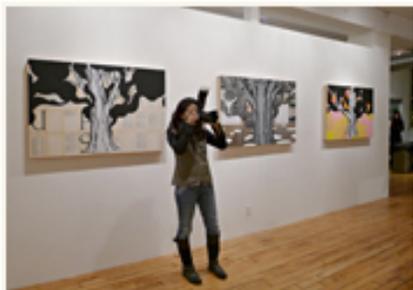




David Ellis, *True Value (Paint Fukette)*, 2011, Joshua Liner Gallery



David Ellis, "True Value," Installation view with *Blade Orbit*, 2011, on left, and *Steel Guitar*, 2011, to rear



David Ellis, "True Value," Installation view, with *MU Tree* with *Cloud*, 2011, left



David Ellis at his opening at the Joshua Liner Gallery, December 2011, photo by Misaki Matsui

## David Ellis FAST AND FURIOUS

by Walter Robinson

The Street Artist **David Ellis** was born in 1971 and so should be around 40 years old, but he shows no sign of slowing down. And it's a good thing, because Ellis has made fast a virtue like no other artist. You see it in his stop-action films, which he first made with a crew of collaborators and also does on his own, using a camera shooting bird's-eye down on the painting action taking place on the floor.

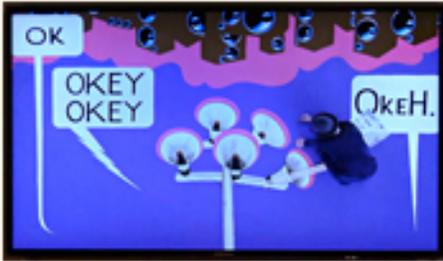
Ellis developed this technique with an unusually inspired collective called Barnstormers, a gang of artists he took down to the red-clay North Carolina town of Cameron, where he grew up, to decorate tobacco barns and other farm buildings with pretty much the wildest Wild Style ghetto highlights you can have.

The genius of the stop action is that it's a fast overlay of painting on top of painting, image on image, design on design, as Ellis pours forth the fruits of a boundless human imagination, fevered and Freudian in its bottomless depths. It's like the creativity flows out endlessly, without cease and without work either. The time just flies by, and isn't that the definition of transcendence, or at least of fun?

The picture is always changing, always new, always becoming, and is thus a parable of what art is. But with gain comes loss, as each new stroke covers over one that's already there. Patterns efface patterns, the new subsumes the old, like Shiva Nataraja dancing cosmic destruction and creation, whatever Ellis makes in one moment is erased in the next. What was just done is gone before you can even see what it is.

The stop-action is mesmerizing and magical but at the same time it's no mystery, anyone can see how it's done, just pictures, pictures, pictures, painted one after the other step by step. But it adds up to a perfect art film, a **Frank Stella** "Black Paintings" kind of art film, formally precise and perfect, a film that defines itself as the pure mind's eye, from beginning to end, an alpha and omega.

It's the kind of film that if the Whitney Museum were doing a biennial, you'd think Ellis' work would be in it, but no, not this time. For now, you can watch them on a LCD screen at the gallery, or see similar works on YouTube [here](#) and [here](#). The vids are eight or nine minutes long (and priced at \$8,500, in small editions).



David Ellis, *OK* (video still), 2011, Joshua Liner Gallery



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David Ellis, *OK* (video still), 2011, Joshua Liner Gallery

[Here](#) is a YouTube vid of Ellis talking about something else, one of his signature Rube Goldberg "player piano" contraptions made out of leftover stuff destined for the trash. The current show at Joshua Liner Gallery has one of these sculptures, the automated drumming machine constructed from used cans of white paint in various sizes, whose lids move with a rhythm all their own. It's called *True Value*, and besides giving its name to the show is the work that won a prize at Pulse New York earlier this year.

Also included in the exhibition is a range of paintings, sweet and spiritual smaller ones done on tobacco-stained paper and large and muscular ones on canvas (priced between \$3,750 and \$25,000). These are Ellis' signature works in a literal sense, featuring an official Street Art graphic, a black-and-white waveform, or "flow," that courses through the pictorial space, over and around fragments of the real world. As such they illustrate a kind of dark mania, a stream of free consciousness set loose in space.

David Ellis, "True Value," Dec. 15, 2011-Jan. 14, 2012, at [Joshua Liner Gallery](#), 548 West 28th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001

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