



Donald Baechler

*Cheim & Read
547 West 25th Street, Chelsea
Through Oct. 28*

Donald Baechler continues to hone his cheerfully glib formula, painting folksy emblems — faces, flowers and ice cream cones, among others — on backgrounds he collages, Rauschenberg-style, with found imagery. Whether viewers find his new, large-scale canvases and midsize gouaches (some fashioned from the Yellow Pages) charming or humdrum will depend on their taste for the decorative and their tolerance for the artist's gee-whiz approach.

Mr. Baechler is all about surface, toggling erasure and accumulation until his canvases look like crazy quilts made of palimpsests. Like his idol Cy Twombly, he displays a gift for visual slang, but his faux-naïf pictures tend to be coyly hermetic.

Despite the epic-sounding title of "The Call of the Continent," it is tough to make much of the jangled array of images behind the central figure, a prancing black-and-white horse. Buddhas, bunnies, old coins, a scrap of tapestry depicting a pilgrim, a yearbook photo of a bushy-haired boy (the artist, presumably) and a metal dog bowl mingle to mute effect with gestural flourishes of saffron and coral.

Things look up when Mr. Baechler introduces a new symbol, a brainlike labyrinth in the shape of a man's profile. It appears centered in "Maze" on a butter-yellow canvas scattered with images of paintbrushes, dice, closed buds and open blooms, and a daydreaming little boy stitched in red thread. Collectively, they suggest a portrait of the artist's busy mind.

In recent years Mr. Baechler has been experimenting with sculpture, and the show includes one irresistible example: A 10-foot-tall figure made of chicken wire, plaster and papier-mâché (soon to be cast into bronze). Its pancake-flat body, Popsicle-stick limbs and spherical Mr. Bill face have a genuinely raw, unruly aspect that the artist could use more of in two dimensions.

ANDREA K. SCOTT