Abstraction, pure and impure : October 20, 1995-May 21, 1996

[text: Amelia Arenas]

Author

Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)

Date

1995

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

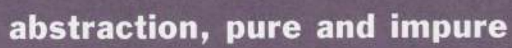
Exhibition URL

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/474

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.

MoMA

© 2017 The Museum of Modern Art



abstraction, pure and impure

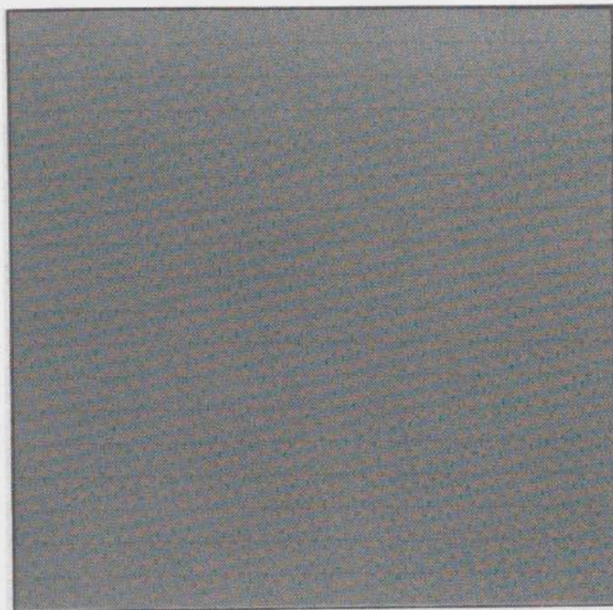
FROM THE COLLECTION

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

October 20, 1995–May 21, 1996

Archive MoMA 1729
The Museum of Modern Art Library

Agnes Martin. American, born Canada, 1912.
Untitled Number 6. 1989.
Synthetic polymer paint and pencil on canvas, 71 ⅞" x 6' (182.7 x 182.9 cm).
Gift of the American Art Foundation, 1990.



In the early seventies, after a mysterious withdrawal from painting in the mid-sixties, **Agnes Martin** resumed making the kind of works associated with her name: quiet fields inflected by tenuous pencil lines and tender colors.

A Zen silence pervades her work. Her gentle rhythms are the visual equivalent of a chant, monotonous and constant, lulling the eye into introspection. As Martin says, "the work is all about perfection as we are aware of it in our minds," but "the paintings are very far from being perfect." Looking at them closely, one can follow the delicate variations of the lines that edge the grey bands; one can imagine the pencil sliding tentatively over the field, wavering slightly as it responds to the weave of the canvas.

Some critics have proposed a link between these nuanced paintings and the vast wheat fields of the farm in Vancouver where Martin lived as a child, but she insists that her work is not *about* nature. However, it is hardly about "pure form." If anything, it is an effort to release the tight intellectual grip that form has held on painting. A near contemporary of the Abstract Expressionists, Martin felt at odds with the individualism of her generation. The leanness of her compositions and her self-effacing technique made her seem more akin to some of her younger contemporaries, the Minimalists. But Martin does not seek an exacting scrutiny of sensory phenomena. Her monastic studio method is a way to prevent the interference of the ego with the voice of the spirit, in order to reveal the tacit continuum of life.

My paintings have neither objects, nor space, nor time, not anything—no forms. They are light, lightness, [they are about] merging, about formlessness. . . . [My work] is not about what is seen. It is [about] what is known forever in the mind.

Donald Judd. American, 1928–1994.
Relief. 1961.
Asphaltum and gesso on composition board mounted on wood with aluminum-pan inset,
48⅛ x 36⅛ x 4" (122.2 x 91.8 x 10.2 cm).
Gift of Barbara Rose, 1973.

Donald Judd left painting in the fifties, dissatisfied with the subjectivism—but maybe even more with the lack of clarity—of Abstract Expressionist art. Ironically, though Judd would eventually become a leading Minimalist sculptor, he also regarded all geometric art with suspicion. In his mind, geometry was associated with the utopianism of modern European abstraction—with Malevich and Mondrian, for example. Judd, in contrast, "had leapt into the world a pragmatist."

There is something of that puritanical spirit in Judd's *Relief*, a baking pan set within a shallow box covered with asphaltum. To be sure, the work argues for a geometry that is decidedly not ideal. The austerity of its design would almost make *Relief* a Minimalist work if it were not for the conspicuous kitchen utensil, which brings into the image some of the love of the ordinary—and some of the irony—of Pop Art. But this association, too, is confounded by the work's unexpected elegance, the metallic gleam of the pan against the rich texture of the asphalt surface.

