

CONTENTS
ISSUE
TWENTY-
SEVEN

- 03 / Editorial
- 04 / Heike Kelter
interviews Kirsi Mikkola
- 08 / Anna Liber Lewis
interviews Carroll Dunham
- 16 / Geraldine Swayne
talks with Pinkie Maclure
- 22 / Ansel Krut on Chaïm
Soutine's landscapes
- 28 / David Caines talks
with Elizabeth Magill
- 34 / Bettina Semmer's
Advice Page for Painters
- 36 / Alaena Turner
interviews Richard Roth
- 42 / Charles Williams
on Joseph Highmore's 'Mr
Oldham and his Guests'
- 46 / Grant Foster talks
with Andrzej Jackowski
- 52 / John Walker: London
New York, 2023
- 54 / Simon Bill on John
Walker
- 60 / Clement Page
and David Rhodes
in conversation
- 64 / Magnus Frederik
Clausen and Daniel
Graham Loxton in
conversation
- 70 / Matt Lippiatt
talks with Tyree Guyton
- 76 / Joni Spigler on
Paul Cézanne

ANNA LIBER LEWIS INTERVIEWS CARROLL DUNHAM

Everything is sort of all rooted in drawing. I'm not really interested in hanging out while things dry, you know? [laughs] That's not how I want to think at all.

Anna Liber Lewis: I'm a huge fan. Your work speaks very directly to me. I don't think I understand why, but I am starting to as I go further down the painting rabbit hole. This conversation is about trying to figure out why your work speaks to me so directly. The last time I saw your work was in the exhibition *Carroll Dunham. Where am I? Prints 1985–2022*, at the National Museum, Oslo, but I also saw the Galerie Max Hetzler show *Carroll Dunham | Albert Oehlen* in 2021, just after lockdown.

I was really interested in the doodle framing of the *Proof of Concept* painting series: it made me think about your earlier work, when you were responding to wood grain. Now the doodle was framing the image, but it was coming down into the bodies as well. It made me wonder what you were drawing as a child and as an adolescent.

