

NOTHING EVER REALLY dies; only we do. We see the world around us, the world as we found it in our earliest time, continue without cessation. Although we know that all creatures meet a death, what we witness is a world that, apart from our intercessions, does not alter — its composition continues, its species

remain. We have built another world, a world of civilizations, and their histories are lives, lives that go on even as each of us departs the scene. Death belongs only to the individual, and the only individuals we truly know are ourselves and those of our own kind.

Only we are bound to the wheel of time. Our makings and our means are beyond the degradation and the decay. Our techniques and technologies maintain themselves as we dissipate, they remain on shelves as we leave them behind, holding themselves in abeyance, honing their blades, retaining their efficacy, waiting to be taken up again.

The art of Brenda Zlamany is a revisitation, a return to a technique and a sensibility distinct from those that typify contemporary art, a revitalization of a one-time mode of viewing and of rendering the vision. Unlike the majority of present-day paintings, which take their visual cues from the flattened, garish, optically shrill image saturation of the current cultural environment, or from the continuing stream of painting styles flowing from the recent past, Zlamany's work displays a manner reminded of seventeenth and eighteenth century art. More particularly, the 18 paintings at Stux Gallery — portraits and landscapes from the past three years — reveal in their tactility the tangible influence of Rembrandt and Chardin, two of the artists Zlamany has named as her inspirations.

Her manner compiles together a ridged tactility and a fluid transparency. Zlamany builds her images upon an underpainting, executed in light hues, which constitutes what she considers the underlying illustration. The pigments are brushed with a heaviness that

delineates and models the surfaces of objects, constructing a density of rendition that seems just short of bas relief. Atmosphere and ambience are added in the application of glazes, as many as 10 to 20 layers, which bring in the darker hues, pooling them in the crevices and recesses of the worked surface of the underpainting.

The result is a strength of presence of the objects depicted — the persons and the vistas have a visual immediacy that comes of the textural realism with which they have been reproduced. The sight of the image feels much like the sight of the real thing. In the strongest of the instances, principally the portraits, Zlamany begins to achieve the virtue Diderot once attributed to Chardin when he wrote that Chardin's brush had on it the actual substance of objects. It is a quality of vision that is observably different from what is current in commercial media and artistic action — a capability pulled from the quiver of accumulated manner, of culturally acquired technique, a method once discovered and refined, and forever after available. It would be the merest sort of polemicism to call Zlamany's glazed and modeled manner irrelevant or obsolete, for that claim would be simply policy statement and not observation. The proof of the continuing vitality of the mode is its efficacy — the simple fact that it works, that we obtain from viewing the paintings the intended effect. If the style were truly obsolete, our eyes would be greeted with visual chaos. We would not be able to see the painting.

Zlamany's style grants her paintings an antique poise, not because her method is old, not because she has instigated a kind of art historical feedback loop, but because her choice of means removes artistic technique

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from the driving current of historical event. The presence of the established and efficacious means is not present, nor is it past — her selection of method places technique in the timeless, simultaneous order of artistic works and styles that T. S. Eliot thought any artist had to reckon with and find a position within. Zlamany's "look" is like something preserved, yet remaining viable.

The same aspect of preservation touches her subject matter. The heavy use of glazing gives the paintings a finish that resembles varnish, a high sheen seems to encase and hold the image fixed. Her portraits particularly give the impression of showing people as specimens caught in amber. The human appears removed from the decay and the degradation, withdrawn from grinding age, taken off the wheel of time and placed under a glassy surface, reflecting a timeless stability, an unchanging state. Two of the four self-portraits in the exhibition fully embody the sense of near seizure. *SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BENEDICT AND HALONG BAY, 1998* and *SELF-PORTRAIT WITH BENEDICT AND OXFORDSHIRE, 1998* are presented as a matched pair, drawn in profile, one facing left and the other right, and hung to face each other. Together and so configured, they make the reference to Piero della Francesca's

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