

Pagel, David. "When Details Add Up to a Sign of Something Big." *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1997, p. F28.

Imagine tossing a dozen images torn from billboards into a gigantic blender, giving them a whirl and then carefully pasting the fragments onto large panels. This will give you an idea of what Roy Dowell's new paintings at Margo Leavin Gallery look like.

More important, it will also give you a feel for the way these intuitive, user-friendly works balance the passion of a libertine against the precision of a surgeon—with felicity, grace and vigor.

Bigger and bolder than ever before, Dowell's crisp, Pop images are tighter and more focused than any of his earlier works. To look at these abstract pictures of colorful signage is to sense a surge in the 46-year-old artist's confidence. Flaunting the fact that they were fun to make, these punchy works simultaneously suggest that their pleasures lie in the discipline with which they were finessed into existence: one little bit at a time.

Although all of Dowell's giddy pictures consist of posters, advertisements and bits of billboard imagery that have been rearranged and painted over to form energized compositions, you'll be more than tempted to call the page-size works on paper "drawings" and the large panels "paintings."

In the first gallery, 16 small drawings are all jazzy improvisation and playful experimentation. Jagged edges of ripped paper stand in as swift little gestures made with the wrist. Unburdened by the seriousness of permanence, Dowell's little works have the presence of sketches: intimate, one-on-one and touching.

By contrast, his collaged paintings in the other two galleries are all resolution and measure. No torn edges appear in these muscular works, which are made up instead of decisive lines and razor-sharp geometries.

To lock their compositions into place, Dowell uses paint like the mortar that holds brick walls together. Matching his palette to the nearest collaged element, he fuses juxtaposed components to one another—not quite seamlessly, but with great economy. The resulting paintings may be off-balance, but they're never offhand.

All of Dowell's pulsating pictures of abstract animation show that what something's made of is not nearly as important as how it works. His art is not one of earth-shattering breakthroughs or chest-thumping triumphs, but one in which meticulous adjustments and painstaking calibrations add up to a whole lot more than their parts.

■ Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 N. Robertson Blvd., (310) 273-0603, through Nov. 1. Closed Sundays and Mondays.