



**Bruce Conner**  
*Book Pages* 1967  
Felt tip, watercolor, pen  
on paper 8.5"x12"



**Bill Jensen**  
*Ten* 1996 Oil on  
linen 12"x24"



**Margrit Lewczuk**  
Untitled 1996 Charcoal  
on paper 22"x30"



**Simon Frost**  
Untitled 1994  
Graphite on paper  
7"x9"



**Mark Tobey**  
*Central Park* 1954  
Gouache 6.75"x10"



**Giorgio Morandi**  
*Bottles* 1957 Pencil on  
paper 9.5"x6.5"



**Elena del Rivero**  
*Letter from Penelope* (diptych)  
1997 Pencil and thread on  
paper 6.75"x9" each



**Charles Seliger**  
*Grasses and Pods* 1966  
Acrylic and oil on  
board 20"x16"



**Blinky Palermo**  
*Projection* 1971  
Offset print 16"x16"



# Original scale

curated by *John Yau*

*January 8 - February 7, 1998*

Eve Aschheim  
Mark Greenwold  
Jasper Johns  
Ann Mikolowski  
Catherine Murphy  
Martin Noël  
Jürgen Partenheimer  
Richard Tuttle

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cover:  
**Jürgen Partenheimer** JP497 W2 1997  
Encaustic and graphite on paper 22" x 17"

## After Scylla and Charybdis

I. Postwar American art is routinely represented in binary terms. Abstract Expressionism, for example, is divided into the gestural and the geometric, with Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning grouped under the former heading, and Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman grouped under the latter. The problem with these divisions is that they ignore artists who belong to neither category. Is Bradley Walker Tomlin a gestural artist or a geometric one? Or has his work been marginalized, as well as misunderstood, because it is neither or both? What about Forrest Bess, Charles Seliger, and Myron Stout, for whom gesture and the grid played even less of a role than it did for Tomlin?

Given that there is a persistent tendency to think of Abstract Expressionism as the source from which all subsequent art of consequence has emerged, either in direct reaction to, or in some kind of stylistic revival or imaginative renewal of, its central tropes, one recognizes that certain categories continue to influence our understanding of art. One of these categories is scale, particularly as Clement Greenberg encoded it with the term "post-easel" painting. Seen against the backdrop of Abstract Expressionism, and the development of "post easel" painting, scale is an issue that I think has largely been taken for granted since the mid 1950s. If, for example, we decide to identify art whose scale relies on neither gestural expansiveness nor the repetition of a grid's modular units, what would we discover?



**Eve Aschheim** *Filter* 1996  
Pencil, oil on canvas 14" x 11"

For while gestural painting is regarded as evidence of the heroic self's existence, and the grid is seen as an expansive, non-hierarchical field capable of conveying universalism, mechanical reproduction, self-contained systems of logic, or an anti-humanist stance, there has been far less attention paid to work whose scale is not derived from either the breadth of human reach or the grid's modular unit, its promise of unlimited repetition and variation. Here, I would propose that both of these measures are connected to a panoramic impulse, and thus a sense of landscape. It is within this context that I asked myself: Are there works whose scale is determined by something other than the grid or gesture? And is that something else evident in the work itself?

I wasn't interested in a predetermined scale that was oppositional to both gesture and the grid, but in work whose scale is determined by something intrinsic to the making of the work, the nature of the support, or the thing that first attracted the artist's attention, whether it is as overt as a piece of bread or as elusive as one's shadow on a stucco wall. For although Jasper Johns' lead relief, *Bread*, and Catherine Murphy's painting, *My Shadow, On Stucco*, seem to have little in common, the scale of both works was necessitated by things and events the artist encountered in the course of everyday life, by a primary perception. And yet, even as I recognized that a familiar yet specific experience



**Catherine Murphy** *My Shadow, On Stucco* 1996  
Oil on canvas 41" x 49"

APEX



may have played a role in the making of their work, I also sensed that something more than mere curiosity compelled both Johns and Murphy to utilize the means of art to return to, as well as reconstruct, the initial moment of perception.

Once I took primary perceptions into account, I had to address the possibility that direct sensations are not always connected to an immediately tangible reality, that dreams, for example, are also an aspect of one's perceptions. Perhaps, and here I am surmising, the artist makes a work of art in order to discover what is tangible about a dream. However, once I took dreams as a



Ann Mikolowski  
Jim Carroll 1991  
Oil on canvas  
4.5" x 2.75"

possible source, I also had to acknowledge that the relationship between memory and perception is neither fixed nor stable. Perhaps the artist used his or her means to construct not a thing, but the perception of a thing or an event.

