

Doug Clow, Untitled #1, Oil on canvas, 12 x 12", Series #2



David Eddy, Finishing School, 36 x 32" 2001

DOUG CLOW AND DAVID EDDY SURPRISE RESULTS

by Jeanette Fintz

*A man who has lost the capacity
to be surprised is like a dead man.*

-Albert Einstein

Empathy, in the best possible of worlds, is the line of communication between the viewer and the maker of art. It opens the door. Often viewers respond most easily to recognizable images, to verisimilitude. My relation to a painting tends to be most keen when I can read the process through surface, decoding the work by the way an artist uses formal elements—the nuts and bolts of line, surface, and space. The two painters I bring to your attention here, at first glance couldn't be more different in their overt stylistic decisions. What they share is the use of line-drawing-as their primary, and at times almost desperate means of communicating with, and decoding the world.

In the work of Doug Clow and David Eddy, surface is responsive to drawing. Line appears to struggle and to claw its way up for air in Eddy's visceral paintings (swimming and fishing are two metaphors he uses to navigate the surface). In Clow's work, line plays a peek-a-boo game with the ground. Its numerous transformations, from pinched figure to engorged ground, are the key to the hermetic mysteries he conjures.

Clow, a Hudson local, is a quietly ardent artist. He has chosen to work in a reductive mode and has been exclusively faithful to black and white oil paint for many years. His graphic paintings clearly are about the evolution of language. In this, his second show at A. D. D. Gallery, Clow again puts selected linear elements through their paces. His approach to line and shape has been to devise a systematic progression that ultimately leads to transformation. In the past, he displayed his alphabetic changes in a chartlike form, which had a choreographic, kinetic quality. (Think Ballanchine.)

The new works in this show are discrete, small, mostly square paintings, each of which tells only part of a longer story. Clow's hyper-rational method for creating a sequence of letters could appear too cool if it weren't for the direct evidence of his search for edges, the shrinking/expanding interactions between figure and ground that he allow us to participate in. He now crops and isolates individual groups of letters (one can't call them words or phrases yet), which touch, grow fat or thin, and may end up floating alone. Cutting in on them close to the edge of the format and pumping up the ratio of black to white, Clow experiments until something surprising happens. In some pieces an image emerges by default, like a jack-o-lantern face or a childlike house. Sometimes what is left is a few floating but girderlike perpendicular lines, articulating what is essential in the space. All of his work is redeemed from design project prosaicism by the fact that he has no ultimate goal, but is conducting an open search undertaken with deceptive simplicity. You get the feeling that Clow may be more surprised than the viewer at the outcome of his experiments—that his search for the magical result through the process of logic is the end in itself.

Clow's newest series, introduced by a piece labeled "transition," look literally like scientific formulas. They have a more consciously assembled appearance: a sequence of lines, extracted and synthesized from previous results, and arranged to use space to communicate a specific, if cryptic message. Line has traveled from abstract shape to symbol. This last group holds our attention not because of their outward beauty, but because of some residual integrity that remains tangible from the process that created them. White letters on a black ground give a blackboardlike effect with out the seductive dustiness of a Twombly.

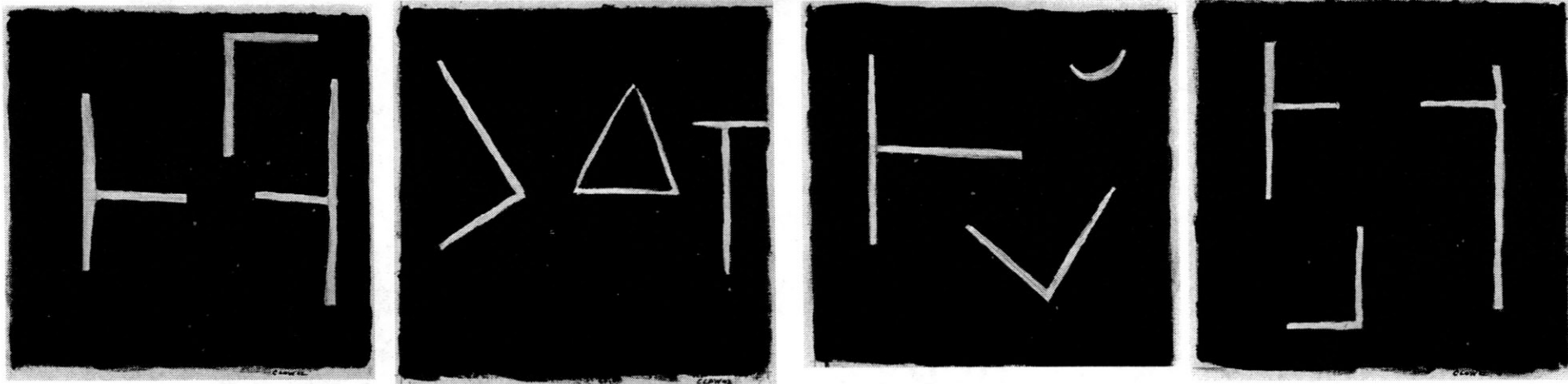
The most obvious departure in format among the new pieces is a group of as yet unresolved works, which use a white ground, and have a horizontal orientation. Small dots, lines, and crescents float in the most lyrical spatial arrangement I have yet seen Clow to admit, suggesting landscape. Perhaps in his dogged way, he is

