SEVENTY-FIFTH
AMERICAN EXHIBITION

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
SEVENTY-FIFTH AMERICAN EXHIBITION

A. JAMES SPEYER AND NEAL BENEZRA

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ninety-eight years ago, The Art Institute of Chicago began a tradition we continue today with the 75th American Exhibition. Because of this tradition of regular showings of contemporary painting and sculpture, Chicagoans have had a first-hand opportunity to witness the growth of American art to international prominence. Seminal works from the influential movements of this century initiated by American artists have been seen at the Art Institute not long after they were created. Always controversial, the American Exhibition is dedicated to presenting what is in our judgment a selection of significant art of our time.

Any exhibition devoted to recent works of art is invariably a complicated undertaking. We are thus indebted to a great many individuals, without whom this exhibition would be impossible. One begins with the artists, whose participation and cooperation is at the heart of our endeavor. The dealers, who are noted throughout the catalogue, have been unfailingly helpful in facilitating the loan of works of art, both from their own galleries and from private collections. We are also grateful to those collectors and museums who have lent pieces for this showing. In addition, we are hard-pressed to adequately thank the three jurors of the exhibition—Jan van der Marck, former Director of the Duke University Center of Fine Arts, Miami; Sam Gilliam, artist and Professor of Art at Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh; and John R. Lane, Director of the Museum of Art at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

Within the Department of 20th-Century Painting and Sculpture at The Art Institute of Chicago, we are especially grateful to the curators of the exhibition A. James Speyer and Neal Benezra; Judith C. Clark, coordinator of the exhibition, who skillfully managed its details and authored the biographical essays; Courtney Donnell for her always available wisdom and experience; Michael Ryan who consistently handled every concern relating to installation with his accustomed thoroughness. Jennifer Turner aided with bibliographical research, Angela Stefano with technical assistance, and departmental secretary Gloria Lindstrom contributed a calming influence throughout.

From other departments we are greatly indebted to Susan F. Rossen, Executive Director of Publications, and Lyn DellQuadri, Associate Editor, for their enthusiastic development of this publication; Dorothy Schroeder, Assistant to the Director, for her support and sage counsel; Reynold Bailey and his art installation crew for their superb efforts; and Mary Solt, Associate Registrar, for implementing the complicated logistics of the exhibition.

We are especially grateful to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for making possible this exhibition and catalogue.

James N. Wood
Director
During the preparation of the 75th American Exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago, it has been impossible to avoid rumination on the past history of this venerable occasion. With no intention to overstate, I can only emphasize that it really is the seventy-fifth time we mount another in this amazing series of exhibitions. Thus, there is the early history — that is to say the history before I came onto the scene — and there is the modern history in which I have so personally participated. It is reasonable to assume that this complete history could be known to professionals in the arts and to the Chicago public. Certainly, the facts are frequently brought forward and are easily available. On the other hand, memories are short, and it is the responsibility of curators who present this exhibition to suggest just how it should be considered in time and to validate its continued existence.

Since 1880, The Art Institute of Chicago has held an annual or biennial exhibition of American art. At one time, a large, regularly recurring survey of American art was a standard event in most major museum programs, but today only a few museums still undertake this type of show, which is broadly selected from work done within a year or two of the exhibition. The most well known and prominent are the Corcoran Biennial, the Carnegie International (which includes a large American section), the Whitney Biennial, and the Art Institute’s American Exhibition. All of these have experienced changes in one way or another from their original concept. By 1962, on the occasion of our 65th showing, we felt that customs and conventions in the exhibition of art had so drastically changed that the big survey, or salon, must be reappraised in its annual status, and thus, in 1966, it was transformed into the biennial it remains today.

The exhibition has been especially meaningful in its service to the city of Chicago; its basic aim has consistently been to expose the community to the most recent developments in American art. As the foreword to the 75th American Exhibition catalogue (1977-18) states, “By means of the annual exhibition of oil paintings and sculpture, the Art Institute endeavors to keep the public of this region in touch with the current achievement in American Art.”

Originally, the exhibition attempted to bring to Chicago practically everything being done by Americans that might not have been seen in the Midwest that year. As outlined in the catalogue preface to the 75th American Exhibition, of 1894, “The conservative, the progressive and the advanced radical schools of modern art arc all well exemplified,” but the major concern of these early shows seems to have been geographical coverage. The preface further explains, “The fields of practice chosen by the artists here represented are as varied as their schools. They have sent us pictures painted in France, Spain, Germany, Holland, England, India, Persia, the West Indies, and the whole breadth of our country.” At the end of the early catalogues, counts are taken, in list form, of artists according to their birthplace as well as their residences. In 1895, for example, twenty-three states of the Union were represented, although one-third of the artists came from Illinois. The shows were selected for the most part by juries in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago. A sizable portion of works during the 1890s and the first decade of this century were chosen by Miss Sara Hollowell, an agent of the Art Institute residing in Europe, whose judgment was highly respected. She brought to the attention of the museum many valuable old master paintings now in the permanent collection. For the American show, she scouted the salons of Paris and Munich, seeking the best American work there. Along with those selections and those by various juries, sometime before 1910, the Art Institute decided to invite work by

Grant Wood
American Gothic, 1930
Oil on limestone
Purchased from the 43rd American Exhibition (1930); Friends of American Art Collection.
artists “which was deemed especially desirable” and was exempt from jury decisions. About twenty years later, the selection jury was abandoned altogether. Since 1941, the exhibitions have consisted solely of works chosen by various members of the staff of the Art Institute; and since 1960, the selection has been made exclusively by the Department of 20th-Century Painting and Sculpture.

The flexible nature of the American Exhibition has produced variations over the years. Interestingly enough, the work of an individual artist in two instances, has been given a room to itself within the context of the exhibition as a whole. Grant Wood was honored by a memorial presentation of forty-eight paintings in 1942, just after his death; and the following year Edward Hopper was treated similarly as a special feature in the show. The exhibition of 1947-48, entitled “Abstract and Surrealist American Art,” emphasizing a prevailing contemporary direction, was a departure from the long series of eclectic exhibitions that preceded it.

From the exhibition’s inception, the custom existed to award prizes to featured artists. Originally, these were graded prizes, from “First” to “Honorable Mention,” in the manner of the times. Happily, we were able to change this in the early 1960s, feeling that each artist lent equal value by virtue of his or her participation in the exhibition, which, in any case, was not designed as a competition. Accordingly, the awards today are basically equal, although some, by stipulation of the donor, offer purchase possibilities; however, the mere fact of not being able to give an award to each and every artist still creates some unfortunate distinctions. The prize jury today is composed of three people, and a history in itself could be written on the list of artists, critics, and other professionals from the art world who have served. In certain cases, the prize-winning pieces have caused an uproar of dismay. During the 1930s, the disapproval of one of the patrons and prize donors, Mrs. Frank Logan, made headlines in the press: “To think that when we established that award we didn’t reserve the right to say something about the paintings which should get it,” she lamented. Mrs. Logan founded a movement for “Sane Art in Art” especially to combat “radical” artistic activity in the 1930s. It is ironic that the medal that accompanies her award was redesigned in 1957 by the leading avant-garde sculptor of his time, David Smith. It was commissioned by Katherine Kuh, then Curator of Painting and Sculpture. One wonders how Mrs. Logan would feel about the use of her prize today.
While considerable controversy was stirred by some of the shows, others were referred to as "just another American Exhibition" and one was even called the "show of a thousand yawns." The exhibition of 1935 awarded the Logan prize to Doris Lee for her *Thanksgiving*, raising an outcry over its "cartoonish" imagery. When one patron withdrew her legacy "as long as trustees have no better sense of true art," another leading patron, Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson, replied that "people are judging it who have no right to judge it until they have studied it. We don't have to like everything ... and if we do, without trying to understand what the artist wanted to show, 'I don't like it,' we show our ignorance." Chauncey McCormick, the Art Institute's vice-president (later president), further explained that the Art Institute was "trying to let the public see what is being painted." Almost twenty years later, in 1951, one finds the Director of the museum, Daniel Caton Rich, defending the exhibition in which Willem de Kooning's *Excavation* won the Logan purchase prize and was acquired for the permanent collection. "Rich stressed the fact," said one newspaper article, "that the Art Institute curators did not invent these art movements!"

