

INTIMACY IN DISCOURSE: UNREASONABLE SIZED PAINTINGS

Curated by Phong Bui

SVA Chelsea Gallery
November 21 - December 22, 2015





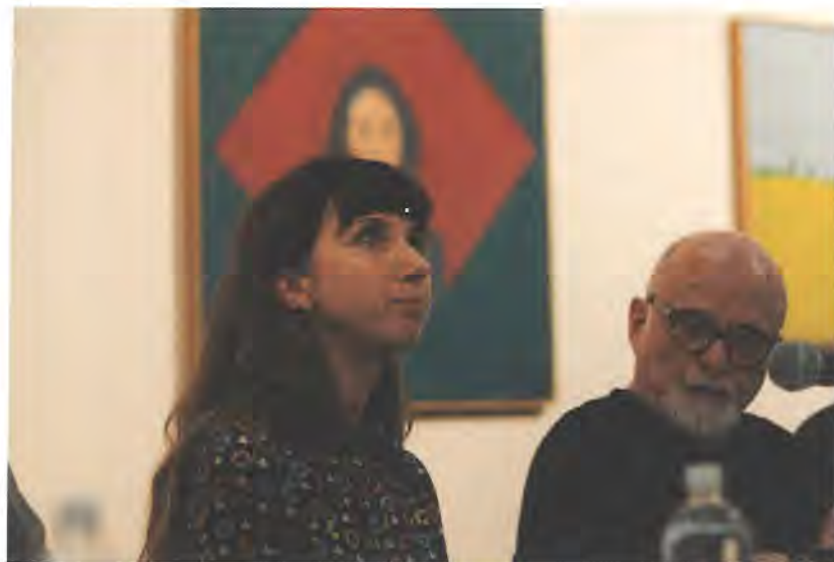
Intimacy in Discourse Panel Discussion at SVA Chelsea Gallery December 12, 2015

Mark Greenwold, Matvey Levenstein, Catherine Murphy, Tom Nozkowski, Ann Pibal, Julia Rommel, James Siena, Robert Storr, Roger White, Lisa Yuskavage, moderated by Phong Bui

PHONG BUI: The idea for this two-part show *Intimacy in Discourse: Reasonable and Unreasonable Sized Paintings*, first of all, derived from a show that I curated in 1999, *An Homage to Albert Pinkham Ryder*, at a now defunct gallery in Greenpoint. It was my much belated response to a memorable Ryder show at the Brooklyn Museum in 1990. The *Homage* show featured works by Forrest Bess, Gandy Brodie, Chris Martin, Peter Acheson, Katherine Bradford, and Margrit Lewczuk among others. It also included a terrific Bill Jensen painting called *Ryder's Eye* (1978 – 79). Secondly, this current show is partially a response to a remark Pollock once made, “The only American master who interests me is Ryder.” I of course immediately thought of the differences in their works. Ryder only made very moderately sized paintings. Take the one at the Met, *Moonlight Marine*, for example, which measures 11 ½ by 12 inches and took him a whole year to paint. Pollock’s paintings, on the other hand, are known for their large sizes. His *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, also at the Met, is about 9 by 17

feet, and he probably painted it in one sitting. Yet their use of materials is pretty similar. Ryder embraced unorthodox materials such as candle grease and animal fat in order to generate what Greenberg called “American chiaroscuro.” Pollock did the same with enamel house paint. I should also mention their shared fascination with Melville, especially with *Moby Dick*. Ryder was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where Ishmael took to sea from the Spouter Inn in the first chapter of *Moby Dick*. Many of Pollock’s late paintings were named after the novel, including *Blue Poles* (1952), *Ocean Grayness* (1953), *The Deep* (1953), and *Greyed Rainbow* (1953), among others. In fact, Pollock’s dog was named Ahab. And when Pollock died, the two books that were left in his studio were *Moby Dick* and *On Growth and Form* by D’Arcy Thompson. Lastly, the concept was also partially related to an unpublished panel *On the Relevance of Small Paintings* that we organized at the Brooklyn Rail headquarters in the summer of 2007, moderated by Irving Sandler and John Yau. The panelists included

Installation View: *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York. November 21 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.

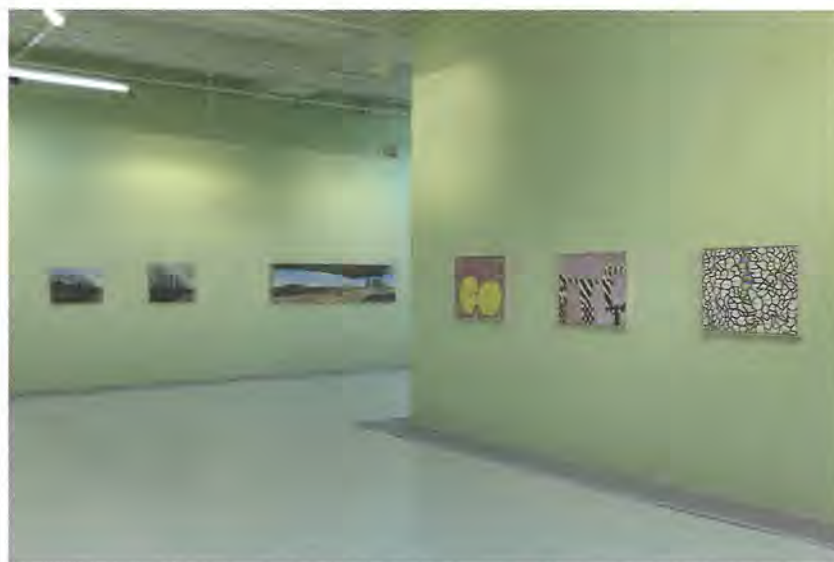


Mark, Tom, James, the late Charles Seliger, Eve Aschheim, and Helen Miranda Wilson. It was Tom who, when asked to describe the two sizes of his paintings, 22 by 28 inches and 22 by 30 inches, said they were reasonable sized. He also mentioned his trip to Siena, Italy in the early 1970s. Initially, I had three different shows in mind that would be on view simultaneously, but we ended up with two.

For Part I *Reasonable Sized Paintings*, which is on view at Mana Contemporary until December 22nd, we focused on a selection of painters that have consistently worked within approximately modest sizes—making paintings that could be tucked under one’s arm and carried—for most of their careers. I should note that there are a few exceptions of painters who made urgent yet natural changes in scale, in what seemed to be inevitable evolutions in their careers. Helmut Federle, for example, made consequential paintings of various sizes for most of his career, but over the last few decades steadily committed to producing relatively small paintings. Bill Jensen, on the other hand, was known for his modestly scaled paintings since the early 1970s, but has been slowly increasing his scale over the last two or three years.

The “unreasonable” in Part II, *Unreasonable Sized Paintings*, doesn’t refer to artists who aggressively blur boundaries, creating unusual variations of canvas shape or size, or those who make excessive references to other mediums. Instead, we included works by artists who only occasionally make paintings of a modest size—defined here as one or two arms’ lengths—usually without specific reasons, though sometimes the paintings arise out of experiments or attempts to explore the variety of ways to represent images. Let’s begin with examples of small-sized paintings that have had an impact on you and your thoughts about size. Perhaps we can start with Tom!

