

# Michael Smith

## Nicholas Metivier

The spirit of J. M. W. Turner hovered over this exhibition of 14 highly accomplished, abstracted landscapes (all 2008); like the great 19th-century artist, Montreal painter Michael Smith is especially mesmerizing when representing natural vistas assaulted by fire, water, and wind.

Turner's eyewitness watercolors of the burning British parliament building are the specific source for Smith's large *Burning #2*, the most flamboyant picture in a high-octane show. It is the work of an intensely physical painter flirting with chaos. Smith uses various tools and applications to generate daubs, swipes, and swirls, all leavened by feathering, cross-hatching, and subtle striation.

Smith also draws inspiration from the incendiary present, via video grabs from Web sites such as LiveLeak, a source for field videos from soldiers in combat. *Burning #1*, depicting a white-hot chemical fire amid a broader conflagration, conveys valor and horror in equal doses.

In the ambiguous painting *Undertow*, an epic seascape with jettisoned ballast floating in the choppy foreground waters and the vulnerable whisper of a ship on the horizon, water is the agent of destruc-



Michael Smith, *Burning #1*, 2008,  
acrylic on canvas, 80" x 108".

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tion. Smith imbues these provisional scenes with a deep feeling of urgency.

—Betty Ann Jordan