



MALCOLM MORLEY
Painting as Model

June 20 – August 2, 2024
520 West 25th Street

Petzel



“Models have featured a lot in many paintings. People refer to them as my toys...I’d be very indignant and say they’re not my toys they are my models. What I am interested in them is as archetypal figures. They stand for an absolute thing.”

—Malcolm Morley

1960s

From Manet through Pollock and on to Martin and Marden *modern* artists have attempted to find more and more radically emphatic ways to affirm painting's objecthood. Strange as it first may seem when presented with a super-realistic image of a ship or a child's birthday party, this tendency in modern and contemporary art was crucial to Morley's work in the 1960s and beyond.





HMS Hood (Friend) belongs to an important group of paintings by Morley on the themes of war, technology, and military prowess. In the mid-1960s, the artist began to use photographs from books, magazines, and newspapers as the point of departure from his abstract pictures of the 1950s.

HMS Hood (Friend)
1965
Liquitex and ink on canvas
41.75 x 41.75 inches
106 x 106 cm
(MOR 23/068)
Private Collection



On Deck

1966

Magnacolor and Liquitex on canvas

83.75 x 63.75 inches

212.8 x 162 cm

(MOR 23/0387)

Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York





GOOD  **YEAR**

Diving Champion

1967

Magnacolor and liquitex on canvas

50 x 60 inches

127 x 152.4 cm

(MOR 23/089)

Private Collection



Coronation and Beach Scene

1968

Magnacolor and liquitex on canvas

89.6 x 90.1 inches

227.6 x 228.9 cm

(MOR 23/093)

Collection of The Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC



Coronation and Beach Scene

Important works on loan include *Coronation and Beach Scene* (1968) from the Hirshhorn, the only double image “super-realist” painting Morley ever made. Starting in the mid-60s, Morley created his “super-realist” works using a technique in which a small source image, such as a photograph, is overlaid with a grid and translated to a large canvas in segments, an uncommon practice among New York artists at the time. Stacking the Queen of the Netherlands’ horse-drawn carriage procession atop, yet among, lounging 60s beachgoers (both sampled from a Dutch travel brochure), Morley’s two-tiered association, inscribed in the language of leisure and advertising (but then, not yet in painting), would continue to unfurl in his later work.



An early masterwork, *Birthday Party*, 1969 depicts a child's party with friends under the warm glow of the sun on an outdoor patio. The birthday boy—identifiable by his crown—is accompanied by five well-dressed children wearing cone hats who are either smiling for the camera or blowing on party whistles to indulge the celebrant.

Birthday Party
1969
Acrylic on canvas
40 x 40 inches
101.6 x 101.6 cm
(MOR 23/0100)





1970s

A significant formal shift takes place in Morley's paintings of the 1970s, breaking with the strict representational qualities that dominated the artist's work in the previous decade. Morley introduced a darker palette and rougher, more expressive brushstrokes, intensifying his manipulative abstraction of the image.



Madison Telephone Book Cover

1970

Acrylic on canvas

33 x 27 inches

83.8 x 68.6 cm

(MOR 23/0102)

Private Collection



A buckled plane has crash landed on top of one of the earlier picture postcard images of a ship arriving into a city's port. This time, however, the postcard isn't faithfully reproduced. Instead, its asymmetrical edges—already obscured by the twisted aircraft—suggest that it has been crumpled in the hands of the artist before being copied.

Age of Catastrophe
1976

Oil on canvas
61.25 x 97.1 inches
155.6 x 246.7 cm
(MOR 23/0167)

