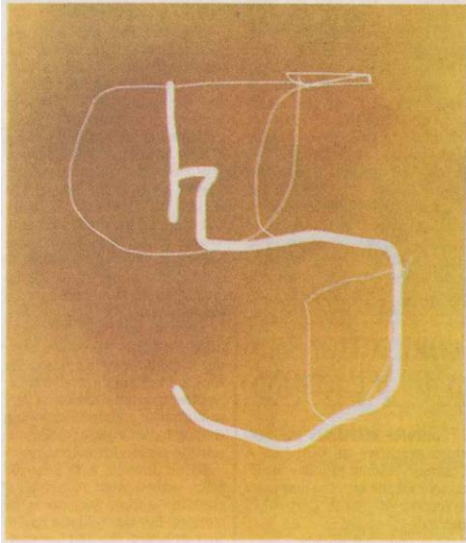


From Doodles, a Hot Artist

By MARY M. LANE



Jeff Elrod/Simon Lee Gallery, London

Jeff Elrod's 'Orange Julius' (2013), one of 11 works by the artist that are being shown at the Simon Lee Gallery in London.

LONDON—Thirteen years ago, Brooklyn-based artist Jeff Elrod felt on top of the art world: After a prestigious exhibition in the tiny artists' commune of Marfa, Texas, he was scooped up by power dealer Pat Hearn and given a solo show at her New York gallery.

Then, Ms. Hearn died of cancer in August 2000 at age 45, leaving Mr. Elrod rudderless without gallery representation.

"The person who was my whole comfort blanket was gone," says Mr. Elrod, 47. "So I ended up going back to Marfa, playing pool and drinking."

Now, the former recluse is resurfacing in both New York and London as the newest member of a group of buzzy artists employing digital manipulation to create abstract art.

In his first show with Simon Lee Gallery that opened last week in London and ends Nov. 23, Mr. Elrod is presenting 11 works created through various techniques of digital manipulation that are transferred onto

Please turn to page A25

An Artist's Digital 'Re-Breakthrough'

Continued from page A19

canvas. In "Orange Julius," a 6-foot by 5-foot acrylic and spray paint work on canvas, white squiggles of two different sizes sprawl across a citrus-colored background. In "I Can't See Neon," chunky white and gray lines swirl around on a light gray canvas.

Mr. Elrod invented his "convoluted process" in 1996 at the Houston Chronicle, where he worked as a night-shift technician in charge of laying photos onto the paper's final version. Often bored, he took advantage of the "gold mine" of colored ink jets to print out doodles he made on an old-school digital drawing program.

At first, the process was simply a comforting hobby.

"I had this total feeling of warmth and security looking at that computer screen, as if I was a kid sitting in the basement on a bean bag playing video games with my parents upstairs," said Mr. Elrod, calling himself an "obsessive" fan of first-generation video games like Pong and the Atari series.

Soon, Mr. Elrod realized his love for "totally minimal, terse, abstract lines" could be used to create art. He began projecting images of the computer-made squiggles onto canvas, tracing them with paint brushes or spray cans. It's a method he still



Above, Jeff Elrod's 2013 'Ice Age,' left, in the Simon Lee Gallery in London. Right, 'Local Minima' (2013).

uses today.

Mr. Elrod's self-described "re-breakthrough" came after a show at Brooklyn's Journal Gallery last winter. Journal specializes in mid-career or emerging artists who often get lost in the frenetic, fickle pace of the contemporary art market, where careers are frequently made and then broken within months.

"A lot of artists these days have one big moment early on and then they fizzle out," says

Michael Nevin, a Journal Gallery co-director.

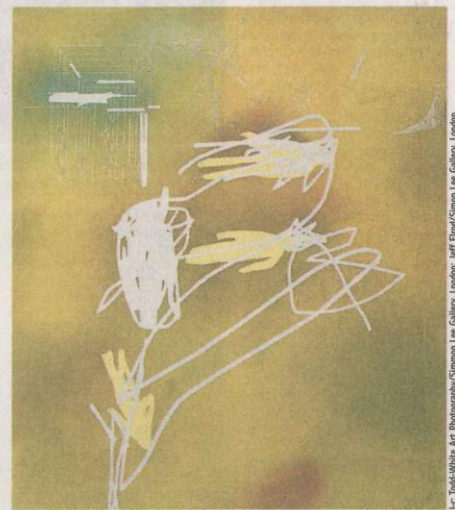
Collector Richard Chang, who sits on the board of MoMA PSI, saw the Journal show and organized a PSI show for Mr. Elrod that ran from January to April this year. It boosted his reputation among art world intellectuals.

Mr. Chang, who put his newly acquired painting by Mr. Elrod into the PSI show, says much of Mr. Elrod's newfound popularity

is because digitally manipulated art has existed long enough that it now seems a legitimate form. Similarly, photography was scorned in the high-end art world until decades after its invention.

Simon Lee has just finished selling Mr. Elrod's 11 new works to private collectors and institutions for between \$50,000 and \$70,000, paring down the buyers from a group of about 300.

It's a roughly 170% price jump



Top: White Art Photography/Simon Lee Gallery, London; Jeff Elrod/Simon Lee Gallery, London

in 10 months for Mr. Elrod, whose five works at the Journal Gallery sold for between \$18,000 and \$35,000, a "slow burn" that required persistence to find buyers, said Mr. Nevin.

In the highly speculative contemporary art world, artists with easily recognizable styles like Mr. Elrod's are particularly prone to "flipping" when opportunists buy work of trending artists and trade it at auction to make a quick profit.

Mr. Lee, a high-end dealer of ultra-contemporary art in London, says he has had to protect similar artists such as Christopher Wool and Matias Faldbakken from the auction houses.

"We've been careful to keep the lid on things," he said of Mr. Elrod's limited supply of work sold through the gallery.

A spring show of Mr. Elrod's work will be at his Manhattan gallery, Luhring Augustine, beginning March 8.