Leigh Behnke: Real Spaces, Imagined Lives, with an interview by Jeri Hise

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LEIGH BEHNKE
REAL SPACES, IMAGINED LIVES

With an interview by JERI HISE
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– Front: Demeter’s Garden II, 2005, oil on panel, 36 x 48”, Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NYC.
– Back: Wallace’s Heresy, 1990, oil/ canvas, 64 x 48”, Collection of Beth and Donald Siskind
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LEIGH BEHNKE: REAL SPACES, IMAGINED LIVES

by Leda Cempellin
1. THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY: SPACE FOR MEMORY

Leigh Behnke was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1946. A series of paintings including Memory Abode (for Janet), 1997 (Fig. 25) refer to her childhood in Connecticut, including time spent at her maternal Grandparent’s house in Coventry. As a college student she moved to New York City, where she earned a BFA from Pratt Institute in 1969, and an MA from New York University in 1976. Her attachment to the iconography of the city, where she presently lives, coupled with her childhood memories of mid-century country and suburban living in Connecticut have given rise to a particular dichotomy in her work: the contrasts of nature and civilization, or of structure and artifice. She is interested in how the human hand intervenes in the natural landscape. From this, other sets of contrasts arise: between interior and exterior spaces (an interest that developed from her study of interior design and architecture at Pratt): between order and chaos, between artificial and natural light, between dense and open space…

Behnke writes of shared childhood memories in her explanation of the evolution of a painting done as a commission for her cousin, Janet Crowder.

“A nightly ritual was to ask one of the uncles to go and pump some water into a pitcher for us to have a glass of water in bed just before going to sleep. This [outdoor] well, an anachronism in the 1950s, was a source of delight for us” (Behnke).

This commissioned painting gave her the opportunity to tackle some issues she had been thinking about, specifically, how to bring about a deeper connection with her own “spiritual geography”, the landscape of her past. This three-panel painting shows Lake Wangaumbaue, [Coventry Lake]: the image is of the lake with rocks and water plants. Behnke explains that:

“the boulders are ones cleared by our family from the shoreline to create a swimming area in front of the cottage”.

This left panel makes reference to the shared childhood history of the cousins by depicting a remembered place, the rocks the young girls climbed on and swam near while growing up. The central panel shows a room in the cottage built by their grandparents, as well as furniture in the possession of the family for several generations.

Behnke and Crowder’s mothers were sisters. They grew up in this house and the cousins spent time together there. The structure and the use of the furniture also refer to the intimate connection between the generations.¹

“The central panel of ‘Memory Abode (for Janet)’ is an interior view of the window of the summer house our grandparents owned in Coventry, Connecticut. The furniture in this interior has long term connections to our family. The marble topped table was originally owned by our Great Grandmother Morgan and was in use in her house on Bigelow Street in Manches-
ter, Connecticut. After her death, it was part of the furnishing in our Grandmother Bantly’s house on Porter Street in Manchester. Both of our mothers grew up in this house, as well as spending summers at the house used in this image” (Behnke).

In the right panel there is a field of daisies. These reappear in a vase in the center panel for both evocative and formal reasons. The daisy is Crowder’s favorite flower, the table acts as an “offering altarpiece” and the flowers are “an act of devotion” presented to her cousin in celebration of her birthday. The painting is a gift commissioned by Crowder’s husband Rob for this occasion. The glass of water on the table reminds Crowder of the ritual of the glass of well-water that the young cousins would ask for nightly from their uncles, at bed time. Water is known as a symbol of purity. It can be connected with the magic aura during which in childhood’s innocence one’s imagination is virtually unlimited. Water in a glass is “domesticated”, it is not a “natural” body of water like the lake recalled in the left panel that recalls the original wilderness. The same thing could be said of the trees on the left, in which the wood becomes “domesticated” by transformation into comfortable chairs at the center of the painting. This reoccurs again with the rocks on the left, which are echoed in a marble table top in the center panel. The water contained in the glass was taken from an outside well, which draws water from the same source that supplies the adjacent spring fed lake. There are many poetic connections within this painting, while it simultaneously explores the nature of “experience”. For example, we can also note that the “wall” created by the flowers in the right panel leads to an actual “wall” within a horizontal landscape, which gives way on the left to a “wall” of rocks and then to the body of water. This transition appears to be the major thematic subject in this multi-panel painting, and again reinforces the underlying concept of the transitory nature of childhood memory.

An analysis of how colors are used throughout the panels shows that the most recurrent colors are brown, blue and green. Brown is a mixed color, while green and blue are pure spectral colors. In the central panel brown is predominant, the right panel is characterized by green; in the left panel, a sort of balance between pure hue and mixed colors is established; indeed, rocks have been manually rearranged in order to produce a pool near the house for the family to swim. It is clear that what is visible in this painting are a number of fragments of memory arising from the past and frozen forever in this painting; by this, what is implied is a set of actions which reflect movement, as opposed stillness: games between two girls, the action of bringing a glass of water to the children, the moving of household goods from the house in Manchester to Coventry, etc. All these actions can be resurrected in memory thanks to the assemblage of fragments of these episodes, that is thanks to the multi-panel structure, which requires the movement of the eye from one side to the other, through singular moments (identified by panels) which are conceptually unified as a whole in the continuity of the space and in progression of time. The fourth dimension (= movement, as simultaneity of space and time) is derived from Futurism as an almost abstract art at the beginning of the XX Century (see the three old women in Boccioni’s il Lutto, 1910), and now becomes visible in a totally representational art.

Behnke is interested in the collective history that is triggered by specific iconography. Thus her work implies a past, and engages these temporal qualities through the act of viewing. Employing a multi-panel structure forces the eye and mind to “travel” and compare.

In 1999 and 2000, Behnke was given grants by the E.D. Foundation to work on a series of paintings based on Victorian homes. Behnke went to Sagamore Hill and took pictures of Theodore Roosevelt’s summer White House.
“My travel arrangements included sharing a cab from the Oyster Bay train station with several live-in domestic workers traveling to other mansions in the area, and my conversations sparked an interest in the living arrangements of the various members of the Roosevelt household” (Behnke).

It is not just that Behnke collected impressions and memories of the past during travel (this time not her own, but other people’s memories); as a matter of fact, all her paintings imply a history, and invoke the temporal through the serial view of the multi-panel structure. Four paintings evolved from this fertile experience at Sagamore: Annie’s View; Entrance for Edith and Alice; Sagamore: Upstairs; Sagamore: Downstairs.

As an outgrowth of her interest in the urban and interior environments, this series is concerned with two types of domestic environment: the living space of the upper class and the working class. Annie’s View (Fig. 39) shows the Roosevelt house as seen and experienced by one of the maids, Annie: the upper panel of the painting reproduces a corner view of the top floor of a fictional house, where the maids traditionally lived, as seen by a passer-by. It is important to remember that, as the reference photographs were taken by Behnke herself, even a painting which purports to reproduce someone else’s point of view (in this case, Annie’s), will have the experience of the artist superimposed on it. Annie’s experience is filtered through Behnke’s sensibility and re-experienced by the artist. This strong personal charge in Behnke’s work, despite the use of “impersonal” photographs, is a fascinating characteristic of her work, functioning in tandem with her continuous focus on formal matters such as compositional structure.

The sense of a personal experience of place is something that this painting by Behnke shares with the work of the California painter Robert Bechtle, who only uses places that are familiar to him, under conditions with which he is very accustomed. The difference is that Behnke is able to make familiar something that is seen for the first time, as Annie’s room. Behnke makes a personal selection of details through photographic cropping, seeing the place through the eyes of another, more familiar with the space. The difference is that Behnke is imparting a sense of the familiar on something that is actually “other”, not something which is part of her everyday experience. She does this through a selection of detail, in order to impart a sense of how the eye of another might see the same scene.

The bottom part of the painting is a predella, which in Italian medieval painting was generally a narration. In this format many episodes are employed to comment on, or complete, a larger narrative or major theme expressed in a central panel. In Behnke’s work there are three scenes, reproducing on the left the view from Annie’s window, her room in the center, and the back staircase on the right. These bottom panels, like any Renaissance predella, give us fragments of her story, of her life: her continuous going up and down the stairs from one room to the other in order to tidy it; her memory of these rooms cleaned so frequently; the “captivity” of her employment in an interior space, from the window where freedom is imaginable but not fully visible in the light and shadows of the garden; the chair in the center panel, where she could rest and have privacy after a very hard working day, where the throne of a Sacra Conversazione has become a chair of loneliness; the window in the left panel; the future dreamt about while sitting in the chair and looking out.

What unifies all these panels is the interplay between light and shadow. This visual drama has been also important in the work of Robert Bechtle. Behnke wants to re-create a Renaissance illusion of three-dimensions as a site for the reconstruction of fragmented memory, while Bechtle makes use of it in order to look at a representational painting in a formal way. She wants to tell a story, or help us to create a story. Her interest moves in the direction of the implied narrative.
One of the main concerns of representational art from the late 1960s forward has been to consider the painting as an arena for spatial concerns (see the work and teaching of Hans Hofmann); in this, the canvas has to be considered as an object, where even the traditionally neutral values of black and white are considered colors. Black is used less frequently as a strategy to push form into space, and is treated simply as a color in play with other colors to give formal drama, as an abstract interplay of color with shape. Behnke’s painting has a juxtaposition of abstract visual interaction of dark and light shapes (which reminds one of the work of abstract minimalist painter Josef Albers) and of representational pieces of life and memory.

These are the most curious paradoxes in Behnke’s work: although formalist in her orientation, she also wants to create a site for memory; although using Renaissance strategies like the multi-panel painting with predella to tell a story, she makes use of photographs, as historical Photorealism does, in order to express three-dimensional perspective strategies.

In many of Behnke’s images of interiors there is either a chair or a staircase; while the former is an element signifying stillness, a moment captured forever, the latter implies movement from one floor to the other. In Annie’s View this interplay between stillness and movement is seen, visualizing life as an accumulation of moments of work and rest. The third and last factor, after the formal play of light and dark and the representational one signifying moments of work and rest in Annie’s life, occurs between fragments of manufactured objects (the walls, the chair, the staircase…) and fragments of natural landscape, like the leaves of the tree on the side of the building in the central panel, or the garden that is seen from the window of one room and the window in the staircase. This visual drama is concerned more with the artist’s personal connection to the individual environments (her childhood in the country and her life as an adult in New York City) than with Annie’s point of view; it has to do more with Behnke’s personal way of seeing these places which are otherwise rather unfamiliar to her, finding a unifying quality she can relate to.

The other paintings in this series primarily depict the Sagamore house as seen through the Roosevelt’s point of view. The structure for both paintings is the same: a central panel with an exterior view of the house, respectively, of its upper floor (Sagamore: Upstairs, Fig. 10) and of its bottom floor (Sagamore: Downstairs, Fig. 9); the side panels show views from the interior of the house. It is interesting to note that in both paintings the left panel shows a large swath of the floor, thus underlying the illusionistic character of the painting in developing depth in the third dimension. The right panel has a mildly claustrophobic feeling due to images of furniture placed near the front of the picture plane and partially obscuring the space behind it; the planes of the furniture, almost parallel to the painting surface, reiterate the two-dimensional character of the plane. In Behnke’s work perspective is used in conjunction with other elements of Renaissance illusionism to create a spatial tension between figurative and abstract elements.

Another point of interest is the square format of the panels which form the predella: the usual format for predella’s panels in the medieval tradition is rectangular. My opinion is that whether intentional or not, while medieval predella’s rectangular shapes are associated with a narrative religious content, the square shapes in Behnke’s predellas remind us of Josef Albers’ paintings in his Homage to the Square series, thus in some ways reinforcing the predominance of structural concern over narrative content. As an alternative reading one could argue that the narrative content runs parallel with the structural concerns, and is prevalent.

In fact, in this series by Behnke, the narrative content runs not just through the image fragments depicted in the three panels, but reaches beyond the painting. Viewers having
no direct experience of the location are invited to make a connection to the imagery (mediated by the artist’s experience of the place). The specific moves toward the universal. For example, in Entrance for Edith and Alice (Fig. 38) the central panel has the same view of the front door (seen from the right side instead from the left) as Sagamore: Downstairs (Fig. 9). These images reoccur, in a similar manner to Don Eddy’s late 1990s paintings.

In 1997 Behnke took a break from her exploration of her “scientific essay” series in order to start a new approach, using personal experience. We may wonder if the recurrence of the identical subject and reference-photo (as in the front door of the Victorian house in Sagamore: Downstairs and in Entrance for Edith and Alice) has the same meaning of poetic redundancy as in Eddy’s later work or if it differs. In the third of our conversations, we summarized a crucial meaning of his later paintings: “As a conclusion, you repeat the image of a flower many times for three reasons. The first is that painting very realistically an image of a flower and putting among other images in a multi-panel painting, you may create new possible relationships, so you can give new life to the flower”. In a similar way, the front door depicted by Behnke, which is repeated in two paintings with little difference, gets different meanings depending upon the context created by the surrounding predellas.

In a previous essay, I have talked about Photorealistic renditions of flora, which despite their high degree of verisimilitude also have an abstract reading. In the Berkeley series by the Bay Area neo-figurative painter Richard Diebenkorn, fields and woods are seen as a group of geometric shapes; in Roses by Bechtle, 1973, the roses are an image sapped of their consistency as objects, thanks to the mediation of the photo between the three-dimensional reality and the two-dimensional painting. This also happens in Don Eddy’s Pontiac Showroom Window, 1972; in the more recent Western Tableau with Rhodesian Ridgeback (Trails West), 1993, McLean puts trees in the background, in order to give space and scale to the foreground. Although in each of these examples the use of nature is rendered differently, it always stresses the two-dimensional quality of the image, and so requires a formal reading rather than one of the iconography, including concealed meanings and symbols.

In Behnke’s painting, a formal reading of the vegetation is also appropriate. For example, even when the painting seems to focus on other content, as in Light Study with Venetian Blinds (Fig. 7), we see that both the window and the plant become two elements symbolic of tension between interior life and the broader society. On the left panel, the plant and the window are both dark, as both are part of the inner life of the apartment. Then, in the second panel from the left, the plant is partially lit, reflecting the sunlight shining upon the active outside world, while the window is partially dark, suggesting the end of interior life; next, the plant becomes darker, as the day finishes and the outside world is reflected into the window, and the window becomes lighter, as life is starting again inside the apartment; finally, in nighttime the window and plant are completely lit, as the plant now suggests life inside the apartment. The plant becomes an indicator of interior and exterior life: it depends of the provenance of sunlight or electric light which is reflected over it. A cycle is completed.

