

To indulge in some comparative literature, it has been intimated, amid certain circles, that after Flaubert style was always mirrored, always un peu gauche, and always a trap. That in those first forays into the more mawkish sides of realism, style found its fixations, its fanatics, and its self-flagellating but dedicated effects. Flaubert himself believed style to be a problem solvable only by arduous labor though he also admitted in many letters sent to lovers that he admired those whose stubborn flights of fancy could "achieve their effects, regardless of Art."

Joseph Holtzman is neither nor. He is neither the blustery lyricist evoked in Flaubert's letters nor the kind of narrow-minded modernist stickler that flourished in the aftermath. His paintings, *historically*, have been contextualized by a decorator's impulse. They are littered with a profusion of characters plucked as much from literature as Lifetime to form an anachronistic loop-de-loop, all foregrounded by the apposite décor to give them that extra oomph: Jane Austen and her chinoiserie, the purple curtains that hold down the center, in some cliques, of Proust's *Temps Perdu*, a feathery, tonal hat from one Stephen Sondheim song or another. Like a parlor game where one is asked who they would invite to the ultimate dinner party, Holtzman's paintings summon a literary creme-de-la-creme, saying to hell with Flaubert's idea that in style (i.e. Art, capital A) there is no subject. After all, style—clothing, curtains, the smell of someone's body, a social circle, a painterly movement—requires a material subject, someone with an instinct for impressions.

So never mind Art right now. Holtzman's exhibition *Six Recent Paintings* is a marriage of tactile ideas, quacking like a couple over brunch. His subjects, more a family-and-friends ordeal, are droll, deadpan, voluble. Confidantes, like designer and photographer Todd Oldham and his partner Tony Longoria, comedian Amy Sedaris, Baltimore Museum curator Jay Fisher, and Holtzman's sister Lisa emerge out of the painted marble less as figures than matters of texture. Realism, to Holtzman, is a close investigation of the details that make up a body, and the surfaces and the colors, which inform its moods, instincts, and mannerisms. Style, ventriloquized through painting, drives the show home. Joseph Holtzman lives and works in Columbia County, NY. Recent exhibitions have included the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive in 2014 and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles in 2015. In 1997 he founded the magazine *Nest: A Quarterly of Interiors*, serving as its creative director and publisher until he closed it in 2004 in order to devote more time to painting.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*