

## a certain discontent

The drawings of Joseph Gerges are, quite simply, dazzling. They display a mastery of media, formal elements and the very language of drawing itself. They are products of a virtuosity that moves effortlessly from volume to shape, from tonal passage to line, and from the evocation of atmosphere to the rendering of surface texture. They captivate us with competence, almost to the point of making us oblivious to an underlying state of mind.

Few artists now working, and not many since the Renaissance, have drawn with the certainty and conviction of Joseph Gerges. That is no small accomplishment in any era and is a rarity in our time. Such drawing once was a product of academies and conservatory school discipline, and the necessarily related personal values and state of mind. It doesn't naturally grow in art schools after Modernism or in Western societies after Freud. Discipline and the selfless humility of practice became equated with something bad, repression. Repetition was Degas' word for the hours of rehearsal and recitation necessary to achieve the highest performance in dance, music and drawing. Repetition even became the subject of many of his pictures. Degas collected and admired Ingres who held to the tenets of the greatest classicist, Raphael, and carried the last melancholy banner of the *ancien regime*. But there was no hope of a restoration for Degas. A recent sub-genre of scholarship about Degas hypothesizes about misanthropy, misogyny, and other discontents. There is, after all, something troubling in his work. So, too, with the work of Joseph Gerges.

Many of the subjects of the work are, as we say, on the verge. An anger, or sorrow, or outrage lies just below the surface, contained. There is nothing overt, no exposition...just ...something ...about to boil over. The people of the drawings possess malaises and personal discontents that we can only intuit. We read their faces and hands for a clue. All the while the artist records and renders with an elegant removal and a commitment to pictorial harmony, himself also in mastery of a certain discontent.

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