

# SELECTED PRESS

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JANE SWAVELY

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ALAN UGLOW

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## JANE SWAVELY

Jane Swavely's (b. 1959, Allentown, PA) abstractions attempt to reconcile romanticism and minimalism while referencing natural and cinematic elements. Intense areas of color are set against zones where paint has been wiped from the surface, revealing undertones and vestigial forms. Swavely's practice is intuitive and comes from the artist's subconscious, each work an expression of a lingering thought. Compositionally, visual evocations of screens and portals are constant in the work as is an illusive silver tone, appearing intensely reflective and polished in some works and a tarnished patina in others. When combined with rich pigmented color otherwise present in her paintings the results can be emulsive and luminous, recalling some alchemical consequence.

Jane Swavely attended the figurative academic program at Boston University College of Fine Arts which was led by Philip Guston in the 1970s and subsequently James Weeks. Swavely moved to New York City in 1980, and worked as an assistant to New Image artist Lois Lane while attending the School of Visual Arts, and then for Brice Marden until 1985. In 1986 at the age of twenty-five, she held her first solo-show at CDS Gallery. She was part of the CDS Gallery roster until 2005. As her career progressed, Swavely became part of A.I.R, a legendary female-run art space founded in the 1970s. A.I.R provided her with five solo exhibitions from 2011-2022, showcasing the depth and breadth of her talent over the years.

Swavely has held solo exhibitions at Magenta Plains, New York, NY; the New Arts Program, Kutztown, PA; Loyola College, Baltimore, MD; and the Mandeville Gallery at Union College in Schenectady, NY. She has exhibited her paintings in group exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Nashville, and abroad. Swavely is the recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship. Her work is in numerous public and private collections, including the JPMorgan Chase Art Collection and the Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania. She currently lives in her loft on the Bowery in New York City and maintains a studio in Hudson Valley, New York.

*Art and Object*  
March 9, 2024

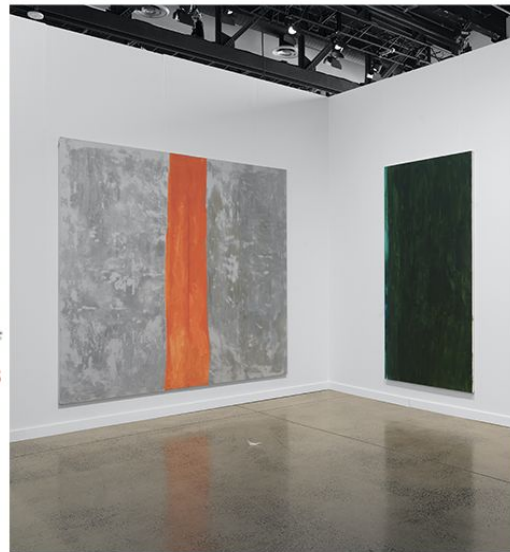


# Previewing Independent Art Fair's 15th New York Edition

MAY 8, 2024 | PAUL LASTER

A mid-career artist, Jane Swavely was trained as a figurative artist at Boston University College of Fine Arts, where **Philip Guston** had been influential and **Brice Marden** had studied. Working with Marden from 1980 to 1985, Swavely moved into a loft on The Bowery, where she still lives, to pursue her painting practice.

Swavely had her first solo show at age 25 at CDS Gallery in 1986 and continued to be represented by the gallery for 20 years before becoming a member of A.I.R, a legendary, female-run space for **women artists** founded in the 1970s. Here, she exhibited her atmospheric abstractions exploring light, landscape, and intuitive mark-making from 2011 to 2022. Earlier this year, Swavely had her first solo show with Magenta Plains, who is presenting her paintings at the fair alongside British minimalist painter Alan Uglow, who also lived and worked on The Bowery until passing in 2011.



COURTESY OF JANE SWAVELEY AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK  
Installation view. Independent Art Fair: Jane Swavely and Alan Uglow. Magenta Plains. New York. NY. 2024.

“The paintings are reductive but not **minimalist**,” said Swavely. “Until 2018, they were gestural landscapes. I wanted to get away from that very romantic tradition. I made a concerted effort to make the work that wasn’t about landscape, but the **color** subconsciously comes from going Upstate, and the light—a cold gray light—comes from living on The Bowery. I sail a lot, so time on the water has definitely influenced me—the luminosity of light on the water. I also love film. There’s a screen-like element to the paintings, in the way **movies** are shot and the composition of the shots. I’m looking at a screen every day. Whether it’s my computer or Instagram or looking at images, the light comes from behind the screen. With some of my paintings, I feel like the light is coming from behind the canvas.”



COURTESY OF JANE SWAVELY AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

Jane Swavely. Silver OID #4. 2022. Oil on canvas. 90" x 90"

*Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*  
March 9, 2024



## Jane Swavely at Magenta Plains



*Installation view, Jane Swavely: Paintings, Magenta Plains, New York*

In what has turned out to be a triumphant exhibition, Jane Swavely presented paintings executed over the last couple of years, denoting a pared down phase of her practice to essentials that serve it well. The expediency of the work is alluded to in a somewhat cryptic statement Swavely made (referring to her paintings) she said: “they are better when they are past”. Does such a stance—the preference for looking forward that the statement implies—foretell a progressive agenda, or a statement of faith? Either way, moving forward serves her practice with advantage. By committing to pure abstraction, in scale reminiscent of the New York School, Swavely puts methods front and center. There is a preference for the one-shot, the unfussy; a reliance on rags to wipe away and highlight, together with the use of large flat brushes, giving the paintings their greasy, smeary, and particularly feathery atmospheric qualities.

Then, there are her experiences as studio assistant to Lois Lane and Brice Marden, which filters in with nods to ‘new image’ totemism and distinct color. Swavely has a penchant for contrasts between gritty, sooty, silvers that come across as though they have been admixed with charcoal, and sectors of often acid hues. Her use of silver has been linked with her oft-cited interest in cinema. In a recent interview she spoke of being effected by the compositions and photography found in Michelangelo Antonioni masterpiece “La Notte”. Then there is the art-historic lineage of the pigment—from Pollock to Warhol to Stella and Humphries—all of which are absorbed in Swavely’s usage, from emotive formalism to remove (chilliness). She has dragged Modernism into the twenty-first century, utilizing the benefit of time, distance and experience. And, yes, there are harbingers to the Ab-Ex trinity of Newman, Rothko and Still, in the work, that can also be viewed as best in a rearview mirror, allowing movement beyond the boundaries of isms.



*Jane Swavely, OID #3, 2021, oil on canvas, 56 x 44 inches*

Upon entering the gallery one encounters “OID #3 Green”, 2021 hung above the front desk. It is a fantastic piece of bucolic painting, in which smoky labyrinths of slashing brush strokes and washes hold one as if deep within a wood. Or, is it a murky interior, beyond a partially opened door that beckons us? The earliest, and smallest (56 x 44 inches) canvas in the show, it’s distinctiveness seemingly the criteria for setting it off from the main body of the exhibition. Chromatically, it forges a sisterhood with Moira Dryer’s casein panels.

The majority of the works have this delineation of ‘OID’ as a component of their titles. Swavely has said that, referring to this component, that she came upon its meaning a fragment of a work, a mere syllable, as in it’s usage as a suffix often implying an incomplete or imperfect resemblance to what is indicated by the preceding element. And, only later did she come across the three letter combination being used as an abbreviation for: object identifier. Is she pointing out the dependence her work has on preceding history, as in that it is somehow zomboid to the original?



*Jane Swavely, Silver OID #6, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 inches*

The gallery proper is lined with six monumental canvases. The largest, “Silver OID #6”, 2022, a diptych measuring seven-and-a-half-feet square, takes place of prominence, occupying the far central wall. By positing one figure, made up of a blackish/reddish/brownish column—with three-quarter of it sitting on the right edge of the left panel and one-quarter taking up the left edge of the right panel—there are evocations of nothing so much as an Oceanic or Easter Island totem. This impression is aided by the ‘chunks’ taken out of it along the uppermost edges by spots of overpaint and/or splatter from the surrounding field of silver. A flanking wall holds two 90 x 45 inch paintings, “Magenta OID”, 2023 and “Silver OID #7”, 2022, a work that Swavely has admitted having struggled with, including intervention by her dog, has led to a result that I would categorize it as involved with what has come to resemble something close to capturing movement. A close cousin to Pat Steir’s waterfalls, there is a rougher, brinier edge here, the flow having been applied by direct contact rather than pouring and washing with spray.

While those paintings become treatises on bisection, or centrality, a pair that share a wall, “Light Trap #3” and “Light Trap #4”, both 2023, each 90 x 45 inches, hanging at a respectful distance from each go with another strategy. These twins each balance an abbreviated rectangle of rich color, with a billowing sail-like quality enhanced by their bendy shapes, bracketed by an L-shaped banding of signature silver. The respective zones are treated with the same atmospheric streakiness we have come to expect. Here Swavely has switched her titling regiment, from the evocative oids, with their intimation of likenesses, to focus the direct gaze at the holy grail of painting.





*Jane Swavely, Light Trap #2, 2023, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches*

The show closes out with “Light Trap #2”, 2023, predominated by brilliant yellows and oranges, delineated as three vertical sectors, the largest a little off-center, and highlighted by a ray running down the left sector that brought to mind illumination from a Dan Flavin sculpture, of all things, but more provocatively, it called to mind the astounding depiction of the angel Gabriel as a pure column of light in Henry Oshawa Tanner’s luminist “The Annunciation”, 1898 to be found in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*Henry Oshawa Tanner, The Annunciation, 1899, collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art*

The interest that Swavely has culled from the art community recalls the excitement Susan Rothenberg was able to rally to her spare atmospheric imagery that, similar to Swavely's, relied on paramount figure/ground relationships.

As a long-time denizen of the Bowery, whose locale has infiltrated her practice, it seems apt that Swavely's commitment to her resolute career, finds a home at the head bulwark of this storied thoroughfare, giving us a new standard bearer. **WM** By **EDWARD WAISNIS**

HaberArts  
January 19, 2024

### *Women Remake Abstraction*

#### *Holding in the light*

John Haber  
in New York City

When Jane Swavely calls a painting *Silver OID*, silvery it is. It does not need metallic paint or glitter, just oil on canvas to shine. It does not need shifting reflections as one's eye crosses its surface or one's body walks beside. It attains that sense of visual and material substance with paint alone, the brush carrying pools of white as it will, covering and mixing with gray. It looks back to a time when painting pretty much meant painting in oil, for its ability to lend depth to a flat surface by holding in the light.

Not that everyone back in the day needed oil. Enamel and industrial paint were good enough for Jackson Pollock now and then, for their shine and low cost, but then he also threw in cigarette butts and coins. Still, Swavely looks back, in her scale and commitment to abstract art as well. Paintings can run up to ninety inches high, and the sixth in the series is ninety inches square. She likes how large paintings are that much more visual and material.

That version looks to a different postwar artist, too. A broad stripe descends the full height of the painting, much like "zips" for Barnett Newman. Swavely is thoroughly contemporary, and her paintings are and new, but then the Jewish Museum has argued for Newman's relevance to art today. Her zip, like his, cannot so easily stick to the edge or center of the canvas. Here its right edge falls just to the right of center. Still, it has fluid edges, much as Newman sometimes allowed his brush to show in a zip while keeping the background color seemingly untouched.



Hold on, though, for she is not just reworking the past. Blacks lend depth to that deep red vertical, much as whites lend silver to gray. The stripe is also more than a foot wide, like brushstrokes for David Reed, and another painting devotes roughly its left half to much the same rust and blood red. One could almost see the halves in collision, were the boundary not so loose and permeable. One could almost see the gray as background, were the brushwork on both halves or within the larger silver field and the stripe not so much the same. Other paintings defy the very thought of a zip, as one color climbs the right edge and crosses over the top.

They may look as if they date to the 1950s, but Swavely is not history. Born in 1959, she has long exhibited with A.I.R., the women's collective in Dumbo. Just starting out, she assisted Brice Marden and Lois Lane at that. One can see Marden's equation of monochrome color fields with drawing in her abstract painting—and Lane's *New Image* painting, like that of Jennifer Bartlett and Susan Rothenberg, in her refusal of purity. The material nature of paint here is just that, a step into this world, not a higher calling. She might cringe at Newman's "The Sublime Is Now."

She fits with the present interest in overlooked women in abstraction, although she has exhibited regularly since the 1980s. She may still seem to fall between generations or run across them. Yet her work is a powerful alternative to the "everything goes" version of the revival of painting or, for that matter, to the zip. Past shows have presented a still greater depth, using dark, resonant colors with elusive outlines. There, too, she insists on that visual and material substance. It carries her from deep red against silver to color climbing the wall.

*Jane Swavely at Magenta Plains through February 24.*

*Two Coats of Paint*  
January 18, 2024

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

SOLO SHOWS

# Jane Swavely and the Bowery tradition



*Jane Swavely, OID #3 Green, 2021, oil on canvas, 56 x 44 inches*

Contributed by Michael Brennan / **Magenta Plains** is located on the Bowery, just as it breaks left onto Canal Street, in Chinatown. Upon entering, viewers are immediately greeted by a washy *terre verte* Jane Swavely painting, *OID #3 Green*, hanging above the desk. It sets an organic tone and is indicative of the half-dozen paintings to follow, hanging in the first-floor main gallery. Swavely's seven canvases are all vertical, and are mostly diptychs, internalized or externalized. They are loosely painted with a 2- to 2 1/2-inch flat brush, heavy on the solvent, with some wiping away by hand. Much color mixing happens directly on the surface. Swavely favors flared, phosphorescent hues. She cleverly manipulates paint with rags to create the illusion of light emitting from the ground. Her work glows, appearing backlit. **Mark Rothko** would often talk about the effects of his timeworn brushes, but **Milton Resnick** revealed that Rothko secretly rendered most of his effects through wiping, adding and subtracting with rags. Swavely is after a different visual feel but employs similar means.

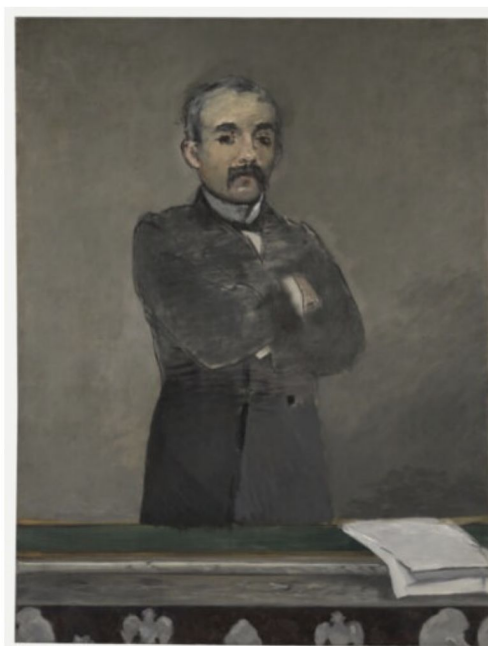


Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #2*, 2023, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches

Swavely's paintings begin and end *in media res*, that is, in the middle of the action. There's not much distinction between background and foreground, underpainting and finish, beginning and end. She prefers her work to appear "super fresh" and not "labored," as she noted in a [2022 \*Two Coats of Paint\* interview](#). I prefer paintings that err on the side of unfinished as opposed to overworked. [Sharon Butler](#) explored this tension in some depth in connection with the MetBreuer exhibition "[Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible](#)" in 2016. For anyone skeptical of the preference, I offer two Manet paintings of French prime minister Georges Clemenceau:



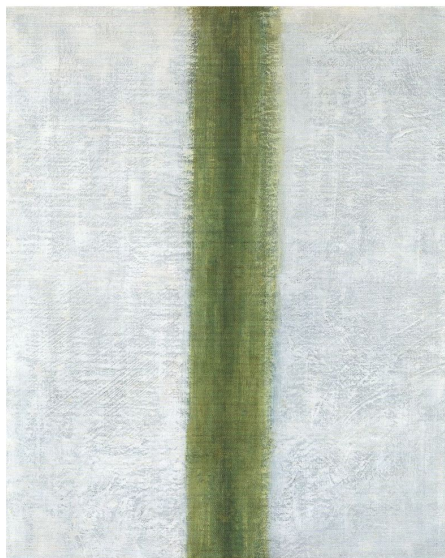
Musee d'Orsay: Edouard Manet, *Georges Clemenceau* (1879-1880), oil on canvas, 37 x 29.5 inches (94 x 73.8 cm)



Kimbell Art Museum: Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Georges Clemenceau* (1879-1880), oil on canvas, 45 5/8 x 34 3/4 in. (115.9 x 88.2 cm)

Is the more finished painting on the right actually better? I think the less finished one is the livelier of the pair, and Swavely makes a strong argument for leaving well enough alone. It takes considerable maturity for any artist to recognize when the time is right to step out of a painting, and then simply to stop.

Paintings, of course, embody the artist's lineage. Swavely's might begin with **Olga Rozanova** and run through **Moira Dryer**.



Kremlin Museum: Olga Rozanova, 1917, oil on canvas, (28 x 19.2 inches / 71.2 x 49 cm)



Moira Dryer, *Pop*, 1989, 2 parts: acrylic and wood, and steel.  
Acrylic/wood: 48 x 61 inches. Steel Plate: 31 x 13 inches.  
Courtesy of Van Doren Waxter.



Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #4*, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches



Jane Swavely, *Light Trap #3*, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches

Her two diptychs, with their internalized fissure and doubly gnashing edges, recall **Barnett Newman's** notion of “The Plasmic Image” and **Günther Förg's** post-modern reboots with their lightning bolt drop.



*Barnett Newman, Ulysses, 1990, oil on canvas, 132 x 50 inches / (335.3 x 127 cm)*



*Gunther Förg, Untitled, 1990, acrylic on lead, 94 1/2 x 63 inches (240 x 160cm)*

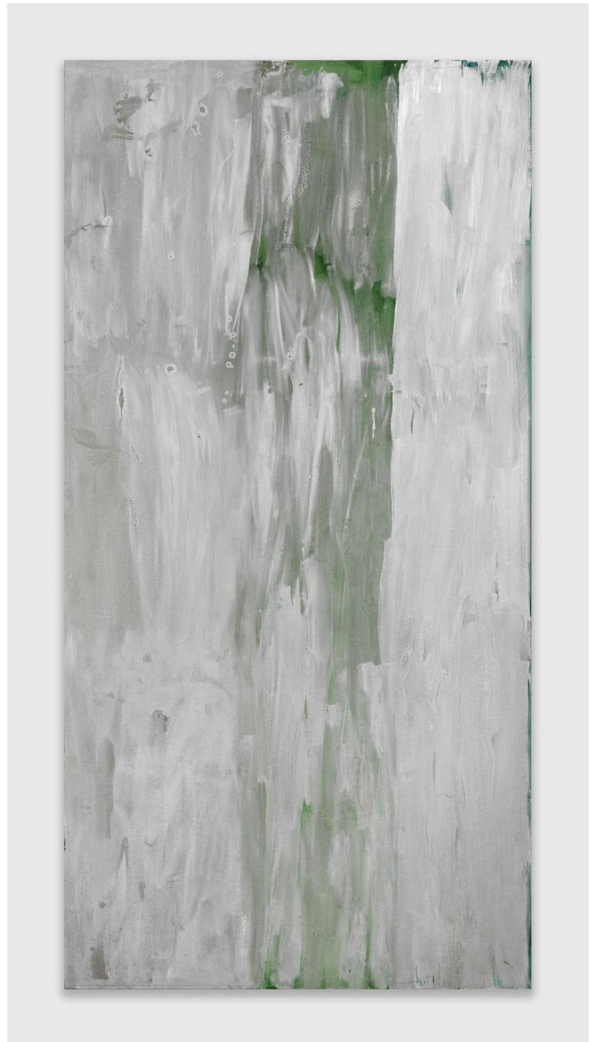
Swavely is most adept in her use of silver paint and finds an extraordinary range of value between light and dark in this color. Silver paint – in particular, metallic aluminum paint – has a long history in “American Type Painting,” beginning with **Jackson Pollock** and running through to **Frank Stella** and **Andy Warhol**. Swavely’s use of silver is closer to **Warhol’s Hollywood silver-screen mode**. Many contemporary painters, such as **Jacqueline Humphries**, likewise use silver as a media signifier. Reinforcing Swavely’s reference to cinema is the narrow profile of her stretchers, which nearly sink into the wall, unlike the blocky, more object-like presence of standard heavy-duty stretchers. Swavely considers all interpretations.

# MAGENTA

# PLAINS



*Jane Swavely, Magenta OID, 2023, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches*



*Jane Swavely, Silver OID #7, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 45 inches*



*Jaqueline Humphries, NMM...MMM, 2023*





Jane Swavely, Silver OID #6, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 90 inches



John Millei, Quicksilver #6, 1991, acrylic on canvas, 132 x 132 inches (335.3 x 335.3cm)

**John Millei** is another contemporary painter who is accomplished at parsing silver, but his acrylic work is flatter and less nuanced than Swavely's oil paint, with its lively interplay of light.

Finally, I appreciate that Swavely, a longtime Bowery denizen, is showing in her own neighborhood. It anchors the context of her abstraction, the Bowery being home at one time or another to its own distinctive subset of New York School artists, including Rothko, **Cy Twombly**, **Eva Hesse**, **Robert Ryman**, and **Brice Marden**. Swavely is pushing the same line, kicking some life into a storied tradition, moving it forward, and keeping it super fresh with modernist painting that raises questions and possibilities rather than enclosing itself in quotations and remaining categorically frozen.



Magenta Plains Gallery: Jane Swavely, Paintings, 2024, Installation View

*Two Coats of Paint*  
March 9, 2022

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

## STUDIO VISIT

# On the Bowery with Jane Swavely



Contributed by Sharon Butler / **Jane Swavely** has lived and worked in a loft overlooking the Bowery since the 1980s when she was an SVA student and later a studio assistant to **Brice Marden**. Since “**Jinx**,” her pre-pandemic solo show at A.I.R. gallery, Jane’s work has become more subtractive, with looser brushwork, more gamsol and linseed oil, and lots of aggressive wiping out — erasing with big rags that she gets by the carton. She is fond of garish near-neon greens and vivid oranges and has introduced silver metallic paint that glimmers and changes depending on the light. Loose geometric shapes contrast with thin hard-edge lines — traces of the crossbar supports behind the canvas. Two of her paintings are on view in “**Very Metal**,” a witty group show at Theodore Gallery in Tribeca through March 11. Although she doesn’t like to talk about her work, Swavely invited me to stop by and see what she’s been up to.

**Sharon Butler:** Well, it looks like you’ve been making some moves since the last time I was here. These paintings are so loose. I love the metallic. What are you looking for in these new paintings? Where do you start?

**Jane Swavely:** I’d say I’m looking for a sort of luminosity that doesn’t necessarily translate to landscape. I’m trying to erase the landscape with minimal spatial representation I want to make non-representational objects with as little effort as possible. Thin paint. Not overworked. I want them to look super fresh. Sometimes they’re really fast, and then sometimes — like that one over there — they might take a couple of years. That one is my least favorite, because it just feels so labored. Where do I start? It’s more about stopping. I try to stop as soon as I can, when I feel like the painting has light and space and doesn’t seem predictable.

**SB: Yes, the paintings have a sense of incompleteness. The erasure and scrubbiness give a sense that the work is in process, whereas that one you don't like has definite lines and near-solid paint coverage. The process is additive and there is no subtraction or erasure.**

JS: I don't have a preconceived notion of what it's about when I start. [Laughs] I think about what it's about afterwards. When I'm making them I'm just interested in the materials and the way the paint behaves, the mixtures of colors, especially the silver paint, and I want to make them as minimal as possible. Subtraction is interesting. The paintings are stretched and primed usually by me (I learned how to stretch huge canvases working as a studio assistant throughout my 20s ) and painted flat on the floor. You can see the stretcher bars and the actual physicalness of the painting and the materials. They're slippery. If a painting looks like it's almost unfinished, if I like the shapes and there are cool moments in it that I enjoy, then it's done.

**SB: Your work lends itself to working on huge canvases because it seems that the material struggle is what the painting is all about. The smaller ones are very different. They are tidier.**

JS: Yeah, I love huge paintings. I wish I had the space to make even bigger paintings right now, but I don't. I'm going to knock down some walls and reclaim my space out there [points out to the bedroom that her kids, now grown, occupied while they were young and her husband's music room]. I love those humongous **Clifford Styll** paintings in the Met.

