

**Jonathan
Lasker**

**early
works**

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Text © Robert Hobbs

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1977–1985

text by Robert Hobbs

Cheim & Read, New York

Jonathan Lasker's Figurative Abstraction by Robert Hobbs

Feeling must have a medium in order to function at all; in the same way, thought must have symbols. It is the medium or the specific configuration of the medium that we call a work of art that brings feeling into being, just as do responses to the objects of the external world The medium of painting is such changing and ordering on an ideal plane, ideal in that the medium is more tractable, subtle, and capable of emphasis (abstraction is a kind of emphasis) than everyday life.

Robert Motherwell, "Beyond the Aesthetic," 1946¹

For me the questions of what is the painting and what is the picture have been important since the beginning. What happens when the viewer looks? How does one activate the viewer's imagination as has traditionally been done with landscape painting, for example, to create pictures which bring picture making back . . . so that the painting can assert itself as a literal two-dimensional object and yet also engage the viewer pictorially. This represents a basic and ongoing conflict in painting, which is traditionally an illusionistic art form.

Jonathan Lasker, Interview with Robert Hobbs, December 16, 2011

The above statements by abstract expressionist Robert Motherwell and postmodernist² Jonathan Lasker indicate how far removed the work and thought of these two painters are from one other. Imbued with art as a personal quest, and conceiving his art in a highly idiosyncratic language even as it contradictorily attempts to communicate universal values, Motherwell remained during his life very much a romantic. Not surprisingly, his art's goals were in sync with those of the early romantic English poet and theorist Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote in 1805:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking . . . , I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolical language within me that already and forever exists, than observing any thing new. Even when the latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature / It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is Λογος, the Creator! and the Evolver!³

While Coleridge views imagination as a conduit to a personal symbolic realm consubstantial with divine truths,⁴ Motherwell's more secular feeling, manifested through the medium of paint, puts him in touch with what he regarded as the self's finer and deeper feelings, thereby enabling him to believe in art as a personal distillation of universal truth. Far removed from this utopian, elitist, and highly ideological humanist realm, with its concomitant idealization of people's ability to transcend socially and historically based obstacles by relying on inborn values affiliating them with humanity at large, Lasker's art is clearly aware of the individual artist's limits. His painting undertakes the task of rethinking artistic language as one of the preeminent generators of the artistic self rather than the reverse, as was the case with such latter-day romantics as Motherwell and other first-generation abstract expressionists. Lasker's art is predicated on a

need to move beyond the romantic definition of art as an idealized communiqué of individual subjectivity in order to grasp its epistemological tactics. And meaning, it follows, is an ongoing interrogative capable of inciting Lasker's viewers to become critical spectators who can discern a space for their own personally intuited significance within his art while also enjoying the irony of its intertextual references to other painting styles and painting in general. Rather than contenting itself with representing discrete moments of the phenomenal world, this art notably re-presents aspects of painting and its tactics for conveying meaning. Thus, it is a radically abstract art, capable of approaching form *discursively*, in terms of encoded stylistic components placed along its proscenium-like two-dimensional stages, and *compositionally*, in terms of a more traditional reliance on abstract shapes and non-mimetic colors.

Although the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco regards abstract art categorically as “a-semantic,” Lasker's figuratively abstract paintings, with their pointedly constructed painterly references, mirror a range of artistic approaches, making his work a special hybrid of a more general and contemporaneous metal abstract style with definite semantic references. He shares this meta-abstraction with a loosely associated group of New York-based painters, including Ross Bleckner, Peter Halley, Mary Heilman, and David Reed. Together, they were among the earlier groups of artists to respond to postmodern questions about formalism's long-assumed authority, a discussion first formulated in the mid-1970s.⁶ Among the Members of this group, Lasker is the only one who can be singled out as a figurative abstractionist, and even though Halley's work has been grouped mainly with the mid-'80s appropriationist artists known as “Neo Geo” with whom he exhibited, both artists' affiliations with meta-abstractionists are deserving of this separate and distinct stylistic designation. The work, then, of all the above listed painters associated with this style is historically notable for finding ways to move beyond the impasse forged by formalist painting, which then was still in sync with New York critic Clement Greenberg's opticality, as well as circa 1960s and '70s conceptual art, with its emphasis on art as an “economy based on the circulation of works of art as signs,”⁷ then still in its hegemony. Instead of focusing on the end of painting—a long heralded denouement whose adherents can be traced back to Malevich and certainly include Ad Reinhardt's black paintings as well and both the minimalist painting of Robert Rauschenberg and the Color Field art of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski—Lasker wished to undertake the opposing goal of finding cogent ways to initiate picture making again.⁸

This new meta-abstraction is also innovative in rethinking the premises of twentieth-century epistemological painting, spearheaded by Duchamp's *Tu m'* and perpetuated by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Per Kirkeby, and the early Sigmar Polke, to achieve a distinctly new way of thinking about painting.⁹ A proponent of this epistemological turn, representing a self-reflexive mode capable of moving beyond Daniel Buren's striped placeholders for art and Allan McCollum's painted surrogates to address its own rules of formation,¹⁰ Lasker began in 1977 to create an important early body of figurative abstractions, which are the subject of this exhibition. The art he has originated can be understood in terms of the rhetorical device, *pronuntiatio*, which Eco defines as “the way of stressing imperceptibly the [work's] irony” while “mak[ing] evident its own quotation marks,” thereby constituting an “intertextual joke,”¹¹ remarkable in Lasker's case for its dry, understated wit.

After attending Queens College for less than a year in the late 1960s and taking off several years to play bass guitar and blues harmonica with rock bands in the U.S. and Europe, Lasker returned to New

York and enrolled in night courses at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) from 1975-77.¹² Toward the end of his schooling there, he took courses with minimalist David Smythe and made collages inspired by Robert Rauschenberg's literalist work that focused on finding equivalents for art's customary representational functions, such as paint swatches for color, pictures of athletics for art's dynamics, words and news items for its traditional content, etc. From other SVA students, he learned of the excellent program in studio art at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia (CalArts), and so he applied and was accepted there, without realizing the enormous challenges facing any painter venturing into this bastion of West Coast conceptualism.

