

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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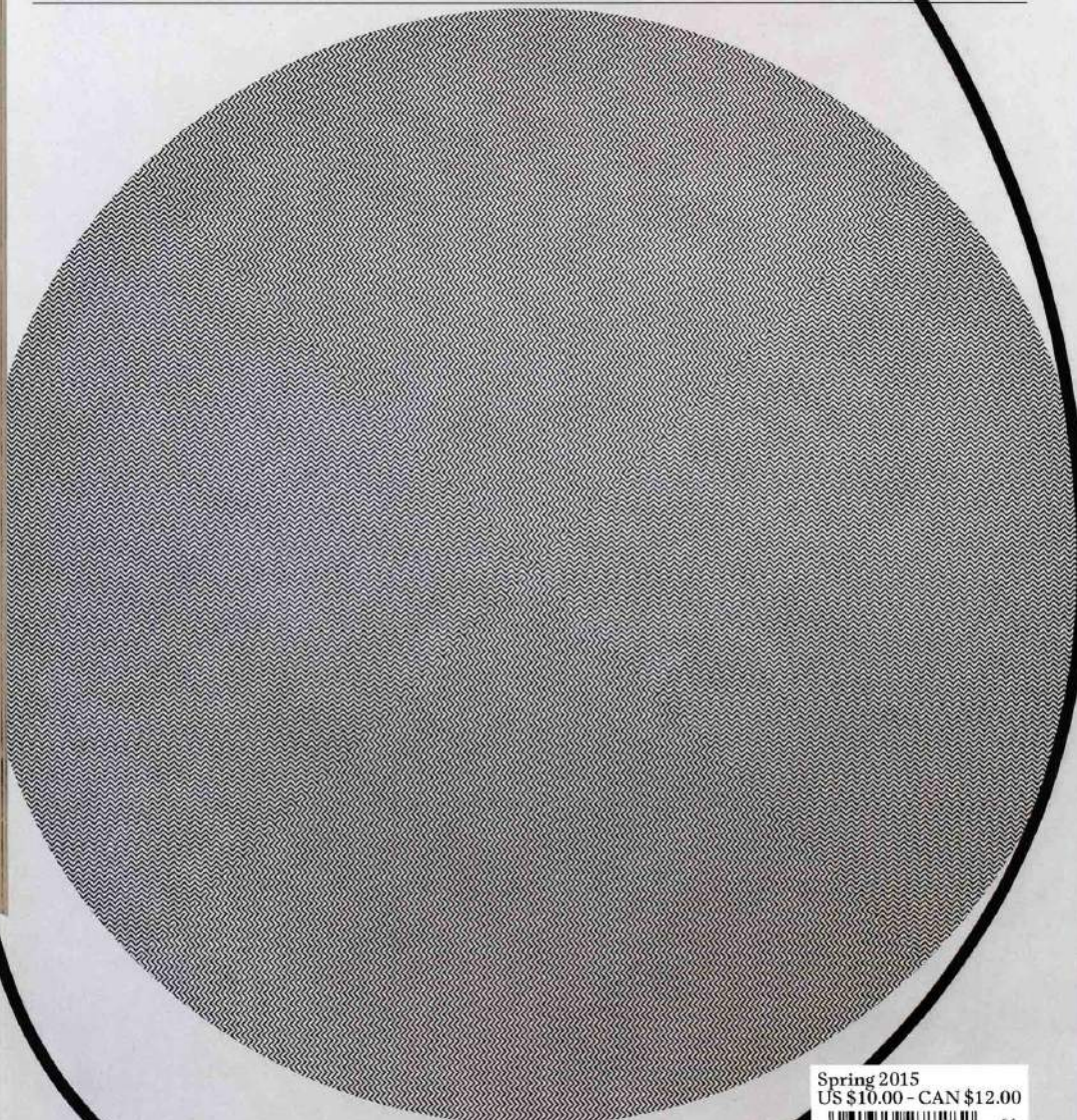
# Afterall

A Journal of Art,  
Context and Enquiry

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Sharon Hayes  
James Richards  
R.H. Quaytman  
Solo Exhibitions

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Spring 2015  
US \$10.00 - CAN \$12.00



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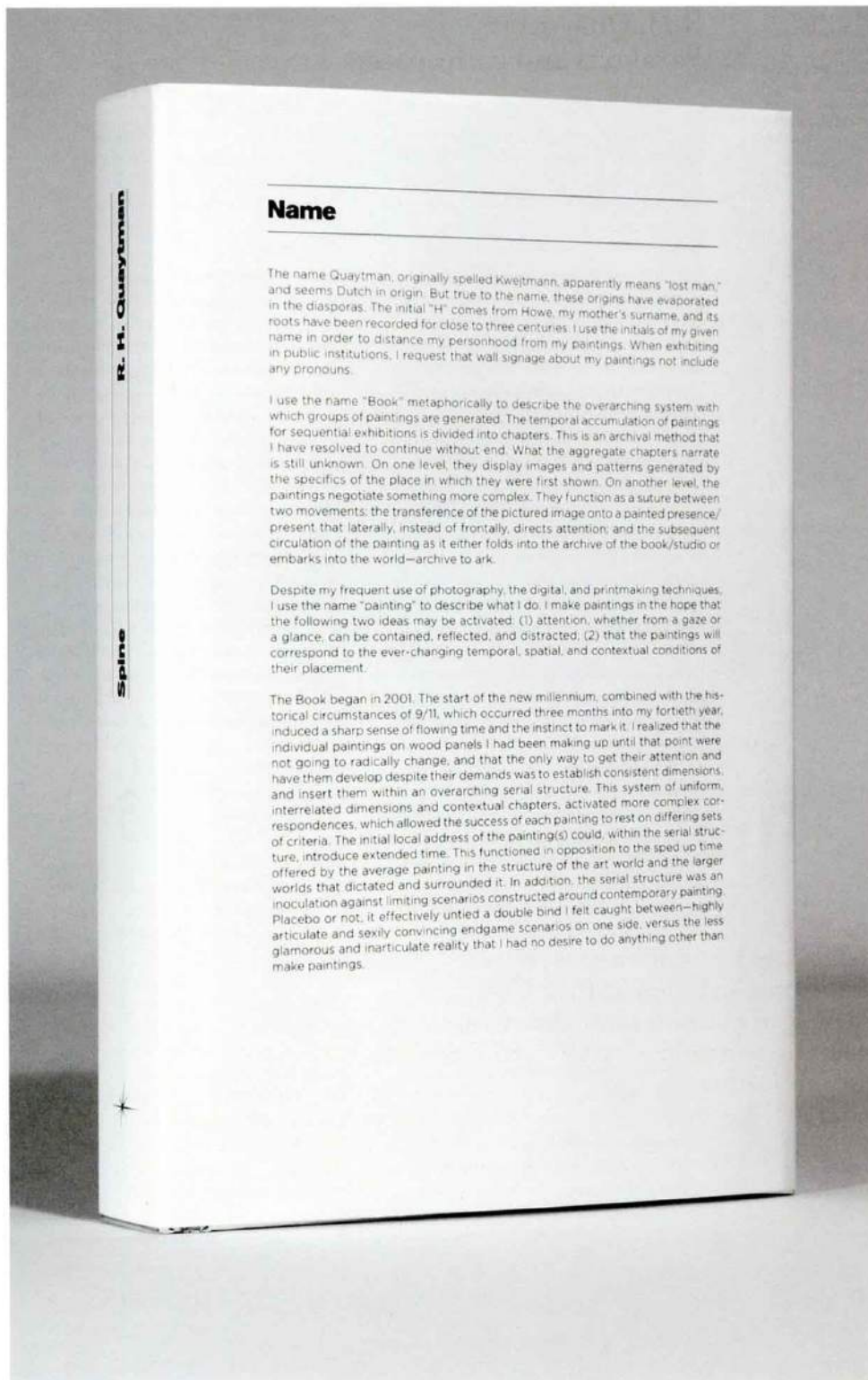
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## Name

