



Nina Johnson

Rochelle Feinstein: *Fredonia!*
November 20th - January 9th, 2021

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FREDONIA!

Nina Johnson is proud to present *Fredonia!*, an exhibition of new and recent paintings by Rochelle Feinstein, opening on November 20th, 2020 and remaining on view through January 9th, 2021. Feinstein is a legendary painter, whose work and ideas about abstraction have influenced generations of artists. Over the past four decades, she has deflated the dogmas of modernism with humor and verve, liberally borrowing from different schools of painting, as well as other mediums, including drawing, photography, printmaking, sculpture, video, and installation. Though it takes myriad forms, her singular project always centers painting within culture at large.

Fredonia! refers to a fictional utopia, a 19th-century name for the United States that never took off, and a failed country in the 1933 Marx Brothers film *Duck Soup*. The exhibition features several recent bodies of work which reflect upon this time of turmoil, anxiety, and gallows humor. Feinstein uses the motif of the rainbow—a visual trope and cultural artifact first explored while in residence at the American Academy in Rome—to present works rich in color and connotation. She moves freely through the history of late 20th-century painting, rejoicing in materiality while poking holes in the notion of *pure painting*. In one, thick pools of paint are stitched together with a zigzagging horizontal length of acrylic yarn. It first appears as a harshly linear intrusion fracturing the painting. But it also resembles a line graph, and thus represents Feinstein's playful, subversive use of abstraction to *record* different types of information.

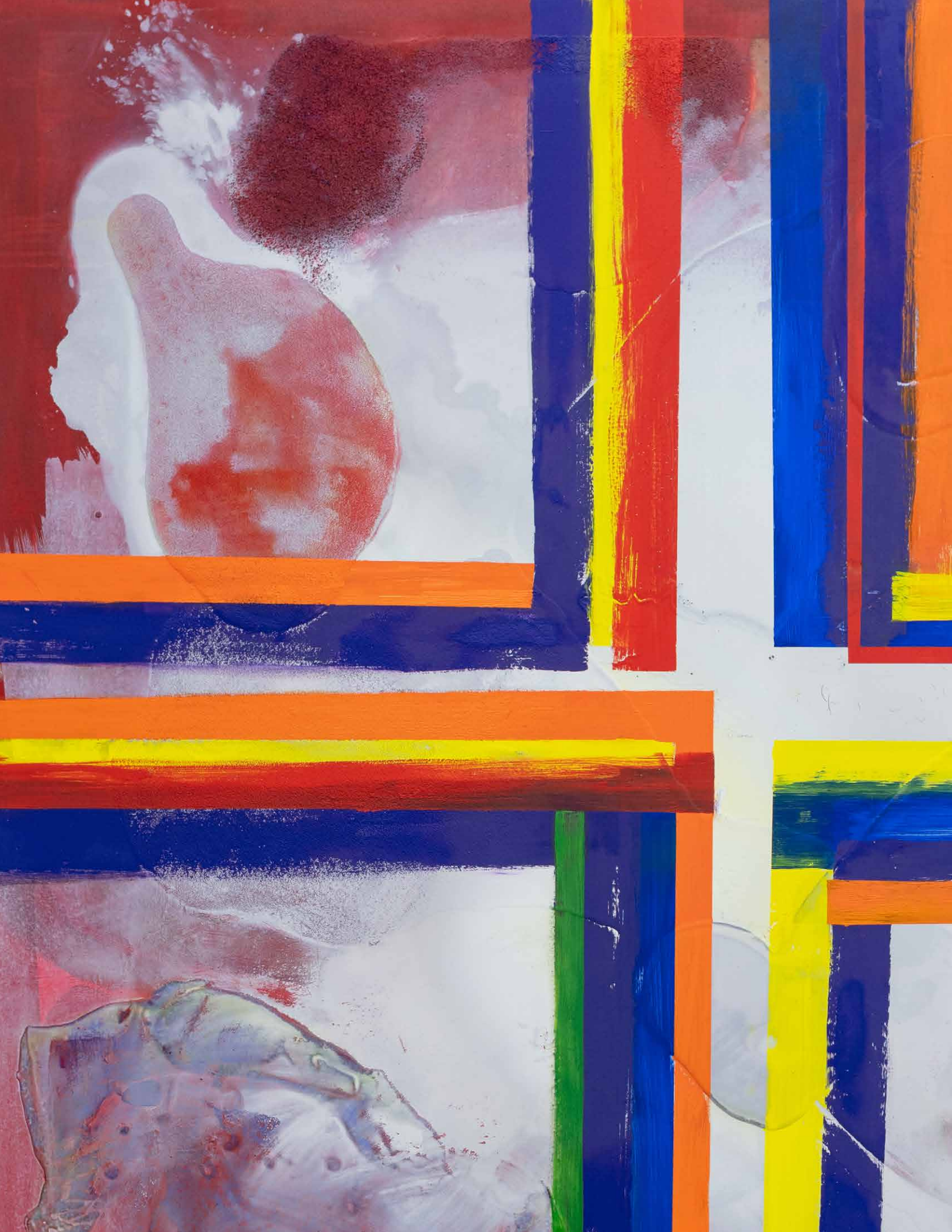
The rainbow itself begins to change form, shifting away from a purely optical presence—and from aspirational connotations of pots of gold—to the spectrum's current use in data visualization. In an election year, no colors are more freighted than red and blue. Feinstein isolates these two colors in her *Plein Air* series. As clouds condense and overlap, one cannot help but think of the Electoral College map on election night. Painted on unprimed drop cloth—wrinkled, with packaging folds still visible—they foreground their material existence, and in doing so, emphasize the logistics of capitalism coursing through contemporary art. A series of smaller works on cardboard further this exploration. These works, with their gradients and graphs signifying everything from customer satisfaction, to humidity, to nothing, are painted on cardboard shipped via Amazon. These are her *Happiness* paintings: a state which, given the impermanence of the cardboard, is as fleeting as a rainbow.



ABOUT ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

Born in 1947, Rochelle Feinstein is a longstanding and deeply respected member of the New York art community. A major survey exhibition of Feinstein's work originated at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2016), and subsequently traveled to Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich (2016), Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover (2017), and the Bronx Museum of the Arts (2018-2019). Other solo exhibitions have taken place at Kunsthaus Baselland (2018) and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University (2012).

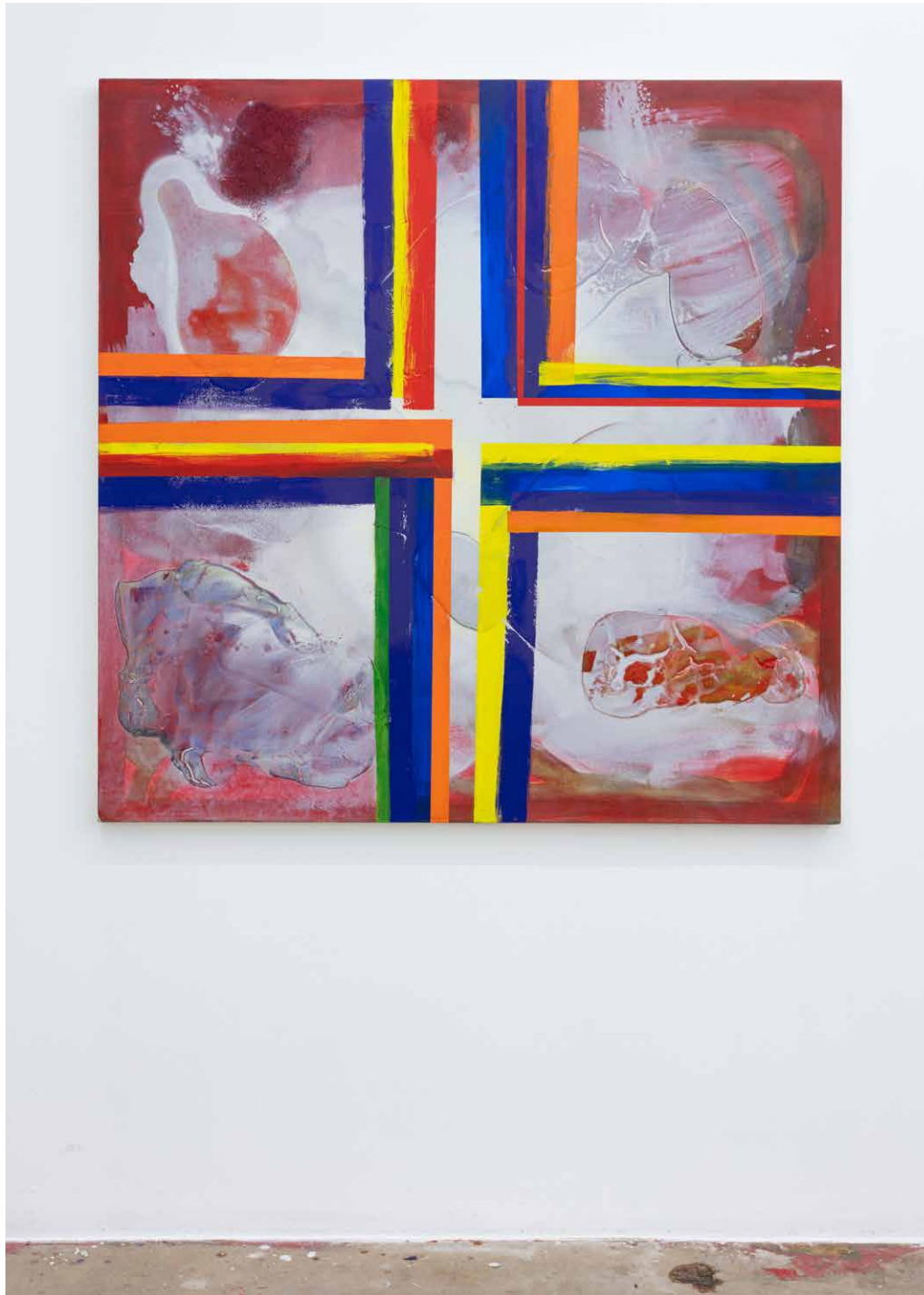
Feinstein is Professor Emerita of Painting and Printmaking at Yale University (2017). Among her numerous accolades, she is a recent recipient of the prestigious Rome Prize Jules Guérin Fellowship in Visual Arts, American Academy in Rome (2017-2018). Her work is in museum collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; and the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum.



ABOUT NINA JOHNSON

Nina Johnson is a contemporary art space in Miami, Florida. Opened as Gallery Diet in 2007, the gallery has produced exhibitions by emerging and established artists from around the world, including Terry Allen, Anna Betbeze, Judy Chicago, Ann Craven, Jim Drain, Awol Erizku, Derek Fordjour, Nicola L., Nicolas Lobo, Nevine Mahmoud, Jonas Mekas, Emmett Moore, Cassi Namoda, Eamon Ore-Giron, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Jamilah Sabur, Peter Shire, Katie Stout, and Betty Woodman. The gallery is located at 6315 NW 2nd Avenue Miami in the Little Haiti district.

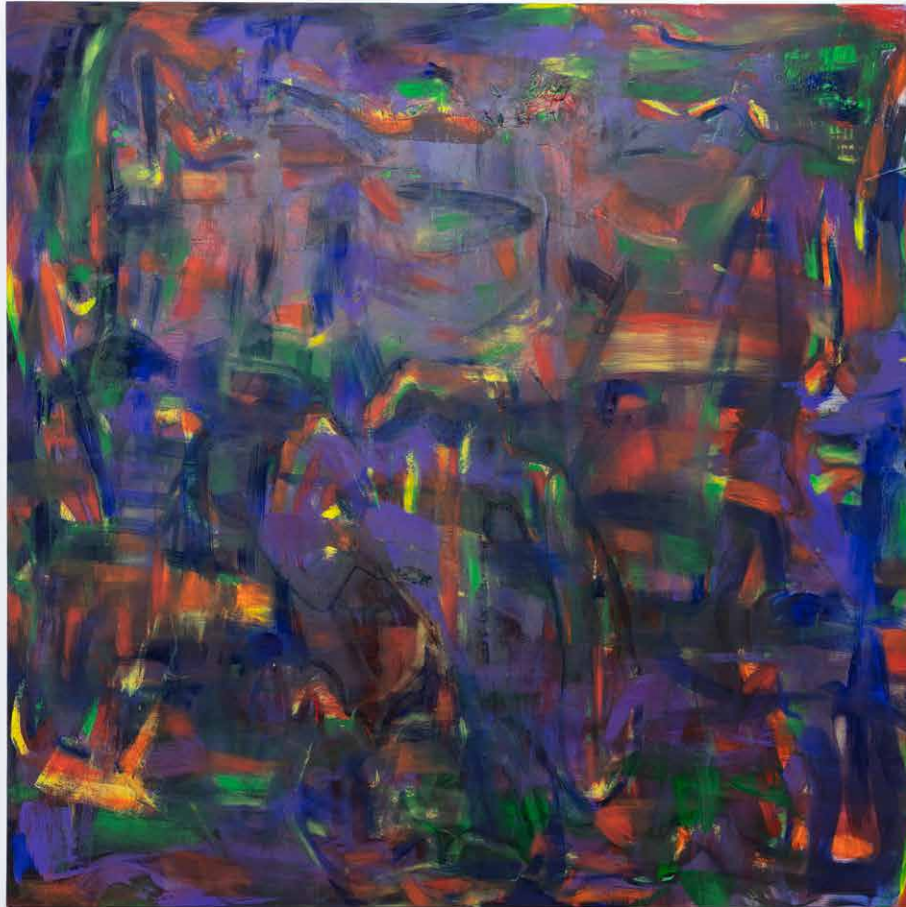
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Drawn and Quartered, 2019
Oil, acrylic, smalt, powdered glass on canvas
50 x 50 x 1.5 in.



Nina Johnson



Grid, Apocalypso IV, 2020
Oil on canvas
60 x 60 x 1 in.





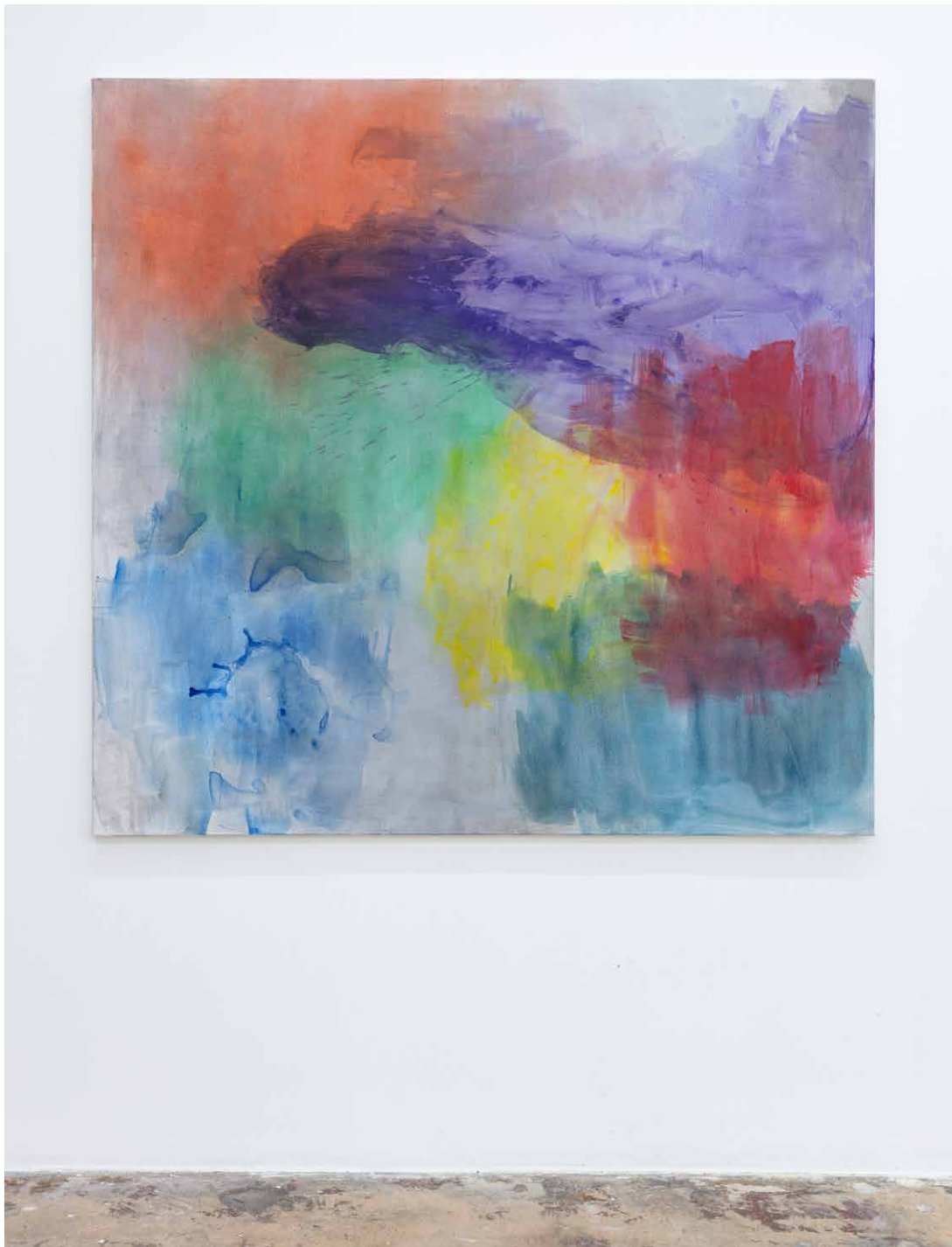
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Apocalypso I, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
58 x 60 x 1 in.



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Apocalypso III, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
58 x 60 x 1 in.



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Plein Air VI, 2020.
Acrylic, thread on cotton drop cloth
91 x 124 in.

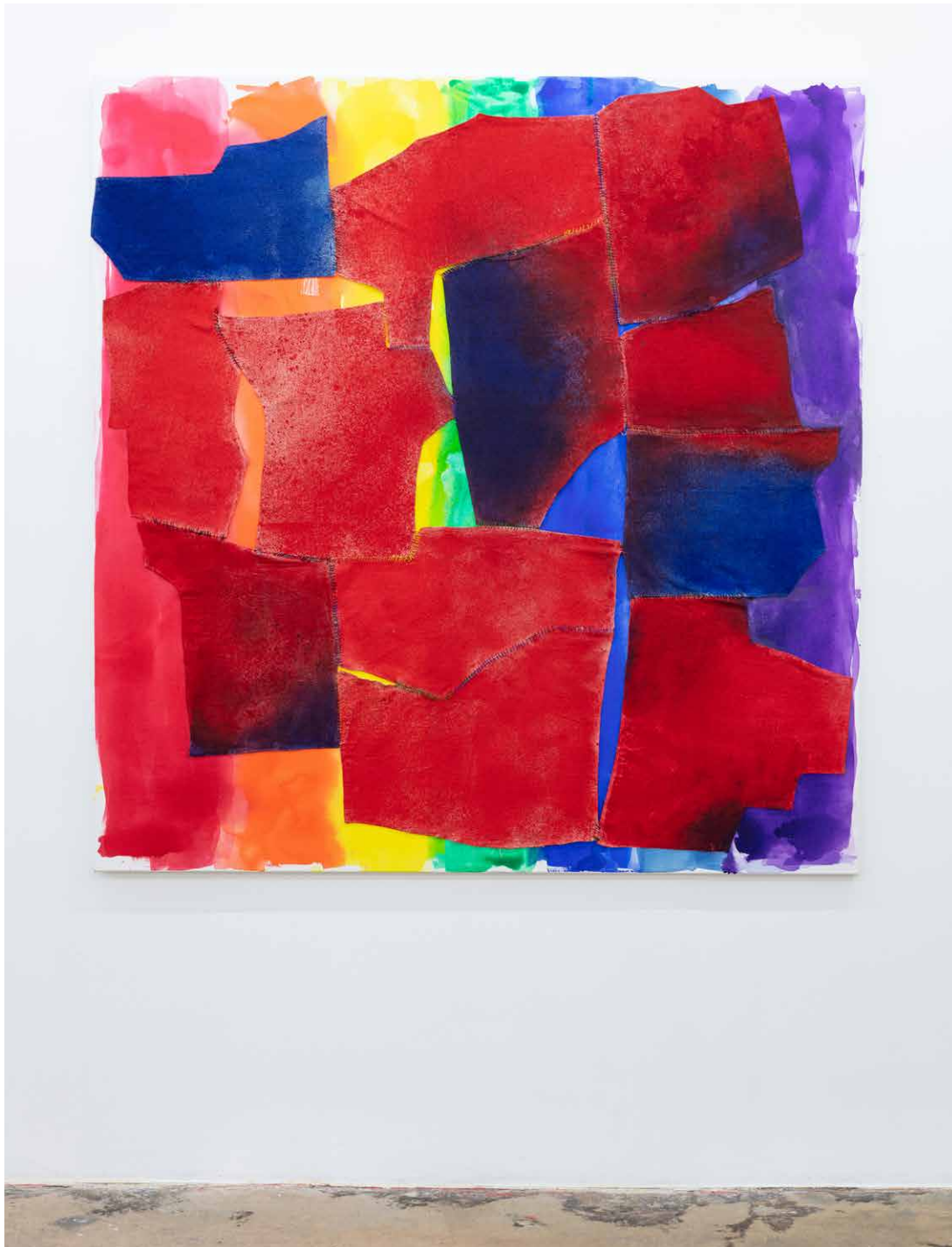


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Apocalypso II, 2020
Enamel, acrylic, yarn, embroidery floss on canvas
58 x 60 x 1 in.

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Fredonia!, 2020

Acrylic, cotton drop cloth, rainbow thread, archival adhesive on canvas
60 x 58 x 1 in.



Nina Johnson



Plein Air IV, 2020.
Acrylic, thread on cotton drop cloth
97 x 124 in.



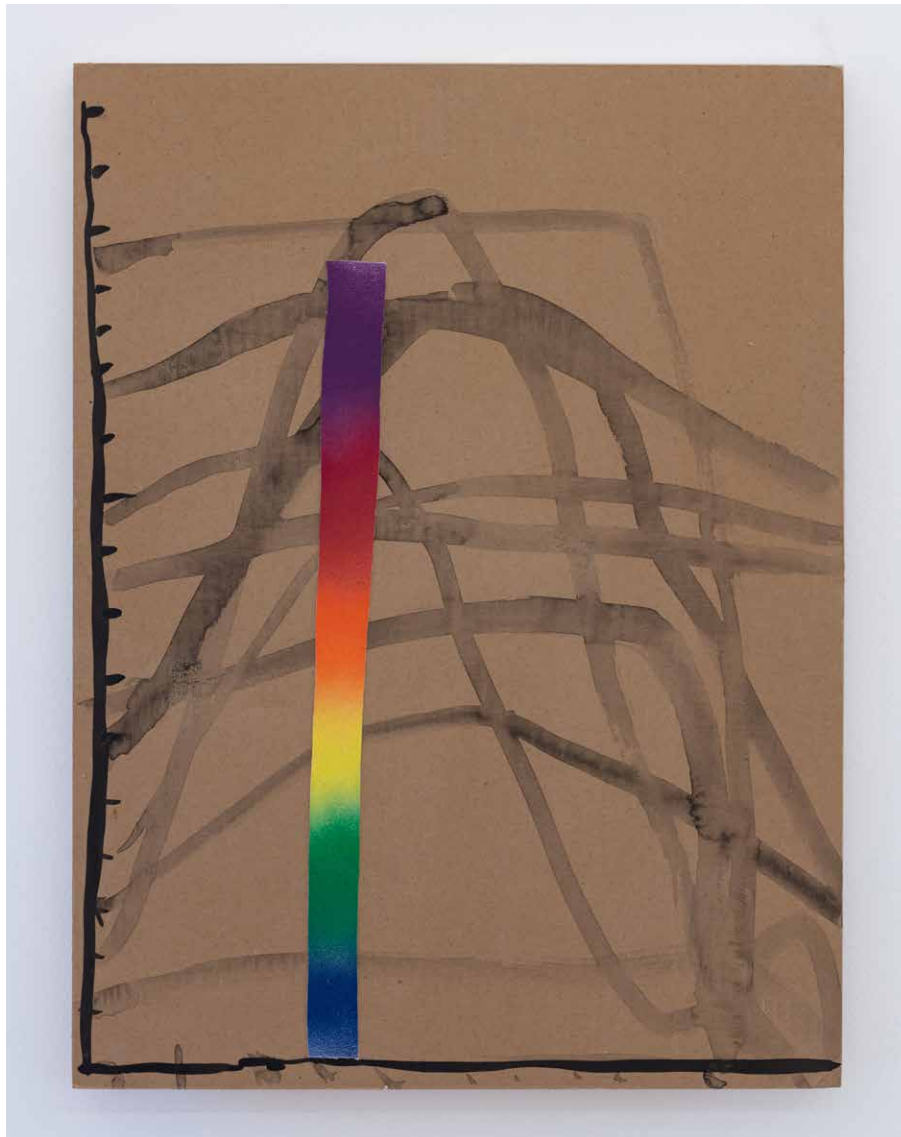
Nina Johnson



Plein Air III, 2020.
Enamel, acrylic, thread on cotton drop cloth
92 x 124 in.



Nina Johnson



Happinesses, 2020

Canvas, acrylic enamel spray paint, ink, acrylic on cardboard. Mounted on bass panel
18 x 24 x 1 in.

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Happinesses/Indexical II, 2020

Canvas, acrylic enamel spray paint, ink, acrylic on cardboard. Mounted on bass panel
18 x 24 x 1 in.

