

## New Image Painting and Beyond

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*The abstract of this article was presented and expanded at the International Fine Arts and Printing Conference (IFPSC) held in Spain on 15-16 February 2024.*

### Abstract

In 1965, the American minimalist sculptor and writer Donald Judd announced the end of painting. All of the new pictorial approaches that emerged in America and Europe from the 1970s onwards as a kind of reaction to conceptual-based approaches were expressed under the definition of "new expressionism". Modernist art and conceptualist tendencies that excluded traditional artistic elements led to the reclaiming of these elements. The paintings in the exhibition organised in 1978, the first time the "new imagism" movement was seen together, were painted with an expressionist approach. This new imagist movement offers an alternative to the abstraction and industrial forms of minimalist art, with its semi-abstract figures and objects formed in the search for imagery within/on the surface of flat abstract fields, and its flat silhouettes that simply evoke. The "new image painting", which first made its name in 1978 with the exhibition organised by Richard Marshall at the Whitney Museum of American Art under the title "New Image Painting", which included ten artists, later found a place in Tony Godfrey's book "The New Image Painting in The 1980's". This research focuses on the 1978 exhibition. By analysing three exhibitions that are thought to be related afterwards, it intends to search for and discuss the existence of new imagism in contemporary art. Therefore, other exhibitions following the 1978 exhibition will also be analysed. The other exhibitions that exemplify the subject are firstly the exhibition "From Icon to Symbol: Images American Art, 1973-1979" at the Blum Helman Warehouse. The second is the exhibition organised in 1981 under the title "A New Spirit Painting". The third and final exhibition was organised in 2018 under the title "A New Spirit Painting Then, A New Spirit Painting Now 1981-2018", again referring to the previous exhibition. As a result, new imagism, which still finds a place in contemporary art, is far from being a temporary art movement. New imagism, which continues to exist in the field of painting, is in a position to question personal and collective memory with the images it creates today.

**Keywords:** New Imagism, New Expressionism, Contemporary art, Richard Marshall, Tony Godfrey.

**DOI:** 10.7176/RHSS/14-5-08

**Publication date:** June 30<sup>th</sup> 2024

### 1. Introduction

To understand the current state of painting, it is important to look back to the late 1950s and 1960s, when art was redefined. Artists began to produce Happenings and new media in the late 1950s. Shortly afterwards, practitioners of Minimalism and Conceptual Art (such as Donald Judd and Joseph Kosuth) joined this movement. Today, however, a desire for art that is not limited to any particular art genre or medium has become widespread. Before the 1950s, this view was already inherent in abstraction as a more "general art project". Abstract painting expressed the desire to paint as generally and explicitly as possible. In this process, it was realised that all painting was already fundamentally abstract, even if unconsciously so. We can say that the period from Impressionism to abstraction and Conceptual Art within Modernism is full of the concept of progress. If abstract

painting represents a kind of progress, it is possible to say that this is actually a conscious progress. It was the realisation of something that has always been inherent in painting. According to Clement Greenberg (1997), the theorist of Abstract Expressionism, the most fundamental element in the processes by which the art of painting criticised and defined itself within Modernism was the emphasis on the inevitable flat surface of the canvas. This is a feature unique to the art of painting. The flat surface of the canvas is a limiting condition or norm shared by theatre art; colour is a norm or tool shared by other art forms such as theatre and sculpture. Flatness and two-dimensionality are the only conditions that painting does not share with any other art. For this reason, Modernist painting focuses most on flatness. The old masters understood the importance of preserving the integrity of the painting's surface, that is, they felt it necessary to indicate the sense of planarity that exists beneath even the most vivid illusion of three-dimensionality. The apparent contradiction that arises here, when fully expressed, is a necessity that ensures success for the works of these masters, as it does for all painting, the so-called "dialectical tension". Greenberg says that modernists avoid this contradiction, they do not resolve it, and emphasises that what modernists do is to reverse the terms of the contradiction. On the comparison between the paintings of the old masters and modernist painting, Greenberg says that the flatness of the works of the modernists is characterised by the fact that the elements within this flatness are first recognised. The person looking at an Old Masters painting tries to see what is inside it before perceiving it as a painting. However, a modernist work is first perceived as a painting. This is despite the fact that the old masters and modernists adopted the best way of seeing all kinds of paintings, Modernism has accepted this as a single and obligatory approach, and this achievement is considered an achievement of critical thinking. Modernist painting's abandonment of the depiction of recognisable objects is therefore not a matter of principle. What is abandoned is the depiction of space in which recognisable and three-dimensional objects exist. In short, according to Greenberg, the old masters created an illusion of space in which people could imagine walking; what the Modernists created is only one illusion. It can only be looked at and travelled with the gaze.

Modernism internalised what existed in classical painting by revealing it, that is, by bringing it to a more open point of self-awareness. However, the transformation of abstraction into a specific form, such as still life, landscape or history painting, shows its inability to convey the essence of the whole painting. The generalisation of painting cannot be realised within painting. The generalisation of painting cannot be done within painting, which brings us back to Happenings, Minimalism and Conceptual Art. In retrospect, these movements, especially the last one, can be seen as attempts to reach something more abstract and generalised than abstract art, something more "nothing in particular". Conceptual Art has played an important role not only as a genre among other types of art, but in art as a whole. Abstraction has for a long time been accepted with a peculiar enthusiasm, and abstract painting has been one of the most impressive displays of the great drama of art, at least for several generations. (Schwabsky, 2008).

In 1965, the American minimalist sculptor and writer Donald Judd heard that painting was over. He and other traditions seemed to be exhausted. Avant-garde movements were rejecting the ethos of belle peinture and dominating it. Advanced art, or art that wanted to reflect its society, seemed to have to interact with new media, video, film, performance, or be made with Minimalist or Conceptual prejudices. For many intellectuals in the art world, the time of painting seemed to be over and could now be left to market painters and pavement artists. Conceptual artist Victor Burgin later said: "I gave up painting in '65, because it was an outdated technology. There were enough paintings and sculptures filling museum basements all over the world, why should I produce more? It was ecologically unhealthy: it was a kind of pollution." Although many artists continued to paint, it was no longer the central activity of visual art. For the insensitive, the paintings still produced seemed to be bankrupt in form and spirit. From their point of view, most figurative painters were painting with their heads buried in the sand, in the old, traditional ways in which nothing had changed during this century (Godfrey, 1986). However, many traditional artistic elements that had been marginalised by modern art and conceptual tendencies were reclaimed and there was a return to painting, painting, figure and narrative. This return represents a tendency to re-emphasise many traditional artistic elements. All of the new pictorial approaches that emerged as a kind of reaction to conceptual-based approaches in America and Europe starting in the 1970s were expressed under the definition of "new expressionism". This resulted in a defensive position for painters and sculptors, which often had a limiting effect. Similarly, Conceptual Art and its various derivatives today retain a legacy of prestige that stems not only from their relative newness, but also from the triumphant assumptions of artistic progress inherited from abstraction.

