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Silk-screens of a pop culture's wreckage



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**RYAN MCGINNESS AT ARTCORE/
FABRICE MARCOLINI**

\$18,000-\$180,000. Until Nov. 15,
55 Mill St., Building 62, Toronto;
416-920-3820

Ryan McGinness is an exuberant boundary-breaker. At the age of 36, the amiably hyperactive, hyperbolically productive, meteorically successful New York-based artist (who is represented in New York by both Deitch Projects and Pace Prints) is a maniacal eraser of the once-clear lines dividing, for example, work and play, business and pleasure, and the increasingly unreal line between high art and innovative design.

McGinness, who grew up in Virginia Beach, Va., came to art-making not from art history lectures (though he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University) or from life class, but from skateboarding. Having made his mark early as a designer of consequence (he was designing a line of skateboards for Supreme in 2000, and incarnated his design philosophy in a now-famous book called *Flatnessisgod*), McGinness seems to have come quickly to the decision to stop trying to produce art that was separate from his graphic design ideas, and hurl himself wholeheartedly into making whatever he felt like making, whether it was regarded as serious art or not.

As his New York dealer Jeffrey Deitch notes in an essay in McGinness's book *Installation-*

view (Rizzoli, 2005), McGinness rapidly expanded his artistic output "like a benign computer virus" during the last decade, generating paintings, sculptures, wall murals and books – while continuing to churn out, like a latter-day Andy Warhol or Keith Haring, T-shirts, soccer balls, skateboards and sneakers. ("Products," according to McGinness, "are the new art.")

McGinness's exhibition at Toronto's Artcore/Fabrice Marcolini, his first solo show in Canada, is titled *Aesthetic Comfort*. It features a couple of seductively writhing Plexiglas sculptures (like works by the Russian constructivist Naum Gabo, but forcefully yanked into the 21st century), and a hot selection of his teeming silk-screened paintings – a number of which are installed in a specially built black-light gallery. Here, the paintings are hung over zappy, eye-popping, wall-mounted, adhesive vinyl configurations – graphic "nests," onto which are fitted the paintings, many of them, like the one reproduced here, being tondos (the disk shape acting as the perfect support for McGinness's whirling, centrifugal cacophony of jangled images and shapes). When the fluorescent black-lighting is turned on, the paintings, which are already deep and dense with imagistic overlays, suddenly become almost three-dimensional. You almost feel you can walk into them.

The exhibition has been organized by Toronto-based critic and curator Randy Gladman, who got to know McGinness and his work during the years he was writing and curating in New York. In his essay "Art and Entertainment" in *Installation-view*, Gladman provides a helpful chronological outline of the development of McGinness's hectic style, of how he began by making silk-screened paint-



Ryan McGinness's being tondos is hung over a graphic 'nest' and lit by fluorescent black light making the work appear three dimensional.

ings of iconic, clip-art images (the images invariably drawn from the everyday world of pop artifacts), and of how, "gorging on the icons and symbols of mass communication," McGinness proceeded to digest "chips of visual pop culture" and "regurgitate a rehydrated paste of common experience."

Look deeply and intensely enough into silk-screened paintings such as the massive landscape-like diptych *The Free Will Illusion*, for example, and you will find, within the painting's almost inexhaustible richness, hundreds of shards of identifiable pop culture moments (*Star Wars* Storm Troopers, for example), tossed about on McGinness's graphic sea of surging icons and vignettes like

bits of 20th-century wreckage, salvaged by the artist's canny defining of a new post-modern pastoralism.

By the way, lest anyone imagine that McGinness is long on flare and fizz and sketchy on profundity, take a look at the beautiful, black *Big Bang Amnesia* – which is darkly imbued with pop objects of oppression and curtailment (handcuffs, etc.), but which can take its place in the sublimity sweepstakes beside big, black, sepulchral paintings by Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko.