

# The New York Times

## Tom Thayer: 'Scenographic Play'

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By Roberta Smith

On view in three galleries, Tom Thayer's work, which is charming and irritating in about equal parts, is having a Chelsea moment. His New York solo debut at Tracy Williams is dominated by the spindly folded-paper birds suggestive of failed origami that are something of a Thayer hallmark; they appear as puppet-sculptures, attached to painted surfaces and perched in and around a large paper tree in "Nature Scene," a wall piece. They also mingle with other animals and the occasional human form in the lo-fi stop-action animation titled "Phantasmagoria," which plays on a small, ancient monitor and is accompanied, in part, by a stuck record.

Mr. Thayer's art is ostentatiously low-tech, with all his objects doing double duty as animation prop or puppet. Preciousness is a constant threat, and so is obscurity, but Mr. Thayer's ability to transform and amplify his modest artworks as they travel from one medium to another is little short of magical. Thus a small collage of a television set and a pair of hands holding a remote, on view at Williams, also appears, much enlarged, luridly colored and activated, in a video projection nearby. The video figures in and partly records two performances Mr. Thayer orchestrated in the gallery the week his show opened.

If the Williams show has the feeling of a pleasantly deranged studio visit, things are a little more focused at the Derek Eller Gallery (615 West 27th Street), where 11 collage-drawings made and revised by Mr. Thayer over the last five years are on view. Featuring more of the cut and folded figures, animals and birds, and wonderful drawn passages, they appear at Eller in a satisfying face-off with the sliced-and-spliced photographs of Adam Marnie (through Feb. 5). All have been used in Mr. Thayer's animations and performance animations, including "Phantasmagoria" in the Williams show and in his collaborations with Dave Miko, on view in "Dave Miko and Tom Thayer: New World Pig" at the Kitchen (512 West 19th Street, through March 5).

To be precise, Mr. Miko's abstract paintings, made with enamel and lacquer, serve as screens of different sizes for unusually slow-moving animations by Mr. Thayer. As his by-now-familiar characters make their way through shifting clouds of iridescent color, a story is intimated. But the particulars are less interesting than the fusion itself. The resulting hybrid splits the difference between painting and animation, and between stillness and motion, in a way that ends up feeling whole and new. Mr. Thayer and Mr. Miko should keep it up.