Nina Johnson



Rainbowed Happineses III, 2020

Canvas, acrylic enamel spray paint, ink, acrylic on cardboard. Mounted on bass panel
18 x 24 x 1 in.

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

Lives and works in New York, NY

EDUCATION

- 1978 Masters of Fine Arts, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
1975 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Pratt Institute, New York, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2020 Fredonia!, Nina Johnson Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2018 Image of an Image, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY (November – March 2019)
Rainbow Room/The Year in Hate, Campoli Presti, London, UK
Research Park, The Gallery at Michaels, Santa Monica, CA
Rochelle Feinstein, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel, CH
- 2017 Who Cares, On Stellar Rays, New York, NY
- 2016 Rochelle Feinstein, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich, Switzerland
Rochelle Feinstein (Retrospectives): In Anticipation of Women's History Month, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
I Made a Terrible Mistake, Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany
Make it Behave, Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany
- 2014 Love Vibe, On Stellar Rays, New York, NY
I'm With Her, Gallery Diet, Miami, FL
- 2013 Rochelle Feinstein, On Stellar Rays, New York, NY
Rochelle Feinstein, Higher Pictures, New York, NY
- 2012 Rochelle Feinstein: The (Abridged) Estate of Rochelle F., 2010–2012, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- 2011 The Estate of Rochelle F., On Stellar Rays, New York, NY
- 2009 I Made A Terrible Mistake, LAB Space/Art Production Fund, New York, NY
- 2008 The Studio Show, David Reed Studio, New York, NY
New Work, Momenta Art, Brooklyn, NY
Rochelle Feinstein, The Suburban, Chicago, IL
- 2002 Pictures, Ten in One Gallery, New York, NY
- 1996 Men, Women, and Children, Max Protetch Gallery, New York, NY
The Wonderfals, Jersey City Museum, New Jersey, NJ
Copicats, Bill Maynes Gallery, New York, NY
- 1995 Paintings, Halsey Gallery, Charleston, South Carolina, SC
- 1994 Paintings, Max Protetch Gallery, New York, NY
- 1993 David Beitzel Gallery, New York, NY
- 1989 Emily Sorkin Gallery, New York, NY
- 1987 Emily Sorkin Gallery, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS AND SCREENINGS

- 2020 Beauty Can Be the Opposite of a Number, Bureau, New York, NY
When We First Arrived, The Corner at Whitman-Walker, Washington, DC
- 2019 Holly Village, curated by James Michael Shaeffer, Bodega, New York, NY
Duck or Doorknob, curated by Noam Rappaport, Ratio 3, San Francisco, CA

Absolute Threshold, curated by Elisa Linn, John Miller, Lennart Wolff. Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich, Switzerland
Gallery Galerie, Galería, Studioli, Roma. Portfolio participation at Jack Barrett Gallery, New York, NY

2018 Notebook, curated by Joanne Greenbaum, 56 Henry, New York, NY
Manifest Content, Campoli Presti, London, UK
Hunter of Worlds, curated by Elise Lammer, SALTS, Basel, Switzerland
Michel Obultra, Issue 1. Limited Edition folio curated by Stephanie Weber/Hopscotch Reading Room, Berlin, Germany
Out of Line, September Gallery, Hudson, NY
En Plein Air, Studioli, Rome, Italy
Kein Schmerz, Kein Gedanke, Galerie Christine Mayer, Munich, Germany
Specific Site, curated by Renaud Regnery, Klemms-Berlin, Berlin, Germany
The Tesseract, curated by Ilaria Gianni, American Academy in Rome, Rome, IT

2017 Man Alive! curated by Wendy White, Jablonka Maruani Mercier Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
Post-Election, organized by Kate Gilmore and Kristen Dodge, September Gallery, Hudson, NY
A New Norm, organized by Georgia Sagri and Fabrice Stroun, 'Υλ η[matter]HYLE, Athens, Greece

2016 On Empathy, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York, NY
How Deep is the Ocean, curated by Arlène Berceoloit Courtin, Shanaynay, Paris, France
La Mérite, curated by Tenzing Barshee, Treize, Paris, France
Mean Machine (Up Jumped the Devil), The Meeting, New York, NY
The Art of Now, Hearst Galleries, New York, NY
Foundation Barbin Presents Redux Sort of, Kai Matsumiya Gallery, New York, NY
The Cats-in-Residence Program, curated by Rhonda Lieberman, Worcester ArtMuseum, Worcester, MA

2015 Occupational Therapy, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, MI
Tightrope Walking Over Delusions Swampland, Studio 10, Brooklyn, NY
New Year's Eve Group Show, The Green Gallery, Milwaukee, WI

2014 Whitney Biennial, curated by Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms and Michelle Grabner, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
JUST 'COS ALWAYS, Circus Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Making Sense: Rochelle Feinstein, Deborah Grant, Iva Gueorguieva, Dona Nelson, University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum, Tampa, FL
The Cats-in-Residence Program, with Rhonda Lieberman, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT
Rochelle Feinstein, Video, Vanity Projects, New York, NY
PIEROGI XX: Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition, Pierogi Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Reliable Tension or: How to Win a Conversation about Jasper Johns, 32 Edgewood Gallery, Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT
Poor Working Conditions, curated by Claire Gruber, Martos Gallery, New York, NY
Clouds, organized by Adam Simon, Lesley Heller Workspace, New York, NY

2013 Jew York, Zach Feuer Gallery, New York, NY

2012 Valet of the Infinite, curated by Justin Lieberman, New Galerie, Paris, France
Social Studies, curated by Andrea Blum, Centro de Arte Contemporáneo La Conservera, Ceuti, Spain
Selections from the Hoggard Wagner Collection, English Kills Art Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
New Prints 2012/Summer, curated by Shahzia Sikander, International Print Center, New York, NY
Retrospective of S-, curated by Sam Messer & Jonathan Safran Foer, Fredricks & Freiser, New York, NY
Day of the Locust, curated by Jessica Baran, White Flag Projects, St. Louis, MO
Underemployed, curated by Josh Blackwell, Zürcher Studio, New York, NY
Inti, On Stellar Rays, New York, NY
Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts, American Academy of Art and Letters, New York, NY
The Best of 2012, Soloway, Brooklyn, NY

2010 Desire, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Parts and Labor, Soloway Projects, Brooklyn, NY

2009 Talk Dirty to Me, Larissa Goldston Gallery, New York, NY

2008 Video as Video: Rewind to Form, curated by Alicia Eler and Peregrine Honig, The Swimming Pool Project Space, Chicago, IL
World's Smallest Art Fair, Anna Kustera Gallery, New York, NY

2007 Aporia-Aporia, curated by the dB Foundation, LACE Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Horizon, curated by David Humphrey, Elizabeth Foundation Gallery, New York, NY

2006 CMYK, Canada, New York, NY

- Aporia, curated by the dB Foundation, Elizabeth Foundation Gallery, New York, NY
 E-Flux Video Library, Arthouse, Austin, TX
 Guess Who's Coming to Lunch?, curated by Dean Daderko, David Reed Studio, New York, NY
 Let's Talk About..., Larissa Goldston Gallery, New York, NY
 181st Annual of Contemporary American Art, National Academy Museum, New York, NY
- 2005 Techno-Sublime, CU Art Museum, Boulder, CO
 Heavenly, or A Slice of White, Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York, NY
- 2004 A More Perfect Union, Max Fish, NY NY
 Spacemakers, Lothringer Dreizehn, Munich, DE
 Giverny, 5 Years of Artists, Salon 94, New York, NY
 After Matisse/Picasso, MoMA P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY
- 2003 Table Top Sculpture/Jessica Stockholder, Gorney, Bravin + Lee, New York, NY
- 2001 Camera Works, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, NY
 All About Paint, Art Museum of University of Memphis, Memphis, TN
 See You (2), curated by Sam Messer and Kiki Smith, Fredericks/Freiser, New York, NY
- 2000 Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts Benefit, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, NY
 The Living End, curated by Ingrid Shaffner, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, CO
 Gesture and Contemporary Painting, Warren Robbins Gallery, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI
- 1999 Negotiating Small Truths, Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX
 Calendar 2000, Bard Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Bard College, Annandale on-Hudson, NY
 Conversation, A.R.T. (Art Resources Transfer), New York, NY
 Down to Earth, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, NY
- 1998 From Here to Eternity, Max Protech Gallery, New York, NY
- 1997 The Drawing File, Pierogi 2000, The Gasworks, London, UK
 Current Undercurrent: Working in Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
 S.L.A.D., Apex Art, New York, NY
- 1996 Reconditioned Abstraction, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, MO
 Painting in an Expanded Field, Bennington College, Bennington, VT
- 1995 Re: FAB: Painting Abstracted, Fabricated and Revised, University Art Museum, USF, Tampa, FL
 Works on Paper/Faculty, Yale University, School of Art, New Haven, CT
 Skew: The Unruly Grid Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, IL
 Cutting Up, Max Protech Gallery, New York, NY
 Other Rooms, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York, NY
 Actual Painting, Pierogi 2000, New York, NY
- 1994 New Painting, Max Protech Gallery, New York, NY
 American Abstraction, A New Decade, Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Loretto, PA
 Redefining the Pop Icon in the 90s, Pamela Auchincloss Gallery, New York, NY

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul, S. Korea
 Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany
 Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
 Muscarelle Museum of Art, Williamsburg, VA
 Mt. Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, MA
 Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL

GRANTS, AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

American Academy in Rome, Jules Guerin Rome Prize Fellowship in Visual Arts
 American Academy of Arts and Letters Art Purchase Prize
 Anonymous Was A Woman
 John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship
 Pollock-Krasner Foundation

Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant
 Foundation for Contemporary Art
 MacDowell Colony Artist Residency
 Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship
 Pollock-Krasner Foundation
 Civitella Raineri Artist Residency, Umbria, Italy
 Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio, Italy
 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Fellowship
 Yaddo Artist Residency

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 "Getting Their Due". Rochelle Feinstein, Artsy, April 30, 2018
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 "Goings On About Town". Rochelle Feinstein. New Yorker Magazine, May 8, 2017
 "Culture Desk". Rochelle Feinstein, New Yorker Magazine, May 5, 2017
 Lorch, Catrin. Rochelle Feinstein. I Made A Terrible Mistake. Internationaler Kunstkritikerverband. January, 2017
 Stange, Raimar. Rochelle Feinstein. ArtistKunstmagazin, November 2016-January 2017
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 "Pop Artum die Ecke gedacht." Münchner Merkur, June 7, 2016
 "Rochelle Feinstein 'In Anticipation of Women's History Month' at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève" Mousse, January 2016 (online)
 Branovic, Tamara "Rochelle, We Love You" Kunst:Art, May-June, 2016
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 Darblay, Louise. "In Zürich" ArtReview, June 10, 2016
 Frenzel, Sebastian. "Abstraction goes disco." Monopol, June 19, 2016
 Havas, Deanna. "Love & History, Deanna Havas on Rochelle Feinstein at Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève." Texte zur Kunst, April 19, 2016
 Hirsch, Faye. "The Big Picture." Art in America, September 1, 2016
 Kotteder, Franz. "Bier und Blauer Reiter." Süddeutsche Zeitung, January 14, 2016, online
 Krauss, Annette. "Abstraction and Emotion." Donakurier, June 15, 2016
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 Liningaan Langkay, Inga. "3x Kunst fürs Wochenende." L'Officiel, June 16, 2016
 Lorch, Catrin. "More than just an idiom." Süddeutsche Zeitung, June 9, 2016
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 Reichert, Kolja. "If Painting Stands Beside Itself." Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, July 2, 2016
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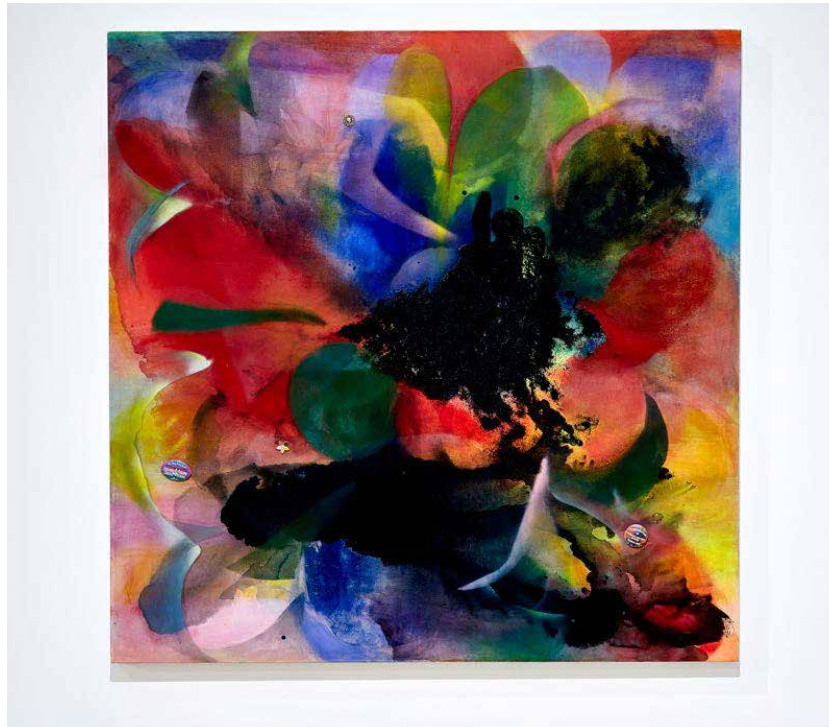
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ArtSeen

Rochelle Feinstein: *Image of an Image*

By David Carrier



Rochelle Feinstein, *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, 2013. Acrylic, oil, smalt, buttons on canvas, 60 x 60 inches. Photo: Argenis Apolinario.

NEW YORK
The Bronx Museum of the Arts
November 7, 2018 — March 3, 2019

What can an abstract painting represent? Rochelle Feinstein offers a plenitude of answers. *Image of an Image* is the most challenging retrospective that I have recently had the pleasure of viewing. At first blush, this collection of works seems like a group show of diverse artists. Feinstein's *In Anticipation of Women's History Month* (2013)—made with acrylic, oil, black cobalt glass, and buttons on canvas—is an abstraction, a color field painting gone bad. And *Plein Air 1* (2018) is made from a gray drop cloth; just as 19th-century artists ordered paint tubes, so she made this painting with materials purchased online. Other paintings are made from untraditional materials: *Fulfillment House* (2017) is a loosely painted yellow, black, and grey grid, a redoing of that familiar modernist motif. *Mr. Natural* (2009) depicts two green crossed lines made of crystal, reflective glass powder, oil, and charcoal on drop cloth. And *Nude Model* (2009), which looks completely abstract, is constructed from Styrofoam, enamel, cloth, and paper mounted on a stretcher. Responding to the printout of a Craigslist post that read, “Nude Model needed for abstract painting,” Feinstein shows that an “abstract nude” can only be an oxymoron.

Like many artists who matured in the 1980s after the formalist vision of abstraction had become passé, Feinstein wanted to give her paintings political resonance, and so her abstract works also refer to contemporary culture in the manner of traditional figurative paintings. That, too, may seem a contradiction in terms, but she brilliantly resolves this by incorporating descriptive materials into her abstractions, and then uses their titles to secure their references. *Image of an Image* (2010), the titular work of her current exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (which comes to the Bronx after a tour of art centers in Geneva, Munich, and Hannover), is a painting hidden behind a scrim. It might stand for all of her art, in which she brackets and visually conceals her subjects. Perhaps in reaction to her early career as an illustrator, Feinstein proceeds through indirection. In *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, for example, was inspired by sad humor with the fact “that the other eleven months of the year are not also an occasion to ‘celebrate’ feminism.”

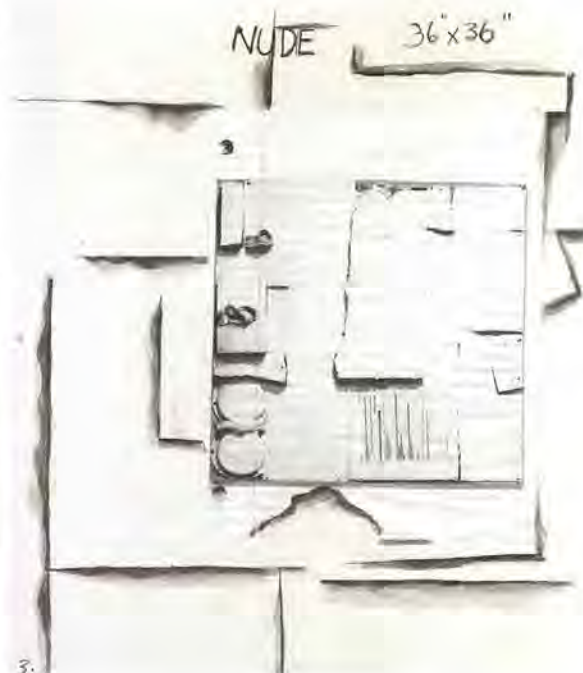
Feinstein's art, which looks unfinished and determinedly provisional, consists of what appear to be fragments of modernist compositions—often just barely held together by grids, by color, or by words. She loves incompleteness and imperfection. Her work, which is not easy to place, is consistently off-kilter and offhand. Feinstein makes Robert Rauschenberg—one of her obvious influences—look like Rembrandt through her determined pursuit of incompleteness. And compared to her, Mary Heilmann is a straightforward visual thinker. In her refusal to reduce her ambitious work to a singular narrative, she wants to open abstract art to encompass almost any subject. Her art escapes all definitions, for no sooner have you pinned her down, than you find that her next work offers fresh puzzles.

Ultimately what I admire most about Feinstein is this refusal of resolution and her serious cultivation of slight visual pleasures. Look, if you will, at *Love Is Over* (2008), which consists of two panels, each made of mirrors on masonite board and acrylic, with those three words laid out—in reverse on the lower panel—and resting on Styrofoam bricks. And consider *El Bronco* (1994), which consists of oil, acrylic, tape on linen, and a framed digital print. Skid marks are formed by the words “WHITE BRONCO,” an allusion to the O. J. Simpson police chase, as seen in black and white on TV. Or view (should I say, read?) *The Little Engine* (2005–08/2016). Alluding to the well-known children's book, it is an ironic parable about colonialism, gender, and race, as well as the embattled legacy of modernism. Composed of two engraved aluminum plaques and three canvases, it features quotations from South African painter and photographer Zwelethu Mthethwa. Brilliantly and continuously elusive, she extends the range of painting in seemingly illogical ways. In her art, one commentator in the exhibition catalogue says, we experience “the shipwreck of the premises of abstraction and modernism.” Fortunately what remains is more than enough to make possible her body of enchanting, deeply mysterious paintings.

Opposite page: Rochelle Feinstein, *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, 2013, acrylic, oil, and buttons on canvas, 60 x 60".

Right: Rochelle Feinstein, *A Catalog of the Estate of Rochelle F. Paintings 2009-2010* (detail), 2010, ink, charcoal, and collage on twenty-two sheets of paper, this sheet 20 x 17". From the series "The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009-10.

Below: Rochelle Feinstein, *El Bronco* (detail), 1994, diptych, oil on linen, ink-jet print, overall 5' 2" x 10' 6".



1000 WORDS

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

TALKS ABOUT HER SURVEY AT THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS, NEW YORK

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN'S paintings pack punches and punch lines, yet the jokes are so bleak they can be hard to laugh at. The ebullient, Helen Frankenthaler-esque *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, 2013, may at first suggest earnest excitement about the commemoration of women's achievements that occurs every March. Round pin-back buttons—variously displaying a tiny curtsying Minnie Mouse and a suffragette—are stuck into the colorful stained canvas. Yet a glittering black heart at the painting's center gives the game away: The work is, in fact, acidly ironic and tinged with melancholy, meant to underscore the patriarchal system that deems "women's history"—the contributions of more than 50 percent of the human population—as a category distinct from "history" itself.

Feinstein's work is funny, feminist, and furious. As a painter coming of age in the 1980s, she struggled to find

her way with a medium long out of fashion, but she persisted, using painting to short-circuit masculine ideologies. Take *Flag*, 1993, a checked dish towel offered as an answer to Jasper Johns, or 1994's *El Bronco*, for which Feinstein created white tread marks on a blue linen support, marrying the LA freeway of the O. J. Simpson chase to the Barnett Newman zip.

Feinstein subordinates form to process. She shifts freely among painterly and prosaic techniques, incorporating everything from drop shadows to drips, stains, and zips, to everyday materials and stray, stranded language. This approach is in line with many younger painters' magpie strategies—unsurprising, given that for years Feinstein was the head of Yale's graduate painting program. She deploys pop-culture ciphers as a means of puzzling out their deeper meanings and restages older works in new constellations.

"The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009-10, is a series of thirteen paintings Feinstein recycled and remade from her own work as well as from presents from other artists, such as a birthday gift from Rachel Harrison. Created during the financial crisis, "The Estate" is a recessionary take on the Rauschenberg Combine: a meditation on value and a way for Feinstein to probe her own worth as a woman artist.

After touring Europe, her survey "An Image of an Image" finally comes home to New York's Bronx Museum of the Arts, and so, too, does Feinstein, who grew up nearby.

—Jennifer Kabat

I WAS BORN IN THE BRONX at Fitch Sanitarium, which no longer exists. My parents lived on Featherbed Lane, and years ago their building collapsed. It no longer exists. My stepmother taught at a junior high on Sheridan Avenue. That school no longer exists. My father, a Golden Gloves boxer, lived with my stepmother in an apartment building on Grandview Place at 167th Street. It no longer exists either. Their synagogue closed, and was converted into the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Soon, I, too, will no longer be around. That's the point of a retrospective. The show will include parts of my 2009-10 pre-posthumous work "The Estate of Rochelle F." The paintings were



made from a massive, varied amount of surplus stuff, such as cardboard, packing materials, tarps, ground glass, paint, and unfinished work accumulated over time. "The Estate" ended when this material was depleted. I was thinking about the 2008 market crash, and about my own value as a woman painter. When do assets become an estate? How does ephemera become valuable?

Those ironies of estates and histories and celebrations are present throughout my work. Take *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*. I'd heard on the radio, "Upcoming is . . . in anticipation of Women's History Month, where so-and-so will . . ."

I thought, *We're going to anticipate the celebration, to claim it as happy, and then it goes away?*

Often, I let enigmas shape my art. Recently, I've been preoccupied with Amazon's corporate language: They've created a whole new vocabulary, with job titles such as "content managers" and "sortation associates," who pull things off shelves in "fulfillment centers." That's enigmatic. I've been pacing my studio thinking about the artist as content manager. How do artists manage "content"?

The paintings *Plein Air I* and *Plein Air II* [both 2018] came from that question. When I was at the American Academy in Rome last year, my studio had

a beautiful terrazzo floor that needed to be protected with a drop cloth, but I found that art supplies were hard to come by. The only way to get a drop cloth? An Amazon fulfillment center. The tarp I bought was the thinnest cotton, quite beautiful, with an open weave and deep folds from the packing. I thought, *I could actually use this as the ground for a painting*. The Amazon box became to me like paint tubes were to nineteenth-century plein air painters. Paint tubes brought the Impressionists out of the studio and into open fields and city streets. The Amazon box brought supplies to me, from anywhere in the world. Then I began thinking of airbrush painting in the 1970s, and



Opposite page: Rochelle Feinstein, *Plein Air I*, 2018, acrylic on cotton, 8' x 10' 10".

Clockwise, from above: Rochelle Feinstein, *Love Vibe* (detail), 1999–2014, oil on six canvases, each 74 x 74". Rochelle Feinstein, *H(e)art Island*, 2017, acrylic, oil, and thread on canvas, 82 x 84". Rochelle Feinstein, *Timing* (detail), 2013–18, buttons and Plexiglas, 36 x 12 x 12". Rochelle Feinstein, *Timing*, 2013–18, buttons and Plexiglas, 36 x 12 x 12".



I've been pacing my studio thinking about the artist as content manager. How do artists manage "content"?

of camouflage patterns as a ubiquitous landscape. I wanted a plein air painting, but of today. I ordered spray bottles used to kill aphids on plants from Amazon. *Plein Air I*'s color is based on Vietnam-era tiger-stripe camo. *Plein Air II* is the camo used in Operation Desert Storm. I left the drop cloths unstretched, and the creases remained. They now fold up nicely into carry-on-size packages, and that's that. Amazon inspired and fulfilled, and shipped via carry-on baggage.

If you have a chaotic childhood, you teach yourself to read signs, to sift through them for significance, and to study phrases and images to ascertain what may be concealed. This requires endurance. And it always leads to mistranslation—to abstraction, as in painting. I came of age later than most of my peers, at a time when Why painting? was the question. How do I understand my medium? How do I understand its social conditions? Endurance and mistranslation were in my nature, and I applied them to painting, too.

Love Your Work, 1999, is part of that sifting for meaning. The phrase is often empty speech—perfunctory small talk. It's a vernacular. I'm a very vernacular person. The speech bubble is a way to communicate in a comic panel where you have very little room.

I've realized form is my thing, not abstraction—like the heart of *H(e)art Island*, 2017. The form of the heart has historic meaning as a symbol of fidelity, but the shape bears no likeness to the physical organ in our

chest. I love that the heart shape continues to exist as a symbol in a brave and stupid way. Today, emoji hearts are everywhere—meaning anything—so I couldn't work with the straight-up form. I had to turn it on its side and make it sag. A sagging and bottom-heavy symbol. In the painting, the heart also represents a physical place: Hart Island, New York, a burial ground dating to a few years after the Civil War that is a potter's field run by the Department of Correction. Only family members can visit, and you can't take a camera. It is a place with histories. I went there in late 2016 with maybe six other visitors and had to think of how to hold on to this place without photography. After the visit, the painting evolved, becoming map-like. I added ferry routes that cross over the heart in the painting's center. I did rubbings that resembled an aerial view or a zoomable user interface. The painting *ZUI*, 2017, became a legend for *H(e)art Island*.

