

Two Coats of Paint

An award-winning NYC blogazine, primarily about painting

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SOLO SHOWS

Yedidya Hershberg: Toward the Uncanny Valley

August 11, 2022 12:59 pm



Yedidya Hershberg, Shira, 2021, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 23 3/4 x 18 1/2 inches

Contributed by Margaret McCann / As though having carefully observed the painter paint them, Israeli painter Yedidya Hershberg's figures appear to now scrutinize the viewer. In *Shira*, silky fabric and upbeat flowers barely contain her skeptical slouch and blunt regard. Most of the figures in "All Thought Becomes an Image" at **Sugarlift** are unclothed, and Hershberg's interest in the tradition of the nude is unambiguous. Yet the bold awareness of his contemporary women thwarts neoclassical idealism. With a descriptive facility aligned with Lucien Freud's belief that drawing fulfills "the desire for active, investigative, manually vivid relation with the things we see and yearn to know," Hershberg's focus is unapologetically on the female form. Unlike new gender perspectives currently explored in figurative painting, his work contends with intractable issues of the **Male Gaze**, complicated by both advanced technology and social consciousness.



Yedidya Hershberg, Nude with a Blackbuck, 2021, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 37 x 23 1/2 inches

Nude with a Blackbuck is lighthearted soft porn in the spirit of Rococo painting, like Boucher's "**Odalisque**". She could be a personification of Vanity, but a veiled reference to Ovid's story of **Artemis and Actaeon** is more likely, her beauty having vanquished the animal to its knees. Hershberg's grasp of gesture captures specifics of weight, torque, and individual anatomy, suggesting admiration for Caravaggio, lauded by **Robert Hughes** as "a minute observer of body language: how people move, slump, sit up, point and shrug, how they writhe in pain; how the dead sprawl."

Yet Hershberg's compositions accord more with those of **Ingres**, in which organic form is carefully balanced with architectonic, leaving little room for the psyche or emotion. In *Nude with a Blackbuck*, the arabesque design flowing counterclockwise from her angled feet through the deer then her elbow enhances eroticism, while the vertical pull of the pointed arch and sideways slice of doorway affirm the disinterested rectangle. The painting's elegant coloration, echoing Sienese painting, **Lorenzetti** in particular, can't subdue sexual inference in the manner of the colorful patterns in **Matisse's odalisques**. In time we notice the turned figure's shadowed face watching us eye her, a moment that weakens the **fourth wall**. Emancipated past **Ingres'** sex slaves (odalisques), or Manet's brazen courtesan "**Olympia**," Hershberg's women don't offer intimate access. The painter isn't exactly deferential, however. His figures toy with the viewer as they make their presences felt.



Yedidya Hershberg, *Vision of Palazzo Morelli*, 2021, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 47 x 25 1/2 inches

Assuming something like a fashion model's contrived pose, the awkward contrapposto and hand placement of the standing blonde in *Vision of Palazzo Morelli* mirrors and grounds that of **Botticelli's Venus**. Like *Nude with a Blackbuck*, the composition seems to quote **Balthus' portrait of Andre Derain**. Unlike Balthus, Hershberg recognizes female agency; each countenance he depicts is as self-serving as a gaze in a mirror. Further, naked people putting themselves on display here are sometimes accompanied by attendants or confidantes who claim a safe space.



Yedidya Hershberg, She Has Been Dead Many Times, 2022, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches

The haunting *She Has Been Dead Many Times* features another strained yet beautifully executed pose, reminiscent of **Artemisia Gentileschi**. Accentuated against the grid patterned wall, the figure's overly serpentine form recalls gothic stylization. Accompanied by slightly crazed eyes, her bodily attitude doesn't comport with the comfort or weight of the believable chair, producing a disorienting effect. Despite her body's light-delimited realism, the face is impersonal. One can discern traces of **Bronzino**, **Ghirlandaio**, and **Filippino Lippi** in the Italianate visage. Reading up the canvas, actuality morphs into fiction, as though moving from the present into the past. Hershberg has spent many years immersed in Italian art, and the piece's inscrutable title may relate to the automatic associations his visual memory makes with a variety of timeless figure paintings, in homage to their mortal, long-gone sitters.



Yedidya Hershberg, *Tori*, 2021, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches

Subtle red and green complementary contrasts – saturated in *Vision of Palazzo Morelli*, cool in *Nude with Blackbuck* – soften a literalism that broaches illustration. Following the warm red-green, light and shadow, figure-ground shifts horizontally across the surface of *Tori* reveals a sophisticated painting language. Likewise, the worn plaster walls playing evocatively off her smooth skin and flat, rough underpainting contesting sculptural form engage and satisfy. The expression on *Tori*'s expertly articulated, luminous face is no more revealing than a shared glimpse on the subway, however, and is similarly dismissive. Underlining the ephemeral nature of the casual posture, blank countenance, and fragmenting, reflected light is the delicate finger-spread on the table – a small, singular moment of stillness and gravity.

