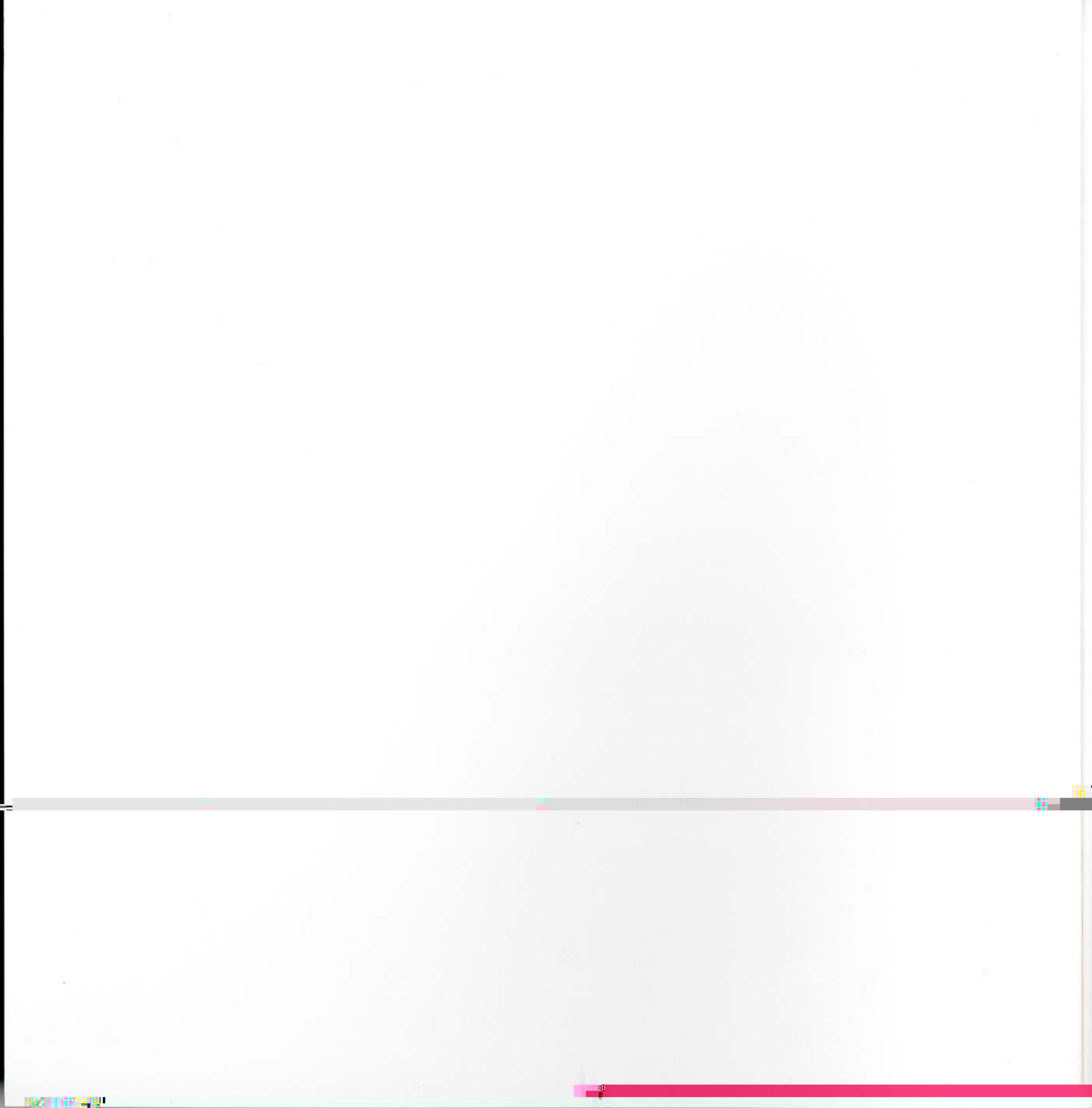


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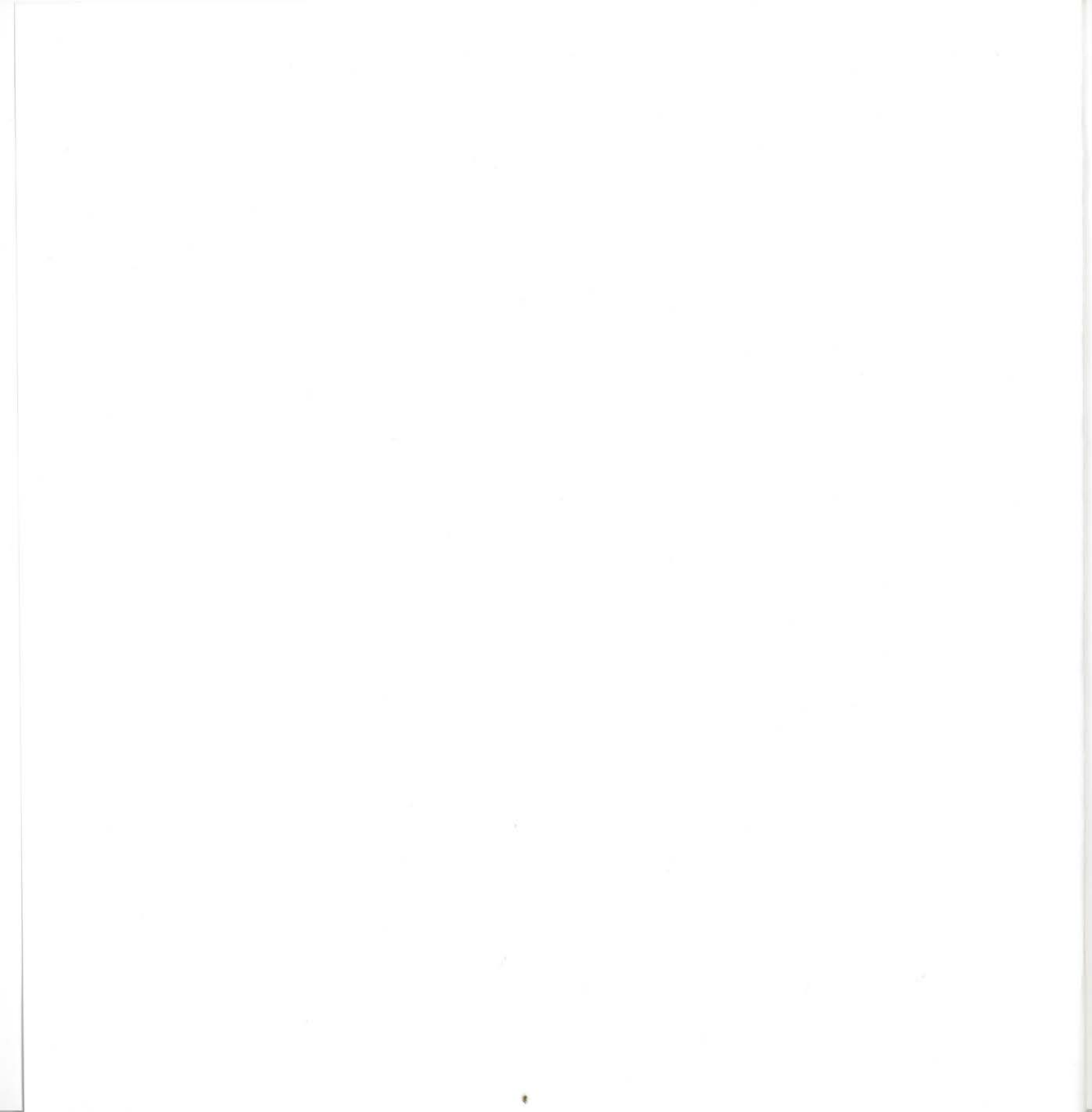
See it **Sat 1** 8pm



THEN

AS

NOW



THEN

AND

NOW

Exhibition Curated by
Ronald R. Deiner, Ph.D.
and Yvonne Rainer

Curated by
Ronald R. Deiner, Ph.D.

