Meditation and Reflection

The Stripes and Seasons series of paintings are both expressions of ancient states of being. The Stripes are seeds of meditation, an offering to the world of a feeling of calm and inner stillness. In Seasons, Fonseca has given us a glimpse of ceaseless, cyclical Nature, paintings that are a reflection of the phases and personalities of an ever-unfolding process of life and time.

—annie ross
Mother Earth, Turtle Island, Homeland

1 Quotes from Harry Fonseca, personal telephone communications with the author from Woodland, California, to Santa Fe, New Mexico: March–June 2003.
2 Quote from poet and artist Elizabeth Woody, personal telephone communication with the author, from Woodland, California to Portland, Oregon, June 2003.
Harry Fonseca’s work in Continuum 12 Artists is composed of two distinct series of paintings, Seasons and Stripes. In Seasons, canvases are covered with long, dripping lines, arcs, spots, and swirls of color, layered like so many decades of time. In contrast, the horizontal lines of the Stripes paintings are controlled and measured, ordered in place. Fonseca said that these works “are about paint. I wanted to make a beautiful painting.” These beautiful paintings, at first meant to be about color, evolved into an internal journey and an exploration of the miraculous cycle of change, from autumn, to winter, spring, and summer. How did he arrive at this place of contemplation and Nature?

In order to understand Fonseca’s current corpus of paintings, one must understand the meaning of his work in the past decade. Fonseca has worked on themes related to the California Gold Rush, St. Francis of Assisi, and the Maidu Creation story. “Much of my work addressed the struggle of Native Americans in Northern California to survive the Gold Rush, religious intolerance,” loss of homeland, indentured servitude, poverty, and abridgement of rights, he says. Stripes and Seasons honor and remind us of the inherent power of the survival of humans and Earth.

Stripes

The Stripes paintings present a structured and deliberate arrangement of lines that invoke introspection and meditation. They are large, like Indian blankets, and possess what poet Elizabeth Woody calls “an elemental vibrancy.” The subtle paintings use minimal color as a measure, like a musical phrase, understated in image but massive in meaning, carrying an emotional and dynamic impact.

The paintings Gray #1 and Gray #2 express an element of Zen Buddhism, a practice Fonseca has been involved with since his teens. Buddhism, in part, encourages humans to reach a spiritual state of enlightenment, an internal home built of truth and universal understanding. These works echo calmness, peace, and a sense of a self-imposed, ritualistic journey of contemplation.

Requiem #1 and Requiem #2 are meditative, dark-hued paintings, based on the color black. The bands of color lie perfectly in place, like verses to an ancient chant repeated over and over. A requiem is a mass for the dead, a ritual to restore parts broken from sorrow and loss. Fonseca reflects upon the terror that Native Americans have survived during the colonization of the Americas, such as the violence inherent in the aggressive taking of land, the use of disease as a weapon, and starvation and fear. Fonseca also contemplates the insecurity of homelessness, poverty, and political invisibility in the United States. “In the U.S., and in the world, there is a need for a requiem—a mass for the dead, and an embrace with hope for the living.” A requiem speaks of the state of human frailty and the fleetingness of living things, conditions that require handling with great care. With Stripes, Fonseca has created a world of serene and embracing pieces. The paintings elicit a feeling of collective meditation and healing. “I was looking at my own mortality,” the artist says. “There is a release, a hope in a requiem.”

Seasons

Fonseca’s second suite of paintings, Seasons, are full of power, the energy of Creation, and the phenomena of constant change. These paintings are titled after the seasons: Autumn Sonata, Winter Solitude, Right of Spring, and Summer Dance.

The recurring process and presence of fall, or what Fonseca calls, “a last hurrah, a passing, but not a death” is embodied in the Autumn Sonata paintings. In these paintings, intense colors—yellows, reds, oranges, and browns—recall morning chill and the falling of leaves. The Winter Solitude paintings, in contrast, are stark white, washed light blue, cool silver, and gray. The colors suggest the penetrating winter wind and a shivering stillness of the season. It is a time for seclusion, rest, and pondering. It is also a time of active preparation for the end of winter storms.

In the Right of Spring paintings, Fonseca uses green, blue, lavender, yellow, pink, and red to express a shining and colorful coming forth of new life. One experiences surprise in the shimmering color. The paintings’ speed and compositional movement convey a glistening response to the season. Fonseca explains, “The right of spring is an annual blossoming, a time of brilliance. It is a right, at present, that has to struggle for its survival.”

The Summer Dance canvases reflect the intense power of the sun, and its role as an elemental life force. The paintings are made up of explosive yellows, erupting golds, and dripping whites, all conveying the sweat of the sun and the power of light. Summer Dance concludes Fonseca’s evocative and emotionally charged paintings of the seasons.
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