

James Singelis: Burning from Within

Egon Schiele once said "Bodies have their own light which they consume to live: they burn, they are not lit from the outside." Many of the portraits created by James Singelis have that same luminous quality. His subjects have that all-important inner glow that illuminates the forms and defines the emotions. Even when he works with black and white, a stirring image comes in from the light or out of the darkness as features form and faces materialize the same way that distant beams of passing car lights cut the night as they pass through an uncovered window. In other instances, when his subjects have a more outer or ambient light reference they may appear ghostly, like an apparition or vision of something from the distant past or far-flung future. Other times, his subjects will blend right into the background revealing a meekness or profound vulnerability in an all-out assault of abstracted space and time.

When painting, Singelis uses color loosely in order to see through the flesh and fur in his quest to portray an inner being, a soul. After all, we are far more complex than we appear from the outside. Our brains are constantly active and our hearts continue to beat and the life we lead comes from within whether we are actively participating in something that stretches our limits, or at rest as we quietly meditate. His approach to paint application and blending varies considerably from painting to painting, which leads one to believe that each moment in the studio, every day that he works, Singelis is searching, inventing and challenging his preconceptions.

In some of his simpler drawings, I find that there is a directness, a starkness where the subject is captured with a few distinctive and deliberate lines. In other works there seems to be an endless battle between representation and the elimination of visual information where the artist employs artist's tape to obliterate unwanted areas. In these particular works, I find an embattled mind at work, the core of the creative soul where anguish and failure can lead to discovery and success. Being an artist, especially today, one can ride the ultimate mental rollercoaster of ups and downs; we see those emotional swings throughout the work of Singelis.

In his mixed media art we see structures emerge from the chaos, a

clarity that slowly comes to the fore as waves and washes of marks and colors frantically follow one after the other in increasingly determined gestures. As a result, these particular works have a certain Popish feel, something like the work of Larry Rivers, who often blended so beautifully popular culture with personal thoughts.

Then there are the collages, whereby previously painted works are torn apart and reassembled with other bits and pieces to create oddly-looking faces that make reference to a multi-personality. Even the 'missing pieces' and torn edges deliver shocks of white creating additional elements to the compositions so we are never totally able to embrace them as a whole.

A series of small paintings on board by Singelis offers another side of the artist, as humor seems to reign heavily here. The broad strokes of paint in the larger canvas become monumental in these more intimate works as a more sculptural, clay-like, malleable surface comes through. Like a crowd scene in a dream-sequence of a fine film, these works project wild emotions; buoyant mystery and distinct personalities that come together like a jam-packed subway car. There is all this energy, all that contrast and a lot of physicality that can be equally overwhelming and incredibly captivating.

In the end, the art of Singelis is filled with raw emotion, honest technique and inventive interpretations, and the viewer is endlessly challenged to decipher the meaning. The portraits are as much an inner voyage as an outer reality while the essence, the content of all his work is the feeling it projects in us. His entire output comprises many of the faces we think we know, personalities that inhabit the collective unconscious; Singelis somehow finds and captures them on paper, board and canvas with whatever means he has readily at hand. There is no particular method here, just an obsession with breaking through that first impression and getting right to the substance. Behind each of the penetrating stares, laughing eyes and lingering glances are a culmination of connections that refer to one's past experiences that equate to who we are each new day. Singelis captures those magnificent moments with a ravenous eye and never-ending fascination and we only have to look to share in the experience.

D. DOMINICK LOMBARDI

D. Dominick Lombardi, as an independent curator, has placed shows in a variety of galleries and museums such as The Shore Institute of Contemporary Art (SICA), Long Branch, NJ; Broadway Gallery, New York; Castle Gallery, College of New Rochelle, NY; Pelham Art Center, NY; and the Choate House Gallery, Pace University, Pleasantville, NY. He has written over 200 features and art criticisms that have been published in The New York Times, Sculpture, Sculpture Review, d'Art (US editor), Art Papers, Art Lies, ARTnews, Art New England, NYARTS magazine and others. He is a member of AICA-USA (Association International de Critiques d'Art).