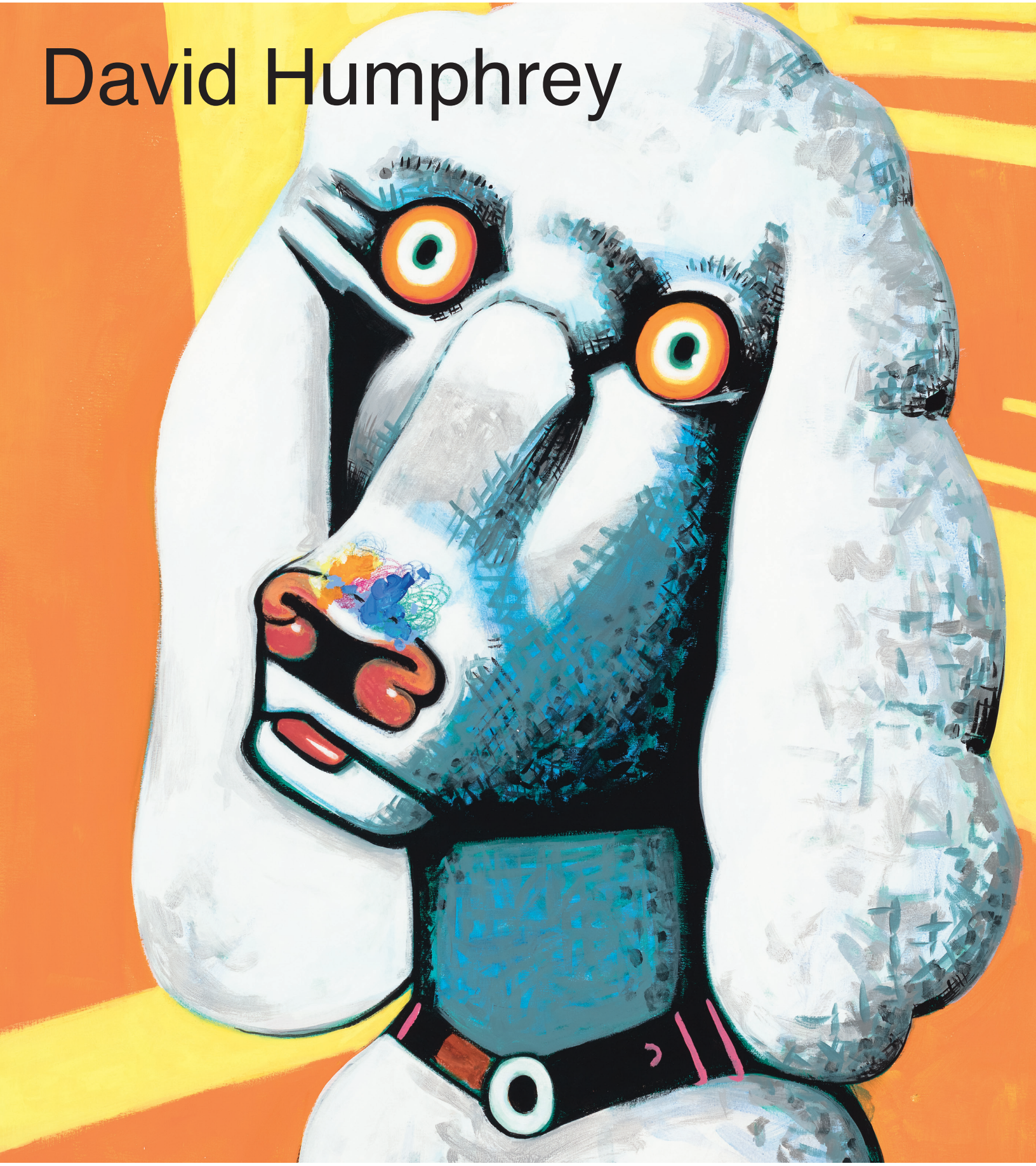
David Humphrey



David Humphrey


PEAVEY

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David Humphrey

FREDERICKS & FREISER

David Humphrey, c. 1987

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Intimacy Within Our Abstraction: The Art of David Humphrey

Davy Lauterbach

fig. 1: The McKees with Philip Guston at his studio in the late 1970s. Photo by Francis Barth.

In the spring of 1977, a young David Humphrey made eye contact with his art hero, Philip Guston, at the McKee Gallery in Manhattan while Guston was ordering art supplies over the phone. Humphrey, who had just graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art, shot him a quick thumbs-up through the office door. Sadly, he would never meet Guston, who died in 1980, although, as fate would have it, Humphrey would go on to be represented by that same gallery. His first major solo exhibition at McKee, in 1984, sparked considerable critical attention, not only because of the arresting scenes in his paintings, which became the focus of most of the writing about his work, but because he was showing paintings. Humphrey was part of an international cohort of American, German, and Italian artists who burst onto the art world in the early 1980s, amid a painting renaissance so grand it seemed as if the medium was reaffirming its inherent artistic dominance. Francesco Clemente, Jonathan Borofsky, David Salle, and others had introduced a personalized figurative imagery in their art, often appropriated from non-art sources and featuring psychological and conceptual undertones. The art world at that moment offered a fertile atmosphere for Humphrey's painterly, figurative creations as well as his political inclinations. Formally and conceptually, his work has always been closely linked to his engagement with the complicated task of picture making as a way of expressing the intricacies of being alive. Humphrey's paintings emerged as a kind of new vision of Surrealism that defined itself against the reductive, pure painting that was going on in New York prior to the 1970s and the relative lack of new painting during the 1970s, when photography was booming and art was no

longer narrowly identified with painting. Humphrey has since been one of the modern art world's most interesting and progressive figures, and his career is far from over.

If the 1980s was the decade in which Humphrey came of age as a painter, it was the previous decade, when he was an undergraduate at MICA, that supplied his artistic foundation. To paraphrase Arthur Danto, art schools in the 1970s became defining institutions of the art world, albeit very different schools than the traditional académies des beaux-arts: not training institutions but institutes of advanced thinking, where teachers and students were often understood as peers.[1] Humphrey's early artistic endeavors invoked unsettling moods in often ambiguous pictorial settings, which seemed in harmony with his appreciation for the poststructuralist theories making their way into American art schools and liberal arts universities at the time. At the core of poststructuralism is the idea that, in order to understand a cultural object, it is necessary to examine not only its formal elements but also the systems of knowledge from which it was produced and the social context in which it is situated. Simultaneously, poststructuralist theories were being tested and challenged by the global explosion of pop culture and new media. These were broken times, but the zeitgeist was advantageous for art-school students, who (unlike their teachers) had gained the freedom to explore their work as if they had no past to renounce. Students were, in any case, considered artists already.

fig. 2: David Humphrey. **Untitled**, 1978. Oil on canvas, 54 × 36 in.

The geographical center of the American art world before and since the 1970s has been New York. But during that decade, a dispersed constellation of art schools, spanning from coast to coast, were making their presence felt. These were not workshops in which one acquired the basic skills of painting, drawing, or design. They were running seminars on the very meaning of art and its politics—even if its politics were taken for granted. As Arthur Danto explains, "There was, so to speak, no artistic *a priori*: art could be anything. But because a radical political consciousness was carried over from the 1960s, the *mentalité* of the art-school artist—student or teacher—was far less tolerant than the openness of artistic practice would lead one to believe. So, it was a period of intense experimentation, in which artists could try anything so long as it was not politically disapproved."[2]

Humphrey arrived in Baltimore in the fall of 1973. Navigating through his first experiences with painting at MICA, he chose late Picasso and Max Beckmann as his guides into the psychologically charged pictorial imagery he was eager to explore. One memorable day during his sophomore year, while randomly searching the library stacks, Humphrey stumbled upon a couple of slim catalogues from

Guston exhibitions at the Marlborough and McKee galleries, filled with paintings that seemed to be calling to him from his own future but were being made now: paintings that expressed the challenges of being human, paintings that needed to be encountered physically, paint that was, until very recently, wet in Guston's studio and was now barely dry. Humphrey's admiration for Guston's work was fervent enough that he spent his junior year at the New York Studio School, hoping in vain that Guston would visit (as promised in the school's promotional literature). Humphrey explains his original excitement for the artist as centering on:

> . . . the way Guston articulates and celebrates *incipience*: the potential for a thing to come into being. He lays out the basic terms (in his pre-figurative work of the sixties) that will later be used to more emphatically name things, but things still haunted by a prior incipience. The blunt forms that . . . become books, canvases, shoes or heads, bear the memory of and often slip back into undifferentiated muck—or sometimes, after some scraping or smushing, an entirely different object. The habitats emerge tactilely, the way one imagines a space by means of blind groping. I like thinking of his world as ham-handed—that corporeal seeing is performed through touch and makes cured meat out of our paws. His work argues that we are made of the same stuff as the things we make or consume.[3]

fig. 3: Philip Guston. **The Studio**, 1969. Oil on canvas, 48 × 42 in. © The Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

If we look at the larger historical context of Guston's relation to the contemporary art scene, we can identify the impetus for how art schools became what they were in the 1970s. The discourse dominating American painting from the early 1950s included several generations of artists, like Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, who were championed by the critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg contended that the modernist movement involved creating artworks that were more and more about their particular medium, with an emphasis on the inherent flatness of the pictorial plane, in contrast to the illusion of depth commonly found in painting since the Renaissance and the invention of pictorial perspective. In his famous 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," Greenberg argued that, in response to the impoverished cultures of both modern capitalist democracies and dictatorships, artists withdrew to create novel and challenging artworks that maintained the possibility for critical experience and attention.[4] His belief in formal autonomy was a reaction against kitsch art, which he deemed a prepackaged emotional distraction

geared toward easy, unchallenging consumption. But by the late 1960s the world was changing so radically and rapidly that artists were posing increasingly broad and fundamental questions of existence. The younger generation of artists and faculty—including Guston, who was then teaching at the New York Studio School, among other places—had worked through Greenberg's America-centric pure modernism and scoffed at his antagonism toward postmodernist theories and socially engaged movements in art. In 1970 *ARTnews* quoted Guston's ambivalence toward formal abstraction: "I got sick and tired of all that Purity! I wanted to tell stories."[5]

At MICA Humphrey was immediately plunged into an art scene that was neither pure nor hung up on traditional modes of art making. He recently described his classmates at MICA to me as a "highly drug- and sex-fueled tribe" that he was happy to be among. In a recent interview for the *Brooklyn Rail*, he reflected, "In high school I made some stone carvings and blobby plaster sculptures but hadn't painted that much or drawn at all . . . I was charged by the energy of remediation. Everyone was so talented; they all knew how to draw. I became obsessed and did it all the time in order to catch up; that was my running start."[6] A lot of these kids had been the best artists in their high schools, who, in large part, left the suburbs to go to art institutions in urban areas, where they formed diverse punk rock consortiums built around high-minded thinking and emotionally charged rebellious attitudes, unafraid to offend or push buttons. MICA itself was where art bad boy Jeff Koons and many other notable art deviants graduated from in the 1970s. Humphrey told me of school-sponsored drunken annual balls featuring nude impromptu performance art where students mixed with B-list movie stars from John Waters films. This type of creative environment was not unique to MICA. David Salle and John Baldessari have famously told stories from their days at CalArts, of figure-drawing classes in which not only the models but also the students were nude; they transformed their bodies into something magical with marks, like war paint, that were then transferred to another surface.[7]

fig. 4: David Salle. **Old Bottles**, 1995. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 96 1/2 × 128 in. © David Salle. Courtesy Skarstedt Gallery, New York.

Art has always evolved, of course, but, arguably, never before had the way art was taught changed so dramatically. The study of craft and the traditional handling of paints and materials that had been passed down for centuries was now largely relegated to courses in illustration, because art making was no longer confined to the creation of painted pictures on pictorial planes. By 2004, when I met David in my first year of graduate study in the painting department at RISD, I too saw firsthand, as a teaching assistant for undergraduate painting courses,

fig. 5: Jean Henri Cless. **The Studio of Jacques-Louis David**, c. 1804. Lithograph, 18 1/4 × 23 in. Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

how, for the enlightened, painting as craft is of marginal interest. A few years after graduating I attended an Arthur Danto lecture where he proclaimed (to the dismay of many) how, after freshman foundation, there is essentially no reason to study painting unless you need it to realize some concept, just as you would learn glass-blowing or computer programming if you needed that for your work.[8] And if you needed to paint, you would probably just try to figure it out on your own. At CalArts, Eric Fischl never learned to paint the figure, but when he needed to, he thought, "What the hell, I can do that."[9] Imagine explaining this to the students depicted behind easels in Jean Henri Cless's engravings of Jacques-Louis David's post–French Revolution art classes, or students who were endeavoring to master anatomy with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in the late nineteenth century, or the students in Paul Klee's or Josef Albers's twentieth-century Bauhaus school studios, where the emphasis on practical skills, crafts, and techniques was reminiscent of the medieval guild system.[10] Nonetheless, in Humphrey's time, there were, and still are, nude models in figure-drawing classes; students still have charcoal sticks and big pads of newsprint paper for studying human gesture and the foreshortening of limbs in space. In fact, it is significant that Humphrey himself has taught as a critic at some notable art institutions—NYU, RISD, Yale, Columbia, and the University of Pennsylvania, to name a few—whose students are eager to study painting within an institutional context that encourages a conceptual approach to art making. It is also worth noting that Humphrey's attachment to the art institution after graduating from MICA has kept him actively involved in critical thinking and undoubtedly with his finger on the pulse of pop culture over the last four decades.

The great shift in the exercises of the art student in the late 1960s and '70s also included a turn toward outlandish affect in an effort to harness the most basic emotions, so as to reconnect with what is ordinarily repressed. These students, knowingly or not, were looking for something far more primordial than what had been achieved by Pliny's legendary Corinthian girl, when she allegedly invented drawing by tracing the shadow of her lover's profile on the wall before he went into battle. And this kind of learning was a direct reflection of the kind of discourse on art that was taking place at the time. It was a discourse that fed on the radical ideas of its era: Norman O. Brown's scandalous views on polymorphic sexuality, the Living Theatre's experimental *Paradise Now*, primal scream therapy, Perry Anderson and the *New Left Review*, Woodstock (where Guston had a studio) as utopia.[11] There was even a global connection between these ideas and the grass-

roots political upheavals happening in Eastern Europe and Latin America. It was a radical time of throwing out the old and ushering in the new as a way to visualize what had not yet been seen, a scary but exhilarating time and also the ideal setting for postmodernism to flourish.

Frederic Jameson famously uses the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as the paradigmatic case study of postmodern art and also as an allegory of the new hyperspace of our global market, which is dominated by the corporations of late capitalism. He argues that the Bonaventure, like most examples of postmodern architecture, does not attempt to blend into its surroundings but aims rather to replace the older buildings around it, even though its shiny surfaces may reflect them. The Bonaventure endeavors to be a total space, a whole world, which introduces a new form of collective behavior where one does not have to leave its premises to buy what one may need. Depthless-ness, pastiche, the fragmentation of the subject, and other characteristics of postmodern culture, Jameson notes, have loosened the strictures between high and low culture to produce one big, varied consumer culture. Jameson argues that our need to produce ever-newer goods allocates an essential structural position to aesthetic novelty.[12] What is true of architecture is no less true of drawing or painting. It is also important to emphasize that there are moral qualities to the idea of going against what came before. Easel painting is a form of art distinct to the West, but by the 1970s the West itself was demonized in the wake of the Vietnam War, and painting, which had historically been the preeminent medium of Western artistic superiority, was collaterally demonized. Painting and sculpture were so identified with the political establishment that it seemed imperative to dissociate from them as a way of expressing opposition to a despised government.[13] Beyond that, there was a vexed question in speculative feminism as to whether or not painting was connected with a kind of masculinist psychology, making its appropriateness to feminine artistic consciousness uncertain.[14] Arthur Danto wrote extensively on this historical transition:

fig. 6: John C. Portman Jr. **Westin Bonaventure Hotel**, 1976. Los Angeles.

> There was a massive critique of a number of what were felt to be disabling concepts—the genius, the Great Artist, the masterpiece, the museum of fine arts, the idea of artistic quality. Since art criticism was deeply inflected with cultural criticism, painting faced objections to its existence unparalleled since the iconoclastic controversies of earlier ages. There had always been a morality of painting, first in terms of a morality of subject matter, later in terms of a morality of aesthetic

> purity, which reigned in the modernist period for which Clement Greenberg was the main spokesman. But never had the morality of painting as painting been an issue as it came to be in the 1970s. It was widely presupposed that in any case painting was internally exhausted, having used up all its possibilities . . . The young American painters who made such a splash in the early 1980s were so thoroughly the products of their art schools' formative atmosphere, so different from anything that had prevailed in earlier times, that they were obliged to reinvent—and rejustify—the idea of painting if they were to persist in its practice. For one thing, if they were to become painters, they would have to paint in an unprecedentedly pluralistic art world, where painting was far from *primus inter pares* [first among equals].[15]

Andy Warhol's gift to the artists of Humphrey's generation was the permission to borrow freely from any time and place in order to construct one's own image. Humphrey's work seems to evolve out of nineteenth-century formalism in its adherence to prescribed forms, although simultaneously it also uses twentieth-century primitivism, which throws Western tradition out the window. He nods to mid-century pop culture as well as to Surrealism and its Italian cousin, Pittura Metafisica. It is as a result of this pluralism, through which art appears divested of goals and direction, that Humphrey's paintings become flourishing landscapes full of possibilities, in which countless varieties of flowers may bloom. In this sense, Humphrey is a true postmodernist. He and his contemporaries found in pluralism a way to represent a world of fractured meanings in art and language. The paintings of David Salle, for instance, embrace what Danto calls a "disjunctiveness" between the meanings of connected symbols, which is accepted as the common parlance of postmodernist painting.[16] Salle juxtaposes seemingly unrelated images in different styles within a single canvas while often attaching extraneous objects, such as flower vases, feminine undergarments, and cigarette packs, to the work. He mixes bland, notational drawing styles with cartoony ones that almost express contempt for the idea of virtuosic draftsmanship. Humphrey's early works, like Salle's work, revel in this elliptical world of incongruous fragmentation where little adds up or is ever resolved. Despite this, there is always enough mystery in their work to continuously demand our attempts at interpretation. As for whatever appropriations one discovers while doing so, it would be hard to argue that either painter is derivative.

fig. 7: Andy Warhol. **Debbie Harry**, 1980. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 42 × 42 in. Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh.

After MICA Humphrey attended NYU, graduating in 1980 with an MA in

liberal studies. This was a time when he was able to remediate his underdeveloped art-school humanities education. Because he had already established a strong studio practice, he could take classes in the various graduate departments at NYU without losing momentum. His studies began in the English department, focusing mostly on the Romantics and literary criticism. From there he moved into cinema studies, which was in the throes of the first wave of poststructuralism. In addition to reading Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, Humphrey enthusiastically read a lot of Freud and a little Lacan, who was often cited in feminist cinema studies. By the time he graduated, he was familiar with the prevailing theoretical discourses of the institutions he had attended, but almost entirely self-taught as a painter.

Humphrey emerged from school as a rather heavy-handed abstract-ish realist, a somewhat marginal position to occupy in terms of the art culture of the time. He fell onto the art scene "a micro-beat behind Julian Schnabel and David Salle," according to Phong Bui.[17] Dan Cameron's article "Neo-Surrealism: Having it Both Ways" in the November 1984 issue of *Arts Magazine* posited Humphrey's emerging moment alongside that of George Condo, Carroll Dunham, Kenny Scharf, and a few others. They were all in a group show entitled *New Hand-Painted Dreams: Contemporary Surrealism* at Barbara Gladstone in 1984. Humphrey may have been grouped with these artists, but there was little coherence. In retrospect, it is clear that this show was very postmodern in its 1980s-revivalist sentiment. Humphrey said of the time, "All kinds of historic moments were being reconsidered and recontextualized. I was happy to use my work as a way to retell the story of modern art."[18] Part of the reason Humphrey was something of an outsider was that he was living in the East Village, playing in a band, and making his art while showing at an uptown gallery that represented a lot of established older artists. Humphrey still seems to enjoy inhabiting the seemingly incompatible worlds of the downtown rock scene and the academic, shall we say, elite-level institutions where he teaches and shows his work.

On the playing field of modern art, the paintings Humphrey showed at McKee in 1984 would have been considered out of bounds a few years earlier. Steven Westfall wrote of Humphrey's work in the 1980s:

> While [the paintings] definitely have the physical presence of concrete "actions" in paint, they lead the slow-lane life of painted pictures, of dreams suspended in material. I believe that the resurgence

fig. 8: George Condo. **After Arcimboldo**, 1983. Oil on canvas, 60 × 45 1/2 in. © George Condo / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

fig. 9: Carroll Dunham. **Untitled**, 1987. Acrylic and graphite on wood veneer mounted on wood, 56 × 32 in. © Carroll Dunham. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

> of interest in the painted picture springs from a deep recognition of the correspondence it carries with the imaginative lives of individuals. The quiet simultaneity of material fact and depicted space in a painting is physical, felt and subjective. Humphrey's pictures address themselves to our apprehension of this simultaneity and its rich psychological implications.[19]

fig. 10: Giorgio de Chirico. **The Song of Love**, 1914. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 × 23 3/8 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome.

fig. 11: David Humphrey. **As Lovely as the Law**, 1987. Oil on canvas, 76 × 64 in.

A lot of the abstract art being made prior to the 1970s asked us to accept a certain elevated level of purity in the abstract that surpassed, on an emotional level, any of our own personal weaknesses as human beings. One of the delightful aspects of Humphrey's work is how he tries to find a human connection to the abstract areas of his paintings. For example, in *Confusion of Tongues* (1987) and *A Comparative Anatomy* (1989), Humphrey's iconographic abstracted body parts, organs, and orifices set against large-scale, hazy demarcations of public spaces and generic domestic interiors function as mysterious portals into a theater of memory and corporeal language. Thankfully, these complicated paintings do not offer easy Platonic allegories of ignorance and knowledge. Instead, they capture a sensation that is alluded to in de Chirico's *Song of Love* (1914). To quote MoMA's wall text on the painting: "By subverting the logical presence of objects, de Chirico created what he termed 'metaphysical' paintings, or representations of what lies 'beyond the physical' world. Cloaked in an atmosphere of anxiety and melancholy, de Chirico's humanoid forms, vacuous architecture, shadowy passages and eerily elongated streets evoke the profound absurdity of a universe torn apart by World War I."[20] In *As Lovely as the Law* (1987), Humphrey uses abstraction to augment a psychology beyond the physical world of the architectural structures and figures in the painting. There is no obvious reason for the juxtaposition of the objects here, and although the works of man are present everywhere, man himself is strangely absent, save for a blue mug shot head. We can assume there are some personal references in the painting, but what is moving is how the abstraction draws us with childlike innocence into the iconography. Humphrey guides our focus less toward his own personal thoughts and psychology than toward the strangeness of the world and our individual ways of perceiving it. In Humphrey's early paintings, thought consists of jumbled images and impulses that put us in touch with the lower layers of the mind in a play of verbal and visual poetry. Indeed, most of the work Humphrey showed in the 1980s commanded a varied language of multi-imagery similar to what we find in poetry, in the way language embraces both figuration and abstraction. He

was using pictorial language as content. In other words, the massive presence the paintings achieved came from the authority wielded by the abstract language of painting (brushstrokes, composition, color) over the wildly associative or grotesque imagery, usually referring to the human body. Humphrey explains, "When postmodernism was emerging, the impulse to break conventional pictorial language apart or mix it up was very pervasive. The assumption was that if you rubbed heterogeneous languages against each other you could either neutralize their power or draw something else out as a new kind of power. I was interested in the latter."[21]

Humphrey was certainly thinking about Guston's late paintings at this time, and I get the sense he also felt some trepidation about painting realistically. It's as though he knew the historical weight of narrative realism might crowbar out any experimental playfulness he was discovering in his abstractions. And who could fault him? Plato himself challenged the value of representational art by questioning the value of an intended visual experience if depiction is merely an illusionary imitation of appearance. Two and a half millennia later, the use of heavily applied, layered oil paint on large stretched canvases with abstract marks may have reaffirmed, for Humphrey, the relevance of modernism in his work, but the paintings he would soon make would be truly postmodern, insofar as how little one need know about the history of art to understand what they are about.

If we look at the work Humphrey was making in the late 1980s and early '90s, we find it has its own satirical collection of visual metaphors and internal cross-references, similar to what we might find in a book of eighteenth-century William Hogarth engravings. Charles Lamb saw Hogarth's images as books filled with the "teeming, fruitful, suggestive meanings of words. Other pictures we look at—his prints we read."[22] Likewise, I know of no other twentieth-century artist who can describe loneliness as eloquently as Chris Ware in just a few wordless comic strip panels. Something similar to these artists' readability was emerging in Humphrey's paintings in the early 1990s, but in a much more cinematic way, which perhaps explains why the critical literature on him, as on Hogarth and Ware, is comprised of what Danto would call "exercises in moral psychology" in which one or another interpretation is tested against whatever clues a picture gave. Hogarth fills his engravings with crafty details and little moments that individually comment on the central action, like theatrical asides to the audience.[23] Humphrey uses crafty details, too, but there are always different ways of interpreting them. Do the two funnel-shaped obtrusions inside the gray mass in *Into the Den* (1994) represent eyes looking outward or spirals for us to look inward? What role do those vessels

fig. 12: Chris Ware. **Building Stories**, 2007. Lithograph, 23 1/2 × 15 3/4 in. © Chris Ware. Courtesy the artist and Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago, IL.

fig. 13: David Humphrey. **Into the Den**, 1994. Oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

fig. 14: William Hogarth. **Gin Lane**, 1751. Etching and engraving on paper, 14 1/4 × 12 in.

contribute to the painting's overall interpretation when, to begin with, the relationship between the mushy appearance of a girl and her environment is not readily clear? In a 1995 interview with Elaine A. King, Humphrey speaks about *Into the Den* as one of a series of paintings he made that used filmmaker George A. Romero's movie *The Dark Half* (1993) as a starting point. The film was shot using the actual house Humphrey grew up in as the residence for the main character's family. Humphrey explains:

> So I rented *The Dark Half* and ran it through my computer to grab images. In the computer I eliminated everything from those images that was not part of my memory. I got rid of everything George Romero put in as my way of restoring the house to what I remembered. I then projected materials from my own image repertoire into those erasure blanks. In a sense I haunted a private space, which I discovered in public. It was so strange to recognize those peculiar, personal details in a mass-market product. It was very distracting, very difficult to watch the movie because tiny details at the edge of the frame, an architectural ornament or a bookcase, triggered very specific memories. I thought it would be quite lively to play in that volatile space between public and private.[24]

These paintings imply something about the suburbs, something about the ambiguity of the flesh, and possibly something toward a moral psychology of sexual awareness. The pleasure of the paintings lies largely in how, as with Hogarth and Ware, one needs little more than literacy in the book of ordinary life to participate in the interpretation.[25] Even when the imagery appears to become abstract, there are enough details given in order to hint at the specificity of a space.

What we see in Hogarth and Ware but are truly compelled to see in Humphrey are the lower reaches of human psychology through the modern lens of a cinematic theoretical apparatus. Jean-Louis Baudry uses cinematic apparatus theory to explain how film is by nature ideological because its mechanics of representation (the camera and editing) are ideological even though films are created to represent reality. That is, filmed subjects, operating as language, are transformed through the apparatus of the camera into an image on film, which is transformed again, through editing, into a finished product.[26] The central position of the spectator of a film, like the spectator of Humphrey's paintings, is also ideological because the cinematic

apparatus, like Humphrey's computer and paintbrush, purports to set before the eye a certain reality using technology and tools that disguise how those realities are put together. The meaning of a film, like the way we view a subject in Humphrey's paintings, is constructed in the formulae of poststructuralism insofar as the mechanics of the actual filmmaking process and painting production work to make the final piece seem natural.

Organizing space is part of the historical language of painting. What is fascinating about Humphrey's work from the late 1980s and early '90s is how he fused computer imagery with painted imagery, allowing him to layer different voices within a picture. Humphrey explains:

> I'd rather the image not achieve a synthesis, that it risks its own catastrophe. I'm also interested in how the computer can give photography some of the powers that painting has: an increased power to retouch. The computer further dissolves the credibility of photography. Everything can be adjusted and changed. What I've been trying to do in some of these paintings is to act out the notion of retouching as a living component of remembering. We seem to remember according to conditions of the present. The computer can rehearse this process in anticipation of the paintings. Some computer imaging software was designed to imitate effects of painting. In some of my newer works I'm trying to make representations of the effects the computer uses to imitate paintings. There's a feedback loop.[27]

fig .15: Mike Kelley. **Deodorized Central Mass with Satellites**, 1991/1999. Mixed media, dimensions variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © The Estate of Mike Kelley. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

fig. 16: Paul McCarthy. **Santa with Butt Plug**, 2011. Bronze, 24 feet tall. Rotterdam. © Paul McCarthy. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

In 1989, for a change of pace and place, Humphrey briefly moved to Los Angeles, where his work had been shown on several occasions. At the time, artists like Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy were making work that combined dark humor with an offbeat scholarly attitude, exploring things typically American, such as Disneyland, comics, soap operas, youth rebellion, B-movies, and so on. They were, to some extent, playing with the idea that passive viewers cannot tell the difference between the fictional world of media and the real world. These viewers identify with characters in television and movies so strongly that they are unconsciously drawn into ideological positions. In Jean-Louis Baudry's theory, moviegoers are equated with people in a dream who have given up control of their actions and, because they are not distracted by outside light, noise, etc., are able to experience the movie as if it were reality.[28] The conventions that apply to apparatus theory also belong to

fig. 17: David Humphrey. **Preoccupied**, 1998. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

the imaging technology Humphrey was using to make paintings in the 1990s when digital media and Photoshop entered the artist's toolbox.

