

PRESIDENT'S REPORT SEPTEMBER 2025

PHOTOGRAPHY AND PAINTING (Part 3)



Marlene Dumas, Miss January 1994

Continuing our exploration of photography and painting, we can examine the work of three further artists who put photographic images at the heart of their practice.

MARLENE DUMAS



The Painter

Marlene Dumas is one of the most influential artists in the international art world of today. In her early seventies, her list of achievements, awards and exhibitions is staggering. She recently set an auction record for a work by a living female artist. The painting (*Miss January*) fetched \$13.6 million, confirming her as a major force.



Evil is Banal



Genetic Longing

Dumas was born in South Africa but moved to the Netherlands in the 1970s. At a time when most significant art is jokey, knowing and loaded with art historical allusions, Dumas stands out as a serious practitioner. Her themes are religion, politics, relationships, children, family and death. Her paintings are simple, powerful, earnest statements, sometimes verging on the abstract. She works in oil on canvas and ink on paper. Her imagery is derived from photographs. The sources are newspapers, magazines, Polaroids and pornography. She doesn't copy the images; there is no attempt to replicate. She uses them as a starting point, as inspiration, finding what Susan Sontag called the 'punctus', the emotional and graphic centre of the image, the telling detail that captures the viewer's attention and leads their awareness into the picture. The photographic sources also give the artist a sort of armature on which she can improvise and proceed with spontaneity. The often monochrome palette recalls the black and white of the photographs imparting an historical 'documentary' quality, giving a disturbing immediacy to the work.



Stern, 2004



Lucy, 2004

Growing up in South Africa during the apartheid era had a profound influence on Dumas' vision. It's not very cheerful.



Child



Helena

TONY SCHERMAN



Bonaparte



Chasing Napoleon

Tony Scherman was a Canadian painter in the mould of Chuck Close and Jenny Saville. He was attracted to giant images of faces as subject matter and compositional device. Unlike Close and Saville, he didn't paint himself or his friends. Rather, he explored the wider world of history, mythology and popular culture. Oddly, like an amateur painter, he painted flower pieces, wildlife, landscapes, film stills, or whatever he pleased - always a mistake.



Hecate as Stag



Conversations with the Devil

Scherman worked entirely from photographs. These were not his own but rather those already in the public domain. He kept an illustrator's 'morgue' of photographs catalogued alphabetically and arranged according to subject matter. His output of paintings was organised in series, such as the body of work devoted to Napoleon Bonaparte based on photographs of Marlon Brando.

His use of images of film stars and other recognisable figures brings him at times quite close to Pop Art, as practised by Andy Warhol and Peter Blake. Unlike Pop Art, Scherman's work has a rich old masterish quality which sets it apart. Scherman was an adherent of a fashion in the 1970s to resurrect the ancient art of encaustic or painting with hot wax. Jasper Johns was another pop artist who experimented with the lost technique. Scherman used wax in a virtuosic manner to create images that focussed on the dense surfaces he was creating.



About 1865



Thatcher

Encaustic allows the painter to build layers of transparent colour with a strong sculptural dimension. It encourages improvisation and reworking.

This ancient medium enjoys a present-day revival. The basic equipment is a hotplate and small metal containers. Shallow cat food containers are ideal. Beeswax is heated on the hotplate and dry pigment is added to the melted wax, producing a coloured paint-like liquid. This is then applied to the support with a variety of implements and brushes. It can be reheated and manipulated *ad infinitum*. It dries almost immediately. Everything that one needs can be had from Cornelissen's.

Scherman worked on a very large scale, with freedom and invention, allowing the wax to splash and dribble and reveal previous layers, as well as being subjected to violent procedures. The image is a record of its own history.

AUDREY FLACK



Rich Art 1973

Another artist whose work represents a different kind of time capsule is Audrey Flack. She was a pioneering photorealist in the 1970s, creating large-scale paintings of carefully organised still life arrangements. Flack photographed the tableaux and then projected to get the slides on to the canvas, drawing in pencil. She then applied the colour using an airbrush. This was a time-consuming and intense task requiring skill and patience. Her aim was to create paintings that had the inner glow of a slide projected onto a screen. Curiously, Flack, Scherman and Warhol had all painted Marilyn Monroe. Marlene Dumas has also painted Marilyn Monroe.