

Art

Chris Martin

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Anton Kern Gallery, through Nov 15
(see Chelsea)

Artists have always rummaged through history, borrowing from previous periods or oeuvres. But for contemporary painters like Chris Martin, this practice has become almost a *raison d'être*, which is understandable, given that art's driving force these days is money, and the moneyed, while happy to pay lip service to ideas, aren't really interested in the arguments that used to motivate artists. So stylistic mix-and-match has become *de rigueur*.

Some ways of going about it are better than others, however, and anyway, displaying a keen understanding of art history has never been an impediment to quality. Martin, who is making his Anton Kern debut, is a case in point: Over the past 25 years, he's brought a fierce intelligence to the problem of painting in the new millennium, which is no longer a question of whether painting is dead or not but rather of where it goes from here. His search for an answer yields reliably compelling results.

His latest work continues to balance abstraction and representation through a *mélange* of genres high and low, from funky folk art to classic modernism. Surface treatment remains a concern, and in this show, glitter is employed to impart an unearthly



PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS MARTIN. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ANTON KERN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

sheen to compositions that range from color fields to evocations of surreal plant life. Torn-out images from vintage magazines pepper some of the canvases, including one recalling George Harrison.

Martin's paintings are humorous though not ironic: Their pleasures are offered sincerely if self-reflexively. And while it's tempting to find within them a note of nostalgia or loss for what was once achievable in art, it's

just as fair to say that they look forward to a future when everything is possible again.—Howard Halle

THE BOTTOM LINE Glitter adds glamour to smartly done paintings.

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