

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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Benjamin Edwards GREENBERG VAN DOREN GALLERY

Benjamin Edwards's new paintings depict landscapes of bland contemporary architecture seen from great distances: a convenience store at the end of a landing strip, a mall across a parking lot, a condo several unbuilt lots away. All is surface: The ground is a mosaic of vectors; corporate logos, streams of numbers, letters, and unidentified shapes whoosh through the air as if on their way to complete some other building somewhere else. The architecture feels provisionally assembled rather than solidly built—there is no left, only planes that happen to pass each other or intersect in virtual space.

The aforementioned logos hover like cartoon thought bubbles, and occasional passages of texture interrupt the paintings' surfaces by introducing an element that's tactile and—in such a flat, pristine world—somewhat suspect, the remains of something dirty and organic (in one painting, a small portion of the surface looks blood-encrusted). Otherwise, Edwards's world is rendered in colors that are cheerful though somehow dispiriting, as though chosen by a focus group. In the background, the glow of a natural but overheated sky reminds us how close in coloring are the sentimental and the apocalyptic. These worlds are inhabited by human, or at least humanoid, figures, but they exist in various states of transparency and pixilation, tending to blur around the edges and at points of contact with the topography. In the far distance, haloed and unreachable, shimmers futuristic, aspirational architecture, a conflation of the ideal and the unreal that helps slot the whole of Edwards's imagined universe somewhere between the utopian and the merely impractical.

The question of how space is currently defined, artistically and philosophically, is Edwards's chief concern in these paintings. Perspective is handled deftly: Most of the works place us to one side of the "action," so that the elements seem to career past, missing us by inches, leaving us dazed. In *We*, 2006, however, the largest work in the exhibition and the one that gave the show its title (derived from that of Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian novel), Edwards applies the precise and willful kind of perspective that in Renaissance painting leads the eye to the Christ child. Here, it acts as a threshold, inviting us to step into the work's intricate mesh and become one of its pixilated figures. The sense of motion that characterizes the other works is temporarily held at bay, paused a moment before absorption into the digital realm. It is, however, one's own personal digital realm, replete with phrases pulled from contemporary advertising ("you cre[a]te, you join").

In previous paintings, Edwards layered multiple views on top of each other, evincing his process, which included taking multiple site photographs, consulting satellite maps, and working out provisional compositions on a computer. In his recent works, this dense stratification has given way to a progressively more translucent ephemerality—buildings and bodies are temporary, and are buffeted by the winds of commerce. All space may be MySpace, but once we cross the digital threshold imaged in these paintings, there's no guarantee against becoming just another string of numbers flying across the landscape to complete an anonymous transaction.

—Emily Hall



Benjamin Edwards,
We, 2006, oil and
mixed media on
canvas, 72 x 108".