

# Art in America

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## Yishai Jusidman at Elizabeth McDonald

On the surfaces of beach-ball-size wooden spheres, Yishai Jusidman—a 26-year-old artist showing solo in New York for the second time—paints landscapes in Neo-Romantic imitation of old-master style. Each sphere is mounted on a steel pipe near eye level; to view the landscape—a hazy world of hills and greenery extending to a distant, luminous horizon—you walk around it. The horizon line wraps latitudinally, dividing the cloudy blue dome of the sky from the wide, dark belt of the earth, which gives way underneath the sphere to unpainted, varnished wood lamination and occasional passages of geometrical abstraction. As objects, the spheres project the mysterious sculptural presence of antique globes. The five shown here hovered about the gallery like celestial bodies, and so the title of the series, "Astronomer," was apt.

These are not traditional globes, of course. In generously applied encaustic, Jusidman represents a ground-level perspectival view. The effect is paradoxical: we read the illusionistically painted space automatically, but the way it circles continuously around the ball is puzzling. It seems absurd and possibly mystical, like some pre-Copernican model of the world in a cosmic bubble. Indeed, one of the spheres—*Astronomer XVII*—has the upper part of its sky/dome gold-leafed in a medieval-style representation of sunlight.

But if the conjunction of globe and perspective landscape makes no logical sense, it does make poetic sense. Not just an inert vehicle for the painting, the sphere is a loaded symbol that triggers a host of associations: *world, universe, wholeness, unity, center and power* come to mind. Fused to the sphere, the landscape imagery becomes imbued with those meanings. Turned into a complete circle, the landscape is elevated from the picturesque to the emblematic. It becomes a visionary symbol of natural order. Slowly circling it, the viewer enters into a meditative, ceremonial orbit.

In addition to the landscape/sphere combination, Jusidman showed work in two other directions. "Geographer" was the series title of a pair of 13-inch orbs on which were painted entirely abstract designs of interpenetrating circles. These were not unattractive, but they seemed regrettably lacking in complexity next to the "Astronomer" globes. More compelling were three pieces called *Sky Study*. These were not spheres but ellipsoids on which were painted delicately nuanced, cloudy gray skies. Less explicitly representational than the landscaped spheres, these were more like works of poetic Minimalism. Two were set on the floor, further enhancing a feeling of enigmatic objectness. Nevertheless, in its resonant symbolic and formal complexity, the "Astronomer" series seems by far Jusidman's most substantial work.

—Ken Johnson



Yishai Jusidman: *Astronomer XVII*, 1988, encaustic, wood, 18-inch diameter sphere; at Elizabeth McDonald.