



ART REVIEW:

Clinton Snider at Suzanne Hilberry

Clinton Snider's paintings dazzle with their technical skill. Snider, like colleague Scott Hocking, concentrates on dilapidated land- and cityscapes. His paintings stage tiny comedies within otherwise bleak environments. Snider's palette and brushwork evince careful study of the American masters. Some works share with the Regionalists and American Scene Painters an interest in the rural countryside. But unlike those utopian views of the Heartland, Snider's landscapes are forlorn. He restricts his palette to the moody grays of Albert Pinkham Ryder, and that palette casts a heaviness on even humorous scenes. Occasionally, a Luminist sunset or a flash across a river surface relieves the painting's overall weightiness.

Snider shows a highly developed sense of visual wit, and nearly half of the prolific fifty-seven oil paintings introduce jokes into otherwise quiet scenes. For example, Rembrandt van Rijn's 17th century etching, *The Rat-Catcher*, is not nearly as amusing as Snider's painting. Snider replaces Rembrandt's poison peddler with an anthropomorphic cat. The biped feline grins while rapping mice unconscious with his stick, recalling the humor and nuance of Goya. A comedic cast of supporting characters includes urban birds, rats, cats, and even itinerant persons. In *Riverbed*, sparrows frolic in a puddle, unaware of the decaying post-industrial complexes in the background. The work is most successful when the punch line is realized slowly.

Though Snider's subject format may appear tightly focused, the works exhibit a surprising extent of experimentation.



Clinton Snider, *The Rat Catcher*, 2012, oil on board, 11-3/4 × 13".
Courtesy the artist and Suzanne Hilberry Gallery.

Snider fabricated the supports for many of the paintings in the show to look like reclaimed materials. In some cases, the effect is beautiful; for instance, in the small wooden panels, glaze and wood grain coalesce to form a convincing patina. Occasionally, these experiments prove to be too heavy-handed. A larger work, *The Ten Thousand Things*, is made to look like it was painted on a decaying multi-panel billboard. The self-consciously distressed surface resembles the kitsch finishes of faux antiques. Other problematic experiments include a sexually suggestive painting called, *The Hay Wain*. This oddly corporeal landscape owes its surreal composition to the center panel of Bosch's eponymous triptych. The house perched atop an enormous mass nevertheless does not conjure the Biblical drama of Bosch's original.



Clinton Snider, *The Hay Wain*, 2011, oil on canvas, 39 × 32".
Courtesy the artist and Suzanne Hilberry Gallery.

Snider is right not to overpower the viewer with relentless humor; his sense of pacing throughout the show is laudable and contributes to the efficacy of his visual puns when they do appear. Still, some unhumorous scenes veer dangerously close to romanticized visions of urban decay and suburban poverty. *Studebaker Razed* overly aestheticizes the demolished factory; the ruins grossly overpower any interpretation that the paint-

brush might lend. When humor is included, it seems to mitigate the fetishism of decay. Snider's show is impressive in all respects. His future work will profit from editing out subjects that fetishize urban ruins, promoting instead the complex, ironic socio-political critique of which he is clearly capable.

Review by John Corso