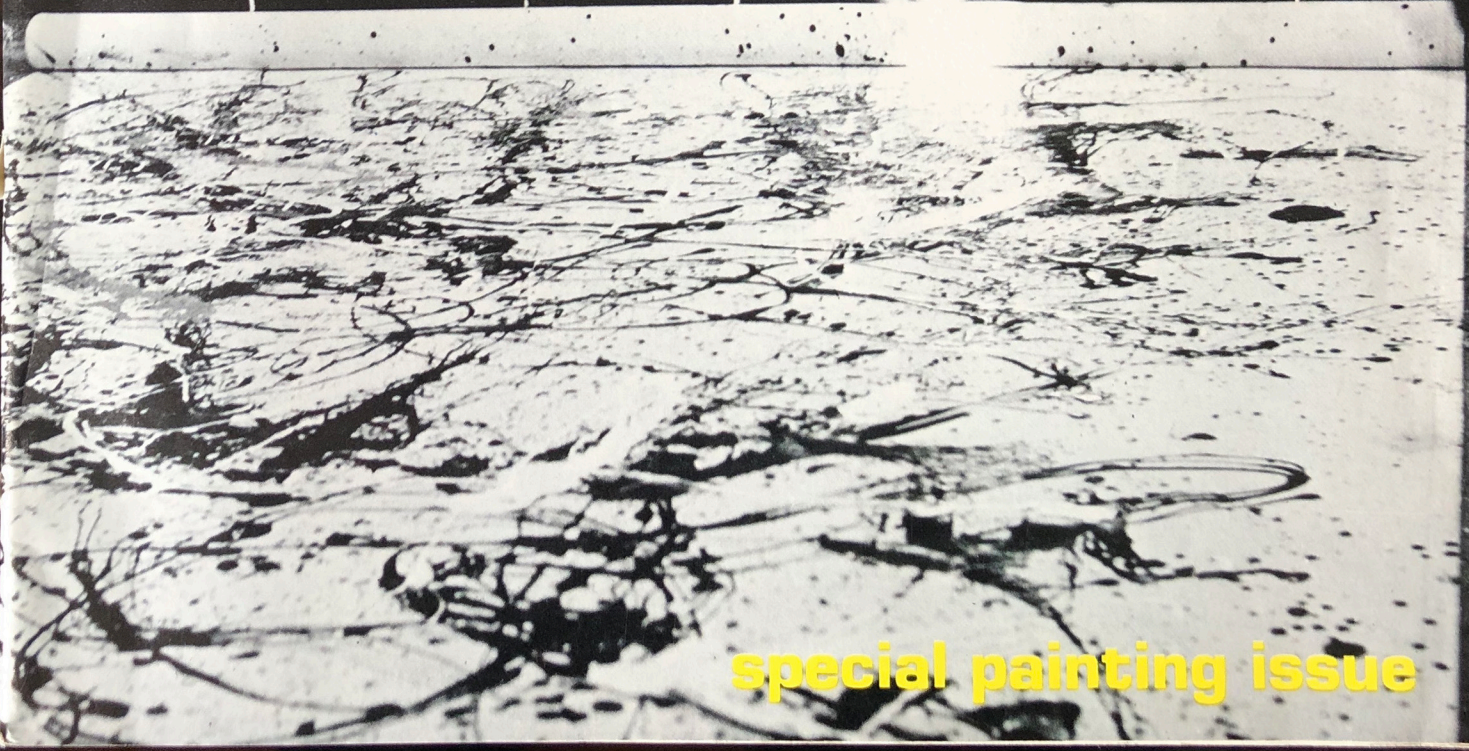


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# ARTFORUM

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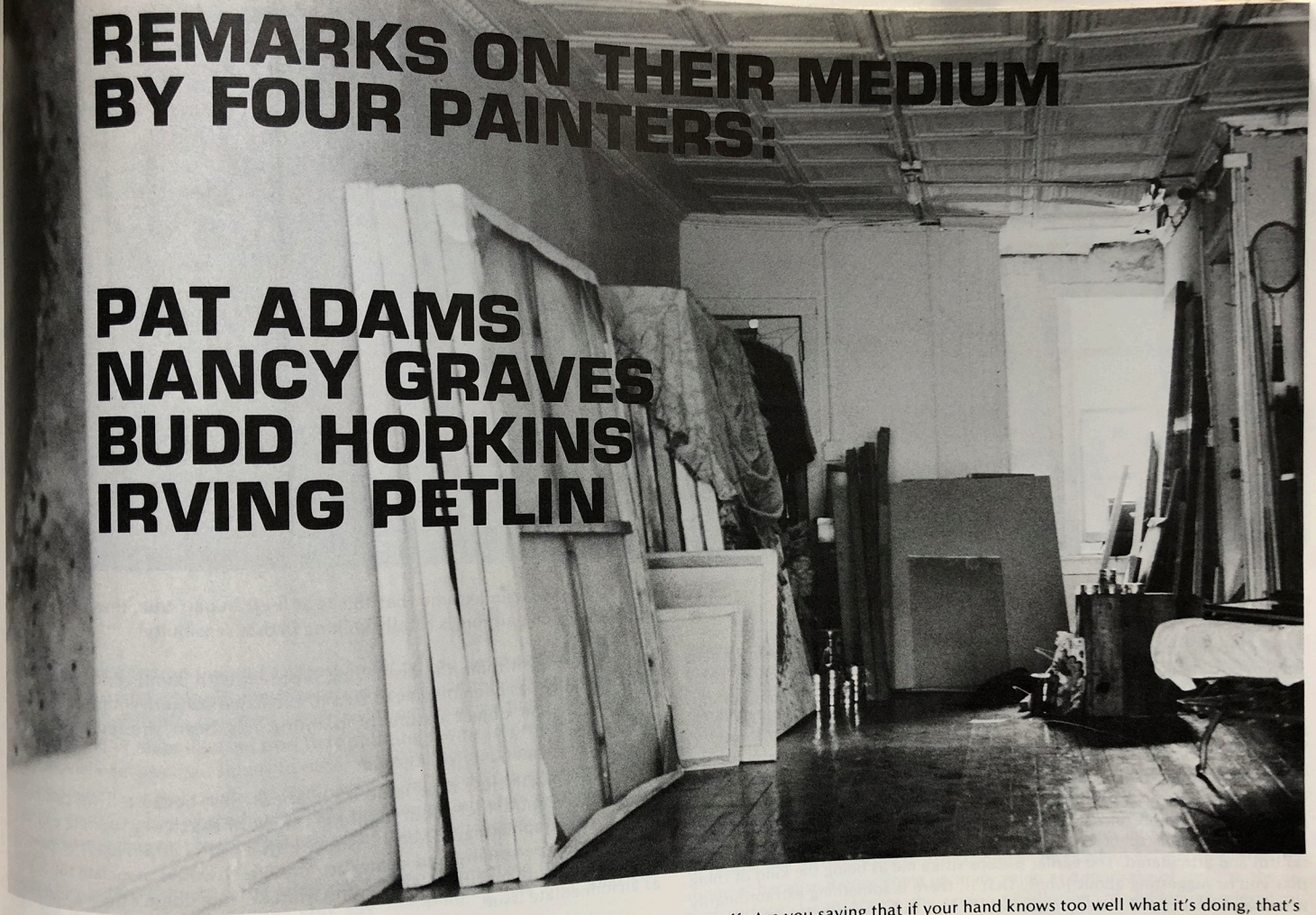
ALEXANDRE FINE ART INC. ESTABLISHED 1996



