

It's Not Made by Great Men

The traveling exhibition "High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975" recovers a lost artistic moment in all its diversity and experimentalism.

BY RAPHAEL RUBINSTEIN

History, runs an old cliché, is written by the victors. This is as true in art history as it is in geopolitics. At any given moment, the walls of major museums, the covers of glossy art magazines and the pages of standard textbooks are filled with works by the most acclaimed artists of the time, while those whom fame has eluded are generally nowhere to be seen. But it's also a historical fact that no victory is forever: critical reputations fluctuate, empires rise and fall, the desert sands erode Ozymandias's statue. We can therefore be certain that some—if not most—of the artists who are today enshrined at MOMA or on the covers of *Art in America*, *Artforum* and *Frieze* will eventually be consigned to deep storage and market oblivion, their places taken by other now unappreciated or as yet unborn figures.

That victory is fleeting and artistic canons subject to drastic revision seem such obvious facts as to hardly need stating, but for some time the deciders of the art world have appeared to feel that their authority is both eternal and infallible. There's been an assumption on their part, usually unspoken but detectable in the total assurance with which art institutions and markets function, that no deserving artist, living or dead, is now being overlooked. (The correlative is that every currently celebrated artist is one for the ages.) This sense of infallibility isn't exactly new. In an essay from the mid-1980s (perhaps the decade when this attitude began to take hold), Arthur C. Danto identified something he called "Glimcher's Theorem."<sup>1</sup> Named for famed art dealer Arne Glimcher, it holds that there are no unrecognized artists; that all deserving work receives attention; that the market always gets it right. Another factor that reinforces the long-term confidence of today's tastemakers is the enormous level of investment—financial, social and intellectual—in the work of the most successful artists. When so many people and institutions have so much at stake, when capital and



Ralph Humphrey: *Untitled*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 56½ by 134¼ inches. Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

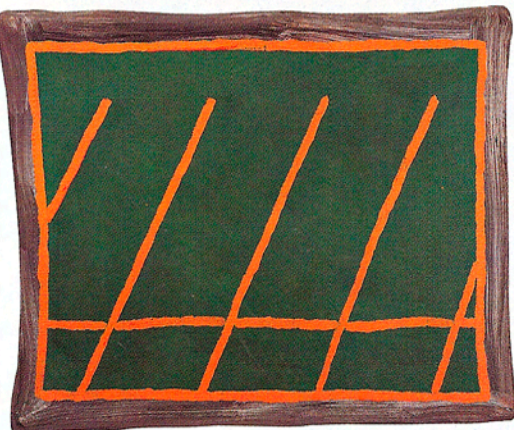
contemporary art are so deeply intertwined, it seems that nothing short of some unimaginably total artistic revolution, or a catastrophic global recession, could upset the status quo.

These thoughts are occasioned by the traveling exhibition "High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975," which features many artists not included in the current canon and, indeed, examines a moment that has been largely passed over by museums, scholars and the current crop of collectors. Curated by art critic and Hunter College professor Katy Siegel, the show looks back at a period when both abstract painting and New York City were struggling to survive. Today, the city is thriving, though some might say only in an upscale, suburbanized state that has little to do with its legendary past. Others might make a similar observation about abstraction. Certainly, the paintings in "High Times, Hard Times" issued from a milieu that is practically unrecognizable when seen from the current New York art-world perspective—a downtown Manhattan in which there were far fewer galleries to show in, little money to be made, great numbers of cheap lofts to rent and, perhaps strangest of all, a sense of shared mission among artists.

Unless viewers are old enough and lucky enough to have frequented New York galleries in the 1970s or happen to enjoy perusing vintage art magazines, a visit to "High Times, Hard Times" will be a venture into unknown territory. Although the show features a number of well-known figures such as Mary Heilmann, Lynda Benglis and Dorothea Rockburne, their work in the show tends to be quite different from their canonical art. Even less familiar are paintings by the likes of Roy Colmer, Guy Goodwin, Cesar Paternosto, Kenneth Showell and Peter Young, intriguing artists whose work has been hard to see in recent decades. In the words of artist David Reed, who served as Siegel's advisor for the show, much of the work in "High Times, Hard Times" has been

"forgotten except by other painters."<sup>2</sup> (And, one might add, the courageous New York dealer Mitchell Albus, whose modest gallery has been the sole outlet for a number of these artists since the early 1990s.) One reason that so many of these paintings have been forgotten is that they were created very much against the grain, in a period when the medium of painting was deemed by many artists and critics to have reached its conclusion, to have been surpassed by other art forms, to have died.

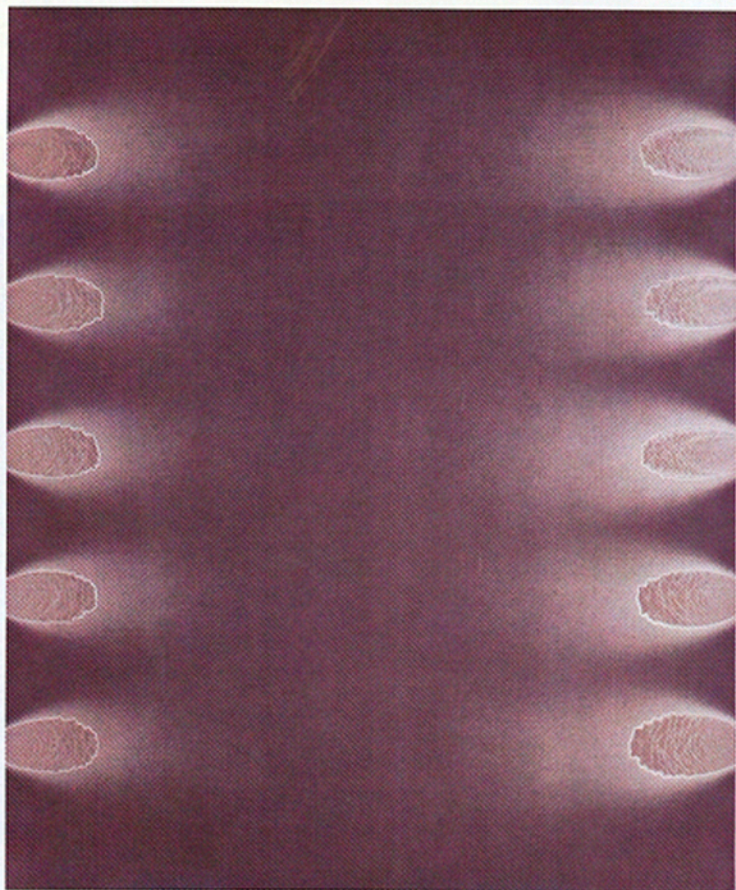
For the New York venue—the National Academy Museum, in an early 20th century, six-story mansion on Fifth Avenue that is about as far from a white box as it is possible to get—Siegel and Reed divided the exhibition into thematic groupings that also sketched a chronology. While much of the work in the show pulls painting into the orbit of other mediums—sculpture, video, performance—the exhibition opens with works by artists who retain the convention of the stretched canvas. This is the case with Jane Kaufman's *6 p.m.* (1971), a large, square, atmospheric field of gold and copper hues; Ralph Humphrey's horizontal canvas (an untitled 1969 acrylic that belongs to his "surfboard" series) of thin, glowing wavy lines; and Showell's *Besped* (1967), a big (108-by-90-inch) painting in which a candy-colored grid is warped to the point of optical illusionism. But even when the rectilinear boundaries of the stretched canvas are respected, a subversive spirit is evident. It can be detected in the way Humphrey rounded off the corners of his canvas, in Jo Baer's decision to let curvilinear shapes extend onto the thick sides of her painting *V. Speculum* (1970) and in the still more extreme approach of Paternosto, an Argentine painter based in New York for many years, who confined himself to painting almost exclusively on the sides of his canvases. In *El Sur* (1969), no more than ¼ of an inch of his pale orange and yellow strips of color make it onto the front of the canvas.



