

The New York Times

Art in Review

BARNABY FURNAS

Closed Loop

Marianne Boesky

509 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Dec. 20

As the digital monster inevitably swallows up all forms of communication and representation, many artists struggle to prove that analog media have capabilities that can't be assimilated. Barnaby Furnas, one of today's most interesting defenders of the old, continues to explore — with much philosophical, formal and technical panache — the inimitable metaphorical potentials of painting.

This exhibition presents three distinctly different approaches. There are examples of his signature Civil War battle scenes in which stenciling, trompe l'oeil patterning and splattering are combined into a kind of Cubist history painting.

In a series of all-black canvases, each painting has a golf-ball-size hole burned through the fabric near the top. Thus Mr. Furnas uses Abstract Expressionist Color Field painting to evoke a postapocalyptic night in which the sun has disappeared from the sky.

Finally and most surprisingly, Mr. Furnas presents a series of psychedelic-Rococo pictures of rock groups performing on densely patterned Victorian-era stages. Glaring spotlight beams crisscross like the trails of bullets in the war paintings.

The three modes have in common the use of transparent painterly techniques to create violent and spectacular effects.

Despite the extremism of the imagery, however, Mr. Furnas seems emotionally detached, more of an analytic experimenter than an angst-ridden expressionist or a Blakean visionary. The cool-hot tension is compelling, but you may wonder if there isn't some psychological depth charge that has yet to go off in his art. **KEN JOHNSON**