

JAMES DEITZ

University Art Gallery
Department of Art
College of the Arts
California State University, Stanislaus

500 copies printed

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University Art Gallery
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California State University, Stanislaus
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Director's Foreword

This exhibition represents some of James Dietz's most recent work. James Deitz, one of the Northwest's preeminent painters, has exhibited work that ranges from landscapes to total abstraction. We are fortunate to be able to exhibit his recent return to abstraction in this important exhibition. It is with great pleasure that I can share this work for others to enjoy.

Many colleagues have been instrumental in presenting this exhibition. I would like to thank James Deitz for the opportunity of exhibiting his incredible work, David Olivant for his wonderful essay and interview, College of the Arts, California State University, Stanislaus for the wonderful catalog design and Claremont Print and Copy for their expertise in printing this catalog.

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Dean De Cocker, Director
University Art Gallery
California State University, Stanislaus

Introduction and Interview

The recent work of James Deitz occupies an imaginative, constantly shifting terrain synthesizing memory and observed images in a style that preserves the particularities of experience even as it transforms them into iconic forms stripped to their essentials. The originality of Deitz's technique lies in his effort to reveal the formal elegance of phenomena not by blurring them, but by bringing their irreversible physicality into sharp focus. In developing this unique approach, he has embraced influences as diverse as Morandi, Tamayo, Hopper, Guston and Rothenberg. I am sure that it is in some part his ability to straddle the apparent divide between the empirical and the archetypal that lends such range and depth to his teaching. Much of the work in the current exhibit was produced in the Department of Art between sessions in the classroom. I have noticed a stimulating cross-fertilization between assignments James gives in his classes and events in his own studio—a dynamic that cancels the typical divide between artist and teacher. James is an artist in the classroom, but, as his current exhibit attests, he also teaches through his work. It has been a privilege to work with him in the Department of Art at CSU Stanislaus.

David Olivant

James, I recall in previous conversations with you your claims that subject matter is unimportant, that you can achieve your aims regardless of subject matter. Would you regard yourself as a formalist and is your recent move into abstraction the logical consequence of this attitude?

On content, I probably should have said not that subject matter (content) is unimportant, but that one genre or area has as much validity as another. In other words, when I approach the landscape, I am aware of its particulars, but they are not what is paramount; likewise with the abstractions, or figurative work, etc. I once read that DeKoonig said, "I have a very biased view on life...but I am always watching, and sometimes I see an awful lot," and I said, "Hey, me too, for real." For me it's not just what I take out of different subject matter; it's what I put in (me). I try very hard to find a balance, one that walks a tight rope of ambiguity. Let's say we approach it very simply, maybe with a statement that we want the viewer to say, again, no matter what the subject (content) is. How about "Wow, I feel like I've been there," kinda deja vu. Sometimes it can be light on the sidewalk, it can be structure, a dreamscape, hardcore politics, or maybe just a moment of sexual arousal. I enjoy how the mind operates, free flow observation with an opinion. We think of many things, important or not, during the course of a day, and I feel they are all legitimate. There's a moment when I'm thinking about any content when I concentrate fully on how "I" see it, no holds barred.

Much of your recent work seems to be about negation or cancellation, either through 'X' motifs or through the act of painting out images. How does this jive with your notion of presence? What is the cancellation about? How important is the destructive urge to your process? What about the notion of "absence"? It strikes me that your works allude to something that is missing, that you have eliminated, or both. Is it 'the subject' that you are canceling? Is that the absent entity?

I love how the mind can peel off the outer layers of imagery and get to the core, even when we need to incorporate several separate images to create a narrative. I am fascinated with how much material and information can be stripped in the process of constructing a more complete statement. The principle of "the most with the least" is just as important in form as it is in content. As for the X's and reductive painting, they have always been there, especially in the

abstracts. But to be perfectly honest they are bigger and more obvious right now because I am affected by a class I'm teaching. Working on Text and Image with the students has made my own painting a curious inquiry as of late. Where it goes, I have no idea. The letter X is very structural and I see it as much as a positive (x marks the spot) as a negative (canceling out). Simplicity and strength are its beauty, "Bam!, BIG X." And, yes, it is a very easy way to change a painting quickly.

