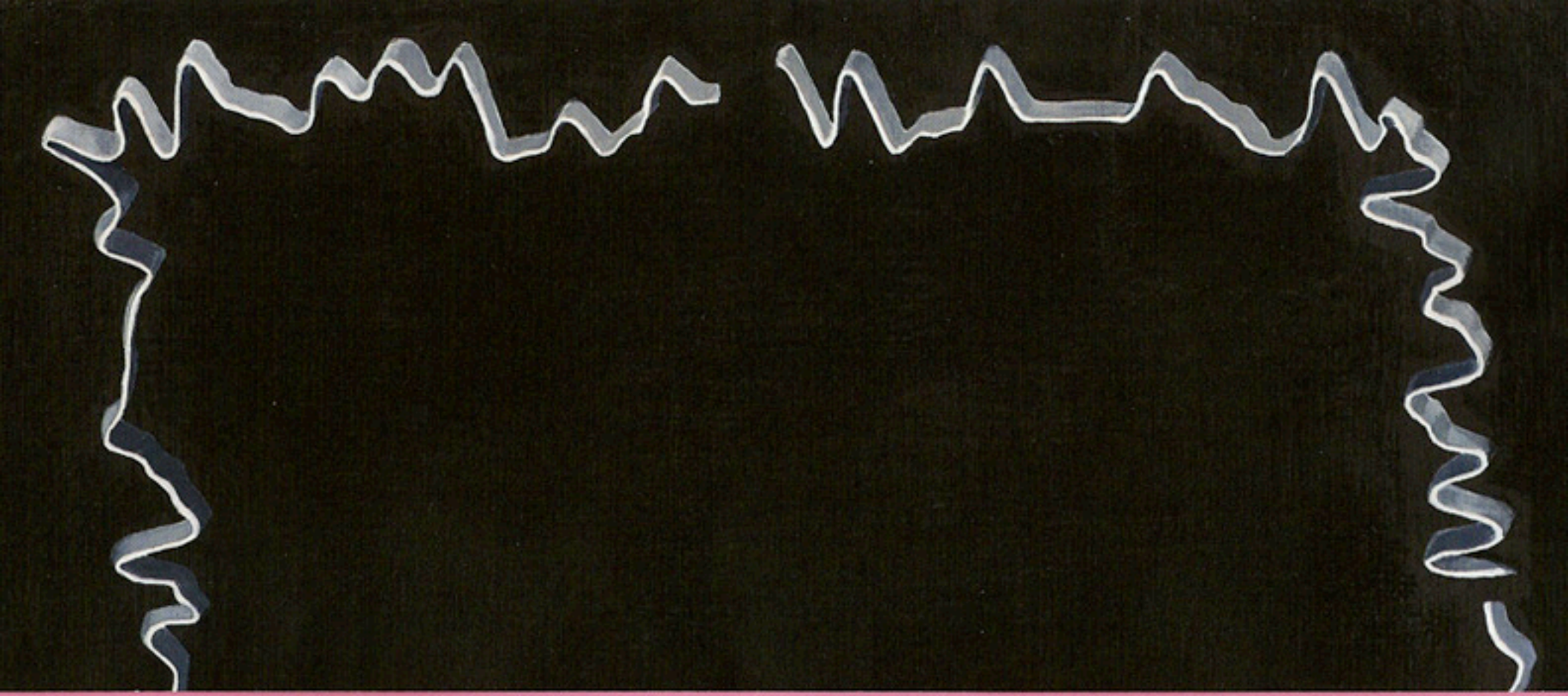


R.H. QUAYTMAN

MOMENTUM 15

WORKS ON VIEW

Selections from *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15*

1–4 32 3/8 x 52 3/8 inches
5–12 40 x 24 ¾ inches
13–23 32 3/8 x 20 inches
24–26 20 x 20 inches
27–29 12 3/8 x 20 inches
30 12 3/8 x 12 3/8 inches

All works dated 2009 and titled *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15* with title annotations as follows. All works made on gesso on wood with specific medium noted here. Unless otherwise noted, works and reproductions are courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo credit: Jeffrey Strurges and John Berens. Original ICA archive photographs taken by: 7. Crosby of Boston, 1941; 13 and 14, John N. Richards for the Department of State, 1966; 19. Bill Wasserman, 1966; and 20. Barney Burnstein, 1965.

