

An invaluable primer on the state of painting today, exploring how this traditional medium has been re-approached, challenged and reimagined by artists at work across the globe

Painting Now

Suzanne Hudson

230 illustrations

28.0 x 21.0cm

216pp

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Book



Key Sales Points

- Clear and accessible text navigates and explains the many themes and ideas that inform contemporary painting; from the human body and appropriation to painting about painting and work incorporating other media such as performance and installation
- Artists discussed include, among others, Franz Ackermann, Tauba Auerbach, Michaël Borremans, Chuck Close and more
- The book's 230 illustrations showcase a dazzling array of work, presented in a unique and striking design by Fraser Muggeridge Studio – one of the UK's most innovative creative studios

Praise for *Painting Now* (HB)

‘An ambitious study and a great achievement ... Suzanne Hudson’s text is a vital argument for the importance of painting’

Studio International

‘Hudson makes an eloquent and erudite survey of artistic practice today - essential reading for anyone interested in a deeper understanding of today’s art world’

Leisure Painter

‘Essential reading for scholars, art lovers, gallery owners, critics and curators’

Class Magazine, Italy



Paulina Olowaska
Cake, 2010

Oil on canvas, 175 × 125 cm
(68 7/8 × 49 1/8 in.)



Bénédicte Peyrat
Dog, 2007

Acrylic on canvas, 230 × 195 cm
(90 5/8 × 76 3/4 in.)

expressivity? Or might contrivance of affect be a substitute for true interiority, and persona for person? Strategies of self-fashioning to frame the artist and his or her work include “bad painting,” a term that could involve the outmoded or what lies outside the norms of acceptable taste—what might one make of the dog offered by Bénédicte Peyrat (b.1967, Paris, France)?—as well as appropriations of various historical painting techniques and practices.

Moving more explicitly to matters of procedure, Chapter 3 (Production and Distribution) focuses on how artists make paintings and negotiate complex mechanisms of distribution—that is, how paintings circulate (in galleries and fairs, across continents and the Internet), irrespective of their creators’ initial intentions. (Take Chatchai Puipia [b.1964, Maharakarm, Thailand], who draws attention to the lives of images across time and place.) Many paintings are painted—at least in part—by someone other than the named author; which is to say, painting now inhabits, to a surprising degree, the industrial space of divided labor so common to conceptual art, as well as to the workshop tradition of apprentices and skilled assistants, and, closer to home, the commercial design studio or architectural firm. By the 1960s, sculpture had achieved separation of concept and realization (when fabrication was contracted out, due to scale or material factors), but painting remained far removed from these changes. This is no longer the case.

Chapter 4 (The Body) pulls back from these systems to look at how the body has remained central to painting, perhaps because of the ongoing desire for human scale, if not necessarily for human agency. The figure is most obviously present in portraiture, nude, and history painting—staples for Marlene Dumas (b.1953, Cape Town, South Africa); these modes are explored alongside abstract paintings, where the body registers through vigorous paint handling that records the physical movement necessary for its achievement. The body also emerges, among other things, as the obdurate counterpart to the virtual sphere, and as the prerequisite for work predicated upon social interaction. Associated with this, Chapter 5 (Beyond Painting) investigates how the body is commonly introduced as a complement to a painting, from



Chatchai Puipia

Vase with twelve sunflowers 120 years after Van Gogh, 2009
Pigments, gold leaf, carbon, and wax on canvas
180 × 154.5 cm (70 7/8 × 60 7/8 in.)



Marlene Dumas

Measuring Your Own Grave, 2003
Oil on canvas, 140 × 140 cm (55 1/8 × 55 1/8 in.)



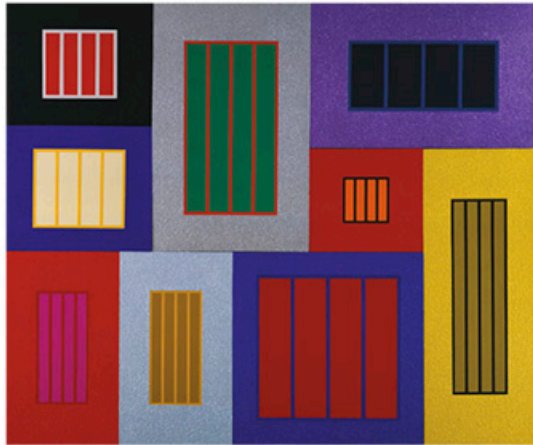
Lucy McKenzie

Alhambra Motifs III, 2013
Oil on canvas, 270 × 480 cm (106 1/8 × 189 in.)

outside its frame. Painting may, for instance, be treated as a tool for a performance or as the hypothetical or actual backdrop for an event, as in works like Lucy McKenzie’s (b.1977, Glasgow, UK) *Alhambra Motifs*, which might be architectural sketches, theater scenery, or independent paintings. In this context, artists negotiate not only questions of what a painting is, but also temporal ones, such as when (and under what circumstances, through actions or in performances) does a painting become a prop. This example alone suggests the “beyond” of the title, but the chapter also studies cases where paintings exist off the frame, in installations, in multiple locations, or in exceptional presentational formats. Finally, looping back to an analysis of art about art with which the discussion of appropriation begins, the last chapter (About Painting) reflects by way of the legacy of institutional critique on paintings about painting—like Florian Meisenberg’s (b.1980, Berlin, Germany) framing of the picture plane with curtains that play on bygone expectations of illusionism.

Real as these headings are, they are artificial barriers. Most artists included in one chapter fit just as readily into others, particularly given their range of work, which in many cases cannot be accommodated in this volume. All are involved in appropriation in one way or another. I cannot imagine that any artist does not think about how his or her paintings are made and how they will find an audience, or does not contemplate the nature of painting, even if moving beyond its traditional parameters. To be sure, the frequency with which such inquiries become part of the work’s subject relates to my claim that the conceptual overlaps with the material: beyond painting and about painting are two sides of the same coin. “Bad painting” crosses many boundaries, and large numbers of artists ride the line between abstraction and figuration, though this also implies a pedantic distinction that I do not uphold (hence, for instance, my putting abstract artists into the chapter on the body). However, I have attempted to keep related artists together, where feasible.

Attention is inevitably uneven in what aims to be a wide-ranging survey. My blind spots and biases as a critic, long-based in New York and now living in Los Angeles where this was written, will doubtless



Peter Halley
Clockstopper, 2002
 Acrylic, pearlescent and metallic acrylic,
 and Roll-A-Tex on canvas
 243.8 × 292 cm (96 × 115 in.)

1.15



Sherrie Levine
Gray and Blue Monochromes
After Stieglitz: 1-36, 2010
 Flashe on mahogany,
 each 71.1 × 53.3 cm (28 × 21 in.)

1.16

(b.1953, New York, NY) have prompted reconsideration—the former as a figurative *bricoleur* (an artist who constructs artworks out of random materials), who paints disjointed narratives using eclectic collage-like juxtapositions of art, political events, film, pornography, and other media; and the latter as a staunch opponent of the figurative tradition with which Salle is identified. Halley has painted, and continues to paint, cells and prisons (squares and rectangles, respectively), and conduits (lines) in a palette of Day-Glo paints punctuated with passages of Roll-A-Tex, an industrial paint whose textured appearance recalls stucco. Influenced by French structuralist and post-structuralist theory—to the extent that they have been regarded as illustrative of its key ideas—Halley's diagrammatic paintings expose the use of geometry in the public sphere as an agent of control.

1.15

Meanwhile, Sherrie Levine's concerted attention to the medium of painting has recently acquired greater significance. Started a few years after the photo-based work (p.34), her 1980s compositions (often checkered or striped) recall modernist abstraction, not through specific antecedents such as Piet Mondrian or Barnett Newman, but as a generic decorative scheme stripped of its spiritual transcendence or idealism. Levine's *Knot* paintings, where she colors in the knots on plywood sheets, are wry meditations on the painting as readymade. Following a number of projects involving specific paintings, Levine completed a series of eighteen monochromes based on Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents*, his increasingly abstract photographs of the sky. Where the *Equivalents* acted as a pathetic fallacy expressive of his inner state, Levine's surfaces were deterministic, resulting from averaging out the tone of a single print.

