

In the Secession's main gallery, the American artist R. H. Quaytman has developed a frieze comprising twenty-two paintings on wood panels titled *An Evening. Chapter 32*. These paintings are placed on two walls that form a forty-five-degree angle. The combined measurements of the two walls equal the length of Klimt's Beethoven Frieze, which the artist references in various ways for this chapter. Like the architectural plans for several previous exhibitions, this configuration is based on the figure of the open book and reinforces one-point perspective.

In addition to referencing the site of the Secession, Quaytman used two paintings by the Flemish Artist Otto van Veen (1556–1629) as points of departure – *The Persian Women* and *Amazons and Scythians*, both in the collections of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. After viewing these unusual and germane works in the restoration rooms at the KHM, Quaytman contributed financially to their restoration in exchange for access to photograph and the permission to include *The Persian Women* in this exhibition. The other painting, *Amazons and Scythians*, is currently on view in the KHM's exhibition devoted to van Veen's student Rubens.

*The Persian Women* depicts an anecdote in Plutarch's *Bravery of Women* in which the women resort to a gesture of self-exposure upon discovering that their men are losing the battle for the city. Trying to return to their citadel, the defeated soldiers encounter all the women of their homes, who expose their genitals while shouting "Whither are you rushing so fast, you biggest cowards in the whole world? Surely you cannot, in your flight, slink in here whence you came forth." Shocked by this sight and mortified by these words the soldiers are forced to return to battle to vanquish the enemy.

The paintings in this chapter utilize a variety of techniques, beginning with a gesso ground of rabbit skin glue that is pigmented to resemble the plaster of the Beethoven Frieze. In some paintings, textile, tulle or netting, has been cut to resemble figures and embedded into the gesso, then sanded very smooth. The photographically based silkscreened images depict the fronts as well as backs of the two Otto van Veen paintings and a Polish landscape that the artist photographed last year while beginning the research for this chapter.

Quaytman hones in on a dialectic inherent to painting between exposure and withdrawal as well as between biography and context. Since 2001, the artist has organized a painting practice of working in chapters as a structuring principle that guides the creation of an overarching corpus. Quaytman has also devised various standards and systems to determine the size, material, surface, and motifs of her paintings. Rather than merely presenting the subject in an isolated picture, the paintings incorporate a method of composition based on a few preliminary rules. Archives and objects associated with the site of an exhibition often serve as a bridge between art-historical investigations

and current reflections, a process that seems to generate its own version of history and how a painting is situated in the present. It is exemplified by the way Quaytman incorporates the reference:

“Then there is the subject, always wanting to be in a perspectival space, which is what I had to think about so intently with the van Veen paintings that inspired the whole thing: how to include them in a painting made now? I silkscreened photographs I had taken of both paintings on quite a few panels in order to experiment with how to paint on them or even not to paint on them. The idea of painting on photographically based images interests me very much and the act of painting on an old painting was liberating. Nevertheless there must be a reason to do it. For the two paintings included here I devised a trick to get me started.

I projected Raimondi’s historic engraving *The Judgement of Paris* onto both paintings and painted the outline of the myth over them. I often think about this image and what it evokes and the van Veen’s suggested in their composition and dimensions many affinities with the Raimondi. Incredibly the superimposition turned out to fit or align in many unexpected ways. It enabled me to find or summon a new narrative in the process of painting the painting. If a person or position or face or body part began to be visible I went with it. The lockdown of the judgment was released in a sense.

Quaytman thwarts the perspectival pull of the gaze into the picture’s imaginary distance by structuring the frieze to emphasize planarity and integrating rhythmic divisions and color fields extending across multiple panels. Two basic optical patterns permeate the installation, checkers and lines. There is also a large wedge shape articulated with Steinway Black lacquer spanning eleven of the twenty-two panels. This wedge shape produces an optical illusion of the nine paintings on the left wall continuing in space through the wall on the right. As the overall composition underscores, Quaytman understands paintings not solely as autonomous objects but also as parts of an ensemble that acknowledge the conditions under which they are produced, presented, seen, and circulated. Although each painting is autonomous, their context is of equal value.

The ways Quaytman has found to continue painting are based in many ways on concepts often discussed around feminism – the subversion of authorship, hierarchy, and the picture’s promise of a subject, a subject that historically is tied to the objectification of female bodies through a typically male authoritarian gaze.

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