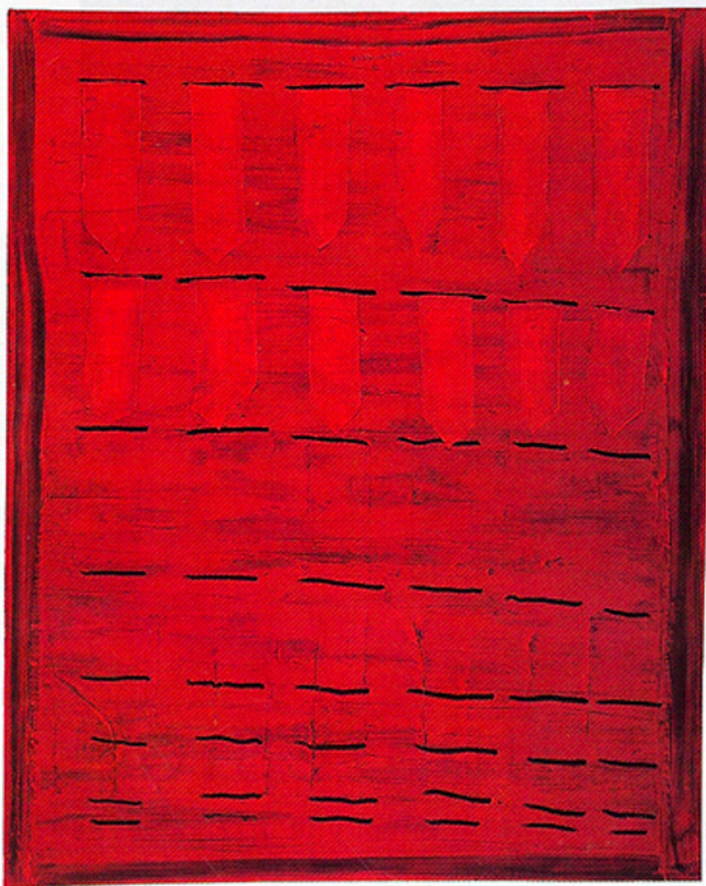
Peter Young: #13, 1970, acrylic on canvas stretched on Ponderosa pine, 17 by 21 inches. American University Museum.



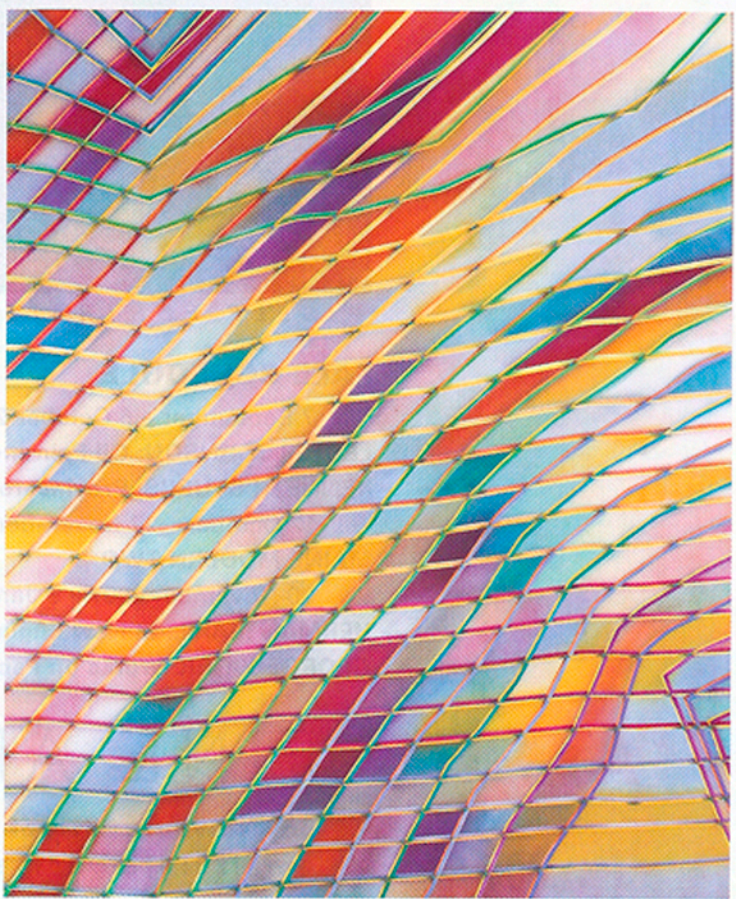
*Al Loving: Self-Portrait, 1974, torn canvas painting, 80 by 60 inches. Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, N.Y.*



