

RADICAL PAINTING

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RAIMUND GIRKE
MARCIA HAFIF
ANDERS KNUTSSON
JOSEPH MARIONI

CARMENGLORIA MORALES
OLIVIER MOSSET
PHIL SIMS

HOWARD SMITH
FREDERIC THURSZ
GÜNTER UMBERG
JERRY ZENIUK

An exhibition organized by THOMAS KRENS

with assistance and contributions by

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Essay by LILLY WEI

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

Ever since the Impressionists implicitly formulated the mechanics of painting as subject by focusing on process and material, the quest for objective experience (what Carter Ratcliff has recently called the “pictorial essences—uninflated, unalloyed, and final”), became an inevitable consequence of modernist art. The puritanical reductivism of the Russian Constructivists, for example, was born of the modernist impulse to avoid the inherent duplicity of interpretation engendered in the gap between the act of art and its understanding. Despite the visual similarities among the work of Malevich, Rodchenko, and Lissitsky, however, the Russians were hardly of a single mind on the subject. Similarly, numerous artists since then, such as Pollock, Reinhardt, Rauschenberg, Newman, Klein, Kelly, Ryman, and Morris have been drawn to the cleansing activity of reducing rather than encouraging the proliferation of visual variables within their respective work, but with an individual richness or iconographic reference that belied the apparent singularity of their respective surfaces. The metonymy of Robert Morris’ grey plywood boxes is radically different in context from the abundant surfaces of Barnett Newman; Rauschenberg’s black paintings are fundamentally opposed to those of Ad Reinhardt.

If the obsessive concern of the present century has been an inexorable tendency toward the analysis of painting, the actions of these artists have served to suggest the range of the territory. While the exchange of reference among their work has been extraordinary, it has also been intermittent. But it is precisely to the tradition of reductivist strategies that the artists whose work is included in this exhibition have systematically committed themselves. Indeed, the conscious orientation of these artists is to privilege in their painting the concept of work as an interpretive field to conduct a project of systematic demystification. The paintings assembled here seek to catalogue the act of their inception with reference only to the literal fact of their presence. In an act of artistic economy, they draw attention to the surface of their making. Such gestures of self-reference attempt to construct tautly analytic representations of pure function; at the same time they open rather than close the complicated question of exactly what process constitutes. By minimizing the potential source of mystery engendered by subjective presence, they raise the possibility that the mechanics of painting are by no means objective and unmediated activities; the surface of their collective works reveals new complexities. Process becomes a mystery in itself.

The desire for “pictorial essences,” furthermore, places the radicalness of these paintings in the larger context of a classical tradition in that the obsession with process that they manifest can be taken as a twentieth-century version of the ancient struggle to locate and depict pure form. In seeming contradiction to the radical stance preferred by the artists, however, their work inevitably participates in the conservative heritage of the debate between form and content. A fundamental tenet of modernism argues that there is no distinction between the two; yet in the work presented in this exhibition that division is reinstated by the systematic nature of the collective efforts of these artists to describe the roots of pure form.

This exhibition first began to take shape in the spring of 1979 when Marcia Hafif showed me her recent paintings, and spoke about them in the context of a larger group of artists in New York who shared similar concerns. This group, which initially included Marcia Hafif, Olivier Mosset, Phil Sims, Joseph Marioni, Jerry Zeniuk, Robert Ryman, and Doug Sanderson, had begun to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern, and to grapple with defining the parameters of their artistic activity. Although the membership of the group at that time was flexible, I was drawn to the idea of bringing their painting to the Williams College Museum of Art on several grounds. In the first place, I liked the work, and the fact that the artists were motivated, rather than restrained, by the limitations imposed by the exploration of process and material. Their collective tendency toward definition within a circumscribed field irrespective of context conveyed an ingenuous and simultaneously powerful commitment to the attitude of painting that had so generously shaped the perception of twentieth-century art. I was struck furthermore by the depth and consistency of experience reflected by the artists in the group; most had been painting in this direction for more than twenty years and their formative attitudes were coincidental with the development of Abstract Expressionism. Presumably they had been nourished at the wells discovered by the early-century modernists, and re-energized by Pollock and the cool clarity of Newman and Reinhardt. A sustained development and contemporary reevaluation of those tendencies suggested a visually compelling exhibition.

On another level, that the artists acknowledged their common references, but were well aware of the irreconcilable distinctions giving their respective work individual quality, strongly supported the argument for a group exhibition. Within that context, the visual impact of their distinctions was multiplied and made manifest. In one sense, their art was made to be seen in a tightly constructed context of juxtaposition by the very absence of dramatic and declarative tactics enforced by the commitment to process. Only in an exhibition that presents the paintings of several artists simultaneously could the full power of their work be revealed. Purged of iconographic reference, the subtle juxtapositions of texture, color, rhythm, process, and scale could, as this exhibition so successfully demonstrates, take on a dramatic intensity.

On a practical level, the catalyst for this exhibition was a group of Williams undergraduate art majors particularly interested in contemporary art. My descriptions of this group of artists' work during a Fall semester course in 1980 on contemporary art led to the formation of an independent study project with this exhibition as its goal. The first group of students—Elizabeth Davis, Tracy Dick, Joseph Thompson, and Eric Widing—began a series of meetings with the group in New York during the winter of 1981 to discuss concepts and logistics. Subsequently, the students met with the artists individually to explore their work, tape interviews, and compile bibliographic information. It was not, however, until the spring of 1982 that the plans for this exhibition finally crystalized. The first group of students had graduated and were succeeded by a second that included Kristen Bloomquist, Carolyn Forman, Susan Hoy, Catherine Vare, and Lisa Yokana. The second group concentrated on developing and integrating the material gathered by the first group, and negotiating

the ultimate framework of the exhibition to the unanimous satisfaction of a group of highly individual artists who were not necessarily predisposed to see the presentation of their work with a similar vision. Their extraordinary enthusiasm and receptiveness to the students' initiative, however, made it possible to develop.

Finally, the presentation of this exhibition represents the collective efforts of the staff of the Williams College Museum of Art. Vivian Patterson coordinated its organization with the able assistance of Lise Holst, Russell Panczenko and Joseph Thompson. Special contributions were made by Nancy Spector and Charles Shepard who, as graduate interns at the WCMA for the academic year 1983-84, provided indispensable assistance in attending to the details of catalogue preparation and coordinating the input of the artists and other participants in the project.

We are particularly indebted to Lilly Wei of Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn whose scholarship and familiarity with twentieth-century painting made her the most likely candidate to contribute a critical overview of the development of these artists. Her insight and understanding has framed and precisely located the concept of "radical painting." But the people who made this exhibition happen, most of all, were the artists—Jerry Zeniuk, Howard Smith, Phil Sims, Marcia Hafif, Olivier Mosset, Anders Knutsson, Frederic Thursz, Joseph Marioni, Raimund Girke, Günter Umberg, and Carmengloria Morales. Their consistent enthusiasm, and cooperation and patience with our efforts to organize and present this exhibition enabled the project to succeed. In particular I must mention Marcia Hafif, who served as a catalyst for the project, and Joe Marioni, who undertook to coordinate the details of the artists' involvement—arranging the meetings, assembling documentation, developing the written material, and arranging for the transportation of the paintings to Williamstown. It was a pleasure to work with them. The scale and presentation of this exhibition is largely a testimony to their unrelenting efforts.

Thomas Krens

Once, leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial chalices dry; this occurs repeatedly, again and again: finally, it can be reckoned on beforehand and becomes part of the ceremony. – Kafka parable

Before artists were advised to make their works aspire to the pure condition of music, which depended only upon sound, and before there existed a concept of an abstract painting, painting was nonetheless subjected to formal criteria: line, color, shape, and so on. Thus, it seems almost curious that the principle of representation had not been abandoned earlier. Yet obvious as that aesthetic conclusion may have been, representation was not challenged until the beginning of this century and with that challenge, modern art made its debut.

Representation as a necessity was discarded; the real or ideal object, which formerly served as a measure of the work of art, found its position usurped. Divested of representational content, these new works of art were proof, finally, that "pure" painting could exist; they were no longer theory. Painting itself, freed from the image, emerged to be perceived at last.

Since one could not postulate beyond the image an image against which it was to be measured, the terms of reference had to be relocated. They were discovered to exist within the work itself. As early as 1890, Maurice Denis, who only restated Charles Blanc's dictum of 1867, issued his pronouncement: "It is well to remember that a picture—before being a battle horse, or nude woman, or some anecdote—is essentially a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." At the time so startling, it was also undeniable.

Once the classic ideas of *mimesis* were questioned, other criteria became rapidly manifest. Cycladic idols, African masks, classical sculpture, Chinese landscapes, Renaissance altarpieces, contemporary art, and even the works of children and lunatics could be situated side by side with equal phenomenal value. Malraux' "museum without walls" or *musée imaginaire*, which functioned as a metaphor for both the simultaneity of art and its value as form and feeling without the imposition of traditional hierarchies could be installed. Thus, painting could be viewed historically, as a sequence of events which had occurred, and ahistorically, as a vast accumulation of existent "facts."

Yet in 1984 the future of painting under a formalist banner is, once again, under attack. That, too, seems curious for those battles have long since been fought and it is futile to fight them again. Depending upon the critic, we are either at the end or at the beginning of an aesthetic period; but in either case, the issues are no longer between representation and abstraction, between formalism and the informal. All painting is abstract insofar as it represents anything; representation and abstraction cannot be separated. But all painting is also real, insofar as it is a painting, composed out of its own materials: *probatum est*. This is the legacy of modern art. The essential question is whether or not painting still has a value. If painting continues to be valuable, indeed, to possess irreplaceable value, the search continues for where that value is located. That is the ultimate battleground; abstraction and representation are disputations about the *locus* of value, as is the opposition of line and color, of formalism and expressionism.

As to the value of painting and its future, that remains to be seen. However,

the history of art, older than the history of documents, is reassuring. The instinct to paint, the will and desire to make paintings, accompanied man into the world and will most likely accompany him out of it. In any event, painters continue to paint through every crisis of art, crises which have been particularly recurrent in this century. That persistence must constitute a value. As to where the absolute value of painting itself is located, the episodes of modern art have been a clearing, a cutting away, and a crucible: what remains is color. Art is another matter, but significant painting must be found in the realm of color and in its dream.

Over one hundred years ago, Impressionism discarded drawing and the finite image, to present, instead, series of cathedrals, waterlilies, poplars, and bridges, as colored, luminous moments. The Post-Impressionists, unhappy with such ephemeral and impersonal visions, wrested from Impressionism's *milles petites sensations*, and its floating patches of color, a painting which would be more solid on the one hand and more impassioned on the other: Cézanne and Seurat against van Gogh and Gauguin. Yet what they all had in common was the attempt to transfer from the retina to the canvas, by means of color, their perceptions and their experience of things. Impressions mingled with expression, and the exterior world, seen through a temperament, became contingent upon an interior one. Nature was under erasure.

