

Steve DiBenedetto
 "Novelty Mapping Picnic"

Cherry and Martin
 24.1. – 4.3.2017

Steve DiBenedetto's paintings are not quite chill, but they are definitely always working on mellowing out. They each appear to have had a few harsh panic attacks, but have all learned to cope with age. They no doubt dropped a shit ton of acid in their younger years, but now that weed is basically legal, they're more or less like, "Hey! That's what I'm talking about..."

Beyond the broadly onerous labor and painterly panache of "Novelty Mapping Picnic," the vibe of each picture is simultaneously irritable yet affable, like your favorite family member. Every rectangle on view contains hours of hemming and hawing within it. The scruffy sci-fi tableau *Cluster* (2008–2015), for example, took DiBenedetto nearly a decade to complete. This kneaded kook of a painting is just one member of an alluring posse of misfits that embrace and eradicate art history, referencing such rough-and-rumble masters as Asger Jorn, Jean Dubuffet, and Terry Winters while proudly and legitimately standing firm as DiBenedettos.

Calibration of Indifference (2015) and *An Opera of Paranoia* (2016) are the sorts of elaborate doodles that Coors-crushing metalheads and Monster-sipping D&D wizards equally geek out about, but translated to linen with oil paint and the jazzy sophistication of cultivated consciousness. The pockmarked portrait *You'll See It When You Believe It* (2015), cleverly uses complementary colors to cautiously draw one into its revamped Art Brut charisma. And while not galaxies apart from the oth-



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Above:
Antitechture, 2011–16
 Oil on linen
 91 x 61 cm

Below:
Green Line, 2016
 Oil on linen
 51 x 41 cm

ers, *Green Line* (2016) is an altogether more dashing pictorial romp.

It's refreshingly admirable and endearing to witness such confidence and anxiety battling it out in paintings without the conversation having to be so heavily focused on painting itself. As personified and modernized artifacts, these average-sized guys pick at and pop their pimples before they go on dates, even though they know how that's going to turn out for them. They somehow adroitly manage to find all the coolest crap on eBay and never brag to their friends about their bargain buys. They're strange without making you feel too uncomfortable. They're intellectual without making you feel at all patronized. Actually, how do they make you feel?

Maybe that's the most charming thing about these paintings – they don't assume anything about the viewer. They don't assume anything about themselves, either. It's highly possible that they don't assume anything at all. Perhaps we can learn something from these intuitively analytical paintings. That is, if we stop being so presumptuous, we can potentially learn to be intuitively analytical, as well. Here's the rub, though: unlike paintings, many of us humans struggle daily between floating in confidence and drowning in anxiety. This is why we tend to regularly retreat back into our own worlds, whether in paintings or elsewhere.

Keith J. Varadi