# Your history is not OUT Organized by David Salle and Richard Phillips history

**DONALD BAECHLER JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT ROSS BLECKNER** FRANCESCO CLEMENTE **CARROLL DUNHAM ERIC FISCHL** ROBERT GOBER **NAN GOLDIN** JENNY HOLZER **JEFF KOONS** BARBARA KRUGER **LOUISE LAWLER** SHERRIE LEVINE **MALCOLM MORLEY** RICHARD PRINCE **DAVID SALLE** JULIAN SCHNABEL **CINDY SHERMAN LAURIE SIMMONS** PHILIP TAAFFE **TERRY WINTERS CHRISTOPHER WOOL** 



# David Salle Richard Phillips

**DAVID SALLE** Let's talk about the notion that painting was seen as regressive during the eighties.

RICHARD PHILLIPS Well, there is an interesting truth to that idea. I think that the problem becomes the a priori assumption that there should be a straight line progressing through modernism. Painting could use languages that didn't have positivistic ends in mind, but instead expose severe trauma in culture in order to show that the blind faith of modernism could no longer be substantiated. The art market expanded; approaches became condensed and modified. You had artists like Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler and Barbara Kruger taking these positions, they were both criticized and praised for their production. Each one of them was complicit in both commercial and critical operations, including Cindy Sherman, in the development of their own language.

DS That needs to be repeated; what the art was actually communicating, as opposed to an assumption about what it signified by virtue of its materials.

### **RP** Exactly

DS We can say that art gives access to a certain quality of life as it's actually lived. The will toward neoclassicism in Picasso, or in late Derain, for example, is something that is not easy to understand unless you've been in the maelstrom of an avant-garde movement. The idea of perpetual revolution doesn't actually square with how life really is.

RP One of the biggest problems happens if you take the painting that was considered regressive and assume a stable reading that doesn't take into account what it could possibly signify. As an artist—and this gets to the title of the exhibition—your perspective is as a direct participant in the reshaping of how art is functioning or being produced at that time. As somebody coming to the city fresh and seeing it without any stake in the ups or downs, I could see the discrepancies in how history was getting written. So my history and your history isn't the history that I read, or what was held up at the time as legitimate or illegitimate. This is what I would like the show to address. I would like to give viewers an opportunity to experience the works and put the divergent positions together. This allows people to get a sense of the climate, not through rhetoric, but through experience. It's not about discovering new work in the rough or raising people out of the darkness.

DS Let's talk about some of the works themselves.

RP The pieces of Barbara's on the vinyl were made at the point that Mary Boone Gallery made a crucial shift and took on her first female artist after making some fairly provocative claims about the sensitivity of men in painting. This was an absolute inversion of the pejorative description of women prior to the seventies. The reaction, the backlash against that, became the backlash of the backlash. This work has everything to do with people who were staking their lives and their livelihood and their critical abilities on what they did. For me the importance of the show is not to privilege one stance over the other, but rather let the record be scripted by the works themselves, and let people see those positions, and how diverse and interesting they are. This is very specifically not an argument for pluralism, because pluralism was another fabrication by a group of people that felt that somehow modernism had been resolved and we were entering into a post-modernist era. That became a debate for neo-Marxist critique on the laxity of the so-called post-modern style, which didn't exist anyhow. I feel very adamant about this point, because when you look at our major institutions and how they have presented this time, it has consistently been gotten wrong.

DS That's the reason for the show. What we want to say is that it doesn't matter whether someone makes a painting or a photograph, what matters is their specific relationship to that form, as well as their relationship to their own cultural moment.

what seemed to emerge at that period of time was an aggressive new physical use of painting on a large scale that incorporated and destroyed narratives that were montages on top of one another in utterly discordant ways, and the interruption of logic and meaning. I think that the alienation that that reflected could have been drawn out of the source of that loneliness that you're speaking about. I think that there was a shared distrust of authorities. I think that the different positions that were taken, while not in visual agreement with each other, shared a common deck-clearing sense of "we've got to remove how things appear in order to jar one's sensitivities in order to be able to absorb our messages." When I came to the city, that was absolutely clear, you know? When you saw some of these very severe photograph and text pieces on one hand and then saw a combination of imagery and physicality in your work on the other hand, in another place, for example. And that went along with the music, the films and the grit of that time. It was not the time that has been sold to us through pop culture at all.

