R. H. QUAYTMAN

selected texts & press

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R. H. QUAYTMAN

R. H. Quaytman approaches painting as if it were poetry: when reading a poem, one notices particular words, and how each is not just that one word, but other words as well. Quaytman's paintings, organized into chapters structured in the form of a book, have a grammar, a syntax, and a vocabulary. While the work is bounded by a rigid structure on a material level—appearing only on beveled plywood panels in eight predetermined sizes derived from the golden ratio—open-ended content creates permutations that result in an archive without end. Quaytman's practice engages three distinct stylistic modes: photo-based silkscreens, optical patterns such as moiré and scintillating grids, and hand-painted oil works. Each chapter is developed in relation to a specific exhibition opportunity, and consequently, each work is iconographically bound to its initial site of presentation.

However, Quaytman's work is ultimately not about site-specificity, but about painting itself, and its relation to the archive. It seeks to graft subject matter and context onto a foundation of abstraction by engaging, in equal measure, the legacies of modernist painting and institutional critique. In her work, the self-involvement of the former and the social-situatedness of the latter paradoxically coexist. The content of Quaytman's work betrays a labyrinthine encyclopedia of interests; she excavates social and institutional histories and places them alongside autobiographical and literary references. Her practice is further characterized by a backwards glance: its conceptual and historical scaffolding is fashioned out of the work of other artists as well as her own; earlier works reappear in subsequent chapters to create a mise-en-abyme of referentiality. It is, among other things, an attempt to construct a personal art history. Its bibliography, while lengthy, remains implicit.

Relationality characterizes the works within each chapter not only in terms of content but also in terms of spatial configuration. Quaytman seeks to disrupt but not entirely eliminate the monocular focus and detachment of individual paintings. To this end, syntax generates meaning, and lines of sight produce constellations of significance. Each painting is a hieroglyph as well as a mirror, gesturing to spaces and beings outside of itself. Seriality and myriad references result in a legibility that is situated outside of the boundaries of the individual unit, and in excess any one viewer or moment of perception. A fragile conversation between neighboring paintings and the body of the viewer animates the seemingly static object.

The occasional appearance of the painting's beveled plywood edge on its surface in hand-painted facsimile alludes to this condition of relationality. The edge suggests that viewing always takes place in a state of partial distraction; that even when looking at a painting head-on, one has already in some senses passed it by. Viewing never takes place in isolation, and each work doubles an invitation to look elsewhere. Distortions and foreshortening underscore oblique viewing, while arrows and optical patterns further propel the viewer through space. The representation of the edge also evokes storage—a longstanding preoccupation of Quaytman's, rooted in the trauma of putting family members' artwork into storage after their deaths. She envies the way that books, in contradistinction to paintings, can simultaneously be stored and displayed. Quaytman is drawn to the act of storing art almost as much as displaying it, an inclination that motivated her to construct storage racks as a method of display. These racks self-reflexively acknowledge that most art objects are fated for a life of storage with only infrequent emergence. To this end, the collection of her own work has become an integral element of Quaytman's project. The first chapter is never fully put away, but placed in a continuum that makes it perpetually available for the next one.

R. H. Quaytman (b. 1961, Boston) lives and works in Guilford, CT and New York. Quaytman studied at Bard College and at the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques in Paris, and received the Rome Prize Fellowship from the American Academy in 2001. In 2015, Quaytman was awarded the Wolfgang Hahn Prize with Michael Krebber. Since 2006, Quaytman has taught at Bard College, in addition to lecturing at Princeton University, the Cooper Union, Columbia University, and the Yale University School of Art. In 2005, she co-founded Orchard, a cooperatively-run exhibition and event space that concluded its three-year run on the Lower East Side in 2008.

Quaytman's work was featured in documenta 14 (2017), the 54th Venice Biennale (2011) and the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Recent solo exhibitions of her work have taken place at Glenstone, Potomac, MD (2022), WIELS, Brussels (2021), a two-part exhibition at the Serralves Museum, Porto (2020) and Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz (2019), Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2019), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2018), Galerie Buchholz, Berlin and Cologne (2018, 2011), Secession, Vienna (2017), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2016), Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2015, 2008), Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2015), Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels (2014, 2012), Renaissance Society, Chicago (2013), the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (2012), the Kunsthalle Basel (2011), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2010), and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2009), among others.

In 2019, her work was prominently included in Luogo e Segni, *curated by Mouna Mekouar and Martin Bethenod at the Punta Della Dogana, Venice. Other major two-person and group exhibitions include* Electric/A Virtual Reality Exhibition, *curated by Daniel Birnbaum, Serralves Museum, Porto (2019);* Signal or Noise, *SMAK, Ghent (2019);* Jay DeFeo: The Ripple Effect, *Aspen Art Museum, Colorado and Le Consortium, Dijon (2018)*; Field Guide, *Remai Moden, Saskatoon (2017)*; Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age, *MUMOK, Vienna (2016) and Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2015);* The Distance of Day, *curated by Rita Kersting, The Isreal Museum, Jerusalem (2016)*; No Man's Land, *Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2015)*; New Skin, *curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Aïshti Foundation, Beirut (2015)*; America is Hard to See, *the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2015);* A History. Art, architecture, design from 1980 until today, *curated by Christine Macel, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2014)*; Arrhythmia (*A Tale of Many Squares), with Martin Barré, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (2013);* Materials and Money and Crisis, *co-organized by Richard Birkett and Sam Lewitt, MUMOK, Vienna (2013);* Abstract Generation, *Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013);* The Angel of History, *Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paris (2013); and* Dynamo, *Grand Palais, Paris (2013).*

Spine, *a comprehensive monograph focusing on the artist's work from* The Sun, Chapter 1 *through* Spine, Chapter 20, *was published by Sternberg Press and Sequence Press in 2011. Other major monographs include* The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 (*Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Muzeum Sztuki, 2020*), An Evening, Chapter 32 (*Secession, 2017*), Morning: Chapter 30 (*MOCA, Delmonico, Prestel, 2016*), חקק, Chapter 29 (*Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2015*), *and* Dalet, Chapter 24 (*Museum Abteiberg, 2012*), *along with critical discussions of Quaytman's work in* Afterall, Parkett, October, Texte zur Kunst, *and* Grey Room.

Her work is held in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Art Insititute of Chicago, the Pinault Collection, the Tate Modern, the Museo Reina Sofia, the Long Museum, the V–A–C Foundation, Fondazione Memmo, the CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, among others.

Quaytman's third solo exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery Ones, Chapter 0.2, *opens in May 2025.* Book, *the second volume of her catalogue raisonné and artist book, published by Glenstone and covering Chapters 21 though 35, will be released on June 3rd with a launch event at the gallery.*

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Art | In Conversation

R.H. Quaytman with Felix Bernstein

“Paintings have their own grammar, in a sense. That one painting could affect the painting next to it, a little like words, is what excites me.”

Portrtait of R.H. Quaytman, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

Glenstone Museum
R.H. Quaytman
September 22, 2022–Ongoing
Potomac, MD

R.H. Quaytman’s current exhibition at Glenstone closes a major body of her work while opening a new one. Since 2001, her paintings have been organized in chapters, and Glenstone displays recent chapters alongside a new set of Warburgian vitrines show hints of her research for *Book*, a self-made artist’s catalogue that will pick up where her last major collection *Spine* left off*:* covering the years 2011–2020 (Chapters 21–35). This volume is bookended by Łódź—the scene of both her Polish-Jewish familial lineage and her aesthetic forebears in the early avant-garde—which remains a continuously vexed site of fascism, censorship, and authoritarianism. The volume is hardly a straightforward homeward journey: the sun and the horizon are continuously displaced; train-tracks and arrows lead one through a chiastic hall of mirrors of retrospective futurity, in which Quaytman uncannily “predicts the past.” Her protest against Cyclopean painting means that presence is always delayed; “the images slide away,” only to reappear as blurred after-images which emerge despite incongruous bi-focal inputs: mirroring the auto-stereoscopic trickery of Magic Eye books and random dot patterns. This boundless deferral of vision and indefinite accrual of meaning becomes a metonym for “reading,” which in Classical aesthetics was prized for its diachronic, metrical horizontality in contrast to painting’s synchronic, simultaneity.

Not one to remain frozen like the angel of history looking backwards, she has started a new volume with *Modern Subjects, Chapter Zero*, which was exhibited at Wiels in Brussels last year, and features historically neglected Belgian artist Antoine Wiertz, notorious for his gothic studio/museum, which he managed to have the Belgian State fund and maintain in perpetuity after the artist’s death in 1865. In researching the show, I discovered that he was one of the earliest artists to be classified as “degenerate” by Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who influenced the Nazis in his attempt to classify deviant features. *Chapter Zero* brings to the fore a longstanding aspect of her work: the recuperation of exiled system-makers who make hermetic arks, museums, and allegories can be found at the edge of historical oblivion from Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński and their museum of modern art in Łódź, to Hilma af Klint and Otto van Veen. But its figurative moments also highlight Quaytman’s exaltation of female protagonists like the Biblical Judith, who decapitated warring patriarchs, and the Amazons and Scythians, or the Persian Women who according to Plutarch exposed their genitals in order to frighten and provoke their failing men in battle.

Using the model of a book Quaytman seduces us with the promise of unity, oneness, and closure, only to disperse, dismember, and beguile us through serialization: the partiality of the episode keeps displacing the totality of the book but also seems to fractally recapitulate the whole, like the fractal nesting system she uses for canvas specifications. Chapter, like capital, is etymologically derived from caput or head: and perhaps Quaytman's corpus is a back bone in search of its capstone. Her new "volume" will move from ground zero towards one in fractional increments but never reach it. This postponement seems analogous to her asymptotic approach to presence, gender, and memory. But this is not a mere celebration of the nihilating negativity of "zero." Unlike the heroic double-negation which affirms and visibilizes the void, her new project is something like a triple-negation: neither side of the binarized digital world made up of zeros and ones is allowed to take precedence, as we are sprawled out in the indefinite infinity of the in-between; a shifting, quavering, scintillating "lenticular perspective," which uncrosses the verbal and the visual.

Installation view: *R.H. Quaytman* at Glenstone Museum, 2022. Courtesy the artist and Glenstone, MD. © R.H. Quaytman. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

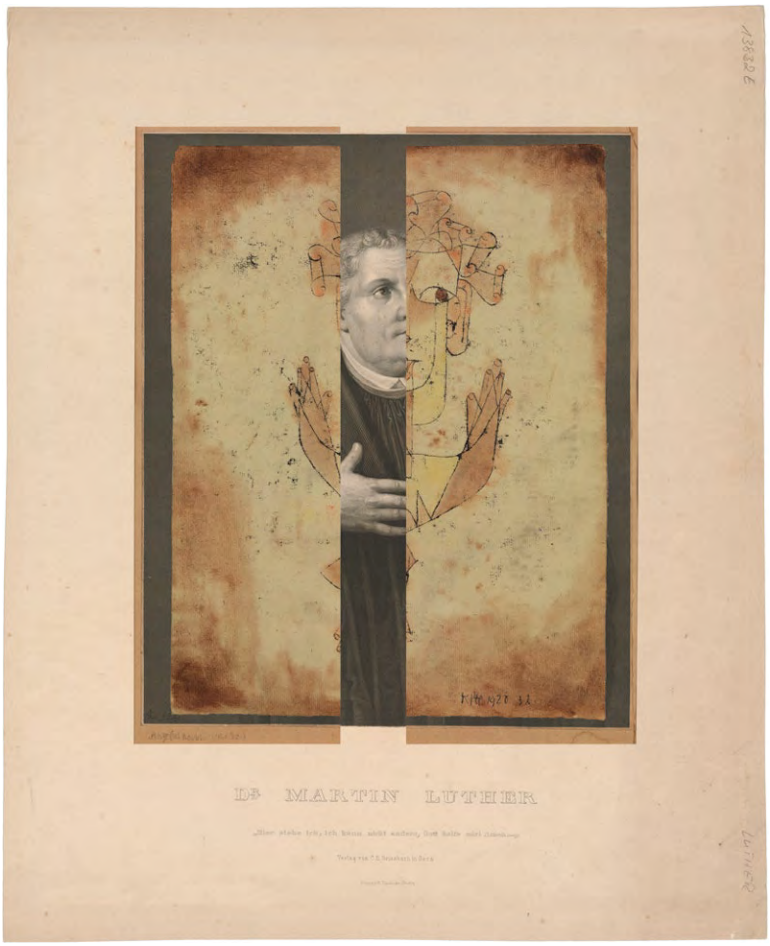
Felix Bernstein (Rail): Yve-Alain Bois's *Painting as Model* was important for shaping your way of conceiving paintings. How would you say your own method of chapter-making fits into the tradition he excavated?

R.H. Quaytman: *Model* drove home to me the importance of reflecting on how art history is constructed, finding ways to reinvision the genealogy of the canon and make interventions into that history as an artist. I understood that the history gates were not so well guarded as, it appeared, the artists gates were. Back then, to put it simply, unless you could thread the eye of the needle between the blank white Ryman monochrome and the squeegee pull of a Warhol polaroid painting, you were on your own. In retrospect, I see that many of the ideas and concepts I learned from Bois and also Rosalind Krauss about sculpture, seriality, space and the photograph I did try to apply to painting. I was not taught in school how to develop a philosophical or historical logic: to think about motivation with regard to subject matter, exhibition installation, sexuality, politics, etc. in defense against the corporatized, shallow, standardized, glittering star preferences of capitalism. Maybe it was *Painting as Model* that laid the seeds of my method—I call it a method and not a system because methods open, systems close. Since adopting it, I have gone to places that I wouldn't have without it. You can see that a bit in the Glenstone vitrines. The geographical logic that the book opened was unexpected and influenced every chapter in unexpected ways: New York to Chicago, Vienna to Koln to Brussels and Venice and then back to LA, and to Brazil, Mexico City and Tel Aviv. But there's also the

temporal expanse in the subjects depicted from the present to the twentieth century and then all the way around to the archaic with the paintings of Amazonian and Persian women and classical mythology.

Rail: Many of these disparate referential threads can come together in a single painting, even when it's isolated from its context. They become condensed like an aphorism, which is another metaphor you use for your paintings.

Quaytman: There are definitely synchronicities between the paintings that come about as the result of my approach to research and site: many times, I don't notice these until after the fact. At the entrance to the show at Glenstone is a painting from *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, originally made for a forthcoming pavilion located in Brazil's Inhotim. *Tópico* means matter—not space and time but stuff, earth. This work comprises one painting nailed onto another. From the center a little eye peers through a black mud-like substance. The eye is copied from Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920). While making *Chapter 27*, I was already making my research for *Chapter 29* and so included the subject of the Angelus in the Brazil chapter. The story of the Angelus is a long complex one, but to be brief, I happened to have the opportunity to see up close the *Angelus Novus* in the storage rooms of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Normally I don't work with images that are already so famous, but looking carefully at it lay down flat on a table in front of me, I saw immediately that the Klee drawing of the angel was glued onto an old engraving. Apparently, no one ever even noticed it before. Probably because you could only see it on the edge or the periphery and seemed only meant to frame the central image. The periphery of images interests me because often we are blind to that spot. After much debate with the conservation department of the museum and myself pouring through hundreds of websites of old engravings, the print turned out to be a mass-produced portrait of Martin Luther. This was a big shock to everybody, given the work's complex historical importance to Walter Benjamin: it was in his collection, and was the inspiration for his famous essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." But, also, because he wrote early on about the Reformation, and because Luther was a famous, virulent anti-Semite. It was my proudest moment when I found it amidst hundreds of images on a web site from Italy.



R.H. Quaytman, *חקץ, Chapter 29*, 2014.

Rail: From the beginning of the chapters, palimpsestic and archival discoveries carry through the works.

Quaytman: Yes, a big aspect of the chapters is a kind of art historical hunt or investigation. And I've also always been interested in how the history of engraving links to the history of painting. Maybe that's why I was primed to even notice that engraving.

Rail: I think your investigation is transferred in a certain way to the viewer. I found looking at the images in your work that there are many clues that resonate in unexpected ways. For instance, your work with artist Antoine Wiertz brought me to criminologist Cesare Lombroso.

Quaytman: I love the idea of establishing one's own art history. From the first chapter, which involved a train ride to Łódź, Poland, the 1939 World's Fair in Queens, my paternal family, and a panorama of eighty paintings all the same size, I became interested in how art history, institutional structures, and lifetimes intertwine. When I went to Poland, first in the nineties, I became interested in two artists, Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951) and Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952), who Bois also had devoted a chapter to in *Painting as Model*. A sculptor and painter who founded the first museum of modern art in Europe (Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź), and what *Chapter 35* was based on in 2019.

The formalism in my work found its footing somewhere between these two artists. Strzemiński was a painter interested in optics and the after-image while Kobro's insight was to say what's important about a sculpture is not the sculpture itself, but the space it sculpts around the sculpture and the movement of your body in relation to its architecture. Both implemented precise geometric ideas into their works. I'm also interested in the way a viewer moves past a painting as if it were a sculpture.

Rail: Did Strzemiński's thinking about optics influence your use of optical illusions such as moiré patterns?

Quaytman: I had already been using optical patterns as a way to activate a wall of painting but Strzemiński's research on the after-image supported this instinct. I like to use op-patterns that provide a slight optical burn or reflective sparkling surfaces that do the opposite and attract the eye. I use these optics like tactics to help compose installations, because these optics clearly affect the neighboring paintings.

Strzemiński also made the first artwork that I know of acknowledging what was happening in the concentration camps. Łódź had a very huge crowded ghetto where many of his Jewish students were tragically imprisoned. He made these incredibly moving drawings of figures seen from a distance in the ghetto. He drew them using the optics of drawing he had been developing—moving out of abstraction into figuration: philosophically and optically grappling with this notion of after-image, trace, and memory.

Rail: Kobro gave you the idea to use the golden ratio (a fractal of squares in rectangles related to the Fibonacci sequence) for your canvas sizes, which can therefore be nested together. You also based your first panel size in *The Sun, Chapter 1* (2001) on the dimensions of Kobro's sculpture *Spatial Composition II* (1928), literally taking it up as a model for your work. A lot of these geometrical formulas are mathematically complicated. How did you figure out how to work with them?

Quaytman: The only way to figure geometry out is to draw it yourself. I especially like this Irish geometry teacher on YouTube. I'm terrible at math, but one thing I love about geometry is it makes math come alive in space in a way I can intuitively understand. It also gave me a method with which to determine the dimensions of a rectangle whose proportions to the square hanging next to it could relate—could cohere rather than relying on guess work or being too tempted to fill the ever-increasing size of galleries with ever-increasing sizes. Also, a painting from twenty years ago relates geometrically to a painting now.

Rail: This formula determines not only the panel sizes, but also the way you hang the paintings, which itself is quite unusual. One grazes the floor, some are eye level, some are turned around.

Quaytman: All the paintings, no matter the size, are related to each other geometrically. One odd thing about my work is that it is difficult to define an overriding appearance. Paintings from one chapter to the next can look quite different. There is something of a group show feel about an installation of mine. I noticed that geometric and material consistency—like on plywood panels

with a beveled edge combined with a consistent geometry—enabled me to side step this expectation of style or consistency. Hanging an exhibition of my work can, on a good day, feel like plugging in a circuit. Some connection between paintings can be activated that doesn't exist with the singular painting. Paintings have their own grammar, in a sense. That one painting could affect the painting next to it, a little like words, is what excites me. So, for example, all the spaces between paintings at the Glenstone are based on the distance and height of paintings around them. Also, much of the time, a painting can turn in any direction. I often turn them when I paint them. Every room treats a group of paintings differently so it's good to have flexibility that way.

Rail: One work that nicely concretizes the cross-referentiality of your works is an assemblage you made at Glenstone: a painting from *The Sun, Chapter 1* is placed on a bright blue shelf which appears to support a larger painting behind it from *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*: it's both a kind of closure for the volume and an open-ended hall of mirrors.

Quaytman: I think it points towards the implication that time is circular or doubles back on itself. One painting from twenty-two years ago still can be strongly related to the paintings now. I use shelves under paintings sometimes in order to place other smaller paintings in front. I like in my studio seeing paintings change when leaning on other paintings. Also, it is a way to think about paintings as books, which can exist between storage and display, unlike paintings. So, there's not only a relationship, hieroglyphically, but also through physical depth. As I was leaving my house for the drive down to Glenstone for the installation, I decided last minute to pack that painting from *Chapter One* along with all the material for the vitrines in the trunk of my car. I thought it might be good to have at least one painting from *The Sun, Chapter One*, and it's a portrait of Washington, and Glenstone is outside Washington. I brought a few extra shelves with me to be on hand during installation in case it occurred to me to place two paintings together. I thought the Washington painting would fit well with this larger work from *35* that was silkscreened with a painting I mentioned earlier of the Amazons and Scythians, made originally for the Secession in Vienna. It was painted by Rubens's teacher, Otto van Veen, and it depicts the Amazons getting together romantically with the Scythians because the Scythians didn't insist on matrimony.

Rail: How did the Washington picture fit into the original thematic of *Chapter One*?

Quaytman: It's a statue of George Washington from the 1939 Queens World's Fair. Since *The Sun, Chapter 1*, was meant to be shown first in the Queens Museum, I decided to use the image from an old photograph I found in their shop which sold memorabilia. My great-grandfather and my grandfather were killed in a fiery car wreck with the Long Island Railroad coming back from the World's Fair, which was held on the same site as the Queen's Museum. I got the title from the *Sun* newspaper where I found the Warholian article reporting the train wreck that killed these two men on the weekend the fair was celebrating the victorious car. The chapter was also a look at Łódź, which my father's family had immigrated to the States from.

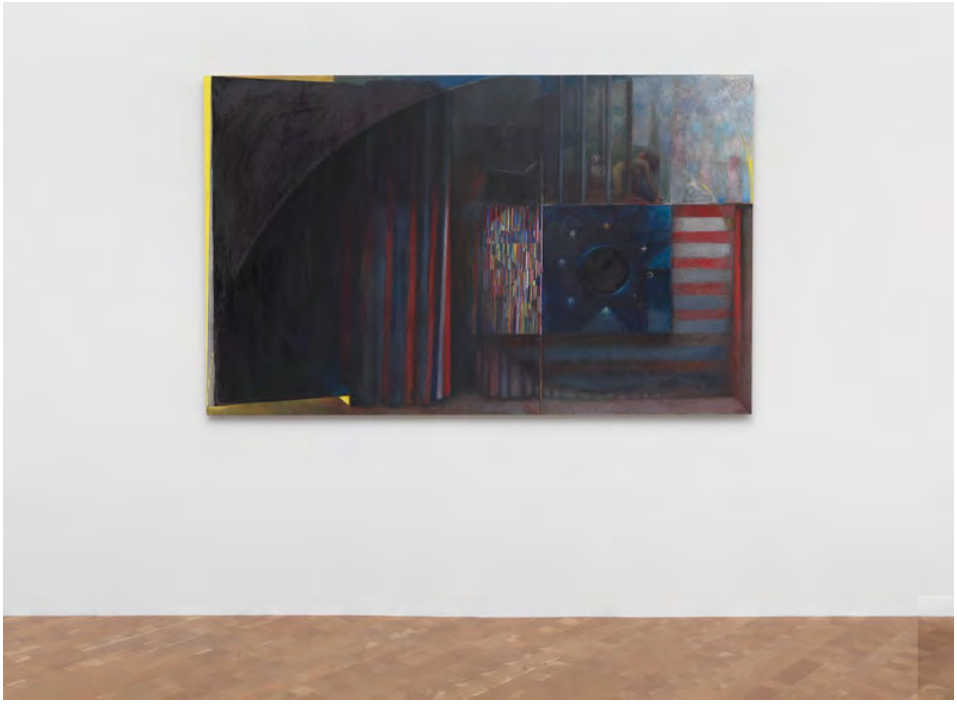
Rail: There's a recurrent image you've used since *Chapter 21*, the start of the new volume, that looks like a stone breast or eye. Is it from a known source?

R.H. Quaytman, *Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21*, 2011. Silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 32 1/3 x 32 1/3 inches.

Quaytman: Christopher Williams was making a window display at Buchholz Gallery in Cologne at the same time I was showing *Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21* in 2011. He was showing books designed by Hannes Jähn, and one of them, Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*, had that image on the cover and it just, it really struck me. I loved it—a singular breast made of cement. I suppose that tied into the prosthetic nature of gender explored in *Breckinridge*. I like that it can draw out plural associations; one friend of mine assumed it was a wine glass seen from below! You never know what people will see.

Rail: The film of *Myra Breckinridge* also contains the strangest example of Mae West's late style, which features its own kind of gender prosthetics. I think the most striking work at Glenstone is your painting of an obscured American flag. Is it your rebuttal to Jasper Johns?

Quaytman: I was invited to write an essay for the Jasper Johns retrospective. And I ended up focusing on his American flags, and writing essentially a "Dear John" letter to him in which we break up. But then I thought, "Oh, I better do my own flag. You know, it's only fair that I should do my own."



Installation view: *R.H. Quaytman* at Glenstone, *The Sun Does Not Move [Dear Johns], Chapter 35,* 2019. Singularity black, oil, gouache, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood. 84 in x 52 3⁄8 inches. Courtesy the artist and Glenstone, MD. © R.H. Quaytman. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Rail: There's a time-lapse video of the making of this painting over a period of months that I love since it shows how many layers are occluded from the final image. It starts with the silkscreened op pattern and the flag is painted over that with multiple kinds of stars. And then there's Trump, who turns into Martin Luther, and a woman crawling across the canvas taken from Muybridge. And the flag slowly turns into a black hole painted in singularity black. Does your work always involve this much underpainting and obscuring?

Quaytman: More and more. When I began the chapters I didn't paint that much over silkscreened images. I usually reserved painting by hand with a brush for smaller paintings. But slowly I began to paint more and more on images of other paintings or simply over patterns that make your vision jump and vibrate. I became more interested in that process. Now it is not unusual to entirely cover the original silkscreened image with paint.

Rail: Can you explain how you painted the panorama from *Morning, Chapter 30?* It's simultaneously opaque, transparent, and reflective.

R.H. Quaytman, *Morning, Chapter 30*, 2016. Gouache, varnish, oil, lacquer, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood. 37 x 60 inches, 22 panels, each 24 3/4 x 40 inches. Courtesy the artist and Glenstone, MD. © R.H. Quaytman. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Quaytman: I think it helps to think of it this way: I paint over *and* under the silkscreen. These twenty-two panels were under-painted with gesso made of two kinds of indigo mixed with rabbit skin glue, chalk, and then sanded. On the top half of the expanse is a gradient from light to dark made with woad indigo. On the lower half, the earth part is painted in synthetic indigo that is darker and more purple and sands very differently than the woad. Then on the far right, a big wedge of shiny gray lacquer pierces the landscape over nine panels. It was very high gloss, which reflects the paintings on the adjacent wall. I wanted the lacquer to resemble a turned off TV or computer monitor.

The original motivation was to make my first trip to the Southwest and also visit Michael Heizer's land art work *Double Negative* (1969)*,* photograph it and incorporate these images into a panoramic landscape painting meant to give a sense of the vast space of an American landscape. The idea to reference Heizer occurred to me because *Double Negative* is in MOCA's collection and I have on occasion referenced the collections of museums where I'm showing. I took a series of polaroids and silkscreened them across six of the twenty-two panels forming the landscape. I called the chapter "Morning" because it referenced the opposite of Los Angeles which is known for its sunsets, not sunrises. To see the sunrise in LA means to look east. But then I didn't want the hope or optimism that a sunrise implies, so I made the sun a tiny yellow dot on the horizon of the eighth panel in from the left before the indigo starts going towards the color of a night sky.

Time is an important motif in four chapter titles. The first chapter is *The Sun* and the end of a period of twenty years became *The Sun Does Not Move*, a quote from da Vinci. Then there is *Morning, Chapter 30*, and *An Evening, Chapter 32*. I made the road trip to the Southwest with my son, Isaac, who had recently transitioned, and he can be seen in one of the panels standing in the distance. So, there's a double meaning of sun and son. Also, at the time I was painting and installing *Morning*, Trump was running for election. I believed there was a strong chance he would be elected. So I thought the sound of the word morning appropriately named the period of American mourning we entered shortly after the show opened.

Rail: What's the classical image on the far right panel?

Quaytman: It's from a reproduction of a print I had discovered in a library print archive in Venice, when I was beginning work on *I Modi, Chapter 22.* I've always been interested in an Italian printmaker named Marcantonio Raimondi (1480 – 1534). He was the first printmaker to focus on reproducing paintings in the form of engravings. Also, he was the first artist accused of plagiarism by Dürer. This image in particular fascinates me. It's an engraving of a lost painting. It is called T*he Dream of Raphael* (1505–10)*,* also sometimes *Hecuba's Dream*. Hecuba was the mother of Paris. It is believed that the image is a depiction of Hecuba having a nightmare in which she gives birth to a flaming torch that ends up burning down Troy. The torch is Paris made famous from Raymond's most important work, *The Judgement of Paris*. I thought it was interesting how compositionally, it's identical to the *Judgment of Paris*, which is also a foundational image for me. And there's the three phallic monsters on the bottom right that seem to echo the group of three men in the Judgment engraving. I like the mysterious almost Bosch-

like nature of it all: Is she dreaming? Is the doubling of the two women symbolic of dreaming? Or is it two lovers? Or simply two nudes reposing while the city burns in the background? It expands the temporal in the panorama with the distant past, what was politically unfolding in the present. And, dare I say, my own shifting sexuality at that time.

Installation view: *R.H. Quaytman* at Glenstone Museum, 2022. Vitrines of artist's archival materials (2022) Courtesy the artist and Glenstone, MD. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Rail: The vitrines show some of the images from *Chapter Zero* and hint at what you are working on now. What prompted you to start a new volume?

Quaytman: I started calling the accumulation and research of my paintings a book as a mental exercise in self motivation, as I rounded the bend of turning forty in 2001. I found it a useful armature on which to hang my heart—it might inoculate me against the demands of the present, in the quickly appearing and fading calendar of the art world focus. It was a way to maintain a steady focus on my thought and work through all the noise of the present. How to hold separate exhibitions and the ideas they explored together like a continuous stitch. There is something very different about this time, my time, your time. We are living on the rails. This time—I was born in '61—has probably been one of the most extreme periods in human history. 2001 to 2020 was a definitive, distinct era. 2020, marked as it was by the pandemic, was clearly different and thus the time to start again.

It was in that spirit that I chose Antoine Wiertz and his atelier/museum as the appropriate opening for a new period. So much about his story and work seemed to parallel the present, so I decided to take his title in the museum guide book for a certain genre found in the peripheral spaces of his museum and call *Chapter Zero* "Modern Subjects." It got me through Covid and Trump. Wiertz allowed me to paint subjects I could not have without the foundation of his work.

R.H. Quaytman, *Modern Subjects, Chapter Zero,* (2020).

The next decade of chapters will begin with zero but never again reach one. I need to reorientate infinity in the face of aging. I intend to continue working within my basic form of plywood panels with beveled edges in ten dimensions. I will continue to paint one painting in order to effect and affect other paintings around it or in the chapter. The difference may be that I rely less on site specificity for subject matter and work more with the images and source material I have already accumulated. The vitrines at Glenstone and the book I'm working on presently with the designer Petra Hollenbach demand at least some sort of interpretation of what the last thirty-five chapters were developing and that is what I am focusing on this winter.

Rail: The influence for *Chapter Zero* was the reclusive Belgian artist Antoine Wiertz. How did you discover him? He's relatively unwritten about in art history but has some notoriety for being excoriated by Baudelaire, who decried his museum as a house of horrors and moral pedantry. His giant paintings led to Lombroso claiming he suffered from a newly coined megaloptic disorder. This view still envelops him: I just read an article calling him the Ed Wood of painting.

The artist at the Wiertz Museum, Brussels (2020).

Quaytman: I worry perhaps that emphasizing the macabre in Wiertz may be to the detriment of the qualities that I found so fascinating about the subject. Of course, I also wallow in the macabre spooky feeling of the place, but ultimately I don't choose to think of him that way. I think of him as a painter who predicted accurately what the public was going to want and also weirdly what it got—namely TV, film, giganticness, the news. He was the unlucky recipient of the message from the future and he responded as a firm socialist or proto-Marxist. Rejecting the idea of an art market connected to value. Rejecting the idea of critics. Rejecting firmly the idea of Paris (his New York). Rejecting painting realistically, like a bricklayer, as he quipped. Longing for a future in which photography takes over the boring labor of copying. Wanting to be the architect of his cumulated work. Being a feminist probably, because I believe, he was homosexual, although have no written proof. And what else? Oh yes, making a painting so big that it doesn't fit in the room and must lean forward in such a way that one can't help but worry that those thin wires that tether the giant canvas precariously to the wall could snap, thus crushing the hapless visitor under its weight. Morality and aesthetics are put to the test in his circus museum.

I had, over the years, heard mumblings about this eccentric atelier-museum that hardly anyone visits anymore. And then when I was invited to make a chapter at Wiels in Belgium with Broodthaers filling two floors below me. Broodthaers actually wrote a defense of Wiertz's museum, when it was threatened with closure and his name appears in many of the vacuum-formed sign works (called "Industrial Poems"). I'm sure the fact that Wiertz made his own museum replete with every genre would certainly have influenced Broodthaers in his own attempts at museum making. Anyway, I visited Brussels right after installing *Chapter 35* in Łódź to look at the space in Wiels and try to begin thinking about a subject. One that could deflect the unspoken hope that I would directly work with Broodthaers. So, one cold morning I thought the time had come to finally visit this museum I had heard murmurs about and see it for myself. I didn't expect to actually find anything I could use there. However, the second I entered I was overwhelmed and knew I had my subject. It's rare when you're just really shocked and baffled and moved by a museum like that. I spent the next two years in a process of researching and then making work based on the place and artist. Since I am also motivated by this idea of holding all one's work into an ongoing whole—an idea I first got from Hilma af Klint, who thought of all her work as one. Wiertz painted some very violent images as a means of protest against social injustice. These include images of women avenging their tormentors with live action gunshots, or cooking the baby for dinner because the mother is starving and can't pay the tax bill laying at her feet. Or a triptych depicting the agony of the guillotine. It is rumored that the prototype for the Statue of Liberty was the sculpture in the museum of a woman tearing the sword from the devil's hand and holding up a torch. It gave me license to paint these very dramatic, gothic subjects. Probably his most famous painting is *Premature Burial* (1854) since it's been used as a book-cover for many books, including Poe's. This was the painting I worked on first, at the beginning of COVID; Wiertz painted his during the Cholera epidemic. I did not silkscreen an image of his painting, however, I just copied it. At the end I made the hand mine and put my Athena ring with real tiny diamonds on the hand that emerges from the coffin. It was just so satisfying and fun to paint that. Without Wiertz, it would never occur to me to paint a premature burial or any of the other horrific modern subjects in this chapter including: capital punishment, suicide, cannibalism, etcetera. That's why I like working with historical figures who have been dismissed as antiquated or obsolete: they enable me to address real and present fears through refracted and parallax viewpoints, which you cannot access if you only look at things head-on.

Contributor

Felix Bernstein

Felix Bernstein is an artist and writer based in New York.

FRIEZE

R.H. Quaytman Finds a Muse on the Verge of Oblivion

Ahead of a major new exhibition in Wiels, Belgium, the artist speaks with Yve-Alain Bois about the influence of Antoine Wiertz on her latest body of work

BY **YVE-ALAIN BOIS** AND **R.H. QUAYTMAN** IN **FEATURES**, **INTERVIEWS** | 25 AUG 21

Yve-Alain Bois Since 2001, your exhibitions have consisted of groups of paintings that you call ‘chapters’. The last completed series, entitled ‘The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35’, opened at Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz in 2019, then travelled to the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto. But the newest chapter, which will be shown at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels this month, is ‘Wiertz’s Revolt, Chapter Zero’. Does that mean it marks the beginning of a new ‘book’?

R.H. Quaytman Yes. ‘Chapter 35’ closed a period of almost 20 years and was retrospective in nature. It began with ‘The Sun, Chapter 1’ [2001] – which was inspired by a train ride to Lodz the year before – and ended two decades later, in the same city, with ‘The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35’. I began working on this new group of paintings right before COVID-19. And so, in lockdown, ‘Chapter Zero’ seemed right. We can all agree that the world changed in 2020, and so everything will change with it. It took me until midsummer to come up with a title. I love and almost used this quote from Paul Celan’s posthumously published collection of writings, *Microliths They Are, Little Stones* [2020]: ‘The poem about the outrage is not the outrage. The poem is the outrage.’ But, in the end, I liked how ‘Wiertz’s Revolt’ sounds like a film or novella title.

R.H. Quaytman, 2021. Courtesy: the artist; photograph: Joanna Zielińska

YAB Your exhibition for WIELS revolves entirely around the largely forgotten, 19th-century Belgian painter Antoine Wiertz. What gave you the idea?

RHQ For many years, I had heard about an obscure, eccentric museum in the heart of Brussels, next to the European Union's administrative buildings. So, one cold winter morning at the end of 2019, I made my way to 62 Rue Vautier and was utterly dumbfounded by what I saw – which, as you know, is such a rare feeling. Since this new chapter of my work was due to be shown at WIELS in tandem with a large Marcel Broodthaers exhibition, his work was on my mind. Occasionally, I reference the artists whose works are either in the collection, or the vicinity, of the place where my show will be installed. I knew that Broodthaers had been a champion of the Wiertz Museum. He had written a short text for a 1974 issue of *Studio International* in praise of the artist, describing him as 'an involuntary (natural) cartoonist of a well-meaning society', when the Wiertz Museum was under threat of closing – as it still is today.

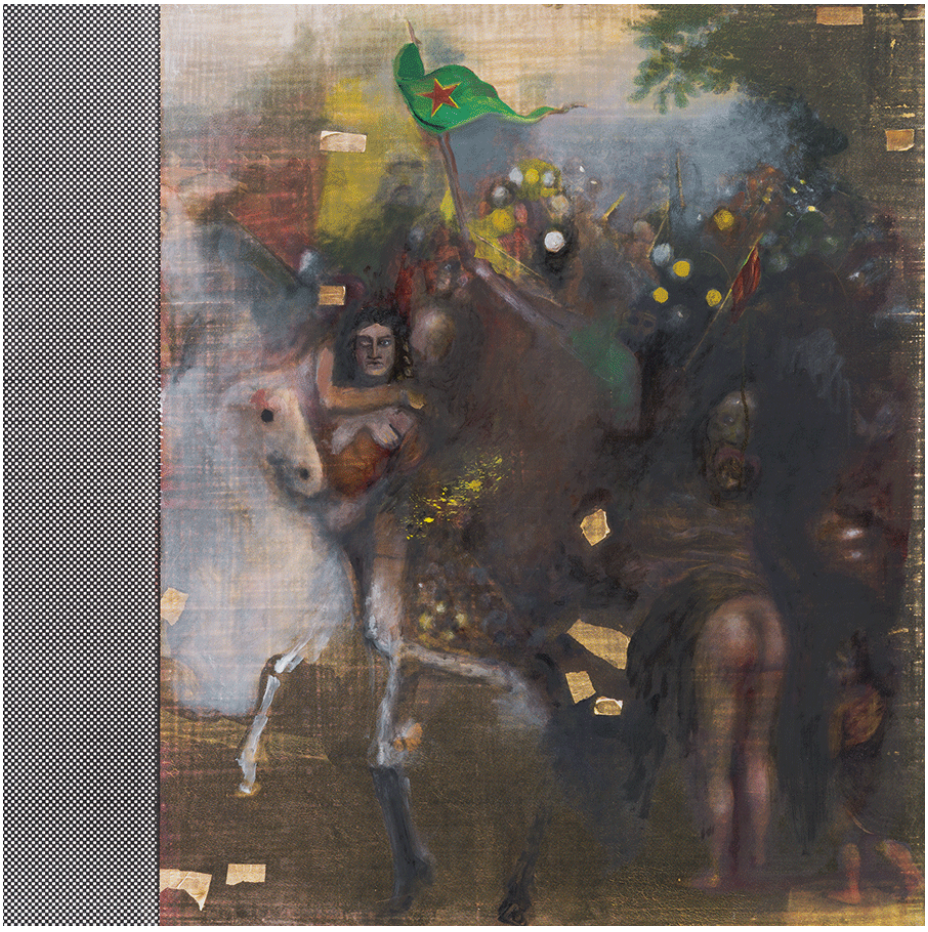
YAB Walter Benjamin was one of the few early-20th-century thinkers who was interested in Wiertz. He refers to him multiple times in *The Arcades Project* [1927–40], as well as in his famous essay 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century' [1935]. Was this important for you?

RHQ Benjamin writes that Wiertz was prophetic, in as much as his art both announces the end of painting as the antiquated craft of a 'brick-layer' and emancipates the medium as a space for thought, while recasting the painter as an 'architect'. Wiertz was a painter-architect who managed to convince the Belgian state to build him an industrial-scale studio, which he then filled with his own work, made in every genre, creating a museum-like, art-historical panorama replete with its own exhibition guide. Had he been born later, he might have been an epic filmmaker. Wiertz saw photography as a means to enlarge paintings into huge panoramas and most of the truly enormous paintings that fill the museum feel like stills from early cinema. Benjamin notes that Wiertz wanted to hang his paintings in railway stations; he calls him 'the painter of the arcades'. It's also via Benjamin that I realized how despised and mocked Wiertz had been by Charles Baudelaire, which is strange, given the Edgar Allan Poe-like atmosphere of the paintings and their museum. When I first saw them, the gothic horror that pours from some of Wiertz's images filled me with perverse glee and gave me the urge to make paintings that could terrify children, like fairy tales. His bombastic gigantism mingling alongside softcore porn and horror imagery also seemed apropos in the context of Donald Trump's presidential reign of terror in the US.

R.H. Quaytman, *Wiertz's Revolt, Chapter Zero*, 2021, oil, acrylic, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 133 × 133 × 3 cm. Unless otherwise stated, all images courtesy: the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; photograph: David Regen

YAB Wiertz had a brief moment of glory in Belgium, but he was very badly treated by French critics, a view later repeated by local ones. After his death, his work was literally left to decay under the sunlight pouring in from large skylights. His museum was deserted, with virtually no one paying attention to him. Did this underdog aspect stimulate your interest in him?

RHQ I like to make work with or about artists whose practices seem open and can provide new critical models that shift my own expectations about objects in time and space. My first three chapters were inspired by the Polish sculptor Katarzyna Kobro. At the time I was working, there was very little written in English about her and her husband, the painter Władysław Strzemiński, with the exception of your essay in *Painting as Model* [1990]. Incidentally, like Wiertz, they created their own museum and refused to participate in the art market, pursuing alternative strategies of support. Wiertz made a very modest living painting portraits, which he declined to sign. Another artist who is high in my art-historical cast is Edward Krasiński. His apartment in Warsaw was also left to decay, much like the Wiertz Museum. 'An Evening, Chapter 32' [2017] drew on Otto van Veen – the 16th- and 17th-century baroque painter who taught Peter Paul Rubens – while '+ x, Chapter 34' [2018] was inspired by Hilma af Klint, whose notion that all her paintings were one work was where I got the idea of organizing my own practice into chapters. She also imagined a spiral museum for her work and largely declined to participate in the market. I have always been interested in artists who are on the verge of oblivion. It's less complicated to enter someone's work conceptually if there isn't a crowd standing in front of it.



R.H. Quaytman, *An Evening, Chapter 32*, 2017, oil, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 82 × 82 × 3 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Galerie Buchholz, Berlin, Cologne and New York, and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; photograph: Hannes Böck

YAB Could one say that Wiertz's museum – because it is an ensemble, a set that he conceived as such – is structurally very close to your idea of the chapter?

RHQ Absolutely. He takes charge by becoming the architect, theorist and activist of painting, combining in one place his entire *oeuvre*, which comprises numerous genres and techniques. Again, this was prophetic in the 1860s, when he turned his studio into a museum. I see something of what he did in artists like Broodthaers, Hanne Darboven, Marcel Duchamp, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Jef Geys and Gerhard Richter.

YAB Even including as a genre the sketch – many of which hang in three small side rooms of the museum – was a very unusual critical gesture at the time.

RHQ Yes. From the outrageously grandiose to the utterly mundane. Also, Wiertz hung paintings in such a way that they seem to activate each other. He even used tricks, like installing peepholes for visitors to view nudes through or hanging a painting of a slumbering guard at the entrance. And this is why I see the whole museum as an artwork. For me, individual paintings are not the point. It took me a little while to figure that out. At first, I was stumped by the abundance of diverse imagery, and how to narrow my focus. One day, when I was reading an old guide to the museum, I looked at the index and began to understand more the complex thinking behind the ensemble. Wiertz divides the paintings into genres by taxonomizing the works on view. I resolved to limit my selection to the first group, those within the category of 'Modern Subjects', specifically 'Dramatic and Satiric Paintings'. There are 11 paintings in this category, which contains most of my favourites.

One of the unique things about Wiertz, for a 19th-century painter, I think, is the way he deploys shock and horror – often culled directly from things he reads in the newspapers – not unlike Andy Warhol. My favourite work, which hangs high on the wall under a skylight above some of the small sketches you've mentioned, is a large painting entitled *Hunger, Madness, Crime* [1853], which depicts a dark-haired young woman seated with her big skirt spread out, like the Virgin Mary in Michelangelo's Pietà [1498–99], and a slightly bloody, bundled infant nestled between her legs. Beside her, in the fireplace, is a little pot with a tiny leg sticking out cooking above a hot flame. At her feet lies a tax bill. It was after seeing this painting that I realized I had found my subject for the show at WIELS.

Wiertz's masterpiece is a triptych called *Thoughts and Visions of a Severed Head* [1853]. Rough – almost abstract – brushy images are accompanied by barely legible, delicately handwritten, lengthy captions that offer a gruesome, first-hand account of his attempt, through hypnosis, to experience what it feels like to have your head chopped off. His paintings seek to dramatically slow down time to capture the three minutes after decapitation. I read this work as an elaborate statement on painting itself – a creative process that could be seen, from the perspective of the artist, as a beheading of sorts. In the triptych, the artist is simultaneously both present and absent. The third panel is almost completely abstract, perhaps expressing what he imagined agony to feel like.

YAB Could you elaborate on Wiertz's feminism and the gay overtones of his work?

RHQ There are many examples of Wiertz's feminism in the museum. At the main entrance, *The Triumph of Light* [1862–70] depicts a powerful woman holding, in one hand, a sword she has just torn from the hand of a crouching, defeated man or demon and, in the other, a torch raised aloft like Frédéric Bartholdi's *Statue of Liberty* [1870–86], which was allegedly inspired by Wiertz's work. Then there is the woman who breaks an iron canon in half with her bare hands [*The Last Cannon*, 1855] and the naked woman who blows off the head of an assailant with a big pistol [*A Blow from the Hand of a Belgian Lady*, 1861].

Regarding Wiertz's homosexuality, I would say it almost burns down the museum. He seemed to grapple with issues of pride and false modesty, which he refers to repeatedly in his writings and in scrawled, graffiti-like messages on the museum walls. I believe this pride was not simply a pompous character flaw, as is so often claimed; it arose from surviving poverty and being homosexual. Throughout Wiertz's lifetime, he maintained a series of close male companions who promoted and sustained his career. In his 2020 essay 'The Case of Antoine Wiertz. Art And/Or Politics?', Belgian theorist Bart Verschaffel wrote that Wiertz, along with fellow painters Lambert Mathieu and Pierre Wauters, 'formed a bachelor club wherein the three addressed one another as "chevalier" [knight]', lived on the wild side and promised never to marry.

In *The Suicide* [1854], a gorgeous, sultry Satan stands to the left of a man still holding the gun with which he has just shot himself. Satan grips some kind of weapon in case the suicide's gun should fail. To the man's right, a large female angel prays ineffectually beside him. On the table, a suicide note proclaims his atheism and disbelief in the soul. It's one of the most overtly sexual paintings I have ever encountered.

Antoine Wiertz, *The Suicide*, 1854, oil on canvas, 1.7 × 2.1 m. All images on this spread courtesy: Wiertz Museum and Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; photograph: Philippe De Gobert

Wiertz's museum expressed a radical, pacifist, socialist ideology that he hoped the new sovereign state of Belgium, founded in 1831, would strive to protect and nurture. This included helping mothers as well as ending hunger, violence against women, plague, capital punishment, despotism and war. Profit was never his motive, but it seems political agitation was. Housed in a museum that Wiertz persuaded the government to fund and maintain, these silent but powerful messages must have been a thorn in the side of Belgium's subsequent government. And the fact that the museum is located steps away from the European Union reminds me of an eccentric old protester standing at the gates of government, day after day, in sweltering heat or numbing cold, making a plea for social justice.

This article first appeared in frieze *issue 221 with the headline 'I have always been interested in artists who are on the verge of oblivion.'*

Main image: R.H. Quaytman, Wiertz's Revolt, Chapter Zero, *2021, oil, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 133 × 214 × 3 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; photograph: David Regen*

Y

YVE-ALAIN BOIS

Yve-Alain Bois is a writer and professor of art history, School of Historical Studies, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University, USA. He is currently working on the catalogue raisonné of Ellsworth Kelly's paintings and sculpture.

R

R.H. QUAYTMAN

R.H. Quaytman is an artist. In 2019–20, she had a solo exhibition at the Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz, Poland, which travelled to the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal. Her solo show at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, Belgium, is on view from 10 September to 9 January 2022.

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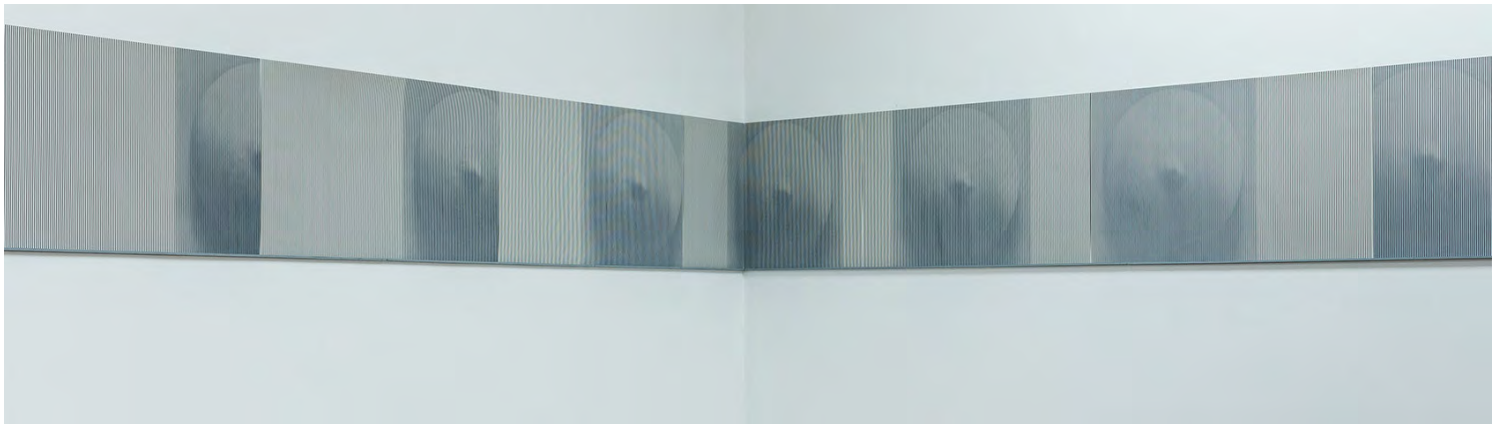


R. H. Quaytman, The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35, Installation view. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

A PAST NOT YET DEFINED

In R. H. Quaytman’s practice each exhibition is a chapter of an open-ended oeuvre

25 February, 2020

EWA BORYSIEWICZ

ART / REVIEW

R.H. Quaytman is one of the most outstanding contemporary American artists whose oeuvre can be seen as one of the most original attempts to revitalize and update the intellectual and emotional potential locked in the painting medium. The artist takes particular interest in examining painting in its physical—as an object that occupies a given space—as well as semantic dimension, as a symbol of a complex relationship with its meaning and material base. Quaytman enlivens the painting medium demonstrating its ability to remain an efficient tool in critical analysis of visual reality although the nature of paintings that are filling up this reality has radically changed in our times.

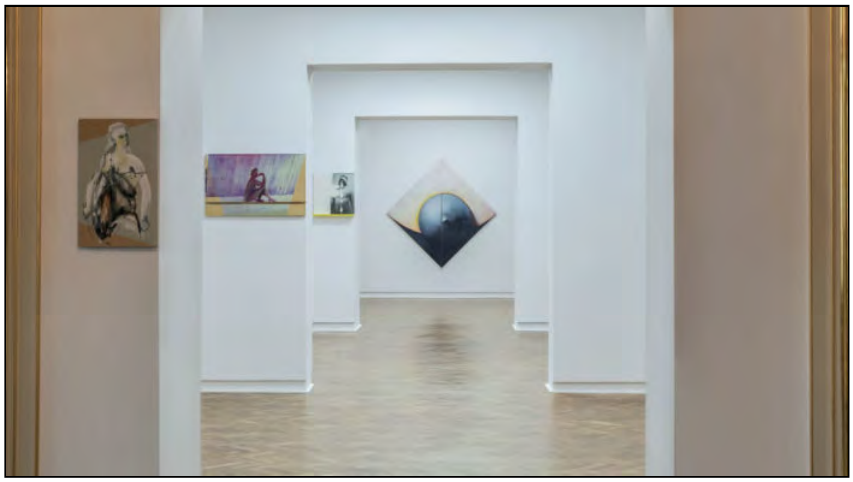
Since 2001 Quaytman oeuvre has been structured into “chapters”. Each of them is a separate exhibition consisting of paintings created especially for the exhibition and sometimes supplemented with carefully chosen earlier artworks. Each such exhibition is site-specific, meaning it refers to architectural but also historic and institutional context of a place. The exhibition at the Muzeum Sztuki was intended as an outcome of re-read chapters from 21 to 34. It was not meant to be a mechanical presentation of these chapters but a new story overarching them. As is the case with every exhibition of this artist, the framework of the story will be dictated by the context of the place which gives specific colors to the exhibition’s retrospective character.

In Quaytman's biography, Łódź and Muzeum Sztuki are places linked with the very beginnings of her "book". The first chapters were largely drawing from the material collected by the artist during her first trip to Łódź—the home city of some of her forebears. It was also here, where Quaytman discovered the oeuvre of Katarzyna Kobro, a radical constructivist sculptor who worked in this city between the 1920s and the 1950s and whose almost entire legacy can be found in the collection of the Muzeum Sztuki. Kobro's art, in particular one of her sculptures, "Spatial Composition No. 2", not only featured at some point as a frequent motif in Quaytman's works but also provided the starting point for original considerations of the American artist on spatial dimension of image and painting.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun, Chapter 1*, 2001-2002. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

"So it is. Once a book is fathomed, once it is known, and its meaning is fixed or established, it is dead. A book only lives while it has power to move us, and move us differently; so long as we find it different every time we read it." The steady flow and constant instability of meaning are one of the key themes in Rebecca Howe Quaytman's work. Her erudite archival investigations prove there is a certain plastic quality, a particular flexibility, immanent to both history in art and art history. Even though Quaytman highlights her paintings' materiality and status as objects fixed in time and space, their interpretation is not at all stable and shifts with the works' arrangements in the different locations.

The artist, a prolific commentator of her own work, refers to her oeuvre as an ongoing, unfinished book, with successive exhibitions serving as "chapters", "units of meaning within a larger context." Each of these consist of "paintings"—but the viewer should bear in mind that, in the context of Quaytman's work, the word should be understood more as a verb than a noun. The technique applied by Quaytman does not indulge the usual set of fantasies that we associate with the medium—be it the closeness, the intimate connection between the artist and the work, the independent genius behind the creation, or the almost sentient existence we ascribe to painted objects.



R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35* Installation view. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 [Warren]*, 2019. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

The process behind most of her pieces consists of silkscreening a photograph-based composition on a wooden panel primed with gesso. This technique allows for limited but significant, discernible and sometimes unexpected variations—in some cases the artist includes motifs formed out of foam or glitter, or repainted in oil or acrylic on the silkscreen composition as part of the construction. In consequence, these works resemble intricate structures, conceived as a combination and layering of meaning, technique and time. To further emphasize their status as objects, Quaytman adds wooden shelves to some of the frameless paintings, or duplicates a pattern visible along the diagonally cut edges of every painting and includes it in her compositions. Their dimensions are subject to another self-imposed geometrical law: they are variations of the golden ratio proportions, allowing for a range of ten, recurring formats.

Although rooted in a dense and mathematically rigorous set of rules, present within the works' dimensions and their existence in space, the consistent use of a single technique with limited variations Quaytman's chapters embrace individual interpretations. Such an approach echoes Rebecca Solnit's views on writing about art: "There is a kind of counter-criticism that seeks to expand the work of art, by connecting it, opening up

its meanings, inviting in the possibilities. (…) Not against interpretation, but against confinement, against the killing of the spirit. (…) This is a kind of criticism that does not pit the critic against the text, does not seek authority. It seeks instead to travel with the work and its ideas, invite it to blossom and invite others into a conversation that might have previously seemed impenetrable, to draw out relationships that might have been unseen and open doors that might have been locked. This is a kind of criticism that respects the essential mystery of a work of art, which is in part its beauty and its pleasure, both of which are irreducible and subjective."

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35*, Installation view, Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

An association with Solnit, a writer, seems justifiable. Quaytman, a daughter of a poet and a painter, assumed many roles throughout her life and was able to look at the art and literary world from different perspectives. "Back then, my parents were two of the most opposite people you could imagine. As a result, I developed a kind of lenticular perspective —I was able to shift back and forth between their points of view. Probably my urge to make different kinds of paintings and put them together is related to that early experience"—she recalled in one interview. As a curator, gallerist and art historian, she contemplated the different facets of the art world's knotty network. Quaytman's recent exhibition in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź may seem as a courageous step towards a disentanglement of relationships in which she had been submerged, and employing a calculated, rational manner in order to understand her present position and to separate ideas from identity.

This is not the first time that Quaytman juxtaposes current and earlier works in one presentation to investigate how the meaning of subsequent parts (or pages) changed over time and in confrontation with new spatial and historical contexts. But the exhibition offers a different look back, and a more complex return, heavy with histories of different scale. The city of

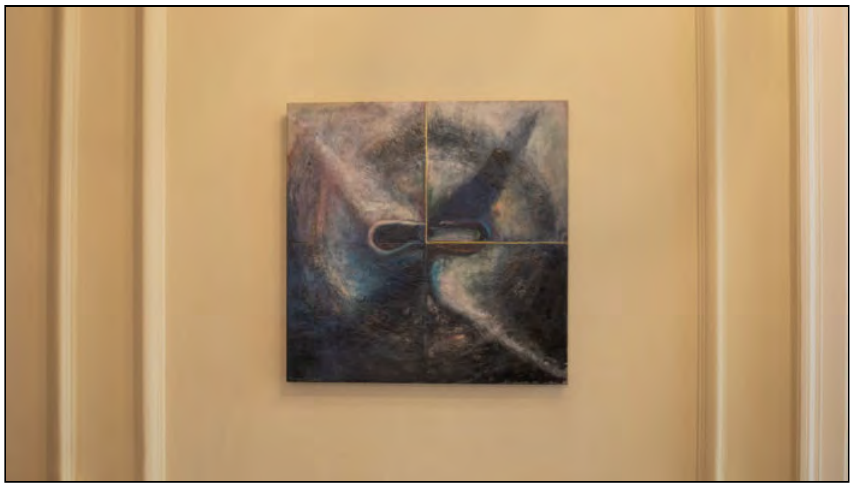
Łódź and its museum, an institution established by artists—founders and members of the "a.r." avant-garde group, among them Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, serves as a beginning for Quaytman in many respects.

The Polish industrial city appears as the foreword to Quaytman's open-ended book, whose chapters would later expand beyond a defined time frame and geography. Quaytman's first connection with Łódź is her grandfather, Mark, born to a Jewish family. His portrait, like an image of an unusual patron saint, overlooks one of the rooms in the museum. His untimely death was evoked by Quaytman in her first series conceived as a chapter—*The Sun, Chapter 1* in 2001. The title work, also presented in the show, depicts a newspaper clipping informing about her ancestor's tragic death. The artist's family history returns in the most recent chapter—*The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35* in Muzeum Sztuki—as an eternal companion and a motionless, persistent influence.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 [Strzemiński/Kobro]*, 2019.

The ancestors meet their descendants in one of the key pieces created by Quaytman especially for the exhibition in Łódź. The diamond shaped painting (*The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35,* 2019) features a circular form against black and flesh-colored background. By virtue of our brains' apophenic tendencies, one will recognize the shape as that of a breast. Quaytman herself comments on this work as being an unconscious reflection of a personal story and her son's transition. The work was positioned as an overture to the exhibition, structured along an axis running via a corridor that opens up onto suite of rooms on both sides. The image of her son (*Son*, 2011) could be seen in the adjacent room, while the circular shape, multiplied and repeated, returned in several other rooms of the museum.

Aside from familial lineage Quaytman explores artistic genealogies. One of them reverberates in a black-and-white composition representing an X-ray image of Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition. White on White* from 1918 (*The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*). The silkscreened radiograph reveals hesitation seeping through a carefully calculated composition. The doubt and indecision underlying the seemingly perfectly executed (but in fact, repeatedly repainted) non-figurative work, contradict the common belief in emotionless, pure abstraction. The affective and spiritual foundations of modernism are again summoned in references to Hilma af Klint (+ ×, *Chapter 34*) the heroine of Quaytman's chapter that preceded to the one realized for Łódź.



R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*, Installation view, Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

Yet, it is the founders of Łódź's museum, in particular Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, who emerge as Quaytman's most prominent protagonists. The works of those two Polish artists were subjected by Quaytman to a number of alterations. *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35* includes depictions of Kobro's sculptures and blown up details of Strzemiński's canvases copied onto gessoed wood. Kobro's influence is not only present in individual works, but permeates the whole concept behind the arrangement of the exhibition—her theory of art in space resonates with the way the works appear in Muzeum Sztuki: "The essential basis of sculpture is space and the manipulation of this space, the organization of the rhythm of proportions, and harmony of form, bound with space. (…) A sculpture should become an architectural issue, a laboratory experiment into ways of resolving space, into the organization of traffic, and urban planning that sees the city as a functional organism (…)."

R. H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 [J. Zielińskaj*, 2019. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

It was Quaytman's interest in the work of Katarzyna Kobro that led her to Kobro's partner Władysław Strzemiński, his concept of "unistic painting" and his analyses of "structure of space as a whole and the way in which the object is embedded in it and constitutes a part of the whole." This echoes Quaytman's treatment of exhibitions as chapters in a book. Furthermore, the relations between the subsequent parts of the exhibition are given equal or more importance than the characteristics of the individual works and the respective stories they convey. Strzemiński's writing offers another important guideline: "Our seeing has not been given to us ready-made and unchanging". Following and expanding on his observations, Quaytman (often by using dense op-art patterns in her compositions), emphasizes the bodily conditioning of the viewers and dismantles the myth of a disembodied, all-rational eye of the mind.

Quaytman looks both backwards and forward. The first work that the viewer will encounter in the show is *O Tópico, Chapter 27* (2014), a square shaped wooden panel, with a high contrast op art pattern in the background and a black splotch of urethane foam emerging in the middle. The dark form conceals an eye, peeping at its onlooker through a small gap

in the spume veil. This bodiless eye formally mimics the one portrayed in the neighboring חקק, *Chapter 29* (2015), a work containing a visual quote from Paul Klee's monoprint *Angelus Novus*. As though mirroring the complex journey of the work by Klee through the minds and writings of Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem, the both god- and humanlike creature in Quaytman's painting was repeatedly distorted through thermographic investigation into its history.

R. H. Quaytman, Chapter 29, 2015 חקק. Photo HaWa. Courtesy Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.

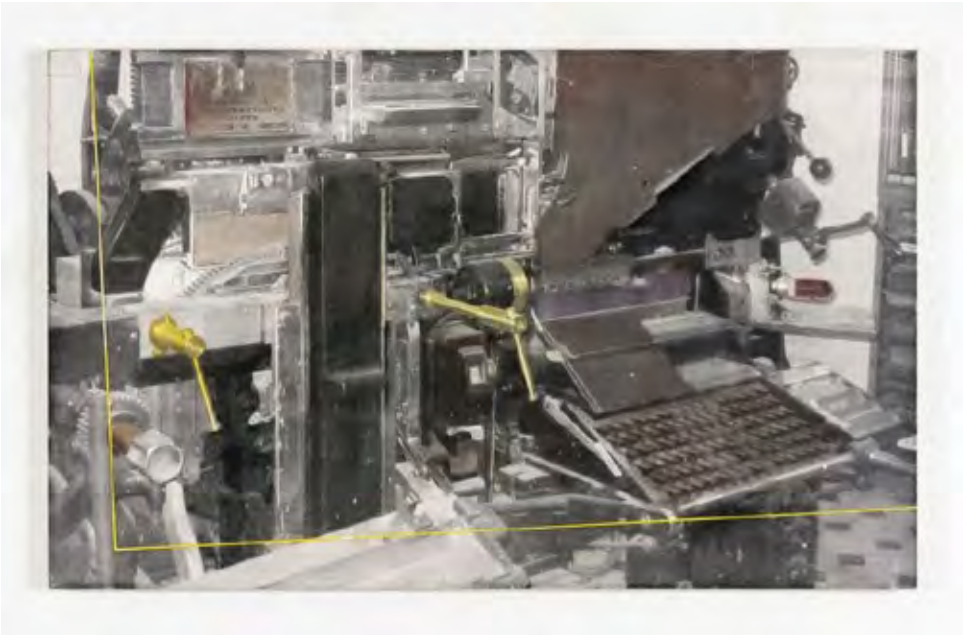
The realization that the eye in *O Tópico* belongs to the *Angelus Novus* brings to mind Benjamin's famous comment: *His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.* The show in Łódź is a tribute to the past and a the many ways to make sense of it. In Muzeum Sztuki, it is us who the seraph watches. With the angel's gaze on our backs we will continue through the exhibition until to discover hints pointing towards the protagonists of Quaytman's next inquiry—Marcel Broodthaers and René Magritte. It seems that in *Chapter 36*, everything will change except the rules.

EWA BORYSIEWICZ is a freelance curator and writer.

CONTEMPORARY LYNX

R.H. QUAYTMAN – THE PAINTING ODYSSEY

The recently opened exhibition of a New York-based artist Rebecca Quaytman at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź is a return to the artist’s very beginnings and a retrospective of sorts, presenting topics that have continually run through her work over the last 20 years. At the exhibition, older works are juxtaposed with over 30 new ones. The artist retells themes she finds crucial, reinterprets them and skillfully creates new contradictions and narratives. She writes a book. Her subsequent exhibitions since 2001 are chapters of the painting odyssey. They resemble an artistic journal or a calendar, and each constituent part records dialogues with different artists Rebecca encountered. The audiences can familiarize themselves with the pages of this new chapter, that are placed on shelves and reveal a thrilling narration. We can recognize the underlying idea, the main protagonists of the chapter and the symbolic end, which simultaneously, introduces the next chapter the artist already started envisioning.



