

WALTER ROBINSON

« C'est le destin bébé »

Air de Paris
from October 16th 2021



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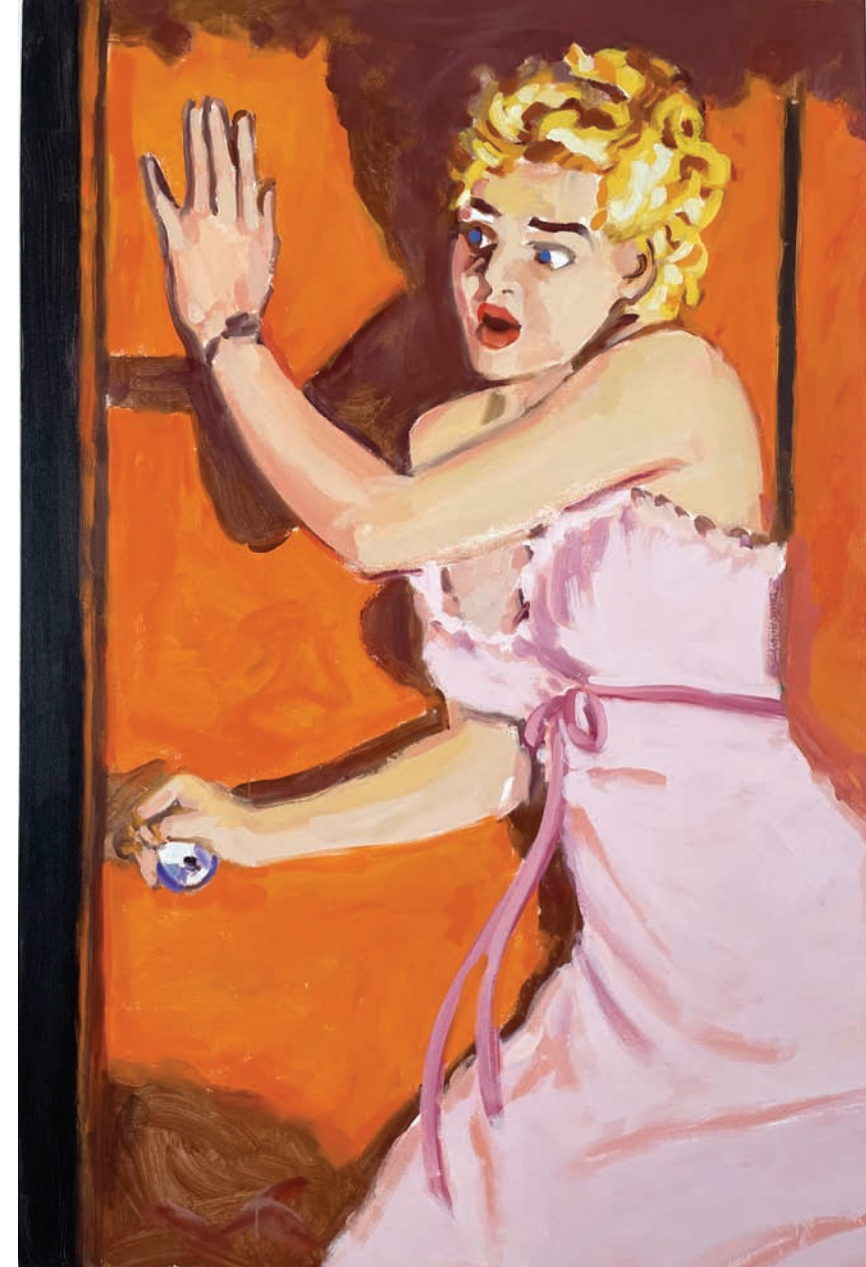
43, rue de la Commune de Paris 93230 Romainville

Walter Robinson is a New York painter and art critic. He was born in 1950 and has lived and worked in New York City since 1968. As an art writer, Robinson is perhaps most celebrated for coining the term «zombie formalism» during a stint as columnist for Artspace.com.

In 1973 he launched Art-Rite magazine with two collaborators, publishing irregularly until 1977. During the same period he was a co-founder of Printed Matter, and somewhat later served as a correspondent for the cable TV show “Art TV Gallery Beat.” Robinson also wrote for Art in America, Artspace.com, the East Village Eye and the Observer. In 1996, he became founding editor of Artnet Magazine, a post he held until 2012.