Shortly after making *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, I made Women's History Month commemorative buttons along with a Lucite column to house them. Every year, a new batch of buttons will be thrown into this time capsule. Maybe one day Women's History Month won't need crappy buttons. Then the time capsule can be buried. But I doubt that's going to happen in my lifetime. □

"Rochelle Feinstein: An Image of An Image," curated by Antonio Sergio Bessa, is on view November 7, 2018–March 3, 2019.

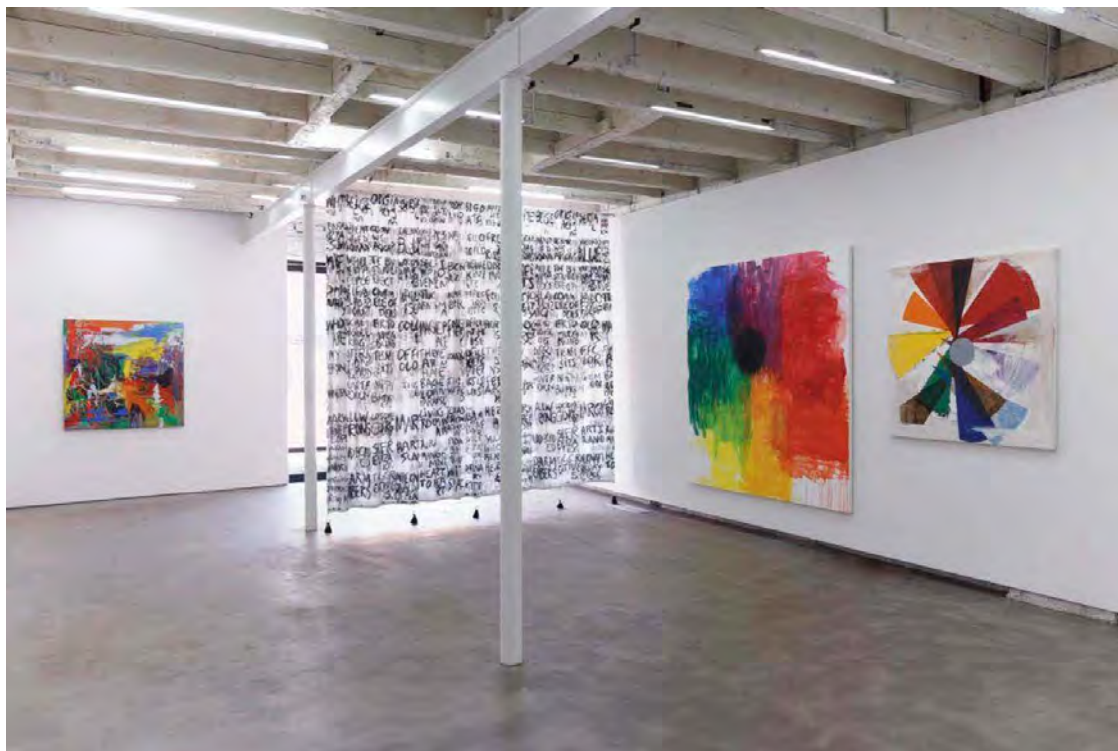


In the past few years, the art world has begun to more graciously reward artists who have honed their practice over previous decades, while remaining inexplicably under-the-radar. Artists like these 10 members of The Artsy Vanguard—a new, annual list of the 50 most influential talents shaping the future of contemporary art practice—are finally getting their due, with museum retrospectives, representation by major international galleries, and surging collector interest.

Rochelle Feinstein

Follow

B. 1947, New York. Lives and works in New York.



Until 2016, Rochelle Feinstein was often described by critics as influential, if under-appreciated; she had yet to receive the institutional support that she deserved. All that began to change with a flurry of solo shows at museums across Europe that year: retrospectives at the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, the Lenbachhaus in Munich, and Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover.

Perhaps Feinstein's importance has been diffused thus far due to the wide-reaching, eclectic ground she covers. The artist samples from the history of abstract painting—a grid here, a zip or splatter there—but isn't afraid to shoehorn in text, speech bubbles, digital prints of cats, or oblique references to everything from Michael Jackson to the Iraq War.

For an exhibition leadingly titled "Who Cares" at On Stellar Rays in New York last year, neo-Color Field experiments shared the space with a sheer textile, its surface scrawled with so many references to current events that it became a word salad. Nearby, a messy gestural painting in primary reds, blues, and yellows hung next to a black-and-white reproduction of the same work: a photo printed on canvas. Should we value one more than the other? By sliding cannily between styles and media, Feinstein is nothing if not thought-provoking. A retrospective opening this fall at the Bronx Museum of the Arts—the first comprehensive survey of Feinstein's work in the U.S.—will finally give audiences a chance to see her full practice in focus.

The New York Times

10 Under-the-Radar Art Shows to See Now

Our critics select museum and gallery exhibitions that provide a respite from carols and crowds.



"Love Vibe" (1999-2014), a series of panels in the exhibition "Rochelle Feinstein: Image of an Image," at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. George Etheredge for The New York Times

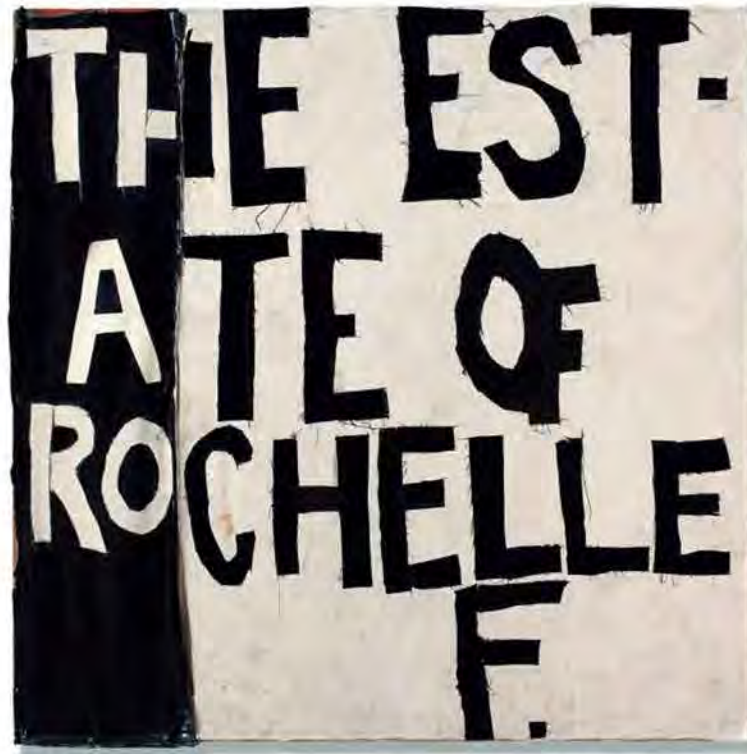
Nov. 22, 2018

THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

'Rochelle Feinstein: Image of an Image'

In her career survey, "[Image of an Image](#)," Rochelle Feinstein, a Bronx native, proves that she can do just about anything with painting. She can chronicle history or tell a joke. She can alchemize linen, photographs, newspapers, cardboard and photocopies into art. She can teach you something about looking and life. (Until recently, Ms. Feinstein was a professor of painting at Yale.)

This artist, a whiz with color, is a wisecracking New Yorker. She sprays and squeezes paint, and stains with it. Several works feel like odes to color charts or to the color theory art students learn in school. Her jokes are dark and wry. A black-and-white painting with big, chunky letters advertises "The Estate of Rochelle F." (2009-10), a reminder of how artists (and particularly women) are often recognized only posthumously.



Ms. Feinstein's painting "The Estate of Rochelle F." (2009-10) seems to comment on the tendency of artists to be appreciated only after death. Collection Perez Art Museum Miami

A morbid strain runs through some of the works as Ms. Feinstein grapples with and battles the forces trying to shut down painting in favor of other media. "El Bronco" (1994) features a stark white tire print careening vertically down a black canvas, nodding to Barnett Newman's color-field "zip" paintings and [Robert Rauschenberg's 1953 horizontal tire](#) mark on paper — but also to O.J. Simpson's Ford Bronco and the murders and criminal trial that polarized this country around racial lines in the mid-1990s.

"Love Vibe" (1999-2014) is a daisy-chain mural of six bright green-and-white paintings with janky black text that reads, "love your work" — except that the words appear in reverse, as if seen in a rear-view mirror. It is a reference to the way artists casually — perhaps insincerely — compliment one another's efforts. It also feels like a love letter to painting and perhaps even to the viewer since, who knows? Maybe Ms. Feinstein loves our work — looking at, contemplating, writing about her paintings — as much as we love hers. MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Through March 3. 1040 Grand Concourse, the Bronx; 718-681-6000, bronxmuseum.org.

Rochelle Feinstein

20.4.— 16.7.2018

Rochelle Feinstein's subjects are no less than freedom of opinion, feminism, racism, the AIDS crisis and Donald Trump. Over nearly thirty years the New York artist, a long-time professor of painting and printmaking at Yale University, has created a body of work that reveals itself as politically caustic yet densely humorous.

Her painting, which the viewer generally encounters in a forceful blast, deals consistently with the cultural and political connections of artistic production, transferring everyday individual and collective feelings into a language of abstraction. For Feinstein, painting is an anti-hierarchical endeavour to answer the question of what the medium can mean today, societally and culturally, without being limited by traditional forms. Her greatest critic, or, to put it better, her closest observer, is Rochelle Feinstein herself. Through an unswerving challenge to the meaning of painting in the world today she gives a voice back to painting: a voice that remains on the pulse, and engages with the viewer in a direct, natural and anything but elitist manner.

Language is an important element of this artistic discourse. Feinstein's work is repeatedly defined by speech bubbles, (self-)critical comments and significant key words from individual or collective vocabularies. "Whatever the source of these words and phrases, each is a form of communication, or miscommunication," comments the artist in a conversation. "Commonplace speech, colloquialisms, clichés that are lacking in emotion. If I'm lucky, they often stage my paintings. I've been collecting these enigmas, informally at first, since the 1990s, and in the last six or so years, as what I term flash cards. However, these are one-sided; the question is the phrase, the answer comes through the painting."

The solo exhibition at the Kunsthau Baselland, which was developed in collaboration by Ines Goldbach and the artist, follows Feinstein's major retrospective that, until recently, toured Europe and will conclude this autumn in New York. This new exhibition concentrates particularly on current works: works made by Feinstein over the past two years, in part during a residency in Rome. Maps play a central part here, and not just due to the fact that the artist is always on the move. "Historical maps drew my attention quite recently," she remarks. "Before and after the 2016 US election, perhaps like many others, I must have looked at maps at least a dozen times a day. While boundaries remained stable, the metrics changed as often. Each work from the last two years began with my selecting and engaging with familiar forms: heart, calendar, monochrome, trophy, etc. *Bleep* and *Plein Air I, II* are the only two works that use maps as a 'form thought' or foundation... Yes, as you say, maps help us to 'navigate or orient ourselves'. Since 2016 it's become increasingly impossible to do that. These paintings are maps of disorientation, obfuscation and deletion."

Perhaps this is the key to Rochelle Feinstein's vibrant work, which can raise the pulse if viewers follow where the artist would take them: painting that does not pacify, but is an event, an experience of the world.
Text by Ines Goldbach

...the answer comes through the painting. **Rochelle Feinstein in conversation with Ines Goldbach.** An interview that began in March 2018.

Ines Goldbach (IG): I would like to start our conversation with paintings you are working at the moment and which started about one, two years ago — works that deal with maps. Maps can help us to navigate or to orientate ourselves: physically, within landscapes, cities and countries, as well as intellectually within certain topics. Do your maps give this kind of orientation within our daily life?

Rochelle Feinstein (RF): Historical maps drew my attention quite recently. Before and after the 2016 US election, perhaps like many others, I must have looked at maps at least a dozen times a day. While boundaries remained stable, the metrics changed as often. Each work of the last two years began by selecting familiar forms: heart, calendar, monochrome, trophy, etc. *Bleep* and *Plein Air I, II* are the only two works that use maps as a form thought or foundation. In the past, for numerous reasons, I wouldn't have chosen mapping as a starting point for a form investigation. Yes, as you say, maps help us to "navigate or orient ourselves". Since 2016 it's become increasingly impossible to do that. These paintings are maps of disorientation, obfuscation and deletion.

IG: On the other hand, regarding *Bleep* for example, there is an exact hint to a location. The image is blurred but there is an indication of a longitude and a latitude. Where does it lead to?

RF: The latitude and longitude locate the White House in Washington, D.C. I used a font culled from United States maps from the 1830s, notably made during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, who is the current president's favourite leader. Among the many similarities between the two are Jackson's Indian Affairs Act that led to the diaspora known as The Trail of Tears, and the expansion of the powers of the Executive office.



Rochelle Feinstein, *Plein Air I*, 2018, *Plein Air II*, 2018, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Who Cares*, 2016, *Who Cares*, 2017, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Ear to the Ground*, 2017, *Who Cares*, 2016, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Wall of Self*, 2017, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Who Cares*, 2017, *Bleep*, 2017, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Tropaeum Sul*, 2017, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Ear to the Ground*, 2017, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *Ear to the Ground*, 2018, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler



Rochelle Feinstein, *H(e)art Island*, 2017, *The Week in Hate*, 2016, installation view Kunsthau Baselland 2018, photo: Serge Hasenböhler

IG: At the Kunsthhaus Baselland, the work *Wall of Self* is also exhibited. The colour you use reminds one very much of the colour of skin. Does this also refer to a map? A mapping of the body?

RF: It is the colour of my skin and of white skin. The work began as a single painting that grew into a proportional 'family portrait'. The form of the monochrome, obviously, is deliberate. I think it's less map than portrait. A friend had used the phrase "wall of self" to describe someone she knew. I thought it striking, referring to the pandemic of narcissism disseminated through media, from selfies, 'likes', postings, to supremacist and populist factions.

IG: Do the special size and format of the painting — being as it is somehow divided into four square sections of different sizes — go together with this idea of a critical portrait filling a whole exhibition wall?

RF: Definitely. Each of the four slightly off-square rectangles appear to be the same size but in fact aren't. I recall, without looking at exact sizes, that each painting's dimensions vary by 2 to 4 inches, horizontally or vertically. I've constructed this wall of portraits, of selves; a unit of hegemonic whiteness. Each embodies imperceptible differences within the family group. Might these distinctions be enough to register change? Perhaps not in the present, but change is inevitable.

IG: Your new works, titled *Plein Air*, remind me also of broad landscapes, and maybe it is with good reason that the title *Plein Air* brings our thoughts as well back to the *plein air* painters of the 19th century in France who — in connection with the appearance of colours in tubes — went out into the fields to paint. Both of your works were painted in Rome. So on the one hand there is this tradition regarding the paintings and on the other hand there is this very thin, easy to get and somehow cheap material that you painted on and that breaks with this tradition. Is that what interests you here?

RF: What a fantastic symmetry! That hadn't occurred to me before. The portability of tubed oil paint for the 19th-century painter rhymes with my acquisition, via Amazon two-day Prime delivery, of this drop cloth (brand name: *Faithful*). Post-industrial to post-materiality. Perhaps this is a continuation of the tradition, and not a break?

IG: You're right. The availability of material wherever we may be includes a certain idea of freedom. On the other hand I think it's quite interesting that you work within a certain tradition of painting, and you're a painter, but at the same time you release yourself from this tradition, don't you think? Your topics cover humour, sex, politics and economy, personal themes and collective ones — always making it clear that working and discussing relevant questions does not necessarily mean using traditional methods or materials. How do you see that?

RF: I don't feel my work is a release from painting at all. In the late 1980s I was just as attached to painting, to my own intentions, however limited they may have been at that time. I was compelled by geometric abstraction. Abandoning those so-called principled conventions was not useful to my ends, which were to stretch, distort and hustle the canon into collaboration with external events ranging from lowbrow to wherever. It became a grappling with the authority of the grid. So, no, I don't think the traditions of painting preclude subject matters or materials.

IG: But on the other hand I guess that painting nowadays — or art per se — sometimes goes together with art fetishism, with an elitist object that has to be admired. I think that this is something you release your paintings from — not to elevate painting from everyday life but to connect art and life, with all its positive and negative sides, with all the political and social topics, the individual and collective themes.

RF: This art/cultural capital dilemma has existed for decades. Because of the historical weight of abstract painting for my generation, understandably, many went elsewhere, I loathed the idea of mastery, of power in art, so despite the weight, I stayed. Looking back, I believe the chaos of my childhood was a boot camp in unravelling signs, allowing me to approach the dichotomies and trichotomies of art and life. I tried to understand the relational complexities of subject-form-content, as present in images as in speech, through the abstruse medium of painting for two reasons. One, painting is a first love. Two, it was the most deeply ingrained, embattled cultural well to draw from and to transform as a visual language with currency. A somewhat arrogant ambition, I guess, but when I realized that painting could resemble an experience of the everyday while it also resembled abstraction, the deal was sealed.

IG: You just mentioned in connection with your new work the product's name *Faithful*. Titles, like the before mentioned *Wall of Self* or *The Week in Hate*, as well as words and slogans are very important within your work but also for the viewer who experiences both together. Language has the capacity not only to open up our imagination but to lead us in a certain direction as work titles do. What interests you regarding the parallelism of strong visual images and strong titles, slogans, sentences or words?

RF: Whatever the source of these words and phrases, each is a form of communication, or miscommunication, commonplace speech, colloquialisms, clichés that are lacking in emotion. If I'm lucky, they often stage my paintings. I've been collecting these enigmas, informally at first, since the 1990s, and in the last six or so years, as what I term flash cards. However, these are one-sided; the question is the phrase, the answer comes through the painting. *Ear to the Ground* is composed from a group of flash cards. Hundreds more are languishing in my studio. I suppose these enigmatic phrases are a way I can be in conversation with a constructed world of communications that change by the day.

IG: I guess also *H(e)art Island* is a good example of a painting that — at first sight — seems to be soft and positive but it also opens up a lot of questions. By reading the title a connection is made with the symbol of a heart that is within the painting but also with the history of the United States, when one thinks of Hart Island, New York, which contains the whole tragedy of the Civil War. This painting may be a good example of your work bringing beauty, humour and strong political questions into a single work.

RF: I'm very pleased by your double reading of the painting. I'm still not sure, but perhaps the heart shape is recognizable as an emotional signifier? That shape was a first step; a form that resembled an emoji, yet clearly was not an emoji. Originally a symbol of fidelity, it now expresses well over a hundred emotions. So what was this heart? Turning it sideways, attaching it canvas to canvas, created an anomaly, an unfamiliar topography, a volume stuffed and sagging on the bottom edge like ballast, and a new meaning to puzzle out. As you say, Hart Island is a burial site for the Civil War dead, and also an active burial site for the city's indigent population for the last 135 years through to the present day. It is accessible solely by arrangement with the city, and the families of the dead are the only visitors permitted. I visited the island in December 2016. The painting evolved over the course of a year; however, my visit was providential. I discovered what I term a good problem to work with. There is no (love) to be found on Hart Island but perhaps some grace and calm. If that feeling transmits beauty, I'm very pleased.

IG: As one last question I would like to give attention to the paintings *Who Cares*, which are also part of the exhibition here in Basel. On the one hand, these works open up the question of the original and the unique, and somehow the opposite on the other. *Who Cares* also sounds like an inner voice asking who cares if the painting is like this or that. Does this mirror as well your way of self-questioning, your way of working, not resting within a certain style, handwriting, etc?

RF: It's a pleasure to reply yes, yes, yes to all your observations. Speaking to the 'original' painting, it was constructed to embody liquidity, mass, surface and rupture. The basic stuff of painting, intentionally made to produce new originals. The inner voice, as you put it, spoke clearly from the start of this project, while other voices chimed in. 2016, the first year of hate, gave voice to 'who cares': about a painting, whatever it looks like, in these increasingly despotic conditions. The familiar phrase is customarily followed by a question mark; in this case it's omitted, but it is assumed. Some of those who've seen these works reply, 'I do care'. So then we talk. The black-and-white digital painting is rendered in half tone, the mode of offset printing in a pre-digital age. Old news. The original painting has become two files that have evolved as ongoing chapters of *Who Cares*. Files are sent to a venue; they are responsible for printing. My two conditions: print on canvas, and at the same size. I leave the result up to whatever printer is used. How to install them, with borders or not, with nails, magnets or grommets; keep them together, or display them in separate spaces; to these questions I reply, sure, yes, okay, do as you wish. Who Cares.

The exhibition were generously supported by Candice Madey, Dr. Georg und Josi Guggenheim Stiftung, Isaac Dreyfus Bernheim Stiftung as well as the partners of Kunsthhaus Baselland: kulturelles.bl, Gemeinde Muttenz, Migros Kulturprozent, burckhardtpartner, Anthony Vischer and werner sutter AG.

During Rochelle Feinstein's exhibition the two solo exhibitions by **Rossella Biscotti** and **Naama Tsabar** were also on display.

Curator: Ines Goldbach

Selected press coverage
Basellandschaftliche Zeitung, 19.4.2018
Badische Zeitung, 19.5.2018
Basler Zeitung, 23.5.2018
telebasel.ch, 20.5.2018
Radio X, 2.5.2018
artsy, May 2018
Kunstbulletin, 30.5.2018
Frieze, 11.6.2018
Artforum, November 2018

Robert Rauschenberg:
Monogram, 1955–59, oil,
paper, fabric, rubber tire,
taxidermy Angora goat,
and mixed mediums on
wood platform on four
casters, 42 by 63¼ by
64½ inches. Moderna
Museet, Stockholm.

All Rauschenberg
images this article
© Robert Rauschenberg
Foundation, New York.

The Artist's Artist

Robert Rauschenberg was enormously influential among artists of his own and subsequent generations. With his first posthumous museum retrospective currently at Tate Modern in London, six artists explain how the American pioneer affected them.

A Rauschenberg Symposium

PARTICIPANTS:

Mary Reid Kelley
Jessica Stockholder
Matt Saunders
Rochelle Feinstein
Sara Greenberger
Rafferty
Gedi Sibony



Rochelle Feinstein:
Hotspots, 2003–16,
twelve acrylic-on-
canvas paintings,
each 42 inches
square, with acrylic-
on-wood dots,
each 6 inches in
diameter. Courtesy
On Stellar Rays,
New York. Photo
Kirsten Kilponen.

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

Selected Robert Rauschenberg:

"I have quoted myself too often about this, but I always wanted my works—whatever happened in the studio—to look more like what was going on outside the window."

Interview with Paul Taylor, *Interview* magazine,
December 1990.

"You begin with the possibilities of the materials and then you let them do what they can do, so the artist is really almost a bystander while he's working."

Quoted in Emile De Antonio and Mitch Tuchman,
Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940–1970, New York Abbeville Press, 1984, p. 92.

"... whatever I've used and whatever I've done, the method was always closer to a collaboration with materials than to any kind of conscious manipulation and control."

Ibid, p. 204.

Condensed Robert Rauschenberg:

I always wanted my works in the studio to look more like what was going on outside the window, so the artist is really almost a bystander, the method was always closer to a collaboration with materials than to any kind of conscious manipulation and control.

****1. Exemplary Robert Rauschenberg:**

Revolver, 1967, I, II, III, IV, V, VI.

Silkscreen ink on five rotating plexiglass discs, metal base, electric motors, and control box, 78 by 77 by 24½ inches. Printed in RYB.

Printed images include: transducer, hand, dance performance,

playing cards (spade suit only), sparkplugs, hawk, photograph of earth, shipping terminal, repeated human figures, motor-cycle, camper, diagrams, tent, and the words (uppercase) SQUALL, AETHER, BOND, ARK, ONSHORE.

2. Exemplary Robert Rauschenberg:

Passport, 1967, from the portfolio "Ten from Leo Castelli." Silkscreen ink on five rotating plexiglass discs, 20 inches in diameter. Printed in CMYK.

Printed images include: mechanical things that move (cars, fans), birds; round things.

3. Citizen Robert Rauschenberg:

Panel: "Residual Rights for the Visual Artist—Are They Desirable?"

Monday, Oct. 28, 1974.

New York University, Loeb Student Center, New York.

Panelists: Paula Cooper, gallery owner; Lawrence Fleischman, director, Kennedy Gallery; Robert Scull, collector; and Ron Gorchov, Nathaniel Katz, Jacob Landau, Peter Max, and Robert Rauschenberg, artists.

I was a fan of Rauschenberg's from the time I first became aware, age twelve, that such a thing as a "living artist" existed. Painting wasn't my default move, it was my choice; I guess I liked its problems. Rauschenberg's work stood as a model for engagement with event, with material, with life and lives, through uncensored art-making. I attended this panel. Everyone argued with everyone, on the stage, from the audience. The issue at hand: artist resale and royalty rights, for which Rauschenberg was perhaps the key advocate. The discussion went on for a long time. When it ended, I found myself caught in an aisle, smashed chest-to-chest against Rauschenberg, who wore the softest



Rauschenberg:
Revolver II, 1967,
silkscreen ink on
five plexiglass discs,
metal base, electric
motors, and control
box, 78¼ by 77 by
24¼ inches.