Collection of The Broad, Los Angeles





The Day of the Locust
1977

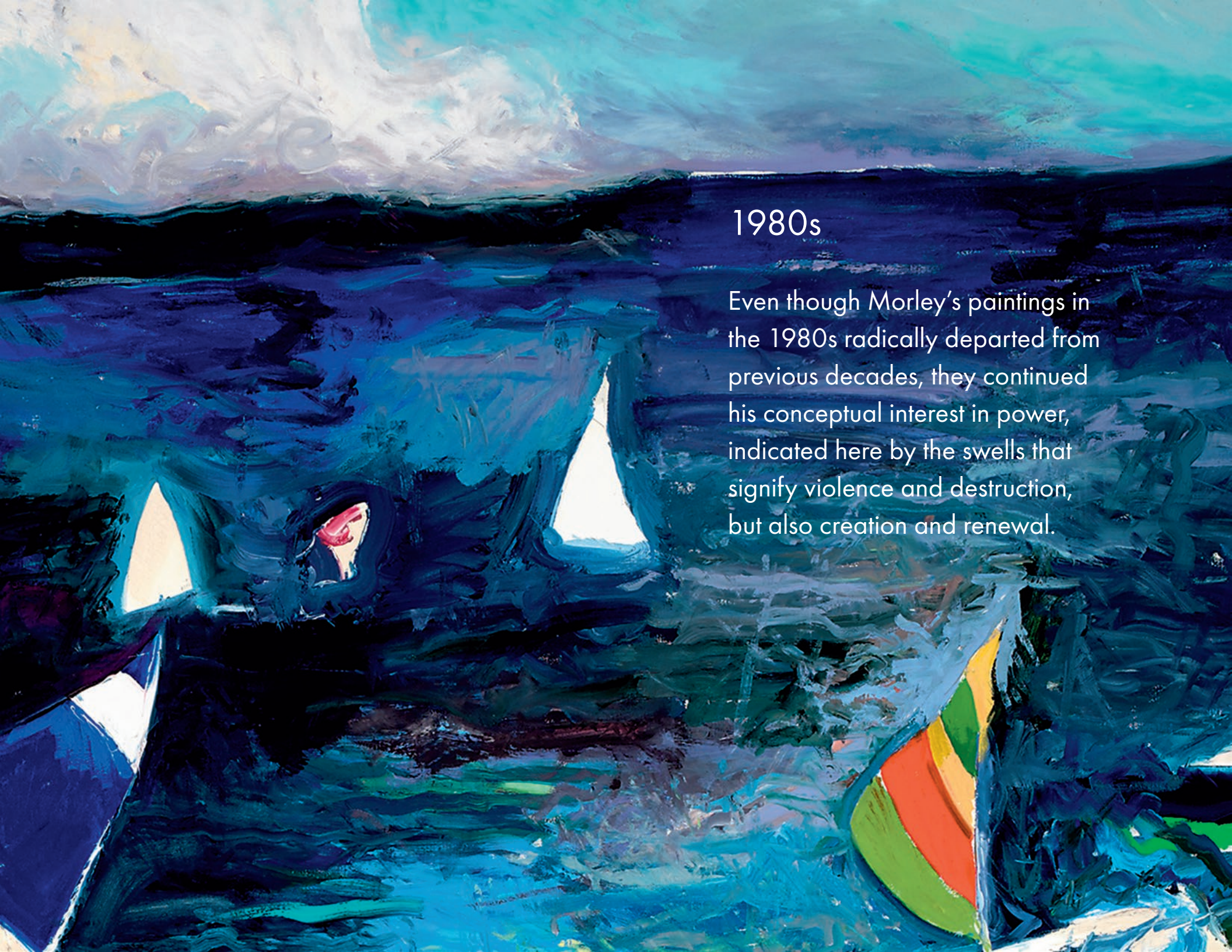
Oil on canvas
94.25 x 78.7 inches
239.4 x 199.7 cm
(MOR 23/0184)

Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York



The Day of the Locust

Morley's relationship with the grid, and indeed models, is further synthesized in the 1977 painting *The Day of the Locust*, on loan from the Museum of Modern Art. Titled after Nathanael West's 1939 novel, whose hero wanted to paint *The Burning of Los Angeles*, Morley uses his first catastrophe painting, *Los Angeles Yellow Pages* (1971) as the base from which he superimposes numerous boats, helicopters, and figures, suspended, in a flurry of combustion and chaos, atop the Los Angeles skyline.



1980s

Even though Morley's paintings in the 1980s radically departed from previous decades, they continued his conceptual interest in power, indicated here by the swells that signify violence and destruction, but also creation and renewal.



