



DARIUS YEKTAI AND FLUID ARTISTIC PRACTICES

Exploring new possibilities for combining the physical and the psychological, Darius Yektai's recent work touches on a number of contemporary ideas. What appears especially fertile is the concept of artistic practice as something fluid that is both shaped and informed by personal responses to changing situations. In a world characterized by instability, it seems appropriate that the means of an artist's expression, such as style, format and execution, might shift as subject, feeling, attitude, perception and response also shift.

Perhaps Yektai's most complex and multi-layered new pieces are the small panel paintings that resulted from his attempt to redirect the subjective turmoil of a family crisis towards productive and focused studio practices. Starting with memory-charged snapshot album photographs — a child striking a camera pose, refreshments on the terrace, a scenic mountain vista — he created vigorously brushed, loosely defined images that hold both emotional and optical energy. Inner illumination and contrasts between dark and light passages can be intense, and the slashing, frenzied brushwork often slows down recognition. The series gives the sense of following a mental trajectory, or following a mind processing memories and acting out emotions through materials. Keepsake snapshots insert an interesting dynamic since they imply authenticity and suggest a very casual relationship to matters of conscious style.

The acting out of emotions through materials seems especially dramatic in Yektai's larger paintings such as "Unearthed" and "Dark Self." Here, as in the smaller works, the haunting, intense quality is sharply augmented by the way the artist creates specific single areas of concentrated illumination. An admirer of the accumulated knowledge of art history, Yektai will readily subscribe to the association with Rembrandt, the grand source for describing feelings and finding visual power in the contrast between rich dark tones and mesmerizing, amplified light. Tradition has a role in the way Yektai builds the resonance of his dark passages with alizarine crimson, thalo green and Prussian blue.

Yektai is at his boldest when his message and the overt physicality of his materials merge. In the large canvases, heavily pigmented, bursting figure shapes push against and challenge the notion of pictorial space. The female torso in "Unearthed" is actually cut out and assertively reattached to the linen support. Stitching leaves a wide border-like opening that emphasizes the primacy of surface. In "Dark Self", the roughened, cakey and abraded skin is both pigment and flesh. By featuring tactile components, rather than metaphor and illusion, Yektai reinforces his belief that everything contains material from something else — a creative approach that earned considerable attention several years ago when he exhibited sculpture that included accumulated pigment residue and empty paint tubes.

Ideas emanating from the artist's newest sculpture are also complex. There are