R. H. Quaytman. The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35, Optima, Chapter 3, 2004, © R.H. Quaytman

Rebecca Quaytman is mainly inspired by the present times and the past. She likes to take a comprehensive look at past and present events. Family's private history, the history of art, history of places Quaytman visits, emotions and the direct and 'current' experiencing of the exhibition space – all these give rise to a coherent whole. The images archived in the artist's head overlap and penetrate one another. Her former works form a creative dialogue with the ones she has newly created as well as works by other artists. Such references to different works are truly fascinating. Besides constructivist and abstract compositions, we can observe the Amazons exhibiting their sexuality. We also see Persian women that reemerge in Rebecca Quaytman's work at different times of her career. We saw them in Łódź in the paintings from Chapter 35 entitled "The Sun Does Not Move". They were also clearly noticeable at the exhibition at Wiener Secession two years ago where "Chapter 32" was presented to the public. Those works were inspired by Otto van Veen's painting entitled "The Persian Women and Amazons and Scythians". At a meeting in Vienna in 2017, Rebecca Quaytman admitted that she was fascinated with female power and the story presented by van Veen that was hidden in the painting and was not referring to Christian narrative. The story itself is symbolic, but indeed, extremely interesting. The Persian women is a story from Plutarch's "On the Bravery of Women". The action takes place during the Persian Wars and depicts men who behaved like cowards wanting to flee and hide within the city walls. At that time women confronted the men and lifted up their own garments, allowing the female reproductive organs to show. They mockingly asked the men whether they wished to go back to the womb where they came from, i.e. to the status quo (understood as the women's womb, a home, a city, old rules). However, as it turned out, there was no return. These bare women may have looked powerless and vulnerable, but they forbade the men to go back to the city. The humiliated men had no choice but to turn around, beat the enemy and only then were they allowed to return to their women.

On the one hand, the story is about women's power symbolized by their bare wombs and breasts. We see women who derive new power from their natural features – features which defined women from the very beginning of mankind. Limitations became a new tool. On the other hand, what strikes us is the simultaneity of images. The story of the Persians in the painting by Otto van Veen is presented as a single frame, although, in fact, the described action spread over time and took place in various locations. Simultaneity is what we see in Rebecca Quaytman's paintings as well. The contemporary artist appropriated

the work by the old master and despite her interventions, all gestures/layers show through. The work by the old master was initially recorded in the form of a photograph. It was later transported and converted into a screen print. Stripped of its uniqueness, the picture loses even more of its distinctive shapes that now become blurred. This effect is achieved thanks to an optical manipulation which relies on human sight imperfection, simple divisions and rhythmicality. One needs to come really close and look hard in order to see the original image. It is extremely difficult to notice it though, because abstract stripes/interventions make looking at the picture quite painful.

R. H. Quaytman. The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35, The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019; © R.H. Quaytman

We are not able to go back and see the then 'status quo' (just like the Persians were unable to do it); we are being pushed away from it. Our perception mechanisms are being challenged and the way they function is fully revealed and symbolically ridiculed. Our eyes demand of us that we move, step further back and look from different angles to see more details. Many antagonistic forces pull

us simultaneously. They drag us and push us away. An old master and a contemporary artist, antiquity and modernity, familiar story and a secret. Gaps in the picture and the inability to see the entire image make us anxious and astonished at the same time – the Freudian feeling 'Unheimliche'.

Consequently, these opposite movements start to define our space. A flat picture becomes three-dimensional. When we take a step to the side, we notice that it is an object. This is not, however, due to the painting surface being perpendicular to its edge. Rebecca Quaytman paints on wood panels with edges trimmed at an angle. In this way she moves the painting away from the wall allowing air to get behind the painting's back. Apart from that, it stands on a shelf, just like a book. This creates a spatial composition.

In 1929, Katarzyna Kobro wrote in the Europe periodical, issue no. 2: "„[…] *Sculpture is a part of the space in which it is located. […] Sculpture enters space and space enters the sculpture. The spatiality of its construction, the connection between sculpture and space, force sculpture to reveal the sincere truth of its existence. That is why there should be no random shapes in sculpture.* […]"

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019, © R.H. Quaytman

When it comes to works by Rebecca Quaytman, shapes and sizes of picture-objects are by no means random. The above quote from Katarzyna Kobro was cited for a reason. Eight basic dimensions of Rebecca Quaytman's works are the result of her research on the golden ratio and works by Katarzyna Kobro, specifically, the "Spatial Composition 2" (1928). The composition was 50 cm high. Quaytman took this number, multiplied it by the golden number, i.e. 1.618, obtaining the initial dimensions: 20 x 32.36 inches. All later works are further mutations and various configurations of these dimensions.

The figure of Katarzyna Kobro and inspiration by her works leads us to another aspect of artistic activity of the American artist we are discussing. Quaytman's exhibitions are, in fact, a dialogue not only with other works and artists, but also with an institution. The theatrical setting of the palace building of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź becomes a stage. On this stage a tale unfolds. The content is communicated through pictures/actors. The theatrical movement and rhythm (rythm was extremely important for Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński) are embodied in the dance the audience performs as a result of being dragged towards and pushed away from the works.

R.H. Quaytman, Łódź Poem, Chapter 2 (Replica of Kobro's Spatial Composition, 1928), 2004

As I mentioned before, the title of the work series presented in the museum space is "The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35." The 35th tale. , But the first story, "The Sun. Chapter 1", was also presented in Łódź. Everything started in this city. At the exhibition we can see a portrait of Quaytman's grandfather,

whose story encouraged the artist to come to the city in 1999. Her grandfather was an emigrant with Jewish origins and came from Łódź. At the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź Quaytman familiarized herself with works by Kobro and Strzemiński. Her first encounter with their works was indeed significant. At that time painting was experiencing crisis internationally – no new solutions and possibilities to develop painting technique were thought to be possible. It seemed that the technique reached the point in its development where nothing else or more could be done. Quaytman experienced quite similar crisis and tried to find a new direction for her activity and painting as such. She then embarked on a journey in search of her own roots. The journey was a decisive factor when it comes to how her work developed. The works by the two prominent Polish artists from Łódź I mentioned above, gave her an answer to her questions about space, perspective and form, and helped her understand what a work of art could be like. At that point she started researching physical aspects of paintings and how paintings can interact with the space and the audience. She takes photographs of artworks (starting with the "Spatial Composition" by Katarzyna Kobro and continuing with van Veen's painting later on) and flattens them out, rubs part of the story they present away and shows that it is impossible to capture ('return to') the status quo of a photographed object. She symbolically 'ridicules' photography and painting, as if inducing them to further fight, but at the same time making us accept their inherent properties and limitations.

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Translated by Joanna Pietrak

Edited by Maria Sołyga

R. H. Quaytman. The Sun Does Not Move. Chapter 35

Curated by Jarosław Suchan

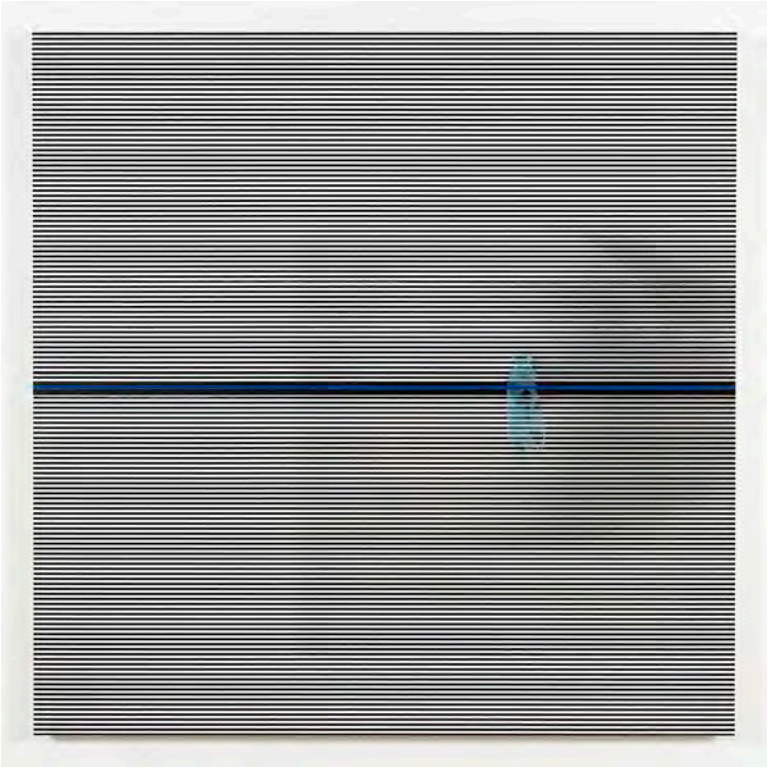
08.11.2019 – 23.02.2020

ms1, Więckowskiego 36, Łódź

MOUSSE

CONVERSATIONS

Everything Is There: R. H. Quaytman



R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*, 2019
Photo: Stephen Faught

R. H. Quaytman interviewed by Daniel Muzyczuk

How to reinvent painting in the context of the overwhelming power of photography? By adding tensions between narrative and abstraction, surface and depth, painterly and sculptural, unique and multiple, R. H. Quaytman has created a compelling and complex body of painterly work in the last two decades. This conversation took place before the opening of *Chapter 35* of her ever-growing “book” at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Poland. It occupies the same space where she first encountered the work of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, whose theories became important reference points for the rules governing her work.

DANIEL MUZYCZUK: Since 2001 you've been working on a book where chapters take the form of exhibitions composed of paintings. These are constructed in a few sizes and based usually on photographs silkscreen-printed on gessoed plywood panels. The system is composed of strict rules and retrospectively feels very coherent. How did this system evolve? And since the writing of the book takes so long, do you see a possibility that the first chapters will eventually need corrections or editing to fit the overall narrative?

R. H. QUAYTMAN: It's not so much that they'll require corrective edits, but that they encourage (re)interpretation. I know they could never be put together again in their entirety. They have been, thankfully, scattered all over the globe. Individual paintings can be borrowed back for exhibitions based on the goodwill of collectors and their willingness to work with the interpretations of curators. Every chapter proposes an interpretation because one grows from the last or has the next one in mind. Of course I'm not really making a book—the paintings are not pages and can't be read. But calling it a book helped extricate me from some bad painting habits. It was a way to shift my own viewpoint, not the viewer's. It also enabled me to incorporate the reading and research that I so like to do. When I began in the late 1980s, remember, painting was considered dead, even by myself.

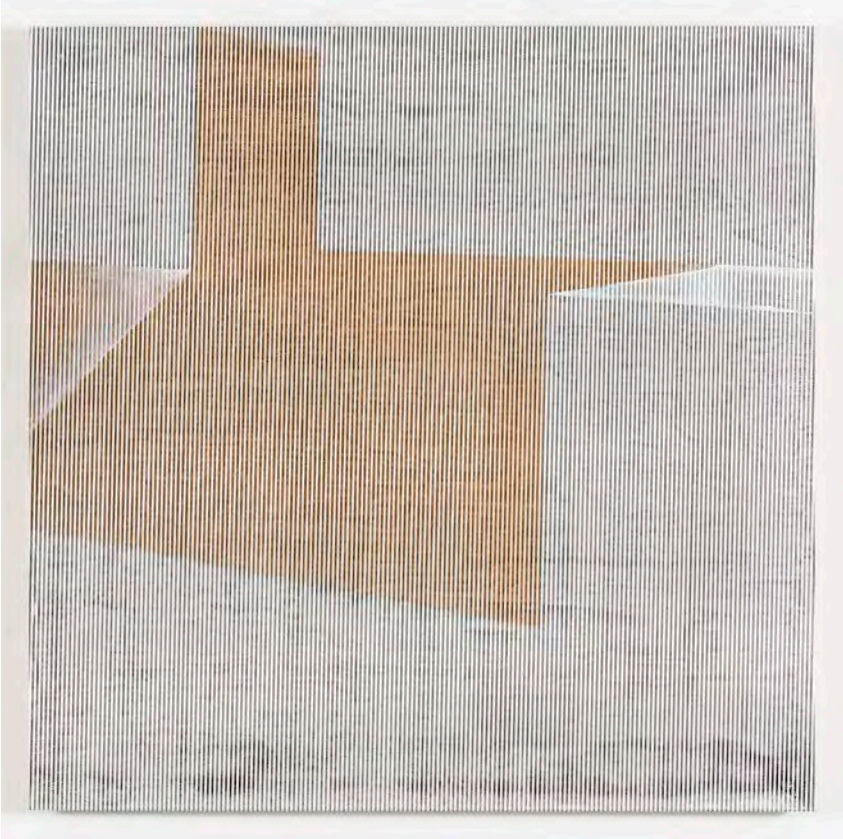
There are only two rules. The first has to do with the paintings' dimensions, which I got directly from the ideas of Katarzyna Kobro. Namely, there used to be ten sizes, but beginning with this group there will be only eight. These delimited dimensions guide the installation and enable me to fill quite large spaces with relatively small paintings. After studying Kobro, the architect Anne Tyng, and Tony Smith, I became interested in the generative logic of the golden section. I started from one dimension, 20 inches, roughly the height of Kobro's *Spatial Composition II* (1928), then I multiplied that by 1.618 and got my first size: 20 × 32.36 inches. From this—bigger or smaller, square or rectangle—all sizes have overall coherence.

The other rule is that all the paintings are on plywood panels with a beveled edge. I don't like painting on a bouncy canvas, and I don't like stretcher bars. The plywood also adds a sculptural quality that emphasizes the materiality of the picture.

R. H. Quaytman, *Lodz Poem, Chapter 2*, 2001-2004

DM: Were you experimenting a lot with plywood before you reached your set of solutions?

RHQ: I'd been working on wood for ten years before *The Sun, Chapter 1* (2001) was shown in 2001. Over the previous two decades I built the foundation of the book structure based on studies in art history, architecture, perspective, and photography. The question of how to counter photography became an ongoing pursuit. The original problem was how to make an abstract painting at all. At that time, in the early 1990s, I tried to bring perspective back into abstraction, with grids in a perspective arrangement whose vanishing point was the edge of the panel. A bit like Sarah Morris's paintings. I then wanted to see how the painting itself looked in perspective, and in order to do that I needed to build a model of an empty space. So I put a very small painting in a foam-core box and photographed it with a black-and-white Polaroid camera. I needed a camera to figure out a point of view, and the best way to get those photographs onto the panel was silkscreen. Photographs are obviously powerful, and I almost couldn't bear it on the painting, they just dominate legibility. So I began using Kobro's work as a way to think through these problems within painting. I chose her most minimal sculpture to build myself a prop. I wanted to use a three-dimensional sculpture to underscore photography's flatness—to show its inadequacy.



R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*, 2019
Photo: Stephen Faught

DM: There are multiple movements in your work. The painting invites you to see it from the front; the bevel promises more from an angle. Then there is the movement you plot while grouping a set of works into a chapter. The connections are forming a sequence that is presumed while seeing works in space.

RHQ: It is a simple thing that every artist does anyway, but maybe I do emphasize the hieroglyphic reading.

DM: There is yet another movement that is introduced by the act of superimposing images. The dialectical images are mediated by the spatial and temporal distance between them.

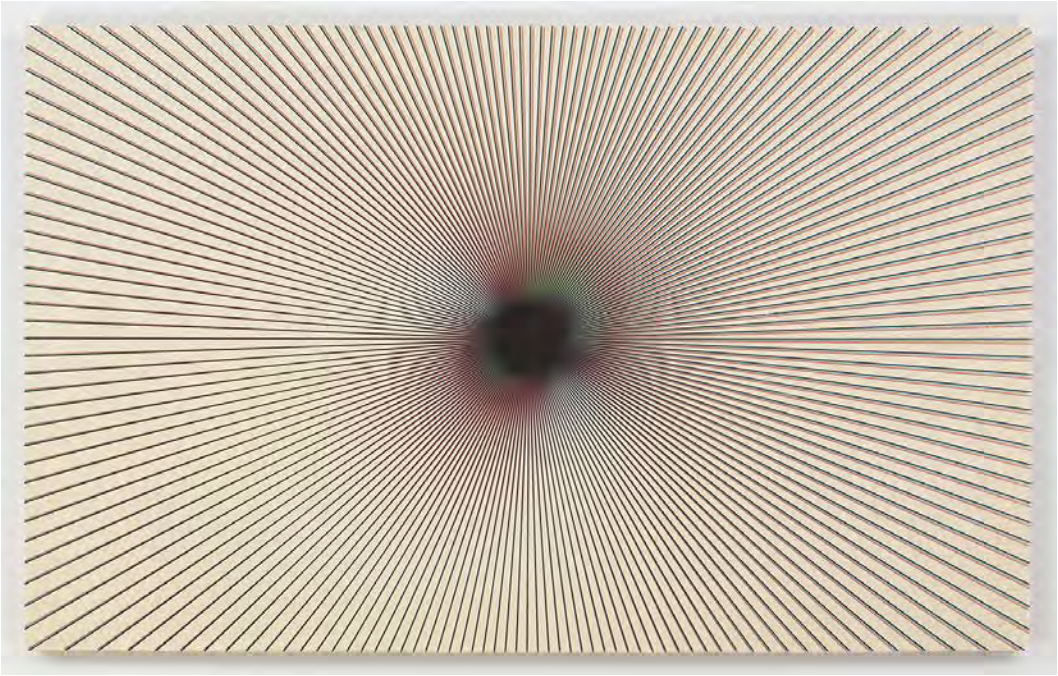
RHQ: I was interested in how to make a painting site specific, like all the interesting art of the time. So when I was invited to make some paintings for the 2000 show *The Earth Is a Flower, Construction in Process* in Bydgoszcz, Poland, I had this problem: How do I make site-specific paintings without a site? Łódź was where my grandfather Marcus Quaytman was born, and he was Jewish and it was Poland and, you know, one's thoughts inevitably go one way. I didn't want to go that way, though. I wanted to go through art history, and that's what led me straight to Kobro, and then later Władysław Strzemiński. My idea was to flip their theories regarding medium. Small conceptual twists can make paintings work the way other mediums do. If this was *Game of Thrones*, maybe painting is the only medium capable of defeating the victorious walking dead: photography.

DM: What qualities of Strzemiński's paintings are interesting for you? It is obvious that you take the notion of afterimage really seriously, as your work is full of solarizing memory processes. His Unistic works utilized effects predating Op art. Moreover, he was stressing the materiality of the painting itself.

RHQ: Exactly. This materiality includes its own status as a painting—hanging, or laying on a table, or placed on a shelf. I only thought of that through Kobro's ideas. I also worked on the reverse by putting a flat photo of her sculpture into a one-point perspective whose vanishing point was the edge of the panel.

DM: When you are using optical illusion, patterns, you force people to move away. Their bodies increase the distance in order to lose sight of the details and see the image that the pattern is obscuring.

RHQ: Yes, those paintings can repel and push the gaze onward to the next painting, to seek relief. Like little motors to propel movement through the exhibition. Of course you can look at them closely, but it burns. You need to go to the next painting for relief, but the afterimage burns through in the focus of the next. Like the computer screen.



R. H. Quaytman, *Silberkuppe, Chapter 17*, 2010
Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

DM: Burning is an ideal expression, as they cause afterimages. Your retina will superimpose that briefly seen pattern on the next image. *Chapter 17* at Silberkuppe, Berlin, in 2010 touched on this. But one might ask if the afterimage isn't also the simplest memory device. It certainly was for the half-blind Strzemiński.

RHQ: I recently began painting on the photographically based silkscreened images much more than I used to. To "paint" like a painter with a brush and a palette in a big studio on a big painting, with a cigarette. With an arm and hand.
Two works prepared for the show in Łódź are close-ups of Strzemiński paintings. I silkscreened onto panels close-ups of the paint and brushstrokes from his "optical" paintings. Through this focusing and reproduction I claim them. Their digital origin is underscored in the low resolution of the process itself. Some of them looked like those 3D patterns with embedded hidden images, which is how I went about approaching the paintings. I allowed that strong urge to look at them in a way that another image jumps out, and was surprised to find where it led. Maybe it's a trick to claim my innocence.

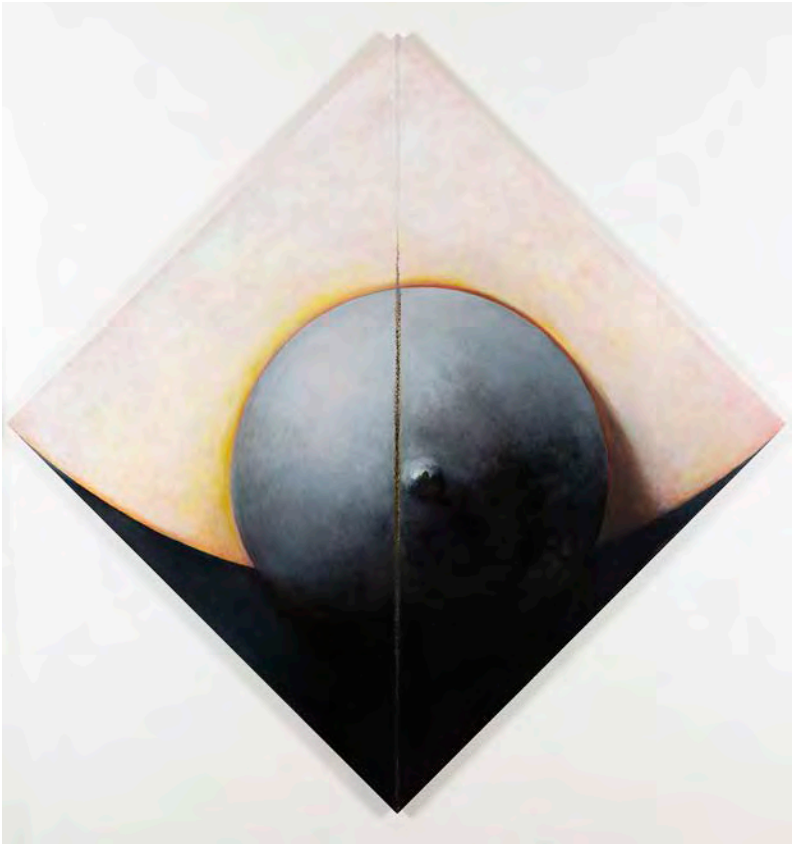
DM: You use language as a kind of keystone that fills the abstraction with meaning. This figurative function of language adds an element to the abstract. It is visible in the titles of individual chapters.

RHQ: Everything is abstract now, and so this process of seeing things in things is easier. It has disintegrated into digits. So we have to figure out what and how we are seeing, and know when we see what we're supposed to see.
I guess I do follow language reluctantly. I find it helpful to think of paintings with things like nouns and verbs and even declension. When I'm happiest with a painting, it feels like I've made an aphorism.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*, 2019
Photo: Stephen Faught

DM: This reminds me the painting *Pengő* (1966) by Victor Vasarely, which is composed of yellow circles. The name refers to a Hungarian currency used in the first half of the twentieth century. This simple gesture transforms the abstract into the figurative.

RHQ: Yes, it's ironically poetic. I get many ideas through poetics. Every word resonates in multiple directions. Try reading a poem as if you were looking at a painting: it always seems simpler that way. Gershom Scholem wrote somewhere that "the image escapes in every direction." Images are radically free and dangerously malleable. I'm interested in seeing that escape, in order to lead the painting reluctantly but gracefully outside itself. Perhaps this is aphoristic. Anyway it is from this perspective that began twenty years ago with a trip to Poland that I got the idea to use that word "book." *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35* is also a retrospective look back. The method, with its removed logic, led me to reflect on the sci-fi quality of the present. Or maybe it works like a seventeenth-century landscape by Jacob van Ruisdael. I'm not sure.



R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*, 2019
Photo: Stephen Faught

DM: Your practice is also rooted in institutional critique, which probably overlaps with your capacity as a curator. You speak about the condition of painting, reproduction, authorship, and the conditions of making an exhibition. This is why it needs to be strongly localized or contextual.

RHQ: I learned a little about curating and site specificity while working at PS1 in the late 1980s. That job taught me more than any MFA could have. Curating can be quite brutal because certain works have to be given more or less emphasis than others. It is not fair and it is not democratic. That early experience also was a lesson in the power of art history to shape and distort, and that I'd better make my own. As Kobro wrote, "I like to have fun by correcting what was not finished in any former artistic movement."[1]

DM: This leads to the question of obsolescence. I am curious what you would say about the relation between that territory versus nostalgia.

RHQ: I think the notion of nostalgia is changing. For example, the distance between Strzemiński and myself feels shorter now than when I began. In some ways, this a-chronological nature is the most anti-perspectival thing I've ever made.

DM: A work placed in a group show shares time and space with other pieces that come from different places and moments.

RHQ: That is the reason the title of *Chapter 35 is The Sun Does Not Move*. It's a return to *Chapter 1, The Sun*. I love the idea that the artist can build a chain or genealogy that visibly links with other art. This is different from the usual sense of appropriation, which was more about delinking the art object from the male artist.

R. H. Quaytman, *The Sun, Chapter 1*, 2001-2002
Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

DM: The feminist issues have become explicit recently in your work. Was your decision to work through painting also a consciously feminist decision?

RHQ: My feminism arose initially from mining art history for lesser-known artists. Rather than use Warhol or Marcel Duchamp like Sturtevant or Sherrie Levine, I found it productive to research and base my practice on artists who were not so famous, whose ideas were not so exposed, like Kobro and Hilma af Klint I also got quite a lot from Andrea Fraser's piece *May I Help You* (1991). And naturally politics begins with one's identity. There is unavoidably biography in the paintings. It is my firm belief that all art includes biography, consciously or not.

[1] Katarzyna Kobro, in *Composing the Space. Sculptures in the Avant-Garde* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki; London: Walther König, 2019), 25.

R. H. Quaytman is an artist living and working in New York City, whose works have been featured in documenta 14, the 54th Venice Biennale, and the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Solo shows dedicated to her work have taken place at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Secession, Vienna, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the Renaissance Society, Chicago, as well as other venues. In 2019, Quaytman is presenting a solo exhibition at Muzeum Sztuki titled *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35*.

View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:
A Book of Her Own: R. H. Quaytman's Visual Historiography – A Conversation with Katarzyna Bojarska
authors:
Katarzyna Bojarska, R.H. Quaytman
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A Book of Her Own: R. H. Quaytman's Visual Historiography – A Conversation with Katarzyna Bojarska

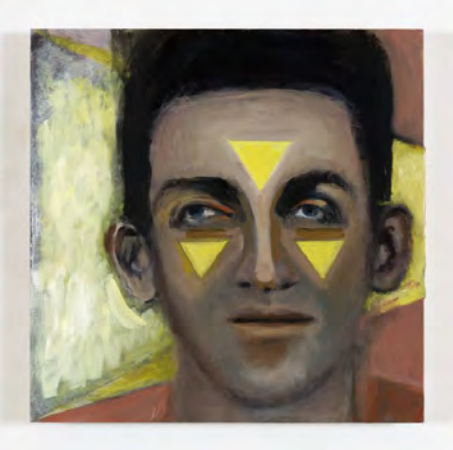
The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, Installing at the Muzeum Sztuki

KB: Could you tell me why, in 2001, you set out on your life's-work project of "painting" the book of R. H. Quaytman, preparing each exhibition as a subsequent "chapter"? Was it about your personal history, the historicity of the moment? Of your moment? What I immediately thought about, and taking to consideration the importance of history, Jewish history, art history, traumatic history, and your personal history in your work, was that for some Jewish-American writers and artists 9/11 has become their own "event," so to speak – a sort of foundational trauma which interrupted the dominant narrative that had established them as the so-called "second generation" or the "generation of postmemory." It's more intuition than hypothesis. I'm thinking here for instance of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* , which was his only major work after the two volumes of *Maus*.

RQ: It wasn't really in 2001; I've been preparing for this since the 1980s, but things got more intense at the turn of the century. I had a baby in 1995, and although I was always very involved and active in the New York art world, I wasn't showing a lot. I had a very hard time getting my work into exhibitions or finding a gallery; I hardly knew conceptually where the things I was thinking about in my studio were leading. It took me a decade to work through photography via the Kobro model. And it was by chance that Ryszard Waśko invited me to a show in Bydgoszcz, and at that time I knew I wanted to make site-specific paintings. And it was also at that time that my father was

diagnosed with cancer and he was dying, and I realized that I knew next to nothing about the history of his side of my family. All of a sudden, these elements coming together made me very curious about this unknown past.

In 2000 I came to Poland and went to Łódź, the city where my paternal grandfather, Marcus Quaytman, was born. He was a Polish Jew who emigrated to the US in the 1910s, and here I was in Poland, not even 60 years after the Holocaust but also in the city of the avant-garde, of constructivism. How to integrate the two? Or how to get to one through the other? I took some pictures during the train rides then, and I learnt a lot about Kobro and Strzemiński. And later on, back home, when I was preparing for the show at the Queens Museum of Art, I was struck by another event from my family's history, the memory (or actually non-memory) of which emerged from the site: the museum is located on the former grounds of the 1939 World's Fair. I used this project to recall the repressed family trauma: on October 14, 1940, my paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were on their way home from the World's Fair when an accident happened – their car was hit by an oncoming Long Island Railroad train. Both were killed. While researching for this exhibition – which ultimately became Chapter 1 of the book, I came across an article in *The Sun* that described the event. I appropriated the newspaper's masthead and its title (but also the sun as the beginning of the day, the beginning of a story anew), and I turned to the photographs taken on the train in Poland, and in an overgrown Jewish graveyard, to my encounters with the avant-garde, and to the archival material I found in New York. 9/11 came later,



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019

but it certainly added to all of this, provided an unexpected context, another trauma. This is how it started. So, it was an impulse to tell the story; I don't know the story clearly yet, but I'm always trying to figure it out.

KB: The story that begins in Poland?

Lodz Poem, Chapter 2 (Jewish Graveyard), 2001-2004

RQ: Funny, it was a very patriarchal urge in the beginning, in the sense of wanting to go back home and to know the genealogy. Also, I know my mother's family story very well – they're all Irish, I spent a lot of time in Ireland, and I'm an Irish citizen too. But I knew nothing about Poland. So, I took a train one day, alone, from Bydgoszcz to Łódź. It was depressing and interesting at the same time. So, as you see, the book began. The first three chapters (*The Sun*, *Łódź Poem*, and *Optima*) were all based on this little trip to Łódź. I found out the Quaytmans (then spelled Kwejtman) were ostrich-feather dealers, so I used ostrich feathers in Chapter 35, as symbols of lost nature.

KB: The natural vis-à-vis the human-historical.

The Sun, Chapter 1, 2001

RQ: Yes. This trip also allowed me to find a key to making site-specificity the origin of the chapter and the content of the paintings, and actually also a key to seriality: trains and their movement – series of views from the train window; they're all interconnected, and relate to each other in this or the other way. In a way, I could be saying I'm making a train as much as I'm making a book [laughs]. I took a leap from trains to filming and montage – to movement in the painting, out and into the next one.

KB: Also, chapters and spectators. The montages in your work

are mobilized by all kinds of connections. I wonder, how was Chapter 1 received when you showed it for the first time in New York City?

RQ: OK – nothing much happened in terms of response. I made two shows of the same chapter: 40 paintings, each panel the same size – one in a gallery and one at the Queens Museum. After this, again, nothing much for two years

KB: So, when did the second chapter come about?

RQ: When I was invited to Poland again in 2004. And there was another opportunity to show it in a space in Brooklyn, and that was *Łódź Poem*. So, you know, my father is dying, I'm raising this kid... distracted and confused. In 2001 I turned 40...

KB: ...and it seems like a very powerful passage between two lives and two histories: one that's running to an end – the history of your father, Harvey Quaytman, himself a painter, and a life story that's about to begin – your child's.

RQ: It was. Also, my father had a studio full of paintings which didn't sell. So, to me – who at the time had begun accumulating unsold paintings – it was traumatic and paralyzing to look at all of this work that no one wanted. It's how I arrived at the first idea to make 80 paintings of one size: I'd be able to put them all on a shelf in my own space after the exhibition. That way, it wouldn't be so shameful, so bad. This feeling of failure was what I began with. But then I became involved in the artists' run gallery called Orchard in 2005. That was the beginning of the time when the depression lifted, because I finally had a context – I realized what I'd been missing was the context. I still think it's the number one problem for artists – the lack of a context.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: What was it about Katarzyna Kobro that you found so

relevant to your own life and work?

RQ: I was overwhelmed by the tragic nature of her life story, but even more so I loved her work! Especially the piece I ended up making an exact replica of – the *Spatial Composition 2* [1928]. When I photographed it for the first time, I realized that it's not marked by time or space. It could have been made any time and be any size. To me, that particular piece was free and open. It was a very liberating experience, and I decided to use the sculpture-image as a tool, literally. Both paintings were entitled *Spatial Composition 23.3 Parsecs Away*. A parsec is an astronomical unit for measuring the distance of a star from Earth. A star whose light was released in 1928 would take 23.3 parsecs to reach Earth by 2004. I painted "1928" on top of the image, in reference to the date of the sculpture depicted in the photograph. Kobro aimed at integrating her objects into both their material and subjective contexts, and also into architecture and time, stressing the perceptual and temporal experience of spectatorship. I tried to appropriate this idea for painting. I've been reading a lot about architecture, also because I was Dan Graham's assistant for a long time, and he influenced a lot of what I was reading. And he turned me on to Anne Tyng, who was Louis Kahn's partner – they had an architecture firm together – and it was her sense of geometry that really gave him his backbone, so to say. And Kobro was similar in her approach to geometry. And both of them struggled because of their status as females. And of course there was also Hilma af Klint, the radical female pioneer of abstraction, whose exhibition I did for PS1 and who taught me the sense of the work as a whole. As you see, I love these ways to reconceptualize. It doesn't even have to be seen in the object itself, it's just how you think about it. And it's

Lodz Poem, Chapter 2, 2001-2004

hard to find ways to change one's thinking, you know?

KB: These acts of reconceptualization seem to lead to a paradox where this very well-thought-through system is at the same time boundless and open to rearrangement. As a viewer I feel invited to participate in this vertiginous process, to bond with your "text." It seems to me your "book" is an exceptional case of the writerly text Roland Barthes was talking about in *S/Z* [1970], which, unlike the readerly text – rather straightforward and demanding little insight or effort to be understood – needs time, attunement, and proper engagement, because its meaning isn't immediately accessible, nor is it evident, owing to the elaborate and experimental use of language. Maybe this is the Irish in you – Barthes celebrated James Joyce for his writerly texts [laughs]. Your chapters require lots of effort and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, various forms of relationality and affective attunements to counter the recurrent frustration, failure, sense of loss, and being out of sync. It seems to me that the image and the viewer constantly desynchronize temporally and spatially, move away from each other. At the same time, viewers seem to create a fugitive community of readers, those who might never meet yet participate in "writing" the same book. And so, here we are, 35 chapters into the story. But when it comes to paintings that form specific chapters, they seem to work and not work on their own at the same time; they're serial and part of a story, or rather parts of different stories at different times and sites.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

RQ: They're dispersed after each chapter is completed and exhibited; they're dispersed to people, collections, markets...

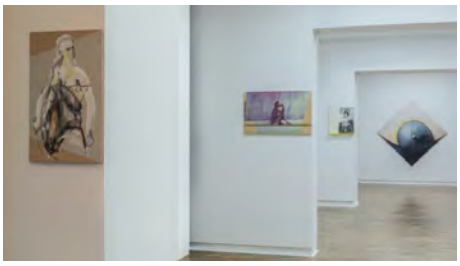
KB: So, the book is never one book, nor is it a totality, but rather

a potentiality.

RQ: It's never complete; it's sort of lost, always.

KB: Does this loss bother you at all, or is it a productive condition?

RQ: In essence, I do like the way it's destroyed by the market. There's one thing though: I still have all the films I made the silkscreens with, and the sizes of the panels remain consistent, so whenever I want or need an image again, I can retrieve it. But every time I pull a silkscreen it's different. But they're monoprints. Silk-screening gave me access to content without the need to paint it with a brush. I found that liberating. It abstracts the photograph, materializes it, and snaps attention back to the picture plane. I've only very rarely printed an image twice, but here I do it several times for this chapter.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Yet, you've also claimed that one painting is never the painting. What is it then? In an interview you said that "the idea of one painting not being *the* painting is feminine. My idea of meaning being contingent on the neighbour, or the context, is a kind of feminine concept. [...] [it's] *boundless*."[1] I find it fascinating, this refusal of totality, and as you yourself wrote: "It's a good thing to be past the time of genius, the intuitive, and the heroic."[2] The stress here is on potentiality and becoming; on the fact that meaning is never given, nor imposed by a sovereign, but rather it's becoming in relationality: it's "interimaginal" and interpersonal. As one critic said, "the monocular focus of the egotistical isolated picture" is being displaced and sight is set in motion – it leaves the picture and begins to wander.

RQ: I love the idea of making a genealogy that visibly links with other works of art and artists rather than mine or me, me, me. I think my approach differs from how we tend to understand

appropriation, whose aim was to delink the art object from the male artist. Also, I've never quite trusted the idea of one painting equaling a story or narrative. To me, seriality means the fact that one painting is informed by others in a spatial-temporal sequence.

KB: This seems similar to the feminist works (mostly photographic) from the 1970s, very much based on seriality, multiples, and dispersal, as well as a refusal of fixed meanings and identities, yet from a different standpoint.

RQ: Of course. Just think of how history has changed, even in our lifetime. For example, the Holocaust: what it was in the 1980s, and how it's being "told" nowadays, has radically changed. Feminism also, as a historical fact, keeps radically changing shape. So, for example when, ten years ago, I wouldn't voluntarily proclaim my works' feminist leanings – today it seems the only option, politically and sexually.

KB: Yes, the only option for survival.

RQ: There's an old engraving by Raimondi that supposedly depicts Hecuba, the mother of Paris, She's seen reclining, pregnant, and having a nightmare that supposedly prophesied giving birth to a flame [Paris] that sets Troy on fire. Right beneath her reclining figure is a mirror image of herself or another woman. I love this image; I used it: cropped it to open it up. I included it in Chapter 22 [*I Modi*, 2011]. This led me to Raimondi's more famous engraving entitled *The Judgment of Paris*, which recurs in the current chapter in Łódź. I like the androgynous appearance of the nymph who looks back at us. If paintings could have a posture, this would be it!

Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Dream of Raphael*, 1507–1508 / *Morning, Chapter 30*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles 2016, installation view

KB: So, your paintings look back at us and the book gets

written in the process. All the loss and dispersal that we were discussing made me think of the Lurianic idea of creation, degeneration, and attempts at restoration. His Kabbalistic theory is based on three concepts: *tzimtzum* – "contraction" or "withdrawal," *shevirat ha-kelim* – "breaking of the vessels," and *tiqqun* – "restoration." Creation emerges from divine light (the sun!), which is enclosed in the "vessels," most of which break; the catastrophe introduces disharmony and instigates the struggle to restore order and save history. Humans play an important role here: they work with words, combining them in order bring back harmony. Your book seems like this kind of attempt to mend history, to glue the vessels together. The difference being, as we've already said, that the totality is left behind, and the laborious reparation, the putting together, remains.

RQ: I feel very much attached to Jewish thought and tradition. I'm not a believer in… but if I was, I'd be Jewish; I like their concept of doubt and I love the Hebrew alphabet. I got lots of ideas from Hebraic and Kabbalistic thinking, from Gershom Scholem and of course Walter Benjamin. My trip to Israel was also a very important event, again personally and artistically. I worked on Chapter 29 there, entitled ***???*** [2015], exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. While researching for the show, I visited the Gershom Scholem Library at the National Library of Israel, and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* [1920] is part of the collection. I literally sank into Hebrew typography and Kabbalah for about two years. I researched the exchange between Scholem and Benjamin on Klee's painting. I found my

Haqaq, Chapter 29 invitation card drawing

title in this reading, the Hebrew word ??? [*qaq*], meaning – "to engrave" but also "to legislate." It also sounds violent. As we all know, first there was the word. This word was apparently engraved or cut in stone. I also travelled to the desert and took photographs there. In Israel my chapter was hung to read from right to left. It's interesting that for this exhibition I actually ended up painting a crucifix, to my total horror. But there it was! I draped it with an alphabet. I love it when a painting goes on its own little walk with or without me sometimes. Yet, you've to follow what it's doing even when it arrives at images that you never in a million years thought you might paint. To my surprise, many people don't see it as a cross but rather as constructivist geometry.

KB: When you were talking about the process of "writing" the Israeli chapter, I kept returning to the concept of the site-specificity of your paintings. It seems that even after the exhibition is over, the dispersed paintings carry with them the memory of the site, the building, the city, the country, other artists, etc.

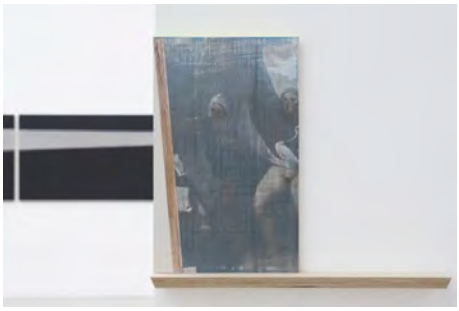
RQ: I think it was one of the problems that got me to the idea of calling it a "book." I was able to say that site-specificity includes these ideas as they're illustrated in this book in various ways. Sometimes they're illustrations of a lost text. They can also be reorganized by other people to do their own thing. So, also the whole idea of hieroglyphic reading rather than Renaissance perspective. I read a lot about perspective beginning back in 1992, actually – trying to figure out how to bring perspective into abstraction. Then I got a camera and photographed the Kobro sculpture. How do I say where the site is? It can be in a concept, in a word, or many things. I think site-specificity involves mirroring where the spectator stands. Yet, "where the spectator stands" can be widely interpreted.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Where is it now, here, in Łódź in 2019?

RQ: Yeah, where is it now? Basically, I started because I needed to do part two of *Spine*,[3] update the whole manual of the book, and I wanted to do it here. I started going through my most important images and looking for this one image, a source. I found this image from Chapter 21 called *Cherchez Holopherne* [2011] with Judith, another wonderful feminist protagonist who is the source of so many wonderful paintings, often by women – Artemisia Gentileschi being the most famous. Anyway, there it was, this one image of something that looks like a stone breast. It looks more like the idea of a breast rather than a real one: it's circular and seems cast in cement.

KB: Always too round and too high [laughs].



An Evening, Chapter 32 / Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Judgment of Paris*, 1510–1520 / *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 [Judgment]*, 2019

RQ: Exactly – no gravity to this breast at all. But there's only so much I understand to do that again – it opens Chapter 35, a chapter where I introduce a new size, which has a whole new complex logic to it. Now all of them fit as modular units, better than before. So, now there are eight sizes, and the biggest is 7 ft. I moved into a much bigger studio and found myself painting more and more on photographs. It got to a point where I was an abstract expressionist with a cigarette and a glass of whiskey in my hand. It was much more physical, painting in this old-fashioned sense, and much slower too. So, for Chapter 35 I began with that image and two close-ups of Strzemiński's paintings, with these very wet brushstrokes. One of them is

particularly suggestive – it looks like lips – and I also went back to the Kobro sculpture and took a few images of that. In my studio I still had the screens from my Secession chapter [*An Evening*, 2017–2018] where I did Amazons and Persians, so I used them, and just started painting over the silkscreens and just let it go where it was going to go. So, it's very much about looking back. I really love painting on photographs.

KB: Why?

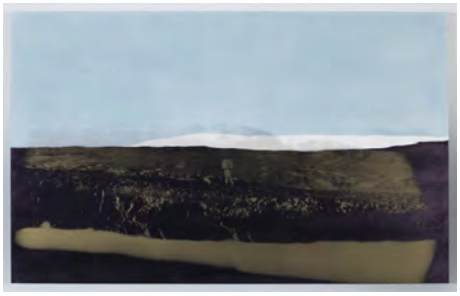
RQ: It just frees you up. Always the problem is the blank white nothingness. As if there had been nothing before this image that I'm bringing into this world of images. So, with photographs as the ground you eliminate the problem, and then you can see – you've a choice what to see, and you can start painting what you see, no matter what it is.

KB: Do you photograph a lot?

RQ: Not seriously, no. But back then… I had this wonderful Polaroid camera but it finally broke. It broke on my last trip here, when I went to Treblinka. So, my last Polaroid images, the ones I truly love, were those Polaroids. With digital photographs it's as if I don't care, you know?

KB: So, this trip to Treblinka…

RQ: Yes, it must have been in 2016. I just finished this huge panorama for an exhibition at the MOCA in Los Angeles [*Morning*, Chapter 30], and it was right before Donald Trump was elected. And I remember thinking Trump might win because of the poverty and homelessness I saw around the neighborhood of MOCA, simply that. This was beyond acceptable, something felt desperately wrong, and it was going to be bad. The panorama was made up of 22 60-inch-wide panels stretching 110 ft. I think it's the best thing I ever made. Right after opening that chapter



Morning Chapter 30, 2016

I had to do research for Documenta 14 [2017], so I went to Athens, and during the trip I pursued my interest in Amazons and Persians for the upcoming Succession exhibition. I went to Delphi and took Polaroids there of my assistant Eli Farahmand standing in the landscape. It was really beautiful. I did a lot of reading then about the beginnings of European history and researching how the Amazons fit into it. Also, the ancient histories of Iran and the Persians and all of that went into this history, which is truly fascinating. There was this incredible, under-researched matriarchy – the oracles in Delphi, basically. I thought it wasn't insignificant that basically every important temple in Greece depicts Amazons being defeated. This road trip brought me through Vienna to look at the van Veen paintings again, and then to Berlin. I woke up in the hotel room there to see that Trump had been elected.

The trip had one last stop, with a visit to Warsaw and Łódź. I've always avoided the Holocaust as an overt theme for painting, especially when I did work to be shown in Poland. It seemed like all the American artists who ever come here always end up focusing on "the Holocaust" with an air of superiority, and it seems embarrassing. There are so many other subjects; the tradition of Polish modernism and conceptual art is so deeply interesting to me because it shows what artists thought about outside of capitalism or the hope of riches. Anyway, I trusted my instinctual modesty when it came to that existential tragedy. While in Vienna, I discussed this trip to Poland with my friend, Sylvie Liska, and she recommended visiting Treblinka. It's only two hours from Warsaw, and it's better to experience spiritually than Auschwitz, which has essentially become a museum. So, after Berlin, in this post-

Parthian Shot, Chapter 31 [Treblinka], 2017-2019

election mood, I resolved to make this "pilgrimage," not sure though how to get there. I began asking the few people I knew in Warsaw, and Andrzej Przywara generously offered the use of his car for the day and he'd found someone I knew a little from NYC to drive me. This was Joanna Zielińska. The drive turned into a love affair for the next three years. She became something between a muse and a siren. I made quite a few paintings from the Polaroids of that day. In Chapter 35 there's a very powerful portrait of Joanna, using a cast I made of her face last summer. It makes an illusion called the hollow-face illusion.

KB: It's a beautiful story! Quite analogous to the story of your father's dying and your child being born. Another powerful passage.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019

RQ: You know, with this looking back thing that has interested you for a while, it's so interesting to me that I never understand what to do until I understand what I did. So even though it might very often sound like I know very well what I'm doing, with all these ideas, and rules, and systems I have, it's not true – I never knew when I was making it, what I was really doing.

KB: That knowledge is the thing of looking backward, and yet when you do that, it seems you do it in your own, very particular way, which implicates many others and which is always a response not to what was but rather what is, here and now, right? You talked about it previously, how there is never direct access to what was, how mediation and abstraction are crucial to the process of backward looking.

RQ: You know, that also applies to art history. I'm sick of the fact that so many fantastic female artists were repressed, and

it's our job to bring them back from oblivion. Their work is what might save us, for real. It has to be taken into account. The process of forgetting or erasure is always active; there's always someone behind it. We need to see it clearly now. On the other hand, one needs to remember that sometimes it's also good to be outside the dominant structures. It can be beneficial, especially in formal terms.

KB: Of course, because you don't have to care too much.

RQ: You don't have to care about the issues that are being cared for at the time, and instead you can find other issues to care about and other communities to address. Vision is clearer.

KB: And once you don't seek mainstream recognition, you can allow yourself thoughts and affects, forms and poetics which might be truly revolutionary though not yet praised as such. Let's return to the sun now. If *the sun does not move* now, what does it do here?

RQ: [laughs] The other day, I was listening to – very cheesy – a biography of Leonardo da Vinci while I was painting, and they read this quote from his notebook with that phrase and it just got stuck in my head: *the sun does not move*, *the sun does not move*... and I thought, wait a minute, for one thing, it orients you to a bigger idea of space; on the other hand, it's also wrong – the sun *does* move, but we don't know that from our senses. So, yes, it's about orientation, how to orient oneself toward the source of light and life, I guess. And it's a beautiful title.

Spine, Chapter 20, 2011

KB: And it relates to the origins of the book, to its opening, oscillating between Queens and Łódź.

RQ: Yes, but also maybe to an idea that this book isn't moving

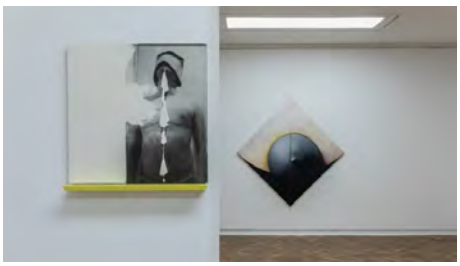
either.

KB: Or maybe it's the only movement.

RQ: Yes, I guess you could say something like that. You, yourself cannot grasp the whole story from the outside. I read this line in the Washington Post the other night: "Scientists are confused about the universe." I thought this was fantastic! All the maps are wrong; it's all to be retold and reframed – how great [laughs].

KB: What is right, then? Us, our memories of the relationships we had, the feelings we felt. The more I think about the two "sun" titles, the more it gets complicated and dense: the sun of the first chapter is related to the newspaper, the popular medium which announced the death of your relatives – personal trauma which emerges in the midst of this huge collective Jewish trauma, the Holocaust. Almost as if the news announced the "wrong" death, and yet somebody's loss. 35 chapters into the story, the sun seems to be you. It doesn't move; it's a kind of *axis mundi* – the world swirling, the world which is grasped in the book.

RQ: There's one more element to that word, which is my son, who is also my daughter. He transitioned right after Chapter 20 [*Spine*, 2011]. In retrospect, I can see how this became a primary reference. So, as I already told you, in Chapter 21 I first used the breast image and it was a tough time – it still is, but not in the same kind of way. A very challenging and confusing experience for all of us.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Which again introduces this perspective of beginnings and endings, of how one narrates the story of their lives – as who and for whom. It immediately brings to my mind Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, a book which, a little bit like yours, is made up of so many other books and people but has a unique voice,

expression, and affect to it.

RQ: You know what, I was just thinking it would be great if I could just give a writer, like Maggie, all my images and then tell them to write the story they see. I wonder what would happen. And if it would still work without this biography. I hope so.

Katarzyna Bojarska owes her gratitude to Agnieszka Pindera and Daniel Muzyczuk from Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and to Ivan Gaytan, the assistant of R.H. Quytman for their generosity and help.

1 *I always felt that paintings had a lot of ego*. Lidija Haas, an interview with R.H. Quaytman, *Apollo. The International Art Magazine, 26 November 2017,* https://www.apollo-magazine.com/i-always-felt-that-paintings-had-a-lot-of-ego/ accessed January 20, 2020.

2 R. H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*, published on the occasion of the exhibition *From One O to the Other* at the Orchard, New York, 2008.

3 *Spine* (2011) is a kind of retrospective after a decade of Quaytman "writing" her book – a group of 37 paintings which can be treated as an abbreviated index to her work since 2001.

Nancy Princenthal, "The Pleasures of Refraction," *Art in America*, January 2019, pp. 56-63

Art in America

THE PLEASURES OF REFRACTION

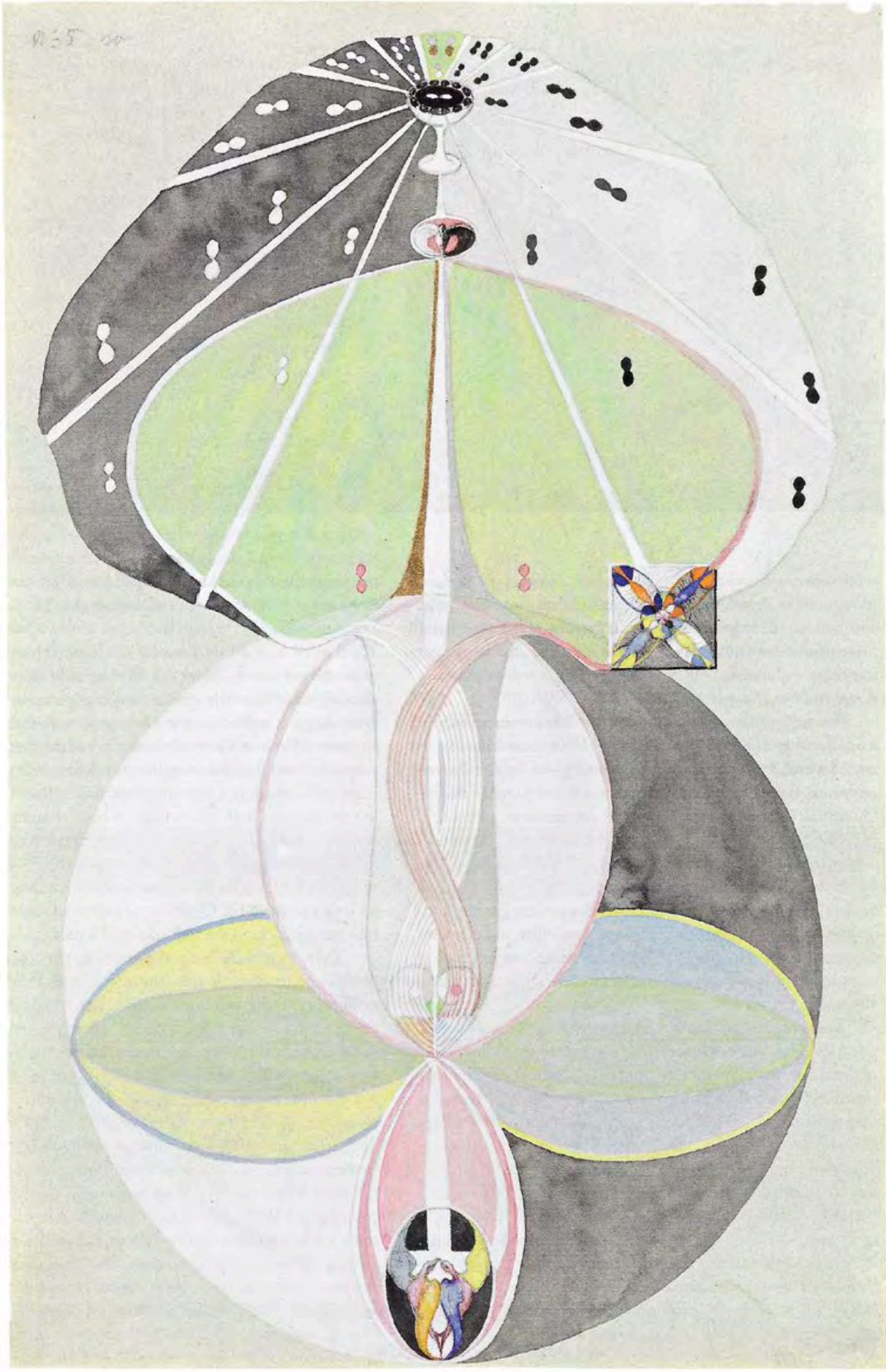
Austere new paintings by R.H. Quaytman serve as an addendum to Hilma af Klint's current retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, suggesting a deep connection between artists separated by a century.

by Nancy Princenthal

AT THE VERY END of the Guggenheim Museum's big, revelatory exhibition of work by Hilma af Klint is a single stretch of the museum's spiraling ramp devoted to luminous and perplexing new paintings by R.H. Quaytman. Looked at another way, which as it happens is the one Quaytman recommends, the unusual joint exhibition starts there, at the top, where it is introduced by her lucid, thought-provoking wall text. "To 'obey intuition' and 'understand only in part' were two commands that Hilma af Klint received and I chose to follow," Quaytman begins, laying out a strand of the tangle of interests she and the early modernist af Klint share, before admitting that such half-blind submission is, "after all, for better or worse, what artists do." Calling intuition "a harsh master" that encourages work that can seem "childish, vain, fleeting, and subject to bad aging," she cites hazards for abstract painters—for artists of any kind—that have seldom been named more candidly. Unimpeachably humble, undeniably mature, and convincing in their promise of lasting intellectual interest and sensual appeal, Quaytman's paintings easily defy those risks.

The museum has placed its own introductory text near the lobby where you'd encounter it first when starting from the bottom. Signed by senior curator Tracey Bashkoff and curatorial assistant David Horowitz, who together organized both shows, the statement nimbly outlines the basis of Quaytman's work and its relationship to af Klint. The two artists were born a century apart—af Klint in 1862 just outside Stockholm, Quaytman in 1961 in Boston—and both found their stride at forty. Introduced to af Klint's work by her father, the painter Harvey Quaytman, the younger artist organized the first solo US exhibition devoted to af Klint, in 1989, at PS1 in New York. It was momentous for Quaytman, catalyzing an ongoing research project of uncommon depth and stimulating a marked change in her own work. Writing in 2013 for a book that accompanied an exhibition of af Klint's work at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Quaytman proclaimed, "Hilma af Klint's work, reception, ambition, and life reflect absolutely everything I think about when it comes to painting."[1] Moreover, both artists let it be known that they were speaking for others. In her wall text Quaytman writes of af Klint: "She was able to deploy visual ideas by asserting that they were not her own. I, too, occasionally use this technique of finding a way to paint through another artist's authority."

Quaytman is referring to the spirit guides that contacted af Klint during a series of séances conducted with four other women. These spirits "commissioned" her to produce a cycle of works that became "Paintings for the Temple" (1906–15) and suggested the design for a spiraling chapel they were to adorn. The earliest of the ambitious works in this series are said to be af Klint's first fully nonobjective paintings, which puts her a few years ahead of Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, Kupka, and other contenders for the title of first modern abstractionist. But the abstractions of these first Temple paintings can itself be contested. Giant, swirly, soft-colored canvases, animated by arabesques and petals, ova and spermatozoa, and further adorned with legible if cryptic cursive



Hilma af Klint: *Tree of Knowledge, No. 5*, 1915, from "The W Series," watercolor, gouache, graphite, and metallic paint on paper, 18 by 11⅝ inches. Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

"Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future" and "R.H. Quaytman: +x, Chapter 34," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, through Apr. 23.

NANCY PRINCENTHAL is an *A.i.A.* contributing editor. See Contributors page.

View of the exhibition "Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future," 2018–19, showing paintings from her series "The Ten Largest," 1907, all tempera on paper mounted on canvas. Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo David Heald.

writing, they refer, wall labels explain, to the stages of the human life span (Childhood, Youth, Old Age). In subsequent work generated without the help of commissioning spirits, af Klint rendered helixes and concentric circles alongside ascending stairways, golden mandalas, and spheres with Saturn-like rings, as well as angels, doves, and swans.

The designation of first abstractionist does not interest Quaytman. Nor does af Klint's painterly touch. Having meticulously copied many of the Swedish artist's paintings—a practice she recommends as the best way to understand a fellow painter's work—Quaytman is struck by their occasional awkwardness, particularly in the facture of the largest ones, executed in tempera. What she admires heartily is their "ecstatic lawlessness, sci-fi contemporaneity, gendered identity mash-ups and revolt from art-historical demands,"[2] not to mention their explorations of temporality and seriality, botany and geometry, language, symbolism and diagrams, the unconscious and sexuality. Quaytman appreciates, too, the frank femininity on display: the curlicues, the Florine Stettheimer-like palette, the floral motifs.

Many of these attributes can be found in Quaytman's paintings, spare and cerebral though they are. In fact, Minimalist orthodoxy notwithstanding—and it begins to look odder and odder, as it recedes into history—content is pretty much impossible to expunge from art. Nearly every early modernist subscribed to one or another pan-spiritual system. Most popular was the Theosophy favored by af Klint, a "scientific" synthesis of Buddhism and Hinduism dreamed up by the intrepid and learned Helena Blavatsky (who was generally dismissed as a crank by midcentury art historians). Blavatsky's system was also embraced by Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and countless others. Among Theosophy's enthusiasts was the formidable (and similarly sidelined) Hilla Rebay, who was responsible for assembling Solomon Guggenheim's collection, and also for cajoling Frank Lloyd Wright to design the museum that would show it. Spirals were key for all; the temple af Klint envisioned was eerily close to the one Wright built in New York (though he couldn't have known her plans).

BUT SPIRALS DON'T appeal to Quaytman, and she does what she can to defy Wright's.[3] She begins by dispensing with the sleights of hand that generations of the museum's installation designers and art handlers have used to compensate for its singular difficulties. Generally, paintings at the Guggenheim are supported from behind such that they float a little in front of the main walls, which not only curve but also incline slightly. Floating the canvases both allows them to hang straight down, and brings them (fractionally) closer to viewers, who are distanced by the deep aprons that join floor to walls. Finally, the museum often compensates for its sloping floors by hanging paintings at a subtle, eyeballed tilt. Quaytman, by contrast, has had her paintings hung smack on the wall and dead level.

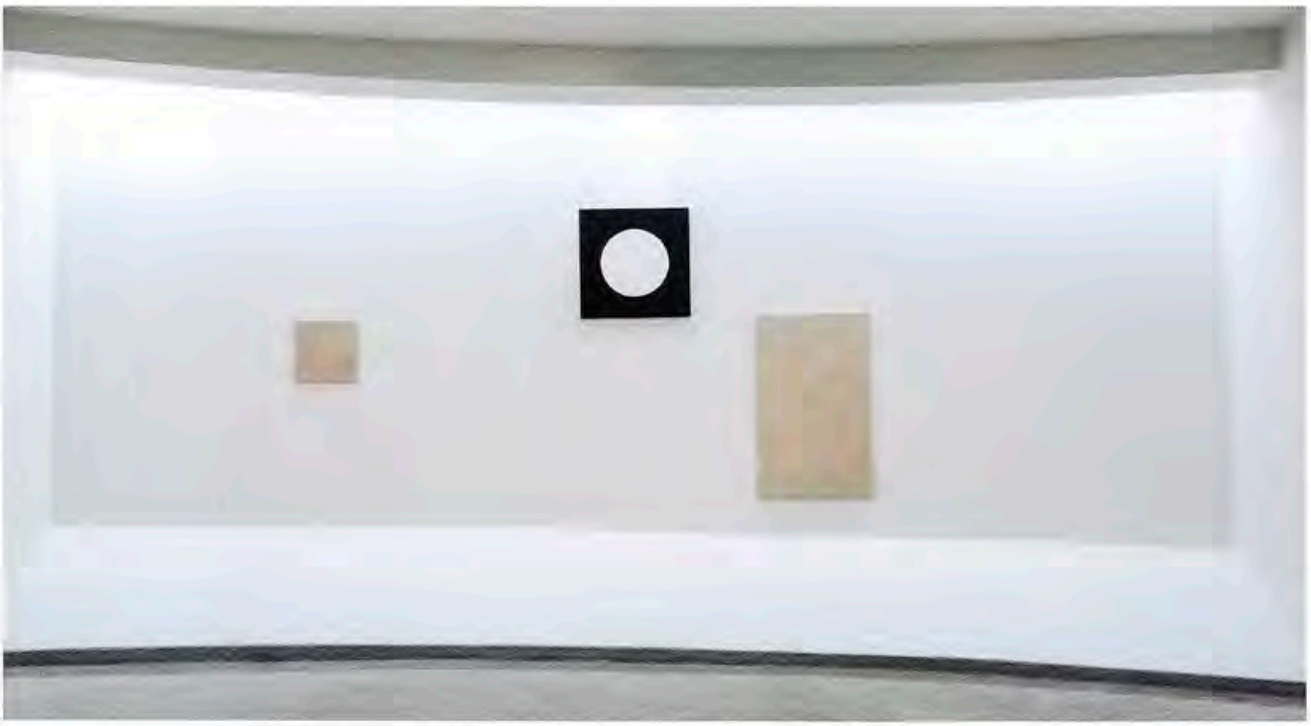
The principal challenge she makes to the building, though, is with a series of circle-in-a-square paintings that anchor her exhibition. Similar but not identical, they appear, singly, in each of the eight bays her show occupies. All are centered between their bay's edges and—perplexingly, at first—all are hung at the same height with respect to sea level, but not to the museum's ramp. So while the first (at the top) touches down where the pesky apron meets the wall, the last drifts up toward the ceiling. Turning around to view the ramp as a whole is like getting your bearings in a listing ship. It's a delightful moment of recognition, both conceptually and kinesthetically. The circles in these paintings are all bright white, on grounds of nearly black indigo, some mixed with graphite to sparkle slightly. They evoke, serially, a rising full moon; they also refer to the small circular skylights, secondary to the museum's main oculus, that are usually concealed. A couple of upholstered stools, also round, and also original to the museum, punctuate the ramp. Recognizing these visual echoes offers moments of pleasure, too.

One or two on each side, the paintings that flank the recurring lunar compositions in every bay, wander, like af Klint's, between pure abstraction—the primary mode—and allusive figuration. There is an introductory image that can be read as a hazy landscape, and others with floral motifs. A ghostly face in profile peers from the bottom corner of one composition. Many are divided by crossed lines both perpendicular and diagonal; some paintings are tipped to hang as diamonds, in one case making an X into a disconcertingly lopsided cross. Often the dividing lines change color midstream, scintillating shifts that are not always evident at first viewing. But the main concern is the paintings' rich, subtle surface patterns and textures, which are screen-printed and often embellished by hand. A fine-grain basket weave, borrowed from an Indigenous South American tradition, recurs, as does a snakeskin texture that in one case involves an actual molted skin embedded, nearly invisibly, as a circling band. There are bold, fanned lines of gold glitter, and surface incidents that hover at the threshold of legibility: the pale, swirled, ectoplasmic imprint of fabric pressed against the surface of several paintings; the nearly invisible line of gold beneath a stroke of blue at the horizon of another.

Deep spatial recession is suggested by some compositions; in others, flatness is emphasized. One painting is collaged with a small print of the Swedish flag and the title page of a book on trigonometry authored by af Klint's father. He and her grandfather were both naval officers, and allusions to nautical signage can be seen in both af Klint's work and Quaytman's. It is one of many testaments to the research Quaytman undertook for this project, which was drawn from a close study of one af Klint's many notebooks (she left more than twenty-six thousand pages of text and sketches in widely varying formats). A vitrine in the little library midway up the museum's ramp displays some of Quaytman's own sketches of the notebook she chose to scrutinize. Hung beside Quaytman's wall text at the top of the ramp—at a glance, it looks like an illustration for it—is a photo-silkscreened image of the worn blue cover of the notebook in question, labeled with af Klint's fine hand and tied with twine.

