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# HAWAII

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## **FIGURING**

Eric Fischl

Thomas Lawson

David Sharpe

Walter Robinson

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For contributions to this catalogue HALLWALLS would like to thank the following:

*Typesetting:* Easy Graphics  
*Photography:* Richard Baim (for Tom Lawson)  
Eric Fischl  
Walter Robinson  
*Design:* G. Roger Denson  
*Proof:* Suzanne Johnson

*Lenders:* Pam Adler Gallery  
Metro Pictures  
the artists

This publication has been prepared in conjunction with the exhibition "Figuring," curated by Charles Clough for HALLWALLS, 700 Main Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

Funding for this catalogue has been provided by The National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency and The New York State Council on the Arts.

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500 copies printed  
by Octobergraphics  
Buffalo, New York

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

"Figuring," an exhibition guest curated by Charles Clough, brings together four young New York City artists who deal with contemporary image making. In the exhibition are the works by Eric Fischl, Tom Lawson, Walter Robinson and David Sharpe.

Often movements in art emerge, as with artists currently using images as a central theme, with techniques and styles which crosscut one another. It becomes difficult with art to sift through and pinpoint the most interesting and influential artists at the apex of new ideas. Though with works by Fischl, Lawson, Robinson and Sharpe, a clearer understanding comes into focus, because their art is strong, classically derived and full of new visual information.

For those in New York City, we wish to thank Charles Clough who organized the exhibition and Valentin Tatransky for the catalogue essay. Galleries: Pam Adler, Metro Pictures and Edward Thorpe for their cooperation. For the artists in the exhibit: Eric Fischl, Tom Lawson, Walter Robinson and David Sharpe.

In Buffalo, this exhibition was made possible by: Steve Baskin, G. Roger Denson, Bob Collignon, Jerry Einstandig, Suzanne Johnson, Susan Paonessa and Sally Scime.

WILLIAM J. CURRIE  
Director



David Sharpe  
*Two Figures*, 7-21-80  
Oil on canvas  
42 x 30 inches



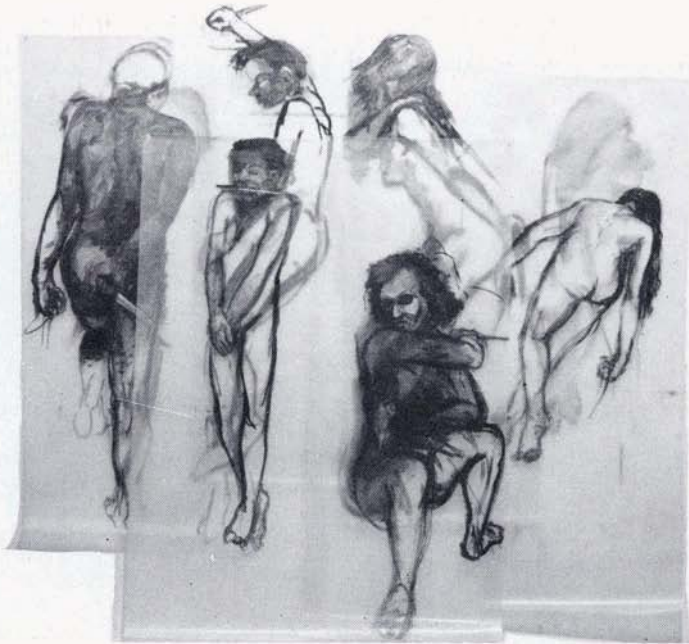
David Sharpe  
*Nude with Painting and Dog*, 6-22-80  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 66 inches

### **FISCHL, LAWSON, ROBINSON & SHARPE by Valentin Tatransky**

Three of these four painters have only recently started to show in New York City. Eric Fischl had his first one man show in New York last spring at Edward Thorp's gallery; Thomas Lawson will have his first show in an independent gallery this coming spring at Metro Pictures; and Walter Robinson, as of this writing, is still not represented by a gallery in New York, though he is showing here, (he'll be in an upcoming group show at Brooke Alexander). The exception among these artists, in terms of exhibitions, is David Sharpe. He's currently showing at Pam Adler. All four are young.

