Question & Answer Between Jamie Morra and Rose Marcus

Central Park (3 Riders) II
2015, Inkjet print on adhesive vinyl, sintra, plywood, silk chiffon, iron frame

ROSE MARCUS

Rose Marcus is an American artist working and living in the Bronx. Her work is known for being of and about New York City. She has a background in architecture and sculpture, though her medium is predominantly photography. She maintains ancillary practices as a writer and curator and is completing a graduate degree in art history. Marcus is represented by Night Gallery in Los Angeles and has been exhibiting here and abroad since 2010.

JM: There is a hint of the architect and painter at odds with one another in the way you manipulate photographs and with the materials you choose to print on. What is your relationship to the gestural and to gesture?

RM: In 2008, I began my first series of photos. I took images of empty storefronts in Manhattan which closed closed due to the crash. They were like double negatives; I caught exterior images reflected in the storefront glass while shooting the interiors. I used a digital camera with no viewfinder so more often than not I was using the window as an extra lens and my shadow allowed the camera access to the interiors. I guess that was the first stage with gesture, honoring the found gesture. All the smears on the windows were painting and compositions of debris inside were like sculpture for me. The resulting images were just so common that I felt like it let both a lot of concept and memory in at the same time. I printed these on the adhesive vinyl at a scale true to storefronts and adhered them to the wall. Both Louise Lawler's and Zoe Leonard's practices were very close. And what your question brings to mind is a distinction maybe, of conceits. That interior-exterior relationship was important because I wanted more subjectivity, more emotional content.

Now I am working with non-reflective images - straight street photography. I'll often mount print these images to thicker substrates and then physically embed other materials into them. The additional materials are limited to plexiglass, silk chiffon and velvet - all of which work with the mechanisms of light. When you cover part of an image, you end up framing another part. I'll sometimes use analytical procedure to develop calligraphic shapes. In 3 Riders, (see image), I culled the pastoral curve of the road as a shape and flipped it.

JM: Advertising employs photography to guide viewers towards latent desire. But your use of photography is about close looking, not cheap thrills. Are you attempting to push the conditions or devices of advertising back onto painting? Or are you using the language of painting, like gesture, as a foil to the iconography of advertising?

RM: I use the materials of advertising, not the approach. People know these materials on a deep corporeal level. We touch advertisements all day long. We lean on them; we throw them in the trash. We don't regularly pass our hands across the surface of paintings or even see them in direct sunlight, or caught in the dark. I am using the tacit familiarity of these materials... a familiarity born of our inability to not look at them. So this approach links to what you call close looking, a phrase I really like, because it becomes about close moving and touching and bringing those actions back to fine art. It is also about watching your eyes, their movements and concerns that may even be independent of... well, your own.

In terms of the exchange between painting and advertising, yes, you are right, the images I choose to print are, definitely given a certain amount of freedom because I relate them to painting, especially Impressionism and Pointillism. These movements both called upon science to produce images, not just illusion, as in the pursuits of Classicism. Oil created illusion that was supposed to mimic reality. Impressionism is much more dealing with the sculptural quality of paint and therefore much more bounded to reality in my opinion. ... I like to interpret some of the paintings from that era as the first street photographs. Images of urban life, as is, were enough. I often print on adhesive vinyl, a commercial grade advertising material that houses digital information kind of sloppily. The degraded pixels melt just so and the colors become distorted.

In terms of the iconography of advertising, I make photos of New York iconography in part because the mind wants to register them with other things like infographics, postcards, keepsakes,

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snapshot and yes, advertising ... and also just not knowing what to do with memories. I make photos that, seemingly, could easily be taken, but are chosen for a tone that doesn't quite fit into in one of the those categories. The photos I work with, if taken for pedestrian purposes, would most likely not be printed and would never be printed large. And by printing them really large I dip back into the language of public space and advertising, but for me, this scale registers first with painting.