The main function of the American Exhibition has continued to be to inform the public about some of the best work done by Americans since the preceding exhibition, and with this underlying purpose, the show has survived and thrived and been adapted to its time. Simply with regard to numbers of artists included, the exhibitions have been radically reduced over the years. Until the 1930s, each American Exhibition included some 300 to 500 works (the 19th exhibition had 1,066 artists). By present standards, these were certainly enormous installations. In the 1950s, the average show represented about 140 artists with usually one piece by each artist; in the early 1960s, some 90 works by approximately 50 artists were chosen. In the 65th, 66th, and 67th American Exhibitions (held in 1962, 1963, and 1964, respectively), no individual artist was shown in more than one of these exhibitions, and thus a comprehensive view of contemporary art was demonstrated within a span of three years. Precisely 277 pieces by 154 artists were exhibited in these three related events. In the 65th Exhibition, second generation Abstract Expressionism was the focus, with works of Jack Tworkov, Joan Mitchell, Theodore Stamos, Milton Resnick, and James Brooks, among others, along with such rising artists as Jasper Johns, Kenneth Noland, Ellsworth Kelly, Sam Francis, and Leon Golub.
were, in a manner of thinking, projected against a backdrop of older masters: Isamu Noguchi, Louise Nevelson, Milton Avery, etc. (It is of interest that, in the intervening years, these masters have increased in status and many of the then-emerging artists have achieved equal distinction.) In the 66th Exhibition, a similar juxtaposition was created between the work of new rising artists, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Helen Frankenthaler, Frank Stella, Mark di Suvero, Roy Lichtenstein, and the work of prominent older artists with current relevancy, Josef Albers, Richard Lindner, David Smith, Hans Hofmann, and Willem de Kooning. In the 67th Exhibition, the guiding principle of the series remained: none of the artists from the previous two shows was included and, this time, the contrast was between Pop Art, which was then a new expression of figurative work, and abstraction. In the former categories were such artists as Tom Wesselman, Jim Dine, Peter Saul, Red Grooms, Roy De Forest, Robert Barnes, Joseph Cornell, Alex Katz, H.C. Westermann, and in the varied category of abstractionists were artists ranging from Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glamer, and Barnett Newman in Jules Olitski, Al Held, and Salvatore Scarpitta. It was always believed that, in the exposure of contrasting movements, better comprehension of the overall situation became possible. Movements, like waves in the sea, overlap constantly; and, by demonstrating the simultaneous diminution of one movement in relation to the rise of another, perhaps some comprehensive idea of the time emerges. Certainly, the visual memories of our museum visitors could not be expected to encompass the whole series over the three years spanned by the above-mentioned exhibitions. However, we hope that the message came across instinctively, if not consciously. In the 68th Exhibition, still an annual, the focus was narrowed to twenty artists, each with an environmental work or a kind of comprehensive individual exhibit. The 72nd Exhibition, occurring in the year of America’s Bicentennial, included thirty-eight artists and sixty-two works, a number of which were executed on the premises particularly for the event. At a moment in our national history when the past was being stressed and celebrated, it seemed appropriate for the Department of 20th-Century Painting and Sculpture to present a group of distinguished contemporaries – from young to old – for example, from Bruce Nauman to Willem de Kooning.

Conspicuous styles of the past several decades have formed the substance of the American Exhibitions: Abstract
Expressionist, Pop, figurative, environmental, Color-Field, and Minimal art. These went in many different directions, but each was sufficiently emphatic to demand special focus at the time. While these manifestations have receded as dominant, exclusive movements, we are correspondingly better able to recognize the individual sources of energy they contained and the relatively few distinguished artists who gave them their real force.

The foregoing details in connection with the specific occasions that they describe might give an insight into the Art Institute's general approach to the American Exhibition and suggest that there is indeed a connection implicit in their sequence.

Generally, there are no set rules regarding the number of pieces chosen to represent each artist in the American Exhibition, the decision being based rather on emphasis. Three or even four small works by an intimate might be shown, while another artist might be allowed only a single, very large canvas or structure. The alternative of a set number of works displayed by each artist frequently results in a mechanical presentation that unbalances the total effect and intention, minimizing the impact of individual participants. All exhibitors usually had noticeable acceptance, and the show should not be taken for an exhibition of "new talent"; discovery is not per se a consideration. During the last two decades, many of the contemporary masters have been shown frequently, not only because they continued to produce significant work, but because their work may have had a different relevance in each particular exhibition. However, there have been many young participants and, most certainly, artists of varying ranks of acceptance. These general observations affecting the guiding principle of the show still obtain. In fact, the only way we could conceive presenting the divergent range of today's visual expressions is to keep open-eyed, avoiding any rigid point of view in our ultimate selections.

Today, the proliferation of painting and sculpture, of visual art, is overwhelming; the sheer dynamism of the activity offers tremendous excitement in itself. Extending to the most opposite poles, employing an inexhaustible range of exotic new and traditional materials, even the pinnacles of today's artistic activity are not possible to present in one exhibition. On the other hand, one should be able in a limited, but decisive, way to suggest the scope, direction, and qualities by a selection of individual artists who are in the forefront, if not actually
leaders themselves. The present show is based on such a concept, and we can only hope that it successfully fixes these ideas, offering a synthesis of the situation. Each of the twenty artists represented is to be viewed individually, of course, while cross references are of fundamental importance. We would like to stimulate viewers to make associations, permitting them to construct unprejudiced connections that, in any case, offer a multiplicity of propositions. In the present show, there is a range of generations, but we do not intend to suggest that this is a comprehensive group of established, older, contemporary masters. Such artists are included when their current work has made an important change, offering a new relevancy. The younger artists demonstrate connecting roots and influences of the past that shed light on the development of painting and sculpture in the late 20th century. Again, determination of individual works is not arbitrary; some artists may have one piece and others have several. As noted above, a guiding principle to decide this question is based on the work's size, scale, and presence in the exhibition. Above all, the exhibition itself, as a whole, is of fundamental importance. Only in view of the total roster do the revelations of each participating artist assume the intended significance. The vitality and scintillation of the exhibition—its ultimate impact—is achieved by accurate selection and presentation of each artist in the most enlightening manner.

In New York, the sheer quantity of exhibition spaces of every kind permits a continuous, citywide demonstration. The prevalence of so much art at any one time provides a comprehensive awareness. The scale and pace of such operations in Chicago is in no way comparable, although there is now a broad exposure of contemporary art in Chicago provided by the several museums and many galleries that show outstanding artists. Most of the artists in the 75th American Exhibition have been seen in local, public, or private spaces during the past several years. They have been shown singly, however, making single impressions, suggesting certain movements, a direction, an individual talent; but there are generally long pauses between the showing of one or another artist, however important. It is this special lack that the Art Institute attempts to bolster, supplement, and compensate in this current survey and to convey a sense of the whole. We have endeavored to illustrate what we consider peaks of expression. The emphasis is on figuration and paint; yet, the results differ enormously in form and subject, and ideological connections result in
formal and expressive similarities when least expected. Of the forty-one works presented, thirty-four are paintings, seven are intrinsically environmental compositions, and two are sculpture. The artists originate from the West Coast, Texas, Chicago, and the East. Regional particularities are debatable, and individuality is prominent and wide ranging.

The American Exhibition has always provided the Art Institute with one of its best opportunities to acquire contemporary American painting and sculpture. It gives us a chance to bring what we consider outstanding contemporary work into the museum on approval, permitting measured consideration of the pieces in context with our existing collections. The generous purchase prizes have augmented this favorable situation, and we have thus acquired much of our distinguished contemporary work. It is hard to overstate the importance of the American Exhibition to the museum when one reviews this group, which includes major pieces by Ivan Albright, Grant Wood, Edward Hopper, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Leon Golub, Larry Rivers, Ellsworth Kelly, Joseph Albers, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hoffman, Burgoyne Diller, John Mason, George Segal, Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Larry Poons, Richard Diebenkorn, Helen Frankenthaler, Andy Warhol, Agnes Martin, On Kawara, Martin Puryear, James Turrell, Siah Armajani, Don Graham, and Bruce Nauman.

Perhaps the biennial suave exhibition sounds a bit archaic at this time. Perhaps it should be international rather than exclusively American, but its significance in bringing contemporary art to the Art Institute and to Chicago cannot be minimized. As the 20th century nears its end, the American Exhibition remains as vital and contributive as ever.

Ellsworth Kelly
Black and White, 1961
Oil on canvas
Purchased from the 65th American Exhibition (1962);
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold H. Mazesick through the Kate Mazesick Foundation
Andy Warhol

Idea, 1973
Acrylic and silkscreen
on canvas
Purchased from the 74th Annual Exhibition (1974);
Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Prize Fund and William Mead Fund

Martin Puryear

Sonoyta, 1982
Wood and mixed materials
Purchased from the 74th Annual Exhibition (1982);
Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Prize Fund
POST-MODERNISM AND THE ART OF THE '80s

Neal Benezra, Associate Curator of 20th-Century Painting and Sculpture

Never in recent memory has there been such diversity in art. The intellectual and formal restraint that predominated throughout much of the last two decades has been swept aside, and virtue restored to such formerly outlawed concerns as content, narrative, idiosyncrasy, and, in particular, painting. Works by older artists as well as by those recently arrived in the art world announce this renewal. Leon Golub's thugs menace us; Jonathan Borofsky's "chattering men" babble continuously and nonsensically; the carved and burned wooden sculptures of James Surls conjure eerie human associations; the provocative, baroque inventions of Robert Morris presage an approaching apocalypse; the theatrical art of Robert Longo suggests a future in decay; the crucifixes of Michael Tracey evoke a healing if awesome presence; and the paintings of Susan Rothenberg and Jennifer Bartlett offer glimpses of a more idyllic life.

The work of many of the artists selected for The Art Institute of Chicago's 75th American Exhibition has been characterized, often derogatorily, as "post-Modern." As an historical phenomenon, post-Modernism has been roundly criticized for its apparent entrepreneurial embrace of the art market, its elevated concept of the persona of the artist, and its claim to quality. Perhaps because the debate has been so heated and emotional, little attention has been devoted to how and why the art of the 1980s developed as it has. A real understanding of that development requires recognition of the formal context from which recent art has grown, examination of the artists who have developed the post-Modern aesthetics, discussion of the evolving influence of criticism in shaping and responding to this art, and analysis of the role played by museums in their exhibitions and acquisitions.

Perhaps the fundamental difficulty in establishing a definition or theory of post-Modernism is the vagueness of our current understanding of Modernism. Early in this century, impassioned advocates of Modernism, whether Cubists, Futurists, neo-Plasticians, or Surrealists, believed they could change the world through art. For them, Modernism had political, cultural, and social implications as well as formal imperatives. Yet, as the harsh realities of twentieth-century life unfolded and two world wars decimated these optimistic hopes, Modernism assumed a different guise. Following World War II, the individual was shell-shocked, atomized, and isolated from what remained of a progressive culture. Solace was found in the solitary self, and the Abstract Expressionists looked inward and to art for self-realization.

However, while such Abstract Expressionists as Clifford Still and Mark Rothko found it possible to paint in a cathartic manner, achieving an art of sublime inspiration, the subsequent work of the Color-Field painters and Minimalist sculptors demonstrated that sublime form could easily be replaced by the pure or decorative, and metaphor could easily be intellectualized. This shift in sensibility was promoted by Clement Greenberg, who encouraged artists to reject the romanticism and literary concerns of Surrealism, in favor of pure form and color. As critic Donald Kuspit has aptly noted, "Greenberg understood Abstract Expressionism more in terms of abstraction than expressionism." In fact, Greenberg sought nothing less than the absolute redefinition of media; and his influence over artists, critics, and historians effectively shrouded the former, heroic concerns of Modernism beneath a single impulse - what Greenberg called the will to "advanced" form. By the 1960s, formalism, once a fairly specific term used to designate a particular style, had become all but synonymous
with Modernism.
If this formalist definition of Modernism differed considerably from the early Modernists’ conception of their own work, developments in the 1960s and 1970s further distorted its original meaning. Formalism led to Minimalism, which, in turn, bred two further movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s: earthworks and conceptual art. While the former constituted a realization of formalist geometry on a truly monumental scale, Conceptualism pressed the reductive impulse to its logical extreme, eliminating the art object altogether.
In large measure, Conceptualism represented a sincere form of intellectual and political activity and spawned a group of critical advocates who both rejected the commercialism of the art world and redefined Modernism in the process. That is, by replacing painting and sculpture with the unpossessable workings of the artist’s mind, Conceptualists believed they had overcome art’s commercialism while simultaneously renewing an avant-garde.
Although their moral commitment to changing the character and meaning of art in contemporary society was above reproach, the Conceptualists nevertheless backed their successors into a corner by closing off all formal options. Like Greenberg, Conceptualists denied traditional art forms solely on the basis of medium, without consideration of matters of content. Ironically, with the liberation of artists from institutional restraints and the art market and the replacement of the art object with ideas, the only formal direction left to young artists seems to have been a direct return to traditional media, particularly painting. Although Conceptualism had an implicit and quite important influence on today’s artists, its ultimate impact was to close the book on the formalism of Clement Greenberg.

The beginning of the end of formalism actually preceded its full fruition. As early as the late 1950s, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg responded to Abstract Expressionism by incorporating all manner of objects, references to literature, and photography in a highly eccentric manner. These artists replaced the Abstract Expressionist field of color with “combiners” that were, in Leo Steinberg’s phrase, “all-purpose picture planes,” the receptacles of a variety of idiosyncratic content. It was in reference to the work of Rauschenberg (fig. 1) that Steinberg, in 1966, reproached formalists and became the first person to use the term “post-Modern” in the context.
of art:

the all-purpose picture plane underlying this post-Modernist painting has made the course of art again non-linear and unpredictable... it is part of the shake-up which contaminates all purified categories."  

The work of Johns and Rauschenberg was of exemplary importance to a group of younger artists who began to challenge the reductivist dogma of Minimalism in the late 1960s. These "post-Minimal" artists -- Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis, Barry Le Va, among many others -- devoted themselves to unorthodox applications of non-art materials. They evolved a new and more casual, process-oriented art based on the properties of their chosen materials. Hesse used fiber glass, plastic, and rope; Benglis employed foam; and Le Va and Morris used felt.

Hesse's role was particularly important in redefining sculpture. Whereas she admired the Minimalists' ideology and great discipline, by the late 1960s Hesse had evolved a far more personal sculptural idiom. Hesse's work Right After, 1969 (fig. 2), combines an eccentric manipulation of materials with a linear quality not unlike the drip paintings of Pollock. In so doing, Hesse replaced the dogmatic idealism of Minimalist sculpture with a rejuvenated expressionism, in which the idiosyncratic application of materials assumed an important role.

If Hesse's example was exemplary for sculptors in the '70s, Philip Guston's work during these years was of equal importance for the post-Modern painters. Born in 1913, Guston had a long and distinguished career, first as a social realist in the 1930s and early 1940s, and as a pioneering Abstract Expressionist in the 1950s. Guston's reputation had long since been established when he became critical of the prevailing formalism and began to rethink his own work:

"In my experience, a painting is not made with colors and paint at all... it might be things, thoughts, a memory, sensations which can have nothing to do directly with painting itself... the painting is not on a surface, but on a plane which is imagined. It moves in a mind."

And, in fact, from 1966 until his death in 1980, Guston challenged fashion as well as his own public. His late paintings are executed in an intentionally rough, awkward manner, and enormous shoes, burning cigarettes, and hooded, menacing...
klansmen are the predominant subjects. All of these late paintings are self-portraits, and in Guston’s late masterpiece *The Studio*, 1969 (fig. 3), the hooded artist even recreates his own image, thus returning self-expression to art. For Guston, the klanomat was a vivid symbol of the world outside the studio, indeed outside the limited confines of the art world. His application of a cryptic vocabulary suggested that formal problems, which had been uppermost in artists’ minds for more than a decade, now be balanced with a concern for content.

When Guston’s pictures were exhibited in 1970, they were attacked by *New York Times* critic Hilton Kramer, as “stumblebum.”* More perceptive was Harold Rosenberg, who noted the relationship of Guston’s art to Dubuffet’s and saw his work as heralding the end of painting’s “too-long immersion in itself” and as “liberating painting from the ban on social consciousness.”*2

In its break with formalism, the late work of Hesse and Guston foretold the initial development of post-Modernism. In the 1970s, such established artists as Robert Morris and Frank Stella shifted direction, abandoning their former Minimalist and Conceptualist allegiances in favor of an art in which content prevailed. The changes in Morris’s art during the past twenty years typify this shift. In his early sculpture and writing, he embraced the Greenbergian line with considerable enthusiasm. In one of numerous articles published in *Artsforum*, the center of Minimalist dialogue during the late 1960s, Morris supported Greenberg’s doctrine of separation of painting and sculpture, arguing that the “autonomous and literal nature of sculpture demands that it have its own equally literal space – not a surface shared with painting.”*2 His sculpture was quintessentially minimal, as he employed wood, aluminum, fiberglass, and other industrial materials in the creation of indivisible geometric shapes. Yet, by 1968, Morris broke with such extreme logic and began to work more intuitively, emphasizing the process of making sculpture by either hanging felt strips from walls or mounding them on the floor (fig. 4). By the mid-1970s, he turned to earthworks projects developed both within gallery spaces and on a large scale in nature.

More recently, Morris has identified himself with anti-nuclear themes. Although he has long espoused political concerns – he canceled an exhibition of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970 to protest the American...
invasion of Cambodia – anti-nuclear themes first appeared in such constructions as The Natural History of Las Alamos and the Firestorm drawings of the early 1980s. His most recent works, which combine turbulent, Turneresque landscape paintings with complex frames composed of anatomical forms, can only be termed theatres of the apocalypse. The artist recently described the shift in his art from abstraction to political commentary in these terms:

It is not surprising that in the present atmosphere of insecure political posturing, economic instability and recurring nightmares of nuclear war, the impulse that drove a confident abstraction to make dimensions have shrunk considerably. It has not just been a matter of the exhaustion of modernist forms. An emotional weariness with what underlies them has occurred. I would suggest that the shift has occurred with group awareness of the more global threat to the existence of life itself.

The recent work of Frank Stella, creator of some of the most redolent paintings of the post-Abstract Expressionist period, is another example of dynamic, mid-career change. A vociferous critic of the Abstract Expressionists’ claim to humanistic values, Stella clearly stated his position in a 1966 interview:

My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there... all I want anyone to get out of my painting, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion. What you see is what you see.”

Beginning with the “Black Paintings” of 1959, Stella gained a well-earned reputation for inventiveness, reducing painting to the self-evident effects of form and color (fig. 5). Yet, by 1970, he moved away from the Color-Field painting that he had helped define. In that year, he began his Polish Village reliefs, using masonite, paper, and felt to construct a sculptural surface. By the mid-1970s, Stella’s forms assumed harsh, irregular shapes and were painted in a manner defying the order and regularity of his previous work. Stella’s new and quite eclectic use of color and line, combined with a relief format, constitutes a revolt against his own past and the Greenbergian premise that painting and sculpture must be separate media, subject to different, immutable laws.

Simultaneous with the changes in the work of Guston, Hesse, Morris, and Stella, a younger generation of artists emerged from the shadow of Conceptualism. Perhaps the
most original of these artists was Jonathan Borofsky. In 1966,
after his graduation from Yale University, Borofsky “stopped
making ‘things’ altogether,” because he felt “painting and
object-making were dead.”11 He became obsessed with the
act of counting as a rational, regimented activity, and he began
to count continuously, writing consecutive numbers down on
sheets of paper (fig. 6):

The counting piece was the culmination of a process of what
was labeled conceptual work—just pen, pencil and paper, and
using the mind, more or less, as a device to exercise daily. It was
every linear and every conceptual. There was no intuition and every-
thing was planned out ahead of time. All I had to do was get up
the next day, pick up my pencil, see what number I was on, and
continue counting.12

Ironically, by pressing such an activity to its logical,
though absurd, extreme, Borofsky found an escape from Con-
ceptualism. Ultimately, he concluded that “Conceptual art
was reaching nobody. . . nobody wanted to go up and read
those texts close up and try to understand them. All those
diagrams, they didn’t matter much.”13 Borofsky began to draw
and paint, assigning a number to each image as a type of
coded signature. With time, the drawings increased in size,
appearing on walls in the 1970s and later evolving into paint-
ings and sculpture that often incorporated sound in vast,
cacophonous installations. Borofsky’s most recent works are
enormous, painted, free-standing male figures that are self-
portraits in various guises: “chattering men,” who speak with-
out meaning or end; anxious “running men,” who flee un-
known pursuers; and “hammering men,” who personify a life
of labor through their repetitive act.

Another direction beyond Minimalism and Concep-
tualism was pursued by Jennifer Bartlett. Bartlett had a
Minimalist orientation when she moved to New York in the
mid-1960s. By the end of the decade, she was working mid-
way between the Conceptualism of Sol LeWitt and the pro-
cess art of Eva Hesse, making canvas wall hangings and
serialized graph-paper drawings. In 1968, she began systemat-
ically to apply these patterned images to steel plates, which
had the advantage of being durable and flexible, as their ar-
range ment on a wall could be altered. While Bartlett’s install-
ations derived from LeWitt’s wall drawings, the increasingly
painterly and sensual quality of Bartlett’s brush and palette
suggested a more romantic impulse. Bartlett’s most ambitious
work was *Rhapsody*, 1975-76. Using over 1,000 steel plates to create a truly monumental work, Bartlett fused landscape imagery with the geometry of her previous work. In recent years, Bartlett has revitalized the long dormant tradition of decorative painting, placing her garden landscapes in public and private environments around the world.

The embrace of painting by many artists in the 1970s assumed a variety of forms, ranging from the pure to the intentionally naive. Initially a sculptor, Neil Jenney began to paint toward the end of 1968 and almost immediately adopted a rather self-conscious attitude toward the medium. That is, his early paintings combined a childlike, “finger-painting” style with naive, disjointed, and fragmented narrative subjects. When Jenney’s eccentric paintings were surrounded by emphatic black frames bearing boldly stenciled titles, they assumed the didactic seriousness of blackboards while announcing their status as “Art.”

Initially, Jenney kept his titles and corresponding subjects at arm’s length from one another, but since the mid-1970s, he has established a closer relationship between them. Titles such as *Biosphere* and *Meltdown Morning* suggest nuclear catastrophe, and Jenney combined these with fragmentary or panoramic images of nature. Moreover, he replaced the childlike style of his early paintings with a highly polished manner of working in oil. His current paintings, unique in their combination of word, image, and style, describe a natural order on the brink of disaster.

The purest and most poetic painter of this initial group of post-Modernists is Susan Rothenberg. Like Jenney, Bartlett, and Brofsky, all of whom were born between 1941 and 1945, Rothenberg developed within the discipline of Minimalism. After several years of making geometric pattern paintings and constructions of plastic, polyethylene, and aluminum mesh, Rothenberg found she was boring herself. In 1973, she began to paint horses, using strong vertical and diagonal stripes to structure and flatten a monochrome space filled with individual or groups of horses (fig. 7). Rothenberg worked in this manner through the 1970s, but in the last several years she has shifted directions somewhat, replacing acrylic with oil and horses with fragmented human figures. Color has entered her work as well, with blues and even an occasional bright red accenting the once predominant blacks and whites. While, initially, Rothenberg’s work was characterized by a rather audacious interest in painting horses during
a period dominated by abstract sculpture, more recently the artist has created evocative relationships between isolated figures and a luminous surrounding space. Inspired by the formal control of Mirodriot and the psychological explorations of Giacometti, Rothenberg’s paintings remain private and meditative.

The importance of this generation of artists was confirmed in the exhibition “New Image Painting,” curated by Richard Marshall for the Whitney Museum in 1978-79. Beyond validating the achievement of Bartlett, Jenney, Rothenberg, and their peers Nicholas Afanascev, Lois Lane, and Robert Moskowitz, the exhibition demonstrated that painting was a viable medium in the 1970s. Implicit in that exhibition, however, was the tremendous impact Minimalism and Conceptualism continued to have upon many of these younger artists. Although relying on imagery and context for the thrust of their art, each continued to depend on the formal methods and intellectual restraint of their predecessors. These painters reintroduced content into art, but they did so in a veiled manner, removing images from contexts and, thereby, neutralizing the expressive impact of their work. Bartlett’s adoption of steel plates as a support, Rothenberg’s division of the canvas into zones, and Jenney’s frames all derived from the geometric abstraction of the 1970s; and the formal discipline that these artists shared may have initially quieted their expressive impulses.

Ten years younger than Bonafsky, Jenney, Rothenberg, and Bartlett, Julian Schnabel matured during the period of their initial achievements. While they struggled in their painting to balance the concerns of Minimalism and content, Schnabel experienced no such aesthetic apprehensions and was anything but tentative:

Artists of the Greenbergian school were extracting the meaning out of what they were doing. Finally, they were just missing around with paint in a very monastic way. It didn’t have a hell of a lot that was essential about it... My painting comes out of a continuum of art that has been. It’s not anti-art in any way. It’s just an art that can get up and stick its head out of the window and do things that were maybe impossible before..."

Schnabel’s initial breakthrough was a formal one. Traveling in Barcelona in 1978, he was impressed by the mosaics and architecture of Antonio Gaudi and began to attach broken bits of cheap dinnerware to his pictures and then paint over them. In so doing, he violated all rules of artistic decorum, and continues to do so, even painting on the most banal of painters’ grounds – velvets. While critical attention has focused primarily on Schnabel’s unorthodox methods and his highly visible persona, in recent years he has developed an increasingly interesting iconography. Although Schnabel has not abandoned the use of plates – which, for all their drama, have often overwhelmed his imagery – he has recently commuted himself to a purer form of painting with subjects drawn from secular and religious mythology, literature, and folklore. In his current emphasis on painting and content, Schnabel has become receptive to a flood of narrative impulses that make his work comparable in scale and ambition to that of his contemporary, the German artist Anselm Kiefer.

Schnabel’s use of literary references as a basis for his art is shared with Vernon Fisher. While Schnabel endeavors to re-heroize the imagination by weaving extravagant tales of Olympian proportion, Fisher paints intimate, nostalgic pictures centering on mundane events in the lives of anonymous individuals.
I am more interested in things happening to people than vice versa. People being affected rather than affecting. People in the midst of events they cannot control or understand.11

Fisher introduced narrative into his work for the first time in the late 1970s. A literature major in college, he sought to integrate his writing into his paintings, incising his texts directly onto and through the surface of the canvas. Initially, the combination favored the text, but since 1970, the painted image has grown in relative importance and Fisher has added assemblaged and free-standing sculptural elements. His use of various media is often disjunctive, as each aspect of the work has its own distinct role in the viewer's overall experience.

The art of David Salle provides an apt and enlightening comparison with that of Fisher. Indeed, both artists employ similar means: a diptych format that heightens visual contrasts, images reproduced from the print and television media, and fragmented narratives and combines in the tradition of Rauschenberg. While Fisher's art centers on narrated recollections, Salle's principal concern has been the dispassionate juxtaposition of subjects that creates a purposeful and troubling ambiguity. Salle often draws on quasi-pornographic images of women, which, when outlined, overlaid, and combined with other apparently unrelated subjects, abstract and neutralize the inflammatory content of his paintings. Salle has maintained a studied, Duchampian silence on the meaning of his work, preferring to allow the viewer maximum freedom of interpretation. As a result, his art is one of gnawing yet unfocused irritation, dispassionately picking at the wounds of society without offering either solace or remedy.

While Salle veils his forms, evoking social issues from a psychological distance, Robert Longo generally presents cultural images in serial and theatrical fashion. Although he has not ventured as far as Salle into the realm of sexual innuendo, Longo employs a vocabulary that includes a variety of mundane, stereotypical images drawn from the media and commercial advertising. When these prosaic subjects are contrasted with dramatic elements — disembodied human hearts, figures in physical stress, for instance — the results are often compelling. By radically altering the scale of his images and setting them against protruding, simulated architectural fragments, Longo creates unsettling and highly dramatic combinations that both demand and defy specific interpretation. Working on
a large scale, Longo creates a series of disjointed cinematic fragments without narrative continuity but with theatrical impact.

In Cindy Sherman’s work, this theatrical element takes center stage. Sherman is a photographer who, since the mid-1970s, has intriguingly disguised herself in a variety of personalities and has made large-scale images of these personas. Until 1980, her images were black-and-white images that suggested film noir movie stills; subsequently, she has worked exclusively in color, assuming more contemporary, extreme, and even violent poses. Beyond her acting role, Sherman is simultaneously screenwriter, director, stage designer, and choreographer. She isolates and amplifies stereotypical and media-derived images of women: the emotional, the battered, the innocent, the domestic, and the sensual woman all have roles in Sherman’s panoramic view of her gender. Although critics have attempted to theorize and politicize her photographs, Sherman, like Salle and other contemporaries, has resisted such interpretation, encouraging us to see them as highly personal, psychological fantasies.

It should be emphasized that the development of postmodernism cannot be written in terms of New York art alone. In fact, the embrace of painting, idiosyncrasy, and literacy, as well as popular, content could well be considered at least a temporary aberration between the New York art world and that of the “provinces,” whose abstraction and theory never predominated and painting was never in question. Figurative painting has certainly never been in doubt in Chicago, where a continuous and obsessive attachment to personal expression through eccentric imagery has existed since the time of Ivan Albright. The painters Roger Brown and Ed Paschke have long been in the forefront of the Imagist art movement, which developed in Chicago in the late 1960s. Despite some superficial formal similarities, their respective approaches to content are very different. Brown’s painting has always been based in a personal and often satirical transformation of contemporary experience, whether it be controversial events in politics, society, or the art world. Since moving out of Chicago and to the southeast shore of Lake Michigan, Brown has often painted landscape subjects and the ravaging impact of nuclear war on nature; in the process, his canvases and the figures within have increased in scale. Paschke, by contrast, is an ardent observer of the media and a manipulator of images derived from magazines, newspapers, and television. Although he has frequently dealt with stereotypes of gender, most re-
cently Paschoke’s figures have been transformed by an electrifying array of sensory images.

