



MARK MOORE GALLERY  
2525 MICHIGAN AVENUE A-1  
SANTA MONICA CA 90404  
TEL 310 453 3031  
FAX 310 453 3831  
markmooregallery.com

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## AROUND THE GALLERIES

By DAVID PAGEL  
Special to *The Times*

### Simplicity mixes with the offbeat

If Dr. Seuss and David Lynch designed a line of Hallmark greeting cards, they'd probably look like **Todd Hebert's** new paintings and drawings at Mark Moore Gallery. Lovely to see and just a little demented, Hebert's images inhabit a world where innocent whimsy and inexplicable weirdness spiral around one another in a dizzying swirl of un-

canny fascination.

Each of his smartly composed and dramatically cropped pictures boils things down to a few basic elements: a common object or two that bespeak the placid pleasures of suburban leisure set in surroundings that are subtly unsettling. In one of the four still-lives, a red and white plastic cooler fills the 5- by 6-foot canvas, towering over the pine forest in the background like a Brobdingnagian monster. In another, a basketball hoop, net and backboard peek from behind the head of a snowman, whose frozen smile is too close for comfort.

Picnic tables, cabin porches and movie snacks appear in Hebert's other works, along with TV antennas, satellite dishes and plastic owls designed to keep pesky birds out of gardens. Set against tree-covered foothills, an empty lot in Chinatown and a sublime iceberg, his four landscapes have the presence of stills

from movies that unspool in the imagination.

The stories are never specific. They are loaded without being heavy-handed. A large part of their pleasure is because of the surgical precision with which Hebert handles paint. The 31-year-old artist, who was born in North Dakota, got a master's in fine arts in Rhode Island, did a fellowship in Texas and now lives in Los Angeles, combines the out-of-focus fuzziness of an airbrush with the razor-sharp clarity of hand-painted illustrations.

Simple realism and offbeat fantasy fuse in his oddly familiar pictures, as do old-fashioned surrealism and newfangled cartoons. The best ones give disquieting shape to the indefinable space where dreams and nightmares rub against one another.

**Mark Moore Gallery**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through Nov. 1. Closed Sundays and Mondays.



Mark Moore Gallery

'COOLER': Subtly unsettling work from Todd Hebert.