1-1-2012

Serge Clement & Marina Kamena: 'Preserving Post-Modern Pop'

Philip Eliasoph

*Fairfield University, pieliasoph@fairfield.edu*

Archived with permission from the publisher: Venu Magazine - All Rights Reserved
http://venumagazine.com

Repository Citation

http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/visualandperformingarts-facultypubs/23

Published Citation


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Visual & Performing Arts Department at DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visual & Performing Arts Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.
Serge Clement & Marina Kamena: 'Preserving' Post-Modern Pop

by Philip Eliasoph, Senior Arts Editor

Entertaining a steady stream of creative colleagues, literary types, and loyal patrons at their Westport home-studio, the artistic duo of Serge Clement and Marina Kamena are usually at the eye of a cultural hurricane. More like stopping in at a little thatched cottage village refuge out in the Loire valley, we enter an inimitably art salon milieu. Unsuspecting first time diners think they are being well fed; veterans know they are being gorged by an inexorably moveable feast of artistic abundance. Well after the vin rouge carafes have been emptied, we sneak down into the secret subterranean studio. Wonders continue – like peeking into the magical sets for Georges Melies “Le Voyage dans Le Lune” [recently revived in Scorsese's award-winning “Hugo”], It's all intoxicatingly, joyously, and deliciously: à la française.

While hostess Marina [she's from a family displaced by Tito's goon squads in the former Yugoslavia who ushers us around various gallery-like rooms, Serge dons his chef's apron finishing off his preparation of some bivalves. He's partial to pearl-like oysters prepared in the customary manner of Brittany which he attends while lording over ... for a succulently prepared lamb roast. Let's not be blasé. The fact that this cosmopolitan couple also make head-spinning, jaw-dropping fine art completes this picture. We are not in the midst of those who either pose or propose to be artists. This is most definitely how artists live, think, imagine – and as a sideline, invent first-class gourmand delicacies.

Arriving like Lafayette to help conquer America's hearts and minds, Clement & Kamena are a delightful, beguiling, and enchanting addition to our regional arts community. With the diplomatic assistance of important local supporters, they made the trans-atlantic passage, finding Westport in 2000 as their permanent residence. Two years earlier they created 10 perfect renderings as the sceneography for Charles Matton's bio-pic... Secrets are kept for pillow-talk. No wonder New York Times art critic Grace Glueck opened her critique exclaiming “over the top we go” with these boundlessly imaginative artists. And just in time for the geraniums and hydrangeas to bloom in Connecticut's earthly paradise, they are opening their latest series: “The Jar Memory Project” at Southport Galleries for June and July.

Take a simple object – how about the generic trademark of the Mason Ball Jar. Patented by the Philadelphia tinsmith, James Landis Mason in 1858 as a practical way for canning fresh foods. With its wide mouth, winter beets and summer strawberries could be safely “preserved” in its tight, vacuum seal. Now add two masterful illusionists – the tag-team of C&K – into the mix, stir up the post-modern visual contexts and voila! Is it a double-entendre, sight gag or paradox of what needs to be lovingly kept from spoilage in our contaminated, toxic world? Abracadabra – it’s the history of art is transformed into a perfectly “preserved” set of iconic images flash frozen into their wildly creative original paintings and limited edition prints. If Andy Warhol could transform the banality of soup cans and detergent packages into “Pop” art, and Jeff Koons had the idea of making plastic beach toys of lobsters into titanium sculptures, then C&K have pushed the post-modern irony to its ultimate extreme. Art History's heavy weights are each playfully canned. Each jar is filled with the memories of Leonardo, Titian, El Greco, Ingres, Picasso, Matisse, de Kooning, Pollock, Kahlo, Warhol and Lichtenstein and more.

“We are attempting something more real, more intense than reality,” Marina explains. Quoting her Parisian comrade – Jean Baudrillard, Umberto Eco, and Marc le Bot – Serge speaks in thickly layered Gothic metaphors. But art of this nature – ponderous, deliciously experimental, mirthfully creative – needs no pretentious analysis. In their cummed-packed, richly illustrated book, “The Joy of Art: A Creative Guide for Beginning Painters,” [Harry N. Abrams, 2000] C&K propel our vision from the primordial art of the caves to the sublime techniques of the Old Masters. Along this golden road, we learn from their notes and witty illustrations that all great art is comprised of newly invented creative methods. Studying one of my favorites from the “Jar Memory Project” in a flaxen nude torso in a sea of fluffy clouds against a cerulean blue sky. It was painted by the Belgian Surrealist Rene Magritte who noted: “Art evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist.” And for Serge Clement and Marina Kamena those mysteries are being tightly sealed with their unbelievably UN-canny appeal.