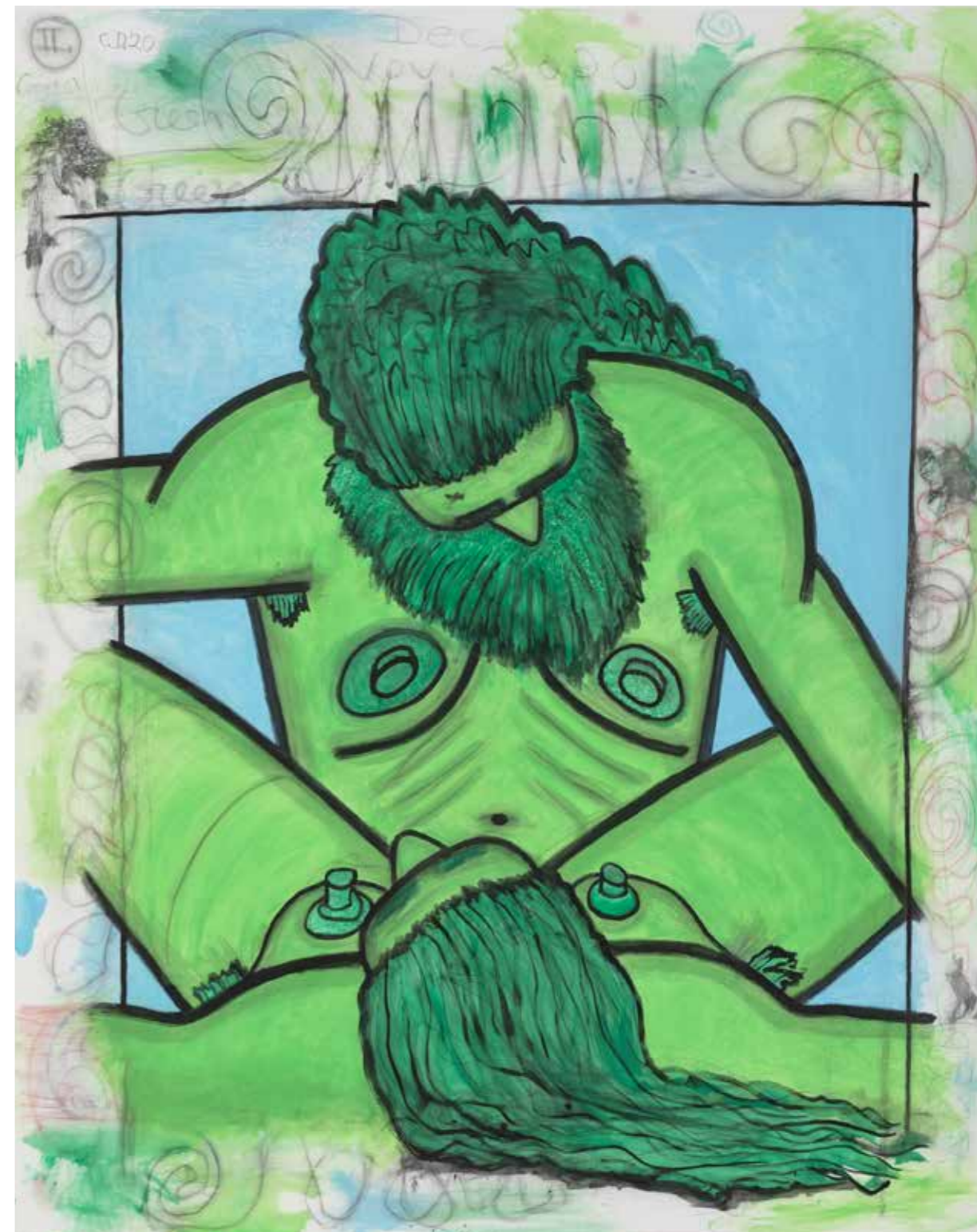
Carroll Dunham: I drew all the time when I was a child. And then, as an adolescent, I stopped for a while. Then, in my late teens, it was probably connected to starting to smoke pot. I started to go back to a doodling style of drawing. I was years away from thinking of myself as an artist, but when I was a little kid, I think I drew probably the same kinds of things. I can't analyse them psychologically, but I know that I was very interested in the kinds of big dramatic violent historical subjects that little boys like, you know? Cowboys and

Indians, war, things that actually came back in my work as an adult. Certainly the idea of using conflagration as a subject, that was very much with me for a while, maybe twenty years ago. I think that my affinity for drawing is what got me back to being an artist really. Everything in my work comes from drawing. It's perceptive of you to bring that up, because actually drawing is the structural foundation of all of it.

ALL: It is, isn't it? I noticed also, in the materials, you're not using oil paint – it's water based?

CD: I learned, early on, that I actually don't like being around oil paints. Physically, they give me a headache. I didn't go to art school, really. I went to a liberal arts college where you could take a studio art major. I wasn't 'taught painting', as they say. I didn't even start thinking seriously about painting as something I would pursue until I was – I don't know – probably twenty-five or twenty-six years old. I was thinking of myself more in general terms as an artist, not a painter. So when I started thinking about painting as an interesting problem to involve myself with, I knew that I hated going into most painters' studios, if they reeked of turpentine and oil, so I thought of it more as a conceptual art problem than I did a craft at that time. I made up a way to do it. And it started really very primitively – crudely. Now I use acrylic paints, which are quite standard, but back then I used paints that are more associated with commercial art or theatre design or something like that. I was painting flat areas of colour. It was much more to do with the *idea* of making a painting rather than the way a lot of artists who make paintings think of it as this sort of sexy *craft* object. That's probably both a strength and a limitation of what I've done. I'm pretty aware of my limitations.

ALL: That's interesting and smart. You're right, it's not good for your health! There is a kind of, you know,



Opposite:

Proof of Concept (II)

2020

Acrylic, graphite, colored pencil, wax crayon, and watercolor crayon on linen
152.4 x 121.9 cm

© Carroll Dunham
Courtesy of the artist
and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin



Big Men (1)
2019-2020
Urethane, acrylic, and pencil on linen
213 x 165 cm

© Carroll Dunham
Courtesy of the artist
and Gladstone Gallery, New York

'big dickness' in the whole oil / turps world, isn't there?

