

December 1999

ZmartArt

**Drop Dead Jeff Koons !
You're a century outdated (R. Mutt)**



**Get revitalized -
Esmanns second show
at Alice L.**



\$10.00



Broadways new sculpture

OUT NOW!

21

ALICE LOOKINGGLASS GALLERY DEC 8 - JAN 5 JAN ESMANN, PAINTINGS

Simon Cane & Arnold Bloomenberg interviewed Jan Esmann for his second exhibition in the Alice Lookingglass Gallery.

Simon Cane: You have often said you are an abstract artist, but most would consider your works figurative. How do you resolve that paradox - if there is any?

Esmann: All good painting is about the dynamic interaction of color, light and form. Almost half a century of endlessly repeating the same 50 masterpieces of abstract expressionism has led people to believe, that if there is a representative element in a picture, it automatically rules out the dynamics of color, light and form and irredeemably places the so called figurative work on an artistic lower level than the abstract work - which naively is considered "pure painting". Therefore the same approach would naively conclude, that a figurative work is an anachronism ... that it is nothing but a sign of the artists ignorance of modernism and his sentimental repetition of premodern styles.

Bloomenberg: Undoubtedly color, light and form are important elements of abstract painting. But modernist artists abandoned representation, because representation by the necessity of mimesis did not allow complete freedom to use the fully expressive and artistic potential of light, form and color. Would reintroducing the figurative not automatically restrict the level of abstraction to a premodern situation?

Esmann: Obviously these three are the only formal elements of abstract painting, but there actually is an other element also: representation. It is quite wrong to assume, that just because the old masters of representation couldn't combine a full use of color, light and form with imitation and the abstracts couldn't combine representation with color light and form, then it can't be done. It is the challenge today, to integrate the whole gammut of formal possibilities into a new pictorial language. The alternative is exhibiting redymades, but thats a dead end as Jeff Koonz is evidence of.

Bloomenberg: The way you describe the situation seems to confirm the distinction between abstract and figurative. For the sake of clarity could you elaborate on this distinction?

Esmann: Yes, it is a problem of language. It is a sad misunderstanding that figurative elements in a painting are necessarily representational and i now regret using that

word. The whole misunderstanding stems from a naive adherence to Platos notion that representation is mimetic. It is obvious that representational painting up until my work has been mimetic, but if you grasp the whole modernist revolution of color, form and light and then reintroduce representation as a formal element of the same status as color, light and form, then mimesis will not be part of the representation because the representation will be solely and truly an abstract dynamic of color light and form. If the spectator sees the representation as mimetic, it will be his own projection. To me it is nothing but an element added to the other elements of color, form and light and my so called figurative painting is therefore painting on a more advanced level than purely abstract works, because it deals with the whole gammut of painterly elements - which neither premodern painting did, nor did modern nor postmodern. This is utterly new since its not postmodern in the Lyotard'ian and Derrida'ian sense of deconstructing metanarratives.

Cane: Yes, but why do you call yourself an abstract painter?

Esmann: Because what we might call non-mimetic representation is something that a few brave men are determined to discover, and because so-called nonrepresentative art is nothing but imitation of modernism. So the only truly innovative artistic situation

today is to add formal representation, or rather pseudorepresentation, to the formal mind of an abstract artist. Imitation today is the sad situation of abstract art. It is impossible to do a purely abstract work of art today, that does not spring from imitation of other abstract works of art. The only way to avoid that and thus do something truly original, is to arrange your colors, lights and forms in such a way, that they assume representation without representing anything. Only that way can we do, what has never been done before with painting: integrate all the elements of painting in a work of art.

Bloomenberg: Thats why you deny your way of doing figurative work is a regression to pre-abstract styles?

Esmann: Exactly. The job today is to integrate the whole tradition of modernism with the whole tradition of pre-modernism - without falling into the good old brown sauce Odd Nerdrum and his student have fallen into. They are doing nothing but neo-symbolism without the *geist* of symbolist transcendence. You see, they have also left out one of the four element: color. Never before have all four been happily integrated; always only three of them or even fewer.

Cane: Once more: why do you call yourself abstract?

Esmann: Because being called figurative generally makes people frown at you, because they immediately brand you as an imitator of nature and not an "artist". However, all abstract artist today imitate the fetish of abstract expressionism. They are the real imitators. Therefore, remembering what i just said about which kind of artwork today demands true genius, you don't have any

Transcending postmodernist kitsch

other name for the kind of approach i have to painting, than to call it abstract. I do admit a better term would be desirable. I would prefer "metanoetic".

Bloomenberg: Undoubtedly "abstract" is not the best phrase to avoid confusion. But you are probably right, that calling your work figurative would cause just as much confusion.

Esmann: Better to have people confused than to have them misunderstand you and yet think their denigration of your accomplishments are the whole and true story. If they realize their confusion, they have an open mind. Thats alpha and omega if you want to comprehend something new. That's also why "metanoetic" would be better. Metanoesis means transcending the mind. Kitsch is by nature when the mind worships its inherrent sentiments as fetishes and produce icons of that fetisch. We are trying to transcend postmodernist kitch.

Bloomenberg: That is new.

Esmann: The metanarrative - or mythos - of postmodernism is that there is a metanarrative. As I have shown in my articles, modernism sprang from the huge metanarrative of theosophy and *fin de siecle* occultism. Midphase abstract expressionism sprang from the metanarrative of negation borrowed from the metanarratives of Zen. Postmodernism sprang from the typical