

**ART IN REVIEW**

# PIETER SCHOOLWERTH: 'Portraits of Paintings'

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**By Roberta Smith**

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*Miguel Abreu Gallery*

*36 Orchard Street,*

*near Hester Street*

*Lower East Side*

*Through Thursday*

Over the last several years Pieter Schoolwerth's paintings have become nothing if not cerebral and calculated. Neither quality tends to be good for painting; in combination they can be deadly. How Mr. Schoolwerth manages to evade the deadliness is hard to say. Perhaps he doesn't quite, and that's the point. Nonetheless his paintings assert a bizarre, freeze-dried clarity that is very much their own.

The amalgams of brushstrokes that dominate each work — usually in the form of a centrifugal central mass — are painstakingly derived from the motifs of 16th-, 17th- and 18th-century European paintings. Traced drawings, some of which are on display, facilitate the translation by layering all the elements in the original composition into a single tangle. There are hints of the original image: tufts of green and signs of raw meat in the portrait of Luis Meléndez's "Still Life With Beef, Bowl of Ham and Vegetables, and Receptacles," or a pair of shocked froglike eyes in that of Bernardo Strozzi's "Healing of Tobit" (who regained his sight). The prevalence of earth and gravy tones evokes an old-masterish palette, while the brushwork parodies Baroque bravura.

The result is a kind of stop-action painting in which each stroke remains distinct, caught in a moment of Disneyfied suspended animation. The works constitute tender homages that are also deliberately hilarious in their excruciating self-consciousness. This turns out to be a form of visual life.

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