

Christof Mascher

★★★★★

Josh Lilley Soho to Hampstead

Christof Mascher's paintings are made by a self-proclaimed child of the 1980s, so if you're just seeing surrealism meets expressionism, you're at least half wrong. Mascher is constructing fantasy worlds on canvas; he credits David Lynch as an influence – which ought to be outlawed by now – and his reveries run to ornate architecture, spaces full of balustrades, banks of candles and looming dark doorways.

At their most real, these places still feel like stage sets, and even then they tend to fall apart around the edges, thanks to sketchy handling. Mascher appears to land forthrightly on bathos



'I Scream Yummy Colours', oil and lacquer on canvas, 2009

whenever he interjects would-be demonic pumpkin faces, ghostly snowmen or spiders into his canvases. But one must then bear in

mind that he was, we're told, reared on sword-and-sorcery schlock like 'He-Man' and platform arcade games like 'Super Mario Bros', and that what he's

aiming for here is less a dose of dark impulse than something that keeps collapsing into virtuality, splitting into discontinuous registers and advertising a mindset whose imaginative life has been corrupted by cultural upbringing.

Even with this conceptual armature in mind, however, it's fair to say that a good number of the paintings feel inert, and one is tempted to say that it's when Mascher alights on genuine strangeness – as when he slathers a crepuscular view of buildings with thick lacquer – that the show bursts into life. Then again, I didn't play computer games much as a kid, and there were no Skeletor posters on my bedroom wall.

Martin Herbert