

# Exhibition Places Artist Firmly in the Present

## Art Reviews

By DAVID PAGEL  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

**Silly . . . Seriously:** Michael Reafsnyder's second solo show in Los Angeles delivers on the considerable promise of his rollicking debut 2½ years ago. Bolder, more decisive and increasingly amplified by an abundant supply of intense visual energy, the young painter's furiously worked oils on panel at Mark Moore Gallery quickly convince you of their sophistication.

The next moment, however, you catch yourself smirking at the very idea that you have just associated refinement and complexity with these mad, outlandish paintings; they're jam-packed with whiplash smears of unmixed colors, muddy mixtures of unpalatable tints and long worms of paint squeezed straight from the tube. If a bemused grin begins to turn the corners of your mouth upward, your face will be mirrored by the bright smiley faces that appear in all of Reafsnyder's fiercely civilized works.

Never forgetting their manners, these raw, rambunctious abstractions always approach viewers with respect and equanimity—despite the out-of-control exuberance that makes them look so disheveled that they seem to be unfit for public presentation. Their stick-figure faces also mock the idea that art from Southern California is sunny and cheerful, like the cliché about its citizens being vacuous and superficial.

One of the best things about these potent paintings is the way they fuse silliness and seriousness. Firmly rooted in a tradition that includes De Kooning and reaches back to Art Brut, Reafsnyder's crudely jubilant panels fully inhabit the present, insisting that where something comes from is less important than where it takes you. It's also terrific how his works fly in the face of so much contem-

porary painting, vigorously demonstrating that messy, densely textured surfaces can have as much crisp, graphic impact as flat, squeaky clean surfaces.

Even though a few pounds of thick, viscous paint have been slathered over each panel, these juicy paintings still embody clarity, precision and distinction. Art, they insist, is not only different things to different people at different times, but different things to individuals *all at once*. In Reafsnyder's talented hands, painting serves up the same sort of complexity we expect from intelligent and perceptive people.

● *Mark Moore Gallery, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through Jan. 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

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F33



Mark Moore Gallery

An untitled oil on panel, from Michael Reafsnyder's solo show.