

## At 74, artist Jim Dine looks inward

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Jim Dine's "Old Me Now: Self Portrait Drawings 2008-2009" can be seen at Gray Gallery through Jan. 16.

Imagine who you might become by this time next year -- next Christmas -- when once again, bitter winter has taken over, darkening our daylight till it bleeds into the longest nights of the year. Will you look any different? How about 10 years down the line, or 20? How will you see yourself in your 70s, or your 80s?

For 74-year-old Jim Dine, the internationally known sculptor/painter/sketch artist who landed on the American art scene nearly 40 years ago in tandem with a collective of pop and neo-dada comrades, self-reflection has fueled an entire series of new self-portraits on view at Richard Gray Gallery.

It's not the first time: The gallery showed a previous self-portrait exhibit in 1985, and throughout his career, Dine has described his own work as autobiographical. Still, to see anyone's self-portraits en masse is incredibly revealing. For the 20 large-scale works collectively titled "Old Me, Now: Self Portrait Drawings," it feels as though Dine didn't just take a good, long look inward; he took several looks from different angles.

As with most of Dine's drawings, these are primarily charcoal on paper, a few embellished with pastels, watercolors, acrylic or all of the above. It's logical to begin a perusal with "Living on Nikolai Strasse" (2009), closest to the gallery's entrance. This is the most stripped-down of the lot, and it's immediately somber. Charcoal splotches rub out the shine on Dine's bald head, the furrowed brows, the freckles or liver-spots (it's difficult to tell which) dotting his forehead. Hung nearly at eye-level to its onlookers, "Living on Nicolai Strasse" begs you to look into the fabricated glints in Dine's eyes. The only color here is an eerie maroon glow the artist has given to his ears and brushed on his left cheek.

Whether or not it was intended, the remaining drawings in the gallery's main room seem to illustrate a kind of catharsis. Immediately after seeing Dine living on his street in Goettingen, Germany (where he's kept a residence for the last decade), we're taken one year into the past. "X-Mas 2008" (2008-09) shows

Dine's chin whiskers and just a hint of red in his lips, perhaps parched by winter air. Here he looks serious, as if he's come to terms with something. There's a bit of flesh added, via pastels, into his cheeks and ears. But what was going through his head one year ago today?

"Old Me, Now #1" (2009) doesn't quite give us the answer, but it's a progression. There's even more color in Dine's cheeks here, and the lines of his nose are more pronounced. His eyes are brown now, his expression almost regal. His shirt has come into focus, with color. Even his signature -- just a scribble in the margins of the first two paintings -- is pronounced, as if he were authenticating his own existence. And by the time we move onto the next drawing, "Singing Hard Times" (2009), Dine looks old, tired, wrinkly, and we're back to black-and-white with a disappearing right ear.

Twenty drawings are almost too many to take in at once. It would be easy to scan the room and see countless Jim Dines staring back at you, each slightly different from the next.

But what sucked me in was the artist's self-inflicted expression. These are not realist drawings, but they evoke realist feelings. The titles of each, too, provoke emotion. In "The New Man" (2009), it's hard not to imagine Dine seeing himself anew, the perfect line drawn down the middle of his portrait separating the hypothetical Before from the After. In "Singing Hard Times" (2009), there he is with his mouth agape, perhaps in song, looking a little more ragged than before.

Because of the pattern of naming conventions here, we can only presume that the two drawings titled "Paris After Aldo Died" (2009) were done in the weeks after Dine's longtime artist-friend Aldo Crommelynck died, on Dec. 22 last year. In the first, Dine's thin chin-whiskers are painted prominently white, and a handful of wrinkles fly like rudimentary seagulls over his furrowed brows. His glasses are barely there, his flesh is void of color, and a black cloud engulfs his head.

Hung separate from its predecessor, "Paris After Aldo Died (second version)" (2009) is softer, with pastels, and there's color in the distance. Dine's forehead seems to float, disappearing into the ether. The beard is gone; the glasses are straight. And just like that, it's almost as if he's back to his old self again.

Jim Dine, "Old Me, Now: Self Portrait Drawings, 2008-2009," at Richard Gray Gallery, 875 N. Michigan Ave., 312-642-8877; [richardgraygallery.com](http://richardgraygallery.com). Through Jan. 16.

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