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Mike Cockrill

Sentiment and Seduction

One story-book-perfect summer afternoon a young boy in my neighborhood confided that his mother performed, "striptease shows for my parent's friends" late at night after he and his siblings were put to bed. He brought me into his house, the only time I was inside it, and showed me his father's secret stash of Japanese erotic art as supporting evidence – and the music his mother stripped to. I was taking serious mental notes. I looked at a Japanese print and thought — This is the greatest drawing I have ever seen. And I also thought — Everything I've been told by adults is a lie. Parents are hiding something — a hidden room I have not yet entered. I was 10. Toto had pulled back Oz's curtain.

I grew up in McLean, Virginia. In the early 1960's all the men were CIA, Pentagon, FBI and State Department. You got the feeling that everyone was keeping secrets. If you asked an adult a question the answer came back either alarmingly absurd or fairytale sugarcoated. "What's in that box?" Answer; "A time bomb." That would be typical. It fostered a very active imagination. I created vivid scenarios.

In church on Sunday I would daydream about my friend's mother as I contemplated the back of her head. She had radiant blond hair and was taller than average. You also couldn't help but notice that she was blessed with Playboy sized breasts. My friend's mom was a knockout, no question. Life was rich. Even better than sugarcoated, but maybe too short. I was wondering when all those bombs were going to go off.

Mike Cockrill, 2009

Mike Cockrill's paintings closely detail the rich transition from the world of childhood fantasy to adult awareness in a manner that is both playfully innocent and sexually charged. Enduring issues in Cockrill's work have developed over several decades and have been carried through several bodies of distinct work. Though formally trained in classical European painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, as a student, Cockrill was deeply drawn to the art of Norman Rockwell, Winslow Homer and Edward Hopper — icons of American narrative painting. Beginning with his first exhibitions in the East Village and his first solo show at Semaphore Gallery in Soho (1985), Cockrill has been a forerunner of the current interest in nostalgic figuration. Cockrill balances the sacred and profane as well as issues of sex, politics, and the suburban family.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10-6pm.

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