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**SUSAN ROTHENBERG: RECREATING SIGNIFICANCE
IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY PAINTING**

By

ROSEMARY COHANE ERPF

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Art History, The City University of New
York**

2003

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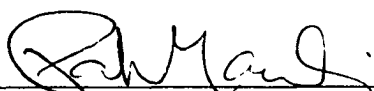
ROSEMARY COHANE ERPF

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate
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Requirement for the degree of Doctor of Art History

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Abstract

**SUSAN ROTHENBERG: RECREATING SIGNIFICANCE
IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY PAINTING**

By

ROSEMARY COHANE ERPF

Advisor: Professor Mona Hadler

Acknowledgements

This text is dedicated to my daughter, Megan, whose love and support has kept me going. My wish for her is that she may find an area of inquiry that sustains her the way art has sustained me.

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Susan Rothenberg:
Recreating Significance in Late Twentieth-Century Painting

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the oeuvre of American artist Susan Rothenberg, a major figure in the group commonly called “New Image Painters” of the 1970s, and one of the most important painters to emerge in the late-twentieth century. Rothenberg’s bold reintroduction of figuration in the mid-1970s was a key factor in the revitalization of painting during a period when the medium was critically perceived as irrelevant and in decline.

I direct my focus towards unearthing the sources and establishing the significance of her well-known horse paintings of the 1970s. Rothenberg’s work in the 1980s, a decade of exploration in her art, continued to be central to the dialogue surrounding painting, particularly Neo-Expressionism. Ever since Rothenberg moved to New Mexico in 1990, she has continued to express both personal and universal themes on canvas, even as she incorporates aspects of Southwestern environment and culture.

This text considers and situates Rothenberg’s oeuvre within a broadly based art historical approach. I use her work as a model to examine and evaluate issues in painting during the 1970s and after, also establishing a sense of the historical moment from which Rothenberg’s work emerged. Moreover, I analyze the way in which Rothenberg synthesized and transformed a wide spectrum of influences, and use an approach shaped by an art historical reading of the 1970s and 1980s that integrates and

connects many styles, rather than singling them out as separate from each other. The literature on Rothenberg is primarily biographical, and, although there is agreement that her work is important, there has been little attempt to analyze the reasons for its significance.

Comprised of five chapters, this study analyzes Rothenberg's work in a slightly overlapping chronological model, arcing from specific aspects of Rothenberg's development to larger issues and subjects central to late-twentieth-century painting. The broad issues and subjects I will look at are the interdisciplinary climate of the 1970s; abstraction's dominance during the early 1970s; the impact of performance art; New Image painting of the late 1970s; Neo-Expressionism's emergence in the 1980s; the tradition of the painterly image; reoccurring themes of figuration and fragmentation; the utilization of the scattered narrative; and the impact of Southwestern Art and environment.

Rothenberg's Contribution

Rothenberg's contribution to late-twentieth-century painting warrants an in-depth analysis. Despite persistent claims that painting was dead, Rothenberg expanded the practice of painting by introducing symbolic imagery into the post-minimal strictures of the 1970s. Her work went against an art world then dominated by abstraction. As Robert Hughes noted, "It is hard nowadays to remember what an unyielding prejudice against any kind of hand-painted figuration existed."¹ Her fusion of imagery with formal constructs signaled a new sensibility in painting, later to be called New Image Painting. The breakthrough nature of Rothenberg's paintings of the 1970s is itself a subject worthy of a full-scale study, but to stop there would be to

1 Robert Hughes, "Signs of Anxiety," Time, 1 March 1993, 60.

consider only one aspect of her significant contribution.

Rothenberg is the only artist associated with 1970s New Image Painting who made a successful transition to the major painting movement of the 1980s, Neo-Expressionism. In fact, Rothenberg was the only woman included in the 1982 international *Zeitgeist* exhibition in Berlin, which ushered in the much-heralded Neo-Expressionism. Rothenberg is central to image based painting of both these movements, even as there are different stylistic features to each movement.

Rothenberg's art has continued to address issues key to late-twentieth-century art. Since moving to New Mexico in 1990, she has further explored fragmentation and disjunctive narration in paintings inspired by diverse cultural traditions such as Navajo Indian art. These works, painted during the 1990s, represent a powerful synthesis of image and expressionistic, abstract painting, an underlying dialectic in Rothenberg's artistic practice.

I locate Rothenberg's unique contribution to late-twentieth-century art in the genesis, treatment, and function of imagery, showing how her imagery evolves from both highly intuitive processes of discovery and specific external stimuli. For example, Rothenberg stated that she came upon the horse imagery through automatic drawing, a doodle on a scrap of paper. At the same time, her work with Nancy Graves on the life-size camel sculptures of the 1970s also shaped Rothenberg's usage of awkward, stark animal imagery. Consequently, I explore in depth her success in finding imagery outside traditional painting and consider a wide range of influences that include Rothenberg's participation in a Joan Jonas performance piece; her photographs of Warhol-factory regular Mary Woronov posed as a horse; her response to the site works of close friend Gordon Matta-Clark; her interest in themes of fragmentation and the creation of veiled identities found in Performance Art, and the

psychological undercurrents of the work of mixed-media artist Bruce Nauman. Nauman's influence dates from the 1970s, Rothenberg's early New York years, and becomes significant again after the two marry in 1990. I will show how Rothenberg creates a new statement in painting by selectively mixing and transforming these diverse influences.

Rothenberg's selective eclecticism informs not only her choice of imagery, but also how her images function both formally and symbolically. I analyze several models important to Rothenberg's development, such as the way meanings are created in performance art. Another important model is found in equivocal, neutralized images of Jasper Johns. Like Johns, Rothenberg's images are ambiguous, resisting straightforward interpretations while remaining encoded in a formal, painterly language.

Rothenberg's fusion of imagery with formalist painting results in works that are never purely figural or completely abstract. The images, though crucial to the formation of meaning, are presented in a pictorial starkness which one associates with abstraction of the late 1960s and the entire decade of the 1970s. As she states, "I put images at the service of painting,"² relying on formal strategies such as the figure/ground relationship to hold the picture together. I analyze this pictorial approach by comparing her work to other post-World War II artists who also combine richly painted imagery with abstraction, such as Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and Jean Dubuffet. In doing so, I unravel the threads that tie Rothenberg's work to numerous post-War movements, such as Abstract Expressionism, post-painterly Abstraction, and Process Art. Rothenberg's work has not been fully considered in these contexts, although superficial affinities to post-War artists occasionally are cited

2 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, 5 March 1998, Artists Visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York.

in the Rothenberg literature. The failure of existing literature to place Rothenberg in this broader context is due in part to the compartmentalization of late-twentieth-century art history. My approach situates Rothenberg much more broadly in art history, in order to uncover how her work represents a continuum in and also a break from existing precedents.

A leitmotif throughout my study is Rothenberg's preoccupation with the figure, whole and fragmented. I show how the horse imagery initially functioned as a surrogate for the human torso until, by the 1980s, human body imagery gradually emerged, distorted and transformed. Rothenberg's figural imagery, often vacillating between the literal and the emotionally symbolic, becomes increasingly abstruse during and after the mid-1980s. My project will also consider Rothenberg's work from a psychologized perspective. My psychologized perspective differs from a specific psychoanalytical reading, such as Freudian or Jungian,³ I refer to meanings that grow from the artist's experience, either directly or obliquely; the psychologized area is comprised of a matrix of factors including biography, association, intuition, emotional resonance, states of mind, states of being, and the objectification of the body. Key to this tendency towards a psychologized picture is a symbolic image. In Rothenberg's recent paintings, imagery and disjunctive narrative suggestions provide a rich psychological terrain.

³ I am not using the term "psychologized" in the same way that Rosalind Krauss uses the term in her essay "Objecthood." Krauss uses the term to describe a non-idealistic approach that ties the object, e.g. Joel Shapiro's small houses, to a concept of literalness as regards materials, scale, and situation. Krauss rejects the notion of metaphor or surrogate in her usage of the term. Contrary to this, in my usage of the term psychologized, I embrace the concept of metaphor, surrogate, and other extensions of human experience. Krauss does acknowledge the importance of memory in the 'psychologization' of the object as I do. See Rosalind Krauss, "Objecthood," Critical Perspectives in American Art, (Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts, 1976), 53.

Methodology And Chapter Organization

Primary research has been central to my study and consists of interviews, both published and unpublished, conducted by myself or others with Susan Rothenberg and artists of her circle, such as Mary Heilman, Joan Jonas, Alan Saret, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, and David True. During the research and writing of this dissertation, I have had numerous conversations with Susan Rothenberg about her work. My research has also extended to dealers/collectors who have been directly connected to Rothenberg's work. These include Holly Solomon (now deceased); Miani Johnson, director of Willard Gallery, who represented Rothenberg's work from 1976 through 1985; and Angela Westwater, director of Sperone Westwater, who has represented Rothenberg's work from 1976 through the present. Through Sperone Westwater gallery, I have enjoyed access to records, correspondence, and, most importantly, Rothenberg's actual works of art.

In Chapters One and Two, considerations of formative influences are key to understanding the unique combination of formal, symbolic, and psychologized elements that are at the core of Rothenberg's 1970 paintings. I examine how Rothenberg's work is rooted in both her assimilation of post-War art and the artistic environment of New York during the years following her arrival in 1969. My inquiry is organized around a series of key questions. For example, what was the impact of first- and second-generation New York School painters, once heroes to Rothenberg when she studied the renowned post-War collection at Buffalo's Albright-Knox Art Gallery during junior high art classes? What was the influence of the exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (Whitney Museum, 1969), particularly the work of Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Bruce Nauman? Rothenberg transforms this mix of

approaches and styles and brings key issues in painting to the fore. What was the effect of the interaction between Rothenberg and other painters, sculptors, and performance artists, including Gordon Matta-Clark, Nancy Graves, Keith Sonnier, John Duff, Jennifer Bartlett, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Alan Saret, George Trakas, Joan Jonas, and Philip Glass? How did the interdisciplinary nature of these 1970s collaborations shape her understanding of how imagery can function? In addition to answering these questions, I consider Rothenberg's little known process-derived works from 1969 to 1972.

Additionally, Chapter One shows how Rothenberg's background and development lead to the first horse paintings. The focus of this chapter is Rothenberg's absorption and rejection of factors that were part of abstraction's dominance during the formative period. Chapter Two focuses on how meanings are constructed in Rothenberg's work by looking at her connection with Performance Art, Jasper Johns, and the associative power of the image.

Chapter Three discusses Rothenberg's paintings in relation to New Image Painting. In particular, I analyze Rothenberg's work in relation to the other artists in The Whitney Museum's 1978 exhibition *New Image Painting*, including Nicolas Africano, Jennifer Bartlett, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, and David True. I will examine the exhibition, the catalogue essay, and recurrent themes and premises. After considering the classification of the artists in the exhibition as put forth by both Richard Marshall, the curator of the exhibition, and Roberta Smith, an art critic who wrote about the exhibition, I will offer an new, alternative classification system. Using this foundation, my focus will turn to Rothenberg's place in this exhibition and her unique contribution. In addition, I consider Rothenberg's work and this movement as representing both a continuum in and a departure from existing lineages of the

painterly image in post-World War II art.

Chapter Four tracks critical shifts in Rothenberg's work from the late-1970s through the late 1980s, including the transition from horse to human figural imagery, from stasis to movement, from imagined to observed imagery, from acrylic to oil painting, and from emblematic to fragmented imagery. This section includes a detailed analysis of Rothenberg's relationship to the movement of Neo-Expressionism. Rothenberg's inclusion in the Neo-Expressionist camp emerged around several exhibitions in which her work was hung with artists such as Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Francesco Clemente, and Anselm Kiefer. I examine the 1982 *Zeitgeist* exhibition in Berlin, showing how Rothenberg's work became labeled Neo-Expressionist.

Chapter Five looks at Rothenberg's work since she moved to Galisteo Creek, New Mexico in 1990 as a period of powerful synthesis connected to both earlier and new themes and concerns. For example, the strong southwestern light and the everyday dramas of animals in the paddock gave way to multiple viewpoints, quasi-abstract paintings with richer colors and fractured narratives. A new physical environment, occurrences of ranch life and, Southwestern art, particularly Navajo ghost rugs play a major part in the stylistic and narrative threads which have emerged since Rothenberg's move to New Mexico.

Existing Literature

The literature on Susan Rothenberg consists of a 1991 monograph by Joan Simon, museum catalogue essays, exhibition reviews, and short articles. Simon's heavily biographical book presents a clear chronology of personal events from Rothenberg's childhood to 1990, incorporating artistic production, exhibition history,

and cultural backdrops for Rothenberg's development. Simon's book, though a useful first study, does not delve deeply into any one area. For example, Simon notes that Rothenberg's paintings have been labeled Neo-Expressionistic or Futurist, yet she does not provide a thorough analysis of how these labels may apply to Rothenberg's work.⁴ Simon's book is simultaneously a primary and a secondary source. Explaining her approach, Simon refers to herself as the "participant-observer."⁵ She is a primary participant because she was Rothenberg's friend and co-observer of the period, taking extensive quotations directly from the artist. Simon's interpretive materials take the form of a secondary source but as a first study, they often lack an analysis of Rothenberg's paintings in relation to a broad art historical context.

Most of the essays in museum catalogues are brief biographical summaries, with the exception of Robert Storr's "All in A Day's Work" for a 1990 survey exhibition at the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art in Malmo, Sweden, which emphasizes Rothenberg's fidelity to the painting medium. Another curator who has written on Rothenberg is Michael Auping, whose catalogue essay for the 1996-97 retrospective at MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Monterey, in Mexico, discusses Rothenberg's imagery both in paintings and in drawings. Among the many critical reviews and short articles on Rothenberg, one that delves deeply is Robert Storr's "Spooks and Floats,"⁶ which deals primarily with the ghostly image of Mondrian inhabiting several paintings of the 1980s.

My study counters the heavily biographical approach by placing Rothenberg's work in a broad art historical context. My examination of Rothenberg's historical roots and my analysis of how her art developed over a twenty-five-year span provide a

4 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 9.

5 Ibid, 7.

6 Robert Storr, "Spooks and Floats," Art in America, May 1983, Cover and pp. 153-159.

solid basis for establishing her contribution. I show how Rothenberg's revitalization of late-twentieth-century painting is situated in a complex mix of transformed influences. Moreover, I show how the fusion of imagery and abstraction, which is at the core of Rothenberg's oeuvre, is also a central issue in late-twentieth-century painting.

CHAPTER ONE: MORE THAN MINIMALISM

“The first virtue of painting is to be a feast for the eyes.”

“Painting is only a bridge linking the painter’s mind with that of the viewer.”

Eugène Delacroix , Journal [1893]⁷

In 1974, Susan Rothenberg painted the crude outline of a horse on a monochromatic abstract field. This painting and those that followed have come to represent an important re-introduction of imagery in post-World War II painting. During the mid-1970s, many art styles coexisted in the various art-worlds in New York.⁸ Representational styles such as Photorealism, Pop Art, and a wide range of figurative artists existed and were exhibited during this period.⁹ However, the critical

7 Eugène Delacroix, The Journal of Eugène Delacroix, 535.

8 Rothenberg and other artists have pointed out that there were many “art-worlds” in New York at that time, galleries uptown that exhibited the “established” artists and those downtown, most of which exhibited more cutting edge work. In addition, there were alternative spaces, artist’s studios, and public sites where performance pieces were enacted.

9 This category includes a wide range of artists, some of which came out of a figurative revival started in the 1950 including artists such as Alex Katz, Grace Hartigan, Fairfield Porter, and Bay Area painters. Works by these artists were exhibited regularly in New York during this period.

discussion at that time and the discussion that was relevant to Rothenberg's circle was dominated by stark abstraction. One has only to look through the art publications of the 1970s, such as *Artforum*, *Arts*, and *Art in America* to see the predominance of reproductions of abstract work and the overwhelming majority of reviews covering exhibitions of various abstract art styles. Going against this aesthetic, Rothenberg's horse paintings re-introduce figuration in late-twentieth-century painting and, as such, are considered breakthrough works. Although the critical discussion of the 1970s suggested that representational styles no longer could embrace or express relevance during that time, Thomas McEvilley has noted, "representation and the figure, far from being obsolete, survived the period of abstraction and reasserted themselves about ten years ago [he would be referring to circa 1975] as something we still wanted and needed."¹⁰ Paradoxically, Rothenberg's paintings are in many ways are rooted in a matrix of divergent artistic attitudes and practices specific to the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, even though they also represent a break from accepted abstract motifs. This chapter's primary focus will be Rothenberg's connections to abstract art, while Chapter Two will explore key factors that shaped her approach to imagery.

This analysis also will attempt to correct the oversimplifications that exist in literature about contemporary art, particularly the perception that Rothenberg's imagery emerged solely as a reaction against Minimalist strictures. Additionally, a more complex analysis will consider the formative influences of various abstract movements on Rothenberg's art. By identifying the character and the issues of the New York City art scene in the early 1970s, we can understand how and why Rothenberg drew raw material for a synthesis that, when combined with imagery,

¹⁰ Thomas McEvilley, "The Figure and What It Says," in *The Exile's Return: Toward A Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 87.

helped revitalize painting. Last, we will see how Rothenberg took this synthesis and used it to shape a content that had psychological tones and resonance, values more fully explored in Chapter Two.

Rothenberg arrived in New York in 1969. The four years that followed served as a crucial gestation period for her horse paintings, the first of which is dated 1974. Rothenberg remembers that during this period [1969 – 1973] she “was learning, listening, looking, hearing, awake . . . getting tremendous input.”¹¹ This “input” came from both painting and non-painting sources, resulting in a selective eclecticism that, paradoxically, led Rothenberg to an original and unique style. Rothenberg assimilated diverse attitudes, systems, and pictorial elements and integrated them into her own highly personal and intuitive artistic sensibility. Moreover, Rothenberg's synthesis of key aspects of painting, sculpture, video, and performance art—brought to bear solely on the practice of painting—contributed to a revitalization of the medium of painting at a moment when it was perceived as irrelevant and in decline. Rothenberg's assimilation of these diverse formal and methodological elements forms the understructure on which the horse paintings are constructed.

Existing art historical models for analyzing stylistic breakthroughs are not easily adapted to Rothenberg's artistic project of the 1970s. For example, one commonly accepted model that views new styles as a series of ruptures with the past discards much of the source material for Rothenberg's development. This construct, often applied to Modernism, pits one style against and in reaction to its predecessor. Rothenberg, however, simultaneously draws from existing styles that are sometimes theoretically opposed. Another model, Greenberg's flawed notion of painting's self-

11 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Joan Simon, in *4 Artists* featuring Robert Ryman, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and Susan Rothenberg, prod. and dir. Michael Blackwood, 47 min., Michael Blackwood Productions, 1988, videocassette.

correcting drive towards purity, is inapplicable to Rothenberg's imagistic work because Greenberg devalued imagery to the point of exclusion. A third model, the problem-riddled theories of Post-Modernism, also is inapplicable because Rothenberg's work neither appropriates imagery nor devalues Modernism.

I propose a model in which the significance of the horse paintings is best realized by analyzing how they connect with and deviate from an inclusive spectrum of artistic practices. This approach is uniquely suited to the 1970s—a period, as Andreas Huyssen has noted, in which a new “culture of eclecticism” emerged.¹² My analysis will alternate between a microcosmic or detailed investigation of Rothenberg's art and its underpinnings, and a view of a limited historical period or “micro-period.” The system of “micro-periodizing,” utilized by historian Stephen Paul Miller, considers “small temporal changes within an historical period” as a way to “articulate the period's prevalent epistemes.”¹³ This allows for an in-depth analysis of a relatively short period—in this case, the years between 1969 and 1974. It is my contention that the horse paintings, which date from 1974 to 1980, are rooted in the earlier, formative years after Rothenberg moved to New York in 1969.

A State of Grace - New York, 1969

When Rothenberg arrived in New York in September of 1969, she was miraculously thrust into a kind of interdisciplinary “graduate seminar” in contemporary art: the downtown lofts, galleries, and communal artistic activities became her real-life classrooms. She had received her degree in painting from Cornell

12 Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” in After the Great Divide (US: American University Press, 1986), 188.

13 Stephen Paul Miller, The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 47.

University two years prior, but her experience there was, at times, difficult.

During her junior year, Rothenberg, then a sculpture major, made a group of Lucas Samaras-inspired *Nasty Objects*. The head of the sculpture department took an immediate dislike to her cement alarm clock with spiky teeth-like protrusions and failed her in his course. Rothenberg quit the school and spent five months in Greece. When she returned to Cornell, the same professor refused her entry into the sculpture department, telling her, "I don't think you have any talent whatsoever and I'm not letting you into my department."¹⁴ Rothenberg re-entered Cornell as a painting major, completed the spring semester in Cornell's independent study program in New York City, and took double course loads back at Ithaca to make up for her leave of absence.

After college, Rothenberg moved often, trying to find her niche. During a post-graduation trip to Formentera, a small island off the coast of Spain, Rothenberg lived an expatriate lifestyle similar to the one she had experienced in Greece, with all the earmarks of an "extended lost weekend."¹⁵ Looking for some direction, she enrolled in 1967 in The Corcoran School of Art in Washington D.C., but dropped out after a short time. The late 1960s were uncertain, difficult times for Rothenberg, riddled with false starts, isolation, and emotional trauma. Her personal life mirrored the national sense of tension and unrest: the trauma of the Vietnam War; the rebellion on college campuses; the collective mourning of a country coping with the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. Rothenberg was determined to make a new start, and in 1969 she left her family home in Buffalo, New York and headed for Nova Scotia. During a wait between trains in Montreal, she impulsively changed direction and boarded a train for New York City. Her art would come to imitate her

14 Joan Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 12.

15 Robert Storr, "All in a Day's Work," in Susan Rothenberg: Fifteen Years - A Survey (Malmo: Rooseum, 1990), 9.

life, as intuition and instinct always guided Rothenberg.

A new life quickly fell into place for Rothenberg. With her suitcase and skateboard stored in a locker in Grand Central Station, Rothenberg looked for a place to stay. Fortunately, John Stoutman, a friend from Cornell, spotted her on the street and offered her temporary residence. She quickly connected with other Cornell friends—artists Gordon Matta-Clark¹⁶ and Alan Saret—who introduced her to the downtown art crowd; within two weeks she had rented painter Mary Heilman's loft on lower West Broadway. Through Heilman, Rothenberg's circle expanded to include Philip Glass, John Duff, Jeff Lew, Richard Serra, Nancy Graves, Steve Reich, Tina Girouard, George Trackas, Keith Sonnier, Robert Wilson, and Dickie Landry. "My whole life began over again,"¹⁷ she recalled. Soon she found her own loft and became a member of a downtown crowd of rising young artists.

The interdisciplinary nature of her circle, within which collaboration was the norm, was in many ways an extension of the communal spirit fostered in the 1960s. Painters helped sculptors fabricate and install sculpture pieces.¹⁸ Sculptors took part in performance projects. Performance artists would enlist friends to enact experimental pieces. Artists in Rothenberg's circle frequented rehearsal sessions of Phillip Glass and Steve Reich. Friends gathered around Tina Girouard's kitchen table throughout the day for impromptu discussions. Rothenberg was an active participant in this stimulating milieu: she attended dance classes given by Deborah Hay, an important dancer in the experimental Judson Dance group; assisted sculptor Nancy Graves in

16 At that time, Gordon Matta Clark was known to his friends as Gordon Matta. Soon after, he added his mother's last name Clark to his name to distinguish himself from his well-known father, artist Roberto Matta Echaurren.

17 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 18.

18 For example, Richard Serra used friends and fellow artists to hold up pieces and roll through steel tubing. There are countless examples of these collaborations.

transforming marble dust and wire into bones and fossils; and participated in three Joan Jonas performance pieces.¹⁹

Minimalism and Process Art dominated the downtown art galleries and studios and was practiced in one form or another by such members of Rothenberg's circle as John Duff, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Mary Heilman. A lively mix of new ideas bombarded Rothenberg, and by her own admission it was a transformative experience. New York was welcoming, expansive, energetic, and fascinating. Rothenberg remembers it as "a state of grace."²⁰

A summary of the micro-period

The late-1960s to the mid-1970s mark a pivotal micro-period in Contemporary Art history, with New York City, arguably, as its epicenter.²¹ By the late 1960s, Soho (South of Houston Street) had attracted a wide range of artists enticed by inexpensive studios converted from empty manufacturing spaces. City housing ordinances allowed legal conversion of raw space into lofts for working and living, giving many artists squatting-rights in an area that was fast becoming a commercial and artistic hub.²² Galleries appeared at an unprecedented rate, as did alternative spaces such as The Kitchen, The Clocktower Gallery, and Artists Space, to name only a few. By 1973, well-established dealers Leo Castelli and Andre Emmerich opened

19 Rothenberg's important connection to Jonas, specifically and Performance art in general will be discussed in Chapter Two.

20 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 19.

21 This is not to suggest that New York was the only center of interest. On the contrary, in Europe, for example, the Arte Povera artists were very active during this period. Important works by many of the artists in that group such as Janis Kounellis and Mario Merz were shown in New York galleries.

22 Many spaces were available to artists through AIR and other City ordinances, which allowed special building codes for artists.

Soho galleries in the 420 Broadway building, making it an important exhibition center for established Pop, Minimal, and Color Field artists. While the work of established post-World War II artists was exhibited primarily in the museums and uptown galleries, the downtown scene expanded to present a proliferation of styles that existed beside the established set of icons.²³

Pop Art and Minimalism were widely recognized as the major styles of the 1960s, and its superstars—Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Frank Stella, and Donald Judd—continued to produce work that was carefully watched throughout this period. Indeed, museum retrospectives of these artists increased throughout the early 1970s; for example, Rauschenberg and Johns had museum exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art and The Whitney Museum of American Art, respectively.²⁴ Many of the Pop masters explored innovations in printmaking, forging partnerships with a new breed of fine art publisher, including ULAE, Gemini G.E.L., and Tyler Graphics.

Several galleries featured representational styles for which the term Super-Realism or Photorealism was coined. Artists like painter Richard Estes and sculptor Duane Hanson aspired to a “trompe l’oeil” effect, distancing themselves from Pop Art’s references to advertising and repetitive imagery. Nonetheless, Super-Realism generally is considered as an offshoot of Pop Art, a style which had no significant influence on Rothenberg and to which she had no affinity.²⁵

23 For a useful summary of the loft laws and rapid transformation of Soho, see Corinne Robins, The Pluralist Decade: American Art, 1968–1981 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984), 1-7.

24 Robert Rauschenberg had an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1969 and Jasper Johns had a retrospective at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 1977.

25 I am not including Chuck Close in this group. Although he is sometimes put in this classification, he does not see himself as a Photorealist. In addition, his work has been concerned with other issues outside of Photorealism. Although his work

Pop Art's predecessors, the Abstract Expressionists, had attained legendary status as the 1970s unfolded. Their legacies continued through a hybrid of gestural and Color Field styles. Second-generation Abstract Expressionist painters were ubiquitous in the galleries, and, even though a commercial market for this art expanded, it no longer represented the cutting edge. We will see, however, that Susan Rothenberg did not reject Abstract Expressionism but rather used it as the basis for her return to painting after a succession of experimental phases.

In the critical perception, however, painting was taking a back seat to other mediums—particularly sculpture—during the 1970s. Robert Ryman's remarks about the early 1960s are even more applicable to the early 1970s:

Pop Art opened artists' eyes to the fact that other things could be done along with painting. Pop was certainly the dominant avant-garde movement in painting in the early '60s. All other approaches were not considered. In fact, painting was pronounced dead several times. A lot of lesser-known Abstract Expressionist painters, and there were a lot, did not know what to do. It was a shock thing. Many painters I knew stopped painting and turned to sculpture because they felt they could not continue with an approach they had been involved with. They felt sculpture offered more of a way to further the problems they had been involved with. I felt very much alone in those years.²⁶

Ryman's disconsolate statement reflects the recurring notion, then popular, that the demise of painting as a medium was imminent. Speculative theories regarding the "crisis in painting" abounded, and numerous artists' panels addressed the question

did not have a formative influence on Rothenberg, he did impact other New Image artists such as Jennifer Bartlett and Joe Zucker.

26 Robert Ryman, "Robert Ryman: Untitled Statements (1983)," in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, Kristen Stiles and Peter Selz, eds. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 607.

"Is painting dead?" *Artforum* even dedicated its entire September 1975 issue to this query. Rothenberg recalls the general thinking of the moment, noting that the critical perception was that "painting was dead."²⁷

Painting was less suited than sculpture to the growing experimentation with non-traditional materials and procedures. Even for artists still painting during the early 1970s—particularly downtown artists such as Mary Heilman²⁸—a new attitude towards painting had developed. Heilman notes that there was an insistence on a kind of "anti-bravado painting, turning away from complicated technical paint application in favor of simple processes."²⁹ (Fig 1/1) Rothenberg was trying to create works that looked as if they had been badly drawn, leaving one viewer to call them "deliberately crude." Curator Marcia Tucker exposed the full rising of this current in her 1978 exhibition *Bad Painting*.³⁰

From the late-1960s through the mid-1970s, however, the critical dialogue was not painting-based but process-oriented. Anti-illusionist ideas spawned Process Art. Process Art emphasized the nature of the materials and the production of the artwork itself. Rothenberg and others in her circle such as Matta-Clark, Serra, and Heilman were all heavily involved with Process Art in the early 1970s.

Lucy Lippard's turning-point exhibition of 1966, *Eccentric Abstraction*, was an early signpost that art was moving towards the ephemeral, the anti-form, and the idiosyncratic. Included in this exhibition were two artists, Eva Hesse and Bruce Nauman, whose work had greatly influenced a generation of artists developing during

27 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, Susan Rothenberg, Chicago, Video Data Bank, 1984

28 Heilman and Rothenberg were friends during that period and part of the same group of artists who socialized, discussed art, and often collaborated on art projects.

29 Mary Heilman, interview by author, October 5, 1999, New York.

30 James Albertson and Marcia Tucker, Bad Painting (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1978).

the late-1960s and early- 1970s. Their work opened up new artistic territories of expanded origins, processes, and structures in which a highly personal statement was encoded.

With *Eccentric Abstraction*, in 1966, Lippard had been ahead of the trend. But by 1969 the shift in art towards new process-oriented sculpture—spawned by the still-dominant formalist and Minimalist tendencies—had a solid base. This new emphasis was well documented by a 1969 Whitney exhibition curated by Marcia Tucker and James Monte. This breakthrough exhibition, *Anti-Illusionism: Procedures and Materials*, revealed the extent to which procedural directives had replaced strict Minimalist geometries and industrial fabrication. The artists exhibited were beginning to think of the finished work of art as a result of a set of procedures rather than as the consequence of predetermined formal requirements.

Traditional casting and carving materials and techniques were rejected in favor of materials that were more pliable and interactive with physical forces such as gravity, force, and velocity. Richard Serra was using molten lead and splashed steel in unique and process-oriented ways—throwing the metals in liquid form against the wall in works such as *Splashing*, (Fig 1/2) for example. Serra also used industrial steel in *Prop Pieces* leaning against a wall or other pieces of steel. In *Verb Piece*, Serra catalogued many of the procedures utilized by the artists, who included Lynda Benglis, John Duff,³¹ Neil Jenney,³² Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Richard Tuttle. Artists rolled, grouped, spilled, flowed, layered, paired, enclosed, and scattered

31 Ironically, John Duff who was to become a good friend, encouraged Rothenberg to abandoned process oriented works and to paint. In an interview, Rothenberg recalls, “He said that there was almost no stretched canvas painting going on, and so it seemed logical to try it.” In Peter Schjeldahl, “Susan Rothenberg Talks About Art, Animals, and “Getting Serious,” *Vanity Fair*, November, 1985, 84.

32 Jenney was then doing sculpture, not painting.

a wide range of materials—at times dematerializing the art object altogether.³³ The exhibition catalogue essay points out that the conception and execution of the piece were in many ways more important than the finished product: “The radical nature of many works in this exhibition depends less on the fact that new materials are being used by the artists than on the fact that the acts of conceiving and placing the pieces take precedence over the object quality of the works.”³⁴

Art historian Robert Pincus-Witten has written that this shift from form to anti-form between 1966 and 1970 “marks a watershed in American Art, ending the decade that derived its options, by and large, from a still earlier parent style, Minimalism.”³⁵ This shift, Pincus-Witten posits, shapes a new “Post-Minimal” period. He constructed a generalized model of the period from 1966 to 1976, which, like Post-Impressionism, was “preceded and posited by an apparent generative style,”³⁶ referring, in this case, to Minimalism. Pincus-Witten wrote: “Thus, an extremely spare scheme of the last decade can be read as 1) the advent of the “pictorial/sculptural” mode; 2) the emergence of an abstract, information-based epistemology; and 3) its counterpoises, Body Art, and conceptual theatre.”³⁷

While Pincus-Witten’s analysis is insightful, it may lead to an oversimplification of what was happening in the art world in the early 1970s.

Certainly one could argue that by the late-1960s and into the early-1970s, Minimalist

33 Much of this material was looked at again in another Whitney Museum exhibition titled The New Sculpture: 1965-1975. Armstrong, Richard and Richard Marshall, eds. And The New Sculpture 1965–75: Between Geometry and Gesture. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990.

34 James Monte, introductory essay, in Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), 4.

35 Robert Pincus-Witten, Postminimalism: American Art of the Decade (New York: Out of London Press, 1977), 15.

36 Ibid., 13.

37 Ibid., 18.

thought proved to be a useful breeding ground for other artistic investigations. For example, the theoretical systems that accompanied Minimalism shared the a priori logic from which information- and language-based art evolved. For example, in Minimalism, a system or schema was conceptualized in its totality before it was fabricated. With information art, the area of investigation and the procedural directives were also conceived in full before the piece was physically realized. However, it is important to remember that Minimalism neither ceased to exist nor was entirely replaced by Post-Minimalism, but rather became one of many styles that coexisted in the 1970s. For instance, Minimalist regularity, geometry, and simplicity continued to inform pared-down abstract painting and sculpture. George Trackas, an artist in Rothenberg's group whom she married in 1971, was creating black and white sculptures firmly rooted in Minimalist sensibilities.

In addition to the abstract art forms that Minimalism fostered, new boundaries between act and object were being tested in first-generation feminist art, environmental art (Earth Art), sculpture, and video art. Pioneers of performative art such as Joseph Beuys and Alan Kaprow had laid the groundwork, and now Performance Art as a new and serious genre was in its first flowering. Joan Jonas, whom Rothenberg knew well, was a pioneer of 1970s performance and video art, which also will be discussed in the next chapter.

This multitude of movements—and the labels used to describe them—indicates the plurality of styles that took root during the early 1970s. These classifications, despite their frequent usage, are not universally agreed upon, are often used interchangeably, and can confuse rather than clarify. One wonders if Lucy Lippard was poking fun at this label stew by titling her chronicle of this period Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference

book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted fragmented text, art works, documents, symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard.³⁸

Categorizations and divisions assigned to the art of this period have led, at times, to art historical narratives that overlook the common ground shared by many artists of the period.

From 1969 to the mid-1970s, Rothenberg was in the midst of this fertile artistic environment, rich with tradition and possibilities. During these years, Rothenberg underwent a transformative apprenticeship.

The Apprenticeship

As Rothenberg's own identity as an artist developed, she identified the issues and practices that held her interest and, almost as importantly, those that did not. Even before her arrival in New York, Rothenberg had gone through a trial-and-error period, experimenting with various approaches and materials. She even had felt some satisfaction with paintings she had completed in 1967-8, works inspired by Larry Poons's elliptical paintings.

Rothenberg first became acquainted with Poons's art while taking art classes as a teenager at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo. She became quite familiar with their collection, which included a quintessential Poons elliptical painting

³⁸Lucy R. Lippard, Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972 (California: University of California Press, 1997).

titled *Orange Crush* (Fig. 1/3). The influence of this work is apparent in Rothenberg's *Rubber Ball* (Fig. 1/4), a painting produced in 1966 during an independent study in New York. In this work, she emulates Poons's play with the figure/ground relationship, a strategy she later explored fully in her horse paintings. Like Poons, Rothenberg exploits the jumpy effects of small increments of saturated color presented as a motif on an optical field.³⁹

A few paintings with images of suburban houses, picket fences, and domestic animals were as close as Rothenberg ever would come to a kind of Pop rhetoric: "These were [Rothenberg's] little statements about suburban life,"⁴⁰ Rothenberg noted, probably alluding to the comfortable suburb outside Buffalo where she grew up. In *Screen Door* (Fig. 1/5), a quirky mixed-media piece, Rothenberg collaged a rectangle of air-conditioning filter onto the part of the canvas she had painted as sky.⁴¹ Here, the imagery is asymmetrically counterpoised against the formal divisions of the entire canvas. This subtle compositional acumen remained a strong part of Rothenberg's artistic language.

Rothenberg's stylistic experimentation—appropriate and often necessary for a young artist's development—accelerated upon her arrival in New York.⁴² Her

39 Yet she opts for a more idiosyncratic placement, dividing the canvas diagonally with an invisible line. Departing from the sharp contours and all-over placement of Poons's ellipses, Rothenberg favors a greater sense of touch and a more atmospheric field.

40 Joan Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, 15. These were similar to the suburban houses she knew growing up in Buffalo.

41 This painting owes a debt to Susan Hall's work that Rothenberg admired.

42 Rothenberg became a serious artist in New York. She socialized with other artists but also noticed that they disappeared for significant periods of time to work in their studios. John Duff, a sculptor whose advice Rothenberg took seriously, taught her the importance of working every day in the studio. She learned similar lessons from sculptor George Trackas. Rothenberg later recalled that Trackas was "...a very committed artist—very, very hard-working, and I was lucky to catch some of that ethic." (Simon, *Rothenberg*, 26) Perhaps her most important role model was sculptor

interest in the work of Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, and John Duff⁴³ led her to experiment with different processes and materials. She tore, cut, glued, re-glued, and suspended experimental materials such as wire mesh, plastic, clay paper, silver paper, and polyethylene sheets. Even so, she followed her natural tendency towards the personal rather than the programmatic.

During her process period she was more closely aligned to Eva Hesse and Richard Tuttle than to Robert Morris and Barry LeVa. She opted for small, labor-intensive hand-made works rather than large, installational constructions of neon, felt, steel, or rubber. It was this kind of juxtaposition of pattern and natural reference—like the lopsided loops of Hesse’s rubber pieces or Tuttle’s irregular shapes—which prompted Hilton Kramer to characterize process art as “demoralized geometry”⁴⁴ She explains the genesis and process of a mixed-media piece titled *(W)holes and Parts*: (Fig. 1/6)

I was experimenting with materials, and drawing played a role in that. I got hold of this idea of “holes and parts,” using the double entendre W-H-O-L-E-S and H-O-L-E-S. I started doing little pencil sketches. Then I began ripping small pieces of paper off the sheet, and gluing them back onto the screen with wire next to where they were cut out, or back in their original places. It was very conceptually oriented because that’s what I was looking at, and that’s what was happening in the art world in 1969.⁴⁵

Although Rothenberg lost interest in this technique, her fascination with

Nancy Graves, in whom Rothenberg saw a totally committed and incredibly driven woman artist who had won the respect of her peers.

43 Rothenberg was looking at these artists work and had become friendly with John Duff who at that time was involved in Process art.

44 Hilton Kramer, “Expressionism Returns to Painting,” New York Times (November 1968): 23.

45 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Michael Auping (24-26 July 1991), in Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings (New York: Rizzoli International Publications and Buffalo, New York: Albright-Knox Gallery, 1992): 49.

parts and wholes would remain. Given her artistic inclinations, she eventually veered away from process and conceptual art, which often lacked a hand-made quality⁴⁶ as well as the rigorous formal organization she favored.

Rothenberg used “typical” process art materials, but found the sensuous, “juicy,” messy quality of the paint more satisfying. In her own words, she “had tried to work with some of these systems that were so popular,”⁴⁷ but they apparently lacked the directness of painting and the nuances of touch that she favored. Even when she was “experimenting with silver paint and lead like Richard Serra,” she insists that she “was trying to bring along the Johns touch.”⁴⁸ The artist’s hand remained central to Rothenberg’s aesthetic, even as she latched onto two staples from the abstract arsenal of the day: the figure/ground and the grid.

For example, the grid format in Rothenberg’s *Multiple Splice* (Fig. 1/7) recalls Eva Hesse’s sculpture *Sans* (Fig. 1/8). The materials are suggestive of membranes, jellied body fluids, and atmospheric transparencies. Lucy Lippard notes that, for Hesse, “her main interest in latex, fiberglass, and other flexible or translucent synthetics was their malleability, their near-ugly delicacy, and ambiguous textures.”⁴⁹ Like Hesse, Rothenberg was more interested in the evocative or metaphorical possibilities of materials associated with process rather than the actual experience of using the materials. This tendency is evident in some of Rothenberg’s little-known drawings from the mid-1970s.

In one such drawing, Rothenberg layers translucent papers on top of a

46 The conceptualist mantra as regards the artist’s hand was best stated by Lawrence Weiner in 1969 with his statement, “1. The artist may construct the work; 2. The work may be fabricated, 3 The work need not be built”

47 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, Susan Rothenberg, Chicago, Video Data Bank, 1984.

48 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 26.

49 Lucy R. Lippard, Eva Hesse (NY: New York University Press, 1976), 133.

drawing of a horse, its image visible through an opaque, smoky screen created by the paper layers. The pencil drawing's intimacy is played against the paper's synthetic quality, creating an ambiguous, if not poetic, juxtaposition of materials. Rothenberg always skewed her process art to accentuate the physicality of the surface, variegating, for example, the matte and translucent surfaces. Rothenberg would orchestrate these surface effects increasingly throughout the 1970s.⁵⁰

In November, 1972, Rothenberg gave birth to her only child. Motherhood forced her to rethink her technical procedures for practical reasons. She switched from hand mixed pigments which were dangerous if ingested by a child to a non-toxic acrylic-based gouache. She also needed something that was fast drying and allowed her to work with speed and facility while the baby was asleep. Rothenberg explains, "When you have a child and when the child cries you have to wash your hands, but then you don't want to put any strong chemicals on them."⁵¹ She also underwent a period of evaluating her identity in terms of being an artist. Everyday she took her daughter, Maggie with her to her studio. She found a new seriousness and purpose in her own work. She began to take herself more seriously and her husband George Trackas offered support.⁵² Rothenberg remembers:

50 It should be noted, however, that some historians posit that this emphasis on painterly surface, a characteristic generally aligned to Abstract Expressionism, also has roots in post-Minimalism. Lynn Zelansky summarizes this in "Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties," in Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1994). She notes Rosalind Krauss's notion that the obsessional rather than the relational, characteristic of Post-Minimalism, has its roots in Minimalism. Zelansky also cites Maurice Berger's notion that Minimalism, rather than being one systematic or logical is about the primacy of experience, characteristics which are explored in Post-Minimalism.

51 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 26.

52 For example, when they were married in 1971, Susan's family gave them a cash gift and George insisted that Susan use it towards the cost of maintaining her own studio.

“It was a way of maintaining my own identity as well as being a very good sculptor’s wife and a very darling child’s mother. I had thought I didn’t have any intention of making it a career, but I was isolated because I had a little baby and not many of my friends or any of the people in the artworld were having children.”⁵³

Rothenberg continued to experiment with processes and styles that were being explored by many young artists at that time. However, by 1974 tired Rothenberg tired of working in an abstract vein. After completing a series of pale green and gray checkerboard pattern paintings with a pencil line drawn down the middle, she thought them to be “dreadful and boring.”⁵⁴ Disgusted with her work, she knew the apprenticeship was over; in the wake of this realization, the horse imagery emerged.

Not an Abstract Painter

This constant experimentation had led Rothenberg to the critical realization that she was not an abstract painter. After the pattern paintings, imagery surfaced in *Foxes on a Hill* (Fig. 1/9), which prefigured the horse paintings in its sketchy images of animals suspended in motion on a monochromatic flurry of paint.⁵⁵ Interestingly, this painting recalls similar concerns in the work of American painter Milton Avery, an artist who explored image and abstraction in earlier decades (Fig. 1/10). In some ways, *Foxes on a Hill* was a transitional painting, in which animal imagery began to surface; this image, however, wasn’t the subject that Rothenberg intuitively felt was

53 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 26.

54 Susan Rothenberg, interviewed by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

55 Rothenberg has actually used animal imagery earlier. She had used the sheep image and also some pieces with animal prints, which not longer exist.

going to be evocative enough for her purposes. "I needed an image of some kind and out came the horses,"⁵⁶ she asserts.

When Rothenberg started using the horse imagery, she did not consider it a wise career move, given the aesthetic climate. She recalls: "I was looking at all this Minimal stuff. I was seeing all this work, and when I started painting pink horses I thought, well, my dear, you aren't going to be seen around New York, but I just wanted to do it. I wasn't ambitious."⁵⁷ Painting was considered passé, and painting in a figurative mode bordered on treason. As Robert Hughes has noted, "it is hard nowadays to remember what kind of an unyielding prejudice against any kind of hand painted figuration existed in New York twenty years ago[referring to 1973]."⁵⁸ Abstraction, primarily in sculpture but also in painting, dominated the pages of art magazines and the galleries. Both past and present literature on Rothenberg has oversimplified the situation by claiming that she introduced imagery to the pared-down abstractions of Minimalism. A more accurate statement is that Rothenberg reintroduced imagery into the then-dominant mode of abstraction—of which Minimalism was then a driving force, but by no means the only constituent.⁵⁹

Whether it was referred to as Gestural Abstraction, Color Field, or even Post- Painterly Abstraction,⁶⁰ the residue of Abstract Expressionism retained a solid

56 Susan Rothenberg, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

57Ibid.

58 Robert Hughes, "Signs of Anxiety," *Time*, 1 March 1993, 60.

59 Added to this over-simplification is the problem that Minimalism began as primarily a sculptural movement and the artists labeled Minimalist painters did not all adhere to strict Minimalist tenants such as the erasure of the artist's hand.

60 The term "Post Painterly Abstraction" was coined by Clement Greenberg in 1964 for the exhibition of the same name he organized, which originated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Some of the painters included were Walter Darby Bannard, Sam Francis, Al Held Alfred Jensen, Ellsworth Kelly, Raymond Parker, and Frank Stella. Greenberg asserts that the artists share pictorial openness and

hold during the late-1960s and early-1970s. Rothenberg's paintings marked a reversal in the sparse abstraction practiced not only by painters associated with Minimalism such as Agnes Martin, Brice Marden, Frank Stella, and Robert Ryman, but also by Color Field painters such as Jules Olitski, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland, as well as second-generation Abstract Expressionist painters such as Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, and Sam Francis.⁶¹

Given the artistic climate, it is little wonder that Rothenberg was shocked when the horse paintings met with critical success. Yet from the beginning, the horse paintings hit a nerve, and their significance was immediately recognized. Why? The answer lies in a number of possibilities that are interrelated. Rothenberg used the familiar territory of 1970s abstraction as a pictorial armature in which to introduce hand-painted imagery.⁶² Not only did abstraction become overastheticized at that time, but conceptual, process, and information art strains were exhausted, leaving open the possibility of more psychologically charged content. And finally, Rothenberg tapped into a repressed desire for image and content emerging from the collective artistic consciousness.

She stumbled upon the horse imagery in her studio while scribbling on a

clarity as well as a knowledge of Painterly Abstraction, and often an emphasis on technical procedure.

61 These categories overlap. The labels are not universally agreed upon in the literature. My reason for using them here is to point out the range of abstract styles even though the labels are used in many different contexts. For example, Robert Ryman was often labeled as a Minimalist because of the sparse monochrome field of color. However, Ryman's attention to the brushstroke can be linked quite clearly to the gestural autonomy of Abstract Expressionism. Agnes Martin is often placed in the Minimalist camp although her attention to touch is at the essence of her work.

62 Historian Irving Sandler categorizes abstraction of this period into either Minimalism or Formalism, stating that both derived from Greenbergian insistence on an abstract, self-purifying mode. See Irving Sandler, Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late '60s to the Early '90s. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996).

piece on paper. Rothenberg has often been asked where the horse imagery came from. “I still have to repeat this embarrassing line about having doodled it,” answered Rothenberg to curator Richard Marshall, adding “I was very disgusted so I stopped working on, and doodled a horse one day.”⁶³ Soon after, she made a small gouache on canvas titled *First Horse* (Fig. 1/11), a “badly drawn” outline of a horse divided by a penciled centerline, with both image and ground painted in a pale terra cotta wash. The sketchy image on crepuscular earth colors recalled prehistoric cave art, which Rothenberg admitted was part of her thinking at that time. From the beginning, Rothenberg anchored the horse to the field. In *First Horse*, short pencil lines staple the horse, pictorially and metaphorically, to the torn canvas while indicating directional vectors. In the three paintings that followed, the horse, still awkward and tentative, increased in size until in *Triphammer Bridge* (Fig. 1/12) the horse roughly matched Rothenberg’s height of 5’6”. This painting was included in a 1974 *New Talent* exhibition at A.M. Sachs Gallery and was purchased by Holly Solomon, who came to see Rothenberg’s work at John Duff’s suggestion.

Rothenberg had thought she would be perceived as a “ghastly intruder”⁶⁴ on the art scene, but fortunately Holly Solomon, who already had collected Pop Art and was receptive to new art, purchased a painting by Rothenberg. Becoming an early and influential champion of Rothenberg’s work, Solomon recalls her first response to *Triphammer Bridge*: “I said a horse, a well painted horse, a painterly horse. . . . How do you miss with this one? Everyone loves horse paintings . . . in monochromatic

63 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

64 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, Susan Rothenberg, Chicago, Video Data Bank, 1984

color . . . couldn't miss."⁶⁵ Solomon wasn't the only one who understood the power of the horse image; that image not only had a rich art-historical lineage, but also was presented in a pictorial language authentic to the period.

Consequently, exhibition opportunities came quickly to Rothenberg. At a party Solomon threw to display her new painting, Miani Johnson, director of Willard Gallery, saw it and offered Rothenberg a one-person exhibition. Jeffrey Lew, the force behind the 112 Greene Street Gallery, also offered Rothenberg a one-person exhibition. This was the first time a painter had been asked to exhibit in the alternative space previously used for performances, concerts, mixed-media events, and installational sculpture. At the suggestion of Bill Katz, a respected "eye" and voice in the downtown art world, Rothenberg approached the exhibition in a site-specific manner, creating three canvases large enough to hold the large space. Scaling up meant that she could work on only one painting at a time in the studio's limited wall space. Until the installation, she never had seen together the three large paintings that comprised the exhibition.

The exhibition was a forceful presentation of image subordinated to composition. In three paintings, *Algarve* (Fig. 1/13), *United States* (Fig. 1/14), and *Siena Dos Equis* (Fig. 1/15) a horse's silhouette fits tightly on an expansive field. The horse is locked in place with geometric lines, triangles, and diamond shapes, and also by the shape of the painting itself, where extremities such as ears or hooves push at the edges. In *Siena Dos Equis*, at 9'6" x 22'10" the largest of the three, a monumental diamond pattern and the naturalism of the horse outline—highly simplified, without features, tail, or mane—are equilibrated. Each horse painting lends itself to a complex

65 Holly Solomon, interview by author, 23 November 1999, New York. Solomon had also seen Neil Jenney's paintings of that period and she thought Jenney was the key to her appreciation of the possibility of a painterly realism.

formal analysis in terms of the horse's placement on the canvas. Similarly, the number of color field dynamics abounds: horse on a contrasting field; horse and field the same color, with a black outline; contrasting colors on each side of the dividing line; etc. Yet these formal aspects alone do not account for the emotional wallop of these paintings. What becomes psychologically symbolic is the melding of formalism and naturalism. Compositional strictures become metaphors for psychological states such as isolation, longing, claustrophobia, separation, and immobility.

Using the Canon

Rothenberg consciously adhered to a pictorial canon particular to the mid-1970s. As Rothenberg remembers, "The horse was a quiet image . . . I was able to stick to the philosophy of the day—keeping the painting flat and anti-illusionist—but I also got to use this big, soft, heavy, strong, powerful form."⁶⁶ This philosophy of the day—or canon—demanded economy and austerity, anti-illusionism, adherence to the flatness of the picture plane, attention to figure/ground relationships, an emphasis on technical procedures, and a strict adherence to geometry. That Rothenberg was well aware of the canon is a matter of record. For example, in a statement about the first horse painting, she notes: "It's just a doodle in a minimal format, with a dividing line down the middle and Frank Stella-type square notches in the corners. I was aware of 'keep it flat,' anti-illusionism all the way."⁶⁷ Surprisingly, the Stella to which she was referring was painted in 1960⁶⁸ (Fig. 1/16), and had become a Minimalist icon. Part of the problem with abstraction by the mid-1970s was that it had become, to a great

66 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 29.

67 Peter Schjedahl, "Putting Painting On Its Feet," Vanity Fair (August 1983): 84.

68 She was obviously not speaking of Stella's work contemporaneous with the horse painting. By that time Stella was into a more baroque phase far distanced from the famous notch paintings.

extent, a stagnant recycling of such icons and familiar devices.

Because of her adherence to the canon's formalist checklist, one early review states, "Rothenberg parodies the artist's knowledge of formal issues."⁶⁹ Though misguided, this statement is understandable. Consider the compulsory canonical elements addressed in a painting such as *Two-Tone* (Fig. 1/17) — figure/ground, economy, monochromatism, and flatness. Yet, the negative connotation of parody—imitation with intent to ridicule—does not apply. Quite the opposite, Rothenberg's use of formal devices was part of an overall approach to painting which would remain a constant in her oeuvre, privileging a certain compositional rigor whereby the image is at service to the painting, and not the other way around.⁷⁰ Rothenberg stated that she showed "no respect for the horse image," dividing it, distorting it, putting it through various formal exercises, most especially geometric divisions.

"Geometry was my kit,"⁷¹ Rothenberg remembers. In fact, Rothenberg favored the horse image initially because of its ability to divide. Richard Serra's Prop pieces and process-oriented works led her to the idea of the centerline; she had been ripping the canvas in half, which eventually she replaced with a pencil line dividing the canvas down the middle. The center division of the earliest horse paintings mimicked a diptych format, cutting the picture into two halves, each of which could "hold its own." This format fulfilled another requirement: Rothenberg discovered that "the center line keeps you from illusionism . . . reading depth into the painting . . . you

69 Cite XXX

70 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, 5 March 1998, Artists Visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York. Note that this approach has stayed with her to the present.

71 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

can only read it from side to side, so it kept it real flat, which was what I wanted to have happen.”⁷² This center division, a popular device during this period, was used frequently by abstract artists such as Brice Marden (Fig. 1/18) and Frances Barth (Fig. 1/19).⁷³ Exploring other geometries as well, Rothenberg used two intersecting diagonals originating in the corners of the painting in *Butterfly* (Fig. 1/20), and vertical bars parallel to the sides of the canvas in *Untitled* (Fig. 1/21). These bars, which lock the horse in place, allude to the barriers of stable doors. Eventually Rothenberg shifted from the geometries imposed by the shape of the canvas to the geometries derived from the horse itself. In a drawing from 1976 (Fig. 1/22), lines connect parts of the horse, resulting in an axis derived from the horse’s body. Rothenberg explained:

I also wanted to make geometry. I had made the most of the geometry . . . relating to the shape of the canvas, the lines, the bars, the X’s, the four corners. I started to want to make geometry that related to the horse itself . . . the image inside the canvas. I had [these things] taking care of the canvas, the rectangle, then I wanted

relationship between the formal and the symbolic?

Geometry and Personal Subjects

Rothenberg's horse paintings represented an important shift towards a personal, albeit ambiguous, set of meanings. During the mid-1970s, "authentically personal subjects"—to use curator Richard Marshall's phrase—emerged in representations to which rigorous geometry associated with Minimalism had been applied. Marshall cites Joel Shapiro's 1972 exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery of the *Small Series* (Fig 1/23) sculptures as an early indicator of this tendency to simplify recognizable imagery with geometry. Shapiro combined geometric forms, such as the cube, with single subjects such as a bird, coffin, or bridge. Fusing image and geometry would be a common thread in Marshall's formulation of New Image Painting, which will be discussed in Chapter Three.⁷⁵

I propose that this tendency was evident as well in less traditional art forms, such as Performance Art and in the experimental works of Gordon Matta-Clark. Rothenberg recognized a kindred sensibility in the conceptually based work of Matta-Clark, who was her friend. Before I discuss the affinities between the two artists, however, a little background about Matta-Clark's work is needed.

Rothenberg first met Matta-Clark at Cornell, where he was an architecture major who was friendly with the fine arts students. Matta-Clark was already in New York when Rothenberg arrived, and he immediately welcomed her into his circle. With Cornell friends "Alan Saret and Matta-Clark," Rothenberg recalls, "I had a home."⁷⁶

75 Recently, Rothenberg has started photographing her paintings at various stages. This has given visual proof to the many changes a painting undergoes in the studio.

76 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 19.

From 1969 to 1971, Matta-Clark worked in various experimental modes, cultivating ephemeral algae pieces and combining processes of cooking with art making. For instance, in *Photo-Fry* (Fig. 1/24), he soaked photographs in specific solutions and fried them. In 1971, he was one of the founders of Food, a restaurant and meeting place for artists and run by artists. He began to address urban issues such as air quality in *Fresh Air Cart* (Fig. 1/25), a pushcart for dispensing oxygen in the Wall Street area, and urban debris in *Freshkill*, (Fig. 1/26) a film about a red panel truck that is smashed by a bulldozer in a garbage dump.

In 1969, Cornell University mounted *Earth Art* exhibition, the first exhibition anywhere devoted to earth art. For this exhibition, Dennis Oppenheim created a piece near the Cornell campus. Matta-Clark was taken with this earth work (titled *Beebe Lake Ice Cut*) and assisted the artist with the removal of a meandering splice of ice, which resulted in a divided frozen lake surface. The power of cutting through an existing entity in nature would later resonate in Matta-Clark's architectural splicings. In his first architectural cutting piece, *Sauna*, he removed and dissected a wood sauna and its adjacent wall sections, reconfiguring and revealing the internal structure. In *Bronx Floors: Threshold; Double Doors; Floors Above, Ceiling Below; 4-Way Wall*, he developed a technique of cutting abandoned buildings as a subversive activity: without consent of the city, required permits, or permission of the owners. Geometric divisions were often imposed on existing structures, and his project photographs also followed a geometric order. For instance, in *A W-Hole House: Roof Top Atrium* (Fig. 1/27), based on a piece he created in Italy in 1973 titled *Infraform*, he documents the manipulations to the X-shape rooftop structure with serial photographs in a grid format.

Matta-Clark realized the power of a geometric cut onto an existing structure

most effectively in the 1974 piece *Splitting: Four Corners* (Fig. 1/28). At Matta-Clark's request, Horace Solomon,⁷⁷ collector and co-founder of 98 Greene Street performance space, procured a house for him to work on prior to its demolition. Matta-Clark made a vertical cut in the center separating the house in two parts, followed by a series of horizontal cuts separating the elevations; doing this, he followed geometric guidelines. For example, he was very careful to keep the division lines parallel to the structure while his excavations created new geometric angles, lines, and arcs. The four top corners were extracted, kept as "souvenirs," and later exhibited. Holly Solomon arranged for a group of people to view the house, and photographs documented the interior and exterior at various stages. Rothenberg remembers the impact of this piece:

The first piece I responded to 100 percent was the cut house piece [*Splitting*, 1974 (Fig. 1/29)]. He was cutting the thing in half the way I was cutting the horse in half. His, though, was a superpower cut. It destroyed the whole concept of a house, and it was an exposé of what the building was. The house was very boring, a dumb suburban house in New Jersey. From the outside the cut has a real formal look. The insides were a chasm opening up the earth at your feet. Realizing that a house is a home, shelter, safety—knowing what a house is—is one thing. Being in that house made you feel like you were entering another state . . . schizophrenia, the earth's fragility, and full of wonder. It was so subtle at every level — there was a crack that fell through a door molding, through the stairs. The house was sad too. Homelessness. There was no home there.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Horace Solomon was married to Holly Solomon and actively involved in Holly Solomon's gallery and other artist-related projects.

⁷⁸ Susan Rothenberg statement, 1982, in Mary Jane Jacob, Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), 72-73.

Both Rothenberg and Matta-Clark used simple, familiar imagery with a wide range of associative meanings including literary narratives, childhood memories, and archetypal symbolism. The horse symbolizes strength, power, and sensuality; the house is a sign of family, protection, and belonging. Both artists subject the image to geometric manipulations, resulting in expanded metaphoric readings. Matta-Clark believed that by exposing, shattering, and inverting architectural and urban structures, he could establish metaphors for social and urban conditions. These metaphors cast light on problems both ecological and social.⁷⁹

However, like Rothenberg's horse, Matta-Clark's house becomes a metaphor for personal conditions. The concept of the wounded house in 1974 was akin to the isolation of Rothenberg's horse of the same year. Moreover, the personal metaphor is heightened by the unexpected beauty of the Matta-Clark work. A brilliant shaft of sunlight would stream into the crevice created by the two precariously shored-up sides of the house. Like an exquisite collage, the textures of the exposed walls—with their layering of old wallpapers—reflect the history of the house and its inhabitants. The project is emotionally affecting even in the photographs, the sole remnant of the building project. Similarly, there is a poetical beauty in Rothenberg's imposition of geometry onto an image with such rich associations. Unlike the Pop-Minimal applicators of geometry in the 1960s—deadpan and detached—Rothenberg and Matta-Clark, working in separate disciplines, had entered more psychological territories.

As Rothenberg's confidence grew, she would explore more psychological aspects of the content, which eventually resulted in the increasing importance of decentralized, pictorial, and psychological tension that became increasingly important

⁷⁹ This was part of Matta-Clark's idea of "anarchitecture," — deconstructing structure — and thereby revealing social and cultural situations.

to her. She notes: "In the early years, I had ambiguous feeling about the horse and what it meant to me. My formalist side was denying my content side. Eventually, I began tearing it apart to find out what it meant. It obviously became a vehicle for certain kinds of emotions."⁸⁰

Rothenberg, Minimalism & Abstract Expressionism

Rothenberg derived much from Minimalism in formal terms, including her reliance on geometry as a point of departure. However, for Rothenberg and many other artists, Minimalist philosophies had lost their relevance. She notes, "Things rush into empty places, and Minimalism had become an empty place."⁸¹

Rothenberg drew upon the tenets of an earlier movement, Abstract Expressionism, to shape her approach to painting. She was aligned formally to Minimalism but philosophically to Abstract Expressionism; in many ways she engaged in a dialectic between the two. Despite her utilization of Minimalist/Formalist rules, the core of her sensibility comes out of the Abstract Expressionist tradition. Rothenberg's paintings have been characterized as humanizing Minimalism but even if one were to argue that this oversimplification were true, it could not have happened without Rothenberg's unique synthesis of Abstract Expressionism. Consider what the artist had to say about paintings that embody Minimalist ideas: "Stella's pinstripes caused me some despair – he almost painted me right out of painting"⁸²

Rothenberg rejected Minimalist doctrine in favor of Abstract Expressionist

80 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Michael Auping, Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings, 19.

81 Susan Rothenberg, artists statement, Art In America (December 1982): 65, as cited in Bruce D. Kurtz, Contemporary Art 1965 - 1990 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1992), 163.

82 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

methods in four important ways: she favored an intuitive, flexible model rather than a fixed, systematic one; she practiced relational rather than non-relational painting;⁸³ she privileged the painterly field in which the hand or touch of the artist is visible rather than removed; and, last, she rejected the Minimalist erasure of emotion. Even though she used the Minimalist canon, her sensibility was more closely aligned with Abstract Expressionism.

Rothenberg's respect for the New York School had developed long before she ever set foot in the city. She was introduced to Abstract Expressionist work during her teen years, when she took art classes at the Albright Knox Gallery in her hometown, Buffalo. One of the strengths of the Gallery's collection is a cache of exquisite Abstract Expressionist work by Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning, and Clifford Still. She also took art classes with Dr. Joe, a neighborhood painter who worked in an Abstract Expressionist mode and admired Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline.

Rothenberg's knowledge only deepened after she moved to New York and frequented the city's galleries and museums. Work of almost all the Abstract Expressionist was exhibited regularly in New York galleries and museums during Rothenberg's crucial gestation period. Moreover, Abstract Expressionist traditions remain central to Rothenberg's work—even in the present. In a recent catalogue essay accompanying an exhibition of Rothenberg's 1990 paintings, curator Cheryl Brutvan noted that Rothenberg works in the tradition of post-War, heroic painting:

According to Rothenberg, the horse image emerged in a "doodle," an automatic drawing process, an artistic practice central to Abstract Expressionism.

Rothenberg says that quick sketches on the back of a Con Ed bill envelope were often

83 I am using the definition of non-relational painting as put forth by Judd and Stella, which will be discussed subsequently.

the starting point for a painting. Using this kind of automatic drawing as a starting point is reminiscent of strategies used by Abstract Expressionist artists such as Robert Motherwell.⁸⁴ For the Abstract Expressionists, this process of image finding had roots in surrealist methodology. Although Surrealist sensibilities are not the source for Rothenberg's work, the automatist process of image finding was crucial to the genesis of the horse painting. Stephen Polcari's summary of the significance of automatism in Abstract Expressionism reminds us how automatism shapes both the processes, subjects, and content in painting.

Automatism's importance for Abstract Expressionism lay in the following: (1) it was an intuitive mode of beginning that emphasized the unconscious as a source of creation; (2) it was a means of expression which assumed not just the imitation, not just the style, but part of the meaning of the work itself; (3) it was the primary creative principle to which Abstract Expressionist subjects were added, and which subsumed them; and (4) it tapped and stood for inner life as a whole."⁸⁵

This focus on the intuitive expression beyond imitation, a "first" principle or point of departure into which meanings are subsumed and the focus on an inner life, provides a matrix in which Rothenberg's investigations of the formal and the production of meanings are rooted. Rothenberg's "doodling" akin to automatic drawing, her "pre-thought" source of image finding was an important point of departure and also colored her flexible, intuitive way of working once the image of the horse was established.

Once the image has been actualized, Rothenberg then allows it to lead her through pictorial possibilities; after this unwilling, non-rational sequence in the finding

84 This kind of image finding relates to Robert Motherwell's notion of plastic automatism.

85 Stephen Polcari, Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 24.

of an image, she then puts it through a series of rational exercises, the “what ifs” of her creative process. What if I divide the horse? What if I change the axes of the horse? What if I put one horse behind another? These problems are often formal in nature, yet the process is not systematic. This series of formal exercises, although not strictly speaking part of the Abstract Expressionist methods of work, unfold in a process that is closer to Abstract Expressionist invention, accident, and playfulness than to Minimalist a priori systems. In short, the formal investigations follow an organic rather than systematic trajectory. Sometimes the image comes first, sometimes the formal idea. Her working method is flexible, following a more evolutionary course: a painting has its own life span and an internal logic. Rothenberg explains:

Sometimes I don't work systematically at all; sometimes I pencil in, usual have a sketch on the back of an envelope for what the geometry and what the (dispositioning or positioning) of the horse is . . . so I may look at the envelope or I may just pencil it in. . . . sometimes I paint the field . . . sometimes I paint the horse first.⁸⁶

In the tradition of de Kooning rather than Judd, Rothenberg's corrective changes may become part of the painting itself. For example, in *Triphammer Bridge*, pentimenti reveal where Rothenberg changed the position of the horse. She leaves evidence of allowed mistakes in the traces of a larger silhouette, and a slight change in angle of the front leg position in a washed raw outline of a larger horse. She attempts neither an anatomical definition nor a sense of the horse's physical weight. Instead, there is the weight of a darker color within the horse's contour line suspended on the terra cotta field of undifferentiated paint squiggles. As a result, a visible history of the process remains, a visual rhyme is created—the pentimenti echo the horse's

86 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

contour—and the shadow of the horse is suggested.⁸⁷ Similar to Abstract Expressionist painters such as Willem de Kooning and Richard Pousette-Dart, Rothenberg often questions *when* a painting is finished.⁸⁸ For example, Richard Pousette-Dart once photographed the life span of one of his paintings. He had over thirteen different paintings under the final finished one. He told me, “I wasn’t sure when it was done so I kept painting.”⁸⁹ Similarly, Rothenberg has gone back “into paintings” to make changes even after they have been sold or are on exhibition. As with the Abstract Expressionists whom Rothenberg admires, painting for her is relational, consisting of a series of adjustments and cause and effect changes, and based on the belief that once the painting has been started, one thing affects another. These issues are not operative in the non-relational practice of Minimalist painting. In 1966, Frank Stella made this distinction clear:

The other thing is that the European geometric painters really strive for what I call relational painting. The basis of their whole idea is balance. You do something in one corner and you balance it with something in the other corner. Now the “new painting” is being characterized as symmetrical. Ken Noland has put things in the center and I’ll use a symmetrical pattern, but we use it in symmetry in a different way. It’s nonrelational. In the newer American painting we strive to get the thing in the middle, and symmetrical, but just to get a kind of force, just to get the thing on the canvas. The balance factor isn’t important. We’re not trying to jockey everything around.⁹⁰

87 This is reminiscent of de Kooning. For example, in *Woman One* he changed the position of the head and the teeth. The teeth de Kooning originally painted were not covered over but were left and became a suggestion of a necklace.

88 Rothenberg has gone back into paintings that she thought were finished to make changes, adjustments. Other times, Rothenberg has attested to ruining a painting by continuing when it may have been completed.

89 Richard Pousette-Dart, in conversation with author, July, 1983.

90 Frank Stella and Donald Judd, “Questions to Stella and Judd,” interview by Bruce Glaser (1966), *Art News* 65, no. 5 (September 1966): 55-61, cited in Kristine Stiles

“Jockeying everything around,” however, was basic to Abstract Expressionist practice and to Rothenberg’s way of working then and now.⁹¹ In Rothenberg’s philosophy, the artist must address the resolution between the internal relationships of every color, line, and space in conjunction with every other color, line or space.⁹² Although Rothenberg’s 1970s paintings of an iconic or emblematic image embedded into the ground have a superficial resemblance to the stark economies of Minimalist form, the horse is not a representation of “the real” or “the literal.” It is the point of departure for a series of relational adjustments in terms of the formal, the pictorial, the symbolic and the psychological. A series of adjustments is critical to Rothenberg’s intuitive way of working. One element is always counterpoised against another. In Rothenberg’s studio, the acting of painting, looking at the painting, sometimes in relation also to other paintings in her studio, and then making adjustment or changes to the painting is standard procedure. Part of Rothenberg’s approach to relational painting has to do in her long-standing interest in the relationship of parts to wholes. This interest has informed her iconography; she often separates images out into parts or fragments and her attention to the various parts of the painting in relation to each other and the whole. This is at odds with Minimalist desire to create a singular gestalt. As Lynn Zelansky explains:

separate parts could become entangled in internal relationship that would render the objects vulnerable; because they would lead to weak gestalts, intimacy producing relationships have been gotten rid off in

and Peter Selz, eds., Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 117 – 124.

91 When Rothenberg built a new studio in New Mexico, she made sure there were many wall spaces so that she could enjoy an internal dialogue not just within one painting, but with many at the same time.

92 Rothenberg commented upon this and other painting criteria as one of the panelists at the Museum of Modern Art on 2/4/97. The subject of the panel discussion was the late paintings by de Kooning.

the new sculpture. An elimination of detail is required in the new sculpture, further, because detail would pull it toward intimacy; and the large scale of the work is important as one of the necessary conditions of avoiding intimacy.⁹³

Quite different is non-relational painting, a Minimalist belief that the artwork exists in the mind, completed before it is realized or fabricated. This principle, which applies to both painting and sculpture, follows from what Robert Pincus-Witten calls the “pre-executive inner necessity.” He explains: “A rigorous external geometry of Minimalism attempts to be congruent with the logic of a style, a logic concluded even before the paintings were begun or the sculptures made.”⁹⁴ Consider, for example, the use of the X in Ron Bladen’s sculpture (Fig. 1/30) in comparison to Rothenberg’s painting. Shape, material, scale, and installation are all pre-determined by Bladen. The actual making or fabrication of the piece may or may not follow, for as Lawrence Weiner made clear in his famous conceptual precept, “the artist need not be present.” Rothenberg may start with the X format in mind, but she makes adjustments and changes in relation to the image and, more importantly, to the painting as a whole. Moreover, our reading of the image is affected by the imposition of the geometric X unto the naturalism of the horse contours.

In addition to an intuitive and relational approach, Rothenberg also ran counter to Minimalist work on an emotional level. Erasure of emotion was synonymous with Abstraction in general and Minimalism in particular,⁹⁵ and this was ultimately at odds with Rothenberg’s project. During the period of the late-1960s and 1970s, as Lucy Lippard has pointed out, “there was a cult of ‘neutrality’ in

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94 Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism*, 15.

95 This notion of geometry and abstraction coincidentally runs counter to the origins of early modernist abstract art, such as the work of Robert Delaunay or Mondrian whose abstract language was steeped in mysticism and a spiritualism that represents more than just a geometric distancing from emotion.

Minimalism, applied not only to the execution of objects but to the ferocious erasure of emotion and conventional notions of beauty.”⁹⁶ Rothenberg rejected the self-contained blankness of Minimalism and its 1960s counterpart, Pop Art, opting for more ambiguous, coded meanings. These meanings were antithetical to Minimalist thought where, as Eugene Goosen points out, “the spectator is given not symbols, but facts.”⁹⁷

It must be said that although Minimalism and emotionalism generally are perceived as antithetical, it has been argued otherwise. Some critics point to the human authorship of Minimalist systems; in an essay on Minimalist writings, Anne Wagner restates Lawrence Alloway's argument that “A system is as human as a splash of paint; the personal is not expunged by using a neat technique.”⁹⁸ In her catalogue essay for the exhibition *Sense and Sensibility: Woman Artists in the Nineties*,⁹⁹ Lynn Zelensky brings together several theories that infuse Minimalism with a more personal meaning. She cites Rosalind Krauss's argument of a “personal self, Anna Chave's discussion of power and brutality inherent in Minimalist rhetoric, and Lucy Lippard's assignation of the artists touch, the idiosyncratic, and the Expressionistic to Post-Minimalism, an off-shoot of Minimalism.”¹⁰⁰ Although these arguments flesh out the theoretical ways of apprehending Minimalist sensibility, they remain theoretical, not visual and do little to change the overall neutrality of Minimalist art on an emotional level. Even the attribute of theatricality that Michael Fried assigns to Minimalist sculpture in his seminal essay “Art and Objecthood” ultimately “distances the beholder

96 Lucy R. Lippard,” xiv. XXX

97 - give Goosen in Chave citation XXX

98 Anne M. Wagner, introduction, *Minimal Art*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 10.

99 Lynn Zelensky, “Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties,” in *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*.

100 Lucy Lippard, *Eccentric Abstraction*, Fishbach Gallery, New York, 1966.

— not just physically but psychically.”¹⁰¹ The aesthetic impact of early Minimalist art does not lie mainly in its emotional evocations or psychological insistence, but rather in the clarity of its conception, specificity of its fabrication, and the order of its systems.¹⁰² Unlike Minimalist art, Rothenberg’s horse paintings had a profoundly emotional impact on the viewer. In fact, Peter Schejdahl devotes a brief catalogue essay to his first reaction to seeing Rothenberg’s paintings at 112 Greene Street Gallery, noting that he recognized them immediately as breakthrough works that embodied sincerity in paint.¹⁰³

The final way in which Rothenberg is fundamentally aligned with Abstract Expressionism rather than Minimalism lies in her insistence on the presence of the artist’s hand in the painterly field. With few exceptions, Minimalism espoused the removal of the artist’s hand,¹⁰⁴ whereas Rothenberg is connected to the physical act of painting.¹⁰⁵ In part, Minimalism was a reaction against the emotionally packed gestures of Pollock, Kline, and de Kooning. In contrast with Minimalist painters, Rothenberg’s work always retains a hand-painted quality. “These are not the pristine

101 Michael Fried is specifically referring to Morris’s sculpture. See Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), 126.

102 This is not to say that exhibitions of certain Minimalist artists, such as Dan Flavin’s exhibition at the Dia (May 1997 to June 1998) are not devoid of emotional impact but it is not the main focus of the work.

103 Peter Schejdahl, “Susan Rothenberg, United States,” in Susan Rothenberg: Paintings, Michael Auping, with essays by Peter Schejdahl, Joan Simon, Robert Storr, and Richard Tuttle (Monterray: Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Monterray, 1996), 67.

104 I am speaking in broad generalities here. There are exceptions to this in the work of an artist such as Agnes Martin who is sometimes characterized as a Minimalist painter although her work depends on the subtle of touch, the hand-painted quality.

105 This painterly quality escalated in the 1990s when Rothenberg switched from acrylic to oil paints, an idea that was suggested to her by fellow artist, Elizabeth Murray.

fields of Marden and Stella,” Michael Auping notes, “but those which recall de Kooning, Twombly, Still and Rothko to a certain extent.”¹⁰⁶ The ground in the figure/ground relationship comes out of the painterly fields of Abstract Expressionism, the undifferentiated fields of Pollock, and the rich monochromatic expanses of Rothko. Even for a painter associated with Minimalism such as Brice Marden—who, like Rothenberg, shares an absolute physicality of the painting surface—his technique followed his desire to make the brushstroke indistinguishable.¹⁰⁷

Rothenberg accomplished much with deceptively simple means; in this she resembles Abstract Expressionist artists like Barnett Newman and Franz Kline. For example, she gets an edge quality using line against an expansive field while keeping all the elements simple and understated. Although Rothenberg’s outlines of the horse have been described as graphic, they are really painterly. Minimalist artists rejected the painterly quality to a great extent. As Stella stated:

I want to say one thing about this painterly thing. It certainly involves a relationship between what’s outside—nature or a figure or something—and the artist’s actually painting that thing, his particular feeling at the time. This is just one area of feeling, and I, for one, am not interested in it for my own work. I can’t do anything with it. It’s been fully exploited and I don’t see why the painterly relationship exclusively should stand for art.¹⁰⁸

106 Michael Auping, Susan Rothenberg: Painting and Drawings, (New York, Rizzoli, 1992), 25.

107 I am referring to Marden’s work that is most directly associated with Minimalism, (1960s and 1970s). In Marden’s early paintings, there is an Abstract Expressionist gestural use of paint. However, during 1970s, his surface are still and the hand of the artists is hidden. When Marden became interested in Japanese brush painting in the 1980s in the Cold Mountain painting series, a gestural line is used.

108 Frank Stella and Donald Judd, “Questions to Stella and Judd,” interview by Bruce Glaser (1966), Art News 65, no. 5 (September 1966): 55-61, cited in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 117 – 124.

Rothenberg forged new ground when she combined the painterly feeling rejected by Minimalism with the economy of Minimalism. During the 1970s particularly, Rothenberg opted for significantly less gestural drama than she would employ in later works. She nonetheless activated the pictorial field by hinting at moody, atmospheric depth created through slight variations in light and dark, under painting, visible brush strokes and smears, and subtle orchestration of surface incident. She spoke of her desire to keep the paintings non-decorative, lean, and forceful: "I changed from sienna to black and white. For me, color seemed frivolous, decorative. It is a distraction from what concerns me: image, density of image, composition, interaction of subject matter, urgency."¹⁰⁹ The key word here is urgency, a condition that by and large is unrecognized in Minimalist aesthetics. It is telling that the only offshoots of Minimalist art that made a strong impact on Rothenberg were those with strong psychological effects. For example, the unsettling, claustrophobic quality of Richard Serra's work affected her, and she also responded to the physical imposition of Robert Morris's box piece.

As the horse paintings evolved, Rothenberg became increasingly interested in the idea of the "psychologized" image in painterly terms. Even though both Rothenberg and the Abstract Expressionists before her relied on the immediacy and physicality of the paint, Michael Auping makes a distinction, suggesting that Rothenberg's paint handling creates a field more "psychological" than "spiritual."¹¹⁰ Auping contends:

Utilizing often highly personal subject matter, Rothenberg has always

¹⁰⁹Susan Rothenberg, interview by Peter Schjedahl in "Putting Painting Back on its Feet," Vanity Fair (August 1982), 85.

¹¹⁰ Philosophical notions of transcendence, sublimity, and the spiritual have been associated with the "fields" of Abstract Expressionism.

worked to bring the atmosphere of the abstract field into a profound psychological dimension. In many of her works of the mid and late-1970s, Rothenberg used a combination of flashe and matte medium to create eerie variations between warmth and coolness, between density and translucency in her backgrounds.¹¹¹

Auping's interpretation, which seems closely aligned with the notion of the "lyrical anxious hand of modern painting,"¹¹² is informed by the increasingly dreamlike and ghostly images of the early 1980s. However, Rothenberg's paint handling and the tense moodiness it creates cannot be fully understood as separate from her image making, and this was particularly true in the mid-1970s. Following in the footsteps of Jasper Johns,¹¹³ image and ground are united by paint handling.¹¹⁴ One writer muses:

Jasper Johns had recently taken the hide and seek of representation to a profound level with his famous Flags and Targets of the 1950s and 1960s, and Rothenberg may have been trying to 'up the ante' by using an image that did not lend itself to abstracting. It is one thing to disguise a flag in a painterly surface, but try hiding a horse.¹¹⁵

But Rothenberg did not try to "hide" the horse any more than Johns tried to camouflage the flag or the target. With both Johns and Rothenberg, the image is stated emphatically, but the way that the image is supposed to function and also its interpretation remain ambiguous.