R.H. Quaytman: + x *(Trigonometry), Chapter 34*, 2018, oil, paper collage, gouache, graphite pencil, and gesso on wood 12⅜ by 12⅜ inches.

MOST OF QUAYTMAN'S paintings, though, are far from didactic. Screened and shaded, hooded and moody, they are seductive but also baffling. Puzzles have run throughout her oeuvre, in references that range from collegial and familial to



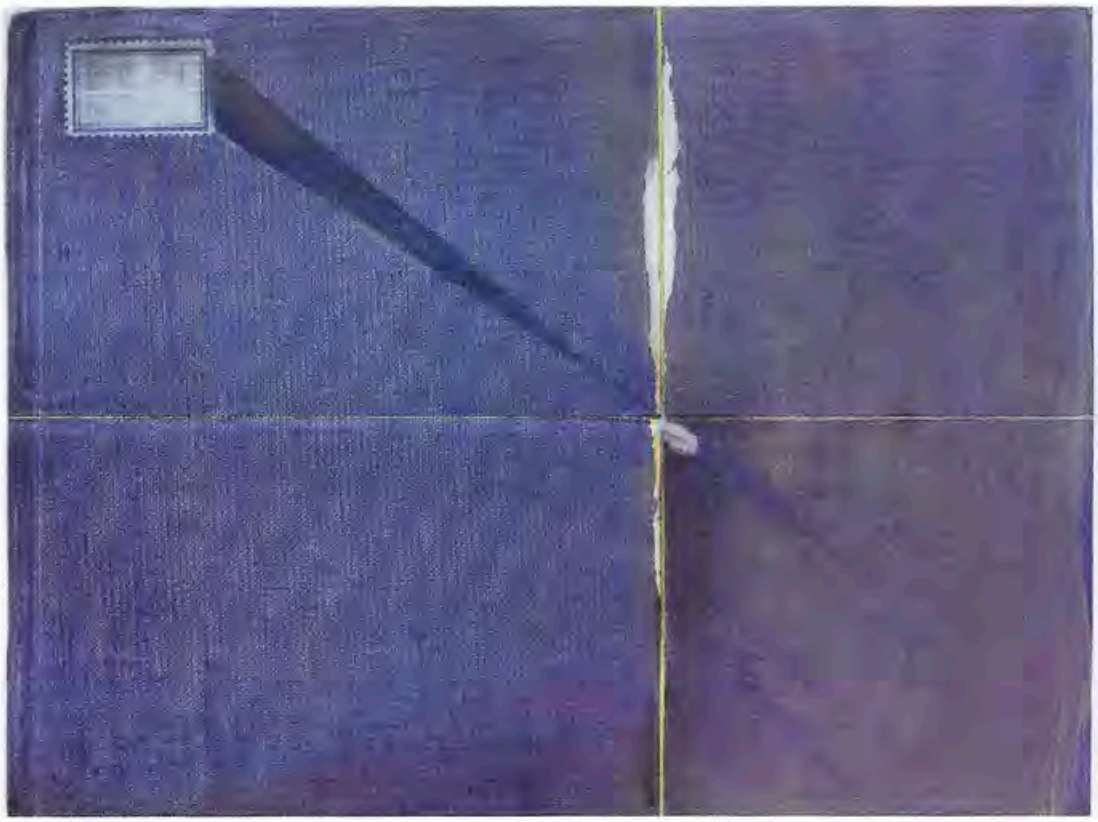
View of the exhibition "R.H. Quaytman: + x, Chapter 34," 2018–19, at the Guggenheim Museum. Photo David Heald.

frankly esoteric. Quaytman's mother is the poet Susan Howe, her stepfather the sculptor David von Schlegell. Among the artists with whom she has been associated are Moyra Davey, Andrea Fraser, and Jason Simon, who shared her directorship of the collective New York gallery Orchard from 2005 to '08. Orchard also presented work by an older generation, including Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Adrian Piper, and Lawrence Weiner. Quaytman's paintings sometimes offer glimpses of her sources, but they are oblique. "Dan Graham's use of mirrors to problematize our conception of transparency and identity served as a source for some of the ideas I apply to painting,"[4] she wrote in the catalogue for a 2011 exhibition, referring to an artist for whom she was a studio assistant in the 1990s, and whose photograph has appeared in her earlier work, including that shown at Orchard.

In other words, if we seek windows in Quaytman's paintings, we instead find reflections and refractions. For an age of inescapable oversharing, it can feel tonic: a form of healthy self-protection. It could also be called a kind of social realism, a commitment to telling the truth about how art is generally made and understood—which is to say, privately. What is readily on offer in Quaytman's work is an expression of intimacy, and of art's obliquities. In a text accompanying a show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, in 2009, Quaytman quoted founder Nelson Aldrich's 1948 statement on the new abstraction, in which he inveighed against its "cult of bewilderment."[5] Aldrich's rant is infamous. Yet by citing it, Quaytman suggests that among cults, a reverence for bewilderment—close cousin to wonder—has uncommon and lasting value.

Not that Quaytman keeps her references secret. As she told Steel Stillman in an interview published in this magazine in 2010, "I want to make paintings that can be read on their own terms, without footnotes. But if, as a viewer, you persist in asking questions, you'll find answers."[6] Quaytman has discussed some of the self-imposed rules governing the production of her paintings. Among them: all the paintings are executed on wood boards, their size constrained by a system of ten nesting dimensions determined by the "golden ratio" (which is closely related to the Fibonacci sequence). Significantly, these ratios also partly determine intervals between the works in any given installation. In fact, relations among Quaytman's paintings are as important as what goes on within them. She is keenly interested in pacing, and in meaning that accrues across images. At the Guggenheim, the teasing references to af Klint's image bank, the ghostly passages, the hints of gold, and the spheres are some of the motifs that gather significance as they recur.

Quaytman suggests that among cults, a reverence for bewilderment—close cousin to wonder—has uncommon and lasting value.



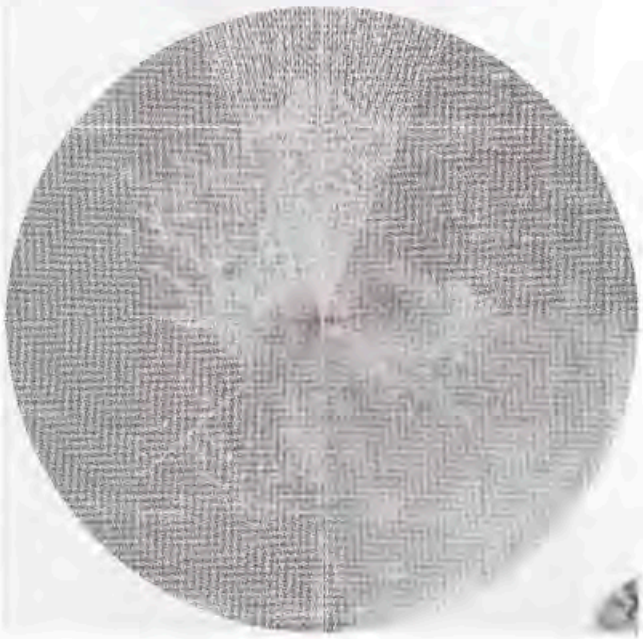
Quaytman: + × *(Blue Book), Chapter 34*, 2018, oil, silkscreen ink, gouache, and gesso on wood, 12⅜ by 20 inches.

In earlier paintings, there were sometimes directional signs urging such connections—arrows, for instance. Acknowledging that paintings are often seen with a sideways glance by viewers hastening past, Quaytman has drawn attention to their edges, placing depictions of their laminated layers smack in the middle of some of her compositions, as in a final painting at the Guggenheim. The similarity of these striped bars to the spines of books is intentional. In fact since 2001, when she introduced bibliophilic terms for her work, Quaytman's entire output has constituted, she says, an evolving archive. Each exhibition contributes a chapter (although its individual components can afterward be dispersed), and the Guggenheim show is titled "+ x, Chapter 34." The first two characters in the title are borrowed from af Klint—who included them in nearly all her notebooks—as a signal to posterity, as art historian Julia Voss argues in her catalogue essay.[7]

The archival project had germinated a decade earlier. As Quaytman recalled in the interview with Stillman, while in Rome in 1991 on a fellowship, she had an epiphany: "'The stance of the painting is the profile.' It was like a riddle; I wasn't sure what it meant, but I knew it was important . . . it seemed to refer to the viewer's movement past a painting."[8] In a subsequent interview with curator Antonio Sergio Bessa, she added, "Originally my idea was to shift the most intense focus off the individual painting and into the situation of the painting—to its neighbors and context." While depth is traditionally associated with narrative in painting, she further explained, "the lateral also can be a narrative, and that might be a way to tie abstraction back in."[9] Her project, a quixotic one, would be to buttress abstract painting with the structures of narrative history and academic research.

Quaytman thereby distinguishes her idea-based work from that of such founding Conceptualists as Sol LeWitt or On Kawara. Unlike their art, for which materiality is secondary, Quaytman's work is "a protest in favor of a medium—specifically painting," a way to "graft subject matter onto a foundation of abstraction,"[10] as she told David Joselit in 2011. Further, she said, "I came to the literary principle of collection because I envied how a book is both put away and still displayed."[11] It was a realization spurred in part by the specter of her father's and stepfather's posthumously warehoused works. "I thought," she wrote in 2010, "if I could make a mental switch from paintings wrapped up in dirty plastic hidden in dusty old storage racks to something more like books organized and indexed on shelves in a home, this traumatic fear could, at best, be avoided or, at worst, postponed. If you don't have a book, make one."[12] Painting-as-archive would be a defense against oblivion and the vagaries of critical and commercial reception that determine it.

Quaytman's commitments both to research and to considering a career-spanning corpus of painting as a unified project are additional links to af Klint, whom Quaytman credits for "her radical concept that all the works (over 1,000 paintings and many notebooks) were one entity."[13] While acknowledging the prestige of books, Quaytman's chapter-based organizational system affirms the authority of abstract painting as an information delivery system. "Language wins all the time over image," she has written. "I want to delay or suppress this phenomenon through optical manipulation."[14]



Quaytman: + x, *Chapter 34*, 2018, silkscreen ink, silver glitter, gouache, and acrylic on wood, 52⅜ by 32⅜ inches.

FOR AF KLINT, a similarly rule-governed abstraction was underwritten by a host of new ways to visualize rapidly developing theories about the physical world. During a symposium accompanying the Guggenheim exhibition,[15] there was discussion of a range of phenomena that were being organized, in the early years of the twentieth century, into charts and diagrams. Sometimes the spiritual and the scientific were hard to distinguish. Along with Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater's spirit-guided color charts, there were Wilhelm Roentgen's diagrams of X-rays, Marie Curie's study of radioactivity, and Charles Darwin's taxonomy of evolution. Art historian Linda Dalrymple Henderson explored how the borderline-occult concept of a fourth dimension became a touchstone for scientific research, including Einstein's work on relativity, Hertz's experiments with radio waves (whence the new machine called the "wireless"), analysis of the electromagnetic spectrum, and above all concepts surrounding "ether." Henderson also cited Charles Howard Hinton's development of a visual model of the fourth dimension he named the "tesseract." Af Klint, it was noted by several speakers, worked early in her career as a botanical and medical illustrator. Writing in the exhibition catalogue, art historian Briony Fer called her a "diagrammer," arguing that she worked closely with technical images. "To focus only on the occult symbolic meanings of her work," Fer argued, "leads inevitably to an interpretive dead end."[16]

Af Klint: *Group IX/SUW, The Swan, No. 9*, 1915, from "The SUW/UW Series," oil on canvas, 58⅜ by 58¾ inches. Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.

The advent of an age of diagrams has been heralded more than once and ascribed to several causes. In a 1987 essay, Vilém Flusser declared it an outcome of the rise of digital media. "Where once writing stabilized language," Flusser argued, "we are just about to leave notation (writing as such) to apparatuses and focus our attention on making and looking at images. We are about to emigrate into the 'universe of technical images.'"[17] More recently, fellow philosopher Brian Rotman proclaimed that the "displacement of the written text's hold on the self" has yielded "a post-literate self." It is "patterned not on the word—stable, integral, fixed, discrete, enclosing a unique, interior meaning, ordered, sequential—but on the fluid and unordered multiplicities of the visual image." Paradoxically, Rotman believes the imagery taking shape within the new media will be of "information-bearing, instructional, explicatory and otherwise instrumentally oriented images—maps, diagrams, tables, charts, graphs."[18]

While it may be true that the digital era has served as a technological spur to the dominion of informational imagery, the current celebration of af Klint's paintings suggests the primacy of visual communication should be backdated. The retrospective also underscores the important role that women played in its emergence. David Max Horowitz, writing in the exhibition catalogue, and Patricia Berman, speaking at the symposium, both noted that women were prominent among the spiritualists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "The majority of mediums during the period were women," Horowitz notes. "The practice allowed them to overcome the marginalization of their voices and disregard social sanctions by claiming direct access to an absolute authority."[19] Needless to say, they met resistance. Notoriously, when af Klint sought confirmation of her art's value from Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, she was rebuffed. Quaytman believes his attitude "was that this huge body of work was the product of a crazy woman who had nothing to do with anything." And, she reflected, this "contempt has formed me."[20] Af Klint abandoned spirit guides shortly after her encounter with Steiner, relying thereafter on inner resources and producing more commandingly geometric work. In doing so, Horowitz writes, she joined a lively cohort of women who turned from channeling spiritual authority to assert themselves in other ways, including as pioneering feminists.[21]

In her 2013 homage to af Klint, Quaytman asked, "Am I ignoring the central dilemma—that she believed in the paranormal and

Quaytman: + ×, *Chapter 34*, 2018, oil, acrylic, snakeskin, and gesso on wood, 20 inches square.

accessed creativity as if her mind was a radio picking up static and signals?" She answers her own question by declaring, "What she believed seems so inconsequential compared to how the paintings themselves stir me."[22] When it was Quaytman's turn to speak at the Guggenheim symposium, at its conclusion, she was brief. When she reiterated her reluctance to dwell on spirit guides, a scholar took issue with her, arguing that we couldn't understand af Klint without accepting the importance of spiritualism. Quaytman responded that understanding af Klint mattered less than appreciating her achievement as a painter. The audience erupted in laughter and applause. ○

1. R.H. Quaytman, "de Fem," in Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring, eds., *The Legacy of Hilma af Klint: Nine Contemporary Responses*, London, Koenig Books and Stockholm, the Moderna Museet, 2013, unpaginated.
2. Ibid.
3. Quaytman told me in an interview conducted in New York in October 2018 that she does value the museum's spiral for serving as a memory palace; she finds that she remembers exhibitions there particularly vividly.
4. R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, Berlin, Sternberg Press and Basel, Kunsthalle Basel and Sequence Press, 2011, p. 165.
5. Ibid., p. 251.
6. Steel Stillman, "In the Studio: R.H. Quaytman," *Art in America*, June/July 2010, p. 92.
7. Julia Voss, "The Traveling Hilma af Klint," in Tracey Bashkoff, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2018, p. 51.
8. Stillman, p. 88.
9. Antonio Sergio Bessa, "Interview: R.H. Quaytman," *Bomb*, Dec. 10, 2014, bombmagazine.org.
10. Quaytman quoted in David Joselit, "I Modi," *Mousse*, Summer 2011, mousse-magazine.it.
11. Ibid.
12. Quaytman quoted in Bennett Simpson, *R.H. Quaytman, Morning: Chapter 30*, Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, and New York, DelMonico Books, 2017, p. 34.
13. Quaytman, "de Fem."
14. Quaytman, *Spine*, p. 325.
15. "Visionary: On Hilma af Klint and the Spirit of Her Time," Oct. 12, 2018, at the Guggenheim Museum, with Tracey Bashkoff, Patricia Berman, Daniel Birnbaum, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, Isaac Lubelsky, Marco Pasi, R.H. Quaytman, and Julia Voss.
16. Briony Fer, "Hilma af Klint, Diagrammer," in *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, p. 164.
17. Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, Nancy Ann Roth, trans., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. 21.
18. Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being*, Durham, NC, and London, Duke University Press, 2008, p. 95.
19. David Max Horowitz, "'The World Keeps You in Fetters; Cast Them Aside': Hilma af Klint, Spiritualism, and Agency," in *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, p. 130.
20. Quaytman, "de Fem."
21. Horowitz, p. 130. He cites Ann Braude's *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1989.
22. Quaytman, "de Fem."

The New York Times

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

‘R.H. Quaytman: +x, Chapter 34’

R.H. Quaytman’s “+ x, Chapter 34,” a work of oil, acrylic, snakeskin and gesso on wood, part of the show of her work at the Guggenheim Museum. R.H. Quaytman

As you summit the Guggenheim’s spiraling rotunda, it is as if the exhibition of the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) had suddenly exploded into 28 fragments, scattering small abstract paintings across the walls. This is R.H. Quaytman’s “+ x, Chapter 34,” a series of works made in 2018 in response to af Klint’s oeuvre from the last century.

Ms. Quaytman is the perfect artist to answer af Klint. One of the leading lights of contemporary post-Conceptual painting, she also organized a show of af Klint's work at MoMA PS1 in 1989. Af Klint worked in series, and Ms. Quaytman works in what she calls "chapters." And where af Klint took orders from spirits she claimed to have contacted through séances and other occult techniques, Ms. Quaytman, for this project, has adopted af Klint as her higher power, working in a more secular, channeled collaborative vein.

An installation view of the show in the Guggenheim's rotunda. The exhibition's works were created in response to the art of of Hilma af Klint. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation; David Heald

Each bay in the Guggenheim's upper spiral features a painting with a white circle in a deep indigo square. These feel like portals, abstracted suns or visionary eyes, but they also echo af Klint's "SUW/UW Series" (1914-15), in which, drawing from theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, she treated painting as a vehicle for merging religions and philosophical systems. In a nearby wall text, Ms. Quaytman comments on how af Klint, working like a "mad scientist," was able to join both rational and intuitive faculties to conjure invisible, metaphysical ideas.

In other muted, post-Minimalist panels, Ms. Quaytman borrows af Klint's symbolic vocabulary, including the handwritten "+" and "x" on the first page of af Klint's notebooks. Thoughtful and methodical, "x +, Chapter 34" is a quiet show, a perfect coda to af Klint. Where that Swedish artist offers a bright, dynamic symphony, Ms. Quaytman responds with a spare, restrained and slightly dissonant tone poem.
MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Through April 23. 1071 Fifth Avenue; 212-423-3575, guggenheim.org.

Lidija Haas, “New Perspectives,” *Apollo Magazine*, November 2017, pp 60-66

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OTTOMANIA IN ERDOGAN’S TURKEY

NEW PERSPECTIVES

1. *Amazons and Scythians, c.* 1600, Otto van Veen (1556–1629), oil on oakwood, 135.7 × 193 × 1cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

R.H. Quaytman has created a rigorous painting system, dividing her body of work into a series of 'chapters'. Ahead of a new show in Vienna, she tells *Apollo* why painting is the best problem in art

By Lidija Haas

2. *An Evening, Chapter 32*, 2017, R.H. Quaytman (b. 1961), silkscreen ink, Marshall's photo oil, oil paint, and gesso on wood, 82.2 × 82.2 × 2.5cm

Within minutes of entering R.H. Quaytman's studio on the Lower East Side, New York, I am, at her invitation, putting my hands on one of the paintings on the wall to feel the strange, rough texture of the rabbit-skin glue gesso she's been using for decades. 'I wish I could let people touch it,' she says of the works on public display. 'Stroke it like a pet!' She used to do that at Orchard, the Manhattan gallery space she ran with several other artists from 2005 until 2008, where she was given to such gestures of extreme intimacy or transparency – even the gallery's finances became fodder for an artwork, in the form of a spreadsheet. 'But now,' she says, 'the insurance is too intense' to let anyone touch the works; the galleries 'get so freaked out.' She draws a much bigger crowd nowadays, for one thing.

Quaytman's irreverence in the face of the artwork, and of the standard pieties of art criticism and the art market, has been earned over a lifetime. Born in 1961, she is the scion of writers and artists – her mother is the poet Susan Howe, her father was the abstract painter Harvey Quaytman, and her stepfather, the sculptor David von Schlegell – and has evidently had to shape a space for herself between the starry, larger-than-life 1960s and '70s New York scene in which she grew up, and her own generation of visual artists, who often reacted in the other direction. She has described 'the religion of my family' as 'minimalism with one foot stuck in modernism', and she herself does not belong to that tradition, nor, quite, among those artists of the 1980s and '90s who refused that quasi-religious attitude to abstraction and minimalism.

Some of her contemporaries responded to the exhaustion of possibilities for authenticity and grand-narrative meaning with a retreat into melancholy and ironic prettiness. The young Quaytman, on the other hand, having intimately witnessed the way a rich artistic context could be reduced in retrospect to a few fetishised individuals, found the prospect of an apparent dead-end a bracing one: 'It's a good thing to be past the time of genius, the intuitive, and the heroic,' she wrote in 2006 in an illuminating autobiographical essay (published in a 2008 book entitled *Allegorical Decoys*). If the death of the genius only excited her, so did the constantly threatened obsolescence of painting as a form (and later of photography, too). She studied painting as an undergraduate at Bard and spent a year at an art college in Dublin and later another in Paris, but she didn't follow the MFA path. After working in the late '80s as a curator and programme coordinator for the PS1 museum in Queens, where she began a long and passionate engagement with the work of the Swedish abstract painter Hilma af Klimt, she undertook her formation as an artist in earnest during an intensely experimental 1991 fellowship year at the American Academy in Rome.

Over the following years, while omnivorous in terms of technique – making mirrored boxes and architectural models, photographing and silkscreening them, designing books – Quaytman developed an increasingly rigorous system for her work. She uses frameless wood panels with beveled edges, on which she paints the absorbent gesso of chalk and rabbit-skin glue, then unevenly sands it down and silkscreens photographic and other images on top (Figs. 3 & 4). 'I guess I do feel iconoclastic when it comes to the photograph,' she tells me. 'I want to take it down. And flatten it. And take its little magic thing out.' (These

3. *Beard, Chapter 19*, 2010, R.H. Quaytman, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 82.2 × 82.2cm

4. *Ark, Chapter 10*, 2008, R.H. Quaytman, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 50.8 × 50.8cm

Both images: courtesy the artist, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne/New York

silkscreened works are often interspersed with smaller handpainted ones, which sometimes depict arrows or other exhibition signage.) The rules she adheres to are strict: individual works come in a range of 10 specific sizes, either square or a golden-section rectangle, to be hung in relation to one another according to a precise and complex geometry. The pieces are made for particular sites where they will be exhibited, and they encompass a palimpsest of meanings and references (many rooted in the location), while also constantly denying their own depth – using the low-res effect of the silkscreening to deflect attention back to the picture surface (Figs. 5 & 8), dazzling the eye with Op patterns or diamond dust, and implicating the viewer by formal tricks that often draw her imagined perspective and elements of the gallery space around her into the world of the painting itself.

In person, Quaytman is a disarming combination of seriousness and play. Her work seems driven by an earthy love of material and an urgent determination to solve a series of intellectual problems: first the question of how to make an abstract painting, then a knot of ideas about perspective she had to work through. 'Usually there'd be just little things like putting the picture into perspective itself, thereby flattening it. You break your way out slowly. Or finding what information is hidden by the perspective of the photograph, and then trying to somehow emphasise that [Fig. 6].' Her influences are varied, from obvious pioneers of photography-based work such as Lichtenstein, Warhol, and Rauschenberg, to Hilma af Klimt and less known figures like Anne Tyng or Dorothy Norman, or the Polish sculptor Katarzyna Kobro – an early inspiration whose *Spatial Compositions* were intended to burst their formal and physical bounds in a way similar to the effect Quaytman was striving for with her paintings.

The structure Quaytman has set for herself evolved in semi-private, although she had exhibitions from the late '90s onward, becoming more visible after 2008, when major institutions such as the Whitney, MoMA, the Guggenheim, and Tate began acquiring her pieces. Long before that she had established a method of archiving and curating her own work, which since 2001 she has conceived as a series of interrelated 'chapters' in a partly imaginary book. We meet as she is 'in the thick of it' with the very latest instalment, 'An Evening: Chapter 32', which opens at the Secession in Vienna this month. The chapters are a characteristic gesture: modest and defiant at once. By shifting the emphasis from the individual painting to its neighbours and the surrounding environment, it pops the painting bubble, the aura of total self-sufficiency such art objects tend to project. 'Haven't you noticed paintings are very egotistical?' she asks me. 'I always felt that paintings had a lot of ego, not my paintings, necessarily, but paintings in general. Look at the rooms they're in, the walls they're on, the money they cost, the whole thing. The way they're saved like nothing is saved. Really, they come through history in an amazing way.' Her concern with how one painting in a space affects another is an attempt to 'displace that ego, by making the painting be influenced somehow by what's next to it'.

At the same time, the gesture insists that Quaytman's entire body of work will retain its conceptual value and coherence regardless of the vagaries of the market or critical fashion. The notion of all of her work forming a continuous whole is one she took from Hilma af Klimt, whose insistence on it (which extended to a refusal to sell any of her paintings) went so far as to help guarantee her own obscurity. Each exhibition Quaytman makes is a new chapter, recapitulating all of the previous pieces at least implicitly, and sometimes more literally, so that there is a sense both of permanence and constant reinterpretation. Unsold works are kept on special shelves, like books, and quite a few of them have a representation of their own bottom edge, the stripes of the wooden panel, included on the pictorial surface, a reference to their coming horizontal fate.

While we talk, Quaytman sits on her desk and smokes a cigarette, rifles through hand-altered books and polaroids and laughs her deep bubbling laugh. She is highly practical about everything from the reasons for her success to her own underlying motivations. She matter-of-factly recalls suffering 'so much anxiety and sadness and depression over being unable to succeed, to make it or sell my work or get a show. I couldn't even get a gallery. I couldn't even get anybody over to my studio until finally Miguel [Abreu] agreed to come over one day.' Her use of the chapter conceit she attributes both to a defence mechanism, a fighting back against the fear of failure – wanting to make it less 'shameful' not to sell and to end up, perforce, collecting a lot of her own old work – and to a desire to push back against the 'egotism of my own paintings'. It is a philosophical experiment that also functions as a way

5. *New Age, Chapter 5*, 2005, R.H. Quaytman, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 133 × 82.2 × 2.5cm

Courtesy the artist, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne/New York

6. *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, 2010, R.H. Quaytman, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 62.9 × 101.6cm

to manage more worldly anxieties: 'a way to sort of take charge of time'. She refers to it as a way of 'keeping the power', as she felt Hilma af Klimt likewise did by treating all her work as part of a larger unit. Though it wasn't her intention, Quaytman even suspects that the use of this system has been key to her increasing success over the last decade or so, 'because you can fetishise it' and there are 'sub-categories that collectors can engage with'. Whatever the social or professional benefits of her system, it has also and much more importantly proved a generative artistic constraint.

One idea that subtly emerges over the course of our conversation is that of power struggle – including that which may take place between artist and viewer, artist and critic, artist and artist, and prior to all that, between artist and medium. Her use of the initials in place of her first names (Rebecca Howe) was an early attempt to deflect the tendency of both galleries and critics to emphasise the person over the paintings (especially in the case of a woman artist). She enjoyed how the genderless signage accompanying her work forced an avoidance of any concentration on the artist's persona. She also liked getting early reviews in Europe that misgendered her: 'It was fun that they assumed it was a he.' Her choice of painting as a form is a bold and potentially fraught one, and that in itself provides the questions that guide her as a painter. She says she has tended to avoid the brush, since when you pick one up 'you have to bring everybody with you...all the brushes start appearing.' At this point in history, 'I do believe it's next to impossible to make a new mark.'

Nonetheless she has never once considered abandoning painting, 'because I think it's really the best problem in art. The plane, the picture, is the best, deepest problem.' Photographs on the other hand strike her as almost too easy. 'That's sort of in a lockdown. Like, to me, every photograph is good. Every photograph does this incredible thing. Just by being a photograph.' She prefers to paint on to a photography-based image – this is where new and strange formal challenges are still to be found. 'It just seems open, as a way to rethink what to paint or how to paint.' There appears to be a kind of loving aggression involved in the impulse: 'I like the idea of painting on to a painting, or on to a photograph of a painting, being a way of looking at and thinking about it and digesting it, literally, taking it. I like that. It's similar to touching a painting – a similar feeling.'

The rules governing the dimensions of each piece and the spaces between them started out, like the chapters, in part as a self-protective measure: 'My father's work was often big canvases, these huge unruly things wrapped in plastic and bubble wrap and covered in dust and God knows what, and who will ever open it.' Such fears have become less compelling over time, and not only about

her own work – she's excited about an upcoming show of her father's paintings in Berkeley. But the commitment to making works whose 'modularity' makes them easier to store if not wanted has been freeing in other ways. You don't have to make certain decisions or reinvent the wheel each time, and there's a thematic or conceptual advantage too. 'The internal geometry enables me to put very different images, very different pictorial ideas together. There's another relationship between them that doesn't have to depend on the logic of what the image is on the surface.' What's more, the move has always served to 'take the pressure off the single image or the single event of the painting and displace it. In doing that, it questions all single paintings.' A large survey show at MOCA in LA, which ran from last October until earlier this year, included a vast panorama of works referring to Michael Heizer's land piece *Double Negative*, a progression of paintings placed in an unbroken horizontal line, whose shades gently shift (Fig. 7).

This focus on relations between paintings over the individual works is reflected throughout Quaytman's practice, which makes the curation of paintings into a form of sculpture or installation in its own right. 'Oftentimes I'll just come to a place with a pile of paintings I've made for that place, but I don't know how I'm going to hang them.' This will be true of her new chapter this November, and lends the prospect of that upcoming show an inherent anxiety that is familiar for Quaytman. Since her works are always to a greater or lesser degree developed with a particular environment in mind, approaching that environment with the works intended for it is always 'really a scary moment'. She frequently makes changes to the paintings once they are in the space 'to make them work in that way that I want them to'. With her paintings, she says, 'the most fragile part of them is their combination'. The notion that this time the pieces may simply not hang together as she'd hoped is 'the terror every time, that's really the fucking thing that keeps me up at night. It's terrifying. But I guess that it's good to be a little bit worried. A lot worried!'

On the walls of her studio are a series of works destined for the upcoming show at the Secession. The paintings are spurred by two late 16th-century panels by the Dutch artist Otto van Veen (Fig. 1), best known as Rubens' teacher, 'and they love Rubens. They really do love him there.' Quaytman is less keen ('It's just always so overt') and prefers the teacher. Both paintings were found, badly damaged, in a stash of 'weird leftover art' on a 'forgotten floor' of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, which Quaytman describes as one of the world's most amazing institutions, 'like the Louvre without the crowds'. In exchange for helping fund the restoration, she was allowed to photograph the process and has been making works from that raw material (Fig. 2). She shows me a lot of Polaroids (they're 'old now so you never know what the film is going to do, which I kind of like actually'), including one of the rugged-looking chief restorer, whose portrait she's thinking of painting, and a range of other images that she then scans and silkscreens and paints on, or plays with by laying textiles on

7. Installation view, 'R.H. Quaytman, Morning: Chapter 30', at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2016

Photo: Brian Forest. Courtesy the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

8. *Morning, Chapter 30*, 2016, R.H. Quaytman, oil, egg tempera, gouache, silkscreen ink, gesso on two wood panels, 94.1 × 94.1 × 5.1cm

the exposure unit. There are pink infrared versions of the van Veen paintings, and works using only the marked backs of them. At the Secession, there are to be nine pictures on one wall and 13 on another, meeting in a narrow corner. 'I have the two paintings coming together at this 45-degree vortex angle.'

The van Veen works are tableaux concerned with female power, one of them showing 'the Amazons getting together with the Scythians', whom they will eventually persuade to form a more equal society (travelling to Greece recently brought home to Quaytman that 'the story of the Amazons is completely integral to the founding of democracy'). The other shows a group of Persian women as described in Plutarch, who refuse to let their men, in the midst of losing a battle, take refuge at home for the night – they fend them off with skirts lifted, exposing themselves, prompting the central male figure to fling his hands before his face and turn away along with his horse ('the horse can't even take it, the sight of that,' Quaytman laughs). It's a somewhat odd, jarring image – the composition of the landscape seeming to echo the V-shapes between the women's thighs – but Quaytman diagnoses a fixation on female genitals that has a long history. 'All the fabric and the cloth is always vaginal. The folds. They're so focused on it throughout all Western art history. It's one of the main focuses of accuracy and this weird sense of reality...When you think about it, it's always a very, very important part of most pictures that have humans in them. The folds of what they're wearing, the textiles.' The fear of the vagina that's dramatised in the van Veen painting comes along with the misogyny that she sees as a primary and fundamental problem structuring all our other problems. It's also 'crazy': 'I mean, the really hard thing to look at is a penis.'

An essay by the Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek will accompany the works. Quaytman, though, is wary of 'righteousness' when dealing with the theme of the female warrior. 'I'm concerned about a kind of shutdown if that becomes the main focus. I'm concerned that it becomes a licence for self-justification, for the painting's ego.' She even suggests that 'the idea of one painting not being *the* painting is feminine. My idea of meaning being contingent on the neighbour, or the context, is a kind of feminine concept.' In the sense that it's associative? I ask. 'Or *boundless*,' she corrects me, 'let's put it that way.' Hers is a feminism that encompasses Hilma af Klimt and the 'bafflement and terror of curators' in the face of her work, 'its being relegated always to mysticism, but not male artists that were doing exactly the same thing.'

'Thinking about feminism has something to do with that picture for me,' she continues, showing me an odd print thought to be from a lost Titian, with the same format as the *Judgement of Paris*. It shows Hecuba, mother of Paris, 'who apparently had a dream before giving birth to him that she would give birth to a torch and it would set fire to Troy'. If feminism has something to do with the setting of fires, it's no wonder Quaytman gleefully cites one of Terry Eagleton's insights about Charlotte Brontë, whose novels she has loved since childhood – that 'Charlotte in *Jane Eyre*, from being an unattractive, poor, powerless woman, is able to burn down the house, blind the man, *and* marry him.' We agree that 'that's the dream!' and she adds that with art, 'that's what in effect you *can* do.' Perhaps, she says, 'I'm just in my Amazon frame of mind lately. Working with these Amazons is making me think of battle. But also, our political reality.'

Quaytman has for a long time taken charge of the reading of her own work by means of her system and by publishing her own accounts of it. 'The only control you have with interpretation is by writing. That's so important.' Here she gives me a mischievous look. 'So you tell them what to say. And they say it.' If anything, she says, critics will 'get annoyed, often, by me over-explaining'. She's always threatening to pre-empt their role altogether.

She has no interest in undermining the coherence of her project by ever giving up on the chapter structure. And yet, 'I would like to get back to just the idea of painting one painting. Not groups. It could be one painting a chapter, or two. Ah, what a dream, that'd be so good! I really want to do that! I always thought the goal of the whole book thing would be to figure out how to make one painting.' She's laughing again: 'In theory, the last chapter.' The notion sounds like a lot of pressure, but she assures me that that's always the very best way to keep herself engaged – 'it's drama, it's good, it's suspense.'

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'R.H. Quaytman: An Evening, Chapter 32' is at the Secession, Vienna, from 17 November to 21 January 2018. For more information, visit www.secession.at.

Jordan Kantor, "R. H. Quaytman," *Artforum*, Vol. 55, No. 7, March 2017, pp. 259-260

ARTFORUM

Left: **R. H. Quaytman, *Morning, 4.545%, Chapter 30*, 2016,** twenty-two paintings in oil, gouache, varnish, silk-screen ink, lacquer, and gesso on wood. Installation view. Photo: Brian Forrest. Below: **R. H. Quaytman, *Morning, 4.545%, Chapter 30* (detail), 2016,** twenty-two paintings in oil, gouache, varnish, silk-screen ink, and gesso on wood, each 37 × 60".

R. H. Quaytman

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES

Jordan Kantor

OVER THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS, R. H. Quaytman has developed a formidable art practice predicated on a dynamic interchange between her paintings and the specific contexts in which they are exhibited. In a gesture that undermines painting's customary status as a portable, autonomous object—and therefore any assumption of self-contained and stable meaning—the artist conceives of each exhibition as a starting point for generating a new body of work, rather than as a destination for already finished pieces. Anyone familiar with this foundational tenet of her practice would thus have expected Quaytman's exhibition of new paintings to be sensitively, and specifically, installed. Nevertheless, the visceral experience afforded by "Morning: Chapter 30" was surprising and thrilling. The main gallery at LA MOCA was dominated by the twenty-two painted wooden panels comprising *Morning, 4.545%, Chapter 30*, 2016; these were hung cheek by jowl to create a panoramic image. With a tilting composition and a sky-blue palette that gets progressively lighter, the show's centerpiece generated a rushing sense of visual expansion that doubled the vast desert imagery rendered within the individual paintings. At the same time, the panels' shiny lacquered surfaces allowed viewers to see themselves reflected within the work. This effect cut short any lingering visual immersion in the depicted landscape and drew our attention back to the gallery itself. Designed explicitly for this wall and to these ends, *Morning, 4.545%* delivered a forceful phenomenological complex of image, object, and context. The work was a clear thesis statement of the artist's intent to account for, and indeed command, the room.

"Morning: Chapter 30" was installed in three galleries and contained approximately sixty-five works, more than half of which were produced specifically for this occasion. While all bore traces of the artist's particular brand of site-specificity and self-referentiality, the show's multipanel centerpiece offered the most explicit case study of Quaytman's working formula. The piece's dominant imagery derives from photographs the artist took during a 2015 visit to Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, 1969–70, a monumental icon of Land art in Nevada's Moapa Valley and held in MOCA's permanent collection. Rendered via the artist's typical hybrid layering of tinted gesso, silk-screened photographic imagery, and handpainted details, *Morning, 4.545%* is dark and liminal, punctuated by small incidents such as the appearance of a solitary figure in one frame and the precise moment of the sun's touching the landscape's horizon in another. Yet *Double Negative* is invoked neither as merely a pictorial motif nor as a pretext for moody, Romantic painting. Indeed, the art-historical status of Heizer's work, emblematic of a moment when many artists pointedly placed their works outside the context of galleries and museums, cannot be overlooked. The critical legacies of Land art—alongside those of institutional critique and Conceptual art—form the theoretical backdrop for Quaytman's practice. Throughout her work, she seeks to acknowledge the arguments such "endgame" movements advanced, without throwing the baby of painting out with the bathwater of modernist imperatives. By taking Heizer's piece as its starting point, Quaytman's installation renders both painting and land, modernist objecthood and postmodernist expanded field, dizzyingly contingent. Because of its status as a work that can never be contained on-site, *Double Negative* stands for a kind of split presence: residing "in" the museum's collection, but always also outside its walls. Re-presenting this work as an image within paintings shown in its custodial institution, Quaytman foregrounded the Land work's peculiar status and invited us to ponder more generally the state of being in two places at once—in the present and in the past, in discourse and as embodied beings. Such blurring of obvious oppositional binaries tells us something of Quaytman's dialectical methods. Double negative, indeed.

In addition to the new paintings explicitly dealing with the MOCA context, the exhibition assembled a selection of works from earlier series, and such breadth made plain the striking prominence that outside references hold in Quaytman's art. The "extra-painterly" here abounded, inviting, even compelling viewers to delve into the artist's investigations of particular corners of art-historical discourse for clues to her work's myriad meanings. In Quaytman's art, every picture tells a story.

A cropped image of two reclining female nudes, borrowed from a print by the Italian Renaissance engraver Marcantonio Raimondi, is a case in point. The image featured prominently in Quaytman's contribution to the 2011 Venice Biennale (*I Modi, Chapter 22*, 2011), and, with eight panels of that work included here, it again played an important role. Like Heizer, Raimondi is a loaded, strategic point of reference. Best known as a "reproductive" printmaker, he achieved renown during his lifetime for expertly translating the paintings of recent masters into copies that disseminated the images across

Left: **R. H. Quaytman, *Point de Gaze, Chapter 23*, 2011,** silk-screen ink and gesso on wood, 40 × 24¾". Below: **R. H. Quaytman, *Morning, Chapter 30*, 2016,** liquid patina, copper powder, enamel, and gesso on wood, 20 × 20". Right: **View of "R. H. Quaytman, Morning: Chapter 30," 2016–17.** Rear wall, center: *O Tópico, Chapter 27 (Solo)*, 2014. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Europe. Given that "Morning: Chapter 30" was predicated on the artist's interest in *Double Negative*, a piece by a "recent master" on Quaytman's own artistic horizon, the inclusion of Raimondi's reproductions here served as the perfect coda for the resulting work, demonstrating the artist's consideration of the legacies of homage, originality, and image circulation in the art of our current day. In case viewers didn't make this connection on their own, the artist used an uncropped version of the Raimondi image in a new painting superimposed on one of the *Morning, 4.545%* panels. The sixteenth-century Italian was thus literally incorporated into the conversation with Heizer, and his work recontextualized *en abyme*.

Quaytman invited us to ponder the state of being in two places at once—in the present and in the past, in discourse and as embodied beings.

The idea of incorporation—of the immersive corporeal experience of being in a body—also coursed throughout this exhibition in other ways. In addition to Raimondi's classical nudes (which, in fact, originally served as illustrations for a sort of proto–sex manual, a guide to how to do things with your body), other bodies, both implied and depicted, populated the show. In a panel from *Point de Gaze, Chapter 23*, 2011, for example, we see a hooded torso whose central axis is marked by an otherworldly beam of light and a curious torn form. This shape, which the artist made by cutting the surface of the source photograph used in the image's silk screen, implies fragmentation and violence. In other works, the body is registered indexically (as in a nearby pair of paintings featuring gigantic reproductions of the artist's own fingerprint) or in language (as in the panel including Christ's injunction not to touch his resurrected body: NÃO TOQUE). Elsewhere, bodies appeared by implication, in abject and anthropomorphic shapes: a small panel from *Iamb, Chapter 12*, 2008, evokes a pile of disembodied tongues, while the bulging polyurethane-foam extrusion outstripping the bounds of its panel in *O Tópico, Chapter 27 (Solo)*, 2014, recalls nothing so much as a metastasized tumor. In still other paintings, Quaytman used a particular image of a lumpy mass; recalling those images that mysteriously flip between looking like a duck and a rabbit, or a girl and an old lady, it alternately resolves into a face and unravels into a formless pile. The artist's interest in incorporation extends as much to the viewers' own bodies as to those depicted in her paintings.

Like the multipanel *Morning, 4.545%*, several pieces here required our physical interaction to achieve their full effect. This invitation to what could be termed performative incorporation was most pronounced in a new lenticular painting, which contains vertical ridges onto which two images are painted on alternate sides. Seen from the right side, the painting reveals an image of the letter *A*. However, once the viewer takes a step to the left, the converse sides of the painted ridges line up to form the letter *M*. At once signifying the exhibition's titular "morning" (AM) and our own first-person expression of the verb "to be" ("I am"), this piece efficiently registers the contingency of both sight and knowledge. The painting's potential meanings—indeed, the work's very legibility—become entirely dependent on the viewer's physical participation. Far from being self-contained, it waits for us to activate it.

Such layered and multidimensional art asks a lot of its viewers, and Quaytman and curator Bennett Simpson smartly included a large vitrine of source materials to provide some insight into the artist's creative process. Presented as a thought board for provisionally hashed-out ideas, the vitrine included production notes, original photographs that served as source material for many of the paintings, and lines literally connecting disparate images, texts, and references in a rhizomatic diagram. Without explaining anything outright, the vitrine provided traces of the process through which the artist's themes develop and take shape, and helped the viewer follow her wide-ranging thoughts. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition offered new interpretative avenues into Quaytman's work as a whole, with especially fine essays by Yve-Alain Bois and Juliane Rebentisch. In the tome's lucid introduction, Simpson recalls that he initially invited Quaytman to mount a midcareer retrospective. While the pair ultimately opted for a different type of show, a hand-drawn reproduction of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, 1920, in Quaytman's vitrine seems to indicate that she may have entertained the idea of a comprehensive survey at one time. Klee's image is arguably most famous as an object of discourse, specifically vis-à-vis Walter Benjamin's discussion of the work in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940). In that text, Benjamin reads the *Angelus Novus* as a personification of history, in which the backward-looking (literally, retro-spective) figure is blown forward into time by the storm of progress. With this reading in mind, as well as the allusion to Benjamin's own status as a theoretician of the relationship between painting and mechanical reproduction, a theme that forms the core of Quaytman's material investigations, we are left to imagine what a retrospective of her work might eventually look like. Like this show, it would promise to be highly self-reflexive, since moving forward by looking back is Quaytman's primary modus operandi. Indeed, what we see in her art is a vertiginous chain of references that can dazzle and sometimes overwhelm, as it seems to recede without end—a mobilization of history in amnesiac times. □

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ART

R.H. QUAYTMAN

By MICHAEL KREBBER
Photography GRANT DELIN

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LAUNCH GALLERY »

I read somewhere that, as a child, R.H. Quaytman could identify the origin country of a painting by its depiction of the sky. (Quaytman's father was an artist; her mother is a poet). This biographical detail is a perfect initiation into the New York painter's work, because Quaytman, too, packs an immense amount of telling historical, geographical, political, and aesthetic information in what might, at first, be seen as a straightforward visual effect. After all, contemporary painting is very similar to the sky in its abstract universalism—harmless, beautiful, dreamy, apolitical, a point on which all viewers can agree. Quaytman takes that idea of abstraction and materiality and turns it on its head. Ever since the artist began working on her series of "chapters" in 2001, she has complicated—and enhanced—the state of postmodern painting by investing her projects with endless layers of

meanings. Her style often involves screen printing and oil or gesso on wood board, a frisson of photography and paint that can harken back to op as well as pop and all of its subsequent countermovements; the accumulating imagery for each chapter usually springs from deep-diving research into the specific sites where Quaytman is scheduled to show the work, and the cultural, political, optic, and even personal associations that coalesce along the way. In short, Quaytman has managed to re-invest the painted surface with a dizzying encyclopedic dimensionality, releasing chapter after chapter of what might one day make up a completed book the way 19th century humanist novelists serialized their epics one chapter at a time. And in each of Quaytman's idiosyncratic chapters, there is, to misquote a modernist, so much there there. References to Walter Benjamin or Clarice Lispector, to fellow artists she's shown with, to artworks she's happened across during her travels, to architecture, theory, memory, literature—it's all right there in the frame.

This month, Quaytman will exhibit work from her 30th chapter, as part of "Morning: Chapter 30," a retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Alongside chosen pieces from previous chapters, the new work is influenced by Quaytman's late 2015 road trip into the Nevada desert to visit Michael Heizer's iconic 1969-70 land-art masterpiece, *Double Negative*. As the artist was preparing for the show, she took an evening off this past July to meet up with her friend, the German painter Michael Krebber, at her apartment on East Third Street in the East Village. Over wine, they discussed everything from Chinatown turtles to Trump. This is a redacted version of a much longer wine-infused conversation. —*Christopher Bollen*

MICHAEL KREBBER: I like this apartment very much.

R.H. QUAYTMAN: Oh, thank you. I like the building very much. Although the first month I was here, a man upstairs jumped out the window. And my first night, it sounded like someone was being murdered in the apartment above me. You know, I found out recently that Madonna lived right around here before she became a superstar—just being Madonna-ish here, when it must have been really dicey. There's also a huge Catholic church directly across the street that I'm too frightened to go into.

KREBBER: The first time I visited New York, I lived on Ninth Street by Tompkins Square.

QUAYTMAN: In the Christodora?

KREBBER: No. It was a simple building that still exists. But the area was completely different. This was back in 1977. Every fifth house was burned down.

QUAYTMAN: Did you ever go to Pat Hearn's first gallery on the Lower East Side when it opened? It was in the '80s.

KREBBER: I went to Hearn's gallery on Wooster Street. Was that her first one?

QUAYTMAN: No, the first one was over here. I worked briefly at her Wooster Street gallery answering phones and stuff. I remember she was always very short on cash. That's where I first met Jutta Koether and a lot of people I later became much closer with, people who you also knew. But Pat's first gallery over in this neighborhood was shocking. The Lower East Side was a hellhole then, not like now with the highfalutin galleries and spaces. When Pat did it, it was incredible because it was just a bombed-out, really scary neighborhood, and she opened this space that was beautiful and glamorous. It took real chutzpah.

KREBBER: And now the whole neighborhood has become glamorous, no? It's an overdose now of avant-garde. It's *arrived*!

QUAYTMAN: I don't give anybody credit for moving over here or anywhere now. I get the feeling that the art scene can't go to Brooklyn, but maybe that's my old-fashionedness. What if all the galleries just started en masse moving to Brooklyn?

KREBBER: When I was here four months ago, I lived for a moment in Lefferts Gardens in Brooklyn, and there was no art at all. It was near a subway station, and I enjoyed living there. It was a completely friendly street where everyone wanted to be happy and lucky, sitting on the stoop outside.

QUAYTMAN: Really? When I lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, it was distinctly not like that. Hasidic men would pick up hookers outside my window. Anyway, I guess we could talk about my trip out to see Heizer's *Double Negative* ...

KREBBER: I was thinking this afternoon about what I should ask you. I don't know a lot about your chapters. I just see your work from the outside.

QUAYTMAN: Actually, I prefer that viewpoint. I actively try to make paintings for passive, distracted, foreign, and even disinterested audiences. The chapter thing is more a method for myself, or maybe it's a symptom. It began around the same time Google was established. I would research on the internet a place I had been invited to show—like Lodz, Poland, for example. I began to find subjects and connections to the few notions I had about painting. But this accumulating subject matter started adding up and leading to other things. But I'll only use an image if it can also provide something perhaps not totally uninteresting to look at and not requiring much prior knowledge.

KREBBER: You and I met through a common friend. And I remember first going down to the Lower East Side and visiting Orchard [a Lower East Side gallery that Quaytman co-ran with a number of artists from 2005 to 2008]. I must have visited Orchard three or four times, and you were always there. And one time you were the gallerist.

QUAYTMAN: In the original concept of Orchard, [artist] Andrea Fraser was going to be the dealer, like, really a dealer, as in the Andrea Fraser Gallery. But she was ambivalent, and so these other agendas started to coalesce.

KREBBER: When I visited that time, you were as the gallerist for your own exhibition ["From One O to the Other," a group exhibition in 2008].

QUAYTMAN: That was awkward.

KREBBER: And in this exhibition, you had this hook or cleat where you could hang paintings. So I went and hung one of your paintings up on the wall. And then I took that painting off and hung up another one.

QUAYTMAN: Thank you! At the time, I thought I could do that everywhere, but then when I got to the museums, they said, "No, we can't do that." The cost of insuring the paintings is prohibitive. What I was able to do at Orchard was have the audience handle the paintings directly. But this kind of installation freedom is not possible for me anymore because of the insurance. You can't believe the tricks that must be done to secure a painting to the wall or a shelf in a museum.

KREBBER: It all becomes part of the work. And there is also a point where some part of the work breaks down. And that's an interesting moment for the artist. It can sometimes be only a small moment.

QUAYTMAN: Well, I'm hoping that the following moment will not eject me. I *do* want to make money just like the next guy.

KREBBER: Yes, but that becomes part of the artwork, too.

QUAYTMAN: Definitely. The irony is that the overarching chapter structure that began to appeal to collectors arose out of the simple fact that I had no money and work was accumulating. The book metaphor enabled me unconsciously to "save face." Because now instead of having unsold paintings accumulate to gather dust, I would have them organized like books on shelves. It was inadvertently a kind of inoculation against the explosive authority of the collector that has occurred since 2001. So in this way, the money is a part of the paintings.

KREBBER: I wanted to mention that when I visited Orchard there was also, on Ludlow Street, another artist space. Gareth [James] was involved and Cheyney Thompson and Sam Lewitt.

QUAYTMAN: I know. That pissed us off at Orchard. We were like, "Come on, Gareth! Don't start this other boy group over there when your responsibility is over *here* at Orchard." Because they were all boys over there. Speaking of which, did you see Andrea Fraser got a big, very positive review today in the *Times*?

KREBBER: No. *Andrea* has a big review in the *Times*? She now lives in Los Angeles?

QUAYTMAN: Yes. She became much happier the second she moved to L.A. I've never seen such a transformation. She needed to be there the way I need New York, actually. We hosted a very fun New Year's Eve dance party at Andrea's house in L.A. this year after my road trip to *Double Negative* and Death Valley.

KREBBER: There was too much quality or talent involved in Orchard for my style —a complete mixture. For me, I thought, it is a failure.

QUAYTMAN: It was a failure. And I stand by that failure, because we wanted it to be. But it was a failure for so many interesting reasons. I mean, it definitely failed at being cool. We were uncool. I think because we had to reach a neutral place between such opposing views. It was democratic in that way. I mean, Andrea and Nick [Nicolás Guagnini] and Karin Schneider and Moyra Davey ... the list goes on. It was not a group of friends.

KREBBER: That's a nice detail.

QUAYTMAN: It *was* a nice detail because I had to battle so much over everybody and everything. But it was sort of good to have to battle about those things.

KREBBER: Orchard was right by Miguel Abreu Gallery, who is one of the galleries that represents you now. There was a whole generation happening during that time of Orchard, which seems not to exist so much anymore. I was reading an interview with the artist Sam Pulitzer and he implied that Miguel Abreu artists were "goody-two-shoes" artists.

QUAYTMAN: I'm totally a goody-two-shoes artist. Sign me up for that! I try not to offend.

KREBBER: I thought I was always on the side of those who were not the goody-two-shoes artists.

QUAYTMAN: [*laughs*] I think we've established a lot tonight.

KREBBER: Maybe that's why I got in trouble and why I'm now living here in New York.

QUAYTMAN: I told you not to move to New York. I did warn you.

KREBBER: But I like that I moved here. I couldn't stay in Frankfurt; I didn't want to live in Cologne at this time; Berlin, no way. So then I thought there was only New York.

QUAYTMAN: But you moved into an extreme living situation. A synagogue converted into small apartments for poor Chinese families is, I would say, extreme.

KREBBER: You once said that you can't be a teacher because you're not optimistic. I was a bit jealous of that idea so I borrowed it.

QUAYTMAN: Please take it!

KREBBER: Because my teaching, for a long time, was optimistic. And I felt for a while that something was really happening and changing in art.

QUAYTMAN: I think I know what you mean. A lot of young men were having great fun for a while. It was less fun for me, perhaps. This reminds me to ask, are you a feminist, Krebber?

KREBBER: I cannot say that I am not a feminist but I cannot say—

QUAYTMAN: Leave it there! "I cannot say that I am not a feminist." Just leave it there. You're in America now. Be optimistic! [*Krebber sighs*] Shit, the U.S. is going down, and it's going down this year. One thing I am worried about is the fact that I'm opening this chapter just a few weeks before the election.

KREBBER: What do you mean? Because there is something in this new chapter

that is about the election?

QUAYTMAN: It definitely is my American chapter. It's red, white, and blue.

KREBBER: Where is your Turkish chapter? So much is happening in Istanbul at the moment; it's just terrible.

QUAYTMAN: Well, let's not forget, I did just finish a chapter in Israel right before this, and then Brazil before that one.

KREBBER: It's not only an American problem.

QUAYTMAN: No, and neither are the things I think about. The map leads from New York to Germany to Italy to Belgium to Chicago to Brazil to our Wolfgang Hahn Prize exhibition in Cologne [a joint Krebber and Quaytman exhibition at the Museum Ludwig in 2015], to Israel, and it now spirals back into the Southwest. I like to escape from the local, from New York. I never wanted to be understood as an American artist, and I always try to take off the blinders of the local and the personal. I often say that I am from the Atlantic Ocean.

KREBBER: Like England?

QUAYTMAN: I'm not a *British* artist. Ugh! I could be called an Irish artist way before a British artist.

KREBBER: But Turkey. I read the news, and it's now all about lynching in Istanbul and cutting off heads.

QUAYTMAN: Well, I could paint that. I'd paint a decapitation. It's a famously popular subject for female artists, come to think of it. In fact, I had a decapitation painting in my Cologne chapter, *Cherchez Holopherne* [*Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21,* 2011].

KREBBER: My mother tried to explain how human nature is when a war happens, and that there will have been so many rapes and killings after a war ...

QUAYTMAN: Naturally, after the war, most of the men are killed and there are only women left over.

KREBBER: My mother also said that farmers always have the cows and the bulls in separate stables, because she came from the countryside. When the bulls were getting excited in their stables, the farmer would go in with a water hose, with cold water, and spray the testicles and then it was calm in the room.

QUAYTMAN: Maybe they should try that technique at the Republican Convention. Just spray all those white testicles.

KREBBER: My father explained communism to me in a similar way. He said the idea or ideology of communism would not work because it was based on the notion that man was good. But man is not good, therefore, it would not work.

QUAYTMAN: That's also the Republican viewpoint from what I can gather, that humans are fundamentally brutes and baddies. This also seems the Israeli—and let's face it—German viewpoint.

KREBBER: But my father is a leftist, like being a Bernie Sanders supporter in Germany.

QUAYTMAN: I do think it's just very hard to know what's going on right now in any way. It's scary and I feel frightened, actually. I think everybody is. All my friends seem to be in crisis.

KREBBER: Well, there is a new situation now that quite disappoints me. I should try to see it in a positive way but I can't—I cannot really do that. But on the other side, I am also getting *old*.

QUAYTMAN: I think it's courageous that you just up and left Frankfurt and came here.

KREBBER: No, it is not courageous. But teaching at the Städelschule was fun, like

surfing.

QUAYTMAN: School is communal. It's company, social. I find, however, being solitary feels right lately. I've never been that way before, but it feels right to be alone now. But I know what you mean; it's hard to envision what's going to happen right now.

KREBBER: There has been a kind of generational change. And something has now also changed in my head. But in either case, a certain moment is gone and now I see the results of it. Now is maybe a situation again where everybody is against everybody. It is ... *murderous*. And you will have to find ways through it. And you will have to not completely dislike that. It's like, when you have ten chairs and eleven people, and they run around the table and have to sit down. It's a German game and it is very cruel.

QUAYTMAN: I know that game, musical chairs. It's the worst! Maybe you have to be at the right party for that game.

KREBBER: I don't know what the right party is anymore. Maybe that's also happened in my head. You know, you have a very good supermarket on the corner.

QUAYTMAN: I love that supermarket, Key Food. That's the slum grocery store with a lot of heart.

KREBBER: I just came up Essex Street, and the other one was called the Essex Street Market.

QUAYTMAN: Oh, that's a famous market. It's nice, right?

KREBBER: It was quite good. I now shop at Di Palo's [on Grand Street] where all the tourists go.

QUAYTMAN: Di Palo's is the best and was there way before the tourists.

KREBBER: Yes, I like everything in there. That's my shop at the moment. And I buy milk opposite my apartment in the Chinese supermarket. I don't go into the fish department anymore. They have all these animals in the fish department, and once I looked into a bucket and I saw three turtles. They cost $8.99 and they were still a bit alive. I thought you could buy them and take a knife and make it more comfortable for them. I could help them. Then the next day I went back and they had two different sizes of turtles. Then I went to the zoo in Brooklyn and the turtles were swimming, and I thought, "Here they are—the same ones they sell in my supermarket."

QUAYTMAN: My assistant Peter Mundwiler's partner just got a job landscaping zoos. Like, designing the polar bear cage! That would be a better job than being a painter, right now, frankly.

KREBBER: Ah, come on.

QUAYTMAN: How to design spaces for animals in our life, in our world.

KREBBER: I still like gambling.

QUAYTMAN: Then you'd like Vegas. Did you ever go to Vegas?

KREBBER: No.

QUAYTMAN: You should go!

KREBBER: I don't need to go to Vegas. I saw it from the plane when the captain says, "Look to the right."

QUAYTMAN: Have you ever done a road trip across America?

KREBBER: I will do that one day.

QUAYTMAN: You want to do that together? I want to get back to the Southwest, to Death Valley, Grand Canyon, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah ... First you land in Vegas and get a hotel room there. Quite good hotels are so cheap because they

want you to gamble. And then you rent a car and you can just go off into the desert.

KREBBER: I know that secondhand. Kippenberger did that trip with a friend. And I know there is a trick to those Vegas hotels. It's easy to get into them, but you can't find your way out. Every way leads to a gambling machine, yeah?

QUAYTMAN: Yes, and there's no daylight. They don't let you know the time of day. All clocks are gone. And you can chainsmoke! It's incredible. You really need to experience it once in your life.

KREBBER: I will think about renting a car and doing this trip.

QUAYTMAN: My trip out to Nevada and *Double Negative* changed all my plans for my MOCA "survey" exhibition. It made me decide to paint a giant American landscape or horizon on 22 paintings spanning a 110-foot wall. I was inspired by Warhol's "shadow paintings" [*Shadows*, 1978-79], which I saw hanging on the very wall that my *Morning, Chapter 30* will hang this October.

MICHAEL KREBBER IS A NEW YORK-BASED ARTIST. "THE LIVING WEDGE," A SURVEY OF HIS WORK, OPENS THIS MONTH AND RUNS THROUGH JANUARY AT THE SERRALVES MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN PORTO, PORTUGAL.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN | **BEST IN CULTURE 2016**

The Best Art of 2016

By **HOLLAND COTTER** and **ROBERTA SMITH** DEC. 7, 2016

Roberta Smith

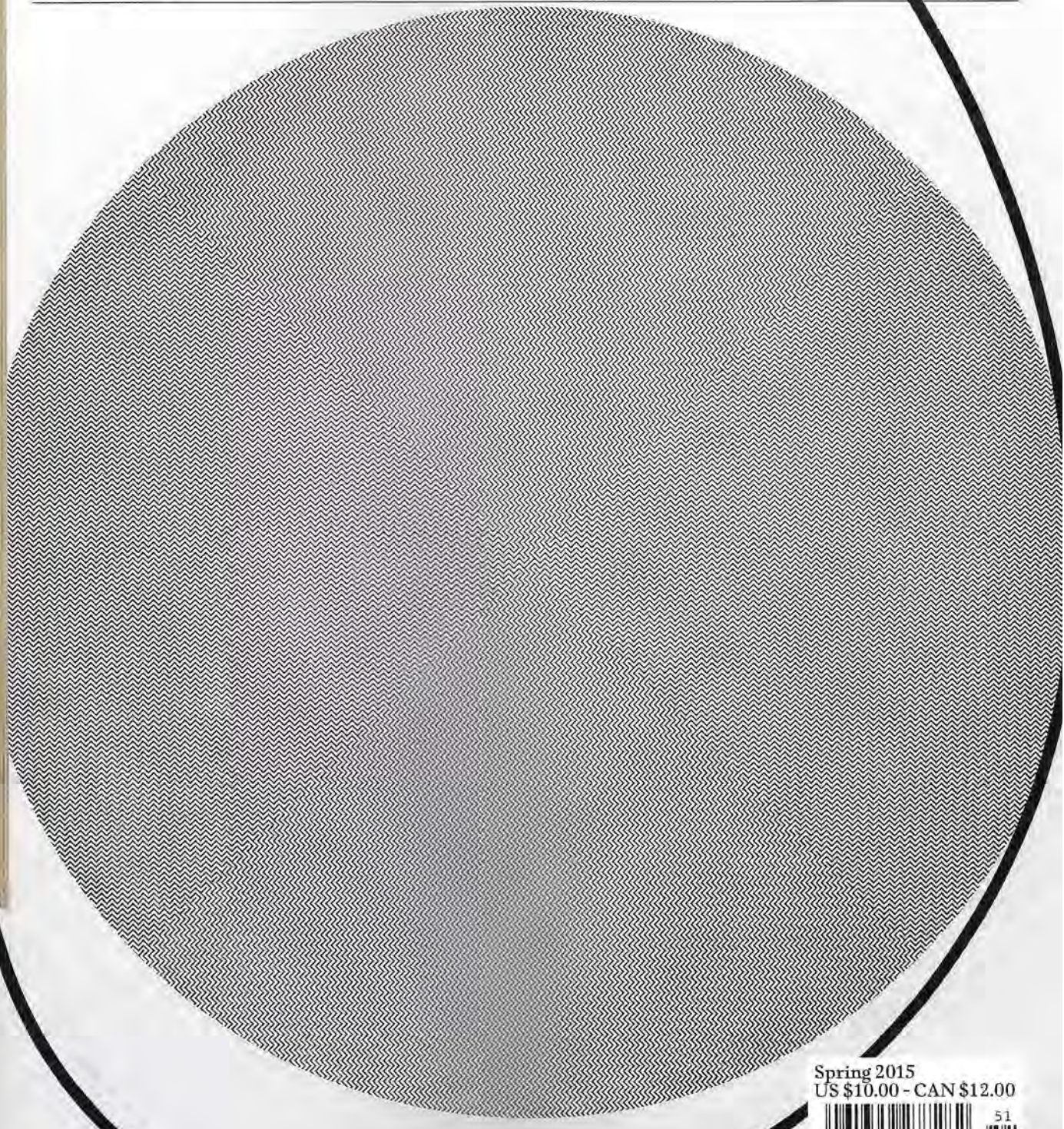
At its best, art is an essential source of comfort, wisdom and hope — and this past season was no exception. Despite our tragically riven society, museums, galleries and alternative spaces often reflected a softening of divisions and hierarchies with exhibitions that were less white, less male or less doctrinaire in historical view. They gave every sign that the art out there, past and present, is still richer and more various than we can ever know.

11. ON THE WEST COAST, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art had something of a banner year with an exhibition of Catherine Opie's "O Project," portraits that document the love and dignity of people who defy narrow definitions of sexual normalcy; an exhaustive retrospective of Robert Mapplethorpe (in collaboration with the Getty) and a survey of the horror movie polymath Guillermo del Toro. At the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, you can still see "Morning: Chapter 30," the first retrospective of R. H. Quaytman's austere merging of painting, photography and location, and "Mickalene Thomas: Do I Look Like a Lady?," the artist's latest excursions into black female identity carried out in photography, video and exuberant 1970s interiors. (Both shows run through Feb. 6.) One of the year's most memorable exhibitions was the Berkeley Art Museum's "Architecture of Life," which inaugurated its outstanding new building while roaming from prehistoric cultures to the present. It was a profound meditation on form, functional and otherwise — the ultimate source of art's essential comfort, wisdom and hope.