**SB: What do you love about huge paintings?**

JS: I like the physicality of them, the way you feel when you stand in front of them.

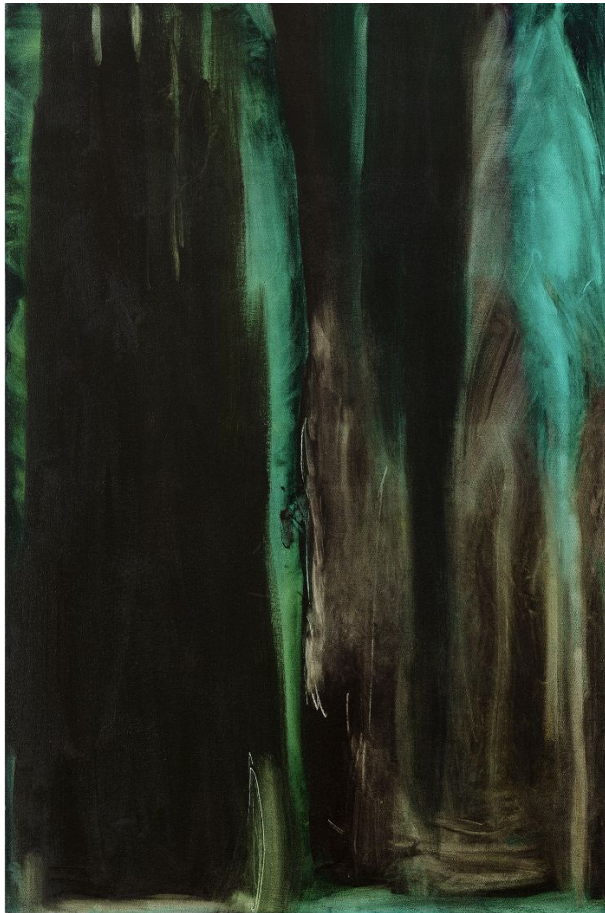
**SB: That they tower over you?**

JS: Yeah, and making something that large feels really powerful somehow, although they're not very practical. I thought I was going to stop making big paintings, and then I thought, what the hell, who cares about practicality, I'm going to do it anyway. What I'm after calls for it. I just want to paint.

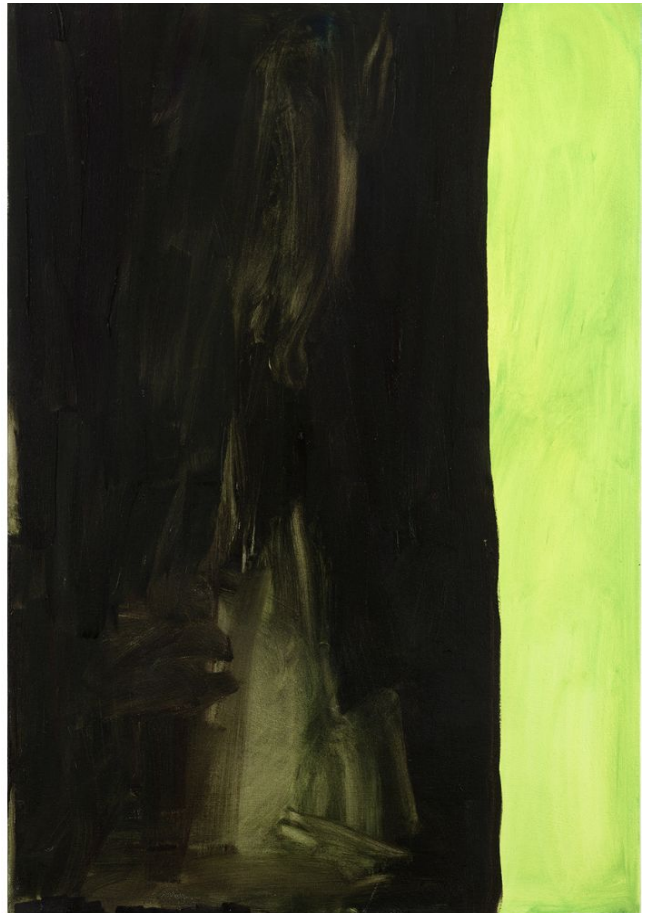
*Art Spiel*  
May 8, 2020

# ART SPIEL

## Artists on Coping: Jane Swavely



*Jane Swavely. Jinx #2, 2018. Acrylic on canvas. 38x25 inches.*



*Jane Swavely. Will-o'-the-wisp, 2019. Acrylic on canvas. 38x25 inch.*

Jane Swavely is a painter based in New York City. She studied at Boston University and the School of Visual Arts and was the recipient of a Ford Foundation Fellowship. Previously represented by CDS Gallery, she is currently a member of A.I.R gallery.

**AME: How are you coping?**

**JS:** Like many, I am in a constant state of anxiety and concern magnified by the incompetence of the administration's failures and lies. I had to put my dog Henry down two weeks ago after 14 years of his companionship and that threw me. I am fortunate to be quarantining with family with access to nature. I begin each day by reading Heather Cox Richardson's "Letter from an American" to get some clarity on each day's events.



*Installation view, Mandeville Gallery, Union College. Courtesy of Union College.*

**AME: When I saw you last we drove up to Union College to attend the opening of a survey exhibition of your work at The Nott. The 16-sided circular building serves as the centerpiece of the college and your work was displayed on one floor on opposite ends, on cascading temporary walls. The undulating setting highlighted the movements within your abstract work. Having just seen the landscape and shifting light in the area added greatly to the viewing experience. Can you tell us a little bit about your work with the curator and the install?**

**JS:** The install was a collaboration with curator Julie Lohnes who serves as the Director of Art Collections and Exhibitions at the college. I felt strongly that the paintings needed to be hung up to the edge of the panels since the paintings themselves play with cropping and edges and they would visually overlap. We played around with that idea and I think that it gave Julie a different way of thinking about the paintings. She hung the show so thoughtfully with a sort of undulating rhythm and interesting juxtapositions.

In contrast to a white cube, the space is unique and dark, with period details, dark red walls and panels on which the paintings are hung. I was concerned that the paintings might compete with the magnificent space, but when I saw it for the first time with the afternoon light filtering through the windows the paintings glowed. In fact, the light shifts during the day and so the paintings needed to be lit accordingly.

**AME: In our last interview, we talked about the influence of film in your work. In this current show the diptychs, among them "The Blue Light #a" (2019) and the "The Boy's Painting" (2019), in addition, to your work incorporating neon, really stood out to me. Could you tell me how they relate to light?**

**JS:** Thinking about film has always been a constant albeit subconsciously, the way shots are framed and cropped, light coming from within. These later paintings, some of which were in the show at A.I.R. in late 2018, are a result not just of being in the landscape but also of inordinate amount of screen time and the light from the screen; a sort of green screen where anything is possible. These paintings come from a zeitgeist of images and work that I am looking at along with my experience in the natural world, in the landscape. The state of the environment and the toxic colors interrupt any sort of romanticism the paintings may have.

**AME: In what ways has your routine changed?**

**JS:** I am fortunate to be able to spend time upstate with family for now, occasionally going home on the Bowery to pick up supplies and mail and to water my plants. I try to spend the majority of my day in studio mode, but it is very hard to stay focused or to concentrate for very long with the world in flux. I am working on drawings for the most part. I am staying active with my A.I.R. Gallery community through Zoom and I spend a lot of time talking on the phone.

**AS: Can you describe some of your feelings about all this?**

**JS:** I am terrified for everyone. I am afraid for those who won't survive. I think about my love New York City and what things will look like in the future.

**AS: What matters most right now?**

**JS:** Kindness compassion and empathy. Give what you can to people who need it. Check in on people who are alone. And in the long run, we need to vote out the administration and his enablers.

*Anna Mikaela Ekstra*

*Two Coats of Paint*  
December 1, 2018

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

## Interview with Jane Swavely: Toxic glow



Jane Swavely, *Jinx*, 2018, oil on canvas, 73 x 61 inches



Jane Swavely, *Jinx #3*, 2018, oil on canvas, 38 x 25 inches

Contributed by Sharon Butler / When **Jane Swavely** isn't working in the old-school LES loft where she raised two sons, she is at a cabin in the Catskills or sailing around the northeast on a beautiful, sturdy sailboat that her husband built. The last time we met was on Cuttyhunk Island off the coast of Massachusetts, where she had sailed from Martha's Vineyard, braving nearly gale force winds, to attend a lecture I was giving at **a small painting residency program**. The next day, she sailed off in the fog, bound for the city and back to her studio. On the occasion of her glowing solo show, her fourth at A.I.R. Gallery in DUMBO, I caught up with Jane to discuss the new paintings, futuristic landscape, contemporary anxiety, the joy of mixing color, and the illusion of light.

Sharon Butler: Your work has changed quite a bit since your 2016 show. The old paintings seemed much more comforting and romantic, perhaps nostalgic for a different era, whereas these seem more nervous ♦ anxious and on edge.

Jane Swavely: Yes, I ♦ve been thinking more about the present and the future than the past. When A.I.R. ♦s Associate Director Patti Hernandez came to my studio last spring, she talked about my paintings as a kind of ♦futuristic landscape ♦ that was apocalyptic and nihilistic. I ♦m not a conceptual painter ♦ I start painting and think about it afterwards ♦ but this seemed like an important conversation. The paintings start with a vague interest in mixing colors. I have a very traditional figurative background, and so that ♦s my vocabulary. Yet I have spent time in the landscape of the Catskills in the Hudson Valley and on the water, so that the quiet mysteries of nature ♦ fog, wind, light, dark woods ♦ do seep in. But that ♦s not the only external influence . For my last painting, *Jinx*, I was drawn to images online and on Instagram that had bright neon colors, and tried to figure out how to get that brightness in oil paint. I wanted to make the light appear to come from within the painting, so I mixed cadmium lemon and phthalo green, and then burnished it until it glowed. It ♦s impossible to photograph. I am always visiting galleries and museums, of course, but I love Instagram way too much.



Installation View: Air Gallery

SB: That green looks toxic ♦ like poison. This one is quite different, more opaque than the others.

JS: Yes, the glowy neon does look toxic, but the smaller silvery painting is more romantic. I was fooling around with silver oil paint (which in fact is highly toxic because of the petroleum distillates) as a color, and it added a kind of futuristic element. But it also strikes me as kind of impressionistic. I ♦m playing with the light behind the space



Jane Swavely, *Untitled Silver Painting #4*, 2018, oil on canvas, 43 x 34 inches

SB: The paintings are having an interesting conversation about light. The light pops. But there is some fascinating brushwork as well.

JS: Yes. The color mixtures are what interest me. That ♦s what gets me started on the paintings. But in the process, the paint application becomes kind of performative. I paint the canvases on the floor, crawling around the edges, on my hands and knees, slathering paint on with my hands and taking it off with white cotton rags. I go through boxes and boxes of them. In terms of materials, these paintings are much thinner and less finished and pristine than previous work; they ♦re dirtier. I ♦m not fussy about the surfaces. I didn ♦t want to overwork the paintings, and didn ♦t care if they got sloppy. Even so, an artist who came in earlier in the week suggested that the images looked cropped, and I think that ♦s true because there is a certain screen quality, like a computer, to these paintings, in terms of the light and the opaque framing devices around the landscape-like elements.





Installation View: Air Gallery

**SB:** The responses to your new work have been good. What do you think about the installation? The way the paintings are hung on the south wall, framing the doorway, it's like walking through a painting. The artist's paintings in the next room are white, so it creates a dream-like scenario. If those paintings had been more lively or colorful, the package wouldn't have worked. And the arrangement of the benches makes a path to the far painting, but also keeps the viewer from getting too close. The acid green of the far painting on the east wall affects all the color in the room, reflecting off every surface. The experience is remarkable.

**JS:** I got lucky. It wasn't planned in advance. Our Executive Director Roxana Fabius and Patti set up the show and I was completely surprised and pleased. I just went with it. We kept the installation fairly spare because each painting is so saturated and needs a lot of room. The more you look at the paintings the more you understand them. Because of how the work unfolds over time, we thought that the benches would encourage people to spend time with it, just looking, and they have proven to be an important part of the installation. On account of the gallery lights, the paintings do look very different out of the studio — more robust, almost like completely new paintings.



Jane Swavely, *Untitled Bb*, Oil on Canvas, 73 x 61 inches, 2018

SB: They both exude and reflect light, especially because of the metallic paint that you use for under painting the smaller ones. Tell me about the titles ♦ *Jinx*, for instance.

JS: This past summer an artist performer and I coincidentally posted green screens on Instagram at the same time, and she commented ♦ *Jinx!* ♦ It happened a few times, and I liked the playfulness of the sentiment, but also the negative, superstitious connotation of bad luck. In fact, I liked it so much, I used it for the title of the show. The other titles are pretty spur-of-the-moment. Some paintings are just plain untitled, others nominally untitled but classified to sound a bit like chemicals. For instance, the purple ones are called *Untitled Aa* and *Untitled Bb*. I don't like forcing a narrative by coming up with a detailed title, and I'm not too interested in narrative in general. I'd rather leave a painting open to interpretation. Sometimes people see small figures in them, and that's not what I intended, but it's OK. I am happy when people bring their own experiences to the work.

**SB:** You know, I don't think many galleries are showing gestural abstractions these days.

**JS:** It never occurred to me, but maybe you're right. A lot of what I see are paintings that are narrative or figurative, or maybe geometric abstraction. I'm interested in making space, and these paintings may be landscape-based, but they are definitely abstractions. I went for broke, and everything I've been trying has finally come together. I feel like, now, in my fifties, I'm making mature work. At last it has snapped into focus. I'm not interested in looking at my old work any more, I just want to keep moving forward. I'm always anxious about getting back in the studio, even after an absence of just a few days, but I think it's important to keep going.

**SB:** You have taken an important leadership role in A.I.R., which, according to the web site, "was established in 1972 as the first not-for-profit, artist-directed and maintained gallery for women artists in the United States." The gallery helps younger artists find their way with the fellowship program and continues to promote mid-career artists as well.

**JS:** I've been a member for almost eight years, and president of the board for the past five years. The gallery that represented me had closed and A.I.R. members Joan Snitzer and Susan Bee suggested I apply. It has been a wonderful experience. Our community is constantly evolving. We have artists ranging in age from the early 30s to nearly 80 years old, and the membership is becoming more diverse all the time. One of the things that attracted me was the fellowship program. And it's nice to have a beautiful space to show work with no commercial pressure. Even if you aren't selling work, you can still show consistently. Did you hear that A.I.R. is going to NADA in Miami this year? We got a grant to do a feminist library at the gallery, so we will be promoting that project at the fair, showing member artists' books.

**SB:** It's terrific to see so much new energy and so many intriguing creative initiatives at A.I.R. I know your contribution is very much appreciated in the art community. Congratulations on your show, and thank you for everything you do.

◆ **Jane Swavelly: Jinx,** " A.I.R. Gallery, DUMBO, Brooklyn, NY. Through December 16, 2018. Also on view: "**Joo Yeon Woo: Sound Words**" and "**Hana Sackler: Here, right now.**"

*The American Scholar*  
November 19, 2018



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## Jane Swavely

Neon Forests

By Noelani Kirschner | November 19, 2018

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Painter Jane Swavely (<http://www.janeswavely.com/>) keeps a studio in the Bowery in New York City and exhibits her work as a member at A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn. Although her canvases depict abstracted forms and colors, she considers her work to be based in the landscape tradition. Her latest show, *Jinx*, explores the boundary between the conscious and the subconscious, and derives inspiration from both the natural environment and supernatural forces.

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“I don’t think of my paintings as conceptual but after they’re done, the concepts behind them become clearer. All paintings are made on the floor, where I use a series of washes to create a luminescence. The canvas has to be flat, or else the paint drips. I’m interested in composition and in experimenting with different color combinations. The paintings are all about the color.

I'm a huge fan of Instagram, sadly—I generally don't like social media, but Instagram has been a great way to connect with other artists. There were all of these green lights and neon colors appearing across my feed, and I don't know if that subconsciously influenced my work or not. With regard to the title of my show, I posted a couple of pictures of my paintings to Instagram, and a performance artist in my orbit saw them and said, 'Jinx!' because she would post similar things from her art, like a green screen from one of her performance sets. In the art world, there's often a zeitgeist or a consciousness just below the surface. You don't realize it's there until you start to see it materialize through everyone's output.



Green Screen #3 , oil on canvas, 54 x 56 inches, 2018

The works in *Jinx* are almost alive. My canvases are abstract, but the references to landscape are strong. I spend a lot of time in Upstate New York, and there's this lure of the supernatural up there. The dark woods, animals, even UFOs. I had a friend who saw one hovering above her field in the Hudson Valley about 15 years ago. She thought it was ski lights at first, but it wasn't. There's a sense of these things that comes through somehow in my series.

*Jinx* is a balance between looking at nature and the subconscious experience of being in nature. I don't know if my paintings depict land or water half the time—they're a mixture of both. I don't like to force the viewer into anything, so I keep the titles of my work neutral. I don't want to direct the narrative. I hope that my work unfolds for the viewer and that there are new aspects for them to discover. Some people see figures in my paintings, which is always surprising. Whatever they see or whatever the paintings evoke is fine with me.”

*Cultbytes*  
April 8, 2018

# Cultbytes

## Interview: Supported by A.I.R., Jane Swavely Returns to the Art World

The sun is shining as I pass by the Houston Bowery Wall, a mural owned by Goldman Properties which shows a rotating program of artists. Infamously, Keith Haring was the first artist to paint the wall in the 1970's. Then the Bowery was New York's skid row lined with flophouses, slaughterhouses, and a hangout for the downtrodden and destitute. Now, the street is the home of upscale restaurants and rents in the area have skyrocketed. Just like the area has gone through a renaissance, so has the painter Jane Swavely's career. After taking a step away to focus on raising her two sons she has with the support of a community of female artists returned with full force to the art world.

Swavely receives me in her first floor loft on the corner of Bowery and Houston. When I enter into the softly lit open-plan living, dining room, and kitchen I immediately feel at home. She has lived and worked in the space for some thirty years. Swavely tells me that she together with her husband and the other residents of the building are going through the legal procedures to keep their homes affordable by finalizing coverage under the loft law, to become rent stabilized. To survive in New York you have to be a fighter. But, why fight alone when you can band together with your neighbors?

As Swavely makes me tea we talk about the art works in her kitchen, most are by female friends of hers. As a member of A.I.R. Gallery, an all female artist run gallery, she sees the importance of female artists supporting each other. The artist and co-founder of MAW Liza Lacroix suggested I interview Swavely not only because she is, in her words, "an amazing painter" but also because she hosted the book launch of NUT II at the gallery. NUT is a series of books featuring work by female artists. After Lacroix invited Swavely to contribute to the book's second edition the two painters became friends. About Lacroix, Swavely said, "she is the epitome of a feminist. She gets things done."

Like A.I.R., Lacroix and co-founder Alli Melanson, also a painter, aim to support and celebrate the female artist community through their project NUT. As the feminist gallery has helped revive Swavely's career and Swavely in-turn supported NUT, I was curious to hear more about the power of female artist communities. In light of the #MeToo movement, it is clearer than ever that women must unite to support each other.

We move from the kitchen to the studio. Previously, it was her children's room but has now been reconverted to a workspace. The room is flooded with sunlight and her stretched canvases are piled up against the walls. Swavely moved to New York in the 1980's to attend the School of Visual Arts. She describes the art world then as smaller; there were fewer artists and galleries. "A dog-eat-dog world," where artists had less agency. But, Swavely was lucky; she landed a job as Brice Marden's studio assistant and was able to continue to develop her own work. A major breakthrough in her career was when Willard Gallery picked her up. First, her work was sold out of the backroom. Then in 1986, at the age of twenty-five, she had her first solo-show at CDS Gallery. Generously, Marden gave her two weeks off to prepare for her exhibition. She was part of the gallery's rooster until 2005.



Untitled #4. Pastel on paper, 43 x 34 in. 2017. Photograph courtesy of NUT II.



Jane Swavely, Hudson River Painting #1, each panel 60 x 30 in, 2013.

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“It’s always like true confessions when you have a studio visit.”

– Jane Swavely

For the sake of her career, Swavely’s first husband, who sadly died, told her to never have children. “But that would have been too selfish of me,” Swavely tells me. When she got pregnant, together with her second husband, her dealer’s response to the good news was: “I have work I need to return to you.” Swavely does not regret prioritizing her family by leaving the art world. With toddlers, it was too hard for her to find the time to paint. But, if her dealer had pushed her to return to her painting career earlier she might have juggled it with motherhood.

Motherhood was at times, isolating for Swavely. Social networking and the Internet, however, changed that. Instagram enabled her to connect with others in the art world. Now, as a member of A.I.R. she is completely immersed in a vibrant artistic community. Twenty founding members including Nancy Spero and Judith Bernstein founded A.I.R. in 1972, most of this core group are today celebrated feminist artists. The non-profit consists of twenty women and self-identified women members who met monthly. In addition to their exhibitions and public programs, A.I.R. runs a fellowship program supporting six artists each year. To date, Swavely has had two solo shows at A.I.R. Gallery, “Espial” in 2016 and “Purlieu” in 2013. The new works I saw in her studio will be on view in her next show at the gallery later this year.





Jane Swavely, "The Blue Light #2," 56 x54 in, oil on canvas, 2013.



Jane Swavely, "Werner's Painting," oil on canvas, 2015.

Her paintings attempt to reconcile romanticism with minimalism. Her works reference landscapes or nature and often include cinematic elements. The interruption, like that of a frame in a film, is a reoccurring feature. A green grass interjects a blue-hued mountainscape; in "Hudson River Painting #1," it is as if she has juxtaposed two paintings in one canvas. The classic German black-and-white film "Das Blaue Licht" directed by Leni Riefenstahl in 1932 informed another series of mountain paintings where the play of light is a prominent feature.

A full immersion in the jungle, "Werner's Painting"(2015) is a direct reference to the documentary "Burden Of Dreams" about the chaotic production of "Fitzcarraldo" by the German director Werner Herzog. The project was difficult for Herzog to realize and, in the process, he was overcome by the jungle: "We have to become humble in front of this overwhelming misery and overwhelming fornication... overwhelming growth and overwhelming lack of order," he says. Swavely's stripped down, but dramatic, rendering of nature may be an offer of support to the crushed director. Swavely does not always like to push a narrative on the viewer, so many of her works are untitled.



Jane Swavely in her studio



Jane Swavely, "Silver Diptych," oil on canvas, 36 x 72 in. 2017.

Nature is close to Swavely's heart. She spends much time in her house in the Hudson Valley. There, she works on several paintings at once. In her city studio, she works at one at the time. Using the floor as her easel, Swavely works in many different sizes, double-squares, and vertical rectangles. She develops her ideas in smaller books or on smaller canvases that stand-alone are works of art. Many of her canvases feel like doorways. When I stand in front of them my body feels diminished. She describes her process as intense and focused. When her husband is away she works the best: "Then I can eat cheerios for dinner and work through the night," she jokingly admits.

"It's always like true confessions when you have a studio visit," Swavely says. Which is true, our conversation was high in energy and we quickly oscillated between talking about her work, private life, and the ever-shifting art world; to me, it is clear that Swavely is keeping up with a keen ear to the ground, or with an eye on who's working with what. We met on the heels of Armory Arts Week. Amongst her highlights was the Bay Area painter David Park's booth at Pier 92. His work is figurative, something that Swavely is moving away from. The intensity of the art market has propelled her to slow down take more time to focus on technique and developing new ideas. A wise decision as her new work is stronger than ever.



Jane Swavely, "Untitled," oil on canvas, 40x30. 2016.



Jane Swavely, "Green Screen," oil on canvas, 36 x 72. 2017.

Swavely's eyes sparkle when she speaks about color. She is a painterly painter; she mixes all her own colors. As an undergraduate at Boston University College of Fine Arts, the program has an emphasis on figuration as Philip Guston headed the department and after him, James Weeks took over. Brice Marden, with whom she worked for several years, graduated from the program some years prior to her. So, they shared many professors. In her newer body of works the natural elements that were present in her previous series have become further abstracted. "Right now I am obsessed with Barnett Newman and Clyfford Still." Newman is a master of abstraction and a leading color field painter. Replacing light and landscape, color has come to the fore in Swavely's her new body of work.

