Matvey Levenstein and Jarrett Earnest in conversation

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Jarrett Earnest: Earlier this summer, we were talking about your relationship to images over the years, how they function within your work, and how you think of them in relation to narrative and time. That got us talking about film. I want to start there and go into the set of images that you've put together in the show. So, you think of each painting within this context of a bigger group, and you've been reflecting lately on how that relates to film as opposed to the different histories of painting.

Matvey Levenstein: I've become much more conscious of the cinematic aspect of what I do. When my wife and I first moved to New York, there were these great film festivals at Film Forum, where I remember seeing Tarkovsky, Fassbinder, Passolini festivals–we went to the movies a lot. Film doesn't seem to be as culturally important as it was in the '70's, '80s or '90s. For me, film was this basic education. When I became a painter, I realized that it's important to look at painting and educate myself retinaly in order to absorb it, to just visually swallow it up. Film was like that for me as well.

I didn't see many Tarkovsky films in Russia, because they were very hard to find. So, later, in the US Tarkovsky became someone that I was thinking a lot about. I would listen to his soundtracks while I was designing a body of work and looking at images because I was working with photographs. Originally, I started working with family photographs as fetishistic objects, that have a lot of aura, the way that the type of painting that I wanted to make had a lot of aura and a lot of history. I was making this little sumi ink drawing of my grandmother in a garden, it was almost this annunciation scene, I imagined she is pregnant with my father. It was part of body of work called *Pictures of my Father*. I quickly realized that I was looking through the photograph, rather than at the photograph, and I started to slowly extend it as if it was a movie scene. Part of this came from the necessities of making a believable painting–I realized the photographs were actually quite flat–so I started pushing the space back and entering into the frame of the photograph and having these weird and funny fantasies as if this was my grandma in *The Last Year in Marienbad*. It's a movie scene, not just a still. I was already aware of that, I knew what I was doing.

JE: When was that?

ML: This was 1992. I realized that I was not interested in the photograph as much as a projected image, the way a movie is projected onto the screen. That is something that I wanted my painting to physically function must closer to, rather than it resembling a photograph, even though I was using photographs and engaging in the dialogue with an object of a photograph. Later, they became almost like scenes from a movie. Richter said, "this is my way of making a photograph," and I didn't say it quite like that but in a sense it was my way of making a movie through painting.

JE: When I think about why film in particular had such a huge impact on painting in the second half the 20th century, I imagine the art history of "serious paintings," through the middle of the century, which were basically abstractions. Film then emerges as the place for the most rigorous, philosophical interrogation of what an image is. That's why

you see, in the '80s and '90s, this flood of people engaging with images in painting, and people like you and Lisa Yuskavage, and earlier David Salle and Julian Schnabel are in conversation with film. There's something about the power of the image, or what it is that you want an image to do in the painting.

ML: I think you're totally right. I was an abstract painter at some point, and I was an expressionist painter, but then later I rejected all of that. So where do you go? I was always interested in discarded material, these things that people are not looking at anymore. I think it was Chuck Close that said that "a way of being an avant-garde artist is to try to make anti-art." So you look at the art of your surroundings, and, quite often, as in his and in my case, it was the seemingly conventional paintings that everyone was running away from. They weren't "art". When I was in school in Chicago, the Hairy Who tradition was reigning large. They didn't go to art museums, they went to the Natural History museum, we were told at the Chicago Art Institute. That's what you were supposed to do. I decided to go to the art museums.

I started looking at what used to be taboo, the European, pre-modernist painting. When I was an art student, I remember I had this book, called *Primitive and Abstract Art*, and it was everything before the Renaissance, and then, you know, late 19th century and 20th century. Everything in between was sort of like, "Oh, this is just boring shit," you know? Suddenly, I say to myself "Oh, there's this whole thing that nobody is looking at!" I thought that if I just did half a decent job taking a stab at it, then I have a whole area free for me to maneuver within. I didn't even need to be that great!

