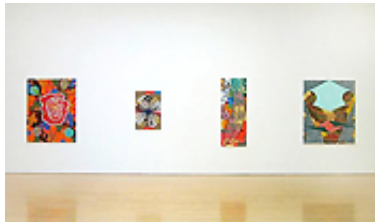


## Print Article



Roy Dowell, "A Survey Exhibition, 1981-2005," installed at Margo Leavin Gallery



**Roy Dowell**  
*Untitled #469*  
 1990  
 Margo Leavin Gallery

# DEADPAN MAGIC

## by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Roy Dowell, "A Survey Exhibition, 1981-2005," Mar. 18-Apr. 15, 2006, at Margo Leavin Gallery, 812 North Robertson Boulevard, Los Angeles, Ca. 90069

In 1993, Roy Dowell organized a show of collages by the second-generation Abstract Expressionist Emerson Woelffer, who taught for many years at Otis College of Art and Design, where Dowell chairs the masters program. Woelffer's work had been praised by Clement Greenberg, but subsequently had seen his star fall. Nevertheless, Dowell related to the elderly artist's grasp of formal yet playful invention.

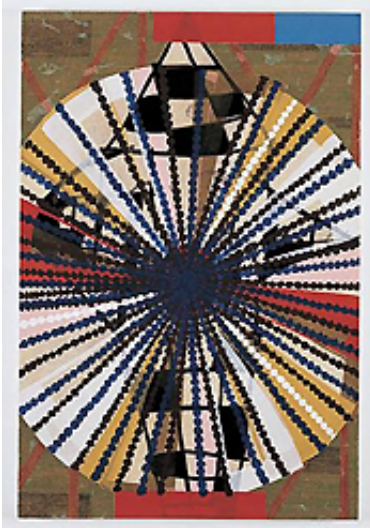
Since then, Dowell has proved himself a reigning master of collage and this 24-year survey is one long, upward swoop of technical prowess and wit. Visual wit, like a badly told joke, can be deadly. In the case of Dowell, it is a deadpan delight.

Though Dowell takes images from advertising and popular culture, he transforms them into his own unique vocabulary of expression. One benefit of the survey is seeing how the shapes and colors employed in his earliest paintings are revived in the mode of collage only to be reconstituted again as paintings. A 2005 painting of a brilliant orange sunburst on a white ground with just a few bits of rough painted fabric at the edges is featured on the cover the exhibition catalogue, which includes an insightful essay written by Christopher Miles.

In a one composition, Dowell draws the outline of a banana and apple, an homage to Picasso's still lifes, but he also ransacks the palette of collage materials to get an effect that is contemporary rather than Cubist. Another, especially large work shows two leaves of a clover and a sliced strawberry, with a glimpse of the "Good to the last drop" cup of Maxwell House coffee, sending a message both salacious and joyous. More often, his source material is not identifiable, simply bold forms, transparent fields and letters that coalesce as wonderful abstract puzzles.

This is a profoundly happy show by an artist who embraces a world full of pictures, objects and events. Full of charm in the best sense, these collages are so seductive that one forgets to wonder how the magic is made.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP is author of *Full Bloom: The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe*, published by W.W. Norton.



**Roy Dowell**  
*Untitled #914*  
2004  
Margo Leavin Gallery