

## KAREN KAUFFMAN AND THE RHAPSODY OF ALWAYS-IS

There's no center to the larger than life-size "Seeing," No edge, no modeling, no focal point. Nothing in the composition embarks the eye on some pictorial excursion. *It is what it is what it is*. Nothing is foregrounded: any difference between negative and positive space is not apparent. Everything pulses like stars in a desert sky (or like a morning moon adjacent to a midday sun), some closer, some further, all in motion, though not apparently so. There's no entry point to the piece, just a surface ripple made up of roiling pictorial activity. Any discernible form - a roof, a window, a mesa, a person - is diffused by light, so we look at fragments that appear out of nowhere, some starkly realized, some relegated to the pictorial haze. There's no transition from in-to-out, out-to-in. It's like looking out through a gauze curtain on a brilliant sunny day. The color scheme (yellow, mostly, white, occasionally black), in fact, suggests a diaphanous veil which suggests revealing, which is what the work is all about.

The work is comprehensive, accidental, ephemeral, qualities that are embodied in the medium: fast-drying acrylic still prone to drips. The overall effect is simply that, *overall*. *Overall* and *simultaneous*. This *always-is* esthetic happens at the intersection of the spongy atmospherics of J.M.W. Turner and the taut surface grid of Jackson Pollock's allover paintings, with a nod to Willem De Kooning's "slipping glimpser." Kauffman's work is characterized by a fixed point of view, as if she has set a fixed point of view camera in one spot (a landscape, usually, one time a cityscape, a couple of times with people) and then records the time-lapse blur – think a satellite recording a 24 hour cycle of weather over the North American continent - of the passage of time. Added to the accumulation of visual data the camera records, she also filters the resultant image through her memory: her De Kooning-esque Red Dress shows a caricature of a woman, starkly rendered, stepping out of the maelstrom. Dark Symphony shows a similarly rendered woman, pregnant perhaps, arms raised to seemingly conduct a symphony, which is not a bad metaphor for child-rearing.

The result is a series of fluid mosaics, frozen in time. Her theme is simultaneity, all things happening at once, momentarily arrested. In conception her work is like Robert Delaunay's Orphism (the Eiffel Tower series), the apprehending of different points of view of the same thing in the same piece (this stands in stark distinction to Monet's serial Haystacks and faces of the Rouen Cathedral, in which *each discrete image showed its subject at a different time of day*). Her constant point of view presupposes pure consciousness, a flypaper of ambient sensations. The artist as bodhisattva. Her only conscious choice is where she sets the camera. The rest – visual, emotional - just happens. Hers is pure, non-judgmental vision. Her compositional purview is the framing; her subject is the passage of time. Her elements are the shards of that-which-is-framed fading in and out of focus.

She applies this always-is esthetic to landscapes, southwestern ones, especially (the Taos Redemption series, Sahara Mirage, Mango Albuquerque, Pueblo Sky). Her subjects range from the frozen-flux of weather (Weather Patterns, Zhivago Stormbreak, Diurnal Winds,

of music (Diffused Melody, Jazzy Rhythms, Dark Symphony), and of time (Sunlight Matrix, Sunset Grid, Time, Retro Passages). The result: mindscapes.

Each work shimmers melodically like atmospheric icons, condensed visual impressions of things seen and things being seen. Their construction suggests that only vision is unchanging. That time passes, that landscapes shift, tectonically or otherwise, that people come and go, that music plays through to some conclusion.

The veiling effect is the most symbolic and significant part of Kauffman's visual cornucopia. In some pieces (Bare Subtleties, Labyrinth) it takes the form of the slats in a fence. In others it takes the form of clouds. In yet others it's like the final moment before death, that final blindness. The work is all consuming and life affirming, that life is a process of vision that deepens over time; that we take in experience, first, through the eyes, then through the heart. Her work is monumental and incisive. It allows us to take inventory of the ambit of visual data, shows everything that occurs – *and that happens to us* - between each single flicker of the eye, and permits us to participate in a visual meditation on our world, to notice the Organic Drama and the Juxtaposition of the Bare Subtleties, the Labyrinth, the Stratus, the Orb Effervescence, and the Archetypal Patterns that surround us, to subsume our All into a much bigger One.

James Scarborough

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