

# ARTnews

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## Inside the Artist's Studio

Did the Met Overlook a Michelangelo?  
Norton Simon's Secret Auction Signals  
Tanguy ■ Calder ■ Kurland





cartoonish creatures with boxy mouths and big ears, snippets of text, eyeballs with links to Buddhist and Hindu iconography, and a wide assortment of other curiosities. The overall effect is pleasingly maximalist.

Brookes's technique suggests affinities with Ryan McGinness and Shepard Fairey. And like those artists, Brookes is a crossover figure. Straddling the worlds of graphic design and art, he has attracted a fan base from the surf and skate cultures for his illustration work. But this exhibition, "Bigger, Brighter, Bolder," with 12 large paintings and an assortment of tiny ones, demonstrated that Brookes isn't content simply to adapt his established style to canvas. The imagery here was looser, more painterly, and the array of symbolic forms more expansive.

There were three broad categories of paintings on view. Most numerous were the animal portraits. Each creature depicted looked a bit generic in contour and pose, but the cornucopia of little forms within supplied a seductive energy. By contrast, the tondo paintings, all with slender rays radiating from the center like a cosmic pinwheel, were forceful and polished. *Tiger, Tiger* (2009) by itself constituted the third group. Its imagery is derived from William Blake's poem "The Tyger," but Brookes's palette verges on the psychedelic, and the picture incorporates Blake's text into its landscape with a dreamlike effective-

ness. If this work signals a new, higher ambition to bring together concept and form, background and subject, detail and grand design, then Brookes is an artist worth following.

—Robert L. Pincus

## 'People, Places & Things'

Naples Museum of Art  
Naples, Florida

In this show, an engaging snapshot of contemporary realism, painters Ben Aronson and Joel Babb and photographer Alec Soth brought diverse approaches to landscape and portraiture.

Aronson's luscious impastos depict Manhattan's skyscrapers and concrete canyons, Paris's stately buildings, and San Francisco's skyline with great dexterity. In these cityscapes, he contrasts blurry, impressionistic foregrounds with near-photorealistic distant views. The artist's figurative works are equally deft. In *The Recollection* (2008), the precise detailing of the fine restaurant in the background opposes the gauziness of the young blond woman, whose blue eyes seem lost in reverie.

Aronson's *Nighthawks* (2008), taking off from Edward Hopper's iconic image, depicts three people in an elegant bar with a Maxfield Parrish-style mural glowing in the background. Despite the differences in setting and format between Hopper's and Aronson's works, both share the palpable mood of isolation in public.

Babb brings new vigor to landscape painting, while recalling such masters as Worthington Whittredge and Frederic Edwin Church. In large pictures, Babb takes the viewer deep into Southern swamps and woods

or along Maine's rugged coast. Like Whittredge, Babb seems happiest immersed among tangled trees. He is particularly adept at painting still water, rendering its reflective and multihued surface with full control of both near and far perspective.

Soth photographs the odd and the ordinary in rich color. *Herman's Bed, Kenner, Louisiana* (2002) is a riot of blue lights and strings of plastic Mardi Gras beads, while *Buena Vista, Iowa* (2002) depicts guy-wires holding a dilapidated Christ onto a cross.

—Donald Miller

## Robert Swedroe

Contessa  
Cleveland

The shiny, complex, resin-coated collages of Miami Beach artist and architect Robert Swedroe project vitality and zest for life through visual excess and sensory overload. The 140 works in this show were divided into two major groups. The eye-jangling "Cyber Series" section focused on pieces with clashing geometries and bright, retina-tingling color, while the collages in "Narrative Assemblage" involved crowded arrangements of visual quotations, derived from Impressionist paintings and Japanese prints as well as African objects and pop-culture imagery.

The narrative collages were the less



Ben Aronson, *The Recollection*, 2008, oil on panel, 41 1/2" x 35".  
Naples Museum of Art.



Kelsey Brookes, *Goofball Gobbledy-Gook*, 2009,  
mixed media on canvas, 36" x 36". Quint Contemporary Art.

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