Annual Report

James Rieck

2008

LYONS WIER ORTT GALLERY

NEW YORK

Looking Forward

BY LUCY HOGG

James Rieck's paintings are large. Their slices of suited bodies, sourced in annual reports depersonalize their already impersonal sources. Found together in a room, these paintings' monumental, pristine surfaces make the rest of us feel just a bit smaller and a little too tactile. Maybe even mortal.

The paintings' cropped compositions remind us of the impersonal capture of the camera's lens. They focus our attention on the gesture of the body. These are bodies all too aware of the ritual moment at hand, the posed-corporate, post-corporeal moment.

Like all the people in Rieck's paintings, these headless men and women are trapped in their clothes. Across an adagio of pinstripe, discrete plaid and a dominate matte black, our attention is drawn to a series of hands at rest. The gestures are chaste, hands resting on laps as if not knowing what to do with themselves. One can hear the panty-hosed thighs rubbing together, or the gabardine pant legs crossing and uncrossing at a long board meeting. The climate is controlled, the coffee is predictable, and casual Friday is nowhere in sight.

The history of the commemorative, corporate moment goes back at least to Frans Hals, although his businessmen seemed like they were having more fun.

But Hals' compositions have much in common with the corporate portrait of today. Rieck's paintings draw our attention to the abstraction that can be found in both: the rhythm of gesture, the angle of pose, the neutral formality of dress and the relation of one body to another. But we can get a little too close to these modern bodies. Replacing their lost heads with our own, we take on their gestures. We are 'holding' ourselves for the camera, but the instant of the shutter's release is extended into the painful posterity of a painting.

Lucy Hogg is an artist and curator living in Washington, D.C.

Committee
36" x 108"
Oil on Canvas
2008

(next page)

Management
72" x 144"
Oil on Canvas
2008

Merger
24" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2008

Hanger
22" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2008

Janis Goodman. In her studio.

The range of work to be found in Janis Goodman's studio offers a compendium of drawing concerns, representing in some ways the schizophrenic condition of the 21st C artist who draws. What to do after Jackson Pollock? The modernist narrative of drawing –moving through the allegories of Surrealism, to a pure performative space, and finally landing in the theatrical space of minimalism– is over. But maybe Pollock's story wasn't so clean, anyway.

Goodman's work clusters into different ways of imagining space. There is baroque space, a metonymic piece of the whole: the drawing moves off the edges, suggesting a beyond. In images of water, hatched and erased surfaces are atmospheric, shimmering, illusory. Other related drawings show human intervention: footprints, drawing in the mud with a stick, the wedge like mark left by a kayak. As one layer of marks etched over another, these are benign traces soon to be softened by the return of the water's edge.

Another group of drawings reiterate the literal space of the piece of paper they are on. Incisive marks reach toward the edges, but then cluster back towards the middle of the page. Although now not a space you can enter, the marks form figures. Some at first glance resemble the classic three-minute gesture of a figure-drawing class, the human figure caught in motion. But the labor of the multiple marks belie that brevity which might otherwise be encapsulated by one quick swoop of charcoal. These shapes were actually drawn from photographs of splashes of water, which accounts for a spatiality that can't be invented.

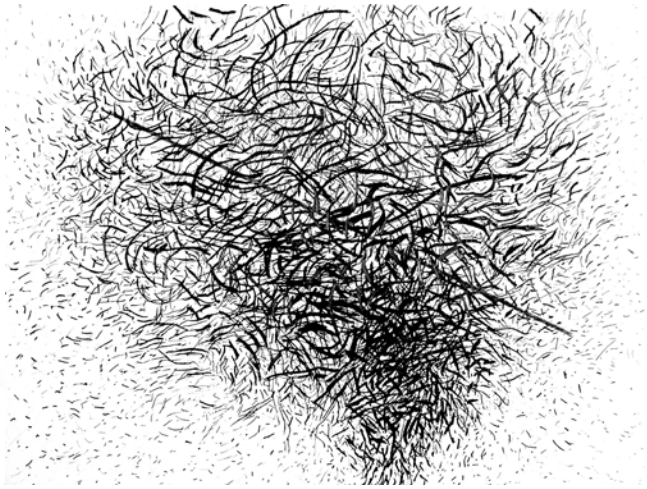
In some of these drawings the clusters of marks seem to be responding to a static marker; a diagonal stick, a continuous horizon line, a dull looking rock-like shape. The flat-footedness of these symbols suggest a conceptual conceit or some kind of buried minimalism, but Goodman says these are actual things she saw: a waterfall in Iceland, a strange diagonal chasm in a landscape, or a rock on Deer Island. The literalness of them is rather like spotting the little foot with a ball and chain wrapped around it in an otherwise sublime seascape by Turner.

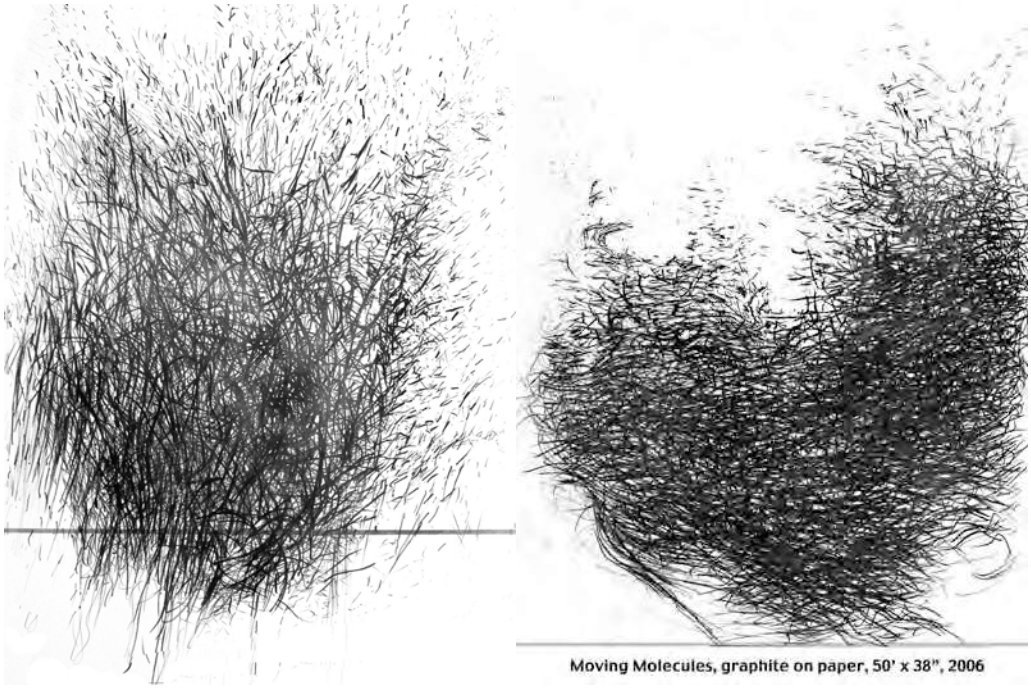
Goodman's work is not, however, interested in duplication, the simple fact of representation. The drawings are about perception, which is unpacked to the point of slow motion, living and reliving something that is all too quick. There is a need in her work for nothing to be too easy. There is a condition of anxiety that hovers over the relationship between abstraction and representation, and that can be found in the marks she makes. Self-conscious delight in the nuance of gradations to be had from drawing with graphite coalesces into a fevered stabbing. How does a light autumn breeze become Katrina? By walking us through the ways of making pictures with marks, her drawings construct our relationship with our own surroundings: one of contemplation, intervention, and then perhaps the less easy one of witnessing an event.

Lucy Hogg

JANIS GOODMAN **The Gallery at FLASHPOINT** **Washington, DC**

March 22 - April 21 2007





Moving Molecules, graphite on paper, 50' x 38", 2006

Splash, graphite on paper, 28" x 39", 2005

is impossible to get exactly what you want. I construct my pieces, and then I deconstruct them, until I get exactly what I see. Once I can see what's in my head, it's full throttle. Still, thinking about it is one thing, building it is completely different."

Didn't Picasso once say it's all in the doing? CHRISTOPHER HUME

Installation view of Hadley + Maxwell's *Horizontal Construction* 2005

Horizontal Construction (detail) 2005 C-print 1.52 x 1.21 m

THE OBJECTS WE SEE ARE GHOSTS OF AN ENCOUNTER

Hadley + Maxwell

MATTHEWS/CONE HOUSE, VANCOUVER

Intimacy is key in the work of Hadley + Maxwell. Since 2001 the duo has been working through a series of close encounters with curators and collectors of art, accumulating personal information about aesthetic preferences and passions that is then interpreted into installations in their interlocutors' homes. Yet despite the sculptural experiments that have shaped *The Décor Project*—as the series is called—what remains are photographs, not so much documents of the installations, but evidence that what is at stake is a sculpture *for the sake* of photography.

The photographer is neither Hadley nor Maxwell but a third party, the commercial photographer Sven Boecker. His presence acknowledges the industrialized art-making that marks much of Vancouver photography and video, and signals an attempt by Hadley + Maxwell to become intimate with this tradition and with the picture said to have started so much—Jeff Wall's *The Destroyed Room* of 1978, which confronts the viewer with a room that serves as a repository of an act, an event or a series of events, a narrative that remains a mystery because something or someone is missing. The rooms photographed by Hadley + Maxwell are not visibly destroyed, but there is an element of the undead about them in that a hovering dynamic of personal relations haunts their construction. The objects we see are ghosts of an encounter; with its uncertain status as both object and image, photography serves as a crucial and fitting representational tool.

Hadley + Maxwell's latest experiment, *Horizontal Construction*, is self-reflexive in this respect. It is a photo work whose core image shows a dining room with a mirror on the wall. The image then replaced the mirror and the room was photographed again, to make a series of what appear to be receding mirrors. The camera reflected in the mirror serves as an anchor for a blue string that seems to traverse the mirror, the photograph and the actual dining-room space, linking the various dimensions in an optical trick reminiscent of a Fred Sandback.

The piece was done in the home of the costume designer Karen Matthews and the playwright Tom Cone, who, in answering a survey created by Hadley + Maxwell, mentioned Sandback as an artist whose work they admired. The piece premiered last June at one of the experimental-music salons that Matthews and Cone host in Vancouver. Installed, it seemed to absorb the dining room in which it was hung. The effect was disorienting. The couple have since moved *Horizontal Construction* into their living room. The move has accentuated the original matching yellow frame on the work, transforming the photograph into a more sculptural object and setting in motion another play of boundaries: image into object, flat into three-dimensional. The ambiguity suits artists who are questioning how to give form to all the things that do not seem to have substance, but move us nonetheless. MONIKA SZEWCZYK

Allyson Clay

LEO KAMEN GALLERY, TORONTO

There is a personal investment in the collecting of books. An identity is bound up in the titles: a history of a life of learning, a pattern of phases. "Yes, this was my feminist period," a shelf might say.

Allyson Clay has thrown her books into the water. The act might register as classically hysterical, but for all that, the resulting abstraction is seductive and painterly. Her photographic images incorporate the tropes

ALLYSON CLAY *Drift: Each Wild Idea (Fountain Series)* 2005 Colour photograph face-mounted on Plexiglas 66 cm x 1.02 m

DAMIAN MOPPETT *Untitled* 2005 Aluminum, steel, wire and stoneware Dimensions variable

of abstract composition: diagonals, grids, repetitions of shape, biomorphic ambiguity. The dominant turquoise ground—turquoise being a signature colour of modernist painting (Cézanne, Matisse, Diebenkorn)—signifies a kind of chemical optimism. In some images, volumes mingle promiscuously; in others, they twirl alone under the rippling light on the surface of the pool. The titles seem arbitrary: they do not form a coherent bibliography, but they are books the artist says she wishes were still on her shelves.

Clay trained as a painter, and her earlier work was informed by critical discussions of modernism and its assumptions (patriarchal, Eurocentric, capitalist). Although it was the product of an intense engagement with theory and with the discourses of feminism, the work, as it evolved, always seemed private, confessional. It proposed a point of view that was peripheral, surreptitious and, because it had to be, transgressive—a woman's point of view.

Clay's new work suggests that years of feminist research have been thrown out with the bathwater. In the *Garden* series, a copy of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* has met the same fate as its author. The book sinks to the bottom of a stream, the disintegrating paper taking on the colour of old leaves. Ophelia is floating down the river, yet again.

As an alternative to that powerless picturesque, Woolf proposed an androgynous voice. She describes a voice that has "forgotten she is a woman." In an ideal world, where the Guerrilla Girls wouldn't have to spell out the imbalanced gender statistics in the art world, it would be a relief not to have to remember.

The other series in the exhibition, *Fountain*, suggests such a euphoric amnesia in its flurry of chlorinated repagination. The Dewey Decimal system, flawed in any case, is a distant memory. The books are off the shelves and into the pool. Their shapes shift into abstractions from which only fragments of meaning can be discerned. We have to fish for our own beginnings, middles and ends. LUCY HOGG

Mix with care

CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER

The civic plaza—that most fraught of public spaces—served as mojo pin to the summer exhibition at Catriona Jeffries Gallery. "Mix with care" incorporated a slew of gallery artists (including the powerhouse Ian Wallace) to study urban settings. With no samplings from suburban or rural geographies, the exhibition was complicit in our collective bias against what social space does exist outside the city centre—a factor that intrigued as strongly as did the show's meditation on urbanity.

Brian Jungen's untitled contribution consists of the torn remains of a Snoop Dogg bill attached to a square piece of plywood removed from the temporary hoarding Jungen constructed outside the Contemporary Art Gallery for his 2001 exhibition there. Jungen's piece calls up the space between our intended spaces—the rickety tunnels and ramps we navigate while sidewalks or buildings receive make-overs.

Alex Morrison's photographs of a graffiti contest in one of Berlin's public commons add a comic lameness to the mix. Sanctioned graffiti, after all, is something like those white-collar skateboarders who zip from meeting to meeting whilst sipping demurely from travel mugs. Morrison's work is an easy, perhaps obvious, read on public space.

But the greatest contemporary civic plaza remains Times Square (or Disney Square, as it's mockingly referred to in post-Giuliani New York). Ian Wallace's monumental work *Times Square NYC (July 11, 2003) I* captures the buzz (and banality) of that destination space. Monochrome bars of paint border the central car-and-pedestrian-crammed photo. The citizens of New York, ant-like beneath their own colossal cityscape, are granted some sympathy via the texture of the canvas pushing up from beneath the photo. Landscape painting rubs elbows in Wallace's work with less picturesque photographic methods.

