

GALLERIES

Diogenes as Collagist: Robert Feintuch at Sonnabend Gallery

By Will Heinrich 4/5/2011, 11:53pm



For the next few weeks, the painter Robert Feintuch will be slouching around the walls of the Sonnabend Gallery. Using himself as a model, Mr. Feintuch paints a single male figure wearing only white boxer shorts, usually alone but sometimes doubled or tripled. He stands in front of a blank wall in an exaggerated shade of his own Caucasian color—gray, peach or pink. He raises a bunch of grapes over his mouth, or raises his arm without the grapes, or swings a club, or screams at himself.

He is man as a messy collage, alive, but still mostly clay. *In the Studio* shows him facing the viewer, but with his head, right leg and left arm all attached backward. His right arm is raised over his head, either holding his invisible grapes, or else maybe the string from which he's twirling. (There is no God; we create ourselves.) He casts overlapping shadows on the wall. To match the stubborn blankness of the back of his head, he has neither nipples nor a navel. In *Taking a Stand*, we look at the artist's back as he looks up at the empty wall and his shadow, cast low and to the right, seems to look up at him. A chair dangles from his hand. Where can he go? He's a man without direction.

In *Thinking*, we can finally see the figure's face, and his legs are facing us, too. But he isn't complete. His legs below the shorts have shadows the color of car exhaust and are as seamless and smooth as an airbrushed hood. But the chair that hangs from his hand is missing its seat, and his chest hasn't been filled in—it's still the blank color of the mindless wall behind it. His feet, too, need a few more steps before they finish. This is man as a process, not an essence.

What do you call a directionless collage without intelligence or essence? A collection of forms that neither clash nor cohere, but just kind of lean together, moving ahead in a series of accidents? The answer is in *Protest*, where several iterations of our man crowd into the left half of the canvas, moving up and away, overlapping. One arm raises the Dionysian grapes, but four others raise fists. What do you call it? You call it a mob.

But if Mr. Feintuch is a cynic about human nature—or the making of art, or the nature of truth, or the possibility of beauty—he is, fortunately, almost as funny as Diogenes. Sometimes, as in *Late Marriage*, the humor can be cartoonish: Our man crouches over a dead or sleeping mate in a plume of smoke. But sometimes jokes are deadly: The naked hero of *Pink Hercules* is the color of Pepto-Bismol. He leans his burdensome bulk on a crutch and carries a club stolen from a Feiffer cartoon. Who knows what hell he's about to raise? We know, at least, that he doesn't.