1

for The Kitchen [black & white gradation with edges] Oil, silkscreen

2

[wide black & white arrow screen] Silkscreen

3

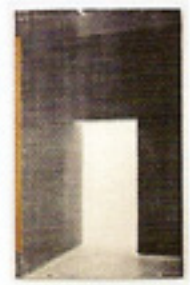
[tight black & white arrow screen with edge] Oil, silkscreen

4

[diagonal pink] Silkscreen

5

[tight black & white arrow screen with edge] Oil, silkscreen

6

[doorway with edge] Oil, silkscreen

7

(ICA archive 1) Silkscreen

8

(ICA Manifesto) Oil

9

[vertical pink screen] Oil, silkscreen

10

[diagonal blue screen with arrow] Oil, silkscreen

11

(DvS 1 structure with edge) Oil, silkscreen

12

(DvS 2) Silkscreen

13

(ICA archive 2, Art for U.S. Embassies) Oil, silkscreen

14

(ICA archive 3, Art for U.S. Embassies), Oil, silkscreen

15

(Modern Artists in America) Silkscreen

16

[white diamond dust arrow pattern] Diamond dust, silkscreen

17

[vertical pink gradation] Silkscreen

18

[black & white arrow screen with edge] Oil, silkscreen

19

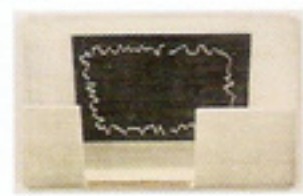
(ICA archive 4, Art for U.S. Embassies) Silkscreen

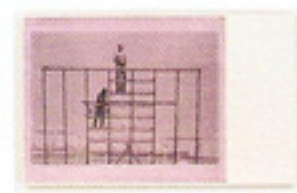
20

(ICA archive 5, Art for Corporations) Silkscreen

21

[pink arrow screen] Oil, silkscreen

22

[jagged edge painting in model] Oil, silkscreen

23

(DvS 3, pink) Silkscreen

24

(DvS 4) Silkscreen

25

(DvS 5) Silkscreen

26

[arrow painting in model] Oil, silkscreen

27

(DvS 6) Silkscreen

28

(jagged rectangle caption) Oil on wood

29

(ICA caption) Oil on wood

30

(black arrow) Oil on wood

R.H. QUAYTMAN

15

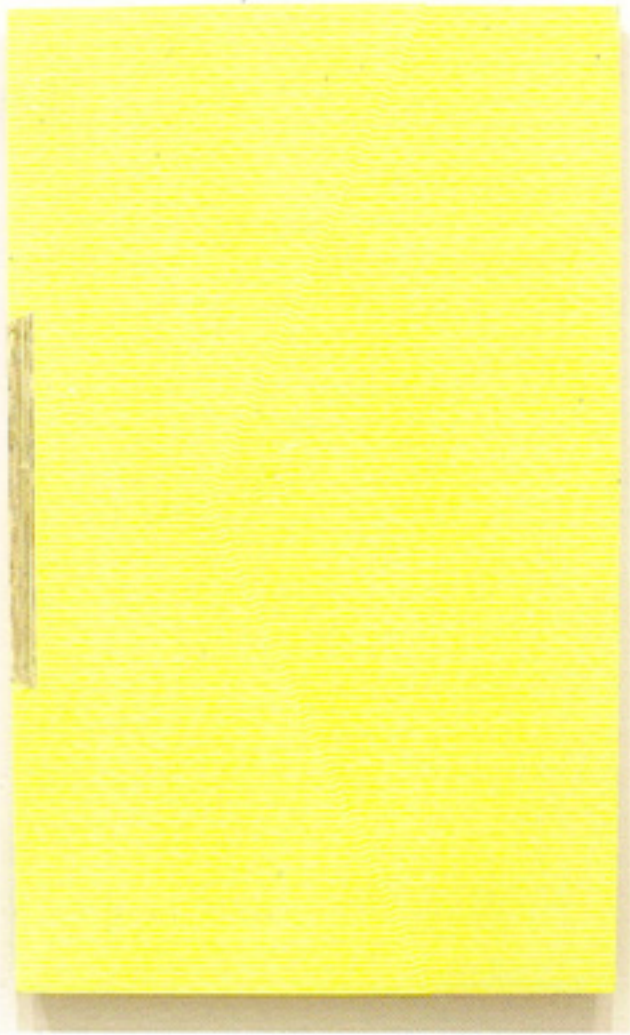
FROM THE CURATOR

Learning to See Ghosts (With an Exhibition Guide)

I have had the uncanny feeling that R.H. Quaytman's paintings visually whisper to me, and to each other: "Look here!" "Wait, not there. Over *here*..." Their voices seem to ricochet through gaps of time or distance, across the painting surfaces, around the room, before my eyes, and between my ears. Images repeat. Abstract patterns reverberate. References become refrains that elude certain meaning. Quaytman records these individually, but also installs the paintings in unfolding sequences that play their collective B-sides backwards, as if to release a secret message in code.

