

Brent Godfrey's "Matter of Time" at 'A' Gallery is Complex Glory

by Rebecca Pyle

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A Place to Call Home, 2008-20. Acrylic on Canvas, 111x71 in.

At this show, you've really, for all effects and purposes, been invited into Brent Godfrey's studio. Postponed for over a year by the pandemic, the exhibit contains Godfrey's social-statement ("social studies") paintings, enormous abstracts, small and large figurative paintings, woven canvas pieces, works on paper. Called Matter of Time, stored matter, stored time, the stuff of physics, and history, fill this show.



Home, 2006. Oil on Linen, 92x80 in.

One crowningly lovely painting rises above them all. Godfrey's "Home," could be at home in a museum. It radiates a gratefulness, and a wishfulness, and other things you can't quite name. It's an enormous painting. Hung on farthest northwest-corner wall of gallery, this painting lacks the abstract impulsiveness/craziness almost all other paintings in this show have. It's still. Two naked men, both of the same height, face each other, a foot apart, embracing before a fireplace. The room, or house, around them is astoundingly beautiful, clearly inhabited by people who love art and its potential for abstract realizations, visions: on plain white shelves are an extravagantly garden number of large pieces of pottery and sculpture (reminiscent of the white-shelved large cache area for sculptures and pottery in an adjacent part of "A" Gallery), radiating intense light, color. This room's fireplace, and mantel, is, as best fireplaces are, somber, simple, and very centered in the room. A creamily-painted chandelier is above the men's bowed-toward-each-other, almost as if in prayer, heads. The chandelier above them, with its complex, intertwining, weaving parts,

seems almost to be made of living branches, or deers' antlers, painted a milky white. The two pairs of feet of the men, so symmetrically facing each other, have, in their gentle rising angle, the look of the beginning-base of one tree. The two men's heads lean, intertwine as much as two human heads can, resting against each other. This painted togetherness, their heads quietly leaning into each other, even their startling nakedness, suggest, like two lions or stags facing each other, a heraldic crest. The painting seems to be, in equal parts, about art, intellect, and love.

Many other paintings in this show are good, excellent, with a thundering quality: it's hard not to be struck to stillness and awe by "1957," with its cavorting Frisbees (which were invented in 1957) and RCA Nipper dogs, and a giant singing Elvis, and its All About Eve and Seventh Seal movie stills. Or the arresting, accusing paintings portraying children and the explosion of nuclear bombs above and behind their heads ("Fallout /Nuclear Family" and "Lies").



1957, 2013-20. Oil on Linen, 60x72 in.

Godfrey makes up for not being an actual sculptor (beyond three-dimensional assemblages here like "Circle," rich with play, made only of circle-topped objects, painted, chalkily, predominantly blue and white) by sometimes actually painting sculptures. In paintings like "Leaving Miro" and "Ladies in Repose," female figures (sculptures) glow their sudden, weird, overly-refined, transfixing white – it's as if Godfrey's showing a curse has fallen on these women, trapped in these chilly, huddling poses.

But in "Pedestal," an even larger oil painting, there is the magic-imp of sculpture-future: a small child, a girl, her hair neatly cut in bangs, stands atop a pedestal as tall as a tall gravestone marker. But there is something about her little Mary Jane shoes, so flat and so simply strapped, and her little, perfect, springy legs in dark tights, her unself-conscious eyes/face, which radiate the physical perfection sculptures hope to have, and suggesting implied almost-infinite movement. A little girl who will never die. If the sculpture "David," by Michelangelo, could become a little girl in her Utah go-to-church best, it's this little girl: Godfrey has even indicated a radiance around her head, a gently painted moon-burst of halo: whoever that little girl is, she's his anointed.



Pedestal, 2018-19. Oil on Canvas, 72x48 in.

The artist is fond of fish, and their form. Swimming through this show are countless twisting, brilliant, koi fish. (In September, "A" Gallery's actual courtyard is in full glory, complexity: quiet fountain with bamboo at its edges, lily pads in a pond with several bright orange fish in it, swimming in dappling shade, vines; long shadows, sculptures.) Godfrey is good also with the purely abstract (those who think anyone can paint a good abstract painting, are, of course, wrong) in "A Place to Call Home," "What Is," and "Bowl," and many others – and good even in powerful and odd paintings such as "Drone" (must be seen), "Filaments" (strings of illuminated round bulbs, in which Godfrey finds a transcendent-but-muted-purple-blue tension) and "The Walk" (suddenly a crazily blurred, enormous bear, hurdling through). All of his work is of sharp interest, and together leads you to an emotional, intellectual, courtyard. A place of beauty.



The Walk, 2014. Oil on Linen, 60x48 in.



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