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7 New York Painters

by Ben La Rocco

BRİK GALLERY, CATSKILL, NY | JUNE 18 – JULY 17, 2011

Though both are now deemed historical phenomena, there is still a Hudson River School and a New York School of painting. Both are in evidence at BRİK Gallery, Catskill, New York, in an exhibition entitled *7 New York Painters*, so named for its participants' ongoing connection to both New York City and the Hudson Valley. The painters are Peter Acheson, Claude Carone, Mark Kanter, Garry Nichols, David Paulson, Kim Sloane, and Richard Timperio. Outside the gallery, there is a formidable statue astride the yellow line on Main Street. It is of Rip Van Winkle though, being in whaling territory, I took him at a



Rip Van Winkle on Main Street, Catskill, New York.

glance for Ahab. The latter acted, while the former slept, but the two are equally well ensnared in American lore and might be taken, combined, for the two-faced gnome of our collective consciousness: our ego and id. Which is which I couldn't say, though for the sake of my argument I will assign darkness to the sleeper, light to the seeker, and let the two fight it out in what is to follow.

Carone and Timperio are seekers. Their titles, "Awake Evening" and "Glorious Morning" (Carone), "Sunscape" and "August First" (Timperio), speak of preoccupation with the light, though Timperio is, as his titles suggest, far more in the sun than Carone. "August First," the giant of the show, is fairly ablaze in color and texture, while thin wet strokes of "Awake Evening" are cast in almost total darkness. Tasmanian Gary Nichols, geographically the odd man out in this distinctly American exhibition, also sails with Ahab.

Nichols's saturated oranges, plentiful greens, and rounded organic presences drift steadily toward the equator and beyond, an eddy quickly circumnavigated by the paintings of Kanter, Paulson, and Sloane. These three painters are graduates of the New York Studio School, well

known for its connection to the original New York School luminaries and its emphasis on a particular facet of composition known as “the picture plane.” I do not wish to imply that their paintings appear similar, only that they participate in their alma mater’s particular attention to the play of surface and illusionistic depth, and that their penumbrae lead back among the lotus eaters to Van Winkle’s realm of nod. Bob Thompson is along this path. Briefly: Kanter, though he does not fling paint like Pollock, uses calligraphic black and white marks against the white, non-negative void; Sloane continues his Herculean examination of the darkest, densest fields of early de Kooning; Paulson, darker still, studies the lines between the figure, the landscape, and oblivion (Thompson) like disappearing tracks in the sand.

Acheson’s paintings are the glue that holds the exhibition together. Smaller than their peers, they punctuate the space with intense bursts of saturated color and off-hand remarks. He does not exhibit the pictorial darkness of his peers, only the darkness of unknowing. If the others’ paintings are statements, his are questions. Along with Paulson’s untamed portraits, Acheson’s paintings point the exhibition outward rather than in. All these painters study nature to inform painting, as did their forebears in the Valley. The contemplation of light is among their signifiers.