2005

March 20–May 2

Sordani Art Gallery

Wellesley College

Wellesley, MA

Cover: Steven Appleby, *MssAcr*, 2001, oil, wood panel

C

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It has been a privilege to work with the artists included in this exhibition. Their representatives, including PPOW, and the Seven Bridges Foundation, Connecticut, all their time and effort. This exhibition would not have been achieved without their

This exhibition is a non-profit project of the

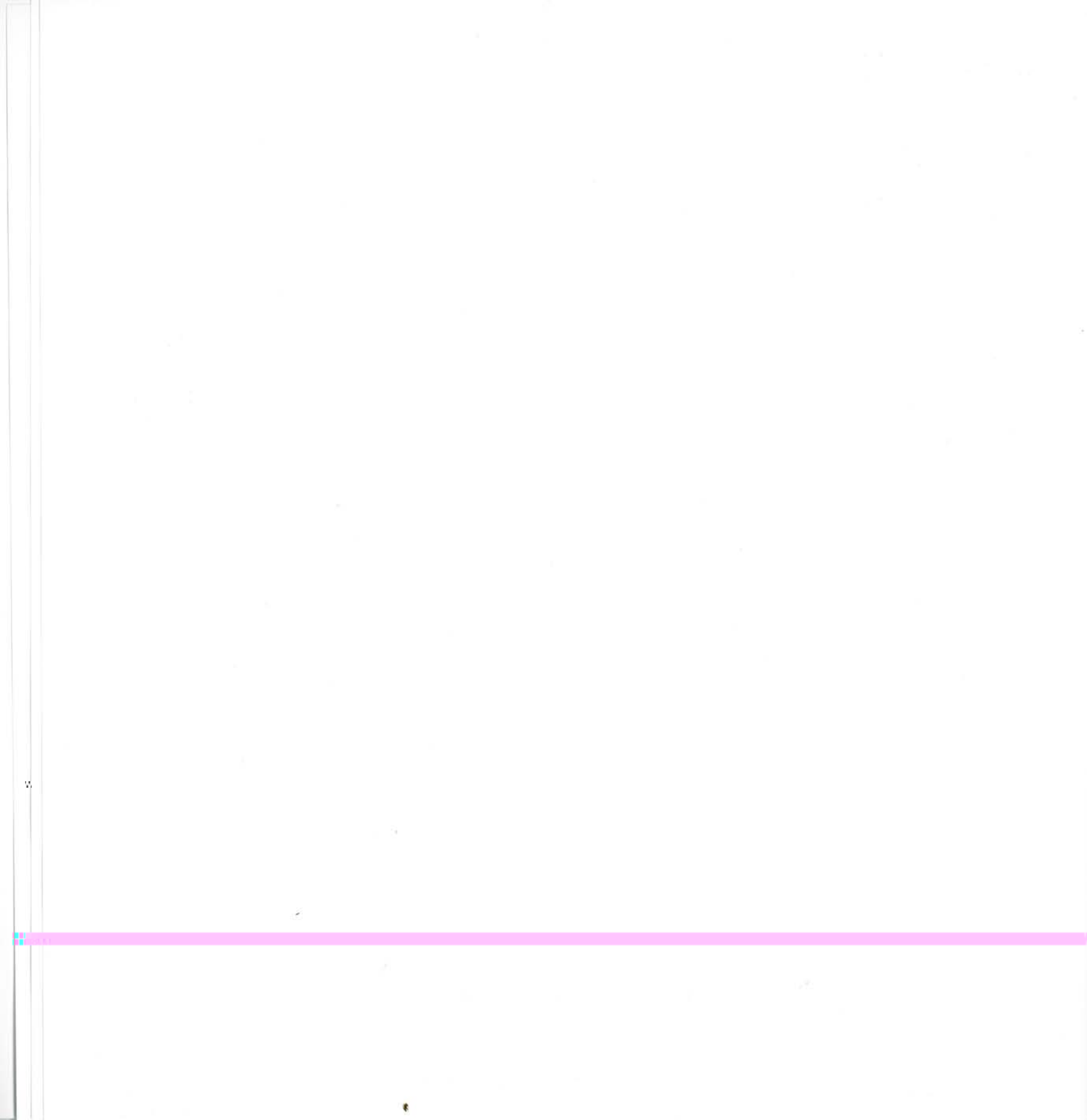
March 2005

William P. Ryan, Ph.D.

Director

Karen Evans Karfor

Associate Director



Go backwards into the future so that your face is lit up by the past.

—Odd Nerdrum

Having survived the formalist reductions of Modernism and the theoretical acrobatics of the past. Yet for the Postmodern painting is not a reaction nor reactionary surrender to pictorial illusion, but a return to the company of the Real, that is, to the "real" prompted by optical experience and pictorial illusion, only this time, and skilful simulation of age, texture, and materiality, and of painting styles and techniques, and of the "real" as a category, and recognizable subject matter.¹ But it is a different sort of real; it both is and is not a re-presentation of reality. There is recognition, but it is not a recognition beyond likeness. In some instances, as is the case in this exhibition, recent painting has deliberately positioned itself—self-consciously and self-critically—within the genealogy of its own tradition, appropriating, re-forming, and recasting Old Master forms, figures, and styles in a visual and intellectual dialogue with Art History, mixing historical allusion with contemporary self-assertions. As one critic has recently put it: "The Old Masters' spirituality and humanism of the Old Masters and the innovation and creativity of the modern masters are the New Old Master art."²

Of course, at some level, all works of art are about art. But in our culture, particularly in the appropriation painting of the past few decades, the art is in its plundered references from the past, its ironic parody and clever pastiche. As Tom McEvilly succinctly announced in 1992: "In the beginning was the Word—and since then there's been quotation."³ The act of quotation, on this view, was thought to affect a critique of the Modernist cult of originality.

point is that the act of quotation is not a simple act of copying or reaction. It is a complex act of negotiation, and epistemological process, including the issue of influence, priority, and the issue of parody. In the material of the past, reconstituted in a new form, as origin, to put it in another way. Is meaning transferred from original to quotation, or do Art's meanings necessarily shift over History's spatial and conceptual boundaries? The issue for parody is not simply a new poetic style, he argued, but a new set of metaphors, and oddly retains power over their original sources, so that the tyranny of time is almost overturned.⁴ What I wish to argue is that certain forms of expression may appeal to the past, while not entirely submitting to it. The issue here is neither originality nor parody, but rather, at issue is a productive collision

between, as Walter Benjamin writes in "The Now and the Then": "subordinated to reason. Nor is their essence and
"It isn't the present that casts its light on the past: rather, the past casts its light on the present: rather, the present
which the Then and the Now come into a constellation like a flash of lightning."⁵ What exactly, then, is conceived
in this intimate coupling of Then and Now, past and present? This is what this exhibition seeks to explore.