The French philosopher Jean Starobinski accentuated the term *architecture parlante*, or vocal architecture, as useful in all this. He believed that

Public Matters, Private Matters

Video Works by Allyson Clay, Osman Bozkurt and Milutin Gubash

Curated by Lucy Hogg
October 21–November 26, 2005

EXTENDED till December 10th

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Essay by Lucy Hogg

LOCATION CONTACT US

Public Matters, Private Matters: Video Works by Allyson Clay, Osman Bozkurt, and Milutin Gubash

Allyson Clay
Imagnary Standard Distance:Day
DVD video: NTSC 60m:00s; 2004

Allyson Clay
Imagnary Standard Distance:Night
DVD video: NTSC 52m:00s; 2004

Some of us can remember getting on airplanes in the 1960s, when everyone dressed up for the event. In old photographs all the men seem to wear suits, and women's hair is done. Telephone calls were also less casual. There were fewer of them, and the minutes cost; party lines demanded decorum.

Public events also had more restraint. A death would have certain rituals, a laying out, a wake, a burial. Grieving had its own formality. Now it can be either very private, with a few comments over a plastic box of ashes, or very public but still casual. An impromptu pile of flowers, stuffed toys and other sentimental mementos placed at an otherwise banal location (a telephone pole, a parking lot, a median strip) mark an accident or disappearance.

The public park was perhaps the first place where the boundaries of public and private started to blur, but a hundred years earlier. With the invention of the weekend, the "banlieue" of Monet's boating parties—then newly accessible by suburban trains—was a place where classes mixed. The mid 19th century was a defining moment of class mobility, as the expanding petite bourgeoisie tried on the attitudes of the leisure class. Domestic life of all kinds was spilling outside, to the dismay and fascination of contemporary commentators.

In **Public Matters, Private Matters**, the video works of **Allyson Clay, Osman Bozkurt**, and **Milutin Gubash** try to make sense of the blurring of public and private space in the 21st century.

Using a minimalist technique and a static lens, **Allyson Clay's** *Imaginary Standard Distance: Day/Night* provides video surveillance of a public telephone booth in Paris. People are observed as they move in and out of a transparent glass structure divided into three telephone stations. They wait, they talk, they get impatient, they adapt to the space inside and outside the booth while they carry on intimate or transactional conversations. It is a study of private gesture in public space. A man is engaged in what appears to be a long, contentious monologue. A younger man shifts his weight from side to side, sorting out social arrangements while his girlfriend looks on, tossing her long blond hair in boredom. A businesswoman waits impatiently, staring at the fully occupied booths, as though her glare could encourage the occupants to finish their calls.

Originally filmed in 1997, the video documents what will soon become a redundant structure, as cell phones become ubiquitous. The body language is moving out of the phone booth and onto the streets. Conversation is no longer contained by the soundproof glass. People seen talking by themselves on the street either have a wire attached to their ear, or are off their medication. We are just now developing etiquette to manage the problem. Quiet cars on trains, warnings at the cinema, signage in restaurants requesting restraint are our inadequate attempts to manage the collapse of the private into the public realm. Clay's video marks a transitional moment. The transparent glass of the booths is the last buffer zone.

Milutin Gubash
Near and Far: Drive-In
DVD video: 4m:51s; 2005

Milutin Gubash
Near and Far: River
DVD video: 4m:00s; 2005

Milutin Gubash
Near and Far: Park
DVD video: 1m:28s; 2005

Osman Bozkurt's *Auto-Park* uses a documentary style to comment on human resilience and a dysfunctional urban infrastructure in Istanbul. Various locals are interviewed about their use of median strips as parks. Grassy areas, wedged between heavy lanes of intercity and commercial traffic in various outskirts of Istanbul, are used by family groups picnicking, youth playing sports, unemployed people socializing. The spaces become unlikely sites of contemplation, rest and recreation for their habitués, providing escape from their cramped apartments and the tedium of unskilled labour.

The first frames of the video construct a pastoral of softly waving trees: children running through the grass, women bent over their tatting, men having a smoke. It resembles the idyll found in Seurat's Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte. But the audio gives the game away, as the frame expands to reveal a stream of large freight trucks and commuter traffic, disturbingly close. The interviewees, often recent arrivals from the rural areas of eastern Anatolia, have an amazing optimism and resistance as they speak of the advantages the spaces provide. Their sense of pride and ownership is only countered by wistful pleas for simple things like garbage bins,

toilet facilities and safer passages across the highways. Officially forbidden, the use of the parks is not acknowledged by a city that offers no alternatives for an under-housed working poor. Gaps in fences show that the sudden intrusion of a ton of hurtling metal is a constant threat to the peoples' fragile serenity. The video is at once poignant testimony of human resilience, and an indictment to the economic conditions that have produced it.

Milutin Gubash's *Near and Far* uses a more filmic approach. Gubash creates dramatic scenarios based on odd incidents he found reported in the Calgary newspapers, usually involving an abject or banal death. He restages the events with himself as the victim, and his parents as witnesses. His dramatic vignettes act as weird memorials for anonymous people whose fate would otherwise barely register. Wearing a generic black suit that seems to anticipate his funeral, the victim seems to be perpetually re-enacting his demise. His parents make pilgrimages to a series of sites where the crimes have taken place: an abandoned drive-in theatre, a quiet riverside, a local city park. His parents take the tour dressed in the casual well pressed clothes of retirees, equipped with a camera, folding chairs, a radio to pass the time.

Nobody is overwrought or particularly perturbed. The parents could just as easily be tourists visiting the Eiffel tower. But the play-acting could be a cover for the real drama of the difficulty of acknowledging, between family members, mortality and disappointment. In one scene the victim hides guiltily in the bushes, as his parents try to whistle him out. In another he returns from the dead, rising up from the water, his wet, impassive gaze suggesting it was their fault. Finally addressing them in an angry soliloquy, he asks them to name his dilemma. "It's the end," they say, smiling. And then the video loops back to the beginning, and the family drama repeats itself, as family dramas often do.

What these works all depict is a transitional space where you are neither here nor there. It is the new suburbs of the mind, where people of today's compressed urban space create a fiction of privacy. Callers imagine they are in a private zone when they place their cellular calls, however much their private selves are unwittingly on display. The people in the park barely acknowledge the incessant traffic, as they unconsciously compose painterly vignettes of private family life. And strange re-enactments of anonymous tragedy in public places become a private forum for the conversations a family might never have.

- Lucy Hogg

Lucy Hogg is a vusual artist based in Washington, DC. She is currently teaching at the Corcoran College of Art + Design

Osman Bozkurk
AutoPark
DVD video: 15m:50s; 2003

(My) Identity Crisis

Lucy Hogg

It's summer, and Jin-me Yoon sits on the grass, legs stuck straight out like a Chatty Cathy Doll. Looming behind her at least twice her size is a large wooden sculpture that seems to be mimicking her pose; its red painted braids, straw hat, and early 20th-Century sailor dress say (she's) Anne of Green Gables, although the *reductio ad absurdum* of the signifiers probably have L.M. Montgomery rolling over in her grave.

Growing up in Prince Edward Island, I spent my pre-pubescent years puzzling over why some Toronto talent scout had never spotted my reddish braids and spunky attitude, thus precipitating my meteoric rise on the musical stage as "Anne." I imagined turning cartwheels alongside Jeff Hyslop (who played Gilbert, Anne's romantic interest) and smashing imitation school slates over my astonished antagonist's head. I was perfect for the part. Many years later while visiting Japan, my interpreter, upon discovering where I was from (I was reluctant to admit it), reassured me that "Anne" was seen as a proto-feminist role model for young Japanese woman in quest of independence.

Mounted as a string of nine suspended 23" x 30" sized light boxes, spanning the widest axis of the Presentation House Gallery with a Cibachrome print installed on either end wall, Yoon's current show *Touring Home from Away* depicts Yoon's family's explorations of Prince Edward Island as they make their way through the tourist gift shops, convenience stores, bed and breakfast lighthouses, golf courses, and potato fields. The conventions of the images vacillate between the casual family snap and the more composed material of a tourist brochure. In tourist high season the family doesn't necessarily stand out as one of mixed cultural heritage, but like any tourist they distinguish themselves as they pose as a family group in front of tourist attractions, visit with the locals, or get caught in the cranky moments of family pit stops. Some of the images however, give away the ruse of this conceit, where the conventions of the family album are stretched by mannered intervention. A disruption which might provoke reflection on the assumptions of cultural identity in transit, or misfire as a bad Brechtian distanciation device.

Touring the rest of Yoon's exhibition at Presentation House I was confronted with the all too familiar landscapes of my youth; the Space Ship at Rainbow Valley; site of ruinous children's' birthday parties. Woodleigh Replicas, a park full of miniature English castles which my father, an anglophile, relished for the annual family trip (later as a sullen teenager I would refuse to go). The War Memorial in the centre of town, in front of which every November 11th we felt obliged to affect some melancholic contemplation in exchange for a day off school in almost always horrible weather.

Some of the images seem forced; Yoon and her family, crouched beside a potato field (Although depicted often in postcards, potato fields are not usually targeted destinations, even for the locals, unless they are farming them). The group standing to attention in the middle of another potato field, gazing off to the horizon, their matching set of t-shirts promoting Anne of Green Gables and the Lobster Crawl. A little boy (Yoon's son) standing in front of some scaffolding near a small historic church undergoing restoration, looking uncomfortable in his red yarn wig (Anne again) . No less disturbing a sight, I had to remind myself, than that sombrero my parents let me bring back from Expo '67; I could be spotted wearing it all over town, it's two foot peak bobbing over the crowds of tourists' heads—as complete an image of Mexico as Yoon gives of PEI.

Jin-Me Yoon, from *Touring Home From Away*, 1998-99

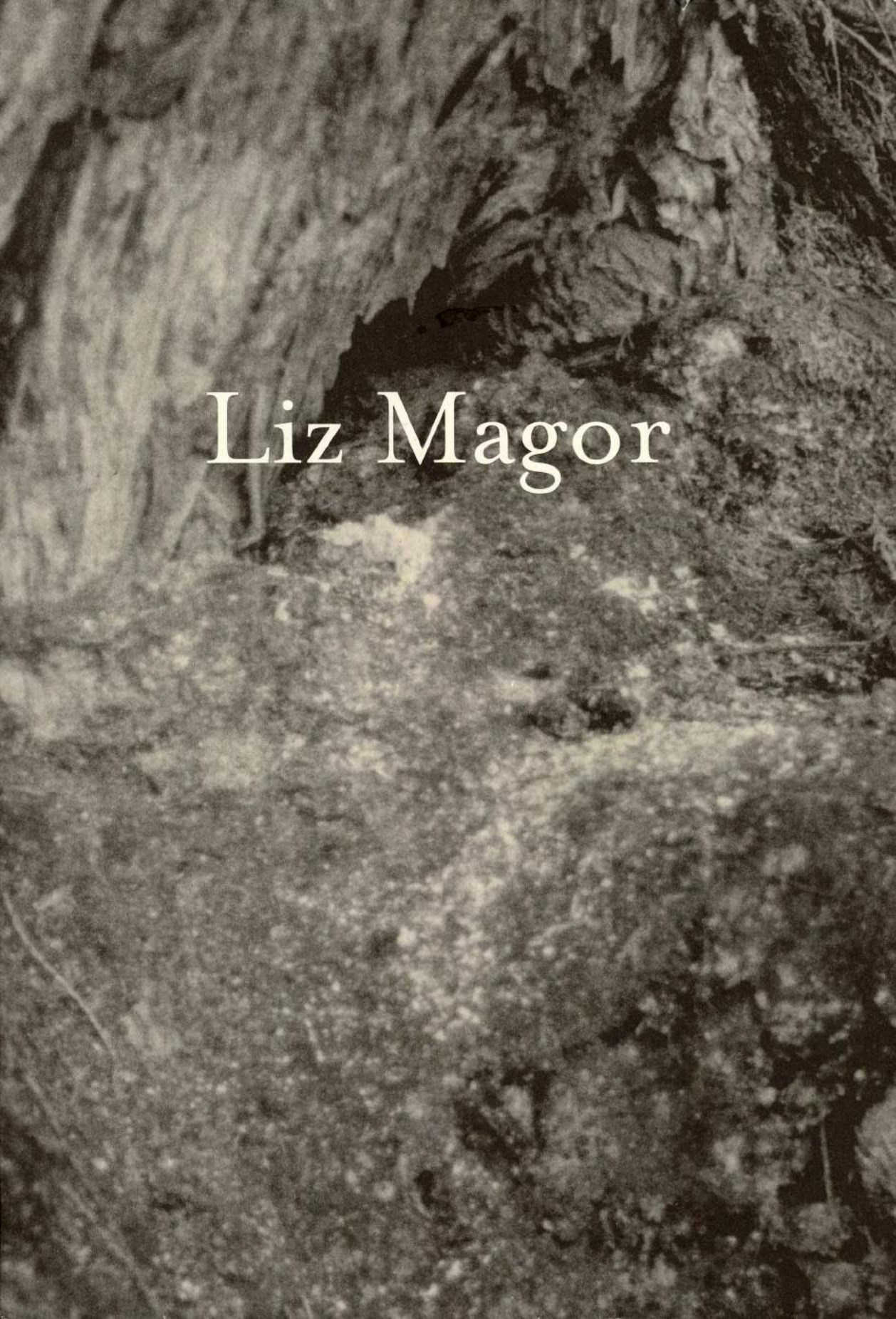
Yoon was invited as an artist in residence at the Confederation Centre, tied into the programming of Curator Terry Graff. Residencies can have their arbitrary effect, as the artist tries to recontextualize their thinking in a place they might never have thought of going to otherwise. This work records the most obvious signifiers of place, the bathetic aspect of which one might encounter on any touristic venture. Access to any more complicated sense of community could only come with the vested interest of becoming a member. With the exception of one pair of images where Yoon appears to be thoughtfully in discussion with a Mi'kmaq leader in front of what used to be traditional lands, or in another pair, where Yoon seems to chatting with the red-haired tourist guide, the visiting family seem quite isolated, the way families can be when they travel. Previous work by Yoon had prepared me to read this exhibition in terms of a discussion of perception of race in the particularized Canadian context of tourism and immigration, or a feminist analysis of the conflicted roles of the professional and maternal woman. In this exhibition it is all mixed up. As I try to filter out my assorted subjective memories associated with the location, I wonder how a viewer who doesn't have them might make sense of the work. They will see a family group presenting themselves at a series of generic tourist destinations, posing in varying degrees of ironic self-consciousness, with props whose significance may not seem obvious or important. The irony cross-fires, flattening the intended cultural dissonance by its misappropriation of signs, signs which hint at the conflicts of a denuded rural economy that has to rely on tourism.

