

ARTFORUM

critics' picks

Peter Doig



Peter Doig, *Mal D'Estomac*, 2008, distemper on linen, 118 x 137 3/4"

The most comprehensive survey since Peter Doig's recent retrospectives at Tate Britain, the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, and the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, fills two New York galleries. The artist, who was raised in Canada, educated in England, and lives in Trinidad, comes by his internationalism honestly. Although he often employs his worldly photos as sources, his tropical and metropolitan renderings are far from photorealist and more in tune with Edvard Munch's swaths of color and Claude Monet's water-washed landscapes. At Gavin Brown, several paintings present a regal-faced, potbellied Ping-Pong player in varying colors and resolution levels, as if to effect the subject's mercurial engagement with the sport. Although a wall separates court from jungle in *Untitled (Ping Pong)*, 2006–2008, resilient neon undergrowth prospers beneath the Ping-Pong table. The florid insurgence becomes endemic in *House of Flowers*, 2007–2009, where blossoms overlay a human form.

This exhibition is complemented by a smaller selection of works at Michael Werner, where Doig's iconic motif of a batlike figure makes a cave of its Upper East Side abode. The spectral entity looks weather-worn in *Man Dressed as Bat*, 2007, roughened by the linen surface's bared grain. Lichen-colored rivulets crimp the bottom edge like the receding crest of a once-violent wave. But the solid colors in the nocturnal counterpart, *Man Dressed as Bat (Night)*, 2008, betray the figure's proclivity for the dark. A distempered mood continues in *Mal D'Estomac*, 2008: The upper half is occupied by a bloated blue sphere, while the lower swells with murky red that occasionally fades, tricking the eyes into seeing shifting shapes. In all, Doig's luscious and enveloping paintings can't help but insinuate his longtime focus on nature, even, if not especially, in its absence.

— **Janine Armin**