The term 'neo-pre-Modernism'⁶ might best describe the strategy of simulation at work in the painting of Swedish-born, classically-trained artist Odd Nerdrum whose seemingly retrograde figuration and painterliness—and, as one critic put it in 1964, his "old masterly
gravy"⁷—earned him the reprobation of his instructors and fellow students at the Art Academy of Oslo. The critic is referring to Nerdrum's reframing of the forms, colors, surfaces, and substances of the glowing, moving doors that open and close. When open, the door
almost religious tenebrous and portentous subject matter of that seventeenth-century Dutch Master. The painter explained his choice of artistic ideals: "I have always found Rembrandt's world more humane than Picasso's. . . . The lifespan of a work of art is proportional to its content."⁸ But as Donald Kuspit has effectively argued about Nerdrum's use of the past, his "traditionalism is not nostalgia . . . but a way of aging the present, making clear that it is born with a patina, that it is time-bound—bound by time from the beginning of its appearance."⁹

'Neo-pre-Modernism' describes a kind of resistance against the formalist and rationalist authority of Modernism, in painting which, like Nerdrum's, seeks to restore the spirituality of a pre-Modern utopia with renewed emphasis on ritual, myth, nature, and significant human values. The artist positions his archetypal narratives, as in *Hermaphrodite* of 1992-96, as a defense against a loss of being in the contemporary world, where nature is

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ally plausible and convincingly portrayed—"a mix of
excitable, blood-flesh, as the painter himself put it,¹⁰
I like Nerdrum, with his visionary and
allegories, Steven Assael arranges contemporary figures in
urban settings, but in a sensibility informed by
Masters, calling to mind
Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque eras. *At Mother* (2005)
colossal myth attached to a sculpted platform with
moving doors that open and close. When open, the door
panels feature the arrangement
into a miraculous golden
resemblance
going to the dead past. The panel

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into a miraculous golden
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conversation) altarpieces of the early Italian Renaissance, in which saints from different epochs are joined in a unified space and seem to be conversing either with each other or with the audience. The
old bloom might have put it" but they tear it out
and painting in a similar way."¹¹

And indeed Assael's dramatic personae are not in the contemporary underground world of 'Goths,' pierced, tattooed, and pierced with a visceral adge, but in a visceral adge, which—obtained in the glow of an ethereal light that sets up a tension between the tangible and the spiritual—betrays the artist's own temporary accession for these mod-

ern-day ascetics.¹² "Light," Assael explains, "has a mystery about it. It reveals and at the same time no one knows where it comes from or where it goes. . . . People thought of light as having a mystical quality. . . . People thought them to see something more clearly. . . . So light was associated with truth, and truth was something that was revealed."¹³ As in the chiaro-scuroed images of the past he simulates, the oscillating light in Bigbee's work structures profound emotional and psychological meaning, catching the ambiguities of the defianced and the desire of these stunted, rough-skinned, and their yearning for identity and recognition.

Brett Bigbee, an Academy of Fine Arts, an institution with a notable legacy of American Realism, and the Turner Prize, Bigbee adopts a much subtler and more distilled approach to Old Master traditions. Bigbee's laconic domestic idylls and tender images of his own family recall the linearity, geometry, frontality, and quiet stillness of an iconic Piero della Francesca Madonna, a type of serene illumination of colored light in Netherlandish painting, and a recasting of Botticelli's allegorical Venuses in the portrait of his wife, *Ann with Plant* (1990–91). Bigbee painstakingly reworks a traditional manner of painting, tirelessly building up layers of colors, glazes, and carefully wrought detail producing visual illusions with an eloquence that evokes a heightened reality verging on the uncanny. In this picture is smoother, more orderly than the real world of Nerdrum's "excrement, blood, and flesh." Bodies are without structure, the underlying skeleton; that skin wrinkles, blemishes of the interior space as

chiaroscuroed or warped, there is no distortion in the window glass.¹⁴ It is an ideal, a construct—neither wholly real nor wholly ideal.

Sharon Bower makes similar reference to the allegorical painting of the Italian Renaissance, and to the painter Alma-Tadema, in her *Artforum* (2003). Saint Lucy, patron saint of the blind, typically shown gouged out in martyrdom (witness to her faith), stands here on a balcony overlooking a composite view of Rome, a view of the temple of Santa Maria della Consolazione (Santa Maria della Consolazione) and the church of Santa Fortunata, combined here in a single image. The vase of grape leaves in the painting, not a platter but a vase of grape leaves in which we can just make out the artist's own eyes peering out of the painting's complexity, is the only detail in the otherwise monochromatic (colorblind) canvas.¹⁵

While sharing in some of the same formal characteristics of Bigbee and Bower's paintings, the paintings of Be Bartlett are more explicitly narrative in scope, grounded in the tradition of Gericault's history painting, painting that in its subject matter, typically depicts serious or exemplary action and references the staged compositions and epic themes of scripture, mythology, and literature. Like the works within that tradition, Bartlett's paintings are designed to be about crucial moments of human experience while

of *Dotty Attie*. In the *Atelier* of 1990–91, composed of fifty-seven panels, each six inches square, reproduces in fragments, and takes its name from nineteenth-century French academic painter Henri Fantin-Latour's *A Studio in the Rationalist Quarter* (1870), a painting that famously immortalized Fantin-Latour's circle of avant-garde friends and colleagues, including Monet, Renoir, and Bazille, depicted gathered round their seated colleague Manet, who, brush in hand, is himself poised in front of a canvas to paint, we are invited to read the *Atelier* as a collage of four panels at upper left, *Attie* has extracted and displaced quoted details from a number of other paintings, and interspersed with bits of text that join her own invention, one with a narrative of violence against women, confirmed in the culminating grouping of panels at lower right. As we read/view, there is an unsettling feeling of scanty and missing detail, like a crime scene to be forensically stitched together in the voyeuristic imagination. The combination of word and image activates a tension between the artist's present role as a participant in her own social world and her place within the heritage of a male-dominated art system. In the difference between the available modalities of attending to the past, the distance is between then and now, between the copy, past and present. Old Masters mediated through a layer of present (female) voice, that text itself alluding to the silencing work of violence against women.