As our visit comes to an end I help put away the canvases Swavely has pulled out for me to see. Among other things, she invites me to A.I.R. Gallery's feminist reading group. Returning to work, in any industry, after having left to become a homemaker is difficult for most. For Swavely however, the process seems seamless. Thanks to A.I.R. Gallery she has found a community where she can be supported and in turn support other female artists. She has now been a member for seven years. Swavely is thriving in this new art world of increased collaboration and give-and-take; I look forward to seeing her continue to rise.

*Two Coats of Paint*  
March 24, 2016

TWO  
COATS OF  
PAINT

## Jane Swavely: Admiration for the jungle

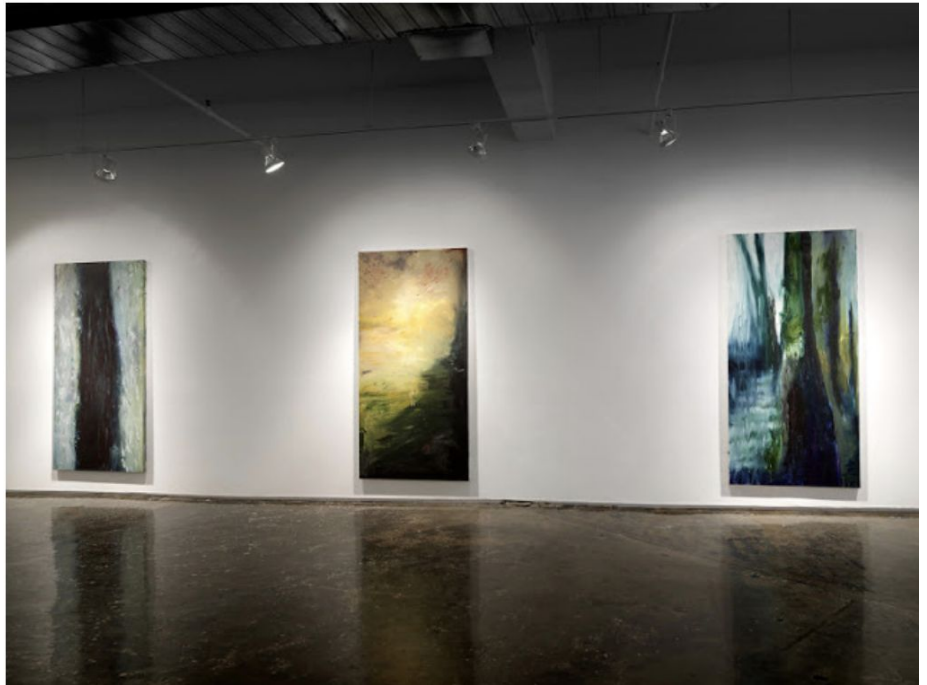


[Image at top: Jane Swavely, installation view from the gallery entrance, A.I.R. Gallery]

Contributed by **Mira Dayal** / There is a sense of unease in the series of paintings that comprise of “Espial,” **Jane Swavely**’s latest show at A.I.R. Gallery. I enter the space ♦ not of the gallery, but of the painting itself. Hovering just inches above the ground, the edges of the canvas become the frame of a doorway, beyond which thick brush conceals a dark forest. But the tall grass of *Werner’s Painting* (2015) is not entirely still; as **Werner Herzog** himself says of the jungle, in *Burden of Dreams* (1982), “There is no harmony in the universe. We have to get acquainted to this idea that there is no real harmony, as we have conceived it. But when I say this, I say this all full of admiration for the jungle.”



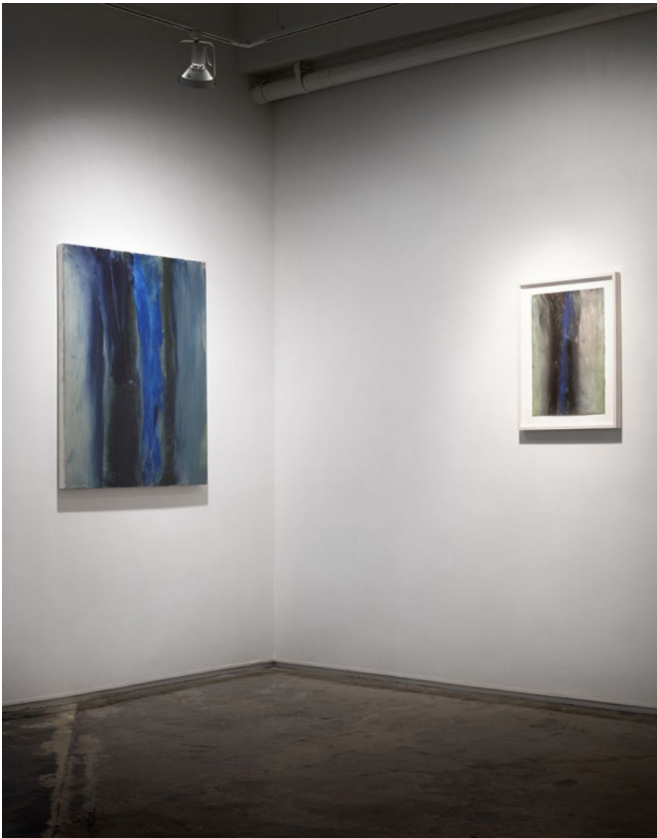
Jane Swavely, *Werner's Painting*, 2015.



Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery. In center, *Untitled, October Painting #6*, 2015, oil on canvas.

While *Werner's Painting* has the most immediate effect, hung on the wall directly opposite the entrance, it is also the earliest painting in this series. Moving through the gallery, one understands how Swavely's interests shifted from flat space and color fields to volumes that are at once fleshy and earthly. Primarily painted in the woods of Vermont during her most recent residency, in 2015 at the **Vermont Studio Center**, each of Swavely's canvases feel thick with the tactility of immersion in a new environment, and with the memory of the same. In *Untitled, February Painting #4* (2016), the viewer finds herself suddenly underwater, kicking at kelpy ferns as a gray whirlpool of oil swirls before her. Inside the painting, the viewer swings around the whirlpool's circumference, feeling the force of its pull, to emerge just beyond that silky, pulsating form into the thin, green, watery environs beyond. *Espial* is the action of watching or catching sight of something or someone or the fact of being seen, and in that conical form of the whirlpool, as one passes it by, one can notice briefly the face within it, a spirit obscured like a drowned Francis Bacon sitter. Now, as Barnett Newman dreamed, the viewer is within both the time and space of the painting, enveloped by its colors. Next to *Untitled, February Painting #4*, a small drawing shows how Swavely worked through the marks and tones that appear in the painting. On the opposite wall, the murky surface of *Untitled, October Painting #6* (2015) is reminiscent of the dark woods of Vermont; the palette evokes a fire burning at a campsite, slowly charring the encompassing trees as the sun sets in the distance. Flanking *October Painting #6* are the two other paintings of the same scale, similarly anthropomorphic, and most evocative of space.

In another corner of the gallery, two perpendicular canvases of a similar color scheme reveal some of the artist's intentions. *Untitled, March Painting #1* (2016) is 40 by 30 inches, but compositionally parallel to *Untitled, March Painting #2* (2016), almost twice as tall at 72 by 36 inches. Both rely on a triangular form within the compositions. The former contains both yellows and purples, making it one of the warmer paintings in the series, while the latter contains deeper and more luminescent navy-purples with more gray than yellow. *March Painting #1* explores the palette that #2 then constricts ♦ using only the tones that help construct the triangular void ♦ making its space immediately more compelling.



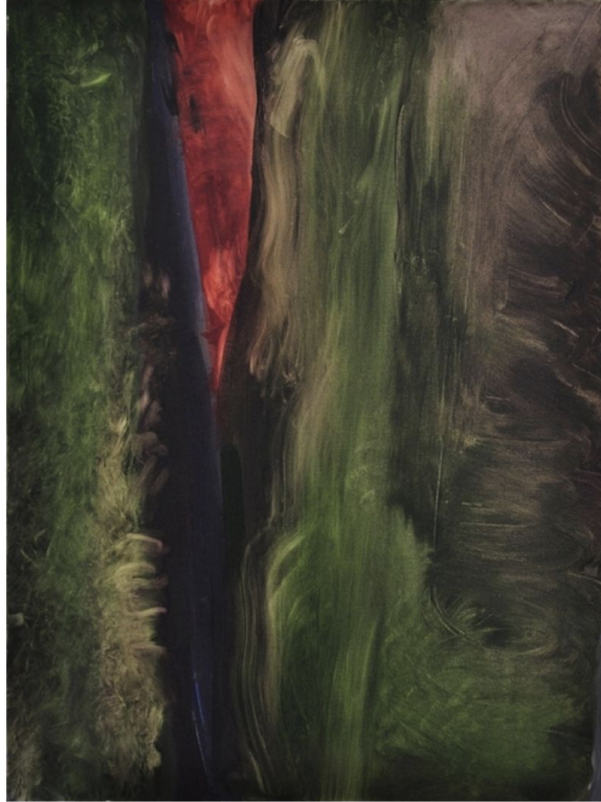
Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery.



Jane Swavely, installation view, A.I.R. Gallery.

In their hues and strokes, Swavely's paintings are reminiscent of Edgar Degas's landscape monotypes, in which he used oil paint rather than printer's ink to create abstract smudges and planes of blended tones. Degas's series was inspired by his carriage ride through the countryside. Both series are thus more evocative of the sensation of being in a landscape rather than a specific site.

What allows these works to function as inhabitable landscapes? While Newman's work reeled viewers into a color field, Swavely's paintings resist close inspection, for as one approaches, the brushstrokes that once felt voluminous fall flat, having been washed away by turpentine-soaked rags scrubbed across canvas heavy with oil. Newman relied on horizontality and overall scale to allow the viewer to inhabit the painting through peripheral vision (and indeed most landscapes are painted horizontal to resemble human vision), but Swavely's paintings are vertically oriented. At 72 by 36 inches, most are an invitation for the body, not just the eyes, to enter. They are indeed the size of a doorway, just big enough to contain a body, and though they are not figurative paintings, their logic seems to rely on cavities that are metaphors for corporeality. In this way, one relates to the paintings and finds oneself in them without needing to identify with a literal body.



Jane Swavely, *Untitled, October Painting #8*, 2015, oil on canvas, 40×30 inches.

The paintings are anthropomorphic not only in scale, but also in their logic of fasciae, tendons, and ligaments. When the pressure of stretcher bars against canvas creates parallel lines of more transparent paint on the surface, those lines feel less like a disruption than a vein pushing up against thick skin. When the vibrant, seductive, red triangular form of *Untitled, October Painting #8* (2015) is revealed in the parting of heavy green strokes, it reads as living flesh, thick and bloody, not found in any other painting. Its position in the gallery's foyer is then almost too revealing, representing the core of the space before the space has made itself felt.

In their juxtapositions, Swavely's paintings finally become a new psychological scape, one that allows for personal identifications and evocations of memories. Here the title of the show seems to deliver the most meaning. Entering the paintings is finding oneself in foreign but familiar territory, as an intruder or estranged relative who once understood how to navigate these cool voids but now finds the ravines inverted, hills convoluted. Indeed, the "claustrophobia" Swavely identifies in the show seems to come not from any single work but from the sensation of intrusion, of forms pressing up against the viewer from each wall of the gallery. In a strange inversion, the paintings, or something hidden in their depths, seem to sense one's presence.

**"Jane Swavely: Espial,"** A.I.R. Gallery, DUMBO, Brooklyn, NY. April 21 – May 22, 2016.



## ALAN UGLOW

Alan Uglow (b. 1941, Luton, UK) built a practice that relied on the mastery of tension between materials. Uglow's understanding of the physicality of paint and the physical exercise of its application enabled him to enter a intuitive zone of working which come across in its particular embodiment of sensation, eye, hand, and nerve.

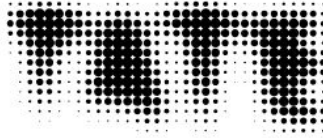
Originally from Luton, UK, he studied art in the UK where he became enthralled in the American Abstract Expressionist movement and the subsequent American painting movements which signaled a wider break from traditional methods of working. On that basis, Uglow moved to New York in 1969 where he found artistic community in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Uglow's work has been in numerous solo and group exhibitions, worldwide, most recently, in 2022, at Pablo's Birthday, New York, NY. In 2013 he showed at David Zwirner Gallery, West 19th Street, in New York City. In 2010, Uglow took part in solo exhibitions, at Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, DE, Museum Wiesbaden, DE and Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam, NL. Other exhibitions, include CCNOA—Center for Contemporary Non-Objective Art, Brussels, BE (2006), and Gemeentemuseum, Hague, DE(2004). As recently as 2019-2020, Uglow was featured in a group show, for Le Consortium, Dijon, FR, titled, New York: The 1980s; Part II, alongside Olivier Mosset, David Diao, Jessica Stockholder, Matthew McCaslin, Aimee Morgana and Michael Scott.

His work is also represented in private and public collections internationally, including the Cincinnati Art Museum, OH; Gemeentemuseum, the Hague, DE; High Museum, Atlanta, GA; Le Consortium, Dijon, FR; Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds, CH; Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, DE; Museum Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, DE; National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavik, IS; Sammlung Goetz, Munich, DE; Sammlung Lafrenz, Hamburg, DE; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, DE; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL. Uglow passed away in 2011 in New York City, NY.



*Tate Papers*  
2020



# Alan Uglow: From Britain to America

DANIEL STURGIS

The British painter Alan Uglow left London in 1969 to permanently live in New York where he became associated with the development of post-minimalist painting. This article focuses on the artist's development in Britain during the late 1950s and 1960s, arguing that aspects of British culture, the artistic debates of the time and the teaching that Uglow experienced in Britain all had a lasting impact on the rest of his career.

There is a wonderful story of the British painter Alan Uglow (1941–2011) cutting a hole in the chain-link fence around the sports field at New York's Pratt University in the mid-1970s.<sup>2</sup> His accomplice was the German artist Blinky Palermo and they both wanted to play football. The story resonates as a picture of two European artists in voluntary exile in New York finding friendship in happy transgression, but it also illustrates a slight pang for the European cultures they had left behind. For both of these artists, America was a foreign country.<sup>3</sup> Of the two, Palermo's career has been the more studied, especially in recent years.<sup>4</sup> Uglow's, however, is a parallel and equally fascinating story.

Uglow was a singular figure who valued resistance and independence in his work. He moved from London to New York in 1969 and there developed a unique painting practice. But Uglow's work can also be seen to draw heavily on his formative years in Britain – to the London of the late 1960s and to the particular set of debates and interpretations that were then prevalent in the city. Uglow's subsequent paintings were informed in part by his experience of the reception of the New York school painting in Britain during this period. This reception involved an element of misrepresentation, where the graphic and formal character of these large abstract expressionist and colour field paintings were prioritised over their material and conceptual qualities. This graphic reading enabled a coming together of opposing artistic languages – a diagrammatic form of popular design and the language of modernist abstraction. This coalescence, which has been suggested by critic and curator Éric de Chassey to be a specifically British sensibility, I see as important in the formation of Uglow's practice.<sup>5</sup>



Fig.1  
Alan Uglow  
*Standard # 8 (Blue)* 1994  
© The estate of Alan Uglow

Uglow can be seen to have blended these languages together in his series of *Standard* paintings (1992–2009) (fig.1) and other works that are informed by both a modernist tradition in abstract painting and a provocative and nuanced association with the depiction of the linear marking on football and sports pitches. I see this trait as connecting Uglow’s ideas to those of the British artist Bob Law, especially through both artists use of open fields, and informing the initial development, in London in 1968, of Uglow’s first ‘lowrider’ canvas. Indeed, even the unconventional hanging systems that Uglow explored in the ‘lowrider’ works and others can be seen to connect to developments he witnessed in London during his time in the city. I see Uglow’s negotiation with these ideas as giving him license, in a very specific New York context, to reinvigorate the minimalist and post-minimalist painting tradition he explored in that city. The canvases, installations and reprographic artworks Uglow produced from the late 1960s until his death in 2011 can be seen to have opened up new ground for painting, complicating and enriching ideas associated with post minimalist practice. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that his work is to my mind so original.

My account of Uglow's formation was built through a number of conversations I had in person and by email between 2015 and 2018 with Uglow's wife Elena Alexander and his friend the artist Emrys Parry, as well as other artists, gallerists and critics. I conducted additional archival research at the Uglow archive in New York which holds the artist's files and all the published articles, reviews and essays on Uglow, as well as a number of unpublished texts. In London I consulted the Central School of Arts archive at Central Saint Martins in London and the Tate Archive. I also examined Uglow's works in London and New York.

## Formative years in Britain

Born in Luton in 1941, Alan Uglow attended Colchester Art School at fourteen, and then at seventeen enrolled at Leicester College of Art, where he studied from 1958–1962, when his parents moved back to Peterborough. He continued his studies in London at Central School of Arts and Crafts (1962–1964) before setting up a studio in Bassett Road in West London. He taught part-time in British art colleges before visiting and then permanently moving to New York in 1969.

However, within his published interviews he rarely spoke in depth about his time in Britain.<sup>6</sup> His silence is interesting, showing if not a desire for erasure, then a certain wish to escape from what he perhaps saw as the provincialism of 1960s England. When he does speak about his student days, he talks of the turgidity and greyness of British kitchen sink realist painting and the tediousness of constant observational drawing, broken sporadically by a few rays of excitement.<sup>7</sup>



Fig.2  
Tom Hudson teaching in the 1960s  
© Basic Design Council

One ray was undoubtedly his time in contact with the Foundation course at Leicester College of Art. As a teenager, Uglow found himself in one of the country's most progressive art schools at a transformational moment in British art education. He was, however, on the wrong course. He had enrolled on the older, more prescriptive National Diploma in Design and experienced first-hand the clash of systems, as the curriculum of his course, which he described as focused on 'conforming to [a] mundane standard of representational painting' came into contact with the newer, more dynamic Foundation course which was set up for the following year's intake.<sup>8</sup> The Foundation course was where the young Uglow gravitated. It was led by the artist Tom Hudson (fig.2) and taught by what Uglow described as 'a wild bunch of artists who were used to dissidence and self-awareness'.<sup>9</sup> Uglow would seek out Hudson's young teaching team who had come to Leicester en masse from Leeds College of Art. That forward-thinking group of teacher-artists included Brian Fielding, Victor Newsome, Terry Setch, and Michael Sandle. Under Hudson's leadership they developed a pedagogy that valued an experimental exploration of materials while promoting the relationship between art and technological progress.

The inspiration was the Bauhaus, the German art and design school founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar in 1919. Of particular interest for Hudson and his staff was its preliminary course, where all students studied a variety of materials and design concepts before progressing on to specific workshops. The course had recently been championed in Britain at the 1956 Bretton Hall Art Education Conference and led to the development of the 'Basic Design' educational movement in Britain.<sup>10</sup> It was through this conference and others like it, as much as through the later Coldstream Report, that artists like Hudson dramatically changed art education in Britain and moved it away from the prescriptive, academic style of teaching that was then the norm.<sup>11</sup> The Bretton Hall conference and the new Basic Design courses and summer schools that sprung up in its wake offered something different – a pedagogy that was progressive, modernist and sought to integrate art more closely with life in the new post-war age. This educational turn, from its roots at the Bauhaus was informed by new ideas in child development, such as those of Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), that stressed the importance of freedom of expression.<sup>12</sup> Students were asked to explore, play and re-imagine basic design elements and vocabularies, and to analyse conceptually how visual images were created. The Basic Design movement developed first in colleges in the Midlands, as well as Leeds, Leicester, Sheffield and perhaps most famously in the north at Newcastle, where Basic Design was led by Victor Pasmore alongside a young Richard Hamilton.

While at Leicester, Uglow really responded to the way Hudson pushed his students to break from the past – to fully embrace the new and to be present, active and questioning. These were all traits that Uglow’s work and life would exemplify. As a young student of seventeen years he already identified himself as a painter. Together with one or two friends, Uglow hung out with Hudson’s young faculty, working alongside them in the print and painting studios and debating art in Leicester’s pubs and bars.<sup>13</sup> Uglow thrived off the passion and dedication of this young team and their shared love of European modernism and knowledge of new North American culture. At the time US jazz and movies were all vitally important, as, of course, was the emergence of abstract expressionism and the New York school painters that were just then becoming visible through invigorated press coverage. Uglow, who was eager, active and had always made himself well informed, consequently took the pilgrimage from Leicester, hitchhiking with his art student friend Emrys Parry, to the Tate Gallery in London to see the *New American Painting* exhibition in 1959.<sup>14</sup> This was the first major display focused on New York school painting and abstract expressionism for a British public. The exhibition showed the work of seventeen artists, with paintings by Jackson Pollock, Phillip Guston, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, as well as artists that Uglow would later cite as being particularly important to him such as Franz Kline, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. The exhibition had a profound effect on Uglow and is mentioned by a whole generation of British painters such as Bridget Riley, John Hoyland, and Robyn Denny, as a turning point in their nascent careers. Uglow was later to say that he was so deeply affected by the exhibition not because he understood everything he was seeing – he has stated that he ‘didn’t really get it’ at the time – but because he ‘was sure they [the American painters] would understand everything I was trying to do’.<sup>15</sup>

From Leicester Uglow moved to London, and the Central School of Arts and Crafts where he studied for two more years for his degree in Painting and Printmaking, graduating in 1962 at the age of twenty-one.<sup>16</sup> The faculty of the school, led by the artist Morris Kestelman, was well respected but not as dynamic as Leicester. In London, Uglow was taught by a roster of twenty or so painters and draughtsmen including Mervyn Peake, Cecil Collins and Alan Reynolds, the so-called ‘golden boy of neo-romanticism’ who had dramatically jumped ship to the constructivist cause.<sup>17</sup> Reynolds’s conversion neatly illustrates what seemed like the only debate then challenging the British art establishment’s view of painting – the chasm between figuration and abstraction.<sup>18</sup> This dispute was far more conventional than the debates Uglow experienced in Leicester, where Hudson’s radical approach instilled a greater understanding of the complex connections between artforms and their sociological and geographical groundings.

During his time at Central, Uglow's paintings were inspired by abstract expressionism's scale and gesture, and were critically successful. He was selected for the 1960 *Young Contemporaries* exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, and four years later for the 1964 iteration of the same exhibition at the Federation of British Artists. There he exhibited brighter, more intensely-colourful abstract paintings, on custom-built stretchers with rounded corners, in colours like 'acid greens and brilliant oranges', that were 'kind of stripey and spotty.'<sup>19</sup> This was all a considerable achievement for a young artist at the time. The 1960 *Young Contemporaries* exhibition is the moment when the young artists associated with British pop art can be seen to have emerged and challenged the status quo.<sup>20</sup> Although Uglow did not embrace pop at the time, his subsequent interest in basing artworks on football's visual culture, or the colours of motor cars, as well as his detached aesthetic all link with aspects of the nascent movement. At the time, the movement saw pop not just within what we would now call pop art, but through the lens of a whole new Mod culture, inspired as much by imported US modernist-jazz and the bold and colourful graphic quality of Blue Note record design, which Uglow was interested in, as it was by British Vaudeville traditions.<sup>21</sup>

For the six years he stayed in London after graduating, Uglow lived and painted in Bassett Road in the Ladbroke Grove area of the city. As illustrated by the diagram 'West London 1958-68: The Avant-Garde and their locations' in David Mellor's *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (fig.3), this neighbourhood was then a focus of a new artistic milieu. The streets between Holland Park and Ladbroke Grove became a centre for young avant-garde artists and curators. Although a couple of years younger, and having recently married his first wife, the British ceramicist Helena Shears Uglow, Uglow was gaining recognition as an artist. As well as in the juried *Young Contemporaries* exhibitions of 1960 and 1964, his work was shown in the well-respected *Bradford Spring* exhibitions of 1963 and 1964; he also exhibited with the Arts Council of England in 1963 and internationally in the 1966 exhibition *Contemporary British Painters* in Lyon.<sup>22</sup> Soon after leaving Central he was also offered part-time teaching opportunities, commuting up to the art school in Manchester and down to the one in Winchester. He was 'emerging' as a respected artist, working in the centre for the new London avant-garde.

