

## Michael Zavros

There are two ways of looking at Michael Zavros's art. Both are rewarding. One is obvious: although I don't mean simple, even if it nonetheless provides comfortable and immediate enjoyment. The other way is bizarre and maybe even uneasy, because it involves inducing an immoral, abnormal warp in this enjoyment.

The easy manifest satisfaction we get is from the gob-smacking assurance of the artist's manual skill and elegant iconic precision of his images, the affluent *mise-en-scène* of which is staged with designer flair or with the pride of trophy-laden *wunderkammer*. This is an effortless enjoyment for us. Maybe not so much for the artist – for even if all that patient, meticulous, sensible, steady-handed industry is evidently a pleasure for him, it's still time-consuming and uncompromising labour. We could call it a labour of love to detailed beauty, yet I suspect there is more to this dedication than affection. It tips also toward a perverse affliction, a styling so disciplined that it hints at being driven by another, less consciously tasteful, less courteously faithful, agency. For, unlike so many realist artists whose unwearied labour – sometimes humble, sometimes stridently polemical – reveals a moral lesson (as sort of redeeming faith in a natural, social or artistic truth), Zavros's realism enjoys the corruption of its core piety. His images are like slyly ambiguous curses – oaths to beauty that are also hexes. Icons of a crafty superstition, they could be treacherous talismans.

I warned you there was an odd aspect to enjoying Zavros's work, but did I mention the danger? This is a *realist* art, but perversely its realism demands *unnaturalism*: an aberrant contrivance that could otherwise be called conjuring. And I have an idea that the conjuring is not just an act.

**Edward Colless**

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