The net of borrowed references is cast even wider by Vincent Desiderio, former student with Bob Bartlett and Brett Boff at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, where he now teaches. His *Complicit* (2002),

while making oblique reference to the nineteenth-century Romantic artist's fascination with the irregular and the abandoned in Théodore Géricault's portrait of the more directly borrowed from medical textbook photographs of human experience. In each other either side of itself replicated elementary images of individuals suffering from incurable—and visibly distorted—larged hands, feet, and face), and on the right, Downs consciousness of their own irregular reality. Or perhaps their unreality signals for the artist a deeper reality. The data here that the artist's own son, who appears in several canvases, himself suffers from physical disability. Like use in Vincent's *Complicit* work it is an Old Master painting that is borrowed but the tender and later importance of a 1940s train modernist depression-era pulp fiction, in which the recurring presence of a villain—villain or hero—lends an unspecified, open-ended drama. In a group of four paintings conceived in memory and mood. Over images of antiquated landscape and library shelves, the words forsaken, forbidden, forgiven, and forgotten are printed, charging the series with associations of a shudder of anxiety.²⁰ Old Master tradition is sacred with, and now modern.

inform the works in this exhibition. The past is not
 imagined, the present and the past all have equal weight. In
 a recent interview with Susan Gablik, Bo Bartlett has stated:
 "I guess I pick and choose from a lot of different artists;
 it's a bit like [making] a quilt, where you pull from all these
 different sources. I learn from looking at the things you
 like, and you draw from all of them. But it isn't a contrived
 postmodern approach or anything like that."²¹ In similar
 tone and approach to the past, Steven Assaer remarks: "I
 think it's more like . . . everything existing at the same time
 equally."²² But it is Vincent Desiderio who has perhaps
 most succinctly characterized the postmodern era's com-
 pulsive consumption of images as "culture."²³
 Faced with an embarrassment of riches in information—styles,
 formal idioms, techniques, and motifs—what is one to paint? How
 new, something distinct from one's own time? These
 seem to be the quest

Christian Vincent, *Field of Frames* (2007)
 as-architect, sketchbook in hand, surveys a panoramic
 landscape of all but discarded trans-art's skeletal
 its searching for an idea with originality, some-
 can convey that will be new, to which he can give his stamp
 of authenticity. As one created an infinite number of times, but he must create
 new ones. He needs to decide if he must reject the conven-
 tional language for the past, referenced by the antique
 frames, in order to go forward."²⁴

Critic and historian Donald Kuspit was aptly charac-
 terized the practice of using the group of artists presented
 by this exhibition, arguing

discovers of the past and using all the rest of the past
 is available to feast on, eat to live on everything is to
 produce nothing of one's own." The issue is framed
 perhaps more optimistically (for poets) by Harold Bloom:
 "The precursors flood us, and our imaginations gradually
 drowning in them, but no imaginative life is possible if
 such a sea is wholly evaded."²⁶ And this, perhaps, is
 one conclusion that may be drawn from this exhibition,
 that an innovation of all genres in art may direct a return

practices, something being
 certain compelling honesty about each of the works on
 may they . . . that betrays a healthy criticism about
 slavish imitation as a collective affirmation of
 painting's adequacy to lived experience and its will
 to face the force of what it means to be human.

uncertain place of the ethical, the . . .
 even the best

NOTES

1. This exhibition began as a paper entitled "Art and the Present: Contemporary Realism and the History of Art" which I delivered at the annual conference of the Association of Art Historians (UK) in 2004 at the University of Nottingham.
2. Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Death of the Artist* (2004), pp. 182–183.
3. Thomas McEvilly, *Art & Order: A History of Art and Architecture* (1992), pp. 10–11.

Contemporary Art, Kemner Museum of Contemporary Art & Design, 1996, p. 8.

4. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, New York and Oxford, 1973, p. 141.

5. Walter Benjamin, "Re: The Theory of Kracauer's Theory of Progress," quoted in George Dickel, "The Suppression of the Aura: The Now, The Then, and Modernity," in *Negotiating Rapture*, ed. Rickard Frass, Chicago, 1996, pp. 52-53.

6. Thomas McMeekin, 1992, p. 136

7. Jani Peppersson, *Forum: Storyteller and Self-Revealer*, *Artforum*, 1998, p. 22.

8. Ibid., p. 23.

9. Wald Kuspit, "Odd Newcomer: Theatrical and the Immediate," *ARTS Magazine*, November 1984, pp. 12-13.

10. Peppersson, p. 102.

11. Ibid., p. 147.

12. Never working from photographs, he has long periods of human contact with his sitters.

13. "Steven Assael: Revealing Light," *The World & I*, August 1994, p. 124.

14. See Ken Greenleaf, *Magazine Sunday Telegram*, January 9, 1994, p. 4E.

15. Bowar's canvas is replete with borrowed fragments, including the replication of a sculpted terrace wall (itself a replication) surrounding one of the gardens on the island of Hears in San Simeon, California; Islamic geometric floor tiles, derived from fifteenth century Marabout from Cairo, the design itself borrowed and copied in pattern books; and perhaps most recognizably, a replication of

Basket of Fruit of 1598.

16. Suzi Gablik, in *Bo Bartlett*, exhibition catalogue, PPOW, NY, 1998.

17. Bill Arning, "Administration of Sentimentality," *Novogays' Ana Khukue*

Sandwiches: Works in Progress, Atlanta College of Art Gallery and City Gallery at City of Atlanta, Atlanta, 1997.

18. Ibid., p. 12.

19. Fantin-Latour himself, among others, and a portrait of Delacroix.

20. The artist explains: "Each is emblazoned with a vaguely Germanic, almost Napoleonic, iconography, while denying its depth and perspective. The flat surface is sized, yet around and behind it, the old three-dimensional illusion continues happily to assert itself. Communication with the

viewer is a constant, and the picture, while denying its depth and perspective. The flat surface is sized, yet around and behind it, the old three-dimensional illusion continues happily to assert itself. Communication with the