Afterall

A Journal of Art,
Context and Enquiry

Sharon Hayes
James Richards
R.H. Quaytman
Solo Exhibitions



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R.H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, encaustic, oil, gouache, urethane foam, silkscreen ink and gesso on two panels, 31.4 × 31.4cm and 82.6 × 82.6cm, detail

Previous spread: R.H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, encaustic, oil, gouache, silkscreen ink and gesso on panel, 62.9 × 101.6cm. Both images courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

R.H. Quaytman: Archive to Ark, the Subjects of Painting

– Sarah Ganz Blythe

Onward! enough speculation
keep on copying
the page must be filled.
Everything is equal, the good and the evil,
the fruitful and the typical,
they all become an exaltation of the statistical.
There is nothing but facts — and phenomena
Final Bliss

— Gustave Flaubert via Hanne Darboven via Douglas Crimp (via R.H. Quaytman)[1]

'Did early abstraction inadvertently indoctrinate us into modes of thinking and perceiving that now prevent the revolutionary experience they first provided?', R.H. Quaytman asks.[2] To address this question, she devises an 'artist's art history' that follows a learning-by-doing model through which she inserts herself into the material presence of this history.

Her work in response to Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) is a case in point. Klee first exhibited the transfer drawing with watercolour — a wide-eyed angel hovering with wings outstretched, gaping mouth, locks of hair and feathers fluttering — in 1920 at Galerie Goltz in Munich. It inspired Gershom Scholem to pen a poem, 'Greetings from Angelus' (1921), to Walter Benjamin, who had purchased the drawing from the show.[3] In Benjamin's hands, Klee's angel became the 'angel of history' whose 'face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees only single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. [...] What we call progress is *this* storm.'[4] Shortly after writing this in 1940 as part of his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Benjamin is believed to have left the drawing in the care of Georges Bataille, who then passed it on to Theodor W. Adorno, who gave it to Scholem, who donated it to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Quaytman knew this life history when she visited the drawing there in 2014. She was struck by the figure's ambiguity — angel or animal, male or female, self-portrait or alter ego? For one work in the series *O Tópico, Chapter 27* (2014), she meticulously copied the image onto a wood panel, replicating Klee's transfer technique, hoping to learn more through the making of the thing.[5] In Quaytman's rendering, a molten polyurethane splatter now comes between the angel and the past he suspiciously contemplates from a modest hole. A wide border of a geometric pattern derived from a Brazilian basket weave cleanly frames the black cloud; it is at once evocative of medieval icons and Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist compositions. Besides the afterglow of fluorescent paint applied to the top edge of the panel, there is no heavenly benevolence or ethereal escape here. It it is not the past that Quaytman's angel surveys, but us, the viewers.

Such conscious positioning of viewership lies at the core of Quaytman's work: 'My pictures often reflect the space in front of the picture and the space the viewer is in, historically, optically or

Sarah Ganz Blythe describes how R.H. Quaytman's engagement with painting is perched between history and site, transparency and opacity.

1 R.H. Quaytman, ¬, *Chapter 24*, Mönchengladbach: Museum Abteiberg, 2012.
2 R.H. Quaytman, 'R.H. Quaytman', *October*, vol.143, Winter 2013, p.49.
3 See Gershom Gerhard Scholem, 'Greetings from Angelus', *The Fullness of Time* (ed. and intro. by Steven M. Wasserstrom, trans. Richard Sieburth), Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2003.
4 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn), New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p.249.
5 I saw portions of *O Tópico, Chapter 27* laid out in Quaytman's studio in September 2014, and in November visited its full installation at Gladstone Gallery in New York, which was organised as a prelude for its ultimate destination in Inhotim, Brazil in a pavilion designed by Solveig Fernlund.

R.H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, oil, silkscreen ink and gesso on panel, 82.2 × 82.2cm. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

architecturally.'[6] She achieves this through a working method that takes the conceptual form of an inconclusive book, in which each new exhibition of predominantly photography-based silkscreened images equates to a chapter that is developed in response to the location where they will be shown. 'The ambition of this ongoing serialised system', Quaytman writes, 'is to develop a living, usable painting model, that corresponds with how — not only what — we see.'[7] For example, the use of Klee's *Angelus Novus* points towards her forthcoming body of work, *Chapter 28*, which will be presented in June of this year at the Israel Museum, while the border of the Atantowoto basket-weave pattern refers to Brazil, the eventual site of *O Tópico, Chapter 27*. The latter will be Quaytman's first permanent installation, housed in a garden pavilion at the Centro de Arte Contemporânea Inhotim, near Belo Horizonte. The building will take the form of the golden spiral, with interior walls positioned according to the Fibonacci sequence. The spiral's curve is also registered in the gesso of several panels of the series, which themselves are proportioned according to the eight component parts of the golden ratio, a format the artist has adhered to since her first chapter, in 2001, and which she intends to pursue for the remainder of her career. While this conceptual framework connects the logic of the panels to that of the framing exhibition space, the panels' surfaces register their surroundings via images of historical artworks, artists or events associated with the gallery, institution or location of display. The result of archival and field research, Quaytman's 'subjects', as the Portuguese title *O Tópico* ('The Topic') suggests, are specific and wide-ranging, among them: a seed the artist found on the ground while visiting Brazil; a teenager posing in front of an old VW Bug, referring to an artwork by the Brazilian artist Jarbas Lopes; and the artist Dawn Kasper, shown working on a drawing that says 'chaos is a ...'. The panels

6 R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011, p.247.
7 *Ibid.*

Installation view, 'R.H. Quaytman: *O Tópico, Chapter 27*', Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2014. Pictured, back to front: *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 94 × 152.4cm; *O Tópico, Chapter 27 (Repair)*, 2014, varnish, silkscreen ink and gesso on wood, 62.9 × 101.6cm; and *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, gesso on wood, 31.4 × 31.4cm. Photograph: David Regen. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

bring external referents into the gallery 'in the hope that', as Quaytman says, '…attention, whether from a gaze or a glance, can be contained, reflected and distracted'.[8]

In this sense, painting is made to work against some of its most traditional formulations. Rather than offering a window-like view onto other worlds, the panels press into the gallery space and are formulated so that each is to be read in relation to its neighbour or another piece in the chapter. Occasional plinths protruding from the panels of Quaytman's paintings, or, elsewhere, shelves accommodating a selection of them, disrupt the suspension of disbelief that representational images can produce while affirming the paintings' status as objects that will be stored away. Rather than invoking a hermetic processional encounter, in which visitors would stop reverentially in front of each work, Quaytman's paintings are positioned 'as objects that you passed by — as things that you saw not just head-on and isolated, but from the side, with your peripheral vision, and in the context of other paintings'.[9] Working against what she has called the 'aloneness and self-sufficiency' of paintings that 'behave like film in dark rooms', the flatness achieved through silkscreen on gesso allows the panels to 'reverberate with other paintings around'.[10] A large vocabulary of artistic languages and references shapes this effect: abstraction and figuration, silkscreened photographs on gesso and polyurethane splats, absorbing Op art patterns and glimmering diamond-dust lines, hand-ground pigments and encaustic paint, printed text and striped lines that reference the panels' plywood edges while evoking Barnett Newman's zips.[11] Quaytman speaks of creating sustained attention through a visual syntax that inculcates first, second, even third readings in which the paintings open up many possible meanings, much like words in a poem.[12] For example, a sequence of silkscreened allusions to the paintings' place of exhibition may be interrupted by an Op art pattern that also indexes the site, while a 'caption' in the form of an arrow suggests punctuation. This variety is held together by a grammar in the form of rules that govern Quaytman's practice. Not unlike Richard Serra's text piece *Verb*

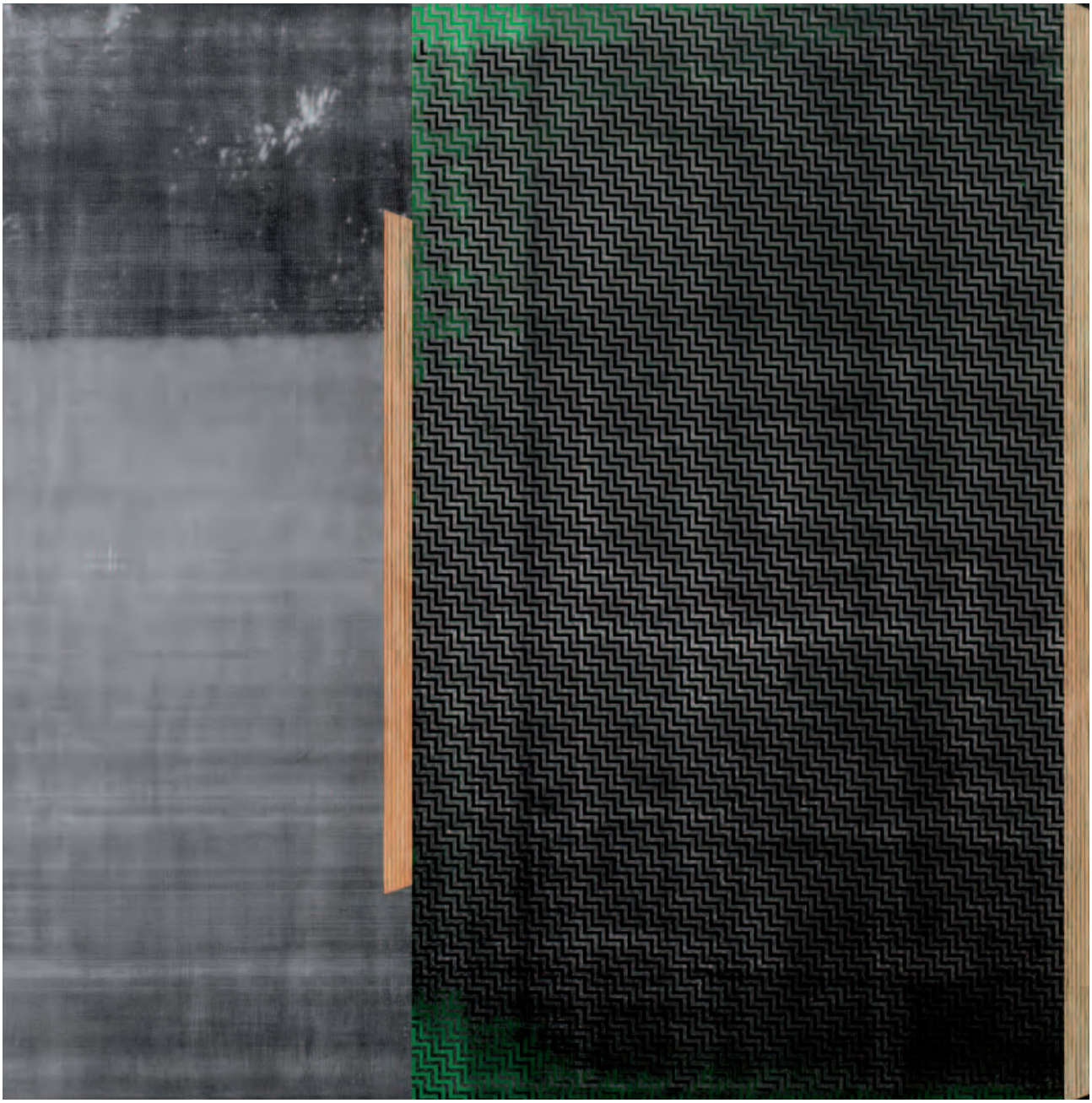
8 *Ibid.*, text printed on the cover.
9 Steel Stillman, 'In the Studio: R.H. Quaytman,' *Art in America*, June/July 2010, p.88.
10 R.H. Quaytman in conversation with David Joselit, 'I Modi', *Mousse*, issue 29, June—August 2011, p.136.
11 'The diamond-dust paintings attract focus, as opposed to repelling it the way the Op patterns tend to do. They pull you in while the others push you out.' R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, *op. cit.*, p.157.
12 Conversation with the artist, 21 September 2014.

List (1967–68), which offers a series of focused 'actions' that generate new forms, Quaytman's strict adherence to format (chapters), size (golden ratio) and support (gessoed plywood with bevelled edges) provides the structure through which materials and subjects may vary while remaining interconnected. Rather than closing down meaning and invention through an imposing single vision, the open structure of associative relations invoked by the panels allows distinct media, materials and subjects to remain themselves while also animating one another. Much like Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, in which many voices, styles and references coexist within the author's construction, Quaytman's system permits a plurality of independent voices that are each allowed their own space within the gallery context.[13] In one work from *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, for example, a gestural blue-brown pool in waxy encaustic lies against the geometrical rigour of the golden spiral in egg-yolk yellow. Mondrian lozenges hung within viewing distance quietly reiterate a segment of the spiral's arc while perpendicular *trompe l'oeil* stripes evoke the plywood stripes that hover above the basket-weave pattern. Distinct pieces, like words, exist in and of themselves while also animating one another in contribution to their group as a whole.

But, what might this whole or subject be? Perhaps it is painting itself, summoned and pointed to without solely using the medium of painting. Quaytman writes: 'Despite my frequent use of photography, the digital and printmaking techniques, I use the name "painting" to describe what I do.'[14] She seems to ask: can a painting be a painting while being something else? And, as if to test out her logic, she plays a game of substituting 'painting' as a noun for other words in a sentence. This grammar exercise plays out amid her notes that accompany each of the 61 plates in the artist's book *7, Chapter 24* (2012): 'Declension: the variants of the form of the noun, pronoun or adjective by which grammatical case, number and gender are identified.'[15] Painting, like a part of speech, can be placed in different contexts and made to act as the subject, predicate, verb or noun and then asked if it still retains its status as painting. 'Paintings, like words, lose their origin and become, over time, emblems.'[16] Quaytman formally accomplishes this exercise by employing non-painting methods (photography, silkscreen, sculpture), but also through the use of historical paintings themselves. They make their appearance in almost every sequence, called up for their association with the

R.H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, oil, silkscreen ink and gesso on panel, 82.2 × 133cm. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

13 See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
14 R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, *op. cit.*, text printed on the cover.
15 R.H. Quaytman, 7, *Chapter 24*, *op. cit.*
16 R.H. Quaytman, 'R.H. Quaytman', *op. cit.*, p.49.



exhibition's context or to signal the next stop in Quaytman's itinerary. Her litany of iconic paintings by largely male modernist masters includes, in addition to the aforementioned examples: El Lissitzky's *Prouns*, Edward Hopper's *A Woman in the Sun* (1961), Lucio Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale* (*Spatial Concepts*), Piero Manzoni's *Achromes* and Sigmar Polke's artificial resin paintings. She also draws on the photographs of such artists as Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Andrea Fraser. This 'artist's art history' manifests itself through a range of replicative methods including the traditional academic mode of hand copying (such as the Klee) and the relatively recent technique of silkscreening (typically to reproduce paintings or photographs of other artists). Consistently, historical references are deliberately disrupted through shifts in colour, stark overlayed lines, shallow plinths, additional panels or the application of bulbous polyurethane splotches. This at once calls up the figures of painting's past and interrupts, distorts and critically works against its utopic impulses and celebrated heroes.

Quaytman's tactical approach is both inventive and resourceful. It balances the sheer desire to participate in painting while soberly mitigating the pitfalls

R.H. Quaytman, *7 (Concetto Spaziale Attese), Chapter 24*, 2012, lithographic print on stainless steel plate, 51.1 × 51.1cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne and Berlin

Opposite:
R.H. Quaytman, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, 2014, copper powder, enamel, silkscreen ink and gesso on panel. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

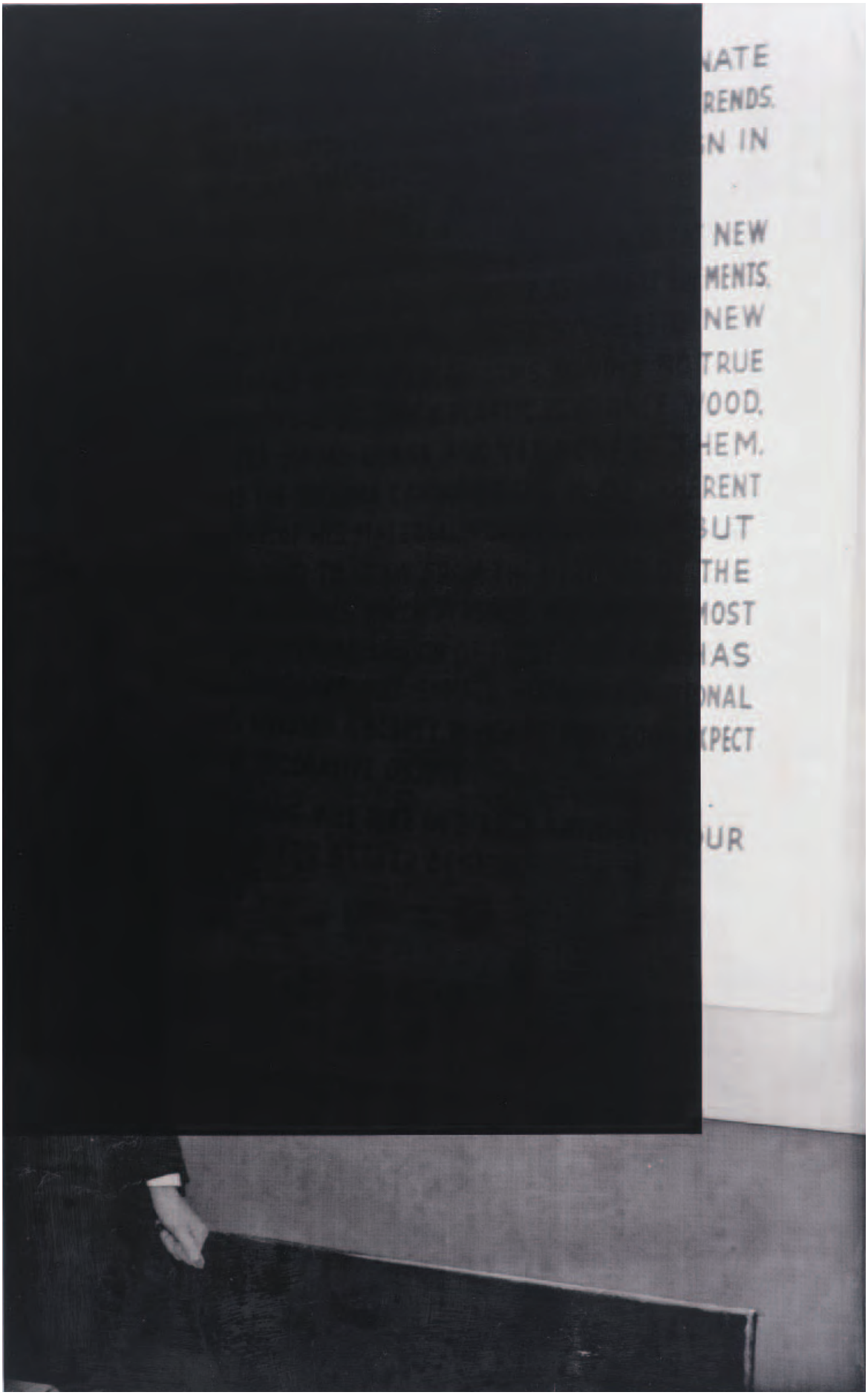
of involvement.[17] This is accomplished, in part, by fashioning painting's narrative as the artist so chooses — calling up certain masters, alluding to particular radical moments. Quaytman takes what has come before as an opportunity to absorb and construct: 'My rules were also made as a protest in a sense, but as a protest in favour of a medium — specifically painting. Maybe it was more of an accommodation than a protest. The rules come out of accommodating contextual facts that seem so unavoidable or endemic that they are not even seen anymore.'[18] So, like the angel of history, Quaytman persistently assesses history and finds herself at once fascinated and unmoored by it. But rather than gingerly backing away from the accumulation of ruins, she acts as an anthropologist, collecting and marking pieces of that history. As she describes, this approach started in 2001: 'The start of the new millennium, combined with the historical circumstances of 9/11 ... induced a sharp sense of flowing time and the instinct to mark it.'[19] Such marking literally manifests itself in *O Tópico, Chapter 27* when her fingerprint overlays a pictogram of the Roman Empire taken from Emma Willard's *Universal History: In Perspective* (1845). A source used in previous chapters, Willard's textbook relates to other pedagogical references,

Rather than offering a window-like view onto other worlds, Quaytman's paintings press into the gallery space.

including knitting patterns and instructions for making knots. Throughout, Quaytman's acts of transformation are in the spirit of Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, who intervenes and relocates signs and sources into new positions or contexts, disrupting their original context or narrative to constitute a new discourse.[20] The once-removed (silkscreened photographs of paintings) or even twice-removed (silk-screened X-rays of paintings) presence of historical materials testifies to her ambivalence about the meaning of the past, while also offering an actionable, often

17 Quaytman has said she lives by the Constructivist sculptor Katarzyna Kobro's statement: 'I like to have fun by correcting what was not finished in any former artistic movement.' Quoted in R.H. Quaytman, 'R.H. Quaytman', *op. cit.*, p.50.
18 R.H. Quaytman in conversation with D. Joselit, 'I Modi', *op. cit.*, p.131.
19 R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, *op. cit.*, text printed on the cover.
20 See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.


City of Rome
Founded B.C. 752
Sabini
Fidenae
Volsci
Albans
Veientes
Campania
356 B.C. Cisalpine Gaul
GREECE
Marsi
Samnites
Lucania
Carthage
Illyricum
Sardinia
Corsica
Macedon
Epirus
Spain
Sicily
Corinth
Thessaly
Numidia
Mauritania
Pergamus
Bythinia
Gaul
Mœsia
Vindelicia
Syria
Egypt
Germany
Holy Land
Noricum
Rhaetia
Pannonia
Pontus
Britain
Armenia
Thrace
Mesopotamia
Roman Empire at its
greatest extent A.D. 107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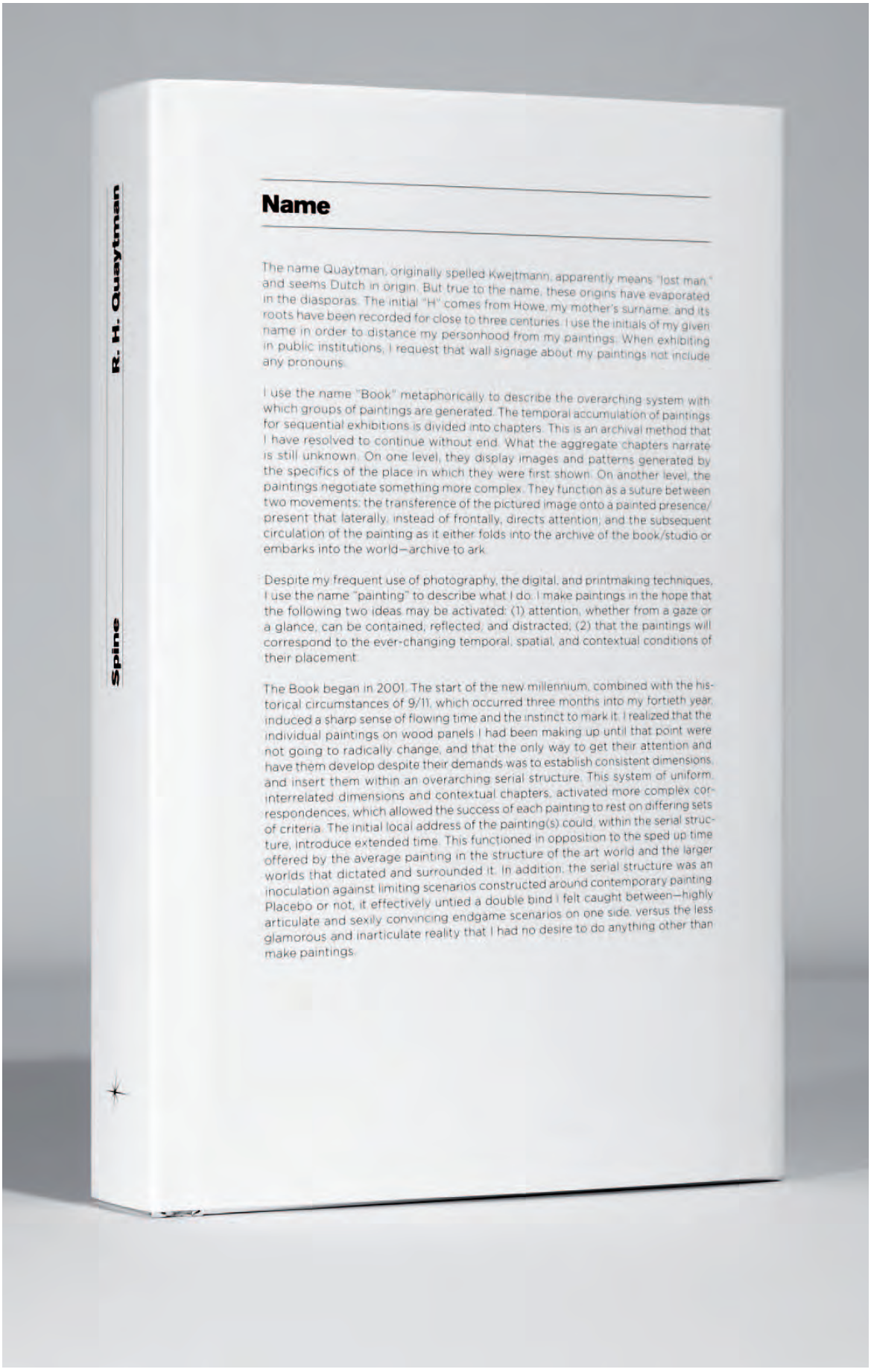
R.H. Quaytman, *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15*, 2009, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 101.6 × 63cm. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

critical way to insert herself into a number of structures that surround it: the patriarchal nature of painting's past, the history of place, the systems of the art world.

Lest her purposes be misinterpreted, or not interpreted at all, this process of bricolage is always undertaken with logic and explanation. Perhaps as a function of her years spent occupying many positions — curator, writer, editor, gallery owner, artist's assistant — or in resistance to notions of the impulsive, expressive creator, Quaytman consistently explains her purpose using the art world's most viable formats: books akin to catalogues raisonnés (*Allegorical Decoys*, 2008; *Spine*, 2011; **7**, 2012); statements issued with each chapter; and display instructions concerning how purchased works should be hung. Knowledge gained from lived experience has allowed her to smartly play with but also work against the pitfalls of the art world to assure that hers is not the forgotten, unstorable or unwritten-about work. She manages the 'circulation of the painting as it either folds into the archive of the book/studio or embarks into the world — archive to ark'.[21] Indeed, Quaytman adopts the gallery as ark, all-containing and protective, as an inevitable construct. Unlike the negotiations between self and history apparent in her version of an 'artist's art history', the gallery remains unscathed, an aesthetic container of silent dominance much like what Brian O'Doherty described in the 1970s.[22] However, Quaytman's system is devised to accommodate the reality that this well-ordered ark is but a temporary haven — its contents will soon be archive bound.

This focus on the past is tempered by Quaytman's interrogation of the manufactured narrative of art history: again, 'Did early abstraction inadvertently indoctrinate us into modes of thinking and perceiving that now prevent the revolutionary experience they first provided?'[23] Without answering this in the affirmative or negative, the question itself opens up a line of enquiry about painting's efficacy then and now. Did early-twentieth-century avant-garde practices actually have the revolutionary impact we now pine for? Did its novel formulations incite revolutionary experiences we can no longer access? If so, can rehearsing its forms and stories ever provide such revolutionary experiences again?[24] For Quaytman, the subject of painting is the devoted commitment to continuously working through these questions, at once to 'maintain and simultaneously disrupt painting's absolute presence'.[25] As such, it is necessary to remain at a proper distance from which to observe, analyse and speculate, as the logic, material form and compositions of her paintings gesture back to history and location, left and right to elsewhere in the chapter or the next, and directly in front to us. Her work suggests, like the *Angelus Novus*, that our present is an ambiguous state of affairs, caught between the storm 'called progress' blowing from Paradise and a fascination with 'the wreckage of the past'.[26] In this suspended limbo, these pictures want something of us, as W.J.T. Mitchell would suggest.[27] They compel us to ask: Should we perpetuate the angel's fixation on the past, or turn around? How might the past be our constant companion along the way to Paradise? What might the subjects of painting be tomorrow?

21 R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, *op. cit.*, text printed on the cover.
22 See Brian O'Doherty, 'The Gallery as Gesture', in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, pp.87—107.
23 R.H. Quaytman, 'R.H. Quaytman', *op. cit.*, p.49.
24 See Saint-Simon's definition of the avant-garde in Claude Henri de Saint-Simon and Léon Halévy's *L'Artiste, le Savant, et l'Industriel: Dialogue* (1825), reprinted in translation in *Art in Theory, 1815—1900* (ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood with Jason Gaiger), Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, pp.40—41.
25 R.H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*, Ghent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008.
26 W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *op. cit.*
27 W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.



Name

The name Quaytman, originally spelled Kwejtmann, apparently means "lost man," and seems Dutch in origin. But true to the name, these origins have evaporated in the diasporas. The initial "H" comes from Howe, my mother's surname, and its roots have been recorded for close to three centuries. I use the initials of my given name in order to distance my personhood from my paintings. When exhibiting in public institutions, I request that wall signage about my paintings not include any pronouns.

I use the name "Book" metaphorically to describe the overarching system with which groups of paintings are generated. The temporal accumulation of paintings for sequential exhibitions is divided into chapters. This is an archival method that I have resolved to continue without end. What the aggregate chapters narrate is still unknown. On one level, they display images and patterns generated by the specifics of the place in which they were first shown. On another level, the paintings negotiate something more complex. They function as a suture between two movements: the transference of the pictured image onto a painted presence/present that laterally, instead of frontally, directs attention, and the subsequent circulation of the painting as it either folds into the archive of the book/studio or embarks into the world—archive to ark.

Despite my frequent use of photography, the digital, and printmaking techniques, I use the name "painting" to describe what I do. I make paintings in the hope that the following two ideas may be activated: (1) attention, whether from a gaze or a glance, can be contained, reflected, and distracted; (2) that the paintings will correspond to the ever-changing temporal, spatial, and contextual conditions of their placement.

The Book began in 2001. The start of the new millennium, combined with the historical circumstances of 9/11, which occurred three months into my fortieth year, induced a sharp sense of flowing time and the instinct to mark it. I realized that the individual paintings on wood panels I had been making up until that point were not going to radically change, and that the only way to get their attention and have them develop despite their demands was to establish consistent dimensions, and insert them within an overarching serial structure. This system of uniform, interrelated dimensions and contextual chapters, activated more complex correspondences, which allowed the success of each painting to rest on differing sets of criteria. The initial local address of the painting(s) could, within the serial structure, introduce extended time. This functioned in opposition to the sped up time offered by the average painting in the structure of the art world and the larger worlds that dictated and surrounded it. In addition, the serial structure was an inoculation against limiting scenarios constructed around contemporary painting. Placebo or not, it effectively untied a double bind I felt caught between—highly articulate and sexily convincing endgame scenarios on one side, versus the less glamorous and inarticulate reality that I had no desire to do anything other than make paintings.

R.H. Quaytman, *Spine* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011). All images courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

R.H. Quaytman: Paratexts and Palimpsests

– Richard Birkett

[The paintings] *display images and patterns generated by the specifics of the place in which they were first shown. On another level,* [they] *negotiate something more complex. They function as a suture between two movements: the transference of the pictured image onto a painted presence/present that laterally, instead of frontally, directs attention; and the subsequent circulation of the painting as it either folds into the archive of the book/studio or embarks into the world — archive to ark.*
— R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*[1]

Poetry is never a personal possession. The poem was a vision and gesture before it became sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value. At the moment these manuscripts are accepted into the property of our culture their philosopher-author escapes the ritual of framing — symmetrical order and arrangement. Are all these works poems? Are they fragments, meditations, aphorisms, events, letters?
— Susan Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values'[2]

Richard Birkett finds a subversive literary methodology in R.H. Quaytman's ordering of paintings into chapters, and the production of related paratexts and publications.

The poet Susan Howe's second work of literary criticism, *The Birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American literary history* (1993), comprises a series of essays steeped in the words of 'characteristic North American voices and visions that remain antinomian and separatist'.[3] Howe depicts antinomianism — a term from Christian theology that emphasises the following of inner belief rather than external moral law — as a vital dissident lineage. The book mines the margins of radical North American literature through historical narratives in which linguistic lawlessness is pitted against authority. It suggests voice as formed by place, beginning with Anne Hutchinson, a seventeenth-century New England settler who challenged the covenant of works laid down by Puritan orthodoxy and as a result was sent into exile. For Howe, orthodoxy is ever present within a textual canon: 'a dark wall of rule support[ing] the structure of every letter, record, manuscript; every proof of authority or power'.[4] By contrast, antinomianism is repressed and distinctly gendered: 'The issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture. Lawlessness seen as negligence is at first feminised and then restricted and banished.'[5]

The core essays in *The Birth-mark* centre on particular historical voices and archival records but do not rest on the singular analysis of these texts. Instead, in form Howe's writings take on 'a digressive structure', as literary scholar Susan Vanderborg has noted, with 'the response to an individual source ... interrupted by questions, related sources and seemingly oppositional narratives'.[6]

1 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011, text printed on the cover.
2 Susan Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values', *The Birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American literary history*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993, pp.147—48.
3 S. Howe, 'Introduction', *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.2.
4 *Ibid.*, p.4.
5 *Ibid.*, p.1.
6 Susan Vanderborg, 'The Palimpsest as Communal Lyric: Susan Howe's Paratextual Sources', *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry since 1950*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001, p.79.

The book is a complex accumulation of 'text-paratext dialogues', and Howe's approach evokes that of the palimpsest in its process of historical recovery through the overwriting of the canon and the use of marginalia. Her essays, while addressing the question of the legibility of suppressed antinomian voices, implicate a genealogical reading of her own practice and its 'subversive' lines of influence. In its layering of quoted voices, *The Birth-mark* thus intersects directly with Howe's 'poems', which set existing textual and paratextual sources together on a page, as if cut up and collaged.[7] Such visual 'staging'[8] of text articulates and problematises the contingencies of writing, while in strict terms not being 'writing' itself. This methodology of the palimpsest also recurs in the 'paintings'[9] of R.H. Quaytman — who is, perhaps not incidentally, the writer's daughter[10] — which through the process of silkscreen printing reproduce archival images as well as photographs of figures and situations determined by the non-arbitrary nature of specific exhibition sites. Quaytman's sources, quoted through a reproductive medium, are part of a layered interplay of 'temporal, spatial and contextual conditions',[11] through which the artist positions painting as a discursive model.

For Howe, the methodology of re-inscribing the 'insubordinate' voices of the past through the inhabitation of physical and textual artefacts relates to the specific experience of female artists and writers. She has stated: 'If you are a woman, archives hold perpetual ironies. Because the gaps and silences are where you find yourself.'[12] Her discussion of the distinctiveness of the North American voice has at its heart the poems of Emily Dickinson, in particular their antinomian genealogy, their isolation from the literary canon and the controlled nature of their posthumous publication. Howe's first work of literary criticism, *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), is a close reading of Dickinson's writing made in response to her manuscript books, which were only published in a facsimile edition in 1982.[13] In *The Birth-mark*, she concentrates on the articulation and distribution of Dickinson's radical writing during and beyond her lifetime, and its 'reordering', 'revision' and 'manhandling' at the hands of editors and institutions.[14] The chapter 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values' addresses the visuality of her poems and letters in their spacing, calligraphic marks, line breaks and marginalia. The poet's opaque ordering of writings in manuscript books, packets and sets can thus be seen in resistance to their subsequent editing into conventional publishable form.

In the late 1980s, in the period between Howe's publishing of *My Emily Dickinson* and *The Birth-mark*, Quaytman combined working as an artist with the

7 Howe moved from painting to poetry in the mid-1960s, although her work has recently been shown within an art context again. The recent work *TOM TIT TOT* (2013) comprised of a series of letterpress prints and later a book, formed the centre of her 2013 solo exhibition at Yale Union in Portland, Oregon. Fragments of the work were later shown as part of the 2014 Whitney Biennial in New York. The work now also exists as an artist's book, with design and artwork by R.H. Quaytman, published by the Library Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014).

8 Howe has described how she 'often think[s] of the space of a page as a stage, with words, letters, syllables, characters moving across'. 'An Interview with Susan Howe' (with Maureen N. McLane), *The Paris Review*, no.203, Winter 2012.

9 Luke Cohen succinctly sums up the naming of Quaytman's practice as painting despite its dominant use of techniques of photographic reproduction: 'The artist defines painting negatively. Painting is approached as a suture through discussions of mediums of other material categories, such as photography, writing and architecture.' L. Cohen, 'Catachreses: On Rebecca H. Quaytman,' *Texte zur Kunst*, March 2010, p.136. It should also be noted that the use of silkscreen printing in order to transfer the photographic image to a support is a legibly material process, open to surface incident and facture.

10 It is widely cited — not least in interviews with the artist, and in the self-authored publications *Allegorical Decoys* and *Spine* — that R.H. Quaytman is from an eminent artistic family: Susan Howe contributes the 'H' to the abbreviated moniker; the painter Harvey Quaytman is the artist's late father; her late stepfather, sculptor David von Schlegell, and half-brother, writer Mark von Schlegell, complete this close artistic genealogy. See R.H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*, Gent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008, and R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, *op. cit.*

11 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

12 '*Talisman* Interview, with Edward Foster', in S. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.158.

13 During her lifetime very few of Emily Dickinson's poems were published, and those that were underwent heavy editing on the part of the publisher and editor Samuel Bowles (in the journal *Springfield Republican*) and editor George Parsons Lathrop (in the anthology *A Masque of Poets* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1878)). Dickinson instead developed a private mode of 'publishing': she transcribed finished drafts onto folded stationery that she then arranged into groups and sewed together, into packets or 'fascicles'. See *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1982), edited by R.W. Franklin.

14 Howe addresses Dickinson's poetry as representing a 'contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation'. S. Howe, 'Introduction', *op. cit.*, p.1.

role of programme coordinator at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. In 1989, Quaytman organised the first significant presentation in the US of the work of the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint, a radical early-twentieth-century abstractionist and devotee of theosophy. In an essay published in 2013, Quaytman details the impact of this exposure to af Klint's work and ideas, a practice hidden in its time (seen only by a close network of fellow female artists[15]) and neglected in the subsequent formation of a modernist canon. For Quaytman, the relevance of af Klint's paintings stands in their 'ability to immunise abstraction's terminal condition and give license to representation via language, botany, geometry, symbolism and the diagram'. Yet equally, the artist's exclusion from the histories of abstraction, attributed to 'her absence from any social network along whose lines abstraction developed',[16] poses for Quaytman vital questions of legibility. Just as Howe addresses Dickinson's 'gesture of infinite patience in preferring not to publish',[17] Quaytman queries how af Klint's supposed self-isolation has been read, speculating instead on the deliberate construction of genealogies outside of the market and in opposition to the construction of the present by historians and critics.

That is, Quaytman considers the prescriptions af Klint laid out in her will for the presentation of her work — that the entire body of her paintings and writings should be considered one unit and always remain together, and that this entity should not be exhibited until twenty years after her death — not as a strategy of inaccessibility, but as an artistic move towards holistic legibility in opposition to isolated singularity: 'The weight of the single painting is displaced onto something larger than itself.'[18] The emphasis on the unity of af Klint's work, and its implicit sanctioning *against* isolation, influenced Quaytman's adoption of the metaphorical 'armature of the book' as a means to impose an overarching structure on the production of paintings. Thus, since 2001, Quaytman has articulated each grouping of paintings produced in response to a particular context as a 'chapter', a grouping considered part of an as yet incomplete whole — the 'book' that ultimately will comprise the entirety of Quaytman's production.

This armature suggests an ambiguous relationship to the exhibition as a primary site of legibility. The 'book' serves as an autonomous DIY structure, yet at the same time the individual chapters emphasise coordinates usually given by exhibitions, such as the particular place, time and context of each grouping's production. The chapters are sequentially numbered and individually titled, and each

Quaytman's chapters treat painting and its supporting institutions as foundational manuscripts, to be written through.

contains a varying number of paintings, from as little as one to as many as fifty. The paintings themselves share physical and aesthetic characteristics within chapters, as well as across the wider serial structure: they all make use of gessoed plywood panels with bevelled edges, and on the whole carry images that hover between the crisp realism of the photographic and the muted, opaque layering of surface facture and homogenous abstract patterning. These silkscreened images and digitally rendered patterns are often reproduced more than once within a chapter. Finally, each chapter revolves around distinctive subjects, which are signalled by the paintings' reproduction of paratextual materials such as archival documents, Polaroid photographs and portraits of individuals or interior spaces. Notably, Quaytman's paintings are secondary 'exposures', making use of material with a previous existence, either drawn from an archive or produced by the artist as un-shown photographs, models or renderings.

These materials function as fragments of institutional, historical or personal

15 Af Klint was associated with a group of four other female artists under the name de Fem (The Five), formed in 1896. The group conducted seances, making extensive notes on the 'messages' received, which in turn influenced automatic drawings and the development of abstract forms in af Klint's paintings.
16 R.H. Quaytman, 'de Fem', in Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring (ed.), *The Legacy of Hilma af Klint: Nine Contemporary Responses*, Cologne: Buchhandlung der Walther Koenig, 2013.
17 S. Howe, 'Introduction', *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.2.
18 R.H. Quaytman, 'de Fem', *op. cit.*

events, annotating the reading of external situations as they also come to frame and comment on the conditions of each chapter, and of Quaytman's practice. The artist has described the structure of her 'book' as 'essentially a calendar … a datebook with appointments (history and time), addresses (places and architecture) and people (viewers and viewed) inserted as time moves forward'.[19] It can also be seen as a distinctly personal archive in formation — in fact, Quaytman has on occasion presented all or a number of a chapter's paintings leaning against one another in storage racks, like books on shelves — both in the sense of the accumulation of materials as 'a frame for consciousness',[20] and with regards to a serial organisation that forestalls the 'oblivion' of dispersion.[21] The 'entries' in this datebook or archive veer between those that transparently reflect the chapter's surroundings, and those that follow filaments of visual or conceptual relations to eclectic and lyrical ends.

In her essay 'Allegorical Decoys' (2008), Quaytman quotes Roland Barthes's description of a methodology allowing for 'a multi-layering of meanings which always let the previous meaning continue as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary'.[22] Quaytman rephrases and reframes the interweaving subjects of each chapter, fragmenting them and perceptually defamiliarising them, an exegesis enacted through the local specificity of each source and its outward, 'unsettling' movement into relations with other materials. The notion of the palimpsest as a paratextual strategy, evident in Howe's writing as a material process of re-inscription, an invocation of reading as a communal act and a critical tool of recovery, seems particularly relevant here.[23] Howe's 'literary criticism', which is contiguous with her poetry, is grounded in the collective re-reading of central texts in tandem with their accumulating annotation, a perceptual and cognitive movement of reflecting and refracting. Similarly, Quaytman's chapters are complex sites in which the artist seeks to 'maintain and simultaneously disrupt painting's absolute presence'.[24] They treat painting and its supporting institutions as foundational manuscripts, to be written through in order to recover traces of elision in their historical and social contexts. Principally for Quaytman, the perceived singularity of painting overlooks its historical and contemporaneous operations within a collective social discourse — in the words of art historian Rhea Anastas, Quaytman espouses instead 'a view of the moment of history as a field of relative positions sharing a common problematic'.[25]

The adoption of a literary model of modular relations in Quaytman's project extends to the syntactic structuring of the elements within a chapter, and its overall display. The artist produces paintings on wood panels in eight 'nesting' sizes,[26] determined geometrically through the golden section. The exhibition of these proportionally defined units, which responds in each instance to the spatial particularities of the gallery or museum, echoes the logic of book design and layout, treating the white wall space between each element as a functional aspect of their sequencing. This relational arrangement recalls the organisation of language, particularly in poetry, where rhythm, metrics and emphasis draw each element into a relation with the whole. Such poetics also entails the negotiation of language between eye and tongue — a negotiation marked in Quaytman's chapters by what the artist calls 'captions', or small hand-painted panels bearing monochromatic

19 R.H. Quaytman, 'Date', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

20 In writing on Quaytman's approach to the archive, the art historian Jaleh Mansoor states: 'Quaytman flips the archive, turning it on an axis that reprioritises the psycho-emotive sedimentation of the subject. In doing so she places the archive on the same side as the subject, a frame for consciousness rather than an impersonal repository.' J. Mansoor, 'Painting, Folding', *Parkett*, no.90, 2012, p.104.

21 R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

22 Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning' (1970), *A Barthes Reader* (ed. Susan Sontag), New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, p.323; quoted in R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *Allegorical Decoys*, *op. cit.*, p.12.

23 As highlighted by Vanderborg, the term 'palimpsest' was used by the poet H.D. as 'a metaphor for the project of the woman poet writing through a patriarchal cultural history to recover traces of elided female myths and signs.' S. Vanderborg, 'The Palimpsest as Communal Lyric', *op. cit.*, p.62.

24 R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *op. cit.*, p.9.

25 Rhea Anastas, 'Not in Eulogy Not in Praise But in Fact, Ruth Vollmer and Others: 1966—1970,' in Nadja Rottner and Peter Weibel (ed.), *Ruth Vollmer 1961—1978: Thinking the Line*, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2006.

26 There are two anomalies to this system of sizing. From the inception of the system in 2001, one painting size was elected that does not 'nest' into the others — it was intentionally chosen to create a 'fissure' in the logic of the system. A second anomalous size (larger than any of the existing panel sizes) was added in 2012.

R.H. Quaytman, *Łódź Poem, Chapter 2*, 2004 , oil on wood , 50.8 × 30.6cm

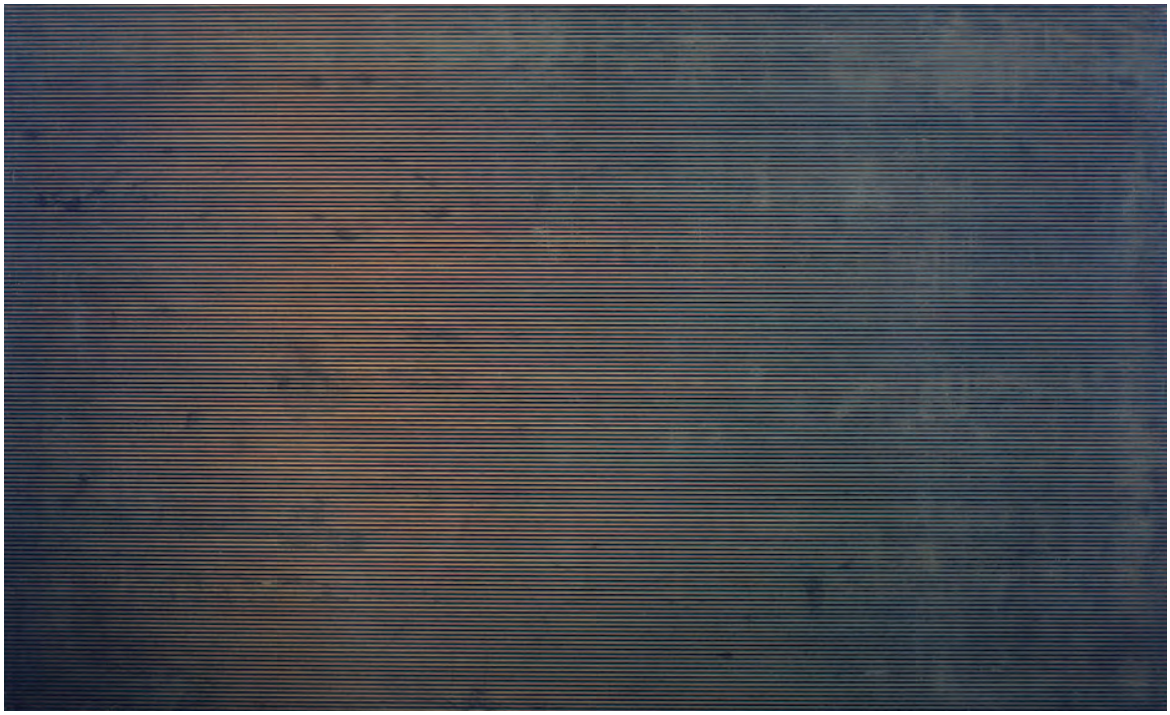
glyphs. These symbols are at times obliquely abstract, resembling decorative filigree; at others they appear as signage, the filigree forming into directional arrows, logo-like forms or typographic elements. The caption paintings are often positioned as if to comment on the works they appear alongside, or more enigmatically to register the manner in which an exhibition context asserts guiding principles. For example, in *Exhibition Guide: Chapter 15* (2009), shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Boston, a painting of a white ribbon formed into the shape of an arrow on a black background greeted viewers as they exited the institution's elevator, directing them into the main exhibition space and towards a second 'introductory' painting depicting the ICA's founding

R.H. Quaytman, *Constructivismes, Chapter 13*, 2008, oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood and shelf. Installation view, Almine Rech Gallery, Brussels, 2009

manifesto. Rather than presenting didactic information on their surroundings, the 'captions' form 'networks of signs and discontinuities'[27] that undermine the hierarchy of text and paratext, centre and margin, photography and painting.

Quaytman has indicated that the forms that appear in many of the caption paintings reference the work of the early-twentieth-century Polish sculptor Katarzyna Kobro and her partner, the painter Władysław Strzemiński. Direct allusions to the artists are also present in images used in *Łódź Poem, Chapter 2* (2004) and *Constructivismes, Chapter 13* (2009),[28] while an arrangement of images and texts sourced by Quaytman in research on the Polish artists, titled *Allegorical Decoys*, was exhibited in a vitrine as part of *Denial Is a River, Chapter 7* (2006). *Allegorical Decoys* is also the title of a 2008 artist's book and its central essay, in which Quaytman cites Kobro and Strzemiński's theory of 'unism' as an influence. This modernist theory, outlined in writings by the artists from the mid-1920s to the early 30s, expounds on the goal of producing artworks that

27 S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.* p.143.
28 Both Kobro and Strzemiński were born in Russia and moved to Poland in the 1920s. Quaytman's grandfather, Mark Quaytman, was a Jewish immigrant to the US from the city of Łódź in Poland, where the artists lived and worked from the mid-1920s until their deaths.

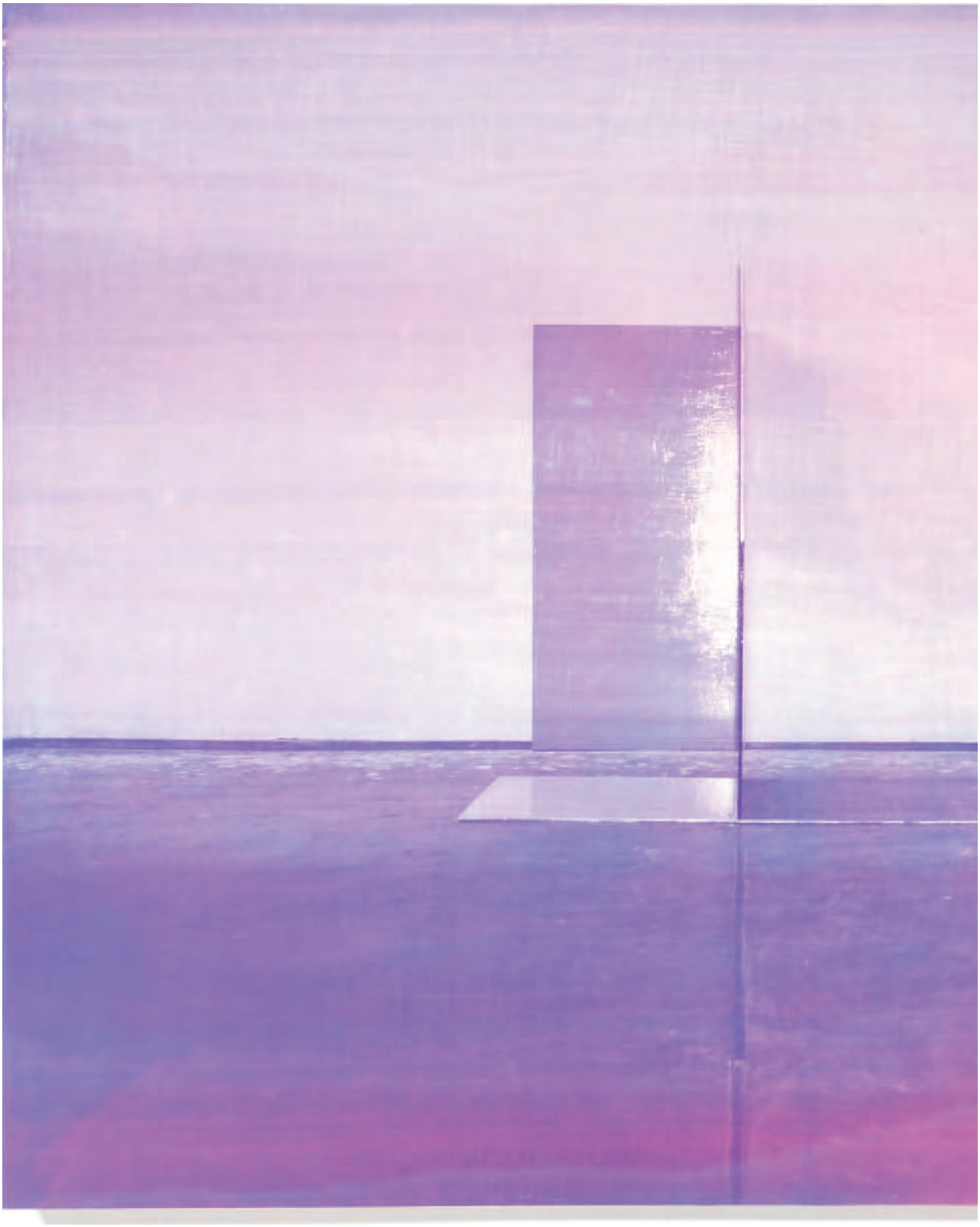


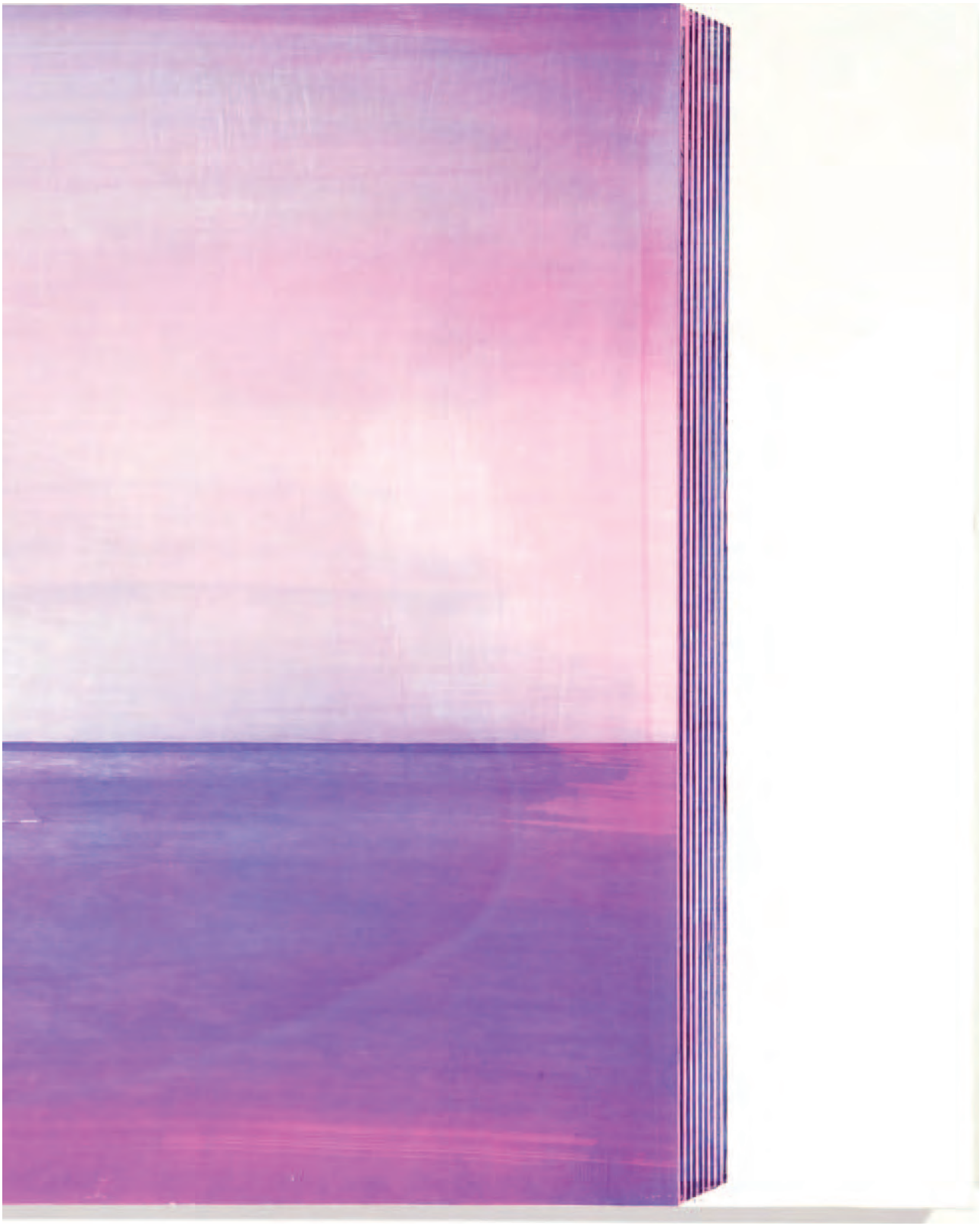
R.H. Quaytman, *Denial Is a River, Chapter 7*, 2006, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 50.8 × 82.2cm

appear non-compositional, devoid of any specific reference or focal point. Addressing the distinction between the 'natural limits' of painting and sculpture, the Polish artists defined unist painting as 'motivated' by the a priori limits of the painting frame, not seeking 'justification in values that subsist beyond the picture';[29] whereas unist sculpture, ungoverned by such a frame, was to be 'based upon the organic unity of sculpture and space [and] the expression of spatial relationships'.[30] Quaytman's production of silkscreened panels, in which the pictorial, the abstract and the architectonic collide, appears to intentionally complicate the dialogic terms of the unist address of painting and sculpture by collapsing both registers into the body of each chapter. Specifically, the artist seeks to push the isolated painting beyond its frame into the realm of the unists' intentions to abolish, as she writes, 'the objectness of sculpture in favour of its architectural integration into the space around it', just as Kobro sought to realise 'sculpture in space/time'.[31] Quaytman adopts strategies in which paintings actively *construct* the terms by which the viewing body experiences the work's spatial and temporal location, extending this integration further towards each chapter's penetration by the contextual site of exhibition.

In a number of chapters Quaytman makes use of photographic images of installed paintings and passing viewers, empty gallery spaces prior to exhibition and architectural models, creating *mise en abyme* effects that assert the spatial presence of the painting over the purely pictorial.[32] And on occasion, this constructed, localising effect is heightened by Quaytman perspectivally 'keystoning' the photographic silkscreen, suggesting the fiction of the image as encountered by the viewer from a specific, oblique angle. Yve-Alain Bois has noted how Kobro was 'always concerned with the space of our experience', citing her statement that 'we come to know space through our actions'.[33] Quaytman's paintings construct a similar awareness in the

29 Władysław Strzemiński, 'B = 2; to read', in *Constructivism in Poland 1923—1936* (exh. cat.), Essen, Otterlo and Łódź: Folkwang Museum, Kröller-Müller Museum and Museum Sztuki, 1973, p.62.
30 W. Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, 'Composition of Space', *L'Espace Uniste* (ed. and trans. Antoine Baudin and Pierre-Maxime Jedryka), Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1977, p.106.
31 R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *op. cit.*, p.21.
32 In chapters such as *Ark, Chapter 10* (2008) and *Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25* (2013), the architecture of the exhibition space becomes a central subject, either through its depiction in photographs or schematic diagrams. In others, including *iamb, Chapter 12* (2008—09) and *Quire, Chapter 14* (2009), the hanging of a painting in a certain space, impacted on by a specific phenomenological context, is documented and translated onto the surface of a new painting.
33 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation', *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990, p.146.





R.H. Quaytman,
Łódź Poem (Spatial Composition 23.3 Parsecs Away), Chapter 2, 2004,
oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood,
63 × 101.6cm

viewer of one's location 'in front of and moving by toward the next painting'[34] — a lateral movement often signposted by representations of the bevelled edges of the plywood panels painted onto the surface of the silkscreened boards.[35]

The presence in Quaytman's chapters of strategies that implicate the 'shifting positions of the viewer' finds its limits in Op art-like works that confound such indexing of perception. Silkscreened applications of digital renderings of checks, concentric circles, vertical and horizontal lines, sometimes overlaying and occluding the photographic image, install an intense, non-hierarchical field onto the paintings' surfaces. Moiré patterning is created by the silkscreen itself, containing within the surface of the work the conditions of its production, while repelling the eye through 'optical burn'.[36] Within the logic of the chapter, Quaytman situates paintings exhibiting such self-sufficient 'sheer opticality'[37] — channelling Strzemiński's notion of a picture as 'a thing designed for *looking at* only'[38] — in direct relation to those that integrate the work into a broader context. The arrangement of works within each chapter thus traces seemingly oppositional movements between photographic flatness, the mirroring of the situated gaze and the objectlessness of Op art — articulating the notion that, as Quaytman says, 'attention, whether from a gaze or a glance, can be contained, reflected or distracted'.[39]

It is significant that Quaytman locates these vectors of viewing, and the associated 'oscillation' between 'the binary of contextual interdependency … and the isolated monocular painting'[40] with reference to the dialogic development of unist values between Kobro and Strzemiński. The enigmatic, recurring descriptor 'allegorical decoys' suggests a symbolic narrative both didactic and divertive. As with other individuals — friends, associates, historical figures — who have appeared in Quaytman's work, often in photographic portraits,[41] Kobro and Strzemiński are not cited merely as totems of creative affinity, but are embedded as paradigmatic actors within still unfolding movements of exegesis and legibility. Occupying a marginal position within the art historical canon, they implicate an unruly, antinomian model of temporal influence in the face of modernist singularity. In Strzemiński's words: 'it is not a question of assimilating some supposedly perfect, extra-temporal form. Such a form does not exist and never will, because the artistic criteria are in fact a sublimation of the criteria of life, which are different at every epoch.'[42]

In a sub-chapter of the introduction to *The Birth-mark* titled 'Submarginalia', Howe enigmatically states: 'Every source has another centre so is every creator.'[43] Quaytman's construction of a 'datebook' through the accumulation of chapters and images charts such an accrual of meanings, constituencies and contingencies. The overarching structural devices recursively applied by the artist may suggest the desire to dispel the arbitrary, or more specifically, to impose control over the work's legibility — the 'book' serving as a third way between the oblivion of paintings gathering dust in storage[44] and their hyper-circulation

34 R.H. Quaytman, 'Łódź Poem, Chapter 2', *Spine*, *op. cit.*, p.53.
35 These hand-painted motifs also bring to mind the reorientation of the paintings when placed on storage racks, showing just their edges like the spines of books.
36 R.H. Quaytman, 'Medium', *Spine*, *op. cit.*
37 R.H. Quaytman, 'Łódź Poem, Chapter 2', *Spine*, *op. cit.*, p.53.
38 W. Strzemiński, 'Unism in Painting', in *Constructivism in Poland 1923—1936*, *op. cit.*, p.91.
39 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, *op. cit.*, n.p.
40 R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, *op. cit.*, n.p.
41 Quaytman's chapters have included staged images of artists and curators including Dan Graham, Andrea Fraser, K8 Hardy, Matt Mullican, Thomas Beard, Susanne Ghez and Hannelore Kersting. Crudely speaking, these individuals form part of Quaytman's social network — they are friends, and people encountered as part of her working life as an artist. Their presence makes palpable certain connections to artistic lineages, while complicating these associations through the implication of personal exchange. For instance, Quaytman was Graham's studio assistant, and while his work around perception and subjectivity is of clear relevance, in *iamb*, *Chapter 12* these canonical concerns are detoured through a further reference to the nineteenth-century British artist John Martin, whom Graham has referred to as the 'first sci-fi artist'. Extending from those within Quaytman's direct milieu, the artist also infers other subjects through more associative reference: for instance poet Jack Spicer is cited through the appearance of his poetry in *I Love-The Eyelid Clicks/I See/Cold Poetry*, *Chapter 18* (2010—11); and David von Schlegell through images of his public sculptures in Boston in *Exhibition Guide: Chapter 15* (2009).
42 W. Strzemiński, 'Modern Art in Poland', *L'Espace Uniste*, *op. cit.*, p.143.
43 S. Howe, 'Submarginalia', *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.39.
44 Quaytman has spoken of the trauma of dealing with the storage of Harvey Quaytman and David von Schlegell's artworks after their deaths. R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

as commodities. Yet for Quaytman these processes are paradoxically not a pitch for 'independence'; they are an immersion in 'interdependence and contextuality' as a viable critique of the canonical accrual of value — a critical reflection on artwork at the junction of becoming 'sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value'.[45]

This is perhaps most evident in the publications that Quaytman has produced since 2008: *Allegorical Decoys* (2008), *Spine* (2011) and *7, Chapter 24* (2012). These paratexts are not conventional exhibition catalogues or monographs, but extensions of the contextual operations within chapters. *Allegorical Decoys* spans the period between 2005 and 2008, during which Quaytman was a director of Orchard, a gallery on New York's Lower East Side collectively run by twelve artists and art historians and driven by the legacies of Conceptual art and Institutional Critique. It implicates the gallery as a frame for Quaytman's production within and beyond her identification as a painter, including three texts written by the artist, alongside images of paintings from the ten chapters produced up to that date, some of which were exhibited at Orchard and reflect the exhibitions and people who formed that context. An essay that relays Quaytman's experience organising an exhibition of Jef Geys sits alongside an *ekphrastic* poem formed around the words of artist Thomas Eggerer. The placement of these two distinct textual modes in relation to one another is abrupt but telling: the former is anecdotal yet also analytical, questioning the responsibilities in presenting another artist's work as well as in relation to the communal discourse of the Orchard project; the latter quotes speech shared privately to form an elegy to a visually absent painting, Eggerer's *The Call of the Wind I* (2007), and to the language of self-examination:

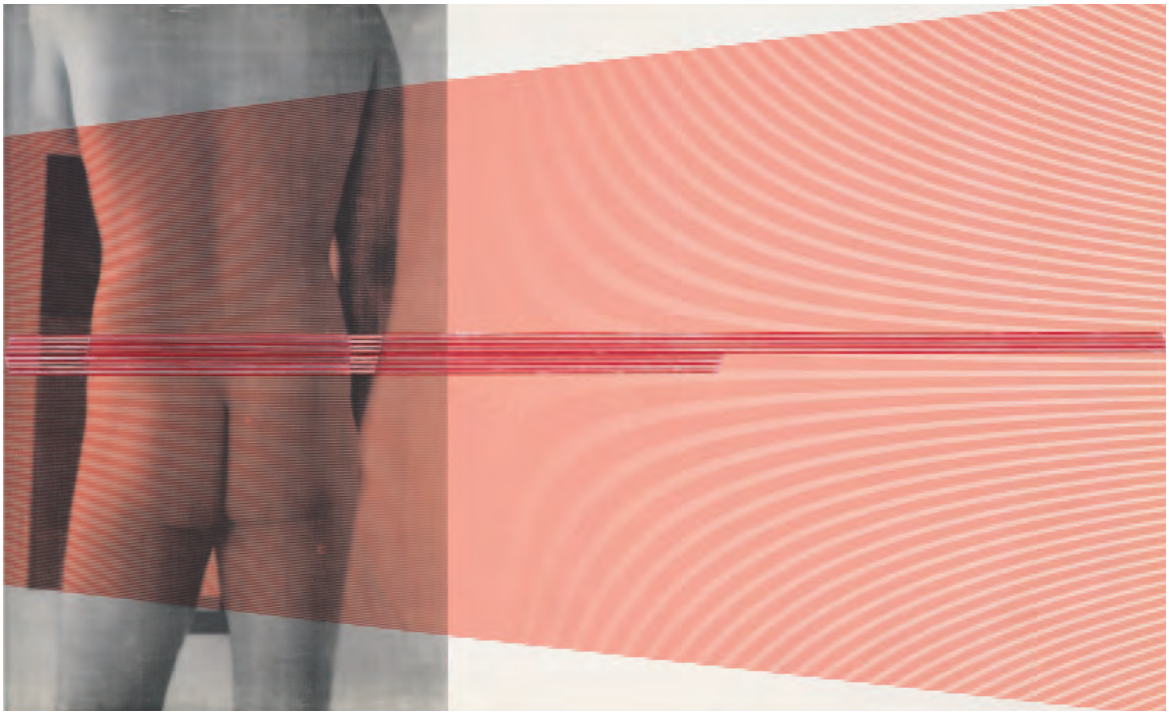
The space doesn't hold what it seems to promise
rotating around itself
reversing the perspective we expect.
I say reverse — maybe that's too strong a word but it doesn't follow the logic if we want the painting to rhyme in perspective.