**DS** The constant is the fragmentary nature of contemporary life, which is hardly an idea specific to the eighties. The house aesthetic of so-called



advanced modernism was unitary and uninflected; it was encoded in minimalism. I love minimalism and we all do, but it no longer felt like anyone's experience that I knew. Even work like Sherrie's or Barbara's, which is unitary, has pulled away from mainstream psychology in a forceful way.

- RP The loudest complaints that came out of that time were that artists who were voicing critical positions of decent were not being absorbed into the market or into institutions. We all know that institutions absorb that which is co-owned by their trustees, and if the trustees aren't buying radical antiaesthetic art, they're not going to get absorbed into the institutions.
- DS I remember being in some gallery where Sherrie had some pieces, I think the Leger watercolors. Si Newhouse came up to me and said: "What's that?" not quite disdainfully, but with some actual curiosity inside of the question. I said, "That's work about failure, Si, you wouldn't understand it." What's interesting about Sherrie's work is how the culture caught up with her ironclad decision to make a highly aestheticized, rarefied experience out of a sense of dejection and failure. It is one of the great success stories of the last 25 years. Let's go back to something you said earlier about fragmentation. The condition of simultaneity is so fundamental that even when someone makes a unitary image it includes its own fragmentation vis-à-vis its relationship to culture.
- RP It reminds me of the song Making the Nature Scene by Sonic Youth. The lyrics to that song basically make the point that fragmentation is the law. It's set against an absolute cacophony of feedback and detuned guitars. It was early Branca-influenced sound that was THE sound of that time, parallel to hip-hop and freestyle and certain kinds of Latin hip-hop music that was really popular in New York contemporarily. There were so many different approaches and so many different positions that were being taken. This effort is to literally try to wrench those positions out of the grasp of categorization.
- DS We're not saying that these are all good artists who were working in New York in those years. There are certainly artists whose work I admire enormously who are not in the show. What we want to say about the artists we have chosen is that they all have a relationship to this idea of culture in extremis as a starting point for their work.
- **RP** The criteria was really about the notion that the work represented a significant disruption in the path that art was following coming out of the seventies, and that it was developing out of discursive and critical languages.

This is an important point: very conservative forms, like narrative figure painting, have insurgent potential when they appear in that situation and deliver meaning that is intended to separate itself from its projected reference. That was a very specific inspiration for myself and other artists coming into this context. With your work, the discordant visual languages—putting them on top of one another, bringing up subject matter and imagery that was abrasive and often offensive, and putting it against images of consumable, modern topographies—those relationships were prioritizing the power of communication.

