



Yishai Jusidman, *Haus Der Kunst*, 2011
an image of "what was once, quite literally, hell on earth."

'Prussian Blue': It's Not All About You

By **Christian Viveros-Fauné** *Wednesday, Feb 27 2013*

The recent New Museum exhibition "NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star" has launched a wave of multi-culti, identity-politics nostalgia that deserves a bracing antidote. That antidote exists, thank God, in a fantastic uptown painting exhibition at the Americas Society. If the first show carbon-dates our 20-year enactment of Freud's "narcissism of small differences" (from AIDS-era Benetton ads to Facebook's relentless adoration of self), the second reasserts art's enduring ability to address humanity's biggest traumas. In this case, it's painting about the mother of all art taboos, the Holocaust.

"To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," Theodor Adorno wrote in 1955, setting out a blanket ban that inhibited generations of shortsighted consumers of *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. A second gripping grad-school prohibition attached itself specifically to painting: In the words of one '90s-era commissar, the medium was a "shorthand code for an entire edifice of institutional domination."

Growing up a painter and a humanist at the tail end of the 20th century was no picnic. Few survived the relentless pressure of political correctness. Of those who did, many became, as it were, unburdened by gallery affiliations, highly independent, and, in time, astoundingly contrary. Of these, no artist has proved more consistently stubborn than Mexican-born painter Yishai Jusidman, who has lived for the past decade in Los Angeles. After nearly exploding his career on multiple occasions, the 49-year-old Jusidman has acquired an overblown but well-earned

reputation as a "difficult artist" (full disclosure: I organized his 2009 career survey at Mexico City's Museo de Arte Moderno, and he was a *jodidopain* in *el culo*). A painter who shrugged off early popularity with fashionable curators—many misunderstood his cerebral pictures as mere critiques of painterly representation—Jusidman has since undertaken figurative work that re-establishes painting as a medium capable of wrestling with the thorniest questions. In his first New York solo exhibition in six years, he takes on a gamble worthy of the Cincinnati Kid: painting what artists have been told is simply beyond figuring.

Titled, a touch preciously, "Prussian Blue: Memory After Representation," Jusidman's ten acrylic-on-wood-panel and two acrylic-on-linen paintings offer startlingly ambiguous, silently evocative, confoundingly beautiful images of what was once, quite literally, hell on earth. Based on archival and recent snapshots taken on the grounds of the death camps of Auschwitz, Dachau, and Majdanek—all but two of the images are of the gas chambers themselves—this suite of empty interiors and landscapes interprets photorealism using essentially three basic materials: flesh-toned paints, which the artist largely deploys to undergird and accent his compositions; silicon dioxide powder, which he mixes into the paint to achieve the effect of a misty or vintage reproduction (the delivery of poison gas was via pellets made of a similar material); and a superabundance of the color Prussian blue (ferrocyanide), a sublimely synthetic color that also happens to be a by-product of the infamous Zyklon B gas, and that appears on the walls of the gas chambers as a remnant of horror to this day. The effect is of mass murder painting its own banal, lurid, yet ultimately mysterious self-portrait.

Whether in discrete pictures such as *Majdanek* (2012), which reveals an ominous wedge of shadow cast along the long receding wall of what could be a simple granary; the tile-like brickwork of what looks like an institutional school shower in *Dachau* (2012); or the collection of utility-room ductwork featured in *Struthof* (2010), Jusidman paints not tragic monuments to memory but tiny mysteries, laid out for viewers to engage individually, the way one might flip through a found album of photographs or a set of uncaptioned news clippings. Through them we progress from being voyeurs—which folks always are when looking at other people's pictures—to excavators, combing our memories for similarities and points of contact. Absent both victims and perpetrators from what remains the world's greatest historical trauma, we look not for "me," but for us.

Details
'Prussian Blue'
Americas Society
680 Park Avenue
as-coa.org
Through March 23