

The Museum of Modern Art

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TWENTY-SIX PAINTINGS BY JESS ON VIEW AT MUSEUM

Projects: Translations by Jess, on view from October 28 through December 8 at The Museum of Modern Art, consists of a series of 26 oil paintings, each with an accompanying text, made between 1959 and 1971.

The subject matter is derived from magazine images, snapshots, book illustrations and other sources. Among these are 19th-century engravings from Scientific American, a bubble-gum trading card photo of the Beatles, a University of Montana yearbook photograph of a soccer game, illustrations from The Nonsense Book (1900) by Gelett Burgess, a photograph of a pumpkin field from the U.S. Agricultural Yearbook (1909) and a reproduction from a 1905 Swedish art book of the painting "The Lament for Icarus" by Herbert James Draper. Each painting is accompanied by a text, also chosen from a variety of sources -- Thomas Hardy, Socrates, Lewis Carroll, Gertrude Stein, Edward Sapir, Kandinsky, Edward Lear, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to name a few.

The images and texts, displaced from their original contexts, combine into a new, mysterious, often suggestive and hermetic whole quite different in meaning from any of the constituent elements. Jess's paintings differ from most recent figurative work not only because of their literary connotations but also because the surfaces are so thickly impastoed with oil paints that the actual physicality of the paintings creates its own dialogue with the images.

Jess's use of color also sets his work apart from other recent painting. In an essay on the Translations, poet Robert Duncan quotes the artist on his use of color: "Every point of color is autonomous, but still it is within the total relationship, the total network of color.... in most contemporary color, intensity is what they aim at. I am concerned not with the intensity but with the identity of the color in the total; it may be intense, but it may be dim or ambiguous, seeming to change in relationships with different other points of color."

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