

Art in America

Eddie Martinez at ZieherSmith

BY DAVID COGGINS

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Image: Eddie Martinez, Snakesperience, 2006, acrylic and flashe on panel, 48 x 60 inches

Eddie Martinez's promising solo debut is full of joyous work that creates its own entrancing world. His paintings and drawings feature a recurring cast of men in baseball hats, gliding parrots and coiled snakes who all stare at us with striking, overlarge eyes. They populate incongruous landscapes full of vivid pattern and color, unified by the visceral pleasure Martinez takes in their invention

Small graphite drawings of men defy perspective and appear perfectly flat, possessing a tender, naïve quality. *Odelay Holmes* (2005) is an engaging portrait of the artist's grandfather, whose drooping mustache mirrors his eyebrows, which curl down in thin dark crescents. Richly rendered on yellowing paper, it has the cherished quality of an unearthed treasure, long hidden.

Martinez is an intrepid draftsman, comfortable with pencil, pen or brush. In some drawings, figures are set amid dense environments of spire and towers, lapped in washed of color. Others depict equally fanciful terrains of displaced sphinxes and human torsos. *Guardian* (2006) is a flurry of graphite vases, mushrooms and eyes. It has the overall energy of an early Twombly, though Martinez always grounds his images in recognizable forms.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

Wangsta Lean (2005) invokes the peculiar pleasure of a Paul Klee watercolor, without feeling precious. A man in a lavender tank top sips a drink below a wash of dark sky while a bird peers over his shoulder. That he is not wearing trousers seems beside the point—Martinez makes such surrealistic details seem natural.

Martinez's paintings on panel are more direct. The acrylic surfaces are so boldly colored that the paint appears to be pure pigment, laid down in decisive opaque layers. In Mario Situation (2006), a pot of sprouting plants sits on a table, brightened by a large spotted orange mushroom and set against a deep black background. Here, Martinez reinvigorates the traditional still life, engaging a classic art template in a spirit of clear-eyed exploration rather than postmodern posturing.

In Snakesperience (2006), Martinez's densest painting, a green-capped man peers over checkered rooftops while a snake twists around a spire and a cat gazes out from the bottom of the image. The figures are formally united by their large intense eyes. Bolder than his drawings and brilliant colored, Snakesperience generates a primal thrill.

In Martinez's work, we are never sure what type of space we're looking at – anything can be superimposed over anything else. In this unruly realm, the artist creates a world of possibility, at once innocent and fantastic.