

Galerie Sébastien Bertrand

Michael Hilsman's exhibition of recent paintings derives its title from the 1944 novel *Dangling Man* by Saul Bellow in which the protagonist, a young man named Joseph, searches for meaning as he awaits being drafted into the army. He experiences an intellectual and spiritual crisis as he is suspended between two realities.

In Hilsman's paintings, figures and objects are literally and metaphorically "dangling." In the painting titled "Dangling Man With Cactus" a delicate piece of string levitates next to a human figure that is precariously suspended. In another work gravity becomes malleable as a kite weighs down the foot of a figure while an untethered feather floats nearby.

These works employ their own logic, in color and form, lulling the viewer into a dream state that is pierced with moments of agitation: in one painting a toe is about to be pricked by a cactus needle, in another painting a pair of scissors stands strangely close to a figure's ear.

The figures and objects in the paintings remain fragile, dislocated and obscured; the fact that they are left "dangling" is a metaphor for the human condition.

"But what such a life as this incurs is the derangement of days, the leveling of occasions...for me it is certainly true that days have lost their distinctiveness. There were formerly baking days, washing days, days that began events and days that ended them. But now they are undistinguished, all equal, and it is difficult to tell Tuesday from Saturday. When I neglect to look carefully at the newspaper I do not know what day it is. If I guess Friday and then learn that it is actually Thursday, I do not experience any great pleasure in having won twenty-four hours.

It is possible that that is one reason why I have been creating agitation. I am not sure...It may be that I am tired of having to identify a day as "the day I asked for a second cup of coffee," or "the day the waitress refused to take back the burned toast," and so want to blaze it more sharply, regardless of the consequences."

- *Dangling Man*, Saul Bellow, 1944