

David Rathman's "Hope I'm Never That Wrong Again" at Mark Moore Gallery in Los Angeles

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Installation shot, David Rathman "Hope I'm Never That Wrong Again" at Mark Moore Gallery in Los Angeles. Image courtesy the gallery.

Minneapolis-based artist David Rathman is known for examining masculine iconography through watercolor. Football players, boxers, rock stars, wrestlers, and especially cowboys have all been subjects of past shows. "Hope I'm Never That Wrong Again" at Mark Moore Gallery in Los Angeles may be his final look at the errant psychology of the Wild West.

Rathman's suite of paintings conjures cowboy iconography using the simplest of palettes and materials: sepia toned ink and watercolor. With these sparse tools and a signature loose hand he examines mythology borne of American imperialism and Manifest Destiny. Rathman's prodigal sons are lonely beat-up cowboys and gunslingers struggling in an unforgiving landscape. His characters look haggard, drunk, scared, and confused. They're familiar, but a far cry from any sort of John Wayne/Clint Eastwood fantasy.

In the painting that bears the title of the show, a steam engine barrels across the image plane toward a galloping horseback figure. Other figures atop the train wield guns as the smokestack spews a roiling cloud into an already turbid atmosphere. It seems nothing good can come of this situation, and the text suggests a huge mistake has been made. The suggestion of regret upstages the dramatic scene going on below the inscription.

In an interview on the gallery's website Rathman was asked whether he conceptualizes his work to comment on the broader male psyche:

"No I really don't. I don't conceptualize or think about that. To me it's more direct; it's about me, other men and boys I've known. It's about profiles and projections of men we've seen in sports media and on movie screens. It's about internal and outward struggles, conflict, resolution, denial, being a participant and a follower. Conquest and vulnerability..."

This introspection is exactly what makes Rathman's subtle counterpoint to so many decades of recycled western cowboy hero plots significant. The work strikes a chord of revisionist history that personalizes our interaction with these characters, making the artist an active participant in a dialog that not-so-long ago was not a dialog at all. With these simple paintings, Rathman reveals the fact that our own constructed narratives, our personal relationships to these cultural archetypes, are what really matter.

Source: <http://www.sfaqonline.com/2013/05/david-rathmans-hope-im-never-that-wrong-again-at-mark-moore-gallery-in-los-angeles/>