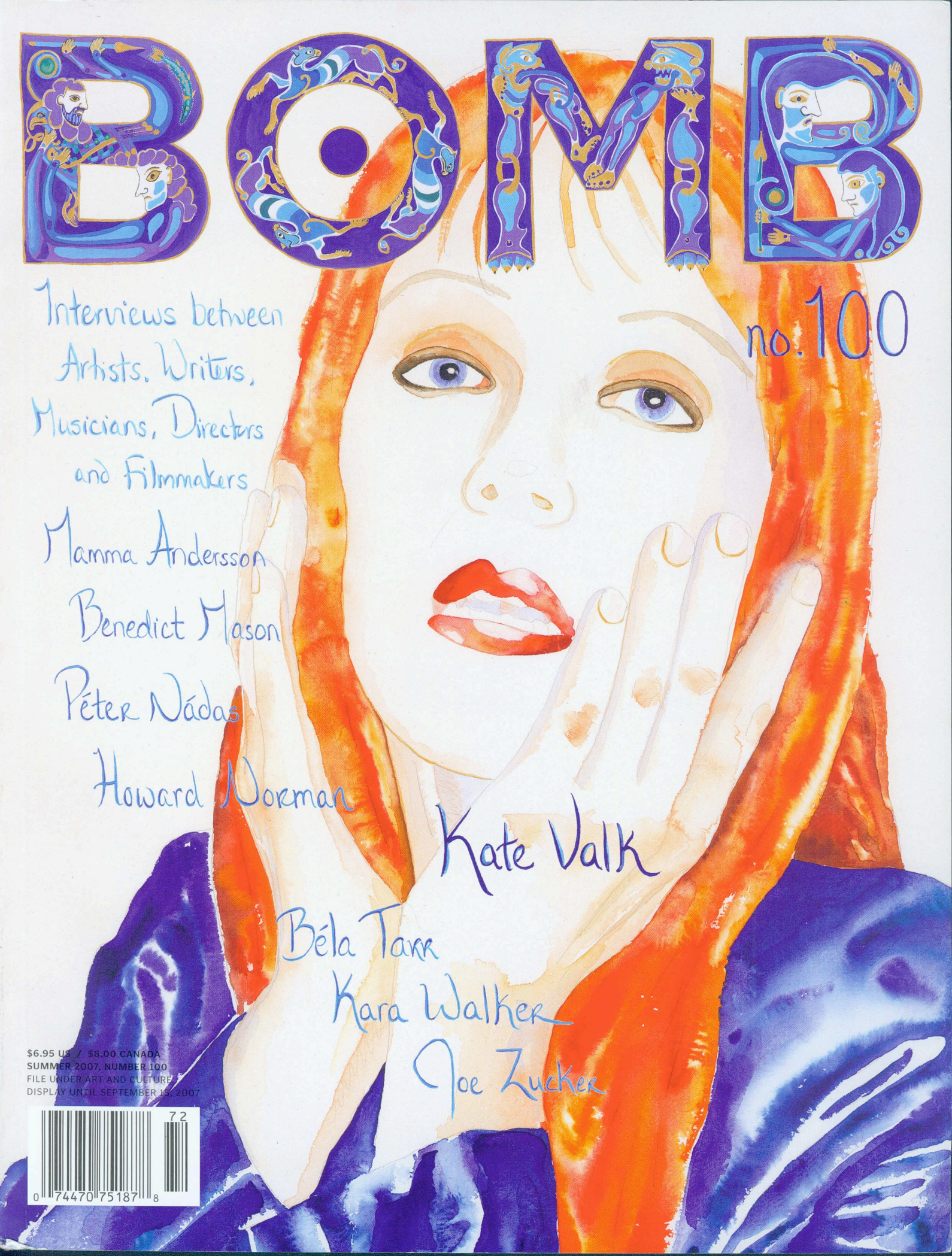

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JOE ZUCKER
by CHUCK CLOSE

The Practice + Theory series
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Joe Zucker has consistently for over four decades been one of America's most innovative artists. His paintings are personal, quirky, idiosyncratic, and often puzzling. His style is rooted in processes, some simple, others remarkably complex. His imagery most often relates in some way to the materials and processes (for example, cotton plantation imagery executed in cotton balls rolled in paint). He has made paintings that include the tools that made them integrated into the works themselves and illustrate the use of those tools as part of the imagery. He has made paintings in which the paint is not applied to canvas or any other ground, but literally floats in space—the medium purely being itself. Pouring, squeezing and manipulating paint, he fashions paintings so personal it would be impossible to imagine anyone else having made them. This is the definition of personal invention.

CHUCK CLOSE

I'm trying to remember when we first met. Was it in Minneapolis or New York?

JOE ZUCKER

It was New York. I moved here in 1968—

CC We came in '67.

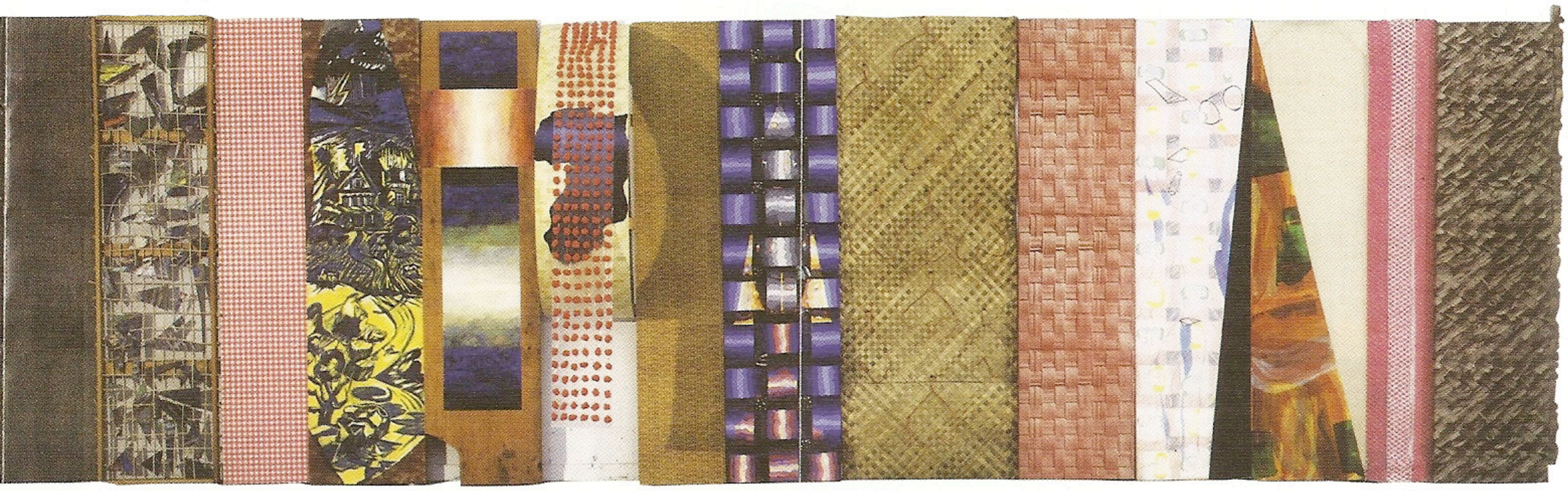
JZ **I called Richard Serra to get advice about a loft. I took one on Prince Street, and we must have met shortly afterward, through Bob Israel, because I remember going to your studio. And then you moved into our building.**

