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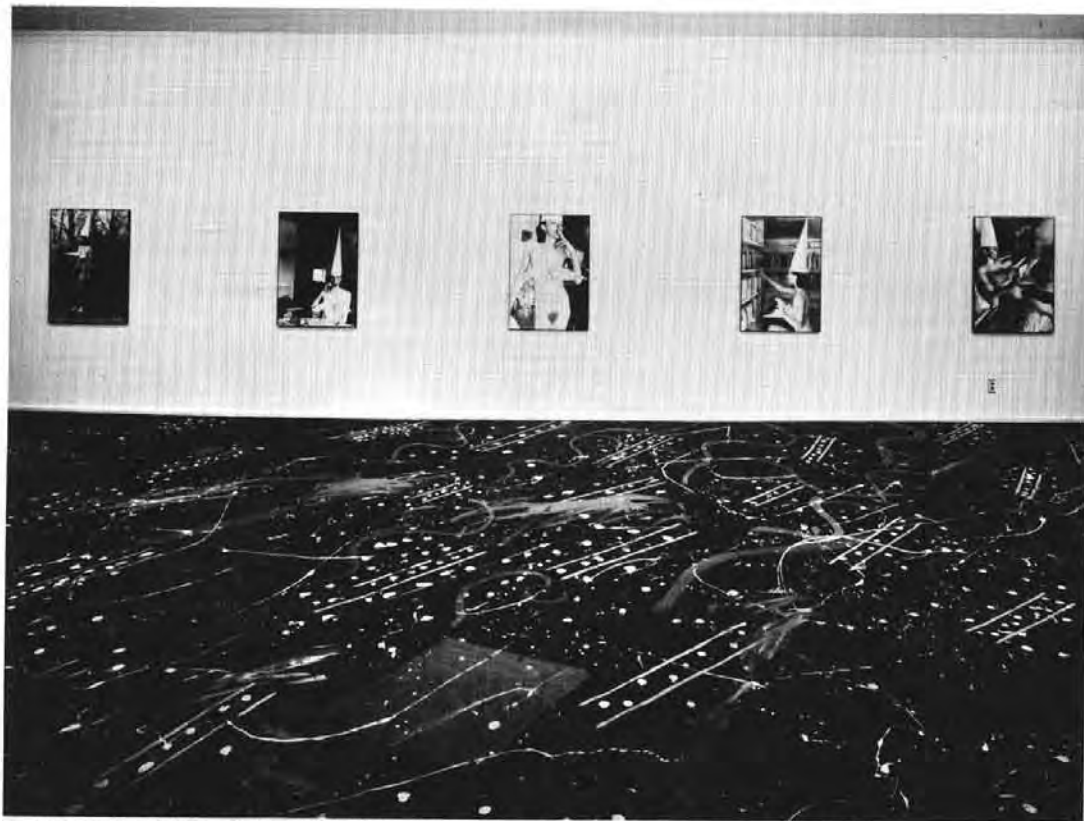
RALPH McRAE

THE PAINTINGS ARE DEAD**DAVID SALLE**

1. The paintings are dead in the sense that to intuit the meaning of something incompletely, but with an idea of what it might mean or involve to know completely, is a kind of premonition of death. The paintings, in their opacity, signal an ultimate clarification. Death is “tragic” because it closes off possibilities of further meaning; art is similarly tragic because it prefigures itself as an ended event of meaning. The paintings do this by appearing to participate in meaninglessness.

2. The movement towards meaning contained in the uses of the subject matter is a sign of the approach of death. It is the viewer’s will to make sense which brings the paintings down (as the hunter brings down the bird), and which activates their essential pessimism. This is similar to the mechanism of man’s inquiry into his own nature which brings about his undoing in Greek tragedy.

3. I’m interested in work which makes you think that you’re going to have to keep paying out the rest of your life.



David Salle, *Untitled Installation*, 1978, 7 b/w photographs and painted floor, shown courtesy of "Locations," Groningen, Holland.

4. The works are connected to the erotic life in more than just subject matter. They align themselves with the state of being in love; there is nothing more involved in pre-figuring its own end than love and sex. Each new affair, each new fixation already contains the fantasy of the next—of the bittersweet sensation of bringing this affair to an end, and more importantly, of surviving it, and being able to re-create it mentally; to exist in the present tense by seeing the object of a fixation recede in the distance; becoming fragmented and untrue.
5. The way this art works is to make you want it to disappear so that you can mourn its loss and love it more completely.
6. The operative method of the work is like the spurned lover, clinging to some one or something when no longer wanted. This is like separating the use of words from its everyday communicative function, but also keeping it very close to that everyday sense of function. These paintings are to life as the overzealous lover is the loved.
7. In this art, dead images of life's interaction with symbols control living images of life's participation in this symbolization process. Work that addresses itself to this process is generally understood to be pessimistic, but for no good reason.

8. The paintings have to be dead; that is, from life but not a part of it, in order to show how a painting can be said to have anything to do with life in the first place, which is in some relation to the arbitrary.
9. The paintings measure our feelings that images control our lives. The images in the paintings take over our own because of their similarity—much the way commies took over government jobs by infiltration through the subtle ways they understood what was required to fulfill those jobs—because of their sensitivity to “modes of presentation”.
10. To redeem the present tense time of looking at them, the pictures have to disappear from that time—recede into the distance. The work has to go away (reject the present) in order to redeem the present from a meaninglessness “looking at something”. This is connected to loving someone who is nothing. A beautiful paradox—to love something or some one whom you know to be nothing, or of doubtful existence. There is a way in which that knowledge fuels the love and allows it to be a record of futility.
11. Connection making is seen as replication or renewal for the soul. We pursue metaphor to understand the first thing

compared. What we love most is for something to be “put into words”.

12. I am interested in infiltration, usurpation, beating people at their own game (meaning scheme). I am interested in making people suffer, not through some external plague, but simply because of who they are (how they know).

13. I am interested in the elevation of the arbitrary and contrived to the level of the ineluctable; not ineluctable in the sense of some higher purpose, but just arbitrary and inevitable at the same time.

14. I am interested in the pictures' ability to make felt a “you” addressed by the picture...an idealized non-existent you which nonetheless takes on a certain credibility. The pictures' strength is in making the real you congruent with the you addressed by the picture by a process of complicity—which becomes surprising in this case because, paradoxically, it is what we expect a picture to do anyway.

15. The pictures present improvised views of life—normalized, but in fact, as it is never seen. The pictures imitate life to find a way out of it. ■

