

William Stoehr - Social Representations

'William Stoehr – Social Representations' is a new solo exhibition showcasing the work of American artist William Stoehr. The show will open at the Sunny Art Centre (30 Gray's Inn Rd., WC1X 8HR, London) on March 5th and will be on view until March 29th 2019. A selection of acrylic on canvas portrait paintings will be part of William's first retrospective in London.

For William '... the essence of art is the exploration of the fundamental issues of our time'. In his work, he explores issues that range from intolerance and discrimination to addiction and violence with their victims, witnesses and survivors. In fact, his portraits are meant to provoke the viewers by staring directly at them or sharing their gaze so to spark a silent narrative led by a dark, subdued colour palette. But what is it that his paintings try to communicate? How are intolerance, discrimination, addiction, and other themes engaged by the apparently muted figures seemingly trapped on the surface of these canvasses?

A first look at the formal aspects of his paintings will shed light on this. In particular, the process of William's practice plays a crucial role. Like the Abstract Expressionists of the 60s and 70s such as Pollock and De Kooning, he pours, scraps, brushes, drips, and scrubs paint on the surface of the canvas. Through this process, he applies multiple layers of paint which may help produce subtly misaligned features or, in some cases, multiple views of the same face. He uses a limited palette of acrylic paint along with metallic and iridescent colours that produce changing patterns and facial expressions with changes in lighting and view angle. Such manipulation of the acrylic medium allows William to depict ambiguous figures which seem to be engaging with the viewer as the eye follows and decodes the multiple and simultaneous depictions on the surface.

The successive and slightly out of alignment appearances of a figure within a single portrait is part of William's engagement with the idea of time, the fourth dimension, as inspired by Cubist theory. As with Cubist work, approaching art which engages with the fourth dimension allows the viewer to perceive the work as perhaps more real. Such perception is, therefore, a key player in defining the

perspectives that the viewers may take on what the figures in the portraits are trying to communicate and represent. In fact, speaking about these elements of ambiguity and simultaneous realities, Stoehr remarked: 'The reality I am after is your reality. If I create ambiguity along with a few naturalistic cues, it is so that you can create reality. That is because you complete the image, you create the narrative, and you project your own emotions'.

Moreover, the inclusion of 'Social Representations' in the title refers to theories in social psychology first elaborated by Serge Moscovici. Following these theories, 'Social Representations' is here understood as our ability to objectify reality by anchoring what is unfamiliar for us to the familiar (what we know as reality) so that threats and disorders in our understanding of the world can be negated. Hence, social representations apply to our understating of social groups, individuals and society as a whole. Consequently, our understanding of the individual and society is always re-shaped and interpreted according to our current understanding of the world.

The ambiguity and simultaneity in the work of Stoehr also play into these ideas of constantly re-approaching these figures as new individuals who in our mind fit a set of representational rules, visual stereotypes and categories about who they are or may be.

William was born in 1948 in Burlington, Wisconsin. He and his wife Mary Kay currently live in Boulder, Colorado. Educated as an engineer, he entered the map business and ultimately became president of the National Geographic Society's mapping group. In 2004 he dedicated himself full-time to his art. His work is exhibited internationally in cultural institutions and museums from the United States to London and Kuwait.

Visit 'William Stoehr – Social Representations' at the Sunny Art Centre, 30 Gray's Inn Rd., WC1X 8HR, London. For enquiries email info@sunnyartcentre.co.uk or call 02086165990.