

Vangelis Rinas: Palimpsests of Time

Through his painted imagery Rinas brings back to life scenes that like old photographs have become forgotten, faded, scratched, mould stained, and deteriorated. Symbolically, to Rinas the old buildings he paints represent the past, slowly-fading as do his reds. Renewal comes from loving the very layers of time that have caused the flaking, fading color and thick texture shown on his surfaces. His paintings contain complex discourses between dark and light, veristic and abstract, hidden and overt, subtle and literal, imagined and real. Clearly, only a virtuoso could create such paradoxical complexity and do it so well. Soft peach tones engage pale yellows and sanguine rusts blend with earthy browns to produce symphonies of tones that at times are soft and at others vibrate with energy.

Thematically Rinas teases his viewers with imagery relating to architecture, shipping, history and his objects seem to be stepping out a time machine to engage with the present. So that, they appear asynchronous, as if the figures are from a dream as do the red and white columnar forms in *Hidden*, oil on canvas painting. Moreover, there is a distinct disjunction taking place when coming in contact with Rinas' abstract expanses punctuated by veristic touches as seen in *Smokescreen*. The miniature ship naturalistically painted emits smoke from its stacks and is surrounded by smaller craft belonging to an Armada entering New York harbor. Rinas with his practiced eye renders the vessels so naturalistically as to create a tromp l'oeil effect, but this type of verism is part of his Hellenic background. It was the great Classical painter Zeuxis who is described in documents as having painted a cluster of grapes so illusionistically so as to cause birds to fly towards them. Rather than rendering objects in terms of line only, Zeuxis used chiaroscuro to model his subjects rendering them voluminous as if receding in space.

But it is not only Rinas' skills with a brush that distinguishes him from others of his time rather it is his multi-layered, riveting ideas as presented in his paintings. There is a wealth of references present that accounts for complex readings of his works. Time is a meaningful leitmotif that appears as layers of plaster, paper, paint, that are worn, peeling, tattered, in works such as *Smokescreen*, *Palimpsest*, *Sunburst* or *Transparent*. When Rinas uses such devices, he is also having a dialog with art history; Braque's *Violin with Sheetmusic*, 1912 in which the master included a nail with its shadow as a way of referencing the illusionistic means of painting. Another great artist with whom he engages in dialog is Marcel Duchamp who in his *T'uum*, 1918 included an illusionistically painted bottlebrush and three safety pins for similar reasons.

Emergent is the title of a beige monochrome painting with a motif in its center that appears like a torn bundle of linen tied together by a rag that holds a picture of a tanker ship in place. The commercial ship is rendered in grisaille the specialty of J.A.D. Ingres one of the most superb Romantic artists of the early 19th century. The manner in which Rinas has juxtaposed his object upon the flat background is also seen in the works of American painter John Frederick Peto (1854-1907) for example in his *Fish House Door*, 1905. But the difference is that Rinas's *Emergent* is conceptually oriented in its allusions to Egyptian Mummy portraits, and to canvas cloth with its sea vessel associations. In fact there is ongoing engagement throughout Rinas' works with text and lettering that renders it conceptual given the nature of the

flatness of text against the illusion of painting. In such works as *Smokescreen*, and *Palimpsest* he uses street signs that have been partially covered over or erased making it necessary for his viewer to tease out possible readings. So that, even though we can only see part of the first and the last two letters of the street name because the center part of the sign is covered by a picture of a ship we can infer its reading as Beekman Street. From this address it is possible to see the Brooklyn Bridge, also depicted in photographic grisaille, and the harbor with ships entering and leaving. In his Cubist works Picasso played word games as in *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912 where he used the partial lettering *Jou*. By so doing, he allowed his viewer to complete the word allowing for possible readings as Jouer or Journal. As sign, text is an abstraction because it is based on a symbolic system that when used in painting results in conceptual works.

Time is an important leitmotif throughout Rinas' works as seen in his many inclusions of layered distressed surfaces but also seen in as crumbling buildings, cracking surfaces, and drilled holes in old walls. The ideas of deterioration, and layering can be read as history, as the passage of time but not in a negative way, rather like treasures buried and about to be re-discovered as seen in Rinas' *Criss Cross*. Amid the flaking and fading métier a shadow of a ship is barely perceptible and because it is veiled with soft shades of beige one needs to make an effort to see it at all.

In his six-paneled *Things Past* Rinas secretes glass skylights and old buildings, ships and other elements while partially revealing them in other passages. In *Transparent* an old building's skylight seen from the inside reveals a red edifice outside, while itself being partially covered by brushstrokes. The volume of the naturalistically painted building is covered over in passages by the flatness of the brushstroke making for a very interesting juxtaposition of spatial areas.

Rinas has surpassed even himself as virtuoso to become a conceptually viable and exciting artist whose talent is multilayered taking time to be revealed.