

## Interview with Brendan Cass

December 2nd, 2005 – RACHEL COOK AND BRENDAN CASS

New York painter [Brendan Cass](#) participated in the exhibition *Monster Painting* this fall at [McClain Gallery](#).



Photo by Brendan Cass of downtown Houston

I interviewed Cass about his work. The discussion touched on the history of painting, how it came into importance and its relevance today. Cass spoke about his relationship to his environs, and I was curious about the question of place for him, with regard to Houston. The following was taken from an email correspondence and some phone conversations with Cass.

**Rachel Cook: Landscape shifts your perception of a place. What were your first impressions of the Houston landscape and how did they shift over the course of spending time here?**

Brendan Cass: The first time I was in Houston was in 1993, where my initial impressions started out from Hobby airport. The city had this amazing expansive flatness to it, and I was fascinated by its sheer expansive quality. I remember feeling really good, as if I could spread out, physically and spatially in my head.

I couldn't get over the sense of openness. I have never seen such a straight, profound horizon in my life. There was this earthy, and, swept feel to the place; and sand/earth tones were the most prominent colors. It affects me to be around human colors, as opposed to manufactured grays, standard brick colors, or metal/glass. I believe it allows for a more open experience.

When arriving in downtown Houston, I continued to have this feeling of respect for the open space. The buildings seemed very thoughtfully distanced from each other, as opposed to New York, or another standard metro solution of using all the space up. Take for instance the Bank of America building by [Philip Johnson](#); what amazed me was how it felt like a hybrid of old west architecture and gothic tendencies.



Brendan Cass ... *Florence, Italy* ...2004...84 x 94 inches

**RC: I am interested in the way you use picturesque scenes, like scenes from a postcard, in your paintings. If you were to make a painting about Houston what do you think it would be like, especially now after being here?**

BC: It would be a view from a ribbon of highway looking away from Houston towards all that openness. I would really like to run my brush through very freely.

I am most interested in intuitive mark-making, and editing later. Also I am interested in organic forms; they feel loaded with pure creative possibilities to me. Natural power, being so profound, is most exciting to me. People seem to go ga-ga over space shuttles and the stock market, while I am still thinking our universe is expanding and the fact that we are hurling through space. The later is just more fascinating and is a metaphor for my work, to realize profound interest already exists.

**RC: When I look at your paintings, they remind of my travels through Europe and photographs I took there. When you travel do you take photographs, and if so how do they influence the paintings?**



Photo by Brendan Cass of downtown Houston

BC: I almost never take photographs when I travel; it somehow interrupts the intimacy of feeling the new experience. I usually use source photos from travel brochures. I am interested in painting a place that many people have sought out. In some way I am intent on making a surreal gesture, a larger-than-life postcard. Many times I have been to the places I paint, and I imbue the works with things from my memories, smell, weather, etc.

I remember being in Ireland at the [Cliffs of Moher](#), and I found this way to walk up to them from about a mile away, just so I could experience them from a pure perspective. On the way I saw moss that was the colors of the Irish flag all over the rocks. I walked through these stony awkward fields that looked so difficult to cultivate and there were these funny cows everywhere. Eventually I made it to these jarring, misting cliffs that were in phenomenal succession. I just wished everyone I knew could see them at that moment.

**RC: Light and color are two strong features in your work. How does your work environment affect the paintings and how do you see these two elements playing out in your work?**



Brendan Cass ... Deep in the Woods... 2004... 84 x 94 inches

BC: Light and color are everything to me. I think about them constantly. When there's nothing to do, I just stare at colors and try to imagine a different tint of caramel, or a blue that has all the blues you could buy in a store but adding 10 % white to it. I am always thinking of mixing different ratios of color together. I love looking at art that is color-conscious. Original color schemes are everything; it is the first thing we experience: the speed of light, then form. It is more ethereal and instant than any other element of painting. I consider very thoroughly light absorption and reflection in my work; it can have a tremendous influence on the outcome of a piece. I am interested in a kind of radiance, allowing color/light to be what it is. I think of light as a life-giving emanation from an immense sphere of fire in the middle of our solar system. My impulse is to paint with immeasurable vibrancy.

Images courtesy Canada Gallery.

Rachel Cook is the editor of Glasstire.