

# Art in America

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## Dennis Kardon at Richard Anderson

In six realist paintings of his family at home, Dennis Kardon confronts his ambivalences about the way his life looks. Middle-class and middle-aging, Kardon bares well-worn but not really dirty laundry. In *Still Time* (1995), he and his wife lie in bed, facing in different directions. The reading glasses on a bedside table seem to have left creases around Kardon's glazed eyes. Strangely, the painting highlights his arm, which is raised behind his head, baring his armpit. The arm's hairy, fleshy immanence is vividly described without breaking a painterly stride; in fact, this passage is as richly painted as a Lucian Freud. In comparison, the rest of the picture, which depicts Kardon's wife and the bedroom furniture, seems perfunctory. One feels Kardon brooding about his Russian-Jewish looks, and wonders if disappointment has banished eroticism. Probably not. In *Dress Rehearsal* (1995), Kardon's ungainly sensuality is aptly symbolized by the family cat, stretched out on it back, legs splayed, begging to have its tummy scratched.

An earlier generation of artists would probably have deprecated the narrative strategies of these paintings as illustrational. Kardon himself began his career as an abstract painter. In the '80s he began making painterly close-up views of patches of skin or the surfaces of liquids—sub-

Dennis Kardon: *Dress Rehearsal*, 1995, oil on linen, 72 by 60 inches; at Richard Anderson.



jects that allude to, but also deflect, painting's flat surface. In this exhibition, Kardon's changing interests have pulled him all the way back to conventional genre painting. While there is a hint of modernism in his slightly inconsistent perspectives, it is now Kardon's ability to suggest complex emotional narratives that impresses.

In the show's catalogue, Linda Yablonsky quotes Kardon as saying, "Whatever embarrasses you is a subject that's ripe for art."

Concurrently, Kardon was showing molded and painted *Jewish Noses* (1993-96) in "Too Jewish." The Jewish Museum's exhibition of works exploring ethnic stereotypes. Actually, the noses seem fairly unremarkable. Kardon seems as productively "embarrassed" by the lumpen humanism of realist painting as he is by his own ethnicity. —P.C. Smith