Pop art seemed appealing in its clever rearrangement of images from the mass media, but their greatest opposition was to the abstract painters who continued under the patronage of the formalist critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg argued that to achieve quality and purity, there should be no other concerns involving the

surface plane of the painting, the shape of the medium, and the properties of the pigment. While the results could sometimes be beautiful, they were often empty and the "aesthetics of dullness" defined their ethos with depressing accuracy. As such, it looked like an academic art, having nothing to do with the outside world. Painting would return to the centre, but in a different way that pop art, minimalism and conceptual art did not (Godfrey, 1986).

Painting, non-painting and these problems related to the past are still important issues today. In some ways they may have become more prioritised. For example, the act of no longer painting has generated a very important territorial debate, at least at the administrative level of art institutions, as it has moved from being a rebellious stance against an understanding of art defined solely by painting to a fully institutionalised practice. In other ways, however, these issues might have become softer, less politicised. Therefore, like Philip Guston, a modernist artist, he could have moved on to painting without the difficulties he experienced when moving from abstraction to representation. Guston's change was perceived as a betrayal by some of his close friends. However, it no longer seems necessary for artists to adhere strictly to such positions. There are two main reasons for talking about today's painting to see it against the background of Modernist painting: One is that the situation of both seems quite similar, the other is that they seem almost incomparably different. If deepening self-consciousness is the only form of progress that can convincingly place abstract painting beyond representation, or Conceptual Art beyond abstraction, then here too the distinction can best be thought of as a difference in consciousness. In other words, contemporary painting is not more conscious than Modernist painting, but it is conscious of different things (Schwabsky, 2008).

The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of New Expressionism in opposition to the sophisticated conceptual approaches of Pop Art, Minimalism, Conceptual Art and Postmodernism. By using visceral accents, subjective colours and distorting forms, artists returned to the emotional content seen in Expressionist movements such as Fauvism, Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter in the early twentieth century and Abstract Expressionism in the mid-twentieth century. Although Expressionism was stigmatised as 'degenerate' by the Nazis in the 1930s, after World War II Germany paradoxically became a refuge for expressionist masters such as Georg Baselitz. Baselitz pioneered the return of expressionism to Europe in the late 1950s, and his entire oeuvre became a symbol of the New Expressionism. Instead of depicting the figure in a traditional way, Baselitz turned it upside down and depicted the spatial perception in an impressive way. Such an approach in the artist's works can be seen as an indication of finding his emotional self through an inner search. The burnt black fields and ash-covered landscape in the Shulamite painting are an expression of despair. In contrast, A. Kiefer was confronting Germany's responsibility for the Great Holocaust and World War II in his work. The revival of expressionist themes also inspired other artists in the Western world. The portrait "Untitled" by the Italian artist Francisco Clemente is presented in a style that expresses deep inner feelings. The fragmented selves create an image that both astonishes and surprises the viewer. On the other hand, the American artist Julian Schnabel, in his painting "Blue Nude with Sword", combined the expressionist tradition with postmodern approaches by evoking the cutting technique used by Matisse in his last period. One of the elements that reinforce the harsh stamp of neo-expressionism is the broken ceramic plates attached to the canvas (Haydaroglu, 2015).

In the following sections of the article, the definition of "New Imagism" and the productions in the exhibition, which was organised by Richard Marshall in 1978 at the Whitney Museum of American Art under the title "New Image Painting" and included ten artists, will be discussed. On the basis that the exhibitions that followed the first exhibition, which constitutes the focal point of this research, can also be read in the context of new imagism: firstly, the exhibition "From Icon to Symbol: Images American Art, 1973-1979" at the Blum Helman Warehouse. Secondly, the exhibition organised in 1981 under the title "A New Spirit Painting". Thirdly and finally, by including the exhibition organised in 2018 under the title "A New Spirit Painting Then, A New Spirit Painting Now 1981-2018" with reference to the previous exhibition, the aim is to define the "new Imagism" movement, which has continued its effects from 1978 to the present day, and to discuss its reflections on contemporary art.

### *1.1 New Image Painting*

Tony Godfrey (1986), author of *The New Image Painting in The 1980's*, notes that when Chia claimed in 1977 that painting had been reinvented, he realised that such claims were common among Italian art critics. He mentions that although this claim seemed insignificant to him at the time, he considered it merely an implausible exaggeration. After all, painters had been painting continuously for years; none of them had forgotten how to paint. So how could painting be reinvented? It was only later, on reflection, that he realised there was a certain truth in this claim, Godfrey (1986) writes in his introduction to . In the late seventies and early eighties, a phenomenon called New Painting emerged, first in Germany and Italy, then in the United States, Great Britain and France (the five countries on which this book focuses). By 1985, with the emergence of similar trends as far

away as Japan, Spain and Australia, it became clear that the state of painting had completely changed. How and to what extent painting is actually being reinvented is the central question this book explores, he explains.

New Image Painting refers to a trend that emerged prominently in the field of art in the 1970s. During this period, artists tended to turn towards more recognisable images. This tendency was especially evident in fields such as performance art, video art, film and photography. However, later on, this tendency started to increase gradually in traditional art disciplines such as painting and sculpture. The use of images in painting and sculpture may have been criticised and discouraged, especially compared to the forms of abstraction and figuration of earlier periods. However, many artists began to work with recognisable forms, challenging the dominant forms of abstraction and figuration of the 1950s and 1960s and integrating them into their own work. This trend suggests that artists were seeking more personal, emotional and even political expressions (Godfrey, 1986).