I enjoy giving a "history" to a painting, leaving evidence of the decision-making process. My surfaces, which are a factor in the "presence" of the piece, are not artificially created for surface's sake. They usually are the product of placing honest imagery down, and then painting over all or portions of it because it failed in its initial role. The cancellation process is a very comfortable process, as easy as drinking a glass of water. In my eyes, if it doesn't feel right, it gets thrown out (painted over, scraped-out). I don't view cancellation as destructive; I see it as just one of the steps to the end. I truly love this pursuit of excellence, so I don't hesitate to efface what's not working.

And finally your last question, which I believe has an enormous amount of insight: the question of "absence." Absence is the final approval. This harkens back to ambiguity. It is when the work reaches a point of breathing, a point between blatant opinion and complete emptiness that it seems to say "I'm done." Timeless shock is what I want the viewer to walk away with.

You cover a lot of ground in your response. I am interested in the accepting attitude you seem to have to cancellation, and I agree that cancellation is an integral part of any serious artist's working process. But do you mean to tell me that when you painted XZ completely black that there was no anxiety about losing the earlier image, even if you could predict that painting it black would improve it?

Also your points about cancellation are all from the artist's perspective, which is perfectly valid, but it seems that even if you are completely comfortable with painting over images or "crossing them out" that the viewer, typically not knowing this, must perceive the act as violent or destructive and that this perception is what creates part of the work's "presence."

Honestly, once I make a decision, no matter how large it is, I don't worry about it, and I never look back. As Mae West said, "Regrets, I have none." So...no, no anxiety. On the contrary it is often a decision that had been brewing anyway, and the action itself is very exciting, as much a necessity and relief as anything else. The reason is that this is where I have found success. We are always telling our students, "Oh, you must take risks!" If you don't exercise it yourself they can read through you as sure as anything, especially when they see the paintings in person. My work is about constant risk. Then again, having used this approach for so long I often understand that it will also add another layer to the history of the work, therefore creating a richer surface and another opportunity to finish the work quickly or expand to the next series of thoughts. If the finish does not come as a surprise, I have grave misgivings about its quality.

I do this over and over again, then I get to a point in a painting when the activity stops, and it's done. Like a thunderstorm, and then the ending, a moment of calm with the remnants like the rain soaked environment.

If the viewer interprets the action as destructive then so be it. I feel that what I am saying and how I am saying it is dealt with appropriately. This action is spontaneous and deliberate. Take for instance "Red River." I worked on this piece daily for a week straight. The painting was a collection of packed images almost devoid of red. The act of mixing the red, and covering virtually the whole surface, was accomplished very quickly-- maybe two minutes--and the addition of the broken black cattle fence and cut wire took only a minute or two. So, often, the painting out is not a cancellation,

it often times is a containment of what lies beneath. The viewer can feel the inner rumblings, the undercurrent is only veiled, they can still "feel" it. My paintings often deal with emotional content anyway; sex, death, and religion are very charged issues which I feel are best dealt with in a direct fashion.

You have often mentioned to me about being developed enough in your own practice not to have to think much about other artists, but I know that some of this must be disingenuous. I've seen the Matisse book in your studio, heard you talk about Morandi, Tamayo, Hopper, Scully etc. So who paved the way for you and who in your worst moments do you fear looking like? You've always stayed fairly squarely within a modernist aesthetic, do you consider yourself a reactionary?

Because I may talk favorably about or look at certain artists does not mean that I lean on them for the answers in my paintings. I am interested in my solutions. If the solutions look like, or run parallel to those of previous artists, then it is as much a product of coincidence as anything. Do I feel the need to re-invent the wheel? No. I take lessons learned, but at this point it is instinctual, not referenced. The books in my studio are there for a visual distraction, often times to take my mind off of my work temporarily, without leaving the visual arena. This is not to say all of these artists haven't influenced me in the past. They have. But they don't affect me much now; very little, if any at all. They suggested to me a "standard" to reach, and they gave me a leg up with what they had learned. It is De Kooning who had the most impact, for so many reasons. Courage above all. His work seemed to re-iterate to me a personal commitment unleashing creativity, "Going for it." There is a brutal honesty to his work, there is a craftsmanship to his work, and there is ambiguity. I found a spiritual mentor and a profoundly gifted painter all wrapped up in one package. In my worst moments I fear looking like any other artist. If by following my natural instincts I am viewed as a reactionary, fine, but it's not intentional.

