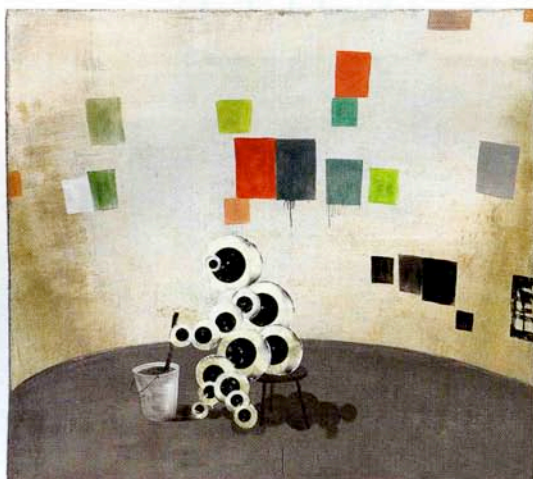


GLADSTONE GALLERY

Mueller, Stephen, "Carroll Dunham", *Art in America*, February 2010, pp. 112-114

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Norbert Schwontkowski:
The Inventor of the Tricolor,
2009, oil on canvas,
71 1/8 by 79 1/4 inches;
at Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

CARROLL DUNHAM BARBARA GLADSTONE

In the general scheme of Carroll Dunham's work, this show could be said to represent his *Nocturnes* and *Pastorals*. In place of Dunham's usual postulators, renegades, caballeros and assorted other big mouths, the subject of most of these new paintings (all 2009) is a woman—and she seems to be Woman, or at least a version of the female archetype. In most instances, she is on her stomach or knees, and seen from the back. We catch glimpses of landscape and sky either over her shoulders, under her arms or between

assorted other big mouths, the subject of most of these new paintings (all 2009) is a woman—and she seems to be Woman, or at least a version of the female archetype. In most instances, she is on her stomach or knees, and seen from the back. We catch glimpses of landscape and sky either over her shoulders, under her arms or between her legs. Her environs seem to be the desert. Often, it is night.

Dunham makes all these elements iconic, or so reduces them to their simplest form that they actually bear little resemblance to what they represent—but we always understand what they are. The pink double humps in almost all of the paintings are buttocks. With the addition of a circle (anus) and a flattened oval below (vagina), there is no mistaking a female figure. Her shoulders, head (seen from the back or top) and extended arms complete the picture. Occasional surrounding flowers are depicted as if drawn by a child (or Japanese cartoonist). As for vegetation, three green humps indicate a cactus, and a brown rectangle stands for a tree trunk; foliage is a green curlicue—a kind of improvisatory Roman key. The sky is mottled light blue and white (daytime) or ultramarine with small white or yellow circles (nighttime, with stars). The figure's hair, cranial and pubic, is also codified

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Carroll Dunham: *Bather (one)*, 2009, mixed mediums on canvas, 71 inches square; at Gladstone.



and always black. Above, Dunham renders it as a series of scalloped forms with blunt extensions, sort of a cross between a geisha and a Rastafarian; below, the hair is an unruly little black cloud.

The six paintings titled *Hers (Night and Day)* are variations of a single subject: a woman seen close up and from behind, sometimes with a breast visible on the side. Some are tightly cropped to zoom in on a particular area. With its convincing expression of the feeling of flesh in water at night, *Bather/Night* (32 by 41¾ inches) has a surprising visceral impact. Depicting the same subject, the much bigger *Bather (one)*—roughly 6 feet square—has a spacious tranquility. *Tree with Red Flowers* and *New Time Storm* (each 77¾ by 92¾ inches) both feature a single tree and its immediate surroundings, which is a barren landscape in the first; the second has more lush foliage, and the wood grain painted on its rectangular trunk seems a reference to the artist's early paintings.

Dunham is intimately aware of the 50-year (at least) history of acrylic painting, and takes full advantage of many techniques that have come and gone. With a crazy but solid design sense, he works wet on wet, using hastily blended paint, thick or washy, and colors that range from straight-from-the-tube yellow ocher to tenderly blended white-to-rose. The effect is brash, like nothing we've seen before, and strangely affecting. Mood and feeling are achieved, and strongly, in all of these paintings with the least likely means. It's like having an episode of "The Simpsons" make you really cry.

—Stephen Mueller