I remember going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art when I was really constructing what I was trying to do, and the MET has the important stuff on the second floor, but on the first floor they have all this stuff that nobody knows what to do with anymore. They know it's great, but ideologically and theoretically, we don't know how to think about it. What was really fascinating me was all these bas-reliefs and wood inlays, but specifically the bas-reliefs. I thought, nobody makes bas-reliefs anymore. Matisse was probably the last one. Well, maybe Charley Ray and Rachel Feinstein make them. But basically, I was thinking about why these are relegated to the first floor where you see them on the way to the bathroom or to the café. It's because we don't know how to think about them; I realized how essentialist we are–we like our painting to be painting, our sculpture to be sculpture. Bas-relief sits somewhere between sculpture and drawing: It's a sculpture which depends on shadows, so it's also a drawing. I became utterly fascinated with bas-reliefs, and I actually did some based on family photographs.

I was always fishing in these discarded materials, this debris of highly refined, classical European culture. I was a scavenger in this junk yard of art history. I wasn't supposed to look at this stuff, and I wasn't told how to think about it. I was really on my own ground. So, there was film, which is representational and narrative, then there was this other stuff, which I could now utilize for my own purposes.

JE: I didn't realize that you ever made bas-relief or had that as a part of your trajectory. It makes total sense. In general, painting has this very complicated dual reality that we've often discussed. It is a physical object, and it is an image. These realities work together and against each other to varying degrees throughout the history of making paintings. Bas-relief is such a brilliant epitome of that, because it is a big piece of rock that has shaped to it, but, also, because of the modulation of light and shadow, it is like a painting. That Charles Ray is just like that: there's so little carving there, but it's palpably a picture.

So, you went to graduate school for painting, and started making sculpture and I haven't been able to properly

articulate this move with you, from abstract painting to sculpture, and back to images in which the painting itself is functioning as an object and as an image.

ML: I went to school in Chicago, and it was a very free '70s type of school where I could do whatever. I studied architecture actually, throughout most of my undergraduate work, first in Moscow and then in Chicago, and I would paint on the side and do performances. I took film classes, and I did make films, which were kind of Stan Brakhage-esque, abstract films. Everybody was trying to make narrative films, and I went directly for abstraction. That's what I was interested in, and it was an extension of my paintings. Everything that I was involved with was stuff like that. Then, I was looking at Rauschenberg combines, and I was really ignorant of Schnabel, or Kiefer, or anything like that, I actually did not know about them or see them until I went to Europe. What I did sort of resembled Kiefer or Schnabel, they were these paintings that would dissolve into installations and stuff like that–very raw and very rough. When I went to Yale, I tried to make what, later, I termed "autonomous painting." I guess it was kind of a conservative place, and maybe I thought that everything that I was doing was fun and games, and that I had grow up and confront painting somehow. But I really could not understand what painting was. Then I tried to make "straight paintings," so to speak, so none of that installation bullshit or anything like these paintings that I had made, like one with a giant woman which had a broken beer bottle stuck in her chest–I didn't believe in the reality of that painting until I actually cut myself on the broken bottle and then bled into the paint. Painting became real when I bled into it.

JE: Years of struggle [laughs].

ML: That's right. So, I thought, let me try to make a straight up painting. What I thought I would do is to reconstruct painting from the scratch, by going back to the original stories. What were the stories? Biblical stories. I did Adam and Eve, Prodigal Son. I thought that the form of them would find itself by me just going straight into stories. These paintings were so ugly and awful that when I gave them to my parents, and they tried to live with them, they couldn't. They brought them to the basement and said, "You know what, we don't want to look at that." The Prodigal Son, was based on Rembrandt, he is hugging his father's knees, and basically it looks like he's giving him a blowjob. It had its moments.

JE: So you were sincerely trying to be as perverse as possible.

ML: I think I was honestly trying to be as true to myself, and still somehow true to painting, as possible. I think perversity was beyond me. I mean, I wish I was being perverse. Now, perversity is actually an important ingredient in my work. Later at Yale when I was already making sculptures, I did make these little deliberately perverse paintings, which everybody loved because they were beautiful, one was called *The Myth of Camaraderie*. They were basically everything Yale wanted from a student, they all loved it and I totally did not mean it. Painting was such an insecure object to me. Looking back, I see that I was the insecure object. I was five years off the boat, I had no idea how art functions outside of an art school–what does a painting do socially, culturally, economically? I was so insecure, so I ditched painting and started making these concrete objects, these sculptures. I made a dome, a winged ladder, a bed, I had this dialogue with concrete as man-made earth, and the utter, sheer, weight of them would convince me of their reality. A teacher of mine said "you're still an image maker," which was true, but I dispensed with painting.

