



Symphonica Allegoriosa, 1986
36" x 54"
oil on canvas

LOUISE STANLEY'S art pivots on the experience of a "double-take." All substantial art manifests suggestive layers – allusions in varying extent to current style, historical precedents, timeless themes and topical concerns. Stanley's paintings mix these in often apparently contradictory ways that make it difficult to pin down their mood. The realistic figures stretch toward caricature; their lifelike milieus implausibly juxtapose a modern stereotype of a glamorous woman with antique goddesses draped in chitons and heros in chamlys. The contemporaneity of the drawing is doubled by the mythic themes. Janus-like, the vignettes shift from wackiness to sincerity, depending on one's perspective.

The surprising first impression demands a second look. The work's initial aspect of comic originality is doubled by its poignant impact, a resonance that radiates like a splash in a pool. In turn, her brushwork's

finesse of touch redoubles the emotionally "touching" nature of the subjects.

As is especially characteristic of narrative art in northern California, the autobiographical component is prominent. The protagonist is a taller, spikier – from her serrated coif to her stiletto heels – alter-ego for Stanley. Interacting with Classical figures, a Renaissance Madonna or as part of a contemporary couple, the artist explores personal dilemmas of creative work and romantic play.

Yet Stanley's stories are not only her own. While her style is idiosyncratic, her updates of mythology are easily identified with. The light-hearted demeanor masks the drama of the struggle, of the ambiguities of giving life to fantasies – artistic and personal. As much as we are in the field of social satire, we are even more in the realm of desire. Doubling our pleasure, Stanley's muse inspires both amusement and musing.

Suzaan Boettger