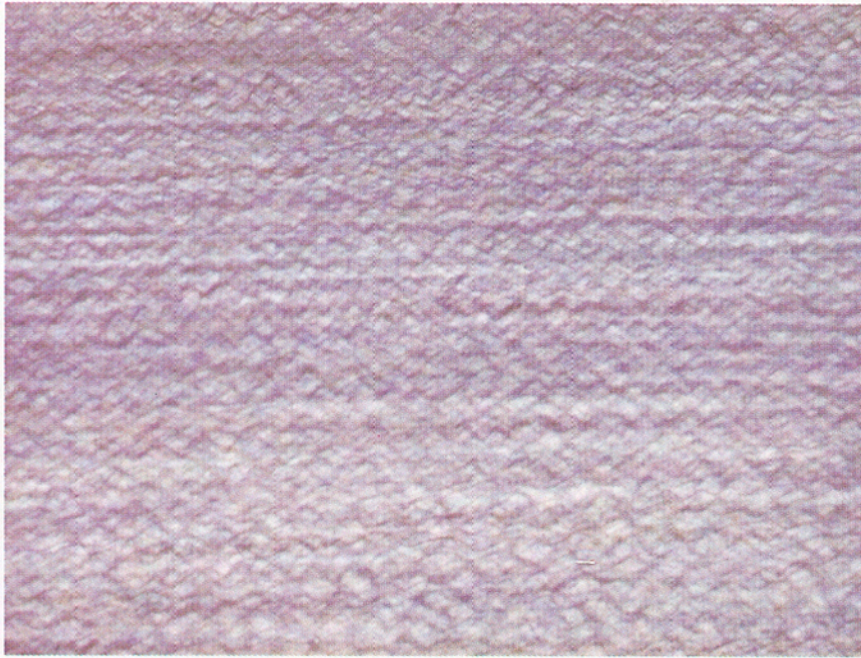
*Michael Venezia: Untitled, 1971, aluminum pigments and carbon black enamel on canvas, 89 1/4 by 75 1/4 inches. Courtesy Rolf Hengesbach, Cologne.*



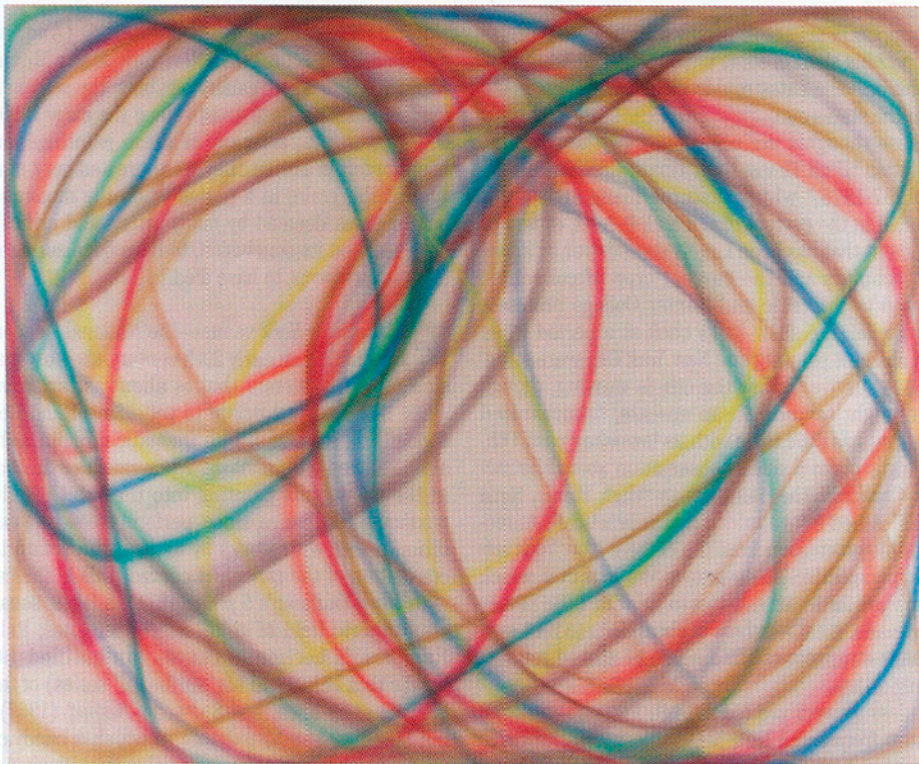
*Mary Heilmann: Ties in My Closet, 1972, acrylic and fabric on canvas, 74 by 50 inches. American University Museum, Washington, D.C.*



*Kenneth Showell: Bessed, 1967, acrylic on canvas, 108 by 90 inches. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin.*



Laurence Stafford: *Untitled*, 1968, synthetic polymer on canvas, 72½ by 96¼ inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



Dan Christensen: *Pavo*, 1968, spray paint on canvas, 108 by 132 inches.

Interestingly, the unpainted front plane has been primed while the worked-on sides have not. In a statement in the "High Times, Hard Times" catalogue, the artist describes the impetus behind this format: "I was breaking away from what I felt painting had become by then: an altogether tired, formalist marking of the frontal plane which no longer appeared to offer significant new options."

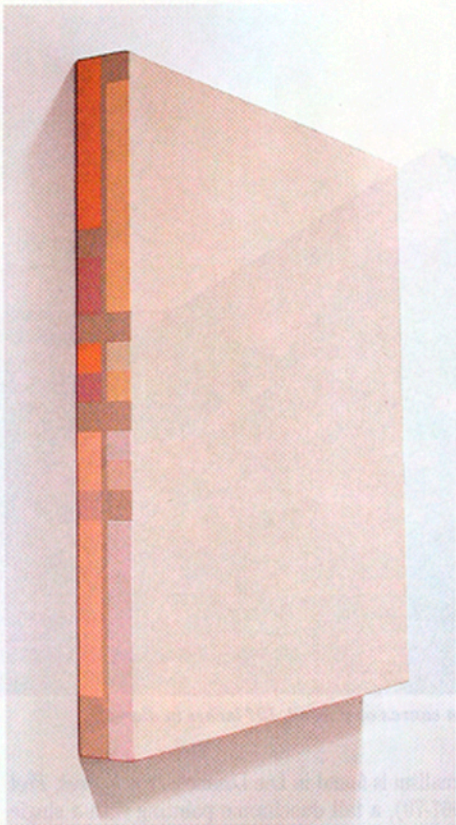
Perhaps the outstanding work in this section is Dan Christensen's *Pavo* (1968), a 9-by-11-foot canvas emblazoned with looping lines of red, green, yellow and brown spray paint that form a tilted and very loose figure 8. At several places, lines overlap to create nodules of dense color that contrast with the open interiors of the loops. Despite Christensen's use of a mechanical device—a spray gun—the lines are

noticeably imperfect. As they curve broadly toward the edges of the canvas and then loop back, they visibly waver and shift, revealing how the artist had to make slight adjustments of direction in mid-motion. Not all Christensen's spray paintings of the period are as nonchalant-looking as *Pavo*, but tight or loose, they always exhibit the artist's distinctive style and convey his excitement about the painting he is making. Since Pollock, the reach of the painter's arm has been a physical fact that many painters have foregrounded. It happens here, too, but the sensitivity and continuous flow of the spray gun makes the steadiness of the hand equally an issue. As Karen Wilkin recently noted in these pages [June/July '07], Christensen's loop paintings relate to the atmospheric spray paintings of Jules Olitski and to the rapid calligraphy of urban graffiti as well as to Pollock. The fact that his late '60s works now look better than ever renders the artist's recent death—just weeks before the exhibition opened in New York—even more poignant.

