



AUGUST 22, 2006

Massimo Vitali, M+B Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, by James Scarborough



Massimo Vitali's life-size photographs, murals, really, resonate exceptionally well in this their first Los Angeles decanting.

If large expanses of sun-streaked European beach upon which repose, supine or not, poseurs one and all, all manner of mostly un-clad sun worshippers (SPF 50? Who needs it?) against backdrops of palm trees and mountains don't remind Angeleno gallery goers of Manhattan Beach, Venice, and Santa Monica, nothing will.

At first glance as seemingly innocuous as a Beach Boys song, these images are undergirded with and fraught by an emotional foundation as stable as sand. It's like a Peeping Tom has posted his fantasies on a blog entitled I See You, You Don't See Me. Vitali's perched above the scene so the POV is like looking down on a crowded beach from a hotel room with a wide angle telescope. *Not that I've ever done that nor would I condone such a practice.* Still, the aura of voyeur lurks just beneath the glitter of sand, beneath the spume of wave, beneath the haze of sun.

But it's not the each works' voyeuristic potential that arrests you. And it's not just the tide of Everyman and -woman who primp and preen and pose, brightly colored, scattered, arrayed, and skewered so they resemble the animated visualization of the output of an iPod Shuffle.

It's their obliviousness that they're being captured if not ogled and consequently googled, run through like a simulated butterfly with a digital pin. Oblivious - consider the flatness of the shapes; the shadows are but another series of form; the ocean is hard and impenetrable like an ice cube, the sky like a wedge of Stilton cheese - but, thanks to the high horizon lines, smorgasbord-obvious, splayed out across a flat surface like an ant farm of thongs and bikinis, umbrellas and shadows, sand and surf.

People anonymous as can be; no social intercourse though they are linked by proximity. Bare and naked but they don't just know how bare and naked they really are. Vulnerable though curiously calm and relaxed. In a word, clueless. There's no central organizational scheme to these works; they are the *allover*, the F-stop equivalent of Jackson Pollock.

This disingenuousness broaches a disconnect between form and content. Compositions are tight, strong, and dynamic. Severe diagonals, mostly, sometimes a sinuous French curve, as the sand meets the water and bifurcates the pictorial surface. But upon these swaths of water, sand, and sky are people parked and splayed, inactive, passive, disinterested, as neutral as grains of sand in an hourglass or the dots on a box of dominoes spilled out of their box onto a blanket.

Uneasiness? Yes, to put it mildly. Disorienting, though the pictorial space is consistent and logical. It's more than a comment on the theme of strangers in a crowd. It's the manner by which the work comments with taut and exquisite intelligence on the same sort of Web 2.0 issues that illuminate such insanely popular social network sites as MySpace and YouTube. That illuminate the apotheosis of the Herd as broached in the latest, greatest Internet commerce sound byte, The Long Tail, those denizens on the ever-flattening end of the Bell Curve that, in the aggregate, make up a silent majority. God help us all.

M+B, October 21 - November 22, 2006. 612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles. 310.550.0050. www.mbfala.com.



August 22, 2006