

Los Angeles Times

In Scott Anderson's 'Supper Club' paintings, pretty isn't the point

By DAVID PAGEL APR 14, 2016 | 8:54 AM



Scott Anderson, "Oligarchs at an Olive Garden," 2016, oil and oil crayon on canvas, 60 inches by 66 inches. (Courtesy of the artist and CES Gallery)

Scott Anderson's eight new paintings in "Supper Club" at CES Gallery are not particularly attractive. Ugly colors, cluttered compositions and ham-fisted paint-handling make for works in which rudimentary images burble up from unsettled backgrounds awhirl with undigested restlessness.

Anderson's oils on canvas are also intellectually sophisticated, physiologically complex and psychologically ambivalent.

Each is an odd *mélange* of abstraction and figuration, a conflicted mess so radically idiosyncratic that it is out of step with itself, many times over. Deeply discombobulated, a painting by Anderson does not march to the beat of its own drum so much as it strives to keep time with a slew of different rhythms. Each of its marks, shapes, figures and forms strikes out on its own adventure. Anarchy ensues.

Ordinary assumptions cannot be trusted. Expectations are defied with such vim and vigor that they also fall by the wayside. No hand-holder, Anderson makes art for grownups. Viewers are left to our own devices.

Think of his paintings as the visual equivalent of burps. Gassy and atmospheric — and with surprising kick — they relate to our bodies in ways that less confident, and less original, works of art do not.

The emotional roller-coaster begins with "Farm to Table Dinner Theatre," a 5-by-4-foot canvas whose figure-ground ambiguity turns space inside out. Big city trends and country-bumpkin entertainment make strange bedfellows in Anderson's topsy-turvy rendition of local color in a global world.

"Oligarchs at an Olive Garden" looks to the suburbs, where it finds pomp and ceremony in all walks of life. Ancient Greek ideals and money-grubbing vulgarity mix like the ingredients of an ill-conceived cocktail.

The differences between clichés and authenticity take charged shape in "El Patio," where a badly drawn Snoopy, a poorly rendered theatrical mask and an emaciated cactus make a virtue of virtuosity's absence.

Likewise, "Holding Food-Court" and "Ort" appear to be made of nothing but false starts — those moments in a project when you know that you have been pursuing the wrong goals. The only option is to stop. And start over. Not from the beginning, but further back.

Somehow, Anderson transforms mistakes and miscues and miscalculations into paintings with a life all their own. Futility and perseverance dovetail. Appearances and reality are tugged apart. The perspective that slowly unfolds reveals that just about everything in the world is not what it seems to be. Anderson's "Supper Club" leaves visitors with loads to chew on.

