



Indepth Arts News:

this week in the art

"BRENDA ZLAMANY Facing Family"

2007-03-28 until 2007-06-10

[Jonathan O'Hara Gallery](#)

New York, NY, USA United States of America

Facing Family features recent portrait paintings by Brenda Zlamany that strike a unique balance between innocence and experience, formal abstraction and



psychological exactness. Opening at Jonathan O'Hara Gallery on March 29, 2007, Facing Family is Zlamany's first exhibition at the gallery and her seventh one-person show in New York. Zlamany first won notice in the early 1980s with her richly glazed still lifes of animals framed in luminous monochrome fields. A decade later, her controversial paintings of bald male artists reinvigorated portraiture. These works rejected nostalgia even as they asserted the value of technical mastery.

Since her last one-person show, in 1999, Zlamany has produced a series of personal paintings depicting herself; her daughter, Oona; and her parents. These pictures, done for her own collection, are assembled in Facing Family. Exquisitely painted, they impose no agenda and are free of both cynicism and sentimentality. "These are the hardest paintings you could make, paintings of your family, for yourself," says Zlamany. "When I painted my father, I found my kick-boxing class useful."

With this group of paintings, composed on squares, double squares, and Fibonacci rectangles, Zlamany continues to explore the expressiveness of precise composition. At the same time, inspired by Rembrandt as well as by Ad Reinhardt, she illuminates turbulent issues of childhood and worldly knowledge. In Portrait #89 (Oona Playing with Two Dead Birds), the three-year-old girl, in an extravagant pink dress, contemplatively holds two dead canaries from the artist's flock. The picture unites the start of life with the inevitability of death. In Self-Portrait with Oona Nursing, the artist nurses her three-year-old daughter, both of them nude. Oona interrogates the

arts search

viewer with her stare, standing in for the traditional infant Christ and bringing her own message to the world.

As portraitist, Zlamany uncovers what is specific to the individual sitter, instead of exaggerating representational conventions to give her works an easy signature. In the portraits of her parents, she conveys the weight of a life not only through the details depicted but also through her arrangement of line and color. Zlamany develops complicated relations between the subjects of her portraits and objects in the picture. In Portrait #95 (Self-Portrait Pregnant with Snake), the snake, a symbol of erotic temptation and masculinity, bites its tail, evoking time's cycle and Piero di Cosimo's portrait of Simonetta Vespucci, as well as Zlamany's earlier series of snake paintings.

Also included in Facing Family are some of her Warhol flower portraits. Fascinated by the challenge of bringing to Andy Warhol's work the psychological depth usually thought missing from it, Zlamany in 2001 began a series of paintings based on Warhol's images of flowers. Each of her Warhol flower pictures is informed by a specific portrait or other painting in art history and serves as a counterpart to one of her regular portraits.

Born in New York City in 1960, Brenda Zlamany left home in 1974 to attend an art high school in New Haven and to study art at Yale University. She also studied art at the San Francisco Art Institute; Atelier 17, in Paris; the Tyler School of Art, in Rome; and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She received a BA from Wesleyan University in 1981. Her work has been exhibited in many one-person and group shows in the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Poland. Recently her portrait of Alex Katz was shown at the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, where it was a finalist in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition, and several of her paintings were included in New Old Masters, curated by Donald Kuspit, at the National Museum in Gdansk, Poland. She received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant in 2006-07. Zlamany lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

A fully illustrated catalogue, containing conversations between Zlamany and Vincent Desiderio and between Zlamany and Alex Katz, will accompany the exhibition.

Related Links:

[Indepth Arts Resources for the State of New York](#)

[Other Important Exhibitions in New York](#)

Quick Arts Access: