

McCLAIN GALLERY

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WILLIAM BETTS:

RECOGNITION

May 12 - June 23, 2012

Artist Reception:

Saturday, May 12, 2 - 4 PM



McClain Gallery is delighted to present a solo exhibition of new work by Houston-based artist **William Betts** in the back two bays. In *Recognition*, Betts continues to explore the "elasticity" of the digital image through his *Surveillance* series using frozen screenshots from video surveillance recordings as source materials for paintings. Here, he focuses on anonymous groups of people at a mall or on the street, and also zeroes in on individuals - entering the intimate realm of portraiture with a unique detachment.

Using a software-controlled process, the artist fastidiously oversees the application of thousands of acrylic dots to a single canvas and in this distinctive application process alludes to the very nature of photography, printmaking and painting at once. The play with the concept of pixilation also yields a grainy impression much like that of a surveillance TV screen.

What emerges from viewing these densely complex works is an uneasy voyeurism; though the scenes suggest no obvious danger, they still evoke a decidedly paranoid tone. As a viewer, there is an eerie sense of being the watcher and also the distinct potential of being watched: a strange, but relevant part of contemporary technological life. The result is a body of work that challenges as well as invites.

Instead of condensing concrete information into retina-challenging abstract compositions, he reproduced imagery captured on surveillance cameras and traffic cams using dots that mimic the pixelated nature of his source images. Although less mysterious than the artist's abstract compositions, they have one thing in common with the other series: an interest in what is ordinarily unseen, elements that Betts draws out for public consumption, be it the colorful reality and composition of a pixel or, in this case, a kind of surveillance imagery that is not commonly available. Betts avoids overt sensationalism—we don't witness crimes or accidents. But the

very mundanity of the scenes serves as a reminder that the promise of security offered by surveillance technology also comes at the price of privacy.

*excerpt from: WILLIAM BETTS by Claudia Schmukli, catalog for 2008
Houston Area Show, Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston*

Houston artist William Betts received his B.A. in studio art from Arizona State University. He has been a finalist for the Hunting Prize three times, and has recently been awarded the 2012 annual prize from *New American Paintings*. In 2010, Betts received an individual artist grant from Houston Arts Alliance. His work has been shown nationwide, as well as internationally in London and in Canada and will be on view in the upcoming exhibition *Rasterfahndung* (Tracing the Grid) at the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart from May 5, 2012 through October 7, 2012.

Image: William Betts, *Couple with Stroller*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 32 inches

McClain Gallery

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Tuesday - Friday: 10 am to 5:30 pm, Saturday: 11 am to 5 pm

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