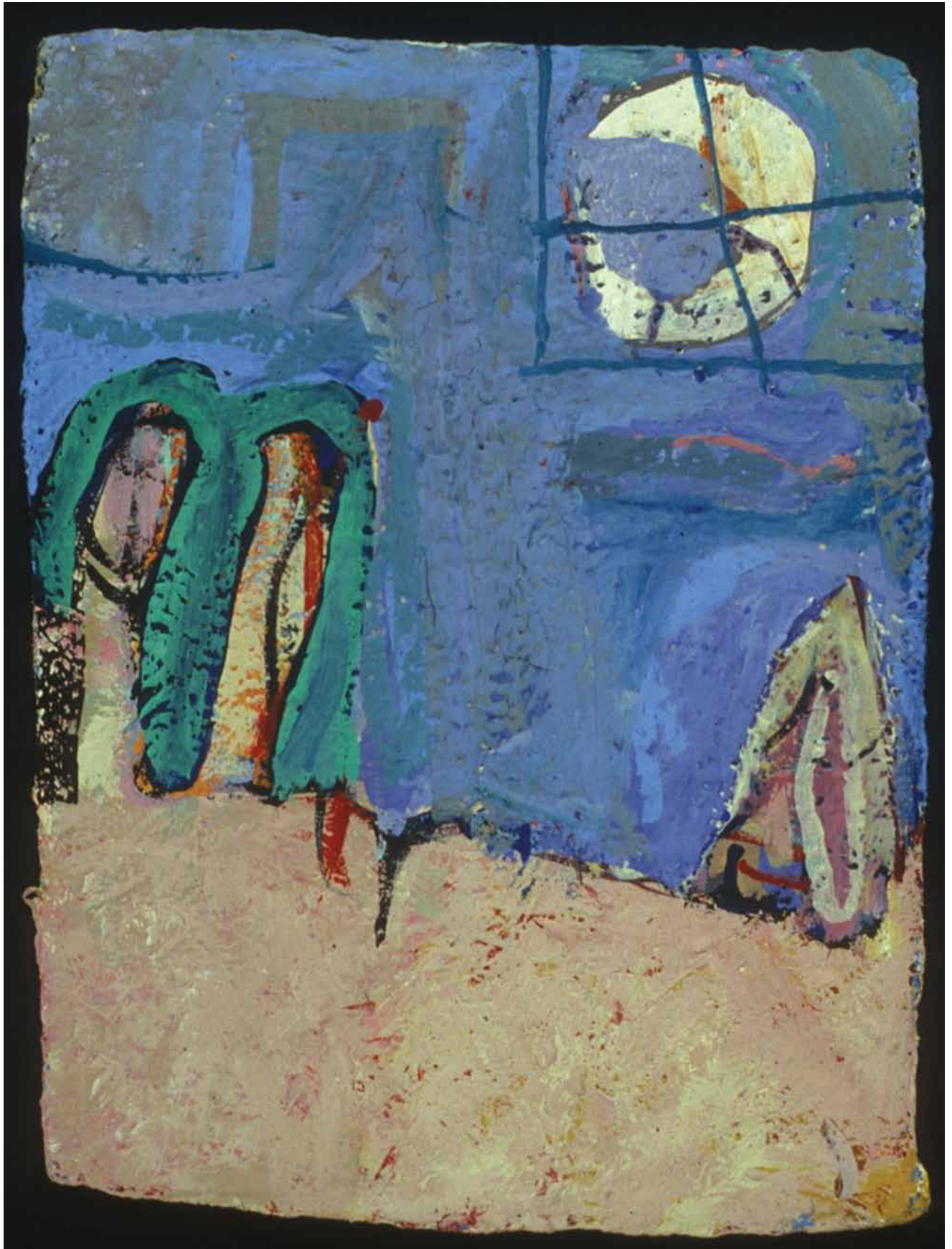
Do you think painting still has a future and if so how will you be a part of that? Have you already made your best work or does it lie in the future? Could you paint yourself into a corner? How do you relate to Post-Modernism?

As far as painting having as future, I see it kind of like asking a musician if the blues have a future. It seems like something so core that these two things will always have a future. Every time someone wants to bury either one, someone else comes along and adds to it. So, for that reason I believe painting has a vital, vibrant future. The mere physicality of a strong original painting in a room transforms that whole room, often times defining that space. I think it is in human nature to want works created by an individual, by hand, around. As far as new ideas go, I'd say, have faith, and I hope that my statements evolve and mature to the point of contributing.

I would hope that my best work is still to come, but artists are very poor judges of their own work and I can easily see disagreement from one person to another as to which works are the strongest. Could I paint myself into a corner? I try to everyday. By this I mean that when the viewer dissects a work of mine, I hope they come to the conclusion that I presented very difficult questions, and very strong answers. So, I challenge myself, I do paint myself into a corner, and then fight my way out, both figuratively and in actuality.

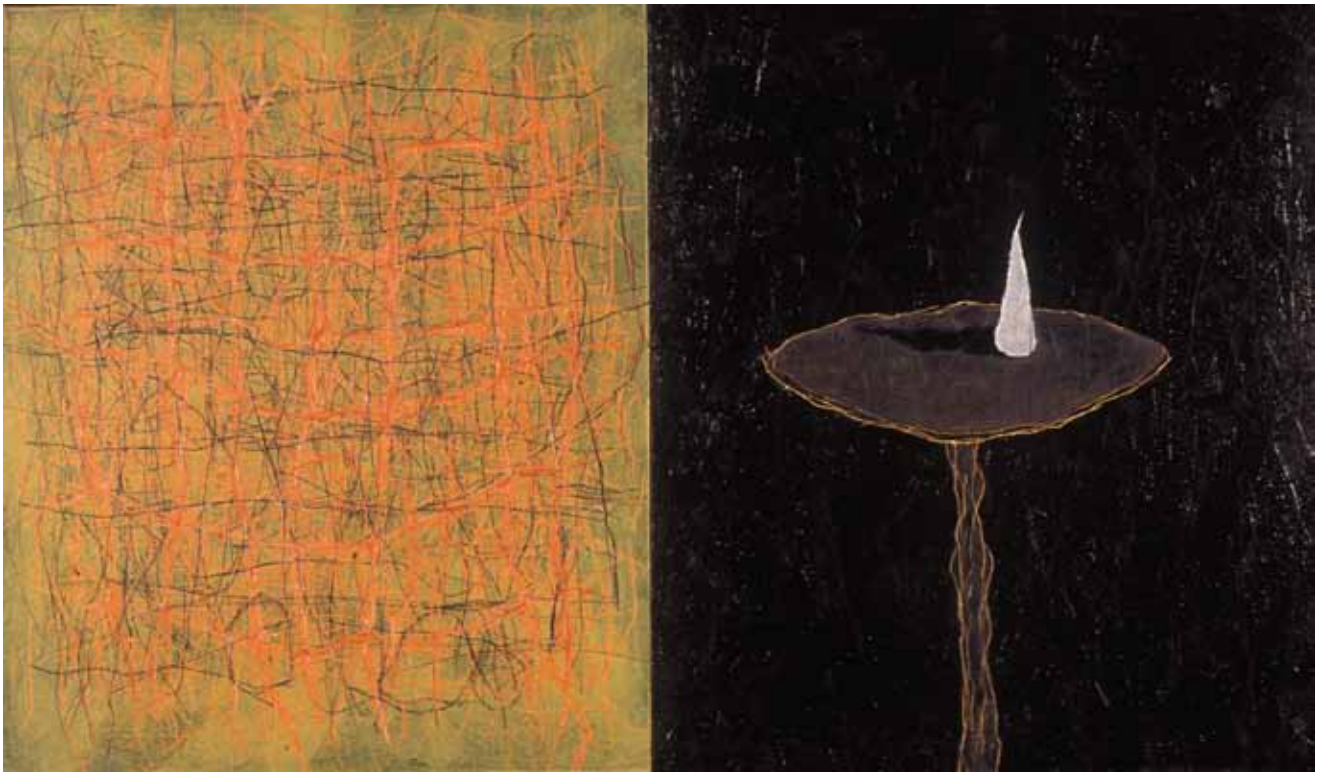
Post-Modernism: This is something that I do not think about much, but if I did, I would probably state that I see myself more as a forerunner than as a bandwagon jumper. I march to the beat of my own drum. I truly respect and enjoy many of my contemporaries, but I don't feel that I am a part of any current schools of thought. If a work, either my own or someone else's, regardless of category, jumps up and grabs my attention, I'm interested in it for that reason. That's enough for me.

