

PREVIEWS OF EXHIBITIONS

BRUCE COHEN

(Leslie Sacks Gallery, Santa Monica) Although art designated as Realism is rife with art historical precedents, Contemporary Realism emerged during the late 1960's and early 70's, a reaction at that time to the popularity of abstraction and hard-edge paintings. The movement drew the interests of artists such as California based Bruce Cohen. Differentiated from the American Social Realism movement of the 1930s, this was a tendency characterized by the distinctive blending of realism with surrealism. Cohen's paintings maintain hard-edge techniques that are characteristically fundamental to his vision.

Drawn to realistic techniques and unusual perspectives, Cohen is particularly inspired by the sense of order found in 17th-century Dutch still life paintings. At the same time, the otherworldliness of Surrealism also plays a pivotal role. However, it is the density of detail and decorative ambiguities in Indian miniature paintings that most impact his visions.

Cohen's surrealist instincts come into play in his ability to express psychological states through interior spaces. Artists have long been interested in depicting interiors, and indeed, his paintings recall the unusual interior juxtapositions and vantage points of Matisse and Magritte. Unlike such antecedents, Cohen's works transcend rationality through the use of hyper-real representation. Though they entail layers of decision-making in the arrangement of objects and architectural elements, Cohen adds unusual angles and points of view to soften any feeling of rigidity or premeditation.

Though he uses a combination of saturated and muted hues, he is particularly masterful in generating light sources that draw inspiration from Vermeer. But by translating light and shadows into grid-like patterns, he manages to evoke distinctively magical auras. It is evident in paintings such as



Bruce Cohen, "Interior with Glass of Water and Picasso Collage," oil on canvas.

"Interior View of Garden," where the geometry of the doorway is reflected in the light beams on the floor.

By the same token, Cohen evokes modern versions of 17th-century chiaroscuro techniques by placing equal weight on shadows. A prime example is "Interior with Glass of Water and Picasso Collage." Here, in sharp contrast to dark shadows, a single shaft of light takes on special value.

Freshly cut fruit and floral arrangements also provide important clues to the sensibilities of the occupants. In "Still Life with Papaya," for instance, fruit that is cut in half offers evidence of absent inhabitants. Colorful flowers, displayed in a variety of artistic vases, are further evidence. Though Western art historical references to flowers carry a plethora of symbolism, in Cohen's interiors, they add an aesthetic quality to the eerie isolation of the rooms. In "Iris and Lemons on Glass Table" for example, a glass vase of flowers sits on a reflective surface. It is as sensuous a vision as a nude figure.

Drawing from objects both observed and invented, pristinely ordered spaces serve as tools to create moody atmospheres. But they are so resolutely structured, arranged seemingly by someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder. At the same time, they tap into Surrealist emphasis on the power of imagination. There is an eerie absence of human figures and suggestions of mystery glimpsed through open doors

and windows. As in “Kitchen Interior with Seascape,” views of ocean and sky hint at worlds beyond the isolation of the interior.

Though they are imaginative spaces, the pristine beauty of these paintings overrides the intrigue. In fact, his allegorical visions hint at modern versions of Renaissance genre paintings. Like his ancestors, the impetus is to create interiors to meditate on.

Elenore Welles

BILLY ZANE and DENNYS ILIC

(Leica Gallery, West Hollywood) The mystique of Hollywood has long been an alluring subject of public fascination. The stories that take place beyond the veneer of the silver screen are of particular interest to actor and visual artist Billy Zane and professional photographer Dennis Ilic, who have each documented behind-the-scenes moments of feature films and captured raw, soulful portraits of actors. Both storytellers create a narrative through a Leica camera lens.

“Rock, Parchment, Scissors” marks the first public exhibition of the photographs of Billy Zane. As an actor featured in over 120 films, Zane kept photographic diaries of his experiences on set, revealing the beauty of locations around the world and catching actors in moments when the camera was not rolling. Working with several mediums including film, Polaroid, Super 8 and digital, Zane kept his photographs filed away in a personal archive. This amounts to a personal excavation, revealing a series of color and black and white photographs from a four-part miniseries, “Cleopatra,” filmed on location in Morocco in 1998 in which Zane starred as Marc Anthony.

When he wasn’t on screen, he was behind the lens of a Leica 24mm soaking in the majestic landscape and elaborate costumes. Standing above Cleopatra’s headpiece,



Billy Zane, “Rock, Parchment, Scissors,” 1999, color photograph.

we can more closely examine the intricacies of her costume, including the Egyptian style bracelets that adorn each arm, the gold and blush colored silk gown and her tightly braided hair. Seated on a royal blue fabric, the desert landscape becomes illuminated by the luxury of the last pharaoh of ancient Egypt. In another photograph, Zane captures a long shot where a sea of Egyptian soldiers lies dead at the feet of Roman soldiers. A corresponding image moves closer to five of the Egyptian soldiers as they lay on the desert sand. Shot between takes, three of the soldiers look up to the camera and smile.

Working in Los Angeles, Ilic has been active for more than a decade. His background as a cinematographer translates to a calculated style that captures a subject without the noise of elaborate lighting. His body of work demonstrates the personal relationship between the photographer and his subject. A portrait of Robin Lord Taylor captures a face partially obscured by a horizontal metal bar that creates a corresponding shadow. The two lines meet like a “t,” framing the subject’s face and pushing it out of the shadows. While we cannot see his eyes, we have an palpable sense of being stared at. Ilic further explores the symmetry of the human form in a black and white photograph of two nude women embracing each other. One blond and the other brunette, their bodies fold into one another’s as if they were one person. While we never see their faces, their embrace emotes an honesty indicative of Ilic’s work, as if the camera just happened to discover the scene unfold.

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