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LUHRING AUGUSTINE

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Josh Smith
LUHRING AUGUSTINE
531 West 24th Street
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View of "Josh Smith," 2011

In his third solo exhibition at this gallery, the indefatigable Josh Smith employs a form of morbid humor through a study of memento mori that treads the line between irony and sincerity. A macabre sensibility lurks in his recent paintings, which might elicit a shudder or a smirk. Scrawled depictions of skeletons, insects, and decaying leaves are a few of the subjects here, all made manifest in an elaborate production that involves an infinite amount of permutations. One room presents several collaged panels made with scans of Smith's previous paintings, their colors warped and modulated, along with layers of silk-screened images and newsprint. These works are hung in an orderly grid, and their imagery emerges from their built-up surfaces, only to disappear into abstraction. As if to foreshadow Smith's signature repetitiveness, a few homemade aluminum stop sign paintings appear as a glib note to self in this room, and yet they are unyielding in their provocation.

The tongue-wagging panels meet the vaudevillian in Smith's "Stage Paintings," 2011, where rough-hewn platforms showcase a draped piece of canvas on which the artist's name is rendered, akin to his earlier works. Illuminated by clamp-on lights, these stages, supports for the drop cloth paintings, literally collapse and fold up onto themselves, ready to be rolled away for the next show. They are installed as a cluster in the back gallery, and their self-containment—practical in their portability—evinces the forethought of construction. Throughout, Smith generates an experience in this show where painting, in its extension into different forms—as backdrop, as sign, or as memorial—performs in a greater capacity, perhaps for a wider audience.

— Piper Marshall