Malevich later proclaimed the "supremacy of pure feeling or sensation . . . freed from the ballast of objectivity." The public "sighed, 'everything we loved is lost.'" It was a sigh which would echo throughout this century, followed by other sighs which murmured, "painting itself is lost." Malevich responded. Nothing was lost. His black square on a white field was instead the "rediscovery of pure art which in the course of time had become obscured by an accumulation of things . . ." By entering into *die gegenstandslose Welt*, into non-objective representation, what Malevich had achieved was the severance of experience from things. The content of painting, henceforth, included pure experience, without things, realized as an art of equivalence. Nature was effectively erased, but painting miraculously remained.

Tatlin and the Constructivists invented another supremacy: materials. Real materials in real space became images of a new iconography and truth to materials became a new cult. Some painters began to look elsewhere for their materials while others speculated upon the nature and uses of their traditional means, weighing new possibilities and combinations.

Experience was presented in an ever increasing variety of guises, but those guises most often were arrayed in color. Color conveyed experience, whether it was Matisse's exuberant and joyous expressions, Kandinsky's meditations on the spiritual or De-launay's more perceptual modalities. Even Futurism, more concerned with matters other than color, found time to abhor the "bituminous tints which attempt to obtain the 'patina of time' on modern pictures," and Cubism, at least in its synthetic phase, returned to an idea of color.

In 1932 Mondrian stated: "All painting . . . shows us that its essential plastic means are only line and color . . . while in the art of the past these relationships are veiled by particular form, in the new art, they are made clear through the use of neutral form . . . the rectangular area in varying dimensions . . ." All painting is line and color; it was another revelation of the obvious. Yet Delacroix had much earlier

qualified that observation: "Line is color!"

In New York, after 1945, paintings appeared which, once again, gambled on the continuing capacities of non-referential works to communicate something, whether it be existential anguish, a new American myth, or the sublime. The blot, the drip, the stroke, the color-soaked, or color-slashed canvases of Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, or Willem de Kooning had in common color and the reification of a process with no predetermined end except by choice of painter and painting. A factor of time, in continuous transformation and posited upon an observer, these paintings momentarily resolved themselves, on an intractable surface, into brooding or brilliant matter.

Post-painterly abstraction, color-field painting, and minimalist formulations all comprised a continuing discourse on color, on materials, on the nature and meaning of painting, on art. Concerns varied from Barnett Newman's deep preoccupation with the transcendent to Frank Stella's denial that there was anything else on the canvas besides paint: "My painting . . . really is an object."

By the 1960s, a climate of reductivism prevailed and produced what Barbara Rose characterized as "a negative art of denial and renunciation." Color itself was challenged. Ad Reinhardt's "ultimate paintings," a series of hermetic blacks, like Kafka's leopards in the parable, drank deeply of the chalice; color was sacrificed. Robert Ryman chose white for his monologues on painting. The vessel retained an absence, a presence and paint; like another vessel, Pandora's box, it also retained a desperate hope.

In 1975, Max Kozloff observed: "For at least five years . . . painting has been dropped gradually from avant-garde writing . . ." Yet if painting were truly dispensable, the time to have "dropped" it would have been in 1921, when Alexander Rodchenko displayed a red painting, a yellow painting, and a blue one at the 5 x 5 = 25 Exhibition in Moscow, and said, "I reduced painting to its logical conclusions . . . it's all over."

Mondrian, however, found other uses for red, yellow, and blue as did Barnett Newman; none, ultimately, proved to be of a reductive order. If Mondrian's *Compositions in Red, Yellow and Blue* defined these colors as universals, it was inclusion that prevailed and not exclusion. For Newman, the *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* series was an attempt to reappropriate from ideation the identity of primaries as expressive color. Rodchenko was not only premature in his conclusions, but was also in error. He had approached painting as a theoretician and assumed that the act of painting and the resulting object were subject to the condition of syllogism and that they belonged to the same order. However, they do not. He was more correct when he confined himself to the statement: "At this present exhibition for the first time in art the three primary colors are declared." Thus, if red, yellow, and blue are surrogates for all color, what was declared was that color constituted painting. Although Rodchenko had other intentions, red, yellow, and blue, from paint, became art. The works in this *Radical Painting* exhibition are part of this tradition. As a group, these painters share their continued renunciation of all that obscures painting. Their paintings assume a revelatory stance: a balancing of the means of art with the meanings of art even if, in some instances, that meaning is as restricted as possible.

The adjective “radical” in the title of this assemblage refers to the radices of painting: paint and color applied to a surface. The theme which all the paintings present is the elaboration of structure based on the optic and haptic properties of paint and color. This theme is not innovative nor is it meant to be; it is simply the insistence on paint and color as primary material, primary sensation and complete in itself. It is an affirmation that the events of modern art have occurred and must be confronted. These events are essentially the loss of traditional reference, the isolation of color, and the creation of an art of experience. It is the transposition onto canvas, by means of color, incarnations of the values that reflect our changing concepts of our art and our humanity.

Is this still possible? These painters believe it is. After all, gold is a color that was once emblematic of heaven. However, it cannot be ascertained if gold was not only the most profound emblem, but perhaps also the most accurate. In *Radical Painting*, the residuum in modernism’s crucible is presented with singular intensity: color. Reckoned on, the ceremony continues.

The eleven painters in this exhibition, American and European, nonetheless prefer their autonomy. *Ogni dipintore dipinge sé*; the exhibition makes that clear. It is not an exegesis of a system. Their paintings are complex, addressed to a quality, not to efficiency or message. The observer must achieve the proper state of perception towards them. He must be sensitive to a kind of quality which is irreducible and irreplaceable. He must also be responsive to certain difficulties and share with the artists a pure love of painting itself as a matter of deep commitment and deep engagement. Only then is an experience possible.

Many of the works are not apparently diversified on the surface and consist of only one or two colors, but they have not been emptied. Everything essential to painting remains. Painting of this order, presented by its own materials, is not an act of reduction, nor a fragmentation, but a clarification and a concentration. As Paul Klee said: “*Die Kunst gibt nicht Sichtbares wieder, sondern macht sichtbar.*” To concentrate is to induce fullness as, for example, in the concentration of matter by Brancusi, which enabled us to sense the full weight of sculpture for the first time.

Not aspects of painting, but a summation of all that painting is—utterly conscious and reflexive—these works explore through their own means that which constitutes form and becomes meaning.

Olivier Mosset’s paintings are the most materially austere in the exhibition, a manifesto of the premises of radical painting: paint, color, and the shape of the support. “A painter’s concern,” he says, “is with specific formal problems.” His paintings embody the neutrality that Mondrian prescribed for painting and seem to shrug off Rodchenko’s logical conclusions, to deny them, by re-presenting color greatly magnified and with greater insistence. Relying on the stimulation of this one color, evenly applied, defined by clean rectangular shape, located within a conceptual sensibility, his works are as reticent as possible. Despite the size of some of the paintings and their bold single color, they maintain that reticence, and despite their impersonality, they appear curiously vulnerable. Anonymity seems the result of restraint, as if the hand has been held back by an act of will. It is a refusal to acquire sympathy through ingratiation or through vulgar antics addressed to originality,

through a parody of originality. "I am interested in correct painting," Mosset says. Consequently, these paintings must be accepted or rejected *in toto*, as entities which will neither compromise nor promise. On the inverse side of their pragmatic, laconic materialism, they assume an almost quixotic air, idealistic and even heroic, released from the tyranny of the artist's personality, of theory and metaphysics, of everything but a self-sufficient and lucid color statement, which the viewer can then observe in equal freedom.

Günter Umberg also avoids metaphysics. "My painting has no meaning but exists through itself." Again, it is the materials that concern him; in his case, dense layers of black and blue pigments brushed onto the thinnest of aluminum supports. His articulating marks are virtually invisible and, at first, these works, pervaded by a sensation of coolness, appear as impersonal as Mosset's. Yet sensuousness and tactility are aspects of Umberg's paintings, conveyed by the substance of the paint, compressed to achieve its maximum physicality and placed on a support which does not compete with that physicality. Hung carefully in relationship to a white wall and lying (as much as it is possible) within the same plane, there is a conscious ambiguity and oscillation between what is positive and what is negative, between what is phenomenon and what is perception.

Umberg predicates the relationship between the work and the observer on these alternating identities, on physiological and psychological responses, establishing a rapport that is dynamic, verging on both definition and dissolution. For the observer, the task is to locate the work, to sense it, to see it, to "find it all the time." By severely restricted means, through a contemporary idiom, Umberg refers to one of the most persistently engaging themes of art: the distinction between illusion and reality.

Marcia Hafif stresses "the means of art, the materials and techniques with which art is and has been made." Her paintings are a continuing series of color experiments, an intensive and extensive study of pigments, media, supports, and how they respond under specified conditions. Her works, often consisting of one color, concentrate on the full possibilities of that color without distractions. To emphasize the condition of her paintings as color, she entitles them by the name of the hue.

In her recent works, Hafif's mark, which functions as the structure for her paintings, appears more spontaneous as if to show other aspects of color's reaction under the impact of brush and hand. Linearity of mode has been released into baroque connotations, into a succession of deftly turned strokings which break over the surface, animating it further. As the brushed color becomes brilliant or matte, it traces a pattern of great intricacy. One color, through her treatment, provides enough incidents so that the surface need not be relinquished to seek ulterior motivations. Rational in her approach, though it is a rationality achieved through a painter's intuition, she presents, with utmost clarity, the materiality of painting in intimate relationship with its manner of making.

Phil Sims describes his paintings as a color experience, a "direct and primary visual perception." The image, self-generated in the act of painting, is paint, and "marking records the painter's activity." Marking, as a gesture of the hand or as a structuring of paint with its accompanying imagery, is a concern that links Sims' paintings with Hafif's; it is yet another variation on the theme of color.

The scale, like Hafif's, is often large, to suggest that the works are not to be scrutinized as objects, but as paintings. They recall the size which was traditionally used for monumental pictures. Often of one color, they, like Hafif's, posit the sufficiency of one or two colors to make a painting that is equally sufficient: no more than what is necessary, but more important, no less.

The markings that articulate the surface of Sims' paintings differ from Hafif's, but this is to be expected since the touch of one hand cannot reproduce the touch of another nor does it desire to do so. What distinguishes the two painters' works is more their attitude toward color. Hafif permits the color to retain its sensuous nature as part of its materiality while Sims, through a certain dryness in his paint, a textured granulation, produces with the same aptness of touch, a color which has been forced out of sensuality into a more intellectual mode. His deliberate, distinct markings, informed by restraint, free of bravura and sentimental excess, create a painting that is characterized by rectitude, a characteristic which applies to the entire exhibition. By denying facile and flamboyant resolutions, all of these paintings escape easy expressions and gregariousness, the merely personal and the emotional. T.S. Eliot said, "But of course, only those who have personality and emotion know what it means to want to escape from these things."

Carmengloria Morales defines her paintings as structures. She chooses as her format the opposition of two canvases of the same size and shape, usually scaled to no more than the extent of her reach. One is painted, the other left untouched. It is a diptych that alludes to the nature of painting as material reality and to its dependence on time. Schematically presented as beginnings, in the bare canvas, and as ends, in the painted one, painting's completeness comprises both states. The progression from beginning to end, the lapse of time which signifies the act of painting, is represented by the narrow space between the two supports which both separates and connects them.

