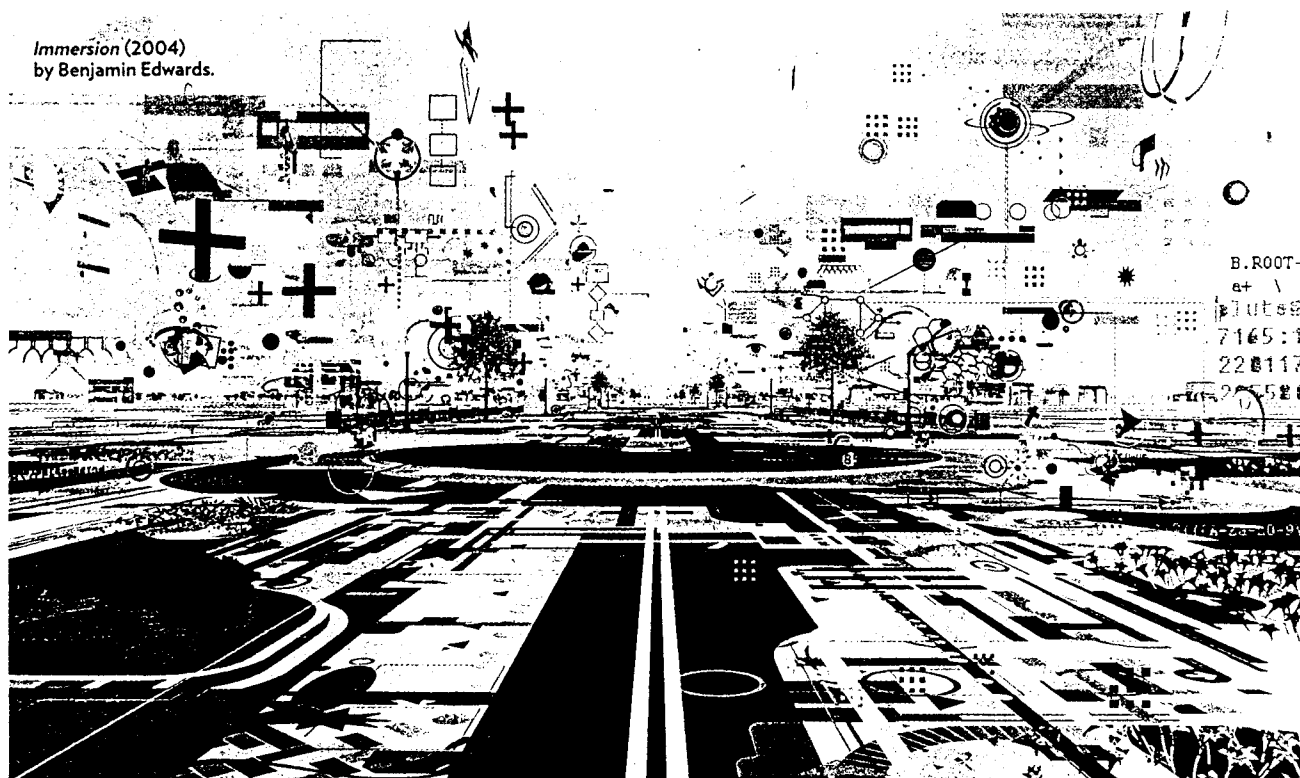


Fall Preview

NEW YORK



Immersion (2004)
by Benjamin Edwards.

AMERICAN BEAUTY

Painter Benjamin Edwards transforms soul-crushing sprawl into a landscape of seduction.

I'VE ALWAYS been interested in how high art and philosophy filter down to a mass, populist level," says Benjamin Edwards on the cusp of his second solo show at Greenberg Van Doren. (The first, in 2001, sold out and was widely credited with a reinvigoration of painting.) Edwards layers commonplace architectural details into frenzied clusters of competing signs and cues, giving us Cubo-Futurism by way of the local strip mall. He composes his work, initially, on the computer, but the finished product transcends the antiseptic quality of so much digitally generated art. For his latest series, Edwards has been downloading satellite photographs of corporate

headquarters (Wal-Mart, ExxonMobil), and playing suburban planner with 3-D home architect software—"the kind you buy at Staples—cheesy, mass-consumer stuff," says the painter. "I've been building hundreds of these houses and decorating them with these stock objects that they come with, gazebos and porch swings."

Edwards, an Iowa native who recently relocated from Brooklyn to the Beltway (his wife works for Hillary Clinton), is certainly qualified to deconstruct the ex-urban landscape. In the four new paintings at Greenberg, the aggressive retail architecture of Edwards's earlier work (think Starbucks and Target) has given

way to gentler pastel panoramas of office parks, subdivisions, and McMansions—a cloudless, car-mediated "Anytown, USA." One might expect Edwards to find a kindred spirit of sorts in conservative *Times* scribe David Brooks, but the artist begs to differ. "My sense is that he's an apologist for sprawl—he's saying that this is how Americans want to live, that this is Utopia," says Edwards. "I don't agree with that at all." Even so, in Edwards's hands, the shapeless, anonymous exurb becomes a thing of otherworldly beauty. K.R.

"Automatic City," at Greenberg Van Doren, November 4 through December 30.

9/13/04