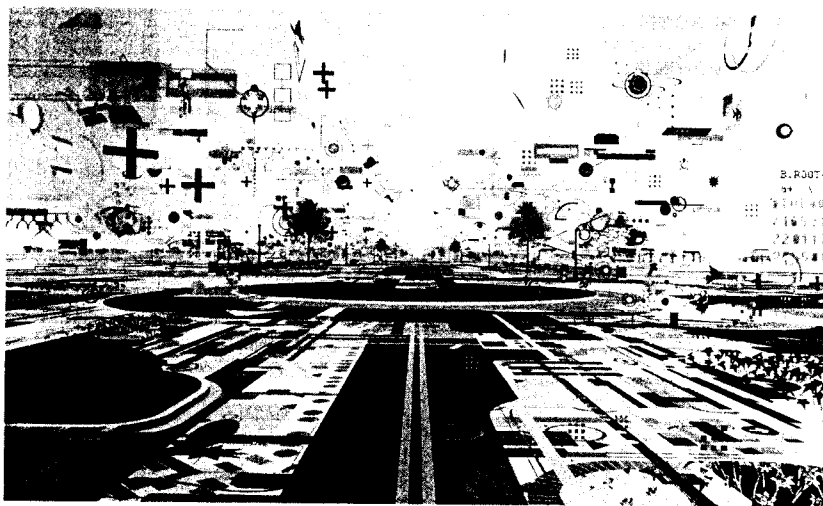


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Benjamin Edwards, *Immersion*, 2004, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 75 x 125".

BENJAMIN EDWARDS GREENBERG VAN DOREN GALLERY

Benjamin Edwards works in the tradition of Piranesi, Etienne-Louis Boullée, and Archigram, creating two-dimensional images of fantasy architecture. But instead of prisons or space pods, Edwards's touchstones are exurban subdivisions, the corporate landscape of big-box stores, surveillance, and—most significant—the computer.

Two walls of eight-inch-square digital inkjet prints on canvas arranged in grids greeted viewers at the entrance to Edwards's recent show at Greenberg Van Doren. One featured sixty examples from the 2004 series "Anti-Icon," which reworks the logos of large companies (Target, Microsoft, AT&T, E*TRADE, BP), turning them into abstract graphics. The forty images from the 2004 series "Multigraph" use graphic elements like the Nickelodeon "splat," Hewlett-Packard's symmetrical cross, and pull-down menus from computer interfaces to create bright, whimsical compositions.

Edwards's larger canvases are exceedingly handsome and comparable, in their obsessive symmetry and orderliness, to High Renaissance paintings. The parallel isn't accidental, since his works are composed around the kind of extreme linear perspective found in Perugino's *Christ Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to St.*

Peter, 1481–83. In *Immersion*, 2004, Edwards makes this type of perspectival construction absolutely explicit by placing a road cut by two yellow lines at the center of the image. The outlines of the road serve as orthogonals that vanish into a round patch of green space—one of those purely cosmetic "parks" that are inserted into rotaries and medians throughout the automotive landscape. The link between perspective and roads—the Renaissance mapping of space and today's information highway—was also evident in the show's magnum opus, *Automatic City*, 2004, which practically lifts Perugino's structure for its composition. Here, the modern road ends in a cluster of anonymous office buildings topped by a hovering structure—evoking both Brunelleschi's dome in Perugino's painting and that of the US Capitol—among which the outlines of various unrealized projects by architects from Le Corbusier to Frank Lloyd Wright are just discernible. Interestingly, Edwards lives in Washington, DC, where a mix of such scenic and ceremonial buildings actually abounds. The capital is the seat of power, a new Rome, the twenty-first-century version of Perugino's kingdom.

Other works focus even more closely on architecture. In *The Charms of Dynamism*, 2003, a prefab neighborhood (Disney's Celebration, Florida, a latterday, commercial version of Brook Farm, comes to mind) dissolves into a suspended field of flat shapes and colors. *House*, 2004, is an architectural hybrid gone awry, its subject a subdivision corner-lot dwelling made of stacked houses built from a variety of styles and materials (brick, shingle, stucco) that conjures Piranesi, the nightmare of the McMansion, and the failure of "serious" architecture to make any inroads into the fertile field of mass housing.

From the Renaissance to Rem Koolhaas, from architecture and design to surveillance and media theory, Edwards's paintings seem to touch on everything that's interesting in visual culture right now. A criticism one might level against his work is that it's too slick, closer to graphic design than painting (this is especially true of the "Multigraph" and "Anti-Icon" series, which might best be viewed as studies for his larger compositions). But then, some of the most significant American artists of the last half-century have worked in or been directly influenced by commercial graphic design or graphic art. Where Warhol took his cues from the print media and Ruscha from road signage, Edwards looks to corporate graphics and the hybridizing capabilities of the computer, sampling from diverse sources and realigning the results on his canvases. And where New York was Warhol's playground and California Ruscha's muse, Washington seems the perfect place for Edwards, since the subtext of these highly structured works is a study of the ways in which signs and logos still serve—as they did in the Renaissance—as both camouflage for and trumpeters of power.

—Martha Schwendener