

piece is a warm or cold experience but a feeling that the objects really exist. Clearly they're not just pictures of churches and bicycles and books. They're charged. Where does that come from?

JW: I think you can say that something has been done to my subjects to highly charge them. I don't have much confidence in my ability to define what I do other than to say that an operation, like a mathematical operation, has been performed to take the image to the limit of expressiveness. But it's not a systematic performance; I abhor systems, anything resembling a system.

DS: Well obviously if some systematic thing had been done to it that would be its least interesting aspect. That's the kind of connection I would be interested in, say between a picture of a woman looking "blue" and a blue colored canvas — the absurdity of all those kinds of connections which are of course operational and incredibly revealing. But there's still some mystery which we're not approaching. It has to do with tearing a picture out of a magazine and that picture having an art resonance. The operation, as you call it, doesn't explain why or how that could be art.

JW: There is a different dimension.

DS: Like those people who are trying to find a context for what are basically ethnological or sociological concerns. These are strictly art concerns and yet it's very difficult to see how that . . . I mean, I don't like thinking that an image is a readymade, that's not satisfying at all.

JW: Our work is a reaction against that act of appropriation which is construed as a readymade. I appreciate the act of putting an image on the wall that can only be misinterpreted.

DS: One option would be to leave the image in the magazine and not call attention to it by extracting it — a much more optimistic view. Someone else might take the image and isolate it and tint it and rephotograph it. What's interesting in the context of these extremes is that your work is generally perceived to be the most invisible.

JW: For want of some kind of orientation, I discovered the variety of honesty I valued — a gesture having nothing backing it up.

DS: It's not annotated or scholarly nothingness. It's not obscure because you do not need any reference or special knowledge as you do with someone like Duchamp. Yet this is really quite irritat-

ing to people. There is nothing you can bring to it — or if you can, it is no comfort at all. There is nowhere you can look.

JW: To get meaninglessness through representation. . . .

DS: Hence the great irony of any vehicle, like painting or photography. Imagine choosing something to be infected with meaninglessness. The dubiousness, the theatricality.

JW: One of my first thoughts about making photographs was to construct an image of great density. That is, the image would be a point where many lines of thought might intersect. Later that ideal was deflected into the desire to make photographs which were not strictly bound by present time.

DS: Willful use of period, heroic style.

JW: And subject matter. In cinema, period film is a legitimate genre, whereas in photography that impulse is called nostalgia.

DS: Photography is preservational; in film you make things up at will — a completely different mentality.

JW: The work should describe a world other than this one. Imagery should be descriptive of a place.

DS: Imagery is coordinates.

David Salle, *Long Intervals of Time and Years*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 62" x 80". Photo: Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery.



JW: Getting back to style, it's an important issue and something we've been interested in for a long time.

DS: The seemingly arbitrary borrowings of style, which returns us to the notion of an extremely low common denominator, so low it is missed.

JW: Right. I called it a dull interest. I think that's something we share in reaction to systematic thinking.

DS: From the beginning I was always interested in a very different mental set.

I don't want to know what's going on. When I start anticipating what I'm doing, I change it. It's another way of keeping certain aspects of the decision-making process outside of me, but a very different way than was considered previously.

JW: Forgetfulness is the guardian of pure intention.

DS: And originality. I'm extremely forgetful of my own ideas. It guarantees that I have to make it up from scratch every time. When I start a picture I have to remember what I was doing before I

was interrupted. I was always impressed with and horrified with people who could tell you what they were doing fairly consistently. I don't want to wake up with so much memory. There's something about your photographs on the wall. You activate something literally rather than figuratively. To speak is to pay attention to context, but to pay absolute attention to context is really in a sense to have bad manners.

JW: O.K. Now I've got it. We were talking about an aesthetic dimension to art which is nonhistorical. The excised magazine picture is about aesthetics.

DS: Aesthetic perception.

JW: Something more sublime than discursive history.

