

Review

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Linda Stojak

New Paintings

Stephen Haller Gallery through April 2

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LINDA STOJAK STRIKES again - two rooms full of new paintings, just the same and different, new directions and old verities, wonderful stuff indeed. And as one has come to anticipate at Haller, Stojak offers beautiful surfaces, great craft adjusted to artistic purpose, novel images - examples of the classical verities at play.

Stojak paints paintings that do not come with popular causes and detailed explanations. They do not need causes or labels or explanations - even, though, the subjects, both the visible subjects and their driving purpose, arise from popular and fashionable concerns about women and children and bodies. What you see at first is simply abstract beauty - figures floating in a blue ocean, a woman with a child's head done almost all in red, a huge white painting elegantly contrived. These paintings impose themselves on the viewer without text or lesson, and then, like a brush fire, flare up as the "reality" of the work grows more apparent.

One of the strangest and most compelling of her new paintings relies upon a typical Stojak composition - a woman in a red, bright red format, the figures blending in with the background. Luscious in surface but eerie as well - a patina over raw emotion. This time, however, there are two emotions at play, there are two figures in the painting, two sensitivities somehow merged and blended, separate and apart, a classical figure imposed with a child's head, far more detailed, far more real than tangible, a child seen instead of a body felt, a peculiar perspective for the viewer as there was for the artist.

One reading of the painting is about the wonder of the child, and the other about the woman, about women, any woman and this specific woman. The child's head, bright-eyed and wise beyond its years, is not, however, separate, only different. The surface unites them on canvas, just as proximity, love and creation unite them in real life.

Another reading of the painting is about grievance but does not arise from misery or anguish. And here the painting is not about women or children, but is a icon arising from inner reality - the ambivalence of crossed purposes, confused emotions, hidden and revealed, are the medium through which the subject emerges. This is not a mother and child, but a splendid painting by someone, a mother, someone with a child, someone who paints women as she perceives them to be. The painter matters and the surface, but what is especially compelling is that there are two, often contradictory, perspectives, a self-portrait of a child done by the mother, a symbolic woman for all seasons imprinted with the image of a single and special child. And so too the beauty, the bodies in blue, the bodies in red, that can, like the elegant surface, be taken in formal terms as wonderful, but, in fact, are in contradiction of the subject - the mouth waters when the bug is crushed, the exhilaration of a new image tempered by the angst and mystery that permeates not just the "subject" but the entire exercise.

And both impacts are as one, the contradictions transformed by a Stojak dialectic, the clash between the lovely and lush with the bizarre. An appealing image and the mystery, the child's head and the woman's body.

Go see. Take your time. What you see is what you get - always - and here you can get lots, but the most fascinating is the startling dialectic of opposites merged in a surface, on a wall - Haller's wall, and, perhaps, if you are so fortunate, your wall. Linda Stojak probably is both less fortunate and more; she will feel compelled to continue to seek solace through the construction of this dilemma and be rewarded for a time, each time, with a new work that resolves the contradictions of life and art, for a time. We get the work, the beauty, the solution, and she the struggle and more work.

And we can all but hope to look forward to more such splendid solutions by Stojak.