

Style

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Art

Go Somewhere, Young Man: A Talent in Need of a Shove

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Jason Gubbiotti, a 26-year-old Washington painter enjoying his first-ever solo at the District's new Fusebox gallery, is easily worthy of New York. This is meant as both praise and blame.

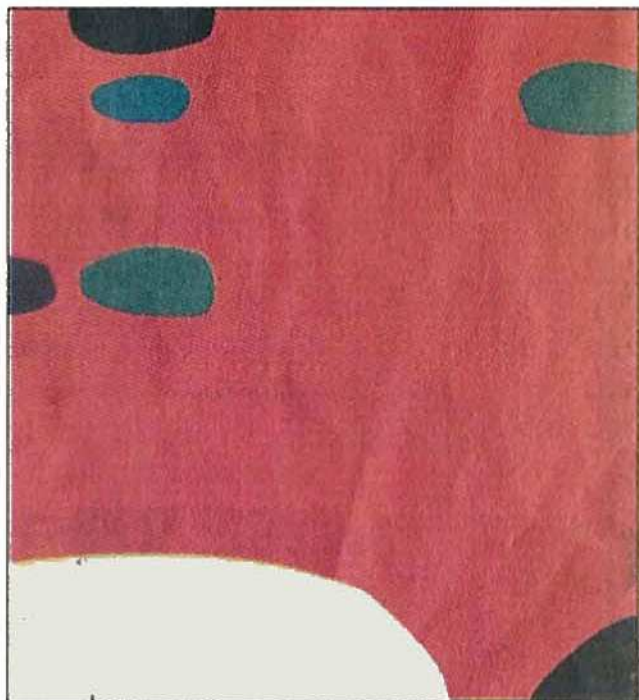
Gubbiotti, only three years after graduating from the Corcoran College of Art, has an impressive command of his medium, and a fine knowledge of its past and current practices. His abstract oils are both lovely to look at and very clever in the way their loveliness is brought about. This makes him typical of many of today's best New York painters—and helps him, and them, fall short of real significance.

Gubbiotti's works on wooden

Washington artist Jason Gubbiotti dotted camouflage colors onto awning fabric in "Scrimmage."

panels have delightfully smooth surfaces that look almost like they have been waxed and rubbed. (He refuses to divulge the "ancient Chinese secret" behind their making.) His colors are a

See ART, C2, Col. 1



FUSEBOX

A Considerable, and Too Comfortable, Talent

ART, From C1

pleasure. Too, mostly soft pastels with a drop of acid in them.

A diptych called "Survival Guide" extends over two panels painted a pale aqua, with blobs of pumpkin orange and magenta floating on them. At first his mark-making looks like it comes from accident and intuition. It appears to follow the purely formal instincts of old-time abstraction. But a closer look reveals the kind of planning that you'd expect from pictures that are of something. On the right-hand panel, the blobs are tiny, flickering across the surface like a fleet of ships shot from high above; on the left half of the piece, seven of those same blobs have been enlarged to almost football size, as though we've zoomed in on the scene without a gain in resolution. (Shades of CIA surveillance imagery.)

Gubbiotti acts as though his trivial, accidental-looking marks are in fact full-blown, thought-through motifs, worthy of reworking and rethinking in a range of colors, styles and scales. The colored swirls of his "Don't Eat Me," painted onto raw water board, started out as hand-drawn scribbles; the three navy ovals of his giant "Big Bear" are a careful blow-up of a passage stolen from a much smaller painting he calls "Sonic Imperfections," hanging farther back in Fusco. Gubbiotti takes the sample-copy-swap aesthetic of digital design and trans-

fers it to handmade oil painting. Gubbiotti's works on canvas are also clever tweakings of the materials and methods of old oils. He stretched "Scrimmage" out of safety-orange fabric, pulled straight from his father's sewing business. The biomorphs that float on it are painted gray and olive in shades the artist sampled from his kinsfolk's hunting camouflage. ("I go to Home Depot way more than I go to the art store," he says, touring me around the show.)

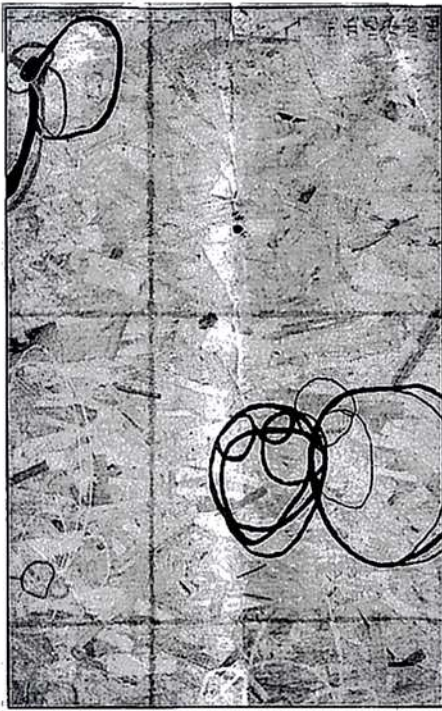
A painting called "Beta Pile" is three canvases thick: The top one bears the final image, but along the stretcher's sides, two further edges of frayed cotton just peek through, the only traces of a couple of failed works that Gubbiotti stapled over with his finished work. That visible surface is also on raw cotton, stained near its edges with veils of egg-yolk orange and midnight blue done in a paint called Magna. That was the medium once favored by Morris Louis and the other abstract painters who hit it big in Washington some 40 years ago—and Gubbiotti uses it with a deliberate knowing wink at them. (When I visited the artist's studio at the Millennium Arts Center in Southwest Washington, the air was thick with fumes from working with this noxious and archaic stuff. The effect achieved was nearly psychotropic, without the risk of doing time.) Gubbiotti's always keen to let the rough edges of his pro-

most ambitious and talented young artists—which is why he needs to leave town soon, for someplace where he doesn't have that status. He needs to head someplace where leaving frayed edges on a canvas or putting oils onto messy water board no longer counts as "testing" the parameters of painting," as he says he wants to do. Elegant tweaks and charming twiddles aren't enough; he ought to slash and burn. Gubbiotti talks about a friend who once asked him, "Why does art always have to be weird?" He should be around the kind of people who will tell him that his art is not

yet nearly weird enough.

New York and its massive marketplace won't do the trick: Positive feedback from even more contented buyers could only do him harm. He ought to go farther afield—maybe to Europe, or to the famously ferocious grad schools of L.A.—where new peers and mentors could prod him to take his art new places.

Jason Gubbiotti: Field Trip is at Fusebox, 1412 14th St. NW, through Dec. 23. Call 202-269-9220 or visit www.fuseboxdc.com.



Gubbiotti says he's "testing the parameters of painting" with raw works like "Don't Eat Me."

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