

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Judith Bernstein

THE BOX

805 Traction Ave

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How far can you ride a rude sketch? Past parody, through *détournement*, and into infinity? For her third solo show in four years at the Box, Judith Bernstein expands her men's-room cunt/cock motifs to cosmic proportions. Drifting through the vacuum of the canvas, angrily birthing galaxies, and gnawing on Bohr models are the cuntfaces: vagina mouth, sphincter chin, and two ejaculating dick-shaped eyestalks either pointing inward, as if self-pollinating, or glaring askance at impotent, long-lashed cockfaces. In the hippieish biophysics of these eighteen paintings, pseudomystical numerology jukes through pubic coronas; the disembodied threads of Bernstein's famous screws, unsubtle euphemisms for the patriarchy, spiral like single-helix strips of RNA. Engulfed vulvas spread day-glo flame across a blue space scattered with molecules or stars, golden fumes, blinding white gesso, brushy black hairs, and the scatological folds of a cuntface. It is a juicy, electric mess.

Bernstein's anti-AbEx blasts have a dated, reactionary flavor—and it's true, hers is a raunchier feminism, swept under the rug in the mid-1970s by a more cerebral discourse. Undaunted, presenting her first major new series in decades, Bernstein attacks her project with pleasure and rage. *Birth of the Universe #1*, 2011, establishes the rough, right-heavy composition that Bernstein maintains for the first ten pieces in the show; not until 2013 did she significantly alter the formula by centering a lone cuntface, composing a cuntface at a diagonal tilt, or portraying a small chorus line of cuntfaces (for example in *Birth of the Universe #14* and *Birth of the Universe #15*, both 2013), all complete with neon yellow bodies and three cheery nooses. With a hanging seemingly as raw, unedited, and ecstatic as the paintings, this show is a tongue-in-cheek attempt to encompass Bernstein's life's work in a definitive stroke—or eighteen persistent, pounding attempts—to wrap themes into cosmology, and—as the text in many of the paintings would have it—to put JUDITH BERNSTEIN on level with BIRTH OF and UNIVERSE.

How far can you ride such a ballsy entendre? All the way back to the Big Bang. — *Travis Diehl*



Judith Bernstein, *Birth of the Universe #11, The Source*, 2013, oil on canvas, 96 x 96".