TOM NOZKOWSKI: As most of you know, I’ve been working in two formats for the last forty years. I’ve had plenty of time to think about why I do it. It’s interesting because there’s a version that we have for public events that’s sanitized, and tells the story cleanly. Then, in reality, there are hundreds of influences: things that you saw once that stuck with you for inexplicable reasons. For me, when I started painting in the first of these smaller formats, on a 22 by 28



inch panel, I meant it to be a completely political idea—an attack on institutions that seemed to me, at that time in the 1970s, to be the only ones who could support works that were extremely large. It was hard to be taken seriously if you weren’t making large paintings. I meant it to be a political strike against capitalism, to only make paintings that were meant for the apartments of my friends, paintings that could be carried under your arm someplace, thrown in the trunk of the car if you wanted to go paint in the country, whatever. And again there were probably a lot of ideas taking me to this place, but the political idea was the key. If that was the only thing driving the work though, I don’t think I would’ve painted in these small formats for as long. I very quickly realized that there was more to it. For example, when I made very large paintings, as I did for many years, it would take me a long time to make changes. I would censor myself: I won’t change the color on this large painting, 90 by 110 inches, because it will take days, and if it turns out worse, I won’t want to change it back. The minute I switched to a small format I could make those kinds of changes quickly. I could put something down, see it in the real world, and if I didn’t like it, I could take it away and that would be it. That really changed everything, and it became much more important than the initial idea. Years rolled by, and now I think I have a third idea about how it relates to the way I want to paint, the level of intensity. The level of image resolution that I desire in my paintings takes me a long time to achieve. It’s very labor intensive. I have to think a lot about it. For me to increase the size of the paintings would mean that I’d have to do fewer of them. Instead of 10 paintings a year, I would have to do 5. Instead of 5, I would have to do 2 or 1. That’s certainly a viable option for some, but it’s not an option for me. There are a lot of things I want to paint before I die. There are a lot of things I want to think about and work on. For me, the small size is essential on that very pragmatic level, on the level of plumbing. This is a key for me. So no more philosophy, just practical studio experience.

Panelists Julia Rommel and Mark Greenwold. Photo: Taylor Defoe

Installation View: Tom Nozkowski paintings (foreground), Rackstraw Downes paintings (background) in *Intimacy in Discourse: Reasonable Sized Paintings*. Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey, October 18 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Kendall Tichner.

BUI: But your trip to Siena was important to that original political idea?

NOZKOWSKI: When I went to the Pinacoteca in Siena in 1972 they had open stacks of amazing small Trecento paintings in the basement, some of them very damaged. I remember walking through and thinking about paintings where Jesus's face had been kissed off the surface of the painting so you could barely see it. Or where the devil had been scratched out of the painting by people's fingernails. I thought, my god, these were paintings that really lived in a community. These were paintings that really meant something, they attracted people on the level that I think artists desire, with the same kind of passion the artists had. So that certainly caused me to think of small paintings differently.

BUI: What about you James! Did you conform to a relatively small size as strictly as Tom did with his two standard sizes?

JAMES SIENA: Yes, they're standard, 19 ¼ by 15 ½ on sheet metal. The sculptor Alan Saret took me for a walk in the scrap yard on South 8th Street in 1989, and I saw some odd sizes of sheet metal, steel and titanium. I thought they might be nice to paint on, but those works have hardly ever been shown. On our second trip I found two pieces of aluminum that were very similar to the standard size I use now, and that's how it started. Lately, the sizes of my drawings have been changing, but not the paintings. One of the reasons I really got into small work in the late '80s was that real estate had changed a lot. Tom just spoke about the '70s when artists were making larger works. In the '80s, artists would talk about real estate at openings. Someone would say "Oh, I got a new studio," and the first thing someone else would say is "How many square feet is it? What are you paying per square foot?" Everybody



wanted to have a big studio. I moved from my big studio in Brooklyn to a much smaller studio on Canal Street, mostly because I became a father in 1988 and wanted to be closer to home to spend time with my infant son. Nobody wanted to show my work in those days, so it was just piling up and it was a lot easier to pile up small things than it was to pile up big things.

BUI: I remember Mark spoke with great admiration for Piero's *Flagellation of Christ* (1455 – 60) but he never saw the painting, am I right?

MARK GREENWOLD: Yes, the *Flagellation* at Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Palazzo Ducale in Urbino, which I had never seen, is one of my favorite paintings. It only measures 23 ¼ by 32 inches. When I had the Prix de Rome in 1987 I had to come home early due to a family crisis, so I didn't get to see it. But anyway, it still looks great in reproductions. My trajectory is perhaps different in that I have been doing small paintings for over forty years. So when Phong called me up and said "I'd like to include your paintings in a show called *Reasonable Sized Paintings*," referring to Tom's phrase, I was outraged. I'm a Midwesterner, a very earnest person, and I thought there's nothing reasonable about painting small. I've given my whole life to this way of painting, so I was unprepared for Tom to say the exact same thing.

SIENA: Why is it not reasonable?

GREENWOLD: Well, as Tom said, it seemed like the most unprofessional thing to do, the most unlike a real artist. I had made large paintings in the past, though I hadn't shown them in New York. I started a huge painting that took me four years. I was like Tom's fantasy about the artist who only produces one painting a year, except that was my maximum output. [Laughter.] I began this painting in LA in my late 20s and finished it when I moved to upstate New York in my early 30s. I realized that I was painting a miniature painting, but it was 10 ½ feet by 7 feet. It's not a big deal for somebody like Catherine Murphy, but it was destroying me. It seemed like the next thing I did would take me the rest of my life. So I went through this very puzzling and kind of horrifying period of trying to scale down from 10 ½ feet. I wanted to be Frank Stella. I'm reminded of that in this show: not that I actually wanted to be Frank Stella,



Installation View: Mark Greenwold paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Reasonable Sized Paintings*. Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey. October 18 – December 22, 2015. Photo: Kendall Tichner.

Panelists Mark Greenwold, Tom Nozkowski, Catherine Murphy, and Robert Storr. Photo: Taylor Dafoe

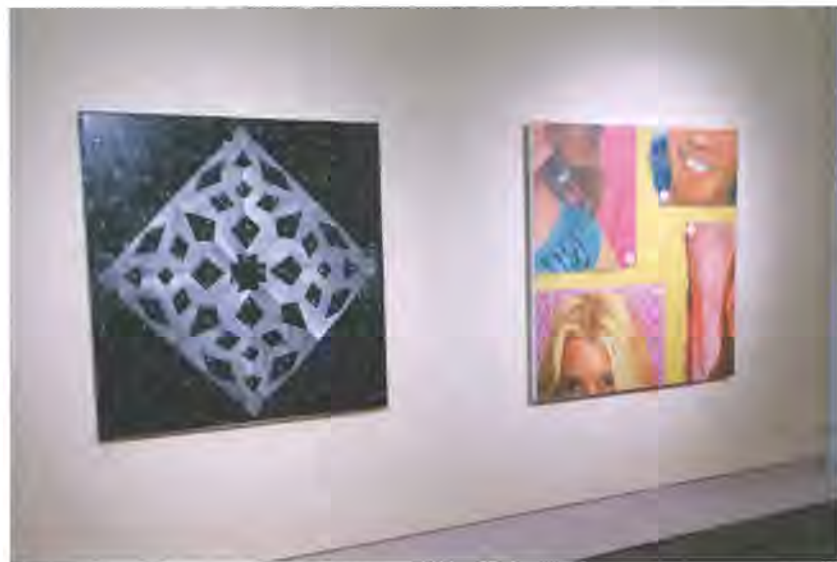
but there was a strong push for big paintings, especially from Greenberg and some others. Things had to be big. Also, as a good friend of mine once said, it takes longer to walk by a big painting than a small painting. [Laughter.] That gets the big laughs. Anyway, I scaled down. I tried to make a 5 foot wide painting, a 4 foot one, and so on. It was the only period in my life where I would begin a 5 foot wide painting, work on it for almost a year, and stop in the middle because I realized it wasn't what I wanted. So then I started working on a painting in the size of the *Flagellation*, called *The Sewing Room* (1975 - 79), which was the only painting in my first show at Phyllis Kind on Spring Street in 1979. It was just a single small work in this big space. There was very little precedent for showing small work, as Tom said. To show small work was conceptual. They weren't like paintings, they were pieces, objects. Again, *The Sewing Room* took me three years to paint. I actually began another painting after that, about the same size, and I realized I was never going to finish it. I felt that it was going to be like Richard Dadd's *Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke* (1855 - 64)—my next work would take me the rest of my life in a mental institution after I killed my father. So I started to draw again, something I hadn't done in years, and to work very intimately with very small formats. And, again, there was this feeling like I was no longer an artist, but there was also the payoff of being able to see things resolved. I could also pay the kind of attention to my work that characterized some of the artists I love, like Myron Stout, Richard Dadd, and the Sienese predella painters for example. So I made spectacularly small paintings for most of the '80s, spectacularly small. But then that whole identity of a miniaturist comes with its own problems. I also worked in gouache, which was, again, not considered the medium of a real artist at that moment, then on paper. So again, the trajectory toward small paintings starts with *The Sewing Room* and gets smaller and smaller. Now as I get older and the clock is ticking, they're slowly getting bigger.

