

TILLOU FINE ART

Beautiful Maneuvers, Mimi Tompson

Chance meetings and long reflective gazes -- this kind of random communication usually goes unrecorded. Holidays and birthdays are the predictable and documented hallmarks in our life. But the meetings and glances, the large painful silences and giddy laughter, and the breathless anticipation of all of the above punctuate our lives in a way organized events never can. The interior memories we grasp are the real journal of record. They spell out a history of our own personal life that, if not completely accurate, is true.

John Spinks takes rectangles and squares for his yarn and spins a jagged paean to life as it is and could be. His story is one of exploration -- he creates his own topsy-turvy world where the Soviet Union sits northwest of Spain, and text swirls about in the sea in between. The text is sometimes as personal as his father's diaries, or as random and poignant as a list of foreclosed properties with the word "home" placed dead center. With a Jesuit passion for detail, Spinks utilizes and reveres the used and the overlooked. A small leaf sits in the center of the painting NONFICTION. Tender and delicate, the leaf holds the center of the painting like a rock. The power of the leaf's shape outmaneuvers its decaying skin.

The maps place and displace the viewer geographically. Countries are torn apart and scattered, floating off like three card monte customers when the police whistle blows. Spinks has created his own version of global warming, and his land masses change position with scientific and mystical purpose. Sometimes map pieces fulfill their geometric duty, balancing the composition, or they give the viewers roads or bays or some means of egress. In Captiva the map is so present, and the water so big, you are able to smell the salt and feel the heat. Spinks has a visceral connection to the land of his Anglo-Irish childhood, as well as the terrain of the dissected countries in his paintings whose sediment is represented by graphic calculation.

Spinks takes both a romantic and knowing look at the modernist canon. His appreciation of form for form's sake is the underpinning of many of his paintings. But that exercise is shaken and stirred by his use of word play and ironic text choices. In Portal, a painted portal is filled with pages from his father's 1943 wartime diary. Charts, statistics, and a revolver serial number sit in what looks like a delicate cave, their reality and hardness dispelling the softness around them.

These paintings exist like visually luscious scrapbook pages. They reveal non-specific histories with specific details, creating a skewed but compassionate world for the viewer to contemplate. We are a part of the world that Spinks describes, and it is a fantastic world -- full of emotion, great natural beauty, war, unspoken feelings and the occasional right look at the right time which causes a connection. Spinks takes us through the looking glass in order to tell us a story. He asks us to look, and to think. Perhaps he wants us to see, to paraphrase the 1914 Endeavor expedition's photographer, how a mass of ice flowers in Antarctica illuminated by the sun can look like a field of pink carnations.

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