Humphrey started making paintings in that period using low-resolution photographic sources that had very little information, which meant the viewer would have to project into the image to imbue it with sense. These were images of people Humphrey knew, drawn mostly from his family's photo albums. Later he wanted to engage images with a different public address and so began a series of six-foot heads. He was using popular realist vernaculars like the ones graphic artists and illustrators use to render movie stars in old movie posters. Those vernaculars cause their subjects to become "types" and essentially lose their idiosyncratic identity. In Baudry's theory the role of film is to reproduce an illusory sensation that what we see is "objective reality" and is so because we believe we are the eye that calls it into being. The entire function of the filmic apparatus is to make us forget the filmic apparatus—we are only made aware of the apparatus when it breaks. This same process is alive in Humphrey's paintings in the way he handles the juxtaposition of abstraction and realism, or the digitally created and hand painted, so as to interrupt the seamless and invisible workings of ideology. This is similar to the effect we see in a lot of contemporary films, where the cinematographer juxtaposes blurred depth of field with handheld and locked-off shots. We become aware of the apparatus but still want to make sense of the dream state the director or artist is creating. Humphrey describes the process of filling in the lack of resolution in his paintings:

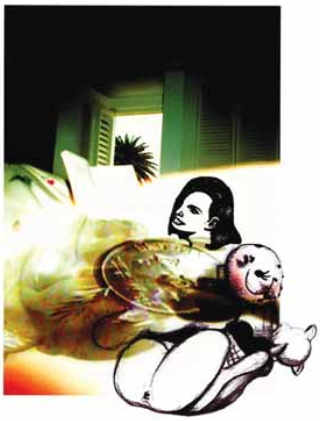

fig. 18: David Humphrey. **Filipina**, 1998. Mixed media on paper, 21 × 19 in.

> If you want to make a painting of the leader, the king or the general (in a time before large-scale inexpensive photographic printing) and you hire the local painter to do it, they will make an image of that person so that all the features are there in the right place, so that it names that special person. Everybody will know. Old movie posters are similar. They picture a familiar star and yet when you really look closely it is extremely artificial. It starts to lose resemblance altogether. What I wanted to do was try to employ those vernaculars to get at something that was buried in them . . . or would get derailed and go somewhere else eventually; but not to the devotional place originally designed . . . I know there is going to be a series of derailings along the way. I want to make that process something really pleasurable, really alive. I want to make those derailings delectable, exquisite maybe, part of the aesthetic life of the work.[29]

In *Filipina* (1998), from a series of digital prints called *Lace, Bubbles, Milk*, a blocky, attractive woman kneels beneath a digitally blurred Roosevelt dime in a room someplace where palm trees thrive. The woman's knees come together to form the shape of an ass with a sphincter and it appears the woman has a stuffed toy duck behind her. In *Water Kitty* (1998) and *Water Kitty 2* (1998), digitally enhanced fragments of flowers and sands swim in impressionistic watercolor backgrounds. These images work in the same universe as such modern avant-garde experimental films as *Gummo* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and *The Tree of Life* (2011), where everything we need is in the picture's ambiguities and it is up to us to sort through them all in order to entertain an interpretation of the film's logic, continuity, and morality. Describing the parallels between Humphrey's paintings and digital media, Nancy Princenthal suggests that, "Inks may fade and paper, like the human body, is degradable, but onscreen images are also notoriously unstable—as are those pictured in the imagination or, most vulnerable of all, in memory."[30]

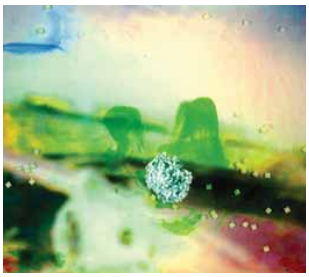

fig. 19: David Humphrey. **Water Kitty**, 1998. Inkjet on paper, 18 1/2 × 20 1/2 in.

fig. 20: David Humphrey. **Water Kitty 2**, 1998. Inkjet on paper, 18 1/2 × 20 1/2 in.

Contemporary artists have grown up on television, computers, and video. In our age of information, millions of individuals watch simultaneously as critical events unfold around the globe. In 2005, JetBlue passengers on their way to Los Angeles watched live coverage of their plane's equipment failure from televisions mounted on their seatbacks. An infinite scope of information is at our fingertips, and as our attention spans grow shorter and shorter, our need for enhanced spectacle gains momentum. For satiation, there has to be someplace for artists to slow down and engage in critical thinking. Just prior to moving to Los Angeles, Humphrey was approached by the reviews editor for *Tema Celeste*, Stephen Westfall, who asked him to review a Jacqueline Humphries show. Humphrey thought writing might be a good way to get involved in the art scene in Los Angeles. He soon began writing for *Art Issues*, which he continued to do until the magazine folded in 2003. He has since written for *Art in America*, *Art Papers*, and numerous other publications. Jennifer Samet says of his writing:

> He creates turns of phrase with words that are not usually combined, like "fizzy nimbus" and "tangled geodesics." His paintings and sculpture are similar: improbable juxtapositions of elements that touch. The couplings and connections are aspirational but unresolved. Highly specific characters—men and women, horses and pets—conspire with abstract, painterly passages. Humphrey's work revels in these ambiguities, in the knowledge that there is always

something impenetrable.[31]

The twentieth century, of course, had its share of painters who tried their hand at writing. Writing, for Humphrey, offers a way to exercise an independent scholarly self, rooted in a studio practice of making things. His collection of essays and reviews, *Blind Handshake* (2009), is a diverse manifesto of writings collected over a decade that lay out what he thinks matters about art—curiously, using the first-person pronoun very rarely. Humphrey told the *Brooklyn Rail* that he tends to write about art he does not quite comprehend fully or that resists understanding. Writing becomes an opportunity to work through a thought that would be otherwise unconsidered. Humphrey said, "For me, the development of a painting proceeds through a kind of productive disorientation. I make each piece in order to learn something. I tried to make the book *Blind Handshake* a remix of my writing in collaboration with the designer Geoff Kaplan, as if it came from the studio with that spirit."[32] One of the things that happen for artists who also write critically about art is the formation of collective conversations. Dialogues about art grow and expand as artists feed off each other in ways that recall what happens in the modern art school. Further, critical literature invites us to consider, in different ways, some of the ethical, political, and practical problems of working with others. Collaboration, however, is rarely a seamless fusion of two artistic minds, or a utopian overcoming of egos; at best, perhaps, it helps articulate the fine balances and tensions that exist between the ego-driven individuality of the artist's process and the creative dialogues that inform and underpin it.

Around the turn of this century, Humphrey formed a collaborative art project with painters Elliot Green and Amy Sillman, working under the moniker Team SHaG. The three artists would pass canvases among themselves, working up amalgams of one another's subject matter. Collaborations have always been an important part of Humphrey's studio practice. For one thing, they help him breathe fresh air into studio processes. They also allow him to intimately observe the ways in which other artists handle imagery, materials, and other people. It is also clear that Humphrey, for most of his career, has looked for ways to collaborate with himself, responding introspectively to questions arising from within his own work. He splits off part of himself to perform in a new character. Those actions are then folded into others, or layered into the constitution of a new work, or maybe a new self.

In the late 1990s, as a visiting artist at the Vermont Studio Center, Hum-

phrey met the most important artistic collaborator of his life: a young artist resident named Jennifer Coates. Humphrey and Coates would go on to get married and work on many collaborative projects together. At the time, Humphrey was working on a series of paintings entitled *Love Teams*. He describes his intention for these paintings as wanting "to paint different individuals [from] heterogeneous source materials, as if they were part of the same world, and to erase the breaks between them. I could use the psychological setup of coupling as a way to metaphorize collage. I suppose that the dynamic of relationship—the psychology of bonding, lovemaking, attachment, and so on—has kept me interested for a long time. I come back to it as a way to thicken the grammar of picture making."[33] In *Arizona* (1997), the male nude with his tan-lined ass is uncomfortably and awkwardly conjoined to a much larger female who is looking directly at the viewer. The wide-eyed male with his arched back and stiff right arm appears possibly mid-coital and no longer in control of his body. The fact that the two figures are situated in this artificial environment with flowers, a river, and what appears to be a wild pony in the distance only intensifies their disunity and incoherence. Is this love team going to last, or is she going to devour him like a praying mantis because his protein is now more valuable to her than his loyalty? In *Love Team on the Bed* (1997), a couple merges together in an awkward contemporary interior. What this room lacks in sensual mood lighting it makes up for in total bleakness. There is an almost compulsive attention to detail in the lace patterning on the bedsheets. The soft white flowers on the bed suggest there is some level of delicacy in the couple's relationship, but the streaky motel-style wallpaper implies little concern for propriety. There are many decisions in the painting that are difficult to explain. One of these is that the scene takes place in a distorted space that feels overlit by overhead lights that cast disorienting shadows. Humphrey's adept handling of the paint where his and her hair come together gives the impression that these two are meant to be together and there will be no way to separate them. After all, the title implies that the couple is a team, but the oddly unaffected expression on their faces leaves us questioning whether we might be witnessing the content of a guilty dream, as when we dream of ourselves exposed and naked. Only Humphrey can know for sure if the painting started out as a provocative idea or as something to shock or possibly arouse an audience. Regardless, the imperatives of realism, which required him to stage the lighting, design the texture of bedspreads, and craft the feel of wood and flesh, transformed the painting into a rumination on pleasure, dreams, the discovery of the body, and sex. The painting is loaded as much by Humphrey's

fig. 21: David Humphrey. **Arizona**, 1997. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

fig. 22: David Humphrey. **Love Team on the Bed**, 1997. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

fig. 23: David Humphrey. **Her Shadow**, 1997. Inkjet on paper, 47 × 35 in.

fig. 24: David Humphrey. **Phone Boy**, 1995. Oil on canvas, 80 × 64 in.

aesthetic decisions and paint handling as it is by the viewer's own understanding of that language. The dyad, or pair, echoes the relationship between the spectator and the work. We are born into interdependency, thrown into the world as not quite singular. Our origins are blurred with others and we obtain singularity with great labor, and only partially, while we try as best we can to understand each other with language that is inherently imperfect. In the end, I think the *Love Teams* are rather sympathetic images of profound moments in the psychological and social lives of couples who wear their nudity the way the rest of us wear our clothes.

In a digital print titled *Her Shadow* (1997), from the *Lace, Bubbles, Milk* series, the feeling is that we are witnessing a passage between dream states in a mass-produced material landscape. Love may function as a metaphor in the work, as it so often does in the art of mysticism, or does it, here, stand for our not easily formulated quest for connection with others? Likewise, is the protagonist in *Phone Boy* (1995) seeking romance? He is naked, having what appears to be a relaxed phone conversation even if his head is craned back awkwardly. This is not Modigliani's reclining nude; the boy's legs are stiff as a board. It is the kind of pose we associate with a teenage girl in bed, talking on the phone with a cute boy. But "phone boy" is far from cute, with his mullet and the receding hairline of a much older man. In any case, he is alone in the eerily lit space, and it appears something has not worked out for him. In *Lace Boy 5* (1997), a male figure with a woman's face is seen from below, as he apparently reclines on a lace-covered bed in a rather uncomfortable pose, even if there is a relaxed look of pleasure on his/her face. We are given no hint of what that pleasure may be, although it appears to have produced a small erection. *Lace Girl* (1997) shows a woman in a type of fractured state we might find in a double-exposed negative that has been damaged by poor handling. She is sitting awkwardly with a hand placed over her eyes, as if to partially obscure her identity. Perhaps it is her own reflection she sees as she stares straight at us? As with the other prints in the series, it is hard to identify the light source in her space. The woman's facial shadows are washed out while her limbs are cast in an inconsistent light, as though they are from another photo or another person altogether. Gathered into a kind of fetal position, she appears transfigured by the strange light. It seems, as with "phone boy," that something has not worked out for her either. *First Kiss* (1998), featuring a loose rendering of a woman's head over a porcelain figurine of two cutesy characters kissing, is another extremely mysterious work. One thing for sure is that these images play on the type of psychology at work in Bret Easton Ellis novels, where stories are enacted, but we

cannot say with certainty what happened, or even who the narrator is. Protagonists are sexually charged, albeit apathetic, romantics—but what they feel is hidden from us, and perhaps from them as well.

Psychological narrative remained central to Humphrey's work through the late 1990s. Working out meanings in his work can often feel like drawing the meaning out of a poem, which is to say that his paintings reward patience and time. Like a poet, he is aware that the abstract elements of an artwork must be carefully handled to hold off easy interpretations.

In 2001, one year after Humphrey's final solo show at McKee, he made a radical decision that changed everything for him: he switched from oil paint to acrylic. Both mediums, of course, have important technical pros and cons: acrylics dry fast and oils have long working times; acrylics lend themselves well to hard edges, whereas oils are generally better for blending; acrylics can go on almost anything, whereas oils are mostly limited to carefully prepared stretched cloth or solid panels. For someone like Humphrey, who tends to make a lot of work and a lot of studies, switching to acrylic seemed a wise technical choice, but this was not his main reason. He explains:

> The technical reason was part of it, but the more important thing was that I wanted to disable my skills—I wanted to navigate a disorienting set of procedures. I had been a housepainter when I was young and I loved the simple directness of applying latex paint to a wall. There was something so bold and direct about it. I'm also really interested in amateur painters. All of their technical shortcomings, as they intersect with familiar conventions, speak of a desire and the promise of gratification. The awkward results are a humorous echo of the staged failures of language in postmodernism. I was happy to lose my ability to judge quality as a consequence of loving those vernacular works. My sculptures are mostly joined together from different found ceramic figurines, a process that became the model for how I make the new acrylic paintings.[34]

Jif (2000) was the last oil painting Humphrey would make. He describes the painting humorously as an allegory for his process of using oils: "Paint as fecal nourishment on the white support of bread."[35]

In 2008, Humphrey won the American Academy in Rome's prestigious

fig. 25: David Humphrey. **Jif**, 2000. Oil on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

fig. 26: David Humphrey. **Roman Nocturne**, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 52 in.

Rome Prize. The following year would prove to be an extremely productive time, in which he explored new directions in his work while getting to know a new set of artists and scholars. Humphrey started out creating an enormous number of drawings in Rome: the Palazzo Massimo with its Greek and Roman sculptures; the dramatic half-domed portico of Santi Luca e Martina; the walls, vaults, and floors of Roman buildings, richly decorated with mosaics made of tiny colored tesserae. Humphrey wanted to capture the marvelous way Rome could metabolize or feed on itself. He likens the idea to a process called "spoliation," in which ancient monuments are progressively stripped of their reusable materials, which are then applied to new monuments.[36] This process is a perfect metaphor for methods Humphrey uses in his own work: cutting, pasting, and layering to build on what came before. *Roman Nocturne* (2009) is a painting inspired by the view Humphrey had of Rome through the umbrella pines outside his studio, where, in the fall, murmurations of starlings would intermingle with the distant city lights at sunset. He illustrates this neoimpressionist scene from the viewpoint of what he calls "two classical dudes dissolving into fizzy twilight."[37] *Roman Nocturne* resonates with religious overtones. Humphrey sketched a lot of statuary in Rome, where, as in Vienna and Paris, there is a vast population of carved people. More specifically, he fell in love with sculpted and painted human hands. He drew hands from works in museums and from people on the streets or in cafés, and when he got home he would draw hands from memories of the day. Walt Disney famously understood how important hands as well as eyes are for expressing emotions. This understanding is why he gave his cartoon characters four fingers instead of five, because a fifth finger takes away from the clarity of expression you get with only four. But Humphrey was interested not only in depicting expression in hands but in telling the story of touch, and how we see with our hands through the act of touching. *Blue Hand* (2009) features a woman with blue paint on her hand. She has touched the railing of a staircase, leaving a handprint there, and then raised her hand as if to touch the inside of the picture plane or to pledge an oath. Something happened to her in the painting's fiction, and then she did something to the painting itself. The image plays with a distinctively postmodern metafictional breakdown of the wall between artist and subject.

Upon returning to New York from Rome, Humphrey began making a lot of sculptures. The magnificence of postmodern pluralism is that it is acceptable to work with baroque spaces containing classical Roman figures while being influenced by artists such as Walt Disney. The porcelain figures Humphrey makes now have a clear reference to his paintings, only they look like the figures one sees in

an airport gift shop, not in Donatello's studio, to be displayed in the Piazza della Signoria. A vast amount of art produced today is conceptual and much of that conceptual art is manufactured. In contradistinction, Humphrey's art is as much about the hand *in the making* – the feel of surfaces and the way tactile engagement with materials becomes a way of communicating. In Humphrey's early paintings, all we often receive is just enough physical information to read an act, or a state of mind. The characters become something like moral hieroglyphs. Sculpting taught Humphrey how to think of his characters as rounded and weighted in the same way Walt Disney's animators bring characters to life, not through drawing their outlines or contours but, rather, through three-dimensional construction using mass and volume. Donald Kuspit articulates a view of sculpture wherein, "Good sculpture has the ambition not to be free of tactility, but rather to vigorously assert it – even affording us an epiphany of it, symbolically engulfing us in it."[38] It is this very tactility in Humphrey's paintings that has become essential to communicating intimacy through his use of abstraction.

fig. 27: David Humphrey. **Blue Hand**, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

At all stages of his career, Humphrey has been as much an abstractionist as a realist. Parts of his paintings are meticulously rendered with acute attention to detail, while others look willfully clumsy, casually streaked, smeared, or abruptly left raw and unfinished. Although technically accomplished with his brushwork, he often positions figures of wildly different sizes next to one another, ignores gravity, collapses distance, and fuses seemingly separate scenes into a choppy whole. During a conversation with artist Nicole Eisenman in 2015, Humphrey spoke about character and narrative:

> Something comes alive right when you're trying to solve a problem in the picture. It might be: What kind of shoes are on this person? What kind of hat is that? Is that a swivel chair? Is there a pattern on it? And in the aggregate of all that problem-solving you end up with a narrative that's both bigger than, and intersecting with, the manifest narrative of people riding on a train or eating a meal or whatever . . . I'm not interested in anything that has to do with a fiction of David Humphrey at all. I do like the idea, though, that I could somehow exercise different roles inside the picture. If I make a big, giant gesture, I do it as though I were a certain kind of artist. Then I zoom out and assume another role—call it a subject position—in which I'm a rendering doofus making pictures of a chair or a person. Ultimately the picture has different characters or roles inside of it, including the depicted figures,

fig. 28: David Humphrey. **Lemon Compote**, 2009. Mixed media, 120 × 60 × 60 in.

> the fiction of a person who made it, and the conventions or modes of representation being employed.[39]

fig. 29: David Humphrey. **Elysian Park**, 2000. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

I would add to this that Humphrey's lifelong study of art and his keen eye for visual beauty has presented occasions, knowingly or not, for his figures to be there simply because the picture requires it in entirely formal terms. Although Humphrey may be known as an artist identified with the resurgence of figurative painting, he certainly positions figures and objects with as much skill and deliberation as an abstract painter working with basic formal elements. The bizarre disjointed woman in *Elysian Park* (2000), entangled amid her falling dress and a field of flowers, may have a third arm, not because the artist is making mythological allusions or crafting an allegory, but because the painting demanded something ochre and curving at that point. Humphrey's representations of stylish hipsters or lonesome drifters are striking and even haunting, yet it is often difficult to identify or empathize with them as individuals. In that sense, it feels as though his characters function as representatives of cliques or even as stand-ins for some specific social culture. A whole kingdom of laborers, students, bureaucrats, snowboarders, painters, musicians, masturbators, voyeurs, pet lovers, and bipolars populate his paintings. There are theatrics and stagecraft in his narratives and his actors perform their mysterious roles with an omnipresent emotional dissociation. In many of these scenes a character looks straight at us with a thousand-yard stare as if we "should have seen what just happened." The staging of these episodes within jarring, distorted, blown-out abstract backgrounds makes them feel precarious where mundane situations become outrageous and freakish, while outlandish ones seem inevitable and commonplace. In *Thanks!* (2004), a twentieth-century sailor in a snowsuit onesie with Ugg boots, clutching a gerbera daisy in one hand and a shopping bag in the other, sails down a river on a chunk of ice, on what looks like a cloudless summer day, even though somehow there is a rainbow above. The landscape behind him is utopian and pastoral: a small cottage on a plateau near a stone bridge looks unthreatening, and the massive, distant mountain is snow-covered and looks like a giant pillow of delicious marshmallow. Everything in the painting is cuddly and squeezable. The shapes are reminiscent of Colorforms and the rounded three-dimensionality of Fisher-Price toys. This painting is not exactly Humphrey's saturated version of John Constable's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* (1831). Constable quietly rebelled against the artistic culture of the early nineteenth century, which taught artists to use their imaginations to compose their pictures rather than

nature itself. He told his friend and biographer, Charles Leslie, "When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture."[40] Humphrey is not at all hung up on or resistant to nature or memory. Actually, nature is essential to his work, and while it retains a residue of romanticism and a hint of the sublime (bountiful skies, pine forests, distant mountains, and sweeping vistas), it is also often gouged, buckling, crosscut with harsh lines, fissured, and bleak, suggesting the aftermath of some environmental disaster.

I have always felt that Humphrey's most recent acrylic paintings have a lot in common, both conceptually and formally, with Neo Rauch's work. Gregory Volk describes the way in which we are required to give ourselves up in front of Rauch's paintings, "approaching them with something of the bewilderment with which the characters themselves seem to respond to their perplexing conditions."[41] He goes on to explain that trying to decipher meaning in Rauch's dense symbolism is a futile (although I would add pleasurable) endeavor because the codes and references are too obtuse and hermetic. The pleasure for me in the experience of meditating on a Humphrey or Rauch painting is akin to the experience of reading James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: I didn't understand it the first two times I tried reading it, but I look forward to not understanding it a third time. In *Wave Watcher* (2004), four bowed porpoises breach from a gigantic, though oddly unthreatening, wave in front of a naked person reposed on silky smooth sand near a flower garden. The watching person, of ambiguous gender, has a well-toned ass that is unsheathed from a towel. Neither the watcher nor the dolphins seem rattled by each other but, rather, flaunt their assets with bravado. The sunbather has a ponytail pulled through the connector piece of his cap, and the towel is painted to look more like a sexy velvet blanket than a cotton beach towel. There is going to be some hot and wild intercourse somewhere in this narrative, I'm sure of it; I just don't know how it's going to play out or who is going to be satisfied. The whole randy beach community is coming apart at the seams as a wet spray shoots through the painting's interior.

Gaby Collins-Fernandez makes a point about sexuality in Humphrey's work when she writes about *Cleaning Up* (2008), which pictures a girl wearing tight gloves and smoking a cigarette, looking down at her own body in a pool of bubbly water. She writes:

> Rather than try to control her unruly shirt/torso, the young woman manages—albeit ambivalently—to treat a part of herself with a distance that suggests diminished ownership. If she doesn't totally treat

fig. 30: David Humphrey. **Thanks!**, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

fig. 31: John Constable. **Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows**, 1831. Oil on canvas, 60 × 75 in.

her shirt as an other, her response does undermine discreetness and wholeness as requirements of subjectivity, as well as the notion that the parts that comprise us—in the way of appearance, personal grooming, accessories, and so on—metonymically represent our "selves."[42]

fig. 32: David Humphrey. **Cleaning Up**, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

fig. 33: David Humphrey. **Black and White**, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Indeed, a lot of the fluidity between sexes and sexuality in Humphrey's work can be seen as an expression of desire unencumbered by identity. In his paintings there is a sense of self-conscious sexual vulnerability. For example, in *Pink Couch* (2012), it is hard to tell if the girl with the cat is teasingly covering her naked torso or cowering into the corner of the couch. The artist's particularized representation of her sexuality is not necessarily the lens through which this question can be answered. Humphrey's work has always embraced a much broader form of what could be called pan-sexuality. In *Black and White* (2007), two people with similar haircuts sit on a stump looking into a snowy landscape while a simplified black snowperson with a white partner stares back at us. These types of contemporary silhouettes and gender-neutral people keep us from immediate and simplistic identifications where we might say, "Hey, there I am in that painting!" At the same time, we are also sorely tempted to invent a story out of the ambiguity: "He weirds me out like that creepy guy, Bill, in accounting, who friended me." What I believe Humphrey does in a lot of his work is shift the process of identifying with types of people to types of behavior. The many, sometimes comic, ways people enact desire or longing for attachment is acted out over and over by objects, animals, and dressed-up surrogates. The process of identification becomes fluid and open.

Humphrey's approach has a lot in common with the spirit of German Expressionism and the cabarets, actors, and clowns of Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Max Beckmann. In *Self-Portrait* (2000), Humphrey portrays himself as a clown among clowns. Gregory Volk links this same German connection in Rauch with the old traditions of European carnival and its costumed village festivals, in which everyone in town participates in the pagan old-world celebrations we now translate as Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras. Carnivalesque antics and exaggeration abound in Humphrey's and Rauch's paintings, but, to quote Volk, "in a way that's usually conflated with mundane, everyday life."[43] According to the Russian literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, "carnival" is an artistic mode that subverts and liberates the rigid assumptions of dominant styles, social hierarchies, and political systems through humor and chaos, and brings the unlikeliest of people together in a place

where unacceptable behavior is welcomed.[44] We can see, in Humphrey's work, vis-à-vis Volk's critique of Rauch, how both artists portray elements of the status quo "coexist[ing] with things that have been decisively, even riotously, transformed."[45] Among the motifs appearing in Humphrey's paintings from the past couple of years are costumes, para-humans or "humanized animals," conjoined creatures, exaggerated features, and expressions of satire—all staples of the carnival. In *Ass Pups* (2010), something of a winter festival takes place on a snowy hillside where the mood is one of quiet revelry. Two beagle-like dogs with long, razor-sharp claws are seated on a pantless boy's butt cheeks. The boy looks back fondly at the pups, but they look suspiciously and directly at us. As often happens in Humphrey's paintings, a reflective pool offers an introspective inroad to the psychology of the image as much as it offers a nice flipped repetition of color and form. The snow mound behind the boy's head looks like a thought bubble; should we fill in the blank? Is this boy truly happy to be outside, or are these predatory pups using him as a sled or perhaps for more? While this painting is antic and certainly funny, it simultaneously invokes more serious matters: predation, repression, and self-reflection. In *Plein Air* (2008), a cute blue-eyed girl with an art-school haircut tries her hand at observational landscape painting. Humphrey's keen eye for period footwear shows in many of his paintings; in this case, the girl sports wedges that were all the rage in the late 2000s. She has commandeered a young person to bend over and offer his or her ass as a palette on which to mix colors. It is unclear, though, if it is a palette or has become the painting itself. Either way, the artist is distracted by something off to the side. The assistant looks horribly uncomfortable. Looming above, on the hill, is what I like to think is their school. The architecture resembles a flat file. The bottom of the helper's feet are ludicrously dirty. There seems to be a little too much snow outside for people to be comfortable dressed in summer clothes (or naked). As in a lot of Humphrey's images, an explicit sexual tone manifests in subjects engulfed by foliage. Nature gives them both concealment and permission to indulge in behavior that the civilized world might not permit. Similarly, Humphrey has often depicted animals and interspecies relationships like predation or domestication. *Tangled* (2008) is one of many drawings that present animal combat as spectacle and as an allegory of intersubjectivity. In *Horse and Rider* (2010), Humphrey humorously depicts himself as, in his words, "the domesticated horse" and his wife as "the attentive, though slightly predatorial, rider."[46]

fig. 34: David Humphrey. **Ass Pups**, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 84 in.

In *Thanks for Letting Me Look*, a catalogue for an exhibition of Humphrey's work, Jennifer Coates provides a caricature of the artist implied by the paint-

fig. 35: David Humphrey. **Horse and Rider**, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

ings: "[His] impulse control is almost nonexistent. He wants to grab everything and lick it, eat your lunch, breathe into your phone. Leave his germs everywhere and laugh too loudly. Hurt people with mean comments. Then nuzzle up to them and ask for love. He is so complicated. But so honest."[47] Coates speaks to a theme of romantic love and bonding that has pervaded Humphrey's work throughout his career. His paintings highlight our knowledge that you may know someone for a lifetime and yet never fully *know* them. Humphrey wants to break down the language we use to construct understandings of one another, so we can see ourselves more clearly, independent of the tangle of other people's perceptions. At the same time, however, his optimistic love for humanity and acknowledgment of the difficulties of being alive suggest that he wants to hug us all so tight that all of our broken pieces will stick back together. One of Humphrey's most endearing qualities is the fearless way he stretches the narrative in a painting without giving away easy answers or employing conventional moves. I believe a key quality in Humphrey's work is beauty and feeling found in the ethereal. His best work often seems beyond our grasp (and maybe even his), but this alerts us to the fact that he is trying to tackle something enormous, something bigger than composition, materials, scale, or what is within a formal understanding of painting. There is a touching romantic quality to Humphrey's overreaching, which, because of his humor and subtlety, never becomes tedious or didactic. Many artists, historically, have been critical of the culture they are working within and yet maintain optimism about the possibility of change. Oscar Wilde said, "The basis of optimism is sheer terror." One can be dissatisfied with one's life, one's relationships, one's culture, one's immediate world, but Humphrey's work maintains an insistently buoyant optimism.

