

# PHILIP SMITH

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## ARTnews

**reviews:** new york

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**Jason McCoy**

Philip Smith's paintings, which look like blueprints of dreams, consist of disparate symbols, set out diagrammatically on monochromatic backgrounds. His source material is diverse, ranging from 1950s instruction manuals and scientific textbooks to supermarket goods and television advertisements. At first, the associations seem to be random. But Smith sets the images down with such deliberateness that we feel impelled to search for deeper meanings and unearth a narrative in the storyboards.

Smith first emerged with the Pictures Generation of the 1970s, artists who appropriated found imagery as commentary on the media-driven society in which they were raised. Yet it is a mistake to pigeonhole this artist as a social commentator or to relegate him to the recent past. In a work like *Turkish Delight* (all 2013), he freely links a pair of hands, a strand of DNA, a grapefruit half (that might also be read as a cornea), and text announcing "Don't Waste Food" in a perfectly composed manner that defies easy interpretation. On one level, this is a drawing stolen from a diary or a sketchbook—a doodle made from a daydream. On another, it's an accomplished, fully resolved work of art, intentionally leading the viewer to new realms of interpretation.



Philip Smith, *Turkish Delight*, 2013, oil and wax on canvas, 43" x 53". Jason McCoy.

In each of Smith's paintings, the final picture is the result of a complicated process of drawing and erasing, whereby he etches his thoughts into a wax-covered surface. The result, as in *Let's Move to Mars*, leaves all previous layers visible, like trace memories or ghostly apparitions. In this image, a globe-headed cartoon figure with a smiling face points to a bed, the site of dreams and psychic phenomena. Smith cites his father—an interior decorator turned mystic—as a major influence on his new work.

These paintings all looked as if they were made by a visionary artist rather than by someone who has spent a lifetime in the art world. That Smith retains a sense of innocence makes his work all the more compelling.

—Barbara Pollack