

Carroll Dunham *Open Studio & Empty Spaces*

27 February – 12 April 2025
First Floor, 41 Dover Street, London W1S 4NS

Opening: Thursday, 27 February, 6 – 8pm



Carroll Dunham, *Open Studio (6)*, 2024, photo: Pierre le Hors

Galerie Max Hetzler, London, is pleased to present *Open Studio & Empty Spaces*, an exhibition of new paintings and works on paper by **Carroll Dunham**. This is the artist's fifth presentation with the gallery, including two duo shows, and the second in the London space.

Dunham has developed a unique pictorial language encompassing painting, drawing, printmaking and sculpture over several decades. Engaging line, colour and form to activate his energetically charged works, the artist creates a fantastical universe populated by humanoid figures who seem to exist outside the limitations of time and place. These long-haired, unclothed specimens have been an ongoing primary subject in Dunham's oeuvre over the last fifteen years.

The exhibition presents eight large-scale paintings from 2024 and ten drawings from 2023, which centre around the artist's studio. In Dunham's 'Open Studio' paintings, an earthling sculptor on an unknown planet is visited by two purple denizens – one male, one female. Highly schematic, the works offer a culmination of the compositional principles the artist has been exploring for more than five decades: archetypal bodies, framing devices, marginalia and isometric space construction. Within his wood-paneled studio, the sculptor makes his objects, as the purple nudes look on bemused. The crisp geometry of the interior scene is at odds with its surrounding landscape. Demarcated by a curved, planetary horizon line, the space is littered with curly cubes and swirling lines, in a state Dunham describes as a 'conflation of mechanical and organic things'.

The paintings are divided into four daytime and four nighttime scenes. In the former, against a bright blue sky, seven blackbirds swoop around the studio space. In the latter, set within the celestial array, a dog comes to visit. In these works, different levels of the gaze are at play: the animals observe the humanoids, who watch the sculptor, who contemplates his own creation. In turn, we – the viewer voyeur – adopt the role of outsider looking in. In two of the works, the dog looks out directly towards us, meeting our gaze. Dunham's careful choreography provides insight into his subjects' complex internal world, while his colour choices expose and question stereotypes concerning race, ethnicity and human nature. Denoting a sense of otherness, the vibrant purple in the present series is inspired by science-fiction and mythology.

The influence of Dunham's drawing and printmaking practice is evident in the bold outlines, flat planes

of colour, areas of transparency and layering, and distinctive curvilinear lines. 'Everything I do is built from lines,' the artist states. 'Even the birds, which are really just sheets of paint. The blackbirds start out as line drawings and then I take a big brush and paint them. The whole thing is a structure of lines. And it goes down to a really microlevel like the way I draw hair.' For Dunham, image-making has always been a matter of method (the *how*) over subject (the *what*). In these works, he seeks an approach to painting which is analogous to the playful experimentation of his drawing technique.

Drawing is the backbone of Dunham's practice: it is here that he births, explores and expands upon his ideas. His large, monochromatic 'Empty Spaces' are rendered in watercolour on paper. They present an empty studio, abandoned of all occupants – human and alien alike. The geometric interior spaces are concisely mapped out, yet beyond the studio walls, the orderliness of the containers begins to unravel into loose, spiralling forms. Dunham, despite all his world-building, is deeply sceptical of the godlike mythos of the artist in search of inspiration from lands, and peoples, unknown. His empty compositions lead us to wonder whether this venture might not turn out quite the way the interplanetary sculptor envisaged. Treading the line between order and chaos, figuration and abstraction, flatness and pictorial depth, *Open Studio & Empty Spaces* exemplifies the artist's innovative approach to myth-making and spatial-construction within his boundary pushing practice.

Carroll Dunham (b. 1949, New Haven, Connecticut) lives and works in New York City and Connecticut. Dunham's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions in institutions including Le Consortium, Dijon (duo show, 2024–2025); Nasjonalmuseet Oslo (2023); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and Sprengel Museum Hannover (duo show, 2019–2020); Denver Art Museum (2014); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2009); Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover (2008); Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin (2007); Drammens Museum, Drammen (2006); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2002); and Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum (1996).

Works by Dunham are in the public collections of Albertina, Vienna; Art Institute of Chicago; Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo; The British Museum, London; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art; Drammens Museum, Drammen; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Tate, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

A solo exhibition of drawings by Carroll Dunham will open at the Art Institute of Chicago in January 2026.

Further exhibitions and events

BERLIN

Elmgreen & Dragset
Momentan nicht erreichbar
20 February – 12 April 2025
Potsdamer Straße 77–87
10785 Berlin

Karel Appel
The Classic Themes
1 March – 12 April 2025
Bleibtreustraße 45
10623 Berlin

Stories of Your Lives
1 March – 12 April 2025
Goethestraße 2/3 & Bleibtreustraße 15/16
10623 Berlin

PARIS

André Butzer
Frau am Tisch mit Früchten
1 March – 5 April 2025
46 & 57, rue du Temple
75004 Paris

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