CD: I can't tell you how uninterested I am in all of that. It's not to say that I think paintings materialise out of thin air, I well understand that. One of the things that's held my interest in painting over the years is the fact that it really involves making things and I have never found a way to delegate any of that or to distribute it in some way where people help me.

ALL: Great!

CD: I'm alone in a room making things: that's the condition within which I work. I love that you notice this because I think I always look at the list of materials – of what paintings are made up of – because I'm on the lookout for people that think a bit differently about it. So I really notice, when I see something I'm interested in, if it's made of acrylic paint, for example, because a lot of paintings made of acrylic paint look pretty generic.

ALL: I think that maybe that's why I didn't inquire around your work when I first encountered it. I just assumed it would be oil. You've really sorted out the surface!

CD: I know this now – I didn't know this when I was twenty-five – but you couldn't really make paintings that look like my paintings with oil paint. And I think the other aspect, which I talk about with friends, is that I don't like to have this sort of endless mutability situation that people who work with oil paint have: there's no scraping the canvas off; there's no going back two days later and mashing things around. It's like... it's either that or I cover it up and I do something different and I rather like that. I think it goes to what I said in the beginning, that everything is sort of all rooted in drawing. I'm not really interested in hanging out while things dry, you know? [laughs] That's not how I want to think at all. So my whole approach in the studio is based on the idea that I can just keep going whenever

I want. I'm not limited by the personality of my material in a certain way. I mean, I'm limited in the *effects* I can get – you can't do the things you can do with oil paint with what I use – but you also can't make my paintings with oil paints. It's interesting. I just think about this stuff a lot. It's nice that you're asking.

ALL: What I loved about the *Proof of Concept* paintings was that you could see your thinking laid out, like a mathematician showing their workings-out – we can see the colour ratios with the green and white. I love that! The doodle which is now kind of blowing my mind is the one in the etching with the single green male figure (*Green Self Model*) – a figure looking into the abyss of a doodle! The doodles are profound marks for me. They're very moving.

CD: Thank you for saying that. It means a lot to me to hear that because, like anyone else, I spend a lot of time beating myself up and telling myself that the things I'm doing are stupid. I suppose it's another way of talking about one's own critical voice, which I think is a healthy thing for an artist to have, up to a point. I have felt that the reappearance of this – what you're calling '*the doodling*' – these non-referential marks – are just what my arm and hand want to do. They're so ingrained in me that I almost don't know what to say about them.

ALL: Yeah, I guess that's why I asked you about being a teenager and a child. You know, when I got back into painting that's where I felt everything was coming from – that young space may be also teenage angst that's unresolved somehow.

CD: Yeah, I think for me, when I moved to New York I was twenty-three years old. And it was still pretty much high-conceptual art time. That was a little after when it peaked, but it certainly was not a time when painting was top of mind for anyone I was talking to. I learned a lot very quickly about how one might think about art and take a kind of intellectual approach to it: artists as a

subset of philosophy, in a way. You could see that type of approach with a lot of New York artists who were older than I. At that time, their work skewed towards a conceptual position. I got back to drawing when I was getting stoned in my dorm room. I always knew that drawing had a connection, for me, to psychedelic culture and to all kinds of lurid stuff that just had nothing to do with the way the New York art world was thinking about itself. Once I got a little bit of confidence I thought that for painting to be meaningful, you have to find your own way to it. I think I knew early on that I wanted to bring these two seemingly completely contradictory approaches... I wanted to bring them together. You asked me about the *Proof of Concept* paintings. It was almost a relief to me to just leave all those notes on the painting – like the diagrams I wanted to remember – and I wanted anyone who looked at them to understand that it's about green people, white people, combinations, permutations. The male on top, the female on the bottom, all the things that are so obvious in the image also have a sort of diagrammatic analogue.

ALL: Yeah, I found them super exciting because of that. I think that is possibly why your work resonates with me so strongly – you have ‘stuck to your guns’ with the imagery but I can feel that there is something going on beneath that. Do the doodles come at the same time as planning the composition? How do you feel your way through it?