Perhaps the power of Judd's work comes from another source as well: the way in which the hollow object—the baking pan—asserts itself, making pictorial space real. According to Judd, actual space is the best antidote to that "most salient and objectionable relic of European art": perspective. Somewhere between a sculpture and a painting, *Relief* celebrates its existence as simply another object in the world.

It isn't necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what's interesting.

Ad Reinhardt. American, 1913–1967.
Abstract Painting. 1963.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 60" (152.4 x 152.4 cm).
Gift of Mrs. Morton J. Hornick, 1977.

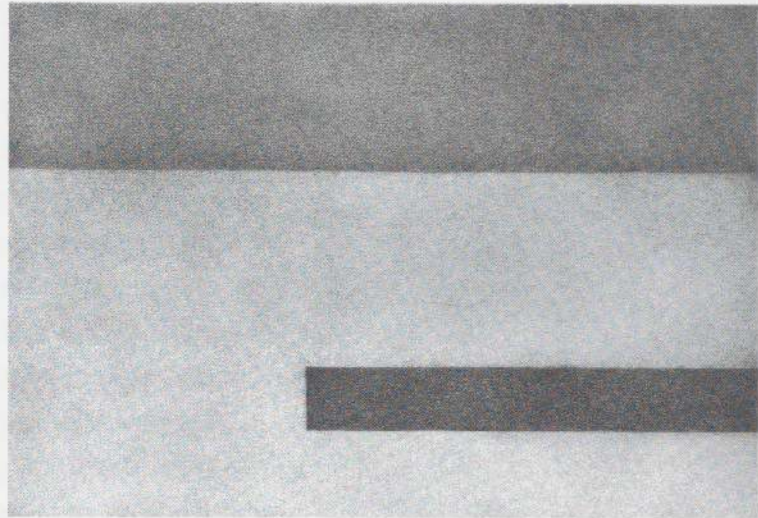
It's quite possible to walk by **Ad Reinhardt**'s *Abstract Painting* and see only a square canvas painted black. But those who stop to look at it for a few seconds might find their reward—more than one black in the painting. Eventually, from the seemingly unmodulated field emerges a symmetrical composition: two bands forming a cross, painted in nearly imperceptible gradations of the darkest hues, which require from the artist a maddening precision. To be sure, the picture demands extreme optical concentration from the viewer as well, but it is expressly in that challenge that the pleasure lies. And it is a perverse pleasure at that: The elusive structure vanishes as soon as one sharpens the eyes' focus to "possess" it.

Reinhardt began to paint in the early thirties, after studying art history at Columbia University. His work, non-objective from the outset and increasingly reductive, climaxed in the mid-fifties with his black paintings.

He wrote extensively about art. Though often cryptic or dogmatic, his ideas appealed to many of his younger contemporaries, especially the Minimalists, who found in the relentless rigor of his painting a model for their work. Reinhardt spoke about the necessity for a purely optical kind of art, which he saw as an historical imperative for the twentieth century, and insisted on the complete separation of art from all aspects of life. For example, he explained that he used black as a way to resist the sensuality (and thus the materialism) inherent in our response to color. His motifs—the cross, the mandala, the circled square—were also a means to transcend ordinary experience, not only because their origins were religious, but because, according to Reinhardt, these symbols had evolved over time into purely intellectual, universal forms. Reinhardt's ambition was to attain no less than the essence of art.

A pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, relationless, disinterested painting—an object that is self-conscious, ideal, transcendent, aware of nothing but art itself.

Myron Stout. American, 1908–1987.
Untitled. 1977–79.
Graphite, 11 x 13¾" (28 x 35 cm).
Gift of the Gramercy Park Foundation, 1980.



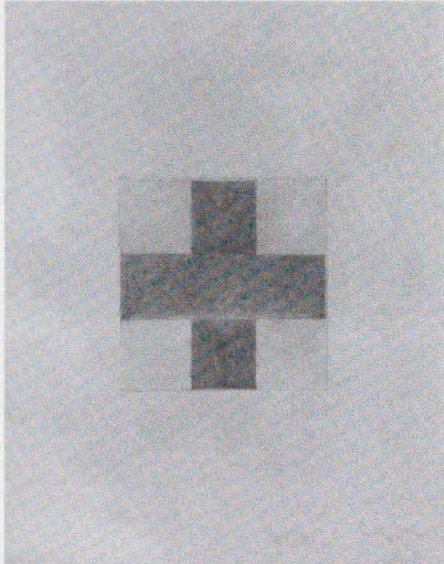
Myron Stout was a soft-spoken man who lived in a small New England town, away from the hubbub of the New York art scene, painting pictures and reading cowboy novels. Like Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still, he came from the West and brought east with him a keen sense of the openness of space. In sharp contrast to the monumental formats and the technical bravado of painters such as Pollock or Still, however, Stout made exquisitely crafted, often tiny pictures such as this drawing.