Well funded by Disney Studios in the 1960s, CalArts was able to bankroll a cutting-edge arts program with such esteemed happenings, fluxus, and conceptual artists as Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, John Baldessari, Michael Asher, and Douglas Huebler as members of its regular faculty. The school was also heir to the relatively recent California neo-dadaist tradition, inaugurated by curator Walter Hopps in 1963 when he staged a full-scale and subsequently highly celebrated Duchamp retrospective at the Pasadena Museum of Art. The primary conduits between this particular exhibition and the Institute's pedagogy were the Californians Baldessari and Asher. Lasker referred to Asher as "the grand inquisitor against painting" since this conceptual artist assumed personal responsibility for eradicating the last vestiges of modernist sentiments in all the students' work. Less programmatic in his teaching, the former New Yorker Douglas Huebler, who had been a member of the famous late '60s Seth Siegelaub group of conceptual artists, which included Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner, was more open to traditional painting, as were two prominent guest instructors. The first was New Image painter Susan Rothenberg, then becoming known for her paintings of images of horses (rather than the animals themselves) in works often divided diagonally into quadrants to emphasize their abstractness. The second was Pop artist Richard Artschwager, whose paintings on Celotex fiberboard made his works insistently physical and ultimately ironically self-referential since they were as much about painting and its support as they were about the representational subject matter they depicted. Both painters taught at CalArts during the spring and fall semesters of 1977; during this time they encouraged Lasker to continue the move beyond Greenbergian formalism he had already begun in New York when he was focusing on Rauschenberg's work.

Their sympathetic approach and ways of underscoring painting as a dynamic and self-reflexive verb rather than a static noun provided Lasker with the incentive to rethink this artistic genre. His brief time at CalArts also encouraged him to counter conceptual art's derogation of painting as simply outmoded by finding ways to reconsider it epistemologically, as a means for granting the painted object's self-awareness and self-governance equal billing with its depictions and metaphoric meanings. "In the '70s," Lasker has recalled, "there was definitely a feeling of the death of modernism, both ethically and tactically, creating a need to find a new path. In that way a lot of my thought came from the spirit of the moment."¹³ Lasker's early efforts in the late 1970s and '80s resulted in palmary work representing a major contribution to the dialogue of late twentieth-century art at a time when painting was being denounced as merely irrelevant and overly precious. Lasker and his fellow meta-abstractionists fomented a revolution from within the then most normative and unsuspected realm of the art world—abstract painting—and Lasker did so by rebutting his conceptually oriented teachers and peers at CalArts through the employment of painting as both his chief weapon and rhetorical platform. Although Lasker was not the only remarkable painter to come out of

CalArts' program—Eric Fischl and David Salle preceded him by a few years, and the some-time painter Mike Kelley was a classmate—he is the only one among this generation of important postmodern artists to formulate, in abstract painterly terms, a clear response to conceptual art's provocations. In fact, outside of Great Britain's Art & Language members, who at times found in painting a way to extend their special brand of conceptual art, often through the ironic proposition of employing it in a series of works purporting to measure a given work's abstraction according to certain pre-agreed-upon percentages (Mel Ramsden's mockingly self-reflexive *100% Abstract* (1968) being a pertinent example), Lasker is one of the few late twentieth-century abstract painters to discover a feasible way to maintain a viable position without affiliating his art with either modernism or conceptualism.

In the 1960s and '70s painting had served the preeminent New York conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth as a convenient straw figure in his ongoing campaign to legitimize his new self-reflexive and tautological way of working. This new mode replaced the inherited assumption of art's long-heralded presence, its putative ontology, with a keen interest in its epistemology. Partially inherited from Duchamp, this attitude was applied even more concertedly against art's residual materiality than this dadaist artist had anticipated so that its status as an object was held suspect even though it was never entirely undermined. Kosuth argued with great conviction that painters were condemned to be mere artisans because at the outset they had accepted the medium as a given category without questioning its means and limits. Instead of making "art investigations" —Kosuth's term for his own work—painters were content with its "presentation" and became in his view decorators of "naïve art forms" rather than philosophers.¹⁴ In his lecture, "Painting Versus Art Versus Culture (Or, Why You can Paint If You Want To But It Probably Won't Matter)," Kosuth elaborates on the rigors of conceptual art and its ability to stratify boundaries by working both within as well as outside the limits of such established media as painting:

*Rather than presenting an inward-turning world, as painting had, I saw this new work doing quite the opposite: it began the process of looking outward, making the context important. I began to realize that the issue for art was to examine its context, and in the process one would be investigating meaning, and ultimately, reality. An important point then, about so-called "minimal art," was that it was neither painting nor sculpture, but simply art.*¹⁵

Crucial to Kosuth's overarching program is his requirement that artists should consider their subjects and work both specifically and categorically so the persuasive rhetoric and sheer sensuousness of a given medium would be incapable of seducing them into becoming its mere adjunct. He believed one should avoid at all costs becoming habituated to a given material and its ability to lull one like a drug with comforting and predictable results. According to this view, conceptually oriented artists need to handle their chosen media analytically, rationally, distantly, and thereby objectively; only in this way can the resultant work remain focused on art's means, as well as its limits, for expressing ideas, and not become a surrogate for the artist's unique and altogether bourgeois individuality.

When Lasker entered CalArts, Kosuth's writings and those of contemporary conceptual artists like Sol LeWitt had already assumed the force of orthodoxy. For such CalArts teachers as Asher and Baldessari, the enhancement of artistic thought, even to the detriment of the attendant skills needed to

realize it, because the centerpiece of their instruction. The son of Betty Asher, a newowned Los Angeles County Museum curator and collector, Michael Asher made the museum's context his special purview by showing how it frames and thereby determines the way that art is perceived. In the fall of 1977, Asher persuaded the staff of three neighboring Texas institutions—the Fort Worth Art Museum, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, and the Kimbell Art Museum—to use the same parking lot for a three-week period for all their service and staff vehicles. The implementation of this tactic resulted in new acquaintances among the various museum staffs and meaningful daily interactions between personnel working in the three museums. Creating a type of *derive* on the order of the French Situationists' noteworthy exploitation of psycho-geography and sheer serendipity as means to orient oneself afresh to one's own city, Asher noted:

Some of the staff members informed me that they had changed their habit of entering or leaving the building . . . and that by using the main entrance they found they were paying more attention to the presence of the collection in the museum. One curator, for example, told me that she normally entered the exhibition area only on those occasions when she had curated the exhibition herself, whereas now she passed through the exhibition area regularly before entering her office. Some of the staff members also said that they had hardly ever taken the time to notice what the main entrance of the museum looked like.¹⁶

If art is involved with changing perceptions and questioning its own institutionalization, Asher's work can certainly be called "art," even if the art object per se is pared down to photographed aerial views of the three museums and their parking facilities, together with the artist's description of the overall project. In consideration of the radical nature of this work, one can see how such an artist as Asher would find the entire category of painting *retarditaire* and would be much more prone to proselytizing the merits of his conceptual perspective than helping aspirant painters like Lasker discover new ways to approach painting.