REVIEW - 06 JUN 2017

Rochelle Feinstein

On Stellar Rays, New York, USA

BY JENNIFER KABAT

Words drip from a curtain:

'HEARTB/ROKEN/DEARM/EMBERS/HARTI/SLAND/DEARW/HITEP/EOPLE/HEARTS/HAPE/
FEEDB/ACKL/OOP/FEMINISTIC/ORIGIN/ALIS/M'. The words, though, are broken, handwritten, a
lamentation. The line breaks force me to re-read them. 'DEARM/EMBERS' scans as 'dream embers'.

'ORIGIN/ALIS/M', with its dangling 'M', could be shorthand for 'men' cut off from their 'origin', while 'ALIS' reads as 'allies'. In her show 'Who Cares' at On Stellar Rays, Rochelle Feinstein offers the dream embers of our present. Her curtain might be a shroud. The piece *Ear to the Ground* (2017) cuts the gallery in half, while the paintings in the show are all halves and doubles, diptychs and triptychs that capture the current sense of helplessness not just in politics or society, but in art too, when its ability to create change can seem limited. The show's title, 'Who Cares', is both a question and statement, as in 'who gives a damn'.



Rochelle Feinstein, *ZUI*, 2017, charcoal rubbing on paper, acrylic, ink on canvas, 96 x 114 cm. Courtesy: On Stellar Rays, New York

In Feinstein's work, language often floats free and becomes an abstraction itself. The curtain also reveals the way the show comments on the human condition – colour (of both paint and skin) and the social realm, care and empathy – as well as on how these terms are set out for us. On either side of the curtain, colour wheels spin out of control in *Off Color* (2017) and the paired canvases *Color Therapy* (2015), begun during the first Black Lives Matter protests. In *Color Therapy*, the paintings' colours bleed into each other and drip down the canvas; shards of a colour wheel point like missiles at the falseness of colour as code, science or even art. The work seems to collapse under the weight of a dark void at its centre, like a dying star.



Rochelle Feinstein, 'Who Cares', 2017, installation view. Courtesy of the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York; photograph: Kirsten Kilponen

The work in 'Who Cares' is mournful. Take *H(e)art Island* (2017), for example: it represents both love and a location. New York City's Hart Island has a disparate history as a Civil War prison, a women's sanatorium and a potter's field, the last resting place of the lost or indigent, where some 850,000 have been buried. Their family members have been waging battle with the city for the right to visit. In its shades of slate, the painting could be maudlin. A stuffed and stitched heart lies on its side, sagging at the centre, mapped with crisscrossing dotted lines like paths or sutures. Here is loss,

history and empathy in our emoji era where images can stand in for words and words are often emptied of their meaning. The painting's companion piece, *ZUI* (Zoomable User Interface, 2017), has honed in so close to the map it's collapsed, or become abstract.



Rochelle Feinstein, 'Who Cares', 2017, installation view, On Stellar Rays. Courtesy of the artist and On Stellar Rays, New York; photograph: Kirsten Kilponen

Feinstein abstracts objects that are 'enigmas' to her (the word appears more than once on the curtain) in order to grapple with their meaning. As seen in 'In Anticipation of Women's History Month', her 2016 European touring retrospective, she's used feminism, politics, the work of other artists and even reproduction and abstraction itself as her starting points. In her 2011 show 'The Estate of Rochelle F', Feinstein plumbed mortality and the Great Recession as she broke apart, remade and reused her own work (and works other artists had given to her), as if the gallery were a garage sale. This process is personal and essayistic, often inflected with both anger and humour. Now the work is tackling darker subjects, and I keep thinking about 'ORIGIN' and 'M', those dangling men and a country. Today that ORIGIN and M – the Originalists, a large camp in the Republican Party, want to return to a literal reading of the US Constitution. Which again begs the question: Who Cares? Particularly in an era when care can be fleeting, professed with ease on social media but lacking real substance, while feeds cycle through news fake and otherwise, celebrity and punditry, protest and the personal.

Jennifer Kabat is a writer based in upstate New York, USA. A recipient of the Creative Capital / Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for criticism, she teaches at New York University and is working on an essay collection called *Growing Up Modern*.

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MAY 8, 2017

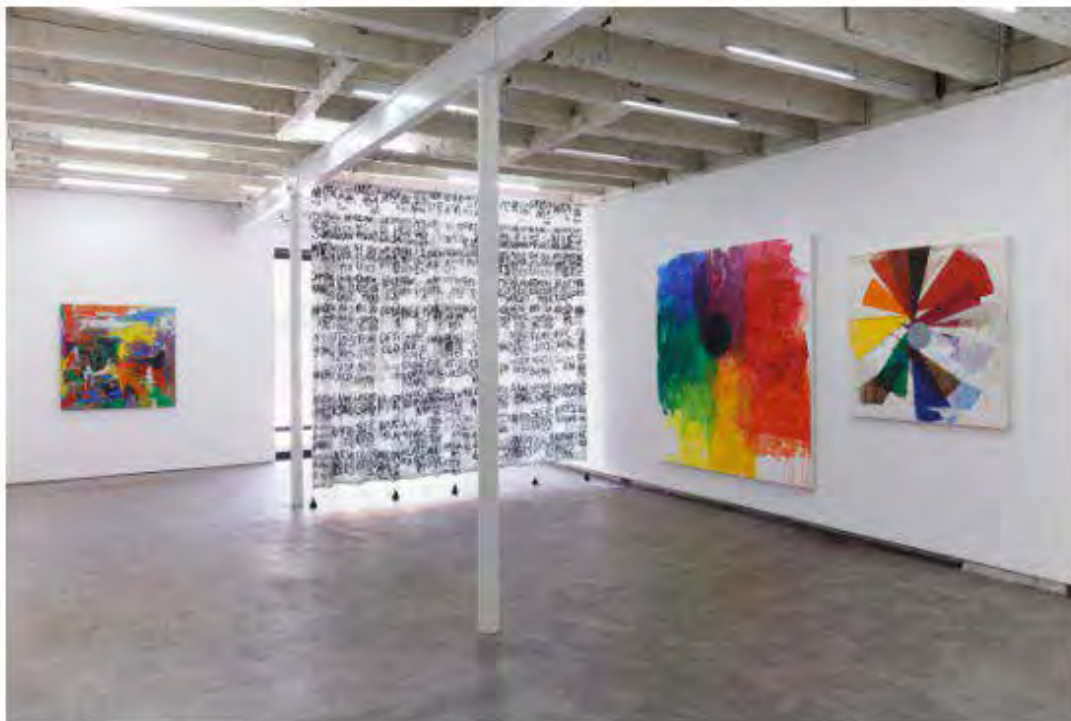
THE NEW YORKER



MAY 3 - 9, 2017

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART



Photograph by Kirsten Kilponen. Courtesy the Artist and On Stellar Rays

Rochelle Feinstein

Painterly joie de vivre and political malaise face off in Feinstein's new show, which is ti-tled "Who Cares." Spoiler alert: apathy loses. "Off Color," a big square canvas featuring brightly colored trapezoids in pinwheel for-mation, greets visitors with a wow at the door. In other works, Feinstein tempers ebullience with encroaching darkness. A white curtain is emblazoned with words and phrases lifted from political news coverage, a tempest of lan-guage in the artist's handwriting. In the scene-stealing "H(e)art Island," a misty gray en-croaches on a maplike abstraction, embellished with a hand-sewn heart shape. Named for Hart Island, the historic New York location of a now defunct psychiatric hospital and a potter's field, it's a melancholic tribute to the city's forgot-ten. *Through May 14. (On Stellar Rays, 213 Bow-ery, at Rivington St. 212-598-3012.)*

PREVIEWS



GENEVA

"ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: IN ANTICIPATION OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH: SELECTED WORKS"

Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève

January 29–April 24

Curated by Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee

The world needs change, and Feinstein is a motherfucking cashier. She seizes abstract painting with her bare hands and injects it with wit and wisdom, redefining its borders to include a riotous intermix of moods and subjects. She gets her hands dirty, shoving the grid around and voraciously appropriating anything that interests her: napkins, Barry White songs, storage systems, kitty cats, and feelings of revenge. In doing so, Feinstein calls the whole world into question, and her work elicits nothing short of new feelings. Curators Stroun and Barshee are smart enough to mount the first comprehensive retrospective of her work, a survey of seventy-seven pieces that chronicles twenty-five years of complex production—so get your ass on a plane. *Travels to the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, June 7–Sept. 18; Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany, Dec. 3, 2016–Feb. 12, 2017.*

—Amy Sillman

Rochelle Feinstein

STÄDTISCHE GALERIE IM
LENBACHHAUS, MUNICH
Daniela Stöppel

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN is always reinventing her sources. Born in 1947, she only started experimenting with an abstract style of painting in the 1990s, consciously developing a practice equally receptive to history, everyday objects and language, and personal experience. Twenty-five years of her art can now be seen in her first extensive retrospective, "Rochelle Feinstein: I Made a Terrible Mistake," curated in Munich by Stephanie Weber. (The exhibition opened in Geneva and will travel to Hannover, Germany, next month and to New York in 2018, with different curatorial permutations and show titles along the way.) In Feinstein's work, life crashes into art's history in amusing or nostalgic ways—sometimes quite literally, as in the 1996 print on linen *Dinner Party*, in which a seating arrangement clusters around a Malevichesque black square. Painting's power to build and revise narratives is underscored by such works as *The Estate of Rochelle F.*, 2009, from her series "The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009–2010, in which the title is messily adhered to sections of black and white canvas tacked onto a stretcher frame, suggesting a kind of tautological "pre-posthumous" oeuvre; or *Love Vibe*, 1999–2014, in which the words LOVE YOUR WORK are written in mirror image in speech balloons stretched across a group of paintings, as an

empty signifier of approval given to an artist or a sly mimic of a self-help mantra. If the artist belongs to a generation of artists born in the '60s, her pictures are not so much reactions to postmodernist strategies of appropriation as visual fragments that have broken off from modernism and made their own journey, remaining firmly fixed on the lodestar of painting.

The first room of the exhibition in Munich offers a case in point: It features the multipart mixed-media installation *I Made a Terrible Mistake*, 2002–2005, which includes references to Barry White and Michael Jackson (whose chagrined response to the question of why he held his baby over a hotel balcony in 2002 is the title of this work and show), along with colorful club lighting and a disco ball, photographs, and videos, and gives the entertaining but not entirely correct impression of a pop culture mash-up. In the galleries that follow, however, the real focus becomes clear: Feinstein's interest in the compositional traditions of panel painting, in the recording of ephemeral events, in the possibilities of abstraction and painterly techniques (including the picture-within-a-picture), in the relation of style to subject, the role of the art market, the question of artistic authenticity, and revision in one's own practice.

This harnessing of painting's classical possibilities is particularly striking in *Before and After*, 1999, a twelve-part installation: While a series of differently sized paintings shows a typical studio scene before an exhibition, with monochrome works leaning against and hanging on the wall, another large painting depicts the same works after the exhibition, now covered in bubble wrap and stored on space-saving racks. Feinstein again chooses the medium of painting to demonstrate this extreme difference in an artwork's affective capacity. In so doing, she not only adds another level of reflection on the system of valorization that is art but also generates new material for that valorization, which can itself be exhibited and sold. Moreover, these works' particular linear and monochrome modes of representation recall both comic-book

illustrations and nonrepresentational painting, making them simultaneously part of two different systems, characterized by a *both-and* rather than an *either-or*. Feinstein assimilates known subjects into her work, digesting and expelling them again in fractured and hybrid form, as the title of an almost-classic grid painting executed in dirty brown tones—*Same Shit, Different Day*, 1990—suggests.

Through painting, Feinstein brings her subjective and private experience—as an artist, a woman, a traveler, a lover, and a citizen—to a wider world. The tea towel stuck to *Flag*, 1993, whose checked pattern is continued in the painting that surrounds it, becomes a feminist sideswipe at female creativity and the "domestic" realm to which

Her pictures are not so much reactions to postmodernist strategies of appropriation as visual fragments that have broken off from modernism and made their own journey, remaining firmly fixed on the lodestar of painting.

artists like Elizabeth Murray have sometimes been relegated; at the same time, a dish towel could also be interpreted as a prefabricated grid, as in the work of Konrad Lueg in the '60s. In *Geography*, 1994, a giant splash of white paint becomes a spreading disaster and an allusion to the threat of AIDS (the artist has commented that the splash refers to "the time the condom broke," while the expansion of paint/sperm seems to anticipate the geographic spread of the disease); in *Travel Abroad*, 1997–98, the diagram of a trip across Europe is filled with receipts from restaurants and tickets from museums. In each case, these canvases successfully *continued on page 304*

STÖPPEL/FEINSTEIN *continued from page 274*

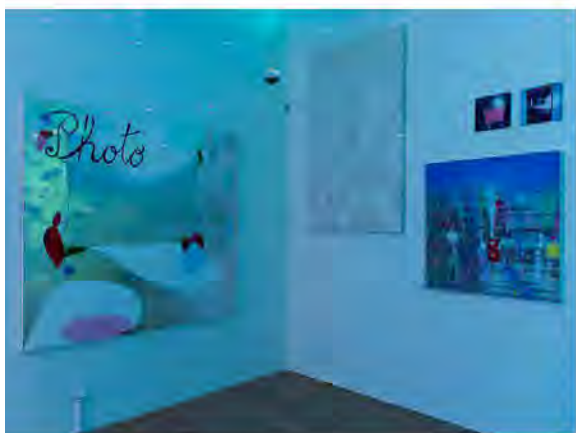
manage to treat their titles and personal contexts not as subjects within painting, but rather as attributes that make the picture itself part of the process of generating meaning.

By introducing external content—from language and expressions to household sundries—into her canvases in a jarring, almost offensive way, Feinstein sets her oeuvre against the essentialist works of the Abstract Expressionist and Color Field painters, and apart from the legacy of dandyish abstraction in the generation of Michael Krebber, et al. Feinstein amalgamates her chosen content so intensely with her chosen form that her work is not just a more or less symbolic reference to painting (or a poor rip-off), but a necessary, progressive way of coping with the emotional impact of the content of form and the form of content. All the while, she remains committed to the fundamental possibility that painting not only might be a transgressive or ironic act—"bad" painting in both senses of the word—but a transformative process. □

The Rochelle Feinstein retrospective, curated by Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, travels to Kunstgesellschaft, Hannover, Germany, where it is curated by Christina Vigh, Dec. 3, 2016–Feb. 12, 2017, and to the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, where it is curated by Antonio Sergio Bessa, June 27–Sept. 22, 2018.

DANIELA STÖPPEL IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AT LUDWIG-MAXIMILIANS-UNIVERSITÄT MÜNCHEN. (SEE CONTRIBUTORS.)


Translated from German by Nathaniel McBride.



From left: Rochelle Feinstein, *I Made a Terrible Mistake*, 2002–2005, mixed media. Installation view. Rochelle Feinstein, *Flag*, 1993, oil and linen on linen, 42 x 42". Rochelle Feinstein, *Love Vibe* (detail), 1999–2014, oil on canvas, six parts, each 74 x 74".



THE BIG PICTURE

By *Faye Hirsch*  August 31, 2016 4:58pm

Rochelle Feinstein is tough on painting while remaining a true believer. Work by work, she seeks to reinvent it, honoring the familiar structures of high modernism—the grid, the monochrome, a critique of the frame—by taking them down a peg. Following a cross-Atlantic trajectory of artists, from Duchamp to Rauschenberg and beyond, who engage the contingencies of daily existence, Feinstein brings to her painting a range of materials and content, no matter how incongruous or low, that amuse and move her. Language plays a central role and dark humor is one of her constants, as she forces abstraction to accommodate life's petty humiliations, fluctuating tastes, and mundane terrors. Her paintings feel personal, not only because we sense they matter so much to her, but because they insist upon our reaction. “love your work” six paintings exclaim in a cheerful font invented by Feinstein; we can read the words as command or advice (“Love Vibe,” 1999–2014). Or, since they are written backward in speech bubbles, as if emanating from us, the words can serve as an indictment of our own mindless blandishments. Think about what you see and say: this is the message she urges upon us.

A clutch of European curators and critics have recognized in Feinstein a spirit more akin to Continental iconoclasts like Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen than to many of her US peers who started showing in the late '80s; her conceptual leanings seem to slot easily into the discourse of post-structuralist and political theory. ¹ Indeed, Feinstein is having a European moment, with a sizable retrospective that originated at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève in January 2016 and is currently installed at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. It travels to Hannover before coming to New York in June 2018. ² She has shown recently in Zurich, at Galerie Francesca Pia, was brought to Art Basel this summer by the London gallery Vilma Gold, and will have a solo at London's White Cube in fall 2017.

The contents of the retrospective vary slightly from venue to venue, depending on the size of the exhibition space (Geneva showed seventy-two works, Munich has forty-two), and each show carries a different subtitle, named for a painting or installation on view. Given the artist's mercurial practice, these variations feel apt. I saw the Lenbachhaus iteration, subtitled “I Made a Terrible Mistake,” at its opening this summer. The museum's curator, Stephanie Weber, manages to convey the arc of Feinstein's career despite having room for only about half of the seventy-seven objects on tour. And more: Weber brings out an often unrecognized undercurrent of pathos in Feinstein's work, one that touches on the frustrations of a life in art and on the artist's race with mortality. It's always been there—the melancholy within Feinstein's edginess—but, focusing on a few groups of paintings and several discrete installations, Weber accords it precedence.

The show begins in the late 1980s, when Feinstein had already thrown out “nature, a suggestion of human forms, generalized architectures, saturated color,” as she says, to start from scratch—turning to the grid as a point of departure:

I had used a gridded format consistently since my student days without knowing precisely how to use it. I went back to the basics to find out how and why, step by step. Simultaneously, I had the ambition to record a present-time filled with eating, walking, sex; on the experience of being in the world—while remaining an abstract painter. As I dumped the idea of developing a signature style, the limits I set for each work upped the ante for the next piece: each painting had to be discrete; it had to have a subject that comes from normal, stupid life. No repeats, no refinements. ³

Over the next decade, Feinstein discovered a seemingly inexhaustible potential for revelatory content in her initial point of reference, the grid. At first her paintings were one-offs, like *Flag* (1993), its dirty red-and-white-checked dishtowel a “found” grid placed within a more wobbly hand-drawn net of blotchy orange strokes. As Weber writes in the catalogue, the painting alludes to Jasper Johns but also, in its abjection, to Mike Kelley's *Janitorial Banner* (1984); some observers at the time seized on it as a “feminist gesture.” ⁴ Feinstein responded with *Find Your Own Damn Voice* (1994), in which she placed small reproductions of her own grid paintings in small square plastic sheaths and Velcroed them onto a canvas—in a grid.

The artist then began working in series. “The Wonderfals” (1990–97), a group of fifteen paintings currently in the Munich exhibition, adduces the ironies of an overused adjective. She recycled leftover red and green paint in the last few days of 1990 for *It’s a Wonderful Life*, creating an ugly holiday plaid as (in part) an indictment of Christmas (and the film). In *A Wonderful Place to Live* (1994) she repeatedly collaged rochelle, illinois 61068 within the black bars of a grid enclosing bare linen squares, reinventing a banal midwestern town as though it were named for herself—an absurdist self-aggrandizement. *Wonderful Sex* (1992) attaches to the canvas a souvenir dishtowel printed with images of presidential libraries, which are reiterated over the surface as repeating red and black shapes blotted with blue—a witty mess inspired by Bill Clinton’s infidelities but implicating the rest of the presidents as well. After a terrible vacation with a lover, she made *Wonderful Vacation* (1994), a striated Rorschach blot in green and blue in which the two halves seem to turn their backs on each other. 5

In the early 2000s, Feinstein increasingly incorporated photography and video, and turned away from the grid as a singular preoccupation. “*I Made a Terrible Mistake*” is a large group of works dated from 2002 to 2005 that includes video, sound, colored lighting, and a dizzying array of paintings of all sizes, some displayed on the wall and others resting against it. The artist first exhibited this series in a lower Manhattan storefront in 2009 in an even larger version. 6 The title quotes pop star Michael Jackson, who offered the sentence as an apology for dangling his young son from a balcony in Berlin in 2002, to the horror of fans and press gathered outside. One of the most striking pieces in the installation is a blue and pink tempera painting reading auditorium, with the more precise name of the place, michael jackson auditorium (indicated on an accompanying plaque), partially obliterated by two rectangles. This *damnatio memoriae* was not Feinstein’s invention but an actual phenomenon, as the sponsors of the auditorium covered up the name after Jackson was accused of being a child molester. 7

Another preoccupation of “*I Made a Terrible Mistake*” is late soul singer Barry White—he of the sexy lyrics and velvety bass, whom we hear in a faint audio. Among the loveliest paintings in the room are canvases rendering the refractions of a disco ball. In *Deeper, Deeper* (2003), they flicker over painted lines of borderline obscene White lyrics; in the white-on-white *DJ Purity* (2004), they allude both to the ’70s dance culture that Barry White pervaded and to the iconic painting by Kasimir Malevich. The installation, however chaotic, resonates with the perverse delights of debased heroes and bad practice—call it “wrong,” or GNORW, the title of a lurid 2002 canvas with those letters painted on a nasty-looking striped pillow stuck onto the surface.

Such “missteps” are humorous, to be sure, but this is a humor rooted in the poignancy of human existence.

The disgraced Jackson, a filthy old dishtowel or pillow—Feinstein elevates her subjects even as she offers them up to ridicule. Laughing almost with embarrassment at what we see, we are also strangely heartbroken; we see her works as rooted in human stresses and failings, from soured relationships to the weight of unsold inventory. Her unrelenting criticality produces the darkest kind of hope—evidence of the will to keep creating even in despair (“I can’t go on, I’ll go on,” as Beckett famously wrote in *The Unnamable*). Feinstein’s preoccupations are, as literary scholar Robert Alter observed of Saul Bellow and Itzik Manger, “the grossness, the poignancy, and the sadness of things flawed in the world below.” In a 1972 essay, Alter identified the bleak optimism in Jewish humor:

The perception of incongruity implies the perception of alternate possibilities, humor peeking beyond the beleaguered present toward another kind of man and another kind of time; for the very aura of ridicule suggests that it is not, after all, fitting for a man to be this pitiful creature with a blade of anguish in his heart and both feet entangled in a clanking chain of calamities. 8

Out of failure the artist scrapes an odd form of dignity, as manifested in creative practice itself. For example, in 2009, in the wake of worldwide economic collapse, Feinstein decided she would, for a time, make work entirely from stuff already in her studio, including earlier paintings that she painted over or cut up and reused. It was unseemly, she felt, to do otherwise. Moreover, like so many New York artists, she had been forced out of her studio; she decided to empty, as well, two storage spaces. The sheer volume of unsold material weighed her down, as it does many an artist as the years pass. The result was “*The Estate of Rochelle F.*,” a “pre-posthumous” (her phrase) group of paintings, numerous explanatory text drawings, and a printed portfolio.

It was not the first of Feinstein’s works referring to the physical and psychic toll taken on artists who feel their careers will never properly launch. Perhaps the most poignant work in the exhibition is the multipart *Before and After* (1999). It consists of a dozen canvases. Eleven of them constitute the “*Before*”: some hung, others leaning against the wall, they self-referentially depict, in exceedingly pale pastel colors, blank stretched canvases leaning against a wall and each other. The twelfth work is painted in red and white; it shows studio storage racks, with canvases slotted into shelving and more works implied by a flat file at the lower right. This is the “*After*,” the end of a narrative of seemingly unvalued productivity. Or is it? The strength of this work lies in its allure: the delicately tinted canvases, with their allusion to modernist monochromes, are charged with meaning. The colors imply changing light, as if these paintings have carried with them other spaces and times, a kinetic passage. It is the ultimate representation of an artistic practice that revels in its own unfolding. Alienated from a system in which labor’s fruits in the form of earnings will seemingly never accrue to the maker, the artist claims her work—indeed, “loves” her work. Irony of ironies, so does Lenbachhaus, which has acquired *Before and After* for all posterity.

“*Rochelle Feinstein: I Made a Terrible Mistake*,” at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, through Sept. 18. The retrospective, with varying content and subtitles, then travels to the Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Dec. 3, 2016–Feb. 12, 2017, and the Bronx Museum of the Arts, June 27, 2017–Sept. 22, 2018.

Endnotes

1. Kerstin Stakemeier treats Feinstein’s art as an “affective” practice, interpreting it via Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Lee Edelman, and others, in “*Affectionate Expropriation*,” Stephanie Weber et al., ed., *Rochelle Feinstein*, Cologne, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2016, pp. 14–18. See also “*The Gang and the Post-Gang Painting of Albert Oehlen: A Conversation Between Rochelle Feinstein and Kerstin Stakemeier*,” in Achim Hochdörfer, ed., *Albert Oehlen Painting*, Cologne, Buchhandlung Walther König, 2013, pp. 62–101.

2. In addition, a survey of the work in the form of an artist’s book, *Rochelle Feinstein: I’m With Her* was issued by Black Dog Publishing, London, in 2016. It contains facsimiles of catalogue essays and reprints of articles from the past twenty-five years, including Carrie Moyer’s “*Modernist at the Disco*,” published in *Art in America*, September 2008, pp. 92–93, and a story I wrote, titled “*Sandy’s Day*,” for Feinstein’s 1996 exhibition catalogue *Satocpyc*, New York, Bill Maynes Gallery (facsimile pp. 30–45).

3. Quoted in Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee, “*Love Vibe: A Conversation with Rochelle Feinstein*,” in Weber et al., p. 26.