The name Quaytman, originally spelled kwejtman, apparently means "lost man," and seems Dutch in origin. But true to the name, these origins have evaporated in the diasporas. The initial "H" comes from Howe, my mother's surname, and its roots have been recorded for close to three centuries. I use the initials of my given name in order to distance my personhood from my paintings. When exhibiting in public institutions, I request that wall signage about my paintings not include any pronouns.

I use the name "Book" metaphorically to describe the overarching system with which groups of paintings are generated. The temporal accumulation of paintings for sequential exhibitions is divided into chapters. This is an archival method that I have resolved to continue without end. What the aggregate chapters narrate is still unknown. On one level, they display images and patterns generated by the specifics of the place in which they were first shown. On another level, the paintings negotiate something more complex. They function as a suture between two movements: the transference of the pictured image onto a painted presence/present that laterally, instead of frontally, directs attention; and the subsequent circulation of the painting as it either folds into the archive of the book/studio or embarks into the world—archive to ark.

Despite my frequent use of photography, the digital, and printmaking techniques, I use the name "painting" to describe what I do. I make paintings in the hope that the following two ideas may be activated: (1) attention, whether from a gaze or a glance, can be contained, reflected, and distracted; (2) that the paintings will correspond to the ever-changing temporal, spatial, and contextual conditions of their placement.

The Book began in 2001. The start of the new millennium, combined with the historical circumstances of 9/11, which occurred three months into my fortieth year, induced a sharp sense of flowing time and the instinct to mark it. I realized that the individual paintings on wood panels I had been making up until that point were not going to radically change, and that the only way to get their attention and have them develop despite their demands was to establish consistent dimensions, and insert them within an overarching serial structure. This system of uniform, interrelated dimensions and contextual chapters, activated more complex correspondences, which allowed the success of each painting to rest on differing sets of criteria. The initial local address of the painting(s) could, within the serial structure, introduce extended time. This functioned in opposition to the sped up time offered by the average painting in the structure of the art world and the larger worlds that dictated and surrounded it. In addition, the serial structure was an inoculation against limiting scenarios constructed around contemporary painting. Placebo or not, it effectively untied a double bind I felt caught between—highly articulate and sexily convincing endgame scenarios on one side, versus the less glamorous and inarticulate reality that I had no desire to do anything other than make paintings.

R.H. Quaytman,  
*Spine* (Berlin:  
Sternberg Press,  
2011). All images  
courtesy the artist  
and Miguel Abreu  
Gallery, New York

## R.H. Quaytman: Paratexts and Palimpsests

— Richard Birkett

[The paintings] *display images and patterns generated by the specifics of the place in which they were first shown. On another level, [they] negotiate something more complex. They function as a suture between two movements: the transference of the pictured image onto a painted presence/present that laterally, instead of frontally, directs attention; and the subsequent circulation of the painting as it either folds into the archive of the book/studio or embarks into the world — archive to ark.*

— R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*<sup>1</sup>

*Poetry is never a personal possession. The poem was a vision and gesture before it became sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value. At the moment these manuscripts are accepted into the property of our culture their philosopher-author escapes the ritual of framing — symmetrical order and arrangement. Are all these works poems? Are they fragments, meditations, aphorisms, events, letters?*

— Susan Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values'<sup>2</sup>

### Richard Birkett finds a subversive literary methodology in R.H. Quaytman's ordering of paintings into chapters, and the production of related paratexts and publications.

The poet Susan Howe's second work of literary criticism, *The Birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American*

*literary history* (1993), comprises a series of essays steeped in the words of 'characteristic North American voices and visions that remain antinomian and separatist'.<sup>3</sup> Howe depicts antinomianism — a term from Christian theology that emphasises the following of inner belief rather than external moral law — as a vital dissident lineage. The book mines the margins of radical North American literature through historical narratives in which linguistic lawlessness is pitted against authority. It suggests voice as formed by place, beginning with Anne Hutchinson, a seventeenth-century New England settler who challenged the covenant of works laid down by Puritan orthodoxy and as a result was sent into exile. For Howe, orthodoxy is ever present within a textual canon: 'a dark wall of rule support[ing] the structure of every letter, record, manuscript; every proof of authority or power'.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, antinomianism is repressed and distinctly gendered: 'The issue of editorial control is directly connected to the attempted erasure of antinomianism in our culture. Lawlessness seen as negligence is at first feminised and then restricted and banished'.<sup>5</sup>

The core essays in *The Birth-mark* centre on particular historical voices and archival records but do not rest on the singular analysis of these texts. Instead, in form Howe's writings take on 'a digressive structure', as literary scholar Susan Vanderborg has noted, with 'the response to an individual source ... interrupted by questions, related sources and seemingly oppositional narratives'.<sup>6</sup>

- 1 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011, text printed on the cover.
- 2 Susan Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values', *The Birth-mark: unsettling the wilderness in American literary history*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993, pp.147–48.
- 3 S. Howe, 'Introduction', *The Birth-mark*, *op. cit.*, p.2.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.1.
- 6 Susan Vanderborg, 'The Palimpsest as Communal Lyric: Susan Howe's Paratextual Sources', *Paratextual Communities: American Avant-Garde Poetry since 1950*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001, p.79.