111 Michael Auping, "Drawn and Quartered: Susan Rothenberg's Figuration," Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings, 25.

112 Ibid., 25.

113 The relationship to Johns will be addressed in Chapter Two when the image of the horse is more fully considered.

114 For example, the target and the area around it are painted with identical technique. Because the drips of Abstract Expressionism could not be controlled, Johns started using encaustic so the strokes would stay where he put them.

115 Michael Auping, "Gotham to Galisteo," Susan Rothenberg: Fifteen Years - A Survey (Malmo: Rooseum, 1990) 28

CHAPTER TWO: IMAGE AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEANINGS

Painting is a vehicle for your psychology, basically.¹¹⁶

Susan Rothenberg

This chapter explores how meanings are constructed in Susan Rothenberg's work of the 1970s. I establish three factors that contributed to the production of meaning in these paintings: Performance Art, which will receive the most emphasis, the early work of Jasper Johns, and the associations engendered by the horse imagery. My discussion is located in a rich art historical context, enhanced by considerations of how these three factors interrelate.

In Rothenberg's horse paintings, content is suggested in ways similar to those found in Performance Art of the 1970s, with imagery that is associative but unfixed, personal yet distanced, neutral but psychologically charged. Very little has been written about the impact of Performance Art on painting, a subject that is critical to the understanding of the content, kinds of meanings, and how imagery functions in Rothenberg's work; my analysis contributes to this much-needed study. At its core, Performance Art influenced content in painting and it is difficult to pin down the nature of content which is personal, ambiguous, and multi-valent.

From Rothenberg's arrival in New York City in 1969 through the

¹¹⁶ Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, 5 March 1998, Artists Visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York.

completion of the horse paintings in the 1970s, performance and video art were prominent in New York City. Rothenberg's exposure to Performance Art and specifically her first-hand knowledge of—and participation in—Joan Jonas's work are particularly relevant. In Performance Art in general, and Joan Jonas's work in particular, disguised personas and surrogate characters enact veiled themes of identity and ritual. In Jonas's work, as with that of many Performance artists, the body becomes an *objectified entity onto which hermetic meanings are projected*. The body plays a critical role in Rothenberg's work as well. Indeed, I show that the horse served as a surrogate for the body, a presumption I will support with evidence that has not yet been organized into a thorough, systematic analysis.

Also a key part of my analysis of meaning and content in Rothenberg's work will be the influence of Jasper Johns's work, in which, I will posit, Rothenberg first became aware of an operational model. This shaped Rothenberg's treatment of imagery while she moved into a more psychological area. A similar operational model exists in Performance Art. Because Rothenberg had been introduced to this model first in Johns's work and felt a strong affinity to it, Performance Art resonated and further shaped how her imagery functioned, particularly in regard to a psychologized content.

My analysis also will examine how the image of the horse functions in the paintings. In both art and literature, the horse denotes a wide range of associational, narrative, and iconic meanings. Representations of the animal in art extend back to prehistoric cave paintings and continue to the present, evoking themes such as the magic of childhood, the hero triumphant, sexual energy, the willful spirit, and taming of wildness by humans. In contemporary art from the 1960s on, particularly in the non-painting genres, animal imagery acquired a particular mythology, which often evoked psychological states and implied narratives. This mythology, formed by artists

such as Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Robert Wilson, William Wegman, and Nancy Graves, invested the animal with characteristics that mirrored human states of being, thus anthropomorphizing it.

Performance Art—Background and Literature

As my discussion is located in a matrix of issues connected to Performance Art, it is important first to survey the background and literature concerning this genre. The connection between Performance Art and Rothenberg's work never has been adequately examined, although references occur in existing literature. Robert Hughes credits Rothenberg with a figural return in painting influenced in part by Performance Art: "And then awkwardly, unexpectedly, with Rothenberg's gee-gee's leading the field, figures started re-colonizing the field. Partly they did so in response to Performance Art, which had absorbed the body images that abstraction had driven out of painting."¹¹⁷ Joan Simon also briefly notes the impact of Performance and Video Art on Rothenberg's painting.

In a broader view, the ways in which Performance Art has shaped painting have not, to this point, been adequately considered. The influence of painting on Performance Art and references to painting in Performance Art during the post-World War II period have been well documented by a growing body of literature.¹¹⁸ However, attempts to evaluate the impact of Performance Art on painting are few and far between, due in part to a lack of general interdisciplinary studies in which the

¹¹⁷ Hughes, "Signs of Anxiety," Time, March 1, 1993, pp. 60–61.

¹¹⁸ Two books that are particularly deal with this subject are: Paul Schimmel (and other authors), Out of Actions between Performance and the Object: 1949-1979, exhibition catalogue, Geffen Contemporary at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1988 and Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones, The Artist's Body, Phaidon Press, 2000.

boundaries between painting and other art forms are not clearly differentiated. The kinds of interpretive spaces that performance leaves between the action and the viewer's response allow for a poetical gap not meant to be pinpointed. It is more useful to consider how the *production* of meaning in Performance Art shaped and influenced painting, rather than to tease out the specific aspects of performance which may—on a superficial level—appear to have been co-opted by painting. Moreover, art historical accounts of the 1970s generally separate art forms from their theoretical undercurrents as a way of illustrating a pluralism of styles; this is an organizational construct that overlooks areas of commonality and connectivity. The intersections of these genres warrant full treatment.

I have found only two attempts to explore the effect of Performance Art on painting. RoseLee Goldberg devised a dialectical theory which places performance and painting in a recurring cycle throughout the history of art in the twentieth century. In Goldberg's thesis, performance serves first as an "irritant," a factor challenging the status quo, and then as a catalyst for painting. Goldberg views the Dada performances, for example, as provocations to societal norms and, as a result, Surrealist paintings followed. The cycle repeats in the 1970s, Goldberg suggests, when Performance Art, which initially served as a political irritant suggestive of a new, communal social order, began towards the late 1970s to lose its fashionable status, and a renewed interest in painting followed.¹¹⁹

Helena Kontova posits another interdisciplinary reading of the post-War period:

Painting has been transformed by absorbing elements of performance, Installation Art, and photography. Avant-garde in the sixties and

119 Rose Lee Goldberg, "The Golden Years," Performance Art: A Critical Anthology, 72.

seventies was characterized by the uses of extra-artistic objects (including the human body), accentuating their materiality and objectification, and was characterized by pure representation which, in some cases, could be turned into a new form of show.¹²⁰

Although Goldberg's theory seems an oversimplification, and Kontova's hierarchical approach excludes a lot of interesting material, both theories point towards Performance Art as a factor in painting's figural re-emergence after a period of critical dormancy

Characterizing Performance Art in the 1970s

120 Helena Kontova, "From Performance to Painting," in Flash Art, no 106. (February to March 1982): 17.

In order to approach the question of how Performance Art influenced painting in Rothenberg's work, it is first necessary to consider the specific characteristics of Performance Art in the 1970s as those traits were first, the ones to which Rothenberg was exposed and second, because those characteristics are not the same after the 1970s when the genre changes both technologically and thematically.¹²¹ Performance Art emerged as a separate and viable art form in the 1970s—a decade sometimes referred to as the Golden Age of Performance Art. By that decade's end, a number of New York institutions sponsored festivals and symposia in an attempt to survey and acknowledge the importance of the art form, identifying performance as the art form most characteristic of the 1970s.

The 1970s also witnessed the invention of Video Art.¹²² From the beginning, Performance Art and Video Art were intimately related; many key performances were recorded by video camera. In fact, during this period, video functioned primarily as a mode of documenting a performance.¹²³ Gradually, artists conceptualized performance sequences to be recorded on video.

In this discussion I treat Performance Art, Video Art, and vanguard dance performances as one generic classification covered under the umbrella of performative

121 For a discussion of how performance art has changed, see Josette Féral, "What is Left of Performance Art? Autopsy of a Function, Birth of a Genre." Discourse: Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture 14.2 (Spring 1992) See death of a genre article for a discussion of how it has changed Cite XXX

122 Bruce Kurtz, "Video Art Was Being Invented," Arts Magazine (December 1972 – January 1973): 32-44.

123 The more technologically sophisticated video works were not really created until the 1980s and after. In fact, the more technically complex quality of 1990s video art, for example, stands in stark contrast to relatively unsophisticated technical processes of video art of the 1970s. In the 1970s, the video camera was heavy and stationary. The artist would move but the camera angle and placement was fixed.

work. The artists of the 1970s did not make clear distinctions among performance, video, and dance, and so I will follow their lead. As parts of a collaborative whole, these experimental art forms were representative of a non-traditional approach, which provided an alternative to the established gallery/museum system. RoseLee Goldberg succinctly summarizes this situation:

. . . the relationship among dancers, artists, musicians, and poets in the early 1970s was a close one, sometimes involving direct collaboration, at others, complementary experiments because performance provided a permissive umbrella for renegades from the more conservative bastions of their chosen art.¹²⁴

At their core, 1970s performance pieces are rooted in the 1960s, when strict boundaries between demonstrations, performance, dance, sculpture, and painting were called into question, fostering a collaborative, communal spirit. Rauschenberg and Johns set important precedents by working with artists from other disciplines such as Merce Cunningham's dance, activity in which the "downtown" crowd participated was Gordon Matta-Clark's 1971 piece titled *Open House*. Matta-Clark used discarded materials to create an architectural environment inside a dumpster between 98 and 112 Greene Street. The dumpster served as a performance piece: participants activated the performance by walking through it. Later filmed by the artist, the piece became a focal point for other performances such as a dance piece featuring Tina Girouard and Suzanne Harris, and a sound piece created by poet and art dealer Ted Greenwald, all three of whom were part of Rothenberg's immediate circle of friends.

By the 1970s, performance works were enacted at multiple and diverse locations throughout the city. Some took place on the streets and in empty lots—a John Cage's musical performances, Yvonne Rainer's movement dancing, Jean

124 RoseLee Goldberg, 78.

Tinguely's self-destructing art, and Niki de Saint-Phalle's costume sculpture. This collaborative spirit became a defining character of the "downtown" artistic community, in contrast to the "uptown" gallery establishment. An example of the kind of group kind of street theater. In addition to "private" performances that took place in artists' studios,¹²⁵ new experimental and often collaborative works were seen at alternative spaces such as 112 Greene Street, Mercer Arts Center (later to be called the Kitchen), Judson Church, and Artists Space. Although commercial galleries were generally outside of the Performance arena at this time, a few important exceptions existed. Sonnabend Gallery in Soho was the site for Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed*, Gilbert and George's *Singing Piece*,¹²⁶ (Fig. 2/1) and several Jannis Kounellis pieces. Additionally, exhibitions were mounted at artists' studios; although little is documented about these studio-held exhibitions, no doubt they were influential, as they were seen almost solely by artists.¹²⁷

Although the 1960s springboarded Performance Art into the next decade, the genre took a different, dynamic turn during the 1970s. The role of the artist shifted. The body became more of a contextual field, on which themes of identity and self-scrutiny were presented. The content moved in a more psychological vein, often referring to states of being.

The artist's role shifted from facilitator to that of director. In the 1960s, the artist often acted as a facilitator, setting up the stage or locations and then simply

125 One such performance was Joan Jonas's *Underneath* which was performed at Alan Saret's studio which will also be discussed in this chapter.

126 This was originally done at another location in England.

127 For example, Alan Saret housed an exhibition of Jennifer I early metal pieces in his studio.

letting the activity happen. Alan Kaprow's *Happenings* at Reuben Gallery¹²⁸ incorporated chance, accident, and audience participation under loosely controlled circumstances. There was a sense that the activity would complete itself without a preconceived knowledge of the eventual outcome. In Yoko Ono's famous *Cut Piece* of 1965, performed at Carnegie Recital Hall, audience members completed the piece by cutting off her clothing. Surprisingly aggressive responses from the audience members—in contrast to Ono's passivity—made this piece emotionally affecting.

Merging performance, installation, and sculpture, Oldenberg's store and street projects depended on their visitors to become actualized. During the 1970s, elements that had been dictated by chance became more scripted, with the script taking the form of a series of actions, activities, or monologues. For example, at LaMama Theatre in 1971, Mabou Mines and director/playwright Lee Brauer staged a series of comic book-inspired stage pictures called *Animations*. Richard Foreman's 1975 piece, *Rhoda in Potatoland*, included a running commentary by the director while a series of provocative and disjointed actions took place. The directorial aspect of 1970s Performance Art reached its greatest theatricality with Robert Wilson's 1975 collaboration with composer Phillip Glass in the production *Einstein on the Beach*. Robert Wilson was rooted in Performance Art as was this production.

There is a decidedly theatrical aspect to Rothenberg's work, which is connected as much with Performance dramas, situations and choreography as abstract painting. In the 1970s, she choreographed the horse on a pictorial stage; in the 1980s, she created dream like settings; and after moving to New Mexico, she stage small dramas and disjointed narrative. In speaking of Rothenberg's works of the early 1980s,

128 Kaprow's events at Reuben Gallery started in the late 1950s and continued throughout the early 1960s. performed a happening titled *Chicken* to an amused group in 1962.

Robert Storr argues that Rothenberg's painting is in itself a form of drama:

The fraying surfaces, clotted color and shifting edges of her work from the late '70s onwards refer to another source. It's drama – and there is drama in the variable speed of her gesture and constant loosening and tightening of her drawing – is an imaginative and painterly one. From this perspective, the suspense of these pictures appears to have existed for the artists as much as for the viewer.¹²⁹

Performance Art of the 1970s also built on the political ground covered by performance activities of the 1960s, when “there was a participation in the avant-garde theatre and in the arts, which can be easily linked to the sit-ins and teach-ins of the protest movement,”¹³⁰ notes Andreas Huyssen. In a statement directed against capitalism and the Vietnam War, Meridith Yayoi Kua performed a series of protest actions at politically loaded locations such as Wall Street and the United Nations. Adrian Piper's quirky attire and behavior examined public attitudes regarding differences in gender and race. Piper's 1970-1 *Catalysis IV* inhabited public spaces, such as streets, subways, and museums, and her work anticipated the polemical role of performance works in the 1970s. Performance artists would go on to address a wide span of issues including gender, sexual orientation, and race. Meanings moved from specific political issues, such as the Vietnam War, to personally coded politics of gender and identity.

In a significant offshoot of this tendency, the body became a contextual field in which issues of gender and identity could be critiqued. Feminist-performance pioneer Carolee Schneemann—inspired by the Judson Dance Group's multiple

129 Robert Storr, “All In a Day's Work,” Susan Rothenberg: 15 years – A Survey, 15.

130 Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Theories of Representation and Difference). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.164.

readings of the body in space—began in the 1960s her investigation of the artist's body as a political and artistic tool. Key works by Schneemann such as *Interior Scroll*, 1975, which she began by stroking and painting her body, epitomize the fusion of Body Art, ritual, and feminism in the 1970s. Later in the piece, precariously hunched on all fours on an ironing board, naked but for an apron, she read a gender-skewed text on a scroll that she previously had extracted from her vagina.

Body Art and feminist art became interchangeable terms during the 1970s.¹³¹ The artist's body had become the subject, symbolically and literally, a contextual field for gender, political, and/or psychological inquiry. The body was bound, mutilated, disguised, fetishized, ritualized, objectified, and at times underwent destructive and often dangerous trials such as biting, cutting, and even self-electrocution. The viewer who was accustomed to the benign performances of the 1960s became a quizzical observer, often left puzzled, shocked, or emotionally traumatized.

Self-scrutiny and objectification of the body in psychologically charged situations were hallmarks of performative genres during the 1970s. Bruce Nauman's work became central in a subtle but important shift towards a more psychological, enigmatic content. For example, in *Live Taped Video Corridor*, 1968-1970, (Fig. 2/2) the viewer/participant is placed in a claustrophobic environment while being surveyed by the video camera. The viewer, as a surrogate for the artist, is forced into a dialogue with himself about an experience that is unexpected and uncomfortable. According to Neil Benezra, this aspect of Nauman's audio and architectural works of the late-1960s and early-1970s illustrated Nauman's "fascination with phenomenology and

131 For example, Lynda Benglis used the strategy of claiming ownership and control over her own body by "owning" portrayals of herself in poses associated with pornography designed primarily for the male gaze.

behaviorism and, in particular, with Gestalt psychology and the exploration of human behavior in anxious or uncomfortable situations.”¹³²

The horse is subject to the same psychological objectification, but in Rothenberg’s case it takes place in a pictorial, not a performative, space. Rothenberg employs formal devices, geometry, and figure/ground relationships to lock the horse into place, using non-naturalistic poses to divest the horse of power, strength, and sensuality. For example, in *Three Spokes*, 1977, Rothenberg speaks of “the limits” imposed on the horse; those limits—both diagonal and vertical divisions—freeze the horse in place even as the two hoofs touching the ground indicate the movement and speed of a gallop. The viewer intuits the reference to human conditions of confinement and claustrophobia. This indirect focus on the human condition, although variably shrouded in the use of ritual, surrogates, or icons, also is apparent in Joan Jonas’s important early performance pieces.

Joan Jonas and her work

The late-1960s through the late-1970s bracket a period in Performance Art history in which the genre took a self-reflexive turn, often exploring perceptual, phenomenological, and increasingly psychological areas. Joan Jonas’s work exemplifies this trend. Rothenberg recalls:

It’s hard to know what to say Joan Jonas is all about. I don’t know what she did before she was here in front of you, naked, examining her own body with a small hand-held mirror. She asked me to assist her. I agreed. She wanted me to lie down naked under glass in Alan Saret’s hole in the floor of his loft and have Trakas roll potatoes over

132 Neal Benerzra, “Surveying Nauman,” in Bruce Nauman, ed., Joan Simon, with essays by Neal Benerzra, Kathy Halbreich, Paul Schimmel, and Robert Storr (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center and New York: Art Publishers, 1994), 28.

the glass while a large section of the New York art world watched through mirrors. I did.¹³³

Jonas began working in a performance mode after she found sculpture too confining for her ideas and became interested in “de-synchronization,” a strategy of both repetition and fragmentation in which perceptual devices between time and space take on a destabilizing effect. Some of her early pieces, such as *Jones Beach*, were not videotaped because Jonas did not have access to a video camera that day. Most of her subsequent pieces were videotaped, and in time she began to incorporate video techniques such as the “loop,” a tripping device causing the image to repeat.

The first piece in which Rothenberg participated was *Mirror Piece II* (Fig. 2/3) in 1970. The performers, several young women in short black dresses, enacted with several young men a series of tasks and activities involving the carrying and placement of large vertical mirrors. The actions were slow and had to be performed carefully to prevent breakage. Precarious factors such as weight distribution created the unknown potential for danger affecting the performers and the audience. Two pairs of women leaned up against plates of glass sandwiched between them; a photograph of the event shows Rothenberg leaning into the glass. The mirrors break up the space, causing reflections in various directions. The slowness of the actions and the use of glass mirrors caused the spectators to feel uncomfortable. Jonas’s description of the piece notes, “The performers must move carefully to avoid breakage,” and “the performers caress the spectators’ reflections.”¹³⁴ There is also a carefully planned sequence of acts ending with the performers walking their mirrors and glass plates in a spiral motion. Jonas used the mirror as a prop in several pieces; in one, she stood naked, some distance from the audience, inspecting all parts of her body

133 Susan Rothenberg, statement for Joan Jonas exhibition catalog, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1975.

134 Joan Jonas, interview by author, 11 November 1998, New York.

with a small hand mirror. The audience could not see the mirror image that Jonas saw, but they could see all that the mirror saw.

The next Jonas piece in which Rothenberg participated, *Underneath*, (Fig. 2/4) was performed at Alan Saret's loft, architecturally strange and formerly a "rag loft." This former factory space had a 5' x 7' hole in the floor, in which George Trackas built a platform for the performers to stand on at a level that allowed only their heads to be viewed by the spectators. Alan Saret recalls that approximately thirty people, mostly artists including Jennifer Bartlett and Thornton Willis, viewed the piece; he remembers it as "some kind of magical experience."¹³⁵ Tilted mirrors allowed the audience to see specific views of the performance. At first, the performers threw a thin blue material up out of the hole. In the second part, two men (Gordon Matta-Clark was one) and two women (Rothenberg was one) jumped into the hole and undressed. The women lay on their backs and were covered by a 4' x 6' glass plate. Potatoes were rolled on the glass, and water was thrown into the hole, but the women remained dry. The men rolled on the glass again, suggesting a possibility of danger. Joan Simon remembers, "other performers stood on the floor at the back edge of the open perimeter, holding up large mirrors and shifting their angles so that the audience could see the changing glimpses of themselves as well as bits and pieces of the walls, floor, and ceiling incorporated into the totality of their work."¹³⁶

Meanings are suggested but not specified, embedded in the perceptual, visual, ritualistic, and psychological arena; they are left free-floating. In addition, an emotional connection is made. Jonas notes, "Part of the content is emotional...using the glass in as many ways as possible—leaning, rolling, and the erotic aspect of it manipulating images—not so much a protest as much as boundaries coming

135 Alan Saret, interview by author, 16 March 2002, New York.

136 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 24.

together.”¹³⁷

The third piece Rothenberg performed in, *Jones Beach*, explored the body in time and space and the phenomenological nature of sound and time experiences. Using the beach and sand dunes as a backdrop, the performance included actions seen and heard at a distance by the audience situated on a slight hill one quarter of a mile away. Sounds created by clapping wood blocks and banging metal sheets were delayed in reaching the audience—sounds inspired by the ritual acts of Kabuki theatre. (Fig. 2/5).¹³⁸ Joan Simon, who performed in the piece, notes that it created a “rift between actions being done and being heard.”¹³⁹ *Jones Beach* was not videotaped, but photos taken by Dickie Landry show that this piece has similarities with other early Jonas pieces such as *Wind* and *Songdelay*, in which the figure is outlined against a stark background. The body is subjected to experiments regarding the phenomenological nature of sound and time experiences. Jonas’s work has the tempo and specific focuses that one associates with both ritual and film techniques such as “the cut” and “the montage.”¹⁴⁰ Fragmentation becomes an important aspect of the works as figures move in and out from hidden spaces.

Part of *Jones Beach* involved Rothenberg being rolled in a hoop with her arms and legs anchored to it, her body forming an x within the circle (Fig. 2/6). The image is perplexing and rife with associations, not only Leonardo DaVinci’s famous Renaissance drawing. A play between static and moving images is also at work: Rothenberg is static in the hoop, but the hoop is moving. She moves with the hoop but

137 Joan Jonas, interview by author, 11 November 1998, New York.

138 She had visit Japan with Richard Serra prior to this piece.

139 Joan Simon, “Scenes and Variations,” *Art in America* (July 1985): 72-79.

140 However, the piece was not videotaped and judging from photos, the *Jones Beach* Piece has much in common with other early Jonas Pieces such as *Wind* and *Songdelay*, where the starkness of the figure particular the silhouette or contour of the figure against a stark background environment.

does not initiate the movement. The x in the circle is not the only instance where Jonas uses geometry to create visual clarity against a simple background; geometry is a recurrent tool used by Jonas particularly in the pieces from the 1970s. In another Jonas piece, *Left Side, Right Side* (Fig. 2/7) from 1972, she uses her face as a field for a series of symmetrical splits; uses a split screen technique drawing a line down the middle of the face; and, while looking into a mirror, repetitiously drones the mantra “This is my Left Side...This is my Right Side.” The left and right become spatially ambiguous due to the use of mirrors and split screens. A key part of the composition, the splitting action breaks down the imagery and highlights a recurring theme in Jonas’s work—a metaphor for the study of the female self. Douglas Crimp observes “that there is no centered self from which the work can be said to be generated or by which it can be received. Both performer and spectator are shown to be decentered, split.”¹⁴¹ Themes of identity therefore are brought in question through image and geometry. More importantly, the artist’s psychology becomes part of the piece.

Rothenberg takes up similar themes in her work. She splits the horse in two; the formal division takes on psychological implications. The horses become trapped, enclosed and, immobile because of the formal divisions and the viewer is left with the enigma of why—how is meaning to be extracted from this treatment of the image. Moreover, with Rothenberg and Jonas both, there are issues of identity that the image embodies, with Rothenberg by substitution and with Jonas through a masked pantomime.¹⁴² Rothenberg notes, “you went to a Jonas work to see one of the

141 Douglas Crimp, “De-Synchronization in Joan Jonas’s Performance,” in *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968-1982*, University Art Museum (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley and Eindhoven, Holland: the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1983), 8.

142 Jonas had become interested in this when she traveled to Japan with Richard Serra.

excruciatingly odd minds of that time make a window into yours.”¹⁴³ Meanings are personal yet distanced and veiled. Jonas notes, “Well, yes, it’s private, but also when can they [the audience] figure it out, ever. It’s coming together.”¹⁴⁴

Rothenberg synthesized the psychological implications of Jonas’s work in general, and the mirror pieces in particular. Jonas’s slow deliberateness that becomes anxiety-producing is similar to the sense of claustrophobia and discomfort that Rothenberg creates in her pictorial restrictions on the horse. The stationary camera which Jonas used in her studio pieces result in a stark, static image which confront the viewer head-on while refusing to offer interpretive clues, a quality that is central to Rothenberg’s horse paintings. In addition, Jonas’s transformations, disguises, and phenomenological exercises make the pictorial subject ultimately the identity of the human self, thus taking her into a psychological area. At the base, there is a sense that Rothenberg’s art, like Jonas’s, is a mirroring of self or more than one side of one’s self. Devices such as fragmentation, splicing the figure into parts, and fusing the animal and human are utilized by both Jonas and Rothenberg. Moreover, the ability of these devices to shape a particular content is central to Jonas and Rothenberg.

The Operational Model

Performance Art utilized an important model for presenting imagery, which I will call the operational model.¹⁴⁵ In this model, a series of procedures, actions, or operations is performed upon the same subject—either the artist or the artist’s

143 Statement by Susan Rothenberg, 4/4/84, reprinted in Joan Jonas: Works 1968 – 1994”, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

144 Joan Jonas, interview by author, 11 November 1998, New York.

145 I’ve not seen this term used before in relation to imagery. I find it useful in thinking about a treatment of imagery that runs throughout both painting and performance art.

surrogate. Because of the operations and the ritual and/or formal structure of the procedures, the viewer attempts to assign meaning to these actions but is unable to do so. For example, in a 1970 piece titled *Trademarks*, the artist, Vito Acconci, bit various parts of his body. After each bite, he applies printer's ink to it, finally stamping his bites onto various surfaces. Acconci's intention was to claim his body as his own and consequently become one with the work of art. However, the viewer, not aware of this intention, wonders why the activity is taking place and what meaning can be assigned to it.

One writer claimed that this model's use in Performance Art has roots in painting from the 1970s, stating:

In a way, the Video Artists were taking a strategy from painting which during the '70s was prominent in the gallery world: that is a body of work with a strong common look on which a series of variations or looking at the image, field of color, formal or gestural strategies in differing spectrum."¹⁴⁶

I disagree with this statement. There is a subtle but important distinction between the kind of unified body of work the writer is referring to, and distinctions that affect its meaning in a psychological way. The variations the writer is referring to are often formal, addressing nuances in terms of scale and color; they fall under the rubric of a single artistic conversation. Furthermore, in this type of work—common in the galleries of the 1970s—the content or effect on the viewer falls within the same basic parameters, not differentiated significantly from piece to piece.

The operational model in Performance Art differs from this variations-on-a-theme mentality in that the set of operations performed on the subject (or image) is

146 Bruce Kurtz, "Video Art Was Being Invented," Arts Magazine (December 1972 – January 1973): 32-44

more about cause and effect, resulting in different emotional and psychological outcomes. Instead of dealing with a mere repetition of formal matters like scale or color, the artist imposes procedures upon herself or her surrogate, which results in different outcomes. This imposition of procedure on the image results in the objectification of an inherently subjective image. As the operations are changed, the meanings and their psychological implications are changed. For example, this model is at work in Jonas's performance/video piece titled *Organic Honey*, (Fig. 2/8) in which she, the subject, assumes the alternating personas of glamour queen and plain Jane; each image elicits differing responses and associations. Bruce Nauman's work from the late 1960s utilized a similar procedural method, in which different activities elicit different responses. In *Six Sound Problems for Konrad Fischer*, 1968, Nauman performed on each day of a week different actions in the gallery space. On Monday, he walked into the gallery. On Wednesday, violin sounds were played in the gallery. On Saturday, bouncing balls and violin sounds were played. Each activity elicited a range of responses from the viewer—contemplative, annoyed, bemused, and so on.

Rothenberg, the Operational Model, and Jasper Johns

I propose that Rothenberg subjected the horse image—a constant in her work from 1974 to 1980—to this operational model.¹⁴⁷ She performed a series of operations or actions upon the horse image, yielding psychological effects. This same operational model was used by one of Rothenberg's influences, Jasper Johns, whose use of it was important to Rothenberg in two respects—first, the way the model played with meanings, making them ambiguous, and, second, how its use created a restrained

147 Jasper Johns was, in fact, an importance influence on many of artists exploring the performative genre. For example, the psychological tension in Nauman's video pieces stems, in part from Jasper Johns.

psychological tension.

For example, Johns presents the American flag (Fig. 2/9), an image rich with patriotic associations, without any clues if the image should be considered patriotic. In its total subordination to the dictates of painting, the inherent meaning of the image is thrown into question. In addition, subordinating the image so completely to synthetic concerns results in an emotional distancing that makes us question whether the flag image has a referential significance outside its ability to be subjected to painting operations. In effect, the image is subjected to the operational model and, as such, its inherent meanings are left ambiguous. John's referred to this saying:

...in a painting, the processes involved in the painting are of greater certainty and of, I believe, greater meaning than the referential aspects of the painting. I think the processes involved in the painting in themselves mean as much or more than any reference value that the painting has."¹⁴⁸

Sidra Stich's discussion of the flag image in Johns's work points to this paradoxical affirmation and negation of the image. She writes:

The well-defined symbol becomes an intriguing complex of contradictory impulses. Johns flag bears the semblance of autonomous art objects, but are also upended national symbols. In addition to the manipulations that negate the flag's conventional appearance and venerated symbolism, John's flags are expressionless in manner. Their inexpressiveness itself is a disturbing force¹⁴⁹

Jasper Johns was the first and most direct influence on Rothenberg's utilization of an operational model. His directive, "Take an Object, do

148 Jasper Johns, interview by David Sylvester, in Art Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, (Malden, MA, Blackwood Publishers, 1992), 724.

something to it, do something else to it," had a profound effect on Rothenberg. Even though the richly painted surfaces in which figure ground are meshed is a crucial linkage, the way in which meanings are communicated was perhaps the most important characteristic that Rothenberg incorporated from Johns's work. His influence moved her into an area where meanings are suggested obliquely and poetically: "My horse is his target, his flags," notes Rothenberg.¹⁵⁰

The Johns-like series of procedures she uses often produce technical or formal results in further objectification of the object or image. This objectification seemingly removes the object or image from a clear-cut interpretation or narrative, opening the door for enigma and uncertainty. Like Johns, Rothenberg also chooses an image rich with associative meanings and puts it in an unfixed position. Like Johns's work, Rothenberg's "oscillates between the thing itself and the thing represented." Like Johns, Rothenberg moves into a psychologized arena. Michael Crichton explains this psychological content in Johns's work, suggesting that "Jasper Johns involves the unconscious mind of the observer in his art."¹⁵¹ This is done by employing ambiguity, paradox, and self-reference in mundane imagery.

There is a similar kind of emotional ambiguity or distancing in Rothenberg's use of the horse imagery. There are no contextual clues to help us interpret this image, yet associational meanings are inherent in it. Rothenberg in fact

149 Sidra Stich, Made in U.S.A: an Americanization in Modern Art, the 50s and 60s, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), 19.

150 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Paterson Sims, November 1986, Artists Visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York.

151 Michael Crichton, Jasper Johns (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1977), 86.

was able to have this emotional distance because the horse did not represent personal memories or feelings. About the horse images, she notes:

I'm always slightly confused about what to say about them. Someone asked me at Calarts . . . [and] I said the horses weren't a great thrill of mine, or part of my life. I rode one at summer camp, and I took riding lessons for one year, but I wasn't the kind of little girl who was nuts about horses; I just wasn't, and [the student] said, 'Well don't you feel bad about painting something so much that you don't care that much about?' I said, 'No, I would have never painted a horse if I loved a horse because I never could have had the distance that I did.'¹⁵²

The paradoxical affirmation and neutralization of the traditional meanings of the horse are reflected in art critic Hilton Kramer's response to Rothenberg's early work, "To say that [this exhibition] consists of horses would be literally correct, but somehow misleading. For it is the quality of the painting that is so impressive—the authority with which a highly simplified image is transformed into a pictorial experience of great sensitivity, even grandeur."¹⁵³ about horses are about horses, etc. get quote. However both the horse and the flag are associative images and their neutralization results in an unfixed reading of the image and its meaning. Because the artist imposes nothing specific upon the viewer, this notion of distance enables the viewer to derive poetical more than literal meanings. Max Kozloff recognizes this possibility for poetics when he pinpoints the connections between Johns and Performance artists and Johns's influence on Robert Wilson: "You felt [Wilson's meanings], but you couldn't analyze them. They were the outcome of poetics, and

152 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

153 Hilton Kramer, "Paintings by Susan Rothenberg at The Willard Gallery," The New York Times, April 24, 1975, C17.

when you alluded to them, you alluded to your experience.”¹⁵⁴ This could well be said for Rothenberg’s horse paintings, too.

Rothenberg’s use of this operational model

These operations, often formal in nature, have increasingly psychological overtones. The horse imagery undergoes a wide range of treatments developing from crude, cave-like scratching to lively, expressionistic brushstrokes. The imagery passes from movement to stasis, and from isolation to fragmentation. Rothenberg uses the horse image as part of a continuing laboratory—fusing the personal with the symbolic, showing “no respect,” in her own words, for the image itself. “I wanted a fleshy, asymmetrical image that I could perform my painting operations on and extend itself.”¹⁵⁵ This operational model takes on another layer of meanings as the image itself and how it is painted invite a wide range of associations. In a general way, the horse has always lent itself to associative and metaphoric readings. In a catalogue essay for a 2000 exhibition titled *Horse Tales*, Susan Edwards shows how the horse’s powerful symbolism has been used in the context of advertising, photography, and mass media as a kind of American icon. She notes: “the horse became an icon for rugged individualism, for social prestige, for swiftness, for a variety of other messages. Moreover, we may wonder how something inanimate [that is, a reproduction of the horse] becomes an icon and an icon becomes a metaphor.”¹⁵⁶ Beyond these media-

154 Max Kozloff, quoted in Amy Newman, ed. Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974, (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 2000), 286.

155 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

156 Susan Edwards, Foreword, in Horse Tales: American Images and Icons, Exhibition catalogue, curator Ezra Shales and Susan H. Edwards, with essays by Verlyn Klinkenborg, Ezra Shales, Susan H. Edwards, and Deborah Bright (Katonah, New York: Katonah Museum of Art, 2001).

based associations, the horse provides more universal associations. In *Triphammer Bridge*, for example, the crudely drawn horse reminds us of a child's drawing, simple, sketchy, and anatomically incorrect. Peter Schjedahl's first response to this painting was "Hello horsie."¹⁵⁷ Associations to childhood, innocence, and wish fulfillment come to mind. But at the same time, these associations are kept free-floating as we register the painting's pictorial rigors: the beauty of the clean silhouette on a flickering tonal field of strokes, the monumental scale, and the flattening out of the image on a picture plane. Meanings remain unfixed, skirting, and ambiguous. Auping describes this characteristic: "Rothenberg's painting process involves a juggling act between recognizable depiction, symbolic content and abstract simplicity."¹⁵⁸

In *Pontiac*, 1979 (Fig. 2/10), Rothenberg introduces a sense of the horse's speed and power, locked in check by a large black bone shape across the horse—a yoke from which the horse cannot break free. In addition to speed and strength, the horse is associated with sexuality and a kind of fetishized love for it by a young girl. Janet Biggs, an artist who explores the complex relationship between young girls and horses in her photographs, has compiled excerpts from literature that deal with the sexuality of the female and the horse. For example, she cites D. H. Lawrence's novella *St. Mahr*: "She laid her hand on his side, and gently stroked him. Then she stroked his shoulder, and then the hard, tense arch of his neck. And she stroked to feel the vivid heat of his life come through to her, through the lacquer of red-gloss-gold. So slippery."¹⁵⁹ Associations that are inherent in the horse image, strong and powerful, are left free-floating in Rothenberg's imagery. The theme of the horse and sexual

157 Peter Schjedahl, "Susan Rothenberg, United States", in Susan Rothenberg: Paintings And Drawings, , " Susan Rothenberg: Fifteen Years - A Survey (Malmo: Rooseum, 1990),69.

158 Michael Auping, "Gotham to Galisteo,"54.

159 Reprintd in zingmagazine.com/zing3/-biggs/page6.html,

sublimation, sometimes bordering on the fetishistic, is taken up in Patricia Cronin's installation pieces such as *Horse Tales* (Fig. 2/11).

Playing against the naturalistic qualities of the horse, one of which is movement, speed, and strength, Rothenberg often locks the horse into place, immobile; in fact, the title of her 1974 painting *Nonmoblier* (Fig. 2/12) means just that. Speaking about Rothenberg's 1975 painting *Kelpie*, (Fig. 2/13) Michael Brenson comments on the tension created between the image and its pictorial confines: "the horse seems wild and tamed, both itching to bolt and about to lurch forward like a piece of porcelain."

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Over the next six years, the horse would be choreographed in Rothenberg's paintings into many forms of movement. At first, their movement was frozen, the energy of the horse more symbolic than actualized.¹⁶¹ As Rothenberg's confidence grew and as she began to recognize the emotional content she invested in the horse image, she allowed greater movement and energy to be expressed in the horse. Part of this change occurred as a result of Rothenberg's changing the direction of the horse from left-faced profile to a more frontal view. While the horse was in silhouette, she performed geometric divisions and formal experiments. She tried imposing the colors of Navajo sand painting in *Four-Color Horse* (Fig. 2/14) but returned to the more

160 Michael Brenson, "Art: Rothenberg Horses At the Gagosian Gallery," the New York Times (23 January 1987):C12..

161 The horse paintings parallel the preoccupation in the non-painting art forms of the time with arrangement of bodies in space. Robert Wilson had been a pioneer in arrangement of bodies in space in many tempos and arrested speeds. In some Wilson performances, it can take up to twenty minutes for a Wilson figure to cross a stage. Motion and immobility also surface in the earliest video by performative works at that time. Deborah Hay, a choreography who had preformed at the Judson Dance theatre, in the tradition of Trish Brown led classes which Rothenberg attended. Hays lead the group through a series of natural, improvisational movements, moving and stopping to music such as Taj Mahal. Natural movement was important, emphasizing the childlike movements, the untrained movements.

monochromatic palettes.¹⁶² After 1975, however, she started to position the horse in space in a different way, the profile giving way to frontal views. Also, the double or single horse in a standing pose became a single horse or a group moving in a gallop, but again the energy is in check.

As Rothenberg shattered and fragmented the horse imagery, a different sense of urgency resulted. For example, in *Squeeze*, 1978-9, (Fig. 2/15) the fragmented horse-head pushing against the legs is reminiscent of the act of birth, creating a viscerally uncomfortable dynamic.

The horse as surrogate for the body

In Performance Art, the body served as the primary signifier of meaning. Similarly, in Rothenberg's work, the horse, serving as a body surrogate for the artist, signifies multiple and unfixed meanings. . In an interview with Robert Storr, Rothenberg stated, "Part of the horses were a stand-in for the figure".¹⁶³ At another time, Rothenberg stated that "the horse was a way of not doing people, yet it was a symbol of people, a self-portrait, really."¹⁶⁴ The horse also served as a metaphor for human characteristics and situations, such as isolation (*Kelpie*, 1978), fragmentation (*The Hulk*, 1979 - Fig. 2/16), birth (*Squeeze*, 1978-79), innocence (*First Horse*, 1974), and loss (*Outline*, 1978-9 -- Fig 2/17) In both the metaphor and the surrogate, one thing is taking the place of or being substituted for another because, in Rothenberg's work, the horse and body are interchangeable. In fact, when her horse imagery began

162 It is interesting to note that this palette would be the basic components of Rothenberg's more fully colored paintings done after 1980 when she moved to the southwest.

163 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Paterson Sims, November 1986, Artists Visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York.

164 Quoted in Grace Glueck, "Susan Rothenberg: New Outlook for a Visionary Artists," The New York Times Magazine (July 1984): 20.

to disintegrate and disappear in the late 1970s, the body emerged, first as fragments, and then as whole bodies. In 1980, when the horse was about to disappear from her work, Rothenberg painted *Tuning Fork*, (Fig. 2/18) in which the abstracted, compressed image of the horse is echoed by a body-double of sorts—a silhouette which echoes the shape of the horse but has the contours of a Giacometti-like torso. “The horse is not a horse anymore,” Rothenberg stated, referring to a *Study for Tuning Fork*. (Fig. 2/19) She explained:

After using the horse sideways, later frontally, it turned almost into a figure. And it turned up in the bare bones. No superfluous geometry dealing with the edges of the painting, but they are bones of the frontal horse, which suggested that a figure was appearing – that the horse was metamorphosing into a human figure. I realized that there weren’t many of those images left, that it had absolutely naturally reduced itself to a place where I was going to be forced to continue – directly.”¹⁶⁵

Several factors substantiate the reading that the horse is a surrogate for the body. First, there are Rothenberg’s direct statements, such as “I didn’t start out thinking of them [horses] as portraits and I still don’t, but gradually they did become a little less formal and more moody. There were times—though not all the time—that I definitely saw part of myself in the horses. Rothenberg’s paintings, themselves, provide perhaps the strongest evidence that the horse was a kind of body-double. In the first three horse paintings, Rothenberg gradually increased the horses’ size, in *Triphammer Bridge* scaling up the horse to roughly her own height. Like the horses in the two paintings that preceded *Triphammer Bridge*, there is no sense of the horse’s physical weight. Without specific details of eyes, ears, or tail, the horse could be mistaken for a large, lean dog. The horse is an imagined image, a painted symbol of a life force, outside of the tradition of anatomically correct equestrian paintings.

165 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 79.

After completing *Triphammer Bridge*, Rothenberg took a series of photographs of Warhol factory regular Mary Woronov in profile crouched in the position of a horse (Fig. 2/20). These served as the basis for a series of paintings, *Mary I*, *Mary II*, and *Mary III*, (Fig. 2/21) an exercise, Rothenberg explained, “to see if the human figure was as strange and compelling to me as the horse was.”¹⁶⁶ In translating the photos to paintings, Rothenberg simplified and distorted the body, extending the arms, for example, so that they would reach as far as a horse’s legs. Rothenberg subjected the body to the same pictorial rigors as she had the horse: a unifying monochromatic palette, a shallow space of subtle markings, and a centerline dissecting both the canvas and the body. Although Rothenberg returned to the horse, specific elements of the *Mary* paintings at times linger; for example, the contours of the lower back, buttocks, and thigh from *Mary III* (Fig. 2/22) are duplicated almost exactly in several horse paintings, including *I x I* (Fig. 2/23) and *Double Measure* (Fig. 2/24).

At that time, Rothenberg concluded that the human body did not work for her because, on a formal level, it was too anatomically specific for her experiments in figure/ground relationships. Rothenberg recalls, “The horse suggested so many possibilities of working out these figure/ground relationships. I suppose, though, it’s a lot of psychological and personal material.”¹⁶⁷

By the 1970s, the image of the animal had taken on a mythic, psychologized, and metaphoric character in contemporary art. The work of Joseph Beuys, Nancy Graves, William Wegman, Jannis Kounellis, and Joan Jonas helped to establish the mythologized status of the horse in contemporary art. The animal as an

¹⁶⁶Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, 33.

¹⁶⁷Joan Jonas, interview by Joan Simon, in “Scenes and Variations”, *Art in America* (July 1985): 79.

alter-ego on which meanings can be layered had been poignantly explored in the work of Joseph Beuys. Sheep, stags, elk, and swans appear in many contexts of his work. In 1965, when Beuys performed *How to Explain a Picture to a Dead Hare* (Fig. 2/25) he covered his head with honey and gold leaf and mouthed words to a dead hare, which he used as a kind of prop-relic. By widely distributing a photograph of himself holding the hare, he further mythologized his own legend while obliquely referring to the political implications concerning the post-World War II status of the German artist at home and abroad.

Another piece that established ritualistic, symbolic, and psychological meanings of the animal in contemporary art was Beuys's *I Like America and America Likes Me*, (Fig. 2/26) performed at Rene Block Gallery in 1974. Beuys, dressed in gray felt and holding a shepherd's staff, spent several days in the gallery with a coyote named Little Joe. The separateness and occasional interaction between the artist and the animal suggested differing emotional states. At one point, Beuys lay down on the coyote's straw; at another time, he spoke to the coyote and encouraged him to tear at strips of felt. The animal was a kind of alter-ego and the artist a shaman who tamed the animal spirit. References were made to the coyote's change of status in Indian culture, once deified and respected, now outlawed after the arrival of the white man: this cultural and political critique also was layered upon the symbols. Similar to the coyote, Rothenberg's horse, lyric in an awkward, disconnected manner, in some ways suggests a lost connection, a lost innocence: "The horse image is a visual incantation. It seems part of an ancient ritual to which we no longer have access, being a symbol of the many secrets we have lost along with our proximity to nature and animals."¹⁶⁸

Rothenberg had first-hand experience with the metaphoric possibilities of animal imagery in the work of Nancy Graves. She had worked on Graves's animal bone pieces in 1968, in a jovial sweatshop atmosphere with other artists who, like

¹⁶⁸ Mark Stevens, "Essential Hesitations," *Parkett*, no.43 (1995): 87.

Rothenberg, painstakingly made bone fossils out of marble dust. Rothenberg also experienced Graves's life-size camel pieces first-hand. (Fig. 2/27) Graves had chosen the camel "for its size and softness, its enigmatic quality and potential for

metaphor."¹⁶⁹ Rothenberg credits Graves with helping inspire the horse imagery.

Joan Jonas had presented a striking image representing the animal-woman symbolism in a more direct way, in her work *Organic Honey*. In this piece, Jonas used drawings of her dog, Sappho, as a kind of leitmotif for "the animal spirit that represents a force or instinct" as well as for the video monitor: "I drew the top half of the dog's head on the bottom of the paper, the bottom on the top, and then with the roll the two halves came together. I also put my masked face in place of the top half of the dog's, turning me into half woman, half dog."¹⁷⁰ (Fig. 2/28)

The video work of William Wegman reminds us of Rothenberg's experiments with the *Mary* series. In *Reel 1: Milk/Floor, 1970-1972*, he pairs images of his dog, nose to the floor, sniffing and lapping up milk, with images of himself on all fours in a similar position. (Fig. 2/29) As with Wegman's dog, Greek artist Jannis Kounellis's horse was used dramatically in a performance piece at Sonnabend Gallery in 1972; astride a horse, Kounellis (Fig. 2/30) rode up the gallery's stairs, holding a mask of Apollo in front of his face. This piece was based on multi-horse pieces the artist had previously enacted in Rome, with references to the noble equestrian placed in a situation that was real rather than representational. Kounellis's use of animals arose from his desire to have art reflect the living or real world, in part as a response to a need for political and social change.

Rothenberg's paintings of Mary Woronov in the pose of a horse linked the two images as surrogate equivalents. When Rothenberg returned to the horse imagery

169 Linda L. Cathcart, *Nancy Graves: A Survey 1969/1980* (Buffalo, New York: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1980), 12.

170 Joan Jonas, interview by author, 11 November 1998, New York.

after the photograph/painting experiments, the human presence is clearly suggested. *White Robe*, (Fig. 2/31) a pivotal painting that speaks to the human attributes assigned to the horse, is a hauntingly poignant painting of a horse of clumsy proportions covered with a tattered blanket. The image is painted in veiled transparent tonal layers that probably are indebted to the membrane-like quality of Eva Hesse's drawings and fiberglass sculptures.¹⁷¹ This same quality is also incorporated in Rothenberg's little known drawings, whose images are seen through white transparent paper.

The color of the blanket is a warm, almost flesh colored, creamy beige in contrast to the stark white background. The legs under the tattered skirt are cropped in such a way that the front leg can be read as either an ankle or the area above the hoof of the horse. The back leg dematerializes into paint markings. The eyehole of the horse costume also is faintly suggested, with the lower part of the circle represented by a grayish smudge and the upper part melting into other tonal markings. The image can be read also as a horse costume, the kind one remembers from a child's school play or a slapstick, vaudevillian routine where the person under the front of the costume is out of step with the person pulling up the rear. Playing against the childlike and comic associations is the suggestion that the artist is hidden under the blanket: the personal may be hidden in the substituted image. Read as a disguise, the tattered blanket makes sense in light of Rothenberg's masked paintings that followed. In *Double Masked Heads*, (Fig. 2/32) two horses, white and black, stand in profile. The white horse eclipses all of the black horse save for the head and the periphery of the contours. The effect is that the black and white horses are seen as one, metaphors for the alter-egos of a single entity subordinated to a flat pictorial space.

The mask had become an important symbol in Performance Art, suggesting

¹⁷¹ Rothenberg has cited the importance of Hesse's work in several interviews.

multiple personas and shifting identities.¹⁷² Joan Jonas used the mask to suggest conformance to acceptable feminine guises. In *Organic Honey*, she combines two personas, one with a glamorous mask worn with an evening dress, and the everyday mask worn with work clothes. (2/33) Jannis Kounellis's plaster cast mask of Apollo at Sonnabend Gallery suggested personal and art historical references. The correlation between the mask and emotional guises is expressed in Bruce Nauman's word piece *The Consummate Mask of Rock* (1975), in which he states:

1. This is my mask of fidelity to truth and life.
2. This is to cover the mask of pain and desire.
3. This is to mask the cover of need for human companionship.

Like Nauman and Jonas, Rothenberg is using the mask as a symbol of identities known only to the artists themselves. Moreover, the horse itself serves to mask the artist's intentions and personal meanings as if they are operating on a subconscious level. Like the images found in Performance Art, these images refuse to explain themselves any further than within the context of a work of art.

Two paintings from 1978 strongly suggest how the horse paintings function as a substitution for the personal. By 1978, Rothenberg was moving from the line to the band, which allowed greater tensile strength but also enclosed, isolated, and contained the horse image. In *Kelpie*, the horse is contained with a black band pushing at the borders of the canvas, much the same way the legs and ears pushed at the borders. Using a similar format, Rothenberg painted *Mr. Bear*—a pointedly personal image—while holding her daughter's bear in her hand. (Fig. 2/34) Both images hearken back to an image of Rothenberg herself in a steel hoop in Joan Jonas's *Jones Beach*, in which the viewers saw everything at a distance and experienced sounds as a

172 The mask also had strong connotations in Modernism.

delayed experience. The “rift between actions being done and being heard”¹⁷³ speaks to the ambiguous, hermetic meanings known only to the artist but psychologically affecting to the audience nonetheless.

Meanings are created in many ways simultaneously in Rothenberg’s work. It is her unique combination of a wide spectrum of visual, symbolic, and associational entities that conspire to create a psychologized arena of meanings in a language of painting.

173 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 24.

CHAPTER THREE

New Image Painting to Neo-Expressionism

"I am an image maker who is also an image breaker—trying for a little more."¹⁷⁴

Susan Rothenberg

"The use of imagery brings into play the imagination and psychology of the viewer to a greater degree than the analytical and perceptual considerations encouraged by other work of the recent past."¹⁷⁵

Richard Marshall

In 1978, Susan Rothenberg was included in the exhibition *New Image Painting* at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Curator, Richard Marshall, assembled the work of ten artists who were utilizing both recognizable imagery and a pictorial language associated with abstraction. This landmark exhibition gave birth to the term "New Image Painting," a classification that has come to represent certain tendencies in painting, an art movement of the 1970s, and an important reintroduction of imagery into then dominant abstract styles.

174 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Richard Marshall, 26 January 1978, tape recording, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

174 Robert Moskowitz, interview by Linda Shearer, (based on a compilation of interviews by Linda Shearer at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988), Ned Rifkin, Robert Moskowitz, (Washington D.C. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution in Association with Thames and Hudson, 1989), 61.

Richard Marshall never intended to create a label for a new movement, but the term stuck and New Image Painting is accepted as one of the movements comprising the 1970's pluralism of styles. The art historical classification of New Image Painting is standard in almost all books surveying twentieth-century art or contemporary art from the 1940s to the present. In the literature, Susan Rothenberg is labeled first and foremost a New Image painter. Although her contribution to and placement in this "movement" is significant, her New Image painting represents only a seven-year period of an oeuvre that spans over thirty years to date.

Considering this movement and Rothenberg's place in it raises several questions: Was a shared aesthetic at work among the artists included in this exhibition? Was New Image Painting really a movement? What is "new" about New Image Painting? What important sources or precursors affected the emergence of the tendencies at work in New Image Painting? How does this movement fit into the lineage of painterly realism in late-twentieth-century painting? This chapter addresses these questions.

The answers to these questions vary in regard to the different artists and must be examined to identify not only the particular character of the body of work that the exhibition presented, but also the validity of the subsequently named movement that followed. Much of my research depends on interviews I conducted with most of the New Image artists. Transcripts of those interviews that I was allowed to tape are included in Appendix A. Although some common threads in terms of iconography, style, and content do exist, and will be explored, many diverse issues and differing sensibilities shaped each artist's practice. Moreover, an analysis of Rothenberg's work in relation to that of the other artists in the exhibition will allow a fuller understanding of the issues and concerns that are particular to Rothenberg's aesthetic. I intend to

show how Rothenberg's fusion of imagery with abstraction fits into a larger tendency in art, reflected in the *New Image Painting* exhibition.

By looking at the other artists in the exhibition, I will place Rothenberg's personal, symbolic, and psychologized use of imagery in a broader context. By psychologized, I mean the infusion of psychology into the artwork's content, specifically an ineffable urgency created by the image in conjunction with the vocabulary of painting itself, as well as a psychological intensity inherent in the painting that is available to the viewer.

The New Image artists all came to the areas of imagery and abstraction from uniquely individual sources with varying emphases and issues, although similarities among them can be drawn. Paradoxically, the territory covered by the group of artists as a whole does constitute a new tendency in painting in the 1970s that simultaneously borrowed from and rejected dominant styles associated with abstraction. These artists also introduced new approaches to content that were provocative in their refusal to be overtly emotional or totally distanced. Meanings or interpretations in their art remain unfixed, multi-layered, and at times ambiguous.

My inquiry will begin with a summary of the precepts outlined in Richard Marshall's catalogue essay, and with a consideration of the exhibition as a whole. Next, I will give special attention to the work and philosophies of Neil Jenney, an important aesthetic precursor for the New Image artist, and then will look closely at the diverse kinds of aesthetic attitudes contained within the work of the New Image Painters, offering a classification system that differs from those existing in the critical literature. This organizational construct separates out the themes and approaches to imagery that New Image Painting comprises; moreover, this analysis shows not only how Rothenberg's work is situated in New Image Painting, but also how its painterly

primacy interconnects with existing threads in painting and forecasts the wave of expressionistic painting of the 1980s.

New Image Painting, the Essay and the Exhibition

Curator Richard Marshall's idea for an exhibition came from New York artists' galleries and studios. During the 1970s, he noticed that the art scene was dominated by Minimalist artists, such as Robert Mangold and Soi Lewitt, whose work he very much admired. Therefore, when on the rare occasion Marshall encountered image-based work, he took note. Marshall saw something emerging, even though as Robert Moskowitz remembers, "there weren't that many people working with imagery."¹⁷⁶ The artists using images were not totally abandoning abstraction, remembers Marshall:

They were doing abstraction but they were putting images in it and it was kind of like—I don't know if I thought this at the time—it was kind of like what Rauschenberg and Johns were doing with Abstract Expressionism; they weren't giving up gesture, but they were incorporating it. So it's a transition, and I thought it was worth exploring in an exhibition. It was there.¹⁷⁷

In his essay, Marshall points out that the artist "draws upon and rejects aspects of each of these [referring to abstract, non-objective, and expressionistic] types of painting]. The images fluctuate between the abstract and the real."¹⁷⁸ I would counter that the images are grounded in an abstract language rather than fluctuating between two artistic modes, noting that a fusion of, rather than a vacillation between, abstraction and representation takes place.

¹⁷⁷Susan Rothenberg, interview by author, 30 December, 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Marshall, New Image Painting, 7.

In Richard Marshall's preliminary proposal for the exhibition, his list of working titles, included "Abstract Images in Recent American Painting," "Emerging Images: 12 Painters," and "New Images in American Painting."¹⁷⁹ Artists on the original working list but not in the final exhibition included Kim McConnell, who was associated with Pattern and Decoration painting; Ed Baynard, a painter and printmaker of elegant images of objects and flowers on simple backgrounds; and Joel Shapiro, a sculptor whose small geometric chairs and houses had an impact on many of the New Image artists. Artists Joe Zucker, Lois Lane, and Michael Hurson were not on the original list but were added as the exhibition took shape. Although Marshall always conceived the exhibition as dealing exclusively with painting, he did think of the work of Joel Shapiro and Bryan Hunt as sculptural corollaries. Marshall encountered Donald Sultan's work in 1978 and would have included that work in the exhibition as well, had the catalogue deadline not already passed. Marshall's final grouping of artists was Nicholas Africano, Jennifer Bartlett, Dennis Green, Michael Hurson, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, Susan Rothenberg, David True, and Joe Zucker. In retrospect, there were other artists who would have "fit" in the exhibition. Pat Steir's painting *Word Unspoken* of 1974 (Fig.3/1) presents a single rose on a grid defaced by an X on top of the image; the isolated image is situated in a grid-like structure giving equal importance to the image and the geometrical construct. Susan Hall's work (Fig.3/2) might have been another candidate for inclusion in the exhibition. Ree Morton's works may have also been a possibility (Fig. 3/3).

Although the artists in the exhibition are quite different from each other, the exhibition held together as a coherent whole. In the catalogue essay, Marshall states that the artists are "related more in sensibility than in style" and that his "aim is to

179 New Image Painting exhibition file, Library at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY.

present their paintings with a view toward understanding them individually rather than collectively.”¹⁸⁰ Their individual concerns and approaches are further articulated in artists’ statements in the catalogue, taken primarily from interviews Marshall conducted. Despite the artists’ differences, Marshall establishes areas of commonality among them in the exhibition. He notes that the depicted image is drastically abbreviated or exaggerated, retaining only its most basic identifying qualities. The images are radically manipulated through scale, material, placement, and color. Because of their isolation and alteration, they create a distance between themselves and the viewer. This is confounded by the wavering equilibrium established between form and content—often weighed more towards form.¹⁸¹

Marshall asserts that the images take on the cultural, symbolic, associative, and emotional meanings that each viewer brings to those images. Narratives are implied, not stated, and mediated by the viewer. Marshall’s analysis points to an image’s removal from a commonly accepted role or setting to a non-specific location that provides no frame of reference. Marshall speaks of this recontextualization of the image: “When confronted with an illusion of an object that is devoid of the surroundings that provide clues and keys to its meaning, the viewer’s interpretation becomes undefined and open-ended.”¹⁸² This free-floating range of interpretations inherent in *New Image Painting* is one of the strongest common denominators of the exhibition’s artists. Images are factually presented without As I have suggested in the preceding chapter, performative genres did much to inform the open-ended, at times

180 Robert Moskowitz, interview by Linda Shearer, (based on a compilation of interviews by Linda Shearer at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988), Ned Rifkin, Robert Moskowitz, (Washington D.C.Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution in Association with Thames and Hudson, 1989),.

181 Ibid, p.7

182 Ibid, p 8.

ambiguous range of meanings and interpretations.¹⁸³

Marshall's discussion of how *New Image Painting* functions is less convincing when he speaks of the artist's manipulation of the image. Marshall states that when the image is:

freed from its usual function, it can be used to expand into other capabilities. The artist is free to manipulate the image on the canvas so that it can be experienced as a physical object, an abstract configuration, a psychological associative, a receptacle for applied paint, an analytically systematized exercise, an ambiguous quasi-narrative, a specifically non-specific experience, a vehicle for formalist explorations, or combinations of any.¹⁸⁴

This statement implies a systematic process whereby the image is, first, conceived in its usual function; second, released from that function; and third, assigned one of the uses listed above. But the process for many of the New Image artists is much more integrated and intuitive. For example, Robert Hurson often sees the psychological implications of an image after it has been painted. Rothenberg conceived the horse as a formal device from the beginning, "something that would divide well."¹⁸⁵ She did not conceive the image first, with traditional functions from which the image was subsequently released. Joe Zucker's system works in a sequence almost reversed from that which Marshall suggests: Zucker made works constructed from cotton balls that

183 My discussion in Chapter Two was focused on the impact of Performance Art on Susan Rothenberg's work. However, other New Image Painters such as Denise Green have credited Performance Art with a general refocusing on imagery, citing Joseph Beuys's performances as having an important impact. See Interview by author.

184 Ibid, p.8

185 Richard Marshall, interview by author, 30 December 2002,

the artist rolled by hand in a mixture of pigment and Rhoplex and subsequently adhered to the canvas. Zucker selected the riverboat imagery because of its socio-cultural relationship to the South, the slave trade, and the growing and manufacturing of cotton. The image is not so much freed from its function, in this case narrative, as it relates to the artist's system and material.

Marshall accomplished his goal "to focus on the work of ten artists who utilized imagery in non-traditional and innovative ways, and make images the dominant feature of their paintings."¹⁸⁶ However, critics and artists alike noted that the exhibition's artists did not necessarily form a homogeneous group. Roberta Smith, for example, subdivided the artists into groups.¹⁸⁷ First, the "figure-ground" group, consisting of Lane, Moskowitz, Green, Rothenberg, and Africano, silhouetted simple shapes against abstracted backgrounds, creating a mix of awkwardness, simplicity, and personal symbolism. Smith defines the second group as "cooler, more complexly ambitious, more ironic in attitude—more difficult to define."¹⁸⁸ This second group, including Jenney, Zucker, Bartlett, and Hurson, often utilizes self-conscious painting methods and eccentric painting materials, notes Smith. Artist David True is the odd man out in Smith's classification system, as his images are fairly realistic, at times resembling hand-tinted photographs.

My classification of the New Image artists differs from Smith's, underscoring instead three different approaches to imagery. The first classification includes Jennifer Barlett and Joe Zucker; both depend on a system of art making which subsequently dictates how the subject matter will be presented and perceived. The second set of New Image artists uses narrative as a point of departure; the narrative is

186 Marshall, New Image Painting, p.7

187 Roberta Smith, "The Abstract Image," Art in America, March/April 1979, 103.

188 Ibid.

suggested in different manners, sometimes fantastical as in Michael Hurson's work, sometimes situational as with Nicholas Africano's paintings, and sometimes relational as in Neil Jenney's coupling of images. With the third group, which includes Susan Rothenberg, Denise Green, David True, Robert Moskowitz, and Lois Lane, the image is isolated and recontextualized in an abstract space; with this group, the images tend to be more iconic and emblematic. These classifications assist us in understanding the common themes and issues: connections between artists in different categories exist. For example, both Hurson and Rothenberg, choreograph their images, both Bartlett and Rothenberg utilize geometric constructs. In all the artists' work, the image becomes psychologized, symbolic, and in some way encodes personal meanings. This is accomplished in great part by situating the image in an abstract environment. Marshall puts it well: "What becomes most apparent in these works is the interplay between the emotive content of the image and its formal structure and characteristics."¹⁸⁹

New Image Painting was the most well-known exhibition of the 1970s to document the use of imagery at that time, but not the only one. A small exhibition titled *Hunt, Jenney, Lane, Rothenberg, Shapiro*, on view at the Vassar College Art Gallery in 1978, strove to display the "use of emotionally keyed, idiosyncratic imagery," which curator Peter Mirrin earmarked as "the central development of American art of the 1970s."¹⁹⁰ This exhibition showed how Joel Shapiro's sculpture related visually and conceptually to the work of the artists who would be in *New Image Painting*. A small six-inch geometric house sitting directly on the gallery floor created a gulf of space between the viewer and object. Recognizable imagery replete with

189 Marshall, *New Image Painting*, p. 7.

190 Peter Morrin, Introductory essay in *Hunt, Jenney, Lane, Rothenberg, Shapiro*, (Poughkeepsie, New York, Vassar Art Museum, 1978, no p.n. no p. n..

associations was fused with the geometric language of Minimalism. These works were particularly important to the artists associated with New Image Painting. Denise Green recalls the important conversation going on between Jenney and Shapiro in the early 1970s regarding imagery and metaphor. In speaking of Shapiro's house sculptures, Michael Hurson noted the psychological impact created by presenting images on the illusion of enormous space.¹⁹¹ (Fig. 3/4) The catalogue essay from this small, thoughtful exhibition notes that Shapiro's small houses are "literally and figuratively as dense as storehouses for psychological states."¹⁹² It is worth noting that prior to the house sculptures, Shapiro sculpted a small horse and also used the image of a horse, blacked out with paint as a kind of self-portrait.(Fig. 3/5).

Another, more well-known exhibition to survey imagistic work was organized by James Monte and Marcia Tucker for the New Museum of Contemporary Art's *Bad Painting*, which assembled the figurative work of fourteen artists from various parts of the United States, "defied, either deliberately or by virtue of disinterest, the classic canons of good taste, draftsmanship, acceptable source material, rendering, or illusionistic representation."¹⁹³ Marcia Tucker stressed that the work in no way constituted a school or movement, noting that artists were geographically disparate and few knew each other. Rather, the iconoclastic images challenged the conventions of Minimalism, traditional figure painting, and even Photo-Realism.

Bad Painting offered a variety of styles ranging from the West Coast funk of Joan Brown to the paint-by-numbers clumsiness of Robert Chambliss Hendon. Artistic strategies, also diverse, included the "dangerous humor" of CPLY, the antagonism towards Classicism of Charles Garabedian, and the shocking anarchism of

191 Michael Hurson, interview by author, 11 December 2002.

192 Amy Benenson, "Aspects of Abstract Representation," in Hunt, Jenney, Lane, Rothenberg, Shapiro, no p. n..

193 Marcia Tucker, Bad Painting, no p. n..

James Albertson. Bad taste was celebrated in the “art brut” smears of James Chatelain and in his accompanying statement, “I want my art to have the morality of a Jew, the playfulness of a queer, and the backing of the mob.”¹⁹⁴ Neil Jenney was the only artist from this exhibition also to be included in *New Image Painting*. Because Jenney slapped on paint in a loose, irreverent manner, some people connected it with the seemingly haphazard facture of California funk painters such as Joan Brown. In fact, Jenney believed that it is because his work was perceived as a kind of funk art that it was not connected with other representational styles such as Pop; however, Jenney did take the title of the exhibition to describe his work of the late 1960s.

Like *Bad Painting*, the *New Image Painting* exhibition grouped together artists of varying concerns, attitudes, and orientations. But is there enough commonality to constitute a “movement”? To explore the possibility of a shared aesthetic and to determine if it provided ground for an official contemporary art movement, it is important to consider each artist’s individual concerns and the way they all fit into the classification of New Image artists. Furthermore, by examining the disparate influences that inform the work of each New Image artist—for example, Medieval manuscripts for Nicholas Africano, commercial window design for David True, or Jungian symbolism for Lois Lane—I will call into question and debunk historical generalizations such as “*New Image Painters* used Pop Art as their aesthetic jumping off point.”¹⁹⁵

Neil Jenney, New Image Painting’s Important Precursor

It is important to study Jenney’s influence on Rothenberg and other New Image Painters such as Lois Lane, Michael Hurson, and Denise Green. His work was

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Bruce Kurtz, *Contemporary Art*, p. 160.

an important early precursor to the New Image Painting, and his particular perception of realism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, though somewhat idiosyncratic, does shed light on the artistic terrain on which New Image Painting is grounded. In 1968, Jenney believed that realism was the style of the future and that its parameters had not been properly defined. He called this renewed interest in representation New Realism, but the term did not take and it wasn't until the *New Image Painting* exhibition ten years later that a term was coined to describe a trend towards imagistic painting. For Jenney, New Image Painting did not constitute a movement so much as a somewhat arbitrary grouping for an exhibition. He explained:

I kept saying New Realism. That's what I'm doing—New Realism. That's what I am doing. So the people at the museum with that show, *New Image*, they were looking for a way to give me some exposure with some context. So that's how they came up with New Image. Cause those people are a little after [later than] me, and they don't kind of share that motivation that I had. It was just a reason to have a show. There was no movement.¹⁹⁶

For Jenney, Pop Art constituted the return to imagery. But Brillo boxes and Campbell soup cans were images understood only by those familiar with American culture, and Jenney wanted to create a universal, transcultural language. For example, Jenney's 1969 painting *Girl and Doll*, (Fig. 3/6) depicting a young girl crying over a broken doll next to her, is a representation of a sad story. All cultures have sad stories. Therefore, the images can be universally understood.

Photo-Realism did not fulfill Jenney's prophecy for a new realism. In fact, in his opinion, it was one of the worst things that ever had happened to realism. Photography-derived paintings of "kodacolor" exactness were devoid of the thousands of "intuitive judgments" needed to sustain a work of art, thought Jenney. Moreover,

196 Neil Jenney, Interview by author, 2 December, 2002.

Jenney rejected the mechanical, photographic-based methods of Pop and Photo-Realism in favor of a combination of what he refers to as craftsmanship and line. Jenney rejected many Photo-Realist practices, asserting that whereas “they avoided the brush, I used the brush.”¹⁹⁷ Actually, he emphasized the brush to the point that it seems a parody of Action Painting’s big brush stroke. (Fig. 3/7) Jenney’s dream of a new realism remained unfulfilled: “I am still waiting for the realists to show up.”¹⁹⁸ waiting, he said, because he considers any melding of abstraction and imagery in the tradition of de Kooning, Baselitz, or Schnabel, per se, to be on the fence, neither one thing nor the other, outside his concept of serious realism.

Jenney’s works in *New Image Painting*, dated from 1969 and 1970, came out of what the artist refers to as his Bad Painting period; he co-opted that term from the exhibition of the same name organized in 1969 by James Monte and Marcia Tucker. Disgusted with the photo-based realist painting of the late 1960s, Jenney, who had been making “environmental sculptures” of corrugated metal, remarked to a friend, “It would be better if you had a good idea and did it terrible . . . and I said, you know, I think I’ll do that.”¹⁹⁹ In his *New Image* paintings, sketchy, isolated images bob in a sea of big, slushy paint strokes that flatly dance over the surface. One critic noted that the paintings, cleverly crude, “must have required great skill to look so awful.”²⁰⁰ The imagery is based on the fundamental relationships of one thing to another: a girl crying and a broken vase in *Girl and Vase*; a saw and pieces of a former log in *Saw and Sawed*; a disgruntled man and an angry woman in *Husband and Wife*.

Although it took a few years for buyers to find these works after they were exhibited in 1968 at the Noah Goldowsky Gallery, they had a strong impact on young

197 Susan Rothenberg, Statement , Whitney Museum, 1982, tape recording.

198 Neil Jenney, Interview by author, 2 December, 2002, New York.

199 Ibid.

200 Mark Stevens (Whitney Museum of Art, Artists file)

artists. Jenney's work influenced many of the artists in the exhibition long before it took place. "Jenney was the one involved with realism early on, and the artists knew about his paintings," noted dealer Holly Solomon just before she died.²⁰¹ Susan Rothenberg was one of those artists. Denise Green recalled how much more interested she was in conversations that she, Jenney, and Joel Shapiro were having about imagery in the early 1970s than in the dialogue others were having about abstraction. Lois Lane remembers that Jenney was invited in 1970 to speak to students at the Graduate Art Department at Yale, where she was a student, as his work was of great interest to the Yale art community. David True came to know Jenney's work through other artists on whom it had had a significant impact.

In the *New Image* exhibition, Rothenberg's work connected most closely with Jenney's, in many ways. Both artists implanted their images in languages associated with Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism. Both artists' images have an awkward, childlike quality that adds another layer of meaning to images already replete with association and memory. The psychological aspect of the image is heightened by the fact that it is isolated on the painterly ground.²⁰² However, Jenney's coupling of images suggests a narrative quality, which was not present in Rothenberg's work of the 1970s. It wasn't until after 1980 that narrative—non-specific, dreamlike, even fragmented—would play an important role in Rothenberg's work.

After the brief, but pivotal, *Bad Painting* works, Jenney became obsessed with realistic detail, elaborate framing devices with visible titles and allegorical references to social and environmental issues. His imagery remains ordinary but symbolic. Jenney expounds: "Some people like to do images of the Tetons, Niagara

201 Holly Solomon, interview wby author, 25 November, 1999, New York.

202 Although Jenney has claimed that his images are not psychological, the juxtaposition of the image and the paint strokes in the *Bad Painting* group and his suggested narratives resonate on a psychological level.

Falls; I'm doing the back yard. I think it's important, and I think I can make poetry there. I think I can make it timeless."²⁰³

Beyond Jenney—New Image Painting's Narrative Painters Nicholas Africano and Michael Hurson

Whereas Jenney's form of narrative is principally relational, the sensibility underlying Nicholas Africano's narrative is principally situational. Jenney's content is about humor that can turn on a dime into something edgy; Africano's work is less allegorical, relying more on a freeze-frame narrative to illustrate distressing situations such as arguments or cruel discussions. Like Rothenberg, Africano accentuates figure/ground relationships and utilizes a stark, almost awkward figuration to visually encapsulate psychological states such as alienation, despair, rage, loneliness, and withdrawal. As Africano explains, these In addition to the narrative, Africano's manipulations of scale underscore the psychologically charged gap among the figures and between the painting and the viewer. Africano's high relief figures built up from wax and oil look miniscule on backgrounds of bland color. For example, the painting titled *A Cruel Discussion* (Fig. 3/8) measures 66" x 84", and each of the two figures is approximately 11" x 4"; the figures are doll-like, but the story line is serious. Africano insists, "I regard psychological references in his work are, Africano intended "to be about something—their human experience."²⁰⁴ Rothenberg's images have none of the cartoon-like and illustrative character of Africano's stick figures. Much, if not all, of *New Image Paintings* has a psychological aspect, but that is not to say that each artist consciously intended this outcome. Africano, however, does give the viewer enough

203 Neil Jenney, interview by author, 2 December 2002, New York.

204 Nicholas Africano, artist's statement, New Image Painting, 25

clues to infer what is happening. As Marshall points out, Africano's rudimentary figures are meant "to suggest a moment of behavior or interaction."²⁰⁵ From that, narrative exists. subject matter as my primary concern as an artist."²⁰⁶ Africano therefore uses scale psychologically, prompting one writer to describe Africano's painting *The Scream* as both cute and terrifying at the same time.

The third New Image narrative painter is Michael Hurson, whose narratives are fantastical, whimsical, and impossible to define. Hurson's facility with image making has something to do with the fact that he came from a tradition of looking at images; however these sources and influences are analyzed, Hurson's quest for an authentic expression defies categorization. In many ways, his work is about the way an idea and an image can be transformed into a work of art.

Early in his career, Hurson's work met with success when his series of eleven miniature rooms made from balsa were exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1973. After a brief time in the army, Hurson returned to Chicago, rented a studio, and confronted the question from which all his art ultimately derives: "What to do next?" Towards that end, he used the image of eyeglasses from a joke book he had made for a friend. In an attempt to shortcut the notion of good composition, Hurson applied images to silkscreens that he could quickly squeegee onto the canvas. (Fig. 3/9) Trying to make one large piece of canvas go as far as it possibly could, Hurson cut it into seven horizontal strips, each measuring -----. On these long canvases and ones of smaller dimensions, Hurson choreographed the eyeglasses, now half human on the long panels, many of which were sold out of Paula Cooper's back room; Richard Marshall chose several of these to be included in *New Image Paintings*. Marshall also showed a group of Hurson's Palm Springs

205 Marshall. *New Image Painting*, 8.

206 Nicolas Africano, Artist's statement *New Image Painting*, 25.

images of a poolside, all uniformly screened onto canvas like a coloring book line drawing. (Fig. 3/10) Later, Hurson painted them in a way that, at first look, they appear uniform; however, there are slight differentiation in color, and the position of the angle of the floatation device in the pool is altered. Equally perplexing is a painting Marshall selected based on the lives of an imaginary duo, Edward and Otto Pfaff. The two figures leaning on a table with a blank piece of paper on it are a stylistic cross between Krazy Kat and George Grosz's ink drawings of literary types, circa 1916. (Fig. 3/11)

Although it is not, strictly speaking, a tactic on the part of the artist, the result of Hurson's imagery is to derail the viewer into any assignation of meaning other than free-floating associations. However, there is a personal aspect to these images which Hurson admits to but which he will not reveal:

I realized that they are of a very personal nature that I was reluctant to speak of. Because that would give them too much . . . I dislike when artists try to explain their work that's not in the picture at all. The explanation's far more interesting than the picture. The eyeglasses are kind of literal. They are what they are. They're little eyeglass dancing figures and they move around and they seem human like but they're abstract.²⁰⁷

Hurson's approach is much more conceptual than Rothenberg's, but they both choreograph the image in an abstract field, for example the horse with Rothenberg and the eyeglass figure with Hurson. Whereas Rothenberg puts the horse through a series of geometrical divisions, Hurson takes a more narrative direction; for example, his eyeglass figures go out for a walk, meet friends, dance, etc.

New Image Painting's Programmatic Artists—Joe Zucker and Jennifer

207 Michael Hurson, interview by author, 11 December 2002, New York.

Bartlett

Both Joe Zucker and Jennifer Bartlett rely on systems of art making. This is the starting point of their work and, by extension, it informs their art both technically and iconographically. As such, of the New Image Painters, Zucker's as well as Bartlett's relationship to imagery is the most programmatic, following from a system of art making related to the materials in Zucker's case, and to organizing the imagery in mathematically derived systems in Bartlett's.

Joe Zucker is a painter who does not see himself as a painter. He utilizes a system that fuses technique, materials, and image. Throughout the 1970s, Zucker's "ersatz" paintings were comprised of small balls of cotton that in the artist's hand had been rolled in a mixture of pigment and Rhoplex. While they still were tacky, he applied the painted balls of cotton to a canvas on a table, constructing a kind of three-dimensional pointillism. *Amphora* from 1971 and *Lovebirds* from 1973, examples of this technique, are the earliest Zucker works in the *New Image* exhibition. It took thousands of cotton balls to fabricate *Amphora*, which measures 86" x 90."(Fig. 3/12) The blown-up image of the vessel counterpoised against the smallness of the dots places scale in a precarious position. As Zucker has said, "the huge increment results in the question whether these are small paintings with large surfaces or large paintings with a small perimeter."²⁰⁸ After 1974, Zucker started to elongate, twist, and shape the drenched cotton balls into "brushstrokes." After 1971, he transformed the cotton balls into "brushstrokes" and combined them with a tar-based substance to "draw" outlines of more complicated "narrative" images. Underneath the picture's thick outlines and the twisted, attenuated cotton ball "brushstrokes," Zucker leaves vestiges of the grid

208 Joe Zucker, Unpublished artist statement, January 4, 1974, Whitney Museum Library, Artists File.

format used to scale up the images.²⁰⁹

Intending another layer of meaning intrinsic to the material, Zucker's paintings refer to the symbolic meanings of the cotton ball in American history. In his *Reconstruction* series, he references the caustic racist underbelly of seemingly innocent images based on documentary photographs or on covers of cheap pulp novels of the South. These works are the only pieces in the *New Image Painting* exhibition taken directly from photographs. In this series, Zucker limits his color to black and white, corresponding to the subject matter. Included in *New Image Painting*, the 96" x 120" painting *Paying Off Old Debts* (Fig. 3/13) brings home the grim realities of the American Reconstruction by showing an African American almost completely weighed down by the bale of cotton he is hauling. In another work from this series, an undercurrent of dread is layered onto the image of a graceful Southern riverboat. In a recent interview, Zucker explains the socio-political realities of the cotton ball and the images he creates with it in his paintings of the trade and commerce during the Reconstruction after the Civil War in the "old South."

JZ: Now, it's a narrative about what I'm painting on. And also, it talks about political situations in the United States. In other words, without the cotton mill, you couldn't have imported slaves into the Southern United States. It's a kind of metaphoric and political stance to it.

RCE: Did you think of the political aspect of it back in '71, or does that come later?

JZ: Absolutely.

RCE: Absolutely from the beginning?

