

Billy Sullivan

Still, looking

opening november 17, 7.00 pm

kaufmann repetto is glad to announce "Still, looking", Billy Sullivan's new solo show at the gallery.

In her famous essay 'On Photography,' Susan Sontag identifies a 'chronic voyeuristic relation' with the surrounding environment, due to the large-scale diffusion of the photographic medium.

Billy Sullivan's work seems to stress this relationship between assiduous observation and the re-picturing of reality, to capture moments of a relentless life-flux that would otherwise fade.

The result of this ongoing documentation is a narration that, from the sixties on, has provided us with a portrait of the artist's environment, which often coincides with the New York cultural and artistic world, from the Factory until today.

Permanence and immediacy are the two extremes framing the exhibition. In the gallery space photographic portraits alternate with a series of still-life paintings, each one representing a new, always-different arrangement of flowers. The two series of works, apparently dissimilar, each reveal a desire to transform the ephemeral into something durable. Through a photographic shot or a quick series of brushstrokes, the artist blesses with duration and permanence even those flowers that are about to wither and fade.

The photographs tell us stories of people caught in intimate circumstances, captured in a moment of authenticity. In spite of the spontaneous nature of the shootings, most of the subjects are pictured in statuesque poses, in continual reference to classical portraiture. Seemingly in an instant, a fluid succession of events is distilled into a sense of timelessness.

In the same way, an ordinary bunch of flowers is rendered through quick gestures and strokes, without any preliminary drawing, letting shapes and colors prevail. Thus the paintings echo the immediacy of the photographs, and the succession of changing bouquets evokes the passing of days. They are memento mori, but also a celebration of life and the ever-renewable emotion of painting.

These two series of works will be integrated with a large-scale site-specific work: a wall painting that the artist will realize in the gallery in the days leading up to the opening. In the wall painting Billy Sullivan again investigates the ephemeral through a series of actions that convey immediacy — or, better yet, that suggest the persistence of what only appears to be ephemeral.