



Melancholic Stichbury

John Hurrell – 6 September, 2014

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Peter Stichbury
Sources and Methods



6 August - 6 September 2014

Here we have a suite of ten framed Peter Stichbury drawings, all of young Caucasian men or teenagers, and made with coloured pencil on grey paper. They can be seen as aids used as preparation for the paintings, or as separate independent entities in their own right - the physiognomies based on downloaded pin shots, the names imaginatively constructed.

Considering the latter, they are a nice foil to his paintings, which though of both sexes, probably in the public's mind tend to be more focussed on the glamorous young women. Both paintings and drawings dwell on a dreamlike fantasy, a sense of fashion and beauty far beyond everyday fashion and beauty. It is not so much satire they exude (they don't mock; they're affectionate) as tease out purity, draining away all traces of the prosaic. They exalt, they elevate.

As with the paintings, the drawn images of impeccable looking models are fastidiously executed. Like the painted doll-like dames, these youths and blokes have blemish-free skins and squeaky-clean hair that is perfectly combed. Lots of it. However they lack the vaguely triangular physiognomies of the paintings, and unlike the painted women who exude extraordinary self-confidence, there is a strong sense of anxiety and tenseness. They are uncomfortable about their place in the world. Yet it's discreetly expressed.

This subtle restraint suggests some might be depressed. There is a pervasive gloominess with their glazed over, downward eyes, slightly sullen demeanour and tightly pursed lips. No smiles (or glimpses of teeth) or twinkling eyes (with wrinkled laughing corners) can be seen anywhere, these non-communicative 'nerdy' types tend to be withdrawn introverts. Denied the vivacity so apparent in the painted women, and wearing mostly formal jackets or military clothing to avoid casual attire, with their constructed images of carefully positioned light, widely spaced apart eyes and old fashioned hair styles, these exceedingly dapper, proud - though slyly morose - fellows are deadly serious.

About what is a mystery. What makes these portraits so subdued, so *down*? Perhaps the nuanced weight that they seem to carry is the 'burden' of masculinity? Yet 'masculinity' (like 'femininity') can be such a vague term, floating far apart from gender, human metabolism and anatomy. Maybe it is here co-joined with ethnicity, prosperity, education, or class. The ever-present unease that permeates Stichbury's consummate layered pencil crosshatching and grey paper support, makes the mental moods and psychological dispositions depicted within this array of elegant portraits persistently troubling.