



DAVID ELLIS

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NEW IMAGE ART

by Leah Ollman



Los Angeles Motion is the operative element in David Ellis's work, whether kinetic sculpture, stop-action animation or hang-on-the-wall paintings. Ten years ago he created the first of what he has come to call motion paintings: time-lapse video records of a painting's continuous making, unmaking and remaking. He shot the first one using a ceiling-mounted camera looking down onto the floor of his Brooklyn studio where, over the course of a week, he and a group of other artists took turns filling a rectangle with riffs on what had come before. The motion painting (a term originated by the avant-garde animator Oskar Fischinger) remains Ellis's most vital mode of creation, an inexhaustible metaphor for life's lack of fixity, a brilliant valuation of process over product.

The five-minute 2007 DVD in this show, *Bob Floss*, was staged like a short, comic set piece, starting with the artist and his girlfriend muttering to each other as they enter a hotel room. Ellis, in the tough-talking guise of Floss, his occasional alter ego, takes a generic pastoral landscape off the wall, cuts it loose from its frame, and begins to paint over it. Real time gives way to the accelerated, compressed record of Ellis's extended improvisation, and the continuously changing painting fills the screen. Trees are added to the landscape, then felled; the river turns black as tar; a dense cityscape clogs the horizon. The field gets covered over, the slate wiped clean, and upon the flat blankness appear a tractor, a dead bull, a fish. In the end, Ellis rehanga a landscape approximating the one he started with, but newly layered with a rich, secret history. Ellis paints with street-smart graphic clarity, but more memorable are the relentless transformations and persistent forward momentum that characterize his work. That sense of "Constant Flow," as the show was titled, permeated a series of paintings on old LP sleeves,

pages from military instruction manuals and tobacco-stained paper, all collaged and mounted on wood panels. One featured a hawk in profile and another an owl, both with neatly patterned feathers. Ellis's signature wave motif in black and silver moved through most of the paintings, ribboning out of album sleeve holes or meandering fluidly across the page, sensuous and sinuous, its essence somewhere between liquid, vapor and melody. He also painted a mural on one of the large gallery walls, of an animal-human hybrid creature with languorous eyes and vibrant gold and orange scales. Lyricism, humor and raw urgency snaked their way throughout this show, cohering with the most impact in the motion painting, with its marriage of the indelible and fleeting.

Photo: David Ellis: Bob Floss, 2007, time-lapse HD video transferred to DVD, 5 minutes; at New Image Art.



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