He began exhibiting his paintings in earnest with Collaborative Projects, participating in “The Real Estate Show” and “The Times Square Show” in 1980. In 1982 he had his first exhibition with Metro Pictures, and later showed at galleries in the East Village and elsewhere. A retrospective of his paintings opened at Illinois State University in Normal, IL in 2014, traveling to the Galleries at Moore in Philadelphia, and debuting the new Jeffrey Deitch gallery in Soho in 2016. In 2017 his work was included in “Fast Forward: Work from the 1980s” at the Whitney Museum. In 2020 he had exhibitions at Galleria Mazzoli in Modena and Galerie Sébastien Bertrand in Geneva.

<https://walterrobinsonstudio.blogspot.com/>



It's Doom Baby, 2021
acrylic on canvas
153 x 102 cm

AIR DE PARIS

WALTER PRESENTS

"Listen to everything that is said, look at everything that is done, and do what you want."

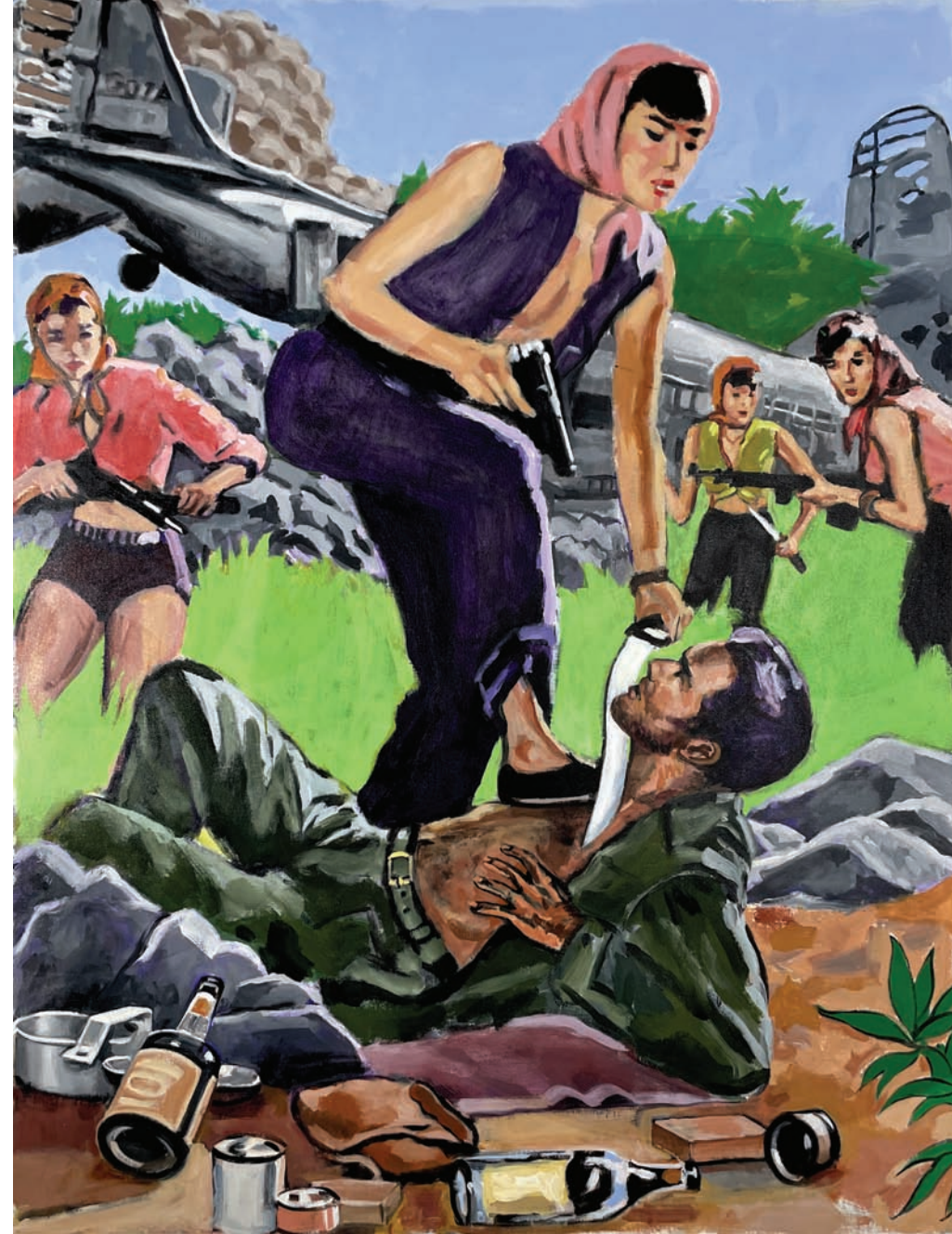
Matisse

Benign king of hi-lo country, Walter Robinson learnt a key lesson from his mentor Mr. Warhol: just let yourself love the world around you, all that you survey, from highest museum masterpiece to lowest gutter burger wrapper, and the world will love you back. A near-mythic figure of downtown Manhattan lore, deep grounded in the grungy glory of that bankrupt 1970s city, Robinson has played many parts, appearing as everything from bar room buccaneer worthy of Bukowski to art magazine editor in a grey flannel suit.

