

THE LISTINGS | DEC. 2--DEC. 8; ROY DeFOREST

By Roberta Smith

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Back in the 1970's, regionalism was a dirty word. In the thoroughly global outside-is-in art world of today, it is barely a word at all. But the artists at whom it was aimed -- postwar Americans working outside New York and Los Angeles -- continue to suffer from its fallout. The singular greatness of Jim Nutt and Peter Saul has only recently started to come into focus; the achievements of H. C. Westermann, Robert Arneson and Joan Brown are less fixed in art world consciousness than they should be. Ditto for Roy DeForest, who is showing new paintings for the first time since 1997 at the George Adams Gallery in Chelsea. At 75, Mr. DeForest is painting pretty much what he has painted for years: dogs, men in hats or headdresses, and supernatural beings against a flattened terrain. Angular, masklike, brusquely rendered, they all seem shamanistic and slightly crazed; their bright, staring eyes imply the ingestion of hallucinatory substances. Mr. DeForest continues to favor dense compositions and oppressively bright colors unrelieved by much in the way of white. (The white goat in "Goat Daze," above, is an exception.) His signature technique persists: tiny dollops of paint, whose culminating twists suggest chocolate chips but also thumbtacks, with their points facing out. His new works have become slightly more structured: compartmentalized into patchworks of portraits, friezes and pictures within pictures, as if the artist had a new appreciation for classic American folk art. They are also more inventive and sensuous in their handling of paint. The bristling textures have diversified -- new additions include mosaiclike sections of dried acrylic paint -- and the clearer composition increases their impact. These works have a blatant, consummate ease. If Mr. DeForest's goal is to transfer the ecstatic experience of the world from his creature-subjects to his creature-viewers, it has never been more clearly or radiantly stated. (525 West 26th Street, (212) 564-8480, through Jan. 28.) ROBERTA SMITH THE LISTINGS | DEC. 2--DEC. 8

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