

handsomely installed in Cheim & Read's towering front gallery, walls painted gray, and viewing was enhanced by the skylight above. A charcoal and oil on mat board, the sinister *Untitled (Three Dogs)* from 1978 opens to a slab of light illuminating a dog hanging by its back feet. Two others rest in the shadows, one beneath a table ornamented by what appears to be an item of discarded lingerie. A charcoal and pastel on paper, *Hanging Dog* (1973) consists of a canine suspended by a rope, caught in the light of an open door. A toppled stool and what appear to be small packages or a torn-up note sketch a bizarre scenario for suicide or an act of erotic asphyxiation. An untitled drawing of an abattoir (ca. 1973) depicts a pack of four dogs dangling by ropes from rings above, patched in the light of two unseen windows. Portraits of human nature in the darker and more personal zone, Israel's drawings occasionally recall the overtly political works of Leon Golub, but purged of even Golub's somber palette, and washed in the service of some unknown rage.

—Edward Leffingwell

## Craig McPherson at Forum

In this recent exhibition, "Steel/Stage," Craig McPherson presented two distinct bodies of work. The seemingly incongruous grouping featured images of steel mills in wintry landscapes hung beside interior views of theater stages, some empty, some populated with naked performers. The Kansas-born New York artist, who has been showing his refined figurative paintings since the early 1980s, included here 25 oils and pastel-on-canvas pieces ranging in height from 13 inches to over 6 feet.

A large oil painting, *Clairton Works (River)*, 2003-05, is an aerial view of one of the few surviving steel plants in the Pittsburgh area—mills that were key to the industrial engine of the U.S. economy in the last century. Two chimneys, partially obscured by steam, extend from the painting's top edge down toward the diagonal thrust of two covered conduits. These in turn lead the eye to the central horizontal line of a walled buttress along the bank of a murky river. On the near side of the waterway, two huge snow-covered mounds dwarf a tractor. The picture suggests



Craig McPherson: *Edgar Thomson (Night)*, 2001, pastel on linen, 66 by 86 inches; at Forum.

the grim relationship between industrial production and natural forces, evoked here by the successive transformation of water from the icy snowdrifts to the liquid river, ending in the gaseous steam spewing from the factory.

In an expansive pastel on linen, *Edgar Thomson (Night)*, 2001, McPherson has brilliantly rendered in black and gray *sfumato* a scenic view of the light-and-steam show produced by a gigantic steel plant at night. The kind of ethereal, misty illumination that appears in this work is a unifying element in the entire exhibition, since it recurs in several of the "Stage" paintings. These pieces depict dark shadowy spaces cut by vertical passages of warm, smoky glare revealing backstage equipment or showing the stark reflections of spotlights on empty stages.

In *Rehearsal* (2001-05), crisply defined hemp ropes form a verti-

cal barrier that partly occludes a seated male figure on the far left holding his red-gloved hands over his ears. Beside him to the right, a nude woman smoking a cigarette languidly watches another cavorting overhead on a flying trapeze. The latter is caught in a triangular configuration of hazy spotlight beams. The mood of *Act One: Scene One* (1999) is a bit more sinister. A red wall nearly absorbs a female figure in the distance who holds a whip. She faces a naked woman in the foreground who stands beside a spotlight, seated man, dressed in suit and trilby; he stares out at the audience with vacant menace.

—Gerard McCarthy

## Johan Nobell at Pierogi

Johan Nobell's oil-on-linen paintings (all approximately 20 inches square) seem meant to stir in the

Johan Nobell: *Landscape with Gumshoe and Owls*, 2005, oil on linen, 20 by 24 inches; at Pierogi.

