

The World is Flat

Hayden Stuart

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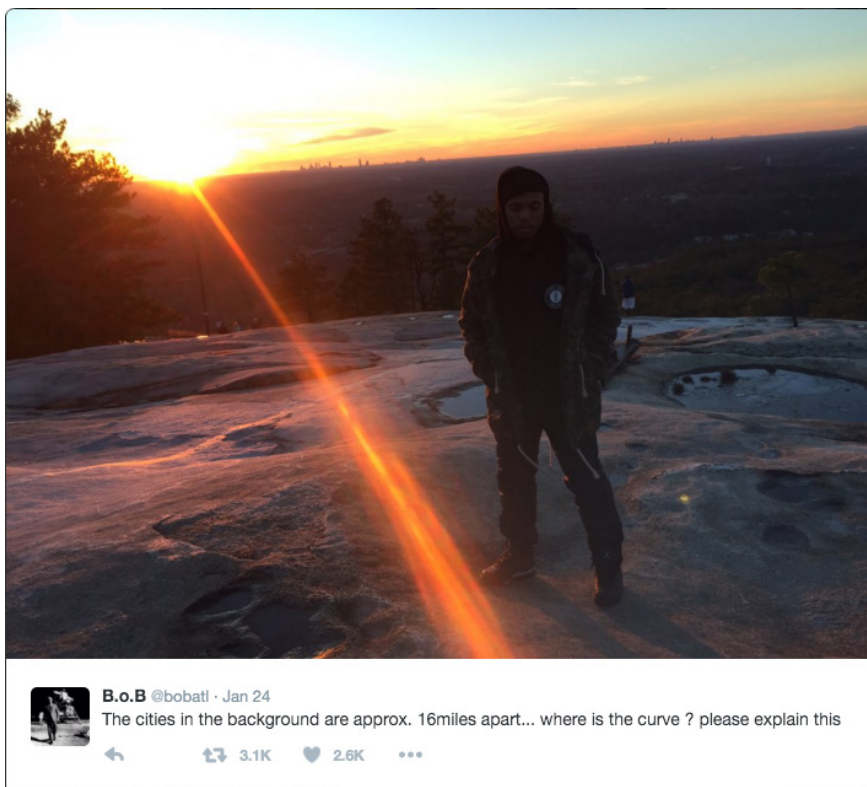
What will be shown in this exhibition may appear to be paintings. I am not sure whether they are paintings, or in fact flat sculptures.

On the 25th of January rapper B.o.B tweeted, “Once you go flat, you never go back.” He claims that the United Nations, the American Government and NASA have tremendously deceived us about the shape of the Earth, and that we in fact live on a flat disc floating through space. This exhibition isn’t about the Earth literally being flat, but perhaps some of those ideas are woven into it by proximity.

Ambiguity and uncertainty feature in these paintings. I am increasingly wary of defining these works by their medium, as it suggests that I have a definitive measure of what constitutes a painting. It’s difficult to tell what turns a sculpture into a painting, but whatever it is seems to be absent. Perhaps some would say my paintings too stupid.

Originally I had an idea to call the show *Sculptures* and exhibit what people would generally call paintings. I believe most of the paintings I make are actually closer to being sculptures. I’m not sure of the aim of differentiating painting from sculpture in this sense, but I think it is important in

regards to defining oneself. About two weeks after I decided to call my exhibition *Sculptures*, American artist Josh Smith opened an exhibition called *Sculpture*, showing what most people would assume are paintings. What troubles me isn't that he got there first, but that someone had already told me that my earlier work looked like his. Either Smith and I both arrived at the same point at the same time, or I've spent too much time on Contemporary Art Daily being influenced by international art.



