

114 **In View**  
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JONATHAN T.D. NEIL

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Follow Me! Chinese Art  
at the Threshold of the  
New Millennium  
TERRY R. MYERS

116 **New York**  
William Eggleston  
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117 **Mike Bouchet**  
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An Exhibition as a Film  
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The Triumph of Painting  
(Part Two)  
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## Mike Bouchet

Maccarone Inc.

15 MAY - 31 AUGUST

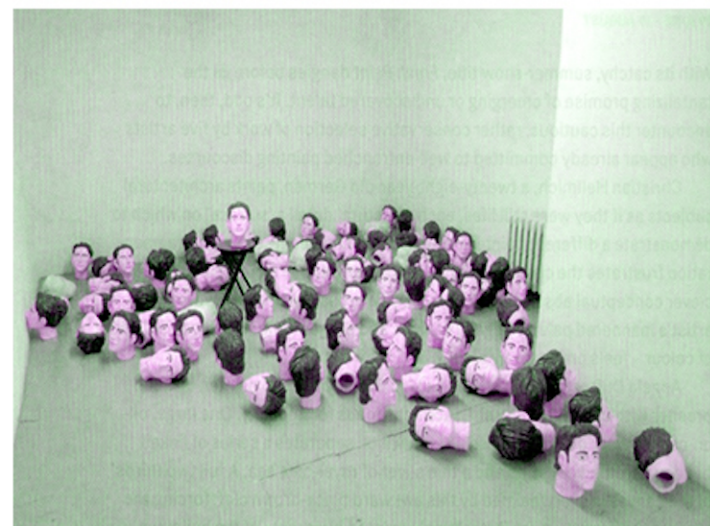
To the extent that Walter De Maria's *New York Earth Room* (1977) displaced old, tired notions of art with fresh dirt, Mike Bouchet's *New York Dirty Room* (all works 2005) fills a fresh, young exhibition space with topsoil and human waste (compost from Rikers Island penitentiary) in order to wallow in the detritus of dead-end ideas. Funny how two rooms of dirt, nearly 30 years apart, can register as opposites. It's a timely reversal, and Mike Bouchet's conceptual wise-guy stance – embodied here in installations, sculptures and paintings – is anything but tired.

Upstairs, *Top Cruise* is a floor-level arrangement of approximately one hundred cast and painted ceramic heads of the actor Tom Cruise. (Currently being fabricated in Mexico, the heads will eventually number 1,000.) It's no matter that the effigies are a poor likeness of Cruise (I have a hunch that Bouchet himself served as the model, given earlier work that involved intimate casts of his own body) – the point isn't mimesis but mass reproduction. Rather than a unique reference, the indiscriminate, interchangeable banality of Tom x 1,000 illustrates the cultural frame of contemporary celebrity. As a mode of distribution, this frame seems to operate most efficiently as an empty, content-free void.

On the gallery's third floor, Bouchet's value-charged concepts of 'full' and 'empty' are taken to the logical next level. An aquarium brimming with a bubbling, dark liquid sits on a tall, crate-like wooden pedestal. The liquid – diet cola – gives off a fetid odour (the artist's recurring trope) and contains a submerged Cruise head. Nearby, a leaning stack of large paintings feature faint, disposable, silkscreen-type images rendered on white fabric using the artist's own recipe for diet cola. Ten similar paintings are hung cheek by jowl across an opposite corner of the room.

Cola bottles, bottle caps, logos and a cellphone keypad are among the vapid subjects. Some images carry Arabic calligraphy. Rendered quickly in the thin, wan cola mixture, the images traffic in the aggressive style of product branding and advertising but with none of the panache or verve that Pop artists brought to earlier material. Interestingly, several of the paintings feature the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 'Nutrition Facts' panel required on American food packaging. Bouchet has zeroed out all the figures, depicting a consumer product of literally no value.

Bouchet has made an art of flouting the means and goals of commercial product distribution (i.e. jeans mass-produced and thrown from an airplane, handmade cola crated and shipped willy-nilly to China). One might guess that these activities have been designed to point up the gnawing emptiness of these aggressive cycles of production and consumption. Gauging whether Bouchet's conceptual stance is a critique of manufactured obsolescence or a trifling, comic send-up is a useful exercise with broader echoes in the surrounding global economy.





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## Fresh Paint

Lehmann Maupin

29 JUNE - 19 AUGUST



With its catchy, summer-show title, *Fresh Paint* dangles before us the tantalizing promise of emerging or undiscovered talent. It's odd, then, to encounter this cautious, rather conservative selection of work by five artists who appear already committed to well-entrenched painting discourses.

Christian Hellmich, a twenty-eight-year-old German, paints architectural subjects as if they were still lifes, each structural detail a 'surface' on which to demonstrate a different painterly effect. This handsomely executed fragmentation frustrates the cohesion of quasi-representational images, injecting a clever conceptual abstraction into otherwise prosaic scenes. However, the artist's mannered palette of greyish blues and ochres – the Neo Rauch school of colour – feels prematurely stodgy.

Angela Dufresne, a thirty-six-year-old Brooklyn-based painter, is much brasher with colour, though she sacrifices focus for audacity. One large, oil-on-canvas work depicts a massive cliff, which separates a series of linked buildings from two figures and a thin sliver of royal-blue sea. A full two thirds of the canvas is overwhelmed by this awkward black-brown cliff, forcing the eye into the narrow, more interestingly painted quadrants of the buildings and the water, both at the picture's extreme margins. It's a manipulative gambit that doesn't quite pay off. More compelling is Dufresne's 2004 *Margaret Antonioni and Catherine Pearl in Cedar Rapids, MI c. 2046*, an aerial view of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, painted – china-like – entirely in red and varying shades of lilac.

Paris-based Fabien Rigobert contributes two, single-channel videos, each presenting a group of four figures (two male, two female) in formal portrait arrangements that occasionally come to life. The upscale one is a modish sitting room adorned by natty figures that morph into new positions against a backdrop of Op-art wallpaper. The other is a campfire surrounded by casually dressed figures on a sofa, a bench and a wheelchair; their slight movements are more naturalistic and enact a spare narrative. As a trend, it's interesting to see how flat-screen monitors – if not responsible for inventing – have certainly promulgated the discussion of video in painting terms. In Rigobert's case, the videos go one better than painting by capturing the active interstices between frozen poses.

David Deutsch is the elder painter in the group, and his work duly displays an assurance that the others lack. What Elizabeth Peyton does for bodies, Deutsch does for buildings in three, medium-sized oil-on-canvas works. His loose, light touch sparingly paints only what is necessary (and not a brushstroke more) to evoke architectural forms, setting and mood. The effect is a floating, wistful sort of perception that translates visually and emotionally – a quality helped by titles like *Blue Smoke* (trailer homes and a car; 2003) and *Rodeo* (a pink-tinted façade and trees; 2005).

Lastly, Steven Black's *2005.01 & 2005.02* diptych depicts the same female figure isolated in roughly the same pose against a white ground. There is the faintest suggestion of an architectural setting indicated by a few brushstrokes of white paint. The doubled figure, by contrast, is painstakingly rendered in heavily painted oils. This hyperselfconsciousness – evinced in a laboured preoccupation with the materials and formal mechanics of painting – characterizes much of the not-so *Fresh Paint*.