In her first abstract paintings as the 1963 oil (Fig. 1), the abstract strokes under the rectangular shape suggest flowers, much as in Hofmann’s paintings there are colors suggesting nature and climatic variations, like in Spring, 1940, a mixture of white snow giving its place to the green new-born grass.

In Geometric Configuration: Variations on a Square, 1982 (Fig. 11), the view of the plant from above underlines its geometric shapes; what is interesting here, more than light effects playing upon shapes, is the variation in the plants position, which is altered in order to create new formal relations between the four essential shapes of the plant, the light, the table section and the chair.
In *Sidereus Nuncius* (Fig. 23), there are yellow and red tulips in the bottom panel; in the central panel a group of skyscrapers are seen from street level; above stars and galaxies are shown. What these three different images have in common are: the idea of gathering together elements belonging to similar categories, which also happens spontaneously in nature (the top and bottom panels) and also artificially in the urban environment (the central panel). The categorization of the known world is a scientific endeavor, and represents a fundamental survival strategy: animals live in groups in order to fight against enemies, they create a society in which each one has its own task. Humans create artificial environments gathering together in similar units, to satisfy the need for order and to adapt to the environment. The second thing the three panels have in common is a progressive scale change, going from actual size to macroscopic from bottom to top. Tulips act as symbols of nature abruptly interrupted by an artificial environment. They represent beauty to humans living in an artificial and manufactured environment; finally the sky covers the world, as a return to unmediated nature. Therefore, the natural fragments here (the tulips) have to be seen as part of a larger scheme running through the three panels; the multi-panel painting has to be seen as an essay, which has to be read in continuum to understand the whole meaning. Indeed, the tulips are not flowers, but signs of an idea taken in context within the whole painting, which cannot be fully understood without them; their meaning is not stated within the single panel, but requires the context of the whole painting.

In discussing *Memory Abode (for Janet)*, 1997 (Fig. 25), we have already commented that the vase of flowers, in the central panel, was associated with memories of the past shared by the artist and her cousin, and that the flowers in the right panel were seen in a “natural” habitat, from which the flowers in the vase had been selected to be brought into an artificial environment. The same tension between the natural and the artificial is visible in the left panel, where the boulders have been arranged to form a swimming area.

Where images from nature entirely cover the canvas, as in *Panoply*, 1997, (Fig. 30), there is a sort of “echo-structure”. It is interesting to notice the similarity of structure in the shape of the shadows, the lake, the trees’ shapes in the central panel which are perfectly recalled by the shapes of the leaves in the two side panels. Even in this case, nature is used to underline similar combinations of geometric structures, rather than for the traditional symbolic meanings associated with these manifestations.

In *Annie’s View*, 2000 (Fig. 39), nature is absent in the central panel of the predella, while in the left and right panels it is present as a lawn, perfectly cut, which recalls the work life of the servant Annie and her job (the grass looks like a table which has just been cleaned up). In this painting, possibly for the first time in Behnke’s work, nature is a fundamental element in understanding Annie, whose presence is not otherwise in great evidence; only the spare pieces of furniture are there to testify about her. It is curious to note that in the predella panels with interior views we can see spare and flat grass outside, and in the oblique exterior building of the central panel there are leaves around the windows of Annie’s rooms, allowing light and color in to the spare walls. Here the recurrent opposition between nature and culture is noticeable in the contrasting elements of sunlight and artificial street light, building walls and foliage. This last set of opposites may also recall the strong difference between Annie’s spare room and the more luxurious life of the upper class occupants. It also invokes the possibility of her thinking of other lives lived in other places.
Notes:

1 See chapter 3 for a comparison between this painting and an autobiographical work by Don Eddy in the 1980s.
2 “In all the 20th Century painting there has been a concern with flatness of the painting, this is something already taken for granted in my paintings. As a result, in my most recent paintings shadows are not just light indicators, but they become forms themselves”. Robert Bechtle in Leda Cempellin, L’Iperrealismo “fotografico” americano in pittura. Risonanze storiche nella East e nella West Coast (Padova: CLEUP, 2004), p. 149.
3 See chapter 3 for a comparison between Albers’ and Behnke’s work.
4 Leda Cempellin, Conversazioni con Don Eddy - Conversations with Don Eddy (Padova: CLEUP, 2000), p. 73.
6 The expression echo-structure has been used by Don Eddy (in Leda Cempellin, Conversazioni..., p. 28) to define his own multi-panel paintings. In his work, the repetition of rhythms, colors, shapes give new possibilities of association between the many panels of the painting. Behnke’s multi-panel paintings are different, for instance, than Eddy’s Catena Aureum II, because they have fewer panels and a bigger structural complexity inside each panel. Therefore, as the reference photographs are rather complex, that implies lots of time spent to look for such original combinations in nature. Although its high degree of beauty, it looks more like the product of an intense formal study rather than a poetic vision.
2. AN ANCIENT AND MODERN STRUCTURE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE MULTI-PANEL SYSTEM IN BEHNKE’S WORK

The multi-panel painting, commonly defined polyptych, consists in “more boards [panels] constituting all together a single work of art”.¹ This general definition underlines the idea of continuity, a story and a structure connecting its component parts. At the end of the XV Century, the multi-panel format was dominant in Europe;² it was generally associated with a religious meaning, and most of all, it was a sort of “site specific” work of art, as it was installed in Churches, and so had to adapt to a physical environment. Between the XIX and the XX Century, the multi-panel format has been used both by realist and abstract artists: the first ones, from the symbolist period, in order to “exalt spiritual myths of the new social religion”;³ the second ones, especially during the Stijl period, in order to “explore the merely abstract resources”.⁴ The multi-panel work has recently been able to multiply an image in space and time, thus exploring the nature of memory.⁵ The curious thing is that neither Picasso, nor Braque seemed to have used this format;⁶ therefore, we can imply that Behnke, having used the multi-panel format to explore many sections of the same subject, may be the first “neocubist” to have explored the possibilities of polyptych in that sense. Only the fauve Matisse has used this format in order to put interior and exterior space in relationship,⁷ in works as Triptyque Marocain, between 1914 and 1916, with a window on the left panel, a woman in the center and a door in the left. Trois Soeurs, a work made in 1916-17, is also interesting, as it shows the same three models repeated in all the three panels, in different positions.⁸ This makes us think of Behnke’s works as East Hampton Staircase with Landscape (Fig. 12), showing us three different angles of the same staircase.

Historically, it appears to me that the multi-panel device of the XX Century was imported to America in the Forties: in 1943 the surrealist artist Max Ernst, who took refuge from the War escaping in the United States in 1939, executed Vox Angelica in the form of an assemblage of 52 ready-mades panels,⁹ thus underlying the artificial nature of non-narrative, non-naturalistic, painting. The avant-garde is a reflection of meaning on painting. Francis Bacon, in the work Art de l’Impossible, has painted the three human figures in three different panels, in order to avoid narration, and to underline the solitude and incommunicability of people.¹⁰

Fabrice Hergott finds explanation for the rediscovery of multi-panel painting in the fragmentation of the single subject as a less “authoritarian” form of art, which mirrors the “fragmentation of the modern world”.¹¹ The newly rediscovered format drew attention away from the inside of the painting, and to the outside:¹² an example is the Rothko color-field multi-panel abstract work for the chapel of Houston where using this format helped the painting to be considered as an architectural element, and in this particular case as part of a complete environment.¹³ Even more important for a comparison with Behnke’s work is Concept Spatial / Trinité by the Italian Lucio Fontana, with an opposition between the horizontal rhythm of the side panels and the spiral in the central panel: the spiral is a recurring rhythm in Behnke’s work, as in Messier’s List, 1997 (Fig. 26).
Leigh Behnke’s multi-panel work is different from that of her famous predecessors of the XX Century, as she has combined narrative content and Renaissance illusionism to her work. Therefore, it is useful to compare it directly with Renaissance polyptych, to see what the differences are.

The first point of comparison is that, while ancient polyptych was the result of a cooperative work (the workshop),14 Behnke’s work, (though neo-figurative and photo-derived as post-Pop work) denies Pop Art’s idea of mass produced banal artificiality of image and production. Hers is a “hand made” object that is completely produced by her own hand.

The second one is that, while the pre-modern polyptych was usually site specific to a Church (with a religious meaning) or to a client (with a celebrative one),15 Behnke’s work has a self defined underlying narrative meaning, and usually is not a commissioned work. The content is defined by the artist and does not take its meaning from the surrounding environment.

The third one is that, while Renaissance polyptych had just one focal point,16 on the contrary Behnke’s work may be defined as a Cubist reconstruction of one subject redefined through its study from different angles.

The fourth difference is that ancient polyptych had a complex structure, which kept images together in a strict hierarchy, all of them complying to a specific order, in order to keep the harmony of the overall theme.17 In contrast Behnke’s predella has no sense of hierarchy. Her work reflects a post-modern concept that is partially photographic in its source, and involves a rethinking of the meaning of pictorial space.18

The fifth difference is the importance of the frame in the older polyptych, which was used to help enhance the meanings between the images,19 while in Behnke’s work the frame is a mechanical device to hold the images in relationship to each other physically. The panels are put near each other in order to avoid the plurality of meanings: the multi-panel painting has to be read as a sequence of a physical narration, so that any extraneous interpretation is avoided.

The sixth and last consistent difference is the technique used: while traditional polyptychs have imported the Flemish oil technique, Behnke has treated the format more casually by experimenting in various mediums, including watercolor and pencil, exhibiting a post-modern indifference toward the traditional hierarchy of materials.20

Now that the differences between Behnke’s multi-panel work and pre-existing polyptychs have been pointed out, it is important to look at the development of her multi-panel work.

It is interesting to consider the evolution in Behnke’s process throughout the years. The multi-panel structure was chosen in 1976:21

“For many years I have used the device of multiple panels to investigate content on various levels: formal, phenomenological, epistemological, and associative” (Behnke).

We have already discussed the diptych format in Temperature Study I, 1977 (Fig. 3): the relevance of its title demonstrates less interest in the choice of subject-matter and more in the formal qualities light and color. In 1978 3 Spectral Pairs (Fig. 17) was executed. This particular format, with six panels grouped in pairs according to complementary colors, shows the same subject repeated three times from different points of view, as if the imagery rotates within a color circle, with only slight variations in the placement of objects. In 1979 the previous small variations in the positioning of the specific imagery become variations in the treatment of the subject itself. For instance Intensity and Value Study, 1979 (Fig. 4), the house is seen from the same corner, with the same cropping of the photographic image, but
the two reference photographs are taken in different times. In the right panel the tree has much more foliage than in the left panel, the plants in the garden are also more luxuriant in the right panel and the leaves trace larger shadows, giving to Behnke an excuse to make stronger light-and-shadow contrasts.

In 1980, with *Value Study: Twilight* (Fig. 13), Behnke introduces aerial views of the urban landscape in three *predella* panels, with a fragment of a skyscraper as seen from below. In my Master's degree thesis, I have traced these two radical points of view to a couple of photographs by Alexandr Rodchenko: *The Mossel's Proma Building*, 1932, and *Pravda Stairway*, 1930-31. Although not taking photographs of New York City, Rodchenko's pictures are reminiscent of urban photography like the strongly foreshortened views of the City by Alfred Stieglitz's *New York by Night*, 1931, Alvin Langdon Coburn's *The House of the 1000 windows, New York*, 1912, Erich Mendelsohn's *The Equitable Trust Building in New York*, 1924. All of these introduce a formal reading of the subject as an assemblage of pure geometric shapes, rather than recognizable views of the City, thanks to the loss of equilibrium generated by the oblique view of the building façades. This allows the viewer's eye to wander through the photo without any reference point.

In 1990, with *Wallace's Heresy* (Fig. 15), Behnke seems influenced by the photography of Berenice Abbott, such as *The Night View*, 1936, a picture belonging to her ten-year-project "Changing New York". In fact, many artists have found there is something very fascinating about New York City in its continuous state of change. In contrast to the European attitude towards preservation, the States are considered a land without a lengthy past, so Behnke wants to discover its history as reflected in the details. Berenice Abbott's photos demonstrated the abstract nature of the City's shapes, with light in continuous change; Behnke's attitude towards urban landscapes looks rather like a surgery dissection, the multi-panel structure she uses is an intelligent way to analyze the world around her. *Turbulence* (Fig. 22) illustrates this change even better. What is interesting here is the interplay between the hard-edged geometric shapes of the New York buildings and the ephemeral organic form of the steam, which is in a continuous and dynamic state of change. This subject also has an interesting precedent in the innovative photography of Stieglitz, as in *The City of Ambition*, 1910. As Peter Bunnell wrote about pictures taken by Stieglitz around the 1910s: "In all these pictures we see the formal configuration not in terms of a realistic layout, but rather in terms of its architecture within a picture..." This is evidence of Stieglitz and Behnke's shared sense of the image as an architecture of shape and color, which dates back to European Avant-garde painting at the beginning of the XX Century.

Behnke’s painting not only brings this prescribed reading from photography into her work, but adds to it the formal problems related to perception. She also unifies various foreshortened views of the City, as seen in the *predella*, where the same street crossing is seen at different hours of the day. The warm pinkish building in the *predella* appears to be the same as the one depicted in the central panel, just changed in position. What comes to mind is surely the Cubist assemblage of different points of view of the same subject, in order to concentrate on a formal analysis rather than on its illusionistic rendering. Also in Behnke's work, architecture as subject can be fully perceived only by mentally reassembling the foreshortened images of the panels, much as Picasso’s subject could be conceptually built up only by assembling the many points of view collected within the same painting. The main difference between Picasso and Behnke’s work is that, while Picasso was slowly moving towards abstraction through the progressive fragmentation and subsequent complication of the composition, the opposite is true of Behnke’s analysis of the same subject; it is equally complex, but is able to reach progressive simplification by fragmenting
the subject through foreshortened views placed near one another, rather than within the same picture.

This formal interpretation, which subtlety connects Cubist analytic paintings, photography, and Behnke’s work, is supported by the fact that in 1907, when Pablo Picasso was painting his *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Stieglitz met him and showed him one of his photographs, *The Steerage*, which Picasso was said to appreciate.\(^{24}\) As he worked on paintings where mimetic subjects fell almost into abstraction, it is reasonable to assume that this is a proper reading of the insights received from photography.

