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Robin Lowe

Leffingwell, Edward. "Robin Lowe at Lennon, Weinberg." *Art in America*, June/July 2008.

Art in America

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Robin Lowe at Lennon, Weinberg

A New York-based painter given to narrative cycles, Robin Lowe found his source for this exhibition of stylized marine paintings in Nevil Shute's novel *On the Beach* (1957). A product of the Cold War, it supposed the consequences of global nuclear disaster. In 1959, the year of Lowe's birth, the story was adapted to a black-and-white film starring Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire and Tony Perkins. A made-for-television version was released in 2000.

Lowe's exhibition "On the Beach" gives full attention to beach, blue water and sky, as well as roads that lead to nowhere. For the most part, the few solitary characters that appear are drawn from the literary source. The sole figure of the 48-by-56½-inch painting *Moira Davidson* (2007)—a representation if not a likeness of the Gardner character—stands casually naked in the open door of a cabana, a nearby empty Adirondack chair facing the sea. Perhaps she waits for the Gregory Peck character and fears his desertion of her for duty.

The ominously titled *A Car to Die For* (2007) finds Moira's former lover, scientist-cum-racecar-driver Julian Osborne, on a curving roadway overlooking the sea beside a carefully painted Ferrari, a stroke of burned rubber on the asphalt where he had skidded to a halt before driving to his death. *Blue Angel* (2008) idealizes an optimistic military wife with wings sprouting from her back, hand on hip, upright and naked in the bow of a small craft mirrored in calm waters.

From one painting to the next, various boats, a raft and surfboards seem positioned midway between life and annihilation. An abandoned fishing boat drifts, as does an empty rowboat, oars in the water, trailing a red box kite and a strangely slack line. A fishing boat up on blocks is uselessly aimed toward the sea in the far



Robin Lowe: *Black Sexy*, 2008, oil on linen, 60 by 50 inches; at Lennon, Weinberg.

distance. An inflatable life raft is occupied by nothing more than a fishing rod and a pogo stick. For each crewless vessel there is a surfboard, two of them bearing painted crosses. An abstracted cruciform appears on the conning tower of Lowe's rendering of a submarine, *Black Sexy* (2008).

This faithful, perhaps romantic depiction served as pendant to *Heaven's Gate* of the same year, which shows a road that abruptly stops above the sea as though at the threshold of infinity. The correspondence of Lowe's oil-on-linen paintings to the story at their source is arguable, yet given global warming and the greenhouse effect, not to mention nuclear proliferation and atomic threats, his considerations are at least sincere, personal and cautionary.

—Edward Leffingwell