

Karen Carson gives farming sex appeal at Rosamund Felsen

By David Pagel | December 19, 2013



Karen Carson
Big Red (Case International #435). 2013
Acrylic on unstretched canvas
10' 2" x 12' 4 1/2"
Photo: Grant Mudford

By the time Monet got around to painting pictures of haystacks, viewers pretty much knew that his works were not about farming.

All kinds of subjects, including perception, time, workmanship and mortality, as well as paint's capacity to make and convey meaning, played into the Impressionist's images of life in the French countryside.

ROSAMUND FELSEN GALLERY

Times have changed — and not for the better.

Today it seems that people look at pictures and see little more than what they depict, without bothering to pay attention to the hows or whys of the process. At Rosamund Felsen Gallery, Karen Carson's new paintings of tractors, balers, combines and swathers go out of their way to make you wonder about everything Monet's paintings of haystacks bring to mind — and a whole lot more.

Think of Carson as an Impressionist for the digital age. Her bold Pop paintings transform the instant access and immediate gratification of the Internet into a slow-growth love poem to sowing grains and making hay, as well as to other things that sustain us, like beauty and truth, not to mention pleasure and the sense of a job well done.

Porn accounts for more than its fair share of Internet traffic, and Carson's sexy pictures of farm equipment are not blind to that fact. Her crisply rendered, lusciously brushed and smartly composed pictures are also acutely attuned to humor, especially to how funny it is to try to make farming sexy.

Yet Carson does so in spades, turning monster-truck-scale vehicles into heroic emblems of strength,

perseverance and integrity. Bread-winning is for sissies, these juicy acrylics scream; real men and women grow tons of the stuff and then ship it all over the globe, where it feeds people from all walks of life.

The Marlboro man would not be caught dead in the climate-controlled cabs of the highly specialized vehicles that Carson's paintings portray as if they were superstars — the Rolls-Royces of agrarian equipment. The same goes for soldiers and the rest of us who admire battle tanks, attack helicopters and nuclear submarines: special-purpose vehicles designed, built and deployed to kill others efficiently.

Carson's big, beautiful paintings invite us to wonder what the world would look like if sex and death did not preoccupy so much of the social imagination. As a painter, she gives physical form to a vision in which sustenance — and its diesel-driven accouterments — are the stars of the show.

Rosamund Felsen Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave., Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, (310) 828-8488, through Jan. 4. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.rosamundfelsen.com through Jan. 4. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Source -> <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-art-review-karen-carson-at-rosamund-felsen-gallery-20131217,0,3211901.story>