In 1981, with *Comparative Compositional Study with Columns* (Fig. 5), the subjects in the two panels are both façades, but belonging to different buildings; here a variation of shapes is introduced to interact with light variations, thus complicating the diptych even further. In both façades vertical lines are prevalent; however, while oblique stairs interrupt the vertical silhouette of the left façade, the right façade has oblique shadows passing through the columns.

In 1982, with *Geometric Configuration: Variations on a Square* (Fig. 11), a new configuration of the multi-panel structure replaces the previously employed diptych for the first time. Here the *predella* is placed under the central panel. The *predella*, dating back to Italian Medieval era, employed small vignettes in rectangular format under the large central image. The specific purpose is to comment on the main image, which states the theme. For instance, the famous *Pala di San Zeno* in Verona, 1457-59, has a central rectangular panel divided into three pieces by columns, where a *Sacra Conversazione* (that is, a conversation between Mary with her Baby and Saints on doctrinal matters), takes place. The three scenes of the *predella* below show to the left Jesus praying on the hill of the olive garden before being captured; in the center, Jesus is dying at the cross; to the right, Jesus is rising from death. These three scenes of the *predella* actually make an important comment on the top image, as they elucidate on the doctrinal clarifications of Jesus’ birth of Mary, and the purpose of his life and mission on earth. In observing Behnke’s work, it is interesting to observe that she has completely subverted the uses of the traditional *predella*. In *Geometric Configuration*, the central panel shows a room with a table, chairs, a lamp, and a plant, as seen frontally but from a slightly elevated point of view. The three small panels of *predella* show sections of table, chair, plant and lamp as seen completely from above; in this way, their essential geometric configurations, as sphere, rectangle, and triangle, are underlined. Table, chair and lamp rotate with slight variations in their reciprocal positions, similar to the changes that can be seen in *3 Spectral Pairs*. In observing the square format of the small panels forming the *predella*, it is curious to note that their shape recalls the one of the central panel, as do most Medieval and Renaissance altarpieces. Indeed, the square format connects the minor panels of *predella* to the central and major panel, as geometric sections of the whole; as the square recalls geometric perfection and stability, the panels may be seen as symbols of a sort of geometric theorem.

In *Light Study with Venetian Blinds*, 1981 (Fig. 7), Behnke “investigates not only times of day, color shifts, and intriguing compositional geometries, but plays with interior and exterior space, its corollary the picture plane, and mechanical movement”.\(^{25}\) In examining this statement we see that the progression of time is the main subject and is related to light and dark contrasts. In raising the question of the temporal, she comments on the progression of time as the main subject as related to the chiaroscuro and value change. The progressive switch from light to dark from left to right suggests a transition from day to night. In the left panel, the inside of the room is completely dark, as the room is closed and it is implied that the inhabitant is out; the Venetian blinds are raised, to let the light of the external sky
with a view of the exterior urban landscape in. Then, the sky becomes progressively darker through the other panels, until on the right it is night outside. The Venetian blinds get partially closed and then shut, shuttering out the exterior world, as now the unseen inhabitant ceases interacting with the external world; therefore, the interior light is on, and the window becomes bright. What happens from the left to the right panel is a progressive reversal of light-and-dark relationships: while in the left panel the window is dark and the outside view is light, in the right panel the window is light and the outside view is dark; the Venetian blinds, which give the title to the painting, are used to transfer the viewer’s attention from the exterior to the interior, paralleling the passage through a cycle of a complete day.

There are two kinds of movement, which is defined as the manifestation of time in space, inside this strip-panel structure: one is the natural movement of the earth around the sun, which provokes day-and-night shifts; the other is the artificial, mechanical movement of the Venetian blind by the human intervention.

Around 1970, another painter was interested in the same subject: Howard Kanovitz with Venetian Blind Window. The German art historian Jorn Merkert, calling the painting “trompe-l’œil gemaltes Fenster-Bild”, underlines the confusion which may be caused by a painting, when too realistically depicted: as the painting is per-se an actual object, a depicted window may be confused for a real window, especially when it hangs on the wall.

“The cut out objects don’t stay by themselves only as painterly-formal, but also as physical presence in the air (...). A trompe-l’œil window-painting against a wall says that in this window it is a window. The tricking images of the painting, which is as such reality, puts reality into question (...). What’s the painting: a shaped canvas, which points out a framed window? That one which surrounds the frame as a painting? The one, which we see over the surface – or the other half of the painting? The one, which we see through the half-opened window?”.

By comparing the two paintings, it is clear that, while Kanovitz’s painting addresses the post-modern problem of presenting a painting depicting a real object, Behnke deconstructs the image to explore what the overarching concerns are as an object with illusionistic power. Lucio Fontana’s work “Concetto Spaziale”, which has an actual physical cut in it showing the surface behind the painting, is subtly referenced here by showing, as in pre-modern painting, an illusion of reality behind the depicted window. Reflecting on this, we see that Behnke’s work is less strategically post-modern than Kanovitz’s; at this point, Behnke realizes that the problem of acknowledging the canvas as an physical entity has already been addressed and solved, so she chooses to look back at the Renaissance traditions and try to establish a connection between pre- and post-modernism.

The subject of the painting depicted is a window placed almost parallel to the canvas’ surface, thus reinforcing the post-modern awareness of the actual flatness of the canvas. In front of the window a plant is set, as an indicator of interior space, and outside the window a portion of the sky and the façades of buildings suggest an illusion of depth in the opposite direction. This suggests to me that the plant and the sky are like “push-pull” figurative forces, reminiscent of Hofmann’s work. Again, in Behnke’s work abstract rather than representational art is the initial impetus and primary source for an investigation of formal problems in her painting. It is also interesting to note that the coupled plant and building, set in opposite directions, is symbolic of the duality between the urban and natural environments, as two of the formative forces in Behnke’s life (the natural environment of her youth, as seen in Memory Abode (for Janet), and the artificial urban environment where she actually lives, in New York City).

The painting by Kanovitz is actually a two-panel painting, a format that has been used before Behnke’s work. This format probably dates back to the Fifties: see Ellsworth Kelly’s Atlantic, 1956, as Sims Patterson says, “hard-edge painting”, a series of “abstractions (which)
strip away the source of all perspective, narrative association, and emotional content”. Kelly’s painting has no perspective at all, in contrast to another two-panel painting, Studio Diptych, 1960-61, made by Hedda Sterne, a Rumanian painter who settled in New York City in 1941 where she knew Pollock and many other artists from the New York School. This curious oil painting is a two-panel painting consisting of many other realistically depicted panels: while these are almost parallel to the edges, the oblique direction of the windows gives depth to the composition. Because of this there seems to be a “struggle” between the two-dimensional nature of the painting as an object and the three-dimensional nature of the illusionistic space that opens behind it. Stern is but one example of the many modern artists attempting to give voice to the new interest in notions of pictorial space.

In 1983 further developments of the multi-panel structure occur in Behnke’s work in Brooklyn Bridge Compositional Study (Fig. 6). These works are exclusively watercolors on paper. The Brooklyn Bridge, one of the world’s marvels, is also an iconic symbol of New York City, the urban environment that figures so prominently in Behnke’s work. This bridge connects Manhattan to Brooklyn, and also divides the two waterways, the Hudson and the East Rivers. In doing this it creates crossed geometric shapes, as skyscrapers make its vertical counterpart. Behnke is intrigued by this bridge and uses its surroundings as a means to investigate formal relationships between the oblique lines of the girders and trusses, the curves of the lamps, and the vertical lines of the skyscrapers. In the bottom panels of the predella, similar in approach to Geometric Configuration, there are three bird’s eye views of the City, fragments of the whole of the central panel rotating, seen from different visual angles.

The use of the image of the Brooklyn Bridge as vehicle to investigate formal patterns dates back to Joseph Stella’s The Bridge, 1922, where this New York City monument is synthesized by an assemblage of vertical and oblique lines, the latter reasserting the depth of the canvas’ field. By using the futuristic rhythmic repetition of lines and the cubist geometric synthesis of shapes, Stella has been able to unify two independent directions, which were first introduced during the Armory Show in 1913.

In 1986 Behnke painted two versions of East Hampton Staircase: the first, East Hampton Staircase with Landscape (Fig. 12), an oil on canvas, and secondly East Hampton Staircase: Direct Reflected Light, a watercolor on paper. In the 1980s Behnke starts to adopt oil as a new medium, though she continues using watercolor and colored pencil. Some of her paintings have two versions, one in oil and the other on paper, as in the case of Night Hawks / Red and Green, 1980 (Fig. 16).
Notes:

2. Ibid., p. 12.
3. “C’est bien aussi le cas pour de nombreux peintres de la période symboliste qui reprendrent la forme des polyptyques d’église afin de proposer de nouvelles images, profanes certes, mais qui exaltent des mythes spirituels ou la nouvelle religion sociale”. Ibid., p. 14.
7. Ibid., p. 211.
8. Ibid., p. 211.
9. Ibid., p. 213.
10. Ibid., p. 215.
12. Ibid., p. 215.
15. Ibid., p. 10.
16. Ibid., p. 11.
17. “...La caratteristica saliente del politico è la sua struttura multipla, la sua natura di organismo complesso capace di sdoppiare in un insieme armonioso un numero variabile di tavole, secondo un programma iconografico e decorativo sottoposto alla gerarchia dei soggetti e dunque all’intenzione del committente”. Ibid., p. 15.
18. See Leda Cempehill, L’iperrealismo “fotografico” americano in pittura...
20. See interview by Jery Hise following this text.
27. “Spatial concept”.
3. BEHNKE AND ART HISTORY

Behnke’s first student paintings are abstract, as we see in a painting dating back to 1963 (Fig. 1). The red rectangle reminds us of those used by Hans Hofmann in paintings like *In Sober Ecstasy*, or *Land of Bliss and Wonder, California*. They have the same consistency and apparent uniformity; the most visible difference is that, while Hofmann’s rectangles are geometrically shaped, the ones painted by Behnke have a more organic shape, which gets narrower on the bottom, thus giving the impression of a form moving back through the canvas, where it appears to meet the other irregular shapes and brush strokes, some of which seem to lie on the surface of the canvas. This is a great example of her assimilation of Hofmann’s spatial theories of “push-pull”: indeed, what pushes the rectangle towards us, and the brush strokes to the opposite side, is the uniformity of the yellow background, much brighter than the other shapes and strokes; as in Hofmann’s work, the complicated areas, made up of brush marks, push the simple rectangular areas towards us.1 In this way, the artist and the viewer are made aware of space beyond the canvas, and also see it as physical object rather than a representation of something. This is aided by the abstract content of the work. What is different in Behnke’s reading of Hofmann’s work is a stronger geometric awareness: indeed, the red rectangle seems to rotate in the opposite direction of the shapes under it, which seem to rotate clockwise. During this period, Behnke’s use of Hofmann’s push-pull theory was for the movement created by the geometric shapes. Hofmann was using the opposition of regular geometric shapes and irregular brush strokes, while Behnke was creating the shapes’ outlines by combining plain shapes with forms made of brush strokes, creating oppositions between simple and complicated areas, and between shapes and strokes within the canvas. In Behnke’s work, the spatial forces are not activated by the fluctuation of a rectangular form manipulated by strokes, but by the irregular trapezoid and rectangular forms, which move obliquely within the yellow background. In graduate school she began to work as a sculptor, as we can see in an abstract 1974 installation *Maquette for sculpture* (Fig. 2), where she continued her exploration of geometric forms in space on larger scale, in order to explore installation. Despite some good feedback on this sculpture, she had to give it up when she injured her back, requiring surgery. At this point she switched back to painting, initially making use of watercolor technique on paper, and eventually moving to oil on panel.

Her use of sequential panels dates to 1976. The first watercolors have a diptych format, and titles, which recall their nature as value and hue studies rather than as content depicted by the imagery. An example is *Temperature Study I, 1977* (Fig. 3): although the subject of this painting is a car on the street, the title refers to specific properties of color when illuminated with different intensities of light. In this case, contrast is set up between the light which illuminates the sky and buildings, and the shadow cast by buildings on the street; this contrast is reminiscent of the 1963 abstract painting, where Behnke used geometric dark areas inside a large light background, setting those areas against the edges of the painting, a similar compositional strategy as the ones used in this figurative painting.
The shared concerns of representational and abstract elements in Behnke’s work resemble the ones used by new-figuration painters of the Bay Area in San Francisco from the mid 1950s: for instance, see Richard Diebenkorn’s *Seated Figure with Hat*, 1967, the hat, cutting down some of the woman’s head, suggests that this painting has to be read more as a group of formal geometric shapes rather than as a specific figurative subject, thus suggesting that there are other things to focus on in a painting than just the recognizable “contents”.

In a similar way, in *Temperature Study I* the imagery is used as a device to explore the effects of light on color. She also uses a cropping technique, which was employed by artists such as Bechtle to encourage a formal reading of the work. This allows the artist to concentrate on light effects. See for instance the painting *Potrero Intersection - 20th and Arkansas*, made by Robert Bechtle in 1990; a formal reading is helped by cropping the roofs of the houses at the top, so that they look more like dark rectangular forms playing against light shapes rather than outlines belonging to houses. The concentration of imagery on the right and top locations suggests the idea of optical movement from the lower left side to the right side, opposite the cars, and then to the upper left side. What Behnke and Bechtle have in common is the exploration of optically dynamic contrasts using representational imagery, thus bringing abstract concerns to the fore in representational painting. In Behnke’s multi-panel paintings, the diptych format reminds me of two examples from early in the 1960s: the *Marilyn Diptych* by Andy Warhol, 1962, and the *French Door* series by Robert Bechtle, 1965-66, with one difference. While the use of this format was episodic in these two artists, Behnke has used it consistently up to the present in her work. In Warhol’s diptych, Marilyn is repeated many times: in the right panel, there is an emphasis on Marilyn at the peak of her career, with this lushly colored, unreal image; in the left panel, there is emphasis on the “other” Marilyn, the beautiful girl whose humanity is underscored through the total lack of color. What Warhol wanted to achieve by this serial repetition of the same image, divided into two panels characterized by a different treatment of color, was to underline the two different natures of Marilyn: the authentic woman, who was obscured by the garish artificial mask of an actress imposed on her by the media.

