

Shepherd-Express
08-13-2015

'Impressions' of Nolan Simon By KAT MINERATH

Contentious truths at Green Gallery

Painting is both artifice and truth. It is a constructed process of pigment and gestures, but the endgame is a real, physical object that becomes its own sort of truth. The contentious relationship that develops between the practice of painting and source material gleaned from mass media fuels artist Nolan Simon's exhibition, "Impressions," on view at Green Gallery.



Simon metaphorically pins specimens of contemporary life to a canvas for a more studied perusal, using references to vanity, sexuality, nature and mortality. The painting titled *pedicator* is split into two registers. On the bottom is a tightly cropped representation of a correspondent for The Weather Channel, his logo-emblazoned jacket and mic in hand immediately suggesting the context; on the top, two mask-like faces with closed eyes emerge from a froth of ominous bubbles. Death and disaster are fed to us as forms of dramatic entertainment, viewed protectively through the long arm's length of cable television.

Most striking is the newest piece in the exhibition. It is a monumental painting done the week before the opening and based on a professional photograph of two friends celebrating their engagement. Their pose could come straight out of a De Beers advertisement. The couple lounges, gazing deeply into each other's eyes. The woman's left hand is raised delicately to her face, placing her engagement ring nearly at dead center in the composition. It is as though the couple has been asked to perform a theatrical role rather than act naturally as themselves. The premise of the painting has weight, but Simon's energetic execution carries it from a mere exercise into a substantially satisfying work.

Perhaps the more we are inundated with pictures, the less inclined we are to study them thoughtfully and sift through the flashy memes of daily life to find some real substance beneath. Nolan Simon stills some of these things, opening a space to think and consider visual culture more slowly. He is not interested in solace or comfort, but opening reflective questions as to how much we are governed by impressions and quick distillations of filtered realities.

Through Sept. 13 at Green Gallery, 1500 N. Farwell Ave. To see a video interview with the artist, visit the A&E section of shepherdexpress.com.