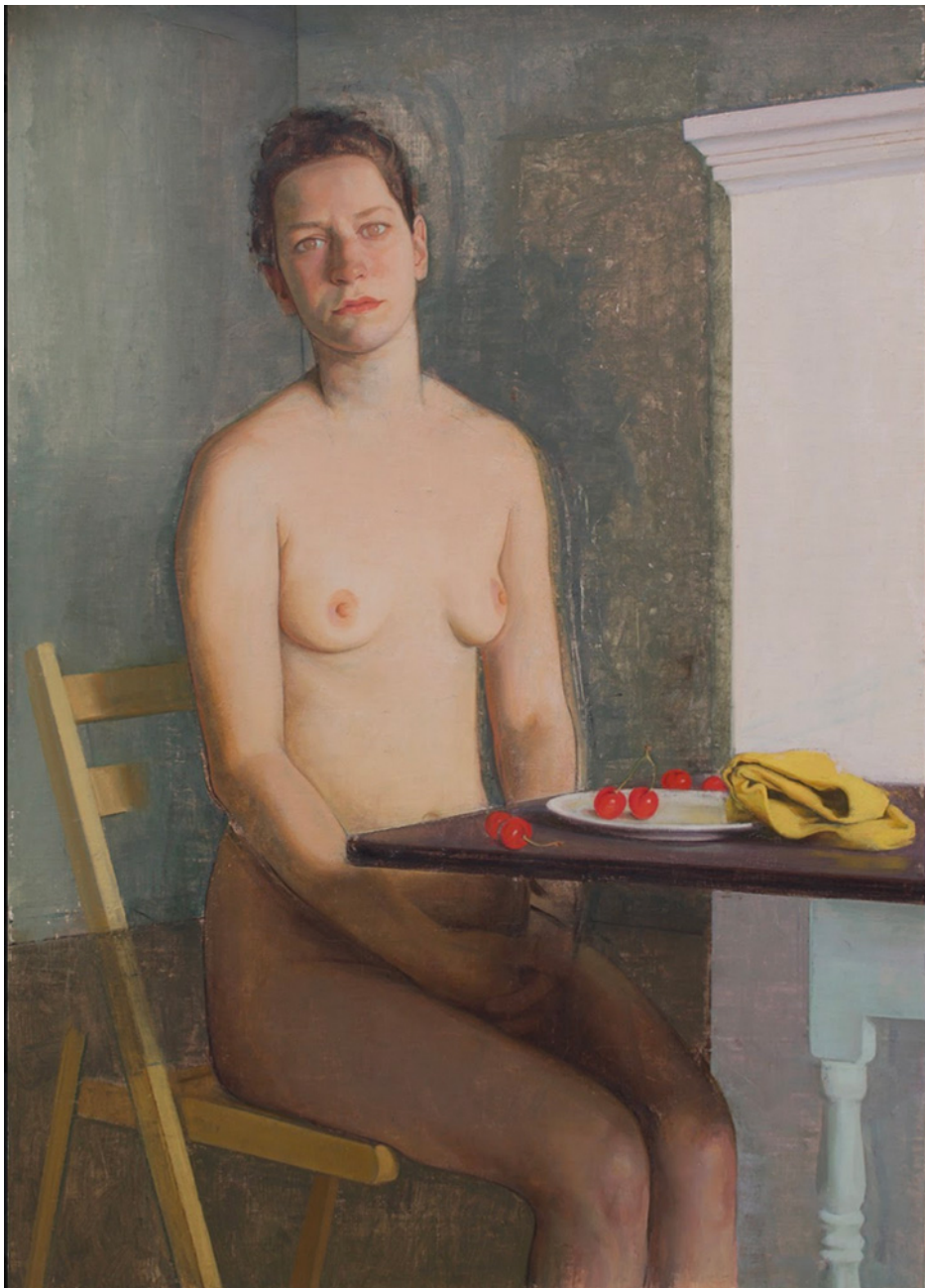
The dislocations of faces from bodies in Hershberg's paintings reflect our new normal, hybrid reality. Some painters do all they can to avoid digital space, but its omnipresence in global visual culture, especially for young people, is unavoidable. Today one can Instagram, Facebook, Zoom, Facetime, etc. while painting from observation – both a rupture and confluence of physical and virtual reality embedded into everyday life. Painters can also shamelessly mine digital stores of information, as Dana Schutz enacts in “**Google**”. This permits the depiction of micro-expressions and positions too fleeting for models to hold for long, as the early experiments of **Muybridge** (assisted by **Thomas Eakins**) illustrate.

Before modern photography, **Caravaggio** learned “how to combine poses seen in real life with those sanctified by tradition” and to “run variations on the idea of decorum” – that is, classical and Christian narrative standards. Hershberg’s relatively random gestures reflect today’s lack of iconographic limits, which gives figure painters freedom to discover new territory. Yet painters have always learned from earlier practitioners – the popularity of appropriation speaks to the value of continuity – which computers also facilitate. The internet can provide any art historical reference, any stage set, and any pose, sacred or profane. Artists can synthesize these not just with direct experience but with older academic methods, and augment that with all the manipulations computer applications allow.



Yedidya Hershberg, Seated in Abu Tor, 2021, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 27 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches

Hershberg’s *Seated in Abu Tor* moves closer to the discomforts of the **Uncanny Valley**. Despite the floating chair, the figure is solidly seated. Against her tonally defined earthiness, the gesture of her hands recalls images of Christ like **Manet’s** – a confounding association. Without other factors that might suggest surrealism, the concatenation of highly realized parts coheres unnervingly. Disbelief becomes hard to suspend and she suddenly appears undressed – especially reading downward from the marvelous, riveting clarity of her individual yet Caravaggesque head, which even a wild blue *imprimatura* behind fails to provoke into emotion. Too much information impedes mystery: the painting becomes a naked portrait and the viewer a voyeur. This affirms Freud’s credo, that “the task of the artists is to make the human being uncomfortable.” But while Freud’s unflattering imagery sublimates carnality into haptic texture and complex facture, Hershberg’s thin surfaces don’t camouflage forceful illusionism.



Yedidya Hershberg, Nude With Cherries and Napkin, 2020, oil on canvas mounted on wood, 27 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches

Nude with Cherries and Napkin provides the viewer more distance. The table's colorful red fruit and yellow cloth separate us from the penetrating stare topping her otherwise docile pose. Artful formal shifts in the color, light, and texture of furniture and the cozy space also render her more generic. This figure painting comes closest to the calm of a **Corot**.

But Hershberg seems more concerned with challenging than soothing the viewer. The show's title derives from W. B. Yeats' mystical "Phases of the Moon" from 1919, when the expanding scientific frontier challenged organized religion's views. Yeats, Edison, Mondrian and others explored new universal systems such as theosophy. In Yeats's poem, a character reflects:

*All thought becomes an image and the soul
Becomes a body: that body and that soul
Too perfect at the full to lie in cradle,
Too lonely for the traffic of the world;
Body and soul cast out and cast away
Beyond the visible world.*

His interlocutor rejoins:

All dreams of the soul

End in a beautiful man's or woman's body.

Hershberg's figures present themselves somewhere between the iconic striving of a nude who doesn't mind being an object, and a concrete, modern female who might. Increasing personhood in his disrobed figures seems to only heighten eros, an irony this gifted painter has yet to master. Adam Gopnik, writing about **the nude in art** stemming from the ideal Greek tradition or the pathetic Gothic body, asserts that the "mixed model ... is a possibility in life but is rarely pulled off in art." It will be interesting to follow Hershberg's figurative evolution as he seeks beauty in equilibrium between responsibility and age-old desire.

"Yedidya Hershberg: All Thought Becomes an Image," Sugarlift Gallery, 508 W. 28th Street, New York, NY. Through August 27, 2022.

About the author: Painter and arts writer **Margaret McCann** presently teaches at the Art Students League.

Tags: Margaret McCann, Sugarlift, Uncanny Valley, Yedidya Hershberg

One Comment



Carolee Guilds

August 15, 2022 at 8:36 am

All very beautiful and extremely well done!