The West Coast has always cultivated its own brand of iconoclasm and figuration. The art of Californian William Wiley, for example, is dominated by a personal mythology. Although he began his career painting in an expressionist manner, since the early 1960s, Wiley has evolved a vocabulary of punning, ironic, and self-referential images. Working in a purposeful isolation in his northern California studio, Wiley enters into a dialogue with himself through his art, often achieving a measure of personal catharsis. He simultaneously employs several media – drawing, both on paper and canvas, painting, watercolor, and assembled sculpture – and constantly combines images and materials in individual works of art.

From Texas comes the remarkably idiosyncratic work of James Surls and Michael Tracy. Surls creates compelling and haunting spirits through the act of carving wood that he finds near his studio in Splendora, Texas. Surls’s work is most powerful when it suggests a human presence, particularly when it is large in scale and suspended from above. The enormous size and hierarchal relationship established with the viewer give his wooden spirits iconic impact. Ultimately, their rustic character reminds us that the power of Surls’s art resides in the raw, natural quality of the wood and the artist’s identification with the land.

Michael Tracy is obsessed with the experience of Latin American religious and political culture. The central image in Tracy’s art is the crucifix, which he both endows with offerings and invoces and violates with rusting knives and swords. While Tracy’s art is explicitly dominated by the symbolism of belief, it is also implicitly concerned with the lives of the faithful, their mutual experience of Catholicism, their poverty, and their political repression. Convined of the healing power that art has held in the past, he has attempted to reclaim its spiritual status in a world dominated by secular icons. Toward that end, Tracy has recently completed the design and decoration of two chapels in Corpus Christi.

The life and art of Leon Golub offer ample testimony to the breadth of political activity possible in the highly pluralist, post-Modern art world. An artist of exemplary social conscience, Golub has long worked toward a public awareness of political terrorism and social injustice. In successive series of paintings – *Vietnam, Mercenaries, White Squad*
and the ongoing Riot paintings—Golub has consistently stated his convictions without acquiescing to either formalist or Conceptualist approaches to art (fig. 8). To his credit, Golub has been able to maintain his vision of painted reportage or modern history painting, without abandoning his association with the art world:

"I am not going to transcend the art world. I operate in the art world, as it is. Here and now... everybody knows artists don't change society, but that's too easy a way to put it. Artists are part of the information process. If artists only make cubes, then what the world knows of art will be cubes. Art becomes part of the context of experience in unexpected ways. If Jacques Louis David had not existed, our notions of what was possible in that period would be much different. Visual history is important in providing a record of what is going on."

An indication of the influence of political issues in post-Modern art is the adoption of a graffiti-like style by many painters. In the tradition of the Mexican mural, with its portrayal of political and social concerns and appeal to community solidarity and pride, graffiti has long been an outlawed art. While working in an aggressive, expressionist style, Sue Coe has affirmed the political purposes of this outsider art, as she has been a constant and vociferous critic of apartheid and nuclear proliferation, as well as a chronicler of American subcultures. In addition to her large, unstretched, and heavily varnished canvases, Coe has illustrated books (How to Commit Suicide in South Africa with text by Holly Metz is one recent example) in an attempt to expand her audience beyond the commercial boundaries of the art world. In contrast, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring have brought their former street imagery into art galleries, museums, and private collections, thereby reversing and domesticating graffiti's former purposes.

Post-Modernism might be described as the return to representation among artists working in established media who have abandoned formalism as a governing style. As noted above, post-Modernism is indebted to the work of Johns and Rauschenberg, as well as to the examples of Philip Guston and Eva Hesse. Nevertheless, it did not emerge even tentatively until the late 1960s. Its pioneers were the "New Image" artists Neil Jenney, Jonathan Borofsky, Jennifer Bartlett, Susan Rothenberg, and others. By the late 1970s, a second
generation, the so-called “neo-Expressionists” appeared, and David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and Robert Longo evoked their predecessors both in the degree of their renunciation of formalism and in their willingness to embrace explicit forms of content.

Integral to post-Modernism is the devaluation of the currency of style, as the floodgates that governed and restricted minimalist objects have opened wide and a torrent of eccentric forms have gushed forth. Provocative and central to this development has been the impact of Pablo Picasso’s late work, particularly as it was seen in the mammoth retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1980. While Picasso’s early work held few surprises for a knowledgeable public, in the later work, his highly expressive and seemingly clumsy handling of paint eliminated, once and for all, the notion that style had predominated over content in this great artist’s mind. What younger artists found in Picasso’s late pictures was a sanction to work in a manner unrestrained by traditional notions of style and decorum. For example, Rape of the Sabines, 1963 (fig. 9), affirmed Elizabeth Murray’s conviction that “you can do anything,” and that “after you show how to break the rules, what is interesting is to reinvent them.” If Picasso’s late work, like that of Guston, showed that art was more than simply a matter of style, it also encouraged the renewal of the history of art in expressly contemporary terms. His quotations from the art of Murillo, Cranach, Rembrandt, and Poussin set a precedent for Schnabel and others, who looked anew at their legacy.

In numerous ways, post-Modernism is an art of idiosyncrasy. This is most obvious in regard to the unorthodox combinations of media that have appeared. Writing in 1966, Robert Morris, then a Minimalist, described relief—the medium joining painting and sculpture—as unacceptable because it denied sculpture its space and painting its flat surfaces. Today, relief is the preferred medium of Morris, as well as of Salle, Schnabel, and Longo, because it both4 fits in the face of such restrictive logic and offers the possibility of dynamic contrasts in content and form.

Post-Modernism might also be termed a theatrical art. Today’s artists are not only indebted to a decade of performance art, film, and television, but are in competition with the dynamism of these non-static forms. The artist has thus become part screenwriter (in the case of Fisher), part choreographer (in the case of Longo), and part actor (in the case of Sherman). Paradoxically, this theatricality introduces another element of the post-Modernist profile: its apparent neutrality. Although these artists are submerged in the observation of contemporary life and manipulate realistic imagery in extremely dramatic form, many critics have accurately commented on the seeming impartiality of the work and the artists’ apparent unwillingness to offer meaning. Cindy Sherman personifies this trait, for although we see her in a vast array of guises and situations, we look in vain for the artist herself. As Kupstas has noted, such distance or restraint is somewhat troubling:

This inability to generate symbolic meaning is the major problem of post-Modernism, a problem which indicates that for all its reflection of the world it offers no revelation of it. It is an art... which tantalizes with the illusion of a hidden intention.”

Kupstas’s position is well taken, yet the demands he makes may be unreasonable at this early stage. Significantly, the artists of the current generation were the first to be schooled, either academically or by example, in Minimalism and Conceptualism. While they have produced powerful formal innovations in response to the Minimalism of the recent past, the
post-Modernists are still somewhat hampered by the theoretical concerns of their immediate predecessors. Not surprisingly, their art promises something that it does not yet deliver. It is too soon to offer any final judgment of these artists, many of whom are still in their thirties. With their maturity, we can anticipate, or at least hope for, an art that offers meaning in addition to image-saturated forms.

The post-Modernist art world maintains a quickened pace in every aspect: promising young artists are exhibiting at remarkably early stages in their careers, those who are successful are commanding incredibly high prices for their work, and there are more powerful collectors of contemporary art than ever before. Such rapid and substantive changes in the art world, which transcend matters of style and content, are integral to post-Modernism and must be addressed in this discussion. How has the evolution from Conceptualism to post-Modernism touched museums in this country? How have developments in recent art altered the influence of art criticism? Finally, how have the changes in the art world affected the professional status of the artist in the mid-1980s?

Although Conceptual art, earthworks, and performance art were explicit assaults on the commercial element in the art world, they implicitly challenged the museum committed to contemporary art. The museum's long-standing claim for the validity of timelessness of quality was challenged as was its institutionalization of objects after they had been bought and sold on the market. These movements sought a more responsive and temporal museum, devoted as much to ideas as to objects.

In effect, Conceptualism undermined, at least temporarily, the traditional function of the museum. The departure from formal concerns in the 1970s, as well as the widespread abandonment of traditional exhibition spaces in favor of alternative ones, placed museums committed to contemporary art in a defensive position. In an attempt to stay abreast of current developments, many museums duplicated the alternative space format, commissioning artists to develop original, and usually temporary, installations in their galleries. In so doing, curators abrogated many of their traditional prerogatives. Instead of being an independent arbiter of the quality of specific works of art, the curator became a journalist of sorts, reporting on the broad spectrum of contemporary activity for his or her public.
Although the renewal of traditional media in the mid-1970s and the corresponding expansion of the art market and private collecting might have signaled a return to more traditional roles for museum professionals, this has not occurred. Museums have been hard-pressed to acquire expensive contemporary works except through donation, in large part because trustees have been understandably hesitant to pay exorbitant prices for works by young artists. Parallel ing this development, some major collectors have chosen to fund their own museums, both institutionalizing their collections and affirming their status as driving forces in the art world. Although it is too soon to know how extensive the phenomenon of the private museum will become, or what influence it will have on the future donation of works of art to museums, in other areas the impact is already apparent. By virtue of their ability, indeed their passion, for collecting contemporary art immediately after its production, major private collectors have superseded museums as arbiters of contemporary art. As a result, the primary role of the curator of contemporary art has evolved from collector and keeper to exhibition organizer. Evidence of this can be seen in the marked increase in the number and quality of exhibitions of contemporary art during the past decade. Implicit in this lively activity is the tacit recognition that museums cannot compete with private collectors in the acquisition of contemporary art, and thus the organization of thematic or one-person exhibitions constitutes the primary avenue for the expression of critical judgment among museum professionals.

