

David FeBland

VALLEY HOUSE GALLERY

DALLAS

by Joel Weinstein

New Yorker David FeBland paints scenes from the lovely, exasperating melodrama known to denizens and tourists alike as Manhattan. Oddly for that imposing, dingy realm, Mr. FeBland's creations are intimate and as sunbaked as the Turkish coast, and the main plot twist in his bright, blurry theater is the collision of souls.

Within each canvas, some disturbance—often quite small but always piquant—is unfolding. In *Sanctuary*, we, the viewers, are entering headlong into a taxi cab, and yet through a trick of perspective typical of the FeBland method, we can see all around. Silent, threatening personages surround the vehicle—cadging change, bent furiously over the windshield, or just peering in—while the driver inexplicably turns upon his huddling passengers as if about to scream, blaming them for everything.

There are far greater calamities in the picture—an airliner plunges from the sky in flames in the far distance—but they seem completely incidental to the out-of-whack hugger-mugger at hand.

Mr. FeBland's tendency to offer us nearly photographic tableaux of highly unlikely coincidences lends his works the wobble of fever dreams, and strongly suggests that, as much as it all looks sort of New Yorky, we are getting to know the lay of a distinctly interior land.

We tag along with the artist past his inventions: street corners, elevated trains, shoeshine stands, corrugated factories. And we get the kind of wide-eyed view that comes from suddenly spinning around at the sound of squealing tires.

Rendezvous is the most distilled of Mr. FeBland's practice of adding up small, plain facts to make intricate fancies. It features a great expanse of sidewalk, so fetchingly pink and scumbly that it might be the painting's star attraction. The supporting cast includes a boy doing a wheelie with a stroller as he runs by a listless doorman having a smoke.

Meanwhile, around the corner we



espionage a man running full-tilt toward us—and the unseen lad—with what is unmistakably a filched purse held high. He is what we've come to know from television as a "perp." We can be certain of this by his ditty-rag, baggy, calf-length sweat pants, and the fallen victim, who lies dazed on the sidewalk showing us the bright yellow moons of her rear end.

The impending crash won't be found in the tabloids, yet it is a supercharged dose of what makes living in Manhattan worth it; or not so, depending on whether you identify with the perp or the perpee.

For a more psycho-sexual brand of excitement, Mr. FeBland gives us *Pan Bimbo*. Pan Bimbo is the Wonder Bread of Latin America, but a bimbo of a different sort dominates this scene, a baleful amazon in a red dress who regards—or more likely looks right through—a man dragging himself and his fleece-lined coat out of the subway, much diminished by his experiences. There are the usual warpages here, especially the incongruous figure of an early Disney Mickey Mouse at the woman's side, squatting like a ratty companion. Mickey is either graffitied on the wall or decorates a trash can, but in any event he gazes with much more generosity of spirit upon the wretch who comes from below.

The latter two paintings are recent works, and if quietude can by any stretch be attributed to Mr. FeBland's artistry,

they are quieter, yet more disturbing, than grandiose compositions of yore like *Sanctuary*. The vicissitudes of race and class remain, but not the careening jetliners or the more obnoxious scumbagery of the street. Mr. FeBland, like Rudolph Guliani, has cleaned up the old neighborhoods, but strife still freewheels just out of sight. He seems to be reaching deeper for the refreshing angst of the true metropolitan, and maybe the painting itself is taking over, lending those stretches of asphalt, concrete and steel which stand for the hardnesses within us a texture that is pretty and bright and lazy enough to stand.

David FeBland
Sanctuary, 1995
Oil on Linen
40" x 70"
Courtesy the artist