In another, larger gallery, painting-sculpture hybrids dominated. Alan Shields was represented by two works: *Whirling Dervish* (1968-70), a low, three-dimensional, five-sided floor piece of stretched and brightly stained canvas that seems to hover a few inches off the floor like some kind of funky spacecraft or a homemade yurt, and *Put a Name on It Please* (1972), a large rectangular net adorned with strings of beads and suspended from the ceiling. They give a good idea of Shields's unlikely melding of Color Field abstraction, traditional craft techniques (sewing, beading) and nomadic architectural structures. There are traces of 1960s counterculture throughout the show, but Shields's work is the most blatantly hippieish in style and ethos. In a 2005 statement

Jack Whitten: *Siberian Salt Grinder*, 1974, acrylic on canvas, 80 by 50 inches. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York.





Cesar Paternosto: *El Sur*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 48 by 48 by 4 1/4 inches. Courtesy Cecilia de Torres Ltd., New York.

printed in the catalogue, the artist, who died in February of 2006, some six months before "High Times, Hard Times" began its tour, recalled how "so much of what artists were trying to do during this period was related to the social-political protests and antiwar activism, which made it seem necessary for things to change in order to make any progress. It didn't seem logical to continue to paint a painting and hang it on a nail in the living room. At least, not to me." Another artist in the show, Al Loving, described his change of style in very similar terms: "I felt stuck inside that box [of hard-edge geometric painting], I mean, this was 1968—the Democratic Convention, this was war—and I'm doing these pictures. The contradiction between my life at that time and these pictures!"<sup>13</sup> Loving—who, like Shields, died not long before the inauguration of "High Times, Hard Times"—is represented by *Self-Portrait* (1974), a ragged assemblage of multicolored torn strips of canvas that hangs on the wall like some tattered battle flag or scavenged cape. Perhaps more to the point, it looks like a geometric painting that has been ruthlessly ripped apart and draped over a piece of wood. As has been often noted, it wasn't easy for African-American artists like Loving—and Jack Whitten, another artist in the exhibition—to pursue abstraction in the 1970s; this work conveys something of that struggle.

Installed nearby was an untitled work by Howardena Pindell dated 1968-70, which, though it hung on the wall, was an equally unconventional take on painting. It consists of 40 gray sausage-like tubes of foam-stuffed canvas joined together in a grid by grommets and metal rings. The ensemble, which is closely related to contemporaneous Post-Minimalist sculptures by Eva Hesse and Robert Morris, was placed so that several feet of it extended out

onto the floor. Lying nearby were two of Harmony Hammond's "Floorpieces" from 1973, hooked rugs formed into concentric bands of colors that simultaneously evoke rural American home decor and one of Robert or Sonia Delaunay's disk paintings, but which belonged, at the time they were made, to a wave of feminist art that knowingly appropriated "women's work" techniques. In another corner of the room was another floor-covering abstraction, Lynda Benglis's *Blatt* (1969). Made by pouring latex paint onto the floor to create a skin of swirling colors, the work is the ultimate painting-without-support, though its now rather muddy mix of drab greens, reds and yellows leaves one more impressed with the idea behind the work than the actual result. The cover of the "High Times, Hard Times" catalogue shows Benglis making another pour painting for a temporary 1969 installation; the contrast between the vibrant, freshly poured latex paint in the photograph and the drabness of *Blatt* suggests that these works may not physically age well. Similar in technique and also looking a little dimmed by age was a polyester resin wall relief by Richard Van Buren, another artist who embraced the challenges of new materials.

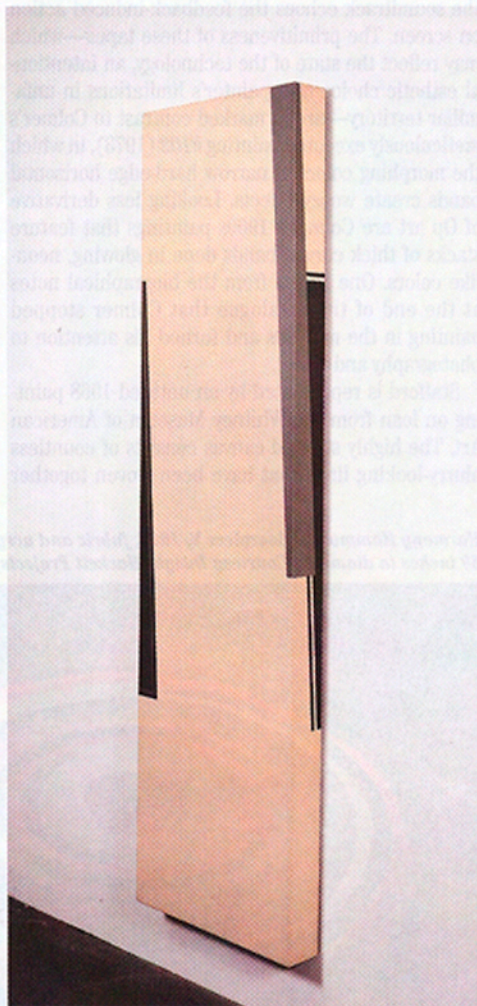
Process was important to many of these artists and they often used it to highlight certain properties of their medium and materials. In David Diaó's untitled acrylic from 1969, the pale, marbled field of color is subtly interrupted by four vertical striations created by the stretcher bars pressing against the taut canvas. The role of process is more evident in Jack Whitten's *Siberian Salt Grinder* (1974)—great title, even though I have no idea what it means—one of a series of works he made by dragging a fine-toothed tool across layers of wet paint to create a smeared image that suggests blurred photographic and video images. When Whitten's 1970s work was exhibited in New York in the mid-1990s, many noted how these paintings anticipated subsequent works by Gerhard Richter. What's striking now is how Whitten's paintings are much subtler in their effects than Richter's; gashes of color are only intermittently permitted to seep through the dark surfaces, while in Richter the underpainting explodes in opulent, sometimes garish glamour. It's no surprise to learn from Whitten's catalogue statement that Ad Reinhardt was an influence on these paintings.