Morales considers the brushstroke to be the essential image of painting and although she introduces a more extensive palette to the exhibition, the specificity of color is only incidental. In her recent works, she neutralizes hues by the use of metallic paints, which become an element of light rather than of particular color. Brushstroke and color function instead as a record of movements: of the tool, the hand, the arm, and the body of the painter.

The construction of the work is based on the successive application of interdependent strokes until an equilibrium is obtained throughout the painting. These series of strokes are surrogates for a series of movements and the final painting, created out of an exuberant choreography of the brush, ultimately bespeaks painting's capacities to simultaneously retain and reveal all the aspects of its becoming.

Raimund Girke, like the preceding artists, upholds the primacy of materials as things that are "tangible and visible." Also like many of the other artists, his paintings and materials are insistently traditional: oil, egg tempera, linen, handmade paper, brushes. Rectangular fields of enlarged but essentially human scale determine the sensing of color and stroke. In the past, his surfaces were more or less homogeneous; at present, though, they are less so, as Girke has always required that the treatment of paint remain perceptible in order to create surface tension and latent energy.

This visibility is also an admission of materiality and a testament to the process of paint becoming painting.

In his newer works the warm earth tones of the ground or cool colors of their underpainting are not at all concealed. Large gestures of white of varying opacities and transparencies are suspended over the ground in opposition: space is introduced. But it is not a finite space; rather, it is a sensation of space, as the painting, with its overlayerings, both hovers on the surface and implies other dimensions.

Like diaphanous curtains, his brushstrokes seem to flutter in a Northern air, agitated by a sensibility steeped in Romanticism. There, color is elusive, always on the threshold of consciousness and vision, always the shadow underlying thought.

Joseph Marioni, quoting Malraux, says that we are "misled by the fact that the term 'painting' is linked up with pictures." Painting is not picturing and should be experienced as "active sensation—not as transfer of information." He continues: "The variety of interpretations are not simple variations of meaning locked into subjectivity, but belong to the ontological possibility of the work itself." He concludes that this possibility is not reproducible except in the context of the specific painting.

Marioni's works thus address themselves to the essential materials of paintings and to the clarity and economy of their presentation. He, too, prefers not to encumber the surface with more than phenomenal meaning and also, at times, reveals the support as an indication of physicality. He reinforces his identification of painting as the thing-in-itself by hanging his works slightly away from the wall, as objects that are distinct. Instead of the play of calligraphic or lyrical strokes, he cascades his paint across the surface of the linen with a lambskin roller, seemingly *au hasard*, but no more so than Pollock in whose works chance and calculation mingle in some indeterminate ratio.

In the panoramic crevasses of the resultant images, an allusion to the American sublime flickers intermittently; however, it is a cooled reference. Color, fluently and incisively applied, tempered by objectivity, dispels its own myths.

Howard Smith emphasizes the act of perception. His search is for forms that will become more and more expansive with more variables of possibilities. At the same time, he pursues greater clarity, an elucidation of the act of painting. "How a painting comes into being, takes form and is completed is no less important than how it begins." Smith also knows that the elements of painting are not easily grasped. Thus, unity and clarity are constant goals rather than constant achievements.

Fastidiously made, Smith's works often consist of strokes of color of a single hue that glide across the support; at a distance, they optically fuse to form a fluctuating and deceptive unity of surface. Of wavering intensities, these hand-inscribed strokes respond to the texture and weave of the linen and, stopping short of the edge, affirm the presence of the ground twice; it is then visible as part of the imagery of the painting and as the location for the paint, the stable reality. This reality is, however, questioned by Smith's treatment of color as something more abstract, less physical, almost as an evanescence. Like the infinite shadings of thought, color is also a state of mind. The delicacy of these paintings make of them a musing rather than a dogma, a meditation on what can be refused in painting as well as on what, with conviction, can remain.

Anders Knutsson, unlike some of the others, emphasizes meaning in painting. For him, painting is both *phenomena* and *noumena*, matter and memory, an act of faith as well as an act of painting. "Color is, after all, a sensation, a mental and emotional interpretation of what the human eye records. It has spiritual, esthetic, psychic and physiological qualities." His thoughts are not unlike those of Kandinsky who believed that the perception of painting was synesthetic. Knutsson, however, appropriates for vision all sensation. Also like Kandinsky, he believes in an art of emotion and feeling.

To apply his thick mixtures of beeswax, oil, damar, turpentine, and hand-ground pigments onto carefully selected linen supports, Knutsson uses a palette knife. He is vitally interested in materials, but only as the vessel for transcendence. He likes to live with color and to have physical contact with it: "It is to see and feel color that one arrives at knowledge of color; you cannot mentally project color. Also, to understand color, one immerses oneself in something like monochrome painting where concentration and penetration is possible."

From these fragile, translucent paintings with surfaces contingent on the continuous rhythm of the application, Knutsson asks the observer to sense what he means by "oneness." His, too, is a temperament conditioned by Northern light.

Jerry Zeniuk's paintings, like Knutsson's also do not stress phenomena. When he paints, he sees a pictorial image and a deeply structured space. "These paintings are a dilemma for me because there is so little to hold onto—no measured space, no rational order, no system of color, except for the inherent law of color which is organic. I can understand if the observer has difficulties since the image that I am involved with is so elusive that even I find that sometimes it is there, and sometimes it is not."

For Zeniuk, painting is unique because it alone, of all the arts, is made on a flat surface with static images and yet evokes a spatial and temporal experience. It is the presentation and resolution of this paradox that he defines as painting's most profound level of meaning. The works themselves are complex arrangements of color and shape, a *chiaroscuro* of color nuances based on the fullness of a complete palette. The scale is humanistic as is the endeavor to present completeness. The eye can view them as a whole, but it is a sense of structure rather than an appearance of structure that is most immediate. They cannot be perceived rapidly and require a contemplative attitude on the part of the observer. Only gradually does the eye absorb the interrelationships of muted hues and shapes, the richness of their intimations, and the complexity of the oppositions brought into meticulous balance. With that balance perceived, space is disclosed as well as a re-ordered world, a deepened harmony.

Frederic Thursz' paintings are overwhelmingly assertive of their facticity, which is enhanced by the large scale he prefers. Reminiscent of the scale used by the Abstract Expressionists, it is a dimension that has been seen in other works in this exhibition and like them refers to human purpose and human perception on a grand order.

Thursz is an additive painter, structuring his work in layers of oil to arrive at precise color, an "invention," he says, based on the nature of paint. In its making, the painting is comparable to a prism; light penetrates the multiple surfaces of different hues, and reappears as reflection and refraction. Occupying a position at

the other end of this exhibition's range, the even, neutral surfaces of Mosset's paintings have become, in these canvases, burdened with accumulations of paint. Not invoked as gesture, the resulting *facture* nonetheless signifies painterly fact. The sheer density of the material, solidly brushed, contends with the support, sustained over the large span of the painting, and a formidable authority prevails.

Despite their completeness as physical entities, these paintings of emphatic color change into something less certain, more difficult. They resemble the interior of Chartres, which is not a color but a light. Cézanne said, "It is the reflection which envelops; light, through the general reflection, is the envelope." It is also the aura associated with consecrated things.

These paintings can, of course, be viewed in other sequences. This sequence suggests itself almost as a musical movement. Mosset's paintings sound the opening notes: pure color as the motif of this exhibition, as the exposition, the protagonist. The others submit their interpretations of that motif. Umberg intensifies Mosset's closure of surface by adding a textural theme and a density. Hafif, Sims, and Morales activate the surface by means of touch, mark, gesture, and stroke and create, as it were, a visual *glissando* across it. Girke, Marioni, and Smith paint surfaces that yield glimpses of space and offer more immediately distinguishable imagery while Knutsson's luminosity extends the dimensions of the spaces thus glimpsed. Zeniuk clarifies and harmonizes that space by the addition of a full palette of colors and Thursz, once more, closes the surface on a resonant note of colored light.

The differences between works in this exhibition are sometimes deceptively minimal; nonetheless, the variety is great as is the variety of perceptions, resolutions, and moods: from the pragmatic to the poetic, the rational to the mysterious, the laconic to the discursive, the classical to the romantic. Nothing significant has been omitted. Purely painting, the triumph is color's.

The pursuit of what is purely painting is the result of the events of this century. It remains, at the moment, the most genuine achievement of the art of our times. Nothing has yet occurred to alter that. It was not invented as a whim or perversity, a studio experiment or intellectual exercise, but rather as the most comprehensive response to common experience, to great changes in the world as they have unfolded over the past eighty years. These changes have shown us a vision of the world as it has never been seen before, which must somehow find its reflection in our art.

As we come to the end of this century, this vision seems even less certain. But "primary uncertainty" is something else we have learned and it, too, must be reflected in our art. In time, our painting will reveal its significance, but for any hope of the future, we must also have belief in a past.

It is a sense of the past as Eliot defined it, encompassing a sense of the present, since the artist ". . . is not likely to know what it is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but in the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living." Eliot was referring to the poet, but it applies to all who are committed to creative endeavor.

Lilly Wei
New York, 1984

Student Statements

Preface

During the past five years the artists represented in this exhibition have met regularly to discuss the ideology behind their painting. From its outset, the group has been engaged in a critical dialogue, both verbal and visual. Their paintings, therefore, do not exist in some aesthetic void, but rather are accompanied by a running text. What is most evident from their documented conversations and published writings is a search for the most appropriate means to define their work. Prompted by the desire to distance their art from previous interpretations and commentary, they have attempted to formulate a new vocabulary. Labels such as "aniconic," "pure," "monochromatic," and "fundamental," have been adopted and subsequently discarded. At present these riveting images of color, which exclude figuration and relentlessly elude words, are described as "Radical Paintings."

According to the artists involved, these "radical" paintings are not based upon formal methods of composition—a deliberate arrangement of parts—but rather upon "structure." This structure is the color itself which affects through sensation, not information. The aesthetic order intrinsic to these works is determined and transmitted through the visual alone. The word "structure," defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the mutual relation of constituent parts or elements of a whole as determining its peculiar nature or character," aptly describes their holistic, non-hierarchical paintings of color and stroke.

By prescribing to a "structural" analysis, however, and only examining the "constituent parts" of their paintings, these artists avoid the conventions of art criticism and its acknowledgement of historical continuity (and contrast). The following excerpts of essays by Tracy Dick and Joseph Thompson, (Williams College, 1981) address this very issue. Troubled by the blatant denial of tradition, both writers chose to consider the group's collective work in its historical and contemporary contexts—not to reduce its importance and immediacy, however, but instead, to recognize its powerful new sensibility.

Nancy Spector

Student Statement

Joseph Thompson

Insistent in the scale and purity of their formal declaration, and elegantly flush with the museum wall, these paintings arouse associations with the legacy of art history in a manner that most forms of contemporary art avoid. It is a particular history, propagated by strokes of paint on ground, nurtured here by the museum wall and our awareness of the master paintings that augment it.

