

"Strange Stories"

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Katy Kline, 1983 (two person with Marilyn Holsing)

M.I.T. Gallery {Massachusetts Institute of Technology}, Boston, MA.

Judith Linhares' gouaches explore ancient riddles of love, death and religion. She was originally an Abstract Expressionist painter, but turned to figuration in 1962. This reorientation did not signal a rejection of her original concerns, but rather re-confirmed an ongoing commitment to the processes and experience of the unconscious. Explicit references to myth, archetypes and ritual are made through her heavily weighted human, animal and architectural symbols. Her elemental landscapes--desert, forest, ocean--in a vivid, emotional palette betraying her fascination with Mexican colors and ceremonies, evoke primordial states of fire and water, the latter a particularly telling symbol of the unconscious.

The meanings and associations of her recurrent forms cannot be fixed, for they, like the unconscious, are involved in a continuous and fluid process of transformation. An octopus in one incarnation becomes a bulbous tree trunk in another; a rug may also be read as a pool; a spider is a cyclops. The artist identifies with the various characters who pass through these personal narratives and is also transformed in the process.

Marilyn Holsing's sober scenes are grounded in a mythology that, like Linhares', both refers to the classical tradition and remains eccentrically personal. Her elemental forms, reminiscent of the weighty architectonics of the early Italian Renaissance painting of Giotto, are set in theatrical, barren and brooding landscapes. The work on exhibition is from two recent series, Divers Disasters (whose ironic title refers to both the French adjective for diverse and F. Scott Fitzgerald's renowned fictional couple) depicts a man and a woman caught in a series of dramatically inexplicable perils. The extremity of the dreadful situations is made even more pronounced by the hard glare of her metallic pencil. Her even more mysterious Idylls series highlights pale, lonely figures and oddly primitive architectural forms; the familiar stability of classical forms and of spatial relationships is subverted by the odd angles and airless, enigmatic situations.

Ms. Holsing has written:

My work over the last few years has been involved with narrative, but not always in the linear story-telling sense. The drawings are personally mythical and diaristic. While I do not believe that I employ a formula in developing the imagery, I have noticed a pattern. In the course of drawing, I become obsessed with an image because it has some personal attachment for me. While I am working with the image its attachment and meaning are not clear, but as I continue to work with it, its mystery is revealed to me. I realize this activity has a ritualistic quality about it.

These Strange Stories are distinct in their touch and in their telling, but the two artists' sensibilities resonate sympathetically. They both rely on the act of painting to plumb the mysteries beneath consciousness through subject matter that, in Linhares' words, is "loaded with history and implication."