

Hendershot Gallery

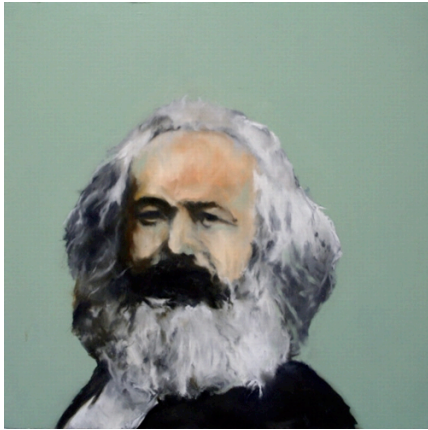
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Karl Marx

Abshalom Jac Lahav



Born in Israel, Abshalom Jac Lahav received a BA in Psychology from Wesleyan University, and studied painting at the SVA and Cooper Union. Lahav is a painter of the unconscious whose storybook paintings explore depth psychology, archetypes and alchemy. His paintings tell a narrative of the collective unconscious, dealing with the ambiguity of the past, present and future. The figures live in a world of fictitious history, current events and psychological archetype. The content is often political and historical, dealing with issues of war and religion. These serious issues are presented to the viewer as dreamlike storybook images, reminding us of both the fragility and the playfulness that can take place in times of apocalyptic horror.

Lahav's most recent body of work is a portrait of 35 famous Jews painted with oil on canvas, each painting measuring 2' x 2'. All portraits are displayed together in an evenly spaced rectangular grid. As well as Marx, the portraits include Anne Frank, Alan Greenspan, Noam Chomsky, Franz Kafka, Vidal Sassoon and Elvis (who had four generations of maternal Jewish decent).

Lahav perceives this series as continuing a tradition and history of portrait painting, while questioning the nature of the historical portrait. Most notably, the work echoes Gerhard Richter's *48 Portraits* series, which presented a line-up of famous white western men in his typical dead-pan, gray-scaled, blurry photo-realist style. The aesthetic of the Richter portraits is austere, uniform, and dehumanized. Lahav's Jewish portraits play off this particularly German intellectual identity, making a cultural 180 degree turn to a celebration of painting, color, and the humanity of mark making. The paintings reject bland aesthetics with a manner that recalls *the Nabis*.

The portraits of two Jewish artists are placed in the middle of the series; in the center of the grid we find Marc Chagall, famous for a quintessential Jewish style, while next to him sits Frida Kahlo, who's Jewish roots were a mere footnote.