



ROBERT FEINTUCH

THE TRICKERY OF OBJECTS, RESOLVED IN BEAUTY

"The paintings take a long time to make, so naturally I get a lot of ideas about what they are about, while working on them." R.F.

ROBERT FEINTUCH is a figurative painter, and he began to make the transition to painting figuratively during the period when a marriage of conceptual and minimalist ways of working was dominant, a time when many people still took a dim and critical view of representational art. Yet critics have quite rightly emphasized conceptual strategies in Feintuch's painting, which they see, not least of all, in the open dialectic of style – that is, in a dialectic of form and content in a relationship of opposition.

Feintuch's paintings may or may not be autobiographical. One might see in the nude viewed from the rear an ironic self-portrait of the artist (who, if anyone, sees himself from behind?). But the most striking features in this group of paintings are the slapstick-style scenes of vulnerability and the ridiculous; situations in which the human being becomes a victim of the trickery of objects in brief incidents that bring lasting humiliation.

Having studied the world of everyday images in early renaissance and baroque painting, and the succeeding periods of French and Italian art, Feintuch has determined that, as in his own paintings, these images speak of desire, death and the transitory nature of existence – *vanitas* themes which also occupy a central position in his own iconography. His *Asleep* with its ticking alarm clock is very much a contemporary *vanitas* image immersed in a beautifying supernatural light, but without the traditional moralizing content. Feintuch's paintings are inspired by images from cartoons, photographs and films, and in them he alludes to complicated relationships between human being and object. Trousers lose their hold, and money leaps away, the shirt ties itself in knots, and the pillow cannot find its proper shape, the bucket tips over, and the Band-Aid on the foot suggests a small accident.

The intricacy of the artist's painting, his command of the luminous light of classical painting, and his delicate treatment of skin and sky clash with the subject matter and the thematic material that emerges from the narrative sequence of images.

The link to the old masters is most strikingly evident in *Saint*, where Feintuch has his own feet rise toward the heavens as if in a detail of a partially hidden ascension. In place of the stigmata of martyrdom these feet display only a Band-Aid, which is perhaps a reference to a minor unfortunate incident. And the sky, which appears quite abstract, might be interpreted too, as an allusion to an ascension. Perhaps it evokes the idea of the sublime in "pre-abstract abstract" painting represented by a range of artists from Tiepolo to Turner. Feintuch, like these artists, uses color that moves beyond the semantic or descriptive and becomes a force of its own. On the other hand, the shifting and changing cloud patterns are an elementary, archaic

image, a symbol or a metaphor for the idea of the passage of time that runs like a thread through all of the paintings.

With these iconographic modifications, Feintuch makes a link with older painters who used a repertoire of images that were similarly contemporary in their time. Feintuch performs a tightrope-walker's trick in his paintings, bringing together different and contradictory elements. He combines the sublime with the banal, the serious and the ridiculous, the popular stuff of contemporary civilization with the ideals of beauty (the use of light and related ideas of the sublime) of a bygone culture, and the classical with photography, film and contemporary painting. In doing so, Feintuch makes visual meanings and enigmas which occupy us for at least as long as the artist needed to complete his paintings.

PETER WEIERMAIR

Director

Rupertinum, Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art, Salzburg

Museum of Modern Art, Bologna