

**ALBERTA: Tim Okamura, *Urban Portraits and Brooklyn Mythology*, May 18 — 28, 2006**

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Tim Okamura: *Blue, Green and Gold*, n/d, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches

Artistically speaking, Tim Okamura may just be the Caravaggio of our time. Selecting many of the subjects for his realistic portraits from people he meets on New York city streets — much like the famed Baroque artist filled his canvases with ordinary people he knew in Rome — Okamura depicts a range of humanity within a context of dramatic light and shadow.

*Urban Portraits and Brooklyn Mythology* is a series of 24 atmospheric oil paintings that Okamura has completed over the past several years. The exhibition highlights his ongoing fascination with the human face and showcases his skills as a talented portrait artist. Born in Edmonton and educated at the Alberta College of Art & Design and New York's School of

Fine Arts, Okamura has lived in Brooklyn since 1991. When not teaching drawing and painting at the Parsons School of Design or the City College of New York in Harlem, Okamura spends his time capturing on canvas the famous and less famous with equal finesse. Thoroughly contemporary in his approach, he places his subjects in graffiti-covered alleyways and depicts their likenesses using rough brush strokes.

In one recent article about Okamura he was referred to as "the artist to the stars" because of his association with *Prime*, a 2005 feature film starring Uma Thurman and Meryl Streep. Okamura's paintings were prominently featured in the movie, giving a star-studded boost to his career as an artist — and a brief opportunity to wear the actor's mantle in a cameo appearance in the film. Underlining the adage that "life imitates art," *Prime* is a story about a New York woman who falls in love with an artist who has yet to achieve fame and fortune. The inspiration for the struggling artist character was none other than Okamura who became involved with the project after Ben Younger, the film's writer/director, purchased one of his paintings.

In *Urban Portraits and Brooklyn Mythologies* a portrait of actor Bryan Greenberg

who played the role of the artist continues the connection to *Prime*. Shown in a tank top with stylized graffiti letters spelling out "Berg" on the wall behind him, Greenberg holds a paint brush in his right hand and stares defiantly out from the canvas.

Despite this brush with celebrity, most of the paintings in this collection have little to do with fame and everything to do with a telling a story using the human form. In the painting *Blue, Green & Gold* we meet a black man stationed in front of a concrete wall calligraphied with the tags of New York's graffiti writers. Viewing this portrait we understand that, for the people who inhabit Brian's world, life is not filled with Hollywood actors and red carpet affairs. A similar narrative is present in *Totem Wall* where a man of Aboriginal descent, seemingly caught between tradition and urban life, stands in front of a wall painted with graffiti and native Indian symbols.



Tim Okamura: *Portrait of Actor Bryan Greenberg*, n/d, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches

Okamura's talent is not going unnoticed. His painting *La Familia III*

— *Les Soeurs*, a group portrait of six street-wise young men, was selected as one of the 53 entries for the 2005 BP Portrait Award. It will be on display at the National Portrait Gallery in London, June 15 — September 17, 2006.

Not yet finished with celebrity, Okamura's portraiture will be seen in the upcoming film, *The Hottest State*, written and directed by Ethan Hawke. He has also been short-listed by the Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures to paint a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II — an opportunity that surely even Caravaggio would not have turned down.

— **BY Wes Lafortune**