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Portraits of the artist



Beyond the Words, Swedish artist **Carl Köhler**'s magnificent neo-Modernist *authorportraits* series is currently showing at **Irving K. Barber Learning Centre**, after a **stint in Toronto**:

In the early 1950s, a young painter and sculptor named Carl Köhler left the Swedish Royal Academy of Fine Art and headed to Paris, as many young artists are wont to do. There, he fell in love with French literature. When Köhler passed away in 2006 at the age of 86, he left

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Written by the editors of
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behind an impressive collection of paintings, sculptures and drawings. Among his work was a group of about 100 portraits inspired by literature — what Köhler called his “authorportraits”.

Köhler painted such notable writers as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Joyce Carol Oates, Virginia Woolf, Henry Miller, Franz Kafka and Günter Grass. Each painting is as distinctive as the author it celebrates; they do not remain anchored to one particular style or technique. Henry Miller is reimagined as a “demon,” fitting for an author whose novel *Tropic of Cancer* was accused of breaking obscenity laws in the United States in the early 1960s. Sometimes Köhler seems to channel the author’s writing style in his paintings, such as his likeness of the avant-garde writer **Samuel Beckett**, or a portrait of the famously prolific Joyce Carol Oates, which, though accomplished, looks as though it may have been dashed off in 15 minutes.

The exhibition continues at the **Joseph Regenstein Library** Chicago in September, moving to the **Boole Library** Cork in 2011. **The Millions** offer a nice analysis of Köhler’s work, while there’s more paintings at **Torontoist** and **Papercuts**.

[Image: Charles Bukowski by Carl Köhler, courtesy of Henry Köhler]

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