

Steve DiBenedetto, "Chaoticus"

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David Nolan Gallery, through Jun 21
(see Soho)

Steve DiBenedetto's new paintings look markedly different from his earlier work. In several pieces, he uses a watery gouache on polypropylene, allowing the paint to puddle and stain, creating variegated textures that cause the symbols in his lexicon (octopuses, skyscrapers, explosions) to seem protoplasmic. The oil paintings' surfaces are smoother, while his marks seem more gestural. The imagery leaves aside its usually layered and encrusted effect for one that's animated and immediate.

The omnipresent brown that suffused so many of his canvases has also been replaced by hot pinks and oranges, suggesting irradiated visions of a sci-fi future. The author Philip K. Dick comes to mind—for instance, his novel *Valis*, in which the main character receives messages via an otherworldly pink laser.

Similarly, DiBenedetto evokes *Total Recall* (also based on a Dick story) and its memory-replacement vacations on Mars with *Casa Amnesia*, in which a metallic-blue-and-green structure sprouts a palm tree that seems to wilt under a toxic magenta sky. In *Cinema Arboretum*, what looks like a skyscraper's skeleton is on fire, glowing and



melting, a cross between carnage and the modernist grid.

In DiBenedetto's world, animals and architecture mirror their environment, camouflaging themselves in it, like permeable, reflective membranes. These symbolic elements suggest characters struggling against each other, or under constant attack, always collapsing and exploding. Tightly constrained within the canvas, they writhe like terrarium tableaux, serving as metaphors for consciousness.—Jennifer Coates