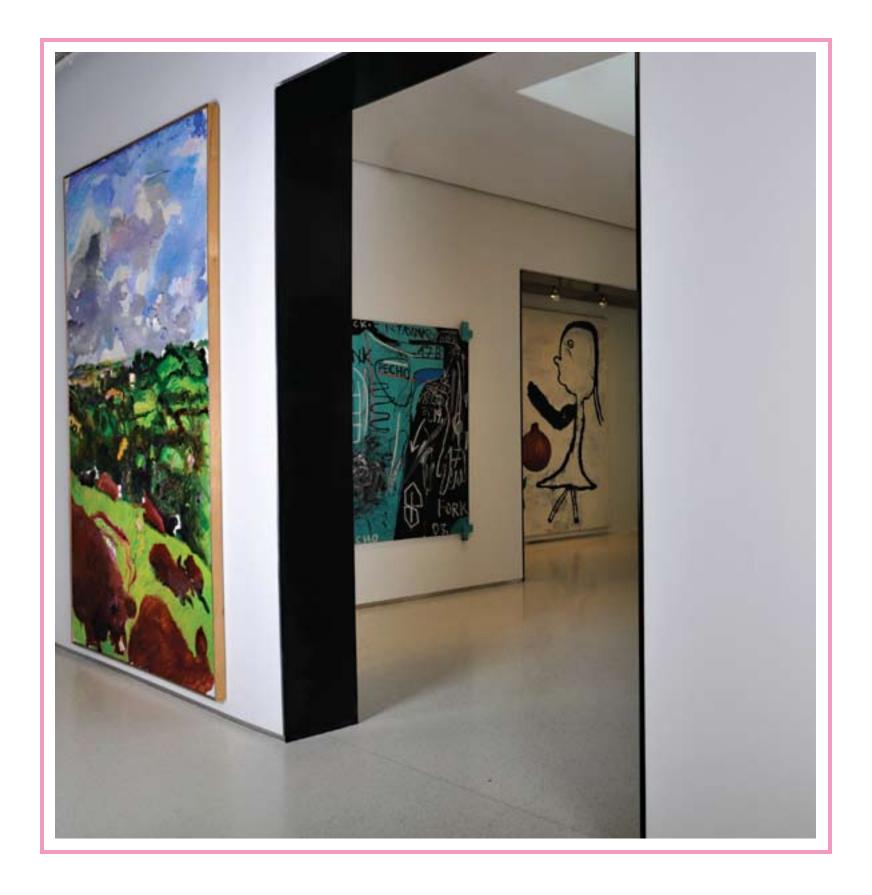
- DS The beauty of Sherrie's work, to use her again for a moment, is her staunchly refusenik position. The buck stops here, that is where the power of her work originates. When those After Walker Evans photographs were first shown, they were incredibly beautiful to look at tough and sad. Her gift as an artist is for choosing things which have an expanding and outwardly radiating resonance. Like a lot of good artists she made her psychology visible on the surface in a way that would not have seemed promising from the outset. She had the historical insight to made choices accessible to others.
- RP It ends up being worth it to show up and try to extrapolate and negotiate meaning from those experiences. That's a common thread that runs through that work: it was not a meta-experience that I'm supposed to experience some other time or in some other place. Even the most reductive works from the time affirmed the need to be there and to be present.
- DS I think that's very well put and also easily misunderstood. The work we're talking about sucks the world into it and then allows it to radiate out again. A lesser work of art is just a group of signifiers. The reason we're still looking at this work is because it pulled things into it rather than simply mirroring or pointing out things.
- **RP** Yeah, I think that there was a sense that there was a visceral potential to override its negation, or criticism.
- DS What about the difference in climate between that time and today? We always assume that our moment is different from ones that come before, but I'm not sure it is. It would be easy to have a negative attitude about stuff you see happening today. Why do artists need publicists, what's that all about? Well if they think they do, then I suppose they should have them.
- RP If that literally is the modality and the subjectivity of their work, then it

should be articulated that way of course. What's been really interesting in looking back at the time of this show is the extreme separation between the art world and the art market.

- **DS** I don't remember knowing anything about the market, not really. I've never been to an auction. I've set foot in an auction house once, just to have a look at something.
- RP Today you have a real split in the art world in terms of the trophy objects and the so-called correct thinking of those who do commissioned, site-specific installation works. It's interesting to hear curators speak amongst themselves; an entire other culture exists around the movement of these pieces from one place to the next. In the end the construction of biennial culture mirrors and completely undoes the logic of what it's seeking to create. It's just the degrees of what's being traded. That idea is important to this show: to make that distinction. Because these are movable things that can hang on the wall in a gallery doesn't necessarily take away from their impact and power to have real discursive potential. The forum in which they were shown, the label they were given as a result and the time in which they were produced, together as a package do not exclude the potential for giving us a chance to re-read exactly what's going on by and through the experience of seeing them apart from the short term goals of marketers.
- DS I very much like the fact that we can continue to re-contextualize and rethink these densely packed—as you put it—aesthetic meaning products.
- **RP** I encourage young artists to see this show and either criticize it or find something that might take them in a different direction.
- DS What you're saying is very interesting Richard, that the institutional critique market and the commercial critique market are two sides of the same coin. A things value is determined by its use. The work in the show is by-and-large work which had a very specific use assigned to it, which in some cases was the wrong one.
- RP That's a very good point to make. In a way, the capacity for work's vulnerability to a mis-reading was something that was literally built into the contemporary form of risk-taking.
- DS That's something I used to think about and found exciting, and I thought the spirit of that risk would be of value to others. What I should have realized is that it will simply be misread.

