

Kevin Paulsen - Press Release

The Healing of the Imagination

When the times are fragmented and uncertain, when violence and divisiveness dominate the airwaves, when greed and hype are the norm, it becomes the artist's responsibility to show us a better way. It becomes imperative for the artist to remind us, especially those who hunger for something greater than the norms of a media driven culture, that there is no necessity for such a situation to endure endlessly, as if human beings were incapable of having and cherishing a vision of a better way. For some artists, holding up a mirror to the world around in all its perverseness and squalor is the way of integrity and truth. For others, there is a primal awareness of the hidden nature of the soul whose longings for wholeness are every bit as real as the hard edges which the world is always pushing into our consciousness. Kevin Paulsen is an artist of the latter persuasion. His love of beauty is without apology; his vision of primordial wholeness, as something intrinsic to human hope and aspiration, is subversive to the ideologies of pessimism and nihilism. What welcome relief Mr. Paulsen provides! And he accomplishes his goals without bombast or moral posturing - with a sure and unassuming touch that underscores his confidence of outlook and power of artistic expression.

With Kevin Paulsen's work, one is ushered into a semi-tropical realm that is half mythical and half historical, a realm that nurtures and heals the imagination. In some of these works, one is taken back to a time apparently prior to the presence of man. In others, employing the same vocabulary of lush, paradisaical trees and semi-mythical creatures, there are signs of civilization, sailing boats, for instance, calling forth rich historical associations of man as explorer and pathfinder, as merchant and artisan, of man most happy and at ease with himself when not driven by the compulsion to dominate his fellow man or to acquire wealth as the ultimate end of life. In both sets of paintings, one is being offered an alternative to the narrative we are all too familiar with - the dreary narrative of violence and exploitation devoid of wonder, appreciation or gratitude for nature's beauty and provision and how nature so unobtrusively and faithfully cooperates with the artistic impulses

of man. In this new narrative, we are set free to begin over with a new set of assumptions, one where greed and fear - and angry recrimination as well - have no purchase, can gain no traction in the imagination of the beholder. His appeal disarms us because there is no haranguing or arm-twisting. Without fanfare or warning, one simply enters into a new landscape where the fear and paranoia ever lurking just beneath the surface of contemporary life in the 21st Century suddenly make no sense.

Mr. Paulsen works from a deliberately simplified set of visual themes and color palette. In this voluntary restriction he discovers freedom and energy, the release of an exuberance that effortlessly renews itself and allows for endless variation. At the same time, Mr. Paulsen adds a whole new level of complexity - i.e. reality - by his choice of medium. The look is that of a fresco with uneven edges (actually polystyrene topped with a thin veneer of pigmented plaster) floating within a frame. Cracks and fissures and areas of distress are made part the surface in a way that introduces a quality of unpredictability. Thus, the passage of time, with its inevitable poignancy, and its inevitable gains and losses, is conveyed with a tactile directness, like coming upon ancient ruins. One is viscerally reminded that a vision, however beautiful and healing, has to be lived out in real time subject to real forces of contingency and risk.

An interesting subtext to Mr. Paulsen's work is how his paintings recall the history of art and pay gracious homage to man's natural decorative instinct. In a subtle evocation of the flow of artistic expression over the centuries, one experiences the quality of ancient Roman frescos along with that of the work of early American itinerant artists in a seamless unit of artistic experience that is fresh and original.

Mr. Paulsen's work succeeds on many levels at once: as civilized vision, as decorative splendor, as narrative in which each individual viewer provides the story line, as kind nourishment and powerful cues for the imagination, as revelation of a world rich in hope and possibility. He opens up a world that we are gladly and gratefully willing to explore.