

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Carroll Dunham

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

Celebrated since the 1980s for his cartoonishly surreal paintings on wood veneer, Carroll Dunham is also a prolific and ingenious printmaker. Since he began making prints in 1984, in collaboration with Universal Limited Arts Editions, the artist has created many lithographs, relief prints, intaglios, screenprints, and monotypes. In "Carroll Dunham Prints: A Survey," curator Allison Kemmerer presented, in approximately chronological order, some 120 such works—a selection that demonstrated the artist's fascination with various techniques as well as his evolution from creating automatic drawings and abstract tuberos biomorphic shapes to portraying representational kitschy box-people and his naughty signature character, the "dick-nosed" man.

In the accompanying catalogue raisonné of his prints, Dunham describes how printmaking, which requires levels of analysis and strategic thinking much higher than those needed for his more automatic techniques, supports his artistic process: "Printmaking is both its own reward and a trigger for quantum leaps of vision in the other domains of my work." However, in his early prints depicting otherworldly circular forms—inspired by the knotted patterns on the plywood veneer of his early paintings—Dunham does show a certain looseness. For

example, in *Accelerator*, 1985, a darkly beautiful and spatially ambiguous lithograph sporting eight different shades of black, the artist exploited the varied types of marks, lines, and textures produced by working on stone. While the work was inspired by particle accelerators, its central vortex of thick dark concentric rings also conjures up a Dantesque circle of hell, drawing what look like animal appendages into its center. Below that, a second maelstrom of ringed energy is penetrated by hard-edged, boldly drawn geometric configurations surrounded by an array of thin playful scribbles.

While these early black-and-white lithographs seem to betray an intuitive approach to the medium, the modernist forms and three-dimensional illusions in *Full Spectrum*, 1985–86, a fourteen-color lithograph and silk screen, suggest a turn toward something more composed. Here, clearly defined

Carroll Dunham,
Stove Pipe Hat, 2000,
wood engraving on
paper, 30 1/2 x 22 1/2.



colored circles float atop an Abstract Expressionist–like field of orange and yellow muscular strokes, streaks, and drips. Soon after making this Dunham produced four grand-scale intaglios with central anvil-shaped forms. The most brutally beautiful of this group, *Point of Origin*, 1988–92, features a bloodred biomorphic *T* exuding from a primordial ocean of reds and browns. The simple figurative "box creatures"—the name, according to Kemmerer's catalogue essay, that his daughter gave to the treelike beings with huge libidinous lips and clenched teeth that appeared in his reduction block prints of the early to mid-1990s—evolved, in the intaglio *Island*, 1997–98, into a treelike humanoid with a branchlike nose suggestive of a penis with testicles.

The figure with a stovepipe hat—the protagonist of Dunham's more recent paintings—is introduced in the wood engraving *Stove Pipe Hat*, 2000. This eyeless caricature, with Pepto-Bismol-pink face, penile nose, and clenched white teeth, could be interpreted as a self-portrait, the personal association emphasized by his choice of support, a wooden panel, which evokes the early works. In subsequent prints Dunham's enigmatic man is inserted into a variety of situations, positions, directions, and forms: gunslinging, enjoying landscapes, collecting dust, and posing erotically with a hermaphroditic lower body. Perhaps an effort to get rid of this irrepressible character, *Closing In*, 2003, is a portfolio of five color etchings in which the man's head is magnified and cropped into barely recognizable forms. In the fourteen black-and-white lithographs that make up "Untitled," 2004–2006, the figure's body parts appear jumbled in jazzy cubist abstractions. The most recent works shown are monotypes portraying boxy green trees with phallic branches; as Kemmerer notes, "Dunham's existential antihero is being reabsorbed into the organic life that spawned him." Like the other prints in the show, these works speak to Dunham's formal dexterity and his ability to make potent combinations of captivating allusions and illusions, rage and delight.

—Francine Koslow Miller