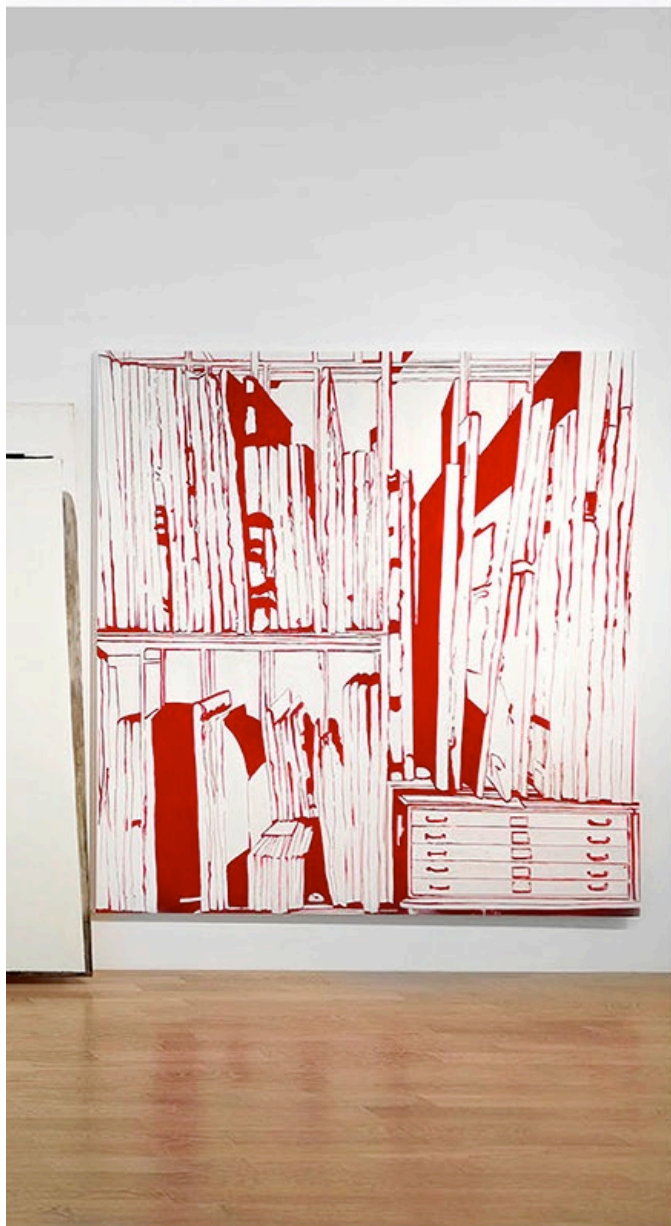




Rochelle Feinstein, *Before and After*, 1999, oil on canvas and linen, twelve parts. Installation view, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, 2016.



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Rochelle Feinstein

STÄDTISCHE GALERIE IM
LENBACHHAUS, MUNICH

Daniela Stöppel

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN is always reinventing her sources. Born in 1947, she only started experimenting with an abstract style of painting in the 1990s, consciously developing a practice equally receptive to history, everyday objects and language, and personal experience. Twenty-five years of her art can now be seen in her first extensive retrospective, "Rochelle Feinstein: I Made a Terrible Mistake," curated in Munich by Stephanie Weber. (The exhibition opened in Geneva and will travel to Hannover, Germany, next month and to New York in 2018, with different curatorial permutations and show titles along the way.) In Feinstein's work, life crashes into art's history in amusing or nostalgic ways—sometimes quite literally, as in the 1996 print on linen *Dinner Party*, in which a seating arrangement clusters around a Malevichesque black square. Painting's power to build and revise narratives is underscored by such works as *The Estate of Rochelle F.*, 2009, from her series "The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009–2010, in which the title is messily adhered to sections of black and white canvas tacked onto a stretcher frame, suggesting a kind of tautological "pre-posthumous" oeuvre; or *Love Vibe*, 1999–2014, in which the words LOVE YOUR WORK are written in mirror image in speech balloons stretched across a group of paintings, as an

empty signifier of approval given to an artist or a sly mimic of a self-help mantra. If the artist belongs to a generation of artists born in the '60s, her pictures are not so much reactions to postmodernist strategies of appropriation as visual fragments that have broken off from modernism and made their own journey, remaining firmly fixed on the lodestar of painting.

