

# The New York Times

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## Art in Review

### André Ethier

'Heading South'

*Derek Eller*

615 West 27th Street, Chelsea  
Through May 16

André Ethier's funny, faux-naïve paintings resemble the works of a self-taught, semi-talented high school stoner steeped in heavy-metal music, fantasy novels and the visionary arts of the French Symbolists. Mr. Ethier, who lives in Toronto and is also a professional musician, paints on easel-size panels in oleaginous glazes, creating an oozy, finger-painting-like luminosity. He makes cartoonish portraits of characters who seem to belong to some timeless ramshackle realm, like a derelict neighborhood in "The Hobbit." Subjects include gnomes; old, cigarette-smoking hippies; a Cyclops whose eye radiates mystical vibes; a bearded fellow in a green wool cap and square-framed sunglasses, eating tuna from the can; and various furry animals. Mr. Ethier also paints luxuriant floral still lifes. In one a lush bouquet grows out of an old boot on a brick floor. In all of these, steamy colors and woozy translucence produce a repulsive, hallucinatory beauty.

The appeal of Mr. Ethier's work is in the tension between lowbrow and highbrow. He's a canny semi-otician toying with kitschy craft and romantic signifiers of longing for an earthier and more soulful kind of world. The viewer stretches between opposite states of mind: one conceptually knowing, the other imaginatively tantalized. This is a good deal: you get to have it both ways.

KEN JOHNSON