

Scott Greene

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## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

KENNETH BAKER *Galleries*

### Tradition gets an update

Despite painter Scott Greene's evident skill, his work narrowly dodges dismissal as punch-line art.

His show at Catharine Clark's demonstrates his ambition to cast topical issues in the idioms of traditional narrative painting.

Greene's art makes us ask whether history and technology have finally consigned handmade representation to the status of hobbyist nostalgia, like, say, scrimshaw. The question has arisen repeatedly since the invention of photography, and contem-

porary painting remains haunted by the prospect of ultimate obsolescence.

Their stillness aside, two factors set the marvels Greene contrives in pictures such as "Ship Shape" (2010) and "Expulsion II" (2010) apart from the special effects in any given high-budget Hollywood fantasy feature.

First: the history of Greene's medium versus that of computer animation gives his every move a resonance unavailable to film. Second: the link between his hand and imagination has an immediacy and unpre-

**Scott Greene: Capitulare de vita:** Paintings.

Through Aug. 21. Catharine Clark Gallery, 150 Minna St., San Francisco. (415) 399-1439, www.cclark-gallery.com.

**Scott Greene's "Ship Shape" (2010) may represent the state of the economy.**

dictability far from the collaborations that Hollywood product entails.

How many of the caustic details of "Ship Shape" did Greene invent while painting the work?

No telling, but items such as the orange "76" ball from a Conoco Phillips gas station, the Shell Oil and Bank of America symbols blazoning tattered sails have a currency that any news viewer will recognize.

"Ship Shape" depicts a latticework galleon — the proverbial ship of state or the economy? — pitching backward over a high waterfall, its cannon spewing water, its mainmast splintering.

Anyone may see popular anxiety about the nation and economy figured in "Ship Shape." Those familiar with painting may recognize knowing echoes of Giambattista Tiepolo's skies or of the American sublime of Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt.

"Expulsion II" reprises a scene often depicted in



Catharine Clark Gallery

European art: Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden after the tasting from the Tree of Knowledge. Greene's divine bouncer — no mere angel with a flaming sword

— wields a flame thrower. The fleeing Adam, an apple still in his mouth, goes down on all fours, hinting that the Fall reset Homo sapiens' evolution.

Greene's Tree of Knowledge bristles with satellite dishes and cell tower antennas.

His comic critique of contemporary life makes a striking first impression. But how much artis-

tic staying power does Greene's work have?

Stylized recent pictures that liken tree branches to exhaust manifolds look like a response to this uncertainty. But perhaps only someone who lives with Greene's work can answer.

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