

**Gordon**

**Lozano**

**Ryman**

**Stanley**

The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Exhibition dates: May 23 through June 22, 1968

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**Lozano**

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Everyone involved in the organization of this exhibit spent many hours looking and planning. I would like to thank Bob Stanley for his assistance in conceiving the show; Marilyn Herzka for her dedication in organizing, correlating, and cataloguing the exhibition; Robert Christgau for his introduction; Noel Martin for his design of the catalogue; Young and Klein for lithography; Jonathan Holstein, Stu Penny, and Nathan Rabkin for photographs; Paul Bianchini and Dorothy Herzka for their advice and encouragement; and Pat Mosher for his editorial help.

William A. Leonard  
Director

*Robert Stanley, Ground number three, 96 x 60 inches, acrylic polymer emulsion on linen*

A painter paints to solve special problems that he understands with almost obsessive clarity. Painting, after all, is his life. He thinks about it all the time and he sees about it all the time. Everything that comes down the old optic pipe registers eventually with that part of the consciousness with which he paints.

For a few thousand faithful, most of whom live in New York and tour the galleries religiously, a painting poses pretty much the kind of hypothesis it is for a painter. But the average man who looks at paintings sees something different. Vision isn't so important to him, and the problem of seeing--much less painting--may never have crossed his mind. So although he examines a painting more painstakingly than he might examine, say, his wife's dress, or a billboard, or even a movie, he really can't say what he's looking for. Enlightenment? A subject for conversation? And aesthetic experience? Some damned thing.

Some painters enjoy great success because they provide easy answers to this bothersome question while bypassing equally bothersome formal questions. Other painters answer the painterly questions with stunning competence but fail to disturb or please you and me. They simply don't relate to us; they leave us flat. But the best painters avoid both pitfalls. They devote themselves to formal questions but reveal a compelling human dimension in spite of themselves. The four painters in this show are like that.

I infer a certain desperation in the work of most of the painters I like. I think many of them suspect that the artistic possibilities of putting brush to canvas are petering out. In the fifties, abstract expressionism concerned itself with the dynamics of movement within the canvas and the equally dynamic struggle of the artist to capture that movement. But by this decade such painting began to seem excessively romantic and self-congratulatory; pop and minimal artists assumed a cool style that dealt in primary shapes and colors and stylized, ironic content. Now that brief tradition seems attenuated and on the wane, and the painterly questions must be answered again. This show attacks from four radically different directions, yet ends in each case at an answer that combines the fifties and sixties.

Bob Stanley, for instance, is fascinated by the distinction between the abstract and the representational. Each of the paintings in his current series is scrupulously realistic, as realistic as the photographs from which they are copied, but they look like abstractions, and not the reductionist abstractions of a Stella or a Kelly, either--they resemble black-and-white silkscreens taken from Pollock. Lee Lozano has rescued texture from the gloppier crudities of abstract expressionism and simultaneously endowed minimal painting with a new kind of sensuality. Bob Gordon's work has thematic precedents in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, but he has launched his attack from pop rather than from abstract expressionism; no other pop artist (to stick him in that category for convenience's sake) would dare show off such obvious process; no other pop artist would, for example, bare the frame of his painting, or staple it to the wall. Finally, Bob Ryman presents what appear to be minimal paintings--except that they are painted in twenty minutes with a twelve-inch brush, action painting at it's most active, and then "hung" and "framed" in a way that makes us wonder whether they are paintings at all. And just

what is painting, anyway? That's why painters should like this show. Now the proper question is what it can do for you, and the answer is, more than might appear at first.

Bob Stanley's work is the reaction of an urban man to the country, to what used to be called landscape. Stanley does not feel comfortable with past romanticisms--his life, like those of most of us, denies them too thoroughly. But in the intricacy of his present work, not to mention his insistence on painting it with his own hand rather than duplicating it mechanically, he has provided an oblique romanticism of his own, one that respects the world of nature without being silly about it.

Similarly, Lee Lozano affirms her own femininity in a world where even first names seem androgynous. Her paintings--with their precise curves, delicate but never arch colors, and firm, meticulous brushstrokes--show how to be a woman without blowing your cool. Lee is no softy. Each of these paintings represents 30 hours labor with the brush plus conceptualizing time, and if she likes you she may ask you to touch them.

While less adventurous pop seems almost chi-chi by now, Bob Gordon has managed to make it do what it does best--revitalize our tawdry surroundings. He works with paper and textiles from the neighborhood of his own loft, and he clearly finds them not just amusing but scary--the very size of his work, combined with his garish materials, has a surreal grandeur that is awesome.

Bob Ryman has undertaken a more specialized project. He insists that painters are human beings, devices of flesh and blood that apply paint with their own hands even when they are most insistent on the mechanical aspects of their environment. While this revelation is of especial importance to painters, it should give pleasure to anyone who feels himself alive in the world.

This is strange work by artists who are not well-known; Bob Stanley is the most famous as well as the most conventional, and he is not much of either. The show has dimensions I have not suggested here, and hopefully you will discover some yourself. I don't know and don't care whether that makes it Great Art. Greatness has to do with the past, and here we are now, looking at these paintings. Don't worry if they disconcert you; rather, worry if they don't. If you are annoyed or confused or just plain put out, walk around for a while. Allow them to sink in and become familiar. By then they will have had their way with you.

Robert Christgau  
New York City

March 31, 1968