

All thought becomes an image

Yedidya Hershberg at the Sugarlift Gallery in NYC

Yedidya Hershberg's paintings begin with the act of perception "Nature is my point of departure", he says, "but there comes a time when it no longer provides me with what I need". In his new body of work, the artist is alive to the possibilities of both observation and invention yet his loyalties lie not with empiric reality, but with the demands of the picture alone. In *Nudes in Abu Tor*, the relationship between the figures and architecture offers a clue to Yedidya's pictorial thinking. It is a painting which wears its skeleton on the outside. The geometry of the architrave, chair and table establish scale and perspective and secure the work's structural integrity. The solidity of these planes is reminiscent of Sassetta's altarpieces whilst the forms of the human figures recall the rhythms of Ingres' *Turkish Bathers*. Here, the painting negotiates two competing notions of *Disegno* (the Italian concept of drawing and design) by reconciling the flat planes of Sieneese art with the curvaceous articulations of Neoclassicism. In his portraits of single subjects, Yedidya dispenses with the scaffolding of *Nudes in Abu Tor* but the simplicity of these works belies their compositional daring. The painter is alert to the nuances of every angle, crop and placement so that spatial relationships are rendered implicit. Often, a nude will be set against the silhouette of a black armchair so that contour, line and gesture are given their full force of expression. Sometimes, an idealised female body will be offset by a more angular and jarring element. In *Nude with Blackbuck and Transfiguration*, for instance, the motif of the wounded antelope (a borrowing from Moghul art) performs a similar function to that of the devils in Sieneese panels. The agonised contortions of the animal not only introduce an element of discord and pain but also throw the sensuous volumes of the figure into relief. In these moments, Yedidya dangles the narrative bait but he is never seduced by the temptation to tell a story. Painting is, he insists, its own art of fiction.

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