

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



Stuart Netsky's "Some of My Best Leading Men Have Been Dogs and Horses" (2014), archival inkjet print, at Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

Edith Newhall, *For The Inquirer*

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Staying the course has never been easy for artists who experience success early in their careers, but two Philadelphia-based artists of roughly the same vintage are doing just that.

That's not to say that Stuart Netsky, currently having his second solo show with Bridgette Mayer Gallery, and Barry Goldberg, now having his fourth with Larry Becker Contemporary Art, are still doing the work they were noticed for in the early 1990s, but they've avoided the pitfalls of change for change's sake, bowing to the fluctuations of taste that throw some mid-career artists into panic mode. Walking through these two very different shows of entirely unrelated work, I was struck by the sense of insistence that has always seemed at the core of Netsky's and Goldberg's art, that they are both doing what comes naturally to them.

Netsky's show, "Sirens," continues his longstanding investigation into glamour and beauty, and the sense of fleetingness and mortality they inspire. His framed inkjet prints of photographs, in which he's isolated the eyes of such charismatic types as Frida Kahlo (from a Kahlo self-portrait in paint), Catherine Deneuve, Cary Grant, Joan Crawford, and Elizabeth Taylor, simultaneously

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capture the distinctiveness of his famous subjects while making them look almost embalmed under their glass frames.

In another series, Netsky has made inkjet prints from photographs of Jean Harlow, Bette Davis, and Joan Crawford by the Hollywood portraitist George Hurrell and sprayed them with hairspray (Harlow) and liquid foundation (Davis and Crawford) so that only the faintest image of each movie star remains, looking as if photographed through dense fog or clouds. Using images of allure, Netsky has again summoned thoughts of death or the afterlife.

Other times, he indulges his sense of humor and his popular-culture and art-history acumen, as in an inkjet print sandwiching images of Brancusi's sculpture, *Mademoiselle Pogany*, Richard Avedon's portrait of the long-necked Marella Agnelli, and a Modigliani portrait. Another inkjet print layers photographic images of Sophia Loren, Faye Dunaway, Marilyn Monroe, Catherine Deneuve, and other celebrated beauties.

Netsky has interspersed totemic sculptures throughout his show that are also humorous, savvy, and assembled of multiple parts, balancing such objects as vividly colored sponges meant to honor Yves Klein, small plaster busts of Greek gods and goddesses, and a Mondrian tissue box. These, and an installation in the Vault gallery that mimics a museum gift shop - Netsky has pillows, scarves, and plates with printed with photographic images ranging from Brad Pitt to a Lucio Fontana painting - show off Netsky's talents as the discerning object-maker he has always been.

Somehow, Barry Goldberg's sweetly mysterious title for his show, "Lions and Tulips," suits his new abstract paintings and watercolors to a T, though of course there's not a lion or tulip - or anything recognizable - in them. Maybe it's the hot pink triangle leaning against the regal rectangle of yellow gold in his large diptych painting, *La Maison Dieu (The God House)*, that makes it seem so apt.

Goldberg is still painting modular forms, usually in twos, that fit within his canvases, leaving an empty rim that extends to the canvas's edge. In his vertical arrangements of shapes, the effect is reminiscent of an above-ground view of minimalist architecture or sculpture; when his forms are arranged horizontally, a straight-on view of land and sky comes to mind, though typically his colors have not read as hues found in nature. This time around, at least two paintings strongly suggest landscapes, his pale blue and pine green (almost black) *L'aube D'or (The Golden Dawn)* and *Feel*, which could be a dark industrial building silhouetted against a milky sky.

As ever, Goldberg's palette of homemade paints, commercial oils, and encaustic in tandem with colors layered over other colors, give his paintings a rich, luminous depth.