

DANIEL MAFFIA

Private Paintings: 1976-1996

There are few contemporary realists whose paintings are as compelling as those of Daniel Maffia. In this exhibition he continues his life-long series of autobiographical paintings. These are works he rarely exhibits. In the previous paintings in this series, Maffia was concerned with the place and circumstance of his birth in France, prior to the second World War. (Reviewed in ARTS Magazine, May 1982, by art history scholar, Karl Lunde). In these recent works he has transcended these specific concerns and expanded his search to include themes which extend his work and elevate it to the universal.

Maffia is nearing his sixtieth year. With maturity, his work has become more profound. The passage of time is an almost obsessive theme. In the paintings "A Kiss In Time Saves Lives"; "People Are Angels And Live In Heaven"; and "Time Piece: Barrow Alaska", Maffia has his constructions of clocks inbedded in the otherwise flat surface of the canvas. Time is measured both concretely and figuratively.

Maffia approaches his personal summing up of the artistic struggle in his work entitled "A Brief History of Painting". The 'ting' is hidden behind a Michelangelo drawing; one of those which has survived. Maffia is referring to the fact that, at the end of his life, Michelangelo destroyed all of the drawings which were in his possession. At the bottom of the painting, under Baudelaire's portrait, are lines from his poem "Les Phares". Here Baudelaire connects the struggle of artists from Michelangelo to Goya to Watteau. The last line reads "... cet ardent sanglot qui roule d'age en age". (This ardent sobbing which rolls from age to age.) The central figure of Maffia's painting, one of the Velasquez dwarfs, represents the dignity of the struggle. Unifying the entire "History" is a constructed golden thread, wound through the eye of a needle.

For Maffia, the artistic process is one of painting, then erasing and washing out, then intensifying the shadows that remain, or establishing new images or legends, washing the images out once again, and reemphasizing what remains in a constant effort to see what is permanent, what is transitory, what is basic, and what is irrelevant. So his final image is a history of the creative process of testing images against each other, adding inscriptions on the

paintings, covering, wiping out, adding and adjusting.

Like all artists who are interested in truth, Maffia knows that he is fulfilling the role of magician, conjuring ambiguities. Because the visual world is deceptive, truth may lie in the written word. The reality of life must be stated unambiguously. Therefore, words in Maffia's paintings are concrete objects, fixed in time like cancelled stamps, and a proof of existence. These concrete words are not abstractions to Maffia. For him, words are magic reality, as magic as the pictorial image.

A close look at Maffia's paintings illuminates the means by which an extraordinarily gifted artist, through images, first solves his own problems, the same problems which confront all thoughtful persons, and by this process his art transcends autobiography and becomes universal.

(RVS Fine Art Gallery, 46 Job's Lane, Southampton, N.Y. May 18 through June 17, 1996)

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