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Knight, Christopher. "Bacon, pork and just plain piggy", LA Times. June 10, 2005. pp E28-29.

Bacon, pork and just plain piggy

Robert Russell wasn't born until three years after the Beatles recorded their "White Album" in 1968, but everything old gets new again. His paintings in "Pink," a solo exhibition at Anna Helwing Gallery, will put you in mind of George Harrison.

"Everywhere there's lots of piggies, living piggy lives. You can see them out for dinner, with their piggy wives. Clutching forks and knives / to eat their bacon." Given today's rampant consolidation of wealth and the corporate structuring of everything from government to the art world, the timing couldn't be better for a hoggish image of greed devouring its own tail.



Pigs 4, 2005
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches

Russell's oil paintings were based on random images that came up when he typed the word "pigs" into Google. Four of the canvases show packed clusters of the blank-eyed barnyard animals, seen from above and filling the frame. Using various shades of pink, white and gray-brown, Russell paints in thick, quick, linear brushstrokes, which replicate the high-contrast tonal shifts in documentary photographic data. The fifth image — a diptych hanging alone in a separate room, as if enshrined — is a small surprise. A double portrait of JFK and Fidel Castro, it of course portrays the iconic Cold War protagonists in the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Google searches across many fields, giving a techno-spin to the old game of chance. History painting, the genre Russell evokes in a cockeyed way, is always more revealing of present than past. So it is with "Pink," a painting-installation whose Pepto-Bismol hues italicize today's pervasive sense of nausea.

Anna Helwing Gallery, 2766 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A., (310) 202-2213, annahelwinggallery.com; through July 2. Closed Sundays and Mondays.