Untitled is divided into two distinct sections by a high horizontal line, with a narrow, darker rectangle entering the composition from the lower right. The clean, clear geometry of the ensemble might be called hard-edged, if the picture as a whole were not so soft. Stout applies his graphite with the most tender, careful touch, often rubbing and erasing. Even when he actually draws lines, such as those barely visible around the shapes, his trace is like a whisper. The delicate grain of the paper trembles gently through in the tenuous haze of his marks, which is why the work, though strictly non-objective, is also atmospheric.

It would be tempting to see Stout's work in the context of the formal purism that characterized much of the abstraction of the sixties, with its relentless emphasis on everything optical. But Stout's work indulges in a sensuality and intimacy that seem at odds with the art of his younger contemporaries, qualities that appeal to one's fingertips as much as to one's eyes.

I believe that "flatness" is something we never **see**, ***but only*** **know**. ***The eyes are not constructed to see flatness, and we come nearer knowing it through the sense of touch. If this is true, the basis of our apprehension of a painting has a duality of see-touch, or maybe better, touch-see, which sets up what is probably the primary, vivifying*** **tension** ***on which painting depends.***

Sherrie Levine. American, born 1947.
Eight from the series of forty **Untitled (after Malevich and Schiele) from the 1917 Exhibition Nature Morte Gallery, New York**. 1984.
Pencil and watercolor, each 14 x 11" (36 x 27.9 cm).
Gift of Constance B. Cartwright, Roger S. and Brook Berlind, Marshal S. Cogan and purchase, 1992.



Nothing is more common in the history of art than the artist's habit of "stealing" from other artists—especially from those who are famous and dead. **Sherrie Levine** has made this traditional practice the trademark of her work. In the late seventies, she began photographing magazine ads. Later, she shot pictures of celebrated works by photographers like Walker Evans and Edward Weston. She then made drawings and watercolor copies of "masterpieces" reproduced in art books.

Yet Levine's mimicry of the masters of modern art is far from the traditional practice of borrowing poses and motifs from past art, an act that flattered not only the artists to whom the copyist implicitly paid tribute, but also the *cognoscenti* who recognized the references. Her impersonal, even fastidious renderings lack the personal element one expects to find in works made "after" an earlier artist—in this case, Malevich. At first glance, her approach might seem closer in spirit to the traditional academic practice of copying the Old Masters in museums, except that to present virtually identical versions of other artists' works as one's own is far from the attitude of the diligent student.

If anything, her work recalls the outrageous act of an artist from the previous generation, Robert Rauschenberg, who had asked the already mythic Willem de Kooning for a drawing, erased every single line on it, and signed it as his own work. Cooler and decidedly more discreet, Levine's appropriation creates a vacuum of meaning by meticulously retracing the older artists' gestures and testing their value outside the context that granted them their epic rank. Cryptic and ambivalent as acts of homage, her works invade the historical space occupied by these modern art "giants," space that is off-limits to the artists of her generation, especially to women.

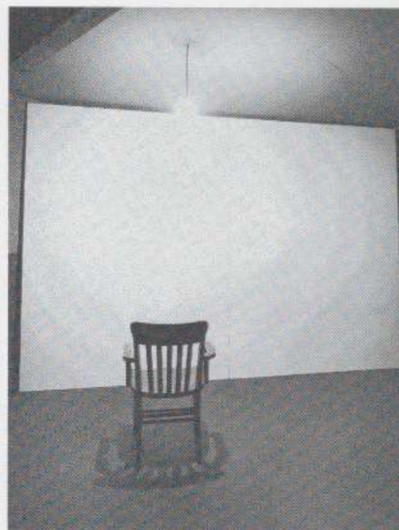
When I started doing this work, I wanted to make a picture which contradicted itself. I wanted to put a picture on top of a picture so that there would be times when both pictures disappear, and other times when they're both manifest; that vibration is basically what the work is about for me—that space in the middle where there's no picture.