JZ: Absolutely. If I thought about it afterwards, I wouldn't have made it. I grew up in a racially difficult neighborhood in

209 In Zucker's stained glass series of the late 1970s, he raises the grid from under-structure to a surface relief created with cotton balls stretched to thin lines.

Chicago. So I'd been concerned about those kinds of situations for a while. It's very hard to make political art without standing on a soapbox.²¹⁰

Although Zucker's artworks are layered with historical references, the works are ultimately self-referential. The materials and process-driven technique become part of the iconography and inform the works' content. Of all the *New Image Painters*, Zucker and Bartlett adhere most strictly to a procedural system. Other meanings are layered on to the picture through extended metaphors; however, the viewer without a text of some sort does not always understand this.

In a series begun in 1978, Zucker develops the metaphor of artist as the renegade pirate who drifts on the flotsam of life, living intuitively and looking for a bit of history to "rip off." The various ship styles represent a range of artistic styles. Crude, commonplace materials become part of the metaphor as they limit the degree of sophistication and refer to the vagabond status of the pirate living apart from societal refinement. In this series, and in other thematic series of his, themes are selected for their symbolic and metaphoric possibilities, not as a matter of personal preference or an attachment to a particular subject matter. Zucker notes, "People like to say to me—well, you like to paint pirate ships. And it really has nothing to do with that. Artists are really about the construction of painting, the components of wood and canvas; they really don't have any concern with what I like."²¹¹ As a matter of fact, Zucker believes that too much attention is placed on painting what one likes rather than painting what one needs to paint. These works are in one sense a visible demonstration of the process of making art; they conceptually mine a vein tapped in Bruce Nauman's exploration of the artist's physical activities in the studio in video works such as *Studio Piece*, which enacts the artist pacing, sitting, walking, stopping, starting. Similarly

210 Joe Zucker, interview by author, 10 December 2002, New York.

211 Ibid.

self-referential, Zucker uses the activity of the artist as a starting point for the artwork, choosing a support, a medium, and a process of construction. As Zucker points out, “it comes down to a dialogue about the topography of the paintings.”²¹² Both Nauman and Zucker, while focusing, respectively, on the artist’s studio activities and the materials and process of art-making, give rise to other meanings and metaphors that are open-ended and associational but ultimately part of a human experience.

Like Zucker, Jennifer Bartlett systematizes her art. Originally from Long Beach, California, Jennifer Bartlett came to New York in 1968 determined to make her mark in the New York art world. She began to use inexpensive enamel tiles found in Canal Street surplus stores. She overlaid these unlikely supports with light-gray ¼-inch grids and painted them with both abstract and imagistic motifs in geometric dots of Testors model paint. Using a mathematically derived system to guide her, she created variations of repeated motifs on the steel plates and arranged them in modular grids on the wall.²¹³ In 1970, she had her first one-person exhibition in Alan Saret’s studio, consisting of hundreds of these tiles arranged in grid-designs on the wall. Gallery exhibitions followed at Reece Paley Gallery and Paula Cooper Gallery; Cooper has represented Bartlett’s work from 1974 to the present. Although the work was clearly rooted in Process Art, Minimalism, and Conceptual Art, styles that were primarily abstract, Bartlett as early as 1968 utilized an image of a house. In the early 1970s, she expanded the house motif to include a picket fence and a duck pond. This motif served as a schema that was repeated in various forms within sixty-one enamel plates in *House Piece* of 1970. The progressive permutations of pictorial elements

212 Ibid.

213 For Bartlett, the mathematical system was not the basis of the content as was the case with Sol Lewitt, whose work Bartlett much admired. Bartlett would have no problem dropping the system to fit or adjust the tile in Paula Cooper’s gallery space. The system was only a jumping off point to Bartlett.

were informed by Sol Lewitt's system-driven installation pieces.

Bartlett attended Yale in the mid-1960s, when Jack Tworkov chaired the art department.²¹⁴ Tworkov oriented the art department towards New York and its rapidly expanding art scene. As a result, Bartlett was aware of conceptual, minimal, and process art. Like many of her classmates who included Richard Serra, Chuck Close, Jonathan Borofsky, Nancy Graves and Rackstraw Downes, Bartlett had ambitions of becoming one of the important artists of the next generation. After graduation, she rented a small loft and had an active dialogue about art with artist-friends Elizabeth Murray, Jonathan Borofsky, Barry LeVa, and Joe Zucker. From 1972 on, Bartlett's work was seen in one-person exhibitions and important group exhibitions such as the 1972 Whitney Annual, 1977 and 1979 Whitney Biennial, several traveling museum exhibitions, and the *New Image Painting* exhibition in 1978. In a particularly significant coupling, In 1975, Bartlett's work was exhibited with Joel Shapiro's house sculptures in The Garage, an alternative space in London. That both artists' use of simple images, such as the house, fused their art with geometries that echoed Minimalist structures was an indication of developing tendencies.

In a sense, Bartlett's work was increasingly separating out the elements that comprise a painting, as well as making the elements of painting her subject; this went against the artistic focus of the time, a focus prejudiced against painting itself and against imagery. As the critic Roberta Smith notes, "Bartlett emerged at a time when reports of the death of painting, if greatly exaggerated, were also widely circulated."²¹⁵

²¹⁴ In 1963, Jack Tworkov became chairman of Yale's art department. Bartlett received her BFA in 1964 and her MFA in 1965.

²¹⁵ Roberta Smith, *Flooding the Mind and Eye: Jennifer Bartlett's Commissions*. Jennifer Bartlett, p. 76 Like Rothenberg, Bartlett uses the associative power of the image. The house in Bartlett's work was the idealized house with picket fence. There is also a feminist reading that associates the house with woman's work and woman's place.

Rhapsody, (Fig. 3/14) the 144 panel-piece shown in the *New Image* exhibition, was actually made in the summer of 1975 and exhibited for the first time at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1976. John Russell reviewed the exhibition glowingly in the *New York Times*, stating that “it was the most ambitious work of art that has come my way since I started to work in New York . . . enlarging . . . notions of time, and of memory, and of change, and of painting, itself.”²¹⁶ Bartlett used geometric shapes such as a square, circle, and triangle, and also simple images such as a house, tree, mountain, and the ocean. She also displayed an almost encyclopedic range of paint markings ranging from pointillist dots to gestural strokes. Bartlett’s aim was to create a large artwork in which images and styles would start, stop, and intersect as language does in a roomful of conversations.

Like Zucker, Bartlett used her system as a point of departure. Once Bartlett decided on the imagery, she spent time in the library, doing research to determine what constituted the essential mountain or tree. For example, she found a picture of an alpine peak to represent the quintessential mountain image. Bartlett used mathematical systems to articulate her chosen iconography in varying combinations and styles on the steel plates. However, Bartlett would abandon or change the system at will in order to conform to installation requirements or pictorial demands. As Bartlett has said, “My interest is in how it can be done rather than what the imagery is.”²¹⁷ Bartlett relied on the system even after the strict mathematical determinations fell away. She explains:

Yes, what I did was use a random selection, in other words what I did was write ‘ducks would be one; steps would be two; window, three; clouds, four; and I just enumerated every one of the objects in the landscape and then put all the numbers into

216 John Russell, “On Finding a Bold New Work,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1976, section 2, p. 31.

217 Jennifer Bartlett, Artists statement in *New Image Painting*, 20.

a coffee can and then I drew a number that would then be dropped down in a subsequent place.²¹⁸

Among all the *New Image Painters*, Bartlett and Zucker reference paint markings with materials that emphasize decidedly artificial qualities. Both artists create something that was highly synthetic and precise through the use of steel plates and model paint, Rhoplex, and cotton balls. Marshall observes that “Like Joe Zucker’s paintings, her [Bartlett’s] work stands as a parallel in paint to the activities of conceptual, process and Performance Artists who were her contemporaries in age and often her friends: Vito Acconci, Barry LeVa, William Wegman, and also Chris Burden [whom she did not know].”²¹⁹ Linkage with performance activities comes out of the late ’60s and early ’70s, when Acconci, Burden, LeVa, and Wegman set out to complete a series of specific, if at times exhausting, procedures. Like Jonathan Borofsky, whose early numbering pieces were linked often obsessively to a project description, Bartlett’s *Rhapsody* was intensely procedural. In contrast, Rothenberg’s work is relational (see Chapter One), meaning that adjustments and corrections are made based on the artist’s involvement with both the image and the paint at the time she is painting, not in advance of it; therefore, Rothenberg differs from Bartlett because she has no a priori procedural directive at work.

Like Rothenberg, Bartlett used geometry, although the visual outcomes were not the same. What is particularly interesting about the New Image artists is that they all engaged in the same issue—imagery and abstraction—but they came from different places and came up with different solutions. Bartlett’s images became more autobiographical, with houses titled for places she lived, sea from beach house, and a

218 Jennifer Bartlett, Unpublished interview with artist, by Richard Marshall, Whitney Museum of America Art, March 22, 1978

219 Roberta Smith, *Jennifer Bartlett*, 84

garden in a house she lived in France.

New Image Painting —Isolating and Recontextualizing Images: Green, Lane, Moskowitz, True, Rothenberg

The image removed from a specific narrative context, isolated, and placed in an abstracted space is as close as *New Image Painting* comes to a signature style. In an internal Whitney Museum memo, Richard Marshall suggested the title “The Abstract Image,” among many others. In response, then director Tom Armstrong wrote in the margin, “how can it be an image and be abstract?” In this exchange, one can approximate the aesthetic territory where the art of New Image Painters Denise Green, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, David True, and Susan Rothenberg is located. Furthermore, the image is recontextualized, removed from a particular narrative and embedded within an abstract sensibility that leaves the image open-ended, heightening the interpretive, associative, and memory- based readings. The images, however, often do contain personal and psychological meanings that the artists either consciously or unconsciously have invested into them. This commonality is all the more significant as these artists’ formative influences, psychological undercurrents, and aesthetic predispositions vary greatly. Consider, for example, Denise Green.

Born in 1946 in Melbourne, Australia, Denise Green came to New York City in the late 1960s and entered into post-graduate studies at Hunter College. Green’s production of images comes from varied sources, including Aboriginal art, Giotto, Tarquinian vases, Performance Art, Joseph Beuys’s drawings, Joel Shapiro’s house sculptures, and Neil Jenney’s “Bad Painting.” Green also is well versed in art theories²²⁰ and Japanese and Indian cultures. Even more important than these

220 At age seventeen, Green left Australia with hopes of gaining employment to help support the family of five children. She finished her high school education in

formative elements were to Green's art is her ability to internalize in her art the exterior world, responding to factors such as the strong Australian light, concrete Tribeca facades, or a grid of window frames seen from city streets below. Green describes how she assigned personal meanings to these exterior factors when she first came to New York:

I remember walking through the streets of Manhattan and feeling that I was an outsider. In a sense, seeing those buildings and those walls and feeling, you know . . . so there was a psychological [state] at one point. And then for one year—I mean I went through Hunter, Robert Morris, and all those conceptual artists who said you couldn't use images when I started paintings—I was doing studies of buildings, for one year. And I was very much trying to convey this psychological thing—not really belonging here. And I was then engaged in the dialogue with Neil [Jenney] and Joel [Shapiro] and I very much wanted to get this meaningful image, so I focused in on a window. . . . So I isolated the window and it was in a field and so it was no longer so much about this psychological state of being an outsider. But it was trying to bring the image and the idea of a meaningful image to another level, but it had been triggered by some psychological state.²²¹

Green insists that her imagery of windows, chairs, vessels, and trapdoors functions more in a metonymic way. Metonymic refers to a figure of speech where a name stands in place of a related object or concept of which it is an attribute. In *Trap* of 1976, (Fig. 3/15) for instance, the trapdoor, which sits amid a flurry of Jenney-like choppy green brushstrokes, is a stand-in for feelings of being trapped, isolated, and

Paris and studied architecture and painting at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, also taking courses at the Sorbonne. In Paris, she digested the art-theory teachings of André Chastel, René Huyghe and Lévi-Strauss. When at Hunter, under the tutelage of Abstract Expressionist teachers Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko, she learned to follow her intuitive side. The intense, saturated colors of Green's New Image paintings owe a debt to Rothko. Outside of painting, Green was exposed to the structural and conceptual approaches of Tony Smith and Robert Morris, who also taught at Hunter.

221 Denise Green, interview by author, 11 December 2002, New York

confined. However, Green's conception of the metonymic has broader connotations: "a fusion of an inner, spiritual world and an outer, material world."²²²

When Green started to scratch or paint isolated images on a flat field of color, her work was "attacked" by many of her peers. "They would say, you're painting an image and they [the viewer] would disconnect," Green recalls, "and I would actually say, it's not an image, it's configuration."²²³ In 1978, Green began coupling images. In *Looking Back on The Other*. (Fig. 3/16) Green juxtaposes a crisp form of a white vase on the bottom-left area of the canvas with a silhouette of a purple hare on the upper-mid area of the right side of the picture. The background is an intense gold-yellow onto which thin, white lines run vertically on the left side, dividing the work in two. Green identifies vessels with paintings, both of them carriers of emotions and thoughts. The rabbit is frozen with head turned, as if suddenly alerted to a natural occurrence. The connection between the two images is not specific, but it is poetical—the place where the painting's two halves connect, with one of the hare's ears slightly intersecting one of the thin white lines from the domain of the vase. The image of the hare also has associations with Joseph Beuys's performance work, *How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare*. Beuys was a critical influence for Green. The gallery that represented Green was one floor above the Rene Bloch Gallery, which exhibited Beuys's drawings and housed his performance pieces through the 1970s. Green explains the connection:

His performance actions incorporated everyday objects with which he felt a strong personal connection. This was also true of his use of such mundane materials as felt and fat. I was especially struck by the fact that his drawings contained references

222 Green, essay to be published in an exhibition catalogue for a retrospective exhibition touring Germany in 2003-2004.

223 Denise Green, Interview by author, 11 December 2002, New York.

to objects, and still have in my mind his depictions of whales, boats, sleds, animals, and vases. This triggered a new development in my work in 1976.²²⁴

For both Green and Rothenberg, Performance Art heightened their use of symbolic imagery and of subject matter that isn't fully explicit to the viewer but that does have personal significance.

Another of the young artists who came to New York in the early 1970s²²⁵ was Lois Lane, also selected by Richard Marshall to be in the *New Image* exhibition. Marshall chose six paintings with imagery that included plant forms, a fan and a dog, and flowered slacks on a clothesline—all in crisp, simplified visual shorthand on an inky black background. Lane silhouettes forms against stark backgrounds, as do many other New Image Painters, including Rothenberg, True, Green, and Moskowitz.

Like Green, Lois Lane always was interested in imagery, even though she realized that it generally was excluded from the Minimalist- and Process-based currents. From the early 1970s to the present, Lane has created collage-paintings combining found images from magazines with paint on canvas. Early on, she was interested in Japanese art, and in emblematic images such as family crests. Joel Shapiro was Lane's next-door neighbor, so she was familiar with his geometricized figures, chairs, and houses.

Her process of image-finding is closely aligned to Rothenberg's, as images seem to surface from a subconscious, intuitive place. When plant forms began to emerge artistically in her consciousness during the early 1970s, Lane began to keep

224 Green, essay to be published in an exhibition catalog for a retrospective exhibition touring Germany in 2003-2004.

225 After receiving her MFA from Yale, Lois Lane came to New York in 1972. Working as an assistant to Jasper Johns served as a comfortable transition from student life to city life as well as a useful entry into the New York art world. After 1974, her work was represented by Willard Gallery, as was Rothenberg's, and it is there that curator Richard Marshall saw her work.

drawings in sketchbooks, later to be the basis of the form language for her paintings. Symbolic imagery continued to interest Lane, and by the mid-1970s she became interested in images one conjures up while daydreaming, arising from a Jungian process from the recesses of the collective unconscious. Lane also had become interested in the notion of “thought-forms,” analyzed in Annie Besant’s writings.²²⁶

Lane was always interested in Minimalism, and her work reflects its economy and monochromatic blankness. Like many New Image artists. Rothenberg included, Lane did not connect with Pop Art and Photo-Realism. Like New Image Painting, those popular styles utilized imagery, but, as Lane points out, “[Photo-Realism] really didn’t come from the same place.”²²⁷ The critical distinction, explains Lane, is that New Image paintings were “about an inner life.”²²⁸

Emboldened by the early work of Neil Jenney and encouraged by Susan Rothenberg’s, *Triphammer Bridge*, which she had seen in a *New Talent* exhibition at A. M. Sachs Gallery, Lane continued her image-based works in an expanded format and began to subdivide her paintings into three abutting panels. Lane used a clothesline in one painting to divide the canvas horizontally in the same way that Rothenberg had used the center line to divide her paintings vertically. (Fig. 3/17) Like Rothenberg, the formal for Lane is never just the formal, outside of the content of the painting. Lane muses, “I don’t think anything is entirely formal. I think we do things for all kinds of reasons, kind of hard to figure, so we just call it formal.”²²⁹

In retrospect, Lane believes that New Image constitutes a movement and a shared aesthetic of sorts, even though everyone was working independently: “All the

226 Lane had been reading Thought-forms by Annie Wood Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.

227 Lois Lane, Interview by author, 2 December 2002, New York.

228 Ibid.

229 Ibid.

artists were doing their private work. . . . all separately but kind of aware of each other.”²³⁰ Although the image-based artists included in the *New Image* exhibition were, for the most part, working privately, Lane remembers that there was some idea that other artists had similar interests. She recalls: “we were young, and we all kind of knew each other. And I remember going up to Bob Moskowitz at a party and saying something stupid like, I think we have a lot in common. I knew he was thinking, right. But in fact we did. I knew we were working similarly.”²³¹

Brooklyn-born Robert Moskowitz was forty-four when his work hung in the *New Image Painting* exhibition. His work had been seen at Leo Castelli’s gallery during the 1960s; although it met with early success there, in time Moskowitz felt out of sync with the Pop and Minimal artists whom Castelli featured.²³² He left Castelli and eventually found his own relationship to imagery, differing from that of the Pop artists he had seen exhibited there.

While at Castelli, Moskowitz had exhibited simple images such as windows with shades, airmail envelopes, decorative couches and fireplaces, and Arp-like “modernist” paintings. All the works were informed by a stark economy that mirrored the rise of Minimalism. After leaving the gallery, he began to explore the psychological metaphors offered in architectural imagery.²³³ Moskowitz came to use

230 Ibid.

231 Ibid.

232 In 1964, Robert married Hermine Tworkov, Jack’s daughter. Although he and his father-in-law did not share the same ideas about abstraction (Moskowitz was working with imagery by that time), Tworkov provided the support and guidance Moskowitz needed to clarify his goals as an artist.

233 In 1965 Moskowitz assisted Walker Evans in a project for Time-Life books, an experience through which he began to understand architectural structures in a new way. Moskowitz remembers, “Walker was obsessed, almost painfully involved with columns. He was painfully aware of the column as a psychological metaphor.” Interview by author, 9 December 2002. Moskowitz already was aware of the importance of architectural elements, but the influence of Evans’s model encouraged

the World Trade Center Towers as a subject for his stark, powerful architectural statements long before the September tragedy, resulting in works that now have an overwhelming emotional and psychological resonance.

Both apparent and unapparent linkages exist between the art of Moskowitz and Rothenberg. With regard to appearance, the simplicity of the image—itsself outside of a familiar context and at the service of pictorial elements—resonates in paintings by both Rothenberg and Moskowitz. Deeper and less apparent are the artists' use of horse imagery as an autobiographical symbol. Rothenberg's horse was a surrogate representing herself; Moskowitz's 1973 white outline of a tiny, childlike horse on a large black field had a lot to do with feelings of isolation and loneliness after his father abandoned his mother and two younger siblings when Moskowitz was thirteen. Also like Rothenberg, Moskowitz was not aware that the image functioned as a self-portrait of sorts until after its completion. Moreover, both artists work intuitively, discovering and assigning meanings as the process of painting completes itself. Moskowitz explains, "I always have an image. I might not know exactly what it means, but you could say the image is the idea. First, it's intuitive—I'll want to paint a particular image. Later, I find out what the image means to me, usually after the painting is finished. I'm never quite sure why I realize one image or another."²³⁴

Like other New Image artists would do, Moskowitz moved towards the psychological, using scale as an operative element. In 1973, he used a simple white line to paint a Modernist-looking chair as a barely visible speck on a 90" x 75" canvas; one needs to get closer to decipher what the image actually is. Remembering the chair as looking vulnerable, Moskowitz drew a simple circle around it for protection. Scale

him to probe further into the metaphoric and emotional possibilities of all imagery, not just that of architecture.

²³⁴ Robert Moskowitz, Interview by Linda Shearer, (based on a compilation of interviews at the Museum of Modern Art in 1988), Rifkin, Robert Moskowitz, 62.

continued to serve as a pictorial and psychological hook. In *Swimmer*, (Fig. 3/18) shown in *New Image Painting*, the arm and face of a man bob in the midst of a choppy sea of deep blue pigment rubbed by hand into the canvas, the image creates a sense of unease: Is the figure drowning or swimming? Painter and critic Thomas Lawson points out that Moskowitz's images of "flight and vertiginous movement counterpointed by periods of calm and rest" have a "strain of whimsical anxiety."²³⁵ "The images are simple, even childlike, but reverberate with a psychological intensity."²³⁶ Despite the prevalence of psychological content in *New Image Painting*, however, Moskowitz does not see the 1978 exhibition "as a movement with a manifesto" but, he also notes, certain issues came out of it, such as the image flattened out on an abstract space.

The two elements that most strongly shaped David True's aesthetic concerns were the work of Giorgio de Chirico, the Italian artist of La Scuola Metafisica, and True's work as a window trimmer for a department store in ----- . Disparate though those two elements may seem, they both share the placement of imagery in a synthetic space. Images of Palladian colonnades, mannequins, and classical statuary are surrounded by the airless, eerie spaces of de Chirico's creation. In window-dressing, consumer objects are arranged in shallow, theatrical spaces. Thus influenced by de Chirico and window dressing, True conceives and constructs his images in pictorial spaces that are theatrical, shallow, and arranged. Like other New Image artists, such as Rothenberg, Bartlett, and Lane, True was provided a starting point for his pictorial entities by the images fully formed from an intuitive space.

Johns and Guston were not important models for True, as they were for

235 Thomas Lawson, "Robert Moskowitz at the Clocktower", Art in America, May/June, 1978, p.115.

236 Ibid

Rothenberg. In fact, True doesn't see the point either in denying the imagistic allusion or in putting the image through a series of arbitrary procedures. Photo-Realism was not to True's liking, although he does incorporate and appreciate "a bit of careful depiction, a certain amount of realism, what I call naturalism."²³⁷

Richard Marshall had asked True about the imagistic painting he had been noticing when conceptualizing the exhibition. True recalls the conversation:

That word 'image' came from a conversation I had with Richard Marshall. He asked me, how do you see yourself, and I was into subject matter but I wouldn't call myself a subject matterist; I would say I was dealing with imagery, images kind of context, it's pictorial so he asked me how does 'New Image' sound to you? And I said, it sounds perfect to me.²³⁸

Marshall included five works by True in the exhibition, three with the image of a sailboat surrounded by waves and sky, and two of palm trees bending towards a storming sea. The image of a sailboat in a pictorial space came directly from True's almost wistful remembrances of being in a sailboat, himself surrounded by the waters of the coast of Martha's Vineyard. True came to study the beauty inherent in fine sailing vessels. (Fig. 3/19)

Rothenberg and the other artists in this category, maximize the pictorial and psychological drama that the isolated image on the painterly field creates. This is true also in the works of more narrative-based artists, Jenney and Africano, who often isolate two figural images on a painted field. The work of Alex Katz must be mentioned in relation to this tendency. In some ways Alex Katz is a precursor to the isolated image on a stark painted field, so prominent in New Image painting. Compare for example, Katz's *Ada* of 195 (Fig. 3/20) with Rothenberg's *Triphammer Bridge*;

237 David True, interview by author, 4 December 2002.

238 Ibid.

both isolate an image without contextual clues and with considerable emphasis on the physical surface of the painting. In addition, emphasis on figure ground contrasts and unites creates pictorial clarity and simplification. But the differences between the two artists's work are more significant. Katz's work, though painterly and economical, is based on observation, and a sense of anatomical structure becomes the scaffold on which the accentuated brushstrokes and slightly arbitrary color is adhered. Rothenberg, images are imagined, remembered, and it is this distancing from observation that allows for an open-ended, free floating interpretive range.

Because Rothenberg's works in the *New Image Painting* exhibition are isolated images, removed from a specific narrative or natural environment, and embedded in an abstract space, they have most in common with the other artists in this third category. They are not located in an important dialogue regarding abstraction, as I have discussed in Chapter One, and the meanings produced by her images is outlined in Chapter Two. The examination of the exhibition's artistic premises and of its artists that I have detailed above allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Rothenberg's work in the context of *New Image Painting*. This is necessary, as she is, after all, primarily categorized as a New Image Painter in most accounts of contemporary art history. But as I will show, she also takes us into the painting genre's ascending position in the 1980s.

New Image to Neo-Expression

Although art historically the label New Image Painting no doubt will continue to define currents of imagistic paintings which arose in the 1970s, there is no consensus among New Image artists as to whether or not it should be considered a movement. Susan Rothenberg, for example, does not consider New Image Painting a

movement whereas Denise Green, another artist in the exhibition, does. The work of *New Image Painting*'s ten artists and of others not featured at the exhibition did in fact signal, to varying extents, a shift towards imagery fused with abstraction. In most cases, images, often associational, are moved into a psychologized area embodying content that proffers ambiguous and multiple readings. In many ways, the exhibition provided visual proof that a critical dialogue could exist outside of Minimal and Process Art, providing a kind of closure to abstraction's dominance. Moreover, painting was restored as a viable and significant art form. New Image paintings are grounded in a particular moment in art history, after Abstract Expressionism, after Minimalism, after Process Art, and after the flowering of the performative genres.

Susan Rothenberg's horse paintings arose after a period of synthesis, absorption, and rejection of a wide range of influences, as I have mapped out in Chapters One and Two. Her journey and development were singular, personal, and very much outside of any collective discussion about art; as I have attempted to show, this too can be said in varying degrees about most of the New Image artists, among whom there was some awareness—but nothing widespread—that other artists were working with imagery. Conversely, Rothenberg believed her horse paintings to be completely outside the critical discussion, but she did not care. Compelled to follow an intuitive path, she used an image and subordinated all to the expressive nature of painting itself. It was very much as Lois Lane pointed out about "the personal work going on in the studio."²³⁹

Rothenberg's work stood out from that of the other artists' in several ways. Her work was the most painterly, with a variety of smears, markings, lines, and scratches on a flattened field. (Example) Rothenberg nuanced the two-color palette

239 Ibid.

into a hushed tonal wall in which the properties of painting itself were celebrated. The paint handling and the tonal quality helped to announce the image to the viewer as mythical, iconic, and symbolic. Unlike the other New Image artists, who work with a vocabulary of inanimate objects such as chairs, boats, eyeglasses, and doll-like figures, Rothenberg's horse, though awkward and not anatomically correct, represented a living, breathing creature. The apposition of this living form against the painterly formal heightens the emotionally charged content. As Rothenberg explained:

I don't think it could have been an inanimate object, either. I like the tension. To take something that implied motion and not use it in that way; to have something that was volumetric and not use it that way—there is a certain perversity in the way I use imagery. I don't know if that is the right word, but I have to take something and redigest it and reinterpret it for me to get hooked on it.”²⁴⁰

Whereas the other New Image Painters used a variety of images, Rothenberg stayed with the horse for almost seven years. The horse is Rothenberg's subject for all five of her paintings in the *New Image Painting* exhibition: *Layering*, 1975 (Fig. 3/21); *United States*, 1975; *Butterfly*, 1976; *Flanders*, 1976 (Fig. 3/22) and *Double Measure*, 1977. A sense of pictorial weight is equilibrated throughout all of these paintings, unifying figure/ground into one powerful statement where the image and the abstraction become co-dependent. Further, the sense of pictorial weight exists as a metaphor for the physical weight of the horse and the atmospheric weight of the abstract environment.

The five paintings in the exhibition offer a range of pictorial constructs in which the horse is subjected to increasingly complicated armatures and divisions. In all of them, the horse is depicted in profile, a silhouette that brings attention to the hand-painted quality of the contour. In *Layering*, two black horses against a terra cotta

240 Susan Rothenberg, quoted by Joan Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, p 47.

background are split by a soft line down the center. I consider this the simplest of the five paintings, except for the confusing stance of the two horses, one in front of the other but sharing the same set of forelegs; however, the painting clearly asserts itself in a realm of art, not of observation. In *United States*, the horse's outline unifies the large canvas, which is divided into two colors, sienna to the left of the centerline, and black to the right. The title suggests both a kind of pictorial mapping of the horse and the horse's metaphoric range as a symbol. In *Flanders*, the horse and the field are both painted black, with extensive underpainting flickering through. The horse's outline reveals a variety of subtle dirty white and gray markings. Instead of the centerline, two vertical bars flank the horse's front and rear, so that the horse seems to impose its physicality on the geometric divisions rather than being totally confined by them. In *Butterfly*, the forward thrust of the horse's gait is matched by the imposition of the vertical X in the center. Rothenberg remembers becoming involved with the "black paint that formed a horse and also formed a big broad geometry."²⁴¹ For the artist, there was some sense of mystery in "going into this darkness" and the geometry itself. In a quotation accompanying the image of this painting in a later exhibition catalogue, Rothenberg states, "The cross of the X is a deep dark secret."²⁴²

Geometric divisions become more complex in these five paintings, especially with *Butterfly* and *Double Measure*; so too does the relationship of the parts to the whole. Geometries that are external to the horse and those that arise from the horse itself fix the horse into place. The horse's contours in relation to the geometric lines as well as the shape of the canvas itself subdivide the painting into a variety of shapes, both negative and positive, which exist in relation not only to other shapes in

²⁴¹Richard Marshall, Interview by author, 30 December 2002. New York.

²⁴²Susan Rothenberg, statement in, "Susan Rothenberg: Fifteen Years - A Survey" (Malmo: Rooseum, 1990), 118.

the painting, but also to the whole. Despite her interest in geometry and monochromatism, the richness of color in Rothenberg's paintings belies the Minimalist aesthetic, which also utilizes geometry and monochromatism. To say, therefore, that *Double Measure* is a black and white painting is somewhat misleading. The white field is comprised of cool and warm whites and a limited but rich range of grays created by a sloppy coat of gesso smeared in patches onto the underpainting. Rothenberg does not mix the colors, but rather jams the brush into jars of white, black, and sienna, which colors are mixed on the canvas.

"It's all about the painting,"²⁴³ Rothenberg has stated, and among the New Image Painters her work celebrates painting most fully. Although the work of Moskowitz, Zucker, and Jenney sets important precedents, as these artists were involved in the painted image up to ten years before the *New Image* exhibition, their relationship to painting itself differs from Rothenberg's. Moskowitz's surfaces retain a Minimalist stillness, Jenney presents painting as parody, and Zucker systematizes the construction of painting. Rothenberg's work is the strongest statement for full-tilt, powerful, emotive, expressionistic painting at a time when imagery *and* this kind of approach to painting were considered "retardataire." Although Rothenberg epitomizes the characteristics most common to New Image painting, it was her expansion of painterly possibilities combined with the manipulation of the image that signaled an important shift in painting. This new utilization of a painterly language would be apparent in the next wave of painters such as Elizabeth Murray, Julian Schnabel, Jean-Michael Basquiat, Ross Bleckner, and Terry Winters. Rothenberg's work not only represented new kinds of content matter that imagistic painting could express, but also pointed in a direction that renewed and expanded the possibilities inherent in the

243 Conversation with author, 19 November 1999.

medium of painting itself. This explains, in great part, why Rothenberg was the only artist from the *New Image* exhibition who also was included in the exhibition that heralded Neo-Expressionism—the *Zeitgeist* exhibition held in Germany in 1981. However, before looking at that exhibition in Chapter Four, I want to look at Rothenberg's New Image painting in relation to important precedents in post-World War II painting. As Rothenberg's New Image painting signals important tendencies that would be explored in the 1980s, her work also connects with the past, particularly the lineage of painterly imagery in post-War art.

Rothenberg and the Painterly Image in Post-War Painting:

The image presented in a language that explores the expressive possibilities of the painting medium itself has a significant tradition in post-World War II painting. I am referring to styles that are not, strictly speaking, part of a “realist” tradition where overt illusionism, or even a trompe l’oeil effect, is attempted. Rather, my focus is directed towards artists who see their method of presenting imagery to be as important as the imagery itself. It is not my intention to present a comprehensive study of this subject; on the contrary, by identifying aspects of artists’ work that have contributed to this rich lineage, specifically that of Willem de Kooning, Jean Dubuffet, Jasper Johns, and Phillip Guston, I can make Rothenberg’s work understood as building on and extending this important tradition in Contemporary Art. Although a wide range of formal, personal, philosophical, and historical undercurrents informs each of these artist’s work, their work has contributed to a more layered and complex notion of the content available through the utilization of the painterly image. Rothenberg’s work is located in this art historical matrix, where technique and image are partners in the formation of meaning.

Speaking about Willem de Kooning's *Woman I* painting of 1950-52 (Fig. # 3/23), Elaine de Kooning noted the ferocity of the image in terms of the ferocity of the paint application itself. But rather than evoking purely personal imagery based on memory and accident, as did Arshile Gorky, de Kooning began with the notions of prehistoric fertility goddesses and Summerian votive figures. In terms of paint, de Kooning's translation of these icons results in a contemporary bag lady with a billboard smile as menacing as the slashes of paint. De Kooning's improvisational approach was fluid and shifting, an extension of his belief that "content is a glimpse of something, an encounter, like a flash."²⁴⁴ The image, and the painting that arises out of the process of working with that image, are in constant flux. In describing this interaction, Jorn Merkert notes: "Not only does the image of the woman shift continually, in whole or in part, things wander through the pictorial space, disappear altogether, then partially re-materialize but in different modes. This in itself illustrates, once again, the endless possibilities contained in de Kooning's image-making practice."²⁴⁵ The "endless possibilities" of which Merkert speaks come out of the inextricable union of image and the act of painting. Rothenberg's work relates to this tradition, which celebrates painting itself in both its lushness and its nuances. One has only to follow the way the outline of the horse is painted (Fig. 3/24) to recognize the endless possibilities of Rothenberg's paint handling. Moreover, this affinity towards lush painting and marks as varied as handwriting only increases in Rothenberg's work after the 1970s.

At the same time de Kooning was painting the *Women* series of the early

244 Willem de Kooning, interviewed by David Sylvester, 1963, reproduced in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art, Kristin Stiles and Peter Selz, editors., 198.

245 Jorn Merkert, "Stylelessness as Principle: The Painting of Willem de Kooning," Willem de Kooning, Whitney 1983-84, p.125.

1950s in New York, Jean Dubuffet in post-War Paris began a series of monumental nudes, which included *Le Metafisix* (Fig. 3/25). Tapping a range of *art brut* sources including the art of children and of the mentally ill, Dubuffet used the materials and techniques as he used imagery to express the raw, savage eroticism underneath the material world of images itself. DuBuffet was attracted to the “uncomfortable incongruity”²⁴⁶ between landscape of the mind and the material landscape of the painting.

The emphasis on psychological sources and on a “psychologization” of the image in general was central to Jean Dubuffet’s interpretation of the painterly image, as it was in other post-War European artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, and Pierre Alechinsky. In Dubuffet’s work in particular, there is a reinforcement of the psychological in the materials themselves. Dubuffet spoke of the combination of “a thing with strongly marked physical character . . . and . . . the course of a dream, or an emotion.”²⁴⁷ I am not suggesting that Dubuffet was an important direct source for Rothenberg; however, Dubuffet did contribute to an understructure in post-War painting in which a psychological or even metaphysical plane is suggested through the combination of imagery presented simply, awkwardly, even in a childlike manner, and reinforced by an emphasis on the physicality of the paint.²⁴⁸

246 Dubuffet, Jonathan Fineberg, *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 2000), 135.

247 Jean Dubuffet, “Empreintes,” in *Les Lettres Nouvelles* 5, 48 (Paris, April 1957): 507-27; trans. Lucy R. Lippard, in Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art*, 613.

248 Sarah Wilson places Dubuffet’s use of materials in the context of anarchism and existentialism in the nightmare of occupied Paris of the 1940s. In her discussion, she points out that there was a rejection of the ‘belle peinture’ . . . in the ‘excremental (DuBuffet)’. Without this tendency in European painting, it is difficult to imagine that the raw quality of Rothenberg’s paint application and stark images would have surfaced with quite the same intensity. Sarah Wilson, “Saint-Germain-des-Pres: Occupation and Reconstruction,” *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968*, 243.

As I have discussed previously, Jasper Johns was important for Rothenberg in terms of content and an operational model. Johns's incorporation of the decontextualized image is central to Rothenberg's paintings of the 1970s. Placing the image in a pictorial space that does not provide any narrative or interpretive clues is central to both Johns's and Rothenberg's art. Although Surrealism presented images without "rational" clues to their interpretation, I assert instead that it is not Surrealism informing the private mythology that is inherent in Rothenberg's work and the work of many other New Image artists; rather, it is Jasper Johns's factual statement of the image, not Surrealism's dreamlike juxtapositions.²⁴⁹ The ambiguity of the decontextualized image, existing in both Johns's and Rothenberg's painting, turns the meaning back to the viewer, without specific tools to read the image; as a result, viewers bring to the image their own associative responses and meanings.

Johns's work also is firmly planted in a dialogue about painting itself. Despite the images' literalism, they are presented in the rarified painting technique of encaustic so as to keep the drips exactly where Johns intended them to be. Jonathan Fineberg explains: "... the painted targets by Johns are so intractably literal that they are almost targets; at the same time the artist ambiguously presents them as painterly works of art."²⁵⁰ In addition to the sensuous, tactile surfaces, Johns attempts to unify the figure ground. At one point, in Johns's alphabet painting, the figure becomes part of the field itself. Rothenberg's work is very much situated in a Johnsian matrix of issues.

Rothenberg reveres both Jasper Johns and Phillip Guston. There are two important aspects of Philip Guston's work that affected Rothenberg's work: the

249 Note that David True has an interest in metaphysics, the pre-Surrealism of de Chirico, not Surrealism proper.

250 Fineberg, 206.

totality of his contribution as an artist, and the autobiographical. Guston further influenced Rothenberg's work by making his imagery a specific autobiographical reflection without compromising the material intensity of the paint. In the 1960s, when Guston shifted into a figurative style, not only his courage but his approach to imagery had great impact on a generation of artists, Rothenberg included. Guston's paintings continued to be shown through the 1970s as he moved increasingly autobiographical content. When Guston revisited the image of the Klansman (Fig. 3/26) he had used in his early mural paintings, it was himself hiding under the hoods, part buffoon, part agitator. By the mid-1970s, Guston's painting became autobiographical still life paintings engaging the iconography of his personal obsessions and demons: food, sleeping, smoking, drinking, and time in the image of the clock. (Fig. 3/27) The last paintings, from 1977 on, reflect issues of loss, ill health, and death. Robert Storr notes: "Taking as their subject the very precariousness of the situation, Guston's last paintings are informed by an increasing coincidence of the autobiographical and archetypal. Often painful to look at, many of these paintings weren't shown until after his death."²⁵¹

Rothenberg's horse paintings of the 1970s also are autobiographical, the horse serving as a surrogate, an unlikely self-portrait. This autobiographical strain would strengthen throughout the 1980s and take increasingly narrative forms after she moved to New Mexico. Like Guston, Rothenberg opts for the courageous move. She leaves the horse behind in fragments, and takes up the figure, first with images of the head and the hand, then in dreamlike apparitions.

New Image Painting placed Susan Rothenberg in the context of other artists who were exploring new meanings in a melding of imagery with abstract painting and at times,

251 Storr, Philip Guston, (New York, Abbeville Press, 1986),87

even systematic procedures. At the same time, the exhibition demonstrated Rothenberg's expansive quality and the particular urgency of her expressionistic tendencies. As such she provides a bridge to imagistic painting in the 1980s. Even as her work remained at the center of the important painting issues of the late twentieth century, it stands apart in its ability to encompass so completely a purely psychological and personal significance.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rothenberg has grasped the true nature of the medium and the reasons for its survival. If painting has an essence, it is not, as the Formalists maintained, to be found in any single property or procedure, be it flatness, color, or the variety of ways pigments may be put down. Polymorphous in its material qualities and formats, painting is many things rather than one and thus escapes categorical definition as well as closure. Its fundamental characteristic, to the degree that it can be spoken of, is discursiveness and a corresponding capacity to respond to a given painter's need to think concretely and each time anew, not in general what painting must be but what a given painting might possibly become.²⁵²

Robert Storr

Throughout her practice, much of Rothenberg's approach to painting has been informed by her interest in "wholes and parts." This approach operates on two levels. First, the imagery itself is subdivided into parts, sometimes through the use of pictorial devices, as we have seen with the 1970s horse paintings, and sometimes by breaking up the image into parts or fragments. Second, Rothenberg's compositions are created through an active dialogue between the parts of the painting and the integrity of the painting in its entirety. As I have pointed out in Chapter One, this is a function of a relational approach to painting in which each painting's elements are determined

252 Robert Storr, "All in a Day's Work," ," Susan Rothenberg: Fifteen Years - A Survey (Malmo: Rooseum, 1990) 23.

not just by their specific properties, but by the part they play in the compositional whole. This underlying concern has remained a key factor while Rothenberg has explored a wide range of themes and self-imposed challenges, always in the terms of her chosen medium. From the late 1970s, when the horse image “ran out,” to the present, Rothenberg has explored several areas of inquiry. These areas, many of which have preoccupied artists throughout art history, include the manifestations of the human form (a pictorial equivalent for movement), an intense experienced moment, shifting points of view, and the psychologically symbolic. Concurrently, Rothenberg has explored the properties inherent in the painting medium itself, such as the expanded use of color, both monochromatic and varied palettes, the dictates of oil rather than acrylic paint, and various kinds of paint applications. This chapter maps these developments in Rothenberg’s work as both a continuation of and departure from the aesthetic ground so exquisitely covered in the horse paintings. In addition, we will see how Rothenberg’s response to the New Mexico environment where she has lived since 1990 has shaped several aspects of her work.

Transition and Fragmentation—Horse to Head

As the horse fragmented and disappeared, images of body parts began to appear. Ironically, this fragmentation began during a time when the horse image reached its most forceful and dynamic guise in the paintings exhibited in Rothenberg’s solo exhibition at Willard Gallery in 1979. When Rothenberg turned the horse from profile to frontal position, in paintings such as *Pontiac*, 1979, (Fig. 4/1) and *For The Light*, 1979 (Fig. 4/2), it gathered a sense of dynamic strength and movement. In both these paintings, the horse image acquires an apparitional quality, the galloping horse’s body surrounded by a halo-like shadow in *For the Light*, and the cobalt blue-headed

horse balancing firmly on one leg planted on the bottom of the picture in *Pontiac*.

Other imagery accompanies these horses. In *Pontiac*, a black shape of a bone in front of the horse's chest extends on a slight diagonal from the left side of the canvas to the right, abruptly halting the implied movement. Parenthetically, Deborah Butterfield horse sculptures of this period such as *Reclining Horse*, 1978 (Fig. 4/3), show the powerful horse encumbered by sticks and straw locking it into a immobile position. A bone image also extends downward from the horse's head in *For The Light*. The bone form had surfaced the year before in *Smoker*, 1978-79 (Fig. 4/4), a painting of a hulkish human form with a blue head in profile; from the head's mouth, a cigarette and a cloud of smoke extend to the left side of the canvas, and, from the head's upper back part, a white bone connects to the top right corner.²⁵³ The enigmatic bone imagery provided a kind of iconographic bridge as Rothenberg traversed from human to animal form during 1978 and 1979.

According to Rothenberg, the bone image began as a doodle, as had that of the horse, and later attained internal psychological significance:

That strange bone image came out of a doodle, and after I got over the strangeness of pulling the bone out of the figure, I found I could use it formally. I guess you could say that the bones were brothers to the early geometric lines. And I think the bone image is stronger, has more to it. I don't really know where it came from.²⁵⁴

Perhaps Rothenberg was tapping the memory of assisting Nancy Graves in 1970, making bones out of wax and marble dust over wrapped wire for Graves's sculptures such as *Variability of Similar Forms*, 1970 (Fig. 4/5). Rothenberg

253 This painting is often connected to Phillip Guston's self-portraits where his head, cigarettes and other elements from his life are presented as a raw still life compilation.

254 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Michael Auping, "Susan Rothenberg's Figuration: Drawn and Quartered," *Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings*, 27.

responded to the distinctive shape of the bone and its representation as a living tissue. Like the horse, the bone had associations to the primal and to a life force. Moreover, the bone, when used in a formal way, gave rise to a range of free-floating interpretations pointing towards human states. “To take an element out of the image, to use it in a formal way,” notes Rothenberg, “turned out to have more of a psychological action than just a formal, geometric, linear action.”²⁵⁵ In a work on paper, *Untitled No. 84*, 1979, (Fig. 4/6) Rothenberg realizes the psychological and emotional potential of the bone imagery; from within an isolated blue horse’s head, the bone stretches horizontally in a brilliantly expressive coalescence of shape, line, color, and mark-making starkly positioned in the upper center of a putty-toned sheet of paper. This drawing would be the basis for *Quoise*, 1979, (Fig. 4/7) whose visual power builds on its simplicity and synthesis of elements. During this period, Rothenberg in *Wishbone*, 1979 (Fig. 4/8), also pairs the horse with a wishbone, a reductive symbol for the horse; playing on solids and voids, she makes the shadow of the wishbone solid black, in the shape of the horse.

The whole horse, and the horse in parts, such as heads, hooves, or bones coexisted for a period as Rothenberg alternated between the two subjects. In the 1979 Willard exhibition, paintings of fragmented parts of the horse—head and legs—stood in contrast to the full torso of the frontal horse images of speed and power in check. In contrast to the powerful charging horse, one sees in *Outline*, 1978-79 (Fig. 4/9), only a crude outline of a horse’s head sinking to the lower right-hand corner of an empty, smudgy white field—an image of loss and dissociation; here, Rothenberg pushes the limits of how one small shape can dramatically hold a larger field. Rothenberg would take on a similar challenge in 1982, in a fifteen-foot long canvas titled *Tenmen* (Fig.

255 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 74.

4/10).²⁵⁶ Works on paper such as *Untitled*, 1978-79, (Fig. 4/11) become a visual record of the horse's dismemberment and disappearance. Rothenberg describes this transitional period:

After using the horse sideways, later frontally, it just turned itself into a figure . . . no bare bones. No superfluous geometry dealing with the edges of the painting, but just the bare bones of the frontal horse, which suggested that a figure was appearing—that the horse was metamorphosing into a human figure. I realized that there weren't many of those images left, that it had absolutely naturally reduced itself to a place where I was going to be forced to continue—directly.²⁵⁷

The last vestiges of the horse appear in *Blue Body*, 1980-81, (Fig. 4/12) as a minimalized head floating within a schematic, curving shape that suggests the contours of a torso, and in *White Mountain*, 1980-81, (Fig. 4/13) as an even smaller abstracted horse head lodged in a thick black line, representing the contour of shadow form.

With new pictorial formats during the late 1970s came new associative and interpretive material. Rothenberg found greater tensility by surrounding her image with a band, sometimes with an elasticity like that of a rubber band, rather than by intersecting it with a line. In *Kelpie* and *Mr. Bear*, a thick black band, suggesting both isolation and protection, encloses these images of innocence. Rothenberg was still guided by the conceptual and emotional glue of parts and wholes, as we see in *Blue Frontal*, (Fig. 4/14) of which Rothenberg notes, "This has wholes and parts, and a hole, too."²⁵⁸ Rothenberg tried new viewpoints as she reconfigured and fragmented

256 Originally this painting has ten figures but Rothenberg painted them out, leaving only one large figure in the center and a small shadow of a figure to its left. These forms are situated in a vast expanse which they do in fact manage to hold.

257 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, 81.

258 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in *Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings*, 132.

the horse. In *Blue Frontal*, 1978, the vantage point is of the artist/rider looking down to see a blue horse through the horse's legs—and, although this wasn't the artist's intention, a womb-like space is suggested. The birth metaphor extends as the blue horse, small in relation to the legs, innocently, quizzically peers out through the protective oval of the legs, more like a mother's arms. "The bony knees and fleshy thighs in this painting," Joan Simon points out, "are more human like than horse like."²⁵⁹ Although Rothenberg did not necessarily intend to symbolize the mother/child pairing, as with much of her work she creates images that are open to various readings, fusing personal and formal, natural and synthetic. Another reading of this painting is one of imminent penetration with the horse as the phallus.²⁶⁰ Rothenberg takes up a sexual theme more directly in 1979 in *Our Lord*, (Fig. 4/15) a puzzling blue painting of an abstracted, seated torso with an erection echoed in a smaller version of the same figure floating above the larger torso. If *Blue Frontal* has mother-child associations, *Our Lord* can be seen as a symbolic father-son counterpart. In both paintings, blue forms against darker blue/black backgrounds create a more pictorially airless space, less naturalistic, more symbolic. Joan Simon interprets the receding small male figure as being related to Rothenberg's formal separation from George Trackas in 1978 and her impending divorce at the time this was painted.

In the paintings dating from 1978 to the head and hand paintings of 1981, Rothenberg maintains a sense of greater physicality and psychological immediacy, eliciting more visceral responses. The roots of this emotional intensity stem back, in part, to the autumn of 1977.

Rothenberg took a one-semester teaching appointment for Fall 1977 at CalArts. When Rothenberg, her daughter, Maggie, and the family cat arrived in

²⁵⁹ Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, 62.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

Valencia, California, all adequate housing already had been snatched up by people who had arrived slightly before the semester began. At first, Rothenberg was housed in what she refers to as the “naked motel,” a place where students routinely skinny-dipped in the pool. From there, she moved into the space provided by the school to be used as a studio, not as a living space. Rothenberg put up a curtain to separate off a sleeping space, brought in a mattress and hot plate, and used the bathrooms down the hall in the dance department: “It was another one of those grim periods.”²⁶¹ Feelings of dislocation and isolation settled in. She had no connection with artists John Baldesarri and Elyn Zimmerman, who also taught there. Only occasionally did she see Jonathan Borofsky, another teacher there, because they lived distances apart. Her marriage to George Trackas, then in New York, was strained and faltering. This anxious time brought forth images of geometric heads, which, save one, she destroyed after they were hung in a faculty exhibition.

However, when she returned to New York in 1978, she painted disturbing images of thickly outlined heads, some encased in a black band, choking, spewing, and gagging on sticks shoved down the throat—a psychological combination of “pain and paint,” as Rothenberg herself has said (Fig. 4/16). As in Nancy Spero’s grotesque heads from *Codex Artaud*, 1971, (Fig. 4/17) Rothenberg distorts the physical image to suggest and elicit psychologically uncomfortable states in a creative space. Continuing for a while to alternate between human and horse imagery and to use fragmentation, Rothenberg returns symbolically in one of her final horse fragment painting, *The Hulk*, 1979, (Fig. 4/18) to a cave-like space, the symbolic origin of her horse imagery.²⁶² The first horse images in 1974 were roughly scratched out on

261 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 58.

262 Rothenberg had been thinking about prehistoric cave painting when she created her first horse paintings.

washy terra cotta ground, recalling cave paintings of revered animals. In *The Hulk*, the remains of the horse—its head and two bones—are embedded in an abstracted, dark cave-like space. A close look at the densely worked dark space reveals shadows of what is left of the horse's once powerful body, now dismembered and immobile. In *Embryo*, 1979, (Fig. 4/19) the horse returns to the womb.

When in 1981 Rothenberg ended her use of horse images, head images forcefully emerged. One day, Rothenberg picked up her daughter's crayons and drew five or six sketches superimposing outlines of a head over a hand. She had been thinking about the hand puppets she had recently made for her daughter, but when the images came out they were powerfully brutal. Rothenberg immediately knew she wanted to explore this imagery more fully. "I was playing," remembers Rothenberg; "I wanted to play, and I think using crayons made me know that I was playing, using play tools, not charcoals and erasers. But they came up strong, strong enough that I knew I had a new piece of work to do."²⁶³ (Fig 4/20) She chose three or four images as a basis for paintings, although the images were altered as they were worked out on the canvas. Rothenberg kept the crayons' primary colors—yellow, blue, and red—and combined them with white ground and black bands. In *Black Heads*, 1980-81, (Fig. 4/21) Rothenberg scaled up the image to monumental proportions in a canvas that measures 107" x 107 ½". Similar to the horse painting, this image is suspended on a white field, liberally punctuated with painterly variations. The abstracted head, with only thick red dashes to indicate eyes, is almost completely encapsulated by a thick black line, which, although it is based on the outline of a close-fisted hand, becomes a kind of pitcher-vessel. A year prior, Rothenberg had used this vessel motif explicitly

263 Susan Rothenberg, "An Interview with Susan Rothenberg," interview by Michael Auping (Galisteo, New Mexico, 24-26 July, 1991), Michael Auping, Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings, 53.

in *Jughead*, in which a red profiled head levitates inside a pitcher. The head and hand paintings had indeed become vessels for “a lot of formal and personal stuff [Rothenberg] was then working through” the end of her marriage and other personal issues.

Once Rothenberg settled on the head image, she put it through a series of operations that were more ‘meteorological’ than geometric, as had been the case with the horses. “They started to look like different weathers to me: cold ones, a hot one, a night one. So I got involved in that. And then I started thinking—I deliberately wanted a mist one. I started to play with the weather idea, and then it was done.”²⁶⁴ These works disclose the artist’s ability to work through the imagery on many different levels concomitantly; Rothenberg confirms that the head and hands “became about the weather, became about psychological states, became about hollows and solids, and became about temperatures.”²⁶⁵

Rothenberg translated these subjects into combinations of a matte medium and a French vinyl-based material known as flashe, creating varying translucent and opaque paint densities that result in what Michael Auping referred to as “a moody phosphorescence that, when combined with the searching sense of line, provokes a deep, almost dreamlike image.”²⁶⁶ (Fig. 4/22) Again, Rothenberg’s psychological content is contained both in the image, presented simply, with symbolic insinuations rather than observational details, and in its painterly qualities, physical, variegated, smoky strokes and surfaces. Rothenberg also plays the simplified shapes against one another in a painting such as *Big and Little Head*, 1980-81, (Fig. 4/23) maximizing the subtle interactions of slightly more irregular shapes against more stylized, symmetrical

264 Susan Rothenberg in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 89.

265 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Paterson Sims, November 1986, Artists visions series, tape recording, 92nd Street Y, New York.

266 Michael Auping, preface, in Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings, 25.

forms. This sensibility has one foot in the “irregular geometries” of Process Art and one foot in the reductive tendencies of Minimalism, a synthesis that has surprising similarities with British artist Richard Deacon’s piece *Tall Tree in the Ear*, 1983/84 (Fig. 4/24). Both Rothenberg and Deacon bring two forms to a resolution perfectly suited to their very different mediums.

Although the head/hand images came from a playful place, they are disturbing. Joan Simon characterizes these paintings as conveying a “sense of humor and childlike openness,”²⁶⁷ while Peter Schjeldhal expands that reading by noting that these images “hint at a diabolic sense of humor.” My interpretation, far starker, depicts these paintings as confronting the viewer as a whole, as did the horse paintings; however, with the head/hand works, the viewer intuits a personal gestalt that is emotionally sobering. Removed from any possibility of sentimentality, the images exist in “a level beyond beauty,” as Michael Auping has accurately described. As the horse paintings created an atmosphere of almost meditative silence, these paintings impart the mood of a muted primal moan, a stifled counterpart of a Munch-like scream.

In 1982, the simplified head metamorphosed into a self-portrait—a mask-like face smoking a cigarette and visually anchored on each side by tabs, suggested by her daughter’s paper dolls (Fig. 4/25). Rather than summoning any of the innate linear and planar gracefulness of either face or hands, or the nostalgia of childhood pastimes, these images recall the comic book roughness of Guston’s last self-portraits. (Fig. 4/26) Like Guston, Rothenberg’s self-portrait is comprised of a few elements—face, cigarette, hand. At this point in the early 1980s, Rothenberg was becoming aligned with painters whose other roughly fashioned images were being termed “Neo-

267 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 92.

Expressionist.”

***Zeitgeist* and other Exhibitions:**

In 1982, Rothenberg was included in an exhibition titled *Zeitgeist* in Berlin at the Martin-Gropius-Bau. The exhibition, organized by Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, assembled the work of forty-five painters and sculptors whose art, according to the curators, “signaled a profound change in the visual arts.”²⁶⁸ This art fulfilled a desire “for an immediate, sensual relation to the works of art,” the curators posited, adding that a new sensibility rehabilitated “Subjectivity, the Visionary, Myth, Suffering, and Grace” and “a basic Dionysian feeling that often characterizes the new artistic perception.”²⁶⁹ This ambitious exhibition spawned two important ideas in the art world: that a new style—thereafter commonly referred to as Neo-Expressionism [see below]—had been identified, and that this new movement was international in nature. Susan Rothenberg was the only woman artist in the exhibition.

When Susan Rothenberg arrived in Berlin, she learned that she was the only woman artist in the *Zeitgeist* exhibition; consequently, she vowed never to participate in any future exhibition similarly comprised. Despite Rothenberg’s reluctance to theorize or speak out publicly about issues to which she held private beliefs, her position as the lone female artist in the exhibition became politicized. Moreover, the perception of Neo-Expressionism’s mythic quality had associations with male dominance. With the exception of Brünhilde, the flaxen-haired protagonist of Anselm Kiefer’s poetic remembrances, the *Zeitgeist* exhibition commemorated only

268 Christos M. Joachimides, “Achilles and Hector before the Walls of Troy,” in *Zeitgeist*, International Art Exhibition, Berlin 1982, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1983), 9.
269 Ibid., 9.

male icons, with images of Christ, Pegasus, Orion, Prometheus, Victor Hugo, and Picasso.²⁷⁰ Through a feminist lens, the exhibition's dominantly patriarchal themes were inherently exclusionary, as further evidenced by Rothenberg's having been the singular female exhibitor. Although some feminists criticized Rothenberg for not vocally protesting the exhibition's male dominance, her contribution to women in art nonetheless was actual, not theoretical.²⁷¹ Rothenberg was one of the first female artists of her generation whose work was held in as high regard as men's. Throughout the 1980s, several other women artists including Elizabeth Murray, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Jenny Holzer, and Rosemary Trockel also began to get the kind of art-world notoriety that their male counterparts had received.²⁷² When asked about a feminist aesthetic, Rothenberg replied:

I never know what to do about these questions. I know that men and women are different. I would imagine a lot of problem solving is dealt with differently. But I would hate to think that you could walk in a room and identify the sex of the painter. Because we all know that we have male and female in each one of us. You shouldn't really be concerned with the sex of the painter when you look at a work of art. On the other hand, what grabs you, say your color sensibility, is a personal matter, and that's partially informed by your sex, I suppose. Most of the art that I saw as a young woman was made by a man, of course, and if there is one factor that I think a woman artist allows for better than a man, it is rendering the world, truly I think, as more various. Men often try to impose a coherency on that condition.²⁷³

270 This fact is overtly pointed out by Christos M. Joachimides in an essay in the catalogue.

271 It is been noted that four out of the ten artists in the New Image painting exhibition were women.

272 Gorilla Girls continued to bring the inequities of the gallery system to public attention taking ads in Art Journals to list, for example galleries who did not include any women in their artist's roster.

273 Susan Rothenberg, "An Interview with Susan Rothenberg," interview by Michael Auping (Galisteo, New Mexico, 24-26 July, 1991), Michael Auping, Susan Rothenberg: Paintings and Drawings, 55.

In retrospect, Rothenberg realizes that she was the exception to the rule when it comes to women in the art world. In a 1992 statement, Rothenberg explains:

It's taken me a long time to see that there *is* a problem. I never feel that my career suffered because of being of the female sex. I've learned, in later years, that I simply seemed to have escaped it . . . But I know there's something wrong if the *New Spirit in Painting* show at the Royal Academy, 1981, in London had no women. I know there's something wrong if I'm the only woman in the *Zeitgeist* show in Berlin. There's something wrong with who's making the decisions.²⁷⁴ In contrast to New Image painting exhibition in which woman artists were well represented, *Zeitgeist* was decidedly exclusionary. One could argue, as Whitney Chadwick has concerning women artists and Surrealism, that the 'personal narratives' of New Image painting offered an opportunity for women artists to work outside of traditional power systems.²⁷⁵ One could further argue, that Neo-Expressionism constituted a backlash response to women's represented a reaction to this

Just as the exhibition *New Image Painting* grouped together artists of differing approaches, on a larger scale the *Zeitgeist* exhibition in general and the term Neo-Expressionism in particular served as an umbrella covering a mix of styles: German gestural figurative painters who first emerged in the 1960s, such as Jörg Immendorff, A. R. Penck, and Georg Baselitz; artists who found forms to address the identity of the post-World War II German artist, including Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer; Arte Povera practitioners, including Merio Merz, Mimmo Paladino, and Jannis Kounellis; painters rooted in the Italian Trans-Avant-Guardia movement, such as Sando Chia, Enzo Cucchi, and Francesco Clemente; artists provocatively layering images such as

274 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Martin Filler, "Painted Desert," *Vanity Fair* (December 1992): 2238.

275 Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. (Great Britain, Thames & Hudson), 198

Sigmar Polke, David Salle, and Julian Schnabel; and many other artists with differing artistic agendas. Although Rothenberg's work lacked the apocalyptic tenor of many artists in the Berlin exhibition, her densely worked surfaces and effective use of scale invited comparison, although often superficial, to other works in the exhibition. Rothenberg's work came from a place more personal than historicized.

The exhibition, which included three early horse paintings, gave evidence to Rothenberg's central position in a strong resurgence of painting. Although her commitment to painting was not new, in the 1980s she was perceived as part of its revival. Of Neo-Expressionism, Hilton Kramer asserted that it established a "legitimization of a mode of painting that exalts in the physical properties of the medium and in its capacity to generate images and stir the emotion."²⁷⁶ Rothenberg had, in fact, been doing this since 1974. At the same time as the *Zeitgeist* exhibition, her more recent works—including the head and hand paintings—were hanging in a solo show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. These exhibitions garnered respect for Rothenberg's work in the European art community, while placing her in a context with other American artists whose work was attracting attention in the early 1980s.

As early as 1980, Rothenberg already had been paired with American artists Julian Schnabel and David Salle at the Venice Biennale; after the *Zeitgeist* exhibition, these three were perceived as the core members of what would be classified American Neo-Expressionism.²⁷⁷ Although Rothenberg considered Schnabel "a roll-up-your-sleeves painter," noting "whatever you want to say about him, he's a painter,"²⁷⁸ she

276 "Expressionism Returns to Painting," New York Times (11 November 1986). In the same article he credits Rothenberg, Schnabel, and British-born Malcolm Morley as the leading proponents of the new "movement" in this country [USA].

277) Jonathan Fineberg places them in this category along along with Jonathan Borofsky and Robert Longo. This indicates the difficulty in compartmentalizing artists of this period as these artists have distinctly different artistic agendas.

278 Filler, 268.

sees Salle in a different way, remarking that “I don’t think David’s a painter. I think he’s a conceptual artist who makes paintings.”²⁷⁹

In 1983, Schnabel stated that “All my images are subordinated to painting”; in this, his work follows Rothenberg’s renewed focusing on the medium. However, unlike Schnabel, Rothenberg does not mix styles, use images as “quotations,” or take on epic, historicized themes (Fig. 4/27). Rothenberg’s work also had been seen with Schnabel’s in 1981 at an exhibition organized by Jean-Christophe Ammann for the Basler Kunstverein in Basel, Switzerland. Joan Simon explains the significance of this exhibition, which also included works by Robert Moskowitz:

The exhibition at the Kunsthalle situated Rothenberg’s work as the link between New Image and Neo-Expressionism. The route through the exhibition began with several rooms of Robert Moskowitz’s paintings, led into a series of galleries with Rothenberg’s diverse expressions, and concluded with Julian Schnabel’s smashed-plate paintings and other mixed-medium works that gave Neo-Expressionism its earliest forceful and controversial voice.²⁸⁰

Neo-Expressionism also ushered in a period of a thriving international art market. New York galleries sprung up in the old factory and textile buildings of lower Broadway, creating early models for the “art malls” now commonplace in New York’s current art center in the Chelsea area of the city. The publicity machine made art stars out of both artists and dealers (e.g., Mary Boone). Charges of hype, market manipulation, and over-inflated selling prices ensued. Rothenberg’s gallery, Willard, was removed from the downtown frenzy, the only gallery in a building on Madison and 79th. In the 1980s, Rothenberg never felt connected with the fashionable character the art world then began to adapt. Looking back, Rothenberg wonders:

279 Ibid.

280 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 95.

I don't know what happened to that bunch of boys in the '80s, who all led such fancy lives. No garrets for them. They wanted to have the best food, beautiful clothes. The '80s will read art historically like that . . . people going out and about, and the women looking lovely, and the guys with their Armanis and their haircuts. That wasn't part of my generation. We didn't want that.²⁸¹

As the roaring market of the 1980s sped up, Rothenberg moved even farther away from the paintings of the 1970s and early 1980s that had brought her success. She changed her medium, her location, and her subjects.

Oil Painting

Rothenberg wanted to explore more fully the idea of "weathers," and she did so in the summer of 1981 when, at the suggestion of artist friend Elizabeth Murray, she switched from acrylic to oil paints, a medium that readily lent itself to Rothenberg's painterly inclinations. Her investigations of this medium directed much of Rothenberg's work throughout the 1980s. Thinner, choppy brush strokes that stayed wet longer were well suited to her new subject, water scenes from a summerhouse she had rented in Long Island. In paintings such as *The Creek*, 1981-81, (Fig. 4/28) images of boats melting into the watery ground were a departure from the strong figure/ground contrasts she had been using.

When she moved into her West Broadway studio that following autumn, she continued to paint the water scenes from memory, but soon two important themes—the figure and movement—took over. To explore these themes, Rothenberg began again to think of parts and wholes. For example, she took her daughter's whole body in movement as a subject for *Maggie's Split* and *Maggie's Cartwheel*, 1981-82

281 Filler, 268.

(Fig. 4/29). The latter, a small painting, 35" x 30 ½", has the energy of a large movement; in fact, this painting easily held its own when installed next to the 8'9" x 6'3" painting *White Mountain* at her one-person exhibition at The Stedelijk Museum in 1982. Using two versions of the same figure in different stages of motion, Rothenberg allows a subtle change of color and tone to create the idea of the shadow, a part of the whole subordinated to the motion's continuation.

Working intensely on new paintings for her upcoming Stedelijk Museum exhibition, Rothenberg abandoned her habit of scaling up from small to larger canvases, and instead worked concurrently on a wide range of sizes and formats. In her 10' 6 ¼" painting titled *Withall*, 1982, (Fig. 4/30) Rothenberg without editing included bits and pieces—or parts—of imagery from other works: swans and sails from the Long Island paintings, and body fragments from other paintings. Jumpy oilstrokes shift in scale, and a "potpourri" of images, some flat and outlined, some slightly modeled, evoke psychologically dreamlike spaces of strange juxtapositions.²⁸² Because of the odd juxtapositioning of imagery, selected works from this period invite comparisons with Surrealism, even though they do not mimic the hyperrealism of Magritte or Dali, or the biomorphic language of Miro or Tanguy. In Rothenberg's paintings during the 1980s, the sparseness of the figures in relation to a tonal pictorial space has elicited from many critics the comparison to the work of Surrealist Albert Giacometti (Fig. 4/31). Rothenberg herself has noted, "If you're going to paint the figure, you're going to come up against Giacometti."²⁸³ Robert Storr has noted that Rothenberg's

Simplifications and corrections are, like Giacometti, part of a

282 In this painting, originally about walking, Rothenberg painted out figures of ten men.

283 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Robert Storr, Susan Rothenberg, Chicago, Video Data Bank, 1984.

search for the essential characteristics of form, but they represent a process of cautious addition to the realm of signs, rather than a reluctant subtraction from the world of appearances; thus her gesture is more a matter of anticipation and release than of desperation²⁸⁴

Even though Rothenberg often takes her beautifully worked abstract environments to an edgy, eerie place, Storr is correct to point out that these are not existential spaces but painterly ones, connecting more strongly with mythic expanses of Clyfford Still. The physicality of these surfaces reveals a toughness that is similar to that of Larry Poons from the mid-1970s to mid-1982, such as *Yellow Cat on Hand*, 1976, (Fig. 4/32); Richard Channin comments that Poons's paintings "skirt the extremes of romantic self-indulgences" on one side, and an "equally romantic self-denial" on the other.²⁸⁵

From 1982 through 1983, Rothenberg's subject was again the body, but the weird spaces it inhabited were equally as important. Rothenberg limited her palette to gradations of black, gray, and white, sometimes with hints of blue, a color which by this point in her work seemed to correlate with images of extreme psychological intensity. Fields of short, thin brushstrokes suggested "weathered" effects such as settling mist, flurried snow, thick fog, icy frost, and sheets of rain. Equally varied and strange is Rothenberg's use of the body: arm fragments attached to a distorted and

Robert Storr, Art In America, "Spooks and Floats," May, 1983, 185.
Richard Channin, "New Directions in Painterly Abstraction," Art International (September, 1970): 63-64.

simplified upper torso in *Patches*, 1982, (Fig. 4/33) and two abbreviated forms fused from the waist down in *Asian Sex*, 1982 (Fig. 4/34). Much of the angst and almost grotesque use of the body came out the difficulties Rothenberg was experiencing.

Although her work was receiving public acknowledgment and critical praise, this period in Rothenberg's life was personally challenging. This difficult period is expressed in *Beggar* of 1982, (Fig. 4/35) inspired by both the homeless people Rothenberg saw on New York City streets and her own experience. Rothenberg recalls, "This was a very painful, sad moment in my life, dealing with alcohol, dealing with Maggie, dealing with lots of things, dealing with a new home [Rothenberg had moved to a new home/studio in Tribeca]. It [*Beggar*] was . . . a conscious reflection of the mood I was in."²⁸⁶ Similarly expressing personal experience is *Overcoat* of 1982-83, (Fig. 4/36) whose "figure either putting on or taking off a coat," Rothenberg explains, "is about a specific man in my life and the question 'Is he going to stay or is he not going to stay?'"²⁸⁷ The crepuscular light that hides and reveals the object that stands in for the body. Rothenberg explains, "I'm trying to find out what the body looks like that isn't anatomically descriptive, but psychologically descriptive."²⁸⁸

During the 1980s, Rothenberg intermittently continues to take a pictorial inventory of her life through portraiture, primarily of friends and family members, such as her mother in *Pillow*, 1984 (Fig. 4/37), her father in *L. R.*, 1984, (Fig. 4/38) and

285 Daniel Robbins, "Larry Poons: Creation of the Complex Surface," in Larry Poons: Paintings 1963-1990, with an essay by Daniel Robbins and an interview by John Zinsser (New York: Slander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc., 1990), 10.

286 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 117.

287 Peter Schjeldahl, "Putting Painting Back on its Feet," Vanity Fair (August 1983): 84.

288 Susan Rothenberg, interview by Paterson Sims, Artists Vision Series, Ninety Second Street Y, New York, 11 November 1986.

friend Elizabeth Murray in *Elizabeth*, 1984-85 (Fig. 4/39). The portraits primarily are based in memory rather than observation, since "Observation just cripples me," Rothenberg stated; for example, when painting Elizabeth Murray, Rothenberg would have her subject stand for a few minutes only and then leave so that she, Rothenberg, could paint from memory, from instinct. She notes, "The subject has to go through your entire nervous system like a sieve"²⁸⁹ Rothenberg would tap realms of memory even more deeply in her next paintings.

Dancing in the Dark:

Rothenberg drew from a mixed group of people—friends, neighbors, and family—as the basis for figural work. Yet the emergence of one enigmatic male figure would engage her recurrently for most of the 1980s and would be part of Rothenberg's further explorations of motion. Rothenberg describes the appearance of this male figure, which would become for her a symbolic image of Piet Mondrian, the Dutch modern abstract painter, whose appearance surfaced from the same subconscious repository from which came the image of the horse and of the bone. The image first surfaced when Rothenberg, "hand moving over the paper . . . like a Oiija board,"²⁹⁰ roughed out a drawing of a thin man wearing glasses and dressed in modern clothes. Immediately she thought of Mondrian:

It just reminded me of him. I had seen some photographs of him in a catalogue or survey books. It just looked like this thin, spare, severe, lonely white-haired man, and I just got it into my head—that's Mondrian. If I was somebody else it might have popped into my head that it was William Burroughs or some other spare,

289 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Amei Wallach, "Anecdotes in Living Color," New York Newsday, Friday, 9 May 1992.

290 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 121.

skinny, stark man. But I had made eyeglasses on him. I just decided that it was Mondrian. And I liked the drawing a lot, so I did the painting. And then I started to play with the idea of making paintings of Mondrian [as a] kind of imaginary dialogue with him.²⁹¹

This was the first time that Rothenberg specifically translated a drawing (Fig. 4/40) into a painting, *Mondrian*, 1984, (Fig. 4/41) a practice that she utilized at other times after this instance. Prior to this, Rothenberg's drawings were based on paintings that already existed, turning to works on paper as an alternative to painting. In *Blue Chair*, ?, (Fig. 4/42) Mondrian is seated in a chair based on one that Rothenberg had in her studio. Pretending that he visited her, Mondrian becomes a comforting artistic father figure who kept Rothenberg company during her long hours of working alone in the studio. Mondrian becomes a substitute for the artist herself, as part of her process involves great lengths of time seated in her chair in the studio, looking at the work(s) in progress. In *Golden Monet*, ?, (Fig. 4/43) Rothenberg playfully includes the quintessential Mondrian iconography, a red and blue square in front of a seated Mondrian, who is either playing cards on a table or about to hit notes on a piano. These paintings also exist as homage to an artist she greatly admired, although his style seems the antithesis of Rothenberg's painterly, image-based works.

Yet, beyond appearances, both artists work from an intuitive place. As Meyer Schapiro has eloquently pointed out in his essay on Mondrian, the Dutch modern master's abstractions were consciously constructed, not by calculation, but by a higher intuition. Mondrian, despite his adherence to "already fixed general constraints on the

291 Ibid., 123.

permitted elements and their relations,”²⁹² notes Schapiro, came to compositional resolution through a process of intuitively feeling and then visually appraising each part in relation to the whole. Schapiro argues that Mondrian’s placements were random, not calculated, and, as such, reflect “an accepted sign of modernity, a token of freedom and an ongoing bustling activity.”²⁹³ In this way, Rothenberg is connected to a Modernist lineage, which may explain her comment regarding her late 1970s work. Surprised that European curators were interested in showing her work, she stated, “I thought I was old-fashioned,”²⁹⁴ probably because she reveres Mondrian, Matisse, and Giacometti. Moreover, a perception of Rothenberg’s work as shaped by and extending a Modernist tradition is one of the reasons why her work was excluded from the 1980s “post-Modernist” discussion, which in itself was riddled with inconsistencies. The Mondrian image, her exploration of the oil painting medium, and her growing interest in motion fused in *Mondrian Dancing*, 1984, (Fig. 4/44). Rothenberg remembered that Mondrian loved dancing, and in this painting he leads his partner in an intensely expressionistic and moody space that creates a slightly ghostly duo, vaguely reminiscent of Munch’s dancing couple in *The Dance*. Mondrian also cycles through a nocturnal space in *Night Ride*, 1987, (Fig. 4/45).

Rothenberg’s interest in movement is central to her work; she choreographs forms in a rich pictorial field. Rothenberg studied dance as a child, attended dance classes in college, and in the early 1970s went to Deborah Hay’s experimental dance

292 Meyer Schapiro, “Order and Randomness in Abstract Painting,” in *Mondrian: On the Humanity of Abstract Painting* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1978), 35.

293 Meyer Shapiro, *Mondrian: On the Humanity of Abstract Painting* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1978), 65

294 Amei Wallach, *Picture of a Painter in Motion*, *New YorkNewsday*, 24 August 1986, 4.

classes in New York.²⁹⁵ Mary Heilman, who also attended these classes, remembers that Hay led her dancers through naturalistic motions such as walking, turning, and jumping, while the music of Taj Mahal played in the studio. The image of Rothenberg's body turning in the steel hoop on Joan Jonas's *Jones Beach Piece* is a strong symbol of stasis and motion. The subject of movement itself became a challenge in Rothenberg's work from 1983 to 1989. Rothenberg remembers that she wanted "to really see how much movement I'm capable of making. It was taking on a whole piece of territory that didn't feel very personal but seemed like, Let's sweep out this whole corner that I've never explored before and move in here for a while."²⁹⁶ Small wonder, therefore, that Rothenberg has held to the belief that the act of painting is itself "an extension of the performing body."²⁹⁷

The idea of movement into visual, painted terms became an exploration that followed naturally from her new medium. In a recent conversation, I asked the artist about this:

RCE: How much of your painting in the 1980s was a function of this new oil?

SR: It was huge

RCE: It looked like in a way you were exploring the medium.

SR: I was. Because the way I used to paint was this swathe with matte medium and pigment, so it's about the temperature of yogurt, but oil paint, each stroke stood up and talked to you and I think I got a little over-involved in that.²⁹⁸

The choppy effects of individual strokes of oil paint resulted in fields of

295 Deborah Hay's dance classes were very much involved in breathing and Zen practices.

296 Susan Rothenberg quoted in Simon, *Susan Rothenberg*, 140.

297 Susan Y Dyer, "Gesso's Coming to Diner," *Women's Art Magazine*, No. 51., March/April 1993, 26., *Newsday*, 24 August 1986, 4.

298 Susan Rothenberg, interviewed by author, 5 January 2003.

repeated marks whose sequential motion led to the kind of investigation of form that the Futurists had explored. Rothenberg began to paint the body in sequential, repeated motions in paintings of the 1980s that recall early Modernist works such as the photographs of Muyerbridge and Marey, one of Marcel Duchamp's last "retinal paintings," *Nude Descending the Staircase*, 1912, (Fig. 4/46) or the Futurist's force lines found in canvases by Giacomo Balla or Umberto Boccioni. Note the pictorial similarities between Rothenberg's *Gyro* (Fig. 4/47) and Balla's *Woman Dancing* (Fig. 4/478). In *Bucket of Water*, 1983-84, (Fig. 4/49) the motion of the arm is continuous in much the same way Czech Republic Modernist painter Frantisek Kupka expressed similar themes in his studies of his child in motion.

In *Holding the Floor*, 1985, (Fig. 4/50) perhaps the most successful of these paintings, Rothenberg orchestrates three elements that can indicate motion in pictorial space: line, repetition, and the body gesture. The figure with one right leg planted on the floor extends the other leg in a high arabesque while fully extending the right arm to the side, fingers stretching the action to its fullest. A path of movement that the arm and leg follow is represented by the form repeated in a blurry fan of motion. This painting had personal psychological significance for Rothenberg:

Its complexities involve perceptual and psychological memories based on real and imagined experiences. The results are a way of discovering what I know and what I don't, what I didn't know and I knew, and what I wanted to learn—which are things that seem close to unpaintable, which is why I love painting, which is not quite like the donkey and the carrot, but close.²⁹⁹

The body becomes increasingly frenetic, as Rothenberg puts it through extensively strenuous actions such as juggling, spinning, whirling, and vaulting. These

299 Simon, Susan Rothenberg, 137.

figures, such as the man springing himself into the air in *Vaulting*, 1986-7, (Fig. 4/51) for example, speak to “a kind of body metaphor for human limitations and also reach.”³⁰⁰ In effect, Rothenberg believes that the human body in motion is a way of expressing emotion that words, alone, cannot do. When Rothenberg became interested in arresting motion within her art, she countered the obsessive spinning with the stillness and tranquility of the Buddha image. Growing up, a stone Buddha at the Albright Knox Gallery had been one of Rothenberg’s favorites; often as a child she brought her youthful troubles to the statue. As the horse was put through a series of operations and/or procedures in the 1970s, so was the human figure in the 1980s. The Buddha figure is comprised of voids and solids, its rounded belly replaced by a negative space. Rothenberg keeps the image static but folds the Buddha into itself, twisted and knotting its legs (Fig. 4/52). Explorations of how the bent figure could hold the space was Rothenberg’s next self-imposed challenge, and it would take on personal significance as important life-changes occurred in 1988 and after. By 1987, Rothenberg thought she had mapped most of her artistic program, commenting:

I’m forty-two years old. I think I’ve probably dealt with all the issues I’m ever going to deal with: doubling up, spinning and diffusing, gravity and anti-gravity, turning things inside out, cutting them in half, putting them back together. Those issues will keep coming up, and I’ll be here in the studio, waiting for them³⁰¹

300 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in AmeiWallach, “Anecdotes in Living Color,” New York Newsday, Friday, 9 May 1992.