~ INTERVIEW ~

Venü - After a so long journey - with you coming together in life, marriage, and creativity – what prompted you at this moment to create the “Jar Memory Project?”

C&K - Painting was born 25,000 thousand years before writing and we can see it today on the cave's walls of Chauvet, Lascaux, Altamira. Geology invented the first recipients containing human genius. Which words come to our mind then: Conservation, Preservation. A jar was there, on the table, and aroused our attention. The term Conservation suggests both the museum case and the grocery shelf. Preserving peas in transparent glass could it be compared to preserving Mona Lisa? Are the caves the first “Jars”? For sure, the mass-produced can and the grocery shelf...

Reference Rene Magritte: Les Marches de L’ete
Reference Pisanello: Portrait of a Princess
Reference Rubens: The Massacre of Innocents
Reference Ingres: Le Bain Turc
We're the witnesses and the actors of a phenomenal consumption of visuals called "art." Depicting Pompeii, Piero della Francesca, Ingres, Picasso, Robert Ryman, in jars comes from a playful desire to make a break, a "Vouloir faire" [want to do] than "Savoir Faire" [know how to do].

It confines, in the laps of an intermission, that has vocation of opening all the windows on the impenetrable mystery of a work of art. To this utopia, we propose another one, based on the words: conservation, memory, patrimony.

No art without art market. Stephen Jay Gould told "Life emerged as soon as it has been possible to master the art of replication. From this ability, complex systems were possible. As our world becomes more complex, our technology must reflect this complexity..."

Now let's "de-construct" the meaning of the "Jar Memory Project." Are these art works about imitating art or do they take on a new and wonderfully magical new levels of intentionality and purpose? Help us understand what these marvelous images — from Ingres to de Kooning — are all about.

Venü - You two are often traveling between Paris and Connecticut on a regular basis. What do you think characterizes the French aesthetic impulse versus a distinctly American vision? Do you think you are transatlantic artists in that sense — taking the best of both worlds?

C&K - There has always been an art market. No art without art market. Stephen Jay Gould told "Life emerged as soon as it has been possible." Likewise for Contemporary Art. Contrary to its predecessor Modern Art, Contemporary Art showed more "Vouloir faire" [want to do] than "Savoir Faire" [know how to do].

— What is a visual art that says with vehemence what cannot be mastered in terms of accomplishment. In other words: Intentional argumentation is not enough to be an artwork.

Venü - You are often too willing between Paris and Connecticut on a regular basis. What do you think characterizes the French aesthetic impulse versus a distinctly American vision? Do you think you are transatlantic artists in that sense — taking the best of both worlds?

C&K - Not sure that we can talk of French or American impulsion today. Any traveler will discover walls covered with same tags in New York or in Paris. Major part of contemporary museums is showing the same artists. Contemporary Art is dressed in a commercial trademark label of secure value. Today, it seems that credo in investment takes advantage of intellectual and spiritual disarray arising in our world.

Serge - I remember the American soldiers in the streets when I arrived in Paris in 1944. The following day, my mother brought me to the Louvre Museum. It was astounding. I had no opinion. I was running to every painting, I loved them all. From that day, I started drawing.

Then, in 1950, I was accepted to the School of Arts Appliques. Teachers were all great masters. After a training course in each branch, I chose the lacquer studio. With Jean Daux, my teacher participated to the realization of the extraordinary lacquers of the Normandie, still today regarded as the most beautiful boat ever built. She burned in the port of New York in 1941. The school was also organizing meetings with very famous artists: Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, Herbin, Jean Cocteau. Then I started to realize lacquer panels, lacquer screens, theater sets.

Serge - I remember the American soldiers in the streets when I arrived in Paris in 1944. The following day, my mother brought me to the Louvre Museum. It was astounding. I had no opinion. I was running to every painting, I loved them all. From that day, I started drawing.

Then, in 1950, I was accepted to the School of Arts Appliques. Teachers were all great masters. After a training course in each branch, I chose the lacquer studio. With Jean Daux, my teacher participated to the realization of the extraordinary lacquers of the Normandie, still today regarded as the most beautiful boat ever built. She burned in the port of New York in 1941. The school was also organizing meetings with very famous artists: Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, Herbin, Jean Cocteau. Then I started to realize lacquer panels, lacquer screens, theater sets.

