



## Currently Hanging

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 resolution, 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 cartoons 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 Guston's cartoons, harsh and to (or intimidated by) the aesthetic and moral, of Guston, then, gives us a doomsday scenario. There's no "weird" or "reality"—to his past. To see his horny and stylings he's appropriate. Canvases live in areas—areas with splashy paint, errant squiggle.

Still, it is Mr. Dunham's gremlins that have made him as a painter whose work it "enact[s] dark condition." I suspect he is serious enough to quash an eyebrow to—sure. Nevertheless, it tells the condition of the art. Take Mr. Dunham's philosophical delirium. *Phosphor* is at Metro Pictures, 555 West 25th Street, until Dec. 4.

## LEE BONTECOU BACK BUT NOT

The sculptor Lee Bontecou is best known for his work in the 1970's, at a time when he was in full swing. This has made him an art student who has achieved commercial success. Some observers have wondered if the freedom of an artist changes when part of work is represented by Bontecou's work has been there, but not in a way that those of us perplexed by his work seen in group showings. When, one would expect, he would exhibit be organized by an artist's *oeuvre* in to

The show of Mr. Bontecou's work is currently at the Leo Castelli Gallery. Unfortunately, not in the same way—figures—which recall the stained-glass and futuristic architecture and accomplished and seen here anyway, lone exception is a work wherein Ms. Bontecou achieves a kind of not without humor. The pointment, but it is *Bontecou: 1958-1999* at the Leo Castelli Gallery, 59 East 7th Street, until Dec. 4.