In the *French Door* series, Bechtle used the diptych format to solve practical problems of transportation from his studio to his gallery. A byproduct of this transportation necessity was that the conjoined panels better emphasized the two-dimensional nature of the painting. This last was an important point in Hyperrealist art: the use of a reference photograph to make a painting looking like the photo, starting in 1962 with Pop Warhol’s *129 Die in Jet*, and continued by hyperrealist painting, serves as a two-dimensional intermediary between a three-dimensional reality and a two-dimensional canvas.

Behnke started to make use of this particular format without knowing specifically of Bechtle’s *French Doors* as a two-panel painting. The reaction against Abstract Expressionist art dominating many art schools in the United States is well known: Behnke, similar to Estes and many other realists of the 1960-70s, started as an abstract painter (Fig.1), because this was the common ground in America. Abstraction was the academy of the day. These artists found different ways to evolve out of abstract painting depending on their individual concerns. What many of these painters have in common with Abstract Expressionism and with each other is that, from Jackson Pollock onward, the canvas was considered literally as an object, a physical entity. At the beginning of the XX Century, in France Picasso and Braque were deconstructing subjects in their most analytic paintings, in order to explore their inner structure; in Italy Futurism tried to make the audience enter the canvas or the sculpture thanks to “linea-forza”, which were able to expand the subject to the environment surrounding them, (see Boccioni’s *Forme Uniche nella Continuità dello Spazio*). In New York City, in 1947 Pollock started action painting by the active motion of
dripping color over a canvas placed horizontally on the floor, thus creating an implied act of [push-pull] connection between the canvas and the audience: when moving about while dripping paint on the floor, the force of gravity pulled color vertically from the artist to the canvas; after the painting was finished and hung up on the wall, the same force was re-
stored horizontally as pulling from the canvas to the audience viewing the painting. This created a virtual interaction between the painting and the audience. Thus the canvas be-
comes an object of the viewer’s reality, because, other than the subject itself of the painting, there is a secondary narrative content created by the personal interaction between the viewer and the painting. Each shares the same environment and interacts within the other’s space. The great innovation of Hyperrealist art in general (see Bechtel’s work) was to bring 
this interaction, which comes via Futurism, (not fully realized) and fuse it with Pollock’s achievements (fully realized, but only in abstract art) to representational art, a goal very
difficult to achieve.

Returning to Behnke’s work, although she makes use of reference photos for her paint-
ings, it is clear that she cannot be fully considered a hyperrealist. Her use of a diptych 
format has a different purpose: instead of considering the photo as the actual subject of her 
painting, she concentrates on what is depicted on the canvas, in a more traditional Renais-
sance way. Further, the imagery is not the primary concern, formal issues as color, com-
position between the panels as a whole, light, and narration are equally considered. As in 
Hans Hofmann’s work, Behnke’s attempts are to explore new combinations of shapes and 
colors to create new relationships. The structural connection between simple and compli-
cated areas, coming from a deep understanding of Hofmann’s work, together with a high 
degree of verisimilitude, are the only important aspects which Behnke shares with 
Hyperrealism; other than that, a renewed attention to the underlying narrative connec-
tions in her paintings and to the three dimensional illusionism of the painting is something 
that differentiates her. The only artist who gives this much importance to the subject-mat-
ter is Richard McLean in California. He is interested in “horse culture”, and pays attention 
to the specifics of the horse, as the main subject of his painting, in order to make social 
commentary on consumer society. Behnke, even if she is paying attention to the subject-
matter of her painting, does not share social commentary as a subject with McLean. While 
her painting may introduce underlying content, it is imbedded within the connections 
between the images, and is not included within the specific images themselves.

In her interview by Jeri Hise, Behnke mentions some conceptual women artists, as an 
inspiration for her work. She has often spoken of Dottie Attie and Hanne Darboven in 
casual conversation as early influences. The post-modern awareness of three-dimensional 
illusionism has also been explored in the triptych Untitled by Jack Goldstein, 1980: alter-
nating a distant view of airplanes and parachutists flying into the wide space of the central 
panel, with two large visions of microscopic phenomena, the artist explored the idea of the 
sublime through “the very distant and the very small” which also characterizes Pollock’s 
dripping paintings. Behnke’s multi-panel work, even if using the photograph in a manner 
similar to Goldsteins, is not concerned with the sublime at all, nor it is dramatic: even in Turbulence (Fig. 22), a study of the various contrasts set up by static versus ephemeral 
forms (buildings/steam), it is a question of observation and actuality, not of emotive con-
tent. It is interesting to remember that one of the first news photographs, taken in the 
village of Oswego in New York State by George Barnard in 1853, shows buildings that 
have been partially destroyed by the flames of the burning mills on July 5th, the look is 
similar to Turbulence, even if the latter simply shows an ordinary scene in the City.

A primary reference in her painting could be considered the analytic reductionist stud-
ies of Frank Stella and Josef Albers, rather than Hyperrealist or abstract expressionist works.
In *Spectrum*, 1961, Frank Stella produces a diptych made of two squares, each of one with six squares of increasing size nested within: one series has progressive colors (from yellow to black), and the other recessive colors. This reminds us of Behnke’s *Temperature Study I* (Fig. 3) and *3 Spectral Pairs* (Fig. 17), which also use complementary colors in a systematic way. A diptych by the Pop artist Jim Dine, titled *Two Blackish Robes*, made in 1976, appears to be echoed by *Temperature Study I*, as there is a slight difference in the character of the black in the two images, the color on the left is more equally distributed and on the right it appears more concentrated. Dine’s painting has an expressionistic effect, particularly in its use of black; on the contrary, Behnke gets a more objective effect in her use of white hues.

In the series *Homage to the Square*, Albers conceives of his work as “a configuration of compositionally interlocking, meditative forms”. The first part of Behnke’s production is concerned with repeating the same subject, but with color and light changes; part of her work focuses on how the shapes in one panel can correlate with the shapes of a nearby panel. In later work, the imagery is seen from one panel to the other according to different points of view: remembering Pablo Picasso’s example in an almost abstract work, Behnke brings to representational art the idea of showing different aspects of an object to encourage the viewer to re-conceive and re-experience the whole. In the three panels of *East Hampton Staircase with Landscape*, 1986 (Fig. 12), there is evidence that the staircase, though seen from different angles, is the same one. The triple arched window is completely visible in the central panel; in the right panel only its base is visible, but its triplex structure makes clear that it is the same window. In the left panel, only a fragment of that window is visible, but even here it is recognizable as part of the same structure. This happens again with the staircase, where the ornamentation of the balustrades is recognizable, though seen from different angles. The subject is seen from different points of view, which are connected by a number of common clues. In this way, by offering varying viewpoints of the same subject, Behnke shows the complexity of our experience, which is both continuous, and also fragmented. This is how memory works: the accumulation of sensorial data within the brain is selective and discontinuous, so that when the original context of a particular experience is lost, that experience may even become distorted, due to the new connotations which are created among the past associations and the present context.

As we know, in 1997 Behnke painted *Memory Abode (for Janet)* (Fig. 25). In chapter one, the furniture in the central panel has been explained as describing a connection between Crowder and Behnke’s mothers and the two cousins, as the two generations were linked by the use of the same furniture. A painting by Don Eddy, *C.VII.E: Dreamreader*, 1984 shows his daughter Sarah looking at the same art book he had used. The book alludes to a subtle connection between daughter and father (a connection reinforced by the toys floating in the space which Sarah occupies). This book connects Sarah, as the subject of the painting, to her father, the artist. His presence is implied as standing above to look at her. This book has a similar function to the furniture in “Memory Abode” in Behnke’s work. In both of these cases, the artists refer to experiential content in general by using episodes belonging to their personal histories; the investigation of experience is accomplished by each using an object as an aide memoir to recall or invoke the associations of various generations. Their approaches differ in two ways; first, Eddy’s painting refers to the immediate present, that is, it was painted when Sarah was the age she is represented as, while Behnke’s picture refers to an implied distant past; second, while Eddy made a one-panel picture, Behnke uses a three-panel structure. [Eddy later adopts this structure]. At that time, for Eddy the unification of different times and experiences was a matter of superimposition, while for Behnke it is a matter of putting fragments of imagery near each
other. Don Eddy has made a distinction between his paintings, which he refers to as “poetry”, and Behnke’s work, which he has called “essays”. Eddy’s multi-panel work is meant to be understood by each viewer according to their own individual sensibility (so that the fish in *Catena Aureum II* may be for the artist a memory of his past diving experience, and for me a memory of an aquarium). Behnke’s multi-panel work is intended to have a more specific reading and interpretation. To this end Behnke attempts to use imagery that will convey shared cultural associations. By placing these in context with other fragmentary images, she attempts to direct the meaning. In this painting, the marble table and the chairs can be dated by style, and their placement near other specific images conveys a meaning by context, in this case towards specific associations linked to the artist’s past.

The link between artist and geographic site is a noble tradition in American art. Behnke recognizes her debt to Edward Hopper in the painting *Nighthawks: Red & Green* (Fig. 16). Her watercolor version was painted in 1980, thirty-eight years after Hopper’s masterpiece. Behnke’s work appropriates the color and composition of Hopper’s painting, however there is a very important difference: there is no human presence in the painting. The three customers at the counter as well as the counterperson have been removed; additionally, the upper windows of the red brick building in the background are opened identically. In the Hopper original they have random openings, implying human presence. Behnke again undermines the original human presence, replacing it with observations of light and color.

Behnke has added the words *Red and Green* to the original title. Coincidentally, the critic Gail Levin, in an essay on Hopper’s *Nighthawks* published in “Arts Magazine” in May 1981, quotes a statement by Van Gogh, referring to his 1888 painting *Night Café*, where the artist said he wanted “to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green”.

Hopper had plenty of opportunity to see Van Gogh’s work, as Levin demonstrates in this essay. The use of color shows this: the red building in Hopper’s work recalls the wall in the background of Van Gogh’s work; the green streak of tiles inside the restaurant in Hopper’s work recalls the roof in Van Gogh’s. In both paintings the human figure is still and isolated, reflecting loneliness. Behnke’s received inspiration from Hopper’s work is not related to the human condition; rather, by eliminating it, she has been able to concentrate on formal problems. Her titles pay homage to the importance of these two modernist paintings to her. She values their qualities of light and color, instead of their emotive content. Behnke redirects the content of her *Nighthawks* by introducing related *predella*. Each image is a façade of a building in New York City. All are geographically close to the scene painted by Hopper, which is located “in Greenwich Village, where Greenwich Avenue, Seventh Avenue and Eleventh Street come together”.

In discussing American Photorealism, I have considered Hopper’s *Nighthawks* to be related to Richard Estes’ *Grand Luncheonette*, 1969, another inexpensive restaurant interior. The primary difference between this photorealist work and the one by Hopper is that although both paintings look emblematic of an American vernacular, Hopper’s work gains intensity in expressing drama by a strong simplification of shapes, while Estes has concentrated his attention on the accumulation of detail in his composition. He creates a very complex system of reflections, which take precedence over the figures in the painting. As in Behnke’s work, Estes also concentrates more on formal matters rather than on narration or drama. Behnke wants to recall the simplicity of Hopper’s composition, changing the narrative implications to the relationship between this major image and the smaller panels surrounding it. She suggests compositional alternatives: the background of the central panel is filled with buildings. In the central panel of the *predella* is the quoted “appropriation”, which gives the title to the composition. An open area appears in the top right side of the other two panels of the *predella*, and also in all the upper areas of the central panel; this
suggests an overview of the front of a building, while the *predella* panels suggest only fragments of buildings. Human presence is not stated, but is implied by the shops’ signs in *predella* panels (Robert Cottingham also uses signs as a way to imply human presence). In the central panel these signs are substituted by empty cars and chairs; the city views have a counterpart in the small plants and trees in the central panel, which are totally absent in the *predella*.

Another American artist who paints banal commercial establishments is John Baeder. In *The Magic Chef*, 1975, Baeder puts cars in front of a building, thus implying, without stating, a human presence. Advertising signs occur frequently, as do the presence of tree leaves in a similar way to Behnke’s work. However, Baeder’s painting has a strong nostalgic and biographical quality, which is totally absent in the pure exploration of light, color and shape in Behnke’s work. The simplification in *The Magic Chef* does not have the purpose of exploration of formal, purely painterly matters as in Behnke’s, but rather it recalls the authenticity of familiarity. Baeder was raised in a hotel in Georgia, so he and his family were accustomed to eating out every day in restaurants like the local diners. This work is strongly nostalgic for an idealized past.\textsuperscript{16}
Notes:

1 “La terza caratteristica consiste nel fatto che i rettangoli fluttuanti nella tela creano uno spazio infinito dietro a loro, dove le pennellate scendono nella parte posteriore spingendo in avanti ed allargando sproporzionatamente i rettangoli, dando ad essi una grandezza ed un’importanza visuale che non avrebbero nella realtà”. Leda Cempellin, L’Iperrealismo fotografico americano in pittura..., p. 75.

2 Ibid., p. 36.

3 “Well, I was conscious of multi-panel works in art history when I was a student. I used this format on some occasions, because of the variety and the flexibility that it offers. In some cases, for example in the dyptich “French Doors” in 1965, it was partially a question of convenience: it is easier to move the single panels, than the whole painting. This work measures six by six feet, so it was rather complicated to bring it out the studio, where the stairs were very narrow”. Robert Bechtle in Leda Cempellin, L’Iperrealismo fotografico Americano... Ibid., p. 153.

4 “Moreover, the point where the panels have been joined emphasizes more of the two-dimensional aspect of the canvas” Robert Bechtle, ibid., p. 153.

5 Ibid., p. 86.

6 Ibid., p. 164.


8 Sims Patterson, Whitney Museum of American Art ... , p. 154.

9 This is something Behnke has in common with Picasso, with the difference that, while Picasso’s work almost goes into abstraction in 1911, during the analytic phase, Behnke’s work always remains inside the figurative sphere.


11 Leda Cempellin, Conversazioni con Don Eddy - Conversations with Don Eddy (Padua: CLEUP, 2000), pp. 54-55.


14 Ibid., p. 157.

15 Leda Cempellin, L’Iperrealismo fotografico americano...., p. 106.

4. SCIENCE IN ART AND THE PAINTING AS AN ESSAY

“Edwin Hubble has said that observation always involves theory. For many years I have used the device of multiple panels to investigate content on various levels: formal, phenomenological, epistemological, and associative” (Behnke).