- RP A distinctively radical potential was realized in the early 80's: the idea of setting loose objects that deliberately released control of intended meaning, in order to accomplish certain kinds of experience that were conceptual agendas. It becomes quite confusing for the monolith of absorption of stable meaning.
- DS Mis-reading was built into the work as a positive value. Today people understand it as a matter of course and that "misreading" is expressed as irony, but really irony is a diminution of what I'm talking about.
- RP There certainly seemed to be a shared sense of mistrust of authority. There was a deliberate collision of languages in order to ruin the logic of intentionality. In my experience of objects, this confirms the sense that you need to be there, seeing this destruction occurring. I want to talk about big time gambles. Some of the outrageous maneuvers that many of you were doing: where did that sense come from? This led to particular scale decisions across the board.
- DS Everybody believed in the power of art. It was just overwhelmingly powerful and meaningful, and that provided a compass point and something to shoot for. It also would be useful to describe the specific relationship of those artists to the larger, popular culture, visual culture, because I think it's different than the one that young artists have today. As much as the doors were open to any and everything the relationship to popular culture was more distant. The work wasn't trying to be popular. When I met Francesco in Rome for the first time, I asked him if he had seen a certain film and he said, "Oh I never go to movies. I haven't been to a movie in 15 years." It was such a great cultural position. Perhaps it's not easy to image the degree of obstinacy involved in some of these attitudes. It's easy to see in Sherrie's work because it's about obstinacy. These other artists have it as well. Artists didn't have the impression that things which were popular or accessible would necessarily be good.
- RP Obscure and obtuse elements could carry weight, and that's part of why there was the very real backlash to Warhol at that time, because many people today will forget that. At that time there was zero value. It does come back to the work itself, and to the negotiations that are going on in the various specific constituent parts in each of the things that were being made and put on public view. Regardless of what became attributed to it.
- DS They should go see it for themselves.
- **RP** That's the reason to do the show. The work is saturated with that which is not displaced elsewhere. With what one can absorb and look at and decide for oneself.





# Some Thoughts on the Art of the 1980's David Salle

" 'They got a cure for that,' the manager had said to him before he went to sleep; 'No,' William Campbell said, 'they haven't got a cure for anything.' "

– Ernest Hemingway

No one to wine with No one to dine with. No one to smoke with No one to choke with. — lohn Wieners

The emotional current that runs through much of the best work of the 1980's, and in some ways is its real subject, is loneliness. The work in this show, collectively as well as individually, manifests the dissolution and alienation that was a consequence of the situation in which young artists found themselves at the end of the 70's: nowhere to go and no one to go with. There were a variety of responses, from the grandiloquent and heroic (or sometimes mock-heroic) to the abjectly anti-heroic, but all shared a strenuous assertion of individual prerogative over ideology. All the narratives that were layered on the generation and stuck to it like sheets of wet newspaper, all the stuff about celebrity and money - that came after and wasn't interesting to anybody.

The common wisdom - that the regressive "return" to painting, symbolizing as it did the values of a political (ruling) class was then countered by the "criticality" of the photo-based art is tone- deaf to the texture and complexity of the actual works themselves. Whether the work is a painting of immense physicality or a modest re-photographed image from the past, the artists in this show have all made a stance of refusing to swallow a journalistic myth of purity.

There is a value in being chameleon-like. Assuming different guises in the work, being able to inhabit different signs, ventriloquism, impersonation - this is what is meant by impersonation. Repainting or re-photographing something results in a new and different thing, one which has a familial relationship to its model. It is a form of acting out - authority is fading. It has to be laid to rest, but also given homage - recreated in less repressive form.

The idea of turning obstinance into action.

### **A STORY**

When I was very small, 5 or 6 years old, I saw on the black and white television in the living room of our house an episode of the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour." On this particular episode, a young woman came on stage and sang a song called "I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Outta My Hair." Everything about her performance struck me. The stage was bare except for a plain high stool in front of a curtain.

A young dark haired woman came out from behind the curtain carrying a wash basin and a towel, which she placed on the stool in a casual manner and then gazed meaningfully at the audience for a tiny moment before the orchestra cued her song.