Leppert (2009) states that to imply that painting is a non-verbal substitute for what can be expressed or conveyed in words is highly simplistic and highly inaccurate. He finds it ironic that a large body of literature on art goes no further than recognising that words are often insufficient to "explain" the communicative and expressive power of images. Paintings are the products of human consciousness that, through the physical act of painting, transform the thoughts and feelings of human consciousness into visual images that are visible but silent and often devoid of readable words. Therefore, according to Leppert, images are not merely visual translations of what can be expressed in words, but visual transformations of a particular consciousness in relation to the world. Conscious or unconscious awareness of a particular situation is, of course, linked to language, but language is not the only tool people use to make sense of their reality, it is only the most common one. Indeed, otherwise there would be little reason to explain the existence of images or music. Beyond this, it is important to recognise that: Images are not only an assertion about the world, but also ways of enquiry, research and discovery. Rather than telling us something, images affect us by revealing in a certain way the possibilities and probabilities of a field that is difficult for some to articulate.

Through the use of recognisable images in the New Image Painting movement, it can be argued that viewers can more easily connect to the works and understand the content more directly. This can be seen as an expression of diversity and innovation in the art world, because artists want to communicate with the audience in new ways and establish an emotional connection.

Among the New Imagists, led by Philip Guston, who "announced the search for a semi-abstract imaginary blending abstracted figures and objects, Jonathan Borofsky, Donald Sultan, Jennifer Bartlett, Neil Jenney, Susan Rothenberg, Joel Zucker, who have different orientations as well as common points, can be counted (Antmen, 2008)." The first real break came when Philip Guston exhibited his new cartoon-based figurative paintings in 1970. When Guston, one of the most important and respected members of the abstract expressionist movement, decided to exhibit paintings similar to his 1969 painting "untitled" (Figure 1), this decision was a shocking event for many people, like a priest committing blasphemy. It could have been perceived as a betrayal. In 1970, Guston exhibited a series of new paintings that were mostly met with shocked silence or open ridicule. The New York Times showed that it was not being overly complimentary by calling Guston "A Mandarin Who Claims to be a Mandarin" in an unusually conspicuous headline. This harsh judgement was generally supported by other reports on the exhibition. Even Guston's long-time supporters seemed unsure of their own reactions, and either remained silent about the meaning of the new paintings or quoted Guston himself (Harold Rosenberg's long and sympathetic review in *The New Yorker* was a notable exception). The harshness of these paintings recalled the sharp reactions to the work of Guston's childhood friend Jackson Pollock years earlier (Ashton, 1979). For Guston, however, the continuation of his old abstract style would have been a betrayal of his inner self. It was no coincidence that these works led to a period of self-searching in which he created his most simple and minimalist works. Guston created a remarkable mass of images that included all the detritus and detritus of life: old shoes, smoky cigarettes and empty paint cans. When he painted himself, he was depicted in bed smoking a cigarette, with a plate of French fries beside him, with no discernible feature except a large eye; and behind him, the materials of his life, a pile of rubbish and a bare light bulb (Godfrey: 1986).



Figure 1. Philip Guston, *Untitled*, 1969.  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79126>

His preference for simply expressed forms stemmed from a desire to glorify the importance of everyday life, a reflection of a focus on the objects of the physical world. *Sleeping* (Figure 2.)" is notable for its subtle drawing style, limiting its palette to red and black tones. It depicts a man with anxious legs shrinking under the sheets, with only his earlobe and eyelashes visible. The pyramidal composition shows Guston as bold and accurate as ever. His dishevelled hair and the fact that he is still wearing moored boots may suggest that he may be asleep, but he will wake up alive and triumphant. Guston's last paintings celebrate this state of affairs with crude humour and inevitable perspective (Godfrey:1986).



Figure 2. Philip Guston, *Sleeping*, 1977.  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/894033>

Guston, like all other modern artists, was confronted with the fundamental problem of modernism. Modernism's excessive demand for contemporaneity, its indifference to the past and its vague vision of the future so narrowed experience that artists were constantly threatened with spiritual deprivation (Ashton, 1979). It is Guston's emphasis on both meaning and material that determines his significance for the New Imagist movement. Although New Painting is often associated with figurative transformation, it is important to consider both emphases. In the words of Achille Bonito Oliva, it is not the figuration itself that is important, but the presence of the figurative: the ongoing struggle to extract meaning from the world (Godfrey: 1986). The first time the "new image painting" movement was seen together was the exhibition organised by Richard Marshall at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1978 under the title "New Image Painting". Ten artists were included in the exhibition, including Nicholas Africano, Jenifer Bartlett, Denise Green, Michael Hurson, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, Susan Rothenberg, David True and Joe Zucker with their paintings defined as New Image Painting.

In *An Argument* (Figure 3) by Nicholas Africano, 1977, two figures appear on a grey surface. The figure on the left is looking towards the empty space of the painting, while behind him another figure is seen with his

hand on his forehead, looking towards him. The male figure on the left has white hair and is standing slightly leaning forwards. While the space between the two figures creates a tense atmosphere, the definition of the canvas in general provides a calm atmosphere. While there is no sign of space, the flat surface of the canvas defines a vague imaginary space for the figures in the frame.

The artist places his figurative images in a huge colourless space that exists almost nowhere and everywhere. In his work, the artist has focussed on an extremely subtle example of human interaction, simultaneously removing all clues to the development of a story, but still providing enough clues for the viewer to infer a narrative. The simple figures are designed to imply a moment of behaviour or interaction, not to realistically depict their individual character and personality. These figures are not intended to be representational, as they are only used for their informational value. Their natural, simple rendering reduces the visual impact of the painting and focuses on the idea that the painting should be a tool, so that the subject becomes part of the painting. The figures are rendered in low relief to emphasise their physical presence, providing a tangible sense of presence on the surface and reducing the perception of spatial depth. The figures appear on the surface. The figures are therefore presented in profile to eliminate a sense of aggression by maintaining a distance between them and the viewer and to create an ambiguous tension between the figures. The meaningful characteristics expressed by recognisable postures and gestures are used by the artist to provoke a reaction, but not to anticipate it (Marshal: 1978).