CC So here you are, a guy I ended up living in the same building with. We spent many years toiling in the vineyard of the School of Visual Arts together and shared other horrible teaching experiences (LAUGHTER) where we had to trick each other into going in the morning. When I first saw your work, you were doing paintings that were basically abstractions, rather plaid-like in their construction, with woven implications. Was that work you'd brought with you from Chicago?

JZ **In the '60s, when I was in school, I had an experience that many painting students have when facing a blank canvas. I didn't know what to put on it. But then I had this curious feeling: Why not make the weave of the canvas the subject of the painting? It had a kind of logical irony. I was making a representational painting of an abstract format and at the same time making a construction out of dyed fabric strips to represent the warp and weft of the canvas. In graduate school I had quite a few of these paintings, and they were getting a good deal of attention in Chicago. Around that time I ran into Jan Vandermark, the curator of the Walker Art Center, and he included me in *Twelve Chicago Painters*. That led to my being offered a teaching position at the Minneapolis School of Art, as it was called then.**

CC It's the Art Institute now.

JZ **Yes. That enabled me to graduate with a teaching job in hand. And I avoided a possible journey to the Mekong Delta, which I was very enthusiastic about! I liked the Art Institute. I had gone there since I was five years old. The museum school had enabled me to see masterpieces early on, and that really**



100-FOOT-LONG PAINTING ("TOSSED SALAD"), 1968–, MIXED MEDIA, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE: APPROX. 8' TALL, AND APPROX. 100' LONG, DEPENDING ON HOW ITS SEGMENTS ARE INSTALLED. ZUCKER TENDS TO ADD TO THE PAINTING EVERY TIME IT IS EXHIBITED. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID NOLAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; PAUL KASMIN GALLERY, NEW YORK; AND AUREL SCHEIBLER, BERLIN.

shaped my body of work. Seeing a Veronese one day, a de Kooning the next, Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*—it bred an appreciation for different physical natures of painting. It undoubtedly influenced the eclectic nature of my work, which is experiential rather than aesthetic; it comes from a natural experience of loving painting rather than a theoretic disposition.

CC I can't imagine what it was like as a kid to have access to work like that. I was out in the state of Washington with a magnifying glass looking at black-and-white reproductions of those same paintings in *ARTnews*, trying to figure out what color they might be. It had to have been an amazing experience for you. But there are so many facets to you. You grew up in a pretty rough area of town.

JZ **I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a racially changing neighborhood where every day there was up-to-the-minute news about what houses had sold and what block the African Americans were moving into. It was like growing up with one of those giant maps of WWII, where the positions of the Allies and the Axis were constantly updated. It was a tough neighborhood. I played basketball in a high school that had the first 24-hour police surveillance in the city of Chicago. I had black teammates, who were my friends.**

CC You were virtually the only white kid on the team.

JZ **There were three or four white guys on the varsity team.**

CC You told me it looked like you had the wrong uniform on. (LAUGHTER)

JZ **People don't realize that in Chicago the different areas were like big communities in their own right. I remember playing at Gage Park High School, where the fans were yelling at my teammates, "Hey, Zulu, where's your spear?"**

CC There aren't many artists who were real athletes. You actually got a basketball scholarship to college.

JZ **I chose not to take any of the offers I got, which was foolish. For instance, I was offered a four-year scholarship to the Illinois Institute of Technology, which was the Bauhaus of America. I did go play briefly at Miami of Ohio, but a number of things led me back to the Art Institute after two years. It was always calling. I put basketball and athletics on the back burner for a long time. I played a little when I lived in New York—there was a pretty savage artists' game—but I wasn't all that interested in sports at that time.**

CC And now everybody who knows you knows how passionate you are about the Bridgehampton Killer Bees. You are one of the coaches for the virtually all-black basketball team, where just about every male in the school plays on the team.

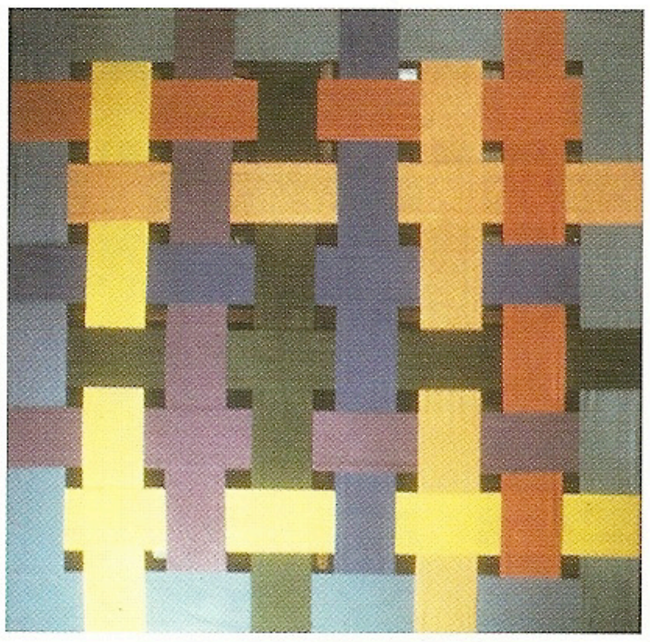
JZ **In 1986 they had a very dominant team and won the state championship. I started following the games, and then I started scouting. I raised money. Five or six years ago I started doing bench coaching and then was involved with the kids.**

There's a language that we understand in the world of painting, a language among the community of people who practice art at a certain level. When you're involved intensely in the making of art, certain key expressions are common to that group, and it's the same with basketball. You really have to know what a one-three-one half-court press is, how that differs from a box-and-one, or a triangle-and-two, or a flex offense. So in a strange way it's a part of my character, along with my passion for fishing, which also has a specific language.