I was recently asked if I have a favorite of Humphrey's paintings. If I were to choose one, it would be a work that appeals to me aesthetically and causes me to see the world differently. In the spirit of that idea, I will close with a glimpse at a recent painting, *Swimmers* (2016), which was included in *I'm Glad We Had This Conversation* at Fredericks & Freiser, New York, in 2017. Here we have a tall white male with his back turned to us, in the middle of some sort of awkward self-embrace, while his sagging swim trunks reveal a butt crack. He is talking with an outgoing and uninhibited dark-skinned woman in a white bikini who is either laughing with him or mocking him. The energetic brushstrokes that form the abstract shapes of a brick wall, a bush, and what may be a car hark back to the abstract style we saw Humphrey employ in the early 1980s. I visited him in his studio when he was working on this painting. He had just finished it and I remember being taken aback

by its strange tangents and abutting forms. The way the two figures' hips meet, the sliver of blue sky between them, and how the man's upper arm aligns with the side of her face all form tangents that certainly would have been discouraged in Jacques-Louis David's art courses, in favor of silhouettes that give clarity of action. Humphrey uses spatial ambiguity for its psychological possibilities. It only recently occurred to me that the painting is about desire becoming real, desire becoming valuable, desire contributing something of use to a broader world. These tangents are a physical bridge between human beings and a celebration of that accomplishment by people of different races and genders. Even though the painting is centered on a sexual dynamic, the greater bond being explored is intimacy. The core of this bond is not desire for or attraction to each other; the painting, instead, proposes that the outcome of their interaction is something yet to be seen, a possibility emerging from awkwardness and misunderstanding.

fig. 36: David Humphrey. **Swimmers**, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

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David Humphrey in his studio, c. 1986

The Sub-moderne: David Humphrey's Applications

Lytle Shaw

A man and a woman stuff cotton wads into ambiguous animals on an industrial work-floor.[1] The table surface is strewn with limp, yet-to-be filled fauna husks, and with more bulbous forms that seem to indicate finished products. Beyond the two modular work stations, and the moving surface that feeds them raw materials, the factory space abstracts itself into large solid color planes (orange and yellow, blue and black) and just a few details suggesting spaces and figures: a Saarinen tulip chair, the rounded edge of the table, perhaps a canister or barrel, and an assortment of abstract drips or swirls of black paint that evoke the curved hairlines of other workers, in profile in the background. All of this abstraction and minimal detailing calls into greater relief the degree of specificity accorded the first two laborers.

He sports a dark pink vintage shirt throbbing with orange polygons. Its vibe is organic mid-century moderne. Atop his rather large cranium sits a crisp, wide-brimmed lid, black underneath and with no discernable logo or language above. His facial hair, too, is carefully curated: a cavalier goatee, with an especially thin soul patch, growing along the chin into a stubble-based anchor beard. His home mirror has been getting something of a workout. She wears a less descript, but still subtle and well-selected (no doubt also vintage) two-tone green top, bright-red lipstick, and an expensive asymmetrical haircut that shows off discrete strands of

1 Above this horizontal line that separates the main text of this essay from the smaller font below, one will find a mostly pleasant, ambient rumination on the works of contemporary, New York-based painter David Humphrey (born 1955), taking in the main sights in the sauntering manner of a gallery stroll; however, *below this line,* in the sweaty engine room of the footnotes, those who lay aside their lavender ascots and powder blue Comme des Garçons blazers for the stinking, mustard-stained T-shirt I provide here, will encounter a series of snarly polemics against a few of our current art historical clichés and overvaluations. There is also a bit of scholarly reference and elaboration.

fig. 37: **Workplace**, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 74 in.

jet black hair in three irregular arcs across her forehead.

They are, no mistaking it, hipsters. Their sartorial language broadcasts their forced march through that unrelenting style gauntlet we know as art school. Have they simply been excreted out the one-way bombardier hatch of this debt-racking fun house, and, failing to find gainful patronage in the urine-soaked alley below, washed up at the closest maquiladora conveyor belt? Is this painting, that is, a slightly sadistic *engaged work* meditating on the "spiraling student debt" about which we hear so much these days? No. Real and terrible as that debt is, David Humphrey does not appear to be allegorizing it here in his 2016 painting *Work-place*; and it is the facial expressions of his assembly line hipsters that key us to this fact. Both of them are contemplative and distant. They have abstracted their attention away from this repetitive activity and are thinking rather than concentrating on their work.[2] The hipsters are not communicating with one another, or with anyone else in the factory. They are lost in an implicitly ongoing contemplative state while their busy hands execute menial tasks. We have seen this look before—when the two were still in art school, working on paintings late at night in their studios. And so if the heaps of stuffed animals they now produce remain of little interest in themselves, we are nonetheless asked to pause on these figures' odd relation to this handmade quasi-mass-production process.

The painting that shows us all this is itself obviously another kind of hand labor. Indeed, Humphrey's canvas contains a kind of minor inventory of painting's mark-making techniques: flat, geometric abstraction (here apparently deployed against the grain as a representational technique suggesting light striking interior surfaces); gestural, painterly swaths (which set off the central figures in a kind of washy pink ambiance, and provide occasional minor points of focus throughout the rest of the canvas); design and caricature cameos (the Saarinen chair, the background hairdo helpers); and then moments of quasi-realism: from the two detailed

2 It was Alois Riegl, the great nineteenth-century Austrian art historian, who taught us to see this kind of individualized absorption in the group portraits of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch painters, where it was understood as a rejection of the Italian model of group portraits, in which the attention of each sitter was subordinated to a single event or object, and so the group was always focalized. As Riegl writes (in his 1902 article and 1931 book) on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century group portraits in Holland: "the basically portrait-oriented pictorial conception in Holland turns all historical action from a reciprocal transaction between third parties into a subjective act of contemplation, attentiveness, and a mirroring of the viewer" (*The Group Portrait in Holland* [trans. Evelyn M. Kain and David Britt, Los Angeles: Getty, 1999]), 252. "The Hollanders," he continues, "resisted the idea of depicting figures that were at the mercy of larger, outside forces" (253).

work stations in the foreground to the two central figures that occupy them and monopolize our attention by the care that has been lavished on their depiction in this otherwise loose and approximate world. The painter himself must have been a little tired, in need of some spacing out, after stuffing these two figures with so much mimetic cotton. But Humphrey's labor here in *Workplace* isn't just the manual kind involved in believably deploying these various painting modes; it is, instead, also a conceptual toil that consists in colliding these languages of representation against one another.[3] "Inventory" may thus name only our first impression of the variance among these divergent modes.[4] What sticks with us instead, as we stick with the painting, is a quiet war among its styles.[5]

And so we arrive at the crux of the painting, in its interweaving of manual and artistic labor: is its project one of taking the stuffing out of painting (and its art-school lineage) by ironizing the practice as a quaint, outmoded handicraft in the world of infinite and immediate phone photography and computer-aided design? Such a stance might seem a little disingenuous from a man who has been putting brush to canvas with alarming consistency since the late 1970s. Would this be merely the kind of familiar self-deprecation we encounter with so many cynical

3 To write of "conceptual toil" is usually to launch immediately into the domain of the "larger project." I'm for this, but with important qualifications. The legacy of conceptualism I'd want to draw on (to be brief about it) is not merely the familiar move toward the series, and the consequent downplaying of evaluation at the scale of the individual work. While both of these moves have been generative, we've also arrived at an impasse in which artists frequently seem to be understood *exclusively* at this larger level of their project or narrative, with their individual works offering no real complication or qualification of this supposedly preestablished "fact" of what this project is. Thus what went by the name of serial permutations in the '60s has come back as an artist's "project" or "narrative." We seem to lack some of the basic evaluative tools to understand whether these narratives are worth pursuing. We need not just a new theory of narrative, but one of evaluation as well, asking basic questions about whether or not certain narratives are of interest. This has been shied away from after the critique of evaluation in the 1970s and '80s. However useful that critique was at the time, we will be trapped in a bad infinity of personal narratives until we can have a public discussion, and theorization, about why some of these are more compelling than others, which sorts of subject positions and institutions they authorize (or destabilize), and how all this relates both to their own claimed genealogies and the context in which they are deployed in the present.

4 "The assumption was that if you rubbed heterogeneous languages against each other you could either neutralize their power, or draw something else out as a new kind of power" (*Brooklyn Rail*, interview with Phong Bui).

5 Are we just planting our flag, a little late, in the north pole of good old postmodern painting? The point is no longer to achieve this denaturalization (it was achieved in the '80s, if not before). It's to rub one language up against another to do new kinds of thinking. Here, thinking about the labor of painting, and about the status of the diagram, the work of "design."

hipsters, the blanket negations used to create a "realistic" attitude free from any supposedly mystifying identifications, that hard-boiled '90s disaffection that enveloped art students of yore like smoke in bars? No again. Let us thus move beyond the boring medium essentialism that would underlie a yes/no referendum on whether painting, in all its handmade-ness, could in fact achieve the status of the "contemporary."[6] Instead we might pursue the seemingly more pragmatic, but also undoubtedly richer, question of just what it is this hand-labor achieves in the present. If there is an attempt to take stock of the current cultural meaning of painting in *Workplace,* it is along these lines.[7] Like meta-paintings throughout history, this one surveys the scene, considering its mode of image making in relation to others, and ruminating on the overall cultural situation in which this labor takes place.

What, then, does this process yield? If we can agree that discrepant modes of representation in *Workplace* fight among themselves*,* and that this combat might stand in as a viable microcosm for at least one key trajectory within Humphrey's larger practice, then we might want to focus in a bit more closely on what's hap-

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6 The term *contemporary* is one of our great lexemes of mystification: it always seems to arrive as an a priori, without, that is, an argument about *why* certain developments or events are understood as constitutive of the now, and the others (also available empirically, clearly sharing the same space and time) are not. Rather than designate a positive entity with a series of qualities, the covert function of the word *contemporary* is often to banish concurrent activities not polished with the word into a dangerous zone we might call the primitivism of the recent past. Think of terms being depicted as flip-phones.

7 There is, of course, a long history of meta-paintings that reflect (often scandalously) on the specific labor involved in making (and seeing) a painted representation. Among a far vaster example pool we might select Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* (1500) in Munich, which consciously conflates the artist maker's self-image with *the* authoritative subject of painting, Christ himself; Rosso Fiorentino's *The Dead Christ with Angels* (c. 1524-1527) in Boston, which, focusing on the instant at which light penetrates the tomb and the dead Christ stirs, seems to grant painting the terrifying power of revivification. Obviously there is Velázquez's elaborate discourse on the rituals, protocols, and displacements of the seventeenth-century court painter in *Las Meninas* (1656) in Madrid. Less obviously there is Jan van Goyen's roughly contemporaneous riff of pairing his own process of pulling recognizable forms out of the primal ooze of pigment to that of the Dutch engineers manufacturing new ground. Closer to the present, we might add Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1855), which reflects on the vast and discontinuous social world of the painter, or Jackson Pollock's focalizing that world on a pane of glass (which would become *#29*, 1950, National Gallery, Ottawa) in Hans Namuth's 1950 film. I sketch this mini-genealogy not to anoint this painting of David Humphrey's with the hallowed authority of art history, but merely to remind my reader that painting's periodic need to take stock of where it is and what it's doing within a world of other, competing representational practices is far from new.

pening when gestural abstraction takes a swing at hard-edge geometric painting.[8] One of the perhaps now familiar propositions of high postmodern painting was that when an array of styles began to interact on a single canvas, this resulted not just in polyphony, but in a denaturalizing of each visual mode's claims to authority and authenticity. In fact, we have lived for such a long time in a world in which this has been the established frame of viewing that it is hard to think otherwise. So much so that perhaps part of the historic thrill (for us, now) of mid-century gestural painting is to imagine a world of about sixty years ago (as if it were ancient Rome or Egypt) in which people *actually believed* that the huge washy brush-strokes of a de Kooning painting, for instance, were really a record of existential choice conducted at high pitch, a life lived on the canvas—an event, as Harold Rosenberg put it, and not simply a picture.[9] In *Red Car*, 2007, for instance, Humphrey just helps a little to make this connection, by literally linking the de Kooningesque swirls of an abstract landscape to the graphic particulars of a life: a two-story house, a white picket fence, a small forest, and a bright-red car. Abstract painterly "events" mingle freely with low-key narrative ones; the life of pigment, with domestic life.

Rather than a simple jab at the Rosenbergian view, then, I take this painting as more of a literalization, an attempt to explore what it might look or feel like to experience life gesturally—perhaps at the Hamptons (where this freestanding clapboard house might fit in), that fateful site of first generation Ab-X summering and death. In any case, part of the attractive mystery of mid-century abstract painting is that people not that long ago—intelligent people, to boot—invested gesture with so much power.[10] And they believed that gestural abstraction, more broadly, was a *necessary* intervention in relation to a world of tamer, more intricate modernisms of the '30s and '40s, or to the various social realisms that to some degree preceded

8 The project, the narrative, has given rise to a new laziness wherein the individual instance is in some sense unimportant, a mere pointer or reminder of this valuable idea that never entirely manifests itself. There are many moralizations of painting "in itself." From Fairfield Porter's "art in its own terms" (in the 1950s) to James Elkins's more recent hectoring claims about what paint, the substance, just *is*. I do not want to bark up this tree. I don't think painting has its own terms, or paint, its own identity. But I do think our sense of any artist's "project" should remain dependent upon (and thus transformable in relation to) close and persuasive readings of individual works .

9 As Rosenberg put it in his famous 1952 essay, "The American Action Painters": "the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go onto the canvas was not a picture but an event" (*The Tradition of the New* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982]), 25. Obviously Clement Greenberg did not share this belief.

10 Frank O'Hara, for instance, almost believed it (though he occasionally winked).

fig. 38: **Red Car**, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

these. Whatever historical timeline they came up with, though, it was a sequence comprised of propositions and responses.

With this in mind, the "moderne" elements in Humphrey's paintings—the conspicuous cameos of mid-century architecture and furniture, period graphic design, and the biomorphic—take on something of a special status.[11] The typical line on the moderne is that it marks the moment, from the late '40s through the '60s, when the more ambitious modernism of the teens and twenties makes an ignoble peace with the commercial world. The utopian social ambitions and rigorous functionalism of Mies, Corb, Wright, and Gropius gives way to an eclectic playboy architecture of the private domain that seems not quite to understand the modernism it pretends to practice.[12] Inside the gaudy buffet of clashing claddings that envelop these buildings, in the modular free-plan environments now native equally to Hefner and to Hewlett-Packard, Bauhaus graphics come back as corporate signage and slick airline posters that have reduced each leisure spot (each new mid-century male utopia of highballs, legalized gambling, and divorces) to two or three tasteful graphic icons—casino go-go girls and pine trees, for instance, coming to stand in for Reno.[13]

But if a degradation of the moderne (and of playboy architecture) was, at first, an effective way to enshrine a small canon of high modernist gems as the asymptote of excellence from which we were always falling farther away, it became clear before too long that the values ostensibly at the center of this canon (functionalism, utopianism) were never quite as firmly established as their celebrants imagined.[14] More, as the moderne began to borrow from an array of irreconcilable practices, it did something more than turn toward a profligate, irresponsible eclecti-

11 By *moderne* I do not refer merely to the so-called streamline moderne style of architecture from the '30s and early '40s, but to the larger turn toward a non-functionalist popular modernism in postwar architecture and industrial and graphic design. The terms googie architecture, raygun gothic and populuxe share territory with what I mean by the moderne. But I avoid them since none is in wide usage.

12 The phrase "playboy architecture" is Siegfried Giedeon's, from the introduction to his *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963). The playboy architect is always "jumping from one sensation to another and quickly bored with everything."

13 In a review of Chris Ofili's "afro-futurist love gods," Humphrey waxes approvingly about the "amped-up hybrid vernacular of poster art" (*Blind Handshake: Art Writing and Art, 1990–2008* [New York: Periscope, 2009]), 41.

14 Critiquing the rhetoric of functionalism in his introduction to *Five Architects,* Colin Rowe writes: "very far from being as deeply involved as he supposed with the precise resolution of exacting facts, the architect was (as he always is) far more intimately concerned with the physical embodiment of even more exacting fantasies" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 3.

fig. 39: **Poster for United Air Lines**, c. 1960. 25 x 40 in.

cism; it also began to wiggle somewhat free from a strict model of linear historiography.[15] In doing this, the moderne could perhaps be understood as a key moment in which modernist practices began to uncouple themselves from, or at least destabilize, the constitutive worldviews and forms of belief that had seemed to be their conditions of possibility. This, then, is what nominates the moderne as a precursor to the generalized condition of sampling that seems to obtain in the world of David Humphrey, where paint-by-numbers camp jostles with the gestural "event," where geometric abstraction clangs its hard lines against realistic figures, and where billows of biomorphic abstraction spill out into clean, perspectival space. If one were to sort this tangle of stylistic languages into something like a continuous spectrum, it might be possible to situate at one end mid-century design, with its reduced graphic language, and at the other, gestural abstraction and staining. In the distant background we might note Heinrich Wölfflin's opposition between the linear and the painterly; but these polarities have now morphed into the logo and the stain; or the branding icon and the blotchy brushstroke. Architecture, then, is often conscripted to play the former role. In many paintings, for instance, crisply delineated buildings

15 Robert Smithson sees this already in the architecture of the 1930s in his essay "Ultramoderne."

fig. 40: **Ass Palette**, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

enter as only partly persuasive enticements for that brand we have come to know as mid-century modernist architecture, the iconic (though not quite identifiable) apartment complex marking an edge or a vanishing point within the composition. We see this in the sensitively named *Ass Palette,* 2008, where again painting comes in for an examination.This pigment proctology yields blocky, brushstroke-betraying painterly rectangles in the foreground, and de Kooningesque swirling profiles in the foreground left; it also yields an odd couple of women reinventing the *plein air* outing; the artist, at left, taking a break from her prostrate pigment stand to stare, with boredom, in the opposite direction; the palette, at right, bent over, head cocked at a strange, uncomfortable angle on the yellow grass, looking perhaps a tiny bit dead. A stylized, minimal landscape fills the middle ground: an utterly white zone with a small tree on one side and a big one (with yellow graphic design Xs hanging from its branches) at the left; a river snakes through in an elegant S-curve. And on the horizon is modern architecture—a four-story something. Is it there just to spoil the pastoral view, to remind us of always encroaching "modernization"? Or is its very modernity a telos we might reach when we've crested this territory

and arrived historically at the ridge on which it sits? Hard to tell. What seems a little clearer is the status of labor out here in the field. Since we see no canvas, the suggestion seems to be that the painterly landscape we're provided (and the painted body) are both, in a sense, the work of this bemused landscape artist. Another modernist building pokes through at the edge of *Side Street in Majorca*, 2006, where a black man wears a Betty Boop mask and an elderly lady in yet another moderne garment (whose exact design appears in other paintings, like a kind of brand cameo) waddles off in the direction of a modular housing complex that barely peeks in from the right.

This language is perhaps most legible in *Baby Sitter*, 2003. Here a kind of cover-band Unité sits at the top of an alpine road, where the babysitter floats over the landscape (like a teen heartthrob vision), one eye covered by his angular bangs, two diagrammatic children framed against his orange shirt.[16] Perhaps we could say that the painting is about warring diagrams: of architecture, eros, lifestyle and landscape, with a couple of infants thrown in. *Hoodies,* 2011, too sits (mostly) on the clean diagrammatic side of this spectrum. Here, six young individuals donning the eponymous sweatshirts huddle on a table behind a shipping container. What, exactly, are they doing in this parking lot landscape presided over by a single forlorn lighting fixture, and why are they all wedged in on this petite table that seems to have been jacked from the local high school? We get help answering this question neither from the stylized pine trees in the distance nor from the real subject of the painting: a collection of four huge biomorphic stains, all solid colors, that billow out across the parking lot surface, jamming the codes between mundane oil spill and elevated abstraction.[17] Humphrey's well-documented interest in amateur painters and paint-by-numbers aesthetics are both relevant here, inasmuch as his diagrammatic painterly language suggests the intentional misapplication of a series of rules or procedures, both in themselves, and in their combinations.[18] *Ike's Bridge*, 2006, may be the summa of this concern with misapplied methodology. Here, a trim Ike sits (legs under his butt, arms at his sides) in some kind of bizarre

16 Unité = Unité d'habitation, a prototypical form developed by Le Corbusier for the residential housing block, the most famous of which is in Marseille, completed 1947-52.
17 This is a territory Humphrey explores as well in one strand of his mixed media works, where be begins with photographs of mud slicks or minor puddles in city gutters and then collages in animal characters or graphic design elements based on the dominant lines of these found landscapes.
18 As he says to Phong Bui in a November 6, 2012, interview: "I'm also really interested in amateur painters. All of their technical shortcomings, as they intersect with familiar conventions, speak of a desire and the promise of gratification." *Brooklyn Rail*.

fig. 41: **Side Street in Majorca**, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

brown covering that suggests a fitted (if slightly threadbare) ape suit. On one side is a stylized pine whose needles have been rendered in over regular clumps of light-yellow lines (five or six per application) that hover atop the three-tone green surface below—a bit like bad wrapping paper; on the other, what we can only call a flowering tree is built out of uniform brown trunks around which float an array of unrelated, wildly out of scale flowers: orange, pink, red, and brown. They would like to convey the message, "happy," but can't quite spell it. These are modes of representation that aspire to, but have not attained, the status of the low-level diagrammatic. Is Ike cooling himself in a kiddy pool? Or has the ground-plane (which is inexplicably denuded and worn in the other part of the canvas) just swung up mysteriously and enveloped part of his body? We'll never know. What we do know is that the former supreme commander of the allied forces has chosen to plant himself down on the lush side of the yard, more central to the bridge that provides the canvas's occasion.

Here, then, we circle back on the status of the handmade. In works like *Ike's Bridge*, painting is not the artisanal as opposed to the mechanical, the patiently rendered representation as opposed to the immediately captured image. Painting might *like* to become artisanal, but it just hasn't gotten there yet. Instead it hovers at the horizon, trapped in a semi-cretinous precursor to legibility. This is not simply a swipe at self-taught painters like Ike, who should perhaps have carved out a little more time for their leisure pastimes instead of burning it all up attending to World War II and the interstate highway system.[19] Rather, it is a fascination with the early stages of method at which painterly representation can become a system, can be broken down into a series of techniques that, performed successfully, produce legible graphic signs which in turn, combined well, produce coherent paintings. This allows us to reframe the problem of the moderne, which is of interest now because the initial dismissal of it as an over-slick, unthinking application of method uncoupled from belief turns out in retrospect to identify not merely a problem with

19 Ike famously painted in order to relax. In response, Humphrey quips: "Perhaps becoming President would help me relax" (*Blind Handshake*, 144). At one level we hear a reversal of power relations, with the artist shedding the anonymity that had cloaked the poet's role for Shelley and becoming the *acknowledged* legislator of the world. Even without knowing his stance on many issues, I would, at this moment, be very happy to support a Humphrey coup. But there is another dynamic in this quote, also worth elaborating: Humphrey seems to be pushing back against that old assumption that art (and one could add poetry) should operate as universally accessible domain of relaxation, that is, as a discipline without demands, without history, without context.

fig. 42: **Baby Sitter**, 2003. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

fig. 43: **Hoodies**, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

American graphic design and architecture in the ‘50s and ‘60s. Instead, this situation in which the application of design methods severs itself from the modes of being and belief ostensibly signaled by a particular method points to a larger condition that has attended the spatialization of what had previously been a more linear history of the arts—the move, that is, from one sequential history of the arts, to an increasingly pluralized and conditional set of histories.

If, to an extent, Humphrey cultivates this floating non-history of competing applications by setting loose a series of irreconcilable visual languages on a single canvas, then in paintings like *Ike’s Bridge* he is, perhaps, proposing another tack, which we might name the sub-moderne, inasmuch at it involves not the facile manipulation of legible (if disparate) systems of representation but rather an engagement with the more remedial conventions of graphic mark making that would, if used successfully, produce a style, but which, instead, hover at its edges, not quite coalescing into coherent marks. Here “application” takes on another sense: not the seamless *deployment of*, but the aspiration for *competence in*, a style. Again, the agenda is not simply poking fun at amateurs or incompetents, but exploring the threshold at which marks begin to cohere within a legible, and seemingly unified, picture-making mode. Remaining just below this threshold, Humphrey can evoke its organizing power as imminent, but not quite present. The result is that a moderne sense of history now fractures or multiplies. Yes, Humphrey explores its uncoupling of style from worldview, application from belief, and seems to present this as the wobbly bedrock of a now generalizable condition of our existence within an array of pigment management techniques and styles (picture them as booths in a craft fair) that stretches to the horizon. And yet with *Ike’s Bridge,* the sub-moderne of misapplied veneers paradoxically evokes that older sense of modernism as an ongoing project of education, of self-cultivation. We just seem to have arrived at an early, awkward moment in which *everything* remains to be learned. From the perspective of *Ike’s Bridge,* the jaded art school kids of *Workspace* emerge as inaccessible demigods. If *only* we had their cynical facility.

fig. 44: **Ike's Bridge**, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 86 in.

Letter to David

Wayne Koestenbaum

February 3, 2017

Dear David,

I saw your show today, and was enthralled. The sculptures are beautifully provocative and comfortingly dolmen-like (a happy Stonehenge of supervisory presences?)—and the paintings, wow, the paintings were heaven: such staggering virtuosity! and such funny, pert, alluring juxtapositions of free strokes, drips, clear delineations. The way you find a face out of nowhere—or let a face suddenly reign, in the middle of a painting, when the face has no ordinary "right" to be there! You shove classical (and comic) figuration right into the middle of vast meditative color fields—and the stories you tell, with these procedural and representational juxtapositions, exceed words but tempt words into being. It's strange and amazing to imagine you plotting out these paintings, which seem like they include improvisation (how could they not?) but which also seem too thoughtfully composed—tactically, like a suspense flick—to have been assembled just by improvisation. The scale is strange, too—and exciting: the largeness of the paintings offers a tangy counterpoint to the intimacy of the emotions and the succinctness of the gestures. So the impression is that you've edited away all the in-betweens, and left just the important players, be these players a drip, a brushy figure-eight of paint, a field of queer smoothed-out beige/white, a pocky festival of seemingly computer-generated hieroglyphs—or a body utterly real (and yet somehow the pubic hair sits on top of the dress, rather than below it) . . . Estrangements, defamiliarizations, amid domestic (and internationally political) tableaux: as if Alex Katz woke up and found himself teletransported to a remake of *Star Trek* scripted by a punk Harold Pinter.

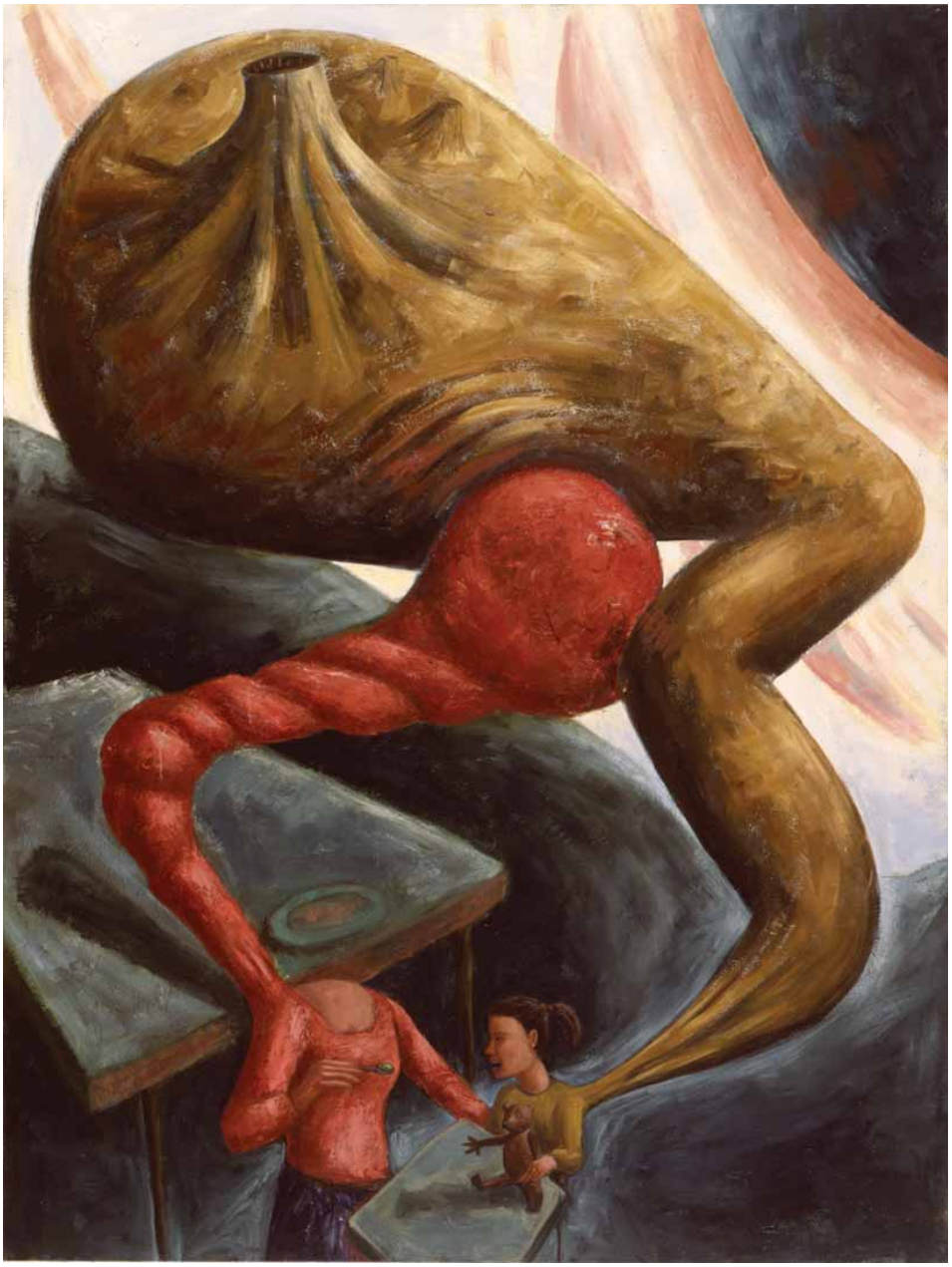
xo
Wayne

David Humphrey, c. 1989

Painting

Eye, 1986. Oil on canvas, 72 × 84 in.

