

Tema Celeste
"A Hush Before the Fall"
Eve Wood
September/October 2002
Pg. 68-69

a hush before the fall

eve wood

Faris McReynolds' paintings both confound and delight, playing on our sense of expectation.

Faris McReynolds' paintings don't ask to be loved. If you love them, that's your business, and if you don't, that's also your business. His images stem from a peculiar suggestiveness, often propounding questions that resist being answered; looking at his work, one gets the feeling that any attempt to answer these questions would mean very little, since each image proposes a kind of boundless circle that continues to open out even as it remains unknowable. McReynolds has a strange and enigmatic way of seeing, a soft, desultory vision that seems at once to confound and delight. If love does indeed come into play here, it manifests itself in the quiet deliberation of his imagery. It's not that his paintings pose specific questions. Instead the work evidenced a particular process or "essential exploration" that may be followed from painting to painting.



68 faris mcreynolds

Absence is centralised in each canvas, creating a strange and vaguely seductive system dependent upon what has gone missing or was never there to begin with. It's a little like falling in love—we depend on something mysterious and incomprehensible, an ellipsis of feeling that has no basis in reality, a deceptive sense of "completion," when in fact the whole idea of falling in love is highly suspect and given to chance. A strange redoubling occurs in the work; the isolated moment becomes one of intense implication that cannot be justified or explained away. The paintings float beyond the quietude of private awakening, implying perhaps an alternate, associative journey through an alternate time and memory.

McReynolds is concerned with the irony that informs the gaze, and thus we find no haunted, empty, Eden-eyed girls or men who seduce with false smiles or bravado, radiating some personal tragedy or betrayal. His figures are at home with their complexities and with the endless moment in which nothing can be adequately explained. In *The Black Hub* (2002), the artist gives us the ripe deciduousness of the forest—leaves fall or are in the process of falling, the whole world is serene and autumnal. In the distance stands the stump of a tree like an amputated limb, a reminder of things that have passed. The cycle of life is closing in around us; winter is inevitable. In another canvas, *Let's Go to the Middle* (2002), a heavy metal-like character is walking with a little girl. The scene could be read as menacing except for the fact the girl is looking ahead, leading the pair out of a forest, while the man gazes down at her as though he were learning the greatest lesson of his life—one that supersedes piercings and leather.

The perspective in both of these paintings is completely flat, and the colors are so light as to nearly disappear in their evanescence. Reds are not bright but muted and suggestive, hinting perhaps at some apocalyptic moment to come. Similarly, the yellows and browns seem so calm as to be radioactive, acting on us slowly and without our awareness. Gladly we succumb to the inevitable fall.

McReynolds has an eye for the despairing moment. His paintings are defined by mystery and a precarious sort of wisdom. In a 2002 work entitled *Unsettled (courtyard)*, the artist distorts our sense of perspective and time. He paints an apartment complex much like any other except that somehow we know, on an almost instinctual level, that we have been here before. For some, the oddness of the scene—the

tema celeste



• Faris McReynolds *Four Rooms*, 2001, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 100 x 250 cm.

•• Faris McReynolds *The Big Collapse*, 2001, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 102.7 x 102.7 cm.

disquieting angles and disjunction in combination with the disorienting perspective—might bring to mind the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Suddenly it is the morning of April 4, 1968, and we are in Memphis, Tennessee, moments before the shooting. Or this could be just another tacky motel gone to seed. Either way, McReynolds plays on our sense of divine expectation, wherein the things we see must somehow correlate, if only intuitively, with an essential primal image that determines our humanity.

In *Century Gate* (2002), a young woman stands in front of three cubelike structures that seem to float disembodied in the landscape. She looks out at the viewer, not so much as a challenge as to tell us that she is aware of her own power to affect us. On her shirt is the Bauhaus symbol, an image associated with iconoclasm and open-ended thinking. Her gaze suggests she might possess some knowledge that we are not yet clued into; were we to lean in just a little closer, she might whisper it to us, and we would never be the

same. McReynolds navigates the space between the young woman's gaze and our own expectations of what she might be thinking. It is a difficult task to affect through ambiguity and suggestion, and often work that attempts to do so appears tired and masklike, the idea of mystery confused with some sentimental impulse.

The artist understands where to step and how much weight to throw down as he passes. He attains a delicate balance in his paintings wherein the "mysterious stranger" becomes a symbol of autonomy, secrecy, and grace. McReynolds allows himself the indulgence of mystery, and so the people who populate his paintings are given free rein to ask questions of themselves and of us with a simple glance or gesture, to engage in the long, heated stare and moments of intense introspection and wonder.

Faris McReynolds was born in 1977 in Dallas. He lives and works in Los Angeles.
Photo Credit: Roberts & Titus, Los Angeles.