

Facing forward

By Edith Newhall,
The Philadelphia Inquirer
October 9, 2011

In his first one-person show at Seraphin Gallery, "Love at the Matterhorn," Phillip Adams has filled the gallery with new paintings from his "Solipsist" and "Matterhorn" series, most of which are black-and-white portraits of young men and women isolated at the bottom of the panel they're painted on, against a white background.

As in Adams' earlier "Solipsist" pictures, his solitary subjects wear glasses that reflect the scenes in front of them. The subjects of the Matterhorn paintings wear the same blue, hooded camouflage-patterned jacket.

Adams' images can stir memories of photorealism - he draws his meticulous portraits with charcoal, occasionally adding painted areas - and he titles his works after his subjects' first names, as Chuck Close did in his early portraits (and still does in his paintings). But Adams' subjects seem younger and less defined as people than Close's contemporaries did in the 1960s. The attitudinal young Richard Serra of Close's black-and-white painting *Richard*, 1969 looked like someone who knew where he was going; the solemn facial expressions of Adams' *Keir*, *Corrine*, and *David* seem blank by comparison. The reflections in the glasses worn by the "Solipsist" subjects suggest that they are passive voyeurs; the hoods on the heads of the "Matterhorn" figures exaggerate their youthfulness.

Adams is also showing paintings of mountainous landscapes with references to the Disneyland Matterhorn attraction. A table with an umbrella is improbably poised in an Alpine landscape in *The Wait*, while a tiny aerial tram car runs between two cliffs in *Forever Young*.

There's an unknowable mystery in Adams' images that he enhances by the contrasts of scale he uses, and the contrast of the drawn portrait to its white background. Now, in these landscapes, he seems to be introducing humor, too.



Seraphin Gallery | Contemporary Philadelphia Art Gallery and Art Consultant
1108 Pine St. | 215-923-7000 | seraphin@seraphingallery.com