

Galerie Sébastien Bertrand

The gallery is pleased to present the third exhibition of the american artist Michael Hilsman (1984, Pasadena, CA).

Michael Hilsman makes non-literal paintings of objects and figures that explore the absurdity, magic, and latent spirituality of the physical world.

Utilizing formats associated with classical painting such as portraiture and still life, and employing a wide visual vocabulary ranging from naturalism to expressionism, Hilsman builds monumental paintings whose objects and figures are in a state of dissolution and fragmentation, often seeming to disattach from themselves and form anew, appearing both familiar and foreign.

Whether it is the bulky male figures or the depictions of various flora and fauna, the figures and objects in Hilsman's work have a frayed, tenuous connection to their own materiality. They are awkward, vulnerable, impermanent, and worn from the constant weight of reality. Fruits and vegetables appear bruised and the human body's many absurdities and quirks are accentuated. Many times in Hilsman's work solid images disappear and ethereal ones become concrete, locked in a state of reconciliation between physical and intangible experience.

Various objects and subjects reoccur in Hilsman's work, such as teeth, walls, roots, shoes, hands or a figure drawn from the artist's body. They have a specific nature in that they are vessels that hold their own essence prisoner, or the memory that we have of them. By referring in this way to the Proustian vision, Hilsman's objects do not really have value in themselves, but serve as triggers of a memory or a deeper knowledge, a human experience both collective and personal.

*"I've found that a number of objects have appeared and reappeared in my work over the years. I think of them as letters in an alphabet that I myself am still trying to learn." **

The narrative elements are fragmented, appearing as incomplete and mysterious details on the sidelines of an invisible main scene.

*"This is how I think of a good painting--"the tip of the iceberg" as they say. The painting is unlocking something much larger than itself." * Michael Hilsman.*

"I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. (...)

The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect."

Marcel Proust, "Swann's way".