

# Art in America

June 1995

## MEXICO CITY

### Yishai Jusidman at Galería OMR

Since Pop art, painting has often been a great reanimator, ennobling the lowly esthetics of advertising and commercial art, reworking photography, introducing uncouth objects and mediums into galleries and museums. Taking banal imagery as a starting point, the work of Yishai Jusidman continues this tradition, but it also stretches the conventions of painting, both conceptually and physically.

The predominant images in this show, which included work from 1989 to 1994, were geishas, clowns and landscapes. Because of their popularity and commercialization, geishas and clowns have become icons recognizable around the world; landscape painting is similarly pervasive. His interest in "universal" images partly reflects Jusidman's peripatetic career: born in Israel, he has lived in Paris, New York, Los Angeles and, currently, Mexico City. The images he uses are equally at home in any of these places, their meanings remaining unexpectedly constant. In addition, geishas and clowns can be taken as metaphors for painting itself: experts in the art of make-up, these personages are simultaneously canvas and artist.

At first glance, the geisha paintings appear to be white canvases. Only upon closer inspection do they yield up the faces and bodies of the geishas. Jusidman creates these figures by manipulating the subtle differences of tone and surface between the white paint and the white surface of the primed canvas. Paradoxically, significant areas of these paintings, in particular the geishas' powdered-white faces, are constituted by the absence of paint.

In Jusidman's landscape and clown paintings, the Renaissance practice of anamorphic painting takes on new life, with a difference. Jusidman not only distorts the faces and vistas in his work, he also brings the flat medium of painting into the world of sculpture

by depicting the clowns and landscapes on wooden spheres instead of stretched canvas. In this way, he works in three dimensions while retaining the rules of two-dimensional representation.

When he first began his spherical landscapes, the artist added small circles to the scenes in order to heighten the three-dimensional effect. In some of the recent works, these circles have grown from secondary elements to large painted

shapes that almost completely overshadow the landscape.

Although painting can reanimate undervalued images, it can also deny an image any future reincarnations: Jusidman's white-on-white geishas cannot be photographically reproduced. A photograph shows only a white canvas since the image is dependent on the viewer's mobility. After having its own death endlessly forecast, in this instance painting gets to have the last laugh at mechanical reproduction. —Kurt Hollander



Yishai Jusidman: *E.K.*, 1990-91, oil on wood, cement, 23 inches in diameter; at Galería OMR.