...stance remarks 1/28/86  
... of the Stockton Arts Commission

# REMARKS ON THEIR MEDIUM BY FOUR PAINTERS:

## PAT ADAMS NANCY GRAVES BUDD HOPKINS IRVING PETLIN



INSTIGATOR: MAX KOZLOFF

Kozloff: What do you consider to be the relation of skill to ideas in painting, and can you indicate differences in this relationship in the lines that you call

Kozloff: Are you saying that if your hand knows too well what it's doing, that's as much of a problem as when it knows too little what you want it to do? Or am I putting words in your mouth?

Adams: Yes, in a way. Hand skill follows eye cognizance. It's really more the eye watching what is on the surface. You have to have enough skill to get it out there, what you really want to determine is whether it has



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## INSTIGATOR: MAX KOZLOFF

Kozloff: What do you consider to be the relation of skill to ideas in painting, and can anything generally be said to indicate differences in this relationship in painting as compared to other media? Or, are there disciplines that you call "skills?"

Petlin: There is a certain kind of skill that is given to you as you are trained. As time goes on, this kind of skill is eliminated, like a bad chemistry, from your work as you go through that period between your training and the assumption of a mature and "stated" way of working. And the new skill that evolves, as your subject has assumed form and skin, is the real skill; that can't be taught. I believe that is the skill we're talking about rather than . . .

Adams: Than training. You were speaking about training, and when I think of skill I think of trying to discover a means that will house whatever notion I may be trying to get out: a skill of handling, of producing marks that induce the sensations, arrangements and so on.

Kozloff: Do they have to be discovered as you're working?

Adams: I think so. You have a certain bag of tricks, and they may degenerate into devices. But it's as if you're trying—your skill comes in trying to make something authentic before your eyes. In the course of working you're trying to define the way to embody your notions. That's the skill, the finding of the means. Training helps, but ultimately you need to invent.

Kozloff: Are you saying that if your hand knows too well what it's doing, that's as much of a problem as when it knows too little what you want it to do? Or am I putting words in your mouth?

Adams: Yes, in a way. Hand skill follows eye cognizance. It's really more the eye watching what is on the surface. You have to have enough skill to get it out there, but once it's there, what you really want to determine is whether it has some concordance with the thing you're trying to generate, the thing you're trying to make visible.

Kozloff: Do any of you feel, insofar as we've just broached the subject, that it makes the same difference in painting that it does in other media? That these matters might not be the same, or arrive at the same threshold in sculpture, for example, or video?

Graves: My opinion regarding the relationship of technique or manner of articulation in painting is the following. An idea is *not* a work of art. Ideas can only be *about*, and are inclusive of materials which infer process. The same holds true for sculpture.

Hopkins: When you say "skill" I don't think we're really talking about the minimum ability that's required simply to get an idea clarified in physical terms, to get the paint down. What I mean when I talk about "skill" is what is meant when you talk about *skillful painting*, that the actual physical handling has an interest in itself. I think the question is brought up in Jasper Johns's painting, where each thing is isolated from the other; the paint handling,



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Pat Adams, *Together Come Rightly Many*, 1974, o/c, 53" x 140".

Kozloff: This is a question I would address to all of you because I think, in different ways, your work seems to have responded to it. At the same time, it may be a condition available specifically to painting as a medium. I'm talking about some kind of mapping function that painting seems to provide, whereas other media will devote themselves to other matters. By mapping, I mean more than composition. I mean some notion of topography that your material describes on a surface, but which has a scale that seems infinitely expandable or shrinkable, depending on the internal references the painter gives it.

Adams: Orientation. I think of the whole self as being involved in orientation when you look at painting. When you say mapping, it has that kind of gyroscopic, locating, placing phenomena.

Hopkins: There's something I don't quite accept there as a metaphor. A map is something I see on a flat surface that I look down on. And essentially I see a painting as being a kind of extra-architectural element. It's rectilinear because floors, the walls, ceilings are rectilinear. It has a top and a bottom.

Adams: So do you.

Hopkins: And, it has an upright posture like us. So I see the surface of any painting instantly in terms of top, bottom, left and right, and as an analogy to the wall on which it hangs. It would be a very different thing if it were leaning against a tree in Central Park, or, resting on the grass where one looked down at it. I think that architectural connections are so powerful, and so accented by galleries, the idea of a flat wall, the post and lintel as being built into anybody's perception of a painting, that I prefer to use an architectural metaphor rather than any other to describe its surface.

