



"DALLAS"

The scale of the picture matters in Deborah Oropallo's "Dallas." The image is life-size, perhaps slightly larger, measuring 81 inches tall and 51 inches wide. And true to the artist's form, the figure in black is missing the head and limbs that would conventionally be part of the image.



"MONTANA"

It may look as if the woman in Oropallo's "Montana" is, well, one woman. But there are two sets of arms in the image and the pair wearing red gloves, which conceal the figure's face, look as if they are floating in space.



"PHOENIX"

Cowgirls and clowns may seem to exist in disparate worlds, but Oropallo merges them in the picture dubbed "Phoenix." And that is probably why this clown is grotesque instead of funny.

Courtesy of Scott White Contemporary Art

GO 'WEST,' YOUNG ARTIST, GO WEST

Deborah Oropallo's solo exhibition at Scott White Contemporary Art features the archetypal gone strange

By **Robert L. Pincus**
ART CRITIC

The clothes are eye-catching: spangled rodeo vests, pants with floral flourishes, ornate boots, etc. What's generally missing are the people who happened to be wearing them when their photographs were taken. It's a striking conceit, but an eerie one.

Deborah Oropallo gives us the human form without the humanity, without the face or anything else. And yet, "Wild, Wild West," her latest solo exhibition at Scott White Contemporary Art, makes for some weirdly se-

ductive viewing.

The pull of her pictures derives from the way Oropallo takes imagery that looks thoroughly archetypal and makes it strange. These are cowgirls gone surreal. You know the sources are photographic, but subtracting details, blurring the backgrounds and heightening color give them a new spectral identity.

Oropallo, whose roots are in painting, has made the transition to digital means in recent years, culling imagery from existing sources and manipulating them to give the final compositions a new identity more akin to paint-

ing than photography. As she once put it, "I use the computer as the tool, but painting is the language of deliberation that is running through my head."

She is clearly attracted to theatrical imagery. In the Bay Area artist's 2007 series "Guise," which was showcased at the De Young Museum in San Francisco, she took familiar grand-manner portraits of the likes of Napoleon and George Washington and combined them with catalog imagery of women advertising fetish and theme clothes. The result was dramatic fusions of gender, cross-dressed figures from the past, which revealed how everyday photography echoes the look of historical paintings in the poses and postures of its subjects. They are slyly funny pictures, as you might imagine.

"Wild, Wild West" carries a similar interest in gender — in this case, the feminine dimen-

sion of cowboy and cowgirl culture. There's "Dallas," with the female figure dressed in black top and pants, with pale trim, a spinning rope encircling her form like floating spheres.

"Montana" is more ambiguous: a torso in bright yellow, vest adorned with stars. She sports pale gloves and a monogrammed hat. But there is an extra pair of arms, covered in bright red gloves, covering the place where her face would be. However the sources were combined, the image itself has a striking formal beauty to it.

Oropallo's work expresses both amusement for and admiration of the extravagant costuming in these pictures. In a handsome new catalog of her work, which carried the informative title "Pomp," she talks about her affection for the rodeo. There's even a rodeo clown, or maybe she's added the clown face.

DETAILS

"Wild, Wild West Show," a solo exhibition by Deborah Oropallo

When: Through March 6
Where: Scott White Contemporary Art, 939 W. Kalmia St., Little Italy
Tickets: Free
Phone: (619) 501-5689
Online: scottwhiteart.com

Either way, "Phoenix" is a comically spooky picture.

Rodeo iconography gets a pop-style makeover in this series. Oropallo's is a Wild West for our time — a Wild West filtered through our collective knowledge of movie and television Westerns, a Wild West drenched in our collective mythologizing of it.

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