

Adrian Ghenie

by Gareth Harris

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Adrian Ghenie, *Nickelodeon*, 2008, oil and acrylic on canvas, 420 x 240 cm.

In Adrian Ghenie's paintings, drips and pours of paint, smeared surfaces, and indistinct masses make up his canvases, but figuration predominates in "Darkness for an Hour," the Romanian painter's first UK solo show. Depictions of Dada, and Duchamp in particular, appear like camouflaged figures rising out of wreckage. This layering involves a considerable degree of dexterity; Ghenie shifts elements into and out of focus, successively offsets darker hues with brighter colors, and subverts perspective, creating an impression of depth and fluidity. This approach prompts the viewer to nearly sink into the cavernous paintings (*Nickelodeon*, 2008, *Turning Point*, 2009, and *Duchamp's Funeral II*, 2009) hung in the first room of the gallery. Ghenie also alternates thick, clotted brushstrokes with more delicate daubs. In *Duchamp*, 2009, the finely honed features of the French Dadaist's face reflect the artist's technical verve. A series of smaller, beautifully structured paintings titled "Pie Fight Study," 2009, are similarly accomplished.

These technical merits work in tandem with the dark, brutal thematic undercurrents of extremism, disenchantment, enforced exile, and the abuse of power. Ghenie brings together diverse personalities, from Dada personages to Laurel and Hardy, creating a reminder of the lamentable state of humanity. He reaches new levels of absurdity by referencing the slapstick Hollywood entertainers; there's nothing more comic than a tragic pair of comedians. The artist's universe may well be a distressing, pathetic place—but at least it's astutely and skillfully executed.