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The book is a complex accumulation of 'text-paratext dialogues', and Howe's approach evokes that of the palimpsest in its process of historical recovery through the overwriting of the canon and the use of marginalia. Her essays, while addressing the question of the legibility of suppressed antinomian voices, implicate a genealogical reading of her own practice and its 'subversive' lines of influence. In its layering of quoted voices, *The Birth-mark* thus intersects directly with Howe's 'poems', which set existing textual and paratextual sources together on a page, as if cut up and collaged.<sup>7</sup> Such visual 'staging'<sup>8</sup> of text articulates and problematises the contingencies of writing, while in strict terms not being 'writing' itself. This methodology of the palimpsest also recurs in the 'paintings'<sup>9</sup> of R.H. Quaytman — who is, perhaps not incidentally, the writer's daughter<sup>10</sup> — which through the process of silkscreen printing reproduce archival images as well as photographs of figures and situations determined by the non-arbitrary nature of specific exhibition sites. Quaytman's sources, quoted through a reproductive medium, are part of a layered interplay of 'temporal, spatial and contextual conditions',<sup>11</sup> through which the artist positions painting as a discursive model.

For Howe, the methodology of re-inscribing the 'insubordinate' voices of the past through the inhabitation of physical and textual artefacts relates to

the specific experience of female artists and writers. She has stated: 'If you are a woman, archives hold perpetual ironies. Because the gaps and silences are where you find yourself.'<sup>12</sup> Her discussion of the distinctiveness of the North American voice has at its heart the poems of Emily Dickinson, in particular their antinomian genealogy, their isolation from the literary canon and the controlled nature of their posthumous publication. Howe's first work of literary criticism, *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), is a close reading of Dickinson's writing made in response to her manuscript books, which were only published in a facsimile edition in 1982.<sup>13</sup> In *The Birth-mark*, she concentrates on the articulation and distribution of Dickinson's radical writing during and beyond her lifetime, and its 'reordering', 'revision' and 'manhandling' at the hands of editors and institutions.<sup>14</sup> The chapter 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values' addresses the visibility of her poems and letters in their spacing, calligraphic marks, line breaks and marginalia. The poet's opaque ordering of writings in manuscript books, packets and sets can thus be seen in resistance to their subsequent editing into conventional publishable form.

In the late 1980s, in the period between Howe's publishing of *My Emily Dickinson* and *The Birth-mark*, Quaytman combined working as an artist with the

7 Howe moved from painting to poetry in the mid-1960s, although her work has recently been shown within an art context again. The recent work *TOM TIT TOT* (2013) comprised of a series of letterpress prints and later a book, formed the centre of her 2013 solo exhibition at Yale Union in Portland, Oregon. Fragments of the work were later shown as part of the 2014 Whitney Biennial in New York. The work now also exists as an artist's book, with design and artwork by R.H. Quaytman, published by the Library Council of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014).

8 Howe has described how she 'often think[s] of the space of a page as a stage, with words, letters, syllables, characters moving across'. 'An Interview with Susan Howe' (with Maureen N. McLane), *The Paris Review*, no.203, Winter 2012.

9 Luke Cohen succinctly sums up the naming of Quaytman's practice as painting despite its dominant use of techniques of photographic reproduction: 'The artist defines painting negatively. Painting is approached as a suture through discussions of mediums of other material categories, such as photography, writing and architecture.' L. Cohen, 'Catachreses: On Rebecca H. Quaytman,' *Texte zur Kunst*, March 2010, p.136. It should also be noted that the use of silkscreen printing in order to transfer the photographic image to a support is a legibly material process, open to surface incident and facture.

10 It is widely cited — not least in interviews with the artist, and in the self-authored publications *Allegorical Decoys* and *Spine* — that R.H. Quaytman is from an eminent artistic family: Susan Howe contributes the 'H' to the abbreviated moniker; the painter Harvey Quaytman is the artist's late father; her late stepfather, sculptor David von Schlegell, and half-brother, writer Mark von Schlegell, complete this close artistic genealogy. See R.H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*, Gent: MER. Paper Kunsthalles, 2008, and R.H. Quaytman, *Spine*, op. cit.

11 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, op. cit.

12 'Talisman Interview, with Edward Foster', in S. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, op. cit., p.158.

13 During her lifetime very few of Emily Dickinson's poems were published, and those that were underwent heavy editing on the part of the publisher and editor Samuel Bowles (in the journal *Springfield Republican*) and editor George Parsons Lathrop (in the anthology *A Massue of Poets* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1876)). Dickinson instead developed a private mode of 'publishing': she transcribed finished drafts onto folded stationery that she then arranged into groups and sewed together, into packets or 'fascicles'. See *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1982), edited by R.W. Franklin.

14 Howe addresses Dickinson's poetry as representing a 'contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation'. S. Howe, 'Introduction', op. cit., p.1.

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role of programme coordinator at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York. In 1989, Quaytman organised the first significant presentation in the US of the work of the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint, a radical early-twentieth-century abstractionist and devotee of theosophy. In an essay published in 2013, Quaytman details the impact of this exposure to af Klint's work and ideas, a practice hidden in its time (seen only by a close network of fellow female artists<sup>15</sup>) and neglected in the subsequent formation of a modernist canon. For Quaytman, the relevance of af Klint's paintings stands in their 'ability to immunise abstraction's terminal condition and give license to representation via language, botany, geometry, symbolism and the diagram'. Yet equally, the artist's exclusion from the histories of abstraction, attributed to 'her absence from any social network along whose lines abstraction developed',<sup>16</sup> poses for Quaytman vital questions of legibility. Just as Howe addresses Dickinson's 'gesture of infinite patience in preferring not to publish',<sup>17</sup> Quaytman queries how af Klint's supposed self-isolation has been read, speculating instead on the deliberate construction of genealogies outside of the market and in opposition to the construction of the present by historians and critics.

That is, Quaytman considers the prescriptions af Klint laid out in her will for the presentation of her work — that the entire body of her paintings and writings should be considered one unit and always remain together, and that this entity should not be exhibited until twenty years after her death — not as a strategy of inaccessibility, but as an artistic move towards holistic legibility in opposition to isolated singularity: 'The weight of the single painting is displaced onto something larger than itself.'<sup>18</sup> The emphasis on the unity of af Klint's work, and its implicit sanctioning *against* isolation, influenced Quaytman's adoption of the metaphorical 'armature of the book' as a means to impose an overarching structure on the production of paintings. Thus, since 2001, Quaytman has articulated each grouping

of paintings produced in response to a particular context as a 'chapter', a grouping considered part of an as yet incomplete whole — the 'book' that ultimately will comprise the entirety of Quaytman's production.