In 1920 Edwin Hubble, a famous California astronomer, was able to use the telescope at Mount Wilson to photograph the stars; he discovered that the nebulas were not gas concentrations within our galaxy, but independent galaxies (he suggested the term island-universes), composed of stars, many with their own planets. The Universe was seen as endless. Since then, other astronomers have been able to observe that these galaxies are moving away from each other, as if at the beginning of the Universe they were all one mass which exploded. This is now commonly known as the “Big Bang” theory of the origin of the Universe.

In a previous interview, Behnke said that she takes all the photographs used as reference for her paintings, with the exception of the photographs of the astronomical subjects, which are based on photos from scientific journals.\(^1\) The immense sky in Blind Sight (Fig. 40) is one of the galaxies described above. In the other panels, other types of views of the visible world are used. The metropolis, and a view of fish in water, each with a different rhythm, reflects the human world erected vertically with skyscrapers, and an underwater world that directs the gaze downward. There is even a sense of light, manifest as energy released by the mass of stars and echoed by the orange fluorescent fish, as well as by the artificial light coming from the interior windows and the street lights in the central panel. This painting deals with the idea of “ether”, a theoretical medium which matter was thought to exist within in early conceptual models of physics. In this painting “light”, “air”, and “water” all manifest qualities associated with this idea of ether as a unifying medium that natural properties were bound by. We see in this painting a phase change from one state of this medium to another.

Sidereus Nuncius, 1990 (Fig. 23), which translates as Starry Messenger, is the title of a book published by Galileo Galilei in March 1610. This book collects the results of his observations of the night sky with a telescope, which he invented. His most important discovery was that the Universe is not a system of spheres one inside the other, with the Earth at the center, but that the Universe is an infinite space filled with stars, and that the Earth is one very small part of it. The title contains allusions to the “telescope-messenger” as a tool to discover the nature of the Universe, which brought into question the Ptolemaic geocentricism (an astronomic belief system in Medieval times) that the Earth was at center of it. At the beginning of the XVII Century, Galileo had to rebut to his then radical theories to rescue himself from death for heresy.

A second concern with scientific theories deals with chemistry. We have already talked about Hofmann’s spatial [push/pull] theory. It is known that this theory is based on a
fundamental theory in physics, discovered by Newton: *any action is balanced by an equal reaction in the opposite direction*. In the first chapter, we discussed one of Behnke’s earlier paintings, dated 1963, as being influenced by Hoffman’s theories (Fig. 1); in the second chapter, we mentioned this theory while discussing *Light Study with Venetian Blinds* (Fig. 7).

Other paintings, like *Blind Sight* and *Turbulence*, are more directly related to scientific theories, and the history of science. The term “blind sight” (Fig. 40) was a term “used for navigation by alternative means before modern technology and communication” (Behnke).

The idea of navigation in modern technology is symbolized here by strategies of early navigation connected with the astronomy. The *predella* at the bottom posits the idea of “navigation” by fish under water, while the central panel refers to navigation by human environment with landscape markers, and by light. While the upper panel suggests the possibility of navigation by the stars (blind sight), all in the substance of “ether” a substance lighter than the air, considered by Aristotle to be the fifth element in nature. *Blind Sight* is seen from the bottom to the top progressively as a navigation of elements from microcosm (the fish) to macrocosm (the stars), with the natural elements transitioning from water to cloud vapor or air to ether. This painting demonstrates a phenomenon common in nature and in science. The transformation of chemical elements from one state to another is known as phase transition. It is interesting to note the use of contrasts between light and dark transitions, as light, color and shape remain the main concerns in Behnke’s work. In the lower panel, the schooling fish are brighter than the water; in the central panel, the buildings are darker than the sky; in the upper panel, the stars are again brighter than the ether.

The idea of transformation of matter from one status to another has also been studied previously in a 1994 painting titled *Turbulence* (Fig. 22). As Behnke states in an interview:

> “Turbulence is an idea which comes from chaos theory, where water becomes steam. The transition from one state to the other originates a different structure. Therefore, what is interesting here is the shape these steam clouds may create”.

The ephemeral organic forms of steam interweave with the city buildings in the two side panels, while in the central panel a rushing river creates another form of turbulence, as it continuously changes shape. In both cases we see matter going through a form of phase transition.

Finally, the third correspondence we are able to find is between Behnke’s work and mathematics. In the essay *Mathematics and aesthetic values*, Ugo Volli theorizes that one of the problems facing art today is a lack of understanding of mathematics. He theorizes that one of the traditional directions of Western thinking is formulated according to Plato’s canons, so that there is tension and contradiction in the two human faculties, “reason”, (the domain of mathematics), and “intuition” (the domain of art) making them difficult to reconcile.³ Giorgio Celli has talked about a prejudice that probably dates to Romanticism that categorizes the artist as a “visionary”, and the scientist as “normal” and having objective perception.³ He uses Van Gogh as an example of why this is not true. Even when he was institutionalized in a mental hospital, Van Gogh painted the *Starry Night* in a manner that demonstrates his knowledge of the locations of the cosmos. The stars are in the sky in exactly the correct position, as they would be seen through his window in the period he
painted them. This is another illustration that art, or at least as Hubble says, “observation” is not irreconcilable with science.

Jacques Mandelbrojt stated, “an artist can be inspired by isolated scientific concepts or, better, he can express more in general a vision of the world inspired by science.” This statement concerning art in relation to science can be illuminating in regard to the evolution of Behnke’s work from the abstract geometric installations (see Fig. 2) or paintings (see Fig. 1) at the beginning of her career to the later choice of figurative painting. She has said that some abstract artists like Josef Albers have inspired her. Mandelbrojt said that abstraction helps to clarify figuration. In the same way that mathematics gives to physics the structures and rules to describe reality, abstract art is an exploration of formalism; utilizing the structures with which the artist will be able to make figurative painting referring to the visible world. This is curious, because we know that abstract art has been a more recent evolution in painting in Western art. The author explains that the cubist artist Juan Gris commented that, while Cézanne translated reality into abstract shapes, actually he was taking abstract shapes to make reality. Behnke did the same: starting from the geometric exploration of shapes (see Fig. 1) and later from a systematic exploration of light (see Fig. 3) and color (see for instance Fig. 24), she gradually introduced a higher degree of “fidelity” to her subjects, going towards a higher degree of verisimilitude. Therefore, her representational paintings have to be analyzed using the precedent of abstract art. The starting point for her work is the Cubist’s investigation of reality through fragmentation, re-introducing the Renaissance device of a multi-panel structure. The seriality in painting, where the same image is structured in different ways, or different images are structured in the same way, is a device similar to one adopted by scientific investigation, where a small number of hypothesis are made in order to be verified, in approach to the same problem. Moreover, the cause of this seeming irreconcilability would be the abstract nature of mathematics, which would not have a specific visible link to the objects belonging to the tangible, seen world.

It appears to me that when we are talking about the “figurative” domain of art, and not the “abstract” one, we are referring to the Western mentality preceding the breaking up of Renaissance perspective, which has been the most mature product of Neo-Platonist thought.

Behnke’s multi-panel paintings refer to this period of art history, and to Renaissance polyptych. However, Behnke is a XX Century artist, she belongs to the post-modern era, where all non-objective art, from the didactic phase of Kandinsky, through Mondrian, to Josef Albers have produced an art which often is a translation of mathematical canon. Even Volli, living in the post-modern era, has corrected the traditional point of view, emphasizing the mathematical nature of perspective.

This is the starting point for Behnke: in referring to Volli’s distinction, the artist’s intention is to reconcile the Renaissance polyptych, which was traditionally representational (even if perspective is mathematically based!), with the “abstract” nature of mathematical and scientific theories. The paintings resulting from this reconciliation are not just structured in a mathematical way, but often refer to scientific theories in a number of ways. Here is a significant example.

Archimedes’ Dream, 1998-99 (Fig. 29) refers to Archimedes’ deep interest in the form of the spiral, which included mathematical properties in its possible manifestations. The spiral is:

“an essential form that continually reappears in both nature and in human design. Indeed it exists in mathematical formulae as well and can be expressed as a numerical progression” (Behnke).
This painting deals with a spiral staircase, which is used as a recurring symbol in the spiral galaxy and the spiral shell. We can see the macro and micro formulations of this shape, which occur in nature and are mimicked by human device. The artist makes an interesting comment about the notion of “breaking up the picture plane”. A spatial-illusionist movement is created on in the right panel, where it enters in the house through the glass door, then makes a wide curve from above in the central panel entering in the left panel, into the intimacy of the upper rooms. The three-dimensional illusion of perspective again comes into play, even in an art which, being photographically based, would ordinarily have an illusion to a flat surface. This paradox of space is something that makes Behnke’s work somewhat unique among photo based illusionistic painting. There is also something else. This perspectival inquiry occurs through fragments of imagery which encourage a reading of the painting from the right to the left. This is a logical sequence which requires the viewer to enter the painting through the image of an interior on the lower right, and then move through a progression of its more secluded interior spaces, which are set above, with the sly appearance of defending the intimate space from strangers. Even if there is a strict coherence in the distribution of spaces in the ascending dynamics which encourage discovery of the structure of the house, in the course of looking from one panel to the other, we get an impression of fragmented vision, maybe even of intentional contradictions of the spatial fragments, in the way the gaze is directed. This contradiction is due to the adoption of several points of view: starting with the right panel, a movement can be traced from the interior space to the exterior space. In the central panel, the eye goes from above to the bottom while on the left panel the eye tries to explore the implied space of the rooms at the top while the direction of the handrail moves in opposition.

There is a complex and delicate osmotic process, between spaces that can be visually transited in so many directions. These functions, according to Renaissance perspectival dynamics, are enhanced by post-modern spatial tensions of Hofmann’s theories i.e. a space which not only recedes, but also advances towards the audience, between the assertion of this space and the negation of visual access through it, using strategies which demonstrate a post-modern consciousness of its illusory nature. The curtains on the right panel are a typical illusionistic artefact which in the Baroque era was used to show the simulation of reality, as in the raising of a curtain; the handrail in the central panel seems to offer to hold the audience from falling down from above, and at the same time it obstructs the visual entrance to the rooms in the left panel.

If we think of Bachelard’s the poetics of space, we might say that this way of dealing with space could be seen as a wish to keep the audience from reading these paintings biographically. The house allows us to partially enter its secrets, but it is not the home of the artist, not her private domain. Behnke’s work remains an “essay”, as Eddy defines it: it may connect to the elucidation of scientific theories, or deal with the pictorial space, and may look “poetic”. A few clues, as the ones above described, help us understand that this is not the correct interpretation, if we want to fully understand the work.

In her interview, talking about The Paradox of Infinite Regression (Fig. 28), Jeri Hise quotes Bachelard’s book. Even while the book deals with physical metaphors for the interior spaces of poets, it also says something that can be applied to the physical spaces in Behnke’s work. In Memory Abode (for Janet) (Fig. 25), the author wrote that memory does not record the real length of time, but an abstract time in the form of space. Therefore, the memory of her grandparent’s summer house in Coventry, where Behnke grew up, is made up of spatial fragments, which when read as a sequence, give the sensation of a
particular time, not specified but rather suspended, where a little girl could become enchanted by a small pool of water, or by white flowers (this color may be associated with childhood purity), or even by an angle of the interior space of the house, a site for play. The central panel has a feeling of childhood in a reassuring space, in solitude, which is fundamental for a daydreamer. For Bachelard, the act of withdrawal into oneself is a way to refute the external world, and to look into for the realm of the imagination, which is an attitude typical of daydreaming children, as Behnke once said:

“\textit{I still visit these places in my dreams}”.

If we look at the geometric configuration of the central panel, we think of Bachelard’s words when he says that the house is, first of all, a geometric configuration, that we tend to experience rationally; however, as soon as we perceive that space as intimacy, rational thought gives way to a place of the dream.

In works, like \textit{East Hampton Staircase with Landscape} (Fig. 12), there is a panel where a door is open, inviting one to go inside, while in the other panel there is a window, opening onto a small hint of a contiguous space. This implies a subtle connection between interior and exterior, between nature and civilization. The door is highly symbolic, and for Bachelard, if it opens, it may have a double meaning: as in opening the door of solitude.
Notes:

2 Ibid., p. 39.
5 Ibid., pp. 14-16.
7 “Allo stesso modo in cui la matematica fornisce le strutture grazie alle quali la fisica può descrivere il reale, l’arte astratta può essere considerata come l’esplorazione, l’espressione delle forme e delle strutture di cui l’artista dispone, e si può allora considerare la pittura figurativa come astrazione incarnata (nonostante si sia considerata per molto tempo l’astrazione come esito originato dalla figurazione, come figurazione disincarnata). È ciò che significa questa frase di Juan Gris: ‘Cézanne – diceva Gris – prende una bottiglia per farne un cilindro, io prendo un cilindro e ne faccio una bottiglia’”. Ibid., p. 76 (translation by Andrea Pinotti).
8 Quoted in ibid., p. 76.
9 Ibid., p. 83.
10 “In primo luogo si può richiamare una classica distinzione tra i due ambiti, ragioni o “facoltà” dell’uomo, che in termini altrettanto tradizionali, si possono chiamare ragione e intuizione (...): l’arte apparterrebbe alla seconda sfera, mentre la matematica esprimerebbe più d’ogni altra scienza la prima; nessun rapporto se non accidentale si potrebbe istituire tra i due termini. Il secondo tipo d’obiezione possibile alla proposta di prendere in considerazione la matematica come possibile fonte d’informazioni sui fenomeni estetici, consiste nell’opporre a questa prospettiva il carattere astratto della matematica”. Ugo Volli, *Matematica e valori estetici...*, p. 180.
11 “Vediamo quindi quali rapporti si possono ritrovare tra matematica e mondo dell’arte (...). Un esempio del primo caso è il rapporto tra prospettiva rinascimentale e geometria proiettiva”. Ibid., p. 180.
14 Ibid., 159.
15 “La casa è, in effetti, in primo luogo, un oggetto dalla rilevante geometria, per cui si è tentati di analizzarla razionalmente (...). Un simile oggetto geometrico dovrebbe resistere a metaphore che accolgono il corpo umano, l’anima umana, ma la trasposizione all’umano avviene immediatamente, non appena si assume la casa in quanto spazio di consolazione e di intimità, in quanto spazio che deve condensare e difendere l’intimità. Allora si apre il campo dell’onirismo, al di fuori di ogni razionalità”. Ibid., p. 74.
16 Ibid., pp. 243-245.
INTERVIEW WITH LEIGH BEHNKE

by Jeri Hise
OCTOBER 28, 2000: Jeri Hise interviews Leigh Behnke

JH: Can we start by talking about the Sagamore series, which is currently in progress?