When looking, I get a different message from across the room than when up close. Some paintings announce, "I am an arrow," but when I approach, they show themselves to be a tight chorus of stripes. At times I feel the Doppler effect, a distinct change in pitch when I am oncoming versus passing by. What I see head on may appear to recede at an angle, while what seems to tilt away is actually recorded head on. My question, "What is that brown beveled shape?" is answered by a nearby painting panel as I glance at its wooden edge from the side: "It's me." Many of Quaytman's works include reproductions of her nearby paintings, or the projects and exhibitions of others. More than archives, they are almost vessels or repositories for other artworks' second lives. At their scale, they have the aspect of headstones that record for posterity, "Here lies this piece of art. R.I.P."

Yet "Rest In Peace" is what Quaytman's paintings cannot seem to do. Instead of letting ghosts lie quietly, they reopen closed cases or reanimate anonymous figures eclipsed by history. As they recall subjects we cannot readily know, they also haunt us with imagery that is specific yet obscured, crisp yet blurred, entire but part of an incomplete whole. To hear Quaytman's paintings speak is to hear ghosts restless with the fact that no story can be complete. While they slip in and out of view, we know there is always more to uncover, research, and relate.



31 *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15* [yellow arrow op with edge], 2009. Oil, silkscreen, gesso on wood. 32 3/8 x 20 inches

Quaytman often creates paintings to be installed in series and read "like words in a sentence, each painting resonating with the next" (see artist statement on reverse). Since 2000, the work has been developed and exhibited as sequentially numbered and titled chapters: *The Sun, Chapter 1* (2001), *Łódź Poem, Chapter 2* (2004), *Optima, Chapter 3* (2004), *Loft, Chapter 4* (2005)...*Denial is a River, Chapter 7* (2006)...and *Quire, Chapter 14* (2009). This structure suggests a broader ongoing narrative in which the underlying stories of each painting overlap and interconnect.

Each exhibition inspires Quaytman to research and construct a "homemade history," drawing new links between her work, the exhibition space where it is seen, and other artists' works from past and present contexts. It is a process that both acknowledges and anticipates how making art and making a place for one's art—specifically in the history-laden practice of painting—involves both chasing, and chasing *away*, ghosts of influence.

Engaging painting traditions from the Renaissance through 20th-century Modernism, Quaytman's works reanimate how we view and define paintings today. Their beveled plywood panels are brushed and sanded with layers of gesso, a base coat used by painters for centuries to prime surfaces to absorb pigment. These sensual surfaces are made as paintings, but Quaytman does not fill them with scenes in single-point perspective that

above: *The Sun, Chapter 1, Book 1—Fear*, 2001. Oil, silkscreen, gesso on wood. 20 x 32 3/8 inches

right: *iamb, Chapter 12*, 2008. Silkscreen, gesso on wood. 32 3/8 x 20 inches

opposite: *Ark, Chapter 10* (Stuart Sherman Passing By), 2008.
Silkscreen, gesso on wood.
20 x 32 3/8 inches

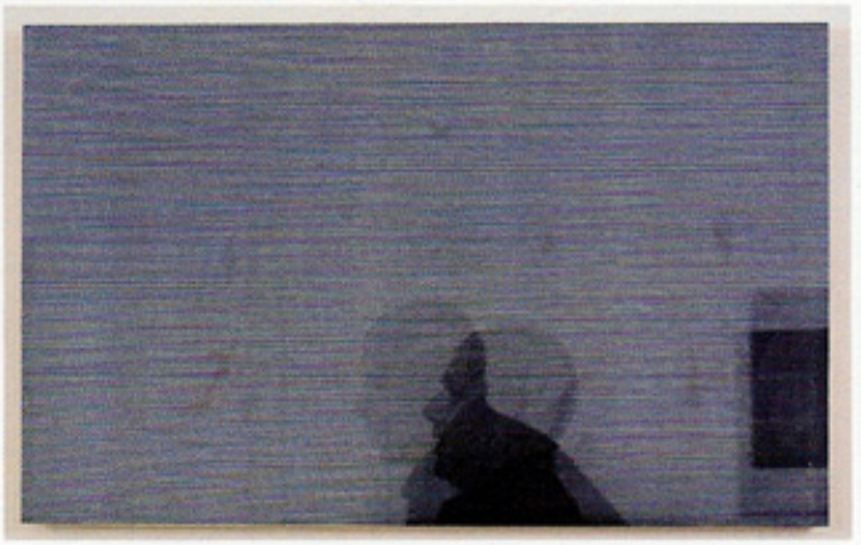
below, top image: From the ICA archive: "Mrs. Hasket Derby of Boston at the Institute of Modern Art exhibition *Plastics 1940*."
Photo: Crosby of Boston, January 13, 1941.