Ilya Kabakov. Russian, born 1933.

The Man Who Flew into His Picture. From the Ten Characters series. 1981–88.

Room installation; overall dimensions variable: Museum installation 8'8½" x 24'6" x 17'3" (265.4 x 746.8 x 525.8 cm).

Gift of Marcia Riklis Hirschfeld, Jerry I. Speyer Fund, and Michael S. and Judy Ovitz Fund, 1992.



On entering the gallery one finds a door. Beyond it, there is a plain room lit by a naked bulb, containing a shelf, an ordinary chair, and a series of framed pictures with texts in Russian. The space has the dour gracelessness of official places—a hallway in a school, a basement in a public housing building—except, of course, for the enigmatic white painting leaning against the wall.

One might imagine this to be the hiding place of an underground artist in the former Soviet Union—since this extreme form of abstraction was the most subversive kind of art one could have made there—until one realizes that the picture is not entirely abstract. On the left panel of the painting, a tiny silhouette of a man, a mere gray speck, floats in the white, open space.

The Man Who Flew into His Picture is one of **Ilya Kabakov**'s Ten Characters, a series of installations inspired by the eccentric people who shared the small Moscow apartment where he lived as a child. In these fictional portraits, those people become ghostly personifications of life in Communist Russia.

Kabakov began the series in the former Soviet Union, where he lived until 1988. After completing studies in Moscow's official art schools, he worked as an illustrator of children's books from the sixties onward. Outside the USSR, however, Kabakov began to be known as the leading figure in the Soviet art underground.

Little in Kabakov's work recalls his training in Socialist Realism—the official style of the former Soviet academies—or, for that matter, the parody of Socialist Realism associated with much "alternative" Soviet art. In contrast with the work of his contemporaries in Europe and America, however, Kabakov's installations are curiously realistic. They are like time capsules from the recent past. As places that are suddenly abandoned, they speak of a drama that we can't fully understand but that is impressed into the texture of every object left behind. In the charged emptiness of these rooms we sense both the weight of alienation and the suspense of a sudden departure.

Life as we live it here [in Moscow] is dominated by a general, archetypal feeling of extremely closed spaces, which in a sense is our inner experience of life itself. . . . In order for [that] emptiness to come into being one has to enunciate [it] and draw it afresh.

Tony Smith. American, 1912–1980.
Untitled. 1962, 1980.
Oil and alkyd on canvas, 8' x 13' ⅛" (243.9 x 396.8 cm).
Gift of Agnes Gund, 1989.

The word *composition* is too generic to describe what is happening in this sparse but imposing painting. Primarily known as a sculptor, **Tony Smith** gives these purely optical, flat forms a monumental power. The black rectangle, for example, seems to plunge into the dense blue field, which in turn pushes heavily upward. The forms in the painting recall Smith's sculptures—massive geometric configurations—which appear to stretch in the space, making the air seem to harden around them.

Smith began his career as an architect and painter in the forties. Until 1960, sculpture was only a private activity for him, the "lab" where he worked out his ideas. But a conventional definition of sculpture or painting will not explain what makes Smith's work in both mediums so forceful—his obsession with the physical drama that takes place at the edges of a shape, for instance, or his concentration on the dynamic power of a form's profile.

Smith studied architecture at the New Bauhaus School in Chicago and worked with Frank Lloyd Wright, which might explain the weight and structural assertiveness that he can give to non-objective forms. From the start, what most attracted Smith to geometry was its inscrutability. Yet far from revealing an idealist's passion for pure form, Smith's geometry stems from a keen sense of the body's physical response to space and volume in the modern urban landscape—especially in New Jersey, where he grew up.

The experience on the [New Jersey Turnpike] was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks very pictorial after that. There's no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.

Robert Ryman. American, born 1930.
Pace. 1984.
Synthetic polymer paint on fiberglass on wood with aluminum, 59½ x 26 x 28" (151.2 x 66 x 77.1 cm).
Gift of an anonymous donor and gift of Ronald S. Lauder, 1994.

