

Ferdinanda Florence

ARTIST STATEMENT

My approach is not one of addition—only subtraction. Options are eliminated, details deleted and suppressed. What is left offers a kind of visual resistance; the subjects are grounded, like a practitioner of Wing Chun. The paintings themselves are emphatically physical, the paint matte and the support clearly visible. In this pursuit I am inspired by the still life paintings of Giorgio Morandi. Critic Hilton Kramer once described Morandi’s art as “emanating from some inviolate zone of privacy, serenity and detachment,” a welcome respite from “a noisy and embattled world” (NYT, 12/6/81). On the contrary, I see Morandi’s art as unquestionably attached to this “embattled world;” his bottles appear as bulwarks against unseen opposition. They are admittedly quiet, but far from serene.

The two series I’m working on, *Orange Equipment* and *VELPCo*, are both focused on particular buildings, which stand-alone like sentinels. *Orange Equipment* is what it says in white lettering on a blue sign, on a building with ridiculous proportions and a footprint that is anything but rectangular. The *VELPCo* series is missing an “&” in the title, it’s actually VEL&P Co., which is stamped on the front of the building halfway up a hill, gripping the ground like an old cathedral.

Painting *Orange Equipment, large no. 1*, I was thinking of Monet’s paintings of haystacks (1890-91); he had painted dozens of these, some backlit as the sun was setting. For Monet it was about light and its impact on the subject, with the substantive becoming non-substantial in the dissolving air. To me those haystacks appear like bizarre and hilarious totems, otherworldly beings who just beamed onto earth and realized they were wearing the wrong camouflage. I used a fluorescent orange as an undercoat, just to see how far from a rational

palette I could go and still wrangle the painting back to a semblance of reality. Orange Equipment is my haystack, just as VELPCo is my Chartres.

Since they feature Vallejo sites, these paintings inevitably address the unresolved past, present, and future of the city. The series “Lemon’s End” from a few years ago features an area of Vallejo now in bitter contention between a proposed Orcem Cement factory and a long-suffering neighborhood fearful of noise, pollution, and depressed property values. “Embattled and noisy” characterizes everything from local politics to the national stage.

My brain is also embattled and noisy. Unlike in previous series, there are no adjacent buildings in the immediate vicinity to offer support, and no roads to cross. We have reached the last line of defense.