But above all he has painted; at first with amusement and irony, a witty skit on kitsch, a wry riff on an almost exhausted form, playing with Pop art like a cat with a tired mouse. But "painting" is a sneaky virus, and once it has infected the innocent artist it becomes addictive, obsessive, a siren singing its own seduction. After decades of serving this compulsive master even the most sworn devotee of "the sign" is bound to find themselves, like Robinson, a devotee of paint itself. Let us remember that Robinson's first solo show was with Metro Pictures in 1982, 40 years ago, and over so long an apprenticeship it is near impossible to stop oneself from becoming increasingly integrated, steadily skilled, an inevitable virtuoso.

Robinson has an unusual advantage, for rather than the old French dictum of "stupid as a painter" he actually knows everything there is to know about art, from most ancient cave carvings to very latest fashion of 2021. Not only did he author a populist history of art, he also worked for many years as a wise and witty critic, not least as a founder of the seminal journal Art-Rite and later as editor of Artnet Magazine. As such he measured with passion and precision every angle in contemporary art, even inventing his own celebrated term, "Zombie Formalism." Thus Robinson came to know, both instinctively as artist and critically as observer, every possible way of making art today, every single goal and gambit. Then he happily carried on with his own signature painting, same as it ever was, just more and more accomplished.

Artists often unconsciously echo the art of the year of their birth, their own aesthetic birthright, and Robinson, born in 1950, seems to have been umbilically seeped in the visual culture of that era; ambiotically afloat in the spectacle of this epoch, the final years when those Mad Men agencies brought traditional



Vietnam, 2021
acrylic on canvas
203 x 152,5 cm

illustration to its pictorial heights. Coming of age in New York's hall of mirrors of ultra-irony, Robinson seemed to be celebrating and sabotaging the all-American values embodied in such graphic styles, a politically radical "détournement" of the aspirational paradise of postwar consumerism. Although Robinson's painting at that time blossomed forth from the Fauvist jungle of East Village Wild Style, it was also closely aligned with the "appropriation" and "simulacra" of his more conceptual contemporaries.

As this current exhibition, his first in France, makes clear, Robinson still stealthily advances as a satirical saboteur of the sign, though his actual painting now demonstrates a worryingly accomplished bravura dash. Thus his roll of green dollars sparks immediate comparison to Manet's famous asparagus, his "salad" is an outrageous exercise in Abstract Expressionist compositional free-fall, and his shirts, tactile and tasty, are extended puns on Neo-Geo gendered as a peculiarly pressed and pinned masculinity.

Particularly poignant is Robinson's chef d'oeuvre, Vietnam, a painting made this year, which pays homage to the complex political history which fatally links that country to both France and the USA. This painting also plays on the very French, highly politicised Pop of Nouvelle Figuration, an homage of sorts to the engagé painters of Mai '68, proving Robinson more than just the ultimate exponent of pure Americana. It is also funny and sexy, both of which are still, just, good things.

A delicious thing to eat, a cheeseburger is probably bad for you and even worse for the environment – a perfect American subject. France especially has fought a long battle against fatally attractive fast food and Coca-Cola, but who can refuse the sheer "thingness" of the thing, worthy of Francis Ponge or Merleau-Ponty, chunky, greasy, melting before us yet indomitably there.

We can read Robinson's subjects as symbols in a hermeneutics of attraction and repulsion: what is good for us, salad; what is dangerous, cheeseburger; and what is both vulgar yet imaginary, actual cash, a spring-roll of green dollars. Painting has always been about desire, the pleasure the artist tries to capture transmuted alchemically into the pleasure of the viewer. Robinson understands that such haptic desires and satisfactions come with a dangerous undertow, the paradoxical pull of what we do not like or want, magnetically drawing us toward our own final implication.

