

David Klamen is committed to creating visual experiences that are both aesthetically satisfying and visually challenging. A significant body of his work consists of realistic paintings and drawings of exotic animals, oriental vases, poetic landscapes, and architectural interiors. In these compositions, a majestic exotic animal calmly gazes out of the picture or a single object is highlighted for contemplation by the viewer; the landscapes and interiors are always empty and silent. Simultaneously, and in contrast to this serene realism, Klamen produces nonfigurative work that is highly energized, barcode-like images whose op-art color effects, metric repetition of line, and/or electric geometry pulsate and resist immediate visual capture.

Klamen's realistic oil-on-linen paintings require patience and concentration on the part of the viewer. An expert with old master painting techniques, Klamen applies multiple layers of varnish to create deep, rich surfaces through which the painting's content emerges only after the eyes have adjusted to the darkness and successfully avoided the reflections. The artist explains that "by varnishing my paintings, I slow down the disclosure of the image, encouraging the viewer to become a participant in the discovery of the painting rather than a passive spectator."

Klamen's more abstract works are also intended as optical and intellectual challenges. Using high contrast and complex barcode-like designs, the artist even more assertively than in his paintings of animals or still-lives, hides realistic images. In these works, the underlying image can be a reproduction of a well-known art historical icon such as Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Socrates* or of an illustration from some pornographic magazine. Klamen's interest in hermeneutics—the science and methodology of interpretation, provides the philosophical underpinnings for much of his creative drive. Through his art, he strives to examine "the processes we use to understand what we experience." He further explains: ". . . almost all of my work . . . is involved with exploring how we interpret things, how we come to recognize images, what makes meaning, how we become active participants in discovering that meaning."

Mastery of his selected medium and exploration of its peculiar properties and inherent limits are also important factors in Klamen's work. How much varnish can one use before it becomes impenetrable? In works on paper, how does watercolor flow, mingle, and react to the paper's surface? A master draftsman, he pushes beyond the normal additive drawing process, to create landscapes by erasing on a sheet completely covered with graphite. In still other works, he studies a single drop of watercolor as it naturally expands on wet paper to create a miniature impression of a landscape or a sunset. He describes the latter as "self-directed Rorschach tests" that help him to search his memory for deeply internalized imagery.

THE WORK OF DAVID KLAMEN

In contrast to the tradition of artists creating works informed by a consistent visual language, David Klamen embraces an aesthetic diversity that is directed instead by an exploration of an expanding idea. The scale of his work has shifted from Lilliputian to larger than life, the imagery from pictorial to digital abstraction, and the tone from the silent to the aggressive, yet in each there is a common commitment. All of these works use various visual images and processes to investigate the question of how we know our culture and ourselves. His paintings test epistemological strategies as diverse as Op art (and its implication that knowledge may be a purely retinal experience), empiricism (the idea that the sole source of knowledge is direct quantifiable experience), introspection, and others. In this investigation, Klamen plays with the history of art, using modern and premodern conventions as metaphors for our communal search for meaning.

THE WORK OF DAVID KLAMEN

On first view, an exhibition by David Klamen looks like a group show. Depending upon the particularities of the installation, there appears to be works by as many as six artists present: 1) a realist, whose interiors and exteriors revive photorealism by way of classic film noir and contemporary fashion, design, and architectural magazines; 2) a romantic, whose untrammelled landscapes are marked by the signs of symbolism or the symbols of science, both of which are filtered through minimalism's reductive geometry; 3) a miniaturist, who often packs more than 100 abstract landscapes onto a single sheet of watercolor paper and still leaves plenty of room for the imagination to roam freely; 4) an intimist, who arranges similar salon-style configurations of modestly scaled paintings on large walls; 5) a postmodern stripe-painter, whose offbeat bands of alternating color voraciously translate the Old Masters and Internet porn into a system that recalls bar codes and the Op art of Bridget Riley and Julian Stanczak; 6) a lowbrow pointillist, whose indelicate, innumerable dots blot out handsomely painted representational scenes as they record the meditative activity of repetitive Buddhist chanting (or *daimoku*).

David Pagel, "The Solo Show as Group Portrait: David Klamen's Multifarious Paintings," from the exhibition catalogue.