It is out of considering these questions that I became interested in registering different examples of necessity pressing the artist to work in ways that don't rely on either gesture or a grid. My interest is predicated on the belief that often their use not

only predetermines the artist's approach to the making of art, but they are this century's most familiar resolutions to art making. I wanted to discover what other resolutions artists might have arrived at, as well as get a sense of what the sources of those resolutions might be.

All of my questions boiled down to this: What other possibilities have existed as mediating factors between the artist's eye and hand? If they were synonymous with primary perceptions, then what seemed to me to be the determining factor was the human body, not as something that could embrace an immense vista or chart a seemingly unlimited expanse, but as something contingent, doubtful, and questioning.

It seems to me the artists are interested in the relationship between perception and knowledge, between the body that sees and experiences and the mind that thinks and remembers.



Richard Tuttle *Untitled (#21)* 1974  
Pencil on paper in artist's frame  
13.25"x12"

dreaming) and still make art? Or, recognizing that the individual is likely to privilege one over the other, is it possible to make art which explores the changing relationship between the two? And if there are artists who raise these questions in their work, might it not be useful to place art within a realm of understanding informed by similar questions, ones which have haunted western philosophy at least since the time of Plato and Aristotle?

### III.

The guiding principle behind this exhibition can be summed up as follows: What are the mediating factors between mind and body? And can they be made apparent? Consequently, how does the artist address the relationship between mind and body, induce the viewer to begin examining the contingent relationship between the two?

Is Johns' "bread" a piece of bread or a sculpture or both? How does one learn what it is?

Is Murphy's shadow on the wall or in the wall?



Jasper Johns *Bread* 1969 Lead relief with laminated rag paper painted in oil 23"x17"

©Jasper Johns/Cemino, G.E./licensed by VAGA, NY, NY

### II.

Within philosophical terms, it can be said that gesture privileges the body over the mind, while the grid privileges the mind over the body. Thus, despite the visual outcome of the work, each mode is finally hierarchical. However, is it possible to privilege neither body (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling) nor mind (remembering, conceiving, and

How does one determine which plane it occupies, as well as defines?

What is the relationship between reality and its details in Ann Mikolowski's paintings, their reconstruction of sight on an incredibly small scale?

What is behind Eve Aschheim's band of white paint? Is the unseen as important as what is seen? What is the relationship between seeing and the mind's eye?

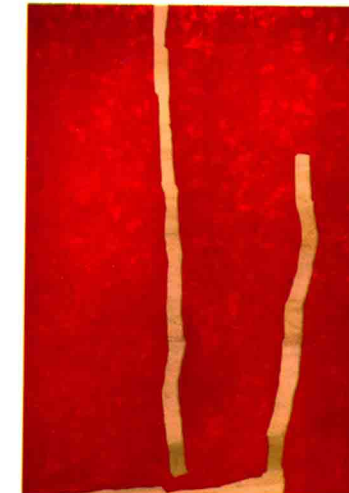
What does it mean to proceed across the surface without having a final destination or overall result in mind, as Bruce Conner, Simon Frost, and Mark Tobey seem to be doing? What is central to artists whose works are the result of minute accretions?

What is the relationship between writing and memory Elena del Rivero investigates in her letters, which reside between the legible and illegible? What does it mean to read that which cannot be read?

What about the relationship between sight and touch that Margrit Lewczuk and Martin Noël investigate through their very different uses of wood and paint?

What kind of physical and visual space is suggested by Bill Jensen's paintings? What is the relationship between them?

What do sight and touch have in common in Charles Seliger's paintings?



Martin Noël *Hierro* 1996  
Oil on wood 33.5"x24"



Mark Greenwold *A Man's Worst Enemies* 1996-97 Oil on board 11.75" diameter

### IV.

Common to all of the artists in this exhibition is the understanding that sight is bounded, that it exists in relationship to the mind's eye, as well as to memory and touch. Thus, I am proposing that one of the recurring issues for these artists is the problematic relationship between seeing and touching, and thinking and knowing, and thus between distance and proximity. In their different ways, each tries to bring seeing and touching, as well as thinking and knowing, closer together. The world they are simultaneously investigating and making is right in front of them. It might be a familiar world, but that doesn't mean either they or we know it.

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