

# NEW YORK TIMES

## JUNE 12, 2009

### ART IN REVIEW

by Ken Johnson

#### VERNE DAWSON

Gavin Brown's Enterprise

620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy Street, West Village Through June 20

A popular strain of contemporary painting combines goofy, juvenile imagery -- pirates, exotic animals, fairy-tale characters -- with lush, sophisticated painting. Judith Linhares and Dana Schutz are good examples. Verne Dawson is another.

In addition to small, deft, loosely painted pictures of birds on tree branches and wires and a landscape with Goldilocks and the Three Bears in the distance, Mr. Dawson's ninth New York solo features three big paintings made with a generous, brushy touch on toothy canvas and depicting scenes from the story of Jonah and the Whale.

In the first, a sea of wildly scalloped waves toss a fishing boat while Jonah, already overboard, floats in the foreground. The second, "In the Whale," is a dark, nearly abstract vision of the leviathan's cavernous interior. And in the third, the whale is beached under a night sky and a gibbous moon, with our hero lying naked and pensive on the sand near its head.

Hanging with the Jonah works is a small painting unlike anything else in the show: it hints at what the story means to Mr. Dawson. "A Few Moments," a hallucinatory, semiabstract composition of bulging eyes, flowers, sky and various unidentifiable elements, makes Jonah's adventure seem like a metaphor about a kind of mind-altering, soul-transforming experience. You wonder what greater depths Mr. Dawson might go on to fathom.