

Art in Review

BY ROBERTA SMITH

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“Back Looker,” a painting by Eddie Martinez at ZieherSmith in Chelsea. The show, which runs through Feb. 20, contains some dozen canvases, about 20 mixed-media drawings and a set of seven hand-colored drypoints. Credit ZieherSmith

EDDIE MARTINEZ

ZieherSmith

516 West 20th Street

Chelsea

Through Feb. 20

Eddie Martinez, who briefly attended art school in Boston and spent more time there working outdoors on graffiti art, has exceptional gifts as a painter and draftsman, which he exuberantly combines. Generally, he has not yet made them his own, but his third show at ZieherSmith suggests enough determination, industriousness and dexterity to get the job done.

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

It contains some dozen canvases, about 20 mixed-media drawings and a set of seven hand-colored drypoints. The strongest works are in the minority: four carbon-transfer drawings; two small black canvases whose scratched-in images reveal colors underneath; two all-white paintings whose motifs are simply outlined in caulk squeezed from the tube; and “Shadows and Dust” and “Brewer,” in which landscapes of emphatic scribbles in red and black are threatened by solid black from above.

Mr. Martinez’s evolving style is a kind of updated, liberated Neo-Expressionism that looks all over the place for guidance: to Picasso, early Peter Saul, Arshile Gorky, Philip Guston, de Kooning and David Hockney. Portrait, still life and landscape mix; Donald Duck makes several appearances. Small clusters, scattered fields or pileups of shapes, objects and hieroglyphs are a constant. There are also paintings within paintings, some of which make their own appearance in the show.

In the large painting titled “Back Looker,” one such pile is crowded into a speech balloon attached to a reclining figure’s mouth; perhaps a painter talking incessantly about art. In “The Grass Is Never Greener” a more orderly accumulation is laid out on a tilted green tabletop in front of four boxy figures, including Donald. An empty chair suggests that the viewer can join the discussion. Incoherence and generic skill overtake several works, but Mr. Martinez is better when he juggles more, not less.