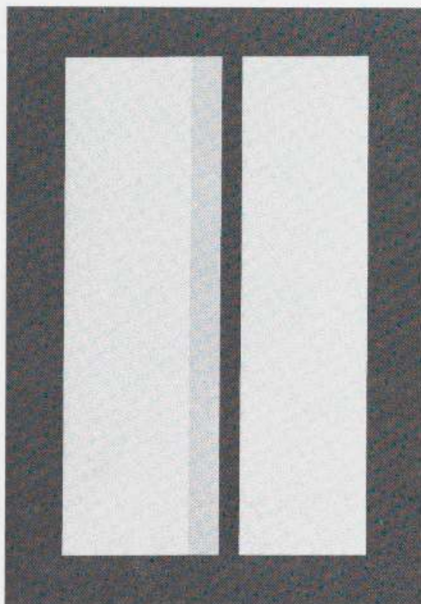
For **Robert Ryman**, the important question has never been "*what* to paint, but only *how* to paint." He would even say that this "how" has always been the most essential thing art had to offer.

For more than four decades, Ryman's work has consisted of a rigorous exploration of the possible permutations of a limited set of givens: How many different things can happen if you make almost exclusively square paintings and always use white paint? Many, considering that the square can be made of canvas, cardboard, wood, aluminum, paper, or formica, and that the picture can be as large as a wall or as small as a napkin. One of the things the viewer discovers is that there is no such thing as white, inasmuch as the white of, say, oil paint is not the same as the white of enamel. Those differences in hue are not just the result of the particular qualities of the pigment, but also of the marriage of the pigment and the surface on which it is applied. After all, a stroke of white oil paint doesn't look the same on aluminum as it does on burlap. The effect changes when the paint is applied loosely or tightly, slowly or quickly, with a house painter's brush or with an artist's brush.

Some might think that Ryman's painting in this exhibition is not a painting at all, but a sculpture. *Pace* is a horizontal panel resting on two thin aluminum legs, with one of its edges attached to the wall. If the most important thing a painting can offer lies on its surface, then here Ryman is allowing us the most privileged of all viewing situations: eye level. Moreover, Ryman gives us not one but two sides to look at—a slick upper surface that reflects the light, and a matte underside—as well as the thin wood trim that edges the fiberglass plate projecting from the wall like a line drawn in space.

I think of my approach as realism. I don't want to confuse things, but it seemed that what I was working with was real—real surface, real light, the way the paint . . . works with the wall and with the environment. There is no illusion involved, and no myth or symbolism. So that's why I felt it was more real than abstract.

John McLaughlin. American, 1898–1976.
Number 16—1963. 1963.
Oil on canvas, 60 x 42" (152.3 x 106.5 cm).
The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation (fractional gift), 1983.



Before becoming an artist, **John McLaughlin** worked as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army and traveled extensively in Asia. He was entirely self-taught. His training was intensive but relatively narrow in focus: He studied the work of Malevich and Mondrian, and, even more avidly, Japanese art from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To McLaughlin, these sparse, elegant works involved the viewer at a deeper level than anything in his own tradition. As he put it, "I could get into these paintings and they made me wonder who I was. By contrast, Western painters tried to tell me who they were. . . ."

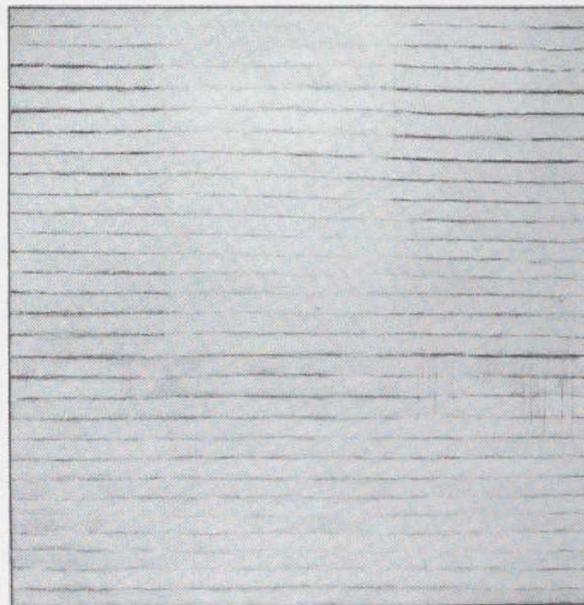
Although McLaughlin was already in his fifties when he had his first exhibition, his work had always been strictly non-objective. Early on he found in the rectangle the neutral form par excellence, and he sought to take as his subject the emptiness of a picture—what the Japanese artist Sesshu once called the "marvelous void."

Number 16 opens up into a space that is both symmetrical and asymmetrical. The picture is framed by a continuous black band and divided in two by a black vertical bar, placed off-center. One might expect this to result in two unequal sections, but running parallel to the black bar is a gray band that compensates for the difference, making the two white areas identical. The eye wanders back and forth seeking resolution: The field on the right seems completely flat and still, but the one on the left seems to vibrate and recede a little.