The first room of the exhibition in Munich offers a case in point: It features the multipart mixed-media installation *I Made a Terrible Mistake*, 2002–2005, which includes references to Barry White and Michael Jackson (whose chagrined response to the question of why he held his baby over a hotel balcony in 2002 is the title of this work and show), along with colorful club lighting and a disco ball, photographs, and videos, and gives the entertaining but not entirely correct impression of a pop culture mash-up. In the galleries that follow, however, the real focus becomes clear: Feinstein's interest in the compositional traditions of panel painting, in the recording of ephemeral events, in the possibilities of abstraction and painterly techniques (including the picture-within-a-picture), in the relation of style to subject, the role of the art market, the question of artistic authenticity, and revision in one's own practice.

This harnessing of painting's classical possibilities is particularly striking in *Before and After*, 1999, a twelve-part installation: While a series of differently sized paintings shows a typical studio scene before an exhibition, with monochrome works leaning against and hanging on the wall, another large painting depicts the same works after the exhibition, now covered in bubble wrap and stored on space-saving racks. Feinstein again chooses the medium of painting to demonstrate this extreme difference in an artwork's affective capacity. In so doing, she not only adds another level of reflection on the system of valorization that is art but also generates new material for that valorization, which can itself be exhibited and sold. Moreover, these works' particular linear and monochrome modes of representation recall both comic-book

illustrations and nonrepresentational painting, making them simultaneously part of two different systems, characterized by a *both-and* rather than an *either-or*. Feinstein assimilates known subjects into her work, digesting and expelling them again in fractured and hybrid form, as the title of an almost-classic grid painting executed in dirty brown tones—*Same Shit, Different Day*, 1990—suggests.

Through painting, Feinstein brings her subjective and private experience—as an artist, a woman, a traveler, a lover, and a citizen—to a wider world. The tea towel stuck to *Flag*, 1993, whose checked pattern is continued in the painting that surrounds it, becomes a feminist sideswipe at female creativity and the "domestic" realm to which

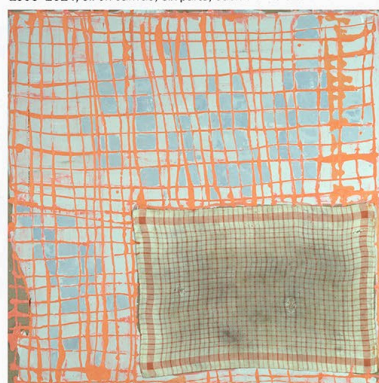
Her pictures are not so much reactions to postmodernist strategies of appropriation as visual fragments that have broken off from modernism and made their own journey, remaining firmly fixed on the lodestar of painting.

artists like Elizabeth Murray have sometimes been relegated; at the same time, a dish towel could also be interpreted as a prefabricated grid, as in the work of Konrad Lueg in the '60s. In *Geography*, 1994, a giant splash of white paint becomes a spreading disaster and an allusion to the threat of AIDS (the artist has commented that the splash refers to "the time the condom broke," while the expansion of paint/sperm seems to anticipate the geographic spread of the disease); in *Travel Abroad*, 1997–98, the diagram of a trip across Europe is filled with receipts from restaurants and tickets from museums. In each case, these canvases successfully

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From left: Rochelle Feinstein, *I Made a Terrible Mistake*, 2002–2005, mixed media. Installation view. Rochelle Feinstein, *Flag*, 1993, oil and linen on linen, 42 × 42". Rochelle Feinstein, *Love Vibe* (detail), 1999–2014, oil on canvas, six parts, each 74 × 74".



STÖPPEL/FEINSTEIN continued from page 274

manage to treat their titles and personal contexts not as subjects within painting, but rather as attributes that make the picture itself part of the process of generating meaning.

By introducing external content—from language and expressions to household sundries—into her canvases in a jarring, almost offensive way, Feinstein sets her oeuvre against the essentialist works of the Abstract Expressionist and Color Field painters, and apart from the legacy of dandyish abstraction in the generation of Michael Krebber, et al. Feinstein amalgamates her chosen content so intensely with her chosen form that her work is not just a more or less symbolic reference to painting (or a poor rip-off), but a necessary, progressive way of coping with the emotional impact of the content of form and the form of content. All the while, she remains committed to the fundamental possibility that painting not only might be a transgressive or ironic act—“bad” painting in both senses of the word—but a transformative process. □

The Rochelle Feinstein retrospective, curated by Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee at Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, travels to Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany, where it is curated by Christina Végh, Dec. 3, 2016–Feb. 12, 2017, and to the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, where it is curated by Antonio Sergio Bessa, June 27–Sept. 22, 2018.

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Translated from German by Nathaniel McBride.