

October 13th
December 22th 2018

Opening
Saturday 13th of October
11 am to 9pm

Steve & the girls

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A Woman's World

You can accuse Steve Gianakos of cruelty in his treatment of women: he pleads guilty. Yet women artists of this exhibition lap up his decapitated muses dipped in soup and his other domestic pin-ups, presented as a variety of spare parts. Even when his pen insinuates sexual desire into the poses of model little girls, these funny ladies would never even think of squealing on this particular swine. In fact their own drawings regularly depict naked ladies and a fair amount of piggery. The dominatrices dressed in leather lingerie that at one time appeared in Hippolyte Hentgen's work come to mind: an image of them being punished with a whip by their slimy extra-terrestrial lovers in a collectors' salon. A perfect environment, when giving rise to paintings within paintings...

Oh, you don't see the link between sado-masochistic games and the art of citation? There isn't really one, as much as there's no irony in Steve Gianakos' work. His portraits of a nymphomaniac Eve, a middle class woman with a Sunday roast face, a debutante with an unpretty profile, a cannibal young mother and an empty head with a full cleavage are less the expression of a misogynist mind—I did say “less”—than the rebuttal of a society obsessed with images, and consequently a powerful criticism of America itself. The artist has carried on in this way since the 1970s, using collage and manual reproduction techniques, where he uses this dominant imagery in a minor mode alongside a strategy of text and image (just to pour salt on existing wounds). These are the terms of the dialogue he maintains with the work of Hippolyte Hentgen or documentation celine duval, analyzing the reproduced images that they appropriate to differing degrees. This critical reading is inseparable from the modes of diffusion employed, i.e. the means by which the image attempts to seduce us.

The distance that Hippolyte Hentgen and documentation celine duval have established between the figure of the author and his artistic production are the polar opposite of the positions taken by Nancy Spero and Dorothy Iannone

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two heroines from Steve's generation whose art and lives as women are as one, both out of evidence and necessity. Whether this stems from political commitment or from "a complete and whole relation with the loved one," their work has never been preoccupied with its reception. Thus the extreme violence of the Torture of Women series by Spero and the frenzied eroticism of Iannone's drawings are still as strong as ever, more so than most of the images that are sadly removed due to presumed sensitivities, as soon as they are "exposed". This representation of the world (of images) through the female figure, as Spero intended, is based on an inventory of stereotypes and conventions inherited from the classical period. According to Iannone, it was Greek vases that inspired the use of sexual imagery in her drawing, a kind of false innocence that might also justify the goddesses with jugs as faces in Gianakos' oeuvre. On a more serious note, if images from antiquity allowed these contemporary artists to evoke the power of mythical warriors, the emergence of academic vocabulary (including Picasso) in Gianakos' work always lends a certain dignity to his bimbos.

Finally, are we willing to accept, in this era of division, the possibility that declarations of love may contain criminal impulses---in the same way that fairy tales have their share of cruelty—and that we should be wary of the angelic faces that dissolve into Françoise Pétrovitch's drawings? Marilou, in Serge Gainsbourg's song, ended her days covered in carbonic foam, her skull split by the fire extinguisher intended to calm the mad desire of "the man with the cabbage head".

Julie Portier
(translation: Chris Atkinson)