

Still

Hendrik Kerstens and Robert Polidori

Sultan Gallery, Kuwait City, Kuwait

Curated by Mark Dean

Exhibition dates: October 6th – November 17th, 2015

Opening reception: Tuesday October 6th from 7-9pm, The Sultan Gallery Kuwait City

The Sultan Gallery is pleased to present *Still* an exhibition of photographs by Hendrik Kerstens (Dutch) and Robert Polidori (Canadian) curated by Miami Beach based art dealer Mark Dean.

In the immortal words of William Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." This exhibition brings together two artists who explore how we understand the past through the present. Both employ photography in ways that deliberately subvert conventional notions about the photograph's relationship to reality. Instead of capturing a "decisive moment" or freezing a slice of time, they adopt the language of classical painting to explore a more layered sense of history. This results in images that appear to exist simultaneously in the past and present.

Hendrik Kerstens achieves this feat by drawing on his Dutch heritage. He photographs his daughter using painterly lighting, poses and costumes that deliberately evoke the portraits of Dutch Golden Age painters like Johannes Vermeer and Frans Hals. Presented so that her porcelain features emerge luminously from plain dark backdrops, Paula Kerstens locks the viewer in a timeless gaze that might have emerged from seventeenth century Holland. But a closer look at these photographs reveals historical anomalies. They are composed with contemporary props: Such objects as white plastic or pink tissue paper have been skillfully manipulated to suggest details of period costumes. And because Kerstens has been pursuing this subject for twenty years, we also see time unfold in a literal way as the fresh-faced young girl matures into a beautiful young woman.

Robert Polidori layers history in another way. A photographer renowned for disturbingly beautiful studies of subjects like post Katrina New Orleans, the crumbling elegance of contemporary Havana or the abandoned schools, offices and homes destroyed by the Chernobyl nuclear accident, he here presents the works that set him on his path. Beginning in 1985 and continuing for the next twenty years, Polidori documented the ongoing restoration of the 17th century Palace of Versailles. His photographs from this series have the scale and architectural sweep of history paintings, and like Kerstens, he uses light and color to underscore the images' painterly aura. But instead of providing narrative dramas, his photographs are peopled by a disconcerting mix of construction materials, upended royal portrait paintings, security cameras and discolored walls. In place of the clarity we expect from a museum presentation, historical distances are collapsed and jumbled. Taking us behind the scenes, Polidori offers a case study of the way that historical consciousness is constructed.

Still, the title of this show, points to a double meaning. On one hand, it captures a contemplative serenity that links these images to the painterly traditions of a less hurried time. But the word also suggests a vision of time in which the past is embedded in the present: still here, still living, still relevant. Kerstens and Polidori meld painting and photography, history and contemporary life, fact and fiction to suggest the ways that memory is forever being shaped and reshaped by the imagination.

About the curator:

Mark Dean established DEAN PROJECT gallery with the opening of the public gallery in September 2007. DEAN PROJECT's original gallery location consisted of a 2,000-sqft gallery building located directly beside the P.S.1/MoMA Museum in Long Island City NY. In October 2010, after three years in LIC, the gallery relocated to 511 West 25th Street in Manhattan. After six years in NYC the gallery has relocated to Miami Beach Florida. Over the past eight years DEAN PROJECT has exhibited around the world at over sixty contemporary art fairs. From the time the gallery opened the public program has consisted of fifty public gallery exhibitions to date including solo, group and annual independent curated summer invitational.

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