Petlin: I would use a different metaphor. I would say there's something much more primitive about the relationship of the viewer and a painting—it's a window out onto or into a world. This is not discussed much these days because it quickly leads to questions of illusion, and the whole subject has been taboo in talk about painting.

But I would like to explore the notion that, in fact, it is its primitive life that is still alive—that is, its window aspect—as opposed to architectural, post-lintel, or topographic usage. The window is the more direct primitive and forceful remnant of history.

Graves: But, to get back to the question of mapping. Scientific systems of measurement which focus the mind on the notion of place or location would be my definition. The visual results of spatial exploration which encompass vast distance are nonexperiential, so that to locate is an abstraction as well as the system of devised indicators. This interests me. By system and concept it is allied with narrative or sequential time. Painting which utilizes these visual references falls within the landscape tradition.

Adams: I've been thinking about illusion, and how the very suppleness of paint (the nonprescriptive nature of the medium itself) opens into, sets out a density of resonance, a complexity of affect. And while I cannot accept illusion at this moment because it does come up in my mind as a mockery of surface, the actual surface, I can accept the notion of allusion, of individual references, bringing in the reverberations that I want to include in a painting.

Kozloff: Can you ever escape allusion?

Adams: I think there is some wish that we might in the talk of literalness and objecthood. And, I feel such critical notions may be especially useful to sculpture, that they do refresh my sense of surface and remind me again of that kind of reality in which a painting is an object. However, as descriptions of that which is intrinsic to painting, they do not suffice. In painting, in this inert stuff which allows for glorious color and allows for all the tactile manipulations that can be managed, I see the inherent suppleness of paint as providing the possibility of inducing all and any response in the viewer.

Petlin: Pat, what happens—now, of course, this is directed to everybody—when you cannot or do not, or, never in your life have used the term "surface" in describing a painting? Or, what if you were to think in terms of the wall, the white wall, and once you enter the territory of the painting you are no longer on a surface? Because this is the way I feel often enough about a picture. That is, I get to the edge of it, and I get inside the picture, and it's not a surface.

Adams: But I don't think it's only a surface, but its surfaceness is part of that marvelous—you know, painting is so damned paradoxical. It includes everything in what it is and what it isn't. And the fact that it is this surface, and somehow the credence that you have to build up to make it a palpating thing



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which is what I would call "skillful" and "expressive on its own terms," is one kind of situation which is delectable and interesting. The idea, which is his selection of image and the way the image has been composed, is kept as a separate and interesting thing. And he makes those two situations, idea and skill, run parallel to each other on separate tracks. I think one of the reasons why that kind of painting is as popular as it is with other painters is that it keeps everything at a high level of expressiveness: skill, the sense of paint handling, and the idea.

Graves: Don't you feel that they're interdependent?

Hopkins: Yes, separate, but interdependent.

Graves: It's interesting to me that you have another point of view. To me the approach of Johns is that the two are coequal.

Hopkins: Well, that's true, but you also absorb it instantly and immediately as a unified situation. With many people who paint beautifully—the old Abstract Expressionist touch—the strokes just meander around. One can describe so and so as a beautiful painter, but that's about all you can say.

Adams: What do you think about Renoir in that way, where it's all handling and no idea, and the handling . . .

Hopkins: I think ideas are there.

Adams: To me, the ideas come up in the course of the handling. There's a sensitive registration of that man's sensibility and a kind of startling mix of color and directional texture in the stroke, and these strokes accumulate into stacked areas which present form quite apart from the subject matter he's handling.

Petlin: How about thinking about Bacon in relation to what you've said, Budd? Let's break down his work into two periods; the earlier period, the more exploratory and more explosive, more hesitant, and more muddled in a certain sense, and yet more spectacular than the recent paintings, which are even more skillful and articulated. The earlier Bacons strike me as being the kind of thing that you're suggesting about Johns. That is, there is something extraordinarily personal, violent, and instantaneous which had to be accomplished in a split second of time. And the paint and the image and its energy and electricity are bound up in the meshing of image and liquid goo accreted to the surface. Johns is, to my mind, a scientist of a sort compared to the emotional explosiveness of Bacon. What do you think of the two?

Hopkins: I was really trying to account for why Johns's paintings have been so popular; it is, I believe, because of their separate coexistent methodologies.

Kozloff: Well, it's interesting to speculate on this, because you describe a kind of dualism in Johns that has historical interest because it seems almost as if his strategy were one of ironic self-protection by categorically separating the two channels, that is, painting and idea. He overtly externalizes them as part of his construct. By doing this, it seems, he has sidled around and past the accusation that a number of critics or spectators might have leveled against painting, that it was merely skillful, merely talented, merely decorative, or merely literary.

Hopkins: This is why I think he analyzed carefully the resources of painting, just as you did in the question, and hit them both equally heavily.

Kozloff: But there's a problem in all this because once again, critically speaking, I imagine painting to be, if it finally is reducible to one kind of term, "touch." I know that in the past other writers have spoken of the flatness of the plane, but touch seems to me much more basic . . .

Adams: *Tache*.

Kozloff: Well, *tache* is French for "spot," and touch is a more inclusive term usable as a means of determining if the object, the artifact, is a painting. And then, once one recognizes that, one recognizes it at the end as well as the beginning. Sometimes, for example, it's a question of deciding as one might decide when one tastes something, what it is that has happened: why does this bagel taste differently from all other breads? This is a question I ask about touches in painting. I know that I can be fabulously charmed by the touch of an individual artist, and just as unbearably irritated by the touch of another artist. Photography, for example, never gives that sensation. Ever. Painting invariably does. Could it be—and Pat, you mentioned Renoir before—could it be that from time to time, perhaps more frequently than we imagine, there are painters whose touch, whose embodiment of sense itself, becomes an idea? That is, the sensation is ideated before our eyes.

