

The vicissitudes of history and storytelling are at the heart of Ivan Morley's practice and have guided the development of his paintings over the past several years. Most often, the artist cobbles together a narrative text that purports to be based in historical fact but is admittedly clouded by memory. The bulk of these generative anecdotes address obscure wrinkles in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century development of California. For instance, the Dig series describes the archaeological discovery of what was said to be the largest red-light district ever excavated in California, and the True Tale series follows an entrepreneur who made a fortune shipping cats to San Francisco for vermin control. Morley works with these stories, picking up strands of information and attempting to give them visual form through an array of techniques. As each painting gets underway, however, its basis in a specific narrative loosens, often drifting into tangents and sometimes even blending with other stories. Morley defers the position of sole narrator to a chorus of observers, rendering the subject in ways that complicate the attribution of a single hand.

This can be seen in two identically titled and dated canvases, *Tehachepi (sic)* (2003), that pertain to a story about a high-desert town that experienced such strong gusts that bullets were always diverted to hit the windward side of its trees. In each of the differently sized paintings, a bullet-ridden tree is pictured but treated distinctly. In the larger one, stylized leaves are rendered with dense and variegated embroidery, and bullet holes are fashioned out of appliquéd florets of oil paint. The smaller canvas shows a similar but obviously different tree whose leaf clusters are rendered in a child-like fashion from flat patches of paint; gone are the didactic arrows indicating wind direction and bullet vectors found in the larger canvas. Morley originally exhibited these side by side, playing up their distinctions and explicitly demonstrating separate viewpoints of the same subject.

Morley's multiple perspective approach to his subject matter allows him to challenge his own predispositions towards painting and push himself into alternate or parallel traditions. He has experimented extensively with batik, for instance, as another