

LOS ANGELES AREA

BRAD SPENCE

Shoshana Wayne Gallery

BRAD SPENCE'S paintings have the aura of dreams. The lightly tinted airbrush on canvas appears like fragments from an extended narrative. The space between the real and imagined, using an airbrush, transforms the generic photographic snapshot into atmospheric paintings. It is hard to identify exactly what is depicted because the soft-focus images are all about inference and suggestion. Spence relies on his studies in psychology and the workings of the human psyche to create images that evoke but do not describe. Because of their lack of specificity, you get sucked in.

The exhibition, entitled "(figs.)," follows previous bodies of work including "Art Therapy" and "Welcome to the Afterlife," in which Spence also created atmospheric airbrush paintings in subdued colors from appropriated imagery. Drawing from myriad source materials, Spence's treatment and transformation of the original images unified them into a solid body of work. In "(figs.)," he applies the same strategy and creates a narrative that unfolds across the images on display. The images pose questions but do not answer them. An image of a parked van on a tree-lined street opens the sequence. It is impossible to determine whether the car is occupied or what it's doing there.

Spence seems to get off on ambiguity. While some paintings possess an overt sexuality, others may offer seemingly banal images relating to current events or media culture. For example *Glove* (2010) is an image of a single white glove without the tips of the fingers. Does it suggest sports, Michael Jackson or O.J. Simpson (whose gloves cannot be ignored)? A crime scene comes to mind where images are presented as evidence. Even a painting as benign as the moon seen through a chain-link fence, *Fence* (2010), becomes haunting when seen in the context of the other works. A narrative seems to move from exterior to interior yet defines no specific sequence of events. An image of a group meeting depicts men and women seated on metal folding chairs in an institutional setting. Perhaps it is an AA meeting or a group therapy session for people addicted to sex. The desire to know and connect the dots comes from the implied relationship between images. *Cocktail* portrays a tumbler filled with ice and clear liquid; *Mirrors II* depicts a

Brad Spence, *Glove*, 2010

woman in red high heels lying on a brightly lit mirrored platform, her spread legs obscured by a camera flash. *Downstairs* and *Corridor* are familiar places. They suggest the remnants of a nightmare or of waking up without one's glasses in unfamiliar surroundings where everything is a blur.

Spence's blur is deliberate and controlled. He has perfected the airbrush technique and can transform a photographic image into an enigmatic painting by softening its edges and muting its color. While some *original* is still the referent, Spence creates a generic — an image that stands in for all corridors, or all cocktails or all moons behind chain-link fences that allows one to free-associate and enter the dream or create clarity in our mind's eye. Both perhaps have the same results — a personal interpretation of an ambiguous image, one that resonates on multiple levels because it never comes into focus.

—Jody Zellen