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PRESS RELEASE



Squeak Carnwath “Unveiling Territory”

April 2 to May 9, 2020

Reception: Thursday Apr 2nd 6-8PM

Gallery Hours are: Wed. - Sat. 11:00am - 5:00pm

Tuesday by appointment

Additional images are available upon request

Left: Squeak Carnwath: “Personal object of the dog” 1986
Conté Crayon on Paper 72 ¼” x 72”

James Harris Gallery is pleased to present our sixth solo exhibition of work by Squeak Carnwath. This show, titled “Unveiling Territory,” looks back at a crucial period in the artist’s career the 1980s in which Carnwath developed a personal language she continues to use today. The works on view in “Unveiling Territory” reveal the beginnings of a vocabulary that challenges the imagination and nudges our perception of the ordinary world; and how shared human experience shift between artist and viewer, artist and subject and the creative possibilities this collaboration offers. At times bewildering, the subject matters in these early works act as a cipher to our daily lives and intimate emotions. They articulate a feeling of hope, through struggle and pain. Their simplicity invokes the idea that what we share as human beings is more than what set us apart. Carnwath engages in a purposeful naivete, which reveals intelligence and a willingness to allow the viewer into her world and become part of it.

The ten works in the show, range from small to large scale, paintings and drawings, and often depict objects found in Carnwath’s home or studio. There is a flatness to these early paintings, but through a combination of familiar shapes and forms, the artist opens up the space to create a layered story. Text and symbols are combined to decipher a narrative structure. In one work titled “A Map of Clues” (1982), the artist has painted a ladder, a life preserver, an image of the Venus de Milo, a candle, fire pit, ceramic jug and other objects. In the center of this composition a large hand. This densely filled work, mostly black, white and gray, acts as a narrative of the artist mind. Is she depicting the grey matter of her thoughts or is she deliberating revealing clues of her artistic struggle. The recurring iconographic element is the hand, a symbol for the maker (artist) and also as a signifier for what connects us as beings is a constant recurring theme in Carnwath’s work today.

Three drawings in the exhibition are monumental in comparison to the paintings. Carnwath and her husband have been avid dog lovers for over fifty years. During this period (1980-1987), her relationship to their pets became a verdant subject matter for her work. Though large in scale, the drawings are intimate, personal moments. In “Personal Objects of the Dog” (1986), a table top in the upper left corner reveals an empty dinner plate with a wish bone; near the bottom right corner someone sits in a chair their upper body invisible only revealing their legs. The entire narrative takes place on the floor between the sitter and the table. Scattered across the floor are dog toys, remnants of play time; there is a sense of calm and love. Perhaps a pause in action communicated by the artist’s frenetic mark making depicting the concrete floor. The paper also reveals her fingerprints used to mottle the pigment. The image is a memory of a moment communicated through personal touch.

“Unveiling Territory” presents a visual parade of images that have become the crux of Carnwath’s painting practice during the past forty years. Each work becomes a demonstration; referring to the public act of declaration but also to instruct or display. Regardless of the linguistic roots, the works have at least these two sides; one concerned with making something apparent (the everyday) and the other with objection (a personal artistic declaration “I am here!”). Carnwath’s art becomes a resistance to emptiness, the opposite end of death, life itself.