

Art Review:

Debut: Eddie Martinez

BY ANTHONY DOWNEY

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From idle doodling to careful sketching, there is something a little obsessive about drawing that most of us are familiar with.

Drawings can be a conscious and, perhaps more importantly, an unconscious act. The desire to draw, moreover, can become compulsive in itself; a condition in which we are obliged relentlessly to interpret our surrounding.

Eddie Martinez's paintings come out of this practice of drawing, and there is a significant – you could say even an overarching – degree of compulsiveness to them.

In the exhibition “A Horse with No Name” the ostensible subject matter is drawn, so to speak, from Martinez's immediate environment. Everything is diverse and diverting, as well as multicoloured: parrots, rooftops, baseball caps, bases of flowers, pictures, snakes, cats, road signs – and all are revisited again and again.

With a kind of pictorial whimsy, everyday occurrences take on something of the fantastical in the very moment of their condensed re-presentation. In *Snakesperience* (2006) a biblical-looking snake coils itself around a confectionery rooftop, while a bemused and baseball-hatted figure attempts to take in the scene. In *Wild Pilgrims* (2005) mushrooms and birds in hats share a space with a jeweled self-portrait and figures in pilgrim hats.

The repetition of motifs in Martinez's paintings is not just compulsive, however, nor is it necessarily fantastical. Repetition of this kind is an outward sign of an elaborate ongoing “dialogue” between an external “real” environment and the internal syntax of painting as a genre.

In *Daily Operation, Sometimes* (2006) we encounter multiple genres: portraiture, self-portraiture, still life, and allegorical narrative painting. Here, repetition, with variations, gives the images an introverted, intimate quality. The diary-like, introspective narrative focus on his apartment and the urban landscape of his adoptive Brooklyn is occasionally claustrophobic in its inclusiveness.

That most of the figures represented here are self-portraits suggests that Martinez is reflecting upon the moment of reflection itself. This is a phenomenological enquiry in the sense that it is about the world around us becoming an object of perception – and what happens to us when we become aware of that moment.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

The reflection on genre painting is a reflection at one remove on the artists' role in producing images. But the apparent artistic detachment this implies is offset by the obsessive intimacy of what is being rendered.

While some of these large-scale paintings can appear overworked or too agreeable, Martinez's drawings have a more space formal approach. Using only coloured pencils and biros, he manages to generate a more immediate sense of an interior monologue about the world around him.

And strange things happen in these worlds. In *Christmas (2205)* the interior of a house becomes the setting for a variety of things: another smaller house; a self-portrait of the artist in a Santa Claus bobble hat; a menagerie of animals; Christmas stockings; a flower pot; and a picture on the wall of a flower pot.

This hieroglyphic-like approach presents drawing almost as a furtive form of thinking aloud – a record of the present that is both a form of depiction and a form of effacement. Between these two poles, we find an idiosyncratic archival urge to instantaneously record all that is happening and has happened.

This categorizing urge is, of course, usually defeated by the fact that there is always another detail to be included. It is part of Martinez's charm that his work appears to both acknowledge and disavow this fact.