

PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

CRITICS PICKS

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DAVID HUFFMAN

Author: Glen Helfand 04.09.04

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In David Huffman's timely and satisfying group of new paintings, a crew of black astronauts—their weary faces visible through slits in their helmets—go about their vaguely militaristic activities within a richly depicted galaxy of floating clouds and gaseous blobs or meteorites. The men use ropes to hoist themselves from one outer-space outpost to another, toting bulbous missiles and ominous-looking containers presumably filled with toxic goo. A mysterious robot enemy is sometimes present, but more often the astronaut-soldiers shoot aimlessly into the ether or set off explosions that Huffman renders with gorgeous stainlike marks. His earlier paintings, too, revel in the imagery of DC Comics and *Star Trek*. But the new works take on a fresh urgency informed by daily media references to WMDs and biological weapons—their pseudo-Martian landscapes could almost be a Middle Eastern desert. Huffman's references to current events and to enduring inequities in the race department, mingled with his ongoing interests in comics and animation, make for a show that's as exhilarating and eerie as a gravity-free zone.