A Conversation About the Framing Of the Figure, Late Spring 2017

by BARRY N. NEUMAN, JUN. 2017

Two dudes. Paddling. In the line-up. Lincoln Boulevard, Long Beach.
(Two surfer dudes, that is.)

Dude: Hey, is purple the color of the moment?

Other Dude: Francis Bacon painted with purple. It’s not so much only of this moment. Bacon’s framing of the figure seems to be making an appearance this season, though.

D: Right. There’s Shona McAndrew’s heroically-sized female nudes. In her recent digital collages, each is depicted reclining in a bedroom. When I asked her if she had an affinity for Richard Hamilton, she replied that she absolutely did. However, unlike Hamilton, who “positioned somewhat anonymous/generalized figures to engage tropes present in contemporary life,” McAndrew aims to “reflect the interior life of each of the individuals that inhabit the space.”

OD: Nicole Ruggiero is creating virtual reality environments in which a hypothetical figure is absent.

D: For sure. The poster for “A Clockwork Orange,” mounted above the bed in one of her works, is a nice touch. Surrounded by other pieces of furniture and personal effects, each viewer of Ruggiero’s work is able to navigate through someone’s private, domestic space – with the implicit permission of the room’s occupant and at various angles. Immersed within a purple, glowing, futuristic, architectonic environment, the viewer is the one who is framed by the artist.

OD: Figures are seen partially immersed in swimming pools in Eric Fischl’s “Late America” series of paintings.

D: Indeed. It’s an interesting effect. In one work, a man, wearing swimming trunks, is standing in the shallow end of a swimming pool, and, in another, a woman, in a long, black, semi-diaphanous, evening gown, is sitting by the edge of a pool. The woman is lost in thought, while her legs and dress are partially immersed in the water. Beneath the surface of the water, each is in a different world. The man, who is having a dialogue with a youngster, who’s standing next to the pool, appears to be both cooling off and in the space created by his dialogue; the woman, however, is, inconsolable. She’s in a world of her own of private thoughts and emotions, but oblivious to how the bottom of her dress is getting soaked in water; nearby, a swimming, black Labrador Retriever is, well, living a dog’s life, not a human’s.
OD: The figures are triply framed. Once by the edges of the pool, twice by the surface of the water, and thrice by the actual edges of each painting.

D: Cool. Actual frames are most notably setting off Cindy Sherman’s figures in “Once Upon a Time, 1981 – 2011” at Mnuchin Gallery.

OD: Royally! Sherman’s work has always been distinctive in the way that it differentiates the New School from the Old School in photography. She produces works in series, and her works are conceptually rooted. Here, the gallery’s attentiveness to custom picture framing has elevated her work in ways that, for the most part, universal acclaim has yet to do. The presentation amplifies the power of each and every work.