

Denis Gardarin Gallery

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By PETER PLAGENS

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Ryan Mosley: Thoughts of Man

Tierney Gardarin 546 W. 29th St. (212) 594-0550 Through Aug. 9

Ryan Mosley's 'Saying Nothing Hearing Everything' (2013) Ryan Mosley, Alison Jacques Gallery, London, and Tierney Gardarin Gallery, New York

It's difficult—especially in one's first solo exhibition in New York—to live up to the label "painting phenom." That's what British artist Ryan Mosley (b. 1980) has been dubbed, and there are some aspects of his work that perhaps merit the compliment. He's ambitious; the biggest painting in the gallery is 100 inches by 160 inches, and the other four are wider than the average person's wingspan. Mr. Mosley can certainly handle paint—from scumbling the shadows on backlit faces to fluidly indicating the floorboards of a stage with some nice, flat ochre punctuated with deftly irregular narrow lines. In terms of iconography, Mr. Mosley is a maximalist, with weird floral shapes, a seated man with a long black beard and a shovel, a couple talking on a bench while entwined with abstracted snakelike forms and some Victorian ladies and gents. (The press release describes the situation in that painting as a "female performer at its center and a somewhat lecherous group of top hats looking on.")

What does it all mean? Given Mr. Mosley's titles—for example, "Botanical Theatre," "Saying Nothing & Hearing Everything"—a reasonable guess is that Mr. Mosley is simply trying to be enigmatic. But Mr. Mosley's style—a combination of R.B. Kitaj's painterly festivals of literary allusion and cartoon imagery from the old Beatles movie "Yellow Submarine"—comes off in the end as a bit arch. There's such a thing in art as trying too hard.

—Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.

