

JoANNE ARTMAN GALLERY

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“Yes, Masters: A MANthology” - A Conversation with James Wolanin



JA: This exhibition, *Yes, Masters: A MANthology*, explores Old Master paintings being reframed in a contemporary context, in addition to the idea that the compositions and narratives still hold relevance in today’s art and society. Do you think of your works as portraits of figures at a particular time and place? Are your paintings set in the past, or are these figures that would exist only today?

WOLANIN: My figures certainly could exist today, but I think of them in the past. The majority of my paintings are set in the time period of the 1960’s. Hair styles, clothing styles, this all comes from the 1960’s. I like to think of my paintings as snapshots of the past, a memory revisited. Nostalgic, taking the viewer back to a time of innocence.

JA: Where did you get your imagery from for this series? What, if any, sources or particular artistic movements did you reference?

WOLANIN: I didn’t limit myself to one particular artistic movement, but in terms of art history, I did stay somewhat contemporary. I began by exploring my personal collection of art books, from there I narrowed it down to artists that I thought would translate well into my particular style and also push the boundaries of my current work.

JA: A large part of the construction of culture is how we depict each other. How do you select and then choose to portray the figures in your work?

WOLANIN: A lot of my work is based on retro advertisements, glamour, so my work does reflect that perceived image of midcentury American idealistic lifestyle.

JA: How does this differ from your typical work? What challenges did you face creating this new body of work?

WOLANIN: This new work freed me to explore some different styles, sent me down some paths that I normally wouldn't have traveled. For example, I took on the challenge of reinterpreting two de Kooning paintings from his early woman series. The challenge was changing his expressionist brush work to my style flat planes of color, and still having the feel of a de Kooning. What's great is when push yourself out your comfort zone, some wonderful artistic break throughs begin to happen. Maybe some bits and pieces of these new works will find their way into some future paintings.

JA: Is there a cultural experience that changed the way you see the world? How has this affected your artistic practice?

WOLANIN: Pop culture of the 1960's has had a lasting effect on me culturally and artistically. Not necessarily the political turbulence of that period, but more of revisiting a time of innocence. Although I was young, these early childhood memories of this era have endured to the point where it's become my primary artistic inspiration.