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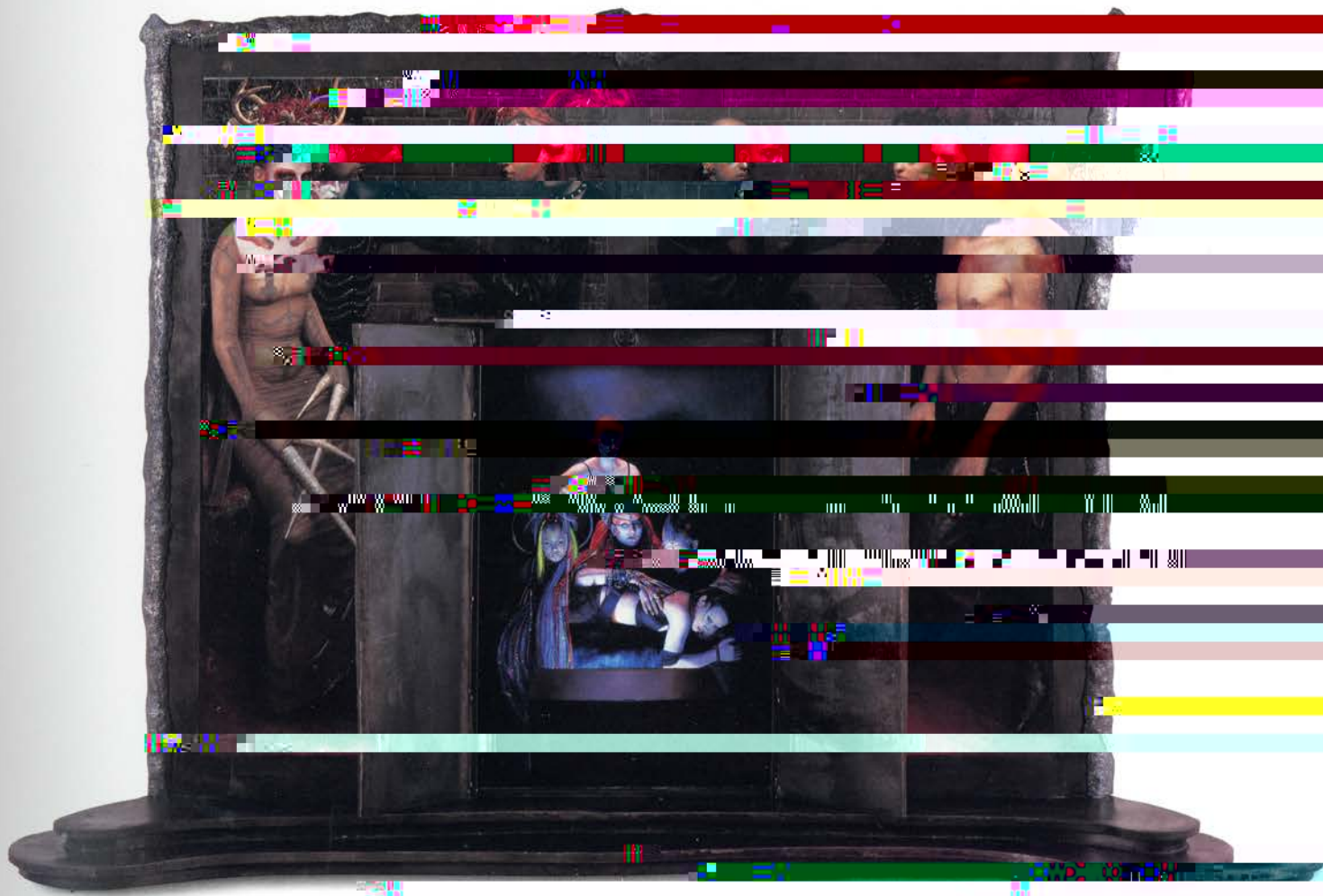
Courtesy Forum Group, New York

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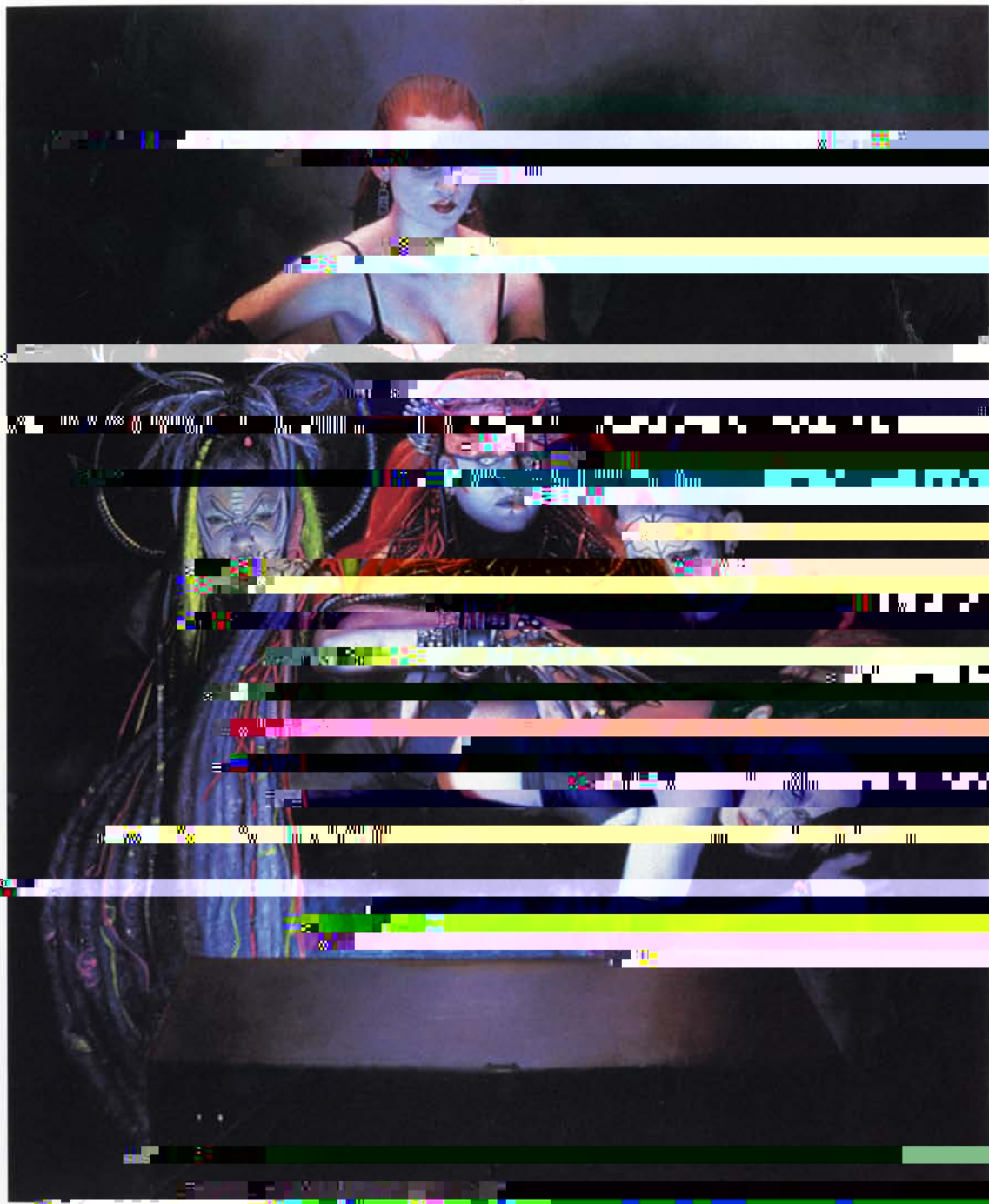


