

Art in America

THE POWER
OF ART
COMES FROM
ITS AFFIRMATION!
ITS ~~IS~~ PURE AFFIRMATION!
ITS AFFIRMATION OF
FORM!

WITHOUT
ARGUMENTATION





GREG PARMA SMITH

David Lewis

Greg Parma Smith's painted realism is perversely synthetic and immaculately crafted. In his first solo show at David Lewis Gallery, titled "Melancholy," Smith presented two series of paintings—"Door gods (origami paper)" and "God of doors (Janus butterflies)," both from 2014. These works, composed of oil, acrylic and metallic leaf, are baroque in their construction and subject matter.

The six paintings in "Door gods" have oversize paper clips delicately fashioned from thin strips of painted canvas. They hook around the paintings' edges, appearing to hold stacks of origami papers in place. Each work is a careful orchestration of patterns, sober cartoon faces and repeating horse or snake motifs. The brightest of the bunch, *Door gods (origami paper): Inward and outside 1*, features a cute dog's face and a hoodie-wearing young man along with an embossed outline of a stylized snake. Like the canvas-made paper clips, the snake creates the illusion that there are multiple physical levels here as it appears to weave through the papers; yet, at the same time, it reinforces the flatness of the work.

The geometrically perfect depictions of paper squares, all with sharp edges, call to mind an iPhoto scroll. The melancholy of the show's title could be read as a reaction to the increasing displacement of the physical artifact into the virtual realm. The cartoon imagery, which has become a staple of Smith's art, is varied but oddly generic. Some characters resemble the disheveled urbanites of illustrator Adrian Tomine; others are like primitive anime characters.

These new paintings raise the ghost of Pop art by revealing just how estranged mass culture has become from contemporary painting culture and the radical image. The appro-

riated comics in Roy Lichtenstein's work clearly threaded low culture into high, energizing both in the process. Smith's use of cartoons seems at the service of a more hermetic endeavor, one that further mystifies the relationship between a popular image and a rarified artwork. In a page of notes that function as a press release for the exhibition, Smith presents a list of dualities, among them: "Good taste/bad taste" and "Fancy/shitty." "Romanticism/cynicism" is one that I would add; while devoted to classical painting techniques (such as trompe l'oeil), his work is free of the mythologies that used to accompany them, suggesting a cynicism about the way painting communicates in the world today.

The six paintings in the series "God of doors (Janus butterflies)" were presented on one wall, salon-style. These works are smaller than the "Door gods" and less densely packed with visual information. The paintings depict pairs of heads in mirror image, silhouetted in such a way as to resemble a butterfly. The heads are either merged in a kiss or face away from one another; some male, some female, they are different sizes and colors, although bright blue, orange, beige and brown dominate. The butterfly illusion comes from a "quick" eye foolery, as opposed to the "slower" effect of the gilded borders, which surround some of the heads. The juxtaposition of the spiraling patterns of embossed gold with the slightly garish cartoon heads in static kiss mode is one of the strangest painting moves I've encountered in recent years. This to me is the ultimate in pictorial decadence, private image-making that speaks in a whisper to the stratification of painting culture and its separation from the culture at large.

—Nora Griffin

SAMUEL JABLON

Freight + Volume

Samuel Jablon's wonderful paintings are covered in multi-colored words rendered in acrylic and studded with glass



Greg Parma Smith: *Door gods (origami paper): Inward and outside 1*, 2014, oil, acrylic and metallic leaf on canvas, 46 by 46 inches; at David Lewis.

Samuel Jablon: *Nowhere Bus*, 2014, acrylic, fused glass and glass tile on wood, 48 by 60 inches; at Freight + Volume.