

Storm Tharp "It's You"

april 14 - june 4, 2011



Dream Dave, 2011, Ink, gouache and colored pencil on paper, 147.3 x 217.2 cm

Galerie Bertrand & Gruner is pleased to present new works by Portland-based artist Storm Tharp, in his second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Tharp's latest suite of portraits marks a continuing creative departure for the artist. Previous works in ink and water offered portraits of fictional characters drawn from memory and popular culture that mixed delicate and meticulous figuration with abstraction. Following a solo show of portraits of friend and artist Ashby Lee Collinson in late 2010, Tharp's current work for the gallery features intimate portraits of two important figures in his life.

With finely attuned sense of colour and line, Tharp creates frank and honest portrayals of his models, Mike and David. Scenes of desire and closeness are underscored by an intense vitality translated via gouaches in soft pinks, earthy reds and mustard yellows. These forge a soft-focus, twilit mood in which pink torsos entwine, and speak, at low volume, of tenderness and excitement.

Entitled "It's You", the exhibition celebrates the natural and the desirable, as well as intimacy. Eschewing sensationalism, Tharp's erotically-charged yet sensitive portraits give a holistic view of a real relationship, and are complemented with large-scale, deeply expressive facial studies of his models. Where previous portraits hinted at wider narratives, of the history and psychology of his subjects relayed by accoutrements but also the suggestive titles of his works, these new pieces are more mysterious. They rather underscore the aliveness of the subjects and their personal significance to the artist. A controlled interplay between figuration and abstraction is also present, suggesting a degree of flux that is perhaps analogous to the way emotions can shift and mutate.

The Pink of Sex, a gouache on paper work, presents 18 scenes that form a kind of cinematic progression of frames or snapshots. A camera is held aloft in the third frame but suggests intimacy rather than voyeurism, as well as, perhaps, a medium important to the artist. The bodies portrayed are sturdy, taut and represent idealized, anonymous forms – though an air of familiarity prevails. The overall impression from these frames is of vibrancy, of bodies in bloom. Gesture remains important for the artist; in the final frame, a male figure has his back to the viewer, wearing a striped shirt with the end of his tie peeping over his shoulder. The casual gesture of slinging his tie over his shoulder is suggestive of a particular, relaxed character but also of a mutual ease between artist and subject. It also speaks of the artist's comfort in allowing the viewer a glimpse into his own world.

Presented in the exhibition alongside paintings are a portfolio of eight drypoint prints made in conjunction with the Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA) and master printer, Paul Mallowney. The title for these is "Health," and they impress Tharp's skill for fine detail: the stripes on a blanket; the hairs on an arm; ripples in water.

Tharp's new works inevitably bring to the fore the history of portrait painting, with Pablo Picasso especially referenced in some of their chunky, tangled forms. Like a song or a work of fiction, his works have a directness that is fresh and intensely alive.

Storm Tharp lives and works in Portland, Oregon. Recent solo exhibitions include Ashby Lee Collinson, Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York (2010), Hercules, PDX Contemporary Art, Portland, OR (2010), High House, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art Time Based Art Festival, Portland, OR (2010), and Arrangement in Flesh Color and Black, galerie bertrand & gruner, Geneva, Switzerland (2008). Tharp was included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. His work is in several public and private collections.

Laura Allsop