CC I wanted to talk to you about the connection between rule-based art and game rules. There's certainly a game-like aspect to your work. We've spent many years talking about the rules we construct for ourselves—you were going to use the same colors in all of those mosaic paintings. . . .

JZ **There's undoubtedly a connection. The hardest thing to teach high-school-age kids who play basketball is the 32-minute frame set time frame. There's no room for errors and corrections. People think that in painting you can make fifty million mistakes because there's no finite conclusion. But I approach my body of work as a series of prob-**

JOE ZUCKER



JOE'S PAINTING #100, 1965,
WOVEN CLOTH STRIPS, 84 × 84″

FIVE MOSAICS #5:
THE BETRAYAL & CHRIST DIVIDING
THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS, 1972,
COTTON, ACRYLIC, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS,
60 × 60″

HELP ME OUTA HERE!, 1977,
ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS,
5 × 8′

lems that are being solved within a certain framework. Some people think I love sailing ships, but for me they are just part of a visual strategy: they are wood and canvas, as are the stretcher bars and canvas painting surface. I have diversity in my work, but I also have control of it. I rarely paint things that I *like*. This doesn't mean that some of the paintings may not be ebullient or ingratiating to the viewer. Responding to your question: for

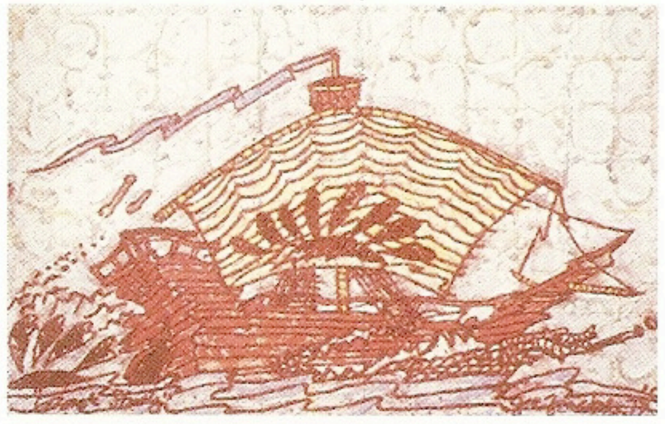
JZ **instance, my paintings about slavery in the South relate to my experience growing up in a racially turbulent Chicago. The subjects were bales of cotton, paddle wheelers, slaves wheeling bales of cotton, plantations. The paintings were made out of cotton balls. This is the way to construct a painting. If you're going to make a painting about pain, suffering, and racism, you might as well make the *object* of the racism the *tools* with which you make the painting. I wasn't trying to find the *style* of oppression; I was trying to advance my statement beyond the level of Picasso's dilemma of painting *Guernica* in a synthetic Cubist style.**

CC We used to talk about the history of art becoming the history of slide shows. You used to call it "art in the dark." We've always been really interested in the physicality of painting. What you have on a slide or reproduction is iconography, so that's what everybody fixates on. You've got cotton or plantation imagery or the old paddle wheelers. It reminds me of what Don DeLillo said about Hemingway, that if you think Hemingway is about bullfights, you don't understand what makes him a great writer. His use of the words *the* and *and* is more important than any of the bullfights, and that's part of the struggle. In the late '60s, there was a certain sense of belief in process, the idea that if you got involved in process and went someplace with it, it would free you from the buffeting winds of style. All of us who were in what became SoHo—that generation that includes Jennifer Bartlett, Elizabeth Murray, Richard Serra—were nurtured by the same things. We were all in this primordial ooze. We crawled ashore and went our different directions, but behind it all was a thing about *building* a painting rather than painting it, this belief in signing on for some kind of activity, which many people could see as almost mindless—rolling cotton balls all day long—as a way to comment on the very act of making paintings.

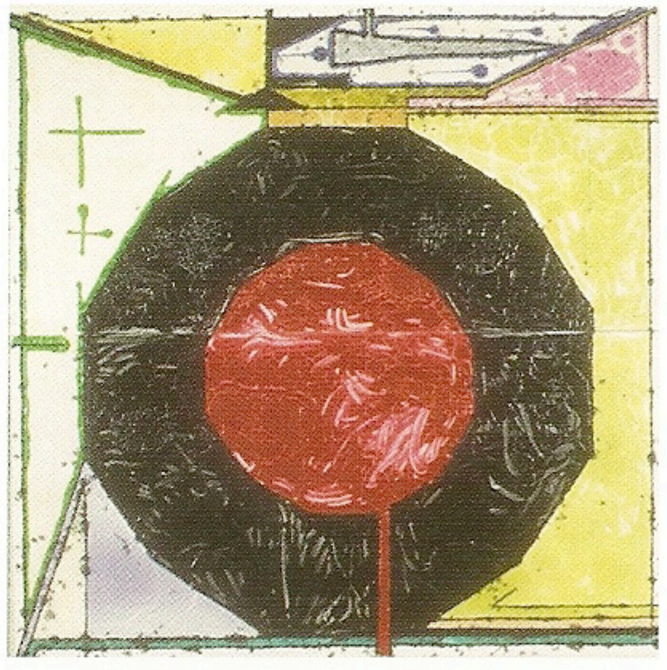
I want the painting to have a logic of its own. I got into the process when I bought the modernist myth. Van Gogh used the handle end of the brush as a tool, and I bought into that myth, that the handle of the brush is as important a tool in painting as the bristles are. Many of my paintings are their own tools. A perfect example is the crate paintings, in which crates are not only the containers for the painting but also a way of constructing a diptych that has a logic unto itself. The interior of the crate is divided into sections not unlike a conventional artist's paint box. But whereas in a conventional paint box the compartments would contain the tools of painting, in the crate paintings the sections are filled with paint, and the crate serves as the brush, because depending on how it is tilted while the paint is poured in, it determines the painting surface. The painting also functions as storage for itself. The notion of a crated painting reflects to me the moment in history where storage is a part of our culture—videos, DNA, cryogenics, hard drives—and, in the art world, open storage: for example, at Dia:Beacon, which is neither an exhibition nor storage, or it is both.

I regard my work as conceptual and literal rather than expressive. Therefore I have a fear of writer's block rather than a fear of creating pictorial imagery. I concern myself with continuing a logical connection from one diverse style to the next.