SIENA: Was it your idea to supply magnifying glasses in some of your shows?

GREENWOLD: The artist Paul Cadmus, who was a friend I loved and admired, used to bring magnifying glasses to my shows to look at my paintings. It may appear to be a pretentious thing to do, but it makes some sense in miniature shows. But the whole issue of miniature painting is problematic. Phong mentioned the panel *On the Relevance of Small Paintings* earlier, which was very intense. Irving and Charles Seliger, who only works small, are similar ages, and both knew how loaded everything was. Seliger, from my point of view, seemed very aware of Pollock's legacy. And I thought, Phong, that even more than Ryder, Pollock was influenced by his wife Lee Krasner's painting in the bedroom. I think she made more interesting paintings than him, at least up until the drip paintings for sure, because they were small and gorgeous.

BUI: What about you Julia?

JULIA ROMMEL: I started making small paintings and was just making small paintings for a few years. I wasn't intentionally or conceptually thinking about small versus big. It was really more of a desperate attempt to make a good painting. I tried so many different things over a few years and I finally found one good painting completely unexpectedly out of the monochromatic wash of paint I'd laid down on a piece of linen. It was exciting that the tiniest little incident in this painting could be what was interesting about it. I then began making more of those pieces of linen, and stretched them around tiny stretcher bars as just preps for ideas for something else. I just edited them to the point where I discovered the tiniest little accident in the painting, like staple marks. It made a lot of sense for them to be small because staple marks on huge paintings are not interesting, but if they're on 6 by 12 inch canvases they become more visible. I started to cultivate more mistakes. And, as an experiment, I began to question whether these could work in medium sized paintings, say 30 by 40 inches. It didn't work at all for a few years because they just looked like boring monochromatic paintings, so I began to unstretch them and chop them up into small fragments. By cutting them up and taking them off the stretcher bars, more interesting things came out of the process, like differences in texture between the gessoed face and ungesoed sides and back. Basically I was thriving for a while on these small paintings, because more and more unexpected and interesting things were happening, and at the same time I was using that same concept to make quite large paintings, around 60 by 80 inches. But they seemed like boring, grandiose, monochromatic paintings even though all of the gestures were the same. The scale shift didn't work. Anything that would provide interest in a smaller painting happened in an entirely different way in the big painting. I finally started having fun with the big paintings when I decided to explore the differences between the conventional things that we do when we make small paintings—we huddle over them, we put them on our lap—and the conventional things we do when we make larger paintings. In a small painting, any accident that happens is by our hands, or by the tools. But we do different things,



Installation View: Catherine Murphy paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York, November 21 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.

naturally, when we make big paintings. They're more athletic. So I started exploiting those things, the more athletic aspects of the natural things that you do when you set up making a painting, like stretching and gessoing, but using my body basically instead of just my hands. The gestures became bigger and crazier. So now I can make both big and small paintings.

BUI: You can do both Cathy. You make small paintings, sometimes scaled to the exact size of the images, and other times you amplify them more than life size on both small and large paintings.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I think I work very differently in that the idea initiates and determines the scale. In other words, when I have an idea for a painting, I work on that idea for a long time. I make drawings as part of working out the idea. One of the ways I allow the painting to organically tell me how big it should be is I do a preliminary drawing, then I do a drawing on my wall which I scale up according to the idea that I have. It gets larger or smaller if in fact I think that the relationship between the idea and the figure/ground needs to be more established. So scale changes. It helps determine the meaning of the painting. I mean it is enormous in its influence, as important as color or composition. A small painting says one thing, a larger painting says something else. I work with an image, so in fact, the image is also in concert with that scale. For instance, if you think the intimacy of the painting in the other room of the snowflake, if I made it the size of one of James's paintings, that painting would have an entirely different meaning. So as much as I don't want that intimacy to be destroyed, I also want to talk about the fact that I'm dealing with reality, in quotes. I also want to deal with the reality of the formal issues of the painting. So I want these two things to be able to talk to one another. Scale for me has been a means to amplify that. In Tom's case, of course his use of scale was a political act, but it wasn't only a political act. Painting has become so much about the body, and I always think when I look at a Tom Nozkowski painting, it enters my brain like a drug. It's in my head. I'm not concerned about some of the things that I'm concerned about when I'm looking at a Bar-

nett Newman. Not that I don't love Barnett Newman, but I always feel like these are brain paintings and I love that about them. Over the years representational painters have come up to me in the street and said, "You are not an observational painter, because your paintings are not scaled to life," and I always want to say, "What's to life?" The idea of 'to life' is related where you want the painting to be seen from, where you want a viewer to stand in a gallery and look at a painting. Where do you want that painting to be seen from? Where is the optimum viewing point for that painting? When I was making paintings from life that were life-sized—I still don't know what that means, if you make a landscape, how can it be life-sized?—when I saw them in a gallery I would say "Oh my god they're postage stamp size!" Even when I'd see them in somebody's house I'd say they were not life-sized. To make them life-sized, they would have to be larger than life-sized because of where I want them to be seen from. So scale is a very important issue for me. And it changes all the time. And it comes down to a dimension like 6 feet and $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. It is that specific when I'm scaling up a painting. So I make a drawing, I scale it up, and have the stretcher made to the size I want. So, this is how I determine scale. It's very complicated.

BUI: So it's fair to say that it can be both formal and psychological.

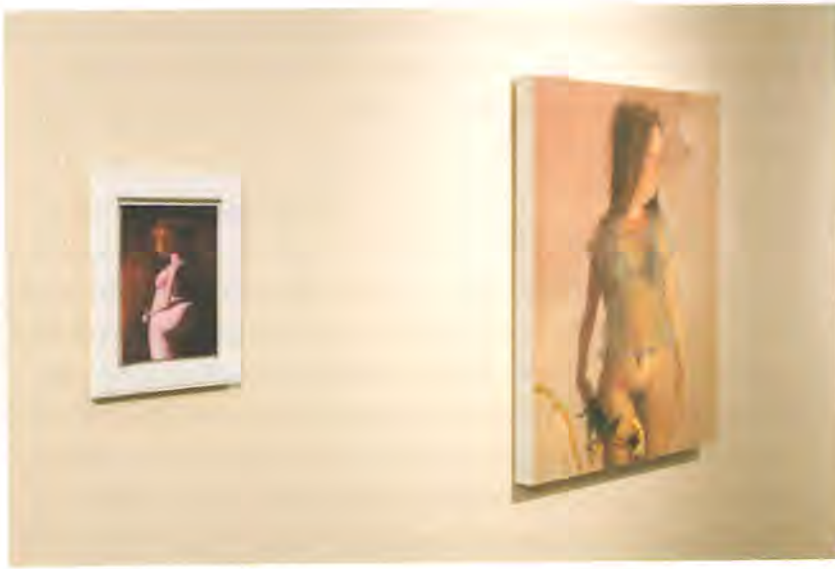
MURPHY: Oh absolutely. All paintings, one way or another, have to mediate those two elements.

BUI: What are your thoughts Rob?

ROBERT STORR: A friend of mine with whom I did construction, Ed Flood, said that every artist has about two to four hundred bad paintings in them and the important thing is to get them made. [Laughter.] I have been thinking about a number of issues and trying to challenge myself so that I make progress in terms of how I pose larger problems. Some of those problems have to do with a very ambivalent relationship to scale. I've almost always lived in places that were too small to do anything very big. Big paintings are also expensive in terms of time and materials. There's a lovely anecdote about Guston watching Stuart Davis painting during the WPA. Guston is stretching his oil paints as far as he possibly can with tiny brushes. He looks into the next studio and there's Stuart Davis scraping off an entire day's work, plopping hundreds of dollars' worth of pigment on the floor. So I've sort of been caught between not wanting to make little tiny paintings with a small brush, but also not being able to scrape the paint away either. At any rate, I have worked as a house painter, I have worked for Siqueiros in Mexico making murals, and I have worked for Dorothea Rockburne as an installation draughtsman. Some part of me wants to do big paintings, but my circumstances have never allowed me to. I'm not really sure where I will fall on the spectrum finally, but I know I want to stretch it and test it. A couple of years ago in France I was going to do a project which would basically be house painting plus Sunday painting. And I even had some little cards made up in



Installation View: James Siena paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Reasonable Sized Paintings*. Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey. October 18 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Kendall Tichner.