JE: With all of your doubt and questioning of the image and the validity of the image and the reality of the image–

ML: It was not the image–the image I trusted–it was the object. What is this thing and where does it go after I'm done

with it? What does it do in society? I was taught by formalists, so there was no politics involved. I kind of wish that what people talk too much about now would have been discussed a bit then. I just thought that I should make something so raw, and that it would find its own place in the world through its sheer weight, concreteness and undeniable realty.

JE: Your work, in a technical way–and I don't mean this as a fetishism, just as an observation–is extremely rigorous and extremely precise. I've told you many times that nobody in the world makes paintings like this. In a material sense, through this decades long process, you've invented a way of working with the materials so that the image and the object are inextricable from each other. The way that it looks is the inherit product of exactly the way that it's made as a thing. What was that process of coming back from those concrete images, or sculptures, to returning to images like this, within the paintings, that are clearly representational?

ML: I was making these objects which later became sculptures, and I thought, "well, I guess I'm a sculptor now." And then there were two things: I started becoming really interested in rendering because my sculptures by then were becoming more and more elaborate. In order to build them, I would just sit on my ass, and make these very intricate drawings just to figure out how to construct them. The drawings evolved into their own thing, then the sculptures only existed as a drawing. I realized that I was missing a kind of delicacy and precision.

I remember going to the MET a lot. Once, on a Friday night, it was full of people because in those days it was free on Fridays, and there were mostly women and some men, that were all maybe in their 30s and 40s, and they were sitting quietly, looking at these paintings. I remember thinking "what are they looking at? And why are they here? They're not part of the art world. What does this mean?" These were obviously college educated, sophisticated people and somehow they're looking at these paintings. My fiction of what they were looking at, because I never actually asked any of them, was that those paintings–those objects–represented back to them their own personhood, their own uniqueness in the world, that they were as unique in this world as those paintings, and that nobody will make a painting like that again. And nobody will make them, each person exactly like that again. It was as if the picturehood of the painting threw back at them the inner cavity of their own subjectivity, interiority. I said, "oh, I understand what a painting does. This is what I want to do." I realized the importance of painting, and that, at least in the west, painting speaks to autonomy and personhood. I then understood the point of autonomous painting and that the object of autonomous painting should depict the subject of autonomy.

JE: Here's the thing about the perception that you have of the people looking at paintings at the MET: they're not looking at them in isolation, they're looking at them in a kind of quasi-public space with other people. With the unconscious or conscious knowledge of the presence of others, and not just the presence of the other people in the room, but with the presence of everyone else that has ever looked at that painting and with the person who made the painting. There's a contingent, intersubjective reality in the way that the painting functions in the world. It's not just a moment between the paintings and the individuals.

ML: At the time, I probably did see it as a moment, but you're right about that.

JE: And that's where film comes in, because the way that film works is that you have a bunch of people in a room all having an interior experience together. That's where the art is.

ML: When I was a sculptor, and I even worked as a carpenter, I was really interested in objects and making things. What I saw was a relationship between an object of autonomous painting and the kinds of spaces that I was then

depicting, whether it was the space of a family, or a church interior: they all start as socially constructed but then turn away from the social and into their own interiority. The social construction, that social contingency, never goes away. What is important is this pocket of inwardness, interiority.

This idea of the filmic and of interdependency was already important to me even then because I realized that this is an impossible project. You cannot make an object of autonomous painting in this day and age, I thought at the time. What you can do is depict the conditions within the painting itself under which that very object of the painting is possible. So as long as you have all of these paintings together, let's say in the space of a show, or in the studio, it creates this theatrical installation, under which autonomous paintings are possible again. You break them apart and perhaps it becomes a ridiculous object. I think this idea of autonomy was always porous even then, not absolute.

JE: There's something about this that I think relates to your growing up in the Soviet Union and then immigrating to America, and your relationship to Tarkovsky feels like it has something to do with that as well. One of the reasons that I want to bring this up is because when I was a teenager, in the rural south, I saw a Bergman movie and it changed my life. I thought "oh, that's art." I watched Tarkovsky movies, but it was never really my thing. But this last year, during the pandemic, I have been thinking about Tarkovsky so much. Something about the interiority of it, the temporality of it, I felt like I had to go back. Maybe six months ago, we put on *Solaris*, (because you were the only person I know who would watch it with me), and the film is just image after image after image that issues forth in a discourse with the sequence of images that you've been painting for in the past few years. It's the Romantic landscape, the still life, the rain. There's something here and it's not just this glib thing of you being from the Soviet Union, it seems like it's something that must have opened something for you.

