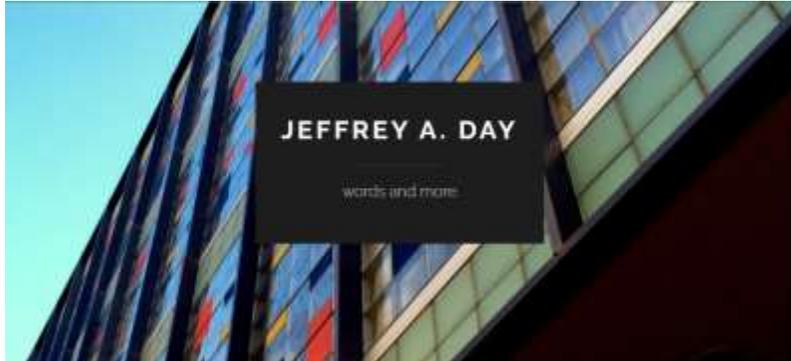




248 Utah Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

BOXBBLUR: Night Watch / Attie



art talk

A lot of art to see and catching up to do

By: Jeffrey A. Day

Published on: October 6th, 2021

A recent trip to the Bay Area took me to Shimon Attie's floating video exhibition "Night Watch;" "Mothership: Voyage Into Afrofuturism"; a show of large paintings by the late William T. Wiley; a magnificent Joan Mitchell exhibition; an unusual show about singer/songwriter/poet Leonard Cohen; a batch of gallery shows; and a concert by the St. Lawrence String Quartet. It was a busy couple of days and I'm running way late on writing about it. I'm going to hold off on Mothership, Cohen and Mitchell, because this would all go on for too long and they're both up for many more months.

Quietly powerful and profound



“Night Watch” when it was shown in New York in 2018.

Shimon Attie’s work is what prompted me to head to SF because along with the floating presentation “Night Watch,” he was also taking part in a panel discussion. I became familiar with Attie’s work in 1999 when I did a little work for a projection project he did on the Lower East Side in NYC. I ran into him a couple of years ago at the Headlands Center for the Arts where he was an artist in residence.

Attie was born in Los Angeles and earned degrees at UC Berkeley and S.F State, but has lived in New York for a long time and his work is much better known there and (probably) outside the U.S.

In his installations that include video and/or photography and usually a live, site specific component, along with stand alone photos and videos, Attie explores



BOYBLUR

248 Utah Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

displacement, history, memory, drawing from sources ranging from the Holocaust to recent refugee crises. It is visceral work that packs a lasting emotional punch, but never panders or preaches. It speaks volumes, but does so quietly. (Attie said during the panel discussion “I’m not an activist.”)

The floating exhibition, along with his videos and photos at the [Catharine Clark Gallery](#) (and elsewhere) make up his most extensive appearance on the West Coast.

“Night Watch,” first staged in New York in 2018, is a water borne exhibition of a barge on which videos of refugees are shown. Each person is seen first in the distance then slowly walks toward the camera/screen/viewer until their impassive face fills the screen. (The barge made a few stops over a period of days; I saw it in Warm Water Cove in Dogpatch following a panel discussion with Attie and others at the Minnesota Street Project). One way or another many refugees made it to the shores of what they hope is a safer place over water. In “Night Watch” they come to us that way again and this time we see their faces.

The Clark Gallery’s Attie exhibition “Here, not Here” covers several decades and is of the level that these works together would make a solid museum exhibition.



From "The Writing on the Wall" (1992 - 93)

With the earliest project, "The Writing on the Wall" (1992-93), Attie projected found pre-World War II images of Jewish street-life in Berlin onto the same or nearby addresses in the city. In "The History of Another" he projected images of individuals on Roman ruins.

A silent group of elegantly dressed young people surrounds a roulette table in "The Crossing (2017)." The "actors" are Syrian refugees who recently arrived in Europe, many on rafts over the Mediterranean, some just weeks prior to filming. As with the people shown on the barge, their faces give nothing away and one has to wonder what horrors they are hiding and what kind of "luck" they had in the journey.



BOYBLUR

248 Utah Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

Feeling more engaged in politics is “Facts on the Ground” for which the artist placed light boxes with enigmatic phrases (striking gold, part of the plan, a problem of logic) in Israel and Palestine. One doesn’t have to be a scholar of the conflicts there to understand.

The gallery exhibition is up through Oct. 30. It includes photographs related to the 2018 presentation of “Night Watch” and a new video “The View From Below” that grew out of “Night Watch.” You can also watch some of the videos online at the Clark Gallery website.

Although the on the water live show is over, you can still view videos from it at the [Minnesota Street Project](#) and the [Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive](#) through Oct. 31.

<https://jeffreyaday.com/art-talk/>