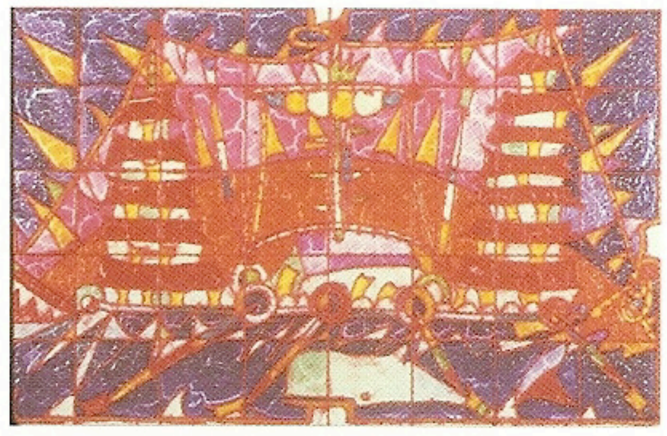
CC Well, that's where the rubber meets the road, because the style is embedded in the process. I've always said,



CHINESE JUNK, 1977, ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS, 5 × 8′.



PENTAGON, 1980, ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS, 8 × 8′.



CAPTAIN MURANO'S D'HOW, 1980, ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS, 60 × 90″.

inspiration is for amateurs; the rest of us just get busy and go to work—and out of the activity all kinds of things occur to you. You mentioned Ad Reinhardt, who was extremely important for me, because he made the choice *not* to do something a positive decision. You may not know what you want to do, but you know what you *don't* want to do. If you start with limitations, you can move. Back to your wonderful paintings with the rope that stretched across big wooden stretchers in various angles. Just stacking paint on the rope, you eventually closed the entire surface off with no canvas whatsoever. It was paint held in space. You back yourself into that particular corner, but when you do, no one else's answers are going to fit. You have to figure out what the hell you're doing yourself. That's what makes your work so personal.

JZ **It has been perceived that I have been working on one painting continuously since 1968: *Tossed Salad*, a 100-foot-long painting that I have gone back to over the years and extracted from. *Tossed Salad* comprises multiple panels with no consistent style but a grid format that came out of my weave paintings. The images were executed in many different processes, and it has survived as a dictionary from which I have abstracted formats for subsequent works.**

CC A great painting that I love seeing every time you haul that sucker out again. One of the panels had the very first cotton ball stuck on it.

JZ **That's right.**

CC And one area was wood-burned. When was the last time you saw a work of art by a serious artist that was made with a wood-burning kit?

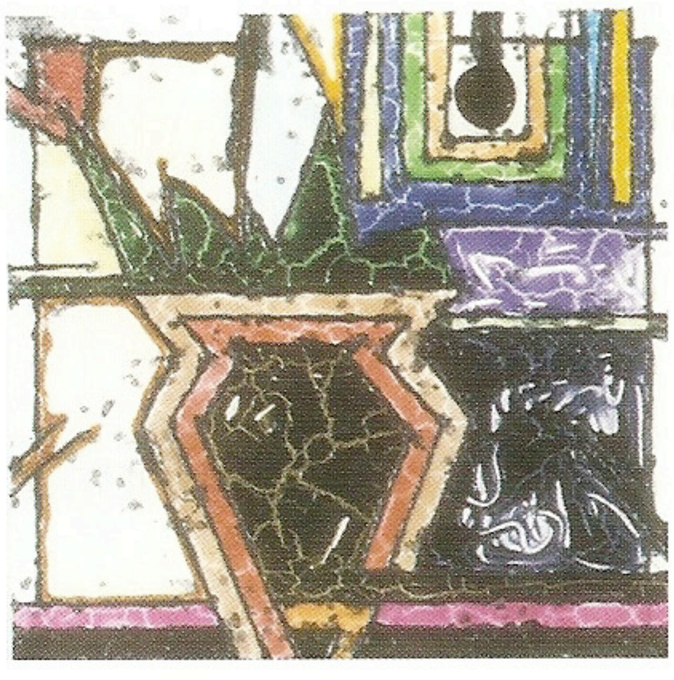
JZ **Using diverse tools cancels out the affectation of talent, of the hand. This is something you and I have spent a lot of time doing, removing the taboo of talent. To create insistence in which one's personal skill diminishes by processing a result that might be an eccentric approach to constructing a painting. It's a way of avoiding the issues of the realist paradox while we're abstracting.**

CC This is the thing that's interesting. Look at Sol LeWitt, people who were there before us staking out a claim for drawings that make themselves. Think about our work, and Jennifer Bartlett's work, for instance—we all three were trying to apply something that has absolutely been the domain of abstraction. A configuration at a time when not only was painting dead, but figurative painting was deader then anything. We were trying to find a truly modernist approach to representation and we ended up borrowing some of the abstract systems. There was an odd shotgun marriage in a sense, but it was really fruitful.

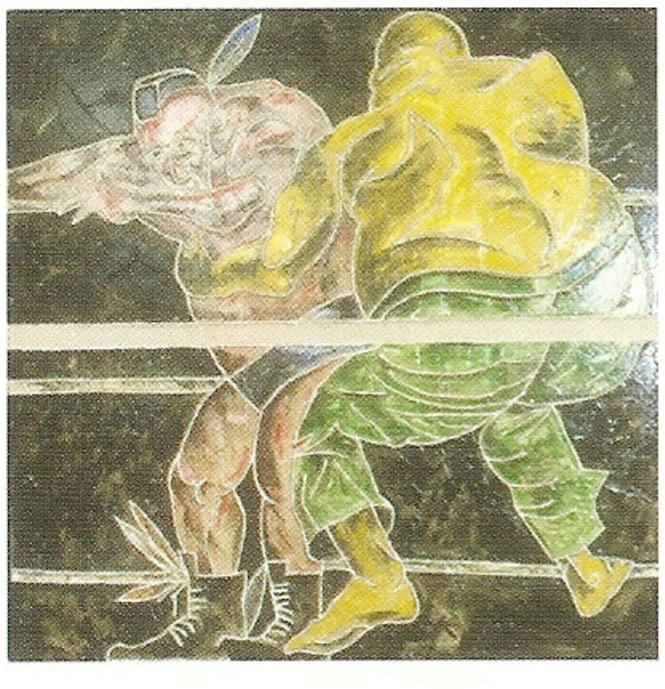
JZ **I used different materials to discuss different political ideas, which not only has something to do with the subjects but sometimes affected the scale of the paintings as well as the balance between abstraction and figuration. One of the best examples of this is the Ponce de Leon series, a group of paintings about the Spanish explorer's adventures in Florida. The tinfoil in the painting was a metaphor for the armor the Spanish conquistadors wore. The series was not just an epic tale of their adventure but also a journey between abstraction and representation. The tinfoil was a collage element that gave the paintings an objectlike identity and also was a humorous pun that kept the paintings from becoming preachy.**

In a lot of things that I do, the imagery is determined by the material, what the painting is made out of, or the process. This enables me to keep, as you were saying earlier, a kind of framework for the change of style that often occurs in my work with very different-looking kinds of objects.

