ALMINE RECH

Gerasimos Floratos
Domes

Sep 6 — Oct 12, 2024 | Shanghai

Almine Rech Shanghai is pleased to announce *Domes*, Gerasimos Floratos' third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 6 to October 12, 2024.

Welcome to pure hybridity, that exquisite oxymoron of honest contradiction at the heart of Gerasimos Floratos's art. Here that which is essential, elemental, and primal collides in a chorus of the unexpected, singular truths belied by the lie of the multitude, authenticity earned like a scarred and battered street cred, the most direct mode of communication visual culture can afford turned like a wiener on a food cart by the hubbub of it all, heard above all the nonsense because it too is an anxious form of deep listening. His pictures are like the contemplation of an assault, the mark making of what leaves its mark but never signs its name, the self as reduced to an anonymous language of desperate gestures. In the city you can sleep through anything—screams, sirens and love songs, all the background noise of our deafening isolation; and in Floratos conjuring the silence deep within the din, thin as the oxygen in our thick-fumed air, these are the sounds that make it through, that wake us from our uncomfortable dreams, uncertain and fleeting, a thrill tinged with dread, the late night "Lullaby of Broadway".

A lifelong denizen of Times Square, Gerasimos came to know the gritty reality of what has now become a myth as not just a fact but a habitually normal one by whatever extraordinary measure because when you grow up in it that becomes all you know. Too loud, too tall and too busy, most sane people could never imagine living in a place like New York City, let alone in the belly of the beast as the Deuce most certainly is; but this dreamscape, red lit, reeking and shadowed, is no more of a deranged fantasy than the comforts of suburbia or the rugged individualism of the Wild West are to those of abiding urbanism. Floratos dances along this chasm of misperception, a high-wire funambulist doing a devilish turn in the chorus line of aspirations that hang above the sidewalks like overripe fruit, a poet of the ordinary trying to find a rhyme for home in the language of the spectacle. And damn can the man sing. These paintings make me swoon, composed in the skeleton key of that back door in the piss-stained alley that only the locals know, not a password to get you in, just an attitude. But if you want to sing along, the lyrics go something like this...

Once upon a time a high school kid worked the late-night shift at his family's delicatessen by the hub, in the sweaty crotch of the crux, at the crossroads where the world comes to visit and act like bewildered tourists, deviant predators or raving lunatics because they left their decency and dignity behind like unnecessary baggage. They come with their fever dreams and desires because they're stuck and realize all the normalcy they know is fucking boring. This kid, let's call him Gerasimos, must serve them because the place is always open and so is the door on the street—wide open like an invitation. It's an immigrant business thing, and if you're from New York it wouldn't surprise you to hear they are Greek-Americans. Staying in one place, that is stuck behind the counter, while the busy world spins around in its dizzy dementia, it must be a curious kind of stationary navigation, maybe like playing a game of dodgeball against a constantly shifting cast of characters whose intentions are no better than their aim. Times Square is a destination, and in the wee hours anything lit up and still open is a kind of destination within the destination for tourists and locals alike, a wayfare of wanderers, a place made for visitors that, on its margins, is a neighborhood like any other. And the funny thing is that this place is ultimately just as boring as life usually is, and the job is certainly as boring as any other crappy labor that employs most teens everywhere. This kid doesn't want to spend the rest of his life in that damn deli, he wants to be an artist, and unsure of just what that means he begins his own self-taught study of what art has been and imagines what it yet could be. There is no school for this kind of education. When things are slow, he makes drawings on the butcher paper with the condiments lying around, birthing new worlds out ketchup, mayo, mustard and imagination. I bet they were kind of disgusting and beautiful.

It's impossible with the frenetic energy, the density and visceral carving of space and form in Gerasimos Floratos's pictures not to think of the environs in which they were engendered. Indeed, they bleed like the night, florescent in feel yet muted in manner, luridly lawless according to its own rules, perpetrating the stray sensibilities awry in the social composition, benignly unconcerned and nonconformist with the dreamer's trespass of an intoxicated jay walker. But the showman's flashiness only half illuminates the cave where the shadows play, never fully disclosed nor unclothed, a wink rather than a glare, blinkered like the tease of a peep show. So much is left lurking, distant echoes muffled by memory. It's all less neon than narcolepsy, a perpetual dusk where the sunlight cannot reach the asphalt between the constructions, more ancestral and personal than we recognize these spaces to be. Yes, they move to the beat of the city, but they hesitate too, stuck in their own time somewhere just outside the present. Don't look for the landmarks or expect the showtunes, Floratos is mining a psychological place that cannot be found in any tourist map or guidebook. Sure, we can feel the pulse of the Deuce, but so too do we sense the nocturnal ennui and existential dread of that young man killing time behind the counter at the family shop, the intensity of the idle, the way that art can be a kind of map-making drawing the lines of escape where impossible dreams point to waiting possibilities.

Floratos is never so much literal as he is lyrical, and his journey—at once liminal and visceral—is an amalgam of the real world and the inner space it occupies, something both physical and mental in the tradition of Situationist psychogeography. This is the nature of his hybridity, the mash-up mélange that constitutes its own mutant anatomy as it compounds complication yet clusters with an indivisible singularity. His is a cartography of the flow where the landscape and the body meet in some awkward embrace, form spirited along by the flux, so many things meeting and colliding, a congested and irascible multitude that resists pastiche as it celebrates heterogeneity. He grabs at so much, eager and greedy, an ambition that flirts with failure. Never set in stone even when the paint has dried, Gerasimos is culling the evidence, the residual effects of the event, using these ghostlike and nascent vestiges to outline the shape shifting of our exquisite corpse like the forensics of a chalk drawing before the body is hauled away. Portraits too they are, the faces that intrude as well as those we cling to in a sea of alienation, primal visages he often paints with his hands, archetypal pictographs of leering impurity, much like his notion of landscape simultaneously figurative and abstract. I'm reminded that Floratos once was, like lots of kids finding their way in the city, a writer of graffiti. You can see it still in his penchant for caricature, a street humor that snaps with the playground retort and cavorts like the mascots and mugs of comic styled graffiti characters. But he digs deeper, searching at last for spiritual dimensions and mystical meanings, not because he knows where he's going but because he can take pleasure in being lost.

The city that breathes of the paintings of Gerasimos Floratos is one of such radical reinventions that its very existence is one of perpetual mourning for its mythic past. I'd guess he'd be able to tell us a lot about the changes he's witnessed from being a little kid to now being a dad himself, but he might also know how Mickey Mouse likes to cop dope when he's done working for Disney on the Deuce and gives a mean blowjob when he's hard up for drug money. I don't know, but untethered to time as he inhabits this space Floratos knows well that the more things change the more they stay the same. Me, I wonder why no one seems to have that classic New Yawk accent anymore. Contemplative as his art may be, knowing how to hail a cab with a sweep of his arm rather than having to scream, the city still resounds in these paintings, a depiction far from the geometric dynamics of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie" or a Busby Berkeley chorus line. To see things fully now he recognizes that we have to give up a bit of clarity, to let the past overlay the present and to try to imagine the moment at hand as it might be seen in the future, to allow that experience remains gritty no matter how much we may try to clean it up or that the crushing effect of unrestrained capitalism can never quite extinguish the spirit. He wrestles with paint as the best do, to tackle the self, but for whatever he captures he does so by letting go, with the unmediated immediacy of a New York School Action Painter and the fabulous freestyle of a hip hop outlaw.

— Carlo McCormick, American cultural critic and curator