

ROBERT CENEDELLA

The current body of work encompasses more than thirty paintings that continue the satirical commentary on art that this painter began nearly forty years ago. The paintings reflect the movements and “isms” that rose and fell during a career notably independent of passing trends. The painter wittily recalls a cavalcade of styles, ranging from geometric abstraction to process art in imagined versions inspired by, but never reproducing, the original sources.

Looking at these paintings, the viewer is confronted with a “visual oxymoron”, a painting that is both authentic and a parody, simultaneously. As has been this painter’s recurring strategy, he puts the viewer in the uncomfortable position of having to think—and to sort out a welter of conflicting feeling about what is true, what can be simulated, and ultimately, what the value is of the paintings he so lovingly evokes. And there is some measure here of “giving the devil his due”, by making these sendups as straight as possible, while putting them into a context that radically calls into question the entire enterprise of cutting-edge painting over the past five decades. The fact that the painter has combined these styles with traditional techniques is another crucial example of the painter’s “double vision” that plays with the viewer’s expectations.

Revival of Easel Painting, the exhibition of these paintings, is conceived of as an installation, so that the viewer enters a real-life art show, whose velvet ropes, and the paintings behind them, are both real and serving as props in a theatrical setting. It is up to the viewer to divine his or her own role in this farce.

These paintings continue the artist’s long interest in putting up a mirror to our culture, and allowing the viewer to see its reflection. This image, playful and exaggerated, like that of a fun-house mirror, may provoke laughter. But the intention of the artist is to challenge the viewer to see the workings of the art world and society at large with a moral vision that is sharp and true.

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