LB: I started this series, which is concerned with Sagamore, the Roosevelt Summer Estate, on Long Island. I was given a grant to go there to do research and photography.

The curators worked with me. They were wonderful: very interested in the overview—the upstairs, downstairs, and the lives of the various people who lived there—not only the Roosevelt’s, but the domestic staff as well. The first painting of the series is called “Annie’s View” (Fig. 39). This is not exclusively Sagamore imagery, but rather a fictionalized version using composite imagery from several sources. I asked the curators if they had information about Annie, who was an actual person, a cook, I believe. They knew her last name, and that she went on to marry and live in the area. She came from Ireland, as many poor young people did, during the potato famine. That was all they knew, and so I was able to project an imagined life onto this basic information.

I found it interesting to imagine the lives of these young women living at the top of the house. Their surroundings were very simple, and their rooms were furnished sparingly. I show the back staircase in this work, as well as views from the upper bedrooms. I can picture young Annie looking out the window and thinking about what she has left behind, possibly wondering about what’s to come. The richness in these surroundings comes from the lighting, not from the objects themselves.

The second painting in the series shows parts of the first floor, the area the Roosevelts would have used as a sitting room and parlor, as well as the main entrance. The lives of the owners would have been very different from that of the staff. The paintings are meant to present an overview. In the top panel above the predellas I’m interested in the play of light on surfaces, most of which are of opulent materials.

JH: Does this painting have a multi-panel structure?

LB: Yes. Each panel is a separate piece. They will be mounted together when they are finished. All the panels are wood. I have them made for me. I find them very beautiful. My work changed a lot when I began working on wood. There’s something special about the way the paint sits on the wood; on canvas it sinks in more. If you look at my early work you can see the difference.

JH: Yes, I can see this is a different surface.

LB: So my painting methods changed in response to it.

JH: Do you use the same system of layering glazes in both cases?

LB: I do. I was originally a watercolorist, and I continue to use a lot of very odd watercolor techniques that I have adapted to oils. For example, can you see liquid frisket in this [unfinished] painting?

JH: Oh, yes.

LB: People always tell me that it is not going to work, but it does. It makes it easier than having to redraw the areas each time, and temporarily protects the drawing or the underpainting as I am applying broad areas of paint. I frisket out the lightest areas or the highlights, and then glaze over. I’m not interested in repainting small details if I don’t have to.
I also use Micron pens, or other archival pens that won’t bleed. I draw first with these pens and I can paint over whole sections, and the line shows through. This also enables me to preserve the drawing, which shows through. I often use a projector, trace some parts of the image with the pens, and make some parts up as I go along, and then apply frisket while I work in the darker areas. I can build up in a way similar to how I use watercolor, by adding several layers one upon the other; some places require three or four layers, some places even more. Even with these shortcuts it is very time consuming. I start with Liquin, an alkyd medium that is fast drying. Later I use a standard oil medium with stand oil and damar.

JH: It looks as though you work around the entire board.

LB: Yes I do. I need to see the whole thing in color before I make adjustments. Basically, I paint the whole thing at least twice: once to get it down, and a second time to figure out the specific relationships. In the first layer I can tell how much simplification I can afford; then I go back in the second layer and begin to edit color and detail. I often do this with transparent paint.

JH: Probably developing it with two involved layers gives it a sense of history as far as these being narrative.

LB: Yes. I get fairly attached to them by the end just because they take so long. I need to spend time adjusting the values in the outer layers. I can’t usually see how much lighter or darker an area needs to be until I get the hue, intensity, and imagery detail passages blocked in completely. Even though they are photographically based there is a lot of deviation as I move forward.

JH: You can start playing… Artistic license. Tweaking.

LB: Yes. I guess the places where there’s tweaking are the ones still to be painted over, especially if I am going to change the composition. I do very small compositional studies so I can see how the underlying shapes are going to line up. Sometimes I have to move parts around; sometimes I have to redraw the perspective lines.

JH: A lot of time before you actually begin the painting.

LB: Yes. Then at the middle stage there is not so much tweaking, as I’m just trying to get it all down. In the final stage there’s a lot of fussing around with it.

JH: What’s the role of light in your paintings?

LB: We saw a very interesting show when we were in England at the National Gallery. Gombrich had done a show that addressed the issue of light and shadow. He claimed that historically there have been relatively few painters using light and shadow as specific elements. It seemed so strange to me- not to think of light as one more compositional option. I guess that’s also because of the glazing technique that I am using, and the way I’m handling the paint. I can get a quality of light from the intensity of the glaze color; it’s inherent in the process.

JH: I certainly get a sense of luminosity.

LB: I do think a lot about that. I remember the curators at Sagamore. They were so sweet about it. I said I couldn’t come unless the house was filled with sunlight. So every day we would check. It is about an hour and a half out on Long Island, and I had to take the train. The night before we’d check the weather reports. The light was such an important element. The first time that I went there the curators were intrigued by the fact that although I was surrounded by items of historical significance, I was shooting film of how light fell in a staircase. They said that they had people come and photograph the objects before, but that I was the first to come and photograph the highlights and shadows. That was how they perceived it but that’s probably a bit extreme. Its the play of light on surfaces and the transitions of color that interests me, but the location does matter.
During the painting process I enjoy the problem solving issues. The quest to figure out how you can employ the pigments to express light: which are transparent, which opaque and how to transition between them.

**JH:** It seems as though you are so proficient in your technique that you aren’t really involved in it, as though it is so natural. Rather you are involved with the image painting.

**LB:** I like the whole process of previewing. I like the process of looking at something and thinking about how to proceed. What I do in the first layer will influence how I’ll use the color in the second. I also like it when something unexpected happens: I’ll have to improvise on my plan in this new situation. There is a sense of a complete process that will allow flexibility, new adjustments over areas that don’t work. I can play with all of that. Sometimes I even change local colors in unexpected ways.

**JH:** What kinds of paints do you use?

**LB:** It depends on the color. I use different brands for different colors. For example, I use Liquitex Hansa Yellow. I find it much more intense than other brands. Other brands I use frequently are Windsor Newton and Gamblin. It takes time to develop these preferences.

**JH:** Tell me about the glazing process you use?

**LB:** I work in layers. The underpainting is fairly opaque and the medium is Liquin. Then I introduce a mixture of stand oil, damar, and turp, with a small quantity of Liquin to speed the drying time.

**JH:** Do you apply pure glaze layers one upon the other?

**LB:** Sometimes, but more often I make image or color adjustments within the glaze layer. I’m very interested in the differences between opaque and transparent colors, and how they interact.

**JH:** Does some of this process relate to the washes you used in watercolor?

**LB:** Yes. Whole sections of overpainting are often transparent. There might be three or four layers underneath with varying degrees of imagery showing through, and then a transparent overpainting with imagery, or a pure glaze layer for color adjustment.

I am very interested in the optical nature of pigments. For example; what happens when you set a transparent layer between two others; what happens when you scumble opaque paint into a transparent layer; what happens when you apply pure color glaze over other layers. I try to set up contrasts in the optical effects of the pigment.

**JH:** I get a sense of a dance of the light on the objects, and the way you move in and out of the opaque.

**LB:** This is important to me: thinking of what will be transparent or opaque; how to make the transitions. It’s fun except when it doesn’t work. An initial stage of underpainting could take two or three weeks and then I’ll go back and repaint the entire surface up to several more times.

**JH:** I knew, by reading an article you gave me, that you paint three or four paintings annually. How do you manage to teach and have the time and energy to paint?

**LB:** I try to get all of my ten hours of teaching scheduled for one day. Then I’m done for the week. I don’t have any committee work, they just want you to come in and do your teaching. They pay accordingly, but it is a very good gig. Monday’s great, Tuesday is slow getting back into the studio. I sometimes don’t get started until almost noon. Then I have the rest of the week to paint.

**JH:** Do your students inspire you?

**LB:** I really love them. I teach foundation painting and drawing. I like teaching the beginning students because they are so wide eyed, enthusiastic, and open to ideas. They haven’t been reading Art Forum and getting controversial ideas that they want to argue with you.
about. They will try anything, I find them quite dear. I also like structuring things; taking an idea and thinking about how I can get it across; about what kind of assignment I can give that will allow them to understand a certain concept. Giving assignments like this works better for freshmen than it does for upperclass students.

JH: You seem to use that skill in the way you approach your paintings as well.

LB: Yes. I think that is who I am. I tend to be a fairly structured, fairly analytical person with little intuitive leaps thrown in. Something needs to make sense to me before I paint it, as well as before I teach it. I need to have an overview. I think it’s obvious that you can’t teach what you don’t understand. I need to know why I’m putting images together or they just don’t work for me.

The way I put things together at the beginning of each work is for formal concerns, more about composition or the color. Often, then, if I repeat an image it’s because I’ve found more layers or meaning in it, or implications that I wasn’t able to get at with my first set of juxtapositions. Sometimes I set up contrasts, like I did with the upstairs/ downstairs, stark/opulent, upperclass/workingclass dichotomies I use in the Sagamore paintings. It’s the same in teaching. If I am clear about why I’m asking my students to do something it makes a lot more sense to them as well. It doesn’t look like I’m just winging it.

JH: I see some of your photos on your studio wall. In what way do use photography to capture your images?

LB: The initial stages of my work are photographically based. I have always taken my own photos. In order to make this last series of paintings that deal with the Sagamore imagery I visited three times and spent a lot of time photographing. I was not allowed to rearrange or touch anything, but they let me set myself up for the correct angles. While we were in New Orleans I had access to a pristine 1895 house. The owner was a painter who has since become a friend. She let me spend a lot of time working out the compositional arrangements, things like opening doors, moving furniture, stuff like that. I try to spend an adequate time in the photographic stage. What are interesting angles? What is the underlying formal structure? What kind of information will I need to develop the painting?

I did this painting for my cousin Janet (Fig. 25).

JH: Are you bringing more personal narrative content into your work?

LB: Janet’s mother and my Mother were sisters, so there was a shared ancestry and family history. I have already written about that, and how it changed my work. I’m drawn to certain kinds of iconography, certain types of imagery. For example, when Don and I used to go to the Virgin Islands, he could paint the landscape, while for me it was too foreign, like a travelogue. I didn’t own that landscape on any level. Not that it didn’t resonate. It’s that he grew up in California and Hawaii. It was very natural for him while for me it was very exotic. The specific images need to feel a little generic to me. I don’t mean that in a pejorative way. There seems to be a period in history, in architecture, that feels very familiar to me. Whether I’m doing cityscapes, which I did for a long time, or the interiors, or even pure landscape, all of these seem to share a connection, a commonality.

All of my images seem linked to a period of time, sort of late Victorian through the 1950’s and a place, namely New England. When I did the painting for Janet, it forced me to focus on what we had in common: our Grandmother’s house, and the landscape of the surrounding area. That landscape had been “mediated” as Simon Shama would say, by the specific human intervention of our forebears, specifically by my Grandfather. In one image in the painting there is a lakeside pile of rock that looks completely “natural” but was in fact created by my Grandfather, who hauled the rocks out of the lake and moved them aside to create a swimming and beach area. Working with these “family” images seemed to bring together a lot of issues that had already been present in my work.
JH: When I read about you naming the rocks as a child I chuckled. It resonated with me because I had a rock over at our fishing cabin called Puppy Dog Island. When we go into our personal history we can find generic things that are universal.

LB: Yes. They are inside you.

JH: You sort of paint what you know. Write what you know.

LB: Yes. I still visit these places in my dreams.

JH: I do too.

LB: I have dreams where I am back in my childhood home in Connecticut. It was built in about the same period—maybe even the same year— as Sagamore. The house in New Orleans was built within a year or two of this date as well. This synchronicity is curious.

JH: And the idea of thinking of the lives and memories within each one…

LB: In the painting Memory Abode (For Janet) her husband Rob wanted to have something special for her 50th birthday. I was a little hesitant at first, but I realized that there were these issues in my work and it presented me with an opportunity to explore them more directly. The iconography was so amazing to me. I went on to use it again. The five paneled painting called “Structure And Artifice/Mediated Landscape” with the rocks in the outer panels and a very cultivated garden in the adjacent ones refers to this landscape as well. The rocks are a direct quotation, and the garden an indirect one.

JH: Would you talk about particular people or events which have influenced your work?

LB: When I first started to do sequential images in 1976, during graduate school, I said that I was looking at Monet; the particular use of color as light he was interested in; and the baystacks where he would go back to an image over and over again. It was considered very corny then, a ridiculous thing, that with all these fresh new ideas going around I would be looking at something from the nineteenth century. I still think he is the greatest colorist of the late nineteenth or early 20th centuries. He was unique in his understanding and use of color; perhaps historically unique. I spent a lot of time looking at him. I also spent a lot of time looking at the Dutch artist Jan Dibbets- a conceptual photographer. In particular some of his sequential photos; at Hanne Darboven and at the Bechlers who went around “collecting” categories of buildings in Europe. I was looking at contemporary photography as a vehicle to explore perceptual theory. Actually, I was not interested in the specific issues these artists were exploring. What came out of this interest was an understanding of how useful the device of the multiple images could be for my own ideas. It has become an overarching premise, a device that has remained constant in my work, while other areas of content shift from painting to painting. The format continues to both interest me and still be imminently useful. That’s what came out of the artists I was looking at back then.

JH: Have you been interested in codex scroll, first printing, not bound?

LB: No. I have been interested in the late Gothic and early Renaissance. The predella format was employed as a device to tell a story in narrative panels. This has been and continues to be a dominant interest for me. Another big influence has been the American watercolorist tradition. A show that knocked me out was a show of American Watercolorists at the Andrew Crispo gallery in the late 1970’s. Seeing John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer completely changed my life, and I became a watercolorist for the next several years. I started my public career as a watercolorist. In a way, I still am a “watercolorist”, but in oils. I still think about the issues that I was involved with while I was using them: for instance, about the transparency of the paint, the luminosity you can get from the ground. These are early influences. There has not been any other influence that is quite so direct since then.

