



CRITICISM • EXHIBITIONS

Wednesday, March 23rd, 2011

Hippie Edenists Adrift: Judith Linhares at Edward Thorpe

by David Brody

Judith Linhares at Edward Thorpe

February 25 – April 2 2011

210 Eleventh Avenue, 6th Floor

between 24th and 25th streets

New York City, 212 691 6565



Judith Linhares, *Cave*, 2010. Oil on linen, 54 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Edward Thorpe Gallery.

A Judith Linhares painting is in a rush like a hurtling meteor. When the cosmic matter of archetype and myth burns up in the atmosphere of Linhares' earthy, wet swipes of vernacular, streaks of celestial afterimage persist. In "Riptide," Linhares' current show at Thorpe, nymphs and satyrs blaze as they plunge to the beaches and woods of what could be Northern California in the '60s. If, like me, you have admired but never quite gotten what Cézanne and Matisse were on about with their fleshy Arcadian bathers, Linhares' hippie Edenists adrift in nature's lyric panic may bring it closer to home.

Linhares was born in Los Angeles and has lived in New York for 30 years, but her artistic personality took hold in '60s and '70s San Francisco, when the Funk and street graphix scenes were colliding with a lineage of painterly abstraction already on strange-bedfellow terms with figuration. Bay Area progenitor David Park's troweled, dissonantly luminous bathers are the particular antecedents to Linhares' choppy, two-fisted but luscious beachcombers. She surfs Park's radical bluntness and speed while remelting his volcanic light into a demented fluorescence: frigid arctic greens, Fruit Loop violets, and tropical reds and oranges set off by fertile muds. In *Wave* (2010), three nudes cavort against translucent, backlit seas. The saturated sunset chromatics are capricious — illusionistic here, expedient there. One nymph dives in, unabashedly splaying her legs in naturist abandon. Linhares doesn't waste her powers on depicting underwater diffraction here, but trusts to the literal overlapping of strokes to gesticulate a higher pictorial mission; if the diving girl's hair, extending absurdly straight down, suggests Marsden Hartley's chesty fishermen, whose hair goes straight up, it's because they are cousins, polarities in sexual

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Cave (2010) features a goateed professorial type caressed by a nubile blonde admirer in a secluded Big Sur-ish sanctuary. A sure-handed still life of pineapple and daisy on reflecting pewter plate anchors the foreground (go-for-broke oils and gouaches of sweets and flowers, as well as animal totems, are Linhares sub specialties), while a quilt of many colors expands upon the pineapple's bristling geometry, echoed also in the murky cave walls. In contrast, the nudes' flesh is radiantly sheer, and a purple cast implicates the professor, whom I imagine as Alan Watts after a lecture at Esalen, as a smug bodhisattva.



Judith Linhares, *Slope*, 2010. Oil on linen, 60 x 84 inches. Courtesy of Edward Thorpe Gallery.

The flesh of the girl sitting in a tree in *Picnic Rock* (2008) is even purpler. It might be the blueberry mud bath, or she might have recognized the Kali within, assisted by Watts — and a certain late, lamented Owsley. Like the diver, she opens her womanhood without inhibition to the breeze. A second girl gets stumbling drunk; not everyone makes it unscathed to enlightenment. (The casualty with the DTs in *Drink* (2008) hallucinates a wall of accusatory masks, Ensor by way of the ghoulsh psychedelia of cartoonist/artists like Gary Panter and David Sandlin.) A third "Picnic" girl grounds herself in a yogic pose with her legs up a tree. A similar pose is taken by the main figure in *Slope* (2011), a sensible enough form of worship among the redwoods. The wild-eyed "Slope" girl inverts upon a red and white-checked tablecloth that enfolds space like Netherlandish drapery. Linhares brings off this fractured pattern in crisp, bouncing light with sustained unfussiness; no conventionally careful marks slow down the eye's liquid journey or the mind's free play of symbols — sacred and profane, virginal and vaginal, feral and suburban.

Jerry Saltz once postulated a reverse flow of influence from the wunderkind Dana Schutz to the older Linhares in an otherwise typically astute review. Schutz is deeply talented but not that talented: she would have needed a time machine to intervene decades earlier, when Linhares established her caustically improvisational, wet-on-wet alternative to the patriarchal presumptions and usages persisting even in then-revolutionary ideas of draftsmanship. (And if one were to postulate about influence, consider that Linhares' pioneering example has been no secret to New York cognoscenti and discerning grad students.) Not to say that Linhares has been anything but a thoroughly engaged participant in recent developments — her current focus on hippie campers would look just fine in the next museum show of Justine Kurland/Rita Ackerman-type lost-girls tableaux, and minus the readymade '60s nostalgia that can accrue; Linhares was *there*. Note to Jerry: it does and should work both ways, but sometimes a breakthrough by a younger artist opens the eyes, not just of other artists but also of critics, to treasures already in plain sight.

[Some changes have been made to this article since initial posting.]



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