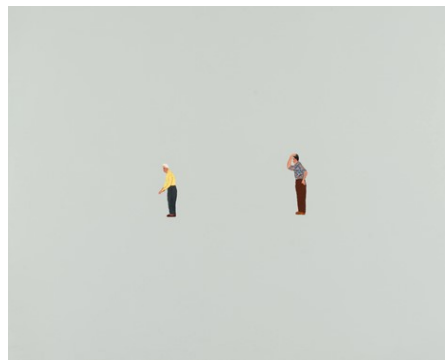


Figure 3. Nicholas Africano , *An Argument*, 1977.  
<https://whitney.org/collection/works/4017>

The disciplined and systematic repetition of simplified images in Jennifer Bartlett's paintings recalls the conceptual principles of Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt. Bartlett presents a schematic arrangement of modular steel plates and serial progressions based on a solid foundation of modernist precision. His *Rhapsody* (Figure 4), 1976, with its mini-malism influences, also refers to the history of modern art and all the potentials and elements of painting.

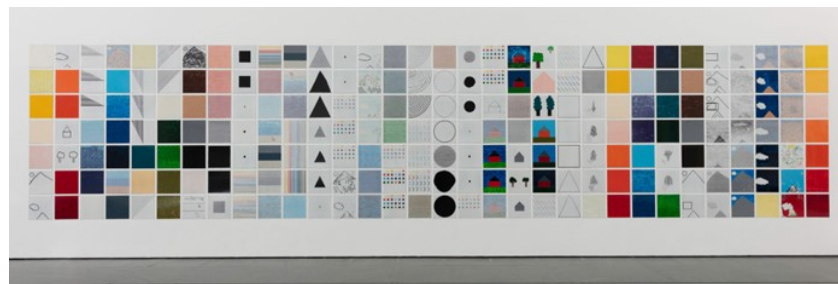


Figure 4. Jennifer Bartlett, *Rhapsody*, 1976.  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/100190>

Within Jennifer Bartlett's own predetermined system, the figure of a house, formed by a triangle placed on top of a rectangle, is moved to make various combinations with basic structures and other images. With this

approach, the house can be painted in a pointillistic, freehand or measured style; it can be depicted in any or all combinations of horizontal, vertical, diagonal or curved lines, geometric shapes such as squares, triangles or circles, natural elements such as mountains, trees or oceans, and can be shown in 25 predetermined colour variations and mixtures (Marshal: 1978).



Figure 5. Denise Green, *Bridge*, 1976.

<https://www.doyle.com/auction/lot/34-denise-green/?lot=1358973&sd=1>

After moving to New York, the artist focused on painting building facades for three years. Part of this preference stemmed from the architectural training he received in Paris. He wanted to reflect his own experiences in his paintings, and this required a connection to the place where he lived. He did not adopt a completely abstract style; he thought that art could not be limited only within itself. From 1975 onwards, he began to work with central images, often scraped or formed from a layer of paint. He dealt with themes such as loneliness, transition, security and expressed them in his paintings. In his most recent works, he has also incorporated non-evocative elements. Although she uses the language of painting, each image carries a special meaning from her own experience (Figure 5). She calls the images "configurations" and they shape her thoughts about these objects. Including some elements, such as surface quality or grid drawing, aims to prevent his pictures from representing just one thing. In particular, by making the underlying grid visible in some paintings, they aim to express emotions as well as structures (Marshal:1978).



Figure 6. Michael Hurson, *Eyeglass Painting #4*, 1970

<https://www.paulacoopergallery.com/exhibitions/michael-hurson#tab:slideshow;tab-1:thumbnails>

The interpretation of the activities depicted in *Eyeglass Painting #4* (Figure 6) does not lead to any logical explanation or straight story. The pencil can be considered as an indication signalling the beginning of the painting and the event, but what follows is neither sequential nor repetitive. The viewer is confronted with the lack of familiar content, although they have familiar forms. Each work is shaped by the artist's location, thoughts and interactions. The spectacle paintings (Figure 6) represent three years of work between 1969

and 1971. The artist rented a video in Chicago and sat in the studio for a month without inspiration; one day the image of spectacles appeared. This image was inspired by a joke book he had drawn for his friends years before, which he applied to a king. Whichever image he connects with, each one is a tool to continue an intellectual process. The first spectacles were not placed anywhere; they were painted on a painted surface. Of course, paintings of spectacles have been more difficult than others because they manipulate an object like spectacles in an unnatural way. However, he is able to move the image with a spirit, a spirit that knows it has been stimulated by an event in his personal life (Marshal: 1978).

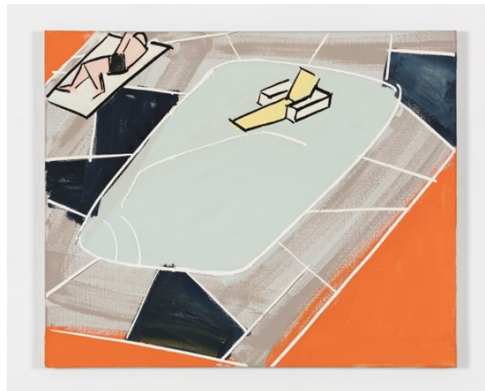


Figure 7. Michael Hurson, Palm Springs Painting #6, 1971.

<https://www.paulacoopergallery.com/exhibitions/michael-hurson#tab:slideshow;tab-1:thumbnails>

The Palm Springs paintings (Figure 7) emerged after a visit to California and were his response to the place. The act of painting brings greater pleasure than the goal of making realistic images. Edward and Otto Pfaff have a strong image. Although he did not intend to make abstract, he thought that figures often looked like that. A sequential but very short moment; an event outside the frame of the painting caused the character of Otto to look back (Marshal: 1978). The artist created new images based on the object and created new images from the states of the self.

Jenney created a collection of paintings in 1968, anticipating the return of realism. He thought that clear parameters had not yet been established in realism and focused on showing the viewers the relationships between objects, he was not interested in technical details. Using universal and cross-cultural symbols, he preferred to emphasise the relationships of objects rather than delving into their psychological depths. While stating that he did not distinguish between abstraction and realism, he argued that realism sought space, balance and harmony by solving abstract complexities. Instead of imitating photographs, he preferred to emphasise paint and stated that realism is a kind of illusion and that the frame strengthens this illusion.



Figure 8. Neil Jenney, *Here and There*, 1969.