As a corollary to Malraux' proposition, the museum wall has developed—by means of its powerful presentation—into a contextual plane of special meaning. It is the surface where art contacts most intimately the continual refinements of its history. In the presence of objects so manifestly engaged with the tradition of the museum wall, we become engaged with the relentless, mostly unrealized aspiration of painting. In the first instance then, as Carter Ratcliff writes, these objects demand to be understood *as paintings*, with a will to mean as such. One expects, by sheer consequence, these paintings to function in accordance with the lasting tempo of their history.

At a different tempo there is an art history which accepts by fiat all art-like objects within its flow. This is the critical realm of art which is aggressively advanced, shaping itself, as it were, by subjugating its tradition to the field of modern cultural advancement. Through complex strategies of formal invention, social exchange, and critical commentary, the languages of tradition are constantly superseded by new languages; objectless art, foul aesthetics, self-mutilation, and ready-made appropriations are apprehended as art because they ineluctably demand it. Although this is an entrenched idea with all the attending institutions of an academy, its tempo is nevertheless quick. Rate of change, in fact, is one of the principal ordering characteristics of art of this epoch. At this level of art production objects may stand in the service of concepts about the function of art. They become invaluable artifacts of pure critical theory as art-idea as art, individual pieces of a conceptual iconography continually unfolding.

There is, in all of these works, an extraction and condensation of the formal elements of painting. This process is as much as anything the iconographical signature of modernism—emblematic but not otherwise distinguishing. What is distinguishing throughout the exhibition is the great range of technique within such an apparently restricted form. Across the subtle differentiations of color and texture this exhibition speaks to and of both art histories, revealing as it does, that they are not mutually exclusive, but that their unions are not everywhere. This is the fundamental aesthetic dilemma of contemporary picture painting, and these paintings all share its burden to greater and lesser degrees.

All the paintings in this exhibition show an interest in surface structure which is different, for example, from the existential gestures of Expressionism or from the turgid impastos of the Symbolists, or even from the reductive flatness of Minimalism. The surfaces then, demand our scrutiny—their range of pigmentation, the ground and application of paint, the literal depths of material augmentation, and the visual

depths of color in spatial progression. It is in the structure and affectation of the surface where one discovers to which of the histories of art the painting intends, and where one most clearly encounters the vagaries of the creative act: the distortions and corruptions and essential vitalities of art of differing qualities.

If the painting is concerned with the history of painting as established by the endless moments of the "great museum wall," then one might see a surface that carries on the rejection of simple illusion and spatial platitude in a way that is Cézannesque; that is, one might sense in the picture the edge of colored material—as an image of visual resistance—set firm in space. The painting might encompass and expand the sublime order of Piero or comprehend Mondrian's lessons of organization and intuition on a scale that is loomingly different. Pollock's sure sense of the all-over will be important for paintings in this format. Above all, the work will come to the practice of painting in a manner ultimately determined by sight, that "seeing eye" which converts the concepts and limitations imposed by culture into forms that overwhelm them by their tension, balance, and harmony. What Adrian Stokes has written so eloquently, holds for this art:

"The artist's perspicacity about culture, about what upholds, destroys or ameliorates his society and his art, provides both a condition and an earnest of his truthful comment upon the inner world that he finds reflected while examining an outer situation."

If, however, the painting reflects a vision of art that is absorbed completely by the progressive culture of modernism, one will sense a certain kind of plastic treatment involved with the revitalization of painting. Articulation in the paint itself, as in the painting's understanding of art history, will be as traceable as sound syllogisms. Having been engulfed by critical culture, the painting will proceed to fulfill it as an icon to the modern attitude.

Student Statement

Tracy Dick

During the first decade of the twentieth century a fundamental change occurred in art. Abstraction appeared in the Art Nouveau movement, in Sonia and Robert De-launay's color experiments, and in Kandinsky's 1910 watercolor, *Composition IV*. Three years later Malevich created his first monochromatic work, an all-black pencil drawing, entitled *Basic Suprematist Element*. In 1918 he painted an all-white square on an all-white ground, entitled *Suprematist Composition: White on White*. These works represent two modes of abstract painting: the first, by Kandinsky, is a form of expressionism; the second, by Malevich, is a form of concrete art. These two basic structural forms not only project themselves as the poles of abstract art, but continue a past distinction made by Heinrich Wölfflin between the painterly and the linear. The major importance of the advent of abstract art is not its break with the past, but rather its focusing on a tradition that has been too often neglected—the tradition of form.

Art has always been its own world separate from that of reality. No matter how realistic a painting is, there is never an object present other than the paint itself. There is no mirror to reality in art, only a relation full of potential. What abstract art did was to make the separation between the two worlds explicit. This is not, however, the sole function of abstract art; its meaning lies within the history of art that made abstraction inevitable. Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* writes that works of art: "... do not point to anything, but by pointing to each other, they suggest or evoke the mood which informs them."

Art, therefore, does not derive its meaning from how it directly relates to nature, but rather how it relates to other works of art. Only as an autonomous creation can it comment upon exterior reality. Abstract artists did not entirely stop painting conventional pictures; they merely chose to focus on the conventions of form instead of the conventions of representation.

Marcia Hafif has described the painting process of contemporary monochrome painters by contrasting their intention and technique to all other artists (including other abstractionists). She labelled the new art "aniconic" or "pure" painting because of its focus upon the symbolic or suggestive rather than the literal or representational. According to Hafif, meaning in this art comes from a synthesis of the organization of brushstrokes with the personal touch of the painter. Hafif believes that the brushstrokes in these works are different from those in others, due to the artists' attempts to develop a "new space" where the two-dimensional canvas excludes a hierarchy of color. This assertion, however, places her more in a fictitious desert than within the tradition in which her art and that of the others in the group truly belong. The basic brushstroke does not differentiate them from the past; it links them to it.

Malevich, the ultimate abstractionist, recognized that there are basic formal elements concealed within all great masters' works when he wrote:

"Raphael, Rubens and Rembrandt, etc. have become nothing more than a conglomeration

of countless things which conceal their value . . . “

Malevich sought to resurrect these “concealed values” by reducing a representational tradition into a formal one. Beneath the figurative, all great works are structured and communicable through formal repetitions. It is the history of these formal motifs that informs the consciousness of the artist. Once an artist decides to paint, this history provides an encyclopedia of gestures, which makes the monochromists, along with all painters, fated to continue this tradition.

Beyond the accepted conventions of style, the form of a work is what must ultimately be focused upon. Hafif and the artists she has described assert through their monochrome abstract paintings that the language of art speaks through its specific forms, not through the representation of reality. The notion that the formal elements of art define art is not particular to these painters or to the twentieth century. It has been an assertion in practice since painting began, an assertion that was first explicitly visualized by Cézanne.

Monochrome painting of the 70s and 80s has outlasted the cries of cultism and must now be looked at as art within a formal tradition. It derives its current forms from individual gestures that attain meaning through their repetition in past art. What gives these works credibility is not the wild markings of a personal unconsciousness, but rather the way in which they repeat forms over and over again and thus redefine art. Geometric concerns of concrete artists and personal actions in expressionistic art are only the tools behind the very basic elements of formal repetition. These tools are what the artists speak with but not of. In monochrome paintings these elements, which relate back to Wölfflin’s distinction between the painterly and the linear tendencies in art, seem to converge. The resulting absence of figures and objects does not make for simple paintings, but rather begs the viewer to look closer and to accept the world of art on its own terms. Once the formal elements are analyzed, the viewer is brought into the world of this art and only then do the dynamics of line and color—in their most reduced state—produce a sensation of beauty.



painting

color concealing color

color revealing color

color penetrating color

color changing color

color generating color

Raimund Girke
1983



1b Full-size detail: *Fairly Light - Gray White II*



2a *Cadmium red medium*. 1982. 80 x 84 in., (200 x 213 cm). Oil on canvas. Collection of the artist

The act of painting implies an ongoing application of separate brush strokes building to a continuous surface generally covering the ground which has been chosen and prepared for the medium in question. The act of painting is a physical act carried out by the painter and involving a continuum of time.

The paintings with which I am concerned represent *themselves* rather than an outside subject/object, a fact which provides the painter with a field of awareness free of that external object. The act of painting and the finished painting consequently are one and do not represent a duality.

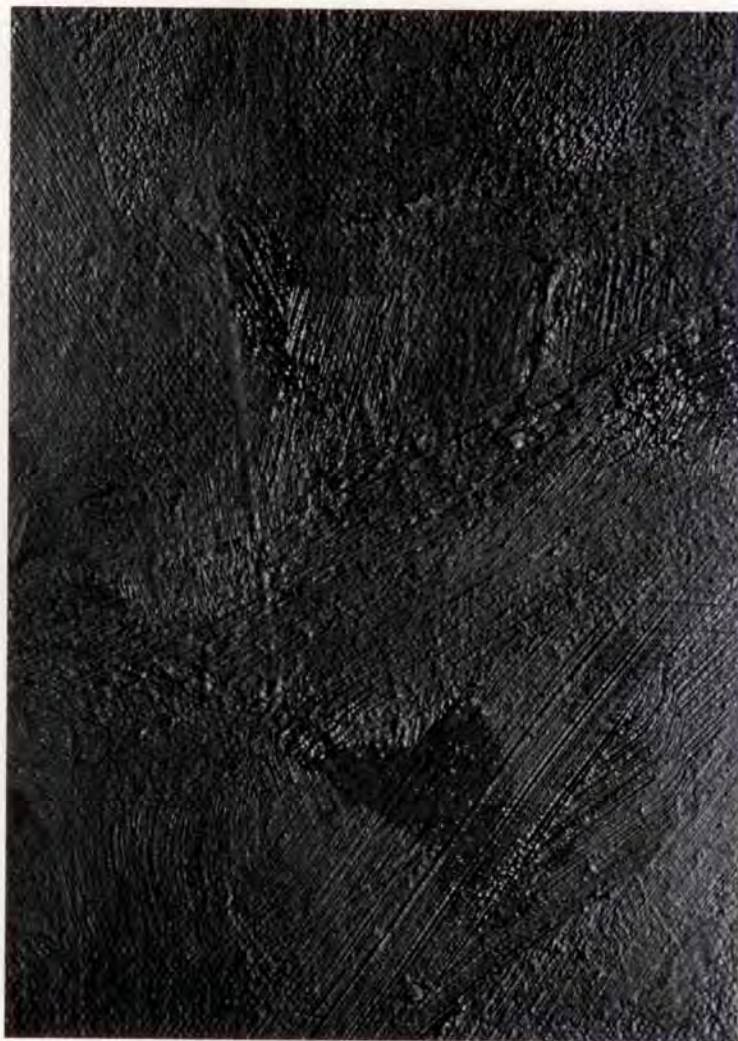
The painting is a whole and is not divided with a grid or other extraneous geometry. The edges are predetermined, stopping at the physical edge of the canvas, not allowing extension into space as in all-over painting. The horizontal and vertical of the stretcher ground it in our man-made horizontal and vertical world.