Adams: Painting does objectify our haptic as well as our visual experience. We want to make, generate our whole sense of reality. And it is that kind of equivalent.

Petlin: And the accumulation of individual touches builds images into concretions of these things until they are recognizable as someone's work.

Adams: They are recognizable as a very intimate record of self. And, as a viewer, you look on it and, in turn, exercise—know yourself by that looking.

Petlin: But if we can assume that this is at least in part true, then how come so much American painting is totally lacking in that sensibility?

Adams: Because I think the dismaying problem with painting presently is that this internality has been displaced by the exclusive concern with literalness and objecthood. The object nature of painting has been stressed, not that inwardness.

Hopkins: Well, I'd just take issue a bit about this, because if we talk about touch as the central fact about painting, I think of touch as a discrete unit, as a kind of calligraphic mark. And I associate that with certain kinds of painting which I don't personally find central to my life. I would associate touch with Bonnard rather than with Matisse. With Matisse, one doesn't think about touch as an immediate issue.

Adams: Well, you would think of it with Pollock and certainly with Rothko. I didn't think of it literally as an Impressionist blob, but somehow the kind of carrying, just the means by which the artist conveys, carries, makes palpable his visual notion.

Hopkins: I don't think of that as the central preoccupation myself. I like to be present, to see the quality of a man's sensibility as one of the aspects of his work. I love the sensibility in Mondrian of touch, even though that's not the first thing I notice. The other issues to me are structural, have a certain architectural solidity, and even perhaps sculptural implications. I happen to be more interested in these issues right now. For instance, if I think of Piero della Francesca, I don't think of touch.

Adams: I think of shape, a shape that contains all the other plastic elements. A kind of dispersal, disposition of shape across the surface.

Kozloff: Perhaps it can be put this way, Budd: you seem to be more moved by painting which poses problems of perception and understanding by means of the medium rather than *within* the medium. Does that distinction strike you at all?

Hopkins: It depends on how important we're making the medium's presence in its definition. I see things in terms of shape and silhouette, in terms of color, and in terms of a certain architectural stability. Later on I might explore a notion of touch, but that doesn't seem to me to be in the forefront of my perception of the work.



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before anything else is gonna go on—this, to me, is a very exciting fact. And then illusion, allusion, density or whatever—it can come up.

Hopkins: Irving, when you said something about never having used the word “surface,” obviously every painter has to deal with the fact that it is a surface, even if it’s something that’s gotten scratched. There’s also no conceivable way to eliminate the problem of illusionistic things occurring. The result is that every artist makes his own agreement with himself about the relationship of those two elements: surface flatness and illusion. And that transaction within himself about what he will allow becomes a very personal identifying aspect of everybody’s work and probably the hardest thing for a forger to imitate. Hopper uses the same space as Jackson Pollock; he just puts different pressures on illusionism and flatness. It’s only a transaction between two situations, a compromise.

Adams: You might talk about density rather than space. I think about that often for myself. It seems to hang closer to the surface.

Hopkins: Yes. Incidentally, one thing Irving’s window metaphor suggested, that I intended to say, is that the thing about painting that makes it so marvelous to me is that every single painting refers instantly back to the whole history of painting. And no one can do a painting without recreating that primitive iconic image staring back, or an illusion of a deep place somewhere else where you could go, or some relationship to the wall it is hanging on because painting’s always been bound up with architecture. Every work has built into it such an incredible history. Buying yourself a paintbox and a little canvas is like buying a small plug into an enormous computer system that is loaded with vast information from the past—all the history of painting.

Petlin: Could I take the window a step further? Ron Kitaj once observed that open windows make people uneasy, more so than closed windows. Going back to this primitive capacity of the painting, if there’s some possibility—it’s a metaphor—but if there is some possibility that an open window does make for uneasiness and magnetism, I could imagine staring at a window which is slightly open, whereas I am not being very magnetized or aware or transfixed by a room full of closed windows. In that room full of closed windows, one of them is slightly open. I do kind of turn to the slightly open window in some fashion.

Kozloff: You’re referring to the fact that a slightly open window within an interior space, where all the other windows are closed, represents an egress into another kind of ambiance—therefore poses a question. And you go on to say this is a metaphor of primitive experience. I’ve noticed that all of you so far are referring to metaphors when talking of the condition of painting—with Budd an architectural one, I to a mapping coordinate. You refer, Irving, to a window. None of these are primitive in the sense of primordial or in reference to the archaic condition of a painting. For that we have to think of the activity of putting something on a surface, of hoping that that something will be a signal of some sort. The window metaphor only becomes something to talk about pertinently with painting of the Renaissance. With the very earliest cave painting, as with everything that followed, we are dealing with signs, are we not? Signs of a representational kind for an audience.

Hopkins: Yes, I feel involved with the idea of hierarchical composition, because it implies that the presence of the icon is privileged territory within the painting field. Hierarchical composition points out the place where the magic is most powerful. Our vision is structured in psychological hierarchies. I’m involved in carrying that through into painting. And this leaves me without much interest in nonhierarchical structure, like, for instance, an Agnes Martin grid.

Kozloff: In other words, you think of painting or you look at painting as a network of coordinates with different kinds of stresses, calling your attention to themselves in a deliberate way.

Adams: One of the most supreme experiences I’ve had lately was looking at a

little brooch in the Walters Museum in Maryland; although it is a brooch, I think of it like my own activity. When you were saying that a painting is related to architecture, in that sense I think of all the things that have influenced my work, and usually they haven’t been put to that use. They’ve been shields, or saddlebags, or book illuminations. And in this case, it was a brooch consisting of garnets on gold. Its format was shaped so that the placing of the stones seemed to have everything to do with perception and orientation. The center, the vertical and horizontal placements, and the corners were identified. A wave of concentricity started happening as these places were felt out to fill the surface. There was a morphological run of shape from garnets that were round to garnets that were tear-shaped. In color they ran from red through oranges, and one green. The whole schema was parallel to painting judgments and seemed a perfect evidence of a sensibility in the act of making form. Would you call that hierarchical?

