

ARTFORUM

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Critic's Picks

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“Everything falls faster than an anvil”

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In this group of twenty-three works (all but five of which were created in the last five years), *cartoon* means more than Pop art's now long-canonized repertoire of damsels and soup cans. Take, for instance, Catherine Ahearn's *Empire of Women*, 2014, which looks from a distance like a polished abstraction, with a single and highly reflective rectangular pane of dark, blue-black Plexiglas. When viewed at closer proximity, it reveals a second layer: a pulp sci-fi scene in bright gouache and spray paint on rough linen showing a blonde heroine zapping her male combatant in the gut with a futuristic laser. As one approaches, the piece's onyx surface morphs—as if zapped—into an adolescent's coveted comic book preserved under glass.

Comic one-two timing—a surface proposition followed by a warping reveal—recurs, for example in Claes Oldenburg's *Fagend Study – Half Scale*, 1973–75. At first glance, the piece appears to be a rusted pipe, but on second look it is a perfectly mimetic two-foot-tall cigarette butt, stubbed into its plinth. Meanwhile, a gallery-wide mural consisting of two registers of undulating Pepto-Bismol pink and cherry red by Carl Ostendarp (*Fruit and Icebergs*, 2014) drowns the works and exacerbates the viewer's sense of cartoon not as a distant point of reference but as immersive and visceral. As in the two eerie Sunday funnies–style paintings by John Wesley in the first room, the cartoon world here is something like a subconscious, a generator of odd relations and trumped expectations, home of the ever-dropping anvil.



Catherine Ahearn, *Empire of Women*, 2014, linen, gouache, spray paint, Plexiglas, 60 5/8" x 40 9/16" x 1 15/16".

— Julia Langbein