

# In The Galleries

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Santa is a hybrid character who embodies some substantial truths beyond the range of most narrative painting one is likely to see.

It is one thing to make Santa Claus a monster and quite another to humanize Nazis as Fudge does in a couple of other paintings, *Come Dine with the Colonel* and *Don't Mess with Seymouria*. In the first one is supposed to recognize that the real "Colonel" and his organization may not be unlike the SS Colonel and his suggested here. Everything within the restaurant is stark and orderly, but romance intrudes as a young women peers dreamily at the landscape outside. Edward Hopper seems to be a stylistic and thematic source for this, but his gentle melancholy has been superceded by mean irony. This transformation is neither ingratiating nor particularly insightful. The sentimentality of the *Seymouria* picture is even more misplaced. It shows a wounded and imprisoned storm trooper weeping as a small dinosaur gnaws on his boot, leaving the viewer with a sense of misplaced pathos and dramatic irresolution. Extinction may be an issue here, but one can't be certain or really care.

Fudge's sardonic eclecticism also embraces ancient Egypt and juxtaposes it with modern pop culture. *Cathy Jean and the Roommates*, with its bewigged ibises, possesses a silliness beyond interpretation. *I Think We're Alone Now*, however, associates rock

and roll quite well with the rock of a pyramid. In the foreground, Bo Diddley, with Pharaoh's crown and collar and a gleaming Gibson, strikes a pose of "pyramidal stability." Beside him, one of the Marvelettes affects Egyptian jewelry and high heels, while in the distance a mummy chases a brown-skinned maid. This may all be idle fantasy of slight importance, but the theme is amusing, and the Bo Diddley with guitar is beautifully painted.

*Something to Believe In* is badly painted — Fudge has had some trouble with foreshortening and elbows and has muddied much of the surface — but the metaphorical "rhyming" of disk shapes in the composition is very successful. The disk motif carries from three flying saucers in the sky, to the equally radiant halo of the young woman in the foreground, to the gold disk suspended from a chain around her neck, to the 45s within the record case beside her. Perhaps the latent symbolism of objects and the hidden spirituality of the trivial are disclosed here.

In his good paintings, Fudge presents the information of his fantasies with economy and directness. Each detail fits compositionally and metaphorically, and the painting manner is simple and workman-like. Paintings such as *You'd Better Watch Out* and, despite its flaws, *Something to Believe In* are memorable precisely because they are simple in appearance; and because the poetic possibilities of each are open-ended and insoluble.