



The Tourist (2002)

Colleen Browning (1918-2003)

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The painting itself

This painting depicts a woman dressed in a bathing suit and robe facing the rectangular images of a perfect tropical holiday, not facing the reality of the people that live in this very common, very earthy setting. The reality encases her but she is totally unaware.

The color in this painting is spectacular. It goes from the gold of the sunbather to the tan of the sand. It is amazing how gradual the transition is from the earthy tan sand to the gold of the paradise. The rhythm pulses from the bottom of the pages' lines and designs to the waves of the center to the stars circulating at the top. The contrast is the glittering gold of the paradise vacation to the subtle tan sand of reality.

The robe lining matches the sky, the bathing suit of the vacationer matches the idealism scenes of the beach. The sand and earth matches the reality.

The lines are amazing, going from the straight lines on the bottom to the circular movement of the stars. The contrast is subtle, subtle movements of the family on the beach to the other beach goes contrasted with trash-laden ground.

You look through the lenses of the rectangles to the pristine vacation. But we are faced with black families living their lives, leaving trash, looking for items left in the sand. There are three main characters that face us, a man with a "don't worry be happy" tourist shirt with a flat affect, no smile, no frown just a baseball cap covering his features. The second is a father a child and finally a women looking over her shoulder.

The small open rectangles show the woman what she wants to see of this place, she never sees what is wrapped in her robe. She is looking in a different direction, away from the reality, the family, the man, and the woman. The gold of the tourist is the same as the tan of the reality; it is just a subtle difference in hue.

Colleen Browning 1918-2003

Dr Eliasoph wrote a book about Colleen Browning's art entitled "The Enchantment of Realism". Colleen Browning's art was considered American realism in a time that art was dominated by men. Later her art was referred to as magic realism, blurring the lines between the imagined and the real.

She was born in England. She worked as a mapmaker for the Royal Air force during World War II, and later as a set designer for a film studio. She proceeded to meet Geoffrey Wagner while on vacation and then married. She came to the US in 1949 and lived in New York City. She was a professor teaching at the Pratt Institute and the City College of New York, as well as the National Academy of Design.

Her life was full of travel and adventure. As a child she traveled throughout Ireland, which began her journey with the magical. As an adult she vacationed in Corsica and Grenada in the summers and later in life she spent time in South America. All of these locations are reflected in her art, with even the hint that the "tourist" could be the artist herself.

Colleen Browning has the power to tell a story through captivating images. In a time where her colleagues were going to the abstract, she stayed with magical realism. Her art tells a story with an image clearer than an epic novel. She was quoted as saying that her art shows "windows into a transformed world where the mundane becomes magical."

Questions to ask:

- 1) What is going on?
- 2) What makes you say that?
- 3) Is she aware of who is wrapped in her robe?
- 4) What do you know that the center character does not?
- 5) What do you think of the color, at the top and at the bottom?
- 6) How does this make you feel? Why?
- 7) Colleen Browning's art was called magical realism? What does that mean if you had to guess?
- 8) What more is happening?