Congratulations! 🎉🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

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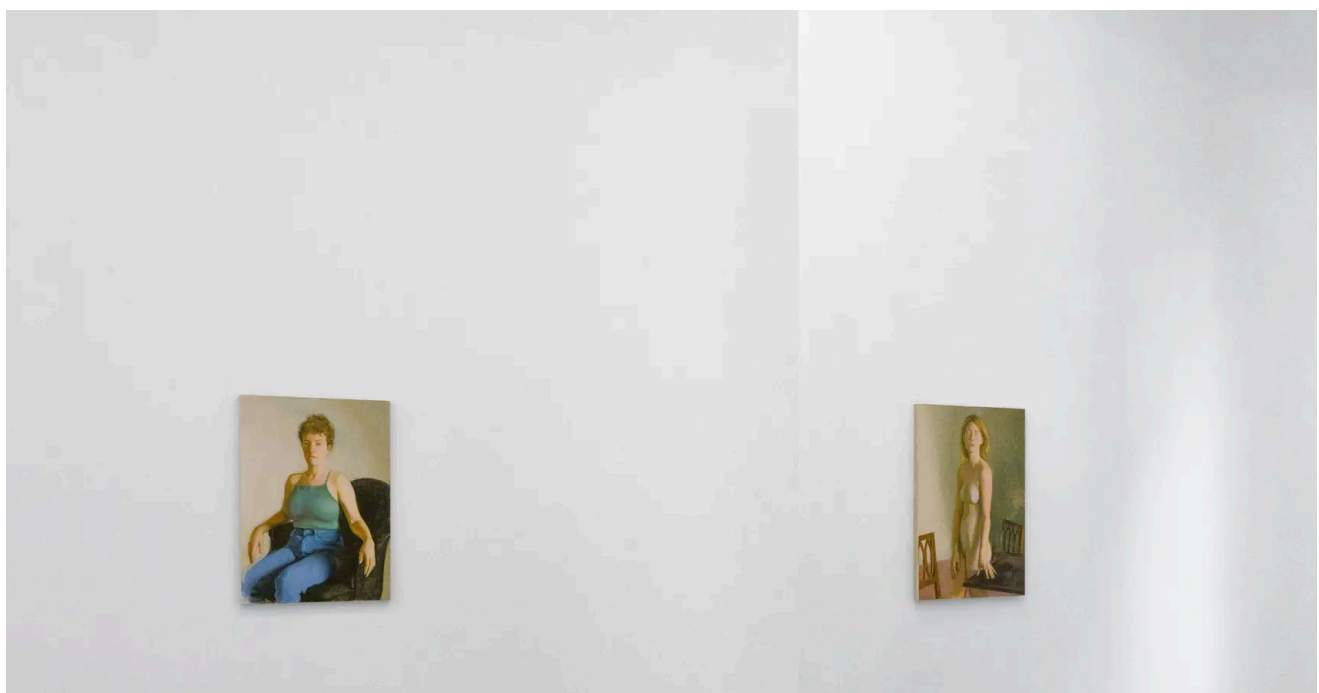
