

Art Reviews

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, when the printing press made mass-produced books available to more readers than ever before, concerned citizens began to worry that the increase in readily accessible information would make people stupid. The capacity for thoughtful recollection might be replaced with an insatiable appetite for escapist diversion.

Now that the Information Age is upon us and our eyes are incessantly bombarded by an overwhelming volume of visual stimulation, worried observers continue to act as if diminished attention spans were the natural consequence of the image glut. Their argument appears to be logical: The more there is to look at, the less time we have to digest it.

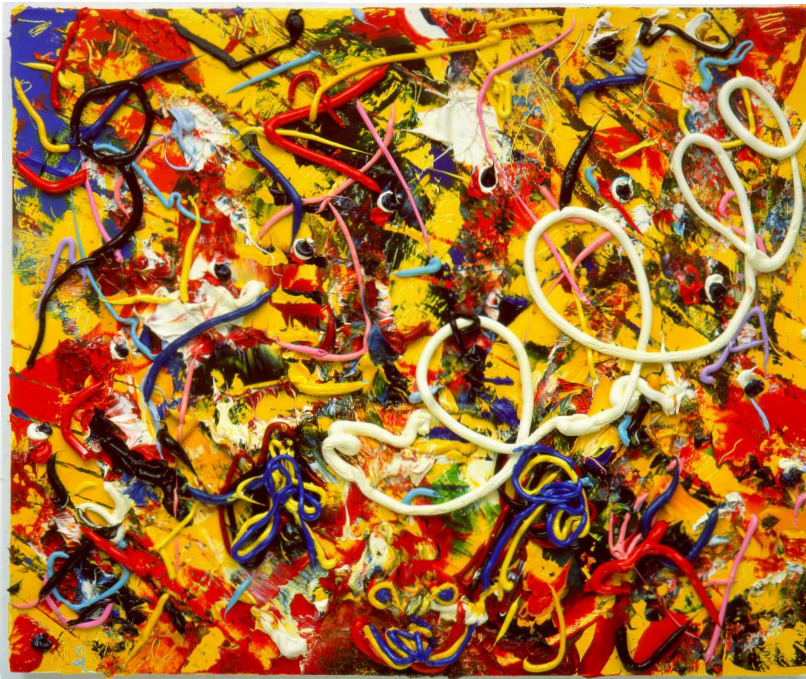
The only problem with this line of reasoning is that it doesn't hold up. To see why, visit **Michael Reafsnyder's** third solo show in Los Angeles, an over-the-top extravaganza that goes a long way to show that visual overload does not necessarily lead to shrinking attention spans.

At Mark Moore Gallery, each of Reafsnyder's 20 hefty yet modestly scaled oils on panel is nothing if not excessive. Some, like "Teutonic Bombshell," "Harumph" and "Mower" are hard to look at, their furious smears and whiplash swipes of juicy paint combining the aggressive, headache-inducing vibrancy of Op art with the meaty physicality of Expressionism.

Others, like "Swishy," "What the . . . ?" and "Nyder-Michael-Reafs" are hard to stomach. Squeezed straight from the tube, fat worms of delicate lavender, murky burgundy, rusty pumpkin, frothy mint, baby-doll pink and cobalt blue clash against churning surfaces of primary colors.

In a sense, Reafsnyder is an anti-Expressionist. The madcap gestures that pile up like multi-vehicle wrecks on his paintings do not describe inner turmoil as much as they invite your eyes to metaphorically leap out of their sockets and careen around meticulously engineered arrangements of texture, gesture and shape.

To emphasize that his carnivalesque compositions belong in the visible world of shared public space, Reafsnyder has painted a smiley



Mark Moore Gallery

Michael Reafsnyder's "Mower" (2000): Smears and swipes of paint recall the physicality of Expressionism.

face on each—sometimes piling four or five atop one another. Their energy is infectious; if you don't take yourself too seriously, it's hard not to crack a smile before these embarrassingly generous images.

Imagine if a painting by Seurat were crossed with one by Pissarro and the offspring were fed a steady diet of steroids and methamphetamine. This gives you an idea of the physical wallop and optical sophistication of Reafsnyder's profoundly weird works. They get your attention in a split-second and then do something interesting with it.

Capturing your imagination, they slow you down long enough to begin to savor those moments when chaos and control dovetail, and everything falls into place with seemingly effortless ease. Once you get past their initially overwhelming impact, they allow your attention span to expand—often further than you'd expect, and sometimes more than you'd believe.

● Mark Moore Gallery, Bergamot

Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through July 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays.