



## BRENDAN CASS

### STELLAN HOLM

For his latest exploration of the landscape's elasticity, painter Brendan Cass has landed upon a perfect psychic convergence of Jackson Pollock and PBS instructional painting guru Bob Ross. While the seven mostly large-scale canvases in the exhibition "New Nature" romanticize the environment with a slightly hippy-dippy naivete, they also make a rather sophisticated and compelling case for the redemptive power of contemporary painting. By approaching the landscape from an almost completely imaginary perspective, Cass is able to strike a fragile balance between the picturesque and the gestural.

Out of a frenzied cacophony of brushstrokes, drips, spills and blobs of acrylic paint, panoramic scenes emerge in shocking fluorescent colors that have rarely been seen since the halcyon days of Wild Style and Neo-Geo. The sublimely sloppy marks that signify tree trunks, mountains, valleys or the humblest of houses double as reverential evidence of a belief in an art-historical lineage. Yet Cass adroitly avoids the forced spirituality of the Hudson River School, the heavy-handedness of many Ab-Ex masters and the bravado of the Neo-Expressionists with a vibrancy and joyfulness that resist the inclination toward the heroic.

Using old tourist brochures as source material, Cass begins his works with an abstracted reality. The ensuing drama of gestures creates a de facto narrative, where a rather personal journey is suggested beneath each layer of paint. In

the 6½-by-11-foot *Capri* (all works 2008 or '09), a delicate pale blue spill hovers above the hillside, acting as a counterbalance to the accumulation of lushness below. While incidental passages evoke techniques as varied as spin art and batik, the composition's physicality is a constant reminder of the artist's ever-present hand.

Cass seems to relish the act of applying paint to canvas, so much so, in fact, that he teeters on the edge of destruction. There is always a risk in these works of the brushstrokes destabilizing the very forms they define. In a relatively small painting like *Greenland*, for instance, the inherent sloppiness of Cass's construction is a hindrance; the composition collapses beneath the weight of its own exuberance. In a larger work like *Puerto Rico*, the globs and drips merge effortlessly into a unified field. When this type of perfect balance is struck between application and structure, the Cass landscape shimmers with a push and pull that echoes the subtle atmospheric shifts of the actual great outdoors.

—David Greenberg