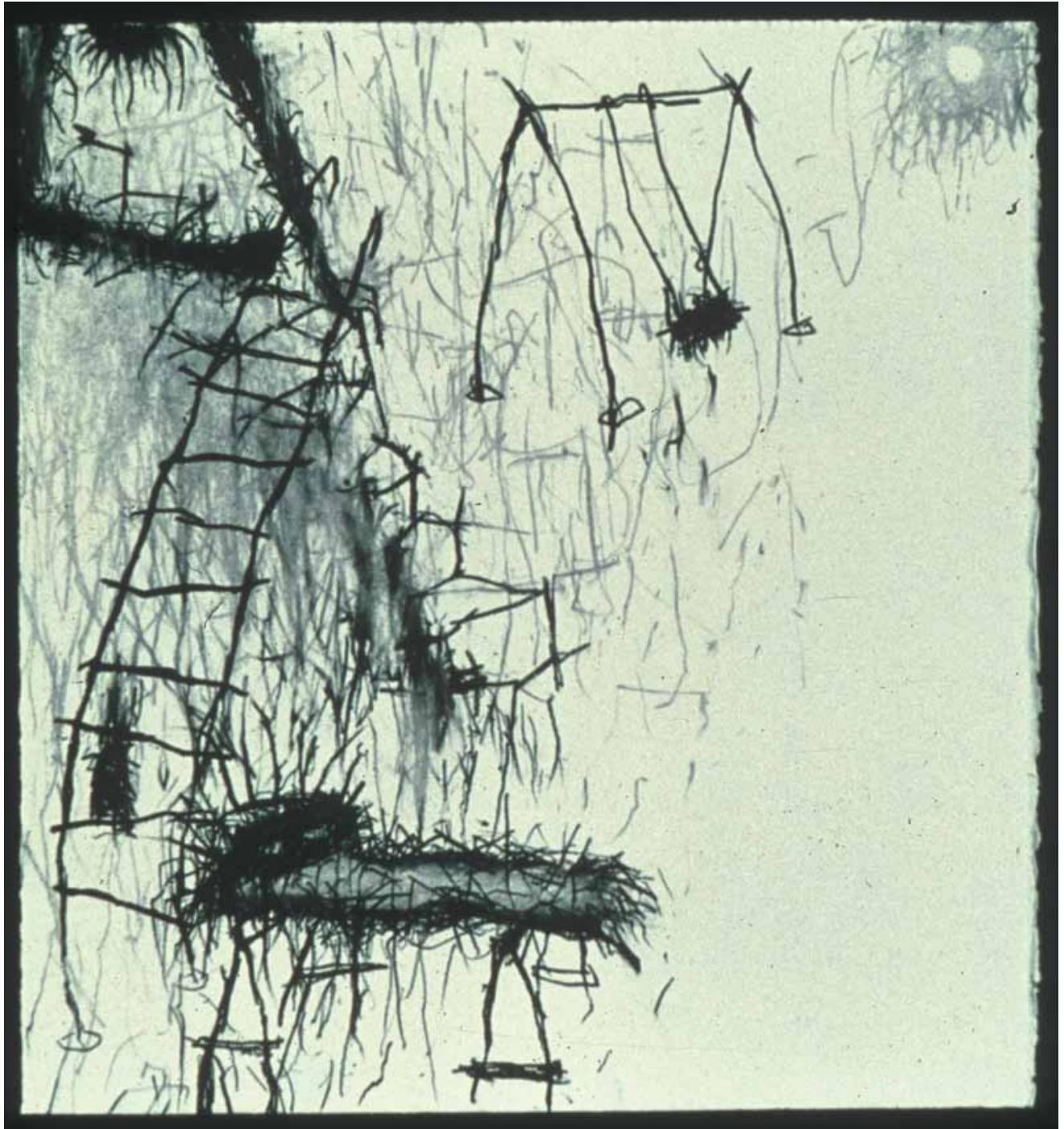
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