

Studio Visits: Christian Rex van Minnen

Posted by SAL, March 3, 2015

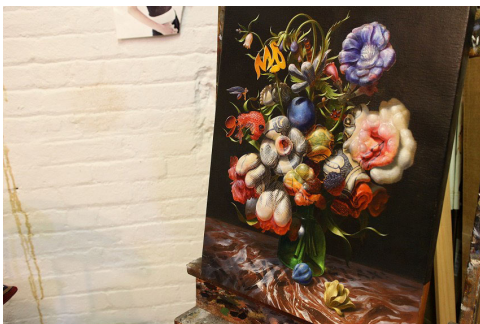
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AM recently had the privilege to visit Christian Rex van Minnen's studio in Brooklyn and see several pieces he was working on as well as some previously undisclosed paintings. We also had a chance to talk to the him about his beginnings in the art world, the influence of the Golden Dutch Age on his work, the origin of his grotesque portraits, tattoos, the Internet and NYC art week.



Christian Rex Van Minnen is self taught painter, which is hard to believe once you see his skills with oils. As a fan of Golden Dutch Age, which was an important part of art history on many levels, he learned how to paint using book reproductions as his reference. After years of mastering his technique at his home in Colorado, he eventually traveled to Amsterdam and got to see some of the works in person for the first time. There, he realized he went over board with his execution, as unlike reproduction photos, the actual paintings weren't as perfect and you could clearly see the brush strokes and human hand behind them. This mistake though allowed Van Minnen to start exploring painting in a new direction. Tackling the phenomenon of pareidolia, he focused on creating work that balances between abstraction and realism. Using his meticulous painting skills along with the ability to let go of pre-programmed ideas of how certain things can look like, his works are basically photorealistic abstractions. Using basic shapes and textures, his paintings look familiar and recognizable, while actually being completely abstract and surreal. By adding a layer of tattoos to almost finished works, both portraits and still life ones, he actually adds another interference layer of the story to his works. He is basically creating three different ways to view the painting – as a narrative provided by the tattoos, a meditation on the form that hosts the tattoos, and the union of the two. His works are often seen as haunting, bizarre or even disturbing, and it wasn't until he started sharing works online and getting appreciation from a wider crowd that he felt comfortable with what he was making.



When we visited his studio, Van Minnen was working on two large still life works that were going to Pulse Art Fair, where he will be showing with Pouslen Gallery from Copenhagen. Also, he will take part in a Pouslen group show at the Lodge Gallery during that week. These new pieces are a continuation of some narrative issues he's been working out, along with some technical experiments, layering the bright hi-chroma underpainting integrated with the traditional techniques. Though primarily visually and technically striking, his oils often carry a strong message. One of the recurring subjects is the connection between the Dutch

Golden Age and the birth of the slave trade. He further elaborates – "I'm making work about it and thinking about how that implicates me. In a time when everyone wants to say 'That's not me,' I'm just not sure I can wash my hands clean of it."