

## Robert Feintuch at CRG

— By SUSAN HARRIS

It is hard to imagine that a cartoonish, middle-aged man in underwear, naked to his spreading waist, can be beautiful and otherworldly. Yet Robert Feintuch's new drawings and small-scale panel paintings, suffused with a glowing, ethereal light and displaying a masterful handling of color, line and stroke, magically transform an unflattering, unsentimentalized self-portrayal into something heroic and almost pious (all works 2005 or 2006). Accompanying the lone figure of the artist, props such as grapes, a newspaper, club, watch and pair of glasses help exalt Feintuch's awkward Everyman. At once intimate and universalizing, eloquent and spare, Feintuch's drawings and paintings verge on abstraction while retaining a commitment to a narrative art grounded in real life.



In many of these works, the artist-subject's face is partly obscured or altered, marking a shift from previous paintings, in which the face was not seen at all. Gazing at the artist's partial or distorted visage is eerily like entering into his consciousness.

In *Bacchus with Club*, the artist raises one arm, adorned with a watch, over his head, while the other clutches a club behind his back. With his raised hand, he delicately tenders a cluster of grapes, in a gesture reminiscent of Caravaggio's *Bacchus*, who similarly handles a wine glass. Feintuch pays loving attention to the plump grapes, the lines and folds of his underwear, and the richly subtle coloration and modeling of his skin, expressively lit.

Trained as an abstract artist during the early and mid-'70s, when figurative art garnered little respect, Feintuch has found himself over the last 10 years rethinking the historical and figurative conventions of Northern Renaissance and Italian 15th and 16th century paintings, along with the strategies of more recent artists such as Philip Guston and John Coplans. The theatrically articulated gestures and atmospheric ambience in which the protagonist simultaneously stands and floats recall the portraits of Jacques-Louis David. Like David, as well, Feintuch addresses contemporary socio-political issues, if obliquely, by including a newspaper that acts as a persistent intrusion of reality. *Pillows*, for example, features an image of an explosion in the pages of a newspaper left open on an empty, ruffled bed. In *Bed on Side With Newspaper* displays an open newspaper draped over the artist's long, mannered, reclining torso seen from behind, an allusion to the sensuous beauty and expressive distortions in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*.

Feintuch's drawings magnify the psychological intensity and metaphorical richness of the paintings. Here the artist gives the white spaces enveloping his figures more physical presence by selectively backing elements with passages of gray, even as specific features and details vanish. The protagonist's eyes might be missing or the lenses of his glasses made opaque, conveying his human vulnerability and insight. The white gap on his wrist where the watch would be heightens a sense of mortality and the passage of time. In their extreme spareness and heightened abstraction, the drawings distill and amplify Feintuch's more general artistic concerns