

Tabla Rasa this Fall

2010-11-01



Danny Simmons at Tabla Rasa. Photo by Mark Blackshoar.

On view through December 3rd, Tabla Rasa Gallery in Sunset Park presents “Wheels Within Wheels” and “Dear Knights and Dark Horses.” Two dissimilar shows in the same space, both of which share a common depth of focus and integrity. The former show features the paintings of Danny Simmons, co-producer of Def Poetry Jam (with his younger brother, Russell Simmons) and co-founder/chairman of Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation. Mr. Simmons, poet author and abstract painter, has maintained a steadfast presence in the Brooklyn art world for years. His current paintings are large, colorful works on paper and canvas that play with cylindrical form, scale and repetition.



Thomas Roma at Tabla Rasa

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is presented with, “In Hot Pursuit” and “Keep It Movin,” two abstract works comprised of bright and whirling shapes like pinwheels that roll and tumble. Both paintings share a carnival feel, made all the more festive from a rooster red backdrop.

The strongest piece is the totemic, “Things Have Changed.” Here the

caterwauling confetti has combined into a composite shape, figurative and centrally composed against an unbleached ground. The figure looms large and seems to pulse from it’s interior marks and crescent shapes, which undulate and fold in on themselves. In this work, one can construe allegory; of the individual, of the interior landscape and of the aggregate aspect of community. Tabla Rasa Gallery, co-founded and managed by artist couple Joseph and Audrey Frank Anastasi, maintains a commitment to (from the galleries website) “the visual arts as an expression of the human spirit and a voice for social issues”. “Dear Knights and Dark Horses”, a show (and accompanying book with the same title) of photogravures by Thomas Roma, fulfils this mission quite nicely. Two time Guggenheim Fellow and Director of Photography at Columbia University’s School of the Arts, Mr. Roma offers a suite of poignant black and white images; those of coin-operated horses paired with portraits of army reserve troops on the eve of their deployment.

This show is haunting less for what is shown than for that which can be inferred. The soldier’s portraits, with expressions alternately listless, stern and pensive are installed directly opposite abandoned amusement devices. The obvious connection between soldiers and horses is a given, but deeper symbolism does exist here as well. The visual gravitas of the riderless horse is tweaked by this horse being a children’s toy, then tweaked again when combined with the crushing unknowns of a very dangerous and adult reality. These themes, proffered sensitively, weigh heavily on the conscience and linger long after the initial viewing. One can’t help but wonder what these soldiers will see, whether they will return from abroad and whether their efforts, ultimately, will be rendered obsolete, fading from our collective memory like the relevance of yesterdays childish diversions.

—Enrico Gomez

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