

art ltd.

Geoff Hippenstiel at Devin Borden Gallery



Less than two years after earning his master's degree from the University of Houston, painter Geoff Hippenstiel has already demonstrated a mastery of scale that eludes many gestural abstractionists. In last year's "The Invisible World," a two-person exhibition with Kay Tasuji at PG Contemporary, Hippenstiel filled a huge wall with a salon-style hanging of 52 small paintings, none larger than 20 by 16 inches. Now he's followed up with a

confident solo outing at Devin Borden Gallery, taking elements of the previous show's most riveting works--sumptuous impasto passages of lush color intriguingly offset by metallic gold and silver paint--and convincingly blowing them up to *AbEx* scale.

Hippenstiel bases his compositions on photographs--sometimes of actual people or landscapes, sometimes on reproductions, including works from Cezanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire series--but pushes their abstraction to the point of unrecognizability, though a hint of homage comes through in the nods to Cezanne. He manhandles paint like Clyfford Still, slathering and scraping across long expanses of canvas, but is more prone to a sweetness of color found in Philip Guston's 1950s paintings or at various stages in Joan Mitchell's career. And he uses metallic spray enamel not graffiti-style but as a supportive, surprisingly low-key formal element. Gold spray paint, in a painting that reads as a domelike structure in a verdant landscape--all the works are untitled--accents the buttery brushstrokes underneath, emphasizing the paint's physicality and three-dimensionality. In another landscape, set against the intimation of a pale sky threatening to grow overcast, the gold sprouts up from the earth in gleaming clusters. The metallic paint, which evokes both precious gold leaf and Andy Warhol's ubiquitous "silver screens," reads differently in the portrait-format paintings, which strike a decidedly otherworldly tone. Gold paint comprises what resemble strips of fabric loosely covering a mummy-like head--or perhaps bandages on a burn victim--set against a yellow background in one canvas; in another, circular silver patches disrupt an easy reading of the tortoise-shell-like composition beneath while resisting settling into their own straightforward pattern.

Works on view in the gallery's storeroom and office had entirely different compositions and moods--from sculptural severity to hedonistic rococo--from the paintings in the show, serving notice that Hippenstiel's protean practice is headed many directions at once.