



CLEARING

Harold Ancart, *Around Town* by Whittaker Iona,  
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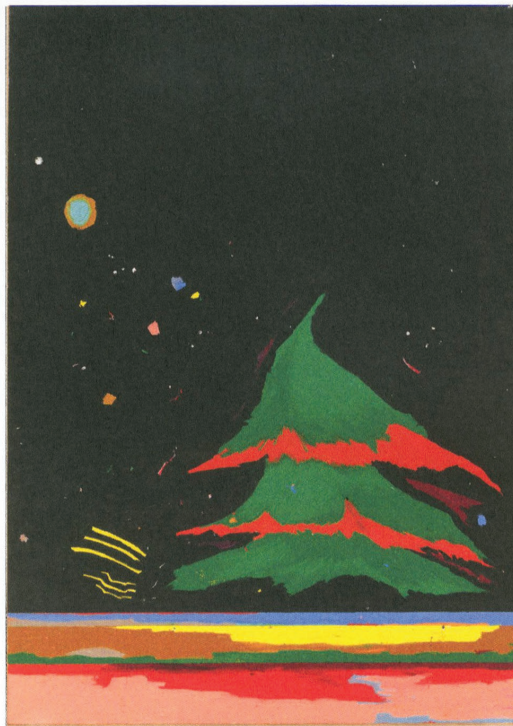
USA

**HAROLD ANCART**  
C.L.E.A.R.I.N.G., New York

The untitled paintings in this exhibition by Harold Ancart have something of the character of illustration. While the artist's interests are plain – there is a relationship to the work of abstract expressionist Clyfford Still, for example – the works share certain qualities with the pictorial culture of storytelling, its visual forms and imaginative effects.

All but one of the paintings (all works *Untitled*, 2015) are large 2.9 × 2.1 metre canvases. In a skillful hanging, five vertical paintings made for a commanding line-up along one wall, while a single horizontal piece lurked in the gallery's innermost room. Having done a lap of these, I saw a smaller work on the way out: a blustery yellow fire next to an unclear pink shape, which is curtailed by the edge of the canvas. The composition mimicked – but didn't copy – that of a larger work opposite. The exhibition's arrangement suggested a sense of narrative, as if these were chapters in the progress of an undeclared tale.

The paintings are large enough to slightly dwarf the viewer; at the same time, their subjects, though rendered abstract, appear to simulate things which, in nature, are small. Two of the vertical works feature energetic crops of round, flower-like blooms taller than human height whose striped stems sprout from vivid Technicolored grounds. In another composition flourishes a raft of what appears to be green and blue grass, bordered with orange. Above it, two differently sized blue orbs – which might have become detached from other stems, or be something else – float amid a buzz of flecks and swipes in various colours. A bright green fir tree, hovering without a trunk over a surprisingly level layer (a horizon?) of colours, could be either large or small. Throughout, Ancart employs caustic, often primary hues, seconded by milky pastels: his fires are an impossible yellow, the



1

fir tree an abrasive red and green (as if a sarcastic swipe at traditional Christmas scenes). Against black or almost-black backgrounds, these colours and the unruly shapes and fragments they fill ferment a lurid but apparently consistent realm that might be Lilliputian or giant. The disorientation caused by their abstract ruptures on a dark, non-perspectival plane breeds a near-uncanny or folkloric atmosphere.

Although they have not strictly been cut out, the edges of Ancart's shapes are often jagged or bristling; smaller patches of colour are splintered in a manner that, from afar, can appear less painterly than cut and scattered. Grassy spikes and the hard edges of flames might recall the tapering of bats' wings or some other gothic outline. The three green and white, cloud-like shapes in the horizontal piece have toothed edges. In the same work, marks trailing the primary shapes tend more towards line, not unlike arrows that lend the clouds a drifting sense of movement; elsewhere, double lines might convey vibration or shudders in the manner of cartoon drawings. There is something in the wilt of stems or the slight compression of the fir tree that echoes the surreal, traipsing creatures in Edward Gorey's book *The Utter Zoo: An Alphabet* (1998). In its expressive application and texture, and in the mixing of pure colours directly on the canvas surface, Ancart's use of oil stick has something of the exuberance of children's crayon drawings.

Collectively, Ancart's works can seem barely able to contain their energies. In the best spirit of illustration, they conjure a visual world that is both irresistible and continuous.

IONA WHITTAKER

1  
Harold Ancart, *Untitled*,  
2015, oil stick and pencil  
on canvas, 2.9 × 2.1 m

2  
Clement Siatous  
*Porteuse de Coco pour plantation*  
1950 (Coconut Bearer for  
the Plantation 1950), 2003, acrylic  
on linen, 105 × 76 cm

3  
Clement Siatous, 'Sagren',  
2015, exhibition view

4  
'Wu Tsang', 2015,  
exhibition view