focus our gaze inward. Instead, they reference other visual languages that direct attention outward: signage graphics, book design, print archives, performance stills, architectural models, sculptural installations, computer screens, and digital space.

Quaytman's imagery addresses how vision might be refocused or displaced, whether through hand-painted arrows, streaky silkscreen prints of photographs, or abstract patterns with reverberating optical effects. In some paintings, she uses Spinel Black (the pigment developed for the Stealth bomber to avoid detection), but mixes it with oil in palette-knifed strokes that actively flicker light. Like marquees, Quaytman considers them "captions" that announce other paintings. She may coat other surfaces with crushed-glass "diamond dust" to veil an image with glare, or fool the eye with *trompe l'oeil* renderings of the sides of the painting panels, as if stored away, out of view. The result is an uncanny tension between here and elsewhere, the painting's physical presence as a body also occupied by the spirit of another function.

Quaytman has discussed her works in poetic terms of *Allegorical Decoys*. Such a term paradoxically suggests her paintings function as intended when *recognized* as decoys with something to say, instead of mistaken for mute stand-ins. Much like poems, they redirect attention away from an original, but do so as allegories or symbols of a fundamental truth. Instead of presuming to be obvious expository statements, they mime or mimic the real to point us to an authentic experience. What they reveal is that the "truth" of an image is hidden in the plain sight of context, which is continually in the making.

The unfolding context addressed in



Quaytman's latest paintings is the site of her first solo museum exhibition, the ICA, and its ongoing history and mission to present and interpret the "contemporary." In her research, she was intrigued by the museum's 1948 decision to change its name from "The Institute of Modern Art" to "The Institute of Contemporary Art" to better connect the American public to the art of its time, and how this was documented in the book *Modern Artists in America* (1951). Within this history, she considered how the Momentum series is branded and sited within the museum's new building to highlight emerging currents of artistic practice today. So, for *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15* (coincidentally number 15 in the Momentum series), Quaytman marks how viewers can be guided to engage with an art that can never be emerging or contemporary forever.

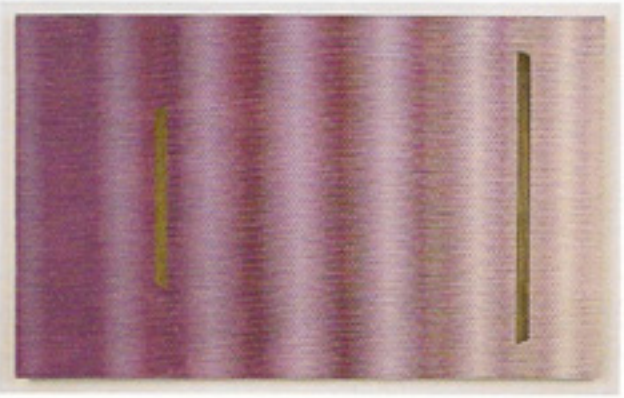
Drawing on ICA exhibition archives, Quaytman highlights images of the 1940s and 60s that document art's ties to industry, corporations, and governmental embassies of the day, and how these feel dated now. She does not show installation views of ICA exhibitions featuring paintings by Harvey Quaytman (her father), or David von Schlegell (her stepfather). Instead, she selects images from her personal archive, including one by poet Susan Howe (her mother) of von Schlegell's sculpture installed on the Boston waterfront, a short distance from the ICA. While von Schlegell's huge steel forms resemble open books, reflective angled planes, and the slotted spines of shelving storage that have directly influenced her own practice, Quaytman presents his work at a remove, letting it recede away from us in a storage place that suggests what happens when history catches up to the contemporary.

