



ROBERT STANLEY

It's a Little Late to be Early

UNCLE FREDDY'S GALLERY ° HAMMOND, INDIANA ° FEBRUARY 7 - MARCH 6, 2004

Introduction

This exhibition and its catalog essay are about dialog.

There is the dialog of the artist between himself, the world around him, and influences of the art scene. Art is created in the space between the artist and the world.

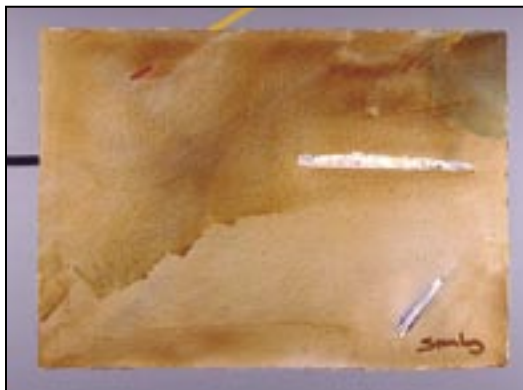
Then there is the dialog, represented by the symbol below ($\{—$), where the curator (Gregg Hertzlieb of the Brauer Museum) “speaks” and the artist “responds.” This dialog represents the artist’s hope that everyone feels free to tell him, and anyone else, what they see and think when they look at the artworks. Ideally, this dialog would go back and forth many times

The title of the exhibit, “It’s a Little Late to be Early,” reflects on the dictums of the art establishment in 2004.

Tom Torluemke curated the exhibit.

dialog {—

Robert Stanley's paintings present open fields that breathe with the space and atmosphere of the dunescapes that lie not far from the Stanley home in Beverly Shores, Indiana. While his paintings are by no means literal portraits of this landscape, they one of lightly scumbled of sand that quietly shift as glide in from the vastness Lake Michigan. Sometimes day, the lines that separate sands, calm lake surface, and seem to disappear, so that themselves peering into an mist that seems both infinite and near enough to touch.



Coming and Going
acrylic 36 x 48 in.

punctuating these areas of sand and haze are solitary logs, sailboats, birds, dogs, trash cans, or items discarded on the beach that stand out, isolated, as reminders of the tangible world of objects. Viewers' eyes lock on to these objects in an effort to establish

remind stretches breezes that is on a hazy the beach overcast sky viewers find expanse of in its depth Frequently

"Field" is what I call the open spaces in my work that sometimes others call "background." Gregg Hertzlieb sees this vastness as important; and also sees that I am influenced by nature. I'm not just affected by Lake Michigan; nature's first influence on me was the rolling fields of southwestern Ohio. Every place I've been since has moved me.

some sense of context, scale, or place in the face of a void that enigmatically confronts them.

The landscape references mentioned above may relate directly to Stanley's inspirations and observations, or they may operate subconsciously as the artist approaches his canvases; the possibility exists, of course, that such real-life scenes play no part in Stanley's creative process. Perhaps the description of the protean dunes landscape is offered more for viewers' and readers' benefit as a metaphor from the natural world to help them comprehend the arenas in which Stanley combines chosen symbols, chosen represented forms to communicate his themes. Whatever the case, amid the colored grounds of his paintings (which, with their active textures, are satisfying to view in themselves and are by no means background tones), Stanley's symbolic subjects grab viewers' attention, urging them to forge relationships not only among these isolated



Comments
acrylic 36 x 48 in.

I believe, somewhat against current art trends, that Art should be rich, having several levels. These "metaphors" are in both the subject matter (hill, hip, rise of music, rise of emotion) and the form (colors, technique, composition).

When I make something, I hope, unsure, that some of what I'm thinking and feeling gets through to people. Even though I know every person will see it in his own way, I still hope for understanding. To have someone feel what I feel about representation is a pleasant jolt.

subjects, but also between the subjects and the pictures' edges, overall color schemes, and overall gestural approaches.