Adrian Dannatt
Amagansett, October 2021



Land's End Men's Traditional Fit Buttondown Collar Sailrigger Oxford Shirt
Canary Multi Stripe, 2019
acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 cm

About the Shirt Paintings

You know in advertisements - these paintings are based on advertisements, ones that come via catalogues, newspaper inserts and emails - men's shirts are often presented as neatly folded.

The shirt paintings are about abstraction, the kind that Marcia Tucker featured in «The Structure of Color» at the Whitney in 1971, including artists ranging from Rothko and Newman to Noland and Stella. The shirt paintings are a way of joining that club, that spiritual quest, while at the same time being a joke about it all, the kind of wit in which Freud saw signs from the unconscious.

Of course as abstractions the shirt paintings are poised very much on the threshold between the spiritual and material worlds. It tickles me, the notion of dressing in abstract patterns, which in addition to serving a mundane decorative function also might signal some kind of cosmological order. A plaid may not reach to a heavenly gyre but it certainly can indicate an ancient genealogy. It's an atavistic anthropology of dress.

The shirt paintings are an extension of the «normcore» series of paintings based on figures and such taken from department store ads and mail-order catalogues. In general this kind of material comes already designed for visual appeal, and already designed to sell (thus relieving me of those obligations). Typically these works partake in various ways in what I like to think of as the consumerist utopia, that idealized version of reality as we'd like it to be, neat and liberal and joyous. At the same time that the polymorphously perverse sometimes manages to peek through.



Men's big & Tall Deep Sea Tropical Flower Short Sleeve Linen Shirt, 2019
acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 cm



Land's End Men's Traditional Fit No Iron Twill Shirt Tree Root Tattersall, 2019
acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 cm



Magenta Rose Multi, 2019
acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 cm



Blue black white pink, 2019
acrylic on canvas
72 x 72 cm

About the Romance Paintings

“So I made [the Romance] paintings from pulp paperback covers because I liked the way they were painted – commercial illustration seemed to be a style that sidestepped questions of avant-garde authenticity. Images of embracing couples vamps and tough guys constituted a clear-eyed language of desire, and its period, the ‘40s and ‘50s, seemed constitutive of my youth, or perhaps more importantly, of my father’s imaginative psychology. Plus, these paintings were libidinally received, just like the originals were designed to be.”

Extract from *A Kiss before dying: Walter Robinson - A painter of pictures and arbiter of critical pleasures, with new works by the Artist.* Richard Milazzo - Galleria Mazzoli Editore. Page 162



Sex Circus, 2021
acrylic on canvas
203 x 152,5 cm

About the Cash Paintings

“Perhaps even more effective than a critical retort is stacks of money. Walter Robinson’s *Stacks* (2020) seems to pile up right against the moralism of critics like Craig Owens, not to mention the Pictures Generation in general. And there have been other such images, seemingly lauding the excesses of Capitalism. But this is not to say such images are not being offered up, on a proverbial silver platter or “in a sink”, with more than a modicum of irony. After all, it is not like Robinson himself, as an artist, has made ‘stacks’ over the years, even during the good ones. And this certainly seems like a good one. Whereas many of the Pictures artists seem to be doing quite well – irony of ironies, which is another kind of stack.

The fact that these stacks of cash are tied into bundles with string adds the further complication that all such accumulations of money and wealth usually involves ‘strings’ or bondage of some sort. In the process of this kind of grotesque accumulation, do we not also become slaves to the very thing we imagine will bring us ultimate freedom and happiness? But, on the other hand, not having ‘stacks’, even small ones, does not mean a life of deprivation will bring those things (happiness and freedom, if not success). But Robinson, as usual, is winking at us, and telling us he knows what is going on in the world of money and art – after all, so many of the *Weekend Updates* he wrote for *Artnet*, and various texts for other magazines, took for their subject the auction houses and the art market, in general. As the ultimate arbiter of critical pleasures, he could not but delight in the ridiculous figures the auction houses ‘cut’, along with galleries, collectors, museums, and artists as well.”

ibid. Page 439



Dark Money, 2021
acrylic on canvas
122 x 92 cm

About the Salad Paintings

I started making salad paintings about five years ago, inspired by my niece, who was working as a “health coach” via her Instagram account. She would combine images of healthy foods with inspirational texts encouraging self-improvement. These texts were so different from art writing, and the emphasis on health so different from the typical art message of bohemian risk and social nonconformism, that I was inspired to make paintings of salads in the same spirit.

In contrast to the flattened and squared away and pinned down shirt paintings, the salads are “tossed” - free, expressionist, Dionysian - the shirts are Apollonian - and inspired in part by Abstract Expressionism, notably the paintings of Joan Mitchell.