Painting fields and the beautiful game

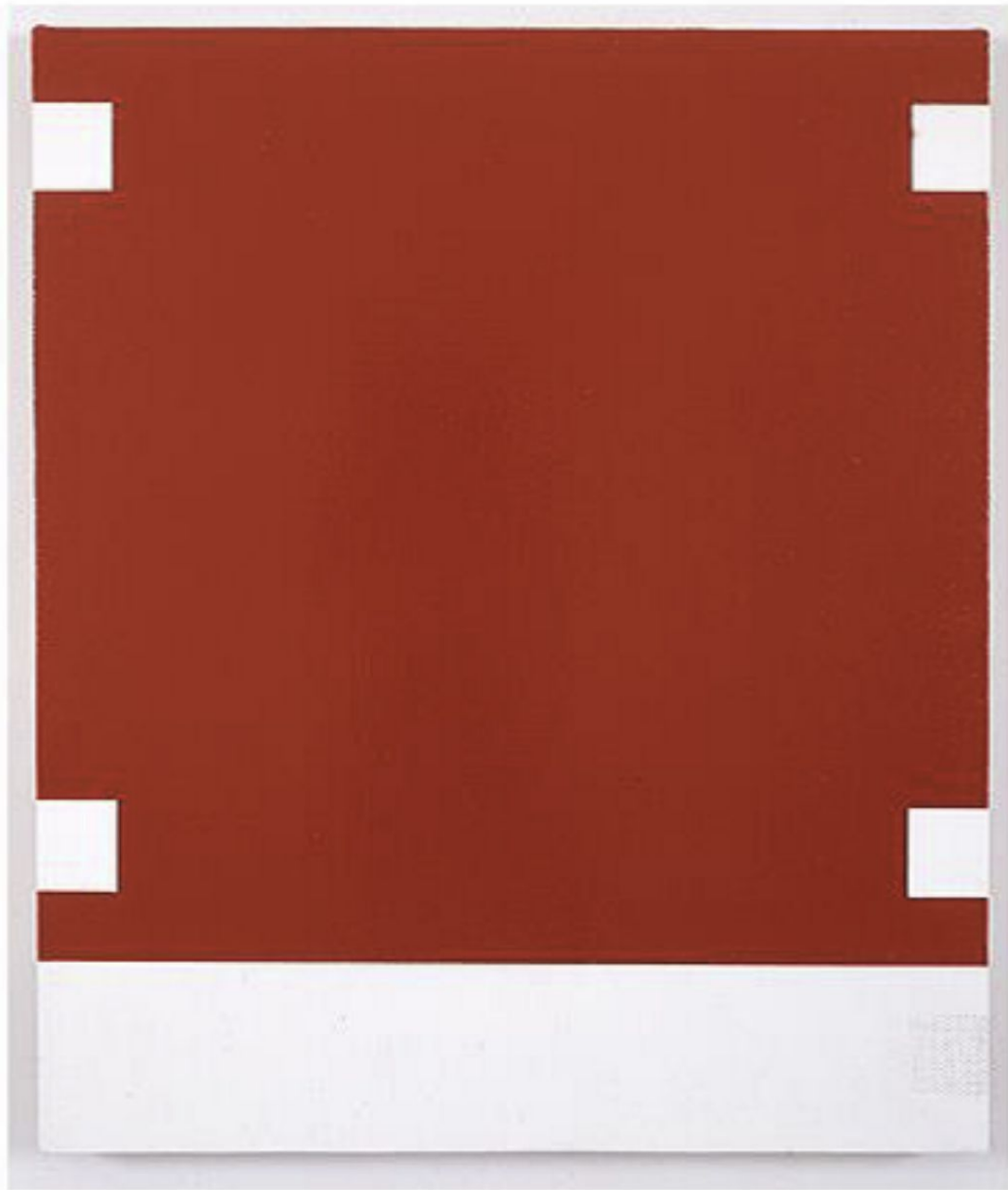


Fig.4  
Alan Uglow  
*Palma* 1988  
M HKA Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp  
© The estate of Alan Uglow

Uglow's paintings from the late 1960s to his death in 2011 often contained a field – an expanse of clear clean paint – delineated and populated by a vocabulary of rectangles, bands or tabs of another colour. In the *Hotel* series, a cycle of ten equally scaled paintings on linen or canvas made between 1987 and 1989, the complexity and subtlety of these fields of colour is striking. Uglow described in 1989 how his paintings since he arrived in New York in 1969 had been focused on 'emptying out' and creating a painting language, learnt from Rothko and Newman, that used 'limited means for maximum impact'.<sup>23</sup> In *Palma* 1988 (fig.4), part of the *Hotel* series, the fields of colour are filled with meticulously applied paint. The surface of the painting is richly modulated, and through the application of skin-like layers almost sculpted to create a subtle physical depth within their surfaces. Throughout his career, Uglow always employed a variety of ways of applying paint and primers to allow for very delicate variations in colour, tone and reflectivity. In some works, he applied up to forty layers of paint, soaked into sponges to reduce the visibility of his hand. He would paint on a variety of supports – wood, metal, canvas, linen – and with a selection of brushes, rollers, and sponges, enabling him to tune each surface to maximum effect. He even took works to be sprayed by art fabricators or car body-shops, or simply left areas of works primed but unpainted.

The paintings are full of perceptual quandaries and this is key to fully understanding them. They operate phenomenologically, inviting the viewer to unpick, decipher and consider them. This quality fundamentally removes the work from being grounded in just the formal compositions of geometric shapes and colours. *Palma* contains four white tab-like forms that sit physically on their red field, but visually float away from it. Two further ghost-like tabs hover in the painting's white lower band, but through their construction seem more concrete and physical. The paintings in the *Hotel* series each find a clarity through the physicality of the way paint is applied – its materiality – and to an attentiveness of their surfaces and edges. This extreme care in the way paint is applied counterbalances the bold visual contrasts of bright reds, whites and blacks that feature in the works. As with all Uglow's paintings, the surfaces are paramount.



Though unspecific, each painting in the *Hotel* series seems to take its title from an actual Bowery hotel: Fulton, Comet, Palma, Providence, Boston, Delevan, Union, Pioneer, Palace, Prince. This titling, which is clearly not illustrative of anything within the painting, creates another dimension in which to understand the work – not through unpicking one’s perception, but through tangential connections, relationships and analogy. This stream of thought forces the viewer to marry these serene surfaces with the poetic associations that their titles might suggest – the allure or grubbiness that the hotel names might conjure up for the viewer. Through this approach, Uglow, who once stated that his paintings were ‘all about the edge’, can be seen to examine the associative conceptual boundaries outside of the work as well as the physical and perceptual boundaries they contain.<sup>24</sup> It is a highly unusual jamming together of perception and association. Although not topographically accurate, the associative boundaries of these perceptual fields developed over Uglow’s career from the intuitive tabs and grids in the *Hotel* series, to framing devices and markings that seemed to echo or alluded to the painted lines on football pitches and playing fields.

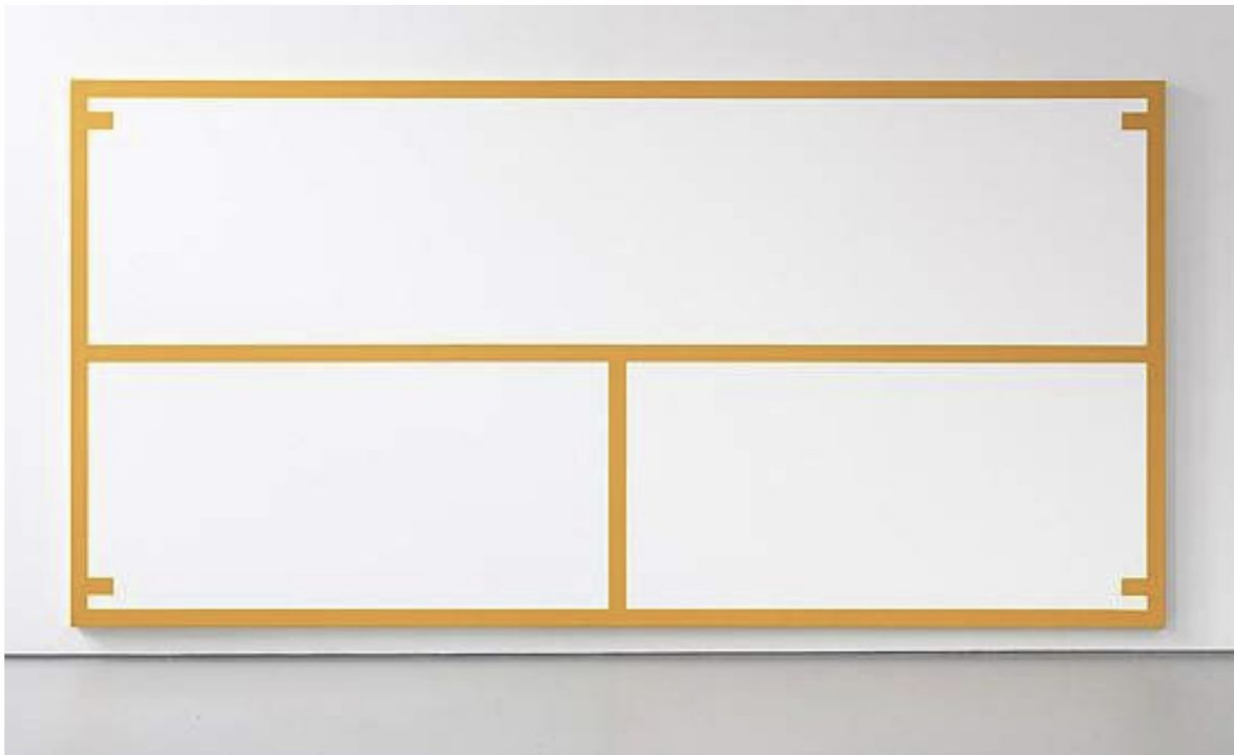


Fig.5  
Alan Uglow  
*Stadium Series #6 (Yellow) 1996*  
© The estate of Alan Uglow



Fig.6  
Alan Uglow  
*C.F.C #2 (Wraparound)* 1995  
Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam  
© The estate of Alan Uglow

For Uglow, this painted iconography of football is not truly diagrammatic. Rather it appears as an echo, or an intuitive adaptation. These visual symbols are unexpected and not always immediately apparent, housed as they are in a seemingly abstract painting. *Stadium Series #6 (Yellow)* 1996 (fig.5) has a pictorial unity that brings together material and perceptual characteristics of this iconography; its painted yellow lines echo both field markings and the painting's edges and divisions.<sup>25</sup> At times, the reference to football is indicated just through a painting's title or colours, such as in *C.F.C #2 (Wraparound)* 1995 (fig.6), a small robust painting on galvanised metal which takes its name from Chelsea Football Club's initials and its colours from the club's strip.



Fig.7  
 Alan Uglow  
*Coaches Bench* 1997–8  
 Museum Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden  
 © The estate of Alan Uglow

However, explicit references to football became more prevalent in Uglow's work, with other icons, signs and emblems from the game almost taunting the phenomenological content of the paintings. These include a series of photographs of European stadiums in both black and white and colour, such as *Untitled [Floodlight Football Stadium]* 1995 (Gimpel Fils Gallery, London), which casually capture the impassioned life of these arenas. There is a visual and theoretical play between these photographs – which capture the sports field's markings, spectatorship or the success and failure of the players – and the paintings which which they are exhibited. There are also hand-painted and lacquered sculptures – or are they object-like paintings? – resembling stadium barriers, such as *Sudkurve* 1993 (fig.7). When exhibited, these sculptures obstruct and break up the gallery space while complicating the unencumbered viewing of the paintings. Similarly, Uglow's *Coaches Bench* 1997–8 (fig.8) with its physical size and referential nature seems at first at odds with his paintings. This life-size and pristine sculpture was based on an actual bench that Uglow saw in Texel in the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> The work also incorporates loudspeakers and sound recordings that refer to football in one way or another – fragments of shortwave radio music and readings of texts by the likes of Albert Camus (1913–1960), George Orwell (1903–1950) and Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977). In its heightened aesthetic characteristic, this sculptural work can be seen to link back, connect with and maintain a dialogue with the paintings.<sup>27</sup>



Fig.8

Alan Uglow

*Sudkurve* 1993

San Jose Art Museum, San Jose

© The estate of Alan Uglow

For Uglow, the languages of painting and football were entwined and it was perhaps the formal and psychological drama within each that connected the two in his thinking. The abstraction from the field markings is a provocation and connects I believe to dialogues that Uglow encountered in aspects of British painting in the early 1960s. During this period the artist Bob Law displayed an equally provocative relationship to abstracting from landscape. There were also important discussions around how abstract painting could be displayed, as well as its relationship to graphic and pop art, that can be seen to align with Uglow's own concerns.

## Uglow and Bob Law

It is tempting to see a connection between the way Uglow's later paintings – such as the works from the *Stadium* series – build this subliminal representation of a social and urban recreational field with how other painters from the British Isles have wrestled with landscape in non-objective and abstract art. Sean Scully, who graduated from Central three years after Uglow, has acknowledged in his photographic series *Walls of Aran* 2005 how his own grid-like paintings resonate in part with the form and structure of the walls bordering and enclosing the patchwork of agricultural fields (rather than sporting ones) in his beloved west of Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, that idea of a non-objective art deriving somehow from both the look and experiences of the environment was central to the development of the St Ives modernists' view, whose ideas were prevalent in the UK when Uglow was living and studying in the country.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, even the non-objective white reliefs of Ben Nicholson, which in some ways appear visually similar to Uglow's paintings, could be seen from the chalky and incised materiality of their surfaces to have been abstracted from the natural landscape. However, I see a far greater connection between Uglow's desire to 'empty out' his fields and the works of the British painter Bob Law.

Law, like Uglow, has a provocative and contradictory relationship to his subject that operated conceptually and that he emphasised through material choices and juxtapositions. Law was seven years older than Uglow and also a somewhat maverick figure. He was later championed as Britain's first minimalist – and even went on to fabricate Donald Judd's sculptures for the US artist's 1974 solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London.<sup>30</sup> Uglow and Law moved in similar circles in London, and both artists showed at the Grabowski Gallery, a semi-commercial and philanthropic gallery in London's Chelsea that championed a generation of avant-garde painters.<sup>31</sup>

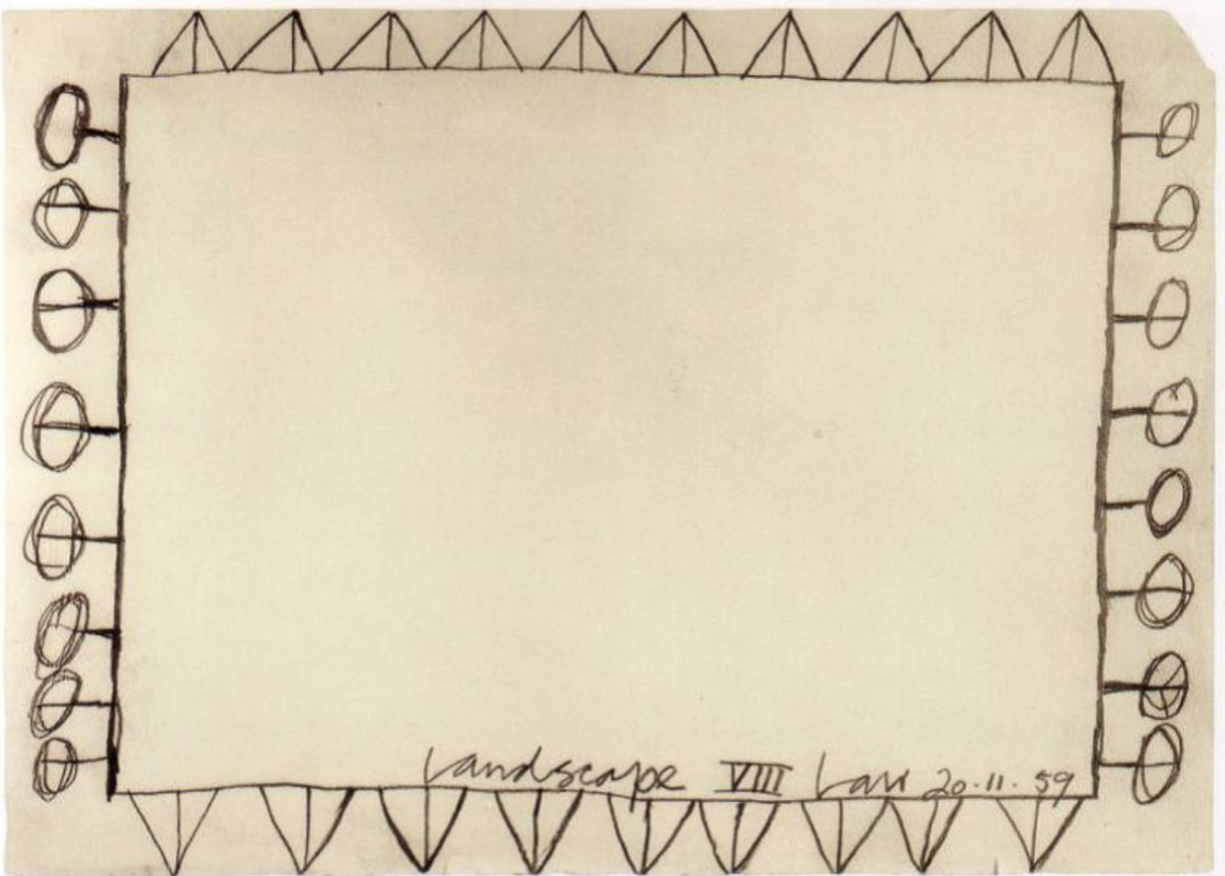


Fig.9  
 Bob Law  
*Landscape VIII* 1959  
 Tate  
 © The estate of Bob Law

In the late 1950s Law began a series of 'field drawings' – or 'open' and 'closed' drawings – that were initially inspired by lying down in the small stone walled fields on the Penwith peninsula in Cornwall. Law initially bordered the 'emptied out' rectangular centres of these drawings with diagrammatic trees and hedges, as in *Landscape VIII* 1959 (fig.9). He then simplified them until they were just lines traced around the extremities of clean paper, as in *Drawing 24.4.60* 1960 (fig.10). In the 'open' drawings, the paper is left blank and clean in the centre; in the 'closed' series, the centres of the drawings were filled with frenetic graphite shading, forming dark and ominous monochromatic fields.

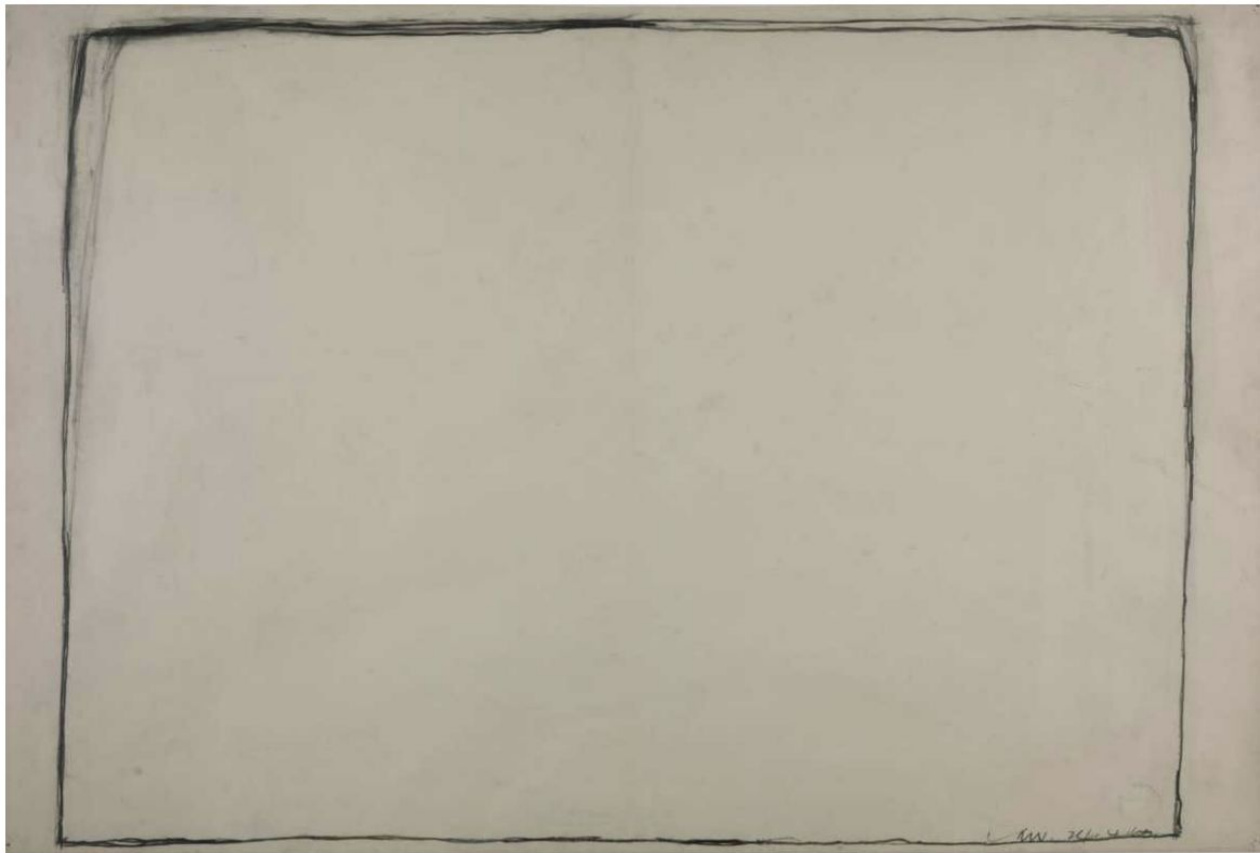


Fig.10  
Bob Law  
*Drawing 24.4.60* 1960  
Tate  
© The estate of Bob Law

From 1960 Law created a series of *Black Paintings* first exhibited that year at the ICA in London in a two-person exhibition with Peter Hobbs, following an invitation from the critic Lawrence Alloway.<sup>32</sup> Uglow spoke frequently of the importance of London's ICA at that time, which was under Alloway's growing influence and that of his colleague Roger Coleman, a near neighbour to Uglow in Ladbroke Grove.<sup>33</sup> Hobbs was also teaching at Central at the time, providing another link to Uglow. Law's *Black Paintings* are densely monochromatic works built up with layers of varying pigments to create deep, light-absorbing surfaces.<sup>34</sup>

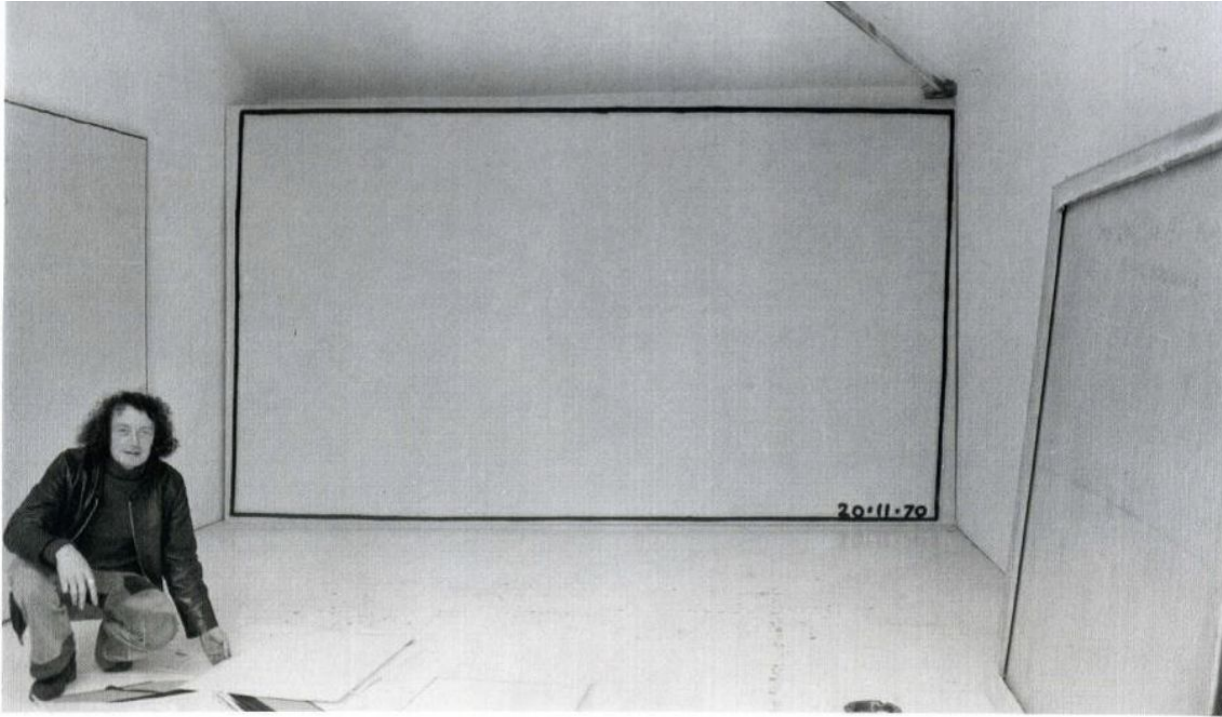


Fig.11

Bob Law in his studio in front of *Mister Paranoia IV 20.11.70 (no.95)* 1970 (Richard Saltoun Gallery, London)

This image was used as the invitation card for his 1971 exhibition at the Lisson Gallery, London

© The estate of Bob Law

Photo © Lisson Gallery, London

Through geography Law is associated with St Ives, having initially moved there from London in 1957. It was there that he started painting and drawing through the encouragement of artists such as Ben Nicholson and Peter Lanyon. Even during the three formative years he spent in Cornwall, however, his work can be seen as a direct challenge to the art colony's modernist position. Law's diagrammatic field drawings were a provocation to the more lyrical traditions prevalent in St Ives of abstracting from nature or even creating constructivist or balanced compositional non-objective artworks. It is this provocative quality that links Law with Uglow's sensibility. Indeed, perhaps the Cornish connection goaded Law, impatient with a St Ives vocabulary that had developed through – and still at this date depended on – a respect for cubism and French painting. Law broke with this, ending the 'open' and 'closed' series with the vast *Mr Paranoia* sequence of laundry-marker paintings from 1969–70 (fig.11). These works have a directness that is quite unlike his more refined black monochrome works and connect with the 'literalist tendency' in American minimalism.<sup>35</sup> This tendency valued the clarity in which materials could speak for themselves, unencumbered by imposed narratives or internal hierarchical compositions.