Quaytman's installation, the texts in this brochure, the exhibition's tours—all guide us to consider this Momentum show's "contemporary" significance, but also to question it. When the show ends, who or what will be remembered? How will we look back on work that is "of the moment?" While exhibitions are temporary, Quaytman's serial chapters mark their own sense of time. The paintings acknowledge an art history full of ghosts both famous and forgotten, while also anticipating the ever-increasing catalogue of images we consume today. This distinct painting vocabulary reflects and reacts to our visual experience of continual absorbing, editing, archiving, and linking the past with what comes next.

Jen Mergel, *Associate Curator*

FROM THE ARTIST

Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15



9

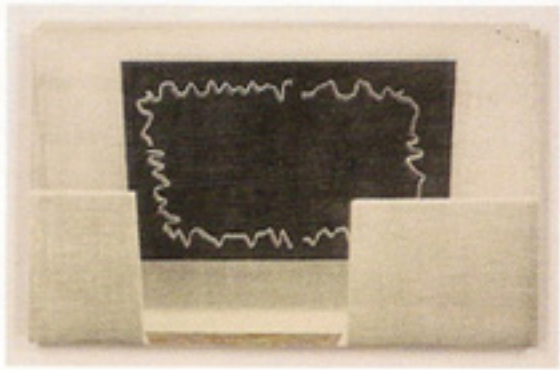
"(Rosa is different from rosarum or rosis but they are only different cases of the same word)" [1]

—Yve-Alain Bois

Each chapter of paintings I make is always influenced by the place the chapter will be shown. For *Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15*, I decided to look into both the history of the ICA and the ways in which the museum explains contemporary art to its public. With these issues in mind, I made a room of paintings which could be followed one to the next like words in a sentence, each painting resonating with the next. In order to do that, I organized my thinking around a three-part schematic: *Painting, Picture,* and *Anterior.*

The first category, *Painting*, focuses on the materiality of the painting itself, its physical dimensions, medium, and color. The second category, *Picture*, is concerned with subject matter depicted in the picture and how it relates to the site of the exhibition, whether through history, architecture or autobiography. The last category, *Anterior*, addresses the viewer in front of and passing by a painting. It also addresses how a painting is situated within a sequence of paintings, how the arrangement or syntax of the exhibition is organized.

Regarding the *Painting* category, there has been a consistent material aspect to all the works since 2001. My paintings are made on wooden panels coming in one of six sizes. They are all based on the golden ratio, which is any dimension multiplied by 1.618, with the exception of the squares. Another consistent aspect is the way I gesso the panels. This is sometimes the only "painted" part of the painting. The gesso is made with a



22

traditional recipe using rabbit skin glue. I like this surface because of the way it interacts with the dot pattern of the silkscreens, and the way it absorbs paint. All the edges of the panels are beveled to emphasize the picture plane. I also use this bevel as the source of a *trompe l'oeil* image of this plywood edge on the picture plane. This repeated motif of the picture's edge on the surface of the painting creates a link in the sequence of paintings.

Color in this exhibition is reduced to black and white, the wood color of the panels themselves, and the particular pink chosen by the ICA for the Momentum signage, Pantone color 237 U.

With regards to the *Picture* category, it is generative to think of each painting as conveying divergent temporal sensations, whether it be a sensation of the past (picture), of the happening now (painting) or of the continuing to happen (anterior). In considering this temporality, I also think about what happens after the exhibition. In this regard it seemed appropriate to begin the experience of looking at these

13

11

paintings by symbolically placing paintings in storage behind the exhibition wall, thereby beginning the exhibition with an image of what happens after its duration. But what painting(s) do I place in storage? About a 10-minute walk up the harbor from the ICA you will find a large outdoor sculpture made of stainless steel called *Untitled Landscape*, built in 1972 by the American sculptor David von Schlegell (1920-1992). The sculpture is situated in front of an apartment building built in 1971 by architects Pei, Cobb, Freed & Partners. The sculpture is sometimes mistaken for giant solar panels or laptops, but like its title suggests, it's much more satisfying to understand it as a landscape. When making paintings, I often think about the picture in the painting as tilting away from the picture plane at an angle similar to the one von Schlegell used for this piece. As with this sculpture, my pictures often reflect the landscape of the exhibition. This sculpture is part of my DNA as an artist. I knew of it because David was my stepfather, and I remember him building it when I was 11. As such, I need to both acknowledge it and tuck it away in the storage rack.

