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The Derek Eller booth at the Armory Show includes, at left, the drawing-collage "Moloch," by Dominic McGill.

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## Smooth and Safe at Pier 94

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(excerpt)

The attraction of any art fair is that many kinds of art talk at once, randomly, democratically, in a relatively direct way, unedited by museum curators, magazine editors, international exhibition commissioners or even art critics. Still, it is possible to string together different conversations. One concerns the persistence of painting or paintinglike surfaces, something that few museums seem willing to broach these days. If you want to call this market-driven, fine. Paintings are portable and salable. But, like the novel or the love song, the medium is also wonderfully mutable and susceptible to physical, emotional and symbolic variation.

At Galerie nächst St. Stephan, the different concepts of painting all but come to blows, what with Imi Knoebel's update of Russian Suprematism in beams of bright, anodized aluminum; Adrian Schiess's wall-size, iridescent, lyrical abstraction (based on a photograph and printed by ink-jet); Helmut Federle's wispy little abstractions, the result of time spent in Japan; and Adam Adach's

rough rendering of trash compactors hanging on a wall covered with newspaper front pages from around the world, each neatly shorn of images. Bjarne Melgaard's parody of Neo-Expressionism snarls forth from several booths, while Jonathan Meese's equally satirical version — more colorful than usual — chews up the carpet at Contemporary Fine Arts.

At Modern Institute, Anselm Reyle, Cathy Wilkes, Katja Strunz, Jim Lambie and Victoria Morton pursue different pictorial languages, from flat to sculptural, on the wall, on the floor and free-standing. (For more free-standing color, try Meschac Gaba's knit hats as architectural models at Michael Stevenson, and, at Jack Shainman, Jonathan Seliger's towering rendition of an Hermes shopping bag in car enamel on aluminum.) At Canada, Joe Bradley presents the fair's most stripped-down, to-the-point painting: four panels of unpainted beige vinyl titled "Bread."

At Blum & Poe, Chiho Aoshima abandons her usual high-gloss surfaces to create a soft, cartoony, urban wrap-around mural on paper, melding photography and digital manipulation with clouds as old as Japanese screens. At Patrick Painter, Ivan Morley reiterates a mildly Abstract Expressionist composition (middle-period Guston) with thread, while Tim Berresheim uses ink-

jet to print a frazzled, linear, computer-derived motif on wood. At Rivington Arms, John Finneran is painting stacks of things like trash cans and free-floating lips on metal with panache and humor, conjuring a cameraless Warhol.

The nonpainting conversation is, of course, vociferous. At Bellwether, Daphne Fitzpatrick's raw-wood ramp and gigantic copper-lined shoe create their own strange world, aided by Anne Hardy's ambitious set-up photograph and Chihcheng Peng's "Shadow Your Man," a series of hilarious digital variations on a short sequence from Buster Keaton's "Sherlock Jr.," in which shoes figure prominently.

At Murray Guy, a dozen large images by the German photographer Barbara Probst show the same woman photographed at the same instant from all angles, stretching one second into three-dimensional space, like Cubism.

The galleries of Foxy Production and Marc Foxx have landed across the aisle from each other with large, competing sculptures by Sterling Ruby in vandalized white Formica.

Another conversation concerns one-person shows. Some are little retrospectives, like the surveys of Eleanor Antin (Ronald Feldman), Adrian Piper (Elizabeth Dee), Martin Creed (Hauser & Wirth) and Jenny Holzer (Cheim & Read).

Other solos feature new, unfamiliar names. One of the best is at Hotel, a London gallery, which has devoted its small, black-walled booth to the elegant goth paintings and also the sculptures of Michael Bauer.

Also outstanding is Eigen & Art's presentation of Maix Mayer, an artist from Leipzig, Germany, who, unbelievably, is not a painter. Mr. Mayer's subject is the failure of the future, recounted in photographs of derelict modernist buildings in Taiwan and the former East Germany and in short films shot in and around them. The booth is covered with wallpaper in patterns based on these structures, creating a total environment in which banality and tragedy conspire.

Nearby, at the Derek Eller booth, the manic master draftsman Dominic McGill also meditates on modernism past and future, while adding collage to his arsenal in "Moloch." In this enormous, new, volcanic drawing-collage, the words of Baudrillard, Santayana, George W. Bush and many others collide and combust around a fiery newsreel-like cluster of magazine images, a red. Their shape is based on the flailing monster at the center of Max Ernst's "Fireside Angel," which was inspired by the rise of Franco. Mr. McGill has mustered a commensurately apocalyptic tone. He makes the end seem near, and for much more than just art fairs.