

The Suspension of Time: Simon Dinnerstein & The Fulbright Triptych

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The Suspension of Time: Reflections on Simon Dinnerstein and The Fulbright Triptych, edited by Daniel Slager, Milkweed Editions, \$ 35., 8 x 9 1/2", 360 pages, 70 Illustrations, 59 in color, 44 essays on The Fulbright Triptych by such writers as Jhumpa Lahiri, Anthony Doerr, John Russell, Guy Davenport, Thomas M. Messer, George Crumb, John Turturro, etc. Photo Credit: Milkweed Editions

Simon Dinnerstein, *The Fulbright Triptych*, 1971-1974. Oil on wood panels, 14 x 79 1/2 ft. Courtesy of the Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania State University.

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Erté deGarces

Seeing an abundance of photographic details of a single painting (about 40) combined with the heft of this book (over 300 pages) led me to expect a typical art history, a formal and iconographical analysis focused on a single masterpiece. I was wrong. This is not to say that *The Fulbright Triptych* (1974) is or is not a masterpiece; it is still young and has yet to pass the test of time. Rather, the book is not typical art history. *The Suspension of Time: Reflections on Simon Dinnerstein and The Fulbright Triptych* is a book composed of exactly what the title claims.

Simon Dinnerstein and editor Daniel Slager culled and compiled 45 pieces of writing related to the Triptych. Very few of these are strictly about the painting so much as they are personal interpretations and anecdotes associated with it. Contributors range from the artistic, literary, and music worlds, and many are acquaintances or members of the Dinnerstein family. As a result, the book is full of praise for the Triptych and nostalgia for the rocky beginnings of Dinnerstein's career at the time during which the painting was begun. These are joined by letters and in-

terviews that chronicle the painting's completion and institutional approval, all of which build a strong narrative around the work and present varied perspectives. Criticism and objectivity, however, seem not to have been intended at any stage in the making of the book.

It is refreshing to read what creative people outside of the art world have to say about this painting. Writer Jumpha Lahiri and actor John Turturro relate to the dichotomy of cultivating a creative life and family life at the same time, suggested, allegorically, by the separation of the artist from his wife and daughter across a worktable of artist's tools. Many contributors responded to objects painted in tromp l'oeil fashion, which seem to be the artist's influential ephemera. For example, historian Louis Menasha, deciphers a 1971 Soviet exit visa painted near the artist's head. Through his concise and lucid account of the political standing of Soviet Jews and the red-tape that prevented many from obtaining exit visas, he places the otherwise unknown Georgian Jew Semyon Rafielovich Pichkhadze in a vivid context.

While it is customary to formally describe a painting in art criticism, it is unfortunate that so many in this anthology did so. The result is painful repetition of the same good description. This and recurring anecdotes and continuous praise make for some monotony, which may have been avoided by coaching the writers or editing the contributions. Despite this, it is an appealing approach for compiling an anthology on a single work of art, and worth a look if the subject is of interest.

The Fulbright Triptych is on view at the German Consulate in NYC through March 15, 2012.

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