ML: When I was in the Soviet Union, I was much more interested in western or European movies. In the Soviet Union, just as you could see Picasso but not Malevich, you could see western movies but not Tarkovsky. I think Tarkovsky became the best of Russia for me. There's a joke that says Soviet Jews became Russians after they've immigrated, because in the Soviet Union they were Jews, not Russian, then, when they got to the west, all the sudden you're just Russian. Yes, I drink straight vodka, it's true. Like I said, it was the best of Russia for me. I don't particularly like most of Russian painting, except icons and 20th century stuff, you know, there was good music, some great literature. But Tarkovsky was really unique, you can compare him to Bergman and to others, but he really constructed this whole world of his own that is this utter cathedral. There was a term amongst the slavophiles in the 19th century: sobornost cathedralness. Sobor is a gathering, but also Cathedral in Russian. The idea of a whole world that you can make out of art was important to me, and I agree with that thing about just letting the images speak. When Tarkovsky moved to the west and started making movies like *Nostalghia*, I thought that they were, in some ways, better. They talked less. He really moved into image-making.

JE: You had said that there was a long period when you started this body of work that you would listen to the soundtrack of *Solaris*.

ML: *Solaris* and *Mirror*. This painting is called *Mirror*. That film is essentially a self-portrait, and this painting is basically my self-portrait.

JE: It's a highly artificial, abstract version of your life.

ML: You only see the top portion of the back of my head as I look into the other space reflected in the mirror, which is reflected onto that shiny table. In that sense, you're right. In a lot of Tarkovsky's scenes, he'll pan into something, I

don't know, floating in the water, so as you're hearing Bach, you see something floating in the water. It's this trust in the most insignificant of moments, and that insignificant moment is amplified. It goes back to specificity as opposed to generality. This is why I have such a problem with the idea that art should mostly reflect the social. I'm always reminded of that Stalin quote, "one man's death is a tragedy, a million is statistics." It's true. When you stop talking about one, and start talking about groups, you end up accepting a lot of things.

JE: When I was looking back at Tarkovsky's *Sculpting in Time*, one of the things that he talks about is that there's basically two kinds of literature that you'd want to adapt into a film: one is a beautifully written masterpiece, and there's no use in turning it into a film because you can't do anything but destroy the thing that makes it special. The other is a piece of writing that has really good ideas, but the way that it's written is whatever, so you can take from it what you want. Since you take photographs and select what will become a painting, which is an extremely elaborate transformation, I feel that there must be some distinction there between what is just a good photograph and the kind of photograph that merits becoming a painting.

ML: If it's so complete as a photograph, it becomes something about the picturesque, and this is where perversity comes in. At first, I'll think "this is too picturesque," but then, I'll think, "why not go there?" I like to think of it as vertigo. A good work of art must have some vertigo; if it goes just a bit too far one way, it could become really awful. Because if you're safe, then it's not that good. It must teeter on the edge of awful. Many people think Tarkovsky movies are goddamn awful, like my friend, John, who thinks that they're too much like paintings not movies. It's important that things can become so easily awful.

One of the things that was an important aspect about going back to painting was giving up on this idea of the moral and political high ground of the avant-garde. In the Soviet Union, the avant-garde was forbidden. We were all taught Social Realism which is a form of Classicism and we hated it. So there was, just as in the West, a Myth of ethical and political purity of Avant-garde, because Hitler and Stalin didn't like the modernist avant-guard. I had thought that, of course I wanted to be avant-garde, who wants to be rear-guard? But then I realized how dubious those guys were, and how, when they were not rejected by totalitarian power, like the Futurists, they were happily lackeys of the regime–so there is no moral high ground. I rejected this idea of safety, that you do some good in the world, that you're marching toward some bright future, by simply being an avant-garde artist.

