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## Robin Hill

Stevenson, Jonathan. "Robin Lowe's exquisitely eerie paintings," **Two Coats of Paint, February 14, 2018.**

<http://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2018/02/robin-lowes-exquisitely-eerie-paintings.html>

## TWO COATS OF PAINT



*Rosa as Sigrid*, 2016-17, 90 x 80", oil on linen

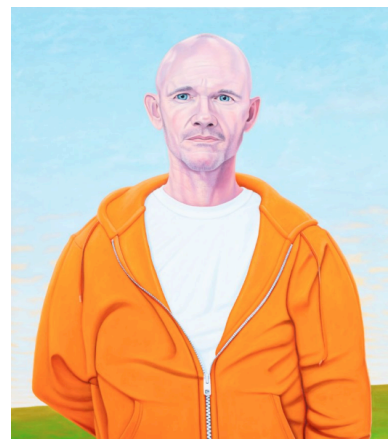
Contributed by Jonathan Stevenson / It goes almost without saying that paintings of people need to bring more to the table than faithful visual representations of what the people look like. But what, exactly? There is of course a range of options as to the kinds of enhancements a painter can incorporate. Natural environment, social milieu, and personal activity are some of the more straightforward possibilities. Robin Lowe, in his arresting exhibition "All in Your Head" at Lennon Weinberg in Chelsea, drills considerably deeper by vivifying the figure to a point of preternaturalness, so as to transfix the viewer.

His key devices are amplified line and color. *Katie*, for example, presents an objectively attractive woman with striking blue eyes, blond hair, and a very strong jaw. But the tresses are more delineated and the face redder than seems normal, and she wears an inscrutable expression between a smile and a smirk. So this wry, postmodern *Mona Lisa* starts you pondering what's going on with Katie, and the hints are at once pronounced and

ambiguous enough to induce you to continue for a while.

Lowe sometimes builds out context in a way that only underlines the baseline mystery. In *Jean Genet as Gary Lennon*, notionally fusing a mid-century French existentialist with a contemporary screenwriter, a man whose intensely wan expression could reflect kindness or balefulness wears an international orange jacket, with one arm bent behind his back. He could be conveying deference, he could be holding a Glock. Keep thinking about it. The other four portraits in the show similarly elicit inquiry – some with the help of title cues, like *Brando as Buck* and *Rosa as Sigrid* – without indulging resolution.

The three remaining works are landscapes, two depicting a lonesome highway extending into middle distance, one an oncoming car at night on the same iconic road. The exclusion of early morning in these paintings may relate to the portraits: their subjects seem too knowing and weathered for the innocence of daybreak. Alice Neel took portrait painting to a new level by imparting interior emotion with unprecedented expressiveness. The claim she staked on the viewer was close to a moral one. Lowe too commands the viewer's lasting attention. But whereas Neel's work is viscerally unsettling, Lowe's – which he does call "psychological portraiture" – is simply eerie: it highlights how little you know, and perhaps can know, about people. What you imagine may all be in your head, but, in this enthralling exhibition, it's Lowe who deftly and discreetly put it there.



*Jean Genet as Gary Lennon*, 2017, 90 x 80", oil on linen