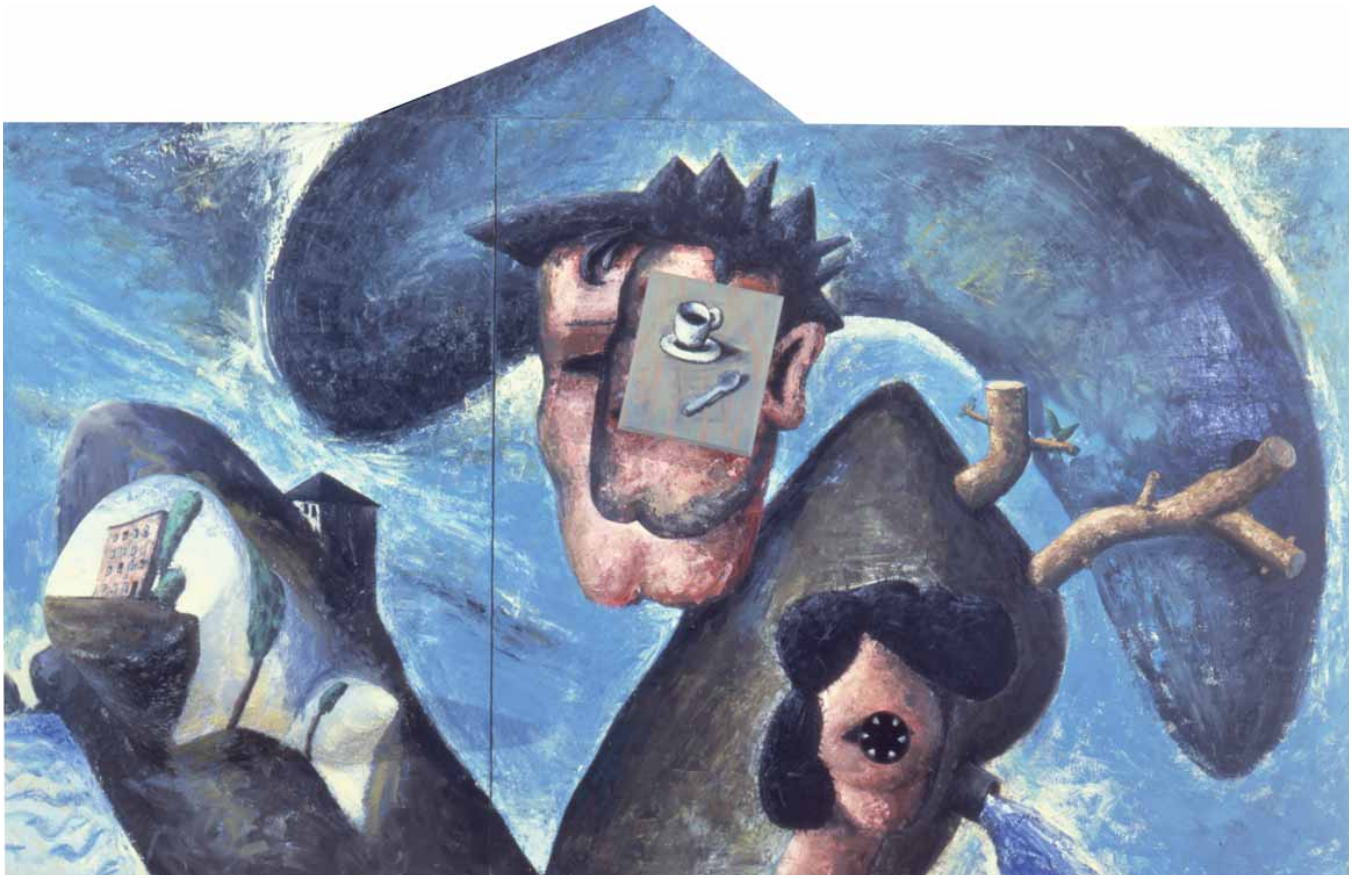
Sentimental Education, 1985. Oil on canvas, 108 × 80 in.



Lamp, 1984. Oil on canvas, 86 × 72 in.

E Pluribus Unum, 1986. Oil on canvas, 84 × 84 in.

She Does, He Doesn't, 1983. Oil on canvas, 75 × 198 in.



Tryst, 1983. Oil and construction on wood, 72 × 132 × 21 in.

Feeding, 1985. Oil on canvas, 72 × 84 in.

Lure, 1984. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 in.

A While Longer, 1984. Oil on canvas, 66 × 54 in.

Listening, 1987. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

As Lovely as the Law, 1987. Oil on canvas, 76 × 64 in.

Testing, 1984. Oil on canvas, 84 × 66 in.

Boss's Office, 1984.
Oil on canvas, 84 × 120 in.

Playpen, 1984. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 in.

Headquarters, 1984. Oil on canvas, 84 × 120 in.

Green Valley, 1985. Oil on canvas, 72 × 108 in.

Felix Culpa, 1985. Oil on canvas, 108 × 80 in.

Crypt, 1988. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Meal Time, 1988. Oil on canvas, 84 × 72 in.

Seeking Authority, 1988. Acrylic on muslin, 40 × 20 ft.
Installed in the anchorage of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Migrant, 1986. Oil on canvas, 90 × 60 in.

Diorama, 1985. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 in.

Early Riser, 1984. Oil on canvas, 72 × 144 in.

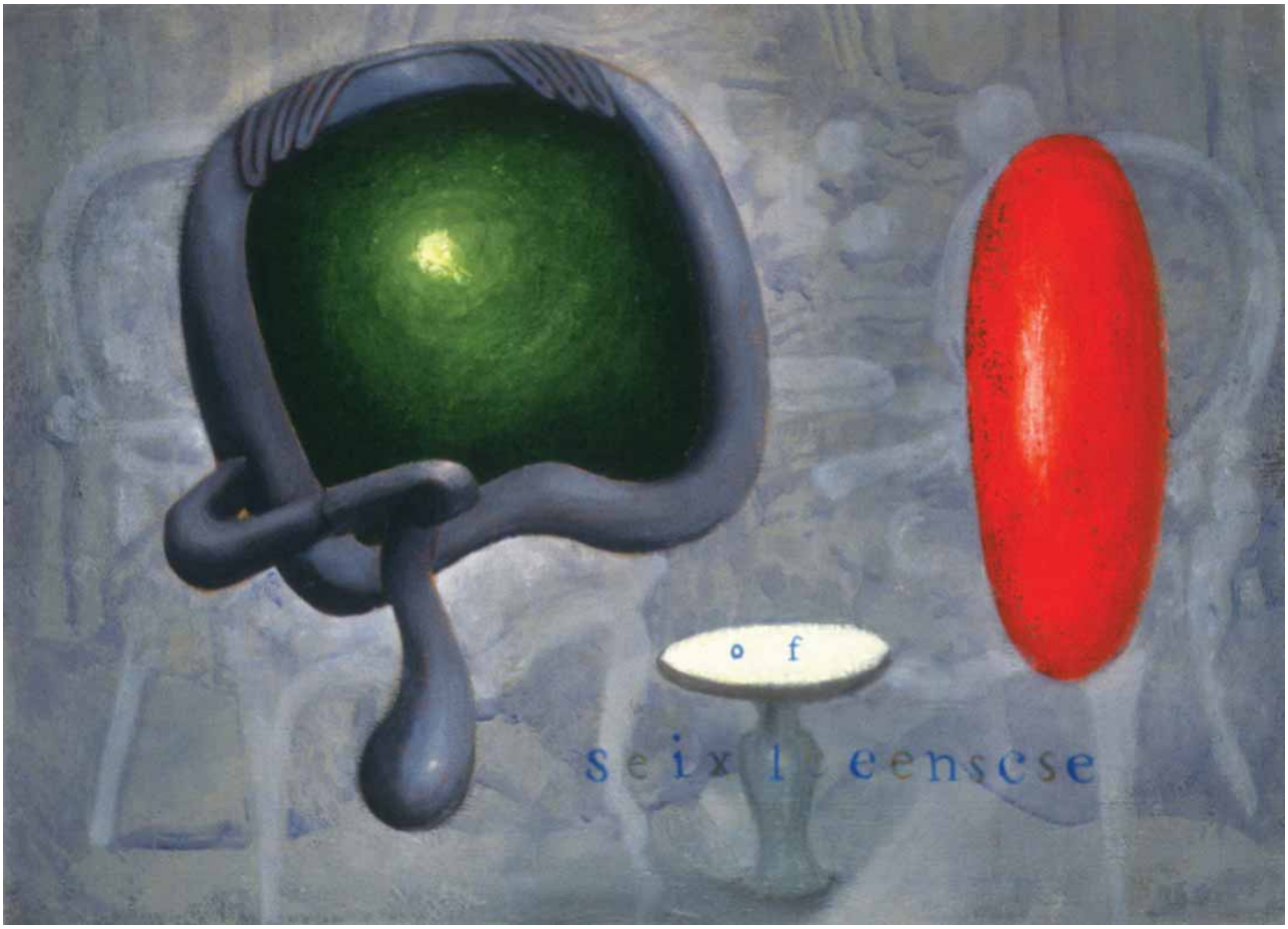
Trough, 1987. Oil on canvas, 66 × 72 in.

Anatomy of Forgetfulness, 1987. Oil on canvas, 84 × 72 in.

Confusion of Tongues, 1987. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 in.

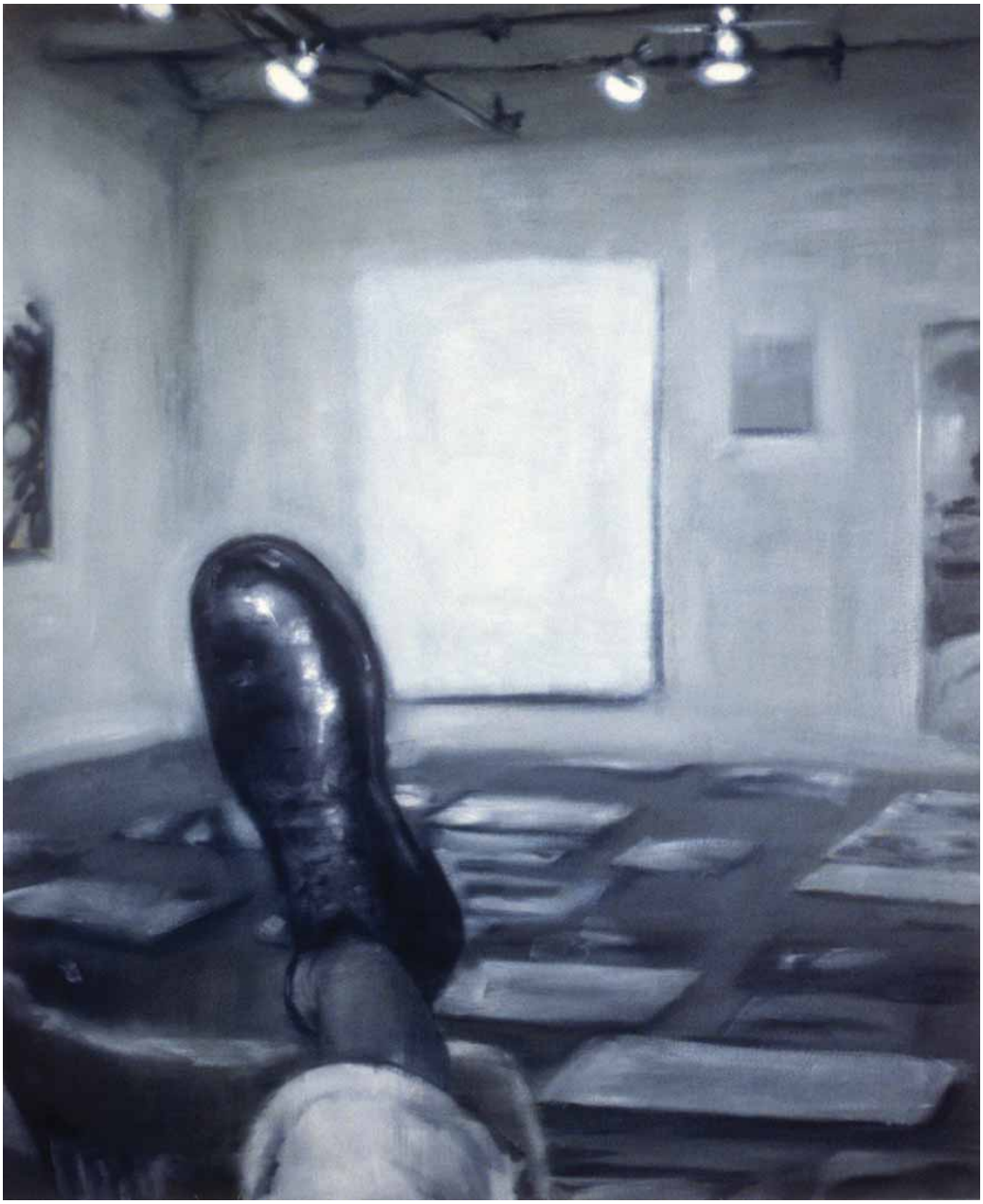
Soldier's Memorial, 1987. Oil on canvas, 84 × 66 in.

Blind Spot, 1989. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.



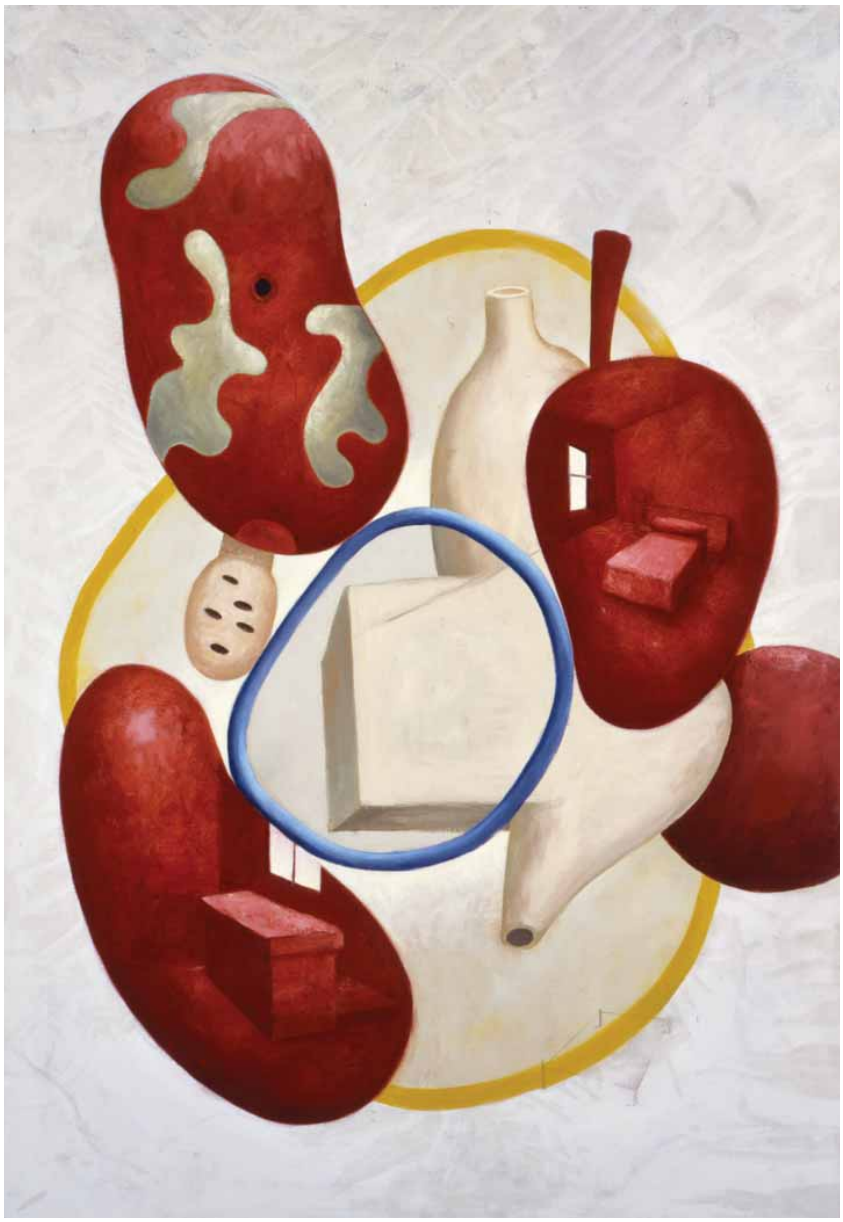
Of Silence and Excess, 1990. Oil on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

And They Dug, 1987. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

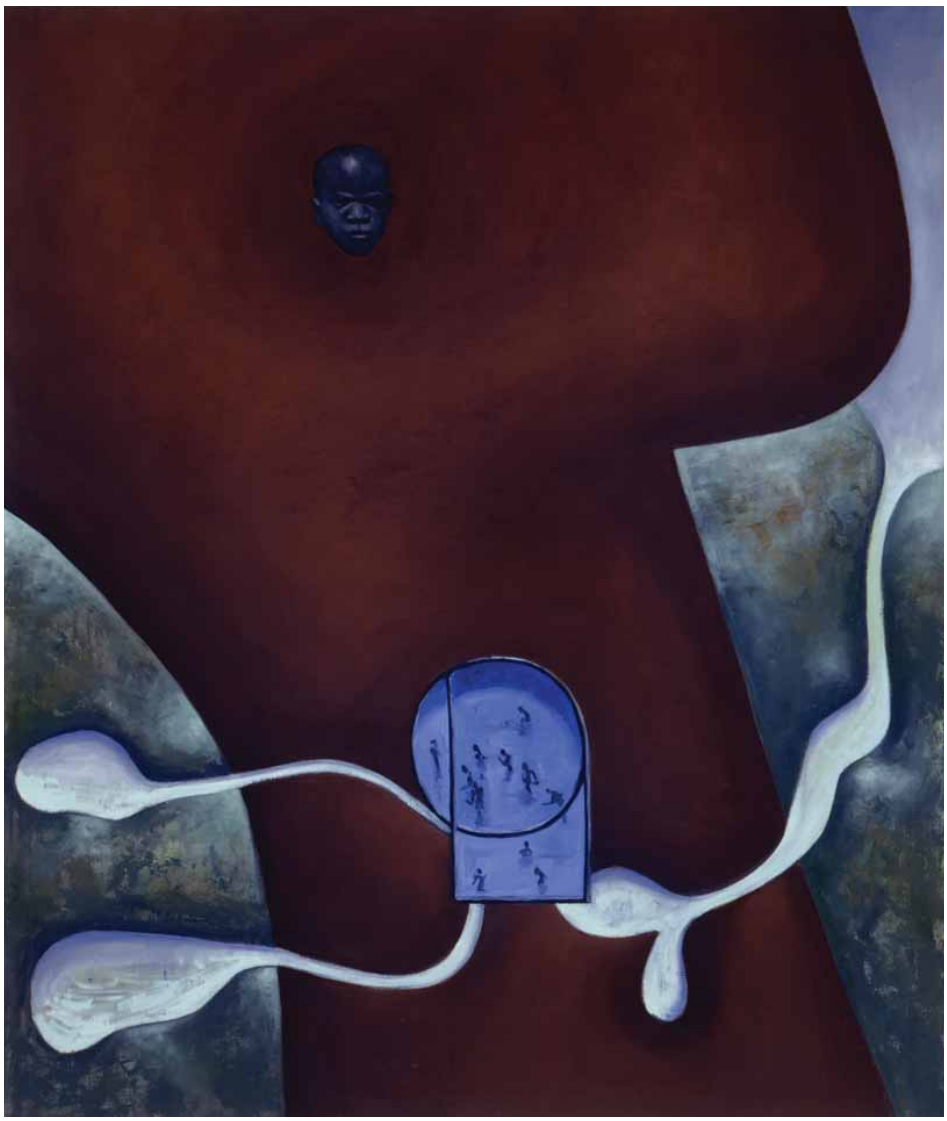


Studio, 1996. Oil on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Speculum, 1987. Oil on canvas, 36 × 50 in.

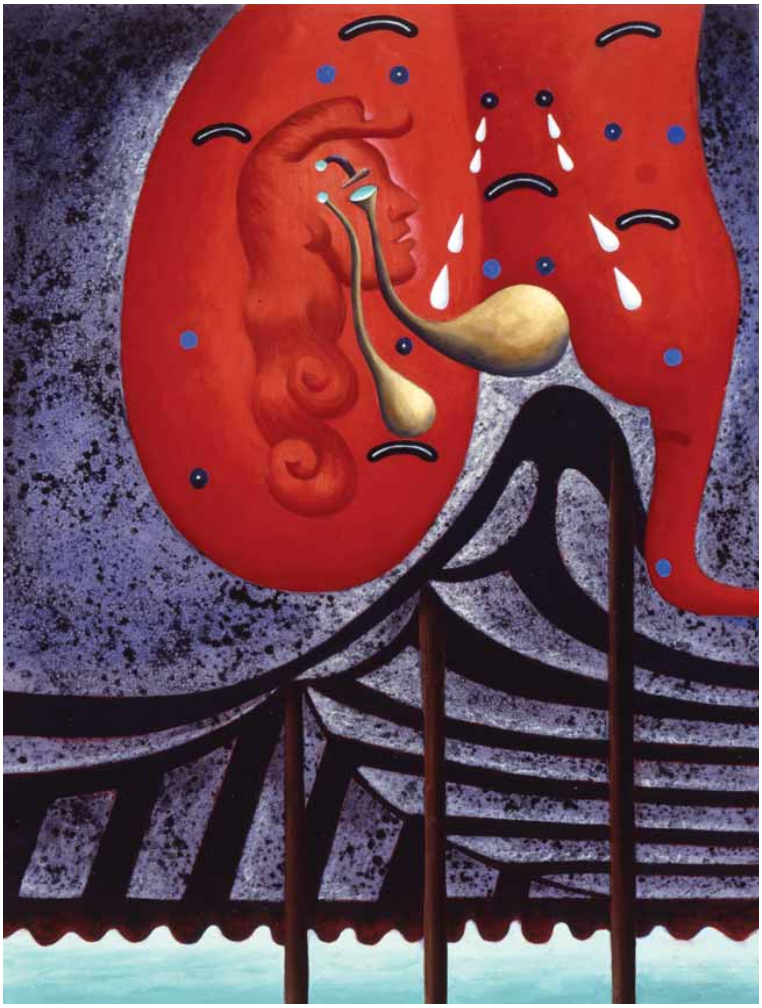


Itinerant Pleasures, 1987. Oil on canvas, 96 × 66 in.

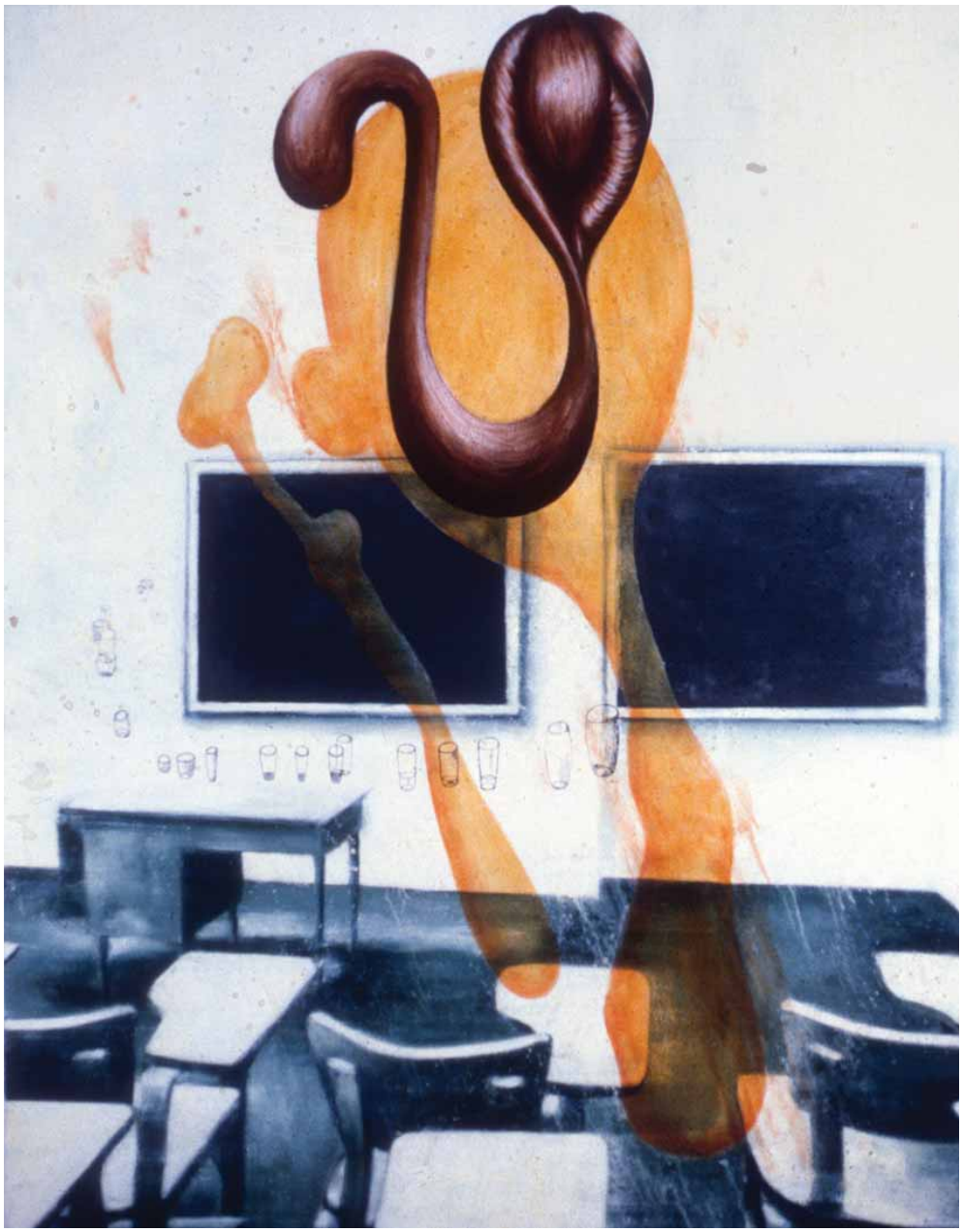


Boy, 1987. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

In Pursuit of Analogies, 1989. Oil on canvas, 66 × 84 in.

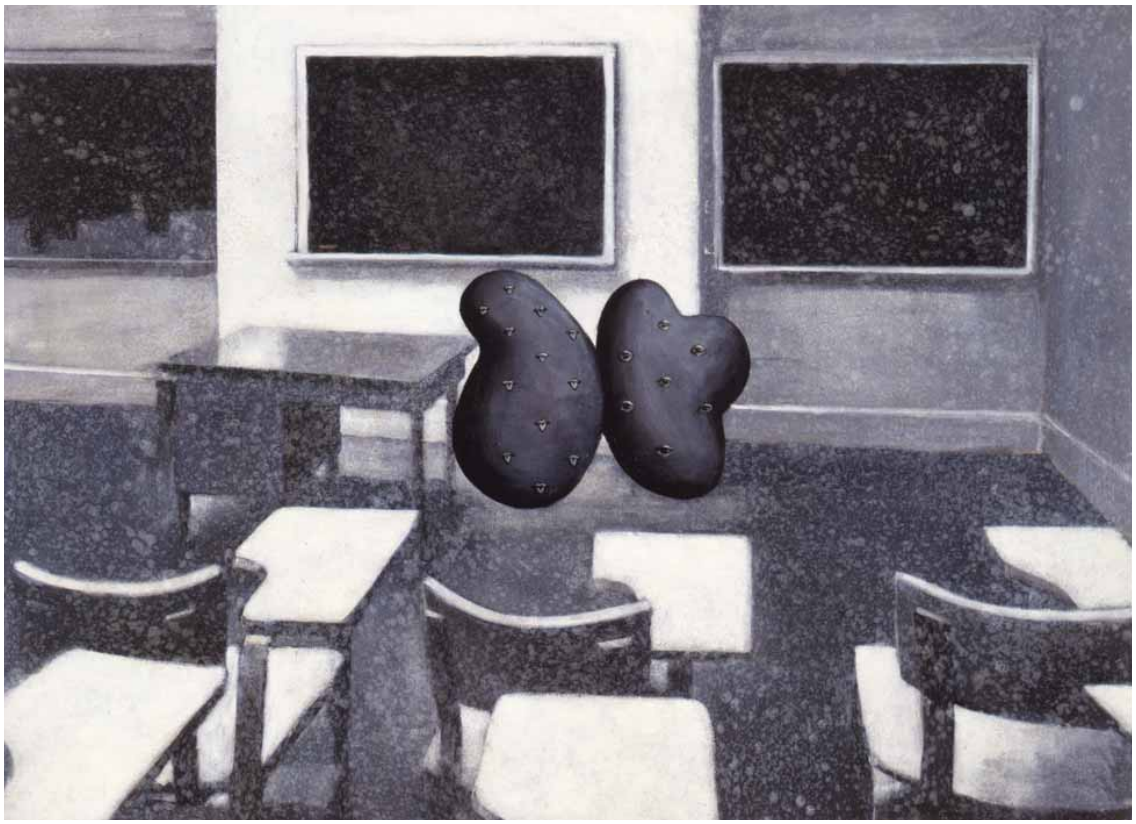


Circus Tears, 1989. Oil on canvas, 72 × 54 in.