4. Stephanie Weber, in Weber et al., pp. 68–72.

5. The artist recounts this incident in Stroun and Barshee, p. 27.

6. The exhibition was installed in a lower Manhattan storefront under the auspices of Art Production Fund/Lab Space; for images, see *Rochelle Feinstein: I’m With Her*, pp. 58–85.

7. Jackson died during the run of Feinstein’s exhibition, and some visitors arrived thinking it had been devised as a memorial, a situation that transformed the whole show, in one sense, into a mistake.

8. Robert Alter, “*Jewish Humor and the Domestication of Myth*” (1972), reprinted in Sarah Blacher Cohen, ed., *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humor*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1987, p. 26.

monopol

MAGAZIN FÜR KUNST UND LEBEN

Abstraction goes Disco



How much hedonism can painting tolerate? Can an affair become an image? What can abstraction offer besides its *Erhabenheit*? Other artists have the success; Rochelle Feinstein has the better questions. Now the native New Yorker is finally honored with an extensive retrospective.

“Thinking today, finishing tomorrow”, once said Martin Kippenberger, but it was somehow visible in his images, it became a problem when his punk anti-intellectualism turned into a cliché. Although her work shares much of Kippenberger’s wit, directness and recklessness, Rochelle Feinstein’s problem seems to be quite the opposite, that is, she never quite finishes thinking.

Feinstein’s art is a bit impertinent, a challenge, maybe also an expression of a wonderfully misguided career choice: Within the field of conceptual art, where thoughts take precedence, she most certainly would have been welcomed with open arms. But until very recently few in painting could make any use of her work.

Only now, around 70 years of age, a great retrospective is bestowed on her. The of a long misunderstood genius? Of course not! Feinstein rejects the genuflection and asks us to dance.

The first room of the show, which premiered at the Centre d’Arte Contemporain in Geneva, and is now at display at Munich’s Lenbachhaus, is decorated in the style of a discotheque from the 1970s. Everyone came: concretion and abstraction, popular culture and art history, the personal and the political. A few pictures lean against the wall, much like they got too exhausted by all the

dancing and therefore toppled over to the side. Others turn their back on us, as if they had nothing to say. Glamour and sex are in the air, the soul singer Barry White whispers salaciously from a video loop. A fan whirrs in another video, spotlights illuminate the images in ever-changing colors. A rotating disco ball is chained in front of a monochromatic black canvas. "Abstraction goes disco," explains Rochelle Feinstein. What is going on here?

It's the magic of the club: On the inside hierarchies will break up, hierarchies between day and night, men and women, you and me, high and low. Contradictions suddenly become endurable. Thus in Feinstein's installations icons of pop (Barry White, Michael Jackson) encounter icons of painting like the black square (Kasimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt), sex-appeal, hedonism, *Erhabenheit*. What is an icon, what are the conventions it follows? Does it appeal to our gut, our feelings, our mind? Feinstein seems to be less concerned with ironic equations than with a re-working of the surfaces of the iconic; with restoring its inherent magic. Thus the color on her monochromatic black canvas was literally scraped off with her fingernails in order to release the underlying threads of gold and silver which are running down the surface like tears. Grief and glamour are closely related, explains Rochelle Feinstein. But can one confront noble abstraction with so much affection? Counter-question Feinstein: Wasn't Malevich's picture initially supposed to decorate an opera?

The engagement with the history of abstraction and its generous combination with references to pop culture and personal experiences can be understood as one characteristic of Feinstein's oeuvre. She just cannot be reduced to an artistic hallmark. "I have never been interested in ingenuity and stylistic refinement, although these are certainly the criteria by which art is usually taught, analyzed and perceived", explains Feinstein. "This feels unnatural to me, it doesn't correspond to the way I think about painting."

Hence it doesn't seem surprising that the art market had little use for Feinstein's work. Whoever expects art to possess the security of a safe investment, or, the steady profit development of the stock exchange, will most certainly not bank on this anarchist, because she also tends to blunder. As an example, a collector knocked on her door by the end of the 1990s. Feinstein initially showed him gigantic group of unsold art works; he immediately cut and ran – she got the idea for her picture *Before and After* – which depicts her storage: Self-demolition as a creative act.

And Feinstein even goes further. In *The Estate of Rochelle F.* (2010) she presents her own "pre-posthumous" estate. The work was created as a reaction to the financial crisis, Feinstein clarifies, when she found herself forced to give up one of her archives simply because she couldn't afford the rent any longer. "I wanted to know: What does the recession mean for people, what does it mean for me as a painter? What does it mean to make a living?" She drew together unfinished works of art, drafts, ephemera, photographs, and newspaper in order to create something new. Her "estate", she explains, links works from 1995 to 2009 to form a "non-stylistic style."

Feinstein, who was born in New York in 1947 and who kind of resembles Susan Sontag given her grey streaks in her otherwise black hair (she doesn't want to be photographed for this essay), initially came to painting through evening courses. In the late-1960s, when the medium was still under the spell of Abstract Expressionism, Feinstein worked for the advertisement agency Doyle Dane Bernbach, which served as a model for the TV series "Mad Men". Making money during the day, dabbling with the canvas at night. "Commercial illustration is based on the direct exchange between the creators, the product, the client, and the consumer. But painting, it seemed to be behind a thick wall, but I was unbelievably attracted to it. I didn't understand its conventions, and I am basically still trying to decipher its incredible possibilities."

Feinstein fights that battle alone. Neither as a student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn or the University of Minnesota nor as a professor of painting at Yale, where she teaches since 1994, could she reconcile with the idea of a “signature style” or of attaching to a specific art movement. Conceptual art: For Feinstein completely correct in its revolt against the fetish art, but she wanted to incorporate this thought process into painting itself. The political activism of the women’s movement: For Feinstein absolutely worthy of support, but she didn’t want her art to be usurped by it.

Feinstein finished “Flag” in 1993, a work that alludes to Jasper John’s eponymous painting. Here, Feinstein combines the typical modernist grid with a common, off-the-shelf dishtowel, that she incorporated in the picture’s bottom right corner.

As some female artists identified this gesture as a feminist statement, Feinstein reacted impatiently and created a new work. Her *Flag* (1993) picture is now shown alongside a painting composed of reproductions of other works, placed into plastic bags that are attached onto the canvas, much like a chronological postcard rack. The work’s title: *Find Your Own Damn Voice* (1994).

Her work titles consistently pose such demands. *Make it Behave* (1990) for example; it shows a reddish square that somewhat maladroitly surrounds the canvas, as if Feinstein isn’t fully in control of the color field painting’s heroic gesture. Or *Smile* (1994), in which she combines the characteristic orange of the smiley-symbol with the well-known smile of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. Who is addressed here? Who exercises one’s authority: the artist or the spectator? Are we the audience or does the painting speak to itself?

Two languages, two systems are conflicting here. On the one hand it is the language of everyday life as “something that is common and accessible to everyone, something that exists independent of painting”, as Feinstein elaborates. On the other hand there is the history of painting, the conventions of its composition, the modes of perception that it imposes on us: Who is this *Mona Lisa* to tell us how to look at her?

At least since the 1980s painters have sabotaged the idea of pure abstraction, as Feinstein concedes: “There was conceptual abstraction, the Neo-Geo-Movement, contaminations of “pure” painting. But for me they still followed the same ground rules for abstraction. That wasn’t enough; I didn’t just want to expand the history of art, I wanted – and this might sound a little presumptuous – a systematic change. I wanted the painting to originate from life and to reverberate to life in return.”

Painting as a chronicle for stories like this one: During the mid-80s to the beginning of the 90s, Feinstein’s had a boyfriend. They separated, and she learned shortly thereafter that he was a serial philanderer, cheating in NY, across the US, and in Europe. Those events that didn’t deter him from sending Feinstein an electricity bill of 23 USD, asking pay her half of this amount, and signing this letter “Love, Paul.” Her picture “Something for Everyone” uses an airline map to diagram and index this betrayal.

Gradually, Feinstein’s generic principal becomes clearer now. She translates everyday feelings into the language of abstraction. Recalling Mondrian, Malevich, Rothko, Reinhardt, and Agnes Martin she reexamines what their repertoire of forms can offer a today’s New York woman of the 21st century beyond the noble ideal of revolution, *Erhabenheit* and transcendence. Can abstraction embody banal feelings like jealousy, love, sex, and anger?

Stylistic incoherence becomes a protective cloak: only that way can Feinstein protect the feeling from kitsch, the political from the gesture, the painterly from drying up. Feinstein knows that art is bigger than her. That's the reason why every thought, as soon as being articulated, and every image, as soon as being painted, must be revisited anew.

"People often ask me: What is your favorite piece?", Feinstein recalls. "I can never answer that. If a piece does its job, if it functions, then I am satisfied."

Which job?

"Art History organizes, neatens, pigeonholes our experiences and feelings. In life, sometimes we oppress and sometimes we are oppressed. I want to find the terrain where both collide."

Feinstein loves painting, that's why she demands everything from it. She rejects old myths, opens them up for new meanings; she studies the material's elasticity, negotiates which landscapes she can possibly cover based on her capacities. *Geography* was realized in 1993/1994 as Feinstein was surrounded by grief and death. The AIDS-crisis was at its peak, "it was during that time", as she phrases it, "a condom burst during intercourse." Feinstein reached for a bucket of white paint and repeatedly emptying it over a canvas to see if it rips apart. It was tight, but the canvas held up.

In Anticipation of Rochelle Feinstein

Natalie Hegerl / MutualArt

FEBRUARY 3, 2016



Rochelle Feinstein, *GNORW*, 2002, acrylic, hand-made pillow, photo collage, 106.7 x 106.7cm. Courtesy of On Stellar Rays, New York and the artist. Photo: Adam Reich.

In the pages of *Art in America* a few years ago, art critic Sarah Schmorleir opined, "Somebody had better hurry up and give Feinstein the retrospective she so clearly deserves." The wait is now over, as the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève opens Rochelle Feinstein's retrospective exhibition, "In Anticipation of Women's History Month," curated by Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee. This is a retrospective with wings, so to speak, for it will travel to two other venues across Europe—Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, and kestnergesellschaft, Hannover—before alighting in New York, at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, in 2018. The retrospective coincides with the release of *I'm with Her*, a cohesive view of Feinstein's career, put out by black dog publishing in partnership with On Stellar Rays, in the form of an artist's book. An additional monograph, featuring new scholarly essays and conversations with the artist and the retrospective's curators, is due out later this year.



Rochelle Feinstein, *Geography*, 1994, oil, mixed media on linen, 106.7 x 106.7cm. Private collection, New York. Photo: Adam Reich.

How would one settle Feinstein's self-reflexive, sometimes self-cannibalizing oeuvre—a practice spanning 25 years, which mines both the artist's personal history, art history, and popular culture, moving between the mediums of painting, photography, video, and assemblage—in an arrangement of works on walls? The short answer is: thematically and non-chronologically. The longer answer may be that Feinstein's art refuses to settle into a given path or groove, but rather roves between styles and subjects, and as such, the exhibition follows different threads of interest through her works. This pattern perhaps follows from the artist's own objective, stated succinctly in an interview in *BOMB* from 2010: "I committed to the idea that a painting done in 1995 could be partnered with something from 2009, an a-stylistic 'style,' each appearing to have been made contemporaneously, yet with huge variables of content sourced from many quarters." It's not a huge stretch that her entire body of work belongs to one single project—Feinstein herself considers the possibility. Yet as the exhibition's title wryly suggests, this historicization and celebration of the artist's work, and the degree of success to which a mid-career retrospective can signify, is still set somewhere on the horizon—we are caught ever waiting "in anticipation" of it.



Rochelle Feinstein, *We Love You*, 2004, oil, aluminum paint on canvas, 121.9 x 162.5cm, Courtesy of On Stellar Rays, New York and the artist. Photo: Adam Reich.

At the start of the show, the painting *We Love You* (2004) greets the viewer with fragments of text drawn from the heartfelt adulations and insistent declarations of innocence written by Michael Jackson fans on homemade signs, in Feinstein's painting, floating and disembodied, in a sea of silver paint. Feinstein's investigation into the cult of Michael Jackson and the public love that surrounds him lends this first room its title: "I Made A Terrible Mistake," the phrase issued by the King of Pop in an apology following an incident involving the dangling of a baby over the balcony railing of a Berlin hotel. Love and regret are recurring themes in Feinstein's works, signaled by titles such as *Like I love You* and *Boo Fucking Hoo*, while Barry White's soothing baritone voice croons with lover's remorse in the video work *WhiteHouse*. These works articulate, as the curators put it, "the possibility of a fall from grace into grace," for the pop star, or for the artist. Not without certain ambiguous caveats, of course: next to a work that recounts the erasure of Michael Jackson's name from a school auditorium after his molestation allegations sits a painting titled *Painting's Littlest Victims* (2003), portraying two innocent-looking flowers, pansies, in a field of concentric circles framing them.



Rochelle Feinstein, *Painting's Littlest Victims*, 2003, acrylic, photo on canvas, 101.6 x 96.5cm, Courtesy of On Stellar Rays, New York and the artist. Photo: Adam Reich.

In an adjoining display on the same floor, Feinstein turns to look at her own work, in the project *The Estate of Rochelle F.* (2009-2011). After downsizing her studio space in 2008, Feinstein regarded the accumulation of painting supplies and materials as "usable 'assets' with unrealized potential," surplus materials from which she then made a body of work. Running along under the nine mixed-media paintings that comprise *The Estate of Rochelle F.* is *A Catalog of the Estate of Rochelle F.*, a series of ink drawings and collages that document each of the works in the "estate," with caption information, Xerox reproductions, and "curatorial notes."



Rochelle Feinstein, *The Estate of Rochelle F.*, 2009-2011, installation view, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2016. Photo: Gunnar Meier Photography.

Things get a bit more catty as the exhibition progresses. On the third floor, a 2013 diptych titled *Today in History* evidences many of Feinstein's interests in a tight package: geometry, repetition, personal effects, and a wonderfully ironic title. The two opposing compositions feature dramatically angled black and white stripes painted over and below a photograph, reproduced twice, of the artist's two cats, displaying terse feline demeanors. A few steps away from the canvases sits a modern chair, slightly shredded by cat claws. The work fairly bristles with energy.



Rochelle Feinstein, *Today in History*, 2013, oil on canvas and digital prints on vinyl, 231.1 x 365.8cm. Courtesy of On Stellar Rays, New York and the artist. Photo: Adam Reich.

This air continues with the suite of works called *Love Vibe* (1999-2014), centering on the phrase of idle adoration often heard in gallery settings: "Love your work." Feinstein's consideration of clichés continues with her many "wonderful" paintings—*Wonderful Country*, *Mr. Wonderful*, *A Wonderful Place to Live*—or with *Same Shit, Different Day* (1990), all abstract paintings with various takes on the modernist grid, which is just another cliché, it seems the artist is telling us. One blocky collage is knowingly titled *Grids R Us* (1992).



Rochelle Feinstein, *Love Vibe*, 1999-2014, installation view, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2016. Photo: Gunnar Meier Photography.

Feinstein's work might sound simple, but each expression of simplicity comes stripped down from more complex origins, a shell hinting at the many layers beneath. Personal experiences are embedded under glib phrases. In the work *Travel Abroad* from 1999, the words "O Sole Mio" point to a busy patchwork painting, perhaps signifying a productive loneliness, while the repeated question, "Feinstein, is that a German name or a Jewish name?" rendered in German script over black, red, and gold stripes, carries with it a veiled threat.



Rochelle Feinstein, *Travel Abroad*, 1999, installation view, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2016. Photo: Gunnar Meier Photography.

Feinstein's refined sense of humor and irony, suffused with a measure of self-deprecation and balanced with a critical view of wider cultural moments, are showcased to great effect throughout her oeuvre and throughout the exhibition. Her wry use of language and form point up the absurdities and deeper truths of both.



Rochelle Feinstein, *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, 2013, acrylic, oil, smalt, buttons on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4cm. Haim Family Collection. Photo: Adam Reich.

"In Anticipation of Women's History Month" runs from January 29 to April 24, 2016 at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Switzerland; from June 7 to September 18, 2016 at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany; from December 3 to February 2, 2017 at kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany; and from June 27 to September 22, 2018 at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York.

—Natalie Hegert



Whitney Biennial 2014

Rochelle Feinstein

to express our unique selves, which rises out of our sheer numbers, we are all the more quickly subsumed into the crowd. To go back to your earlier remark, Baudelaire's abdication of the traditional "subjective" lyric for more "objective" prose reflects this tension.

PD: At an opportune moment, one, the other, or both scratched "Jennifer V + Larry T Mr NYC 1991" into a freshly-poured slab of sidewalk in Chelsea. They encircled their declaration with a crude heart, and through said heart they drew an even cruder arrow. Twenty-two years later, I fell in love with what's at stake in that bit of extramarginal marginalia. The youthful sentiment, not to mention its execution, doesn't betray the money poured into the same gesture at the other end of the spectrum. Vast amounts of wealth and scholarship underwrite the inscription of civic heroes, deep-pocketed philanthropists, and A-list celebrities into our public spaces. Jennifer and Larry were not daunted. They added their unofficial incursion into the public record with the best of faith; I have no doubt.

DS: That reminds me of Georg Simmel's 1903 essay "The Metropolis and the Mental State," in which he wrote about the transformations he believed human beings were undergoing in their evolutionary progression toward newly urban creatures: the urban dweller's need to individualize him- or herself within a crowd of samenesses was radically reshaping and even deforming individual psychology, so he or she would start to exhibit "the strangest eccentricities." To Simmel, what was occurring through the development of the metropolis was nothing less than the "atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture"; this resulted in what he termed a "blasé attitude." These unofficial markers you are talking about are many things, but they are not blasé.

PD: "We two dear men, friends forever, were here. If you want to

know our names, they are Gaius and Aulus." "On April 19, I made bread." "Antiochus hung out here with his girlfriend Cithera." The graffiti of Pompeii is usually recounted because of its sexual and/or scatological content, but these examples, from the entrance-way to a bar (in the first case) and army barracks (the second two), show that the content runs a familiar gamut: friendship, hunger, love.

Can transcribing informal examples of public imprint into a more "official" medium have systemic reverberations? Would people ever care about Jennifer and Larry's proclamation? Do Jennifer or Larry care at this point? The possibility of an audience engaging with existential scratchings-in cement seems tenuous—there's less at stake than when appropriating the language of other markers, as we did with the Milwaukee plaque. In my personal brand of populism, I'd argue that there's something far more evocative in the names and sentiments unofficially representing us in our public space. There is essence.

DS: Well, I'm afraid that Robert Musil's remark "There is nothing in this world more invisible than a monument" applies to both. Official or unofficial, our eyes gaze past them. Unless, of course, as with you and me, one starts to take a systematic interest in them. Otherwise, their signs seem to refer to times and places and people caught up in a cyclical rhythm—of birth, death, love, war—that feels too remote and/or general to apply to us personally. Maybe there's a parallel with the recounting of dreams: nobody wants to hear about anyone else's dream unless they make an appearance in it. Memorials and monuments seem to belong to others' dreams (or nightmares).

PD: Nightmares of unnecessary information. That's the perfect image of a quagmire that is the glut of public inscription, all the resources that underwrite it, and the running-without-moving terror of attempting to differentiate ourselves by contributing to the collective pool.

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN speaks with JENNIFER KABAT

Jennifer Kabat: Can we talk about extinction and Lonesome George? How did he get the name Lonesome? Was he always lonely?

Rochelle Feinstein: I've been working simultaneously on two videos, each about different species but both about "the end." The first is *Toy George*. Lonesome George, a giant tortoise of a thought-to-be-extinct subspecies, was discovered on Pinta Island in 1972 by a ranger, Fausto Llerena. He became George's keeper—and he found him dead in June 2012, somewhere between 112 and 132 years old. Under Fausto's watch, George lived at the Darwin Project, Galapagos, both as a major tourist attraction and as part of a breeding study to keep the Abingdon Island subspecies alive. Attempts at reproduction failed, which may be why he was named Lonesome George, after the fifties

TV personality "Lonesome George" Gobel. Maybe they intended to put a light touch on George the tortoise's impending extinction. I've followed his "story" for years, first in print, later on the internet. George's remains are currently at the taxidermist's and will be on display this winter at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. All his visible parts will be intact except his eyes—

JK: His eyes? That seems really weird and almost like something around which you could do something, because the other elements of your piece involve voice, and somehow seeing—the eyes as the window to the soul—and

voice and who speaks seem movingly linked.

RF: Yes. The second video, *She Has a Name*, is about my mother, who was lost sometime in the late 1970s, never found, and presumed “extinct” sometime in the 1980s. Her “ending” is unknown. There are no records of her life; no census reports; no voting, criminal, medical, or death records, or any factual material to add form to her life. What I do have is an archive of home movies; a made-for-TV movie about schizophrenia, *Strange Voices*, made by a relative in 1987; latter-day Rotten Tomato reviews; and email documents accumulated on my laptop—the “motherboard” of the piece.

JK: So we have two losses that seem to add up to a larger sociopolitical context, involving media. With George, there’s the environment, and he’s evocatively connected to Darwin and all that Darwin represents; your mother’s story is pulled through a political landscape and a personal one.

RF: I wouldn’t dig into these narratives, or any, without faith in discovering a much larger dimension. I tend to start with an emotion in obvious and dumb ways. For example, my brother and I are the last of our line. While I’m not like George, I “can relate,” as a member of my species, to his single and childless status. Anthropomorphizing aside, the social and economic conditions of George’s story are not “adorable.” Beginning in the late nineteenth century, hunters decimated the tortoise population of Galapagos for meat and fuel, while the growing agricultural economy introduced goats and other livestock that ate the grass that was the tortoises’ food supply—a familiar narrative. My mother was schizophrenic. One of her many misfortunes was to be institutionalized during the years Nelson Rockefeller and Hugh Carey were governors of New York, at the onset of deinstitutionalization policies, when over 50 percent of the mentally ill population

were removed from hospitals and “returned to the community”—placed largely in squalid welfare hotels, with minimal medical and social services. My mother became extinct as a result of this social experiment.

JK: That story is achingly sad. The way you interweave these narratives and see them expansively is really moving. And there’s the schlocky TV movie—

RF: *Strange Voices* is the last place I ever wanted to go. I hate it. It’s sort of like emotional slumming . . . high on the bathos spectrum. I only saw it in its entirety three years ago. When it came out, in 1987, I was on the subway, reading the *Times* review of this movie about schizophrenia that seemed weirdly familiar—

JK: The review I found last week?

RF: Yeah. *Strange Voices*: the story of a young woman gone nuts, cowritten and coproduced by my cousin. I wasn’t told about the movie, not then and not since. When it showed up on YouTube, I downloaded parts until the data was removed for copyright infringement.

JK: That seems ironic.

RF: On eBay, I found a pristine VHS, from Denmark. Around that time, my brother found a pile of 8mm family movies. These started gelling as distinct elements in *She Has a Name*, a melodrama by and about my family that begins with three minutes of the made-for-TV movie, alongside the footage taken by my father of what he chose to film. To that, I’m adding my own on-screen presence. My question is: who owns this story—or who is the owner of any historical narrative or retelling of an event?

JK: Yes, the idea of story and narrative and who owns it—

RF: The internet in my case.

JK: I like how the media accretes in your work—in its collected

media, in its mediated on-screen experience, and in your narration. It becomes this thing about life but also about the nature of mediation.

RF: Yes, about mediations accumulated over time. Funny, I got an email today with the subject line “Search Results Matter.”

JK: Yes! As a fiction writer, I feel I’m always striving to reach a place where multiple ideas can exist in one piece, and I’m always failing. It pisses me off. I mean, I write about art in part because so many elements can coexist in a single piece. In fiction? I can’t reach that depth. Narrative is so straightforward, and truthfully I don’t often like fiction that isn’t. Essays, though, can compress many things and have elasticity.

RF: So why keep writing fiction? Maybe it shares with painting the “why does it still persist” question . . . All I can say is the results are not, often enough, compelling.

JK: I love fiction.

RF: I loved fiction. I don’t anymore because the narrative path moves from here to here to here [*indicating a straight line with her hand*]. Not sure what I’m learning on that path. Maybe a lot, maybe not much.

JK: Yes, life isn’t one straight heretothere story.

RF: And most fictional narratives are driven by one character’s story, despite the presence of multiple characters.

JK: But narrative in our day and age is thought of as so layered, especially with shifts in media. We see a continuum of passing stuff as viewers and rarely get stories with the considered richness that you’re bringing to these videos. Art can compress things. Like poetry . . .

RF: Compression. My low-res videos are really short, and they don’t do much. They do nothing, in fact. But I don’t want them

Rochelle Feinstein

to do the things the movies do. Probably because I think like a painter when making a moving image. The compression here may be comparable to a layering process in painting—real-time application of material and thinking spatially in two dimensions.

JK: Your work is about problems in painting, but there's an emotional level to it, like with your cats in the painting *Today in History* (2012–13), which comes with a shredded chair. I love your work because it's funny, too.

RF: This painting should be installed with the chair placed approximately eight feet away. Sentimentality and loss and comfort get embodied in this weird modernist chair mangled by kitties imaged in the supersize photographs that are part of the paint-y paintings. One can lounge, take in a 360-degree view.

JK: But in your hands, issues in painting seem really urgent. Urgent and funny. Like *In Anticipation of Women's History Month* (2013), which

is deadly serious and yet has all this warmth and humor . . . and a wearable pin to go with it, which sits on my desk.

