Keith Crowley
The Unseen
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Tiger Strikes Asteroid
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Nan Adams and The Hitchhiker:
The unseen, the known, the looming and the familiar in the paintings of Keith Crowley.

Keith Crowley's paintings contain subtleties, discreet moments and blurred imagery that, when combined, produce something very particular. Like one's relationship with another person, Crowley's paintings are better known for their specificity than analyzed for their exact and clear content. Like the work of photographer Robert Adams, these works are at once familiar and mysterious, yet we cannot quite say why.

All the works in "Unseen" give us a feeling that we have been in these places before. Whether the place is in front of a computer screen watching YouTube videos at midnight or standing on a street at night in Northeast Philadelphia around Christmas time, the work and the places it depicts feel eerily familiar. Our view, though, of these familiar places is always changing.

In one painting, "Nocturne (Effulgent Pause)," we see a non-descript building, lit ambiently by fluorescent light while another light source emanates from behind the building. The light from behind seems to suggest the imminent and looming arrival of something, or someone. Who, though, is hanging out behind this building so late at night? In another painting, "Nocturne (Vacant Fete)," our view shifts and we become the one looming outside at night, staring at the rows of houses, lit happily with Christmas lights. As is the case with many of Crowley's paintings we seem to encounter the moment just before or the moment just

after an event takes place. Our role as a viewer becomes vague in a sense; who are we in relation to these familiar places, these familiar scenes? What have we just missed? What are we just about to see? It is hard to say. In Crowley's work, though, it is not something we necessarily need to find an answer to. The stillness of the painting just before or after the moment of the event is the place we are to rest on. We are to rest in the vague nature of the moment depicted and how it is depicted.

The paintings, with their thin, repeated layers of color and subtle, careful adjustments, have a mysteriousness that is only heightened by our vague relationship to them. The vague, yet highly familiar scenes are mirrored in the almost glassy, window-like surface of the work and very much felt through from layer to layer. In many ways these paintings of eerily familiar images are made in a manner that are indebted to the non-image based black paintings of Ad Reinhardt. As is the case with Reinhardt's black paintings, Crowley's work appears to become clearer and then subtler again the more time we spend with it. Edges of buildings seem to become more concrete and then dissolve into the darkness that surrounds them; ground that seems dark and solid becomes loose and watery as the color of each layer asserts itself when our eyes adjust. As we do when we look at early black and white photography, with its soft, dissolved and out of focus edges, we must allow our eyes to see what is put into the frame of the work as much as we must allow our minds to settle and accept what is not clarifiable, what we cannot put into focus.

The works in "Unseen" are very much as the title of the show leads you to believe. The paintings, like the places they depict, need to be experienced more than just seen and need to be known rather than simply met. They have a nature that, despite their stillness, is ever evolving, unknowable, yet, familiar.

-Matthew Sepielli is an artist living and working in Philadelphia. He is currently pursuing his MFA at Bard College. Note: The title of the essay is derived from an episode of The Twilight Zone, "The Hitchhiker," which originally aired in 1960.