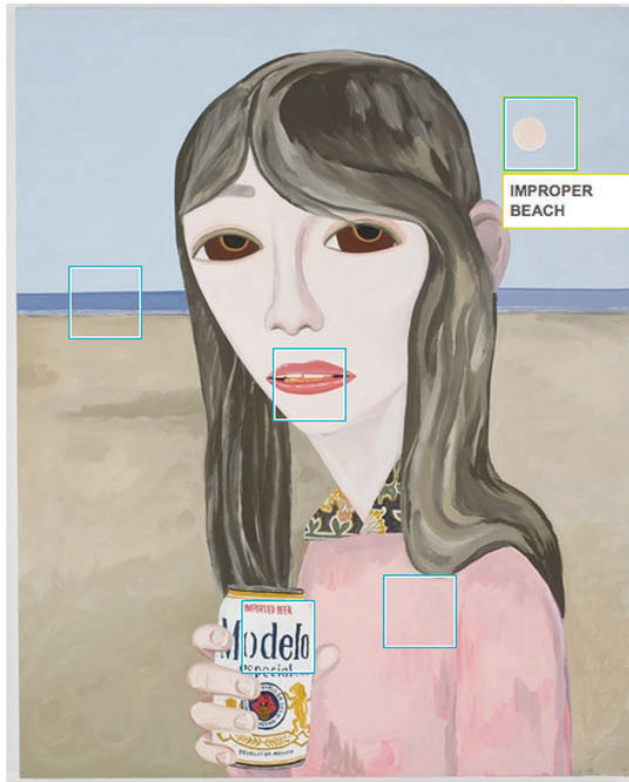


DECODING IMAGES



Brian Calvin, Alta California, 2009

Acrylic on canvas.
Courtesy Anton Kern
Gallery, New York.

Currently at Anton Kern Gallery, Brian Calvin exhibits new portraits of young, slim women in various generic locales. The Calvin's paintings use a slack Pop vocabulary mixes flat and textural swatches and isolates relatively concentrated elements of design and commerce. The style, the artists suggests below, figuration taken to its opposite, reductio ad abstraction.

IMPROPER BEACH

The background is an extreme simplification of the beach: sand, sea, sky, sun. Before the term took on a different connotation I suppose you could have called it an abstraction. I want the viewer to feel beach-ness rather than to see something that looks like a proper beach.

UN-REAL

The imagery in my paintings is invented, or rather arrived at, through the act of painting itself. I don't paint directly from life. Of course I do observe life directly and these observations guide me while painting. I change things over and over in each painting until it starts to open up and resonate for me. I need to see a spark behind the eyes and then I try to develop things from there.

GENERAL, NOT GENERIC

This is not a generic background, but it is a generalized background. Distinguishing characteristics have been purposely excluded, but the "beach" still has a strong resonance with the beaches of Ventura County where I live.

LABEL HUNTING

She's drinking a Modelo Especial with it's lovely regal label. "Alta California" is a slight nod to Mexico: our shared past and a shared coastline divvied up by language and fences. But that's just my take, after the fact. I'm happy that others will take it somewhere else.

MIND TO MOUTH

I don't think in terms of types or narratives. That has never been my intention. I accumulate and dispense with details. The lips were probably closed and then the little sliver of teeth and tongue added a whole different feel, a good one in this case so it remained. At a certain point, this back and forth leads to an odd, somewhat deadpan balance. At that point, the painting starts to breathe and I try to get out of the way--hopefully something deeper than my intention starts to emerge.