This armature suggests an ambiguous relationship to the exhibition as a primary site of legibility. The 'book' serves as an autonomous DIY structure, yet at the same time the individual chapters emphasise coordinates usually given by exhibitions, such as the particular place, time and context of each grouping's production. The chapters are sequentially numbered and individually titled, and each

***Quaytman's chapters treat painting and its supporting institutions as foundational manuscripts, to be written through.***

contains a varying number of paintings, from as little as one to as many as fifty. The paintings themselves share physical and aesthetic characteristics within chapters, as well as across the wider serial structure: they all make use of gessoed plywood panels with bevelled edges, and on the whole carry images that hover between the crisp realism of the photographic and the muted, opaque layering of surface facture and homogenous abstract patterning. These silkscreened images and digitally rendered patterns are often reproduced more than once within a chapter. Finally, each chapter revolves around distinctive subjects, which are signalled by the paintings' reproduction of paratextual materials such as archival documents, Polaroid photographs and portraits of individuals or interior spaces. Notably, Quaytman's paintings are secondary 'exposures', making use of material with a previous existence, either drawn from an archive or produced by the artist as un-shown photographs, models or renderings.

These materials function as fragments of institutional, historical or personal

15 Af Klint was associated with a group of four other female artists under the name de Fem (The Five), formed in 1896. The group conducted seances, making extensive notes on the 'messages' received, which in turn influenced automatic drawings and the development of abstract forms in af Klint's paintings.  
16 R.H. Quaytman, 'de Fem', in Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring (ed.), *The Legacy of Hilma af Klint: Nine Contemporary Responses*, Cologne: Buchhandlung der Walther Koenig, 2013.  
17 S. Howe, 'Introduction', *The Birth-mark*, op. cit., p.2.  
18 R.H. Quaytman, 'de Fem', op. cit.



events, annotating the reading of external situations as they also come to frame and comment on the conditions of each chapter, and of Quaytman's practice. The artist has described the structure of her 'book' as 'essentially a calendar ... a datebook with appointments (history and time), addresses (places and architecture) and people (viewers and viewed) inserted as time moves forward'.<sup>19</sup> It can also be seen as a distinctly personal archive in formation — in fact, Quaytman has on occasion presented all or a number of a chapter's paintings leaning against one another in storage racks, like books on shelves — both in the sense of the accumulation of materials as 'a frame for consciousness',<sup>20</sup> and with regards to a serial organisation that forestalls the 'oblivion' of dispersion.<sup>21</sup> The 'entries' in this datebook or archive veer between those that transparently reflect the chapter's surroundings, and those that follow filaments of visual or conceptual relations to eclectic and lyrical ends.

In her essay 'Allegorical Decoys' (2008), Quaytman quotes Roland Barthes's description of a methodology allowing for 'a multi-layering of meanings which always let the previous meaning continue as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary'.<sup>22</sup> Quaytman rephrases and reframes the interweaving subjects of each chapter, fragmenting them and perceptually defamiliarising them, an exegesis enacted through the local specificity of each source and its outward, 'unsettling' movement into relations with other materials. The notion of the palimpsest as a paratextual strategy, evident in Howe's writing as a material process of re-inscription, an invocation of reading as a communal act and a critical tool of recovery, seems particularly relevant here.<sup>23</sup> Howe's 'literary criticism',

which is contiguous with her poetry, is grounded in the collective re-reading of central texts in tandem with their accumulating annotation, a perceptual and cognitive movement of reflecting and refracting. Similarly, Quaytman's chapters are complex sites in which the artist seeks to 'maintain and simultaneously disrupt painting's absolute presence'.<sup>24</sup> They treat painting and its supporting institutions as foundational manuscripts, to be written through in order to recover traces of elision in their historical and social contexts. Principally for Quaytman, the perceived singularity of painting overlooks its historical and contemporaneous operations within a collective social discourse — in the words of art historian Rhea Anastas, Quaytman espouses instead 'a view of the moment of history as a field of relative positions sharing a common problematic'.<sup>25</sup>

The adoption of a literary model of modular relations in Quaytman's project extends to the syntactic structuring of the elements within a chapter, and its overall display. The artist produces paintings on wood panels in eight 'nesting' sizes,<sup>26</sup> determined geometrically through the golden section. The exhibition of these proportionally defined units, which responds in each instance to the spatial particularities of the gallery or museum, echoes the logic of book design and layout, treating the white wall space between each element as a functional aspect of their sequencing. This relational arrangement recalls the organisation of language, particularly in poetry, where rhythm, metrics and emphasis draw each element into a relation with the whole. Such poetics also entails the negotiation of language between eye and tongue — a negotiation marked in Quaytman's chapters by what the artist calls 'captions', or small hand-painted panels bearing monochromatic

19 R.H. Quaytman, 'Date', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

20 In writing on Quaytman's approach to the archive, the art historian Jaleh Mansoor states: 'Quaytman flips the archive, turning it on an axis that reprioritises the psycho-emotive sedimentation of the subject. In doing so she places the archive on the same side as the subject, a frame for consciousness rather than an impersonal repository.' J. Mansoor, 'Painting, Folding', *Farkett*, no.90, 2012, p.104.

21 R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, *op. cit.*

22 Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning' (1970), *A Barthes Reader* (ed. Susan Sontag), New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, p.323; quoted in R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *Allegorical Decoys*, *op. cit.*, p.12.

23 As highlighted by Vanderborg, the term 'palimpsest' was used by the poet H.D. as 'a metaphor for the project of the woman poet writing through a patriarchal cultural history to recover traces of elided female myths and signs.' S. Vanderborg, 'The Palimpsest as Communal Lyric', *op. cit.*, p.62.

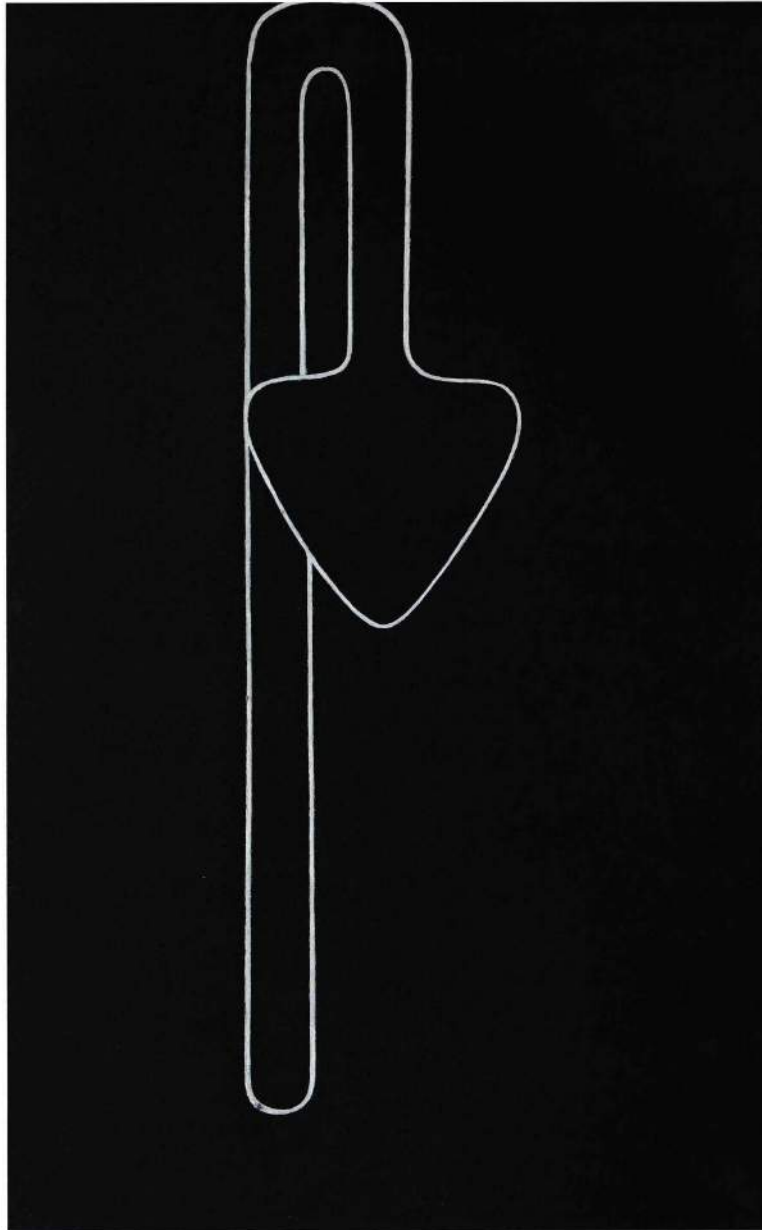
24 R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *op. cit.*, p.9.

