

## Art in Review

### Keith Mayerson

'Hamlet 1999'

Derek Eller Gallery  
526-30 West 25th Street  
Chelsea  
Through Jan. 5

Keith Mayerson's four-year "Hamlet 1999" is ending with a brilliant bang: a salon-style exhibition of 103 touchingly clumsy, jaundice-hued paintings dominated by portraits of male heroes from life, literature and the movies.

The show's prevailing yellow discourages swooning at the sight of so many objects of gender-blind infatuation: James Dean, Keanu Reeves, John Lennon, Superman, the young Abe Lincoln, Arthur Rimbaud, Harry Potter and Spiderman. It also evokes both nostalgia and rebellion by suggesting varnish, old newspapers and cigarette smoke, as well as the oal-ettes of van Gogh, Gauguin and Ludwig Kirchner. The expanses of intent, semi-familiar faces break for occasional landscapes, interiors and old-fashioned abstractions whose vaporous monochromes suggest pure feeling or creativity.

The Prince of Denmark's tragedy, arguably one of the most harrowing coming-of-age tales ever told, is only loosely evoked. For example, Keanu Reeves (in sundry movie roles) is Hamlet, as are Spiderman, Rimbaud, Dave from "2001" and Laurence Olivier. More interesting is the general ambience of sensitive, saviorlike youth struggling against evil, obviously including stereotypes of masculine heterosexuality, the latter insidiously reinforced by the very pop culture narratives invoked here.

Mr. Mayerson's art has numerous precedents: 1970's Bad Painting, 1980's appropriation art (including Walter Robinson's pulp-novel covers), Jim Shaw's collection of thrift store paintings, Robert Gober's "Slides of a Changing Painting" and Raymond Pettibon's B-movie recapitulations. Given that context is almost all, it might be added that Mr. Mayerson's work could almost, but not quite, be at home in one of the artists' co-ops situated upstairs from this gallery.

Be that as it may, Mr. Mayerson has forged something fresh and promising and suitably Post-Conceptual from all this, affirming that the personal, the political and the painterly are one. *ROBERTA SMITH*