For her costume the woman wore a pair of slacks and what looked like a white bra. Perhaps one reason I remember her performance was the incongruous costume; a woman coming out on national television on a Sunday afternoon in her bra was unusual. I sensed there was something special about this woman who was, after all, in a very nonchalant kind of way, practically in her underwear - something that allowed me to watch her without feeling like I was spying on her, and yet still have a little of that feeling anyway. What I chiefly remember was being impressed by what was, to me, the extreme originality of the song and her rendering of it. During the whole song, the young woman was actually washing her hair - not just miming, but actually washing her hair in the basin of water. To my child's mind, this overlapping of singing and hair washing was a stroke of theatrical brilliance - it was "representation" of an order I had not imagined before. When the woman finished the washing part, she took the towel from the rungs of the stool and dried her long dark hair with it, finally wrapping the towel around her head to make a turban the way women did in movies and in ads, and as she sang the last chorus of the song she gave the audience a warm kind of look - arms outstretched, - the way young women do when their hair is wrapped in a towel and they are singing and smiling, maybe because they know they are at that moment adorable.

And the whole time she sang this very witty, knowing, and rueful song about her trouble with a man, and her desire to be rid of his troubling influence in her life.

It was all so wonderful, ingenious really; the song's lyrics were witty and wise and the song's melody was so bouncy and bright. I couldn't believe that someone as talented and original, someone who had devised this musical and theatrical scene that had somehow gone straight into my heart had not yet been "discovered," that this person was still performing on amateur variety shows waiting for her big break.

The thing was, I had no idea that her song came from the wildly popular Broadway show, "South Pacific." I was, after all, just a small child in the Mid-West; I didn't really know there were things called "shows" and had never heard or seen one. Certainly I had never heard the words, "South Pacific," or the names, "Rogers and Hammerstein," or the names of any other Broadway composers or lyricists. I thought the young woman had written the song herself, and had, all by herself, devised the very winning bit of stage business she used to create the reality of the song. I was certain she would win that week's prize from the Ted Mack people. I'm not sure, but I think this has something to do with appropriation.

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# Your history is not Our March 5 – May 1 2010 Haunch of Venison New York history



