

## *Larry Thomas: Ploys & Decoys*

### *A Trail of Pixels in the Forest*

One of the defining aspects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ever-growing visual relationship between the physical and virtual world. As new digital imaging technologies and environments evolve toward the organic structure of the human user, their application allows us to peer deeper into distant realms, both real and theoretical, from the cellular to the celestial.

In an age of body scans, virtual-reality avatars, cloning, microchip implantation, and genetic engineering, popular culture and the media bombard us with conflicting messages of the positive and negative impact of technology upon our society. The entertainment industry gives us overblown, hyperbolic extrapolations, graphically rendered in films and video games, while rational and irrational fears drive the application of stealth technology within our nation's armed forces at home and abroad.

With greater frequency, we reference the *natural* world as a place outside humanity's endeavor to bring order, rationale, and civility to its existence. Beyond the margins of our urbane existence, however, lies a wooly and undiscovered wilderness of cells, pixels, particles, and the imagination.

This space between the natural and material world is a field that remains ripe for exploration and exploitation. It is a natural state of disorder, where hard drives crash, images fragment, batteries die, viruses cause cascading system failures, and order and chaos find embrace.

Dwelling within this wilderness, Larry Thomas uses the visual language of simulation and camouflage to communicate with would-be travelers to his domain. In his latest series of paintings and prints, Thomas utilizes this language as a metaphoric trail of breadcrumbs to explore what it means to reveal and conceal identity.

Thomas' method-as-message approach illuminates the relationship between our society's adoption of camouflage as a defense mechanism and its preeminent use throughout the natural world. Along the way, he also reminds us that chaos is an elegant process by which dissolution and evolution occurs, and that our human systems all share similar strengths and vulnerabilities.

Depending upon the perspective of the viewer, one might interpret Thomas' compositional flows as existential purges or, conversely, as identity lost within a consumptive mass. This glass half-full, half-empty scenario shifts among Thomas' compositions and titles, aptly validating either perspective within work that intends to clarify and obscure by design.

Thomas creates paintings that are of our time, using digital imaging and formatting technologies in printmaking to establish a visual synthesis between what is actual paint and printed image. In this sense, Thomas explores the subject of camouflage with an

honest acknowledgment that he implicates himself in this process of deception between what is real and simulated within his own work.

To this end, Thomas employs both literal and digital collage, concealing the edges of the printed surface with painterly gesture while simultaneously composing digital images that mimic the expressive potential of paint. Within the artist's studio sits a giant color printer, a computer, and a large easel — three devices that command equal space and use for the artist to achieve his unified images.

Thomas actually begins with his roving eye, and a mutable approach to a vast cache of photographs, digital images, and scans of miscellaneous objects found at thrift stores, estate sales, and auctions. A piece of ductwork, a pile of unwanted costume jewelry, old paratrooper photographs, barbed wire, rubber bands, colorful plastic toys, branches, images of bones, computerized graphs and medical charts all become fodder for manipulation and abstraction. In addition to these images, Thomas maintains a photographic library of commissioned artist-model poses and self-portrait images that are used as reference for the creation of figures concealed within his compositions.

From a distance, Thomas' paintings and prints appear as magical abstractions, whirlwinds and torques of line, local color, and the occasional pixilated grid surrounded by neutral-toned atmospheres. Upon closer inspection, however, we may begin to make out certain details of the aforementioned objects, embedded within swathes of color and texture that move as if caught in the vortex of a tornado. Seeded with memory, nostalgia, and emotion, these clouds hover as manifestations of clotted auras or protective force fields — anamorphic and buoyant vehicles for the mysterious trajectory of everyday life.

Marcus Cain, Curator