

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Cecily Brown



Cecily Brown, *Carnival and Lent*, 2006–2008, oil on linen, 97 x 103".

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555 West 24th Street

September 20–October 25

In Cecily Brown's sordid safari of lustrous, body-laden landscapes, representation quickly devolves into abstraction. Scant, birdlike tread marks occasionally surface to indicate possible routes through the mayhem, as in *Carnival and Lent*, 2006–2008, a densely populated drama that recalls Pieter Bruegel's sixteenth-century painting of the Renaissance festival and is reminiscent of Willem de Kooning's work in its busy conglomeration of figures. Brown's deft classical references soften the erotic, heaving images. In the cheekily titled four-canvas series "Skulldiver," 2006–2007, three of which are exhibited here, the peach and green paintings enliven natural landscapes with bodies engaged in cunnilingus, dashed with Renoiresque brushstrokes; their pastoral eroticism also connotes Georgia O'Keeffe's sexually suggestive calla lilies. Though these provocative themes are so randy they could have been stripped from Anaïs Nin's diaries, they have a petit mal peacefulness to them, offering a laconic breather amid the

intense reds and pinks of Brown's other work. She's known for working at a grand scale; in this show, a number of small canvases seem to distill the rush of experience depicted in the oversize works but are in fact further explorations of their themes.

Just as some of Brown's paintings explode with intimate vitality, others turn inward to expose the feverish creativity of isolation. In *The Adoration of the Hermit*, 2008, dancing figures pop out from a wildly imagined canvas, while the sprawling *Indian Tourist*, 2008, reminds viewers that they remain immersed in Brown's topography. Four works titled *Study for San Mere*, all 2008, inspired partly by English novelist Mary Webb's *Precious Bane* (1924), offer a somber view; deep-hued and supernatural-looking flora and fauna tantalize the journeyer, who must ultimately abandon Brown's exuberant heart of darkness for the lesser tourism of everyday life.

— Janine Armin