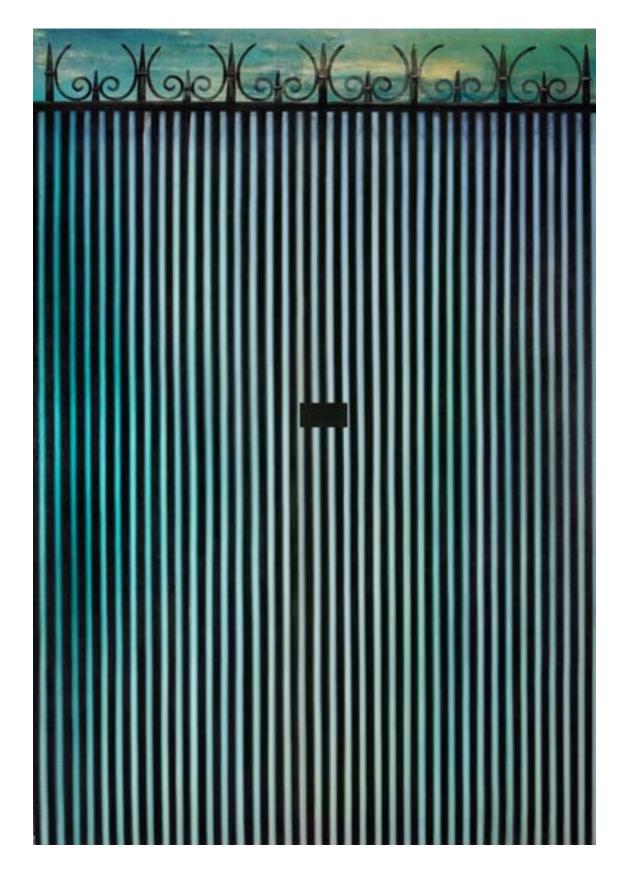














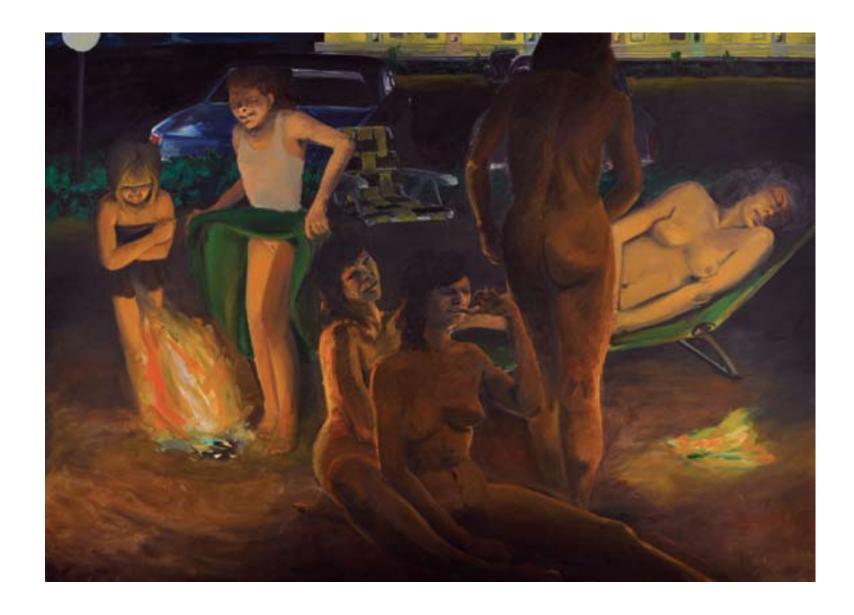


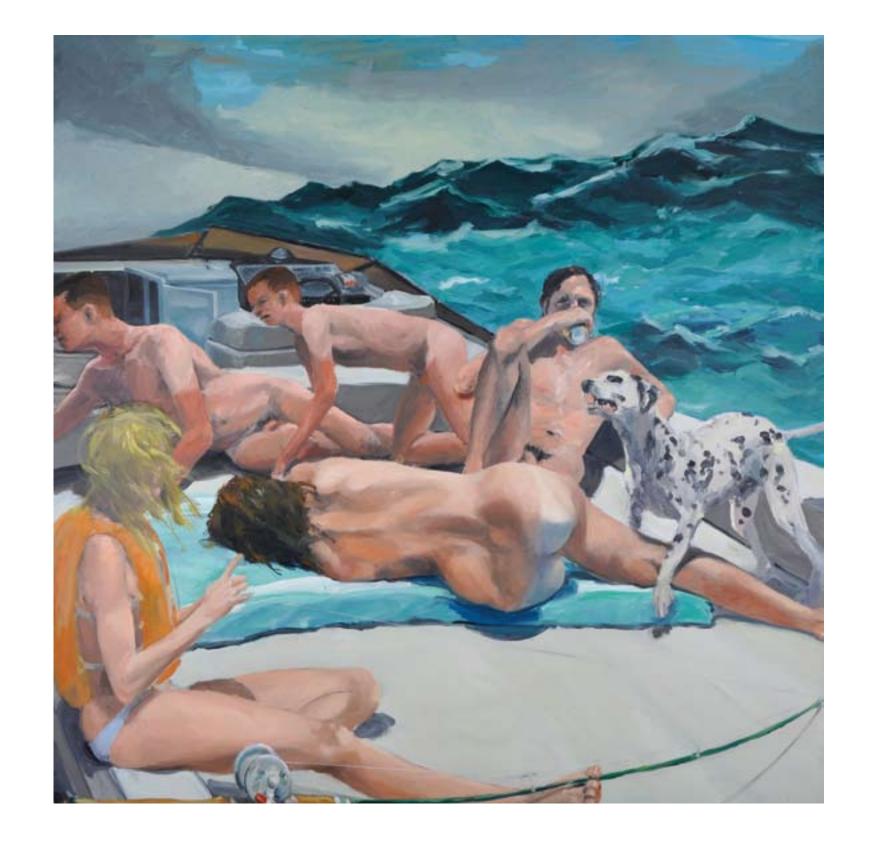
















View from the Shallows 1990 oil on canvas 84 x 69 in. (213.4 x 175.3 cm.) STANLEY AND BARBARA GRANDON, DETROIT











