

ART IN REVIEW

Odd Nerdrum

'Self-Portraits'

Forum

745 Fifth Avenue, near 57th Street
Manhattan

Through July 30

This exhibition of self-portraits does not deliver the sort of weird storytelling for which Odd Nerdrum is revered by his fans and deplored by his detractors. With a couple of notable exceptions, it tends to emphasize the 55-year-old Norwegian's self-absorbed grandiosity and didactic Old Masterism.

In a half-dozen easel-size pictures, Mr. Nerdrum depicts himself against dusky sky or dark shadows in antique clothing, with his mouth half open and his eyes mournfully glazed, as though he were crushed by the weight of the world. A facile handler of pre-modern technique, Mr. Nerdrum produces glossy, richly sensuous painterly surfaces. But in these works, his painting does less to create a vivid illusion of personal presence than to envelop the artist in a stale aura of quasi-Rembrandtian soulfulness.

One exception is the show's largest picture, "Self-Portrait as the Prophet of Painting," in which the artist appears life-size in a floor-length, pearl-studded golden robe, brush and palette in his hands, against a romantically barren

rocky shore and a twilit sky. In this goofy, over-the-top image, Mr. Nerdrum seems to be having some fun with his own self-glorifying predictions.

In the show's most startling picture, Mr. Nerdrum subverts his own high-minded solemnity with an unusually self-revealing, mysteriously comical gesture. Holding the hem of his robe up to his chest, he offers a full frontal view of his swelling, marmoreal paunch and upsweeping erection. Now that's humanism.

KEN JOHNSON
