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When unnatural colors are brushed, poured and scraped into unexpected beauty



Detail of David Reed, "No. 3," 1972, oil on canvas (Brica Wilcox / 356 S. Mission Road)

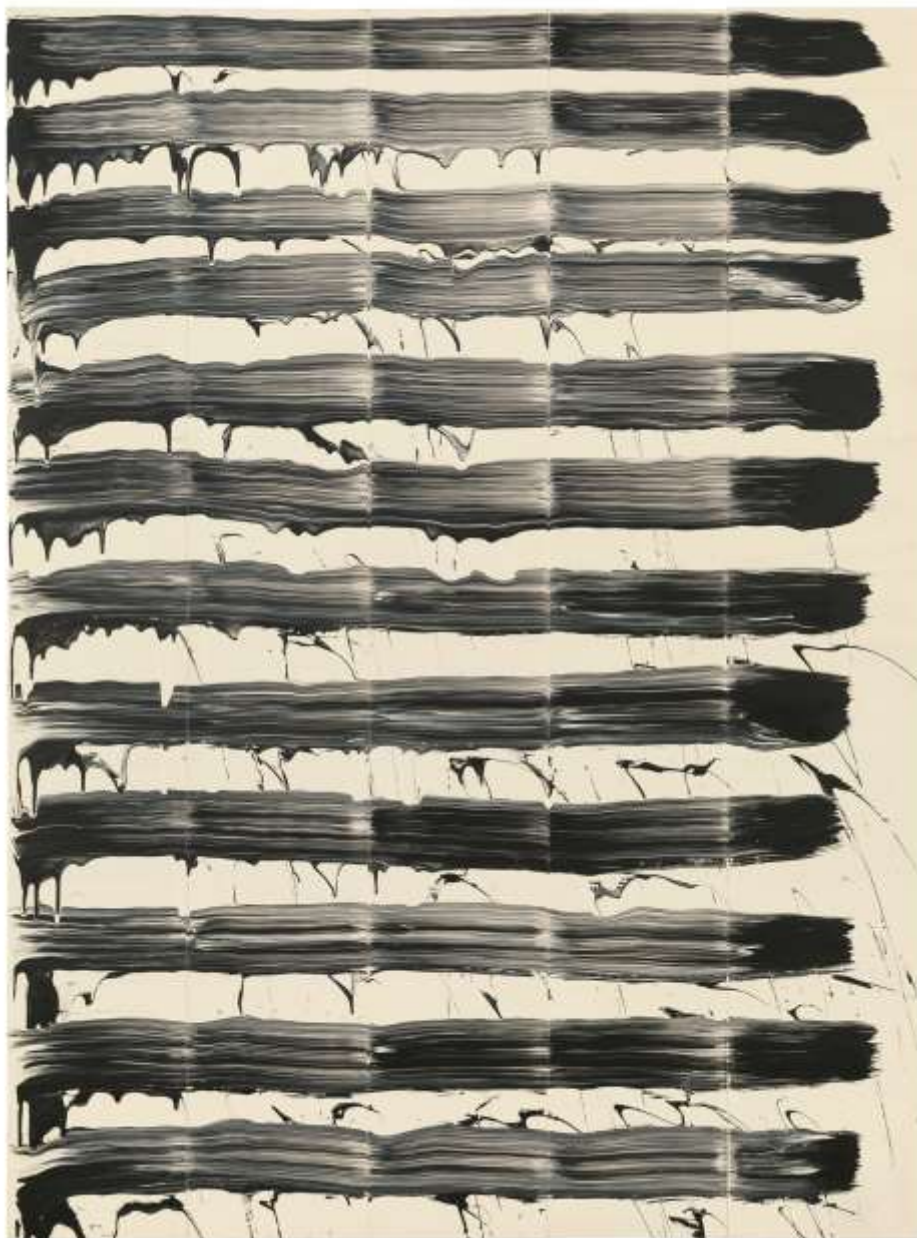
By David Pagel | April 19, 2017

Painting hit rock bottom in the 1970s. The loudest voices said it was dead. Many believed that other media — sculpture, video, installation and performance — moved viewers more deeply.

David Reed did not believe the buzz. Nor did he think that abstract painting was the answer. As a 26-year-old who had just moved to New York City from the West Coast, he was skeptical of what he saw with his own eyes — and what people were saying about what he saw with his own eyes.

Reed set out to make paintings that had no illusions about their place in the world. Or any delusions about their role in getting people to make sense of our surroundings and our place in them.

He stretched canvases that were the size of the door to his Tribeca studio. He bought paint by the gallon in colors too ugly for houses. Then he got down to business, brushing, pouring and scraping paint in ways no one would describe as tasteful, much less harmonious or composed. Elegance was out of the question.



Private Collection, David Reed's "No. 64," 1974, oil on canvas, 76 inches by 56 inches
(David Reed / Artists Rights Society)

In the process, Reed discovered that the whole point of painting was discovery: simultaneously seeing and feeling the space that our bodies occupy by traveling, in the mind's eye, to otherwise impossible-to-reach places.

Those discoveries are on display at the gallery 356 S. Mission Road in "Painting Paintings (David Reed) 1975." Organized by Katy Siegel and Christopher Wool, the eye-opening show originated at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University and traveled to Gagosian Gallery in Manhattan.

In Los Angeles, it has expanded. In addition to the loaded brushstroke paintings Reed made from 1974 to 1975, the studio-door-size paintings he made from 1972 to 1974 are on view. Paired, the two bodies of work

PETER BLUM GALLERY

form the foundation of everything Reed has painted over the last 40 years. “Painting Paintings (David Reed) 1975” is the primordial stew out of which his increasingly sophisticated art has sprung.

The seven works from '72 to '74 are rough and tumble ramblings through overlapping layers of liquid light and unnatural color. Their queasy combinations of opacity and translucence never look pretty. But they let you see beauty in unexpected places.

Installed on the opposite wall, his 12 works from '74 and '75 do double duty as Structuralist studies and Existentialist explorations. Each one-, two-, four- or five-panel painting tracks movement through time as it records the body's capacity to make a mark on the world. Painted wet-on-wet, each two-color work is a tug of war between action and aftermath, vision and realization, hanging on and letting go. In Reed's hands, the moment expands, taking viewers in two directions — or more.

That's what happens in the show as a whole. Looking at the past lets us see the present with fresh eyes, and that makes the future look different.