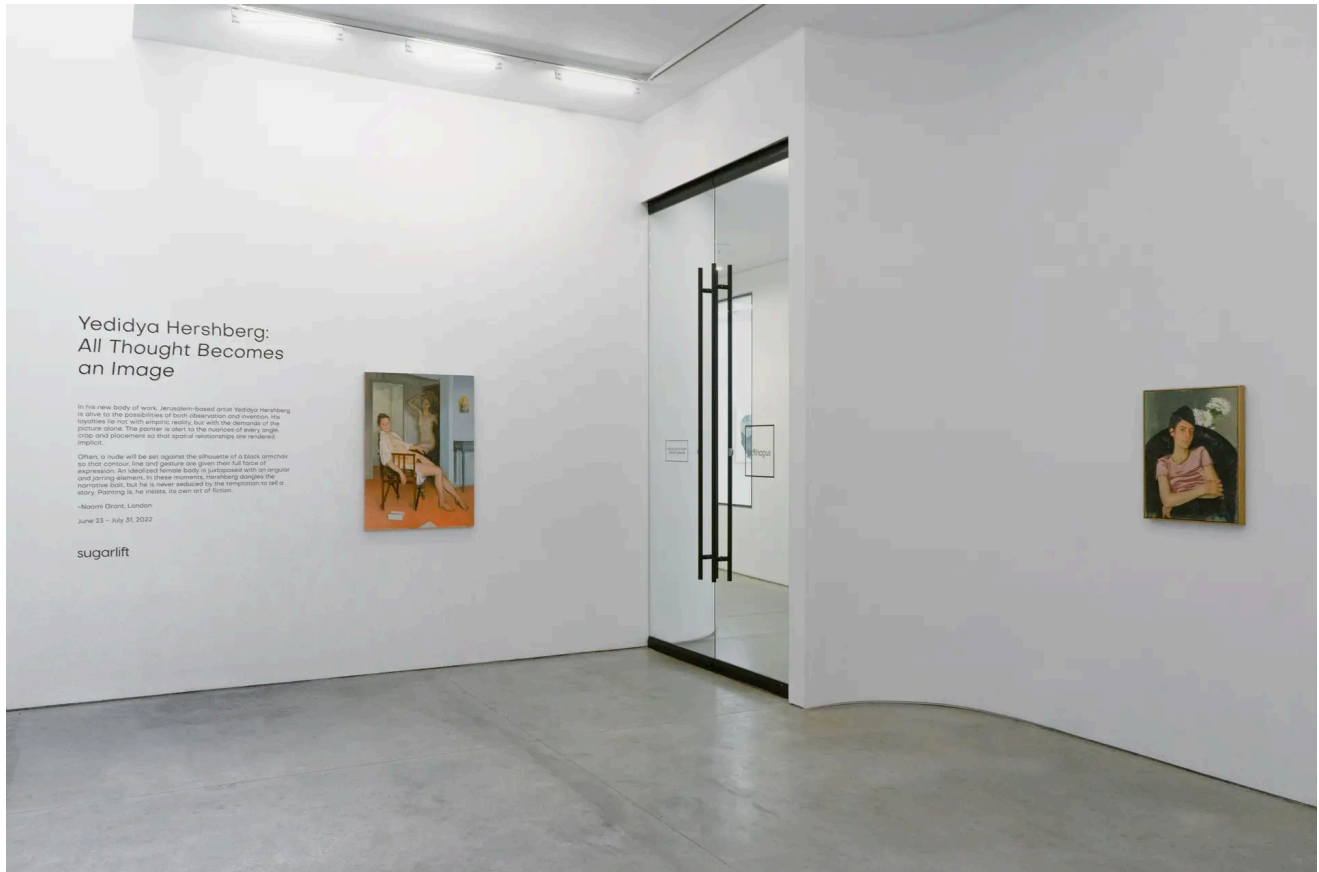
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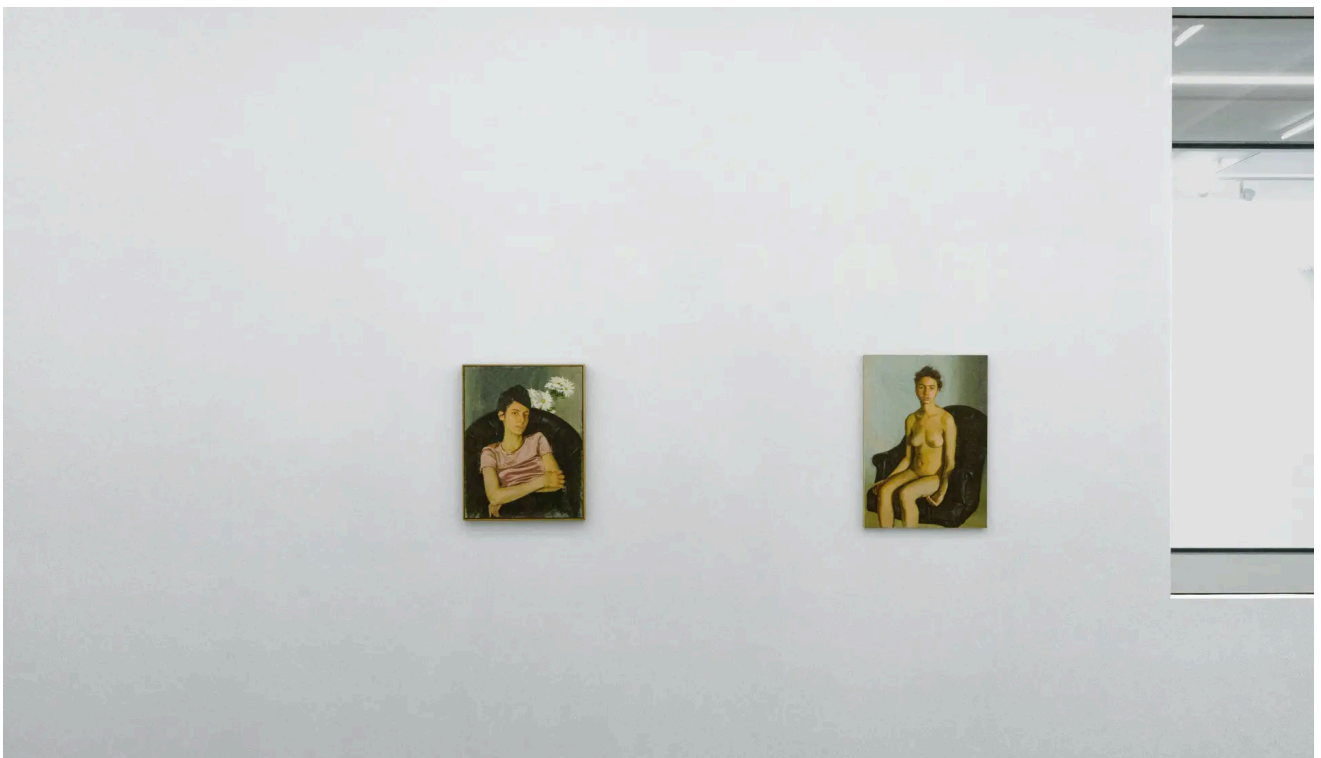
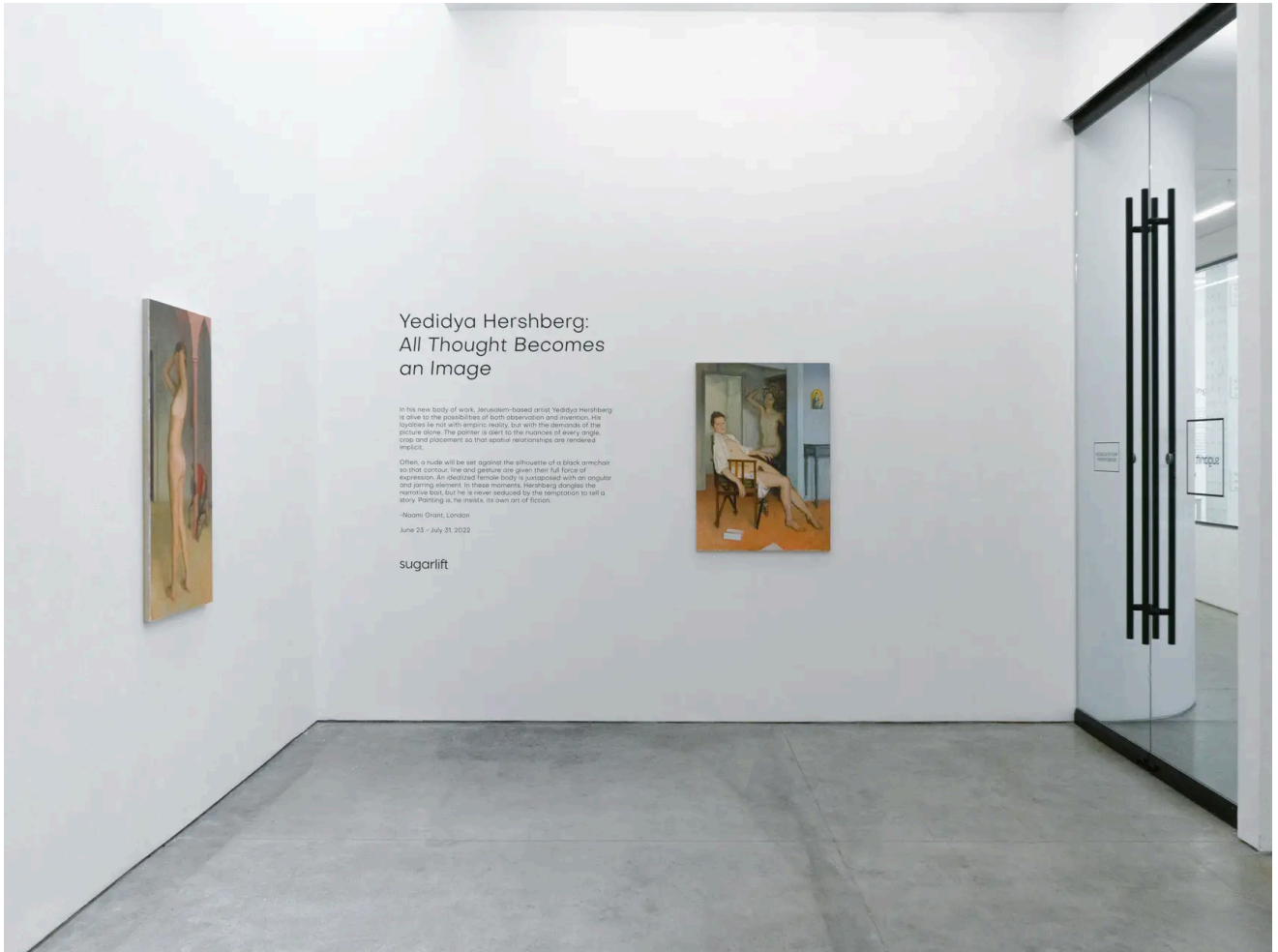