Here McLaughlin is closer to Mondrian and Malevich than to the old Japanese artists he admired. The optical involvement that this quiet painting demands is the result of a process that is as austere and methodical as it is intuitive and individualistic.

I compose my paintings by conscious and objective effort. . . . I work long and hard, make and remake until I feel that every barrier to being there has been hurdled. I use my powers of selection (and rejection) to the full, but cannot explain why I accept a particular design as against others. Nor, incidentally, do I employ logic as a means. . . . I have no workable scheme or formula. If my work could be reasoned out and defined in terms of logic, I have failed.

Frank Stella. American, born 1936.
Astoria. 1958.
Enamel on canvas, 8' ¾" x 8' ¾" (245.7 x 245.7 cm).
Gift of Philip Johnson, 1981.



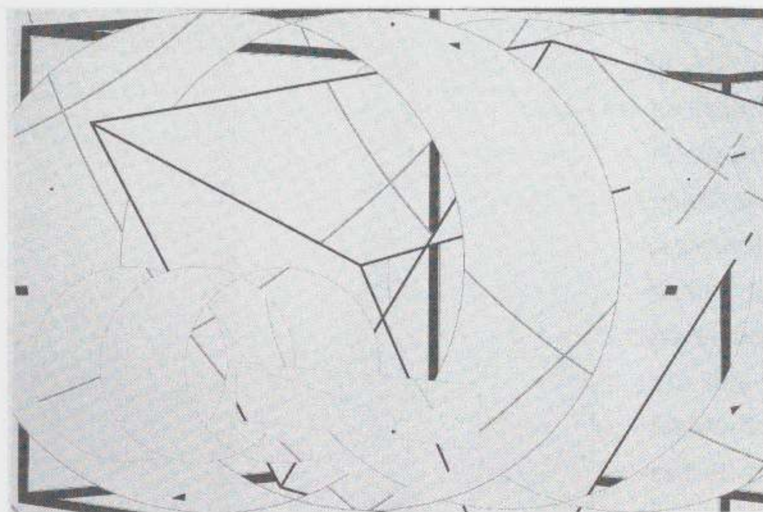
According to his own recollections, **Frank Stella** started his career by imitating everybody else's work until he grew tired of looking at his own paintings. In fact, he didn't even like making them. He remembers being particularly bored with "painterly" problems: "What to put here and there, and how to make it go with what was already in it." He achieved a breakthrough in 1959 when he began the black paintings. In these bold, symmetrical pictures Stella used ordinary enamel with the no-nonsense attitude of a house painter, so that, as he put it, the paint would look as good in the painting as it looked in the can.

Astoria was made the year before the black paintings, but the field—a dark ground covered with bright yellow bands—already has the stunning reductive quality of those works. Still, the sensuality of Stella's predecessors lingers on the surface of the picture. One encounters those expressive "accidents" that are the signature of de Kooning or Kline—the translucent paint drips hanging from the bands, or the coarse, dry track of the brush at the bands' edges, where the yellow meets the dark undercoat. At points, the paint is thick, even lumpy, but sometimes it is so thin that the colors bleed into one another. In some spots, Stella almost obliterates the pattern with a thin wash, as in the lower register of the painting, or at the center, where a faint rectangle overlays the bands.

Astoria has a quality that, in retrospect, one can find througout Stella's career, whether it be in the confrontational simplicity of the black paintings or in the baroque excess of his later work: the conviction that a painting need not excuse itself for being just what it is.

To the extent that the abstract image has to be infused with a physical pictorial presence, abstraction has, in some curious sense,* not *to be abstract.

Al Held. American, born 1928.
Inversion IV. 1977.
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 8' x 12' (243 x 365 cm).
Mr. and Mrs. David Kluger Fund and promised gift of the artist, 1978.



