

# Talking With: Jonathan Beer and the Making of “Memory Palace”

May 27, 2015

by Pat Rogers

Tripoli Gallery in Southampton has been transformed into place for wondering and maybe even dreaming. The gallery is populated with paintings on wood, Astroturf, plastic, drop cloth, PVC, foam and even a found black velvet painting. But it's the art drenched walls that truly transform the space into someplace new to navigate: dramatic and bold, they have an important role to play in “Jonathan Beer | Memory Palace”.

The exhibition is a site-specific installation created while Jonathan Beer was in residence at the Hamptons gallery from April 13 to May 1, 2015. Since then, the “Memory Palace” has been open for exploration. Expect to find bright sunsets and dusky landscapes as backdrops and symbols of an alternating romanticized or thwarted and darkening American Dream.

Beer's paintings in “Memory Palace” center on hoped for talismans from days past, pulling inspiration from American billboard signs, roadside alters in India, and Beer's Romanian father's chainsaw-carved Brancusi replica with other far-flung objects from contemporary living. Woven into the painting are news references and personal memories that create a bright tapestry of false fantasy and revealed truth.

Pat Rogers from Hamptons Art Hub (HAH!) embarked on a virtual exploration of the making of “Memory Palace” with Jonathan Beer (JB) via email. Read on to discover what the artist had to say about his latest work. Continue scrolling for our slideshow for a look at some of the art that makes up “Memory Palace”.

**HAH!: Describe “Memory Palace”.**

**JB:** “Memory Palace” is an attempt to address a totality of my experiences as they relate to America and being an American. So what you are seeing is this combination of forms, textures, and images that in concert create a kind of psychological architecture that within the space of the gallery is architecturally realized. “Memory Palace” combines an experience, a collection, and an archive using wall painting, paintings, and sculpture. I would say that the paintings and sculpture, usually viewed individually, are now connecting points that anchor the psychological architecture created by all the works together.

**HAH!: How did the experience of creating it contribute to the essence of the immersive piece?**

**JB:** I worked in the gallery for nearly three weeks creating the installation. So I was essentially living in the space and being there all day (and sometimes all night) let me do two things: I internalized the way I (and the audience) would move through the gallery and then slowly giving that motion a backdrop by painting the walls.



Jonathan Beer and Tripoli Patterson. Photo by Ryan Moore, Courtesy of Tripoli Gallery.

**H AH!:** Why is memory important?

**JB:** Because it is the only thing that anchors us to the past and it also gives meaning to the present. To evolve and grow we need a record of what has transpired.

**H AH!:** What is compelling about the American Dream for you?

**JB:** I think that the mythology of the American Dream has always fascinated me. It's a living thing that really cannot be contained by a single description. It is a combination of history, of dreams, sadness, heartbreak, nostalgia, and striving; all told through narratives large and small. Those narratives come in the form of images, advertising, individual memories, pop culture, etc. Whether they be living in a small city, going to the gas station, watching news footage from Iraq and Afghanistan, to the recent riots across the country, I'm interested in the grand story that arises from those experiences, as much as each individual one.

**H AH!:** Why are dawn and dusk significant to this piece? Is this true of your work in general?

**JB:** I think they are very emotionally loaded times of day. They are used often in advertising and visual culture as a result of that. They play a large role in my work and I wanted to use this opportunity to turn those times of day into literal 'places' within my memory palace. Sunset is so often a romantic time; it is a sign of good triumphing against evil, of love, the end of a hard day's work, of new promise, of tomorrow, of survival and endurance, and of course of beauty. Dusk, however, is more elusive and sinister. We imagine we understand and know things in the light, but as that light fades our lack of knowledge about the world is revealed. I associate things like sadness, clandestine operations, night vision, heartbreak, mortality and death, collapse, and struggle with the night.

**HAH!: What about your strongest memory? Do you find this recurs throughout your work?**

**JB:** One strong memory that has had significant influence on my work was seeing the live night vision footage of the first air strikes at the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003. It continues to influence my work to this day.

**HAH!: How does “Memory Palace” relate to your art in general?**

**JB:** I have always been interested in neurology and philosophy as they relate to human experience. I.e: one studies the nature of human experience, and the other studies the problems connected to experience. Moments where we use images to understand the mind – such as using architecture to help make a mental map – is a profound and beautiful thing. I think I’ve always been drawn to instances like that where we use images and imagination to break down the world.

**HAH!: Does each artwork in “Memory Palace” relate to a specific memory, or, perhaps, the essence of the meaning of your memory?**

**JB:** Not every piece is tied to a specific memory. Some definitely relate to the actions of remembering and forgetting. Most refer to the synthetic nature of memory; memories are not singular experiences or 100% true. They are combinations of feelings, impressions, moments, images, sounds, and smells; which change over time as you access them. I like to think my paintings evoke that kind of experience.

**HAH!: How does working across mediums contribute to “Memory Palace?”**

**JB:** Painting and sculpture are different beasts – and they offer different sets of experiences. Just like objects in the real world. They are combinations of feelings, impressions, moments, images, sounds, and smells; which change over time as you access them. I like to think my paintings evoke that kind of experience.

**HAH!: The titles are narrative and evocative. Are they connected closer to your experience or to the work itself?**

**JB:** Usually closer to my experience.

**HAH!: Do you consider the paintings icons or signposts that lead the way through an elusive dream state?**

**JB:** I like that description a lot. They wouldn’t be as easy to read as signposts in reality but yes they are markers of one kind or another.

**HAH!: What is your favorite work in the show?**

**JB:** That’s a difficult question...its probably a tie between *Rode Hard and Put Away Wet*, *Long Letters to the Evening*, *Newport II*, and *They, Them, Us*.

**HAH!: What strikes you as you’re surrounded by “Memory Palace”?**

**JB:** That this is the beginning of a new path in my work and I'm really excited and intrigued to see where it leads.

**HAH!: What do you hope visitors will discover during their experience of "Memory Palace"?**

**JB:** I hope they find themselves slipping between moments of time and between associations. I hope it sparks a conversation and some introspection. I hope that they experience a range of feelings from silliness and satire to frustration, puzzlement, and melancholy. If they take the time to look and feel a lot of things and talk about them, to get lost in the work, that's all I can ask for.

To see images of the opening of "Jonathan Beer | Memory Palace," view our slideshow:

[View Slideshow](#)

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**BASIC FACTS:** "Jonathan Beer | Memory Palace" opened as a completed installation on May 2 and is extended to June 1, 2015. Tripoli Gallery is located at 30A Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. [www.tripoligallery.com](http://www.tripoligallery.com).

Jonathan Beer (b. 1988, American) has exhibited in New York, nationally and internationally. Solo shows include "Happening & History" at Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts (New York), "American Epic" at MCD Museum of Art + Design (Miami), "The Landscape Revisited" at Rosemount College (Philadelphia). [www.jonathanbeer.com](http://www.jonathanbeer.com).

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