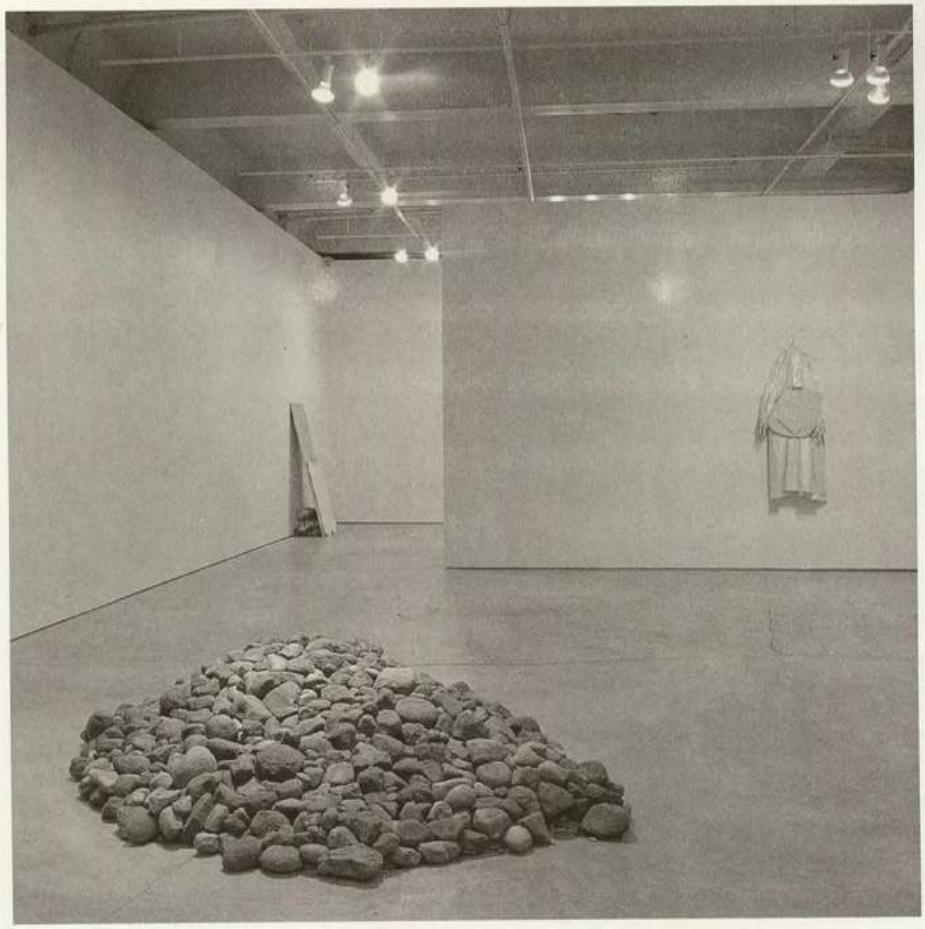
My unease at seeing my place of origin reduced to the promotional material of the provincial bureau, might be the same unease of finding oneself a visible minority in a population that is predominately white. This is a point similar to one Yoon made in an earlier work, *Souvenirs the Self*, a series of images where Yoon inserted herself in front of popular mountain views of Banff and Lake Louise (That work's format as a set of unfolding, perforated of postcards, was playful in its possibilities of distribution and was clearly justified by its subject matter. In the current exhibition, the light boxes qua light boxes in a Vancouver context always raise the question, why light boxes? Conjuring up as they do in the low-lit peaked ceilings of the gallery space, the Stations of the Cross, or Jeff Wall). For the viewer from "Away," the collapse of what could constitute an Island identity to the bare bones of potatoes, lobsters, and red-haired girls might not be all that poignant a loss. So the point of comparing that paraphrased identity to the dilemma of the visible minority falls flat.

Projecting myself as the only viewer who might "get it," I swing between embarrassment and dismay, like a teenager spotted by friends out on an expedition with her parents. No one will give you the time to explain how these things actually do have something to do with who you are, and you are left with the harrowing knowledge that it is these things by which you will be misunderstood.

This is a hazard of making art. As I struggle with my conflicted emotions I wander away from the narrative, back over to the image of Jin-me Yoon and the giant Anne, whose sheer weirdness transcends the didactic panels the viewer from "Away" might otherwise need.•

JIN-ME YOON
TOURING HOME FROM AWAY
PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY
NORTH VANCOUVER
JANUARY 5—FEBRUARY 10, 2002


Liz Magor



Installation view of *Stores*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, 2000

Home Again

Lucy Hogg

You've been running ragged circles in the forest, following some archaic directive telling you to retreat to nature. After the city went down, people were turning into packs of primates. No water, no electricity, no phone. The worst of it was, people were marking their territory with their shit, taking over as many apartments as they could, until each one was emptied of comestibles. This looting was made easier by so many people abandoning their homes when it hit. Leaving without so much as a can opener. Running in search of some agency that might help. Keyless, shoeless, thinking in a childish way that nothing would be more effective than to show up at the door of a fire station to announce their dire straits. Then not to find it, or not know where it was, or to find it empty, or gone. Gone, gone, gone.

You sight what looks like a constructed, variegated mound of rocks in the forest setting. There could be very good reasons to stay away from a pile of rocks. It might indicate someone's unwillingness to dig down six feet to bury a body; a repository of contaminated flesh and unknown rituals. A marker in an otherwise remote unpeopled wilderness. Stumble across it and you realize you are not alone, have not been alone for several hours. Or days. Or for as long as it has been since you began wandering around in circles, lost. But it could be a cache, hiding something you need, especially now. Perhaps this is an opportunity. How long will it take to move those rocks? You could move them aside and then move them back. But the

rearrangement would give your presence away. You weigh the risk.

Animals presage earthquakes by several days. Cattle grow restless, birds fall silent, pets go missing. They sense the infant seismic stirrings that will mature into catastrophe. Collapse. Something is always slipping while our lives sit balanced on the edge. Put together a world that holds, the way it used to be. A cup is missing its saucer. Put this one with this. If that works, try a bolder move: this couch with these drapes, this body with that time. Now change your father, become your ancestor, find the family you lost, the purpose you missed.[1]

With a cursory glance at Liz Magor's *Stores*, one might assume the gallery was a work site, an excavation: a piece of drywall leans against a wall, someone's rucksack hangs from a nail to protect lunch from ground intruders. The largest element, a pile of rocks, flags the ruse. A closer look reveals fluorescent orange cheesies spilling out from underneath; larvæ-like, they seem to be multiplying under what is now clearly a hollow shell. A pile within a pile. Further inspection shows traces of the rocks' manufacture: casting burrs in the cracks between rocks—excess fluid that has escaped the imprint of the pigmented mould. An attempt to pick up an individual rock is frustrated; they are linked in constellations which form the total effect. Tapping the surface produces a muffled, hollow sound. It is a fake.

On one wall hangs a weathered rucksack, looking as if it might have been recently unearthed, and is perhaps slimy to the touch. It takes a beat to recognize the small margin of visual difference that allows you to realize it is made of rubber, a cast imitation. Relieved of its realness, it becomes more animate, as if it might start to breathe like an artificial lung. A hint of vaguely familiar orange powder has leaked out from a deteriorated seam; pieces of macaroni lie on the floor like dead maggots. Through a tear, one can see the unmistakable

packaging of Kraft Dinner. Three or four boxes, you decide: enough emergency sustenance for six to eight people at one sitting.

TAIPEI: A cat, dehydrated and barely breathing, was found trapped in a house 78 days after Taiwan's earthquake. The animal apparently kept itself alive by eating another cat, veterinarian Chen Taochieh said yesterday. The head, tail, bones and bits of fur from the second feline were found next to the survivor.[2]

Building materials lean against another wall: a fragment of pock-marked drywall, and a piece of plywood. They are waste, about to be pitched in the dumpster, a by-product of some inefficient domestic renovation. You might walk by them, but something in the way they are placed, makes them appear almost arranged. The crisp, delicate edges of the objects and their flat, uninflected reverse sides reveal that they too have been cast from a mould. Stashed behind them are several bags of carrots and potatoes, sweating veritable condensation. Grocery sized, this is an amateur cache, a stopgap measure with a short-term view. But cast in multiples, there may be thousands of these lean-tos strategically placed for migratory fugitives.

As children we made snow forts. Perfect, no clutter. Ingenious secret doorways, intricate intersecting frozen tunnels burrowing through the large mound of snow which had been pushed to the side of the road by the snow plow. Anybody driving by would never know we were in there. Hunkering down, we'd have our first secluded domestic conversations with our playmates. Removed from the domain of parental control, our murmurs mimicked the sounds we could hear through the bedroom door as our parents privately discussed the days events.

A white raincoat and a white woven purse hang on a white hook on another wall. There is some suggestion of fashion here, someone's attempt to match these pearlescent surfaces, conveying a tawdry

daytime glamour of making do in a rainy climate. The cast bag is a ghost of the kind women carried in the 80s. Its most valuable element, a women's rectangular pocket book, bulges tumescently from within. There is nothing else in the bag, but further exploration would be frustrated by the bag's sealed lips. It is as deliberate as a rubber decoy.

In considering Liz Magor's exhibition, the professional viewer might at first conjure up analogies of survivalism in the art world: oppositional encampments, conflicted stakeholders, and the dialectic of disingenuous metaphor. On the other hand, the urban pedestrian coming in off the street might be reminded of an incident from the night before; about to disarm the alarm on his late model car, he notices a sleeping bag in the doorway of a light industrial building, along with some cardboard, a grocery cart jammed with things whose original value is lost, destined to be redirected to the ineffable demands of urban camping.

Whatever the cause, the instinct to pull into the shell is strong. Introversion seeks its form. The cabin waits. Given the urge, it's surprising that the country isn't dotted from coast to coast with these little forts. . . . For the rest of us, the Cabin in the Snow is best kept as an idea. A place where our true self resides knowing it has no real home in the world.[3]

In *Messenger* (pp. 28, 31, 32), a work from 1996, Magor created a complex evocation of domestic retaliatory retreat. A cabin conjures nostalgic frontier images of pre-industrial settlement. Fitted up with a rag tag collection of military equipment, this environment articulates a self sufficient masculinity, fortified by the rigorous economy of function. The niceties of comfort and hospitality, which might imply a need for social engagement, have been banished.

I was almost forty, and was visiting my parents at their house in the winter. Every night my father ritually locked us all in: wooden bars placed in the sliding door channels, a little screw nested in the bolt lock under the

handle of the front door. If an intruder did smash the side window, they would still not be able to turn the knob; this was Dad's logic. During the night I heard a squalling sound, tortuous, rhythmic, and strangely human. Trying to get closer to the sound, I struggled unsuccessfully with the storm windows that were solidly snapped into place. I finally had to tell myself that it must only be foxes mating, not some sordid scenario of domestic violence across the field. But I realized that if the house were set on fire, we would never get out in time.

The need to control an environment is not unlike an artist's will to define their production of meaning. The creative process is hazardous, as one tries to find shelter while living in the muck. But this psychological terrain can be found in every household. To establish pattern and routine is reassuring. Mentally we organize our day, plan our wardrobe, rehearse the rhetoric of daily interactions. We create the identity that will facilitate our negotiation, incorporating the subtle social codes with which to fend off or establish contact.

In Magor's *Burrow* (1999; p. 60) and *Hollow* (1998–99; p. 59), the conditions of habitation are reduced to a hollow tree; their moulded exoskeletons force the soft body of a sleeping bag to adapt to their interior contours. There is comfort in these limited parameters, simplified to a world confined to sleep, the choice of deep retreat.

In *Stores*, there are no signs of shelter. The inhabitant has become a migrant, stability assured only by the secret knowledge of hidden sustenance. Food is the object of desire, and it exists in two extremes: vegetables as icons of good food coming out of the dirt, and their nemesis, junk food. The latter can be immediately consumed, quickly raising the sugar and salt levels for emergency repair. The former requires more equipment, patience, and planning. As if subscribing to the exhortations of a self-help book, the scavenger, within these binaries, is able to accommodate mood swings in their foraging strategy.

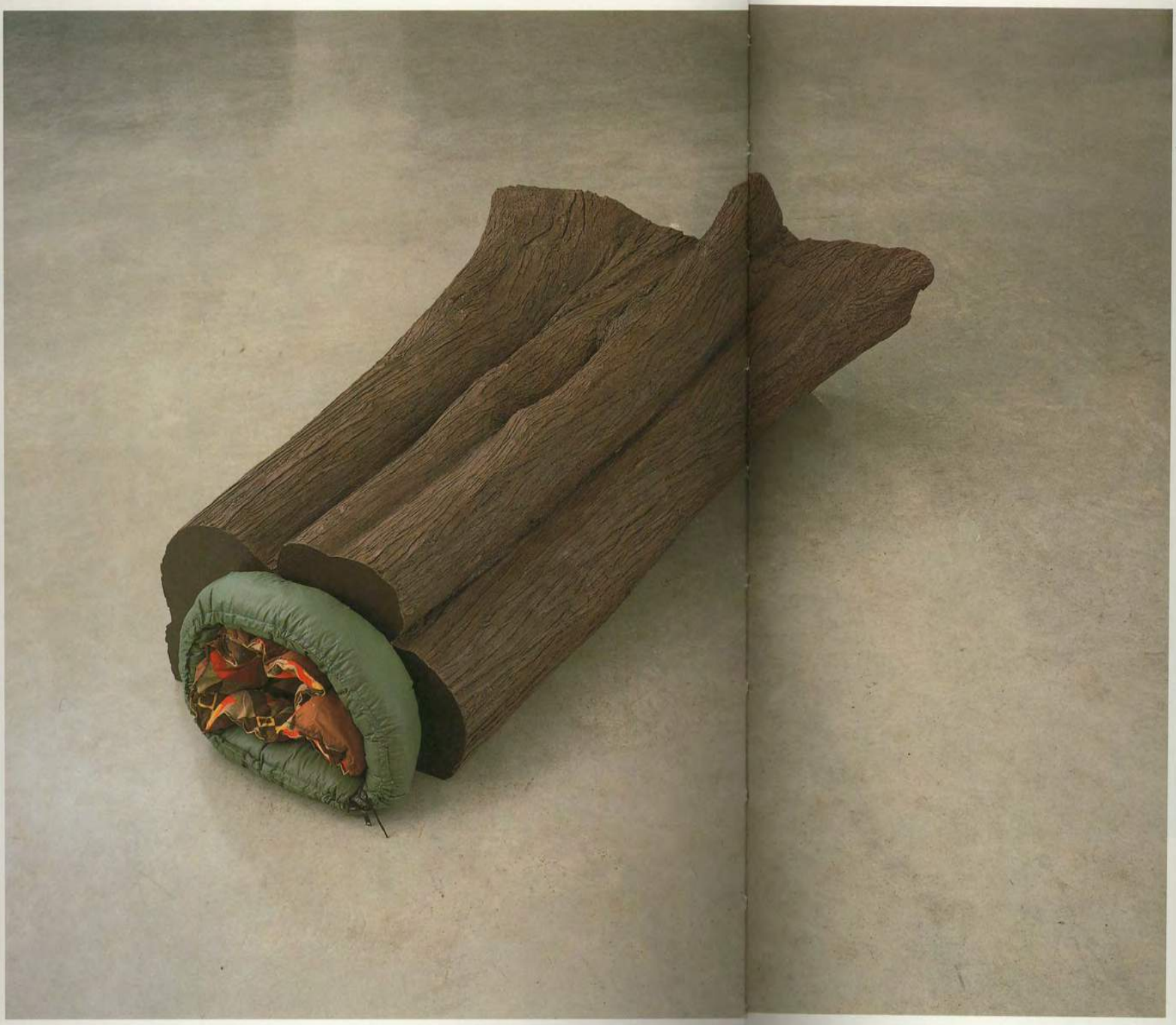
Complications can only exist as some ratio of the two options, making for some degree of freedom for the life of the mind.