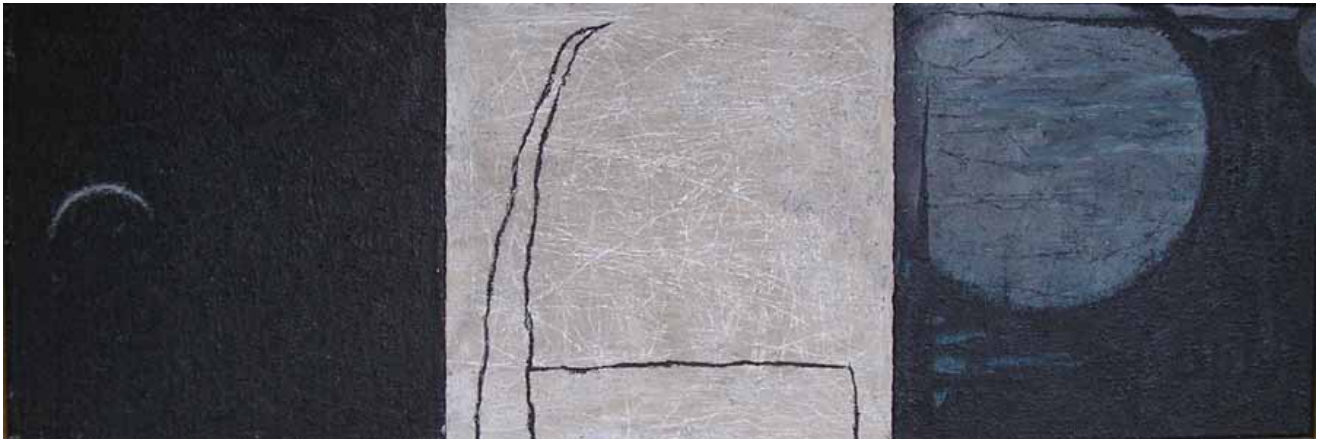