During Lasker's year at CalArts, John Baldessari, another reigning conceptual artist at the school, renowned for teaching a "post-studio" class, was on the verge of creating a series of works that would subsequently become emblematic for the late '70s and '80s neo-conceptual photo-based art by Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Barbara Kruger, among others, since it was predicated on the creation of elaborate theoretical programs as cogent frames through which individual components would accrue meaning. Consisting of photographs taken every 10 minutes of images appearing on the screen of his TV, which he then serendipitously labeled with the first word popping into his mind, Baldessari's *Blasted Allegories* were made the year after Lasker's departure from CalArts. The American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1854 statement, in which he decried his own inability to remember the superintending morals for which his narratives had become celebrated, served as the title for this series:

Upon my honor, I am not quite sure that I entirely comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories; but I remember that I always had a meaning – or, at least, thought I had.

The assertion served Baldessari's goals well, since it established a precedent for separating artists from the outcome of their statements and transferred responsibility for creating meaning to viewers, who were

encouraged to weave together, in this particular case, sets of visual and verbal non sequiturs into their own syntagmatic chains. Comprising an allegory by virtue of being a two-tiered arrangement of images and words in which one type of information appears to offer an interpretation of the other, this series of linked representations is almost belligerently conceptual and postmodern in its emphasis on art's categorical nature, the ability of photography to reference its genre structurally while perpetuating it visually, and viewers' need to collaborate in the open-ended process of reading/creating the work. This series became a leitmotif for the entire era when New York critic Craig Owens's two-part "The Allegorical Impulse" was published two years later.¹⁷ Subsequently, Baldessari's epithet became the title for a 1989 anthology of contemporary artists' writings edited by curator Brian Wallis for New York's New Museum.¹⁸

Although Lasker was framing his painterly response to conceptual art's proscriptions prior to Baldessari's series, and in fact had met with the artist only once during his time at CalArts, he was working within some of the same intellectual parameters as Baldessari. These ideas comprised the school's overall conceptual universe even though Lasker was approaching them from the diametrically opposite point of view of painting. As he later told peripatetic critic and curator Francesco Bonami, "CalArts at that time was extremely hostile to painting. This adversity strengthened me as a painter."¹⁹ In retrospect, this adversity was constituted by an irascible and disaffected audience of professors and students who would have to be won over to painting in a distinctly new way if Lasker were to succeed. By internalizing this audience when conceiving his early work and responding to its reservations about painting while still continuing to be seduced by the beauty, power, and sensuousness of paint,²⁰ Lasker opened the medium to new opportunities. He took modernism's shopworn verities—particularly its two-fold emphases on the mechanics of seeing as part of its subject matter—and redirected them to become a distinctly new means for thinking about painting both palpably and pictorially. The approach was in some ways reminiscent of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, since Lasker's deliberate use of ambiguous multi-storied and variously sited references shifts attention away from the work of art to the very real spaces in which viewers receive and respond to his rich panoply of references. As Lasker wrote:

Painting on the one hand brings you back to physical reality, the actual space we all inhabit. The thick oil paint, the bi-dimensionality of the surface constantly brings you back to where you are physically. They are real things in the real world and they are happening in front of you. But at the same time the imagery refers to other things, gives you pictures, triggers the imagination, the memory of something and creates a fantasy. . . . They do deal with physical reality and illusion simultaneously. . . . whereas painting gives you the body as well. Your own body.²¹

The first challenge facing Lasker was the need to find a way to paint without being simply seduced, thus becoming painting's critic rather than one of its mere promoters and proselytizers. This formidable task depended on maintaining a distance from the material, so that his work would constitute a categorical assessment of it rather than a mere enumeration of its delights. This does not mean that he was either antagonistic or hostile to painting. He has never attempted to break with it; over the years in fact, he has been more concerned with expanding its conditions while continuing to enjoy it. Considered in retrospect, by using the works themselves as key evidence, it is clear that Lasker rethought the ontological/epistemological

polarity of conceptual art in terms of the then passé genre, painting. "During this period," he has recalled "I was going back and forth from figuration to abstraction. The issue was whether the figure was going to be abstract or referential; eventually the figure became an abstract 'figure of speech,' so to speak."²² In his art, epistemology becomes less a separate and alternative category, as it does in conceptual art, and more a means for assessing the type of ontology art is capable of affirming. In the following statement Lasker equates epistemology with discourse:

When I began working, my objective was to find a way to make a painting discursive, rather than monotopical. I also wanted it to be discursive on its own terms, rather than in literary terms. . . . To me, this existential objecthood was now ready to be depicted as subject matter . . . a poetics of painting. A poetics which could also embrace broad topics, such a memory and presence, materiality and transcendence, and the flattening of high and low culture.²³

In this statement, Lasker moves away from modern abstract art's hermeticism and its at times tautological content, whereby it simply restates itself and its mode of being, to become a highly acculturated set of signs and an interplay of citations already imbued with meaning: codes aware of their semantic horizons and capable of reflecting on the patterned frameworks in which they accrue meaning.