RF: Abstraction, without a human depiction, can't readily be penetrated by emotion. So you perceive abstraction in some other way. Some thinking/feeling way, and it brings along whatever accumulations, however ahistorical or personal. I like abstraction that puts up the appearance of a cold, impenetrable front. That makes me think, "Oh yeah, are you talking to me?" I love that.

JK: And there's the original development of abstraction—how it's been historicized—linking it to a teleology that was almost an eschatology of art, as in, "We're onto the endgame, folks, and we're going to have a second coming"—as if abstraction were the clear line to the Rapture after the "End of Art."

RF: And there's who got taken up . . .

JK: Almost like in a UFO.

DN: Yeah, ego and desire to go toward the existential statement.

I'm looking at those white squares—and the black and green, black and blue, and black and magenta lines around them.

LF: It's not a framing device.

DN: It's not a framing device, and that's quite an accomplishment! They are free of so much metaphor, illusion, and statement extraneous to the paintings themselves. They actually do what a lot of Minimalist works try to do but are too grandiose to accomplish.

LF: They're meticulous and so pure.

DN: And they're hand painted—there's a little wobble . . .

LF: I'm noticing that, as you get close, the whites change color . . .

DN: It's affecting. Even the thickness of the stretcher, which I would say is maybe two inches or a little less, seems very . . .

LF: Well, it has a stripping on it—it looks like a canvas stripping. It's probably either canvas or canvas around wood. So, actually, when you get close, it becomes a band. Just like the other bands—the black band, the pink band, and the square. It's really so integral!

DN: It's such a specific size, too. These are terrific paintings.

PART 2

Paul Cézanne, *The Bather*
(c. 1885)

DN: I know this is one of your favorite paintings.

LF: It is my favorite painting. In fact, I did a whole series of drawings and paintings from it, none of which are likely to exist anymore.

DN: Wow, when?

LF: Probably in the sixties . . . when I first got to New York. I had received

LOUISE FISHMAN speaks with DONA NELSON

We have been looking at art together for decades—in galleries, museums, and in each other's studios. We are always expanding our understanding of art making and thinking. We have been each other's most serious and dedicated critics. For this conversation, we met at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

—Louise Fishman and Dona Nelson

PART 1

Jo Baer, *Primary Light Group: Red, Green, Blue* (1964–65)

Dona Nelson: We're looking at . . . Jo Baer.

Louise Fishman: These paintings are so understated. There's nothing dramatic; there's nothing sucking you in. They are beautiful paintings and they are forceful—in their squareness. Very even. They don't do what paintings by men seem to do, which is more to knock you over the head.

DN: No, they are restrained. I admire that they are not lyrical. They are different from Agnes Martin's works in that way—totally different, actually.

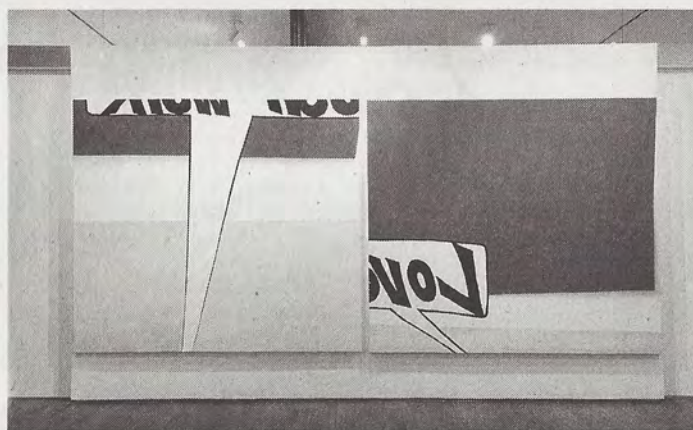
LF: Right, right.

DN: And they are cerebral. They don't go beyond what they are. That's a big accomplishment after the Abstract Expressionists and all their, you know, desire . . .

LF: Ego.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2014

Art in Review



ADAM REICH/ON STELLAR RAYS

Rochelle Feinstein

'Love Vibe'

*On Stellar Rays
1 Rivington Street, between
Bowery and Chrystie Streets,
Lower East Side
Through May 11*

In her latest show, the wryly autobiographical painter Rochelle Feinstein explores a vacuous bit of art world parlance: the

An installation view of Rochelle Feinstein's solo exhibition "Love Vibe," comprising six paintings, at On Stellar Rays.

phrase "Love your work," typically delivered with an air kiss. Manipulating it with humor and surgical dexterity, she finds hidden reserves of meaning.

The words float, in cartoon speech bubbles, through her installation of six large paintings. Each has a bright green back-

ground, which we are meant to see as a kind of "green screen" (to judge from a digital projection near the reception desk) that suggests any number of possible settings. And each text must be read in mirror image, defamiliarizing the words.

The placement of the bubbles

varies; as you look around the room, they appear to rise and fall, or to shift left and right. Sometimes they are cropped so that only snippets of the original phrase — "Love You" or "Work"— are legible. The subtext shifts accordingly, from hyperbolic admiration to purposeful exhortation. Sometimes the whole phrase becomes a kind of mantra, transcending its breezier associations.

With remarkable economy, not to mention painterly brio, Ms. Feinstein turns a cocktail party platitude into a symphonic arrangement of the many different voices heard by creative professionals. And she reminds us that although the art world is inherently social, it's sometimes necessary for the people who make art or look at it to tune out all the chatter. KAREN ROSENBERG

Interview

LOVE YOU, MEAN IT



ABOVE: ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN, *LOVE YOUR WORK*. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ON STELLAR RAYS

Rochelle Feinstein is skeptical of your flattery—especially one particular phrase.

"It's one of what I call 'Life's Three Great Lies,'" says the abstract painter, pointedly. "Things you can't really trust that people say quite often. One is, 'The check is in the mail,' another 'I won't come in your mouth, I promise.' And the third one, for the art world, is 'Love your work.'"

Feinstein, also Director of Graduate Studies in painting and printmaking at Yale, has long been interested in exploring such perplexing social codes in language. Through her signature marriage of abstract forms and text, her work calls attention to frequently used idioms and

platitudes that impersonate opinions and beliefs, conveying no real meaning or insight. Together, they comprise a kind of "filler speech" that serves only to provide the speaker with a sense of validation.

At On Stellar Rays gallery this Thursday, April 10, Feinstein will be unveiling "Love Vibe," a singular painting installation comprised of six large-scale canvases that include variations on the "Love your work" phrase, prompting viewers to think about their response to the work before they even begin to consider it. Feinstein hopes this experience will inspire a greater sense of accountability within them, reminding them to choose their words carefully. "Each of the paintings is done through a kind of meandering perspective, which challenges you to think about where you're looking and what exactly it is that you're referring to when you're responding to it," she says, explaining the set-up of the installation. "Can you point to the thing that you say you love? Are you sure?"

NOOR BRARA: What's the story behind *Love Vibe*?

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: It came out of language—I'm interested in mnemonic speech. The basics we understand, and how we use them and what we think they mean, which is something I've been exploring for the last few years and is a thread throughout my work. This piece sort of came about after I got a particularly brutal review. I've always been interested in the ideas of perception and cognition, how we learn about things and how we make a "read" of a painting. So, while I wasn't deliberately setting out to have a painting "read," I was still thinking about all the layers of perception and cognition that come between you and an object. It's not a bad thing, and I was trying to understand that at a time where I was actually okay with getting a bad review. It questioned my whole practice, which is really just about day-to-day life. What do I experience every day and what drives me? How does language help me or become an obstacle? The "Love your work" phrase is something that I'd heard for years, and I think it's still in play. It's one of the most awkward phrases to use because if you're the one saying it—often you're called upon to say something—it's not that it's necessarily insincere, but it's sufficient only for the moment, when you can't think of anything better to say.

BRARA: The work is also said to be a reflection on the accumulation of taste, and I was wondering what you thought about taste in the art world. Should we constantly be talking about it, or do you think we should keep it to ourselves?

FEINSTEIN: I think with regards to taste, it's really about how you make your own taste and what your criterion is. Even if you decide to use a blank page, it's still a signifier of your taste and therefore a projection of you. To me, it's an awareness of the urgency of a particular social condition that creates taste. I was at this conference in Knoxville recently, and I was thinking of how my work is kind of an exchange between old media and new media, and what the difference is between aesthetics and technology-based work. And that intersection is really what I'm interested in, in how technology becomes part of taste, and how it informs different definitions of taste today.

BRARA: Yeah, I think technology definitely blurs the lines between categories of taste. Because we have access to everything, it's really easy to quickly "acquire" or fake a particular kind of taste that you want to claim as your own. You also mentioned that you were interested in the form of how these messages are presented, and in *Love Vibe* you chose to use a speech bubble. I was thinking that you could have used quotation marks instead, but that probably would have conveyed a much more punctuated message. The speech bubble is suggestive of a satire, but it's not necessarily telling you how to interpret the phrase.

FEINSTEIN: I was thinking of it coming from a comic book. In a comic book, the bubble is attached to the character speaking—they can't go back on what they said. I think if I used quotes or any other kind of punctuation for the work, it would be suggesting a linguistic structure outside of that particular phrase. It wouldn't be as "spoken," and would perhaps signify a kind of assigned meaning, which is exactly what I'm questioning the existence of. With the speech bubble, there's a certain emptiness there, which sort of captures the sentiment I have towards that phrase. It's unreadable, it can only be deconstructed by the person using it, and because of that you don't know what's really being said.

BRARA: And in that way, the bubble emphasizes the emptiness of the phrase by placing it in an equally empty visual form. I would love to observe people at the opening and listen to what they say aloud, and to you, when they're looking at it. Are they allowed to say, "Love your work?" What does your work prescribe as the right way to praise art, if at all?

FEINSTEIN: I think I'd prefer "No comment." [laughs] Artists get it. But, for everyone else, I'm really interested to see how they react, and if they get it, too. I love that the phrase hasn't gone away, so I'm curious about how it's used now. I also wonder how people will interpret the

rest of the painting. I started this piece in 2000 when blue screen was what was most widely used, and now there's this dominance of the green screen in everything. Because the work is comprised of these large expanses of green, will people think it's a commentary on digital projections? It'll be interesting to see how it's read today.

BRARA: Why did you pick the color green?

FEINSTEIN: At the time, I was motivated by the idea of a fully saturated outdoor space. I was interested in nature, and the idea of landscapes without any other form of life—what you're left with is just green. And as a paint color, for something that indicates outside while you're inside, the experience of looking at it in a room was really interesting to me. The green doesn't vary—I wanted this uninterrupted, matte effect, without oily or yielding surfaces. So, it depicts painting, and the purest form of that, but then with the phrase, it also feels like your reading. Altogether, it's visually a very straightforward way of presenting an inquiry. No distractions or hiding places.

BRARA: "Love your work" is an example of codified language, and I know that's also been an important trope in your previous work. Can codified language be deconstructed when ambiguity is so deeply embedded in its use? What, then, are you left with?

FEINSTEIN: I'm not sure if it's possible, but I keep trying. The word "love" for example—just there. That, for me, has been really, really rich. Because love is not quantifiable, and it's used as an expression of taste. It's used affectively. It's used in intimate language and in public speech. I think part of what I'm supposed to be doing, as the artist, if I use a word like "love," is to use it in relation to an object or person so that it may be displaced by establishing a connection to something. And that maybe in that process, the encoding—which I don't think you can ever fully break down—becomes a little more legible. I love malleable messages like that. It's a constant question, and it really makes you think.

"LOVE VIBE" IS ON VIEW AT ON STELLAR RAYS GALLERY STARTING TOMORROW, APRIL 10, THROUGH MAY 11.

Art in America

Rochelle Feinstein:
Today in History,
2012-13, oil on
canvas and digital
prints on vinyl,
91 by 144 inches
overall; at On
Stellar Rays.



ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN On Stellar Rays and Higher Pictures

Rochelle Feinstein isn't one to wait around for the academy to get a bead on her. With not a single major museum exhibition, nor anything resembling a substantive catalogue to document her prolific output and significant influence on young painters, she practices a kind of self-cannibalization, mining and physically repurposing her past works as though writing her own art's history. Feinstein has a spot-on sense for some of the weirder narratives of popular culture (Michael Jackson's tabloid mishaps; white-guy covers of songs by R&B soul master Barry White), and is something of a cross-trainer in mediums (painting, silkscreen, assemblage, photography), which she wields in innovative ways. Her work could easily be mistaken for that of an artist less than half her age. (She is now 65.)

This was a strong two-venue exhibition full of lively solipsisms and formal puns. Downtown, at On Stellar Rays, were four large mixed-medium paintings completed in 2013 and a slide show featuring nearly all the art Feinstein made between 1998 and 2008. The slides were projected continuously from an old-school carousel, and many of them had been graffitied by the artist in Magic Marker, with the effect of an art-class lecture gone over the edge. Particularly mordant is a bucolic landscape almost completely scrawled over by the word "RETROSP-ECTIVE" [*sic*].

One of the finest paintings was *Today in History*, a single work comprising four panels in black and white, two presenting photographic blowups on vinyl, the others abstract compositions on canvas. The photographs are of Feinstein's two late house cats curled up on a living-room carpet, a mundane scene reproduced twice, but with subtle differences: one of the images was culled from a negative, and the other from a Xerox. In the striped abstraction, Feinstein draws out the slightly warmer middle-range tones of the

photograph and the cooler, more acrid halftones of the photocopy. (Think Daniel Buren collaborating with a Kinko's employee.) Just visible above the cats' heads are some table legs, adding further linear play.

Uptown, at Higher Pictures, the offerings seemed even more startling for their nearly synesthetic osmosis of painting and photography. Three were large Cibachromes the artist made in 2000 using an early version of Photoshop. (The rest of the 58 works in this series could be viewed in the office.) For these, Feinstein appropriated pictures (mostly landscapes and urban panoramas) made by anonymous amateurs using DIY Kodak darkroom kits from the '60s and '70s. She then added black-and-white speech bubbles and rephotographed the scenes, so that trees, mountains or buildings seem to be ejaculating words like "Now," "Here" or "More." The old Photoshop lettering looks "warm" to contemporary eyes, and the paper's graininess rather tactile and pleasing. Not content simply to allow these altered images to age, however, Feinstein sliced some of them up, reconstituting them as paintings (dated 2002). Slathering on highly viscous blue-green acrylic and coating them with an imperceptibly thin layer of varnish, the paintings (part gestural abstraction, part landscape) shine with a Finish Fetish-like polish too subtle to see in reproduction.

One thinks of the adage "Everything old is new again," only turned on its side. Somebody had better hurry up and give Feinstein the retrospective she so clearly deserves. Writing her art's history is going to be a tougher task: this oeuvre won't hold still long enough to get old.

—Sarah Schmerler

Rochelle Feinstein WITH PHONG BUI

Just a few days after the opening reception of her new exhibit *The Estate of Rochelle F.* at On Stellar Rays (March 27 – May 1, 2011), the artist Rochelle Feinstein paid a visit to the Rail's headquarters to talk with publisher Phong Bui about her life and work.

PHONG BUI (RAIL): It must have been in late May of 1988, just a few days before Meyer and Lillian Schapiro left for South Londonderry, Vermont, where they had gone every summer ever since in the late 1930s, that they showed me a small abstract painting, with a loosely painted grid and rather somber palette of burnt sienna, raw umber, sap green, and deep blue, which, I was told, you had given them. My first question is: How did you get to know the Schapiros?

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: I was living with someone whose parents were close friends with the Schapiros. I don't know when their friendship began, but in the early 1950s, many left-wing New Yorkers, including writers and artists like Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Gandy Brodie, Wolf Kahn, and Emily Mason, just to name a few, had either moved to Vermont permanently or lived there only during the summer. I remember after a few visits to Meyer and Lillian's (often referred to as Dr. Milgram) house they asked me to bring my work to show them, which I eventually did. All of the paintings I made in Jamaica, Vermont, which was ten minutes away from their home, were very small, mostly because my studio was basically niched in the upstairs attic of the house I was staying in at the time. As you can imagine I was just really feeling my way as a young painter in the early '80s. And because I admired Meyer so much, the idea of showing him my work terrified me. But when I finally did manage to show him and Lillian a few of my paintings they really liked them. So I was relieved. And from that point on, we would occasionally visit their West 4th Street home in the city.

RAIL: Between Perry and West 11th Street on the East Side.

FEINSTEIN: That's right. And we were on Charles Street, which was only two blocks away.

RAIL: In the late '80s you began to show your work. You had your first two shows with Emily Sorkin Gallery in '87 and '89, which was right after the market crash in 1987. Looking back now, how would you re-assess your relationship with Neo-Expressionist paintings? Was there a shared distrust of centralized, hierarchic, ideologically closed systems from the previous language of Minimalism? Or were you interested in setting a path that opposed those predominately large-scale, narrative paintings, yet shared their freely borrowed and recyclable images from mass culture?

FEINSTEIN: I'd say it's both, plus romanticism: a love/hate relationship with it all. Actually, having seen the Martin Kippenberger retrospective in 2009 at MoMA I realized that what I identify with in his work is this love and loathing relationship with painting. And it's that combination that keeps me coming back to painting, even though it can be very disappointing every time you come back to it. In any case, during that time I had to expose myself to a lot of people of my own generation in order to learn from that kind of chicken coop, so to speak. Even though I lived and worked in the East Village in those days when all the galleries, including Civilian Warfare, Gracie Mansion, and International With Monument were springing up, for some reason I was a little fringe. I didn't know that I was supposed to have my nose pressed against the glass. Gradually I started meeting people through talking about art; David Reed was among them.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

RAIL: Who is an ideal person to talk about art with.

FEINSTEIN: Yes, absolutely. I remember going to the Ralph Blakelock show at the old Salander-O'Reilly Gallery on the Upper East Side. And as I walked in I saw David looking at the catalogue and I said, "Oh no, we're going to have to go through this again—'hi-oh yeah, we've met!'" You know, we both do this. And suddenly we started looking at the show together and took the train home, and it was the beginning of a wonderful friendship. But it all circulated around that art; that was the connection point.

RAIL: I remember seeing that show as well. I came back from Italy in early September, 1987. And it was a real revelation to discover a painter who had this same weight of mysticism and vision of nature that Ryder did, but with a completely different treatment of materials, surfaces, and so on. But before we go forward can we go back to your early formation? You went to Pratt Institute and graduated in 1975.

FEINSTEIN: Actually I went to Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) first. I worked during the day then I went to school at night for six years. I studied fashion illustration and fortunately I had a teacher who believed that you had to know anatomy. And from there I just started drawing and painting. So it was then I wanted to be a painter.

RAIL: That was when you transferred to Pratt?

FEINSTEIN: Yes, but at first they couldn't accept all my credit unless I had an Associate's Degree. So I lied and said that I had one. They finally accepted me. As a junior I became a painting major.

RAIL: Who, among artists we know, did you work with?

FEINSTEIN: Rudolf Baranik was one. Also, Ernst Benkert, who was amazing and highly conceptual for that moment when everyone was involved with just the painting culture. He was very cool, very analytical, and he was the person I chose to work with.

RAIL: How about Sidney Tillim?

FEINSTEIN: I met Sidney at an interview for my first teaching job at Bennington College.

RAIL: When was that?

FEINSTEIN: 1981. He came to Bennington earlier to be with the Clement Greenberg crowd.

RAIL: That seems right, because Tillim went to school with Greenberg, and was with Hilton Kramer, at Syracuse University.

FEINSTEIN: Yes, on the postwar, G.I. Bill.

RAIL: Tillim's criticism is now mostly remembered for its advocacy of Pop Art, as well as Realism, though he always wanted to be as engaged with his time as possible, and in a variety of ways, because he loved Baudelaire. His rave writing on Claes Oldenburg's "The Store" (1961) equals his writings on the paintings of Alex Katz and Philip Pearlstein.

FEINSTEIN: Not to mention Donald Judd in his review for *ARTnews*, criticized Sidney for having switched from abstraction to figuration.

RAIL: And Tillim later returned the favor for Judd's show.

FEINSTEIN: Yes, mostly because he was such a contrarian. You know how I got the job? Hard to believe but the school put an ad in the *Village Voice*, which I answered. At that time I was waitressing and I thought, well, maybe I can teach. I had done a poster for MoMA's Printed Art exhibition, which included a public art project on the busses circulated in NYC. It was the days when Joe DiMaggio used to say "Save with the Dime." Bus ads had little cards that you could tear off and take with you. Anyway, I thought I could bring a few of those posters, that it would be okay for an interview. I remember Sydney was a little bit truculent with me in the interview, which was fine, and I later learned that they decided to hire me because one of the faculty members, Sophie Healy, who was quite remarkable, said, "Well, let's hire Rochelle because she looks like she likes to dance." It was because I had this big belt that I had tied on the side like Fred Astaire [laughs]. On the first day I showed up for my job, Sydney was there and he walked up to me and said, "Hello, my name is Sidney Tillim, welcome, I didn't want to hire you, but welcome anyway." And I thought, "This is really good! Somebody actually tells you the truth." We became instant friends.

RAIL: Do you think that that friendship had an effect on your early work in some ways?

FEINSTEIN: It did mostly because we talked to each other about our work a lot, especially on the long train or bus ride back and forth from New York to Vermont. We also lived in the same neighborhood. He was on Bleecker, and my studio was on 2nd Street. What was so interesting about Sydney was that while he was so erudite and perceptive a person he wasn't a contemplator about his work. Whatever he did he did it very quickly, whether it was drawing from the TV or painting with a paper towel as if it was like action painting. He was very interested in relationships of color and the idea of painting and immediate labor, not the kind of labor that required too much time. And I was at the point in my work where I was really laboring over paintings, and I never forgot what he said to me: "You know Rochelle, what's a painting? It's a piece of paint on a surface. If you can make a painting in 25 minutes, that's great."



Rochelle Feinstein, "Nude Model," 2009. Styrofoam, enamel, cloth, paper mounted on stretcher. 36 x 36".



Rochelle Feinstein, "The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009. Fabric, paper, drop cloth, stretcher. 60 x 60".



Rochelle Feinstein, "I" 2010. Oil, leaf, acrylic, fabric on canvas. 49 x 38".

And I said, "Oh, that's ridiculous." But now I think, "If I can do it in 15 minutes, that's great." So Sydney really helped me to think about painting differently than the way I used to think about painting.

RAIL: And I can see in your work the similar contrarian nature, or let's say the flat-footed interplay between representational images, from ordinary and domestic objects like a couch, a bookcase, a corner view of a bathroom, and so on, to snapshots from your personal traveling and different abstract trajectories. I'm speaking of the series of egg tempera paintings on 10-inch-square panels from the defunct Ten in One Gallery in 2002.

FEINSTEIN: A wonderful gallery. We miss it.

RAIL: Which brings up another question: knowing your work, which for the most part, is inseparable from your expressive temperament, it was a surprise for me to see the paintings made with egg tempera, a medium that requires infinite patience and delicate, minute application of cross-hatch brush strokes in order to build up believable form. I mean how did you decide to work with egg tempera, which you haven't worked with since?

FEINSTEIN: I only did it for about a three or four year period, mostly because I was traveling in Italy for four months, and I wanted to work while traveling. I had 20 beautiful panels made, all of which could fit into a suitcase. And I was at that time very interested in Siennese paintings, which were painted with egg tempera. What struck me about egg tempera was how it was used systematically to describe narrative. I was interested, for example, in the way color signs pointed out the important hierarchy of the relationships of the narrative—whether in the predella or the altar. I learned and observed what dominant colors are used for Christ and Mary, for the saints and the apostles. All are painted with different versions of a four-color palette, which were two reds, two different reds, a green, and a blue, plus white. And so I decided to use photographs that I had collected that were really lowbrow, as you just described. In any case, you're right, I haven't worked with egg tempera ever since.

RAIL: In all of the reviews of your shows that I have read, I thought Barry Schwabsky's was the most perceptive. He said, "Your effort to tease formalism and personalized abstraction can easily lead to results that are too hermetic, or some form of quirkiness for its own sake." But he praised the work for showing how an agile or even fierce sensibility need not create a stylistic consistency to make the work strongly felt.

FEINSTEIN: I think that he did, and does, understand my work, which is particularly about the matter of style. And to go back to your initial point about the '80s, even though things were sort of bouncing all over the visual map—the material map—there was still such a thing as style. And for whatever reasons, I wanted every

painting to represent a particular moment, like a calendar, whether it was about the world, or me personally. And I wanted each painting to have its own presence, so having a consistent style would prevent me from achieving that goal. Once I showed a painting with a dishtowel glued on the canvas, and people would send me dishtowels and pajamas and all sorts of things in the mail. And I said "No. I'm not someone who's just introducing material to say that this is an opposition to formalism. I'm actually just saying this is a dishtowel and I'm making a painting with a dishtowel." So the formal aspect in painting has always been important to me.

RAIL: What about the social-political aspects, depicted in a variety of ways, with, as many critics would say, a subversive feminist effect? Let's begin with the use of text, which is used with a sense of humor. For instance, in the series of photographs called "Joyride," made in 2000, there were words such as NOW, HERE, THERE, LISTEN, WAIT, LOVE, MORE, WRONG, which were all inserted in these thought bubbles and cryptically placed in different landscapes.

FEINSTEIN: It's such a good thing to talk about. Because I don't think they're texts.

RAIL: You mean like the way Louise Fishman calls her text-based paintings of her friends, "Angry Lucy," "Angry Paula," portraits.

FEINSTEIN: Exactly. I was interested in abstraction's relationships being self-referential. In other words one abstract painting shares something with another abstract painting whether it's more intentional or less so.