La Plage

1980

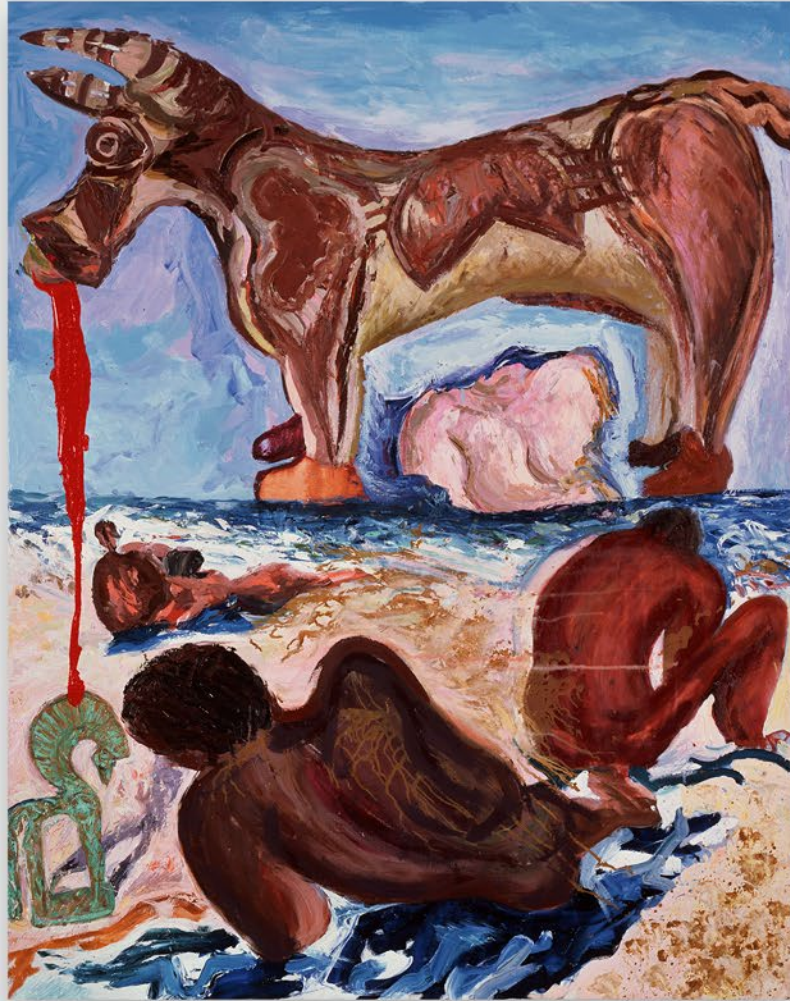
Oil on canvas

72.25 x 98.75 inches

181 x 264 cm

(MOR 23/0202)