25 Rhea Anastas, 'Not in Eulogy Not in Praise But in Fact, Ruth Vollmer and Others: 1966—1970,' in Nadja Rottner and Peter Weibel (ed.), *Ruth Vollmer 1961—1978: Thinking the Line*, Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2006.

26 There are two anomalies to this system of sizing. From the inception of the system in 2001, one painting size was elected that does not 'nest' into the others — it was intentionally chosen to create a 'fissure' in the logic of the system. A second anomalous size (larger than any of the existing panel sizes) was added in 2012.

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R.H. Quaytman,  
*Eddá Poem, Chapter 2*,  
2004, oil on wood,  
50.8 × 30.6cm



glyphs. These symbols are at times obliquely abstract, resembling decorative filigree; at others they appear as signage, the filigree forming into directional arrows, logo-like forms or typographic elements. The caption paintings are often positioned as if to comment on the works they appear alongside, or more enigmatically to register the manner in which an exhibition context asserts

guiding principles. For example, in *Exhibition Guide: Chapter 15* (2009), shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in Boston, a painting of a white ribbon formed into the shape of an arrow on a black background greeted viewers as they exited the institution's elevator, directing them into the main exhibition space and towards a second 'introductory' painting depicting the ICA's founding

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R.H. Quaytman,  
*Constructivismes*,  
*Chapter 13*, 2008,  
oil, silkscreen ink,  
gesso on wood and  
shelf. Installation  
view, Almine Rech  
Gallery, Brussels,  
2009

manifesto. Rather than presenting didactic information on their surroundings, the 'captions' form 'networks of signs and discontinuities'<sup>27</sup> that undermine the hierarchy of text and paratext, centre and margin, photography and painting.

Quaytman has indicated that the forms that appear in many of the caption paintings reference the work of the early-twentieth-century Polish sculptor Katarzyna Kobro and her partner, the painter Władysław Strzemiński. Direct allusions to the artists are also present in images used in *Łódź Poem*, *Chapter 2*

(2004) and *Constructivismes*, *Chapter 13* (2009),<sup>28</sup> while an arrangement of images and texts sourced by Quaytman in research on the Polish artists, titled *Allegorical Decoys*, was exhibited in a vitrine as part of *Denial Is a River*, *Chapter 7* (2006). *Allegorical Decoys* is also the title of a 2008 artist's book and its central essay, in which Quaytman cites Kobro and Strzemiński's theory of 'unism' as an influence. This modernist theory, outlined in writings by the artists from the mid-1920s to the early 30s, expounds on the goal of producing artworks that

<sup>27</sup> S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.* p.143.

<sup>28</sup> Both Kobro and Strzemiński were born in Russia and moved to Poland in the 1920s. Quaytman's grandfather, Mark Quaytman, was a Jewish immigrant to the US from the city of Łódź in Poland, where the artists lived and worked from the mid-1920s until their deaths.

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R.H. Quaytman,  
*Denial Is a River,*  
*Chapter 7*, 2006,  
silkscreen ink,  
gesso on wood,  
50.8 x 82.2cm

appear non-compositional, devoid of any specific reference or focal point. Addressing the distinction between the 'natural limits' of painting and sculpture, the Polish artists defined unist painting as 'motivated' by the a priori limits of the painting frame, not seeking 'justification in values that subsist beyond the picture';<sup>29</sup> whereas unist sculpture, ungoverned by such a frame, was to be 'based upon the organic unity of sculpture and space [and] the expression of spatial relationships'.<sup>30</sup> Quaytman's production of silkscreened panels, in which the pictorial, the abstract and the architectonic collide, appears to intentionally complicate the dialogic terms of the unist address of painting and sculpture by collapsing both registers into the body of each chapter. Specifically, the artist seeks to push the isolated painting beyond its frame into the realm of the unists' intentions to abolish, as she writes, 'the objectness of sculpture in favour of its architectural integration into the space around it', just as Kobro sought to realise 'sculpture in space/

time'.<sup>31</sup> Quaytman adopts strategies in which paintings actively *construct* the terms by which the viewing body experiences the work's spatial and temporal location, extending this integration further towards each chapter's penetration by the contextual site of exhibition.

In a number of chapters Quaytman makes use of photographic images of installed paintings and passing viewers, empty gallery spaces prior to exhibition and architectural models, creating *mise en abyme* effects that assert the spatial presence of the painting over the purely pictorial.<sup>32</sup> And on occasion, this constructed, localising effect is heightened by Quaytman perspectively 'keystoneing' the photographic silkscreen, suggesting the fiction of the image as encountered by the viewer from a specific, oblique angle. Yve-Alain Bois has noted how Kobro was 'always concerned with the space of our experience', citing her statement that 'we come to know space through our actions'.<sup>33</sup> Quaytman's paintings construct a similar awareness in the

29 Władysław Strzemiński, 'B = 2; to read', in *Constructivism in Poland 1923–1936* (exh. cat.), Essen, Otterlo and Łódź: Folkwang Museum, Kröller-Müller Museum and Museum Sztuki, 1973, p.62.

30 W. Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, 'Composition of Space', *L'Espace Uniste* (ed. and trans. Antoine Baudin and Pierre-Maxime Jedryka), Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1977, p.106.

