



Museum review: Halim Al-Karim and Kris Cox at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art

by Somerset Tullius

A Visit to BMoCA- 5/13

Opened in 1976, The Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art is in a historical building located in the center of Boulder, and the museum features a full rotating schedule of contemporary works. BMoCA's mission is to provide the public with access to contemporary artists through performance, exhibition, education and outreach. Right now at BMoCA they are showing works from Christopher Morris, Halim Al-Karim, and Kris Cox.

The work of Halim AL-Karim is on the first floor and is reflective of Karim's childhood in Iraq. I listened to an I-Pod as I walked around the exhibit and would have been lost with out it. I find that an explanation is needed for most contemporary works. However, I became enchanted by the work of Al-Karim. He grew up in Iraq and was trained at the University of Baghdad, but as soon as he graduated he would have to be a part of the Iraq military who, at the time, were at war with Iran. Karim wanted to escape the military life because he didn't believe in the cause, so he found a random woman to hide him in the desert for a couple years. While living in self-exile with gypsies he learned about magic and potions and the mystic ways of the Bedouins. I found this to be extremely interesting and through looking at Al-Karim's art, one can see the connection. In Sumerian Temple of Love, Al- Karim made his own paper and used swatches of gold textile from Iraq. He cut out the paper and made it look like Arabic architecture. The whole piece is meant to seem like an altar, and it does. When looking at this piece as a whole it is easy to recognize its origins but isn't so easy to understand its meaning. This piece is supposed to represent the feminine and the goddess. Karim used 70 bowls set on an altar on the floor to represent the 70 Goddesses of Love. He placed on the other side of the gallery a piece that is the male counterpart, and represents the gates into heaven. I really enjoyed the work of Al- Karim, but I thought that most of it came alive once I knew the story behind it. I believe this is a tenet of contemporary works, because there is so much meaning how does an artist get his/her message or essence of feeling across? I think Halim does this in a way that is unobtrusive, mysterious and evocative. Karim uses beautiful colors and forms and as a whole the show is really calming and feels like you have stepped into a dream. In Halim Al-Karim's world the only things that are real are material, color, light and beauty.

In the next part of the museum there are works by Kris Cox. Cox first started to pursue art when he was at college for a mathematical degree, which he eventually dropped. Kris then got on the art track and went on to get his MFA at RISD in ceramics. Kris left ceramics and moved on to painting, but he didn't leave his ceramic skills behind. His works are supposed to be looked at as flattened sculptural pieces. Kris says his works are to be thought of as objects. They are not about the world or a view, they are supposed to pull you into the immediacy of the here and now. I found these pieces to be extremely interesting, the paintings are large and consume your whole view and they look exactly like marble. I really wanted to touch the pieces to see what they felt like because they look cold and smooth and almost slippery, like a wet floor. The pieces are made through a very labor-intensive process where Cox uses heat, bee's wax, wood putty, and sometimes metal to get his end result. I felt that the pieces looked almost like ancient alien tablatures or something like that because of the linear and circular elements that lie just below the surface of his work. His pieces are described as both minimalist and modernist, which they are. But what is most interesting about his works are how though the use of different mediums, Kris is able to recreate the look of certain surfaces. There is a huge diptych that looks like weathered wood, but when you get close to it you can see all these layers of work and marking from the artist. I think it is a lot more interesting when you can see the markings of an artist because it creates a sort of timed story, when one mark is over another it is newer and part of the artists process.

The pieces of Halim Al-Karim and Kris Cox were really amazing and even though they were both very different, I thought that they both were reminiscent of the way both of them grew up. It is interesting to see, especially in contemporary art, how the artist chooses different types of mediums to get their point across. In one of Al-

Karim's pieces he used clay and dirt and flaxseed oil with sand, which seems perfect to represent his time in the desert. But more importantly, I think it is the experience that the artist has with the medium that is interesting and telling. For Karim it was important for him to use perfumes and textiles because that is what surrounded him and his experiences and for Cox, the use of fire and layering of mediums and linear perfection reflect his path prior to becoming an artist. I had never been to BMoCA before and I really enjoyed the space and found it to be quite tranquil, which didn't take away from the artwork. I would recommend anyone to BMoCA, it is really nice and I enjoyed the way the exhibits were set up, they must have an amazing curator.

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