

## Philadelphia Inquirer

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Sunday, Jan. 23, 1983

Tom Hatten continues to explore the portrait themes of his past work by peopling his canvases with characters filled with turmoil and out of touch with one another.

The pictures in Hatten's show at the Lawrence Oliver Gallery, 1626 Pine St., complete the diptych series of likenesses of himself and his wife that he has been working on for 10 years, but they function more as allusion or even visual motif than as narration or portraiture.

These are forlorn faces, brooding faces, now complex, now simplistic faces. The emphasis is on how the picture is seen rather than on what is observed. Stretched into grotesques, the faces are meant to evoke a complex world of hate and horror mixed with some hope.

The "stringiness" of the shapes give Hatten's people life and changeableness. He pulls paint across his canvases, creating sometimes near-monochromatic surfaces. At other times his use of color is surprising.

His fields generally range from flat ochre to umber, and sometimes the faintest light on his subjects is re-made in his paintings with skeins of hatching with varied densities. At other times, harsh colors (for example, the reds he is now beginning to use) and purposeful deformity connect him to the expressionist tradition.

By having a palette that is for the most part somber, Tom Hatten assures us that the mood is deadly earnest. His sense of the surreal still has dash and punch, but Hatten seems to be huffing and puffing a bit on his present course. Will he run out of steam? The show will run until Feb. 1.