

“Agog”—the Debut of Big Fuss, aka Andrew Mer

Lots of things took place (besides the suggestion of swallowing bleach) during COVID 19 times and one of those critical anomalies was the overnight appearance on Instagram of untitled photographs under the moniker of Big Fuss (aka Andrew Mer).

Without so much as a brief introduction, Mer, a wandering boulevardier with his iPhone clapped to his ear, navigated the mostly empty streets of Manhattan, mining images that only his eye could see.

Though most of the Instagram world or at least a slim part of it, revolves around point & shoot homey images, Mer is a canny stylist for compositions that often more resemble paintings by the likes of Joseph Stella (as in “The Brooklyn Bridge: Variation on an Old Theme” from 1939) or other even lesser known American Precisionists, than ordinary photographs.

There’s a light-fused, fractured and kaleidoscopic look about them, at times resembling André Kertész’s “Distortions” or even the Modernist experimental work with light of Edward W. Quigley.

At other moments, his images might bring to mind the pioneering street photography of Berenice Abbott, such as “City Tempo-Fifth Avenue and 44th Street from 1938.

Mer carries his own tempo, prowling and exploring Manhattan like no other guide.

It might be a studied glance of a shop window or blur of a passing car, the images are meticulously composed without the benefit or heavy metal-ness of more elaborate photography equipment.

The viewer enters an untitled world of light and layered imagery, ranging from what looks like a classical statue draped in a gauzy and somewhat funereal veil to a red hued interior of a downtown bar with hidden figures, their backs to the viewer.

So this debut, emerging chrysalis like from the pixel-light corridors of Instagram to printed and framed editioned photographs on a gallery wall, feels a tangy bit revolutionary.

One might question this observation or thinking that so-called 'dumbing down' of technology from the Meta universe to plain old chromogenic life is somehow backward or at least quirky.

Take your pick but bear in mind that photography for the masses as it were came about in 1888 with George Eastman's the Kodak, a box-like camera loaded with a spool of strippable paper film that could take up to a 100 photos.

Fast forward or speed dial to October 2010 and the debut of Instagram by founders Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom.

Mer arrives on that scene, circa 2020, already a sophisticated culture-vulture, doc film producer and live music aficionado, producing eye-widening compositions of city life that are fast, frenetic and holding a steady beat.

Judd Tully