

the miracle is to believe

sean mullins
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“And what is a genuine lunatic?

He is a man who prefers to go mad, in a social sense of the word, rather than forfeit a higher idea of human honor.”

Antonin Artaud, “Van Gogh, The Man Suicided by Society” (1947)

“The fall of a leaf and the fall of Satan: it’s all the same.”

Samuel Beckett

Sean Mullins’ work evinces an unequivocal belief in painting’s auratic potential. This faith evacuates the medium’s interminable cycle of crisis and reevaluation into bare distillation: a man and his marks.

Eschewing a systematized approach, Mullins’ surfaces invent mnemonics by any means necessary. Spectred by self-representation and the ever present figure of lamented love, these pictorial impressions are bequeathed from the past two years of personal history, coinciding with the closure of his time in New Orleans. Unsurprising then that— though they carry the melt of provisional abstraction—their allegiance lies primarily with 19th century execution and ethos; tapping, sliding, and spotting the canvas into focus much as Degas had in his 1872 visit to the Bayou.

Even as these paintings allude to numberless intimate entanglements, their visual gut is housed in the sincere obscenity of the most macro of world-views: not only does magic exist, it can be touched. Matters of empathy, bolstered by the writings of Edith Stein, suffused with the flame of Goethe, visaged by Munch and Cezanne, are couched within an unwavering conviction that language fails to deliver the inexplicable gestalt of human experience. Mullins circumnavigates the potential mundanity of an autofictive project through a cosmic rendering, actively tuning an evermore raw antennae towards the sensorial.

Exemplified in the white spaces of his most exploded pictures, the ground functions as the simultaneous seat of both aspiration and futility. Beyond initial scrubbing, brushstrokes are left to hang and stitch, often with the windswept force of an antithetical movement, never surrendering the communicative to the siren of illusionism. A work is closed and set aside upon reaching a state where an additional mark would threaten to interpret rather than evoke.

In totality, *The Miracle to Believe* functions as parable, progressing left-to-right through stations of confrontation, mourning, forgiveness, and eventual liberation.

These are the works of a rover, an acolyte of sparsity and freedom, sundrenched and straw-hatted, incapable of transcribing his chroma with anything but the levity of plein-air, even if made in the smallest of windowless rooms.

Text written by Kye Christensen-Knowles

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