



Howard Hodgkin, *Autumn Foliage*, 1998-99,
oil on wood, ca. 13½ x 16½".



Euan Heng, *Night flight*, 2001,
oil on linen, ca. 36 x 34".

in Poland. In this context an incipiently Romantic dimension seems to emerge even in Poussin. Hodgkin's exacerbated contemporary painterliness may seem weak in comparison to such mastery but serves to highlight the hidden strengths of some of the collection's smaller figures. In one of the few juxtapositions that seems based on a formal echo, Hodgkin's oval *When in Rome*, 2000, draws attention to the shape of the Archangel Michael's shield in Sebastiano Ricci's adjacent *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, ca. 1720—a passage that anchors great centrifugal force in its own conspicuous painterliness. Likewise the startling disjunctions in Jan Weenix's *Landscape with Shepherd Boy*, 1664, the compositional imbalance of Sébastien Bourdon's *A Brawl in a Guardroom*, ca. 1643, and the daring vacancy of Arent de Gelder's *Jacob's Dream*, 1710-15, seem to take heart, as it were, from their continuing relation to Hodgkin's present—just as that present, in turn, may recognize its own brutal image in the raw-meat red slathered across the bottom of Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1663, an inarguable excuse for the sitter's cloak.

—BS

MELBOURNE

EUAN HENG

AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES

Unlike other painters who came into vogue in the '80s, Scottish-Chinese artist Euan Heng made works that, even then, were neither wild nor spectral. For a start, they were self-consciously Mediterranean, in the tradition of Matisse and Léger—but

gray. His bewildered but purposeful gentle giants and world-weary office workers, depicted through a synthesis of Christian and Classical heroic models, seemed half-human, half-animal. Though he was loosely associated with the dramatic but now dry-docked expressionist efflorescence in Scottish painting, Heng had been resident in Australia since 1977. Here, where his images of uncertain souls plodding across the universe were far too easily conflated with the capricious, quickly dated neo-expressionist desire for elegant bombast, he has endured a sleeper reputation.

Heng's obstinate pictures have changed very little over the years, except that they have become more luminous and more clearly calculated—not a stray brush mark or a single nuance missed. He so obviously avoids depicting anything like a rushed moment (the monumental blue man attempting wingless takeoff from total standstill in *Night flight*, 2001, is proof enough) that his work should, instead, be compared with that of Alex Katz, another style-conscious artist of the static whose consistency exceeds even Heng's. Both artists covertly but deliberately bow to the bohemian cult of the dandy, a cult in which appearance is calculated to cause maximum effect. But Heng's classicizing simplifications and his painstaking repetition of gestures, from painting to almost identical painting, seem directed toward affect, not effect, for his attention is lavished and focused above all, and quite selectively, on hands. How might we understand the significance of Heng's insistence on such selective refinement next to his cloisonnistic cult of the contour—his dour restriction of means and severe stylization extending to every-

thing in his paintings except these delicately modeled hands and, sometimes, faces? Culture, according to early-twentieth-century iconologist Aby Warburg's theory of the pathos formula, is transmitted through affective recapitulation, and Heng's figures are ghostly embodiments of affective gestures, poses, and postures. His men are mimes, and their overt theatricality is underlined by the staginess of the trees, clouds, and blank backdrops against which they are posed. The flashlight-wielding man in *Sleuth*, 2000, combines inscrutability with a consciously Pierrot-like pathos accentuated by his glance—an appeal, consistent across all the other paintings in the exhibition, to the viewer.

This explains, then, why such a historically literate artist paints pictures of men pinned like elegant butterflies onto luminous fields of soft cartoon color. The man in *Night flight* mimics the triumphant early modernist arbitrariness of Matisse's famous pre-World War I figure paintings and the Etruscan and Roman wall paintings that Heng was sketching and drawing in Rome in preparation for this exhibition. Although the masterly drawing of the figure in *Sleuth* looks faux-primitive, this is not the existential loneliness of expressionism, nor the naïveté of, say, Francesco Clemente, for Heng's paintings are far less elliptical in their address and, unlike Clemente's, are without disingenuousness. Heng's is a more precisely calibrated primitivism.

—Charles Green

CORRECTIONS: In the September issue, *Artforum* miscredited the cover-image photographer. Ron Mueck's *Untitled (boy)* was photographed by Thorsten Arendt. The on-site images accompanying "Groans of Venice" [pp. 154-167] were taken by Roman Mensing and Thorsten Arendt (www.artdoc.de). *Artforum* regrets these errors.