

Catalogue text, *Meditations in an Emergency*

Self-consciously deceptive, Benjamin Rubloff's paintings scrape away at something calcifying within American imaginations of freedom. Part progressive disturbance, part blockage, his current works linger at the edge of catharsis and void, implicating the viewer in acceptance of a dangerously conspiratorial invitation: There is space here for all of us to occupy. As works intent on collapsing boundaries between subject and object, the paintings reach toward transformative moments; instances that aim toward obfuscating the viewer's desires for comfort and his or her common beliefs about safety. Working through spaces of domestic settlement, Rubloff's paintings explore layered constructions of American mythos and the active performance of personae, both personal and national. At these intersections, where influences overlap, the subjects of these works embody a foreboding sense of waiting for the viewer, of needing to be seen, and of looking back from their vantages within obscured and misleading histories.

Permeability is paramount. Here, reflective enclosures made of glass and mirrored fortresses assimilate the environs—whether peopled or vacant—of the viewing world into phantasmagoric elements within the pieces themselves. What becomes important is discovering, in each work, the thing that is most temporary: which elements eventually concede to forces beyond their control. While the subjects of these paintings resist our immediate engagement—many of them obscured, deconstructed or framed, ostensibly, to retain their own constructions of illusion—the paintings familiarize themselves in relation to their subjects; they offer up a bit of tense space where the two, viewer and viewed, must interact. The paintings allow for a type of conversation that, although it may end in stalemate always maintains some semblance of “safe” proximity and acceptable perspective while it troubles our notions of the rigidity of surfaces.

There are elements of danger throughout, conscious engagements with freedom and identity that look toward a threshold of possibilities. We are asked not to question and not to worry, but to linger. What Rubloff gives to the viewer are openings: offerings and complications, dissociations and allowances. As a collective, the pieces create manifold narratives of troubled freedom whose intersections are emboldened by their reciprocal permeability. Conspire freely.

—Christian M. Howard