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Shimon Okshteyn, at Nohra Haime Gallery

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"All You Need To Know."

Having come of age in the former USSR, Okshteyn was trained in the tradition of Russian classicism. Since immigrating to the United States, his work has gone through a stylistic transformation that has

embraced hyper-realism in his meticulously crafted graphite on canvas drawings.

This show, comprised of nine new works, continues his exploration of grisaille photorealistic drawings. Prior to this, Okshteyn's drawings consisted of everyday recognizable objects, from old hats and clothing to common appliances. By rendering such items larger than life, he would imbue them with a presence that was not there before; this was how Okshteyn investigated the world around him. His subject matter, no matter how mundane, took on an aura of a private history. Here, however, Okshteyn examines something that is not so much an object as it is an idea; the brush stroke, the universal symbol of the vocabulary of Painting. The paradoxical nature of this inquiry creates an intriguing ambiguity.

Before he can make his hyper-realist drawings of brush strokes, the artist has to first create them. By turning thick impasto paint into thin graphite drawing, he creates an illusion of a third dimension. What we are seeing is a disorienting vision of heavy paint applied thickly, which, upon close examination, turns out to be thin gray varnish. In another twist, heavy impasto paint strokes, often associated with primary colors, are painstakingly translated into a gray scale utilizing graphite rubbed into the canvas.

The almost square shaped canvas, (44x42 inches) with images that bleed into its edge, give these two-dimensional works a sculptural quality. We enter the pictorial space to find ourselves in a different world; an abstraction of the building blocks (brush strokes) that would otherwise comprise the picture. And indeed, as we examine these drawings, they conjure different images.

In Untitled III we can see a Chinese landscape painting of rock formations, while Untitled XI depicts rock texture. In Untitled IV and Untitled V, there is an allusion to American Abstract Expressionist painters' use of brush strokes that cuts through the surface, while Untitled VII brings to mind Hokusai's woodblock print of Great Wave off Kanagawa.

Okshteyn's carefully rendered graphite drawings employ only shades of muted gray, from light off-whites to darker charcoal hues, in this successful bid to observe, in near scientific detail, the underlying and most basic element of what makes a painting tick. Musingly dubbed *A STROKE IS A STROKE IS A STROKE*, this show is not so much about the physicality of brush strokes; it is more an attempt to grapple with the mystery of painting by looking far beneath its surface.

Through 5/8.