Talent

A Few of My Favorite Things

Michael Bevilacqua is not one of those artists who can’t (or won’t) tell you where he gets his ideas. Take the genesis of *High-Speed Gardening* (2000, pictured), one of four new paintings he’s showing at Fredericks Freiser Gallery (504 West 22nd Street; through March 17), a typically graphic, complex 102-by-126-inch canvas that combines references to gardening, the artist Ed Ruscha, the Autobahn, and punk music. “It’s a metaphor for family,” Bevilacqua says simply. “Growing up in a small California town, we always had to do chores that involved weeding and raking.” The actual title, he continues, refers to a Ruscha drawing of the same name that Bevilacqua first paid homage to in a college jewelry class, etching the words *HIGH-SPEED GARDENING* into a brass belt buckle (a friend passed the buckle on to Ruscha, who then wrote to Bevilacqua telling him that it was an interesting idea to turn a painting into an object). The Autobahn? Bevilacqua and his wife drove on it from Paris to Berlin, got stuck in a traffic jam, and observed their fellow travelers getting out of their cars and sharing snacks as if at a picnic. Punk? “For me this is a bad time for music, so I went through my punk stuff from the eighties.” Despite their seamless compositions, Bevilacqua’s paintings are not created digitally. “I just start with one basic image and then I keep adding. In a weird way, it’s like the Abstract Expressionists—they’d start out with a mark and then react to it.” Sometimes, says Bevilacqua, his strange collisions even come true. “I’ve been putting images of Björk and the main character from the Matthew Barney film *Drawing Restraint 7* together in my paintings for a couple of years. Now I hear that Barney and Björk are going out.”

E.N.