

RAFFI KALENDERIAN

Satellites

Opening: Friday August 29th 2008

Exhibition from August 30th to October 11th 2008

The Peter Kilchmann Gallery is pleased to present the first European solo exhibition of works by Raffi Kalenderian (born 1981 in Los Angeles, where he lives and works). His work revolves around the portrait and the figure, and evidences a painterly approach which is both intimate and manneristic. The "Satellites" exhibition consists of a series of new drawings and paintings.

Raffi Kalenderian says that he came to portraiture more or less by chance, by painting that which was around him. Usually his subjects are people from his immediate environment, such as his brother or friends. Although the works seem to be snapshots of captured moments from the artist's life, the characters appear withdrawn. His figures are calm and detached, in atmospheres largely drained of emotion. Kalenderian's are familiar surroundings: his subject may be found settled on a couch or chair, in an apartment, or lying on a bed surrounded by books.

Raffi Kalenderian's portraits usually show a whole body, isolated from other people. While the artist may leave a piece of furniture unfinished, this is never the case with his faces. They are carefully worked, but strangely, to reveal a gaze often looking off blankly, as though his sitter were watching television, or bored and eager to leave. The blankness of facial expression and banality of surroundings is counteracted by expressive color and painterly technique applied to incidental surrounding objects, such as a seemingly out of place Persian rug or overgrown house plant. For the majority of the drawings, he works from life, spending hours with his sitters. This social aspect of the work give rise to an emotional intimacy, a sense of closeness which is passed on to the viewer. The paintings are bolder in color and form and are more compactly composed than the drawings, which are more casual and less claustrophobic. By naming his paintings with first names like Iris, Kate, Rochele or Shanti, the artist calls up a personal universe into which he draws the observer, entrapping him in the elaborately suggested contingencies of the particular surroundings.

Seemingly insignificant details invite the viewer to guess at a story left untold: a garment worn by the sitter seems to refer back to a shared experience known only to painter and subject, a violet floor seems unlikely in the particular living room in which it has been portrayed, the subject's posture seems uncomfortable enough to suggest a desire to leave. But the beholder will also notice more amusing details in these portraits: oversized feet, books held at angles at which they could not be read, or special attention given to body hair. The characters in Raffi Kalenderian's paintings are represented in common domestic environments but are rendered as though from a dream. This dreaminess is appropriate to the artist's own way of thinking about his work: Kalenderian has expressed the desire that the portraits should, like satellites, transmit back from Europe some greeting to their subjects in Los Angeles. They are meant, like the Lou Reed song, to be Satellites of Love.

Raffi Kalenderian received his BA at the University of California in Los Angeles in 2004. His work has thus far been presented in the following galleries and institutions: Black Dragon Society, Los Angeles; Marc Jancou Contemporary, New York; Eleven Rivington, New York; Track 16 Gallery, Santa Monica; Feuer Gallery, Los Angeles; Co-Lab, Copenhagen.