301 Carter Ratcliff, “Images on the edge of Abstraction,” Architectural Digest (December, 1987): 52-58.

Chapter 5

Gotham to Galisteo

My subject now is my life in the Southwest. It's crazy to search your psyche for ideas when it's right out there in front of you in the sun.

Susan Rothenberg³⁰²

The next phase of Susan Rothenberg's life and development as an artist was profoundly influenced when she married artists, Bruce Nauman and moved to New Mexico to live with him on a ranch in Galisteo Creek, a tract of land, outside of Sante Fe. The emotional ramifications of this life altering move would find their way into Rothenberg's paintings. In addition, the impact of the Southwest environment and life on a ranch would also impact greatly on Rothenberg, leading her to a new and expanded palette and subject matter inspired by the sights, sounds, and dramas of ranch life.

U-turn in Life and Painting:

In 1998, Susan Rothenberg sat next to multi-media artist Bruce Nauman at a dinner organized by Angela Westwater, director of Sperone Westwater Gallery, who represents both Rothenberg and Nauman. Shortly after that, Rothenberg and Nauman started to see each other, four months later they went to City Hall and married.

302 Susan Rothenberg, interviewed by Martin Fuller, New York Times, 1996.

Although he came to New York regularly, Nauman lived in Pecos, New Mexico. Rothenberg decided to stay in New York, at least until her daughter, then a senior, graduated from high school, and to relocate to New Mexico afterwards. The images from this period are indeed biographical, but the forms that her material takes and the kinds of experiences they encapsulate are really about universal states of being.

Bluebird Wings, 1989, (Fig. 5/1) Rothenberg's first painting in New Mexico, is about presenting with authoritative visual intensity an inherently lyrical subject. The sense of fleetingness one associates with the subject—based on a bird that flew to Rothenberg's window—is almost overpowered by the impenetrable density of the pictorial space, created in great part by variations in width, color, and paint application of the pictorial bands. In her New Mexico work, Rothenberg often is interested in painting sensory manifestations that are impossible to objectify but that can become an equivalent thing in terms of paint; for example, in *Heads at Tank*, 1990, (Fig.5/2) Rothenberg was trying to paint the sounds of the horses drinking water at night. Now dealing with the physical horse rather than with the emblematic horse, Rothenberg transforms hearing into seeing; we see the horse's head transformed into snakes, with all their sensuous and magical symbolism. The snakelike heads are not threatening but graceful, recalling the form of the hand puppets casting shadows on the wall in the head and hand painting. In *Three Heads*, 1990, (Fig.5/3) the graceful snakes, looking like three feet in a pointed position, are deep green against a softer green background. These images represent the sensuous, romantic sides of her new relationship, whereas *Blue U-turn* evokes the stressful changes that a new life meant for her.

The difficulties of a cross-country romance and the stress of life-changes resonate in *Blue U-turn*, (Fig.5/4) a painting that began as a portrait of Bruce Nauman

but metamorphosed into a body turned into a snakelike androgynous being stretched in impossible positions—as was Rothenberg during this period, while she flew cross-country, raised her daughter, attended to aging, ailing parents, and wrestled with having to leave her beloved New York. The blank stare coming from the bald head on the end of the gristly creature’s sinuous body peers out, with a look of something “resigned to be somewhat ambiguous,” to use Michael Brenson’s phrase.³⁰³ The U-turn figure is embedded in a field of blue so deep that it suggests the lowest chasms of the ocean or the cracked earth of the desert at night, clothed in moonlight—an image reflecting the psychological extremes through which Rothenberg herself was going.³⁰⁴ Another stubbornly enigmatic image is realized in *Bone Heads*, 1989-90, (Fig.5/5) a painting that even Rothenberg now finds scary. Two fused torsos arch over a thin, attenuated bone with a head on each end, the fossilized forms stretched to a point just short of breaking; this painting stands in contrast to drawings of this subject done before, in which the bones and heads look like taffy being stretched (Fig.5/6). This painting could well be interpreted as a visual symbol of the fearful aspects of fusion with another person—dependence and need. Many of these extraordinary paintings from 1989 through 1990 were exhibited at Rothenberg’s one-person exhibition at SperoneWestwater in 1990, where again she was critically acclaimed as one of the most important painters of her generation.

One sees from this U-turning period in Rothenberg’s life a transformation of bone fragments into completed, whole symbolic statements of her psychological

303 Ellen Handy, “Mysteries of Motion: Recent Paintings by Susan Rothenberg,” *Arts Magazine* (May 1990): 70-74.

304 This significance of what Rothenberg refers to as ‘Giotto’ blue had been established early in Rothenberg’s work. The three paintings Rothenberg created in 1989, *Bluebird Wings*, *Blue U-Turn*, *Blue Flip* all incorporate blue in the picture and the title.

being. What once were imagistic parts have become resolved entities which, for Rothenberg, subsume and incorporate a great amount of personal material.

Small Dramas:

Rothenberg does not consider herself a narrative painter. It is true that in Rothenberg's paintings one does not find an extended story line or a stated or implied text. But from after Rothenberg's move to New Mexico until the present, the subjects of her paintings have often been the small dramas—the scattered narratives—of life on a ranch, usually involving incidents with animals and other kinds of everyday experiences such as playing a game of cards or dominoes with friends. Although the actions that inspired these small dramas are an important point of departure, the specific depiction of an event is not where the significance lies; rather, the subject is in service to Rothenberg's creation of her own compelling visual drama. Rothenberg is drawn to subjects with the potential for psychological resonance. This was just as true in the 1970s, when the animal (horse) was imagined and emblematic, as it was in the 1990s, when she observed animals and then re-imagined them in the studio.

Using *Dogs Killing Rabbit*, 1991-92 (Fig. 5/7), as an example, we see how Rothenberg transforms these everyday dramas into authoritative painterly statements. Taking the instinctive animal behavior of chasing down and killing prey as its subject, the painting can be subdivided roughly into four quadrants. The top left quadrant is comprised of a horse's legs from the vantage of the rider or observer. Rothenberg's consciousness of legs and of other elements in one's field of vision while looking down resulted from her habit of walking daily while looking for points of arrowheads, shards, and other native American artifacts either unearthed by small burrowing animals or revealed by the uneven terrain of Galisteo Creek. "When you're walking

through this land,” remarks Rothenberg, “and you’re not particularly aware of anything, you start to become really aware of your legs”³⁰⁵ or, we may assume, any other animal’s legs as well. *Note: Three Pairs* (Fig.5/8) From the slight diagonal of the horse’s leg closest to the center of *Dogs Killing Rabbit* shoots out another diagonal, formed by the dog moving on its prey; this diagonal extends into a wide rushing sweep downward to the bottom of the painting and is comprised of paint markings and a rough outline indicating a dog’s shape. Also within the bottom right quadrant is a horizontal comprised of a small animal rushing towards the center, which cuts the painting more emphatically into upper and lower sections. The bottom left quadrant is almost completely empty, mirrored by the almost empty diagonal in the opposite upper right quadrant. In order to keep this mirroring from monotony, Rothenberg adds to the upper right quadrant two small outlined heads, stand-ins for Rothenberg and Nauman, who were trying to stop the predatory action. These weightless heads float like a disembodied consciousness witnessing and observing—pictorial symbols representing an out-of-body experience. A dramatically active smudgy white background punctuated with pinkish umber smears and ashen gray marks unites all of the painting’s parts into a coherent whole. Rothenberg mixes multiple points of view, varying scales, and various styles of representation to depict fragmented legs, animals, and floating heads, thus creating an overall sense of disorientation and controlled chaos.

Rothenberg’s play between representation and abstraction is located not just in the juxtaposition of recognizable body fragments against an abstract field, but also in the paint handling itself. In the lineage of Chaim Soutine, Willem de Kooning,

305 Susan Rothenberg, quoted in Simon, “On Walking and Working: An Interview with Susan Rothenberg,” interview by Joan Simon, Susan Rothenberg: Paintings And Drawings, 91.

and Phillip Guston, Rothenberg's images seem to materialize out of varied and rhythmically restless paint handling. The irregular facture and the way images appear from and disintegrate into paint markings are reminiscent of Soutine's great paintings of the 1920s. (Fig.5/9). Color plays a leading role in Rothenberg's pictorial drama; reds, umbers, and pinks, suggestive of flesh and heat, sometimes bleed onto the gritty white surface. On the whole, this and the other ranch drama paintings retain the raw, rugged quality of the head and hand paintings, harkening back to a New York School sensibility and an urban toughness.³⁰⁶ With the ranch drama paintings, Rothenberg assembles a scattered narrative whose unity seems on the brink of falling apart but in fact is held together with a boldly rigorous compositional acumen.

Rothenberg's daring disjunctive compositional sense is manifest in three paintings based on her seeing her husband, Bruce Nauman, being thrown from a frightened horse.³⁰⁷ In *Accident*, 1991-2, (Fig.5/10) the fright of witnessing the scene is palpable. A small white head with a green hand over its gasping mouth, situated in the right-center of a blank white expanse, stares in horror at the falling head and the jumble of horse legs crowded into the left side of the canvas. Weighting the left side of the canvas with the action speaks to the loss of balance inherent in the fall itself. In *Accident #2*, 1993-4, (Fig.5/11) the intensity of the same moment is expressed primarily in bright color suggestive of strong sunlight and the area's clay-red earth. In *Accident #3*, (Fig.5/12) fragmentation and unreadable forms such as two red squares make this the least decipherable of the three accident paintings. Although these paintings derive from the memory of a specific incident, like many of Rothenberg's paintings from the 1990s to the present they refer to the scattered, fragmented,

306 Rothenberg will always consider herself primarily a New York painter. She describes herself as a New Yorker living in the Southwest.

307 Nauman raises and trains quarter horses.

discursive aspects of human experience. Other than Rothenberg, I can think of no artist of her generation who captures the multiplicity of perception with more rigor. Like the disjunctive narratives of Performance Art, the drama becomes metaphorical for emotional states which, in the ranch scenes, often reflect conflict, fear, violence, anxiety, and chaos.

Like the Long Island paintings of the 1980s, the New Mexico paintings reflect Rothenberg's response to nature and its emotional and psychological expressiveness. She comments, "I think I get more connected to what's important to me by being outside. There's so much going on outside. Sometimes you try to put it all in [your art], but when you put it all in, it's busy. Then you have to go back to making a painting which has a coherence that has nothing to do with what you saw."³⁰⁸

Rothenberg's palette became more vibrant in response to the Southwestern light and colors. In Galesteo Creek,³⁰⁹ Rothenberg "experiments" with reds as she would with greens in the recent Poker paintings. Although her studio is a concrete cube, shutting out most natural light, the harsh beauty of the desert light and colors finds its way unto the canvas. Except for Rothenberg's most recent greens, her color sensibility is mainly earth tones. Rothenberg relates a telling story about her preferred palette. "Bruce, as present, started to stock my studio. And he didn't know what to buy, so he bought the colors he liked. And I stood there and I looked at the orange paint, turquoise paint, lime green. When I buy colors, I buy earth colors. These are M&M colors."³¹⁰

Another subject that has occupied Rothenberg from 1996 to the present is

³⁰⁸Ibid., 99.

³⁰⁹ Rothenberg mentioned the notion of experimentation with color in correspondence with author, 4 November. 2003

³¹⁰ Susan Rothenberg, quoted in AmeiWallach, "Anecdotes in Living Color," New York Newsday, Friday, 9 May 1992.

game playing, namely poker and dominoes. The idea for *Red Poker*, 1996-97, (Fig.5/13) the first of these game paintings, came from the bi-monthly poker games that Rothenberg and Nauman had with friends and neighbors. Modernist precedents for this subject exist in Cézanne's card series, but the subject also has personal significance for Rothenberg, whose father, when she was in high school, settled a business deal with a game of cards that resulted in his becoming an overnight millionaire. The game playing, be it cards or dominoes, appealed to Rothenberg, whose interests often lie with "investing a familiar situation with intensity."³¹¹ The "ground creates the environment for the activity,"³¹² and color is also used as a conduit for the intensity, as with the game paintings; *Red Poker* is a monochromatic orchestration of vibrant reds. In *Dominoes #1*, 2000-2001, (Fig.5/14) flat areas of yellow, white, and red play against the bird-eye perspective, which heightens the sensation that all the dominoes will slide off the table, as does the one that is crashing on the sleeping dog below. In *Dominoes-Cold*, 2001, (Fig. 5/15) Rothenberg uses intense non-naturalistic greens suggested in part by the halo green of the night camera that husband Nauman has used in his most recent video piece titled *Fat Chance John Cage*.³¹³ In this most recent series, the game playing table has disappeared, and only narrative fragments—dominoes, forearms and hands, noses, lips, eyes—communicate non-verbally, free-floating in an expressionistic green ground. In *Game 7*, 2002, (Fig.5/16) Rothenberg captures the internal concentration, assessing, strategizing, and

311 Susan Rothenberg, in conversation with author, November, 1999.

312 Ibid,

313 Rothenberg and Nauman have often addressed the same subjects in their work; animals, the body fragment, movement. Yet their approaches are entirely different. Their studios are separate as is their own internal dialogue about their own work. As both artists had already achieved significant critical and commercial success in the art world at the time they married each other, their partnership differs from the models put forth by editors Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron in *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimate Partnership*.

reactions that are part of the game player's range of experience. Intense fragmentation led Rothenberg into her most quizzical paintings to date, in *Ivory Arms*, 2001, (Fig.5/17). This painting reflects back to *Squeeze* of 1978-9, but instead of the horse's head lodged uncomfortably between the horses legs, Rothenberg lodges green lips between splayed arms that hold strings with green ears at the end. The "lips are talking to the ears,"³¹⁴ notes Rothenberg, adding to the picture's Surrealist tone. Rothenberg does find humor in these images while commenting on them matter of factly, noting that ears are "the most forgotten organ."³¹⁵ Bruce Namuan's sculpture *Mouth to Ear*, (Fig. 5/18) seems a logical precedent for both the image and tongue in cheek titling of Rothenberg's *Hand to Mouth*, (Fig. 5/19).

Two other compositional factors have gained prominence in Rothenberg's work of the last ten years—that of a circular or spiraling motif, and that of the empty center. The movement that Rothenberg explored so thoroughly during the 1980s has often been subsumed within the painting's internal dynamics. For example, in *Accident #2* the horse's head turned in a U-shape, moving our eye around in a curve that continues with the other leg while simultaneously moving the eye towards the action of the hind legs; the result is the beginning of a kind of spiral motion. As early as 1989-90, Rothenberg was grappling with centrifugal force in *Pinwheel*. (Fig.5/20) Again, a references to earlier works are evident as *Pinwheel* harkens back to both spiral movement of (Fig. 5/21) and the color divisions of *Four Color Horse*, 1976 . The spiral becomes more circular in *Pink Paths* (Fig.5/22). In *The Chase*, 1999, (Fig.5/23) a painting of dogs chasing each other in a frenzy, the pinwheel transforms into a circle with an empty center, where, in addition to the spiraling motion. Color adds to the power of the centrifugal force suggested by the spiral and the spiral leads to

314 Ibid.

315 Susan Rothenberg, correspondence with the author, 2 February, 2003.

an empty center. Although the energy is more frenetic, the rhythms in Rothenberg's painting are more staccato than in the languorous sweep of Matisse's masterwork of movement in a circular motion, *The Dance*, 1909-10. Matisse distills movement into a continuous sweeping line with a whip-like snap; Rothenberg choreographs movement with a more physical, pulsing sense of the forms in motion, movement heightened by the noticeably gestural paint strokes and forms moving slightly in varying paths of motion, which results in a more visceral painting. Whereas Matisse accomplishes a pictorial equivalent for grace and harmony, Rothenberg celebrates raw, primal nervous energy.

Rothenberg's paintings' empty center created by centrifugal force and spiraling movement is also informed by another source indigenous to the Southwest: Navajo Indian "ghost rugs," the ritualistic names for Navajo saddle blankets. In ritualistic ceremonies and prayers, these blankets were considered magical, deriving their powers from the horse, an esteemed creature in Navajo culture. In 1994, Rothenberg painted *Ghost Rug* (Fig.5/24) to commemorate her mother's death. After she began painting, she recognized that the motif was similar to the empty-centered, decorative-bordered Navajo saddle blankets (Fig.5/25) in which she had become interested. Above the rug float eyes, inspired by her mother's eyes as she was dying. Rothenberg would use this powerful imagery in several subsequent paintings, but never more sensitively than in *Face-Pink*, 2000-2001, (Fig.5/26) where arms enclose the eye, recalling Rothenberg's loving gesture of enclosing the eye of a goat she came to love as a pet in *Goat Eye*, (Fig.5/27).

Nauman and Rothenberg live with examples of these indigenous weavings, ghost rugs, which are generally oatmeal color in the center and surrounded by a border of usually geometric but sometimes imagistic designs. Borders as opposed to bands

were introduced into Navajo weavings after the settlers came to New Mexico around the turn of the century.³¹⁶ The reason for the empty center was practical, as these blankets were folded and put under the saddle, leaving only the decorative border visible around it. The empty center is an important pictorial source that Rothenberg continues to utilize as her imagery fragments on empty-centered compositions often unified by grounds of increasingly bold colors such as the thalo green.

Rothenberg has come full circle, life having imitated art as she is surrounded by actual horses now, not those she imagined and put through the formal/psychological paces during the 1970s. One painting titled *Breath*, 1993 (Fig , 5/28) says much about Rothenberg's ability to find visual counterparts for naturalistic phenomena, such as breath, which cannot be literally represented; nevertheless, Rothenberg takes on the impossible task of painting sound. In doing so, she gives us not just a pictorial equivalent of sound, but the essence of intimacy, where one is close enough to hear breath, quiet enough to listen. This painterly realization of states of being and facets of experience is alluded to in poetry by Robert Creeley, whose poetry Rothenberg admires. In a poem dedicated to Rothenberg, Creeley writes:

One dreamed of a thoughtless moment,
the street rushing forward, heads up.
One willed almost a wave of silence
to hear the voices underneath.

316 The double saddle blankets or "ghost rugs" were made primarily between 1890 and 1910. The blankets were woven by the women for barter with traders. They were also woven for their own families and for their men. Each blanket woven for a man was considered a journey. When the blanket went on the horse, the prayers attached to it were believed to keep the man safe on his journey and return home. This was done by weaving in strands of hair or threads of clothing into the center of the blankets.

Each layer, each particular recalled.³¹⁷

Given the strength of Rothenberg's most recent paintings and the artist's maverick spirit, there is every reason to believe that Rothenberg's visual poetics will remain at the center of painting's life force in the twenty-first century.

317 Printed in Susan Rothenberg: Paintings from the Nineties, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, ,2000, no p. n.

CONCLUSION

Susan Rothenberg's contribution to the history of art is directly related to painting, its re-emergence and continued status as a vital medium in late-twentieth-century art. Her pivotal paintings of the 1970s showed that the genre was still capable of visually encapsulating emotionally and psychologically powerful themes and meanings, which she accomplished through a fusion of imagery and abstraction; although she subordinated imagery to abstract, compositional, painterly rigor, the image remained vitally necessary to the production of meanings. Moreover, Rothenberg's painterly statement connected to a wide spectrum of sources, including Abstraction, Minimalism, and Performance Art. Rothenberg assimilated both these painting and non-painting sources and adapted them to express her own unique sensibility, which championed first and foremost the language of painting, and which mined a psychological vein yielding human states and conditions.

Rothenberg's work signals an important shift in contemporary art of the 1970s with a re-introduction of the image. This tendency, which ran counter to the dominant aesthetic currents, surfaced with Rothenberg as a pivotal force, a tendency whose various modes and methods of expression were presented in the Whitney Museum of American Art's *New Image Painting* exhibition of 1978. Although Rothenberg is connected to the *New Image* painters in terms of themes, functioning of imagery, and psychological content, her work embraced more painterly tendencies and, as such, not only is situated at the center of the 1970s imagistic revival, but also

provides a bridge to painting's expressionistic currents of the 1980s. In Rothenberg's continuing exploration of between image and abstraction – an issue central to her oeuvre—her work was well positioned to provide this important linkage. In the Berlin *Zeitgeist* exhibition of 1982, Rothenberg was placed in a broad-based international spectrum of artists' work; as with the *New Image Painting* exhibition, her insistence on personally coded imagery and a unique fusion of image and paint distanced and distinguished her work from that of other exhibitors. Rothenberg's work has remained singular, while it is located in the center of a dialogue about painting's art historical relevance and its capacity to communicate authentic meanings in the late-twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

Serving as more than an important indicator of shifting issues in painting, Rothenberg's work from the 1970s to the present gives actual credence to painting's ability to renew itself, to expand in order to incorporate new meanings, to find significance in the physical properties of painting itself, and most importantly to be original. This accomplishment is celebratory, as the painting genre was held in questionable status throughout the 1970s, when art forms such as performance and video at times seemed to eclipse painting's importance.

Rothenberg's selective eclecticism—her ability to synthesize important traditions in post-War art and transform them into fresh visual statements of psychological and emotional depth—is at the core of her accomplishment. Ever since Rothenberg established and marked her territory in the 1970s—take an image, do something to it, and, most importantly, have it hold its own as a rigorous, visually dramatic statement—she has approached new limits, exploring how to paint movement, interiority, environment, memory, conflict, and intimacy. Remarkably, when Rothenberg takes on a new image, situation, or technical challenge, the resulting

paintings are expansive, connecting to both art historical lineages and instances of experience.

Finally, Rothenberg's work is an art of confrontation, not so much with the viewer, although her paintings are direct and honest, but with Rothenberg the painter. With every painting, the artist confronts the question of what to paint, a question of particular relevance to American painting of the twentieth century. Once she selects her subject, the question of how to paint it becomes what the painting is truly about.

Appendix A

New Image Painting: The Interviews

The following interviews were conducted in order to ascertain more authentically the specific nature of New Image Painting and to provide primary source material for further study. My methodology was to find answers from each artist as regards the following questions: what are the origins and influences of your work; characterize your artistic motivations and the content of your New Image work; what are the origins of your imagery and how you use it; state whether you consider New Image Painting a movement. The answer to those questions are contained within the interviews.

NEIL JENNEY: Interviewed by Rosemary Cohane Erpf, 11/15/02

RCE:

How did you get started?

NJ:

I'm a self-taught artist. I didn't hear all the bullshit. I had someone on my paper route who was an Abstract Expressionist.

RCE:

Truman Egleston?

NJ:

I was always the kid in the class that could draw pretty well. You know, every class had one. Every day or every week, I'd see this Abstract Expressionist stuff — that was in the '50s. He [Egelston] was a teacher at Mass College of Art. After a while, I said, you know, I can do that. Just by coming in contact with it so often over the years, you know. So in like '57, I did Abstract Expressionist paintings, a little here, a little there, a lot of intuitive judgment. I love the whole synthetic quality of it. Even though I could draw pretty well, I was really interested in composition, in light and dark, all the variables — using in a very intuitive and synthetic way. I loved it. So I was an Abstract Expressionist painter in '57 through '64. So when I went to college in '64, I had a lot of momentum, what I call stylistic momentum. While all these other

kids were hoping to become artists, I was already an artist. I went to a high school that allowed us to have art every day, so I was making art every day. I took the summers off and then I'd get back in the fall and, gradually, I started working the summers too. Got my own studio in the cellar.

So I was very firm about de Kooning, hated de Kooning.

RCE:

You said you hated Matisse.

NJ:

Some of his linear drawings I kind of like, especially facial stuff. They're okay. But he's just a fake and a phony. Has shitty line and shitty color. But let me get back to this, to make a long story short: being self-taught, there are two styles in art, I realized. There's abstraction, and there's realism. Now I hated de Kooning because where the f--- is he at? This screaming woman, which is what he was doing at the time.

RCE:

Did you hate Soutine as well?

NJ:

No, let me get into de Kooning. I didn't see Soutine in *Time* magazine every week. But you used to see de Kooning's screaming women in *Time* magazine. That [*Time* magazine] was my link to the art history, to the art world. I hated de Kooning because I felt the image was pandering to the public. I mean, are you going to be an Abstract Expressionist all the way, or are you gonna do it half-assed . . . you know, use like here and there. Two styles in art: abstract and realism. Now the pyramids are abstract art. So the notion that abstract art is new is wrong. The Parthenon is a collection of abstract decisions. So abstract art is as ancient as ancient can be, and of course realism is as ancient as ancient can be. So you have these two styles. Now one of the things that happened in the '50s, that I saw towards the end of the '50s . . . you were having second-generation Abstract Expressionists and third-generation Abstract Expressionists, which was me, and I realized that I'm third-generation Abstract Expressionist and I'm trying to move into the fourth-generation Abstract

Expressionism, which is basically minimal. So when I went to college, I had reached the kind of hard edge stage.

RCE:

That was what year, '64?

NJ:

I was hard edged in '64.

RCE:

Yes, I've seen pictures of those works.

NJ:

Okay, so here we are. Then you have the image thing coming on with Pop Art — things coming on in '62, '63, '64. I remember the first time I saw a Roy Lichtenstein painting in *Time* magazine. I was violently opposed to it. Thought it was pandering. But as time went by . . .

RCE:

What does that mean to you when you say 'pandering to the public'?

NJ:

Well, you know, when I grew up in an era that . . . what are you gonna be when you grow up . . . I'm gonna be an artist . . . oh really, are you gonna be a magazine

illustrator or are you gonna be one of the longhairs? So you had to make a decision of where you're at. Well, I was an Abstract Expressionist. I could do magazine illustration like those guys, but in those days every cover of *Time* magazine, *every* cover was a painting.

RCE:

Oh, that's interesting.

NJ:

So I'm gonna be an Abstract Expressionist. So I'm going there; I'm committed to this. I love it, I fine-tuned it, I've got my whole compositional sensibility together.

RCE:

So by the time you went to art school, you were already doing it.

NJ:

That's right . . . my theory when I went to art school. I quit after my sophomore year; it was bullshit. So, the [Vietnam] war was going on at the time. In those days, you went to school, you went to war. Then they changed the rules — that you had to have a C average. I didn't have a C average. So I got drafted.

RCE:

So you didn't have C average in art school?

NJ:

No, but I won the Jordan Marsh annual with a jury prize that spring, with a painting I did in '65 because the ones I was doing in '66, the large shaped paintings, were too large for the show.

[After a brief interruption]

NJ:

Now, there was abstract and realism. Hated Pop Art, but then I realized after seeing more, especially Warhol, that it had validity because they were saying something about the American condition. The whole formula was to pick an image of America and make it big, like the hamburger — make a twelve-foot hamburger, or Marilyn, make forty-five Marilyns, forty-five Coke bottles. Image of America: do it over and over again. That was the formula. I realized that it was valid. Said a lot about corporate America and I thought they're kind of nice looking too, especially Warhol. Hated the Brillo boxes, which they pushed like crazy. The Brillo boxes stunk. They were ugly and stupid, and they're obviously made of plywood. I hated them, whereas the Marilyn Monroes — to me, she's a corporate tragedy. To me, here's a poor girl, cute girl used by corporate America, and that's what happens.

So, I stayed to be an Abstract Expressionist, and then I became a Minimalist sculptor because that was the kind of thing that was more interesting to me, and that was a formulized Abstract Expressionism. So I was doing this kind of work that is known as environmental sculpture; in the beginning, I called it theatrical sculpture.

I taught myself art history by reading *Artnews*, not reading but looking at every

page. That's how I formulated things, and what I realized was that nothing happened. They didn't document the Armory Show in the 1920s. Then, in the mid-'30s, you'd see a Picasso; and there, nothing happened.

And then Pop Art happened, and then second-generation Pop Art happened — that was Photorealism. And I hated Photorealism. I was talking to someone and I can't remember who it was, and I said, Photorealism is the worst f----- thing that ever happened to realism, the worst things. And I said it's terrible, you know, Kodacolor and no lines and no content. And I said to this guy, 'It would be better if you had a good idea and did it terrible.' And I said, 'You know, I think I'll do that.'

RCE: That was "Bad Painting."

NJ:

So that was my idea. So I had to decide, what is realism, and I decided that realism is not just about the symbolic element — the image of America. I decided that what Realism is about is things relating to other things . . . bringing more content, making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. You know what I mean, the whole gestalt thing, things relating to other things. So I did it and I said . . . new realism, hey, look at my new realism. [I was] saying that Pop Art was new realism, and I am doing new realism, too, and I should be in those shows. And people looked at it and said, 'very funky.' Now, Funk Art is a California thing and I'm in New York and I don't want to be California in New York. And I said, new realism, New Realism, don't you get it . . . a good idea done big. No, very funky. I never was included in the Pop artists shows. And they said, you're not doing Pop Art. And I said, I know it's not Pop Art,

it's realism; I'm doing Realism.

RCE:

In the late '60s?

NJ:

Well, they did the Pop Art show in '72 – '74.

RCE:

Okay.

NJ:

I said, I'm a realist, realism. I should be included in those shows. Now, in my view, I had friends in those museums. 'Cause you know they had just built the Whitney when I came to town. I was there before they got their curators; I was there before Marcia Tucker and Jim Monte and all those people. I was there in the days of Margaret McKeller, when she was in charge of the whole thing — or at least their registrar. So I was with Bellamy and they liked my work, so they put me in the annual but I had no context cause I wasn't Pop Art. And they wouldn't think "realism," so I was out. So I kept going around, going around, asking, 'You seen any realism?' No. Everyone was doing Process, on a typewriter, basically pseudo-science. Never got seen. Never got a show. Then, in 1970, I got a show. You never get a show when you do it. In 1970, I got a show with Bellamy — Goldowsky Gallery. I was the first person to have a one-person show at Goldowsky Gallery with Bellamy. They only did group shows because they ran into trouble with the Green galleries. They had one-

man shows. But then I got them to break that rule, because I had the sculpture. So he got David Whitney to give me a show, and David Whitney said he didn't want the paintings; he wanted the sculpture. So Bellamy said what about the paintings. So, I had the show and after that show I think everybody had a show: Jo Baer, Michael Steiner might have had a show, Dan Christensen, everybody. But after the '70s show, one of the paintings was bought by Ivan Karp. Ivan was of course the brains behind Leo Castelli; the most powerful man in Modern Art was Ivan Karp, no question. He knew more than everybody. He knew who bought everything. Who would have a list like that? Ivan thought that realism was gonna happen. He did have some good artists: Duane Hanson, Estes, decent artists. But the artists never showed up. The realist never showed up. And you see what I am doing now? I'm still waiting for the realist to show up. I keep asking, 'Seen any realists?' I wanted to be in a group show. I want to have a movement here.

After doing the *Bad Painting* and then having to clean it up a little bit. Originally it was 'bad drawing' and 'bad painting.' People thought too funky.

RCE:

Did you come up with the term Bad Painting, or did Marcia?

NJ:

No, I kept saying New Realism. That's what I'm doing, New Realism. That's what I am doing. So the people at the museum with that show, New Image, they were looking for a way to give me some exposure with some context. So that's how they came up with New Image. 'Cause those people are a little after me, and they don't

kind of share that motivation that I had. It was just a reason to have a show. There was no movement.

RCE:

But the weird thing is, it has stuck. If look at any book about art after 1945, any survey, textbook type, they all have a little section: Minimalism, Process, New Image, etc. So it was accepted as a movement, but it really wasn't a movement. Of course. I see that there was this return to imagery by the end of the 1970s.

NJ:

But what I said was that it was more than Pop Art, more than just an image. It [the image] returned in the Pop Art period. Pop Art was the return to imagery.

I did bad drawing, bad painting. Then they said clean it up. So I did good drawing, bad painting. And that was pretty successful.

RCE:

And which paintings were that?

NJ:

That was the kind of pinnacle of the one at the Met – the jets.

RCE:

Them and Us?

NJ:

Them and Us — the American and the Russian mig. I realized, you know what, I want to do good drawing and good painting. That's what I want. That's where I'm really at. That's the finished position; and I decided right then, and that was right in '71. My show was over in '79, and, as soon as that show was over, I stopped making bad painting. And the good painting . . . I knew I had to do good painting. And I didn't know how to do good painting, and I knew I had to do good drawing first, so basically in '71 and '72, I did drawing.

RCE:

You said you had to teach yourself how to draw.

NJ:

Let me say this: I always could draw. It's a matter of correcting each line until you've reached an intuitive perfection, you know, not sloppy shit, no scribble shit. Perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect, perfect — and it works. And the point I'm trying to make is this: I made this decision, no photographs. Having been raised as an Abstract Expressionist, I knew that my adjustments to the page, a little bit there, a little bit here, a little lighter, a little darker, a little this, a little that, I knew that you could not eliminate all that intuitive judgment. You can't do what I do with *click*, and therefore click is out, the camera's out. I felt that there were at least ten other people in this big country of ours that are making the same decision I was — to become a realist the old-fashioned way. And I'm not saying go back and do the old shit.

RCE:

Who are those people?

NJ:

Who? There are none.

RCE:

But you said that there were maybe ten people with the same decision-making process.

NJ:

I felt like there's a movement out there, and it will surface from Ohio, I came from Boston, it will come from Philadelphia, from Miami. It will surface. I decide that I'm gonna draw without the camera and I'm gonna do it the old-fashioned way — and that's what I've been doing, and I developed my own techniques. I've developed my painting like nobody else 'cause I don't know how they build theirs. I know the process I go through to achieve my color. I think. I've always said what I want, finally, finally, idealized line and accurate color. Accurate color.

RCE:

Accurate color or Impressionist color? At one point you said you'd like to combine Greek line and Impressionist color.

NJ:

That's right. Impressionist color is basically atmospheric color. It's basically their attempt at accuracy.

[Interruption – after RCE and NJ have a discussion of Dick Bellamy – Bellamy stories and reminiscences]

RCE:

Pop Art and Photorealism: You see Photorealism as a descendant of Pop Art — next generation Pop Art?

NJ:

No, I see Photorealism as going back to Singer Sergeant. That photo has been around since 1860s — Gerome, you know.

RCE:

Okay, that's true, but there is something different about Photorealism — but it has been marginalized and, I think, rightly so, at least by most artists. It's like a little blip on the screen. I don't think it's ever been thought of as a very important

movement.

NJ:

No, it's second-generation Pop — the pick up truck, do it over, do it over. Storefront, storefront, Estes was the best of them 'cause he had the whole reflection thing. It's a formula. They're not thinking about it. There's no philosophy.

RCE:

But it's different than Singer Sergeant.

NJ:

Oh, definitely.

RCE:

It's a different technique.

NJ:

Oh yeah, Kodachrome, use the color right off the print, accucolor. Terrible. That's what invalidated. Has no line, no composition, and no color. And no idea.

See, most of the kids doing the photograph thing now are saying, What, can I use a photograph? That's what they're saying.

RCE:

How can they manipulate the photograph?

NJ:

Whereas I said, don't even bother. That's the dumbest thing you can do. Why compromise your intuition. Why not flex it on every level. I knew these people are not gonna come out with good shit in the end. You know what I am saying . . . with timeless perfection, they're not gonna achieve it. They're using a machine that's handicapping them.

RCE:

What about the photographic genre on its own? You have no problem with that.

NJ:

I think it's valid as documentation. What could be more valid than that?

RCE:

Okay.

NJ:

But you don't love that for the intrinsic quality of the photographer. You love that for the image that's there. So there's no artist involved. The photographer is not an artist.

RCE:

You don't think so?

NJ:

What's he doing — a photo of drama, a dramatic event. Where's the art?

RCE:

But what about all the decisions that have to be made?

NJ:

When you're an artist, you're saying look at this. It's a portrait. Okay. It is important, but, in terms of its being, it's thingness. Okay, one of my statements is that painting is sculpture, is that paintings have to survive as objects or object making. Okay, I'm still a sculptor. I'm doing painted sculpture. Photographs are not very impressive sculpture. That's the problem. There's no thing there.

RCE:

I'm mulling this over. When you say a thing, what you are implying in this thingness?

NJ:

No. I'm talking about the validity of sculpture. Is sculpture valid or not?

RCE:

It is. But the reason you're saying that it's valid as a painting, as an object, is because it's made?

NJ:

Which involves a thousand decisions.

RCE:

So what did you think of Minimal sculpture that was in the mind of the artist and then executed at the factory? The artist didn't make it.

NJ:

I thought it was really great at the time. But in those days you had to claim a process.

RCE:

Okay.

NJ:

When I saw my first Judd, which happened to be the one that Henry Geldzahler owned, which happened to be the best Judd ever made.

RCE:

Which one, of the stacks going up?

NJ:

The stacks going up and galvanized. I thought this is great. And that's what we

loved about Stella. He eliminated the here-and-there and this-and-that and a little here and a little there of Abstract Expressionism. It was still Abstract Expressionism. The copper pieces.

RCE:

The black stripe paintings.

NJ:

Yeah, and it's completely synthetic, and it's Abstract Expressionism beyond the this-and-that game. And the same thing with Judd; I thought it was great, but you know what — it's a dead end. How far can you carry it, because it is limited in its variations. And then he got into pretty plexi and shit like that.

RCE:

It gets stuck in a kind of mannerism?

NJ:

It's like people ask me about Richard Serra. You know, it's like we showed together and I know him a little bit — no, well. I feel that Richard Serra and myself have a great deal in common. We are searching for timeless perfection. He's got his search and I've got mine. Now, he doesn't make his art. A little scribble on a paper here, he sends it to a ship builder somewhere, and they bend up his ship parts and he doesn't have to move and he's got a good deal there. And I have a lot of respect for him figuring out life as well as he has. But as far as art, I'd take one of my little ones over one of his big ones.

RCE:

Well, they're kind of apples and oranges.

NJ:

Well, you've got apples and oranges, that's right. You know what? I've got man-hours in mine.

RCE:

Well, you've got a strong belief in craftsmanship — you've made that clear.

NJ:

Well, he made his, didn't he? No, he didn't. So I feel that what I'm bringing here is a thousand intuitive decisions, and he's bringing one. And I say, how can you match one against a thousand.

RCE:

Well, I don't know, you're quantifying things.

NJ:

Let me say this. He is trying to build his pyramids, and I think it's valid and I think that abstract art has always existed with realism, side by side, throughout all of history, not that one doesn't dominate the other now and then . . . but you know what, it's harder to be an artist the way I did it. And all these kids are going to college now, going to art school, and I read that they graduate twenty thousand artists a year. Where are they? Where's the art? They fell for the bullshit. These kids don't know you've got to do it on your own. You've got to get rid of the cameras and get a pencil.

RCE:

Drawing, learn to draw?

NJ:

And learn this: Have a philosophy behind the image.

RCE:

How does an artist develop a global philosophy? You said an artist needs a global philosophy.

NJ:

One of the weak spots of Pop Art is that it is really applicable to American culture and maybe a European viewer, but you show it to the people of New Guinea and it's not gonna touch their button.

RCE:

[Laughter] I've never heard it put that way.

NJ:

Now, I did a painting, *Girl with Doll*, girl with a broken doll.

RCE:

Sad story.

NJ:

That's right. You show that to the people in the New Guinea jungle, they'll understand,

RCE:

Do you think it terms of universals?

NJ:

Absolutely. I want a transcultural vocabulary. Now, what I'm doing right now, I've got North America divided. I think the whole issue of borders in the modern world is very important. Here's United States, here's Canada. I've got one strand of rusty bark, here's your house, here's my house. Some people like to do images of the Tetons, Niagara Falls; I'm doing the back yard. I think it's important, and I think I can make poetry there. I think I can make it timeless — I'm not copying people. It comes out of me. It's like the Beach Boys. Something here, there. Boom. Timeless.

RCE:

Yes, the Beach Boys are.

NJ:

One of the things I realized about the Beach Boys: they're so great, Brian Wilson's so great. When they're over, you're not ready to have it over. You have to play it again.

And that is the natural dimension of his songs . . . to be about two minutes. That's the natural dimension; it's that short, and it is so captivating to expect more and want more and have it taken away from you. That's why I don't have many shows.

RCE:

Well, you're wise.

NJ:

Because one, I don't have a dealer. Bellamy was my dealer.

RCE:

You show a lot at Barbara Mathes Gallery.

NJ:

I don't have anything to do with those shows.

RCE:

You don't. She gets them.

NJ:

The show at Gogosian. Did you see that show?

RCE:

Yes. I know he did it.

NJ:

I didn't own a single painting at that show.

RCE:

I know. He does that all the time.

NJ:

He owns a lot of them; he buys all my stuff at auction.

RCE:

So, let's get back to global philosophy. How does an artist get that?

NJ:

Well, you have to know where you're at. That's one thing. What's important, you have to set out what's important. Like I decide that borders are important, that back yards are important.

LOIS LANE: Interviewed by Rosemary Cohane Erpf on 12/ 2/ 2002

RCE:

When did you start painting, or did you come from another medium?

LL:

Well, actually I studied voice until I was about sixteen. I was supposed to be a coloratura soprano, but then I got horrible stage fright so it didn't seem like the thing to do . . . so, I applied to art school because it was the only other thing I *could* do.

RCE:

Where were you?

LL:

I was in Philadelphia. And I went to Philadelphia College of Art, and then I went to Yale for graduate school.

RCE:

So you were there at Yale for what years?

LL:

I graduated in '71.

RCE:

There were a lot of interesting people going to Yale around that time.

LL:

Oh, yeah.

RCE:

Then you came to New York

LL:

I came to New York. I was Jasper Johns's assistant for a year.

RCE:

Oh, what fun.

LL:

Well, Barbara Rose was at Yale. Barbara was teaching there, and my friend Rochelle was going to take the job, but she decided to go cross country and I took the job.

RCE:

So you were his assistant in '72?

LL:

'71 to '72 — for a year, because then he left town.

RCE:

Was that when he was in that bank, that beautiful bank?

LL:

Yeah.

RCE:

So what was he doing at that point, figures?

LL:

He was doing a lot of prints. He didn't make a lot of paintings. But he was doing the ones with body parts.

RCR:

Yes. He was heavily involved with prints then, at ULAE and . . .

LL:

Yes, he was often away doing prints. I mostly had to know where the prints were, and come and eat lunch with everybody.

RCE:

What fun.

LL:

It *was* fun. It was a great way to enter the city and the art world.

RCE:

Was he a nice boss?

LL:

Yeah, he was a pretty nice boss. He was pretty, you know . . . he was. . . . We both kind of kept to ourselves. I don't think either of us was terribly outgoing.

RCE:

It probably worked better.

LL:

It worked fine.

RCE:

So you have started painting in Philadelphia and continued at Yale. And in New York?

LL:

Yes. I didn't paint that much at first in New York. Sometimes I'd take long periods off and then I started again.

RCE:

When you were painting during that period, were you painting images?

LL:

I was doing collage-painting. I was using more symbols. I was interested in sort of Japanese symbols, family crests.

RCE:

Emblematic?

LL:

Emblematic stuff, yeah. I'm just trying to think. Actually, those early painting — I started doing plant forms. I had this sketchbook, and I started doing these quick little drawings, forms of plants, so in those early paintings that's what I was doing. I think the paintings I did in grad school, I didn't do that. And then I worked for a senior citizen center, which a lot of us did early-on for social services in New York. A lot of artists taught art. I would cut out pictures from old *National Geographics* for them, and I found myself doing two piles: one for them, and one for me. And so I started doing those collage drawings, but I had pretty much always done collages in some way of another for many years. You know, cutting things up, using things, discarding things, saving things for later, layering stuff, and so the images sort of came from working with the senior citizens. Then I saw Susan's [Rothenberg's] paintings. She was doing those horses. I saw her work in a group show, and there was just one painting. And I guess, in a way, there had been maybe a few people working by themselves with images.

RCE:

Had you seen Neil Jenney's paintings at that time?

LL:

Well, Neil had come to school to speak, and that was sort of on my instigation because I really loved his paintings.

RCE:

So he came to speak at Yale in 1970?

LL:

Probably, 1970.

RCE:

So, when he came, he had already done the Bad Painting — they weren't called that then. Did he bring slides and all?

LL:

Well, we were already aware of his paintings.

RCE:

He said that no one wanted those paintings at that time.

LL:

I don't know what the art market was for his work, but we were all well aware of

his work. We went into the city.

RCE:

He showed those works at Goldowsky Gallery.

LL:

That's right. I forgot about that gallery.

RCE:

But he was with Dick Bellamy then.

LL:

You know, like most students, we were immersed in the latest stuff. We would come down to the city and go to shows and stuff.

RCE:

Did you continue doing the collage work?

LL:

Always, always. I still do.

RCE:

I wasn't aware of that. When did you start the paintings like the ones I would have seen in the *New Image Painting*?

LL:

I guess the mid-'70s, because I started doing those plant forms drawings, and I did some collage drawing. I had a little show at Artists Space, and there were one or two plant form drawings in that show. That was really a long time ago. That was '73, '74 maybe, I don't know, and then I kind of grew out of that — and in a way I think Neil's work emboldened me in the kind of work I wanted to do. I read a lot of Jung at that time. I was interested in the kinds of images that came from my subconscious, and I was also interested at that time in a lot of esoteric stuff. You know, thought forms and images that came up, you know, while you were daydreaming. I wanted to know what that was. I was very curious to work with that.

RCE:

When those images came up, did you make drawings of them or . . .

LL:

I mostly made drawings. I was aware of stuff by Annie Besant, you know, actual thought forms. I didn't have those kinds of experiences, but I knew I had to be in my studio. And I also knew that some of the images maybe came from dreams. I knew that was a connection. And I knew also that images didn't come from normal consciousness. I knew it was an artist's work — that's what comes up. Yeah, there was a lot of activity at that time about that thought form

RCE:

Yes, I know it was there.

LL:

I never talked to other artists about it. I really wasn't aware if anybody else was looking at those books or anything.

RCE:

So in the mid-'70s, when you were doing this but before there was a New Image show, where did you see the art world going? Did you see your work as being counter to the current? Did Minimalism seem viable for you then?

LL:

I was always connected to it. My work, particularly the large black paintings, is rooted in Minimalism. I think when I first came to that group — you know, Stephen Museller was doing it . . . Abstract Expressionism?

RCE:

Lyrical abstraction?

LL:

That's right.

RCE:

What was that?

LL:

I wasn't really working from that. I was more working from Minimalism and images.

RCE:

It seems to me at that time there was kind of a prejudice against imagery.

LL:

Yeah, there was. So nobody knew where you were coming from, I think, when we first started showing work.

RCE:

Did you feel like you were doing things privately?

LL:

Yes and no. Because we were young and we all kind of knew each other. And I remember going up to Bob Moskowitz at a party and saying something stupid like, 'I think we have a lot in common.' I knew he was thinking, right. But in fact we did. I knew we were working similarly.

RCE:

I think his work is terrific. He's pretty much carved out his area. And the work that was up in his studio when I was just there was wonderful.

LL:

He's a wonderful artist. But I think at that time things traveled through the ether.

RCE:

So you felt rooted in Minimalism but you didn't want to do abstraction?

LL:

Yes.

RCE:

What did you think of the imagery of Pop Art or Photorealism?

LL:

[Shakes her head no] No way. No, I liked it. If it wasn't there [Pop Art], maybe I would have been there. Well, people have always used imagery.

RCE:

So when people speak of imagery, the reintroduction of imagery then, there really had been imagery, Pop Art, Photorealism, and other strands of realism.

LL:

Yes, but it really didn't come from the same place.

RCE:

There was no real connection? Not from the same place?

LL:

No.

RCE:

I think that's critical.

LL:

I think so, too.

RCE:

So, grounded in Minimalism and your interest in sort of emblematic images. Did you think of how the viewer would see them?

LL.

Sure.

RCE:

Did you feel they were accessible?

LL:

I was never sure, and I don't think they ever were, entirely. At least in my work. They were always paintings that were accessible on one level — and not on another. People could look at them and enjoy them, but there were other people who saw other things in them.

RCE:

were you interested in a particular kind of content, for lack of a better word?

[Lost tape for a minute]

LL:

They were more about a kind of state.

RCE:

And when did you start the partitioning, dividing the surface?

LL:

It started with a painting called *Mardi Gras* that Miani [Johnson, then director of Willard Gallery] had. I don't know where it is now. That was a kind of tulip-shaped plant on either side of a very long stem, and then I did the clothesline that divided the canvas. There were also splits in them.

RCE:

What of these splits and divisions: Were they formal constructs?

LL:

Generally formal, but I don't think there *is* formal, actually.

[Laughter]

RCE:

Yeah, what is formal? [Laugh]

LL:

I don't think anything is entirely formal. I think we do things for all kinds of reason, kind of hard to figure, so we just call it formal.

RCE:

So Richard Marshall put the exhibition together. Did he come to your studio?

LL:

Well, I think he saw the work at Willard. He knew Miami. I think he sensed that something was afoot. And he put it all together and made a show of it. That was my understanding.

RCE:

So do you think New Image Painting was or is a movement?

LL:

I think it was in some way.

RCE:

Do you think there was a shared aesthetic?

LL:

Yes, I think there was.

RCE:

Oh, another thing. Were you aware of Joel Shapiro's sculptures, the houses?

LL:

Oh yes, he lived next door to me. Joel and Ellen Pahelan. We lived on 10th Street together.

RCE:

Do you think that a lot of imagery from that period was psychological?

LL:

Sure. That's probably why I didn't want to think about them. The paintings were about a kind of inner life.

David True: Interviewed by Rosemary Cohane Erpf on 12/4/ 2002

RCE:

When did you start painting? Did you always paint, or did you come into painting from something else?

DT:

I was a sculptor. And I worked in wood. They were figurative, so to speak. I don't like the word figurative so much, the connotations — but I used human images, and then, when I came to New York City, I shortly abandoned that and I became a Minimalist. I was a Minimalist for about ten minutes. [Laughter]

RCE:

When did you come to New York?

DT:

I came in about '68.

RCE:

And where were you coming from?

DT:

From Ohio. As soon as I got my Masters degree, I took off. I got a teaching job and discovered, really, the contemporary art world. I mean, I was certainly aware of it. I had been coming to the city for weekends for a long time.

RCE:

Where were you teaching?

DT:

Where? It was a private school called the New Lincoln School. I taught Grade 4 through seniors and loved it for a couple of years. And then I always wanted to paint. I tried it and abandoned it. I had this kind of sculpture career happening. I had to make a choice to stop it or I would be carried away.

RCE:

You don't have any images of that?

DT:

Actually, unfortunately, the reproductions were lost.

RCE

That's too bad.

DT:

It was because I was very proud of them. They still had that kind of contemporary look to them. Anything that has a kind of reductive look looks contemporary.

RCE:

Simplified.

DT:

But I wanted to paint, and that's that.

RCE:

What year was it that you started painting then, late '60s?

DT:

Well, I would say full tilt, about 1969. I was doing installations as well. I was doing installations that furthered painting, you know, artifacts that were portrayed in the painting. That wood thing behind you is actually a tower that's upside down. What is now the base is a tower for certain cult members to levitate off of. And that obviously had been cut and taken out of the original place or venue. So I had this involvement in narrative presentations that were called installations before, really, installations became that popular. I'm rather indifferent towards installations, but at the time I loved it. It was fantastic. What it did was allow me to kind of bridge.

RCE:

Painting and sculpture?

DT:

That gap between the two. But until a year ago, for a period of two years I worked not exclusively but largely on making reliefs, and they are all in the country and I've showed them to no one. And I feel very strongly about them. And they relate very well to some of my more recent work. So I would like to show some of them and some of the paintings the next time I venture out.

[Break]

RCE:

Now, in the mid-'70s, the paintings you were doing . . . were they like the ones in the *New Image* exhibition?

DT:

The first ones were like . . . there were a lot of animals.

RCE:

Do you have any images of them? Well, I am not sure if I've seen those.

DT:

Well, here's a painting that was in the exhibition. This was a show that was at Staten Island called *The Figure in Modernism*. And they borrowed an older painting . . . and here is a reproduction.

RCE:

Oh, good. Yes, I have seen this. This was reproduced in an article Marcia Tucker did about imagery.

DT:

Well, that was in the Venice Biennial she organized — that and two other paintings. That was the one painting I held back from that period.

RCE:

But this was from '81. Were you doing these back in the '70s?

DT:

Well, there was a kind of bouncing back and forth. The earlier paintings were, quote-unquote, somewhat realist, although there were these weird juxtapositions. Then I had a kind of vision and made a painting of a ship. And those were . . . you must have a catalogue.

RCE:

Yes, I was just reading your statement from that catalogue, and I wondered did that really happen or was that an allegory? Did that really happen to you? [Referring to True's statement in the *New Image* catalogue that describes a kind of dream or vision about being visited by a painter from a former time who wanted to inhabit True's being.]

DT:

Actually, I could say that it happened, but at the same time who's to say if it was a product of my imagination?

RCE:

Sure.

DT:

But I could also say . . .

RCE:

You weren't taking some strange drugs at that time or something?

[Laughter]

DT:

No, not at all. I've never taken strange drugs. But I saw it [inaudible] . . . that images can come from mysterious places.

RCE:

So the ship was one of those images.

DT:

Well, it was. When I say vision, I don't mean that in a mystical sense, but rather in the sense that pictures would appear in my mind, pretty much fully developed, and I would try to jot down the salient elements, the compositional, the pictorial essence of it, and then I would start painting. They were always in black and white. All the color was devised in time and over time.

RCE:

Were you involved in any of these thought-form ideas?

DT:

What do you mean, 'thought-forms'?

RCE:

There was a dialogue about them — Annie Besant.

DT:

I do know that scientists, I mean Einstein, not to compare myself with him, but his ideas were devised as pictures; I mean they came to him in pictures. That is the only way that he could figure a kind of theory and, of course, that translated mathematically.

RCE:

It makes me think that Einstein was primarily a visual person.

DT:

Well, he said he was a visual person.

RCE:

I myself cannot get anything until I visualize it.

DT:

Well, that's just it. We concretize. But that process is not a direct one: you can't tabulate it out of the mind onto the canvas. It's really just a starting point, a springboard.

RCE:

Okay.

DT:

And I moved to Savannah. I wanted to be on the ocean. Most of those paintings that were in that show, but one, were done in Savannah. The beach where I lived, always in the presence of the ocean, had that Southern light. I mean I started off with these kinds of gray, softer paintings, having painted them in New York City, and then I moved down south and my palette changed. But, I wasn't aware of it until I brought my work for my one-person show. I saw the work on the wall and I thought. 'Oh my God, They're so garish.' It surprised the hell out of me. But that sort of got me on a trajectory there — synthetic color rather than European earth-based colors.

RCE:

In the New Imagery, in addition to the ship imagery, what was the other image?

DT:

Oh. that was a palm tree blowing with [inaudible] . . . geometry. That painting is now in Norway, I believe. In Sonya Henie art museum.

RCE:

One of the all-time greats; I grew up watching Sonya Henie movies.

DT:

Well, absolutely.

RCE:

That's a great honor.

DT:

I consider it a great honor. She had a great sense of form and had a very sexy life.

RCE:

She did. She was a star.

DT:

But that had geometry in it and sort of abstracted or distilled natural elements. In fact, that particular image has come back in my mind again.

[Phone rings — interruption]

RCE:

Now, using imagery at that time . . . Did you feel any reaction, pro or con, to other strains of imagistic painting, such as Pop Art or Photorealism? Did you feel any strong ties?

DT:

Well, when I was in college, I wrote my thesis on Claes Oldenburg, genre artist. I was very interested in Pop. I was always image-oriented.

DT:

Well . . . Richard Marshall. He was the one who cobbled together a bunch of people that were dealing with imagery but were also dealing with what was basically abstract space. I was less involved with abstract space. I think that Roberta Smith had a problem with me as a New Image Painter.

RCE:

She saw you as separate from the group?

DT:

Pictorial, and I'm not going to argue with that. That word, image, came from a conversation I had with Richard Marshall. He asked me, 'How do you see yourself?' and I told him I was into subject matter but I wouldn't call myself a subject matterist; I said I was dealing with imagery, images' kind of context, it's pictorial. So he asked me, 'How does New Image sound to you?' And I said, 'It sounds perfect to me.'

RCE:

I saw the list of working titles that he put together for the proposal for the Whitney. I think Tom Armstrong wrote in a couple of memos going back and forth, and one of the titles was “The abstract image.” In the scribbled note back from Armstrong was ‘How can it be an image and be abstract?’ There were a number of artists who were not in the show and, interestingly enough, Joel Shapiro’s name kept coming up and, of course, he was not a painter.

DT:

There was a redux of that sort — called *Icon to Symbol: Imagery in American Art*. It was at Blum Helman, downtown . . . put together by Peter Freeman. And they sort of added to the list and deleted some. They put in people like Peter Saul and, of course, Shapiro was in that.

[Both look at catalogue]

RCE:

Did your images ever come from photographic sources?

DT:

Well, not directly. I mean I used photographic references, like anyone does when you need to see how an ankle turns or an elephant tuft sticks out, or something like that. But that’s not been a major source but always a resource.

RCE:

And Photorealism, did that have any impact on or interest for you?

DT:

Photorealism. No, not really. I never really thought much of it. I didn't particularly like it.

RCE:

I don't know anyone who liked it.

DT:

Or still likes it.

[Laughter]

DT:

But I do like a bit of careful depiction, a certain amount of realism, what I call naturalism. I mean I do respect that; I think a lot of that is going to be coming back. We see it handled in a somewhat ironic manner, as if they're embarrassed.

RCE:

Now who would that be?

DT:

You know the current: Yuskavage and that scene, which I get a kick out of.

RCE:

I get a kick out of it. It's very funny.

DT:

It's funny stuff, but at the same time it hasn't taken on a kind of narrative.

RCE:

And where can it go?

DT:

Well, it has to go . . . They have to come up with bigger ideas. They're coming up with style.

RCE:

Right.

DT:

But I sense across the board that there is interest in subject matter. Especially teaching MFA students, I sense that.

RCE:

Did you see your work as kind of a hybrid, at that time, of Minimalism and . . .

DT:

No, that's just my sensibility. I was sailing the summer before I came to that painting, and I didn't want to stop sailing — and I was interested in the design of boats. You know, form follows function — and that function follows beauty, it seems to me, after a while, sailing boats primarily. I realized after the finest craft, the strongest, most extraordinary performance always paralleled by beauty, by extraordinary beauty, by design beauty. And I became sort of obsessed with sailing. When I came back to New York, I would go into these sorts of reveries, if you will. But I really wanted to be back on Martha's Vineyard, sailing every day, not doing what I was doing.

RCE:

What about the sense of the images of that period being not so much isolated as surrounded by some kind of space?

DT:

You mean about my work? One of the biggest influences on me was the fact that I had trimmed windows, I had dressed windows. I was kicked out of college.

RCE:

Which school?

DT:

Ohio University. And I came back home and my father said, ‘Well, you have to get a job.’ Well, he knew the manager at the largest department store, and they had lots and lots of windows and they needed a window designer. So I got the job. Really, it was an extraordinary opportunity. So I placed these images within a very shallow space.

RCE:

I’ve always had a desire to do that, actually.

DT:

Well, it’s fun. I could have stayed with that. And then I would start to set up lights, reflected lights, you know — it was all synthetic, so in some ways that experience, in terms of how I feel about pictorial space, and theatricality, and synthetic light, was established then and it just came roaring back. When I first came to the city, all I did was look at windows, old windows, and abandoned windows. So much of that back then, and now everything has sort of been tidied up. There were store windows that hadn’t changed the concept in about twenty years. It was bizarre.

RCE:

Yes it is, and then there’s the commercial aesthetic of windows . . . like drugstores or grocery stores try to do windows, like Food Emporium. Strange, have you noticed that?

DT:

Yes. Well, I started doing like the gas and electric store — you know, not store

but office — and there I was really taking off at it, and they started referring to me as Rembrandt. You know, my boss called me Rembrandt.

[Laughter]

RCE:

Well, you were Rembrandt. That's interesting. Now, what about artists who were in that exhibition, for example Neil Jenney and Robert Moskowitz? Their work is a little earlier. They were a little earlier. Did that have . . . had you seen that work?

DT:

I'd seen some of Jenney's work. A number of my friends really loved Jenney's work, and so I sort of got into it through their interest and have liked it ever since. I mean, it's very playful, and his hard realist works, his landscapes, are interesting. The framing and the use of board signs is not as compelling to me.

RCE:

Late '60s painting, the *Bad Painting*, does seem to be pretty pivotal in many ways.

DT:

Yeah, they're very funny.

RCE:

They *are* funny.

DT:

I also liked Michael Hurson's work in many ways. The drawings . . .

RCE:

I saw a great painting of his at Bob Moskowitz's studio. There was a really long one. I think it was the first one of the . . .

DT:

The eyeglass paintings? [Reiteration of conversation with Hurson; see Hurson interview.]

RCE:

Do you consider New Image Painting a movement?

DT:

No, I didn't consider it a movement. I remember moving back to New York City in 1980, and I was walking up West Broadway and I bumped into someone (I forgot who), and he had a friend with him, a women friend, and there was 'Hi, how are you,' and then I asked this women, 'What kind of painting do you do?' — you know, one of these dumb questions, and she said, 'I'm doing new image painting,' and I wondered what the hell does that actually mean. I nearly coined the phrase. But in the last couple of years, people will bring up the power of the New Image Painting; it's very

strange. I didn't hear at all about it for a very long time. Some people thought it was kind of wimpy, and then the Neo-Expressionist thing swept aside.

RCE:

Some people even consider it a transition to Neo-Expressionism.

DT:

But it's not Neo-Expressionism. Whoever is thinking that is wrong.

RCE:

What would you say is the difference between Neo-Expressionism and New Image Painting?

DT:

Well, I suppose Salle played around with that, but they went into other things like collage and the layering, and it was about something far more expressionistic . . . say, Rothenberg was somewhat more expressionistic.

RCE:

Well, she was included in the *Zeitgeist* exhibition, as was Borofsky, which was the 'call' to Neo-Expressionism, and her work changes quite a bit as many artists' have; yours has.

DT:

Exactly.

RCE:

I do think that whether you call it a movement or not, there was something that happened.

DT:

Well, it was. When I say vision, I don't mean that in a mystical sense but rather in the sense that pictures would appear in my mind, pretty much fully developed and I would try to jot down the salient elements, the compositional, the pictorial essence of it, and then I would start painting. They were always in black and white. All the color was devised in time and over time.

RCE:

What were your thoughts about content?

DT:

I was under the influence of de Chirico, the metaphysical paintings. That's what interested me more than anything. That and window trimming.

RCE:

Well, that's a good combination. They seem related.

DT:

That's right: they're artificial. There is no real air.

RCE:

Have you been to Turin?

DT:

No.

RCE:

Well, then the Guston paintings and Johns . . .

DT:

No, well, I never liked Johns. I never liked organizing on certain abstraction precepts.

RCE:

So you really start with the image.

DT:

Well, I was interested in a certain pictorial space, to denying it. To me, that seems like a club-footed idea. I mean, it is fine; if you want to apply that gravitas, you can do that on any notion. But to make that out as a big deal, it was way overblown, a product of commercial interests and the way the commercial interest and the pictorial world was kind of dancing around at the time.

RCE:

It's interesting that the sources have a connection to Surrealism.

DT:

Of course, but it's pre-Surrealism — metaphysical. I don't see that as Surrealism. I suppose that he introduced, I suppose, a lot of Surrealistic ideas into the vocabulary for the European artists.

[Discussion of Max Ernst]

RCE:

And what about Performance Art?

DT:

Well, dance, I used to go to a lot of the dance things.

RCE:

Were there artists in the representational tradition that influenced you, like Fairfield Porter and Alex Katz?

DT:

I admired them for their kind of easy brush; I don't have an easy brush. I have a kind of more voyeuristic connection to them because that kind of getting it right by forming it immediately . . . that way is something that I admire greatly. I basically

construct paintings. Those guys are . . . sort of brush artists, and I'm not really much of a brush person.

RCE:

Oh, you're not?

DT:

Not really. I mean I work with a brush, but it's not about the movement of a brush — the way things are formed.

RCE:

You're not into the gestural?

[Looked at some recent work.]

Joe Zucker: Interviewed by Rosemary C. Erpf on December 11, 2002

RCE:

When did you start painting?

JZ:

I started painting when I was five years old. I went to the Art Institute of Chicago School in Chicago from the time I was five years old until I got a Masters. I went to the children's program periodically for years.

RCE:

Was that because you showed great talent as a child?

JZ:

My mother thought I showed great talent.

RCE:

Mom was right.

JZ:

Actually this painting (*Joe's Painting #4*, 1964). That's the start of my professional career. I was twenty-three.

RCE:

You were twenty-three and you started painting in this abstract style?

JZ:

Well, they're really paintings based on the structures of cotton canvas — the structure of warp and weave relationships. They're paintings of an abstract relationship.

RCE:

Did the paintings follow from a program you had? How did that come about?

JZ:

I was twenty-three years old. The painting instructors I had were from Europe. One was more or less a kind of School of Paris fan, a student of Kandinsky, and the other one had been born in Poland — painted a kind of painterly abstract French painting. And both had a negative effect on painting, to my way of thinking. Basically, the painting came out of, and most of my work comes out of, a kind of perceptual basis. In other words, if there is nothing else to paint, you can paint how the canvas is made. And this has stuck in my work. Most of my work has to do with that kind of idea — that either it has to do with the relationship between what the image is and the material it's made out of, and/or the image and how it's made. In some cases the process and the materials are related to the subjects; in other cases it's

only one or the other.

RCE:

[*Joes Painting #4*] Do you consider this an image?

JZ:

Yes . . . because it's the structure of how basic fabric is made, and some of these pieces were woven fabric. They're objects. The only painting was that I dyed the cotton strips that were woven out of it. I dyed cotton duck strips in the washing machine, and then I wove them on the stretcher bar.

RCE:

Did you spend a lot of time looking at different kinds of fabric and canvases?

JZ:

I did. I didn't spend a lot of time. I migrated between looking at books of fabrics, and I shopped. I bought certain . . . later I used pre-made fabric that I wove, like Dan River fabrics, polka dots.

RCE:

Did you come to this because you felt that it was a valid subject or because you felt there wasn't valid subject matter to explore other than that? You said, 'When there's nothing to paint.' Did you think there was nothing to paint?

JZ:

Well, I don't know, but it was more about a confrontation. If you've ever painted, you are always confronted with an empty canvas. So what I did was, I was still painting an empty canvas but I blew up the surface. You see, most people blow up an image. That's been the Warholian situation: You blow up Holly Solomon or the electric chair, but you don't blow up what it's painted on. So this is, in a sense, an enlargement of the painting surface. And there is enough variety — and it hovers in a world between abstraction and figuration, and that, of course, is the supposed core of the the New Image show. That only holds true in the work of a couple of people, really.

RCE:

Well, it holds true if you think about how artists somehow combine language of abstraction with imagery, but it doesn't mean that every single artist is interested in this area between imagery and abstraction. So when did you come to New York?

JZ:

[Looking at *100 Foot Wall*, 1969] A hundred-foot long painting with no style. A single fragment painted every day — worked on it for a year, with a single fragment every day, all based on grids. One hundred feet long.

RCE:

And when you came to New York, were there a circle of artists you were with?

JZ:

I got to know people. Some of those same people I wound up showing with Bartlett — Jennifer Bartlett, she was a good friend. Joel Shapiro, I got to know Joel. Chuck Close, etc.

RCE:

So when did the more image-based pieces such as *Amphora* come out?

JZ:

Well, they came out of the piece in '69 because these are all made out of cotton. So these in a sense are ersatz paintings. In other words, they're objects where I am making a cotton surface and an image simultaneously. So, in essence, they are following the same kind of idea that it's a fabric kind of situation; a fabric, handmade, has a system, sort of repeats the kind of surface that you would get when you blew up a detail of a canvas surface. So all the cotton work, more or less, came out of that.

RCE:

Tell me more about how you made these . . . a summary of the technique of the rhoplex.

JZ:

I rolled it, put different paints in my hand. Made each module, soaked it with paint.

RCE:

And you used cotton, cotton balls.

JZ:

I bought conventional, one hundred in a bag, conventional cotton balls. I made one or two hundred paint balls at a time. I put them on trays of different colors. The paintings are made flat.

RCE:

So the cotton balls started out as a module, almost like a pointillist technique?

JZ:

That's right.

RCE:

And then you became more gestural with the cotton balls.

JZ:

Yup. Then I made them into brushstrokes.

RCE:

Was there something about that labor-intensive — I might say almost obsessive — process that appealed to you?

JZ:

Well, it did really appeal to me. It wasn't a case of appealing to me. It developed its own logic. Paintings all have their own logic.

RCE:

You worked from a photograph [looking at *Amy Hewes*, 1976, a painting of a riverboat].

JZ:

Now, it's a narrative about what I'm painting on. And also, it talks about political situations in the United States. In other words, without the cotton mill, you couldn't have imported slaves into the Southern United States. It's a kind of metaphoric and political stance to it.

RCE:

Did you think of the political aspect of it back in '71, or did that come later?

JZ:

Absolutely.

RCE:

Absolutely, from the beginning?

JZ:

Absolutely. If I thought about it afterwards . . . I wouldn't have made it if I

thought about it later. I grew up in a racially difficult neighborhood in Chicago. So I've been concerned about those kinds of situations for a while. It's very hard to make political art without standing on a soapbox. There's a difference between political art and propaganda.

RCE:

Right.

JZ:

So in a sense what you can do, you can make a politically motivated work of art. Something that deals with it but has a political message.

RCE:

But it's not necessarily understood without a text.

JZ:

That's right. But people get it, and some get it and some don't, but in that case you're still not on a soapbox telling people. There's a line between political art, propaganda and, I think, being a political activist.

RCE:

And public relations.

JZ:

Right. I decided clearly that this was about painting and politics. But at the time these were painted, you have to realize what was happening in New York — how difficult it was to paint something like this. You're dealing with the height end of reductive art, so to interject things that instead of Minimalism was 'Maximalism,' where content echoes an issue rather than just the intrinsic beauty of the material . . . this deals with material and its evocative qualities.

RCE:

I think that content is one of the underlying issues that links the artists in the New Image show.

JZ:

Probably the most important painting show in New York. Certainly the most important show in New York *then*. It opened up all these things that you're having to contemplate. It brought a number of issues to the fore, and I remember a lot of it was generated during the high political activism in New York.

RCE:

I always think of the '60s as being the high point of political activism.

JZ:

Well, the late '60s; '70s was Jackson State, Kent, the war, massive protest. There is no doubt in my mind that the events of the '60s . . .

RCE

Well, it shapes the '70s.

JZ:

It shaped it in a lot of ways. You're right. The '60s represent, really, the end of Modernism — like New Image shows it's one of the seminal periods of Post-Modernism. The end of the avant-garde, in a sense. This is what people talk about — the past in contemporary terms, history, and language. When you think of Neil Jenney's painting . . . in some of the paintings that I did with writing on it and humor. Any kind of humor was verboten modern, didactic thought, so you have sort of the end. It's like a group of people that saw the reductive theory is coming to an end. And a group of people were trying to start over.

RCE:

And find their own way. But did you find in the '70s there was a prejudice against imagery . . . that you were going against that dominant strain?

JZ:

Well, there were the New Realists, who were the new whipping boys.

RCE:

Who were the New Realists?

JZ:

People like Don Eddy, sharp-focus realism, Photorealism, because Modernists always could — they could attack that, because it's like the bourgeois painting for the bourgeois. Whereas abstract painting was always involved with the intellectual league.

RCE:

But most of the artists I've spoken with that were in the New Image painting exhibition didn't think that Photorealism impacted on their painting, or that they didn't in fact like Photorealism.

JZ:

Most of them don't, because they were a threat to the real hardcore Minimalist people. Because the New Image people dealt with an abstraction of some kind as a departure point. Some of it was respectful. But look at my attitude — reducing the subject of the painting, not to a kind of Machiavellian white canvas, but reducing it to a story about what you're painting on. That's a threat: Some people would interpret that as making fun of the reductive logic, you know? Do you see that? In my work?

RCE:

Yes, I could see that in two ways. First, in a kind of witticism, a witty way like Neil Jenney's *Bad Paintings*; and I can also see it in a different context, where it's less obvious. And that has been something like Bruce Nauman's works of the late '60s — activities in his studio. The pieces where he paces, and runs, starts, and stops. Conceptually those works, which I think were critical, were about what an artist does, and some of those activities were videotaped — and also stills from the video were

reproduced. It has to do with some thing or some kind of wit. I think that turning to what the artist does, what the artist does in his studio, what the artist works with, is turning to something that is so obvious but had not been thought of before as subjects for art . . .

RCE:

. . . and jumping-off points for other issues political, social. What was your reaction among artists and public when you started to show your work in the '60s?

JZ:

Well, I was with one of the most premier dealers of that time.

RCE:

Klaus Kertiss?

JZ:

At Bykert. He had a curiosity about artists' minds. He was always interested in what was going to happen next.

JZ:

This is an interesting painting. It's Mendel, the geneticist, and the grid and all of it is made out of twisted cotton. So it's like mullions. So it's like stained glass. The whole show had to do with stained glass paintings. But all of the scripts in this are names of my family members, the vine is like my family tree, so to speak. But by

then, '78, there was quite a bit of support for my work.

RCE:

When did you stop using cotton?

JZ:

The last cotton painting was early '80s. Then I moved to other materials.

RCE:

I think you were on to something in work that looks so blatantly artificial.

JZ:

It's funny you should mention that, because now the people do the whole thing as ersatz. It's not really easel painting; it's a stand-in for easel painting. You know, when you think of how many people put me in painting shows. In essence, I'm not really a painter, an easel painter.

RCE:

What are you then?

JZ:

Well, from a conceptual standpoint . . . they [his artworks] are involved in painting. But [not] when you think of working traditional, of working traditionally on canvas with stretcher bars. One of the things that people like myself has, why I have

had impact with younger artists, is I don't really believe that painting [is enough], the way you move it around, just the expressive value. I think you've got to control something.

RCE:

Do you think that's true just now, or was it always true?

JZ:

I think that it's very hard to paint a picture and have the things that we identify so strongly with Abstract Expressionism or Neo-Expressionism . . . that the painting itself has the same evocative qualities that it had for so many years. I think we are moving in the opposite direction. Take Chris Offili: His paintings are the stuff of his culture. Not from thick painting. It's like an object . . . it totters in the area where paint is excessively thick and physical, but it is also his material that is part of his cultural overview. It's not about the value, the effect; in fact, he's almost mocking. He draws a strange analogy between dung and the scatological quality of paint. Like Holly Solomon once said, she was talking about painting, 'It's all in the toilet training.'

[Laughter]

RCE:

That's a great line.

JZ:

What's shocking about an Offili is that it celebrates the end of the meaning of painting as thickness as having any value — not because it's dung, but because of the implications.

RCE:

Who were the artists that you felt connected to when you came to New York?

JZ:

Chuck Close, Jenney to some extent . . . and Bartlett also tottered on that sort of thing where there was no stylistic development.

RCE:

The house pieces.

JZ:

Yes. Developing a high style wasn't going to cut it any more. In fact, Roberta Smith pointed that out at the Gogosian show of the Jenney Bad Paintings, and she pointed out that there were other dealings with no essential style.

[A discussion about style and other artists such as Gerhard Richter ensues]

JZ:

With Richter and Polke . . . they also have that situation where they don't develop a look where you can always recognize a look.

RCE:

Well, I think they do, but I think they are constantly about destabilizing that — so that you can't really locate what *the* style is. The style is about a dialogue between styles.

JZ:

That's exactly true.

RCE:

With Guston's late work . . . did that interest you? I wouldn't think that was on your wavelength exactly.

JZ:

I like the Guston late paintings, but I don't really have any interest in that kind of painting.

RCE:

But what formed you in Chicago?

JZ:

Chicago was tough; there was nothing really happening. We got some visiting artists there, but I really think by being at the Art Institute for so many years, going by the masterpieces every day, every type, ranging from *La Grande Jatee* to *Excavation*, that I became a pluralist because I had such an attachment to different works, different

surfaces . . . Veronese, the great Van Gogh paintings . . .

RCE:

They become so familiar.

JZ:

When you start school at such an early age there, it has to have some impact on you. My work is such that it is very territorial.

RCE:

Your work was really different. Were you concerned at all that there didn't seem to be any other artists on the same page, so to speak, as you in the early '70s?

JZ:

It's hard, but what are you gonna do, be another Bob Ryman? Painting, you know, isn't about what you like; it's involved with what you have to do. That's what a lot of people don't understand when you get into a tough world that combines sort of emotion and talent and breaks and people who support you. People like to say to me — well, you like to paint pirate ships. And it really has nothing to do with that. Artists are really about the construction of painting, the components of wood and canvas; they really don't have anything concerning what I like.

RCE:

It seems that you were really concerned with the whole idea of originality early

on.

JZ:

You know, I think that's why something of . . . It is about a program that determines the kind of paintings I paint. My paintings are not determined by what will fit into a didactic idea. It's not so much I think it's time to paint this.

RCE:

You don't start, for example, with 'I want to do an archetypal image; I want to do a symbol.' You start from a completely different place.

JZ:

Yes, and while I was in Israel lately, I went to the Tel Aviv Museum and saw this Picasso exhibition that was really dreadful; I mean it had so many bad works, and what this is about really enforces what I kind of believe in. It doesn't diminish Picasso, but that sometimes people, they run so far astray to paint the endless *Minotaurs*. Painting with no structure or control.

RCE:

How did Richard Marshall come to you about New Image painting?

JZ:

Well, that was pretty late, and I had been showing quite a bit already. I think a lot of that was about a body or work. I mean all those people had a body or work,

some more than others, but . . .

RCE:

So, looking back, do you think that New Image painting was a movement, is a movement, had a shared aesthetic?

JZ:

Well, I think it had such impact. The only way you can look at this, and the only way one should look at this, is by a lot of younger artists today. Recently, a young painter said that he thought certain painters kept things alive. And some of the young painters, the Laura Rollinses of the world, are really related to all of this.

RCE:

Who are the artists he thought kept painting alive?

JZ:

Malcolm Morley . . . oh, I can't remember. But he thought that the period was important.

RCE:

It's interesting, because in the '70s everyone said painting was dead. And when you think about it, some really good — good, bad, or otherwise — painting was being done.

JZ:

Well, I think that's true. You know Marieluise Hessel from Bard. She has that thing called the Rivendell collection.

RCE:

Yes, I know that collection.

JZ:

Well, if you see that book, you see all the things you see today — they are in that book.

RCE:

It's like Arthur Danto said, that everyone says that nothing happened in the '70s when, in fact, everything happened in the '70s. And I think that the categories set up from the idea of Pluralism have separated things out instead of looking for common threads.

So do you think it was a movement?

JZ:

Well, I think it would have been a movement if one gallery had taken on eight of the artists. Somebody told me that once.

RCE:

Thanks Joe, this was great.

DENISE GREEN: Interviewed by Rosemary Cohane Erpf on 12/11/02

RCE:

The 1976 *House*, 48' x 48'; that came from, you said, Joel Shapiro's house.

DG:

I had a dialogue with Joel. I talked with him very often, and Joel and Neil Jenney and I . . . Neil was a friend, too. I think Joel was kind of an influence, but, you know, I started out painting a horse and a window, so I knew about that kind of imagery, too, but I liked the way that Joel spoke about his work. I remember he made reference to his own materiality, how he was really influenced by Michele Learis. He was really doing something that was intelligent as an object, but it sort of indicated some psychology. I liked that.

RCE:

Did that appeal to you because psychology or some kind of psychological content seemed to be missing from Minimalism or Process?

DG:

Absolutely, yes, yes. You know, if I was going to work with an image, an

archetypal image.

RCE:

What does an archetypal image mean to you?

DG:

Well, for example, *Trap* was not an observed object, not a specific something. It was really the idea of the trap, and the issue somehow embedded in it was that the brushstroke made it so that there was no possibility of reading it as natural.

RCE:

You recontextualized it into an abstract world of picture making.

DG:

That's right.

RCE:

Into an abstract form — picture making.

DG:

That's interesting, because you were extending this whole Minimalist aesthetic and doing something so forbidden.

RCE:

You had a sense that images were taboo?

DG:

Oh yes. Oh yes.

RCE:

That was palpable.

DG:

Oh, I was attacked by so many artists.

RCE:

And what was the sort of attack?

DG:

They would say, "You're painting an image," and they would disconnect. I would actually say, "I'm not painting an image; it's configuration."

[Laughter]

RCE:

So archetypal means to you . . . ?

DG:

I think it's elevating it, and you use it from a mundane or everyday because it is a sort of general, or universal idea. And it's my archetype. Everyone has an idea of archetypal.

RCE:

It resonates with you.

DG:

That's right.

RCE:

Was it anywhere in your motivation to come up with an image, to think of an image, which would speak to a large spectrum of people? Do you think of the viewer when you're painting, when you're creating work.

DG:

I think that it was only with the image of these recent World Trade Center paintings that I managed to elevate it to something that a large range of people could connect to, because it was a global phenomenon and everyone had a shared reference to it and that meant that a large number of people could bring their own interpretation, associations, and meanings to it. All these others . . . I would love to believe that it touches other people, but ultimately it came from a very sort of private set of references.

RCE:

So the trap, a window, the vessel, a figure, and two figures, a woman, and other figures.