1.16

Levine's more intellectual approach conjoins material and cognitive factors. Even though medium specificity is not the goal, it is hardly insignificant that the works are painted. For many artists, the legacy of conceptualism has prompted appropriation, not of a specific image, object, or painting, but of a broader idea of period style. The American artists Blake Rayne (b.1969, Lewes, DE) and Wade Guyton (b.1972, Hammond, IN) (pp.111, 175) both revisit twentieth-century painting, the better to expose their work as mediated by what has preceded it. As Rayne asserts in an artist's statement:

1.17

1.18

I see the task of my own practice to be that of putting the beliefs attributed to the sign "Painting" to the test by subjecting it to the material conditions of the medium of painting. These material conditions...are for me: modes of distribution and external framing (context); internal procedures of formation (process); and relationships

expressing a misbegotten nostalgia for both. Yet his pithy, sometimes directly hostile, inventions of names skewer the ethos that pervaded both spheres of cultural production, and the gender politics that serviced them. To wit: *I'm So Fucking Hard* (2002), a send-up of Ernest Hemingway, famously over-identified with his masculinist fiction.

- 1.30 Others, like William Daniels (b.1976, Brighton, UK) and Caragh Thuring (b.1972, Brussels, Belgium), have turned to earlier moments to make claims for the mutability of sources, arguing for the formal and other perversities afforded by the rampant conversion of cultural artifacts. Daniels reconstructs well-known paintings into maquettes composed of scavenged quotidian materials, which he puts to use as a model for his own painted works. Muted in tone and flattened into cardboard planes, they recall the faceting of Cubism as much as the imagery that was their ostensible source (in the case of *The Shipwreck*, Turner's 1805 painting of the same name). Thuring's five paintings on unprimed linen, 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4 (all 2009), flirt with legibility as pastoral scenes. On account of their blank spaces—the passages left empty in one painting but not in another—it is only in aggregate that the images resolve into a whole referencing their source: Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), itself based on Titian's *The Venus of Urbino* (1538). Although not random, Thuring's choice of Manet serves primarily as a pretext for the artist's experimentation.

- 1.32 Silke Otto-Knapp (b.1970, Osnabrück, Germany) finds sources closer to the present. Her paintings of avant-garde dance (such as Bronislava Nijinska's 1923 ballet *Les Noces*, and a studio shot of Yvonne Rainer) are taken from found photographs, whose muted palettes she evokes through translucent washes. Forgoing realism, she carefully effaces shadows, highlights, and other fine details, to accentuate a dancer's pose, costume, or the space that enfolds them in the course of rehearsal and presentation.
- 1.33 Andrew Grassie (b.1966, Edinburgh, UK) voraciously ranges across the centuries, fashioning photorealistic tempera studies of gallery interiors where his works are exhibited and the studio in which they were produced. In a 2007 show at Maureen Paley, London, Grassie installed paintings depicting the gallery's exhibitions in the previous year during their installation, with each work hung in the same spot in the gallery from where he took the photograph on which it is based. He has also indulged the possibilities of making his own exhibition, as in 2005 when he curated an imaginary display of works from the Tate gallery's collection by Matisse, Stubbs, Henry Moore, and others—greatest hits in a show that never was.



William Daniels
The Shipwreck, 2005
Oil on board, 30 × 40 cm
(11¾ × 15¾ in.)

1.30



1.31

Caragh Thuring
1, 2009
Oil, gesso, and acrylic
on linen, 145 × 192 cm
(57 × 75½ in.)

illustrated the 2010 album *Teenage Dream*, and also served as artistic director for her music video, *California Gurls*.

A “let them eat cake” mentality pervades this work and aids its circulation as a luxury good that gains credibility through association with pop, while at the same time presenting itself as a sophisticated articulation of this same consumer world. In one sense innocuous, even a guilty pleasure, the candy-land paintings have come to represent unapologetic frivolity. Though in comparison to the schlocky opulence of Jeff Koons’s seventeen sculptures scattered around the lavish rooms and gardens of the Château de Versailles in 2008—such as an aluminum red lobster hanging alongside a crystal chandelier in the Mars Salon—Cotton’s “bad” paintings are decidedly circumspect.

Questions of intent, however, registered differently after the collapse of the financial market, leaving some artists as casualties. As curator Paul Schimmel proposed in relation to the 2007 sale at Sotheby’s, New York, of *White Canoe* (1990–91) by Peter Doig (b.1959, Edinburgh, UK) for \$11.3 million (the then-auction record for a living European artist). Doig—known for his dreamlike landscapes that appear suspended in time, and figurative scenes that often dissolve into abstract motifs—went from being “a hero to other painters to a poster child of the excesses of the market.” In this climate, whether the artist meant to appeal to the market or not was a matter of some importance. For instead of a government, corporation, or even an individual agent, the market itself has now become the prime target, albeit a moving one. Consequently, questions of psychological depth and sincerity still attend discussions of intention as much as finished artworks. To cite just one notable example, the writing around the British artist Merlin James (b.1960, Cardiff, UK), known for his historical-genre paintings that frequently picture domestic architecture and flotsam from the past, turns on the matter of attitude. Is the work a return to a shop-worn humanism or an ironic critique of this very tradition?