The color is concrete. It is what it is, a pigment made of earth, mineral, vegetable, or dye. It is not the representation of *light* color, or of a mental color. Any color is a viable color and no color is more important than any other color.

In these paintings composition can occur in a linear fashion, moving from start to finish, or it can be built up over the whole canvas simultaneously. Brush strokes can be vertical, aligned with the edges of the canvas, or they can be diagonal in one or many directions.

Having established the dimensions, the pigment, the medium, the brush, the painter is free to enter into the state of mind requisite for the creation of something new from nothing. The artist approaches the canvas with a clear mind and acts upon it in the present to bring forth the unknown which passes through him/her into being.

Marcia Hafif





3a *Morning Star*. 1983. 51 x 48 in., (130 x 122 cm). Oil/wax/resin on linen. Collection of the artist

The universe began at a finite time when the four forces of nature were *one*. It grew from a speck, billions of times smaller than a single proton. It is isotropic – it looks the same from every direction; has no center or horizon and would appear the same to any observer anywhere.

Quantum and relativity theories allow us a more subtle, holistic, and organic view of nature than the one put forth by Newton and Descartes. Our world can no longer be seen as a huge machine. Man can no longer identify himself with his mind alone, but instead must integrate his whole organism: body, mind, and soul. I want my paintings to recognize and reflect this knowledge.

I focus on materials, the uniquely painted surface, the image of oneness. For me the true excitement lies in exploring new, unknown, luminous phenomena of color and light. The frontier of the unknown has always been my choice: this investigation brings possibilities for emotional and spiritual growth.

Anders Knutsson



3b Full-size detail: *Morning Star*



4a *Painting*. 1983. 96 x 84 in., (240 x 210 cm). Acrylic and linen on stretcher. Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö, Sweden

What reproduces is the picture
what does not is the painting.

I investigate painting as a dialectic exchange
between the intrinsic logic of the object
and a primordial issue of experience.

The intent is the expression of an image
whose presence is intrinsic to the object.

The experience is a gestalt expression
of a certain human condition.

The issue is not the color of the object
but rather the function of an image
whose objectness is color.

My interest is in a deconstruction approach
to theories of color and light
as they relate to the function of the painter
as an image maker.

I present the object itself
as the actualized image of a colored light.
To translate the experience of that image
into language
will present that language as a sophist illusion.

To speak about painting is to differ its meaning
to language its meaning is to defer its being.

Joseph Marioni
Painter
1983



4b Full-size detail: *Painting*

Carmengloria Morales



5a *Dittico NY 83-9-3*. 1983. (35 x 2) x 70 in., [(89 x 2) x 178 cm]. Bronze powder/rhoplex on canvas. Collection of the artist

FRAGMENTS

The diptych is constituted by two adjacent parts, equal in dimension and thickness. The shape of each part is given by a square or by a vertical rectangle multiple of a base square. In the last two years I have started using also the vertical golden rectangle. This is because I felt the necessity of relating with the traditional "human" space. 1983

The dimensions are determined by the relation between my body and the painting. 1977

Painting is also determined by the relation between my body and the canvas extension. 1983

I work on the principal components of painting: the act of painting, its history (the awareness of itself), and on their reciprocity and circularity. The diptych constitutes (and is constituted by) an instance of equivalence – of unit, of value, of the parts – although distinct by one being painted and the other not. These distinct parts represent the co-elements of a system of signs insisting on the same meaning at the same moment. They concur to form a "single painting" which, as such, evades temporality but which, by being "built" each time, always re-news itself, and reproduces itself in diversity. 1976

In the diptych the unpainted canvas – the oxygen flask – is part of the painting, it is inside the creative act. They cannot co-exist on the same canvas, otherwise they would return to form an image. 1974

I work only one part of the diptych. The intervention is pure action of painting. I fill the canvas starting from the top going to the bottom with a free gesture. A diagonal gesture. 1977

Since 1978 my gesture got wider. Now I build the painting moving myself in all directions. The top, the bottom, the center of the painting gets organized in relationship with my standing up painting in front of the canvas. 1983

Carmengloria Morales



5b Full-size detail: *Dittico NY 83-9-3*



6a *Untitled*. 1983. 110 x 55 in., (279 x 140 cm). Oil on canvas.
Collection of the artist

Recently, I began to feel that I had enough of this fundamental, holistic, abstract, and concrete business. I don't need anymore paintings about painting or painting as image. I'm through with actuality and experience, done with processes and issues. On the other hand, I welcome any opportunity to look at paintings. I'm ready for paint and its application, for color and texture, for scale, for light, and although, as Marcia Hafif has stated (*Artforum*, Sept. 1978, p. 38), "A monochromatic painting does not need to be supported by the presence of other paintings and, in fact, is generally best seen alone," I'm looking forward to examining different relationships between different paintings, to see what distinguishes a painting from another, what their connections and likenesses may be and what elements they may share. A painting's exhibition will, in the end, help us to understand what we are doing and what all this is about. Different choices amidst the contradictions specific to painting and the practice of these choices help to define the field and what the limits of the discipline are. It's historical and it's actual. Maybe there is not much sense in trying to write about it because the only way to do it, would be to deal with specific objects and to talk in front of them, but anyway, with the correct handling of its economy, you're pointing to the conventions of painting and in doing so, you're helping to establish some of its truths. An exhibition of the proper kind of paintings, without being really subversive, could always, for someone, bring in some meanings and that's what I'm looking for.

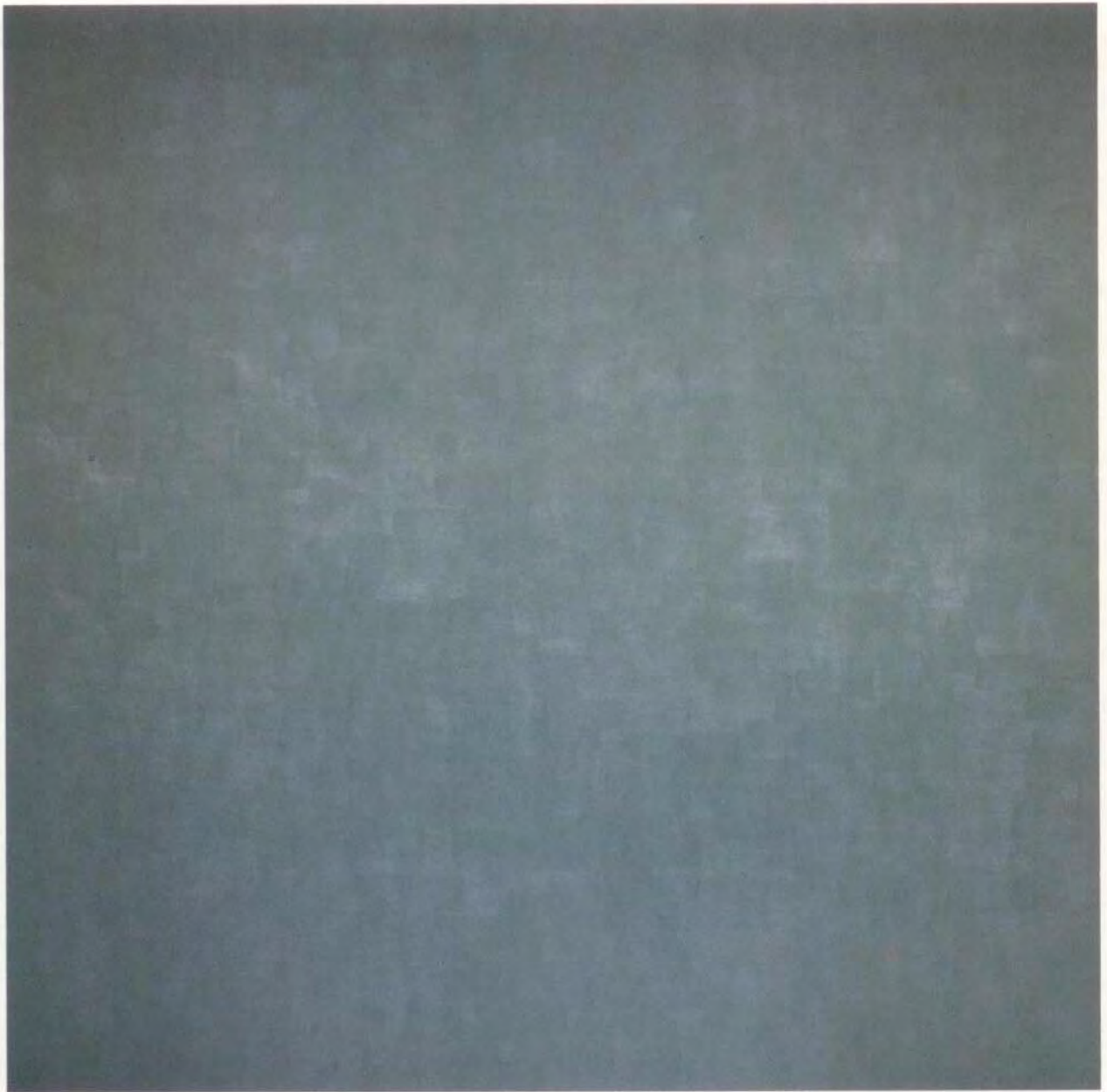
Otherwise, and to reply to Frederic Thursz (*Art in America*, Dec. 1981, p. 155), well, basically, I try to paint; to paint a picture and to get a painting and, as Howard Smith says, (in the same magazine, on the same page): "If you think it's easy, you're crazy."

Olivier Mosset
Paris, September, 1983.



6b Full-size detail: *Untitled*

Phil Sims



7a *Untitled*. 1984. 102 x 102 in., (259 x 259 cm). Oil on canvas. Collection of the artist

Painting is painting. For the painter there can be no idea but in paint. What is unfortunate is that the intent of painting is being forgotten. Paint can become the bridge, to go beyond is to transgress upon the intent.

