

schmick
contemporary

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SCHTICK

nina**RADONJA**

The story runs that Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into competition, Zeuxis exhibiting a [painted] picture of some grapes, so true to nature that the birds flew up to the wall of the stage. Parrhasios then displayed a picture of a linen curtain, realistic to such a degree that Zeuxis, elated by the verdict of the birds, cried out that now at last his rival must draw the curtain and show his picture. On discovering his mistake he surrendered the prize to Parrhasios and deluded himself, a painter.¹

Schtick is imitation.

Schtick is artifice.

Schtick is palpable mimetic output of distorted input.

Schtick is a self-referential anecdote of the *real (art)world*.

Nina Radonja hijacks visual iconography and ubiquitous aesthetics as the impetus for her works. The foundational elements of Radonja's paintings are distorted renderings of an unmistakable figure. The blurred interference of source imagery suggests a journey of mediation, a circulation, or in the words of Hito Steyerl, a *poor image*, "a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun and distraction."²

The works are skillfully painted, conjuring a mimetic imitation of warped visuals. These paintings consciously sit in relation to their preceding canon of western art history. The painted illusion alludes to the post-renaissance tradition of pictorial verisimilitude. The flattening disruption of the pictorial plane and the subversion of expectation aligns with the modernist's formalist endeavour of moving from looking *through*, to looking *at* the painted surface and its content. And just as the camera triggered a paradigm shift in the way these modernist artists engaged with their medium, so does the internet generate new ways of thinking, interpreting, and painting the world around us. Radonja's paintings are like the next iteration of photo-realism, a kind of computer-optic-realism.

¹ Secundus, Plinius. *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on The History of Art, 77-79 AD*. Translated by E. Sellers. London: Macmillan and Co., LTD. 1896. P.111

² Steyerl, Hito. 'In Defence of the Poor Image', *e-flux journal*, no. 10 (November 2009), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>

The adornments infer a flatness to the image underneath. Radonja reminds us of the power of computer-optics and visual information, and how, as Nora Khan puts it, “stupidly, we wrap ourselves around devices with a cute aesthetic without thinking to check if it has teeth.”³ This tension that is strung between the foreground and background suspends a foreboding subtext. The works calls into question the way knowledge and truth may be distorted or entirely generated. As Irmgard Emmelhainz suggests, there has been a “transformation of the world into images... while images now participate in forming worlds, they have become forms of thought constituting a new kind of knowledge.”⁴ If generated representations are becoming links in the epistemological chain of truth, we should be aware of the way they are shaping our future.

The real magic in this show is the lack of object. Radonja’s paintings unite with the physical walls. The illusion softly undulates with the contours of old paint, directly masking the white cube beneath it. The works are like a fragile spell, gently hovering, enforcing a suspension of disbelief, until, on further inspection, the delicate membrane between image and reality ruptures. The viewer is then catapulted back into the physical space we occupy, left in a subtle state of shock, and perhaps even resentment, as we realise we have been duped like Zeuxis. The lack of object challenges the meaning of painting, of art, of object, of value and of truth. What is a painting if not an object that can be moved, sold and owned? What is real in a world constructed by images? What is true when experience is mediated by information? These paintings will cease to exist in reality but their legacy is written in the data that constructs the HEIC files we will collect and inscribe on the cloud forever.

Annabelle McEwen

³ Nora Khan, “I Need It To Forgive Me,” *Site 1. The Logic Gate: the Politics of the Artificial Mind*, (2017): Glass Bead, <https://www.glass-bead.org/article/i-need-it-to-forgive-to-me/>

⁴ Irmgard Emmelhainz, “Conditions of Visuality Under the Anthropocene and Images of the Anthropocene to Come,” *e-flux journal*, no. 63 (March 2025), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60882/conditions-of-visibility-under-the-anthropocene-and-images-of-the-anthropocene-to-come/>

From left to right

Nina Radonja

Role-Play

Acrylic, oil, paper, tape

45 x 43 cm

POA

Nina Radonja

Baggie

Acrylic

3 x 2 cm

POA

Nina Radonja

The Star II

Acrylic, oil, stickers

45 x 43 cm

POA

Nina Radonja

The Star

Acrylic, oil, stickers

45 x 43 cm

POA

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