



GLADSTONE GALLERY

"New Time Storm" by Carroll Dunham at Gladstone Gallery.

Carroll Dunham

Gladstone Gallery
515 West 24th Street,
Chelsea
Through Dec. 5

This joyous show of sweet, goofy and raunchy paintings might be the best of Carroll Dunham's nearly 30-year career. Sex is still his main subject, and he continues to work in a style that amalgamates Pop, Surrealism and Expressionism. But he has taken a surprising turn from the angry gender warfare of previous years, and he has banished his Puritan character with the bullet-firing penis-nose. With candy-bright colors separated by fat black lines and paint applied in a multitude of ways, these canvases have an engrossing sensuality. The images are turbulent but exuberantly so; they find Mr. Dunham on the threshold of a new Eden.

Some are landscapes centered on a leafy tree with a massive trunk and colorful daisylike flowers scattered about under lovely blue skies. The trees appear animated as if seen through the eyes of a Druid.

Most of the show's works feature the boldly outlined image of a naked woman with full, pendulous breasts. In some she is viewed from the front bending forward to wash herself in translucent blue water. In others she bends over with her posterior and genitals — highlighted in some cases in shocking pink — presented to the viewer in a pornographic manner. There's a naughty formalist joke here: you are implicitly invited to enter the picture imaginatively — to penetrate the painted surface and go into a virtual world conceived of as female. More broadly, Mr. Dunham is mischievously toying with the old romantic equation of nature and femininity (as in Gauguin), envisioning with comic élan and realist skepticism a pastoral, erotic alternative to our industrial, violently male-dominated world.

KEN JOHNSON