

Statement

I have always thought of my paintings as landscapes. Even the pieces that are non-representational, or show no discernable marks other than the ground, relate to specific places or events. Ultimately the work is about atmosphere; that fleeting sense space whose quality of both density and nothingness carries the identity or character of a particular place or experience. I refer to and usually title specific paintings by their image and call it the subject, but I think the content is really driven by the properties of the passive space: color, saturation, surface, and sometimes scale . . . the atmosphere.

I have been attracted to California imagery since my childhood. There is a lot of atmosphere and a kind of light that do not exist anywhere else. The street signs and palm trees bring so much energy and text to the work that I just cannot avoid them as subject matter. I think artists like Bechtle, Hockney, and Ruscha have picked up that same energy.

The power lines, streetlights, and palm trees are reference points around which to build atmospheres. When people tell me " . . . I've been there," they are not talking about just physically being there. I think the weight and personality of places like Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and anonymous highway truck stops are implicit in the distilled set of visuals I paint. The paintings tend to reveal themselves slowly, at first as areas of specificity, but eventually as familiar and more emotional than spatial.

I have resisted calling the works "American Landscapes," but there is something very American about their creation in that they feature idle time associated with ground travel. Many images come from photographs taken while I'm driving, or through my windshield while at a stoplight. I am also very attracted to what you can see from the front door of your motel. There is something inspiring, almost spiritual about driving long distances and surrendering to the road. I drive to California from Texas every year and never take anything resembling a direct route. This process reveals so many opportunities to be overwhelmed that I just can't resist it.

Johnny Robertson