Two or three years ago it was almost impossible to show these kind of paintings in New York City at an established, commercial gallery – not that this type of art wasn't around at the time. Richard Prince, another young artist who shows at Metro Pictures, said that it was hard to show this type of work as recently as a year ago. Now, this kind of image making has flooded the New York galleries.

Why and how this change has occurred is not the subject of our catalogue essay. My purpose is to say something about the paintings and the artists featured in this show.

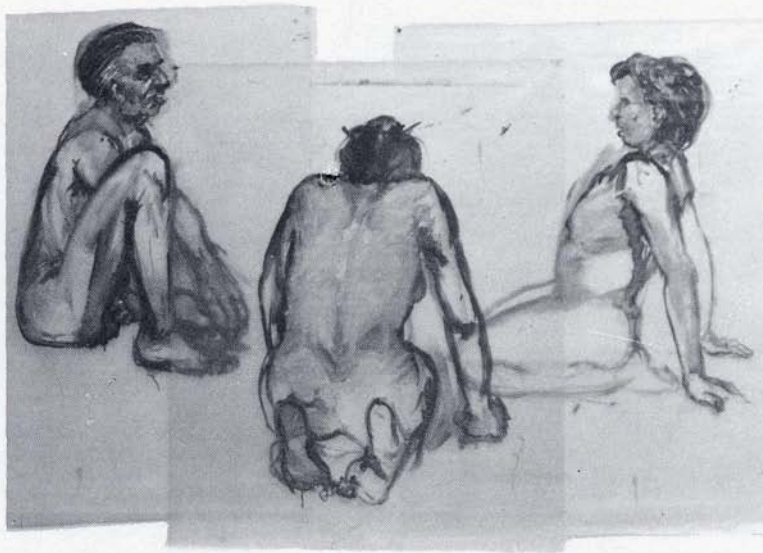


Eric Fischl  
"Knife Party" 1980  
oil on glassine paper  
80" x 84"

However, the fact of this exhibition, and the selection that it constitutes, provides part of the answer to why this kind of art has surfaced in New York City. Certainly, the public emergence of these painters has nothing to do with a revolution in taste among New York art dealers. But it does have something to do with artists banding together, putting themselves forward and forming their own public forum.

The two founders of Hallwalls, Robert Longo and Charles Clough (the curator of this show), are now exhibiting New York artists. Having a place outside of New York City helped a number of artists, not necessarily from Buffalo either, to surface in the big city. I remember David Salle (now with the Mary Boone Gallery) and Sherrie Levine (now with Metro Pictures) saying a couple of years ago that Hallwalls was the one place that supported and understood their work. A few weeks ago you could read about Cindy Sherman in the *Soho Weekly News* as having gotten her public start in Buffalo. Sherman, like Salle and Levine, is not from Buffalo – the point is that her Hallwalls beginning was cited by this New York newspaper as pedigree.

To be impressed by the publicity that some of these artists have received in New York is to overlook a lesson in what it is that goes to form an artist's reputation. Fads of course come and go. But fine art endures. It endures not because it goes down as



Eric Fischl  
"Arbitration" 1980  
oil/glassine  
55" x 80"

history, but because it creates history. And making history is neither a matter of journalism nor of art historical book-keeping.

This show that Clough has organized for Hallwalls does in fact illustrate a current trend among young painters in New York. But to stop at that is to miss the essence of this exhibition. This show, above all else, is first and foremost a selection. Included here are some of the more gifted and intelligent of the new figurative painters in New York City.

Sooner or later everyone jumps on the bandwagon. The current Whitney Biennial in New York attests to it. What's lacking at the Whitney Museum is not lacking in this particular show at Hallwalls – a sense of discrimination.

