

Zsolt Bodoni **“Yesterday’s Heroes, Tomorrow’s Fools”**

Nicodim Gallery is pleased to present “***Yesterday’s Heroes, Tomorrow’s Fools***” - an exhibition of new paintings by Hungarian artist, Zsolt Bodoni (born 1977) and his first US solo show.

Bodoni’s darkly brooding paintings are tangibly atmospheric. First elevated and then punished by the vigorous sweeps of brushwork he uses to wash his landscapes and shadowy interiors, the works readily evoke the violent struggles of Hungary’s chequered past. For Bodoni, the tangled politics of his region’s history are especially poignant. As an ethnic Hungarian growing up in Romania during the last years of Ceausescu’s dictatorship, (Bodoni was born in Transylvania, a province that belonged to Hungary during the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but was then given over to Romania by the French in 1920), Bodoni was part of a unique generation that knew communism in childhood and experienced its disintegration and the transition into democracy in early adulthood; but he was also part of a minority group that suffered - if not persecution - then discrimination at the hands of the fiercely nationalistic Ceausescu.

If he had been born a century earlier, life would have been very different for the young artist - a fact he was constantly reminded of during his growing up, surrounded as he was by the imperialistic Austro-Hungarian architecture that dominates Transylvania. Yet more so even than the architecture that surrounded him, it was the monument that left its mark and has continued to both trouble and inspire him. For the past year, Bodoni has become increasingly preoccupied by the idea of the monument in his painting. His new body of dramatic works address the commanding physicality of a type of sculpture intended to inspire or affirm the prowess of a victorious nation or movement; but they also deal with the ideological implications that accompany the decision to erect, remove or replace a particular figure or symbol in a key public place.

Looking back as an adult on the changes that swept through Hungary and Transylvania, the artist was struck by the fact that each ‘empire’ brought with it its own heroes: The Hungarians celebrated their founding Magyars with statues of their warrior leaders and the ‘turul’ – a mythical, falcon-like bird said to have led them to the land that became Hungary. Much later, leading Imperial figures such as Andrassy, the patriotic general, and Horthy, (regent of the Kingdom of Hungary in the interwar years), were immortalised in stone and bronze – only they too were to prove as mortal as the rest of us, for when the communists came, the bronze was melted down and re-cast to commemorate the idols of the new state.

Yet again these new 'heroes' were deposed and decried as impostors. In the case of the gargantuan statue of Stalin, erected in Budapest in 1951, the deposition occurred only five years after its grand unveiling; and in the most dramatic fashion. On October 23, 1956, the year of the unsuccessful Hungarian uprising, around two hundred thousand Hungarians gathered in Budapest to demonstrate in sympathy for the Poles. The Hungarian Revolutionaries broadcast sixteen demands over the radio, one of them being the demolition of Stalin's statue. Over one hundred thousand protestors set about the statue's destruction and 'Stalin' was ripped from the pedestal leaving only his boots behind.

While Bodoni's works are inspired by a strongly narrative element grounded in the context of his own personal experience and history, much of his painting is devoid of figuration and extraneous detail. Large areas are left undefined, empty of fuss and unnecessary congestion. Bodoni isn't frightened to leave these dark holes for us to peer into and struggle through. His sweeping brushstrokes pick us up again if we lose ourselves for too long, but the shadows that remain a constant fixture of his paintings, are never very far behind us.

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 2, 2009

Exhibition Dates: May 2 – June 6, 2009

Venue:

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