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NEW YORK

TODD JAMES

Gering & López Gallery

TODD JAMES, based in New York, was known as REAS in his graffiti days during the 1980s, making most of his art on the subways, but stopped in the latter part of that decade as the city and the train cars themselves were on their way to being totally cleaned up. Fast forward to 2000 when Barry McGee, Steve Powers and Todd James presented their collaborative exhibition "Street Market" at Deitch Projects in New York, which subsequently traveled to the Venice Biennale and instantly put this new generation of street artists on the map. FYI: "Street Market" was shown as an earlier version called "Indelible Market" at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia in 1999, curated by Alex Baker, and before something gets shown in New York City, sometimes it's as though it never happened. Well, Todd James' first solo show in New York just happened, and it kicked major ass.

Perhaps the most versatile of the three artists associated with "Street Market" (which was scheduled to be recreated in the summer of 2010 before Jeffrey Deitch decided to accept the directorship of MOCA), James was the production designer for the Comedy Central show *Crank Yankers* and the creator of logos for the Beastie Boys and The Source, not to mention having his graphic on a sneaker from Nike.

Todd James, *Mommy I Want to be Good Now*, 2008



JAMES, IMAGE COURTESY OF GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY, NEW YORK
KIM, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST © 2008 KIM

James' fluid cartoony style is reminiscent of hand-drawn cell animation, master animator Ralph Bakshi's cartoons, underground comix and of course, graffiti. His strong drawing and compositional skills are highly evident in many of the larger works on view, such as *Hot Dogs and Hamburgers* (2008), whose fluid line reminds one of the late 1960s cartoon *The Pink Panther*, directed by Friz Freleng.

For "Make My Burden Lighter," James presented works on paper, two paintings on canvas and a looping animated video, *Blood and Thunder* (2008), featuring short vignettes including walking exploding hand grenades and a sexpot pink-skinned woman shooting a gun. Dozens of small gouache and graphite-on-paper paintings covered one wall, with many of the characters or scenes looking like they could have sprung out of the video, such as *Stack of Missiles* (2010), with a plane hugging a horizontal grouping of the projectile weapons with blood dripping between them. The gag cartoon quality of pieces like *Ice Cream Girl* (2010), with a woman holding up two sugar cones with a triple scoop treat resembling her breasts and nipples, is laugh-out-loud funny. While not overtly political, many of James' paintings deal with themes of war, violence and sexuality in a deceptively playful way. *Mommy I Want to be Good Now* (2008), for example, with its twisted clusterfuck of planes, scantily-clad military women, foodstuffs and oil barrels all dripping blood could easily sum up our quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan. The blood-stained, anthropomorphic *Drill Tank* (2009), shows a tank giving the middle finger, declaring "BRB" via a word balloon to indicate that you haven't seen the last of this menace. Many of James' works have graphite details added on top of the gouache, which makes for an interesting contrast of line and flat color. While it has taken awhile for James to make his solo debut in New York — he has previously had one-person exhibitions in London, Copenhagen, Paris and Australia — it is certainly worth the wait.

—Chris Bors