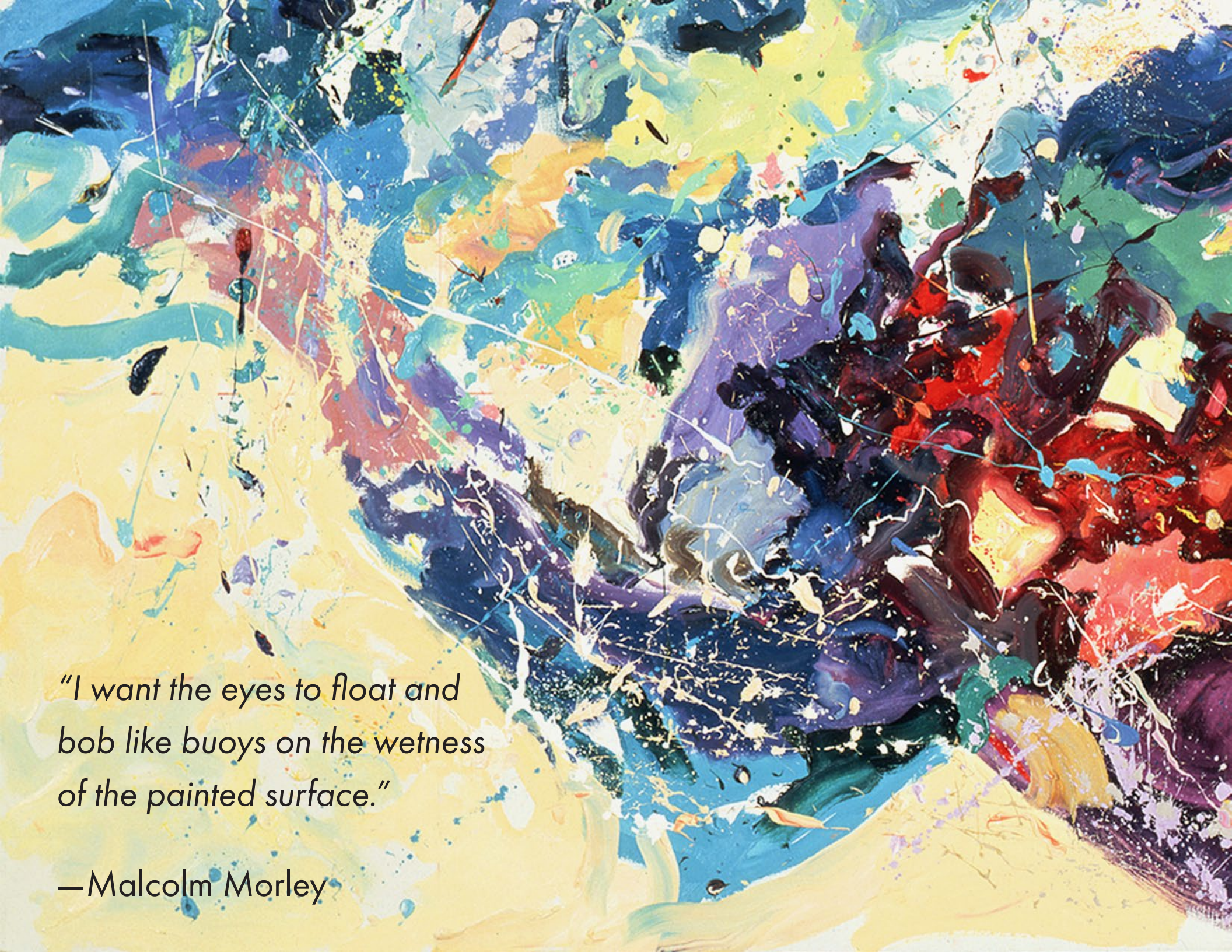
Private Collection



The Palms of Vai
1982

Oil on canvas
48.5 x 38 inches
123.2 x 96.5 cm
(MOR 23/0210)

Collection of CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson



"I want the eyes to float and bob like buoys on the wetness of the painted surface."

—Malcolm Morley



Seastroke, 1986 is an impressive example of Morley's painterly improvisations of the 1980s. the title *Seastroke* continues his interest in satirical wordplay, suggesting a play on the word sunstroke as well as the repeated movements entailed in swimming or rowing, and the gestures used to apply paint to a surface.

Seastroke

1986

Oil on canvas

60.25 x 98.25 inches

152.4 x 248.9 cm

(MOR 23/0229)

Collection of CCS Bard Hessel Museum, Annandale-on-Hudson



1990s

As the decades progressed the squares of his grids, like the painterly universe Morley had constructed for himself, expanded and morphed. By the 1990s, his grid moved into three-dimensions before receding and ultimately melting away altogether, his forms appearing more playroom fantasy than military drill.



The Oracle

1992

Oil and gold leaf on linen in four parts

2 attached model airplanes (paper, aluminum)

172 x 240 inches

436.9 x 609.6 cm

(MOR 22/119)

The colossal work *The Oracle*, 1992 is a painting in four parts. It is composed of four separate canvases and highlights four motifs to which Morley repeatedly returned: the moon, the plane, the ship, and the knight. This “Dadaist” gesture is again on full display here with the inclusion of two hand painted paper biplane models attached to the two upper quadrants of the picture.





Morley's proclivity for recycling earlier motifs is visible with major paintings such as *Titan*, 1994. It is a painting of Morley's bedroom, in which he has inserted an assortment of some of his favorite models including a squadron of blue and yellow planes, a tugboat aptly titled *Titan*, and a lighthouse wrapped in candy cane red and white stripes.