The criticism of post-Modernism, and particularly that of neo-Expressionism, has been especially heated and directed more often against the personalities and economies of the art world than against the works of art. We are as likely to read about Salle’s enigmatic personality or Schnabel’s passion for his wife as we are about either artist’s work. Interestingly, the critical response to neo-Expressionism can be compared with that levied against Pop Art when it first appeared in the early 1960s. Also an art of recognizable, yet ultimately enigmatic imagery, Pop Art perplexed its critics. Indeed, there is little to separate Max Kozloff’s characterization of Pop artists in 1963 as a “pin-headed and contemptible style of garb-chewers, hobby-sowers and, worse, delinquents” from Robert Hughes’s recent description of today’s “art starlet, waddling about like a Strasbourg goose, his ego distended to gross proportions by the obscurities of the market.”

As has been evident in this essay, such critics as Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and, more recently, Lucy Lippard and Rosalind Krauss have been enormously influential in defining, if not determining, the art of the post-World War II period. Two factors of post-Modernist art have conspired to negate this traditionally powerful role. One is its pluralist and anti-theoretical nature. For example, such artists as Schnabel, Longo, and Sherman are grouped together under the rubric of neo-Expressionism, but their work is connected primarily by its denial of the dogmas that formerly governed art, rather than by a shared impulse, content, or style. As a result, a critic as perceptive as Suzi Gablik can appear quite baffled by the pluralist chaos she perceives in post-Modernist art:

"The overwhelming spectacle of current art is confusing not only to the public, but even to professionals and students, for whom the lack of any clear or validating concerns, expressed on the basis of a common practice, has ushered in an impenetrable pluralism of competing appearances." Gablik’s seeming confusion not only stems from the absence of a governing style or theory, but equally from the utter speed with which art is made, exhibited, and collected—the second
factor that has operated to the detriment of the critic's endeavor. As Harold Rosenberg once noted:

The rise to prominence of a new style or of work by an unknown artist used to be preceded by much critical discussion and evaluation. Today, the process often operates in reverse; first comes the popular attention then the discussion and assessment. Novelties in painting and sculpture receive notice in the press as new facts before they have qualified as new art.22

Rosenberg's words are even more true today than when he wrote them in 1966. By the time critics are able to formulate and publish opinions on a new artist, the works they either validate or criticize have long since been accepted or rejected by collectors. Critics are thus thrust into a rearguard position, in which they either reaffirm or deny a fait accompli. This rush to history, wherein the critical interlude separating the making of art and the writing of its history has increasingly narrowed, has reduced the role of the critic, like that of the curator, from an arbiter of quality and historical importance to that of a reporter.

The change in the nature of the artist's profession from that of an impoverished rebel to a man or woman of the workaday world is difficult for many observers of contemporary art to accept. Critics have romanticized the bohemian existence of past artists, particularly of the Abstract Expressionists, in their assaults on the values of today's artists. Gabo, has pursued this line of thought the furthest, advocating, at least rhetorically, that some form of "tradition and authority may be necessary... in order to provide something to revolt against." 23 The fact is that the art world of the 1980s has assumed a position of respectability in its relationship to the commercial system, government, and public. The making of art today is a legitimate profession, and the individual who engages in it is, as Rosenberg foresaw as early as 1966,

no longer a first- or second-generation outsider lost in a metropolis or suburb and accumulating his life experience through random insights and chance meetings. Today he is an all-American youth from farms, villages, or towns, who has been through a university art department and surveyed the treasures of art through the ages and its majestic status as the darling of power and wealth. Instead of resigning himself to a life of bohemian disorder and frustration, he may now look forward to a career in which possibilities are unlimited. 24

Yet, while the changes in the profession of the artist have been striking, they are not new. Historically, great artists have often been accorded financial, social, and even political reward. As noted above, Picasso serves as a model of an artist who maintained control of his career and his art while being transformed into a cultural hero. More recently, Andy Warhol has personified the artist who is not only comfortable with success, but who openly courts it.

Unquestionably, the vast market for contemporary art has provided new possibilities for successful artists. It is a fact of post-Moderne life that artists now no longer need to live in New York to achieve a broad-based, commercial audience for their work. Today, it is possible for artists to act as their own dealers, and to control the sale of their work and the direction of their careers. Some artists have written their own galleries, not merely to show their own art, but also to support promising younger artists. Others have used their financial success to win a greater degree of freedom for themselves, traveling, experimenting, and even engaging agents to shield them from the often overzealous attention of dealers.

If commercial success conveys opportunities, it also has its dangers. While patronizing, Hughes's warning against making millionaires of thirty-year-old artists nevertheless has its merits. Lucas Samaras's recent paintings, personifying the art world's dealers, curators, and collectors as snarled skeletons, offer a similar, morale-lowering message. Samaras, like Hughes, sees in this world a dangerous cabal, enticing in its potential for both reward and ruin. The challenge facing artists today is to heed as a warning Andy Warhol's prediction that we will all be famous for fifteen minutes, and to take it as a challenge to develop a career of life-long innovation and achievement.
2See, for example, Douglas Crist, "The End of Painting," October 16 (Spring 1981), pp. 69-86.
3Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria (New York, 1972), p. 91.
10Quoted in Battcock (note 8), p. 156.
13Quoted in Stein (note 11), p. 165.
In context, Rothenberg's words are as follows:
"I was working through all the influences around me, and finally I realized that I was losing myself in the studio – which is really a basis for change."
15The exhibition "New Image Painting" included the following artists: Nicholas Africano, Jennifer Bartlett, Delaine Greer, Michael Horvitz, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, Susan Rothenberg, David Tuan, and Jori Zanker.
17Quoted in Wallis of Language, Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1982, unpaginated.
CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

