



Yishai Jusidman, *Astronomer XXIII*, 1989,  
encaustic on wood, 20" in diameter.

**YISHAI JUSIDMAN**  
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GALLERY

Yishai Jusidman presents a series of wooden globes and ellipses, each about 20 inches in diameter, perched on brass poles at various heights near eye level. Each is overlaid with a wax-and-pigment encaustic and shows a landscape or, in a few cases, something like a schematic starscape. One seems to be unfinished, so that the patchwork of wood beneath is exposed; on another the colors are so pale, the landscape so flat, and the horizon so low that the effect is nearly abstract. A third has what appears to be gold leaf on top, which lends to the scene below a bright, almost revelatory glow. In another room, two globes, with their even more abstract heavenly circles, seem to represent the epicycles of the planets and the spinning paths of the stars in the sky.

At first the effect is disorienting; one looks at a globe expecting to see a map, with the countries and oceans laid out in two-dimensional projection. To find oneself encouraged, instead, to see through the surface of the globe and find a landscape comes as

some surprise. Moreover, for the most part the scenes themselves are rendered vaguely enough, in pale shades of green, gray, and, where the artist has left the wooden globe exposed, brown, that one is constantly straining to make out the details, focusing in on the facts of a scene—a line of trees or a far horizon—then fading out again to see less definite bands of color.

In fact what the globes show are neither two-dimensional maps nor mimetic portrayals of landscapes, but representations of the visual field itself—the ovoid shape, fading at the periphery, that the human eye appropriates. What is embodied, then, is not so much something to be seen as something already seen, not a landscape itself but the phenomenal quality of the eyes' perspective on a landscape, presented again to the viewer. Indeed if one stands so close to the pieces that they fill one's field of vision, the effect of the fading of the colors and forms toward the curved edge of the globes is striking; they seem to be looking back, as one sees the form of the landscape mirroring the circle of the eye's field, rather than presented in the contrived flatness of a stretched canvas. Taken together, the pieces recall one of Emerson's essays on nature, which begins, "The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it figures is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world."

There are, then, aspects of romanticism to the work, of the desire to turn our subjective experience of nature inside out until it constitutes an objective world. But Jusidman also seems to have deliberately mixed his visual cues with earlier images, of the early globes of the heavens and the earth that cartographers and astronomers made at the rise of the new science in the 17th century.

And so the work also touches upon various more or less metaphorical functions of the circle, from the music of the spheres and the dome of the heavens to the circle of the compass, conjuring up the qualities of early science, its air of intent calculation and almost mystical awakening to the book of nature. Several of the pieces have abstract circular forms applied to the lower half of the globes, which function like the visible gears of a clock (itself a mirror and metaphor for the various-sized circles traced by the planets in their orbit around the sun). Jusidman places the simple act of looking into a context at once larger than itself, because a microcosm of the universe as a whole, and smaller, because related to the sphere the eye carves out for itself in the act of looking. His work is a remarkable reimagining of the function of landscape painting, in which the pieces serve as intermediaries between ourselves and the world at large.

—James Lewis

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