JM: Is there a reason your images often depict figures but remain faceless?

RM: I just read an interview with Carroll Dunham whose figures are also faceless. We have the same motive on that - faces just have too much personality and the viewer will either be attracted or alienated. It is not about being a voyeur, it is about giving more space for the viewer to project themselves. As you suggested in an earlier conversation, identity is at stake, but expressions, like gesture, tell a story. Portraiture is portraiture.

JM: Is the 1:1 scale of your work a reference to the body?

RM: The scale is not always 1:1, recent work is even larger than 1:1. I want what looks like photography to have sculptural weight. At times, I am testing the strength of the material and I like that the work can become unmanageable, physically, for me. It makes my decisions more risky. And it makes a practice that is largely outsourced, i.e. the printing, require a lot more physical tasks which I like. I want to manually stay involved with the work.

When the work is figurative, I especially want viewers to think about the physical weight of a person on the ground. In part, I've focussed on the lower half of the body in that work for this reason. This is why contrapposto is still so effective, there is sex appeal, but it is also a diagram of the weight of the body on itself and on the ground. I studied painting for a summer at the Studio School and Graham Nixon talked a lot about Giacometti's paintings. He talked about how the figure was pinned into the world by its surroundings. In short, the frame creates the body. Contour lines and isolated figures were dishonest, deadly. As if gravity itself assists in making the images.

JM: We have discussed problems with words like quotidian, colloquial, pedestrian and voyeuristic to describe your work. I think of your content as vernacular, both in its relationship to language and architecture. Is there a word or way of describing these images you feel comfortable with yet?

RM: No.

JM: Your images of Central Park pit culture against nature, reframing public space as a private moment. Are you actively positioning these 'dialectics of the landscape' to borrow some of Robert Smithson's terminology?

RM: I have been trying to work my reasoning away from binaries. I think culture is embedded in nature. In terms of public space, it strikes me more as circumstance, on relating to the limits of language. Public space is a condition. This sentence, "I spent the afternoon in Central Park.", is such a fixed idea that it could be translated into a pictogram. It is often about fulfilling an expectation of having a private moment in public.

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ROSE MARCUS

Central Park, 2015, Inkjet print on adhesive vinyl, BC plywood, plexi glass, rubber, iron frame

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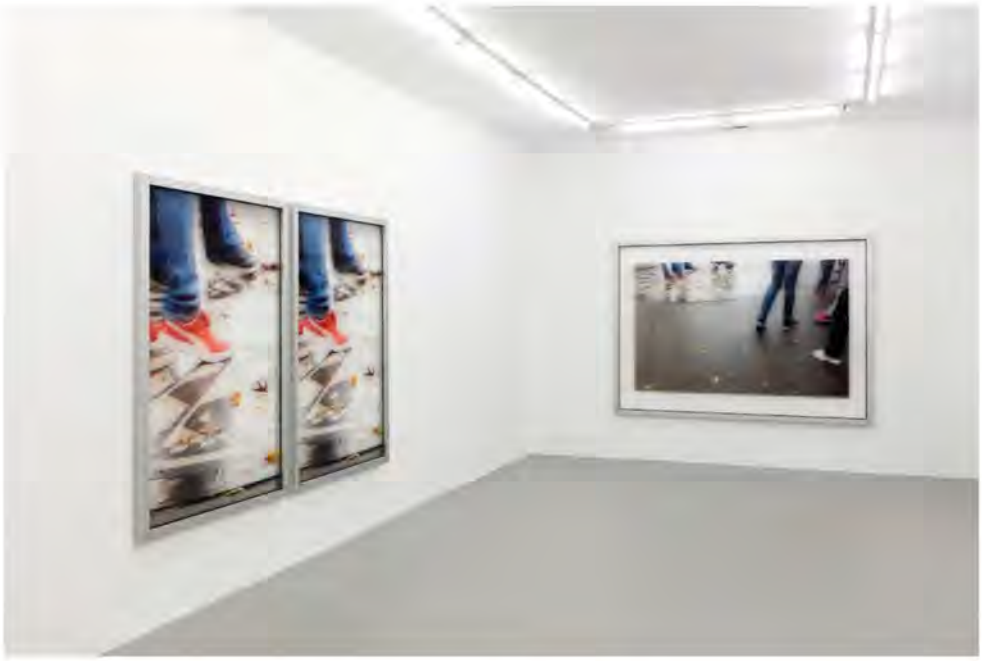