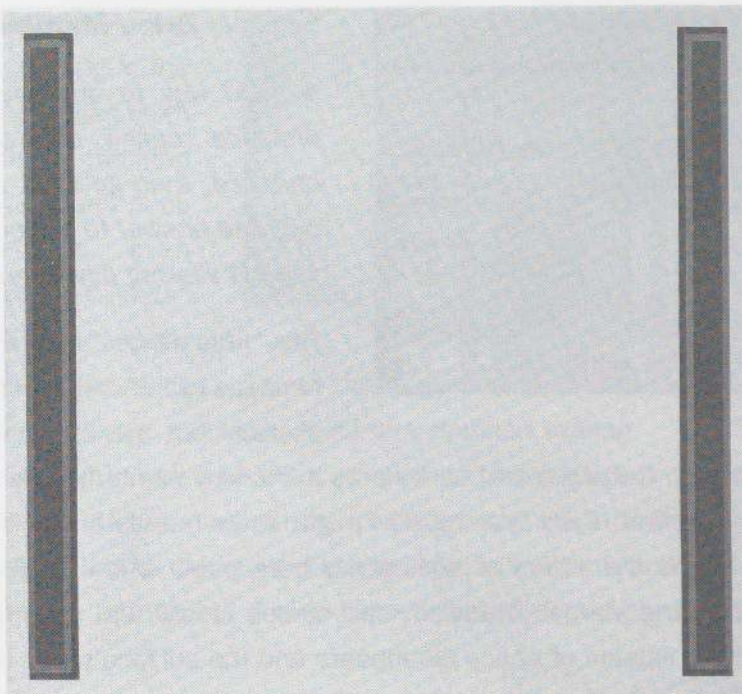
In the mid-fifties, **Al Held** was painting large canvases, heavy with encrusted paint and grand gestural brushwork, the sort of aggressively physical art that is associated with the Abstract Expressionists. By the sixties, he had abandoned the turbulent style of his predecessors in order to paint monumental, hard-edged forms which, though flat, seemed to swell within the confines of the pictures, as if squeezing the air out of them. At a time when flatness had become dogma, Held's new paintings seemed to flirt dangerously with illusionism. In the seventies, he went even further with works such as *Inversion IV*, where crystalline geometric forms twirl and crash in a paradoxical space.

Without making any reference to the objects in the world, the space in these pictures is as convincing as the courtyards and landscapes represented in Renaissance paintings. Held achieves this illusion by drawing the geometric forms as three-dimensional volumes. Yet, instead of receding into a hypothetical horizon, the shapes seem to tumble out of the picture plane toward us, which, as the title suggests, actually inverts the effect of traditional perspective.

The result is disorienting, but also thrilling, like a roller coaster ride. In fact, Held himself likes to see in these paintings an optimistic metaphor about our own times.

I think there are . . . people who in the act of making paintings are talking about the despair of things, the impossibility of continuing in this [world's] chaotic, mad situation. . . . I think that the only way out of the maze, so to speak, is not to . . . take the maze and straighten it out into a straight line, but to go . . . through the maze without feeling it's dangerous.

Jo Baer. American, born 1929.
Double Bar, Grey (Green Line). 1968.
Oil on canvas, 36⅛ x 39" (91.9 x 99 cm).
Ruth Vollmer Bequest, 1983.



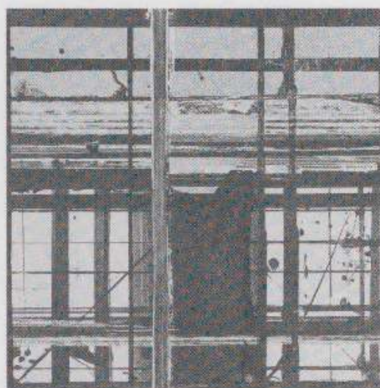
Jo Baer has said that all things in the world are surrounded by a halo of energy, a certain force that emanates from them and that makes them seem, in a sense, "larger than themselves." One might say that her work is an effort to render that phenomenon visible.

Double Bar is a pale gray field bracketed by two thin black bars, each with a green linear form inside. To the naked eye, the forms seem perfectly sharp, but since they are painted free-hand, their contours are in fact imperceptibly irregular, producing a slight throb where the color areas meet. As a result, these dominant, active forms seem to push at the ends of the field, stretching it.

Baer's sophisticated manipulation of optical phenomena is rooted in her early studies in biology and physiological psychology. What originated as a scientific interest, however, ended up bringing her closer to the art of her time, especially to Minimalism and Op Art, which were emerging when she began to paint. Like the work of many of her contemporaries in these movements, Baer's pictures resist symbolic interpretation. Her ambition was to offer a heightened retinal experience—a sort of sensory self-consiousness.

It's almost impossible to write or speak about non-objective paintings which have been intentionally originated at the sub-verbal, non-vocal level. This sort of painting must speak for itself.

Brice Marden. American, born 1938.
Card Drawing #14 (Counting). 1980–82.
Ink gouache and masking tape, 6⅛ x 6" (15.4 x 15.0 cm).
Gift of Alexis Gregory, 1982.



