

SIDEBAR

He Saw Something, Did Something

Flemish painter Gery De Smet was waiting for a Washington, D.C., Metro train when he heard an audio recording warning passengers to keep an eye open for terrorist threats. “See something? Say something!” repeated the female voice, inspiring the name of De Smet’s newest exhibition of acrylic paintings.

“I’m inspired by things I find in the street,” De Smet said, explaining the reason he chose to name his newest exhibit “See Something? Say Something!” He paints events, signs or happenings that he sees in person, newspapers or over the Internet. “I have, sometimes, the feeling that society puts things in the streets for me [to paint].”

Making its debut in the United States at the American University’s Katzen Arts Center, De Smet’s exhibit is broken down into several series of paintings, each with its own theme.

His series “Running mate” includes several paintings of nudists invading sporting events — events based on real life. The naked people are frozen on canvas with their arms in the air, running and skipping with a sense of glee and abandonment. De Smet explained that depicting these nudist invasions “gives an extra dimension to streaking,” which has almost become the norm and is “a sport in a sport” in Europe, he said. “We admire people who have the courage to do something like this, but at the same time think how stupid they are,” he said. De Smet hopes the collection gives viewers a good laugh.

“*U Loot, I Shoot*” has a completely different tone. Thirteen 15-by-11-inch canvases reflect serious divisions in modern society, such as spats over territory, ethnic and racial prejudices, and nationalist intolerance. The paintings portray forlorn, vacant areas that exude a sense of warning. “No Loitering!” declares one sign on a canvas

of blue snow — as a trail of footprints runs past the sign. Other pictures are more direct and politically incorrect. One sign translates to “dirty Belgian.” Several reflect the negative stigma associated with Islam. His next painting in the series will be a “no running” sign by D.C.’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The exhibit also includes large-scale aerial-view paintings of 19 famous racetracks around the world from Great Britain and Germany all the way to Australia. The series, “Today all the circuits are closed,” is another witty take on aspects of society that are normally overlooked, much like the Metro terrorist warning we take for granted in our 21st-century world.

— *Rachael Bade*

Gery De Smet: See Something? Say Something!

through Aug. 8

American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center

4400 Massachusetts Ave., NW

For more information, (202) 885-ARTS (2787) or visit www.american.edu/katzen.