

## GREG MILLER: DREAM ON

Greg Miller's neo-Pop paintings reify two things about contemporary taste: one, the collage aesthetic has not been overwhelmed by post-modernist irony — indeed, that aesthetic's own potential for irony continues to unfold — and, two, the era of consumption kicked off by the end of World War II has not really ended, it has only changed gears. Or platforms. Miller's work tells us a fair amount about nostalgia, accretion, and the persistence of memory, even when the memories that persist are only approximations — or even simulations — of the recaller's actual experience. In other words, Miller paints what we think we ought to remember (rather than the erratic selection of images we do remember); he ironizes the process by compiling the picture out of disparate elements united only by their association with a lived past (thus hinting at the way we actually remember things); and he reminds us that our appetites haven't changed all that much from half a century (or longer) ago. We're still motivated by sex, success, and self-image, and advertising, as it always has (indeed, as it's supposed to), cleverly acts upon those motivations.

It is not a subliminal process by any means: as visual information, refined and sensuous as it is technically, Miller's work is as straightforward, even blatant, as a 30-second commercial. Like such a commercial, these paintings persuade and beguile through idealizing imagery and gentle trigger words. But, unlike the sources they appropriate and parody, these signal-filled pictures don't sell anything in particular, except perhaps a notion of doing it differently this time around — differently than the original sources, differently than the Pop art that critiqued (and at the same time celebrated) those sources, and differently than the cipher-filled post-Pop of the 'Pictures Generation,' which examined how such manipulated, and manipulative, images impact us.

Miller's painting thus exploits and challenges our subjective relationship(s) with essentially recycled information, outdated data that plays upon nostalgia and upon our sense of aesthetic distance at the same time as it still cajoles and propagandizes — thus sabotaging the safety we think such aesthetic distance provides us. The allure of these iconic (or at least icon-like) images rests in great part in the fact that they retain the mystery that kept us in thrall, likely as children, in their day. They pretend at the innocence of comic books — or, perhaps, reveal that comic books weren't so innocent after all. Further, Miller renders them as weathered and abject, subject to a painterly sabbat that enhances their charm and, slyly, their authority. And his radical jumps in scale between elements

give the paintings a further playful quality, adding a sense of the antic to the sense of the antique. You bet, Miller's paintings are fun. That giddiness is an integral part of their persuasiveness.

Ultimately, of course, Greg Miller is not out to sell you anything but his art. And that art, with all its awkward grace and its monumental treatment of superannuated cultural information, deliberately delivers nothing but dreams and memory triggers — triggers for memories you might not in fact have. Caveat emptor, Miller's paintings warn you even as they delight you with their evocations of places far from the here and now. Miller has spoken of his own cherished memories, of the weathering billboards he would see on California highways as a kid. We can't all be California boys and girls, no matter how we wish, so Miller transports us back to a place as well as time, a there as well as a then, a formula that induces two contradictory sensations: loss and hope. These two fundamental impulses have come to embody not just the California dream, but the American dream — at a time when their pull is being manipulated by forces rather more sinister than Madison Avenue. Even as they deliver what we think we want — or dreams thereof — Greg Miller's pictures warn us to watch what we wish for.

— Peter Frank