

One of my favorite movie scenes is a “play within a play” scene in the film *Opening Night*. Gena Rowlands and John Cassavetes are cast as Myrtle and Maurice, two actors and former lovers who end up in a play together as a couple, Marty and Virginia. The scene in question takes place during the second act of a live performance. Rowlands/Myrtle/Virginia goes off the script and starts to ad lib which results in a bizarre onstage argument with Cassavetes/Maurice/Marty. I really couldn’t tell which of the two layers of characters they are inhabiting or whether this is a real fight they are having with the camera rolling.

By superimposing the characters of the play on top of the film characters, and then folding the whole thing back with the ad libs of a real life couple, a strange suspension of reality occurs.

I attempted to do something similar with the mural paintings, to create one level of theatricality with a scaled building facade standing in as a painting, and then add another layer of the mural which acts as the “play within the play.” I wanted to emphasize the objecthood of the paintings by focusing on the edges (adding a row of tile to the top), and the surface (with a rough stuccolike texture and attic vents). As Michael Fried has stated, “espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a new genre of theatre.”

For me to allow myself to make a painting, it needs to be transparent about acknowledging its own (theatrical) objectivity as well as addressing the continued cultural relevance of painting as being fueled by its primacy in the marketplace. I tried to illustrate this by drawing a formal correlation between art and real estate: the facade of a building is a flat rectangle just like a painting, in order to acknowledge the fact that art and real estate are in the same asset bubbles. I always think of the critical distance proposed by Brecht for his plays, he didn't want you to lose sight of their artificiality, to break the fourth wall and admit that as Rowlands says to the audience in *Opening Night*, “it’s only a play.”

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