

Chicago Art Map

Mapping out the local art scene and the world at large



Joe Boudreau's Crazy Fucking Maps

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By Erik Wennermark

Detail of a Boudreau painting

Boudreau's paintings, on display at Las Manos gallery through October 31st, are like maps directing the artist's frenetic intent. They possess their own unique legends and rules, but by following the directions a viewer can certainly come to find the neighborhood, if not the exact house, the artist intends.

By way of comparison, [Basquiat](#) may be the first artist that comes to mind, and it is an appropriate connection. The mad layering, the scratched out and painted over areas of canvas, and the exceedingly casual feeling to the composition (that must be agonizing to make seem so easy), assure the similarities. But unlike Basquiat, this is not a graffitied urban landscape, but more like a posh cartographer's breakdown. Rand McNally mixed with the aggression of an artist like [Pollack](#), who I also see in Boudreau's work in the materials if nothing else: the use of low-quality paint, the drips, the mix of texture.

But more than any of these painters, I was struck by the similarities to Philip Guston, a favorite of mine. It's the iconography that does it—most particularly the repeated image of a man's trouser leg that takes the shape of a medieval turret. When Guston forsook Pollack and the rest of his Abstract Expressionist buddies with a return to a form of quasi-representation most recognized in his [Ku Klux Klan looking men](#), he relied on such icons—light bulbs, feet, cigarettes—much as Boudreau does in his paintings.

Boudreau uses the aforementioned pant leg, something I was calling a staple for the purposes of identifications—though it could be a “C” or a waterslide, or anything really—and a carnival tent. These icons dot the maps, leading the viewer down strange yet familiar streets in search of an architecture she never imagined existed.