

Art in Review



RENTAL GALLERY

Painterly with Conceptual attitude: installation view of "An Activity So Pure," Matt Chambers's show at the Rental Gallery.

Matt Chambers

An Activity So Pure

Rental Gallery
120 East Broadway, at Allen
Street
Lower East Side
Through Oct. 17

The title of Matt Chambers's second New York gallery show, "An Activity So Pure," seems to invite an ending like "Deserves to Be Violated, Ridiculed and Hammed Up." At least that is what Mr. Chambers appears to be doing to painting, which he took up a few years ago while pursuing an M.F.A. in filmmaking. His paintings are big, varied in subject, painted with remorseless gusto and installed cheek to jowl on the gallery's four walls. The resulting onslaught of 22 8-by-4-foot canvases is both robust and grim: painterly with an overload of Conceptual attitude.

Most of the works partake of a representational style — Pop, Expressionism, realism — all blurred by the thick paint. In one piece, two cute dogs meld with a large ice cream cone, in messy imitation of Jeff Koons's sunny photo-based realism. In another, a stewardess with wings conjures up several generations of the "bad painting" tendency. And in two others, scenes of scantily clad women in interiors are undercut with black in a way that evokes pulp-fiction illustration and Max Beckmann.

Also depicted are an hourglass with bones instead of sand, a stack of cheeseburgers and a silhouette of Alfred Hitchcock made from the letters of his name.

Three abstractions consist entirely of failed paintings sliced into strips and arranged on canvas; a painting made of old shirts looks vaguely flood-damaged. And the artist portrays himself as a friendly geek in "Self Portrait" and "Self Portrait With More Difficult Shirt to Paint."

Mr. Chambers also makes zines, the latest of which yields the phrase "An activity so pure it never has to act" — which he definitely refutes. It will be interesting to see where he takes his painting, or it him.

ROBERTA SMITH