Anterior aspects of the installation are generated by what is before or in front of the painting, be it the viewer, the surrounding paintings, or even the institution where it is seen. 30 Looking at the installation, you will find many such examples, like the particular color pink I use, the title of the chapter, the archival source of the optical patterns, the use of signage in the paintings, and the architecture of the room itself. Each painting is made to implicitly address a viewer both standing before it and passing it by. When the exhibition is over, this anteriority has a more temporal form of legibility, one that is in a continuing dialogue with my past and future chapters.

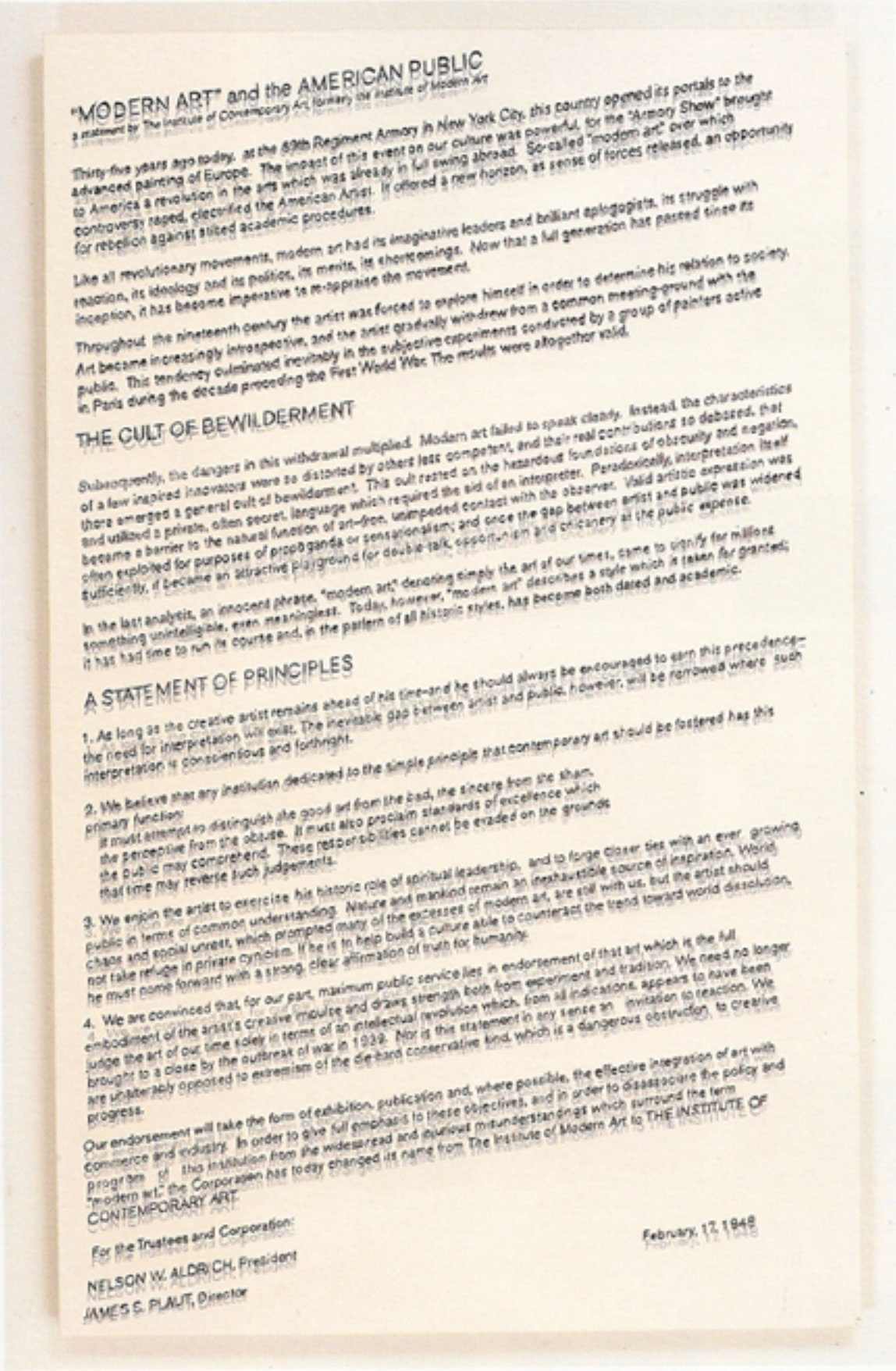
As first mentioned, there is a process of slowly bringing into focus an overall relationship between a chapter and the particular place and audience that this chapter will address. In beginning to think about *Chapter 15* and the history of the ICA, I chose to focus on one essay by the art historian Serge Guilbaut called "The Frightening Freedom of the Brush." In it he describes a pivotal event in the ICA's history involving its 1948 decision to change its name from the Institute of Modern Art to the Institute of Contemporary Art in an attempt to distinguish itself from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and formally replace the word "modern" with the word "contemporary."