RCE:

So what was your reaction to Neil Jenney's "Bad Paintings"?

DG:

I think it was really in the air, and I think this tendency to move in this direction was really in the air. And I had done my graduate work with Rothko, at Hunter—with Motherwell and all those. And I had this sense that you couldn't work with anecdotes. There was this whole list of things you weren't supposed to work with. So my idea was to synthesize the images . . . I think my experience was being drawn to Minimalism somehow but wanting to connect it to my experience.

RCE:

That makes sense. Do you think that New Image painting was a movement?

DG:

Yes, it was. Well, it was really the first time in many years that an American museum had shown something that wasn't really abstract. I think that Richard Marshall was very tuned in, bringing that kind of work together. And it was an aesthetic.

RCE:

There was never a platform where you all met and discussed.

DG:

No. No, as a matter of fact, Richard asked me, 'what were the influences on your work?' And I said, 'just Beuys,' and he said, 'I don't get it.' Well, I was showing Max Protech, which was right above Rene Bloch, who showed his work and he [Richard Marshall] eliminated that . . . and he insisted it had to be Guston. And I've since realized that Beuys was the major force in the work. He had introduced everyday objects in his work, but they were sort of meaningful.

RCE:

You mean sleighs, felt.

DG:

He did drawings of leaves, and I remember looking at those drawings and saying, 'ah ha.'

RCE:

And also the image of Beuys himself with that hat.

DG:

Here is that catalogue that has some essays, and it's the catalogue for my German tour and the essays by (WHO?) of the Albertina. We had a discussion, publicly, and here is his

essay that substantiates that connection. I do think that there was a shared aesthetic. What do you think?

RCE:

Well, I think there is a shared interest and this language between image and abstract is one.

But if I had to say that I think at the core of it was a certain psychology – having to do with psychology . . .

DG:

It's curious because it's not expressionistic. But it's somehow portraying some inner world, and it's doing this with some sort of awareness of all of the issues that have been. Somehow, for me, I was so aware of Minimalism. Don Judd, I was incredibly interested in Don Judd. But how the hell do you combine a Don Judd aesthetic with psychology? That is absolute opposites.

RCE:

So you didn't necessarily want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. When you included imagery, you intended to have a Minimalist sensibility.

DG:

Oh, absolutely.

RCE:

The paintings here . . . Is that supposed to be a window, or lines? [Referring to *Looking Back on the Other*, 1978]

DG:

No, I was making a field of lines very much related to the thickness or depth of the stretcher.

RCE:

Was Performance Art something you had interest in?

DG:

I would say that Performance Art was a very vital force. I would say that there were two trends in the art world: one was color field painting that came from what Greenburg had promoted, and the other was Conceptual Art, and I thought that Performance Art and Conceptual Art was a post-Greenburgian aesthetic. New Image Painting was another kind of post-Greenburgian aesthetic in painting, because Greenburg said you have to get rid of references to literatures, etc.

DG:

And the Performance artists got that content because they didn't work in traditional media. But I wanted that content in painting; it had to be outside that Greenburgian aesthetic — to have psychological content in the work.

RCE:

Did you take part in any Performance Art?

DG:

Yes, I did. Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer. But going back to Beuys for a minute . . . he was a powerful presence in the late '70s.

RCE:

When did he have that retrospective at the Guggenheim?

DG:

That was in '79, but before that he did all those performance pieces at René Block.

And everyone went to see those.

RCE:

Yes, and the chalkboard prices of his, and *I Like America and America Likes Me*.

DG:

And I think if you're a painter, and you're really trying to paint, and if you see his drawings . . . and his work was the only work with images.

RCE:

And what about Photo-Realism?

DG:

I just wasn't interested. I was more interested in Dorothea Rockburne and Mel Bochner —terribly arrogant people, but they were aiming to think through their work. And Photo-Realism and, to a certain extent, the Pattern and Decoration people . . . it's almost like you do that kind of painting if you want to relax, but in a certain way you've got to tangle with some tougher issues and throw it all up in the air and you don't even know what's going to come out. Also, the personalities . . . the artists were not engaging. I was engaged within a conversation with someone like Joel, who was a tormented kind of guy, but it wasn't only that.

RCE:

He has a wonderful mind, and a wonderful eye, and a wonderful knowledge of art history.

DG:

Exactly, and if you think the art world was smaller, it was driven then by the dialogue between artists . . . and we all ended up at the same after-hours joints, and you had conversations with Joel and Neil and some very, very bright people who had very interesting angles on art. But if you ran into the Photo-Realist, one of those people, there wasn't a lot to say.

RCE:

All technical stuff . . . about reflections?

DG:

And if they went out at night, they wanted to black out and get drunk. And it was much

more interesting to me to talk about issues of identity and figuring out. That's wonderful that you get this and are doing this research.

RCE:

Who else was doing imagery that interested you besides Beuys. Alex Katz, for example?

DG:

No, no, Ralph Humphrey and de Kooning spoke on the Pompeii paintings at the Met. Susan Rothenberg connected to those. I connected to those, so that was something.

[Break]

RCE:

When did you do your first painting? When did you start painting?

DG:

1972.

RCE

And were images in there in the beginning?

DG:

The first paintings I did looked like Mondrian's trees. So they were fractured. So there was always a reference to an image but also a desire to be very abstract.

RCE:

It seems in the '70s there was a strong interest in figure/ground relationships, but it was usually discussed in very dry, Formalist terms. It seems to me that many of the New Image painters are changing the figure/ground relationship into something not so formal.

DG:

You know, I did those tree studies when I was in Paris. And then I came to New York, and I did graduate work with Rothko and Motherwell and all those people, and I remember walking through the streets of Manhattan and feeling that I was an outsider. In a sense, seeing those buildings and those walls and feeling, you know, so there was a psychological [state] at one point. And then I did for one year — I mean I went through Hunter, Robert Morris, and all those Conceptual artists who said you couldn't use images — and when I started paintings, I was doing studies of buildings, for one year. And it was very much trying to convey this psychological thing: not really belonging here. And I was then engaged in the dialogue with Neil and Joel, and I very much want to get this meaningful image, so I focused in on a window. It was that window painting . . . and it focused in. So I isolated the window and it was in a field, and so it was no longer so much about this psychological state of being an outsider; it

was trying to bring the image and the idea of a meaningful image to another level . . .
but it had been triggered by some psychological state.

RCE:

Is that still available, that little painting? — that is interesting, very enlightening.

I MICHAEL HURSON: Interviewed by Rosemary Cohane Erpf on December 11, 2002

MH:

I first came to New York my second year I was at the Art Institute, and I sold a painting and I took the money and came to New York.

RCE:

What year was that?

MH:

'62 or '63. I stayed a week. Had a wonderful time. My father was very impressed with how much I did on the money I had. And then I came back here when I was in the Army. I was stationed in Maryland. I came up on the weekends. Then I moved here after the Army, for one year. Then moved back to Chicago, then moved back here in the '70s.

RCE:

When in the '70s?

MH:

I had a show at the MOMA and then I came here for good.

RCE:

How did the MOMA find out about your work; had you been exhibiting in Chicago?

MH:

Not that much. I did a series of rooms, miniature rooms, and it was successful, and it had been shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art and then shown here. And I came here.

RCE:

Were they sculptural?

MH:

Yes.

RCE:

A lot of artists in this NI [New Image] group were doing architectural images, walls, windows, buildings, interiors, etc. What made you do these rooms?

[Interruption]

Back to the rooms — looking at an installation shot of the rooms.

MH:

It was Thurman Buzzard's apartment. It was an imaginary apartment: the living room, you

could see into the bedroom, and from this part you could see into the dining room.

RCE:

Who was Thurman Buzzard?

MH:

Imaginary personage.

RCE:

I always associated Chicago in that time in the art scene with imagery. Was there any sense of that for you?

MH:

Well, there was an article that struck me as very telling about Chicago in *Esquire*, some time ago. It described the collection as a picture palace. Growing up in an environment, a place I went to school, so many extraordinary images that are figurative or realistic or representational.

RCE:

I guess I'm thinking of later people like Pachke and Jim Nutt.

MH:

Well, that comes out of that because it was an environment that was not akin to New York painting. I had seen the Ben Heller collection about mid-way in art school. and I was very struck by that quality of picture making.

RCE:

And who were some of those artists in that collection?

MH:

Well, Pollock, de Kooning. And some time after that I saw a Jasper Johns, one of the maps — without identifying too much with it, I knew I was looking at something remarkable. It was imagery, but it was painted, but it was not Abstract Expressionism. And I wouldn't say that I recognized what it was until some years later.

RCE:

Can you articulate what it was now?

MH:

More in the process of how the eyeglass paintings came to be. There is an enormous painting by Picasso, late Picasso, in the collection called *Nude Under A Pine*

Tree, and it's gigantic and it's a reclining nude woman figure.

RCE:

From the '50s.

MH:

Yes, I think, or later. And you could say it's very Johnsian. Johns had done a painting called *Image*, which has a notation, 'This should be 7 inches long.' This is one of my favorites. What I thought had happened is that he had indicated to his [printmaker doing the screen] to blow up the image to a certain size and they hadn't taken out the notation; I mean, I would apply this to the process. This is my guess; the influence a little bit of Warhol, maybe, and he attempted to do something along those lines. I would guess when the thing came back with the notation, 'This should be 7 inches long,' it would appeal to his sense of irony.

RCE:

And his sense of the accident.

MH:

Yes, I was struck by that as well. That painting came into the ? collection around late '60s, early '70s, and I was very struck by it. I kept looking at it, and the thing that struck me about it is that there he was very indifferent to how he painted it. There was no corollary between making a represented image and how he painted it; the chips fell as they may, very Johnsian. And I got this image for eyeglasses which I had drawn with charcoal, but I had them silk-screened.

RCE:

So, you drew them with charcoal and you had them silk-screened, okay.

MH:

And then I started to apply onto a canvas, the same thing, somewhat indifferently. The two things were simultaneous, the methods of Picasso, and I think it goes back to that original concept of looking at the Johns. And it took me a long time to figure out what's going on., the two didn't have to be cue

[Interruption]

RCE:

It's interesting in all the books about Contemporary Art, Johns and Rauschenberg are pinpointed as the precursors of Pop Art. It's that way in all the books; that's the way I even teach it. But it's interesting how important they really were to artists, conceptual and painters — to artists of the '70s and even '80s.

MH:

Oh, sure.

RCE:

In a sense even more resonant.

MH:

When I saw his retrospective, the recent one, I was struck by how, going through it, he would educate us. I went through that show as a step-by-step procedure on how much he taught you about perceiving or looking, and I was fascinated when he made that turn around in the '80s towards very personal subject matter like the [inaudible].

RCE:

When you started using the eyeglass imagery you were in Chicago?

MH:

I had an early period, and then I had an after-Army period, and by the time I had the show at the Modern I did the rooms -----when I came back from the Army, I couldn't get anybody to show my work. And there was this kind of tension because my picture making part of my left-----

Paula Cooper was the first dealer who really kiked them and never really gave me a show of them, but sold them in the back room

RCE:

So, what year was that?

MH:

The early '70s, after the . . . rooms.

RCE:

The eyeglass and the figure seemed to be used together, and one becomes the other.

MH:

From the waist down. Do you know the dealer, Donald Droll?

RCE:

Yes.

MH:

He once remarked that I got away with murder in those pictures . . . what I could depict. I thought they were highly personal without going into anything personal.

RCE:

So the personal part of it was hidden to the audience. So did you know it was personal when you did them?

MH:

No, I had never a clue.

RCE:

And how did you first come to the eyeglass?

MH:

I say that in the New Image Catalogue. I say *that* because I try to remember what I said. It's an image I had done in a jokebook for a friend. I was faced with trying to start working again. I rented a studio and wasn't particularly inspired to work, and that image came up again and I decided to use it as a device.

RCE:

As a device for what?

MH:

To do something.

RCE:

So it seems you had personal meanings after you started the working with that image.

MH:

I realized that they are of a very personal nature that I was reluctant to speak of. Because that would give them too much . . . I dislike when artists try to explain their work that's not in the picture at all. The explanation's far more interesting than the picture. The eyeglasses are kind of literal. They are what they are. They're little eyeglass dancing figures, and they move around and they seem human-like, but they're abstract.

RCE:

In the mid-'70s, did you live downtown?

MH:

Yes.

RCE:

Did you socialize with other artists? Was there a sense of community then?

MH:

There was a remarkable sense of community then. I had an apartment on West 10th Street. I was very lucky. I came to New York. I found a wonderful little apartment, small but nice. That wasn't particularly my period of struggle.

RCE:

What was your period of struggle?

MH:

Now. [Laughter] It's reversed. I watched the world that I live in dismantle itself.

RCE:

So how did Richard Marshall come to you about the New Image show? Did he come to your studio?

MH:

He had seen three of my works in a group show.

RCE:

Do you see New Image Painting as a movement?

MH:

No, it was a show.

RCE:

Well, do you think there's a shared aesthetic among a good portion of the artists in that exhibition?

MH:

No. I think to be born in 1941 is a movement. When you think about artists that were born around that period, I think that's a movement. Still working, that's a movement, but it's not a defined movement.

[Later]

RCE:

When did you become aware of Minimalism?

MH:

After the Army.

RCE:

Late 1960s and early 1970s?

MH:

Yes. I was always fascinated by Stella's pictures.

RCE:

The pin stripe ones?

MH:

Yes, but then again, I didn't make abstract works. But then they weren't abstract; they were literal. That was the whole point. Michael Fried wrote that essay.

RCE:

So the Stella paintings, you felt, were literal, but where did they leave you emotionally? Were they not emotional in content for you, or were they?

MH:

I thought they were dazzling. And then many years later I got that catalogue and saw those black paintings. And I saw all the things the curator said about, where the titles came from and what they meant. Then you saw this Americanism contained in the biography of the paintings and what they meant. They speak for the artists. I didn't

understand too much about the Richter paintings. Then I went back and took the tape tour — and heard all the things that Robert Storr said. And then I got this confusing idea that the paintings exist as a device for text. And that's interesting, because the third time I went to see the show I had all these ideas behind the paintings and the pictures themselves.

[A discussion of Richter]

Interview with curator, Richard Marshall, on 12/20/02

RCE:

What made you start to think about an exhibition of this sort?

RM:

It was. Well I arrived in New York in 71 – 72. So all during the 70s, I was looking at the art that was out there and I remember it was really dominated by Minimalism. I remember seeing and loving Mangold's painting and Sol Lewitt. And so from the looking, these certain painters who catch my attention because these certain painters were not

RCE:

Because they weren't doing it

RM:

They were doing abstraction but they were putting images in it and it was kind of like, I don't know if I thought this at the time, it was kind of like what Rauschenberg and Johns were doing with Abstract Expressionism, they weren't giving up gesture but they were incorporating it. So it a transition and I thought it was worth exploring in an exhibition. It was there.

RCE:

Did you think you would start a movement?

RM:

No, No

RCE:

Did you think it was like little tendencies here and there that you were going to draw together?

RM:

I didn't see it as a movement. I saw it as something that seemed to be emerging. It was more than just coincidental or sporadic, I thought. A number of artists were doing this. And they weren't necessarily young kids.

RCE:

Many had been to graduate school.

RM:

Because the really young age was the Basquiat generation, chronologically.

RCE:

Because you know, the name has struck.

RM:

Yes, that surprised me. I didn't know what to call it for the longest time until there was a catalogue deadline.

RCE:

Then the truth comes out.

RM:

Well the word was image. I just didn't know how to make it into a title.

RCE:

Did you ever perceive the exhibition as painting and sculpture? Joel Shapiro comes to mind and Brian Hunt. Do you ever think of sculpture and painting?

RM:

No it was always painting.

RCE:

But the sculptors you mentioned, I saw them as three-dimensional aspect of the same thing.

RM:

Were there artists within the group who seemed like the forerunners, such as Jenney and Moskowitz whose work are the earliest?

RM:

Well those two and of course Joe Zucker had been working in that idiom but he always seemed kind of freakish and weird, not just the cotton ball paintings but the choice of subject matter so I did see him as a forerunner and I thought it would help putting him in the context of these other artists. so he didn't seem so totally idolated.

RCE:

Do you think within the group, you know when it was reviewed by Roberta Smith, she subdivided the group? She saw certain artists in different categories. In here configuration, David True was the odd man out, which I thought was interesting. Do you remember that?

RM:

No that you mention it, I do.

Break

RCE:

Well Bartlett and Zucker were more involved with systems.

RM:

That's true and they stuck with it. They're always painting in this – intellectual

RCE:

More conceptual

RM:

And Dennis Green and Lois Lane kind of more iconic, emblematic, symbols rather than images almost. And I saw the Rothenberg painting of a frontal horse and it looked strong.

RCE:

What was perception of the genre of painting during that period? Did you see it as a dying genre – that dialogue.

RM:

I remember that dialogue and the great emphasis – the intellectual thrust away from the act of painting on canvas but I personally had always been drawn to painting. I don't know if "I as this as resurrection. I didn't agree that painting was dead.

RCE:

It was interesting how many of the artists did feel that the imagery really was verboten in a sense, they knew it was out of the link, but they didn't care. Were there any artists that you felt were important for sources for this kind of work, like Guston comes up in your essay.

RM:

It was hard for me at the time to come up with any kind of historical precedents

and Guston was more current or visible. In retrospect, it's easier to find.

RCE:

For some but not for all. Guston was important for Rothenberg but Zucker could have cared less.

RM:

I suppose not.

RCE:

To your credit, you managed to put together an interesting group of artists, though all different. No two line up exactly alike. As artists, they are really individuals.

RM:

Quite different. And I realized that at the time but I wanted to keep it open, not trying to put too many boundaries. And I remember being introduced to Donald Sultan's work at the time which I also thought was really very intriguing and liked a lot, but it was too late to put him in the exhibition. And I knew Julian Schnabel (we came to NY at the same time) and I was watching his work but it somehow didn't seem to fit to me then. It does now but it was also .I saw that was the next wave.

RCE:

That brings me to the next question. Thinking about the New Image painters and

there relationship to Neo-expressionism. I'm curious to know if you think that Neo-Expressionism is a contrivance – the term or does it really represent a return to painterly

RM:

I don't see Neo-expressionism as such a separate entity as New Image or Neo-Pop. They all kind of seem to make sense. But I think the so-called New York Neo-Expressionism – the influences were coming from somewhere else – more European. The New Image seems much more American based.

RCE:

There are a couple of things in the literature about the American thing.

RM:

I think that these New Image people were giving the authority for not even the next generation, but the next group of artists - – ok – we can go ahead, we can really give up the conceptual, Minimalist restraints. Because Bartlett still is part of that, like Chick Close but David Salle is he conceptual based?

RCE:

Well, I see the linkage there seems to be accepted for maybe Africano, more about setting up narrative scenes that have a lot of implications. For many of the artists it was association.

RM:

And differently not appropriation. These are not appropriated as you were saying they were personal or mental – not appropriated

RCE:

It seems that this group was not really connected to another 70s movement, if you want to call it that, Photo-Realism—in fact many of them, that I spoke to, dislike Photo-Realism and many of them say that their work has nothing to do with it. They were coming from a different place.

RM:

Yes

RCE:

Where do you see Photo-Realism in the 70s.

RM:

It was an offshoot of Pop. I don't see it related to what we are talking about.

RCE:

Either do I or do the artists. It's interesting how they all sort of sidestepped it.

What so you think about the tendency in many of the New Image Artists to make the paintings look very crude, cleverly crude. Even Rothenberg, I remember her

saying that she wanted to paint a line, feign a line, in a sense that looked badly drawn
Like on writer said of Jenney, he had to work very hard to make those paintings so
bad.

RM:

Yes, because they were beautiful painting.

RCE:

Where do you think that came?

RM:

Well, Rothenberg, she's a painter, she was searching for a subject. And she came
upon the horse but she was still very much involved with the gesture, the stroke. They
are very abstract paintings that have an image.

RCE:

Did you see performance art of the late 60s and 70s as having an influence?

RM:

I don't know that I thought of it but now, I recall Trisha Brown and the dance
movements were drawn from ordinary movements from the street and turned them into
a kind a abstract dance.

RCE:

There are some interesting connections.

RM:

And there were paintings like Robert Krushner whose work I admired

RCE:

He was on the original list for the exhibition. Did you see Pattern and Decoration as a separate entity?

RM:

No, Kushner, at the time, was using unstretched and shaped canvases and I think that might have wanted to keep it the stretched canvas rather than opening another aspect. I think that could have been the reason. But also, in the late 70s, I can't remember their exhibition history.

RCE:

She was with Holly down there in Soho. I think that would have been the late 70s.

RM:

(Looks it up in catalogue). Yes, 76

RCE:

But you didn't think of it as a separate thing.

RM:

No, I was sorry it was being promoted that way. It makes sense to talk about it that way to sell it but I think it worked to their detriment—whereas New Image Painting was less specific. I don't think it worked against those people. Where, Pattern and Decoration artists were pigeonholed there. I think for example, Kushner is a terrific painter. But I don't think he has ever broken out of that.

RCE:

Well, I think we're done. I thank you. I just wanted to get it from you – your perceptions. I didn't think you thought of it as a movement but I want to see.

RM:

Well, it's funny I had lunch with Alan Heiss last week and she was at the opening and I remember her saying, this is something, you've really hit something and people are going to talk about it in the future. And I thought that's a nice compliment and she kind of was right.

RCE:

Were you surprised afterwards? It is in every text about the exhibition.

RM:

I didn't expect that.

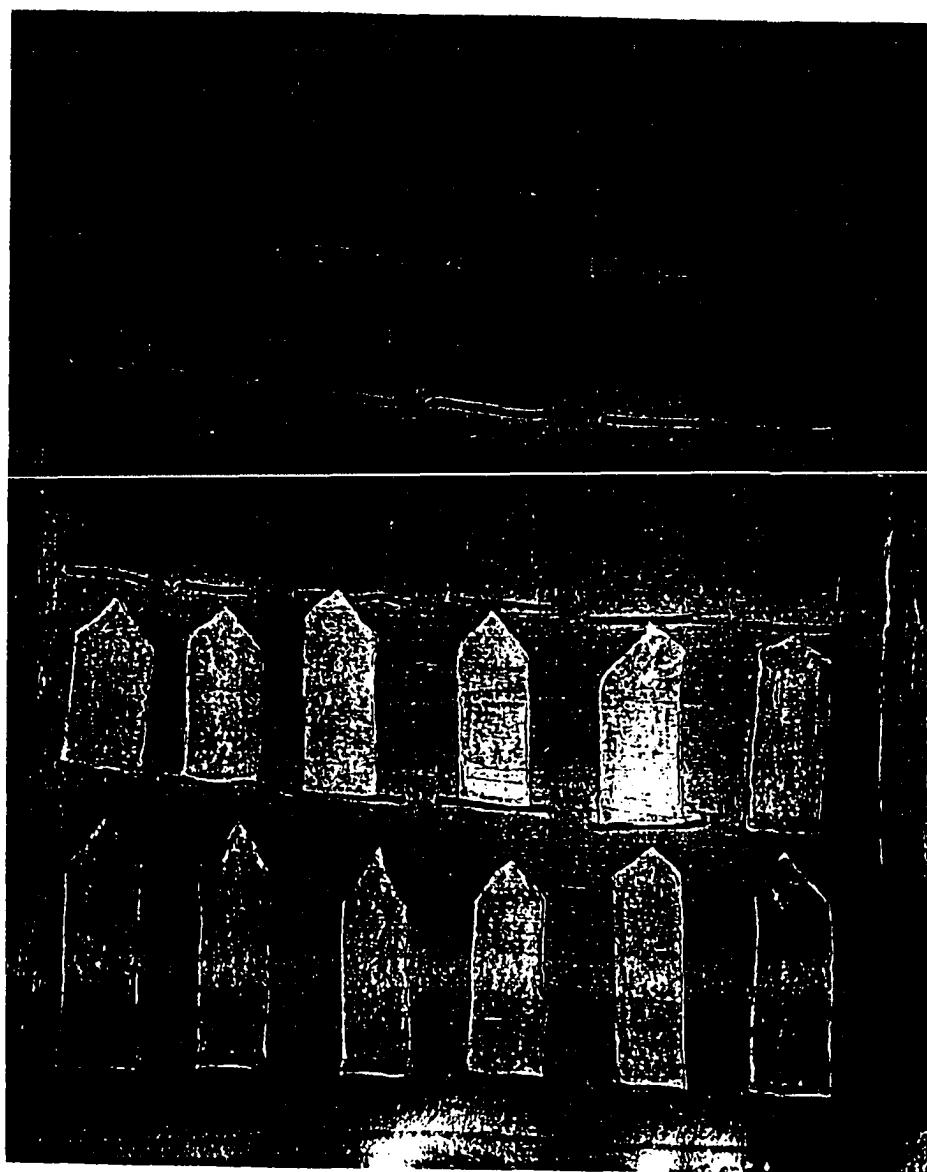


Fig. 1/1

Mary Heilman
The Closet 1971
Acrylic and cloth on canvas
74 x 60"



Fig. 1/2

Richard Serra
Splashing 1968
Molten lead

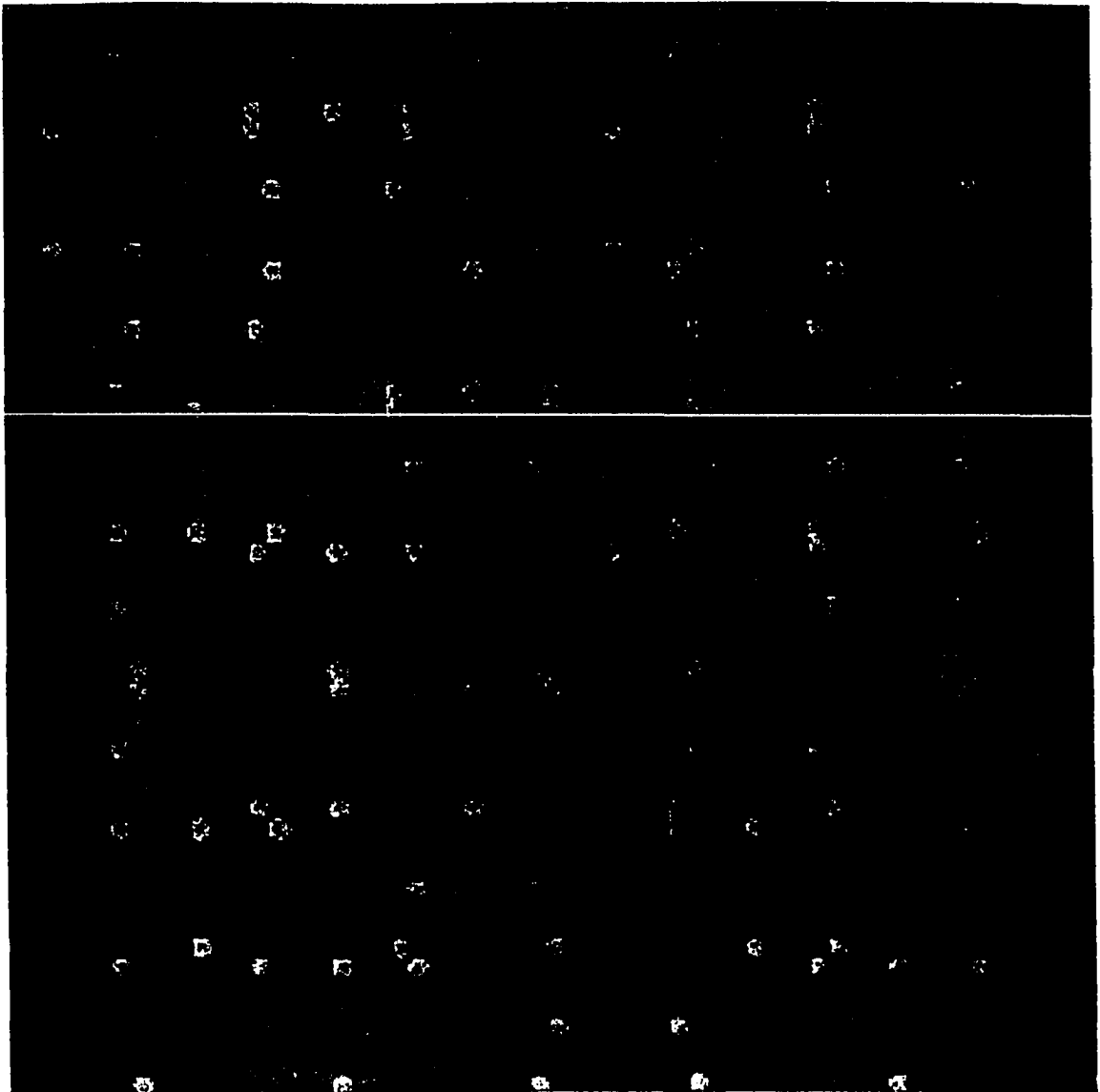


Fig. 1/3

Larry Poons
Orange Crush 1963
Oil on canvas

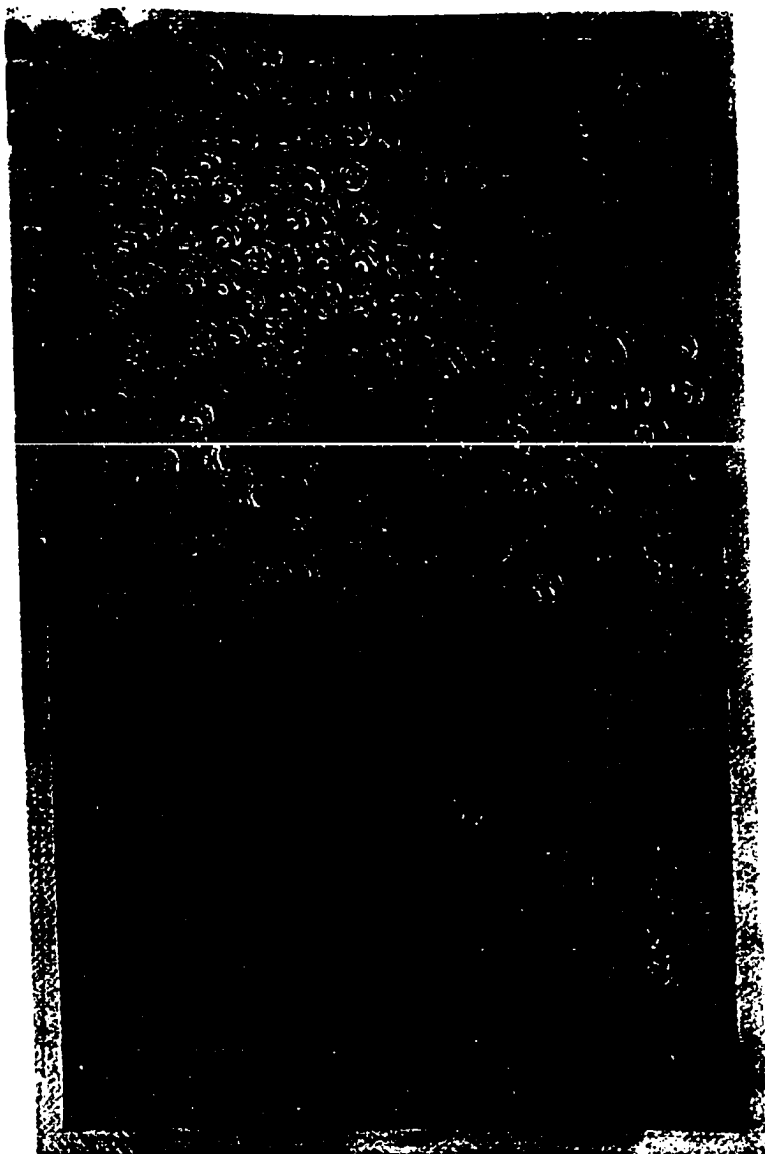


Fig. 1/4

Susan Rothenberg

Rubber Balls 1967-68

Aluminum and oil-based house paint on canvas
8 x 5'

298



Fig. 1/5

Susan Rothenberg
Screen Door 1967-68
Mixed mediums, including collaged air-conditioner
filter
72x60

299

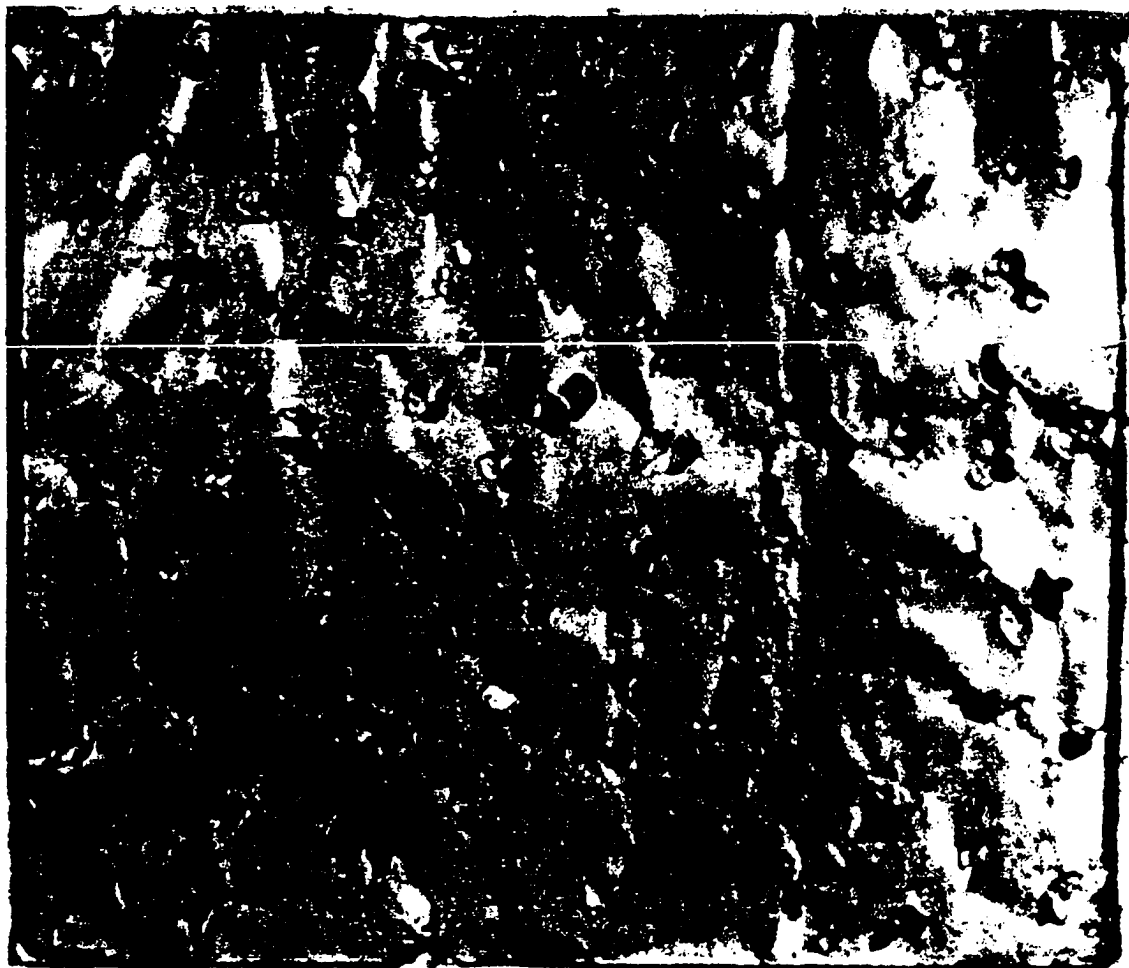


Fig. 1/6

Susan Rothenberg

(W)Holes and Parts 1971

Paper, glue, and aluminum paint
48 x 54"

300

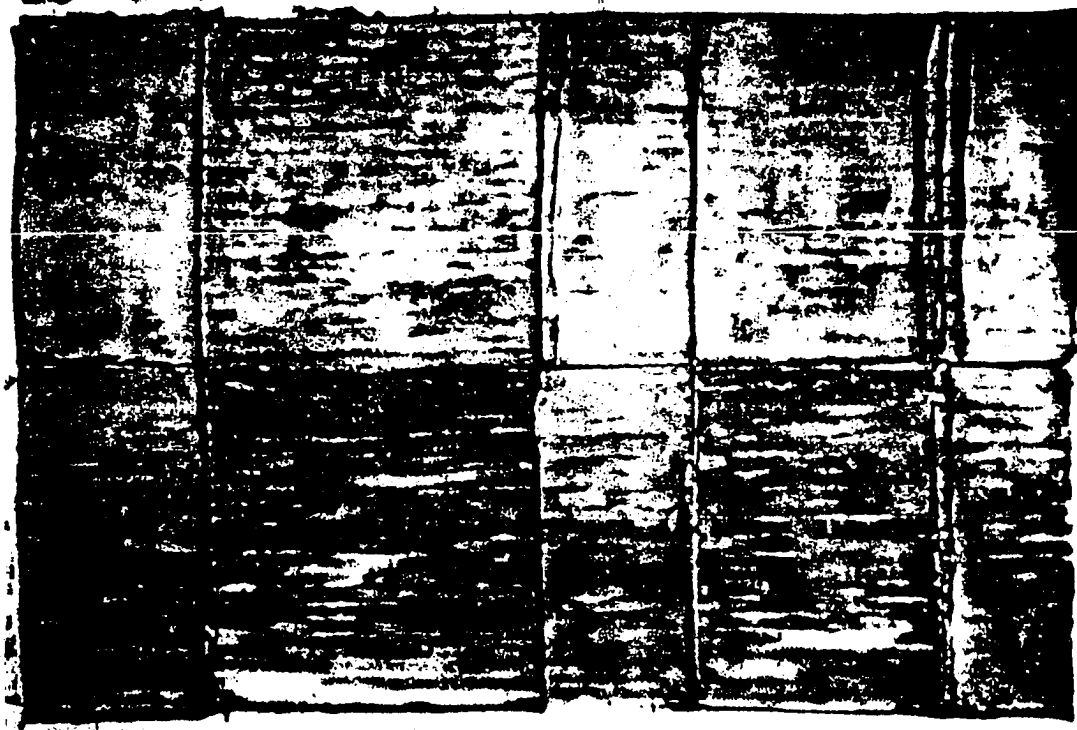


Fig. 1/7

Susan Rothenberg

Multiple Splice 1972

Woven canvas, laths, aluminum paint, and graphite
48 x 72"

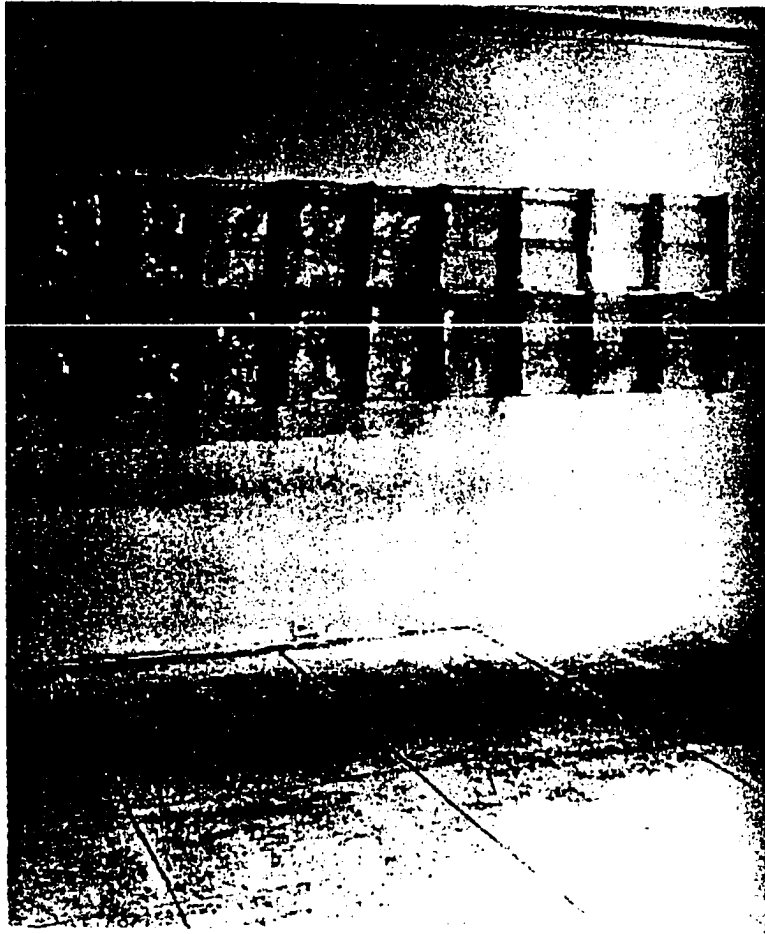


Fig. 1/8

Eva Hesse

Sans II 1968

Fiberglass

3'2-11x21'6x6 1/8 -5 units, each 38x86 1/8

302

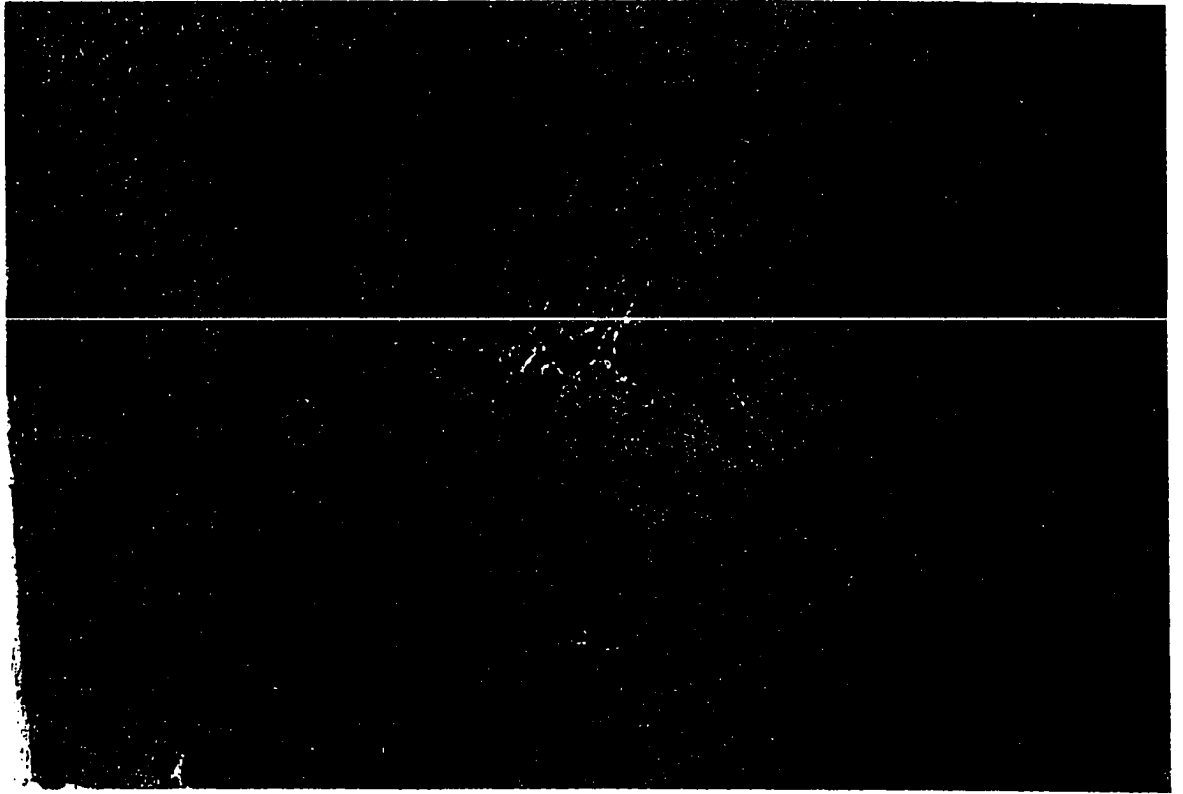


Fig. 1/9

Susan Rothenberg
Foxes on a Hill 1972
Acrylic on Canvas
53 x 77 1/2"

303

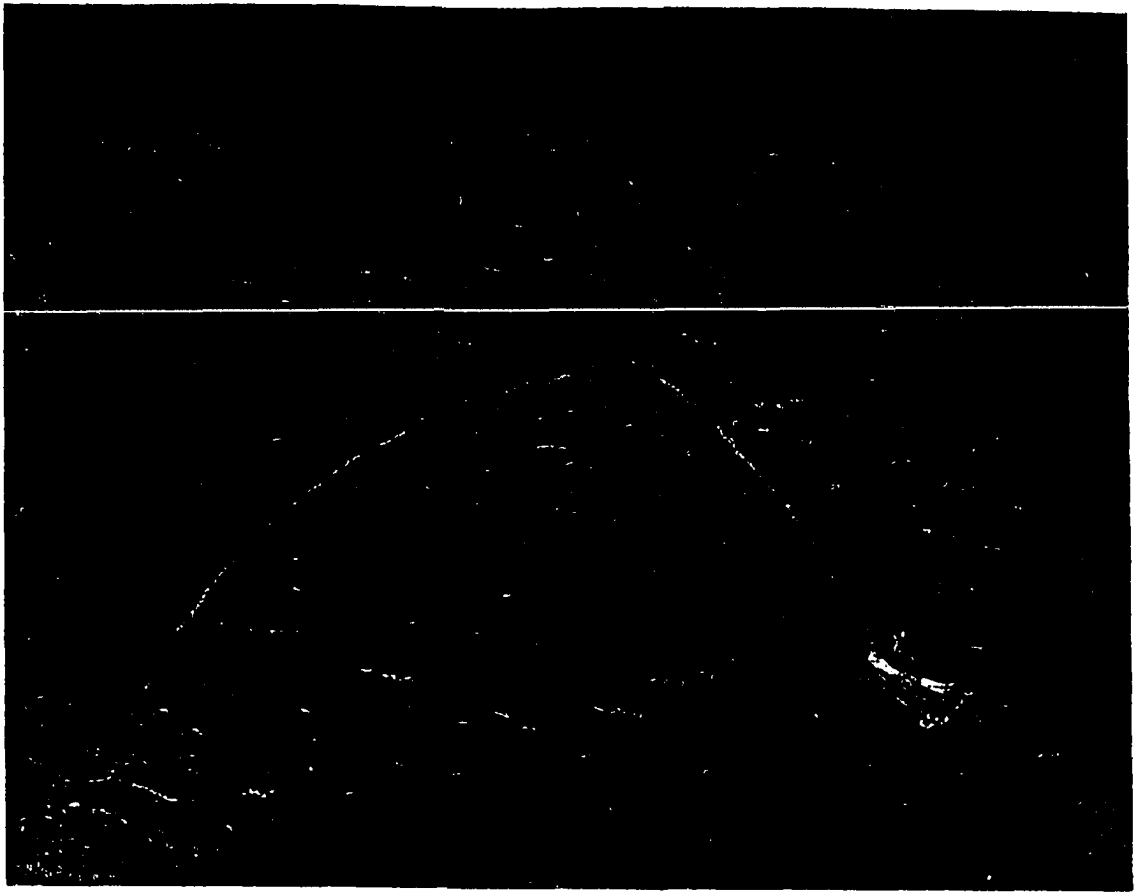


Fig. 1/10

Milton Avery
Speedboat's wake 1959
Oil on Canvas
54 x 72"



Fig. 1/11

Susan Rothenberg

First Horse 1974

Tempera, mate, flashe, pencil and
gesso on unstretched canvas
26" x 28"

305

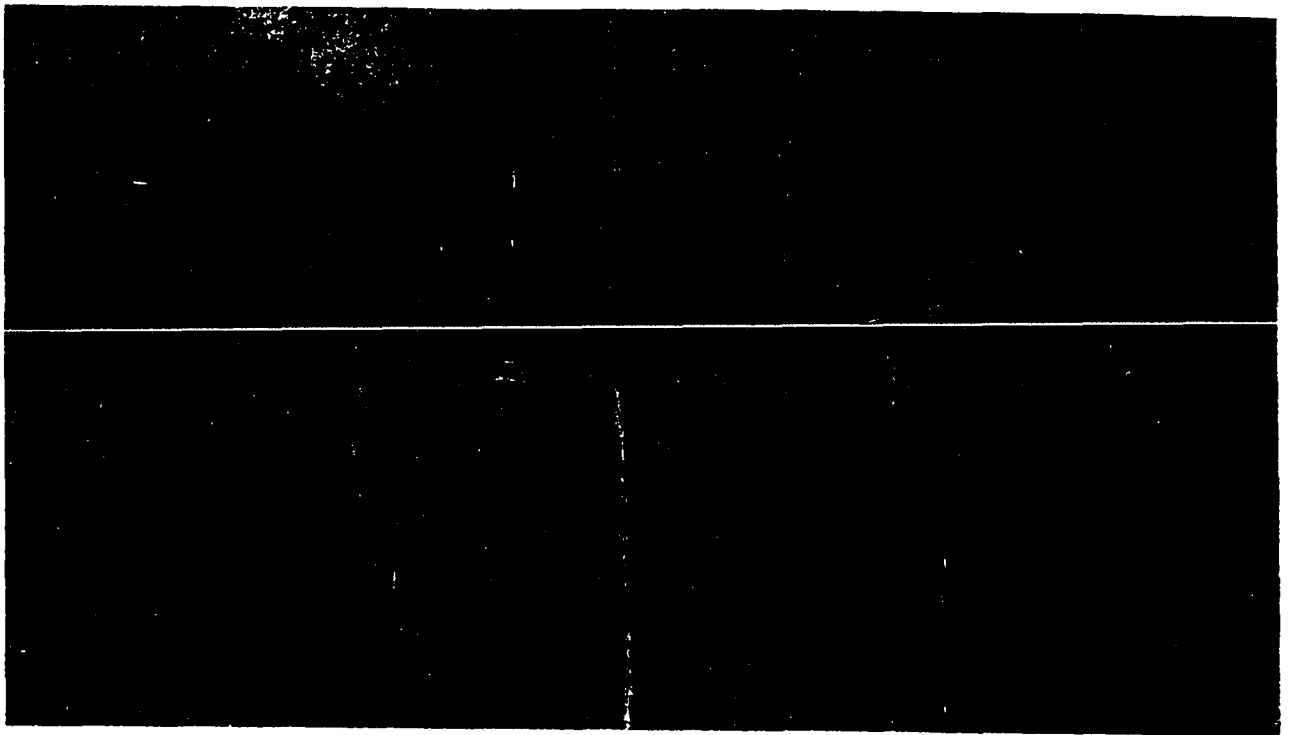


Fig. 1/12

Susan Rothenberg
Triphammer Bridge 1974
Acrylic on canvas
5'7 x 9'7"

306

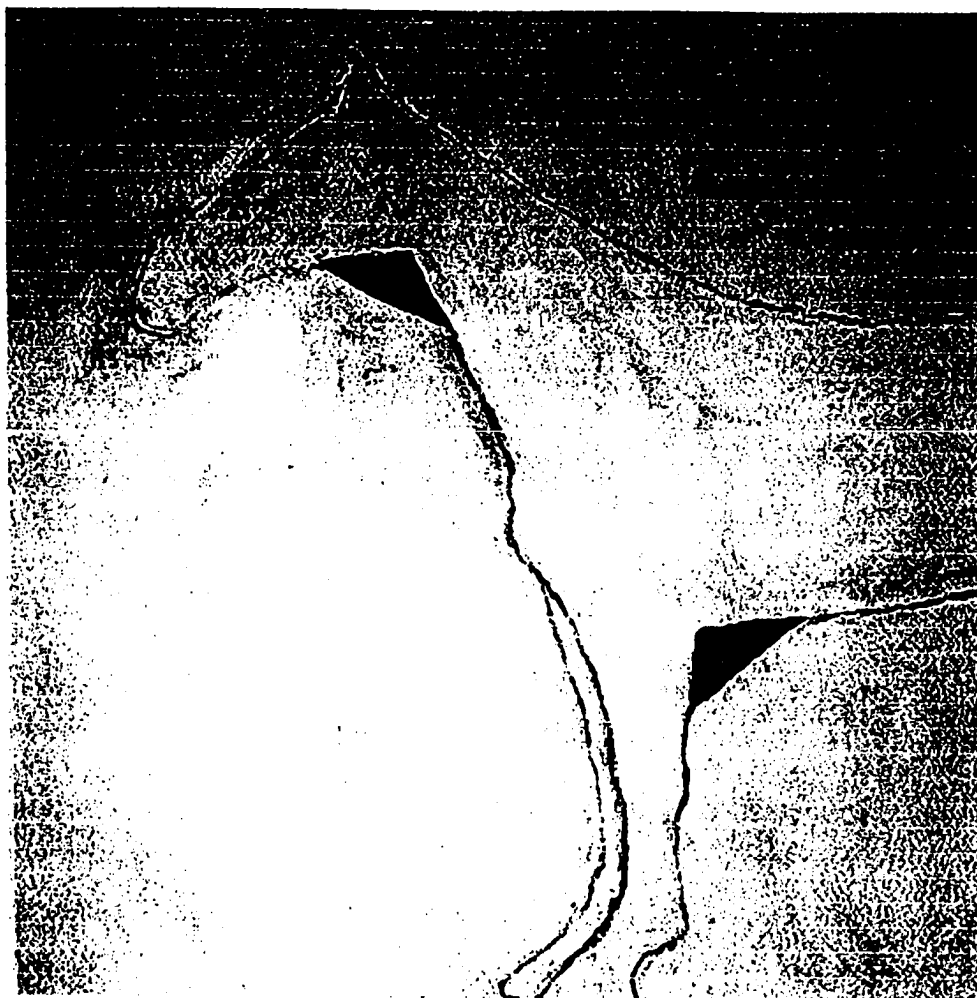


Fig. 1/13

Susan Rothenberg
Algarve 1975
Acrylic on canvas
9'6" x 9'3"

307

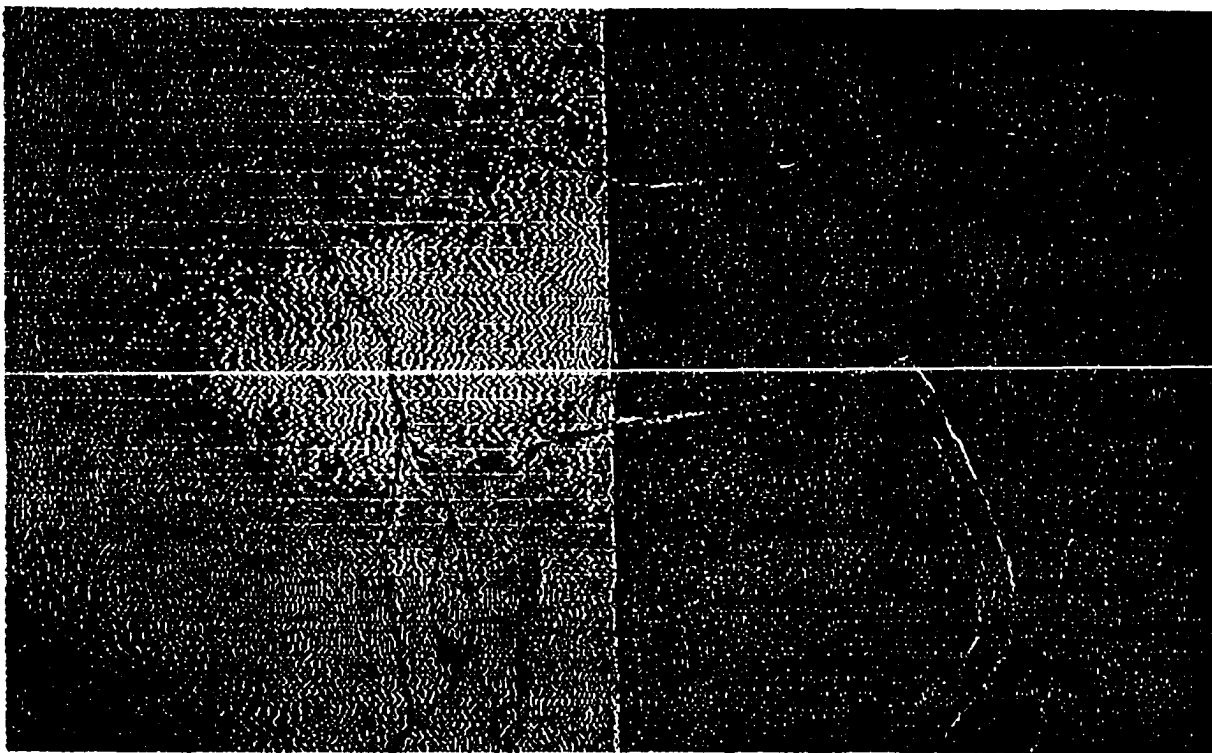


Fig. 1/14

Susan Rothenberg
United States 1975
Acrylic on canvas
9'6" x 15'9"

308

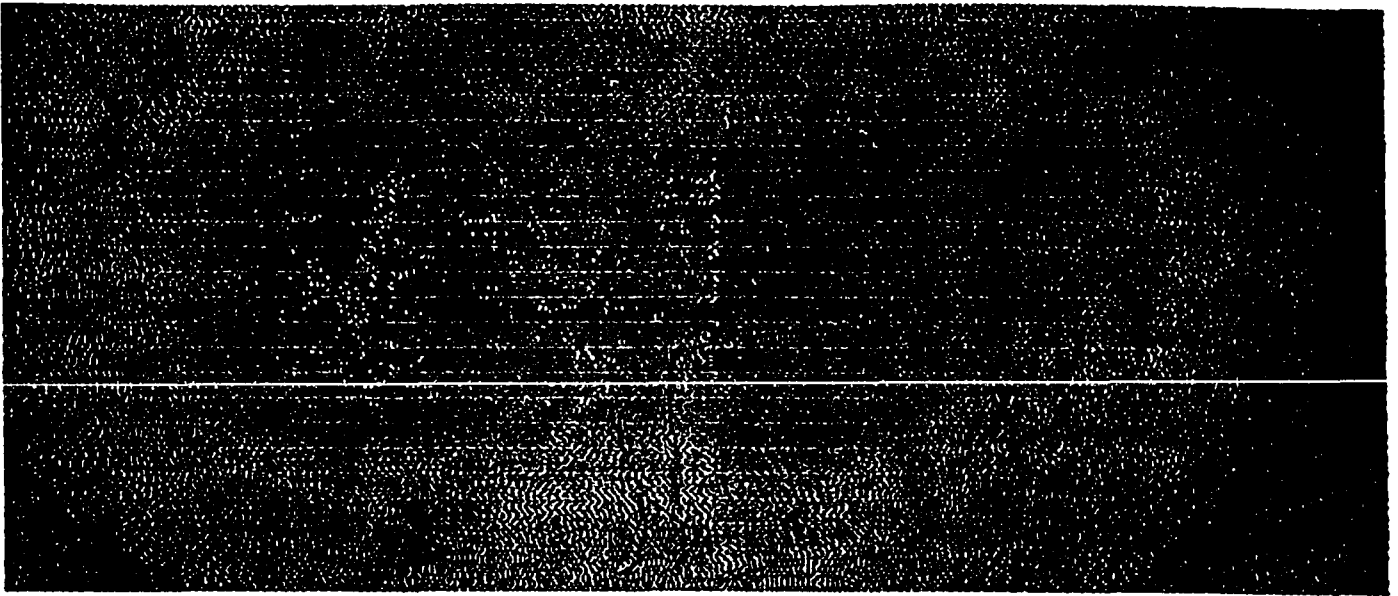


Fig. 1/15

Susan Rothenberg
Siena Dos Equis 1975
Acrylic on canvas
9'6" x 22'10"

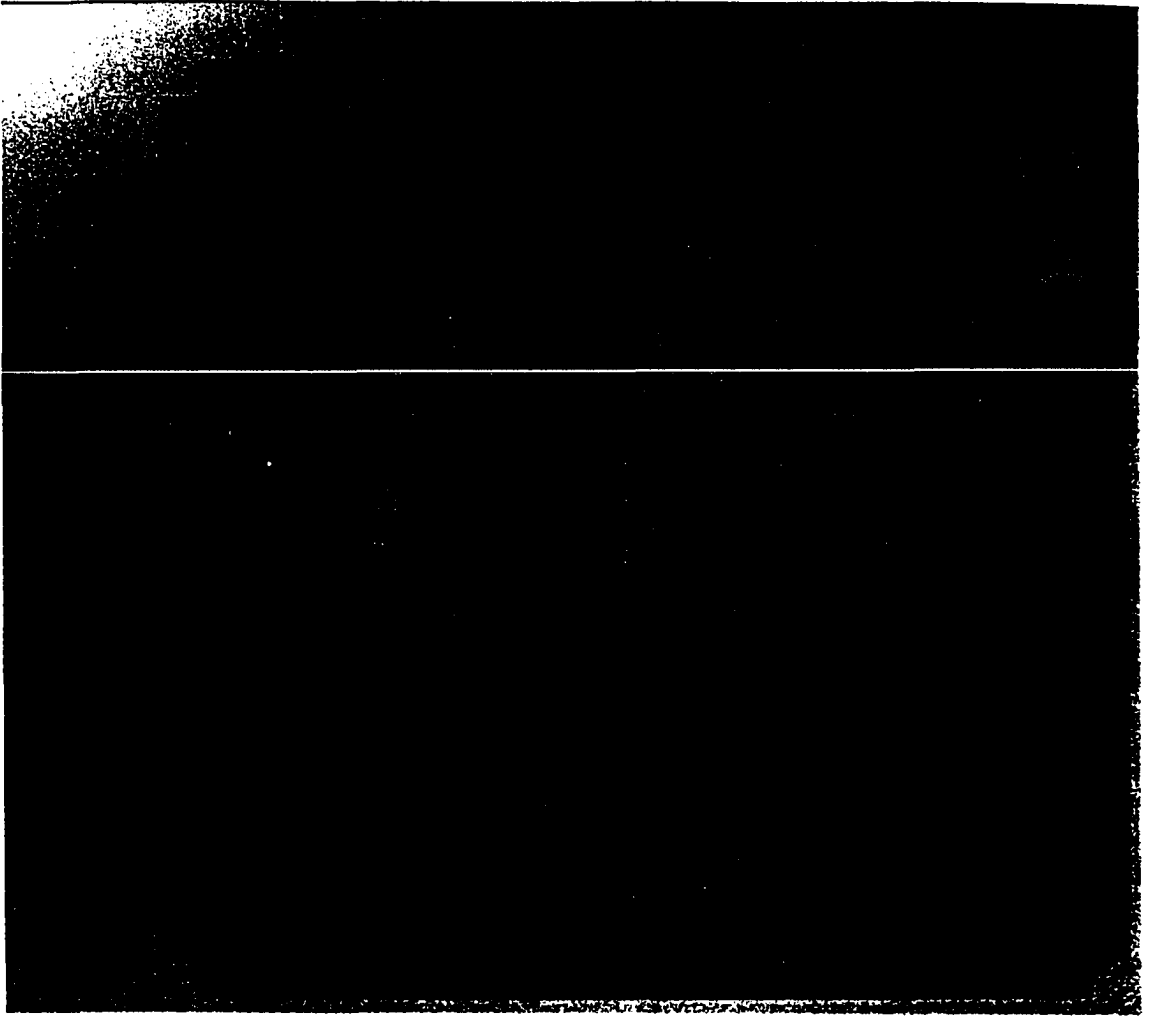


Fig. 1/16

Frank Stella

Avicenna 1960

Aluminum paint on canvas

6 x 6'

310



Fig. 1/17

Susan Rothenberg
Two-Tone 1975
Acrylic on canvas
69 x 113"

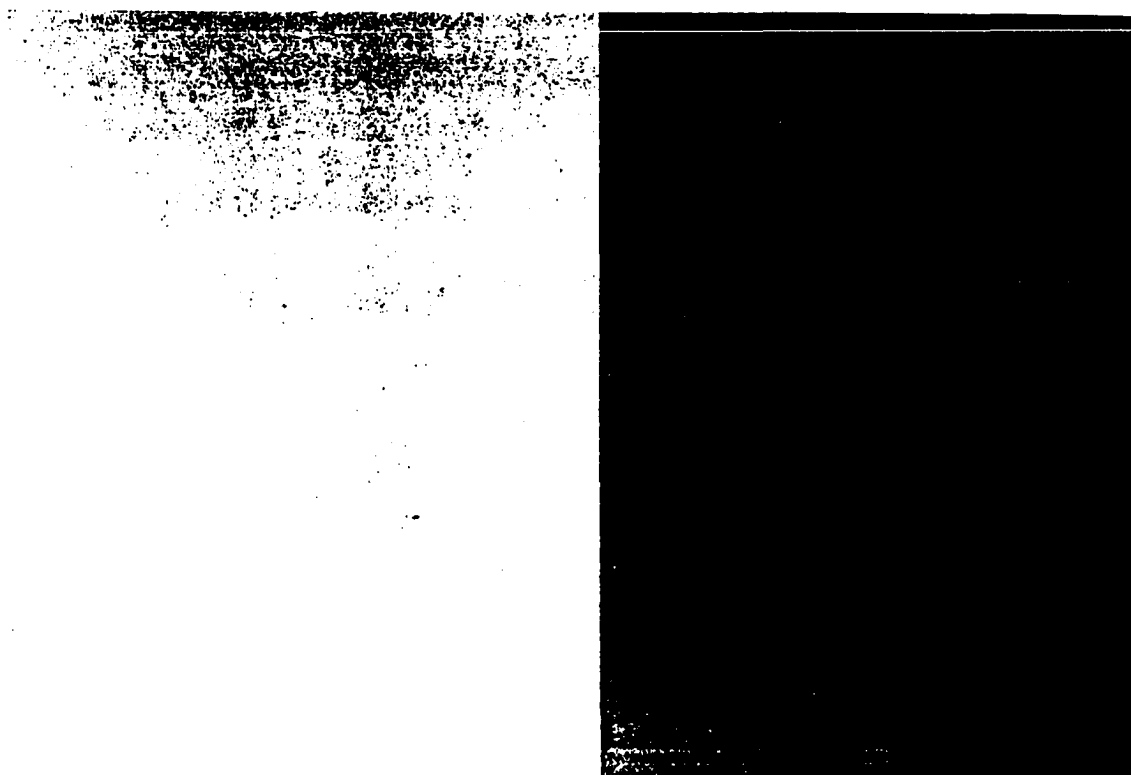


Fig. 1/18

Brice Marden
Grove Group II 1972-3
Oil and encaustic on canvas
Dyptych

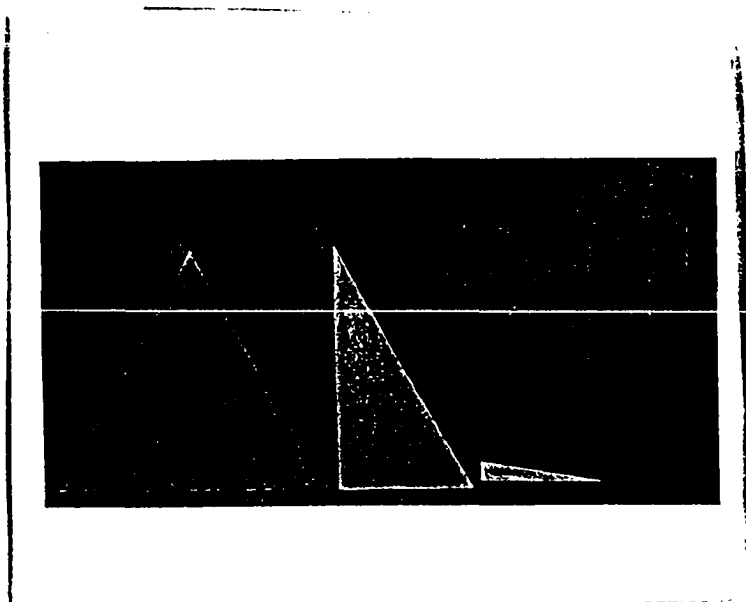


Fig. 1/19

Frances Barth
Untitled, Blue 1973
Oil on canvas
60 1/2 x 121 3/4"

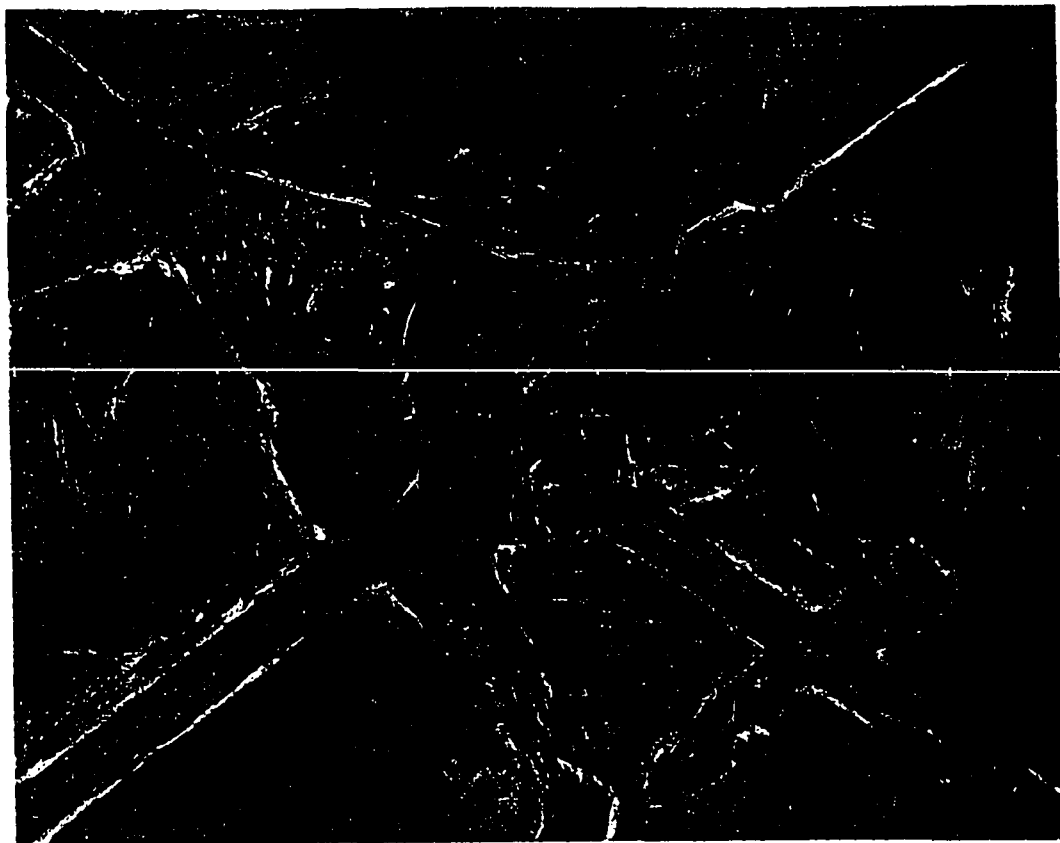


Fig. 1/20

Susan Rothenberg
Butterfly 1976
Acrylic and matte medium
on canvas
69 1/2 x 83"

314

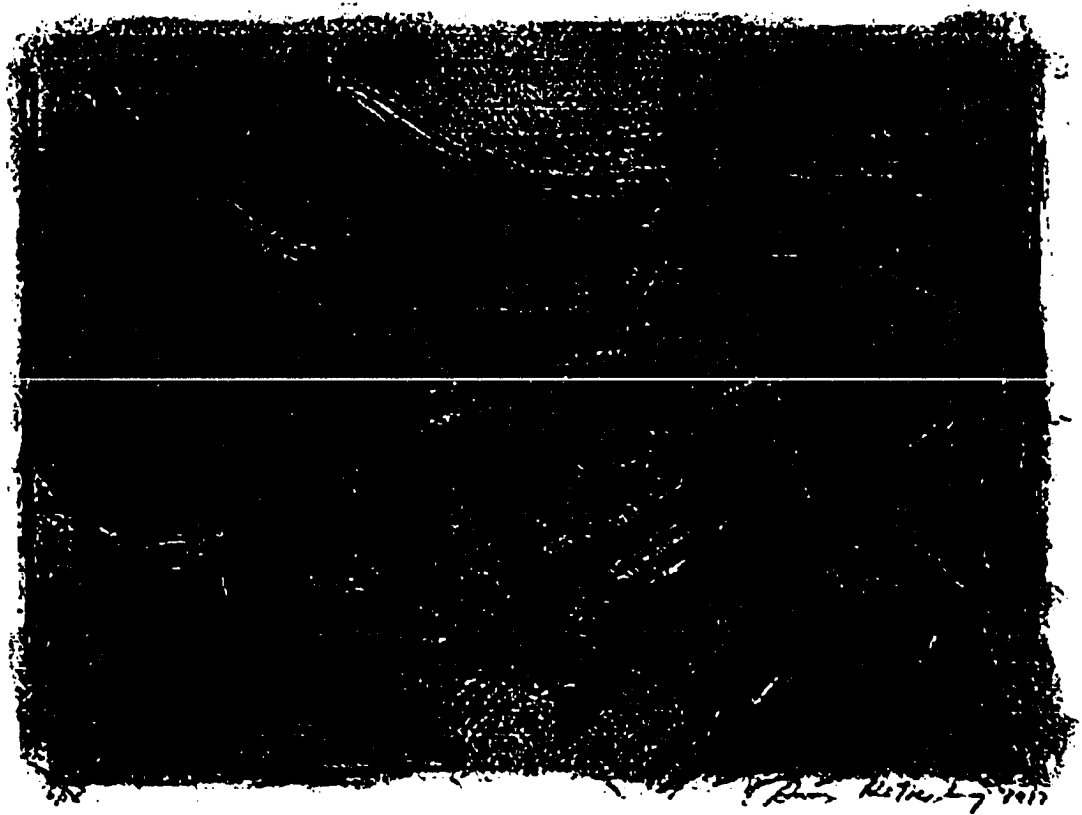


Fig. 1/21

Susan Rothenberg

Untitled 1977

Oil crayon and lithograph on paper

12 x 15 1/2"

315



Fig. 1/22

Susan Rothenberg
Untitled 1975
Graphite on tracing paper
24 x 27 1/2"

316

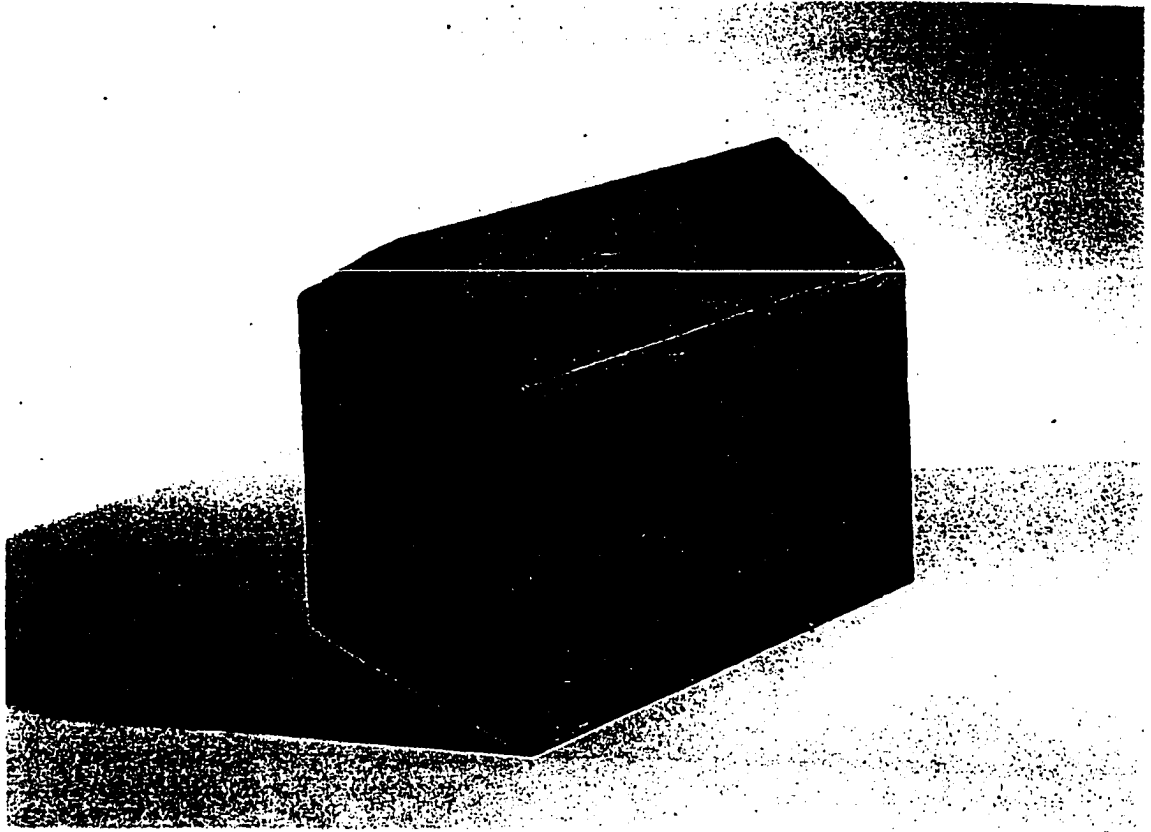


Fig. 1/23

Joel Shapiro

Untitled (From Small Series) 1974

Cast Bronze

5" x 4 1/8" x 6 1/8"

317

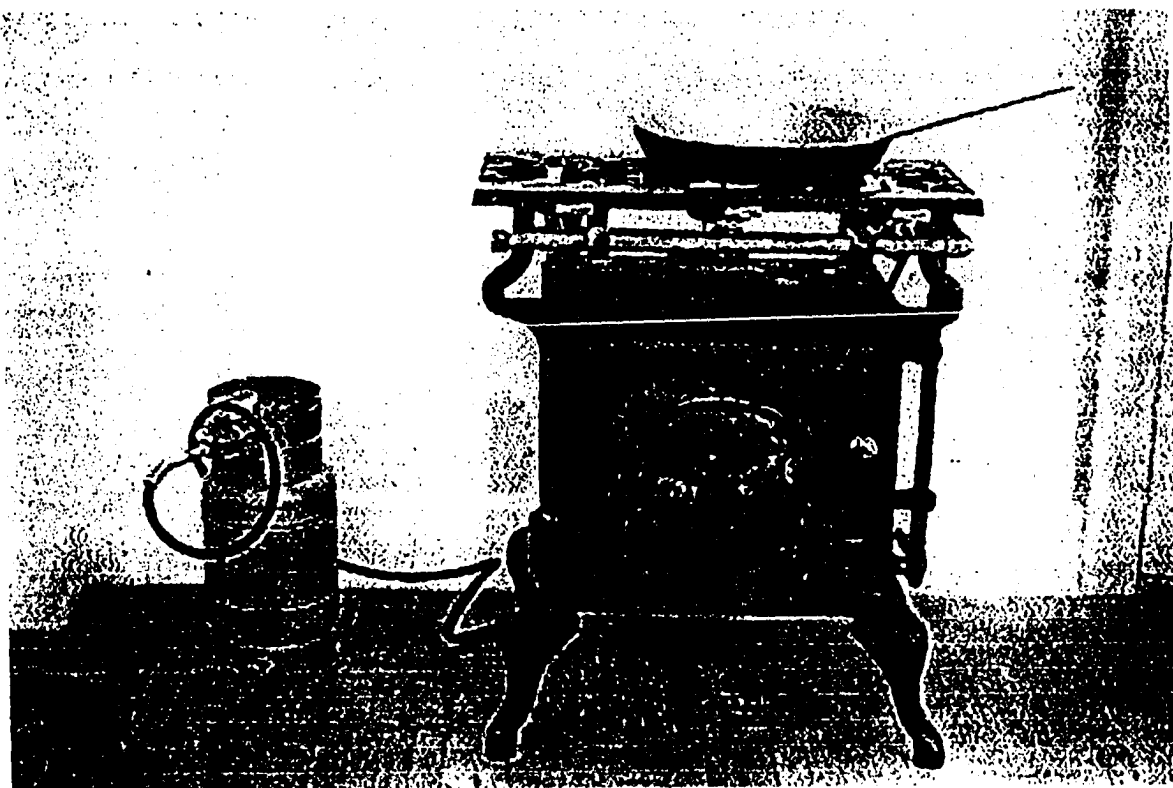


Fig. 1/24

Gordon Matta-Clark
Photo-Fry 1969
Mixed media
variable

318

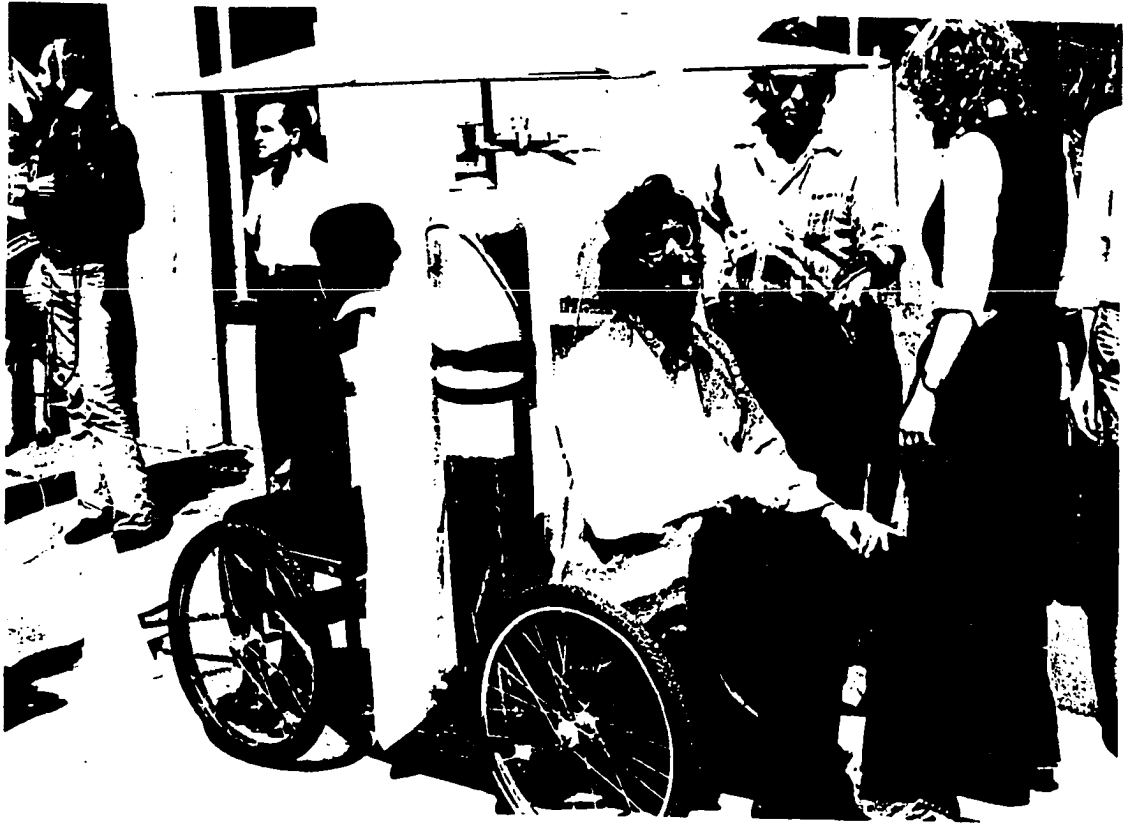


Fig. 1/25

Gordon Matta-Clark
Fresh Air Cart 1972
Steel cart with nylon canopy,
2 seats, and oxygen tank
175.3x165.1x85.1 cm