At any rate, for a small show at a small gallery on the Lower East Side of New York - “Don’t Make a Scene” at Kai Matsumiya Gallery - I wrote this text:

So guys what’s your agenda? We’re going to stick to our goals and follow our nutrition plans and eat healthy, right? Fuel up for a wintry day with some egg oatmeal with blueberries and chopped walnuts, or a wholesome green salad with chopped carrot, cucumber and tomato. Never underestimate the deliciousness of simplicity. A person could easily take the day off and binge on blockbuster movies in Times Square, but if you have big plans for your health and wellness, you won’t reach them by slacking off. It’s not easy to be driven by passion. It’s exhausting and can feel hopeless. But who wants to live life on autopilot? How can you miss the chance to experience the immense joy that comes from knowing you’ve touched someone else’s vital center? I struggle to inspire people to change their outlook and create paths to freedom. Painting has been good to me, and I would love to pay this forward and show people how they too can achieve happiness and peace and begin living their own lives of freedom. It’s the most fulfilling thing in the world, and the time to start is now.

-- Walter Robinson, New York, Jan. 26, 2016



Bean Salad, 2021
acrylic on canvas
122 x 122 cm



Caesars Salad, 2020
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



Hero Junior Burger, 2021
acrylic on canvas
102 x 102 cm



Burger King Rodeo Stacker, 2019, acrylic on paper, 27,9 x 35,5 cm

About the Burger Paintings

“The painterliness of the image alerts the viewer Robinson is not interested so much in literally rendering an actual hamburger, bottle of beer or pack of cigarettes; rather, he is invested in portraying the representations of these objects in the images as representations, not as any objective reality. By reiterating them as images, he brackets the representations as society’s, as the corporation’s, attempts to create false need, to generate generically a hunger to consume. They. Belong to the cultural and historical phenomenon Debord emphatically called, and described in his book as, the Society of the Spectacle: “The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images”.

ibid. Page 88



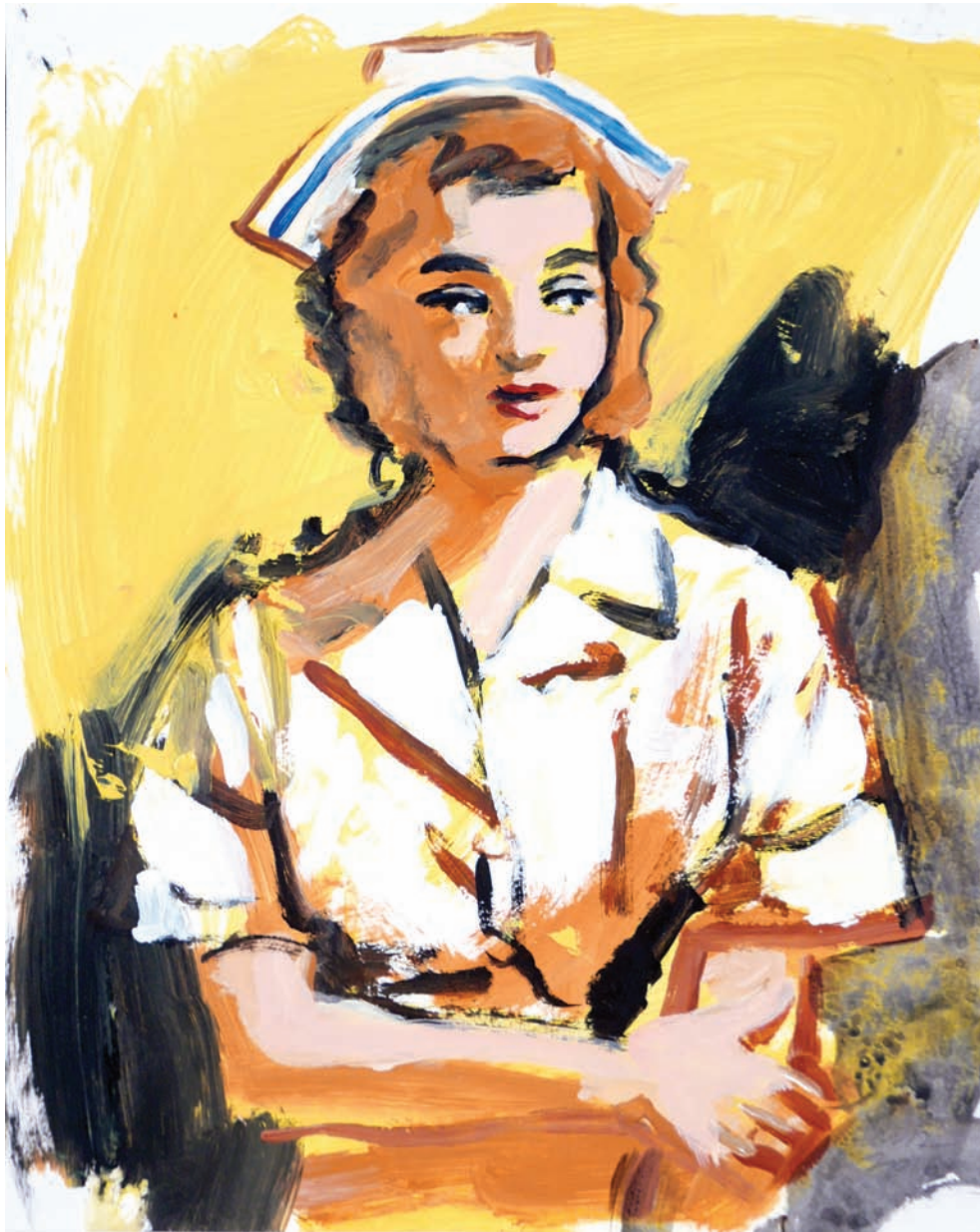
Single Malt, 2017, acrylic on paper, 27,9 x 35,5 cm