RAIL: In a relational sense.

FEINSTEIN: Yes. And how do we look at anything? Perceptually and cognitively. The first time I had really used words, I had been working on a series of eight paintings in the studio called "Love Your Work." They were all green, and the words "Love Your Work" were painted very large and backwards. Then one day I visited my brother, who had just come back from China. He had this whole folio of photographs on the coffee table, and he said, "Sit down and look at my photographs." And I did. So I turned to one page, and it was the official postcard of a temple. He said, "Isn't that amazing? It's the same image I took." And I said, "No, that's not amazing." Because our perceptions are really formed largely by what we've seen and what's familiar. But it got me thinking about my collection of color photographs of nature from the '70s, 8 by 10 foot prints done by amateurs in their Kodak-outfitted basement labs. They were spotted, torn, but they were always in sequences. So that's how the text entered into it, because I was thinking, what could any of us possibly be looking at? Gradually I started taking the font from those "Love Your Work" paintings, and inserting different words, as you had mentioned, into

each photograph as a directive. The idea was how do you take a completely neutral image, which after you say, oh that's pretty, or I've been there, or whatever, then direct it to stop?

RAIL: Did you paint each word directly on each photograph?

FEINSTEIN: No. I digitized the anonymous photograph, scanned each word and remade all 58 on the computer, because I thought it was important for the saturations of each color to suggest different seasons and hours of the day, from the East Coast or West Coast.

RAIL: What about video works? How did it fit in, when did it begin?

FEINSTEIN: It began around 2002 when I did the Barry White project in my house, which was a lot of fun.

RAIL: Which was later included in the show *I Made A Terrible Mistake* at Art Production Fund's Lab Space on Wooster Street in 2009.

FEINSTEIN: Yes, although the work was all done between 2003 – 2005. People looked at it and said, what do you mean you made a terrible mistake? In other words, I didn't know what younger installation artists knew: to do a big project first get the backing and commitments before you do the work, not after. So, I ended up with this huge white elephant, and it was very hard for it to travel, and expensive. It all went into storage, and stayed there until the wonderful Art Production Fund said, why don't you do it here?

RAIL: I was glad to have seen it on the last day. In any case, when did your interest in feminism begin?

FEINSTEIN: It began with my first political action at the Women's House of Detention where I joined a group of radical feminists. I was maybe 18 or 19. All of those jailed women, before being put on trial, sat there in limbo, didn't have money to raise bail. That's why they were there. Needless to say, all of us got together and decided to organize this one-day-sale. I remember people from the neighborhood brought all sorts of stuff and gave it to us. And we did raise enough bail money to get many of the women out that same day.

RAIL: That's great.

FEINSTEIN: It was. So I was very dedicated to action, and from there I began to read Simone de Beauvoir, and also those women who were in academia, like Susan Bordo, not necessarily writing about feminism, but they



Rochelle Feinstein, "Carousel," 2010. Oil collage, digital film, wood on canvas. 49 by 40 by 4 inches.

recognized that there was a way to look at anthropology, art history, through other lenses, and not only feminism, but feminists representing an opening in the discussion. As for how my interest in feminism manifests itself in my work, I certainly hope it's not that overtly manifested. I would prefer my freedom to make the painting independently.

RAIL: I spoke with Pat Steir about her feminist involvement, and she said because of the fact that she was so active politically that there was no need to do the same in her paintings. She's very happy that the two activities are separate from one another.

FEINSTEIN: I agree with Pat. The work does have a lot of feminist tendencies in it, but I don't want it to repeat what we already know through language. I need it to have a visual life.

RAIL: Let's focus on the works in the recent show. Take "Carousel" for example, a painting which, underneath, seems to be very worked, with well-rehearsed brush strokes, though one can read it as a puzzle because it was covered by a printed black image of luggage on a sheet of velum. It seems either deliberate or random. The same can be said of the other painting, "No Joke," with the inflated color balloon placed on the top, which intensifies its precariousness because the whole painting is hanging on a thin string.



Rochelle Feinstein, "Image of an Image," 2010. Gold and aluminum leaf, scrim, steel rod on canvas. 81 x 77 x 4.

FEINSTEIN: "Carousel" is one of those paintings that I think really has both my anger and my melancholy in it. First of all, anybody can make an abstract painting, if they're taught how to make one. That was basically the painting underneath. Meanwhile, I had been thinking about the nature of collage—which is now called mixed media—and what it meant in the 20th century, which was about rupture. I wanted to carry the idea of rupture further with the digitally printed image on film.

RAIL: The hand versus the machine.

FEINSTEIN: Exactly. And that's why the film is hung on two grommets—so that it doesn't stay flat to the painting surface underneath. That way the exchange can be read more effectively.

RAIL: Though with "Image of an Image" it was done with the opposite purpose: the shower curtain needed a little patch of silver and gold leaf in some parts to integrate the two surfaces.

FEINSTEIN: True. One thing I did not want for my work was for anything to repeat; yet I want everything to be related to its moment. With the three paintings you just spoke about, while they're not alike, they share an additive world, mostly. Painting isn't enough for me, it really isn't.


RAIL: Believe me [*laughs*], I've had the same feeling. Also, in your recent interview with Justin Lieberman in *BOMB* you spoke about how boxing, which you practice routinely, provides clarity to the different rankings of weight, height, and so on.



Rochelle Feinstein, "No Joke," 2009. Oil, acrylic, vinyl, bungee on canvas. 60 x 60 inches.

FEINSTEIN: That's why I like boxing.

RAIL: We know Alex Katz, for instance, goes to the gym to work out every day, which helps him keep up with those huge paintings and the quick pace of execution that they require. Or Haruki Murakami prefers running long distance while listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival or the Beach Boys so he can get to his writing fresh. When did you begin to box?

FEINSTEIN: Well, my brother reminded me that it began when we were growing up. My father, Martin Moskowitz, was a Golden Gloves boxer. He used to take me to the Friday night fights, out in Sunnyside Gardens in Astoria. My Uncle Louie was also a pro boxer. So how could boxing not be part of my life? What happened was, about for years ago, between traveling to New Haven, coming home and going to the gym, and then my studio, it was too exhausting. One day I was walking two blocks away from my studio and there was Gleason's Gym, and the minute I walked in I felt immediately at home. Once I began to box I realized that I'm not going to be a pro boxer by any means, but it really helps me to understand my flaws, my mistakes. I actually learn from them. For me the affinity is also to the rules, when you hold your ground and don't square up, really how you move around that ring, and control from the center of the ring. 

Rochelle Feinstein's work is hard to decipher. It is full of jokes, yet oddly lacking in punch lines. Unlike that of many of her postmodernist contemporaries, the elusive meaning of Feinstein's work has consistently deferred any sort of commodification. Alongside a continuous and insistent engagement with the problems of painting, she has produced video and time-based work as well as sculpture and installation, yet her works are not an intertextual pastiche or a pedagogical deconstructive tool. Ironically, they seem to continue the modernist project in spite of itself. It was said of Picabia that he was, above all, an abstractionist. For Feinstein, abstraction and non-instrumentalized thought have always reigned supreme. This makes her work particularly timely. Should we not, at the tail end of our post-modern, post-ideological era, look to those who kept the faith all along? Her paradoxically political brand of *art pour l'art* and her laissez-faire attitude toward subjects could easily be seen to prefigure the works of Rachel Harrison, or to sit alongside those of Jutta Koether, Michael Krebber, or Martin Kippenberger. Unwavering belief alternates with self-effacement, and then violently segues into an absurd surrealist game.

A friend recently related an anecdote to me concerning her own experience of a work by Rochelle Feinstein: a painting of a grid with a meandering line disrupting the order. Of course, the easy way to deal with such a work would be to posit the two elements against one another: order and self-reflexivity versus the chaotic human gesture. Familiar territory. But Feinstein's explanation of the work was quite different. The grid was Los Angeles, and the line was the path of OJ Simpson's SUV cutting through the freeway while being chased by the police. What!?!?

It was my honor and pleasure to visit Feinstein's studio last summer. We had a long conversation there concerning her most recent project, *The Estate of Rochelle F.*, followed by our attempt to hash out some of the finer points in an even longer conversation by email.

—Justin Lieberman

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

and Justin Lieberman



Mr. Natural, 2010, reflective glass, crystal, charcoal oil on dropcloth, 72 x 50 inches.



The Estate of Rochelle F., 2009, dropcloth, canvas, paper, 60 x 60 inches.

Justin Lieberman: Your new project, *The Estate of Rochelle F.*, is retrospective, but with a deliberate revisionism, taking apart older works and rearranging the components into new things. It seems like a pretty anarchic move in relation to most people's conception of an oeuvre, but then you're still alive so...

Rochelle Feinstein: I'm a liar. I'm still here, as intended, when I began the project in 2009. I know I won't always be here, but at that time, I was mulling over the question: What is compelling to make paintings about? The economy and everything else was either in shutdown or moving backward. I'd just consolidated two storage spaces into a single archive. My studio was packed with diverse materials, including paint to make paintings from—all were useable "assets" with unrealized potential. It was an Aha! moment: I decided to use up as much of this surplus as possible to make new work. This was

a thought that had gravitas. To create an estate I would control, what would *that* be, pre-posthumously? Pre-post-humorously? Weird and interesting, to have a start and end point roll into one another, to be consciously creating a past intended as an accumulation of many paintings that would materialize as a corpus sometime in the future.

Yeah, it's a retrospective collection, assembled in the present tense... implemented as a device for me to devise new work. Revisionism is implicit in the act of recycling. In my case, both the inert materials and a few former paintings just came along for the ride, each presenting an idiosyncratic dare. Whatever inorganic stuff they are made from, how they signify, their vernacular associations (Craigslist, cardboard, placemats, snapshots, window shades, and so on), each presents a specific challenge. Their physical properties and the way we name and identify them both inevitably undergo alteration

from their original state. My actions are directed by curiosity: how do these elements partner with a painting language that is, also, an already received one? This question has been prominent in my work since 1989.

In this project, I get to tweak my own credo. *The Estate* relies on the depletion of those things already available, including older paintings. Two rules emerged rather quickly. First, to not spend any additional money on this work and to use any and all supplies as "assets." Second, to use maximal material and minimal gesture. I hope we get to anarchy and what an oeuvre is later.

JL: This reminds me of an essay by John Miller where he discusses the potential energy of art supplies, and the way that it's exhausted by their transformation into artworks, the artwork functioning as the graveyard of art supplies. Your way of working here seems to challenge that: old works are imbued with new use value. This seems to take a lot of weight out of the objects, returning it to yourself through a de-prioritizing of the idea of a "finished work." But it also brings up some weird questions in relation to the originals: Were they ever once complete? Are you defacing them?

RF: I do believe in a "finished work." Yet, if the work is still in my possession, and I've concluded that it needs to be "fluffed" because of current circumstances, then I will do so. The "original" then exists as a foundation for a new "original." I use traditional painting materials as an aesthetic choice, understanding how they behave during the working process. The use of "non-art" materials by countless artists is practically a default mode by now. Stuff, or residue of stuff, has long been part of the vocabulary of art supplies, and in many cases, has been substituted for paint. Art supplies are also pre-coded for a specific end use: to make a work of art. Employing both in one work is unexceptional. Materials are everywhere, potentially speaking, yet their transformation into a new territory of form and content, feels less likely to occur or to be something sought after. Garbage bags, textiles, hair, rubber, text, etc., are well-worn tropes. They've been indexed, categorized, homogenized, and pasteurized, absorbed as a

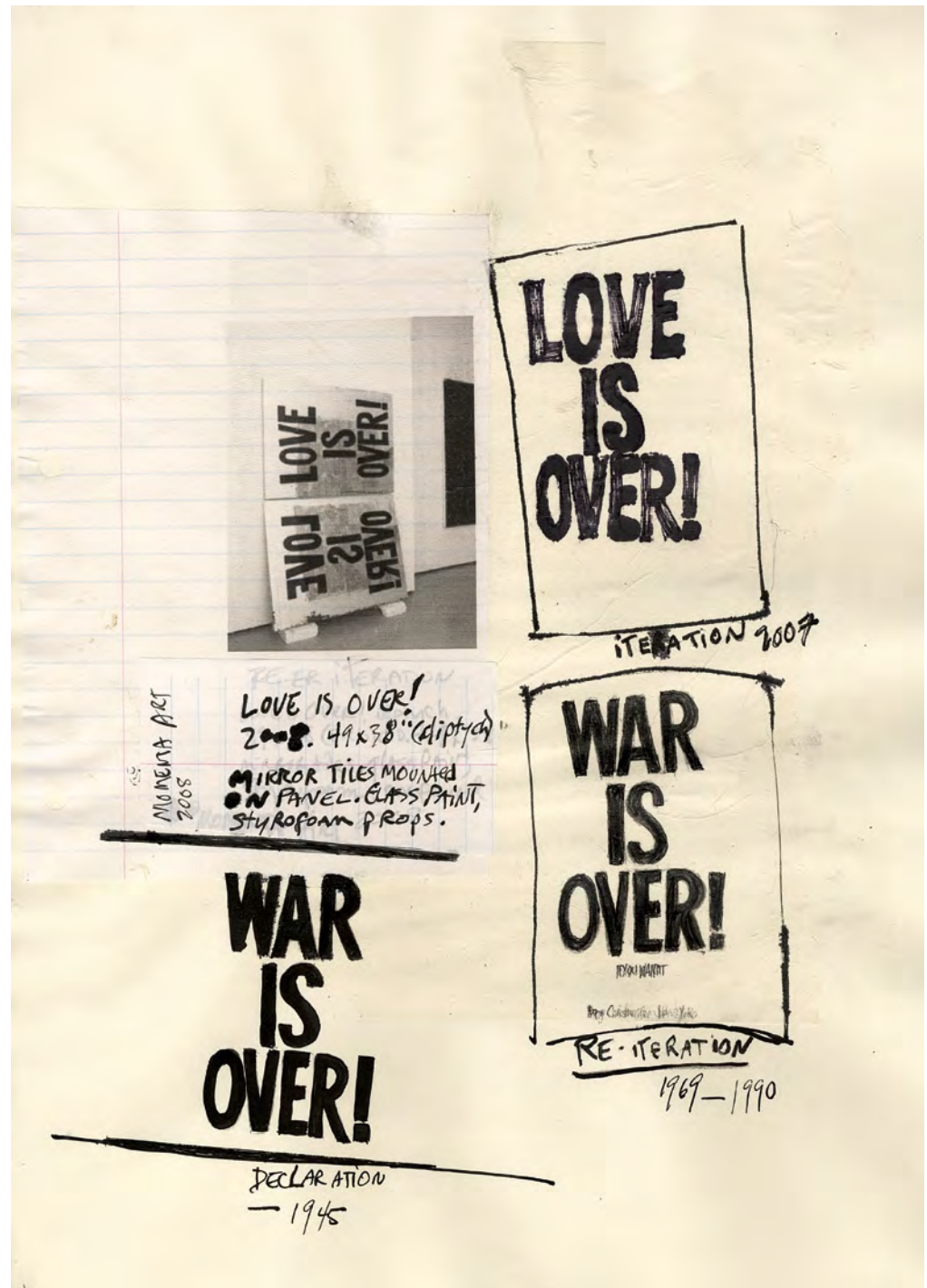
set of accrued meanings through the historical precedent of the last century, recent criticism, or via six months of social media buzz. The use of materials or materiality—when painting with a capital *P* is at stake—is encrypted into this already agreed-upon canon. For example, in 1992 I used a dishtowel in a painting. The checkbox next to my name was ticked off as follows: “feminist,” “issues of domesticity,” “anti-modernist.” Yes, I’m fortunate to have anything checked off, but my point is this: I am interested in how a perceptual experience transforms into a cognitive one. This need not begin with gender, but it could if gender was presented as the primary issue, overshadowing the read of the other elements in a work.

Warhol speaks of material transformations with eloquence in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*. He cites the mountains of unusable footage cut from the synchronized swimming scenes in Esther Williams’s films. He says something to the effect that he’d like to make a new movie from these “leftovers.” He says it’s a movie he’d like to see. And it’s a painting I’d like to make.

To your previous question: two reclaimed paintings in the Estate were lying around, nagging at me in the studio. Two other pieces were stretched and primed, but were without imagery. The remaining stretchers were bare, recycled from discarded paintings formerly in storage. There is one small painting I didn’t show you, pulled from the dust pile. I cleaned and repainted it, reproducing the sooty residue as an image, added new things, and it was finished. Yes, it was complete, and now it is a new complete. This is weird and we’ve just begun.

JL: But there is a fundamental difference between Warhol’s transformation of the Esther Williams leftover material and your treatment of your own past production, which requires a certain leap of faith, right? After all, you can’t pretend to be objective about this stuff.

RF: Yes, there are undeniably fundamental differences. My subjectivity has been a constant, annoying cop and critic. Plus, Warhol did not actually use the Williams outtakes to make a new film. What we may share is an attitude



Origin of Untitled (!) in *The Estate of Rochelle F.* catalog, 2010, ink and collage on paper.

that considers what is unseen, or is barely visible, as a productive place to stage a new subject. While some *Estate* paintings are built upon my earlier paintings, most are not. The rest, however, are made, at minimum, from an art supply or artifact, both vestigial leftovers from some other form of production.

JL: Are you saying you consider your early work to be barely visible? I would think that a subjective assessment of one’s own past production would send

it into glaring relief. There is an element of psychoanalysis in this revisionism. You have to deal with your own history through your associations with the works. “I was sleeping with so-and-so when I made this, etc.” Changing the work is like a confrontation with whatever personal associations reside within it. You strip it of its “pure” relation to a memory of your past self by infecting it with your present self. Maybe once you commit to altering the works, you alter them in relation to themselves rather

than in relation to external criteria?

RF: That's not at all what I meant. Let the early work sit tight, unaltered. I'm fine with that. My thoughts in 1989 were not solely about merging varied materials with paint. I was fascinated by the question of seriality and so-called signature style, neither of which, even as a young artist, I could align with or subscribe to. It was such a given for the many painters of my generation that I'd have to be comatose *not* to find this fascinating. After showing through the '80s I decided to address this in my work. of a form

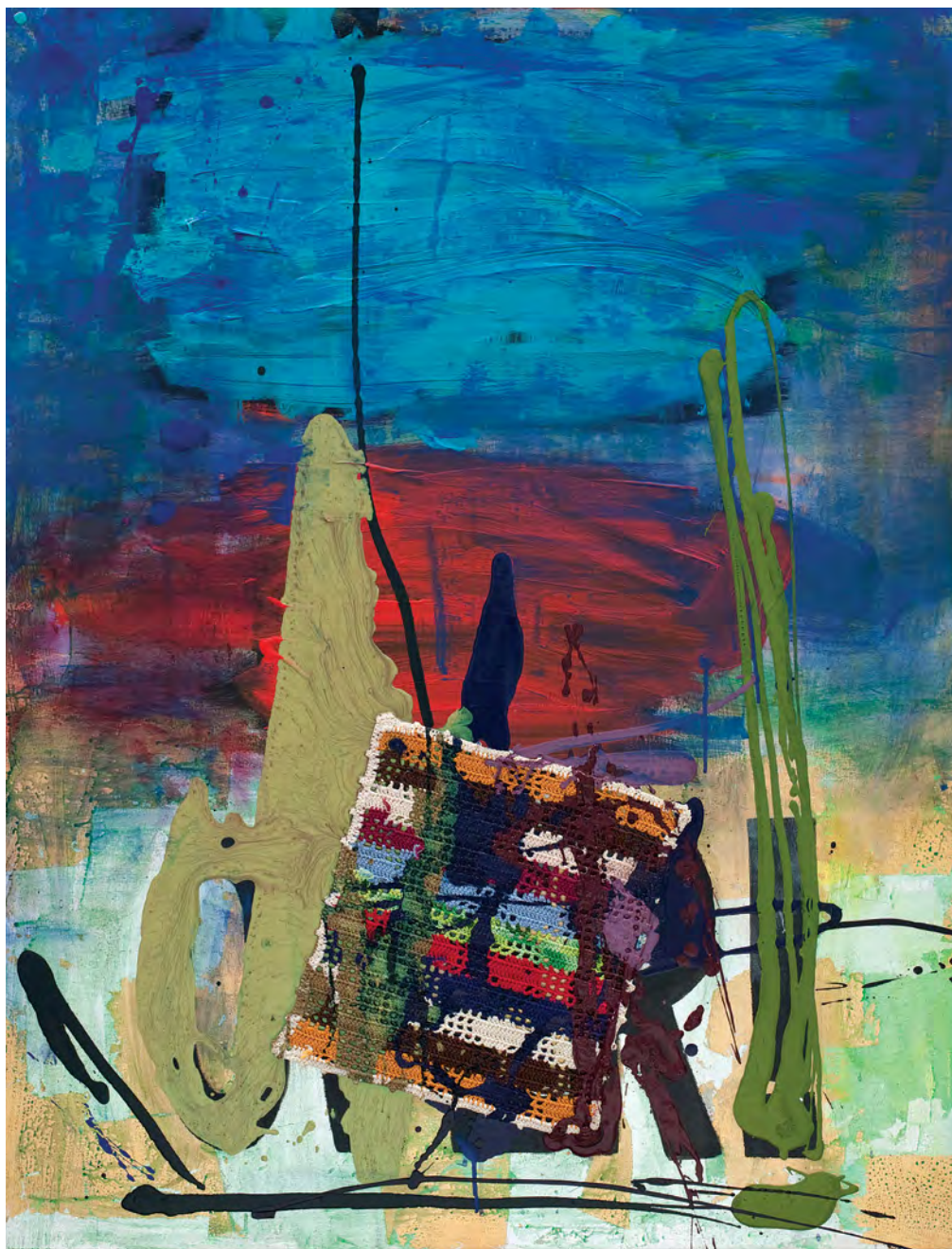
is not very interesting to me, although that is the way much painting is taught, investigated, and perceived. It feels unnatural to the way I think about individual works or the accumulated works of a given artist. Back then I was too involved in feminism and activism for these engagements not to have informed my thinking as a painter. I wanted systemic change, a balls-out way of making my paintings be, actively, even aggressively, in discussion with one another. I committed to the idea that a painting done in 1995 could be partnered with something from 2009, an a-stylistic "style," each appearing to

have been made contemporaneously, yet with huge variables of content sourced from many quarters. It's *all* made from a whole cloth of recording and reacting to major or mundane experience, from my subjectivity and my encounters with subjects. I don't make serial works but, now, having said all this, perhaps the entire body of work of the last 20-odd years is a single project? The past can represent itself, and it will, in any event. The intent for *The Estate* project is to deplete those passive things not yet used, to make a new work. But before anything is cut, screwed, glued, stapled, poured, brushed, or sanded, there is feeling; all the forms follow from that. I like that you've opened the psychodynamic door.

JL: For me there are two kinds of artists: those whose work develops temporally, and those whose work expands in space, creating endless variations on a central thesis. Pure formalism generally engenders temporal development, whereas in the work of artists like HR Giger, Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy, Salvador Dalí, or Walt Disney, there seems to be a desire to create a themed world. Your project almost seems like a transition from the thematic type to the temporal type—it engages time so unequivocally.

So the works come out of a charged emotional place, rather than one of disinterested reflection. You love a particular work, so you find a way to care for it. You respect one, so you find a way to honor it. You hate another, so you find a way to deface it. You joke around with one. You treat the works as though they are people. You form relationships with them.

RF: That's very close. I'd add that these are multiple places of feeling. One place of feeling—concerning, say, desire, anger, curiosity, exhaustion, or frustration—is quotidian. The other place of feeling, or of reflective feeling, is about painting; I can't have been doing this for so long without a charged relationship to painting. What it can and can't do, what is or is not expected from it (let's get into this?) in relation to historical or cultural imperatives... I am emotional about painting culture. Most works in this project spring from this friction. *Mr. Natural* is an example. My initial



Untitled (!), 2010, oil, acrylic, gold leaf, textile on canvas, 49 × 38 inches.



Nude Abstract, 2009, mixed media, enamel, acrylic, 36 x 36 inches.

thoughts were about American gestural abstraction—I've admired it from afar, periodically hoping my gestalt could morph into the cosmic, mystical place of a fermenting soul. At the same time, while very interested in first-generation abstract painters such as Richard Pousette-Dart, I'm impatient with latter day mark-making employed as a conveyance for fuzzy feeling. Blah. This *Mr. Natural* began taking shape through material choices . . . a canvas dropcloth, visible staples, footprints, and a ground-glass surface, slightly dangerous to the touch. The dropcloth, longer than the stretcher, could not be cut (one of my rules) hence the draping at the bottom is a natural result of the misfitting. This led to a memory of R. Crumb's *Mr. Natural*, the sybaritic alien guru-of-choice who I enlisted as my guide to the inscrutibility of generalized gestural abstraction. I arrived at a big X, both an index of *no*, and a territorial marking of a rectangle.

All these "places" are equally

charged with meanings, and hugely interesting to kick around, like a couple of cats in a bag, with, hopefully, a less tragic, and more subtle, resolution.

JL: This brings up a subject that is always sticky, which is the relationship to the viewer. There seems to be an oscillation in your work between an objective critical distance (which depends on a certain shared knowledge with viewers) and a reactionary anarchism that disregards the presence of viewers entirely. How do you approach the subject of what the audience doesn't know?