CC There is always a metaphorical comment on the nature of work itself. I am thinking of those almost stick figures in which there were squeegees stuck on the ends of dowels to form the arms and legs. Each of these squee-



SPRINKLING CAN(S), 1980,
ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS,
36 × 36″



DR. KAWABATA VS. JAY STRONGBOW, 1981,
ACRYLIC, COTTON, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS,
99 × 99½″

PONCE DE LEON DUELS SEMINOLE CHIEF MISHAGOSH, 1983,
ACRYLIC, ALUMINUM FOIL, AND RHOPLEX ON CANVAS,
108 × 144″

gees would push paint somewhere, which is of course what a painter does. A painter pushes paint. They stood for the activity that you were engaged in while you were making them, which is three layers removed from imagery, but totally transparent. You understand that it is about a painting making itself.

JZ **Nobody ever wrote about them in this context. The frames moved into the canvas to form the body and at the ends of the squeegees there were gloves, hats, ski masks, and socks, which seemed odd to me at a time when people were talking about the shape or the perimeter of the canvas being the mantra of modernist painting. They were trying to find the edge, but—**

CC You moved the edge in.

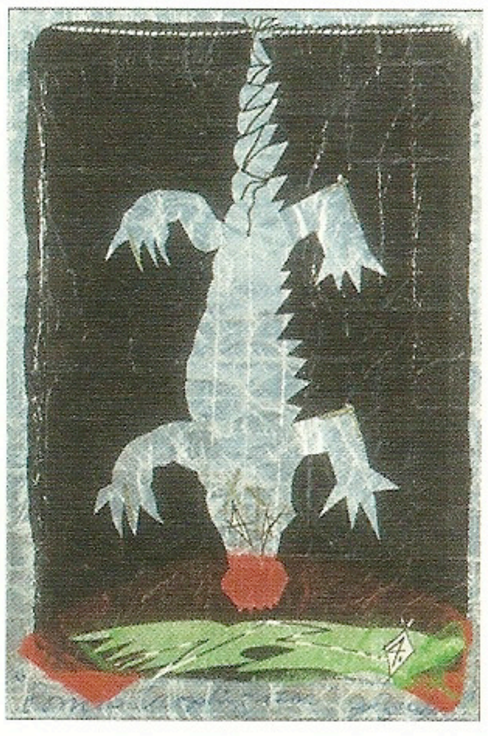
JZ **The paintings you are referring to are the Joseph Smith series. Joseph Smith was the father of the Mormon Church. Mormonism is a modern religion, and these paintings are about modernist strategy. In their stiffness and gestural quality, they present Joseph Smith in a frozen fascistic pose. If you take the gloves and hats and socks off the dowels, you remove the image of the figure, leaving a process-oriented abstract painting. The brush-limbs are attached to the pieces of the frame. The dowels that the gloves, socks, and hat are attached to are part of the frame, and they push large amounts of paint into the center of the canvas, which forms the body of Joseph Smith. Instead of the perimeter of the canvas defining the limits of the painting, as in current modernist series, some of the frame helps paint the painting itself, therefore having a dual role as a brush and boundary.**

CC Your work is always about the physicality of the paint and what it can stack up to make. That's your work's common denominator. You gave it its *own* materiality that was more paintlike than I have ever seen paint used. It wasn't used to make something else, it was itself. Using a material in a way that calls attention to its materiality while transcending that materiality and becoming an image, is pretty complex.

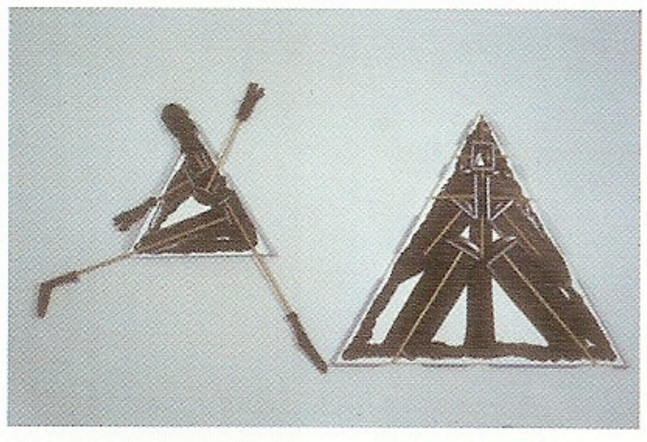
JZ **As in your work, these things touch on the craft of painting. I still deal with a tactile sensibility. I guess I am a sensualist.**

CC Craft, the dreaded C-word. There is no more despised or suspect term than *craft*, yet we know that paintings don't just happen. Every painting in the world was made with a process; it's just the role it plays and the path you take. And I do want to say, on the record, that coming up in the '60s with you, living in the same building, going to school to teach visual arts together, hanging out in the bars talking about art . . . There is no greater influence on the way I think about painting, and no person who played a more important role in the formative period of my work and changed my mind about how paintings can and should be made than you. I just am so grateful that I knew you then and that you were part of my everyday working life. It was great to go down and see what you were doing and then have you come upstairs and see what I was doing. That was such an interesting, pluralistic time. So many different things were going on at once; it was such a healthy art world. I have a theory: if you look at the artists of the '60s or the artists of the '80s, you have superstars who had to mature in the white-hot glare of the spotlight. Our generation was given time to make our work, and we were successful enough to get by. It can be said that our generation is making some of its best work right now, 40 years later. There was something really special about the conditions that produced us, how we manage to reinvent ourselves, to keep kicking new doors open. That protected us in a way that nurtured us and allowed us to continue. It's really a unique generation in American art.

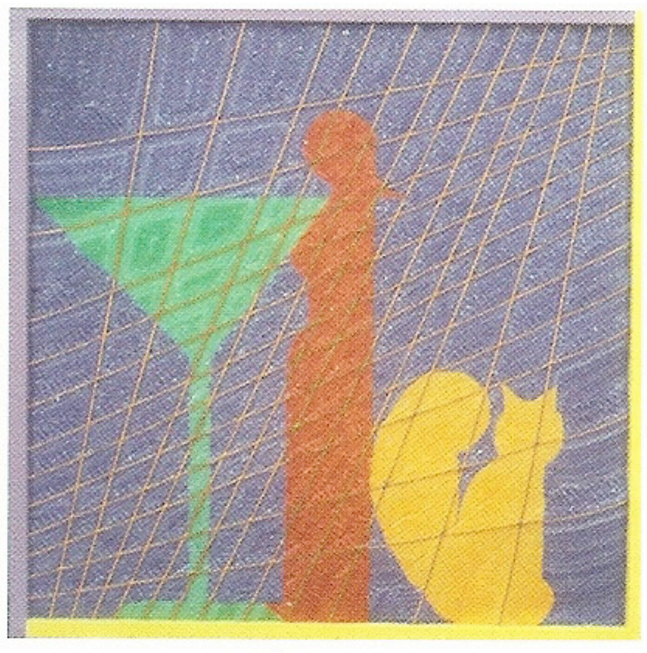
JZ **Well, I think because of the war in Vietnam, the change in the political landscape in America, artists were a lot closer to a collective consciousness of where we stood as artists.**



PONCE DE LEON'S TROPHIGATOR, 1983,
ACRYLIC, RHOPLEX, AND FOIL
ON CANVAS, 48 × 32″



PORTRAITS OF JOSEPH SMITH, 1984,
ACRYLIC, ENAMEL, AND WOOD ON CANVAS,
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE.



RAVENSWOOD SERIES:
4BRUSHBRITTA, 1989,
ACRYLIC, SASHCORD, AND WOOD,
89½ × 89½″

CC Absolutely. And every institution was being re-examined. Faith in any institution, or in *anything*, was up for grabs.

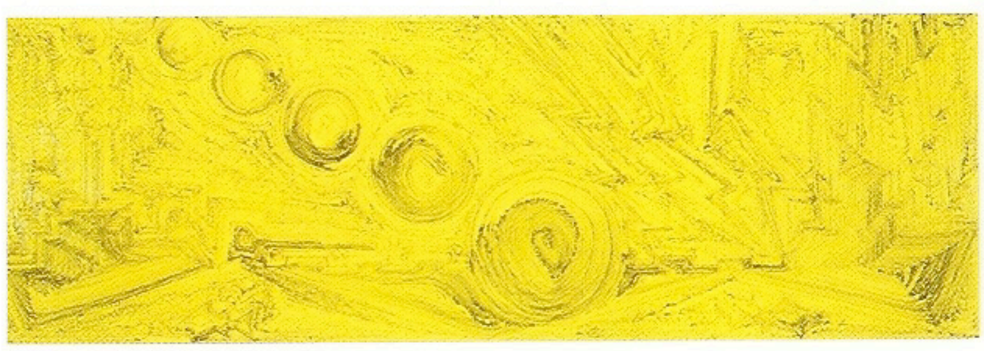
JZ **We asked the museums where they stood on the war in Vietnam. At that time nobody was criticizing the museums for what they were doing with contemporary art: Why aren't there any mid-career shows? Why don't they do this or that for artists? Why is the museum now a monument to corporate and big business? That's the language of today. I remember a demonstration that was attended by artists demanding that the Metropolitan Museum of Art take a position on the war in Vietnam. Carl Andre climbed the steps to the entrance in *costume bleu* with a manifesto in his fist. The museum responded by sending out a tea trolley on which sat a large tea service that probably belonged to Marie Antoinette. It was like, "Let them drink tea." Chuck, it seems to me for some strange reason *because* we were at this demonstration, that you and I and Marcia Tucker were accused of being involved in a plot to blow up the Met. How ironic that we are now both in its collection and you had a show there recently.**

CC That was not a great careerist strategy, biting the hand that fed us. (LAUGHTER) And the women's movement, it hit us like a ton of bricks around '72 or '73. Women had always made up more than 50 percent of the college graduates, but they then had the right to play on the same field. I'll tell you, that's one of the things that really made a difference. Given how macho the Abstract Expressionist generation was and what a lot of sculptors were doing with tonnage—you couldn't make a work of art as a sculptor unless it required earth-moving equipment. We were about as non-macho as we could be, interested in craft, things that are almost like "women's work." I just recently realized the important role my grandmother played in my life. Always with her busy hands making patchwork quilts, crocheting, and knitting—the results of which looked just like the paintings I make. It does seem so different from a lot of what the previous generations, the male artists, had wrapped themselves in.

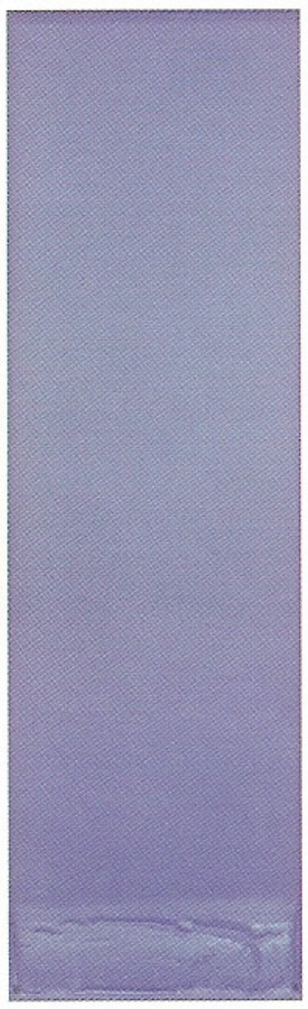
JZ **Craft is part of American culture, like the blues. One of my first series of paintings was about the invention of the cotton gin and the life of Eli Whitney. One of the paintings depicts a roll of cotton duck canvas. Another one depicts Eli Whitney's bride's wedding dress, so in the same series I was dealing with the manufacture of the raw surface artists painted on and how cotton also was used to make dresses and decorative objects. In fact these paintings themselves looked like big doilies, which is not so far from a patchwork quilt. The series referred to both high and low art.**

CC Your studio looked more like a David's Cookies outlet than an artist's studio. Huge sheets of cotton balls that you were manufacturing. There you were, rolling these balls, day in and day out, in arrays of colors. It was pretty anachronistic, given where art had been and what was going on.