Phil Sims





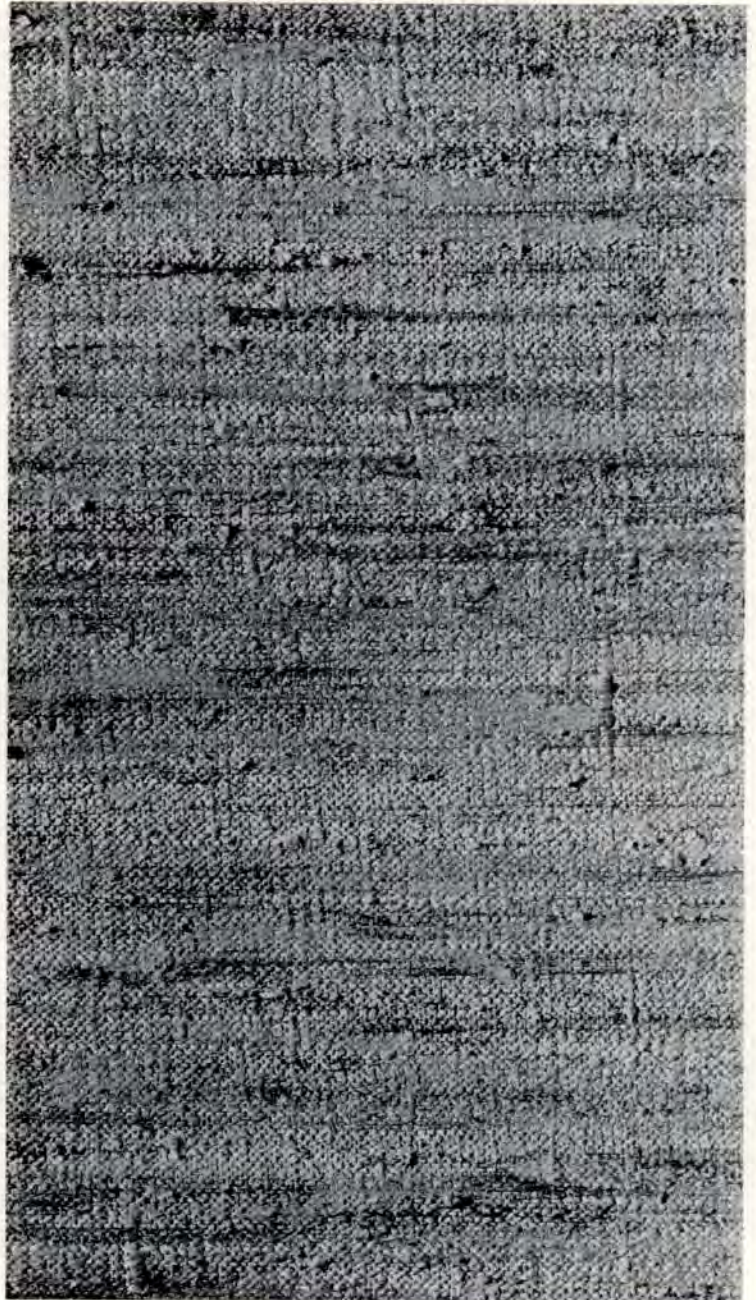
8a *Rialto*. 1981. 30 x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., (76 x 73 cm). Oil on canvas. Collection of the artist

In making paintings I want to encourage looking. My work is made to be perceived in a certain temporal mode – slowly. As the viewer is engaged, the act of looking elongates itself and discovery becomes more possible.

Often in looking at paintings, one doesn't think about how they are made. I am interested in revealing and pointing out aspects of a work's construction and development. I want to focus attention on certain basic elements of a painting, such as the support and ground, the paint, and the brushstrokes. Each painting I do has a top, bottom, and two sides. I want all of these individual characteristics to be realized through looking, not just accepted *a priori*.

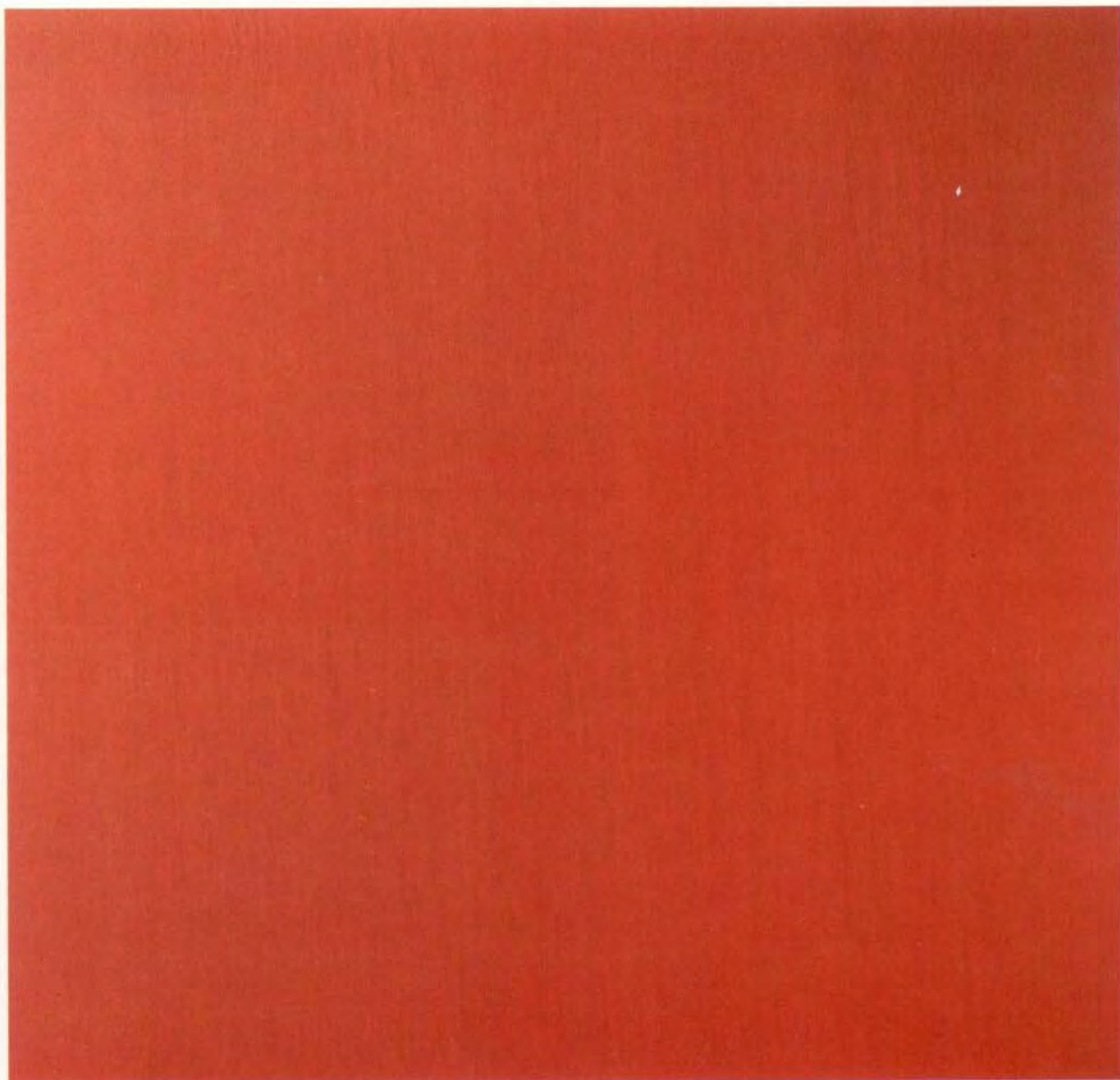
Even though I concentrate upon what I consider to be the elements and parameters of a painting's existence, the scope of my concentration always seems to broaden, not contract. Unifying such disparate elements as a rectangular support and paint is no simple matter. Add to that the articulation of such variables as color and light, space, scale, and physicality, and you've got a very complex entity. There's always much more going on than initially meets the eye: no wonder it always seems impossible to finish a painting.

Howard Smith
February, 1984



8b Full-size detail: *Rialto*

Frederic Matys Thursz



9a *Vermillion KLC*. 1983. 84 x 87 in., (213 x 221 cm). Oil on linen. Collection of the artist

The light within is the light without. It is the simplest of equations for Painting yet difficult to achieve. This painting is *in situ*: my studio in Ossining, N.Y. where seven fifteen-foot windows of Gothic shape are evenly penetrated by daylight. The white light is polarized by triadic layerings of colors which act as a prism, emitting as the ultimate hue, vermillion, the summation of the painting.

The prism is achieved by the sequential application of crisscross corrugated strokes of pigment, suspended in an unvarying medium, to form layers. Applied warm or cold, each layer is either isolated from the preceding layer or melted into it.

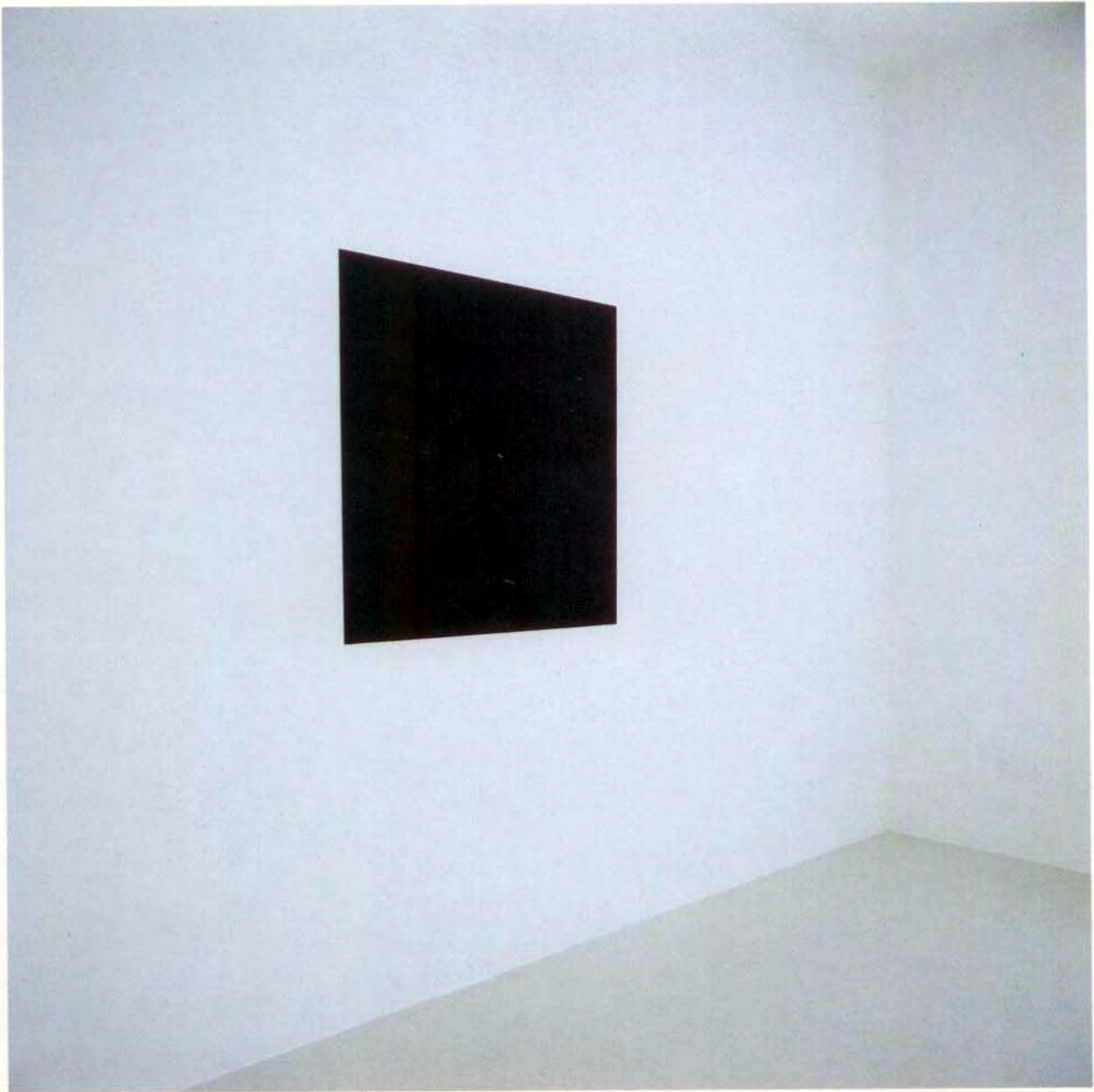
Vermillion is the base of the triad: the color key. It is a pigment which after twenty-five years still holds profound meaning for me. This volatile color salmon with clay-grey glow has been admired by painters I admire, has been sought, has sometimes been subdued: from Pompeii where it was protected in beeswax, to Rembrandt, to Soutine.

