



Robert Terry: *Summer 1860, 2005*, oil on canvas, 24 by 18 inches; at Eugene Binder.

MARFA, TEXAS

Robert Terry at Eugene Binder

For more than a decade, Robert Terry has been creating a series of modest but intense portraits of Abraham Lincoln. At first glance, the exhibition suggested a treasure trove of thrift-store finds: 14 clunky, sincere homages to the Civil War-era president. On closer inspection, the paintings revealed a striking consistency of hand, palette and scale. On 20-by-16-inch store-bought canvases (with staples show-

ing around the edges), Lincoln's head, rendered in multicolored impasto, is centered on monochrome grounds of such unlikely hues as salmon, chartreuse or teal. Each portrait depicts the subject in a frontal or three-quarters view, from the shoulders up, with emphasis given to the droopy-lidded but searing eyes, prominent brow, pursed lips and large ears. Bearded in some instances, clean-shaven in others, Lincoln is invariably shown in a black suit and white shirt with wing collar and black bow tie.

Terry, a New York artist, received some attention in the mid-1980s for his gestural land- and seascapes in heavy impasto, works then associated with Neo-Expressionism. The Lincoln series derives from photographic portraits by Mathew Brady and other contemporary practitioners. Titled with the dates of their photographic sources, the paintings were neither painted nor installed chronologically—*February 9, 1864*, for example, was painted in 1996; *Thursday, August 26, 1858* in 2005—so that there is no easy

progression based on the tolls of age or history.

Monday, August 13, 1860 (2004) depicts a sad but youthful Lincoln against a buttery lavender background. Modeled in tones of yellow and burnt orange, the face is described with slaps of the palette knife, which pulls the paint up from the surface, while the gleaming black hair is given physical dimension via thick, palpable brushstrokes. With downcast eyes and thick sensuous lips pursed in a slight pout, *1863* (2004) depicts a distracted, utterly introspective Lincoln. His face is yellow-orange with red creases and shadows. Typically, the harshly exaggerated modeling of the flesh bears a com-

plementary coloristic relationship to the ground, which in the case of *1863* is somewhere between pea green and olive drab.

Although they were produced a century and a half after their subject's death, Terry's paintings provide remarkable insight into Lincoln's character. As representations of representations, they recall Warhol's *Marilyns*, and yet they access the emotional substance rather than the iconic surface of the subject. Unobstructed by popular imagination, Terry's portraits transform Lincoln the legend into Lincoln the man.

—Frances Colpitt