In Britain at the time, the reception of minimalism was complex, entwined as it was with other developments in North American painting and the newly found visibility of earlier twentieth century avant-gardes. In truth many things were developing concurrently. It is worth remembering that the work of the British sculptor Anthony Caro and that of his students featured heavily in the 1966 exhibition *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture* at the Jewish Museum in New York, yet belonged to a more formalist and Greenbergian tradition than the pragmatic materialist objectivity that can be seen now to characterise the minimalism that the exhibition announced.<sup>36</sup> Law's empty canvases recognise this latter position. Yet they also hold in their titles an element of almost taunting mock-confrontation.<sup>37</sup>

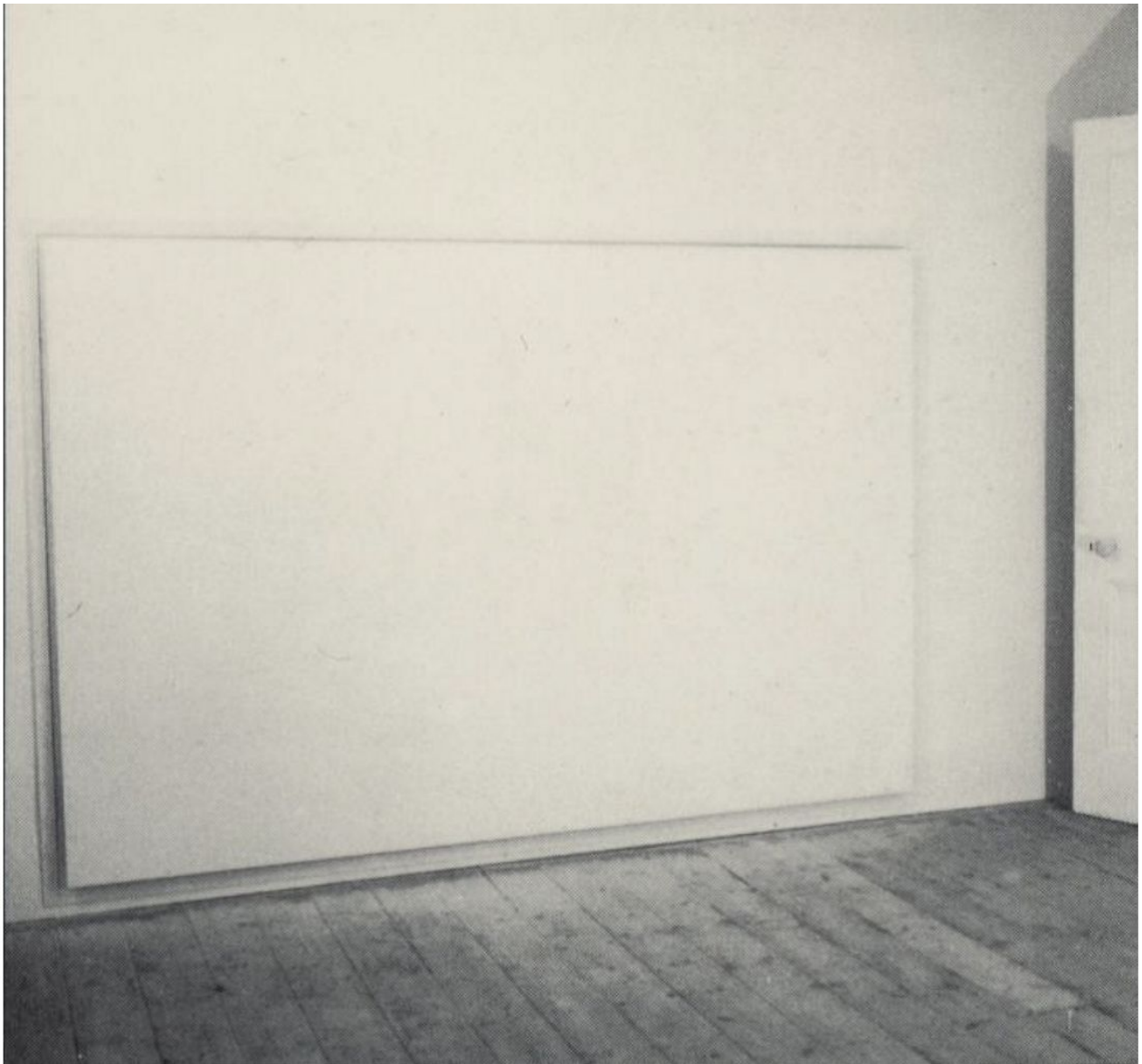


Fig.12

Alan Uglow's *Untitled* 1968, photographed in his studio at 21 Bassett Road, Ladbroke Grove, London in 1968

© The estate of Alan Uglow

When Uglow developed his first low-panel painting *Untitled* 1968 (fig.12) in his Ladbroke Grove studio in 1968, he discovered a specific format and set of concerns that he would continue to engage with throughout the rest of his career – how a painting relates to its surroundings; how it can speak to and affect what is outside of its own frame. For Uglow the conceptual edge of the work expands beyond the painting itself both phenomenologically and associatively.

*Untitled* 1968 was the first of Uglow's 'lowrider' works, which he made on a four foot by eight foot (1219 x 2438 mm) sheet of hardboard. As a standard cut unit size from the builder's yard, it was marginally bigger than the seven foot by six foot (2134 x 1829 mm) canvas paintings that he had been making up to this point. In 1995 Uglow described the process:

The first piece was made not only as an alternative support for the canvas, but to free what was central to the canvas paintings, which were concerned with emptying out, reducing the plane to one colour, but framed by colour on top, bottom and sides. I wanted to separate those two elements, plane and frame. I took a standard 4 x 8 foot masonite panel and reinforced the back so it would float an inch [25.5 mm] from the wall, then attached four 1½ inch [38 mm] aluminium strips 9/16ths of an inch [14 mm] thick directly on the wall using double sided tape. The canvases had been vertically orientated, but the panel looked wrong as a vertical, and when I placed it horizontally it didn't seem right floating mid-wall, so I dropped it to just off the floor. I liked that juncture where the bottom section of the frame and panel almost met the floor, that space. It became a vacuum that created tension between levitation and gravity.<sup>38</sup>

With the paint on an industrial support, the frame on the wall, the painting off the wall, and the work hovering near the floor, Uglow played with the way the viewer physically relates to the installation and navigates the tripartite surfaces of painting, wall and floor. He came to understand this work as important for the later development of his paintings. This was not just within its format but in the way he had begun an interrogation into the sculptural and architectural constraints governing the way paintings were hung – how a painting's internal structure corresponded with its hanging and its outside environment. Uglow was to explore this dialogue through his subsequent paintings and installations in numerous ways that heighten visual and perceptive sensitivities.

Uglow referred to his low panel works in shorthand as both 'lowriders' and 'pissoirs'.<sup>39</sup> These casual descriptions reveal a lot. 'Lowrider' refers to the US custom-car subculture where the frame of intricately painted cars would be lowered to just inches above the road. This illustrates Uglow's desired 'vacuum' and how slight and minimal changes in installation can have powerful effects. The 'pissoir' is a base nod to the height and porcelain-like sheen of the paintings' surfaces, as well as referring to the artistic provocation of the artist Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) infamous *Fountain* 1917.<sup>40</sup>

*Untitled* 1968 can be seen as the first of Uglow's works to address what for the art historian Molly Warnock is '[a] key problem in the history of abstract painting ... that of the painting's edge, and its double and to some extent divided capacity to link the work to a larger situation and to cut it out from it'.<sup>41</sup> She argued that these concerns would go on to govern Uglow's subsequent painting in New York. Uglow's integration of the conceptual edge of the painting and its interaction with what is outside of its boundaries relates to the concerns of other minimalist painters working across the Atlantic in New York at the time. Uglow's painting can be seen to echo aspects of Frank Stella's well-known black, aluminium and copper paintings with their 'what you see is what you see' literalism.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Jo Baer and Robert Mangold's work at the time was formally reducing the language of painting to its most primary elements, a tendency that bears a relation to Uglow's empty fields.<sup>43</sup> However, Uglow's interest in the internal space of the painting, its hanging, and the architecture outside of it perhaps resonates most closely with contemporaneous developments being worked through by Robert Ryman. It was around 1967, the year before Uglow made the first 'lowrider', that Ryman began valuing the way his paintings were fixed on the wall and formally integrated masking tape, staples and later various types of mounting devices into his paintings.<sup>44</sup> For Ryman this was a symbiotic relationship between painting and the manner of presentation, a relationship that was emphasised by the fact that the paintings were made through both painterly and semi industrial processes.

The 1968 'lowrider' opened up sculptural and associative readings of different surfaces and supports, concerns that would sustain Uglow throughout his career; the work also coupled these with matter-of-fact experiential or phenomenological readings. As the 'lowrider' series developed over the next thirty years, Uglow kept the hanging height and unit size constant, but later came to reject the wall-based frame.

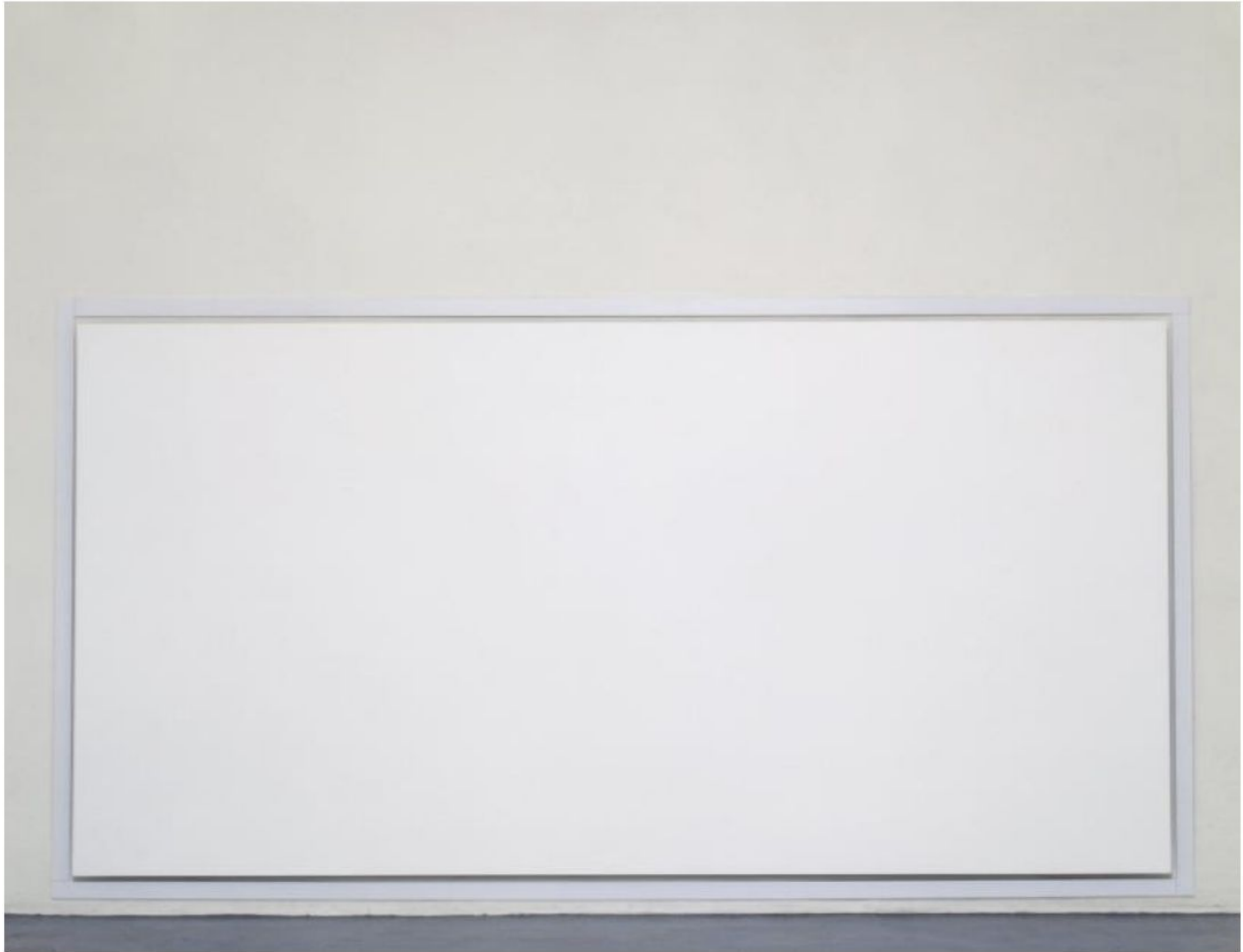


Fig. 13  
Alan Uglow  
68/88 1988  
© The estate of Alan Uglow  
Photo © 1988, Lorence-Monk Gallery, NYC

Uglow first revisited the 'lowrider' paintings in New York in 1988 when he made *68/88* (fig. 13), an iteration of the earlier painting. The original had been irreparably destroyed while in storage, and he had in his studio only a photograph of it on a contact sheet.<sup>45</sup> It was therefore in 1968, in London, when Uglow first addressed the relationship of a painting to its installation – and how that installation effects the environment in which it is hung. The painting is not just a painting on the wall. This concern, that of the relationship of the painting to its environment, was a focus for Uglow and with this re-making of the first 'lowrider' he acknowledged that the genesis of the idea came while he was still in England.

The work and its environment

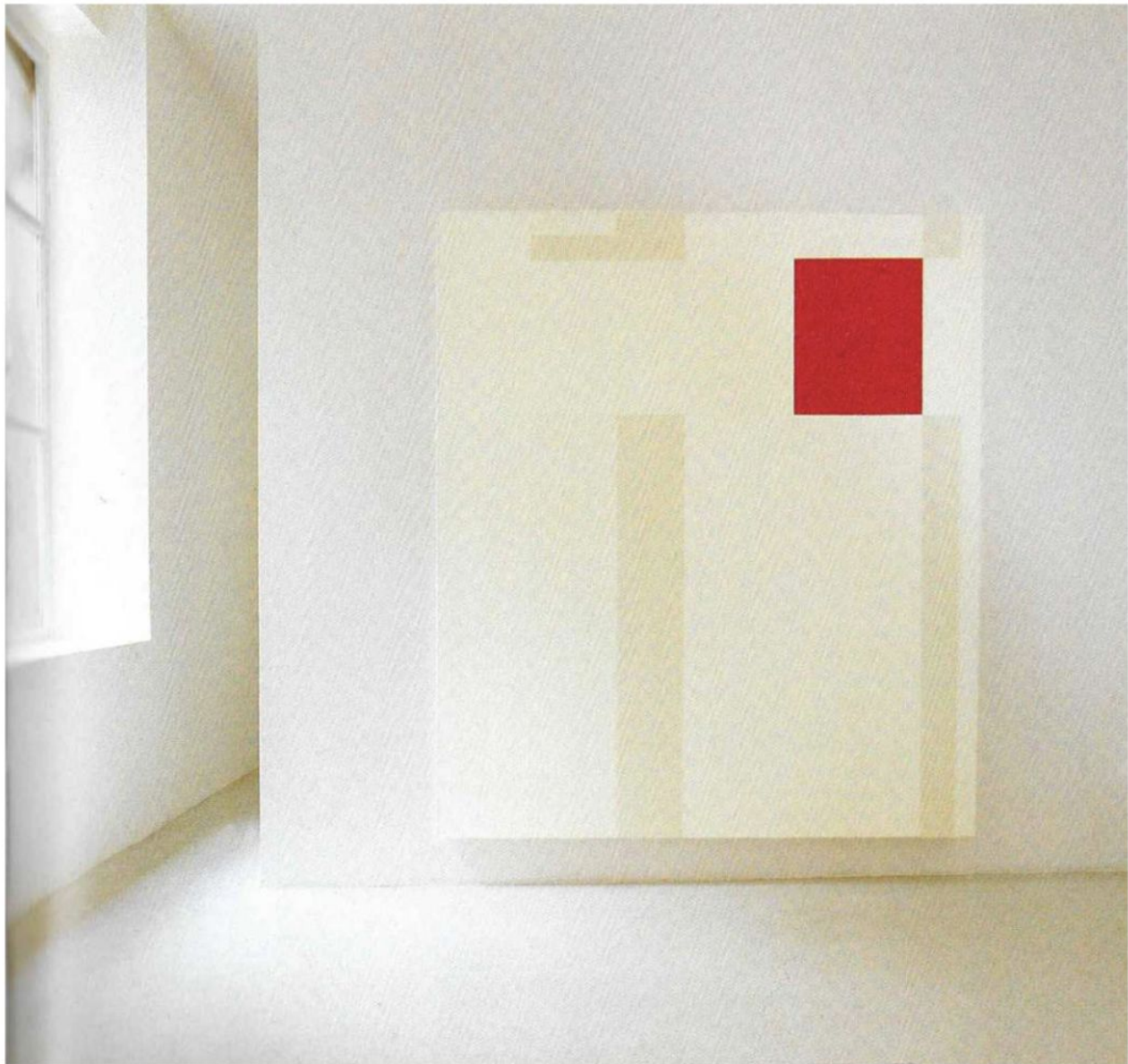


Fig.14  
Alan Uglow  
*Signal (Red)* 1984  
© The estate of Alan Uglow

In 1984 Uglow made the work *Signal*, which was exhibited in Cologne at the artist Gunter Umberg's project space, Raum für Malerie.<sup>46</sup> *Signal* is a diptych, a pair of paintings that relate to each other through space, both physically and mimetically. Each canvas is seven foot by six foot (2134 x 1829 mm) and consists of a pristine white field which holds within it vertical and geometric bands of different whites, as well as a single bold rectangle of colour – in one painting red (fig. 14), in the other yellow. The paintings are on custom-made stretchers with the right edge deeper than the left. This means each painting's stretched canvas plane lies at a slight angle to the flat vertical wall. They are like large, low wedges – with one edge just-slightly off the wall. Each half of *Signal* acts as an equivalent of the other. They are not mirror images of each other but rather include 'small departures from the symmetry and parallelism' that Amine Haase cited as imbuing in the viewer a heightened sense of awareness and 'alarmed readiness'.<sup>47</sup> If the two paintings were stacked together, they would make a unified, regular whole but when hung opposite one another, there is a psychological tension outside of the picture frame itself as this unity has been broken. This is perhaps similar to the vacuum-like force Uglow noticed in the low hanging of *Untitled* 1968. Both canvases, *Signal (Red)* and *Signal (Yellow)*, seem to communicate – to signal – to each other across the gallery space through their shared formal characteristics and structure. This prevents them from simply appearing as refined 'straight' paintings. Facing one another, they are split, and though not identical, each partners the other – a pairing that asks you not to get in the way, not to disrupt their unity.

*Signal* is a perfect example of what Uglow and his contemporaries like Palermo were trying to develop in their work. The painter David Reed described this as 'the New York School solution ... [to] make a painting that was a portable object that could control its environment'.<sup>48</sup>



Fig.15

Alan Uglow

Installation photographs of *Signals* 1987 during *Century 87* at the Nieuwkerk, Amsterdam in 1987

© The estate of Alan Uglow

In 1987 Uglow made another work, *Signals*, which was exhibited the same year in the Nieuwkerk, a Calvinist church in Amsterdam, during the city-wide project *Century 87*. *Signals* was a series of four large monochrome panels in red, yellow (fig.15), blue and black; the four panels were installed high up on opposite and opposing walls creating a cross formation in the nave of the church. As with the two canvases that made up *Signal*, these four paintings spoke to each other – Uglow describes them as literally semaphoring across the space.<sup>49</sup> Uglow was drawn to the culturally loaded space of the church when thinking about Mondrian's abandonment of Protestantism when he became a Theosophist and joined the esoteric nineteenth century spiritual movement with which the early development of abstract art in Europe is invariably linked.<sup>50</sup> The monochromes have a down-to-earth, concrete quality, which was enhanced by the incorporation of quadrasonic speakers playing their own parallel 'down-to-earth' sounds and noises into the installation. A recorded track amplified below each painting included guitars, drums, hammers, a soldier describing shooting the enemy 'like a fish in a barrel' and other war commentary – a collage of noise from real life and television – as well as a voice reading passages on colour and perception from the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) book *Remarks on Colour* (1950).<sup>51</sup> The historic formalism of Mondrian and his neoplasticism promoted an ordered and harmonious form of abstraction built from regimented and essential colours, forms and lines. This is complicated by Uglow's installation, which uses the work's real and associative environment(s) and is aware of the paintings' (and installation's) multiple contingencies.

## Leaning Standards

Uglow's experimentation with how his work was installed and affected its environment was also central to the installation of his *Standard* paintings, which are perhaps the works for which he is most well-known and which were gathered together at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in 2013.<sup>52</sup> Uglow started this series of formally reduced works, of which *Standard # 8 (Blue)* (fig.1) is one, in the early 1990s. The paintings are a regular size, seven foot by six (2134 x 1829 mm), and each consists of a clear white canvas framed by bands of colour, simple elements that Uglow nonetheless made expansive. This white field is never uniform and contains precise overpainting and variation in its apparent emptiness. The precision and care of the painting and the subtlety of these fields gives the painted surface of these works a sculptural quality. The framing bands of colour, though flatly painted in single tones, are not uniform in their weight and physical depth – each vertical or horizontal band or tab is composed of a greater or lesser number of paint layers. This variance reveals itself through close looking but also as light levels change or the viewer moves around the painting. The width of the bands and their proportions are constant, allowing them to hold the sensitively applied sculptural flatness of the internal fields. Their simplicity is illusionistic and they are emblematic of Uglow's complex concerns surrounding the act of painting. They are of a quality or standard, as much as they are standardised.