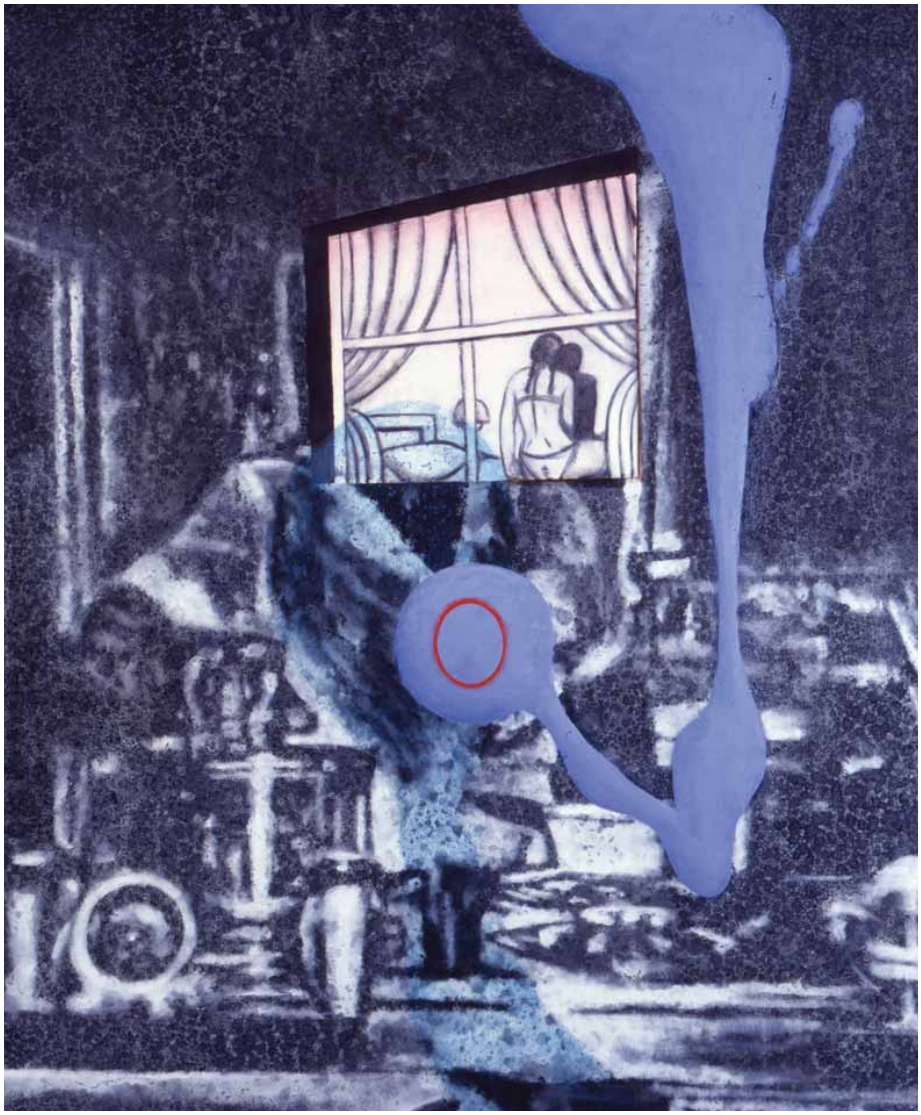
Teacher's Pet, 1990. Oil on canvas, 84 × 72 in.

Waiting Room, 1989. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.



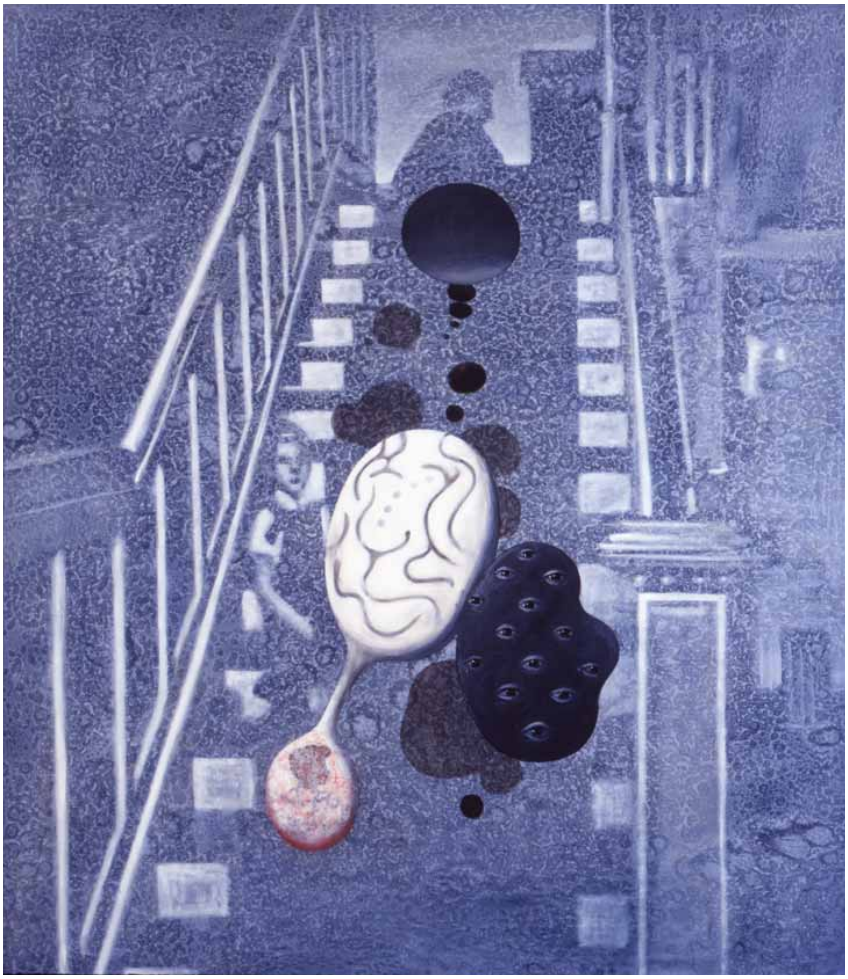
Classroom, 1990. Oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Rêve, 1990. Oil and human hair on canvas, 60 × 48 in.



Rear Window, 1991. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

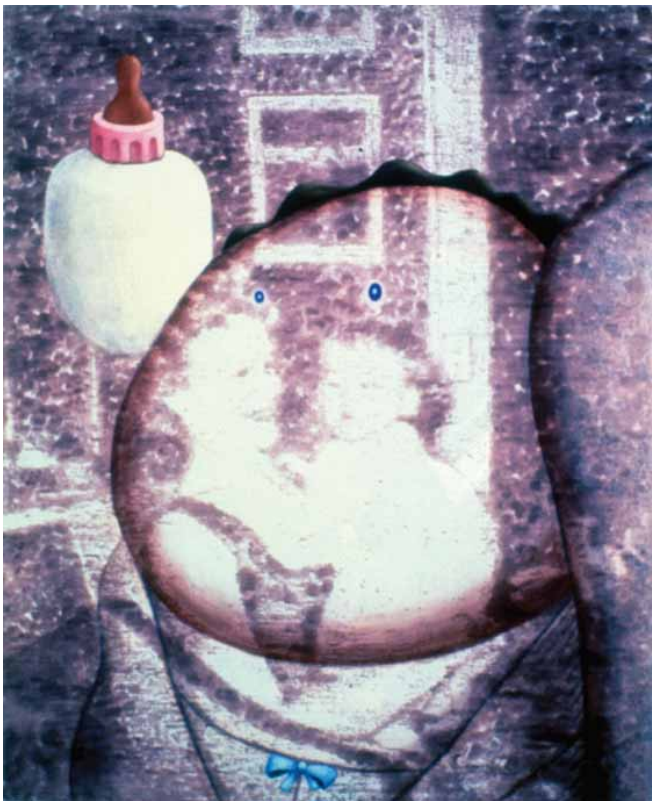
Dad, 1991. Oil on canvas, 84 × 96 in.



Top of the Stairs, 1991. Oil on canvas, 96 × 80 in.

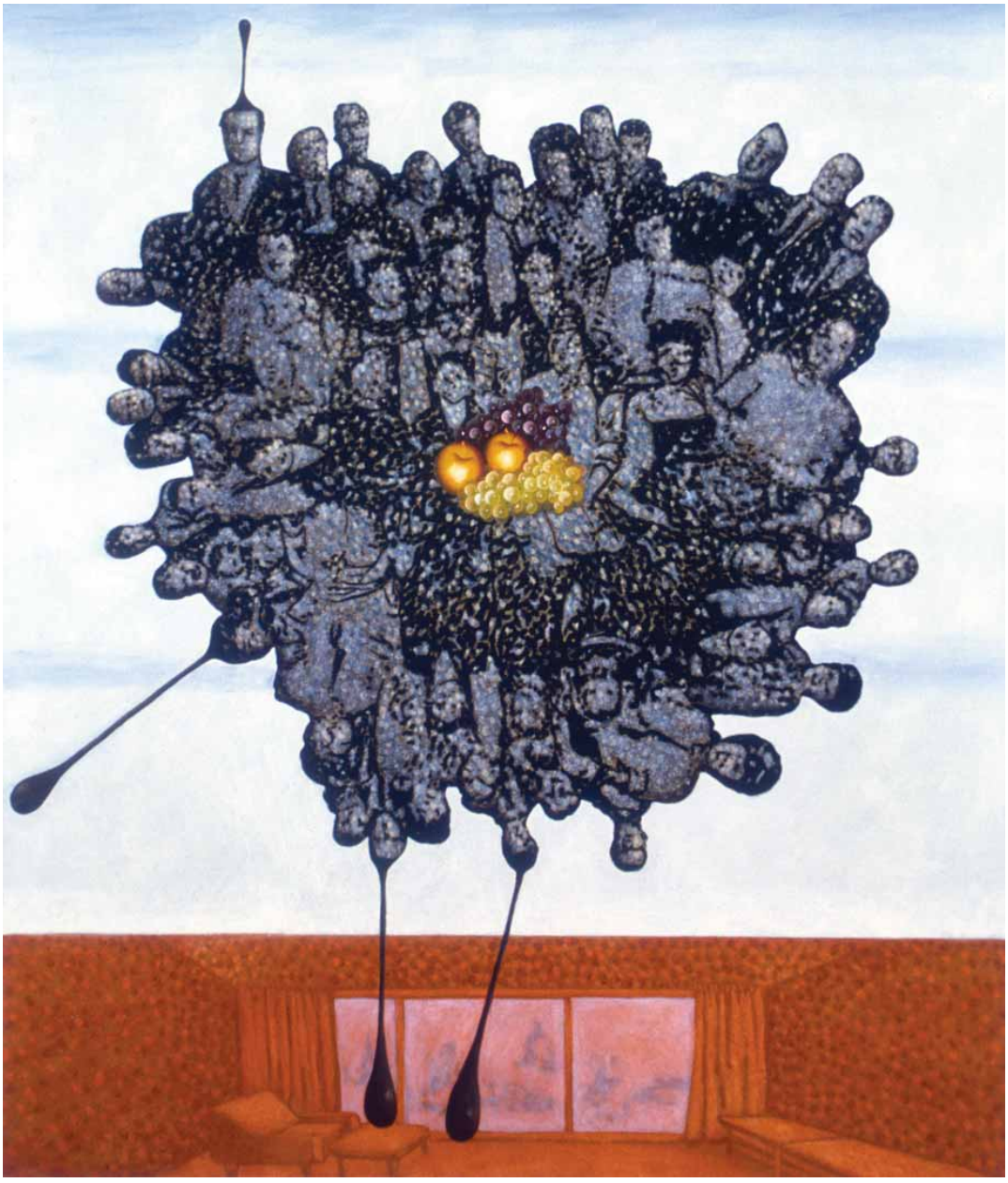
Family Gathering, 1990. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Mirror, 1992. Oil on canvas, 84 × 72 in.

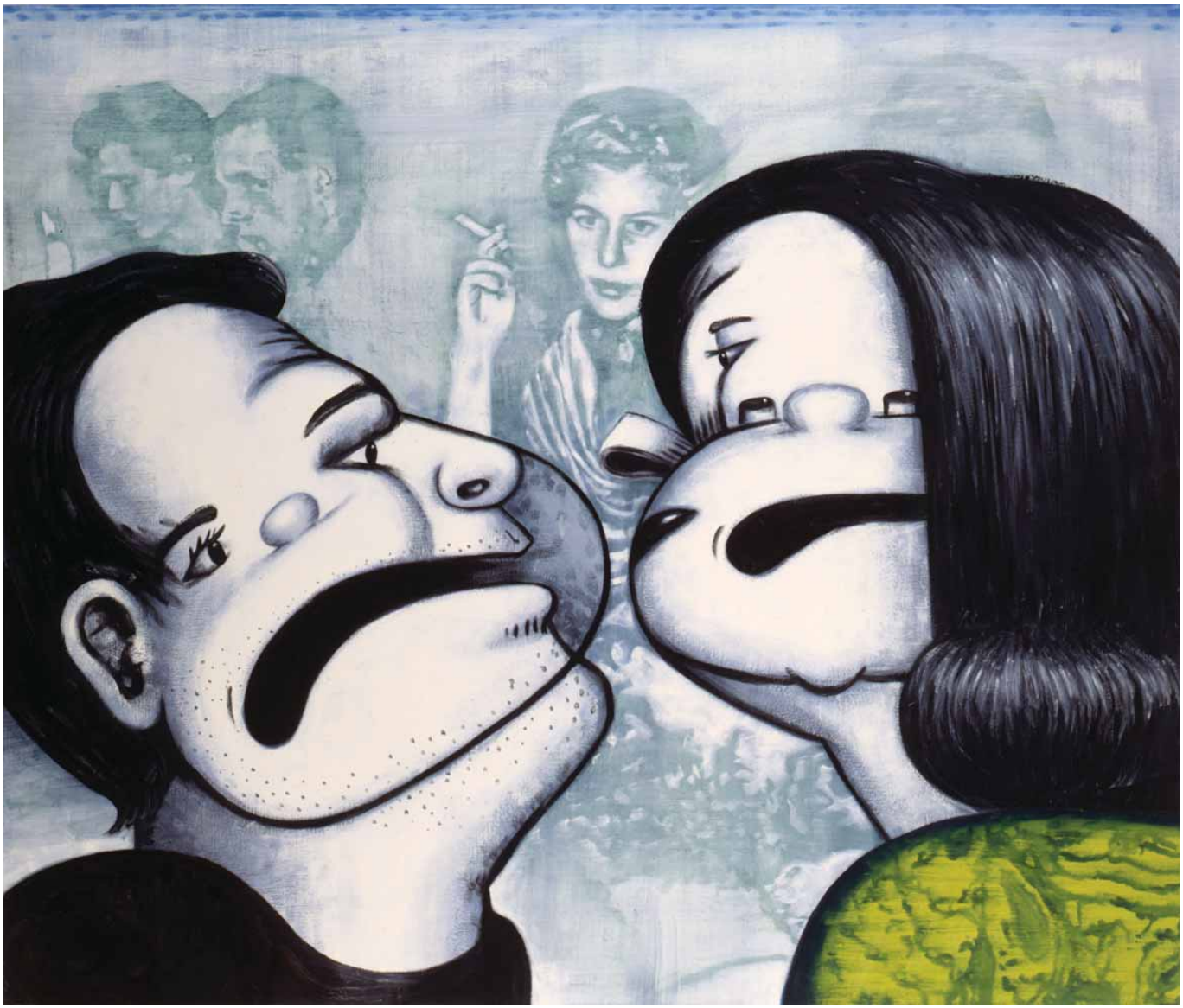


Where's Dad?, 1991. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Christmas 1962, 1991. Oil on canvas, 72 × 84 in.



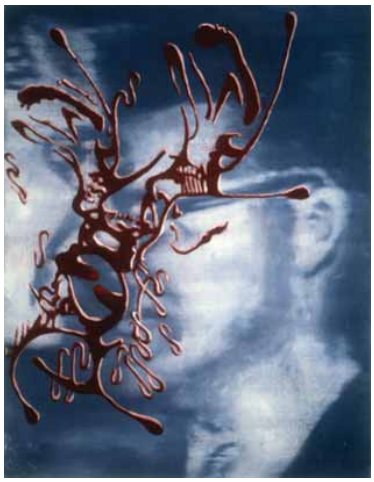
A Family Gathering II, 1990. Oil and collage on canvas, 70 × 60 in.



Close, 1994. Oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Barrier, 1993. Oil on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

Gifts, 1993. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

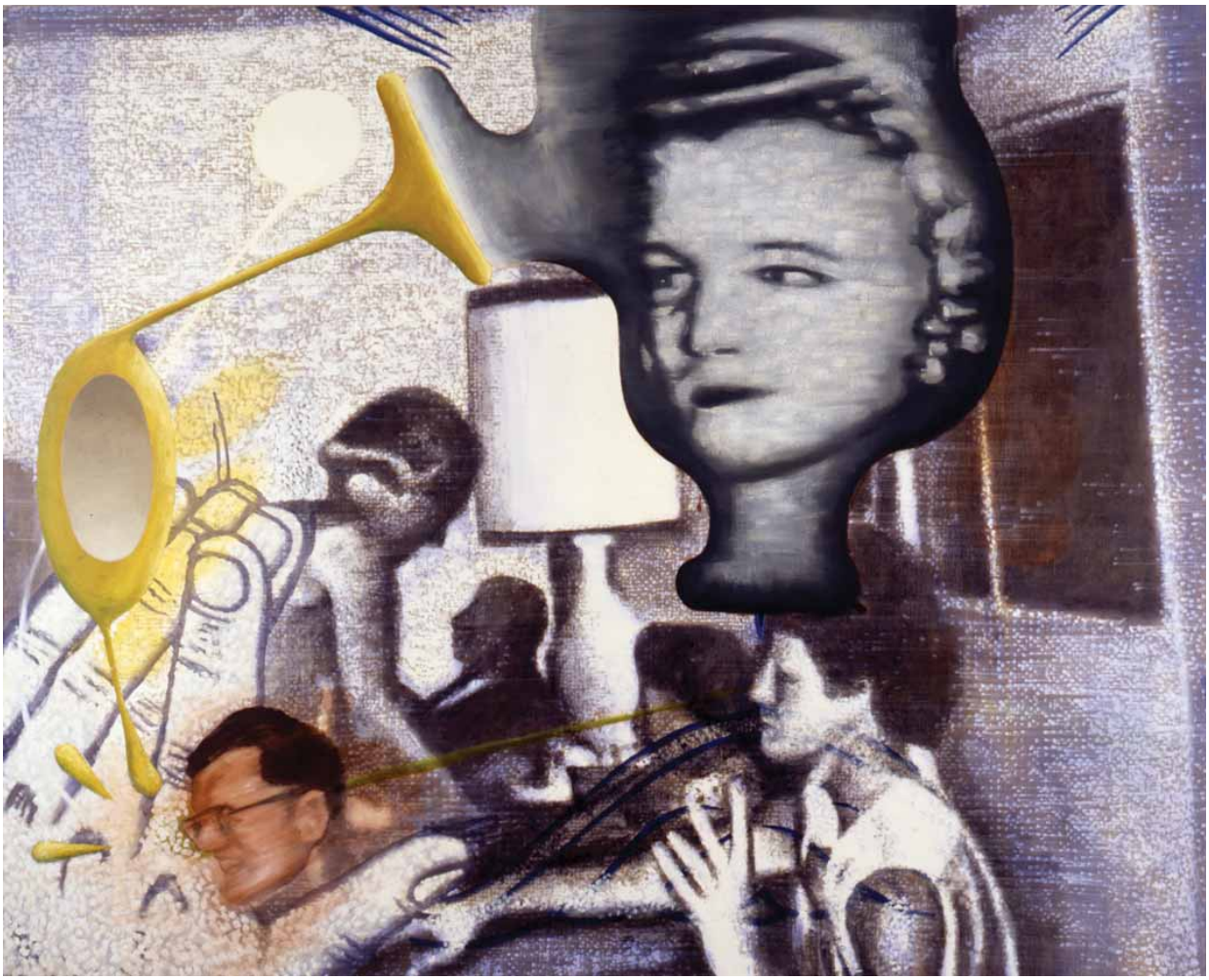


First Supper, 1992. Oil on canvas, 72 × 82 in.

Men, 1993. Oil on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

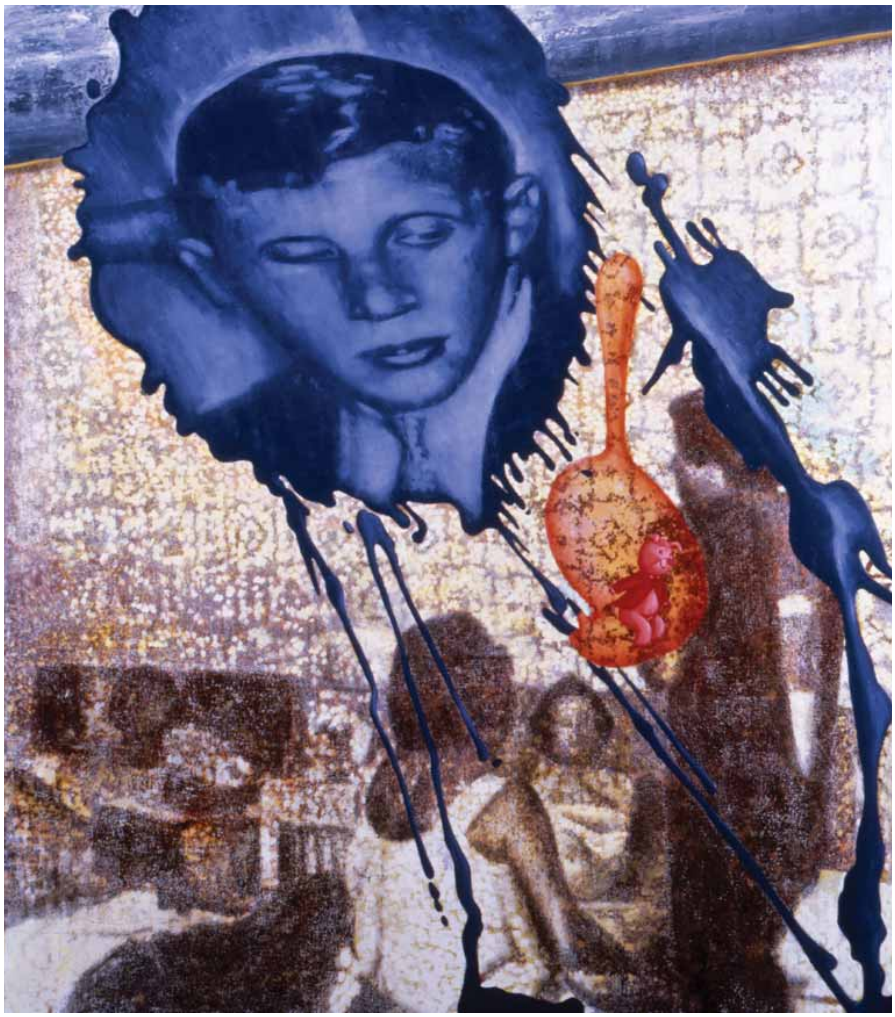
My Mother Speaks to Her New Brother-in-Law, 1993. Oil on canvas, 84 × 72 in.

Guests, 1992. Oil on canvas, 48 × 60 in.



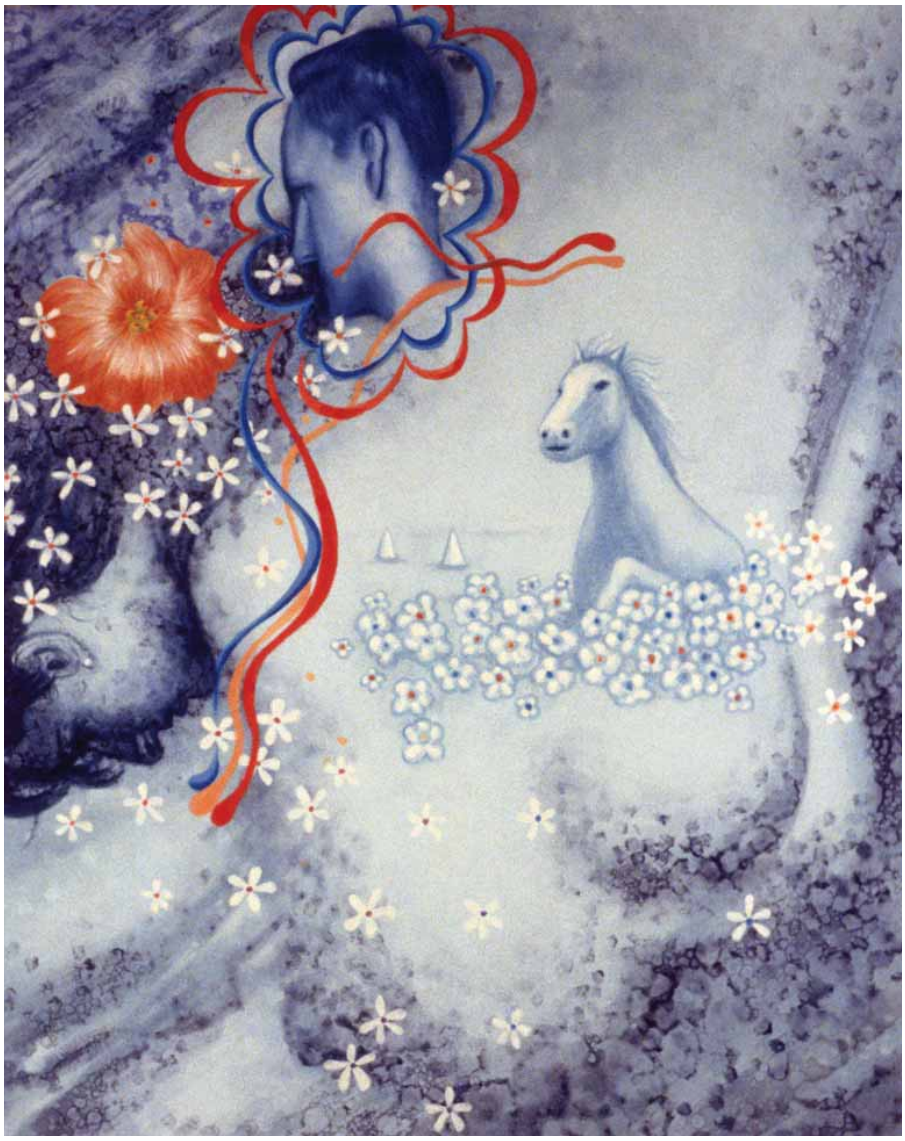
Cocktails, 1991. Oil on canvas, 78 × 98 in.

Drinker, 1991. Oil on canvas, 96 × 76 in.



Your Sponge, 1992. Oil on canvas, 82 × 72 in.

Here They Come!, 1993. Oil on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

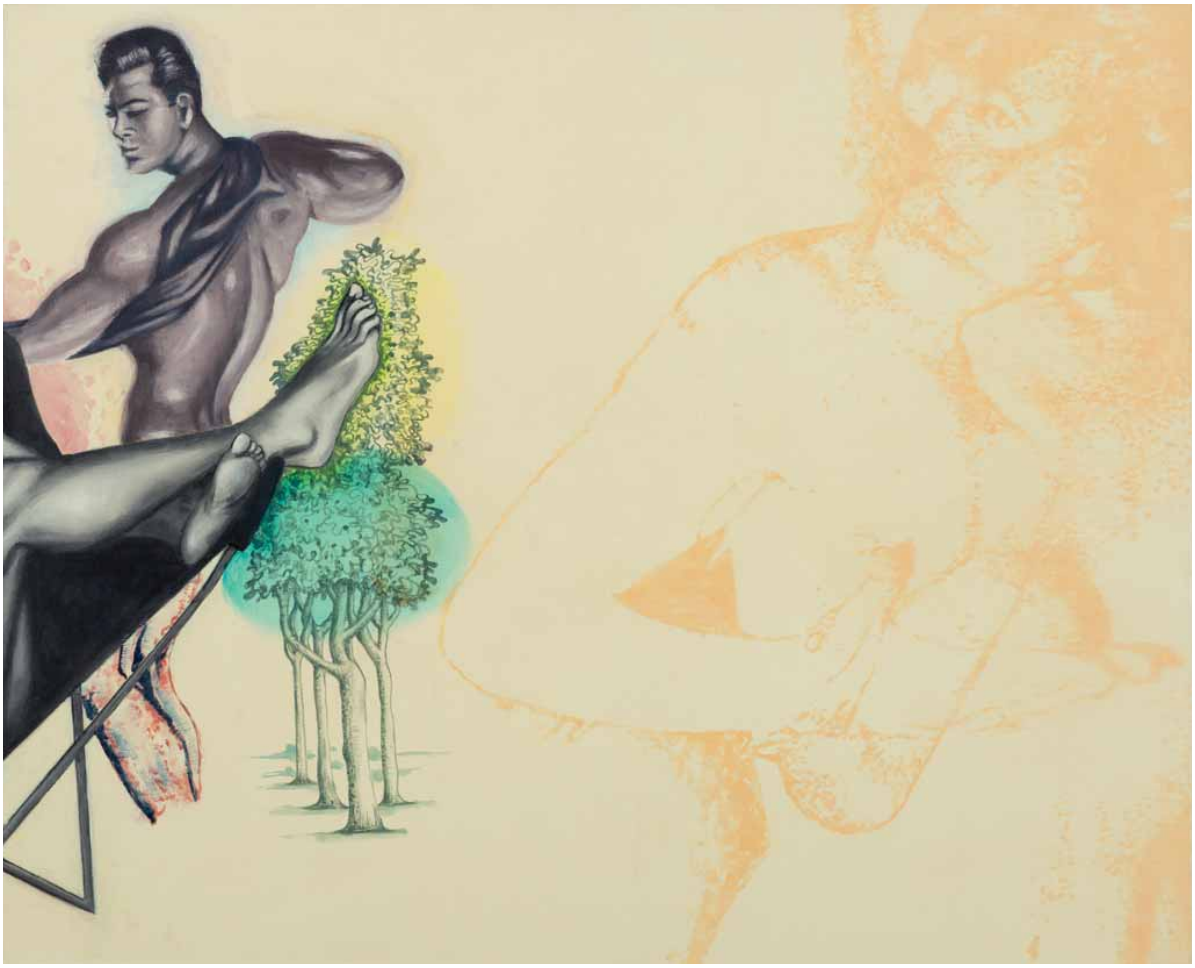


Pony Love, 1996. Oil on canvas, 60 × 48 in.