Hopkins: I’d have to see the brooch.

Adams: Hierarchical may be our point of view, it may not be the point of view of every object that’s ever been made. It’s a way of interpretation that we’re accepting for this discussion, to a certain extent.

Adams: I take any work of art to be a reflection of the motions of the mind of the artist. I think we can read an object . . .

Graves: I guess what I’m disputing is the reason for which something is made. A brooch has a particularly distinct utilitarian purpose, and it was a commission, most likely, from a particular person for a certain occasion, which is quite different from being in the studio making a work of art for yourself.

Adams: I just don’t think that the content was indicated. The content I take to be the sensibility projected onto . . .

Graves: What I enjoy about objects of the past is the process of fabrication and the diverse reasons for which they have been made. To question the esthetics of all or any objects is post-Kubler. I think about the insights and ambiguities afforded by art history and archaeology as they contrast with the way art is seen at the moment, or cultural conditioning, and the fact that the object in question resides outside these two.

Hopkins: I don’t think it really makes any difference. Art now seems to be the way a thing is used rather than anything connected with how it was made.

Kozloff: I would like to go back to this notion of hierarchy for a moment, because we’ve discussed it on one level. There’s another way of talking about it. A hierarchical ambition would seem to imply a schedule of priorities. The highest priority achieves a certain altitude in a hierarchical scheme. And this now, what I’m about to say, is a criticism of current pictorial practice so frequently demonstrated in exhibitions. One goes to a show of painting—a one-man or one-woman show—one sees a number of paintings on display, and they are approximately the same size. There have been only the fewest executive decisions that have occurred beforehand . . .

Adams: I don’t like that kind of painting.

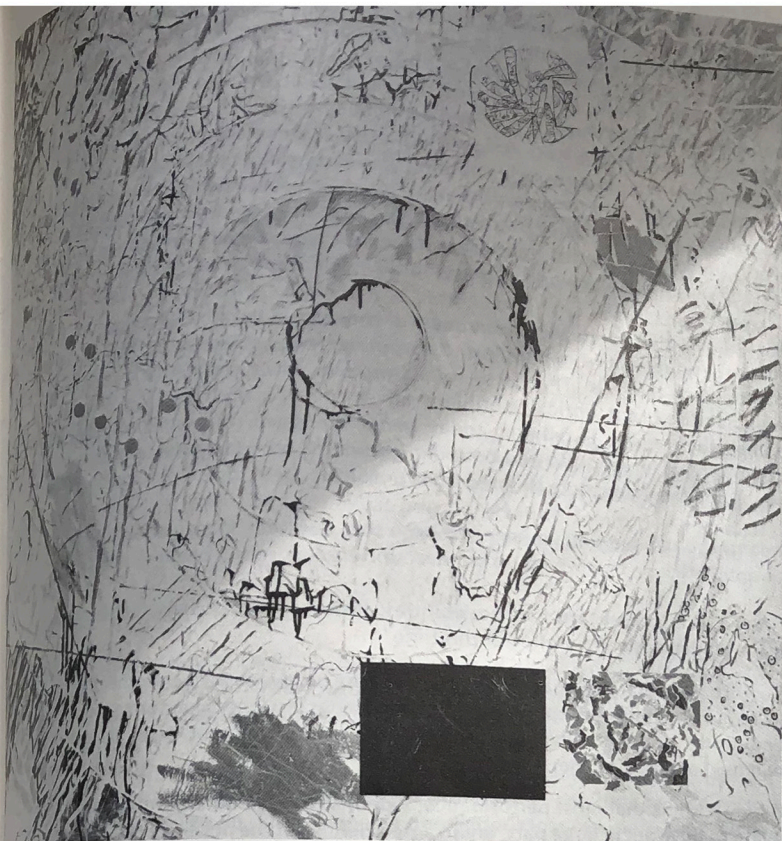
Kozloff: You see? A notion, for example, of a slanted touch, or a monochromatic palette; once this scheme has been delivered, small variations are played out. This provides a show. The hierarchical intent is to establish mini-differences at most. Many paintings, one thought. The idea that an artist’s paintings may differ significantly, may require disparate solutions, has low priority.

Adams: It’s lower-archival.

Petlin: That’s the American clean machine at work. And it is cleaning up the environment of pieces and bits of human feeling that shouldn’t count or shouldn’t be brought into play.



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Nancy Graves, *White Field: to Janie C. Lee, 1974*, m/m, 60" x 60".

Graves: "An idea is not a work of art. Ideas can only be about, and are inclusive of materials which infer process."

Hopkins: Franz Kline once went into an Ad Reinhardt show and looked around carefully and said, "I like that one."

Kozloff: But then how do you, as individual painters, square your displeasure with this phenomenon, with some kind of continuous ramification in your experience through a series of canvases which are very aligned with each other?

Adams: I can't hear your question because I have a question. Which is, of what use are those canvases to that artist? What is the purpose of that repetition, to the painter?

Graves: Making a show, perhaps, for a particular gallery in a particular month.

I think that's what we were talking about. On the other hand, though, to get back to that thing about an idea, it's not possible to work it out in a single painting. For some people, it may be. But there are artists who find it perplexing to come to a conclusion within one work itself, and might find it necessary to make other works which then would give a particular conclusion to certain ideas and enable them to go on further in that first place. And I think because of that, traditionally, there have been works in series, works that are related. Then, of course, we are human beings limited in what we do. Even though we may be trying to do many different things, there is a certain sameness about works within a period of months.

Hopkins: I think that's very important. Many artists are particularly obsessed by certain things which they don't really recognize as obsessive, and they believe that they are dealing with the problem of infinitesimal formal clarifications. What they're basically doing is clinging, by every possible means, to an obsession that they can't possibly shake, and convincing themselves that they are making rational, objective decisions.