Fig.16  
Alan Uglow  
*Portrait of a Standard (Blue)* 2000  
David Zwirner Gallery, New York  
© The estate of Alan Uglow



Like the very specific installations of *Signal* and the 'lowrider' works, the *Standards* are installed leaning against a gallery wall.<sup>53</sup> To reinforce the point, Uglow photographed one of these works, intended to act as a reprographic partner, 'blue print', or instruction showing the works' implacable placement on blocks. His use of the photographic is present in both the life-size silkscreened *Portrait of a Standard (Blue)* 2000 (fig.16) and in the 1994 edition *12 Standards Leaning*, important not just within his own body of work but also when considering the later trajectory of painting debates from the 2010s. This is perhaps most evident when thinking of the development of ideas associated with 'painting without painting' and how some contemporary artists from the 2010s popularised reprographic and technological approaches to artistic authorship, making paintings and 'networked paintings' that activated concerns outside their frame.<sup>54</sup> Uglow's use of photography prefigures and relates to these debates through a form of matter-of-fact artistic detachment and how the *Portraits* of the *Standard* works can be seen to activate the *Standards* themselves. The portraits do this through emphasising qualities within the paintings, such as the obliqueness of angles in the propped standards, their materiality and the necessity of their particular installation and broader contingencies. Uglow's reprographic interest has roots in the Bauhaus's coming together of art and industry, of which László Moholy Nagy's *Telephone Paintings* are a prime example.<sup>55</sup> This discourse is likely to have been present in the Bauhaus-inspired teaching that Uglow experienced in Leicester.

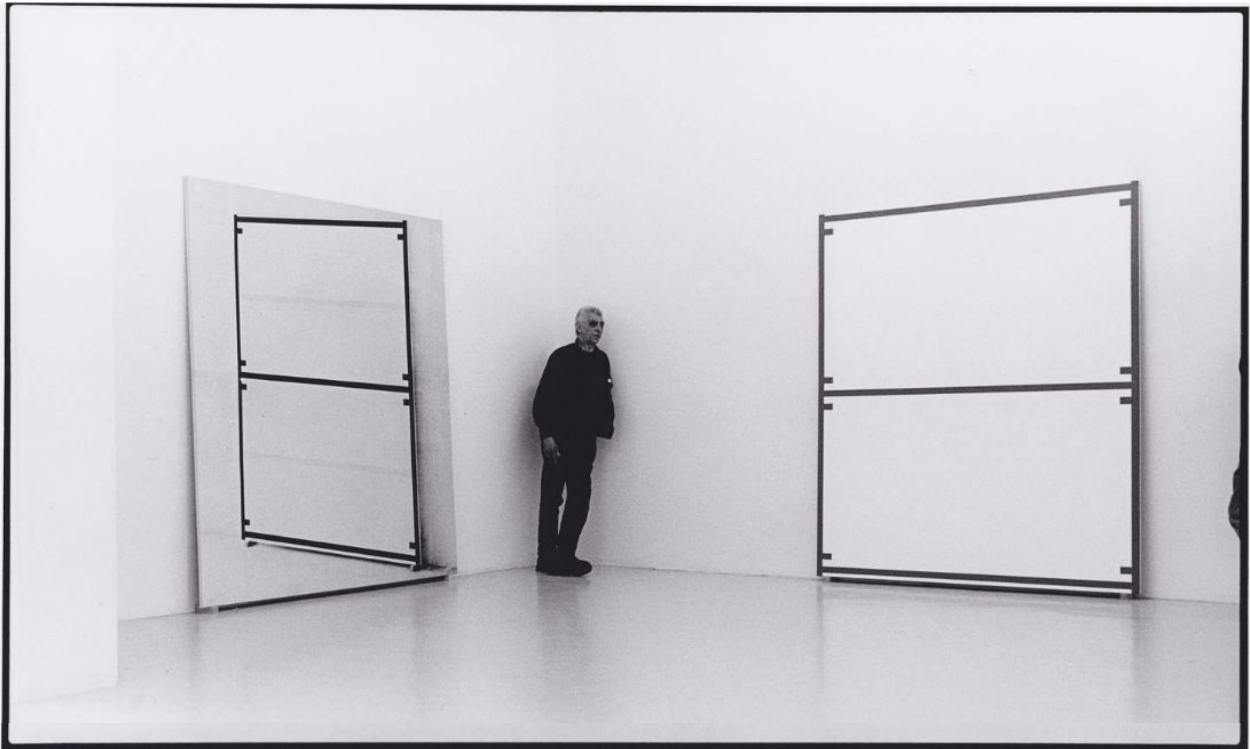


Fig.17

Alan Uglow pictured leaning in the corner of Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam, 2000, between *Portrait of a Standard (Blue)* 2000 (left) and *Standard # 8 (Blue)* 1994 (right)

© The estate of Alan Uglow

It is striking that when the artist was photographed with a propped *Standard* and its accompanying *Portrait* (fig.17) he also leans with them – in one way mimicking the painting’s now sculptural quality but also emphasising what I would describe as their transient detachment. The paintings and the artist all exhibit an attitude. By being leant against the gallery walls the *Standards* flirt with impermanence; they seem to be without a fixed position, as if you could move them. This gives the paintings a sense of vulnerability heightened by their pristine surfaces. The paintings ask the viewer to examine them closely but also to step away. The paintings are dispassionate, exposed, but also formally tough in their execution and installation.<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 18

Alan Uglow pictured lying in front of *Blue Equator 2000* (Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam) at Griedervonputtkamer, Berlin, 2001

© The estate of Alan Uglow

It would be wrong to say that the way Uglow’s paintings since the 1990s have been installed within the gallery is indifferent. Rather, they have a listless pose that emphasises the body and creates a tension in the relationship between the viewer and artwork. The artworks seem to ask you to be active while they are indolent. It is a tension that animates the viewer’s own physical awareness when looking at the work. This dichotomy between our body and the painting, creating a physical connection analogous to a connection between two people seems very important for Uglow. As well as within *Signal*, the *Standards* or the *Portraits*, there is also an installation photograph of a lowrider painting, *Blue Equator 2000* (fig.18), where the artist lies in front of the work on the gallery floor. For Uglow, something formal seems to require something casual.<sup>57</sup>

## Unconventional installation

Uglow states that the 'propping' of his *Standards* came out of what he calls 'a studio situation'.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, his choice of small wooden wedges to lift the work just off the floor are slightly more refined examples of the wooden blocks often found in painters' studios. Importantly, however, the manner in which these works are installed seems to be outside of the formal composition of the works themselves. Indeed, to see the geometric aspects of these paintings as clearly as possible, it may be more helpful to see them vertically. When leant, the internal and external right angles are confused by the tilt. The clear rectangular fields become just off-rectangular and parallel lines converge. In this respect, Uglow's tilt is a willing distortion. One that is exaggerated still further in the *Portraits*, where the photograph of the painting is additionally taken obliquely. It connects to, but is the antithesis of, the conventional hanging of paintings by Franz Kline, for example, who Uglow greatly admired. Kline's works were often painted sitting on the floor but when elevated on the wall seem to lose some of their connections to the physical and bodily experiences of both artist and viewer.<sup>59</sup>



Fig.19

Lee Lozano

*Wave Series* 1967–70, installed for the exhibition *Lee Lozano: Painter* at the Whitney Museum, 2 December 1970 – 3 January 1971

© Whitney Museum

Of course, there are many precedents for the stacked or leant painting. Uglow would have undoubtedly known about, and possibly seen Lee Lozano's *Wave Series* 1967–70 (fig.19) when it was exhibited in 1970 at the Whitney Museum of Art.<sup>60</sup> Here Lozano leant her eleven paintings of gestural and measured waves against black walls. The number of waves grows in each painting; each canvas was painted in one sitting, so the internal vertical crests and troughs capture the time Lozano's brush stroke took to make. The initial painting in the series has just two waves and the tenth painting ninety-six. The last canvas was to have doubled this to include 192 waves but physically it was beyond Lozano's capability in paint so is drawn in pencil. The particularities of Lozano's installation and the unfinished nature of the series seem to bring her work back directly to the body and its limitations – in her case the physical movement necessary – top-to-bottom – to make each continuous brushstroke.<sup>61</sup>

However, there is an interesting London precedent which may have also helped inform Uglow's innovation. Indeed, the London painting circle that he moved in as a student and the exhibitions which he saw may not only have informed the unconventional hanging of his work but it may also help account for the permission he gave himself to move to a clearer graphic and iconic quality in his painting. Again, we must return to the ICA, and the 1959 exhibition *Place*, which Uglow saw.<sup>62</sup> The exhibition was devised by the artists Robyn Denny, Ralph Rumney and Richard Smith as a way to expand on a quality of the new American painting which they and others had seen and been discussing. As Roger Coleman, one of the exhibition's curators, states in the catalogue:

In the works of Pollock, Rothko, Newman and Still space tends to be a direct function of the size of the painting surface and it has been called an environment. The surface is preserved as a surface and activity occurs over it vertically and horizontally expanding outwards to the four edges rather than from the edges into the center [sic].<sup>63</sup>

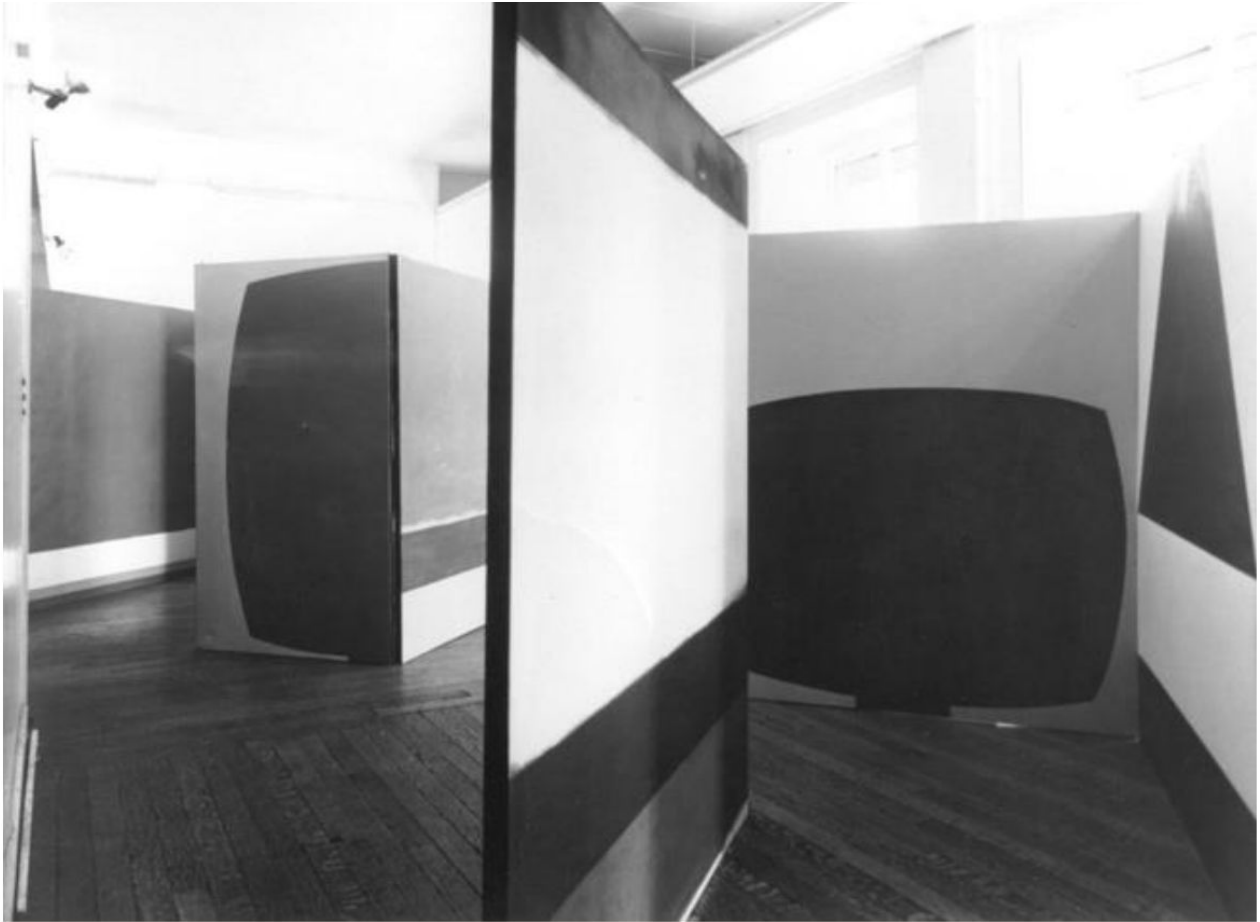


Fig.20

An installation photograph of Robyn Denny's work in the exhibition *Place* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 24 September – 24 October 1959

© Robyn Denny

Within *Place*, the exhibition environment itself became central. The exhibited works were paintings by the three artists involved and were made within a set of clear standard parameters of size, colour and organisation in order to create a structured maze through the galleries (fig.20). The paintings were resting on the floor, creating a warren-like environment in order to disrupt the viewer. Visitors walked through the space, confronting the works, which were arranged so that intentional visual dialogues based on repeating colours and forms could be made between what was in front of them and what was behind them. Pairings of paintings were, as with Uglow's *Signal* paintings, opposite one another, requiring the viewer to turn their whole body to fully see either one. The specifics of the exhibition's installation also questioned or interrogated the authority of the paintings themselves – they became almost decoys of paintings as much as they were paintings in their own right. The works on show hovered awkwardly between being canvases one would expect to see elevated on the gallery wall, designed for serious aesthetic contemplation, and becoming more like representations of paintings.

If one reading a visitor may have taken from *Place* was that the installation is inseparable from the paintings, and a painting may be a decoy as well as a painting, it was another exhibition (or series of related exhibitions) where it has been argued a proto-pop style of abstraction became highly visible in British painting.<sup>64</sup> The 1960 exhibition *Situation* was held at the RBA Galleries rather than at the ICA but organised by the latter's Deputy Director, Lawrence Alloway. The show aimed to show 'large abstract paintings outside the status quo'.<sup>65</sup> William Turnbull, who was a very active teacher during Uglow's time at Central and a vocal contributor to the impassioned ICA Talks sessions which Uglow attended, was seen as an authority with respect to the British reception of European abstraction and the new North American art of the time.<sup>66</sup> It was in this capacity that he advised Alloway on the *Situation* show. He had actually visited Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman in New York, having earlier spent time in Paris with Alberto Giacometti, Georges Braque and Constantin Brancusi.<sup>67</sup> Turnbull and Alloway invited tutors and students from Central including Brian Young, John Epstein, Peter Hobbs and Peter Coviello to exhibit in *Situation*, and Uglow showed great interest in the exhibition.<sup>68</sup>

### A lasting impact

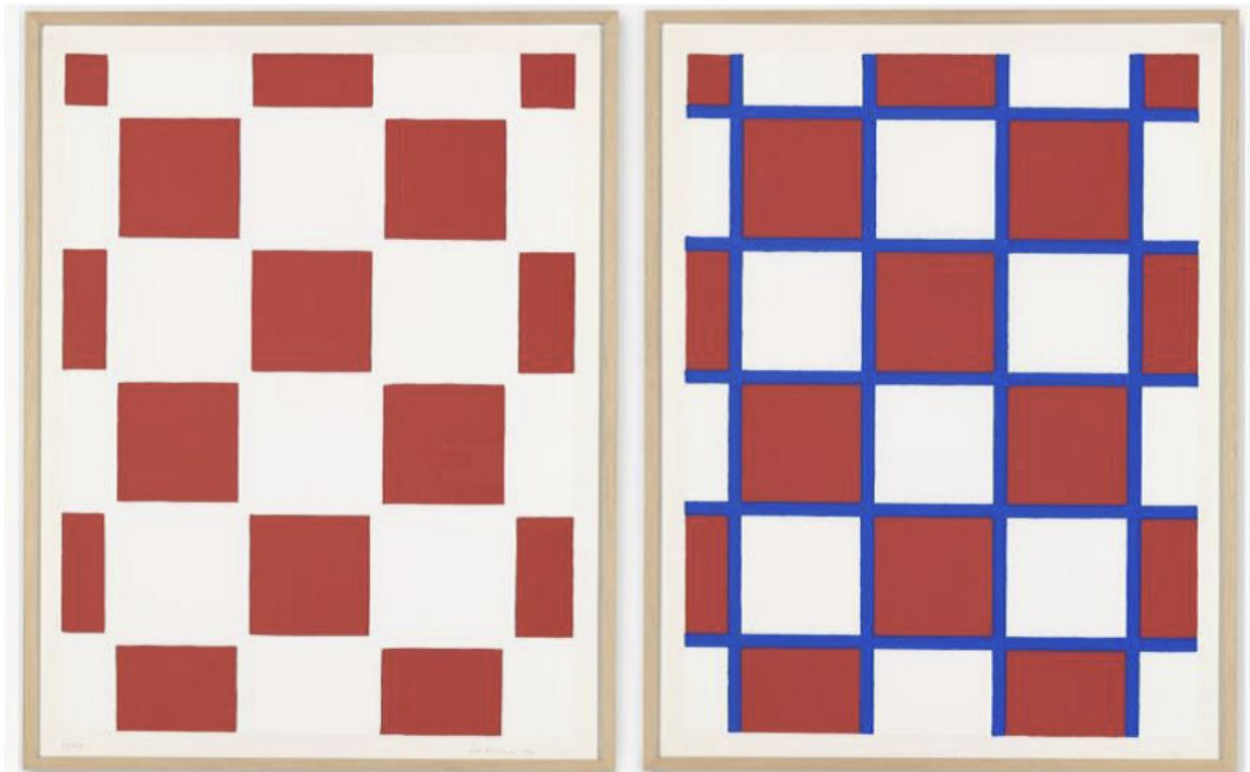


Fig.21  
Blinky Palermo  
*Flipper* 1970  
Tate  
© DACS 2020

The debates around *Situation* provide another example of how Uglow's experience of the art and culture he witnessed in Britain resonated in the subsequent works he was to make in New York. *Situation* has been characterised by the art historian Thomas Crow as a moment when a pop-enthused form of abstraction emerged in Britain, brought about by a misreading of American abstract painting as it was filtered through an equal appreciation of North American pop culture and graphic design.<sup>69</sup> This tendency was visible in the works of Richard Smith, Bernard Cohen, Robyn Denny, Gordon House and others. Although Éric de Chassey pushed the point by calling it 'a British specificity', it is certainly interesting to think about the way graphic representations of actual things were found, lifted or informed abstract painting in Britain at this time.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps this tendency is most visible in Richard Smith's work, where designs from products like cigarette packets or the pockets of the then exotic blue jeans, were copied to inform the composition of a seemingly abstract painting or more complex painterly construction.<sup>71</sup> Importantly, de Chassey was talking about a dialogue around composition rather than a diagrammatic approach. It is an echo or ghost of the design. In a way this tendency is similar to that used by Palermo ten years later when he used the checker pattern from a pinball machine as a source for his diptych print *Flipper* 1970 (fig.21). Uglow's use of clean graphic lines in the *Standards*, which resemble or are lifted from the lines of sports fields, seem to belong to this same tradition which finds abstraction within a mediated cultural world of design and then subsumes it for other means.

It is a mediated cultural world that Uglow also pushed outside the frame of pure formalism. His paintings from the late 1980s to the 2000s achieved unity and clarity through embracing other art forms beside themselves – sound, photographs or an engagement with the reprographic, the facsimile and the decoy. I am acutely aware that it would be wrong to overemphasise the importance of Uglow's experiences and the artistic circles he moved in when in Britain on his subsequent career. After all he left the capital in 1968 for a three-week trip and on his return, perhaps even before he had returned, he decided to permanently settle in New York. As Uglow dourly put it, in New York he saw 'a situation that looked much more interesting'.<sup>72</sup> He knew that his work was – or should be – in dialogue with the critical painting going on at that time in that city, not London. It was a culmination of a love affair with North American culture and the focused intensity of New York painting that made him feel a direct affinity to the passion of the artistic debates he found there.

In New York Uglow swiftly sought out the artistic community of painters. He frequented bars such as Max's Kansas City, St Adrian's, and Fanelli's, initially becoming closely associated with the artists centred around the gallerist Klaus Kertess's legendary Bykert Gallery where he would exhibit for the first time in 1974. He cites Paul Mogensen, Bill Bollinger, Bob Duran, David Novros, Brice Marden and Winston Roeth as all being important early contacts for him. At the time, Marden was perhaps Uglow's greatest supporter. He purchased an early work of Uglow's and in the mid-1970s their Bowery lofts were adjacent with a shared staircase. In 1975 Uglow turned down an 'artist selecting artist' solo exhibition nominated by Marden at Artists Space, as he felt unable to supply the necessary work.<sup>73</sup> But that year he did show in the Whitney Biennale and thus in a relatively small amount of time since arriving in the city six years earlier, can be seen to have established his position. He would go on to have his work shown in the inaugural exhibitions at Mary Boone's new gallery and then became a pivotal figure for New York painting from the early 1980s onwards. That he was able to do so reflects not only the quality of his artworks but his conviction in knowing their seriousness – a seriousness that acknowledges and gives license to developments in European – British – as well as North American art.



*The Independent*  
April 23, 2011



## Alan Uglow: Artist who took inspiration from his love of football

Alan Uglow was an artist whose work reflected his twin loves of painting and of football.

He was a devoted fan of Chelsea FC and in his best-known pictures, the Stadium Series, minimalist pale-hued fields are outlined and bisected by lines of colour, clearly inspired by the layout of a pitch. Deceptive in its simplicity, his work played a game with the concepts of space and boundaries; he described painting as "a paradox. A finished object that stays open".

Alan Uglow was born in Luton in 1941 and was taken to Chelsea matches by his father and uncle. He got his first taste of abstract expressionism in 1959, on a visit to the Tate's The New American Painting exhibition, which included artists such as Rothko, Pollock and de Kooning; 16 of the 17 painters had made their reputations in New York. So in 1968, after a degree in painting and printmaking from Central School of Art and Design, he travelled to America's artistic capital for a month's visit.

By 1969 he had moved to the city, motivated by what he explained in a later interview as "the energy of New York" and the fact that "the art scene was still developing". He participated in his first group show at Bykert Gallery in 1974, which was followed in 1978 by his first one-man show at Mary Boone Gallery.

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In the 1970s Uglow worked with his friend Winston Roeth on printing drypoint etchings, including the *The Dartmouth Portraits* suite, for Jim Dine. In 1984 he showed at Günther Umberg's *Raum für Malerei* in Cologne, breaking tradition in a gallery which until then had been known for strictly monochrome works.

During the late 1980s Uglow revisited an idea he had first tried in the '60s, experimenting with automobile lacquer on aluminium. The result was a finely polished finish which reflected – and played with – the viewer, like the paintwork on a gleaming new car. These pieces are designed to be hung below eye level, suggesting perhaps both the idea of getting into a low-slung sports car, and that abstract expressionism had fallen below the radar of the mainstream art world.

Football was the theme at exhibitions in 1995 at Gimpel Fils in London and in 1998 at the Stark Gallery in Manhattan, the latter of which featured the bright-white installation titled *Coach's Bench* (1998), accompanied by recordings of texts about soccer by Harold Pinter, Albert Camus and others. Remembering the 1995 exhibition, René Gimpel said: "I liked Alan immensely. He was tough, independent, a chain smoker", adding that he considered him as "an outsider to the art world."

A bilingual monograph, Alan Uglow, edited by Martin Hentschel, was published last year to coincide with an exhibition at the Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld. Reviewing the exhibition, the artist and critic Joan Waltemath observed that "The format of the Stadium paintings, with their symmetrical borders and rectangular interstice, mirror the soccer field's proportions and create a ripe ambiguity between the fields in the painting and the field of play..." and emphasised that "what keeps it from descending to the level of gimmick is the degree to which it reveals Uglow's rootedness in the world around him and how it gives us a way back into his paintings." **Marcus Williamson**

Alan Uglow was succinct, quietly passionate and generous, writes **Tim Ayres**. Firstly, succinct in that he only wore black, ever. I once gave him a vintage pink Giro d'Italia jersey, for riding around New York on his bike, and he dyed it black. He never said more than was to the point. He was never terse or taciturn, just sparing. Like his paintings. On our first meeting – I was a young hopeful, he a "been-around the block" artist – he said that I should "set the controls to the heart of the sun" and it made sense. He then raised his eyebrows in that "so get on with it" way that he had.

Alan was passionate about what he cared for in a quintessentially British, understated way. His paintings are generous in their succinctness, succinct in their passions; they always said to me "enjoy this". In the terminology of his beloved football, he always had his eye on the ball.