Lasker began this critical process by taking advantage of the last vestiges of modernism still on the horizon. Known variously as Pattern and Decoration, New Decoration and, more simply, P&D, this predominantly '70s movement, which began in 1970 in San Diego before being transplanted to New York the following year, was primarily the brainchild of feminist painter Miriam Schapiro, who subsequently worked with Robert Rauschenberg, a one-time minimalist, to whose work Lasker was particularly attracted. Lasker was also interested in the work of another P&D artist, the New York painter Valerie Jaudon. Bolstered by feminist strategies and Third World (craft) agendas, P&D attempted to revive the Matissean decorative origins of modern art, albeit with ersatz patterned fabrics, women's work, and wallpaper designs. Its strength resided in its quest to reconfigure popular culture as the subject of high art; its apparent weakness—its circulation around a kitsch decorative sensibility—appeared to Lasker to be a distinct advantage, one he has continued to mine, since it brings together high- and low-brow tastes within the same work. Keeping viewers slightly on edge, Lasker's well-informed sensibility delights in incorporating in individual works both the cultivated and the vulgar, which he values in combination for their overall contemporaneity. On this subject he has reflected:

I think the edginess of my work does involve some kitsch. In my work I have never been afraid of kitsch. I think the greatest work often risks being kitsch, and the best art also fights the constriction of taste. Such conventions restrict the creative aspect of anything, not just art.²⁴

P&D had the distinct advantage of distancing Lasker from traditional abstract painting focused on transcendent values. Its subscription to kitsch represented a viable subject matter for him because of its ubiquity, not its eccentricity, thus enabling him to emphasize his populist leanings rather than cling to any idiosyncratic and purely elitist preferences in which he might be indulging. Once Lasker viewed art in terms

of overlapping patterns, he in effect had conventionalized it. At the same time, his use of patterns partially deflected his painterly notations away from abstract expressionist brushwork, and its seismographic connection with artists' feelings, so that the ensuing signs might become more straightforward and noncommittal registrations of art's effects.

A pertinent example of this approach is reflected in Lasker's account of *Illinios*, the earliest painting included in this exhibition of early figurative abstractions:

In 1977 I painted Illinois; it was a break-through work. The name came through associating the shape in the lower-left with the shape of the state of Illinois as it appears on a map. It started by scumbling grayish green paint onto blue. I was, at that time, doing drawings of biomorphic shapes on newsprint paper. One day I took the shapes from the newsprint paper drawings and began putting them on my scumbled background. When I realized that the resonance between foreground figures and scumbled background was not sufficient, I began to draw black elements—drawn lines off-register with the edges of the shapes—to resonate with the forms and the background. What struck me about these paintings was the process of going from positive, colored patterned backgrounds to negative white figures in the foreground. It struck me that there was a role reversal of figure to ground, in that the assertiveness of the ground challenged the figure for dominance.²⁵

It is tempting to look at the white figures in this and other contemporaneous Lasker paintings as frosting and thus open-ended signs, Derridean slipping signifiers so to speak, providing viewers with Rorschachs, which they can personalize and make their own.

Lasker's patterned works assume some of the rigor of minimalist art since they declare at the outset their physicality as painted designs and sets of discrete and repeated signs troweled, brushed, and scumbled on the surface of his paintings. But differing from such minimalist painters as Robert Ryman, Lasker's images are intended to be both literal and figurative. In addition, the differential between received ideas in popular culture and the artist's effort to replicate them by hand has produced in Lasker's work a discernable gap between concept and result that is inherently allegorical, i.e., metaphorical in terms of a broader ideational scheme. In this situation, one artistic mode critiques the other, and neither his allusions to popular culture nor the hand-wrought facture used to render them can boast having the upper hand when presented in tandem. These works thus act out ongoing tensions between technology and handmade. Apropos this tension, Lasker has stated:

Painting represents one of the last remnants of the human hand in the contemporary world. Artists are the last people privileged by society to use their hands. Otherwise, the world is obsessed with technology and its means for reducing labor; it can't wait to do away with the hand.²⁶

Moreover, these paintings look like physical objects and mediated depictions so that modern art's two-fold presentational and representational scheme to self-reflexively depict its medium while delineating its contents is bifurcated, and modernism's synthesis devolves into two competing views. These alternatives resemble the old visual conundrum of seeing the same schematic drawing as either a rabbit or a duck (but never the two simultaneously) more than it does in a modernist integrated scheme. In this respect it differs markedly from the overlapping strategies of David Reed's *trompe l'oeil* realism and abstraction, which can be perceived simultaneously.

In order to understand and appreciate Lasker's truly innovative critique of modernism, it is necessary to differentiate his conceptual alternatives from modernism's integrated point of view. Doing so requires a slight diversion from the topic at hand in order to underscore the enormous qualitative difference his work enacts. This distinction can be dramatized by pointing to a stirring piece of art criticism, re-enacting modernism's two-fold emphasis on depicting its formal means as well as subject matter. I have in mind the early twentieth-century German critic Julius Meier-Graefe's insight into the ways Monet's Impressionist paint strokes rhyme with flower petals to naturalize artistic creation, while making nature appear to be participating in a grand painterly pantomime:

Monet's painting resembles a kind of flower, which we can hardly imagine to have existed before our times: the chrysanthemum. He paints forms akin to their clusters of sinuous, slender-tongued petals, yellow without, red within; to their huge, snow-white ruffles, fit wear for a Pierrot; to their ragged golden heads, with thread-like reflexed plumes. We recall this flower-like quality when we talk of his colour, or pronounce him a landscape painter or a naturalist. In reality he is a great decorator, who is not afraid to show the means by which he gets his effects.²⁷

in his effort to discover an empathetic metaphor capable of transcending the limits of the black-and-white illustrations illuminating his text, Meier-Graefe may well have felt the need to create verbal equivalences for the integral syntheses constituting Monet's work. Despite its contrapuntal movement between artifice and nature, Meier-Graefe's, and by extension Monet's resultant self-enclosed whole, differs significantly from the postmodern and phenomenological alternatives of Lasker's art and its presentation, depending on one's view of it, as either a physical object or sets of abstracted elements depicted on shallow stages. In doing so, Lasker breaks down modernist unity: no longer is one solely a captive of art's magical and transcendent spell, for the work changes with the seer, and escape routes are provided for viewers to jump over boundaries by looking at painting as both a decorative conceit and a mental construct.

