

Strange Forces

Four painters create ambiguous, provocative imagery that touches on the sublime. BY JOSEPH JACOBS

Ben Weiner

Weiner, who lives and works in Long Island City, New York, is making a stir in the art world with his highly magnified, 6-foot still lifes, which he has been painting since graduating from Wesleyan University in Connecticut in 2003. Though the images may recall photorealism—and Weiner does indeed employ photographs, first setting up his scene, taking extensive pictures, then selecting from one to seven prints to paint from—the resulting images could not be further from that movement. His work is not a deadpan presentation of contemporary society or popular culture. Instead, his still lifes are filled with subjectivity, exuding a paradoxical mix of sensuous attraction and frightening repulsion that virtually transforms these microcosms of the world into a monumental, sublime universe. For example, “Science,” is filled with “a liminal ecstatic experience of visual disorientation,” according to Weiner on his Web site. He feels the strand of faux pearls can just as easily be read as a strip of DNA and the hair gel as primordial ooze. His work thrives on this ambivalence between truth and fiction. The pictures are not so much a comment on fashion and consumerism as they are a fascinating and even grotesque distortion of the world that evokes a broad range of powerful emotional responses in the viewer.

Representatives: Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, Calif. 310.453.3031.

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Ben Weiner, “Science,” 2006,
oil on canvas.