

JUSTIN LIEBERMAN
Salto Mortale
February 25 – April 8, 2010

Justin Lieberman (b. 1977, Florida, USA)

Through his practice, Justin Lieberman attempts to impose a quasi sociological order on the bedlam of a distinctively American subsistence by turning a flux of capitalist odds and ends- magazine clippings, found photos, counterfeit dollars, lottery tickets, small sketches, public signage, etc- into a subjective material history of late-modern life.

It is tempting to regard this process as a systematic desublimation (in the Freudian sense) of various social, cultural, and economic orders, one which privileges a critical stance in regards to these things over a poetic one. Indeed, Lieberman often authors texts which would seem to support this view. However, if we examine these texts themselves as part and parcel of the artist's practice, a different picture emerges.

His pieces are frequently humorous and sometimes disturbing. However, there are works that reflect a sedate Lieberman, an artist more concerned with formal questions than with shocking or unsettling the viewer. Lieberman cites the fiction of the consummate modernist Henry James in regard to these works, discussing them primarily in terms of eluding the commodification of meaning. On the surface, Lieberman's work appears to grant us just this opportunity. Yet if we linger for a moment, we will see that this is a false conclusion. Lieberman's work ultimately reveals itself as an ongoing struggle with the nature of faith and belief, and the subject of this belief is in a constant state of flux. It is a constant coming-to-terms with skepticism as it relates to ideas both pragmatic (consumerism) and impossibly romantic (revolution and suicide). Lieberman's most fundamental skepticism is always directed at himself.

His current exhibition ***Salto Mortale***, at Bernier / Eliades, is in part a continuation and elaboration of the retrospective self-historicizing methodology which began explicitly in his show ***For The People of Philmont*** last year. These pieces seem to evince a belief in romantic ideals that stick out of Lieberman's practice like some kind of distended organ transplant by a body that has rejected it. In his new exhibition he will present a large installation, paintings and sculptures. For the installation he chose to revisit several older works which were still in his possession. During the past these works were meant to illustrate, rather than re-affirm, the movement of bourgeois commodification. In this show however, he returns to these works with a fresh eye and questions concerning the role of the work of art itself.

The art of Justin Lieberman presents us with a parallax in regards to class. Are we to view it (and possibly him) as a pre-modern critical endeavor, one aimed at desublimation of the hypocrises of a consumerist society, or is it rather an explication of impossible belief in modernist ideals of artistic expression and social revolution?

At times Lieberman seems engaged in a kind of resentment, the term used by Nietzsche to describe the desire of slaves to drag the master down to their own level. Yet seen from another view, Lieberman's work is both humanistic and progressive, reinstating the autonomy and universal nature of the work of art. Lieberman's work paradoxically embodies both these views, and as we shift our perspective, the pieces take on an increasingly ambiguous relationship to the artist, to each other, and to us.

All people pictured in the paintings and photographs in ***Salto Mortale*** are suicides. If spectators recognize them, then they are artists, writers, musicians, poets and philosophers. If they do not, then they are portraits of people who killed themselves. Lieberman avoids naming them individually, as he has stated in the accompanying text; "These works are not a research project, a tribute, homage, or a critique. They are some other thing."

Justin Lieberman has participated in several shows among which:*Mind the Cracks!* Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel, *If the Dogs Barking*, Artists Space, New York, NY, *Agency: Art and Advertising*, McDonough Museum of Art, Youngstown, OH, *Dargerism: Contemporary Artists and Henry Darger*, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY. He is currently working on a book of alternate endings to the Henry James story "The Beast In The Jungle" with the artist and critic Colleen Asper. He recently released the record "Object Lessons" with C. Spencer Yeh.

The gallery remains open Tue- Fri, 10:30 – 20:00 and Sat, 12:00 – 16:00