### Nan Goldin

Valerie after love making, Bruno dressing, Paris 2001 2001 Cibachrome print  $271/2 \times 401/8$  in.  $(70 \times 102$  cm.) Edition of 15 COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND YVON LAMBERT, PARIS/NEW YORK

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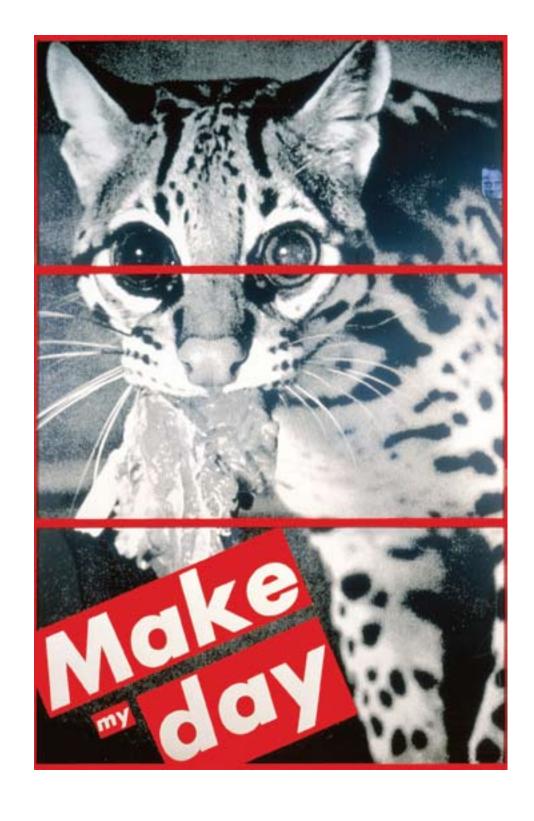
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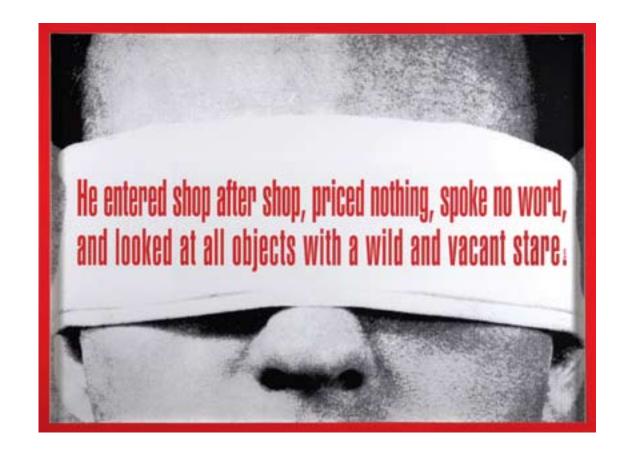
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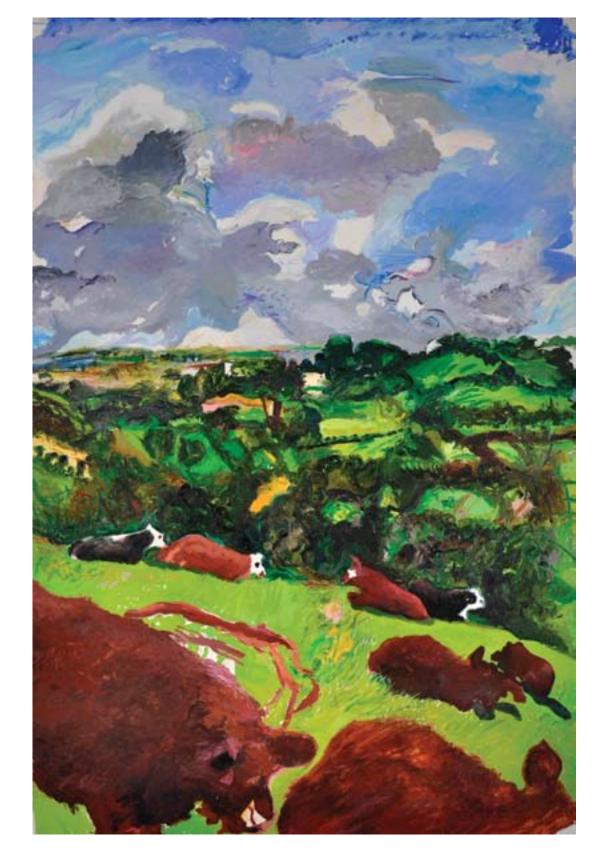




