



Steven Allison: Alone in the Desert

A millennial man, Phoenix area-based artist Steven Allison subscribes to principles of the 100+-year old Modernist art movement when people questioned the value of art and broke the Academy-prescribed rules for artmaking. More specifically, Allison personally and artistically identifies with Surrealism, a Modernist cultural movement which started in the aftermath of World War I and was heavily influenced by the Dada art movement. We know the movement through writings and visual imagery of juxtaposed realities with dreams, illogical content with strange constructions made from everyday objects, a seemingly significant influence on current Do-It-Yourself (DIY) works. The primary aim was to “resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality” or surreality according to André Breton, one of the cultural movement’s leaders. In other words, to activate the unconscious mind through the juxtaposed imagery of distant realities. The movement’s artists were fascinated with “dreams, desire, magic, sexuality, and the revolutionary power of artworks to transform how we understand the world.” *

The desert is referenced in Allison's paintings which, on one hand considering where he lives, makes sense. The desert is referenced frequently in works by Surrealist painters such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Agnes Pelton, and Leonora Carrington. The desert is a dry, barren wilderness, generally free from distractions and life. In that sense, it becomes a blank slate for the unconscious mind to creatively flourish, as well as to journey through unencumbered.

In his vibrant desert landscapes, we see symbols left by ancient cultures, as well as unnerving imagery of eyes on walls, cactus, rocks, and in the sky which for Allison represent souls. We also see codified personal symbols which reveal his world view and are meant to spark ideas of personal change and open-mindedness to spiritual, mystical, and magical ideas. Simultaneously, they provide connections with people who came before and are metaphoric for people we connect with now, our own struggles, hardships, and mortality. He uses figurative elements which twist in distortion and take flight within the painted image.

Steven Allison earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Arizona State University in 2020. Prior to that, he earned an Associate degree in Digital Art from Mesa Community College in 2017. His work has been included in various group exhibitions since 2018. After graduation from ASU, Allison transitioned from working in watercolor and acrylic to primarily working in oil. He is disciplined about his artmaking practice, painting two hours each day and six to eight hours on his days off from working in an art gallery in Scottsdale. phICA is pleased to present Steven's first solo exhibition in our Virtual Exhibitions Initiative.

*<https://www.artic.edu/highlights/13/surrealism>, Art Institute of Chicago, 7-11-21

Ted G. Decker
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