Adams: I wish I had a sense that they really were obsessive. They seem merely gratuitous.

Kozloff: Tell me, these infinitesimal variations that painting is very hospitable to, are they factors that prevent or at least inhibit dynamic growth in painting, because it's a self-indulgent activity which we're concerned with? How do you feel about that?

Petlin: It's a deadly aspect of the New York art world, which has been called a fast food franchise in certain quarters. That is, you quickly put up a coherent group of works—by "coherent" I don't mean in the good sense of the word—but "coherent" works, to a very shallow audience.

Adams: Saleable.

Petlin: Yeah, a coherent personality on the wall for a short period of time to be followed by another coherent style, fully developed, nothing ragged, nothing leftover, no endings, no beginnings, it's a flash look. It's fast. It's over. It's simply a kind of turnover, and the New York art world has been tremendously deadened by this for some time.

Graves: What was the question you asked, Max?

Kozloff: It had to do with painting's capacity to afford small, even infinitesimal changes as a kind of indulgent processing that can keep dead center the painter's activity, making his or her work too homogenous overall.

Hopkins: You can easily think of people like Morandi, Mondrian, Rothko, Albers. I wouldn't say their work was stopped dead in its tracks by those problems. Rather there seems the possibility there to do some great painting within this very, very narrow range of changes.

Kozloff: Pat, you've been talking about your own, or other painters' conceivable motivations in doing a painting. There is, of course, the other side, that is, how people consume your painting. For example, would any of you object to a viewer considering your work as part of a decorative ensemble within a private home? Is it put there because it affords a certain kind of visual, colored, tactile presence within a number of other presences which aren't the paintings?

Adams: No, it's useful. Every human being needs everything with which he can manage to surround himself to affirm his own sense of well-being. If it seems to at first be a color that will go with a rug, and by this function a painting is brought into a house, in the course of watching that work, the viewer may find his sense of self altered, alerted.

Kozloff: Do any of you have any objection to the idea of a painting being essentially or purely decorative?



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Adams: I don't know. I don't understand decoration or ornament.

Hopkins: You're talking about its use. There's no way to say a painting is decorative, period. That's just one of its inevitable functions. Even the most disturbing, anguished Max Beckmann is decorative.

Kozloff: Still, shall we continue with this notion of the decorative? I have the impression that the word "decorative" is a taboo; it's a very stigmatizing term in esthetics. It may be for political reasons; it may be because it sounds too consumer-oriented. But suppose it were said that the decorative had been the dominant incentive for art-making throughout most of the history of recorded art? Especially in architectural ensembles, where paintings have their place, and in cultures other than the West. So our position is, in fact, a minority one in terms of image-making.

Adams: Major art in the West has been predominantly figurative. Nonfigurative contents were driven into unusual places: ritual objects, shields, carpets, the walls of the mosques in Isfahan—these are called decorative objects or situations. But I think they allow an occasion in which the format is provided, and contents can be marked—contents which we have not thought of as content or as being content until this century. I've always been most supported by looking at work of that order, finding in it a truer registration of direct feelings and direct sensation than work bound to normative vision. I'm thinking of Islamic art, glazed tile wall surfaces, where perception is actively manipulated to arrive at mind-boggling dissolution of attention at the moment of near apprehension, and then the reknitting of the experience toward the point of unity. It is an experiential thing that has religious and meditative overtones of accumulative expressive force. It's not mere embellishment of an object.

Petlin: I think there's a problem here in describing the notion of the decorative objects. They've been wrenched out of their natural functioning contexts, and all the logical reasons that went into their production and use have been disembodied, in a sense—placed on a pedestal in a museum.

Adams: I'm thinking of being in the Jomeh mosque, walking around, watching the destruction of the configuration by sunlight, by perceptual exhaustion, by the change in the viewing distance—that kind of involvement. I was really played upon as a viewer. It was a perceptual experience that was really highly manipulated, and I cannot conceive of that experience as a decorative experience.

Kozloff: I wonder if it makes sense to talk about paintings as emblems of power, or as power-motivated, because that seems distinct from the notion of painting as decoration. A modern painting, in this sense, tends to be a Faustian object, with fantasies of control and perfection dominating throughout a limited field. There is a maximized opportunity for sheer willfulness and caprice to take over and reshape a whole allusive environment. You might say that there's been just as intense a willfulness in a decorative object of craft origins, except that it doesn't seem to have that meaning for us as a modern painting does. Is there a tension or a dialogue between these two notions today?

Graves: When you refer to a craft object, do you mean something out of the past or out of the present?

Kozloff: In many cultures there is a temporal continuity, except when the West has influenced—I was going to say, tainted—them.

Adams: When you mentioned the idea of paintings as emblems of power and not just decorative objects, I agreed immediately. But I see paintings as vessels of magical or iconic power, rather than as symbols of imperial, manipulative power.

Petlin: Yeah, but the question that is really on the table is: has there been in the 20th century, certainly the latter part of the 20th century, an accretion of

power in the development of a modern style—a kind of melding or accretion, in which one has served the other or fed off the other? I think American art has the capacity to be a reflector of that sort of question. Since World War II there's been an enormous voluntary and willful expansion of picture-making into a kind of great, blank, powerful presence, and this coincides with a great expansionist period in our political and economic history. We were the inheritors of the world after the war, and in a sense we became the place in the West where everything was possible; nothing was withheld, everything flowed into us, and we went out into the world with supreme confidence. All of these things do come together. Painting is not an activity which is separate from the way the world functions. American painting during that period really did accrete to itself the sensibility of a world of power, and became reflexive. It looks it.

Kozloff: At this point, then, let me ask this question. I gather that you would like to see a retreat from parallels to corporate power as expressed, say, in the paintings of the '60s. That is to say, a recoiling away from that packaged, manufactured, but optically brilliant adventure of painting in the '60s into some other region. Is painting today better equipped to respond to cultural conditions at large, or do you consider it reserved for more private, more personal, and therefore more isolated sensations?

