

It's erotic, it's art and it's damn fine painting by Joseph Bravo

Terri Thomas' work is certainly eye-catching -- color saturated, precisely rendered and often shocking. All these elements make for good work, but there is something else -- something more --- that makes Thomas' work so fascinating. In paintings and photographs the same face appears again and again. Eventually the realization comes -- the woman portrayed is not a mere artist's muse, it is the artist herself. It is her body in the positions of porn, painted in a contortion of glowing candy colors, her face that has been manipulated into resemblances of Barbie, celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, or, in her latest work, Cicciolina (the porn star ex-wife of artist Jeff Koons). It is Thomas, costumed and staged, revealed, concealed, exposed, and juxtaposed. She is at once the muse and the voyeur, subject and object.

While on one level her work is an exploration of herself (Thomas is an identical twin whose previous career was in the beauty industry), it is also an examination of the society at large. Her work comments on the media's portrayal of beauty, sexuality, individuality and femininity and how this representation creates and feeds societal expectations.

A master of self-analysis, Thomas' work makes the viewer hyper aware of the ridiculousness of, repulsion from and attraction to social taboos. Her newest work is fraught with artifice and symbolism -- and often her form is still at center stage, altered and rendered, beautiful and grotesque, simultaneously revealed and masked by the filters of social norms and deviance.

Introduction from Interview with Debra Broz

Couldn't have said it better myself so I didn't even try. Sometimes you hear a bunch of art smack about an exhibit and the paintings fail to live up to the rhetoric or, conversely, rely too heavily upon it. Such is definitely not the case with the works featured in Fete Bucolique Debra Broz' observations are astute and on the mark.

Thomas' artworks are immediate and attainable, they are rich in iconography but not so esoteric as to be obtuse. Thomas' paintings and sculptures are indeed simultaneously appealing and appalling and mesmerize viewers who feel a little embarrassed for looking so closely at images similar to those more conventionally viewed in private. But Thomas is not embarrassed and frankly reveals herself and, in so doing, unveils things about the society in which we live and the secret life of the individual in the context of the cognitive dissonance produced by normative expectations.

Self-portraiture as a vehicle for social commentary is a time honored tradition. Thomas herself states that, "I looked at artists like Sherman, Orlan, Schneerman, Wilke and Saville.." Thomas started out appropriating porn imagery but felt removed from her work. According to Thomas, "It's easy to criticize from the periphery, but it takes courage to put oneself at stake" and these works are nothing if not courageous. They call into question social constructs of beauty, femininity and sexuality. The images are self-glorifying while self-critical. They simultaneously titillate and mock both the subject and the viewer.

Thomas' art provides that rare combination of visceral and intellectual stimulation. Her paintings are profound without being pretentious. They are not simply products of the male gaze but reveal a uniquely feminine perspective on erotic imagination with all its personal and social conflicts.

I found that my work has more to do with desire...or rather, the contradictions of desire:

How we are strongly attracted to things that we know could manifest in some type of pain;

How we desire to be safe, but also want to be reckless and dangerous;

How we want both stability and total freedom;

How we want tenderness and romance, but we also want our hair pulled, and to be fucked.

The challenge is how to create objects that convey this ambivalence, this friction.

Terri Thomas' Fete Bucolique will be on view May 2 - May 30, 2009 and I strongly urge anyone in the vicinity to make the trip down to [New Gallery](#)/ Thom Andriola in Houston to see it. You won't be disappointed but you may be a little embarrassed at how much you enjoy the exhibit.