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Robert Fishko, *Director*

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ART IN REVIEW

Paul Fenniak

Forum Gallery
745 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street
Manhattan
Through May 8

Paul Fenniak, a Canadian in his early 30's having his first New York solo exhibition, paints palpably realistic pictures of people with a more or less subtle surrealistic spin. He is best at portraiture. In "Man With an Itch," in which an anxious-looking fellow in a wrinkled shirt, backed into the corner of a striped sofa, absently scratches his

arm, there's a magical combination of painterly substance, crisp illusionism and cool light that calls to mind Lucian Freud's paintings of the 1950's. There's a compelling sense of comic peculiarity, too, in "Figure With Standing Lamp," in which a goofy-looking woman stands with her head tilted, next to a floor lamp whose shade is similarly askew.

In some multigure compositions Mr. Fenniak choreographs theatrical situations, bathed in bleak northern light, that are too obviously dreamlike, variously calling to mind the portentousness of artists like George Tooker or Odd Nerdrum. But in "Paying for Tea," his newest and, at four by six feet, biggest painting in the show, in which a woman in white serves tea to a woman sitting with a pink suitcase at a park cafe, there is a genuinely haunting, cinematic monumentality. It reminds one that the narrative as well as painterly possibilities of traditional, figurative representation are still far from exhausted. **KEN JOHNSON**
