

Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

RYAN MCGINNESS DEITCH PROJECTS

According to painter Greg Lindquist, recounting his experience as a studio assistant in *Ryan McGinness Works* (Rizzoli, 2009), McGinness once discovered that the popular clothing chain Urban Outfitters had pirated the "look" of his signature silkscreened patterns for a line of T-shirts. On successfully suing the company for infringement of copyright and acquiring the entire cache, the artist ran a thorough quality check on the merchandise, and then marketed the items under his own imprimatur.

Something of that clever sense of reinvention permeated McGinness's most recent New York solo exhibition, which included striking silkscreened canvases, paintings on wood panels and five sculptural "studies" on pedestals. As though raising the ante set by 1970s pattern painting, McGinness cultivates a visually cacophonous style that features layer upon layer of luminous graphic designs and computer-style icons—all original creations derived from everyday street signage, advertising and pop-cultural insignia.

Visual compression is the operative principle behind McGinness's dazzling new acrylics on linen or canvas, many of them mural-scale. Exploiting a psychedelic palette for fields dense with schematic fish, chains, keys, animals, tiaras and home furnishings (to cite only a few motifs), McGinness sets the observer's eye scurrying about the surface in search of a clear, meaningful resolution.

There isn't any, and that's precisely the point. Works such as *Imaginary Happiness* and *Semi-Logic* (both 2008)—marked by bright, flat, irregular arrays of figurative elements—seem primarily ornamental, dedicated to a graphic sublime. A number of circular panels bearing spiral motifs in fluorescent pigments, their lacy patterns spilling onto dark walls illuminated from above by black light, mock all potential cosmic associations through their own frank, ironic contrivance. The

Ryan McGinness: *Only a Thief Thinks Everybody Steals*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 96 by 144 inches; at Deitch Projects.



models for freestanding sculptures of interlocking sheets of painted resin come off as gawky maquettes for some futuristic stage production.

Far more engaging is the capacious *Faith* (2008), its black, lacquerlike surface slowly disclosing a panoply of familiar, if illogically disparate forms—candelabra, paper clips, plants, arabesques, an artist's easel. Here the apparition of common objects, suspended in a pictorial space that is at once everywhere and nowhere, compels reflection on what McGinness (in an interview with Peter Halley in *Works*) describes as sheer, untranslatable visual pleasure.

—Gregory Galligan