There's even less color in Michael Venezia's untitled work of 1971 that offers a large matte black canvas with plumes of bright gray metallic paint intruding from right and left. Each plume—there are five per side—appears to be surrounded by an aura of light that quickly fades into the blackness. It's like there are 10 flashlights shining into a darkened room. Without knowing how the painting was made, the viewer understands that whatever unusual process Venezia employed is at once the origin and the subject and of the painting. Clearly, something just beyond the edge of the canvas has forced the metallic gray pigment across the picture plane, with visually dramatic yet rigorously controlled results. In fact, Venezia aimed spray guns into the canvas and had them operate for equal lengths of time in order to create the sets of almost identical gray plumes.

Interestingly, many of the best paintings in this show involve spray guns, usually wielded in a novel manner. Why is this so? In part, it is the excitement the artists must have felt in embracing a new tool,

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in finding out what it could do, but it may also have been the particular properties of the spray gun. It gave artists the ability to apply paint with industrial neutrality while also leaving the option for more painterly effects, but without the heaviness associated with gestural painting. In Christensen's and Venezia's work, paint becomes a disembodied material, opening the canvas to a range of new chromatic and atmospheric possibilities. The spray gun also introduced an element of speed into the creative process, a high velocity that had previously been unknown in a painter's studio. This wonderfully undocinaire show also makes room for artists who availed themselves of oil paint's traditional corporeality, a tendency most nota-



Jo Baer: *V. Speculum*, 1970, oil on canvas, 80 by 22 by 4 inches. Private collection, New Jersey.

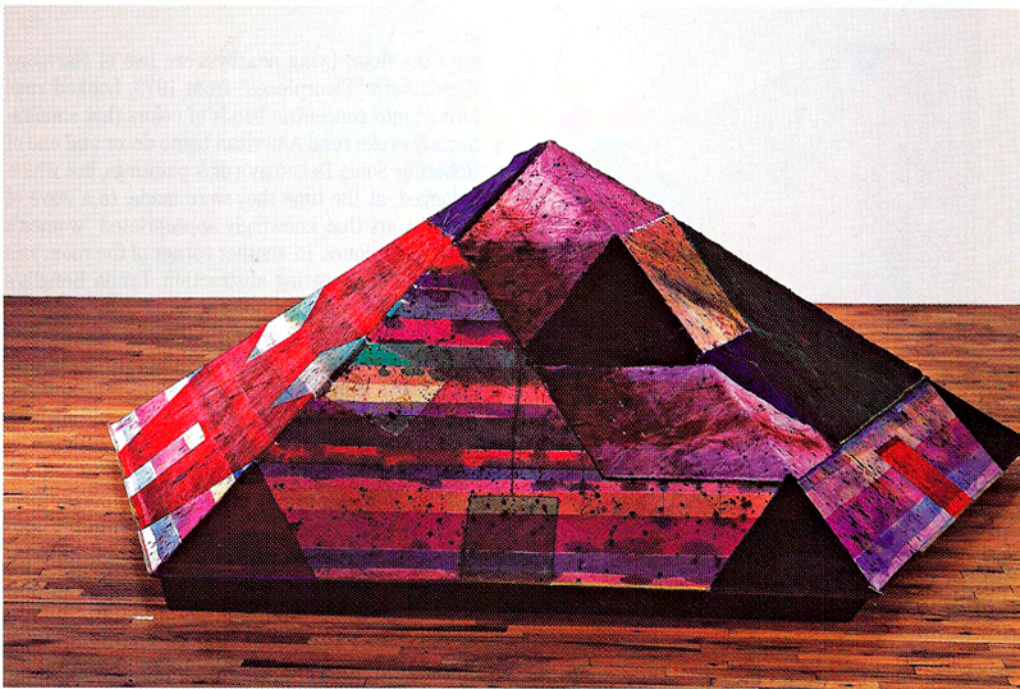
**There are traces of 1960s counterculture throughout the show, but the works most blatantly hippie in style and ethos are Alan Shields's painting-sculpture hybrids.**

bly seen in Guy Goodwin's *C-Swing* (1975), a canvas of thick, curving bands that has the visual heft of a Mark di Suvero sculpture, and Ron Gorchov's *Cock-robin* (1975), a shaped canvas with a masklike image of two densely painted brown oblongs on an orange ground. (This was a different Gorchov painting than the one exhibited at other venues.)

Two other engaging spray-gun wielders in the show are Roy Colmer and Lawrence Stafford, both of whose works reveal the impact of video on painting in the early 1970s. Along with a painting, Colmer was represented by a pair of 1972 videotapes. In one, we hear Pharaoh Sander's great jazz anthem (with vocals by Leon Thomas) "The Creator Has a Master Plan" as pulsing blobs of white slowly meld, split and move from side to side. The wow and flutter of the soundtrack echoes the feedback-induced action on screen. The primitiveness of these tapes—which may reflect the state of the technology, an intentional esthetic choice or a painter's limitations in unfamiliar territory—are in marked contrast to Colmer's meticulously executed painting #102 (1973), in which the morphing colors of narrow hard-edge horizontal bands create woolly effects. Looking less derivative of Op art are Colmer's 1960s paintings that feature stacks of thick curved bands done in glowing, neon-like colors. One learns from the biographical notes at the end of the catalogue that Colmer stopped painting in the mid-'70s and turned his attention to photography and video.

Stafford is represented by an untitled 1968 painting on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art. The highly striated canvas consists of countless blurry-looking lines that have been woven together

*Harmony Hammond: Floorpiece V, 1973, fabric and acrylic paint, 59 inches in diameter. Courtesy Dwight Hackett Projects, Santa Fe.*



*Alan Shields: Whirling Dervish, 1968-70, acrylic and thread on canvas over wood, 107 inches in diameter.*

in what seems at first glance like a monochrome field but is in fact made up of numerous, threadlike strands of differentiated colors. Having initially made his paintings by walking back and forth in front of the canvas spraying color as he went, Stafford built a motor-operated cylinder on which a canvas could be stretched. As this canvas-covered drum rotated, he applied spray paint, one line at a time. Once the canvas was filled, he took it off the cylinder and added details, still using a spray gun. The result is an abstract image that resembles a television screen dense with static snow or a blow-up of a microscopic photo of a sheet of handmade paper. Like other works in the show, this perfectly smooth, factureless painting possesses a trompe l'oeil effect that defies Greenbergian flatness.

