Welcome to the gallery. The East End has long been known for its attractiveness to plein air painters, as the special light of the area has been hailed for generations.

However, the East End has another reason to appeal to artists. It is home to some of the most discriminating gallery owners and intelligent patrons.

This all attracts a different type of artist—the avant garde, the unafraid, and the extremely talented have changed the landscape of the East End art scene and are being met with resounding applause. VOX Hamptons chose to take a fresh look at two artists being featured at some of the East End’s most contemporary galleries. We spoke to the gallery owners and the artists, and did some analysis of our own to get a better understanding of their sometimes enigmatic work.

MATTHEW CUSICK AT GLENN HOROWITZ BOOKSELLER

Matthew Cusick has long received critical praise for his work. He is well known for taking on major social issues with finesse and an appealing aesthetic. Born in New York City, Cusick attended (and was subsequently expelled from) Catholic school. He later received his BFA from Cooper Union, and now lives and works in Texas.

Cusick begins by cutting and tearing up books, maps and atlases. He organizes his materials into multiple piles, creating a veritable “painter’s palette” of scraps, then mixes and masters them, creating ephemeral landscapes, seascapes and abstractions. His early pieces are precise collages of road maps, perfectly arranged to create colorful scenes. With the most unbelievable degree of precision, Cusick creates elaborate scenes of intertwining freeways, portraits, and wildlife. His critique of American consumerism and social politics has been as sharp as his X-Acto knife. And he has been hailed for it.

Chasing the Dragon is a perfect example of Cusick’s early work. He sharply criticizes the never-ending desire for goods and material that is American consumerism. The twisting and intertwining roadways of detail melt into a menacing dragon. The dragon that can never be caught is Cusick’s interpretation of the socially reinforced American ideal that you can never have enough.

The work on display at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller represents a different side of Cusick. A change from his critique of American values, Cusick now looks inward for material to examine. Cusick has vivid memories of being suspicious of the things he was first taught. In his new work he re-examines many of the textbooks from his time in parochial school. Works about colonialism, religion, history, and anthropology are chopped up and put back together in provocative ways. The very act of cutting up these books suggests rebellion and dissent.

These first school lessons are something we all share. And the first encounters we have with modern systems of knowledge are usually the longest-lasting and most influential. Cusick tries to find the truth in these old texts. He tries to get at the underlying complexities of our relationship with them. He examines, and invites the viewer to examine, the affects of the stories and histories that someone else has imposed upon us.

Ether reexamines a Western Civilization textbook and a Catholic Bible as if the texts, once cut up and made nonsensical, are much clearer to the reader. The anthropological and historical texts that Cusick uses were written by authors who were passionate but sometimes misinformed, and they took certain liberties. Once chopped up and taken out of context from an outdated history book, phrases like, "Our country was once a wilderness, inhabited only by savage Indians and wild beasts," and terms such as, "barbarous nation" are seen in a new light, provoking the viewer to wonder how many times he or she may have read phrases like these without truly questioning their impact. In Ether phrases such as these make up the rainy, drizzly background, while a barrage of cloud-like forms parachute down from above.

Leviathan. This collage began with a children's Bible and the images of saints and symbols from the stories. He was intrigued by how the stories of the Bible had been interpreted in order to be taught to children. The waterscapes are made from maps, provoking a critique on the subject of cartology and the idea of a one-dimensional world view. A map shows the outlines of countries as simple lines and color delineations, rather than the years of turmoil, war, and struggle which drew those lines.

The great hulking beast rising from below is the Leviathan, a term frequently referenced in the Bible as the embodiment of evil, darkness and hell. Even in Moby Dick, often hailed as "the great American novel," the white whale is often referred to as the leviathan, and as the embodiment of evil.

This is meditation on childhood and adult perceptions of heaven and hell, the saints and the constellations above, and the darkness and mystery below. The simplified saints indicate a youthful and naive belief in heaven, and are juxtaposed with the very real and very solid darkness below. Determining whether that leviathan is an actual hell or the depths of human nature is up to the viewer.