French that said “Robert Storr, Peintre en bâtiment,” which means “Robert Storr, House Painter,” and the other one was “Pientre du dimanche” which means “Sunday Painter.” And I was going to go out into the suburbs of Paris to paint little landscape paintings, but not of the landscape, of the graffiti on the side of railroad overpasses and things of that nature. And I was going to hang them in a room which was otherwise a house painting job. I was going to deliberately paint it in ways that you should not do house painting, but with regular house painting materials. I was going to try and juxtapose these two things. Now all I have left are these two cards, which means that it truly qualifies as a conceptual art project. [Laughter.] And they’re very small. I feel I can share this with Adrian Piper, who is also known for her calling cards. Anyway, I think ultimately the physical scale of painting has to do with the body of the artist. And I’m not a subtle person in the way that I need to be to make a really good small painting. I’ve tried, and I have made plausible small paintings, but not really good small paintings. I think I need more time than I’ve ever had and I just hope I get a chance to work on both sizes, small and large.

BUI: Lisa, would you like to comment on how you use small paintings as studies for larger ones?

LISA YUSKAVAGE: That’s not always the case. I don’t have one way of doing things. Sometimes I make a small painting after a large painting instead of the other way around. It’ll be one thing I didn’t get to do, maybe a small shift of an edge in a figure, and so on. The thing about scale that is interesting to me is that when I went to graduate school, I was making both very large paintings and very small paintings. Then by the time I graduated I was making tiny small paintings because I was trying to hide what I was doing. I also thought it was an easier way to survive, to do something small. I remember Jake Berthot coming to my studio and asking if I considered painting with my finger, because it has to do with the issue of scale being personal and intimate. And I did, and it was really interesting. I always get excited when I see a monoprint by Degas with his fingerprints. You feel as though he’s there. His fingerprints are to scale. But then I recently had a weird experience with those small paintings of mine, especially

White Light (1985) that Michael Roemer, a film professor at Yale, bought from my MFA thesis show in 1986. He recently gave it back to me, and it’s hanging in my living room. I really enjoy looking at it, partly because it gives me a chance to think about how I came to make those paintings and why they were so satisfying for me at the time, and why I started to make them again ten years later. In retrospect, it was Vuillard’s small paintings like *The Meal* (1899) or *Self-Portrait with Sister* (1892) which I saw early on as a kid growing up in Philadelphia that really made me think differently about scale versus size. Then of course later on I got to see more of his paintings at the old MoMA, like *Interior, Mother and Sister of Artist* (1893) where the sister is disappearing into the wallpaper. And the scale of the paintings is slightly bigger than your head. It’s something that Catherine touched on: the imaginative, psychological space of a small painting. It’s like when you look into a peephole and you take in the whole room. That is also a feeling of a shift of scale that evokes a sense of intimacy. Julia was talking about putting a painting on your lap. Painting while you’re actually holding something as opposed to painting at an arm’s distance creates a different physical relationship to the space and alters how the image exists in that specific space. Interestingly, I am not a fan of Vuillard’s larger paintings which were almost always commissions and, therefore, tended to be decorative. Another great, small Vuillard painting is *The Green Interior* (1891) at the Robert Lehman wing at the Met. I’ve gotten so much mileage out of that painting, its sense of intimacy. They were called Intimists for a good reason. In any case, whenever I’m moved by an artist’s work, I always try to walk in their shoes a little bit and see what it’s like. If I see a lithograph that I like, I wonder if there’s something in the materiality of the process that might change something for me. And when I come across something that works, I know it. Having said that, I should admit I sometimes like having distance, and other times I like closeness. I like having both experiences. Dona Nelson once said about her paintings and figurative scale, “We always know how big people are, generally speaking. Even if we range in size, we know that something that is this big is either at a distance



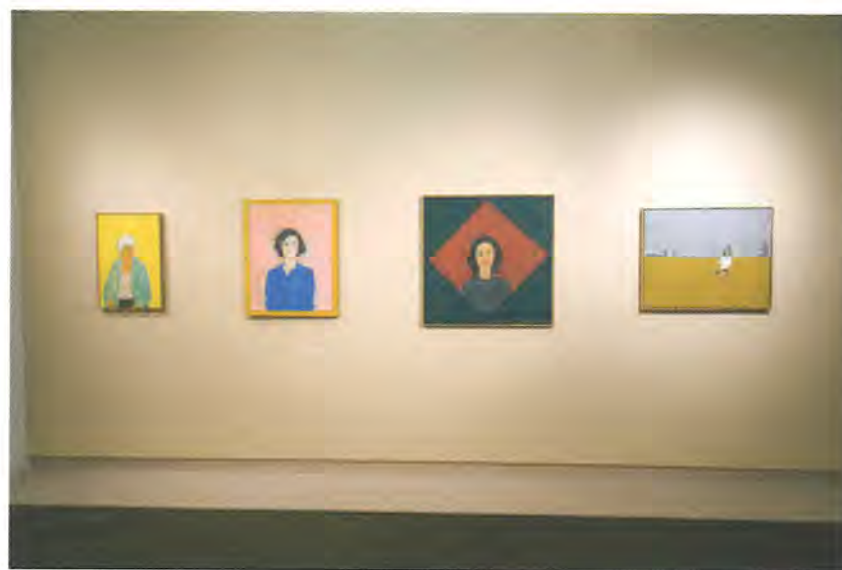
Installation View: Lisa Yuskavage paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York. November 21 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.

Installation View: Katherine Bradford paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York. November 21 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.

or in an imagined scale.” Obviously, when someone like Alex [Katz] makes something over sized, we’re aware of the relative scale. We’re aware of the scale of something like a banana for example. We know what it’s like to hold one. But if you suddenly paint a big banana, it has a different impact than confronting another human in that scale. But I remember when I just got out of school, I had a few small paintings, comparable in size to mine in this SVA show, in a group show *New Talent* at Alpha Gallery in Boston in 1986. I remember the person who organized the show said to me, “You know, no one will ever take you seriously unless you make a big painting.” I thought she was obnoxious, and I almost didn’t want to ever make a big painting just to stick it to her. And then I thought, who cares? I just remember that prevailing attitude. It almost goes back to what Tom was discussing, making something small as a political act. I was confronting it as a 20-something year old who was making small work because I had reasons at that time. I wasn’t not making large paintings because I didn’t want to, I just wasn’t succeeding at them at that time. I was working where my successes were, in that body of work. And I just fought that common idea that no one would take me seriously if I didn’t make big paintings. That was in the early ’80s. After that I didn’t work small again for a while, until one day I was making a painting and I had a piece of watercolor paper that I had gessoed at my studio and I just decided to do something super fast, just play. And I was like, “Oh, that’s pretty cool.” I actually really liked the little painting so I did another one. And I thought of it as a fast thing where you could paint wet into wet, to go through an idea super fast without judgment. And again, in that sense it’s intimate, nobody’s going look at it. I can put it in a drawer. I think the idea of being able to stick it in a drawer helps me a lot. I started to make more and more risqué things on that scale. The idea was to challenge myself to see what would happen, it’s only a piece of paper. I also think different materials have different effects on scale. At least for me, panels, for example, don’t do very well on a large scale, partly because of the way the paints sit on the hard surface. I remember someone telling me I should be looking at Gwen John, because she was only making small paintings



Installation View: Ann Pibal paintings in *Intimacy in Discourse: Reasonable Sized Paintings*. Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, New Jersey. October 18 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Kendall Tichner.



and that’s what I might want to consider. At some point, you have to put all these different comments away, like “you won’t be taken seriously,” and just do what works. It was only when I began to work on the series of *Bad Habits* paintings that I started making little oil maquettes. Finally, I felt like if I was going to do a big painting, there had to be a really interesting reason. I can make selections from the smaller paintings. They were almost like notes, but they became very developed. One year, I made about 70, which is a lot for me, but last year, I probably made about three. And I realize what substituted it was that I started making large drawings. And, they just petered out.

