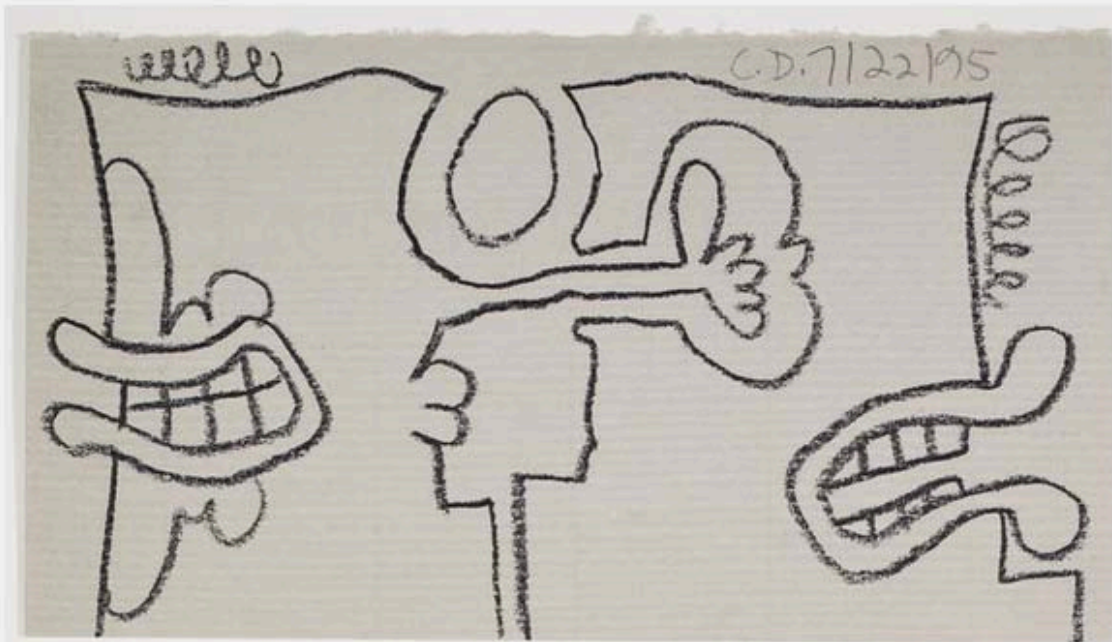


# GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Pagel, "Review: Intriguing peek into Carroll Dunham's vibrant mind," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 2012.

## Review: Intriguing peek into Carroll Dunham's vibrant mind



Carroll Dunham, "Untitled (7/22/95)" 1995. (Carroll Dunham / Blum & Poe / April 30, 2012)

By David Pagel  
May 6, 2012 | 2:15 p.m.

With nearly 400 works, "Carroll Dunham: A Drawing Survey" stands out as one of the year's largest shows. It's also one of the best.

Arranged chronologically at Blum & Poe, the 30-year survey's intimate pictures give visitors a good long glimpse into the New York painter's consciousness as it struggles to find its footing, hits its stride, improvises freely, gets stuck in its comfort zone and then breaks free, spitting out works whose ugly beauty is troubling, indefensible and unforgettable.

You may not want to live in Dunham's head, but it's a great place to visit.

The journey starts slowly in the first of four adjoining galleries, which contains about 100 drawings Dunham made from 1982 to 1994. Some are on wood veneer, whose manufactured knots are the perfect partners for the kinds of shapes Dunham favors: raw, simple ones that are not artsy or expressive but simply there.

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Urgently penciled scribbles become lumpy forms that appear to be groping, probing and rubbing against their ambiguously scaled surroundings. The sense of searching embodied by Dunham's malformed organisms matches his quest to find his art's purpose.

Things pick up speed as he uses ordinary pencils, colored pencils, ballpoint pens, wax crayons and acrylic paint. Some images are carefully shaded, their bulbous knobs and rambunctious orifices almost fleshy. Others are scrawled, their messiness suggesting mistakes Dunham wanted to obliterate but only made worse.

Kids' drawings come to mind, their innocence curdled by Dunham's refusal to fake it. In others, he plays the Surrealist game of exquisite corpse with himself, folding the paper to block his view of the whole. When cellular structures appear, they seem to be having existential crises, the built-up pressure nearly unbearable.

The sense of experimentation is frantic, almost desperate. It is as if Dunham were driven to get at something essential without having any faith in his methods or confidence in his capacities.

His stubbornness pays off in the next three galleries, each of which includes about 100 pieces made, respectively, from 1995 to 2000, 2000 to 2006 and 2007 to 2011. Larger, more elaborately rendered pictures appear alongside schematic landscapes, blockhead-style figures, solitary trees and close-ups of women's crotches.

A war between refinement and rawness takes place. Vigor and vulgarity win big in pictures whose formal features are as sophisticated as their imagery is brutal.

In a small gallery down a hall, the seven newest drawings stand out because they do not seem to have been made for the artist alone. But there is enough cave-painting primitivism and jailhouse tattoo in their DNA to keep good manners — and every trace of Mannerism — at bay.

**Blum & Poe**, 2727 S. La Cienega Blvd., (310) 836-2062, through May 26. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.blumandpoe.com](http://www.blumandpoe.com)