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22 May 2011

Paintings by Damian Loeb



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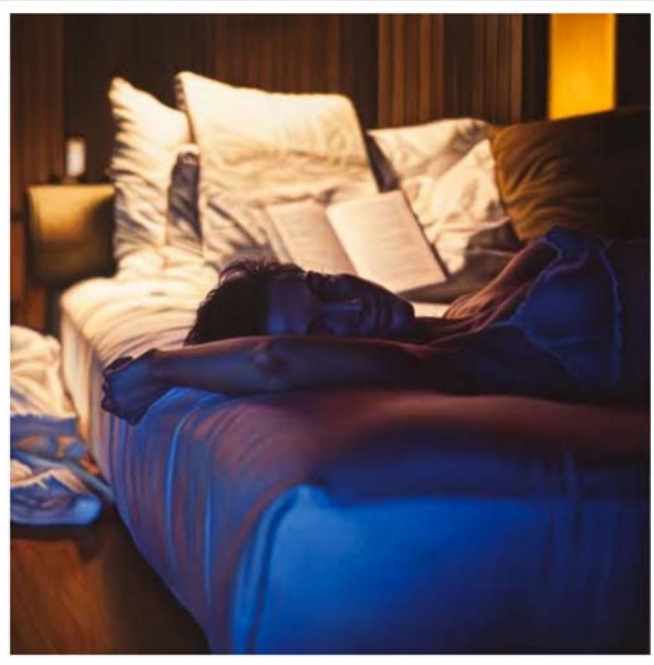


There is an exhibition of photorealist paintings by self-taught Damian Loeb up until mid June at Acquavella. I have been following his career for a while (from when he splashed on the scene with Mary Boone years back). There was debate back then surrounding his staying power or whether he was a flash in the pan. But clearly those that believed that he had a strong career ahead of him won. This is his second show at blue chip Acquavella.

Loeb's early work was culled from images from media - advertisements in magazines, etc. Loeb then appropriated images from movies, specifically science fiction and horror movies. Although they were oil paintings, there was a quiet and unnerving quality to the works that reminded me of Gregory Crewdson's photographs, which he has carried onto his later work. His last exhibition with Acquavella was both landscapes and painting from his own photographs of scenes that looked as if they were film stills.

In this show, Loeb's work is equally as beautiful as in the past, but I think shows more depth, especially psychologically. In this series, he focuses on pictures that he took of his wife over the last seven years and painted from these images. The moments that he has captured are truly intimate - there is an ease between her and the viewer - which makes us somewhat uncomfortable as we are confronted with her relaxed nature and her nudity. I am not sure if its because of the way she stares directly at you in some works (a contemporary Olympia), the immediacy you feel from the modern furniture and surroundings or just his genuine talent for capturing a moment so real you feel like touching the work to make sure its actually a painting; I am jarred by the fact that I am walking in on a very private moment.

His eye for color, composition, cropping and technique is as good as any Old Master. There is a Vermeer quality to his treatment of light in his paintings that is exquisite and his use of black and restraint of hue reminds me of the Spanish masters. The theme of the bather is repeated - in the tub, in the shower and even as you view her mannerist back as she bends over a child (I think compositionally from Degas' bathers). I love his use of 3 x 3 ft and 4 x 4 ft square format for these paintings (rather than his very horizontal, long rectangular format he has used in the past). You truly feel like your are looking through a window and completely feel like a voyeur.



My favorite work, by far, in the show is the one above. His wife is lying on the bed horizontally bathed in the blue glow of what we can imagine is a flat screen TV. I love the dichotomy of the traditional technique and the idea of the nude - which has been painted for centuries - truly updated and made contemporary by the invasion of technology here. And what makes the work even more dreamy, sexy, magical - is not his gorgeous wife in her bra, but the treatment of the wrinkled sheets and pillows captured in the yellow light behind her. You can almost see the imprints of the couples head on the pillows that sit somewhat askew - the memory of an intimate moment between a couple - whether lying in bed reading together or otherwise. I am glad to be a fly on this wall here.

Posted by Alicia R Bochi at [5/22/2011](#) 

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