

Art 50 2012: Chicago's Artists' Artists

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The first time you meet Robert Lostutter he will be taking mental notes, rather imperceptibly, on the shape of your ears and the slope of your nose. Later, he may incorporate them into one of his imaginative watercolor drawings of bird-men. But don't expect that to happen soon. "Everything I do is slow," Lostutter says, meaning methodical, subtle, perfect. Lostutter has entered the mature phase of his lifework. With fellow Imagist artists, decades ago, he produced quirky, semi-violent, carnivalesque paintings. He has slowly progressed to focus on a single figure's face, a man with evolved or mutant bird-like features. They are exquisitely drawn, and in this way Lostutter is like his peer Jim Nutt, whose artistic trajectory has similarly narrowed on a woman's face, with evolved or mutant features, each exquisitely drawn. But even more insightful about Lostutter's flock of bird-men are the portraits made by nineteenth-century Japanese printmaker Toyohara Kunichika. There are the faces of Lostutter's bird-men, peeking out from Japan's past into our Chicago present. Lostutter delights in the story of Kunichika's prints as they were once used as wrapping paper for Japanese exports. The gorgeous prints just showed up in shipping containers, one day, like flotsam treasures. "Sometimes good artists come into history at the wrong time," says Lostutter. He shows through October 20 at Corbett vs. Dempsey.