

David Levine

FORUM

For more than three decades, David Levine's incisive and scathing caricatures have lampooned the famous and the infamous, primarily in the pages of the august *New York Review of Books*. But the artist has another, gentler side, one that sensitively and insightfully captures the fragile humanity of anonymous subjects in the luminous, painterly tradition of American forebears such as Homer and Sargent. Two shows at the Forum Gallery paid homage to Levine's awesome double-barreled talents in a generous sampling of caricatures dating back to 1969 and paintings in oil and watercolor, most of them of more recent vintage.

As Nicholas Penny notes in his catalogue introduction, the subjects of Levine's take-no-prisoners pen are often reduced to infantile activities: a smug Donald Trump balances a toylike slab of skyscraper on his shoulder; George Bush, clutching an armload of missiles, perches on Dick Cheney's knee; Bill Clinton gleefully digs into a big plate of waffles. Or his targets morph into animals—Philip Roth becomes a tweed-coated rooster, Martha Stewart lays golden eggs from a plump, feathered body, and Truman Capote sprouts slimy, amphibious limbs.

In his paintings, though, Levine captures affecting glimmers of resignation and stoic endurance, and his figures often seem to come from another era. The aging man in *A Presser* (1971) or the people in *Crowd at Ebbets Field* (1960) recall the working-class subjects of the Ashcan School, while the moody, kimono-clad woman of *Influenced* (2002–3) might have stepped straight out of a Whistler.

In his ambitious crowd scenes, such as *The Front* (2000–3) and *Water Fountain and Crowd, Coney Island* (1964–65), the sheer mechanics of depicting big groups, overlapping pattern and color, and areas of light and dark reference the great compositions of the 19th-century Salon. Levine is equally adept at depicting solitary figures, whether it's an African American embroiderer intent on her work or a pale, dreamy woman looking up from her reading to turn a bemused gaze on the viewer. In recent years, Levine has cast an eye on the melancholy city of Venice, juxtaposing its majestic architecture against groups of garishly clad tourists. Working in oil or in the tricky medium of watercolor, Levine always shows himself adept at a kind of searching, ambitious realism that transcends any sense of the shopworn or academic.

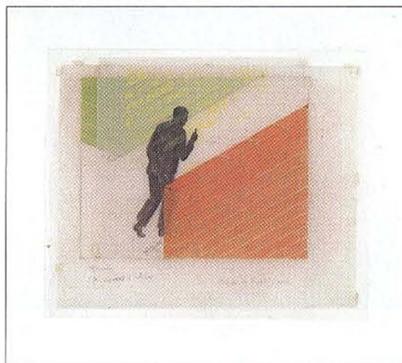
—Ann Landi



David Levine,
Influenced, 2002–3,
watercolor on paper,
14 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Forum.



Patrick Faulhaber,
El Taquito Café, 2003,
oil on wood,
6" x 8".
Danese.



Francis Aij's,
Study for "The Prophet", 2001,
oil, pencil, and
tape on vellum,
19" x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Yvon Lambert.

Patrick Faulhaber

DANESE

Unlike many photorealist artists whose painstakingly precise work sometimes leaves no room for "soul" or emotion, Patrick Faulhaber uses the technique to produce works that are not only exquisite but also very moving, as was evident in the "Texas Paintings" shown here. Viewers did not wonder, "Why didn't he just take a photo?"

The mostly oil-on-wood pictures were street scenes of working-class neighborhoods near Dallas. With one exception there were no people in the paintings. But in contrast to Edward Hopper, Faulhaber establishes no sense of crushing loneliness. Rather, he celebrates his dingy, hopeful little cafés, beauty shops, and tattoo parlors, and his works are packed full of small details that delight the eye. Telephone wires stretch and sag across the blue sky and above the tidy little clapboard diner in Faulhaber's

2002 watercolor *Naomi's*. In *El Taquito Café* (2003), he shows the way rain and oil mix on blacktop.

Faulhaber captures the exact quality of natural light at a precise time of day during a particular season and can convey the very sizzle of neon. *Sonny Bryan's* (2000) is caught just at sunrise in winter: the parking lots are empty, the stores still closed. Santa Claus and a Christmas tree adorn the roof of the smokehouse. In *Smooth*

Groove, a 2002 oil and gesso on panel, a tattoo parlor splashes the nighttime street with electric blue from its neon signs.

"Texas Paintings" avoids the pitfalls of photorealism to let the artist's feelings shine through, along with his mastery of form.

—Arlene McKanic

'La Nuit Américaine'

YVON LAMBERT

One needn't have seen François Truffaut's 1973 film *La nuit américaine* to appreciate this subtle, eloquent group show. Like the movie whose title it shares, the exhibition addressed the blurring boundaries between art and life.

The main gallery featured a group of spare works, including 17 small watercolors by Douglas Gordon (all 2003), which read like pages from a visual diary with quickly rendered, single- or double-brushstroke figurative motifs: a silhouette of a man's upper body; a pair of crossed hands. Titles, such as *Pray to Your God It Will Happen Soon* and *Richard Tuttle Must Live*, conveyed the intensity of thought that accompanied the apparently nonchalantly composed pieces. Joan Jonas's intriguing trio of lyrical digital