

DAVID NOLAN **NEW YORK**

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Jim Nutt, *Trim*, 2010, acrylic on linen with mdf frame, 25 3/8 x 24 3/8 inches

Jim Nutt: 'Trim' and Other Works: 1967-2010

By ROBERTA SMITH

David Nolan Gallery
527 West 29th Street
Chelsea
Through June 26

Jim Nutt works slowly, so an exhibition of three new, and newish, paintings and seven drawings mostly finished this year feels like a gift. The works are all portraits of women. They look back to Van Eyck, Ingres and Salvador Dalí for their extreme refinement and lucidity, but not for their intense realism.

Mr. Nutt's realism is something else altogether, a form of pictorial science fiction, perhaps. The trompe l'oeil fruit-and-vegetable portraits of Arcimboldo are precedents, although instead of fresh produce, Mr. Nutt gathers scraps from the dustbin of Cubism and Surrealism, assembling them into faces that also hint at landscapes, architectural edifices and sculpture. Noses in particular are carapaces with lives of their own. The dark-haired woman in "Plumb," clothed in a faceted, crosshatch pattern that seems to allude to Jasper Johns, has a sleek, black nose that resembles carved marble. The one of the woman in "Pin" has a crisp ridge, but soft sides where a shading from deep red to black might be a spreading bruise, a cold or the effects of liquor. And the nose of the redhead of "Trim" reflects the blue-on-blue dots of her dress, subtly implying a certain shininess.

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Mr. Nutt's drawings may be even better than his paintings. Their lucidity becomes, literally, transparent, and their aberrant textures and delicate marks stand. Their strangeness goes on forever. A second room devoted to earlier works by Mr. Nutt provides background on his technique, subject matter, absorption of Surrealism and popular culture. The 1971 work "Running Out" presages the portraits in several ways. But this display is also a sad reminder that no New York museum has had the vision to assemble a full-dress Jim Nutt retrospective. ROBERTA SMITH