I chose a coherent triad from the cobalt and quinacridone hues which are all compatible with vermillion while the cadmium and chrome colors are not. On a chassis more rectangular than square – an important format for me – the linen is prepared to receive the *imprimatura*, consisting of vermillion and earth colors with Old Holland Mixed White (lead and zinc) which will delimit and determine the form of the final painting. On this armature, the triadic layers are brushed against the grain. A hazy light emanates and demands focus at the edges and articulation at the corners of the quadrum. The painting reaches stasis gradually. Through a stance of action/reaction, a precise color light evolves, part science, part intuition.

This illumination is the sole meaning of making the painting. In Painting, is there another?

Frederic Matys Thurstz



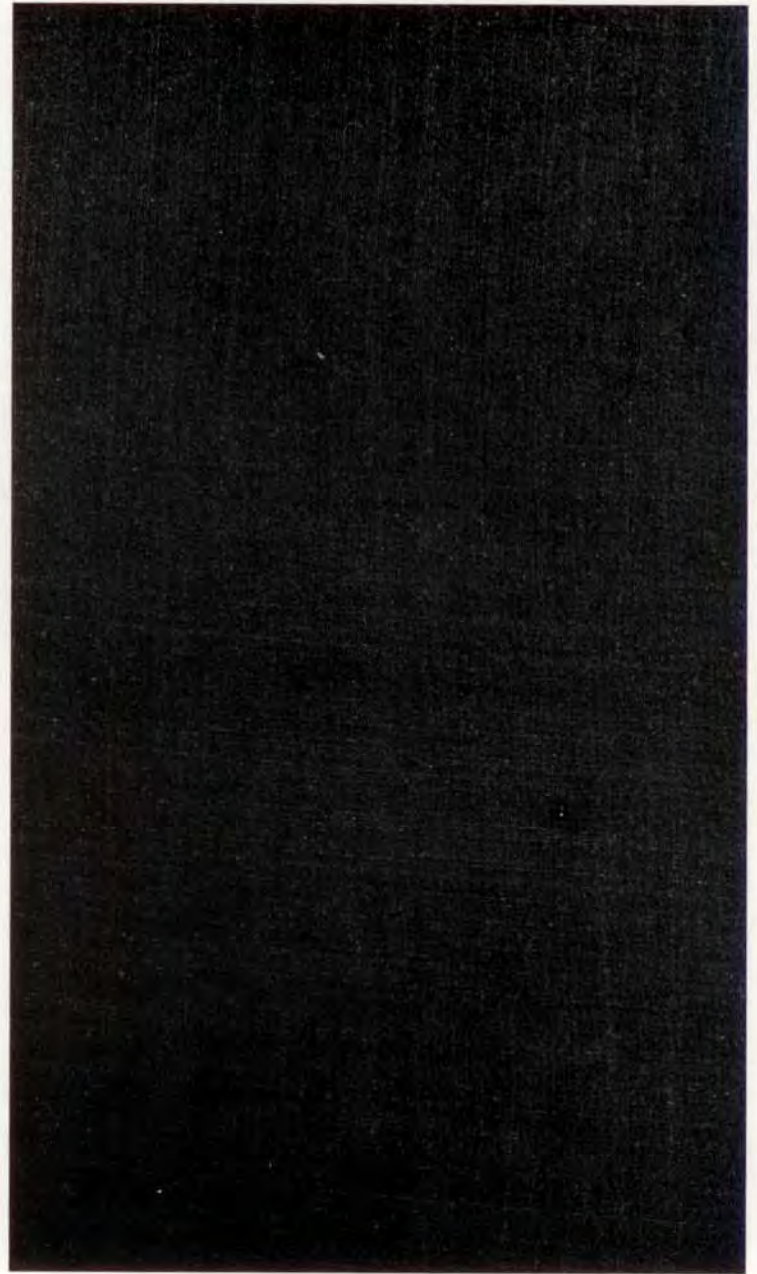


When I speak of Painting, I also speak of Paint; that physical, pre-given color substance in my painting, which not only materially but fundamentally differentiates itself.

I see a Painting not exclusively in its 'Objectness', but always in a very specific relationship to me. This 'to me' relationship allows a close bond to the Painting. I no longer stand outside a set of related elements; instead through perception and experience, I am drawn into the Painting.

I understand Paint as a presence of Color that has principally an existential quality. Color is material and at the same time immanently immaterial; which means, it is capable of evoking a pure spiritual/intellectual response in spite of being inseparably bound to the purely physical.

Günter Umberg
December, 1983



10b Full-size detail: *Untitled*



11a *Untitled*. 1983. 33 x 30 in., (84 x 76 cm). Oil on linen. Collection of the artist

I believe in the masterpiece, the possibility that one work may contain all that came before it. Whether this painting is actually painted becomes secondary to the pursuit of it, and it is this developing idea or vision which is primary. Just as there is a reasoning process which we call rational thought, I believe there is a visual thought process, and that it may indeed lead one to its own image.

I believe as well in the continuity of painting, and that what I paint is neither better, more free, clearer nor more pure than art of the past. I am born of an age and do the best that I can with it. Good painting is a contradiction between flat and spatial experience, and it is in this contradiction that I believe lies the meaning and profundity of painting. It is in the harmony of this contradiction that we may find beauty.

Jerry Zeniuk



Checklist

Raimund Girke

Born: 1930; Heizendorf, Germany.
Professor at Academy of Fine Arts
(H.F.B.K.), West Berlin. Lives and works
in Köln, West Germany.

1 *Umber/Ochre/Gray-white*

1982/3. Oil on canvas
88 x 80 in.
(220 x 200 cm)
Collection of the artist

2 *Fairly light-Gray White II*

1983. Oil on canvas
80 x 88 in.
(200 x 220 cm)
Collection of the artist

3 *White Changing #1*

1983. Oil on canvas
75 x 80 in.
(187 x 200 cm)
Collection of the artist

4 *White Changing #2*

1983. Oil on canvas
75 x 80 in.
(187 x 200 cm)
Collection of the artist

Marcia Hafif

Born: 1929; Pomona, California.
Lived and worked in Rome, Italy,
1962 to 1969. Lives and works in
New York (since 1971).

5 *Cadmium red medium*

1982. Oil on canvas
80 x 84 in.
(200 x 213 cm)
Collection of the artist

6 *Strontium yellow chromate*

1983. Oil on canvas
80 x 84 in.
(200 x 213 cm)
Collection of the artist

7 *Phthalocyanine blue*

1981. Oil on canvas
144 x 144 in.
(366 x 366 cm)
Collection of Mr. Sheldon Solow, NY, NY

8 *Cerulean blue*

1983. Oil on canvas
80 x 84 in.
(200 x 213 cm)
Collection of the artist

Anders Knutsson

Born: 1937; Malmö, Sweden.
Moved to the United States in
1967. Lives and works in New
York (since 1976).

9 *Morning Star*

1983. Oil/wax/resin on linen
51 x 48 in.
(130 x 122 cm)
Collection of the artist

10 *Green in Vermont*

1980. Oil/wax/resin on linen
47 x 136 in.
(119 x 345 cm)
Collection of the artist

11 *New York Reds*

1977/8. Oil/wax/resin on linen
82 x 96 in.
(208 x 244 cm)
Collection of the artist

12 *Homage to Gustav Dalén*

1984. Oil/wax/resin on linen
75 x 90 in.
(190 x 229 cm)
Collection of the artist

Joseph Marioni

Born: 1943; Cincinnati, Ohio.
Lives and works in New York
(since 1972).

13 *Painting*

1983. Acrylic and linen on stretcher
96 x 84 in.
(240 x 210 cm)
Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö, Sweden

14 *Painting*

1983. Acrylic and linen on stretcher
96 x 84 in.
(240 x 210 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Karin Schyl, Malmö, Sweden

15 *Painting*

1984. Acrylic and linen on stretcher
98 x 72 in.
(220 x 180 cm)
Collection of the artist

16 *Painting*

1984. Acrylic and linen on stretcher
108 x 120 in.
(270 x 300 cm)
Collection of the artist

Carmengloria Morales

Born: 1942; Santiago, Chile.
Lives and works in Milan, Italy.
Spends a few months each year
working in New York (since 1979).

17 *Dittico NY 83-9-3*

1983. Bronze powder/rhoplex on canvas
(35 x 2) x 70 in.
[(89 x 2) x 178 cm]
Collection of the artist

18 *Dittico NY 82-3-2*

1982/3. Dry pigment/oil/wax on canvas
(16 x 2) x 16 in.
[(41 x 2) x 41 cm]
Collection of the artist

19 *Dittico NY 82-3-1*

1982/3. Dry pigment/oil/wax on canvas
(26 x 2) x 20 in.
[(66 x 2) x 51 cm]
Collection of the Chase Manhattan Bank

20 *Dittico NY 83-9-2*

1983. Bronze powder/rhoplex on canvas
(16 x 2) x 16 in.
[(41 x 2) x 41 cm]
Collection of the Chase Manhattan Bank

Olivier Mosset

Born: 1943; Bern, Switzerland.
Lived and worked in Paris from
1967 to 1977; lives and works in New
York and Switzerland (since 1977).

21 *Untitled*

1983. Oil on canvas
110 x 55 in.
(279 x 140 cm)
Collection of the artist

22 *Untitled*

1983. Oil on canvas
110 x 55 in.
(279 x 140 cm)
Collection of the artist

23 *Untitled*

1983. Acrylic on canvas
120 x 240 in.
(305 x 610 cm)
Collection of the artist

24 *Untitled*

1983. Enamel on canvas
84 x 84 in.
(213 x 213 cm)
Collection of the artist

Phil Sims

Born: 1940; Richmond, California.
Lives and works in New York
(since 1976).

25 *Untitled*

1981. Oil on canvas
110 x 130 in.
(279 x 249 cm)
Collection of the artist

26 *Reverie*

1980. Oil on canvas
110 x 98 in.
(279 x 249 cm)
Collection of the artist

27 *Untitled*

1981. Oil on canvas
110 x 98 in.
(279 x 249 cm)
Collection of the artist

28 *Untitled*

1984. Oil on canvas
102 x 102 in.
(259 x 259 cm)
Collection of the artist

Howard Smith

Born: 1943; Chicago, Illinois.
Lives and works in New York
(since 1973).