Adams: I don't see why you need to pose that question. Do we always have to be antithetical in how we set up our descriptions?

Graves: Well, those are two possibilities, however, and I think that both of those tendencies can function at this time.

Kozloff: But what about the career of painting today vis-à-vis the other media, in terms of public acceptance? Are such things as video, performance, and bodyworks more readily acceptable to aspects of current experience than painting, or is it the other way around?

Graves: I think that most performance, video, and some other forms which also relate to the wall, in large part, are in agreement with the notion of fast food.

Kozloff: Video, you say?

Graves: Most video. Within any medium there's the possibility of making something extraordinary, but in a larger sense, when one takes a particular "ism," it attracts a multitude very often because of its novelty. Yet very few ever explore it.

Kozloff: But isn't there a dilemma in that one could counter your argument by saying that the production of painting is essentially a luxury trade, sociologically speaking? So it doesn't seem any more attractive a thing to pursue. How do you get around that, or don't you?

Graves: Well, I simply don't.

Adams: I've never known a culture that didn't have to afford painting.

Petlin: Also, as luxurious as painting is in some people's minds, the production of it, that is, it's actually the cheapest way to make art, much cheaper than video or sculpture. It takes nothing to make it, and it can survive in a period of scant resources more easily than almost any other medium being used today. When Budd was talking about the paintbox as a plug-in to this enormous historical computer, in a way painting is just that. It can survive on a lack of involvement with the culture, lack of interest by the supporting power structure, so long as there are people with the instincts and impulses to make painting. Some of the other arts, like video or sculpture, which involve complicated production and electronics, trucking, installation and so forth, cannot survive in a period of scarcity. But painting can.

Hopkins: I thought, Irving, of your analogy about power and corporate structure—how easily that fits the production of large-scale sculpture. Sculpture has become this kind of executive thing on the telephone to the factory, or-



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dering something that's extremely large and impressive and requires a great expenditure of energy and funds, et cetera, to get set up. It's much closer to something I find unpleasant about connections between American imperialism and its visual manifestation in an art form. Sculptors all talk about their last trip to the foundry or the factory, and they sound like so many vice-presidents behind a desk.

Kozloff: Art-making becomes a matter of logistics. One virtue of painting seems particularly exemplary in the situation we're discussing—the emphasis on technologies as they feed into art. One sees that esthetic discussions, even the expressive motivations of artists, become entangled in the how-to-do and seems to be eroded by the notion of the processing or the manufacturer. Painting never seems to have fallen victim to that particular kind of obfuscation, so the conditions of experiencing painting remain today as they were before—that is, basic to the confrontation between the spectator and the work presented. We don't think of painting as technological theater.

Petlin: If one were to try, as you suggest, to imagine the prospects for the immediate future, following the great moment one would call the assumption of the world-bearing weight, and its slippage that's the period we're in now: what will painting look like or be like? What questions will flow into the individual artist working in a more subdued atmosphere? I personally have been waiting for this more subdued atmosphere.

Hopkins: I think we all have.

Kozloff: You're saying that the emphasis would then be on enriching the horizontal cast of possibilities, rather than making a vertical extrusion from them. Is that, in some way, how you feel?

Adams: Well, the multiplicity of points of view would be considered as a fractured situation resulting in seepage that lowers the pressure necessary to discover the way to go on. There's been a tremendous loss of vision. Much work seems an external pastiche of well-known motifs or means.

Kozloff: Following through this line of inquiry, would you say that painting is ceasing to be dependent, as it has been for so long, on ideas and manipulations present only in New York, that is, in a capital-centered art activity?

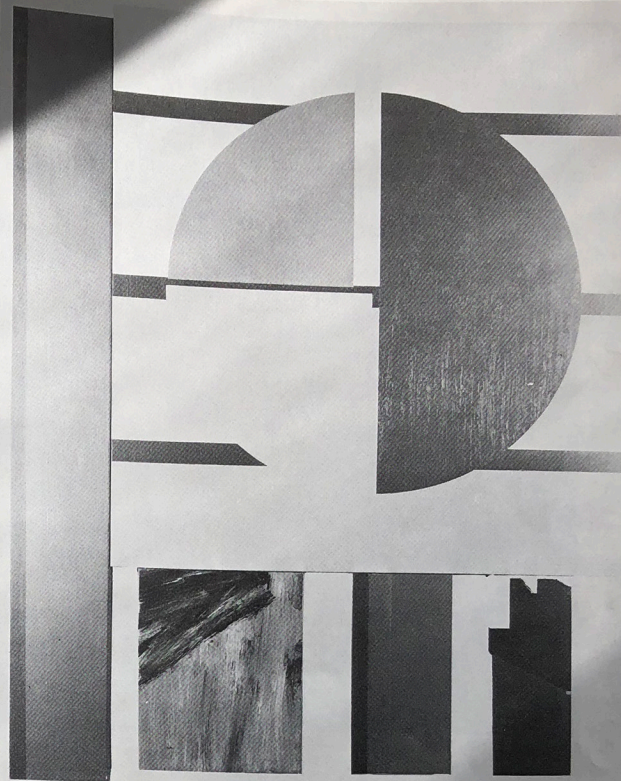
Hopkins: As a general observation about the situation of painting right now, I feel that we're in a post-movement period which has increased the visibility of a great deal of interesting and idiosyncratic art. The problem was that painting which existed outside of movements—Pop or Minimal or whatever—was considered marginal and beside the point. Painters who followed no party line, such as Greenberg's for instance, were actually harder to see. All this has changed rather suddenly, and now a previously marginal figure like Francis Bacon, who existed outside prescribed art history, is suddenly extremely visible just because of the idiosyncratic nature of his work. Painting values like touch, or intimacy, or personal idiosyncratic color or imagery—these values have all resumed their traditional importance, as progressive notions of art history have waned.