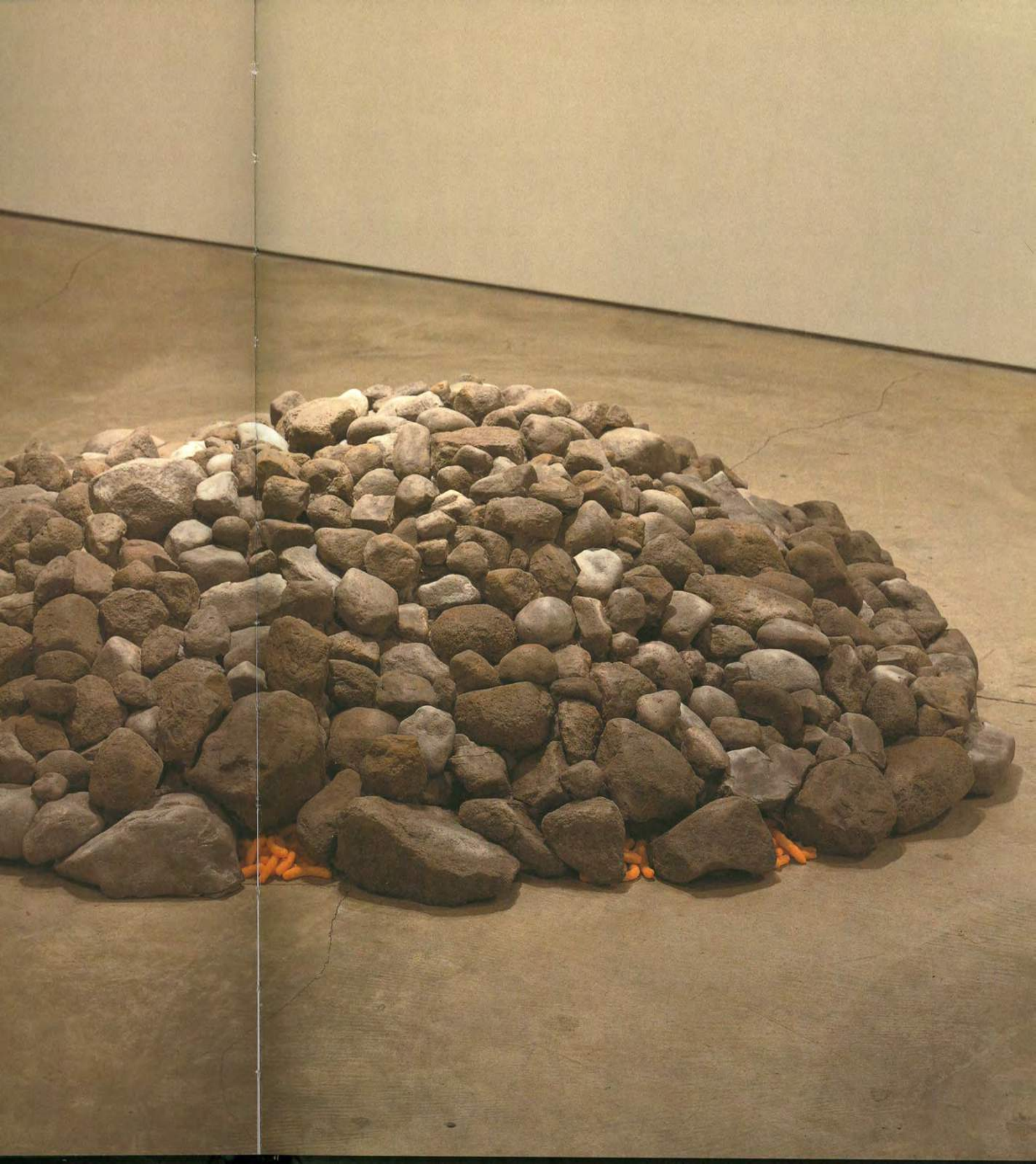
Liz Magor's work is labour intensive, determined in its will to represent plausibility. One might imagine a lost career in special effects, although Magor's representation must withstand direct scrutiny, its illusionism not intended for the background of filmic approximation. The barely discernible shift of consciousness occurs with the realization that the camouflaging elements are not real, but are representations. With that, the hunting and foraging narrative fumbles. The work becomes self reflective, as we are caught in the details of its simulation. Moreover this simulation is not singular. The signs of production suggest that there may be multiple caches and calculated decoys, spread all over the map. We are not alone in our inner crisis of speculation and uncertainty, as we attempt to second guess the reason for the surface ruse. But as participants in this economy we are implicated. Caught out in the embattled terrain of our own dissembling, we are positioned for active thought. All bets are off, but we won't give this place up.

Notes

1 Liz Magor, "White House Paint," *Real Fictions: Four Canadian Artists* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) p. 55. 2 The Province (Vancouver), 10 December, 1999, sec. A, p. 48. 3 Liz Magor, "Messenger," in Liz Magor: Messenger (Toronto:Toronto Sculpture Garden, 1996) n.p.


POMMES





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Le Conseil des Arts du Canada

Neil Campbell, Robert Linsley, David MacWilliam, Elspeth Pratt, Derek Root, Ken Singer, Jeremy Stanbridge, Todd Tedeschini, Renée Van Halm, Brian G. White

weak thought

Vancouver Art Gallery

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Lucy Hogg

The rock face loomed as we slowed down just a little on our way through Squamish, in an attempt to spot the insignificant bits of coloured humanity clinging to its steepness. The "Chief" is a popular recreational site, a short commute for the Vancouver urban dweller's respite from the regimented stress of the nine-to-five world. Hardly the armchair for the weary businessman.

It's a late Saturday morning and the sports equipment co-op is full of shoppers planning the ergonomic details of their next outdoor experience. Spanning up over their heads is a large abstract relief, its sensual undulations suggesting the body. On its earth-coloured ground are subtly coloured plastic organ like attachments spaced at an arm or leg span from each other, implying articulated movement upward. It is a vertical landscape of monumental proportions, conjuring up a domesticated interior version of the old romantic ratio of man diminished by nature, yet called to conquer.

If we trace any consistency in the artwork of David MacWilliam we might find a certain kind of sheepishness manifesting itself as an obfuscation of style. Here style is the eradication of style, at least in the larger sense of gesture or motif. Earlier work, with its overt figure and ground relationships, flirted with the heroic, awkwardly, in the way a lot of painting of the early 80s was awkward, recognizing as it did after two decades of minimalism and conceptualism a certain redundancy of a "debased and irrelevant tradition."[1] Unlike the more contemporary mediums of print, photography and video, painting apparently didn't participate in the languages needed to respond to history, politics and strategy that the critical avant-garde had been demanding.

MacWilliam's later 80s work reflected his growing knowledge of the craft of oil painting, and style began to insinuate itself into the work; this being an imperative of habit, or maybe a modernist response to the spectre of an imaginary market. The motifs, derived from historical examples of painted drapery, linked us reassuringly from painting to painting with a certain logic echoing the narrative found in any monograph chronicling your average 20th century artist's course of development.

By 1993, a crisis point was reached, and old studio procedures and conventions were rejected. Canvases and supports became unpredictable in format and material, and seriality broke down. MacWilliam's paintings became contingent upon each other, simpler fragments needing to be grouped to form compound structures. Style could only be pegged as an attitude, willful whimsy or as random trajectory. No longer did the paintings refer to traditions of fine art, but more to the industrial techniques of the manufactured surface (sanded, polished, rubbed, ground), unmediated by the gesture of the hand. Formats transformed found shapes of the everyday, templates vaguely referring to some previous, practical use.

He was listening to himself for a change, doing whatever he felt like, because who cared?[2]

David MacWilliam's recent rock climbing paintings acknowledge not so much a particular interest in rock climbing, but reflectively act on localized aspects of contemporary west coast leisure culture. The æsthetisization of interactive gymnasium structures (which can be found in venues with names like Vertical Addiction, Cliffhanger, and Rockhouse) immobilizes them, offering up a melancholic rumination on the inertness of formalist concerns (here read a critique of modernist painting), analogous to the domestication of raw nature as it is colonized by technology. The colours of the shaped figures and their contrasting grounds have been derived from brochures for interior design, offering

David MacWilliam, *Drift*, 1996 [cat.13]

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us received ideas of what constitutes good taste, furthering the domestic analogy and reassuring us that we could still be shopping, affirming our lifestyle choices, whilst grappling in a fundamental way with the laws of gravity.

The paintings suggest that a potential art audience (and market) lies tantalizingly out of reach of the purview of the Vancouver art community, instead replaced by the highly visible recreational culture dominating our city where obvious capital investment (memberships at the yacht club and timeshares at Whistler) could otherwise find its way to cultural institutions, educational programs, and fine art collections. Here, where the majority of all paintings bought are conventional landscapes, MacWilliam's works offer a nature as it is produced and consumed by its audience, no longer the sublime viewed untouched through the pictorial window, but as concrete commodity. However, the genres are mixed. The figure is evoked by the proportions of the paintings, derived from the standard 4' x 8' format of plywood, recalling a human span of reach. Within the implied architecture of building materials the climbing holds in their molded colours ask the body to move on up. We swing diagonally upwards, engaged and vertically challenged into a primary co-ordination of hands and feet. We are the figures in the ground, virtually called to consider where we are moving to or from, within the life-size theatre of action and consumption. Nature is culture as we tentatively reach for the next foothold, and success or failure in that relation will not necessarily depend on ascent.

[1] Ian Wallace, "Painting in Spite of Art: David MacWilliam," *Vanguard*, vol. 12, no. 10 (December/January, 1983/1984), p. 22. [2] Lucy Hogg, "The Rest of Our Lives," published in conjunction with the exhibition *The Rest of Our Lives: David MacWilliam*, Stride Gallery, Calgary, 1995.

David MacWilliam, *Lamina*, 1996 [cat.10]

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The Canada Council for the Arts since 1957 | Le Conseil des Arts du Canada depuis 1957

altered visions

Johannes **Zits**

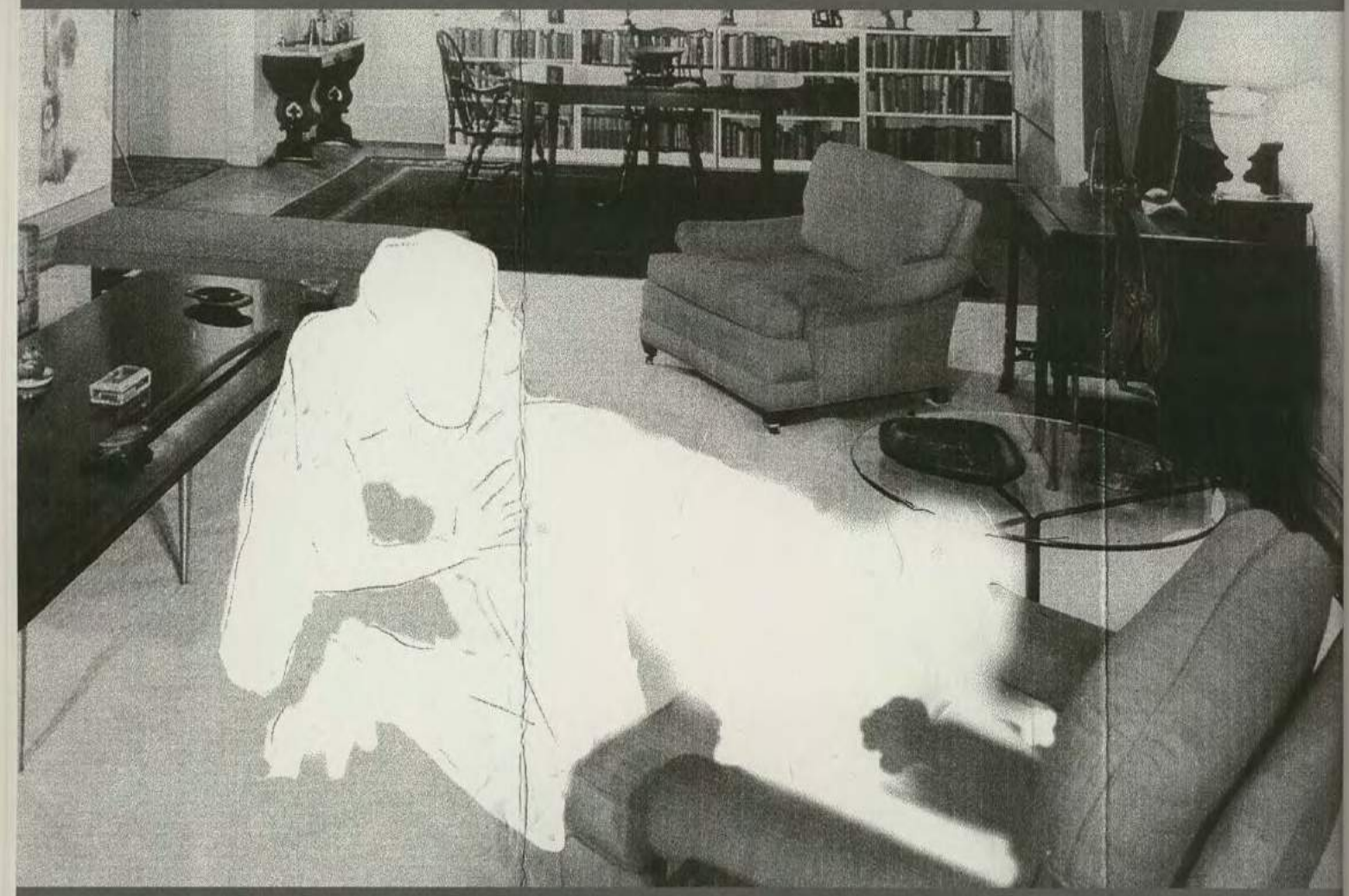
Thecla **Schiphorst**

Charles **Rea**

contents

Johannes

Zits



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Painting and Other **ACTS**

Lucy Hogg

The large print-outs of designer interiors seemed foreign in the dusty warehouse studio, smelling incongruously of ink jet spray. Images of generic comfort were photographed as if for an upscale bed-and-breakfast brochure, promising both familiarity and fantasy in a non-controversial setting. Next thing I knew they were on the floor, Johannes poised like Jackson Pollock over the surface of a pristine digitized image. Gloppy, spattering paint landed with a certain precision upon the pixelated reproduction with palpable transgressive effect.