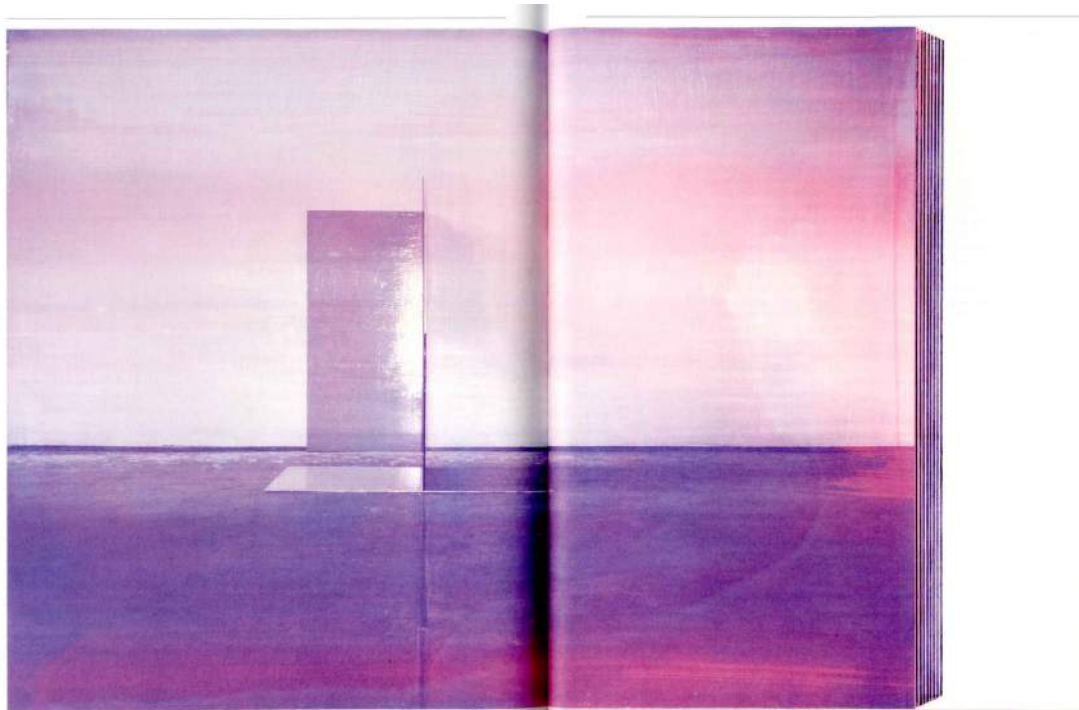
31 R.H. Quaytman, 'Allegorical Decoys', *op. cit.*, p. 21.

32 In chapters such as *Ark*, *Chapter 10* (2008) and *Passing Through the Opposite of What It Approaches*, *Chapter 25* (2013), the architecture of the exhibition space becomes a central subject, either through its depiction in photographs or schematic diagrams. In others, including *iamb*, *Chapter 12* (2008–09) and *Quatre*, *Chapter 14* (2009), the hanging of a painting in a certain space, impacted on by a specific phenomenological context, is documented and translated onto the surface of a new painting.

33 Yve-Alain Bois, 'Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation', *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990, p.146.



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R.H. Quayman,  
*Ender Poem (Spatial  
Composition 2.5.5  
Poros: Away),  
Chapter 2, 2004,  
oil, all screen ink,  
gesso on wood,  
85 x 101.6cm*

96 | *Allerall*

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viewer of one's location 'in front of and moving by toward the next painting'<sup>34</sup> — a lateral movement often signposted by representations of the bevelled edges of the plywood panels painted onto the surface of the silkscreened boards.<sup>35</sup>

The presence in Quaytman's chapters of strategies that implicate the 'shifting positions of the viewer' finds its limits in Op art-like works that confound such indexing of perception. Silkscreened applications of digital renderings of checks, concentric circles, vertical and horizontal lines, sometimes overlaying and occluding the photographic image, install an intense, non-hierarchical field onto the paintings' surfaces. Moiré patterning is created by the silkscreen itself, containing within the surface of the work the conditions of its production, while repelling the eye through 'optical burn'.<sup>36</sup> Within the logic of the chapter, Quaytman situates paintings exhibiting such self-sufficient 'sheer opticality'<sup>37</sup> — channelling Strzemiński's notion of a picture as 'a thing designed for looking at only'<sup>38</sup> — in direct relation to those that integrate the work into a broader context. The arrangement of works within each chapter thus traces seemingly oppositional movements between photographic flatness, the mirroring of the situated gaze and the objectlessness of Op art — articulating the notion that, as Quaytman says, 'attention, whether from a gaze or a glance, can be contained, reflected or distracted'.<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that Quaytman locates these vectors of viewing, and the associated 'oscillation' between 'the binary of contextual interdependency ...

and the isolated monocular painting'<sup>40</sup> with reference to the dialogic development of unist values between Kobro and Strzemiński. The enigmatic, recurring descriptor 'allegorical decoys' suggests a symbolic narrative both didactic and divertive. As with other individuals — friends, associates, historical figures — who have appeared in Quaytman's work, often in photographic portraits,<sup>41</sup> Kobro and Strzemiński are not cited merely as totems of creative affinity, but are embedded as paradigmatic actors within still unfolding movements of exegesis and legibility. Occupying a marginal position within the art historical canon, they implicate an unruly, antinomian model of temporal influence in the face of modernist singularity. In Strzemiński's words: 'it is not a question of assimilating some supposedly perfect, extra-temporal form. Such a form does not exist and never will, because the artistic criteria are in fact a sublimation of the criteria of life, which are different at every epoch.'<sup>42</sup>

In a sub-chapter of the introduction to *The Birth-mark* titled 'Submarginalia', Howe enigmatically states: 'Every source has another centre so is every creator.'<sup>43</sup> Quaytman's construction of a 'datebook' through the accumulation of chapters and images charts such an accrual of meanings, constituencies and contingencies. The overarching structural devices recursively applied by the artist may suggest the desire to dispel the arbitrary, or more specifically, to impose control over the work's legibility — the 'book' serving as a third way between the oblivion of paintings gathering dust in storage<sup>44</sup> and their hyper-circulation

34 R.H. Quaytman, 'Łódź Poem, Chapter 2', *Spine*, op. cit., p.53.

35 These hand-painted motifs also bring to mind the reorientation of the paintings when placed on storage racks, showing just their edges like the spines of books.

