

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Los Angeles Times

Review: Adam Saks' pilgrimage paintings present a journey all their own

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OCT 04, 2018 | 6:00 AM



Adam Saks, "Pilgrim on a Hidden Path," installation view. (Meliksetian Briggs Gallery)

In relief printing techniques, the portion of wood or linoleum block that is cut away with a blade creates the contour of the linear shapes that will be printed. The void paradoxically makes the image.

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Berlin-based Danish artist Adam Saks embeds linocuts within his recent group of large oil paintings, “Hidden Path I-V,” at Meliksetian Briggs Gallery. The technique resonates with the handsome paintings’ subject matter, which is based on following a medieval spiritual pilgrimage from France to Santiago de Compostela at the northwest corner of Spain.

A site located “at the end of the Earth” where the apostle James is believed to have been buried, the place is encrusted with a dense history of conflict, resolution and power plays between Christians and Muslims. Saks’ paintings, eccentrically topical, are suitably built up in complex, almost archaeological layers.

Abstract patches of spectrum-wide colors are first laid down. Next come painted and printed images – a lexicon of the pilgrimage journey that includes sturdy hiking boots, Albrecht Durer’s famous [praying hands](#), a knotted rope (multicultural symbol of the sacred geometry of the universe), the cozy shoe that provided a home for the Old Woman of the English nursery rhyme, assorted flora, lucky horse shoes, antique flintlock pistols, medical illustrations of human limbs and more.

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Adam Saks, "Hidden Path I," 2018, oil on canvas. Meliksetian Briggs Gallery

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Then, black paint fills in the spaces in between, sometimes erasing an image and flattening out the depth to emphasize surface. (The result recalls a schoolroom blackboard.) Finally, Baroque and Arabic linear arabesques are drawn – apparently straight from the paint tube or with oil sticks – their frequent references to architectural ornament sometimes sliding into the homey Spanish word “casa.”

A black void might be the centerpiece, or conversely a concentrated mass might float in black space that hugs the painting’s edges. Elsewhere the canvas plane is home to fractured symbols, which the mind strains to connect.

Like his teacher, German painter Bernd Koberling, albeit in a stylistically different way, Saks links disparate elements into a continuous whole. Painting is elegantly, thoughtfully presented as a journey all its own.

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Adam Saks, "Hidden Path II," 2018, oil on canvas. Meliksetian Briggs Gallery

Meliksetian Briggs, 313 N. Fairfax Ave., Hollywood, (323) 828-4731, through Nov. 17.
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