

LAS VEGAS

"Las Vegas Diaspora: The Emergence of Contemporary Art from the Neon Homeland"

LAS VEGAS ART MUSEUM

9600 West Sahara Avenue

September 30–December 30

Heartily disproving the catchy tourist-bureau slogan, Dave Hickey's Vegas-boosting exhibition suggests that what goes on in this neon-ringed macrocosm of excess, heat, and dust doesn't necessarily stay here. Hickey, head of the art department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for most of the 1990s (he now teaches in the English department), has organized a group of twenty-six notable alumni who benefited from an art education in a land of strip clubs, low-rent casinos, and a notable lack of art-world pressure. Subtitled "The Emergence of Contemporary Art from the Neon Homeland," the show focuses on painting with brash Pop inflections. It opens with James Gobel's candy-colored seven-by-sixteen-foot felt-and-yarn fantasia of fat dandies in wonderland. Mounted on a tangerine-hued wall positioned mere feet from the gallery entrance, the work sets a kaleidoscopic tone matched by Tim Bavington's equally large, equally colorful vertical-stripe painting, which is itself mounted on an eye-tickling lime-green wall. In these pieces, it is easy to discern Hickey's adoration for Sin City's alluringly artificial glow. The color schemes soften, as do the edges, in Philip Argent's oozing abstract canvases and Jane Callister's similarly hued poured paintings. Jack Hallberg presents winning serpentine arrangements of shiny disks of acrylic paint. Figurative elements are infused with gleeful seductiveness and pop-culture references in Carrie Jenkins's girls-gone-wild watercolors and in Sush Machida Gaikotsu's blend of Asian scroll paintings and Chanel No. 5 adverts, whereas Victoria Reynolds's ornately framed trio of meat-and-entrails paintings are repulsively attractive visions that tap into the region's red-velvet bordello past. More contemporary are Sherin Guirguis's tangled relief of midcentury modernist chairs and Curtis Fairman's deluxe crystal-and-chrome quasi-sex toys, the latter of which could be slipped unnoticed into the Swarovski boutique in the nearby Wynn shopping mall. Hickey does not define a regional aesthetic as much as revel in the exuberant spirit of what he had a hand in unleashing.



Tim Bavington, *Step (In) Out*, 2007, synthetic polymer on canvas, 8 x 24". Installation view.

—Glen Helfand