Judith Crist
Jennifer Bartlett was born in 1941 in Long Beach, California. She received a B.A. from Mills College, Oakland, California, in 1963 and a B.F.A. and M.F.A. from Yale University in 1964 and 1965, respectively. From 1972 to 1977, she taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. She currently lives and works in New York City and Paris, France. The formal structure of Bartlett’s art evolves from a working method that distills the essence of a subject by recasting it in countless variations and sequential orderings. Bartlett first utilized this process in the late 1960s when she began to employ enameled steel plates painted with patterns of lines and colored dots as primary structural units. In the 1970s, she included imagery of figures, landscapes, and architecture in her work and focused on new elements of systematic study, adding serial investigations of shape, image, drawing technique, painting style, and medium. Her recent works—scenes of houses, cabins, boats, pools, and fences—comprise painted objects that exist as two-dimensional representations on canvas and as scaled, three-dimensional extensions of the scene in front of the canvas. These installations explore the progression of a motif from depicted space into actual space.
Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in 1960 in Brooklyn, New York. A street artist with no formal art training, Basquiat turned his attention from public walls to paper and canvas in the early 1980s. In 1981, he participated in the “New York, New Wave” group exhibition at P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, New York, and was given his first one-person show at the Amiina Nosce Gallery, New York City. His work has since been represented in a number of exhibitions in the United States and Europe. Basquiat’s background as a graffiti/street artist is reflected in his use of language, linguistic signs, and emblematic figures executed in a spontaneous childlike manner. He combines fragments of words, phrases, and figures with a spiritual primitivism influenced by his Haitian heritage. The overlapping and scale variations of images and language notations give his paintings a collaged appearance (in some works collaged materials are actually used in combination with paint and oil stick), drawing attention to the flatness of the picture plane and its surface articulations. Touted as a naive artist, Basquiat’s overall approach is direct and somewhat raw, but his works betray a sophistication in their calibrated surface rhythms and formal composition. Jean-Michel Basquiat lives and works in New York City.
Jonathan Borofsky was born in 1942 in Boston, Massachusetts. He received a B.F.A. from Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, in 1964 and an M.F.A. from Yale University in 1966. He moved to New York City in 1966 where he taught at the School of Visual Arts from 1969 to 1977 and had his first solo exhibition in 1975 at the Paula Cooper Gallery. From 1977 to 1980 he taught at the California Institute of Arts, Valencia. Borofsky currently lives and works in Venice, California. In 1975, Borofsky executed his first wall drawings, turning from conceptual counting pieces to room-size works whose imagery was based on his dreams and autobiographical notations. Since the mid-1970s, these have been expanded into installations that reflect Borofsky’s interior states of mind and his social and political concerns. Composed of paintings, objects, projections, mechanized props, and taped sounds, the installations surround the viewer in closed circuit, free association environments. Within them his Molecule Man play a recurring part in various materials and forms. The size and placement of these figures activate the surrounding space and generate relationships with adjacent objects; the Chattering Men function as a surrogate audience complete with built-in, mechanized dialogue.
Born in 1941 in Hamilton, Alabama, Roger Brown moved to Chicago in 1962. He attended the American Academy of Art and The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied painting with Ray Yoshida and art history with Whitney Halsted, receiving a B.F.A. in 1968 and an M.F.A. in 1970. Early in his career, Brown developed an interest in architectural history and naïve folk art, particularly the work of Joseph Yoakum and Aldo Piccione. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, he participated in various group shows at The Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Hyde Park Art Center, where he exhibited with the “False Image” painters (Hanson, Ramberg, and Dube) in 1968 and 1969. His first one-person exhibition in Chicago was at the Phyllis Kind Gallery in 1971. Since the early 1970s, Brown has painted symmetrically-composed, narrative scenes of contemporary urban and rural life in America. Figures (silhouettes reminiscent of comic book illustrations of the 1940s and 1950s), architectural settings, and landscape configurations reduced to stylized elements become units in rhythmic, repeated pattern systems of overall representation. In his recent work, Brown has humorously and satirically dealt with everyday life, contemporary political events, and the art world. Roger Brown currently lives and works in New Buffalo, Michigan.
Sue Coe was born in 1951 in London, England. She attended the Royal College of Art and, in 1972, made her home in New York City, where she began her first political works, entitled Will Man Become Extinct? Since the early 1970s, Coe has produced forcefully expressionistic art that confronts contemporary political events and moral issues. In her work, she has dealt with such topical subjects as violence in El Salvador, South Africa, and Northern Ireland; racism, terrorism, vigilantism, and rape. Her canvases, often worked in a mixed-media technique of oil paint, graphite, and collage, portray humanity divided into two camps— the victims and the victimizers. Figures are grotesquely contorted by pain or by the activity of inflicting it. In some instances, human beings take on hybrid animal forms, suggesting a bestiality brought into existence by socio-political institutions and forces. Distorted spatial perspectives and heightened light-dark contrasts intensify the narrative impact of each scene. For Coe, political awareness is knowledge contributing to change. Coe had her first New York solo exhibition at P.P.O.W. Gallery in 1983. That show consisted of paintings based on the illustrations from her book, How to Commit Suicide in South Africa (text by Holly Metz), published in 1983. An illustrated book on the pacifist and nuclear disarmament movements in the United States and Europe is in preparation. Sue Coe lives and works in New York City.
Vernon Fisher was born in 1943 in Fort Worth, Texas. He attended Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas, receiving a B.A. in 1967 and the University of Illinois, Urbana, earning an M.F.A. in 1969. He was given his first one-person exhibition in 1970 at North Texas State University, Denton. He taught at Austin College, Sherman, Texas, from 1969 to 1978. Fisher lives in Fort Worth and, since 1978, has held the position of Associate Professor of Art at North Texas State University. He first gained recognition in the mid-1970s for a series of narrative works composed of image/text overlays that explored relationships among the various elements of a piece and their coalescence into a unified context of meaning. Since 1979, Fisher has produced more complex, multi-dimensional wall installations, consolidating a maximum amount of visual and written information in each work. These wall installations comprise personal and mass-media imagery and include written texts superimposed over images, as well as three-dimensional objects. The multiplicity, disparity, and juxtaposition of elements creates tension and interplay; for the viewer, each part enhances the others on both a conscious and subconscious level. A work by Fisher cannot be 'read' in an ordered sequence; rather, an associative, fluctuating play of connections triggers cognizance and comprehension of the whole.
Leon Golub was born in 1922 in Chicago, Illinois. He attended the University of Chicago, earning a B.A. in art history in 1942, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, receiving an M.F.A. in 1949. Golub's early work was influenced by ethnographic and German Expressionist art, but after a trip to Italy in 1957, he drew upon late Greek and Roman sculpture as the source of his imagery, producing paintings of athletes, philosophers, and colossal antique figures. These evolved into the Combat and Gigantomachy series of the mid-1960s, which depicted man struggling against himself and unseen forces. Since the early 1970s, Golub's large-scale canvases of violence, power, and vulnerability have overtly referred to contemporary political events. Working serially and in a paint scraping technique, Golub powerfully portrays Mercenaries, White Squads, Interrogations, and Riots. Over-life-sized figures, whose sources lie in composites of magazine and newspaper photographs, are placed against silent, airless backdrops of monochromatic color fields, where they play out their roles as violators, victims, and combatants, tensely embroiled in or restlessly disengaged from acts of conflict. Leon Golub lives and works in New York City; he teaches at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick, where in 1983 he was appointed John D. van Dyck Professor of Visual Art, Mason Gross School of the Arts.

Four Black Men, 1985
Oil on linen
121 1/2 x 200 1/2 inches
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Riot/IV, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 109 inches
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
Neil Jenney

Born in 1945 in Torrington, Connecticut, Neil Jenney attended the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, from 1964 to 1966. He moved to New York City in 1966, where he was given his first one-person exhibition in 1967 at the Neuh Goldowsky Gallery. In 1969, Jenney turned from sculpture to painting, producing a series of works composed of single narrative scenes of childlike figures on gesturally painted monochrome fields of intense color. Jenney's juxtaposition between the image and the title that was stenciled onto heavy black frames surrounding the paintings gave these works thematic and universal overtones. In the 1970s, Jenney began using oil paint, producing more realistically rendered images of landscape and sky in horizontal and irregularly shaped formats which were combined with titles and heavier, architectural frames. The frames, with their shadows sometimes illusionistically painted on the images, gave each work a “window on the world” structure, emphasizing its traditional art context. Because of their synthesized construction, these
works became vehicles of philosophical, ecological, and political content. More recent work extends earlier concerns but emphasizes the divided format of titles presented in larger scale. Although his work can be defined as realistic painting, Jenney's approach is conceptual in its dramatic exaggeration and structural integration of painting's traditional attributes of image, frame, title, and content. Neil Jenney lives and works in New York City.
Robert Longo was born in 1953 in Brooklyn, New York. He attended North Texas State University, Denton; Nassau Community College, New York; and State University College, Buffalo, New York, where he received a B.F.A. in 1975. While in Buffalo, Longo co-organized Hallwalls, an artist-run alternative space, which since its inception has shown some of the most innovative young artists in the United States. In 1977, Longo moved to New York City where he currently lives and works. A performance artist as well as a painter and sculptor, Longo first received recognition in the early 1980s for works which focused on the theme of tension in contemporary urban life. These included Men in the Cities, a series of life-sized drawings of young professionals frozen in ambiguous, exaggerated poses as if pushed and pulled by unseen forces, and Corporate Wars, a series of sculptural reliefs of corporate officials engaged in overt acts of hostility. In recent work, Longo has expanded his subject matter, employing a variety of images and techniques drawn from television and magazine advertising. Paintings and drawings of figures and media-propagated symbols of achievement, power, and the "good life" are combined with architectural reliefs of wood, bronze, or aluminum. Color is used in these works to emphasize their mass-media derivation and to heighten the tension produced by the assemblage of diverse compositional elements, representing the myths and realities of urban America.
Robert Morris was born in 1931 in Kansas City, Missouri. He studied at the Kansas City Art Institute from 1948 to 1950 and Reed College in Portland, Oregon, from 1953 to 1955. In 1966, he earned an M.A. from Hunter College in New York City, where he has held the position of Assistant Professor since 1967. Morris has authored numerous theoretical and critical texts and, throughout his career, has explored a number of parallel aesthetic concerns. A leading proponent of Minimal Art in the 1960s, he also has been involved with process sculpture, performance, earthworks, and land reclamation projects. In his recent work, Morris has dealt with apocalyptic themes of death, destruction, and the victimization of humanity in the age of nuclear weaponry. Combinations of painting and sculptural relief, Morris's *Burning Planet Series* utilizes imagery drawn from his previous works of the early 1980s: the *Hyperatomykia Series*, hydrocal reliefs depicting human carnage; and the *Firestorm Series*, drawings of swirling forces of destruction. In his *Burning Planet Series*, the addition of intense color on canvas framed by painted skulls and dismembered human appendages intensifies the horrific content. Constructed as mini-theaters of fear and fascination, the series takes on a dramatic baroque intensity.
ED PASCHKE

Born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1939, Ed Paschke attended The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, where he received a B.F.A. in 1961 and an M.F.A. in 1970. After serving in the military, Paschke traveled to Europe and New York City in 1964, where the media-derived images of the Pop Art movement reinforced his already strong interest in figurative representation. He returned to Chicago in 1965, and in the following years, participated in exhibitions at The Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Hyde Park Art Center, which between 1966 and 1972 became a forum for Chicago Imagist artists. His work at the time centered on basely colored and unnaturally illuminated portraits of individuals living on the periphery of social acceptability - night people, freaks, and side-show types. His recent work is concerned with the more generalized imagery of electronically produced media sources. In these canvases, figures, pushed and pulled by energy forces, abstract and dissolve in pulsating fields of high-keyed, high-tech color. The transformation of reality into technological modes and the influence of this process on direct perceptual experience forms the basis of Paschke’s art. Ed Paschke lives and works in Chicago, Illinois, and teaches at Northwestern University.

