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Showcasing Fabric of Art

By LANCE ESPLUND

Bill Rice: Paintings & Works on Paper

Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects

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Through July 1



SHFAP/steven harvey fine art projects

Bill Rice's 'Silks.'

Something of a Renaissance man, the painter, scholar and actor Bill Rice (1932-2006) moved to New York in 1953. A compelling performer on stage and film, he worked with Jacob Burckhardt, Robert Frank, Gary Indiana and Jim Jarmusch, as well as punk musician Richard Hell; and he painted dark, brooding, Goya-esque pictures of the city—buildings, streetscenes and homoerotic nightscapes in which washy figures, taxicabs, signs and windows burn red, white or yellow against the blackened backdrop of the Lower East Side.

Mr. Rice's local color can sometimes jar; and some of his New York pictures resemble snapshots, rather than fully developed narratives. Two of the 11 paintings in this small retrospective stand out. Suggestive of Henri Matisse's post-Moroccan period, the roughly four-foot-square "Tree" (c. 1973) is inventive, delicate and light-filled. The tiny, fragmented "Untitled (Head)" (c. 1984) conflates an East Village portrait with a Coptic textile.

But it is Mr. Rice's romantic New York noirs that were his midnight feast. Fleeting, somewhat dangerous, often seen voyeuristically through a window, they are liquid, immediate and indistinct—layered worlds in which individual stories overlap and intertwine to become the collaborative narrative of the city.

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