

Vincent Amicosante

The nineteenth century brewed the declaration of independence of paint. Impressionism, the last major burst of descriptive painting (unless one includes the hybrid double-refraction of photo-realism) ultimately undid itself into a succession of ism's of anti-descriptive painting styles, some abstract, some anti-intellectual. The "anything goes" climate persists but regrettably now often engenders as much yawn as shock.

Twentieth century painting is largely polarized around abstract, non-objective decorative art in which "the medium is the message" (McLuhan's expression) and art in which content is the message; Dada and its successor, surrealism. If the latter set out to "épater le bourgeois", they seem to have settled down to "persuader le bourgeois." Illustration, advertising, TV ads, now enlist the inventions of de Chirico, Arp, Ernst, Dali and Magritte to a point where they are commonplace. But even if mild surprise has supplanted shock certain practitioners wield the depictive-illustrative character of surrealism with a subtlety and wit that justify the hyphen in artist-illustrator; Vincent Amicosante is one of them.

New York City's School of Visual Arts which does not rigidly separate fine and commercial art provided Vincent with an academic training in depicting things and places (anatomy, perspective, space, light, painting procedures) and encouraged his disposition for the narrative. Beginning in the mid seventies he did paintings and illustrations for various clients in New York City and his move in the early eighties to New England enlarged his iconographic vocabulary with seaside themes that persist in his paintings, whether commissioned or created for gallery display.

Vincent's paintings in gouache (opaque watercolour) or oil feature a meticulous realistic technique, but are assaults on expectations of reality. Familiar, even banal themes are rearranged, become enigmatic. The waking world is put on trial. Images seem to refuse explanation and create moments of unease. In unlikely matings objects and places are removed from their habitual fields and their usual functions. A Nantucket window looks on a roiling ocean, but the ocean is inside the house. A "Birth of Venus" is alluded to by four porcelain doll's heads and four shells while the sea of her birth is unseen, beyond the dunes enmeshed in snow fences. And hovering in the scene are the bubbles, a frequent element in Vincent's private iconography. Those most ephemeral of phenomena now made permanent.

Arcimboldo, Bosch, Granville, Ernst, Magritte, Amicosante

Nicholas Solovioff
Harvard University, B.A., M.F.A.