319



Fig. 1/26

Gordon Matta-Clark
Freshkill 1972
Documentary film

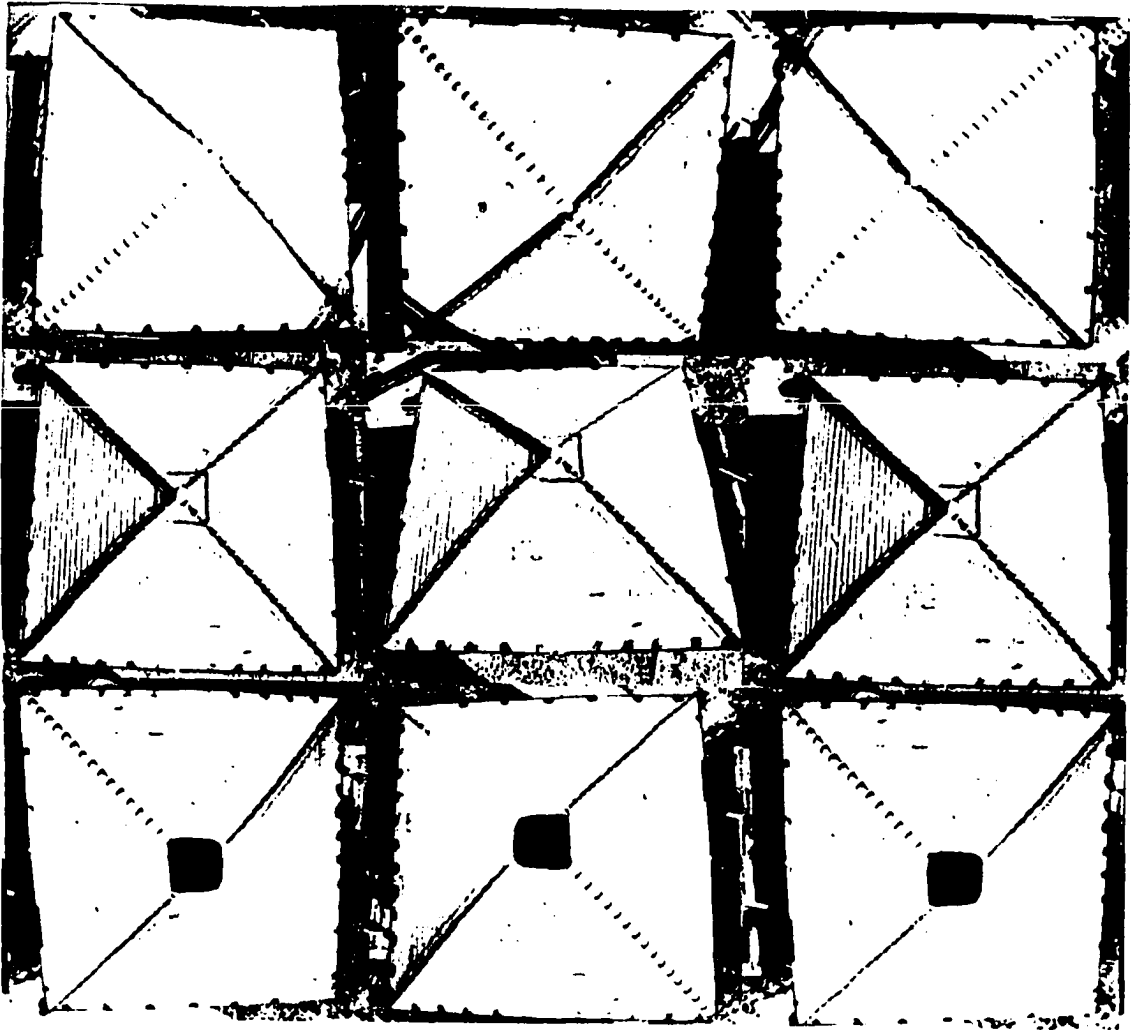


Fig. 1/27

Gordon Matta-Clark

A W-Hole House: Roof Top Atrium 1973

Black and white photograph

69x78cm

321



Fig. 1/28

Gordon Matta-Clark
Splitting: Four Corners 1974
Two cibachromes
70 x 100 cm each

322

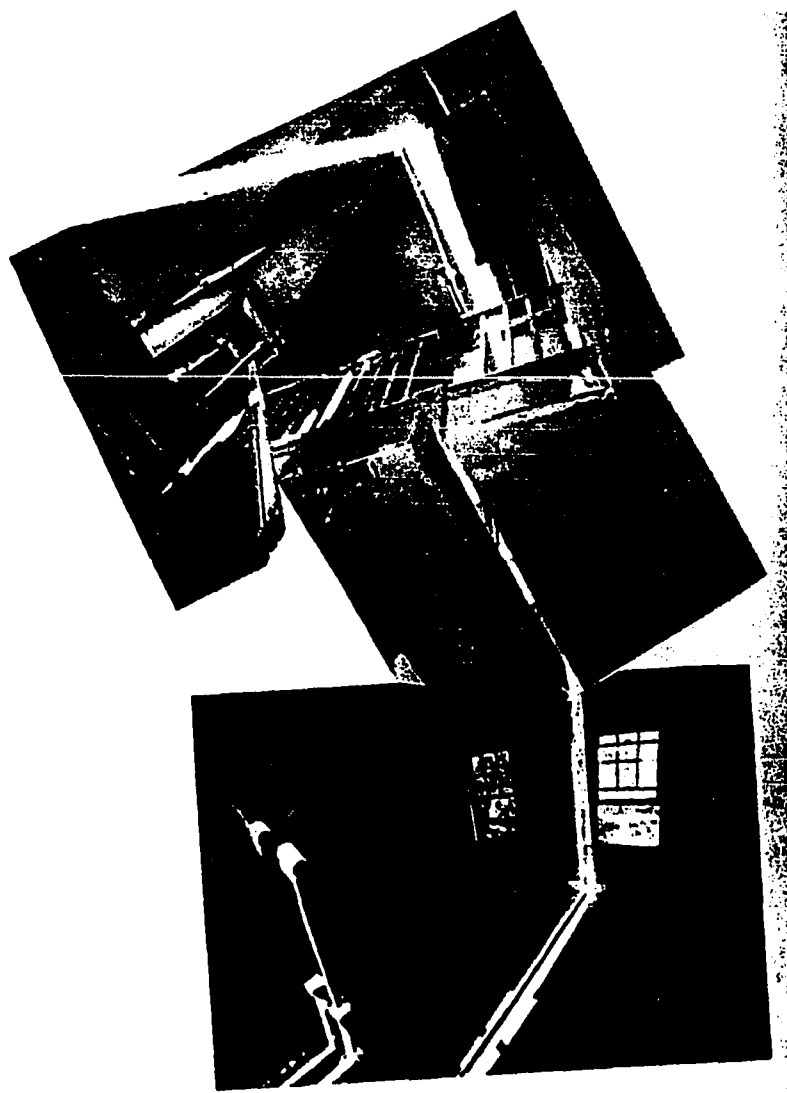


Fig. 1/29

Gordon Matta-Clark
Splitting 1974
Color Photocollage
104.1x78.7 cm



Fig. 2/1

Gilbert and George
Singing Piece 1974
Performance Piece

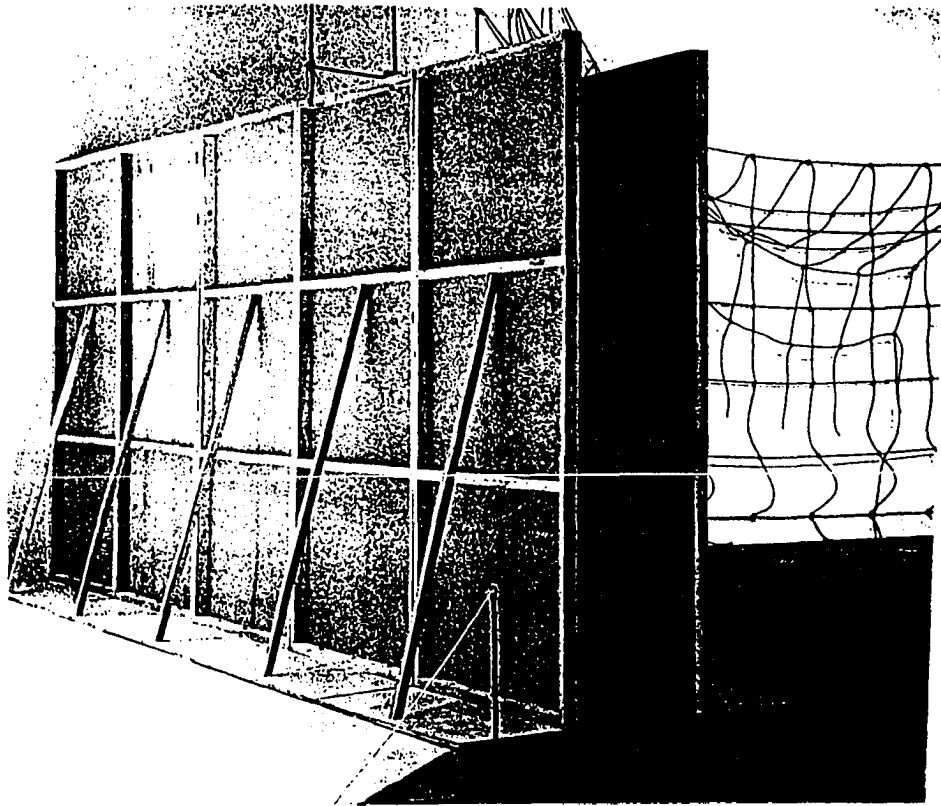


Fig. 2/2

Bruce Nauman

Live Taped Video Corridor 1970

Installation



Fig. 2/3

Joan Jonas (Susan Rothenberg
leaning on glass)
Mirror Piece II 1970
Performance Piece

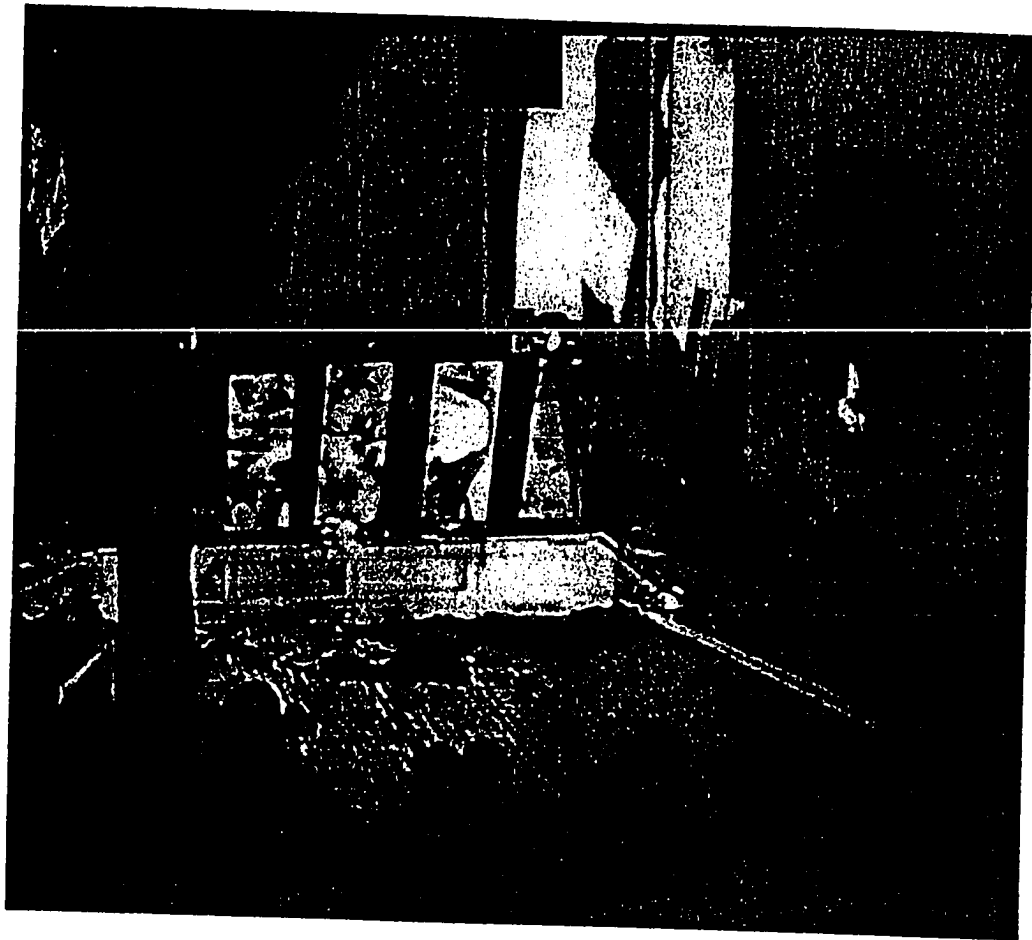


Fig. 2/4

Joan Jonas
Underneath 1970
Performance Piece

327

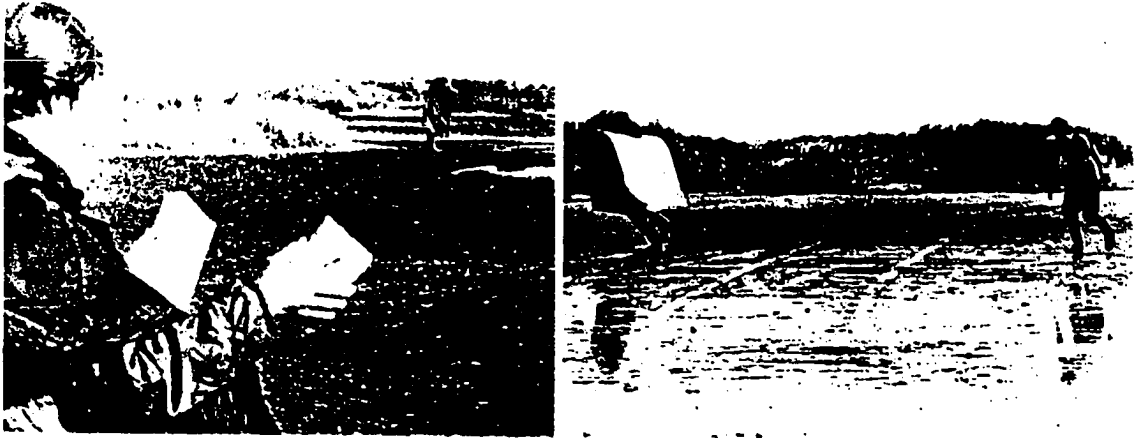


Fig. 2/5

Joan Jonas
Jones Beach 1970
Performance Piece



Fig. 2/6

Joan Jonas (Susan Rothenberg in hoop)
Jones Beach
Performance Piece

329

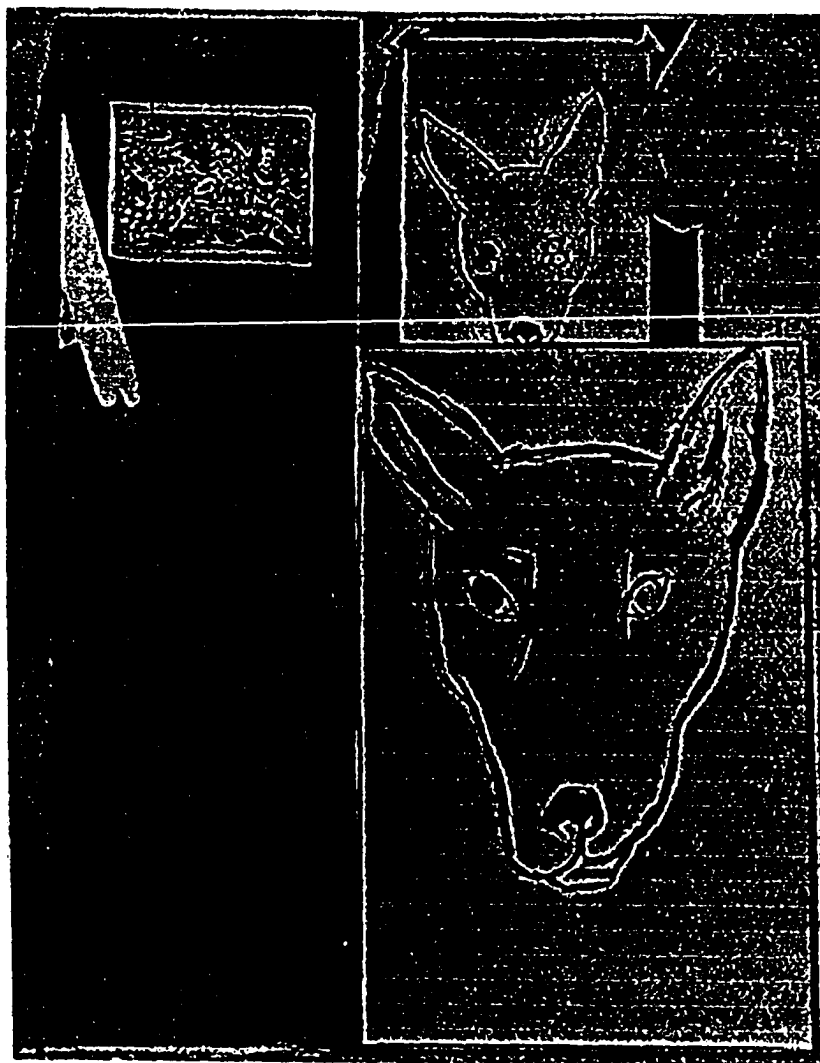


Fig. 2/7

Joan Jonas
Left Side, Right Side 1972
Performance Piece

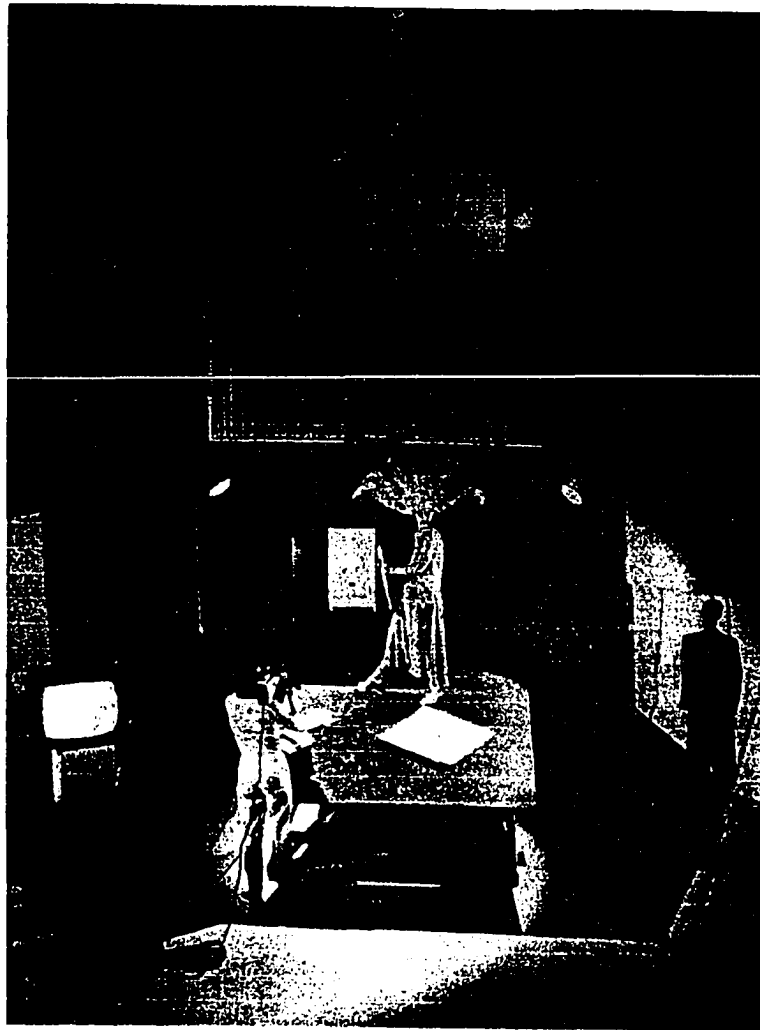


Fig. 2/8

Joan Jonas

Organic Honey's Vertical Roll 1972₃₃₁

Performance Piece

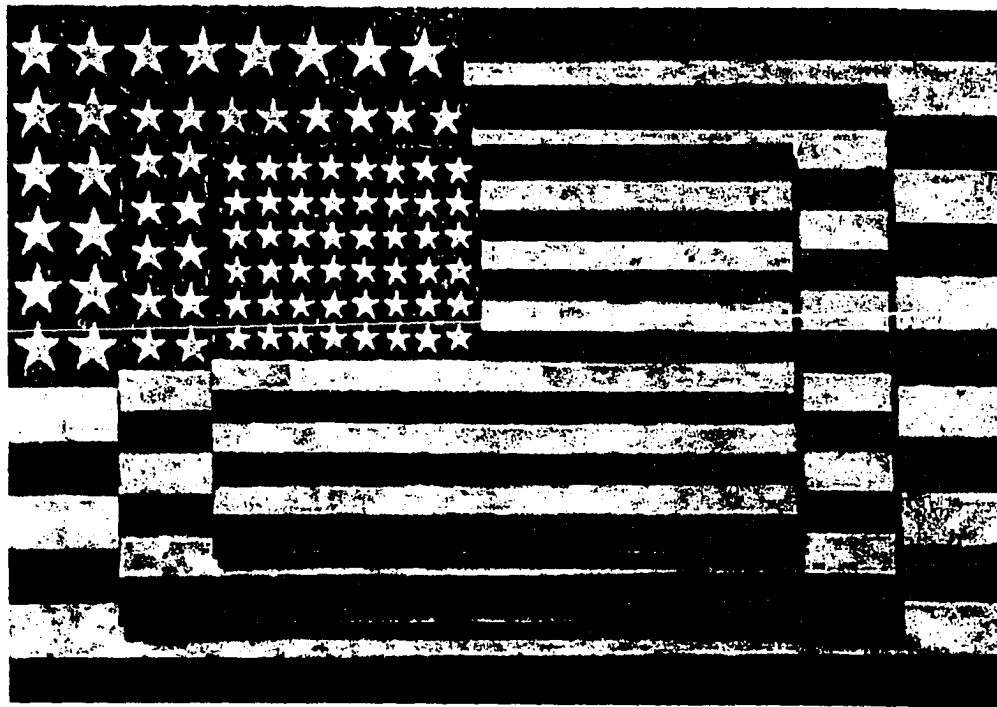


Fig. 2/9

Jasper Johns
Three Flags 1958
Encaustic on canvas
30 7/8 x 45 1/2"

332



Fig. 2/10

Susan Rothenberg

Pontiac 1979

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

88 x 61"

333

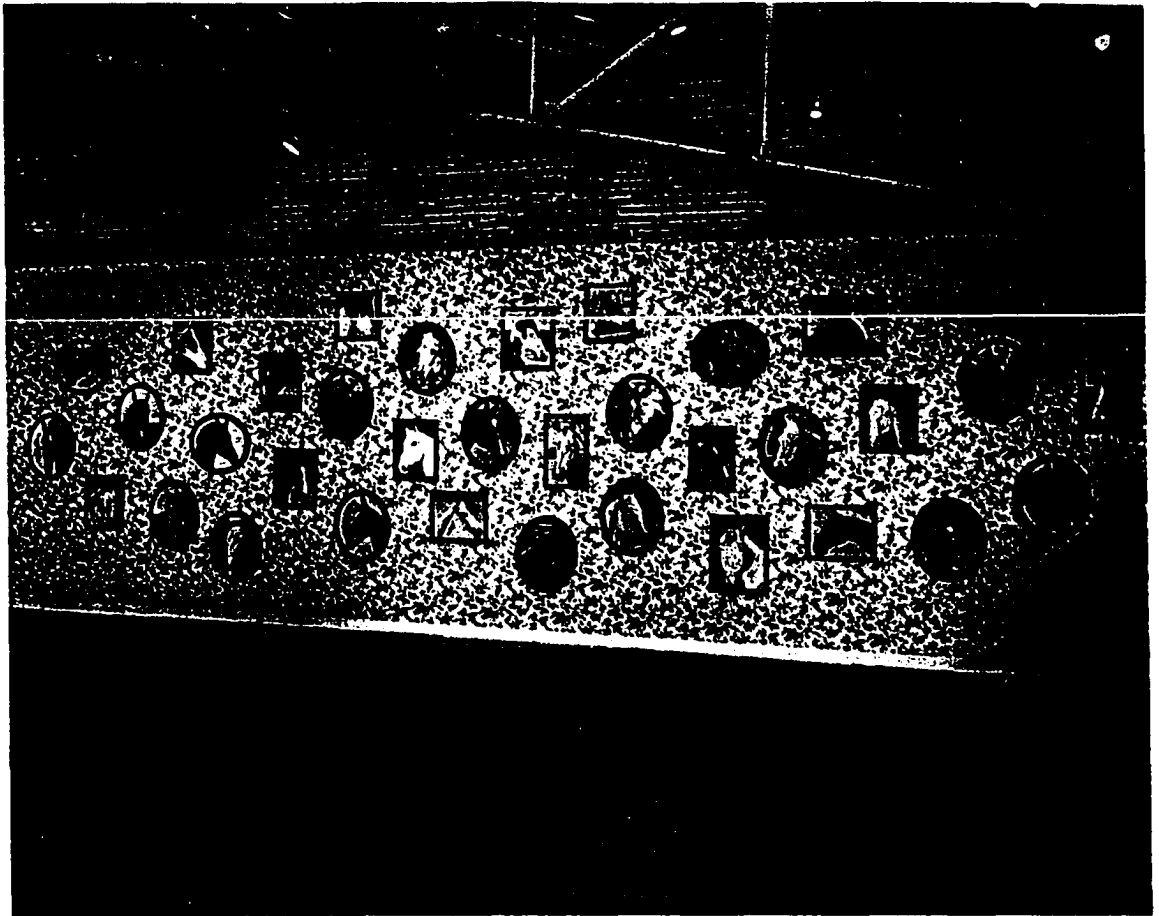


Fig. 2/11

Patricia Cronin

Pony Tales 2000

Oil on canvas, walnut frames, and "Summer Country
Archive" wallpaper

334

132 x 588"

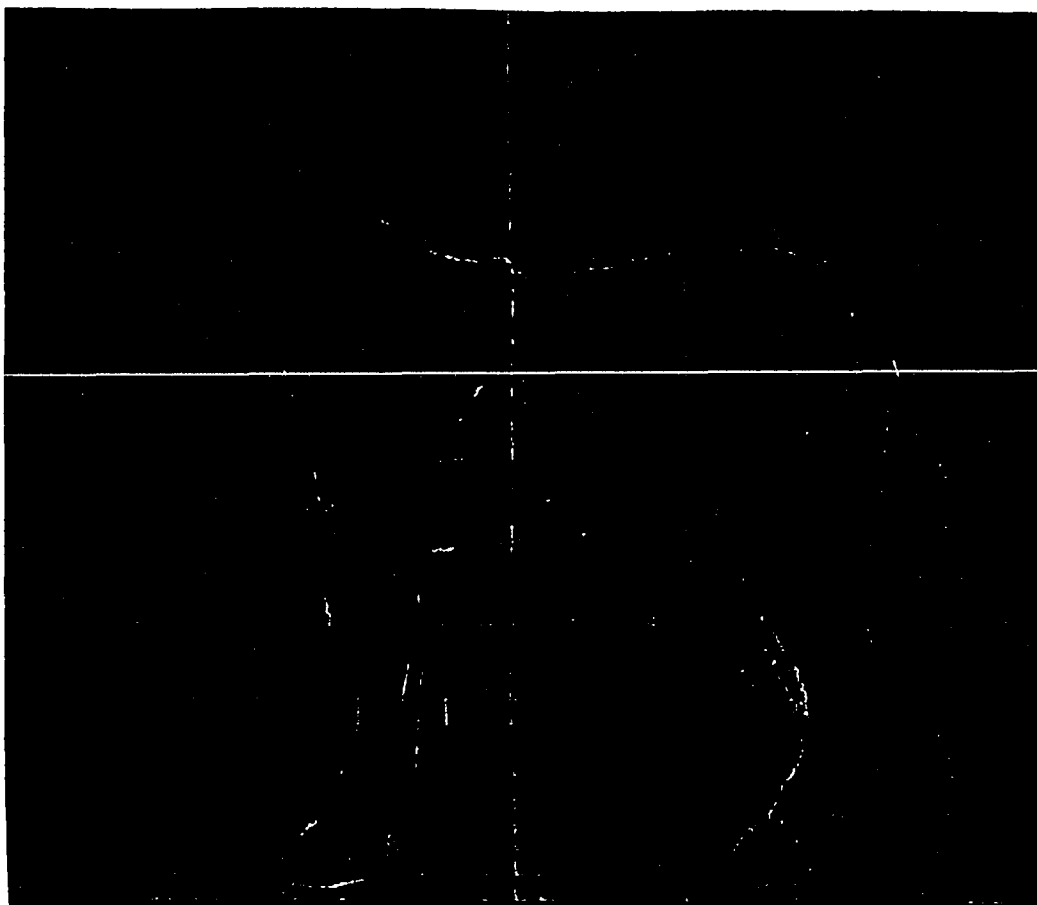


Fig. 2/12

Susan Rothenberg

Nonmoblier 1974

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

167.6x192.4 cm

335

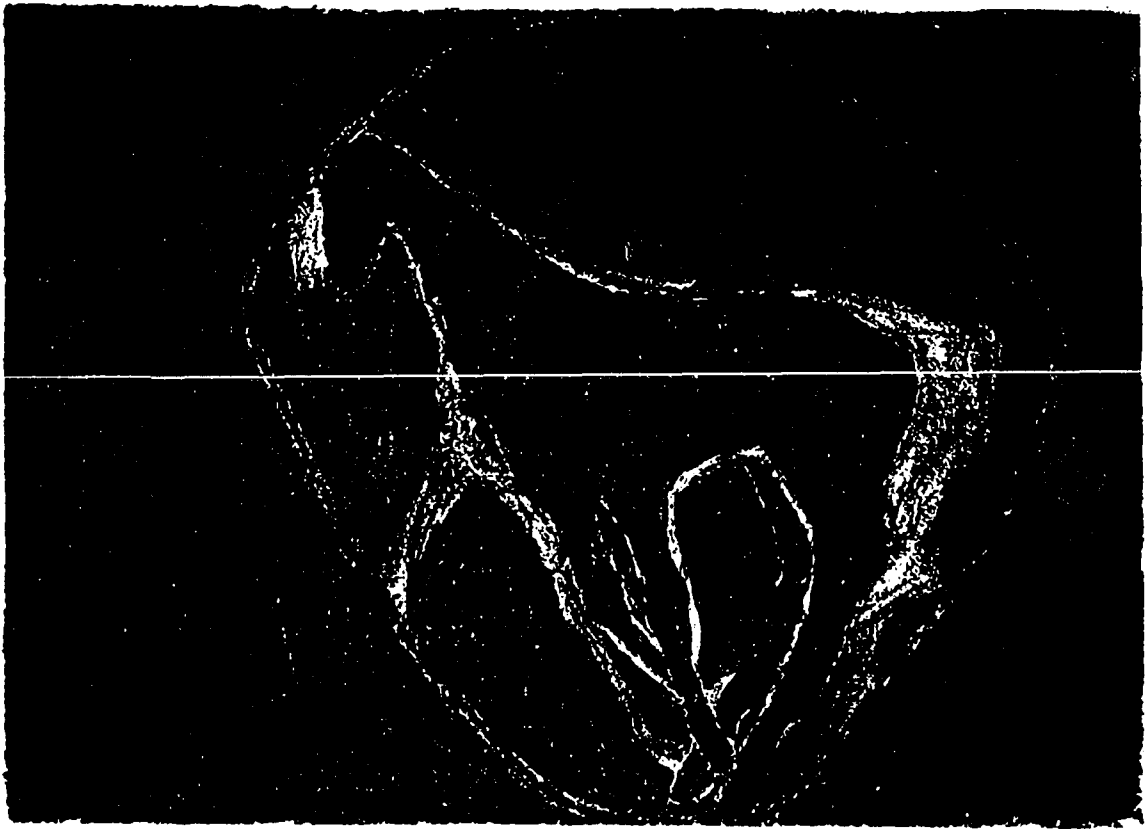


Fig. 2/13

Susan Rothenberg

Kelpie 1978

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

6'5x9'1

336



Fig. 2/14

Susan Rothenberg
Four-Color Horse 1976
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
5'7x9'4

337

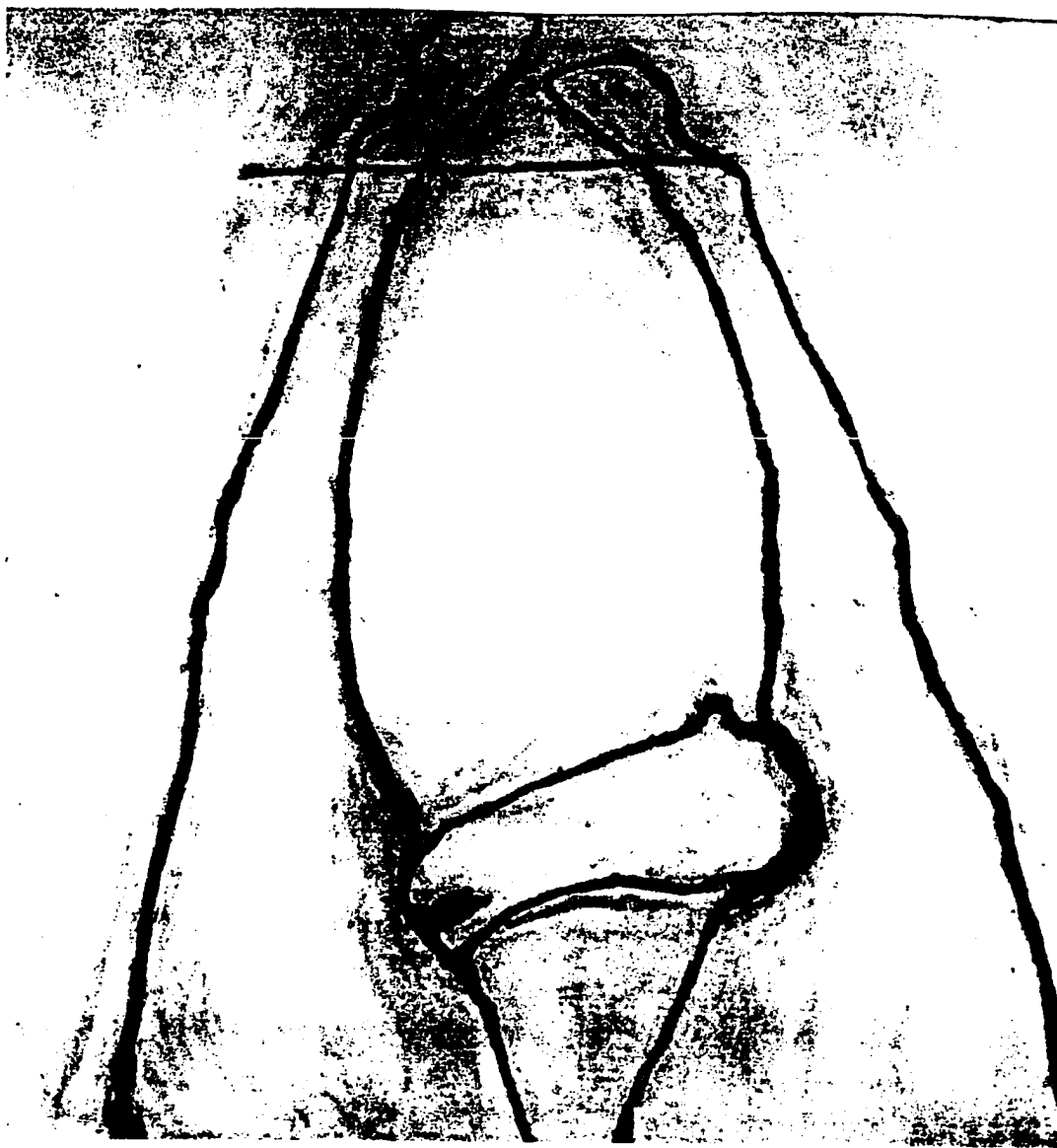


Fig. 2/15

Susan Rothenberg
Squeeze 1978-79
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
92x87

338

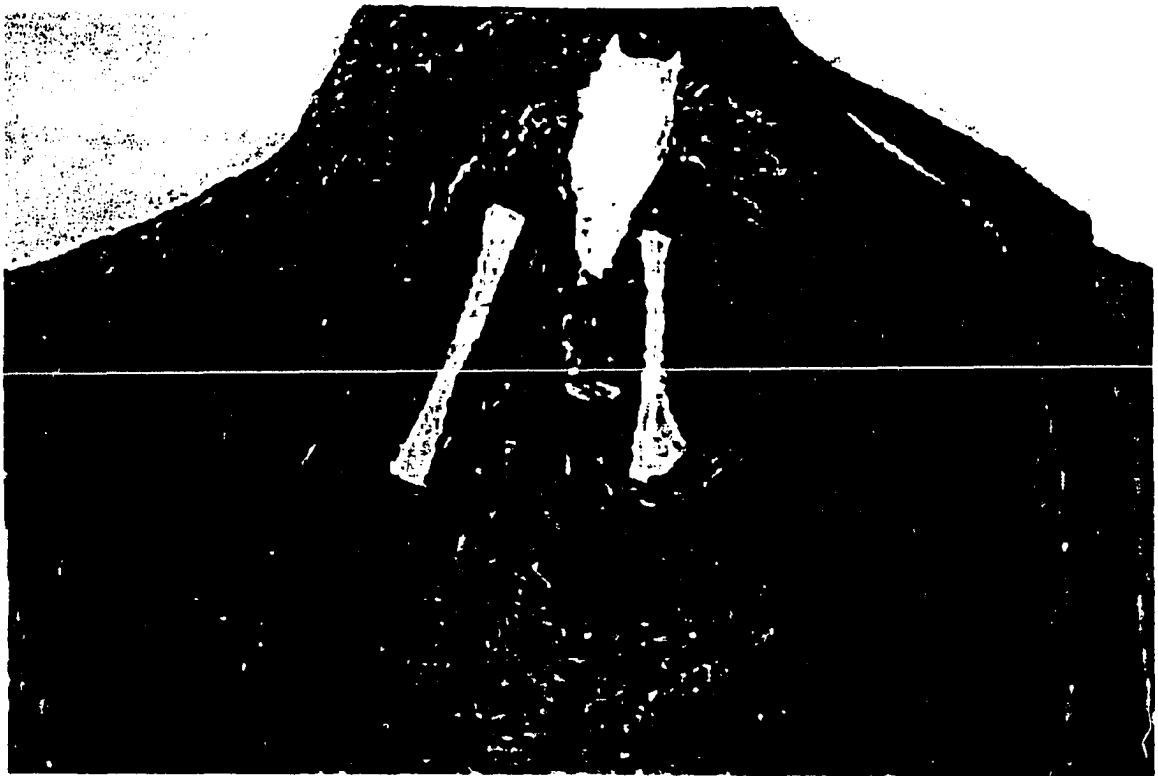


Fig. 2/16

Susan Rothenberg

The Hulk 1978

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

197.5x264.2 cm

339

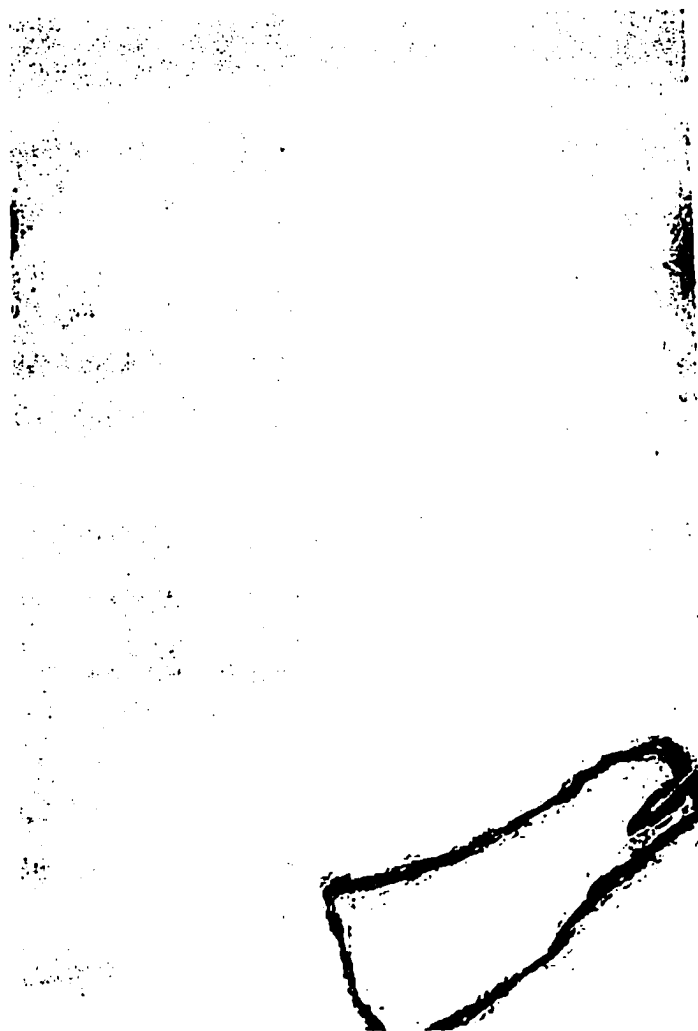


Fig. 2/17

Susan Rothenberg

Outline 1978-79

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

185.4x127cm

340



Fig. 2/18

Susan Rothenberg
Tuning Fork I 1980
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
83x79

341

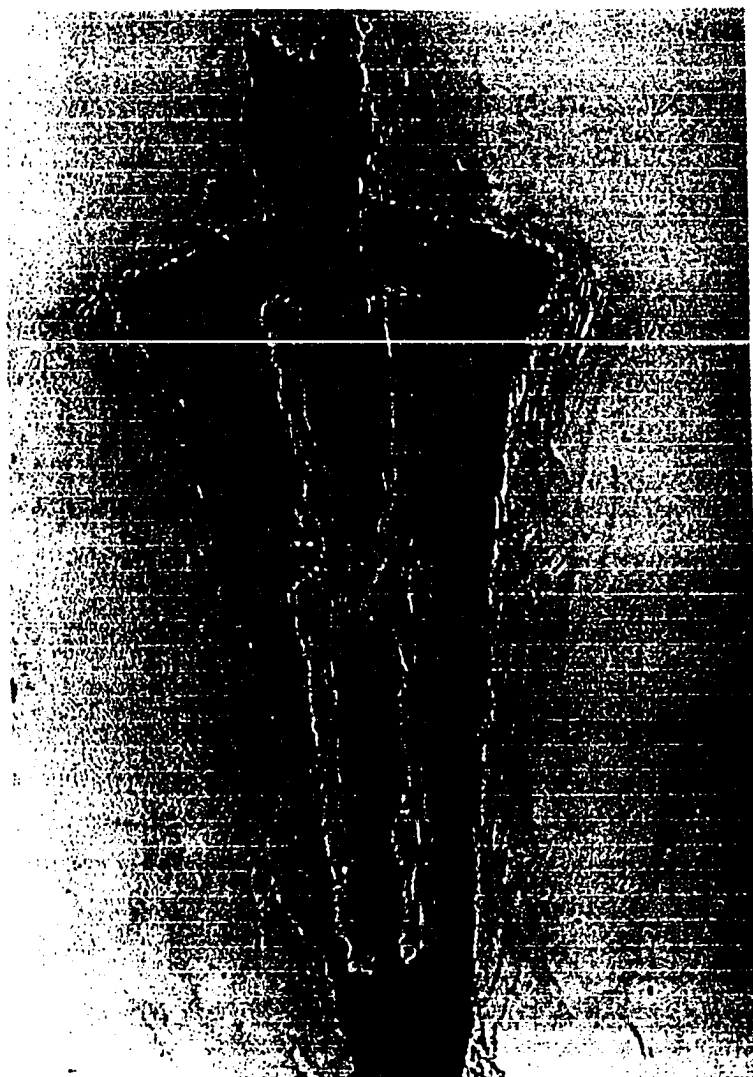


Fig. 2/19

Susan Rothenberg
Untitled 1979
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
50 x 38"

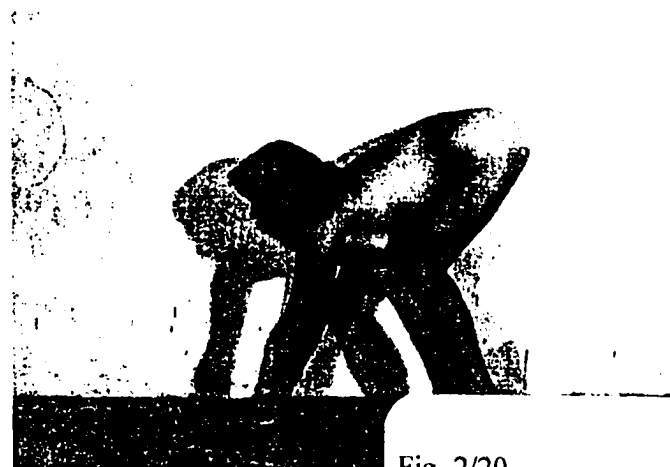


Fig. 2/20

Susan Rothenberg

Mary I, Mary II, Mary III 1974 343

Test Photographs



Fig. 2/21

Susan Rothenberg
Mary I, Mary II, Mary III 1974
Acrylic and tempera on canvas
46 x 78" each

344

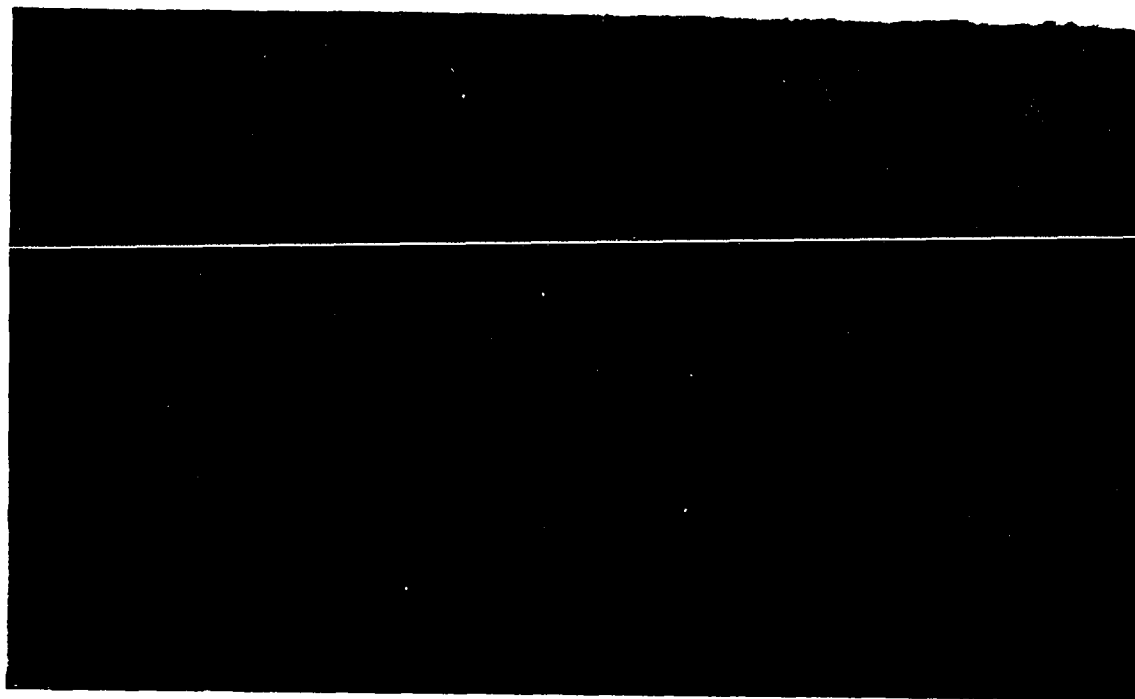


Fig. 2/22

Susan Rothenberg
Mary III 1974
Acrylic and tempera on canvas
46 x 78"

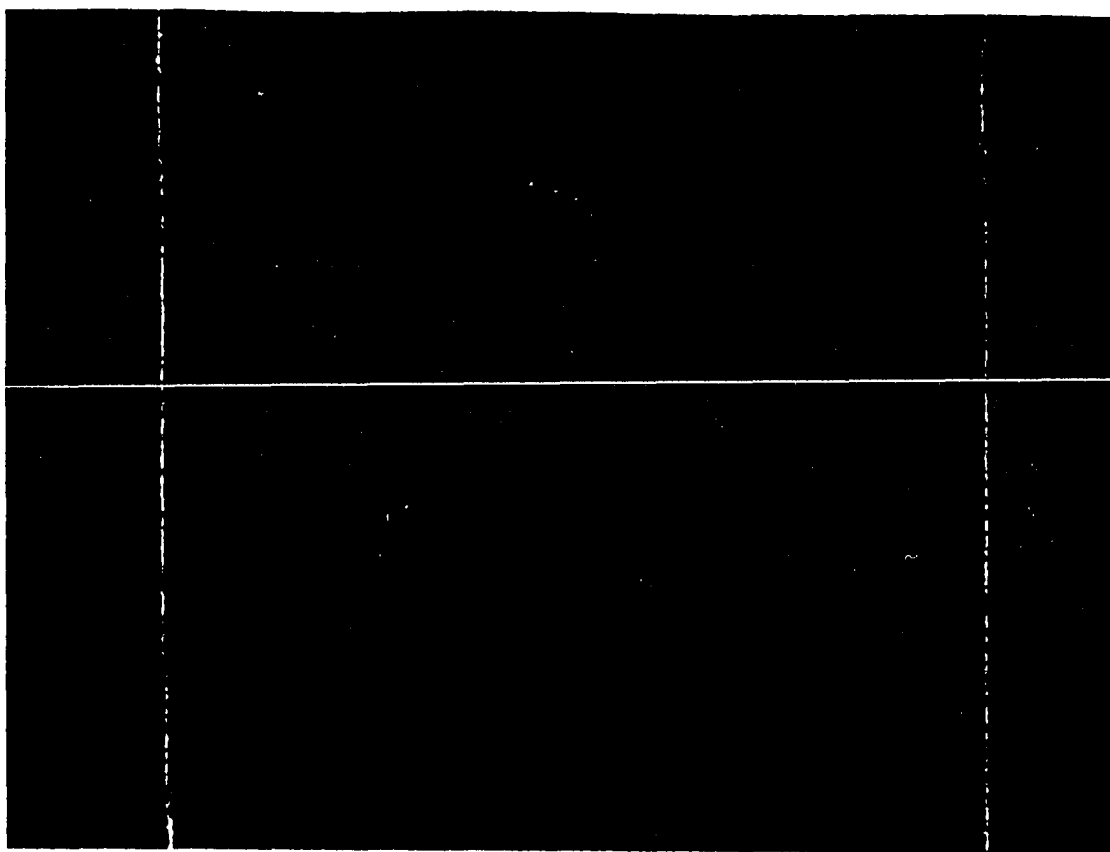


Fig. 2/23

Susan Rothenberg

IxI 1976-77

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

78 1/4 x 104"

346

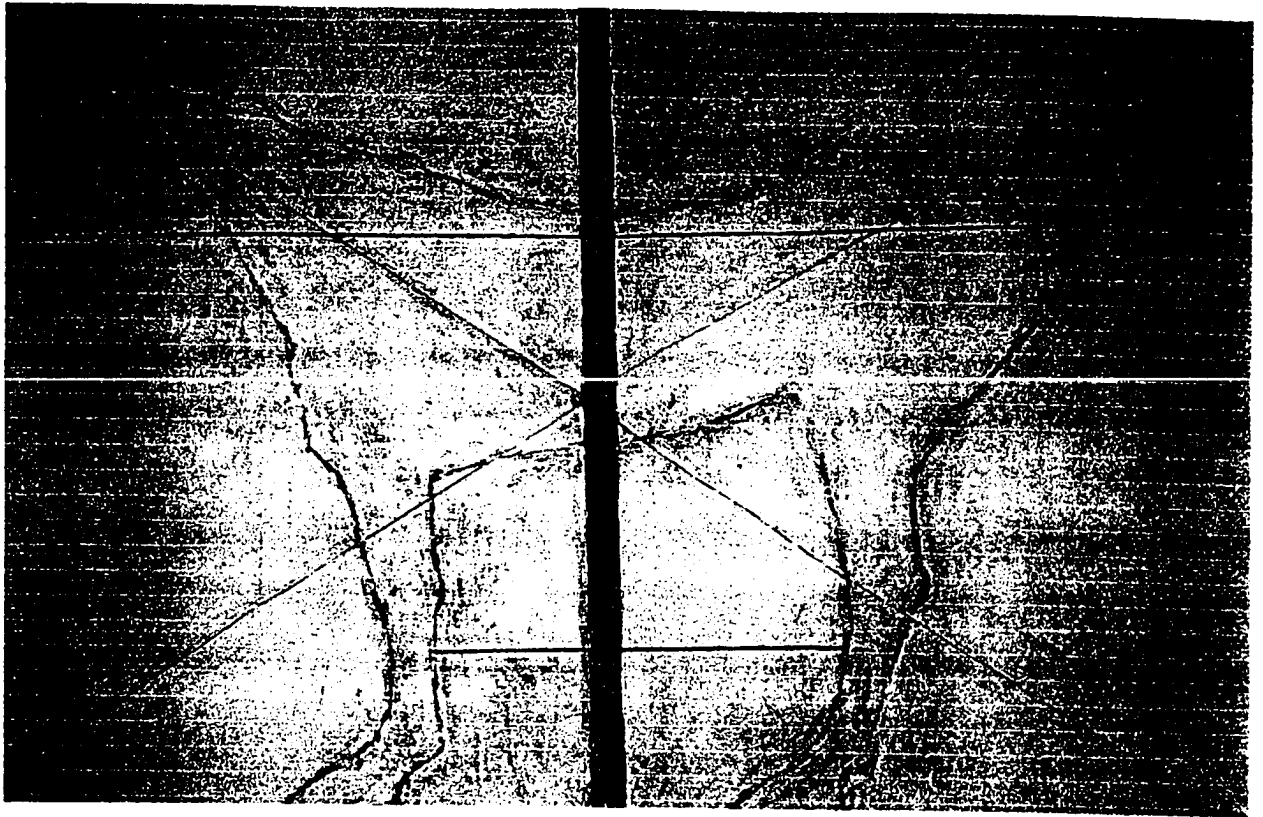


Fig. 2/24

Susan Rothenberg

Double Measure 1977

Acrylic and tempera on canvas
6'4 x 10"

347



Fig. 2/25

Joseph Beuys
*How to Explain a Picture
to a Dead Hare* 1965
Performance Piece

348

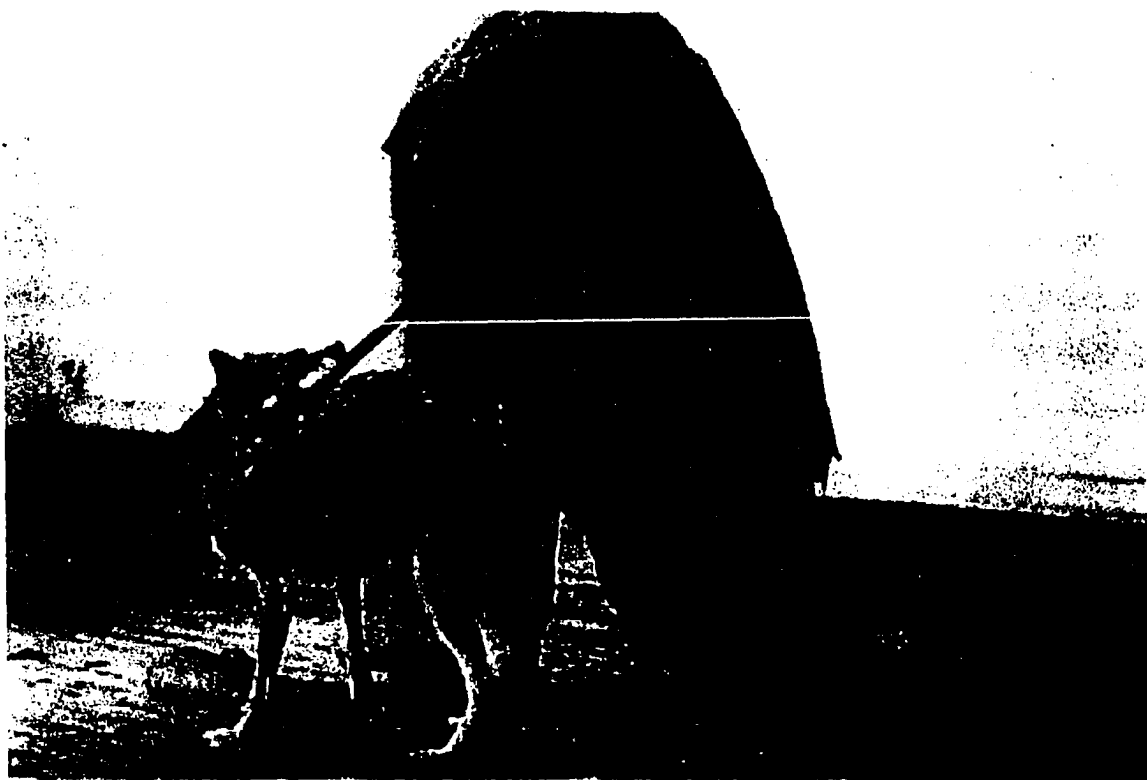


Fig. 2/26

Joseph Beuys
I Like America and America Likes Me 1974
Performance Piece

349



Fig. 2/27

Nancy Graves
Camel VI 1968-69
Sculpture

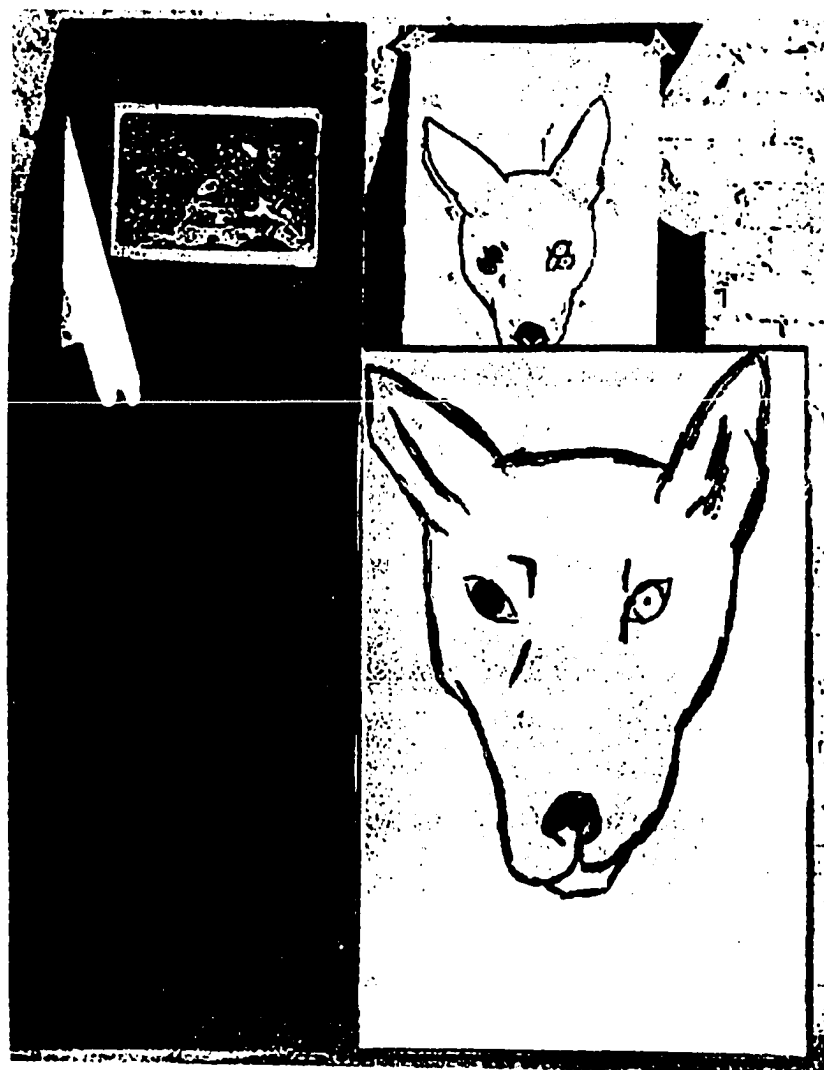


Fig. 2/28

Joan Jonas

Organic Honey's Vertical Roll 1972

Performance Piece

351

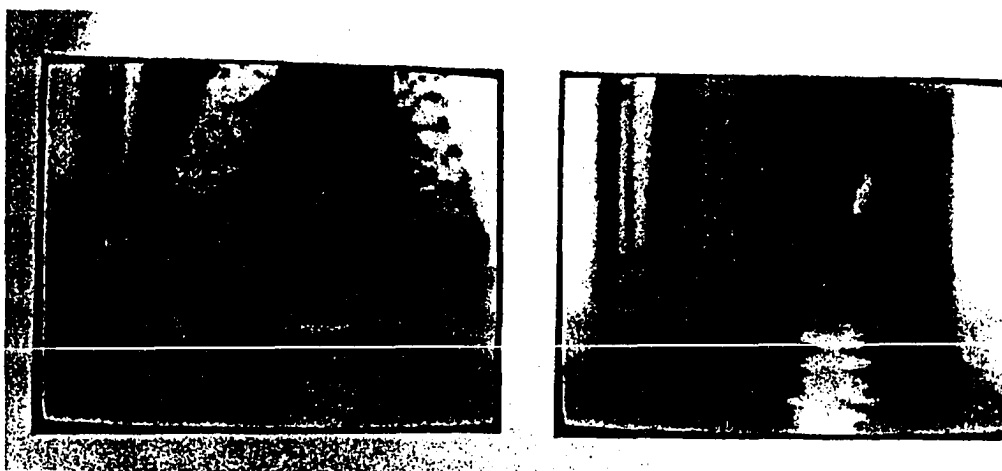


Fig. 2/29

William Wegman
Reel 1: Milk/Floor 1970-1972
Reel/video



Fig. 2/30

Jannis Kounellis
Apollo 1972
Performance Piece

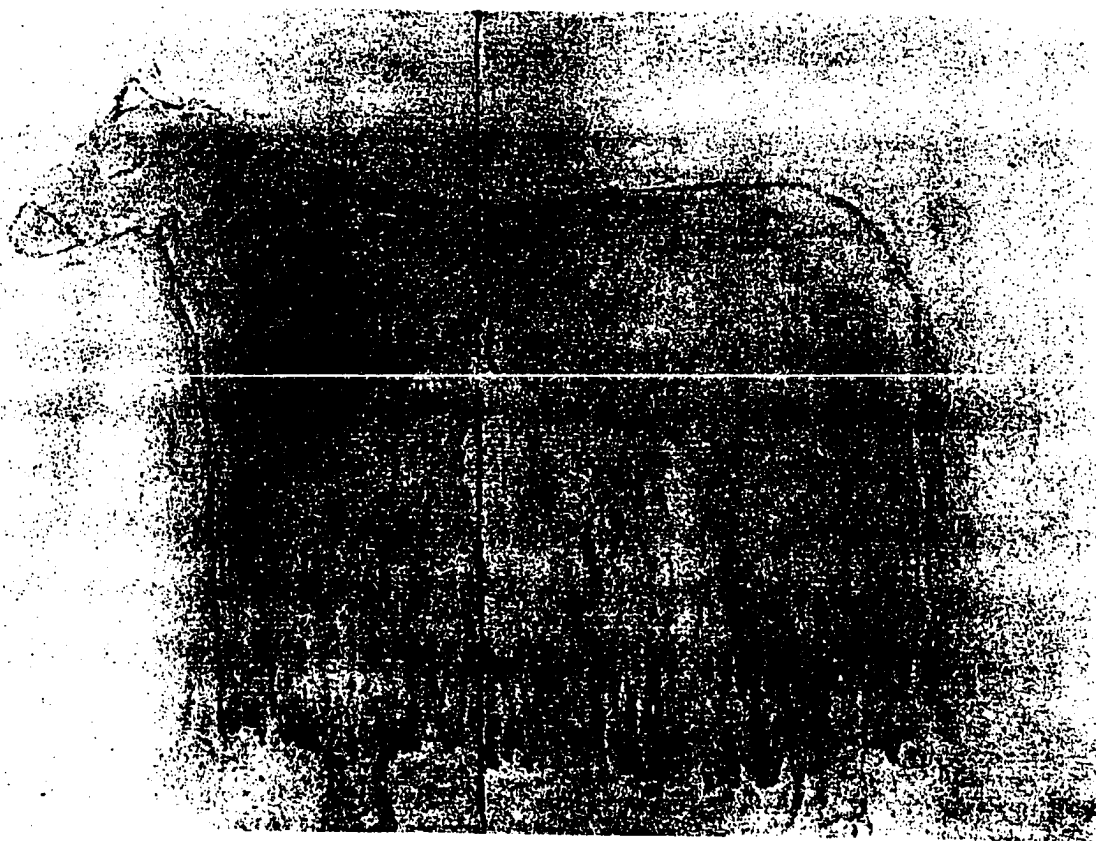


Fig. 2/31

Susan Rothenberg

White Robe 1974

Acrylic and tempera on canvas

64x86

354

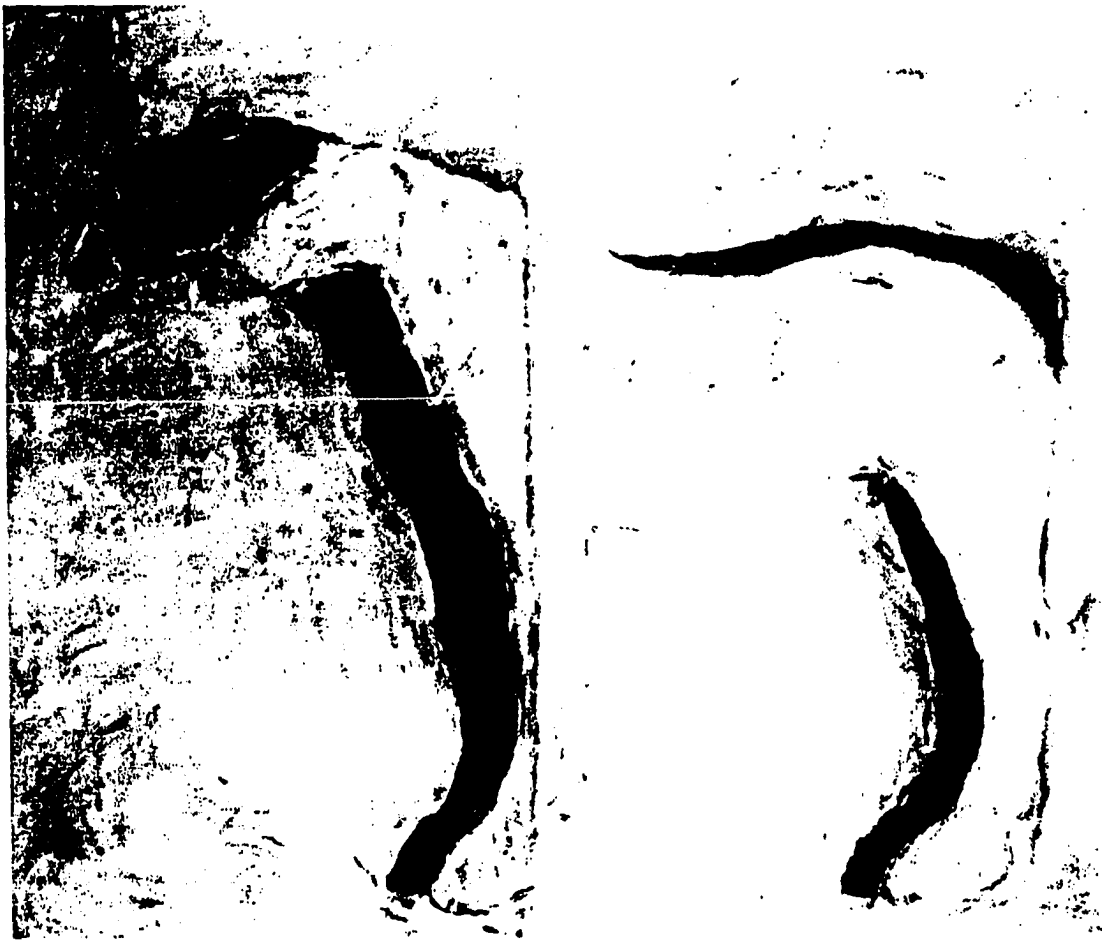


Fig. 2/32

Susan Rothenberg
Double Masked Heads 1974
Acrylic and tempera on canvas
65 x 78 1/2"



Fig. 2/33

Joan Jonas
Organic Honey's Vertical Roll 1972
Performance Piece

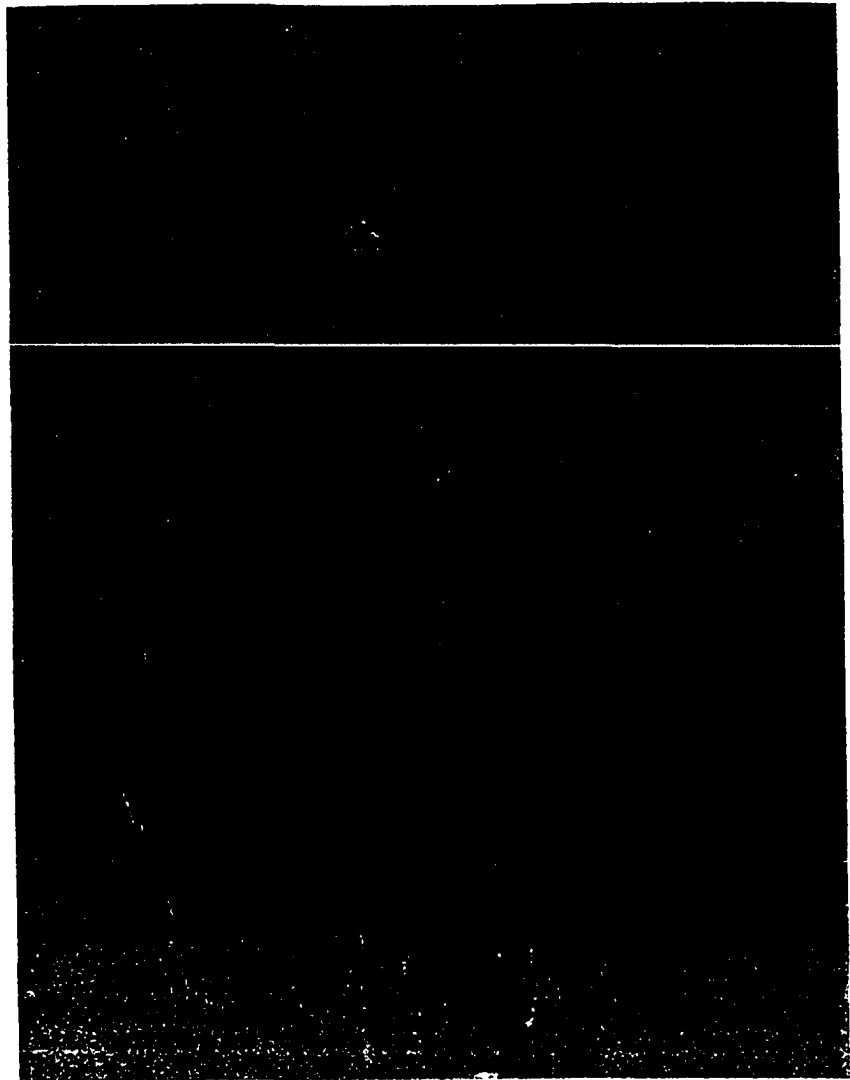


Fig. 2/34

Susan Rothenberg
Mr. Bear 1978
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
95x75



Fig. 3/1

Pat Steir
Word Unspoken 1974
Oil on Canvas
84x84

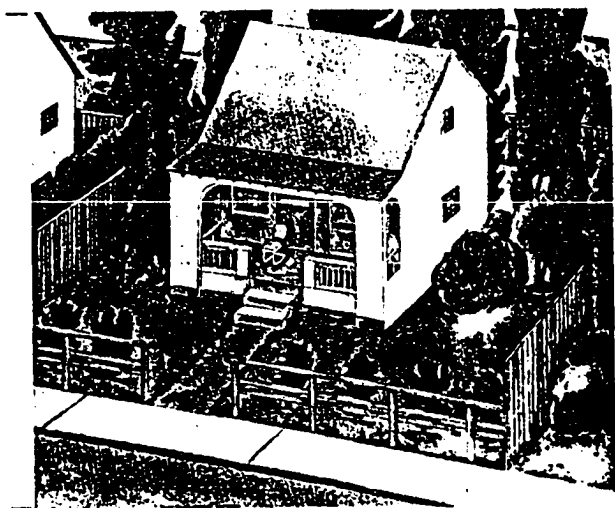


Fig. 3/2

Susan Hall
Suburban Recluse 1972
Acrylic on canvas
26 x 30"

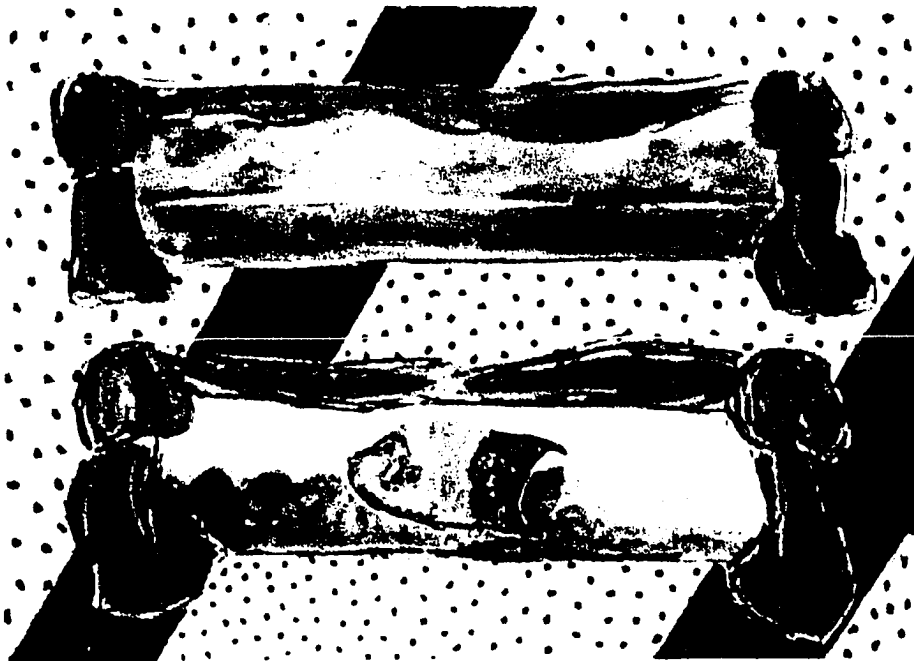


Fig. 3/3

Ree Morton

Study for Regional Work 1976

Watercolor, pastel, oil crayon,

pencil, paper

29 1/2 x 41"

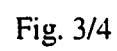


Fig. 3/4

Joel Shapiro
Untitled 1973
Sculpture
4 x 5 x 1"

361

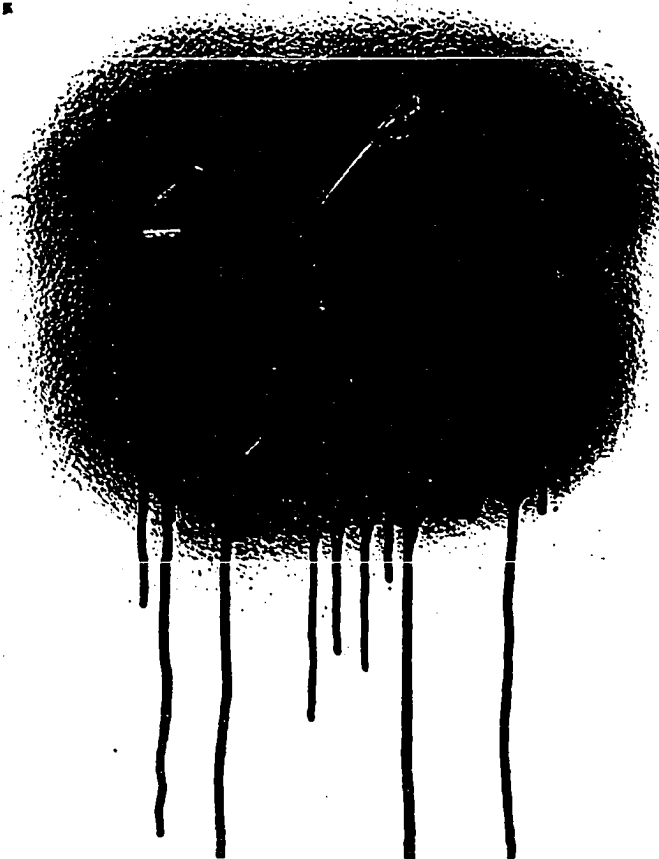


Fig. 3/5

Joel Shapiro
Untitled 1972
Enamel on wood
6 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 1 1/8"

362



Fig. 3/6

Neil Jenney
Girl and Doll 1969
Acrylic on canvas
4'10" x 6'4"



Fig. 3/7

Neil Jenney
Them and Us 1969
Acrylic on canvas
58.5 x 135 x 4"

364



Fig. 3/8

Nicholas Africano
An Cruel Discussion 1976-77
Oil, acrylic, wax on canvas
66 x 84"

365



Fig. 3/9

Michael Hurson
Eyeglass Painting #4 1971
Oil and silkscreen on canvas
19.39 x 75"

366



Fig. 3/10

Michael Hurson
Palm Springs Painting #2 1971
Oil and silkscreen on canvas
68 x 34"