Consider **Brice Marden**'s method for looking at art:

A good way to approach a painting is to look at it from a distance roughly equivalent to its height, then double that distance, then go back and look at it in detail where you can, begin to answer to the questions you've posed at each of these various viewing distances.

This "little dance," as Marden calls it, this "ritual of involvement," happens in the only real space of painting—that place, not only physical but mental, that exists between the picture and the viewer. Getting there, as he puts it, "is why painters make paintings."

At first, *Card Drawing #14* might strike one as a view into a room with two distant windows—such is the effect of seeing the bare paper showing through the dense overlap of grids. But following Marden's advice, one comes closer and experiences something quite different: That initial illusion of space disappears and the surface takes over. One sees the loose, wet stroke of the brush, the stains left by the ruler, the masking tape. Drips, spots, and streaks of ink that speak of an impulsive process coexist with deliberate touches of white paint that obliterate some marks and reiterate others.

Marden's drawing brings to mind Piet Mondrian—not the pristine, transcendent forms that one associates with him, but rather Mondrian's studies in which one sees the nuts and bolts of his art, his hand adding and erasing, moving a bar a tenth of an inch up or down, thinning a line or thickening it.

It is interesting to see how an artist of a later generation recognizes more of himself in the actual work behind Mondrian's "pure" abstraction than in its utopian aspirations. Marden's picture seems less about structure than about the search for it, about an intensely personal engagement with both materials and ideas in which the viewer is invited to take part.

The paintings are made in a highly subjective state within spartan limitations. Within these strict confines which I have painted myself into and intend to explore with no regrets, I try to give the viewer something to which he will react subjectively. I believe these are highly emotional paintings not to be admired for any technical or intellectual reason, but to be felt.

Daniel Buren. French, born 1938.
One Painting in Four Elements for One Wall. 1969–77.
Synthetic polymer paint on striped cotton cloth; 4 pieces: 1) 20¼ x 39¾" (51.4 x 100.1 cm); 2) 20 x 39⅜" (50.8 x 100 cm); 3) 29 x 27½" (73.6 x 69.9 cm); 4) 39⅝ x 60" (100.7 x 152.5 cm). Kay Sage Tanguy Fund, 1978.

Daniel Buren has spent most of his career finding the most unlikely places for his art. Beginning in the sixties, his "paintings"—large sheets of striped cloth or plastic—have hung between buildings, trimmed sidewalks, or been glued onto street walls and shop windows. Sometimes their emblematic, even intrusive design registers much like the "off-limits" signs seen at demolition sites, or like the patterns stenciled on glass doors to prevent people from walking into them. At other times the stripes become a self-effacing, decorative element, like a wallpaper motif or a Parisian awning.

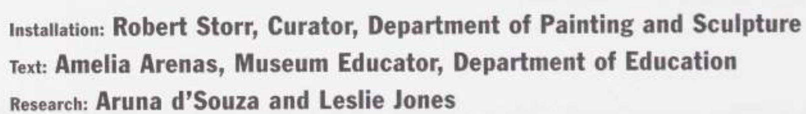
Buren's paintings always alter the context in which he places them—in this case, a museum gallery. These four pieces of striped canvas stapled on each corner of the wall call attention not only to the site's architecture, but also to its social structure: The conspicuous pattern energizes that most tacit of architectual elements, the corner, but it also frames the privileged place that museums usually assign to pictures.

For Buren, every museum is a sort of asylum:

The work set in it is sheltered from . . . all sorts of dangers, and most of all protected from any kind of questioning. The Museum selects, collects and protects. And all works are made to be selected, collected and protected. . . . Any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism. And this idealism . . . shelters and prevents it from any kind of break.

One might wonder, then, what his work is doing here. Buren sees no contradiction in his enterprise. In the early sixties, he rebelled against the sort of purely formal abstract paintings he had been making and, like many other artists at that time, began to think of his work in terms of the institutional, social, and symbolic space it occupied.

In order to escape the fate of being the ultimate decoration, [the work] first has to take the risk of being perceived as a minor decorative element, since . . . [it] is no longer the thing to see, to look at, but the element that permits seeing or looking at something else.



Installation: **Robert Storr, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture**
Text: **Amelia Arenas, Museum Educator, Department of Education**
Research: **Aruna d'Souza and Leslie Jones**

This is the second in a series of publications on the contemporary works in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The series is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

© 1995 The Museum of Modern Art, New York