indeed using the word to create the universe.

Drawing is Eddy's lifeline and painting is his raft in a world that's anxious and whimsical in turn. The artist, a former roofing contractor turned successful painter in the last five years, has a direct physical, exploratory approach to his material. This September he had his second well-received show at the Carrie Haddad Gallery. In one of his best pieces, "Navigator," the surface (layers of acrylic with a chalky additive) seems to be actively fighting his cast of semiautobiographical figures, threatening to suffocate or drown them. Eddy uses the predominantly linear figures as expressive devices in an abstract and subjective space. His work has been compared to Paul Klee's because of his use of hatched lines and schematic figures, but I see more of a psychic resemblance to the nightmarish masked creatures of James



David Eddy, Swimming Lessons, Acrylic on panel, 28 x 26", 2002



Doug Clow, Untitled #5, #3, #2, #7, oil on canvas, 10 x 10"

Ensor and the fragmented graffitis of Jean Michele Basquiat. At first glance, the beautifully modulated grays, pastel colors, and childlike figures seem innocuous enough, and some of the big-eyed kids have a resemblance to clawing Keene children of the 60s-until you take a closer look.

There is anxiety in the line drawing, whether incised, revealing layers of brighter colors like wounds, or penciled on a surface, baldly, like a kid would scrawl on a wall, that needs to be taken seriously. Among the roles he assigns to his figures-children, dogs, parents-in the gestalt of his universe, one often assumes that his primary identification is with the child, perhaps the super-sized boy-king with the crown of thorns in the painting "Joy Ride." In "Swimming Lessons," one of Eddy's most simple and eloquent compositions, a small child tentatively reaches one black clawlike hand out into a wide, undifferentiated plane which is squeezing him in place. The use of swimming and water metaphors to describe the act of making art appears to be directly linked to survival in the real world.

I noticed many oddly damaged creatures, often without arms or one-armed, in need of a child psychologist. How consciously or subconsciously Eddy is creating these pathetic souls is not something the viewer is privy to. The paintings

are accessible to viewers because of the presence of figures, and engaging due to the charm that the direct and childlike drawing produces. But the paintings succeed when they do because of Eddy's involvement with the process, his balancing act (another thematic activity) between surface density and the scratched and lyrical line that is the real language of these pieces.

The painting "Fish Out of Water" succeeds on all levels. The paint reveals, conceals, and coexists tenuously with his cast of characters. They line up as in an evolutionary chain, perhaps representing the development of the artist's own psyche; the , one-eyed creature, the grounded fish on the river bank, and the one-armed fisherman child. All are vulnerable, but finally powerful enough to master the piece of the universe, which is ultimately the painting space itself.

Eddy's largest painting to date, "Joy Ride," has a runaway lyricism to it that none of the others have, perhaps because the increased scale and the open circular movement allow the characters to seem to fly as well as float or swim. The pink, halved ground is reminiscent of Philip Guston's sumptuous abstract landscapes as well as some of his later cartoon paintings. The child-king, the dominant character, harkens back to Guston again, via Max Beckman, via Piero, a sign that the

self-taught painter is doing his homework!

But the storytelling space has more in common with the fantasy narratives of Marc Chagall, complete with nostalgic family saga, birth-to-death cycles, along with embryos, angels, and a satisfyingly dark and waspish witch on a broomstick. It has a sweeping overview of the artist life from a much higher vantagepoint, both compositionally and metaphorically, than the rest of the work here. We look forward to the next installment.

Doug Clow's exhibition runs through November 3. Opening reception is October 5 at A. D. D. Gallery, 22 Park Place Hudson, NY. For more information call 518-822-9763. David Eddy is represented by Carrie Haddad Gallery, 622 Warren Street Hudson, NY. For more information call 518-828-1915.

