

Art Review:

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DISPATCHES

ART, MUSIC, ARCHITECTURE, FILM, SHOPPING, NEWS



MOTION PICTURES: EZRA JOHNSON

Painter Ezra Johnson's first solo museum exhibition, *What Visions Burn*, is a 22-and-a-half-minute DVD; but in a way it contains scores of paintings. His low-tech approach to digital animation involves painting, photographing and then repainting single canvases for each scene in such a way that he is, in effect, creating celluloid palimpsests. Johnson's painting style evokes Impressionists like Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec who were attracted to the fuzzy chaos of crowd scenes and the fleshy, saturated colours of cafés, theatres and bohemian nightlife, demonstrating a love of rough-hewn textures

and emotionally charged locations that isn't far off from cinematography. The story (a daring art heist in New York) calls for the recreation of art historical and contemporary masterpieces in its sets, for complex establishing shots and evocative exteriors (such as the moon peeking through clouds over the New York skyline) that would be ascribed a cinematic sensibility even if one were seeing only the paintings on the walls. The press materials call the project a 'painting-film', which is an unconventional hyphenate to begin with, saying notably: 'This is film both of and about painting, and it is painting both of and about film.' By using a layered

narrative that occasions, for example, seeing the theft of paintings through the visual perspective of a security camera (in effect looking at paintings within paintings and film within film at the same time), his relentlessly self-referential and transparent honesty to his process points to the deeper metaphor still, wherein the art thieves exist as metaphors for modern digital culture's enchantment with reckless acquisition and appropriation, and wherein painting still holds all the power. *Shana Nys Dambrot*

EZRA JOHNSON,
WHAT VISIONS BURN,
TO 6 MAY, HAMNER
MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES
WWW.HAMNER.UCLA.EDU

What Visions Burn, 2006, DVD,
22 min 27 sec. Courtesy Kantac/
Pever Gallery, Los Angeles