

The Everyday

The Paintings of Stanley Goldstein

Genre Painting: The Search for the Everyday

While history – and the history books – is replete with grand works of art depicting lofty themes of kingship and gods, societal proclamations of power and social inequities, and humanity’s relative significance or insignificance when set against the enveloping realm of nature, there is another tradition often explored by artists over the centuries: the intimate minutia of our daily existence. We call this portrayal of the everyday *genre painting*, and it reveals the quiet moments, fleeting glimpses of unguarded time, the true nature of our relationships one to another.

Historically artists have employed genre painting to great affect, often challenging perceptions of how even the meanest of human lives are valued, especially by those in the upper echelons of societies where wealth measured worth and power determined wealth. It often fell to the artists (painters, sculptors, writers, poets, etc.) to turn their eyes onto the common and familiar, and by so doing, elevate their subjects to planes otherwise reserved for those capable of commissioning works of a more grand nature. The seventeenth-century Spanish artist Diego Velázquez was one such seer. As a court painter he was renowned for his paintings of the Royal Family and grandiose depictions of battles won, but his most poignant works were often of individuals from common walks of life engaged in the most spontaneous and common of activities. *The Water Carrier of Seville* (1619) presents a view of a worn and tired man working at the most menial of tasks. It is a captured moment in time of a scene Velázquez’s audience

would have been most familiar, but by singling out that particular moment, that particular gesture and expression, Velásquez causes his audience to stop and observe. The servant they may have once been only vaguely aware of is now the focus of their attention and conclusions must be drawn. They do not know the man's story, but by the very act of seeing him as an individual he is recognized for what he is: a fellow member of humanity. He works, he toils, he has feelings and, no doubt, hopes and fears just like us. He is us. This ability to see and portray nobility and value in the everyday is the great power and allure of genre painting. It challenges our tendencies to see others as "the other." The person reading in a chair is doing what I do; kids play like my kids play; a parent holds his child as I hold mine – and the barriers we raise between us fall. They are as I and I as they. These are the lessons of Stanley Goldstein.

In Them I See Me

It is an ancient story, one that is told time and time again ... the story of our relationships with one another. It is the fodder for literature, music, and as in the work of Stanley Goldstein, the visual arts.

A woman reads to her child in the highlighted glow of a single light singling her out from the surrounding darkness. We learn from the title that the scene is set in *Late Afternoon* (2006), and the casual, intimate attire of the woman casts it as the type of spontaneous event that occurs in life, an opportunity to teach, or perhaps a few well-chosen moments of attention to a child. It is the type of moment we all know, candid and unstaged, but Goldstein gives us more than a simple snapshot, he delivers a painterly updating of an ancient motif, the mother and child as

portrayed throughout practically every culture and time: Isis and Horus, Mari and Mithra, and countless others. Such a universal retelling of the mother/child relationship is often seen as an exemplar of the divinity beyond our mortal plane, but in the work of Stanley Goldstein we sense that it is the divinity of our everyday lives that is worthy of our attention. This mother and child are definitely domestic and we can identify with the intimate relationship. It is an idyllic aspiration.

While the relationship of parent to child is universal, if not always so poignantly experienced as rendered by Goldstein, the relationships between lovers and spouses are equally universal ... and equally complex in their dimensions. *Anna's Back* (1989) portrays a young woman, standing with her back to the viewer, looking over her shoulder to engage the viewer. Her body language is simple and revealing: her back is to us, she is turned away, but still she connects with our gaze - or the gaze of her lover/spouse, with whom we are to identify. Her back is highlighted as if to emphasize the shunning aspect of her pose, but it is her face that keeps us from feeling rejected. There is hope there, a sense of permanence and commitment in the relationship that runs deeper than the temporary desire to turn her back on her lover, an unpleasant situation, or even just a fleeting moment of discomfort. In truth, we are not told if these are the intentions of the young woman, who was clearly posed by the artist, but it is the emotional familiarity of the scene that resonates with us.

The young woman appears again in *Going Out* (2008), which depicts a woman attired in man's clothes carrying a child in her arms as she departs. On the wall hangs the painting *Anna's Back*, a painting within a painting, and thus we experience the continued presence of this young

woman who, posed or otherwise, continues to engage us with her solemn and sensitive gaze. It is an example of Goldstein's ability to narrate the intimacies of our daily lives.

The Poetic Moment

It is not enough for Stanley Goldstein to simply paint those unguarded moments with which we are all familiar. To do so would reduce the message to a barrage of the mundane. Rather, Goldstein composes with his eye, ever on the lookout for the poetic moment. That moment might occur when a subject in the painting notices the artist noticing him. In *Point O'Woods* kids play as they jump off a pier or run across the decking, but one boy stands apart as he glances back over his shoulder. There is no condemnation towards the observer, nor is there elation or fear, simply the recognition of another. While there is no doubt that the eye-meeting stare of the boy was intended for the artist, by capturing the moment on canvas Goldstein allows us to stand in his shoes, so to speak. What was once a casual and brief connection is now transferred to us, the viewers. We are the beneficiaries of Goldstein's ability to find the poetic moment.

Not all of Goldstein's paintings are so overt. Just as often he allows us a peek into the private, and it is in the intimacy of the moment that we make our connection. A father sits next to his son in *On the Airplane* (2008). We can imagine the communication between the two as parent listens to his gesticulating child. The content of the conversation is irrelevant, but the experience is universal, and we identify with both. It is the same intimate connection we make with the subject when viewing a quiet and delicate domestic tableau by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon

Chardin or a solitary moment of aloneness by David Hockney. It is the understanding that, by seeing in others our own private moments, we are not alone.

Lighting the Way

Stanley Goldstein does not leave us to flounder in questions of what his work means. He guides us every step of the way. As a superb colorist he emphasizes and subdues. His technique is one of building, layer upon layer, color upon color until we find ourselves drawn into his world. But color is only one tool at the artist's disposal. His compositions are often offset, adding to the sense of immediacy and happenstance. Figures may be cropped or the balance of the whole out of kilter. It is not the golden mean the artist seeks, but the randomness of the real.

Light also guides us along our voyeuristic journey. Many of Goldstein's works reveal a strong light source either highlighting or drawing attention to the subject, but the light source, though a dominant feature, is never the subject itself. The light more than illuminates, it reveals. In *Pet Rat* (2010) the bedside lamp is a beacon that allows us to see the softer moment of a father nestled next to his son while, in the foreground, the titular rat echoes our role as observer of this domestic bliss. In the work of Stanley Goldstein we find that the artist always lights our way

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The everyday can, and often does pass us by unnoticed. It is the success of Stanley Goldstein to capture slices of the everyday to show us their importance. The deeper we allow ourselves to be pulled into his world the more we find that, while his subjects are *his* familiars, he shows us *our* world in equal measure. While we may not be kings or gods or heroes of battles won, we are, in the everyday, the same.

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