

Art Critical Analysis



Description

Four Palm Trees is the artwork of the famous painter Robert Bechtle. This photorealistic work was created in 1969 in California. I viewed it in De Young Museum, San Francisco, CA on April 23. Bechtle used oil technique in order to create his 230 x 280 cm masterpiece. *Four Palm Trees* presents a view of the small town of Dixon, United States. The work shows a landscape that is associated with native California as soon as one throws a glance at it. In the immediate foreground, beneath our very eyes, four palm trees are situated that are the dominant subjects of the work. They stand at different distance to each other and cast sharp shadows on the golden sand. These exotic trees are painted against the background of the sunset and infinite sandy desert. On the horizon of CA paradise appears a hint of civilization – the suburbs.

Analysis

In *Four Palm Trees* there is a definite balance between the variety and unity. Such components as the palm trees themselves, desert and sky seem to belong to one another. They form the harmonious whole of the Californian landscape, while the suburbs on the horizon of the work stand out by its affiliation with civilized life and development. In this way, the wholeness of the nature is “cut” by human world.

In general, the composition of the work has many things to pick on. First of all, the tree trunks are rather close to the bottom of the canvas. Moreover, there is too much space for the sky, thus, the work is lowered. In addition, in spite of four palms, depicted on the canvas, the desert still seems to be empty, creating a feeling of solitude. Still, in spite of the mentioned compositional mistakes, it is hard to tear the eyes away from it. Another formal element that influences the mood of the viewer is the combination of parallels, horizontals (desert, sky, suburbs) and verticals (four palm trees). The presence of these patterns, that underline steadiness and lack of movement, only contributes to the strange feeling of loneliness.

Robert Bechtle creates a symmetrical balance in his work, leaving right and left sides of the canvas approximately the same in size. The artist applies the perspective in his work, decreasing the size of palm trees that stand farther. In this way, the trees do not stay in row. Still, all the palms have a photographic accuracy, avoiding blurred and unclear strokes. The repetition of the visual elements is represented by the one of the mentioned trees, that together with the sky and desert create an impression of infinity.

The color spectrum of the work ranges dramatically. The use of bright yellow and blue colors on the background together with dark green and brown tints of the trees is more than just appropriate. The green tops of palms highly contrast with the environment surrounding them. The suburbs on the background also stand out despite its remoteness to the foreground scene. The sky over the desert is saturated with the hues of different colors, starting with cold blue and ending with warm orange, creating a picture of Californian marvelous sunset. Speaking about the textures used in the work, it is already mentioned that the artist pays attention to all the details that is one of the major characteristics of photorealism.

Interpretation

Bechtle is considered to be one of the earliest photorealists. He has developed his own style and subject matter, maintaining them over his career. The artist works from his own photographs, creating paintings described as photographic. Bechtle takes inspiration from the local San Francisco surroundings, painting friends, family, landscapes and street scenes. His brushwork is barely detectable in his photo-like interpretation. Bechtle's paintings uncover his perspective on how things look to him, the light and the color of a commonplace scene. In his work, the artist encloses a feat of covered artifice, making his pieces of art stand out not only by beautiful shell, but also a deep subtext.

Four Palm Trees is an astonishing example of Bechtle's ability to convey qualities peculiar to the landscapes of suburban America—particularly those of his native Northern California—in razor-sharp focus and with a perceptive wit. At first sight, Bechtle's artwork of four palm trees standing against a backdrop of suburban homes resembles a clichéd, picture of postcard view of California. Still, the emphatic emptiness of the scene fosters an indefinable sense of unease. Though palms are considered to be symbols of California's beauty, most of them were imported by developers in order to invoke an Edenic paradise. Bechtle's contrast of the isolated palm trees with the suburban subdivision becomes a kind of reminder that the built or artificial environment inevitably displaces the natural environment. *Palm Trees* functions as a metaphor for a sense of loss that often fills the Californian landscape. Bechtle emphasizes that paying full attention to the work one can see extraordinariness in ordinary things.

Evaluation

Robert Bechtle's work has value. It characterizes the natural landscape one would discover in California. Moreover, the work carries a kind of wit, presenting not only a postcard, but also a deep sense behind a simple content – the conflict between California's natural beauty and civilization. The work evokes absolutely contradicting feelings while viewing. In general, the landscape raises my spirit by the sense of rest, sun and warmth. At the same time, it leaves the feeling of loss and solitude. In addition, the art technique of the picture is very close to my flavor. Thus, in my opinion, this work, as well as many other Bechtle's masterpieces, must be considered one of the most successful examples of contemporary art.