



GALLERIES



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Kris Knight: Farewell Log Cabin

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BY DAVID BALZER June 24, 2009 21:06

EDITORIAL RATING:

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One should try to consider Kris Knight's painting without dwelling too much on its supposed queer sensibility. The new work in particular wants to transcend the solely experiential or autobiographical, its eroticism being as hetero as it is homo, at least ostensibly. The sticking point for many (one that, lamentably, gets attached to Knight's queerness) is the work's apparent vapidty: its Gus Van Santishness, which fixates on adolescence with what, to some, seems a longing, yet still frustratingly cute, perversity. And what is Knight saying, exactly? The new exhibit, called "Farewell Log Cabin,"

appears to comprise portraits from a field party, that oh-so-Canadian-small-town milieu, where teens drink, fuck and work out their solipsistic melodramas away from authority figures. There's a lot of dewy skin, drugged eyes, post-coital flushed cheeks, northern lights, etc. It's very beautiful, but is it anything a fashion spread or music video couldn't give us?

Well, to start, Knight's work is historical, and this is not just because it is figurative. He is operating, smartly, within the symbolist tradition of portraiture, with a clear affection for hagiographic painting: his figures are surrounded by items that speak, often flamboyantly, to their bravery or suffering - blankets, sweaters and parkas, the latter's furred hoods becoming saintly halos. Knight must be familiar with the work of 17th-century Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán, who depicted penitent monks in lusciously rendered habits, with Karel Funk, Zurbarán's contemporary successor, who trades the habits for hoodies, and also with tackier references, like mass-produced art of puppies and girls from the '70s (which is perfectly OK: Margaret Keane's version of empathy is terrifically, profoundly adolescent). But it is precisely this ambition that leaves us wanting more. I, for one, would like to see him push himself further as a craftsman, to render things increasingly finer. (As a brush-wielder, he is no Zurbarán or Funk, who both paint with more accuracy.) Such potential is already in his faces, however, which are the stunning anchors of his works, and which, sometimes, ask us to look longer, harder and more fantastically than their painter has.

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David Balzer Jun 30, 2009 1:25 PM

Sheesh

I don't believe in responding to what I feel has already been made clear in a published review, but you've prodded me. To reinforce: I love Knight's work. The first part of this review expresses the opinions of those who don't (they exist); the second is a defense of the work in light of this. Read carefully and you will see that my statement about Knight's brushwork is an encouragement, not a "jab": the beauty and mysticism of his subject matter demand a painter with an ongoing dedication to technique. I have no doubt Knight fits the bill, and has a great career ahead of him.

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toomanyartfags Jun 28, 2009 9:45 AM

Just Bitchy

I found this review rather confusing as to where the critic stands with this artist. He seems to want the painter to mirror artists from the past, what good would this do?

Agree | Disagree | Offensive



boxofpaints Jun 27, 2009 7:16 PM

Jabs Jabs Jabs

Shit...what did Mr Knight do to piss off Mr Balzer? I have to say though, this article's sensationalism got me to see the show and it's an accomplished exhibition. You really don't see this kind of painting on Queen West and it's refreshing. The man can paint and his palette is lush and his paintings literally glow. I enjoyed the fact that Knight's brushwork has become looser since the last show of his I saw but this article makes no mention of it, nor does it mention any painting in particular which makes me wonder if Balzer even went to the show? I didn't see any paintings from a supposed field party and there was nothing small town about it, maybe he was just basing this critique on his last show? Knight's portraits are both defensive and vulnerable but I really liked his painting of the lone snow buried cabin with phantom-like northern lights. I found this article strange and snarky, almost like Balzer is trying to get Knight to paint how he wants him too, obviously tighter, but considering the show i

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