Stevan, Cassiel, Jr. Mar 2001, oil
Courtesy



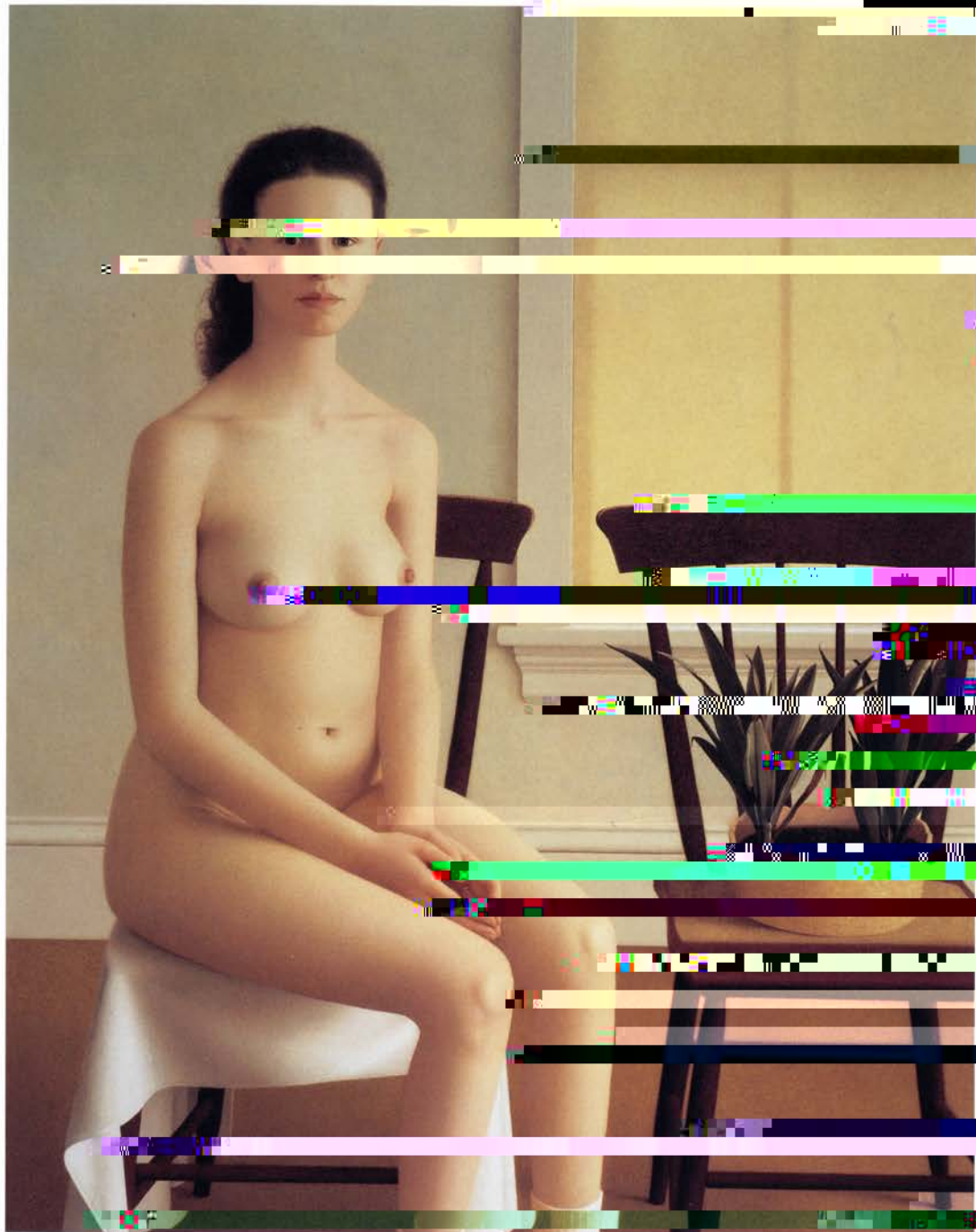
Steven

Fox, New York



Brett Bigbee, *Ann with Plant*, 1990-91, *oil on canvas

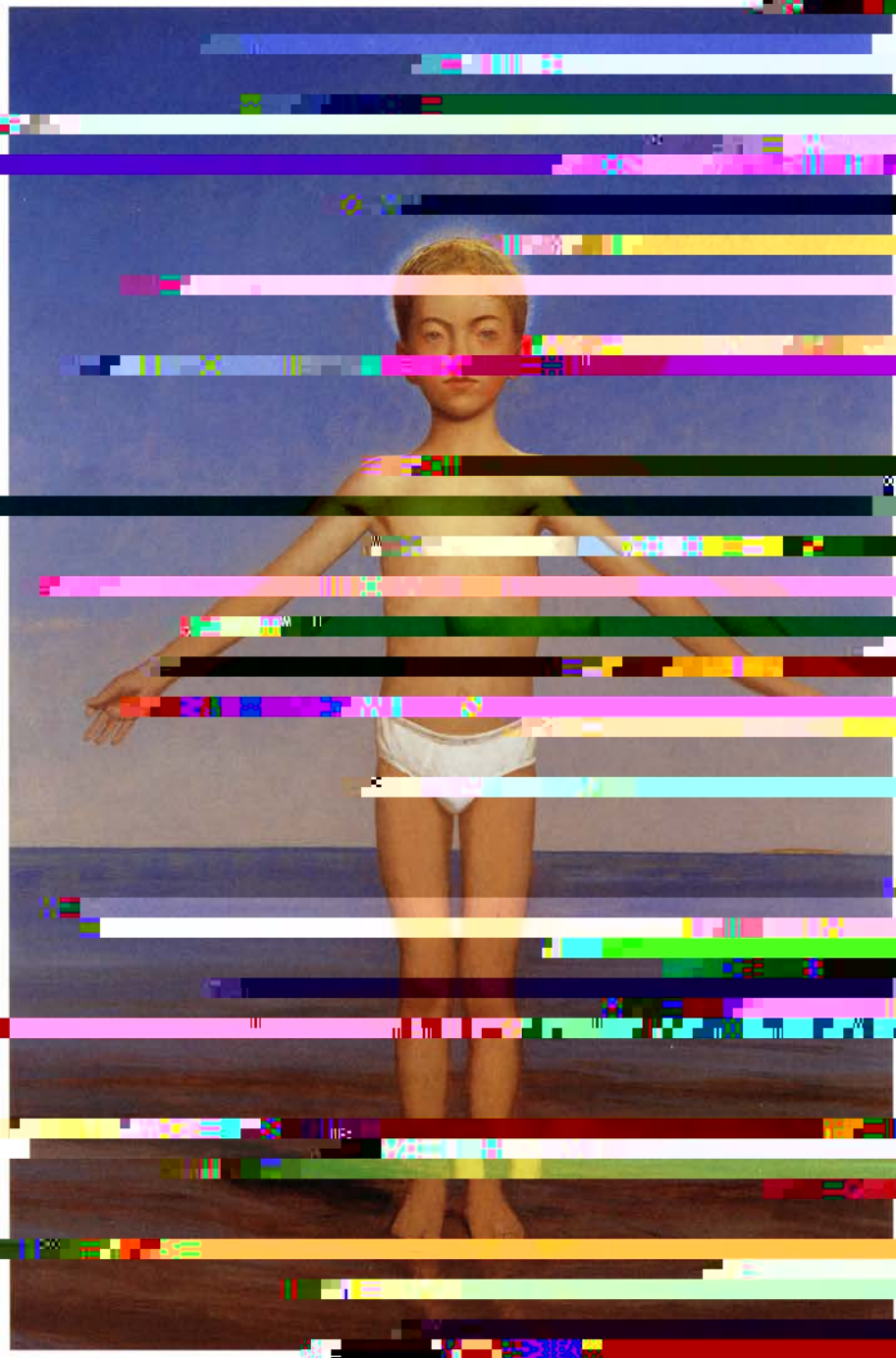
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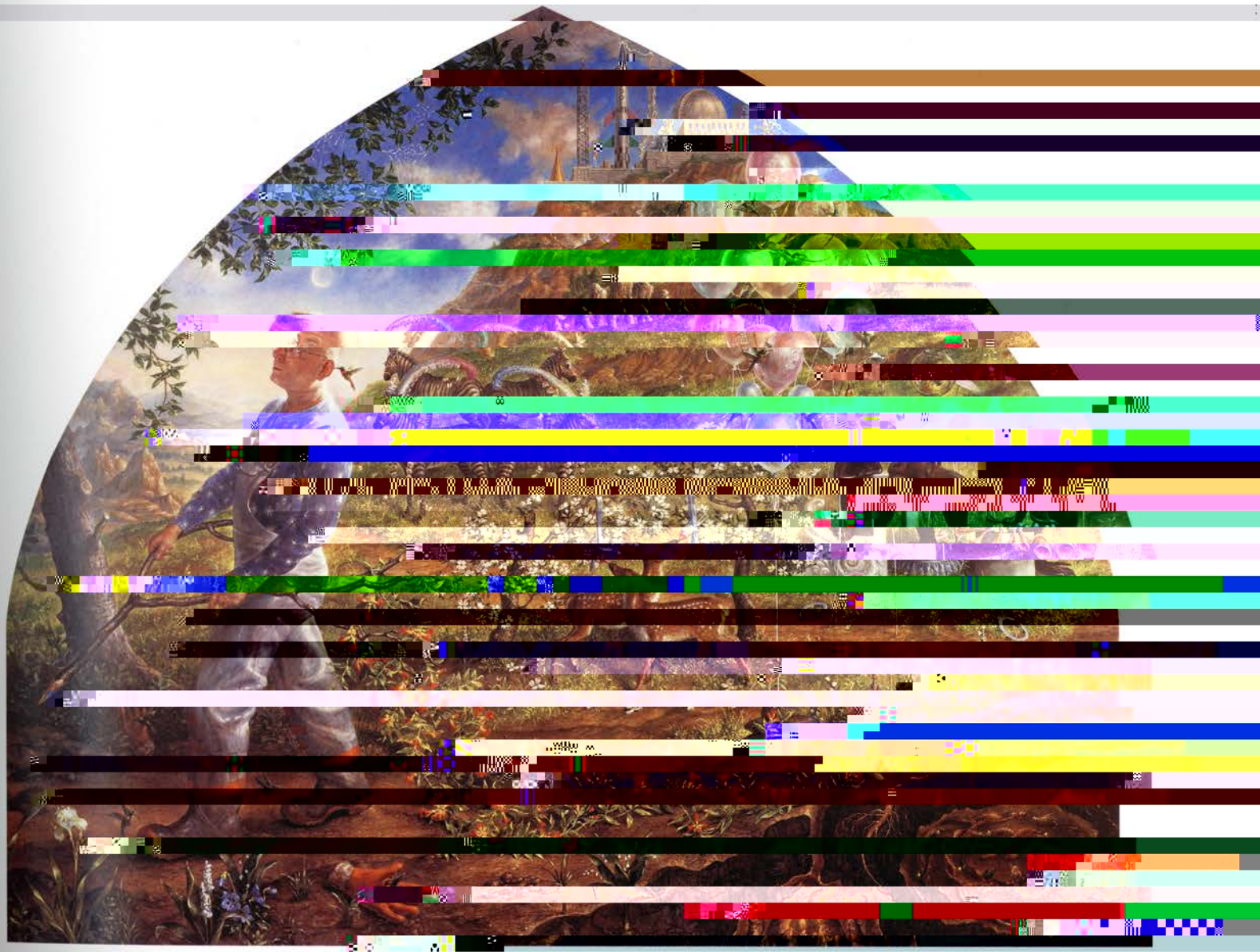
Sharon B. ...
Court



