



Time Out New York / Issue 742.743 : Dec 17–30, 2009

## Art

### Studio visit

#### **Steve DiBenedetto**

**Breaking the ice—and the surface—with the painter.** By T.J. Carlin

**I've heard you talk about the length of time it takes you to complete a painting. Is it always the same?**

Usually they have to go through some really unpredictable stages. Typically a painting will start and feel like it's moving in a linear fashion, but then it ends up feeling completely dysfunctional—or actually too functional—and usually needs to have something traumatizing happen to it. So I end up getting ensnared. I feel like that's ultimately my process: It's sort of like having to weasel my way out.

**What constitutes a “traumatizing” act?**

Usually it means doing something to the painting that runs the risk of possibly destroying it or ruining it. Like, Oh God, you shouldn't do that! But usually it ends up being fairly liberating in some weird way. That big one over there was a whole other painting at one time that I eventually got just disgusted with. Now it's been...traumatized! It's upside down, it's had all this stuff smeared on it. I try to set up those conditions where there's, like, a certain amount of total disregard for the logic of the painting.

**The cultural theorist Paul Virilio talks about the architecture of disaster, as well as about speed and the breaking of cultural surfaces. I feel like your paintings break the surface in a two-dimensional way.**

Well, usually it comes down to a type of figure-ground thing. One recent painting ended up being a kind of underground chamber. There was a kind of organic-looking thing in the corner that started out as the idea of an ornamental, architectural gargoyle, or a hunchback. I was thinking about the Hunchback of Notre Dame, sitting out on some ledge. One thing led to another, and it ended up being a reference to Gothic stuff or some of this crystalline Minimalism we're dealing with now. If I'm going to end up standing for anything down the line, it would be wanting to give more permission for a single painting to inhabit clashing tendencies, let's say. And hopefully not in a collaged way. I don't like the idea of collaging, like David Salle, whom I respect. That's more about letting things coexist independently. I like the idea that maybe the painting is fractured, but essentially uniform.

**What are you reading these days? Do you read?**

[Laughs] I'm actually not a very good reader in the city. I used to read books when I'd go away to the country. But I do read stuff now and then. The one thing I like more than good or bad art reviews are really bad restaurant reviews. Those are my absolute favorite. When you just feel like this idiot waiter at this trendy place doesn't realize they're fucking over this food critic. Isn't that a really amusing thing to ponder? 'Cause when I go to a restaurant, nobody gives a shit, of course, and I can't have any revenge if something really wrong happens. And, um, interviews. I'm anxious to read the Chris Martin interview in the magazine *The Journal*, No. 27, with my buddy Joe Bradley. Joe organized the show I'm in at Zach Feuer, so I'm really excited about that.