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Here's Looking When

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Erica Ryan Stallones

“Here’s Looking When”

MFA Thesis Exhibition, February 14-18, 2011

Artist Statement

What I want to capture and lend to my viewer is not the physical reality of the scene I have painted: Located somewhere amidst the thin layers of paint is the *possibility* of what has just happened, or is about to happen, or what is trapped inside the figure, unable to escape. My work invites the viewer to seek after that which is hidden or lost.

The world I paint is a world of angles and intersection, of convergence and unbalance. It is a world of shallow depth, where the environment pushes in and competes with substance, and flesh must take on light and depth to stand out. It is a world where light is the most concrete and tangible element present. When paired with flesh, it is powerful, painful, illuminating.

In a world of generalizations, the details I choose to render are significant because they are specific: Elements of light and heat tell us where we are and how we should react. The afternoon sun is oppressive, weighty; it indicates areas of import, slows down motion, freezes expression. Morning light is warm, but soft, diffused. It is encouraging, permissive. When indoor light is eclipsed by the flash of an unseen camera it becomes revelatory, even accusatory. It exposes artifice, but knows how to keep a secret.

I am compelled by that which cannot be bound physically or explained rationally. Through paint and figuration I endeavor to create experiences rather than narratives; experiences where oppositions dissolve, where conundrums and contradictions are embraced as integral aids toward greater understanding. Gathered in small, ambiguous groups, the youthful characters in my paintings stand around waiting for something to happen, watching their peers or returning the gaze of someone just outside the frame. The impetus of these gatherings, the weight of the missing information, the mundane mystery of the situation, the invitation and denial of access to the observer offer clues without assuming answers.

My paintings allow you a glimpse into a familiar but ultimately foreign place, a memory that is not your own, a part of the whole. The inhabitants of these spaces are reflections, shells. They are caught in a maze of searching glances, unreturned gazes. They are wise, skeptical, generous. You are invited to watch, to follow their gazes, to judge or relate, but never to join.

Our world and theirs are both vibrant, complicated places separated by formal variances, irreconcilable differences. The body alone does not contain the possibilities of life, nor can humanity be accurately captured in photographs or paint, yet it is this very failure to truly create or imitate life that intrigues me. I hope to preserve some mystery/suspicion/discomfort, to emphasize the theatricality overlooked in observable reality. I strive to make visible that which has been forgotten, to provide access to another plane of thought or being. It is my hope that by presenting scenes of uncomfortable familiarity there might open up a small window of self-examination and a path to a more complex and nuanced understanding of humanity.