

## DATEBOOK

**"Ryan McGinness: A Rich Fantasy Life"**

Through May 19; Quint Contemporary Art, 7739 Fay Ave., La Jolla  
Free; (858) 454-3409 or [www.quintgallery.com](http://www.quintgallery.com)

## ART REVIEW

# FANTASTIC PLANET

**Ryan McGinness' works at Quint Contemporary play off of archetypal images**

By Robert L. Pincus  
ART CRITIC

It might be hard to imagine Hieronymus Bosch with a sunny disposition. But if he had taken a less grotesque view of humanity, he might have found a kindred spirit in Ryan McGinness.

Like Bosch, McGinness likes to pack his paintings with small images and favors a hallucinatory strain of picture making. And like Bosch, he seems to lean toward a densely populated panorama that means to be a microcosm of the world.

McGinness' second solo exhibition at Quint Contemporary Art has its own alluring title: "A Rich Fantasy Life." That phrase seems right too, since the imagery takes on such fantastical proportions. But it's also a touch ironic, given that the artist's symbolic imagery isn't personal but archetypal. Perhaps the fantasy life he's focusing on is a collective one and its icons mix the comic with the serious.

People aren't individuals in his art. They represent "man," "woman," "boy" and "girl." Their descendants are the logo figures on restroom doors and traffic signs and the icons in Matt Mullican's paintings of the 1980s. Birds are reduced to a bird that would suit the pattern on an early childhood toy; flowers look as if they were culled from a wallpaper motif. And so forth.

Other sources are clip art of the low-budget variety and silhouettes of the homespun sort — though silhouettes acquired currency in contemporary art before McGinness, courtesy of Lari Pittman and Kara Walker.

McGinness, who has attained international recognition and is being avidly collected by the likes of Museum of Modern Art in New York and London's Saa-

tchi Collection, first made his name in the design world, applying his eye to skateboards and the like. But it would be a mistake to think that his paintings and lithographs simply transfer his interest to paper, canvas and wood panel. He makes his various sources his own, transforming them and giving everything a visionary dimension.

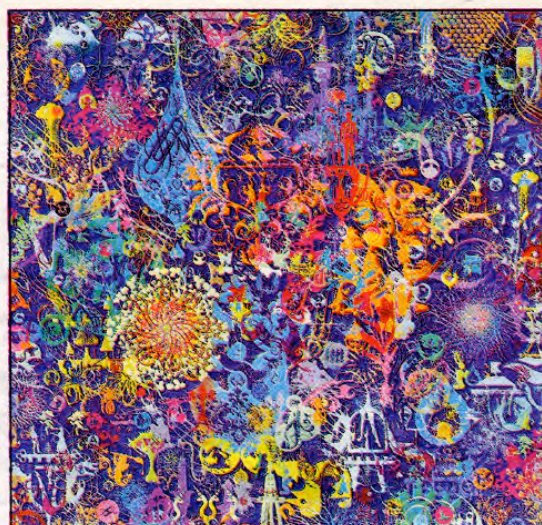
One look at "The True Knowledge of Things," one of five large-scale canvases on paintings, and you know this is his ambition. Well, at least one very long look, since it appears as if we're gazing at a tower of images, with silhouetted people existing on little platforms, surrounded by flora and fauna, real and unreal, and a cornucopia of other things.

They're a sort of landscape here, but it isn't one that conforms to ordinary surroundings. The tower rests in a lush field of green, which is surrounded by McGinness' characteristically fluid lines in ornate patterns.

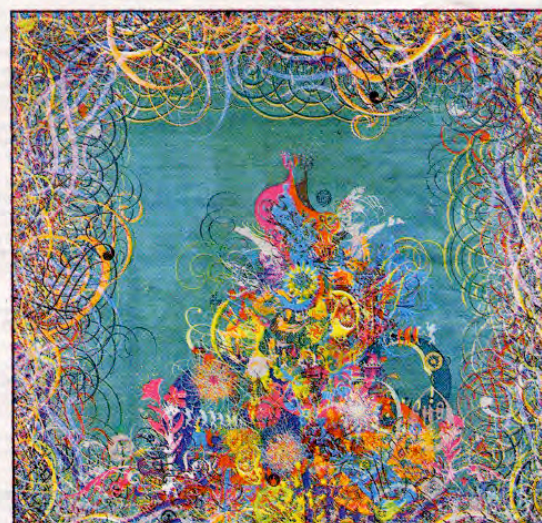
In some large canvases, like "False Negative" and "A Dream Within a Dream," it seems as if the masses of images are rising before our eyes, like hills or rounded trees under monochrome skies. It's as if images are becoming their own landscape, replacing the physical world — which doesn't seem terribly far from the truth in our media manic universe.

In "Moshi Moshi," his little iconic forms fill the entire picture surface: human figures with birds growing out of their heads, circles that become moons and others that become frames for smaller images. Legs form pinwheels and animals of all sorts flit across your visual field.

It's all rendered without brush, silk-screen style, but with a kind of obsessive virtuosity. In two modest-sized paintings, both



In "Moshi Moshi," which is 8 feet tall and wide, Ryan McGinness fills every square inch with figures, creatures, vegetation and other less definable forms, all done in lush color. *Quint Contemporary Art*



There is no well-defined landscape in "The True Knowledge of Things," but the form at the center of the canvas resembles a tower of images rising against the backdrop of a green sky. *Quint Contemporary Art*

untitled, he drops the imagery and concentrates on lines alone, interweaving them as if he were creating tapestry-like compositions. They also have a cosmic undercurrent, the way the designs guide the eye toward a kind of luminous hole or nucleus at the center of spiraling forms.

It's as if, in taking refined line to an extreme, he ends up giving decorative forms a metaphysical quality. When he turns to simpler pictorial designs, as in a handsome portfolio of lithographs,

"Chain Reactions," it's something of a letdown. They are elegantly structured: vertical patterns of chain, of several widths and hues that are cropped to look as if they could continue up or down the wall indefinitely. But after delving into the dense territory of the large-scale paintings, there's no turning back.

The release of Ryan McGinness' new book, "A Rich Fantasy Life," coincides with the closing of the exhibition May 19. He will be signing copies from 6 to 8 p.m. at the gallery.

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