BUI: Like James, his drawings, at least for the last few years, tend to be much bigger than his paintings.

SIENA: True. But are your drawings very large and fast Lisa?

YUSKAVAGE: Not so fast. I think it’s also a question of preparation or how you make preparatory works. Like I said, some of these don’t live in another scale.

BUI: This in fact applies to one of the reasons for *Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. There are small paintings that one makes that never become larger paintings. They stand alone. Margrit Lewczuk’s paintings are good examples. Her works that are in the show survived a fire in her studio in 1999, which destroyed almost all of her work. Since then, she has made completely different kinds of paintings, small and large, that often explore similar themes and imagery. They emanate lightness and musicality, or mystical rhythms, quite unlike her old paintings which are often associated with density, packed with static images. Ann, your paintings are made with acrylic on panels similar to James’s. They’re abstract and consistently small, but not identical. Can you elaborate on how they came to be in such a scale?

ANN PIBAL: When I first arrived in New York I was in my mid-20s. It was the late ’90s. I had come from the Midwest. I was in graduate school in Iowa University where I had made huge oil paintings. When I arrived in the city, I immediately was faced with a crisis. It was a crisis about how to reinvent my practice in the context of this urban world, and in the context of so many artists everywhere at all times.

Installation View: *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York. November 21 - December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.



Williamsburg in those days seemed like Sesame Street for artists. I ended up working with acrylic paint on a smaller scale out of necessity. At first the imagery was entirely non-referential. And I think that I could have said exactly what Tom said about it being political. At the moment, it felt really assertive of me. It felt distinctive. I felt like I was taking a big risk to make small paintings. I invented a set of parameters which included that every painting be a different size (and this is still true of my work, which drives people insane) and that every image be different, too, so that there's never an arrival at an iconic assertion of truth, or the establishment of a series within which to make subtle variations. Interestingly, without necessarily deciding to, in the last year and a half I have let go of a lot of those restrictions, and now I'm working on paintings that are quite large for me, and I'm allowing myself also to repeat imagery. So for me it was both political and practical. For a long time, I knew the exact measurements of the interior of a particular suitcase and the exact number of paintings that I could take with me wherever I wanted to go for a specific duration of time, to work in a domestically scaled space. My panels are quite different from James's because, although they're aluminum, the sides of them are fabricated with wood, so that when you apprehend the object, it doesn't necessarily have the same kind of heft that metal has. I was interested in it being more physically buoyant, even domestic in tenor, so that it was much less heavy. When I was 19 and on a month-long school trip with my undergraduate college, we visited Tom's old studio on the Lower East Side—he knows this story—and I was just struck by his studio, which was previously a synagogue.

So I never had the idea that making small paintings was necessarily unusual. I think it feels more unusual in relationship to a particular kind of American abstract imagery. I just don't think we inherit the same sense of the Abstract Expressionists' grand individual expression from European artists. I'm also interested in the way a smaller painting can indicate or describe a space of conversation. It can still be a sensual or a body-based conversation, but a smaller scale painting can be associated with the way a person holds a book and has a conversation with it, metaphorically at any rate. I'm interested in working against the idea of a definitive manifesto, without the establishment of an extrapersonal scale. I think that small paintings can reestablish the body, especially in respect to abstract paintings that can have one to one scale.

BUI: That's one of the reasons why I decided to blow-up the reproduction of Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* and Ryder's *Moonlight Marine* to the same proportion, just to amplify the differences in subtleties of scale. I recently revisited Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* at the Met with a few friends, and while they were talking about its monumentality in reference to his Midwestern upbringing in Cody, Wyoming, and the vastness of the land, I was reflecting that I always felt that when he moved to Long Island in '45, he began to substitute the land with the sea, the Atlantic Ocean. Just as Ryder used a small canvas to evoke the infinite space of the sea, Pollock needed a large size to achieve the opposite effect: a sense of intimacy.

PIBAL: You can also have a really huge painting that doesn't have big scale.



BUI: Roger, would you like to follow up on what Ann just said?

ROGER WHITE: Yes. I've been thinking a lot about the difference between size and scale. I think, as many have said, size is probably 90 percent practical. I did a show of paintings that were all 40 by 60 inches because those were the interior dimensions of a Subaru Outback if you laid the seats down. I could just stack the paintings flat in the back and drive them to the gallery. The political aspects of paintings' sizes, as Lisa and Ann were saying, have receded a little, but there's still a push towards largeness. I mean I was really amazed to learn that, within a show, paintings are almost priced by the square foot. But apart from the practical aspects of size, there are also some philosophical ones. I was thinking a lot about digital reproduction and how it affects the way we interact with images. I went to school at the dawn of the age of the JPEG and I also don't live in New York right now, so sadly most of the things I see are first on the computer screen. And size in digital terms is very interesting, in that the file size of a JPEG is related to the amount of data it has, which can be expressed in different ways: you can look at it really small, you can look at it full-screen, you can print it out on a wall sized paper and the file remains the same size. The last thing it has to do with is how it actually activates your perception of field. Size is related to the capacity to scale-up or scale-down. And I do think that's the case with my paintings as well. A painting is a rectangle that's a certain size on the wall in relation to your body. But the scale or representation of it can do different things. I recently saw *Giorgio Morandi* at David Zwirner (November 6 – December 19, 2015) and

thought about that very aspect in his work. I used to think that the measure of a really good still-life painting was that you would stand in front of it and want to grab the bottle because it feels like it's right there. But that's almost the last thing that I want from still life now. There's some degree of bodily expectation, but then your senses are also telling you about the scale of the world that's at odds with your experience of the still life. That kind of tension between scale and size motivates how I paint now, so the issue of life-size is a concern. But I found myself wanting to create paintings where the size is telling you one thing and the scale of the object is telling you something else about where you're standing. I feel in my case it may have something to do with the flexibility of looking at images on the computer screen and confronting that digital experience in painting. It's very real and challenging.

GREENWOLD: Can I just say why we all do what we do? I think it's so personal, in each of our cases. When I think of the hierarchy of value in literature, I'm supposed to feel that real writers write novels. This is total bullshit. Some of the greatest writers write short stories, but almost inevitably it's the novelists that are praised. What about a writer like Alice Munro doesn't write novels because she doesn't want to?

BUI: Or [Guy] de Maupassant, Chekov.

GREENWOLD: Exactly!

MURPHY: Do you equate small paintings with the short story? Because I really don't.

GREENWOLD: Only in terms of the hierarchy of value in the art

Both images: Installation View: *Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings*. SVA Chelsea Gallery, New York. November 21 – December 22, 2015. Photo: Bridget Badore.

world. As Roger mentioned, paintings are often valued by the square inch. It's mystifying after all these years. What about Faberge eggs? What about Vermeer? My point is only that all of us in this group are so idiosyncratic in our choices. Our use of scale and size is so personal, so odd and so unquantifiable in terms of strategy. Ultimately it's who we are. We're all so severely limited in our own ways. Limitations exist in all good art. I just think good artists figure out what it is they can do.

BUI: And do it to the best of their abilities.

MURPHY: Well your limitations have to become your strengths. And that's true of everybody, not just artists.

GREENWOLD: Dentists. Some become orthodontists. [Laughter.]

MURPHY: Exactly! [Laughs.]