This dialectic between viewing painting as either a painted object or a representation comprised of painted signs, which Lasker has termed "the dichotomy between actual and depicted space in painting," comprises his concerted response to the conceptual injunction to make art a self-critical proposition, instead of simply luxuriating in painting's ability to become a decorative confection.²⁸ Lasker has elaborated on his art's contrapuntal formal and propositional stances in the following manner:

My early idea was to create something so viewers can recognize the constituent elements of my art on a literal level—namely, planarity, the physicality of painting, and the materiality of the painting process. The white forms in the earliest works are already superimposed on a painterly surface, so there are two clear stages of physical application in them. All these factors tell you what the trappings of the painting medium are. And yet, at the same time, one wishes to give the viewer as much of a picture as the viewer can receive, while at the same time being very clearly aware of the artifices of the medium. The problem concerns how much of the picture a viewer can receive and still be aware of the painting as a literal object.²⁹

The ambiguous reference to the viewer's capabilities in this statement can best be understood in terms of the astute observation made by the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé in his far-too-rarely cited "Preface" to his watershed poem, "Un Coup de Dés" ("A Throw of the Dice"). Mallarmé's insight can be viewed as the origin of modern art's focus on form and also postmodernism's or meta-art's self-aware recursive texts, including their ability to comment ironically on their formal means while utilizing them to express aesthetic ideas, thus stepping outside their given frames even as they work within their distinct perimeters. Mallarmé wisely noted, "the paper [on which the poem is inscribed] intervenes each time an image [in the poem] of its own accord, ceases or withdraws,"³⁰ thus making reading a two-fold process of considering the poem as a series of images while also gazing at the printed text on white paper as an artistic object. Lasker's concern for the viewer's ability to coordinate both aspects of this project hinges on the need to make paintings distinctively pleasurable experiences and at the same time self-reflexive compositions.

In the 1990s Lasker achieves hyperbolic situations dramatizing figurative abstraction's two-fold goal to image itself and its own structural modus operandi at the same time it delights viewers with exciting, tour de force paintings in which oil paint assumes the decorative perversity of icing on art's metaphoric cake. He achieves heightened epistemological understanding of meta-abstraction's highly artificial nature when he exaggerates the materiality of his medium to the point that it constitutes high relief.

But to return to 1977, while beginning to formulate the basic terms of his painterly style, Lasker hit on the idea of a series of positive/negative spatial interplays. These interlocking polarities are particularly congenial to his nature since he tends to think dialectically, preferring to see the same elements from reverse perspectives. Lasker looks at individual terms first as positive forms against a negative space and then overturns the hierarchy so the background assumes the presence of the foreground, before receding once again. In this way he establishes in his work ongoing oscillating and engaging contrapuntal rhythms, able to vivify and endow his paintings with the semblance of the life force by establishing distinctly different cadenced velocities whereby it can be seen and understood. In works from 1977, such as *Moody Room*, and in a number of paintings from 1977 to 1981, the year when he initiated the so-called *Motel Series* with its characteristic slabs of impasto, subsequently found in such works as *Zen for Ben*, *Pre-Fab View*, and *Romantic Gulf*, we can see that foreground and background have either switched places or become competitive, so that one vies with the other for a position of supremacy. As Lasker later noted:

The early pictures were pretty flat. They had a pattern background and I would overlay a figure on top of that ground. At first, these figures were like painterly white shapes with black lines painted off register against them, on top of a pattern background. It was going from positive to negative. The background, normally negative, was the most active element whereas the figure was negative because it was in black and white. I would thus neutralize the figure and the ground, make them equivalent. Later on, I realized that that was not so essential. What was essential was the fact that the background, the pattern, was about one type of visual language and then the foreground, the figure, was about a different type of visual language. It created an interesting dialogue. You were given a physical process that you could easily read and at the same time you were also dealing with an image. So you were confronted with something both literal and metaphorical. For me, that was the way to re-engage imagery, retain literality while being also metaphorical.³¹

In such pieces backgrounds become foregrounds, and the slightly abstract yet still figurative images that emerge from them seem to be poetic and painterly animations of the canvas's original pristine surface. Reborn as *dramatis personae*, the take possession of the painting at its conclusion. In this way, the painting's beginning is metaphorically re-inscribed in its conclusion, and the cyclical nature of creation is thematized. On another occasion, Lasker analogized his analytic approach as an "image kit":

I often think of my paintings as a form of image kit or perhaps as jigsaw puzzles, which offer components of paintings as clues pointing the viewer, not to a finished narrative (as when the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle completes a picture of Notre Dame), but rather to a self-awareness of how one construes a painting.³²

These enigmatic glyphs that often resemble pieces of puzzles, as Lasker reminds his readers, and thus are reifications of the works' essential ambiguity can be seen as having a source in one of his early encounters with vanguard literature. As a teenager, he read widely and intensely. Among his favorites were the Beat poets and the plays of Eugene O'Neill, George Bernard Shaw, and August Strindberg. Lasker remembers Shaw stating that drama depends on conflict, an observation he later recalled when he began to think about painting's potential as abstract drama enacted by his ambiguous shapes. "At the time I began my early painting," Lasker has recollected, "I was not reading French theory, which I only began to investigate around 1985 and '86. I was really using insights into art from dramatic literature, which I had read as a teenager, particularly the elements of dialecticism, discourse, and dramatic conflict. My mental paths came from sources other than what one would normally anticipate."³³ Strindberg's work is particularly apposite for Lasker. The late nineteenth and early twentieth-century realist-and-then symbolist Swedish playwright had a major impact on such modern playwrights as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee, among others, and was notable for his interest in photography as well as his close friendships with the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch and the French artist Paul Gauguin.