<https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2001/neil-jenney-the-bad-years-1969-70/>



The artist does not think there is a distinction between abstraction and realism. He finds realism in the search for space, balance and harmony by solving abstract complexities. According to him, realism not only solves abstract concerns, but also involves precise philosophical interpretation, which is why it is considered a higher art form. Jenny does not try to hide the fact that his paintings are art or to imitate photographs, instead he wants to emphasise the importance of using paint. The artist recognises that realism is a kind of illusion and that all illusionistic paintings need frames (Marshall 1978). In his 1969 painting *Here and There* (Figure 8), as in his other paintings, there is a thick black frame. The title of the painting is written under these frames. The use of paint provides a transitional atmosphere between image and object.

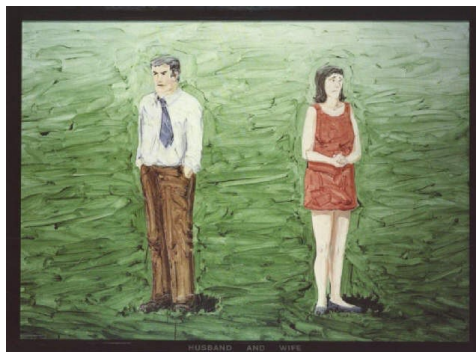


Figure 9. Neil Jenny, *Husband and wife*, 1970.

<https://gagosian.com/exhibitions/2001/neil-jenny-the-bad-years-1969-70/>

Jenny's *Husband and wife* (Figure 9), dated 1970, is framed, as in her other paintings, by a distinctive black frame with the title of the painting below the frame. Reminiscent of Nicholas Africano's paintings with the positioning of the figures on the canvas, these paintings are quite different in terms of the use of paint and gestures in expressive approaches. In the artist's paintings, the gaze oscillates between perceiving the object and perceiving the paint applied to the surface.

When working on a painting or drawing, the artist feels satisfied because for him the image creates an isolated feeling and does not offer a shared experience. It is important for him not to use colours arbitrarily, but to strive for a natural depiction of forms. The values of the colours used are very close to each other, they are often marked by differences in their surface, light and dark colours are used side by side. The paintings are often inspired by the artist's own drawings and photographs in magazines. It can be difficult to express clearly why a particular image was chosen. The artist sometimes feels as if he has made a translation. The canvas is often divided, and this division is transformed into two different forms due to the closeness of the colour values. In some cases, the artist uses an element such as a clothesline as a central image and this division becomes a clothesline, creating a binary division with forms attached to the far left and far right. In the 1978 painting *Untidled* (Figure 10), we see three amges as if hung on a clothesline. A grey neutral narrative on a black ground increases the mystery and tension in the painting, while the dark space draws the gaze into the frame.

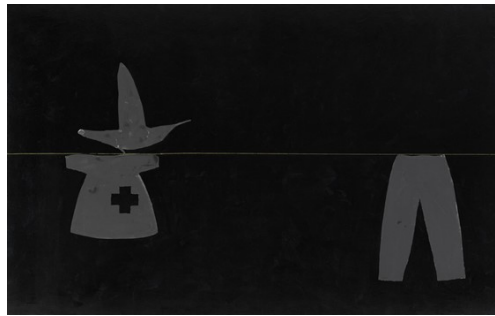


Figure 10. Lois Lane, *Untitled*, 1978.

<https://whitney.org/collection/works/2129>

Robert Moskowitz began his career in the early 1960s with the concept of architectural corner spaces. Later, these symmetrical spaces began to fill with spontaneous signs and he began to explore the metaphorical meanings of signs. The figure of the duck, in particular, impressed him with its modern form and frequently appeared in his paintings. He added protective lines to the painting to emphasise the duck's vulnerability. *Cadillac Chopsticks* (Figure 11) represents the contrast between passive and mobile power. Despite the ambiguity in his works, Moskowitz took care not to create a mystical atmosphere.



Figure 11. Robert Moskowitz, *Cadillac Chopsticks*, 1975

<https://www.moca.org/collection/work/cadillacchopsticks>

Robert Moskowitz's *The Swimmer* (Figure 12) symbolises a man struggling to survive in New York, and the painting strikes a balance between reality and abstraction. Moskowitz believes that his paintings create a menacing atmosphere despite their claim to be large and elegant. He emphasises the quality and detail of his work and works intensively with the imagery he uses. Moskowitz states that the images he uses are engraved in his brain and become almost abstract (Marshal: 1978).



Figure 12. Robert Moskowitz, *Swimmer*, 1977.  
<https://whitney.org/collection/works/2892>

Susan Rothenberg adopts an image-breaking style in her paintings, reshaping traditional imagery and focusing particularly on geometric elements such as the central line and divisions. The figure of the horse (Figure 13) appears frequently in Rothenberg's works and, when divided correctly, provides a remarkable balance. The horse figure, both halves of which can stand alone, is critical to maintaining the integrity of the painting. In areas with complex divisions, it is important that each section is strong and at the same time contributes to the unity of the painting. Lines and bars help the viewer to understand the painting while emphasising details.



Figure 13. Susan Rothenberg, *Flanders*, 1976.  
<https://www.richardgraygallery.com/viewing-rooms/susan-rothenberg#tab-5:thumbnails;tab7:thumbnails;tab-7:thumbnails>

When Rothenberg began working with the figure of the horse, he noted that divisions were often associated with rectangles, but later he related geometry more deeply to the figure of the horse. For example, in "IXI", the geometry of the horse is defined as head-line-X-line, and this geometry is strongly linked to the shape of the horse and the bars. In "Butterfly", the black paint that forms the body of the horse also shapes the geometry, and the disappearance and reappearance of the black lines enables the integration of the horse and the X figure (Marshall, 1978).

Defining the horse figure on flat surfaces, the artist distorts the canvas with vertical, horizontal or diagonal lines to reject the illusionism created by the painting. Apart from canvas paintings, the artist also has photographed performances in which he confronts his own body with the image of a horse (figure 14).