I remember talking with a friend at Yale, and I said, "I don't understand what it means to be an artist in America, in New York." He said, "Oh! it's very simple, Matvey. There's a march of art history and you just take your place in it." I thought, I want to be you when I grow up, but I just can't; I didn't believe in that march, and it sounded awful to me. I was very ambivalent about it. That ambivalence has always haunted me, even in terms of my relation to this idea of the "art world" where you just simply plug yourself in. I always wanted to be a contrarian, to make it difficult, even for myself, so I purposely went back to these techniques, like Sumi ink drawing, that I was taught in Russia. I hated it at the time, but then realized that that's what made me who I am. I was in this unique possession of these things which were forms of self-portraiture, so I purposely went back to speaking the language of the enemy, that ironically I could speak well, with nuance. I don't speak the language of friends, I speak the language of the enemy. I became really interested in Classicism, which had been anathema to me. There was a lot of perversity involved in that, but I didn't want to delude myself into thinking that what I'm doing is "Good." It might be good, as in I'm good at it, but I'm not "Good." I'm not doing God's work here.

JE: Over the past few years, you've really focused on landscape images, still-life images in interiors, and sometimes a still-life with landscapes. I thought of one of your paintings yesterday, because I had gone to the store and picked up

a bunch of red-orange gladiolas. I put them in a vase on my kitchen table, it was a really warm day, so they started to open as my partner and I were having coffee. It was so slow, but there was this kind of extreme presence and beauty and light. Part of me said, "Oh, God, maybe I should try and take a photograph of this!" And the other part of me knew that no photograph could reproduce that feeling, because it was so much about time–that shimmering feeling of time–which is moving but can also be still. Your still-life paintings reproduce that tension in a way that a painting can, but that a photograph cannot. I want to talk to you about your understanding of what I'm describing here.

ML: Depicted time is related to but not synonymous to the time that it takes to make a painting. Somebody once said that painting is the slowest art. What I like about painting versus film, or literature, or music, is that it is very generous with your time. It instantaneously reveals itself to the viewer. You can look at it for a second or for a long time. There's a generosity about it that I like. I might spend an enormous amount of time on it while you look at it for a second. The slowness of making it is perhaps related to the slowness of reading it, but I do want immediacy, so that you see it as a whole image rather than in parts. This doesn't necessarily mean that the slower the painting, the longer it takes to make. I don't worship labor, or this idea that a painting is better because it's been labored over. If I could make them faster, I would. Labor does not create value.

JE: Within this painting, there's probably four or five different registers of the represented at the very level of the picture. The way that those registers all become unified is through the continuity of the surface, where you've managed to make them materialize as though they're on the same plane. I guess that has to do with artificial light, which has its own kind of a representation of time progression, then there's also the light coming from the window, and there's the temporality of the still life which is sagging and dying at the very moment of being represented, and then the gesture of the light being turned on or off.

ML: Turning off, in this case.

JE: I think this is one of the most complicated paintings you've ever made.

ML: Probably. Like you said, you construct a surface. A painting is an object, a representational painting is also a presentational painting, to avoid the word abstraction. In the end, isolated, this portion of Mirror becomes a color field, it has to be materially, utterly satisfying. I would say Vermeer is the model in terms of the construction of the surface, though, weirdly, I was not thinking about him. Maybe because it's too close, or because he's too perfect, like what you mentioned Tarkovsky had said about something being too perfect so you should leave it alone. Casper David Friedrich and Ingres were these models of painters that would make representational paintings, but with this continual surface, where if you took one part away it would just shatter, like glass. I call this tautness.

JE: I know that you studied with Vija Celmins in graduate school, and there are ways in which your work superficially seems like it has a lot to do with each other, but as I actually look at it, I see you're on opposite ends of the spectrum. She is such an important and almost contradictory figure in terms of what she did within painting, vis-à-vis the painting and the object. Especially with these most recent paintings, and after we've seen that big Celmins retrospective, do you have any new reflections on her work or how it might illuminate what you're doing?

ML: Like with Vermeer, it's just something that I like a lot. She was my teacher for a year, during my second year at Yale, when I was making those concrete objects. She was funny, I made this screen window and poured concrete over it and made this image of lovers and put gold dust on it–very sappy–and, this being her highest form of praise yet, she said, "Well, that's not the best thing I've ever seen, but this one is okay." It was as if the rest of my paintings

were kind of awful. I knew I was on the right track. I don't want to say she was maternal, but she was like a friend in this otherwise cold and formal place. She made this piece which was two rocks, where one was an actual rock and the other was constructed, but looked identical to the real one, you couldn't tel which one was which. Those kinds of theoretical musings, the real and the memetic, were all important to me, Just as I was describing how if you look at every square inch of something, it becomes abstracted.