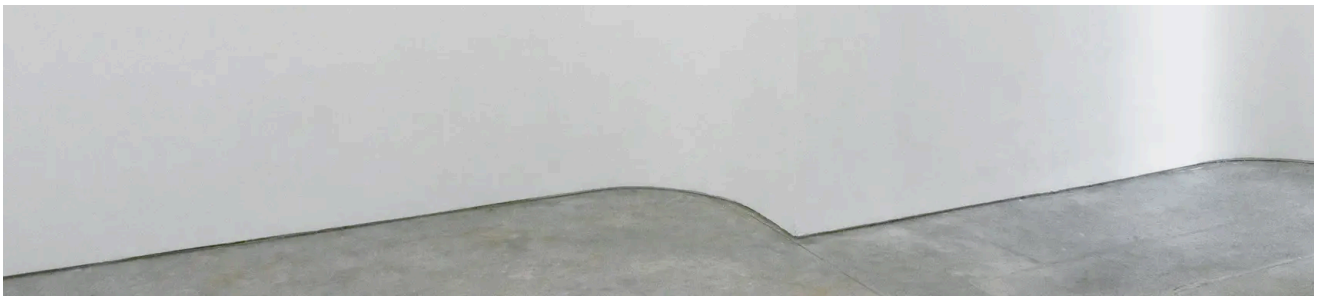
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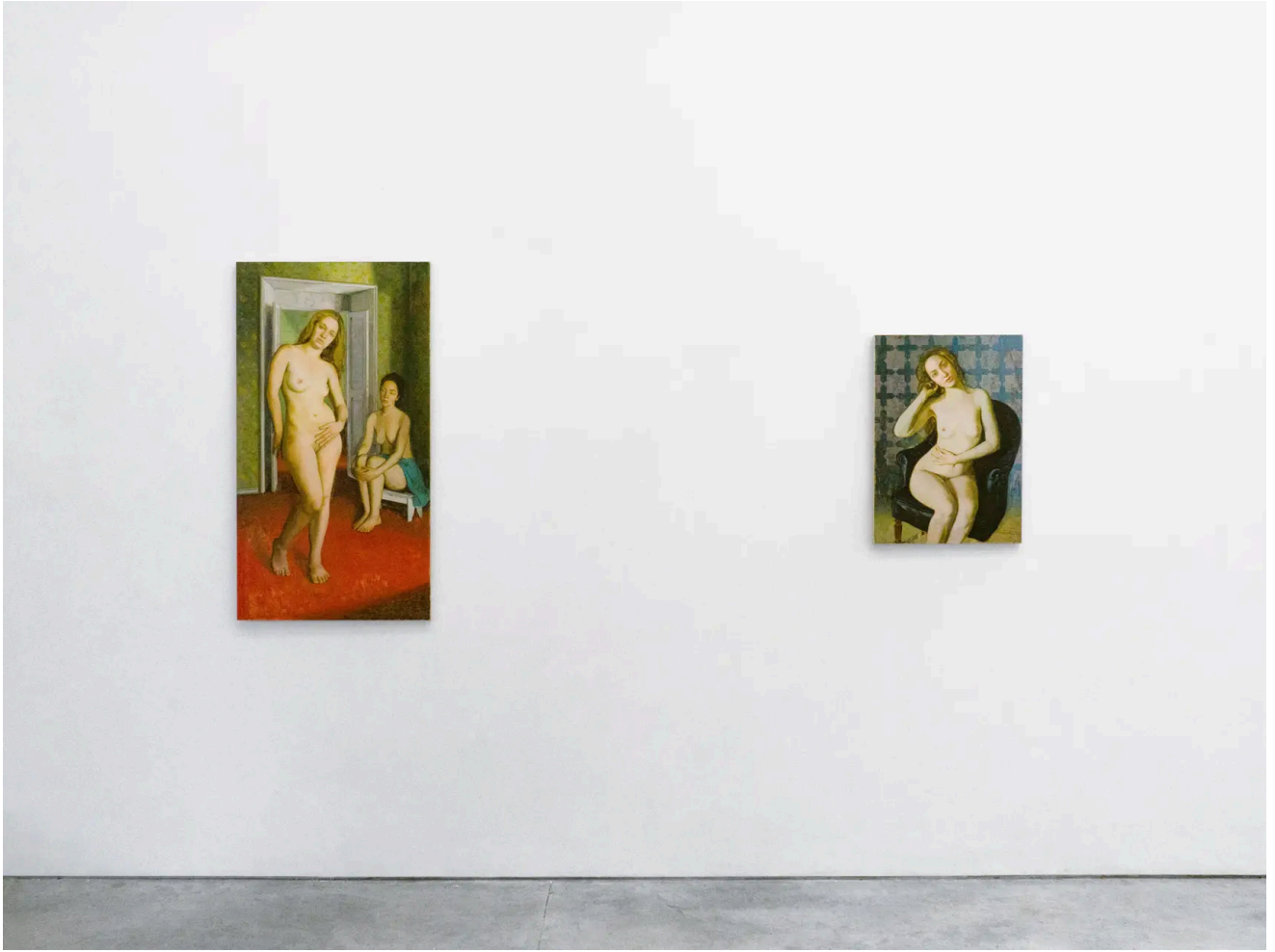
Yedidya Hershberg: All Thought Becomes an Image

