

APRIL 22–APRIL 28, 2009

Best in Show

Recommendations
by Robert Shuster

André Ethier: 'Heading South'

Derek Eller Gallery
615 West 27th Street, 212-206-6411
Through May 16



Art

The Lurid Unreal

Automatism, embraced by the surrealists as a direct path to the subconscious, has often seemed like a conceptual gimmick, but for André Ethier, spontaneity is a practical necessity. The Canadian painter mixes his oils with a varnish-like solution that dries quickly—so fast that he's acting, he says, on little more than urges. This may explain the artist's recurring nightmare imagery: psychedelic visions and lurid portraits of half-human beasts. Here, among a dozen such works, there's a shaggy creature looking morose, a shoe sprouting a Van Gogh-ish swirl of flowers, and a bearded harlequin of Rabelaisian perversion. Ethier combines the grotesquerie of underground comics (à la Gilbert Shelton's *Freak Brothers*) with the front-and-center composition of the album cover, and paints it all in dark, vivid hues, which—thinned out in his solution—mix with watercolor-like blurring, enhancing the unreal. It's no surprise that red dominates, for Ethier seems to be channeling demons.



Courtesy André Ethier and Derek Eller Gallery

Quick-dry psychedelia:
Ethier's *Untitled*, 2009