36 R.H. Quaytman, 'Medium', *Spine*, op. cit.

37 R.H. Quaytman, 'Łódź Poem, Chapter 2', *Spine*, op. cit., p.53.

38 W. Strzemiński, 'Unism in Painting', in *Constructivism in Poland 1923–1936*, op. cit., p.91.

39 R.H. Quaytman, 'Name', *Spine*, op. cit., n.p.

40 R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, op. cit., n.p.

41 Quaytman's chapters have included staged images of artists and curators including Dan Graham, Andrea Fraser, K8 Hardy, Matt Mullican, Thomas Beard, Susanne Ghez and Hannelore Kersting. Crudely speaking, these individuals form part of Quaytman's social network — they are friends, and people encountered as part of her working life as an artist. Their presence makes palpable certain connections to artistic lineages, while complicating these associations through the implication of personal exchange. For instance, Quaytman was Graham's studio assistant, and while his work around perception and subjectivity is of clear relevance, in *iamb*, Chapter 12 these canonical concerns are detoured through a further reference to the nineteenth-century British artist John Martin, whom Graham has referred to as the 'first sci-fi artist'. Extending from those within Quaytman's direct milieu, the artist also infers other subjects through more associative reference: for instance poet Jack Spicer is cited through the appearance of his poetry in *I Love The Eyelid Clicks/I See/Cold Poetry*, Chapter 18 (2010–11); and David von Schlegell through images of his public sculptures in Boston in *Exhibition Guide: Chapter 15* (2009).

42 W. Strzemiński, 'Modern Art in Poland', *L'Espace Uniste*, op. cit., p.143.

43 S. Howe, 'Submarginalia', *The Birth-mark*, op. cit., p.39.

44 Quaytman has spoken of the trauma of dealing with the storage of Harvey Quaytman and David von Schlegell's artworks after their deaths. R.H. Quaytman, 'Collection', *Spine*, op. cit.



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as commodities. Yet for Quaytman these processes are paradoxically not a pitch for 'independence'; they are an immersion in 'interdependence and contextuality' as a viable critique of the canonical accrual of value — a critical reflection on artwork at the junction of becoming 'sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value'.<sup>45</sup>

This is perhaps most evident in the publications that Quaytman has produced since 2008: *Allegorical Decoys* (2008), *Spine* (2011) and *7, Chapter 24* (2012). These paratexts are not conventional exhibition catalogues or monographs, but extensions of the contextual operations within chapters. *Allegorical Decoys* spans the period between 2005 and 2008, during which Quaytman was a director of Orchard, a gallery on New York's Lower East Side collectively run by twelve artists and art historians and driven by the legacies of Conceptual art and Institutional Critique. It implicates the gallery as a frame for Quaytman's production within and beyond her identification as a painter, including three texts written by the artist, alongside images of paintings from the ten chapters produced up to that date, some of which were exhibited at Orchard and reflect the exhibitions and people who formed that context. An essay that relays Quaytman's experience organising an exhibition of Jef Geys sits alongside an *ekphrastic* poem formed around the words of artist Thomas Eggerer. The placement of these two distinct textual modes in relation to one another is abrupt but telling: the former is anecdotal yet also analytical, questioning the responsibilities in presenting another artist's work as well as in relation to the communal discourse of the Orchard project; the latter quotes speech shared privately to form an elegy to a visually absent painting, Eggerer's *The Call of the Wind I* (2007), and to the language of self-examination:

*The space doesn't hold what it seems to promise*

*rotating around itself  
reversing the perspective we expect.*

*I say reverse — maybe  
that's too strong a word but it doesn't  
follow the logic if we want the painting  
to rhyme in perspective.*

*Yes there is a lot about rhythm and  
rhyme in my paintings.*

*Musical structure  
But maybe that's a tricky one to say  
— painters often say that you know.<sup>46</sup>*

The third text in *Allegorical Decoys* details the 'circuitous genealogy' of Quaytman's approach to painting. A numbering system relates sections of the essay to accompanying images, but rather than being directly embedded in the text, these illustrations appear on the book's cover, which unfolds into a large poster bearing reproductions of 54 of Quaytman's paintings. This unusual architecture figures the sequencing of images at one remove from the expansive, reflective writing. In keeping with this apparatus, Quaytman's text largely resists direct interpretation of the paintings pictured. The book maps a series of relationships between interior and exterior, text and paratext — the 'interweaving [of] expectation and categories ... checkmat[ing] inscription'.<sup>47</sup> The codex of the image sheet suggests the attribution of meaning as an act of communal, multiple unfoldings, echoing the aspirations of Orchard itself.

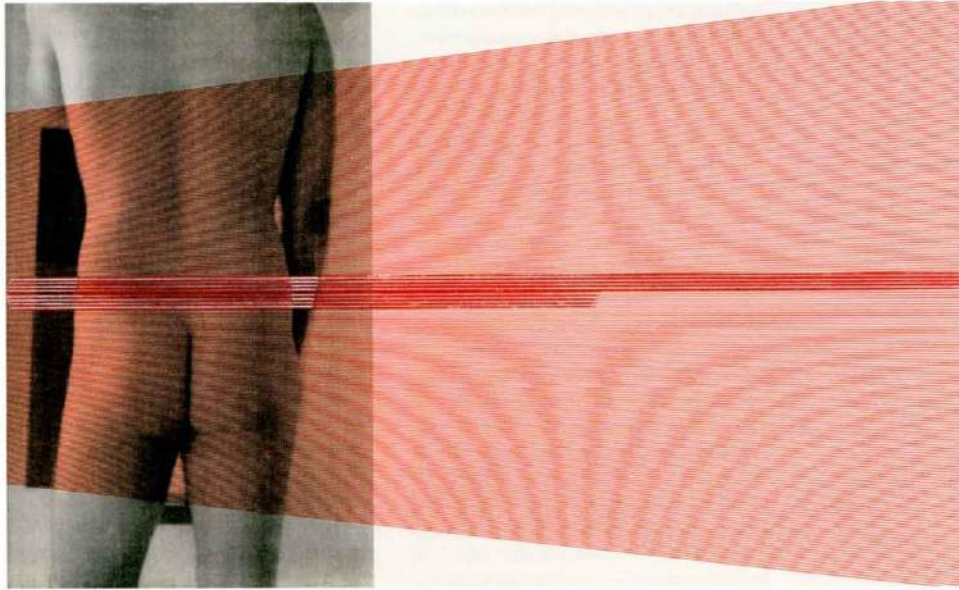
Quaytman's second publication, *Spine*, collates images of the paintings from all twenty chapters produced between 2001 and 2011, alongside self-authored descriptions. The folded cover of the book is again a bearer of central content, inverting the conventional text-paratext hierarchy; an essay that extends the self-reflection of *Allegorical Decoys* is divided across inside and outside covers, with section titles echoing institutional captioning ('Name',

45 S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.*, p.148. Howe references here Jean Baudrillard's 1972 essay 'For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign', in which he states: 'In the auction and art market we wished to comprehend a sort of *nucleum* of the strategy of values, a sort of concrete space-time, strategic moment and matrix in the process of ideology, which latter is always the production of sign value and coded exchange. This economy of values is a *political economy*. It goes well beyond economic calculation and concerns all the processes of the transmutation of values, all those socially produced transitions from one value to another, from one logic to another logic of value which may be noted in determinate places and institutions — and so it also concerns the connection and implication of different systems of exchange and modes of production.' Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (trans. Charles Levin), St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981, p.122.

