

# BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

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Christopher Brown reroutes his work: Bay Area painter Christopher Brown has finally gone crazy -- on canvas -- something his work has needed for a long time. We see the results in a few of the recent pictures on view at Berggruen. The rest coast on a kind of American Scene nostalgia, with touches of polite surrealism.

In "The Music of the Rails" (2004), brightly colored freight trains streak this way and that through the picture space. They trace an Abstract Expressionist composition in a figurative idiom.

The trains' scale and definition keep us from knowing whether Brown intends references to real or model railroading. Both evoke realms of American life, public and private.

Here the trains also illustrate the advantage of imagery and anecdote to a painter: They offer readymade means of moving color around a surface.

For years, Brown has faced the artistic problem -- not his alone -- of finding good pretexts for displaying his considerable chops as a painter.

Several canvases here appear to have endured some pretty punishing revision, suggesting genuine struggle with problems of what to do and when to stop. In "The Music of the Rails," "Heaven" (2004) and "Cat Laughing at the Radio" (2004), Brown has hit it about right, though "Cat" counts as a slight, comic effort.

Brown's exhibition pulls in too many directions, as if he had come up against a deadline and just decided to show what he had in the studio. But in the best pieces he finds traction enough to make us look forward to his next outing.