

AESTHESIS

by EILEEN KELLY, 2010

Inhale/Exhale is a body of work that demands new ways of seeing painting. "Aesthesis" is the word for "perception" in Classical Greek which translates as "a breathing in of the world." The suspended "ahhhhhh" of understanding and the quick inhale "uh" of the breath in wonder and amazement comes to mind. Aesthesis is centered in the body and connected to all the senses not just the eyes.

Lowell Boyers' paintings invite us to just such "perception." The canvases themselves breathe with a visceral authority that is born of the tension between the abstract puddles of paint and color and the figurative expression of human gesture. The figures are often outlines, transparent. Blood and guts spill out into pools of paint that recall bodily fluids. There are faint images of organs and flesh, the human meat, brain and muscle, captured within an outline of form.

In Boyers' paintings the physical world and the imaginative world are not divided. The paintings call forth, provoke, a poetic vision of the soul and speak to a very contemporary need to replace or return the soul to the vast scheme of things, to cut through the void of our modern, mythless culture. Suspended from ladders and dangling amidst unfastened tethers we find heroes, aspirants in the throws of a transformation of consciousness. The paintings do not release you, should not soothe you. If we are to participate with the paintings in the creation of a new and personal mythology then we must conceptualize modern man in both his soulful and soulless place, both embodied and disembodied, both transcendent and entrapped, both animated and lifeless.

This moment of history calls for a new mythology to question the meaning of our worldview. We live in a post modern world where the Campbell's soup can has been worshipped as an icon of alienation in anonymity and mass production. We have prostrated ourselves at the altar of kitch and sensationalism. Boyers' paintings are dangerous because they take on big existential questions in a time when irony has killed seriousness in painting. Can one take as a subject for painting "what is the soul?" In the year 2005 is it a question for painting? Is it too naïve? And too impossible? How can the sincerity of such classical concerns be addressed? If at all?

Enter Lowell Boyers, Inhale /Exhale, challenging our very origin of perception. Do we perceive with our eyes at all? Or with the brain? Or with the heart? The work demands that we perceive anew because our eyes are dead. In a culture of sophisticated visual consumption our eyes have become aestheticized but more dangerously they have become anaesthetized. We no longer see into things. We don't see with our imaginations.

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So then how can one see the truth?

Boyers' paintings embody "the divine spark of life." Forcing figurative and abstract elements together in a relationship that is both aesthetic and disjointed, he creates harmony and conflict, surface and meaning, chaos and choreography in an operatic vision of humanity. This work resonates with truth about the human condition not because of its narrative landscape but because by daring to exist the paintings themselves see things as they are with new old eyes of wonderment and horror.