

# PAGE H. LAUGHLIN



zoom in / zoom out

## PAGE H. LAUGHLIN: zoom in/zoom out

**At this point** in the history of our country, most U.S. citizens consciously participate in our consumer-driven, winner-take-all, materialistic world. This seems to be the case in light of alarming manufacturing plant closings, airlines going bankrupt, pensions being rescinded, energy costs soaring, and deceptive unemployment statistics. Still, whether its automobiles, furniture, fashions, hairstyles, health clubs, or shopping at the green grocery, the type of must-have objects we demand and our desire to accumulate not only drives the economy but defines who we are as individuals and as a nation and how others tend to view us. No one seems more acutely aware of this than the artist Page Laughlin.

Using an array of stylized photographs from high-end interior design magazines as a starting point, Laughlin confuses and explores the underlying issues surrounding this idea of a fabricated lifestyle and the fantasy world that surrounds it. Here we find statues that are surrogates for human activity or family values, suggestive biblical themes, or notions of the exotic. While Laughlin's loose brushwork might first appear to cast a nod to the impressionist painters of the 19th century, her cinematic still-like canvases are anything but traditional.

During a recent studio visit, Laughlin cited several artists that have inspired her at this point in her career. Interestingly, the first two are the German contemporary painters Gerhard Richter and Neo Rauch, and the third is the 17th-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer van Delft. Richter is master of a range of styles and many of his works reinterpret recognizable images from mass media sources. Conversely, his large ultra-color abstract works are visual spectacles that reference nothing but the paint itself and are created with large squeegees that rake the paint across the canvas. The recently celebrated Rauch creates works that deal with sharp social critique and past-glories of his homeland, East Germany. Vermeer is most noted for his exquisite contrast of dark and light tonalities. Each of these artists show astonishing dexterity and a command of their medium.

Laughlin pulls from these sources and her own loose knit form and complex coloration work to create and simultaneously dissolve the picture plane, causing



*Untitled (Lady in the Lamp),  
Magazine Interiors Series  
38 ¼ x 36 ¼ inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist*

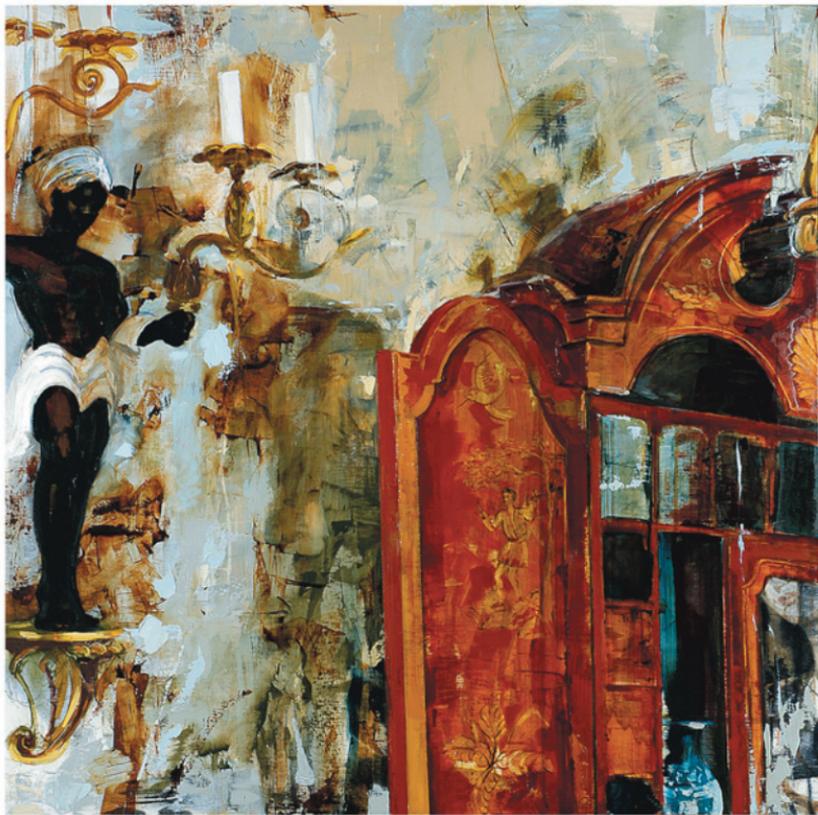
confusion in the process. She refers to this as interference or a blurring of details. Here, the physical action of Laughlin's painting process—the smears, scraps, and streaks of the application—stand up and announce their presence. This veiling approach allows the artist to create glimpses of what she wants us to see—swirling patterns and images borrowed from wallpaper designs that appear to come alive, statuary that takes on human qualities, a hint of a chair here or a bed there. Like a film director who uses his/her craft to guide us through a journey, the artist combines all these conspiring elements to skillfully re-direct our gaze. According to the artist, "I am interested in what these fantasies reveal upon closer inspection and in what is veiled in seduction. Working with these interiors, in a way, mirrors my own relationship to painting. I, too, am creating a fantasy to be examined."

In the work *Untitled (Couple)*, *Magazine Interior Series*, we immediately notice a statue of a couple embracing, with the woman gazing down and away. The man's right arm is raised in defiance or perhaps to shield his eyes from an image or light. The wallpaper hovers front and center and sprouts a curvilinear limb or vine that bears fruit and flowers. By uniting these two elements from the original photograph, Laughlin seems to have captured the theme of Adam and Eve at the moment of conscious sin—or perhaps this is mere decoration.

In contrast, a room interior is visible in *Untitled (The Lady in The Lamp)*, *Magazine Interior Series*. Here the emphasis is not so much on the lamps but again, on a figure, one that resembles Venus de Milo. Looking deeply through the haze of the picture plane, one can see the reflection of a woman in the mirror. Laughlin has created a visual conversation between the statue and a person or a painting whose image is being reflected, a visual strategy often used in the movies. This sightline is purposeful and helps to create a tension in the work, whether we consciously realize it or not. In most of Laughlin's work, the longer one peers into the image that she has created, the more one begins to witness the forms as they slowly announce themselves.

Like it or not, we are inundated with commercial advertising as it bombards our senses everywhere we turn. In Laughlin's richly textured, psychological work, we are asked to consider the implications of ownership, beauty, privilege, class, and wealth as they relate to our all-consuming consumer culture.

David J. Brown, Senior Curator



*Untitled (Candleholder and Man with Knife),*  
*Magazine Interiors Series*  
48 x 48 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

## Exhibition Checklist

### Page Laughlin: Zoom In/Zoom Out

*Untitled (Chinaman),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
38 ¼ x 35 ¾ inches  
Oil on panel, 2004  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Candleholder and Man with Knife),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
48 x 48 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Hall table),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
24 ¼ x 24 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Conversation),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
24 ¼ x 24 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Private Collection

*Untitled (Lilywhite),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
12 x 14 inches  
Oil on panel, 2004  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Bronze Lady),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
24 x 20 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Small Blackamoor Plantstand),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
24 x 20 inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Balls in Bowl),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
48 x 48 inches  
Oil on panel, 2006  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Yellow Wallpaper),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
38 ¼ x 36 ¼ inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist (on cover)

*Untitled (Couple),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
38 ¼ x 36 ¼ inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Family Unit),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
38 ¼ x 36 ¼ inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled (Lady in the Lamp),  
Magazine Interiors Series*  
38 ¼ x 36 ¼ inches  
Oil on panel, 2005  
Courtesy of the artist

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out

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