

The Psychological Resonance of Jansson Stegner at Almine Rech

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By Noah Becker



The art of Jansson Stegner interests me - I've been a fan of his mannerist figurative works for many years. His work appeals to my own way of making paintings - mostly for his interest in old paintings from history. I could list artists (other than myself), who also share this interest - Christian Rex Van Minnen comes to mind, John Currin, Trevor Guthrie, Robin F. Williams and others... But Jansson Stegner is an artist who has developed a shockingly original style all his own. When I heard about his solo show at Almine Rech in New York City, I wanted to know more.

The following is our conversation about his enigmatic paintings.

Noah Becker: When you make your paintings, are you pre-planning a narrative, or are you working intuitively?

Jansson Stegner: In terms of the narrative?

Becker: Yes, in terms of how the narrative ends up in the work. Is it something that you kind of plan in advance, or does it happen intuitively during the production of the work?

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Stegner: I'd say it happens more in advance, but I like to have sort of a loose hand with it and let it go as it will, sort of. The main elements in a painting have to be planned out ahead of time. I have to figure out what kind of clothing this person's going to be wearing - what their pose is going to be like. All of that stuff contributes to how the narrative is received. And so that all gets sort of worked out in advance and more or less executed - but then changes always occur along the way. But it never ends up exactly the way that it was planned...

Becker: Right. And what elements do you feel make for a successful painting?

Stegner: For me, I think the most important thing is some kind of psychological resonance between the figure and the viewer. That you feel like you're in their psychological space somehow. And then beyond that it can also include the figure and its environment - so that it communicates something like that to you. Some sort of psychological tension or interest, or like you're actually interacting with another person.

Becker: Once that aspect is accomplished, what happens?

Stegner: After that I want to create a painting that keeps the viewer's visual interests for as long as possible. So they can sit and look at it for 30 minutes and not be bored with it - you know? I find so many paintings you kind of get a big splash from them in the first second, and then within 10 seconds you're ready to look at something else. I want to create something they can have enough visual interest to keep you looking at it and keep you involved with the figure in the painting.

Becker: How do you think about the use of color in your work?

Stegner: Color... that's a tough one. I rely so much on the objects in my paintings for the color arrangement - I don't do extreme improvising with color. Color comes about as the arrangement of the things that I decide to put in the painting. I guess I just ideally have some kind of color scheme that I want to work with and I organize it. It's like a basic plan of two or three colors and I try to use that the best I can to kind of emphasize the narrative or the psychological dimensions of the colors of the figure.

Becker: What are some of your influences in painting? It seems like your work has a connection to art history.

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Stegner: I mean the biggest ones to me have always been El Greco, Otto Dix, Balthus, even like early Lucian Freud. And Lucian Freud generally I guess and Edward Hopper... A lot of artists that do work that is sort of grounded in realism without being realism exactly. The big three I think for me would probably be, as I said, El Greco, Dix, and Balthus. But there's like a whole bunch. But yeah, mostly a lot the artists from the past.

Becker: Thanks for talking with us. WM