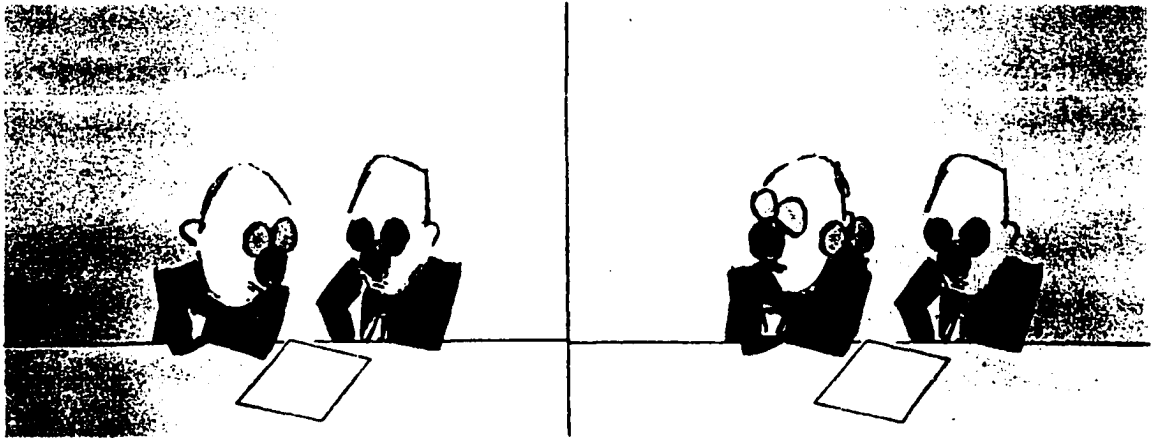


Fig. 3/11

Hurson

Edward and Otto Pfaff 1974-75

Oil and silkscreen on canvas

36 x 96"

368

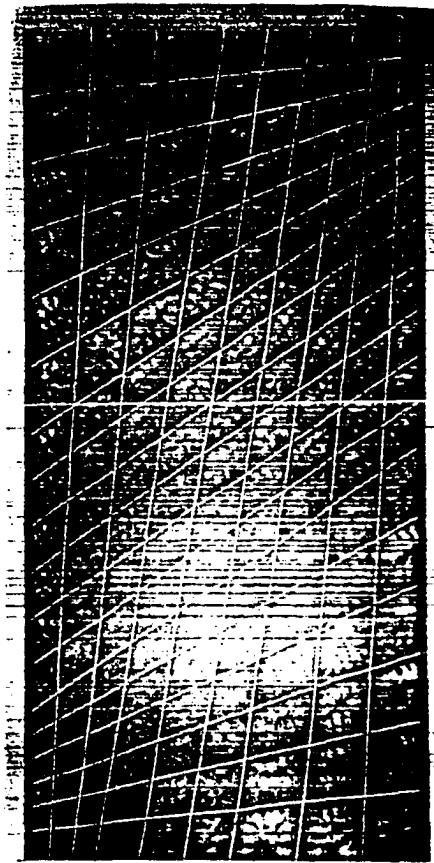


Fig. 3/12

Joe Zucker

Amphora

Acrylic, cotton, and rhoplex on canvas

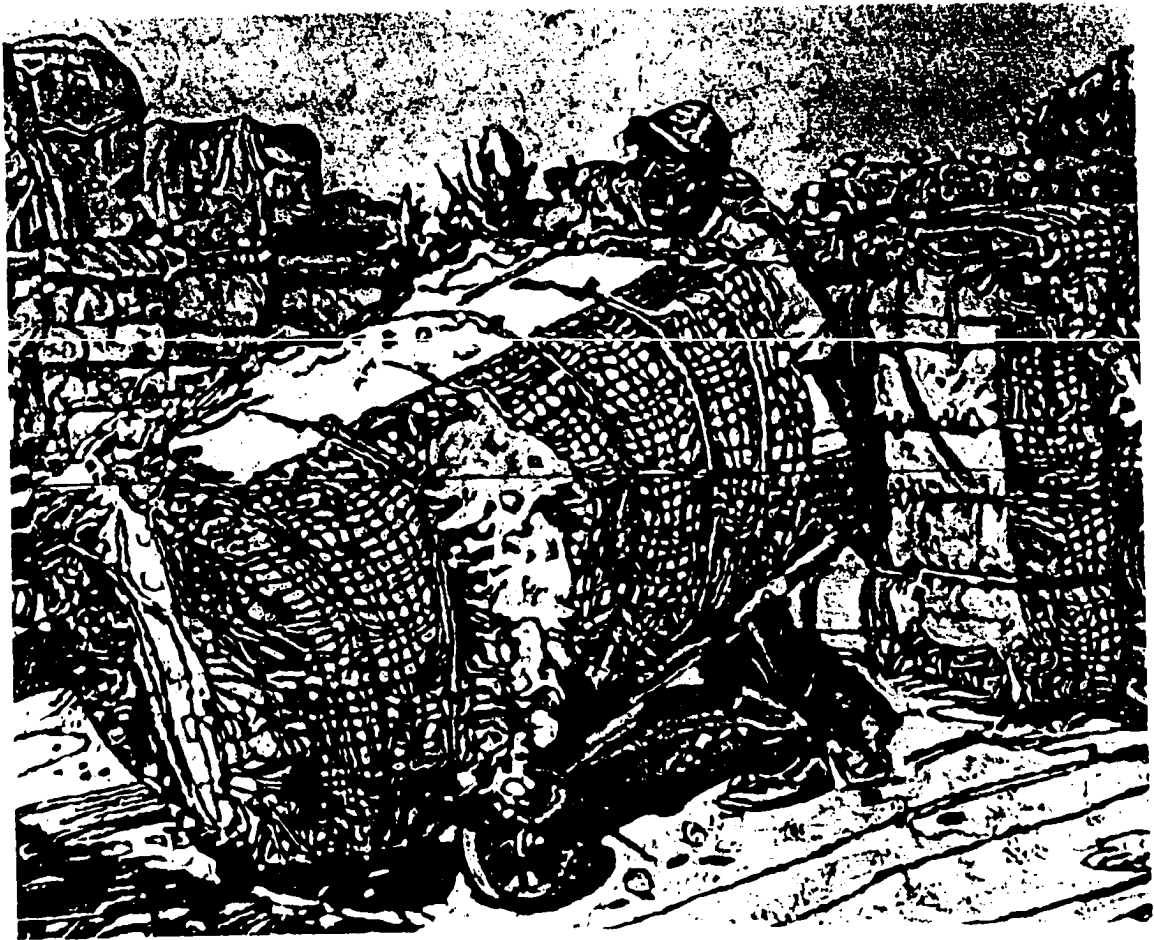


Fig. 3/13

Joe Zucker

Paying Off Old Debts 1975

Acrylic, cotton, and rhoplex on canvass

96 x 120"

370

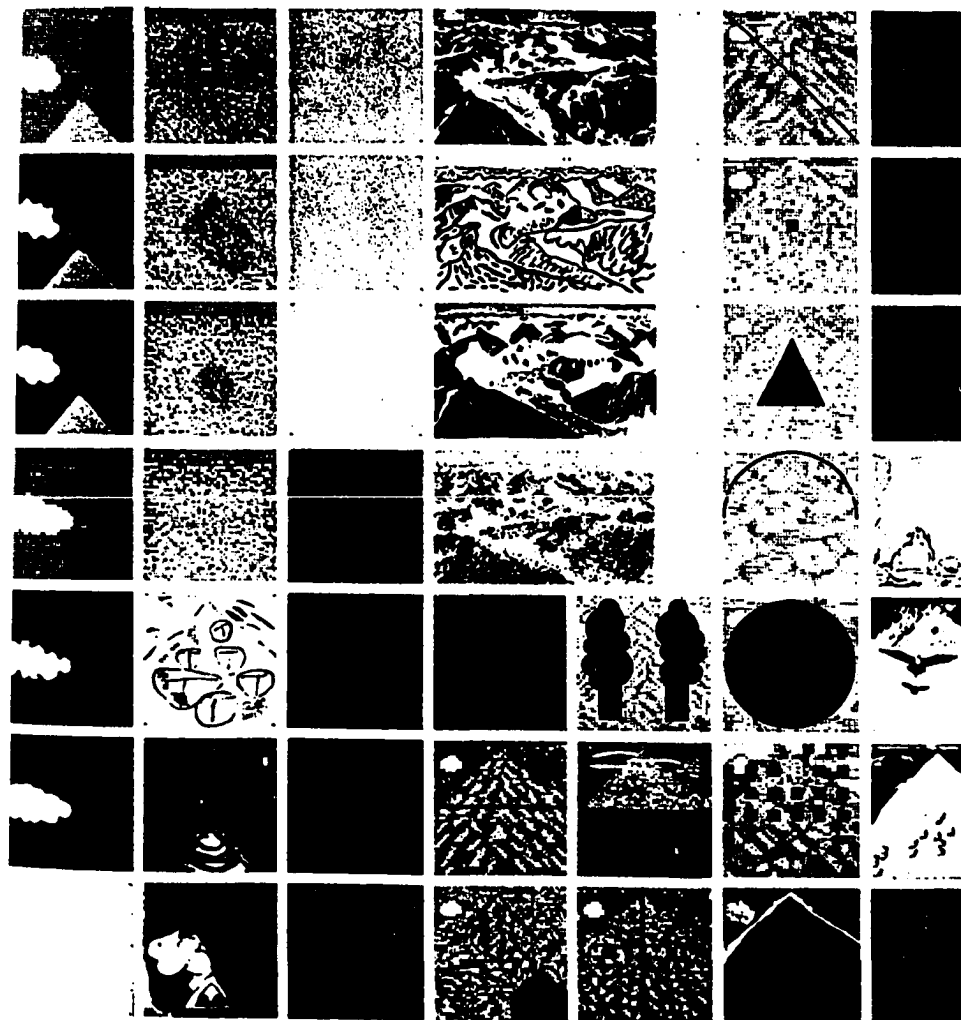


Fig. 3/14

Jennifer Bartlett

Rhapsody 1977

Mixed medium on aluminum plates

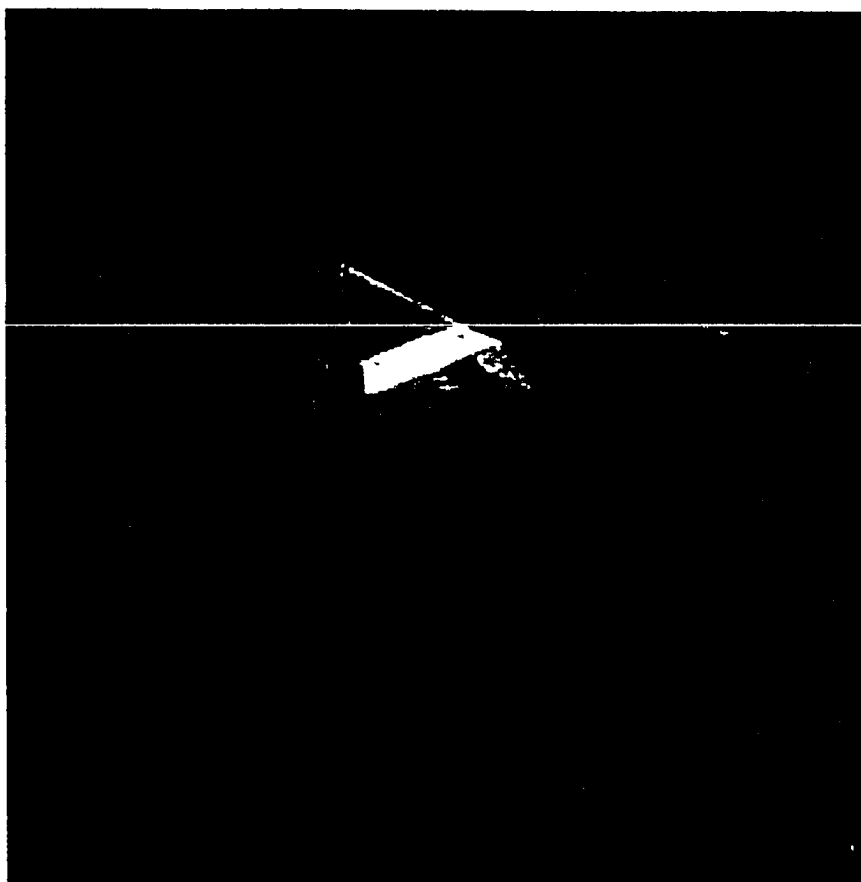


Fig. 3/15

Denise Green
Trap 1976
Acrylic on Canvas
122x122cm

372

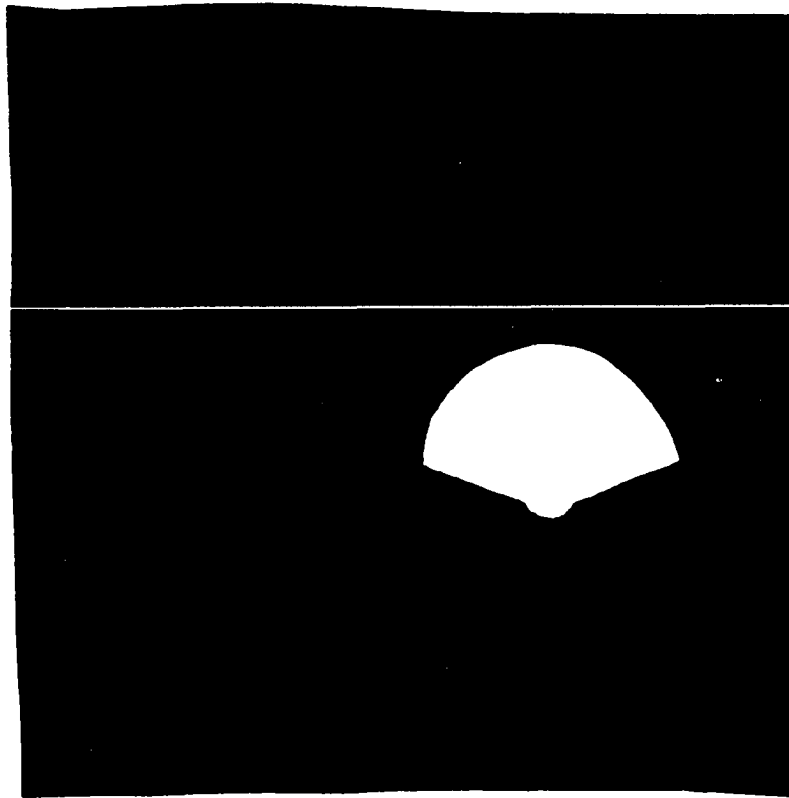


Fig. 3/16

Denise Green

Looking Back on the Other 1978

Acrylic on canvas



Fig. 3/17

Lois Lane

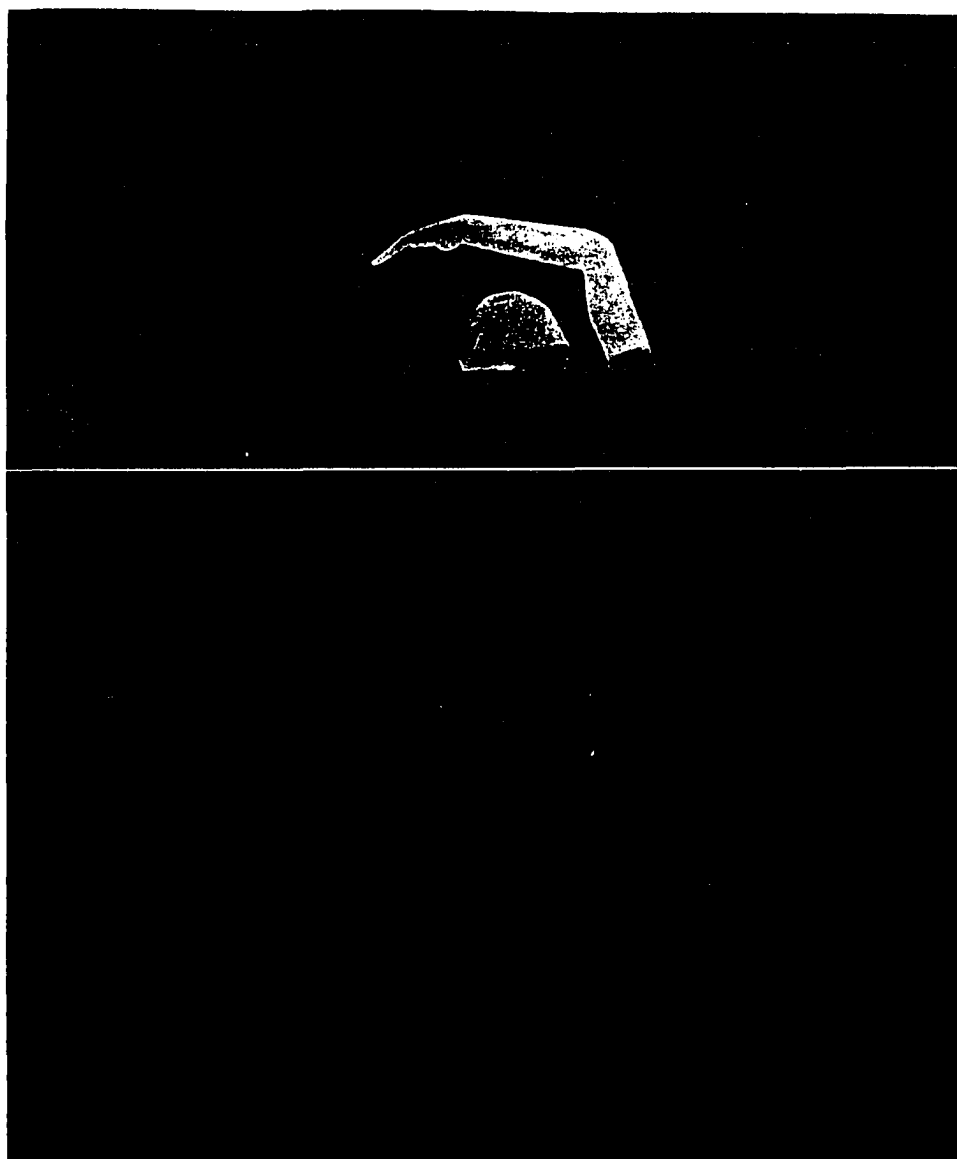


Fig. 3/18

Robert Moskowitz
Swimmer 1977
Oil and pure pigment on canvas
90 x 75"

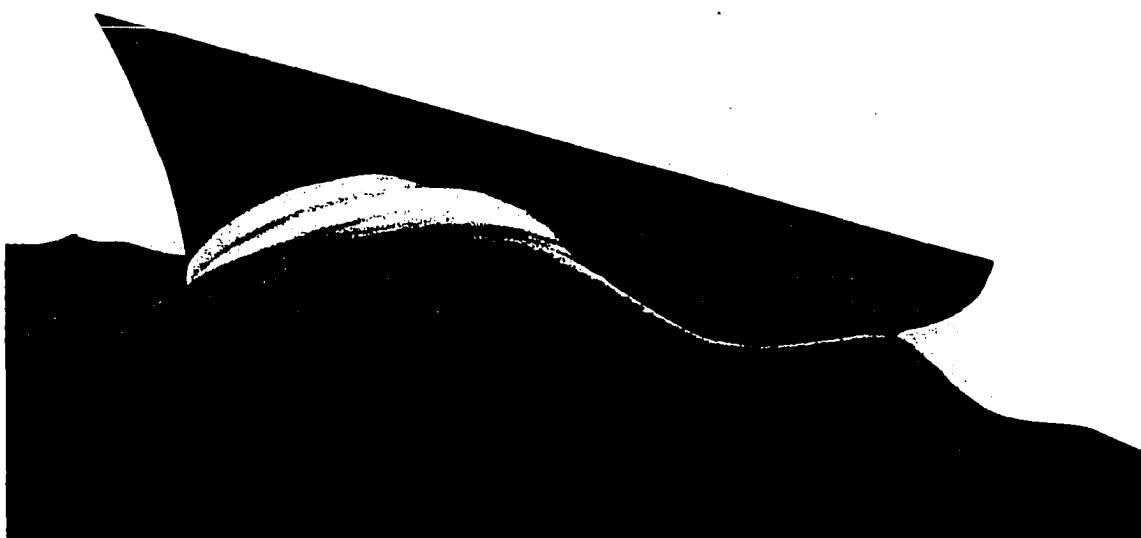


Fig. 3/19

David True
Chinese Sea 1977
Oil on canvas
44 x 66

376



Fig. 3/20
Alex Katz
Ada In Black Sweater 1957
Oil on canvas

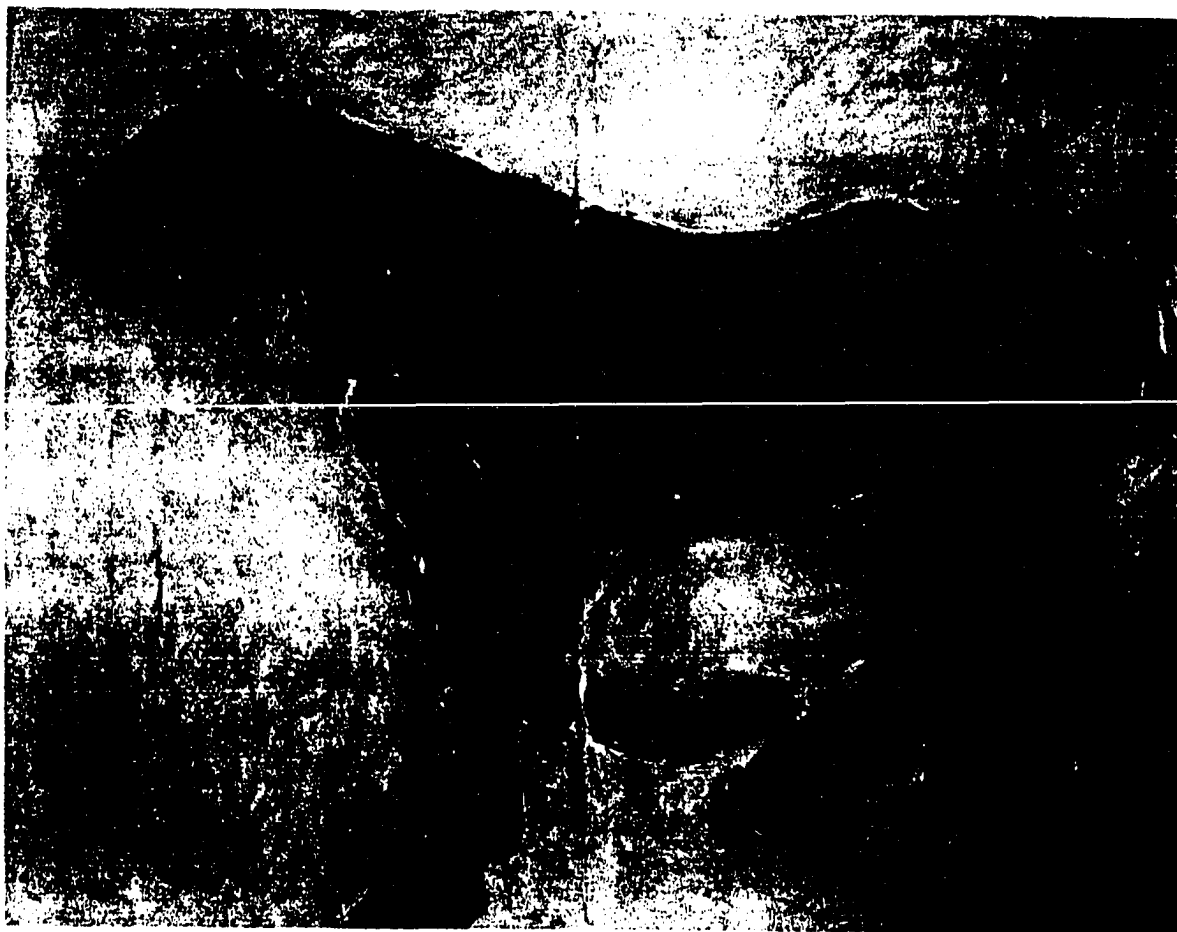


Fig. 3/21

Susan Rothenberg

Layering 1975

Acrylic and tempera on canvas

66 1/2x82 1/2

378

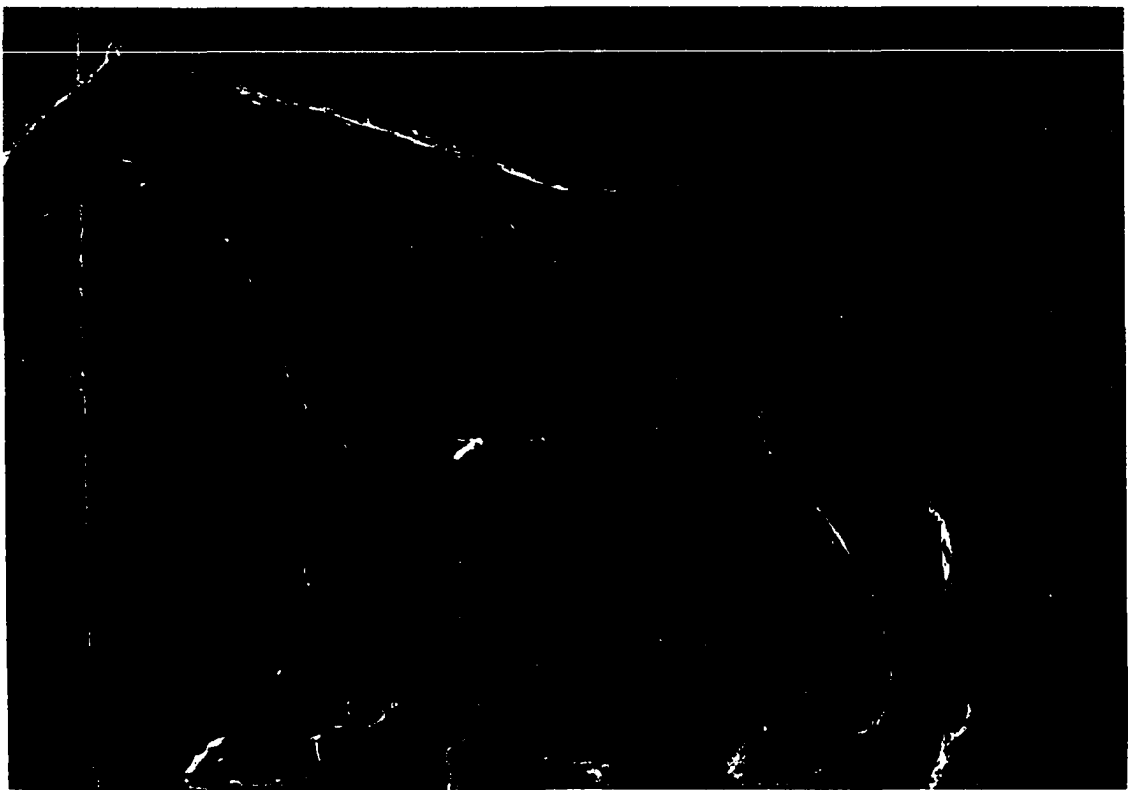


Fig. 3/22

Susan Rothenberg

Flanders 1976

Acrylic and tempera on canvas

63 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 98 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



Fig. 3/23

Willem de Kooning
Woman I 1950-2
Oil on canvas



Fig. 324

Susan Rothenberg

Untitled 1979

Acrylic and flashe on canvas

36 1/2 x 36 5/8

381

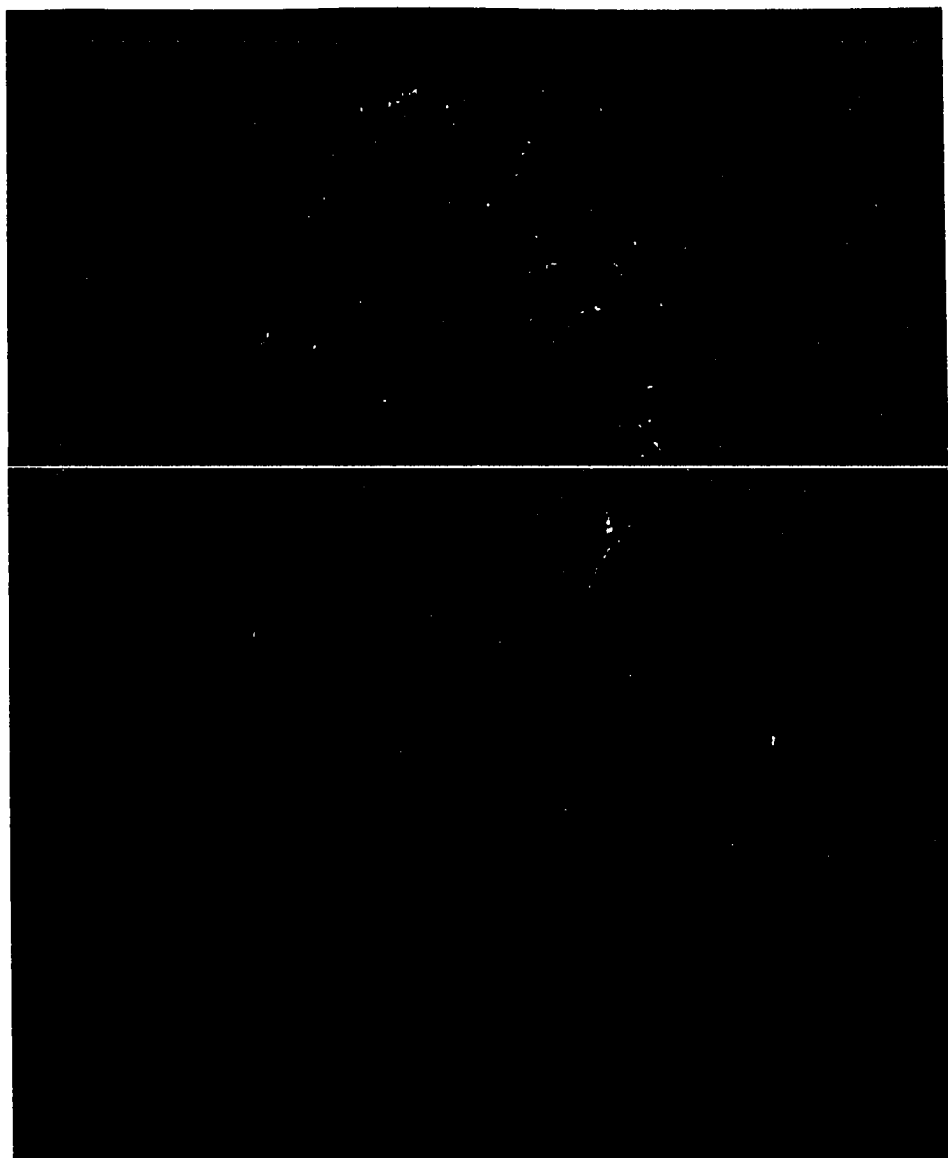


Fig. 3/25

Jean Dubuffet
Corps de Dame
Piece de Boucherie 1950
Oil on canvas
51 x 38 .5"

382



Fig. 3/26

Philip Guston
Untitled (Two Hooded Figures) 1969
Oil on masonite
31 x 36 cm.

383

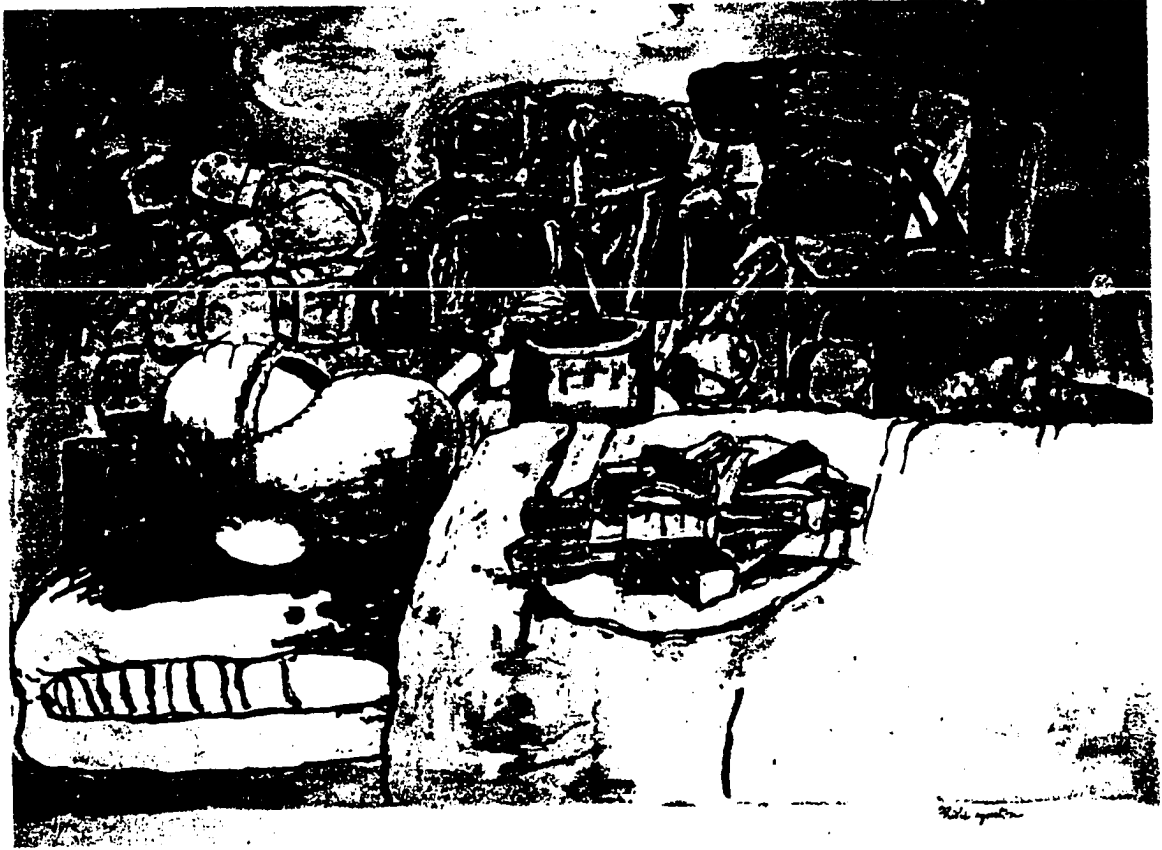


Fig. 3/27

Phillip Guston

Painting, Smoking, Eating 1973

Oil on canvas

77.5 x 103.5"

384



Fig. 4/1

Susan Rothenberg
Pontiac 1979
Acrylic and flash on canva
88 x 61"

385



Fig. 4/2

Susan Rothenberg
For the Light 1978-79
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
8'9" x 7'3"

386



Fig. 4/3

Deborah Butterfield
Reclining Horse 1978
Mud, straw, sticks, and steel
35.125 x 83.25 x 53"



Fig. 4/4

Susan Rothenberg
Smoker 1979-79
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
62 1/4 x 45"

388

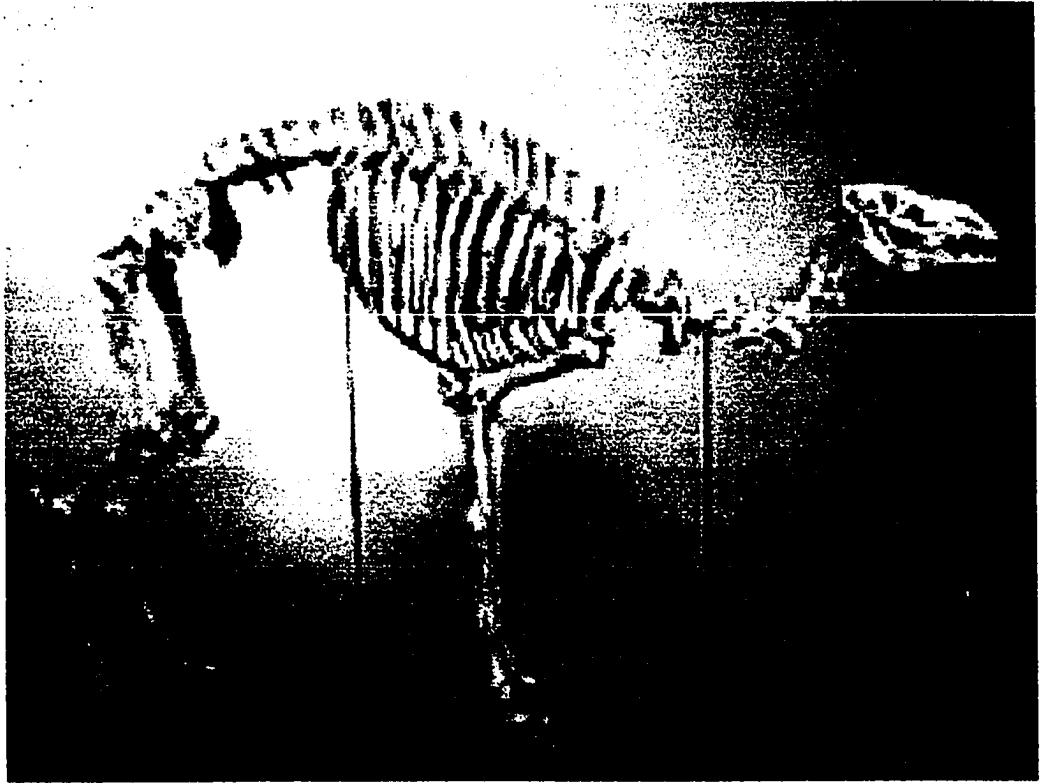


Fig. 4/5

Nancy Graves

Pleistocene Skeleton 1970

Steel, wax, marble dust and acrylic

84" x 120" x 36"



Fig. 4/6

Susan Rothenberg
Untitled No. 84 1979
Acrylic and charcoal on paper

390

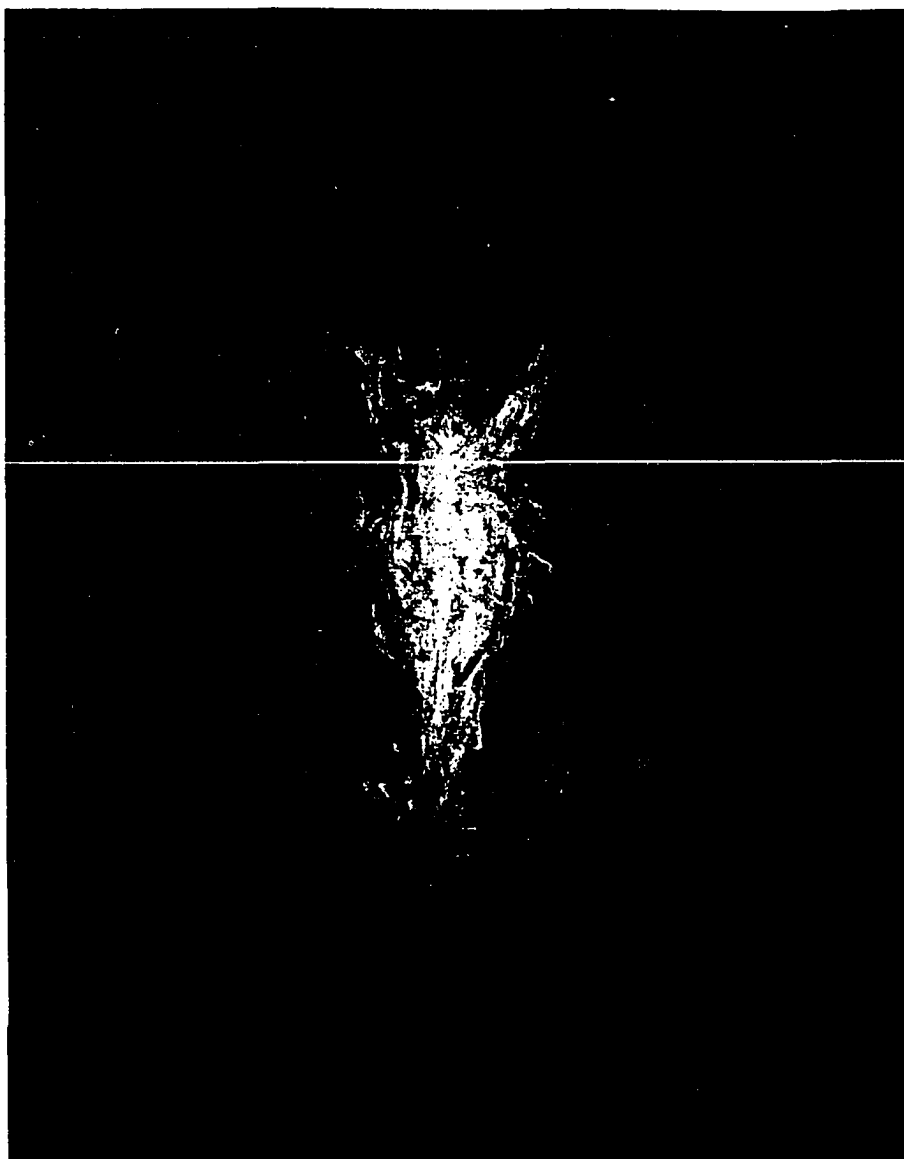


Fig. 4/7

Susan Rothenberg
Quoise 1979
Acrylic on canvas
91.5 x 73.5 cm.

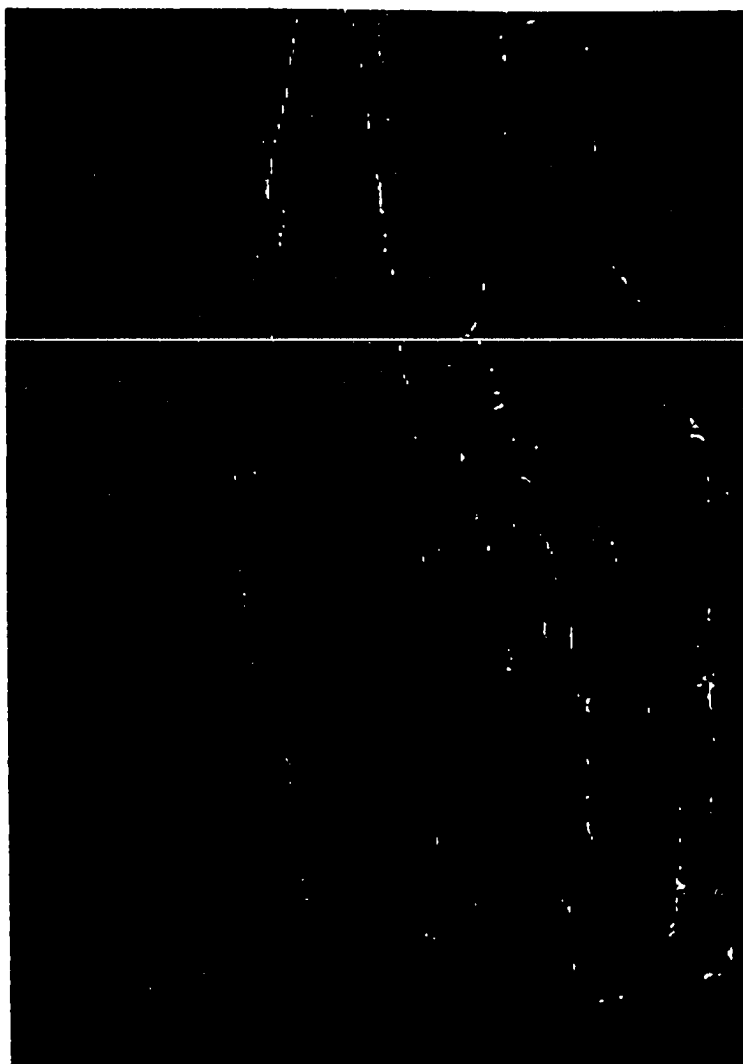


Fig. 4/8

Susan Rothenberg
Wishbone 1979
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
102 x 76"

392



Fig. 4/9

Susan Rothenberg
Outline 1978-79
Acrylic on canvas
185.4 x 127 cm



Fig. 4/10

Susan Rothenberg

Tenmen 1982

Oil on canvas

5'1" x 15'6"



Fig. 4.11

Susan Rothenberg
Untitled 1978-79
Acrylic and flashe on paper
20 x 20"



Fig. 4/12

Susan Rothenberg
Blue Body 1980-81
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
9' x 6'3"

396



Fig. 4/13

Susan Rothenberg
White Mountain 1980-81
Acrylic and flashe on canvas

397

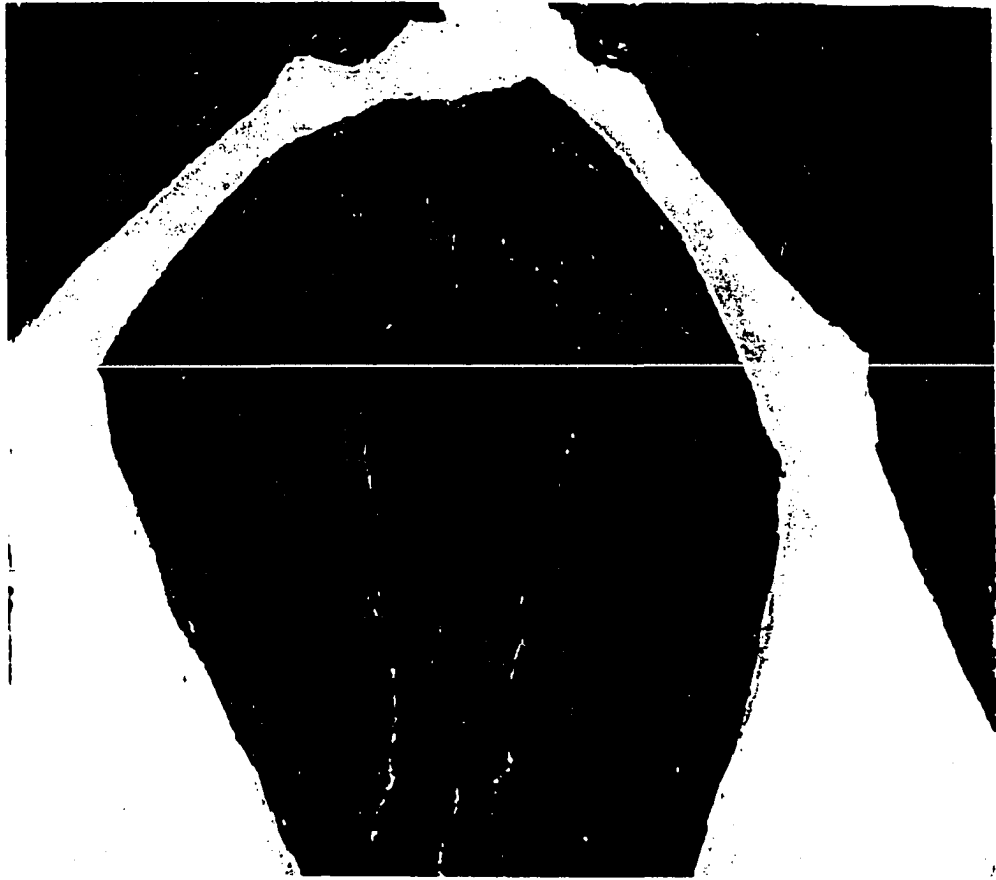


Fig. 4/14

Susan Rothenberg
Blue Frontal 1978
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
195.6 x 224.8

398

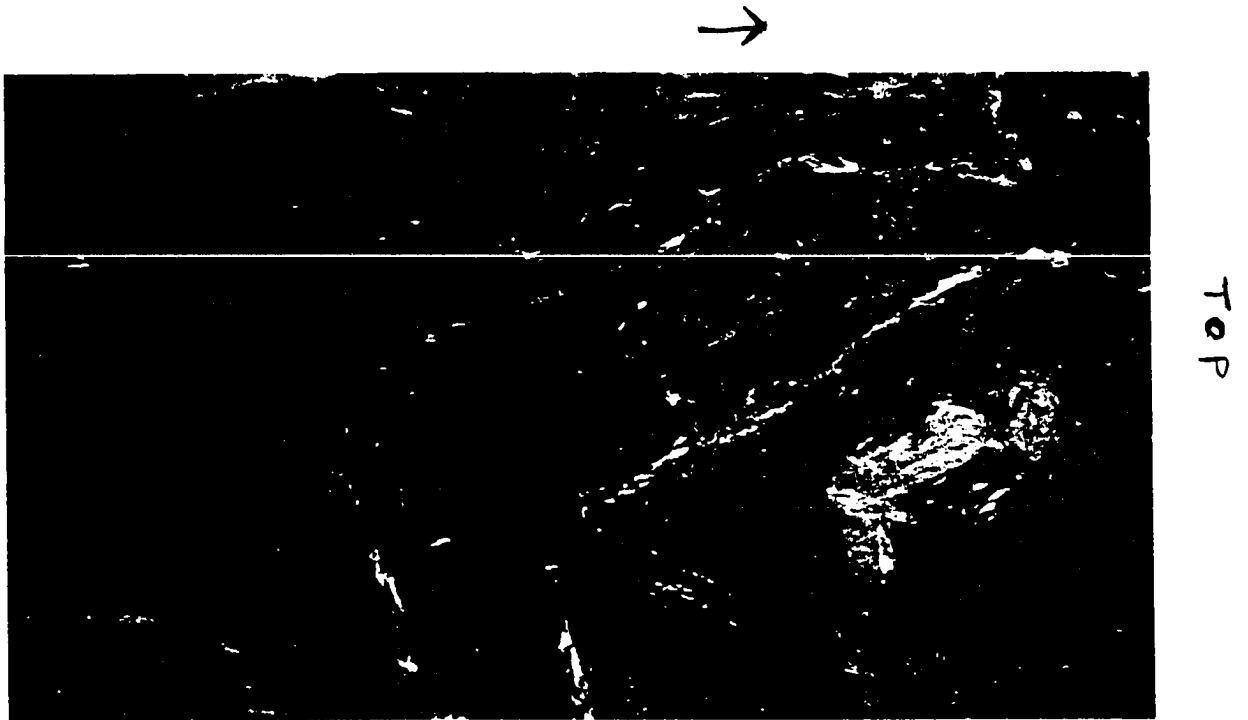


Fig. 4/15

Susan Rothenberg
Our Lord 1979
Acrylic and flashe canvas
69 x 36"

399

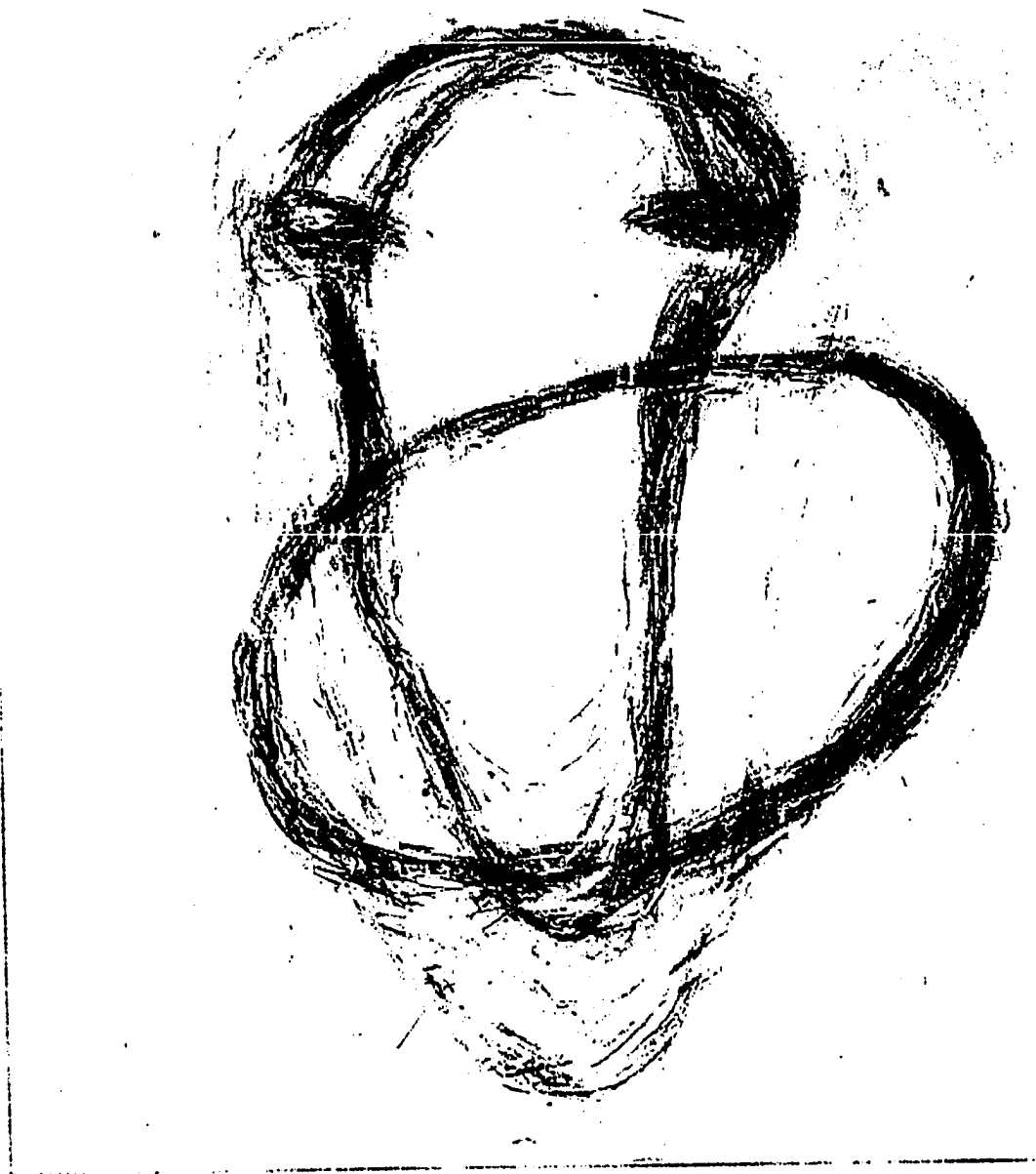


Fig. 4/16

Susan Rothenberg
Untield (Head with Cylinder) 1981
Acrylic and flashe on canvas

400

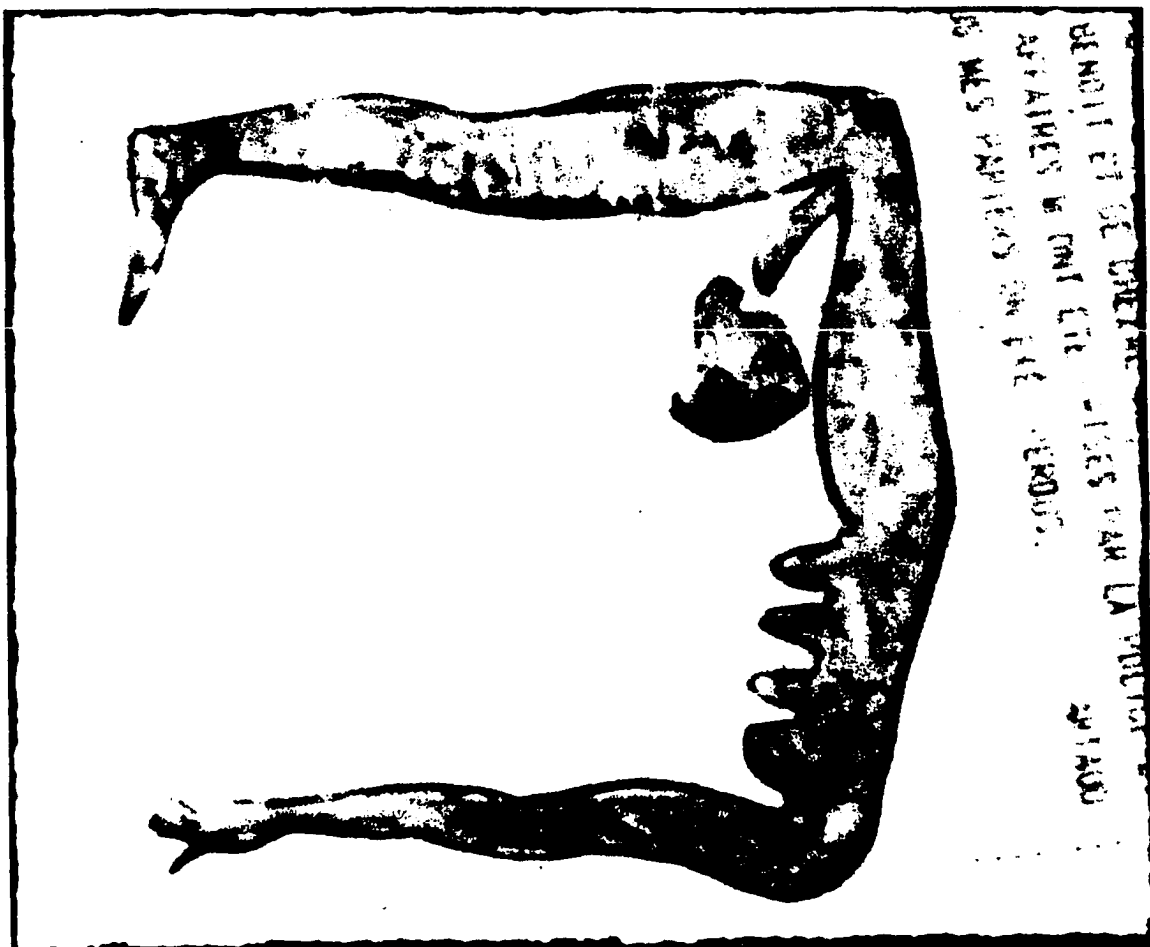


Fig. 4/17

Nancy Spero
From 'Codex Artaud' 1971
mixed media on paper

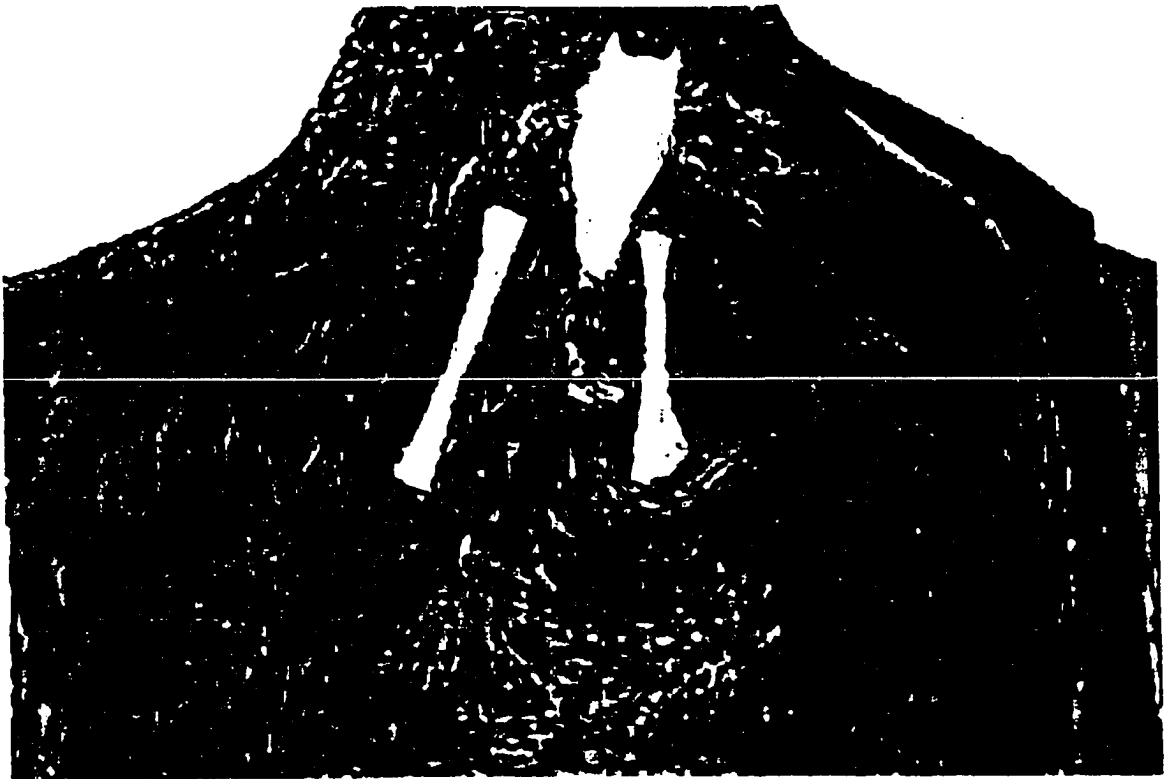


Fig. 4/18

Susan Rothenberg
The Hulk 1979
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
197.5 x 264.2 cm

402



Fig. 4/19

Susan Rothenberg
Untield (Horse Embryo) 1979
Acrylic and gesso on paper
50 x 38"

403



Fig. 4/20

Susan Rothenberg
Drawings From Head And
Hand Series c.1980
Crayon on canvas
Various dimensions



Fig. 4/21

Susan Rothenberg
Black Head 1980-81
Acrylic and flashe on canvas
8'11" x 8'11"

405

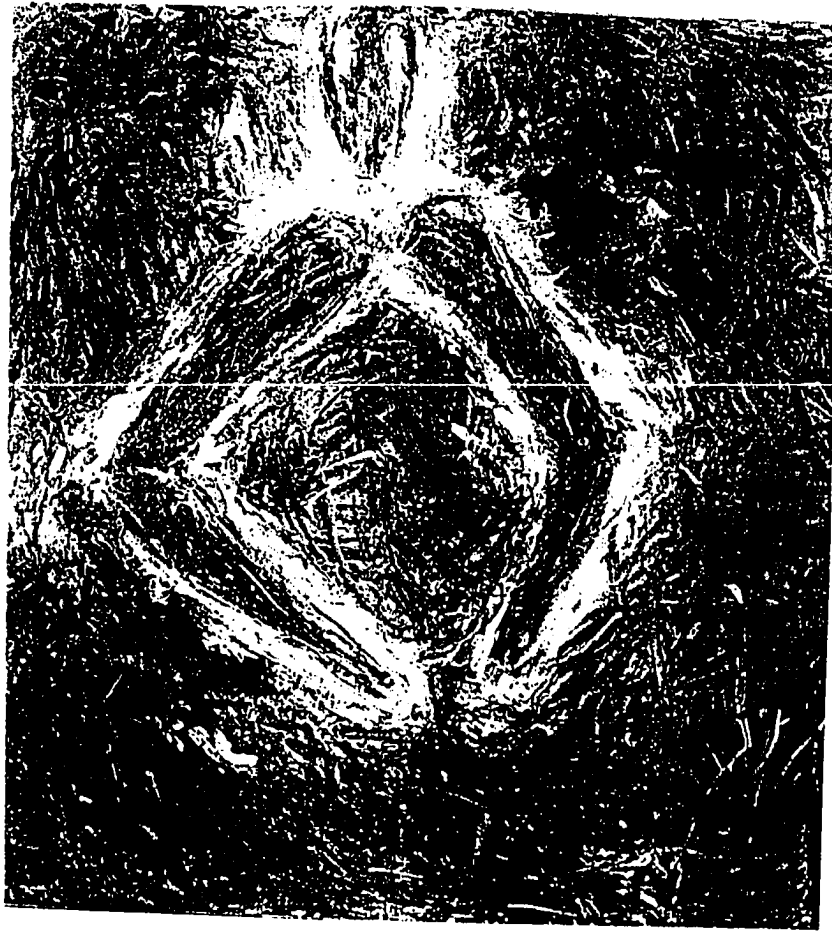


Fig. 4/22

Susan Rothenberg
Headlights 1983
Oil on canvas



Fig. 4/23

Susan Rothenberg

Big And Little Head 1980-81

407

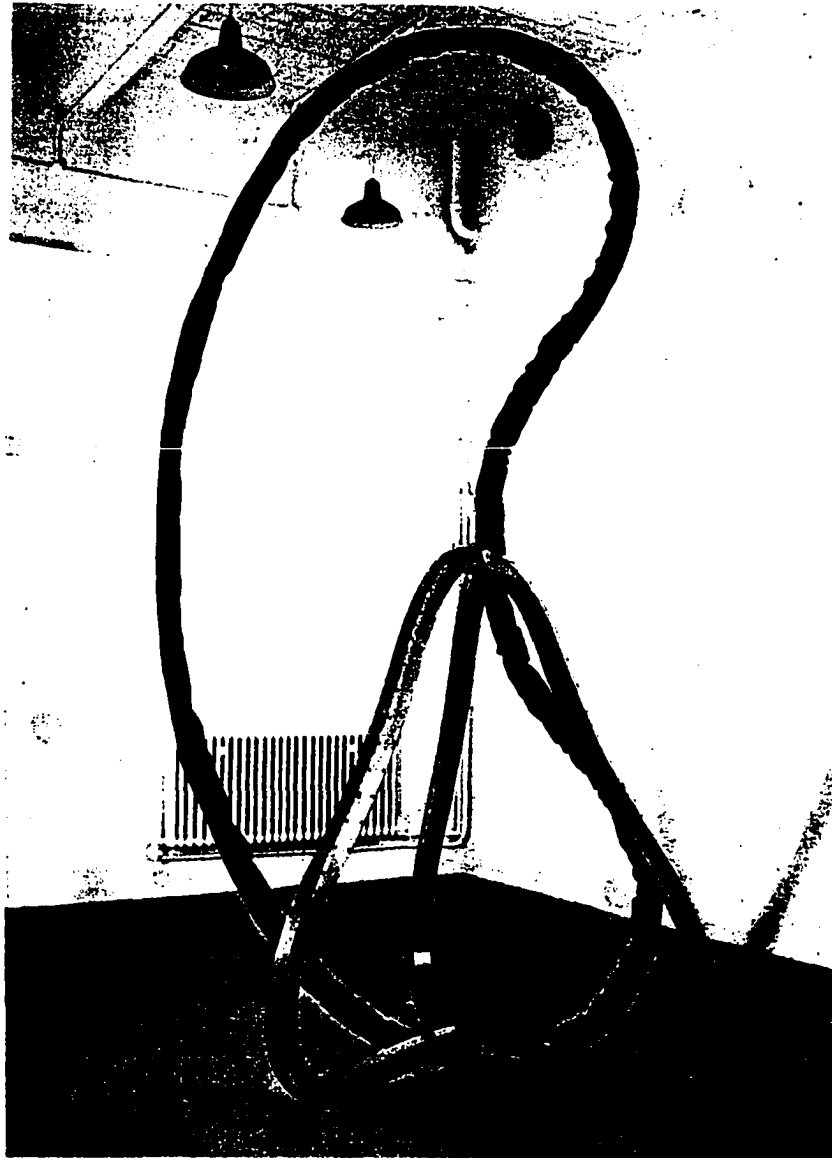


Fig. 4/24

Richard Deacon

Tall Tree in the Ear 1983-84

Galvanized steel, laminated wood

91.5 x 73.5 cm

408



Fig. 4/25

Susan Rothenberg
Self-Portrait 1982
Oil on Canvas
15 1/4 x 21"



Fig. 4/26

Phillip Guston
Untield (Two Hooded Figures) 1969
Oil on masonite
31 x 36"

410

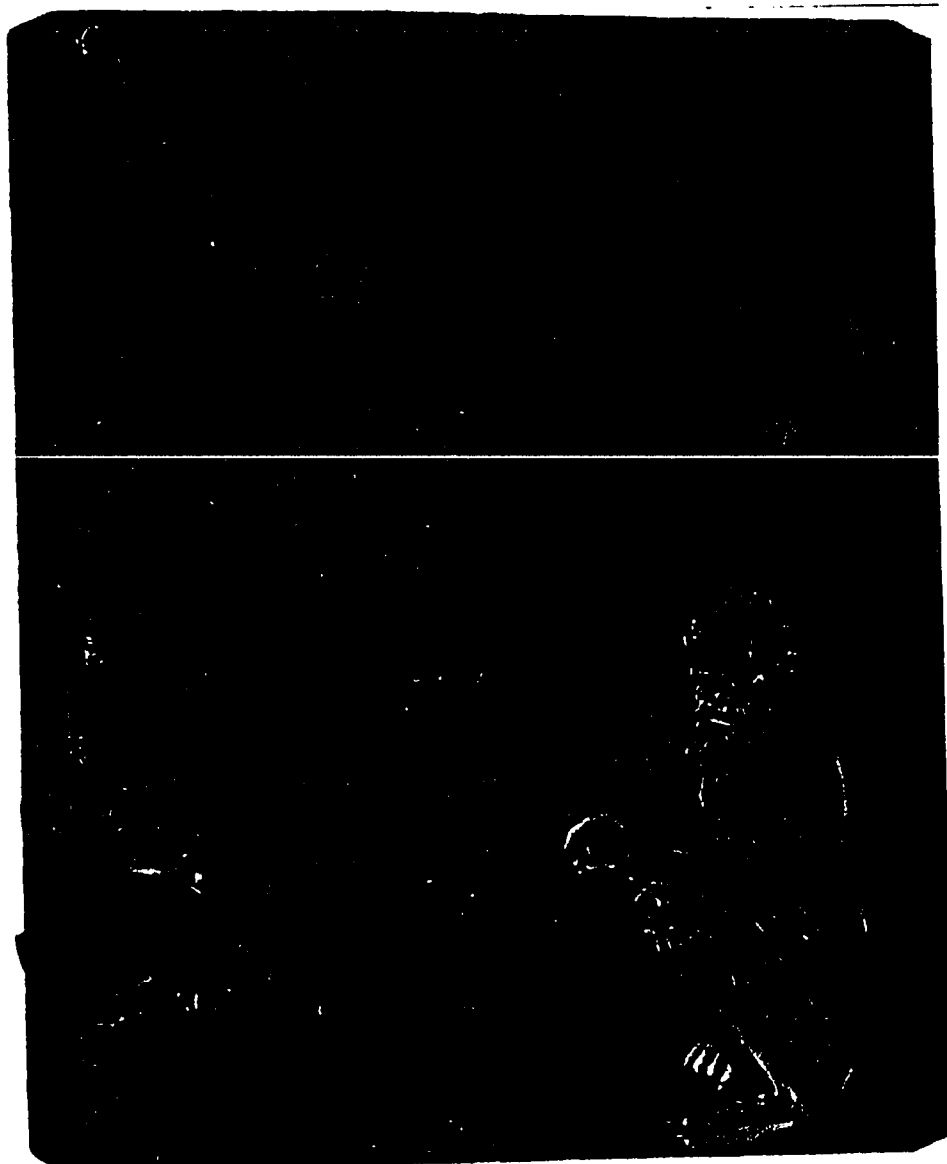


Fig. 2/27

Julian Schnabel
Aborigine Painting 1980
Oil on canvas
96 x 86"

411

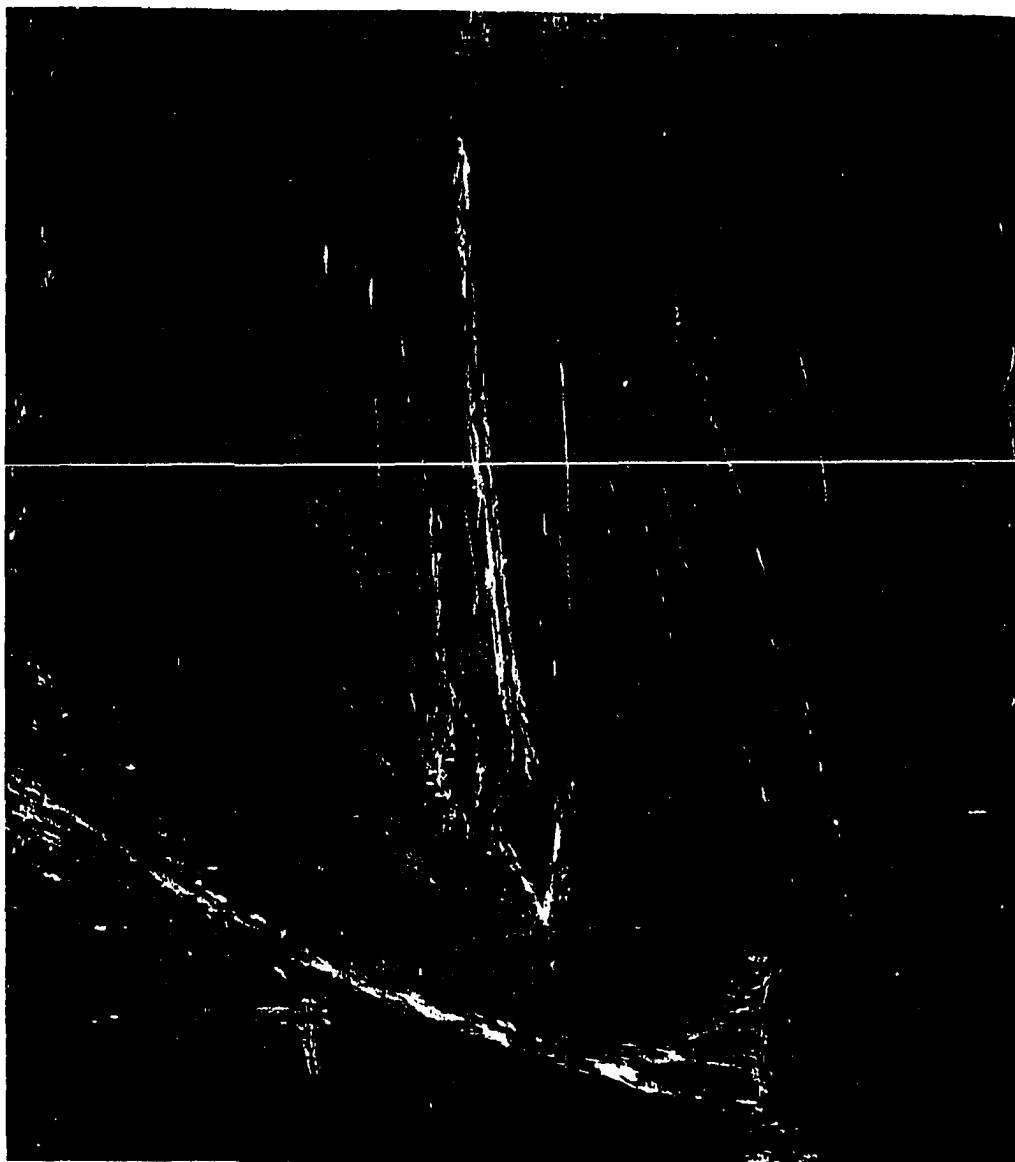


Fig. 4/28

Susan Rothenberg
The Creek 1980-81
Oil on canvas
88.25 x 78"

412



Fig. 4/29

Susan Rothenberg
Maggie's Cartwheel 1981-82



Fig. 4/30

Susan Rothenberg
Withall 1982
Oil on canvas
5'5.125 x 10'6.75"

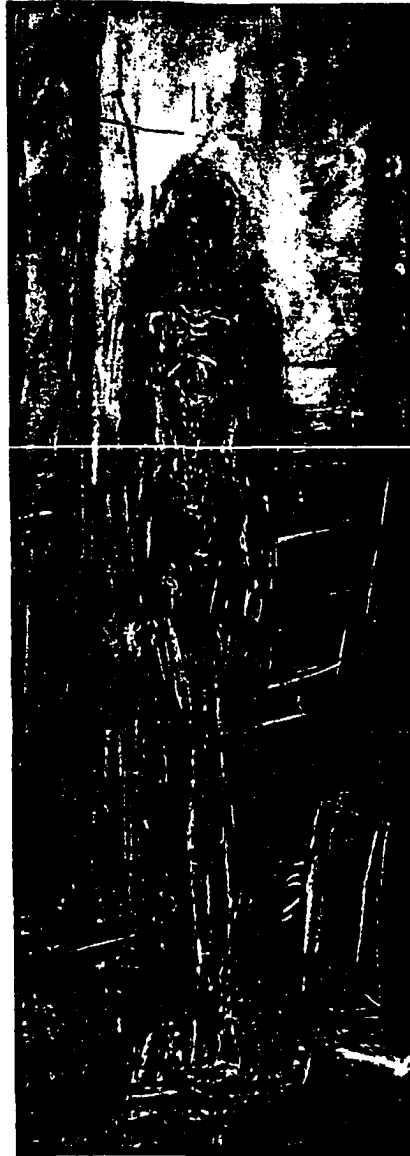


Fig. 4/31

Alberto Giacometti
Standing Nude 1951
Oil on canvas
24 x 9"

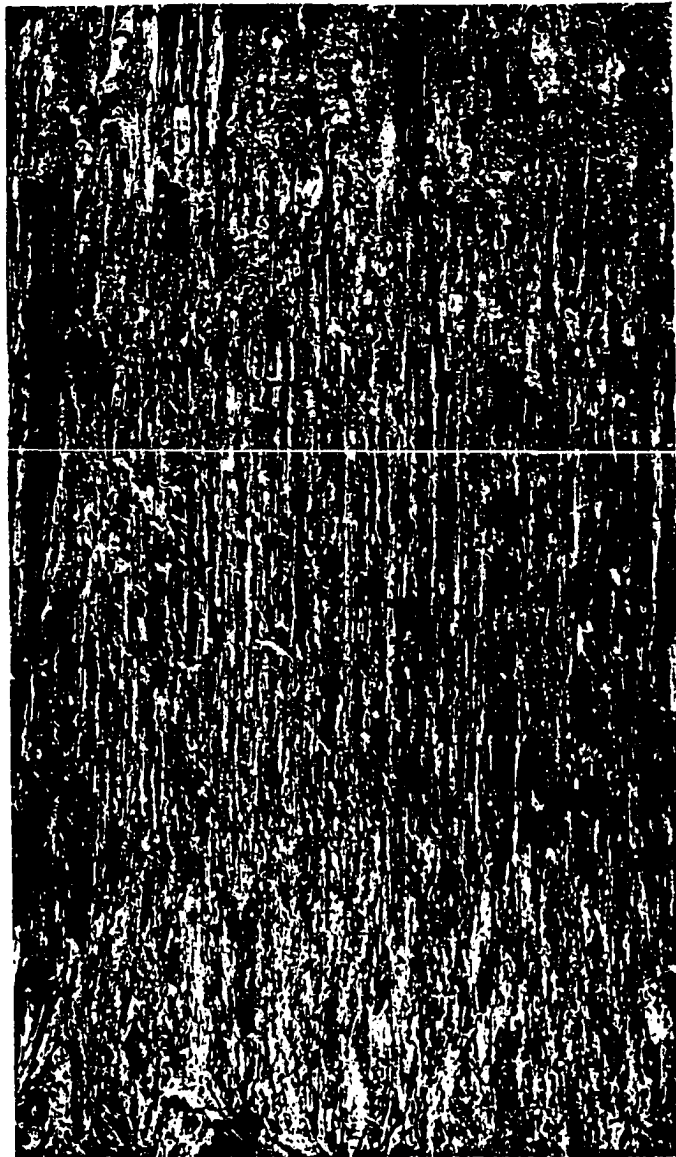


Fig. 4/32

Larry Poons
Yellow Cat on Hand 1976
Acrylic on canvas
106.25 x 66.5"



Fig. 4/33

Susan Rothenberg
Patches 1982
Oil on canvas
73" x 99"

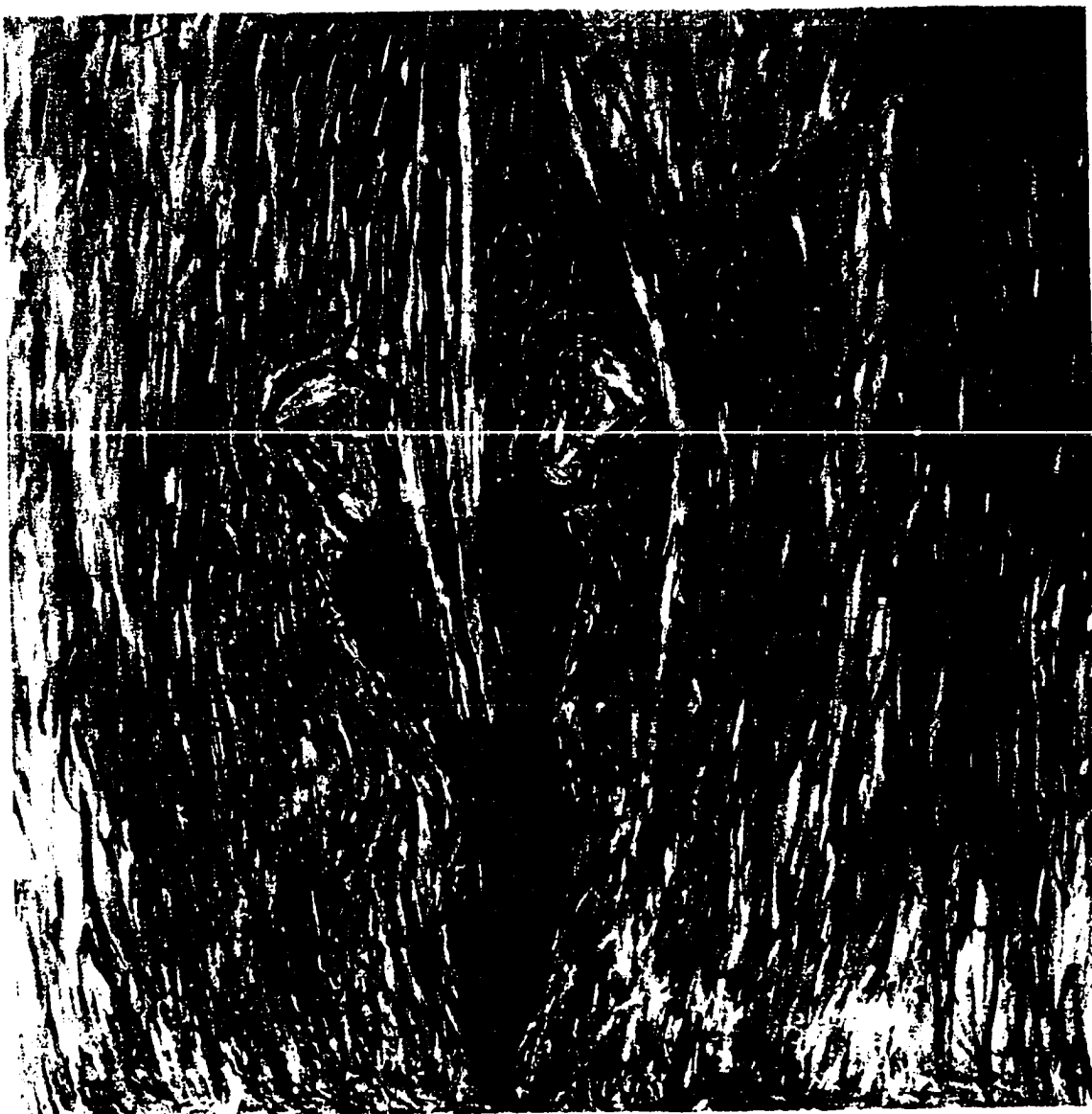


Fig. 4/34

Susan Rothenberg
Asian Sex 1982
Oil on canvas
62 x 62"



