

Friends Indeed is pleased to present High Speed, a solo exhibition of new paintings by New York-based artist Maggie Ellis.

Working within the tradition of elaborate figurative scenes dating back to the Renaissance, Ellis breathes new life into her compositions, which are rife with references to contemporary culture, creating a through-line between the past and present.

While the figures are based on her own drawings, Maggie explores the setting freely, beginning each painting without a pre-determined sense of what kind of space she is describing. Abstract gestures start to suggest a place, which she then develops into a tangible environment peopled with her characters.

The painting *Flat Rat* feels like all the people trying to get ahead, racing their bicycles at top speed, with grimacing expressions, oblivious to the fact that the ground beneath their tires is teeming with dead or dying rats, many of them squashed, flat, and bloody. Who are the rats? It's easy to identify with them — beings trampled under so much competition, the organic detritus of the capitalist machine. The painting is also comical in its sense of urgency and trippy in its coloration. The often unnatural hues and varying techniques deployed across the figures lend a sense of individuality and uniqueness to each. A floating plastic bag recalls the satirical video art within the film *American Beauty*, while the background wall might be a freeway sound barrier or evidence of a divided state.

*Pizza Party* depicts an orgiastic bacchanal seemingly culled from the world of Pieter Brueghel the Elder, but bearing all the signifiers of our own era. Humans and animals rejoice and gorge themselves side by side, lending a twisted pastoral quality to the scene; a not-so-*Peaceable Kingdom* for the age of Pizza Rat. Characters briefly glimpsed on the subway, perhaps, are here realized as beings in various stages of memory and formation, with open-ended possibilities for reinvention. The religious ecstasy animating El Greco's swirling figures is replaced by a chemical one, a search for transcendence in the confusion of the crowd. The figures' outstretched arms strive, grasp, and chug. The judgement of George Grosz's vision of a teeming *Metropolis* 100 years prior rears its ugly head as we rage unto our own doom. Soldiers in mass confusion, as seen in Piero's battle scene from the Arezzo cycle, are recast as partiers, each seeking their own connection to the spirit world, disappearing in the crowd, swaying madly under a rotting sun.

Ovals are all around; elliptical groupings of figures provide a powerful structure. A ritual, a rite, is taking place. *Those Who Run Seem To Have All The Fun* is like a fever dream beyond *Where the Wild Things Are*. Nature and Culture collide and procreate as the walls give way to trees, and stars are replaced by Christmas tree lights and reflections from the mirror ball. Elongated figures in multiple hues work together with what they have, making out in the background and denying what lurks in the shadows. It's not entirely clear if the dancers contort in pleasure or pain; one figure appears with spots all over their head, possibly diseased, reminiscent of one of Picabia's more grotesque portraits. As with all the paintings, the image is powerfully evocative, but with a refreshingly light touch. The narrative is not heavy-handedly spelled out for us, providing ample opportunity to revisit these beguiling and seductive works again and again.