

James Valerio at George Adams

The wary expression and side-long gaze of James Valerio's minutely observed graphite self-portrait (1998) indicates that while the artist's torso is exposed, his consciousness is not. This show offered four large paintings and 10 still-life and figure drawings made by the well-known Chicago realist between 1974 and 1998. What's intriguing is the contradiction they embody: Valerio's sharp-focus rendering promises full disclosure, but the works are notably ambiguous.

Two Models on Studio Floor (1998) recalls William Beckman's signature paired male and female nudes, but we look down on these two as they enigmatically lie on glossy, reflective tile, their heads turned away from each other, jagged shards of a broken glass and spilled amber liquid between them. Beyond that fabulously painted flesh and floor, what is going on here? In *Dandelion Dream* (1995), two good-looking nudes are seen inexplicably levitating and tumbling within shiny satin comforters outdoors. These works are neither psychologically bizarre enough to be surrealist nor dark enough to be expressionist; in fact, their emotional inaccessibility makes them merely frustrating. They seem principally to serve as pretexts allowing Valerio to display his virtuoso rendering of disparate surfaces.

Yet *Frances* (1974), a large painting of an obese nude woman seated in a bedroom, engrosses the mind as much as Valerio's self-portrait does. The model's sharply painted bellies, rippling cellulite and dense network of varicose veins on gargantuan thighs are both horrifying and fascinating. Certain features of this portrait recall Manet's *Olympia* (1863): the subject's intelligent if guarded expression that frankly acknowledges the viewer, the flowers around her, and her mules. At the same time, the Madonna is evoked by the blue of her robe as well as by the flowers. A mirror, connoting vanity, is tilted up to give an off-kilter reflection of a window, a rather blunt cue of a topsy-turvy world. But in this 25-year-old work, Valerio presents a smart dame seemingly able to handle it.

To the extent that this small



James Valerio: *Two Models on Studio Floor*, 1998, oil on canvas, 90 by 100 inches; at George Adams.

group of works can be taken as representative, it suggests increasing attention by Valerio to the illusionistic rather than the metaphoric possibilities of painting. Some may find such technical spectacles enduringly delightful; for me, they're transient. A title like *Evasive* (a 1995 drawing of the head of a woman with her eyes averted) suggests that Valerio knows that behind all his apparent realism, on some level he's been hiding, and that his challenge is to extend authorial scrutiny beyond his seductive mantle of delicately stroked salt-and-pepper chest hair.

—Suzaan Boettger

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 on Mondrian's austere paintings; could be an art lover anywhere.

The art reproductions course, separate Jusidman project from Géricault's. The latter painted bust-length portraits concentrating all the expression on his sitters' faces. By contrast, Jusidman mediates our intention 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 "delirious anxiety of imminent death" with Newman's *Heroicus Sublimis*—but, more importantly, the proffered illustrations are alternatives to the clinical descriptions as "representations" of the sitters. Yet sympathetic union between them and us may be short-circuited by Jusidman's contrapuntal presence in each work. And portraits of the two patients who refused to be depicted with art reproduction of Jusidman's choice may be the most frequent of all. —Tom McDono

Oliver Herring at Max Protetch

Oliver Herring first gained notice in the early '90s by knitting M coats and blankets as memorials to the performance artist E Eichelberger. He later shifted from making garments as surrogate gates for the figure to knit

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