Fig. 4/35

Susan Rothenberg

Beggar 1982

Oil on canvas

39.5 x 50.5"

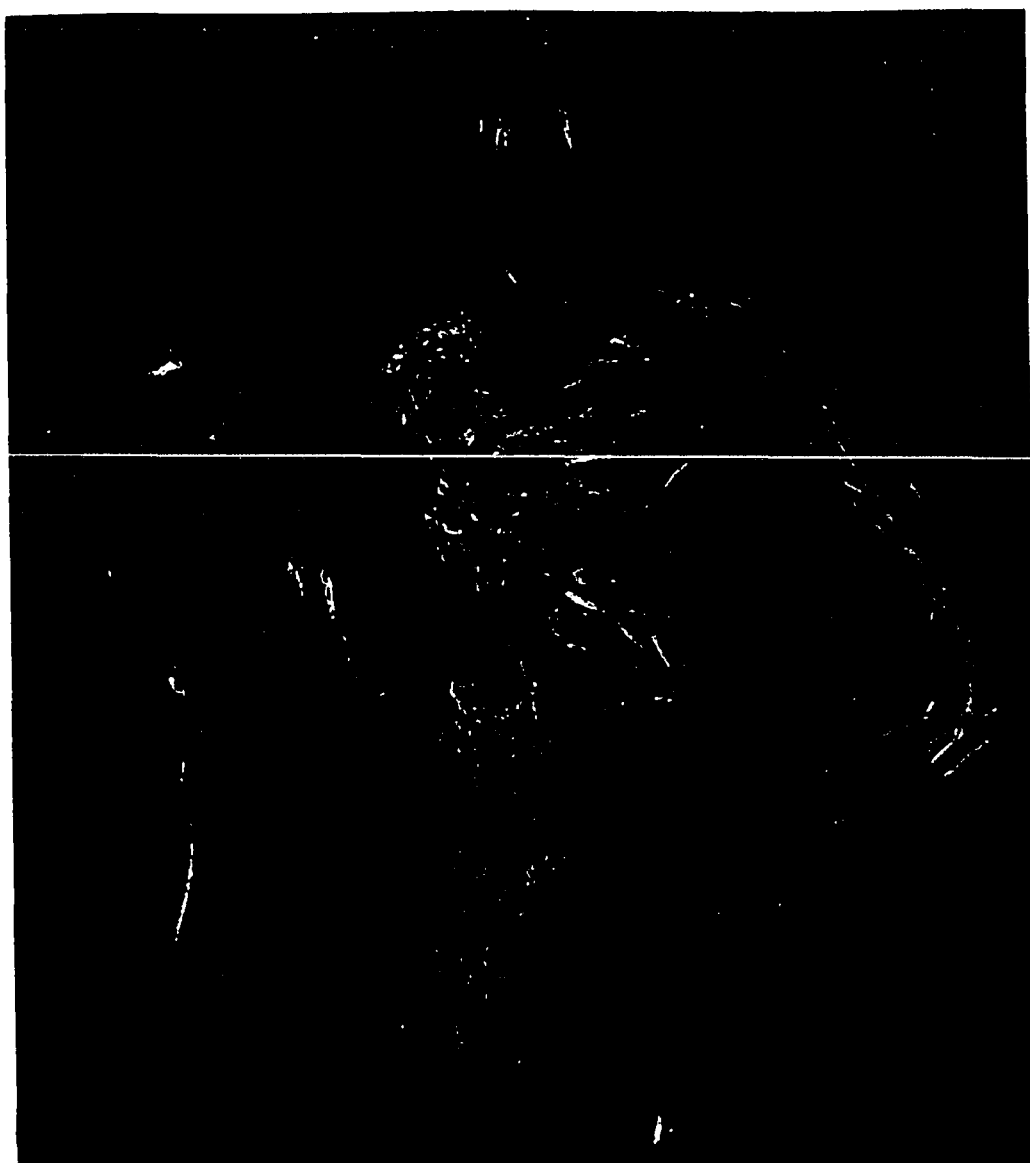


Fig. 4/36

Susan Rothenberg

Overcoat 1982-83

Oil on canvas" 44 x 39.5"

420

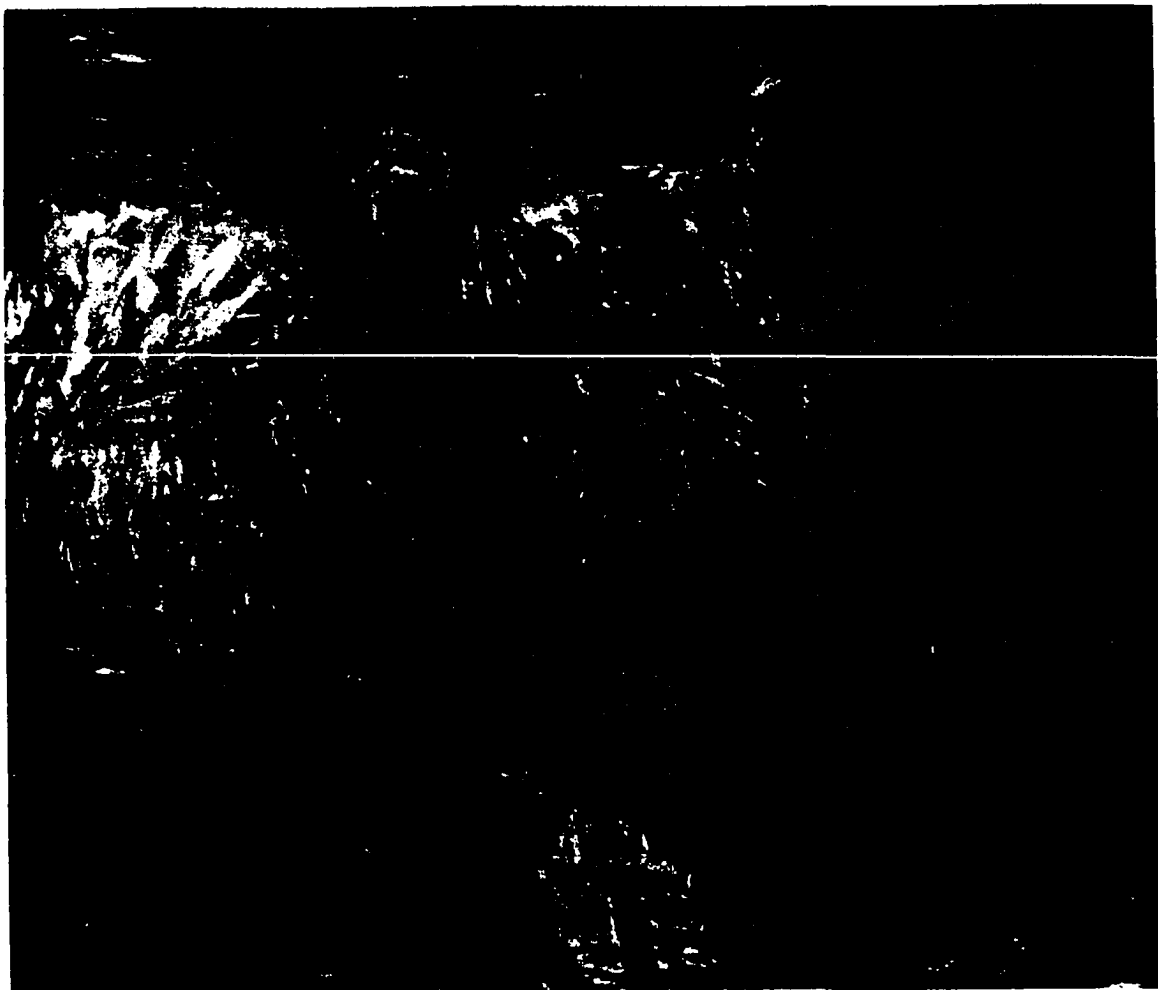


Fig. 4/37

Susan Rothenberg

Pillow 1984

Oil on canvas

46.5 x 54.5"

421



Fig. 4/38

Susan Rothenberg

L.R. 1984

Oil on canvas

47 x 36"



Fig. 4/39

Susan Rothenberg
Elizabeth 1984-85
Oil on canvas
71 x 54.5"



Fig. 4/40

Susan Rothenberg

Untitled 1984

Charcoal on paper

47.5 x 31"



Fig. 4/41

Susan Rothenberg

Mondrian 1984

Oil on canvas

9'1" x 7'

425



Fig. 4/42

Susan Rothenberg

Blue Chair 1987

Oil on canvas

78 x 71"

426

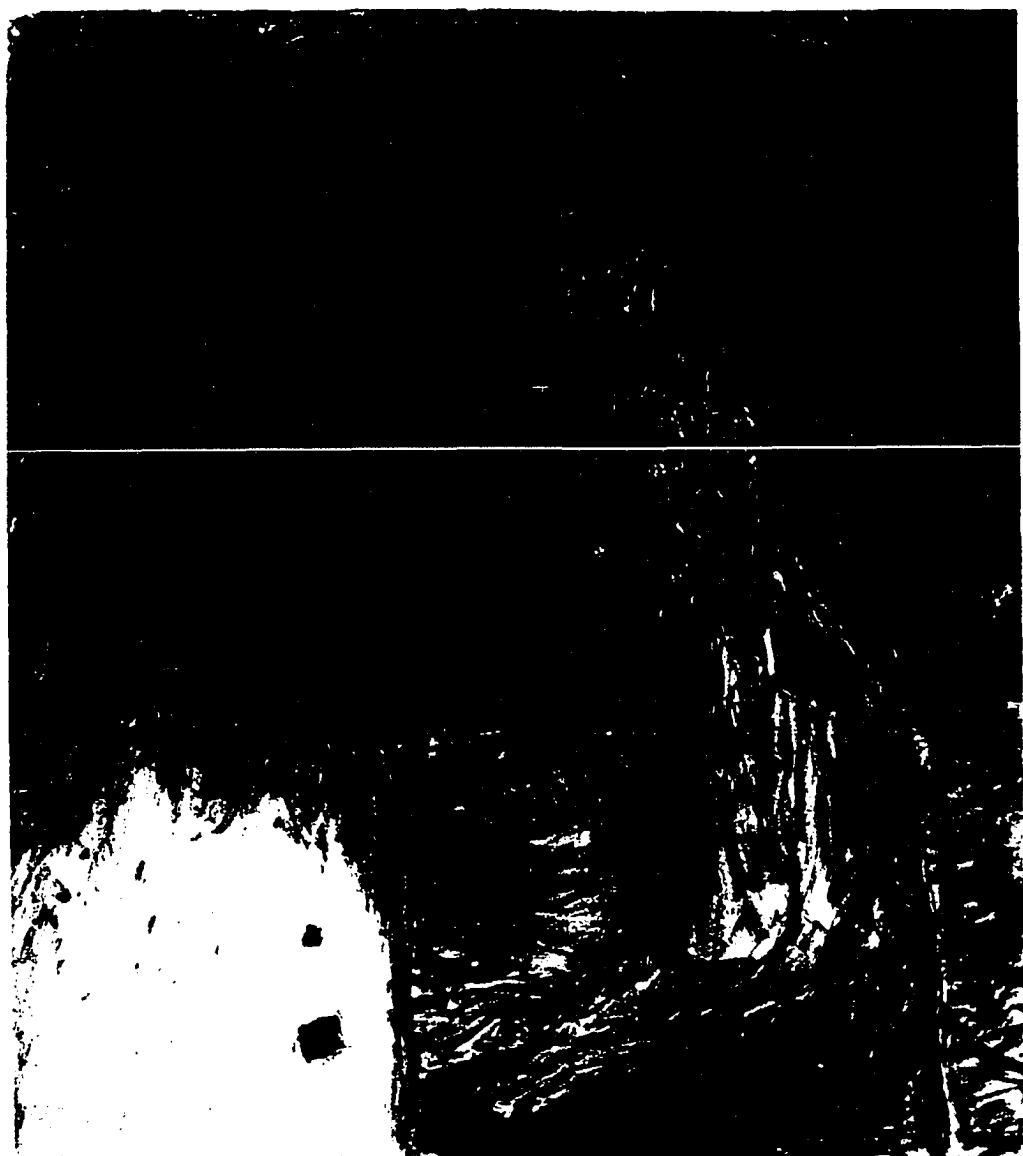


Fig. 4/43

Susan Rothenberg
A Golden Moment 1985
Oil on canvas
54 x 48"

427



Fig. 4/44

Susan Rothenberg
Mondrian Dancing 1984
Oil on canvas
78 x 91"

428

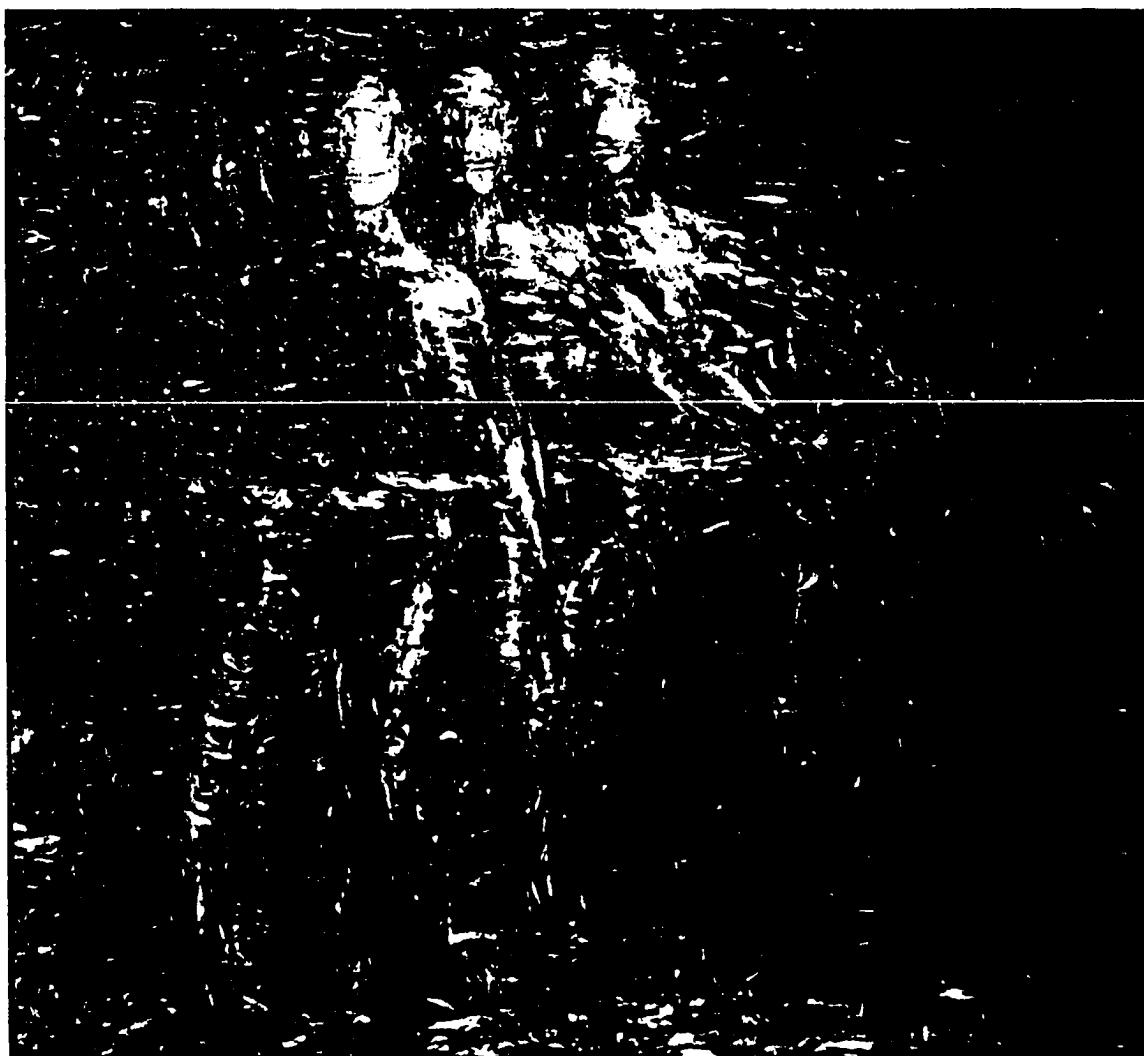


Fig. 4/45

Susan Rothenberg

Night Ride 1987

Oil on canvas

7'9" x 9'2"

429

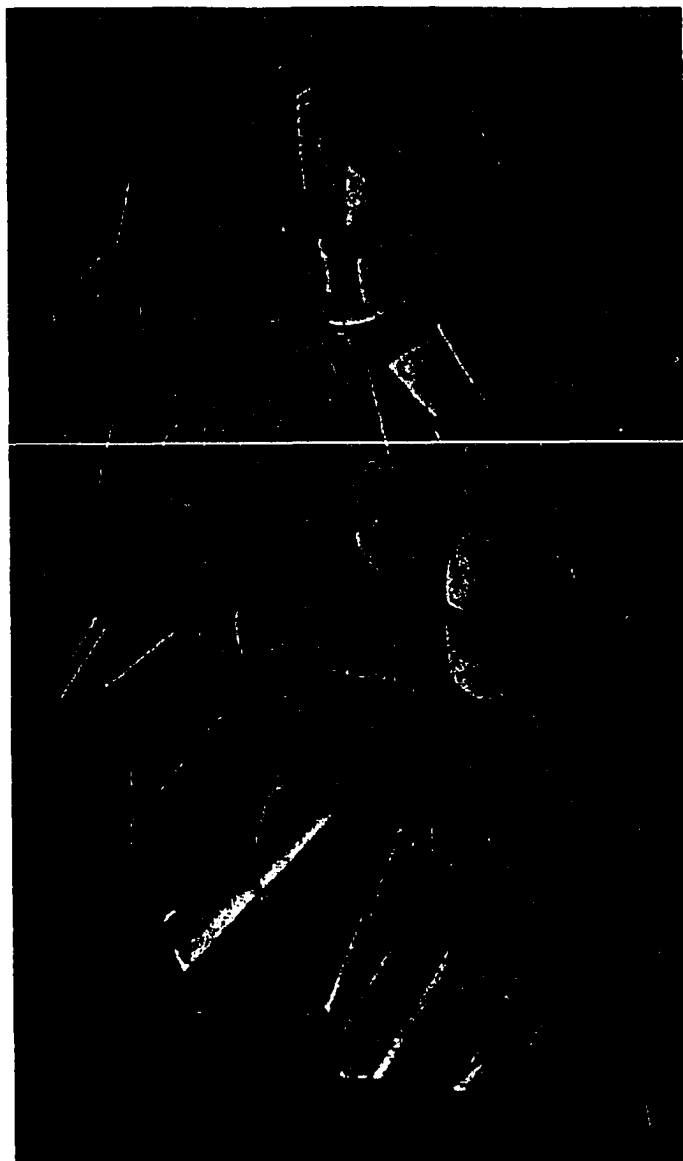


Fig. 4/46

Marcel DuChamp

Nude Descending the Staircase 1912

Oil on canvas

58 35"

430

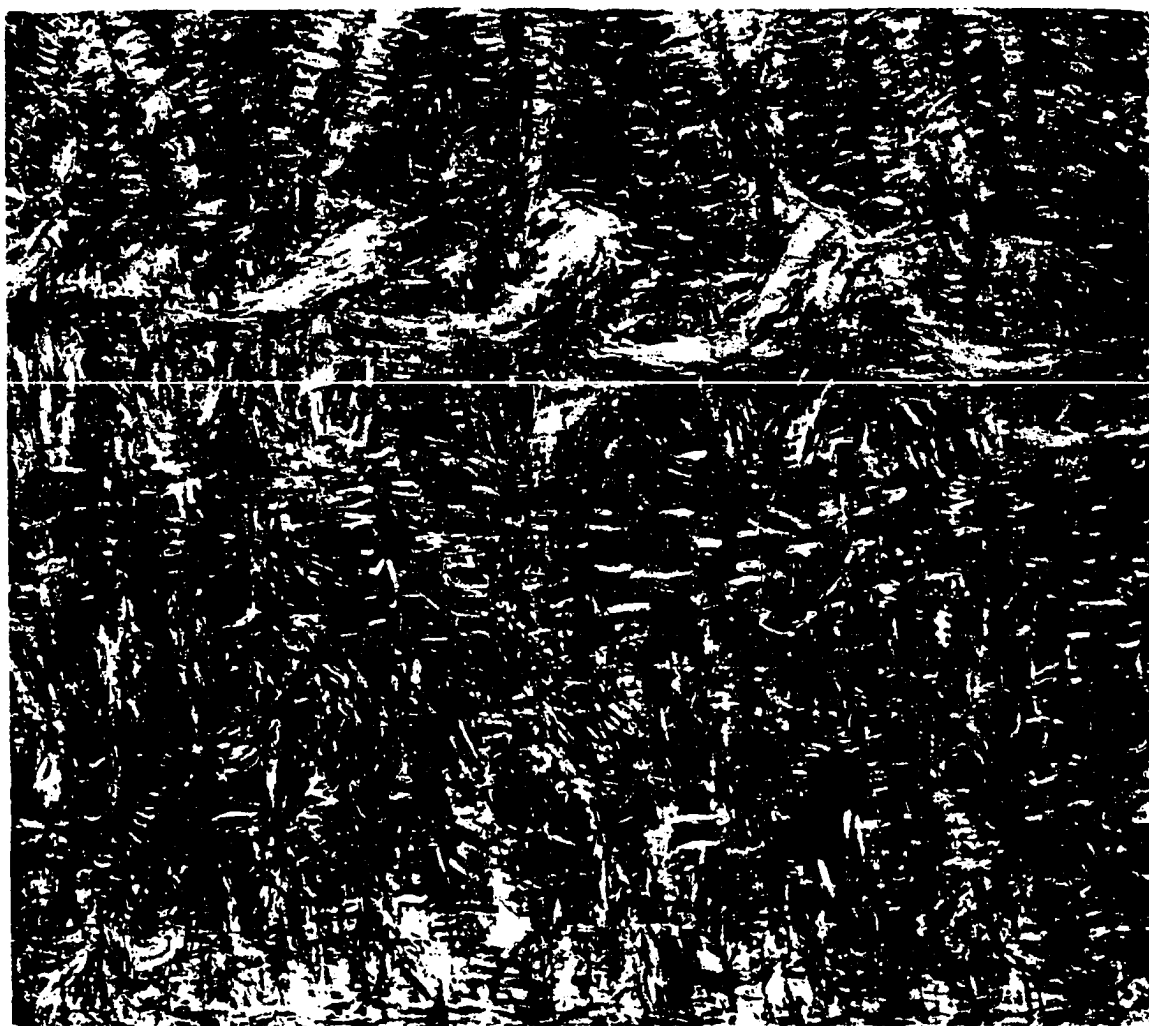


Fig. 4/47

Susan Rothenberg
Gyro 1986-87
Oil on canvas
1986-87

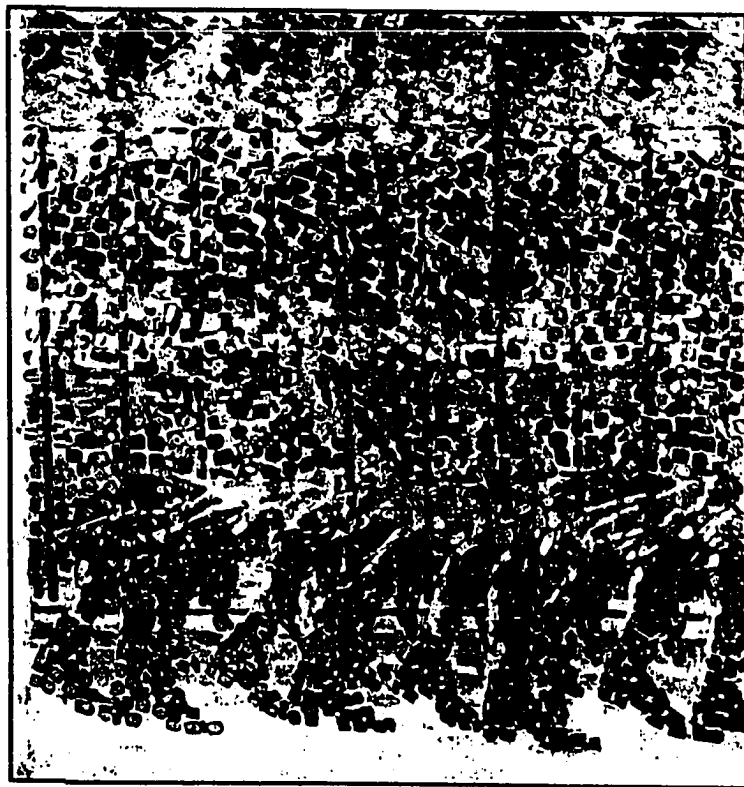


Fig. 4/48

Giacamo Balla
Young girl on balcony 1912
Oil on canvas

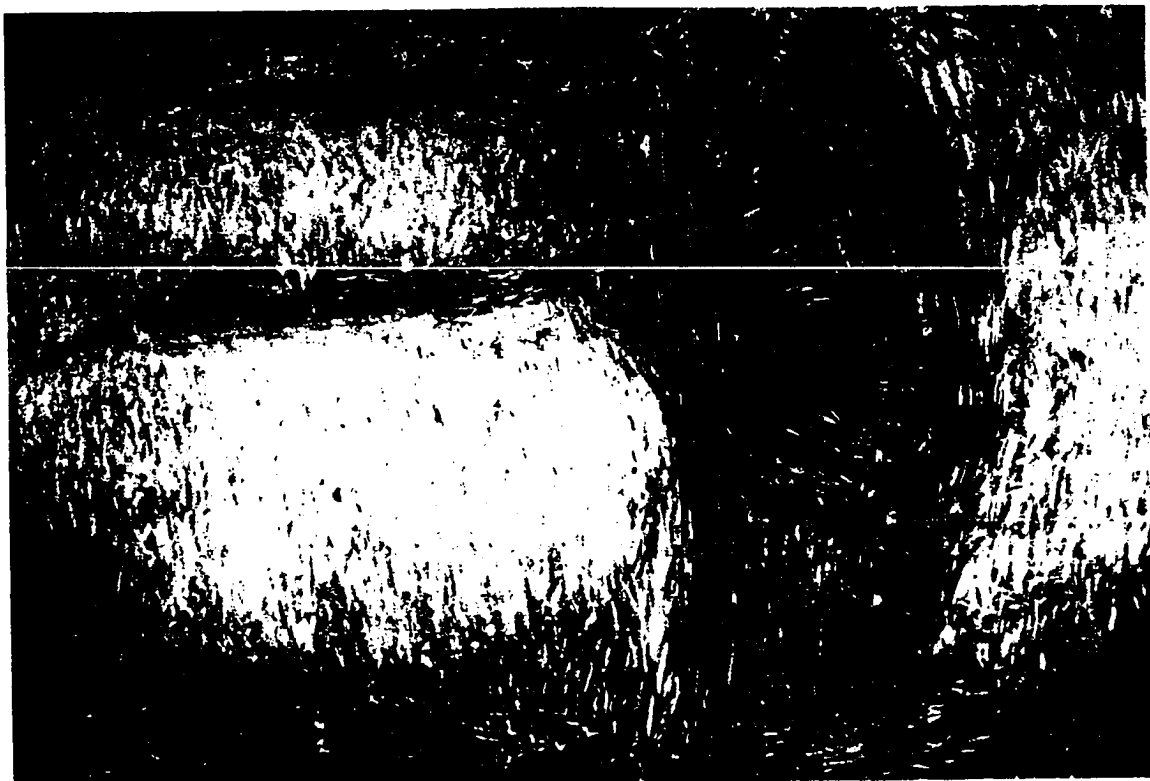


Fig. 4/49

Susan Rothenberg
Bucket of Water 1983-84
Oil on canvas
7' x 10'7"

433

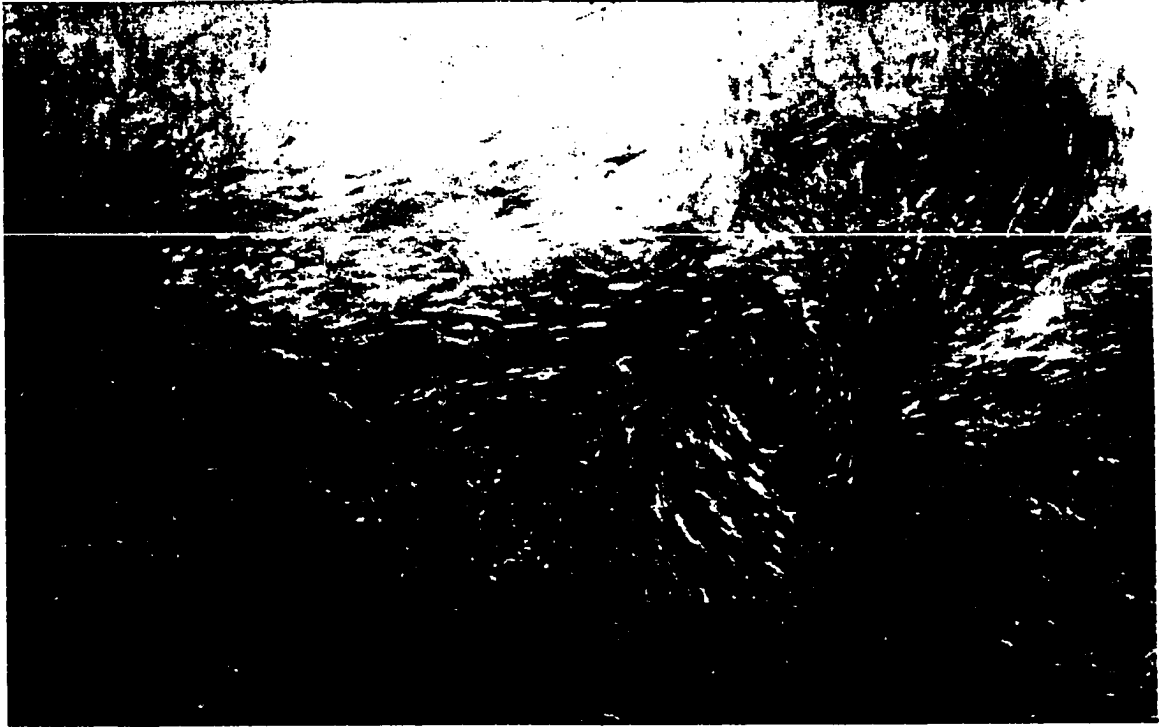


Fig. 4/50

Susan Rothenberg
Holding the Floor 1985
Oil on canvas
84 x 147"

434

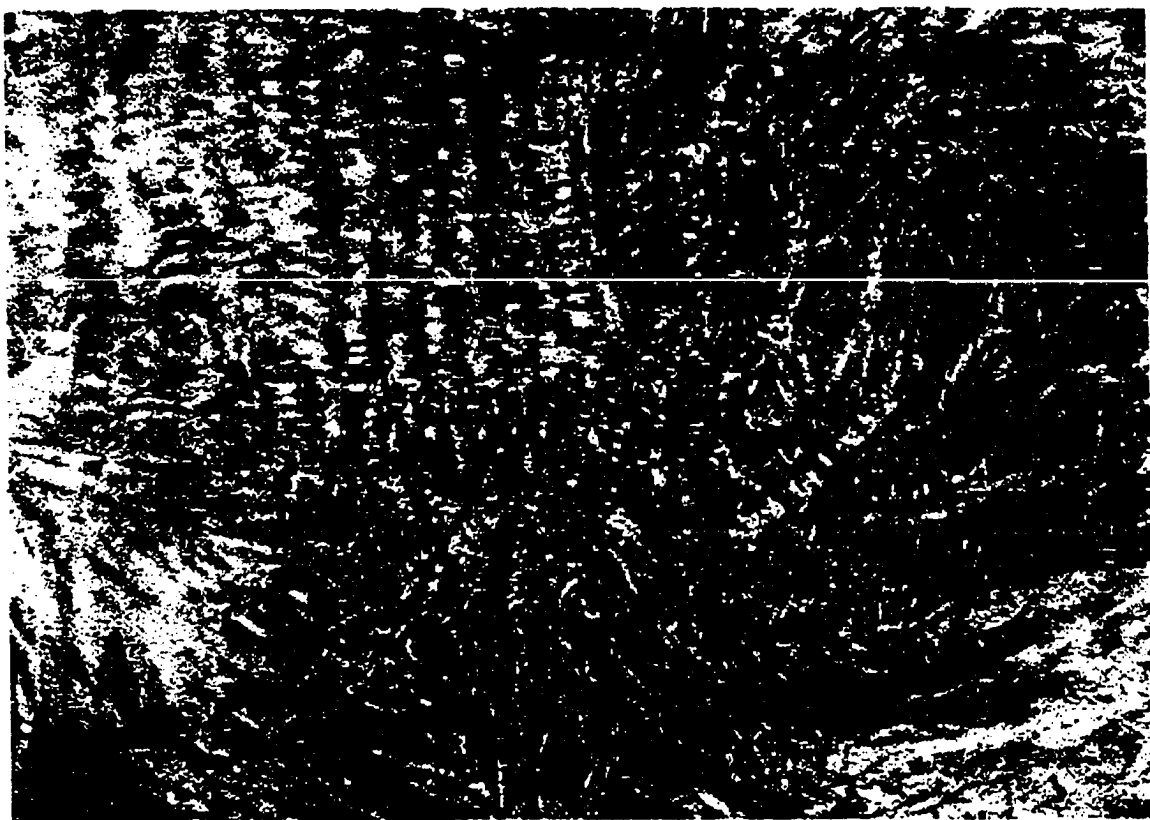


Fig. 4/51

Susan Rothenberg

Vaulting 1986-7

Oil on canvas

7'6" x 11'

435



Fig. 4/52

Susan Rothenberg
Folded Buddha 1987-88
Oil on canvas
7'7.25 x 9'3.25"

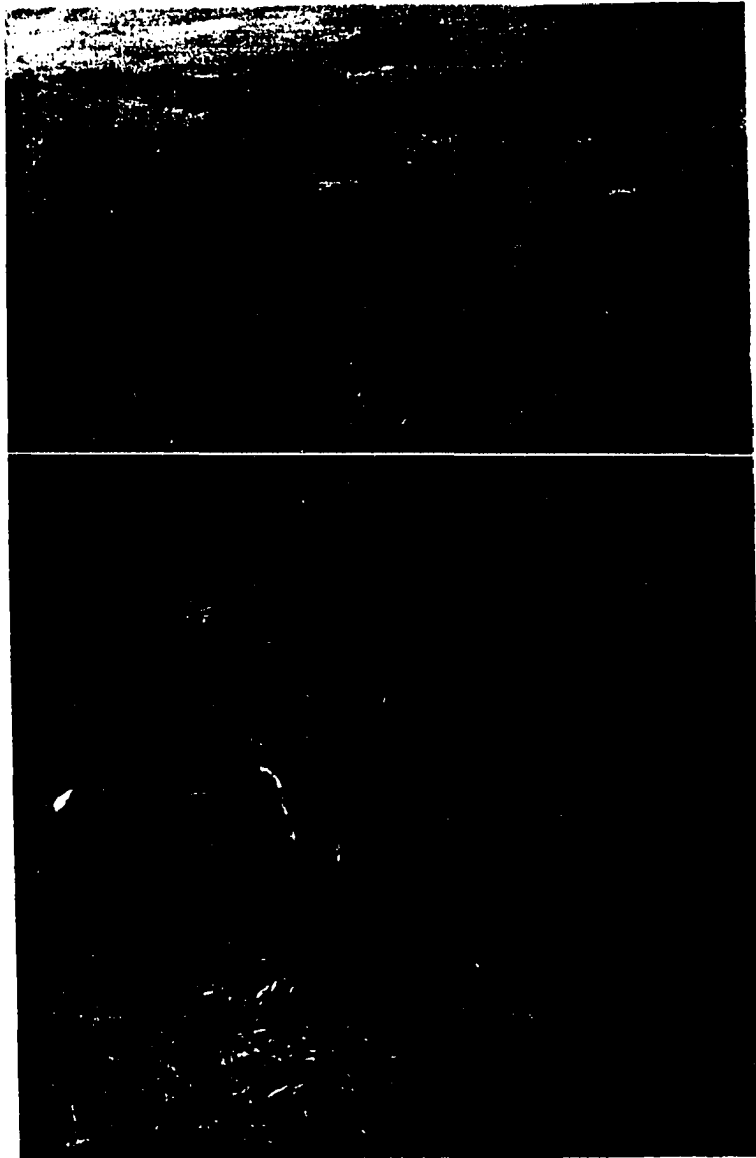


Fig. 5/1

Susan Rothenberg
Bluebird Wings 1989
Oil on canvas
65 x 43"

437



Fig. 5/2

Susan Rothenberg
Heads at Tank 1990
Oil on canvas
66 x 49"

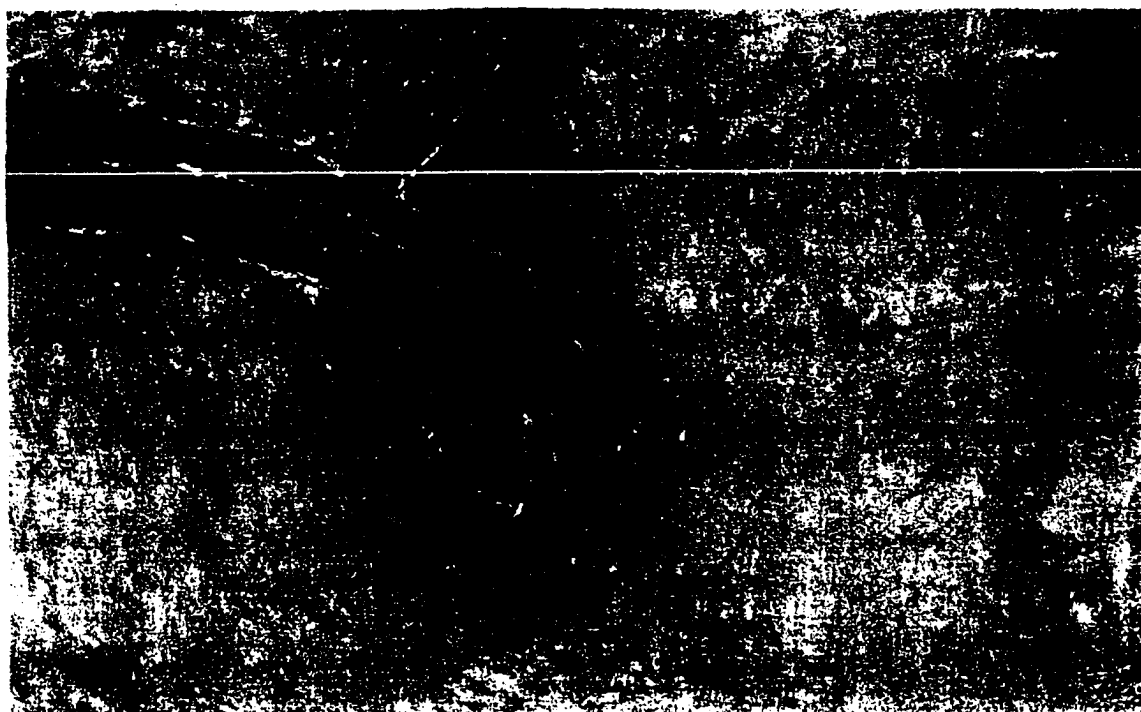


Fig. 5/3

Susan Rothenberg
Three Heads 1990
Oil on canvas
40 x 64"

439

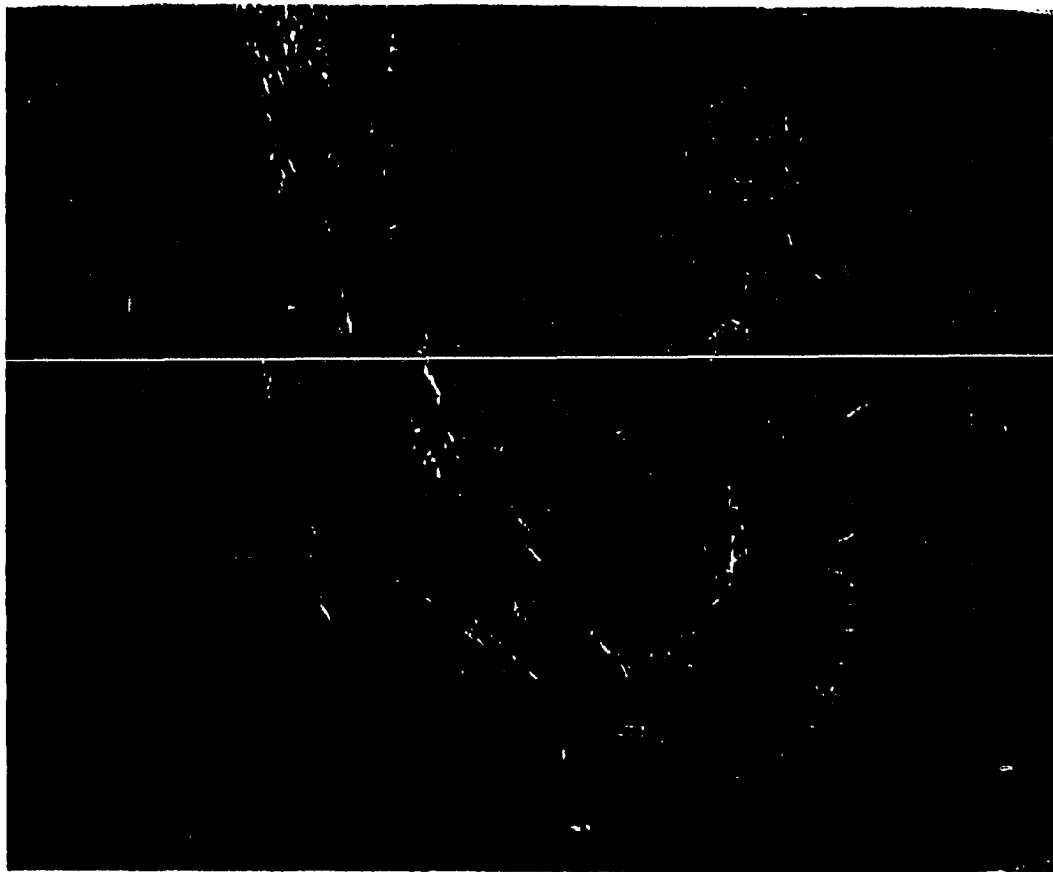


Fig. 5/4

Susan Rothenberg
Blue U-Turn 1989
Oil on canvas
91 x 112"

440

TOP

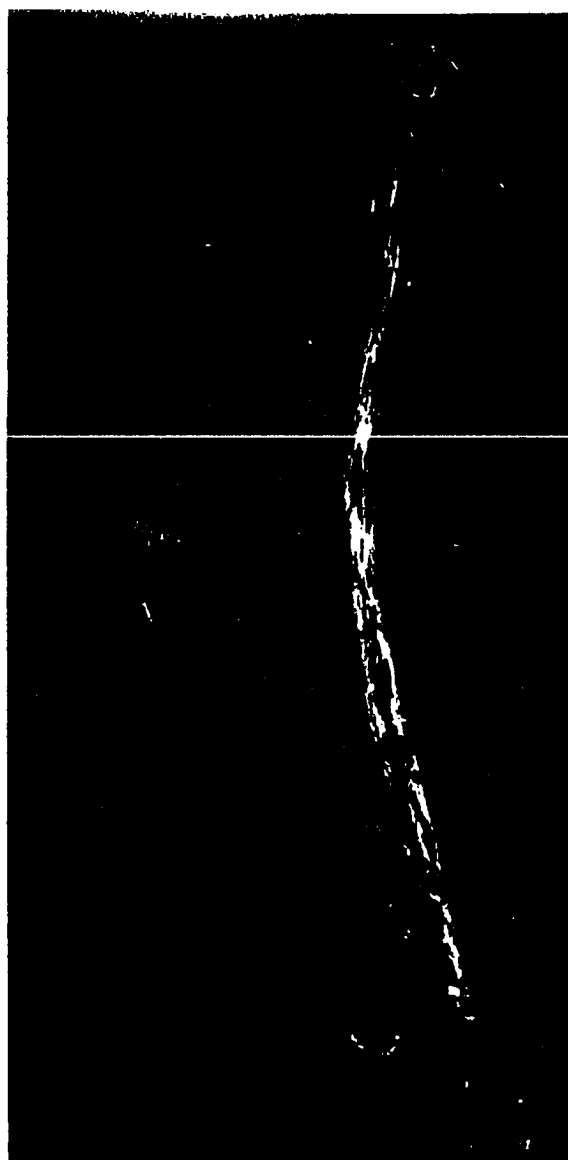


Fig. 5/5

Susan Rothenberg
Bone Heads 1989-90
Oil on canvas
6'5" x 12'8"

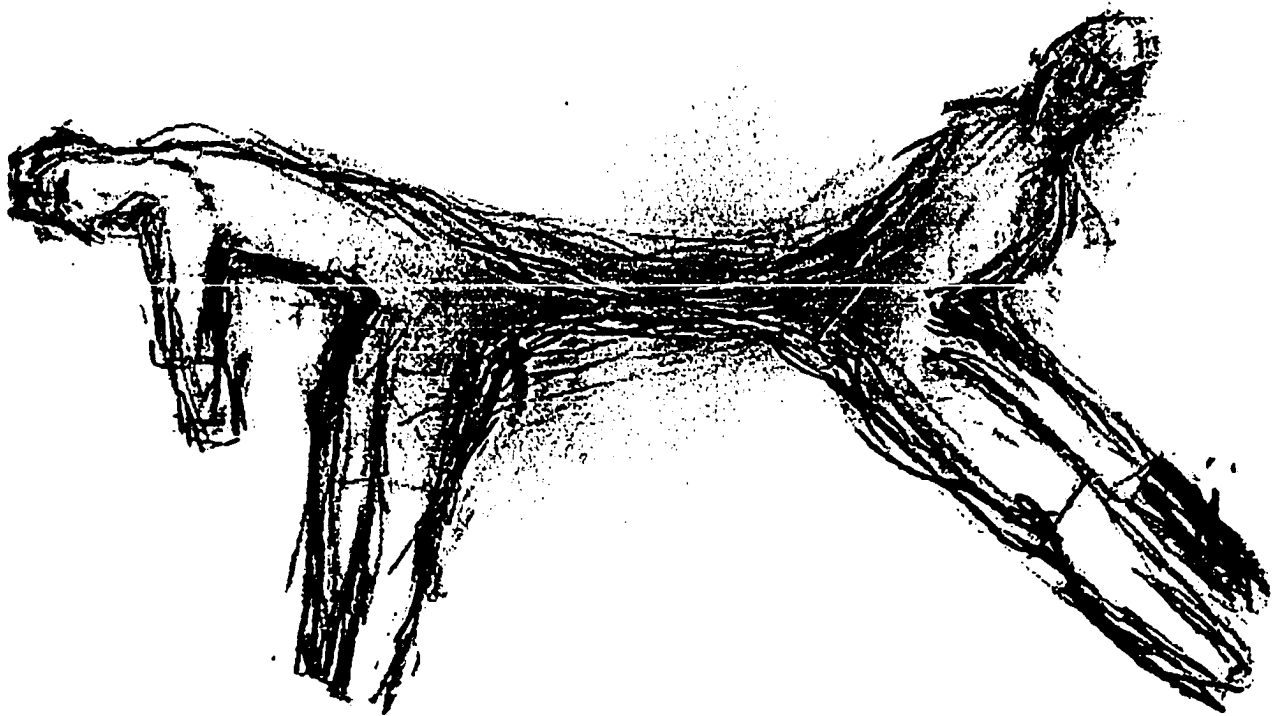


Fig. 5/6

Susan Rothenberg

Untitled 1990

Pastel and conte crayon on paper 442

17.25 x 28.5"



Fig. 5/7

Susan Rothenberg
Dogs Killing Rabbit 1991-92
Oil on canvas
87 x 141"

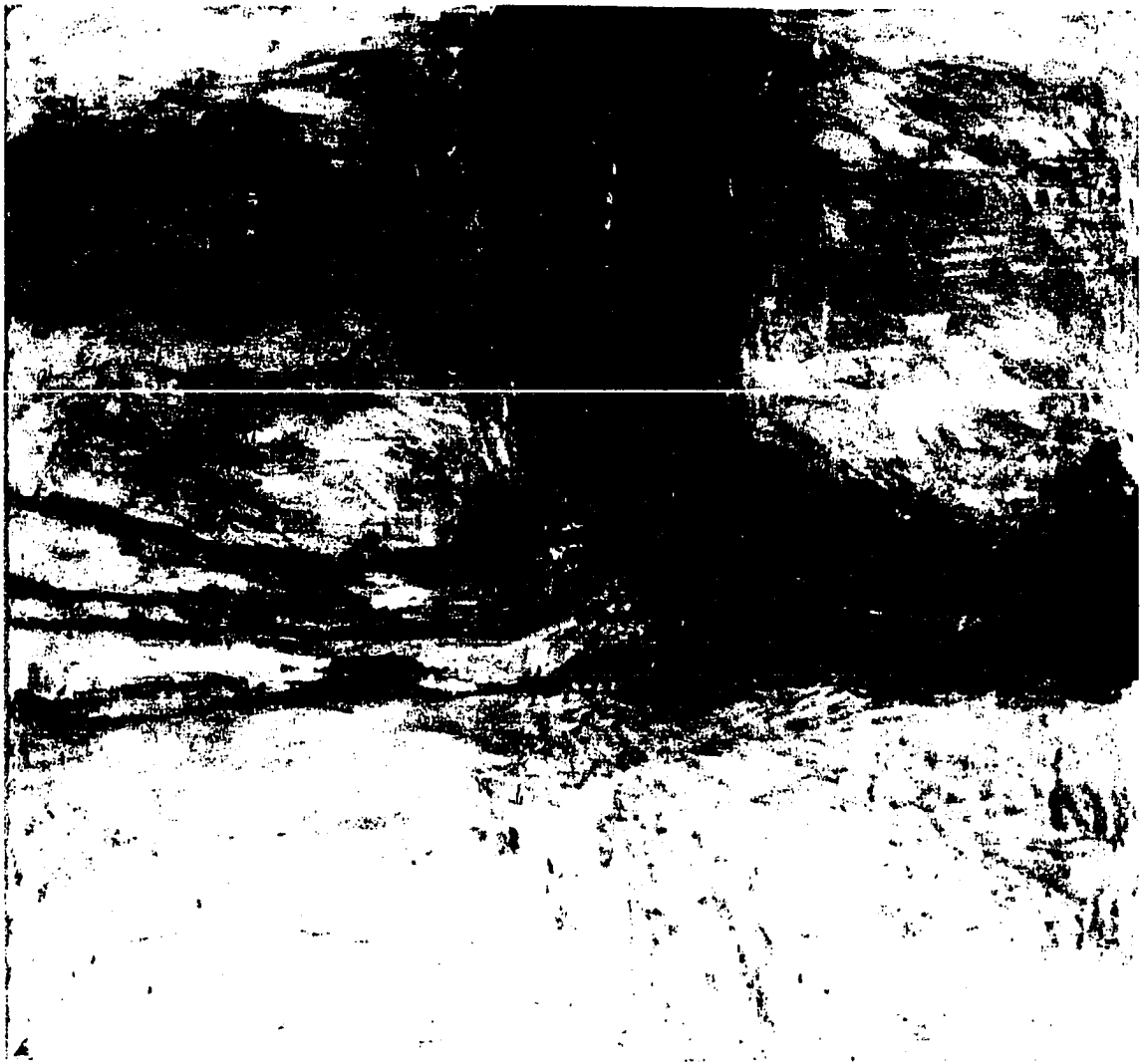


Fig. 5/8

Susan Rothenberg
3 Pairs 1990-91
Oil on canvas
157.5 x 146 cm.

444

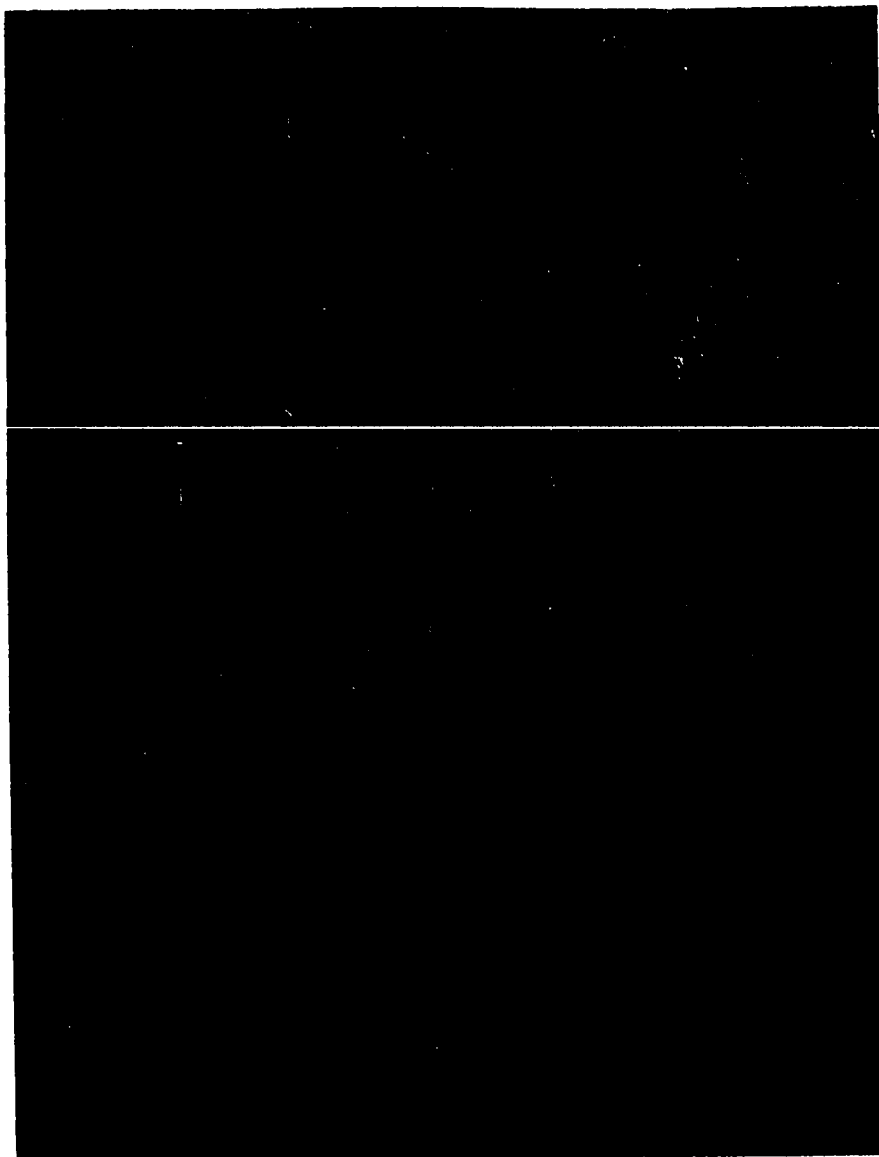


Fig. 5/9

Chaim Soutine
Hanging Turkey c. 1926
Oil on canvas
37.75 x 28.385"



Fig. 5/10

Susan Rothenberg
Accident 1991-92
Oil on canvas
90 x 112"

446



Fig. 5/11

Susan Rothenberg
Accident #2 1993-94
Oil on canvas
66 x 125"

447



Fig. 5/12

Susan Rothenberg

Accident #3 1994

Oil on canvas

87 x 91"

448

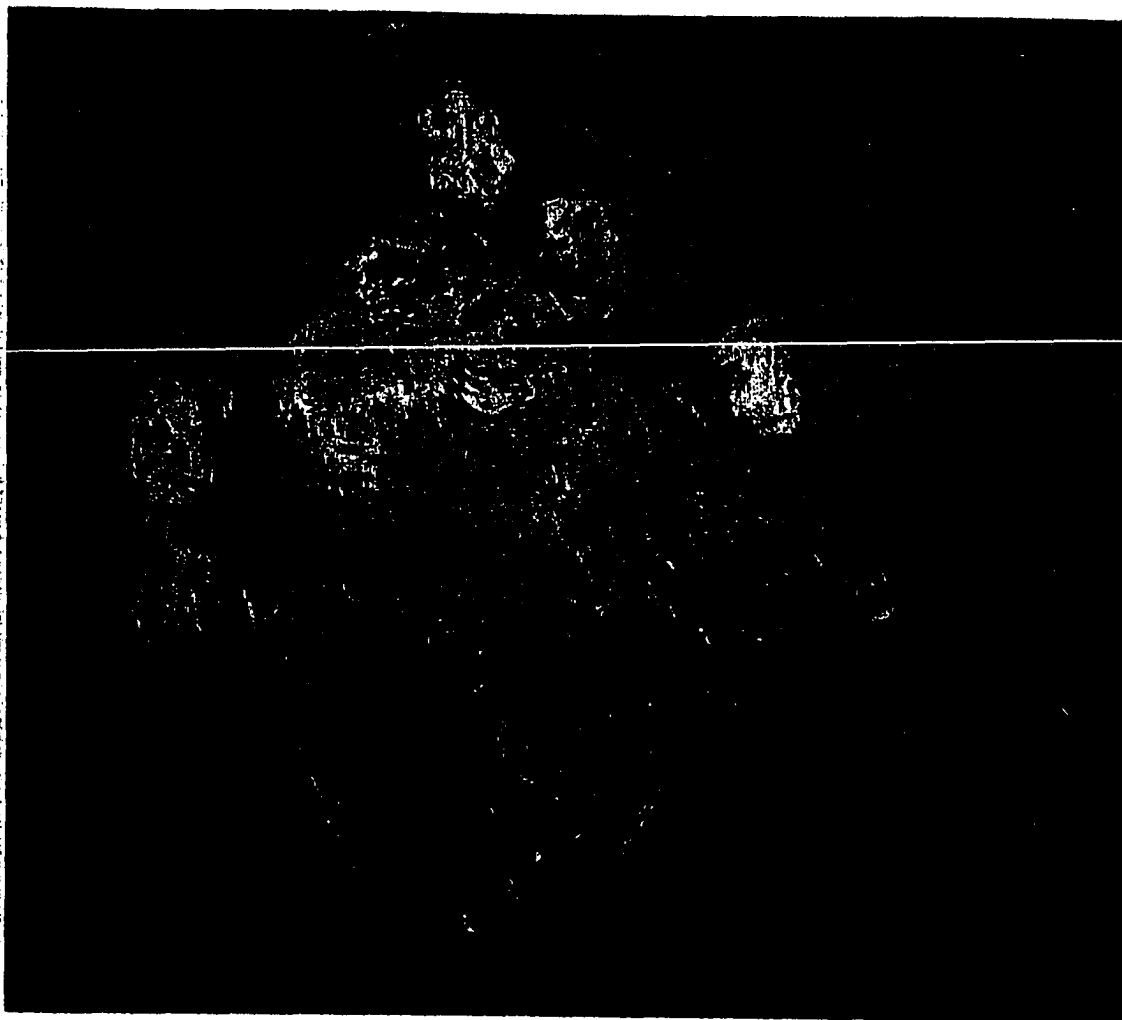


Fig. 5/13

Susan Rothenberg
Red Poker 1996-97
Oil on linen
68 x 78"



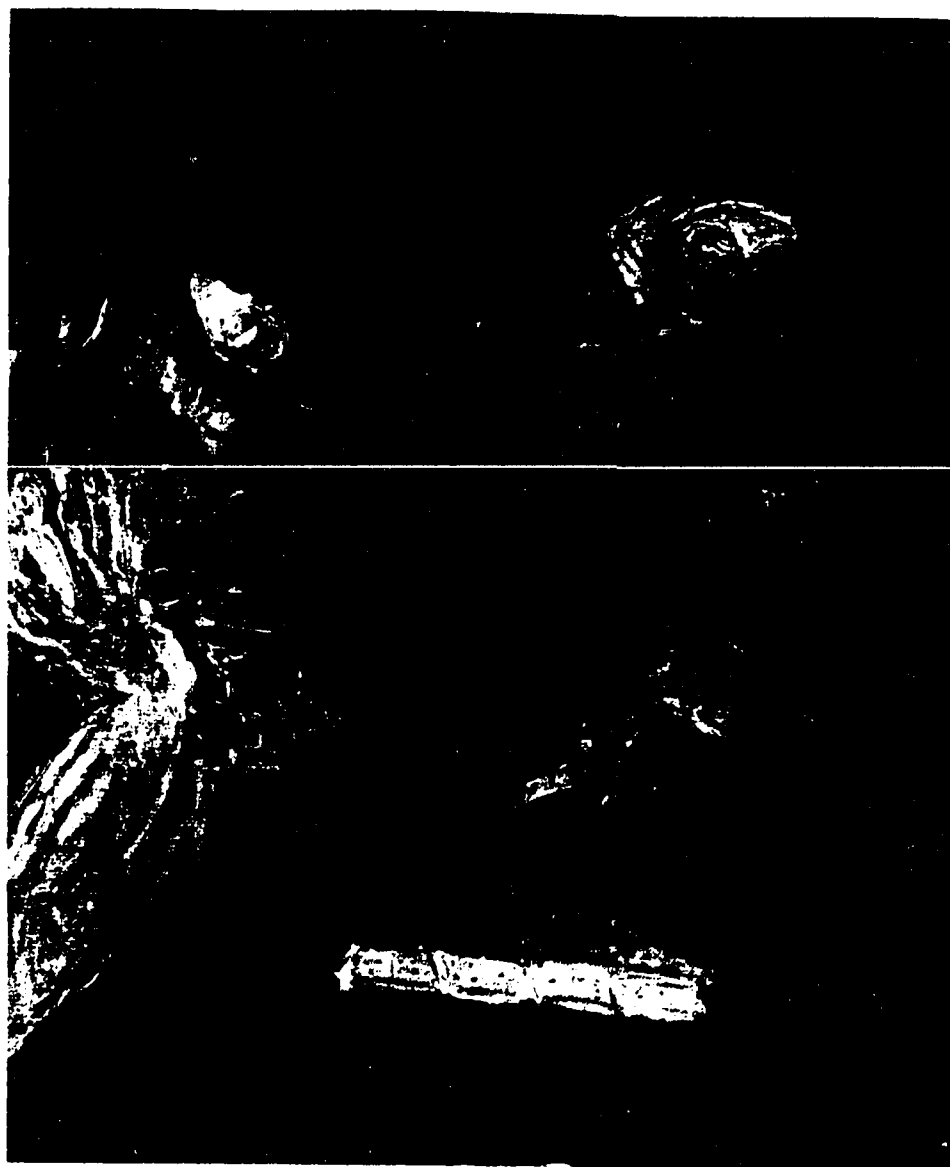


Fig. 5/15

Susan Rothenberg
Dominoes -Cold 2001
Oil on canvas
86.5 x 72.5



Fig. 5/16

Susan Rothenberg
Game 7 2002
Oil on canvas
75 x 80"

452



Fig. 5/17

Susan Rothenberg
Ivory Arms 2001
Oil on canvas
54 x 66"



Fig. 5/18

Susan Rothenberg
Mouth to Ear 2001
Oil on canvas
50 x 70"

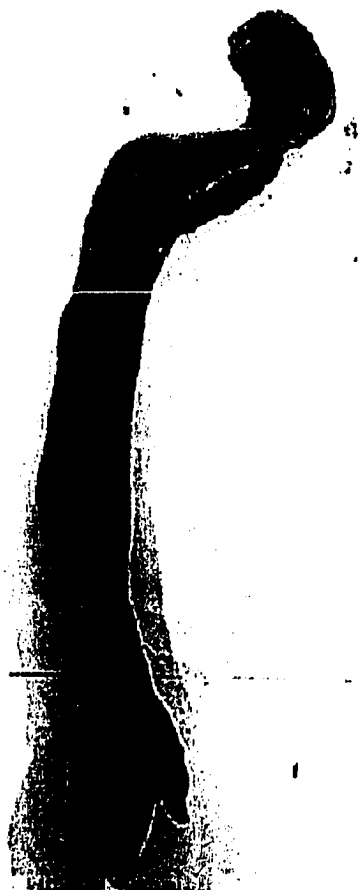


Fig. 5/19

Susan Rothenberg
Hand to Mouth 1977
28 x 10 x 4"

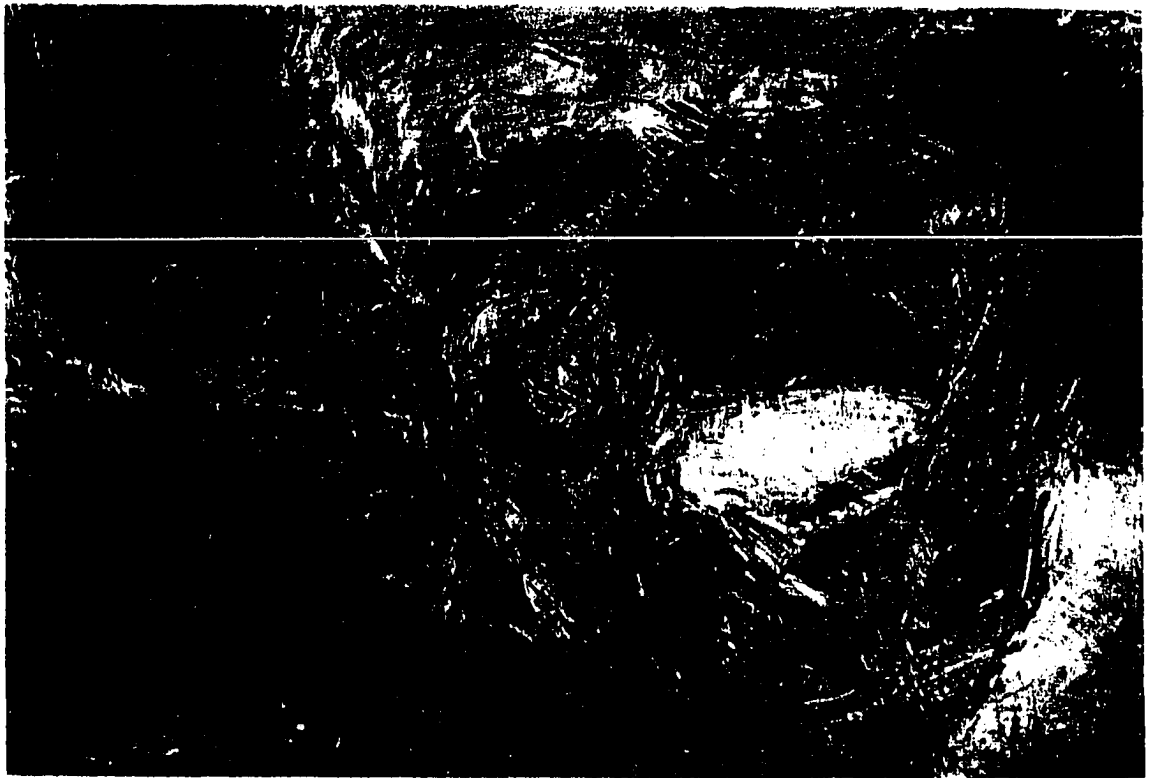


Fig. 5/20

Susan Rothenberg
Pinwheel 1989-90
Oil on canvas
95 x 142.75"



Fig. 5/21

Susan Rothenberg

Untitled 1990

Pastel and conte crayon on paper

19 x 26 1/2"

457

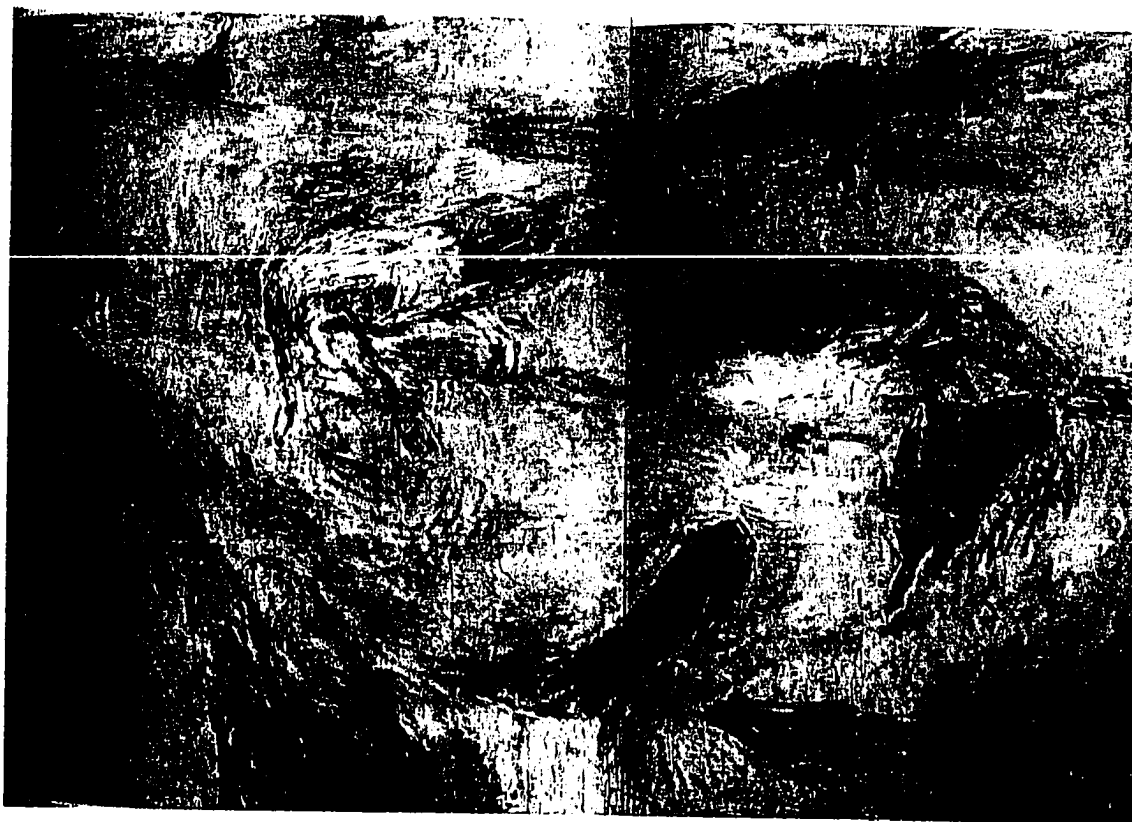


Fig. 5/22

Susan Rothenberg
Pink Paths 1996-97
Oil on canvas
74 x 110"

458



Fig. 5/23

Susan Rothenberg
The Chase 1999
Oil on canvas
91 x 93"

459



Fig. 5/24

Susan Rothenberg
Ghost Rug 1994
Oil on canvas
54.25 x 67.25"

460

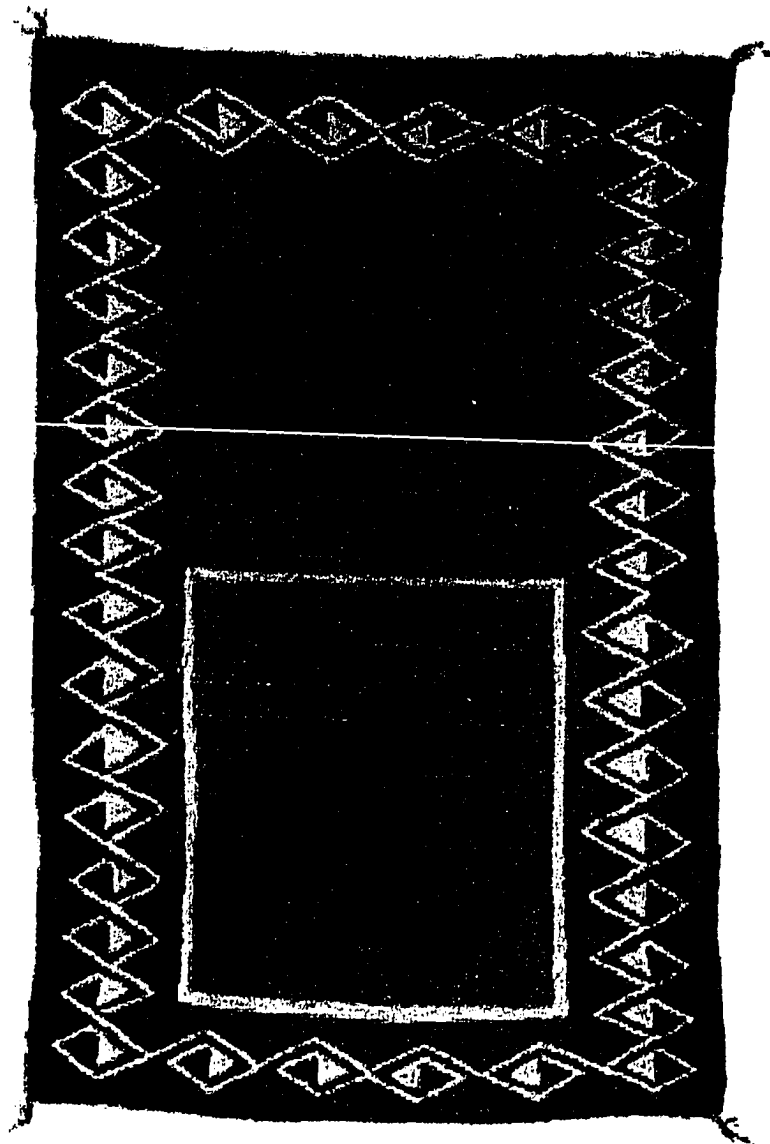


Fig. 5/25

Unknown

A Double Saddle Blanket c. 1900-10
49 x 35"

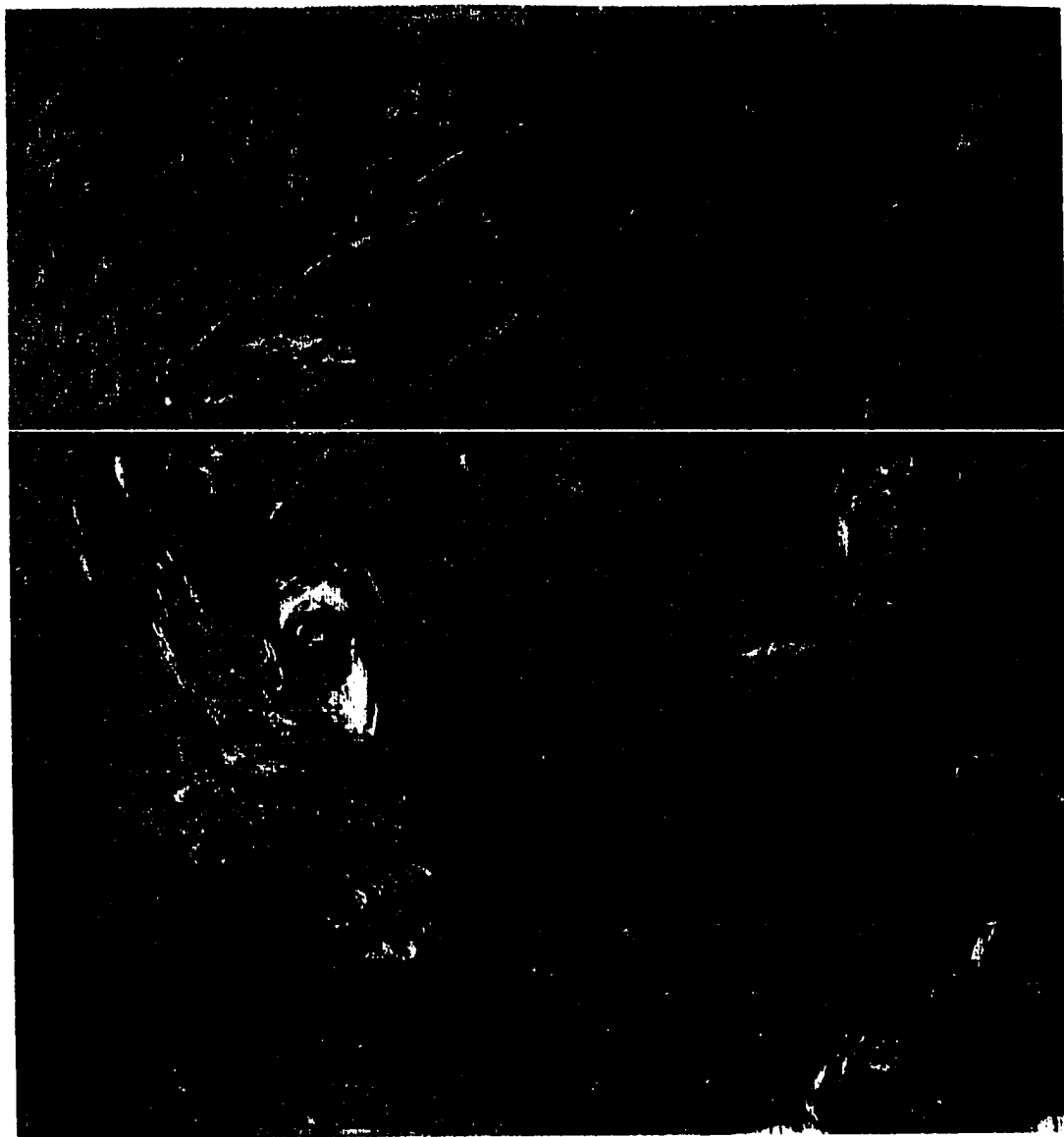


Fig. 5/26

Susan Rothenberg
Face-Pink 2000-01
Oil on canvas
75 x 72"

462

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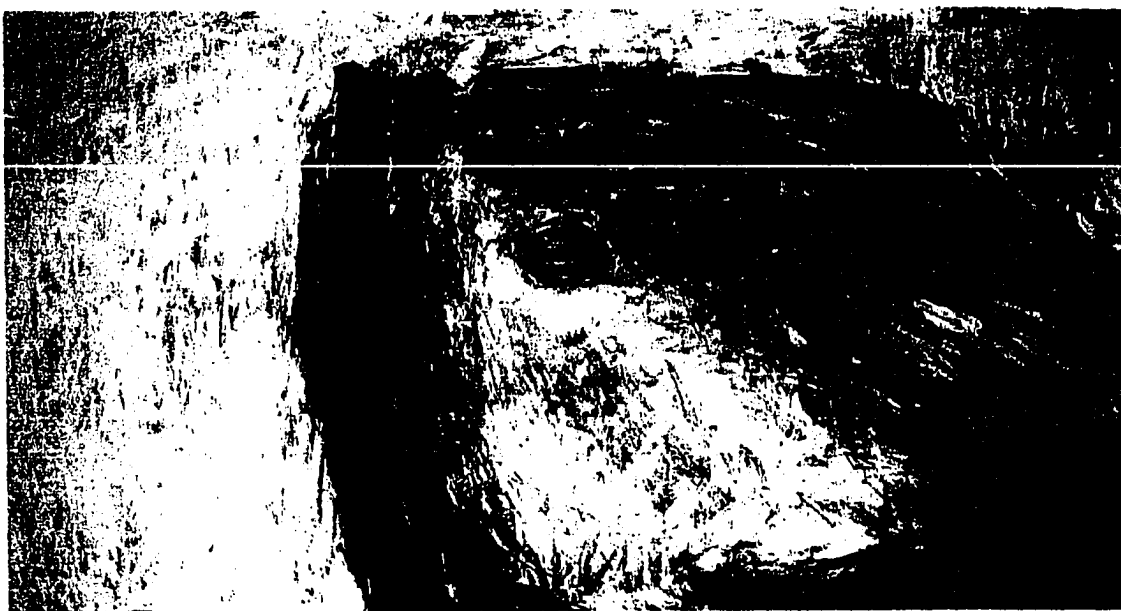


Fig. 5/27

Susan Rothenberg
Goat Eye 1991
Oil on canvas
66 x 125"



Fig. 5/28

Susan Rothenberg

Breath 1993

Oil on canvas

27 1/4 25"

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