

Time Out

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"The Paintings of Carroll Dunham"

New Museum of Contemporary Art, through Feb 2 (see Museums).

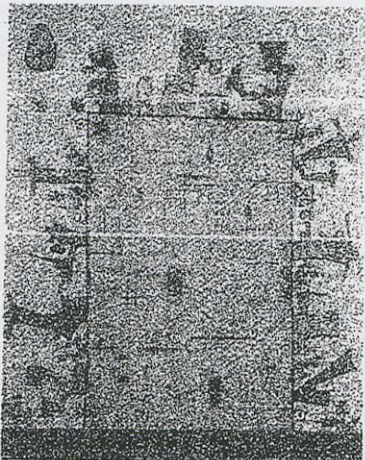
Carroll Dunham is a good artist, and this is exactly the kind of retrospective a good artist deserves—the kind that Lisa Phillips (who's taken time off from her duties as NewMu director to co-curate with Dan Cameron) might once have hung during her curatorial tenure at the Whitney Museum. Featuring 40 paintings from the last 20 years, and comfortably installed in the New Museum's first and second floor galleries, the exhibition not only provides a concise overview of Dunham's oeuvre, it also makes a convincing case for his enshrinement in the annals of late-20th-century art history.

A longtime master of the now overly hyped fusion of representation and abstraction, Dunham's work appears as a confident arc of continuous change—from the oozing amorphous blobs of color of his early work to the knife-wielding penis-heads and gun-toting suits of his latest canvases. While Dunham's work clearly stands alone, it is difficult at times to get around the influence of Philip Guston, who also escaped the confines of pure abstraction to find a happy medium that included representational imagery. This is particularly true of Dunham's work since 1994, which, with its cartoonish exploding planets, far lips and gritted teeth, strongly recalls Guston's late paintings.

If there is a defining trait that links

every phase of Dunham's career, it's his debt to graffiti: His painting style is consistently characterized by an immediacy of line, drip and color that evokes the buzzing energy of a 1980s burner. Dunham (who has spoken of the influence of recreational drugs on his early work) also draws on the intense hues and visual vocabulary of psychedelic posters. It is this simultaneous embrace of psychedelia, graffiti and cartoons that marks Dunham's unique contribution to contemporary painting. His influence on the work of younger artists like Matthew Ritchie and Inka Essenhigh is readily apparent. If a retrospective is a kind of test, Dunham passes with flying colors.

—Franklin Sirmans



Carroll Dunham, *Demon Tower*, 1997.