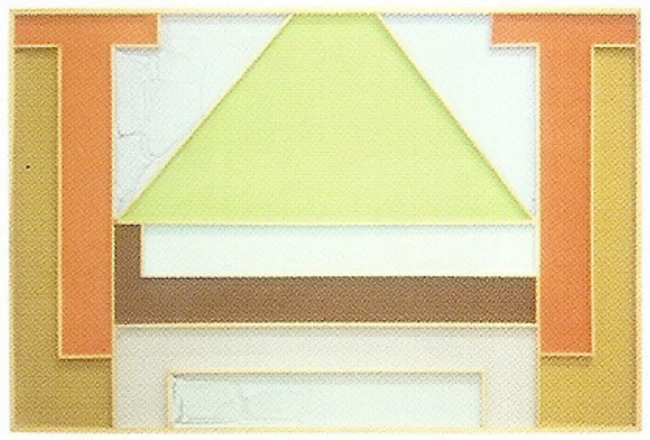
JZ **In the end a lot of it comes down to dealing with what you have to say. I had a show in Los Angeles last year of some drawings of mine from the '70s, and the dealer sent me images of the ones he was going to show. They were sarcastic, funny; some of them were nasty, kind of cheap shots. I thought, I can't let this happen. I started to panic—then I didn't. Six months later I'm up at Yale doing a graduate painting seminar. This young man was having some trouble with his work, saying it didn't feel right. I told him the story. I said, "I freaked out because these old drawings were so outrageous." But you are what you are. The lesson I learned was that they were reflections of how I felt, what I had to do, and finally they became part of the public domain. People wanted them; they must have hit a nerve. I guess I was trying to tell the student not to hold back.**



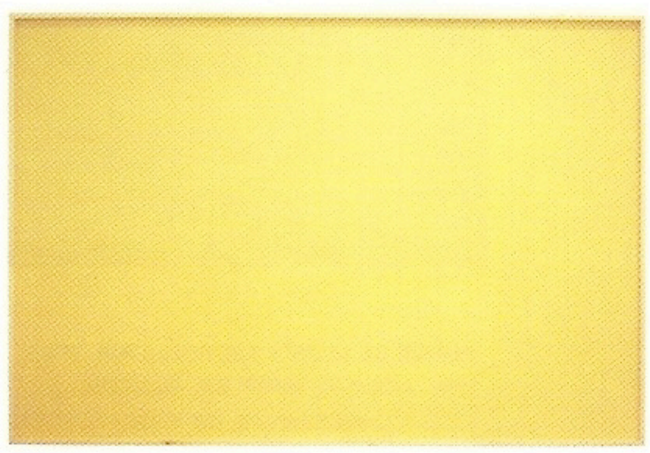
SASKATOON, 1998,
ACRYLIC, 4 × 12″



JOE'S LAKE #9, 2000,
ACRYLIC, 75 × 24″



VESUVIUS (1) BOX, 2003, ACRYLIC, CANVAS,
AND WOOD, 48 × 60″



VESUVIUS (2) LID, 2003, ACRYLIC, CANVAS,
AND WOOD, 49 ½ × 61 ½″

CC The ones where you used the pinking shears?

JZ **No, these were cartoons of pirates, and poems about criticism.**

CC I think that among a lot of younger artists there's a return to an ambition *for* painting. The slacker generation seems to have subsided, and people are really trying to learn how to make paintings and are willing to stay there long enough to figure that out. Also, a lot of people are doing labor-intensive work: James Siena, Tara Donovan. People who are interested in how you build something, or how you make an apparition.

JZ **Labor-intensive art has been reduced not by the lack of interest in Zen philosophy but by the computer.**

CC There's a tendency also to look back on a sanitized art history in which everything seems so clear. But look at Eva Hesse's diaries. It's surprising who she hung out with, whose openings she went to, who she found played a role in her work and she in theirs. There's that tendency to see the art world in the Old Testament sense: so-and-so begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so, who begat so-and-so. But it just doesn't happen like that. Influences come from out of left field. People are grouped together according to shared concerns, but those are not necessarily the most important aspects of someone's work, and they can obscure what makes their work interesting and different.

JZ **Younger artists have a great advantage that we didn't have. The towering figure of Picasso was such a huge impediment in the late '50s and early '60s.**

CC Did you see that horrible *Picasso and American Art* show at the Whitney last year? Oh, my God. It started out with 10 of the worst Max Webers you've ever seen. Precisely what you're talking about: the *oppressive* weight of Picasso as a hero, role model, mystic mainspring, or whatever. The more decades that we get away from that, the better off the art world is.

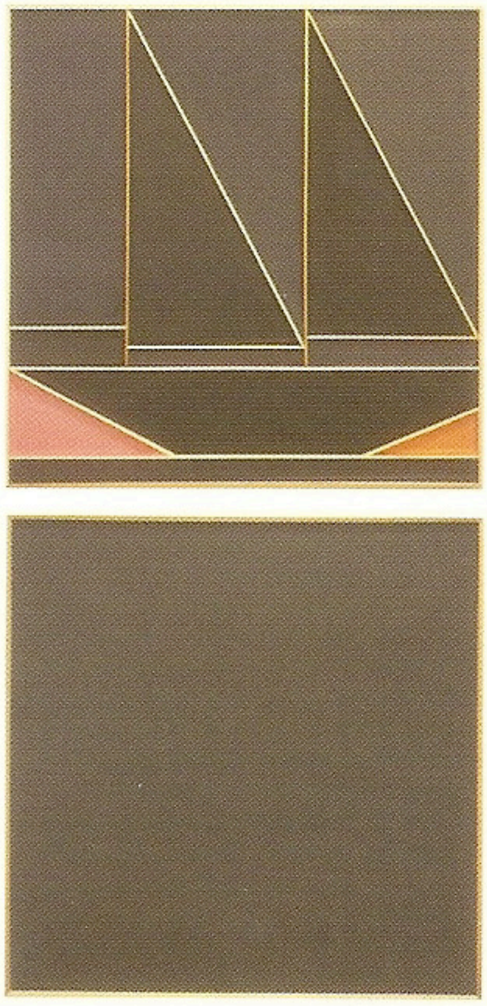
JZ **At the Art Institute I studied painting with Paul Weigart, an elderly gentleman, who had been a student of Kandinsky. I remember him facing me with a large art history book featuring *Night Fishing at Antibes*, and a postcard from Kandinsky to Weigart fell out and landed on the floor. Weigart did not believe in painting with the light on in the studio. Neither did he believe in having much paint on the brush, but in scumbling: the paint was thin and then rubbed into the canvas. At 4 PM in Chicago in the winter, it was dark, and I remember the sound of the filbert brushes scraping lightly sized canvases. The sound was like the sound of invading locusts. It seemed to be all about tinting—usually brown. I believe the ultimate goal was to develop a School of Paris style.**

CC When you were teaching at the School of Visual Arts, you gave problems where they had to design the tool with which to make the painting.