School Days, 1994. Oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in.

Some Sort of Future, 1994. Oil on canvas, 50 × 40 in.

Modern Home, 1995. Oil on canvas, 40 × 50 in.



Toweling Off, 1998. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Arizona, 1997. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Bathers, 1996. Oil on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Elysian Park, 2000. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Chandelier, 1996. Oil on canvas, 60 × 48 in.

Pile-Up Guy, 1998. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

On the Bed, 1999. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Sierra Love Team, 1997. Oil on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Phone Boy, 1995. Oil on canvas, 80 × 64 in.

Friends, 1998. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Thinking of You, 1999. Oil on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

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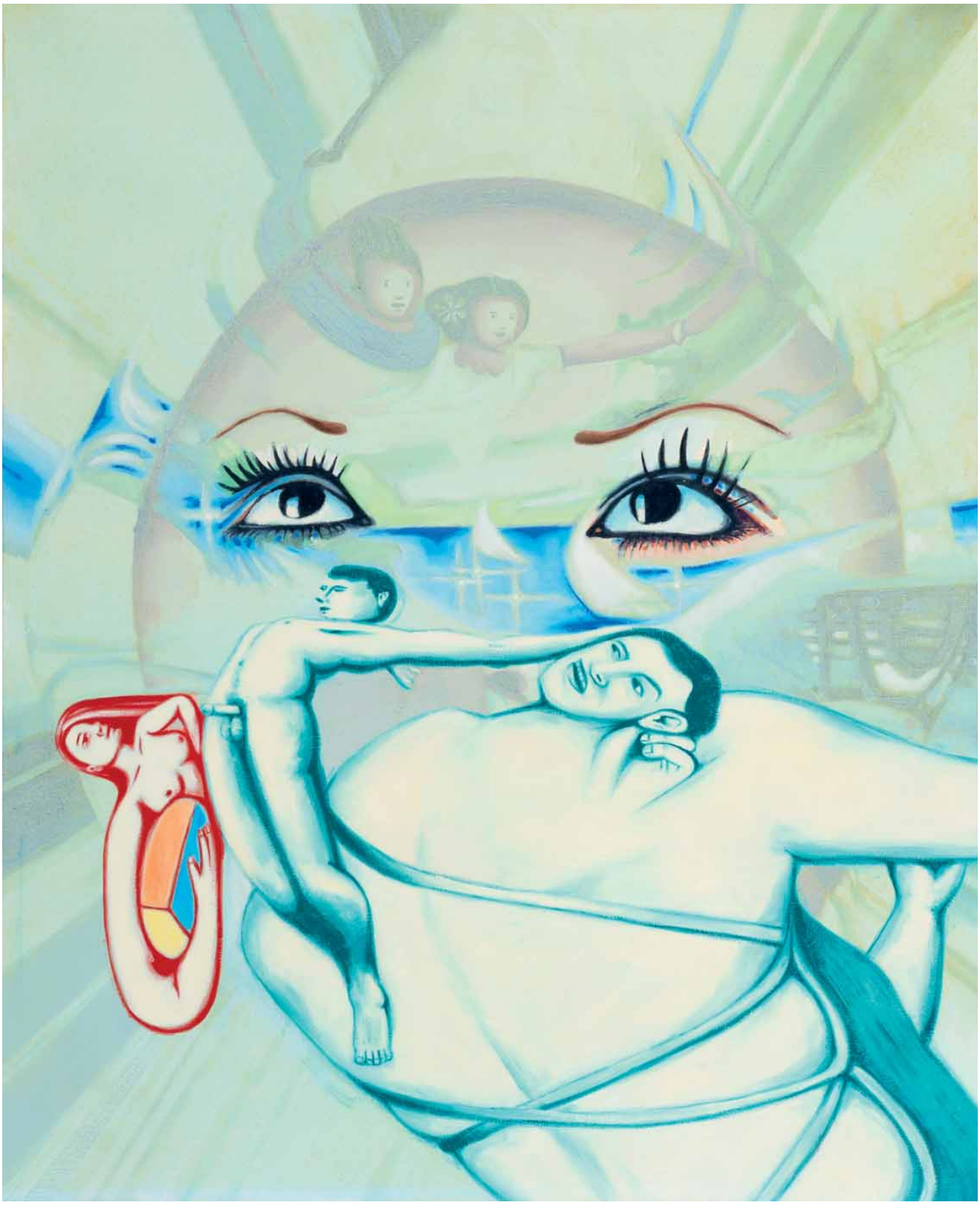
Bikers, 2000. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Tangle, 1999. Oil on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Page 6, 2001. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 38 in.



Remembering the Beach, 1999. Oil on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Roadside in Italy, 1998. Oil on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Gymnast, 2001. Oil on canvas, 84 × 96 in.

Two Kitties, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Kitties on a Wall, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

At the Wall, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Horsey Love, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Winter Tears, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Underpass, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 26 in.

Caregiver, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

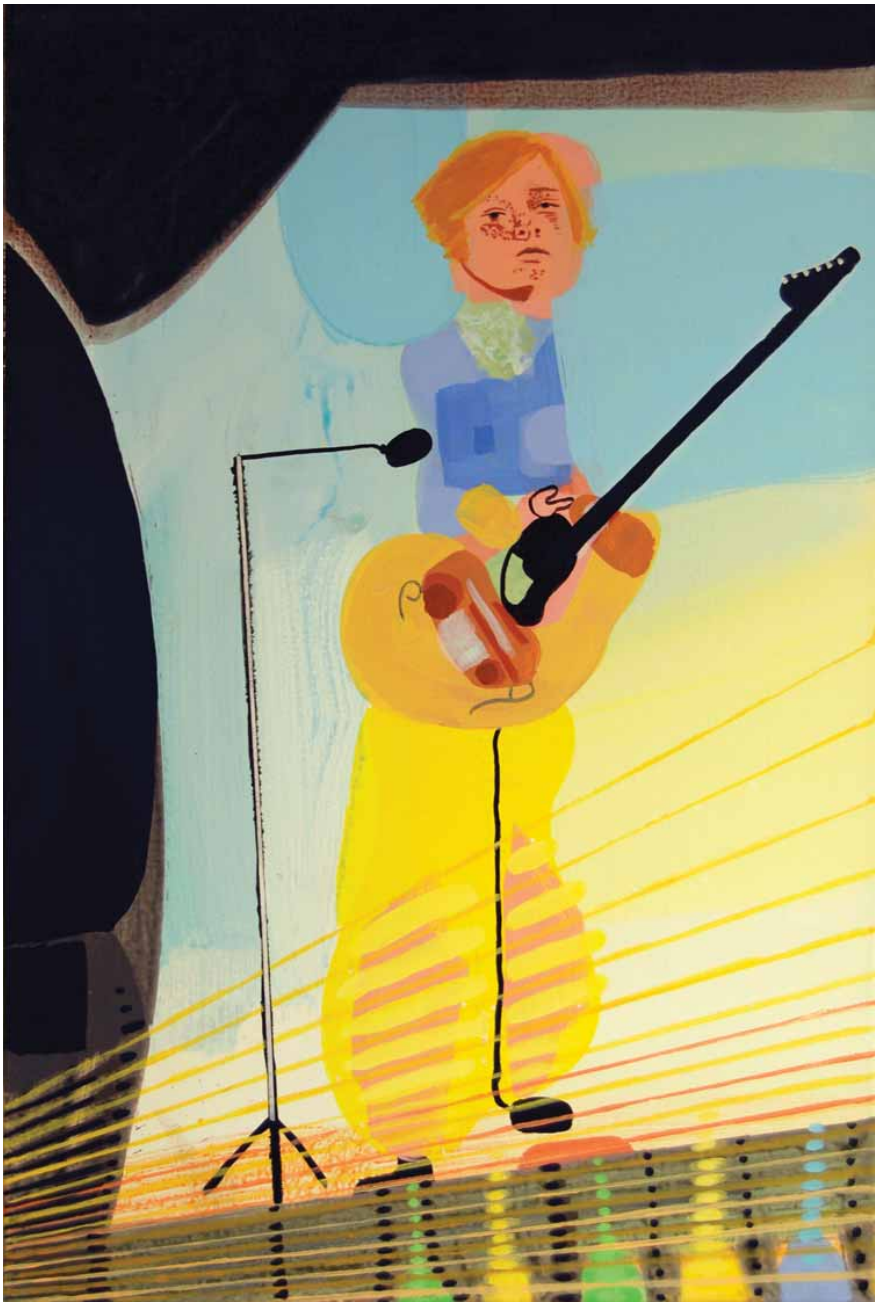
Sno Kids, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Thanks!, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Sno Boy, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Wave Watcher, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 86 × 72 in.

RV Park, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.



Guitarist, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 24 in.

Marshall, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Proud Owner, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 108 in.

Pet Dog, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Ike's Pond, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 24 × 30 in.

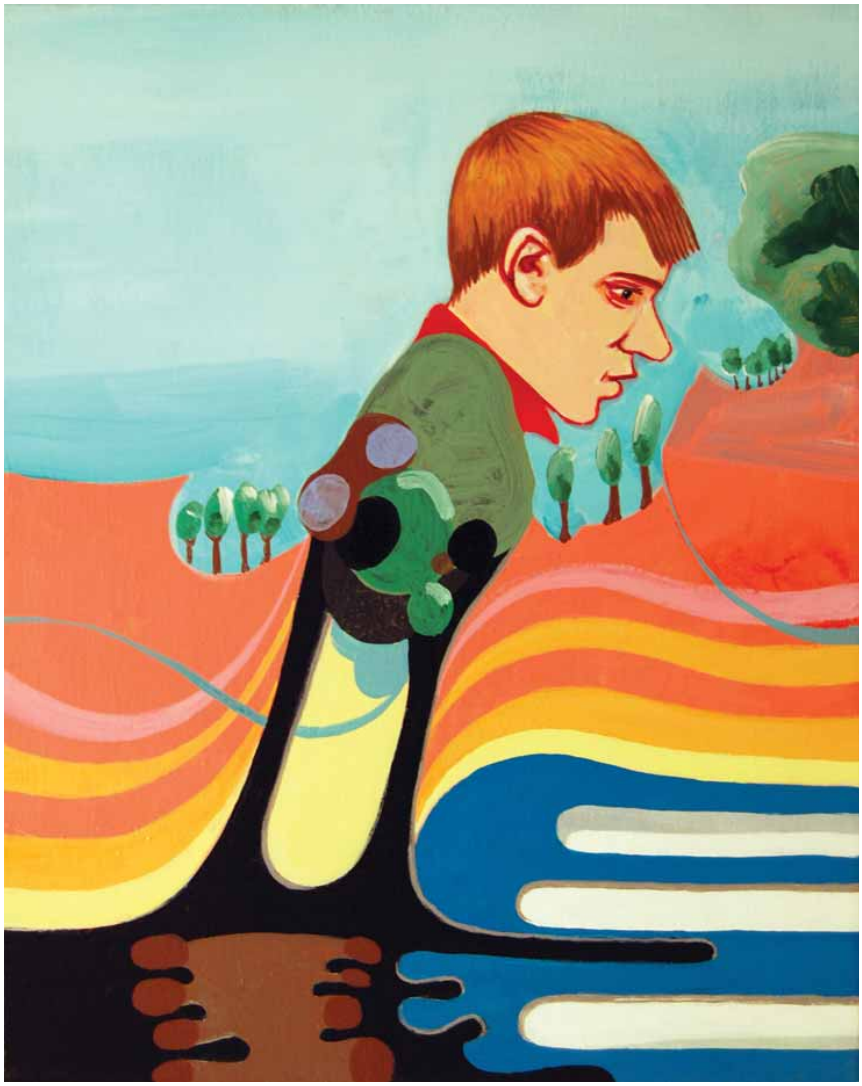
Ike's Friends, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Ike's Woods, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 84 in.

Ike Paints from Life, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Black and White, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

City Birds, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 22 in.



Alone, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Country Bear, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Clown Girl, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Swimmer, 2001. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Treading Water, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

Tiger, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Man with a Tiger, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 52 in.

Roman Nocturne, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 52 in.

Interspecies Embrace, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 52 in.

Her Shadow, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Back Yard, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

Chocolate Kiss, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 40 in.

Horse and Rider, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

They Like Our Numbers, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.


They
like our
numbers

Puppies, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Reflection, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 40 in.

Acteon, 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

Ass Pups, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 84 in.

Pounder, 2007. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Proud Sculptor, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

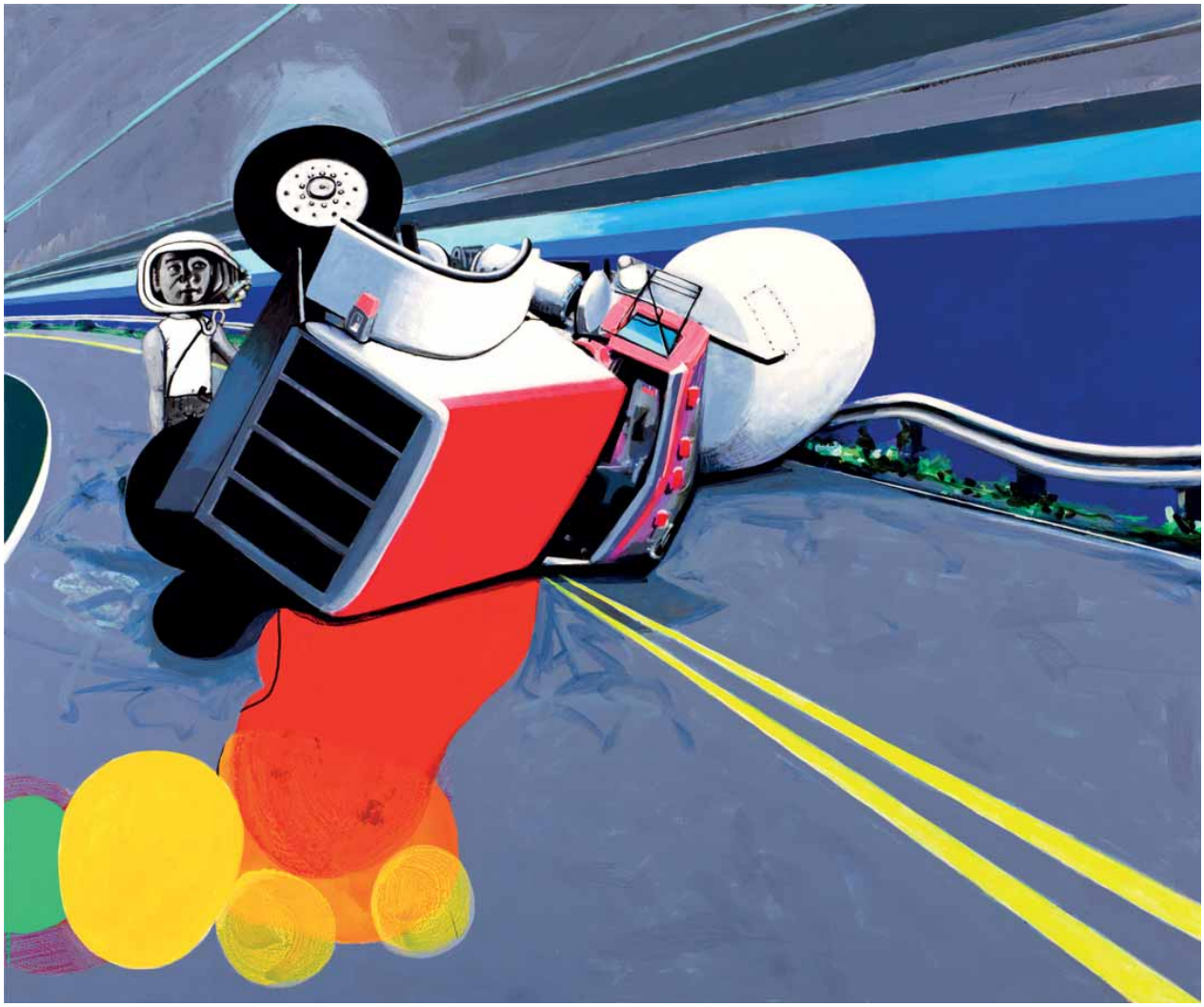
Bear Boy, 2006. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Giving Pleasure, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Under the Table, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

At the Door, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.


26



Cement Truck, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Scratcher, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Two Mugs, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Silvercup, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Changing Sneakers, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

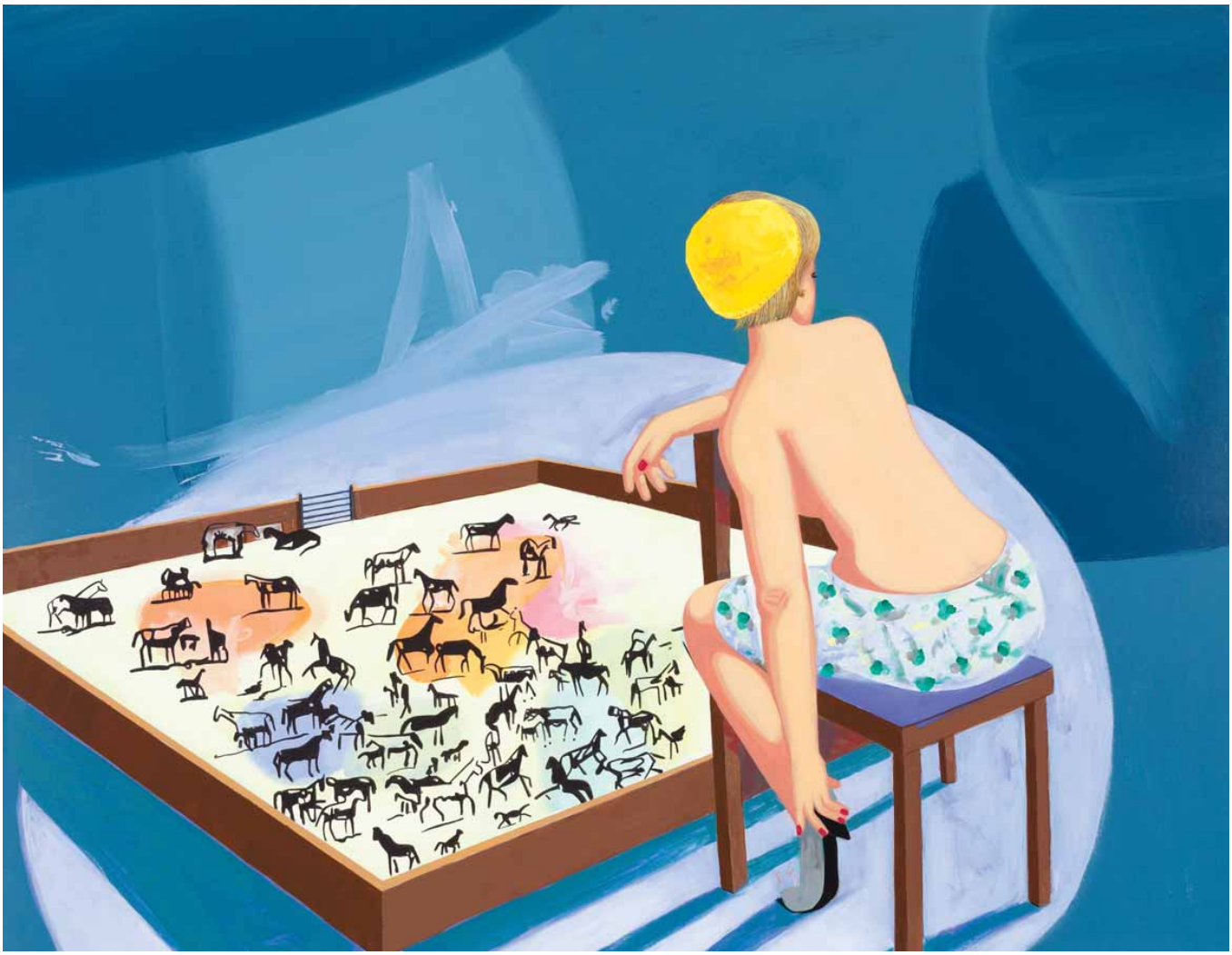
Pink Couch, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Hoodies, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Dirty Hands, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Scout's Break, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Space Man, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 42 × 42 in.



Paddock, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

The Birds, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Party Girl, 2001. Oil on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Horsey Love, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Keys, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Tara, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

On the Couch, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

Xanax, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 88 in.

Posing, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Shutterbugs, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Sidewalk, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Shooter, 2014. Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 52 in.

Woodsman, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 80 × 96 in.

Crossing, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

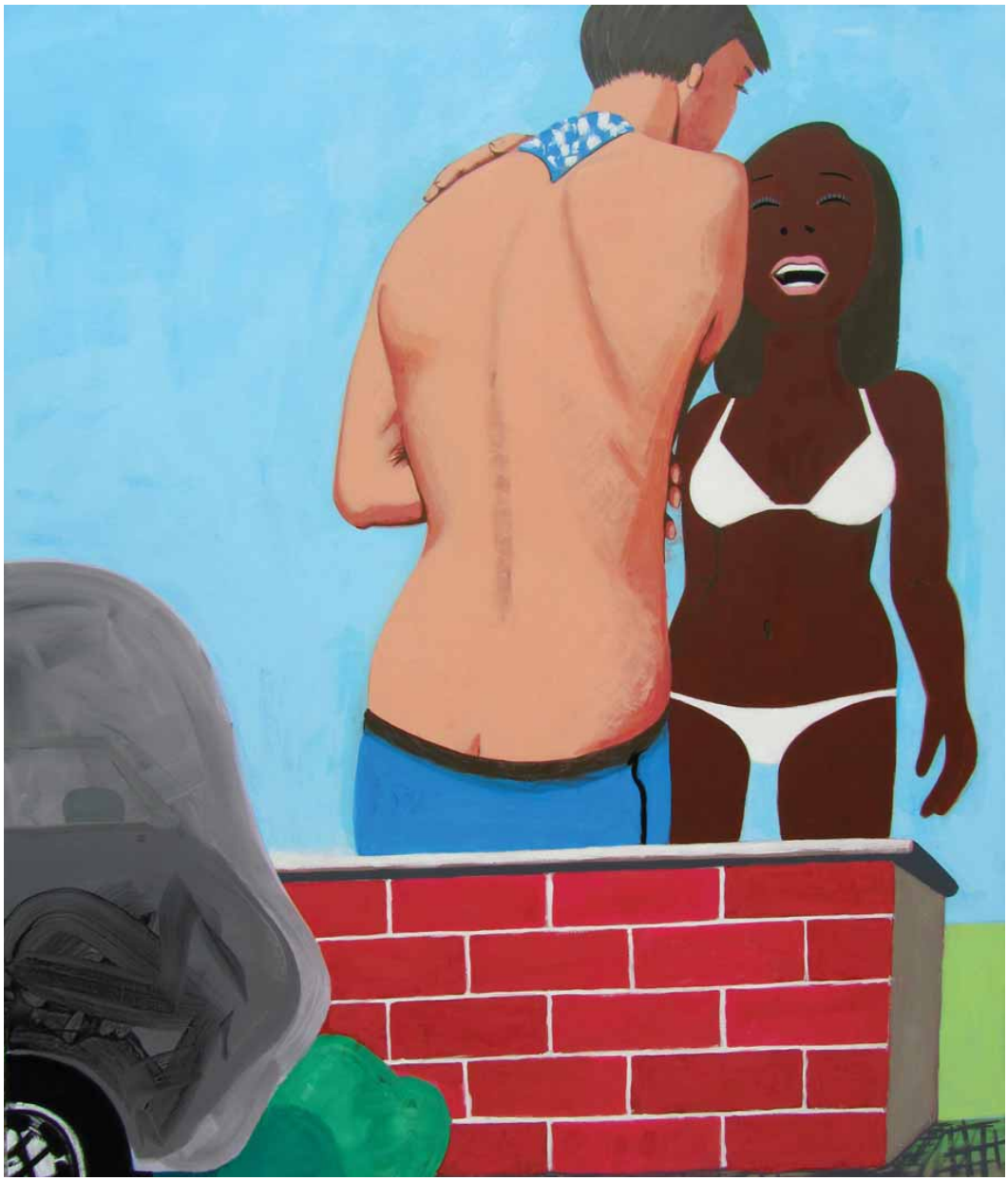
Gathering Mud, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Headquarters, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

Plumbing Bill, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Recharge, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 80 × 96 in.

Shopping, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 86 × 72 in.



Swimmers, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

The Morning After, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.

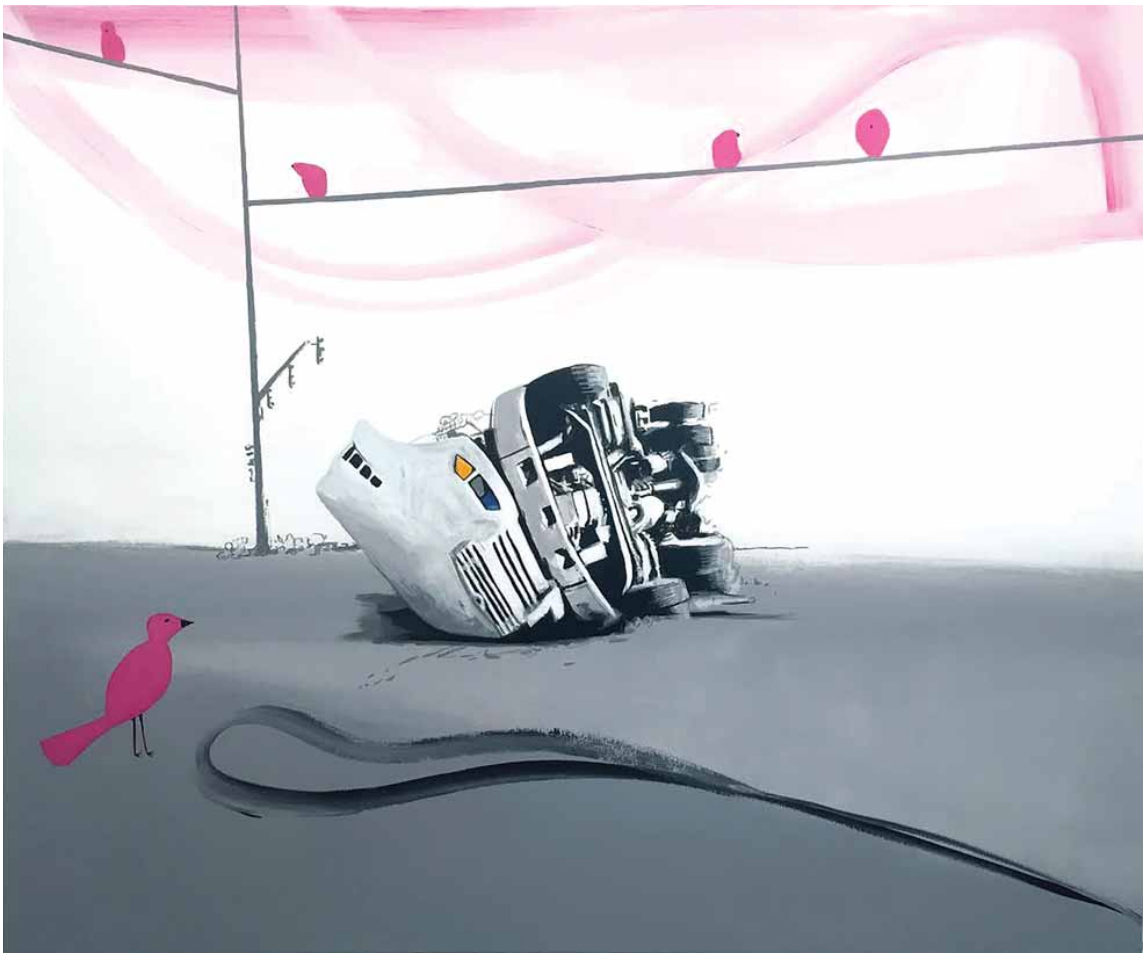
Witness, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Procession, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 50 × 60 in.

Admirers, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 30 × 22 in.

Deplaning, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Into the Tree, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 72 in.



