

**CARROLL DUNHAM**

"He She, and It"

October 30–December 4, 2004

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to announce its first exhibition of new work by Carroll Dunham. Dunham's canvases consume and spit out aspects of Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Surrealism, and even graffiti to build tautly painted, sexually and psychologically charged personal narratives and reflections. The early works, painted on wood veneer, used the existing textures of the knotted grain to create elaborate compositions recalling both fantastic organic forms and the popular imagery of cartoons. Dunham's psychedelic eruptions of inchoate sexual organs and primordial secretions moved gradually into toothy blobs of caricatured men and women. Soon dick-faced men and loamy hags inhabited pockmarked landscapes and even entire planets, as Dunham's abstractions became quasi-figural tableaux.

In these new series of paintings, Dunham has reworked one particular recurring character from his ongoing painted narratives, that of the roaming man, perhaps an alter-ego, sometimes seen walking in black and white landscapes, at other times aiming guns and shooting blanks. While the figuration of his sooty hat, crumpled shirt and coat, and barred teeth remains consistent with earlier renderings, the man is now broken. Dunham narrowed his focus to fill the canvas with the particular details—just the tip of a nose, or a collar and lapel. His once easily recognizable figure now exists in abstracted compositions, expanding into fields of roughly textured paint and expressive, gestural line. Works of all sizes, some stretching over two canvases, dissect the figure and twist the perspective to create a jumbled spray of different vantages that seemingly connect into a single visage of Dunham's caricature; however, the pieces just don't fit. Though the paint now bleeds and the man is not as secure, the work remains true to Klaus Kertess's assessment of Dunham's previous work: "Rude, sometimes lurid, often grotesquely humorous in a Boschian Garden-of-Earthly-Delights kind of way, rich in metaphor, this art's squirmy psychosexuality is embraced by visual, formal acuity."

While women once figured more prominently in Dunham's fables, he has turned in recent years to exploring femininity in sculpture. Like drawing in three dimensions, he has been outlining elaborate forms in sheets of flat metal, painted black like shadows of some alien female presences. In his new series of sculptures, he reworked these silhouettes, bending and twisting the figures. With each turn of the viewer's eye, these works seem to morph, grow, and evolve, though they never seem to become fully solid. However long each changing view is studied, it is as if shadow continually obscures the true appearance of these crones. Like specimens, this band of creatures is both menacing in figure, yet constrained on bases recalling operating tables—like an unknown species captured, yet still not seen.

This paring of masculine and feminine, between the boys always on display and the girls perpetually in the shadows highlights the tension at the heart of Dunham's loose figuration. The grotesque and abstracted hordes of men and women appearing in the paintings and sculptures mirror the psychological undercurrent pinning down the morass of sex and gender which has continually kept the complexities of Dunham's work from fully crossing the stile between abstraction to figuration. Joining these different groups, though, does not resolve two halves into a whole, but furthers the inquiry into the relationship between Dunham's formal technique and imagery. As Molly Nesbit says in her essay that accompanies the exhibition catalogue, "One would hesitate to call this 'it' paradise regained. /One should not."

Carroll Dunham was born in 1949 and currently lives and works in New York and Connecticut. He has been the subject of one-person exhibitions, including exhibitions at Guild Hall, East Hampton, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, and a mid-career retrospective at the New Museum in New York in 2002. His work has been included in numerous Whitney Biennials and is currently on view as part of "Disparities and Deformations: Out Grotesque," SITE Santa Fe's fifth biennial curated by Robert Storr. A fully illustrated catalogue with texts by Molly Nesbit is available.

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