



ROBERT FEINTUCH

Posted by [Daniel Wiener](#) on Sunday, December 13, 2020 · [1 Comment](#)

[Robert Feintuch](#) lives and works in New York. Since 1985 he has had solo exhibitions at Sonnabend Gallery, New York, Akira Ikeda Gallery, Berlin, Studio La Città, Verona, CRG Gallery, New York, Daniel Newburg Gallery, New York and Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, among others. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions at institutions internationally including The Peggy Guggenheim Foundation (Venice), Ca' Pesaro Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna (Venice), Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art (Porto), The Rupertinum (Salzburg), Museum für modern zeitgenössische Kunst (Bolzano), Remai Modern (Saskatoon), The National Academy Museum, (New York), The Addison Gallery of American Art, (Andover), and in the Venice Biennale.

Feintuch has a forthcoming solo exhibition at Thomas Brambilla Gallery in Bergamo.

QUESTION:

Your painting taps the rich use of allegory in the history of painting. Allegory relies on stories. One of the job of painters of the past was to choose which moment to depict of a well-known story. You also choose a frozen moment in a narrative. But your audience does not know the story which led to that moment. They do not know what happened before or after. The untold story is as important as what is displayed. I wonder if this is correlated to your tendency to depict the back of a man. A portrait which does not portray. Do you envision the before and after, the story as a whole? What is your feeling about narrative in your painting? Do you reveal by not revealing? Is there pleasure in holding back? Or pain? Do you calibrate how much you tell and how much you don't tell between paintings? Some more, some less?

ANSWER:

I like the implication in the word "allegory" of speaking to mean something else, or of symbolic meaning, and I know that people often receive and retain stuff from stories, so it makes a lot of sense that you would see the paintings that way. And I like it when people want to tell me the stories they see in my paintings.



Himself, 1996, polymer emulsion on canvas, 73.5 x 47"

But that's not how I think about them- I never have stories in mind. One of the central things I love about painting is that it makes a still place, but I don't think of it as a pause in an ongoing narrative. For me, that sense of suspension says that it is worth considering everything in a painting, and I am really interested in how stillness, lack of specific context, and ambiguity support metaphorical readings. Metaphors say that things mean more than one thing, and even in the most reductive painting, that seems central to me.



Bacchus, Seated, 2016, polymer emulsion on honeycomb panel, 38 x 28.5"

After I wrote admiringly about his work in '91, John Coplans became a friend, and though it took me some time to recognize it, he was really an influence. I saw that by not showing his face in his self-portraits, he gave a kind of permission to the viewer to scrutinize his body and to look everywhere, and it helped to make the work about more than his self. And I'm sure, in part, because of my own work, I saw something about the way that real life undercuts grandiosity in John's photographs that seems really accurate, that I loved.



Smoke, 2018-19, polymer emulsion on honeycomb panel, 41.5 x 26.5"

This may simply be a consequence of who I am psychologically, but for me, holding back can intensify desire, and it can make what isn't said overtly a strong presence. As self-conscious as I can be, I really wouldn't say that I calibrate how much I tell. I do know that in art and life I don't like being clobbered with simple meanings, but I do like work that asks for interpretation, so I tend to look for and take pleasure in a kind of suggestive ambiguity when I think I've found it.