

# ARTICULATION AND ICONOGRAPHY

## *The Paintings of Bryan LeBoeuf*

Talent is privileged; it excludes. Talent is undemocratic; in an egalitarian world it has an unfair advantage. During the past century talent in the arts was marginalized into a craft chauvinist ghetto. But with the institutionalization of the avant-garde, progressivism is increasingly being called into question. Can the century old tropes of the avant-garde really be considered progressive when the rules for their production have become so familiar and systematic that they've become entrenched in academia?

Bryan LeBoeuf's work addresses these issues by embracing the mastery of iconography and articulation head on and in equal measure. His work seems to go back in time to ask, "Did we throw the baby out with the bathwater?" LeBoeuf applies old master paint articulation to contemporary narratives to re-contextualize that language as progressive in the contemporary art discourse. LeBoeuf seduces the audience with his masterful paint handling into a complex world of abject despair, mass euphoria, sexual inquiry and tender alienation. From the intimate to the monumental, one enters LeBoeuf's world almost without knowing it to encounter references to art history, popular culture and autobiography.

Unlike some of his contemporaries who use either irony as a built-in disclaimer or an ostrich-like neo-neo-classicism as a way to avoid the world, LeBoeuf refuses to gild his work in tongue-in-cheek asides or bury his head in the sand.

In "The Family Landscape" the sun rises on the perfect family paradigm. A young boy surreptitiously joins his parents in bed. He lifts their blankets to discover his place in their relationship making a pyramidal shape, which echoes the triangulation of the mother/father/child dynamic. The child's anxiety speaks to the super charged power of this moment of sexual individuation and Oedipal divisiveness.

Identical men, one asleep the other sitting pensively by his side, inhabit "Rorschach." Is this a metaphor for insomnia or a meditation on the subconscious mind? Is the sitting figure the spiritual manifestation of the recently deceased prone figure? The viewer has to decide for himself and ultimately this is LeBoeuf's greatest strength. He never gives you so much that you don't have to participate or so little that you don't trust him.

In "The Mosh Pit," the chaos of the dance floor becomes a Bosch-like descent into a slam dance hell where a cruciform reveler is carried away on a river of disembodied hands and arms. This is a contemporary last judgment that never loses its connection to either the history of art or the world as we know it.

Cold linoleum, bleak paneling and a blinding headache greet the protagonist of "End Sight." This is a road picture for transient America, a reflection on isolation, cultural disintegration and an inability to connect to the world. This is a picture about late nights, empty bottles and endless, aimless driving. This is a scene that no one would want to enter unless it was rendered so seductively that you couldn't help yourself.

And this is where LeBoeuf's talent gives him a leg up on the competition. It is through this perfect confluence of iconography and articulation that LeBoeuf makes his case for a re-examination of the power of painting. The sheer beauty of his masterful manipulation of paint can, almost without our knowing it, take us places we might otherwise never choose to go.