

Reviews

Cameron Hayes



The Russians knew perfectly well that the happiness of the African animals was that they had such low expectations—before the pets were introduced, detail

★★★★★

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
through Jun 28 (see Soho)

The first room of Cameron Hayes's show suggests that this Australian painter's interests lie somewhere in the anthropological. In a series of canvases, he moves across several continents (the first painting on the left is ostensibly set in India; a large Russian fairground provides the background for another work), packing urban scenes with hundreds of figures performing the daily absurd activities of modern life. The perils of globalization seem to be an undercurrent throughout.

However, trying to match the visual narratives to the artist's ridiculously long and often nonsensical titles becomes tedious, and wouldn't even be necessary if these panoramic views were convincing on their own. Instead, the large compositions amount to little more than disorienting accumulations of caricature renderings. The process of picking through them comes disconcertingly close to searching a *Where's Waldo?* illustration. Hayes's group of soft sculptures in the next room, which recounts white culture's deleterious effect on the aborigines, is similarly irksome.

This isn't to say, however, that Hayes can't make his subjects—imperialism, industrial blight—affecting. As soon as he stops painting in miniature, the image quality dramatically improves, and the color is better able to convey an emotive content. A painting about Helen Keller, for example, is a convincing and easily understandable portrait of rural poverty and hopelessness. You leave this show wishing for much stronger curating, which could have made the result a whole lot better.—*T.J. Carlin*