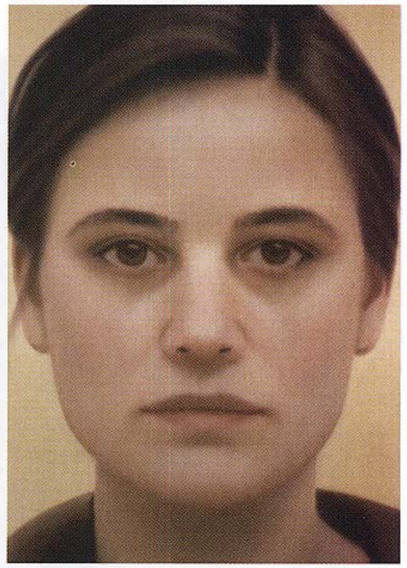
Till Freiwald, Untitled, 2004, watercolor on paper, 90" x 60".



Paul Fenniak, "The Guest," 2000, oil on Masonite, 48 1/2" x 36 1/2".

the human form because it expresses a lot of our attitudes toward the world," Hocks says.

Fenniak also works from photos that he shoots himself; in his paintings, he composes quasi-narrative scenes. Once more of an expressionist, the Canada-based artist became interested in "observed reality"—with a twist. A fan of American author Patricia Highsmith's psychologically edgy novels, Fenniak infuses his pictures with a mood of emotional intensity and uncertain suspense. Some of his oil paintings depict single individuals and their meanings are ambiguous. Is the young woman seated in an armchair with a suitcase at her side coming or going in "The Guest," 2000? Is she tired or afraid? What's on the mind of the woman standing in the semi-darkness of "Laundry Room," 2003? Such paintings, Fenniak admits, might be viewed as portraits by default, for as much as they do not set out to "refer to actual people," he says, "seen as character studies, I suppose they do."

A fascinating aspect of portraying faces and the human form Fenniak says, "is how the subjectivity of a subject and that of the artist blend" within a painted picture. Viewers may sense, he suggests, how a subject must have captivated the artist who depicts him or her and also how the artist "takes possession" of his subject. Some would argue that this melding of spirits, rooted



in an artist's psychological probing of a subject, is an essential aspect of portraiture. ("I get something from the other person," legendary American portraitist Alice Neel [1900–84] remarked, reflecting on one end of the artist-sitter relationship.)

Piloco has explored this phenomenon in portrayals of students, people in cafés or young women in urban settings. Piloco finds and asks interesting looking people he encounters in coffee shops or on the street to sit for him; on canvas, he constructs settings for his sitters that relate to their real-life identities, such as a restaurant for a waitress or a reading room for a college student. "I like to have some social connectedness," he says.

Paul Fenniak, "Laundry Room," 2003, oil on canvas, 30" x 22".

Years ago, Piloco and five other New York–based artists (they called themselves "The Paint Group") met regularly to discuss issues and undertake painting assignments related to the realist techniques they all practiced. Piloco says that he tries "to capture and convey the actual feeling of the moment" of his encounter with a model. "It's half technical—knowing how to paint a subject—and half about just feeling it, which is not something you can intellectualize." Piloco says the challenge of, and the magic in, the best portrait painting lies in being able to capture this emotional-psychological essence of a subject. To try to do so by following formulas to symbolize certain emotional values—by placing a hand here or tilting a sitter's head there—only makes a picture feel stiff, academic and dull, he observes.

Till Freiwald also paints from live models. Working in watercolor on paper, Freiwald, who lives in Italy, creates smaller works from life. By contrast, he paints in watercolor on paper larger, monumental images of the same sitters (measuring 5 by 7 1/2 feet) from memory. "The face is a mirror," he says. "The most important thing is to create an atmosphere that allows a sitter to look at me with the same attention that I look at him or her."

Like the large-scale photo portraits made by his contemporary, the German photographer Thomas Ruff, Freiwald's straight-on views, with tight cropping