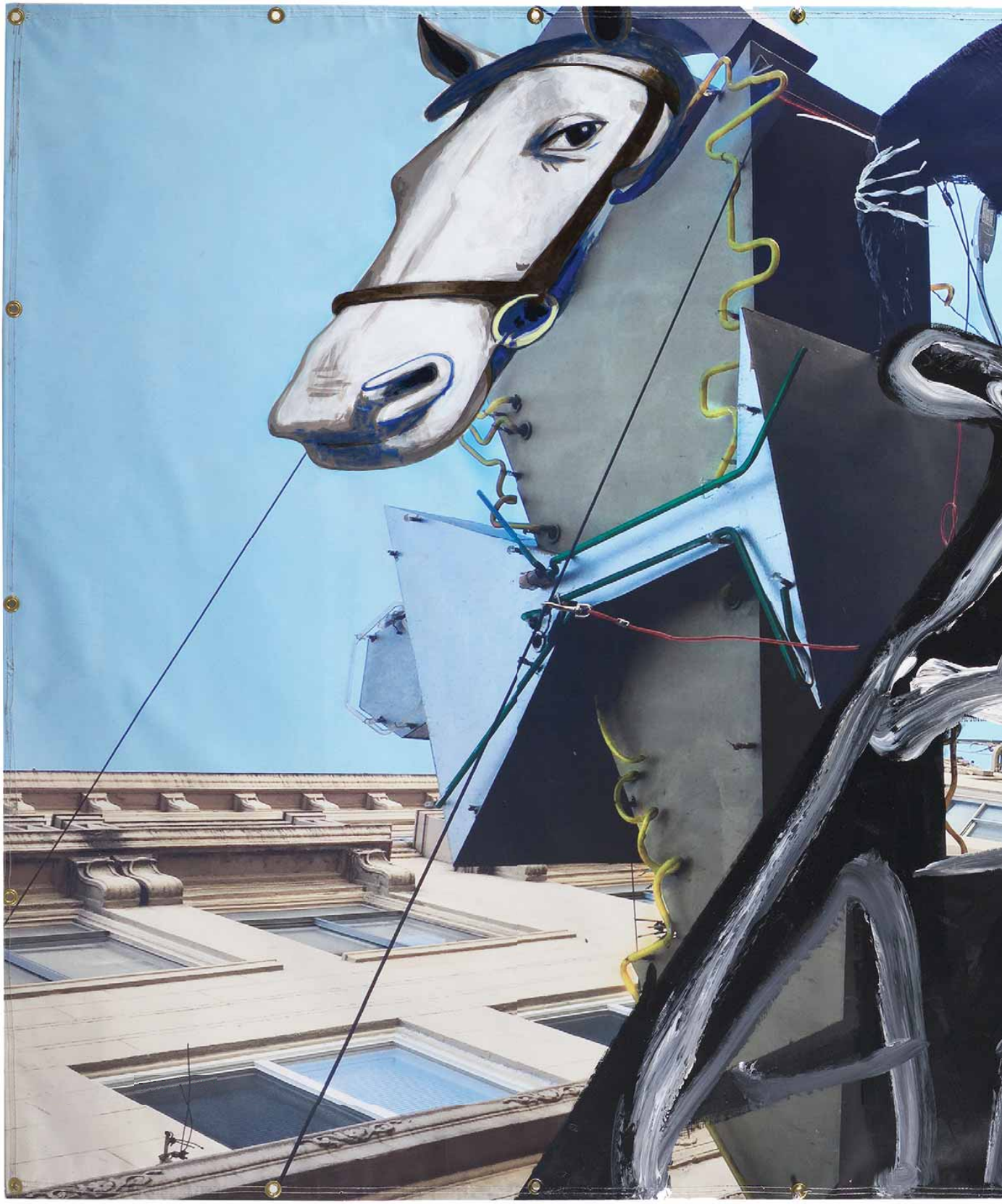
Overturned, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 44 × 54 in.

Corner Mart, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 22 × 30 in.

Poodle 2, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 54 × 44 in.

Measuring Treads, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 80 × 60 in.

Bagged, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 80 × 60 in.



Cocktail Horse, 2018.
Acrylic on printed vinyl, 60 × 70 in.

Muddy Street, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 80 × 60 in.

Pooch, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 80 × 60 in.

Lecture, 2018. Acrylic on printed vinyl, 80 × 60 in.

David Humphrey, c. 2017

Sculpture

Strider, 1995. Celluclay and glazed ceramic, 10 × 7 × 10 in.

Kitties, 1995. Celluclay and glazed ceramic, 9 × 9 × 7 in.

Hunter and Quarry, 1996. Celluclay and glazed ceramic, 20 × 10 × 10 in.

Squat, 2017. Acrylic on plaster, 32 × 30 × 20 in.

Couple, 2016. Plaster, paint, and wood, 24 × 17 × 5 in.

Personage #2, 2016. Plaster, paint, and wood, 27 1/4 × 15 × 11 1/2 in.

Campers, 2016. Mixed media, 48 × 29 × 48 in.

Puppies, 2016. Mixed media, 50 × 29 × 48 in.

Shape Hutch, 2014. Installation views. Mixed media, 84 × 70 × 50 in.

Totem, 2003. Mixed media, 20 × 6 × 7 in.

Earring Tree, 2000. Bronze, 15 × 9 × 8 in.

Lemon Compote, 2006. Mixed media, 120 × 60 × 60 in.

Puppy Bunk Bed, 2006. Mixed media, 41 × 46 × 32 in.

Personage, 2017. Mixed media, 90 × 36 × 36 in.

Movable Wave Hutch, 2006. Mixed media, 72 × 60 × 60 in.

Sentinel Poodles, 2003. Mixed media, 84 × 72 × 36 in.

David Humphrey's studio
with works in progress,
c. 2006

Words in the Studio: Mess in Time

David Humphrey

In a Brooklyn Rail roundtable discussion of Philip Guston's sixties paintings, I said, "I love the determined contingency of all of them, as though each decision was a response to the question 'what if?'" And then later, "Guston articulates and celebrates incipience, the potential for a thing to come into being." As a consequence of those remarks, Joan Waltemath asked me to elaborate on what I meant by contingency.

I write this first sentence the morning after the angry oligarch-clown captured our US presidency. The contingency of elections folds into history to produce a vertiginous and imprisoning nausea. Contingency is infinitely scalable and this one is sized to hurt and diminish. The "what if" that can be played out on the surface of a canvas looks like a confession of weakness in the face of hard power.

Contingency, for artists, is highlighted by our feeble efforts to overcome it—by the making of coherent forms, solid structures, and the control of materials. Substance resists and has a signifying life of its own while images unleash associations in many directions. We make beautiful messes with materials chosen and sometimes understood but never entirely mastered. Failure dramatizes both the possibilities we imagined and the energetic desire to make them happen. Nietzsche writes about the semi-arbitrary and self-defining power of the artist to say, "thus I willed It." We go forward powered by an illusion of executive command that helps us produce objects that patiently wait for their encounter with contingency.

Duchamp's tradition of the readymade provides options for artists to become sophisticated consumers; "thus I choose it." Artists and shoppers, like voters, make decisions with a momentary sense of agency that will have consequences impossible for them to anticipate. Art's weakness has been used as a form of strategic vulnerability (the wolf in sheep's clothing), as a twisted criticality (the

commodity that is not one), and as a way to cope with or resist a world ordered in disagreeable ways. The artwork's weakness echoes our personal relation to geopolitical and environmental forces we are persistently urged by oligarch clowns to ignore.

But contingency doesn't mean random; events occur according to affordances in the state of affairs. The space of possibility is bounded by the impossible on one side and tyrannical necessity on the other. Coherence, or organized form, would seem to limit the play of contingency if you want to give it life within a static artwork like a painting. Deciding to make a mark here and not there instantly and finally transforms the potential into the actual. I think of Paul Cézanne as an artist who builds his observation-based images by means of aggregated approximations. His information unit, the mark, is placed one by one in relation to others according to a sequence of disciplined guesses about the location of this branch overlapping another or the yellow highlight on a piece of foliage hovering beside a similarly shaped yellow patch of distant ground. The parts of a Cézanne painting, especially in his landscapes, make a coherent order according to how you look at them. Branches and leaves seem to hang together in a certain constellation, but when you return to the same spot after looking at other parts of the picture, a different gestalt displaces the first one. The experience of looking at his work is one of mentally making and remaking an order that is never stable. His rendering of the world embodies a vibrating contingency of perceived sense.

But is deep contingency a threat to meaning and what we consider significant? If any decision can be reconsidered in a different context, then why does this or that one matter? Rules look absurd and confidence starts to erode. Richard Rorty believes that there is positive value to acknowledging the historic contingency of our values. He thinks convictions and language itself are best seen as contingent. He believes that it is important to continuously redescribe the context of our assumptions and the interests they might serve. Perspectives are tools, and, for Rorty, questioning their purpose moves us in the direction of greater freedom.

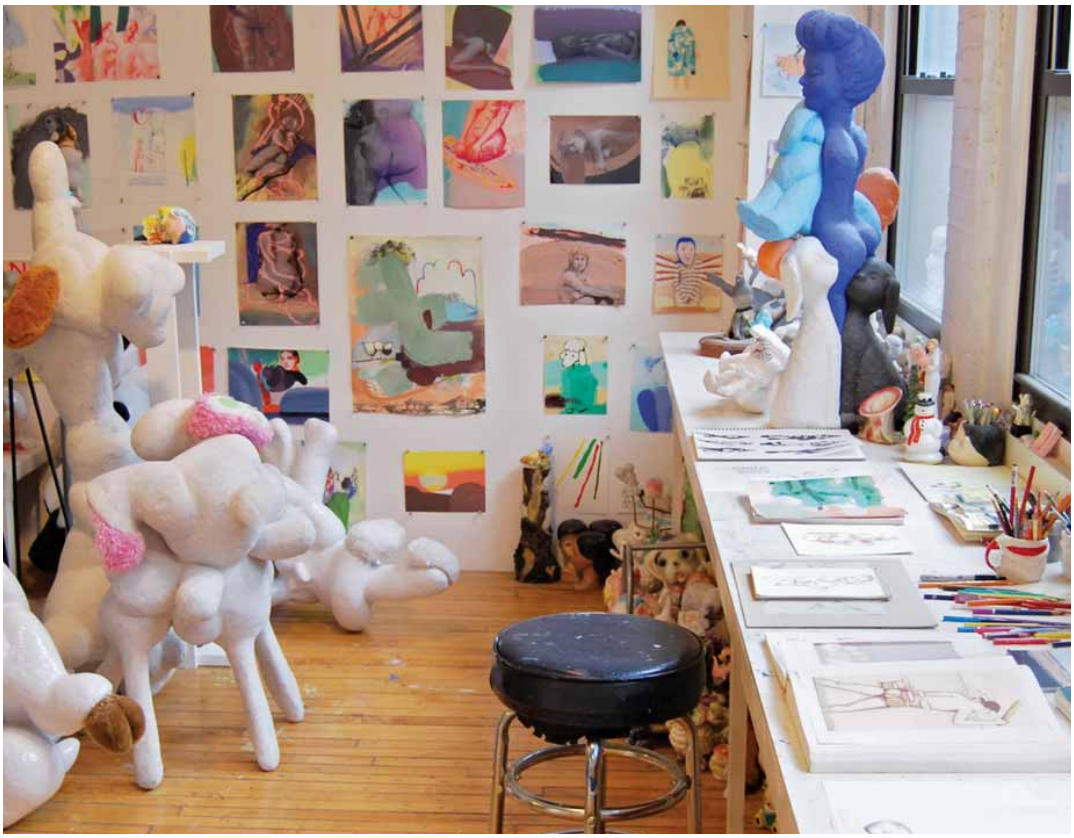
How does this play out in a painting studio? I try to create conditions that stimulate the emergence of new metaphors (hopefully serving Rorty's liberal cosmopolitan ideal) by making a habitat where source images, works on paper, and paintings interact with each other productively and unexpectedly. I find ways (through drawing, projections, software tools, and occasional flights of imagination) for different images to breed or hybridize within the studio's messy turbulence. Thousands of branching decisions about shape, color, position, or content tangle

into and around each artwork. I will test possibilities by jamming this image into another or making a new work isolating the color or some other feature of a painting in progress. The challenge is to stay one step ahead of grooved habits. Arresting the development of a work sooner than planned or going too far can be useful. Breaking and repairing, erasing and vandalizing, remembering and anticipating are operations that can be folded into the process. I like the idea that individual works hang together in my studio array like Cézanne's marks describing a landscape. Each work counts as an approximation that aggregates with the others into a provisional picture of layered consciousness.

A painting in the studio can easily be altered for any reason by the artist. But it is instantly transformed upon arrival at the exhibition space into something fixed, more or less forever, with a signature. Artworks inhabit a strange stasis irradiated by passing events. The finished work promises to stay still while we and the world change around it. It also promises to make new kinds of sense at each historic turn. So perhaps the movement from studio to exhibition is not so much a transformation as a shift of context and time frame.

I had an exhibition in London at the Keith Talent gallery in 2007. The dealers were inspired risk-takers but also, it turns out, law-breakers. My work from the exhibition fell into a black hole after they were convicted of art-related crimes. Last year my New York dealer got an email from a person who rescued a couple of the least damaged paintings from a derelict warehouse slated for renovation. He loved them and took them home for restoration, exercising his version of a finders-keepers rule. I'm still trying to figure out the best way to handle the situation. The rest of my show, presumably, found its way to a dumpster. Contingency bore down to produce new futures for these paintings, probably like the future of most artworks over the vastness of time.

Mess is contingency's icon and narcissism's nightmare as it threatens the illusion of control. Making art is a way of making sense, but is also a way to untie the bonds of sense. It's a way to vivify possibilities and disorient the customary. Redescriptions and metaphors are provisionally formed and reformed in the flux of the studio before proceeding into the slowed-down turbulence of a horizonless future.



David Humphrey’s studio, 2007

A Conversation

David Humphrey with Jennifer Coates

fig. 45: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Untitled**, 2015. Mixed media on paper, 9 × 12 in.

JC: Around the time when we first met, I saw a lecture you gave about your work. It really made me like you, because you were wearing a shirt that said “Jackass Carnival,” and you talked about your work in a way that suggested that you, the artist, the person standing before us, commanding our attention, was not trustworthy, and possibly a jackass. You showed a painting of a classroom and you even said that teachers, too, should not be trusted. You made me think of the theater of painting, but also these warped social institutions that we take for granted. Can you talk about the lack of trustworthiness of the artist—does this inform the construction of narratives in your painting?

DH: I have a tick when I do a lecture, which is to always begin with an apology. The first problem is that we are looking at projected images instead of objects and that the audience is stuck in their seat, and having to listen to me talk. I’m an obstacle in the way of their independent relation to the artwork.

JC: I really liked it. I just want to insert, I enjoyed listening to you talk quite a lot.

DH: Maybe it’s also a rhetorical ploy to disable a critical response from the audience.

JC: You’re trying to manipulate them into liking you more? You could just say, “I know you’re not going to like me, it’s cool.”

DH: I admire artists who make provocations; they make it easy to hate them but end up being talked about a lot more than the reasonable ones. I believe in the artist as charlatan or trickster but don’t always work it up as a performance. The structure of the slide talk almost forces a narrative form onto the presentation; this comes before that, over and over. I usually sequence the images to elaborate thematic threads so my sentences accumulate into paragraphs. There is a loose chronology but the talk becomes a tangle of associations and a story based on how I navigate the images on the screen. Those classroom paintings you mentioned (I did a lot of them) were thinking about the way individuals get forged into groups by means of institutions and architecture. There’s something amusing about being the artist standing before an audience collectively looking at those classroom paintings; it highlights the authority position that I’ve been put into by whoever hired me to talk. I rather like assuming that position while finding a way to undermine it.

JC: That seems connected to the way that you make paintings. Not to say that your paintings are untrustworthy, but that there's a game or a puzzle about them. The narratives unfold in confusing ways, and maybe the way you talk about your paintings has something to do with the way you make them, in terms of imagery, or information undermining itself.

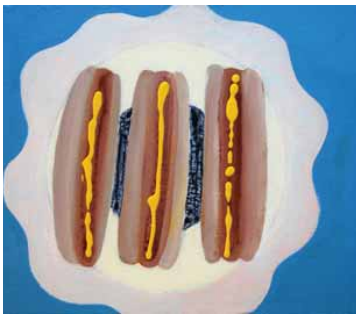


fig. 46: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Dogs**, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 14 × 18 in.

DH: The main goal, both in making and what I anticipate people will experience while looking at a painting, is that there should be an unfolding of possibilities. There's a puzzle structure to it, but no solution; it's that each crux, each question that arises when you think about the relationship of the imagery to the color or to the form, let's say, opens up another question that hopefully is generative, that produces something dynamically intersubjective between the work and whoever is looking at it. What happens in the studio is a kind of anticipation of that. I like to assume different subject positions or roles while making a work.

JC: There's no one story, there's no one interpretation, there's no one way to describe or establish meaning in it, and it's this heterogeneous shit show.

DH: The worst case is that it's just a lot of floating ambiguity. I have to put enough into it for the experience to be engaging or substantial, like the relationship between two people, or between a pet and its owner, or some other social tie. There has to be the right amount of thematic and formal flexibility for the work to adapt and thrive in unanticipated contexts.

JC: I remember another painting from that first lecture I saw of yours. I think it was called *Pee Girl*? Do you remember which painting I'm talking about?

DH: Yes, I do.

JC: Of course you would, because you made it. I just wanted to make sure it actually really existed. It seemed to me like a great, weird, feminist take on painting the female figure; I remember being really excited by this painting. There was something going on with the girl. Her pee seemed unruly.

DH: As the pee hit the ground it became a metaphor for painting, so that the spreading of the liquid was related to the means of representation, the paint itself. It analogically surrounded her. I guess I liked the idea of a portrait of the artist as a defiant young girl.

JC: Yes, that's what I loved. Here's this little girl, and the pee is empowering her. The pee is a tool. I was going to ask you to talk about pee and painting, and you already did.

DH: I'm always trying to find ways to metaphorize the medium. Whether it's the support, or the gooeyness, the liquidity of the paint, there are a lot of ways to do it. You do that yourself and you talk about it in a recent article you wrote.

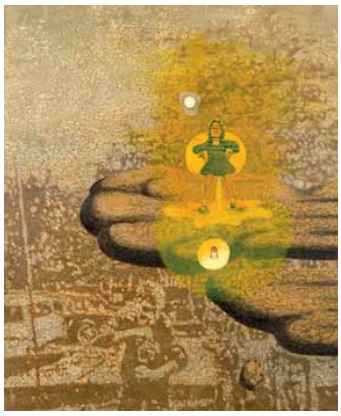


fig. 47: David Humphrey. **Pee Girl**, 1993. Oil on canvas, 72 × 60 in.

JC: Don't talk about me.

DH: I'm not allowed to talk about you?

JC: No.

DH: I never thought of paint as being the blood of a sacrificial victim. That was an important contribution you made.

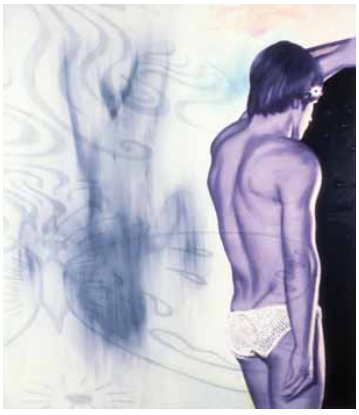


fig. 48: David Humphrey. **Eric**, 1997. Oil on canvas, 84 × 84 in.

JC: Well, thank you . . . but back to you. Another painting of yours I fell completely in love with was from 1997. Your website says 1998, but it's wrong, I can assure you. It's called *Eric*, where a dreamy, well-built man wearing crocheted underpants and a flower behind his ear, stares off into a cosmic void; suspended in a blur behind him is a naked woman, upside down. She's superimposed with swirls, a butterfly, and a circle with radial lines surrounding it. I understand these to be part of the Humphrey sex-and-desire lexicon. The butterfly is the vagina, and the circle with the radial lines is the butt hole? The transcendent butt hole, the anus of the painting, as we like to say? The thing I loved the most about this painting is that its address seems sexually multivalent. Can you talk a little bit about how and why you have worked with different sexual perspectives in your paintings?

fig. 49: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Lisa**, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 14 × 18 in.

DH: At the time, I was looking at a lot of source material that I thought had solicitations built into its picture rhetorics. I was looking at beefcake and cheesecake magazines, and trying to weave them together in an open-ended reflection on desire, and also the history of pictures that had designs on people's desires; desiring, and possibly transforming our desire. I looked at a lot of pictures that didn't work on me the way they were supposed to, but I was interested in their mechanisms—physique magazines, workout magazines, period gay imagery that somehow navigated its way through forbidden longings. I loved the way these magazines passed themselves off as one sort of thing, but were not so secretly appealing to something else. That particular source image for Eric was of a hunky guy looking out the window, or staring off into space, so you had the sense he was desiring something you couldn't see, except that he's wearing fishnet underwear, so you could see his ass.

fig. 50: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Untitled**, 2015. Mixed media on paper, 9 × 12 in.

JC: You could desire him.

DH: Right. I thought that would be a great jump-off point, to fill in some other inchoate desires that were springing up behind him. He's looking off into space, but in the air behind him is this slightly immaterial woman upside down, and I think she was hanging from a trapeze. She was in a state of disoriented ecstasy, but also half conjured, not as conjured as he was. Then weirdly, you can't see it in the jpeg, the flower tucked behind his ear is painted with an emphatic, fully colored, thick application that I thought made it more real than anything else in the painting, as though it could fall out of the picture into our space.

JC: I see. The displaced sexual organ.

DH: Yes.

JC: I look at this painting and I just can't tell whether the guy is looking into the void and thinking about this woman that's far away, or is she trying to seduce him, and she can't get him, because his attention is elsewhere, outside of the heterosexual romance structure? I love not knowing. I love being invited in to the multivalent thing, to feel equally at home with het-

erosexual and homosexual desire in one image.

DH: I would like to make paintings that go beyond anything I might've anticipated or consciously put in them. I want them to be an adventure. Whatever my particular desires are, whatever the desires that were nested in the images, they open up a field of possibilities in anticipation of someone else interpreting them.

JC: I love to interpret your paintings, as you know. Often I come to your studio and I think I'm going to learn something about you by decoding the narratives, and like an invasive Freudian dream analyst, I come in and I think, "I'm going to figure this out. Finally, I'm going to learn something about who you are."

DH: Maybe you affected the development of my work, in that I need to always be one step ahead of you.

JC: You do. When I first attended that lecture back in the day, I had an image in my head of a shuffling deck of cards, with the front card always moving to the back, and that I would never really know you.

fig. 51: Unknown Artist. **David Humphrey's Grandmother's Zebra Painitng**.

DH: Wow, I succeeded, maybe.

JC: You did! You won! So anyway, how do you feel about zebras? I noticed you have a handful of zebra paintings, and I know you've painted a lot of animals, and some of them are like paintings in themselves, like zebras. Is that what drew you to them, or is it something else?

DH: Partly; the zebra is kind of a walking painting, ingeniously artificed in its patterning. It has a problematic relationship to the horse. It's like a customized horse. They're more feral than horses and not so easily trained. My grandmother owned a painting of a zebra, and it was one of the cheesiest, most sentimental paintings I'd ever seen. Everyone in my family loathed it.

JC: I'm familiar with it.

fig. 52: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Cheetos**, 2015.
Acrylic on canvas, 10 × 10 in.

DH: It had these eyelashes that were heavily made up, and I thought, “What does this zebra mean to my grandmother?” I don’t think she ever reflected on it, she was not a very reflective person, but something about it drew her, and I guess I was drawn to the mystery of what drew her.

JC: Maybe it’s like the zebra is a fancy, bejeweled, made-up horse. It’s like an extra-special horse.

DH: Yes, it is extra-special, and it’s also—

JC: Exotic.

DH: Is it a black horse with white stripes, or is it a white horse with black stripes? I think it’s a black horse with white stripes. I remember Stephen Jay Gould describing something that happens to the embryo in which a section of the pigmenting gets turned off, so, as the fetal zebra grows the stripes unfurl.

JC: It has something to do with Turing instabilities, but don’t ask me to talk about this more, because I can’t remember, but it’s true that the patterns on animals are some kind of programmable, mathematical formula that Alan Turing figured out, but I’m not smart enough to understand it. Reaction diffusion equations. Discuss.

fig. 53: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **On the Couch**, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 24 × 30 in.

DH: Well, let’s put that in a footnote to this interview.

JC: I do wonder about you and the animals. You’ve depicted cats, puppies, tigers, goats, horses. Do you identify with one animal over another? Which animal do you think is most you and which animal is most me?

DH: Cats came into my work as a consequence of meeting you! I painted them as a love letter to you, because I knew that you had very intense feelings about cats.

JC: I do.

DH: Also, I liked their vernacular greeting card side. There's something about their cuteness—

JC: Their big moist eyes?

DH: Yes, and their wide-open sense of awareness without comprehension.

JC: Like in your paintings of twin cats—they're seeing some kind of disaster that we can't see, or they're unaware of a disaster that's about to befall them; they're just not cogent.

DH: They stand for us in some ways. If I was to imagine myself as another species, it's always a dog. Just a stupid, needy, hungry dog that doesn't quite understand what it wants, but seems to want with all kinds of slobbering obviousness.

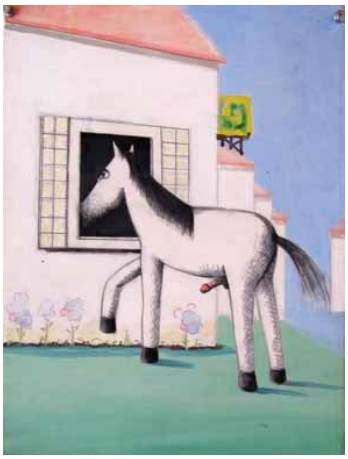


fig. 54: David Humphrey. **Snooping Horse**, 2007. Acrylic on paper, 12 × 9 in.

JC: So I'm the dumb cat, and you're the slobbering dog?

DH: Yes! We craft an idea of our humanity based on the way we understand our difference from animals. It's just as worthwhile, though, to think about our lack of difference with them. I think of the interspecies relationship as a kind of an allegory of interpersonal relations, the otherness of the animal is not unrelated to the otherness of the person you desire, or the person you are trying to understand.

JC: Or the person you're trying to get away from.

DH: Like you.

JC: Yes, like me . . . Anyways . . . another painting I wanted to talk about from yesteryear, from 2000, is called *Elysian Park*. It reminds me of some of your *Love Team* paintings that you described as computer dating, where you would take a woman from one source and a man from another, related to the beefcake and cheesecake stuff, but it was more about coupling, right?

DH: Yes, coupling, and the awkward binding that happens within coupling. *Elysian Park* grows from that, but is slightly more harmonized. It doesn't stage the awkwardness quite as dramatically as my *Love Team* paintings. The protagonist (or perhaps protagonists) seems to be swimming through herself while intersecting with the landscape.

JC: To me, it looked like it's two versions of one woman that you computer dated into a nonsensical kind of spasm, and it looks like she's a product of the landscape, or dissipating into it. She's breaking both herself and the sense of the picture apart, or maybe the picture is breaking her apart, and, to use a quote from W. J. T. Mitchell that you've often referred to, "What does this picture want?"

DH: Wow. It's going to take me a while to figure out what this picture wants.

JC: I mean, look at her hair going up like that. I don't even know, when does hair do that?

DH: Under conditions of extreme wind? There's only one face here, and her eyes are closed, so maybe she's drifting into an otherness within herself. As she falls into the landscape and partially fuses with it, she's also moving through it. She's swimming through the landscape with her dress as a fulcrum. Her dress has an architectural presence in this English-style park with paths, flowerbeds, and green fields. It plays out a pastoral fantasy of landscape in which consciousness and location intersect.

JC: To me it looks like this almost reclining, seated figure, with her dress falling off, is waiting to be ravaged, but the thing that could be doing the ravaging is completely unaware of her, and swimming instead—that's really odd.

DH: This painting took on a life of its own. There is a kind of propeller/windmill structure to it that revolves around an axis centered under her dress.

JC: Maybe both figures, or both versions of the same figure, want a dissolution of boundary, the dissolution of an ecstatic experience, a merging with

the landscape, and one part wants to swim through it as if it was liquid, and the other part wants to be penetrated by it.

DH: I think that's true of the character in the painting. But what does the painting itself want? Maybe it wants we spectators to join in, to surrender also, to lend our limbs to the turning dissolution.

JC: Good answer. Should we look at another painting of yours? Maybe a more recent one.

DH: Sure.

JC: Let's look at *Interspecies Embrace* from 2009. You painted this when we were at the American Academy in Rome, and you were doing a lot of these animal–human hybrid couples. Do you remember what that awful woman said about this painting and your work generally? That it's all about me anally violating you? Is that what she said? I can't remember the exact wording.

DH: I think that's what you heard her say. You were in the hallway and heard it through the closed door.

JC: Yeah, I was eavesdropping on this woman and her husband.

DH: She was loathsome, but that was a very funny moment. If this painting suggests that, it's not going to happen very soon, because the predator doesn't look like it has the means to penetrate anything.

JC: No, and I think the predator is not, it's not really a violation so much as it's—

DH: It's an embrace.

JC: It's like, "I'm coming with you! Take me with you! I want to be with you!"

DH: The tiger is almost smiling. Don't predators sometimes have a relation-

ship to the prey which is related to love, playful but, oops, also murderous. It's certainly true of our cat Timmy. I was looking at a lot of Roman imagery of big cats in relationship to deer when I painted this. The human that's being embraced has a pair of hooves instead of hands, and is on all fours, performing his own little interspecies action. I was interested in the way big cats were used by the Romans to allegorize power: the State in relation to its subjects or its enemies. But predation also provides nourishment. The big cat eats the prey, but in the case of this painting it's a little more like playacting.

JC: Well, it looks like, if you don't mind me saying, this half goat, half human looks resigned to his or her fate. Looks just sort of, "Okay, I know this is what you like to do, that's all right."

