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By Gerard Haggerty

Of course terms like "labor-intensive" and "quirky" are both relative; and when pushed to extremes, they become nearly synonymous. Witness the world of Mark Greenwold, on view at DC Moore Gallery (724 Fifth Avenue) through November 10th. Set aside some time for your scrutiny — certainly the artist did, since this selection of small oils on panel took a decade in the making. Come prepared with a magnifying glass, or a pair of strong reading glasses — or better yet, two pairs that you can double up. Step close enough to smell the faint, lingering odor of varnish, and behold images that put the magic in "magic realism."

Paintings like Greenwold's are routinely likened to dreams, and the comparison applies not only to the ambiguous moments he represents, but also to the manner in which they're represented. These extraordinary scenes are rendered in a way that's sharper than ordinary sight, closer to visionary experience than human vision. Their hallucinatory clarity brings to mind the tactics of Franz Kafka. Because each and every evidentiary detail rings true, readers of "The Metamorphosis" accept the outrageous premise that poor Gregor Samsa awakens to find he's become a cockroach.

What if Gregor had a cousin? Greenwold's *A Moment of True Feeling* simultaneously defies logic and certifies truth. Faced with the exquisitely precise image of a locust that sports a human head, we suspend disbelief. The cozy interior also includes a portrait of the artist, who stands alongside three fully human friends. To judge from these figures, the grinning insect must be about the size of a collie. {"Lassie, you've changed!"} Nobody acknowledges the startling creature in their midst; indeed, no one person acknowledges the others, though three members of the quartet seem acutely aware of the viewer's presence. They're all lost in thought, but their thoughts are not lost to us, for we see multicolored and distinctly different patterns springing from each of their noggins.

A splendid catalogue that accompanies the exhibition describes the artist's working method, which combines source material garnered from magazines like *House Beautiful* with snapshots of his close pals. The interiors are chosen first, and the figures — human, animal, and chimerical hybrids — are posed to suit these settings. The sensibility is that of collage, or as William Burroughs called it, "cut-up," a term that aptly captures Greenwold's mordant drollery. Preparatory drawings help the artist envision the overview, and then the disparate bits are all brought together in paint. Wearing a jeweler's magnifying glasses and applying minute brushstrokes one at a time, Greenwold creates a seamless surface in which every square inch — millimeter, really — receives equally obsessive attention. In one crucial regard, the resultant works are altogether different from dreams. Dreams come to us full-blown, but they fade immediately. *A Moment of True Feeling*, an oil on wood that's 32" long — gigantic by Greenwold's usual standards — is the product of a year's hard labor in 2004-05. It will never fade. Quite the contrary; the longer you study it, the richer it grows.

Greenwold's process is excruciatingly exacting, but his paintings are full of wit. A picture like *The Excited Self* suggests a collaboration between Jan Van Eyck and Robert Crumb. At stage right, we once again find the artist, seen in profile wearing a scarlet bathrobe. The matching, turban-shaped towel that's wrapped around his head recalls Van Eyck's famous self-portrait in a red velvet cap, and it also suggests the look of some self-proclaimed sultan: a potentate with a barem of two, one of whom is perched on the edge of an Empire style tub wherein another woman bathes. The claw-footed bathtub seems to have wandered into the front room. There, on top of an antique writing desk, we see what initially appears to be an incredibly elaborate still life tucked into a tall cup. But first-glances tell us very little about Greenwold's art. Look again and you discover that this rainbow-hued phantasmagoria is a thought-bubble that snakes out from beneath Greenwold's headgear. Perhaps the little man is pondering Big Love.