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CARMEN CICERO

Graham Modern

CICERO'S major themes are urban violence and, in a more humorous vein, the war between the sexes. His large-scale, crudely painted acrylics manage to shock even in a day when we have become accustomed to gutsy attacks on the canvas—to say nothing of the threat of violence in our daily lives. In *Running Scared* (1983), a distorted, almost cartoon-like figure races down a sidewalk at night. His skin is chalk white, shadowed with blue and gray; the only bright color in this ominous setting is his blood-red lips and the bright red clouds beneath a gleaming moon in a midnight-blue sky. His legs, which bend upward in defiance of the laws of anatomy, suggest the panic of the figure and also imply a monumentality much greater than the painting's five-by-three-foot size would lead one to expect.

Cicero has maintained a studio on New York's Bowery since 1971, and it is fair to guess that paintings like *Running Scared* or *Looney Tunes* (1975), which depicts a street shooting, are based on specific incidents and feelings rather than a generalized angst. Relationships between men and women are quite another matter. Though *The Battle of the Sexes* (1972-74) shows a man and a woman in violent physical combat, Cicero seems to have mellowed a bit with age. The more recent *Golden Dreams* (1984) shows a man by the ocean conjuring up the bust of a smiling big-breasted female who materializes out of golden clouds. This work too is shocking at first because of its raw color, rough brushwork and crude drawing, yet in the context of the show it was most

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Carmen Cicero, *Running Scared*, 1983, acrylic on canvas. Graham Modern.

engaging—a dream of joy that contrasts sharply with the fear of violence that characterizes Cicero's urban scenes. —R.B.