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About the Artist: Aiden Kringen

“I strive to take traditional realism and pare it down and reassemble it along a geometric framework that fits within a modern context. For me, the process of painting a portrait or figure involves balancing between reality and abstraction, down to each single feature of the face or hand. I dissect the figure using line work, dividing between tone and texture, and then reconnect the pieces along invisible planes throughout the painting. My goal as an artist is to encapsulate idealized beauty through a cracked or broken lens. I respect the purity and beauty of the human essence while accepting that it is imperfect, and therefore depict it through a process of fractalization.” – Aiden Kringen

Biography:

From "Prismatic Vision: The Artwork of Aiden Kringen" by Richard Speer (Copyright 2017)

A kaleidoscopic fantasia—crystalline planes floating in space, nestling together like immaculate puzzle pieces—abstract nebulae, human figures and faces enveloped in swirling fields or particles of energy—these number among the images evoked by the hauntingly enigmatic paintings of artist Aiden Kringen. Within this worldview a mysterious network of interlocking planes becomes visible to the beholder: mystical fields of unknown substance revealed as the building blocks of our bodies and semblances, surrounding, cocooning, perhaps even protecting us. It is a vision verging on the mystical, which Kringen portrays through a distinctive style: a fractured, cubistic mode of consciousness in which multiple dimensions or perspectives assimilate into an ecstatic whole. The artist deploys this style in opulent and seductive portraits as well as abstract tableaux whose optical signature is magnified by compositional dynamism and deeply layered surfaces.

Born in Los Angeles in 1992, Kringen lived variously in the American West and Mexico—Sebastopol, Jalisco, Portland, Flagstaff—before settling in the hill- and vineyard-dotted environs of Sonoma, County, where he is now based. In these very different environments, each of which possesses a uniquely picturesque natural

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beauty, the artist began from an early age to develop his aesthetic approach. He has always had a keen eye for detail, grounded in a gift for looking closely at the human experience. “I’ve always been interested in observing people,” he recalls, “and in the details of how we interact with one another.” He put this natural ability to task when he began working on illustration and graphic design projects while in high school. From his mother, an artist and graphic designer, he learned the fundamentals of composition and typography, the nuances of positive and negative space, and the relationships between them. Using sheets of Letraset—a system for transferring typeface—proved particularly instrumental in developing a methodology for layering and collage, which continue to inform his works on canvas and paper. He learned old-school techniques, hands-on and mechanical, in keeping with a Bauhaus-like appreciation for perfectionism, integrity, and hard work.

Kringen began painting at 14. Then as now, drawing was central to his approach. He studied vintage anatomy atlases and drew meticulously in his journals, working through myriad permutations of bones and skin, angle and pose, and muscles in motion. Honing his natural talent for figuration through long and exhaustive study, he arrived at an understanding of the figure that is both intuitive and virtuosic. On acrylic and mixed media on canvas, Kringen lays down linework with a Micron pen in ever-more-complex compositions, often with the addition of gloss mediums to bring out the layers’ reflectivity and prismatic character. In some pieces he incorporates gold and silver leaf to heighten drama and luxuriance, recalling the mosaic-like work of Gustav Klimt—who, along with fellow Austrian Expressionist Egon Schiele, stands among Kringen’s most prominent influences.

It was in 2011 that he began painting in the style with which he is now most associated: a technique fusing drawing and painting, line and brushstroke, with fragmented shapes undergirding the imagery. Notably, this is not simply a stylistic conceit, but more a way of perceiving reality. “Ever since I was young,” Kringen notes, “I’ve spent most of my time observing people: trying to break people down, in a visual sense, into small categorizations of their features, their mannerisms, the way they twitch their nose...” His hypersensitivity to likeness and gesture is key, for this is

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what distinguishes his portraits from those by artists who strive to depict idealized beauty as an end in itself. Yes, there is an undeniable beauty of Kringen's subjects, but it does not follow strictly conventional paradigms. There is an individuality, a capturing of idiosyncracies and eccentricities, of optimism and fatalism, light and dark, in his work. He is not painting archetypes, but rather illuminating the essential characters of real people in a highly refined genre of psychological portraiture. The fragmented linework, the grids of planes he uses as lenses to focus these characteristics, is sui generis but never gimmicky; above all it is a tool for defining and refining the features of the face, adding depth and definition.

In his abstract work he uses similar techniques, paring the fabric of perception itself down to bare essentials of form, color, and texture. The abstract pieces are simultaneously elegant and complex, combining the sweeping gesturalism of Abstract Expressionism with the rigorous structure of the geometric painting. Across the breadth of his output Kringen balances technical and thematic polarities into bracing integrations of sensuality and grittiness, inviting contemplation into the nature of opticality and the infinite possibilities of the seen and unseen.

Richard Speer is a contributor to ARTnews, Artpulse, Visual Art Source, and Surface Design. His essays and reviews have appeared in The Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, The New York Post, The Oregonian, Salon, Newsweek, and Opera News. He is the author of "Matt Lamb: The Art of Success" (John Wiley & Sons), the biography of Outsider artist Matt Lamb, as well as catalogue essays about many of the world's leading contemporary artists.