

Art in America

December 1999

Yishai Jusidman at Galeria Ramis Barquet

In this exhibition, titled "en/treat/ment," young Mexican painter Yishai Jusidman explored art's role as an intermediary between self and other. Fifteen modestly sized rectangular vertical panels (all 1998), painstakingly worked in tempera, present solitary seated individuals dressed in street clothes. All but two hold books open to reproductions of famous paintings from Western art history. Each panel is accompanied by another, smaller painting that functions as a caption: on a light gray ground, white lettering provides the artist's name and birth date, the date and medium of the work, and the initials of the depicted person along with a lengthy clinical description. The subjects of these paintings are all patients in a Mexico City psychiatric hospital and have complex

diagnoses that collectively form a virtual catalogue of mental disorder. Just look, for example, at poor *R.R.*, afflicted with "hebephrenic schizophrenia accompanied by autistic psychopathy, semantic dissociation, psychalgia and uranomaniac delusions."

This contemporary medical exactitude is coupled with an artistic sensibility more akin to that of the 19th century. Théodore Géricault's portraits of monomaniacs from the early 1820s similarly conjoined the most up-to-date medical terminology with a humanizing, empathetic portrayal. The palette of somber earth tones favored by both painters deepens the stylistic affinity. Jusidman has learned Géricault's lesson well; it is not so much a matter of depicting one's subjects with an abstract "dignity," but of simply showing them as they are, without bias or favor. Some, like *A.M.*, with her asymmetrical face and tightly wound body, appear visibly disturbed, but many of the best works portray individuals with no apparent sign of psychosis. The narcoleptic paranoid *M.C.*, in skirt and denim jacket with a scarf dashingly thrown over her shoulder, carefully

presents an illustration of one of Mondrian's austere paintings; she could be an art lover anywhere.

The art reproductions, of course, separate Jusidman's project from Géricault's. The latter painted bust-length portraits, concentrating all the expression on his sitters' faces. By contrast, Jusidman mediates our interaction with his subjects through the illustrations he has chosen for them. Sometimes those choices seem like a variety of the pathetic fallacy—Jusidman might well associate a "delirious anxiety of immanent death" with Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*—but, more importantly, the proffered illustrations are alternatives to the cold clinical descriptions as "representations" of the sitters. Yet a sympathetic union between them and us may be short-circuited by Jusidman's controlling presence in each work. And the portraits of the two patients who refused to be depicted with an art reproduction of Jusidman's choice may be the most eloquent of all. —Tom McDonough

Yishai Jusidman: *M.C.*, 1998, oil, egg-distemper on wood, 35 1/2 by 20 1/2 inches; at Ramis Barquet.

