

Art in Review; Michael Bell-Smith

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Michael Bell-Smith operates in the gap between animated cartoons and painting with unusual effectiveness. His short digital loops, shown on small screens or paintinglike wall monitors, portray landscapes, cityscapes, figures and oblique social commentary. But their main concerns are color, space and light, tweaked and amplified by digital technology and restrained animation. Whether we are flying high above an endless suburbia, as in "Some Houses Have Pools," or looking at the artist as he stands in the middle of a Midtown street, as in "Self-Portrait NYC," the excitement lies in grasping the layers of the image and the way they do, or don't, change.

In the post-Katrina "Continue 2000," a red-caped hero stares at the setting sun from the roof of a house adrift in a flood of shimmering, patchwork color. He is going nowhere, but the sun explodes and the world turns momentarily gray, like an omen.

"Up and Away" scrolls through an encyclopedic array of panoramic horizons -- city skylines, deserts, mountains, castles, forests, oceans -- that conjure up dozens of movie genres but are actually downloaded from video games (and are so coarsely pixilated they seem Pointillist, or knitted). Now it is the viewer who goes nowhere: space is deep but never penetrated. It's like watching a deck of cards being shuffled: pick a landscape, any landscape. Mr. Bell-Smith brings new and old and static and mobile into a promising, visually enthralling alignment. ROBERTA SMITH