

## Paintings captioned

*May from page F4*

rock gently a copy of David Revill's biography so that a smile appears and disappears from the jacket portrait photo of the composer.

The fastidiousness of May's art made me wonder whether he sometimes overworks things.

"Oh, yeah, frequently," May said. "When I had about finished the 'Home Improvements' paintings, I decided I should make a crate for them, so they could be shipped anywhere for exhibition. But I worked on it too

long. It finally became such a showpiece in itself that if I were going to ship it somewhere I'd have had to make a crate for it."

Though humor and ideas ricochet through May's retrospective, he does not consider himself a conceptual artist "because I enjoy making things too much," he said. "I used to describe myself as a conceptual craftsman. I spent a lot of time in college on ceramics and painting, and grew up on a Wisconsin farm where my dad and other relatives

made pretty much everything they needed. I find great pleasure and solace ... and even feel somewhat self-indulgent when I lose myself in what I'm making. Because I also had this Catholic upbringing that makes me feel I really shouldn't be doing this, but something more socially useful."

May contrived the intense, intimate lighting of the "Home Improvements" paintings to offset their small size, on the order of a foot square. "In school, we were encouraged to make paintings on a scale no less than 4 by 5 feet," he said. Later "I realized that if

you put a lot of focus on a small work, it takes on more importance. I found that I had boxes of these can lamps that I'd made, though it was kind of a pain in the neck for the installation crew. They said that even though it's a low-tech show, it involved more wiring than almost anything else they'd done."

*E-mail Kenneth Baker at [kennethbaker@sfgate.com](mailto:kennethbaker@sfgate.com).*