RF: By finding what the viewer does know, which may be equal, less, or more than what I know. Chances are that I'm as present in the world as I am in my studio and in teaching. Artists are all both producers and viewers. Ya' think? Someone asked me a question during a recent lecture: Who is my viewer? Which is really interesting

because it is so sticky. The words *audience* and *viewer* are frequently used interchangeably, but they're not. An audience represents a plurality of "stuff." A viewer is one—potentially a unit of the aggregate, a brick in the building, but no less crucial. My short answer to your question, and the one from the audience: the viewer is not anonymous. This always arises with abstract painting, and with painting in general. What do you think about what the audience doesn't know?

JL: I like the distinction between the viewer and the audience, but I don't want to think of the audience as a plurality. I would rather make some distinctions about my own audience and what they know, and then address them as such. As for the viewer, in the beginning stages of a project, I prefer to think that this person doesn't exist. Once I'm further along, I acknowledge that I am working for them, and try to find some common ground. Then I let them lead the way, and try to speak for them in such a way that the ideas seem like theirs rather than mine. Sometimes I misstep, and the viewer says "No." (When I have made jokes in bad taste, or assumed too much, for instance. Then there are bad reviews in public, and chastisements from my friends in private.) Then I backpedal furiously and try to reformulate. Finally, I assume they know everything I know and that they are sick of hearing me talk about it. I'm burned out and can't give anymore. That is always the tragic end of my romantic/antagonistic relationship with the viewer. Then it starts all over again...

RF: Quite a negotiation . . . We differ, as we should, but maybe not so much. The "stuff," that is, the knowledge of audiences, has great diversity. So, for me, it's an unfixed, randy group, changing its tastes, its database, so to speak, at accelerated speeds of acquisition, satiation, and registration. I participate as an artist who is a part of that audience and is simultaneously compelled to taking a position, a point of view, in relation to that polyglot material. Mine is not a fixed position in relation to subjects or forms. I might have just identified my position: mobility. Therefore, your romantic/antagonistic relationship of starting with "the viewer does not exist, yet" is one I might try

on, like a set of instructions, very Other to my antagonistic/romantic habituated pattern, which is “I am the viewer, and, oh, yeah, what is this supposed to mean?” Then I could romance the whole thing by trying to understand it, woo it into something with sex appeal to me. The viewer will, inevitably, return in the end.

The question “Where’s the love?”—in the big geo-world, or in the phenomenological sense—is a big part of my drive to make work and of my engagement with the viewer. It’s a roundelay. A Craigslist posting, captioned “NUDE MODEL NEEDED FOR ABSTRACT PAINTING,” had been in my files for six years before I could use it in *Untitled, Nude* (2009). Only through undertaking *The Estate* and having the necessity to use stray materials could I reframe and engage with someone else’s absurd sexual paradox, but through my cold eye. What would a nude, abstract painting look like? I could not stop thinking about the person who baited this hook. I took the bait just so I could make a work rooted in those ludicrous premises. The arguments of style, form, modernism, feminism, social media, and the distribution of some kind of information were compressed into one Craigslist solicitation paragraph. So the work is white, flat, lozenged, painted, rendered, printed, textual, assembled, and collaged—a naked abstract painting in low relief.

JL: Your position seems very generous and permissive toward the audience. Mine is all fucked-up and egomaniacal, full of resentment and a pathetic desire for acceptance. I aspire to be a bit more open. That said, I think that we are both engaged in a kind of courtship. A seduction.

There is a deliberate impoverishment of materials and means in your work, almost in an Arte Povera sense, which also references the impoverishment of culture at large rather than strictly gallery culture. There’s also an element of non-nostalgic camp in your work which I see as democratic—it’s the part that lets me in. Once I read that a gesture is “defined by its economy and grace”—I like that. But then I also read this impoverishment as a withholding, a “this is what you get.” There is a kind of altercation between the permissiveness of the camp element



Image of an Image, 2010, gold and aluminum leaf on canvas, digital image on scrim, 81 x 77 inches.

and the feminine no implicit in your abstraction. The materials and means don’t give themselves over so easily to understanding. They demand that we take responsibility ourselves. We have discussed your work in relation to feminism. Is this withholding related?

RF: I don’t feel at all generous. I instinctively steal and borrow subjects to engage with things that are not *of* me but are present in the ecosphere enough to become *me*. I may appear permissive and respectful at first, but I’m often puzzled, grabby, and mean-spirited in stealing subjects and materials. As a work begins, these bits

of information are held captive (very unsexually) until they cooperate with the conditions I propose with paint, scale, and color decisions. This is where I butt up against subject: Where is it, exactly? What are its margins, limits? The third part is the most vexing and complex one: What do I have to offer? My beliefs, perceptions, understandings... How does a thing get made so that it becomes an aggregate of socially generated subjects and materials, painting rules and regulations to do or be undone, and my own skill, or lack thereof, and, ultimately, an object that proposes, through its stubborn stillness,



The Little Engine (triptych), 2005–2008, mixed media, canvas,
79 x 240 inches.

the active movement of thinking?

I like boxing, so in regard to the idea of an altercation, great! Most people think of an altercation as a street fight, a brawl; anything goes. But boxing is a match: a codified set of rules and strategies men and women learn, rehearse, and apply. Boxers vary in height, weight, age, talent, technique, physical and mental agility, versatility. The match-up may not always be ideal, but whether it's a three-round novice fight or a twelve-round bout, the ring is always the same size—a grid within which you must gain control through the use of all available tools. I'm for any art that uses the tools and rules for gain. I think of my studio activity as more nuanced than a brawl: locate the grid, find the center, don't square up, keep moving, create an opening, and be alert to ones that suddenly present themselves. The altercation—well, it's just *bam bam bam*—an event quickly produced, enacted, gone. Not too much to chew over in the end.

In relation to the feminine *no* that you detect, that's a yes. The question of value as specifically related to an impoverishment of means, in this particular project, not my work as a whole, is a yes...

JL: Are you playing with me? That's a *no*, yes?

RF: Okay, I am playing. You're correct. It is the feminine *no*: a way of giving meaning to loss. *The Estate* taken as a construct is, fundamentally, facing loss as a productive act. It has felt

performative somehow, but not in the sense of a work of performance art or a durational event. Even working figuratively was never an option for my work. An object elicits zero empathy; it's not sentient. It's more of an obstacle to feeling. My *no* and the obstacle are co-dependents. I'm reminded of a legendary story that I heard first-hand but of which I remember only the outlines. At a public lecture at Columbia University on the philosophy of language, someone was saying that a double negative could become a positive but a double positive cannot become a negative. From the rear of the hall, philosopher Sidney Morgenbesser shouted, "Yeah, yeah." This is the way I mean my *no*.

JL: Hilarious. I think of your *no* as a negation that does not involve an imposition of will. It is a sacrifice of something that you want for the sake of maintaining the structure of the self, a denial to the self for the self. It is not a simple "no means yes" thing, though. You might associate it with the Bartleby stance: "I would prefer not to." Bartleby sacrifices everything through this *no*: his job, his place in society, his freedom, and, ultimately, his life. And what does he gain from his sacrifice? Nothing that we can perceive. That is why it is so disruptive! His refusal to participate causes havoc all around him. It is tremendously romantic, almost impossibly so. That is how I perceive your project.

RF: Negation has been a productive

force in my studio, and acutely so for the last 18 months. A couple of years ago, the dBfoundation gals proposed a project to a group of artists based upon Bartleby's stance. I think it was for T-shirts. I could not come up with anything for them. I now realize the reason—it was an already-announced cultural negation. I have to find my own negation, it must be all mine. For example, to reject figuration as sentient, too loaded, is to negate my body. I can't quite do that, but I can "prefer not" to deal with "the body" as a construct examined, denounced, re-constituted, reformulated as "social" bodies. Make any sense?

JL: Perfect sense. I feel the same way. I find the bandwagon oppressive. Especially in relation to this particular issue, because a bunch of Bartlebys standing around in a room together completely shuts down debate. It is a boring party. The refusal is no longer disruptive if it becomes a convention. Then it is merely a coquettish game.

RF: And you offer a perfect example. If our works were installed in a room, together, there would definitely be debate. Unless, of course, we occupied the space as a position, in collaboration. That would smooth the read of the work. This seems to be a common experience, amongst artists, consensual parties, and teachers of art. As far as this consistency goes, choosing "a direction" as an individual, amplifying it through sequential, repeatable presentation of works, I'd prefer not to.

As I'm making paintings, I'm occupied by thinking about the discussion they create with one another—is it a somber argument, are they mocking each other?—as well as the contradictions inherent inside each piece.

JL: Tell me about the shower curtain.

RF: Thank you for a simple question! Everyone calls it a shower curtain. I'm learning to live with that. It's actually two panels of a scrim with a digital print, to scale, of the painting it hangs in front of. I applied gold and aluminum leaf to each quite recently, using the print like a paint-by-numbers template. It's probably more straightforward than my description. Should I go further? The title is *An Image of an Image*.

JL: So there is a distancing going on? What was the image originally?

RF: It is an act of distancing that provides me with space for speculation. I've got to go backward a little. The image was initially the third element in a 2008 triptych titled *The Little Engine*. The title is borrowed from *The Little Engine That Could*, an early 20th-century children's book that I read many times over as a child—my *Mother Goose*—about the triumph of will over adversity. It's a moral tale, as well as a parable of American modernism. My triptych began with this quote from the South African artist Zwelethu Mthethwa: "Art in our day is not really done for art's sake; it questions issues related to global processes such as urban industrialization, identity crisis, gender, race and social imbalance." The middle painting of the *Engine* was based on a photo of a bullet-riddled windshield. But the *Image of an Image* you ask about—this was initially the caboose of the "engine," and was developed without an external textual or visual reference. Gold and aluminum leaf was applied to canvas and an image took hold—either of a wall or a map in a state of assemblage or deconstruction—while the leafing brought other iconic, slippery representations to mind.

Back to the scrim—or curtain—it was a digital image, intended to hang as part of the triptych, but I decided not to add it. *The Little Engine* was completed without the addition, and the scrim was stored. *Image of an Image* has become

Boxers vary in height, weight, age, talent, technique, physical and mental agility, versatility. The match-up may not always be ideal, but whether it's a three-round novice fight or a twelve-round bout, the ring is always the same size—a grid within which you must gain control through the use of all available tools. I'm for any art that uses the tools and rules for gain.

a painting independent of the earlier triptych. I had leftover foil that I leafed onto the scrim; with the additions, the potential was realized, as a material is projected upon and through—it's reflective and transparent, so the doubling of image then varies with the available light source. The making of this thing, involving processes handmade, digital, sewn, and fabricated, was immensely satisfying as it was dictated by what I thought the object needed rather than by a priori decisions.

JL: What does it mean to state "Art in our day..." on a painting in such a clear, general way? It seems bizarre. It insists that this is what *art* is, for *everyone*, and assumes an almost impossible authority. I am tempted of course to reply: Who are you to say what it is?

RF: Those were key questions for me before I thought of making *The Little Engine*: Who is being addressed? Who is doing the addressing? I was not just tempted to ask, but I did ask: Who are you to say what it is? Yet, while I agree with the urgency of social subject matters (social imbalance, identity, environmental issues, etc.) they have become so accessible within art production and art education as to be nearly a prescriptive form. They're verging on becoming as ossified as gestural abstraction has within the visual landscape. Who doesn't think about socially generated circumstances? Who doesn't

parse an art object as a social being? I wanted to make the painting look like a poster, an announcement, or a demand, and motivate it retinally to stumble over the words. For real. We talked earlier about the relationship of viewer to audience, and finding a "place of feeling." Yes, anger, consternation, and admiration—how could I make what was an already complicated condition to an even slower read, making it a more vexing experience than it already was? By trying to engage with the question visually. Who am I to make a painting about this? Agency is the answer to this question: I am the artist.

I Made a Terrible Mistake: Rochelle Feinstein Remembers Michael Jackson

cameron shaw 07/06/09

Since his untimely death, I, like many, have become obsessed with the meteoric rise and fall of Michael Jackson. For me, it has rekindled my earliest flame of fanaticism: At age six, I attended my first concert, the final leg of the sold-out Bad World Tour. That night in Los Angeles, the stage was rocked by an earthquake - a common occurrence for city residents, but in retrospect, a sign of the shift in celebrity terrain that would come to define Jackson's career.

Rochelle Feinstein's latest exhibition at Art Production Fund's Lab space, "I MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE," has presciently exhumed the fertile ground of Jackson's ensuing public missteps, accusations, and apologies. Begun in 2002, days after the King of Pop infamously dangled his infant son from a hotel balcony, Jackson's fall from grace is framed by the 2003 death of crooner Barry White, known for his message of unabashed love. In her work, Feinstein draws upon images of uprooted pansies at Giverny, cherry blossoms, and a rushing river to create a synthetic Eden, unsettlingly rife with the promise of absolution and sensual redemption.

The comically disjunctive mélange of painting, photography, video, and sculpture is united by Feinstein's longstanding interest in light and its optical and metaphorical manifestations. Open only three days a week, the exhibition is visible 24 hours from the street, suggesting that one's initial impression of the works is as critical as the experience of viewing them inside the gallery. Bisected by an unfinished wall, the show is particularly dramatic at night: the Jackson side glows with colored bulbs, while a disco ball peppers the side of the gallery dedicated to White with glimmering dots.

The disco ball gains conceptual valence through repetition, becoming a symbol of transgression and transformation. In the work, *Global TV*, 2005, a small television screen is painted to resemble the clichéd party staple, while the black-and-white programming flickers unintelligibly behind. A series of white paintings, including *DJ Purity*, 2004, mimics the dappled light of the object on canvas while evoking the monochromatic works of Robert Rauschenberg. One is left to consider the crucial function of light in the painting process, and also its role as the stifling byproduct of the celebrity machine.

Though Feinstein is sometimes obtuse in her referential system, the work *Auditorium*, 2004, is agonizingly clear. In cheery pink and blue, it depicts the blank space that was created in the marquee of the Michael Jackson Auditorium when his name was removed following allegations of child molestation. Though the light in Feinstein's works seemingly burns brightly throughout the exhibition, its absence is painfully palpable as the darkness of ridicule, violence, and forgetting.

[*"I Made A Terrible Mistake,"* installation view; *Auditorium*, 2004, egg tempera on panel, plaque; all images courtesy the artist and the Art Production Fund.]

The New York Times

April 15, 2011

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN: 'The Estate of Rochelle F.'

By **KEN JOHNSON**

On Stellar Rays

133 Orchard Street, Lower East Side

Through May 1

Rochelle Feinstein, who has been painting at the intersection of feminist insouciance and Rauschenbergian exuberance for the last two decades, here toys with the idea of ending the struggle. But the invigorating effect of her exhibition argues for the opposite of retirement.

In a handwritten cri de coeur introducing a series of collage-drawings representing plans for the paintings in this show, Ms. Feinstein meditates on the dismal economy's effects on herself and other Americans. She decides to consolidate her remaining resources into one last testament.

Made of paint, canvas, newspapers, plastic foam, photographs, torn fabric and a sad, heart-shape balloon spray-painted in rainbow stripes, Ms. Feinstein's works play a mordantly knowing, passive-aggressive, art-about-art game. A five-foot-square canvas announces the exhibition title, "The Estate of Rochelle F.," in buoyant, frayed, glue-on letters cut from black fabric. "Mr. Natural" is a sly satire on creative virility. It has a bold, brushy X composition of thick, coagulated green paint punctuated by a splotch of white, crystalline material that can be read as alchemical salt or the ejaculate of the heroic male Expressionist. The lovely "Image of an Image" offers a feminine alternative: sheer curtains covered with a patchwork of gold and aluminum leaf hang from a steel rod over a similarly decorated canvas. Painting subsides into bourgeois, domestic complacency.

What true creative striver does not at some point feel the pain of futility in this capriciously rewarding world? Ms. Feinstein's wry, melancholic art suggests that despair may be a fecund mother of invention.

Art in America

September 2008

Modernist at the Disco

Rochelle Feinstein mixes formalist style and postmodern attitude in her darkly humorous paintings and altered objects.

BY CARRIE MOYER

Since the early 1990s, Rochelle Feinstein has been making deeply personal paintings that interrogate the legacy of modernism through the palpable framework of her own lived experience. Feinstein's dark humor and uncanny ability to find resonant and, more important, scalable visual metaphors—images that seem to effortlessly expand and contract between the personal and the political—has made her a vital figure in the art world, especially valued by painters. Early on, she was happily mining the conventions of modernist abstraction for their social implications, all the while enjoying the formal ravishments of flatness and the grid. Although Feinstein is often called a conceptual artist, her inventive approach to processes and materials derives more from the act of problem solving than a fixed theoretical stance. In an effort to compensate for painting's intrinsic limitations, she is willing to try anything.

This winter Feinstein presented simultaneous solo exhibitions of work from the past two years at two well-known artist-run venues, Momena Art in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and the Suburban in Chicago. Both shows contained a mix of paintings, ready-mades and multiples that touch upon a seemingly incongruent array of ideas and methods. The paintings ranged from representational to abstract to text-based. Into this mélange, Feinstein introduced an installation of altered television sets, a collection of silkscreened mirrors and some stamped-metal nameplates. The artist's long-standing interest in light—and its many metaphoric and optical manifestations—functioned as the primary conceptual and perceptual element linking disparate works. In Chicago, light feebly bounced back and forth between a series of mirrored panels, a tiny disco ball and a vintage monitor placed on a battered stool. In Brooklyn, a grainy signal was transmitted from a cluster of five '70s-era black-and-white TV sets and clock radios titled *Global TV*. Each of the small, vaguely space-age monitors was hand-painted with the crude black contours of a disco ball, through which snippets of recognizable television programs could be

seen and heard. Another characteristic that binds Feinstein's work is this no-nonsense, earnest method of manufacture. Whether she's painting a picture or covering a panel with a prefab grid of mirrors, her uncomplicated approach to materials often belies the highly evolved knot of ideas and emotions that form the core of each work.

In earlier canvases, the addition of banal materials (dishcloths, Xeroxes of found texts, photos of flower beds or monosyllabic speech balloons) combined with a dissonant palette seemed to indicate Feinstein's impatience with the slowness and muteness of painting. By contrast, the overall tenor of both recent exhibitions was somber, spare and even melancholic. This mood is reflected in her colors. Matte blacks, the off-whites of

cotton duck, mirrors and dull metallics elegantly offset the occasional flare of primary color. When text is used, it is elegiac and unequivocal. Riffing bleakly on "WAR IS OVER (If You Want It)," John and Yoko's famous 1969 billboard project, Feinstein placed the slogan "LOVE IS OVER!" on top of a grid of mirrored tiles. The phrase is screenprinted on small (8-by-10-inch) panels in 20 different languages—one, reportedly, for each of the artist's lovers. In a larger version, "LOVE IS OVER!" appears in English on two reflective panels that look like a sandwich board. Instead of hanging vertically, the panels in all works are rotated so that the text runs perpendicular to the floor, forcing the viewer to bend awkwardly in order to study it. The fierce hyperbole of this declaration of love's bitter end may be utterly self-evident, but the placement of the panels insists there's no such thing as an "easy read" in this artist's world.

"LOVE IS OVER!" uses the viewer's fractured reflection in the ambient twinkle of mirrors to personalize an otherwise operatic sentiment. In Feinstein's "Hotspot" series of paintings, light is arrested in blown-out halftones and portends something much, much bigger than the drama of our intimate relationships. Feinstein began making the "Hotspots" in 2005 to commemorate each year the U.S. military has been engaged in

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Rochelle Feinstein: Love Is Over!, 2007, glass paint and mirror tiles on panel, Styrofoam, diptych, 38 by 49 inches each.

Opposite, Global TV, 2007-08, glass paint on vintage black-and-white TVs and stools, dimensions variable. Photos this article Frank Schwere.



Feinstein

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Afghanistan. Each painting shows the same four-color schematic of a sphere that vacillates between disco ball and corporate brand. Painted in loose benday dots on raw canvas, the off-kilter layers of color eventually settle into a single murky silhouette of a gridded sphere. At Momenta Art, three "Hotspot" paintings served as sobering visual ballast for the rest of the show—opaque logos advertising military spectacle without end and other global migraines.

Not all of Feinstein's recent paintings are as mercilessly stripped down as the "Hotspots." The artist's latent romanticism and love for painting history, sometimes overshadowed by her comical cynicism, are given full voice in works such as *Boo Fucking Hoo*, *Photo* and *Hitting the Wall*. From afar, *Boo Fucking Hoo* looks like a black monochrome randomly covered with a spray of shimmering marks, an update on Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold*. Up close, however, it is clear that the sparkle comes from haphazard lines of gold and silver leaf that are "scratched" into the dark ground. Dragging a long fingernail through black paint is but one (fabulous) way to wake up that old warhorse of heroic abstraction, the monochrome. Feinstein's sly anthropomorphizing of abstract shapes carries through to *Ball and Chain*, a miniature disco ball contraption that sat forlornly in front of *Boo Fucking Hoo*. Instead of being suspended from the ceiling, the mirrored ball is disconsolately jerked around on the floor, as if being strangled on its chain, attached to a motorized black platter resembling a small platform or sculpture pedestal.

The grouping of three contiguous works at Momenta Art, collectively titled *The Little Engine*, might be considered a kind of accidental encapsulation of Feinstein's various trajectories. In the center of the group was *Shoot*, a realistic painting of a bullet-riddled windshield, based on a photograph from Falluja. The artist has removed the carnage beyond the windshield and replaced it with a lovely blue sky etched by a network of cracks and shattered holes. In Feinstein's hammy ode to photorealism, the painted fissures in the glass are so exaggerated that they begin to look like sutures raised across the skin of the painting. Abutting *Shoot* on the right was *Hitting the Wall*, a large painting covered with a ragged patchwork of delicate gold and aluminum leaf. Like a swanky rendition of an overcast Guston abstraction from the 1950s, the work features soft gilt rectangles that jostle in the center of the picture, echoing the seemingly capricious composition of *Shoot* and emitting a diffused light. Besides creating a minuscule barrier between the viewer and the surface (in violation of Greenberg 101), placing the reflective leaf on top of the canvas presents the possibility of a reciprocal interaction: we look at the painting and the painting "looks" at us, however opaquely. Self-reflexivity, an *idée fixe* of modernism, is thereby relocated from the formal to the psychological sphere.

The act of swapping out the locus of self-reflexivity—from the purely exterior and esthetic to the interior and personal—comes full circle in *Zwelethy/Zwelethu*, a large red, yellow and green painting that dominated the group, flanking the left side. This picture is emblazoned with the words of the South African artist Zwelethu Mthethwa: "Art in our day is not done for art's sake. It questions issues, related to global processes, urban industrialization, contemporary cultures, identity crisis, gender, race, and social imbalance." His weighty pronouncement is hand-painted to resemble the chunky wood type of a 19th-century broadside and embedded in a miasma of hot, striated color that seems to melt off the canvas. Hans Hofmannesque rectangles of intense red and blue—the ultimate representations of the hegemony of formalism, or simply a couple of jazzy, colored rectangles—push way out to the very front of the picture plane, visually outpacing the text. Two small, mysterious aluminum nameplates, embossed with incorrect and correct spellings of Mthethwa's name, hang on the wall



The Little Engine, 2005-08, mixed mediums on canvas, triptych, 77 by 237 inches overall.

next to his fiery words, hammering home the daunting task of using art to negotiate the vast space of cultural difference.

Photo (*Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*) is a dazzling meditation on Joan Miró's 1924 painting by the same name in which he playfully predicts the future of representational painting. Comprising two elements on a white field—the word "Photo," writ large in a curly, black script, and a small abstract scrap of blue—Miró's picture is refined and chicly "modern" for 1924. In Feinstein's version, the vivid hue of Miró's dreams has exploded into discs of light that revolve around a silver room. Quirky lozenges of pure color, overlapping like early modernist exercises in transparency, seem to wash over the walls. Looking at this picture, it's easy to imagine Sonia Delaunay and Feinstein together at Warhol's Factory, shaking their groove things.

"Rochelle Feinstein: New Work" was on view at Momenta Art, Brooklyn, N.Y. [Jan. 25-Feb. 25], and "Rochelle Feinstein and David Reed" appeared at the Suburban, Oak Park, Ill. [Jan. 13-Mar. 5].

Author: Carrie Moyer is a Brooklyn-based painter and writer, and an assistant professor at the Rhode Island School of Design.

Rochelle Feinstein

I MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE/WhiteHouse, 2006

The White House, tour guides, 30 paintings, 5 TV sets, environmental "Garden" video, Barry White audio loop, 30 6-inch mirrored disco balls, 10 units hazer lights.

On loan from the artist

In this macro-installation, White House tour guides lead visitors through a drastically altered National Landmark. The tour goes through thirty public and private spaces, each of which runs a disorienting lighting program designed to compress a 24-hour light cycle into one hour. Thirty paintings from Feinstein's "I Made a Terrible Mistake" series – along with five copies of her "Garden" video, a ubiquitous Barry White audio loop, and thirty rotating mirrored disco balls – also occupy the White House.

Feinstein's project transforms this site of symbolic power into architectural folly, reworking the symbolic value of our national "big house" from the inside out. The artist says: "The most recent responses of George Bush, for example, about 'security' at US ports, are just one reason why I would like to use the big house as a metaphorical site. Mistakes are made, no apologies offered. And this is an ideal site for some redemption (which G.B. does believe in), elegiac Motown-style."

The paintings and videos used in this installation are culled from two earlier threads of Feinstein's "I Made a Terrible Mistake." The work in this series explores the structures of mistake and redemption, using Barry White's music to present a "promise of redemption, albeit through the sensual-sexual realm, contradicting the traditional expectation of forgiveness in the moral realm."

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