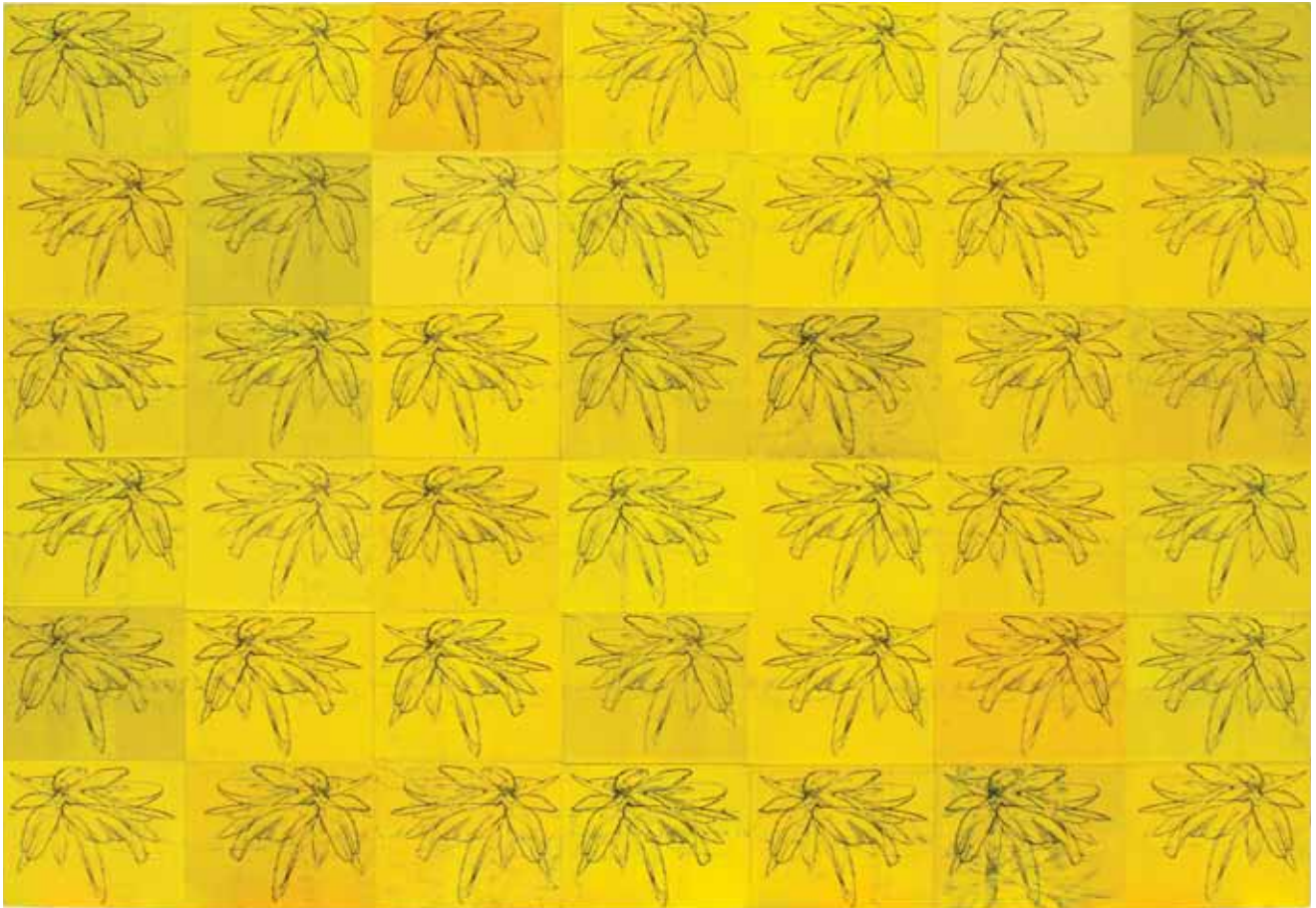


















Retrospective Works

page 10	<i>Blue You</i> (1989) gouache on paper 6" x 8" Collection of the Seattle Arts Commission
page 11	<i>Red River</i> (1990) oil on canvas 48" x 42" Collection of the Washington State Arts Commission
page 12	<i>Southern Comfort</i> (1992) oil on canvas 44" x 20" Private Collection
page 13	<i>Trick or Treat</i> (1993) oil on canvas 30" x 48" Private Collection
page 14	<i>KW</i> (1995) charcoal on paper 15" x 14" Private Collection
page 15	<i>Déjà vu</i> (1995) mixed media on paper 6 " x 4" Private Collection
page 16	<i>Crib</i> (1999) oil on canvas 16" x 16" Private Collection
page 17	<i>Flock</i> (1999) oil on canvas 42" x 40" Collection of Zevenbergen Captial
page 18	<i>Recurring Dream</i> (2002) oil on canvas 66" x 22" Private Collection

New Works

- page 19 *Beach House* (2009)
mixed media on canvas
34 " x 29"
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 20 *T for 2*(2009)
oil on canvas
16" x 10"
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 21 *4X* (2009)
mixed media on paper
33 " x 9 ⁵/₈ "
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 22 *Butch* (2009)
mixed media on paper
24 ¹/₈ " x 12 ¹/₈ "
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 23 *Butch* (detail)
- page 24 *Yellow* (2009)
intaglio print on canvas
67" x 45"
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 25 *Yellow* (detail)
- page 26 *I,II,III,IV* (2009)
oil on canvas
48" x 12"
Courtesy of the Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle
- page 27 *I,II,III,IV* (detail)