GREENWOLD: I think it was Sandy (Sanford) Schwartz who said that if Pollock had painted in Myron Stout's size, he wouldn't have had the same career. I'm sure that most of us would agree that Myron was an absolutely wonderful and important artist. A lot of it has to do with the tenor of the time, all of the weird things that happen in a period. But I just wanted to clarify, I didn't *really* want to be Frank Stella [laughter], but that was the notion of what artists did. Somebody like Lisa, who I really admire, can do things with scale that are amazing, and on different sizes. It's very interesting to me that she's gone back and forth between them. Cathy, Alex, and many other artists in the SVA show can do the same, but artists who choose to spend their lives working small like me shouldn't be considered introverted and perverse and scared. And we shouldn't be forced to sit at the children's table and all that. [Laughter.]

BUI: Mark are you suggesting that the reasonable sized painting show in which you are included is far more inter-

esting than this one?

GREENWOLD: As I said, I'm always more excited about shows that I'm in.

BUI: Matvey, what would you say since you make big ink drawings but relatively small oil paintings by comparison?

MATVEY LEVENSTEIN: It's like spin the bottle but it gravitates toward Lisa. [Laughter.] It really does not want to hear me. I have to say that I am excited about the equation of small-scale painting with perversity. The relationship between introversion and perversion is very interesting to me actually. One of the first things that I heard in an American art school when I was fresh off the boat, was somebody telling me "If you can't do it small, don't do it at all." The second thing was "When introducing yourself," presumably to the ladies, "introduce yourself in the following manner: 'Hi I'm Matvey, I'm from Russia, we make everything big and bulky.'" So those two contradictory notions stuck in my head and, come to think of it, the size that I have the most difficulty with is in between, the middle size. I think with big paintings, particularly if they're representational, I can imagine physically being in them; they have a spatial dimension. With the small paintings it's more mental, though it is still about space. It's all about the cavity of your head. I think the difficulty that I'm having with the mid-size painting is exactly that it is like another human body, there's something confrontational. And since I predominantly depict space, not figures, it makes it harder. In theater, when you want to draw attention to something you're saying, you can either shout or whisper. Both have the same effect of emphasis. You're shifting off the normal range of the voice. The same probably holds true of large and small paintings. If you're asking me why I like small paintings and large drawings, I think it's because drawings don't have the same identity. When most people look at them, they're not quite sure what they're looking at. I guess they know it's a drawing but otherwise they need some kind of amplification. Oil painting is already grand, you don't need to make it large. It's true of subject matter as well. If it's already important, like an interior of a church, then I'll usually make it small. If it's kind of banal or decorative, like a still life, then I make it large.

BUI: Let's take some questions from the audience.

NATHLIE PROVOSTY: I wanted to mention something that Charles Ray said in an interview with Alex [Alexander Nagel, published in the September 2015 issue of the *Brooklyn Rail*] about scale and size. He spoke about a giant shoe in a shoemaker's shop window that was big in order to allow people "to spot his or her store from across the street." Even though it's a giant shoe, it shares our "everyday functional scale." He added that, "to change scale rather than size, the world and its space must change too." And I wondered if there were any thoughts on that observation?

SIENA: Pollock, back in the day, was really big. Now his paint-



Lois Dodd, *White Poppy and Allium*, 2006.
Oil on Masonite. 12 x 12 inches. © Lois
Dodd, courtesy Alexandre Gallery.

ings don't look so big.

LEVENSTEIN: I was shocked by how small his studio actually was.

SIENA: The world has changed now. I don't know if it changed in the way Charlie Ray referred to, but, for sure, the speed of communication and the whole rhythm of life has changed.

STORR: One of the interesting things about the scaling up of museums is that it disfavors formally big art, and favors small art. If you put a Pollock on a big wall in a museum, it doesn't look so big. But if you put a really killer small painting on a really big wall, it grabs attention. So when you talk about these scale changes it works in all different dimensions and there are some surprising results.

NOZKOWSKI: This actually touches on something else, which is that the smallest painting can in fact bring people closer. Just before we came here, Joyce [Robins] and I stopped at a great show of Al[fred] Leslie's abstract paintings from the late '50s and early '60s at Allan Stone Projects (October 29 – December 24, 2015). There were a few people in the gallery aside from Joyce and me. I noticed that all of us were standing about 6 inches away from these incredible surfaces. I think eating paint would be a truly wonderful thing if we could do it, and this would be the feast. As I was looking at the work I remembered that in art school one of my teachers said, "Well, that's how artists look at paintings; they stick their noses up against them, they want to smell the paint." That's how I want everybody to see paintings. And one of the really nice things about smaller paintings is that people do come up to look at them closely. Newman said, "It'd be nice if people spent more than a minute looking at my paintings." But part of the problem was that he made billboards. I mean they're wonderful, great billboards, but they're billboards. They're made for a fast peruse. They're essentially conceptual objects. The big conceptual paintings belong to institutions, where the small ones belong to people's homes, as devotional objects and so forth.

MURPHY: I really want both. You can have both. I want a painting to have enough power that a viewer can read it at a certain distance. And I don't want that power to dissipate as that person gets closer to the painting. I really want to have both a body experience and a mind experience. That's one of the reasons I make paintings. I don't make giant paintings, I make medium-sized paintings, but in all of them I want both.

NOZKOWSKI: I think the way a painting should be seen, is to fill your field of vision with the painted image, whether it's a very large painting or a very small painting, so that you can absorb it in its entirety, conceptually or perceptually.

STORR: With Velasquez or Bob Ryman you can look their work at any distance, in any scale. There are painters who have taken this on and who've actually done it. And I actually think that I can look at Newman from any distance, quite happily. I was recently at Guston's studio and there was this marvelous set of cartoons he did about the art world. You've seen some of them. But there's one of Tom Hess

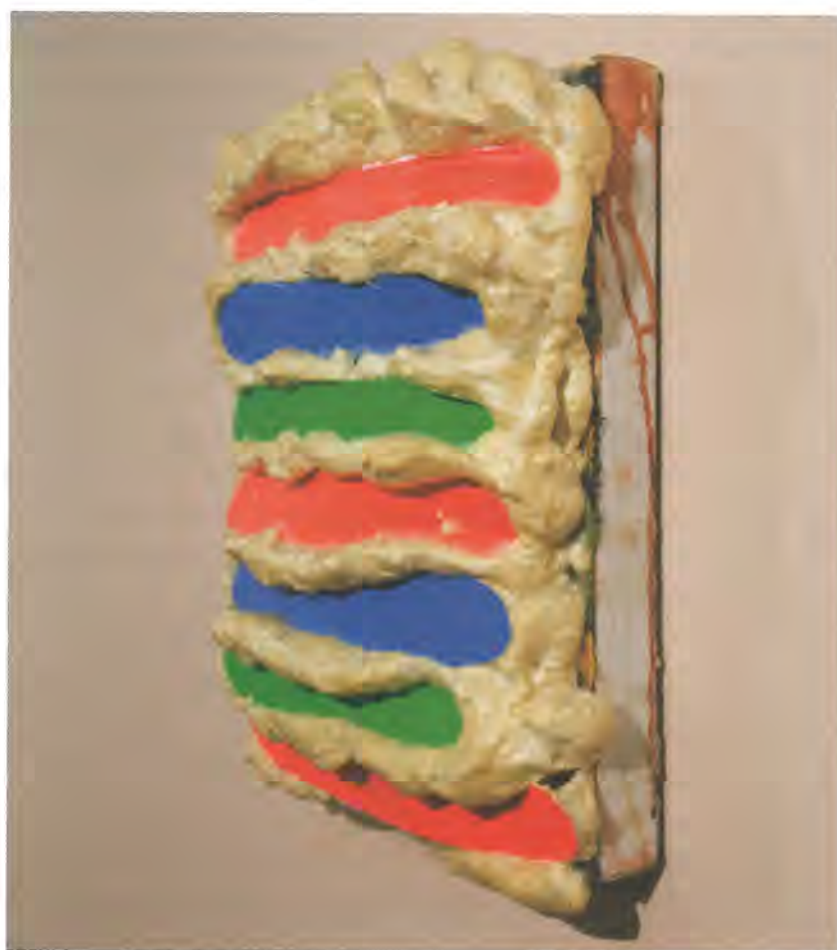
and he's leaning up to a painting with his eyeballs sticking out and he's perusing every inch of a painting. Chances were that it was a Newman.