Titan
1994

Oil on canvas
54 x 60 inches
137.2 x 152.4 cm
(MOR 22/001)



Shipwreck
1994
Oil on canvas
56 x 78 inches
142.2 x 198.1 cm
(MOR 23/0279)
Private Collection



2000s

In the 2000s, Morley finally begins to let go of the grid. Lyrical painting takes a field of boldly colored forms as its subject matter. Although the underpainted grid remains visible in some areas of the canvas, the artist is no longer beholden to it. At its edges, the paintings begin to move from representation toward abstraction.



Monster Energy
2007

Oil on linen
64 x 72 inches
162.6 x 182.9 cm
(MOR 22/092)
Hall Collection



Collage
2008

Watercolor on paper
with paper collage

13.5 x 16 inches

34.3 x 40.6 cm

(MOR 22/043)



Ring of Fire

2009

Oil and string on linen
with separate oil on linen

88 x 81.5 inches

223.5 x 207 cm

(MOR 22/022)



COYCO

YAMAHA

YAMAHA

12



American Fighter Pilot (Ace)

2011

Oil on linen

47.6 x 60 in

121 x 152.4 cm

(MOR 22/054)



Rules of Engagement
2011
Oil on linen
45.5 x 58 inches
115.6 x 147.3 cm
(MOR 22/125)



The Spitfire

2012

Wall: Oil and sand on linen, wood and brass with paper and metal attachment

Sign and hanger: Oil paint on aluminum and steel

Sidewalk: Encaustic on wood, oil paint on steel and paverpol, cotton and wire

137 x 94 x 51 inches

348 x 238.8 x 129.5 cm

(MOR 22/010)

The Spitfire, 2012 is a stage-set like environment that recreates the exterior of an English pub. The work includes a life-sized cut-out of the artist standing guard as a Royal Navy Cadet, a painting of three bomber planes on the attack under the cover of darkness, an image of a civilian jumping to safety, a sculptural rendering of a V1 flying bomb, and a papier-mâché British Bulldog. Part history painting, self-portrait, political treatise, advert and effigy it forces viewers to tangibly grapple with the core themes that preoccupied the psyche of the artist for decades.



International Jubilee

2012

Oil on linen with watercolor
on paper and string attachments

62 x 72 inches

157.5 x 182.9 cm


(MOR 23/0568)

Private Collection



Through the 2010s, Morley continued to defy stylistic characterization. *Aircraft on a Yellow Plane* (2014), the latest work in the exhibition, demonstrates Morley's release from the grid, the wings of aircraft brushing each other in a loose ensemble against an opaque plane.

Aircraft on a Yellow Plane
2014
Oil on linen
42 x 52 inches
107 x 132 cm
(MOR 22/034)



Morley's painterly lexicon, transmutations of the vocabularies of advertising, capitalism, commodification, consumerism, corruption, modification, leisure, power, surveillance, transport, war, and weapons, continue to expand into gestural, focused fanfare for the retina, each painting containing many pictures.



About Malcolm Morley

Morley is acknowledged as one of the earliest innovators of Superrealism, which developed as a counterpoint to Pop Art in the 1960s. Over the course of his distinguished career, Morley defied stylistic characterization, moving by turns through so-called abstract, realist, Neo-romantic, and Neo-expressionist painterly modes, while being attentive to his own biographical experiences. Morley studied at the Camberwell College of Arts and the Royal College of Art.

Over his lifetime, Morley had numerous presentations of his work hosted by institutions including the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1983); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1983); Brooklyn Museum, New York (1984); Tate Liverpool (1991); Kunsthalle Basel (1991); Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (1992); Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY (1992); Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1993); Fundación La Caixa, Madrid (1995); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (1996); Hayward Gallery, London (2001); Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (2006); Yale School of Art (2012); the Hall Art Foundation, New York (2013-14), and Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2023). He has participated in numerous international surveys, including Documenta 5 (1972) and Documenta 6 (1977), and was awarded the inaugural Turner Prize in 1984, the Painting Award from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1992, and the Francis J. Greenburger Award in 2015. He was inducted into both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2009) and the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2011).