

MEETING OF MINDS



Carroll Dunham, (fives) *Night and Day #1*, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 51 x 66 in.

Matthew Weinstein puts five questions to Carroll Dunham.

Carroll and I went to Philadelphia yesterday to see the Philadelphia Museum's wonderful exhibition of source material for Marcel Duchamp's elaborate assemblage *Étant donnés* (1946–66). Carroll and I have been talking about art for more than 20 years. I cold-called him one day when I was still in college because I really liked his paintings. I was choking on death-of-painting discourse, and also choking on Death, which in the late '80s was flying through New York and picking up everyone it could grab. Carroll's pictures were like a burst of life on two levels: First, the life of painting was there—the life of an intense subjectivity elegantly splaying itself over a flat surface; and second, life itself was in these paintings—life as a generative, sexy, and grotesque force. I always thought that Carroll's paintings were the equivalent of farting during sex. We are sexy. We are disgusting. We are funny.

Carroll and I spent a lot of time talking about *Étant donnés* while we had sandwiches in the coffee shop. Neither of us sees Duchamp through his readymades. My enthusiasm for this, his last work, is really about the way Duchamp exploited the process of perception to create a very novel kind of viewing experience. He seems to have been thinking up 3-D animation, which took over my work about 10 years ago. Carroll couldn't take his eyes out of the peepholes [in the wooden door of *Étant donnés*]. Clearly, he's interested in Duchamp's literal and metaphoric myopia, as well as in the lensing of the world through human openings. Of equal interest to us both is the affectionate craftsmanship of this tableau—the love of making a work of art, the need to fit the parts perfectly into a whole, and the unwillingness to finish it because its life is joined to one's own. —Matthew Weinstein

What do you see through those peepholes? Some people see a dead woman, some visual rape, some enticement, desire, and the visual equivalent of sex.

I guess I don't really think about it narratively. Or maybe the thing jams my attempts to project a narrative onto it. I imagine Duchamp making associations that led to the specifics of the scene, not illustrating a narrative. You feel you're confronting a deeply odd artifact that someone felt compelled to make. It's both very raunchy and rather chaste. Peepholes notwithstanding, I also see it as his skeptical and eccentric way of musing on a train of thought in French painting extending back through Cézanne's late bather paintings, Courbet, and beyond—the nude in nature.

One of the things that has always interested me about *Étant donnés* is that in it the figure takes human form. It is no longer fragmented, alluded to, or diagrammed. A similar process went on in your work. I remember seeing the figures pop up out of the mounds all of a sudden: "We're heeere!" What made you need to make people out of all the different parts you'd been pushing together?

I didn't know that I needed to do that. It seemed to almost happen on its own. Somehow my own relentless logic about abstraction led me to a place where that term no longer quite applied. The progression of images of the human figure in my recent work is the latest evolutionary phase of the process. I think Duchamp set out to make physical an image that more or less existed in his head, so it came about very differently from the way things usually develop in painting.

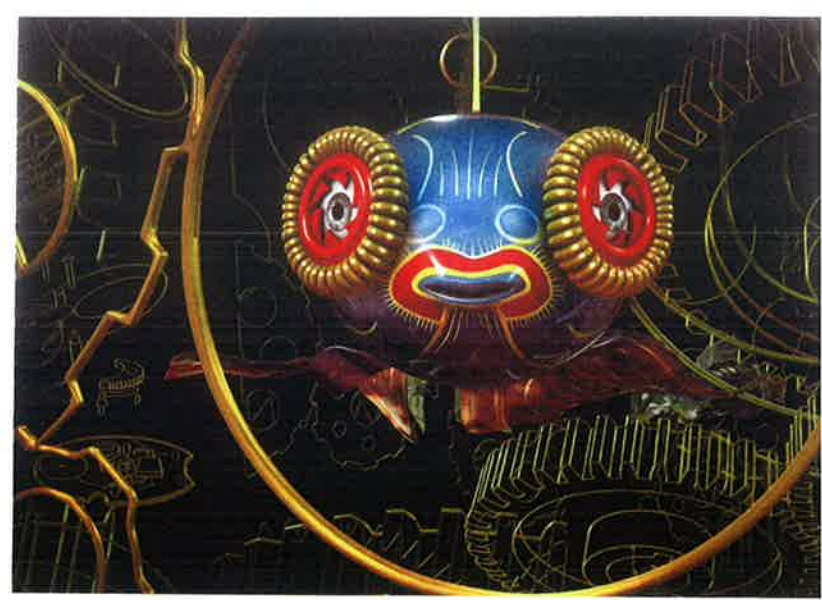


Carroll Dunham. *Hors/Dirt/Two*, 2009. Mixed media on canvas, 51 x 66 in.

on subjects like Picasso and Calder. You go to the galleries. You live with the work of other artists. And the artistic references in your work are very unveiled. We were talking about how Duchamp was engaged with the art world as an artist, dealer, spectator, and social presence. How does your direct engagement with other artists' work affect the way you make your own?

Thinking about other people's art, living or dead, helps me think about my own and increases my sense of connectedness to something larger than myself. Like many artists, I have a constant inner conversation taking place with whomever at any given time. Looking at art also just interests me more than most other things, so I try to do it. The art world is quite fascinating on an anthropological level, but that is a social reality. It's possible to be involved in the history and

You look at art more than most artists I know. You write about art. You take



Matthew Weinstein, still from *Chariots of the Gods*, 2009. 20-minute animation. Blu-ray disc.

present state of objects and bracket out the other part, at least for a little while. Many might disagree with that last statement.

After the *Étant donnés* exhibition, we looked at some Matisse paintings, specifically *Yellow Odalisque* from 1937. We talked about pleasure. Your new paintings really are about pleasure and are very reminiscent of this period of Matisse. What the hell is going on? The last time the outside world checked in with your world, you had an image of a figure with a gun up its ass?

I thought that painting was about pleasure too, just looked at from a slightly different perspective. Over time I have become increasingly preoccupied by early-modern French painting, in which category I also include Picasso. I feel more challenged by it and responsive to it than I had before, and my work probably reflects that. Matisse was thinking about painting at a profound level, and the relationship in his work to the decorative or the carnal forms of pleasure is extremely examined and philosophical. I'm not sure a contemporary American, no matter how enamored of certain traditions of art and thought, could make pleasure a subject in that way.

Is there no rest for the people on your planet, or is death the end of desire?

No rest, no end to desire. Desire just moves to a different host vehicle. I think it's woven into the fabric of consciousness, probably of all life, maybe even the "fabric of reality." That's one of the things *Étant donnés* is about. ♦

Matthew Weinstein has a solo show on view at Kevin Bruk Gallery in Miami, Florida, Jan. 9–Feb. 2010, kevinbrukgallery.com; and Baldwin Gallery in Aspen, Colorado, August 2010, baldwingallery.com. Carroll Dunham has a show currently on view at Gladstone Gallery, 24th Street, New York, through Dec. 5, gladstonegallery.com; and an exhibition at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, Apr. 10–May 15, 2010, blumandpoe.com.

Matthew Weinstein *Spiral Walk*, 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 90 x 72 in.

