

Meyer Vaisman
MATRIX/BERKELEY 119

University Art Museum
late July - late September
1988

Souvenir, 1987-88



In Meyer Vaisman's paintings the volumetric stacking of canvases or layering of compositional elements, and the ersatz texturing of surfaces--a photomechanical imprinting of a magnified reproduction of canvas weave borrowed from a commercial Letratone® pattern sheet--parody the modernist ethos about flatness and truth to materials. Purity, another key modernist mark espoused by the critic-theorist Clement Greenberg, is also travestied as Vaisman deflates the spiritual, essentialist aura associated with reductive abstraction (as in the art of Barnett Newman or Robert Ryman) and instead makes reference to mass production, commodity fetishism, and the problem of representation in the post-modern, post-industrial arena.

Absence is a key issue. It is overtly denoted in the empty filler paintings (Painting of Depth, 1986-88; The Irregular Correct Painting, 1987); and in the blank white and black disc-forms or vacant picture-frame forms of compositions like The Graying States (1988) and Still Life with Portraits (1988). The latter's focus on collectible knick-knacks emblazoned with pseudo-portraits of forgotten heroes, dead leaders, and unnameable or generic persons, offers another designation of absence, here in terms of image vacuity and identity dissociation. Absence is also implied in the caricatured portrayals of Vaisman and his friend Lisa, which are featured in the Souvenir paintings. These portraits--actually reproductions of drawings made by a street artist outside the Uffizi Gallery--

are but fictive representations, mere signs of individuals with no pretense of naturalism or referential necessity.

Vaisman's art thus articulates the displacement of actual painting by simulated and reproduced imagery as well as the displacement of a sense of authenticity: mechanical processes in lieu of handmanship, artificiality and distortion in lieu of verism, copies several times removed from their sources in lieu of "originals" that seek to imitate and directly connect with "reality."

The paintings have the character of substitutes, produced things. As such they share an affinity with ideas expressed by the influential contemporary philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who claims that we live in a world of simulacra in which reality has been replaced by signs and images. As paintings which emphasize a sense of absence they qualify, moreover, as fetish objects. According to Freud the fetish--a nonsexual object that excites erotic feelings--represents desire for that which is missing and wanting (on a primal level, desire for the phallus of the mother). In Vaisman's view, pleasure once associated with the human body has been superseded by pleasure gained from the acquisition of art, and biological reproduction has acquired a parallel, if not a competitor, in mass production and photo-mechanical replication. Vaisman's paintings both reflect and represent this situation, themselves paying homage to the exaltation of the (empty) art object, the object of substitute

pleasure. They signify art as commodity-fetish/object-of-desire/desired-object by exaggerating references to commodity manufacture--as in the printed surfaces, the repetition of the same shapes and imagery, the synthetic palette (hues typical of process inks used for photo-color separations), and the stacking (an allusion to surplus goods and conspicuous consumption); and by conflating these with burlesque allusions to sexuality and eroticism--as in the greasy holes of Painting of Depth or the pornographic photographs of Untitled (1986). Vaisman's art is, then, an ironic, telling statement about prevailing conditions of production and consumption in the contemporary art market.

Meyer Vaisman was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1960. At the age of sixteen he moved to Miami and then to New York, where he attended Parsons School of Design and became a founding partner of International with Monument, an East Village art gallery. He and other young New York artists have been labelled as the "Neo-Geo" or "Neo-Conceptualist" group. Vaisman lives in New York and is represented by Sonnabend Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery, and Jay Gorney Modern Art in New York; and Daniel Weinberg Gallery in Los Angeles.

Sidra Stich
Senior Curator

Works in MATRIX:

1. Painting of Depth, 1986-88, process ink and axle grease on canvas with plexiglass, 84 x 60 x 8-1/2". Lent by Daniel Weinberg, Los Angeles.
2. Untitled, 1986, process ink and gesso on canvas, 68 x 130 x 10" overall. Lent by Mark Steisel and Sara Slavin, San Francisco.
3. The Irregular Correct Painting, 1987, process inks on canvas, 45 x 37 x 7". Lent by Jonathan and Susan Dolgen, Los Angeles.
4. Souvenir, 1987, process inks on canvas, 45 x 37 x 9". Lent by Cynthia Lowenthal, Los Angeles.
5. Souvenir, 1987-88, process inks on canvas, 45 x 37 x 9". Lent by the artist.
6. The Graying States, 1988, process inks and axle grease on canvas with plexiglass, 84 x 60 x 8". Lent by Ed Cauduro, Portland.
7. Still Life with Portraits, 1988, process inks and acrylic on canvas, 96 x 96 x 8-1/2". Lent by Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles.

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Daniel Weinberg Gallery, L.A. '86; Jay Gorney Modern Art, NY '86, '87; White Columns, NY '86; Leo Castelli, NY '87.

Selected group exhibitions:

Artists Space, NY '84; Jay Gorney Modern Art, NY '84, '86, '87; "Neo York," University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara '84 (catalogue); "Paravision," Postmasters Gallery, NY, and Margo Leavin Gallery, L.A. '85-86; Sonnabend Gallery, NY '86; "Rooted Rhetoric," Castel Dell'Ovo, Naples, Italy '86; "New York New," Paul Maenz Gallery, Cologne, W. Germany '87; "NY Art Now: The Saatchi Collection," London, England '87; "Cultural Geometry," Deste Foundation of Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece '88; "New York in View," Kunstverein München, Munich, W. Germany '88.

Village Voice, Nov. 24, '87.

Hart, C. "Intuitive Sensitivity: An Interview with Peter Halley and Meyer Vaisman," Artscribe, Nov.-Dec. '87.

Cotter, H. "Meyer Vaisman at Leo Castelli," Art in America, Jan. '88.

Oliva, A.B. "Neo-America," Flash Art, Jan.-Feb. '88.

Cameron, D. NY Art Now: The Saatchi Collection (Milan: Giancarlo Politi '88).

Linker, K. "Meyer Vaisman," Artforum, Feb. '88.

Jones, R. "Meyer Vaisman at Leo Castelli," Artscribe, Mar./Apr. '88.

Meyer Vaisman, exhibition catalogue, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art '88.

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Smith, R. "Art: 4 Young East Villagers at Sonnabend Gallery," New York Times, Oct. 24, '86.

Taylor, P. "The Hot Four," New York Magazine, Oct. 27, '86.

Heartney, E. "Neo-Geo Storms New York," New Art Examiner, Sept. '86.

Pincus-Witten, R. "Entries: First Nights," Arts, Jan. '87.

Heartney, E. "The Hot New Cool Art: Simulationism," ARTnews, Jan. '87.

Cameron, D. "Who is Meyer Vaisman?," Arts, Feb. '87.

Bankowsky, J. "A Spectacle of Capability: Belcher, Taaffe, Vaisman," Flash Art, Apr. '87.

Indiana, G. "Funny Ha Ha, Funny Strange," The

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