Figure 14. Susan Rothenberg, *Mary Series* Test Photographs, 1974

<https://www.richardgraygallery.com/viewing-rooms/susan-rothenberg#tab-5:thumbnails;tab7:thumbnails>

One night, while working in his studio, David True encountered a figure whose presence he felt on his right side. Although the room was empty, the feeling was so strong that he could not ignore it. The figure was dark and translucent, with no distinct features and a masculine appearance. This figure indicated that it was a spirit living in the body of an artist and that it was looking for a new body. He was looking for an artist to transfer his ideas into the physical world. True asked about the visitor's previous home and who he was but received no answer. Eventually, he learnt that the spirit was free and would now enter a body. In time, True felt that the ideas of this spirit would begin to appear in his work. True learnt that he was afraid of this situation but that the spirit would not hinder his mission. True and the visitor walked towards each other and the visitor disappeared. True forgot the incident, but four or five years later he realised that the ideas that inspired his work today had come to him. These ideas were emerging as complete visual structures in his mind, and True stated that he made conscious decisions while painting, because he was painting only for these ideas (Marshall, 1978).

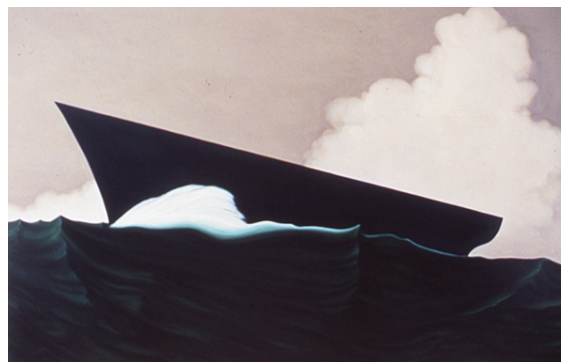


Figure 15. David True, *Green Sea*, 1976.

<https://www.adambaumgoldfineart.com/david-true>

David True's seascapes and landscapes seem to subvert logical explanations. The silhouette of a boat emerging from the stylised waves does not give the viewer a clear indication of the boat's presence. Details such as masts, sails, cabins or rudder cannot be observed; there is only a simple silhouette of a boat. Although these images appear clear, precise and straightforward, they defy a specific interpretation. Although they allude to the sea, the place and the subject, the emphasis is on form, not content. The images depicted - the boat, the ocean, the clouds, the land - form a picture that oscillates between surreal illusions and objective abstractions.

Joe Zucker began his painting career with early paintings based on woven patterns and made from dyed cotton fabric. These works focused on diagrams made using dyed cotton fabrics instead of traditional canvas. In 1971, he became interested in the production of surfaces made with cotton balls and the piecemeal construction of the painting. The dye-soaked cotton balls allowed him to simultaneously shape the structure and imagery of the painting. The Amphora series was chosen to reflect the process and the

tools used rather than the content. Amphoras made with cotton balls became vessels consisting of thousands of pieces. In his later works, the size of the cotton balls determined the images of lovebirds and he used a cotton ball for each bird's eye. By focusing on cotton in his paintings, Zucker addressed the process from the harvesting of this material to its commercialisation and subsequent reshaping as paintings. The content of the painting was based on the image on the surface rather than the canvas. His work was associated with the types of material and the pictorial content was used as a tool to discuss the topography of painting. His abstractions sought to strike a balance between freedom and control, working in harmony with the nature of cotton. Using subjects such as fields, sailing ships, alchemists as metaphors, he aimed to engage the viewer with images full of various associations. For example, the shaping of the crocodile skin provided a tactile opportunity for the painter, and Merlyn's Laboratory served as a metaphor for the artist's process. Zucker continued his work by focussing on the past and present rather than the future (Marshall, 1978).



Figure 16. Joe Zucker , *Paying Off Old Debts*, 1975.

<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/205402/paying-off-old-debts>

When the exhibition titled " New Image Painting ", organised by Richard Marshall and including ten artists, is examined with sample paintings from the artists, it is clear that there is no common modernist manifesto that includes the perspectives of the artists. The New Image Painting movement has opened a new path for artists in the compression of the period, but this new modernist sense is not a new one that rejects the old, but rather a place that is included in the multi-layered expression of postmodernism. as mentioned above, it is possible to see influences from minimalism in the paintings included in the New Image Painting movement. It should always be remembered that what constitutes art productions and even history is to be in constant dialogue with the past. Because an art production from today is in dialogue with the postmodern view in the sense of criticism of past productions. It is necessary to summarise the approaches of these ruptures in order to understand the New Image Painting movement, which emerged from the approaches of the changing paradigms to painting after Minimalist art and Duchamp. In his book *The End of Art*, Kuspit (2006) presents his point of view on Newman and Duchamp in a very clear comparative manner. Namely: Newman and Duchamp question aesthetics and the process of art production, separating the work of art and aesthetic experience. According to them, the process of creating a work of art is not an aesthetic experience. While Duchamp sees this process as an irrational psychodynamic process, according to Newman it is a primary creative process. Psychological processes and experiences do not need to be represented in art because they have intrinsic validity independent of art. According to Duchamp and Newman, the sensory presence and pleasure called aesthetics are not related to the work of art; on the contrary, the work of art functions as a symbol reminding us of the mortality of deeper processes. Sensory experiences distract one from spiritual and creative foundations, and therefore works of art should only be perceived mentally. The origins of this idea begin when Plato, in his works, places art in the realm of sensory illusion.

It is precisely in this conflict that New Image Painting restores painting's autonomy.

### *1.2 New Image Painting and Beyond*

According to Greenberg (1997), the idea of discontinuity is the furthest thing from authentic art today. Art is - among many other things - continuity. Without the art of the past, without the need and urge to maintain

the old standards of excellence, there would be no such thing as Modernist art. The reflections of the New Image Painting movement that emerged after 1970 can be seen in the exhibitions, and even if this movement does not have the aim of maintaining the old standards of excellence, it is possible to see the reflections even when we look at today that the movement is sustainable.

Philip Guston played an important role in the emergence of "New Image Painting". Guston, who switched to a figurative style in the mid-1960s, was initially associated with Abstract Expressionism. Realising that his earlier works were moving towards a misleading notion of "purity", Guston resolutely recorded realistic elements in the 1970s, focusing on his everyday emotions, obsessions and insecurities. His visual repertoire of authentic and direct expressions was shaped by references to the stylised figures of 1940s American illustrators such as Al Capp or Basil Wolverton. These figures also influenced the 1960s "underground" comic book artist Robert Crumb (Hopkins, 2018). It is possible to say that the New Image Painting movement continued its presence in the exhibitions that opened later: firstly at Blum Helman Warehouse, "From Icon to Symbol: Images American Art, 1973-1979" at the Blum Helman Warehouse.

