

Santiago de Paoli ***peintures et Hotline***

Exhibition from September 1 to October 14, 2018

Opening on Saturday September 1st, 6 to 9 pm

Open from Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 7pm and by appointment.

Santiago de Paoli is not your usual painter. He is a singularly strange and surprising painter. He makes paintings of moons, candles, lamps, human posteriors, genitalia, flowers, hearts, socks (socks? yes socks), landscapes, and other relatively banal subject matter. So far pretty basic, at least on paper, and maybe not so strange. But it gets strange, so much stranger— especially the moment you start looking at the paintings. For what are they? But before trying to answer that, maybe we should ask how are they? Like any great painting, how and what they are painted on is big part of what they are.

de Paoli paints on singularly unusual supports which include felt, recycled textiles, as well as wood (often also recycled), and more recently, plaster. He does so for a reason that is not dissimilar to why and how he arrives at his subject matter: in order to obviate the high seriousness of painting. Indeed, his pictures, which are liable to combine moons or vases with genitalia, are evocative of the sense of humor, and weird innocence, of children. Unsullied by the corrosive and self-congratulatory stuff of (painterly) irony, his odd and disarming humor deliberately thwarts sophistication— or at least what we (in the art world) generally take sophistication to be. For de Paoli's work is quite sophisticated.

His iconographic frame of reference includes everything from Italian renaissance painting to the surrealism of Giorgio de Chirico to the thematic simplicity and obsessiveness of Giorgio Morandi as well as the antic weirdness of Philip Guston,— one is even tempted to think of the bewitching naïvety of, say, Alfredo Volpi, not to mention children's books. In other words, these paintings are not a little timeless. The quality of their contemporaneity lies both within the raw, unassimilable, impulse of their creation and their immediate socio-political context. Make no mistake about it: these paintings are political. They are political in their deliberate refusal to conform to expectations regarding "the political" in the context from which de Paoli hails (Buenos Aires, and more generally Latin America). This politic is agreeably aggravated by a no less deliberate embrace of ambiguity— a mode which neither his region nor our current historical moment is very fond of. In this sense, his work is a non-militant return to the essence of painting. Never taking for granted the nature of painting, what he does continually interrogates what a painting is while staving off any attempt to render it politically expedient by virtue of the weirdness and ambiguity of his subject matter. This is, needless to say, a dangerous position, anywhere, but especially in Latin America— where art is almost always expected to unequivocally communicate a specific political ideology. Demurring any status of symptom or allegory, they gently ask to be seen as things in themselves— things whose art has nothing to do with communication, but everything to do with painting.

Chris Sharp, July 2018