*Alan Philip Uglow, artist: born Luton 19 July 1941; married 1986 Elena Alexander; died New York 20 January 2011.*

*The Guardian*  
February 27, 2011

# The Guardian

## Obituary

### Alan Uglow obituary

**British-born abstract painter, he became a quintessential New York art-world figure**



Despite moving to New York in 1969, Alan Uglow remained a devoted Chelsea FC fan.  
Photograph: Tim Ayres

Alan Uglow, who has died aged 69, was a British painter, installation artist, photo-grapher and musician, who, despite retaining the vocal inflections and passion for football that were legacies of his upbringing, became a quintessential New York art-world figure. His career was characterised by a highly principled devotion to the values of classic modernism, and a disdain for fashion that won him devoted admirers among both artists and collectors. His eloquently economical paintings epitomised Mies van der Rohe's dictum that less is more.

Born in Luton, the son of a master carpenter, Alan was brought up there, and in Danbury, Essex and in Peterborough. He studied at the Leicester College of [Art](#) and the Central School in London, exhibiting at the Young Contemporaries from 1960 to 1964, and at the Grabowski Gallery in 1965. As the 60s progressed, he was drawn to a kind of non-figurative art that reflected the influence of Piet Mondrian and, less obviously, Alberto Giacometti, as well as American artists including Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt.

In 1968, he made his first visit to New York and moved there permanently the following year, renting a loft in SoHo, then a nameless industrial neighbourhood, and establishing himself as a fixture among the painters, conceptualists and performance artists who congregated at bars such as Fanelli's, Max's Kansas City, and St Adrian's. He supported himself by printmaking for more established artists such as Jim Dine, and painting and decorating.

He absorbed everything the New York art world had to offer, while working slowly and patiently on his own paintings, which became increasingly refined, tending at first towards the monochromatic or the chromatically neutral. In 1974, the curator Klaus Kertess included him in a group show at the influential Bykert Gallery. By the time of his first solo exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery, in 1978, Uglow's art had been pared down to the interplay of subtly modulated whites deployed within the framework of a highly reductive geometry.

By the early 1980s, Uglow was beginning to find himself out of step with a Manhattan gallery scene increasingly in thrall to commerce. Continuing to paint, he found an alternative outlet for his creative energy playing bass guitar, performing in New York and Europe with his second wife, the dancer and poet Elena Alexander, and becoming a founding member of the band Hard Labor.

He began to exhibit at the Lorence-Monk Gallery in New York from the mid-1980s, and later at Stark Gallery. Defying the tide of postmodernism, Uglow remained an unrepentant if undogmatic modernist, and increasingly his reputation came to depend on recognition in northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands. In 1986 and 1992, he and Alexander spent year-long sojourns in Europe, and in 1995 he exhibited in London at Gimpel Fils. European trips were relished for the opportunity to visit Stamford Bridge to support his beloved [Chelsea FC](#).

Painting in series that evolved slowly over decades, he remained faithful to his central vision while pushing boundaries in ways sometimes apparent only when the work was installed in a gallery. Beginning in 2000, there was a radical shift in Uglow's use of colour, which became bolder and more varied, often being employed to articulate space in surprising and illusionistic ways. Some paintings displayed the graphic simplicity of a playing field or ice-hockey rink seen from above, without ever becoming merely diagrammatic.

Occasionally a piece would be freestanding, breaking with conventional notions of painting altogether. In 1998, he had a full-sized "Coach's Bench" fabricated out of wood, with a corrugated fibreglass roof and a concealed sound system that broadcast crowd noises recorded at football stadiums, as well as readings from texts by Vladimir Nabakov, Albert Camus and Harold Pinter.

With his punk black T-shirts, drainpipe jeans and his ravaged but striking features, Uglow remained a familiar figure in the bars of downtown Manhattan until a series of illnesses, culminating in a diagnosis of cancer, confined him largely to his studio. Long before, Uglow had become a cult hero to many younger artists, and the exhibition of a new work at the contemporary art space MoMA PS1, or a one-off at the Paula Cooper Gallery, came to be seen as an event.

His obstinate dedication to the values of high modernism gained growing respect in mainstream circles, and the last year of his life saw the publication of a handsome monograph devoted to his work (Alan Uglow, edited by Martin Hentschel), and major exhibitions in Germany at Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld and Museum Wiesbaden, and at Galerie Onrust in Amsterdam, the headquarters of his Dutch art dealers.

He is survived by Elena.

● Alan Philip Uglow, artist, born 19 July 1941; died 20 January 2011

*BOMB Magazine*

July 1, 1991

 **BROOKLYN RAIL****ArtSeen**

## A Tribute to Alan Uglow

By *Medrie MacPhee, Stephen J. Morse, and Olivier Mosset*

For more than 20 years, I lived next door to Alan Uglow. His presence, sloping down the Bowery in his signature pencil black pants and Swedish policeman's leather jacket, seemed one of life's permanences. When we would meet, we'd pick up where we left off, slipping into studio talk and what was happening with his beloved Chelsea team. His unprepossessing, crusty English working class humor encased a deeply intelligent and refined core. This construction extended to his work. Picture a soccer field removed of the sweating, straining feats of its players as they struggle for purchase, pared down to the field itself—an ethereal platform, the air, light, space, goalposts shimmering at the edges, drawing you in and expanding outward. High modernism meets the populist religion of team sports.

Alan was bluntly honorable. I don't know if it was an extension of his sportsman's code of fair play, but I experienced it firsthand in the mid-'90s at the Baldacci Gallery, where we both showed. Alan was unfailingly generous and supportive; he respected women.

An authentic human being, Alan pursued his passions with enthusiasm and was not interested in the "life at court" aspect of the art world. He lived his moment on the planet to the fullest—with all of the attendant missteps, self-destructive behavior, and regrets that anyone with a taste for risk and a total commitment to his calling experiences. I miss my Bowery mate.

*—Medrie MacPhee*

As a collector, I live with the works of Alan Uglow, which are objects of perfect contemplation. I am not an artist, not an art historian, not an art theorist, not an art critic. I simply live with the objects I acquire, mostly unencumbered and uncontaminated by the combative disputes about history and theory that punctuate the art world. I came to Uglow's art before I knew anything of the artist. It is a privilege to be able simply to look, and no artist in my collection rewards looking as much as Alan Uglow, who also became my friend in the last years of his life.

What do I see and how does it reward? Uglow's art unfailingly astonishes me. It simultaneously calms and excites. The originality, clarity, purity, intelligence, elegance, and luminosity of the work is visually and intellectually thrilling, but its perfection simultaneously calms because it produces a sense that all's right. It is paradoxically still and moving. No matter how little one may know about making art, Uglow's craft is transparent and immense. Regarding such grace is rewarding in itself and confers grace. The art is also ravishingly beautiful. The critical writing about Uglow is sometimes embarrassed or ambivalent about its beauty and perfection. More's the pity for those critics.

When I return home, which is filled with Uglow, I never fail to look anew with the same sense of excitement, and, yes, awe I felt when I first saw his work at Gimpel Fils in London in 1995. To live with such objects is to be continuously enriched. Although Uglow's works may initially look simple, the longer one looks, the more complicated and rigorous they become. The architectonics are clear but pyrotechnic in their unexpected complexity. The enormous number of minute choices of the making reveal themselves and then recede as the enthralling pleasure of looking dominates other responses.



Alan Uglow had an unquiet soul, and lived in an artistically, politically, and interpersonally unquiet era. Out of the chaos within and without, Alan created with his intelligence and vision an ideal order that gives respite. Was the chaos causally related to the order that emerged? Talking to Alan about his work and reading interviews with him and critical writing about him, it seems that most of the artistic motivation was aesthetic and intellectual, situated in the art historical and critical issues of Alan's time. I am unconvinced. But, whatever the source, Alan followed his own muse with maniacal artistic integrity. With clarity as his constant ambition, and singularity of purpose, Alan created art that moves the eye and the intellect, and is a balm to the soul.

—*Stephen J. Morse*

Alan Uglow has left the building. The thing is, when artists leave, they leave stuff behind: art, paintings, works. We will have to deal with that. We will, though I might not be the best person to talk credibly about Alan Uglow's work because I took his paintings for granted. They were good paintings. Period. And Alan was a good painter.

You could find him in bars, which is where painters ought to be. He smoked. He drank beer, "Speckled Hen" or "Stella." He had been in the Whitney. He showed at Bykert and at Mary Boone's. We saw his paintings in Amsterdam. We talk about them in Berlin. His paintings were precise and consistent. His wife is an American poet: a situation as perfect as his paintings.

He also kept a genuine British working class attitude: "football," punk rock, and skinhead boots. Plus, he was totally aware of the contradictions in the American Dream: the Pioneer, the Prince, or the Palace on the Bowery.

Of course, things have changed. The Bowery hotels became New Museums, the “Good World,” “White Slab,” TV, flat screens, and Chelsea belongs to an oligarch whose girlfriend heads an Art Center. But the contradictions have survived; they could even be more acute. And, with its insignificant means, painting is still around. We remember Mondrian’s lines, Newman’s zips, the border and the edge. And we will remember paintings leaning against the wall, a couple of steps in the third dimension and some photographic images: the symbolic, the imaginary, the real.

In the end, and with a precision close to perfection, Alan Uglow has helped to define painting. He made it. We loved him, maybe that’s why Roberta Smith said he was a “painter’s painter.” She also said, “Tellingly, his early passions included the spare, attenuated figures of Giacometti.” And, as we all know, Giacometti’s “Walking Man” is a “Johnnie Walker.”

—*Olivier Mosset*

*BOMB Magazine*

July 1, 1991

***BOMB***

# Alan Uglow (1941–2011)

A tribute to the late British-American abstract painter from  
one of *BOMB's* founders.

On first coming upon one of Uglow's paintings you might think it mechanical in its execution and reductive in concept. Yet slowly, and for most too slowly, you would come to discover the fusing of reason and passion in their human scale and the asymmetrical composition, their delicately constructed surfaces, and the density of their color. Exploiting the concreteness of abstract painting, Uglow utilized a vocabulary of shifting scales and refined visual effects to articulate a specificity and a sense of presence, rather than a transcendent otherworldliness. Uglow's work (and life) represent a form of dissent from those instrumental and institutional logics that would standardize everything, and there lies their significance. These are not the works of an artist who by any means might be considered cool, or logically cold; they are the works of someone who sought to bring to his audience the small, highly considered pleasures of body, vision, and touch in an age of impersonal spectacle.

perception, and embodied experience. As such, his works articulate the essential and qualitative in opposition to the advantageous and quantifiable, which are encompassed by the extraneous and banal. By these means, his works symbolically take up the struggle for self-identity, self-consciousness, and subjecthood.



Alan Uglow, *Easy Access*, 1990.

On first coming upon one of Uglow's paintings you might think it mechanical in its execution and reductive in concept. Yet slowly, and for most too slowly, you would come to discover the fusing of reason and passion in their human scale and the asymmetrical composition, their delicately constructed surfaces, and the density of their color. Exploiting the concreteness of abstract painting, Uglow utilized a vocabulary of shifting scales and refined visual effects to articulate a specificity and a sense of presence, rather than a transcendent otherworldliness. Uglow's work (and life) represent a form of dissent from those instrumental and institutional logics that would standardize everything, and there lies their significance. These are not the works of an artist who by any means might be considered cool, or logically cold; they are the works of someone who sought to bring to his audience the small, highly considered pleasures of body, vision, and touch in an age of impersonal spectacle.

*The New York Times*  
February 2, 2011

# The New York Times

## ***Alan Uglow, Abstract Painter, Dies at 69***

**By Roberta Smith**

Feb. 2, 2011

Alan Uglow, an abstract painter of light-filled geometries whose expansive fields, bordered with notched lines, reflected in part his passion for soccer, died on Jan. 20 in Manhattan, where he lived. He was 69.

The cause was complications of lung cancer, said his wife, Elena Alexander.

Mr. Uglow was what is often called a painter's painter, respected within the art world's precincts but not well known beyond them.

His intuitive sense of proportion and subtle painterly texture gave his work a clarity that could easily be called classical. His fields of white, outlined and bisected by tapelike lines of strong color, or segmented into wide bands or blocks of color, were indebted to the precision and tactility of Mondrian and the scale and specificity of Minimalism.

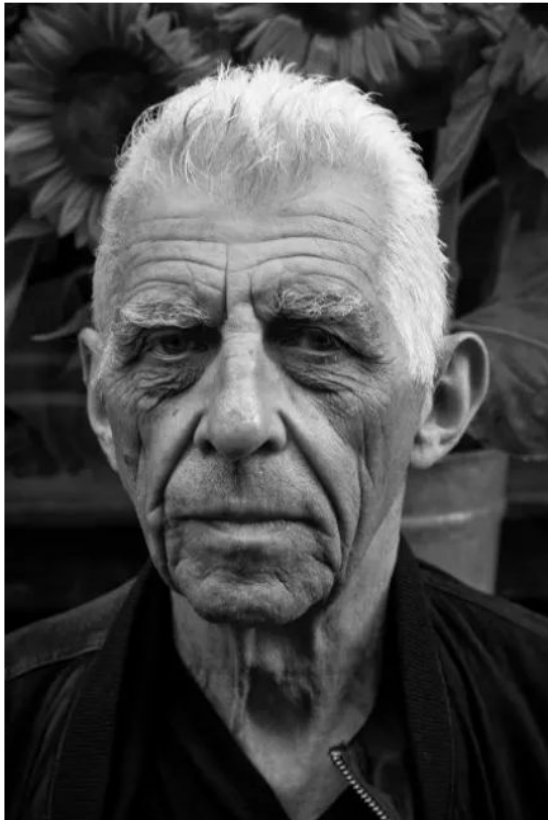
Mr. Uglow always played the physical solidity of his efforts against their optical radiance, thickening his stretcher bars so that his paintings protruded farther from the wall, hanging his works close to the ground or even simply leaning them, set on tiny blocks, against a wall.

If his [outlined fields](#) brought to mind an abstracted soccer or, as he would insist, *football* field, it was not surprising. A longtime fan of the Chelsea Football Club, Mr. Uglow used a photograph of a regulation coach's bench—a shedlike structure—on the announcement card of his 1995 exhibition at Gimpel Fils Gallery in London.

His 1998 exhibition in Manhattan at the Stark Gallery in Chelsea included an actual bench, finished in blazing white and equipped with a soundtrack of him and an English friend reading passages about soccer by Nabokov, Camus, Pinter and other writers.

Mr. Uglow also took photographs and exhibited them. One of his favorite subjects was soccer stadiums.

Alan Philip Uglow was born on July 19, 1941, in Luton, England, and began studying art when he was a teenager. He earned a degree in painting and printmaking from the Central School of Art in London in 1962.



Alan Uglow  
Tim Ayres

Tellingly, his early passions included the spare, attenuated figures of Giacometti.

He moved to New York in 1969 and first displayed his work in 1974 in a group show at the Bykert Gallery, a well known Manhattan redoubt of abstract painting at the time.

In 1978 he made his solo debut in simultaneous shows at the galleries of Mary Boone (paintings) and Susan Caldwell (drawings) on West Broadway in SoHo. He had nine subsequent solo shows in New York, most recently at the Stark Gallery in 2002.

Mr. Uglow exhibited frequently in Europe, including [a large survey of his work](#) at the Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld, Germany, last year. A show of his work will open in April at Murray Guy in Chelsea.

Besides his wife, who teaches at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark, his survivors include 10 nieces and nephews.

In the early 1980s Mr. Uglow learned the bass guitar and played in a rock band called Hard Labour. The band sometimes accompanied [Ms. Alexander](#) as she read from her poetry.

*The Brooklyn Rail*  
May 2010

## BROOKLYN RAIL

**ArtSeen**

# SHARING THE LIGHT: ALAN UGLOW'S GENEROUS ECONOMY OF BEAUTY

By [Joan Waltemath](#)

Two museum exhibitions in Germany give an in-depth look at the work of a New York painter, Alan Uglow. At the Haus Esters, in one of two Mies van der Rohe villas in Krefeld that were converted into a museums after the original homeowners departed, Uglow joins a select group of artists with works from the last decade. At the Museum Wiesbaden, a look back over his work from the Mondstudio Collection traces the development of Uglow's sensibility and concerns over more than 30. Together with catalogues from both venues, Uglow's work receives critical attention long overdue here in the States.

Two large, horizontal pieces are the first on view in the exhibition at Haus Esters in Krefeld. In "Blue Equator" (2000), both strong and subtle contrasts, classic to Uglow's way of working, pull the first impression of a minimalist geometry toward a complex unfolding. A blue stripe dead center divides a field, which only slowly differentiates itself from the four small, white rectangular tabs in each corner. After a moment the field emerges as a grey. The grey moves towards green grey in relation to the warm tan tone of the borders, keeping the apprehension of the painting in motion while entering the villa. Through its unfolding, this painting creates an immense breathing room, while the piece, simple and unpretentious, hangs low on the entrance wall, naturally lit by the villa's front facade windows. The vertical casements of the windows, similarly proportioned, seem to mirror Uglow's work. There is a sparseness and a clear demarcation of elements; there are corner details that play an essential role in stabilizing the whole.



Much has been made of Uglow's obsession with football, that is, European football. The format of the "Standard" paintings, with their symmetrical borders and rectangular interstice, mirror the soccer field's proportions and create a ripe ambiguity between the fields in the painting and the field of play. As analogy it throws light on painting as a series of moves, and in the realm of movement it reveals the importance of who's playing the game. As a twist on the endgame discourse that painting was caught up in when Uglow emigrated to New York, it offers another way to go. It's an open-ended relationship, one that no doubt will continue to be mined in discussions of Uglow's work. What keeps it from descending to the level of gimmick is the degree to which it reveals Uglow's rootedness in the world around him and how it gives us a way back into his paintings.

"Gold Top" (2009), in acrylic on canvas, shows how symmetrical events in Uglow's "Standard" vocabulary have also been used to create asymmetry and a revolving complexity. Each element in the piece is measured through the symmetrical format against its opposite, initiating a search for other elements to verify the symmetry through another aspect of the form. This process continues revolving in and around the "Standard's" fields, unfurling the space in successive turns. The gold and silver sparkle and darken while the open field of white takes on shadow and light as only white can give us.

In "E." (2009), a light turquoise "T" form, standing on its left side, pushes from right to left, separating the upper gold field from the lower silver one. Each of the four colors on the outside band are different, though some do not immediately separate from one another, but rather gradually distinguish themselves, torquing and tugging at the field whose gold and silver surface shimmers and shifts back and forth in response to the tension. The four white tabs in the corners hold the picture plane in spatial tension, confronting the indeterminate space that the painting posits. Its latency is reflected outside, where the lush garden of the Mies van der Rohe villa is about to burst into spring.

There's a beautiful moment where, through the villa's window, the details of the Mies van der Rohe balcony guard rails inform a visual dialogue with "Untitled" (2009). In it another "T" form, this time in gold, stands atop a central red line framed by two outer bands in silver, painted as a single form with the ever-present small corner tabs. Both forms speak with the same vocabulary albeit in different disciplines. The silver end pieces in the Uglow guard the inner space of the painting just as the van der Rohe guard rails secure the balcony's edge; both address themselves to being.

The first room of Uglows holds a series of “12 Standards/Leaning” (1994)—silkscreened images of his classic “Standard” paintings sandwiched between two sheets of glass leaning against the walls. The glass sheets feel heavy, and their weight, propped up on the hardwood blocks, Uglow style, gives the impression of something serious happening. Looking at the “Standard” photographed straight on eliminates the information about the painting that we see with our own two eyes, calling attention to the limits of the single-lens-view a photograph gives us. The paintings in the photos are on blocks, too, creating a doubling that brings this level of information back into his works and allows the information to be read both mediated and not. As objects they feel much like what one sees, when by covering one and then the other eye we observe the phenomenological shift that is unified through stereoscopic vision. Uglow, looking at the separation dead on, sets it up as subject.

The glass reflects the surrounding space, bringing the world into the paintings and giving a hint of how Uglow’s oeuvre will evolve. Wiesbaden’s high-ceilinged rooms and natural light make a perfect setting for the careful play of whites and off-whites, offering an opportunity to see the work’s inner light not overwhelmed by spotlighting. “Untitled,” (1974-75) is the earliest piece in the exhibition—a cream-white expanse with indications of incidence curving along either edge. The short, horizontal lines that punctuate a long bare canvas strip running top to bottom along the right side seem to breathe, going in and out, in and out, bowing the line in a constant rhythm. Coming in on the top and bottom, two silver tabs frame the void. The relationship between one side of the painting and the other is one of inestimable distance. Tensions are low-key but grow more pronounced over time.

In a casual pairing of works throughout the main room of the exhibition, “Untitled” (1986) offers a counterpoint to the adjacent “Untitled” (1974-75), just described, evidence of a shift in focus from periphery to center. Its two black rectangles serve as figures in a fluctuating field of whites. The fluid painting of the white ground creates an irregular field that punches and dives, causing the rectangles to hover. The space they posit emerges slowly through the process of looking as the elements assert their presence and set up spatial relationships. Situated at a moment before Uglow’s project had fully formed, these works in the Mondstudio Collection offer an opportunity to see the origins of Uglow’s position in context.

“Midnight Blue Alfa Romeo” (1990) is a black and white stripe painting that turns dark blue as you close in on it and see your own reflection in its depth. Shiny like a car’s surface, it is hung low, at a sports car height. This could be one of the earliest paintings to clearly acknowledge the movement around it as constituent in viewing. Its frame, attached rather to the wall than to the beveled-back edge of the painting, is a device Uglow began to work with in the 60s, and it sets this piece apart from the others in the collection.

The high note in the big room is struck by “S.R.” (1992). Here mint, cobalt green, black, and light grey blue horizontal and vertical bands twist and torque the field as the eye roams around trying to make sense of their impossible interaction. Top to bottom, left to right, the painting won’t sit still. A white T form, horizontally deployed, pushes across the canvas right to left until it hits the grey blue band on the opposite edge. The contrasts push the grey blue towards lavender. The space the painting carves out shoots forward at the top and lays back at the bottom, sending the orthogonals into unlikely motion. Paired with a red “Standard” (1993) that sits on blocks next to it, calmly holding its own, their differences show the distance Uglow has taken a simple set of variations.

In one of the side rooms, a group of small pieces hanging in a row and measuring around 24 to 28 inches high, mostly square, gives a sense of Uglow’s interests between 1989 and 1998. Painted on various materials from canvas to galvanized metal and MDF board, they show the range of Uglow’s vocabulary to be simple but deployed to unfold in waves of complexity as the relationship between the parts impress themselves on the mind’s eye. For example, a stunning visual play occurs in the two-panel “Interval #7” (1992), where the classic Uglow corner tabs are cut out from the support instead of painted on it. The painting comes alive when the cutouts in the MDF board on the left edge of each panel start to activate a discrete square between the two panels. The immaterial square, equally a form, is roughly the size of one of the panels. Once the correspondence between them becomes apparent, the tension between the autonomy of the individual panels and their transformation into a whole brings the relationship between material and form into focus. A slippage on the material plane, it recalls Carl Andre’s famous line, “A thing is a hole in a thing it is not.”

In four pieces from the “Bootleg” series (1994-6), in acrylic on galvanized metal supports that are spread out around an oval room, a central white stripe determines the center of a solid color field. Blue, silver, orange, and green, Uglow’s colors are both commonplace and specific. Through their interaction, a glimpse into their associative potential arises to challenge the banal categorization we sometimes assign to colors. It takes a bit of time to see that the central white bands are of slightly varying dimensions; the play between color and scale, and then the contrast with white, bombard the eye, but slowly the bands individuate out of the series to differentiate themselves from one another. The support and hanging device have merged in these works as in a Robert Ryman painting, but with Uglow it never becomes part of the composition.

Three horizontally formatted, low-hanging “Standard” paintings from 2005, 2006, and 2007 use iridescent medium and metallic color in the horizontal and vertical bands to reflect light, effecting a modulation from dark to light in response to movement. The whites in their reticent voids hover and disappear. Both work in ways to acknowledge that changes in a two-dimensional surface occur through shifts in the point of perception. A translation of the minimalist theatricality that Fried wrote about, Uglow’s paintings haven’t gotten the wide recognition here for the solid grounding in the 70s they are built upon. There have been any number of other artists who have brought painting forward through the endgame era—Hafif, Mosset, Marioni, and Rosenthal come to mind along with Ryman and Marden, among others—but Uglow’s contribution is singular. With a masterful flatness in his application of paint that stands in opposition to the depth that those same surfaces create when form is put into play, Uglow delivers a multilayered twist on Greenberg; yet he has most often been shown here in the context of work relying on conceptual posturing.