P. D. Rutledge, *Golden Boy*, 2002, oil on linen, 83 1/2 x 57 inches
Courtesy R.F.C. Gallery, New York



Thomas Woodruff, *All Systems Go: Mission Time*
Courtesy PPOW, New York



June Herrernan, ⁸⁸

Courtesy of the ⁸⁸



De

Courtesy

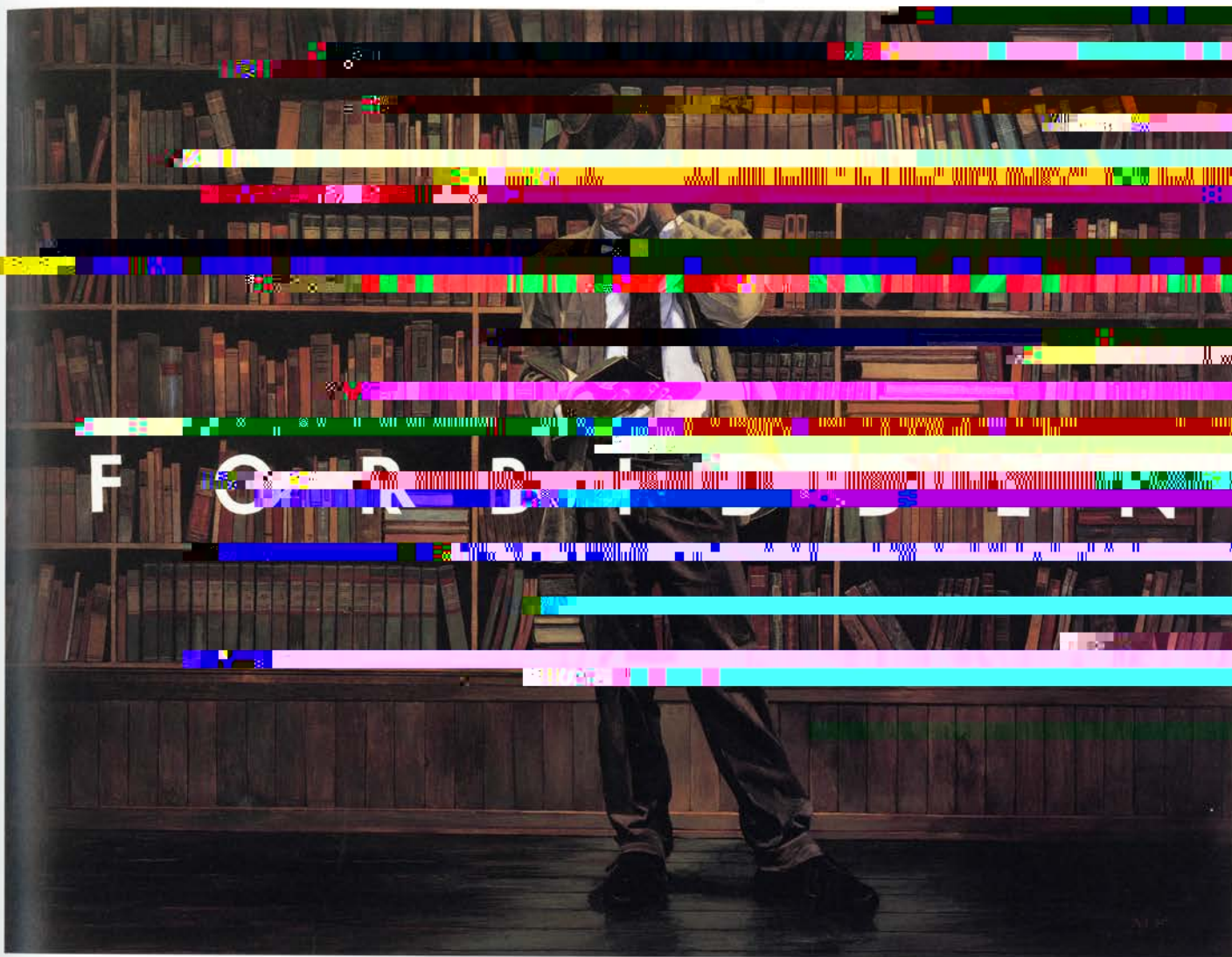
PROW, N. Y.



