

Where Are We? When Are We?

Alvin Epstein

On first viewing Simon's *Fulbright Triptych*, even in small reproduction, this painting is immense. Life-size. It looks as large as the room it portrays.

But what's going on?! What's happening here?
Where am I supposed to look?
No dynamic diagonals to lead my eye from here to there!
My eye doesn't know where to go!
I'm lost—I have to make a choice—this way or that?
No compulsion to start here—or end there!
Stop!!

I tell myself to look elsewhere—
 and now . . .
 look back again.
Don't try to "grasp" the painting all at once.

Read it—not as a book with one continuous story to tell—rather as many stories—a history.

Be content to wander through the history and not be compelled to start here and finish there.

Simultaneity—that's it! Simon's Simultaneity. Experience the pleasure of lingering here or there, where many things are happening all at once, independent of each other but all related by Simon's having chosen to include them—each story, or bit of a story, chosen and carefully placed in relation to all the others. Nothing arbitrary or left to

chance. Balance, order, clarity, all of it very personal to the chooser—Simon—and all of it available to us, to wander in at our pleasure.

There are the people, clearly a family even though separated by their shared world, facing us full face, frank, open, looking at us looking at them—(maybe *we* are the painting?)—but as frank and open as they are, they are also strangely silent and remote, letting their surroundings speak for them.

And the surroundings are a very rich, albeit mysterious, world in which these very specific portraits exist—an interior replete with personal references which tell us—and *don't* tell us—much about the lives lived in this interior, warmed by two aggressively industrial-age radiators, while through two picture windows (how apt the term—are they pictures or windows?) we see a village street where the details of houses, gardens, and walkways are decidedly suburban and of our own day, but the presentation is undoubtedly medieval—so time itself becomes ambiguous.

Where are we? When are we?

The answers are in those fleeting moments when the imagination clusters around any one of the myriad separate areas, and composes a story that evaporates immediately as my eye travels onward.