

Review

THE CRITICAL STATE OF VISUAL ART IN NEW YORK

March 15, 1998

Renée Cox

Rajé: A Superhero: The Beginning of a Bold New Era
Cristinero Gallery through March 28

BY J. BOWYER BELL

WHAT YOU GET IS NOT what you are offered by Renée Cox — a Bold New Era — but rather exactly what you might expect in an aesthetically corrected, politically aware Chelsea gallery of the moment: altered photographic images — Cibachrome editions — done big and slick, a Black (Afro-American) heroine, glitz and “satire” and relevant narrative and lots and lots of glitter, as our heroine Rajé makes her way through time and place

and symbol, and sits on the Statue of Liberty or runs for president.

The work flashes and imposes, touches all bases, will please those who seek relevant narrative in fashionable images presented by trendy means. And the exercise is not just competently done, but with brio, skill, capacity, dash — and one assumes commitment; the artist often being the last to know that the new does not stay new for very long unless it arises from necessity.

So Cox gives us splendid examples of the taste of the times, this year's tastes and trends and maybe next year's as well, an elegant if not compelling variation of a major current on the scene. Nothing unexpected and everything crafty and slick. There is no base untouched, no symbol missed, no posture not praised or burlesqued, a carefully adjusted mix of the moment. Most art is a carefully adjusted mix of the moment, one more cubist painting or another abstract-expressionist variation. And no such art seems tired or unneeded to the maker. Artists are delighted to rush down the same path to the promised rose garden over and over, their feelings special and so surely their work special, relevant, worth looking at as well as worth doing — the last illusion and sometimes the first.

So in the end, Renée Cox, facile and slick, makes facile and slick images, which being in part the intent, accomplishes as intended the purpose of the work: glitz and satire, the popular and the political, packaged and displayed and, one assumes, appreciated for all the wrong reasons just as, one suspects, it was so constructed. Still, in the end you get the work you want: what you see is what you imagine you see. And, surely, there will be many who will see the cutting edge of the times, the images of the moment, and the narrative needed in the bright Cibachromes neatly framed.

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