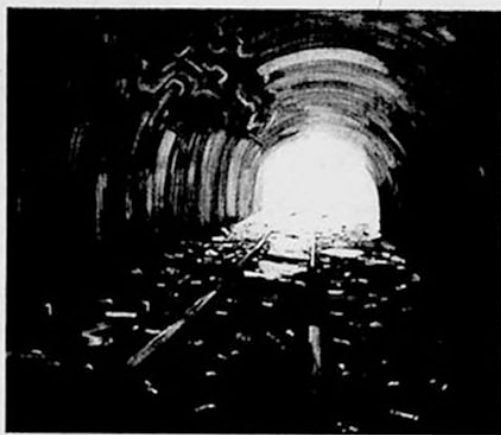


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ARTFORUM

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Tomory Dodge, *Tunnel*, 2004, oil on canvas, 84 x 96".

TOMORY DODGE

ACME

Mostly land- and cityscapes, and unabashedly gestural, the oil paintings (all works 2004) in Tomory Dodge's Los Angeles debut are among the most convincing of current arguments for the vitality of painterly painting, revealing a sensitivity to the medium impressive in such a young artist. Dodge's stylistic nods are varied, including David Park, Philip Guston, Joan Mitchell, Frank Auerbach, Peter Doig, and even Gerhard Richter, as well as other painters who have explored the use of gesture in the service of representation. His work does not seem caught up in neo-expressionist tendencies nor in the abundance of cutely exuberant cartooning in contemporary painting; rather, it feels born of a deep curiosity about what happens when straight-up painterly and representational concerns commingle.

Laid on in stiff, deliberate dashes and fluid, cavalier slashes, Dodge's compositions appear to be the makings of an artist who has set himself the project of painting detailed pictures predominantly with large brushes. That might sound like a joke, or a weird painter's exercise, and there are hints of both here. But despite their quirky self-effacement, Dodge's works are bold. More precisely, they take up the task of picturing a nuanced world in broad strokes: a painterly challenge that echoes the tasks of perception and understanding. They are sensually and intellectually rewarding works that seduce with their paint handling and compel with their mixture of abbreviation, distillation, synthesis, and ambiguity.

Painted from a blend of imagination, memory, observation, and photographic

sources, and clearly informed by a sensitivity to the painterly and photographic rendering of light, color, and space, Dodge's scenes are often less than pretty but take on a certain loveliness in his treatment of them. *Night Slide* transforms an amusement park's spiraling water slide into luminous calligraphy. In *Tunnel*, we look down a dim, trash-strewn vault at a light that converts its walls' irregularities and perhaps layers of graffiti into an electric dance of color. *Inside Out* and *Oasis* depict what appear to be fields of debris, the former punctuated by a collapsing house, and strewn about in the foreground, a toilet and an overturned couch, perhaps in the aftermath of a tornado or just in a dump. The latter painting is inhabited by a naked couple who have found a watering hole in the midst of the wreckage. The brushwork in these canvases articulates the sprawling mess but also calms it, whether offering a patchwork of color that communes with the couch's striped upholstery or blessing the skinny-dippers' wasteland with just a hint of Eden.

These are paintings of a post-postmodern sort, aiming to become the Trojan horses of subversive complicity that Thomas Lawson imagined in his landmark essay "Last Exit: Painting" (1981) but without the heavy cynicism that tainted that text. Current as they are, Dodge's works radiate a nineteenth-century mentality expressed by the likes of Baudelaire and Courbet: a drive to describe the spirit and beauty of one's age, even in the midst of its ugliness. Dodge's are wonderfully complex and conflicted paintings, simultaneously jaded and romantically optimistic toward the potential of their craft and their world.

—Christopher Miles