

“Our Distance Became Water: Sculptures and Paintings”

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THAT SINKING FEELING

A great sinking feeling ... Something is “going down.” A distress signal from elsewhere or here and now, and abject foreboding. It hardly matters which. The foregrounding of elemental forms, gilded vistas, precarious ladders to nowhere. Utopia lost again – and always a pretension anyway, for the most part. We can hear idealists raving at the moon while darkness falls over the human condition.

Predicaments and presentiments. Portents for sinking into gloom while nonetheless climbing – or claiming to climb. Entropy under duress (and produced under duress), while trying nonetheless to ascend and escape – or due to the very fact of trying to ascend *without* duress.

It all causes pain in the heart, numbness in the brain. It is almost the proverbial artwork as heart-attack machine. Some ladders seem to have fallen, others pass through or stand in aqueous settings, or pierce jellyfish, blackness, with the odd trace or vestige of geometry barely discernable suggesting it is all occurring inside a glass structure, a crystalline city, or some now-preternatural “gallery” in Venice. Venice *as* preternatural “gallery.”

Amidst suspended or floating forms, some cubic and ominous, with string tethers suggesting ropes and pulleys, the ladders mostly climb skyward while falling. Yet they narrow as they rise. Some have fallen over. Others appear to be bleeding.

There is no human presence here. “Man(un)kind” has been erased. Only De Chirico-esque illusionism and disillusion remain, perhaps an evocation of the end of pictorial pretensions and the onset of a world of empty and/or broken promises. Renaissance perspective implodes. Flotsam and jetsam of heart and mind, some might say – brain on overload and autopilot, others might say. Yet the artist is present, even if he has invoked remembered self-dissolution and the absence of human agency other than ruins and perspectival chaos.

CODA: THE ARGUMENT

The sculptures and the paintings tend to argue with one another. The sculptures are fashioned from bits of decaying wood from long-gone Venetian gondolas, or cast-off pieces in the construction of Venetian gondolas, plus pieces of discarded Murano glass. The wood is painted in such a fashion that it becomes “jewel-like” and in most cases “tied” by family resemblance to the fragments of glass. The primary edge, if one exists, is in the assemblage of such detritus – made more precious by presentation in a vitrine – in association with the paintings as “backdrop.” Many of the paintings, however, are also assemblages, and the comparison soon breaks down in terms of any aesthetic conclusions other than that they clearly agree to disagree. Perhaps it is the beauty of the painted wood and glass assemblages that saves something only apparently lost across the “landscape” of these works as reports on a condition approaching a lost cause. Best then to leave them to argue amongst themselves before they are dispatched to different places and to different collections associated with the artworld and its penchant to commodify into oblivion such conversations that have little or nothing to do with evaluation as artworks.

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