

## *The Work Of Howard Kanovitz*

by Udo Kultermann

The work of Howard Kanovitz is one of the pioneering achievements toward the reintegration of the realist tradition into contemporary art. Along with parallel, but different, approaches by artists such as Philip Pearlstein, Alfred Leslie, Richard Estes, and Malcolm Morley, Kanovitz created a basis for a complex realism and the various facets that followed. His realism is a fresh reappraisal of the urban environment of New 70's and thus different from all the earlier types of realist painting. Among the several innovations of his artistic approach is the democratization of subject matter, which includes portraits of his friends, major figures of the New York art scene, banal objects taken from the daily environment of the artist, popular media imagery and objects from the world of advertising--all themes reflecting a specific and unique iconography and a real-life approach to the perception of a real environment. Like the Florentine painters Masaccio, Andrea del Castagno and Uccello in their time, Kanovitz established methods by which it was possible to visually understand and represent the complex and sophisticated cultural milieu in his time. He developed a specific technique, including photography, opaque projection, and silk screen methods, and with these achieved an appropriate documentation of the multilayered reality of the New York urban scene (New Yorkers of 7-965i The Opening of 1967). In several of his works the process of the development of the painting remains visible to the viewer, while in other works, by means of human scale cut-out figures standing on the floor in front of the painting, the viewing itself becomes the theme (The People of 1968). In still other works he inaugurates a new and ambivalent approach of revitalizing the tradition of trompe l'oeil painting (Projected Man of 1977). Since 1971/1972 Kanovitz's use of sophisticated forms of illusion has played an especially important role in his work, which becomes a philosophical challenge that questions the traditional vision of realism. The awareness of this dimension was articulated by Kanovitz himself. "Fidelity to the subject as seen begins to shift as elements not usually

associated with subjects take "Fidelity to the subject as seen begins to shift as elements not usually associated with subjects take on symbolic importance." The complex formal and iconographic range of Kanovitz's works since 1980 has furthermore increased, and encompasses images of memory, literary analogies and details of the cultural environment of Amagansett, in the State of New York, where Kanovitz lives after extensive travels in Europe during the late 'seventies. His works in recent years include landscapes, still-lives and scenes with figures-- not in the tradition of these categories, but often in a combination, thus constituting new pictorial forms. Consistently through all the various phases of his work Howard Kanovitz is concerned with the reality of seeing. Seeing and knowing, the problematic and human dimension of perception, are the main concern of the artist. The art of Howard Kanovitz reflects on the process and essence of painting, on the continuity of an art form which opens new perspectives not only for the eye also for the mind, and thus is in line with the general reflected consciousness of our time. The eternal question of how reality can be perceived has been transcended into a creative and visual articulation of the unsolvable question of what reality is.

--Udo Kultermann