

## Janet Jones: Viva Las Vegas

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We make space, and in the making of it we hover at the edge of safety and terror. There are few more poignant states of the human condition that can become the subject of art, and of painting in particular. For painting, this edge lies between the certainty of its own objecthood and its paradoxical receptiveness to illusion, a relationship that extends to its dual investment in the external world of entities and the interior world of reflected impressions.

In Janet Jones' recent exhibition "DaDa Delirium" at the MacLaren Art Centre, a selection of works from 2003 to 2010, the artist tested this relationship against the "delirium" that Las Vegas conjures up, a reference made explicit in *A Las Vegas of the Mind #1* and *#2*. Basing this body of work on a photographic research trip, Jones focused on what Vegas does best—the fabrication of an illusory world of light and shadow, a film noir of desire and deceit. In the paintings that follow on these photographs, the anonymity of public space becomes a mask or veil rendering incidental and indecipherable all activity caught within its lens. Like a mask, this anonymous space beckons us, calling out to us that whatever we do, whatever we desire can be obtained.

And yet we know otherwise. Like the double gaze in Hitchcock's rear-view mirror, the apparent solidity of place yields to the indeterminacy of perception, a subjective space in which the incidental and indecipherable actions of the viewer, and the multiplicities of image experienced by the body's movement through space and time, subvert the security of anonymity. [Paul Virilio](#) writes about the role of double exposure in early film, where it was deployed as a sort of reflective palimpsest over the character's face to suggest their inner thoughts, fears and feelings. In "DaDa Delirium," Jones replaced the film character with the viewing subject, elaborating a sense of anxious alienation through an array of mirror reflections and subliminal, elusive imagery, a flickering sensation that seems inescapably our own.



Janet Jones *DaDa Delirio* #2 2009 / photo Toni Hafkenscheid

But knowing otherwise is not to know only fear, and Janet Jones has no interest in moral lessons. In a painterly tour de force, Jones applies soft pastel and fluorescent colours to the edges of the paintings, and even in some cases intrudes delicately into the severe white-and-black tonality of the image. Under proper gallery lighting, the subtlety of this colour intervention works not as an addition to the imagery, but as a framing device, a glow surrounding the painting whose effect is to deliver to the viewer an illuminated familiarity, an intimacy that folds together anonymity and anxiety, solid form and inchoate space, enabling us to stand on the brink, to give definition to the intangible.

Such is the manner by which Janet Jones takes on the simultaneity of reality and illusion in painting, constructing for the viewer a hyperreality, a space defined by each individual, with one's emotive state charging the void of anonymity. The critical threshold of control and its loss that Jones paints for us here suspends us in that moment of allure as light becomes form and form slips into a lightness radiating outward beyond the outer edges of the painting, like the last lights of Las Vegas before the darkness of the desert night swallows up their promise.

It would be easy to imagine that Jones' Las Vegas reference should invoke a forum of judgment. Ecstasy and despair run through the history of both Las Vegas and modern art. But as I've suggested, these paintings provide no safe haven; rather, they evoke the midnight thrill of a world reduced to the interpenetration of light and dark, poisoning us on the fulcrum that divides the space we occupy from the projected space into which we long to fall. This is the new sublime—not the face of nature we know from [Caspar David Friedrich](#), but the face of human nature confronted by the consequences of our own ambivalence. The distance separating Friedrich and Jones is the distance seen in that rear-view mirror.

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Janet Jones *DaDa Delirio* #4 2009 / photo Toni Hafkenscheid