Yes there is a lot about rhythm and rhyme in my paintings.
Musical structure
But maybe that's a tricky one to say — painters often say that you know.[46]

The third text in *Allegorical Decoys* details the 'circuitous genealogy' of Quaytman's approach to painting. A numbering system relates sections of the essay to accompanying images, but rather than being directly embedded in the text, these illustrations appear on the book's cover, which unfolds into a large poster bearing reproductions of 54 of Quaytman's paintings. This unusual architecture figures the sequencing of images at one remove from the expansive, reflective writing. In keeping with this apparatus, Quaytman's text largely resists direct interpretation of the paintings pictured. The book maps a series of relationships between interior and anterior, text and paratext — the 'interweaving [of] expectation and categories ... checkmat[ing] inscription.'[47] The codex of the image sheet suggests the attribution of meaning as an act of communal, multiple unfoldings, echoing the aspirations of Orchard itself.

Quaytman's second publication, *Spine*, collates images of the paintings from all twenty chapters produced between 2001 and 2011, alongside self-authored descriptions. The folded cover of the book is again a bearer of central content, inverting the conventional text-paratext hierarchy; an essay that extends the self-reflection of *Allegorical Decoys* is divided across inside and outside covers, with section titles echoing institutional captioning ('Name',

45 S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.*, p.148. Howe references here Jean Baudrillard's 1972 essay 'For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign', in which he states: 'In the auction and art market we wished to comprehend a sort of *nucleum* of the strategy of values, a sort of concrete space-time, strategic moment and matrix in the process of ideology, which latter is always the production of sign value and coded exchange. This economy of values is a *political* economy. It goes well beyond economic calculation and concerns all the processes of the transmutation of values, all those socially produced transitions from one value to another, from one logic to another logic of value which may be noted in determinate places and institutions — and so it also concerns the connection and implication of different systems of exchange and modes of production.' Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (trans. Charles Levin), St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981, p.122.
46 R.H. Quaytman, 'The Call of the Wind', *Allegorical Decoys*, *op. cit.*, p.31.
47 S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.*, p.136.



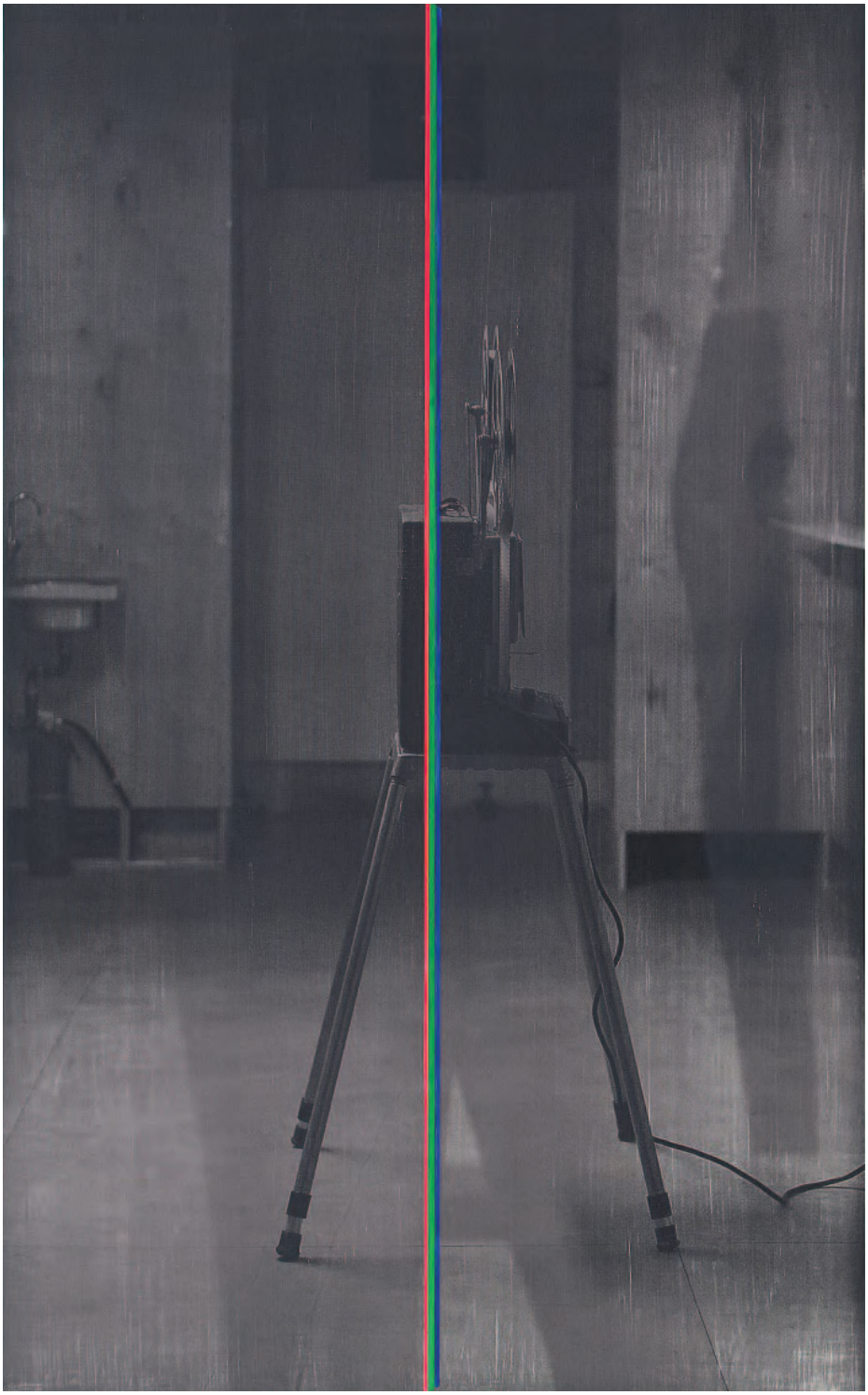
R.H. Quaytman, *Beard, Chapter 19*, 2010, oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 82.2 × 133cm

'Title', 'Date', 'Medium', 'Dimension', 'Collection'). While the book holds a sense of comprehensiveness, it is undoubtedly also palimpsestic, as images and paratextual annotations that have previously appeared momentarily, as part of a relentless cycle of exhibitions and press releases, are collated and re-inscribed outside of this flow. Emphasising this, *Spine* recursively functions as the 'primary site reference'[48] for the final chapter represented in the publication: *Spine, Chapter 20*, which was produced to be shown in two exhibitions in 2011, at Kunsthalle Basel and at the Neuberger Museum of Art at Purchase College — SUNY in upstate New York.

Spine, Chapter 20 folds the archival structure of Quaytman's practice back onto itself, the chapter's 37 paintings mining Quaytman's archive of films that she has used to produce silkscreens for previous chapters. Across its presentations in Basel and at Purchase, new collusions of images and transferences of meanings between one work and the next were mirrored by the material, spatial and temporal layering of paintings. In one work, a vertically oriented panel bears the silkscreened image of a 16mm film projector, originally used in *Ark, Chapter 10* (2008). This image, which relates to the re-presentation of a 1973 film screening by Michael Asher at Orchard in 2005, is newly superimposed on the spectral image of the naked backside of film curator Thomas Beard (a friend of Quaytman), which formed the central motif in *Beard, Chapter 19* (2010). In Basel, this new painting, titled *Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark/Asher Screening/Beard)* (2011), was itself hung over the top of a second, larger horizontal panel of vertical grey gradient lines, its Op backdrop throbbing like the banding on a defunct video monitor. On the wall next to this composite work, a panel titled *Spine, Chapter 20 (Denial Is a River)* (2011) bore the image of a basement wall of the SculptureCenter building in New York, an image originally repeated in the three works that form *Denial Is A River, Chapter 7* (2006). In the Neuberger Museum version of the exhibition, this arrangement of panels and impositions was reversed, with *Spine, Chapter 20 (Denial Is a River)* hung over the grey Op panel and *Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark/Asher Screening/Beard)* displaced to elsewhere in the installation. This interplay of historical and conceptual affinities, friendships and institutional sites — caught in movements between revealing, exhibiting, projecting or occluding — proposes *Spine, Chapter 20* as a meta-site of paratextual community.

48 R.H. Quaytman, 'Spine, Chapter 20', *Spine*, *op. cit.*, p.375.

R.H. Quaytman, *Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark/Asher Screening/ Beard)*, 2010, oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 82.2 × 50.8cm



The selection of particular examples from a large group is always a social act. By choosing to install certain narratives somewhere between history, mystic speech and poetry, I have enclosed them in an organisation, although I know there are places no classificatory procedure can reach, where connections between words and things we thought existed break off.

For me, paradoxes and ironies of fragmentation are particularly compelling.

Every statement is a product of collective desire and divisibilities. Knowledge, no matter how I get it, involves exclusions and repression.
— Susan Howe, 'Incloser'[49]

49 Susan Howe, 'Incloser', *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.45.

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

R. H. QUAYTMAN

Abreu

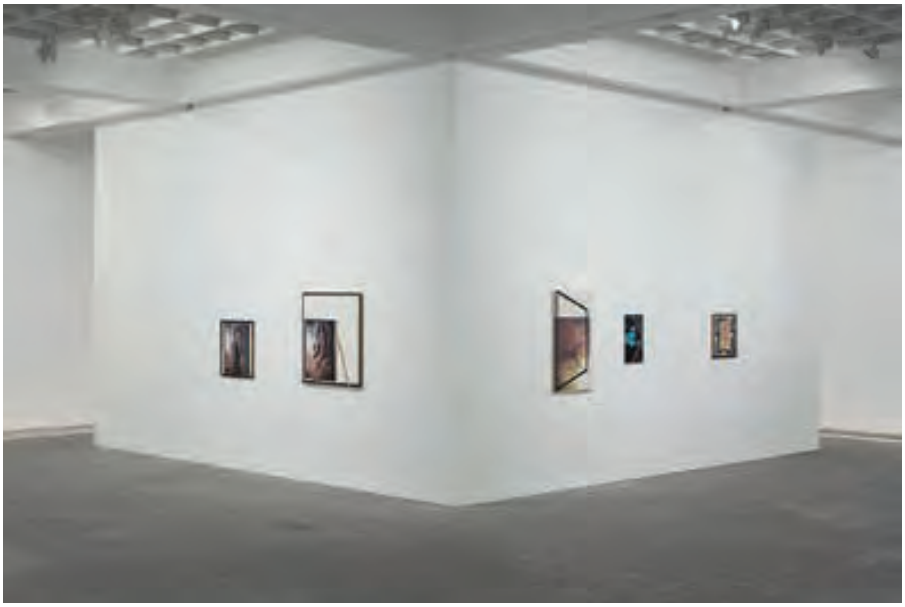
Paintings from the twenty-ninth "chapter" (Quaytman's term) in the cerebral artist's ongoing project, which were first shown at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, are joined by subsequent work based on Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus," which she saw in Jerusalem. The slack-mouthed seraph, invoked by Walter Benjamin as the angel of history, appears here amid the painter's signature moiré patterns and bevels, as does, more surprisingly, a sixteenth-century engraving of Martin Luther—which Quaytman claims she has discovered underneath the Klee work—an angel atop a reformer. If she's right, it's a stunning piece of art-historical detective work. Either way, these recursive paintings, in which later works refer to their predecessors, place Klee's art in a profoundly affecting infinite regress. Through Nov. 15.

Nuit Banai, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: On R. H. Quaytman at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art,"
Texte zur Kunst, No. 100, December 2015, pp. 230-233

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

On R. H. Quaytman at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art



"R. H. Quayman: Haqaq, Chapter 29," Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel, 2015, installation view

By the mere fact that a painting is a painting, it asks to be read historically, to be addressed both in terms of its presence as an object and also in regards to the symbolic value of its materiality. Of all of the painters to gain momentum in the last decade, R. H. Quaytman is notable for having taken on painting as painting in this modernist sense but then, only so as to take it through a post-war art historical extraordinary rendition sorts.

This summer, Quaytman presented her most recent "Chapter" at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, engaging her own past in relationship to this site, as much as the legacy of modernist discourse in the Middle East. Here, art historian Nuit Banai gives her take on Quaytman's "Haqaq, Chapter 29."

Though we may always be caught in the muddy tangle of History, few works are more revisited as an allegory for the twentieth century's engagement with it than Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus" (1920). Famously celebrated in Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," the drawing, which the philosopher also owned, made appearances this summer both as a framing conceit for Okwui Enwezor's Venice Biennale and also in R. H. Quaytman's more systematic Tel Aviv Museum of Art exhibition "קקח, Chapter 29," (Haqaq, Chapter 29). In his essay, Benjamin offers two possible ways of approaching the past: the historicist perspective presents a homogenizing chain of events heralded as "progress." This dangerously static and universalist notion of time can only be punctured by the historical materialist approach, represented by the Angel who understands that this ostensible continuum is, in fact, a "single catastrophe [that] … keeps piling wreckage

upon wreckage" at its feet. Such a melancholic diagnosis calls for radical action, "a revolutionary chance in the struggle for the suppressed past" galvanized by the historical materialist's seizure and revival of minor or concealed moments in history's fractured remains.

While in Venice this potentiality became the stuff of spectacle, selfie-sticks, and messianic didacticism; in Tel Aviv it was set in motion in more subdued and open-ended ways with Quaytman's new body of paintings. As has been widely noted, Quaytman structures her practice around a recurrent grammar, which includes distinct "chapters" that both respond to the immediate architectural context for which a given body of work is conceived, while also positioning the works – groupings of modular plywood panels with beveled edges, a gesso ground layered with silk-screens of photographs or abstract designs – as part of a sequential chain. In the exhibition leaflet, guest curator Mark Godfrey explains the particular constellation of images and research paths that led to the chapter produced for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The conceptual anchor, we are told, is Klee's "Angelus Novus," which, inherited by Benjamin's friend, the philosopher and historian of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem, is today housed in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. But both the singularity of this prized work and its authority were offset, in Quaytman's show, by its dialogue with other images, discourses, histories, and archival sources that the artist had collected over the past year. In this "chapter," these elements appeared in various configurations, the majority overlaid with abstract forms that frame or crop certain details, bringing particular segments into the foreground. Photographs of the Judean Desert are interlaced with rocks from Herodium, pages of books in the Gershom Scholem Library, and portraits of an anonymous American art student (later revealed to be of Middle Eastern descent).

Guided by chapter title "Haqaq" – from the Hebrew verb meaning "to engrave" and "to legislate" – the exhibition enacted a complex performance of power's various registers in relation to modernism's aesthetic and judicial domains. Though challenging the possibility of maintaining a "univocal" modernist aesthetic or political narrative has been an ongoing concern for Quaytman, she here specifically engaged the ways in which the modernist project was adapted and transformed within the Middle Eastern context. In this regard, she is the quintessential historical materialist, entangling, colliding, inflecting (and infecting) images in ways that make it impossible to "read" history through a single lens or as a homogenous continuum. Working in the main building (rather than its 2011 addition), Quaytman also excavated another story of modernism in Israel, one that goes against the grain of the historicist narrative of the secular Zionist project and the overwhelming celebration of "The White City" of Tel Aviv as the crowning moment of the Bauhaus's progressive ideals (wherein a group of Jewish architects, trained in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin before being expelled from Germany in 1933, transform a scruffy Middle Eastern outpost – still reflecting the "eclectic" architectural style of the Ottoman Empire – into a European avant-gardist proposition for collective living).

Here, the messianic and modernist went hand in hand, not only in the regime of the aesthetic (to engrave) but also in the judicial (to legislate). It was not only the "Angelus Novus" that revealed

R. H. Quaytman, "Haqaq, Chapter 29," 2015

this paradoxical doubling (as Klee's drawing contains within it a shadowy figurative silhouette); in fact, every work in this exhibition appeared to hinge on an internal juxtaposition between (at least) two regimes of thought. Time and again, modernist conventions, supposedly stripped by the historical avant garde of their obscurantist yoke of religion and mystifying chimeras of otherworldly authorities, were wedded with those very same motifs to which the messianic movement in Israel lays claim (i.e., the Judean Hills, pre-Christian sites). A corner piece, hung at the juncture of two walls – just like Malevich's "Black Square" in the "Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10" (1915) interfused the language of non-objectivity (the flatness of blue ground) with that of mystical aspirations (*rayonnement* of white beams and a starry night). It's Benjamin and Scholem in conversation, the materialist and spiritualist dimensions of modernism, and a reconsideration of the ways in which these genealogies have produced paradoxical power structures in contemporary Israel. By making present a moment when two strains of modernism existed in mutually constitutive tension, Quaytman questioned the polarization that has occurred in the meantime. This is thus a chapter, to quote Benjamin, "where thinking suddenly halts in a constellation overflowing with tensions … [where] the historical materialist … cognizes the sign of a messianic zero-hour (*Stillstellung*) of events, or … a revolutionary chance in the struggle for a suppressed past." In other words, it is neither possible to will History into wholeness nor return to an ur-moment of "holistic modernism," but only to continue to fracture, multiply, and animate the "suppressed" material of the past in a still-unfolding present.

Yet the crisis we face today, in the neoliberal capitalist context, has become even more dire as the delineations between the historicist and historical materialist positions are increasingly blurred, with the former actively appropriating the techniques and discourses of the latter for reactionary purposes. Indeed, it is not only the content of the past that is being marshaled but also its forms: as for example, the "Hilltop Youth" of the hardliner, nationalist settler movement who have not only commandeered the ethos of the socialist pioneers of the early 20th century (Jewish agricultural labor on the land) but also their garb (worker's clothing). What re-excavated moments and forms can possibly be seized to "revolutionize" this entanglement? In Quaytman's exhibition, it is the sole image of an individual (the art student of Middle Eastern ancestry) that incites a moment of radical criticality: by eliding aesthetics with a "racialized" identity, "קקח, Chapter 29" suggests that our contemporary task is to understand how modernist "forms of life" materialized not only from an emancipatory logic but also from processes of discrimination.

NUIT BANAI

R. H. Quaytman, "קקח, Chapter 29," Tel Aviv Museum of Art, May 20–September 5, 2015.

The New York Times

Art in Review

R.H. Quaytman's Variations on Klee's Angel

By **HOLLAND COTTER** NOV. 5, 2015

Two years ago, the New York artist R. H. Quaytman was invited to do a show at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. She traveled to Israel to research themes for a new body of work, and found one in a piece of 20th-century Modernist art: Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint "Angelus Novus," a jewel in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

A 2015 work by R. H. Quaytman at Miguel Abreu Gallery featuring Paul Klee's 1920 monoprint "Angelus Novus."
Images Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

The image, of a large-headed, wide-eyed, birdlike figure with arms or wings raised as if in astonishment or alarm, has an extraordinary provenance. It was owned by the critic Walter Benjamin, who, when he fled Paris ahead of the Nazi arrival, entrusted it to the writer and philosopher Georges Bataille, from whom it passed to the social critic Theodor Adorno. What attracted Ms. Quaytman, though, was less the work's history than its appearance, including what she suspected to be an older print underlying Klee's.

After two years of research, she determined that Klee had indeed mounted his image on a 19th-century print based on a portrait by Lucas Cranach (1472-1553) of Martin Luther, who, late in his life, gave voice to violent anti-Semitism. There's no way of knowing whether Klee's choice of the portrait was deliberate. Its presence certainly complicates one of Israel's most treasured art objects, one that Benjamin took as the model for his famous "angel of history."

Martin Luther is shown in this Quaytman painting from 2015.

Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Ms. Quaytman, a subtle and intellectually scrupulous artist, spells out these complications and adds some of her own in this solo show of mostly recent paintings that take the visual interaction of the angel and Luther, one or the other always advancing or receding, as their theme. The result is an exhibition almost entirely about hiding and revealing, and hiding again. It's as tight and expansive and emotionally rich as a book of interlocked poems.

THE NEW YORKER

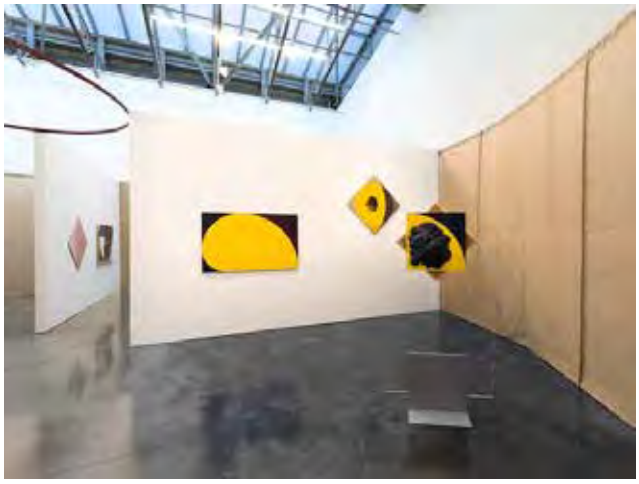
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

R. H. QUAYTMAN

Abreu

Paintings from the twenty-ninth "chapter" (Quaytman's term) in the cerebral artist's ongoing project, which were first shown at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, are joined by subsequent work based on Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus," which she saw in Jerusalem. The slack-mouthed seraph, invoked by Walter Benjamin as the angel of history, appears here amid the painter's signature moiré patterns and bevels, as does, more surprisingly, a sixteenth-century engraving of Martin Luther—which Quaytman claims she has discovered underneath the Klee work—an angel atop a reformer. If she's right, it's a stunning piece of art-historical detective work. Either way, these recursive paintings, in which later works refer to their predecessors, place Klee's art in a profoundly affecting infinite regress. Through Nov. 15.

ARTFORUM



View of “R. H. Quaytman: O Tópico, Chapter 27,” 2014.

R. H. Quaytman’s chapter-based works draw upon geometry and grammar to examine how paintings can function structurally. O Tópico, Chapter 27*, her latest installation, is on view at Gladstone Gallery in New York until December 20, 2014, before it permanently moves to a pavilion—which, like the architecture in the show, is designed by Solveig Fernlund—at the contemporary art museum and botanical garden Inhotim in Minas Gerais, Brazil.*

AS THE CHAPTERS progress and the paintings accumulate, I am compelled to locate the direction they might lead. What are they adding up to—or, to put it bluntly, what is the “book” about? Until now, the content of the chapters has been historically and contextually based in Europe and the US. In accepting Inhotim’s invitation in 2012 to produce a permanent installation, I had to reexamine my own authority in relation to the site and the audience. Even though I believe that my work would not be possible without the advances and insights of peripheral modernisms that came out of Poland and Brazil (Kobro, Strzeminski, Clark, bo Bardi, Lispector, Oiticica, Artigas), I also felt acutely aware in Brazil of my role as an outsider. To address this site, as I have with previous chapters, seemed somehow illegitimate and false. In the position of foreigner/tourist/guest, how could I authorize the paintings with any hope of resonance there and also have them make sense with the work that preceded it?

I made two research trips to Brazil and just looked, listened, and read. I became overwhelmed by the vigor of Brazil’s nature and realized that maybe the only way to begin to think about this group of paintings would be through the idea of matter itself: matter as in earth, the thing itself, the subject. That’s how I settled on the title *O Tópico*, which means “matter” or “subject” in Portuguese. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Triste Tropique* was important to these paintings, and I felt my title echoed that.

I began by gessoing in black and yellow hues a full set of eight panels in the pattern of a Fibonacci spiral. The sizes of my panels are based on the golden section—they all use the ratio 1:1.618—and they nest. For Brazil, I decided to paint the pattern of the spiral generated from this ratio as the base for nearly all of the paintings. The pavilion is also based on this well-known shape that’s found everywhere in nature. It turned out that this “ground” had a spinning or spiraling effect that I could not have predicted. When hung on the walls of the pavilion, which have been designed with the same proportion, the paintings seem to spiral and point outward into the landscape of the botanical garden. Since one of my main concerns has always been to find a way out of the monocular pull of the single painting and into a hieroglyphic or lateral legibility and movement, this was a great discovery for me.

I also ended up trying two new media—encaustic and polyurethane—which in turn forced me to paint in ways that I have avoided most of my life, namely gestural abstraction. In fact, I made the first painting by pouring a puddle of polyurethane onto the floor and then nailing the dried form it created to one of the black and yellow gessoed square panels. It looked like a pile of shit, basically, but as I looked at it on the wall of my studio I began to see a frightening Janus head. This is how I found my subject—in the pouring, the painting, the making. But this is perhaps too complicated to get into in this short space. The point is that the making was the route that enabled me to begin to feel more authorized.

— As told to Frank Expósito

Art in America

R. H. Quaytman

at Gladstone,
through Dec. 20
530 W. 21st St.

R. H. Quaytman lights out in a new direction with this show, which debuts her use of encaustic, polyurethane and wood relief. The unusual installation creates tiny side rooms, which lend greater drama to one piece in particular, a tumorous-looking, multicolored blob sculpture that hangs from the wall. What's consistent is that she conceives of her works in groups she calls "chapters," and, as Steel Stillman wrote in *A.i.A.* in 2010, "one unvarying rule is that each chapter relates to the site where it was first exhibited." This body of work, *O Tópico, Chapter 27*, was commissioned for the sprawling Brazilian botanical garden and art park Inhotim, where it will appear in a pavilion custom-designed by Quaytman's frequent collaborator, architect Solveig Fernlund. The Golden Spiral, a widely used logarithmic shape, is a leitmotif throughout the show.

Maggie Taft, “Surface Studies: On R. H. Quaytman at the Renaissance Society, Chicago,”
Texte zur Kunst, No. 89, March 2013, pp. 228-32

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

SURFACE STUDIES

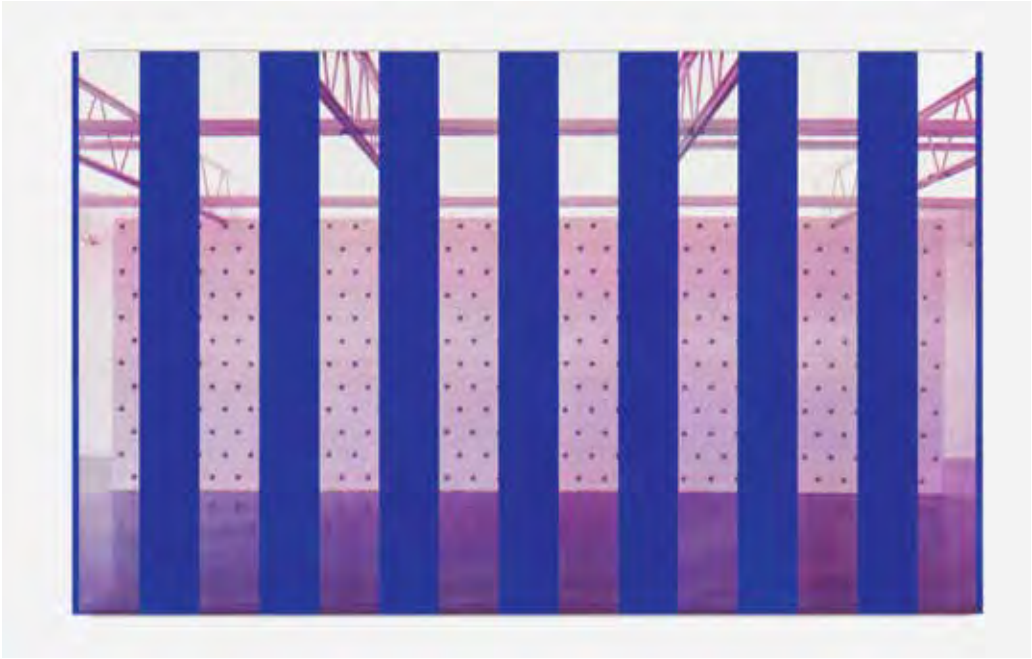
On R. H. Quaytman at The Renaissance Society, Chicago

R. H. Quaytman puts a variety of photographic techniques – appropriation, reproduction via silkscreen, and collage – to the service of painting, imaging a catalogue of the contexts surrounding the sites in which her exhibitions are shown. The most recent in her well-known series of exhibitions-as-“chapters” indexes photo-documentation of The Renaissance Society, its outgoing director Susanne Ghez, its associate curator Hamza Walker, and its former curator Anne Rorimer.

In addition, her works depict several milestone exhibitions at the museum, which helped revise Conceptual Art’s reception as more than an attempt to dematerialize the art object. At the crossroads between site, history, and surface, Quaytman’s newest chapter contributes its own palpable reflection on the way that we define art during the process of its historicization.

R. H. Quaytman’s paintings from the past decade are rife with references to other art, including the work of Andrea Fraser, Dan Graham, and architect Anne Tyng. To make art about art is, of course, nothing new. And yet Quaytman literalizes the practice in a distinctive way, employing art history as image. Through a photo-transfer process, her paintings reproduce photographs and documents scavenged from archival collections. Typically, her works are site-specific. Paintings from a 2009 exhibition at the ICA in Boston pictured documents related to the museum’s split from the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the middle of the twentieth century. In her contribution to the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Quaytman used the museum’s Marcel Breuer-designed building and the orthogonal shape of its windows to address the relationship between perspective and flatness in painting. In these shows, as in Quaytman’s others, each painting took at least part of its title from that of the exhibition, further tethering the work to the site of its display. Because of her concern for a site-specificity that engages with the “matter” of institutions – not to mention her involvement in the short-lived corporation-cum-gallery Orchard – the artist’s work has been read as the contemporary progeny of institutional critique.[1]

In her latest exhibition, “Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25” at The Renaissance Society, Quaytman opens with a painting depicting a portrait of Chicago-based art historian and critic Anne Rorimer. Hung in the gallery’s foyer, it introduces Quaytman’s distinctive manner of painting, used in nearly all of the show’s 26 pictures. Rather than painting with a brush, her pictures are silkscreened, a process that effectively liquefies the photograph.[2] Traces of this liquid state are evident in the painting of the picture of Rorimer, which is stained with a filmy blue residue that bleeds across the image. Just as Quaytman’s process registers as image, so do her materials. She silkscreens onto plywood panels with beveled edges, often borrowing their trapezoidal shape as visual form. In the Rorimer painting, an elongated, striped trapezoid running up the right side of the panel is layered atop the photo transfer. By stacking images in this way, Quaytman generates a collage aesthetic that repeats throughout the show: For instance, a panel with an Isa Genzken X-ray skull from 1992, “Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (Genzken’s Skull)” (2012), is stacked on a shelf in front of a cloudy maroon monochrome; so layered, collage becomes sculptural. The formal manifestations of process, material, and collage in Quaytman’s painting depicting Rorimer, rather than Rorimer’s critical faculties, proceed to structure the exhibition. For though the show is unambiguously about the museum, Quaytman’s paintings offer little in the form of critique.



R.H. Quaytman, “Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25”, 2012

R.H. Quaytman, “Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (After James Coleman’s slide piece)”, 2012

Take the hazy image of four shelves of books belonging to associate curator Hamza Walker, which is reproduced in two silkscreened paintings. For those who know Walker and have visited his office, those bookshelves, bowed and buckling under the load of all his books, are nearly iconic. But Quaytman's pictures deliver none of that weight. Instead, each holds attention on its surface. A marbled pattern, produced once in chalky white and once in diamond dust, stretches across both paintings and asserts the flatness of the picture plane. And apart from a few legible titles – "Warhol's World", "Inside the Studio", a Toroni catalogue – the fuzzy spines offer little information, pushing any penetrating gaze back to the surface. The four stripes of volumes running diagonally across both pictures thus acquire a graphic quality.

In fact, many of the paintings in the exhibition contain a graphic element. Quaytman's signature trapezoid sits flatly on the surface of many of the pictures, and a delicate snow-and-light motif, a gauzy web of polygons derived from a pattern book, is often repeated in paintings hung in front of, behind, and between the paintings silkscreened with photographs. Quaytman has explained her use of pattern paintings as a way to activate the representational images they intersperse. "It's very difficult to put two photographs next to each other," she has said. "So you need something with a different kind of breadth."[3] In "Passing Through the Opposite of

What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (Imprints of a no. 50 brush repeated at regular intervals of 30 cm)" (2012), Toroni's brush marks, which Quaytman has reproduced in gray paint on a white panel, do similar work. Flanked by silkscreened paintings of photographs, the regularly repeating marks of Toroni's paintbrush, just like the snow-and-light pattern, serve as a visual accent. Although they have their origins in different spheres – Toroni's marks in art and the snow-and-light motif in ornament – they are made to operate in the same register as patterning.

Some will undoubtedly object to this technique, and to the seemingly rote use of Daniel Buren's iconic stripes to overlay a number of paintings of photographs, as an effort by Quaytman to dress her work in art-historical seriousness. It's a move that certainly strips the imprints and the stripes of their conceptual integrity. And yet there is something strangely apt about their application. Drawing out the graphic potential of Toroni's and Buren's mark-making, Quaytman unveils an often-overlooked element that pulses through much Conceptual Art of the 1970s and 1980s – design. Of course, The Renaissance Society offers a ripe space in which to present this point. It was, after all, due in part to Rorimer, who often worked with the museum, that in the 1990s Conceptual Art was reframed as a palpable practice instead of an immaterial one.[4] But the museum's contribution to Conceptual Art history is already well known. So what are we to take away from these documents of The Ren's history that Quaytman appropriates and hangs on its walls?

This is the resounding question the show poses, and one to which the paintings offer little answer. Instead, they bat it around, each painting deferring to another through a series of material and formal citations. Diamond dust used in the painting of Walker's bookshelves reappears in a snow-and-light painting, and a small panel decorated with this motif sits on a shelf in front of a painting picturing the I-beam mullion marking the entryway to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Chapel of St. Savior. In a picture reproducing an installation view of a Toroni exhibition that Quaytman marks with two elongated trapezoids running side by side up its center, Mies's cross reemerges in a graphic reduction of the painting to its vertical and horizontal lines.

This system of repetition mimics the one used by Clarise Lispector in "The Passion According to G.H.", the 1964 novel from which Quaytman took her show's title. In Lispector's book, each chapter begins with the last sentence of the prior one. As a result of this technique, the novel reads less like a straightforward narrative than like an assemblage of interwoven stories. It is a helpful analogy for making sense of Quaytman's web of images, which themselves comprise a chapter (since 2001, Quaytman has conceptualized her exhibitions of painted panels as chapters in a larger body of work that, as of yet, has no end. Her current show is Chapter 25). What Quaytman's output suggests is really something very simple, almost banally so – that despite their shared subject and their interwoven references, each painting is a discrete surface pregnant with visual possibility.

No picture makes this more apparent than "Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (After James Coleman's slide piece)" (2012). It is comprised of two paintings placed one in front of the other on a wooden shelf. One panel contains a depiction of a darkened gallery with a projection screen so white it

glows with an ethereal luminescence. The second, which is smaller and sits in front, shows the slide depicting the Milan city square that Coleman projected onto the screen when he showed "Slide Piece" (1973) at The Renaissance Society in 1985. In Coleman's work, the slide was shown in a continuous cycle alongside a synchronized audiotape featuring recordings of people describing the scene. Each time one description finished, the slide would switch, though the image would remain the same, and a different description would be given. The work thus offered a constellation of viewpoints, each of them directing viewers' attention to a different aspect of the picture. The series of commentaries illustrated the way in which a single image could host vast nodes of focus.

Quaytman's citation of Coleman delivers this picture again; however, what is most hypnotic in her piece is not the photograph, but the blazing white screen from which it is absent. In the image's absence, what remains is a modest geometric form, like a relic of modernist abstraction borrowed from Kasimir Malevich's "White on White" (1918) or one of Josef Albers's "Homage to the Square" paintings (1949–1976). Instead of presenting narrative possibility, the form directs attention to its surface. Quaytman's painting is an invitation to plumb the depths therein – of facture (the silkscreen process), of color (the blue and the maroon), of flatness (as in Walker's bookshelves), of composition (the repetitive patterning), and of form (Conceptual Art's design element). Nestled inside Quaytman's archival images of institutions is a dedication to those aspects of painting that transcend them.

MAGGIE TAFT

R. H. Quaytman, "Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25", The Renaissance Society, Chicago, January 6–February 17, 2013.

Notes

1 Luke Cohen, "Catachreses. On Rebecca H. Quaytman", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, 77, 2010, pp. 136–139; David Joselit, "Institutional Responsibility. The Short Life of Orchard", in: *Grey Room*, 35, 2009, pp. 108–115.

2 Cohen, op. cit.

3 R. H. Quaytman, "R. H. Quaytman Artist Talk, Sunday, January 6, 2013", online at: www.renaissancesociety.org/site/Exhibitions/Videos_Event.R-H-Quaytman-Passing-Through-The-Opposite-of-What-It-Approaches-Chapter-25.632.html?forceFlash=1.

4 The term "palpable" is borrowed from Christine Mehring's discussion of Rorimer's contribution to Conceptual Art historiography, cf. Christine Mehring, "Conceptual Atlantic", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, 85, 2012, pp. 230–233.

ARTFORUM
APRIL 2013 INTERNATIONAL

REVIEWS

CHICAGO

R. H. Quaytman

THE RENAISSANCE SOCIETY
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The screenprinted and gessoed varnished panels of R. H. Quaytman speak foremost, perhaps, to a discourse of painting, but also to that of photography, sculpture (the panels are thick, often painted on multiple sides, and at times may be physically handled by viewers), and even literature (exhibitions are organized according to "chapters"), among other forms. For Quaytman's recent exhibition at the Renaissance Society, "Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25," projection emerged as a central theme. Not only did pictorial references—works featuring installation views of a James Coleman slide show, an X-ray previously exhibited by Isa Genzken of the German artist's own skull—to this subject abound, but the near holographic quality of Quaytman's surfaces rendered these images as if projected. Likewise, mixtures of pigment and gesso seemed to glow from beneath intricate Op patterns, so that, as though being transmitted, the image itself appeared to be in motion. Consisting largely of silk screens of recent portraits or installation photographs from the Renaissance Society's archives, the exhibition unfolded like an accumulation of rooms with no clear entry.

View of "R. H. Quaytman," 2013. Foreground: *Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (After James Coleman's slide piece)*, 2012 (12⅜ x 20"). Background: *Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches, Chapter 25 (After James Coleman's slide piece)*, 2012 (37 x 60").

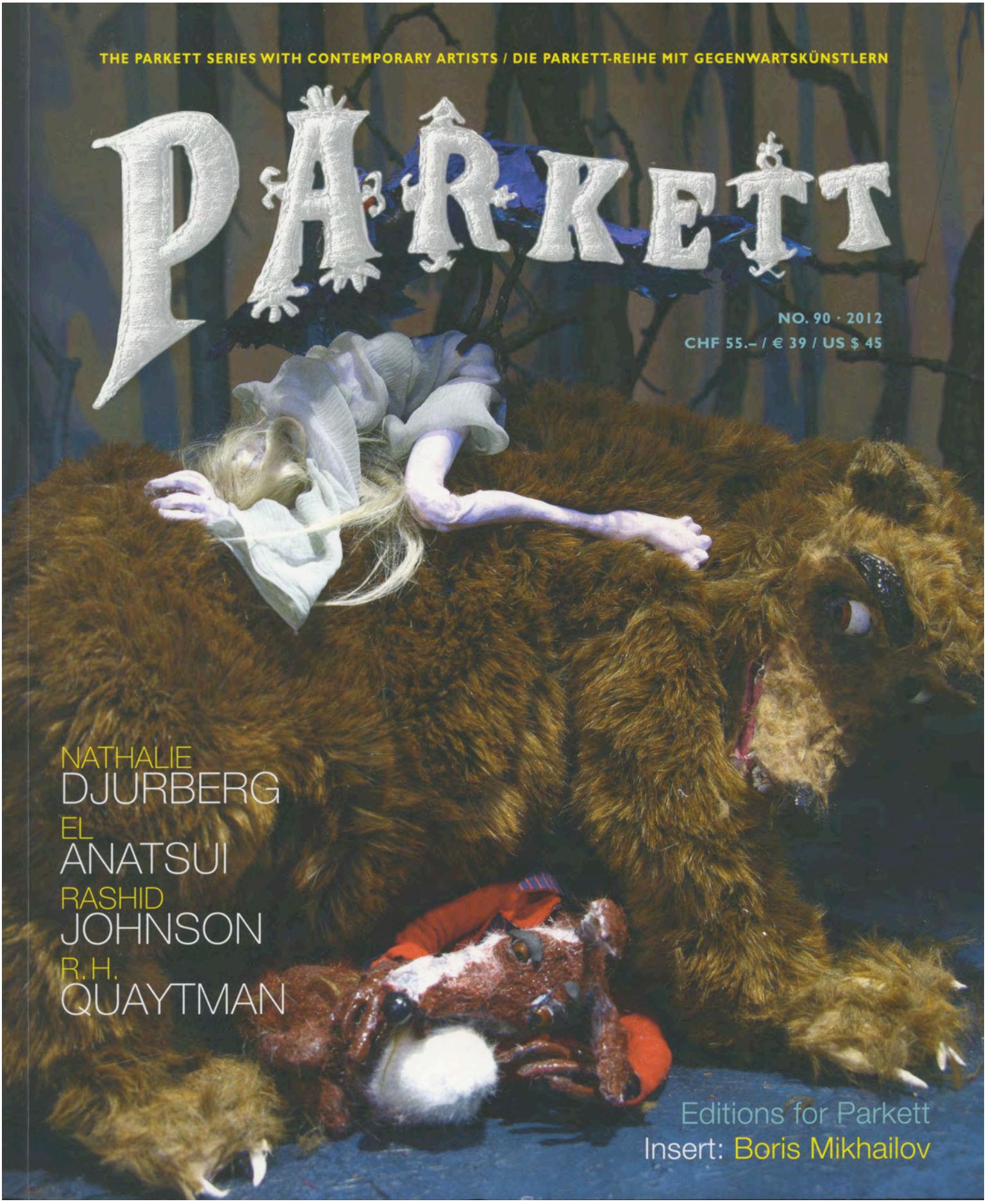
And indeed, from projection, architecture closely follows, as the former assumes, in the words of scholar Tom Gunning, the "dual role of canceling out and conjuring up space." This was particularly evident in *After James Coleman's slide piece* (to give only the work's identifying subtitle; all works 2012), which features an installation shot of a projector that partially illuminates a darkened gallery; the screen, no longer a portal, has been blanked out by a white gesso ground. Quaytman pointedly amplifies this tension between constituting and eliminating space, nearly always laying down some degree of surface "interference" between the viewer and the sites within sites that her paintings depict. For example, two pieces that share the exhibition's title and feature an image of the gallery (as it appeared in 1990, installed with work by Conceptual artist Niele Toroni) doubled the viewer's perspective. Yet the effect was stopped short by, on one hand, hand-applied Buren-like stripes and, on the other, thin, vertical stripes that, appearing like the spine of a book, divided the painting in two. Resonating with Bruce Nauman's description of abstraction as "two kinds of information that don't line up," the work vibrates between opposites (surface and perspective, figuration and abstraction) that lose their autonomy as such.

Permutations of inner and outer space in Quaytman's compositions, however, extend beyond pictorial play. The figuration of particular people, the social infrastructure (both actual and the more abstractly influential) that informed the show's production, takes equal precedence. Among those appearing here were the institution's longtime director (and curator of this show), Susanne Ghez, as well as curator Anne Rorimer, with whom Ghez organized important exhibitions of Conceptual art in the 1970s and '80s. The gallery's architect, John Vinci, was represented too, through the teaching slides he used to show Mies van der Rohe's nearby Robert F. Carr Memorial Chapel of St. Savior.

As references grew apparent, the interpolation of subjects and space likewise became visible. For a particularly literal example, take the exhibition's sole truly three-dimensional work, a twenty-one-by-thirty-one-by-seven-inch white box, open just slightly on one side and featuring a corner mirror that reflects a miniature painting by Quaytman—depicting Dan Graham's 1976 installation *Public Space/Two Audiences*, as it appears in a well-circulated photograph taken by Rorimer—tucked nearly out of sight. At the same time, it also captures the image of the viewer, flattening the two together on a single plane. This pictorializing of the person examining a painterly translation of a photograph of an installation that was itself an optical device speaks to Quaytman's interest in a recursivity that, in 1969, cybernetic post-Minimalist Paul Ryan compellingly described as the "power to take in our own outside."

Quaytman's nearly empty spaces and analogical correspondences—rendered in color schemes (the University of Chicago's maroon against Buren's aquamarine) and materials (diamond dust and silver foil!) extravagantly discordant enough to introduce an aspect of glamour—invoke the legacy of queer aesthetic practices as much as modernism's aftereffects. Quaytman's is a proposition less about the artist's identity than about painting as a syntax that has become queer. In other words, outside and inside at once.

—*Solveig Nelson*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QUAYTMAN
Editions for Parkett
Insert: Boris Mikhailov

RHEA ANASTAS

A Nude Poses in the Whitney Museum

Of the nine silkscreen-on-wood panels that comprise *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, a group of paintings R. H. Quaytman realized for the 2010 Whitney Biennial, several feature a woman standing in the Fourth Floor North gallery of the Whitney Museum of American Art, as in A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES (2010).[1)] This nude is physically direct, having been photographed at full height posing near the asymmetrical box of the museum's slanted Marcel Breuer window. The light from the window draws out the details of the model's forehead, profile, and neck, and shines down on her collarbone and breasts. A tiny white illuminated cylinder indicates the cigarette she holds. The cigarette occupies the picture's

RHEA ANASTAS is an art historian and cofounder of Orchard.

Holding a Cigarette

center together with her pubic bone. This nude forms a vertical counterpoint within the horizontal picture (24.375 x 40 inches), an upright bodily presence within an expansive room. The panel shows a series of foreshortened, flattened depictions of the volume and natural light of the room at the Whitney where the group of nine paintings was installed and exhibited for the first time. Quaytman's vocabulary of planes and balanced geometry relates in part to the formal and cultural function of architecture to frame perspectives and separate units of space. The window and the screened photographic image through which we see A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES are viewfinders of space "inside" the picture. A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES is a study of the transformation of architecture into two-dimensional views of media or information, window or screen.[2)]

The open quality of "looking into" of A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES is countered by other works in the Biennial group. Some panels feature three-color vertical patterns and flattened geometric images of a foam core model the artist made of the Whitney room, while others feature lines of optical pulsation alone. In these paintings of abstract intensity, a slight raking suggests orthogonal projections of the gallery and the Breuer window. Even so, the dominant directing of the eye in these panels is away from the reason of perspective and toward a wilder seeing that is by turns over-stimulated and blocked.

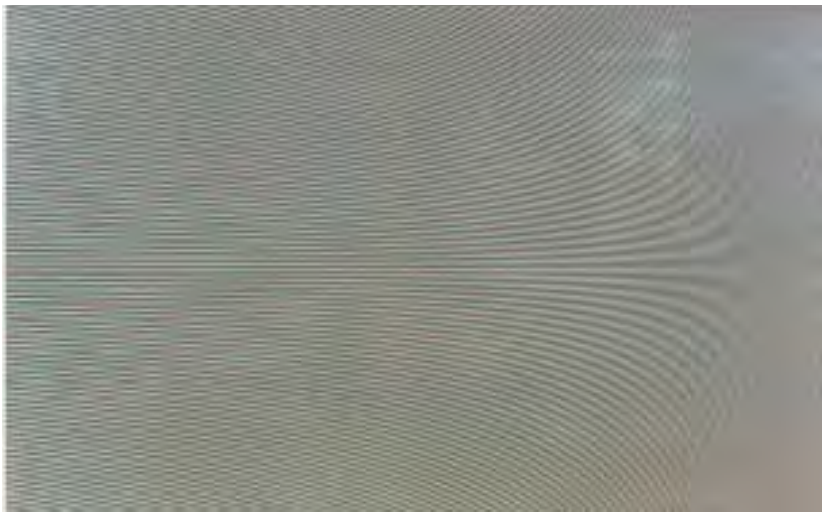
I want to describe the nude in A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES as a key to the picture. By looking closely at this painting's embodied space of display, we see something of Quaytman's "chapter," a concept that the artist has been applying since 2001, defined as a serial structure or overarching ordering principle with corresponding regularized panel dimensions.[3)] From the start, the sunlit woman is an attractor of looks. The lines of sight that lead us toward her and that show her turning away from our looks are constitutive; they structure relationships. The interior of the picture that the nude occupies is more complex than it may first appear. Quaytman culls this nude subject from a well-known canvas by the American painter Edward Hopper, A WOMAN IN THE SUN (1961), which, like the Breuer window, has come to be associated with the public identity of the museum. The Hopper painting defines certain psychological boundaries. There is a bedroom where a nude poses, a sunlit interior whose outside we glean only in the distance through a curtained window. Hopper's

scene issues from the painter's private realm for individual reception in a public gallery or museum.

In contrast, Quaytman posed artist K8 Hardy in the public gallery of the Whitney.[4] Poses are core actions in Hardy's photographic work and in her *Fashionfashion* zines. Her presence in this contemporary view of a nude rejuvenates the politics of sex and sight in the notion of a model's role. The timing of the modeling is also an interruption. Standing in front of the picture in the room where this posing occurred, the viewer recognizes that the modeling session for the camera had to have taken place before the panels were installed. The photograph from this event was subject to digital manipulation and then transferred to film for silkscreen printing on the gesso-coated wooden panel. Located at a temporal remove from our co-presence with the image, the modeling for the camera is a private event of the two artists in the museum, as if to cross the public gallery with domestic or studio realms.

The empiricism of Quaytman's paintings stimulates the viewer's own empiricism. The material qualities and surfaces of the works are as crucial to this knowing-through-experiencing as the artist's placement of the panels within a collective display, each unit subject to the narrativizing of sequence, arrangement, and installation.[5] On the other hand, this logic of connectivity and separate identity also holds true within each painting. For instance, the bands of tightly-brushed brown strips applied in oil to the surface of A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES encompasses the full height of the right edge of the object. The strips form a polygon that extends to the opposite edge of the panel and diminish in height. These strips duplicate the bevel-cut edges of the panel on which A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES is painted and, they echo the recessed volume of the Breuer window, especially articulated in the screened photographic image of the window which negates the picture's depth. These same painted edges enclose the woman, cropping the top of her head and the bottoms of her feet.[6]

Beyond formalizing structures and concepts into a set of working principles or an overlay of reasoned order, Quaytman's structure of the chapter has the effect of placing emphasis on the actual subjects of the work—the images, figures, situations photographed for the work, and fragments of archives—the things and ideas about which the paintings speak. The artist usually relates these subjects to some aspect of the context or site of presentation, to the venue or institution where the work will be exhibited or to the curatorial idea or language that accompanies the presentation of works in a group exhibition.[7] Even so, by invoking the notion of the artist's oeuvre as an ongoing series or total work, the chapter refers us to



an origin or locus in the artist's practice that stands apart from any particular framing within an exhibition or event of reception within a career. The idea of a whole exceeds any of its parts. With A WOMAN IN THE SUN – WITH EDGES, the viewer is pulled into a distribution of moments across the work's production and reception, which is also a distribution of authorship that includes the work's other named artists and the beholder, whose positional role defines part of the painting's space.[8] It follows that the mirroring of the Whitney gallery and the scene on the panel's photograph connects, recedes, and unfixes. Within the serial group of the chapter, individual paintings repeat, inflect, bring atmosphere, and generally get caught up in things—caught up in lines of sight that show social relationships, doing their work, so to speak, on the subjects, themes, and ideas of a given chapter.

Quaytman's work can be understood through this visual vocabulary of composed parts or segments—through a logic of material divisions and their connections—connections that, despite the systematizations of the chapter, may actually exist as separations or openings within the idea of a social and linguistic system. There is a silent incompleteness to the chapter that bears comparison to geometry, the other crucially important systematic language of Quaytman's work.[9] In statements and lectures Quaytman has emphasized the chapter's relational aspect: "one response seriality provides is to situate primary legibility outside the boundaries of the individual unit,"[10] and "When I make paintings, I think of them firstly as images that can be placed next to other images."[11]

In critical writing about the artist's work, we read frequent proposals about Quaytman's art as a type of painting after medium-specificity. These arguments assume a hierarchy of discourse over the actual theoretical activity of artwork in its own right, while they secure the authorities and systematizations of history, theory, narrative, or archive. In contrast, one might hope for a positioning of Quaytman's work as an experiment with and upon these authorities. To my mind, Quaytman's role can be cast as taking independence from field-specific discourses in particular among other existent notions of categorization and institutional belonging in general. A significant context for this reading can be found in the three-year-plus period of Orchard, the artist-run gallery where Quaytman and I were among the group's twelve members.[12] The set of chapters that Quaytman conceived and exhibited while working as Orchard's director shows the serial structure to exist autonomously as a space for experimentation, that is, outside any single exhibition of a chapter's works—as if working within Orchard was chapter-like in its framing function (the chapter is often assumed to be synonymous with the public exhibition of Quaytman's work). One of the paintings from this period, PAINTERS WITHOUT PAINTINGS AND PAINTINGS WITHOUT PAINTERS, CHAPTER 8 (2006), is described by the work's subtitle: CHRISTIAN PHILLIPP MÜLLER'S PICTURE OF ANDREA FRASER PERFORMING MAY I HELP YOU, AT ORCHARD IN FRONT OF LOUISE LAWLER'S PICTURE OF

AN ANDY WARHOL PAINTING. The panels from 2006, as a group, focus on a 1966 slide projector piece by Dan Graham and a 2005 performance by Andrea Fraser revisiting MAY I HELP YOU? (1991).[13] Only one of these paintings was presented in the "Painters Without Paintings" exhibition.[14] In this work we see a performance still, taken by Müller, of Fraser shown from the back as she looks at a small cibachrome mounted on a museum box (a work by Louise Lawler titled THE PRINCESS, NOW THE QUEEN, 2005).[15]

This square picture contains in its deceptively stable, classical form a complex unfolding of the rhetorical authority of the naturalized image through which, in the words of Craig Owens, the object "sensitizes us to the fact that the viewer's relation to a work of art is prescribed, assigned in advance by the representational system."[16] Quaytman has silenced Fraser's monologue and has made the artist over into an object (of the painter and viewer). We see Fraser as a figure caught in the act of beholding. In doing this, Quaytman has put Fraser's live discourse of social analysis, the spoken stream of theory of MAY I HELP YOU? (1991) in the wrong place, rendering it still for a moment as the subject of a static silkscreened painting. This presentation further depends on details that telegraph social meanings. Through the panel's tightly composed arrangement of Fraser's head and eyes which are held in relation to Lawler's Warhol portrait of Norway's Crown Princess Sonja, PAINTERS WITHOUT PAINTINGS says something about the notion that theory in the visual arts is subject to a physical enclosure by the body and bounded by a visual field. Quaytman realized a number of panels of this photograph, treating it with a variety of patterned surface effects. I take this image of accumulated artist representations to formulate the following: The

analyses and mediums that have been attributed to the activities of these artist-authors are not fixed, but rather constitute physical and conceptual movements of idea—between self and other, between forms crossed over by culture and positions within culture—in an ongoing, lateral and cyclical motion. As with Quaytman's work, the vocabulary is of repeated acts of collective and singular receiving, one after the other: look back, look away, look into. Only then does one partially see a way through.

1) Quaytman made twenty-nine works as part of *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, nine of which were included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial exhibition, curated by Francesco Bonami and Gary Carrion-Murayari, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, February 25 – May 30, 2010. As with most chapters, a handful of singular hand-painted oil on wood paintings (Quaytman refers to these as "captions," 12.36 x 12.36 inches or 12.36 x 20 inches) were included in the group of silkscreen ink, gesso on wood paintings (a few of these silkscreen on wood panels also included diamond dust or oil paint). In a statement on this chapter, Quaytman relates that "distracting distance" is taken from a line in a poem by Osip Mandelstam of 1932 – 1933, see "Distracting Distance, Chapter 16," in R. H. Quaytman, *Spine* (Sternberg Press, Kunsthalle Basel, Sequence Press, 2011), p. 279.

2) Quaytman is a keen observer of the work of Dan Graham. The two artists have been in dialogue for over two decades.

3) I use "overarching" and "serial" after the artist's own phrasing for the chapter, see Quaytman's text "Name" which appears on the cover of *Spine* (no pagination). Quaytman has written about the chapter as a method in *Spine* and in the published version of the lecture of 2006, "Allegorical Decoys," in R. H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys* (MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008), pp. 9–26. Quaytman's text "Dimension," also in *Spine*, describes the use of golden section ratios and consistent dimensions for the panels (no pagination).

4) In Hardy's task-based performance, BEAUTIFUL RADIATING ENERGY (2004), we see Hardy continually warm-up, her white-clothed body positioned in front of and casting shadows onto a set of video projections that include contemporary images of popular culture, parades, and protests. We hear her shouting, "I am happy; I am here; I am hurt. I'm ready!"

5) Occasionally Quaytman's work is represented in group exhibitions by a single work, though the artist has realized chapters that consist of a single panel for group exhibitions.

6) The importance Quaytman places on the positioning of the viewer within the field of the painting and as a subject of address relates Quaytman's work to that of Jo Baer. Baer analyzes the traditional static position of modernist, formalist painting, "The type of system one uses when remaining still implies a fixation, a concentration, that is different from what one gets when one is displaced... A fixed image has no surprises and is a window that allows one to definitively fix an image in one position, and, by doing so, attain orgasm… This is not the way in which one looks at things and is not the way in which one experiences things." Jo Baer, "Traditional and Radical Painter. Excerpt from an interview with Serge Guilbaut and Michael Sgan-Cohen," (1974) in Jo Baer, *Broadsides & Belles Lettres, Selected Writings and Interviews 1965 – 2010*, ed. Roel Arkesteijn (Amsterdam: Roma Publications, 2010), p. 81.

7) It should be noted that Quaytman begins the artist's text on *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, with further concern to subject and context: "Aside from its site-specific aspect, each chapter develops formal ideas about painting. This chapter thinks about distance, specifically, how to insert distance while maintaining abstraction's claim to the facts of proximity." *Spine*, p. 279.

8) Traditional hierarchies of artist and audience may also lessen, as Quaytman invites Hardy's contribution as a peer in the place of a model.

9) Among the notes presented within a design and text for a poster that Quaytman produced for the first publically exhibited chapter, *The Sun*, we read, "Geometry has an ambiguous reputation, associated as much with idiocy as with cleverness. At best there is something desperately uncommunicative about it, something more than a little removed from the rest of experience to set against it's [sic] giant claim of truth." *The Sun, Chapter 1*, poster, 2001.

10) R. H. Quaytman, "Collection," in *Spine* (see note 1), no pagination.

11) R. H. Quaytman, *Spine* (see note 1), p. 375.

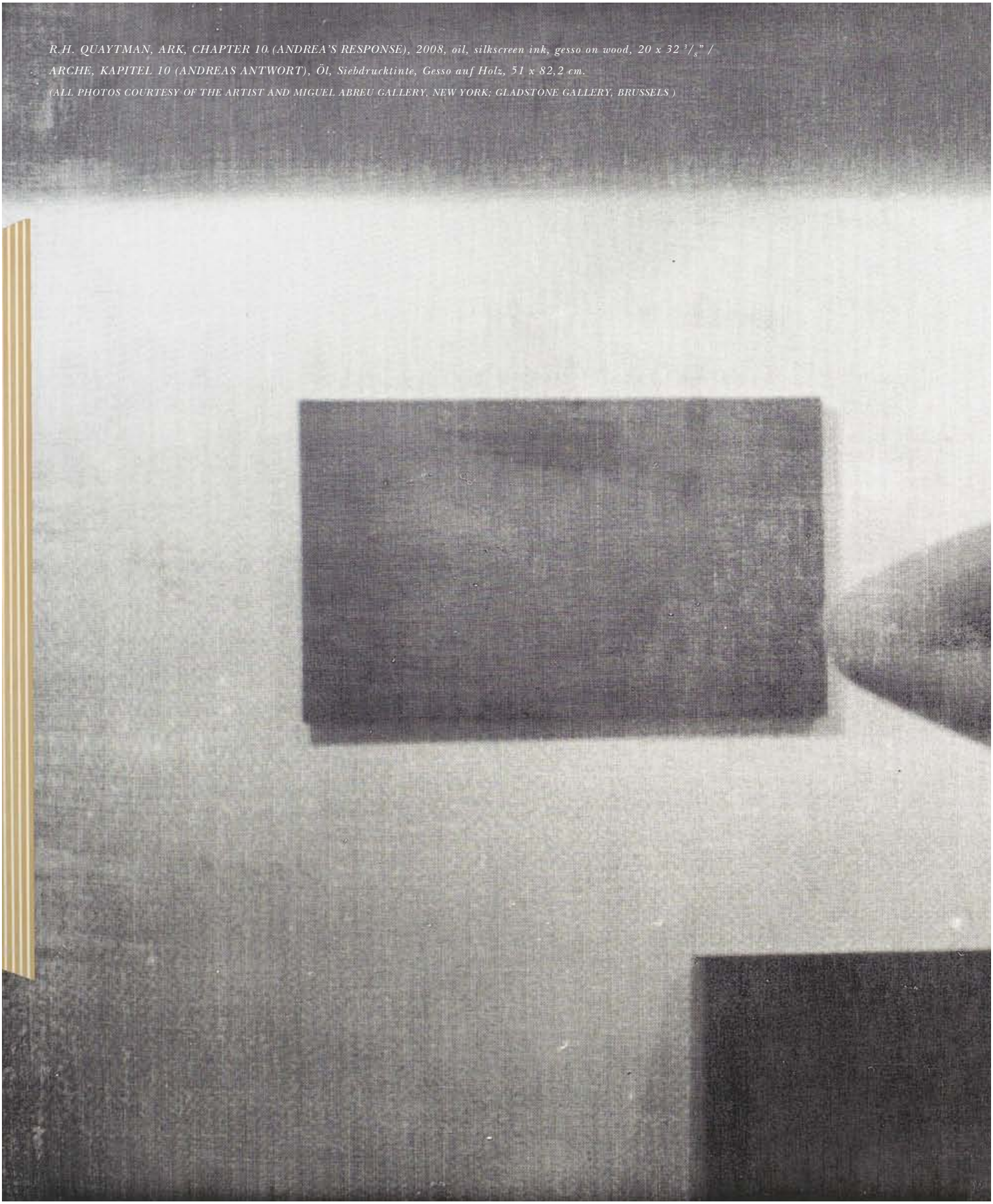
12) On May 11, 2005 the cooperatively organized Orchard gallery inaugurated its program of exhibitions, events, openings, screenings, discussions, and performances in a storefront on New York's Lower East Side with the clear idea of the experiment's end after three years.

13) Quaytman's emphasis in this chapter is on two artworks that Orchard produced and exhibited, Dan Graham's PROJECT FOR SLIDE PROJECTOR (1966/2005), only partially realized in 1966, and Andrea Fraser's MAY I HELP YOU? (1991/2005). Fraser's work was first presented at American Fine Arts Co. in New York in 1991 with actors performing a twenty-minute monologue Fraser wrote within an installation of Allan McCollum's PLASTER SURROGATES (1982/1991) realized with McCollum.

