

But look again. The incoming tide floods the living room floor. Through the window—and, strangely, also through the house's translucent walls—you can see what's outside: the hazy horizon and the islands in the bay. Where there should be a porch, there's ledge; the back door that lets in the breeze lets the surf roll in, too. Under a night table, a row of rocks is arranged like slippers. These images are serene and treacherous.

They are photographs, and they are not. Despite knowing better, we want to believe what we see in them. Becton's seductive sense of control—he is, at heart, a formalist—encourages credulity, even though it is clear that what we are looking at is a photographic hallucination. Becton's works are meditations on ambivalence: digital montages, beautiful and unsettling mashups, altered realities.

A surface of rational calm, like a still, perfect day before a storm, overlays the allure of imagination. It is not quite a surface, though. Walls, floors, and ceilings open to the elements—and to the imagination. They provide a framework but no shelter; they are lit with the clarity of memory. What we see depends on what we bring to the act of seeing: what memories, what desires, what emotions. Becton is really exploring our own permeability. It becomes hard to distinguish between what is an actual photograph and what is manipulated. Sometimes the surf crashing at a doorstep is a photograph of a painting of the ocean (a sly way to ask questions of the nature of representation). The fantastic accretion of barnacles and rust and eroded paint on the red hull of a beached buoy tender seems invented. Its intricate pattern suggests Chinese silk, as if Becton has added his own embellishments to the surface, tempting us to make out a hidden landscape in the hide of the derelict boat. The curve of the stern makes the hull read as two-dimensional, an opulent curtain tied back with a rope of seaweed and mussels, revealing a view of the shoreline.

In his earlier work, a threshold could halt the incoming tide; now the water rises above the wainscoting, flooding the house. Paint peels, shelves have been emptied and rooms abandoned—or liberated from the constraints of the physical world. In another image, it looks as if Becton has carved a mouth into the arc of that buoy tender's hull, turning it into a man-made monster devouring the peaceful painted coastline.

While he retains his framework, his rooms and mantels, they are growing less substantial, yielding weight and reality to invading waves and clouds. Human endeavor—the need to organize, to contain—is yielding to the possibilities of chaos.

Becton is showing us that order is fleeting. Boundaries erode. A dream house contains within its luminous walls the calm sky and lapping water—and the seductive potential for flooding, for disaster. Beauty and terror are of a piece, inseparable.

— Deborah Weisgall