

VILLAGER ARTS & LIFESTYLES

Of cameras and commemoration

A new lens on the major themes of mortality and memory

ART

WINTER STORIES

Paolo Ventura

Through April 12

Hasted Hunt

529 West 20th Street

(212-627-5117; hastedhunt.com)

DEATH AND THE RIVER

Juan Manuel Echavarria

Through April 5

Josée Bienvenu

529 West 20th Street

(212 206 7990; joseebienvenu.com)

THE EIGHT PAINTINGS

Ashley Bickerton

Through April 19

Lehmann Maupin

540 West 26th Street

(212 255-2923; lehmannmaupin.com)

BY JEFFREY CYPHERS WRIGHT

Art creates a portal for us to travel through time, and several current shows address this ability with starkly different designs and results.

Mining the strata of his own childhood memories and stories from his grandmother, Milan native Paolo Ventura's "Winter Series" invents a series of photos representing the memory banks of a dying man.



"Winter Stories #33," 2007.

The scale models and figurines re-envision a simpler time. But this is not quite Eden. A fairytale grimness or noir frisson tempers the beckoning nostalgia.

In a rainy scene, the umber and ochre palette is so restrictive that it becomes

inviting. Anonymous and isolated, men in trench coats pass by. The black umbrellas possess a luxurious sheen as well as a menacing uniformity.

A corner building's cropped front presents a strong diagonal, suffusing the

atmosphere with surrealism. Above the oppressive scene, a bright window on the second floor shines with relief and promise as if to say, "Just get home with all your

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secret intrigues and worries and a nice dinner party awaits you."

The circus, replete with its drama and metaphors, is a grand theme in the show. Ventura's vignettes recall the dizzying visions of his countryman, the filmmaker Federico Fellini. A clown clutching a bouquet calls us into a tent. A puppet theater with drawn curtains pledges to provide fuel for the imagination. A high-wire act passes over the heads of a crowd much as the artist passes his sleight of hand over our eyes.

In "Winter Stories #9" a man leans against a circus wagon, gazing at a showgirl who rides by on a white horse. She is the star, her lavender and white plumage proclaiming her magic and majesty, and yet her back is to us, maintaining a sense of mystery.

Ventura hovers at the edge of the sublime, populating a world where everyone is an actor on a set. The show has not yet begun, but we're invited in, where we share the excitement with the insiders.

Memory is also the subject of Juan Manuel Echavarria's show at Josée Bienvenu—or more aptly: memorial. For over a decade, the artist's videos and photographs have spoken to the ongoing drug war in Columbia. "Death and the River" documents a mausoleum that is the final resting place of many victims of the 40-year old conflict.

For the people of Puerto Berrio, the anonymous bodies that are pulled from the Magdalena River offer them an opportunity. If they can do a favor for the dead by consecrating their bodies and tending to their graves, then the dead may return the favor one day.

Courtesy Paolo Ventura/ Hasted Hunt NYC

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