

Yishai Jusidman

en-treat-ment

Galeria Ramis Barquet through June 19

BY DOMINIQUE NAHAS

THE PAINTING EXHIBITION entitled *en-treat-ment* at Galeria Ramis Barquet presents fifteen diptychs in oil and egg tempera by artist Yishai Jusidman. They depict mental patients holding various art books in their laps with reproductions of masterworks open to view. Each is considered with scrupulous attention to nuance. And each work is both highly detailed and crisp in parts, and equally sketchy and vague in others so as to contain equal amounts of reportorial detail as well as a metaphysical de-materialization of paint and subject.

The willing participants in the artist's project are painted in full scale, and every portrait is complemented by another "portrait," which mimics a museum label with information which relates to the ideological and conceptual underpinnings of this fascinating and unnervingly understated exhibition. These "labels" didactically inform us of hard-edged facts: Jusidman's name, his date of birth and birthplace, fictionalized initials of each sitter (to protect privacy), a list of symptomatalogies of the sitter, the title and date of each reproduced artwork (among these are *THE LAUNDRY WORKER* by Toulouse-Lautrec, *VIR HEROICUS SUBLIMIS* by Newman, *THE SPINNERS* by Velazquez) and the name of its creator.

The windows of the soul (to use a well-worn romantic conceit on which the success - or lack thereof - of a traditional portrait painting is predicated), the eyes of each subject are blank. By contrast, the open pages of art historical reproductions seem to glow with the luminosity of their

historic importance. Yet that glow of recognition, mirrored in the viewer's (if not the sitter's) eyes only heightens the play of incongruity that Jusidman is after in this body of work.

The actual deep-structure "subject" of Jusidman's *en-treat-ment* project is hard to specify. It gets lost in the details, so to speak, and this is the intention of the artist as well as the source of his paintings' importance. Between the gaze of the sitter looking up to us after having looked at an open art book and our own searching for points of significance between the clinical data presented, the "look" of each face, hair style and clothing items, and the presumed "aura" of the artwork as subject and object, we are lost in a maze of aimlessly specific information and identification.

In the catalogue essay that accompanies his exhibition at Ramis Barquet, Jusidman states he was inspired by the "deceitful simplicity" of Giorgio Morandi's 1925 self-portrait as much as by the Velazquez's portrait of the dwarf Juan de Calabazas. And, indeed, *en-treat-ment*, as a successful project, relies as much on Jusidman's own moody intelligence to form a visual exegesis on the projection of self as a cultural construct as it relies on Jusidman's recalling the capacity of these great masters to strike humanistic chords in their pictorial struggles to embody both the presence and absence of a sense of self. The artist tackles the linkup in the popular imagination of creativity to madness in order to attempt to interrogate the myths that (purportedly) intertwine the artist, his subject and the art viewer in the privileged space of art. The result is an unsettling and powerful exhibition that resists explanations and interpretation in spite of the dense layers of potential readings available to the viewer.

IN THE FULL PORTRAITS OF fifteen anonymous residents of Mexico City's Fray Bernardino Alvarez Psychiatric Hospital, each sitter looks at the viewer with an expression that is hard to define. Each sitter has an inward gaze, yet it is hardly the look of conscious self-recognition, as each person is, no doubt, on medication. Nor are their expressions laden with the projection of artistic ego, one intent on providing the viewer the truth of the individual destiny of each sitter, a secret truth hidden to all, but unlocked by the probing brush and mind of the genius portraitist.

There is none of the false bravura à la Eric Fischl here. Jusidman's artworks are not about revelation or contested wills between subject and sitter. They are not about false conviviality or celebrity. Instead, the "portraits" we see are pictures that underline our own search for meaning and significance in art. These artworks are ruminations on the artist's encounters between the lives of his sitters, between the significance of the art in reproduction and between the implicatory circuit that binds viewer, artist, sitter and art history in a loop of recognition within the public space of the gallery. If anything, these images are about the limits of information and knowledge.

Within the facts, details and images which constitute this exhibition, there lies a sense of overall yet latent suspension of possible meaning that remains somehow implacably juxtaposed to the art reproductions themselves. As culturally loaded signifiers, they overtly invite interpretation. Even in reproduction, they intervene in the lives of those that see them the instant they are recognized.

En-treat-ment resolutely avoids resolution or conclusions just as

poignantly as it bids the viewer to witness the stillness of the subjects. These paintings speak of enigmatic knowingness. Jusidman gives no element more importance than anything else, yet he gives everything a privileged position in the matrix of artmaking while examining why this is so. He does this without flourish or sentimentality. Instead, the artist seems driven by an authentic desire to inform, to probe, to elicit the constraints of the world and its unconscious limitations in light of the myths of artmaking and the presumed power of the universal language of art, accomplished without affect or false projection.

The exhibition of Yishai Jusidman's portraits at Galeria Ramis Barquet is a quiet stunner. Don't miss it.

R