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Critic's Choice

Like time-lapse photography painted onto canvas: The art of Waldemar Zimbelmann



Waldemar Zimbelmann, "Untitled," 2015-16, acrylic on canvas, 35.83 inches by 27.56 inches. (Robert Wedemeyer / Waldemar Zimbelmann / China Art Objects Galleries)

At a time when too many people spend too much time multitasking, and too many paintings are thin and one-dimensional, it's exciting to see Waldemar Zimbelmann's first solo show in the United States.

At China Art Objects Galleries, each of the eight paintings in "My Hands Have Vanished" multitasks so effectively that you forget you are looking at static objects and you begin to imagine that you're witnessing time-lapse performances.

All of the Kazakhstan-born, German-based painter's acrylics on canvas depict figures superimposed atop one another. Few are whole. Many consist of heads and torsos or torsos and limbs. Sometimes a disembodied limb appears on its own. Most often, heads float into focus, sometimes four or five atop and around a full figure. Despite all the incomplete bodies, there's nothing morbid or gory about Zimbelmann's figures. Each has the presence of a daydream or memory, a wispy apparition that appears in the mind's eye when our reveries get the best of us. Rationality takes a break.

Sometimes it seems as if Zimbelmann's pictures chart an individual's life, from embryo through infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. At other times, his paintings appear to depict single instances of time, especially those when the various voices in our heads speak freely, in a confusing cacophony of insights — or when our recollections of previous experiences create similarly complex mishmashes between past and present, dream and reality, fact and fiction.

Most of Zimbelmann's images look as if they were made in the late 19th century. But they also feel timely, like antidotes to the inattentiveness that comes with the manic pace of modern life. Contemplative and slow, they make space and time for experiences all their own.