JE: I think that she really forces you to recognize the translation of the image from the photograph, or from another media. But when I look at your paintings, they don't bring me back to the photograph. They bring me deeper into their reality as a painting. That seems to be a completely different ideology or intention there.

ML: I think, maybe she's more doubtful about the purpose of the painting than I am. There's this kind of agnosticism about it. When I started painting in the early nineties, there was actually very little painting. It was like a little ice-age of painting, or the last time that painting had died. The ideal art was something that would dissolve itself into the nexus of life. I remember thinking that I wanted to do just the opposite.

JE: You said this thing earlier about how you never doubted the image but instead the object. In a way, Vija Celmins's work is the opposite.

ML: Remember the cartoon, Pinky and the Brain, where Pinky would wake up and say "so Brain, what are we going to do today?" and he'd go "We're gonna take over the world!" When I wake up and think about how I'm going to take over the world, I don't think about the original stimuli, or the original impetus for doing things. The great thing about having this conversation, other than that it's a lot of fun, is that it actually does bring me back to the original intentions, which are important, and you do lose them. I tell my students that people think that art is just subject matter and technique, but really that belongs to everybody. That's for the birds! Art is somewhere in between the subject matter and technique. And what is it? It goes back to that fusion that you were talking about between object and image. I also thought of it as fusion between form and subject, and the subject as distinct from subject matter, so you cannot talk about one without bringing the "other" into play.

JE: I think, weirdly, that one of the reasons why painting has reemerged as a more significant art form in the 21st century than it was in the late 20th century, is because we live under this regime of the tyranny of the image. It's a disembodied image, it's immaterial. Painting is the place where we must reconcile the image with the stuff, in a way that is vitally important to us in a way that film is not dealing with anymore. Now, precisely, we've returned to this recurrence to the technology of painting, which is material technology.

ML: Which is also extremely archaic, and really has not changed since the 16th century, with the exception of putting paint into tubes. When I teach painting, I usually say to my students that they've got to realize what a perverse enterprise they're involved with. Nobody would go to a late 15th century dentist, or somebody who practices late 15th century dental techniques. That would be sheer madness. So, perhaps, it's connection through time makes us feel grounded. Which is also precisely what people don't like about painting. The ideological attack on painting, which I totally understand, is that brings you back, it drags you back. I don't have a defense of painting, or one from a progressive point of view, because there isn't any–there's nothing "Good" about it–it brings you back

JE: You bring up the 16th century, but I think you could go back even further.

ML: Look at cave paintings! They're excellent. They need nothing else. What I find so satisfying about them is that they are so limited in their means.

JE: It made me think about the fact that in your life, as you get older, you realize the difference between having a friendship that is 20 years long, or someone that you've just met for a year, and you can like them a lot, but there's something that happens where you have a depth of an emotional, social understanding of someone's experience or depth which is non-replicable. I think that painting, as a technology, has a cultural role that we may not like, because we may not like to be recognized in the way that paintings force us to recognize certain aspects of ourselves or our history. There's no other form like that: photography doesn't have that; film doesn't have it. There's a lot of wonderful other things that that you can't fake a several 1000-year relationship with.

ML: Something that I don't like about a lot of contemporary painting is that I don't see this questioning of painting. They go "well, you know what I mean, it's a painting." And I think, no, I don't know what you mean. Every time I paint, I start from the scratch. Painting is dead and you breathe life into it. It is not a bandwagon that you jump onto–it's not going anywhere. You have to prove to me that you've constructed a personal philosophy of the subject and process, and why this means anything at all and why anyone should care.

Schjeldahl wrote this brilliant review of some sculptor, back in the '80s or '90s, where he says something like, well, it's all very nice, but she just presumes that there's this whole audience leaning in to hear what she has to say, and she doesn't realize that there is nobody leaning in.

The reason why I totally get the critique of painting, and the distaste for painting, and what I find most interesting about painting, is the politics of it. Painting is a problematic thing. It's a bone in the throat of Hegelian or Marxist linear history. Trust me, intellectually I understand this antagonism toward painting. It's just that I am on the other side of the barricade.