

Edwin Schlossberg.
Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

One can read Edwin Schlossberg's *Deep See Poems* as referring to the punning title of one of his artist's books; or one can "see" them as a kind of visionary graffiti, well-crafted rather than casually scrawled. They're writing in which words become abstract images, sometimes festively colored, sometimes fragmented into isolated letters. Like Icarian meteors, sentences often blur into gestural streaks. Indeed, there's a kind of distraught didacticism



Edwin Schlossberg, *Self Is Another*, ink and graphite on vellum (48-1/2 x 39-1/4 x 5-1/4 in.), 2002. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

about Schlossberg's texts, as though he is pleading with us to take his thoughts seriously rather than simply enjoy their aesthetic display. He invites us to reflect even as he distracts us with the quirky style of his reflections. Ideas proliferate, but the sensuous interplay of the words, which are of different sizes, colors, and shapes, provides a sensory experience that precedes any concern with meaning.

The paper gets more integral to the poem as Schlossberg's work develops. In the poems from the 1970s, the text appears on unobtrusive plain paper; in the new ones, it appears on and under doubled

sheets of luminescent vellum. The membranous surface of each sheet seems to exist independently of whatever is inscribed on it. It subsumes the life of the mind the words represent into its own inner life. In *Underwritten* (2002), the words almost disappear into it. The labile space between the doubled papers becomes what Freud called a repression barrier. The text underneath is readable up close, the text on top is blurred. The unconscious is unexpectedly clearer than the conscious. Words become what Freud called mnemonic traces, the vellum writing pad making them even more enigmatic. Thus the new works are more about the evocative power of paper than about the conceptual power of words. Schlossberg writes the early poems with feeling. In the new ones, the real feeling is in the semi-transparent paper; veiling the words, it shapes their appearance, adding its strange beauty to their meaning. Schlossberg is a mystic, eager to find "the history of the world in one word," as a 1977 work states, the way William Blake found it in a grain of sand. In the new works, history and language seem forgotten in mystifying vellum.

—Donald Kuspit