"This apparently harmless, one word change sparked, not only in Boston but in the whole country, a critical upheaval that would shake up the American art world for several years." [2]

In an attempt to publicize and validate this change of affiliation and wording, the ICA distributed 10,000 copies of an extremely controversial manifesto. I painted this document as it appeared from my overhead projector as a reminder of the ever-present anxiety produced by the experience of looking at and trusting in contemporary art. I was interested in how little and how much has changed since that time.

In addition to this reading, I looked through the ICA's photographic archive. In it I found many beautiful and interesting pictures, but I chose this small selection because I was able to re-contextualize these particular images into the logic and overall syntax of the exhibition. The photograph-based silkscreened paintings telescope back through time, from the recent past to the 70s, 60s and 40s. Each photograph, no matter its date, must reach back up to the present of this particular constellation of paintings. While each painting is also meant to be seen alone, I use exhibitions to pierce the ego of their singularity, and give them something other than themselves from which to diverge.

R.H. Quaytman



"MODERN ART" and the AMERICAN PUBLIC

a statement by The Institute of Contemporary Art, formerly the Institute of Modern Art

Thirty-five years ago today, at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City, this country opened its portals to the advanced painting of Europe. The impact of this event on our culture was powerful, for the "Armory Show" brought to America a revolution in the arts which was already in full swing abroad. So-called "modern art" over which controversy raged, electrified the American Artist. It offered a new horizon, as sense of forces released, an opportunity for rebellion against stilted academic procedures.

Like all revolutionary movements, modern art had its imaginative leaders and brilliant apologists, its struggle with reaction, its ideology and its politics, its merits, its shortcomings. Now that a full generation has passed since its inception, it has become imperative to re-appraise the movement.

Throughout the nineteenth century the artist was forced to explore himself in order to determine his relation to society. Art became increasingly introspective, and the artist gradually withdrew from a common meeting-ground with the public. This tendency culminated inevitably in the subjective experiments conducted by a group of painters active in Paris during the decade preceding the First World War. The results were altogether valid.

THE CULT OF BEWILDERMENT

Subsequently, the dangers in this withdrawal multiplied. Modern art failed to speak clearly. Instead, the characteristics of a few inspired innovators were so distorted by others less competent, and their real contributions so debased, that there emerged a general cult of bewilderment. This cult rested on the hazardous foundations of obscurity and negation, and utilized a private, often secret, language which required the aid of an interpreter. Paradoxically, interpretation itself became a barrier to the natural function of art—free, unimpeded contact with the observer. Valid artistic expression was often exploited for purposes of propaganda or sensationalism; and once the gap between artist and public was widened sufficiently, it became an attractive playground for double-talk, opportunism and chicanery at the public expense.

In the last analysis, an innocent phrase, "modern art," denoting simply the art of our times, came to signify for millions something unintelligible, even meaningless. Today, however, "modern art" describes a style which is taken for granted; it has had time to run its course and, in the pattern of all historic styles, has become both dated and academic.

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

1. As long as the creative artist remains ahead of his time—and he should always be encouraged to earn this precedence—the need for interpretation will exist. The inevitable gap between artist and public, however, will be narrowed where such interpretation is conscientious and forthright.

2. We believe that any institution dedicated to the simple principle that contemporary art should be fostered has this primary function:
it must attempt to distinguish the good art from the bad, the sincere from the sham,
the perceptive from the obtuse. It must also proclaim standards of excellence which
the public may comprehend. These responsibilities cannot be evaded on the grounds
that time may reverse such judgements.

3. We enjoin the artist to exercise his historic role of spiritual leadership, and to forge closer ties with an ever growing public in terms of common understanding. Nature and mankind remain an inexhaustible source of inspiration. World chaos and social unrest, which prompted many of the excesses of modern art, are still with us, but the artist should not take refuge in private cynicism. If he is to help build a culture able to counteract the trend toward world dissolution, he must come forward with a strong, clear affirmation of truth for humanity.