Because Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) made such an early lasting impression on Lasker, it is tempting to view this work, particularly its emphasis on symbols at the expense of dialogue and narrative, as providing rationale for the allegorical type of painting Lasker initiated in 1977, even though he of course was also intrigued with a range of classical and modern dramas. *The Ghost Sonata* is a "Chamber Play," the structure of which may be reflected in the titles for Lasker's painted cubicles, such as *Moody Room* (1977) and *Single Room Occupancy* (1978). Representative of the playwright's later symbolist work, this play is structured in three movements, like a piece of music, and was intended, according to its author, to be a dramatization of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in D minor, opus 31, no. 2. Working in accord with one of symbolism's overriding goals, Strindberg recognized the need to emphasize the mechanics of expression rather than to rely on his own feelings being communicated directly. At various times in this work, for example, the character of the student Arkenholz serves as a frame for viewing the play. Earlier in the drama he entertains visions the other characters cannot see; then the play turns tables on him, involving him in its theatrics, when the Old Man recognizes him, making him part of the dramatic piece's overall vision. In addition to this meta-theatrical play-within-a-play, Strindberg's *Sonata* is cadenced to correlate with the differently designed sets, enunciating each act and accruing meaning through increasingly rarified settings, concluding with the Hyacinth room, a chamber abundantly filled with the heavily perfumed flowers

representing death. At one point, Strindberg considered titling this play *Kama Loka*, employing the theosophical term describing the halfway house for the human spirit before it attains death's ultimate repose. Representing a type of Purgatory for reassessing life, the different settings of Strindberg's drama present his characters with irreconcilable conflicts between reality and illusion. Replete with inversions, Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata* opposes youth with old age, innocence with guilt, horror with beauty, redemption with sin, ghosts with life, and death with love, so that its characters, as the Strindberg specialist Eszter Szalczer perceptively notes, "are shown as dynamic sets of relations as opposed to singular identities,"³⁴ thus functioning in an equivalent capacity to Lasker's cast of painterly signs in his works. A dreamlike atmosphere, created by some of the fluid, shapeshifter-like characters in the play, enables its author to relinquish most of the remaining ballast from his earlier naturalist work so that ambiguity prevails. Without the familiar stanchions of a recognizable world, viewers of Strindberg's productions are forced to confront a dramatic crisis in which the community of conventions constituting naturalistic theater is broken apart: they are then thrown back on the drama, its schematic form and self-consciously presented arcane symbols--a situation not unlike viewing one of Lasker's paintings.

Strindberg's two-fold symbolist approach to theater, evidenced in his attempts to dematerialize his stage sets and establish situations whereby dreams in turn construct dreams, thereby dissociating them from reality,³⁵ parallels Lasker's own understanding of the source for his dramatic figurative abstractions:

In my early works decorative or geometric patterned backgrounds with more gestural and subliminal forms layered on top of them create an ongoing duality and dialecticism comprising the rudiments of a linguistic construction. At the time I was not thinking about language so much, but was thinking about conflict and drama, which brings me back to my interest in dramatic literature. I think of my paintings as being non-narrative, yet discursive. Painting is a weak medium for narrative—I have always thought this—but right there in the beginning of my work there is some kind of language at play. Perhaps as much language as one might put into a painting, without being narrative.³⁶

In Lasker's insistently painted early works, white ghostly forms, appearing in such as *Single Room Occupancy* (1978), are only vaguely reminiscent of Strindberg's and certainly far from dependent on them since they interlock with the abstract shallow stages Lasker depicts to create tensions between foreground and background elements. Differing from Strindberg's residual naturalism, Lasker transposes New Image figures into abstract dramatis personae. He also stages a metaphysical void in the center of his work by refusing to provide viewers with a narrative even though he sets the stage for one, thus encouraging them to fill in the gaps by personalizing them. On a number of occasions he has alluded to this break and to the consequent openness of his work: he told New York critic Raphael Rubenstein, for instance, "There is no resolution in my paintings,"³⁷ and he described his work to Bonami as "Not quite a narrative but an incipient image, a possible picture. Also a dialogue The separate elements challenge the unity of the picture."³⁸ He agreed with European curator Hans-Michael Herzog: "Yes. My painting is both spontaneous and highly conscious. There is this split between the conscious and the unconscious. My painting is very flexible, it goes back and forth between the two."³⁹ And he told New York critic Steven Madoff, "I want to present the viewer with an image that he has to recompose for himself."⁴⁰

As participants in Lasker's work, viewers must supplement his forms with their own interpretations. Lasker wrote, "I'm seeking subject matter, not abstraction."⁴¹ But, at the same time, he also noted, "I want a painting that's operative."⁴² Consequently, these perceivers' supplements must be both two-fold and multi-tiered: they are encouraged to look horizontally at the characters before them as potential characters on a stage, and vertically at the conditions that determine painting's continued viability as art. Looking vertically, these viewers can begin thinking about how painting hovers between nonobjectivity and recognizability, since the works are concerned with both the particular core elements of an abstract drama and the distinct intellectual and cultural category of painting. *The Ghost Sonata's* emphasis on the vampirism of old Director Hummel, who counters the perfection of the young and idealistic Arkenholz, might be considered one possible source for the basic constituents in Lasker's painting, which literalizes, abstracts, and makes assertively immanent the type of elements that are transcendent in Strindberg's play. Considered in this way, Lasker's postmodernist pirating of the modernist vocabulary can be construed as a vampiric act in which naïve revelations of direct feeling are replaced with the masks that an understanding of art's mediating mechanisms necessitates. Instead of cohering residual naturalist components and full-fledged symbolist ones into the same work as Strindberg does, Lasker plays off reciprocities and differences between abstraction and nonobjectivity in his paintings.

In his subsequent work Lasker extends the dialectics activating these early works. As the artist told the London-based art critic, painter, and musician David Ryan in 2001, "In my mind I'm still making the painting from 1977-80 . . . the three elements . . . [of] figure, ground, line . . . have remained my basic formal vocabulary."⁴³ The figure/ground relationship, as mentioned earlier, establishes the parameters of an ongoing dialectic around which Lasker's art continues to revolve. "In earlier paintings," Lasker stated, "I was very given to . . . establishing a very defined order and then violating it with something that seemed its antithesis. However, those painting are, I think, very clearly about signs, about knowing one thing by its opposite, its other."⁴⁴ The impact of this transgression was felt by a number of early collectors and friends who were seduced by the beauties of his initial flat patterned fields and who asked Lasker if he could possibly forego the intrusions of overlaying them with abstract figures.⁴⁵ At the time, Lasker considered this break with the harmonies of the works' overall fields to be analogous to the powerful despoiling effects achieved by Willem de Kooning and Malcolm Morley. To this pair of violations a great number of other contradictions can be added. In addition to the painted objects and depicted illusions that have already been discussed, as well as the abstract/figurative and kitsch/high art pairings that have also been suggested, dialectics in Lasker's work catalyze the following substantial number of polarities: dumb and smart, universal and specific, emotional and rational, firsthand and secondhand [experience], physical and metaphysical, distant and proximate, present and absent, textual and contextual, decorative and transcendent, immanent and virtual, artificial and real, awkward and refined, unique and conventional, spontaneous and reflective, expressionistic and calculated, unconscious and self-aware, drawn and painted, flat and stage-like, geometric and biomorphic, evanescent and lugubrious, and generic and specific. Even without the benefit of individual explications, viewers of Lasker's work can readily appreciate the applicability of these opposing qualitative categories and recognize how his dialectics move far beyond a simple bridging of opposites. The sheer number operative in his art suggests a rigorous assault on painting's stability and art's presumed stasis, resulting in clear denial of the comfortable decorative perspective Matisse, for example, fantasized

