I liked the idea of swimming pools and beaches because they’re places where we make ourselves very vulnerable. We’re virtually naked. And we’re playing around, having a great time, but from a physical standpoint we’re very vulnerable. And yet we also make exceptions of privacy. It’s kind of a metaphor for how we treat our privacy. It’s kind of carefree and we take it very casually. I find the idea of using beaches and pools as a wonderful metaphor for the way we’re happily giving away our credit card information to people and yet we lock up our bicycles. That’s kind of a strange thing to me.”

The placement of the viewer and the artist in these works is extremely important to Betts. “Most of the paintings have a vantage point that’s a hundred yards off, that’s kind of remote. I feel that’s a very personal vantage point. As an artist I’m seeing things from a certain distance.

To me that speaks to this very subtle alienation that we all feel, that's a quiet undercurrent to all these technologies."

Betts plays with the clash between voyeurism and recreation. "There is a distance to it," he explains, "there is a removal. And when I see the show, when I walk through the show, there's a little creepy factor to it. But I don't want that to be overwhelming. There is this omnipresence now of cameras, of people taking pictures everywhere. I really want to explore that a little bit because on the one hand it's very approachable, and some of that feeling may get lost because of how approachable [the paintings are], but to me these issues are pretty deep and pretty serious."



Take a dive into this sun-soaked world of surveillance by visiting [William Betts' website](#) or seeing the [paintings in person at Margaret Thatcher Projects](#), up until July 15th.