

Art OF OUR TIME

SELECTIONS FROM THE | ULRICH MUSEUM OF ART
| WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Patricia McDonnell AND *Emily Stamey*

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Toby Kamps, Laura Moriarty,

Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,

AND *Robert Silberman*

PHOTO-ESSAY BY *Larry Schwarm*

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Front cover: Joan Miró, *Personnages Oiseaux* (Bird People), 1977–78
(cat. no. 16)

Back cover: Tom Otterness, *Millipede*, 2008 (cat. no. 45)



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WHEN DAVID REED MOVED INTO HIS FIRST NEW YORK STUDIO IN 1971, HE AND OTHER ARTISTS OF HIS GENERATION FACED A CHALLENGE: how to keep the medium of painting vital when images were traveling more rapidly than ever before and many modern art movements seemed exhausted. Convinced of paint's infinite potential and determined to "make the paintings they say can't be made," he set about creating a singular form of abstraction.¹ His energetic, color-saturated works draw upon a range of sources, including art history, landscape, and film.

At first glance, the free-form arabesques of color and decentralized composition of *#471* resemble 1950s abstract expressionist paintings by Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock. But Reed's flat surface, combining straightedge and curvilinear elements and showing little trace of brushwork, suggests this canvas is the product of painstaking labor and deliberation – in contrast to the spontaneous approach taken by those two painters. The undulating ribbons of hot red on the left and pale pink on the right, made by applying paint with a spatula to produce varying degrees of translucency, assume a three-dimensional, photographic quality. Resembling high-contrast enlargements of drapery folds in Baroque portraits – a subject that fascinates Reed – they add illusionistic depth, suggesting that he thinks of abstraction in symbolic and experiential terms.

Reed, an avid moviegoer, readily admits that film has changed the way he sees both art and the world.² Many of his horizontal images bring to mind the sweeping panoramas of Technicolor westerns, and he talks about the vibrant palette of the vertical *#471* in cinematic terms:

I was trying for every possible extreme of color – light and dark, warm and cold, the extremes of hue in the red and green. I also had some idea that if I could glaze the same hue over a paler version of that hue, I could end up with a "super color," a kind of neon-glare-y quality that makes me think of Superman.³

44 #471
1999–2000
Oil and alkyd resin on canvas
110 1/4 x 34 1/8 in.
Museum Purchase, 2002.0014

Reed recalls hearing the art dealer Nicholas Wilder observe that the painter John McLaughlin's geometric abstractions always ended up in bedrooms because their owners wanted them to be the last things they saw at night and the first things they saw in the morning. At that moment, Reed says, he realized he wanted to be a "bedroom painter," an artist whose work people live with intimately. Ideally, his paintings would be "part of normal life, seen in private moments of reverie."⁴ To that end, he has made works, such as *#471*, that serve up equal measures of painterly smarts and sumptuous delight, mirroring the complexities and pleasures of everyday life.

Toby Kamps

1. Reed, telephone conversation with the author, October 20, 2009.

2. David Reed, "Journal," in *New Paintings for the Mirror Room and Archive in a Studio off the Courtyard*, exh. cat. (Graz, Austria: Neue Galerie Am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1996), 13.

3. Reed, e-mail to the author, October 21, 2009.

4. Arthur C. Danto, "Between the Bed and the Brushstroke: Reading the Paintings of David Reed," *David Reed*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1995), 71.



About the Contributors

Toby Kamps is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He has organized exhibitions on the work of Vanessa Beecroft, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenburg as well as such themed exhibitions as *Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art* (2000), *Lateral Thinking: The Art of the 1990s* (2002), and *The Old, Weird America* (2008).

Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include *Marsden Hartley: American Modern* (1997), *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002), and *Painting Berlin Stories* (2003).

Laura Moriarty is the author of three novels and the recipient of several literary awards. Before becoming a full-time writer, she was a social worker. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Kansas.

Antonya Nelson has written three novels and published six short-story collections. She contributes often to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times Book Review*. Nelson holds the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her award-winning novel, *Living to Tell* (2000), takes place in her hometown of Wichita, and her forthcoming novel, *Bound*, is set there as well.

Timothy R. Rodgers is director of the Scottsdale (Arizona) Museum of Contemporary Art. Formerly chief curator at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, he is involved in a range of writing and curatorial projects. His scholarly concentration is on American early modernism.

Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus. His chief scholarly interests have been photography, film, and contemporary art. Silberman collaborated with former *New York Times* photography critic Vicki Goldberg on the companion volume for the 1999 PBS series *American Photography: A Century of Images*.

Larry Schwarm is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, *On Fire: Larry Schwarm*, won the Honickman Book Award and Prize.

Emily Stamey, the Ulrich Museum's curator of modern and contemporary art, is the author of *Jolan Gross-Bettelheim: The American Prints* (2001) and *The Prints of Roger Shimomura: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1968–2005* (2006). Her scholarship centers on ethnic identities and social themes in American art.

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