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Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

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FREDERICK HAYES

'Build an Empire'

Number 35

39 Essex Street,

Lower East Side

Through Dec. 6

Frederick Hayes is an encouraging anomaly. At 54, he is only now having his first solo gallery show in New York. Mr. Hayes's subject might be defined as both the richness and harshness of urban life. His drawings depict city blocks whose structures shift from tended and grand to neglected and modest and while modulating between realism and semi-abstractness. His short video focuses on New York streets and random pedestrians. But it is his paintings that sing. Or more accurately the painting: "Urban Grid" is a series of 32 small canvases forming a large rectangle; each is a vigorous portrait of a city dweller that could easily stand on its own. The portraits depict men, women and teenagers, and are based on images taken from television, magazines or newspapers; on Mr. Hayes's own photographs; or on his imagination.

The press release says that Mr. Hayes has been inspired by Robert Colescott, and to some extent this may be true. But Colescott painted with devil-take-the-hindmost abandon, and

his figures tended toward caricature. Mr. Hayes builds his subjects' faces carefully if bluntly, distinguishing each robust stroke. He has an opulent and inventive sense of color and is fearless in his contrasts of shadow and light. And despite their physicality as paintings, his portraits suggest actual people. Whether artists like Max Beckmann, Marsden Hartley and possibly Emil Nolde figured in the development of Mr. Hayes's style, they are among the precedents for its adamant and considered vitality.

Jane Jacobs saw cities as magnets for "people with ideas of their own." These are the people Mr. Hayes paints. ROBERTA SMITH