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AGOSTINO ROCCO: THE SCENE RETURNS

By Bryan Barcena

It would almost seem that, within the context of contemporary art, the pursuit of aesthetic beauty has become something of an artistic faux pas. Objective aesthetic pleasure would seem to be a concept too vain and shallow to justify its existence in the complicated socio-political landscape we currently inhabit. Stripping the term “beauty” from the concept of art would, however, almost seem to strip away the essence of its ability to seduce the eyes of viewers and capture their attention. Achieving visual pleasure or delight need not always have the effect of cheapening or flattening the conceptual punch of an artist’s work; instead, it must become a piece within the greater whole that comprises a successful visual communication.

Describing the work of Italian, Agostino Rocco, as staged portraiture would limit the work to its final outcome and ignore how its process speaks to its conceptual framework. The fanciful and ornate portraits that Rocco creates are indeed stages, dramatic

productions that are meticulously created and then captured by the camera. Rocco is historicizing the subject and in doing so invoking a kind of power involved in classical beauty. The subjects that inhabit Agostino Rocco’s compositions seem to dramatically exhibit a sense of pomp and circumstance; this is in fact not the photography taking itself too seriously but a deliberate action by the photographer to enhance and hyperbolize to the point of kitsch. The photographs are a sort of pastiche not only of the mythology of the subjects but of the time and history that the figures belong to. In a way these photographs may also recall the work of Cindy Sherman in their effort to create mystery and allusions to scenes that exist within collective memory. It could almost be said that these photographs are a kind of documentation of a performance between Rocco and the subjects within his photographs, the photographer acting as director and set designer.

Although these photographs are grounded in history, they are





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OPOSSITE PAGE:

Agostino Rocco, La Chambre, 2009, Lambda digital print, 39 3/8" x 63", Ed. of 3. © the artist.

LEFT:

Catherine de Medicis, 2008, Lambda digital print, 74" x 49 3/8", Ed. of 3, © Agostino Rocco

BELOW:

Claudia 1, 2009, Lambda digital print, 59 1/8" x 44 1/2". Ed. of 3. © Agostino Rocco

not attempting to tell a story themselves. There are both subtle and obvious signifiers within the scene that reveal to us the role of the characters, the grandeur and pomp of the pre-revolution French monarchy and noblemen, Victorian ladies, Spanish widows and innocent children, yet the artist withholds on defining a narrative. There is a definite likening of these photographs to those of contemporary fashion photography, not only because of their aesthetic beauty but because they are both culminations of time and effort to create a scene that nears the ideals of perfection. Rocco finely tunes the elements, ensuring historical compliance, adding dramatic scenery, bringing together a melee of factors that come together only when the image is frozen.

It is made almost instantly clear to any viewer that the work of Agostino Rocco holds beauty, and more specifically feminine beauty, on a pedestal. The Italian photographer approaches the genre of portraiture from the perspective of a classical artist attempting to finesse the subtle elements of form, composition and color. The elements that define Rocco's photography work together to present viewers with a scene, a still-life where the subject works alongside subtle symbols and signifiers in creating a world where composition and beauty are the products. ■

Agostino Rocco's work is on view at Etra Fine Art. 50 NE 40th St. Miami FL, 33137. Phone 305 438 4383
www.etrafineart.com

