



Disappearance Oil on panel 18" x 22.5"

A Compulsion For Beauty

by Stephanie Volin

While studying the new group of paintings by Lawrence Berzon, many words initially came to mind: disfranchise, disembody, disillusion... The prevalence of such a “negative” prefix as “dis-“ was a mildly startling first impression. Yet, upon further reflection, these words mesh well with Berzon’s ongoing sub-themes of absence and loss; in this case, loss of control over one’s identity, loss of individuality, loss of mystique...

The women at the core of this work are, simply stated, a beautiful but pensive bunch. They seem simultaneously held hostage by their beauty, yet desperate to hold onto it, and, in some instances, devise new ways to transcend it.

Their meditative expressions throughout the group are remarkably similar: faces cast downwards and to their right; eyes open and looking, but devoid of - or more aptly, suppressing - spirit and intelligence;

a subtle micro-smile that is suggestive of the Mona Lisa, but refers more knowingly to a Stepford woman. One immediately gets the sense of their dashed expectations in life, but more tragically, the unrealistic expectations for them.

In “Disappearance”, one of these dreamy sorority sisters reposes amidst a scattered shrine dedicated to the Feminine Ideal. At first blush, one could almost believe she is meant to evoke a chameleonesque figure, merely blending in with her surroundings: in this case, magazines full of beautiful and flawless women. But that would be too simplistic an interpretation for such a complex painting. As the title helpfully suggests, she is literally fading away before our eyes; her “self” being dissolved by her extrinsic need to be admired for looking a certain way. She sits passively, in a classical pose, awaiting the gaze of others. But having achieved

the uniformity of near-perfection, she has become invisible.

The woman at the center of “The Alteration” is more proactive in deciding her fate. She sits on the deck of a pool, with needle and thread, embroidering her shapely legs with a pattern of leaves and flowers. She shows no enjoyment or fulfillment in this task; instead the uninterested, mechanical movements of a factory worker. Furthermore, her expression belies the pain she must feel as she repeatedly pierces her skin. What should we make of her mutilative attempt to “gild the lily?” She has devised an extreme new way to adorn her body; one that will help her stand apart from the pack. But that she does this so casually, poolside, with her hair in a towel, as though she were painting her toenails, adds to the disconcerting image.

Perhaps the most open for interpretation of the group is “Aspirations”. A woman is rehabilitating in a hospital room; one limb, an elaborate wing, drapes over the side of the bed; the other, her arm, is tended to by her doctor. What is most interesting about this painting is the question of which appendage is the desired outcome. It’s easy to draw comparisons to a plastic surgery addict, forever managing and micro-managing their appearance, constantly eradicating nonexistent “imperfections”... But if this woman is indeed attempting to transform into a bird, this portrait exhibits an expansion of that desperate mentality: a surreal need for surgical

Aspirations Oil on panel 18" x 19.5"



The Alteration Oil on panel 22" x 17"

intervention. She hopes to become an other-worldly beauty, something that will truly set her apart from the others.

The images that Lawrence Berzon creates are both timely and timeless; mysterious yet palpable; tragic but strangely serene. In viewing them, we are rather concerned about the consequences of our collective fascination with physical attractiveness, especially in this hyper-digital, media-driven age. But then we remember that these “values” are at the very core of the life cycle of all living things; they are not even particular to human behavior.

They can be considered and lamented and even be the subject of paintings... but never, ever dismissed.

www.LawrenceBerzon.com