Marina - We met in Paris at the Crazy Horse Saloon. Bunch of adolescents, friends of the owner's children was gathering there on Saturday nights, there was all kind of beautiful performances... As a child, I have been a music lover. At each special occasion, a friend of my father brought me magnificent classical records whose covers and booklets were full of photos and illustrations. I was really entering the images while listening to music. Thanks to the Beatles, I discovered other exciting images when I was a teenager. In fact, later on, I made a number of covers for famous French singers to make a living.

Three art shows knocked me down: Picasso to the Louvre, the Prado and the Uffizi big "Jars"? A word can occasion laughter if it brings together the Wedding at Cana and green peas. Depicting words in the language of illusion using the painting becomes our chosen task. Contemporary Art is dressed in a commercial trademark label of secure value. Today, it seems that credo in investment takes advantage of intellectual and spiritual disarray arising in our world.

C&K - Let's go back to the beginning. Serge, tell us about your early life in Paris, what it was like training at l'Ecole des Arts Appliques and how did that initial philosophy guide the rest of your career?

Serge - I remember the American soldiers in the streets when I arrived in Paris in 1944. The following day, my mother brought me to the Louvre Museum. It was astounding. I had no opinion. I was running to every painting, I loved them all. From that day, I started drawing.

Then, in 1950, I was accepted to the School of Arts Appliques. Teachers were all great masters. After a training course in each branch, I chose the lacquer studio. With Jean Daux, my teacher participated to the realization of the extraordinary lacquers of the Normandie, still today regarded as the most beautiful boat ever built. She burned in the port of New York in 1941. The school was also organizing meetings with very famous artists: Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, Herbin, Jean Cocteau. Then I started to realize lacquer panels, lacquer screens, theater sets.

Marina - We met in Paris at the Crazy Horse Saloon. Bunch of adolescents, friends of the owner's children was gathering there on Saturday nights, there was all kind of beautiful performances... As a child, I have been a music lover. At each special occasion, a friend of my father brought me magnificent classical records whose covers and booklets were full of photos and illustrations. I was really entering the images while listening to music. Thanks to the Beatles, I discovered other exciting images when I was a teenager. In fact, later on, I made a number of covers for famous French singers to make a living.

Three art shows knocked me down: Picasso to the Louvre, the Prado and the Uffizi big "Jars"? A word can occasion laughter if it brings together the Wedding at Cana and green peas. Depicting words in the language of illusion using the painting becomes our chosen task. Contemporary Art is dressed in a commercial trademark label of secure value. Today, it seems that credo in investment takes advantage of intellectual and spiritual disarray arising in our world.

C&K - Let's go back to the beginning. Serge, tell us about your early life in Paris, what it was like training at l'Ecole des Arts Appliques and how did that initial philosophy guide the rest of your career?

Serge - I remember the American soldiers in the streets when I arrived in Paris in 1944. The following day, my mother brought me to the Louvre Museum. It was astounding. I had no opinion. I was running to every painting, I loved them all. From that day, I started drawing.

Then, in 1950, I was accepted to the School of Arts Appliques. Teachers were all great masters. After a training course in each branch, I chose the lacquer studio. With Jean Daux, my teacher participated to the realization of the extraordinary lacquers of the Normandie, still today regarded as the most beautiful boat ever built. She burned in the port of New York in 1941. The school was also organizing meetings with very famous artists: Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, Herbin, Jean Cocteau. Then I started to realize lacquer panels, lacquer screens, theater sets.

Marina - We met in Paris at the Crazy Horse Saloon. Bunch of adolescents, friends of the owner's children was gathering there on Saturday nights, there was all kind of beautiful performances... As a child, I have been a music lover. At each special occasion, a friend of my father brought me magnificent classical records whose covers and booklets were full of photos and illustrations. I was really entering the images while listening to music. Thanks to the Beatles, I discovered other exciting images when I was a teenager. In fact, later on, I made a number of covers for famous French singers to make a living.

Three art shows knocked me down: Picasso to the Louvre, the Prado and the Uffizi big "Jars"? A word can occasion laughter if it brings together the Wedding at Cana and green peas. Depicting words in the language of illusion using the painting becomes our chosen task. Contemporary Art is dressed in a commercial trademark label of secure value. Today, it seems that credo in investment takes advantage of intellectual and spiritual disarray arising in our world.

C&K - Let's go back to the beginning. Serge, tell us about your early life in Paris, what it was like training at l'Ecole des Arts Appliques and how did that initial philosophy guide the rest of your career?