Clough's selection throws into relief the most important issue that's emerged in the current practice of figurative painting: does the process of seeing belong to culture or paint? (By "paint" I mean paint as matter). The paintings here argue that the act of seeing belongs to culture. These artists don't paint from nature. They paint culture. In other words, they see in terms of images. They use found images – cultural artifacts – like newspaper photographs, magazine pictures, other art, and in gen-



Thomas Lawson  
*Family Portrait*, 1980  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 40 inches  
Photo: Richard Baim



Walter Robinson  
untitled. 1980  
Acrylic on board  
12" x 12"

eral, what they *remember* of pictures in periodicals, books, television and movies. However, there is a significant difference between what they do and what the Pop Artists and photo-realists did. It has to do with the role of paint and painting in their art. This is the other issue that their work confronts.

They insist on the act of painting as a convention in itself. This is unlike the Pop Artists and photo-realists, who painted in a manner that aped the look of the image that they were often simply mechanically trying to reproduce. Fischl, Lawson, Robinson and Sharpe insist on the conventions of painting, because they are moved by what the image is in itself, and what it signifies, rather than they are in the availability of the image, as had been the Pop Artists. These four painters are closer to the American tradition of abstract and figurative painting than they are to Duchamp. They use paint to rescue images that are forgotten in the banality of culture. Fairfield Porter is no Eric Fischl; de Kooning is no Thomas Lawson; Warhol no Walter Robinson; and Guston no David Sharpe. These are not value judgments, but an illustration of how differences make up a tradition. The difference between someone like Robinson and Warhol is that Warhol is more impressed with the person – Elizabeth Taylor, let's say – or the brand name, than he is with the image itself. It's a moot point to try to reveal how



Walter Robinson  
untitled. 1980  
Acrylic on board  
12" x 12"

the handling of paint can show a new attitude towards subject matter – though that's what's happening here.

Aside from his oil paintings on canvas, Eric Fischl does oil sketches on glasine paper. They are executed in a free, painterly manner. The paper is important. It facilitates his handling of paint and enables him to express various relationships between the figures. He uses the freedom of paint, oil and paper to arrive as naturally as possible at his subject matter.

I recently heard an art historian say – speaking of Courbet's *Stone Breakers* (1848) – that Courbet rejected traditional, formal ideas of putting a picture together. She said that Courbet didn't blend his paint or construct his figures in a classical way in order to create a smooth, harmonious picture. The language of this historian is creating a confusion between the material properties of paint (and design) with aesthetic results. Goya's black paintings are smoother, more harmonious than those of, for instance, Boucher and Fragonard.

If Fischl paints quickly, freely and well, which I think he does, than it has to do with the fact that he wants to see something. Violence, in Fischl's art, begins in the family, and the family, for him, as an artist, begins with the body. You can see this in the en-

semble of the couple watching their TV sets. Paint, in Fischl's art, is a metaphor for the body. The body denotes sensuality, joy and its own deadweight. Athletic activities, like life savings, are seen as exercises in passion.

Thomas Lawson's themes are also centered around the family. He defines the family in three terms: birth, sex and death. Then there's the additional element – the aesthetic dimension – which in his work is expressed by the scale that the images occupy within the frame of the picture, and the place from which and manner in which he culls his images. He responds to images of violence, death and passion in newspapers and magazines, but he responds as much to their texture, the indifference of the context in which they exist, their scale and the atmosphere that they breathe. Lawson's paintings are dark and modest in the way that only a young intellectual, aware of the distance that exists between his past and the past of history, can make them. He's ironic, but not condescending. Note his use of oil stick and color. Art is not merely a matter of seeing. Art is being conscious of you yourself seeing.

For Lawson, the process of seeing is a matter of image making. The dead man constitutes a part of his inner world. His paintings are sleazy moments of tender refinement. Besides that, they're critical of the complacency of Pop Art.

