

ART AND CAKE

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Wendell Gladstone's "Fever Pitch" at Shulamit Nazarian

By Eve Wood



Wendell Gladstone, Moon Shadow, Photo courtesy of Shulamit Nazarian Gallery

Wendell Gladstone's "Fever Pitch"

through February 17

Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles

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Wendell Gladstone's first exhibition at Shulamit Nazarian represents an amalgam of gorgeously rendered surreal mindscapes that defy traditional understanding. Reminiscent of Charles Garabedian's ominous and psychologically charged imagery, Gladstone's work engages the viewer in a deeply sensuous, albeit dangerous psychological terrain where anything goes.

Working in acrylic on large scale canvas, Gladstone's images constitute a complicated array of fundamental human emotions from rage to passion to deep sadness, yet at the core of each of these paintings is a deeply felt human connection, as though Gladstone was trying to work through his own disjointed associations with his own humanity. All of the works are fiercely enigmatic and proclaim themselves in bold, acidic colors. There is also a palpable tension expressed within each painting as most of the images juxtapose male and female figures twisting into one another or at odds. Works like *Liminal Lady* comprise a new take on Botticelli's *Venus*, where the central figure is multiplied in a myriad of acid like colors. Yet, it is the action of the pouring of the water from a bottle that is most fascinating here as the "water" transmogrifies halfway down the painting into liquid silver that takes on strange shapes, like a sun hat and a starfish, finally wrapping around one woman's arm and falling off into the sea below her. Again the face of the figure is reminiscent of Diego Rivera's circular modernist faces.



This image as with other of Gladstone's works is psychedelic, post modernist and primitive all at the same time. The narrative structures proposed by these paintings are gorgeous, riotous and unforgiving as in *Snail's Pace*, where a woman floats naked above a dinner table where a red haired leprechaun-like man holds the woman's toe from below all the while spewing out an array of colors from his mouth while the floating woman pulls the other man's head into multiple versions of itself. The central figure at the table appears to be a woman whose face is a mosaic. Again, there is tension between the male and female energies and the female force is the stronger of the two, presiding over the men below.

Indeed in most of Gladstone's images the woman is shown as powerful and all seeing, all knowing, as in *Voodoo*, where a man is shown drinking from a cup held up by a woman who proceeds to drop a dead fish into the chalice. Again, the male figure does not see what is happening all around him, but is focused only on the cup directly in front of his face. Often the male is seen in relief, his body less defined, as in *Solid Gold* where a man and woman are seen dancing, yet only the woman's body is flesh colored and human like. In this work as in all of the paintings there is fluid fleeing from human bodies, a breast that becomes a fountain, a fingernail exhaling green mist, and is it this ecstatic gesture repeated again and again that creates another common thread between the works, another secret hidden narrative.