

RON MILEWICZ: RECENT PAINTINGS

There are two ways to begin. One is to say that Ron Milewicz's paintings are thoughtful explorations of perception, meditations on the city in which he lives, filtered through an innate sense of geometric order. The other is to say that Ron Milewicz paints eerie, passionate evocations of classical myths, reinvented in ways informed equally by the legacy of antiquity and contemporary vernacular culture. Both descriptions are true, but curiously, this apparent dichotomy does not indicate any split in Milewicz's concerns. He may seem to be following two divergent paths in his recent work, yet, in the end, they prove to be intimately interconnected.

Milewicz's disciplined cityscapes engage us first by their seeming fidelity to appearances but they soon reveal their artifice, becoming stranger, even slightly disturbing, with longer viewing. Nothing is quite what it seems. In a recent series, convincing perspectives of the vast spaces of the urban periphery – rail yards, low-lying warehouses, sweeps of highway and El tracks – turn out to be pure fictions, rooted in scrupulous observation but constructed according to highly conceptualized geometric precepts. Views set side by side prove to be impossible marriages of meticulously observed diametric opposites. Invention and measurement transcend the limits of perception. Similarly, while Milewicz's color is intensely evocative of particular times of day, seasons, and qualities of light, he never relies on the literal hues of the natural world. Instead, he deploys saturated, synthetic chroma that force us to consider his images abstractly, no matter how powerfully specific they seem, no matter how seductive his all-encompassing, omnipotent viewpoint. He further dislocates us by refusing to identify where the viewer stands. We hover above the infinite outer-borough sprawl,

stabilized only by the crisp geometric shapes that punctuate the canvas, doing double duty as abstract structure and potent suggestions of the urban industrial landscape. In the distance, the iconic Manhattan skyline draws us deep into the painting, like a mirage that resolves itself into broad patches of paint. Far from being literal accounts of the view from a Long Island City studio, Milewicz's moody visions become haunting dreamscapes of a perhaps mythic place, at once familiar and unattainable.

Milewicz's dissections of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur fulfil the implications of his cityscapes. The boundless stretches of Queens rail yards, the blocks of warehouses, and the frieze of the Manhattan skyline are ambiguous backgrounds for mythical dramas, sealed off by ancient walls, bathed in what could be either the slanting afternoon sun of the Mediterranean or stage lighting. Theseus kneels to unwind the thread that will lead him safely out Daedalus's maze, about to slip between two massive rectangles of wall, so congruent to the surface of the canvas that entry seems all but impossible. Slaughtered Athenian youths and maidens lie in a loose triangle on a pile of rubble, pressed toward us by a towering wall; one, inexplicably rigid, echoes the graceful arc of the bull leapers in Minoan frescos.

But, as in the cityscapes, nothing is quite what it seems. Scale shifts, as we are drawn into these small, fierce pictures, compelled to enter mentally their miniature theatrical universe. The suave neo-classical nudes reveal their origins as dolls and action figures, the looming Minotaur starts looking like a figurine, and the shrubbery against which the drama unfolds becomes a row of eucalyptus sprays. We find ourselves not in an ideal pre-Hellenic Crete, but in a tawdry contemporary world of the disposable and the mass-produced. Yet, as in the cityscapes, geometry dominates, returning us to the realm of archetypes and abstraction, until

the mysterious figures begin to read more as neutral emblems of tradition and the ancient past than as equivalents for flesh, marble, or plastic, while Milewicz's forthright paint-handling brings us back firmly into the realm of art. The tension between these conflicting associations animates the series, just as the tension between perception and invention animates the cityscapes. Each series informs the other. The cityscapes make us interrogate the backgrounds of the Minotaur paintings more closely, while the Minotaur paintings make us look at the industrial edges of Queens in the cityscapes in new ways. Perhaps myths are being enacted in the shadow of the 7 train, just out of sight, behind the blocky building in the center of the canvas.

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