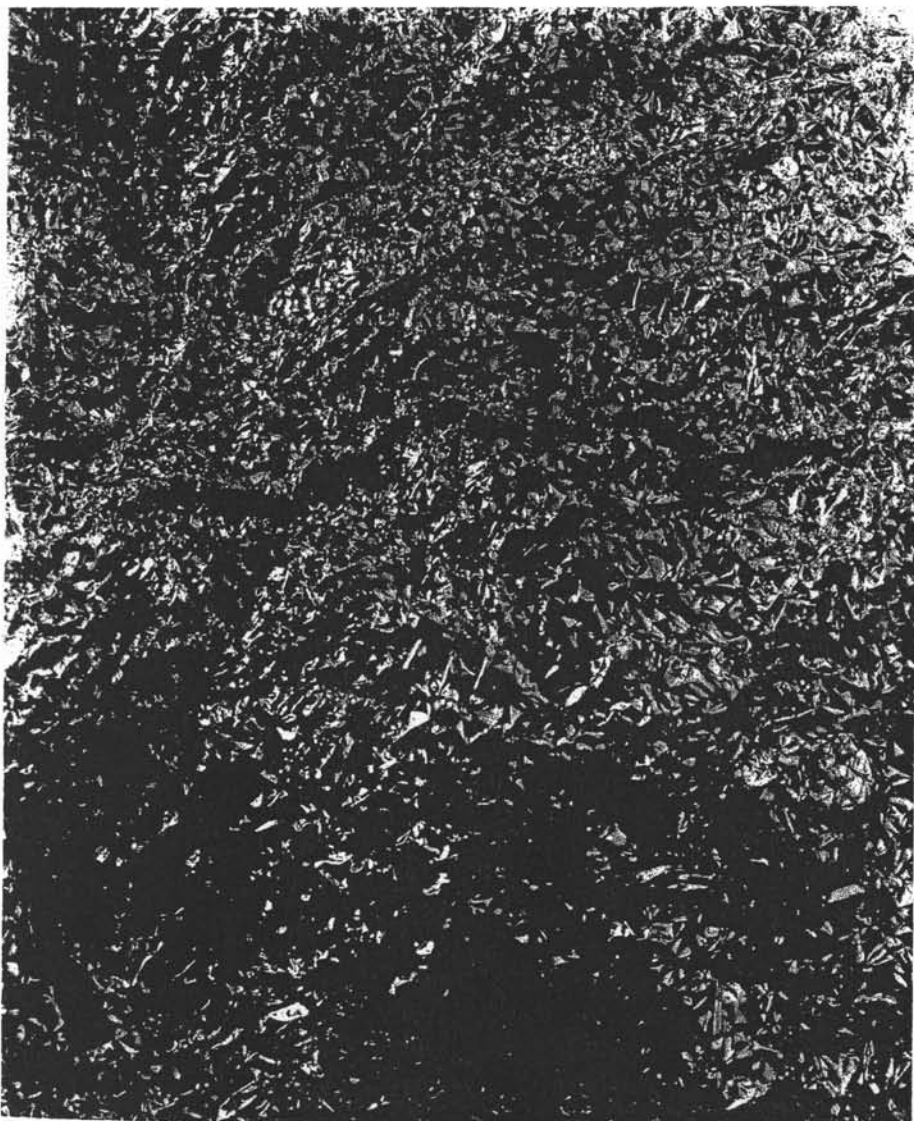
DS: Ironically, as we move toward the notion of an aestheticized world, its function is to originate art which can more legitimately be "in the world" as that "thing in itself" that advanced art was always trying to inherit.

JW: The social function of the aestheticized world is located in the attempt to surmount the power of images and language by embracing forms of epitome and stereotype as a way of adopting a philosophical attitude which proposes an avenue of freedom in art making. Our work is about the world.

DS: The obligatory which is the source of beauty. An "aesthetically motivated" image is so directly of the world that it bypasses art altogether. Definition gives the capacity to invade. Our use of style is so vulnerable, it admits of so much more vulnerability than can be tolerated. That's the meaning of this fairly detached use of style, this sort of fatalistic attraction. It's like seeing the blood run out of you. That's all there is and when it's gone it's gone. Something which prefigures its own end. An unintelligent use of style would be to use it in the same way that using words reinforces their literal meaning. I use style like the Jesus prayer. I keep repeating it as if I didn't know where it came from.

JW: The uninspected life is not worth living. (laughter) Sometimes I don't think I make photographs. I've adopted a style, colonized it, and I make things which look a lot like photographs. But then again style isn't something we have much control over. What seems to be important in an investigation of style is the possibility that it could be willed into being.

James Welling, *April, 1980*, photograph.



DS: The point about style is that it's the ultimate vacuity. All the time you're looking at it the meaning is drawing away from it. That's the aesthetic experience we were describing and that's not the way most people approach the problem of style. They might come to your work or my work and feel it's been drained off.

JW: You got there too late. With my work the capacity for uncertainty seems to work against provisional readings of the work, continually and ideally rupturing intention and effect so as to rediscover it in another realm.

DS: I make a painting and it's about all the paintings I won't make or couldn't possibly see my way clear to make. The image is held in a nexus of won't and can't, like something always held away from you, successively distanced, and that inversion of intention makes sense if you see the aesthetic as something which is really about loss and longing rather than completion.

JW: As long as I've known you your imagery has been completely consistent but I'd be hard pressed to name it. Your earlier objects were always incredibly expressive and poignant. Awkwardness is symptomatic of the direction these paintings take. Again there is a full feeling that is constantly seeping away.

DS: They render consciousness provisional.

JW: It has to do with tearing down the components of consciousness, of which style is a large part. It's a vast province to get a grip on.

DS: Style is intricately linked up with a means of attacking consciousness.

JW: I wanted to ask you about superstition. Art and aesthetics seem to attain the character of a superstitious belief, and there is something connecting your subjects which can only be described as superstitious. If something isn't a superstition it's usually thought of as factual and that's precisely the connection which you have tried to avoid.

DS: The works make it impossible to write anything off safely. Completion itself is seen as the source of dread, because we know what completion really is. God forbid the connection should be too firmly made. Perhaps this is not altogether a good feeling — you may not want to feel this way all the time.