In New York, solo exhibitions of new and old works by most of the "New Image Painting" artists were organised. The Blum-Helman Gallery also organised an exhibition entitled "From Icon to Symbol: Images in American Art, 1973-1979", with some changes in the artist line-up. Paintings by Donald Sultan and sculptures by Joel Shapiro, Scott Burton, Bryan Hunt and Bruce Robbins accompanied the mid-1970s works of seven original New Image painters (excluding Jenney, Hurson and Africano). As the Blum-Helman Gallery represented five of the artists in the exhibition, these revisions were significant. The exhibition emphasised the importance of sculpture, especially Shapiro's sculpture, in the evolution of this movement. All these exhibitions encouraged a re-evaluation of the New Image movement (Smith, 1986).

The New Painting deals primarily with the relationship between meaning and matter and the related question of how a displaced and worldly life is possible in the modern world. This search is concerned with myth, the unconscious and irrational impulses that replace organised religion and formerly important concepts such as science, technology and social construction (Godfrey, 1986).

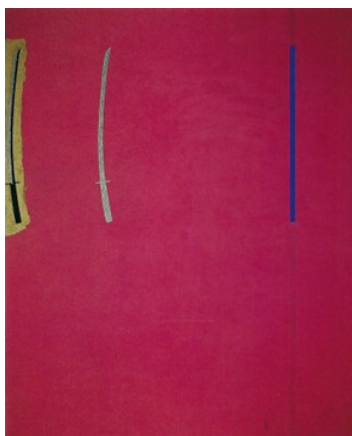


Figure 17. Robert Moskowitz, *Sword*, 1976  
<https://www.robertmoskowitz.org/1970-1979>

Particularly noteworthy in this exhibition is the 1976 work "Sword", in which Barnett Newman's figure, perceived as a cut "zip", is transformed into a glowing weapon on a dark red background. At the same time, Burton's black "Table I" and Shapiro's small monolithic house mark two earthly and psychologically charged departures from a Minimalist cube (Smith, 1986).

It was the second exhibition organised in 1981 under the title "A New Spirit Painting", where the New Image Painting movement continued. Another American painter rediscovered at this exhibition was Leon Golub. Since the 1950s, Golub had been working with a wounded and torn understanding of figuration Christos Joachimides



Figure 18. Leon Golub, *Interrogation II*, 1981

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/leon-golub/interrogation-i>

Painting the brutal aspects of the male-dominated world, where political excesses and violence against humanity are encouraged, Golub refrained from making a moral judgement. He assumed the banter between the mercenaries and interrogators in his painting and the effects of these actions, and they were looking at us through Golub's works. While some would be bound or gagged victims, Golub makes his works on the ground, dissolving paint deposits with volatile substances and then smashing the surface of the canvas with a butcher's cleaver. The paint adheres firmly to the texture of the canvas and seems to penetrate everywhere, from the wrinkles of the painter's heroes to the wrinkles around their eyes. Although Guston and Golub were internationally recognised, American artists in general were not prominent among the figures who led the revival of painting in Europe (Hopkins, 2018). It would have been shocking to see so many of Leon Golub's life-size paintings in such large dimensions, completely unexpectedly. Golub's huge, frameless canvases depict scenes of mercenaries being killed, torture and death squads (Hopkins, 2018).

In this exhibition, sculptural productions came to the fore. 1974 Donald Sultan, *Nankow Pass (Wall of China)* (Figure19) is a miniature version of the Great Wall of China. Scott Burton, 1975, *Bronze Chair* (Figure20) is a bronze casting of an old style chair. Joel Shapiro, *House* (Figure 21) dated 1974 is a rev image in the *minimalist* sense. As can be seen from the sculptural examples, New Image Painting is not new in the modernist sense, but in the beginning of the postmodern period, it is in a place that has to refer to many art concepts.



Figure 19. Donald Sultan, *Nankow Pass (Wall of China)*, 1974.

<https://donaldsultanstudio.com/>



Figure 20. Scott Burton, *Bronze Chair*, 1975.  
<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/118769/bronze-chair>



Figure 21. Joel Shapiro, *House*, 1974.  
<https://www.roseberys.co.uk/a0622-lot-539550-joel-shapiro-nbspamerican-b-1941-nbspuntitled-house-1974-nbspbronze>

The third and final exhibition is "A New Spirit Painting Then, A New Spirit Painting Now 1981-2018", organised in 2018 with reference to the previous exhibition. In "A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981 - 2018", Rosenthal revisits an important moment in his curatorial career, the 1981 exhibition, almost 40 years later. The original exhibition showed how painting could be questioned in a conservative environment, with artists discussing the conscious relationship between the painted image and reality. In his new presentation, Rosenthal further explores this theme, questioning the role of this moment in our personal and collective memory. Most of the artists in the exhibition are still actively working. The exhibition is realised in two spaces of the Almine Rech Gallery and includes artists who participated in the 1981 exhibition. The New York section focuses on historical works from the 1980s, while the London section includes works by the same artists from the 2000s onwards (Micchelli, 2018).

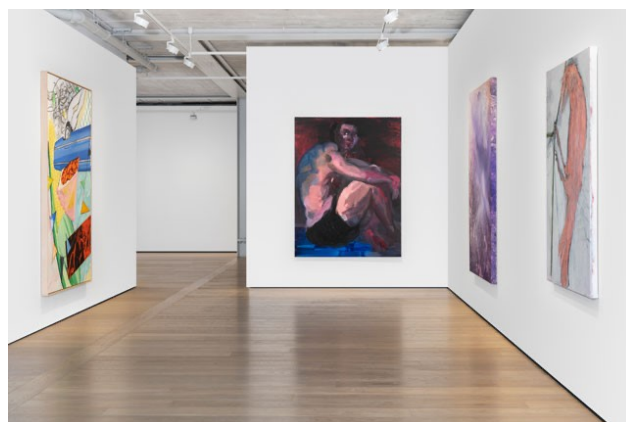


Figure 22. Almine Rech Gallery, *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981-2018*,  
<https://www.alminerech.com/exhibitions/961-a-new-spirit-then-a-new-spirit-now-1981-2018-curated-by-norman-roenthal>

"A New Spirit in Painting" offered an opportunity to explore an alternative history of painting and to assess



the contemporary situation. More than 150 works by established and emerging artists were on display (Figure 22). These included works by artists who had risen to international prominence in the 1960s, as well as works by members of the older generation. The exhibition drew attention by hosting works that questioned traditional conceptions of art. One of the most important contributions of the exhibition was that it offered new perspectives to the art world by introducing less internationally known names such as young German and Italian painters ( URL1 ) The exhibition presented a wide range of works from the masters of modernism to the New Image Painting movement. Susan Rothenberg from the first exhibition took part in the exhibition with her painting *Pink Raven* (Figure 22)dated 2012. With her expressionist free brush strokes, it can be considered as an indicator of continuity from the exhibition opened in 1978.