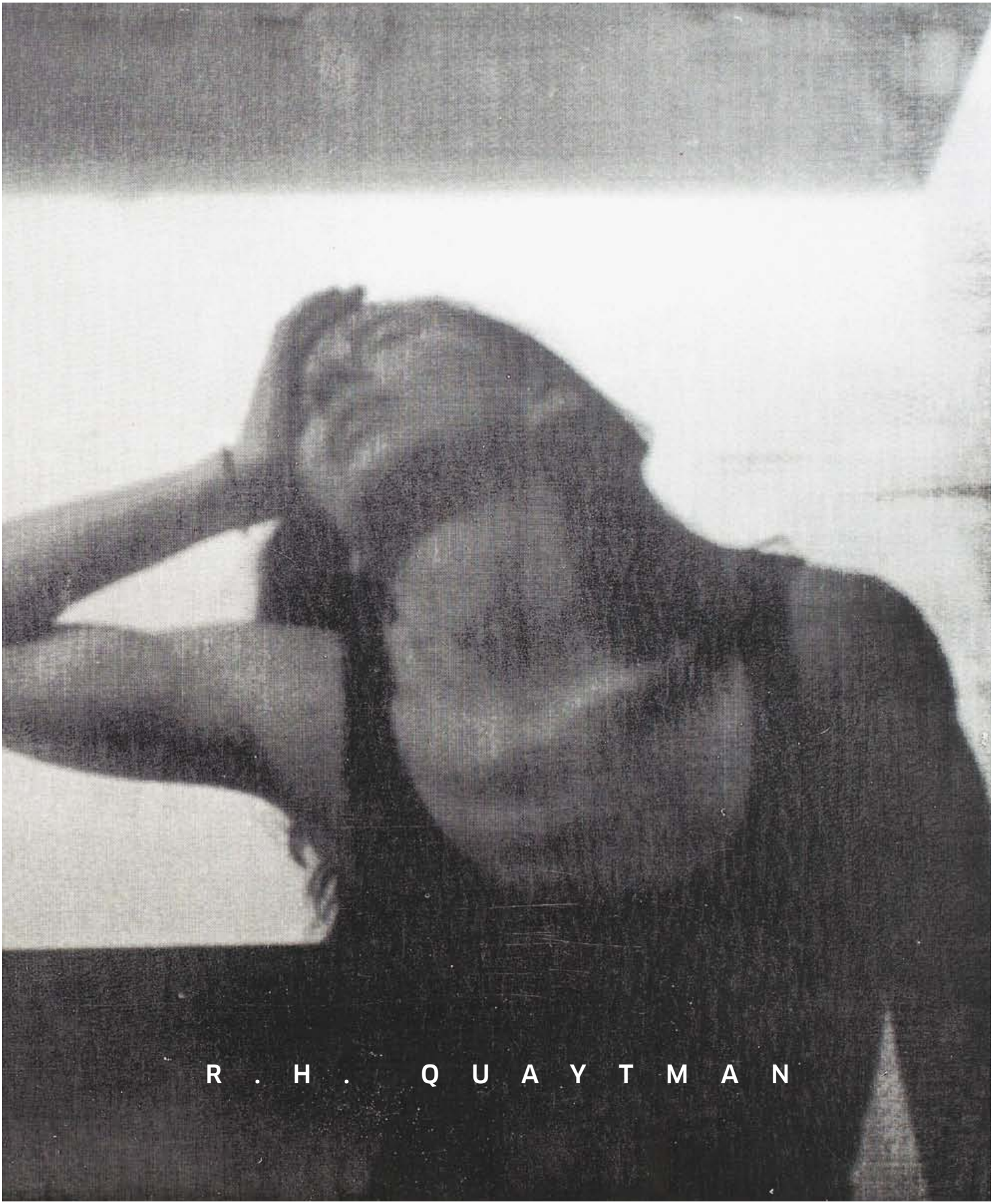
14) The exhibition "Painters Without Paintings and Paintings Without Painters," was organized by artist Gareth James at Orchard, New York (December 2005 – January 2006) and included works by BANK, Simon Bedwell, J. St. Bernard, Daniel Buren, Merlin Carpenter, Nicolás Guagnini, Jutta Koether, Michael Krebber, Lucy McKenzie, R.H. Quaytman, Blake Rayne, John Russell, Reena Spaulings, and Cheyney Thompson.

15) THE PRINCESS, NOW THE QUEEN is Warhol's 1982 portrait of Kronprinsesse Sonja (Crown Princess Sonja) photographed by Lawler in storage at the National Museum in Oslo.

16) Craig Owens, "Representation, Appropriation, and Power," (1982) in Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 99.



R.H. QUAYTMAN, ARK, CHAPTER 10 (ANDREA'S RESPONSE), 2008, oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 3/8" /
ARCHE, KAPITEL 10 (ANDREAS ANTWORT), Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.
(ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY, NEW YORK; GLADSTONE GALLERY, BRUSSELS)


R . H . Q U A Y T M A N

MEANS AND EQUIVALENCE

DANIEL HELLER-ROAZEN

Everywhere we reckon with equivalences: from the sciences of nature to the humanities and the arts, from economy to politics and government; we count one for one. We take such identity as a basis for knowledge. Yet in each case, equality is the consequence of a cut, which has the power to set beings in symmetrical relations. The ancients knew this well. They devised a theory of sections and divisions, which formed the basis of an elaborate system of proportions. Pythagoras was its fabled inventor. He may have written nothing, and it has been doubted more than once that he existed. Yet in the teachings attributed to his many followers, the theory of partition occupies a crucial place. In the oldest Pythagorean fragments known to us today, Archytas of Tarentum—philosopher, mathematician, musician, and monarch at the end of the fifth century BC—distinguishes various types of measured sections. They came, after him, to be called the "old means."[1] According to his doctrine, between two different quantities, it may be that there is not only one, but many "medialities" (*mesē* or *mesotēs*): numbers, intervals, lines, and sections, at which naturally distinct things, when placed in certain relations, suddenly acquire the character of equality.

In his *Collection* or *Synagoge*, Pappus of Alexandria, the Helistic mathematician, records the elements

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ones," Leonardo wrote, "so painting considers all the stable quantities as well as the proportional qualities of shades and lights of distances in perspectives."[9] "If you say that music is composed of proportion, then I, too, have followed the same in painting."[10] Yet the painter did not limit himself to extending the rules of harmony to his art. After declaring painting to be the natural sister of music, he advanced a second claim: just as the eyes rank higher than the ears as organs of sensation, so painting ought to be called the greater of the two siblings.[11] As evidence, he evoked the temporalities of the arts. Acoustical harmony is destined, by a law of nature, to incessant transience; pictorial harmony, by contrast, lasts so long as to extend into a kind of space.

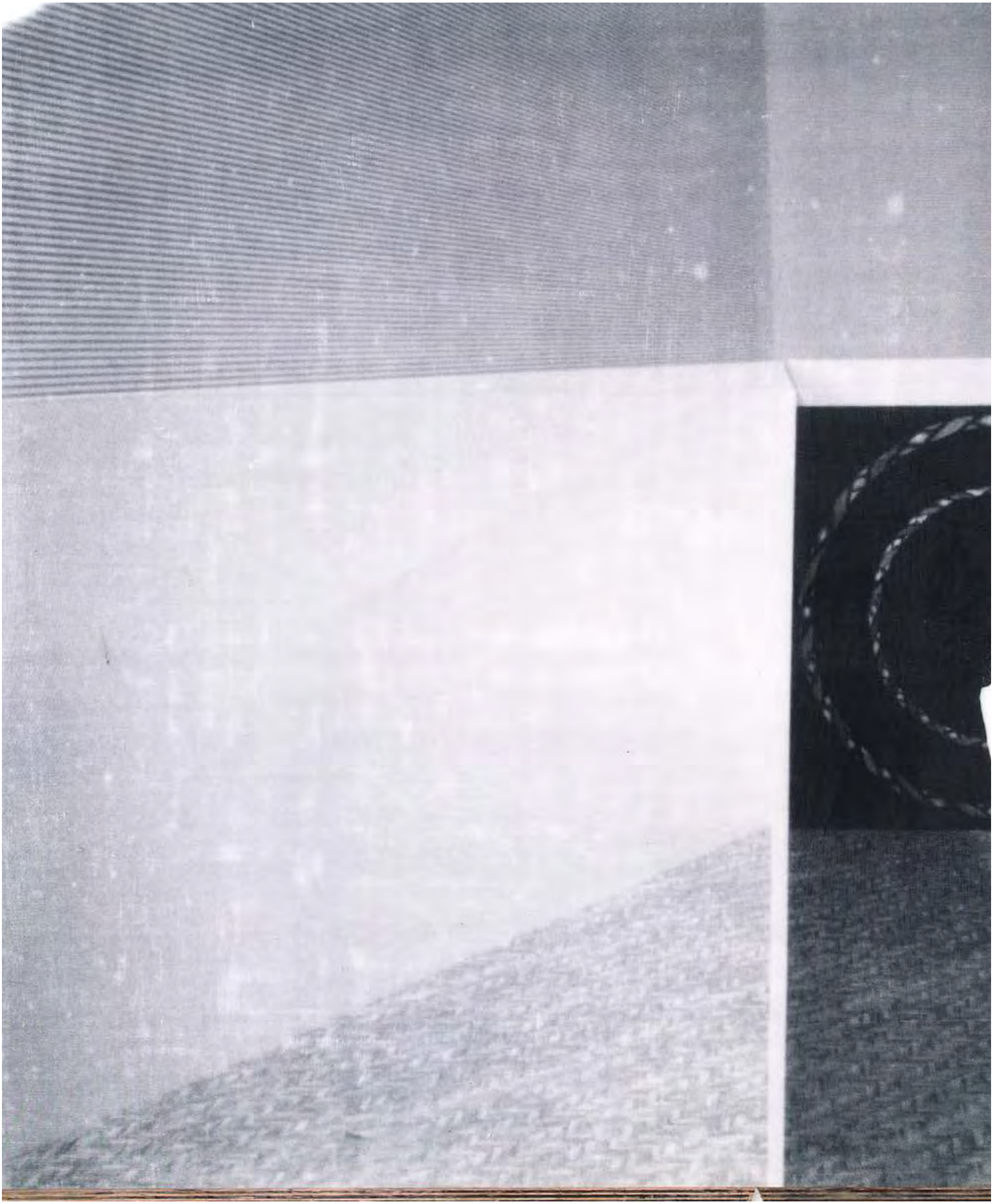
Music … composes harmony by the conjunction of its proportionate parts, which function at the same time, being obliged to be born and to die in one or more harmonic times.… Painting, however, excels and surpasses music, because it does not die immediately after its creation, as does unhappy music. On the contrary, painting remains in being, and it demonstrates to you the life of what is, in fact, nothing but a single surface.[12]

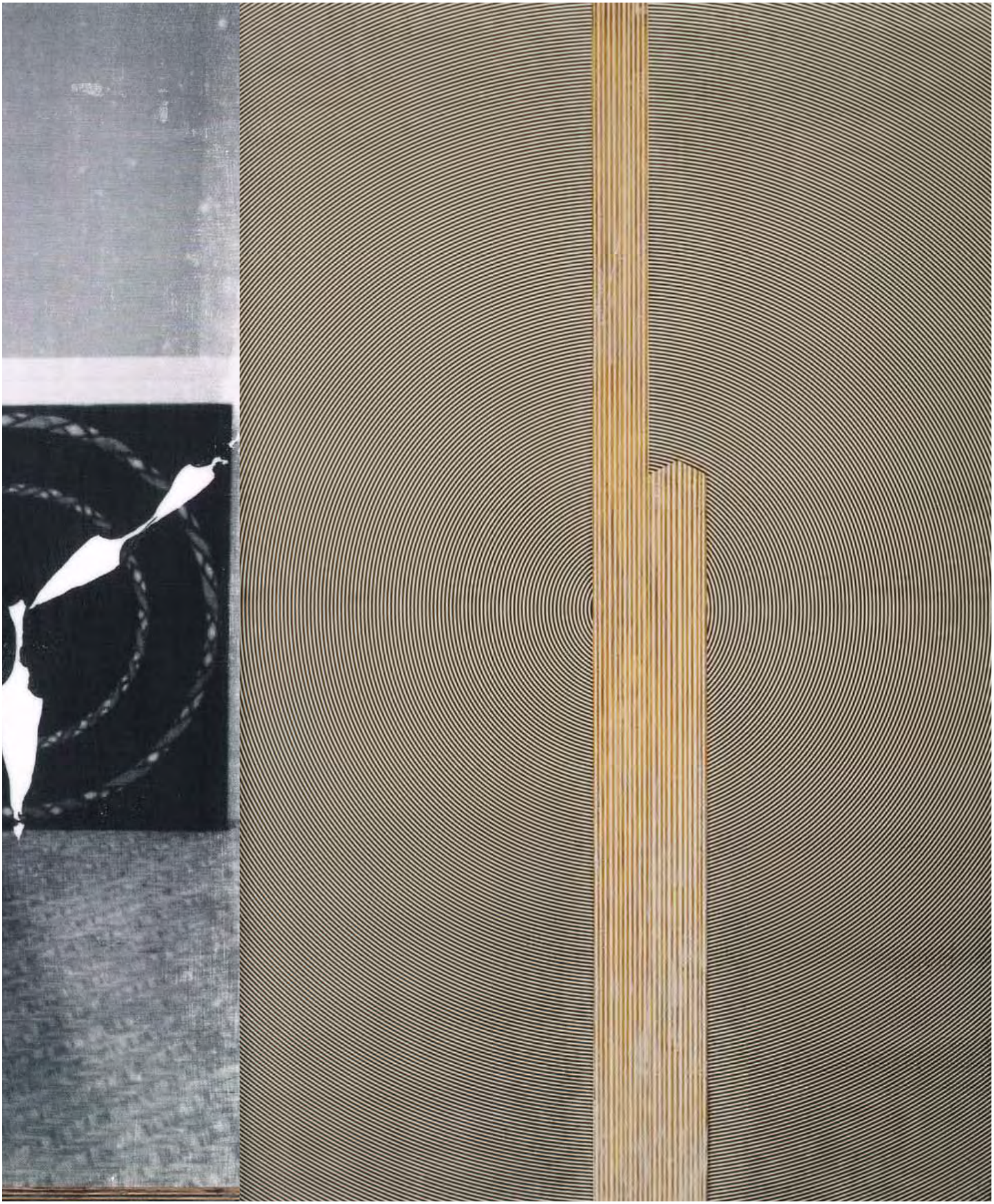
In time, the harmony of proportions found an application beyond the liberal and the fine arts. Friedrich Hölderlin devised a far-reaching doctrine of sections, drawing from the ancient theory of means the principles of what he called a "mechanics" of poetic representation. He sketched his theory in the "Notes" to his two translations of Sophocles. He began with a statement bearing on all representation: "One has to make sure with every thing that it is Something, that is, that is recognizable in the means (*moyen*) of its appearance, that the way in which it is delimited can be determined and taught. Therefore and for higher reasons, poetry is in need of especially certain and characteristic principles and limits."[13] The most basic principle and limit, for him, was the cut he named "caesura." He took this term not in its established meaning, in which it points to a limit within a single line of verse, but in a new sense, which may involve the action staged in tragedy. Hence he argued that the speeches of the blind prophet Tiresias, in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex*, constitute caesuras in the two dramas.[14] Each brings about a sudden break, which sets differing quantities of representation into an unexpected equality. "In the rhythmic sequence of representations," he explains:

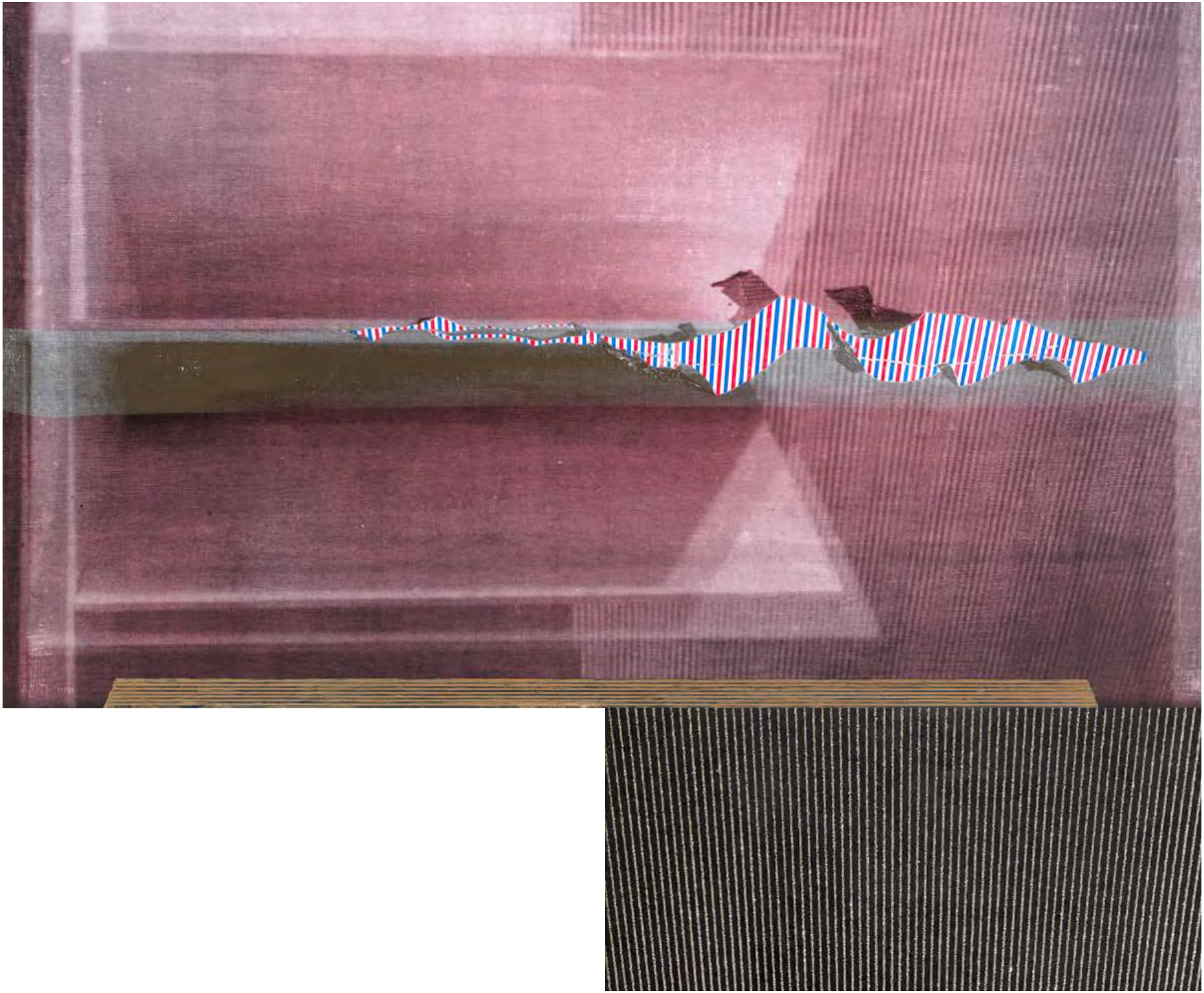
There becomes necessary what in poetic meter is called caesura, the pure word, the counterrhythmic rupture; namely, in order to meet the onrushing change of representations at its highest point in such a manner that very soon there does not appear the change of representation but representation itself. Thereby the sequence of the calculation and the rhythm are divided and, as two halves, refer to one another in such a manner that they appear to be of equal weight.[15]

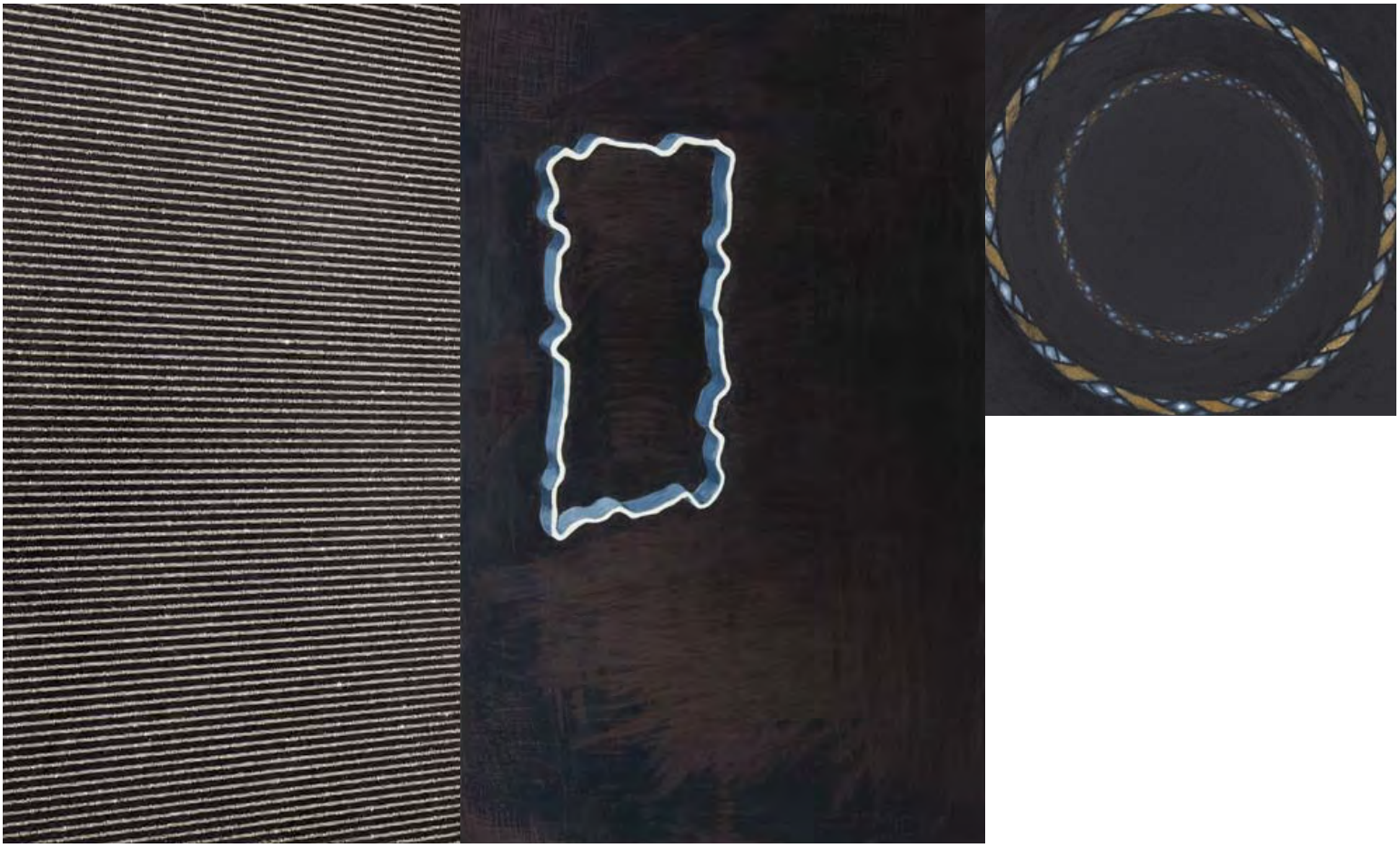
Hölderlin explicitly applied his remarks to tragedy. Yet they can be extended to every representation that unfolds in succession and simultaneity. This includes the art of paintings that, while "remaining in being" in their silkscreen, gesso, and wood surfaces, follow each other in the order of changing times and spaces, both within individual installations and within a sequence of chapters. One may take the poet's words as the expression of a general principle. In every "rhythmic sequence of representations," "there becomes necessary what in poetic meter is called caesura": "the pure word, the counter-rhythmic rupture." Like an unexpected silence in the flow of speech, such an event brings movement to a halt. In itself, it may seem little; if perceived at all, it may appear to be nothing more than a turning point. It brings about no "change of representation," for it reveals nothing but "representation itself": the single condition of systems of proportion on which all harmonies must rest. This is the most minimal of partitions: the hidden cut. No knowledge of related quantities can do without it, although, once established, it itself naturally recedes from view. For in geometry, as in music, speech, and action, to know something and to "make sure that it is Something," one must "recognize it in the means of its appearance," and to find the mean—whatever it may be—one must always make an incision. It is the dividing line that produces equivalences, in their unlike likenesses, and that lets one perceive things unrelated as the parts and portents, sections and signs, of one harmony.

1) Archytas's fragment was preserved by Porphyry. For the text, a translation, and a commentary, see Carl A. Huffman, *Archytas of Tarentum: Pythagorean, Philosopher, and Mathematician King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 162–181.









from left to right / von links nach rechts:

p. 108/109	PR-1:	133 x 82,2 cm / 52 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 32 $^{3}/_{8}$"
p. 110	PS-1:	82.2 x 82,2 cm / 52 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 52 $^{3}/_{8}$"
p. 111	PR-2:	82.2 x 51 cm / 52 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 20"
p. 112	PR-X:	62,9 x 101,6 cm / 24 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 40"
p. 112/113	PS-2:	51 x 51 cm / 20 x 20"
p. 113	PR-3:	51 x 31,5 cm / 20 x 12 $^{3}/_{8}$"
p. 113	PS-3:	31,5 x 31,5 cm / 12 $^{3}/_{8}$ x 12 $^{3}/_{8}$"

And suppose for a moment that it were impossible not to mix genres. What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the a priori of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order, and reason?
— Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre"[1)]

Painting, Folding

JALEH MANSOOR

R. H. Quaytman's *Spine* (2011) adduces—rather than documents or represents—the painter's wager with productive matrices.[2)] In a text on *Spine*'s cover, Quaytman uses the word "book" as a metaphor for the "overarching system with which groups of paintings are generated." She refers to this approach as a method of archiving, one that engenders exploration. Quaytman's process occupies the particular margin in which each genre asymmetrically corrupts its other: perspective clearly contains flatness, while flatness does not clearly contain perspective; haptic and optic co-contaminate; painting achieves narrative as do time-based genres such as film, and even literature. However, not all time-based forms suggest a narrative *telos*. At a moment of yet another crisis of legitimation, Quaytman does not merely shuffle categories as part of a refined painterly game (from Masaccio to Martin in practice, and Lessing to Greenberg or Marin in theory). Why paint after Stella, or after Rodchenko, or after Duchamp, or after Seurat? The crisis, if there is one (or if that disaster is the absence of crisis), hits a more radical, more fundamental vein.[3)] Quaytman begins with the following problem, as stated in our correspondence: "How to displace the monocular focus of the egotistical isolated picture; how to activate leaving the picture."[4)] The decision to remain committed to painting and equally faithful to the dismantling of power germane to the critique of institutions sets Quaytman's practice in a perpetually differentiated internal space.

Transitional space, both optical and conceptual, expresses some of the most interesting moments in modernism. Consider the putative "birth" of abstraction. Leo Steinberg calls the

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delivery of abstraction in pre-Cubism—specifically Picasso's LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON (1907)—"depth under stress." It's no coincidence that the inauguration of this heretofore unthinkable spatiality would happen over the bodies of "whores," "trollops."[5] The "gender problem," like any repressed term, once evoked (even if dismissed or buried), comes to be dispersed over the entire discursive field. Perhaps gender and genre are indivisible.[6]

Steinberg baptizes one endpoint of this argument calling it the "flatbed picture plane," to designate a repository for dedifferentiated data barely mediated; almost entirely commensurable only with money. "Depth under stress" was no longer relevant. Flatness hypostasized into the unitary quality of the object. While this development supposedly contributed to "the plight of the public" to understand transitional space, it also assisted the circulation of cor-


WORLD'S FAIR DAILY

5¢ 5¢

No. 157 Monday, October 14, 1940

Refugee Students Salute America

'I Am An American' Day

Students of New York City's Evening Schools, many of them refugees from Europe who are learning the language and customs of America to fit them for their new life in the United States, will present a program at American Common tonight at 7:45.

A pageant, "Your Flag and Mine", which will be presented by students of the George Washington School, will be in keeping with the theme of American Common itself, which is dedicated to the perpetuation of a democratic way of life. Addresses will be made by Regina C. M. Burke, assistant superintendent of New York City's schools; Theodore Fred Kreyer, law secretary to the Board of Education, and Morris E. Siegel, director of evening and continuation schools.

Highway safety problems will be discussed by members of the National Safety Engineers Association meeting at Gas Wonderland Theatre this afternoon at 4:30.

Pageants, parades, thousands of

see and do at the

FORD EXPOSITION

and Art of the U. S.

International Business Machines

Gallery of Science and Art

International Business Machines

Corporation's building

porate abstraction, another kind of flatness, homologous with the abstraction of advanced capital.[7]

Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (2009) in *Spine*, retextures, in silkscreen regenerations of photographed paint strokes that copy the printed statement entitled "'Modern Art' and the American Public" issued by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, on February 17, 1948.

Quaytman had the opportunity to visit Lodz, Poland, just before working on *The Sun* series (2001—ongoing); her grandfather, Mark Quaytman, was a Jewish immigrant from Lodz. *Chapter 1* (2001) concretizes problems of "origin." In the trope of parents and grandparents, the empirical reality of loss through trauma is inscribed in the subjective tissue of memory: systematic and political as evoked by the camps, and arbitrary as in the cause of a grandpar-

R.H. QUAYTMAN, *THE SUN, CHAPTER 1*, 2001, oil, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 3/8" / *DIE SONNE, KAPITEL 1*, Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.

ent's death. Mise en scène, it is neither objective nor subjective. The trauma is both collective and personal and it becomes what the artist calls "a source for painting external to the viewer, and yet far from a mere archive with its implication of evidentiary empiricism."[8] Quaytman flips the archive, turning it on an axis that reprioritizes the psycho-emotive sedimentation of the subject. In doing so she places the archive on the same side as the subject, a frame for consciousness rather than an impersonal repository. She writes, "The museum was a method—a method of memory."[9]

The earliest works in the *The Sun* series, the first twenty chapters in *Spine*, position the window as an opening between pluralistic inside and outside rather than positioning the window as a structuring device. The frame of the window sutures the subject and its field, sewing

her into the mise en scène. But the object is no longer the grand interpolative system. The window is commonly understood as a metaphor of classical figuration, but there's no cogent step that transforms it into a technology of omniscience. In Quaytman's *The Sun*, the window becomes, once again, the apparatus of mediation, migrating from the train windows of Lodz through the lozenge that signals its recession. This is a recession that frustrates perspective as the apotheosis of memory and futurity. One would assume that there'd be something better to do than generate diagonals doubling as train tracks that carry progenitors to and from camps. This time, it betrays itself, shifting from fathers to matrices… The orthogonals (uncorrelated angles) provisionally crystallize as tracks and appear again and again across nineteen chapters and hundreds of paintings in an unpredictable series. The window draws

R.H. QUAYTMAN, THE SUN, CHAPTER 1, 2001, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 3/8" / DIE SONNE, KAPITEL 1, Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.

a passage through process, rather than forming a law of self-possession that underscores transcendental opticality.

While *Spine* contains reproductions of paintings like an inside-out fold, many paintings contain the book. *Quire, Chapter 14* (2009), in particular, multiplies books and pages turning in space. Space is constructed by placing one flatbed—the book—inside of another—the picture plane. Vertical and horizontal pull and push in and out of rhythm. The book as indivisible form and content emerges from the window. The orthogonal, as a measuring stick, comes full circle—the logic of the fold, not unlike the wedge, renders the book literally possible.

The critical reception of Quaytman's oeuvre seeks to name the logic of its "making." Many place her work under the sign of the lateral "network" in which the textual and painterly op-

TWO KILLED AT CROSSING

Car Crashes Through Gates at Cedar Manor.

TRAFFIC DELAYED TWO HOURS

Acetylene Torches Used to Get Automobile Off Tracks.

Two men were killed early today when the car in which they were riding crashed through gates on the New York Boulevard crossing at the Cedar Manor station, Jamaica, Queens, and was struck by a Long Island Railroad express train. They were identified as Charles Press, 56 years old, of 337 Central avenue, Lawrence, L. I., and Mark Quaytman, 36, of 59 Columbia avenue, Cedarhurst, L. I.

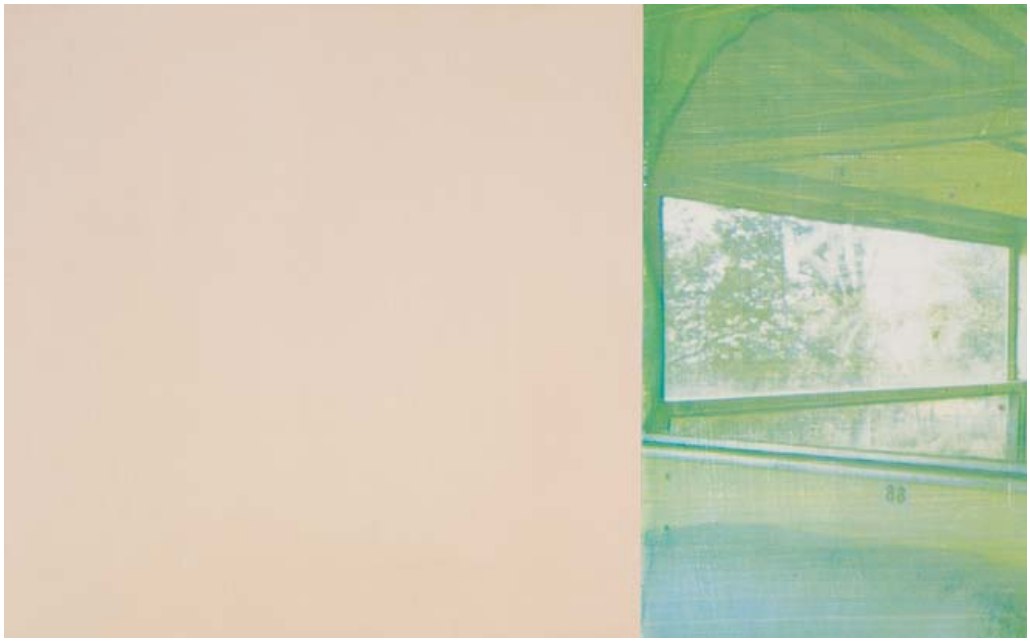
erate beside one another. Many ask questions about the mode of "control" that makes production, publication, and distribution possible.[10] How did Quaytman's project deliver her to these lateral networks and other systems within the hierarchically organized medium? This question is treated as though self-evidently the result of historical determination and the irrelevance of the medium. How did an artist working within the dictates of institutional critique and, contradictorily, the medium of painting, arrive at *Spine*? The exfoliating incommensurabilities raise, once again, the problem of the matrix, a term evolved from the Latin *mater*, meaning the condition for the possibility of inscription.

The *de-generescence* of *Spine* cannot be confused with degeneration. Regression of genre generates a ground at once too richly rigorous and luxurious building the condition for the pos-

R.H. QUAYTMAN, THE SUN, CHAPTER 1, 2001, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 7/8" / DIE SONNE, KAPITEL 1, Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.

sibility of law overwritten by law, finding itself in the manifolds of *Spine*. The forms are drawn from a transcendental imposition on materiality, irresponsible and random, one to the next.

The object exceeds its eidetic correlates—a metric to generate metrics. In other words, "process occupies the particular margin."[11] Why does this matter: After so many funerals, painting is not dead and moves from object to subject and back, a chain without correlation making subject possible. An "'I'-less 'I' of narrative voice, the 'I' stripped of itself, the one that does not take place…" Derrida says, "Here now, very quickly, is the law of abounding, of excess, the law of participation without membership, of contamination, etc.… It will seem meager to you, and even of staggering abstractness."[12] This plurality is not a "perpetual inventory" or another iteration of the "anomic archive."[13] Contamination is not open-ended, it leaks into the space of entertainment and control, but is bound by frame and page, a flash in the darkness.



R.H. QUAYTMAN, THE SUN, CHAPTER 1, 2001, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 3/8" / DIE SONNE, KAPITEL 1, Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.

1) Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1, *On Narrative* (Autumn 1980), pp. 55–81.
2) R.H. Quaytman, *Spine* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011). *Spine* resembles a catalogue raisonné of R. H. Quaytman's work produced since 2001, the year the artist began organizing paintings into chapters.
3) The mathematics that made linear or single-point perspective possible was elaborated in seven volumes by the medieval Muslim scholar Alhazen (965–1040 AD), titled *Kitāb al-Manāzir* or *Book of Optics*. The author describes the first camera obscura, or pinhole technology. The *Kitāb al-Manāzir* was translated and published by Friedrich Risner in 1572.
4) R. H. Quaytman's correspondence with the author.
5) Leo Steinberg, "Philosophical Brothel," *October* 44 (Spring 1988), pp. 7–74.
6) "But the whole enigma of genre springs perhaps most closely from within this limit between the two genres of genre which, neither separable nor inseparable, form an odd couple of one without the other in which each evenly serves the other a citation to appear in the figure of the other, simultaneously and indiscernibly saying 'I'

and 'we,' me the genre, we genres, without it being possible to think that the 'I' is a species of the genre 'we.'" Derrida, "The Law of Genre," pp. 56–57.

7) Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria" in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 55–92.

8) R. H. Quaytman's correspondence with the author.

9) R.H. Quaytman, "The Museum Recited," *Artforum* 48, no. 10 (Summer 2010), p. 323. Memory, or Mnemosyne, is at once held as a possibility and foreclosed by the museum—its institutionality works against it. "And wasn't it true that Bouguereau was forgotten in spite of the museum's leaden delays?" p. 323.

10) David Joselit, "Painting beside Itself," *October*. 130 (Fall 2009), pp. 125–134.

11) R. H. Quaytman's correspondence with the author.

12) Derrida, "The Law of Genre."

13) Rosalind Krauss, "Perpetual Inventory," pp. 86–116, and Benjamin Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive," pp. 117–145, both in *October* 88 (Spring, 1999).

R.H. QUAYTMAN, THE SUN, CHAPTER 1, 2001, silkscreen ink, gesso on wood, 20 x 32 3/8" / DIE SONNE, KAPITEL 1, Öl, Siebdrucktinte, Gesso auf Holz, 51 x 82,2 cm.

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R. H. QUAYTMAN

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View of R. H. Quaytman, "Spine, Chapter 20," 2011, Kunsthalle Basel. From left: *Spine, Chapter 20 (Iamb)*, 2010; *Spine, Chapter 20 (Iamb)*, 2010; *Quire, Chapter 14*, 2009; *Spine, Chapter 20*, 2011; *Spine, Chapter 20 (Distracting Distance/Hardy)*, 2010; *Spine, Chapter 20*, 2011; *Spine, Chapter 20 (Silberkuppe)*, 2010; *Silberkuppe, Chapter 17*, 2010; *Loft, Chapter 4*, 2005; *Spine, Chapter 20 (Beard)*, 2010; *Spine, Chapter 20*, 2010; *Spine, Chapter 20*, 2010. Photo: Serge Hasenböhler.

Tabula Rasa

PAUL GALVEZ ON THE ART OF R. H. QUAYTMAN

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE that the person who makes R. H. Quaytman's panels was formerly a collaborator of Donald Judd's. The fastidious construction, the often dazzling optics, the play between transparency and opacity: Quaytman's painting and the Minimalist object share much. Most of all, perhaps, they share a systematic logic in which every detail, from individual paintings and installations to their publication and distribution, is subject to careful control. And it is this relentless drive that makes one wonder about the development of this system—its contours, whence it came, and how it continues to sustain itself.

Quaytman's recent climb has been quick. Since the artist's earliest solo shows at Miguel Abreu Gallery and Vilma Gold in 2008, there have been ten exhibitions in five countries in less than three years, a pace that would make even the most industrious among us drool with envy. A triumvirate of installations this past summer in Cologne, Basel, and Venice, along with the publication of a "catalogue raisonné," *Spine*, must surely make 2011 the year of Quaytman's coming-out party, if not crowning glory.

Yet this queen of panel painting is no debutante, as is well known. Journeyman years in the roaring 1980s and '90s, when many budding talents were being plucked fresh out of school, were for Quaytman ones of gestation, not overexposure. More than a decade separates the artist's student days at the Skowhegan art program and Bard College from her first official "chapter" exhibition in 2001: "The Sun, Chapter 1." From this point, a relatively slow, fomenting period is followed by an explosive burst. In the seven years up to 2008, the shows number nine; in the subsequent three, nineteen.

The artist's labors have also produced two books, *Allegorical Decoys* (2008) and the aforementioned *Spine*, and numerous interviews and gallery texts, making Quaytman herself the works' most prolific

Quaytman's corpus as a whole is a game that anybody can play, one that can be repeated with no danger of ever becoming repetitive, since each enactment will play out differently from the last.

R. H. Quaytman, ***Beard, Chapter 19***, **2010**, oil, silk-screen ink, and gesso on wood, two parts, 32⅛ x 20" and 20 x 12⅜".

reader. However, the lucidity and intelligence of this written oeuvre has come at a price, one that has been most often paid, it must be said, in the outside reception of the painted one. So diverse are the iconographic references planted in each of Quaytman's installations, so articulate are her narratives of their origins, that most writers gleefully rehearse them, often with no further comment. And this is true whether they look outward toward the panels' context of display, with an obligatory nod to the history of institutional critique and its descendants, or inward, to the possibilities open to painting after the "death of painting," to name the two dominant topoi of the literature. Though I'm sympathetic to these readings, they often ignore one of the great strengths of Quaytman's work: the precision with which the contextual elements get incorporated into the pictorial system the artist has devised.

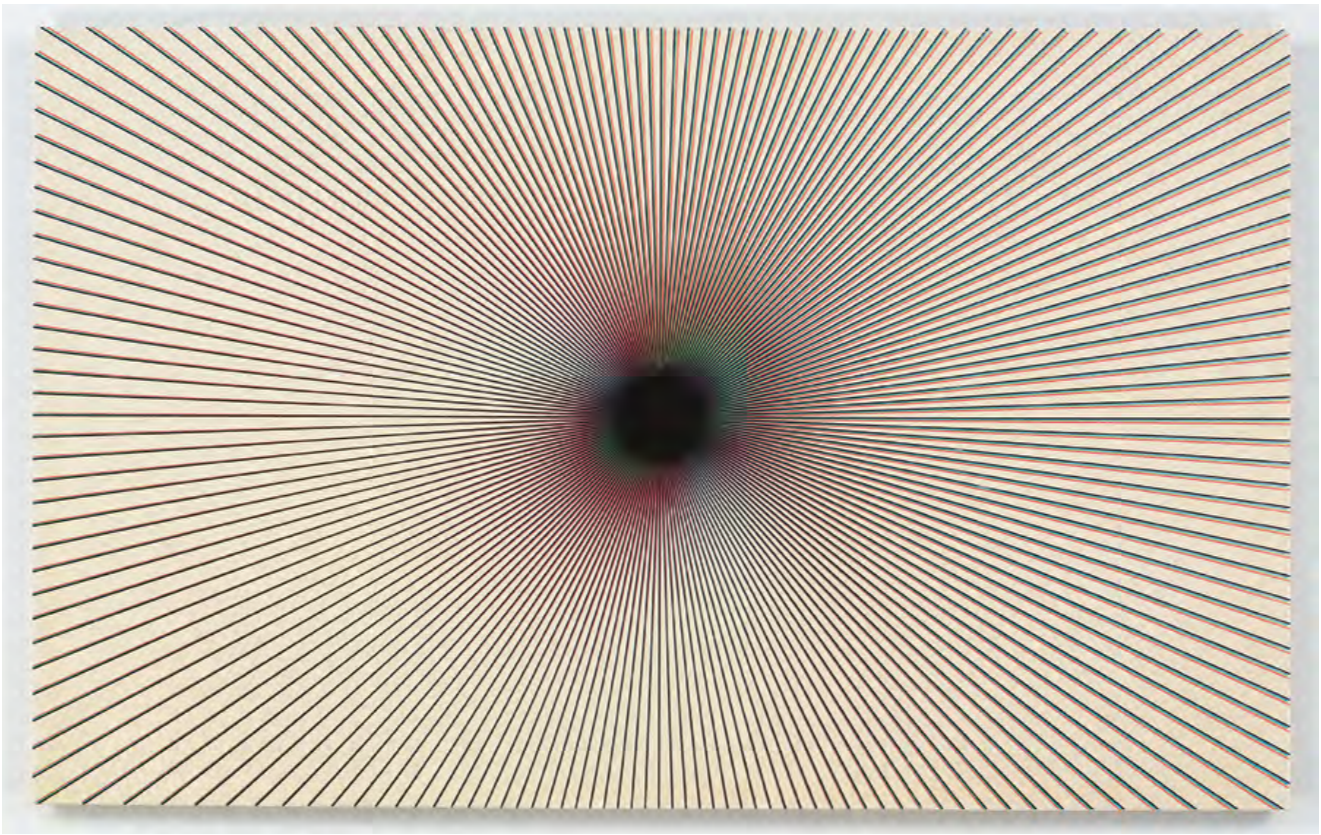
IN COMING TO GRIPS with this oeuvre, then, it is essential to understand the structure of its basic unit: the chapter. Quaytman uses this term not only to name separate installations of panel paintings, but also to give them a sense of open-endedness, of archiving without end, as if reading a novel without conclusion. The chapters all share certain features, some variable, some invariable. The latter include the support, the frame, the proportions, and the technique. The panels' ground is almost always gesso on wooden panel, a reminder of a time when painter-craftsmen treated their paintings as opaque things before ever thinking of them as transparent windows. The panel's edges are beveled, to reinforce its objecthood. Quaytman thus achieves by more subtle means what previous generations of painters achieved by thickening the depths of their frames—that is, a cleavage between surface and wall such that the painting begins to take on a three-dimensional life of its own, as if a relief.

Shorn of stretcher and frame, the panel is furthermore subjected to limits placed on its dimensions. A rectangle based on the golden section is one where the ratio of the longer side to the shorter side is exactly the same as that of the sum of these two to the longer side. If you cut the largest square you can from any golden rectangle, the leftover piece will be a miniature version of the original rectangle. Quaytman's panels all come in sizes based on the golden section (save for one exception, a 40-by-24.75-inch format kept in reserve), and they never exceed 32.36 by 52.36 inches.

All these rules are of course classic strategies for eliminating whimsy and arbitrariness from the creative process, the holy grail pursued by generations of die-hard modernist painters, as well as by Minimalists rediscovering the strategies of Constructivism and the pleasures of the Fibonacci sequence. No surprise, then, that in wanting to be more machine than man, an artist such as Quaytman should also have recourse to the photograph—the soulless medium par excellence. It is here, at the level of the halftone photo-silk-screen process, that the second set of features in the system—the variable ones—comes into play. Sometimes what is printed is a photograph, either taken by the artist or culled from an archive; sometimes it is an optical pattern printed directly onto the screen; and sometimes it is both at once. Two further elements are allowed to vary: color and texture. Quaytman often keys groups of panels and sometimes entire installations to a specific color or set of colors. There can also be an element of chance. The optical patterns at times are generated when a screen is printed twice (or thrice) in different colors, slightly offset, sometimes to the artist's great surprise.

To think of Quaytman's silk screens as a form of mechanization makes inevitable a comparison with the medium's foremost practitioner. If Warhol wanted to be a machine, willing to mime the worst of mass culture in order to become one, and if Sigmar Polke and other masters of the screen would follow suit, Quaytman cannot be comfortably inserted into this genealogy (or assembly line). The ads, celebrities, and logos for which Warhol is most famous are a subclass of images that never grace Quaytman's silk screens. I can only conclude that this is because the artist is still invested in a tradition of abstract painting that Warhol never ceased to mock and travesty, albeit in brilliant fashion. If Quaytman reintroduces reference into voids long ago depleted of it, it is because the artist sees no contradiction between the impersonality of abstraction and the impersonality of the photograph, a conclusion reached in different ways by such artists as Polke, Gerhard Richter, and Michael Krebber. Both abstraction and photography distance the work from the hand of the artist and therefore, by extension, from an a priori idea originating in a controlling, creative mind. The antithesis between figuration and abstraction that drove a century of painting is rendered moot. What matters now is less whether a painting is an example of one or the other, but by what and how many means something ends up painted at all.

This might also explain the cool air of detachment many say they feel in front of Quaytman's panels. We are so accustomed to the chance splashes and drips that Warhol let into his most dramatic silk-screen paintings that it is easy to forget that a more restrained application is also possible, nay, even desirable. Since the earliest Pop practitioners of the method had an ax to grind with the macho rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism, the messiness of those early silk-screened works was a kind of commentary on how the abstract gesture was merely one among many kinds



Above: **R. H. Quaytman**, ***Silberkuppe, Chapter 17*, 2010**, silk-screen ink and gesso on wood, 24¾ x 40".

Below: **R. H. Quaytman**, ***Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, 2010**, oil on wood, 12⅜ x 20".

of imagemaking procedures. For similar reasons, the brushstroke itself was often subjected to the process (that is, a brushstroke was photographically transferred onto a screen and then painted, thus creating a mechanical ghost of the original) as a way of magnifying and thus further distancing the pictorial mark from the authorial hand. While Quaytman does occasionally leave traces of the brush on the panels, I would say that these cases are exceptions that prove the rule: "No gestures allowed." The perfect examples are the small, talismanic handpainted panels known as "captions" that appear in every chapter and are not subject to the same set of rules as the other panels. It is as if in reading the history of postwar art, Quaytman had decided to skip the section on AbEx and its discontents, instead going directly from the self-effacing procedures of Minimalism and the reception of the historical avant-gardes to the rise of the photographic sign—and to the digital one, if the recent move in the work from a CMYK "print" color scale to an RGB "screen" one is any indication.

IF THE SPECTACULAR is off the table(au), then what *does* Quaytman silk-screen onto the panels? What I said in these pages on the occasion of "Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15," the artist's exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 2009, essentially holds true for the rest of the chapters: "As for subject matter, the range was also restricted. One category comprised abstract compositions of thin parallel [or patterned] lines; these were slightly offset or colored to create optical effects. The silk screens, many of which were abstractions, also came in two other types: photographs of other works or of the galleries they had occupied; and images related to the history of the museum [or exhibition space]." This last category of context-related imagery is the hinge on which swings most of the writing about Quaytman. And understandably so, for it connects the work to the legacy of institutional critique while at the same time seeming to provide a way out of the impasse of the "death of painting" *Trauerspiel*. But before examining these arguments more closely, let me

View of R. H. Quaytman, "Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21," 2011, Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne. From left: *Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21 (Krebber's whip and Buchholz's purse)*, 2011; *Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21*, 2011; *Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21*, 2011.

Allover, screenprinted abstractions populate almost every show of Quaytman's, dropping like bombs into a tranquil sea of reference.

address one last feature of the chapters: their organization of perceptual space.

So concentrated is Quaytman's gaze on the slightest variables of painting that critics who do pay attention to these things often forget, or run out of room to talk about, how single panels interact spatially with their neighbors within the collective ensemble of each chapter. Once one does so, it becomes clear that Quaytman's skills as "installation artist" rival those as painter. Though the term has fallen into disrepute due to a fatal combination of overuse and understudy, I can find no other words, except maybe the more workmanlike "exhibition designer," to characterize someone whose exquisite sense of proportion and knack for juxtaposition have given her the ability to command a given space with such authority. Having worked on installing exhibitions for three years at the Institute for Contemporary Art/P. S. 1 Museum in New York in the late 1980s, where curator Chris Dercon's shows—such as "Theatergarden Bestiarium," a group show foregrounding artists working in collaboration—were formative in the artist's education, Quaytman would continue the role of artist-curator not only with exhibitions of Hilma af Klint, Marcia Hafif, and Stephen Prina but also in joint efforts with other artists and, of course, in the chapters.

The recent "Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21" at Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Cologne is a telling example. On the right wall of the main room hung three panels. From left to right were a large vertical panel with a skewed, seemingly torn photograph of a Krebber piece and a purse owned by gallerist Buchholz; a medium-size vertical panel almost completely given over to an image from a card found in the antiquarian bookshop in front of the gallery, depicting the biblical general killer Judith with the words CHERCHEZ HOLOPHERNE ("find Holofernes"), which give this chapter its title; and a small panel containing a black triangle against a white ground. At first glance, this descending configuration had all the charm of a police lineup, moving not only from biggest to smallest but also, in terms of subject matter, from contemporary art to collector's item to abstraction. This disjunctive syntax deserves fuller comment than can be given here. But since we are talking about installation design, let's focus on the rhythm that sweeps the eye from the leftmost edge of the Krebber panel, drawing it along the upper and lower diagonals of the trapezoidally shaped, "receding" photograph in that work, until it eventually sandwiches the figure of Judith in the next panel, before terminating at the apex of the black triangle. If you were to follow this pincer movement, as I did,

View of R. H. Quaytman, "Spine, Chapter 20," 2010, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, NY. From left: *Spine, Chapter 20 (P. M.)*, 2010; *Spine, Chapter 20 (The Sun)*, 2010.

View of R. H. Quaytman, "Iamb: Through the Limbo of Vanity," 2008, Vilma Gold, London. On table: *Chapter 12: iamb/Captions*, 2008. Foreground, front of stack: *Chapter 12: iamb/Captions*, 2008.

from the left, you would find yourself helped along by the black triangle, which suddenly has taken the form of a three-dimensional arrow accessed by a wooden handle or hinge, an illusion created by the virtual joining of the panel's beveled left edge with its painted double, which rests on the left-hand border of the piece. And where does this arrow lead? Toward the wall heading back to the adjoining entrance, where one finds a panel, rotated and of a different color, that replicates the one first passed on entry to the gallery.

Quaytman's chapters are filled with such moments. The use of the golden ratio ensures that even with no ostensible thematic or formal connection between panels, there will always be a latent order underlying them all. This is true even of the allover, screenprinted abstractions that populate almost every chapter, dropping like bombs into a tranquil sea of reference. Because these abstract designs are nonhierarchical (that is, because they extend all the way to the framing edge and thus revoke traditional modes of composition that involve a figure isolated against a ground), each one seems to fuse with the gessoed surface to which it has been applied, in effect becoming a factual declaration of that surface. At the same time, as optical illusions, they work in the complete opposite direction—distorting and destabilizing the perception of planarity altogether, be it through moiré effects, afterimages, or a digital keystone printing process that allows the pattern to change according to one's angle of approach. This schizophrenic conjunction of empirical and physiological vision can be spellbinding, but never so bewitching as to make one oblivious to the rest of the chapter and its overall system of proportion.

Thus, a paradox: A system of the utmost structural order is nonetheless infinitely open to permutation. The corpus as a whole is a game that anybody can play, one that can be repeated with no danger of ever becoming repetitive, since each enactment will play out differently from the last. What makes it difficult to write about the work, then, is that the microscopic analysis of a single chapter, itself already a tangled web to unweave, loses sight of the connection to the larger "book." The broad overviews of Quaytman's oeuvre undertaken in recent criticism often suffer from the reverse condition. In following the invitations to look elsewhere, suggested by iconographic clues sown throughout the chapters, be it into the institutional or informatic context or into the aesthetic positions shared by collaborators and friends, what gets lost is the specificity of this highly developed and intricate system.

THIS IS WHY, up until this point, I have refrained from mentioning the artist's three-year directorship of Orchard Gallery, the vibrant alternative space on the Lower East Side in New York that closed its doors in 2008. Clearly, not only was that period formative as a model of organization and a source of energy that was then translated into the solo work, but it was also, by all accounts, a moment shared with kindred spirits looking for alternatives to the dominant modes of exhibition then (and one could say still now) on offer. But to say that the work of Krebber, Andrea Fraser, Blake Rayne, Josef Strau, Nikolas Gambaroff, and Thomas Eggerer, to give just a sampling of the artists with whom Quaytman has exhibited either at Orchard or other venues, is part of a new zeitgeist of painting as institutional critique, transitive or networked painting, etc., while perhaps doing the admirable service of rooting these artists in a garden of shared sensibility, ultimately does little to distinguish one from the other except in the vaguest of terms. (To take one small example, most discussions of the 2008 Orchard exhibition "From One O to the Other" gloss over the fact that Quaytman's panels were the only *paintings* in the show and, more important, that they were created with specific tropes of *modernist* painting in mind.)

In reading such arguments, one sometimes gets

View of the artist's studio at the American Academy in Rome, 1992. From left: untitled, 1991; *Father*, 1992. Photo: Marco Valdivia.

the feeling that all it takes to be "critical" of the institutions of art are some archival photographs, storage racks, and invocations of the digital. But the history of Conceptual and post-Minimalist art tells us that it was only after an undoing of all pretenses to transcendence was performed from *within* the domain of the aesthetic object that attention was turned toward the museum and the gallery, the guardians of those objects. Unlike many peers, Quaytman does not shrink from this historical heavy lifting, which each chapter replays but also re-forms, with the painted panel as its crucial point of leverage.

The cynical view of such a maneuver is to say that Quaytman's painting reaestheticizes what used to be antiaesthetic, that what was once on the outside is now firmly ensconced on the inside, so to speak. But what artistic practice has not suffered this fate? If anything, Quaytman's endeavor acknowledges—and thus opens up for discussion—the fact that the discrete work of art housed in a museum or gallery is at this historical juncture the site of ever-increasing fetishization and spectacularization, to such an extent that an old-school, bricks-and-mortar critique of institutions now seems altogether quaint in comparison. And however deplorable we may find this condition, it is nonetheless the case that so long as a particular thing is valued so highly by society, it will always remain *potentially* a site of critique.

In other words, a more generous view would have it that the artist is realist rather than aesthete. By revisiting institutional critique's antivisual stratagems through its own bête noire—painting—Quaytman walks that precarious tightrope between inside and outside, between revalorizing painting and dismantling it, a balancing act whose difficulty, it seems to me, is underestimated when one looks solely at the work's iconographic relationship to reference and communication. One wishes, in fact, that the institutional-critique school of criticism would read more of the death-of-painting school of criticism, not to learn how to wax nostalgic about painting, which unfortunately is often the case in the latter, but to see that the medium, in the right hands, can be a deconstructive force in its own right.

QUAYTMAN'S UNIQUE PARENTAGE is another cliché of the literature. Born to the abstract painter Harvey Quaytman and the poet Susan Howe, Quaytman grew up in an artsy household whose doors were open to the likes of Bob Grosvenor, Marcia Hafif, Joan Jonas, Bob Morris, and Richard Serra, among others. Even the extended family shares this creative DNA: A stepmother danced with Yvonne Rainer; stepfather David von Schlegell was a sculptor.

But it is another branch of the "family tree" that I want to explore here, one that will tell us as much as will any psychobiography about the work's foundations. Quaytman's *Father* was born in 1992. It is an early pre-chapter painting in which a small white rectangular panel nestles between two thick perpendicular black lines painted directly onto the wall. Next to it, another white panel of identical size sits atop a slightly larger one. It is reminiscent of that

classic optical illusion in which two lines of equal length will nonetheless appear larger or smaller depending on the direction of the lines attached to their ends, <> versus >—<. (Each panel also contains at least one small black line within it.) In this case, the panel on the left seems dwarfed by the much larger expanse of wall traversed by the black lines, whereas the right panel consumes the smaller space afforded it. One panel appears anchored inside a larger shape within the wall, while the other appears to float on top of and therefore beyond the grasp of that wall. Already at this early date, some of the structural logic of Quaytman's work is in evidence. The panel, like any sign, does not magically convey its meaning to the world solely of its own accord. Instead, that meaning is generated when the panel is set in opposition to other panels. What makes *Father*'s pairing a particularly efficient demonstration of this principle is the fact that the panels are the same size, thus making the opposition all the more apparent.

A cynic would say that Quaytman's painting reaestheticizes what used to be antiaesthetic—that what was once on the outside is now firmly ensconced on the inside. But what artistic practice has not suffered this fate?

Reaching even further back, one could argue that *Father*'s own father is Mondrian. The configuration that I've been describing can be taken as an homage to the Dutch painter's New York studio. In it, we see that Mondrian's ambition to transform architecture into a field every bit as destabilizing in its figure-ground reversals as his paintings was, for a brief moment, also Quaytman's own. And if there is any doubt about this work's paternity, one need only consider the fact that the lozenge implied by the angled ends of the black lines around the left-hand painting (picture a diamond defined by the ends of those lines) is by the artist's own admission a copy of one of Mondrian's celebrated diamond paintings of 1931, *Composition with Two Lines*.

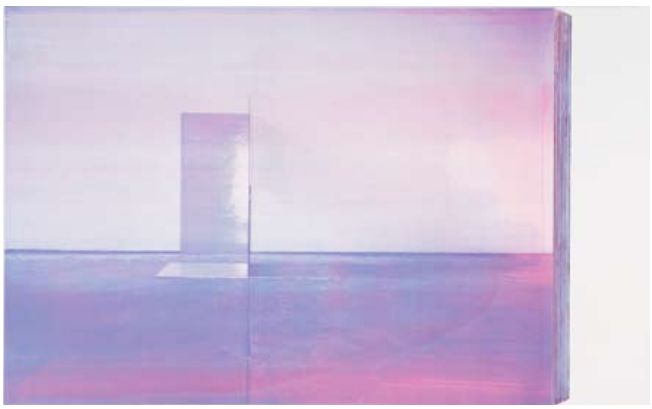
If the leap into three dimensions were to be *Father*'s last word, one would be hard-pressed to conclude on this evidence alone that it was, as the artist claims, the origin of the chapters. It may have been a deep meditation on the legacy of abstract art in the early '90s, a time when many were enthralled with both photography and identity politics, but perhaps it would have been nothing more than that. It often happens, however, that in pursuing a line of thought to its conclusion, one stumbles across a tangent that then itself becomes a new line of thought. This is what happened to Quaytman in the case of *Father*—literally. For when the two pieces were hung side by side, an unforeseen connection emerged. The shadows that the right-hand panel cast onto its support had the form of thick lines with angled ends, due to the beveling of the panel's edges (which created diagonal ends) and its protrusion from the wall (which gave the shadows width). These turned out to be the exact same shape as the large black lines in *Father*, since its diamond-shaped "frame" cut them at that angle. The total effect was an invasion of the left-hand panel's picture plane by its partner's framing edge in a way that an artist like Mondrian, whose work requires strict frontality, would have never imagined. Reading *between the lines* in this way, Quaytman discovered that the painted panel still had more to offer—if one could learn to look at it from other points of view, *obliquely*.

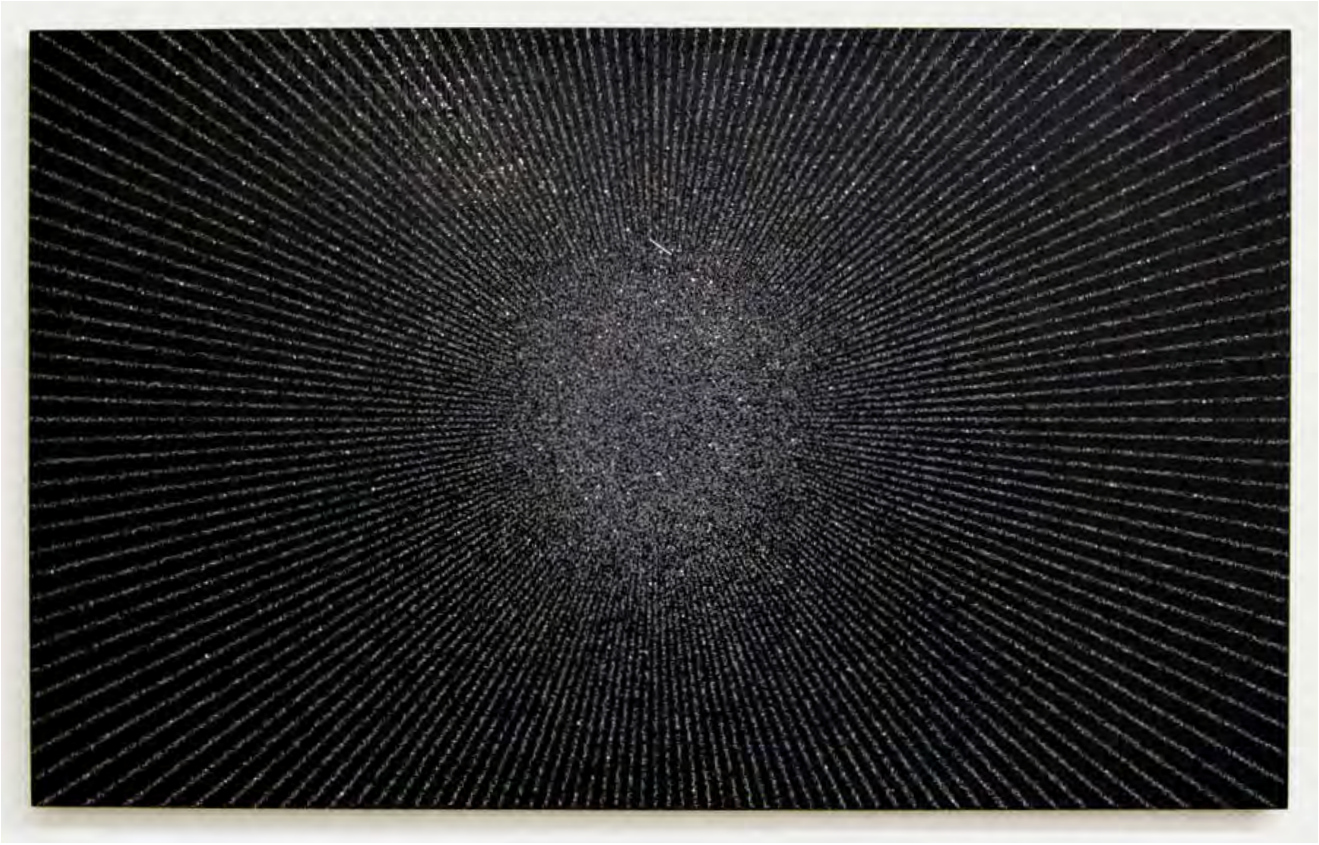
And what of the mother? Quaytman's writings are full of references to strong female characters: Hilma af Klint, the architect Anne Tyng, her colleagues at Orchard. But one stands out above all. "ŁódŹ Poem, Chapter 2," 2004, is a dedication in paint to another artist of Polish ancestry, the sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, who produced some of the most extraordinary sculptures of the twentieth century. One of these, *Spatial Composition 2*, 1928—which, depending on one's point of view, looks either like an unfolded metal shoebox or an architectural model of a corner—made such an impression on Quaytman that she had an almost identical copy fabricated in 1999 and later photographed it for one of the silk screens used in "ŁódŹ Poem." I say "almost identical" because the replica was a mirror image of the original work. And of course one way to look at something obliquely, from a different perspective, is to look at it in a mirror—the way painters have done in their self-portraits since time immemorial, an act for which their reversed hands are the telling trace.

Since circumnavigation is absolutely crucial to Kobro's sculpture, this choice of inspiration created an implicit conundrum. How to incorporate this sense of rotation in a medium such as painting, which is resolutely flat and one-sided? One solution was to multiply it; a second was to accentuate even further the panels' ability to create spatial ambiguities. Accordingly, the artist installed two panels, each depicting the same photograph of the mirrored version of *Spatial Composition 2*, each in a different set of colors, and each containing a painted version of a beveled panel edge that vertically divided a left-hand

Below: **R. H. Quaytman, *ŁódŹ Poem (1928, Spatial Composition 23.3 Parsecs Away), Chapter 2*, 2004**, oil, silk-screen ink, and gesso on wood, 24¾ x 40".

Right: **R. H. Quaytman, *ŁódŹ Poem (Spatial Composition 23.3 Parsecs Away), Chapter 2*, 2004**, oil, silk-screen ink, and gesso on wood, 24¾ x 40".





R. H. Quaytman, ***Silberkuppe, Chapter 17***, 2010, silk-screen ink, diamond dust, and gesso on wood, 20 x 32⅜".

silk-screened area from an uncovered space to the right. Because this dividing line was angled at each end, it read as if the entire screened area were a surface that had been rotated several degrees toward us—as if its "edge" were receding into perspectival space. What made this rotation quite jarring was that the photograph itself moved in the opposite direction. The view presented was one in which the sculpture appears at its flattest: The upright plane facing the viewer was pinned to the wall, like a painting; the plane perpendicular to it was reduced to the thinnest of margins, barely perceptible, like a drawn line.

BOTH "PARENTS" FIGURED PROMINENTLY in the retrospective "Spine, Chapter 20," on view this year in different configurations at the Neuberger Museum of Art at State University of New York, Purchase, and at Kunsthalle Basel. This genealogy was particularly in evidence in Basel, where three large walls radiating from a central point divided the main space into three wedge-shaped galleries. Around these spaces, long perspectives opened up along the outer walls. A two-panel diamond painting, done in explicit reference to *Father*, hung at the end of one of these vistas. Two panels connected to "ŁódŹ Poem" were exhibited in a separate rear gallery, one original, the other made afterward from the original screen, like many of the other panels in the show.