> *I guess you only get one shot at these, eh Johannes?—If you mess up you have to start all over. Johannes laughed nervously.*

When I first met Johannes he was a straight-ahead painter. Or as straight-ahead as anyone could be, back in 1981. We were all messy oil painters: young, and caught up in a wave of self-definition, killing our post-painterly fathers. What I mean

by straight-ahead is the idea that paint itself embodied some kind of subjective honesty, a direct line to the core of humanist expression, harkening back (of course it goes further back than this) to a pre-World-War-II expressionism. Johannes's earlier work consists of life-size portraits of his family and friends, the paint calling up the gestural quality of Alberto Giacometti. Later work positioned nudes in ambiguous settings which register only enough to point out the psychological distance between the figures.

What we might not have been so conscious of then were the structural conditions of a 1980s boom economy and the conditions driving the art world back to an emotional reunion with the acceptable bourgeois commodity item. As Benjamin Buchloch pointed out in his 1981 essay "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," the return to representation in European painting in the late 1970s (and its subsequent reverberations in the various international art scenes) invoked the historical amnesia of 1930s Social Realism: its subservience to fascist and socialist regimes comparable to the restrictive imperatives of capitalism under Thatcher and Reagan. The brushstroke's complicity was its claim to unmediated

expression of subjectivity, taking us all down the garden path in melancholic rumination over the loss of pre-industrial notions of individualism.

Some of us gave up. Some of us changed channels. Some of us moved on to photo-and-text installations. Some of us consciously put bags on our heads, and kept on painting. The working fiction of a craft-based medium is that if you persevere, your technique improves. And straining the narrative even further, a consciousness of technique (because it is so heterogeneous and arbitrary without this) is a consciousness of concept, historical process, and the survival of painting. The anti-aesthetic (or lack of training, however you want to look at it) of 1980s painting couldn't take this into account; it needed time to develop its own fictions.

It became harder to be straight-ahead. You'd be accused of being a knuckle-dragger, a monkey painter.

Johannes, who is of Dutch extraction, began to account for his own identity in the early 1990s. By adapting the brushwork of Frans Hals or early Piet Mondrian,

his work reconstituted Dutch landscape as might be seen by the tourist from a bus, in painted snapshot compositions of pilgrimages to family origins. These paintings were moving away from the existential implications of earlier work into a search for the constitution of self as found through nationality, both personal and artistic. When this search for self moved into the realm of sexual orientation, the paintings became figurative again; but the figures were ready-mades, lifted from gay pornography magazines, inhabiting Ikea-like domestic interiors.

The salient feature of Johannes's current work is the separation of figure (or figures) from the ground by a dichotomy of media: that is, photography equals ground; paint equals figure. This apparent split formally invokes the desire for reconciliation between the two (that old painting saw). The nude figures in their multitudinous splotches of flesh tones are at times barely distinguishable as a couple in an embrace, or at other times separate, occupying different parts of the room in relational tension. His figures move through luxurious settings of velvet and brocade on thick, off-white pile rugs, with carefully arranged intimations of traditional values and the pretence of old money. Here, we have hired

housekeeping in a Vermeer casting of light. These figures have time for their idylls; they also have time, apparently, to work out at the gym. They represent lifestyle choices, which, pushing the edge of plausibility, suggest we go shopping. They suggest that, because we are not quite perfect, there is room for improvement, or our rooms need improving—we're not quite sure which. Desire, though, remains at an ineffable remove within the insistence of the decor (no matter how rich) and the generic nature of the featureless figures (no matter how trim and fit).

We have, too, the domestication of the painterly sign. The drops and splotches recall us to that fraught moment of the post-WW-II abstract artist, poised in the arena of the canvas, about to commit an act of creation. We are cheated of that vicarious experience as the mark coheres, focuses, moves us into the more prosaic demands of representation. There is a certain self-conscious calculation in its placement—even minimal attention to signification will undo its free-wheeling expressionist autonomy. This is made all the more explicit in its present context of pixelated ground. The structure of paint becomes the underside of

digitization, and vice versa. Both become abstract; but given certain distance of focus, they freeze into recognizability. Like signage that, once registered, becomes legible from previously impossible distances, we are captured by the image.

And, once we're in there, how do we get out?

Work Cited

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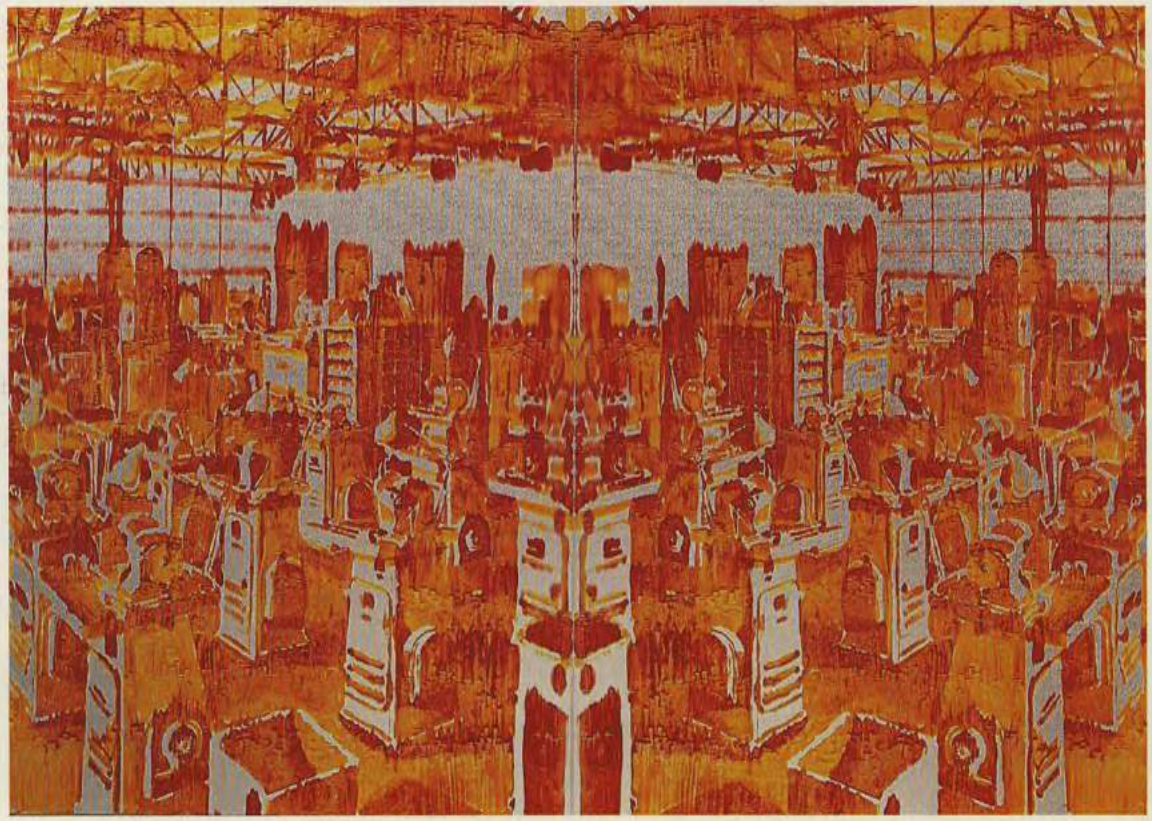
Charles

Rea



Who's **Afraid**

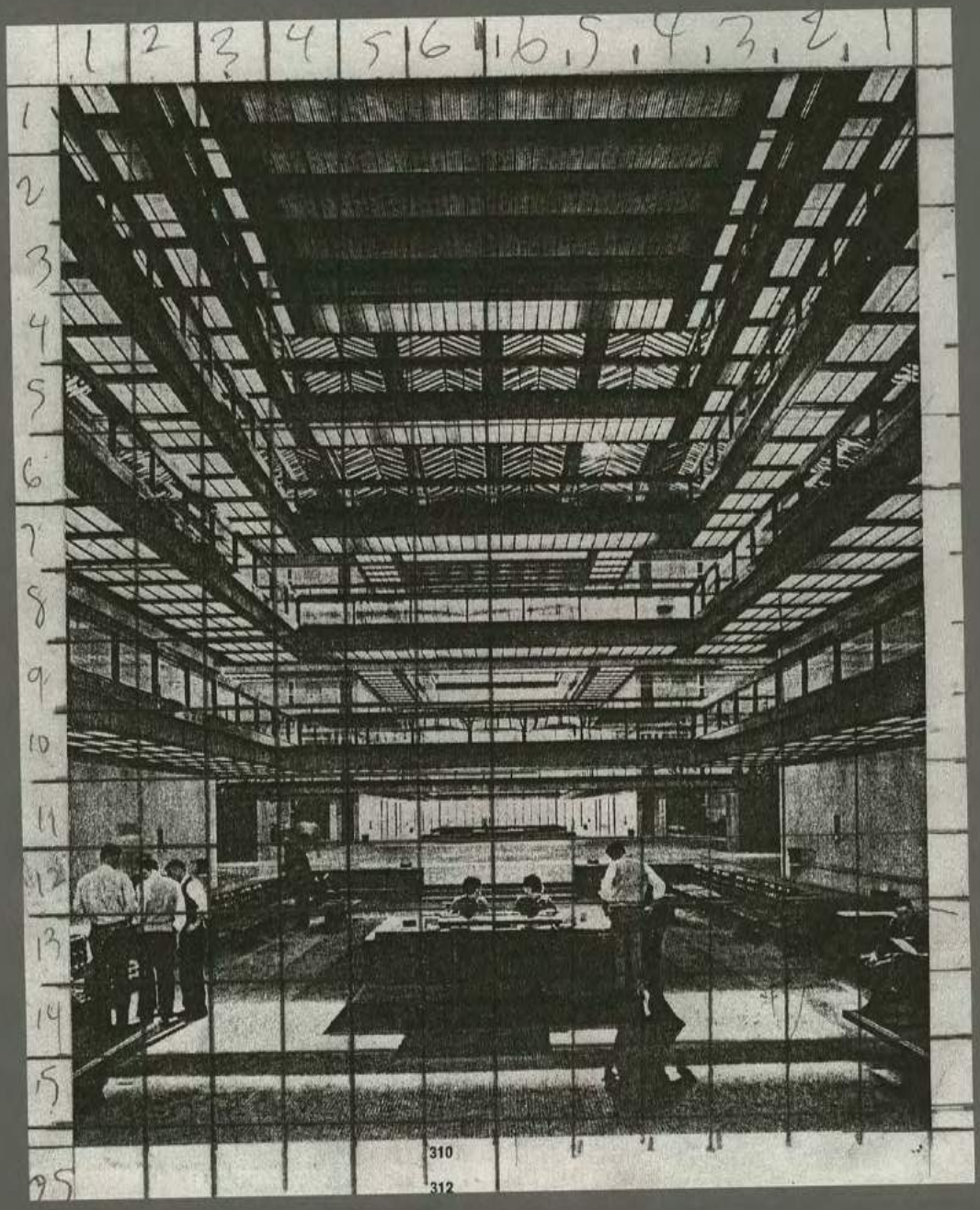
Lucy Hogg

The translucent glazes sit uneasily on the synthetic, metallic ground, their arbitrary viscerality recalling bodily fluids, or unformed desire. Or so they often say about paint. Eventually it can be seen that there was some method in the application, small frenetic up and down motions, digit-sized. Short actions of the wrist. There is a coolness to the paint, and then I realize I am looking at an unfolded canvas, a Rorschach print. The resulting image is short on focal depth, like a photograph pulled out of the developer too soon.

In the early 1980s paintings by Charles Rea we have a crystalline space of unfolding rectangles literally painted on books, the physical structure of their composition echoed in the illusionistic representation. Like a child's kaleidoscope the images suck us into their vertiginous perspectives until our viewing is stopped flat by the oppressive heavy paint. What were once open books have become subtexts, hidden by the skin of paint.

In the later work (1993-96), the books flatten out, but they are at least offering their titles. In their cosmetic packaging they seem formally organized by a certain logic of colour until we find common themes in the receding columns (ah, we're in the self-help section?) pushing us in and out of the flat matte monochrome picture plane, toying with our emotions as we puzzle over their ersatz vanishing points. Whose book collection is this anyway?—the titles of contemporary and historical artists' monographs sandwiched between a wide range of popular reading selections, from Dr. Seuss to Danielle Steele to Jean Paul Sartre, vaguely conjuring up the identity of a third year university liberal arts student, collapsed onto the reading shelf at the cottage. However, all they can give us now is the promise of their brightly coloured promotional graphics, the contents of one book easily substituted for the contents of another, left unread.