About the Liquor Paintings

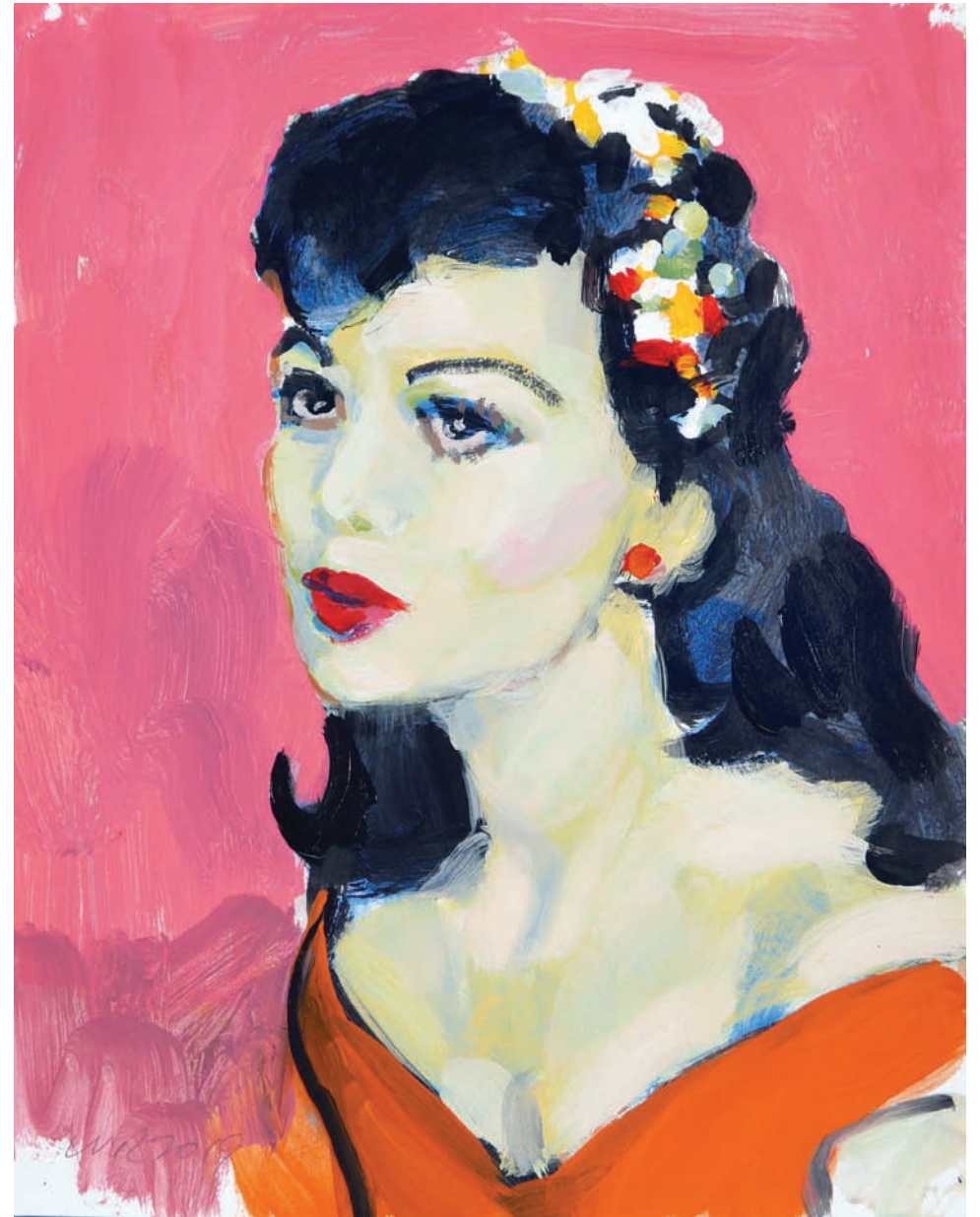
“We can derive the sense of dissolution in Robinson’s painting in the dissolute quality of the paint and in the way the lettering is smeared- ‘smeared’ in the same way we might slur our words when we are drunk.”

