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Michael Goldberg

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ART IN REVIEW

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2003

Michael Goldberg

Lennon, Weinberg
560 Broadway, at Prince Street
SoHo
Through May 31

At 78, Michael Goldberg carries on the Abstract Expressionist legacy in paintings of snarly, all-over line and rough patches of acidic color. Mr. Goldberg's painting is animated mainly by the spirits of Pollock and de Kooning. He draws with oilstick rather than dribbling, and his touch is not nearly so sensuous as de Kooning's, but his big, congested, frontally aggressive pictures recall paintings from the late 40's by both artists. The mood is different, though — playful, comic and hedonistic rather than tragic, furious or angst-ridden.

There is a difference, too, between breaking new ground and keeping a dying style on life-support. Jonathan Lasker, a younger artist whose paintings in some ways resemble Mr. Goldberg's, treats the conventions of gestural abstraction as dead clichés subject to a semiotician's ironic parsing. For Mr. Goldberg, the conventions of scribbling, smearing, troweling and otherwise activating the picture plane are still alive, and you feel his loving engagement with them the way you do a young jazz musician's with old standards.

In some cases, the painter overworks his canvases and they get muddy. The better ones have a looser weave, in which different modes of attack are more clearly discernible, creating a bracing dissonance.

KEN JOHNSON