So are Mike Robinson's paintings. Robinson, like Fischl, is very much a painter's painter, and like Lawson, is able to separate the conventions of cheap, commercial art from the depth of feeling that the images denote. I've already compared him to Warhol. Robinson is moved by what the image signifies. To put it another way: commercial art is bad not because it's bad, but because it's good and not good enough. The problem with commercial artists is that they lack the artist's touch; that is, they make things rather than look at things. Robinson's best paintings, in my opinion, are the small ones of women's heads – lips, eyes, nose and hair. He looks again at images that have been looked at. His paintings are not illustrations. He thinks about paint and color in terms of the image. That's simple enough, but too often taken for granted. He's a good painter. David Sharpe's best paintings, I think, are also his simple, small ones. In his current New York show, one of the best paintings is a re-working of a portrait by Goya. His paintings are distinguished by their humor, quirkiness and references to art history. His attitude is a measure of his wordliness – his detachment from the nervous, brooding quality of art making.

The last show that Clough curated here (in September of 1979) featured Ross Bleckner, Gregoire Mueller, Julian Schnabel and Jeff Way. These are ambitious young painters. This show is even more important in terms of its selection, because we see these painters at a more mature stage of their development. Also – each artist here has chosen a particular facet of his work to represent him.

## BIOGRAPHIES

## ERIC FISCHL

Born: New York, New York, 1948

Education: California Institute of the Arts,  
Valencia, California, B.F.A., 1972

### WORKS EXHIBITED AT HALLWALLS

1. "Arbitration," 1980, oil on glassine,  
55" x 80"  
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery
2. "The Aftermath Bath," 1980, oil on glassine,  
72" x 84"  
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery
3. "Dying Woman," 1980, oil on glassine,  
72" x 72"  
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery
4. "Head of Family," 1978, oil on glassine,  
60" x 90"  
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery
5. "Life Saver/Life Preserver," 1979, oil on glassine,  
60" x 72"  
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery

### SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, N.S., Canada, 1975  
Studio, Halifax, N.S., Canada, 1976  
Gallerie B. Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 1976, 1978  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York City, 1980  
Davis Art Gallery, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio  
Sable Castelli Gallery, Toronto, Canada, 1981

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Canada Canvas, 1975  
Vancouver Art Gallery, "17 Artists: A Protean View," Vancouver, B.C., 1976  
Neun Kanadisches Kunstlers Kunsthalle, Basel, Switzerland, 1978  
Edward Thorp Gallery, New York City, Winter, 1979, Summer, 1979, "Contemporary Drawing," 1979  
Project Studio 1, Queens, New York, "The Big Drawing Show," 1979  
Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary, Canada, "Aspects of Canadian Painting in the Seventies," 1980  
Annina Nosei Gallery, New York City, "Drawing Show," 1981

### PERFORMANCES

"Prayers Of Our Sisters" by Eric Fischl, Carol Wainio, Paul Theberge  
Annaleonowens Gallery, Halifax, N.S. Canada, 1977  
Music Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 1978  
Musee des Beaux Arts, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 1978

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Lehmann, Henry. "On Canvas From Sea To Sea," *Montreal Star*, January, 1975.
- Chandler, John. "17 Artists: A Protean View," *Artscanada*, October, 1976.
- Perrin, Peter. "Friends of the Form," *Artscanada*, February, 1978.
- Jurg Kupper, Van Hans. "Metaphysik des Alltäglichen," *Baseler Zeitung*, Son. 11, Juni 1978.
- Bogardes, George. "Fischl Explores. . .," *Montreal Star*, March 23, 1978.
- Spalding, Jeffrey. *Aspects of Canadian Painting in the Seventies*, Catalogue, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, January 19 - March 16, 1980.
- Rickey, Carrie. "Taste Test," *The Village Voice*, May 5, 1980, p. 83.
- Pincus-Witten, Robert. "Entries: Palimpsest and Pentimenti," *Arts*, June 1980, pp. 128-131.
- Tousley, Nancy. "Canadian Painting Aspects of the Seventies," *Vanguard*, Summer 1980, pp. 30-37.
- Zimmer, William. "Theme Song (And Dance)," *Soho News*, July 2-8, 1980, p. 26.
- Kelley, Patrick. "Eric Fischl: Paintings & Drawings," *Dialogue, The Ohio Arts Journal*, September/October 1980, pp. 46-48.
- Anderson, Alexander & Rickey, Carrie. "Up Against The Wall Street: An Investor's Guide to Galleries." *The Village Voice*, October 15-21, 1980.
- Berlind, Robert. Review, *Art in America*, November, 1980, pp. 141-143.