DH: He's almost rolling his eyes, definitely putting up with the game, which I think is being enjoyed a little bit more by the cat. It takes place on a stage, with a stylized sun sending its chiseled futuristic radiance down upon a sacred ritual of—

JC: Of nationalist empire?

DH: Of dominance.

JC: I guess I hadn't realized that you were talking about ancient Roman nationalism in this painting. I thought it was about us!

DH: No, I'm sorry, it really is about us.

JC: That's my selfish ways.

DH: If you want to breathe life into a subject, you have to layer it with your own psychological priorities.

JC: Yes, and that's what marriage is all about. That's what I've been trying to tell you all this time.

fig. 55: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Untitled Drawing**, 2015.
Mixed media on paper, 9 × 12 in.

fig. 56: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Untitled Drawing**, 2015.
Acrylic on canvas, 9 × 12 in.

DH: You are funny.

JC: I know! So let's talk about *Ass Pups*. The thing I like about this painting is that it was supposed to be in a show, and someone was like, "No, no, no, this painting is just utterly inappropriate." Can you talk about how inappropriate you are, and the things that have happened in your life as a result of you being inappropriate, this painting being only one among many?

DH: I don't think I'm inappropriate, just hapless. I'm always being taken by surprise when people are offended by what I do or say, because I think it's all in good fun, and in a spirit of levity or joy.

JC: But you were going to show it in Virginia?

DH: Yeah, the curator chose it and it was shipped. But the dealer said, "No, thank you, I cannot show this." Oh well. The image was derived from a snapshot that I saw online of a boy lying on his stomach in his living room, playing with two dogs. In my painting it's like the dogs replace what would be his butt.

JC: But look at this tail.

DH: It's little.

JC: A penile tail.

DH: The snowy ground that they're sitting on is cleft, like ass cheeks, and there's a big hole that reflects and inverts the boy and his dogs. I thought it was very formal, all about doubling. Twin dogs doubled in the reflection.

JC: The most beautiful thing about this painting, in my opinion, are these little paw moments. The reflections of the paws as they meet at the surface of the water, it's just tender. The focal point of the painting is tenderness and touch, it's not rapey at all.

DH: I didn't think so. Besides, the boy has a funny, sinister, toothy grin. When-

ever you put teeth into a grin in a painting, it catches something both mirthful and a little aggressive, because the mouth shows its power to bite. But the dogs don't seem to care about him as much as they care about the spectator looking at them.

JC: They think the spectator might have snacks for them.

DH: Right, they're begging.

JC: This boy doesn't have snacks for us, but maybe you do.

DH: It also posits the idea that perhaps the two cheeks of his ass are independent beings.

JC: Is that how you feel about your own ass?

DH: I try to take them out for a walk each day.

JC: I think I've seen that. Shall we look at another one?

DH: How about *At the Door*? You listening at a door.

JC: That was one of my finest moments. End of the year at the American Academy—I passed by the door of that horrible woman and her ineffectual husband, and I heard them talking about me, and about us, and I just couldn't pull myself away.

DH: Well, the funny thing about this painting, to me, is your flexed bare feet. That's the part where you're not just passively listening—

JC: Those are my ears.

DH: Ears?

JC: Those are my displaced ears.

DH: All the psychedelic turbulence happening around your head is not only the information you're hearing on the other side of the door, but also my version of the fizzy and cosmic paintings you were making at the time. Maybe the closed door is an allegory of painting itself, in which the surface is a permeable barrier, a portal to a fictional elsewhere you can never enter.

JC: I like that. Let's talk about the one with the pink couch. What is that called?

DH: It's called *Pink Couch*. It casts the interspecies theme into a slightly more domestic setting, where the woman on the couch is curled up with her black cat. The cat is the same color as the shadows, even approaching the color of her dark skin so that they become a composite organism slung at one end of the enormous sofa, causing it to tip off the bottom edge of the picture. I thought of the interior as very Disney/mid-century modern.

JC: Can you talk about race for a minute? You're very unafraid to paint a black person, an Asian person, and I think that's really important. You're also unafraid to address issues of race in conversation as a white male, in a grad school critique, for example, whereas I feel like a lot of white people are really afraid to say the wrong thing, or to create an artwork that's charged, and not be able to take responsibility for all the ramifications, and I really respect this about you, that you dive in. Maybe you're not trying to make a political statement with the painting, but it ends up having political significance to be a straight white man and be able to embrace these different experiences and addresses.

DH: I consider it an adventure to make work that steps outside myself and imagine other people, or to act in ways I don't recognize. It feels like an imperative of the imagination. Where should one draw the line at what an artist is eligible to represent? I have a very unclear idea of who I am in the first place. There is so much great work being done now that examines privilege and historic constructions of identity. I would be happy if my paintings could participate in those conversations somehow. I make

fig. 57: Jennifer Coates and David Humphrey. **Untitled Drawing**, 2015. Acrylic on canvas, 9 × 12 in.

paintings that proceed from the question “What if?” If I have a protagonist in the picture, oftentimes that protagonist will have all kinds of skin colors while the work is developing, and I will pace through them until something makes sense. I become a casting director. What does it mean to make sense? It means that the image generates productive questions or derails expectations. If I had a TV show, and there were a lot of characters, I would want to have diversity, and the same is true in the world of my paintings. Sometimes I’ll go for a while making new work and eventually realize that I haven’t painted a guy or I’ve only been painting ambiguously gendered characters. I’ll need something else to enrich the studio’s social ecology.

JC: I really love that about you, you’re very embracing, you’re an open kind of guy.

DH: Is that what gets me in trouble?

JC: Yes, maybe. But it’s unselfconscious. I mean, *Pink Couch* is just such a ridiculously funny, weird painting, it doesn’t fall into stereotypical traps; your work doesn’t fall into stereotypical traps.

DH: I find it interesting that if I make a painting with a black person, I will sometimes learn about other people’s preoccupations and projections. It’ll be an occasion to see how representations of black people are navigated. They’ll ask, “Is this about race?” Well, is it more about race than a picture of a white person?

JC: You’re right. I’m thinking of that painting you did from 2002, of a horse and a vacuum cleaner. “Is this painting about a vacuum cleaner?” It’s not. It’s about missed intimacy, it’s about trying to know something that you can’t ever really know, but not letting that stop you.

DH: I guess that’s intersubjectivity as a subset of inter-objectivity. The machine on the one side, and the animal on the other, framing our thoughts about being human and the unbridgeable gap to others. You’re sitting here in front of me, I’m talking to you, and I think I know you, we’ve been

together for a long time—

JC: You don't really know me.

DH: No?

JC: You don't want to know me.

DH: I'm not even sure you're real.

JC: I'm not either. But the machine and the horse. It's like two different ages, the machine age, and the preindustrial age. See, you have bigger ideas than I really understood before we started this interview. I thought you were just this jackass, but I see that you're actually addressing the whole of human history.

David Humphrey and Jennifer Coates, 2012

Biography and Exhibition History

Biography

Born in Augsburg, Germany, 1955.
Lives and works in New York City.

Education

1977	Maryland Institute College of Art, BFA
1976–78	New York Studio School
1980	New York University, MA

Awards

2011	American Academy of Arts and Letters, Purchase Award
2008	American Academy in Rome, Rome Prize
2002	John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
	Thomas B. Clarke Prize from the National Academy of Design
1995	National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
1987	National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
1985	New York Council for the Arts Grant
1979–80	New York Council for the Arts Grant

Solo Exhibitions

2019 *New Paintings and Sculpture*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY
Banner Day, Crush Curatorial, Amagansett, NY
2018 *Overheard*, Real Estate Fine Art, Brooklyn, NY
Zone, St. Paul Projects, Baltimore, MD
2017 *I'm Glad We Had This Conversation*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY
2015 *Impulse/Control: David Humphrey and Dannielle Tedeger*, Joseloff Gallery at University of Hartford, West Hartford, CT
2014 *Work and Play*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY
David Humphrey, Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta, GA
A Horse Walks into a Painting, Protocol Gallery, Gainesville, FL
2012 *David Humphrey*, Fredericks & Freiser, New York, NY
David Humphrey, American University Museum, Washington, DC
2011 *David Humphrey*, Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, GA
2010 *David Humphrey*, Lux Institute, Encinitas, CA
David Humphrey, Solomon Projects, Atlanta, GA
Defrosted, a life of Walt Disney in collaboration with Adam Cvijanovic, Postmasters, New York, NY
2009 *Team SHaG, collaborative paintings by Amy Sillman, David Humphrey and Elliot Green*, Rhodes College, Nashville, TN
2008 *Expecting Ecstasy*, Parisian Laundry, Montreal, Canada
2007 *David Humphrey*, Fred Amaya Gallery, Miami, FL
2006 *New Paintings*, Solomon Projects, Atlanta, GA
2006 *David Humphrey*, Frederic Snitzer Gallery, Miami, FL
Snowman in Love, Triple Candie, New York, NY
2005 *Oven Stuffer Roaster*, Morsel, New York, NY
2004 *David Humphrey*, Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York, NY
2002 *Both Less and More*, Littlejohn Contemporary, New York, NY
Lace, Bubbles, Milk, Pittsburgh Filmmakers' New Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA (catalogue)
2002 *Holiday Melt*, Solomon Projects, Atlanta, GA
Holiday Melt, Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami, FL

2001 *Holiday Melt*, Saks Fifth Avenue Project Art, Palm Beach, FL
2001 *David Humphrey*, University of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA
2000 *David Humphrey*, McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1999 *Sculptures*, Deven Golden Fine Art Ltd, New York, NY
Me and My Friends, The Phillip Feldman Gallery, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR
1998 *Love Teams*, Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL (catalogue)
Works on Paper, Roy G Biv Gallery, Columbus, OH
1997 *Team SHaG, collaborative paintings by A. Sillman, D. Humphrey and E. Green*, Postmasters, New York, NY
Sculptures, Deven Golden Fine Art Ltd, New York, NY
1996 *David Humphrey*, Nancy Solomon Gallery, Atlanta, GA
David Humphrey: Paintings and Drawings 1987–1994, Wood Street Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA (catalogue)
Head: Recent Paintings, I Space, Chicago, IL
1995 *David Humphrey: Paintings and Drawings 1987–1994*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH (catalogue)
David Humphrey, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1994 *David Humphrey*, New Arts Program, Kutztown, PA
1993 *David Humphrey*, McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1992 *David Humphrey*, Patricia Shea Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
1991 *David Humphrey*, Bergstrom-Mahler Museum, Neenah, WI (catalogue)
David Humphrey, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
David Humphrey, McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1990 *David Humphrey*, Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA
David Humphrey, David McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1989 *David Humphrey,* Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA
1988 *David Humphrey*, David McKee Gallery, New York, NY
David Humphrey, Alpha Gallery, Boston, MA
David Humphrey, Cone Editions, New York, NY
1987 *David Humphrey*, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1985 *David Humphrey*, David McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1983 *David Humphrey,* Pittsburgh Plan for Art, Pittsburgh, PA
1979 *David Humphrey*, Washington Square Gallery, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

2019 *Downtown Painting*, curated by Alex Katz, Peter Freeman Gallery, New York, NY
Footloose, with Keisha Prolieau-Martin, curated by Catherine Heggarty, Ortega y Gasset Projects, New York, NY
2017 *The Secret Life of Plants*, Freight & Volume, New York, NY
Phrogz, with Jennifer Coates, Fiendish Plots, Lincoln, NE
2016 *Representing Rainbows*, Gerald Peters Gallery, New York, NY
New York; New Friends, curated by William Eckhardt Kohler, Linda Warren Projects, Chicago, IL
Ghost in the Machine, with Austin Lee, Life on Mars Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
2015 *Your Bad Self Group Self Portrait Exhibition*, Arts + Leisure, New York, NY
(Un)Real Featuring: Michele Bubacco, Angela Fraleigh, David Humphrey, Martin Muss, and Claire Sherman, curated by Mary Dinaburg and Howard Rutkowski, David Richard Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
Love Child, Ortega y Gassett Projects, Flushing, NY
David Humphrey and Jennifer Coates: Plush Onus, Arts + Leisure, New York, NY
2014 *Tightened As If by Pliers*, Ortega y Gasset Projects, New York, NY
Art in Pop, Le Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France
2012 *Little Languages/Coded Pictures,* curated by Theresa Hackett and Micelle Weinberg, Lesley Heller Workspace, New York, NY
2010 *Animal Companions*, in collaboration with Jennifer Coates, Holly Coulis, and Ridley Howard, CCA, Andratx, Mallorca
Visible Vagina, David Nolan Gallery, New York, NY
Animal as Other, curated by April Gornik, Danese Gallery, New York, NY

Knock Knock: Who's There? That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore, curated by Elana Rubinfeld and Sarah Murkett, Armand Bartos Gallery, New York, NY
Spring Fever, curated by Ridley Howard and Nicole Russo, 106 Green, Brooklyn, NY

2009 *Chunky Monkey*, Red Flagg, New York, NY
Spazi Aperti, Romanian Academy, Rome, Italy

2008 *Perversions of Theater*, curated by Franklin Evans, Apex Art, New York, NY

2007 *Inside the Pale*, Thrust Projects, New York, NY
Mr. President, University Art Museum, SUNY, Albany, NY
Neointegrity, curated by Keith Mayorson, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY

2006 *Complicit*, University of Virginia Art Museum, Richmond, VA
Normal, Linda Warren Gallery, Chicago, IL

2005 *Jeff Gauntt & David Humphrey*, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, NY
Life and Limb, Feigen Contemporary, New York, NY

2004 *When I Think of You I Touch Myself*, curated by David Humphrey, New York Academy of Art, New York, NY

2003 *New Prints*, McKee Gallery, New York, NY
4 x 4, Artist's Union, St. Petersburg, Russia
Pop thru Out, Araio Gallery, Choongchungnma, Korea (catalogue)
The Burbs, DFN Gallery, New York, NY (catalogue)

2002 *Pasted On*, Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago, IL
Super Natural Payground, Gallerie Marella, Milan, Italy (catalogue)
177th Annual, National Academy of Design Museum, New York, NY (catalogue)
Hair Stories, Adam Baumgold Gallery, New York, NY
Words in Deeds, PICA, Portland, OR
Someone's Been Telling Lies, Forde Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
Luscious Too, Zolla/Lieberman, Chicago, IL

2001 *Fhuh . . .*, Fishtank Gallery, New York, NY
Self Made Men, DC Moore Gallery, New York, NY

2000 *Objects that Flicker*, Solomon Projects, Atlanta, GA
Painters in the Studio, Exit Art, New York, NY
Rapture, Janet Phelps, New York, NY
The Figure, *Another Side of Modernism*, Snug Harbor Art Center, Staten Island, NY (catalogue)
Collaborations, Bucknell University Art Gallery, Lewisburg, PA
Toys, Keagan Martos Gallery, New York, NY

1999 *Drawing in the Present Tense*, Parsons School of Design, New York, NY
Body Parts, Pewabic Pottery, Detroit, MI

1998 *The Mind Is a Beast*, The Work Space, New York, NY
Road Show, DFN Gallery, New York, NY

1997 *La Tradicion*, Exit Art, New York, NY
Lubiana Biennial, Lubiana Biennial Place, Lubiana, Slovenia (catalogue)
Drawn & Quartered, Karen McCready Fine Art, New York, NY
Hair-Do, curated by Nancy Brett, The Work Space, New York, NY

1996 *Thing*, Deven Golden Fine Art, New York, NY
Photographism (in painting), Pratt Galleries, New York, NY
Face, One Great Jones, New York, NY
Some Friends in My Apartment, Barbara Pollack, New York, NY
Psycho-Morphing, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York, NY
True Bliss, LACE, Los Angeles, CA

1995 *Crystal Blue Persuassion*, Feature, New York, NY
Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC
Internal/External, Foster Goldstrom Gallery, New York, NY (catalogue)
More Than Real, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
On Target, Horodner Romley Gallery, New York, NY

Arresting Images, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

1994 *Digressions*, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York, NY
Flooding Camera, The Work Space, New York, NY
Family Values, Russet Lederman Productions, New York, NY

1993 *Art in the Age of Information*, Wood Street Galleries and 808 Penn Modern, Pittsburgh, PA (catalogue)
Pittsburgh Collects, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
Appraising the Preternatural, organized by Sue Spaid and Michael Anderson, Patricia Shea Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
Psychological Impact, curated by Rhonda Wall, Northampton Community College, Bethlehem, PA
Goldberg, Humphrey, Koorland, Robert Morrison Gallery, New York, NY
Personal Imagery, Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, NY
43rd Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary Painting, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (catalogue)

1992 *Dysfunction in the Family Album*, curated by David Humphrey, Diane Brown Gallery, New York, NY
Underthings, Bliss, Pasadena, CA
(Drawing) Pictures, organized by Amy Sillman, Four Walls at PS1, Long Island City, NY
Hair, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

1991 *Personal Portrait*, Annina Nosei Gallery, New York, NY
Mute, curated by Susan Tallman, Solo Gallery, New York, NY
Expressive Visions and Exquisite Images: Two Aspects of Art of the 80s from the Richard Brown Baker Collection, Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland University, Rochester, MI (catalogue)
Landscape as Stage, organized by Meyer Raphael Rubenstein, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

1990 *Prints & Monotypes*, Pelavin Editions, New York, NY
Faces, Marc Richards Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
The Unique Print: 70s into the 90s, Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA (catalogue)

1989 *The Nature of Things*, Cydney Payton Gallery, Denver, CO

1988 *Fresh from New York*, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand (catalogue)

1987 *Drawings from the 80s*, Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA
Magic in the Mind's Eye, Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland University, Rochester, MI (catalogue)

1986 *American Art Today: The Figure in the Landscape*, Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami, FL
Public and Private: American Prints Today, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY (catalogue)
Painting and Sculpture by Candidates for Art Awards, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY
Inner Image, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME
Artificial Paradise, Asher/Faure Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
New Drawing, Gallery Association of New York State, Hamilton, NY
The Potent Image, Morris Museum of Art, Morristown, NJ (catalogue)

1985 *Artists in Two Mediums*, Bennington College Art Gallery, Bennington, VT
Art in the Anchorage, Creative Time, Brooklyn, NY
The 20th Retrospective Show, New York Studio School, New York, NY
Manifestations of the Figure, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, NY
Art on Paper, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC
Exhibit A, Brooklyn Federal Courthouse, New York, NY
Contemporary American Prints: Recent Acquisitions, Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY

1984 *Drawings by Young American Artists*, Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Alborg, Denmark
Intermedia: Between Painting and Sculpture, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT
A Refocus on Landscape, School 33 Art Center, Baltimore, MD
A Refocus on Landscape, Pittsburgh Plan for Art, Pittsburgh, PA
Painting and Sculpture, Hill Gallery, Birmingham, MI
New Hand Painted Dreams: Contemporary Surrealism, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY
Fall Show, Condeso/Lawler Gallery, New York, NY
Young Americans, Galleri Bellman, New York, NY
Inner Visions: Drawings, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
In Spirit, Monique Knowlton Gallery, New York, NY
Drawings, Barbara Toll Gallery, New York, NY

1983 *Selections 21*, The Drawing Center, New York, NY
American Cauldron, Kouros Gallery, New York, NY
Group Show, Barbara Toll Gallery, New York, NY
Bodies and Souls, organized by the Artist's Choice Museum, A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, NY
Three-Dimensional Painting, Allan Frumkin Gallery, New York, NY
1982 *New Talent*, Alpha Gallery, Boston, MA
Summer Show, David McKee Gallery, New York, NY
1981 Thirty New York Painters, Hobart College, Geneva, NY
1980 *CAPS Award Winners,* State University of New York, Purchase, NY
1979 *CAPS Recipients Exhibitions*, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY

Selected Writings by David Humphrey

Pastoral with Pets, Lux Institute, 2012.
Blind Handshake: Art Writing + Art 1990–2008, New York: Periscope, 2009.
"Hi, My Name is Artwork," *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* Online #1, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 2005.
"Describable Beauty," *New Observations* #113, 1996.
"On the Fantastic," *Tema Celeste*, 1996.
"Telepathy" (a collaborative artists' book project with Bill Jones), 1993.
"Hair Piece," *Art Issues*, February 1990.
"Stained Sheets/Holy Shroud," *Arts Magazine*, December 1990.
"The Abject Romance of Low Resolution," *Lusitania* 1, no. 4, 1990.
"The Dictator's Body," *Stanford Italian Review* (drawings), 1990.

Exhibitions Curated

2010 *In a Violet Distance*, Zurcherr Studio, New York, NY
2007 *Horizon*, EFA Gallery, New York, NY
2006 *19 Penises*, thebody.com/visualaids/web_gallery
2005 *Life and Limb*, Feigen Contemporary, New York, NY
2004 *When I Think of You I Touch Myself*, New York Academy of Art, New York, NY (catalogue)
2002 *Hello to Handmade Words*, K.S. Art, New York, NY
2001 *Fhuh . . . Promiscuously Subarticulate Paintings*, Fishtank, New York, NY
1997 *Normotic*, One Great Jones, New York, NY
1992 *Dysfunction in the Family Album*, Diane Brown Gallery, New York, NY
1990 *Stained Sheets: Holy Shroud*, Krygier/Landau Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, CA

Selected Reviews and Publications

2019 Jonathan Stevenson, "David Humphrey: Facile like a Fox," *Two Coats of Paint*, March.
https://www.twocoatsofpaint.com/2019/03/david-humphrey-facile-like-a-fox.html
2017 Jonathan Stevenson, "David Humphrey at Fredericks & Freiser," *Two Coats of Paint*, February.
http://www.fredericksfreisergallery.com/news/david-humphrey-at-fredericks-freiser-in-two-coats-of-paint
2016 Sarah Brown, *Vogue*, October.
David Cohen, *Artcritical*, May.
2015 Nicole Eisenman, *BOMB*, May. https://bombmagazine.org/articles/nicole-eisenman-and-david-humphrey/
Peter Drake, "Work and Play," *ArtPulse Magazine*, January.
http://www.fredericksfreisergallery.com/news/david-humphrey-at-fredericks-freiser-in-artpulse-magazine
2014 Paul Laster, *TimeOut New York*, April.
Jennifer Samet, "Beer with a Painter: David Humphrey," *Hyperallergic*, October.
https://hyperallergic.com/158162/beer-with-a-painter-david-humphrey/
David Ebony, *Artnet News*, April.
2013 Raphael Rubenstein, *Art in America*, January.
2012 Phong Bui, "David Humphrey with Phong Bui," *Brooklyn Rail*, November.
https://brooklynrail.org/2012/11/art/david-humphrey-with-phong-bui

Hilary Harkness, “Studio View: Painter David Humphrey,” *Huffington Post*, November. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/david-humphrey-painter_b_2140433
David Brody, “A Future in Plastics: David Humphrey’s New Paintings,” *Artcritical*, December. https://artcritical.com/2012/12/21/david-humphrey/
Ara Merjian, Artforum.com, March. https://www.artforum.com/picks/fredericks-freiser-gallery-38429
2010 Karen Rosenberg, “A Life of Walt Disney,” *New York Times*, July. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/09/arts/design/09galleries-003.html
TJ Carlin, “Empire of This,” *Time Out*, February. https://www.timeout.com/newyork/art/empire-of-this
2007 Chris Bors, www.artinfo.com/articles/story/26151, March.
2006 Chris Bors, “Snowmen in Harlem,” Artnet.com, February.
2005 Edward Winkelman, “Artist of the Week,” *Edward Winkelman Blogspot*, January.
2004 James Kalm, “David Humphrey,” *Brooklyn Rail*, May.
Sheila Pepe, “ What’s in a Game?” *Gay City News*, April.
2003 Elliot Green, “David Humphrey,” *Bomb*, Fall.
Raphael Rubinstein, “David Humphrey: Correlative Kitsch,” *Art in America*, November.
2002 Ken Johnson, “Tricky Adios,” *New York Times*, June.
2000 Jerry Cullum, “Poodles, Ice Cream and the Way We Live,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March.
Felicia Feaster, “Kitsch on Quaaludes,” *Creative Loafing*, Atlanta, GA, March.
2000 Carol Diehl, “David Humphrey at McKee Gallery,” *Art in America*, June.
Christopher Chambers, “The Splice of Life,” *D, Art*, Fall.
Karen Wiken, *Partisan*, Spring.
1999 Catherine Howe, “A Conversation with Catherine Howe,” *NY Arts*, February.
Scott Weiland, “A Conversation with Scott Weiland,” *NY Arts*, July/August.
Anthony DiMaggio, *Review*, June.
1998 Fred Camper, *Chicago Reader*, April.
Jon Cone, *Art Byte*, December–January.
1995 Peter Plagens, “A Painter’s Pixel Palette,” *Newsweek*, February.
Jerry Stein, “Family Photos Take Role in Artist’s Paintings,” *Cincinnati Post*, April.
Owen Findsen, “Mysterious Narratives Enter New Art Dimension,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April.
Eva Heisler, “ Computer Gargoyoles,” *Dialogue*, September/October.
Faye Hirsch, “On Paper,” September/October.
1994 Dan Cameron, “Art for the New Year,” *Art and Auction*, January.
1993 Daniel Weiner, “Studio Visits: David Humphrey,” *Artspace*, March/April.
Donald Miller, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March.
Annette B. Sanchez, “Art in the Age of Information: Thought-Provoking,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, April.
Paul Richard, “What’s Wrong with this Picture,” *Washington Post*, October.
Charles Hagen, “David Humphrey,” *New York Times*, November.
David Shirley, *Option Magazine*, October.
1992 Charles Hagen, “Dysfunction in the Family Album,” *New York Times*, January.
A.M. Homes, “Dysfunction in the Family Album,” *Artforum*, May.
James Scarborough, “David Humphrey at Patricia Shea,” *Artweek*, October.
Benjamin Weisman, “David Humphrey – Patricia Shea Gallery,” *Artforum*, November.
Pamela Wye, “David Humphrey: Adjusting the Picture” *Sulfur* 30, Spring.
Michael Anderson, “David Humphrey,” *Art issues*, November/December.
1991 Sara Lading, “Artist Illustrates Relationship Between Anatomy, Emotion,” *Valley Sun*, January.
Kenneth Baker, “David Humphrey: Walk on the Weird Side,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February.
Mark Bartlett, “David Humphrey,” *Art issues*, April/May.
Meyer Raphael Rubinstein, “David Humphrey at David McKee,” *Art in America*, July.
Peggy Cyphers, *Arts Magazine*, September.
“David Humphrey,” *Journal of Comtemporary Art*, Vol. 4, #2, Fall/Winter.
1990 Buzz Spector, “Stained Sheets/Holy Shroud,” *Art issues*, September/October.
“David Humphrey,” New Yorker, April 23.
1989 Suvan Geer, “Galleries – Santa Monica,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26.
Parnassus – Poetry in Review 15, no. 2, 1989 (cover illustration and illustration).
1988 John Yau, “David Humphrey,” *Artforum*, May.

Catherine Liu, “David Humphrey,” *Flash Art*, May–June.
Holland Cotter, “David Humphrey,” *Art in America*, September.
Hearne Pardee, “David Humphrey,” *Art New England*, July–August.
Jennifer Heath, “Nature, Science, Technology Show Refreshes Briefly,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 2.
Meyer Raphael Rubenstein, “David Humphrey at Cone Editions,” *ETC Montreal*, Automne.

1987 Mark Van Prolyn, “Hints of Narrative.” *Artweek* (San Francisco), April 4.
Kenneth Baker, “Organic World of a Surrealist,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6.
Kate Regan, “David Humphrey,” *Artnews*, Summer.
Dorothy Burkhart, “Political Paintings Highlight Four Shows,” *San Jose Mercury News*, April 10.
David Humphrey, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* #2.

1986 Holland Cotter, “David Humphrey,” *Flash Art*, December 1985–January 1986.
“David Humphrey,” *The Print Collector’s Newsletter*, May–June.
Colin Gardner, “Galleries,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1986.

1985 Kenneth Baker, “David Humphrey – review,” *Art in America*, January.
Nancy Princenthal, “Young Americans.” *Artnews*, January.
Kim Levin, “Cryptanalysis: Art in the Anchorage,” *Village Voice*, June 18.
Deborah Phillips, “Bright Lights, Big City,” *Artnews*, September.
Kim Levin, “David Humphrey – Centerfold,” *Village Voice*, October 22.

1984 Ronnie Cohen, “David Humphrey,” *Artnews*, December.
Dan Cameron, “Neo-Surrealism: Having It Both Ways,” *Arts Magazine*, November.

Collections

Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Carnegie Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA
Chemical Bank, New York, NY
Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH
Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO
Exxon Corporation, New York, NY
First Bank Minneapolis, Minneapolis, MN
Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, NJ
McCrory Corporation, New York, NY
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA
The Portland Museum of Art, Portland, OR
The Progressive Corporation, Cleveland, OH
Prudential Insurance Corporation, Newark, NJ
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN

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Contributors

Davy Lauterbach lives in Los Angeles, where he is a painter and writer as well as an artist in television production with credits including *The Simpsons* and *Days of Our Lives*.

Jennifer Coates is a painter living and working in New York City and Poyntelle, PA. She received her BFA from the University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and her MFA from Hunter College. She was a recent recipient of the Sharpe Walentas Studio (2018–19) and was a fellow at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Italy (Fall 2019). Recent solo exhibitions include *Toxic Halo* (High Noon Gallery), *Correspondences* and *All U Can Eat* (Freight & Volume Gallery), and *Carb Load* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts). Her work has been written about in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artcritical*, *Hyperallergic*, *Huffington Post*, *Smithsonian Journeys,* and *Art News*, among other publications.

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