

Echoes Steeped in Memory

Echoes of the past reverberate through tunnels of time, resonating in Ardyn Halter's canvases and prints, *The Family I Never Knew*. They are steeped in memory, memory the artist knows can never be his.

Echoes of family, obscured by darkness, ghostly, opaque, struggling back to life through the lens of his struggle. Halter is a man in the middle, a bridgehead between those who live and those who wanted to live, but did not survive. He connects us tentatively, to them. He gives them a voice and knows that he cannot give them life. For the voice is of loss. We can confirm little more than that they once lived.

These are echoes of a lost civilization, of an everyday living, breathing community, poised to be remembered, to be seen again. They are icons that give shape and meaning to existence, to a life submerged in amnesia. They claw out to us from those paintings, reminding us that once they were there, a part of everyday life.

There are echoes of the perpetrators too. They do not appear in human form, but in letters and words, hard, crisp, forceful, framing the people or veiling them, ever-present, obscuring our view, dominating and interrupting. Their language is laid in rigid lines over real lives, their ideas, their ideals, their hatred imposing, disrupting.

Halter, has struggled to re-present his family, to conjure them from darkness and give them form again. He is removed by a generation, a survivor of a kind. He is there in the paintings himself. If you look closely you can see him reflected in the canvas, alongside the relatives he never knew, frustrated at how little he can know them, knowing he can never breathe life back into them.

His paintings are calm and dignified, sad eyes staring out at you. But then you see that they are disturbed. And they disturb one, as their subject disturbed the artist. One is unsettled by them, their conscience poking out of darkness, whirling around the canvas, life sucked out of them. These are images of people from happier times, transposed into the context of hateful parentheses, vile slogans intending genocide. Suddenly the people become victims, steeled to their fate, lonely people, lost, lifeless, flat, – flat as photographs – hoping, longing for a different outcome to their lives.

In drawing them back from oblivion, Ardyn Halter makes us conscious of the scale of loss. These are the family he never knew and can never know. They are hazy in the sense that they do not belong, never belonged to his memory. These eleven works are one man's struggle against amnesia and his fight against obfuscation. There are eleven paintings, eleven prints, in all. They claim a difficult terrain, poised in the space between oblivion and commemoration, powerful in their honesty and candor.

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