

# Review For Adrian Ghenie at Nicodim Gallery, 'how' just as important as 'why'

By **DAVID PAGEL**

MAY 13, 2015, 7:00 AM

**I**f you enjoy pop music, you know that reading the lyrics is not the same as listening to the song. The way the words get sung has everything to do with what they mean.

The same is true of painting, even though viewers often forget that how a picture gets painted is just as important as what it depicts. The relationship between subject and style, or form and content, is integral to Adrian Ghenie's 10 oils on canvas at Nicodim Gallery.

Based in Berlin, the Romanian artist paints portraits: small close-ups of men's heads and large landscapes, each populated by a solitary individual. In terms of subject matter, Ghenie's paintings are all about alienation and the angst that accompanies it.

The men in the small portraits (the artist is portrayed in some) are monstrous combinations, their faces slapped together from fragments of other faces, including self-portraits by Vincent van Gogh and Francis Bacon as well as Llyn Foulkes' demented cartoons and Chaim Soutine's meat paintings. The landscapes and street scenes are equally bleak, their isolated men adrift in a contemporary rendition of Edward Hopper's grim cities.

But the way Ghenie paints — lushly and vigorously and with reckless abandon, piling it on thickly and scraping it off furiously — is a pleasure to behold. It's clear that he loves paint and that he knows how to move it around.

The sensuality of his process slams head-on into the subject matter of his images. The makes for paintings that tug viewers in various directions.

Pleasure and pain do not collide so much as they swirl around each other in a complex stew of mixed messages, ambivalent emotions and unsettling suggestions.

Nicodim Gallery, 571 S. Anderson St., Unit B, (323) 262-0260, through June 2. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.nicodimgallery.com](http://www.nicodimgallery.com)