CD: Drawing gives me the feeling that I'm starting to understand the subject. Drawing gives me the feeling that I'm claiming it; that I'm bringing it into my vocabulary; that it's becoming one of the things that's within my territory, that I can use, and I have to find my way to that in drawing. After that, it could go toward prints, it could go toward paintings, but the likelihood is that as those ideas are elaborated upon, they

would go toward paintings. I get to a point where I feel like I am inside of it. I'm in the middle of it.

ALL: I wanted to ask you about the green – the green people.

CD: I'm working now on a book about that exact thing because it's a big body of work. I started down in that direction in 2019. There are drawings, paintings, and prints that are all kind of around this idea.

ALL: I wonder, are they green or are they in green light? What's the green? I know you're interested in science fiction.

CD: Green people are big in science fiction; certainly earlier science fiction.

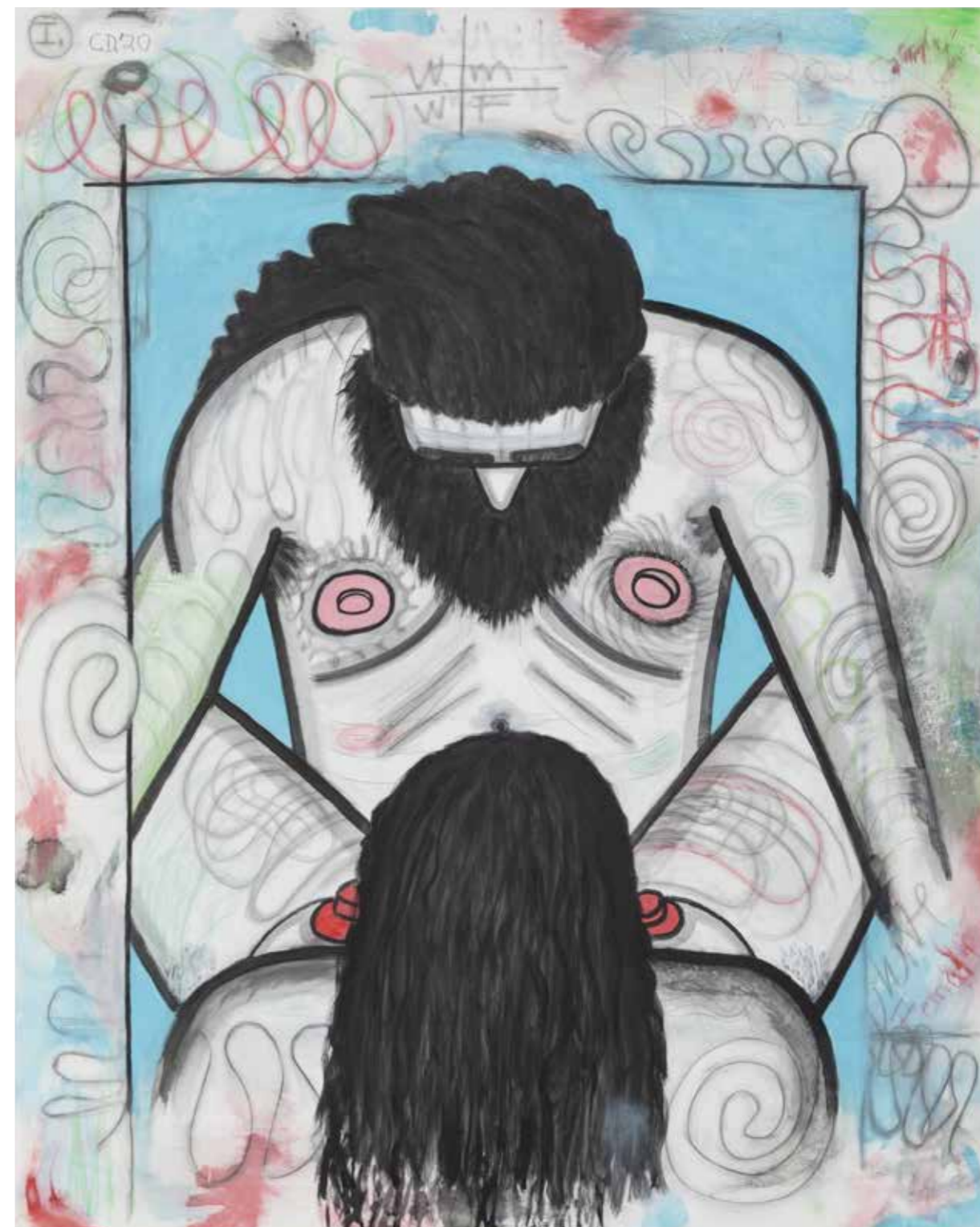
ALL: What have you been reading or watching? What's the sci-fi you like?