The provenance of Stafford's painting is a reminder that some of this "forgotten" work was fairly well known in its time: Peter Young and Alan Shields, for instance, were separately featured on covers of *Artforum* in 1971; Dan Christensen showed at important galleries in the U.S. and Europe and was included in the Whitney Annuals of 1967, '68 and '69; Al Loving had a solo show at the Whitney in 1969; Ralph Humphrey was highly regarded—in an article on Elizabeth Murray, the painter Carroll Dunham recently claimed that Humphrey was "always present in the minds" of the abstract New York painters born around 1940 who were interested in shaped canvases.<sup>4</sup>

Another defiant response to doctrinaire

formalism is found in Lee Lozano's *Punch, Peek, Feel* (1967-70), a tall duochrome painting with a single row of circular holes cut into the canvas from top to bottom. Looking a bit like enlarged postage stamp perforation marks, these punctures afford glimpses of the wooden stretcher bars and the wall behind, but they seem less like an exercise in materialist abstraction than an act of aggression made against a finished yet (to the artist) somehow unsatisfying painting—or maybe that's what we read into the work, knowing of Lozano's impending rejection of painting, the art world and New York.

A more humorous use of the stretcher is Peter Young's #13 (1970), a small composition of an incomplete orange grid against a green ground. What makes #13 so funny is that Young has used lengths of uncarpentered tree branches (Ponderosa pine, according to the catalogue) as stretchers, thus giving the painting a funky, folksy quality. By using the same material as a conventionally stretched canvas, only in its "natural" state, Young creates a witty, memorable work that also embodies something of the era's back-to-the-land spirit. [See Young article this issue.]

The connection of painters like Young to the counterculture was spotted quickly at the time by at least one critic. In a 1970 *Art News* article titled "The New Informalists" that featured a surprising number of "High Times, Hard Times" artists (Young, Shields, Showell, Diao, Christensen and Stafford), Carter Ratcliff found himself "reminded of light shows, bleached dungarees and tie-dyed shirts." He also believed that the painters he was discussing had "learned to use a certain kind of pseudo-art and urban folk art."<sup>5</sup>

Not as funny as Young's backwoods abstraction, but just as original, is Dorothea Rockburne's *Intersection* (1971), a large floor piece involving a thin layer of oil (not oil paint, just crude oil) sandwiched between two layers of transparent plastic sheeting. In this recreation of the original work, the oil-filled plastic was puckered and shiny. A piece of heavy particle board helped keep the ensemble in place. This may be the farthest-out work in a show with a lot of far-out art. A skeptical visitor might ask whether some oil-smeared

sheets of plastic on the floor have any relationship to painting at all. If she were to stay with the piece a bit longer, this resistant viewer might notice that the functional particle board also serves to create an Albersian composition of inset rectangles, which might spark a reminder that Rockburne attended Black Mountain College, where Albers taught. Over and over, "High Times, Hard Times" reminds us how the malleability of painting—and the challenges delivered to it by inventive artists like Rockburne—kept the medium vital, even in a moment when many already believed it to be a dead issue.

Other "intersections" in the show reveal artists operating at the junctions of painting and performance. There are video monitors devoted to Carolee Schneemann's *Body Collage* (1967), a dramatic three-minute film of the naked, glue-covered artist rolling around in a sea of paper strips to transform herself into a living artwork, and Yayoi Kusama's *Self-Obliteration* (also 1967), a 23-minute film of naked people painting dots onto one another's bodies amid mirrors and light shows to the accompaniment of some rather lame Grateful Dead-style guitar noodling. Although traces of hippiedom are visible throughout the show, Kusama's is the only work that

explicitly identifies with the Dionysian world of acid trips and love-ins, and, as such, its interest is more historical than artistic.

One of the curator's aims in making her selection—and, obviously, even a show this large leaves out vast numbers of New York abstractionists—was to highlight the international character of the city's art scene. In addition to works by Kusama and Paternosto, there is a small 1969 piece by Blinky Palermo (involving a DIY wall stencil) and a long canvas floor piece from 1967 by Franz Erhard Walter designed to be manipulated by two people, but here displayed rather inertly, albeit with an accompanying video of the work in action. While Kusama, Paternosto, Palermo and Walter all spent time working in New York, there are also many interesting, and still largely unexplored, connections to be made between artists in "High Times, Hard Times" and their contemporaries in other countries. I, for one, was particularly struck by how close much of the work in the show looked to the oeuvres of the French Supports/Surfaces artists. A great show could be done exploring the deconstruction of painting as carried out during these years in many countries, in differing cultural

contexts. Thus a work like Al Loving's *Self-Portrait*, which speaks to the artist's African-American background, could be paired with one of Claude Viallat's works using similar materials but imbued with the visual culture of France. The affinities, the sense of parallel purpose, discovered by such comparisons might be a surprise to some Franco-phobe American critics.

Another sociological point made by "High Times, Hard Times" is how, in the words of David Reed, "the innovations [in abstract painting] had come from unexpected new sources—women, blacks, lesbians, gays, counterculture radicals, and bohemian sensualists." In terms of gender, race and sexual preference, the roster of the exhibition reflects Reed's observation, though it's hard to identify which artists might qualify as "countercultural radicals" (maybe all of them?) and harder still to pick out the "bohemian sensualists" (Kusama and Schneemann qualify, I suppose, but none of the paintings do much to advertise their makers' lifestyles). One wonders why some of these sources would have been perceived as novel. While opportunities for African-American artists may have expanded significantly in this period, hadn't lesbians, gays, radi-



