Do It Yourself:
An Interview with Faye Hirsch
by Fanny Horton

Fanny Horton: What is this exhibition about, and have you been disappointed at all in your first experience as a curator?

Faye Hirsch: I wanted to get one of Andy Warhol's 'Do It Yourself' paintings for this exhibition, but we were told by the Andy Warhol Foundation that they are all in Europe and worth millions of dollars. Much to my surprise, however, it turns out there are 'Do It Yourself' drawings, and that bears Somabend owns one, but she didn't want to lend it to the show. The more impossible it grew, the more I wanted one of the 'Do It Yourself' paintings—especially the 'Do It Yourself (Landscape) listed in the Ludwig Collection in Rainer Crone's 1970 book Andy Warhol, where it is reproduced in black and white and, in my copy of the book, on yellowing pages that have grayed the image considerably. It is evidently large, 72 by 54 inches, and probably would have been rather expensive to ship, let alone insure. This landscape is of a barn in the countryside with a rustic road running past. There is a big, spreading tree with a gnarled trunk behind it, and a smaller house in the distance.

FH: What color is the barn?

FH: I don't...
Katurah imprim.

FH: Whence?

FH: I’m sure it’s because it makes me feel very small and helpless and poor. Perhaps if I had been wealthy or fashionable I might have been able to get a ‘Do It Yourself’ for this exhibition, where it might have had a really significant impact—that is, in my group show, where its presence amongst all the other works would have given them, and it, well, a very special frisson, in a nutshell. Have you ever seen one?

FH: Not in the flash.

FH: I haven’t either; only in these reproductions I’ve told you about, which I’m sure do not give a very accurate impression of the work at all, as reproductions often don’t. (For that matter, now that I think of it, the reproduction is only 10 inches high and 7-3/4 inches wide—that’s quite a big difference from the actual painting!) In the ‘Do It Yourself’ (Landscape) in the Ludwig Collection, there are no fewer than 32 areas with the number 9, which cease to appear altogether as you move up, so I suppose that the number 9 is intended in the quote-unquote ‘original’ as an earth tone, or maybe green, though the tree is just chock full of 2s (there are 45 of them in the upper part of the painting…) and four in a bush below (47 altogether) so I suppose 2 is green. See, this is one of the wonderful things about color originals being reproduced in black and white—it makes counting so much easier!

FH: I’m certainly glad you brought your notebook so you could remember all those numbers.

FH: My God. Fanny, I never go anywhere without a pad and paper—I’m a writer, you know, and can be caught scribbling at all hours in all places. The subway, restaurants… I’m sure you, of all people, understand.

FH: One does marvel that somebody at some point decided both to extend a spectrum of possibilities to the masses of persons who warned for any and all manner of color yet systematized and limited it inasmuch that it might be transformed into a force of order, may control, and eventually something so bland as to circumvent expression altogether? Not as all like those wise horticulturists who had a more generous and expansive attitude toward color: take Mr. Russell, certain of whose lips have gained wide recognition; many distinct colors are still in cultivation, such as ‘Lime Light’ and the blue-and-white bicolor ‘Vogue’. And those that aren’t! Whence those colors!

FH: Anyway, to continue. There are plenty of ones in the painting—29 altogether, and exclusively in the top part. Another tone of green, maybe? Bits of blue sky peeping through? There are also—and I think this must be significant—29 numbers 16.

FH: Well.

FH: Yes. I’ll be cool about it if someone out there with a more scholarly approach wants to do something with all this raw data. (A footnote would be nice.) The 16s are all over the painting—maybe they are yellow, representing the dappling effects of sunshine. One of them is all alone in the center; near the bottom, amidst a lot of nines and sevens. Speaking of sevens, there are 19 of them, as well as six tens and sevens, four 12s, and—get this—one, single 19.

FH: Are you quite sure?

FH: Absolutely certain. One might well ask what that is supposed to be! A cherry in the cocktail?—You know what’s amazing! This painting was done around the same time that Johns was making those false equivalencies between colors and color names. Something must have been in the air. Anyway, I’ve been very sad about not having a ‘Do It Yourself’ in my very first show. It could have been the linchpin.

FH: It would have been the linchpin.

December 1966.

Manuel Antonio Bravo’s Portrait of Faye. 1962. Oil on canvas. 31” x 40”}

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