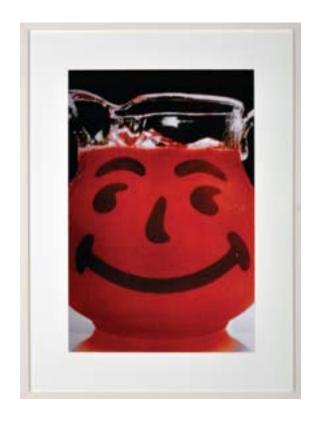




















Rebirth I: (The Last View of Camiliano Cien Fuegos) 1986 Oil and tempera on muslin 148 x 134 in. (375.9 x 340.4 cm.)

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST, NEW YORK

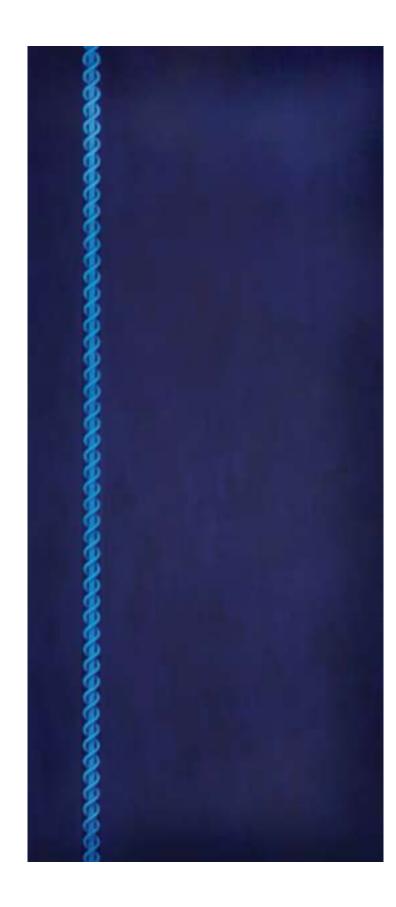


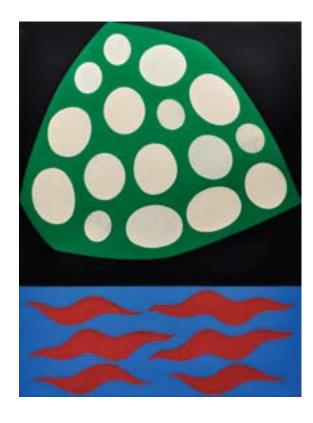
















**Terry Winters**Flush 1989 oil on linen 96 x 76 in. (243.8 x 193 cm.)
THE BROAD ART FOUNDATION, SANTA MONICA







## **SPECIAL THANKS**

We would like to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to David Salle and Richard Phillips who have proven incredibly devoted and impassioned throughout every step of this exhibition. Their vision and enthusiasm for the show embodies the very collaborative and pioneering spirit the exhibition conveys, offering an intimate and unprecedented glimpse into the 80s through their own perspective as well as that of their fellow vanguards. In addition, we are indebted to all the artists who generously supported the exhibition: Donald Baechler, Ross Bleckner, Francesco Clemente, Carroll Dunham, Eric Fischl, Robert Gober, Nan Goldin, Jenny Holzer, Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Malcolm Morley, Richard Prince, David Salle, and Julian Schnabel, Laurie Simmons, Philip Taaffe, Terry Winters and Christopher Wool.

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Barrett White Emilio Steinberger Directors

Emma Hall Exhibition Coordinator



# **CREDITS**

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### HAUNCH OF VENISON

New York
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
USA
T +1 212 259 0000
F +1 212 259 0001
newyork@haunchofvenison.com

London
6 Burlington Gardens
London WIS 3ET
United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 7495 5050
F +44 (0)20 7495 4050
london@haunchofvenison.com

Berlin Heidestrasse 46 10557 Berlin Germany T +49 (0) 30 39 74 39 63 F +49 (0) 30 39 74 39 64 berlin@haunchofvenison.com

www.haunchofvenison.com