

ART REPUBLIK EXAMINES THE
FACELESS PORTRAITS OF GIDEON RUBIN.
BY MELODY BOH

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There is something familiar yet haunting about Gideon Rubin's works; after all, they are faceless. But they were not always that way. The Israeli-born artist was a realist painter – he has always painted portraits, and still does, but took inspiration from life and observation, sometimes taking months to complete a work. However, in 2001, the tragic events of September 11 saw Rubin witnessing the horror unfold before his eyes from his friend's rooftop, changing the way he worked and turning his back on his realist style.

Born in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1973, Rubin first graduated with a Bachelor's degree from School of Visual Art, New York before going on to complete his Master's degree with Slade School of Fine Art, University College in 2002 in London, where he continues to reside. The artist has since showcased his works in numerous solo and group exhibitions all over the world, and with works in private collections in London, Hong Kong, New York, Paris and beyond. In 2013, he undertook the Outset Israel Bialik Residency in Tel Aviv. In 2014, he was awarded the Shifting Foundation Grant and spent time at the Da Wang Culture Highland artist residency near Shenzhen, China.

Today, Rubin possesses a simpler, quasi-minimalist painting style. Drawing inspiration from old photographs, photos of celebrities or paintings by old masters, he paints faceless portraits and, on occasion, obscured landscapes. He strips his subjects bare, transforming them into unidentifiable figures. Through his abstract paintings, Rubin encourages viewers to focus on intentionally included details, and urges them to form their own narratives and consequently, be part of the process. The artist explains, "I'd like to think the figures in my paintings remind the viewer of certain people or evoke memories rather than portray specific identities... focusing on certain details that I provide, such as the posture of a figure or a tree in the paintings background. It's a more abstract way of looking at a scene; it is impossible to directly identify with the characters in my paintings, I want to offer alternative ways of viewing the figures, where the viewer is also involved in completing a narrative or scene."

A huge focus in Rubin's works is the way medium is employed. Adopting the canvas or raw linen as a preferred medium, the artist often leaves entire areas untouched in his paintings, allowing the white space to become an integral part of his works. He paints a canvas repeatedly, again and again, the surface of the paintings suggests previous layers of paints and scenes, culminating to a final scene that is entrenched in multiple layers of paint and history.


Drawn to earthy tones, Rubin works primarily with a palette that involves more tones than colours. He applies broad and bold brush strokes in subtle shades such as sandy tones, grey blues and off whites, suggesting in the simplest yet most expressive terms a life passed, a secret unearthed or a memory resurfaced, and his desire to bring these forgotten moments or people back to life again. Rubin mixes his colours with an abundance of zinc white, damar varnish and linseed oil to achieve de-saturated colours, perhaps a reflection of the faded quality of old photographs that he uses as source materials.



This page, from top to bottom: *Untitled (Class Photo I)* (detailed view), 2015; *White Glove*, 2015, Gideon Rubin.

Facing page: *Braids* (detailed view), 2015, Gideon Rubin.

In 2016, Rubin will kick off the new year with 'Questions of Forgiveness', a solo exhibition at Galerie Karsten Greve in Paris, France from 9 January to 5 March. Borrowing imagery from old photographs and abstracting them to faceless forms, Rubin employs his characteristic abstract style to his works, once again evoking a sense of both intimacy and disconcertment.

"The paintings are intimate and unapologetically nostalgic but the work is not sentimental," says Rubin. "Viewing these paintings might be a voyeuristic experience, but instead there's a sense of familiarity. It's like the memory of something that's at the point of fading completely, or remembering a history that you were told about but never actually experienced first-hand.... The insignificant moments represented are the stuff of collective memory – the minutiae that make up the meaningful part of our lives. 

For more information, please visit
www.galerie-karsten-greve.com