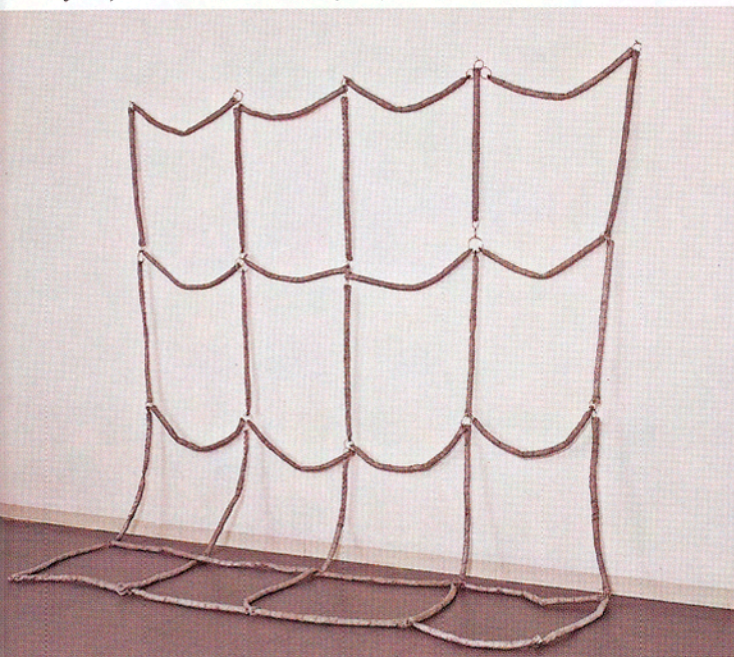
Ron Gorchov: *Tenderhook*, 1975, oil on canvas, 21 by 27 by 7 inches. Courtesy Vito Schnabel.

icals and bohemians long been significant innovators in modern art? Perhaps the perception that their presence was somehow "new" had to do with the cultural image of postwar American abstraction. From the jacket-and-tie-wearing Irascibles to the often businesslike proponents of Color Field painting, the public face of American abstract painting tended to be male, straight, politically disengaged and professional. Of course there were exceptions, but until the social revolution of the mid- to late 1960s, a big part of the U.S. art world, like the dissent-averse Cold-War society around it, didn't advertise its difference.

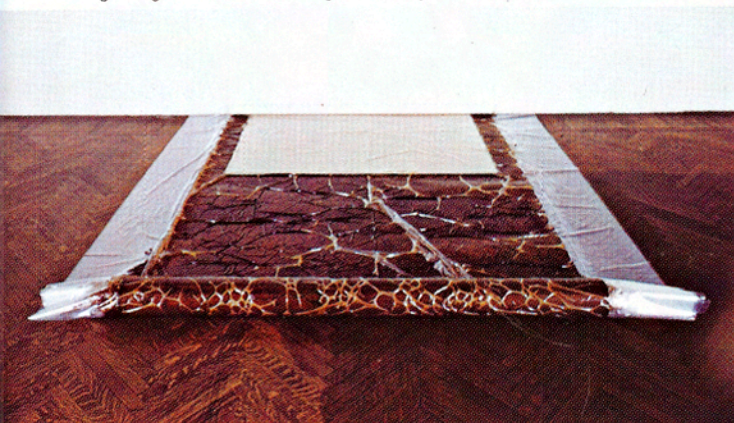
While the downtown art scene circa 1970 was cash-poor and unglamorous compared to later eras, it wasn't free of competition, nor were its denizens above changing their work in response to market conditions. In the artist statements that punctuate the catalogue, there are some refreshingly candid admissions. Mary Heilmann recalls: "When I got to New York and couldn't get any attention for that sort of thing [plywood and fiberglass sculptures leaning against the wall], I segued over to a freeform unstretched kind of painting." Peter Young describes the genesis of his dot paintings: "I was so excited by this prospect [of being in a Minimalism exhibition at the Guggenheim], but I wasn't included in the show. I then figured that the Minimalist boat had left the dock and I wasn't on board, so I'd better try something else. That's when I started doing the dots."

Although the show doesn't track such shifts by individual artists, most of whom are represented by only a single piece, there is one rather abrupt stylistic turn, which in the New York venue occupied the final two galleries. Prior to these rooms, the artistic heritage of the show is largely Color Field painting and Constructivism, along with a variety of non-high-art domains (from quilting to graffiti), but at this point the appearance, in several paintings, of recognizable imagery and expressionistic gestural brushwork seem to constitute a rupture. The imagery in Heilmann's *Ties in My Closet* (1972) is exactly what the title says, several rows of ties hanging in a closet, depicted with strips of thin fabric, cut to resemble the bottoms of folded neckties, pressed into a ground of red acrylic paint streaked with black. Rows of thin horizontal black lines establish the hangers over which the ties are draped. Without the title, one might almost take this as a quirky abstraction, but once acknowledged,

Howardena Pindell: *Untitled*, 1968-1970, canvas, enamel, grommets and foam, 144 inches wide. Courtesy Sragow Gallery, New York.

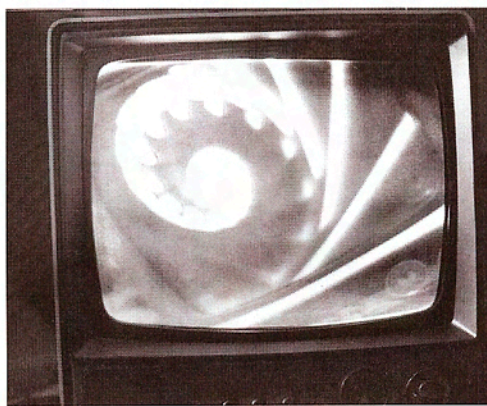


Dorothea Rockburne: *Intersection*, 1971, mixed-medium installation, 15 by 99 by 92 inches. Courtesy Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York.



the tie motif won't go away, making this canvas a precursor to the New Image painting that emerged later in the 1970s (and proof that Heilmann evidently had pretty quickly segued again from "freeform, unstretched" painting). In the arc of Heilmann's career, however, it's a deceptive work since rather than turning to image-driven painting she has pursued a style of loosely geometric abstraction.

