

Christopher Parrott at Fay Gold: Big Punch in Small Format

In surprisingly small format, new works from contemporary realist Christopher Parrott pack considerable punch. The Athens-based artist's emotionally layered paintings present twenty-something men and women in detached and unsettling human landscapes. He pairs his subjects as well as grouping them – as many as four or five - standing, sitting, embracing, drinking, surveying and ignoring each other. Facial expressions are ambiguous. Bodies are sensual and strong. The women are nude or dressed in dark shifts, tops, and pants. The men lean, slouch, and gesture, wearing simple trousers and shirts, occasionally a suit and tie reminiscent of the 1960s. The effect is stark and disturbing.

Something in Parrott's choice of clothing, haircuts, and poses recalls Robert Longo's iconic figures, also depicted alone, in pairs, or small groups. But while Longo's treatment is brash, his subjects gyrating and contorting, Parrott sets his stage in understated fashion in loaded, intimate scenes. This heightens their power, and our sense of voyeuristically examining moments not meant to be seen.

This is sophisticated work for a young artist. At thirty-two, Parrott knows precisely what he wants to achieve, and executes with remarkable control. In tiny formats (as small as 10" x 14"), his images use color, composition, and painterly precision to recreate strangely compelling scenes. His palette is restrained and atmospheric - grey, black, khaki, olive, deep red, and a dusty, darkened rose predominate. Surfaces are flat but luminous, as Parrott works in oil on canvas and paper, and also draws in charcoal.

Parrot frequently divides the picture plane into vertical halves, thirds, fourths, and fifths. His use of rectangular doorways, walls, and backdrops further enhances the searing solitude and implacable separation among his characters. This alienation is already suggested by faces that turn away, and stances that convey hesitation, self-protection, and disaffection.

In *Siren Song*, a nude couple embraces on a bed, while an androgynous figure plays flute nearby. A fourth figure watches. *The Fallen* depicts a woman with her back to a partially clothed man. The silence between them is palpable, and the body language, vaguely menacing.

Although they cannot seem to connect on an emotional level, Parrott's subjects are blessed with the assets of youth – physiques are solid, taut, and pleasing. The element of attraction is undeniable, yet what holds us is the artist's skill: satiny surfaces that sharpen the effect of distance, and a slight broadening of cheekbones and jaw lines, emphasizing strength and homogeneity in the faces. We find kinship here with Alex Katz's portraits. But Parrott's archetypal figures play out specific scenarios, reflecting an uneasy coexistence of sensuality and isolation.



© Christopher Parrott Siren Song (2006)



© Christopher Parrott The Fallen (2006)

This is open-ended tension – there is no obvious danger, no clear cause for apathy or alienation.

What *is* clear is Parrott's sobering viewpoint on contemporary relationships. In *Execution Style*, figures glance away from each other, and the viewer. Only one character, a young woman, faces us, with arms raised behind her head and an expression that is both imploring and accepting. She seems fully aware that they are *all* held at metaphorical gunpoint in front of a firing squad. In *Fix*, Parrott snapshots two young women preparing to go out for an evening. A meticulous charcoal drawing, it is a voyeuristic glimpse into a private moment: one woman fingers her hair while the other reaches into her dress to adjust a breast. Oblivious to each other (or anyone who may be watching), the effect is both seductive and chilling.

In Parrott's universe, relationships are fluid and temporal, on the brink of unspoken words and endings. Contact is difficult, if not unattainable. We are reminded that youth is both beautiful and brooding. Contemporary culture further isolates and anesthetizes, even in the most intimate settings.

Whatever narrative the viewer weaves into these works, we can't help but pay attention. This is talent preparing for big things. It's already impossible to look away.

- Debra Wolf, September 2006



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