



Oren Eliav, *Head*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 44 ½ x 35 7/8 in. (113 x 91 cm),
Courtesy Braverman Gallery, Tel Aviv. (972) 3 5666162

OREN ELIAV

ARTIST TO WATCH

Eliav recently won a prestigious Rappaport Prize, awarded annually to a promising young Israeli painter by the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (one other goes to an established painter), and as a result was honored with an exhibition at the museum. As an artist interested in how the whispers of the past echo in our collective cultural memory, perhaps there is no better place to have been born and raised than in Israel, where ancient history becomes part of the fabric of daily life. But this young artist is equally engaged in illuminating the modern experience of time: “I’m trying to construct a haunted present,” Eliav says. He does so by using the formal properties of paint as a conceptual tool; in his art, historical objects are rendered in thick or deliberate brushstrokes that also maintain an autonomous identity as paint, so his works are about both the object and the act of painting. By layering patterns or smears over loosely rendered subjects (thereby obscuring or negating them), the tension between realism and abstraction resonates. Admitting to a painterly “lust for ornamentation,”

he conjures up the aesthetic flamboyance used in the Baroque period to signify grandeur and inspire religious feeling. Some believe that such artistic overabundance obscures that sublime purpose and leads only to visual seduction. Eliav paints through these fine lines of distinction, and he says that the tension between doubt and faith is the true focus of his work. Eliav lives in Tel Aviv, the same city where he was born in 1975, and quickly has gained a respected reputation in a thriving contemporary art scene. The Braverman Gallery, representing an impressive roster of cutting-edge artists, including Eliav, offered a one-person show in 2010. That same year, he was included in the Liverpool Biennial, his first international exhibition after receiving an MFA from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Tel Aviv. During his BFA studies at Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem, he spent an exchange year at Cooper Union, New York. With such powerful work, this artist to watch will soon gain international attention. —KWT