

MARIO NAVES

## David Row Slowly Abandons Compositional Calculation

Prior to his 1991 show at the John Good Gallery, David Row was one of any number of art-world professionals—a painter adept at crafting abstractions that nodded to the theoretical and looked good on the wall. In the early 90's, however, Mr. Row broke up and reconfigured his signature ellipses into mix-and-match triptychs. In the process he forsook expertise for what could be called

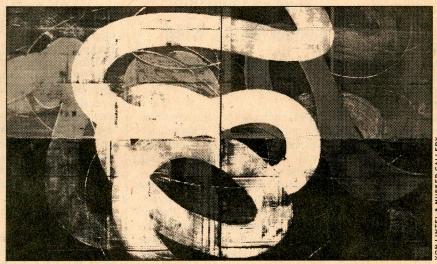
professionalism with a purpose.

The works featured in the aforementioned Good exhibition may have had their foundation in "semiotic analysis," but they flourished as paintings, pure and not so simple. By locating logic within dissolution, the artist gave his dissected geometries an excitement they had hitherto bypassed. With them, Mr. Row's weathered facture and electric colors became integral components of the work's reso-

lution, and he proved himself one of the few artists to utilize the shaped canvas as a means of confirming (and strengthening) pictorial space. The critic Barry Schwabsky called the triptychs "meditations on the numbers one, two and three." What made the paintings compelling was their insistence that such mathematical meditations were, at best, a tenuous proposition.

Since then, Mr. Row has continued to refine his formal vocabulary, and the work has been handsome but often convoluted. In his paintings at the Von Lintel & Nusser Gallery, the artist can be seen stretching his stylistic muscles while playing it safe. The new canvases depict an architecture disrupted by veering pathways that have the heft and momentum of an interstate highway. The pictures haven't, as of yet, found their structural axis; they're manipulated designs rather than full-bodied pictures.

The best and not coincidentally, least



David Row's Phosphor, 1999.

programmatic painting is a diptych called *Phosphor* (1999). The work's diptych format is, admittedly, an irrelevance, and the artist's use of a 12-inch taping knife as a painting tool is mannered. But they are offset by a spatial and chromatic opulence that borders on the romantic. Mr. Row's art would seem to benefit from the loosening, if not the abandonment, of compositional calculation

*Phosphor* registers because its ghostly beauty is organic rather than engineered; it is, in other words, the one that got away.

Let's hope this capable painter makes his peace with "semiotic analysis" and goes out on a limb more often. *David Row: New Works* is at the Von Lintel & Nusser Gallery, at 555 West 25th Street, until Nov. 27.

## CARROLL DUNHAM DOES GUSTON LITE

The denizens of Carroll Dunham's paintings, now on view at Metro Pictures, are blockheaded and quarrelsome. His squat, faceless beings are all gritting teeth, erect phalluses and cavernous vaginas. Mr. Dunham's rude cosmos is overseen and presumably blessed by a rubbery, doughnut-shaped entity: a cosmic orifice. In *Twin Lakes "The Sun"* (1999), his cranky car-

toons well up from the periphery of the title planet. In Ship (1997-1999), four male figures with pissing (or ejaculating) penises set sail on an immense boat, along with three captive women. Mr. Dunham delineates these scenarios with a graffiti-like haste: Forms are outlined in black, colors filled in and surfaces expertly dirtied. The crudity of Mr. Dunham's paint handling would seem to reinforce the manic comedy of his imagery. But mostly the canvases are arty in a way best appreciated

by those who don't have much patience for

painting in the first place.

Mr. Dunham has always relied on a Twombly-esque doodling, and in a couple of the paintings he superimposes his characters on fields that blatantly mimic those of his artistic mentor. Yet the antecedent of Mr. Dunham's imagery is Philip Guston. Guston's late pictures, with their lumpish figures and desolate rooms, are among the paramount achievements of late-20th-century art. Yet their influence has been, to put it diplomatically, less than salutary. Followers like Mr.

Dunham look at Gocartoons, harsh and to (or intimidated be tic and moral, of Gham, then, gives us doomsday scenarickle. There's no we ality"—to his pastisee his horny and stylings he's approperany as seen with splashy paint, errant squiggle.

Still, it is Mr. gremlins that have as a painter whose it) "enact[s] dark condition." I susptious enough to quan eyebrow to—s! Nevertheless, it tell condition of the art take Mr. Dunham' philosophical del ham is at Metro I Street, until Dec. 4

## LEE BONTEC BACK BUT N

The sculptor L best known for 1970's, at a time full swing. This ha art students who commercial succ some observers ha dom of an artist ch ly when part of w representation by tecou's work has there, but not in a those of us perple seen in group sho ing. When, one w hibit be organize artist's oeuvre in t

artist's oeuvre in to The show of M rently at the Leo C tunately, not in the tures—which recomplished and of the seen here anyway, lone exception is a wherein Ms. Bonto alism achieves a knot without humo pointment, but it is Bontecous. 1958-1 li Gallery, 59 East 7