“The same interest in the high-octane semiotics of brand identity animates my later paintings of the ‘shelf landscapes’ found in liquor stores, bars and elsewhere. Regimented like soldiers on parade, each decked out in their distinctive colors, the liquor bottles hug the picture plane like apparitions from a Greenbergian fever dream. I like to think that the enviable potency of the magical elixirs inside each bottle somehow find immediate expression in the colors and brushstrokes dancing across the canvases that contain them.”

ibid. Page 157. Page 160



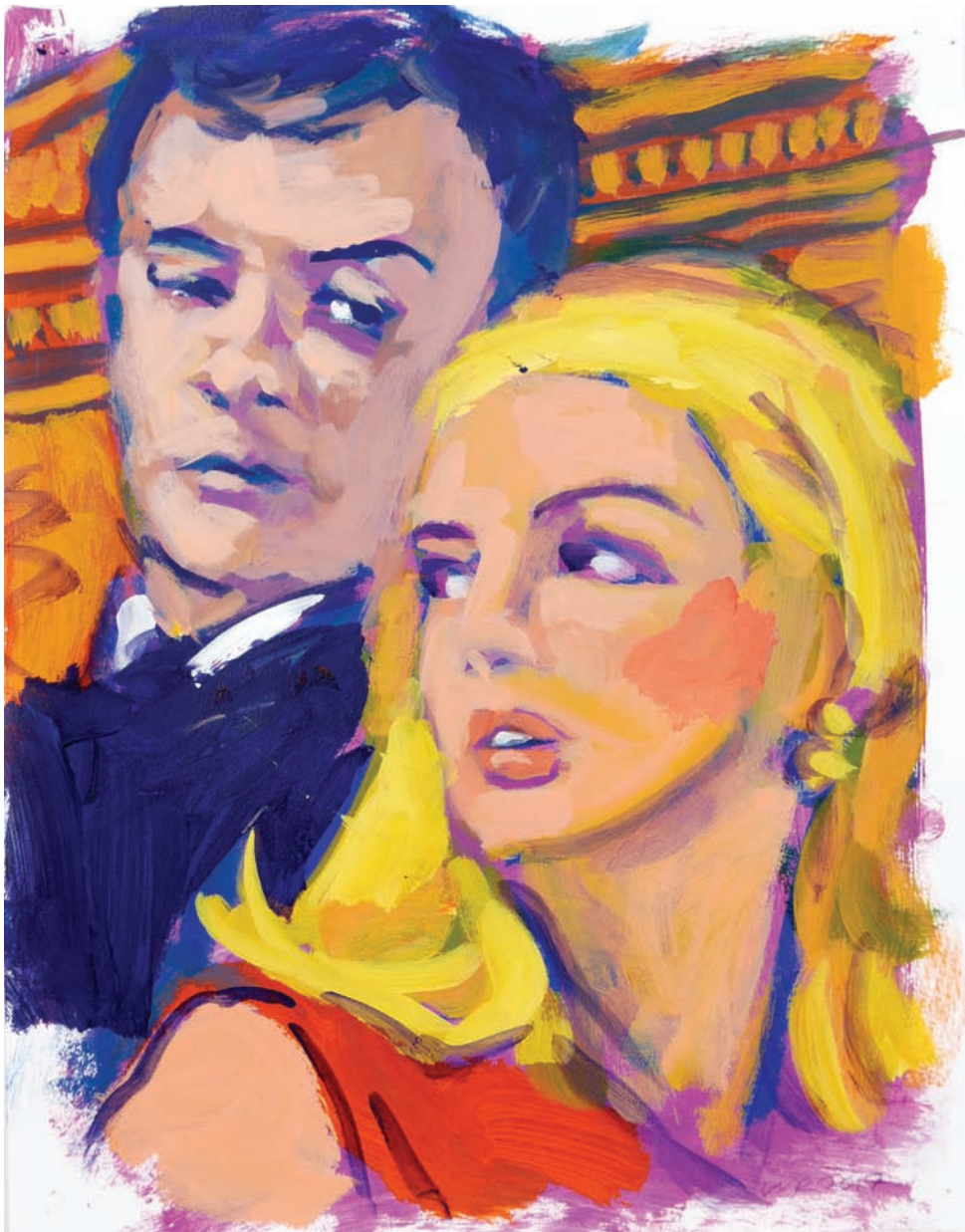
Ships Company, 2019
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