4. We are convinced that, for our part, maximum public service lies in endorsement of that art which is the full embodiment of the artist's creative impulse and draws strength both from experiment and tradition. We need no longer judge the art of our time solely in terms of an intellectual revolution which, from all indications, appears to have been brought to a close by the outbreak of war in 1939. Nor is this statement in any sense an invitation to reaction. We are unalterably opposed to extremism of the die-hard conservative kind, which is a dangerous obstruction to creative progress.

Our endorsement will take the form of exhibition, publication and, where possible, the effective integration of art with commerce and industry. In order to give full emphasis to these objectives, and in order to disassociate the policy and program of this institution from the widespread and injurious misunderstandings which surround the term "modern art," the Corporation has today changed its name from The Institute of Modern Art to THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART.

For the Trustees and Corporation:

NELSON W. ALDRICH, President

JAMES S. PLAUT, Director

February 17, 1948

1. Yve-Alain Bois, "Martin Barré and the Logic of Deviations," in *Martin Barré* (Cologne: Galerie Daniel Buchholz, with Andrew Kreps Gallery, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Thea Westreich/Ethan Wagner, 2008), 50.

2. Serge Guilbaut, "The Frightening Freedom of the Brush: The Boston Institute of Contemporary Art and Modern Art," in *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston*, edited by David A. Ross (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 58.

MOMENTUM 15

R.H. QUAYTMAN
Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15
NOVEMBER 18, 2009–MARCH 28, 2010

The Momentum series presents artists whose works mark emerging currents in contemporary artistic practice in the U.S. and around the world.

Momentum 15: R.H. Quaytman is made possible through the generous support of the Harpo Foundation.

The Momentum series is sponsored by the Cartin Family, Rebecca and Martin Eisenberg, and Marlene and David Persky.

LUNCHTIME GALLERY TALK

Thursday, November 19, 2009, 12:00 pm

R.H. Quaytman and exhibition curator Jen Mergel discuss Quaytman's work and practice.

FREE with museum admission. Space is limited. Tickets are first-come, first-served and include a 10% discount at the Water Café.

BIOGRAPHY

R.H. Quaytman was born in 1961 in Boston, and lives and works in New York. She received her B.A. in painting from Bard College (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). She was subsequently awarded a 1992 Rome Prize Fellowship. Quaytman was director of Orchard, a cooperative gallery in New York, open from 2005 to 2008, and is currently faculty of Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College. Her book *Allegorical Decoys* was published in 2008, and a comprehensive artist book of her paintings is forthcoming. Recent group exhibitions include: *Constructivismes*, Galerie Almine Rech, Brussels (2009); *Painting Now and Forever*, Matthew Marks and Greene Naftali Galleries, New York (2008); *The Man Whose Shoes Squeaked*, Richard Telles Gallery, Los Angeles (2008); *Denial is a River*, Sculpture Center, New York (2006); *Łódź Biennial*, Łódź, Poland (2004); and *Crossing the Line*, Queens Museum of Art, New York (2001). Recent solo exhibitions were mounted by Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, and Vilma Gold Gallery, London (2008). Solo exhibitions are forthcoming in fall 2010 at the Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York, and the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco. *Momentum 15* is Quaytman's first solo museum exhibition.

RESOURCES

Visit the Poss Family Mediatheque (gallery level) for more info on Quaytman and ICA archive images and texts that inspired her project.

ICA interpretive programs and materials are made possible by significant support from the Carl and Ruth Shapiro Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Nathaniel Saltonstall Arts Fund.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Gregory, Stamatina. "R. H. Quaytman." *Modern Painters 21*, no. 3 (April 2009): 69.

Joselit, David. "Institutional Responsibility: The Short Life of Orchard." *Grey Room 35* (Spring 2009): 108-115.

Lewis, David. "R. H. Quaytman." *Frieze* (January 20, 2009), www.frieze.com/shows/review/rh_quaytman

Nickas, Bob. *Painting Abstraction: New Elements In Abstract Painting*. (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2009), 316-319.

www.orchard47.org

Quaytman, R. H. *Allegorical Decoys*. Gent, Belgium: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2008.

Smith, Roberta. "R. H. Quaytman: chapter 12: iamb." *New York Times*, January 23, 2009: C35

Stillman, Nick. "R. H. Quaytman." *Artforum 47*, no. 8 (April 2009): 189-190.

cover: Exhibition Guide, Chapter 15 (jagged rectangle caption) (detail), Oil on wood, 20 x 12 3/8 in.

ICA
THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART/BOSTON
100 Northern Avenue, Boston
www.icaboston.org