In most retrospectives, one expects to see original works. But "Spine, Chapter 20," in both versions, was not a reunion but a redoing of old panels taken from each of the previous chapters, hung in nonchronological order. Given the logic of Quaytman's chapters, this odd form of retrospection makes perfect sense: Since each chapter is context-specific, the installation design was accordingly different in the two venues (at the Neuberger there was a single large wall bisecting an enormous gallery, instead of three smaller ones, as in Basel); since each panel is considered by the artist to be unique, there was no problem with reprinting an old screen to create a new panel.

In fact, one could say that the implicit biographical underpinnings of the very idea of an artist's retrospective—a summary of one's artistic "life"—is here undermined and subverted, since the panels neither date to their original moment in the time line nor adhere to a fixed chronological presentation. Thus, another of Quaytman's paradoxes: Each panel is unique and related to a specific chapter, but like a deck of cards, the panels can be shuffled around or even remade and added to. On the one hand, this may pose

Quaytman discovered that the painted panel still had more to offer—if one could learn to look at it from other points of view, *obliquely*.

R. H. Quaytman, ***Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (DvS 4)***, **2009**, silk-screen ink and gesso on wood, 20 x 20".

problems to the collector who covets "originals" and to the historian who craves linear teleologies. On the other, the situation mimics the logic of the market, which puts a premium on the labor-saving production of multiple "originals" from a limited set of prototypes. And it is perhaps a boon to future curators, who will be able to do shows without having to replicate entire chapters, following Quaytman's own example. At the very least, these dilemmas show that, for the moment, the artist's practice has kept pace with—both affirming and upsetting—the necessarily changed institutional context surrounding its recent success.

As the child of an artist and a writer, Quaytman has on numerous occasions declared a love for poetry, both as inspiration ("Chapter 18" drew heavily from the work of Jack Spicer) and activity (the artist's poem "The Call of the Wind" was published as the second section of *Allegorical Decoys*). It seems fitting, then, to end with one final word. In the history of art theory, *tableau* was a term used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to define the special unity and autonomy of easel painting as a defense against its incorporation into broader decorative ensembles. The whole history of modern painting has worked to undo this autonomy—a trajectory that could be denoted at the level of language by the truncation of the French diminutive *tableau* to the more quotidian *table*. Quaytman would no doubt approve of this move from autonomy to utility, from disinterest to interest, from picture plane to tabletop, from artwork to object.

But I imagine the artist performing a different sort of cut. For with slight alteration, a tableau can also become a *tabula*, which in Latin denotes, among other things, board, plank, writing tablet, plaque, letter, game board, account book, and, of course, panel. Now, it is common enough to invoke the tabular surface and its variants in order to describe the status of postwar painting *tout court*—as a flatbed depository, a screen of projection, a mirror of consumer desires. But if I put special emphasis on the seemingly gratuitous wordplay *tableau-tabula* here, it is because, rather than a receptive surface, Quaytman's picture plane is a space of *activity*. It is the place where one *writes*, in all senses of the word. It performs what one could call the activity of writing, the work on the signifier in its most infinitesimal forms, the slightest shift whether of a letter or of a point of view. A tableau in Quaytman's hands is, in other words, the site of many possible *tabulae*. □

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David Joselit, “I Modi,” *Mousse Magazine*, No. 29, Summer 2011, pp. 130-137

MOUSSE

I MODI

BY DAVID JOSELIT

Research on mythology and Marcantonio Raimondi brought R. H. Quaytman into contact with *I Modi*, a book of pornographic sonnets illustrated by the master engraver in 1524. This was the impulse for the new “chapter” the artist will show in Venice, which attempts to find a thread leading through the labyrinthine paths of the original work. David Joselit investigates the literary principle involved in the artist’s research.

Beard, Chapter 19, 2010. Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London

Opposite – I Modi, Chapter 22, 2011. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

david joselit: You make series based on chapters.

r.h. quaytman: I started in 2001 working with the structure of chapters. Each exhibition is a new chapter. After the initial exhibition all the individual paintings become dispersed and can be shown separately in other contexts. But, in general, every time I do an exhibition it's a new chapter. A chapter can be anywhere from one painting to as many as the situation warrants. The rules are that each new exhibition is a chapter in an ongoing archive that I plan to continue without end. Secondly, each painting is made in one of seven consistant nesting sizes on plywood panels which are gessoed with the same rabbit skin glue gesso. Those are the basics laws. There are some other minor ones but we don't have time to get into here.

dj: Do you worry about the legitimacy of the rules, as it were? Not beyond your own system, but as a kind of constitution-making. You generate a constitution and then you act on it. And there are amendments, and exceptions.

rhq: It's been pointed out that there is a disjointedness to my rules or system. That the way I have established the rules is perhaps less methodical than some other rule based practices.

dj: This is one of the big paradoxes of the 20th century in terms of the way rule-based art is made. If you look at Sol LeWitt or any rule-based practice, the rules are fairly arbitrary. They only appear to come from some neutral place. There's always this moment of deciding what the rule will be. I think that's one of the profound things about such art, because it has to be authorized or legitimized by something outside the system, right? The system doesn't make its own rules.

rhq: My system kind of does make its own rules. It's different from how Sol LeWitt or Judd or On Kawara would make rules, because those rules were based, I think, on a dialectic that was going on at the time, and they were made as a kind of protest against preconceptions of particular mediums. My rules were also made as a protest in a sense, but as a protest in favor of a medium – specifically painting. Maybe it was more of an accommodation than a protest. The rules come out of accommodating contextual facts that seem so unavoidable or endemic that they are not even seen anymore.

dj: Is this why you choose a literary principle of division or collection?

rhq: On a very simple level I came to the literary principle of collection because I envied how a book is both put away and still displayed as compared to a painting.
I didn't want accumulating work to go in storage without reason or thought. I was not having many shows, and not selling work. So I thought simply, how can I accumulate work in a way that isn't depressing. I was reading an article by Antek Walczak about poverty and Paul Thek. I think he really hit the nail on the head when he writes: "The fear and terror of the artist – what makes my work relevant and not junk, or how to escape garbage collection and end up in the collector's house? The motion of art, both as waste and as valuable product". It was from an acute sense of this reality that I veered towards a literary system.

In addition the exhibition event itself seemed too weighted, out of proportion to how artists work. Enforced, no doubt, by the downgraded status of a "studio practice". The truncated exhibition event, through a literary principle, could be broadened to something much more durational and in sync with what I was living. The chapter structure stands in opposition to the power of the gallery system and the schedules it dictates. I thought or hoped it could be possible to keep continuity with or without exhibitions or sales.

The other problem I have always thought about is how to insert or graft subject matter onto a foundation of abstraction.

dj: By "foundation of abstraction" do you mean the classical avant-garde developments in abstraction?

rhq: Abstraction in that the first reading or concern about the painting is itself, why and how it's working as a painting – not as a picture, but literally as a painted object hung on a wall, put into storage, or inserted alongside other art objects and events. A painting whose first reference is its own reality, the here and now of you looking at a painting in this space via reduced deployments of color, line and surface. Of course it turns out that its 'own reality' is not so simple and in fact also mired in assumptions outside of its bounded self.

dj: So why introduce the picture, then? Why did you feel that was necessary?

rhq: I first started inserting the "picture", to think about perspective. Perspective was at the heart of what had been contested via abstraction. I began using the idea of pictures first as mirrors. The space the painting was meant for would be mirrored in some way. Also the moving viewer was mirrored. I was Dan Graham's assistant at the time it occurred to me to use photography as a mirror and I'm sure was influenced by his work.

dj: We're sitting here looking at your project for the Venice Biennale, *I Modi*, *Chapter 22*. Do you want to describe this chapter?

rhq: I began work on this chapter by researching master engraver Marcantonio Raimondi. The title *I Modi* comes from a book of the same name written in 1524. Composed as a set of 16 pornographic sonnets, it was a collaboration between two venetians, the satirist and journalist Pietro Aretino and Raimondi. For three of the paintings I have sourced images of the only known surviving fragments of the original now in the collection of the British Museum.

I also use a small selection of Raimondi engravings that I found in the Correr Museum Library in Venice

DI DAVID JOSELIT

Ricerche sulla mitologia e su Marcantonio Raimondi, hanno portato R. H. Quaytman in contatto con *I Modi*, un libro di sonetti pornografici, illustrato dal maestro incisore nel 1524. È da lì che parte il nuovo "capitolo" che l'artista presenterà a Venezia e che cerca un filo d'Arianna nei percorsi labirintici dell'opera originaria. David Joselit indaga sul principio letterario che informa la ricerca dell'artista.

david joselit: Realizzi serie che sono organizzate in capitoli.

r.h. quaytman: Ho cominciato a lavorare con la struttura dei capitoli a partire dal 2001. Ciascuna mostra rappresenta un nuovo capitolo. Dopo la mostra iniziale, tutti i singoli dipinti vengono dispersi e possono essere mostrati separatamente e in altri contesti. Ma, in generale, ogni volta che realizzo una mostra, questa costituisce un nuovo capitolo. Un capitolo può essere formato da un numero variabile di dipinti, da uno fino a quanti la situazione ne consente. La regola è che ogni nuova mostra è il capitolo di un archivio in continua crescita, che ho intenzione di ampliare all'infinito. In secondo luogo, ogni dipinto è realizzato, scegliendo una tra sette grandezze progressive, su pannelli di compensato trattati con lo stesso gesso a base di colla di coniglio. Queste sono le regole fondamentali. Ve ne sono altre di minore importanza, ma non abbiamo tempo di entrare nel dettaglio anche di quelle.

dj: Ti preoccupi della legittimità delle regole? Non al di là del tuo sistema, ma come se creassi una Costituzione. Dai vita a una Costituzione e agisci in base ad essa. E vi sono emendamenti ed eccezioni.

rhq: È stato fatto notare che le mie regole e il mio sistema sono caratterizzati da una certa incoerenza. Che il modo in cui ho stabilito le mie regole

fig. A

Marcantonio Raimondi, fragment of I Modi, 1524. Courtesy: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Venezia

(fig. A). One image in particular grabbed my attention from the very beginning of my research. It is called *The Dream of Raphael* (1507-08) (fig. B). No one is sure exactly what it depicts. Confusingly it is apparently a copy not of a Raphael but of a lost work by Giorgione. The interpretation I like best says that it depicts Hecuba, the mother of Paris who while she was pregnant with Paris had a very bad nightmare that prophesied giving birth to a flame that sets Troy on fire.

But then who is the other woman? It has been suggested that it is Hecuba looking at herself dreaming. Like she had a dream she had a dream. But it seems also to suggest masturbation in an apocalyptic Venetian landscape.

fig. B

Marcantonio Raimondi, The Dream of Raphael, 1507-08. Courtesy: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Venezia

Ultimately however, although I adore this image so much, it was just too powerful an image for me to active the way I need to activate pictures. So I ended up cropping it down to simplify it and open it up. I also see the features of a large head in profile in the grassy hill behind her (fig. C).

fig. C

I Modi, Chapter 22, 2011. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

This image logically lead to another Raimondi engraving called the *Judgment of Paris* (fig. D). You can see what Manet was referencing in *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.
I like the androgynous appearance of the nymph who looks back out at us. If paintings could have a posture this would be it.

è, forse, meno metodico di altre pratiche artistiche che si fondano su regole.

> *dj:* Questo è uno dei grandi paradossi del Novecento per quanto riguarda il modo in cui si fa arte fondata sulle regole. Se si guarda a Sol LeWitt o a qualunque pratica artistica basata su regole, le regole stesse sono piuttosto arbitrarie. Sembrano venire da qualche luogo neutrale. Vi è sempre un momento in cui si deve decidere quale dovrà essere la regola. Credo che sia uno degli aspetti più profondi di tale arte, perché dev'essere autorizzata o legittimata da qualcosa che si trova al di fuori del sistema, giusto? Il sistema non crea le proprie regole.

rhq: In un certo senso, il mio sistema crea le proprie regole. È diverso dal modo in cui Sol LeWitt oppure Judd o On Kawara costruivano le loro regole, perché quelle regole si basavano, mi pare, su una dialettica vigente all'epoca. Tali regole erano costituite come una sorta di protesta contro i preconcetti nei confronti di particolari *media*. Le mie regole, in un certo senso, sono state inventate come una forma di protesta, ma come una protesta in favore di un *medium*, nello specifico la pittura. Forse si è trattato più di un accomodamento che di una protesta. Le regole nascono dall'accomodamento di fatti contestuali che sembrano così inevitabili o endemici da non vedersi nemmeno più.

> *dj:* È questo il motivo per cui scegli un principio letterario di divisione o di collezione?

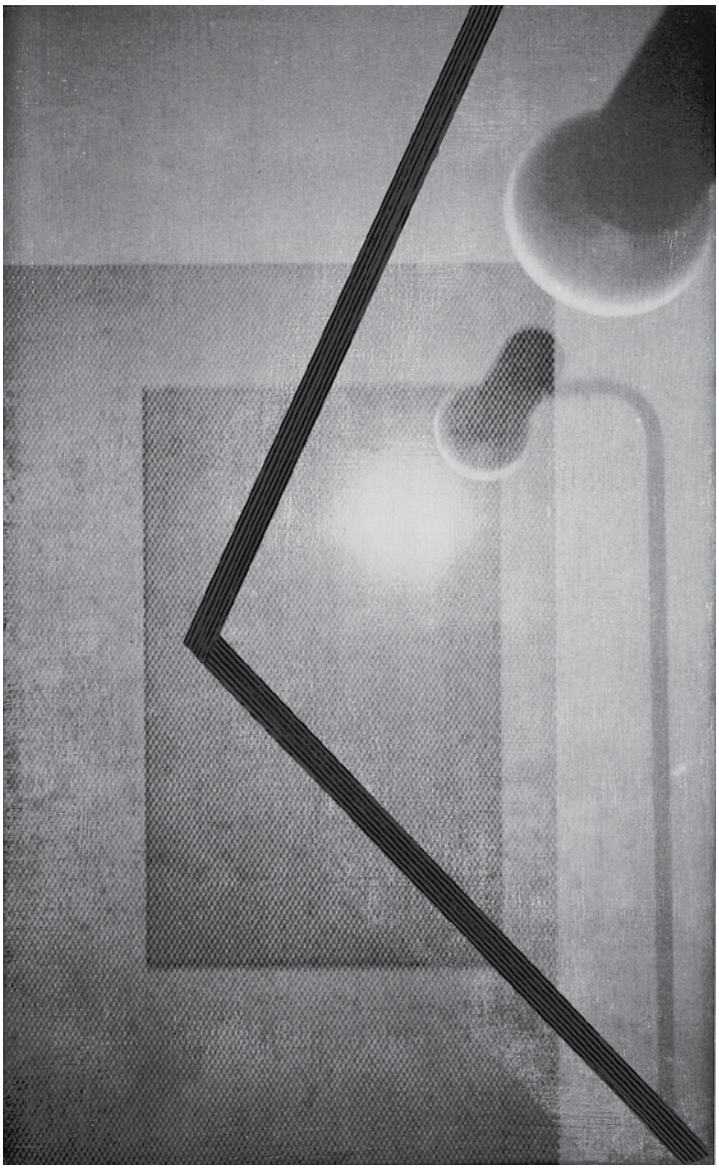
rhq: A un livello molto semplice, sono giunta al principio letterario della collezione perché invidiavo il modo in cui un libro, rispetto a un dipinto, nel momento in cui è riposto, continua a essere esposto. Non volevo accumulare opere perché finissero in un magazzino, senza una ragione o una valutazione. Non stavo facendo molte mostre e non vendevo. Perciò ho pensato: "Come posso accumulare opere in un modo che non sia deprimente?". Stavo leggendo un articolo di Antek Walczak sulla povertà e su Paul Thek. Era veramente nel giusto quando scriveva: "La paura e il terrore dell'artista: che cosa rende il mio lavoro significativo e non ciarpame? Come sfuggire alla collezione spazzatura e finire nella casa del collezionista? Il movimento dell'arte, sia come spreco sia come prodotto di valore". È stato a partire da un'acuta percezione di questa realtà che ho virato in direzione di un sistema letterario.

In aggiunta, l'evento espositivo stesso appariva troppo appesantito, sproporzionato rispetto al modo in cui gli artisti lavorano. Una condizione imposta, senza dubbio, dallo *status* declassato di una "pratica in studio". L'evento espositivo tronco poteva essere ampliato fino a diventare qualcosa di molto più duraturo e in sintonia con quanto stavo vivendo. La struttura a capitoli si oppone al potere del sistema delle gallerie e alle scalette da esso imposte. Ho pensato o sperato che fosse possibile mantenere la continuità con o senza le mostre o le vendite.

L'altro problema, a cui ho sempre pensato, riguarda il modo in cui inserire o innestare l'argomento su fondamenta di astrazione.

> *dj:* Per "fondamenta dell'astrazione" intendi i classici sviluppi nell'astrazione dell'avanguardia?

rhq: Astrazione nel senso che la prima interpretazione o preoccupazione di fronte a un quadro riguarda perché e come esso funziona come qua-

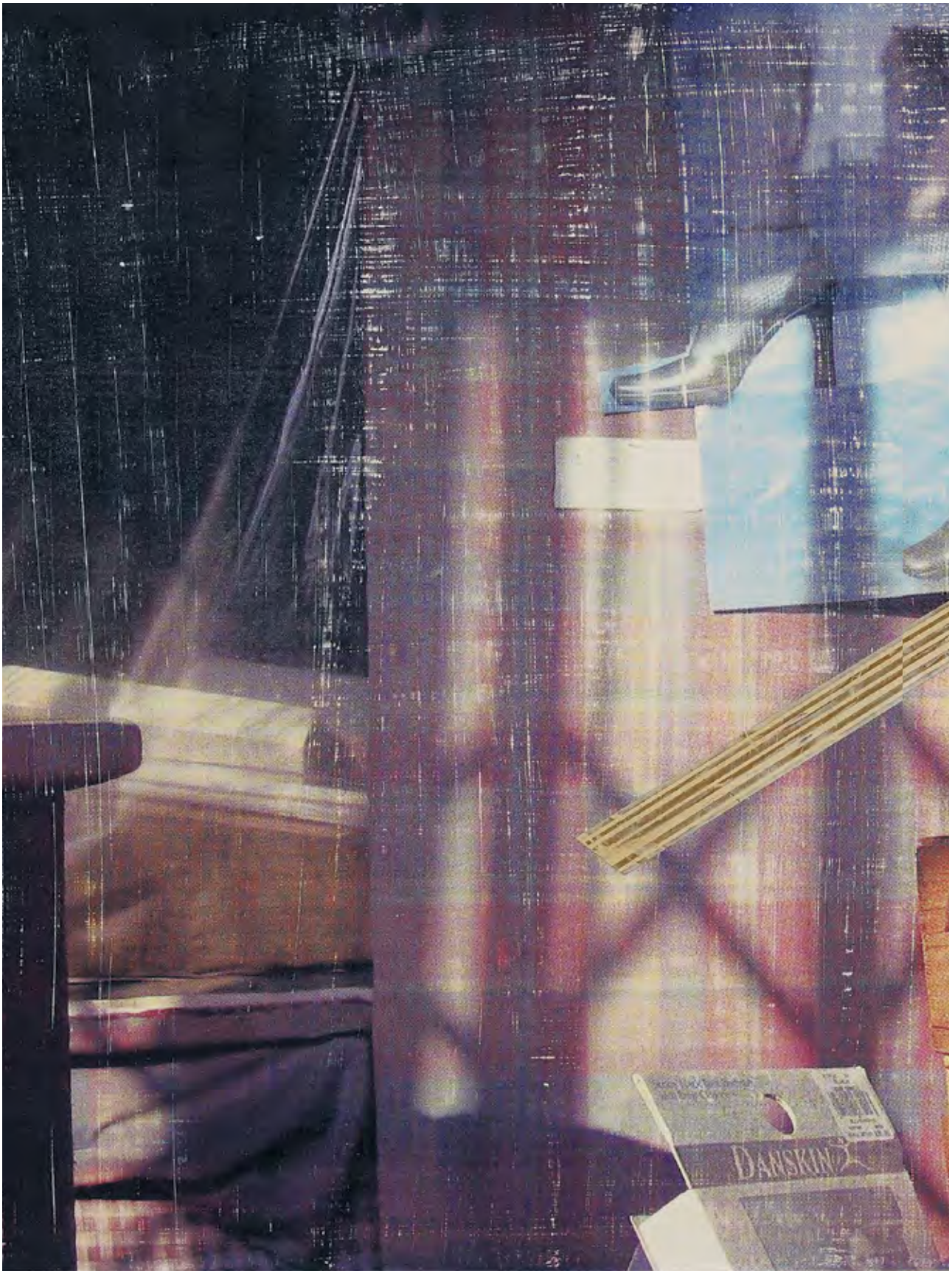


Left – Chapter 12: iamb, 2008. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Below – Chapter 12: iamb (Blue Gradient), 2008, 2008. Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London

Left, bottom – "Chapter 12: iamb", installation view, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, 2008/09. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Below – Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 (Woman in the Sun – Yellow Scuff), 2010. Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London



Chapter 10: Ark (Storefront, L.E.S.), 2008-2009. Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London

fig. D

Marcantonio Raimondi, Judgment of Paris, c. 1517. Courtesy: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, Venezia

dj: What do you mean when you say "activate pictures"?

rhq: I need to flatten the image so it can reverberate with other paintings around them. When a picture is too powerful or busy, it sucks up into this kind of aloneness and self sufficiency which I try to avoid. I don't want paintings to behave like film in dark rooms.

dj: However, each work does exist on its own terms, and yet they also exist as vectors out to other things, either other spaces or other paintings. Almost always other paintings in the context of their initial presentation, right?

rhq: Yes, they have to be a good neighbor. They have to be open to disruption and shifts in legibility. They have to be open to a shift from rectilinear plane to orthogonal object. The title *I Modi* means the ways or the positions. I like how that resonates with this aspect of my installations and also with Venice being a city of itineraries which must be adhered lest one get completely lost which inevitable one does anyway.

dj: Is there something about this resistance to entering into the image that you think is meaningful in your work? Keeping everything rigorously on the surface?

rhq: I think this avoidance of the centrifugal images has loosened somewhat in my work. At first I had a kind of horror of the representational. Feelings of guilt wash over me when I attempt depicting objects outside the painting in paint. On the other hand it's always a temptation and you could say that the paintings are elaborate exercises of avoiding that fundamental mimetic gesture. I keep this gesture confined to the smallest caption paintings. And on occasion a small painted eye will appear.

dj: Do you think there's a kind of eroticism related to cruising in your work? I'm interested in this kind of looking that is always gliding toward somewhere else yet at the same time is really focused on an object of desire.

rhq: Yes, I guess you could say that. Although I unfortunately can't claim experience to sexually exciting experiences like cruising at the moment. I, like everyone, loves to look at and depict on occasion a nude body, most recently with K8 Hardy at the Whitney Museum and again with Thomas Beard for Bergen Kusthalle. Neither of these models lead the somewhat dreary heterosexual life I do. So in a way I was gazing at something I don't have access to and thus I would say it's more voyeurism than cruising.

These nudes are represented, in ways that are not distinctly contemporary. This is something I worry and wonder about. I mean my disinclination/inability to depict contemporaneity.

dj: Then there are landscape images. And a life and death opposition?

rhq: Yes, in researching Raimondi and mythology, I was reading Agamben's essay "Warburg and the Nameless Science". In it he quotes a Warburg diary entry which goes like this: "It looks to me, as if, in my role as a psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilization from its images in an autobiographical reflex. The ecstatic "Nympha" (manic) on the one side and the mourning river-god (depressive) on the other". This thought resonates with me very much in terms of thinking about how to tie *I Modi*'s maze like itinerary together. I thought maybe the visitor could enter by one door and see the manic or pornographic Nympha, but upon entering from the opposite door the depressive river god. Those kinds of ideas feel good to have but in practice don't always work. I can only figure out *I Modi* when I'm in the actual room hanging the paintings.

fig. E

I Modi, Chapter 22, 2011. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

dro – non come immagine, ma letteralmente come oggetto dipinto e appeso a un muro, riposto in un magazzino oppure inserito in un contesto insieme ad altri oggetti o eventi artistici. Un quadro il cui riferimento primo è la sua stessa realtà, il qui e l'ora di chi osserva un dipinto in questo spazio, attraverso l'uso ridotto di colori, linee e superfici. Ovviamente risulta che la "sua stessa realtà" non è così semplice e di fatto è impantanata in presupposti che stanno al di fuori del suo sé limitato.

dj: Allora perché introdurre l'immagine? Perché hai ritenuto che fosse necessario?

rhq: Inizialmente ho inserito l'"immagine" per riflettere sulla prospettiva. La prospettiva era al centro della contestazione portata avanti dall'astrazione. In principio ho usato l'idea delle immagini come specchi. Lo spazio per cui il dipinto era pensato sarebbe stato in qualche modo rispecchiato. Anche lo spettatore in movimento si sarebbe rispecchiato. Ero assistente di Dan Graham all'epoca in cui mi capitò di servirmi della fotografia come specchio. Sono sicura di essere stata influenzata dal suo lavoro.

dj: Siamo seduti qui a guardare il tuo progetto per la Biennale di Venezia, *I Modi*, *Chapter 22*. Vuoi descrivere questo capitolo?

rhq: Il mio lavoro su questo capitolo è cominciato con alcune ricerche sul maestro incisore Marcantonio Raimondi. Il titolo *I Modi* viene dal libro omonimo, scritto nel 1524. Composto come un gruppo di 16 sonetti pornografici, nasceva dalla collaborazione tra due veneziani, lo scrittore satirico e giornalista Pietro Aretino e Raimondi stesso. Per tre dei dipinti mi sono basata su immagini ricavate dagli unici frammenti sopravvissuti che si conoscano dell'originale, ora custodito nella collezione del British Museum.

Uso anche una piccola selezione d'incisioni di Raimondi che ho trovato nella biblioteca del Museo Correr a Venezia (fig. A). Un'immagine, in particolare, ha catturato la mia attenzione fin dagli inizi della mia ricerca. S'intitola *Il sogno di Raffaello* (1507-08) (fig. B). Nessuno sa esattamente che cosa ritragga. Apparentemente – e ciò crea un po' di confusione – non si tratta della copia di un Raffaello, ma di un'opera andata perduta di Giorgione. L'interpretazione che mi piace di più è quella secondo cui si tratterebbe di Ecuba, la madre di Paride, che, mentre era incinta dello stesso Paride, fece un terribile incubo, nel quale partoriva una fiamma che divampava e distruggeva la città di Troia.

Ma allora chi è l'altra donna? È stato suggerito che si tratti di Ecuba che guarda se stessa mentre sogna. Come se sognasse di sognare. Ma sembra anche suggerire la masturbazione in un apocalittico paesaggio veneziano.

Alla fine, tuttavia, sebbene adori quest'immagine, essa era troppo forte perché potessi attivarla nel modo in cui ho bisogno di attivare le immagini. Così ho finito per ritagliarla, in modo da semplificarla e da aprirla a nuove interpretazioni. Mi sembra di vedere anche il profilo di una grande testa nella collina erbosa dietro di lei (fig. C).
Quest'immagine rimanda logicamente ad un'altra incisione di Raimondi, intitolata *Il giudizio di Paride* (fig. D). Si può notare a che cosa si sia ispirato Manet per *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*.
Mi piace l'aspetto androgino della ninfa che guarda nella nostra direzione. Se i dipinti potessero avere

dj: The diamond motif occurs quite a bit in this chapter (fig. E).

rhq: At Buchholz gallery in Cologne I found a checkerboard pattern in one of their books. And then when I was in Venice I realized it was almost exactly the same as the pattern of brickwork on the Doge's Palace. So I tried to repeat that pattern (fig. F). Anyway, I tried to figure out that pattern for a week on Illustrator, and I did do it. There's that thing where if you put a line through, it does this optical trick where the line becomes very wobbly. And I like that very much, you have this very rigid geometry, but optically it makes straight lines wavy.

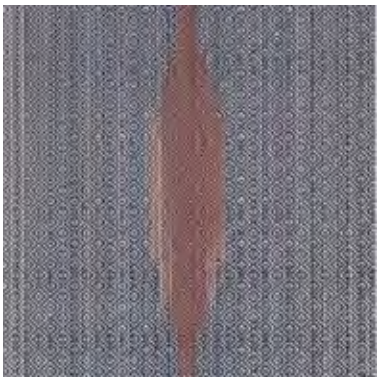


fig. F

I Modi, Chapter 22, 2011. Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges

dj: So that's also watery.

rhq: And then I use literally a kind of water pattern, you know that big one that also reminds me of Raimondi's engraved lines.

dj: The perspective of the bodies, their spatial orientation, is unknowable. They look like they're foreshortened, or ceiling paintings, but not exactly. They're not really on the ground in any way.

rhq: In general I'm much more geometrically inclined. There's very few circles or curves in my work. This chapter has much more of that. It was just so beautiful, Venice, and going there, I mean... In winter it was like a dream. The fog, the buoys... the past.

una postura, sarebbe questa.

dj: Che cosa intendi quando parli di "attivare le immagini"?

rhq: Devo appiattire l'immagine, affinché possa risuonare con gli altri dipinti circostanti. Quando un'immagine è troppo potente o troppo piena, viene risucchiata in questa sorta di solitudine e autosufficienza che io cerco di evitare. Non voglio che i dipinti funzionino come film proiettati in stanze buie.

dj: Però ciascun dipinto esiste nei propri termini e, allo stesso tempo, come vettore che conduce verso altre cose, che si tratti di altri spazi o di altri dipinti. Quasi sempre altri quadri nel contesto della loro presentazione iniziale, giusto?

rhq: Sì, devono essere dei buoni vicini. Devono essere aperti ai sovvertimenti e ai mutamenti nella leggibilità. Devono offrire un'apertura allo spostamento da un piano rettilineo a un oggetto ortogonale. Il titolo *I Modi* sta ad indicare le modalità o le posizioni. Mi piace che riecheggi questo aspetto delle mie installazioni e anche il fatto che Venezia sia una città ai cui itinerari bisogna adeguarsi per non correre il rischio di perdersi, cosa che inevitabilmente accade comunque.

dj: Ritieni che questa resistenza a entrare nell'immagine sia significativa nel tuo lavoro? Il fatto che tutto rimanga rigorosamente in superficie?

rhq: Penso che questo rifiuto delle immagini centrifughe si sia abbastanza attenuato nel mio lavoro. In principio provavo un certo orrore per la rappresentazione. Vengo assalita da sentimenti di colpa quando cerco di dipingere oggetti al di fuori del quadro nella sua materialità pittorica. Dall'altro canto è sempre una tentazione e si potrebbe affermare che i dipinti siano elaborati esercizi di fuga da quel gesto mimetico fondamentale. Io confino tale gesto alle più piccole illustrazioni didascaliche. E all'occasione un piccolo occhio dipinto fa la propria comparsa.

dj: Pensi che vi sia una sorta di erotismo, collegato al *cruising*, nel tuo lavoro? Mi interessa questo genere di sguardo che scivola sempre verso un'altrove e, tuttavia, al contempo è sempre concentrato su un oggetto del desiderio.

rhq: Sì, credo che si possa affermare questo. Sebbene, purtroppo, al momento non possa dire di avere esperienze sessualmente eccitanti come il *cruising*. Mi piace, come piace a tutti, osservare, e all'occasione ritrarre, un corpo nudo, cosa che recentemente ho fatto con K8 Hardy al Whitney Museum e ancora con Thomas Beard per la Bergen Kusthalle. Nessuno di questi modelli conduce la vita noiosamente eterosessuale che conduco io. Perciò, in un certo senso, stavo guardando qualcosa a cui non ho accesso, motivo per cui si potrebbe parlare più di voyeurismo che di *cruising*.

Questi nudi sono rappresentati in modi che non sono distintamente contemporanei. Questa è una cosa che m'interessa e su cui m'interrogo. Intendo la mia avversione per la contemporaneità e la mia incapacità di ritrarla.

dj: Poi ci sono immagini di paesaggi. E una contrapposizione tra la vita e la morte?

rhq: Sì, mentre conducevo le mie ricerche su Raimondi e la mitologia, stavo leggendo il saggio di Agamben "Aby Warburg e la scienza senza nome". In esso il filosofo cita una annotazione di diario di Warburg che così recita: "Talora ho l'impressione come se, nel mio ruolo di psico-storico, cercassi di diagnosticare la schizofrenia dell'Occidente attraverso il riflesso autobiografico delle sue immagini. L'estatica "Ninfa" (maniaca) da un lato, e dall'altro la divinità fluviale afflitta (depressiva)". Questo pensiero mi rimanda alle mie riflessioni su come legare tra loro i percorsi labirintici de *I Modi*. Ho pensato che forse il visitatore potrebbe entrare da una porta e vedervi la Ninfa maniaca o pornografica, mentre entrando dall'altra porta incontrerebbe la divinità fluviale depressiva. Queste idee sembrano buone quando ti vengono, ma non sempre funzionano nella pratica. Riuscirò ad avere una visione chiara de *I Modi* solo quando mi troverò effettivamente nella stanza ad appendere i dipinti.

dj: Il motivo del diamante ricorre piuttosto spesso in questo capitolo (fig. E).

rhq: Alla Galleria Buchholz di Colonia, in uno dei loro libri, ho trovato un motivo a scacchi. Poi, quando sono arrivata a Venezia, mi sono resa conto che si trattava quasi esattamente dello stesso motivo creato dalla muratura in mattoni del Palazzo Ducale. Perciò ho provato a ripetere quel motivo (fig. F). A ogni modo, per una settimana ho provato a riprodurre quel motivo su Illustrator e ci sono riuscita. C'è questo fatto per cui, se tracci delle linee che si intersecano, si crea questo effetto ottico per cui le linee diventano mosse. Mi piace molto il fatto di avere questa geometria molto rigida, ma che, da un punto di vista ottico, rende le linee ondulate.

dj: E poi c'è anche qualcosa di acquoso.

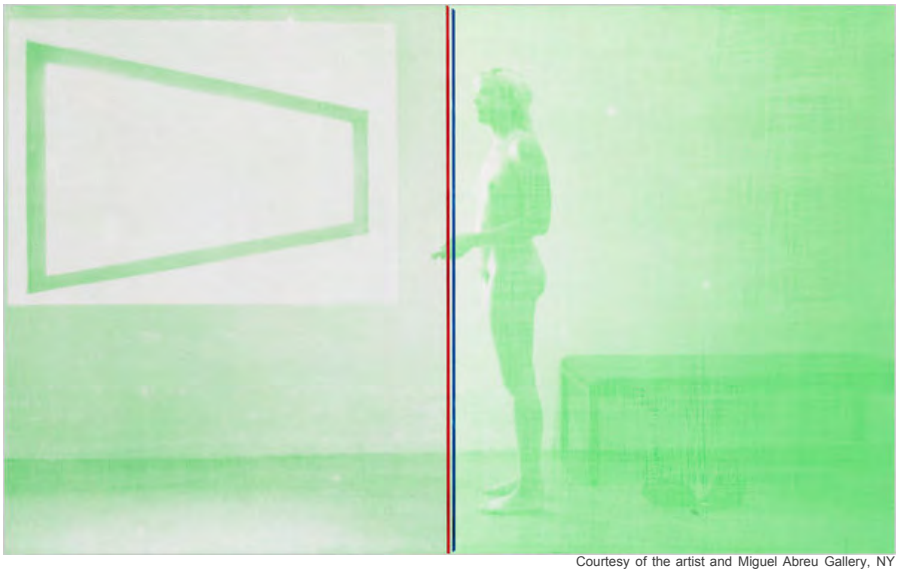
rhq: Sì, uso letteralmente una sorta di motivo acquoso, quel motivo grande che mi ricorda anche le linee incise di Raimondi.

dj: La prospettiva dei corpi, il loro orientamento spaziale, è inconoscibile. È come se fossero delle rappresentazioni di scorcio o dipinti realizzati su soffitti, ma non esattamente. Ad ogni modo non sono propriamente a terra.

rhq: In generale sono molto più orientata verso la geometria. Ci sono pochissimi cerchi o curve nel mio lavoro. Questo capitolo, invece, ne contiene di più. Venezia, e il fatto di andarci, è stato bellissimo... In inverno sembrava un sogno. La nebbia, le boe... il passato.

ART REVIEW | WESTCHESTER

Idiosyncratic Imagery



Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, NY

R. H. Quaytman's"Spine, Chapter 20 (Distracting Distance / Hardy)," 2010, oil, silk-screen ink and gesso on wood.

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER
Published: December 17, 2010

The traditional, Western way of approaching a painting is to treat it like a window. Linear perspective, developed during the Renaissance, even provided a scientific method for creating a sense of space opening up inside that picture window. But what if you scrapped the idea of the window, as modern painters did? And then decided to treat painting like a photograph or book? Perhaps you can see where we're headed, from the title of "R. H. Quaytman: Spine, Chapter 20" at the Neuberger Museum.

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Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu

Ms. Quaytman stands on the cutting edge of conceptual — or, at this point, post-post-conceptual — painting. "Spine, Chapter 20" serves as a sort of midcareer retrospective, although a highly idiosyncratic and self-reflexive one. It is both a chapter in, and a summary of, her career so far.

The installation itself has a "spine": an 80-foot wall extending from one corner of the room, on which most of the roughly 30 paintings are hung, creating a sense of

Gallery

"Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark)," 2010, oil, silk-screen ink and gesso on wood.

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Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, NY

"Spine, Chapter 20 (The Sun)," 2010, oil, silk-screen ink and gesso on wood.

space — even emptiness, if you turn your attention toward the walls where paintings are customarily hung in the Neuberger.

The first object you encounter, "Spine, Chapter 20 (Distracting Distance / Hardy)," features a photograph silk-screened in light-green ink onto a wooden panel. The photograph captures a woman, the artist K8 Hardy, standing nude before a trapezoidal window inside the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan, where Ms. Quaytman's work was installed in the Whitney Biennial this year. The irregular window in the Whitney, designed by the architect Marcel Breuer, is, of course, a suitable metaphor for Ms. Quaytman's own approach to painting.

Other works refer to different "chapters" in her career. One, subtitled "I Love — The Eyelid Clicks / I See / Cold Poetry," nods to a current exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and to Jack Spicer's linked-together poems. It also includes a silk-screened photograph cribbed from the San Francisco museum's archives, of a female convict at San Quentin.

Another work, "Lodz Poem / Kobro," centers on a photograph, silk-screened in faded pink, of a metal sculpture by the 1920s artist Katarzyna Kobro, recreated in Ms. Quaytman's studio. A third features Ms. Quaytman's initials painted on a dark background, and mimics the attenuated styling of Ms. Kobro's "Spatial Sculptures."

Several paintings nod to contemporary artists — even art spaces. The "iamb" series makes visual reference to Josef Strau, an artist who uses lamps in his sculptures, and with whom Ms. Quaytman was paired in a 2008 exhibition in London. "Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark)" features an image of the pre-renovated Orchard, the artist-run exhibition space that is often credited with sparking the glut of galleries on the Lower East Side in the last decade, and of which Ms. Quaytman was the director. Another work, "New Age, Chapter 5," centers on a photograph taken at the sculptor Tom Burr's house. According to the wall label, the painting is also in Mr. Burr's collection.

Ms. Quaytman's work can be seen as picking up the threads of many postwar painting arguments. Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg are credited with silk-screening photographs onto canvas, thereby eliminating the celebrated touch of the artist. Ms. Quaytman tweaks this formula, however, by using plywood panels, specially ordered in seven sizes that echo the golden section, a mathematical ratio favored by artists since the Renaissance. (The bisected gallery itself is like an averted golden rectangle.) And rather than the hit-and-run silk-screen repetitions of Warhol, Ms. Quaytman's work consciously focuses on one or two quiet images, turning painting into a meditation on photography, and vice versa — but generally collapsing the two.

Her paintings circle back more directly, however, to the work of the "Pictures Generation," particularly Troy Brauntuch, Sarah Charlesworth, Jack Goldstein and Allan McCollum. For these artists, weaned on postwar television, films and advertising, images acquired a new fluidity. It wasn't so much how or by whom a picture was generated as it was the artist's imprimatur to put it imaginatively back into circulation.

But where '70s and '80s artists went for the jugular, using aggressively charged — or aggressively banal — images to explore "representation" (the most overused word in

postmodernism), Ms. Quaytman, like many contemporary artists, has returned to the enigmatic, poetic and personal. Her work can seem navel-gazing in its self-referentiality, particularly with regard to the art world. And yet her personal history is leveraged so that her paintings seem at once autobiographically specific and universal — another word struck from the postmodern lexicon.

Poetry, which in its avant-garde forms has been the medium most obsessed with depersonalizing the personal, is one point of entry. So are books themselves, the millennial analogues to painting, which was declared dead several times in the last century. The use of chapters and books as an organizing principle for Ms. Quaytman's work also seems to counteract a favored postmodern theorist, Walter Benjamin, who wrote in the '30s that the illiteracy of the future would not be the inability to read written texts, but photographs.

Ms. Quaytman's visual tactics, however, are wide-ranging and formidable, too. The inclusion of thin "spines" of color, bisecting several paintings and made up of the RGB (red, green and blue) scheme used in computer monitors and television screens, as opposed to the CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black) scheme used in silk-screens and color printing point to universalizing methods for representing objects and images; we see how the inventors of technology teach us to see (the palette in these paintings has also been restricted to RGB). Similarly, a painting with a variation on the scintillating grid — a phenomenon in which dots appear and disappear when you stare at a grid with dots placed at the intersections of the lines — suggests a kind of universalizing optical experience, in the same way Gestalt exercises did.

The universalizing aesthetics of modern masters also come into play. Several works have trompe l'oeil wood passages painted into them, a staple of Cubist visual trickery. One minimal, white, lozenge-shaped panel, titled "Spine, Chapter 20 (P.M.)," has another panel, black with white stripes, affixed to its surface. In toto, the work is like a late '50s Frank Stella (or perhaps Daniel Buren) piggy-backed on a Piet Mondrian.

With all of this in play, Ms. Quaytman's work makes for a cerebral experience, but also an intensely visual one — or, to use Marcel Duchamp's detested word, retinal. Her work has the appearance of what painting should look like in this post-everything, millennial age: it is technical, but leavened with the personal. More important, it suggests that how we look at images and the world right now may be provisional, another chapter in the story of vision, technology and humanity.

And, as can be seen in the very first painting, Ms. Quaytman's work contains echoes of the traditional. Because, where the window of Renaissance painting was an intensely theorized object, it compelled you to stand before it and look — and, more important, think about looking.

"R. H. Quaytman: Spine, Chapter 20" runs through March 20 at the Neuberger Museum of Art, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase. Information: neuberger.org or (914) 251-6100.

A version of this review appeared in print on December 19, 2010, on page WE9 of the New York edition.

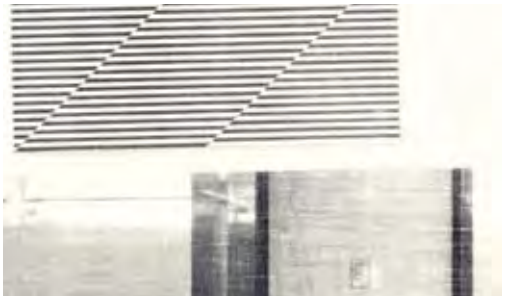
Luke Cohen, "Catachreses: On Rebecca H. Quaytman,"
Texte zur Kunst, No. 77, 2010, pp. 136-140

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

LUKE COHEN

CATACHRESES

On Rebecca H. Quaytman



In the works of Rebecca Quaytman, painting is sublated in the mirror of its post-avant-garde critique – indeed in the threefold Hegelian sense of the word as preserved, abolished and resolved into a higher level. Against the background of the history of institutional critique and under the conditions of digital and other reproduction methods, the New York-based artist opens up the medium in a programmatic way in regard to the economic and discursive networks of its production and display.

A view of three exhibitions in the past years reveals that painting is not the theme here, but the starting point of a critical-reflective practice.

Although an obscurity since the late 80s, R. H. Quaytman's painting practice has recently met critical and commercial reception due to associations with the collectively run gallery Orchard in New York's Lower East Side (2005–2008). At the gallery, Quaytman assumed the role of director amongst a group of twelve artists, filmmakers, academics and curators. Despite being the group's only painter, Quaytman's work reflects the politics of a collective practice. The artist actively decentralizes the singularity of the subjective relationship of viewer, painter and painting through engagement with painting's historical and social contexts. Complementing this, much of Orchard's program consisted of re-staging critical practices associated with 60s' and 70s' conceptual art and institutional critique as an attempt to recode the commercial gallery as a site of community, enabling discourse and social exchange.[1] Within this recycling of critical narratives, Quaytman positioned painting as the "foundation" and "cliché" central to any critiques of the autonomous status of art.[2]

"Orchard, Chapter 8, Taken from a Christian P. Muller Photograph of Andrea Fraser Performing M. I. H. Y. at Orchard in front of a Louise Lawler" (2006) documents Quaytman's involvement with Orchard. The image captures the back of Andrea Fraser's cocked head, mid-performance, looking at a photograph by Louise Lawler. Fraser, Quaytman's readymade subject, orients us in the regress of frames. As onlookers to the painting we are positioned to mirror Fraser's body as Fraser's body performs our role as spectators. The painting functions as a model for viewing, it stages the spectator as the *mise en scène*.

As the title of this painting suggests, Quaytman's work is dependent on a process of naming and misnaming. The artist defines painting negatively. Painting is approached as a suture through discussions of mediums of other material categories, such as photography, writing and architecture. The artist sacrifices the purity of painting for a tactical re-articulation of the terms of engagement, suggesting it in what art historian George Baker has called a "symbolic economy".[3] "Painting" for Quaytman is a point of contiguity, an intermediary site of inscriptions of other mediums. The majority of the works are made using photo-based silkscreens applied to gessoed plywood panels in six modular sizes corresponding to the dimensions of the golden section. Starting with polaroids, archival and digital photographs, Quaytman transfers the images onto films which are then made into silkscreens. As a result of this technique, the photograph is turned into a liquid, as if paint, during the process. Conceptually, Quaytman exchanges the zero degree of the painting for the infinite logic of photographic and digital reproduction. The indexicality of painting, negotiated through photography, emphasizes the historical and archival function of the image, while the utilization of painting as a frame orients the image's physical presence and weight. The

seriality of the paintings keeps the body of work from reaching completion. However, what is sold can be reprinted after the transaction, so that her œuvre is never dispersed through the act of commerce. Robert Rauschenberg's "White Paintings" (1953) restaged the monochrome, undermining its zero by positioning it as a screen for projection, a metaphor that brought it close to photography and film. Here it is the screen from which the painting emerges. The paintings frame the digital as a site of regulation between a material and immaterial economy.

Quaytman disrupts the figure/ground relationship of her works through direct consideration of the context in which they are exhibited. As with the work of Martin Barré, this is negotiated spatially through physical consideration of how the work is hung in the architecture of the site[4] – the artist works with models of the gallery not just to strategize the installation, but also makes the architecture the content of her work, sometimes using the models as subject matter. Similarly, Quaytman takes as base material the discursive conditions of the paintings, such as the historical and institutional framing of the site of exhibition, as well as how they relate to her biography. Within the frame of the individual painting this is manifested in direct consideration of the work's immediate social field. As a byproduct of the digital interfacing with the geometry of the screen, the paintings generate moiré op patterns. This functions in situ to disrupt the viewer's retinal experience with the work. Pushing the viewer's gaze to the frame of the painting, they account for the movement before, in front of and beyond the painting, resonant with the post-minimal sculptures of Dan Graham. However, Quaytman's hand reappears in paintings as *trompe l'œil* rendering of the paintings edge, pointing to the breaking point of the image, the limit of the picture plane, as well as their life beyond exhibition – painting seen from its side, as if in storage. In contrast, smaller hand-painted works depict signage. Readymade symbols, such as arrows, function as "captions" that direct the relationship between works and the viewer within the exhibition context. This reverses the logic of catalog layout, relegating the hand crafted to narrating reproduced images.

Excluded from the photograph, in this exchange, is paper. Without this material support, Quaytman still insists that the paintings operate in a traditional economy of writing; the installations are curated to carry the syntax of a poem, each exhibit is regarded as a "chapter". Epistemologically, this links the entirety of the output; each work is dependent on the one that came before it and always implies another. This was commented on directly in "Chapter 1: The Sun, Book One – Fear" (2001) in which the image of an open book was printed on to the picture plane, letting the knotted wood of the panel color the pages. However, the absence of a physical book is compensated through sanding and varnishing each individual painting, encouraging them to be acknowledged as objects that are handled and touched. This dimension of the work was foregrounded in Orchard's penultimate show, "From one O to the Other" (2008), a collaborative exhibit with art historian Rhea Anastas and painter Amy Sillman. Quaytman contributed to the installation a storage rack of paintings positioned in the back of the gallery from which viewers could arrange works on two brackets. A technique comparable to Michael Asher, this strategy made transparent the physical condition of painting as a liminal position between exclusion and inclusion from exhibition and storage. Likewise, this maintained the arbitrary arrangement of works by spectators within an overarching order of their framing by the gallery.

If in the show at Orchard Quaytman collapsed the space between painting and viewer, at Miguel Abreu Gallery "iamb, Chapter 12" (2009) *articulated* the gap between painting's material, conceptual and social determinations. The installation exposed the subject as simultaneously viewer of painting and its blind spot.[5] Recurrent in the exhibit were images of lamps, which either mundane in their appearance or emitting a

glare that bleached the picture plane operated as feedback. The implication was that focusing on the source of illumination eliminates its use value. To look directly at a lamp, in effect, meant to see nothing. These paintings were hung amongst screen-print painted representations of Hermann grids that when focused on mark the circumference of viewer's line of site with flickering patterns. The show's title is revealing. Literally, iamb is a two syllable poetic meter that places stress on the second sound. Homophonically iamb also sounds the phrase "I am". Folded between painting, written and spoken language, the Cartesian cogito was presented as a nil point, the oblivion of direct communication and self-presence. However, looking outside the frame of the paintings for answers, we are immediately drawn back to the center; "iamb" is also a dyslexic spelling for "lamp". The attack on the viewer was also an attack on the ego. To keep the circuit from closing meant to understand the work and one's position within it and the site collectively.

In the most recent show, Quaytman surfaces the "institution" as the absent center of the tripartite relationships of painting, viewer and painter. Quaytman's "Momentum 15" (2009) at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, focuses on the Institute's ideological secession from the then New York-centric (MoMA and Alfred Barr, in particular) conception of "modern" art. The Institute's decision in 1948 to change its name from an institute of "modern" art to one of "contemporary" art was an attempt to reach a larger audience and reflect the values of the populous. Approaching the exhibit from the museum's elevator one of Quaytman's hand-painted arrows points the viewer towards the gallery. Between the painting and the entrance, the viewer's trajectory is immediately broken by the ICA's founding manifesto, "'Modern Art' and the American Public" (1948),[6] hand-painted with shadowed letters. Within our peripheral vision across the entrance an op moiré painting mirrors the explanatory wall text in the ICAs corporate pink, Pantone 237-U.

The interior wall is appended by another wall to accommodate storage of Quaytman's paintings. The images are taken from the artist's personal archive. They depict images of her stepfather David von Schlegell's reflective outdoor sculpture "Untitled Landscape" (1972), located within walking distance of the ICA. Formally, von Schlegell's sculpture resembles four gigantic stainless steel open books. Stacked against each other in storage, bands of tape prevent the viewer from handling the paintings. Installation shots from the ICA's exhibition "Corporations Collect" (1965) silk-screened as taken directly from the Institute's binders, labels intact, are hung against this enclosure on the interior of the gallery. The images depict the abstract expressionist painting and sculpture of Louise Nevelson, Alfred Jensen and Jose de Rivera. The works, perhaps "contemporary" at the time, register as modern from a contemporary aesthetic standpoint. Then again, Quaytman's paintings within the corporate setting of the ICA make the concerns of the images contemporary once again.

"Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15" (2009), implicates the ICA within the larger framework of American geopolitical institutions, the décor of U.S. embassies, and provides the syntax for the exhibit. It depicts an installation shot of an op pattern painting of diagonal lines pointing horizontally. The pattern directs the gaze of the viewer outside the frame of Quaytman's painting and into corner of the gallery's wall. Quaytman hangs the negative of this image perpendicularly, pointing the viewer back to the same dead end. This patterning is reproduced throughout the exhibit, blown up to fill entire paintings throughout the gallery space. Sequences are created by the op arrows pointing to each other and to gaps in the exhibition's hanging. Unlike Daniel Buren's use of stripes to frame, pictorialize and make transparent the institutional setting, the moiré effect of Quaytman's paintings are painful on the eyes and function as vectors directing one around the room. Hung upside down, one painting crops the arrow as a diagonal line, dividing the painting

into three sections – the middle comprised of the branded pink. The trajectory crosses a series of "captions", a defunct 60s era logo of the ICA painted in Ad Reinhardt black-on-black, polish constructivist unist compositions and a print of the ICA's "Plastics" exhibit (1960) almost entirely blocked out with a rectangle sized to mirror the dimensions of the frame.[7] At the exit, we meet the same arrow that led us in, screen painted from a photograph of it within a model of the gallery space; its direction is still legible from within the walls. Following it we are in the museum's neighboring exhibit, "ICA Collection: In the Making."

Artist and critic Andrea Fraser defines the ends of institutional critique through the metaphor of melancholia, operating within the shadow of the lost art object. Stressing the necessity of perceptual recognition of the viewer to legitimize the arts in a narrative of aesthetic de-skilling starting with Marcel Duchamp and culminating in minimalism, she instates the notion of "institution" as decentered from the physical architecture of the museum and internalized as the social condition and subject position of those participating in a cultural field. The ICA exhibit literalizes this relation by restaging it as a moment of transgression by both participants, a mutual branding between the "institute's" aesthetics and history with that of the artist. Framed by the ICA's foundational misnomer, the reciprocal attempts of artist and institute to exhibit each other are immediately placed in a larger political field. However, if as Fraser states, as a subject there is a "museum" individually inside each of us,[8] Quaytman's paintings function as the absent referent, equally destabilizing the "institution" with the "subject". In the place of "painting", the highest form of commercial and symbolic capital of the museum or the "center" of the "institution" of the arts, we are given a knot. It is comprised of a series of exchanges between artist, institution, viewer, painting, writing, book, modern and contemporary, that gives us "painting" as the commodity, but produces a topology[9] of the social.

Notes

1 See Melanie Gilligan, "Kollektive Erhebung / Über das Projekt 'Orchard' in New York", in: *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 59 (September 2005); also Andrea Geyer and Ulrike Müller, "An Idea-Driven Social Space", in: *Grey Room*, no. 35 (Spring 2009), pp. 116–127.

2 R. H. Quaytman, Allegorical Decoys, Belgium: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008, p. 17.

3 George Baker, The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007.

4 See Yve-Alain Bois, "Martin Barré and the Logic of Deviations", in: Martin Barré / Thea Westreich / Ethan Wagner, Martin Barré, Distributes Art Pub, 2008.

5 Quaytman's use of the lamp in this exhibition is an extension of her collaboration with artist Josef Strau in: "R. H. Quaytman & Josef Strau", Gallery Vilma Gold, London, December 11, 2008 – January 18, 2009.

6 President Nelson W. Aldrich and director James S. Plaut's populist manifesto against the elitism of modernism and the New York art world situated the ICA as a vulnerable center between extreme right and left wing politics of the cold war, leading it to appropriation by the reactionary politics of the McCarthy era. This forced the ICA to rearticulate its claims and allegiances just two years later with the aid of MoMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art in the joint statement, "A Statement on Modern Art" (1950); see Serge Guilbaut, "The Frightening Freedom of the Brush", in: Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston, ed. by Elisabeth Sussman, Massachusetts: The Institute of Contemporary Art, pp. 52–93.

7 This work references Władysław Strzemiński architectonic compositions. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation", in: Painting as Model, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 1990, pp. 123–155.

8 Andrea Fraser speaks literally of the interiority as if it structured as a museum. Of the "institutional body" she states, "We are all here members of cultural fields. We carry, each of us, our institutions inside ourselves. There's a museum in here, inside of me, with the Corinthian columns, the grand staircase, and the mezzanine. There's a system of organization: the way I see things." It also marks the limits of the subject, "But I can't leave it, because I would then not only cease to have an effect within the field; I would also cease to exist." Andrea Fraser, "Why Does Fred Sandback's Work Make Me Cry?", in: *Grey Room*, no. 22 (Winter 2006), p. 40.

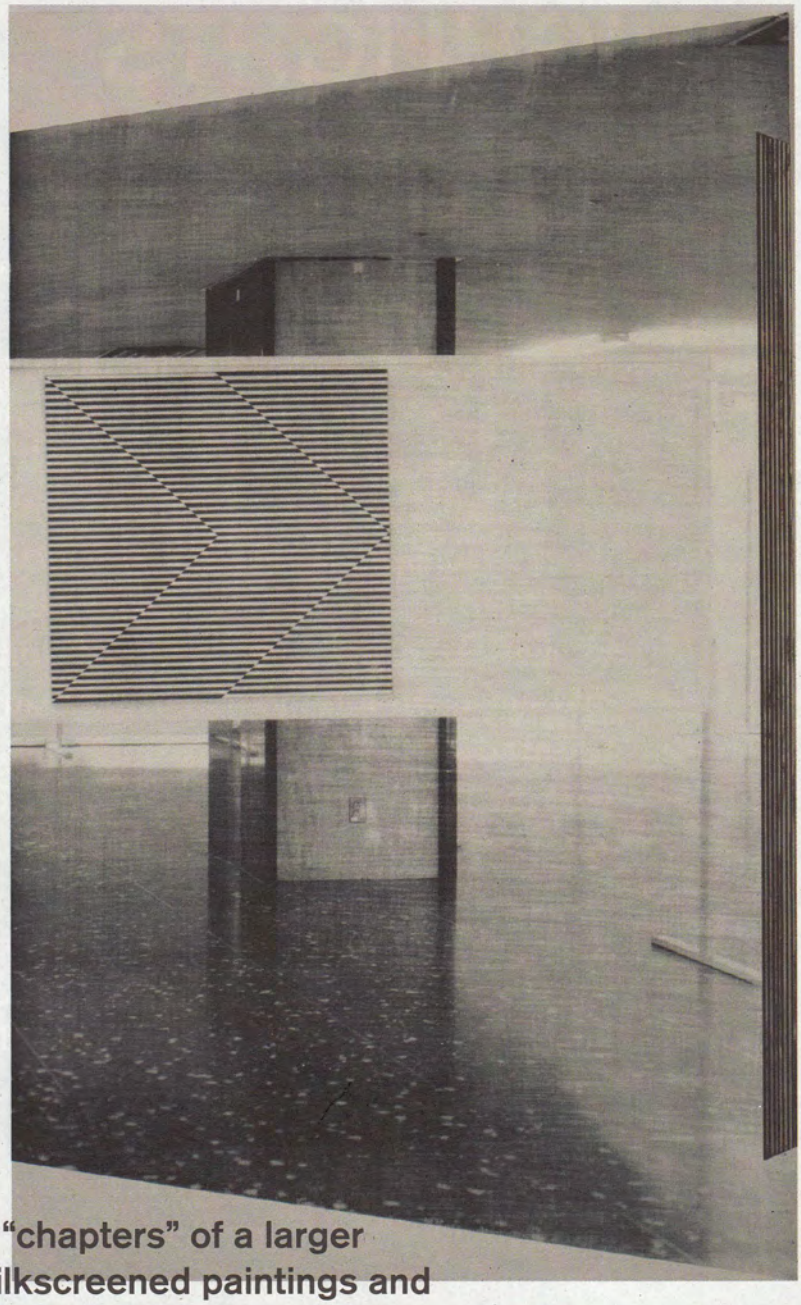
9 "Topology" here references art historian Eric de Bruyn's "Topological Pathways of Post-Minimalism", in: *Grey Room*, no. 25 (Fall 2007), pp. 32–63. In his text it is employed as a social and political field condition. It represents a de-hierarchized space of shifting subject positions and social and political contexts. Applied to Quaytman's practice, "Topology" accounts not only for aspects of the paintings surroundings acting on the paintings, but also those implemented that pierce through the frame of the paintings, i.e., the content is the context of her work and the context is the content of her work, which she manages in social, historical and political terms. Implemented as a spatial metaphor by Eric de Bruyn, "topology" also presupposes the condition of "network", a term now deployed by art historian David Joselit to define contemporary painting. See David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself", in: *October*, no. 130, pp. 125–134.

a contemporary magazine / ISSUE 07 / Summer 2010 / FREE

KALEIDOSCOPE

R.H. QUAYTMAN
TOBIAS ZIELONY
THE PERFORMATIVE BODY
CLEMENS VON WEDEMEYER
JOHN SMITH
CHRISTODOULOS PANAYIOTOU

TOPICAL OPTICAL



Organized into "chapters" of a larger narrative, the silkscreened paintings and optical effects of New York-based artist R.H. QUAYTMAN disclose a fugitive nature at the heart of painting today.

words by
JOANNA FIDUCCIA

This page:
Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (ICA archive 3, Art for U.S. Embassies), 2009

Next page, from left:
Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (DvS 3, pink), 2009 Chapter 12: iamb (blind smile), 2008

All images courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

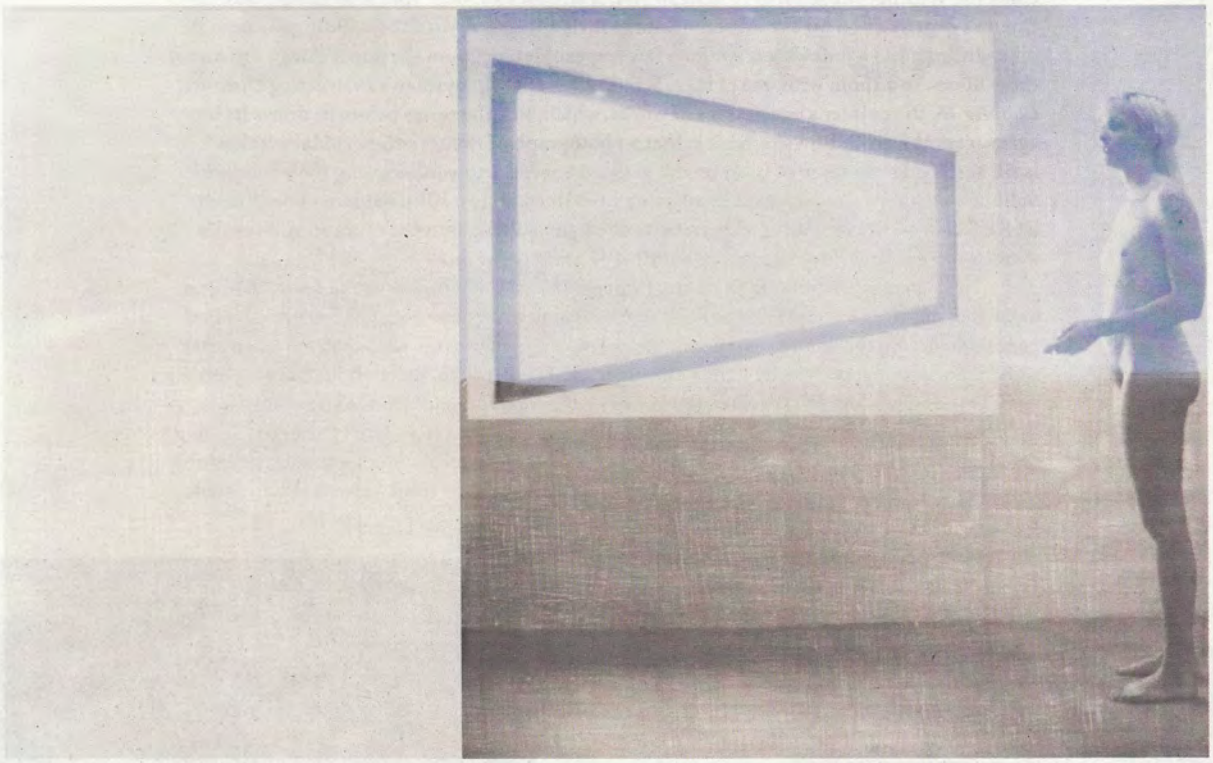
More than forty-five years after it was erected, the gray granite ziggurat of Madison Avenue, the Whitney Museum of American Art, is still an anomaly. That is by design. Marcel Breuer's construction for the museum admits little concourse with the buildings around it; it hardly even has windows, except for a few trapezoidal forms on the upper floors. On one of these floors, in a room with one of these windows, is R.H. Quaytman's *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16*, the painter's latest series of works, which, like the series before it, draws its imagery from the exhibition site. So it is that a photograph of Breuer's trapezoidal window is silkscreened onto some of Quaytman's gessoed boards, while others echo the window's oblique view down the avenue in irradiating RGB lines. In two silkscreens, a nude (the artist K8 Hardy) stands smoking a cigarette in the light sluicing into the room from Breuer's window—a quote of Edward Hopper's 1961 *A Woman in the Sun*.

Then there is *Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 (Yellow Window with Edges)* (2010), an arrangement of planes and trompe l'oeil stripes that resemble the edges of beveled plywood panels, depicting the window from a single-point perspective—the same point, I learn after some maneuvering, occupied by the painting itself. Had I known more about Quaytman's work at the time when I first visited the Whitney Biennial, perhaps I would have been less surprised by this coincidence. I would have known, for instance, that since the artist's residency in Rome as a recipient of the Rome Prize in 1992, she has made scale models of exhibition spaces, placing mirrors inside them in order to photograph miniature works or double

the viewer's perception of the room. Unapprised of this, however, my subdued jig inside the Whitney made apparent one of Quaytman's most profound painterly paradoxes: her capacity to engage the body through illusions that stipulate its absence, producing a blind spot both seen and occupied by the viewer. To anthropomorphize recklessly, *(Yellow Window with Edges)* depicts what the painting sees while no one is there to look at it.

