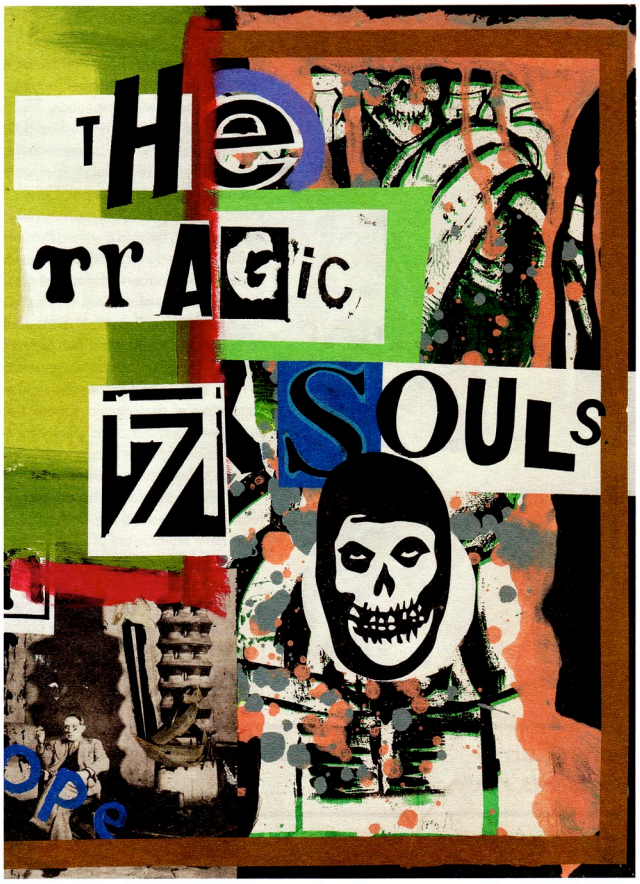

Michael Bevilacqua
Placebo Effect

Gering & López Gallery, New York
10 June – 20 August

Michael Bevilacqua makes no apologies for his semiautobiographical paintings, which also reference the music of the Ramones, Placebo and virtual band Gorillaz, and mix in cartoon characters, screenprinted and stencilled elements, collage and text. While his earliest work was decidedly hard-edged and somewhat decorative, his recent attempts at breaking up his compositions have proved fruitful. Like Sigmar Polke before him, Bevilacqua is interested in the materials and techniques of painting, although by no means has he forgotten his roots, which include growing up in central California in the 1970s and having the chance to see bands like the Dead Kennedys play in a high school cafeteria. Bevilacqua's paintings succeed because they don't focus entirely on any one flavour and are more of a mashup of styles and meaning. *The Tragic Souls* (all works 2010), for example, includes a stencilled version of the skull logo of the band the Misfits. It's an image that has been used by other artists, most notably Banks Violette, but here Bevilacqua pairs it with a collaged photo of Picasso, a silkscreened background and broad sweeping brushstrokes. The ultimate effect is that of an artist attempting to connect various life experiences and influences, rather than the narrower focus of Violette's work.

Looking at Bevilacqua's earlier, more graphic paintings, one would assume that they are planned in advance, or composed on a computer, but in fact the artist never begins with drawings or sketches. So although his new works look more organic, it was a natural progression for him, and to his credit, he didn't get stuck in a commercially viable style and play it safe. Bevilacqua draws upon Andy Warhol's technique of using screenprinting as a brush, most effectively in *Rise and Fall*, which depicts the legs and feet of the cartoon character Popeye atop his downed nemesis, Bluto. Formally, a yellow and black background is separated from a turquoise and black area by horizontal rainbow-coloured lines, with the phrase 'rise and fall', written in the cut-out letters of a stereotypical ransom note, appearing as the central element.

The long painting *Placebo Effect*, which is also the title of the exhibition, has some of the most accomplished painterly passages on view. Bevilacqua, who has said that the character 2-D of Gorillaz (as drawn by Jamie Hewlett) is a stand-in here for one of his children, repeats the graphic in different forms across the length of the work, successfully representing the idea of a body and mind in constant flux. On the surface Bevilacqua's work resembles an updated version of Pop art, but he actually uses this imagery as a cryptic language about himself, his family, his art and his internal struggle to achieve a balance between these worlds. These paintings then may serve as a form of therapy for the artist, while also playing the role of doctor, offering the viewer something to feel good about. *Chris Bors*

The Tragic Souls, 2010, acrylic, screenprint and collage on paper, 76 x 56 cm. Courtesy Gering & López Gallery, New York

Bors, Chris. "Michael Bevilacqua: Placebo Effect." *ArtReview*, September 2010, Issue 43, pg 119.

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