Vincent Desiderio, *Contemplative Disturbance*, oil on wood, 11 x 25 1/4 inches,
Courtesy IVY Contemporary Art, New York, NY



Michael Flanagan, *Reader Service*
Courtesy FIU, New York



FOR BLOOD

Christian Vincent, *Field of Forces*, 2001, Oil on Canvas
Courtesy Fortum Gallery, New York





EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Dimensions given in inches, height across

Steven Assael

Waters, 2001

oil, wood panel, canvas

110 × 150 × 42

Courtesy Forum Gallery, New York

Michael Flanagan

Requiem Series

oil on canvas, 110 × 150 × 42

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Dee Deane

In the Atelier, 1990–91

57 panels, each 6 × 6

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Julie Heffernan

Seymour as Heavenly Boy, 2003

oil on canvas, 68 × 100

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Bo Bartlett

Golden Boy, 2002

oil on linen

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Odd Nerdrum

White Heron, 1992–96

oil on canvas, 80 × 100 × 8

Christian Vincent

Leaf of Franes, 2001

oil on canvas, 110 × 150 × 42

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Brett Digbee

Ann with Plant, 1990–91

oil on canvas, 53 × 42

Seven Bridges Foundation

Connecticut

Honors Woodruff

All Systems Go: Mission Poesy (Diviner), 1999

oil on canvas, 110 × 150 × 42

Courtesy PPOW, New York

Marion Dowar

Santa Lucia, 2003

oil on canvas, 48 × 40

Courtesy of the artist

Vincent Desiderio

Contemplative Distance, 1992

oil on wood, 11 × 25 1/4

Courtesy PPOW, New York

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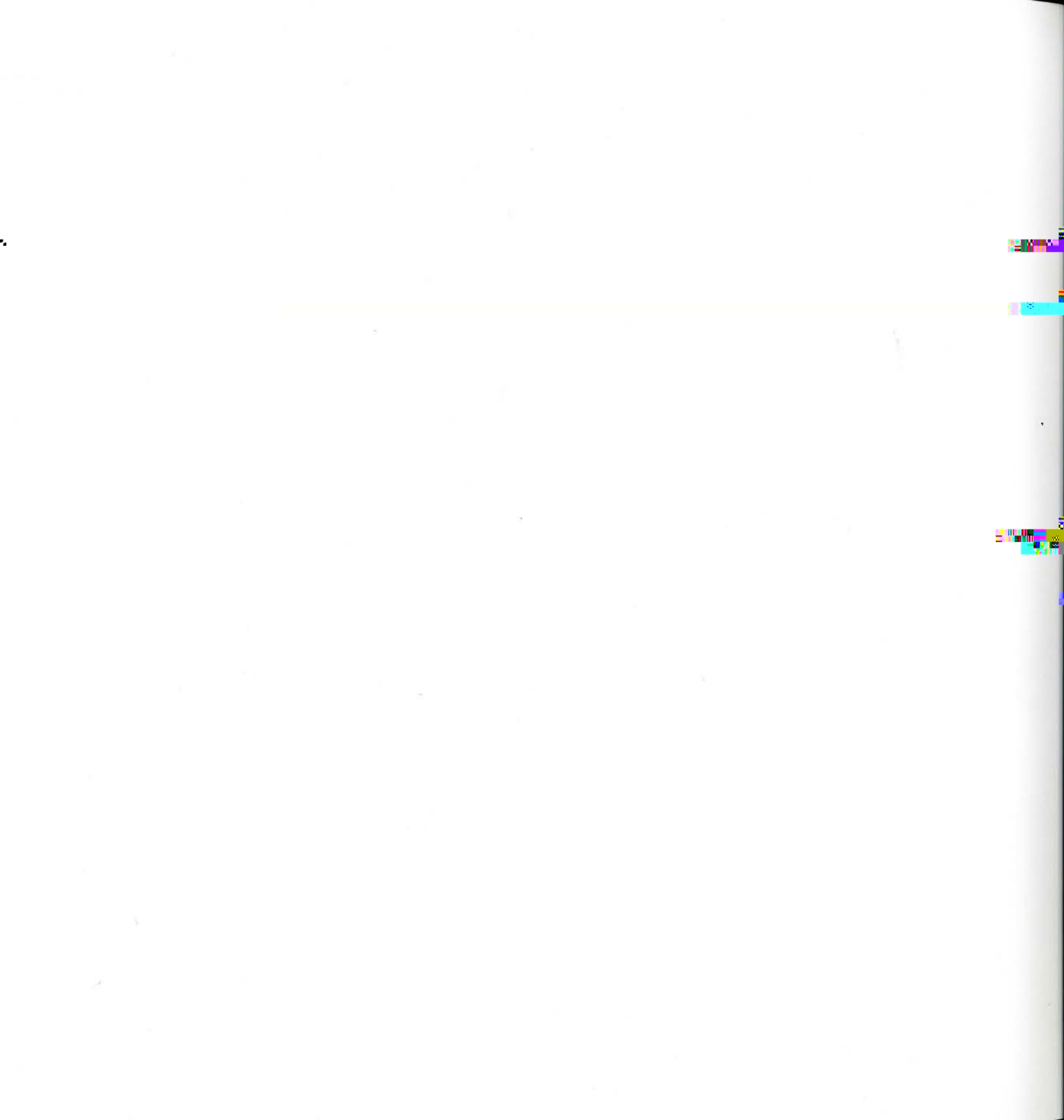
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Helen Farg
Mindi

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Then as Now

March 28 - May 22

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. P.

PAID

Featuring: Steve A. D., Arvin B.,
Brett Bigbee, Sharon Bowe, Vincent Desiderio,
Michael Flanagan, Julie Heffernan, Odd Nordland,
Christian Vincent, and Thomas Woodman

Opening Reception:

Saturday, March 19, 2005, 6-7

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Business Council: Bend Dental, Creative Business Interiors,

First Liberty Bank and Trust, Quaker Oats, Westmoreland Club.

Front: Christian Vincent, *Field of Frames*, 2001,

oil on canvas, 84 x 110 inches

Courtesy, Sordoni Art Gallery, Wilkes University