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THE DAILY PIC: This is “A Painting – Ahmed Barka”, painted (or rather, not!) in 1970 by the wise Italian trickster Giulio Paolini. The piece is now in a show that pays tribute to him, curated by Begum Yasar at Dominique Levy's gallery in New York. Rather than being an actual painting, the work seen in today's Pic is in fact a photo-sensitized canvas printed with a *photo* of a painted beige monochrome, which has been marked with rudimentary perspective lines. That monochrome was Paolini's first work, done in 1960, when it was meant to “make the space of representation visible rather than carrying out the act of representation”, according to Yasar's text. The 1960 canvas stands as the pre-condition, as it were, for all of post-medieval art – for what lies under the entire Old Master tradition – while at the same time sitting comfortably among the radical reductions of avant-garde, anti-Old Master modernists such as Yves Klein. (Actually, almost no Old Master paintings have their vanishing points dead center, but for some reason we always imagine it there.)

But of course, that *painted* surface isn't really Paolini's piece from 1970: In his title, he ascribed the canvas to a (fictional) painter named Ahmed Barka. (Another 13 identical photos give the same painting to other authors.) The piece Paolini is willing to put his name on at Levy is the photograph, which supersedes both the Old Masters and the old moderns and takes us into conceptual space. Or maybe, by virtue of attaching a non-Western name to his painting, Paolini's carrying us all the way forward into postmodernism. All I know is that this is one *mise-en-abyme* that I'm happy to fall into. (*Private Collection, Lugano, © Giulio Paolini; photo by Elisabeth Bernstein, courtesy Dominique Lévy Gallery, New York*)

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Posted at 4:22 PM

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