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the WILD

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Painter Steve DiBenedetto on Chaos and Overload

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Steve DiBenedetto's chaotic yet fluid paintings, which have been featured in MOMA as well as the Whitney, have taken a plunge toward the tactile in his recent show featuring a new collection of collages at Half Gallery. Using tape, old artwork and objects you might find on the floor of an artist studio, DiBenedetto's work has layers, both physically and conceptually. We visited the artist in his studio in Long Island City for a view inside the process of creating chaos and a talk about the joy of overload in a world of minimal.

There is a lot of stuff in these collages, what materials are you generally drawn to?

Typically I work in oil paint on canvas and colored pencil....I've done various work in print making as well. But over the last few years I've been intrigued with the way fragments of drawings and other materials tend to pile up in unexpected ways in the studio. This has led to the sort of collage type works I'm showing at Half gallery.

It seems like you use many of the pieces from your older work in these collages, sort of pieced together from many elements.

Yeah there are items from all over the place—different times of work and referenced images. I like the general chaos of the way these things get treated in the studio...But I don't

include just anything. All of the stuff is generated by me or relates to some theme I'm concerned with, hence it's not like I'm just plucking stuff out of the newspaper. But I will scan the hardware store for tape.

The idea of cross-pollination became interesting to me, combining everything in the studio. And it became fixated on concentrating everything into paintings. Cramming, in some people's minds, way too much stuff into one painting. Which of course I don't give a shit about. There is a tendency for a type of overload which I gravitate towards.

I think there is a trend right now for everything to be clean and minimalist and simple, but I like your work because you have to dig through it.

I like that idea that someone has to do excavation. I almost think of my work as something tangled up in bushes or something. The materials bleed together.

Yea! Like that piece at half gallery which was sort of just taped up on the wall, without a frame. It was just how it was.

Thank you. That's what I mean. But to be honest, there is a degree of me just really not wanting to give a shit. I mean come on. These things have their own energy. Part of it is about thinking about how provocative things can be installed in a certain way. It still startles me how uncomfortable viewers still are when things aren't minimal or convenient.

I'm sure this is true for a lot of artists, but for me, I like that sometimes there's this random juxtaposition of things coexisting. I just like the idea that they get totally, chaotically, organized. Or just hang out together. The whole art world right now is run by this sort of post-minimalist language. There is a huge-ish division between this language of confusion and this prevailing thing about tidiness or simplicity. I'm not opposed to it but when things become a sort of epidemic, I feel like I should go in the opposite direction.

Is the work at Half gallery different than your usual pieces?

Yes. The only other time I showed work like this was in David Nolan's gallery a year or so ago. Those were somewhat more well behaved, conventionally framed collages than these new ones at Half Gallery. These new are more physically disrupted, with stuff attached to the glass as well as out side of the frame.

I saw a lot of images of octopi and helicopters...what's your connection?

The use of the octopus started out as a specific reference to a line by Terence McKenna that I ran across back in 1990 or so. I think his thinking is extremely useful and provocative and wanted to have something in my work that might call peoples attention to his work. As an image though it has taken on a bit of a life of its own in the work, which I'm ok with. I do what it tells me to do now.

I also came across Arthur M Young, the guy who designed the Bell 47 helicopter hanging in the MOMA. He was also a really unique weirdo, highly educated, and he wanted to fuse together the physics of the universe with ideas that related to continuousness and spiritual energy. He's on that wavelength and then he makes the helicopter. The helicopter to him is a primitive device and he becomes obsessed with the cyclopter, the winged self. I like the idea of Young's whole trajectory, to be that nuts and bolts and at the same time, out there, in a very serious way.

This reminds me of drones, a little bit. It's eerie.

I always like it when people sense a type of paranoia in my stuff. Like a hyper-desperation.

Do you feel that paranoia or is it projected?

I don't necessarily feel paranoid. But what I like about that idea and what I want to show in my work is this enhanced way of going though of world.

I have realized that that I'm drawn to the chaotic things though. Like I like music that is stressed out. Like weird jazz and metal.

What are you working on at the moment?

I am attempting to realize a three dimensional, full size hybrid helicopter/octopus painting device that will be cast partly with octopus ink. It will have 8 blades/tentacles that will distribute octopus ink on to 8 painting surfaces.

And what is your WILD Wish?

I wish there could be some sort of reduction in obstacles in the world that inhibit possibilities. On a global level. Like an evaporation of obstacles so there were more possibilities in the world. If that makes sense.

Steve's work will be on view at Half Gallery until February 25.