Michael Bevilacqua at Jessica Fredericks

Michael Bevilacqua’s paintings have appeared in numerous group exhibitions, including “It’s Only Rock and Roll,” which is currently on a national museum tour. This recent show, titled “What is It That is The Worm Inside of You?,” was the 32-year-old artist’s New York solo debut. On view were five canvases, ranging in size up to 7 by 6 feet. These quasi-figurative works are hard-edge compositions, meticulously painted with flat, unmodulated areas of garish color. The artist delivers in each painting a powerful graphic punch similar to that found in works by Stuart Davis and certain Pop artists, and also in commercial advertising design. Bevilacqua uses as raw material logos of corporations and rock-and-roll acts, such as Oasis, Björk and Pulp. All of the canvases also feature images derived from Matthew Barney’s 1994 film Cremaster 4, including several highly stylized depictions of the so-called “Faeries” played by female body-builders.

In Cannonball, the Cremaster 4 logo appears in the upper right; while much of the rest of the surface is covered by large blue and green blobs—a schematic representation of a splash of water. Lichtenstein’s “brushstroke” paintings come to mind, but the image most likely refers to an early scene in the Barney movie where the protagonist, having tapped-danced his way through the floorboards of a pier, splashes into the sea.

The “Faeries,” wearing blue jumpsuits and with their bright orange hair done up in three large buns, appear in the paintings Life is Sweet, Snoozberry Swizzler and Dig Your Own Hole. Titled after an album by the Chemical Brothers, the latter presents in the foreground two of Barney’s androgynous creatures wearing high heels. One of them is shown sewing a hole in the floor, a reference to the movie’s pier scene. Bevilacqua, however, has transposed the setting. In the background, curving bands of wild colors might be roadways at some futuristic racetrack. Near the top of the canvas, Oasis and Chemical Brothers logos look like billboard ads placed far off in the distance.

Bevilacqua, in this thought-provoking exhibition, underscores the pervasiveness of advertising in American culture. His “art about art” also shows how even recent avant-garde works, such as the Barney film, can be quickly consumed cultural commodities, already ripe for repackaging.

—David Ebony