



"TURTLE RACE," 2011, **Jhina Alvarado**, OIL AND ENCAUSTIC WAX ON PANEL, 30" x 40"  
PHOTO: COURTESY JOANNE ARTMAN GALLERY

**LAGUNA BEACH, CA**  
**Jhina Alvarado: "Cinéma Vérité"**  
**at Joanne Artman Gallery**

It was just a paper grocery bag filled with old photographs from the '40s; but for Jhina Alvarado, a San Francisco painter, it became the exciting source of her new series. The bag contained "piles and piles of images of people, most likely no longer living, and no longer remembered. More importantly the bag was stuffed with personal and forgotten memories." The images were of people who could have been family, but in clothing, hairstyles, and a presence that told of another era, "when people didn't look plastic," but were flesh and blood and real. While considering how easily we acquire or lose memories, the '60s documentary filmmaking style came to mind, a style that searches for truth through intimate close-ups and fleeting memories. This series forms the basis of Alvarado's new show at Joanne Artman Gallery, "Cinéma Vérité."

Alvarado sought to resurrect thoughts of the past, transforming forgotten people into contemporary images, for today's generation, who know little of the pre-WWII era. A natural hand-held camera technique became adapted as painting on panel with only two acrylic colors, white and raw umber, giving the impression of an old and faded B&W photo, in the stark realism of a forgotten era. Like a

*vérité* filmmaker, Alvarado endows each painting with a sense of mystery and anonymity—a woman lost in thought, four playful boys in bathing suits, kids dangling on monkey bars, several women on the beach. To remove their personal identity, she places a dark bar over their eyes. She also eliminates any background, allowing the viewer to focus only on the scene and its immediacy. Then she coats each painting with eight to ten layers of encaustic wax, giving the image a creamy surface, yellow and faded, blurred and fuzzy, distancing the viewer with a "Private, Keep Out" warning. But the textured wax surface also adds an ethereal quality that further releases each original image from the world of photography to suggest an anonymous, universal memory that is no longer tied to a particular person, but is shared collectively, a relic that exists beyond time. Alvarado has since expanded her *Cinéma Vérité* series, using photos from the '20s to the '50s. With these enigmatic panels, she has become a cinematographer with paint, bringing the past forward, with a cinematic spirit she keeps alive in her contemporary paintings.

—ROBERTA CARASSO