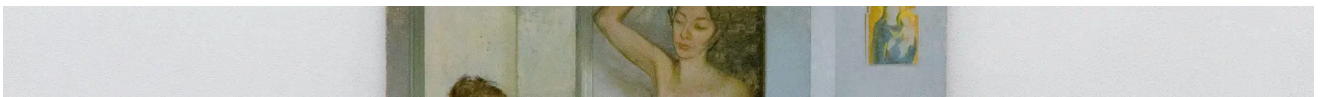
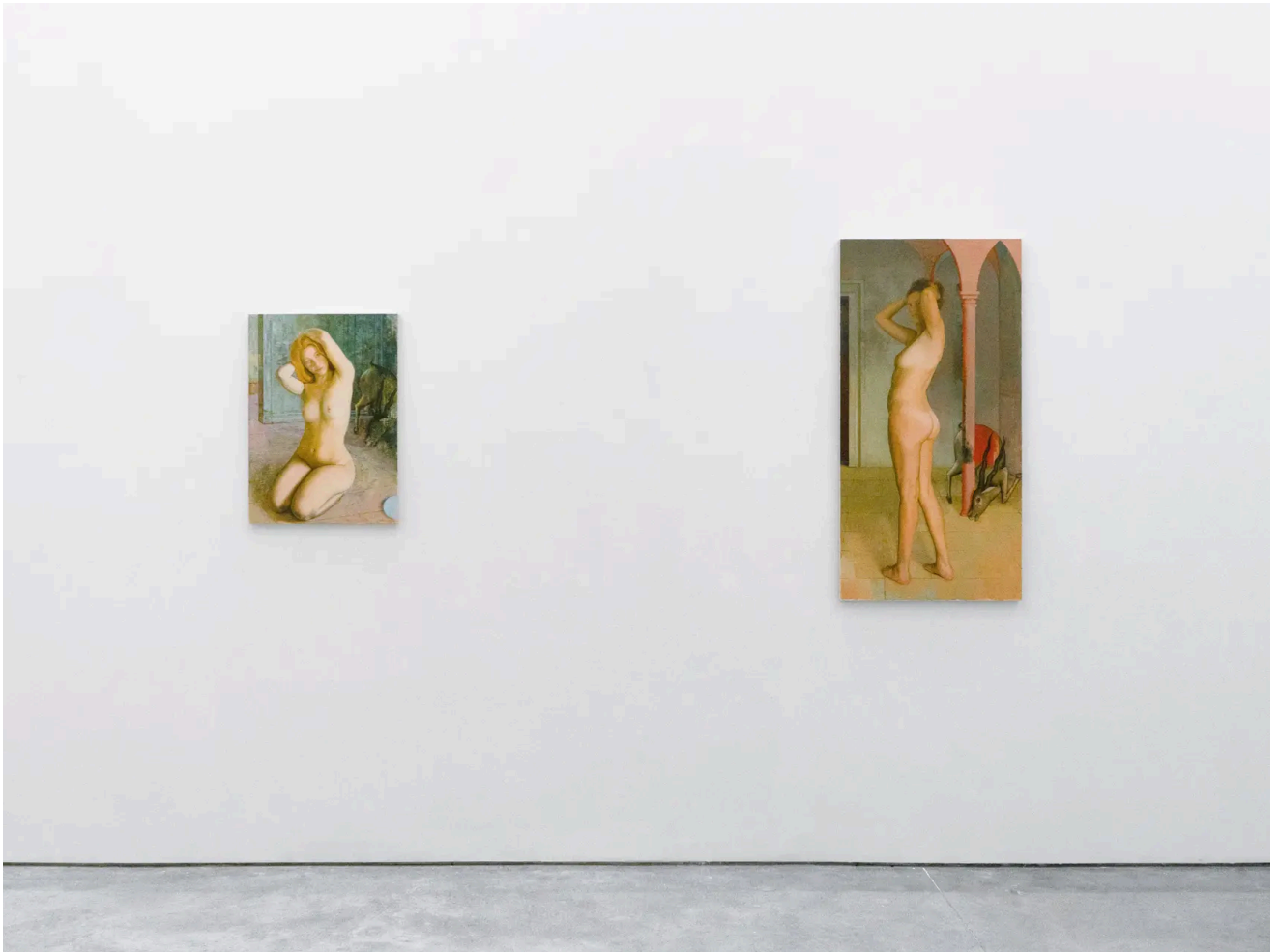
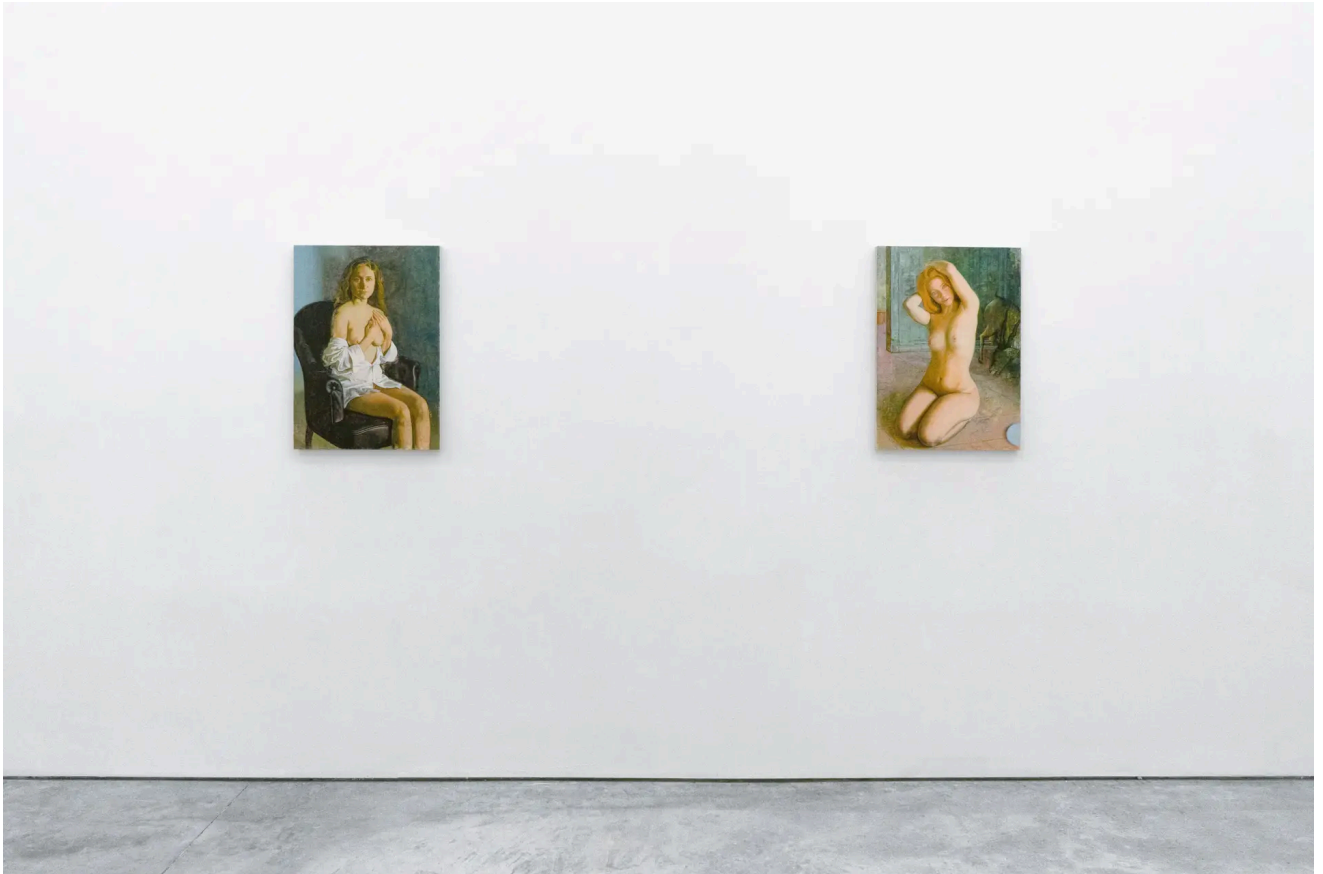
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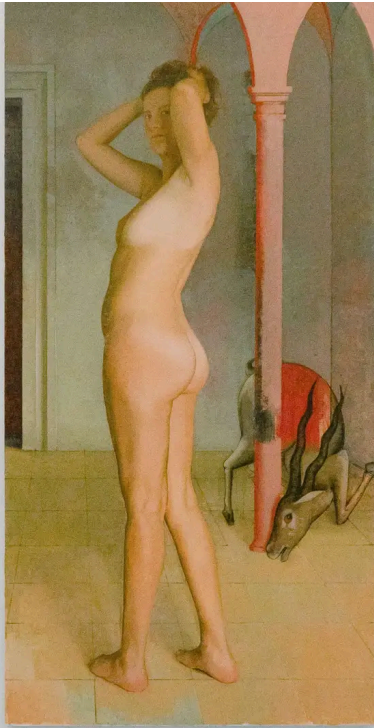
Jun 23, 2022 - Aug 27, 2022



