

KELLEY JOHNSON: *Dreaming*

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KELLEY JOHNSON
By Lindsey Stouffer

My first impression of Kelley Johnson's current work for *Dreaming* was that someone had forged an artful collaboration between Francis Bacon and playful child. I wanted to see more. The rich tension of painterly beauty and horror collides with episodes of playful marks and colors that surface and recede throughout the territory of the canvas.



To see these works is to be absorbed into an internal landscape completed by the viewer. The paintings are large, richly saturated canvases. Blues and greens draw you deep into the work towards an ever present yet shifting horizon. Then these flat, candy colored marks intermittently appear. Sometimes they pop up behind the horizon, at other times they are stuck right to the surface. They reference wallpaper, rainbows, or registration marks. Together, a cycle is completed that plunges the viewer deep into the work and then plucks you right back to the surface and back again.

The places in these paintings set up a context for a figural form that appears throughout. It seems as if the "figure" is our point of reference. When I saw these works, I couldn't resist putting myself in the place of the figure which appears sometimes as a simple evocative mark and at others is a dominant presence.

Kelley's previous paintings show more places that are naturalistic; the ones that I saw were interiors, which was interesting since the current works also seem like interiors of sorts. His current work taps directly into his faculty with paint, his beautiful palette, and use of light and ability to evoke more than is depicted. The record of many layers of paint suggests moments in time, as if each painting is really a place along a continuum.

These paintings are powerfully alluring and subtly disturbing in the way that dreams can be.

Written by Lindsey Stouffer

Lindsey Stouffer is a sculptor. She currently teaches at the Sam Fox School of Design and Visuals Art at Washington University in St. Louis. Her recent public artwork is located at the Forsyth station in Clayton (St. Louis). Ms. Stouffer will have an exhibition in May at the Bruno David Gallery (Project Room).

This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists.