



MIKE PERRY, A SMALL PILE OF ROCKS IN WATER. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY.

Taittinger Gallery Presents Mike Perry's provocative third show: "Fluidic Space and a Cosmic Cocktail"

By ANTHONY HADEN-GUEST

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Fluidic Space and a Cosmic Cocktail, Mike Perry's third show at the Taittinger Gallery at 156 Ludlow in New York City's LES, is an engaging and provocative hang. The work veers from the cartoony to pure abstraction, then to semi-abstractions that suggest signs, others which include eyes, invoke woodlands or feature whiplike lashes of pigment and these turn out to represent moving waters pictured from above. "I love nature, I'm a nature person," Perry says. "I like being outside." Of the waterscapes he simply says "I didn't see the ocean until I was twelve. That was in San Diego." Interpenetrating Splashes, one of these waterscapes, is at once convincing and vividly colored. Perry's pigments are mostly gouache and his use of color is radical in that he steers clear of the brushy paint-handling of, say, the Ab Exes to produce pictures as bright and gleeful as those in a children's book. His titling of his work can also be a quirky add, as with Swimming in it and Neons Leave Teeth.



MIKE PERRY, SWIMMING IN IT, 2022. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY.

It's a striking that Fluidic Space should be up at Taittinger precisely when the big show at London's statuesque Somerset House is occupied by Cute, which presents images and artefacts, featuring the culture of adorably vulnerable big-eyed infants, puppies and kittens that has become a worldwide phenomenon, and Cute also includes work by artists who are, one way and another, channeling this work. So it would be tempting to label the work Pop Art II but it's way different, not being simply generated from merchandising and mass media as Warhol made images of Coca Cola and Chairman Mao, and sculpted Brillo boxes. Cute-type materials are part of the real world and right now, just when Barbie and Hello Kitty have squooshed the de-copyrighted Mickey Mouse, men and women are walking the streets with grinning merch-originated homunculi on their clothing and bug-eyed soft toys dangle from bikes. Cute is everywhere.

This is relevant because Perry's work was generated from much the same sources. He observes that he was born in 1981, the same year as MTV, and that comicbooks weren't his main energiser. "It was more TV. A lot of cartoons. Bugs Bunny, Roadrunner, all that kind of stuff," he said. "My favorite was the Pink Panther. He sees the door on the ground ... he opens the door and fall down into it ... all these absurd strange things."

Such socio-cultural forces have been continually gathering speed and that has been a determining factor in the development of his work. "It was a moment in time that things started to move faster," Perry says of his start-up period. "There was more cable news and more channels and so much more media. Like bright colors. In the 80s people were wearing fluorescent colors, there was new technology, new fashion, new pop culture stuff. I can't help but feel that I was a child of that era."

There's a certain amount of work in Cute that's a bit creepy. But I don't see any punk in Mike Perry's work. I observed that there was nothing malignant about his painted eyes. Right, he says.

"I'm a big fan of Jim Henson who did The Muppets and Sesame Street" he told me "I read about how he would make a puppet, and the last thing he would do is come in and put the eyeballs on. He would put the dots on the eyes. Because it was such an important thing to do. I love that. So I always try to do that as part of the process. I do the whole piece, then I do the eyes of the creature. It's like where do the dots go? What is this drawing trying to say?"

So what are his drawings trying to say?

"I feel I'm like a Pop surrealist," Perry says. "Things are a bit turned upside down and abstracted. They are almost real but they are not real." The multiple ambiguities in art, the lack of the cut-and-dried clarity of signage, delight him. "I think that's one of my favorite parts about making things. Only I know what they are. Everybody else has to decide what they are. Everybody has their own point of view." WM