

Greg Drasler at Betty Cunningham

by Noah Dillon



Greg Drasler, *Mergers and Acquisitions*, oil on canvas, 50 by 70 inches, 2011.
Courtesy Betty Cunningham Gallery, New York.

Greg Drasler's oil paintings from the nineties and early-oughts—solitary housewares suspended by cords in oddly decorated domestic corners—are affecting. They skirt lines between representation and abstraction, play and sobriety. His new show, “On the Lam” at Betty Cunningham, rarely indulges in such feeling. Rather, most of the new paintings throng with signs and what registers as emotional emptiness.

Drasler appears indebted to the visual style of WPA artists and photographers, even calling out Walker Evans by name. He shares their enthusiastic narrative celebration of Americana. But Drasler's hodgepodge of clichéd references comes across as cloying and confused. Most of the paintings show the interiors of classic cars—behemoths of postwar American luxury redecorated with textile patterns and set against fanciful backdrops. *Mergers and Acquisitions* (2011) depicts a bisected sedan overlooking a seascape, its upholstery flattened into earth tone argyle and turquoise zigzag with “LLP” monogrammed on the dashboard. Steering wheels project into both the drivers' and passengers' seats, as well as the back

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seat. Two lanterns allude to the ride of Paul Revere. Ultimately, these weighty and loaded signs don't pay off. Instead, Drasler's casual piling of allusions yields a cluttered, overloaded allegory. The gallery furnishes Drasler's written "Reflections on the Works." Unfortunately this handout adds nothing of clarity to the images: the dissociated tract instead only verbalizes mixed metaphors similar to those the paintings have made visible.

While Drasler's paintings can look overly fussy, in the show's largest work, *On the Lam* (2011), one broad swath of cadmium green over colorful patchwork blankets and trailers wins the scene. It splashes over a caravan and across contrived quilts and carriages in a single stroke seems spontaneous, direct, and thoughtful. *For Walker Evans* (2010) also succeeds. Drasler imagines as a lover a camera, attached to a tripod and laid in a sedan's back seat. The paint is seductive, leading us through the car and into the woods in the background. Letting go of the illusion of gravitas in this painting, Drasler is spritely and engaging.

Also included are four paintings similar to his past work: dangling wares in the corner of a room, each named for one of the four seasons. In *Winter* (2010), a ski lift hangs stiffly, simultaneously buoyant and broken. Here, Drasler's attention to form, light, and touch is more focused, and generous color creates atmosphere. The paintings are eerie and their storytelling relies on subtlety and imagination rather than excessive amalgamations. It's a feat to make a single tool or toy so alive and engaging. Instead of illustrating sensation, he translates it.

~Noah Dillon



Greg Drasler, *On the Lam*, oil on linen on two panels, 70 by 160 inches, 2011. Courtesy Betty Cunningham Gallery, New York.