Experiencing international works through documentation on screen is quite important to my process. As an artist from New Zealand who has primarily made work in Australia, the problem of a centre/periphery debate is always in my mind. “In the age of pictorial reproduction the meaning of paintings is no longer attached to them; their meaning becomes transmittable: that is to say it becomes information of a sort, and, like all information it is either put to use or ignored.” As almost all the imagery in my work has been appropriated, their meaning is flattened. Characters and symbols are removed from their context of car wash products and now what they stand for is lost. Through the flatness of these reproductions, the content becomes meaningless and gains properties of ambiguity and uncertainty that reflect their authorship. Perhaps by understanding the nature of these transposed images as representations of the second-degree, the irony of my authorship is revealed.

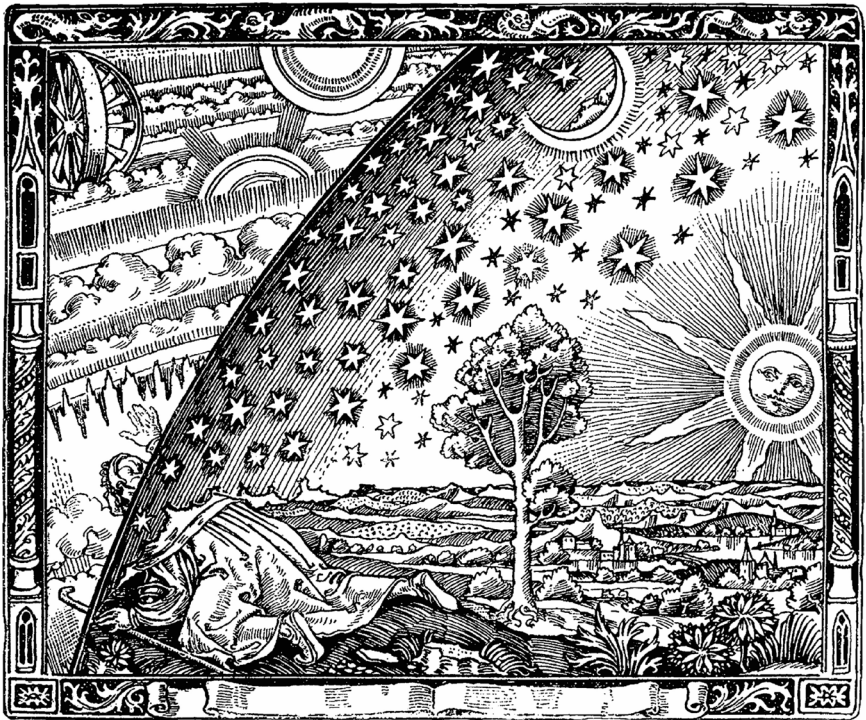
In an interview Marlene Dumas was asked why she paints, she replied “Because the world is flat.” What she meant by this isn’t the same as what B.o.B claimed. Instead, I believe she is speaking about how our experience of the world is based understood through images.



Maybe this show is about the lack of depth in my work. Maybe in my authorship of these works I really do believe the world is flat. By becoming a ‘stupid painter’ I can explore the vastly growing expanse of miss-information that floods our lives.

Stupidity shouldn't be something to be afraid of. Its presence within my practice is undeniable, though its location and function remain ambiguous. Avital Ronell suggests that while stupidity is difficult to define, one of its characteristics is that it consists in the absence of a relation to knowing. Where intelligence holds up a reserve of knowledge, stupidity "severs the illusion of depth and marked withdrawal, staying with the shallow imprint." Perhaps this is what I am interested in; the flatness of painting sculptures.

1. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 17
2. Avital Ronell, *Stupidity*, p. 10





Hayden Stuart is a Car Wash Attendant at Superwash Car Wash in Malvern East, where he has been employed as a casual staff member since 2011. At his work he performs a wide range of tasks including customer service, plant equipment maintenance, cash reconciliation using Microsoft Excel, general handyman duties, and procedural documentation. On site are an automatic touch-free laserwash, 4 spacious self-serve bays, 6 vacuum bays, 2 fragrance machines, and a vending machine with choice of popular car detailing products. This job assists Stuart in functioning as a contemporary artist, and this article was written at that site.

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