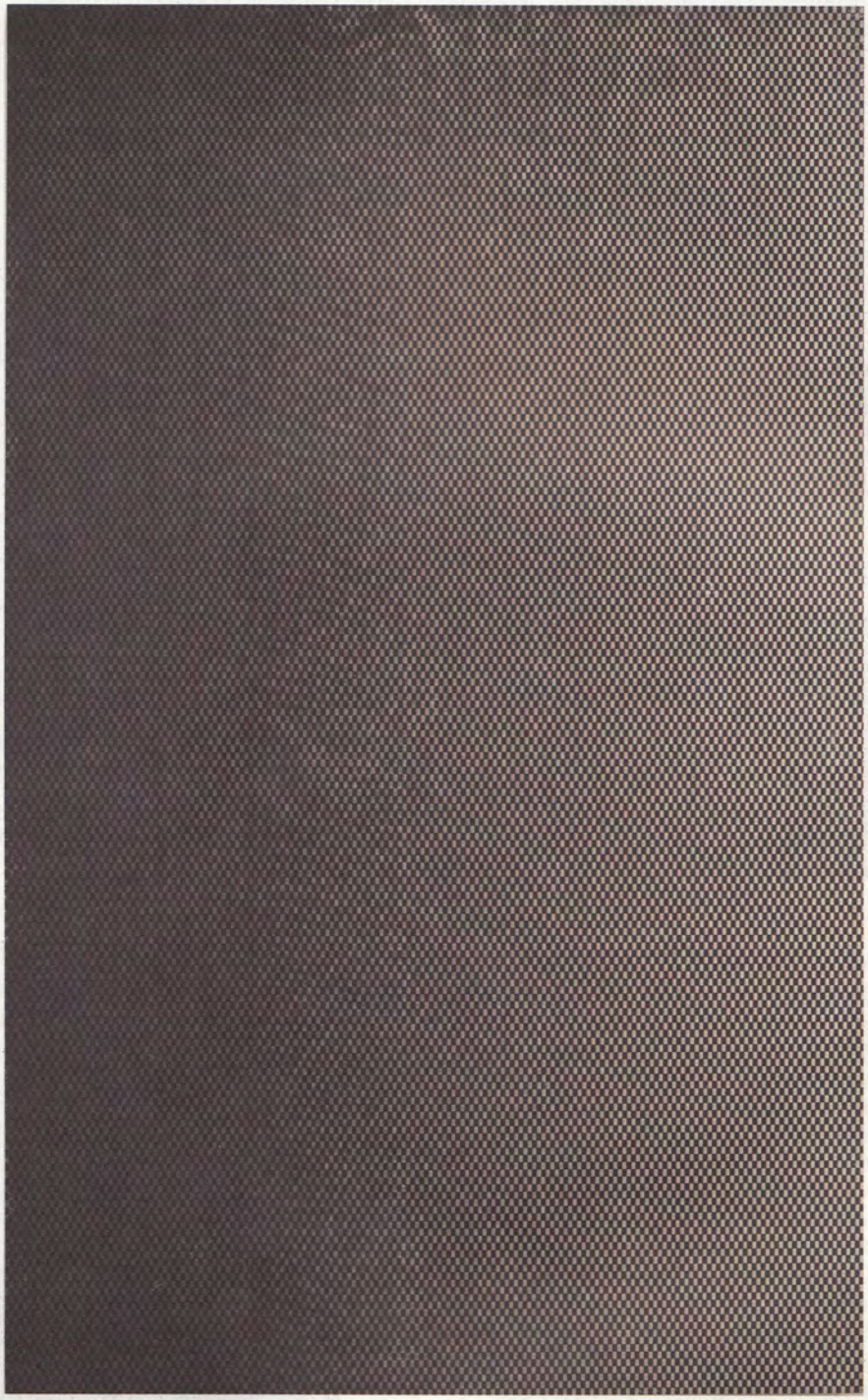
Quaytman's paintings—photographs silkscreened onto wood planks with beveled edges, often employing optical effects such as the "scintillating grid," moiré superpositions of lines and coruscating surfaces of Warholian "diamond dust"—ask to be viewed askance, in passing. The artist's only freehand paintings, which she calls "captions," are small-scale graphics evoking signage or punctuation pointing the way onwards, past paintings arranged with a mind toward modulating their neighbors. Jen Mergel, the associate curator of the ICA in Boston, which presented a solo exhibition of Quaytman's work this spring (*Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15*, featuring the ICA's institutional history), has called this "the Doppler effect" of circulating through her shows. The viewer, however, is not the only one in motion. On the same residency in Rome, Quaytman came to the koan-like epiphany, "The Stance of Painting is the Profile," a phrase reflected not only in the "profile" plank inlays and the aggressive op surfaces, most comfortably viewed from an angle, but in Quaytman's practice of naming each series a "chapter" (sixteen exist to date)—implying that every exhibition is only a partial view of a narrative compiled elsewhere.

Though she began composing these chapters less than a decade ago, Quaytman's own storied roots in abstraction are far older. The daughter of painter Harvey Quaytman and poet Susan Howe, as well as step-daughter to sculptor David von Schlegell and writer Margaret Moorman, and granddaughter to the Irish playwright Mary Manning, Quaytman was raised in New York in the 1960s, surrounded by figures like Richard Serra, Joan Jonas, Robert Morris and Marcia Hafif. It is tempting to make much of this pedigree, as well as Quaytman's slow attainment of commercial success (she had scant gallery representation before beginning to work with Miguel Abreu several years ago). The combination would seem to account for Quaytman's broad and complex purchase on painting: its inclusions (of references, of the body in motion, of its immediate context) and its exclusions (of expressivity, of the body in rest, of the auton-



Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 (A Woman in the Sun · blue), 2010
Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Chapter 10: Tsdreyt In Kop with Edges, 2008
Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York



iamb, Chapter 12, 2008
Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

omy of a work or even a series). Quaytman's practice appeared until recently like one of the art world's many blind spots, in light of which the meshwork of art history appears, as the novelist Julian Barnes once wrote, like a collection of holes tied together with string.

In *Chapter 12: iamb*, presented during the winter of 2008–09 in collaboration with Josef Strau at Vilma Gold in London and Miguel Abreu in New York, this blind spot was the motif—part figurative (lamps and light sources) and part sensorial (grids, grills and other optical effects reproducing the retinal singe of staring into a strong bulb). *Chapter 12: iamb (blind smile)* (2008) is a silkscreened photograph of an older man (Dan Graham, actually) basking in lamplight—a beatific Teresias whose outstretched arm abuts the bottom edge of a painting, one which is also included in the exhibition (only rotated ninety degrees). *Chapter 12* is full of these cameos and mise-en-abyme, fusing the instantaneity of snapshots with the putative permanence of painting, much as Teresias unites blindness and insight. A photo of a lamp bulb and a photo of a camera flash, one reflects, would look about the same.

But if the effect of this is to bring painting and photography closer together, it is also to put the works themselves at a distance, if only a temporal one. Walter Benjamin's definition of aura, "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be," comes to mind. As Georges Didi-Huberman explains in his essay "The Supposition of the Aura," this definition marries two points of Benjamin's thought: the *apparition* as a revelation or awakening, and its *uniqueness* as a certain phenomenological specificity, or "here-ness." Didi-Huberman allies this notion with Benjamin's distinction between a picture and an image. The former is an illustration; the latter, an illumination. "It's not that what is past casts light on what is present," Benjamin writes, "or what is present its light on what is past; rather, an image is that in which the Then and the Now come into a constellation like a flash of lightning."[1] Quaytman's flash bulb is like an emblem for these dialectical images that criticize, in Didi-Huberman's words, both the modernist forgetting of the aura (through the act of memory they represent) and the archaic nostalgia for the aura (wryly, in the lamps' halo surrounding the photographed paintings or, more directly, the nimbus produced by op effects).

Memory and forgetting, then and now and here—and the critique of display that ignores those things (namely, the practice of presenting paintings as transcendent, permanent and magisterially present)—pervade Quaytman's work. For her last exhibition at Orchard (the lauded collectively-run New York gallery that Quaytman directed from 2005 to 2008), "From One O to the Other" with Amy Sillman and Rhea Anastas in 2008, Quaytman presented *Chapter 10: Ark* in a storage unit, inviting viewers to rifle through her paintings and hang them at their wont on the wall. Searing optical motifs and silkscreens of Polaroids taken of the space and its players during

ARTIST'S BIO

R.H. QUAYTMAN is a New York-based artist born in 1961. She received a BA from Bard College in 1983 and attended the post-graduate program in painting at the National College of Art & Design in Dublin (1984) and the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques in Paris (1989) before being awarded a Rome Prize Fellowship in 1992. She was director of Orchard, a cooperative gallery in New York's Lower East Side, from 2005 to 2008. Quaytman has had a solo exhibitions at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2008) and the ICA Boston (2009), and her work was included in the 2010 Whitney Biennial. She is represented by Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York and Vilma Gold, London.

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

R.H. Quaytman's work will be presented in two solo exhibitions in 2010, at Neuberger Museum of Art, SUNY Purchase, Purchase, New York, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.

Above, on the left:
Chapter 10: Ark (Storefront, L.E.S.), 2008-09
Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London

Above:
Chapter 10: Rhea Anastas with Edge, 2008
Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Momentum 15: Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15; installation view, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 2009-2010
Courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

the years of Orchard's operation stressed the archival nature of her paintings, as well as their almost aggressively fugitive character. In an essay addressing Quaytman along with peers including Sillman, Jutta Koether and Cheyney Thompson, David Joselit describes this stress as "transitive painting," whose forms adumbrate the transformations they will undergo as soon as they enter into circulation as objects.[2]

For Quaytman, this is a circulation that acknowledges the less than noble future to which most paintings are headed—one in "cold storage," as Joselit says, something Quaytman was forced to confront when tasked with cataloguing all of her father and stepfather's unsold works following their deaths. *Chapter 10* candidly confronted the caching of paintings, which is, for many, as good as their death. By enfolding their storage—symbolically (in the "profile" trompe l'oeil edges), materially (in their eminently moveable plank boards, all in standardized sizes) and iconographically (in her use of photography, that assassin of painting)—, Quaytman has developed work that is both inextricably tied to its context, or its "here-ness" and the conditions that will make it, well, go elsewhere, and full of signifiers of its distance. Or really, of *the spectator's* distance, as the chapters continue to construct an opus insofar as they presume no viewer—much like *(Yellow Window with Edges)* whose trapezoidal form, uncannily, first appeared in *Chapter 1: The Sun* nine years ago. The painting in profile is the painting tilting away from its viewer, a posture altogether different from most cynical endgame painting, whose ironic distance depends upon a close and complicit community of shared attitudes. In the context of contemporary painting endorsing that pose, Quaytman is an anomaly and, one hopes, someday a landmark.

AUTHOR

Joanna Fiduccia is Assistant Editor of *Kaleidoscope*. Her writing appears regularly in *Artforum*, *Spike*, *artonpaper*, *ArtLies* and *MAP*, and she serves on the editorial staff of *Manifesta Journal*. She has recently contributed catalogue texts for Nina Beier, Carla Scott Fullerton and Lucy Skaer, and co-curated, along with Chris Sharp, the itinerant "Zero Budget Biennial" in Paris, Milan, London and Berlin in 2009–2010.

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted in Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Supposition of the Aura: The Now, The Then, and Modernity," in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 8.

2. David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," in *October* 130, Fall 2009: 125–134.

Steven Stern, "Past Present," *Frieze*, No. 132, June-August 2010, pp. 132-135

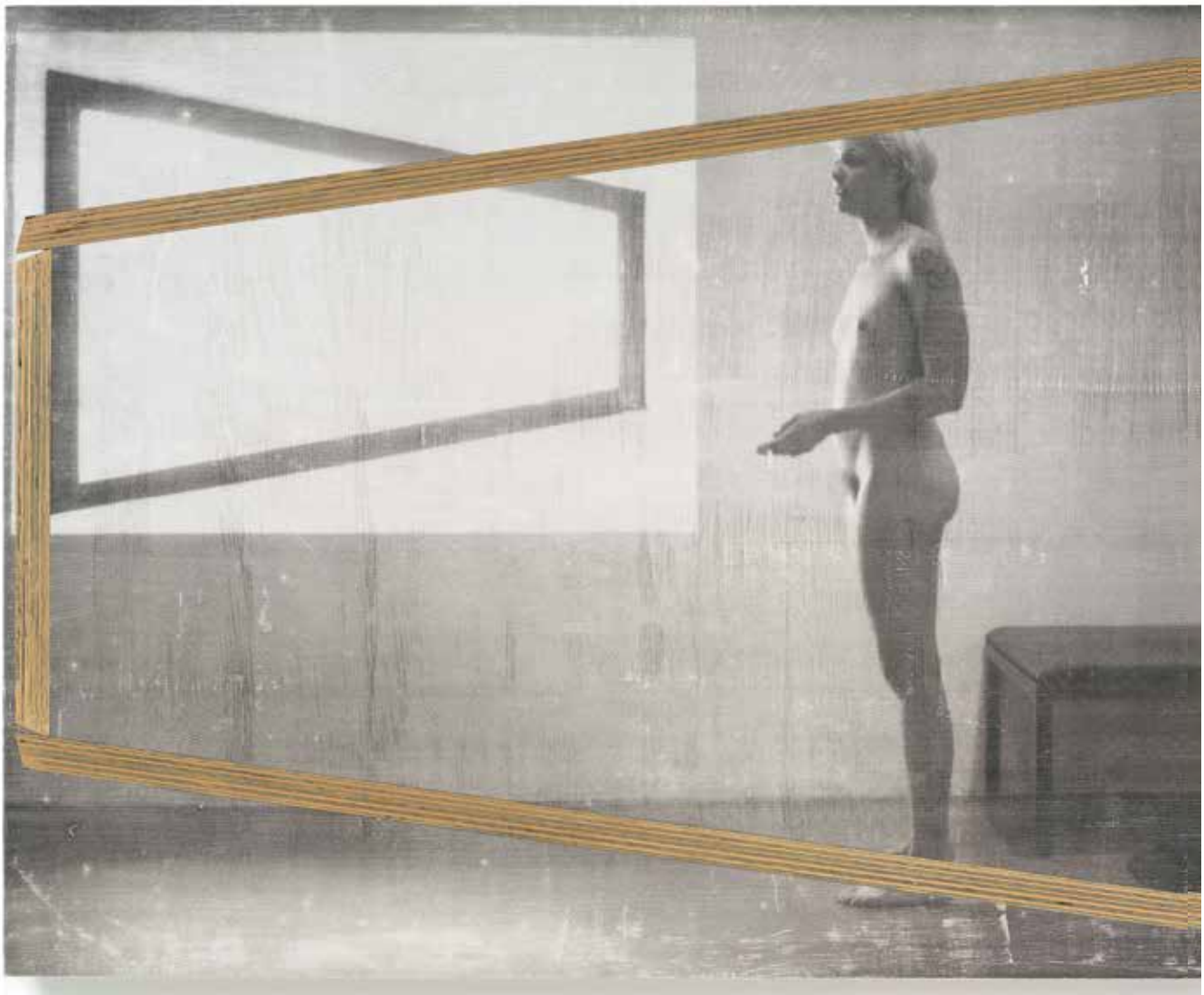
frieze

Summer 2010

R.H. Quaytman
Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 (A Woman Looking out Window – red)
2010
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
51×51 cm

Past Present

From American Modernism to museum archives and the legacy of her artistic family, **R.H. Quaytman** telescopes time and place
by Steven Stern



Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 (A Woman in the Sun – with Edges)
2010
Oil, silkscreen and gesso on wood
63×102 cm

Distracting Distance, Chapter 16 [arrow in model]
2010
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
51×51 cm

Noël Coward supposedly once complained that reading footnotes was like 'having to go downstairs to answer the door while in the midst of making love.' It's a good line, capturing that frustrating, unromantic moment when one is torn away from all-absorbing transports, when the public world intrudes on private pleasure.

As it happens, I don't agree with the sentiment. I enjoy footnotes. I often read them before the main text, sometimes instead of the main text. My eyes drift down the page, away from the subject at hand, hoping to find tasty lost bits lodged at the bottom, like raisins sifted down a box of cereal. Distraction has its own pleasures. But perhaps it is not simply distraction at work, but some kind of protest against the supposedly seamless authority of the text. There is something humanizing about footnotes. They are records of the author's past and perhaps they are premonitions of the reader's future. They send you elsewhere – to the next book, the next research project, the next obsession. They move you along, into a network of connections, into further footnotes.

Maybe the reason footnotes have a bad reputation is the intimations of obscurity they embody. No-one – at least, no-one with any ambition – wants to 'become a footnote'. That would mean your life's work is all but forgotten, only worth acknowledging as a pendant to someone else's accomplishments. Footnotes are where the people who didn't make it into the main story get stuck, in a kind of limbo at the bottom of the page. But, in the long run, I suspect we are all destined to become footnotes.

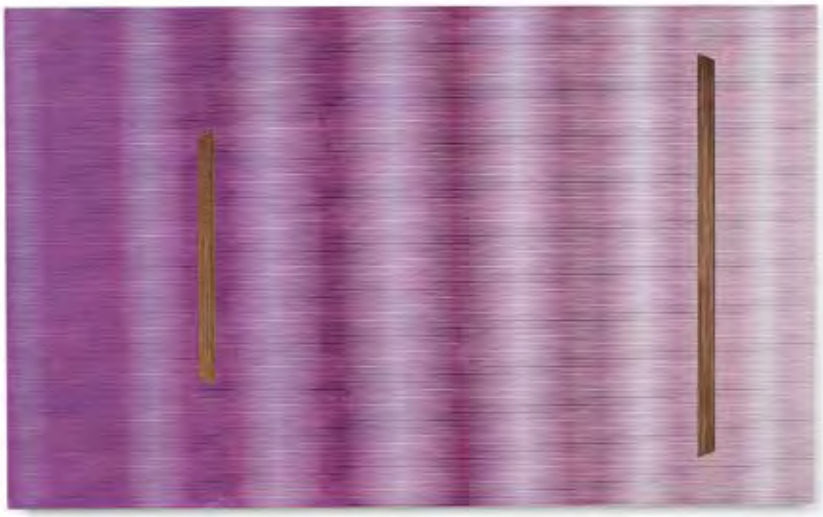
It's pretty clear that R.H. Quaytman is in the pro-footnote camp. She has spoken of the drifting, distracted search that serves as preparation for her work. Her personal canon of artistic influences are, for the most part, figures she has come across in this way, people who have almost slipped through the cracks: Polish Modernist sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, architect Anne Tyng and Swedish mystic painter Hilma af Klint. More than that, though, there is the way her work exemplifies and reproduces the mechanics of the footnote: the eye drifting from single-minded attention to a singular object, towards another, more multivalent place. In Quaytman's work, all glances are sidelong.

Quaytman is a painter, though she might be considered to be working against painting – or, more accurately, against a certain age-old mythos of painting as the iconic image of raptured ahistorical contemplation. (Painting as a kind of love-making, perhaps?) 'What mechanisms are at work in painting,' she has asked, 'that assume an audience of one male monogamous Cyclops who will never leave?'

To counter what she calls this 'ego' of painting, Quaytman has, since 2001, structured her work in numbered 'chapters': each exhibition is presented as the latest installment of 'an ongoing book.' The viewer is encouraged to think of the exhibition as a thematic unit, with the meaning of each piece dependent on those adjoining it. The paintings hew to a rule-bound format, all of them done on wooden panels with beveled edges, their sizes usually determined by permutations of the Golden Ratio. Some are photo-based silkscreens, based on archival material or Polaroids the artist takes herself. Some are vertiginous Op-inspired patterns. Some are spare, hand-painted, diagrammatic abstractions. Together these forms are intended to work as a kind of 'grammar of painting.' Each chapter serves as a particular response to the site where it is shown: its history, the architecture of the room. Even when the show is over, the paintings, sold or not, continue to encode and memorialize the space they once occupied.

For four months last winter and spring, Quaytman's 'Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15' occupied the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. The artist's first solo museum show, it could be considered a 'museum solo', as one might say 'drum solo'. Riffing on the museum's history and rifling through its archives, Quaytman attempted to play the institution's own game, literally matching her methods to the museum's conventions. Just next to the white-on-pink introductory wall text, the artist placed a buzzing pink Op-ish gradient: the precise shade of pink the ICA uses for the signage, Pantone 237 U.

There was another bit of didactic text at the beginning of the show, an official statement from the ICA. It's dated 17 February 1948, and is something of a footnote itself: an odd crevice in the history of Modernism in America. Reproduced by Quaytman in skewed, ghosted, hand-painted letters, '"Modern Art" and the American Public' was a document signed by James S. Plaut, then director of the Institution, and Nelson Aldrich, its president. It is a manifesto and an exercise in rebranding. Bemoaning the 'private, often secret language' that has



Above:
Chapter 15 [vertical pink screen]
2009
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
61×102 cm

Below:
Chapter 12: iamb
2008
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
82×51 cm

become associated with the term 'modern art' the museum announces a name change, from the Institute of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art. Effectively purged of pernicious influences, the museum vows to pursue the 'effective integration of art with commerce and industry'.

The show, which Quaytman has said is about 'the ways in which the museum explains contemporary art to its public', functions on one level as institutional critique of the most basic sort, exposing skeletons hidden in closets and tweaking a certain popularist strain. But her trip into the archives also has an air of melancholy about it. Quaytman *takes on* the museum's

'What mechanisms are at work in painting,' Quaytman has asked, 'that assume an audience of one male monogamous Cyclops who will never leave?'

authority – both challenging it, and assuming that authority for herself – but she also takes on its ghosts.

The history of Modernism in America is not merely an academic concern for Quaytman. The artist's own biography – often referenced in her work – is at issue. As she has noted, she essentially grew up in the art world. Her father was the abstract painter Harvey Quaytman; her step-father, sculptor David von Schlegell. 'Minimalism with one foot stuck in Modernism,' Quaytman has written, was 'the religion of my family'.

At the ICA, the viewer walked past the first temporary exhibition wall to find a plywood rack lodged in the wall's centre. In it, a group of paintings were stored end-on, leaning against one another. Quaytman has used this conceit in earlier chapters: the storage unit meant to suggest the eventual 'fate' of paintings, their sidelong stance gesturing towards the future time when they will be taken down and stowed out of sight. The works hidden away here were all photo-based silkscreens, images of a 1971 public sculpture by Von Schlegell, which still stands in front of a waterfront apartment complex a few blocks from the ICA's current home. In her notes on the show, Quaytman recalls watching the sculpture's construction, when she was 11 years old. 'This sculpture is part of my DNA as an artist', she writes.

Quaytman relates the angled panels of Von Schlegell's steel sculpture to a particular perspectival effect in her own practice. Often the images in her photo-based works – 'the picture in the painting', as she puts it – will be distorted relative to the picture plane, the entire image foreshortened, as if leaning away from the viewer. With another geometry imposed upon that of the source photograph, the paintings seem to alternately anticipate and challenge your position in relation to their surfaces. Another recurring visual motif in Quaytman's work – a *trompe l'oeil* strip, identical to the bevelled wooden edges of her panels – also works to thematize this sidelong orientation. It is as if, looking a painting head-on, you have already passed it by. Your relation to it is always oblique. In Quaytman's work, the image and the viewer are constantly moving away from each other, in space and in time. As we move into the future, paintings move into the past.

This sense of movement gets translated into visceral affect in Quaytman's 'Exhibition Guide': the purpose of a guide, after all, is not just to explain, but to move you along. But as you move forward, you are always looking back, not just to the previous paintings, but to the histories they evoke. The visual rhymes and resonances between the works in the show can be a bit unnerving, calling forth something akin to *déjà vu*. It as if the distinction between the viewer's immediate past and the mid-20th-century past of the ICA are collapsed. Similarly, the gallery space you occupy, and the gallery space depicted in the archival images seem to melt together. A silkscreen piece shows an installation shot of a 1966 ICA show, 'Art for U.S. Embassies'. One of the paintings shown hanging on a temporary wall in the image appears to have escaped from 1966, and into Quaytman's exhibition. It makes a circuit around the room: its pattern, an arrow-like chevron of Op-ish horizontal lines, is echoed, almost subliminally, in several of Quaytman's works. It also reappears, superimposed over two other archival photo-based paintings: almost, but not quite mirror images of each other. At times it feels like the images are watching you, anticipating your movements. These are *knowing* paintings, in every sense.

At its most intense, this sort of telescoping of time and place can be almost literally unsettling – which is not necessarily a bad thing. 'On a very few occasions,' Quaytman has written, 'I have had the feeling of being another person in another place with a past and future entirely separate from my own. An inexplicable sensation – as if by accident I had slipped into someone else's life, a life defined by place rather than culture.'

Quaytman's 'Distracting Distance, Chapter 16', shown as part of the latest Whitney Biennial, is, among other things, about this kind of uncanny slippage. It is also a fugue on the subject of space and light. This chapter consists of nine paintings – ten, if you count the window on the north wall of the gallery space. This window, a distinctive feature of Marcel Breuer's Whitney building, becomes, in this context, another bit of ambiguous geometry: like many of Quaytman's works, its angles are skewed, suggesting perspectival distortion. The window reappears in two silkscreen paintings, based on the same photo, hung on opposite walls. In them, a nude woman, looking self-assured, smoking a cigarette, stands

Right:
Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (ICA Archive 4, Art for U.S. Embassies)
2009
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
51×81 cm

Below:
Chapter 10: Ark (Christian Philipp Müller's picture of Andrea Fraser performing 'May I Help You?' at Orchard in front of Louise Lawler's picture of an Andy Warhol Painting behind a Tony Smith Sculpture)
2008
Silkscreen and gesso on wood
51×51 cm

in front of that window, in the same space the viewer occupies. The image is, of course, based on the iconic Edward Hopper painting *A Woman in the Sun* (1961), a prize of the Whitney's permanent collection, and which as Quaytman notes, was painted in the year of her birth.

The other works in the room bounced the viewer's gaze around. One is covered with glittering diamond dust, reflecting the ambient light, changing from every angle. Two patterned works seem to vibrate, to extend beyond their edges: although apparently black and white, on closer inspection it is apparent they are constructed from the RGB palette, like television screens or computer monitors. A diagrammatic arrow points towards the (actual) window.

In her notes to the exhibition, Quaytman proposes the window as a model for a kind of politics: an emblem, in the words of scholar Thomas Keenan, of 'the possibility of permeability' between public and private, which has always been part of the artist's practice. As the wall text at the Whitney Biennial noted, the nude model in Quaytman's 2010 *Woman in the Sun* is artist K8 Hardy. Other artists and fellow travellers have appeared in her work: Thomas Eggerer, Andrea Fraser, Dan Graham. This repeated gesture is a tip of the hat to influences and affinities, but it is also a way of registering the social world of art-making in the work itself, another way to challenge the myth of the singular, self-sufficient, ostensibly self-created painting.

To a large extent, Quaytman has constructed her own art world, just as she has constructed her own art history. Between 2005 and 2008, she was part of the collective that ran Orchard, a for-profit (but not especially profitable) alternative gallery on New York's Lower East Side. Conceived as a reaction to the Bush era, and modelled on Colin de Land's American Fine Arts, it was a refuge for a certain strain of politically engaged, brainy art – art that came with footnotes. At the height of the art market frenzy, Orchard presented shows on 'Polish Socialist Conceptualism of the 70s' and screened Michael Asher films. Fraser restaged her manic 1991 performance *May I Help You?*. Artists acted as curators, critics acted as artists; self-critique was part of the game plan.

When Orchard closed, Quaytman produced a multiple for the occasion, *Orchard Spreadsheet* (2008), which detailed the finances of the gallery. It looks, not incidentally, like a minimalist painting, an Agnes Martin grid turned into an accountant's tally of profits and (mostly) losses. As part of the final group show, she also mounted 'Chapter 10: Ark', its title suggesting (among other things) both a before-the-deluge packing-up and the brief arc of the gallery's career. There were photo-based paintings depicting the space and the people who came through it, including one of Fraser's performance. The title – *Chapter 10: Ark (Christian Philipp Müller's picture of Andrea Fraser performing 'May I Help You?' at Orchard in front of Louise Lawler's picture of an Andy Warhol Painting behind a Tony Smith Sculpture)* – is clearly meant, in part, to poke fun at the kind of footnote-friendly atmosphere that Orchard exemplified. It is a pocket history of a certain artistic lineage presenting as a setting of nesting dolls. It is also a complex and compelling image, instantly readable, less a series of footnotes than an essay unto itself. The title speaks of names; the image speaks of the strange nature of looking at images.

In her 2008 book, *Allegorical Decoys*, Quaytman quotes the text from Fraser's performance: 'Look... it's an illusion. It's the illusion that none of this was paid for and nothing will be bought and it hangs there as if just spread out before us voluntarily, of its own volition. It has always been there and will always be there – for us.'

I wasn't there when Fraser re-presented the monologue at Orchard. I didn't attend the final show where Quaytman's painting was first displayed. I have never seen the painting in person and I don't know where it is: perhaps on a collector's wall or in a storage rack somewhere. Right now, I'm looking at a JPEG of that painting on my computer. You, presumably, are looking at the same image in a magazine, several months from now. We are thinking about painting, but neither of us is looking at a painting. We have become part of the social world of this image, made to occupy of the next level out in the *mise-en-abyme* it depicts. And both of us will move on, soon enough, and look at something else. Somehow, I think the painting knows all this.

Steven Stern is a writer in New York, USA.

IN THE STUDIO
R. H. QUAYTMAN
WITH STEEL STILLMAN

Modest in scale, moody in atmosphere and sumptuous in surface, the paintings of R. H. Quaytman are confections for the eye and puzzles for the mind. Quaytman makes smart, philosophical work, layered with modulated autobiographical content. Edges are a preoccupying theme and a recurring motif. Neither boundaries nor divisions, Quaytman's edges instead conjoin, hinging one perspective, one kind of experience, to another.

Born in 1961, Quaytman grew up in the New York art world of the '60s and '70s. Her mother is the poet Susan Howe, and her father is the late painter Harvey Quaytman. Fittingly, her work blurs boundaries between text and image. Though viewers need not follow every reference, those willing to do a little sleuthing will uncover a lode of fascinating information that only adds to the paintings' manifest pleasures.

Quaytman paints on easel-size plywood panels, all of which receive some amount of hand work. Most panels are then silkscreened with photographs or other images gathered from archives of all kinds—art historical, institutional, personal and scientific ones in particular. Each painting can stand alone, but all are made in series, called "chapters." Individual chapters include a variety of painting styles and motifs, held together by formal and narrative relationships that become slowly evident. Quaytman's production is guided by an elaborate program—a "system," she calls it—that determines the paintings' content. One unvarying rule is that each chapter relates to the site where it was first exhibited.

Taken as a whole, Quaytman's work suggests a many-layered novel or film—a text in space and time. In her work, past and present, depth and surface, meet, but the distinctions between them do not collapse. Each reference maintains its identity. Afforded no ultimate resolution, the viewer is set in motion, going from one complex, intriguing visuality to the next.

Quaytman has been making and exhibiting paintings since the mid-'80s, and has a lengthy résumé of solo and group shows in the U.S. and Europe. Her ideas gathered force in the late '90s and since then, in part through her participation in the collaborative gallery Orchard on New York's Lower East Side, and as a result of a series of well-received one-person exhibitions—notably a show at Miguel Abreu in New York in 2008—her work has begun to reach a larger audience. Last winter Quaytman had a solo project at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, followed this spring by a room-size installation at the Whitney Biennial. In the fall, she will exhibit "Chapter 17" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and then have a comprehensive survey—not a retrospective, she insists—at the Neuberger Museum of Art, in Purchase, N.Y. Since 2006, she has taught in the MFA program at Bard.

R. H. Quaytman in her New York studio.

Quaytman is married to the filmmaker Jeff Preiss, with whom she has a 14-year-old son. She lives in New York, and her Lower Manhattan studio is an orderly, well-lit space. We talked there for several hours one mid-March afternoon.

STEEL STILLMAN Do you know how your parents met?

R. H. QUAYTMAN They met in the late '50s when they were both studying painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. My mother is from an established Boston family: her mother was an Irish actress and playwright, and her father was a law professor at Harvard. My father, on the other hand, was from Far Rockaway, in Queens, and was the son of Jewish immigrants. I was born in Boston, but we moved to New York, to SoHo, when I was about three. A year later, my parents broke up—their relationship was strained by a lack of money and the difficulties of loft living at that time. Soon afterward, my mother and I moved to the West Village with the sculptor David von Schlegel, who later became my stepfather.

SS Did you spend much time with your father when you were growing up?

RHQ I spent weekends with him and my stepmother, Frances Barth, first on Grand Street—Brice Marden lived in the same building—and then in a loft on the Bowery, right next to where the New Museum is now. I have vivid memories of SoHo in the mid-'60s. For instance, I remember seeing Janis Joplin walking down the street, wearing a pink boa, as I played with Barbie dolls on the fire escape. She would practice with her band in a building across the street, and I'd hear them at night as I was falling asleep.

SS Have you always wanted to be an artist?

RHQ I've never wanted to be anything else, though there was a brief period when I thought about teaching the blind. When I was young, I loved to draw—I'd get lost in it. I think that's how most painters get their start. On weekends, I'd hang out with my father in his studio, doing projects. We started a print collection, and did bookbinding. We'd also take long walks on the Lower East Side during which I became more aware of my Jewish side. Later, when I was going to high school in Connecticut and trying to fit in—my stepfather David was teaching at Yale—my father was afraid that I might turn into a WASP.

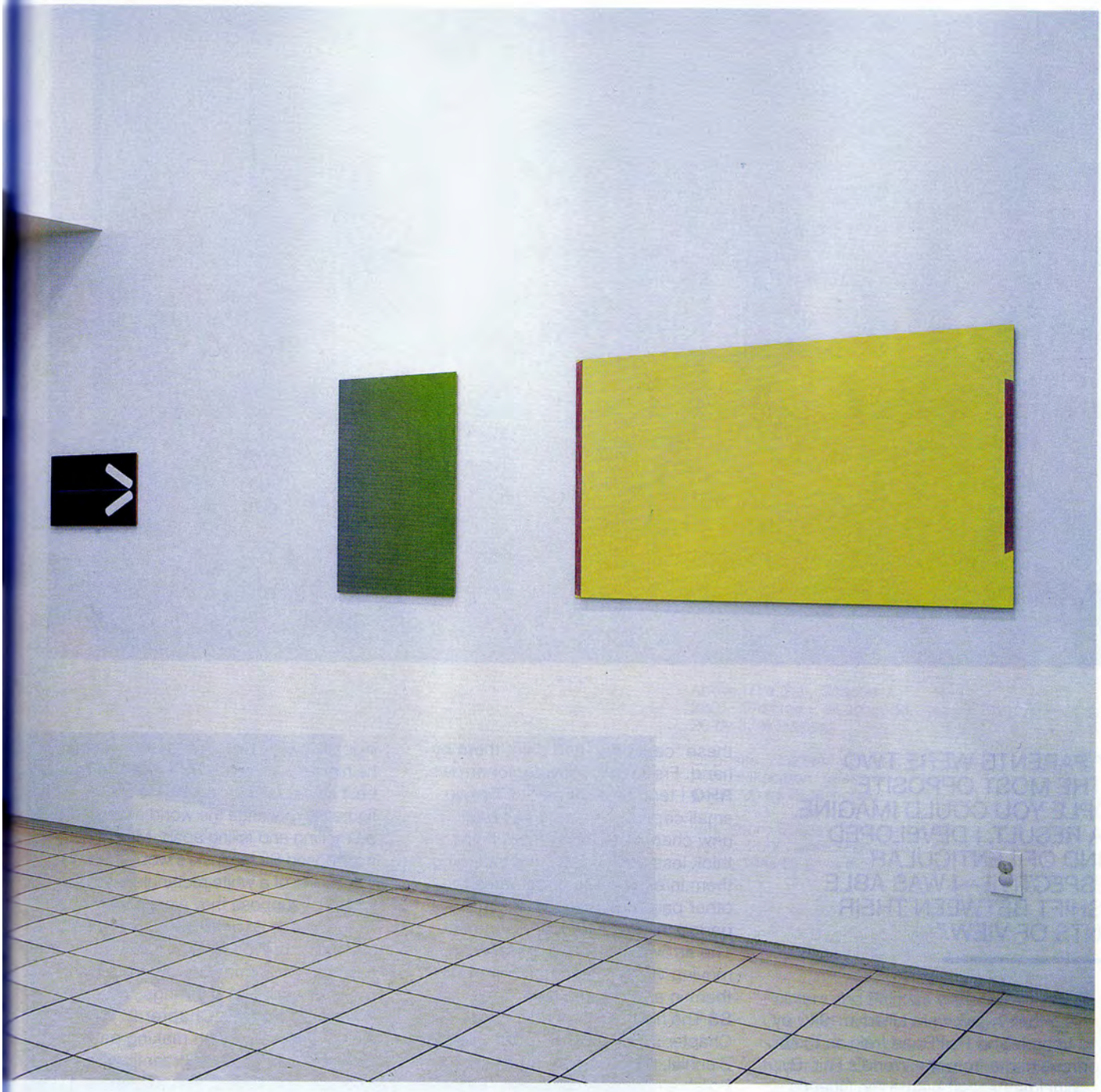
SS Was it difficult to reconcile these different parts of your background?

RHQ Back then, my parents were two of the most opposite people you could imagine. As a result, I developed a kind of lenticular perspective—I was able to shift back and forth between their points of view. Probably my urge to make

different kinds of paintings and put them together is related to that early experience.
SS Were you a painting major at Bard?
RHQ I was, and many of my teachers were my father's friends. So after Bard, needing to gain my own perspective, I spent a year studying painting in Dublin before coming back to New York. Eventually I got a job at P.S.1 answering phones. From there, I was promoted to program coordinator and worked with the curator Chris Dercon on a number of shows in the late '80s, including one featuring Hilma af Klint, which I organized. P.S.1 gave me access to an art world that I hadn't encountered through my family or at school.
SS Were you also pursuing your own work?
RHQ I lived in Williamsburg and always had a studio, but painting just at night and on weekends became problematic.

"I BEGAN TO THINK OF PAINTINGS AS OBJECTS THAT YOU PASSED BY—AS THINGS YOU SAW FROM THE SIDE, WITH YOUR PERIPHERAL VISION, AND IN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER PAINTINGS."

I spent several months of 1989 in a program in Paris started by Daniel Buren and Pontus Hulten called the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques, but it really wasn't until I won the Prix de Rome in 1991, and had a year of uninterrupted time, that I began developing the system I still use to make my paintings. In Rome I began to make sentences of paintings—groups of panels that belonged together. And then, one day, I had an epiphany: "The stance of the painting is the profile." It was like a riddle; I wasn't sure what it meant, but I knew it was important.
SS Could you trace it to anything?
RHQ It seemed to refer to the viewer's movement past a painting. I began to think of paintings as objects that you passed by—as things that you saw not just head-on and isolated, but from the side, with your peripheral vision, and in the context of other paintings.
SS Since the early '90s you've been making architectural models of rooms, placing small paintings in them and photographing the arrangements.
RHQ When I returned to New York from Rome, I began thinking about how perspective might be brought back into abstract painting after its relative banishment by the modernists. In the process, I built a shallow box, put a mirror in it and photographed it with a Polaroid camera.
SS You still make paintings based on Polaroid images. When they're installed in shows, these paintings have an interesting mirroring effect. Because the architectural model is of the gallery itself, and because the painting in the model is also hanging in the actual gallery, viewers can feel somehow anticipated, or reflected, in the work.
RHQ I was an assistant to Dan Graham in the mid-'90s, and although I wasn't specifically thinking about Dan when I began using that image structure, there is certainly a parallel between these paintings and his time-delay video installations.
SS After starting with the Polaroids, you've regularly used silkscreening to turn photographic source material into painting.
RHQ Silkscreening has given me access



View of the exhibition "iamb, Chapter 12," 2008-09, at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

to content without my having to paint it with a brush. I've found it liberating. And since any medium or form in painting brings its own cast of ghosts, it has allowed me to tap into a genealogy of painters who have dealt with photography—Rauschenberg, Warhol, Polke and Richter among them. Silkscreening abstracts the photograph, materializes it and snaps attention back to the picture plane.

SS By the end of the '90s, your idea of organizing paintings into sentences expanded, and sentences became chapters—longer, more complex series of paintings. How did that come about?

RHQ I'd decided that whenever I had shows I would make paintings that related not just to one another but to the exhibition site as well. Then in 2001—I'd just turned 40—I was invited to do a show at the Queens Museum, and another in conjunction with it at Spencer Brownstone gallery in SoHo. I decided to make 40 paintings for each show, all of them linked. Conceived together, the two shows became "The Sun, Chapter 1."

The Queens Museum occupies the only surviving building from the 1939-40 World's Fair. Tragically, my grandfather Marcus Quaytman and

"MY PARENTS WERE TWO OF THE MOST OPPOSITE PEOPLE YOU COULD IMAGINE. AS A RESULT, I DEVELOPED A KIND OF LENTICULAR PERSPECTIVE—I WAS ABLE TO SHIFT BETWEEN THEIR POINTS OF VIEW."

his father-in-law were killed in 1940 by a Long Island Rail Road train as they drove home from the World's Fair. By coincidence, just before the Queens Museum show, I'd been in Poland to participate in an exhibition, and had taken a one-day trip by train to Lodz, where my grandfather Marcus had come from. I'd taken lots of photographs of the train ride, and decided to use them for "Chapter 1," as a way of tying these histories together. The painted panels, which were all the same size, were installed at the Queens Museum in a long line as though they were film stills, or the cars of a train.

SS Almost every chapter includes a small, mostly black painting. You call these "captions," and paint them by hand. Frequently they depict arrows.

RHQ I tend to work on one or two small caption paintings as I begin a new chapter. Painting them helps me think less analytically, and including them in exhibitions punctuates the other paintings the way a comma or period might punctuate a sentence. The arrows set up a contradiction, moving viewers along and drawing them in at the same time.

SS The next series, "Lodz Poem, Chapter 2," was made for the 2004 Lodz Biennial. It focused on the work of two Polish early modernist artists, Katarzyna Kobro and Wladyslaw Strzeminski.

RHQ I'd discovered Kobro's work when I was preparing for that earlier show in Poland. In the '20s she was making constructivist sculpture that could have been made in the '60s or '70s. I've often copied artwork as a way to understand it, so I rebuilt one of her painted steel sculptures and took many photographs of it. Some of the images became paintings.

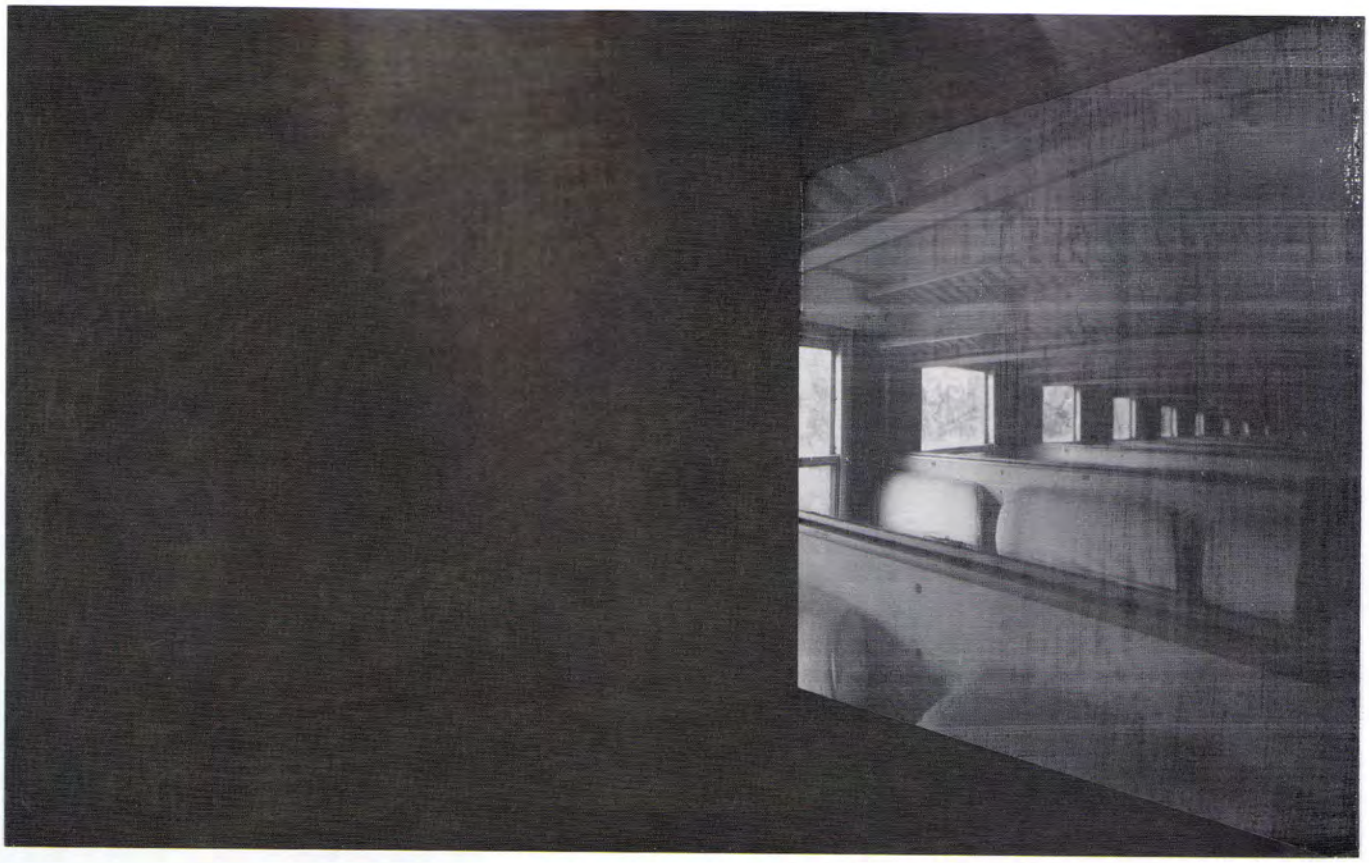
For "Chapter 2," I interwove paintings related to Kobro's sculpture with caption paintings referring to Strzeminski's drawings of Jews in the Lodz ghetto. Although he himself was not Jewish, many of his best students were, and in his shaky, figurative drawings the world appears to be melting and falling apart. My paintings transposed Strzeminski's wobbliness to the outline of a white rectangle on a black ground. I suppose they were a way to acknowledge, in an exhibition in Poland, the events of World War II.

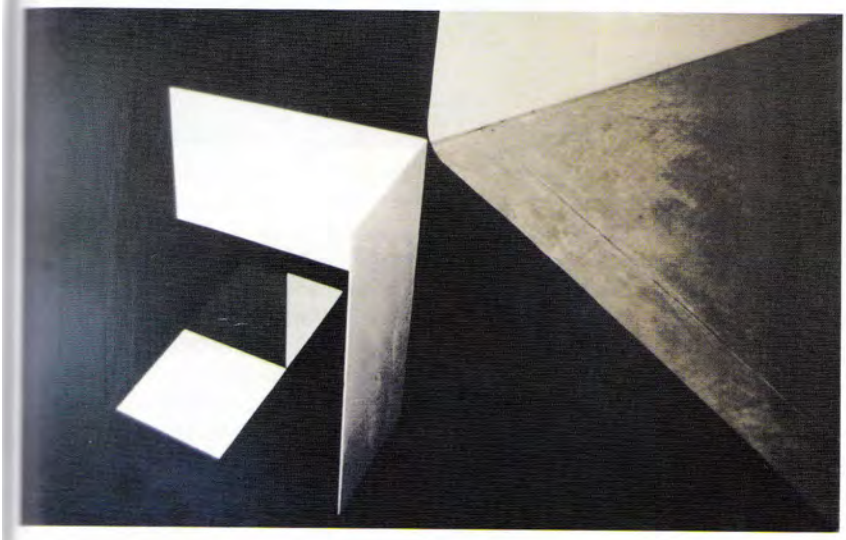
SS Was Strzeminski the inspiration for your early Op paintings, which were also part of "Chapter 2"?

RHQ I'd already been making pattern-based paintings, but Strzeminski's interest, in the '30s, in opticality and the afterimage inspired me. Unlike '60s Op, my pattern paintings do not convey a future of freedom and fun, but call attention—as Strzeminski's work did—to vision itself.

SS From 2005 through 2008 you were the director of Orchard. How did Orchard get started?

RHQ Orchard was a direct response to the reelection of George W. Bush and to the strong feeling, among the people I knew, that there was a real disconnect between the booming art market and the political disaster





Above, *The Sun, Chapter 1*, 2001, silkscreen, oil on wood, 20 by 32⅜ inches.

Opposite, *The Sun, Chapter 1*, 2001, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 20 by 32⅜ inches.

Left, *Kobro Spatial Composition #2 (1928)*, 2000, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 19⅝ by 31⅞ inches.

we were in. Another impetus was the death in 2003 of Colin de Land, who'd run the gallery American Fine Arts. Though I hadn't shown there, many of my friends had, and we all felt its loss. So we decided to open our own gallery, and to run it as a collective. I'd been without gallery representation since 2001, so I was happy to be engaging with people and ideas, and showing my work in a context that I'd chosen.

SS In keeping with the requirements of your system, you used Orchard itself as subject matter for your paintings.

RHQ Right. I made quite a few Orchard-related paintings. I made two paintings for a show there called "Paintings without Painters and Painters without Paintings." One was based on a photograph of a slide-projector piece that Dan Graham had made for the gallery, and the other was a painting of the artist Andrea Fraser looking at a Louise Lawler photograph of an Andy Warhol painting of a woman.

SS In that painting [*Ark, Chapter 10 (Christian Philipp Müller's picture of Andrea Fraser Performing* May I Help You *at Orchard in front of Louise Lawler's Picture of an Andy Warhol Painting behind a Tony Smith Sculpture),* 2005] we look at the back of Andrea's head as she looks at Louise's picture, and so on, and the woman in the Warhol looks back at us. It's a painted *mise-en-abyme*, and it functions as an emblem of your practice. For the viewer, the deep

Left, *Ark, Chapter 10 (Christian Philipp Müller's picture of Andrea Fraser Performing* May I Help You *at Orchard in front of Louise Lawler's Picture of an Andy Warhol Painting behind a Tony Smith Sculpture)*, 2005, silkscreen on wood, 20 inches square.

Right, *iamb, Chapter 12*, 2008, oil, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 20 by 32⅜ inches.

Below, *iamb, Chapter 12 (blind smile)*, 2008, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 20 inches square.

"THE PATTERN I USED FOR THE OP-LIKE PAINTINGS IS CALLED A SCINTILLATING GRID, WHICH WAS INVENTED TO SHOW THE BLIND SPOT AT THE CENTER OF VISUAL PERCEPTION."

satisfaction of your work, aside from its visual interest, is to be found in parsing its references. What may at first seem obscure, inside-the-art-world allusions unfold into more expansive narratives.

RHQ I want to make paintings that can be read on their own terms, without footnotes. But if, as a viewer, you persist in asking questions, you'll find answers.

SS For "Ark, Chapter 10," which was the three-person show you organized at the end of your time at Orchard, you made paintings that related to Orchard's history, and displayed several of them on storage racks similar to ones you have here in your studio. The display of paintings became a sculpture [*From One O to Another*].

RHQ I felt I needed to acknowledge—within the structure of the pieces themselves—the fact that I would be showing my own works, becoming, in effect, my own dealer. The storage racks, like the racks in a typical gallery's back room, enabled visitors to pull out the paintings the way a dealer might, when showing them to prospective clients.

SS The racks addressed the nightmare, which perhaps all artists have had, that their work will never be seen.

RHQ Making the storage-rack pieces reminded me of the trauma of putting my stepfather's and father's works in storage after they died. Those experiences and the questions they raised—about artists' estates, and about the life of the work itself once the artist has gone—left a big impression on me.

SS In 2008, you made a book, *Allegorical Decoys*, whose centerpiece is an essay you wrote about the development of your work. Having been your own dealer, you became, in effect, your own historian and publisher.

RHQ I realized instinctively that, in some sense, the paintings wouldn't exist unless they were written about and collected. Otherwise, they would be like trees falling in the forest with nobody there to hear them. Writing that essay was an opportunity not just to reflect on my practice, but to locate my work within a larger critical conversation on my own terms.

SS Also in 2008, you used two exhibitions—a solo at Miguel Abreu in New York, and a two-person show, with Josef Strau, at Vilma Gold in London—as the basis for "iamb, Chapter 12."

RHQ When I discovered the shows would happen concurrently, two ideas came to mind. The first was about light, because Josef often uses lamps in his work. Light, looking and being blinded all seemed good metaphors for painting. The second was about illustration. Josef and I had earlier talked about the idea of painting as illustration, and about how freeing it can be to operate in a supposedly degraded space. I decided to use the image of a print I'd

bought years ago with my father, of a scene from Milton's *Paradise Lost* by the 19th-century English artist John Martin. Then I began reading *Paradise Lost*—which is in iambic pentameter—and realized that the sound of the word iamb made it seem right for the title. I love words that have more than one meaning or association.

SS Vision is at the heart of "Chapter 12."

RHQ The pattern I used for the Op-like paintings is called a scintillating grid, which was invented to show the blind spot at the center of visual perception. When you focus on it, your peripheral vision goes haywire.

SS The fact that "scintillating" means sparkling also seems to refer to the several paintings you coated in diamond dust.

RHQ Diamond dust introduces a different kind of optical experience. Unlike an Op pattern, which both blinds and repels vision, diamond dust blinds and attracts vision. And the combination of the two can create an interesting tension.

SS Dan Graham appears as a model in "Chapter 12." In an image based on a photograph, we see him from the waist up and naked, in front of a scintillating grid painting in your studio, his eyes turned into the bright light of a lamp [*iamb, Chapter 12 (blind smile)*, 2008].

RHQ I sometimes use other artists—or people in my life—as models, posing them in front of my own paintings to acknowledge their presence in my thinking and in my work. But a viewer doesn't need to know who Dan Graham is to appreciate the symbol of an older man staring into the light like a blind visionary.

SS At the Whitney, you've installed "Distracting Distance, Chapter 16" in a north-facing room centered on one of Marcel Breuer's trapezoidal windows.

RHQ "Chapter 16" is about the relationship of a window motif to the idea of distance. I wanted to work with one of Breuer's windows because, for years, I've used that same shape in my paintings to refer to perspective. As I looked into the history of the Whitney, I discovered that Breuer hadn't wanted windows in the first place—he thought air conditioning and electric light had rendered them obsolete. I'm sure he had the Guggenheim's top-heavy, windowless form in mind.

As I was considering the window, my mind kept returning to one of the more iconic paintings in the Whitney's collection, *A Woman in the Sun*, painted by Edward Hopper in 1961, the year I was born. I love how empowered that nude is; she's like a film noir character. Realizing that my friend the artist K8 Hardy looks like the woman in the painting, I asked her if she would agree to model nude in the Whitney. She agreed immediately, saying she had lots of "nuditude."

SS She shows up in two of the paintings. In them, you reimagine the Hopper, locating K8 not in a bedroom but in the very room at the Whitney where the viewer stands, with the window in the painting echoing the window on the wall.

RHQ And as in Hopper's painting, K8 stands in profile, while the viewer passes by. My idea was to set up a series of reflections between the viewer, the space and history of the Whitney, and American painting.

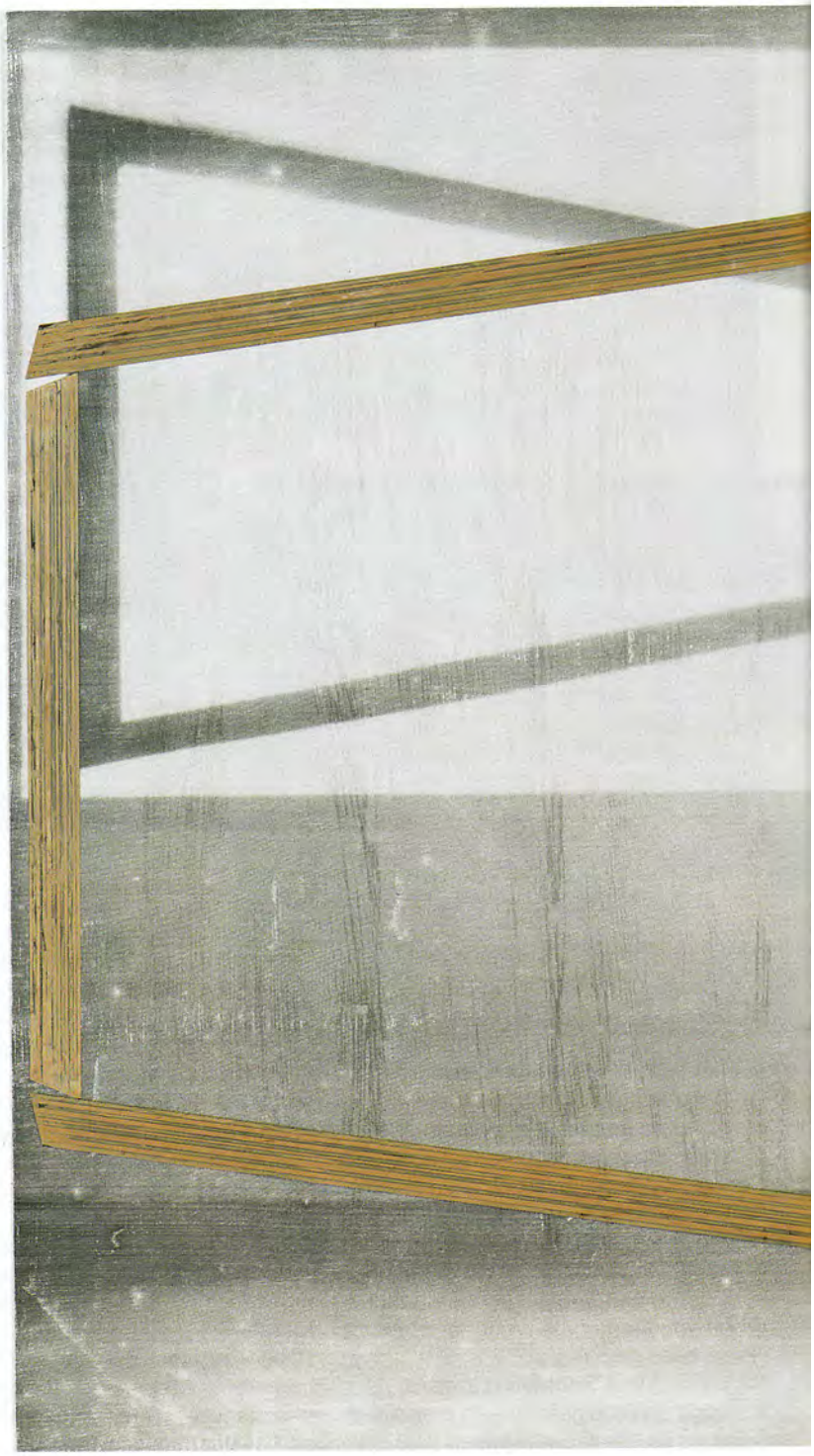
SS How does the motif of the window relate to the Op paintings?

RHQ I wanted to create a sense of light that seemed colorless. I discovered that the RGB color model used for TV and computer screens—today's windows onto other spaces—could be used to make

paintings that would read from afar as light, or as a glowing grayness. When you approach these paintings, or look at them obliquely, their colorlessness shifts to red, green or blue, depending on your angle and the light in the room.

SS The title for "Distracting Distance, Chapter 16" is a variant of a phrase by the poet Osip Mandelstam. Many of your titles intimate a poetic approach to painting.

RHQ I find it helpful to think about painting as if it were poetry, and to focus on a given painting's grammar and syntax, even on its vocabulary. In reading a poem, you notice particular words, and how each is not just that one word, but contains other words as well. The same is true for a painting.



"'CHAPTER 16' IS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF A WINDOW MOTIF TO THE IDEA OF DISTANCE. FOR YEARS, I'VE USED THE SHAPE OF BREUER'S WINDOWS IN MY PAINTINGS TO REFER TO PERSPECTIVE."

I've always found it helpful to take other media and transpose their forms and ideas to painting. Early on, when I was feeling kind of lost as a painter, I'd read about other kinds of art-making—sculpture, video or conceptual art—and almost unconsciously twist the thinking around to make it be about painting.

SS It seems like you do a lot of reading. What is your work process like?

RHQ Much of my studio time is spent as if I were a writer: reading, thinking, looking at pictures, making notes. I also spend a long time on the little caption paintings, but once I've decided what to do, everything else happens quite rapidly.

SS Your painting system is really a set of rules. Why are rules so important?

RHQ They've been a way to confront what seemed problematic to me about painting—the overbearing authority of its long history, its exhaustion, its capitulation to capital and power. Taking color, dimension, medium, subject matter, even the choice to be a painter—things that might otherwise seem arbitrary—and applying rules to them has given me at least the illusion that I'm free to make something of my own. My rules are inventions—and they continue to generate new possibilities.

SS Do you know what you'll do for SFMOMA?

RHQ Not yet, but I've been reading about the San Francisco poet Jack Spicer. I may not use anything related to him, but his approach to writing poems appeals to me. Spicer wrote them in sequences, believing that the single poem was like a one-night stand. His focus was on the book, not the poem, which exactly parallels my relationship to painting.

SS And after SFMOMA, you'll be

Distracting Distance, Chapter 16, 2010, silkscreen, gesso on wood, 24¾ by 40 inches.

having a survey exhibition at the Neuberger.

RHQ I am interested in how that kind of overview will fit into the architecture of my ongoing project. I'm also working on a companion volume to *Allegorical Decoys*, featuring images of every painting from the first 17 chapters.

SS Is it too obvious to suppose that these chapters will one day add up to a book? What exactly would such a book be?

RHQ The book may be like a story or a long poem, but I don't have a conclusion in mind. My plan is to go on painting with this system for the rest of my life—and my hope is that I won't ever find out how it ends. ○

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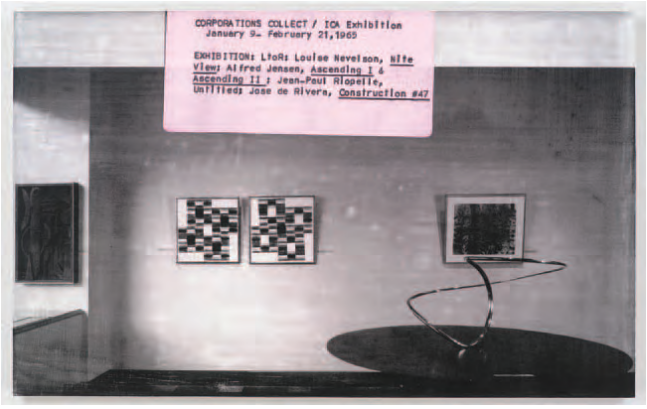
ARTFORUM

From left: **R. H. Quaytman, *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (ICA archive 3, Art for U.S. Embassies)*, 2009**, oil, silk screen, gesso on wood, 32⅜ x 20". **R. H. Quaytman, *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (ICA archive 2, Art for U.S. Embassies)*, 2009**, oil, silk screen, gesso on wood, 32⅜ x 20". **R. H. Quaytman, *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (ICA archive 5, Art for Corporations)*, 2009**, silk screen, gesso on wood, 32⅜ x 20".



R. H. Quaytman

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON

Paul Galvez

TWO SILK-SCREEN PAINTINGS, which recently hung together in a corner at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, could stand as an emblem for the painting practice of New York–based artist R. H. Quaytman. Both show the same archival photograph of a 1966 ICA exhibition, "Art for U.S. Embassies." Across the upper half of each, another photograph is overlaid, of a white wall on whose left side hangs an Op-art chevron painting, Terri Priest's *Organic Interaction #107*, 1965, which was on view in the original exhibition. So an image of an abstract painting sits on a monochromatic picture plane that sits on a photograph that sits on a panel. This cross section of layers already yields much: a nod to the optical but also mechanical nature of abstract painting; archival traces of the ICA's history; and the déjà vu of seeing one's experience of the gallery folded into the work itself.

But the two corner panels are not exactly identical. One is the mirror image of the other. As such, they are the same *and* different. Or, better, we are made aware of the slightest differences because the two are almost, but not quite, the same. So one cannot really say that this single work or any other allegorizes the whole. I think that Quaytman, the former director of Orchard gallery in New York, aims to defeat such moments of tidy summary, the better to prevent any master term or template, just as a mirror reflection inverts an original reality or splits it into two.

Quaytman has for years been creating installations of painted panels that she terms "chapters." The mirror-image works at the ICA were part of her fifteenth such installation—"Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15"—which also happened to be the fifteenth exhibition in the ICA's Momentum series. It *also* happened to overlap with Quaytman's sixteenth installation, "Distracting Distance, Chapter 16," at the Whitney Biennial in New York. I saw Chapter 16 before Chapter 15. But reading out of order is largely beside the point. Quaytman's chapters are really inflections of a single word, *painting*, and with great clarity she explores all its possible grammatical extensions and etymological roots, without adhering to any simple sequential progression. This takes her work into territory that is not necessarily pictorial, even though that is where it starts.

In Boston, the rules Quaytman followed were simple. Her paintings were oil or silk screen (or both) on gessoed wood panel. The panels came in six sizes, all based on the golden ratio. Each had prominently beveled edges on all sides. At times the panels appeared to float off the wall. As for subject matter, the range was also restricted. One category comprised abstract compositions of thin parallel lines; these were slightly offset or colored to create optical effects. The silk screens, many of which were abstractions, also came in two other types: photographs of other works or of the galleries they had occupied; and images related to the history of the museum.

But within these rules lay room for surprising variation. The ICA installation opened with a silk-screened reproduction of a 1948 manifesto announcing the conversion of the old Institute of Modern Art into one of "contemporary" art. Inside the main gallery were photo silk screens of corporate and ambassadorial collections curated by the ICA. A storage rack built into the side of the gallery entrance contained panels painted with views of a sculpture by David von Schlegell, Quaytman's stepfather, located a ten-minute walk away from the ICA's waterfront building.

The work's formal austerity and single-mindedness all but demanded a guiding principle or idea for viewers to make sense of it. Judging from audience reactions, however, many were flummoxed in their quest. The references in "Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15" to contexts past and present were no less enigmatic. They evoked institutional memory, but only obliquely. In fact, it is unlikely that visitors were aware that the precise pink color used in many of the paintings was taken from the Pantone shade of the ICA's Momentum series logo.

Very rarely did two panels in the same mode stand next to each other, and each panel gave rise to multiple modulations. An arrow painting at the entrance was at least three things simultaneously: a quasi-abstract form, a graphic directive to look at the adjacent panel, and source material for a painting in the next room. For every Op-art-like painting there was one of greasy or sandpaper-like textures or a photo-based one. The effect was to temper evanescent, visual play with things concrete and gritty.

Much work done in a conceptual vein—including so-called conceptual painting—aims at self-definition, at tautology. Yet Quaytman's chapters move in the opposite direction. They deny resolution. That is why they frustrate. But that is also the source of their affective power. What separates her work from the ad hoc quality of much recent art is its precise, unrelenting manner. No point is made, no argument delivered, without being deliberately deflected in a myriad of ways and all at once.

> Quaytman's work prevents any master term or template, just as a mirror reflection inverts an original reality or splits it into two.

Painting that thinks about its own discursive and institutional conditions is often called self-reflexive; it wants to look at itself in order to find "painting as such." Looking into Quaytman's mirror, however, we do not see *painting as such*. On the contrary, we see that words *such as painting* are not only reversed but already split: For Quaytman, *painting* is not simply an abstract designation but a noun indicating an object of visual scrutiny and a verb indicating an occasion to act. Her work thus reveals some of the possible inflections interior to all forms of self-reflection. It situates us within, not in front of, the mirror of our own multiple selves. □

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