Installation view at And Now Dallas, Texas, 2016

Central Park, like Smithson's work, was designed to encourage a dialectical relationship between culture and nature. Maybe these dialectics always get simplified into surface? Go five miles in any direction away from the park and you will find the industry that creates that aforementioned image of an afternoon. I'm just trying to make these simple connections reappear... that incessant division between the concrete and metaphysical, mind and body, and in this context, entertainment from industry. We consistently seek readymade experience. My hope is that loosening fixed things, especially icons, monuments and public space, will re-tether them to their opposites. And I do love parks.

JM: You reuse images and materials towards different ends in your work, which seems to serve a narrative thread. Do you feel comfortable defining the terms of your practice within these choices?

RM: All of the works are one-of-a-kind but the digital information can be reused. Like everyone, I have taken thousands of digital photos. I should probably never take another one again. It's starting to hurt. I should probably only use 10 photos for the rest of my life—All I know is when a photo has not been figured out, I reuse it.

I'm curious how the images will look in 20 years. Repetition gets called branding but it is much deeper. I think about Jim Dine's bathrobes a lot. Our reality is so dense, so much has changed in the last century, half century, decade, that to really honor a material, or even just one image you have to go back to it, or you are not letting it fully deliver the information it keeps.

JM: Do social issues creep into your work as a result of the setting in which the images take place or is this something you are trying to address as content?

RM: Purposeful content, absolutely.

four Turkish and Eastern European artists, among which Nilbar Güreş was a personal favorite. Her work examines the cultural codes of gender and sexuality, and here was represented by two pieces on fabric and paper respectively; the former is cute and whimsical with its sparse stitching of figures onto soft blue fabric, playfully titled *Die Gärtnerin: Vaginal Fisting* (2014). There is a notably strong historical component to this year's fair, and a set of four drawings by mid-century surrealist Erna Rosenstein, who was recently included in the Jewish Museum's "Unorthodox" exhibition (2015–2016), were particularly refreshing for the oblique historical lens in which they were found: at the booth of Warsaw's Foksal Gallery Foundation, among the works of other artists active in the Polish capital in the 1960s and 1970s.

Larger galleries, meanwhile, exude an air of business as usual, and many are presenting reliable bodies of work from their established artists. Fred Wilson at PACE is particularly satisfying, showing sculptural pieces from the last decade, eloquently playing with the iconographies of national and cultural affiliation and belonging. At Marian Goodman, a solo presentation by William Kentridge mixes his steampunk-esque sculptures, collages, and a stark new series of prints in Indian ink depicting mythological scenes. Corresponding with the artist's current exhibition at the gallery, Casey Kaplan is showing the work of N. Dash, which turned out to be one of the day's understated highlights. In dialogue with painting and post-minimal sculpture, Dash integrates fabric into multilayered assemblages (all *Untitled*, 2016) that, for all their austerity, possess a softness and tactility that make Casey Kaplan's booth feel like a sanctuary in a fair that otherwise tries far too hard to be excessive.

This year's Frieze showed little evidence of the market slowdown on everyone's lips, although the atmosphere at Wednesday's preview felt a little more on the subdued side than might be expected. Indeed, if anything, the fair seems to be in an expansive mood, aware of its integral role both in supplying a market for sales, and in shaping the wider discourse. The market may ebb and flow, but even in leaner times there'll still be plenty of panel discussions to attend.