Adams: When you say "party lines," I say, rather, that a very clear review of the formalist position was being presented and exercised in relation to recent painting. Although the stress did seem to limit what the contents of art could be, I certainly can't see that by taking that kind of pressure off we have enriched the situation at all.

Hopkins: No, I'm not saying that. It's a question of clearing the air a little so that vision will be a little keener. I'm not talking so much about an artist's internal practice as how visible his work is. This issue of the idiosyncratic, the personal vision, the intimate touch, the sensibility—that side of painting is now seen clearly again. It hadn't disappeared. But the point is that there was a time when it was so much underplayed and underestimated. There was a time when

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Stockton Arts Commission



Budd Hopkins, *City Rises II*, 1974, o/c, 61 1/4" x 47 1/4"

**Hopkins: "... I see a painting as being a kind of extra-architectural element. It's rectilinear because floors, the walls, ceilings are rectilinear. It has a top and a bottom."**

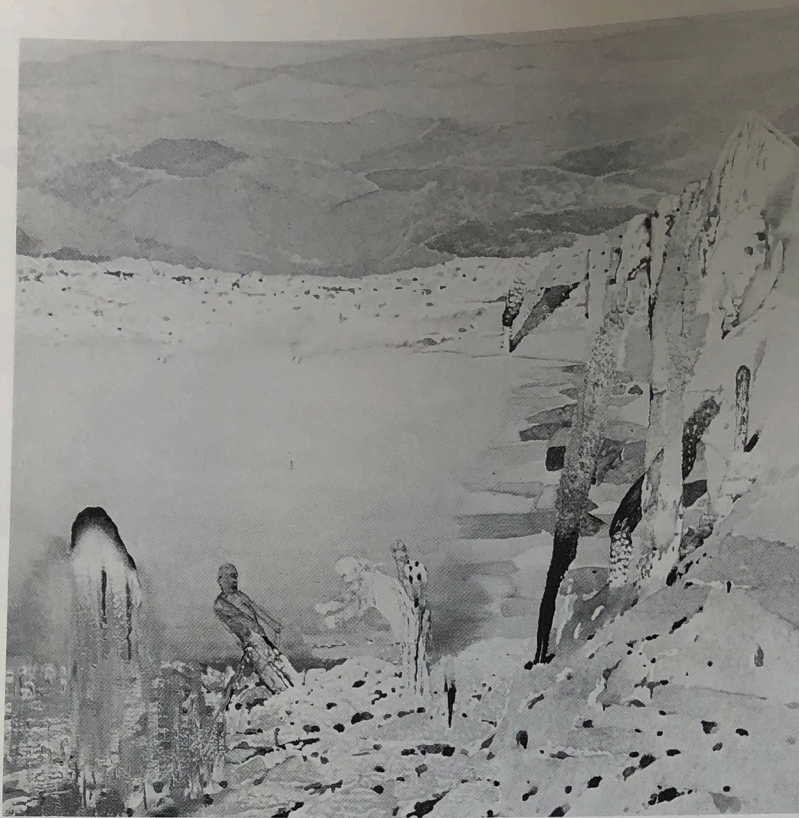
the idea of having other people execute your paintings for you didn't seem to involve any particular kind of loss. Now that's changed around.

Adams: We go through these alternations between rendering and finding. I don't think that's a time to rejoice. The notion of something being idiosyncratic has no appeal to me at all. I would rather think of the personal as backing into Everyman.

Petlin: In a funny way New York is sort of like Paris before the war years. That is, every time there is an exhaustion, the provinces are called upon to supply something, whether it be cuisine or images. The provinces are now being called upon to bring into New York some kind of palpable imagery. For example, the work that is called California Funk, or things that have emerged over the years out of Chicago, things like that have certainly had more of a presence in a nascent way than ever was the case earlier in New York.



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Irving Petlin, *Study for the Clay Lake*, 1975, o/c, 36" x 36".

**Petlin: "As luxurious as painting is, in some people's minds, it's actually the cheapest way to make art."**

Graves: Well, that has something to do with the notion of democracy, I think.

Hopkins: Not exhaustion?

Graves: I think there definitely is an exhaustion of ideologies. But those things that are now given focus also have to do with another attitude prevalent in the museums, which is that everyone should have a say. The result is diversity, not quality.

Adams: That seems diversionary.

Kozloff: Do you react more with alarm or pleasure when you detect certain signs that other painters have been affected by your work?

Graves: I think that's a dualism.

Kozloff: Both things happen at once.

Hopkins: I haven't had the pleasure.

Graves: It depends on the situation—whereby one learns objectively from its acceptance while evaluating possible directions for new meaning.

Hopkins: I'm sure that when Mondrian made one more convert to Neo-Plasticism, he was elated and terrified simultaneously.

Kozloff: Well, let's speak of tension built into your own fantasies of your uniqueness and yet your desires that you can blend in a larger effort beyond the limits of your own ego. To be alone has its privileges, but also its terrors.

Another question. Have any of you thoughts about the limitations of painting? The satisfactions you've not had with it from time to time or recurrently that you'd like to discuss?

Adams: If you have color, how can you feel deprived?

Petlin: You don't have control of the power stations!

Adams: I came into the world never thinking that was something I'd want to have.

Petlin: We don't have the government!

Kozloff: It was very interesting your response, Pat, "If you have color how can you feel deprived?" I wonder, sometimes, if affection for the paint substance may have a political value. That is, during fallow periods in our country, psychologically and politically, affection of all kinds seems to diminish. What I mean is, there is something authentic in feeling a visceral response to that which you are shaping. And "authenticity," meaning health, means also more stability in guiding one's self through life. Perhaps that becomes exemplary for others.

Adams: There is that purposive aspect of painting. One does have this deep source in the complication of being. One of the greatest pleasures I have is watching someone who looks carefully, someone who perceives. Looking at a picture is a most incredibly intimate exchange.

Kozloff: Well, that is the hope, I think, that we've been discussing. An exchange of that sort has been known to endure. It is what painting offers its viewers when both are doing their best. ■