JH: Just a matter of your process.
LB: I do look at other work that I love, but I don’t think there is anyone who is a direct influence on me in the way we just discussed.

JH: Since this is an interview for Women in the Arts art history class I’m curious to know what issues you could speak about as a contemporary female painter. Are there issues you have dealt with as a woman?

LB: In one way, I would say it is harder for women, and it was a lot harder when I first got out of school. I graduated in 1969: at that time it was still almost unimaginable that women would have real career, so few role models were around then. It very changed quickly after that, so by the mid 70’s a career was a possibility. I remember running into a former painting teacher, someone I studied with at Pratt. I was heading to my loft in Soho, carrying canvases and art supplies. He asked me what I was up to, and looked in the bag, asking if “those are housekeeping materials?” In that time it was hard to picture yourself in an ongoing career, much less have others take you seriously. 1970’s feminism changed that, and by the time I was in grad school there were many emerging female artists. The gallery I show with, Fischbach, has always had a noble history of showing women. The “Janes”, both Wilson and Freilich were there, as well as Lois Dodd, and Nell Blaine. An amazing woman, Marilyn Fischbach, who was a good friend of Elaine Dekooning, started the gallery. She was the first to show Eva Hesse, and Jo Baer. Later Larry DiCarlo and Aladar Marburger continued that tradition. They were two young gay men, just out of art school, who had studied under Elaine’s tutelage. They liked women, and showed them.

JH: Have women painters of the past or women artists influenced you as you were developing your work or ideas.

LB: Hilda Bechler and Hanne Darboven, whom I mentioned before, are women. I read the lives of women in the famous Germaine Greer book. I looked a lot at Mary Cassat for her tight compositions. Now, of course I have a lot of women friends who have careers, and they have been very inspirational to me. A woman named Regina Granne who teaches graduate drawing at Parsons was just enough older than me to be a mentor when I was starting to work. She urged me to make a real commitment and to take the work seriously. I have been mentored by a number of women artists, not in a commercial way, but through supportive friendships. This is a life we’ve chosen, and we all are doing it.

JH: Who else has influenced you?

LB: You mean women, or men, too.

JH: Either.

LB: Back in 1972, I shared a studio – my first one – on Christopher Street with John Wesley. He was just the dearest man, and became a close friend. Robert Birmelin, who is a well-known representational painter was the leaseholder, and rented to the two of us. These guys were older than me, both established artists with gallery representation. They didn’t treat me as just a cute face in the studio. They were respectful and took me seriously. They were my entrance into the art world. We had fun sharing the studio and I got an idea of what the life of a working artist was. Soon after that, I met Don Eddy, who became my husband. He introduced me to another group of painters, both men and women, in their late twenties and early thirties. Through him I met Jeanne Siegel, who hired me to teach at the School of Visual Arts. There I met Judith Linhares, Barbara Scrubartz, and many other artists of my own generation, all emerging at the same time, with the same concerns and struggles. I still maintain friendships with a group of these artists, and we meet and talk “shop”.

JH: What aspects of your work would you talk about?

LB: The abstract elements might be discussed in studio visits. We might do a “working critique”, talking about the formal elements or the development of the piece in progress. A discussion of what works, and where. Sometimes we talk about other levels of content.

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When I begin a painting I concentrate on the formal considerations, as well as the underlying premise, how am I using these shapes, and how do they work together. However, the iconography is important to me as well. I want the imagery to have layers of meaning. Still, initially, I concentrate on the formal aspects. I guess you could call that the “abstract element”.

**JH:** Do you feel you are moving more towards abstraction? Some of the imagery, coming from your painting of the late 70’s and 80’s show the abstract element is stronger now.

**LB:** Really? That’s interesting. I don’t believe I’m thinking of it any differently, but maybe I’m just getting better at it, or maybe clearer. There are refinements I make as I go along.

**JH:** Would you care to talk about the Paradox of Infinite Regression, or Archimedes Dream (Figg. 28-29)?

**LB:** Those paintings fit into another category of iconography in my work. I’m addicted to popular science books. I have a whole bookcase full of them, and I go through periods where that is all that I read. I was just crushed that they took Science Friday off the air on my local NPR station. Can you believe it? [Since restored] I enjoy thinking about what’s “out there” in the cosmos, in physics. For a long time I have used cosmological images. They are the only images that I haven’t collected for my self. I adapt images based on Hubbell, and other sources. There is a lot of latitude. You can invent a lot of it.

I want the combined, juxtaposed images to be a reflection of what the world, or perhaps the universe, is. I think about these things, these questions are a part of who I am. I want to bring some of that into the work. I am also interested in how the paintings can be metaphors for other issues. I have used the image of a spiral repeatedly in my work. It is form that occurs in nature in both macro and micro forms. The nautilus forms a perfect spiral as it builds its shell. Galaxies are formed into spirals. Man has adapted and utilized this form as well, in architecture and of course in mathematics. Archimedes Dream refers to the moment when he understood the implications of the corkscrew, another spiral.

On a more formal level I am intrigued by the way the spirals in my work punctuate the space. You can push back into the picture plane and play with the perspective lines. Things line up, panel to panel, and sometimes, as in The Paradox of Infinite Regression, I try to make the individual pieces weave in and out of each other and appear as one.

**JH:** What struck me in regard to the staircase is Gaston Bachelard’s Poetics Of Space and the inner structure of the shell. It is a lovely book. Bachelard describes interior space. I love how one journeys through this painting [Paradox of Infinite Regression, Fig. 28] traveling through the door and out into space. And then the reflections send you back again. There is a general confusion of space, like doorways in Italy, where you look through and see further in, and through another door.

**LB:** These are all different locations. I keep a “library” of collected images I can draw on. One of the things I like to do is play with them; put them together in various arrangements; see how each resonates in relationship to others; look for commonalities. One of these images is from Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. where it is the entrance to the rest rooms. It is not an interior of particular importance, but it is architecturally interesting. The second image is a stairwell in the Courtauld Museum in London.

**JH:** I feel as sense of vertigo looking into the spiral, falling down into a shell.

**LB:** The third image is the entrance to the teashop at the Baths in Bath, England. Sometimes places just “strike” me, the formation of the planes, or the play of light. People will ask why I’m photographing a particular spot. It’s because I see inherent possibilities, the arrangement of the forms, the play of light on surfaces. Sometimes it’s the geometry, which interests me as a painter.

**JH:** Well, you don’t take images literally. You play with them.
LB: Yes, just because I’m always thinking of the potential for sequencing I always try to shoot multiple versions; some vertical, some horizontal, varying the horizon line. I give myself the potential for more options, as I often need several variations.

JH: Tell me more about your gallery, Fischbach.

LB: Marilyn Fischbach is still a partner, but no longer active. She lives in Paris now. As I mentioned, she discovered Eva Hesse, showed Jo Baer, and a number of other minimalists. She counted Elaine deKooning as a good friend as well as an artist in the gallery. She was a visionary. She saw the potential in minimalist painting and was one of its first commercial proponents. She was very involved, both socially and professionally, with the players in the scene during the 60’s and early 70’s. At a certain point she decided to move to France and she turned the gallery over to her good friend Beverly Zagar, and two young employees of the gallery, Larry Dicarlo and Aladar Marburger. They were passionate about representational painting, and Aladar was an early supporter of the “painterly realists” like Neil Welliver, Lois Dodd, and Jane Freilicher. Some of them were already connected to the gallery—Sylvia Mangold was, as she was married to Bob Mangold (a well know minimalist). Others were invited to join and the gallery became a more eclectic mix. As Marilyn slowly decreased her influence the gallery continued this shift until in the early 1980’s when became an exclusive showcase for realism. It was always seen as a gallery strong in its support of women.

JH: So, for you that was exciting. Did you have much interchange with them?

LB: I didn’t know Jane Freilicher very well. I knew Jane Wilson a little better, and liked her work very much. Both were always friendly and supportive. Lois Dodd was a favorite of mine and she has been friendly, but it not like I’ve spent time over coffee with them, talking issues.

JH: Well. You’re working artists…

LB: I also had my own circle friends, whom I mentioned before. Jack Wesley and Bob Birmelin in the studio, Judy Linhares and Barbara Schwarz at school…. I found it best to stay out of gallery politics.

JH: By the way, you stated that that we are in an art world where strategies are often mistaken for visions.

LB: I meant it casually, but I think it’s partially true. I think there is a lot of strategizing, especially regarding younger artists who are trying to take the vernacular and make a statement. So you have artists taking small segments, finding their own niche within a larger area. Sometimes it becomes a parody of the initial insight; a pastiche based on the original idea. This niche finding is often a strategizing process. I’m not necessarily negative about it, it’s just that if it’s taken too far or if it’s too derivative it can be extremely formulaic. The last few Whitney Biennials have been rampant with this kind of work. Some of it will have longevity, but a lot won’t.

JH: Do you have any advice to young painters, especially young women?

LB: Don’t follow fads. Find something that will sustain you for the long run, even if people don’t see you as mainstream or cutting edge. I am thinking of my interest in Monet in grad school—the other students thought it was hilarious that I might find meaning for making “currently relevant” work in Monet. Follow your own vision but be aware what’s out there. I don’t mean that you have to live like you’re in an ivory tower or a desert island. While I was thinking about Monet, I was also looking at Dibbets. You have to find your own voice, your own mix. If you’re always looking for the next big thing you’re probably going to burn out. I think that’s good advice for both genders. I think that we’ve become much more gender friendly. Doors will open for artists who have a personal vision; gender is not as determinative as it once was.
JH: Do you feel positive about the role of art historians and critics?

LB: I’m a little more positive about art historians than critics, but I don’t want to categorize everyone. There’s good work being done by both. I do think critics are more likely to follow what’s hot, what’s edgy. I find it the most useful way to approach art is to believe in the validity of divergent approaches even if they are not current.

We went to a book signing last night for Donald Kuspit, who rails against the direction that painting is going in. He uses the term “redeeming art” for his crusade. I do think it is important to have people who are interpreters of the current trends. There is good work being done in many areas and fields. Art historians often do a less good job of interpretation of the current climate. Their job is to look back, and they tend to classify artists into broad movements. I think they are better at the overview.

In my current series of paintings, I’m thinking about how the interiors depicted were lived in, and how that use might be reflected in the composition. This issue does have overlaps with gender studies, as well as economics. These are new issues for me, but relevant within the context of women’s studies and historical reading: how can one represent some real aspect of the immediate past, and the actual lives of women that lived then.

JH: In my “Women and the Arts” class we studied Berthe Morisot’s Wet Nurse which is based on a formal, centered composition. At the time wet nursing was quite an industry. She had to leave her baby at home to go out to nurse a rich woman’s child. What was she thinking about as she did this?

LB: That’s exactly where I am with Annie’s View. What was she thinking? What was it like for her up there in that little room?

JH: You said at one point that you weren’t allowed to touch things in the Sagamore house. I was thinking that on the contrary, the maid is allowed to touch things when she is cleaning; however, she isn’t allowed to just be in the rooms, as you were.

LB: Let me tell you about this. It is an experience I had that made me aware of the lives of the working people. Don and I went to England on vacation. We rented an apartment (from the National Trust) at the manor house in Droitwich called Hanbury Hall. The apartment was the original servants quarters. Every day we went in the back entrance and up the back staircase to the top of the house. Bingo. That’s how I began to think about it. By the way, the Hanbury Hall gates are used in my painting “Temporal Portal”). When I went out to Sagamore I had to take the train to Oyster Bay, and then get a local cab at the station. On Monday morning all the maids arrive back after their weekends off. The cabbies would herd us all into cabs in groups according to location. I’d share a cab with several of these women, as the cabby drove around, dropping them at their employer’s houses. The talk was about what they did on the weekends when they were at home, how much they missed their families, and gossip about their employers. After talking with these domestic workers, I would get to Sagamore and talk with the curators about the lives of the women in the same situation during the turn of the last century. I think I became very aware of these women’s lives in a way I hadn’t been previously.

JH: They probably had their own subculture.

LB: Exactly. The curators reminded me that those lives were not grim. They were for the large part happy, and Sagamore was a good job. They were not lonely, the way some of the maids in the cab were, mostly working alone in a house. They were living in the house with others; they formed a cohesive group with its own subculture and support system.

JH: This might be an interesting idea to follow up.

LB: I asked the curators if they knew more about Annie, who as I mentioned, was an actual person. They knew her last name, where she was probably from, and that she went on
to marry and live in the area. That's all they knew about her. I've projected a lot on to that, to try to imagine her life.

**JH:** It's hard not to project our own consciousness. That was an issue with the Wet Nurse. In interpreting, how much are we projecting our own experiences onto the Wet Nurse and to Morisot, to the mother and the painter.

**LB:** Yes. It may have been very nice for many of them, compared to the other possibilities.

**JH:** Do you have visions for the future, or are you letting things evolve?

**LB:** I'm letting things evolve. I have about a year and a half of work ahead of me based on the Sagamore and New Orleans images. I'm reading a book by Michael Blach on the “Back of The Big House” which is an analysis of southern slave quarters. I have been thinking about these alternative lives.