JZ **I wanted each student to make a hypothetical improvement to a historical painting. The assignment was, "Take this painting home, make some aesthetic adjustments on it, bring it back with a proposition that you've made this a better painting."** (LAUGHTER) **The first kid shows up with a copy of the famous van Gogh self-portrait where he's cut his ear off. This guy, of course, had carefully repainted the ear onto Van Gogh's head. I just threw up my hands; that was it for me. It said it all, about 1970 at SVA.**

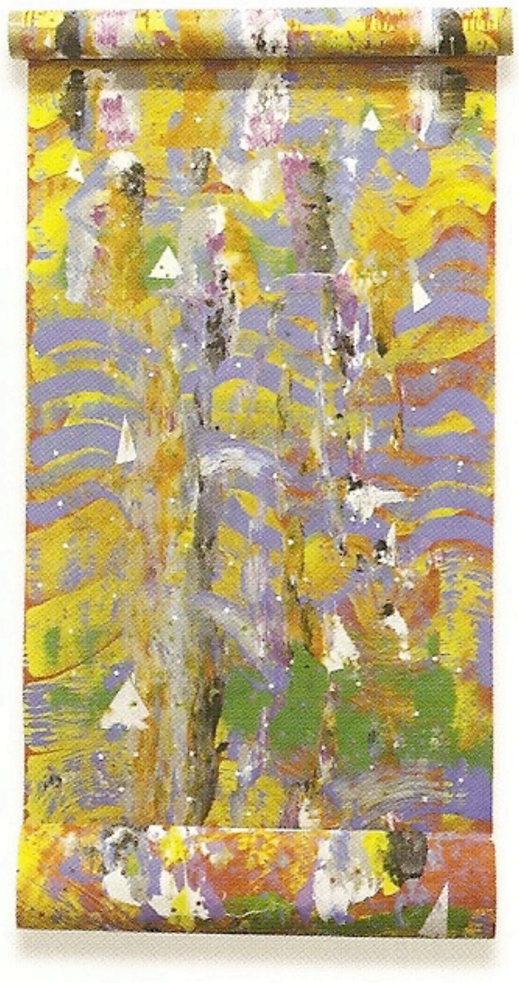
CC I bet the most important class that they had was "Survivor," where you brought a plumber in one week and an electrician in the next so you could learn how to fix up your own loft. (LAUGHTER) So, what are you doing right now?

JZ **I am working on an extension of the crate painting**

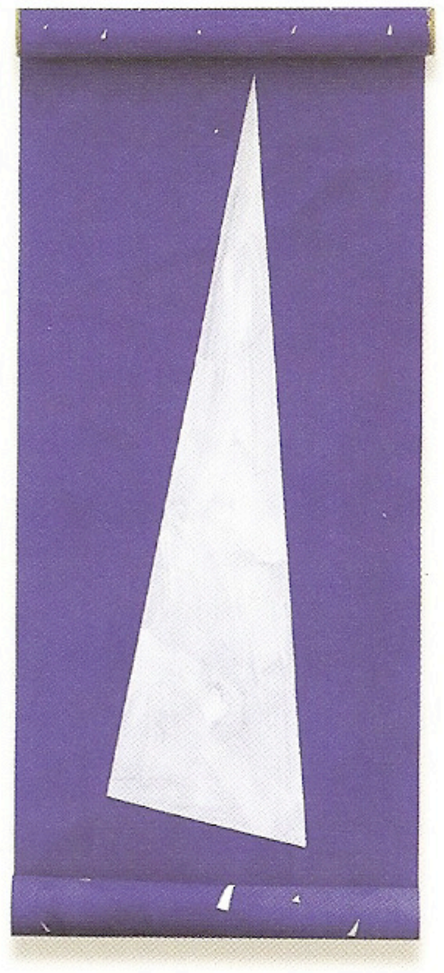


SLOOP (1) BOX, 2003, ACRYLIC, CANVAS, AND WOOD, 48 × 48″

SLOOP (2) LID, 2003, ACRYLIC, CANVAS, AND WOOD, 49 ½ × 49 ½″



UNTITLED, 2006, LATEX ENAMEL ON PAPER WITH CARDBOARD ROLL, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE.



UNTITLED, 2006, LATEX ENAMEL ON PAPER WITH CARDBOARD ROLL, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE.

series. The new paintings are in essence scrolls, or rolled-up canvases. The subject of the paintings is furled sails. The roll, or scroll, provides a large amount of surface. The ones that I'm working on now are all seascapes, essentially sail imagery. So the subject fits the process. The scroll pieces also enable me to deal with an object as a Torah-like image, freestanding, 40 to 60 feet.

CC Is there anything on that roll inside? Do you put imagery on it and then roll it up, so that nobody sees it?

JZ **No, but the paintings are two-sided. Where you roll the scroll, the backs of the paintings become the front. Let's say it's a painting of the water, and what would be the wave at the bottom curves and becomes landscape. The back of the painting is houses, and the front of the painting is ships. So now what I'm doing is organizing the front and the back so there's a beautiful structural relationship between the two of them.**

CC Are you going to exhibit them in the middle of the room so you can see both sides?

JZ **I'm going to let people look inside them, like a book, and with some others, I'm going to flip my roll and probably curl and hang it. I just like that the back moves to the front—there's a strange structural relationship, like in the box paintings where the paint is tilted so it goes from the back of the picture to the front. I haven't really figured all of this out. It's a very mild and flexible system in terms of scale, tolerance, things like that.**

CC I find the idea of the roll of canvas and the way it relates to a Torah scroll really interesting: hidden information; a secret language that only the initiated understand—all of this and your own background as a Jew interest me. I was surprised when I went to Sol LeWitt's funeral in his hometown of Chester, Connecticut, this weekend. I hadn't realized that the synagogue where his funeral was held was designed by Sol LeWitt himself. It was like being inside a Sol LeWitt sculpture. The Torah doors were a multicolored Jewish star that opened in the middle to reveal the Torah chamber. I was unaware of Sol's involvement beyond cultural Jewishness—going on to real connectedness with the religion itself. Is there anything like this at work with your roll/scroll painting project?

JZ **The answer is yes. While growing up in Chicago my family and I attended Sinai Temple, a reformed Jewish congregation on the South Side. I'm well aware of the Torah's role—no pun intended—in the Jewish religion. On two previous occasions I have referred to my connection to Judaism: first in a '70s painting called *St. Sinai*, and second, in my narrative series about the life of Ponce De Leon, which includes a fictitious Seminole chief called Mishagosh, an often-used Yiddish expression. The Ponce series comprises 53 paintings of various scale that tell a story of a trip from figuration to abstraction. The Torah or small paintings do a similar thing, but the imagery unfolds in a much more seamless way. Also, as in the Torah, it gives the viewer the opportunity to read or see an area of choice. This is the first complete series of paintings that has a strong reference to my religious background.**