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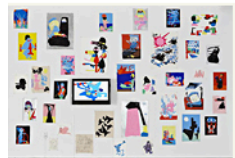
Todd James, "Make My Burden Lighter," installation view at Gering & López Gallery



Todd James  
*Crazy Tanker*  
2008  
Gering & López Gallery



Todd James  
*Captain & Tenielle*  
2009  
Gering & López Gallery



Todd James, "Make My Burden Lighter," installation view at Gering & López Gallery



Todd James  
*Too Amped to Stop*  
2010  
Gering & López Gallery



Todd James  
*Peace Patrol*  
2008  
Gering & López Gallery

## GRAPHIC GRISTLE by Carlo McCormick

One of the most singularly subversive figures to emerge from the underground in the past 20 years, **Todd James** has delivered in his first real solo show -- closing at the Gering & López Gallery tomorrow, Feb. 20, 2010 -- a potent dose of raw visual transgression that is outstanding in its comic vitriol. It can be hard to imagine how his kind of ultra-aggressive whimsy and lurid political sleaze plays on that bastion of moneyed elegance that is Fifth Avenue, save that it seems utterly appropriate that the gallery is in the same building as the Manhattan offices of *Playboy Magazine*. But rest assured there is nothing in this furious visual onslaught that would diminish James' most badass rep of impeccable street cred.

A graffiti veteran (writing under the nom de guerre of REAS) who was among the last and most rambunctious to work on the New York subways before the deafening silence of the vandal-proof cars, James has more recently risen to art world attention as the collaborative partner of **Barry McGee** and **Steve Powers** on the epic bodega-from-hell installation "Street Market" that toured from the ICA in Philadelphia to Deitch Projects in New York and the Venice Biennale, as well as for being part of the subcultural youth pantheon that made up the wildly popular traveling museum show "Beautiful Losers." He has been too long an insider secret, however, and it's more than gratifying to see him take this opportunity and figuratively slaughter it.

In "Make My Burden Lighter," James delivers an incendiary assault on the intrinsic pornography of contemporary war in a crude and rude cartoon style that is at once hilariously iconoclastic and disquietingly erotic. His sprawling installation includes modestly sized oil paintings, a mesmerizing animated cartoon loop called "Blood and Treasure" (sold as a limited edition DVD), and dozens of gouaches and drawings on ragged bits of paper push-pinned to the wall. The show is indeed provocative of the kind of light-headedness that comes with a heavy heart. That tingling is a phantom limb called consciousness as the artist tries to intuit his own conflicted feelings in a culture that has been made numb by the media and desensitized by the brutalities of a seemingly endless and inevitable global war.

Filled with images of modern military machines of mass destruction anthropomorphized into smutty forms of carnal violation and drenched in violent baths of blood, gushing love fountains and candy colors and putrid flesh tones, "Burden" makes graphic gristle of the daily atrocities we accept as the news and confronts our personal if yet universal ambivalence towards that seductive call to arms that has led too many generations of youth to premature graves.

A master provocateur, James continues to stick it to the man if now more in fine artworks than outright criminal activities, but his gestures remain both slapstick and poetic -- a poke in the eye, a painful jolt to the funny bone, a much needed kick in the ass. Catch it if you can, for Todd James is a truly dangerous man.

Todd James, "Make My Burden Lighter," Jan. 15-Feb. 20, 2010, at Gering & López Gallery, 730 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019.

**CARLO MCCORMICK** is contributing to *Paper Magazine*.