

First Class / Second Class

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Miles Ladin
Blass & Co. (Bill Blass, Nancy Kissinger, Mica Ertegun and Duane Hampton at the Seventh on Sale benefit, New York City), 1995
Digital pigment print, 63 x 44 inches

MARCH 31 — MAY 7, 2011

Opening Reception: March 31, 6 - 8

Chris Verene

Rebecca Morgan

Miles Ladin

Devin Troy Strother

Ruben Natal San-Miguel

Holly Jarrett

Conor McGrady

Brian Shumway

Curated by Asya Geisberg and Leah Oates.

Asya Geisberg Gallery is pleased to present “First Class/Second Class”, an exhibition curated by Asya Geisberg and Leah Oates, with Chris Verene, Rebecca Morgan, Miles Ladin, Devin Troy Strother, Ruben Natal-San Miguel, Holly Jarrett, Conor McGrady, and Brian Shumway.

“**First Class/Second Class**” features work that investigates various aspects of class structure via either a personal narrative or an outsider’s perspective. The artists come from a range of backgrounds and cultures, and do not necessarily foreground the theme of class in their work. This exhibition extracts class as a necessary and frequently overlooked prism through which we can interpret their work. “First Class/Second Class” posits that class is omnipresent as an identity marker, and frequently undermines race, gender, and nationality, while simultaneously being dependent on individual circumstances. Works in the exhibition illustrate the tribal aspects of class, and show how it might be as confining or freeing as other aspects of cultural identity. “First Class/Second Class” presents a multiplicity of alternative views, in order to alter assumptions and to personalize the topic from each artist’s perspective.

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Holly Jarrett's sculpture "Pig's Palace" concentrates on the current state of British working class youth. Compelled by what she sees as the drift from national pride to abject self-hatred, Jarrett juxtaposes Henry VIII and Robert Pattinson, Matisse and childish stickers, as visual and cultural co-equals, creating a portrait of poverty of environment and imagination.

Chris Verene's series of photographs charts the personal stories of his extended family living in a small economically depressed town in middle America. Shot over 26 years, "Family" creates a nuanced portrait of a community's survival amidst the absence of class mobility. Hopelessness is alternately evoked and thwarted. The exacting details of each image force a victory over circumstance.

Devin Troy Strother works with vividly colored cut paper, toying with racial stereotypes that have their roots in class-based assumptions. Using titles that play with expectations of propriety, Strother pokes fun at the art-world and world at large, creating uncomfortable and humorous juxtapositions.

Miles Ladin's black and white photographs of glamorous parties and social events attended by the rich and famous in New York City reveal the peculiar aspects of upper class reality. His subjects have self-marginalized and live apart from most of society. Stark lighting delineates the incongruity and acute awkwardness of this self-selected elite.

Rebecca Morgan hails from a Pennsylvania farm town, and resides in Brooklyn. Her paintings and cartoon-drawings depict the culture clash created by that migration. Animalistic and bizarre transformations evoke the stereotypes of uncouth and uncultured rural redneck Appalachia.

Conor McGrady grew up in Northern Ireland, where he was harassed daily by British police. His work addresses the occupation and subjugation of a community frequently living in prison-like housing complexes. McGrady creates iconographic symbols that capture moments of protest, anger, and disobedience, emanating from an underlying frustration at a lack of opportunities.

Brian Shumway's photographic series documents young women who hope to be models or actresses, acting out their fantasies of femininity and beauty. The women choose their outfits and environments, but the portraits show a subtle sense of vulnerability as the models peer out of the picture frame. Situated within limited urban environments, they aspire to something greater and outside the boundaries of race, class, and cultural notions of sexuality.

Ruben Natal-San Miguel's street photography documents people going about their daily rituals in Harlem, a neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification. His images capture an uncontrived sense of freedom and the candid manner of his subjects, whose behavior, dress, and decorum disregards other class-based strictures.