## THOMAS LAWSON

BORN: Glasgow, Scotland, 1951  
Education: St. Andrews University,  
Edinburgh University

## WORKS EXHIBITED AT HALLWALLS

1. "Family Portrait," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 40"  
Courtesy of Metro Pictures
2. "Taking Advantage," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 40"  
Courtesy of Metro Pictures
3. "The Street," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 40"  
Courtesy of Metro Pictures
4. "Wild In The Street, Hanged In The Park," 1981, oil on canvas,  
50" x 40"  
Courtesy of Metro Pictures
5. "A Sometimes Emotional Issue," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 40"  
Courtesy of Metro Pictures

## SELECTED ONE-ARTIST EXHIBITIONS

Metro Pictures, N.Y., May, 1981

Mercer Union, Toronto, December, 1980

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Metropicture, *Inaugural Exhibition*, November, 1980

ABC NO RIO., *Animals in Cities II*, November, 1980

Brooke Alexander, *Illustration and Allegory*, Curated by Carter Ratcliff, May, 1980

Palazzo Triennale, Milan, *Nuova Immagine*, Curated by Flavio Caroli, May, 1980

Fashion Moda, N.Y., *Animals Living in Cities*, October, 1979

Nieuw Amsterdam 17 So., William St., N.Y., *New Work*, Curated by Peter Frank, October 1979

Studio Cannaviello, Milan, *Immagini (riconoscibili)*, April, 1979

Artists Space, N.Y. and The Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, *Four Scottish Artists*, March, 1979

The Drawing Center, N.Y., *Group Show*, November, 1978

3 Mercer, N.Y., *Object Show*, April, 1978

Artists Space, N.Y., *Silent Auction*, December, 1977

## DAVID SHARPE

Born: Owensboro, Kentucky, 1944

Education: The School of Art,  
Institute of Chicago, BFA  
and MFA, 1968

## WORKS EXHIBITED AT HALLWALLS

1. "The Swing," 1980, oil on canvas,  
60" x 50"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
2. "Nude With Painting and Dog," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 66"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
3. "Figure In Landscape," 1980, oil on canvas,  
60" x 50"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
4. "Figure In Landscape," 1980, oil on canvas,  
60" x 48"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
5. "Four Figures With Cardinal," 1980, oil on canvas,  
50" x 50"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery

6. "Nude In Interior," 1979, oil on canvas,  
40" x 48"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
7. "Woman Doing Her Hair," 1980, oil on canvas,  
32" x 32"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery
8. "Two Figures," 1980, oil on canvas,  
42" x 30"  
Courtesy of Pam Adler Gallery

## SELECTED ONE-ARTIST EXHIBITIONS:

Pam Adler Gallery, New York, 1981  
 Pam Adler Gallery, New York, 1979  
 Sonia Zaks Gallery, Chicago, 1978, 1980  
 G.W. Einstein Co., Inc., New York, 1977  
 The Artist House, New York, 1974  
 Douglas Kenyon Gallery, Chicago, 1975, 1974, 1973, 1972  
 English Editions Limited Gallery, Detroit, 1973  
 Metropolitan Structures, Chicago, 1972  
 Joe Lo Giudice Gallery, Chicago, 1970

