

Lia Newman

Director and Curator, Davidson Gallery
Davidson College, NC

Myles Calvert - Exhibition Review - Dalton Gallery / Arts Council of York County, Rock Hill, SC***Surface Appeal with Fringe Benefits***

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Myles Calvert's artwork centers around mundane, familiar items, often of domestic origin, such as furniture, appliances, and decorative objects. Trained as a printmaker and inspired by the color theories of Josef and Anni Albers and the subject matter and Pop style of artists such as Patrick Caulfield and Richard Hamilton. To create his prints, drawings, neon sculptures, and tapestries, Calvert draws on objects from both his memory and current environs. These everyday items are collected, combined, and repeated in different forms to conflate the artist's past and present. The notion of drawing from one's environment expands beyond imagery for Calvert, however; exploring the tools and technologies available to him is also integral to his practice.

Over the last decade, Calvert has relocated several times. Each place has brought access to local facilities and the ability to experiment with new techniques and processes, from multi-plate lithographs to hand-bent neon to dye sublimation prints on textiles. Regardless of where he finds himself and what media he is working in, Calvert notes, "All of the same rules get pulled forward." The objects prominently featured in his works "must be universally recognizable, serve a function, and be manufactured in either basic or opulent versions." Coincidentally, perhaps, moving from Canada to England back to Canada to upstate New York and, most recently, to South Carolina, means that many of the objects Calvert uses in his work, particularly furniture and decorative belongings, are the very items the artist must often leave behind and reacquire once settled in a new place.

Calvert often develops a specific visual vocabulary to connote a particular place. For example, in his recent series *Inside Vessels*, his birthplace of Collingwood, Ontario, Canada, is represented by silhouettes of ceramic vases and pitchers typical of the forms made by Blue Mountain Pottery, a ceramic studio that operated in his hometown from 1953 until 2004. To create these works, Calvert cut out in Masonite the oversized vessel shapes and screenprinted them, layering them with resin, screenprinting them again, layering them with more resin, and so on. The vessels are then mounted to substrates that have also been overlaid with several layers of screenprinted imagery and paint. Calvert balances simple, geometric patterns, such as diamonds or stripes, with more organic and complex patterns.

His current residence of Rock Hill, South Carolina, is alluded to in his use of historic textile patterns from the archives at Springs Creative, a cotton textile company founded in 1887 that still operates near Calvert's home today. Complementary colors cause the

vessels to stand out from their backgrounds, and the combination of patterns and materials create dazzling, optically disorienting pieces. The compositions provide hints of domestic spaces, such as edges of tables and corners of rooms. For the presentation of these works in *Surface Appeal with Fringe Benefits*, Calvert hung these works lower than the centerline of other nearby pieces to emphasize the bodily relationship of the viewer to such domestic objects; one encounters this large-scale vase as though it is positioned on the floor. Calvert continues his interest in making the historic contemporary by combining traditional and new technologies, such as photographic screenprint processes and a CNC router (using computer software controlled machines to cut out the vessels, for example, rather than a human-guided tool such as a jigsaw or bandsaw).

Other more functional, domestic objects, such as toasters—and at times, actual pieces of screenprinted toast—have made appearances in Calvert’s work for years. Toasters and toast could be a symbol of England, a place linked to his formative years as an artist and educator. In *Surface Appeal with Fringe Benefits*, Calvert presents two toasters, one in gold and the other in Tiffany Blue, produced in a similar fashion to the aforementioned works: wooden cutouts screenprinted with the image of a toaster and then layered in resin. His color choices and the dedication of time and effort to create artworks centered on such an ordinary household object imbue the item with a sense of importance, further emphasized in this case by the addition of radiating neon light. Relocating several times over the past few years has forced Calvert to evaluate his purchases carefully. If you are a person who relocates often, do you settle for the practical, inexpensive Black & Decker toaster or do you get seduced by the well-designed, pricey SMEG?

While Calvert’s toasters radiate with the addition of neon light, his multi-plate lithographic prints of ottomans seem to glow from within. Footstools initially crept into Calvert’s visual lexicon while living in England, where he saw 17th- and 18th-century furniture and decorative rugs and tapestries at the Victoria & Albert Museum. The elegant ottomans depicted in works such as *If Money Wasn’t Involved* and *Subtle Was Rarely An Option* are ornate, with decorative tassels and the appearance of elaborately patterned, crushed velvet upholstery. They connote opulence and luxury, magnified by Calvert’s composition, exquisite details, and layering of color. These lithographs, produced while Calvert worked alongside master printers at a residency at Tamarind Institute at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, are truly “printmaker’s prints,” with the artist pushing the medium to the extreme. The effort required to create these works mirrors the lavishness of the subject matter.

Whether a single footstool is rendered, as in *Due Diligence*, or several ottomans overlapping on the same page, as in *That Darn Healthy Glow*, the hassocks generally take center stage; they float on mottled or solid backgrounds, removed from their domestic settings. These works stand in contrast to a series of eight black-and-white etchings focused on living spaces. Calvert once again connects process to concept; drawing, the foundation of the etchings, is an intimate endeavor, and the imagery pictures personal living spaces. While the central images are sofas, other personal

items such as lamps, plants, and artwork are also visible, providing a glimpse of the occupants' taste. These living rooms could be straight from the pages of popular interior design magazines, yet upon closer examination some of the belongings are familiar. Calvert's own artwork, replicas of his ottoman lithographs, for example, grace the walls of these homes or are propped against a wall, as if the occupant is moving in or out.

For this exhibition, Calvert took advantage of his proximity and relationship to Springs Creative and the available technology there to manufacture printed textiles. Three new works build on scans of old textiles from the archive. High resolution scans capture—and celebrate—minuscule weave patterns, inconsistencies, and human error. These works again combine past and present. The chosen patterns were made before software intervention and pay homage to the handiwork of laborers, likely women, who would have originally hand-painted the stencils or operated cylinder printing machines. Calvert's renditions rely on dye sublimation, a digital printing technology using heat transfer to apply an image to a substrate, in this case, lightweight cotton.

While neon is typically associated with commercial signage, Calvert chooses to use the medium at the exhibition's entry to provide a clue about his overarching concept. Five hand-bent neon sculptures of simple house structures, when viewed within the context of Calvert's entire exhibition, speak less to the concept of house and more to the notion of home—and what it means to feel settled, content, and comfortable. Although made with neon, Calvert notes he tried to replicate the single-line drawing technique—making an image without lifting the pen, or in this case, without backtracking while bending the neon tubing. The title of the work, *The Importance of Wonk*, emphasizes the artist's emphasis on imperfection; the process of learning a new technique to make these pieces, Calvert says, “outweighs their final outcome.”

Experienced together, the works in *Surface Appeal with Fringe Benefits* examine value, though not necessarily material or economic worth. Why do certain objects, places, or experiences have more personal significance than others? Sometimes the most expensive item is not the one we remember or cherish most. The array of works presented here reminds us that value is often about perspective. For Calvert, worth seems tied to the connection with a person, place, or moment.