

## A Memorial Group Show that Raised the Spirits

Surely all of the 9/11 memorials that took place in 2011 were heartfelt. Yet it is doubtful that many were as aesthetically edifying as the group exhibition “Fall: Rising Above 9-11,” curated by Carson Ferri-Grant for the West Side Arts Coalition.

Among the variety of works indicating how various artists were affected by the tragedy that took so many innocent lives, one of the most poignant was Nicolas Bouteneff’s moving acrylic on canvas “Infinity,” depicting the beams of light, ghosts of the towers, that rose in tribute against the night sky for some time after the attacks. Painted with impastos akin to those of Wayne Thiebaud, Bouteneff’s acrylic on canvas gave enduring form to that ethereal tribute. Roy Szuper also gave us another powerful image of the towers in his moody photograph “Looking Out My Bedroom Window,” in which the two structures were restored to stately life by retrospective vision, yet ominously engulfed in shadow, like a premonition, against the red light of dawn.

Another gifted photographer, “Russell Swanson,” also employed shadow dramatically, to silhouette, a young man gazing through the chain link fence around the site into a void of fog in the wake of that fateful morning. Artist/curator Ferri-Grant’s oil on canvas “Replanting” was possessed of a melancholy beauty, with the figure of an apparent vegetal

being created with the same neopointillist strokes that compose the surrounding landscape, seated on the grass between two tall trees evoking the towers themselves.

Peter Tunney contributed a work featuring large jumbled stenciled letters in the semi-translucent pale yellowish hue of old newspapers, with headlines about the attacks showing through like penitence, surrounded by a dull red ground the color of dried blood. Unjumbled, the letters spelled out, “City of Dreams.”

A fiery young angel with wings of flame, gazing up at a radiant star was seen in Shikoh Shiraiwa’s tall diptych in oil on canvas. Beside the painting was an inspirational companion poem in English and Japanese, containing the lines “suddenly / the world was overwhelmed by the darkness / despair, fear, thousands of meaningless deaths / nevertheless / we rise.” And as in Bruce Springsteen’s song “The Rising,” the theme of ascension in the face of devastation was also brilliantly evoked in Regina Valluzzi’s semiabstract acrylic on canvas, “Dream of our soul awakens,” with its lyrical pink blue, and green hues, and climbing vines soaring upward like the towers against lit-up city windows.

Urban architecture also figured prominently in “Instantaneous,” a boldly simplified acrylic on canvas by D.J. Barry, in which the towers were revived by wistful

wishful thinking as totemic structures containing cheerful images of children at play. And a similar theme was interpreted in another unique manner by Artur Pashkov, whose oil on canvas “Dreamscape” showed the two towers standing alone, apart from the city, set against blue mountains and pink clouds in a radiant heavenly realm. In a strong found object assemblage called “Free Fall,” however, Olivier Rabbath brought back traumatic memories of victims leaping in desperation from the burning towers with actual shoes and trousers set against a blank background containing a large question mark. And Ha Lee struck an ironic chord with “The Memorial of History: Dictator Laden,” in which the monstrous mastermind of the terror attacks, Bin Laden,” is seen in a garden incongruously cradling a baby lamb in his arms.

It seemed altogether fitting that, as an outdoor annex to this powerful memorial exhibition, the gifted street artist Hani Shihada, familiar to New Yorkers for over 25 years, executed one of his large sidewalk chalk murals of firemen raising the stars and stripes at Ground Zero on a sidewalk near the gallery.

— Peter Wiley

WSAC, Fall: Rising Above 9/11, recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street (Center island).