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

State University of New York at Stony Brook, "Eight From New York," 1980 (curated by L. Alloway)  
 Pam Adler Gallery, New York, 1980  
 80 Washington Square East Galleries, New York University, "Faculty of the Department of Art & Art Education," 1979  
 Cincinnati Art Museum, "Collector's Choice," 1979  
 Mitchell Museum, Mount Vernon, Ill., 1979  
 Philadelphia College of Art, "Point," 1978 (catalog with illus.)  
 N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, "Seven by Nine," 1978  
 Webb & Parsons Gallery, Bedford Village, New York, 1978  
 Pam Adler Gallery, New York, "Inaugural Exhibition," 1978, 1979  
 Sonia Zaks Gallery, Chicago, 1978  
 Illinois State Museum, 1978  
 Lee Hoffman Gallery, Detroit, 1978  
 Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Conn., "7th Annual Contemporary Reflections," 1978 (catalog)  
 G.W. Einstein Co., Inc., New York, 1978  
 The Drawing Center, New York, 1978  
 The Soho Center for Visual Arts, New York, 1978  
 Independent Curators, Inc., "New Works/ New York," 1977-78, traveling through N. Dakota  
 OIA, "Art in Public Places," 1977  
 Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1977  
 Chicago Cultural Center, "Masterpieces of Chicago Art," 1977  
 "Outside City Limits," 1977, traveling exhibition around New York State (catalog with color illus.)  
 The Toledo Museum of Art, 1977  
 The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "Visions: Painting and Sculpture: Distinguished Alumni 1945 to the Present," 1976 (catalog with illus.)  
 G.W. Einstein Co., Inc., New York, 1976

Illinois Arts Council & University of Chicago. "The Chicago Style Painting," "The Chicago Style Print-making," 1974  
Douglas Kenyon Gallery, Chicago, 1974, 1973, 1972, 1971  
"Chicago Painting in the 1960s," tour of major museums in Canada, 1972-73  
"Illinois Painters," traveling exhibition, 1971-72  
Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati, 1971, 1972  
Illinois Bell Telephone Collection, "Decade of Accomplishment in Drawing," 1971  
Art Institute of Chicago, "Recent Acquisitions," 1970; "Society of Contemporary Art," 1971; "Society of Contemporary Art," 1969; "Artists Under 30," 1968  
Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1971, 1970, 1969, 1968  
Adele Rosenberg Gallery, Chicago, 1967, 1966  
Gallery Arkep, New York, 1965, 1964  
University of Chicago, 1964

## COLLECTIONS

The Art Institute of Chicago  
The Bell Telephone Collection  
Edward Bergman  
Joseph Shapiro  
The Owens-Corning Corporation  
The Prudential Insurance Company of America.  
Blue Cross/Blue Shield  
Kemper Insurance Company  
Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York  
Oklahoma Art Center  
Illinois State Museum  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago  
Federal Home Loan Corporation, Washington, D.C.  
Bankers Trust Corporation, New York  
Exxon Corporation  
IBM Corporation  
Museum of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Scotland

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Zimmer, William, Group Show Review, *Soho Weekly News*, January 24, 1980, p. 24  
Adrian, Dennis, "David Sharpe at Pam Adler," *Art in America*, September 1979, p. 135 (color illus.).  
Florescu, Michae, "David Sharpe," *Arts Magazine*, June 1979, p. 6 (color illus.).  
Frueh, Joanna, "David Sharpe at Zaks," *Art in America*, July-August 1978.  
Upshaw, Leon, "David Sharpe," *The New Art Examiner*, March 1978, (illus.).

## AWARDS

Creative Artist Public Service Program (CAPS) Grant, 1980

## WALTER ROBINSON

Born: Delaware, U.S.A., 1950

### WORKS EXHIBITED AT HALLWALLS

1. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
2. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
3. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
4. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
5. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
6. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
7. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
24" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist
8. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
24" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist
9. untitled, plastic paint on panel,  
24" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist

### SELECTED EXHIBITION

Times Square Show, June 1980

### CURRENT

Editor of *Art Letter*  
Press officer, *Collaborative Projects*

### PAST

Co-editor/publisher *Art-Rite* magazine  
Founding member Printed Matter Inc.