Caliente, 1985
Oil on canvas
50 x 100 inches
Promised gift of the staff of The Art Institute of Chicago

Flea, 1985
Oil on canvas
90 x 100 inches
Collection of Robert H. Bergman, Chicago
Susan Rothenberg was born in 1945 in Buffalo, New York. She attended Cornell University, where she received a B.F.A. in 1967. After graduation, she traveled to Europe and entered the master's degree program at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. In 1969, she moved to New York City, where she currently lives and works. In the mid-1970s, Rothenberg emerged as one of the pre-eminent figurative painters in the United States, producing a number of beautifully worked canvases depicting abstracted images of horses. By painting figure and ground the same color and intersecting them with vertical and diagonal bars, she successfully maintained a balance between the objective flatness of the picture plane and the humanist appeal of figuration. In 1978, she temporarily abandoned the horse motif (it was finally abandoned in 1980) and turned to abstracted, overlapping images of the human head and hand. Although usually employing black, gray, and white, Rothenberg has recently begun to experiment with color and its effect on form and space. In this work, executed in oil rather than acrylic, she has moved toward a more gestural and textural approach to the painted surface, creating backgrounds out of which emerge shadows of figures drawn from a wide variety of sources. A poetic expressiveness and pathos permeate these canvases.
David Salle was born in 1952 in Norman, Oklahoma. In 1970, he entered the California Institute of Arts, Valencia, receiving a B.F.A. in 1973 and an M.F.A. in 1975. He was given his first one-person exhibition in 1975 at Project, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1975, Salle moved to New York City, where he currently lives and works. Salle’s art is based on the principles of appropriation and displacement. Drawing from a large vocabulary of images from art historical and mass-media sources, Salle juxtaposes them in compositionally divided works. By separating these images from their original contexts, Salle neutralizes their meaning and focuses attention on their modes of visual representation. Using a variety of styles and techniques that include the gestural paint manipulation of Abstract Expressionism, the photographic realism of magazine advertising, and the printed interfaces of fabric design, Salle creates disjunctive compositions of displaced and equivalent visual information in which the absence of connectives among the images short-circuits narrative interpretation.
Lucas Samaras was born in 1936 in Kastoria, Greece. He immigrated to the United States in 1948, becoming a citizen in 1955. He was given his first solo exhibition in 1955 at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, where he earned a B.A. in 1959. He attended Columbia University from 1959 to 1962 and taught at Yale University in 1969 and Brooklyn College, New York, in 1971–72. Samaras first came to prominence in the 1960s with works assembled in a variety of unconventional media that explored material/object transformation. He continued to pursue this course in the 1970s and early 1980s, focusing on the medium of photography, from which evolved his series of Asetopolinoids, Photo-transformations, and Panoramas. Coexistent with these series, Samaras has produced numerous drawings, paintings, and sculptures in more traditional materials. His recent work, a series of acrylic paintings, is humorous and bitingly satirical in its portrayal of the art world and the artists, collectors, dealers, critics, curators, and spectators who comprise it. Depicted as skulls or mask-like creatures with grotesquely deformed and exaggerated physical features including double mouths, protruding ears, and sunken eyes, the figures stare at the viewer, hovering in front of fields of intense color or emerging from gesturally worked surfaces of the canvases. Lucas Samaras lives and works in New York City.
Julian Schnabel was born in 1951 in New York City. In 1985, he moved to Brownsville, Texas, and in 1989 entered the University of Houston, where he received a B.F.A. in 1973. In 1973-74, he participated in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. He briefly moved back to Texas in 1975, where he was given his first one-person exhibition in 1976 at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He then traveled in Europe, returning in 1977 to New York City where he currently lives and works.

Julian Schnabel's figurative and abstract images, drawn from a wide variety of literary and art historical sources, as well as the artist's own experience and imagination, interact and combine into thematically unified works. Selected for their color and texture, unconventional materials (animal hide, blankets, velvet, and tarpaulin) are used as grounds upon which Schnabel builds up wax, modeling paste, and pigment, producing beautifully worked, but agitated surfaces. Found objects, particularly the broken ceramics that have been identified with Schnabel's work, are often employed as formal elements and create numerous interplays between the thick, three-dimensional surfaces and the original two-dimensionality of the grounds. Both his images and chosen media assume equal formal and emotive roles in Schnabel's work.

*First Eggs (Two Napoleonics Playing Leaping in Front of the Pyramids), 1985*
Oil on tarpaulin
60 x 210 inches
Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York

*The Wind, 1985*
Spray enameled and modeling paste on tarpaulin
577 x 225 inches
Courtesy of Pace Gallery, New York
Cindy Sherman was born in 1954 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. She attended State University College, Buffalo, New York, earning a B.F.A. in 1976. After graduation, she remained for a year in Buffalo at Hallwalls, an artist-run alternative space, where in 1977 she had her first one-person exhibition. In 1977, she moved to New York City, where she currently lives and works. Sherman turned exclusively to the medium of photography in the mid-1970s. As photographer and model (Sherman poses for all of her photographs), she has used photography as a means to explore the mass media’s manipulative power and capacity to create and perpetuate cultural stereotypes of women. In her first series of black and white photographs, Untitled Film Stills, 1977-80, Sherman focused on imagery derived from 1950s cinema and television. Her work since 1980, larger in format and photographed in color, has encompassed a wider range of characters drawn from sources that have nurtured fictional standards. Sherman has targeted high-fashion advertising in her work, pushing the eccentricity of its images to an extreme that borders on parody. She has also dealt with myths and fairy tales, casting herself as female embodiments of good and evil. Sherman employs a painterly use of color and light and draws attention to artistic artifice and its ability to manipulate emotional and aesthetic response.
Frank Stella was born in 1936 in Malden, Massachusetts. He attended Phillips Academy from 1950 to 1954, studying with Patrick Morgan; and Princeton University from 1954 to 1958, studying with William Seitz and Stephen Greene. In 1958, he moved to New York City, where he was given his first solo exhibition in 1960 at the Leo Castelli Gallery. The recipient of numerous awards and honors, Stella has also held various teaching positions, including the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetry at Harvard University in 1983-84. He currently lives and works in New York City. Since the late 1950s, Stella has explored formal issues within a serial body of work that has challenged traditional definitions of painting. His shaped canvases of the 1960s, composed of repetitive geometric patterns that encompass the canvas's framing edge, reduced painting to two-dimensional objecthood by eliminating spatial illusionism and figure-ground compositional relationships. In 1970, Stella began to incorporate actual space as a formal element, producing works constructed of interlocking planes of high and low relief in painted and non-painted materials—felt, paper, cardboard, and wood. Since the mid-1970s, Stella has progressively introduced into his work more energetically aggressive spatial volumes of painted and etched aluminum, steel, magnesium, and fiber glass, exploring contrasts of color, texture, and shape and their relationship to formal structure.

La colonia laeta, 1965
Oil, urethane enamel, fluorescent alloyed, acrylic, and printing ink on etched magnesium and aluminum 127 x 137 1/4 x 13 3/4 inches
Collection of B. L. Davidson, Toronto

Gũũku, agaza rall starvation, 1995
Oil, urethane enamel, fluorescent alloyed, acrylic, and printing ink on etched magnesium and aluminum 127 x 137 1/4 x 34 1/8 inches
Courtesy of M. Knoedler & Co., Inc., New York
Born in Terrell, Texas, in 1943, James Surls earned an M.S. from Sam Houston University, Huntsville, Texas, in 1966 and an M.F.A. from Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, in 1969. He taught sculpture at Southern Methodist University in Dallas from 1970 to 1975 and at the University of Houston from 1976 to 1982, where he established the Lawndale Annex as a laboratory of avant-garde art, music, dance, and theater. In 1976, Surls moved to Splendora, Texas, where he currently lives and works. Since the early 1970s, Surls has created anthropomorphic sculpture in wood. His working process begins with iconographically complex drawings that serve as narrative guidelines for the development of his sculpture. Appropriate pieces of wood – tree trunks, branches, roots, and vines – are sought and then combined to produce the sculpture. Honoring the original shape and grain pattern of each component part, Surls adds joints and surface articulations by whittling, hatching, peeling, and burning. Reminiscent of naive folk art, the sculptures balance precariously on the floor or hang by wire from the ceiling. Fantastic and surreal in the juxtaposition of title and object and in the varying shifts of scale, shape, and color within each work, Surls’s sculpture assumes various levels of meaning drawn from the artist’s personal experiences and private visions of the world.
Michael Tracy was born in 1943 in Bellevue, Ohio. He earned a B.F.A. in 1964 from St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas. After graduation he returned to Ohio, attending the Cleveland Institute of Art from 1964 to 1968. He received an M.F.A. in 1969 from the University of Texas, Austin. Since 1978, Tracy has lived and worked in San Ignacio, Texas. Tracy's art is based on his desire to fuse the temporal and spiritual in contemporary terms. His sculptures of crucifixes, shrines, and Stations of the Cross borrow from a number of religious sources, including medieval panel painting and Mexican processional icons, shrines, and milagros (small objects used as offerings). Tracy is interested in the formal ritualistic qualities of these sources as they are used in ceremonial activities of devotion and atonement. The effacement of the flesh inherent in extreme acts of penitence is symbolically embodied in the materials that Tracy employs—spikes, swords, broken glass, hair, and velvet the color of blood. His protracted working method takes on a ritualistic character. The works begin as frames onto which thick layers of acrylic paint are applied. As a variety of materials are added, the pieces are sometimes buried or left in the open to weather, which forces them to age and decay. Tracy's art represents an attempt to renew spiritual values in a brutal world.
William T. Wiley was born in Bedford, Indiana, in 1932. He studied at the San Francisco Art Institute, receiving a B.F.A. in 1960 and an M.F.A. in 1962. He was given his first solo exhibition in 1960 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. From 1962 to 1973 he taught at the University of California, Davis. The recipient of numerous awards, Wiley lives and works in Forest Knolls, California. Autobiographical symbolism and metaphor have formed the basis of his art since the 1960s. Working in a variety of media and styles, ranging from realistically rendered to abstract, Wiley uses objects, figures, numbers, and signs as elements of a personal symbolic language. A graphic quality characterizes much of his work. Webs of lines and calligraphy overlap and merge in free association with his unique imagery, forming verbal and visual puns. In Wiley’s recent works, many of which make reference to political issues, the surfaces are divided into areas of drawing, flat geometric forms, and strokes of intense, thickly applied color, from which symbols emerge in varying scale, forming multi-layered levels of allusion and meaning.

Acrylic, charcoal, and graphite on canvas, painted wood and string; ink on paper
Canvas: 75 1/2 x 55 1/2 inches
Drawings: 10 5/8 x 7 1/2 inches each
Courtesy of Alfonso Ossorio
Galleria, New York and Stanze Gallery, Chicago

Foot Gage to Foot Gage, 1985
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas
64 1/2 x 53 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist
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