CD: When I was a kid, I started reading all the paperback books that I could find. I most vividly remember that there was an American author called Edgar Rice Burroughs, who created the character *Tarzan of the Jungle* [laughs], a character that I don't think would do quite so well today. But Burroughs also wrote science fiction and he was one of the very early prolific science fiction writers. He wrote a series of books about a human male who mysteriously finds himself on the planet Mars, dealing with this complex civilization. And the first Martian he encounters when he wakes up on Mars is a twelve-foot-tall green warrior with four arms. And it's a very vivid image for a kid to try to conjure in their mind.

ALL: Did you try and draw it?

CD: I'm sure I probably did. I don't remember. I'm sure those descriptions sit in one's imagination as a kind of archetypal picture.

I have to say that I felt at a certain point – and this well pre-dates the pandemic and Black Lives Matter – this goes back to the work I was making before *The Wrestlers*. I made a quite large series of paintings over the course of years that I called *Bathers*, based on the idea of images of a female alone in nature. It was my attempt to try to engage with



Opposite:

Proof of Concept (1)
2020
Acrylic, graphite, colored pencil, wax
crayon, and watercolor crayon on linen
152.4 x 121.9 cm

© Carroll Dunham
Courtesy of the artist
and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin



another area of art history that I was very interested in. But then, at a certain point, it felt important to me – because I am quote-unquote ‘white’ – it felt important to me to make the characters in the paintings white. That’s when I started to really make the males and females in my paintings literally white...

ALL: I’ve heard you talk about them as a void: *white being*...

CD: Yes. They are, in fact, the least-painted part of the painting: it’s really gesso. So that went on for a while and that felt appropriate. That felt right. And I think I got really, really sick of looking at these big white shapes in my paintings and at the same time I was thinking about, like all of us, about the racial situation in the United States. I was thinking about a kind of boredom with my own interests, my own sort of seriousness, I don’t know, something happened. You can’t explain these things. I was working in print studios. I do a lot of monotypes, it’s a big interest of mine. Basically I was just messing around one day and I made a green one, you know? I’m so tired of all this white shit all over my work, so I made a green image of a green male with a beard.

At a certain point I started to feel like I was being extremely disingenuous not to engage with the entire biological reality of being male, and that I had

to look at that. And also there were probably some personal things going on. I was thinking quite a bit about fraternal relations, male friendship, different things, and I knew that the *Bathers*, as a subject, was kind of played out for me. It was time to bring a male principle into the paintings to balance that. Wrestling came into my head as a subject again, spontaneously. And with that, the idea that it has to be naked, hairy men. I mean, *it has to be!* I just saw it that way – like the male equivalent of females in my paintings.

ALL: The male figures who are looking out or away? I’m curious about them.

CD: That perspective of drawing a profile from slightly behind with the shoulder? I figured out a way to draw that, which I felt very comfortable doing, and that I could repeat. I never wanted to show personality. I’m not particularly interested in personality as something that I want to represent in my paintings. I don’t know if it’s a human thing or a cultural thing. I think it’s a human thing. We project most of our understanding about another person’s identity onto their face, so I didn’t want to try to draw faces. I didn’t want to have it be mixed up with anything to do with portraiture, or any specific personality in the paintings. I also think that there’s a sense one has as an artist, that there’s always someone looking over your shoulder, whether they are dead people that you imagine, or people with the studio down the hall who you think don’t like what you’re doing, or somebody else that you feel competitive with and you want to show them how great you are. There’s always this stuff that’s presenting itself to you constantly, and somehow that seemed like part of the image. So that’s where it started.

