



"Rosy de Palma," 2009 by Ruven Afanador

Ruven Afanador: Mil Besos

By Julia Morton

The tragic history of humanity is not a story on which we easily reflect—despite our willingness to do so. So, in order to confront and expel our demons—or to sooth or incite one another—other means have been created, such as dance, song and music. Flamenco is all three of these things. Flamenco performers tell the story of outcasts and peasants who trace their origins back many centuries to the Punjab in India, and to a mixture of ancient Gypsy, Andalusia, Greek, Jewish and Arabic cultures. The passionate dance, when done correctly, is meant to free the dancer's duende or "soul" and photographer Ruven Afanador has used several famous Spanish dancers as his models, many of them well into their sixties.

Flamenco dancers peak in their careers when classical and modern dancers are stepping down, because it's believed that only life-worn women have the experience needed to convey the deep emotions required by the dance. Dressed in extreme costumes, all black, and wearing the dark make-up of the classic Greek tragedian, Afanador uses the stark, white Andalusian sunlight to enhance the graphic staging. The dancer's dark bodies and bright faces flash before us in cinematic black and white. Like furies they excite and terrify. We see the expressive faces of "Rosy de Palma" (famous from Almodóvar's early films), "Antonia la del Pipa" or "Pepa de Molina"—not classical beauties, but remarkable ones.

As one moves through the exhibition, the photos become a tragic/comic theater, a play punctuated by moments of fabulous swirling, stomping beauty. Carefully art directed, the enticing visual rhythms allow you to feel the movement, and hear the sounds. But Afanador is aiming at the underlying reality of the dance, and at the secret rituals that passed the flamenco on and kept the important memories, rivalries and traditions alive. ***Ruven Afanador: Mil Besos, Throckmorton Fine Art, 145 E. 57th St., 212-223-1059.***