

**ART REVIEW:**  
**Brendan Cass at Freight + Volume**  
**By David Humphrey**

Expressionistic works, like those of Brendan Cass, conventionally speak in an urgent first-person voice that says "I care about this." Less unequivocally, Cass's paintings belt it out with the controlled spasmodics of a rock singer. While his hysterics may seem rehearsed, they can be relied on to deliver appealing landscapes with an inclination toward dissolution and collapse. This exhibition was titled "Europa," and consisted of four large acrylic paintings (all 2006) of scenic mountain villages derived from travel brochures or postcards.

Cass retains the tourist images' promise of idyllic simplicity while exercising a vigorous painterly attack. Broad swipes of smeary color spill over densely painted under-layers while daubs and drips splash into turbulent atmospheres. But the weather is sweet, even saccharine, with bright confectionary color saturating the hectic surfaces.

Cass celebrates the charm of Norway and Iceland in the hurried voice of someone thinking of something else. The Norwegian towns of Longyearbyen and Lofoten are simultaneously conjured and vandalized by his careening brushwork. Buildings are rendered as simple shapes, a few crude strokes indicating windows and roofs. Thick gobs of acrylic spray across the canvas surface to challenge both the solidity of the towns and the fiction of a deep picture space. Such stylization casts doubt on the reality of these northern arcadias, which look like make-believe worlds. The large scale, however (6 by 10 feet and more), suggests a more serious aspiration.

The "Europa" paintings could be understood as a form of historical commentary. If the act of painting from life can draw distant objects to within arm's reach, depicting a landscape from a travel brochure draws the really far away into our presence. Cass's second-hand images conjure distant places while retaining traces of the found images' original rhetorical purpose: to persuade us to go there. But the "there" Cass wants us to visit is in his mind. His exuberant paint handling maps subjectivity onto the socio-historic field of the 19th-century picturesque, which served to promote leisure travel by domesticating both the sublime and the exotic. Cass's playful, inventive paintings toy with the ideology of those hidden terms.