

The Robb Report



The Soul of a City

MAX FERGUSON

The paintings of Max Ferguson (b. 1959) are conservative in two senses: They stand apart from the art world's current fads and fixations, and they are intended to preserve certain facets of New York that the artist feels are fading into oblivion. Although some have linked him to the photo-realists

because of his strikingly meticulous and detailed brushwork, Ferguson disputes this, explaining, "Technique minus soul equals zero." He sold his first painting at 19, while he was still a student at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. That picture—a view of Amsterdam from his apartment window—seems not far removed from his present vision.

Shindler's List (above) is quietly contemplative in the tradition of Hopper, but has a mysterious edge that is Ferguson's alone.

In line with his tutelage in Holland, Ferguson brings a burnished old-master glow to his pool halls and subway platforms. As to genre, the works aren't easily categorized. Landscape, or at least locale, is usually foremost, but human figures are also used; the painter and his father often serve as models in noncommissioned works. While not approaching the existential air of Edward Hopper's people, Ferguson's are generally solitary units. The effect is calming and suitable for contemplation, seemingly real yet pristine.

Schindler's List has the intricately rendered perspectives and planes that earned Ferguson the photo-realist moniker. In its restricted palette, the moody, vibrant cityscape includes enough incident to gladden any moviegoer—that mysterious woman approaching from the distance, armored in her black trench coat and umbrella. And those lovingly drawn reflections in puddles, sure to bring joy to the heart of Ridley Scott. *Girl in Miami* (1999, 20" by 30") is not shown here, but it can be seen on Ferguson's web site. The clean, sunny horizontals and pervasive flatness of image are less complex than the New York paintings but no less appealing. Intentional or not, another film reference is not easily ignored: This is the *Miami Vice* color scheme in excelsis.

In addition to his primary body of work focusing on New York City, Ferguson also examines Coney Island and Miami, as well as an ongoing series on New York's Jewish community. Ferguson's quietly gorgeous oeuvre is worth knowing. It can be explored at the ACA Galleries (established in 1932) in New York's Chelsea district or on the artist's web site. —W.M.

ACA Galleries, 212.206.8080, www.maxferguson.com

Ferguson's meticulous oils are painted on panels instead of canvas, in the tradition of the 16th-century Northern masters. Capturing the very spirit of New York and its environs are Plaza Hotel, East 84th Street Snow, and Astro Park (right, top to bottom).