The distinction between humanism and critique matters because irony positions many artists as “critical,” in opposition to the market and its excesses, meaning that irony becomes an act of earnestness and protest—chiefly against offering trifles to the idle rich, or the one per cent, to use the language of the Occupy movement. (Labor issues within the art world proper are also significant concerns for artists, through organizations such as the Occupy Arts & Labor group and Working Artists and the Greater Economy [W.A.G.E.]) This applies regardless of artists’ potential or actual commercial

2.29

2.30

2.24

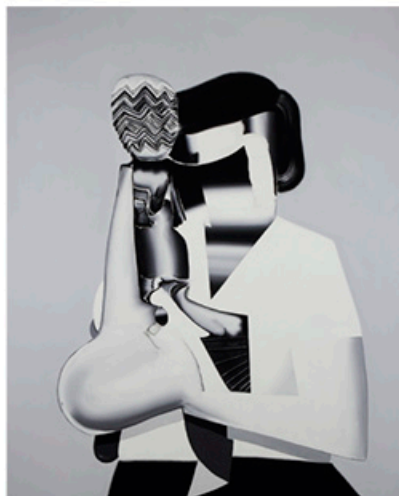


Shahzia Sikander
Pleasure Pillars, 2001
Vegetable color, dry pigment,
watercolor, ink, and tea on wasli paper
30.5 × 25.4 cm (12 × 10 in.)

2.25



Ha Manh Thang
Artist and Artist's Girlfriend, 2007 (detail of diptych)
Acrylic and collage on paper scroll
255 × 83 cm (100 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 32 $\frac{1}{16}$ in.)



Tomoo Gokita
Mother and Child, 2013
 Acrylic gouache, charcoal, and gesso
 on linen, 229 × 183 cm (90 × 72 in.)

4.24



4.25
Benjamin Domínguez
El Sueño II, 2013
 Oil on linen, 99.1 × 109.2 cm
 (39 × 43 in.)



Henry Taylor
Split, 2013
 Acrylic and charcoal on canvas,
 two parts, each 182.9 × 152.4 × 6.4 cm
 (72 × 60 × 2½ in.), overall dimensions
 182.9 × 308.6 × 6.4 cm
 (72 × 121½ × 2½ in.)

4.27

4.26



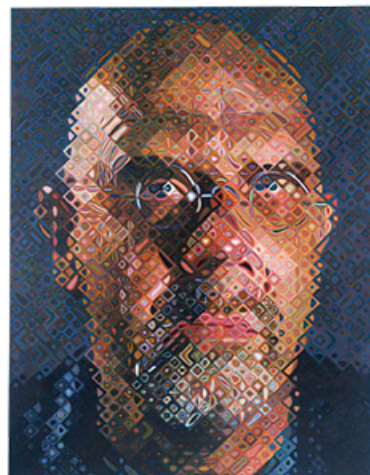
Nicole Eisenman
Sloppy Bar Room Kiss, 2011
 Oil on canvas, 99.1 × 121.9 cm
 (39 × 48 in.)

4.28



Elizabeth Peyton
Matthew, 2008
 Oil on board, 31.8 × 22.9 cm
 (12½ × 9 in.)

4.29



Chuck Close
Self-Portrait, 2005
 Oil on canvas, 276.2 × 213.4 cm
 (108¾ × 84 in.)

6.24



Lesley Vance
Untitled (26), 2009
Oil on linen, 43.2 × 35.6 cm
(17 × 14 in.)

6.25



Josephine Halvorson
Sign Holders, 2010
Oil on linen, 101.6 × 76.2 cm
(40 × 30 in.)

6.26



Ruth Laskey
*Twill Series (Robin's Egg Blue/
Yucca/Light Green)*, 2007
Hand-dyed and handwoven linen
50.2 × 46.4 cm (19¼ × 18¼ in.)

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