

AnOther Magazine

The Artist Painting Pulp Fictions on Bedsheets We meet Walter Robinson, the critic and artist whose bedlinen-based artworks have us clamouring for a duvet day

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The Americans © Walter Robinson, Courtesy the Artist and Vito Schnabel Gallery, Photo by Argenis Apolinario.

Walter Robinson's art is formed of paint applied to patterned bedsheets, depicting everything from lovers embracing and glammed-up 50s starlets to fists full of dollars and a chiselled-jawed hunk with a gun. It's textbook US pop: the lipstick of Lichtenstein and the fabric re-appropriations of Rauschenberg, smattered with an odd, disembodied sense of nostalgia. But for anyone well-versed in art historical lineage, it's Robinson: as well as being an artist in his own right, he served as news editor of *Art in America* magazine from 1980 to 1996, and as founding editor of *Artnet* magazine from 1996 until 2012. "You could say that my writing career was a long study in thinking about art. But the art itself comes from somewhere else; it's a whim, not a calculation," he says. "You can't find a more self-conscious artist or a nicer art critic." As his new exhibition, *The Americans*, opens at the Vito Schabel Gallery in St. Moritz, we sit down with eloquent painter to find out more about the surprisingly seductive power of his art, the influence of pulp romance paperbacks and the beguile of bedlinen.

On being an art writer and an artist...

"Aren't critics and artists natural antagonists? As a critic, I was disposed to favour new art by a wide range of other artists. As an individual artist, I'm inclined to dismiss all my competition. Right now I find more happiness sitting at my easel than in front of my laptop."

On his assertion that "Nature is horizontal and culture is vertical", and painting on bedsheets...

"I stole that notion from [American art critic] Leo Steinberg... an anthropological cliché - culture begins when the human creature stands erect. Metaphors only go so far, though, and a patterned bedsheet, well, it can be a peculiar emblem of the threshold between biology and civilisation, between staying in bed and getting up. But if it's l'amour fou [mad love] you're after, and I am, then the bedsheet is probably best conceptualised as laundry, where it's tumbled around head over heels, first drenched and then overheated."

WALTER ROBINSON

On his love of mid-century pulp romance paperbacks as source material...

"The imagery is seductive and widely effective. Back in the 1980s, when I first started making these pictures, I found it drew young women to me, like a bouquet or a serenade. Also, at the time, before cyberspace, the imagery seemed to be a vernacular language in danger of dying out, available only in musty second-hand stores. I was then engaged in a preservationist enterprise.

"As a painter, I love the illustrations themselves, and want to emulate their style, which is singular. As a whole they constitute an inventory of human passion and drama. When I started, the art world had denatured itself, remaking the world into a rationalised construction. An academic might say I was looking to re-enchant painterly figuration after it had been disarmed by materialist critique."

On how the New York art scene has changed since the 1960s...

"[Laughs] I came here a half century ago, and much has happened. You could say that 'pluralism' remains the reigning art philosophy, if it can be called a philosophy, despite being so strenuously opposed by academic writers since the early 80s.

More recently diversity has become a curatorial imperative in a way it never was before, with a concomitant interest in a kind of postmodernist art of social and political responsibility. This new 'social realism' has triumphed over what seemed a market-driven revivalist abstract painting, brilliantly dubbed Zombie Formalism by one perspicacious writer, i.e. me.

The Americans by Walter Robinson runs until September 2, 2017, at Vito Schnabel Gallery, St. Moritz.

