



"Blood and Punk Royalty to Grunge Royalty"  
 Roberta Smith  
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Anyone curious about what young artists are up to these days should venture into Gavin Brown's Enterprise, a small, hole-in-the-wall gallery on Broome Street, just beyond SoHo's western fringe. The gallery usually mounts a single exhibition in its tiny storefront space, but this month it has temporarily expanded, renting an equally cramped basement storefront across the street, to make two simultaneous introductions.

In the gallery proper are Elizabeth Peyton's small votive paintings of Kurt Cobain, the leader of the rock band Nirvana who, hemmed in by fame and drugs, killed himself last April. Across the street are two mannequin sculptures with shockingly rearranged or multiplied body parts, by Dinos and Jake Chapman, English brothers who started working together three years ago.

The shows could not be less alike, and their pairing is largely fortuitous. But they play off each other well, describing two sides of several coins of the 90's realm, and adding up to more than the sum of their parts. They shed light on the ways 80's appropriation continues to proliferate in the 90's; on the hold that realism, manipulated to varying degrees, exerts on young artists, and also on the emotionalism inherent in a lot of current work.

The small paintings by Ms. Peyton, who is 29, are beautiful in a slightly awkward, self-effacing way, and the gallery seems tailor-made for their offhand intensity. (They might have trouble in a larger, more finished space.) Ms. Peyton has always made small, private images of public figures: Marlon Brando, Napoleon, Rupert Brooke, Queen Elizabeth, Ludwig II of Bavaria and Sid Vicious are previous subjects and the current exhibition includes two paintings of the actor Jean-Pierre Léaud, of Godard and Truffaut film fame. But until now she has confined herself primarily to wispy, somewhat illustrative works on paper.

With her new efforts, Ms. Peyton commits herself to painting, and to clear transparent colors applied in thin loose strokes on Masonite. Her style is a strange blend: part Abstract Expressionist, part Renaissance miniature, with a touch of Pre-Raphaelite romanticism thrown in for good measure. (The works also resemble a series of paintings, copied from the covers of pulp novels, made by Walter Robinson in the 1980's.)

Ms. Peyton's images of Mr. Cobain, based on photographs of the musician in performance or repose, are in many ways the tributes of an extremely sophisticated fan in mourning, a fan familiar with Andy Warhol's images of celebrities and interested in according her subject a greater directness of touch and feeling, of intimacy. Her penchant for indicating his pale skin and bleached hair with stark whites gives his famous charisma an incandescent

glow that seems to be both coming into focus and fading away. In these and other ways, the auras of painting and fame are repeatedly equated.

It's good that Ms. Peyton is aiming her nostalgic style more firmly at the present and a figure that clearly means so much to her. But some old fashionedness remains. In front of Ms. Peyton's rendering of Mr. Cobain you may find yourself thinking more of Jean Seberg's St. Joan or Balthus's Heathcliff than of Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and other members of "that stupid club" Mr. Cobain's mother said her son joined when he took his life.