ALL: That reminds me of that brilliant Philip Guston quote where he says “*You know, when you first become an artist, everyone’s in the studio with you.*”

CD: It’s exactly that. That is a wonderful quote. And it’s 100% right.

ALL: It so is!

CD: The only thing I would say to him is I’ve never actually been alone in my studio. Like even if I’m only spending time with dead people that I imagine, I’m never alone. So there’s always something I’m in some sort of dialogue with.

ALL: The figures that are looking into the abyss – it strikes me that it’s almost like a full circle from where you started the wood grain. It’s almost as if the figures were born out of this abstraction, and now they’re returning to where they came from. Do you think about that?

CD: You know, that’s a very astute question, Anna. My answer might surprise you: *I can only hope that that’s true.* I can’t tell you how much I don’t want to be the guy dealing with all this subject matter. I think that this is another thing I would say to you, as an aside: I have the experience of my work taking me on a journey and that my job is to try to honestly understand what my work is telling me. I have no idea what I’m really thinking about until I see what I’ve made. And I think that’s been true since I was a very unformed artist. I just didn’t know it. I thought what was going on was that I was coming up with these ‘ideas’ and that I was imposing my ideas on the material. But in fact, I think it was almost the opposite.

ALL: Mmmm, I understand that. I think about how painting alters my nervous system and if I see a good painting, I will breathe differently.

CD: I wish my work would lead me back into that weird maze of abstraction. Because when I was young, I had absolutely no doubt that representational painting was idiotic. It was done. It had nothing to do with the real problems that we have as a culture or as a human race or as anything, and I wanted to participate in this new history of abstraction. Very much the way someone like Kandinsky would have spoken in the early twentieth century. I had those thoughts!

I would put it that if this is conceptualised as a sort of journey, that one is on this path, and that you can’t get from the place you are to the place you’re going to be without taking the steps on the path. You know, there is no jumping ahead. That’s not how life works. To get from here to there, you have to take the steps.

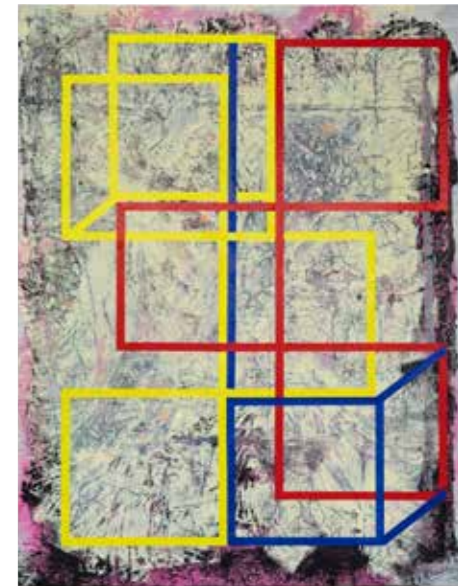
ALL: There’s a lot of shame in painting. When I look back at some of my paintings, I feel like the only way to get better is to move through the shame.

CD: Well, yes, but I think that the shame is yours. The shame is a thing to be taken apart and left behind you on that journey. And then you can always look back. Sometimes I’ll look at my website, which has almost every painting I’ve ever made on it. And I just recently had the paintings I made in the late 70s photographed, of which there are very few, but they’re on my website now. And I’m trying very hard to feel proud of the young man who made those things, because I think he was fine. He was doing his best.

ALL: Yeah, you can have compassion for that kid!

CD: I have a lot of feelings for that person because he had no idea. He was fine, but he was filled with shame and guilt and doubt and remorse and, to a certain extent, the present version of him still is. But I’ve learned how to, at least, keep those things in some kind of perspective that doesn’t prevent me from working most of the time. I still have a vivid memory of the second-guessing and undermining and shameful bullshit that I pulled on myself when I was a young man. I wish I could have avoided it. You know, you don’t get the chance to do it over. You have to take the lessons with you as you go along.

With thanks to Geir Haraldseth curator of contemporary art at the National Museum in Norway



Anna Liber Lewis
Hidden in the Zero
2023
Oil on canvas
170 x 150 cm

Photo by Benjamin Deakin