



By TANIA RALLI

Contributing Writer

Fassbender Stevens Gallery is showing two German painters who appear to be just as interested in the process of making art—if not more so—as they are in the final artwork. Both artists generously slather portions of their canvases with thick oils, and leave other areas flat and glossy, in what proves to be a worthwhile series of experiments in the technique of painting.

Sven Drühl appropriates images from known and unknown artists for his work. In his titles, he makes inexplicit references to the artists by using their initials. Some of the artists—like Alex Katz—spring quickly to mind because of the shape Drühl's paintings take, whereas another painting that mimics Caspar David Friedrich looks nothing like the German Romantic's work.

Yet by using pre-established images, Drühl does not confine himself to painting in his predecessor's style. Each work is distinctly his own as he uses caulking to delineate different parts of the canvas. *C. D. F.*, named for Friedrich, is a popping, contemporary take on landscape painting. Fuchsia hollyhocks burst out in the foreground of the painting, and ripples of viscous green paint conjure a forest of pine trees. The woods are interspersed with fields, colored in such a way that they look



Drühl, S.W.



Drühl, A.K.

awash with marigold dust. White clouds splash against the sky, not at all unlike the clouds that Friedrich painted, which he teased across his canvases rather than painting cotton candy puffs.

In a way, this painting in particular has a sort of Japanese pop aesthetic, with its bright colors and instant appeal. There is something immediately satisfying about each of Drühl's paintings. More than just the tactility of each work, Drühl seems to paint with a handy confidence in an effortless manner.

In another of the works, titled *S.W.*, Drühl casts the painting of a friend as his subject. Peering into a courtyard, the image has an impromptu feeling. A dark tree trunk surges through the center of the picture, and snarled vines obscure the view. Combined with the palate of strong colors, the painting has a primitive quality—primitive in the way in which 19th century French painters embraced foreign influences from Japan and Africa.

By using appropriated images, Drühl seems to set the task of inventing a picture aside, instead focusing his energies on various types of brushstrokes and shiny infusions of paint. The sundry paintings on display boast different textures, from thick dabs to the impenetrable gloss of lacquer.

This variety of technique within the paintings unites

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# The art of slathering

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Drühl with the other painter being shown at Fassbender. However, beyond the intrigue of presenting smooth and coarse strokes of paint in a single work, the work of Jürgen Grölle looks nothing like Drühl's. Some of the same subjects are present—like landscapes—but Grölle approaches his work from a starker, abstractionist point of view.

With the exception of his works on paper, all of Grölle's paintings are large. *Leider kein Hirsch mehr da* (a rather cumbersome title that, loosely translated, means "Alas no more Deer to be seen") portrays, fittingly, an empty landscape. It is strictly the bare bones of a landscape, and in the tradition of abstraction the image calls upon the viewer's imagination to fill in the details and to make something coherent of the shapes.

Taken element by element, the picture's shapes sit on a vast, even field of bright yellow. A distant hill emerges as a contained finger painting in green. The forefront of the canvas is held up with wide bands of oil paint, so thick they look like frosting and, frankly, half a chocolate cake.

*Cute Smile Wuppertal* is marked with a spontaneous sludge of white paint that dashes across the large canvas. But the smooth, monochromatic

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835 W. Washington Blvd.  
312/666-5913. Tuesday  
through Friday, 9:30 a.m.  
to 5:30 p.m. Saturday, 11 a.m.  
to 5:30 p.m.  
Both exhibitions run  
through July 6.

background coalesces better with a crisp shape that looks like a big, tropical leaf. In fact, the background seems to have been painted around the leaf, which has blackish-green ridges achieved with thinner coats of paint and a physically imperceptible texture.

Grölle employs unusual color combinations, pairing periwinkle and shades of pink with olive green and forest green. The colors are unnatural, in the sense that they seem manufactured and new.

Whereas the various elements of Drühl's painting create a cohesive whole, Grölle's works fall short in their dissonance of styles. The abstract shapes are isolated from one another on the canvas and appear to have very little relation to one another. The lack of focus is furthered by the disparate manners of painting. Technically speaking, each work displays feats of painting with oils, but the viewer is left looking at an exercise in painting, not a complete work of art.



Jürgen Grölle's *Cute Smile Wuppertal*.