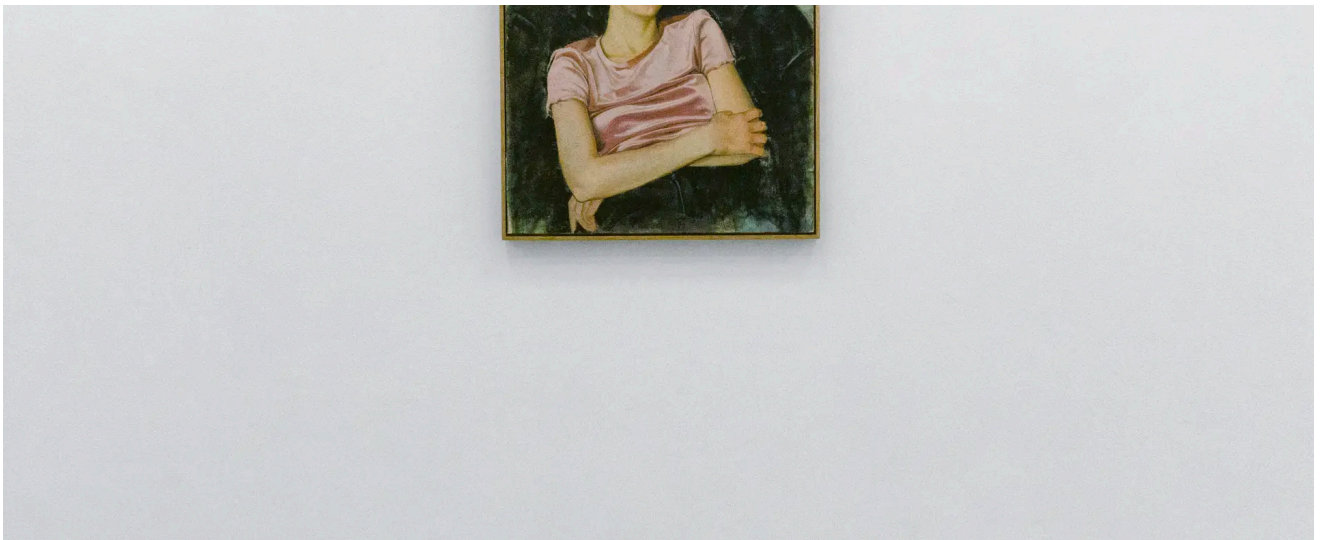












In this extraordinary body of work, Hershberg deftly negotiates the interplay between observation and invention.

His paintings are rooted in the tangible yet transcend empiric reality, pursuing the unique demands of the picture itself. Through a masterful engagement with composition, form, and narrative restraint, Hershberg reveals his deep understanding of painting as an autonomous art of fiction.

The ambitious *Nudes in Abu Tor* exemplifies Hershberg's meticulous pictorial thinking. The structural precision of the architecture—arches, tables, and chairs—grounds the composition in a geometric framework reminiscent of Sienese altarpieces by Sassetta. This solidity contrasts with the fluid, sensuous forms of the figures, evoking echoes of Ingres' *Turkish Bathers*.

In his portraiture, Hershberg pares down this complexity to explore spatial relationships and expressive contours. These works, though simple in appearance, are compositionally daring. In many, the interplay of light and shadow emphasizes the figure's contours, with the silhouette of a black armchair heightening the figure's lines and gestures.

Sugarlift is honored to present *All Thought Becomes an Image*, the first New York solo exhibition by Israeli artist Yedidya Hershberg, on view from June 23 through August 27, 2022, at 507 West 27th Street, New York, NY.

SUGARLIFT

Sugarlift is a contemporary art gallery based in New York City.