Walter Robinson Bamboo, 2019
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



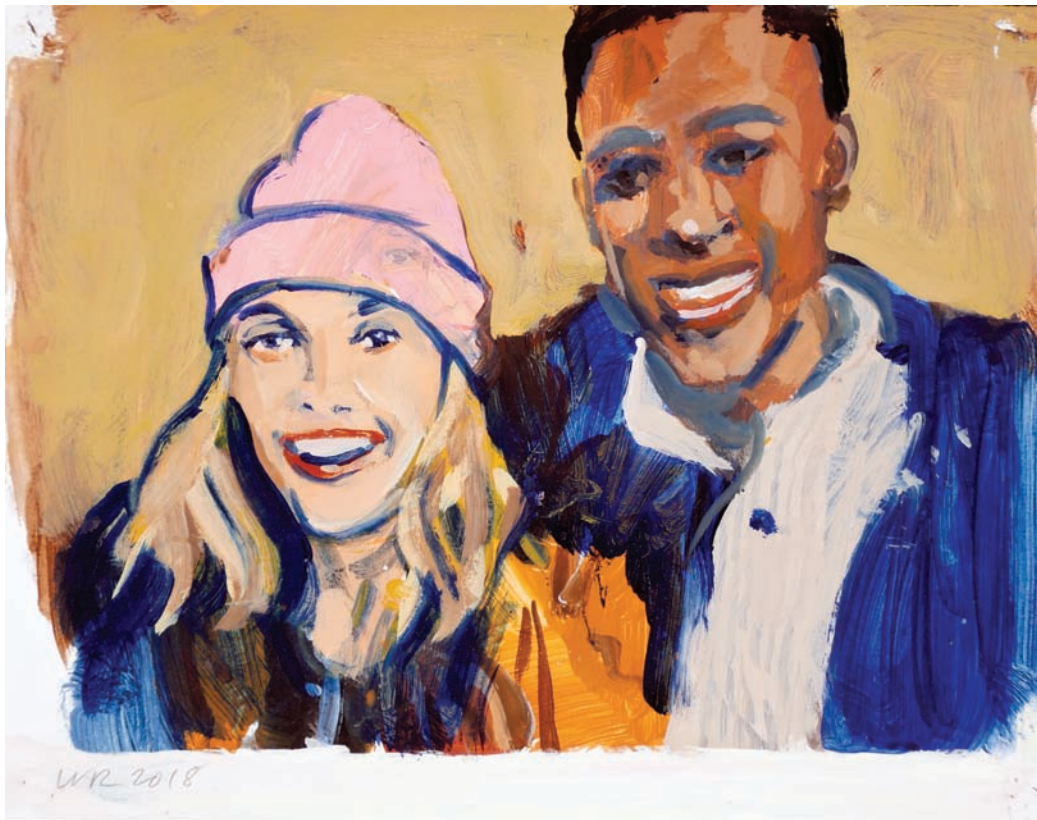
Rolls of Cash, 2015
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



The Ambassadors, 2017
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



Dangerous Games, 2019
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



Year End Bonanza Sale, 2018
acrylic on paper
27,9 x 35,5 cm



Womens Drifter Drape Cardigan Sweater Lands End, 2014
acrylic on paper
35,5 x 27,9 cm



New Paintings and Works on Paper, 2013-2020, exhibition view © Galleria Mazzoli, Modena



New Paintings and Works on Paper, 2013-2020, exhibition view © Galleria Mazzoli, Modena



Modern Times, exhibition view at Galerie Sébastien Bertrand © Annik Wetter

Flint Jamison

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Until December 9th 2021

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« Count Zero interrupt »

Until October 23th 2021

next

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