about. In fact, Matisse's modern painting is far removed from the many aesthetic and phenomenological quandaries with which Lasker's art assails viewers.

Beginning with the early paintings in this exhibition, Lasker learned to distance himself from his work so that his creation is as much a statement of replication as invention, and autographic touches are neutralized, becoming, in the artist's words, "automatic [spontaneous] and reproduced all at once."⁴⁶ Some signs in Lasker's art reference, without replicating, biomorphic, constructivist, and abstract expressionistic motifs, assuming the role of abstract signifiers for now hackneyed ways of working. Lasker's brand of meta-abstraction reduces modern art's history to a litany of gestures. He has noted "warehouse[ing] various signature elements, which are used in recombination" in his art,⁴⁷ to enable him to derive a new syntax from clichéd forms.

Lasker has acknowledged, "Johns and Rauschenberg were important . . . particularly in regard to how they treated gesture. Treating it, that is, in an analytical manner." He added in particular, "Johns's methods of codifying touch on a certain level."⁴⁸ This reference to Johns deserves a brief explication. His work with encaustic reprises, in my opinion, the famous Faiyum funerary portraits made in this medium as well as refers to a literalization of the pun used as the title for Duchamp's last painting *Tu m'*, which becomes this medium's tomb. It is not generally understood that in his encaustic works Johns simultaneously creates actual brushstrokes and wax impressions of them. This modernist and incipiently postmodernist acknowledgement of art's oscillation between present and past tenses is reenacted in a somewhat different way in Lasker's early paintings. He has also pointed to the precedent set by Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* as "doing the gesture once, then doing it again. Being involved with the gesture and using it as a thing."⁴⁹

Mining the unremarkable type of doodles one makes while talking on the phone or otherwise preoccupied, Lasker works to neutralize such marks. One of his goals is for them to become as self-referential as possible, in order to represent a sine qua non for the creative process: the act of simply making notations on a surface. The resultant phenomenological emphasis on seers whose perspectives affect what they perceive in art is a crucial concomitant to this type of mark making and can be considered one of Lasker's anticipated results. As he pointed out:

The mark is neutral and yet you somewhat know that it's a tool for understanding. Indeed, people can't quite get at my paintings so they stay in a phenomenological condition . . . I think that painting at its best is this phenomenological impact when you look at it, experience the confrontation and then, only later can start towards meaning. It is a visual event that strikes you in a way that is not linguistically definable.⁵⁰

Even in his early work Lasker found most artistically encoded signs to be too constraining and therefor made the decision at the beginning of his career to rely less on semiotically distinct notations. Like prose, such signs are too easily read through for distilled meanings and not replete enough with the purposeful and necessary ambiguities that keep Lasker a dedicated reader of verse. Similar to some of the best modern and postmodern poetry, which is partially divorced from its marker's point of view, Lasker's their conclusions more often than not resemble glimmers of themselves caught in the interpretative and self-reflexive mirror intending to reveal the work of art's true face.

In conclusion, we might ask how Lasker's painting is similar or dissimilar from the conceptual art partially responsible for initiating the crisis to which his overall oeuvre can now be regarded as considered response. If the conceptual art once touted as the new norm at CalArts was one of the catalysts for his figurative type of abstraction, does it make Lasker ipso facto one of its unwilling adherents? The answer is: most likely not, since his art is not just the painterly equivalent of conceptual art but is instead a two-fold new and reinvigorated response to painting in its own abstract terms of representing itself, at the same time it incorporates signs depicting a range of painting styles, so that an irreconcilable gap between self-representation and depiction is maintained. What benefit, one might ask, is achieved by this breach? In our era of rampant and ongoing criticism, where investigative reporting has been replaced with opinion polls and politicians often react to the perceived realities of these statistics rather than the issues themselves, Lasker's painting refuses to comfort people with an easily ascertained content and instead plays off countering definitions of perception. This work encourages its viewers to consider the essentials of a problematic and shifting world and to make up their own minds as they follow the many qualitative shifts his paintings set in motion. The ensuing differing opinions are schematized in these works as dialectics, and these dialects vary from the basic conditions that differentiate between the acts of looking into a work and seeing a painted object, or, to use Lasker's terms cited in the epigraph, the differences between "the picture" and "the painting," causing viewers either to conspire with the rudiments of the abstract drama placed before them or to take comfort in the fact that painting has been reified into a physical object. At the same time Lasker reenacts abstractly the problematics of contemporary life in his work, he seriously reconsiders painting's poetics as well as viewers' phenomenological positions.

¹Robert Motherwell, "Beyond the Aesthetic" in Stephanie Terenzio, ed., *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1992), 37.

²Although in the twenty-first century the term "postmodern" might appear to be only a late twentieth-century holdover, important mainly as a 1970s and '80s critical means of valuation, its relevance, like the modern category it emends and supplants, continues to be useful, particularly since it emphasizes inroads made into the former widely held autonomous view of art and its concomitant authoritative and romantically conceived and deified creator, who was viewed as an originator of artistic form, rather than its useful adjunct, as is the case with postmodernism.

³Kazuko Ogura, "From Sight to Insight: Coleridge's Quest for Symbol in Nature," *The Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge*, New Series 29 (NS (Summer 2007)) <http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/Coleridge-Bulletin.htm>, consulted December 23, 2011.

