

art ltd.

Mark Stock

by Barbara Morris

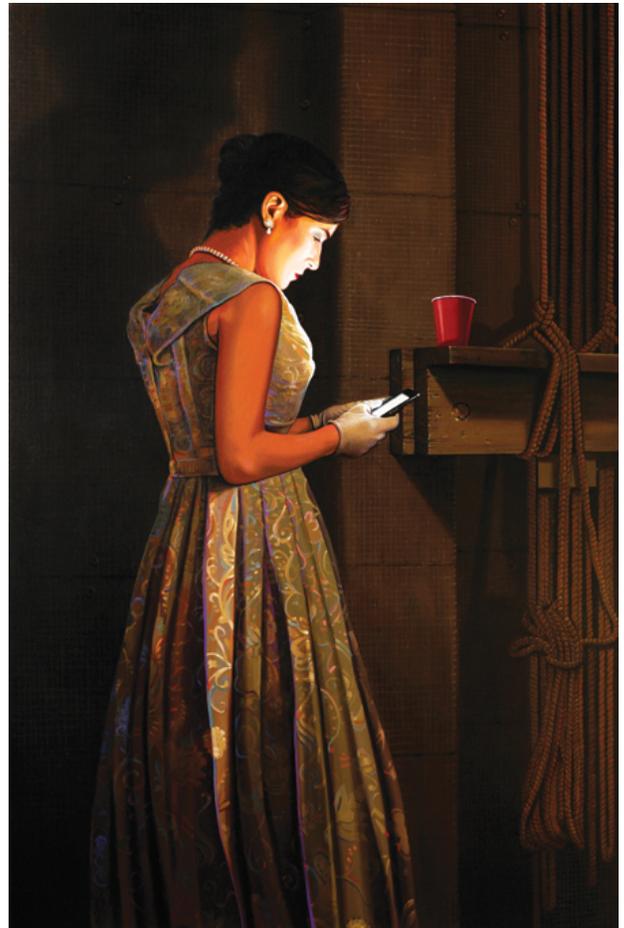
May 2014

Painter Mark Stock once nonchalantly invited a young woman for a walk in the LA hills near the Hollywood sign, concealing a surprise—as they neared the sign, a table, covered with a white linen cloth and bearing a chilled bottle of champagne, came into view, with a butler in full livery awaiting their arrival. “Hey, this is nice,” Stock commented, as if caught off guard himself. This theatrical tableau, as recalled in the artist’s monograph by Barnaby Conrad III, hinged on the impeccably correct butler, in this case a friend of Stock’s, who created a romantic aura in a setting that was half reality, half fantasy—a web of intrigue and magic that became the artist’s trademark. Gifted in many ways, as an artist, athlete, musician, and skillful magician, his career has come to an abrupt halt—Mark Stock, sadly, passed away unexpectedly on March 26.

Mark Stock was born in Frankfurt, Germany, where his GI dad was then stationed. The family returned to the US two years later, and, as an army brat, he moved around the country

frequently. His artistic talents were discovered early on, and when a whirlwind two-year career as a rock drummer began to pale, he enrolled in Southern Florida University, focusing on printmaking. Upon graduation, he landed a job in Los Angeles, working for the acclaimed print shop Gemini G.E.L. as a lithographer. His first day on the job he met David Hockney; Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein were also among the notable artists whom he assisted.

LA suited Stock well, and he became immersed in the worlds of theater and dance. Not only did he study dance, and occasionally perform himself, he became a successful set and



Impulse
2011
Oil on canvas
64" x 42"

costume designer, working with Los Angeles Chamber Ballet. Continuing to hone his craft, he was invited to include a self-portrait in a drawing show at the Brooklyn Museum. This piece was singled out by critic Hilton Kramer in his *NY Times* review as “stunning.” These events garnered Stock the notice of prominent NY gallery Hirschl & Adler, which extended him a three-year contract.

From early on, Stock found himself unlucky in love, falling for women whom he perceived as, in some way, out of his league. His painful rejection was channeled into a series of paintings, *The Butler’s In Love*, featuring a dejected, balding servant, leaning against the wall as if for moral support. The artist felt that, in its pathos, his work also displayed an affinity with the work of Charlie Chaplin, whom he greatly admired. An image of a butler painting found its way to gallerist Martin Muller, whose San Francisco gallery, Modernism, was at that time—in 1987—still becoming established. “It hit me very, very strongly,” Muller recalls. “Every now and then in life you have these major encounters.” He spent a year tracking down the artist, determined to have his work for the gallery.

Stock soon moved north, and arrived on the scene in a big way with an event Muller organized at SF’s Bix restaurant. In conjunction with the publication of Conrad’s book on the history of absinthe, Stock was commissioned to create a painting, *The Butler’s In Love—Absinthe* (1989), where the dejected fellow gazes intently at lipstick stains on a glass, a table with the contraband spirit sitting adjacent; it was created in ten days and was hung, still wet, in the restaurant. Actor-director David Arquette later made a short film, *The Butler’s In Love* (2008), based on the Stock painting.

Stock’s dramatic scenes include solitary voyeurs in formal attire, a seductive murderess sipping wine by a corpse, actresses glimpsed backstage. Face beautifully lit from below by the warm glow of her cell phone, *Impulse 2* (2011) features a woman wearing a sleeveless dress with gathered waist, yoke, gray-green with cream, red, blue and violet highlights—short white gloves, pearls, her hair swept up in a bun.

Twenty-five years after the debut of *The Butler’s In Love—Absinthe*, Stock riffed on that work to create a series of small works for a show commemorating his journey. These *trompe l’oeil* oils feature what appear to be postcard images of earlier butler paintings, taped to chalkboards on which faint tracings of chalk sketch evocative images. In honor of the memory of Mark Stock, Modernism will now devote the entire gallery from May 1 to June 21 to an expanded exhibition celebrating his life and work. As Barnaby Conrad expressed by phone, “He enriched our lives, and he will be sorely missed.”

Modernism gallery, in San Francisco, will be honoring Mark Stock with a memorial exhibition, from May 1 — June 21, 2014. www.modernisminc.com