



Marilyn Lerner, *Forms of Experience*, 1988, oil on wood, 48 x 65 1/2".

gests a simultaneity of attainability and unattainability, as well as the illusory acquisition of objects through photography. The empty frame, on the other hand, is again an overdetermined gesture.

Picture at an Exhibition, 1988, is composed of two rectangular burgundy-colored monochromes, one hanging vertically and the other horizontally. Each one is inscribed with a gold rectangular outline. Separating the monochromes are two indeterminate photographs of paintings. In the photographs, more of the frame and the wall have been captured than the actual painting. In this piece, Weidmann reveals an ambivalence toward both esthetic hierarchies and the "meaningful" space within the frame. The sections of bland wall defined by his pieces are about as suggestive as the monochromes, objects, and photographs themselves. Weidmann reiterates verbatim the rhetoric surrounding commodification and the death of painting, without internalizing or transforming it. He makes meaninglessness truly meaningless.

—Matthew A. Weinstein

MARILYN LERNER

JOHN GOOD GALLERY

For an artist to develop an abstract vocabulary in which each element has both a personal and an archetypal meaning usually takes years. One could also say that a development of this sort (slow, unpredictable, and having little to do with fashionable styles) is in itself a critique both of the formal codifications of abstraction and of consumer culture's treatment of abstraction as decorative instance. Marilyn Lerner, now in her mid 40s, shows signs of being able to sail through the Scylla (formalism) and Charybdis (decoration) of abstraction in order to reach a realm of specific meaning.

Lerner works in oil on carefully cut pieces of plywood, which she primes with modeling paste. Her vocabulary largely consists of circles and squares. Lerner's preference for this basic vocabulary, as well as the frequent inclusion of black and white in her palette, connects her to the Constructivist and Suprematist traditions. She does not use her vocabulary to deny the particularity of geometric shapes, their forcefulness; rather, she employs a wide spectrum of color, from rich, vibrant hues to bone-dry tones, to articulate shapes and patterns.

The overall shape, the colors, the size and placement of painted shapes—Lerner integrates elements in ways that are simultaneously discordant (non-hierarchical) and harmonious (they contribute to something larger). Her paintings may be read as tactile, visual analogues to Far Eastern music. Lerner, who has traveled to the Far East frequently, particularly to Bali, has redefined and extended her experience of this music, its non-hierarchical and nonnarrative shapings of tones, into a painterly project. In so doing, she recontextualizes contemporary abstraction's materialist basis by reconnecting it to its Symbolist beginnings. The overall shape of *Spirit House*, 1988, is more or less that of a vertically oriented rectangle, with specific yet seamless extensions as a triangle and a cut-out rectangle. This painted white shape, which may recall the floor plan of an asymmetrical house with a small courtyard, is further defined by cruciform-derived shapes, a row of triangles, and a patterned row of alternating squares. Lerner's vocabulary is both basic and specific. Her shapes are meant to be contemplated, disassembled, and reassembled, like a train of thought one stops and ponders. By investigating the zone bordered by acts of looking, thinking, and feeling, Lerner articulates the specific shapes and colors of thinking itself.

—John Yau



Jasper Johns, *Map*, 1961, oil on canvas, 78 x 123 1/2".

JASPER JOHNS GAGOSIAN GALLERY

This exhibition brought together all but one of Jasper Johns' map paintings, as well as several prints and works on paper. For all the attention paid to Johns' work in recent years, there has been no attempt to challenge the widely accepted view that the artist is a hermetic formalist. Roberta Bernstein, whose essay on Johns is excerpted in the catalogue for this show, continues this treatment by stating, "The map is a subject which could be interpreted to have personal meaning, if certain areas were made to stand out from others. But Johns paints the map the way he paints all of his other works: each area of the surface... is of equal importance." This kind of thinking is in basic agreement with Frank Stella's well known reification of formalist criticism: "What you see is what you see."

One reason critics have contributed to the mystification of Johns' work is because they have failed to develop a way of reading that is specific to his art. They have failed, in other words, to heed their own dictum—that new forms of art demand new ways of reading. While critics have developed a number of provocative ways of reading Pablo Picasso and some serviceable ones for Jackson Pollock, they have developed few for reading Johns. Thus, after being exhibited for more than three decades, his work remains a mystery.

Johns began working on his first map painting in 1960. Formally, he had already incorporated found things into his work, begun to address the relationship between the name and the thing named, and investigated notions of the boundary. The map paintings, then, seem to be a formal extension of earlier work, and have often been viewed that way since they were first exhibited. I would like to propose, however, another way of looking at both the

maps and Johns' earlier work. At the beginning of his career, before he worked on his first flag painting, in 1954, Johns taught himself how to use encaustic and how to make plaster casts. In a sense, he had taught himself two distinct means of communicating, but had not yet discovered what it was he wanted to say. Encaustic is a mixture of pigment and wax. Among other things, wax is a material exuded by worker bees. It has a honeylike odor and is used to construct a nest or house. The worker bee is both an engine of efficiency and an undifferentiated life force—a worker rather than an individual. It is also a paradigm of consumer culture, which attempts to be continually generative. Johns has said, "I think artists are the elite of the servant class." He has also said that as a child he learned that artists were socially useful.

The maps are the works of an artist who wants to be socially useful, and at the same time of one who knows that works of art are seen but not looked at: they are consumed by society. Artworks reveal our capacity to consume something without considering what it is. In painting, Johns strives to make the viewer aware of his or her own mindlessness. The map not only evokes the difficulty Johns has differentiating himself from others, but it also becomes a field of discovery. He presides over its emergence, its birth. Johns' early paintings, including his maps, are about the skin and body of the self. They are poignant signs of recognition.

—JY

"FLUXUS: SELECTIONS FROM THE GILBERT AND LILA SILVERMAN COLLECTION"

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Fluxus was fun art. Sometimes it was a little dumb, but most of the artists, and