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Artists



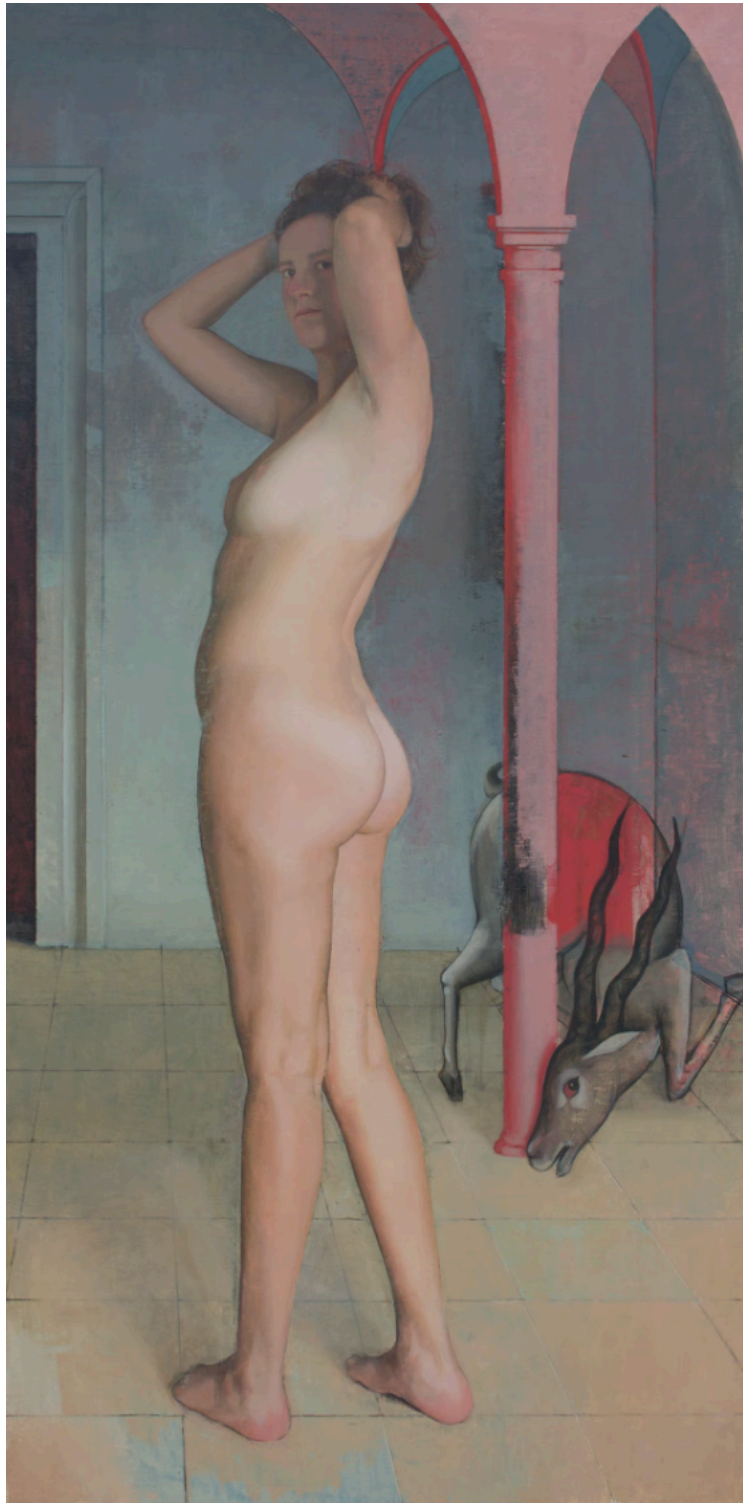
Gallery 1

Yedidya Hershberg: All Thought Becomes an Image

Sugarlift

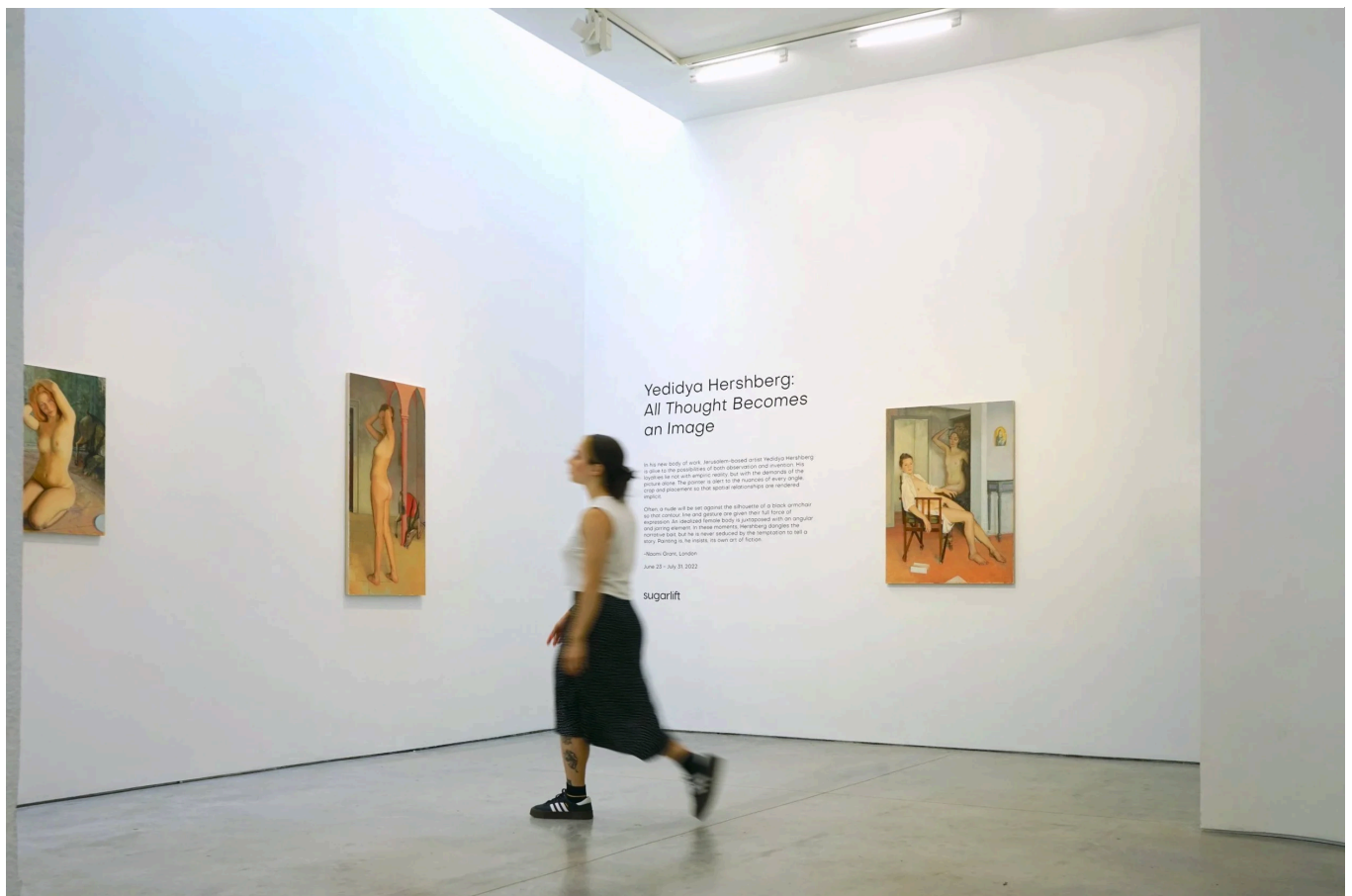
June 23 - July 30, 2022

Sugarlift presents new work by Israeli artist Yedidya Hershberg in "All Thought Becomes an Image". This is the artist's first solo show in New York.



In his new body of work, Herschberg creates with both observation and invention, yet his loyalties lie not with empiric reality, but with the demands of the picture alone. In *Nudes in "Abu Tor"*, the relationship between the figures and architecture offers a clue to Herschberg's pictorial thinking. The geometry of the architrave, chair, and table establish scale and perspective and secure the work's structural integrity. The solidity of these planes is reminiscent of Sassetta's altarpieces while the forms of the figures recall the rhythms of Ingres' *Turkish Bathers*. Here, the painting negotiates two competing notions of *Disegno* (the Italian concept of drawing and design) by reconciling the flat planes of Sienese art with the curvaceous articulations of Neoclassicism.

The painter is alert to the nuances of every angle, crop, and placement so that spatial relationships are rendered implicit. Often, a nude will be set against the silhouette of a black armchair so that contour, line, and gesture are given their full force of expression. Sometimes, an idealized female body will be offset by a more angular and jarring element. In *"Nude with Blackbuck"* and *"Transfiguration"*, the motif of the wounded antelope (a borrowing from Mughal art) performs a similar function to that of the devils in Sienese panels. The agonized contortions of the animal not only introduce an element of discord and pain but also throw the sensuous volumes of the figure into relief. In these moments, Yedidya dangles the narrative bait, but he is never seduced by the temptation to tell a story. Painting is, he insists, its own art of fiction.



Yedidya Hershberg was born on August 4, 1988 in Jerusalem, Israel, to painters Israel Hershberg and Yael Scalia. At age 14, Hershberg began joining the Jerusalem Studio School summer programs in Italy, and by the age of 18, he participated in the Jerusalem Studio School's full-time Master Class program. After completing his studies, he moved to Brooklyn, NY, where he lived and worked for 3 years. In 2014, Hershberg went on to attain his MFA from the University of New Hampshire on full scholarship. Lacking identification with the prospect of professorship in academia, Yedidya resolved to return to Israel and reestablish the Jerusalem Studio School. Yedidya presently resides in Jerusalem, Israel. He is the Director of the Jerusalem Studio School and an Assistant Master Class Instructor at JSS In Civita Summer Art School & Residency in Italy. He is currently represented by Rothschild Fine Art, Tel Aviv.

