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SAN ANTONIO

Roy Dowell at Finesilver

Roy Dowell's collages are reminiscent of Pop art's cheerful embrace of the two-dimensional world of advertising. His saturated palette, which includes bright, opaque reds, yellows, blues and greens, recalls Lichtenstein's paintings, as do his graphic black lines and scraps of paper printed with Benday dot patterns. Because the sources of these scraps are posters and billboards, the French *affichistes* come to mind as well, but the single most important reference is to Cubism, a style of little consequence for most contemporary artists. Dowell makes it fresh and interesting again.

The recent exhibition at Finesilver included five easel-sized paintings on panel and 20 smaller framed works on paper. Crowded (in a good way) and bustling, the show emanated a carnivalesque cheer that was reinforced by the works' acrobatic compositions. Almost entirely covered with neatly cut pieces of found printed paper, the surfaces are also streaked with linear brushstrokes and small passages of transparent washes. Although an eyeball or a fragment of a word or a letter might appear here and there, the information previously conveyed by the printed material has been excised to the point that it has a purely formal significance. Reduced to abstract elements, like the individual pieces of paper in Picasso's and Braque's collages prior to their synthesis into guitars and wine bottles, Dowell's paper elements are juxtaposed to create carefully balanced and

tightly knit compositions, evidence of his artful eye and exquisite sense of weight and proportion.

The maturation of Dowell's work is signaled by progressively buoyant compositions and looser paint handling. In contrast to the other works (all from 2001) in this exhibition, *Untitled* (#684) of 1996 is characterized by a heavier hand, ponderous forms and weighty balance. The black brushstrokes that articulate a pair of circular forms on this horizontal painting are thicker and appear to have been applied slowly and with more force than the painted elements in recent works. *Untitled* (#839) and *Untitled* (#841) depend on a centralized focus from which the collaged and painted shapes seem to spin. In the former, a large floral motif, with a circle of printed paper serving as the flower's center, is made up of extended elliptical "petals," one of which is a magnified photograph of a strawberry. Curving black lines—some painted, others printed—on white grounds, cut circles of paper (including the aforementioned eyeball) and bright yellow passages also appear in the painting.

The smaller works on paper range from well mannered to almost tasteless. Most are carefully composed, like collages by Schwitters, but *Untitled* (#825) includes a sprinkling of glitter, and *Untitled* (#833) is daringly close to the spiky linear style of Bernard Buffet.

Thinking back to the paintings that Dowell began showing 15 years ago, I recall a then-unusual reference, in palette and pattern, to 1950s decor. His latest work demonstrates that the artist has always been just out of sync with prevailing tastes and trends, and thankfully so.

—Frances Colpitt



Roy Dowell: *Untitled* (#841), 2001, acrylic and collage on panel, 36 by 28 inches; at Finesilver.