

f r o m v e r m e e r t o b a l t h u s



The Dream (Balthus Series) 1999



The Tunnel (Mauritshuis Girl Series) 2000

Twice, I have been consciously inspired to work with the images of other artists, these being Vermeer and Balthus. By doing so, the intent was not to replicate the style, nor to attempt to master the technical virtuosity of another, as was a common practice during the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries among students of European art academies. Rather, as with any object of inspiration, the impetus to further explore the work of these two artists was based in my personal experience of their work - a process of reaction and assimilation, the result of which a fresh interpretation was born.

Each artist utilizes the visual language of form, colour, line, composition, texture, negative and positive space, concept, etc., however, what we each make of these visual components, how we use them, creates a "mark" not unlike a fingerprint. Whatever it is that inspires us, does so because it strikes a cardinal chord and, thus, compels a response. In both Vermeer and Balthus I found a compatible visual language and through investigating its similarities discovered dissimilarities and, throughout, my own singular expression in response. Inspiration comes in many ways - reacting to it is the journey.

vermeer: the mauritshuis girl series



Vermeer: Girl with Pearl Earring



The Tunnel

Vermeer's *Girl with Pearl Earring* is a work I first encountered as a child - it appeared as a small reproduction in the "A" volume of an encyclopedia. A was for "art," among other things, and this volume provided a whirlwind introduction to the world of painting, a miniaturized gallery of Michelangelos, Picassos, Warhols, etc., wherein centuries of art-making were reduced to a mere pages. Vermeer's *Girl with Pearl Earring* enthralled me and I recall a lazy summer afternoon, with pencil and a page torn from someone's notepad, captivated by the act of recreating her haunting gaze. I was not alone in my mesmerization; Vermeer's girl is one of the most popular of his works, her image so often reproduced that one grows nearly blind to it. Like the enigmatic smile of Mona Lisa - seen too often, one is immunized against its impact.

Then, in January of 2000 I found myself face to face with her, "the girl." An hour or so from Amsterdam (where I was spending the winter), the Mauritshuis Museum in Den Haag (The Hague) was hosting an exhibition entitled Rembrandt by Himself, an inaugural gathering of Rembrandt's self-portraits, not something to be missed. The Mauritshuis is an intimate space, crowded with small rooms and large paintings and that day, at least, too many visitors to view anything too clearly. To escape the shoulder to shoulder claustrophobia, I rounded a corner into a room nearly empty of people, save for those whose images were stretched on canvas and hanging quietly on walls. And there she was, *The Girl with Pearl Earring*... as fresh and alive and as contemporary as she must have been when posing for Vermeer almost three and a half centuries before. She took my breath.

And she played on my mind. Melodramatic as this may seem, the only way of exorcizing her grasp was to indulge my need to further explore her image. What was it about that pose, that expression, that momentary glance that rendered the subject of this painting both alive and timeless? Of course, there was Vermeer's treatment of the subject, the application of the paint

which, upon close examination, is astonishingly loose - little dabs of white at the corners of the girl's mouth, the brush strokes defining the fabric of the headdress - executed without the self-conscious pain of deliberation. His geometric analysis of the face, a study of form in planes of light and shadow - all this, altogether, contributed to the integrity of the subject and its intrigue. My intent in exploring Vermeer's subject centred on discovering the kernel of its credibility, to succumb to it as with any object of inspiration - not for the need of result, but for the need of doing. Thus began several works which I call The Mauritshuis Girl series, of which *The Tunnel* is one.

The Mauritshuis Girl series is composed six paintings. The first of this series, *In the Woods*, depicts "the girl", much as Vermeer painted her, wearing the peculiar, yet, timeless headdress but placed within an established context - in this case, the indication of a forest. Painting # 2, entitled *The Gathering*, depicts her as one of several people in a crowd. The paintings which followed: *The Umbrella*, *The Sea*, *Clouds*, and *The Tunnel*, utilize only the pose, while the women depicted vary otherwise, quite dramatically, in appearance.

The Mauritshuis Girl may still continue to crop up from time to time, as she has become subsumed within my personal iconography. And so, what began as my involvement with Vermeer's *Girl With Pearl Earring*, has become my Mauritshuis Girl, an exploration of a psychological state as expressed in the turning of a head, of momentary eye contact, of the ambiguity of fleeting encounters, of a single, almost insignificant moment trapped.

playing with balthus



The Dream



Balthus: The Room

Balthus (Count Bathazar Klossowski de Rola), a figurative painter of Polish decent and French nationality, embarked upon his career in the late 1920's, holding his first solo-exhibition in Paris in 1934. The images he produced over the following four decades are haunting and enigmatic depictions of friends (Joan Miro, Andre Derain, Matisse, etc.), street scenes, landscapes and interiors wherein the human form, most often female, plays an integral role. Certain works - interiors in which young women or girls were the subject- struck a primary chord with me. As a figurative painter who also paints female subjects, these Balthus figures compelled me to recreate them. Thus, focusing on details of his compositions - extracting a single figure, altering its context, or combining figures – the process began.

What occurred during this exploration of Balthus was not anticipated. I found myself struggling with the vulnerability of his female figures, needing to transform them, sometimes clothe them, contrary to my reason and sense of aestheticism. For example, the figure in my "The Dream" is based on Balthus' "The Room" in which the figure is *right* unclothed. The light falls perfectly and unbroken along the length of the figure...but reveals a young and vulnerable body. Those who are familiar with my work will know I have painted women in blatantly sexual poses, yet, in recreating certain poses of Balthus I found myself reticent, uncertain and realizing I could not have posed the female figure as he did. My female figures, provocative as they may sometimes be, maintain their autonomy whether it be through a sexual power or what seems an unconscious disregard for their audience. While originally drawn to the beauty and purity of Balthus' forms, this exercise proved that a mutual aestheticism does not ensure a mutual perspective. Indeed, in exploring the perspectives of others - be these born of era, of gender, of politics or race - one finds one's own.