⁴For an enlightened discussion of Coleridge's romantic symbol and its religious connotations, cf. J. Robert Barth, "Symbol and Sacrament in Coleridge's Thought," *Studies in Romanticism* 11, no. 4, "Samuel Taylor Coleridge" (Fall 1972): 320-331.

⁵Umberto Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics," *Daedalus* 114, no. 4, "The Moving Image" (Fall 1985): 182.

⁶Cf. Anders Stephanson and Craig Owens, "Interview with Craig Owens," *Social Text* no. 27 (1990): 56.

⁷*Ibid.*, 61. This is Craig Owens's observation.

⁸Jonathan Lasker, Telephone Conversation with Author, January 5, 2012.

⁹In the late '70s the New York-based painters David Salle and Julian Schnabel attached their figurative work to this trajectory.

¹⁰In 1997 the Swiss-based and Romanian-born art historian Victor I. Stoichita's book, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, trans. Anne-Marie Glasheen (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), investigated the phenomenon of post-Renaissance paintings about painting as tautological *mise en scenes* intended to elaborate and reflect on the nature of painting.

¹¹Eco, "Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Post-Modern Aesthetics," 178.

¹²Jonathan Lasker, Interview with Author, New York City, February 12, 2003. Unless noted, other references to Lasker's early years and interests were made by the artist during this interview.

¹³Jonathan Lasker, Interview with Author, New York City, December 16, 2011.

¹⁴Joseph Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991), 37 and 91. The first statement was "Introductory Note to *Art-Language* by the American Editor," 1970, and the second is from an unpublished lecture delivered to art students in 1971 at the University at Chile, Santiago; Cleveland Art Institute; and Coventry College of Art, Coventry, England. Although this lecture was not published, it presents in concise form Kosuth's ideas that were widely available elsewhere. It is cited here because of its precision.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶"October 9 – November 20, 1977, Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas," in Michael Asher and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax and Los Angeles: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and The Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, 1983), 187.

¹⁷Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67-86, and "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2," *October* 13 (Summer 1980): 58-80.

¹⁸Brian Wallis, *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists* (New York and Cambridge, MA: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1989).

¹⁹Francesco Bonami, "Jonathan Lasker," *Flash Art* 27, no. 176 (May/June 1994): 95.

²⁰Lasker, Telephone Conversation with Author, January 5, 2012.

²¹Quoted in Ann Hindry, "Jonathan Lasker: Conscience et Conflit," *Art Press* no. 23 (December 1997): 22.

²²Interview with Author, December 16, 2011.

²³"After Abstraction," in Wilfried Dickhoff, *What It Is* (New York: Tony Shafrazi Gallery, 1986), n. p.

²⁴Interview with Author, December 16, 2011.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Julius Meier-Graefe, *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics*, vol. 1, trans. Florence Simmonds and George W. Chrystal, (New York: Arno Press, 1968, rpt.), 306.

²⁸Quoted in Elaine King, "Interview with Jonathan Lasker," in *Abstraction Abstraction* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery, 1986), 30.

²⁹Interview with Author, December 16, 2011.

³⁰ "Preface" to "Un Coup de Dés" in *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, trans. Henry Weinfield (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 121.

³¹ Quoted in Hindry, 22.

³² Lasker, "After Abstraction," n. p.

³³ Interview with Author, December 16, 2011.

³⁴ Eszter Szalczer, "Nature's Dream Play: Modes of Vision and August Strindberg's Re-Definition of the Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1, "Theatre and Visual Culture" (March 2001): 46.

³⁵ In August Strindberg, *Strindberg: Five Plays*, trans. Harry G. Carlson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 205-206, this playwright describes his "Dream Plays" ("drömspel"), dramatizing the unconscious' means of working, in the following manner:

Anything can happen, everything is possible and plausible. Time and space do not exist. Upon an insignificant background of real-life events the imagination spins and weaves new patterns: a blend of memories, experiences, pure inventions, absurdities, and improvisations. . . . The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all: that of the dreamer.

³⁶ Interview with Author, December 16, 2011. Another Strindberg play Lasker remembers reading is the early and realist *Miss Julie*. New York University drama professor Una Chaudhuri has taken note of Strindberg's special brand of realism, cf. Una Chaudhuri, "Private Parts: Sex, Class, and Stage Space in 'Miss Julie,'" *Theatre Journal* 45, no. 3 (October 1993): 320. Rather than viewing it as a slice-of-life recreated on the stage, she considers it structurally as the result of ongoing tensions:

In this text [Miss Julie], naturalism appears not as a closed and coherent system but precisely as an opening, a gap between two historical systems, one exhausted and moribund, the other still to emerge.

She also refers to the "reduction of the characters [in *Miss Julie* and other realist plays] to the status of signs within the plays' philosophical discourses," a cutback analogous to Lasker's revocation of romantic painting's symbols for the more postmodernist reliance on signs.

³⁷ Raphael Rubinstein, "Counter-Resolution," *Art in America* 83, no. 4 (April 1995): 88.

³⁸ Bonami, 95.

³⁹ "Hans-Michael Herzog Interviews Jonathan Lasker," in Hans-Michael Herzog, ed., *Jonathan Lasker Gemälde/Paintings 1977-1997* (exh. cat.), trans. David Galloway (Bielefeld: Kunsthalle, 1998), 31.

⁴⁰ Steven Henry Madoff, "New Lost Generation," *Art News* 91, no. 4 (April 1992): 76.

⁴¹ Lasker, "After Abstraction," n. p.

⁴² *Ibid.*, n. p.

⁴³ David Ryan, "Visible Thoughts: An Interview with Jonathan Lasker," *Art Papers* 25, no. 5 (September/October 2001): 30.

⁴⁴ Lasker quoted in Herzog, 32.

⁴⁵ Lasker, Telephone Conversation with Author.

⁴⁶ Lasker quoted in Ryan, 31.

⁴⁷ Demetrio Paparoni, "Jonathan Lasker," *Tema Celeste* no. 32-33 (Autumn 1991): 88.

⁴⁸ Lasker quoted in Ryan, 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁰ Lasker quoted in Hindry, 24.

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