By 1996-97 the images of books have metamorphosed into diagrammatic doodles, their configuration developing incrementally in counter clockwise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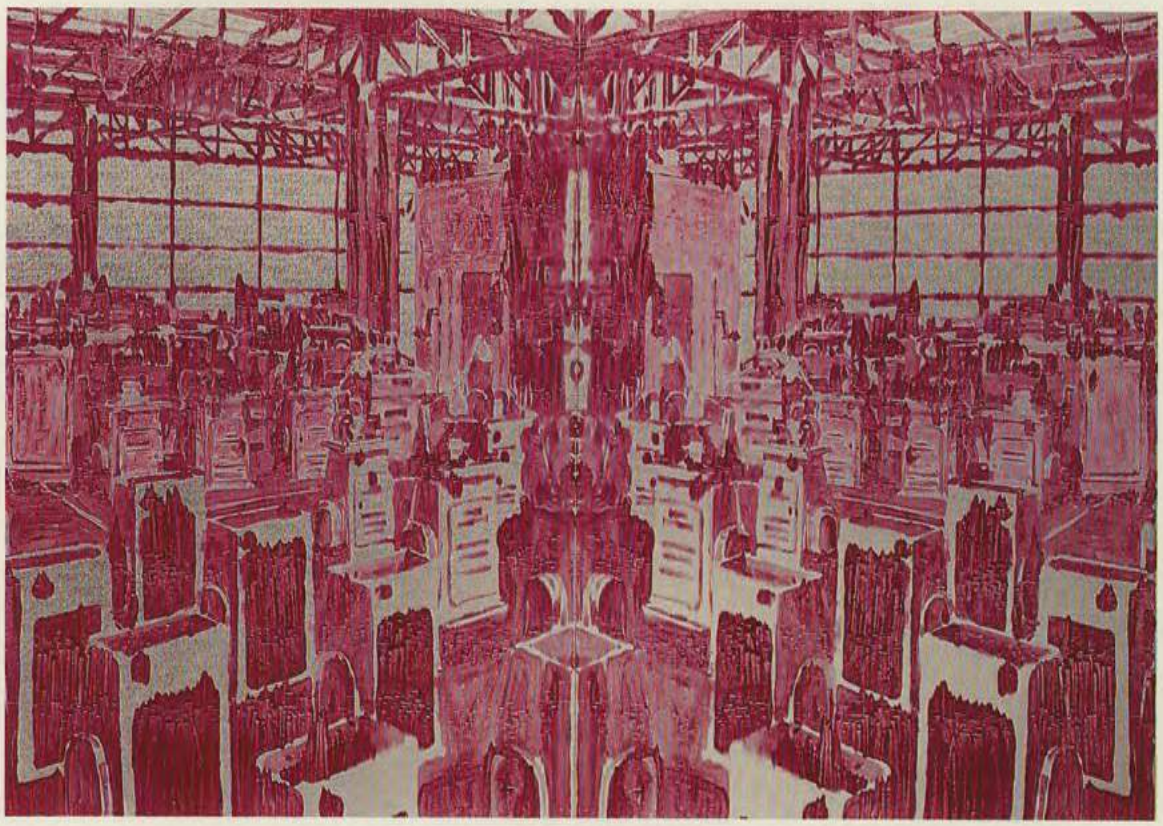
fashion around the large canvas. Their quasi-scientific appearance suggests a technological optimism or cyclical healing pattern as the figures migrate across the uniform ground colour, like a time release mechanism moving inexorably towards another conclusion or another beginning. They shift only very quietly in hue and intensity, but one is not sure if this is because of their actual difference in colour or the effect of inconsistent conditions of light in the room, the measure of actual differences of pigment, or simply the circumstances of perceptual instability. Objective or subjectively fluctuating. Does it matter?

In the current works (1997-98) the figure/ground dichotomy is similar; articulation of image separates itself from a flat, but this time luminescent, silver ground. The modulated colour has a chemical acerbity: quinachrodone and dioxine violets, pthalo blues and greens, hansa oranges, exacerbated by nervous, vertical markings which, upon closer viewing, don't serve any descriptive purpose. In the smaller, more intimate works

the image is doubled once; an interior space is folded to create a fictive passage to its vanishing point. These images are taken from a variety of sources (architectural digests or technical manuals) of hospitals, clinics, prisons, banks, civic ministries: all institutions devoted to corporal or corporate management. As structures they require certain codes of behaviour and our tacit compliance. Notably, the expectation of the human figure is disappointed; we are forced to traverse those passages of eerie quiet ourselves. The cold trajectory seems limited in psychological specificity, making us fearful of the generalizing effect of the cure.

In the larger diptychs the folding is doubled again. The original source image is split, the left side folded to mirror itself on one canvas, and likewise the right on another. They are then seamed together to form a diptych, divided by sister colours. What was an asymmetrical image becomes two symmetrical images, presented for scrutiny like non-identical twins.

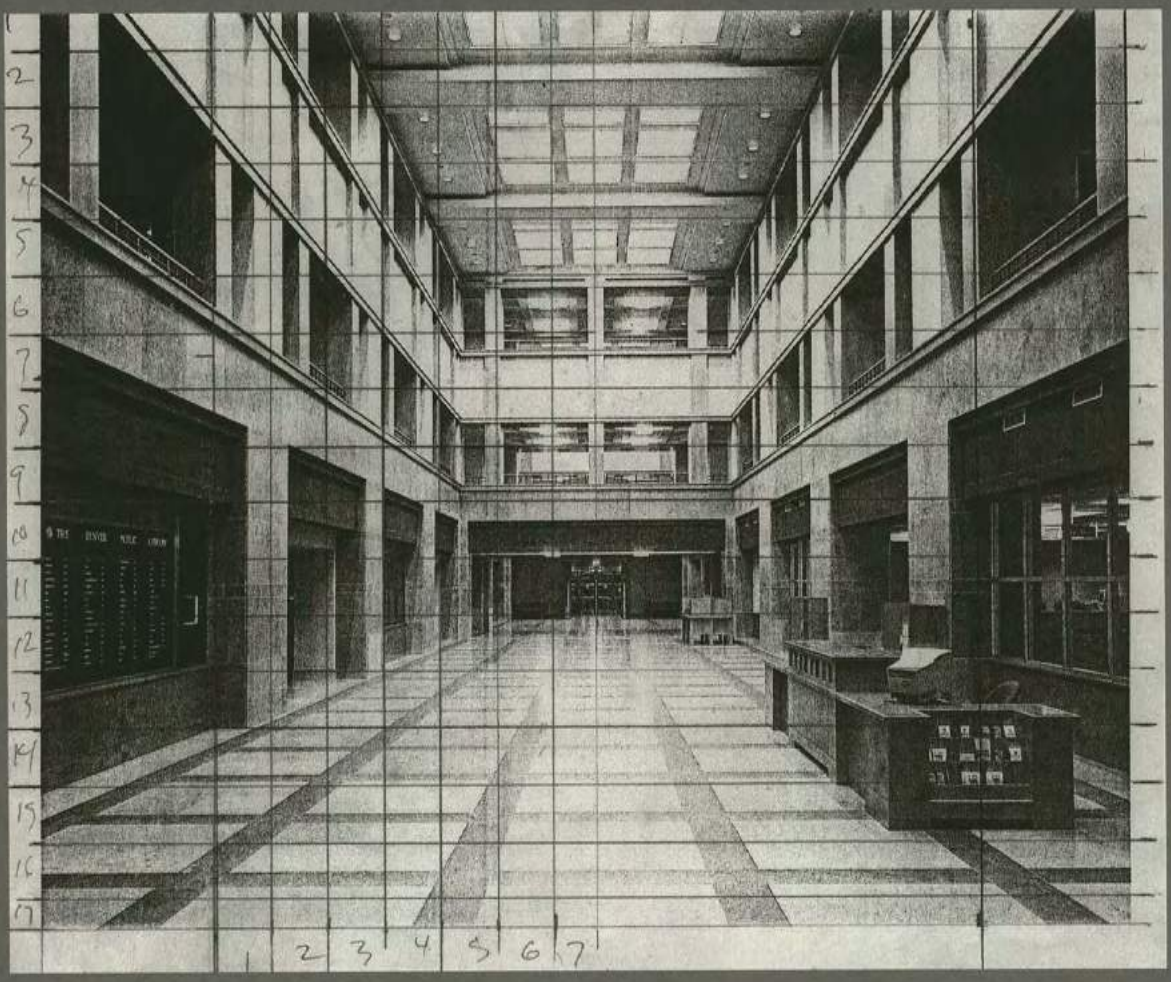


Charles Rea
Leave of Absence (diptych) 1998
oil paint on silver upholstery
119 cm X 305 cm

Taken from images of factories and machine shops, these paintings are more alien, more viscerally threatening. The materiality of the paint in its agitated consciousness resting lightly on the surface stops us from any kind of reassurance of renaissance perspective. We are ostensibly centered but we have to do a double take. As we discover that what is in one image is not in the other, our peripheral vision is called upon in an attempt to stabilize. We are left with an unresolved stereoscopic vision that suggests that the right and left hand sides of the brain have yet to synthesize.

What were assembly lines, production bays and tooling machines anthropomorphize, the Rorschach allowing us to identify and re-invent ourselves as monsters in crisis. The titles of these paintings refer to institutional descriptions of what could be a myriad of human conditions. "Hearing Impaired," "Leave of Absence," and "Occupational Hazard" create categories to define interruptions of production which are a result of human frailty

in relation to possibly oppressive conditions. The industrial sites too are certainly melancholic in their depiction of archaic or soon to be redundant technology. Like a sick nervous system, the disoriented body of production is pinioned, spread-eagled for examination. We are touched by the fear of loss of motor control, touched by the desire for equilibrium, by the need for gainful employment. Or maybe our disequilibrium is the active state, the real condition of our relation to the authority and approval of the institutional mind. Charles Rea's paintings in their spectacular quality hint at a certain beauty in their reflections of instability. The monolith of order is the mirage. Our grounding is flexible, our own unruliness a part of the equation as much as the conspiracy of circumstance.



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SANDRA MEIGS/ DUMMIES

CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY MAY 1997

BY LUCY HOGG

The paintings sat on the wall like luridly lit aquariums, each with its own ersatz halogen light attached like a hand reaching up from the bottom, inverting the discreet library portrait. Did we say these were portraits? Collapsed red alkyd pustules for eyes, a strip of metallic tape smiling for a mouth, compulsive smearing for hair, the face's complexion dabbed as if it had been systematically poked at with a stick. A tiny spotted triangle hanging off the bottom of the painting like the end of a tie caught in a car door.

In Sandra Meigs paintings there is a constrained persistent quality to the excess. The ostensible chaos of the materials has its own economy: the transgressive use of the paint is deliberate, with no one system of mark making repeating itself within a particular frame. The use of colour, too, is specific. If one doesn't get caught trying to identify the image it could be beautiful; but, once that process begins, the colours become denotative, even practical.

Another seated portrait. The polka dot background is an array of 60's children's party invitation colours. Only the yellow dots, for some reason, are all dripping. The figure is pieced together in what seems to be the truncated limbs of other people's clothes: a drapery study of a pink blouse; a striped pyjama leg; a blue silk moiré sleeve; a man's suit jacket wrapped around the face. But she/he is tied up or held together with brown rope. It looks as though chocolate Duncan Hines icing has been gratuitously smeared and rubbed across the chest area. Two shiny pooling black eyes are crying.

A mucky grey obliterates the simple floral of a child's cotton print, cheerfully light orange and yellow. This face is asymmetrical. The nose, not quite limp, looks like it's been dipped into execrable beige matter. The children have been brushing their teeth with peanut butter. There has been an attempt to tidy up these faces, for their birthdays, the first day of school, a wedding anniversary, within the domestic scale of the painting's support. The polymorphous paint handling suggests the infantile, but there is a megalomaniacal cunning to its articulation that suggests the omnipresent adult.

Perhaps on a first reading these might seem like sick paintings. Drawn into the gallery by the brilliant lighting and colour, the conventional expectation of the brushstroke is disappointed. The discontinuous surface provokes queasy disclaimers of what one is *not*. However, a second reading triggers recognition: Here is the body's squalor (for which paint acts as the text) from which no one is exempt. But it's not all going downhill fast. There is a poignancy to these complex digressions, a testimony to human capacity for coping. Keeping busy at least.

❐

Boo #7 July 1995

ROBERT LINSLEY
AT CATRIONA JEFFRIES

LUCY HOGG

The photograph had Robert Linsley's face peering over the edge of one of his paintings. Was that the face of a Revisionist, I wondered, and went back to the gallery hoping the show was still up. The walls were empty, gallery closed. I went back again, and asked them to pull his paintings out of storage. A set had been sold. *Circle in the Woods #1* (1994). So it was gone. I remembered it from opening night. Progressive panels leading me through fractured secondary growth to the light of a clearing, a carpark (a repeated motif in this show). These had seemed aptly done. An effect had certainly been accomplished. The illusory effect of chiaroscuro. Dark to the light.

Over to the ones that were left. *Circle in the Woods #2* (1995). I took some notes.

Beige grounds, greens strangely separated, use of black for emphasis, rough brush strokes, gobby at times, some dry reworked areas, but in some places inexplicably thin or unattended—oil paint with the flat look of acrylic. Strange abrupt passages, abbreviated edges, no consistency to the disintegration of form—expressionism, or expediency? I admired certain painterly passages and wondered at other lapses and signs of struggle.

On our way out the gallery director showed me a small quick oil sketch, *Capilano Cemetery* (1991) laid flat on a table. Grave markers haphazardly placed on a soft light green translucent ground. Thin fluid paint. This one was easier, more immediately compelling. Economy of perception. Quick.

After the assumptions of the anti-aestheticism of the eighties, the valorization of 'awkwardness', the notion that 'awkward' spoke volumes outside the codes of finesse, and the now institutionalized nay saying against 'value judgments', the point at which one can identify good painting from bad is highly contingent. A question that arises is whether or not a painting is purposely bad, its internal critique having evolved to the point where it can barely exist, a shadow of its former heroic self. To suggest, however, that Linsley's paintings participate in that discussion might be misleading. As far as he's concerned he's dealing straight up with the moderns, sharing the dialectical optimism. A perpetual fresh start for Art. So it is not a disdain for bravura that might lead some to question the way these paintings are made. The quibble remains. If Linsley's paintings were 'better painted', could they be 'better paintings'. The body of the paint is not separate from the body of the idea. There is a correlation between the struggle of the paint handling and the difficulty of the subject matter. The sublime isn't what's available. There is a stark ubiquity in the depiction of these construction sites, parking lots and distressed forests that is poignant but not nostalgic.

I get more querulous over the assumption that anyone can just go and sit down on the edge of the endowment lands and paint away. For a woman it goes beyond a simple question of self consciousness, painting in public; it's hard not to conjure up disemboweled bodies in the bushes. I somehow have to imagine how I would have to be taller, larger, to sit out there with my easel in a state of total equanimity. So we've got the free-ranging gaze, still transparently masculine. Nothing fresh about that. Emily Carr aside (her and Agnes Martin).

