



4806. Hellesyltvegen mot Hornindalsrokken. SEP 1948

Dear Suzann.

I have never written a reply to a critic before, for a review either pro or con, but I was really moved by what you had to say. and I felt understood which I rarely to by the press. So thanks for taking the trouble to extend yourself into those paintings and expressing yourself so clearly. I liked the way you put things. it seemed to warrant an appreciation. But wisher-Norman



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To wash

## Duncan Hannah at Phyllis Kind

Duncan Hannah's recent paintings function most obviously as narratives: the stories they tell are blunt, while the formal means employed are, to say the least, understated. The result is a kind of deadpan poetry related to the reticence of the "new" novel. Paradoxically, it is the very restraint of Hannah's simple compositions, controlled brushwork, pared shapes and often hazy color that conveys his expressive strength. The paintings' cool flatness throws their anguished emotionality into high relief.

Thus the dominant aspect of Hannah's paintings is their sto-

ries, as the themes of alienation and inhibition are pervasive. Technically, this mid-career New York artist (at 36, he has had annual solo shows here since 1981) could be called a realist painter, but applying that term only accentuates how much his reality, like any other, is a matter of interpretation. A somber mood generally prevails. Landscapes have heavy gray clouds or overcast skies, but figures are central to Hannah's expressive power, and they provide counterparts to this meteorological gloom, their darkly pensive facial expressions sometimes suggesting imminent weeping. Eyes are downcast or unfocused, postures are protectively closed in on themselves.

in *Vagabondia*, radiant foliage consistently presents nature as a solace or refuge. Hannah's figures don't, however, always recognize this: the sullen boy in *News of the World* may be feeling the frustration gap that lies between the "worldly" newspaper under his arm and the hick town around him, but his back is to the open road that leads toward a horizon of opalescent clouds. If he would turn toward this "news" of the natural world and experience it more fully, then the image might develop the kind of inner vivacity now generally missing in Hannah's painfully constricted yet strangely intriguing views.

—Suzaan Boettger



Duncan Hannah: *News of the World*, 1988, oil on canvas, 50 by 70 inches; at Phyllis Kind.

The figures are usually shown as estranged from their environments: a young girl stands on a rural street, her back turned to the looming *House on the Hill*; an adolescent stands alone near barren trees in *Nobody's Girl*; a boy is isolated in the bleak small town of *News of the World*, and slouches uncomfortably against the blackboard in *Homesick*.

With a fine tension that he doesn't allow to slacken into sappiness, Hannah gives striking visual form to brooding moods. Less conspicuously, the artist also projects the solutions to his characters' problems. The ship sketched on the blackboard behind the downcast boy in *Homesick* reminds one of how fantasy can provide a substitute for a desire's realization (here, to travel home). Secondly, the beauty with which Hannah depicts vegetation, whether spindly trees, or,

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