

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

Fri, Apr. 18, 2008

## Journey into the realm of pataphysics

Thomas Chimes' paintings, in a Locks exhibit, are to be read as poetry.

By Edith Newhall  
For The Inquirer

The most recent piece in Thomas Chimes' 2007 Philadelphia Museum of Art retrospective is now the earliest of his "Iambic Paintings." That work, Untitled (Finnegan's Wake), and several newer multi-panel paintings from his Iambic series, can be seen in his show at Locks Gallery, as well as a selection of the small single-panel paintings of the late 1990s that foreshadowed them.

Simply put, the tiny paintings that Chimes organizes into grids of 25 paintings (each multi-panel grid constitutes one work) are a kind of visual poetry, meant to be "read" like iambic pentameter, line by line. The raised images that inhabit each painting are Chimes' personal vocabulary of characters largely plumbed from Alfred Jarry's novel,

*Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll*, Pataphysician, and his Ubu plays, as well as Jarry's real-life friend, the Symbolist writer Jean Moréas, all reduced to caricatures of themselves.

Even if you have a working knowledge of pataphysics and Chimes' long preoccupation with it - as anyone who visited Chimes' retrospective might - these new paintings are as enigmatic as any of his previous works, if not more so. His caricatures are looking increasingly faint and worn, as though they've become the essence of themselves. Some of the raised gold circles around the images in the paintings have been sanded down in places, too, giving them the appearance of antique plates, medallions, or even orbs.

Whatever mystery the Iambic Paintings hold at their core, the code can only be broken by Chimes. That metaphysical certainty, coupled with the measured, steady rhythm of these works, makes them the most majestic paintings of his career so far.



"Iambos I" (2006-07), oil on 3-by-3-inch panels, from one of Chimes' 25-panel "Iambic Paintings."