MURPHY: Pollock's paintings are powerful from far away, but it's only when I get close up that I understand those drips. The only way you can feel that is to go close up.

STORR: A really well painted wall is a wonder to behold. The surface, the textures, and so on. Not everything that is big and relatively uninflected is necessarily rhetorical. It actually can be just that much more skin.

NOZKOWSKI: The fault may be in the viewers. And there are many. [Laughter.] The question really is how much do you want to put out there for the viewing public? What is the give and take that you desire in this exchange?

GREENWOLD: And if somebody has spent their life, as Tom has, making small paintings, why call a Barnett Newman a billboard? I tried that with my fiancé, an abstract minimal painter. I realized that people who make big, seemingly uninflected work or minimal work, don't just pay rhetorical attention, they pay real attention. An Agnes Martin to some people is like looking at a Catherine Murphy. One of the interesting things about our generation, or at least me, was that I essentially grew up around Greenbergian modernism, and understood those ideas in my own way. But I still paid a lot of attention to Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin, and Newman. And I read Tom Hess's brilliant monograph on Newman and believed it. Now at this stage in my life, I'm looking up at Jesus or whoever and I'm thinking, "Oh my god, is the Kabbalah really that essential to appreciating a Barnett Newman, as Hess brilliantly argued?" By the way, I just wanted to say that Lee Krasner was such a great drip painter and painter in general. The scale of her work is so



Installation View: Chris Martin, *Untitled*, 2004. Expanding insulation foam, acrylic and paper. 16 x 11 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Anton Kern Gallery.

astonishing because it's so intimate and has a thrilling complexity that's very different from her husband's work. She supposedly dripped first. The other artist I wanted to mention, who is really important to me, was Frida Kahlo—before Madonna bought her work for an endless sum of money. I know Rob has spent a lot of time in Mexico but I didn't know anything about the *ex voto* tradition that Frida Kahlo comes out of. I went to see *Paintings in Naples from Caravaggio to Giordano* at the National Gallery of Art (February 13 – May 1, 1983) and the *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* show at the Grey Art Gallery (March 1 – April 16, 1983). I had never seen Frida Kahlo before. It was astonishing to see her small paintings. Even though the Caravaggio show blew me away, the intimacy and the emotional power in Frida's work, along with the flayed quality that I'm very interested in, was amazing. On the level of academic accomplishment they were almost an embarrassment. She had no chops in the traditional sense.

SIENA: But she had passion and privacy. She had a necessary separation. Many of us have complained about it. You, Mark, have complained about it for years! It was good for your work.

STORR: She also had the negative example of Diego [Rivera].

SIENA: Can I just make a point about one of Lisa's big paintings that I wanted to squeeze in there?

YUSKAVAGE: Squeeze in where?

SIENA: I'm not Matvey. [Laughter.] Your painting *Bonfire* (2013 – 15), in your most recent show at David Zwirner (April 23 – June 13, 2015), had to be large.

MURPHY: Lisa's best-known paintings are of a size that refers to artists like Thomas Gainsborough and the great British portrait painters. When that size is combined with your subject matter, it's so shocking. I wanted to say that the relationship between object, figure, and ground is so much more compelling and powerful in your paintings because of their scale. Ryder's paintings worked because he understood that relationship. Tom's paintings work because he understands that relationship.

YUSKAVAGE: I recently received a phone call from a wonderful art restorer, Dana Cranmer, to come and see a damaged painting of mine called *Big Blonde Squatting* (1994). It's predominantly painted in a yellow palette. It's got to be a big painting because it has the word big in the title, but it's a fragile painting at the same time because it's so light in color. It was in a group show *Oh Beauty* at Regina Gallery in Moscow, Russia in 1995 and there were big male handprints all over her. [Laughter.]

PROVOSTY: Like Tom's earlier description of the surfaces of the Sienese Trecento paintings that were worn out or scratched.

YUSKAVAGE: This happened in Russia for a different reason. Anyway, when I walked into Cranmer's shop I was totally shocked by it. I thought, "Wow that's a big yellow painting of a big yellow woman." I was glad I saw the painting again

because the scale of that yellow was so intense. I was glad I made it. I don't know how to make it any more. I'm no longer the person that made that painting in that moment, in 1994.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Were the abstract and representational paintings in the show by Merrill Wagner meant to be exhibited together as a group?

BUI: The idea arose during my last visit to Merrill's studio. Since she constantly moves between the country, where she paints from nature directly every weekend, and the city, where she paints during the week, we both came up with the idea of this unlikely pairing together.

ROSEMAN: It creates a wonderful conversation.

BUI: Well thank you for noticing it. Cordy [Ryman], can you describe your relationship to small paintings?

CORDY RYMAN: I'm most comfortable working on small paintings, particularly within my wingspan. And none of my small works are studies for the larger works. The larger works require a different mindset in that I have to plan them out ahead, especially the site-specific works.

DENNIS HOLLINGSWORTH: Don't you think for small paintings to have big scales they need to have a certain centrality?

STORR: I was just in Edinburgh and they have two amazing national galleries. They have the Scottish National Gallery, which is basically for Dutch Renaissance all the way to Impressionism, and the other gallery is a collection of modern art. I had never really seen their collection of modern art before but they had the most incredible Mondrian about 18 inches square and almost all the action is on the margins. So I don't think that centrality is required. In fact, working against the center in small paintings is often the best thing you can do. It's just hard to make one that really carries, that's all.

NOZKOWSKI: I'm surprised that Mark isn't mentioning the *Flagellation* again.

GREENWOLD: Phong keeps bringing it up. [Laughs.] I wouldn't have mentioned it.

NOZKOWSKI: I mean it's completely off kilter.

GREENWOLD: Oh, you mean in that way. Well, yes, it's essentially a diptych, and there are two very different things going on. The notion that painting should be anything is absurd to me because it seems like so much can happen in a painting that upsets our notion of what well-made or well-balanced painting is. That's what's so wonderful about painting. Again, Rob wrote brilliantly about Max Beckmann, one of my favorite artists. He's always undermining compositional features. He's an incredible Cubist, but he's not considered a Cubist.

STORR: There was one great Beckmann painting which is in Hamburg that we weren't able to get for the Max Beckmann retrospective at MoMA (June 26 – September 29, 2003). It's of a porthole of a ship, and it's the size of a

porthole of a ship. And the whole thing is based on the sea. It's really an amazing painting.

MURPHY: I think also it has to do with how you want to use the edges. Anything centralized talks to the edges, and the center pulls it together. The edges also serve as the stop and start of the time signature. When you leave the edges you leave the painting, so if you're bringing something in from the side, you end up using time differently in the painting. And the more complicated the time gets in a painting, the more complicated painting becomes. But I think Dennis poses an interesting question because, in fact, the centralization of my images is something that haunts me. I'm excited whenever I get out of the center of the painting. Then of course, in my next painting, I'm back in the center and I love it and I'm having fun. I am very much drawn to the center. But it's the edges in Ann's paintings that often define them.

PIBAL: I just want to respond to Nathalie's comment about the giant shoe. The thing about a giant shoe, in the way Ray described it, is that it ceases to be a shoe and it becomes a spectacle, and becomes alien in its relationship to the body. It therefore measures space differently. It becomes a big sculpture. I think one thing small paintings can do is broaden the range of associations they make. In the context of abstraction in the 20th century, a small painting can refer to more things than a large painting can. Look at Cordy's paintings, or Ron Gorchov's over here, especially considering his distortion of the format that makes them seem bigger than they actually are.

STORR: In the days when very big paintings were done for very big spaces, like ceilings and so on, the idea of finesse was just not possible. You would do things that were screamingly dramatic because at the distance that most people would view them, they wouldn't seem as dramatic. Take the Mexican painter Orozco [José Clemente] for example. He was not a subtle painter, but he really knew how to control the space and really knew how to project an image in space. If you view his works up close there's very little satisfaction if you're looking for painterly virtuosity, but he was a killer painter. He knew that he could not permit himself to be subtle if he was going to make a painting to be viewed from a distance. And I think that's something we lose track of because most of us are making easel-sized paintings, in one way or another. It's similar, in a way, to the case of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. One of the concerns about the restoration was that they would strip away all the layers and reveal these vulgar colors. Well, they were meant to be vulgar colors! They were meant to carry! And the taste that connoisseurs had developed over the years was for a smoky, obscure palette.