29 *Rialto*

1981. Oil on linen
30 x 28¾ in.
(76 x 73 cm)
Collection of the artist

30 *Riva*

1981. Oil on linen
50¼ x 40¼ in.
(128 x 102 cm)
Collection of the artist

31 *Siren*

1981. Oil on linen
84 x 64 in.
(213 x 163 cm)
Collection of the artist

32 *Red Light*

1981. Oil on linen
39½ x 37 in.
(100 x 94 cm)
Collection of the artist

Frederic Thursz

Born: 1930; Casablanca, Morocco.
Lives and works in New York.
Professor of Art at City University
of New York.

33 *Vermillion KLC*

1983. Oil on linen
84 x 87 in.
(213 x 221 cm)
Collection of the artist

34 *Vermillion II*

1983. Oil on linen
84 x 87 in.
(213 x 221 cm)
Collection of the artist

35 *The Bride*

1983. Oil on linen
88 x 91 in.
(224 x 231 cm)
Collection of the artist

36 *Study for Chartres*

1983. Oil on linen
99 x 49½ in.
(251 x 126 cm)
Collection of the artist

Günter Umberg

Born: 1942; Bonn, Germany.
Lives and works in Köln, West Germany.

37 *Untitled*

1983. Pigment/damar on aluminum
26 x 26 in.
(65 x 65 cm)
Collection of Siegel Contemporary Art, Inc., NY

38 *Untitled*

1983. Pigment/damar on aluminum
44 x 44 in.
(110 x 110 cm)
Collection of the artist

39 *Untitled*

1984. Pigment/damar on aluminum
60 x 60 in.
(150 x 150 cm)
Collection of the artist

40 *Untitled*

1983. Pigment/damar on aluminum
29.2 x 29.2 in.
(73 x 73 cm)
Collection of the artist

Jerry Zeniuk

Born: 1945; Hamburg, West Germany.
Lives and works in New York
(since 1970).

- 41 *Untitled*
1983. Oil on linen
33 x 30 in.
(84 x 76 cm)
Collection of the artist
- 42 *Untitled*
1983. Oil on linen
63 x 60 in.
(160 x 152 cm)
Collection of the artist
- 43 *Untitled*
1982. Oil on linen
33 x 30 in.
(84 x 76 cm)
Collection of the artist
- 44 *Untitled*
1984. Oil on linen
63 x 60 in.
(160 x 152 cm)
Collection of the artist

Chronology of the Group

The following chronology documents the organization and subsequent activity of the group of artists represented in this exhibition. Culled from assorted recordings, notes, publications, and memories, its purpose is to demonstrate the degree of mutual interaction and influence among the artists. Drawn together by their commitment to a particular aesthetic, these artists have generated a dialogue – public and private, verbal and visual – which has evolved over the past eight years. Prior to and during this time different members of the group exhibited independently. This exhibition, the visual manifestation of their collective dialogue, marks the first time that all eleven artists have displayed their work together. This chronology is by no means an “official” record; discussions have been forgotten and studio visits undocumented. It should, however, provide a source for further information.

September 1976

Exhibition and catalogue: “Colours in Painting: A European Situation”
Istituto Italo – Latino Americano, Rome, Italy.

December 1977

Exhibition and catalogue: “Bilder Ohne Bilder”
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, West Germany.

June 1978

Exhibition and catalogue:
“Fractures du Monochrome”
Musée D’Art Moderne, Paris, France.

September 1978

Publication: “Beginning Again,” by Marcia Hafif in *Artforum*.

Olivier Mosset contacts Marcia Hafif after reading her article in *Artforum* to suggest the formation of a discussion group.

October 1978

Meeting: Olivier Mosset’s studio
Present: Hafif, Rosenthal, Sanderson, Zeniuk.

Meeting: Marcia Hafif’s studio
Present: Marioni, Mosset, Rosenthal, Sanderson, Sims, Zeniuk.

November 1978

Meeting: Phil Sims’ studio
Present: Hafif, Marioni, Mosset, Dennis O’Leary, Zeniuk.

Meeting: Marcia Hafif’s studio
Present: Marioni, Rosenthal, Sanderson, Sims, Zeniuk.

December 1978

Meeting: Steven Rosenthal's studio
Present: Hafif, Mosset, Sims, Zeniuk.

Meeting: Olivier Mosset's studio
Present: Hafif, Marioni, Rosenthal, Sims, Zeniuk.

January 1979

Raimund Girke, painter from West Germany, is introduced to the group by Jerry Zeniuk. During early 1979 and again in 1980, he attends two meetings and visits studios in New York.

January 31, 1979

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Discussion: General concepts of work and the use of color.
Present: Girke, Marioni, Mosset, Sanderson, Sims, Zeniuk.

February 9, 1979

Meeting: Phil Sims' studio
Discussion: Appropriate labels for the work and the editing of the manuscript of the previous meeting.
Present: Girke, Hafif, Marioni, Mosset, Sanderson, Zeniuk.

February 11, 1979

Exhibition: "Fundamental Color," Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö, Sweden
Participants: Knutsson, Marioni, Sims.

March 14, 1979

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Present: Morales, Ryman, Sanderson, Tanger, Thursz, Wagner, Zeniuk.

March – April, 1979

Publication: "Could Leonardo Da Vinci Make It In New York Today," discussion between Olivier Mosset and Gregoire Müller in *Flash Art* (March – April).

May 30, 1979

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Discussion: Purpose of meetings and terminology of working concepts
Present: Knutsson, Marioni, Mosset, Tanger, Thursz, Wagner, Zeniuk.

June 2, 1979

Paper delivered at "Jungian Perspectives on Creativity and the Unconscious," "Painting as an Actualized Object" by Joseph Marioni, Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, OH.

June 5, 1979

Meeting: Doug Sanderson's studio
Discussion: Plan for presentation of one painting in private exhibition space.

June 1979

Exhibition (private) and meeting: Julian Pretto Space, Franklin Street, New York, NY
One small painting by each artist was presented and discussed.
Present: Hafif, Henry, Knutsson, Mosset, Sanderson, Saxon, Sims, Tanger, Wagner, Zeniuk.

October 1979

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Discussion: Specific aims for further discussions and organization of specific areas of interest.

Publication: "Monochrome in New York," (edited transcript of January meeting) *Flash Art* (October-November).

Carmengloria Morales, painter from Milan, introduced to the group by Marcia Hafif, visits and paints in New York for a few months each year. She attends meetings and visits studios.

March 11, 1980

Exhibition and catalogue: "Color Painting" Cerf Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Participants: Gimblett, Hafif, Lawson, Marioni, Sims.

March 12, 1980

Symposium: San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA
Participants: Gimblett, Hafif, Lawson, Marioni, Sims
Moderator: Richard Armstrong.

March 24, 1980

Meeting: Susanna Tanger's studio
Discussion: Slides of work were shown and detailed descriptions of working processes were outlined.

April 21, 1980

Meeting: Merrill Wagner's studio
Discussion: Subject matter in the painting
Present: Hafif, Marioni, McCollum, Morales, Smith, Tanger.

May 14, 1980

Meeting: Joseph Marioni's studio
Discussion: Materials and the painting as an object; definition and use of shape and edge
Present: Knutsson, Mosset, Sims, Smith, Tanger, Wagner.

June 1980

Meeting: Howard Smith's studio
Discussion: Picasso exhibition
Present: Carlson, Hafif, McCollum, Mosset, Smith, Tanger.

November 1980

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Present: Mosset, Smith, Zeniuk.

Publication: "Excerpts from a conversation about painting," edited by Judith Aminoff, in *Cover Magazine* #4 (Winter 80-81)
Participants: Hafif, Mosset, Smith, Zeniuk.

January 14, 1981

Radio Broadcast, WNYC: "Artist in the City"
Participants: Hafif, Smith, Zeniuk
Moderator: Jenny Dixon.

January 19, 1981

Exhibition and symposium with catalogue: "Painting About Painting" Ben Shahn Gallery, William Patterson College, Wayne, NJ
Participants: Hafif, Kleiman, Mosset, Sanderson, Smith, Tanger, Uglow, Wagner, Zeniuk.

April 1981

"Getting on with Painting," by Marcia Hafif in *Art in America*.

"Two or Three Things I Know About Her," by Olivier Mosset in *Cover Magazine* (Spring).

November 17, 1981

Exhibition: "Painting – 7 New York Painters," – Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY
Participants: Hafif, Marioni, Mosset, Ryman, Smith, Thursz.

November 19, 1981

Lecture: Robert Ryman discussed three kinds of contemporary painting. Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY.

November 24, 1981

Symposium: Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY
Participants: Hafif, Marioni, Mosset, Sims, Smith, Thursz.
Moderator: Mary Delahoyd.

December 1981

Publication: "Letters: More on Monochrome – definitions, amplifications, repercussions and more . . ." by Brennan, Hughes, Kerns, Knutsson, Marioni, Mosset, Rosenthal, Sanderson, Sims, Smith, Tanger, Thursz, Zatti, Zeniuk in *Art in America*.

Günter Umberg, painter from Köln, West Germany, introduced to the group by Joseph Marioni, visits New York in 1982 and 1983. Makes studio visits to Hafif, Marden, Marioni, Mosset, Ryman, Sims, Thursz. Attends meeting September 14, 1983. Presents installation of two paintings.

January – February 1982

Exhibition and catalogue: "Color; Four Painters," Oscarsson Hood Gallery, New York, NY and Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö, Sweden
Participants: Gimblett, Marioni, Sims, Willis.

October 29, 1982

Exhibition: "Unpunctuated," Grommet Gallery, New York, NY.

January 22, 1983

Exhibition: "Paint as Image," Max Hutchinson Gallery, New York, NY
Participants: Berthot, Dorfman, Hafif, Jones, Kleiman, Klein, Marden, Marioni, Monroe, Muehlemann, Passlof, Resnick, Ryman, Sims, Thursz.

February 10, 1983

Exhibition: "New Abstraction," Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, NY
Participants: Hafif, Marioni, Mosset, Ryman, Sims, Smith, Thursz, Zeniuk.

April 12, 1983

Exhibition: "Color Painting – 3 New York Painters," Druckwerk – Galerie für Neue Kunst, Munich, West Germany
Participants: Marioni, Sims, Zeniuk.

June 2, 1983

Meeting: Marcia Hafif's studio
Discussion: Williams College exhibition
Present: Marioni, Mosset, Sims, Smith, Thursz.

June 17, 1983

Exhibition: "Bilder Von 7 Painters," Klausstrasse 11, Hamburg, West Germany
Participants: Kaminsky, Marioni, Rose, Schroder, Sims, Umberg, Zeniuk.

June 22, 1983

Meeting: Joseph Marioni's studio
Discussion: Structure of Williams College exhibition and suitable writer for the catalogue
Present: Hafif, Mosset, Sims, Smith, Thursz.

September 14, 1983

Meeting: Joseph Marioni's studio
Discussion: Installation plan for Williams College exhibition. Viewed work of Günter Umberg.
Present: Sims, Smith, Thursz, Knutsson, Umberg.

October 20, 1983

Meeting: Joseph Marioni's studio
Discussion: Structure of Williams College exhibition
Present: Mosset, Sims, Thursz, Zeniuk.

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