

Review The power of the doodle: John Mills' art opens a door and lets your imagination walk through

By **David Pagel**

If doodles could hallucinate, they'd probably see images similar to those that flit into focus across the sensuous surfaces of John Mills' new paintings.

At Rosamund Felsen Gallery, "For Your Eyes Only" consists of 15 small, medium and large canvases that the L.A. artist has dabbed with brushes and scratched with both ends of pencils, sometimes leaving graphite marks and at others incising lines into layers of paint that have not yet dried.

Each of Mills' daydreamy paintings transforms the casual scribbles and meandering marks of doodles into a pleasurable romp that wends every which way and often ends with an explosive realization of the freedom to be had — and the wonders to be discovered — when you don't where you're going.

Aimlessness rarely looked better. Nor delivered more consequential results.

Most of the marks that Mills makes with his paintbrush look as if they were made with a pen, either the industrial-type suitable for brick walls or the precise ones used by graphic designers. When he uses a pencil, he handles it less like a draftsman and more like a writer, jotting down symbols and glyphs in his own shorthand.

Seemingly lackadaisical, Mills' paintings are exceptionally efficient, both for the brevity of their gestures and for the suggestiveness of their compositions — which are sketchy in the best sense of the term.

Mills manages to make the contours of comic strip characters (like Snoopy) and cartoons (the Simpsons) look right at home with shapes found in works by Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Klee and Joan Miro as well as James Ensor, Emanuel Leutze, Adolph Gottlieb and Ellsworth Kelly.

Mills handles this unlikely roster of historical heavyweights with a light touch. Rather than referring to them directly, his deftly diagrammed compositions present the barest of hints and let our minds do the rest.

That involves trust. And optimism. Not to mention some risk. In Mills' hands, the combination pays off in spades.



John Mills' *Let's Agree to Disagree*. (2015), oil and graphite on canvas, 60 inches by 60 inches. (Photographed by Grant Mudford. Courtesy of Rosamund Felsen Gallery.)

latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-john-mills-20160608-snap-htmlstory.html