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CULTURE MONSTER
ALL ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Art review: Antoine Roegiers at YoungProjects

April 3, 2012 | 2:49 pm



Antoine Roegiers fulfills a desire common to viewers of paintings by Bruegel and Bosch: He lets us in. He breaks the implicit seal on their exquisitely dense dramas and grants us the privilege to roam through villages and over hillsides, to linger upon odd and marvelous details, to enter a scene and watch it unfold in something akin to real time.

Roegiers, a Belgian artist living in Paris, paints and draws and since 2005 has been making animated videos from his own imagery and well-known works by the great 15th and 16th century Netherlandish painters. There are six videos in his first solo show in the U.S. at YoungProjects, and each stretches and bends time, kneads it and perforates it, affirms its elasticity. This is animation at its most compelling and yet most literal, devoted to the fundamental act of breathing life into something still.

In an 11-minute piece, Roegiers unpacks Bosch's phantasmagoric St. Anthony triptych, in which the hermit faces an array of real and allegorical demons. Bosch followed the pictorial convention (common to periods of Western and non-Western art alike) of representing multiple chapters from a narrative within a single, unified space.

Roegiers unbraids the strands, follows them individually, then rejoins them, repeating and varying as he goes, to build a lush visual fugue. In one passage, color courses through a black-and-white version of the painting like blood rushing into veins. Images distend and blur, evoking the saint's psychic torment. Gorgeous and haunting, the video extrapolates imaginatively from Bosch's painting while respecting the integrity of the original.

The same is true of Roegiers' take on Bruegel's "The Netherlandish Proverbs," a village scene spilling over with odd, humorous vignettes illustrating truisms,

warnings and assorted bits of wisdom. A man carries light in a basket (signifying futility), a pair of women spin and wind wool (a reference to gossips) and another character drapes atop a man's shoulders the blue, blinding cloak of deceit. Action layers upon action, the scenes appearing, accumulating and disappearing in a syncopated rhythm enhanced by Antoine Marroncles' deft score.

The longest piece in the show, at 18 minutes, and one of the most captivating, interprets Brueghel's engravings on the theme of the Seven Deadly Sins. Roegiers tours us through the dystopia of our own bad instincts, crisply rendered in sepia line on a warm cream ground, punctuated sporadically by intense color -- the proud peacock's showy spread, the scarlet, rippling tongues of reptilian creatures lustfully kissing and licking a nude woman. In his day, Brueghel was sometimes referred to as the second Bosch for his adaptation of the earlier master's grotesque, hybrid menagerie playing out moralizing scenarios. Five hundred years later, Roegiers proves a worthy successor to them both.

-- Leah Ollman

YoungProjects, Pacific Design Center, 8687 Melrose Ave., Gallery B230, (323) 377-1102, through May 8. Closed Saturday through Monday.
www.youngprojectsgallery.com

Image: Antoine Roegiers, "Les sept peches capitaux (The Seven Deadly Sins)," video projection, 2011 (detail). Credit: YoungProjects.

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