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May 30-June 21, 2015

RJD Gallery

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Skin deep

The human form is an oft-explored subject, with interpretations highlighting everything from emotional depth to the exterior qualities. In the exhibition *Skin Deep* at RJD Gallery in Sag Harbor, New York, participating artists—including Tracey Harris, Pam Hawkes, Adrienne Stein, Odile Richer, Teresa Elliott, and John Caruso—will focus on varying aspects of the being.

"What do we see looking at the human form? Is skin a barrier or an invitation to touch? How far below the surface is the soul?" asks Johanna Patrick, assistant director at the gallery. "This exhibit will showcase distinct, individual visions of 'beauty.'"

In Stein's painting *Late July*, the artist emphasizes contradictions. "The cheerful forms of the sun-soaked foxgloves give way to the truth that one should proceed with caution," she says. "They are delicate and dangerous, like the young girl emerging from them."

Stein continues, "Foxglove has always been a mesmerizing flower to me. Its exotic bugle form and cheerful coloring make it so alluring, yet it is fatally poisonous. The paradox between its outer beauty and its inner danger fascinates me. My model was a French foreign exchange student who lived with my family. She was a young teenager at the time, but seemed beyond her years. The paradox between her childlike innocence and her womanly intensity fits the foxglove symbol."

For her work *Coeurs en éventail*, Richer allowed the model to choose her costume, and used her amusement and enchantment to build the image. The outcome shows the model both revealing and hiding herself.

"The idea of nudity in a painting is also a great challenge because I don't want to provoke, but it's a powerful and beautiful way to express vulnerability," says Richer. "The heart-shaped tattoo in the center of the painting adds softness to the strength of the pose and the dynamic of the costume. I believe the final image gives an overall feeling of an amusing tenderness."



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Harris' *Polka Scarf* is from a continuing series of women with scarves in motion. "The blurred motion allows a certain anonymity to the model. In this painting, the model's face is slightly moving. You may sense how she looks, but you are not quite sure of the exact details. It could be any person with this particular coloration. And this woman isn't frozen in space; she is a living, breathing person, which feels very natural to me. She is a woman in a state of movement, giving you a glimpse into a mundane moment in life, putting her hair up in a scarf—beautiful and ambiguous," says Harris.

On a formal level, Harris plays with the optical illusion of the polka dots becoming stripes across the picture plane. "The visual play of the polka dots becoming stripes doubles as a wonderful metaphor for perception and beauty," she describes. "Is what we initially perceive all that there is? Is beauty an illusion? How deep is beauty? What is real? Is beauty our perception of the surface, or is it more than skin-deep?"

Shivering Sun, one of Elliott's works in the exhibit, was inspired by mirages seen in 1940s film noir movies. Elliott shares, "Film noir movies were black-and-



2



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1
Adrienne Stein,
Late July, acrylic on
canvas, 24 x 20"

2
Odile Richer, *Coeurs
en éventail*, oil on
canvas, 40 x 20"

3
John Caruso, *Cascade*,
mixed media on paper,
ed. of 10, 38½ x 27½"

4
Tracey Harris, *Polka
Scarf*, oil on panel,
24 x 24"

5
Teresa Elliott, *Shivering
Sun*, oil on canvas,
36 x 30"

white, but I wanted to hint at the same effects using color, with deep shadows, heightened color and exaggerated light. The older noir films were made in earnest, taking themselves seriously by painting a dark mood of purposelessness, and hopefully this modern-day protagonist also has the power to suggest anxiety, pessimism and suspicion. The roughly applied second skin also hints at deception

in attempt to conceal, and there lies the mystery of crimes committed, guilt and loss of innocence."

In his latest series of paintings, Caruso transports the male nude to a time and space that was free of constrictions or judgment. *Cascade* is one of these paintings. "In this piece, the water source becomes both specific and universal—whether the viewer sees a waterfall in the

Amazon rainforest or a fountain in Rome, she/he is encouraged to celebrate the subject's nakedness and beauty as it is cleansed and refreshed by the invigorating rush of water," says Caruso. "Hopefully the viewer is reminded of our inherent freedom to be naked and unashamed in our most natural and vulnerable form."

Skin Deep takes place at RJD Gallery May 30 to June 21. ●

4



5

