



art & photo

Painter Ranbir Kaleka Dreams His Characters Into Action

by Robert Shuster

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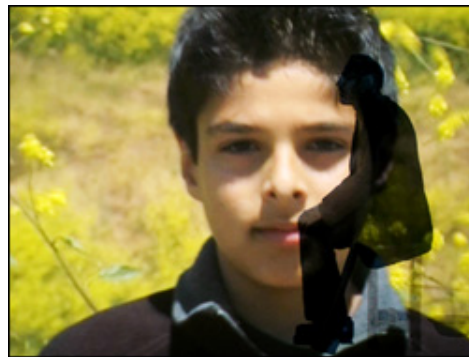
'Crossings'

Bose Pacia

508 West 26th Street, 11th floor

Through October 29th

You can stare all you want at a painting, trying to daydream its characters into action, but only a sorcerer like Ranbir Kaleka can make it happen. Kaleka, a native of India and a terrific figurative painter of expressionist fabulism, has been experimenting for some years now with video magic.



Kaleka's video projection on a mixed media painting
photo: Carlos Martin

In "Crossings," one of three video installations at Bose Pacia, Kaleka has painted several figures on four separate panels, using only shades of gray. Projectors beam moving images (in color) of the same characters onto the painted versions, bringing them to life. In certain sequences, the effects are wondrous. Four people, as if paroled from stiffness, step out of their frozen selves; elsewhere, they settle slowly into their seated doubles. A slouched man suddenly lifts a sledgehammer, striking the space before him, and produces a white horse. It's a busy 15-minute dream of jumbled memory and longing. Less successful is Kaleka's insistence on constant shifts in background, mostly scenes from India's Delhi and Punjab regions. At times, "Crossings" resembles a PBS travelogue.

In an earlier work, "Man Threading a Needle," a subtler application of the technique truly creates the sense of a painting come alive. The gray shadings of the oils shape the video's lurid colors into a holographic presence: An older man stares at his hands, which hold a needle and thread. But then, unnervingly—like the eyeblink in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*—he shifts, shudders, breathes.

A video-only installation, "Man With Cockerel" highlights Kaleka's expertise with composition. Painterly, black-and-white, the scene could be an outtake from a film by Satyajit Ray—a man smugly carries a prized rooster, then loses it. Elementary effects of post-production software (dissolve and distortion) make the piece look underdeveloped, but then Kaleka, a keen experimenter, considers all his work to be "in progress." Let's hope we see more, soon, of his innovations. Don't miss these.