

RL Fine Arts: Contemporary art project

Jeremy Penn

The Secret in their Eyes

Exhibition July 26 to August 30, 2012

It is a rare talent indeed to be able to paint a face, eyes, and, when looking into the eyes of the portrait the viewer feels an instant connection to the person. New York artist Jeremy Penn has this ability.

My work explores the initial feelings of a single gaze and the preservation of that moment in time. The immediate reaction can be completely different for each viewer, making the relationship with my paintings intense and personal. I spent many years researching primordial instincts and the unspoken language of control through the gaze. They say the eyes are the gateway to the soul because the eyes emote truth in their submissiveness and seduction in their dominance. Either way, the eyes are always telling our secrets.

The subjects I painted for “The Secret in Their Eyes” are all individuals in the public eye who have mastered the art of seduction. Subjects like Brigitte Bardot, Kate Moss, and Anna Karina are all women who have enveloped me in a seductive power play. My paintings are intended to be a recreation of that moment in time, the power of that initial gaze that pierces your soul.

The genre of portrait painting has been a constant throughout the history of art, in many different cultures. Our interest to view other human beings seems never to waver, as if we are continually searching for clues as to our very own being. How else to explain the fascination with depicting others, whether in painting, sculpture or photography? Artists who have the ability to capture the essence of the person seem to have a special talent, not shared by many.

Since the dawn of cinema the power its images have on us is as strong today as it was in the beginning. The silent movie stars knew the power of the eyes – for them, it was purely through the eyes that they managed to convey their emotions and connect with the audience.

In these paintings, Jeremy Penn celebrates the indefinable power of the eyes to convey the innermost secrets of the person being looked at or in looking. Seduction is being carried out both by the viewer and the viewed. In this celebrity obsessed culture of ours, we are surrounded by a vast array of images of movie stars, all to promote the particular depiction of the ‘star’. But some images, some ‘stars’, seem to live on in the imagination and continue to weave their spell. These cinematic superstars – Brigitte Bardot, Maria Felix, Anna Karina, Catherine Deeneuve – are true superstars, and they continue to haunt the imagination, with their astonishing power to seduce us with their personality. La Bardot, or ‘BB’, who charged women with a new energy and power during the desiccated post war years; Maria Felix, an true superstar of the ‘golden years’ of Mexican cinema and one of the world’s most beautiful women; Catherine Deeneuve, to this day an incandescent actress and beauty, a whole genre unto herself, and Anna Karina, one of the icons of European cinema.

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Adding to this mix, there is of course, the strange power and beauty of Jane Birkin, English but almost completely identified with France, whose astonishing song 'Je t'aime' with Serge Gainsbourg, still, to this day has the power to shock and dismay. Kate Moss, the face of today, becoming more beautiful as she ages, has been idolized and photographed so many times, in so many different ways, both official and unofficial, but still manages to catch our gaze with her shifting sense of beauty and style.

Lastly, strange company indeed, but significantly showing the power of the eyes to convey inner most thoughts : the artist's wild imagining of the disgraced John Galliano, latterly of Dior, dressed in Jewish religious clothing, eyes both haunting and haunted! A tragic story of wasted genius but handled gently and humorously, with great style and technique.

All these strange, wonderful creatures, recreated as if through a prism of photos, as if the blurring of the image is because of the multiplicity of images available. Still, the power of these eyes reaches out and connects viscerally with us, and we understand again why we love to look.