

## Reviews

### Peter Cain, "The Sean Pictures"

Matthew Marks Gallery, through Fri 12 (see Chelsea).

**P**eter Cain's series "The Sean Pictures" dates from 1996, the year before the artist died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 37. It represents Cain's leap into painting the figure after years of rendering cars—strangely elided cars (in one side view of an upside-down coupe, the front and rear ends morph into a truncated form with a single tire). Although based on photographs, Cain's work is too soft to call Photorealist—and too weird to be called appropriation.

The paintings in "The Sean Pictures" all feature a similar image: the artist's boyfriend, lounging on a beach, depicted at an angle so intimate it suggests that Cain snapped a picture while lying beside him (these photos, along with drawn studies, are included here). The paintings present two views of Sean: He's either com-

pletely prone and laughing, or curling his head up, as if to get a good look at some passerby.

Sean's figure takes on the grandeur of a mountain range, although in the case of the laughing version, Cain resorts to unconventional hanging: These canvases are installed sideways, with the subject's head pointed downward in an oddly affecting amalgam of Richterian distance and Katzian (as in Alex) tenderness.

Yet it was for Robert Ryman that Cain once expressed a particular affinity, which makes perfect sense. Ryman's subject is the tenuousness of painting as an enterprise, and so, in effect, was Cain's. But Cain, in these last paintings at least, came to see an equivalence between conceptual ambivalence and the frailty of the human condition.—Howard Halle



Sean Number Two