

## Bradley Wood and Nataalka Husar at Angell Gallery

Impressionism and the Der Blaue Reiter movements stand out in art history for radical painting technique and use of color in combination with a critique of a newly developing society. Walking into Angell Gallery has a certain déjà-vu, nostalgia feeling where you can't pinpoint exactly what you are looking at. It is neither a Matisse studio painting, yet there are references to it in the spatial dimension of the painting, nor is it a Kirchner masterpiece with lengthy women in a crowded city, however the long legs of the ladies portrayed mimic the former.



Installation view of Bradley Wood, *Scenes from a Soap Opera* at Angell Gallery, 2016. Courtesy of the artist

This uncanny imagery is part of the series called *Scenes from a Soap Opera* by Bradley Wood. Narrating scenes of the super rich in lavish interiors, Wood plays on the dichotomy between seduction and ignorance. His characters are placed in social situations, for instance in "Silver Fox," a mysterious man in a suit, smokes a cigarette in the foreground, while being surrounded by a group of beautiful young women in the background. The face of the main figure is uninterested in whatever is happening around him and that emotion transfers to the viewer himself, who becomes almost indifferent to the work. The bright colors on the paintings behind him and the vivid dresses of the women revamp the viewer's attention and make him examine each and every detail. Similar to soap operas – there are characters you love and characters you hate, and you have to pay attention to understand and overcome the dramatic climax of the plot.



Bradley Wood, Silver Fox, oil on canvas, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy of Angell Gallery

The viewer is thrown into discourse by Wood's works: whether to praise and covet the expensive lifestyle or to condemn it. With the emergence of "big money" from technology, finance, and entrepreneurship – there is a subtle critique of ignorant and wasteful spending. The parallel with Der Blaue Reiter is not only seen in the subject matter of Wood's work, but also in the form and color of the objects. The large areas of vibrant color – as the yellow in "Lounging on Mies van der Rohe" and the pastel blue of "Silver Fox" – are what create the nostalgic Impressionist (and partly Fauvist) feeling. The viewer recognizes an iconic technique and is quickly drawn in by the overwhelming tones to examine the content.



Bradley Wood, Shark, oil on canvas, 68 x 100 inches. Courtesy of Angell Gallery

Seductive female figures featured in almost every painting play a huge role in Bradley Wood's painting. In "Shark," you have a fashionista girl in a short, leopard-printed dress, sitting next to what looks like her marine collection. Fierce and determined, she is a shark in the world, yet remains feminine and gentle. A more radical depiction of the seductive woman appears in "Casa," where three women are lounging around nude near the fireplace. Sex and money are popular themes in pop culture and almost any Hollywood industry – noticeably areas which Wood draws inspiration from.



Bradley Wood, *Casa*, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches. Courtesy of Angell Gallery

The “projects room” of the gallery has a small surprise that leaves the viewer a little bit hungry for more – it houses *Galley*, a sneak peak of Nataalka Husar’s exhibition to come. The structure of the show is very interesting in. The titles and captions of the works are hand written in pencil on the walls, and the representational paintings are pasted into books entitled “Burden Innocence.” Husar takes a comedic angle on the themes of history and social hypocrisy, using her family experiences and Ukrainian roots as the basis.



Nataalka Husar, *Firing the Muse*, 2011 (left); *Endless*, 2012 (middle) and *Trespasser*, 2012, detail (right), each acrylic on medical linen bound artist book, 9 x 10 inches. Photo: Elizaveta Mironova

Just as in Wood’s show, women play a crucial role in Husar’s works. Each depiction of a woman – in a conventional role such as a nurse or a flight attendant – is mesmerizingly relatable. The body language and facial expression revealing the vulnerability of the character. In combination with a very small canvas size, the experience becomes profoundly personal as the viewer comes to relate with each character. “Poetic Justice,” mirrors the biblical compositions of Judith with Holofernes’ head but with a comical tone – depicting a flight attendant with the head of a man on a silver platter. Each one of us knows how irritating and maddening some passengers can be, and it is easy to relate to the stewardess who has an evil yet pleased smile on her face.



Nataalka Husar, *Poetic Justice*, 2012, acrylic on medical linen bound artist book, 9 x 10 inches.  
Courtesy of Angell Gallery

Wood's two-meter-tall works and Husar's tiny book paintings provide a beautiful and variant representation of women in the 21st century. The former brings out the dramatic and almost shallow aspects of society while the latter pulls on engrained historic elements of womanhood. Both Wood and Husar are excellent colorists and mesmerizing painters.

Elizaveta Mironova

\*Exhibition information: Bradley Wood, *Scenes from a Soap Opera* and Nataalka Husar, *Galley*, November 4 – 26, 2016, Angell Gallery, 1444 Dupont St., Unit 15, Toronto. Gallery hours: Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 5 pm.