

Studio Visit

Larry Mullins A Studio Visit

James Kalm

If like me you've been following the twists and turns of New York painting hitting not only the airplane hanger sized palaces of corporate commercialism, but also the alternative to the alternatives, then you may have bumped in to paintings by Larry Mullins. He was a featured artist in the recent Brooklyn Rail's "Made in Brooklyn" show, a Williamsburg Salon _ Refuse, a nose thumbing at the "other" survey show taking place across the East River on 75th Street. Or you may have seen examples while visiting the back gallery at Bellweather where he's scheduled for a one-man show in '03. Once viewed, the works resonate in memory. They have a lean muscularity not unlike a tweaked out hot rod, stripped down for street racing with power to spare. Phrases and typefaces are used in a linguistic game of mix and match, seeking a kind of internal equilibrium as well as poetic significance. The paintings have a graphic flatness and high contrast which requires a momentary pause for the eye to begin to discern the closely hued tonal grounds. I caught up with Larry at his studio in downtown Brooklyn.

JK: Tell me about the paintings.

LM: Well the paintings are language driven, and I'm using abstraction sort of to support them. It's the music behind the lyric in a way. I'm trying to stay somewhere between sign painting and getting my message across.

JK: Did you actually work as a sign painter at any time?

LM: No I've always had a fondness for type and things of that sort. They got under my skin a little more maybe than most people, just because I had some sort of affection for them. Then about a year ago I started using these Gothic fonts. I've found some other ones too. I'm finding nice combinations.

JK: Is this "Old English" or is it "Black German"?

LM: That comes out of a book about 100 Gothic alphabets. Some of them are so psychedelic that it really takes a long time to get a grip on them. Their beauty is just enough.

JK: How important is the language. Is there a poetic thing that you're also working on?

LM: Yeah definitely. Sounds, cadence and the philosophy of speed are things I'm interested in. It's nice if there's something quick going on or there's something slow happening. It's nice to go back and forth with the language. It feels so natural to be working trying to find the right way to say something, then turning it over and doing something that's very decorative in a way that draws attention to it.

JK: What do you look on as your influences? I asked about sign painting, is there anything else?

LM: The "Psychedelic." The things that came out of that, they were so wonderful. That stuff had such integrity to it. I liked that. In a way, these things are bits and pieces of a lot of things I really like, or love. I was in Tribeca one day about a year and a half ago and this was on the ground (holds up a paper coffee cup printed with thick swirls.) One of the ideas that drive these pieces is that there is a whole lot of work coming out of a simple paper cup.

JK: If I just walked in and was trying to read these, because of the type face I might think that there's a Gothic sensibility, but then you have this other font that is like 1880's side show lettering and other elements floating through there.

LM: Yeah, times are combined. They are sort of like semi-psychedelic medieval sign paintings. To me that's a description I can live with.