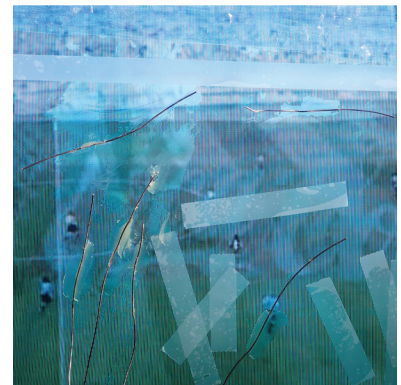


Stephanie Washburn's "Twice Told"

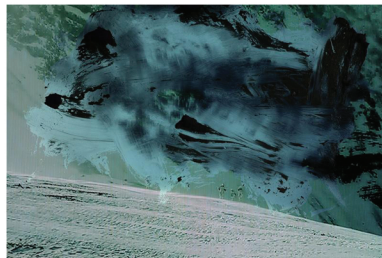
April 24, 2012 Written by Danielle Sommer



What makes a tale "twice told"? For Nathaniel Hawthorne, who published a collection called *Twice Told Tales*, these were stories that had already lived one life by having been previously printed. And for William Shakespeare, who coined the phrase, a "twice-told tale" was the most tedious tale of the lot, borrowed and uninspired. Shakespeare, however, had not met **Stephanie Washburn**.

In the case of Washburn's "Twice Told," on view at the Mark Moore Gallery in Los Angeles, the tales that repeat belong to the endless stream of images and narratives available through the television set. Washburn, a painter, breaks the fourth wall by reacting to this stream, turning the television on and smearing her screen with not just paint, but everyday household items like butter, tape, bread, and potatoes. She then sets up a Hasselblad digital camera, and snaps a picture.

The resulting images, which Washburn calls "television drawings," don't look much like drawings; nor is the television screen easy to spot. From a distance, many look like abstract expressionist paintings. The spaghetti strewn across the screen in *Reception 2*, 2011, and *Reception 9*, 2011, initially calls to mind the gestures of Jackson Pollock, although thoughts of the fleshy materiality and subversive humor of many 1970s feminist artists follow quickly.



For many of the images, including *Reception 4*, *5*, and *13* (all 2011), it's almost impossible to make out any specific background image beyond a field of color. The television's tell, of course, is its glow, and that glow permeates Washburn's images: warm in some and cool in others, at times penetrating swathes of paint and at other times merely strengthening the shadows of dimensional objects.

This interplay of the television image and Washburn's interventions occurs not just formally (in terms of light and shadow, or scale), but figuratively. In *Reception 1*, 2011, a rubber-gloved hand creeps onto the scene from the bottom left of the image; blending almost perfectly with a group of three hands in the background, except for the fact that the intervening hand (the gloved hand) has a deep shadow to emphasize its physicality.

The beauty and power of Washburn's work comes from how effortlessly the images marry both formal and conceptual references to a variety of traditionally "opposed" relationships: digital and physical, visceral and cerebral, touch and sight. It's no wonder that the series is called "Reception" – Washburn's photographs don't just rework old narratives and images into new forms, but challenge us to consider our role as media consumers in the 21st century.

"Twice Told" is on view at the Mark Moore Gallery in Culver City, Los Angeles, through May 19, 2012.