

Brice Marden, 'Bear Print', 1997-98/2000, oil on linen

understood as being all about becoming. The plane is both a mental construct and a physical surface. How can they ever coincide? The gap between these two senses of 'plane' may be the source of the gap in Marden's oeuvre. Between 1984 and 1986, Marden became Marden in a new way.

'Become what you are,' was Nietzsche's daunting and paradoxical commandment; Marden had demanded of his paintings that they 'become what they are' by repeating as image what they are as objects. In his catalogue essay, Richard Shiff quotes extensively from Marden's early writings, notes and interviews, among which one reads: 'The paper is an integral part of the drawing. The wax... everything's a real part of the drawing.'

It becomes very real. What is real must become real.' And elsewhere: 'Colour losing identities, becoming colour.' Being must be becoming, and must become appearance: 'If each panel is the same size, I want them all to look the same size.' Somehow, after the crisis of the mid-1980s, Marden no longer had to strive for this sort of paradoxical tautology in which the real doubles back on itself. In his work of the past two decades, Marden simultaneously emphasises the plane (as a physical entity) by the way he moves his lines of colour across it and opens it out (as a mental entity) by the way the interactions of those lines create a continual expansion and contraction of space, no longer (whatever Marden thinks) reducible to a plane – a sort of breathing, its support must rather be thought of as a sort of body.

The newest paintings here, 'The Propitious Garden of Plane Image', 'Second Version' and 'The Propitious Garden of Plane Image', 'Third Version', both 2000-2006, are very long, frieze-like arrays of dancing lines and interlocking colours extended over six canvases. They're extraordinary, yet they have something of the rather cold, overcomplicated quality I remember from Marden's last show of concatenated monochromes at the Pace Gallery in 1984. Their handling of scale puts the viewer at a distance from their physicality. Could a new crisis be brewing?

Barry Schwabsky is London reviews editor of Map

New York

Lisa Yuskavage

DAVID ZWIRNER/ ZWIRNER & WIRTH 18 OCT – 18 NOV

A profound immersion in the great tradition of European painting – an immersion so whole-hearted that some contemporary critics would dismiss it as simply conservatism – and an equally strong affinity for the in-your-face vulgarity of Jeff Koons or Mike Kelley (which other critics might equally condemn as mere provocation) should add up to an unsustainable contradiction. The fact that Lisa Yuskavage does, for the most part, bear up under the tensions inherent in her style, and has been doing so for some 15 years now, may account for the fact that her work gives me such an otherwise inexplicable sense of jubilation. Because the work contains this tension, it is almost impossible not to be both attracted and repelled by it – and when experienced with a certain degree of intensity, this attraction/repulsion becomes a species of the sublime. When I see Yuskavage's work, I can't help but be in awe of what she can get away with, and I'm not just referring to her notorious 'bad girl' imagery – lately focused on the sort of faux-lesbian encounters beloved of men's magazines – which after all should have lost its capacity to shock by now.

She gets away with it because she's so good – and that's about as much as needs to be said, maybe, about the issue of 'skill' that's hovered around Yuskavage, John Currin, and a few other figurative painters of late.

These artists' detractors claim that they exploit a criterion of skilfulness that is academic, irrelevant to contemporary concerns, but they should remember what the poet Frank O'Hara had to say about technique: 'If you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you.' With respect to the age-old

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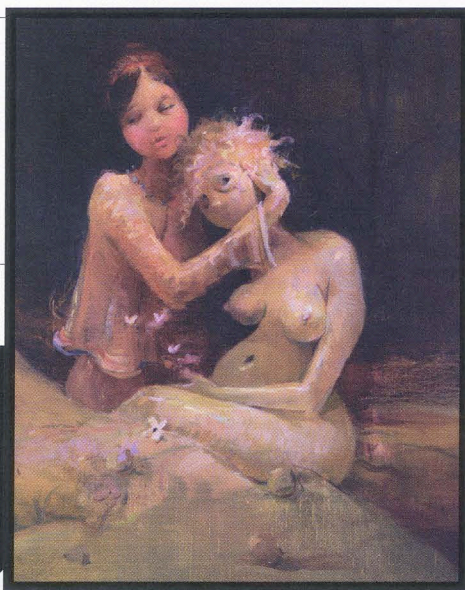
Brice Marden

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART 29 OCT 2006 – 15 JAN 2007

One of the most interesting parts of this show is the part that isn't there: what happened to Brice Marden's paintings between 1984 – when he left off making the paintings built of juxtaposed monochrome panels, a body of work that had occupied him since the late 1960s, after having earlier concentrated on single gray panels – and 1986, when he started making the paintings based on linear webs of colour with which he is still involved? In fact, the exhibition makes the hiatus look even bigger, since it skips from 1981-82 'Elements I' to 1987-87 'Diptych, Untitled #3'. A great sense of liberated energies emerged from this break or (as Brenda Richardson characterises it in her catalogue essay) crisis; Marden had gone from one understanding of how to negotiate the tension between the pictorial nature of a painting and its objectness – an understanding that had apparently become quite constraining, and had come to necessitate a combinatorial method that was starting to look mannered – to a different approach to the same perennial problem, this time one that keeps gently opening and closing the gap between image and object.