James Deitz

EDUCATION: 1986, M.F.A. Drawing and Painting, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
1984, B.F.A. Drawing and Painting, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND

VISITING ARTIST:

2006, 2008-09 California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA
2003 Pierce College, Lakewood, WA
1992 University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

2010 James Deitz, University Art Gallery, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA
2008 Seattle: Land, Water, Sky, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
2006 Paintings, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
2004 James Deitz Drawings, The Cedar, New York, NY
2003 James Deitz, Fine Arts Gallery, Pierce College, Lakewood, WA
2002 New Work, Art Center Gallery, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA
2000 Dialogue, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1999 Interiors, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1998 Toys, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1997 James Deitz Paintings, Fine Arts Gallery, Pierce College, Tacoma, WA
1996 Mexico, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1994 Drawings, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1993 New Work, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1991 An Introduction, Upstairs Gallery, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
1990 Paintings, King County Arts Commission Gallery, Seattle, WA
Recent Work, Blake Gallery, Seattle, WA
1989 Drawings, Robert Allman Gallery, Seattle, WA
1987 Ink Drawings, Browning Arts, Grand Forks, ND

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2008 Art Faculty Exhibit, John Stuart Rogers Building, California State University, Stanislaus, Turlock, CA
On the Wall, Steele Gallery, Gage Academy of Art, Seattle, WA
2005 Drawings: James Deitz, Gail Grinnell, Caryn Friedlander, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
2002 North Dakota Museum of Art Annual, North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, ND
2000 4 x 4: Four Decades of School of Art Alumni, Jacob Lawrence Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
1995 The Painted Table, Seattle, WA
1994 Retrospective, AG47 Gallery, Seattle, WA
1993 Hands Off Washington, Crocodile Cafe, Seattle, WA
The New England Fine Art Institute, State of the Art '93, New England Art Expo
Art Works for Aids, Seattle Center Pavilion, Seattle, WA

- 1992 12th Northwest International, Whatcom Museum, Bellingham, WA
New Artists to the Gallery, Summer Show, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
34th North Dakota Print and Drawing Annual, North Dakota Museum of Art
- 1991 The Artist in the Art: Self Portraits, Bumbershoot Festival, Seattle Center, Seattle, WA
25th Anniversary Exhibitions: The Later Years 1986-1990, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 1990 Seven Seattle Artists, AG47 Studio Gallery, Seattle, WA
Never Before Funded Show, Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle Center, Seattle, WA
WPA (Workers Produce Art), Galleria Potatohead, Seattle, WA
- 1988 30th North Dakota Print and Drawing Annual, North Dakota Museum of Art
- 1986 Masters of Fine Arts Exhibition, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle
- 1985 Works in Progress, Department of Fine Arts, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
University Bookstore Invitational Juried Show, Seattle, WA
- 1984 Bachelor of Fine Arts Exhibition, Hughes Fine Arts Gallery, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND
- 1983 North Dakota Governor's Show, One-Year Tour, Selected Cities

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS:

4Culture, King County Arts Commission, Seattle, WA
 Seattle Arts Commission
 Zevenbergen Capital, Seattle, WA
 State of Washington: Washington State's Art in Public Places Program, Mattawa, WA, Auburn, WA

REVIEWS:

- 2000 Still lifes with twists, Matthew Kangas, Art in America, (Special to the Seattle Times)
- 1994 Lawrence exhibit is this month's star at galleries, Robin Updike, The Seattle Times
- 1992 Two artists turn fragments into wholes, Regina Hackett, The Seattle Post-Intelligencer
- 1990 Gallery Review, 911 COCA, (Center on Contemporary Art), Seattle, WA

Acknowledgements

California State University, Stanislaus

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University Art Gallery

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