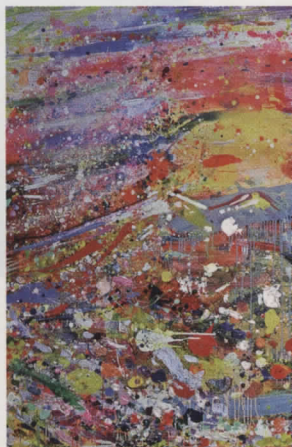




Josh Smith: *Untitled*, 2008, mixed mediums on panel, 60 by 48 inches; at Luhring Augustine.

Brendan Cass: *Capri*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 78 by 132 inches; at Stellan Holm.



their labored utterances and our reading of the text floating alongside them, compound into a dark reflection upon the failure of grand schemes. A clip of the Italian version regularly aired on TV in Buvoli's native country, to raise public awareness about aphasia. One would be hard pressed to imagine a similarly effective artistic intervention here: a leap perhaps too perilous for American TV.

—Faye Hirsch

JOSH SMITH LUHRING AUGUSTINE

I used to think that this downtown painter's strategy of compensating with sheer quantity for what his paintings lack in quality was bound to fail. He has tediously mocked the authentic, "autographic" mark by repeatedly painting the letters of his name in a gestural manner. The scraped smudges of his many "palette" paintings, allegedly artifacts of studio production, are lame one-liners. Yet none of his surfaces are distinguished by true fecklessness, as he is too eager to make just the right kind of bad impression.

Working in a limited number of standard formats, Smith produces not series, but product lines. "Currents" included 22 paintings, each measuring 5 by 4 feet, in the gallery's front room, and another 16 4-by-3-footers in the back, all dated 2008 and all untitled. (A glossy catalogue at the front desk illustrated many, many more.) About half are oil or oil and acrylic on canvas, the rest mixed-medium collages on panel. Many are utterly unremarkable, generic abstractions.

Yet you wouldn't call Smith a hack, exactly, because occasionally he exhibits the emotional investment that accompanies genuine investigation. In one such painting, a cloud of transparent white consorts with streaks of brown, rose and red-orange. It recalls the slackest of Hans Hofmann's late work, in which arbitrary backgrounds drift without the deal-clinching counterpoint of blocks of pure color. And Smith sometimes takes real risks. Page proofs of a Josh Smith catalogue appear in one panel painting, tattered à la Mimmo Rotella and smeared with paint the color of grape jam. Visually grating, this painting dispenses almost entirely with finesse. To his credit, Smith also has the cheek to channel artists as unfashionable as Hundertwasser and Motherwell.

In several canvases, Smith turns for subject matter to a writhing or leaping fish with big Picasso eyes, the creature's slithering contours rendered in meaty color chords. In others, the undulating outline of an oak leaf presses at the painting's edges. Is the artist invested in the iconography of his motifs? Let's see . . . the fish symbolizes fecundity in some cultures; in others, its penchant for penetrating mysterious depths assumes a psychological or sexual significance. Well, Smith's watery blend of swagger and doubt is making waves. And the ancients believed that the mighty oak drew lightning more than any other tree. So, like oaks from tiny acorns, big careers from small ideas grow.

[Smith's work is on view at *Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève* through Aug. 16.]

—Stephen Maine