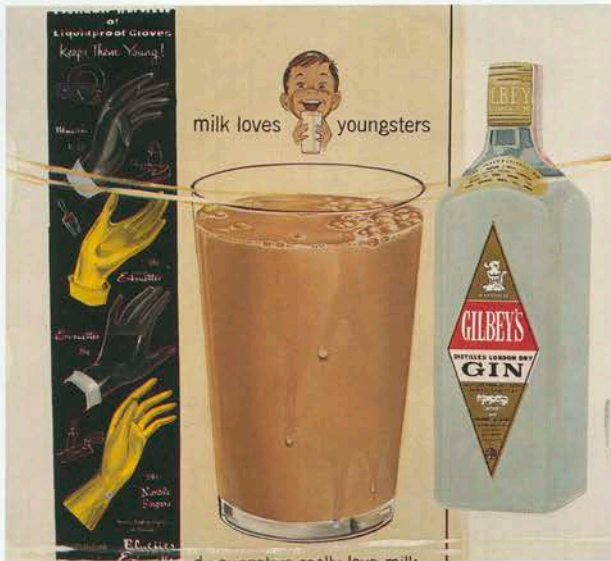


S P O T L I G H T

DAVID SALLE

OWEN DROLET



GILBEY'S, 1993. OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 82 X 92".

In exhibitions at Mary Boone and Gagosian (the former containing four works from '83 and two from '93, the latter made up entirely of recent work), we see David Salle at two very different stages in his career. First, the work of a young artist who helped provide much needed

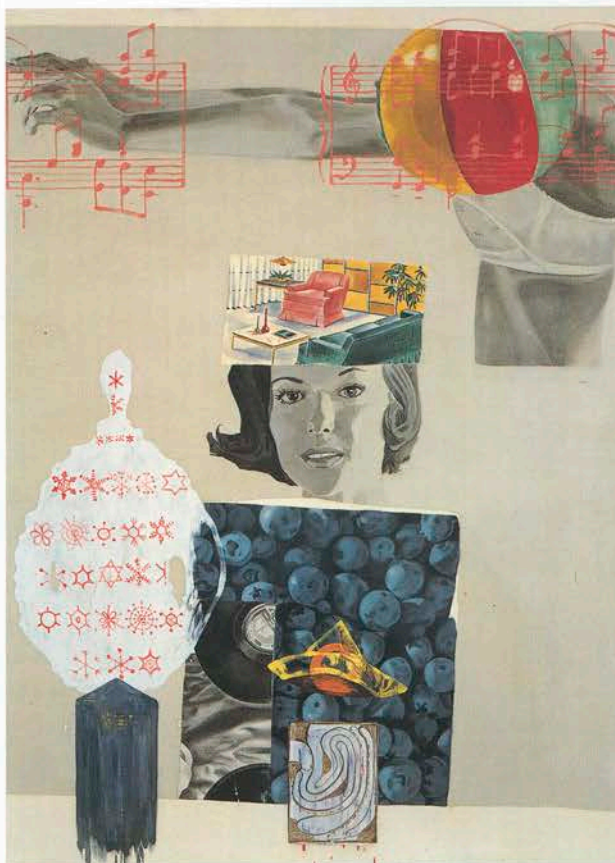
perceptual irrigation into the then-dry conceptual landscape of the art world; and second, a mid-career artist showing renewed vitality just two seasons after a disastrous exhibition that seemed to symbolize the exhaustion of all his resources. Salle's work is

rooted in the Pop tradition, and by rediscovering those roots the artist has managed to revitalize his output. The new paintings bear a striking resemblance to early Rosenquist with their nostalgic imagery and humorous juxtaposition. Like Rosenquists, they borrow heavily from the ab-ex tradition in their compositional layout. Salle once said it was artists like Still and Pollock that remained on his mind more than any fellow pictorial imagemakers.

By turning back to the Pop vernacular, rather than juggling five hundred years of art history until all of its meaning is lost, Salle has managed to let his images speak, regaining a symbolic weight equal to his formal achievements. In a work entitled *Gilbey's* a large glass of chocolate milk rests in the center of the painting. Above it we see a boy drinking a glass of milk. Text across the top and bottom of the canvas explains to us the love affair between children and this calcium rich liquid. To the left on the chocolate milk, and equal in size, is a bottle of gin. What we are presented with are liquid symbols of our cool creamy childhood in which growth was the only requirement, and the dry burn and intoxication of adult freedom and its attendant responsibilities. Dramas of childhood nostalgia meeting adult sophistication and degradation remind us how good Salle can be when choosing from the right image bank.

While the aesthetic juggling of images on a "flatbed" picture plane is certainly reminiscent of Rauschenberg, it is not merely proto-Pop or even Pop that informs Salle's formal placements, but a movement contemporary to Pop, and closely related: color field. Salle is known for creating decentralized fields of information in which one image reinforces another while simultaneously canceling it out. By looking closely at what might seem an unlikely source, Salle has found a typically formal way to bring back an intensity to his original program of creating dramas appropriate, in both form and content, to our postmodern times. Ironically, he is what the Rosenquist of today aspires to be.

At Larry Gagosian and at Mary Boone, New York



BLUE, 1993. OIL AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 84 X 60".