The idea of fresh starts is a limited view of modernism. Without maundering on about the putative death of painting, I would say that Painting is always bogged down in its historical assumptions. But we can't feel sorry for it for too long; photography, video and installation have taken on the overlap of painting's baggage and have by now acquired some of their own. It's a rare accomplishment to make an artwork that overcomes its medium and its history, to convincingly render contemporary experience. But we are harder on paintings when it comes to critical assessment, lacking as they do the cerebrally varnished surfaces of the ready made or the critically approved mediation of photography. We have to read the surface, but who has the time?

To read the surfaces of Linsley's paintings is an exercise in problem solving, conceptually filling in the absent to try to make sense of the present. The staggered panels induce movement and separation, like pieces of a puzzle scattered on a card table. The gaps in the intelligence of the paint, collapsed areas of drawing and fogged tonalities lead you to small crisp moments of the everyday and then back again to chaos. Cohesion for the viewer depends on an empathetic disposition for looking.

●

Mimics

ESSAY BY LUCY HOGG

When looking at the paintings of Ron Terada and Steven Shearer it seems clear that there is an agreement about what a painting might look like; a laconic presentation which engages with various tenets of modernism and the specialization of production through quasi-technological means. Julie Arnold, in the context of this exhibition, is the Third Man —a catalyst. Her work couldn't be described as painting, but visually and materially it fits. Her earlier production and projected future works point to a number of shared interests: logo-motifs, clichés, melodrama, romance, and needless to say, irony.

Terada's and Shearer's paintings can be taken off the wall, shipped to another place, remounted, and perhaps sold. Arnold's artwork lasts only as long as the exhibition; the walls are then painted over, the computer program put back in the file. Shearer's and Terada's work is a product of studio practice. Arnold's work dispenses with the studio; it is ephemeral, a design layout. She determines what her parameters are, and then sets out to produce her exhibition. Ostensibly, she demurs from participation in an economy of exchange.

We're like Hall and Oates
and she's the studio musician we've brought in.

△ Logo Series (Installation Detail) — vinyl letter, paint
Julie Arnold — 1993 - 1995

▻ Logo Series (Detail) — vinyl letter, paint
Julie Arnold — 1993 - 1995

There are varying degrees of intentionality built into each artist's work. I think of a see-saw. Aesthetics (formalism) on one end, the agit prop (the discursive) on the other. It's tipping back and forth. The participants may slide one toward the other; they may even unwittingly trade seats. Arnold's work more consciously engages representations of corporate power; the idea generates the form the work might assume. In Shearer's work the intentionality is found in the production, or rather, the production embodies the idea of the work. It is for the viewer to make it out. Terada might be placed somewhere between those two positions. The process — painting — remains intact, but he has a specific idea in mind before he begins.

CAPTURED BY HIS CLOTHES

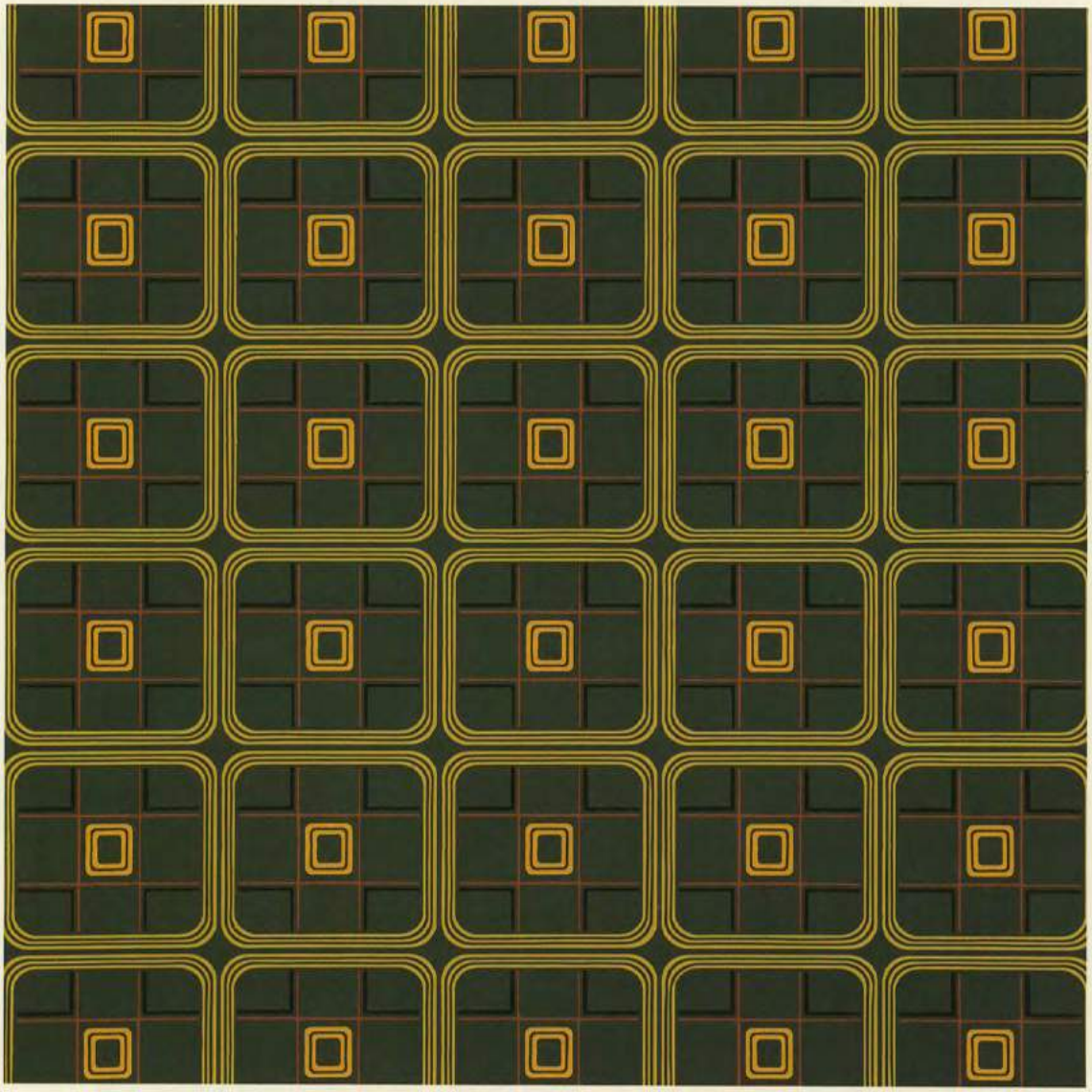
Shearer's democratic surfaces consist of ubiquitous patterning which invoke the banal familiarity of family restaurants, wallpaper, or the upholstery of 70s car interiors. The patterns consist of a raised surface of paint on top of a unified ground. The paintings exist in co-dependent relationships: as single entities they are not meant to be self sufficient. (The paintings are best exhibited, at the very least, in pairs.) Daniel Buren talks about the problem of making work with the consciousness of where it is going to be exhibited, the "unspeakable compromise of the portable work of art" [1] that in trying to anticipate where it will be shown, the work takes on the characteristics, chameleon-like, of "...the predictable cubic space, uniformly lit, neutralized to the extreme, which characterizes the museum/gallery of today."[2] Shearer's work suggests this complicity: the viewer moves from one painting to the next to find out if it is better or worse, different or the same. There are no revelations or surprises, no climaxes or dénouements. The resolution of the ego is waylaid, its location postponed in a social world where its identity is doomed to convoluted reflexivity. On a bad day, this could be about deferred desire produced in the language of capitalism. But left with no narrative, one can ramble. The colours feel familiar, but are carefully chosen and combined: a fragment of a glimpse of a car at an intersection, video games, the covers of record albums, fashion magazines. When all else fails the colour is invented, which is to say, mixed in a heuristic fashion. The patterns test the limits of what is actually an obsolete computer technology used to produce vinyl signage – exhaustively reworking the variations that the machine's limited capacity can generate. If one is attentive, one can see the hand buried in the paintings, existing in a constricted and perverse way. The mechanical surfaces are produced by a paradoxically intensive labour of the hand, which, in seeking to deny itself, produces an effect more perfect than one attainable by purely mechanical means. The paintings also disguise themselves as self-referential, alluding to the discussion of the endgame of painting and the critique of the loaded hairy stick. But there is a compressed pleasure to be had in the cumulative experience of viewing these careful paintings. They are not contemplative, but these fragments of the quotidian crystallize with fugue-like precision, suggesting a complexity in the adversity of the banal.

LOOKING GOOD

Nothing is worth having that you can't have both ways.[3]

Ron Terada uses the monochrome, but its appearance is deceptive; encountering it one becomes aware that it is not the 'industrial' surface of 60s monochrome painting. Terada's painstakingly produced surfaces are clearly not the readymade referred to by Thierry de Duve, in which a painting is reduced to its ultimate signifier of the purchased blank canvas.[4] The grounds are hand painted, using a cross-brushing method to achieve smoothness, and may consist of up to 80 coats of paint. They could be seen as Neoclassical, in the sense of Ingre's enameled surfaces, the *tromp l'oeil* effect sublimating the act of production.[5] In Terada's surfaces, the hand, again, is hidden. Their purity is then subjected to the one coat of text, a discernable layer of paint floating on top, which becomes the figure on the ground. The text operates as worldly referent in a realm which would otherwise refer

[1] Daniel Buren, The Function of the Studio, tr. Thomas Repensek, October # 10, 1979, p. 54.
[2] ibid. p. 55.
[3] From an unpublished volume of aphorisms by L. J. Woods.
[4] Thierry de Duve, The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas, Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal, 1945-1964, ed. Serge Guilbaut (MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1990) p. 260.
[5] Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting, The Logic of the Gaze, (Yale University Press, 1983) p.89-92.



Untitled
Steven Shearer

acrylic on canvas
17.5" x 17.5"
1995

only to itself — the materiality of paint on canvas, a unified ground sitting flat on a wall.[6] The oxymoronic 'personal ad' presents an emotionally-vexed writing challenge: how to convey the specific (the personal) in the form of acronyms, clichés, meta-clichés, and other reductions of self-description and sexual preference. The monochrome implies the generic yet actualizes itself here as specific, providing the context for the advertisement of an individual's desires; desires which are most often constrained to generic expression. The laboured surface of the painting disguises itself as the mechanically reproduced surfaces of everyday life — from newsprint to Melamine; the text in its ineluctability suggests all that cannot be represented in the language of the everyday.

I once read an article in Vogue on how to distinguish a fake Ralph Lauren polo shirt from a real one.

Norman Bryson discusses the hidden labour in nineteenth-century academic painting, arguing that surfaces could no longer be perceived by the body (as opposed to the eye) in the tactile apprehension of brushwork. He compares a work by Ingres to brush painting of the Far East. The act of viewing in the latter is a kind of re-enactment by the viewer of the initial creation of the work by the body of the artist, much as we might think of Jackson Pollock's marks as being able to take us through the act of his painting. In Ingres this sense is suppressed.[7]

Lee Krasner recalling Jackson Pollock asking her: Is this a painting? [8]

MAYBE YOU CAN BE ONE OF US

The mediated relationship to materials in Arnold's work makes for a certain alienation, not unlike how one might feel in relation to the mass-produced elements in contemporary life. Arnold finds a counterpoint to this alienation in the visual play of cliché and parody. All of the words that she uses in her installation — logocracy, logodaedaly, logolatry, logomania, etc. — can be found in the dictionary, yet when placed together on a wall they have a nonsense quality to them. The visual component, both the name-marks and logos, are invented but appear to be authentic, in the way a logo acts as a stamp of origin. (In the beginning, was the Word...) Her purposeful use of cliché is reiterated in her choice of image, typography, and vinyl surfaces in the laser-cut signage she uses. Arnold 'dumps' — as a graphic designer would put it — the orange and black colours found on a Power Ranger toy into a notion of aggression; the image of a heart and a 'feminine' script is dumped into a notion of romance. Knowing she was exhibiting with two painters, she imagined her allotted wall as a painting, with Shearer's and Terada's serial works tunneling towards her installation at the end of the gallery. Her wall, in its monumental scale, may be seen to refer to the pre-Renaissance period when painting had not yet become portable. Or it could remind one of a billboard, its temporary image subject to the tides of consumer marketing. She mimics the portable, predominantly square-format paintings by Shearer and Terada in her design layout, while at the same time echoing Malevich's 1913 monochrome, which proclaimed the "..tolling of the funeral bell of polychromatic painting." [9] Finding itself in this context, her work mutates to the conditions of the exhibition. Like a Commedia del' arte Pierrot, it assimilates the language of the court, yet remains insidiously ambiguous. Arnold's overt acknowledgment of the construction of advertisement and corporate signage nudges Shearer's and Terada's work out of the comfortable confines of formal and art historical reference: casting doubt onto their self-sufficient distance and coolness. Conversely, the paintings catapult Arnold's work into the realm of finish and surface, forcing a recognition of how the manipulation of certain materials, any

[6] A hint of illusionism (or of an external referent) has always saved painting from itself: Walter Darby Bannard, a painter/critic associated with Greenberg, writes about the late-modernist painter Jules Olitski "...[he] suggests it [illusionism], softly, here and there, so that we know it is there, kept in reserve, backing up the painting." (Artforum, January, 1970) The reductivist logic that would finally boil a painting down to a blank canvas is thus avoided. But the implications of the use of a referent, sky for instance, were not discussed.

[7] ibid. Norman Bryson

[8] ibid. Thierry de Duve, p. 266.

[9] Rodchenko cited by Anatolii Strigalev in Art of the Constructivists: From Exhibition to Exhibition, 1914 - 1932, Art Into Life, Russian Constructivism, 1914-1932 (The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, 1990) p. 28.

Untitled (My Mother) acrylic on canvas
Ron Terada 30" x 30"
1994

materials, maybe read in an aesthetic, rarefied manner.

