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Michael Goldberg

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Review

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Exhibitions

Michael Goldberg

Paintings, Drawings

Lennon, Weinberg

through February 20

BY J. BOWYER BELL

THOSE OF YOU WHO VALUE art should place a large checkmark alongside your gallery itinerary to make certain you see Michael Goldberg's exhibition at Lennon, Weinberg, where a glorious, full-color experience awaits: two rooms teeming with mature, splendid works, drawings and paintings, all hot from the studio, one yet unstretched. What we have is the culmination of a career, ripe and wondrous works where everything appears to come easily and with dash, but the complexity of these exercises gives us great painting rather than mere felicity of signature.

The best of these works are not only some of the best works of Goldberg's long and various career, but some of the best paintings being done today.

These are swirling, happy, color paintings, paintings that indicate delight in their making, and demonstrate the enormous experience and skill that can, seemingly effortlessly, be brought to bear on the surface. This work is the culmination of a career spent elaborating and extending what the founding father's of the New York School proposed. In lesser hands, these could have become shallow if elegant works, decorative, like many of those still being painted today by the young, or, worse yet, pretentious evidence of conflict waged upon the canvas — all slashes and dribbles, usually signifying that the maker knows the posture and the program, but not anything worth fighting about.

But in Goldberg's hands, as in others', Norman Blum or Milton Resnick or Joan Mitchell, for example, often if not always the painter has had a long, hard slog to fight off influence, the charms of derivation and elaboration, to find within the cannon a way forward. Some simply switched styles. Al Leslie once de Kooning's heir moved into huge realist nudes — even and at last Resnick inserted uncertain figures into the great expansive of elegant brushwork. Others persevered. They did not revolt against the first generation as did Stella or Twombly; they were, addicted to the brush, not attracted to color fields and soaked canvas, but moved on rather than out. They did their thing, evolving, changing almost always making good work. And this Goldberg has done, made his own work, made work that comes after the golden era that is in itself glorious and golden, spectacular if no longer novel.

What one sees here is what one gets

not evidence of a war or theory in three-dimensions, but a burst of energy transformed into tangible art works, works that swirl and twirl on the wall. Some are more effective than others — all paintings are not equal, and I find Goldberg's use of the grid less entrancing than the free flow of line that shows up in so many of the drawings and to enormous advantage in *THE JOLLY STOMPERS III*, 1997, — where Goldberg stomps out and about in a carefully organized, wholly spontaneous swirl — a touch of this, a taste of Twombly, the colors not unlike Mitchell's, refined expressionism, all abstracted, absorbed made his own.

So there you are really neat paintings, really lots and lots — maybe too many for one visit — of fine and finished drawings — and a feast for the eye in a world of concepts and contexts. No one has to explain these paintings, only to wallow in their delight — and wallowing in delight in this case arises from work with more aesthetic content per square inch than all the serious art, all the residue of pop culture or political correct exercises which can be seen in an afternoon's stroll through Chelsea.

There will undoubtedly be, as has been the case in the past, much to savor and treasure in the future that is a residue of pop culture or politically correct objects in a different polity — liking paint and Goldberg does not exclude one from liking work arising from a different generational view or for different purpose.

So come one come all. What one gets from these paintings is intense visual pleasure, not lessons, Bacon's screaming pope, not a tilted steel beam or conceptual angst. Goldberg gives us passion and color, excited delight, a sunshine moment extended — and all but the grouchy can come, savor and go out into the everyday world of SoHo better off for the exercise.