ALAN KIRILI: This is largely about scale but, for those who work both big and small, do you find there are different tensions between the image and the constraints of a given format?

ROGER WHITE: A writer I know was talking about short stories and the idea that maybe there's more of a sense of artificiality in them because the beginning and the ends are closer. It's something I'd never thought and would never in a million years have related to the artificiality of a genre. I think at any scale, it's about managing the beginning and end.

BUI: Which reminds me of when Mondrian, as one of the jurors for the *Spring Salon for Young Artists* in 1943 at Art of This Century, came across an early Pollock called *Stenographic Figure* (1942). He stood in front of it for a good half an hour, until Peggy Guggenheim came along to remind him that they had more than a hundred paintings to look through and that, as a painter, she thought the work was undisciplined and lacked maturity. His response was that it was "the most interesting work [he'd] seen so far in America." I think it's very interesting in that I wonder whether Mondrian anticipated Pollock to be the one who would further what he had done with Cubism—breaking away from and moving beyond the frame convention?

MURPHY: I don't know if he anticipated that. I think he just saw a good painting.

STORR: I'll just throw out an anecdote. When Kirk Varnedoe was hanging the Pollock retrospective at MoMA (October 28, 1998 – February 2, 1999), he put together one fantastic room with all the paintings from 1950 and '51. He just leaned them against the walls one night, before they were hung. I was going through with my daughter, who was a teenager at the time, and her friend. And while I wasn't looking, the two of them lay down on the floor and looked over their heads back at this Pollock, like looking at the night's sky while lying in the grass. I thought, that is the first time in a long time that Pollock seemed really big. I think we get used to a certain orientation to certain works of art. If you radically change that orientation, either to view them as bigger or smaller, they open up.

LEVENSTEIN: There's also the relationship between touch and gesture. What happens wonderfully on a small scale is that the touch registers, however smooth your painting is. It's very hard to replicate it on a large scale without it becoming a kind of gestural expressionism. Big paintings become pictures much quicker, and they become smoother by nature. On a small scale, everything you do just registers more visibly. They are really objects, they're sculptures. Big paintings are pictures, unless you do something drastic a la Anselm Kiefer for example.

STORR: And that's where Alex [Katz] comes in. Because he, for years, has been trying to cool down the gesture of Abstract Expressionism in order to make it so that mark is equivalent to shape and equivalent to passage, to just remove all of that melodrama, and make it just about what you're seeing.

BUI: Thank you all for being part of this gathering. ■

Lisa Yuskavage



Cherry KK, 1998. Oil on panel. 6 7/8 x 4 7/8 inches. Courtesy of David Zwirner, New York/London.

Acknowledgements

Without the flexibility and resilient support of our friends Francis Di Tommaso, director of SVA Galleries, and his staff including Jamie Keesling, operations manager, Jeffrey Perkins, director of communications, and Folake A. Ologunja, senior publicist, this exhibit would not have materialized the way it did. Every step in this exhibit, from its conception, to early meetings at the *Rail* headquarters and gallery conference rooms, to last minute negotiations over specific works and the exhibition design (which included quarter rounds and ceiling tiles for a floor runner that later I noticed implied an inversion of ceiling and floor) all reflected the Rail Curatorial Project's spirit of adaptation. It was an additional pleasure working with Tyson Skross, exhibitions manager, Carl Auge and Robert Campbell, exhibition coordinators, and Bridget Badore, photographer, whose dedication to this particular project was unmatched.

I'm of course grateful to the amazing and fastidious ensemble of installation assistants Jun Ishida, Emet Sosna, Mark Salinas, and Daniel Kingery, as well as to Brian Smith and SVA's graphic design team that designed and printed the exhibit's handsome invitations among other things. Under the direction of both Tyson and Carl, a remarkable cast of SVA students performed endless and indispensable tasks, especially in the last few days and minutes leading up to the opening reception (5 – 7 pm, Saturday, November 21, 2015). Alexis Correa, Anna Hugo, Toni-Marie Devenuto, Evan Peltzman, Kelsey Glaser, Alex Machado, Efren Pagan, Damian Alvarez, Alex Garcia, Alex Romero, and Alex DeFoe are undoubtedly artists to watch.

At the *Rail* headquarters, Maggie Barrett, art director, and Yasi (Yasaman) Alipour, digital art director, unfailingly rose to the occasion whenever we needed extra hands, and Maggie was responsible for the elegant design of this free catalog. Maggie and Yasi along with Taylor Dafoe, former assistant art editor, Sara Christoph, managing director, and Laila Pedro, managing editor, tirelessly balanced the *Rail*'s endless demands with those of this exhibit, including facilitating editorial meetings, panel discussions, and other events, while managing editorial deadlines, among other things. I should also note that one of the profound pleasures in working with our young comrades at the *Rail* is witnessing their growth. In this instance, Darragh McNicholas became my sole curatorial assistant overnight with unimaginable poise and organizational skill. Not only did Darragh manage all the required logistics, including the day-to-day correspondences with the artists and their respective dealers and collectors, he kept the conversation flowing between the *Rail* and Francis and his staff. To see Darragh transformed from a newcomer in the field to a veteran assistant curator was immensely joyful. I admire his willingness to place a good work ethic and a sense of adventure above personal reservations and habits.

While it is always a privilege to collaborate with fellow artists, it was an especially great privilege in this instance. These particular artists' strong visions and convictions are the very reason the Rail Curatorial Projects was formed as a way of embarking on a journey, uncorrupted by social or political motivations, with the po-

tential to create playful experiments and results. Michael Berryhill, Sebastian Black, Katherine Bradford, Lois Dodd, Louise Fishman, Ron Gorchov, Joanne Greenbaum, Nora Griffin, EJ Hauser, Sanya Kantarovsky, Alex Katz, James English Leary, Matvey Levenstein, Dean Levin, Margrit Lewczuk, Chris Martin, Loren Munk, Catherine Murphy, Aliza Nisenbaum, Ellen Phelan, Joanna Pousette-Dart, Tal R, Neo Rauch, Julia Rommel, Cordy Ryman, Julia Schmidt, Juan Uslé, Don Voisine, Merrill Wagner, Roger White, Terry Winters, and Lisa Yuskavage have all offered an abundance of enthusiasm and comradery that is indispensable to the exhibit in particular and to the *Rail* in general. I'd like also to extend my appreciation to those generous individuals who loaned work or otherwise helped with the exhibit: Steven Stewart at Kansas Gallery; Tamar Nahmias, Maria Brassel, and Madeline Warren at Hauser & Wirth; Max Bushman and Susanna Chachko at C L E A R-

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Finally, I would like to say how grateful I am to those artists who, in addition to participating in the exhibits, took time out of their busy schedules to participate in our timely panel discussion on December 12. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Mark Greenwold, Matvey Levenstein, Catherine Murphy, Thomas Nozkowski, Ann Pibal, Julia Rommel, James Siena, Robert Storr, Roger White, and Lisa Yuskavage.

Lastly, one thing we all can agree upon is that painting, one of our oldest mediums, still carries an important purpose: to thread our visual memory with a cumulative record of unique instances of singular and individual expression where incremental contributions can be as vast as the sea or minute as a grain of sand. The artist is sensitive to both, and everything in between. ■

Onward my friends,
Phong Bui



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Cover image: Nora Griffin, *Kamikaze Harlequin*, 2015. Oil on canvas, wood frame. 37 x 41 inches. Photo: Stan Narten. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James, New York.

Artists

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Ellen Phelan
Joanna Pousette-Dart
Tal R
Neo Rauch
Julia Rommel
Cordy Ryman
Julia Schmidt
Juan Uslé
Don Voisine
Merrill Wagner
Roger White
Terry Winters
Lisa Yuskavage



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