Image Deconstruction and Analysis

Institutional Affiliation

Date

Titus Kaphar is an artist who believes in the honesty of paintings. Kaphar repainted John Vanderlyn’s (1775-1852) painting, Landing of Columbus (1846). Titus Kaphar is a modern day African American Artist who spends his time on artwork to focus on the impact of history. The Colombus day painting, the Landing of Columbus was painted in 2014. It is a medium oil and mixed media on canvas. It measures 67 3/4 x 90 3/4 x 4 inches. The piece is showcased in the Jack Shainman and Titus Kaphar Gallery in New York.

Titus Kaphar is an exciting artist as black male painters are not very common. He is a modern day painter who takes pride in addressing history by interacting with the appropriate mediums and styles. He works and lives in New York and Connecticut. He mixes the work of Renaissance and Classic painters thus creating a connection between quotation and fiction. He is the first artist to receive the Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence biennial fellowship from the Seattle Art Museum.

The landing of Columbus is a piece that immerses the viewer into the world of Christopher Columbus at that time, the Italian explorer and colonizer. Kaphar is inspired by the Landing of Columbus done by John Vanderlyn in 1846. The piece is interesting as Kaphar hides Columbus and the crew in raw canvas. It shifts the viewer to the ignored or somewhat overlooked people in the background. With this, I would interpret this as the intervals, in this case, the background, is essential. The indigenous people are crucial. Kaphar realized this as he understands that the white is as important as the black. Kaphar is an artist who focuses on the change of analogies, a change of vision and change of focus.

The elements of the work are the colonialists, the indigenous people and the background that puts it all together. The choice of medium represents the situation at that time, the colonialist and the conflict that rose as a result of their influence. The painting is a more significant understanding to acknowledge the past and take pride in the events that happened. It is a battle that unfolds to a greater understanding. Columbus Day painting is a piece that identifies the missing puzzle pieces. With this piece we realize that the background and the primary focus, in this case, reversed focus, are one this, but they look different.

Kaphar uses the elements of mixed media on canvas to bring forth an aspect of the canonical and classical image to introduce as to a different reality that could have been an artist’s vision of history that runs simultaneously to the prevailing narrative. Kaphar is an abstract expressionist artist in a modern day setting. Just as the way Van Gogh was a part of the Impressionist movement but he still led the way for the Fauvist movement. On the other hand, Kaphar uses his fascination with history and brings out the vision that we might have overlooked. Kaphar uses that opportunity to manifest his exploration of the historical canon, as his primary focus.

In the Landing of Columbus, he redefined it by making the background, the indigenous as necessary as the main characters, Columbus, and his crew. The first version shows how Christopher Columbus landed in the mainland and the indigenous people were not that noticeable. Kaphar chose to cover the foreign crew with fabric, leaving the natives uncovered. Kaphar uses fabric to shift focus in most of his pieces. We can almost say that it is his signature move.

The Columbus Day Painting shows how the painter, covered the foreigners with raw canvas while leaving the background figures as they are. With this, he artistically takes power from the main focus, and he brings the light to the natives. Kaphar chose to leave the flags and spears visible in the piece to show the amount of imperialism the Europeans had in Santa Maria, the geographical setting of the painting. Furthermore, with this alteration, we see the colonial violence at the time and how it was unchanged.

With this, we understand that Kaphar sees history and remodels it with more than a modern artist vision of separation between the painting and the painter. In the Landing of Columbus, he created a version with new historiography inspiration that was built from the physical remains and shortcomings of the past. The piece is a deeper understating to the imagined memories that were once a reality centuries ago. For that reason, a viewer can see that Kaphar dug deep down to reveal what was once lost and revisit the power of the already existing history.

The historical importance of the painter and the painting all stem from the point of liberation and artistic freedom. Kaphar is a modern day artist who acknowledges portraiture in a way that identifies with the Americans who did not have the chance or the privilege to have their portrait painted due to societal factor such as being poor, not white and not a property owner. Kaphar is a black painter who uses his capabilities to restore the viewers with the lost and undiscovered history. The Columbus Day painting is an innovative yet classical painting. It is innovative as it brings the viewer to a specific mystical and historical absence and presence.

The painting shows a particular moment in Kaphar’s life where he shows the importance of portraits that wrestle with the struggles of our past but speak to the diversity and advances of our present. It speaks to a more significant cause and social matter that involves domination and exclusion. In that, the Colonialists contributed at the time, and they all existed in the space of conflict. Kaphar advocates for the inclusion of the excluded in history and a change of focus. For that reason, the piece is a persuasion that challenged the viewer to accept duality, (foreground and background) as it is always a secret unity.

In conclusion, Kaphar is an artist that represents the hidden message behind history that propelled our current reality to where we are. He can understand the mutuality we have with our history and our existence. He has overcome mental block, and for the viewer to get to that level of understanding, he or she must overcome it to realize the relationship between what happened in the past and what happens in our reality.

References

Frank, Patrick. (2014). Prebles’Artforms. New York, Pearsons.