More explicit is Pat Steir's *The Night Chant Series*, No. 1: *Beauty Way for J.B.* (1973), a diagrammatic painting as oblique and freighted as its title: several grisaille irises are painted onto a large black square, with a few more flowers, this time in vivid reds, yellows and purples, appearing in a surrounding white border. Steir adds tally marks, x's, color swatches, a gray scale and various scratchings here and there to give the 84-inch-square painting the look of a sketchbook page. With its art-historical borrowings (the black square and white border shout Malevich), illustrational content (the flowers) and coded iconogra-



Roy Colmer: Video Feedback, Cincinnati, Tape 1 and Tape 3, 1972, videotape transferred to DVD on monitor, 80 minutes. Courtesy Mitchell Alguo Gallery, New York.

colors," she has recalled.<sup>6</sup> After completing *The Storm* Snyder says she "fell apart completely" and stopped working for six months. When she recommenced, her work more directly addressed feminist themes. Siegel believes that *The Storm* represents "a denial of the early optimism and bright beauty of the late 1960s." In a recent interview in the *Brooklyn Rail*, the curator offered her own interpretation of the last part of "High Times, Hard Times." She explained that "there is a little bit of an elegiac sense to the end of the show that says that the initial moment of possibility and openness didn't go on forever, that it came to an end."<sup>7</sup>

I'll leave it to readers to decide what is the legacy of this work, and whether the "possibility and openness" of that heady era expired circa 1975. Instead, I'll close with a few comments on the issue of who is in "High Times, Hard Times" and who isn't. Reviewing the show in the *New York Times*, Roberta Smith took Siegel and Reed to task for passing over the artists who, in her view, dominated the period—Frank Stella, Brice Marden, Robert Mangold and Robert Ryman. Without them, Smith wrote, the show was like a "time capsule from a time that didn't quite exist." This seems to me a complete misunderstanding of Siegel and Reed's project.

The aim of "High Times, Hard Times" is not to reflect the

standard version of New York painting 1967-1975 but rather to recover a lost history, to bring back into public view works long unseen, often painted by artists who have been long overlooked. What is the value of such a project? Why would a curator want to put together a show whose stars are Jack Whitten, Dan Christensen and Harmony Hammond, rather than those three heroes of West 53rd Street, Stella, Marden and Ryman?

Serious historians long ago ditched the "great men" and "great events" approach to their discipline. At least since the rise of the Annales school, best-known through the microhistories of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Fernand Braudel's multivolume studies of European society, we have learned that there is just as much historical truth to be discovered at

the margins of power, in the facts of everyday life, in slow, nearly invisible, long-term movements, as in palaces and parliaments. As an exhibition, "High Times, Hard Times" significantly alters how we view painting in New York City during a nine-year period; as an instance of historical revision, it offers a powerful model for anyone who isn't satisfied with the versions of our recent visual culture as offered, with clockwork regularity, by Christie's, Sotheby's and MOMA. □

1. See "David Sawin's Paintings," in Arthur C. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990, p. 17.

2. All quotations, unless otherwise noted, come from *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975*, ed. Katy Siegel, New York, Independent Curators International, 2006.

3. Both Shields's and Loving's accounts of how political events of the late 1960s affected their work echo the experience of an artist of a different generation, Philip Guston. In 1977, Guston recalled: "So when the 1960s came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The war, what was happening to America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything—and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue." Quoted in Robert Storr, *Philip Guston*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1986, p. 53.

4. Carroll Dunham, "Shapes of Things to Come," *Artforum*, November 2005, p. 210.

5. Carter Ratcliff, "The New Informalists," *Art News*, February 1970, p. 50.

6. Quoted in Hayden Herrera, *Joan Snyder*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2005, p. 37.

7. Phong Bui, "Katy Siegel and David Reed," *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2007.

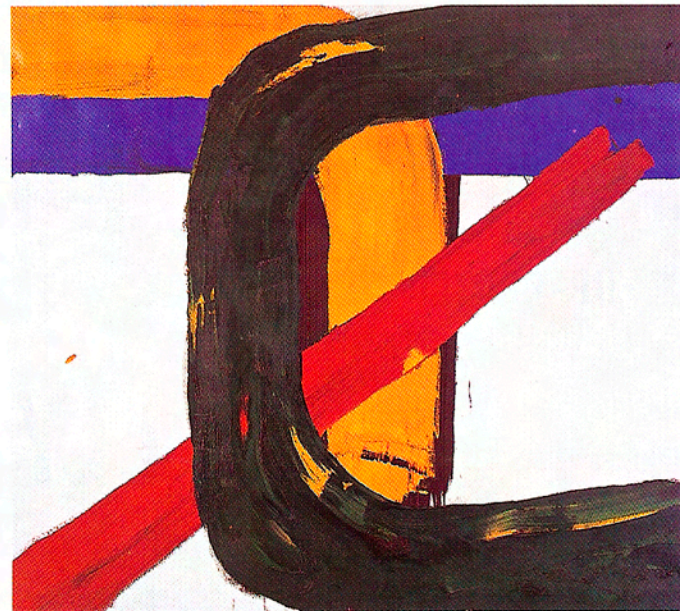
Curated by Katy Siegel, and organized by Independent Curators International, "High Times, Hard Times" debuted at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, N.C. [Aug. 6-Oct. 15, 2006], and traveled to the American University Museum, Washington, D.C. [Nov. 21, 2006-Jan. 21, 2007], and the National Academy Museum, New York [Feb. 13-Apr. 22, 2007]. It is currently at the Museo Tamayo, Mexico City [May 25-Sept. 9], and goes to the Neue Galerie, Graz [Dec. 14, 2007-Feb. 24, 2008], and the ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe [Mar. 28-May 18, 2008]. Accompanying the show is a catalogue with essays by Siegel, David Reed, Anna Chave, Robert Pincus-Witten and Marcia Tucker, as well as statements from many of the artists in the exhibition.



Pat Steir: *The Night Chant Series*, No. 1: *Beauty Way for J.B.*, 1973, oil on canvas, 84 inches square. Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York.

phy, it is a thing apart from all the preceding work. In this painting Steir seems to be pursuing the kind of intellectualized meta-painting pioneered by Jasper Johns rather than the deconstructed formalism that dominates "High Times, Hard Times."

Around the corner hung Joan Snyder's *The Storm* (1974), a muddy 72-by-144-inch painting comprising 18 identically sized panels, each filled with its own composition of vigorous brushstrokes in mostly browns and blacks. In some of the panels, jagged patches of yellow or white appear, and there are a few bursts of deep red. The ensemble is essentially three rows of small-scale Ab-Ex studies. In the several years preceding *The Storm* Snyder had gained recognition for her lyrical "stroke" paintings, brightly colored compositions that feature irregularly placed stacks of juicy horizontal brushstrokes. Often drips of paint leak out from these strokes, and sometimes Snyder festoons them with spray paint. *The Storm* began as one of these exuberant works but the artist soon had a change of heart. "Every time I painted a passage that was beautiful, I covered it with dark



Guy Goodwin: *C-Swing*, 1974, oil on canvas, 87½ by 102 inches.