A key word to keep in mind when considering Stanley's art is representation. His work seems to address the tension that can occur between forms that are realistically or illusionistically rendered and abstract passages that either refer to exclusively to the language of art and art-making or provide the barest hints of recognizable shapes. Stanley sets up a dialogue between observation and invention, realism and abstraction that grows into a lively, even stormy exchange. Viewers find themselves wondering about the fundamental aims and impulses behind the act of painting. On the one hand, artists choose to depict or transcribe visually-appealing observed scenes and subjects that have metaphorical potential for the artist to express notions that may well lie beyond the potential of clear verbal articulation. On the other hand, artists delight in the nonobjective language of mark-making, in effect letting the characteristics and qualities of the materials serve as metaphors for themselves (and even communicating the state of mind of the artist-- letting the materials' appearances on the pictures' surfaces become metaphors for the artists' desires to manifest visually particular emotions or simply ways of feeling). Representation, then, becomes enormously complex as an overall concept. Stanley gives viewers items to look at that are certainly

I do delight in the making of the mark. The gesture itself, the feel of the surface transmitted through the brush, even the sound and smell of brush strokes give me joy. I wonder if this might be somewhat like a musician's delight in sound as well as melody.

recognizable (although even those items are abstracted or stylized at times in ways that refer to modern art's historical movements too numerous and varied to discuss here), but the recognition that takes place is only one of the perceptual activities that can be engaged in within the works. Or, more specifically, the recognition deals with the exterior world; a glimpse into interior, subconscious, or intellectual worlds is also available for the dedicated viewer.

One painting that well exemplifies the multifaceted, multi-leveled nature of Stanley's endeavors is *Seeing*. This acrylic painting with collage shows a running bull and a flying bird, definitely things that the artist or any person either has seen before or can



Seeing
acrylic and collage 36 x 48 in.

see during the course of daily life. In addition, however, by juxtaposing and placing these recognizable forms among non-referential marks and areas of tonal variety and gesture, Stanley seems to refer to artistic seeing in which the artist internalizes subjects, internalizes his activity to get closer to an intensely personal understanding of what can only be described as some sort of fundamental or essential nature. Seeing can

*Seeing in new and ambiguous contexts,
still within Nature's order and chaos, is
vital for me.*

be a sensory activity, but it can also be a form of feeling that gives rise to the impulse to create. The use of collage further speaks to the many aspects that the notion of seeing can take because pictorial components are removed from one often prosaic context and placed into another that takes advantage of the collaged item's perceived metaphorical value. The artist sees the collaged materials (in the sense of visual perception), but he also "sees" the materials (in the sense of a mysterious inner appreciation) and integrates the materials into his work, thereby challenging the viewer to reconcile old and new contexts. A collaged item originating from the artist's own body of work further adds complexity to the mix, leading one to puzzle over how a picture can be both a picture and part of a picture simultaneously. The paradox literally lies in the artist layering images and layering executed thoughts to assemble a greater work that draws together past expressions into a continuous present.

The acrylic painting *Dispositions* also uses a title with a double-meaning to enable Stanley to move between conceptions of representation. The shadows on the standing stick forms cause viewers to interpret the field of the painting as having great unmodulated depth, yet the self-evidence of the paint handling reasserts the verti-

My placements respect tradition (Renaissance), yet push in contemporary directions. The great minds of the Renaissance, for instance, had no idea that Physics would reveal a world of chaos and order simultaneously. So, how can chaos and order be shown through placement?



Dispositions
acrylic 48 c 60 in.

cal two-dimensionality of the picture plane. The expressionist aspects of the picture give rise to the interpretation of the title Dispositions as referring to moods, while the perspectival illusions Stanley employs seem to establish Dispositions as referring to placements, with the linear elements arranged or disposed in carefully chosen places. The fragile forms standing in the empty landscape of the piece contribute to a feeling of bleakness, reminding one of a desert to where one could conceivably be banished or in which one could be crucified on the lone skeletal cross. The hopeless tone, the sad mood that is conveyed in this painting testifies to feeling that can be summoned up in the viewer by the artist's skillful placement of simple forms.

A subject that appears in a variety of ways in many of Stanley's paintings is a flatly-rendered square or rectangle that, based on the titles of such pictures as Panes and Eyegates #2, seems to either be or symbolically refer to a window. Such a shape can be seen (in addition to the previously mentioned works) in Signs, Ladders, Inverse-Converse, Conjunctions, Comments, and Abeyance. Because the rectangles or squares are very generalized (not detailed in their appearances to suggest any portrait relationship to an actual existing window), their value seems to lie in an understanding of them as



Panes
acrylic 18 x 22 in.

