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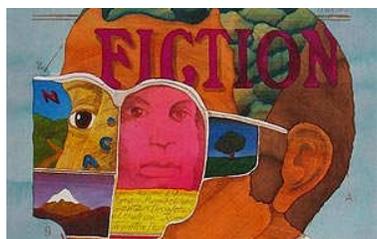
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The Illustrious Mr. X

Dorsky show has a young feeling

by Paul Smart

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Jan Sawka.

The diverse, eye-opening, fun and very funny new exhibit in the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art's main galleries, The Illustrious Mr. X: Museum Collection as Character Study, achieves its intentions the moment one hears it being discussed.

Older artists and art insiders, along with those who still base their knowledge of art history on classes steeped in the slow progress of the western traditions, tend to describe it with loaded words from "lively" to "interesting," while adding in asides that they didn't really "like" it.

Younger artists and those new to museum collections seem to relish the way the new show, curated by Karlos Carcamo and Greg Slick (formerly of Beacon's industrious Go North Gallery), have created something that almost shimmers with excitement, matching photo-realist motorcycles and Pop nudes, 19th century daguerreotypes and a darkly-tinted oil portrait by George Bellows, then providing a narrative through their eclectic choices that's all conjecture and ironic commentary, albeit in an oblique post-modern fashion.

This may be the youngest-feeling show seen in the Hudson Valley in some time, rendered more democratic and wide-reaching than the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies' exhibits, or all that Saratoga's Tang Museum's been up to lately, by nature of the odds-and-ends Carcamo and Slick have uncovered in the SUNY New Paltz teaching collection, started in the 1960s and added to by donating artists as well as independent collectors throughout the region.

"Of what do art objects speak beyond their obvious representation or documented intent. If we could string even a few of their 'voices' into a narrative, what might it relate?" Carcamo and Slick write in an introduction to their show. "Aiming a narrative lens at the museum's permanent collection, the exhibition offers visitors a chance to spend time with a portrait of a bigger-than-life personage. Connoisseur, traveler, bibliophile, love of good music and food, Mr. X seems to have consumed life with both outsized appetite and discerning taste."

The two curators, who will present a second part of their concept come January, do more than play into the art world idea of first curators, and now collectors as the true visionaries of contemporary culture, displaying creativity by choosing what's good from a wide arena of artistic output otherwise mired in pluralities. Yes, they say they wrote out their concept before diving into the Dorsky's vaults, figuring out how they wanted a show with separate sections playing with ideas and subject matter such as Origins, Food, Books, Music, Sports, Shopping, Fantasies & Dreams, and Relationships...each (and all) prefaced by cryptic statements of intent and emotional collecting motivation from "Mr. X." But what results is wildly visual in its effect.

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What a joy to see John Baeder and Tom Blackwell's photorealist works, long overlooked in museum overviews of recent trends in art, brought back into the forefront, where they still capture immediate and lasting attention. And how nice to have one's own early days staring at album covers and collecting music posters rewarded by some fine versions of the same on view here, from some key Latin American posters to Jan Sawka's amazing 1980s etchings on view, and just in time to herald the artist's return to the region (more of all that at a later point).

Augmenting the blast of diversity and investigative fun involved in the "Mr. X" exhibition, up into mid-December, is an accompanying selection of works from the Center for Photography at Woodstock's permanent collection, curated by the Dorsky's Wayne Lempka, entitled "Thoughts of Home." Working of images that conjure all that the central concept involves, from teen girls lounging through boredom in their poster-festooned bedrooms to the welcoming of vets back from war and sullen parental battles and sorrows, this is a strong, emotional means of charting all that's involved in modern photography up to where we are, almost, in our contemporary take on the newly-expanding and au courant medium.

Through the next week, all this is also supplemented by a show of intimate Polaroids and black and white pictures by Andy Warhol, somehow lent greater sweetness and feeling by all one sees preceding it in the museum's East Wing galleries; as well as the challenging but rewarding Praxis regional compendium show in the museum's West Wing, up into November, that reviews local artists' work as it relates to the many ways in which modern creators seek to affect the world they inhabit.

All heady stuff, indeed, filled out with even more material in the form of lectures and outside activities, including the town and village wide "Carrying," a project with the goal of shedding light on college campus gun violence that's seen the installation of 50 signs throughout the New Paltz community (one for each state) that convey the complex rules and regulations that pertain to concealed weapons across the nation.

Talk about not only cutting edge, all of this, but a keen demonstration of the visual arts continued importance as a means of focusing (and refocusing) attention on often forgotten elements of contemporary life.

Finally, Sunday, September 19, there will be a Praxis-related performance of Marcy B. Freedman's *The Go-Between*, in the galleries, from noon to 3 p.m. Then on Thursday, September 23, at 6 p.m., there will be a lecture on Warhol's *Photography as Art and Life* with Jenny Moore, Project Coordinator for the Warhol Photographic Legacy Program that brought these images to the Dorsky; Neil Printz, co-author of the catalogue raisonn e of Warhol's paintings and sculpture, and Shelley Rice, photography historian, critic, and Arts Professor at New York University...all in the Coykendall Science Building

For more on all things Dorsky, located on the SUNY New Paltz campus, call 845-257-3844 or visit www.newpaltz.edu/museum.

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