Figure 23. Susan Rothenberg, *Pink Raven*, 2012

<https://www.alminerech.com/exhibitions/961-a-new-spirit-then-a-new-spirit-now-1981-2018-curated-by-norman-roenthal>

Susan Rothenberg says: "It was as if each of us came from different islands, all united in one sea. We were not a movement, but a group of individuals redefining images. It seemed strange to me that we could all come together and call something (Smith, 1987). He expresses his views on the ongoing exhibitions. With his painting *George and the Dragon*, (Figure 24) Malcolm Morley confronts the viewer in a poetic and anachronistic place between subject and technique in painting.



Figure 24. Malcolm Morley , *St. George and the Dragon* , 2016.

<https://www.alminerech.com/exhibitions/961-a-new-spirit-then-a-new-spirit-now-1981-2018-curated-by-norman-roenthal>



Figure 25. Francesco Clemente, *Tower of Song*, 2017.

<https://www.alminerech.com/exhibitions/961-a-new-spirit-then-a-new-spirit-now-1981-2018-curated-by-norman-rosenthal>

Francesco Clemente's *Tower of Song*, (Figure 25) dated 2017, brings to mind the neo-geo movement with its geometric expression alongside the New Image Painting movement. This painting, in which images from the artist's own life are reflected on the canvas, stands in a very familiar and distant place like the other paintings included in the movement.

## 2. Conclusion

It is important to look at the late 1950s and 1960s to understand the state of art today. During this period, art was redefined with innovations such as Happenings and new media. Movements such as Minimalism and Conceptual Art also contributed to this process. Today, art is not limited to a specific genre or medium, but has become a general desire. While the period of Modernism extended from Impressionism to abstraction and Conceptual Art, abstract painting basically expressed a desire for progress. Modernist painting focussed particularly on flatness, and the flat surface of the canvas is one of the main characteristics of this movement. However, in the 1960s and later, movements such as pop art, minimalism and conceptual art further abstracted and generalised abstract painting. In the post-modernist period, the act of painting, non-painting and problems related to the past have become important. Movements such as New Expressionism emerged as a reaction against abstract art by emphasising emotional content. In this period, figurative and emotional elements regained importance in the art of painting. Today, contemporary art is different from Modernist painting, but it also bears similarities with it. This difference can be explained by the focusing of consciousness on different things.

In the 1980s, the "New Image Painting" movement represents a remarkable trend in the art world. Tony Godfrey's book analyses the emergence and development of this movement. This trend, which began in the 1970s, involves artists turning towards more recognisable images. Especially in traditional disciplines such as painting and sculpture, there is an increasing focus on recognisable forms rather than abstraction and figuration. Artists such as Philip Guston abandon their abstract style in favour of more figurative works. Guston's works focus on the objects of everyday life, aiming to convey meaning and emotion through images. The "New Image Painting" movement represents diversity and innovation in art by enabling viewers to connect more easily to the works.

Nicholas Africano's "An Argument" focuses on the impressive stance of two figures on a grey background. The figure on the left stares into space, while the figure behind him gestures with his hand. While Africano's works examine human interaction, the simplicity and gestures of the figures are designed to imply behaviour or moments of interaction. The artist uses the technique of low relief to emphasise the physical presence of the figures, while maintaining the distance between the figures, creating a sense of aggression. Jennifer Bartlett's work references the history of modern art by presenting an arrangement of modular steel plates, making various combinations within her own predetermined system. Bartlett's works point to the full potential of modern art with minimalist effects. Susan Rothenberg adopts an image-breaking style by reshaping traditional images and makes frequent use of the horse figure. While David True's works deal with nature landscapes and sea themes, in some of his paintings he uses abstractions instead of figurative images. While Joe Zucker is known for his surface production with cotton balls and

piecemeal painting construction, material and process are at the forefront of his paintings. Although New Image Painting opens a new path for modern art with its minimalist influences, it stands in a place included in the multi-layered narrative of postmodernism and re-emphasises the autonomy of art.

According to Greenberg (1997), the idea of the interruption of continuity is one of the concepts most distant from authentic art today. Art is, among many other things, continuity. Without the art of the past, without the need and urge to maintain old standards of excellence, there would be no such thing as Modernist art. The New Image Painting movement that emerged after the 1970s seems to be sustainable, even if it does not aim to maintain the old standards of excellence. Philip Guston's shift to a figurative style and the realistic elements in the works of other artists show the reflections of this movement. Guston's influence was important in the exhibitions and the continuity of the New Image Painting movement was ensured. Sculptural productions were also prominent in the exhibitions, and it was seen that this movement, even if it was not modernist, referred to many art concepts at the beginning of the postmodern period. In particular, the exhibition titled "A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981 - 2018" enabled the New Image Painting movement to be re-evaluated and its contemporary situation to be analysed. The exhibition presented new perspectives to the art world by exhibiting a wide range of works from the masters of modernism to the New Image Painting movement as well as young artists.

New Image Painting emerged as a reaction against the decadence of late-capitalist culture. This movement emphasises that painting has not been reinvented, but its importance has been rediscovered. Painting is undergoing a more dynamic evolution than in the past and is now being embraced by many young painters. By questioning the relationship between meaning and matter, New Image Painting explores how to live in a seemingly displaced world. It has also opened up ways of producing images for centuries to come and continues to question personal and collective memory.

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