What went on for Marden around 1985? Was it a period of pure inactivity, of patient waiting? Or was it filled with unsatisfactory attempts, false starts? Neither the exhibition nor the otherwise admirably informative catalogue breathes a word. It's a shame, because while Marden understands his art as all about the plane on which it occurs – thus the exhibition title, *Plane Image* – at another level it can be

Right Lisa Yuskavage, 'Swamp', 2005, oil on linen



Y U K

Left John Cage, 'Essay', 1987, installation view at La Casa Encendida in 2006



Cage wrote through Thoreau's text 18 times, the words used in each writing through being eliminated from the gamut at the completion of each text, reducing its size, and consequently the length of the texts. Cage used these words to create mesostics, his poetic version of an acrostic, on Erik Satie's title 'Messe des Pauvres'.

Subsequently, recordings of Cage reading the texts at a constant rate of delivery, the differing lengths of texts resulting in different lengths of recordings ranging from 20 minutes to 30 seconds, were expanded or contracted using the technology available in the computer music department of CUNY's Brooklyn College. The texts were to sustain the same pitch, but have a uniform duration of 16 minutes and 49 seconds, a duration that was arrived at by chance. These 18 tracks of tape were mixed together resulting in the exquisitely rich audio portion of 'Essay'.

'Essay' illuminates Cage's sophisticated palate of techniques,

ideas and references. Language has been transformed into its musical form, poetry, and abstracted to become pure sound.

Individual words and their meanings may be intermittently understood, but without their sentences these words have been stripped of intended purpose and constricting device. Released from familiar phrases they, like the sounds of his compositions, are heard rather than expected. The seemingly austere installation stretches the boundaries of the medium; the requisite three-dimensions are expanded to embrace a fourth, in time. The lighting's slow undulation arrests the attention and clarifies perception – each day the chairs guide our gaze in a new direction. Twenty years on, this creation by a 75 year-old artist, rather than receding into the annals of art history, like most of Cage's oeuvre, remains more innovative than much new work today.

The visual and musical work of John Cage will be featured in an exhibition at Inverleith House, 28 April – 8 July.

Victoria Miguel is a writer living in New York

dichotomy between colour and drawing in painting, I have always seen Yuskavage as primarily a colourist, and her recent paintings, shown downtown at David Zwirner, certainly give strong support for that understanding: the luminous mist that swathes the two blonde babes of 'Kingdom', 2005, with its astonishing transitions from pale yellow to pink, is more voluptuous than any mere body could be. But the drawings and other small works uptown at Zwirner & Wirth show that for Yuskavage, colour is only half the story. The fact that she even showed a couple of watercolours in grisaille – 'Brood', 2005 (a pregnant nude looking away past a foreground still life of fruit) and the older, self-explanatory 'One Girl Holding Another Girl's Leg', 1999 – could be taken as polemical: to employ a medium best loved for its ability to conjure brilliant colour and then leave out the colour makes a big point about colour being inessential.

Am I starting to sound like a formalist? Shouldn't I say a little more about the political or psychological implications of Yuskavage's imagery? Does her insistence on it over 15 years express conviction or merely habit? I'd say the female nude serves her the way colour does – and that just as she can create a sense of the richness of colour while using only grey, she could just as well evoke the feelings of emotional and physical unease that fascinate her with an apple. But that sort of indirection is not Yuskavage's style, and she's nothing if not true to herself.

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Madrid John Cage

LA CASA ENCENDIDA 24 NOV 2006 – 7 JAN 2007

Madrid's La Casa Encendida is a relatively new multidisciplinary space with an exhibitions programme featuring emerging visual artists in the four floors of galleries, and favouring contemporary music in the courtyard-cum-theatre. In November it mounted an exhibition of John Cage's installation, 'Essay', 1987, punctuated in mid-December with a week of performances, paying homage to the infamous inventor of genius, and giving substance to the historian's mantra; that the future is revealed through the past.

'Essay' takes the form of six chairs, which are positioned in new locations and new directions each day, along with an overhead grid containing 50 lights and 36 loud speakers. The locations of the chairs, as well as the placement of the lights, were decided using chance operations, a technique Cage developed in his compositional practice that enabled him to evade personal tastes and preferences. The 50 lights slowly and continuously change intensity throughout each day, and begin at a different point each morning, while 36 auto-reverse cassette decks ensure that the audio continues without any repetitions for the duration of the exhibition.

Surprisingly, the dense soundscape one encounters has a paradoxically lucid beginning; 'Essay' is short for 'Writings through the Essay: On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' by HD Thoreau. The words of Thoreau's text became the gamut of language for 'Essay'.

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