Hearing someone talk about your art generates new sentiments. While there is a sense of emptiness in Dispositions, I do not feel the hopeless tone that Gregg senses. Yet, such differing reactions from viewers are essential. I do not believe the mantra "I don't care what others think; I do it for myself." Artists are human. Normal humans care about other humans. So, when someone sees in my work something I didn't, I wonder: What does this view tell me about the world, the other person, myself? Can I use the visual input and response in future work? I like it when people talk with me about my art.



Eyegates #2
acrylic and aluminum paint 36 x 46 in.

an abstract concept. Paired with or placed among the carefully rendered realistic components that Stanley uses and that were mentioned previously, these windows also tie into the artist's investigations of representation. A window is something one looks through, something that stands as a transparent separator of the outside and inside. Before the advent of modernism, artists of several centuries considered the picture frame as symbolically serving the same function as a window frame, where the often painstakingly realistic scene was contained and made comprehensible by the four framing edges, in the way a vast, majestic landscape is made manageable for perception and appreciation by the isolating frame of a window in a building. Stanley's windows are acknowledgments of the fundamental relationship of the window to art. His stylized windows refer to the outer edges of canvases which serve as the contact horizons between his world and the rest of the world. Inside the framing contours is a glimpse at an inner life, where objects are elevated beyond their mundane existence by the processes of selection and tran-

Eyegates #2, an older piece (1979), merges both past and what were to be future interests. There is ambiguity in the window/ door/edge that we look through or around. Natural form is revealed in curved lines which could be a woman's hip, a hill, or something else. Then there is the paint itself and the gestures themselves. Like music, there are feelings in the glow of a painted square, the texture of the surface, the sweeping splash and natural/chaotic dripping.

scription, and painterly gestures are invested with the power to exemplify states of being or feeling. Multiple windows, multiple panes testify to the extraordinary number of viewpoints and approaches available to the artist willing to look both without and within. For Stanley, art is a window that affords him the chance to see the world and see himself seeing the world.



Random Real
acrylic 36 x 48 in.



Ibi Progression
acrylic, enamel on
wood
22.5 x 19 in.

One final area of the work that further shows the complexity of the artist's enterprise is his development of completely imaginary and nonobjective, but authoritative and convincing, forms. Works such as *Stranded*, *Wanderers*, *In Honor Of*, and *Ibi Progression* give tangible existence to configurations that have no real-world equivalent. The act of painting, however, gives these configurations life. In these works, viewers see Stanley as the consummate game designer, creating products that have an indisputable

logic and sensibility. By drawing viewers through his windows and engaging their natural impulses for recognition with various realistic forms, Stanley enables viewers to arrive at a place where the non-referential is no longer disturbing; viewers grow to accept his inventions to the point where his imaginary constructions (both depicted

If Gregg means that I like to look at things until they make greater sense and no sense except Beauty, Chaos, and some kind of Order, I agree.

and actual) somehow become unquestionable. Ibi Progression and Stranded particularly, largely because of their sculptural frames, move from pictures of things to things themselves, like non-functional items of furniture. Just as a game board (an old Ouija board or finely-made chess board, for example) can be satisfying to possess for its tactile and pictorial qualities, besides its promise and reminder of amusement or fascination, so too are Stanley's two and three-dimensional creations capable of being prized and valued despite any considerations of functionality. These works offer an opportunity for challenge, an opportunity readily accepted because the enjoyment of their creation emanates so strongly. Viewer enjoyment naturally seems to follow from a head-to-head showdown with the master designer.



Study: Investigation
watercolor & pencil 8 x 10 in.

Because Stanley has established the rules and terms of the activity, viewers can never second-guess him in his intellectual and artistic engagement of them. Instead, they can accept his provocative questioning of how representation is a forever elusive notion. They can also delight in the beauty of colors, lines, and shapes that transport them to new realms of the imagination, with the artist as their capable and eager guide.

Gregg Hertzlieb

Director/Curator Brauer Museum of Art

*Beauty, delight, and questioning the world—I hope
to reach those realms.*

Robert Stanley

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It's a Little Late to be Early
February 7 - March 6

Uncle Freddy's Gallery
Curated by Tom Torluemke

Catalog printed by
Accucraft Imaging, Hammond, IN