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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK  
EARTHY DELIGHTS

Carroll Dunham is working blue. That fact won't shock fans of the painter—he arrived, in the eighties, with polymorphously perverse abstractions that gave way to a ribald world of phallus-faced men—but his new show at Gladstone



just might. The best paintings of Dunham's career are also his most explicit: joyous updates of Gustave Courbet's "The Origin of the World," which transplant the female nude from the boudoir to a cartoon-bright Eden. A hint that this might be all about Eve appears at the entrance, in a picture of a tree bearing red flowers in lieu of forbidden fruit. But Dunham's book of genesis is painting and the scripture cited here runs from van Gogh's "The Starry Night" and Cézanne's "The Bather" to ukiyo-e erotica (jet-black hair is styled like a geisha's) and the splay-legged women of late Picasso. Surfaces are aqueous and furious, splattered and smeared. Cropping plays pictorial games with abstraction. A confrontational pink *derrière* would dissolve into minimalist, Robert Mangold-like curves if not for the rude joke of a tree trunk spied between thighs in the landscape. There's no mistaking the nature of this figure-ground relationship.

—Andrea K. Scott

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