ALMINE RECH

Visages

Nov 7 — Dec 14, 2024 | New York, Upper East Side

Almine Rech New York is pleased to present Visages, a group exhibition on view from November 7 to December 14, 2024.

Why faces now? Well, because faces are always and forever compelling, as long as each of us has one and animal life manages to persist. But there are other reasons, too. Just last year, the surgeon general diagnosed an epidemic in this country of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection doing serious damage to individual and societal health. Faces and our relationship to them are increasingly undergoing a strange sea change, a transformational trip through the uncanny valley of AI, deep fakes, virtual reality, digital filters, hormone therapies, and the latest in cosmetic procedures. Gender and appearance have never been so fluid, performative, or androgynous. Technology has never been as life-like nor as thoroughly enmeshed in our lives. Because our present moment is submerged in an identity politics, verging on tribalism, that too often reduces identity to physiognomy and race, now is also a good time to think more expansively about the convergence of faces and being multifaceted, visages and vision vis-à-vis one's outlook on the world. Perhaps a show about portraiture and the human face now is also asking, why even face the now when it too often appears hostile, brutal, destructive, and irrational? Is it possible? Or, how can we face the times in which we find ourselves? Can we face it by representing some of its many faces?

> A face is an arresting encounter, a direct address, an unstable event and catalyst
> A face is a powerful trigger, Proustian or otherwise.
> A face is a forgettable or unforgettable arrangement of features that can leave a neurological imprint deeper than language.
> A face is a plaza, a playground, an open space, an invitation to enter.
> A face is a mask, an opacity, a front.
> A face is a poem written in time, all those lines with nature's own hand scripted.

In this show of portraits—each one distinct, by a different artist in their individual manner—the group assembled produces a scattershot crowd that suggests a tentative community, a speculative international public that is at turns discombobulated, bawdy, dispassionate, flirtatious, disfigured, fierce, chic, brooding, haunted, energetic, and absurd. One beautiful—or anguished, joyful, sleepy, withdrawn, thoughtful—face holds the whole world within its contours. And a face is always beautiful, the way all animals are beautiful because they exist, because it won out over countless hypothetical genetic alternatives and is real in the flesh. It is, as well, a partial portrait of this particular gallery and many of the artists who constitute it. Taken together, the works model an aspirational diversity, an array of coexisting differences in subject, approach, and look. The abundance and disparities, undergirded by a basic shared humanity, are the point. It bears reminding that there are a hundred ways to be diverse—in style, interest, attitude, touch, texture, framing, distortion, degrees of abstraction, varying sensitivities, experience, etc.

Beyond being anchored by canonical titans like Picasso and Warhol, historical figures like Tom Wesselman, Elaine de Kooning, and Marie Laurencin, and established contemporary legends like Richard Prince, Georg Baselitz, and Miriam Cahn, the precise composition of this show's long artist list matters somewhat less than the deeply resonant fact that there continues to be so many compelling and new artists' practices devoted to the depiction of people and their faces, each individual and fully realized, insisting on being met on their own terms.

Younger figures included here, like Jess Valice, Chloe Wise, Amanda Wall, Ines Longevial, and Ji Xin, carry on the timeless art historical tradition of portraiture but necessarily update it through their contemporary lens that considers selfies and other techniques of self-imaging, spiritual malaise, narcissism, gender politics, branding, and cultural globalism. Artists like Brian Calvin monumentalize the features of the human face as an open-ended set of flat, abstracted variables, while artists like Genieve Figgis and Cahn conjure unsettling and often ghoulish characters with novelistic richness. Fortunately, the challenge posed by our faces is never ending and there must be as many ways to draw, paint, photograph, or sculpt a face as there are faces to represent.

— Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, writer, curator, and publisher