LOGORRHOEA: EXCESSIVE FLOW OF WORDS ESP. IN MENTAL ILLNESS

There was one more thing I had to read before finding myself with myself in front of the blank page; "Valéry Proust Museum" by T.W. Adorno.[10] *I read it to the end. The weekly Sunday nap was calling to me. I lay down on the couch and dreamt about a small painting. It was on a prefab stretcher, and I could see that the one colour of blue that was painted on it (cerulean, straight out of the tube, readymade) was barely inflected. I couldn't read anything in it. Not enough to be sky, not enough to be a seascape. Nothing. Just blue paint smeared in an uninteresting way over a white gessoed ground. I realized (in the dream) that the painting meant nothing.*

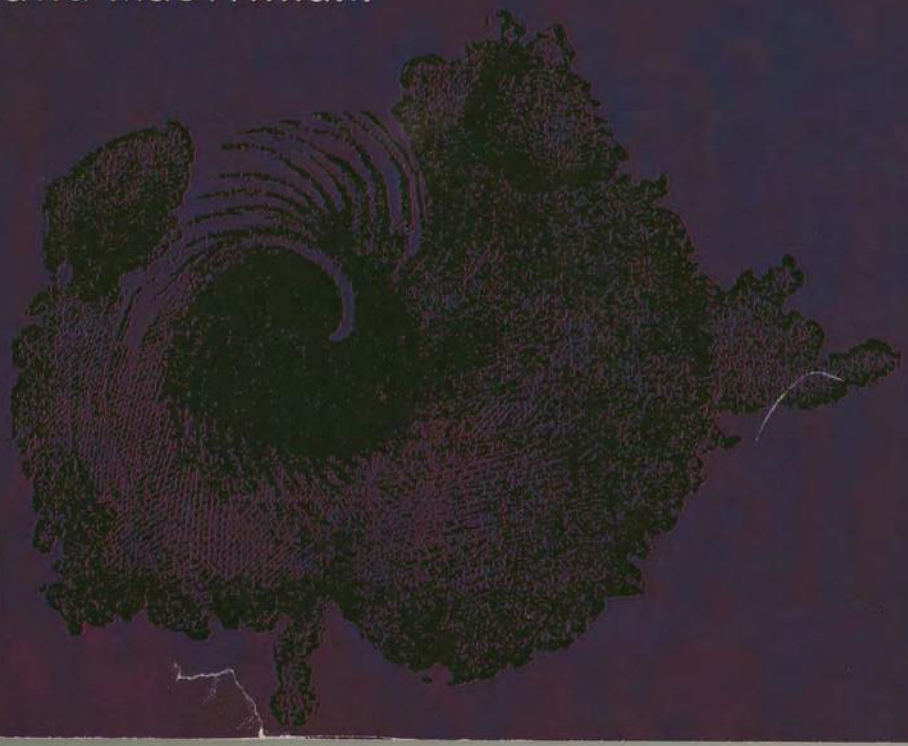
In the essay Adorno creates a fictional discussion between Valéry and Proust on the nature of museums. On one hand, the artwork finds itself in a 'neutralized' self conscious space where it has to compete with a cacophony of lesser and greater artworks, its autonomy of purity confused; on the other hand, the artwork is 'raised' up out of its original surroundings (the studio, the domestic interior, the boardroom) and placed in a space that, in an absence of decor, "symbolizes the inner spaces into which the artist withdraws to create the work". Both points of view posit that the original life of the artwork is over: the former spells out a small death, a reification; the latter suggests that the life of the art, once separated from its original intentionality, is created in the space between the object and the viewer. Somehow consciousness of both those points of view is necessary.

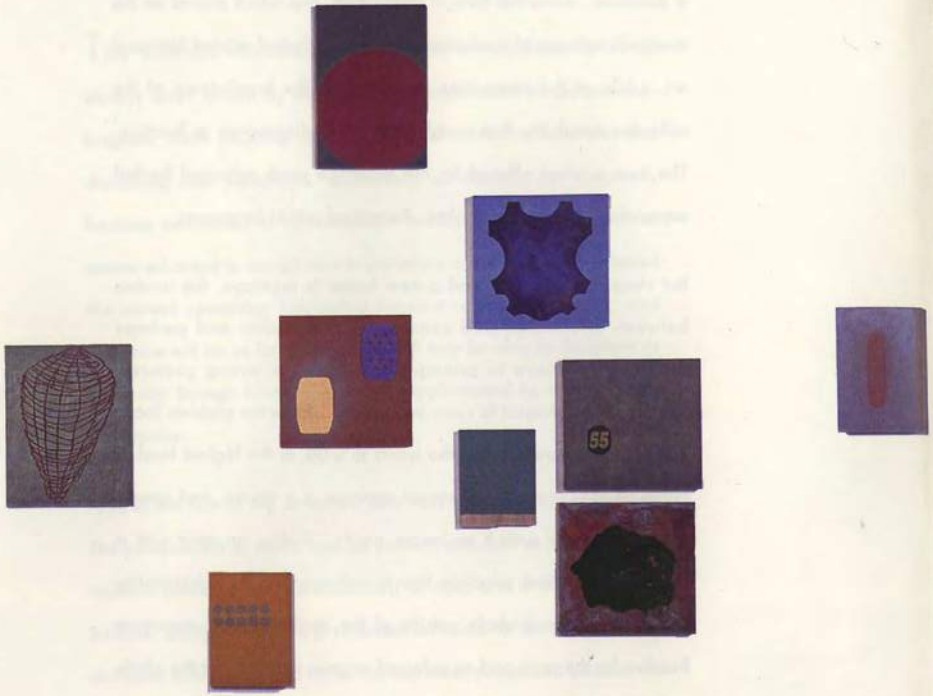
The works in this show inflect one another, suggesting that what might appear formal or even decorative can be read in a textual way, and what is ostensibly more textual may collapse into the formal. The raised text on the wall moves onto the monochrome which then spreads itself flat into a pattern across the canvas. The vinyl edges of the signage point to the plastic edges of the acrylic painted surfaces. All of the work takes up surfaces of the everyday. In Terada's and Shearer's work these are dumped most explicitly into the language of painting — a language which is no longer the vehicle of the contemplative. Arnold's wall of logos drags the paintings of Shearer and Terada into a dialogue with language and corporate signage. In juxtaposition, these works make the conditions of display — and how we identify the objects (or installation) as art in the gallery context — more explicit. Subjectivity (always in danger of manifesting itself as cliché in painterly terms) is situated here through the negotiation of pattern, text, emblem, acronyms, and visual condensations of desire. The cliché is turned in on itself; and the viewer, when looking for some kind of confirmation, must find themselves in the interstices. The banality of the object — or its subject matter, has indeed found its way into the exhibition space as Buren has suggested; but, as Marcel Duchamp's readymades have demonstrated, the art object's permeable and mutable nature lies in the inevitable impact of context and discussion.

[10] T. W. Adorno, Prisms: Valéry Proust Museum, tr. Samuel and Shierry Weber (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts).

The Rest of Our Lives

David MacWilliam

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Studio Visit

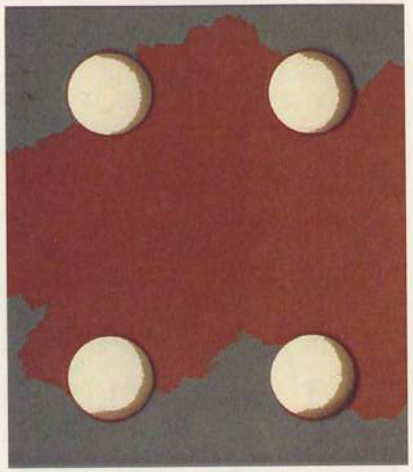
After I left the studio I wondered if I'd been of any help. Somehow the paintings seemed to sum up his personality. A sense of controlled arbitrariness. Pieces of paintings laid out like penny candy. They couldn't exactly be trajected into the rhetoric of semantic fragments. He was listening to himself for a change, doing whatever he felt like, because who cared? One half of the wall was slightly unbalanced, colour–wise it had to be broken up, too many earth tones.

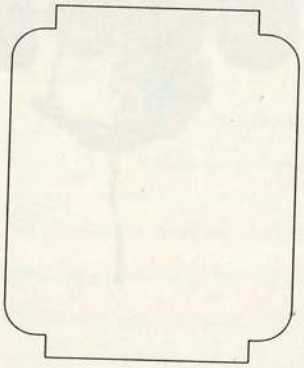
Some of the stains were strangely cosmetic, meticulously highlighted, like he'd spent all day rubbing at the mistake. The flaws in the wood were not planned, but then were purposefully painted in. Polka dots hung dumbly over burnished grounds. Other stains, real enough, had been blown about with a straw. Ugly, someone said. The supports varied. Old canvases cut down, found templates, veneered shapes, leftover waste from production; objects that had been intended for other uses, now obscured.

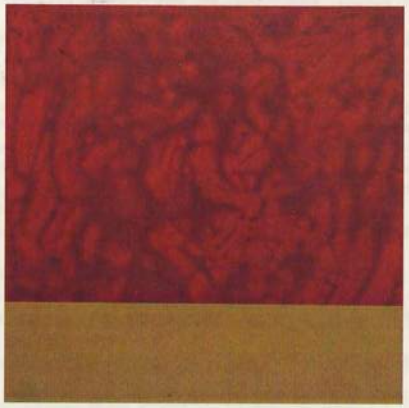
My father would tool around in the garage — we thought he was tidying it up — but nobody was sure what exactly it was he was doing in there.

The paintings seemed to be a willful exploration of randomness, an attempt to stylistically undercut one another. Style was the bugbear of the eighties. Everyone had had one. I realized my desire to ask him what it all meant was to avoid the work of finishing them off for myself. That that was what they meant. I had to see how they were made. That that might be what any painting might be about.

L H







This publication is dedicated to my friend and colleague Mike Banwell, with whom I've enjoyed breakfasts Friday mornings at the Chilli Pepper Cafe. Mike, not only did you inspire the naming of this exhibition, but you also gave me a new way to think about the future.

I would like to thank my friends Greg Bellerby, Lorna Brown, Barbara Cole, Lucy Hogg, Robert Linsley, and Ron Terada who kindly agreed to consider my proposal, and collaborate on this catalogue. And especially, thanks Barbara, for all the things we did.

I would also like to thank all those involved with the Stride Gallery, in particular Shelley Ouelette whose enthusiasm was such a pleasure to be around, as well as Chris Cran and all the other Calgary artists who were so interested and supportive.

the **STRIDE GALLERY** 722- 11 Avenue S.W., Calgary, Alberta T2R 0E4
(403) 262-8507

Paul Collins

Propositions Painting

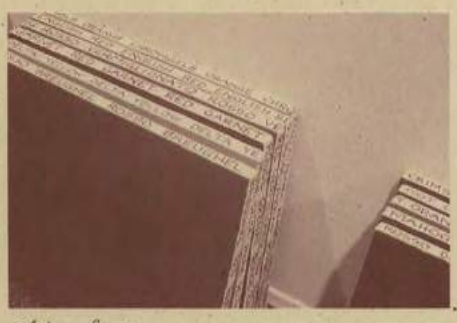
THIS show is about naming: inclusions and exclusions, correspondences and non-correspondences inherent in the act of naming .

The work in this show suggests a rephrasing of the language of painting and its relation to subjectivity. From a feminist perspective the positioning of the subject in relation to language has been in question: how language predetermines power relationships through the construction of gender difference. Access to power could also be discussed in terms of second language acquisition: how previous positionings of a subject determines that subject's relationship to a new language and its power structures. These relationships are not static, although signs of conflict or resistance tend to be masked or supressed by the dominant culture. The subject is defined in static terms, categorized in relation to a norm. Within the history of Western painting that normative subject could be described as white male European; all other subjects fall into categories of difference. The work in this show suggests a rephrasing of that language of painting and its relation to subjectivity.

Arlene Stamp's work deals directly with the technology of painting. In CASE OF RED the system of identification for the colour red functions as a metaphor for the social process of categorization. However exhaustive the inventory (of red) a margin of exclusion still persists. Involving all surfaces of the gallery REDDER comments on the curatorial act itself, a highly contingent construct of meaning: transparent, opaque, self reflective. The metaphor of category is extended further into the qualitiative differences of the surfaces of the reds. In their minute differentiations there may yet still be another red left undescribed.

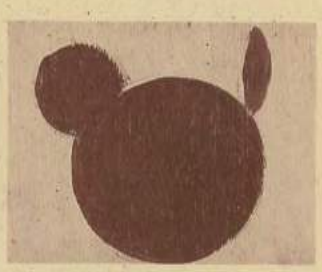
Paul Collins' REPRODUCTIONS carries on that project of reflection, mirroring the other participants in the show in an ironic enactment of mechanical reproduction. Bubble pack provides a dot matrix for the image, implying its endless reproducibility, undermining the cult value of an object's uniqueness. The qualitative loss of the tactility and articulation in the original image suggests a process of neutralization, investing the image as a sign with the potential to contain exchangeable meanings. This may speak of the mediating forces of reproduction on any perception of reality, and loss of specificity. CHOSES more explicitly addresses that kind of neutralization; our attempts to connect a word to an image are confounded by random choice of colour, work, and object represented; forcing the viewer to re-enact the act of naming (Adam in the Garden, giving names to everything in it), but not allowing any conclusions to be made.

Janet Werner's work articulates the prelinguistic moment. In psychoanalytic terms this is the moment before differentiation begins, before the baby enters language as a gendered subject, and is subject to the power relations that that entails. The paintings operate from within the language of Modernism, but her use of materials and non hierarchical ordering of images suggests a subject which is constituted in spite of, or outside of ,that order. The scattering of images on a wall suggest mutability, a sentence not meant to be completed, refusing closure.



Arlene Stamp

Armstrong



Janet Werner

John Armstrong's paintings more specifically query the construction of a masculine subject. Proper names selected out from the free floating signifiers of a commodity culture (extracted from brand names of various products) suggests a lack of specificity or individuality. In the academic hierarchy of painting, still life has always been seen as a lesser genre which historically was seen as the domain of women painters, close to the decorative. Here it functions as an ironic memorial to masculinity, and to the discourse of painting as a male perogative. The paint handling is a nostalgic reminder of a heroic past of painting; the loaded brushstroke (or palette knife) at once a gesture of freedom and sign of alienated consciousness.

The intent of putting this work together was to present a set of propositions, which depending upon the nature of the examination being made, intersect, diverge, and perhaps contradict. The title implies a proposed scheme for painting, but more in the sense of a demonstration of the problems of painting to which no one resolution can be afforded. Painting if it is at all to be used as a means of representation, (of an idea) has to acknowledge its own history. The practise of painting is embedded with historical notions of subjectivity, the mark of the hand as ultimate register of an interiorized consciousness. In the age of electronic reproduction painting has become an exaggerated symbol of autonomy, a caricature which obscures any connection a gesture of expression may have had to its social and political context. For an idea of subjectivity to be reworked it must be re-articulated within a larger social matrix, rather than maintaining the status quo in old models of alienated consciousness, autonomous yet diminished as active social agent.

Lucy Hogg - *curator*. November 1992

Propositions
Painting

John Armstrong
Paul Collins
Arlene Stamp
Janet Werner

November 27, 1992
- January 17, 1993

Opening Reception
November 26, 8:00 p.m.

Charles H. Scott Gallery
Emily Carr College of Art & Design
1399 Johnston Street
Vancouver, B.C.
V6H 3R9