The beauty of the museum’s early 20th century rooms is underscored by the way Uglow’s paintings interact with the space in front of them, at the same time their interior space emerges through the act of seeing itself. They take into account that perception is not static, that it doesn’t happen from a singular point of view, but is based on presence, with all that implies. The dense materiality and perfectly pitched, painted surfaces are calibrated to speak through the visual to the haptic. You need the hair on your skin in order to read the subtext of an Uglow painting. It happens in a moment, and if we understand Uglow, it cannot be separated from the one who perceives it.

The New York Times  
February 16, 1996

# The New York Times

## Also of Note

*Critics' choices of some other  
Manhattan art shows:*

**"VEHICLE,"** Paolo Baldacci Gallery, 41 East 57th Street (through March 2). An amusing grab bag that includes pictures by two blue-chip Futurists, Balla and Carrà, a mesmeric and very funny video by Chris Burden, a subtly painted image of a tar cart by Joe Solmon and a sleek, rather surprisingly eerie painting-cum-relief-sculpture of a car hood by Richard Prince. Everything is on the theme of vehicles. Don't miss the amazing photograph from 1911 taken by the 12-year-old Jacques Henri Lartigue; it shows two men in a wheeled bobsled that he designed, skidding furiously down a hillside. (Michael Kimmelman)

**STEPHEN ELLIS,** André Emmerich Gallery, 41 East 57th Street (through Feb. 24). These icy abstractions, with colors that glare as if illuminated by headlights, consist of swirling forms and irregular blocks, the paint pulled and flattened so that the blurry effect is like seeing the images through a scrim. The pictures bring to mind the works of David Reed, which are better, and of Gerhard Richter, which are much better. And they seem to be about nothing so much as the futility of abstract art. (Kimmelman)

**ROBERT YASUDA,** Elizabeth Harris Gallery, 524 Broadway, near Spring Street, SoHo (through March 9). If you're still wishing that Brice Marden would go back to his old style, you'll probably enjoy Mr. Yasuda's pairs and quartets of monochrome canvases, painted in

luminous shades of gray, green and tan. The side-by-side panels work nicely, but when he places one canvas over another, Mr. Yasuda tends to tilt the top canvas downward, and this excursion into real space collapses the optical space it's meant to enhance. (Pepe Karmel)

**ALAN UGLOW,** Petra Bungert Gallery, 225 Lafayette Street, near Spring Street, SoHo (through March 16). Bars of monochrome color surround and divide the white sheets of Alan Uglow's drawings, transforming ground into figure. Although these are miniature versions of his paintings, they achieve something of the same perceptual intensity. The accompanying photographs of soccer fields, an important inspiration for Mr. Uglow, are less accomplished. (Karmel)

*"ALAN UGLOW, Petra Bungert Gallery, 225 Lafayette Street, near Spring Street, SoHo (through March 16).*

*Bars of monochrome color surround and divide the white sheets of Alan Uglow's drawings, transforming ground into figure. Although these are miniature versions of his paintings, they achieve something of the same perceptual intensity. The accompanying photographs of soccer fields, an important inspiration for Mr. Uglow, are less accomplished."*

—Pepe Karmel

*Artforum*  
December 1993

# ARTFORUM

## ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING HURTS

David Carrier talks with Alan Uglow

By David Carrier, Alan Uglow

**ALAN UGLOW:** These recent paintings are called “Standards.” They have a uniform nature.

**DAVID CARRIER:** Uniform because you always subdivide your surface the same way?

**AU:** No, but I’m playing with that idea. I’m interested in essentials, in getting rid of lots of stuff I find that very freeing psychologically. Basically I’m trying to make the pieces mundane or ordinary in a certain way. The frame opens the whole idea up and closes it at the same time. My work has changed, but some things have remained consistent, like this idea of “open” and “closed.” At the moment, which is a closing-off period, I’m lifting from myself a lot; this work derives from my previous work. But I really question everything.

**DC:** What were you doing when you began, around 1965?

**AU:** I was interested in the frame and the edge. I was looking at how Giacometti set a figure in space, just indicating the edge. Sometimes he’d draw a frame, and I always wanted to see if what was outside was also what kept the frame together somehow. I learned from Giacometti a certain kind of meanness I’d like to have in my work. Not in a stingy kind of way, but a poverty—without taking a lot of space, his work has incredible presence. His figure creates a loaded situation. That’s why it’s always interesting for me to imagine having a Giacometti with a painting of Barnett Newman’s. These are essentials I too would like to achieve.

**DC:** Wasn’t the American art you saw in London in the late ’50s opposed to Giacometti’s?

**AU:** But one doesn’t follow those kinds of restrictions. Ideological imperatives aren’t good for artists. I don’t see how anyone could really say if you like Giacometti you can’t like Newman. Work should be free to do what it wants and go where it wants.

**DC:** Do you feel doubt?

**AU:** Constant doubt! You want to make good paintings, so things work. But that is a direct result of hesitation, reluctance, paranoia. My paintings involve an absolute need to complete an act—and putting up work in the gallery is like an action—to see it through from beginning to end. I'm interested in looking at something over a period of time and seeing how it moves, because paintings move, no matter how you try to make them sit. I need to find some way to keep the thing open and revolving in this way.

**DC:** In that way, is your art like an action?

**AU:** Most of this stuff is done on the run, under high tension. It's stealing time. These are things and ideas for now, that's for sure. They depend on the past and the present—the future is unwritten.

**DC:** But the viewer can't know all that, not right off?

**AU:** Sometimes people just walk into the gallery and take one look. You could pass these paintings and not pay them any attention. There's something about them that will irritate people they'll be too much this way, or not enough of that. This takes us into the realm of the ordinary, or—

**DC:** Can I say the word I've been blocking the whole time I've been here?

**AU:** Let's hear it.

**DC:** "Beauty." They're beautiful. Now I've really put my foot in it. Calling you a formalist would be nothing in comparison.

**AU:** Now we've hit rock bottom.

**DC:** But the rightness—I mean the sense of proportion, the elegance of these works—isn't that beautiful?

**AU:** I was hoping they wouldn't be that way. I want the paint to get up on that thing in one piece. There are certain precautions you have to take. The thing has to be a clean machine. You want the idea to get out there with no mess, no fuss. Spareness is another way of putting it; meanly spare. Unfortunately it doesn't turn out that way all the time. Beauty isn't really a bad word, but it's not the whole story. I'm not opposed to the utilitarian, but I'm old enough not to believe in the utopian.

**DC:** You have to be thinking about the gallery space, don't you, when you are working here in your studio?

**AU:** It has windows in the front like my studio, and a short wall. It's a little awkward. But it doesn't really matter. You move things around in the studio to look at them. Sometimes you get distracted. The floor piece stands somewhere away from the wall.

**DC:** The floor piece looks like an industrial fabrication, not a finely worked artwork. But it stands on the floor, so why not say "sculpture"? Is "sculpture" a forbidden word?

**AU:** I don't know if I like the word. This piece wasn't sculpted, it was constructed. It's called *Sudkurve*—an object that has meanings in terms of the football ground. They use it for advertising, it's a kind of display. In the end I'm just trying to make the work really easy somehow, which it never is. It's always hard to get to the point, and the work has to look like it's just happened. I like the idea of what you see is what you get, which is an old axiom, but when the hat fits, wear it.

**DC:** You're always compared to Robert Ryman and Brice Marden.

**AU:** I know, and I don't know why, though it's not bad company. But I hope I've slipped through that net. I have to say in the end the people who make the work have made all the decisions already, and anything that happens afterwards in print is written on the wind, to a certain degree. Which isn't to put down writing.

**DC:** You want viewers to see this object for itself, here and now?

**AU:** How else! It's better than labeling. When you go back to the painting you can still see something else for the first time. Anyway, why should one want to carry a lot of baggage around? We all receive the same information. I think there's a certain laziness here, and some writers come on like mind police. There's a device that keeps a vehicle from going beyond a certain speed—governors, they call them. Think of the British phrase "all right guv." It's funny how the painting becomes a test. It's testing the attempt to get it up there, and testing back once it gets there.

I'm never sure about interviews. I always think of things after interviews. That's when it gets interesting.

**DC:** The interview is a kind of fiction?

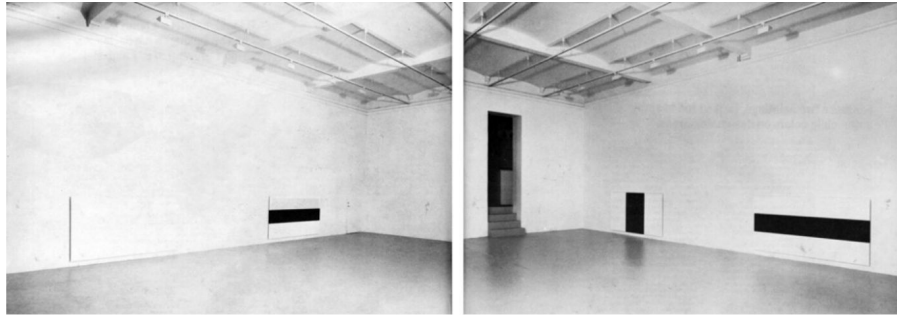
**AU:** That sounds like the start of a whole other interview.



*BOMB Magazine*  
July 1, 1991

# *BOMB*

# Alan Uglow



Alan Uglow, Left: Installation View 1991: *Untitled #1*, 1991, alkyd aluminum, 48 x 96 inches; *Untitled #2*, 1991, alkyd aluminum, 48 x 96 inches. Right: Installation view 1991: *Bordeaux Red*, 1990, alkyd/lacquer on aluminum, 48 x 96 inches; *Midnight Blue*, 1990, alkyd/lacquer on aluminum, 48 x 96 inches. Photos by Jan Almeren. All images courtesy of Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm.

Alan Uglow doesn't neglect a single source of inspiration—from the noise of the street to the beauty of Italian luxury cars—his is a rigorous formal reflection with a subjectivity full of charm and tenderness. Alan's paintings are beyond reductive commentary and that's why, with him, it's always best to stay alert.

### **Alain Kirili**

It's a big decision, in life, to go from one country to the other. What was it, 20 years ago, that made you decide to come to the United States?

### **Alan Uglow**

I first came here in '68 for a month, and liked it so much I decided I had to come back again. That is basically it. It was a situation that looked much more interesting than London did at that time. The energy of New York, the art scene was still developing.

### **AK**

Was it cheaper to live here than in London?

### **AU**

I was doing construction work to get by but it seemed that rent was cheap, \$250-300 a month.

**AK**

Were there artists you liked in this country?

**AU**

In '59 there was a show at Tate (Gallery) of the new American painters so I was familiar with that work.

**AK**

You told me that the first time you met Ad Reinhardt was in London.

**AU**

I didn't meet him, I saw him giving a lecture when Lawrence Alloway was the director at the ICA which was an intimate kind of town house gallery space. It was a great show and he put on a great performance. He basically read his fundamental spiel, nothing more, which completely nonplussed everybody in the room. There was nothing that they could get back at him with, it seemed totally unclad.

**AK**

Your first one-person show in New York was in 1978, with Mary Boone?

**AU**

Yeah, yeah. And '79.

**AK**

And then there was this long period.

**AU**

There was quite a long period of time where I didn't show here, although I showed in Sweden.

**AK**

Why was there such a long period? Do you feel there was resistance to your work?

**AU**

Well, things happen. One is still doing alternative things to make money, you know, you lose time and you lose ground in a certain way. And the climate was changing. People said painting was dead which they say all the time, every five years or whatever.

**AK**

Do you know that you are a dinosaur? We are dinosaurs, very wise.

**AU**

It was a good period, too. Certain people, of course, just kept on doing what they always do.

**AK**

You did a show in Cologne, Germany, in '84. I have this image about the friendship between Imi Knoebel and Blinky Palermo: did you feel that there was something in favor of abstract painting at that point in Germany?

**AU**

That group came out of the Academy in Dusseldorf in the late '60s, the boys' class, the Beuys's boys' class, so to speak. It opened up a lot of new directions and possibilities. (Günter) Umberg's Raum für Malerei was where I showed in '84. Up until then he'd shown *strictly* monochrome people. Monochrome has been partly my concern in the work. When he offered me the space to do shows, I said, "You're sure? I thought this was like the monochrome room." He said, "No, we're allowed to make a change." So it happened, in subsequent shows after that, he indeed showed a whole variety of different artists. The great thing about that space was that you couldn't put too much work in there, it allowed you maybe three works.

**AK**

You built a wall so that two of your paintings could interact.

**AU**

They were begun with the idea that this one painting consists of two paintings opposite one another. The picture plane was at an angle to the wall so it projects more on the right. You could actually run your fingers down behind the picture plane, where it hovered on the left side. The two pieces ended up being one piece, attracting one another across the room. They were like bodies, in a way, but it really brought the spectator into the piece; that was the reason why they had to be opposite one another.

**AK**

There is always a strong feeling about space and painting, installation and painting in your work. In your 1988 show you had a relationship between sounds and color which contrasts with the silence of the show you had last fall. The show of 1988 was large, monochrome panels placed high on the walls with four speakers . . .

**AU**

That was originally a project for Century 87 in Amsterdam. I had the choice of a couple of sites but I chose a Calvinist church to do it in. There was some kind of thing about Mondrian and his pre-Theosophic upbringing. Anyway, I said okay, let's go in there and make a noise in this place. It looked not abnormal on the walls in the church because each piece faced across from each other so it was in the form of a cross.

**AK**

A cruciform installation.

**AU**

The church had these high windows, four points opposite one another, and then the center of the church where the congregations sit is circular in form so that one can walk around the perimeter of the seating, and in relationship to the walls, the sound would travel with you, or one went into the sound. So there was a direct kind of contrast to the semaphore of the monochromes.

**AK**

But the speakers in New York played sounds of a ticking clock, a jackhammer, guitar, drums, voices of soldiers . . .

**AU**

Yeah, it was the same tape, there was a lot of stuff like that, TV. Some recording Elena (Alexander) had brought home from the street. I made a collage of sound which was on two recorders and two tapes playing the same thing. It's my excursion into performance—that's about as much as I perform these days. (*laughter*)

**AK**

In your recent show there was great charm and serenity, a relationship you created with those two paintings presented low, next to the corner of the floor and the wall, the paintings called *Bordeaux* and *Midnight Blue*. Both are lacquer on aluminum and have an aluminum frame. What is that separation of the aluminum frame that you put around each of those paintings?

**AU**

Um, Jesus, where to start? (*laughter*) Well, going back to these kind of paintings goes back to 1968. At that time, the paintings I was doing dealt with the center of the field and the edge, and I was using broken borders. The border would change its relationship to the edge, in each corner and around the four sides of the painting. On this new piece I decided to literally stick the frame on the wall and leave the space between the frame and what was visible of the wall by slightly decreasing the size of the panel, so that we've got this relationship, first with the wall with the frame, and then the relationship with panel to the space that is then created by the edge of the panel and the inside edge of the frame. It's like some kind of vacuum which occurs there. Yeah.

**AK**

How do you proceed for the selection of colors? That Midnight Blue and that Bordeaux belongs to what range of colors? And how are they fixed onto the aluminum?

**AU**

It's a sprayed lacquer which is then baked, and it was done at the fabricator's shop, Joe Bougayer. The one made in 1988 was recreated because the first one was lost and damaged, or damaged beyond repair so...

**AK**

You mean the one from 1968?

**AU**

From '68. So in '88 I began making a series of those pieces. To some extent, the panels as I get them now, as they've changed, come almost as a ready-made. So for these two, I asked Joe to spray automobile colors on designated areas.

**AK**

That Midnight Blue belongs to what sort of car?

**AU**

An Alpha Romeo.

**AK**

And the Bordeaux?

**AU**

The Bordeaux is Maserati.

**AK**

Great, very, superb, yes please, please go on then Alan. (*laughter*)

**AU**

Well, where were we?

**AK**

When the panels come back, what do you do on them?

**AU**

I have to deal with Joe's work, he's prepared the panel with the grounds for his application of the lacquer and then I get the rest of the pieces in a raw state for me to work on. So then I'm making decisions as to where I want the color. The decision was to paint above and below the Midnight Blue on either side of the Bordeaux Red. It becomes the technical thing. I have to deal with the way Joe has left the piece for me to carry on and so I have to do any preparation on the edges of the lacquer which may need it, then I have to tape paper over the whole thing in order to not allow any mistakes to fall onto the color. I don't want the thing to get damaged at that point so . . .

**AK**

I know by being at your studio that you do some paper cut outs. Do you systematically do first studies and research on paper?

**AU**

I don't know if I'd call them studies. For instance the cut outs, I know where they should be in relationship to the corners but one never knows exactly what's going to happen. Once you start painting on it is when you get used to the idea of the thing. And then it hopefully becomes another situation but, it being ready-made when it gets to me is the thing that I'm interested in right now.

**AK**

Your work seems very photogenic; they have a mirror quality and they create with the deepness, the separation between the frame and the panel, shadows. I notice that you like to take slides, to photograph certain stages of your work; do you do that systematically or irregularly?

**AU**

No, it's just while I'm moving around the pieces . . . I like to take photos of them while things are happening. Especially when there's good light in the studio. If I change something then I can see what happened before in case I want to go back to it. About them being photogenic, one has a sort of built-in camera. But by now, most of my pieces, when it comes to photographic paper, being photographed . . . are totally illusive . . .

**AK**

They are totally illusive, because there is a mirror aspect in the work. That very strong raw aspect in those two paintings of high gloss creates a certain relationship to reflection.

**AU**

I've always been drawn to certain cool elements and ways in which ideas can be manifested. In the two high-gloss pieces there's something else going on. *68/88*, the original piece which is all white, could suck you into the wall in a vacuum. I refer to that first piece as like a *pissoir*, the height of it, the way it enters and leaves the space and where it stops itself and then goes. I make work and I go around in a thing for a while and then I stop doing another kind of painting over here, and then I go back to it, it's never that straight line, it's the same with talking into this machine.

**AK**

Because of the low position of those two paintings you relate them to a *pissoir*, which is funny because I relate them to the low horizon of Monet's *Water Lilies*. I think the Uglow is between Duchamp's *pissoir* and Monet's *Water Lilies*. (*laughter*) You see?

**AU**

Yeah, well I think maybe I'm pissing in another direction. (*laughter*)

**AU**

Well, I . . .

**AK**

You don't give a damn about that or what?

**AU**

No, no. I mean it's interesting what comes in and goes out, how the viewer can . . .

**AK**

. . . Perceive it.

**AU**

I've always been drawn to certain cool elements and ways in which ideas can be manifested. In the two high-gloss pieces there's something else going on. *68/88*, the original piece which is all white, could suck you into the wall in a vacuum. I refer to that first piece as like a *pissoir*, the height of it, the way it enters and leaves the space and where it stops itself and then goes. I make work and I go around in a thing for a while and then I stop doing another kind of painting over here, and then I go back to it, it's never that straight line, it's the same with talking into this machine.

**AK**

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Yeah, well I think maybe I'm pissing in another direction. *(laughter)*

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Alain Krili is a French sculptor living in New York.



*The New York Times*  
February 5, 1988

# The New York Times

## *Art: 'Committed to Print,' on Political Themes*

By **Roberta Smith**

Feb. 5, 1988

Alan Uglow's latest exhibition is a single installation piece titled "Signals." It presents a form of abstract painting that is both pure and impure in ways that are unusual today. The emphasis here is on perception and the way the eyes and ears can work together and against each other, corrupting and expanding their very different capacities. Four large monochrome panels, one high on each wall, provide floating squares of undiluted red, blue, yellow and black. Four speakers, one to each corner of the gallery, emit pulsations of an entirely different sort. Simultaneously and in sequence, they play tapes that have recorded the sounds of a ticking clock, a jackhammer, guitar and drums and the combination of all three. Over these background sounds are to be heard voices talking about the marines, giving a weather report and reading from Wittgenstein's text on color, as well as the sounds of an art gallery opening.

After a while, each wall seems to function like a big white flag with an unusually plain bit of semaphore at its center, and the sound, shifting from speaker to speaker, starts to pull the space out of shape. Overall, these effects and distortions create an ebb and flow of sensation that is infinitely more interesting to experience firsthand than to read about.

Artforum  
March 1989

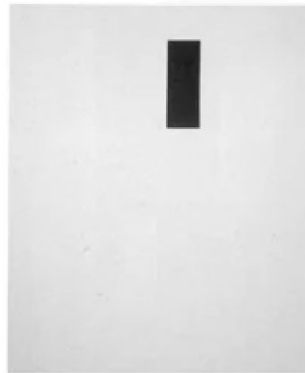
# ARTFORUM

ALAN UGLOW

LORENCE-MONK GALLERY

*"Ugnow's compositions are so subtly realized that the time it takes to unravel them can seem infinitely distended; a change of lighting often reveals a whole new battery of pictorial incident. In Hidden Agenda, for example, Ugnow plays the two sides of a simple bipartite structure off each other. Formal differences become legible by reading back and forth from one panel to the other, as a limited vocabulary of rectangles on a white background is keyed to nearly fugal intricacy. Low on glitz, high on discrete formal wit, Ugnow makes subtly inventive paintings that consistently defy the nearly claustrophobic parameters within which they operate."*

—Jack Bankowsky



Alan Ugnow, *Brush Pass*, 1988, oil on bleached linen, 84 x 72"



Claudia Hart, *Eye, Alee, I*, 1988, black and white photograph, 58 x 48"

strength lies in the confidence that frees him to be indeterminate, to reserve the right to change his mind.

—LEN

## ALAN UGLOW

LORENCE-MONK GALLERY

Alan Ugnow can claim neither the sanction of history, long accorded like-minded peers such as Robert Ryman and Brice Marden, nor a direct line on the zeitgeist that empowers the '80s-style abstract simulations of Peter Halley or Sherrie Levine. Yet unencumbered by the embalmed readings that distastefully attach themselves to the star-status signature, his paintings make a refreshingly convincing case for the palpable if rarefied pleasures of his particular brand of formal painting.

On his announcements for this exhibition Ugnow chose to reproduce *66/68*, 1968–88, a painting consisting of a white fiberglass panel raised off the wall, detached from its frame, and positioned near the floor—in other words, reduced to its constituent components. The work partakes of the transgressive theatricality attributed to full-blown Minimalism. Originally made in 1968 and reconstructed for this exhibition, it constitutes a textbook demonstration of classic Minimalist mandates. In the context of the show, however, it functioned more as a historical point of reference off which to bounce Ugnow's resolutely pictorial concerns than as a statement of his current position. Where the painterly minimalisms of Ryman, Marden, or Ellsworth Kelly accrue a measure of historical potency by their proximity to the extreme term of the monochrome, Ugnow's less celebrated work depends almost wholly on formal interest.

The three largish canvases here (all works 1988) are distinguished by an

elaboration entirely interior to the frame. Ugnow layers translucent veils of white paint, building buttery, opalescent grounds which he punctuates with hard-edge rectangles in primary colors. At a glance the milky surfaces appear uninflected, but upon closer inspection, complex ghostlike demarcations reveal themselves. It is difficult, initially, to determine whether the differentiations in a work such as *Discrete Paronia* are actual or illusory—whether color modulations ranging from cadmium to vermilion depend on adjustments of value or hue. Ugnow's compositions are so subtly realized that the time it takes to unravel them can seem infinitely distended; a change of lighting often reveals a whole new battery of pictorial incident. In *Hidden Agenda*, for example, Ugnow plays the two sides of a simple bipartite structure off each other. Formal differences become legible by reading back and forth from one panel to the other, as a limited vocabulary of rectangles on a white background is keyed to nearly fugal intricacy. Low on glitz, high on discrete formal wit, Ugnow makes subtly inventive paintings that consistently defy the nearly claustrophobic parameters within which they operate.

—Jack Bankowsky

## CLAUDIA HART

PAT HEARN GALLERY

Claudia Hart's first solo exhibition of paintings and objects (all works 1988) employs Enlightenment themes and formats. The paintings mimic the diagrammatic layout of encyclopedic and scientific book illustrations, and the objects derive from Neoclassical themes. Each has been carefully manipulated so as to deflate its ideological basis. The Enlightenment motifs and formats are but a paradigm—a model that reflects the practices and beliefs

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