46 R.H. Quaytman, 'The Call of the Wind', *Allegorical Decoys*, *op. cit.*, p.31.

47 S. Howe, 'These Flames and Generosities of the Heart', *op. cit.*, p.136.

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'Title', 'Date', 'Medium', 'Dimension', 'Collection'). While the book holds a sense of comprehensiveness, it is undoubtedly also palimpsestic, as images and paratextual annotations that have previously appeared momentarily, as part of a relentless cycle of exhibitions and press releases, are collated and re-inscribed outside of this flow. Emphasising this, *Spine* recursively functions as the 'primary site reference'<sup>48</sup> for the final chapter represented in the publication: *Spine, Chapter 20*, which was produced to be shown in two exhibitions in 2011, at Kunsthalle Basel and at the Neuberger Museum of Art at Purchase College — SUNY in upstate New York.

*Spine, Chapter 20* folds the archival structure of Quaytman's practice back onto itself, the chapter's 37 paintings mining Quaytman's archive of films that she has used to produce silkscreens for previous chapters. Across its presentations in Basel and at Purchase, new collusions of images and transferences of meanings between one work and the next were mirrored by the material, spatial and temporal layering of paintings. In one work, a vertically oriented panel bears the silkscreened image of a 16mm film projector, originally used in *Ark, Chapter 10* (2008). This image, which relates to the re-presentation of a 1973 film screening

by Michael Asher at Orchard in 2005, is newly superimposed on the spectral image of the naked backside of film curator Thomas Beard (a friend of Quaytman), which formed the central motif in *Beard, Chapter 19* (2010). In Basel, this new painting, titled *Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark/Asher Screening/Beard)* (2011), was itself hung over the top of a second, larger horizontal panel of vertical grey gradient lines, its Op backdrop throbbing like the banding on a defunct video monitor. On the wall next to this composite work, a panel titled *Spine, Chapter 20 (Denial Is a River)* (2011) bore the image of a basement wall of the SculptureCenter building in New York, an image originally repeated in the three works that form *Denial Is A River, Chapter 7* (2006). In the Neuberger Museum version of the exhibition, this arrangement of panels and impositions was reversed, with *Spine, Chapter 20 (Denial Is a River)* hung over the grey Op panel and *Spine, Chapter 20 (Ark/Asher Screening/Beard)* displaced to elsewhere in the installation. This interplay of historical and conceptual affinities, friendships and institutional sites — caught in movements between revealing, exhibiting, projecting or occluding — proposes *Spine, Chapter 20* as a meta-site of paratextual community.

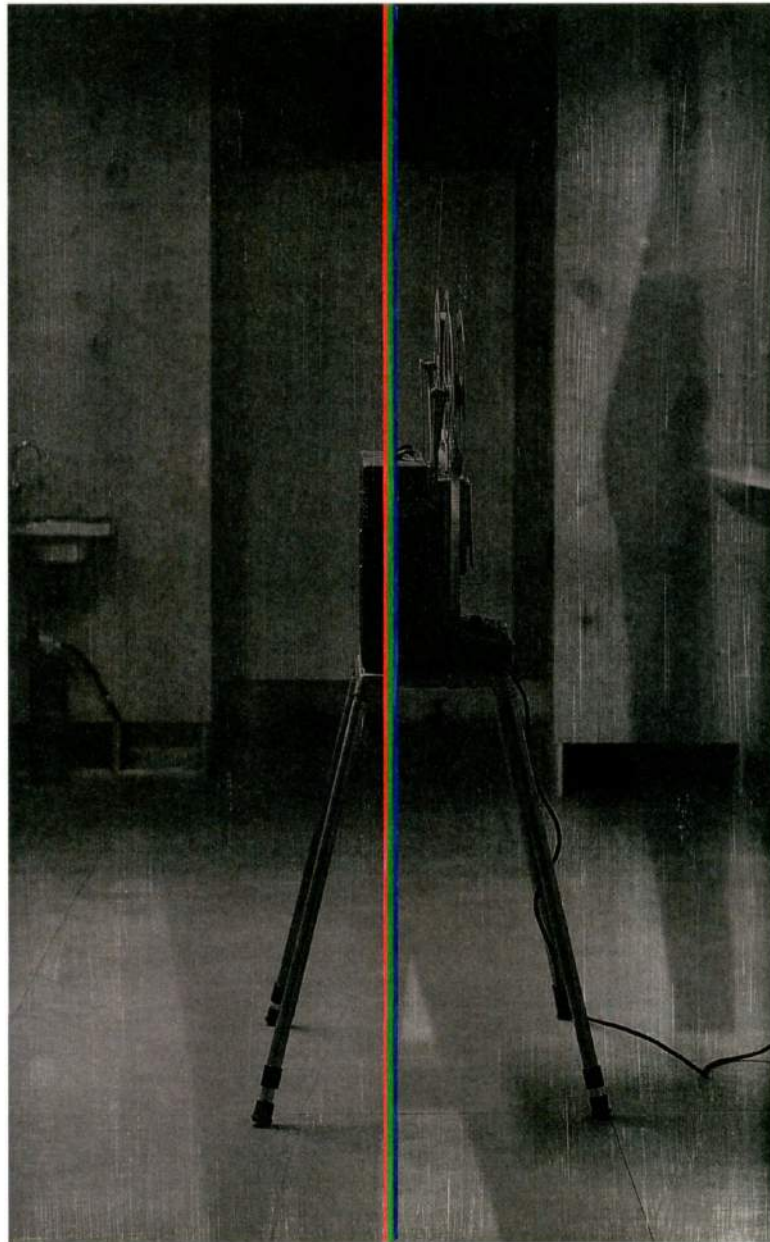
R.H. Quaytman,  
*Beard, Chapter 19*,  
2010, oil, silkscreen  
ink, gesso on wood,  
82.2 × 133cm

48 R.H. Quaytman, 'Spine, Chapter 20', *Spine*, op. cit., p.375.



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R.H. Quaytman,  
*Spine, Chapter 20*  
(*Ark/Asher Screening/*  
*Beard*), 2010, oil,  
silkscreen ink,  
gesso on wood,  
82.2 × 50.8cm



*The selection of particular examples from a large group is always a social act. By choosing to install certain narratives somewhere between history, mystic speech and poetry, I have enclosed them in an organisation, although I know there are places no classificatory procedure can reach, where connections between words and things we thought existed break off.*

*For me, paradoxes and ironies of fragmentation are particularly compelling.*

*Every statement is a product of collective desire and divisibilities. Knowledge, no matter how I get it, involves exclusions and repression.*

— Susan Howe, 'Incluser'<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Susan Howe, 'Incluser', *The Birth-mark*, op. cit., p.45.