**JH:** I've just finished reading *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs.

**LB:** Yes. I've heard of that. My readings always seem to enrich the direction of my work. I don't know what direction my reading or my painting will take next. I might switch back to science!
APPENDIX
ILLUSTRATIONS
Fig. 1 – *Student Work*, 1963
location unknown

Fig. 2 – *Maquette for sculpture*, sizes various,
PVC pipe, 1974

Fig. 3 – *Temperature Study I*, 1977, watercolor on paper, 11 x 14”
Private Collection
Fig. 4 – *Intensity and Value Study*, 1979, watercolor on paper, 41 ½ x 57”
Private Collection

Fig. 5 – *Comparative Compositional Study w/Columns*, 1981, watercolor on paper, 20 x 35”
Private Collection
Fig. 6 – *Brooklyn Bridge Compositional Study (2nd Version)*, 1983, watercolor on paper, 53 x 40”
Collection of Zurich Kemper Investments, Inc.
Fig. 7 – *Ligh Study With Venetian blinds*, 1981, oil/panel, 15 x 82”, destroyed September 11, 2001 in World in Trade Center, Collection of Brown and Wood

Fig. 8 – *Broken Symmetry*, 1990, watercolor on paper, 40 ¼ x 39”
Collection of Stacey Phillips
Fig. 9 – Sagamore: Downstairs, 2000, oil/panel, 12 x 40”
Private Collection

Fig. 10 – Sagamore: Upstairs, 2000, oil/panel, 12 x 40”
Private Collection
Fig. 11 – Geometric Configurations: Variations On A Square, 1982, watercolor on paper, 59 ¾ x 49”
Private Collection

Fig. 12 – East Hampton Staircase With Landscape, 1986, oil/canvas, 36 x 91 ½” framed
Private Collection
Fig. 13 – *Value Study: Twilight*, 1980, watercolor on paper, 38 x 41”
Private Collection

Fig. 14 – *Color Contradictions in Yellow and Purple*, 1980, watercolor on paper, 38 x 41”
Collection of Fred Gerard
Fig. 15 – Wallace’s Heresy, 1990, oil/canvas, 64 x 48”
Collection of Beth and Donald Siskind
Fig. 16 – *Nighthawks/ Red and Green*, 1980, watercolor on paper, 43 ½ x 45”
Collection of Beverly and Howard Zagor
Fig. 17 – *Three Spectral Pairs*, 1978, watercolor on paper, 20 \( \frac{1}{4} \) x 25 \( \frac{3}{4} \)”, 46 \( \frac{3}{4} \) x 97” overall
Private Collection

Fig. 18 – *Time Sequences/Value Changes*, 1979, watercolor on paper, 45 x 84”
Collection of Commerce Bancshares, Inc.
Fig. 19 – Moses Kaleidoscope, 1989, watercolor on paper, 25 x 46”
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert E. Carroll

Fig. 20 – American Gothic, 1984, watercolor on paper
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert E. Carroll
Fig. 21 – *Morning Light*, 1988, oil/linen, 26 x 60 ½”  
Private Collection

Fig. 22 – *Turbulence*, 1993, oil/ panel, 16 x 52”  
Collection of Doreen and Phil Margolin
Fig. 23 – *Siderius Nuncius*, 1990, oil/linen, 43 x 30 ½”
Private Collection
Fig. 24 – *Encore Acadia*, 2003, oil/panel, 36 x 36”
Collection of Commerce Bancshares, Inc.
Fig. 25 – *Memory Abode (For Janet)*, 1997, oil/panel, 30 x 60”
Collection of Janet and Rob Crowder

Fig. 26 – *Messiers List*, 1996, oil/panel 14 x 44”
Private Collection
Fig. 27 – *Temporal Portal: Imagined Lives*, 2000, oil/panel, 14 x 40”
Courtesy Fischbach Gallery, NYC

Fig. 28 – *The Paradox of Infinite Regression*, 1999, oil/panel, 12 x 34”
Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NYC
Fig. 29 – Archimedes’s Dream, 1998, oil/panel, 20 x 56”
Private Collection

Fig. 30 – Panoply, 1997, oil/panel, 12 x 36 ½”
Private Collection
Fig. 31 – *Chrysler*, 1996, watercolor on paper, 36 x 20”

 Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery
Fig. 32 – *Light Study w/Mirror*, 1981, oil/linen, 24 x 31”
Collection of Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri

Fig. 33 – *True Romance*, 1994, oil/panel, 34 x 20”
Seavest Collection
Fig. 34 – *Still life with Christmas Cactus*, 1985, oil/canvas, 17 x 37”
Collection Commerce Bancshares, Inc.

Fig. 35 – *Fifth Avenue and Fifty Seventh Street: Twilight Transit*, 1985, oil on canvas, 29 x 86”
Grey Global Group
Fig. 36 – *Cambridge Window*, 1995, oil/panel, 12 x 49”
Collection of Commerce Bancshares, Inc.

Fig. 37 – *Passage West*, 1997, oil/panel, 20 ¼ x 52 ½”
Private Collection
Fig. 38 – *Entrance For Edith and Alice*, 2001, oil/panel, 36 x 36”
Private Collection
Fig. 39 – *Annie’s View*, 2000, oil/panel, 36 x 36”
Collection Sidley Austin Brown & Wood
Fig. 40 – *Blind Sight*, 1996, oil/panel, 34 x 24”
Courtesy of Fischbach Gallery, NYC

Fig. 41 – *Interregnum*, 1995, oil/panel, 40 x 36”
Courtesy Fischbach Gallery, NYC
LEIGH BEHNKE: 
EDUCATION, SOLO EXHIBITIONS, 
GROUP EXHIBITIONS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS
LEIGH BEHNKE

BORN:
1946 Hartford, Connecticut

EDUCATION/AWARDS:
1969 Pratt Institute, New York, BFA
1976 New York University, New York, MA
1999 E.D. Foundation Grant, New Jersey

TEACHING:
1979 Kent State Blossom Program
1979 presentSchool of Visual Arts, New York
1989 National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Master Teacher
1990-93 National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Panelist

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:
1978 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1979 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1981 Thomas Segal Gallery, Boston
1982 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1985 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1991 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1992 National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC
1994 Fischbach Gallery, New York
1998 Fischbach Gallery, New York
2000 Elaine Baker Gallery, Boca Raton, FL
2003 Cloistered Spaces and Other Environments, Fischbach Gallery, New York
2006 The Garden, Fischbach Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:
1978 Landscape/Cityscape Art Gallery, State University of New York, Potsdam
Borderline Drawings, Iola Gallery, New York
1979 New York Now, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ
A.J. Wood Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
The Urban Landscape, Wave Hill, Riverdale, NY
The New American Still Life, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
The Gallery, Kent State University, Ohio
Selections from the Fischbach Gallery, State University of New York, Cortland  
On Paper, ICA, Virginia Museum, Richmond  
Real, Really Real, Super Real, originated at the San Antonio Museum of Art, Texas; traveling to; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA, and the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana  

Collector’s Gallery XV, The Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, San Antonio, TX  
Contemporary American Realists: Works on Paper, University Art Gallery, University of Pittsburgh, PA  

1982  Contemporary Realism, Brainerd Gallery, State University of New York at Potsdam and Plaza Gallery, Albany, NY  
Still Life/Interiors, Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA  
Fine Arts Faculty, School of Visual Arts, NY  
Lower Manhattan from Street to Sky, Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, New York  

1983  Realists Watercolors, Florida International University, Miami, FL  
Contemporary American Women Painters, Rahr-West Museum, Manitowoc, WN  
Contemporary Images of Watercolor: 1983, Allen Priebe Art Gallery, University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh  
In Honor of the Brooklyn Bridge, David Finley, Jr. Gallery, New York  

1984  Painting/Photography, Thorpe Intermedia Gallery, Sparkill, NY  
America Seen, Adams-Middleton Gallery, Dallas, TX  

1985  American Realism: The Precise Image, The Isetan Museum, Tokyo and the Daimura Museum, Osaka, Japan  
American Realism, William Sawyer Gallery, San Francisco, CA  

1985-87  American Realism: 20th Century Drawings and Watercolors, organized by the San Francisco Museum of Art, California, traveling to: DeCordova and Dana Museum and Park, Lincoln, MA; Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas, Austin, TX; Northwestern University, Evanston, IL; Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA; Akron Art Museum, Ohio; Madison Art Center, Wisconsin  

Watercolor USA 1986, The Monumental Image, Springfield Art Museum, Missouri  
Nature Morte: The Museum Considers the Still Life, Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Loretto, PA  

1987  Group Show, Fischbach Gallery, New York  

1988  Contemporary American Realism: Selections from the Glen C. Janss Collection, Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA  

1989  First Annual A.D.A. Show, New York City  
Summer Show, Fischbach Gallery, New York  
Gallery Artists, Fischbach Gallery, New York  
Second Annual A.D.A. Show, New York City  

1990  Flaneur/Flaneuse: Out for a Stroll, Barbara Fendrick Gallery, New York  

1991  New Horizons in American Realism, Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, MN  
Urban Realism, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
Urban Icons, Klarfeld Perry Gallery, New York
Urban Realism, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
1991-92 Dual Cultures: China and USA, Six Realist Painters, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, NY
1993 Contemporary Realist Watercolors, Sewall Art Gallery, Rice University, Houston, TX
Excellence in Watercolor, New Jersey Center for the Visual Arts, Summit, NJ
Paintings from the Commerce Bancshares Collection, Lakeview Museum of Arts and Sciences, Peoria, IL
1993-94 American Realism: The Urban Scene, Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID; traveling to: Redding Museum and Art Center, Redding, CA; Albany Museum of Art, Albany, GA; Canton Art Institute, Canton, OH; Paine Art Center and Arboretum, Oshkosh, WN; Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Maples, FL; Sunrise Museums, Charleston, WV; The Rockwell Museum, Corning, NY; Muscatine Art Center; Muscatine, IA
1995 American Art Today: Night Paintings, Art Museum at Florida International University, Miami, FL
1997 Realism in 20th Century American Painting, Ogunquit Museum of American Art, Olgunquit, ME
Get Real, Duke University Museum of Art, Raleigh-Durham, NC; curated by Virginia Bonito
2001 Contemporary American Realism III, M.A. Doran Gallery, Tulsa, OK
2002 H2O ’02: Paintings of Water, Fischbach Gallery, New York
2002-2003 6 Realists, General Electric Company, Fairfield, CT
2003 Facing Reality: The Seawest Collection of Contemporary Realism, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
2004 179th Annual, National Academy Museum, New York, NY
2004 Little Worlds, Fischbach Gallery, New York, NY
2004 Gone Fisching: Paintings of Summer, Fischbach Gallery, NY

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS:
Poroner, Palmer. “New Directions of the Seventies”, Art Speak, 1979

BOOKS:

PUBLISHED ILLUSTRATIONS:
Stephen B. Oats, Portraits of America, Houghton-Mifflin Co., v. 2, 4th ed. Cover,

CATALOGS:
San Antonio Museum Association, San Antonio, TX, Real, Really Real, Super Real; Sally Booth, Alvin Martin, Linda Nochlin, and Philip Pearlstein, 1981.
Brainard Art Gallery, State University of New York at Potsdam, Contemporary Realism; Joseph Hildreth, 1982.
School of Visual Arts, New York, Fine Arts Faculty; Jeanne Siegel, 1982.
Contemporary American Oil Painting, Jia Difei essay) and Scott Wampler (editor).. Changchun, China: Jilin Fine Arts Publishing House, 1999.
Adams-Middleton Gallery, Dallas, TX, America Seen: Contemporary American Artists View America; Alvin Martin, 1984.
Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LA, Landscape, Seascape, Cityscape; Lowery Sims, 1986.
PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS:
Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH
Georgetown University, Washington, DC
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge
New York Public Library, New York
Tamasullo Gallery, Union County College, Cranford, NJ
ABD International Management Corporation, New York
AKZO America Inc., New York
Best Products Company, Inc., Richmond, VA
Cahill Gordon Reindel, New York
Cargill Inc., Minneapolis, MN
Commerce Bancshares, Inc., Kansas City, MO
Comras Company, Miami, FL
Criswell Development Company, Dallas, TX
Deloitte & Touche, New York
Dreyfus Corporation, New York
Financial Guaranty Insurance Company, New York
General Electric Corporation, Fairfield, CT
Grey Advertising, Inc., New York
H.J. Heinz Corporation, Pittsburgh, PA
INA Corporation, Philadelphia, PA
Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc., Detroit, MI
Mastercard International, New York
Marsh and McLennan Companies, New York
McCaslin Properties, Dallas, TX
Mound, Cotton and Wollan, New York
NYNEX Corporation, New York
Charles E. Smith Construction Company, Crystal City, VA
Sidley, Austin, Brown & Wood, New York
Southeast Banking Corporation, Florida
Springfield Art Museum, Springfield, Missouri
Xerox Corporation, New York
Young and Hampton, Houston, TX
Zurich, Kemper Financial, Illinois
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LEDA CEMPELLIN was awarded Dottore in Lettere Moderne at the University of Padua (1999), and Dottore di Ricerca in Storia dell’Arte at the University of Parma (2004). With a scholarship granted by the University of California, she spent the Academic Fall 1998-99 and a two months Academic Training at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she addressed her studies to the American Photorealism. For several years, she has collaborated with several Italian cultural and art magazines throughout Italy (in Conegliano/TV, Dosson/TV, Mantova, Padua, Osimo/AN, Pasian di Prato/UD, Brescia, Rome), and with several institutions: the University of California in Padua; the Associazione Italo-Americana del FVG in Trieste; the Associazione Culturale Internazionale per l’Analisi del Testo Letterario e Figurativo MeQRiMa in Udine. In spring 2003, she has been a member of the Scientific Committee of the Exhibition Iperrealisti at Chiostro del Bramante, Rome, with an important mention in catalog by Walter Veltroni, Mayor of Rome. In summer 2004, she was the curator in Pordenone of the exhibition: Omaggio a Don Eddy. Il percorso pittorico dell’artista visto attraverso una collezione di poster e di manifesti, also traveling to the Expo Arte (= Fiera del Levante) in Bari. During this 2004-2005 Academic Year, she has been visiting scholar at the Studio Arts Center International in Florence, with a cycle of lectures and the exhibition American Photorealist Posters 1972-2001, promoted by the artist Audrey Flack. Main books published: Conversazioni con Don Eddy, CLEUP 2000; L’Iperrealismo ‘fotografico’ americano in pittura, CLEUP 2004, which is the first articulated and in-depth study on the American Photorealism in Italy. In August 2004, she has been interviewed in Padua by Prof. Segato, and the interview has been transmitted by radio in the program “Contagi e Contaminazioni culturali”, (Radiocooperativa: 92.7-93.250 FM). For the 2005-2006 Academic Year, she will be Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art History at the Western Oregon University, Monmouth, OR.

JERI HISE received her degree in Fine Art from Smith College, where she was awarded a fellowship as an Ada Comstock Scholar. She is an artist and free-lance writer in New York City. As an artist, she is a founding member of Inkling Studio. Hise has exhibited widely her work throughout the United States: in California, in Oregon, in New York, in Massachusetts. Her work is included in numerous collections throughout the United States, such as: The Portland Art Museum at Portland, Oregon; the Benton County Historical Society at Corvallis, Oregon; the President’s Collection at Smith College, Northampton, MA. She is affiliated with the Northwest Print Council and the New York Artists Circle. As a writer, she is currently working on an essay about contemporary printmaking and the world famous Vivian and Gordon Gilkey Center for Visual Arts at Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon.