

D A V I D M O R E N O

B E N E A T H T H E S K I N

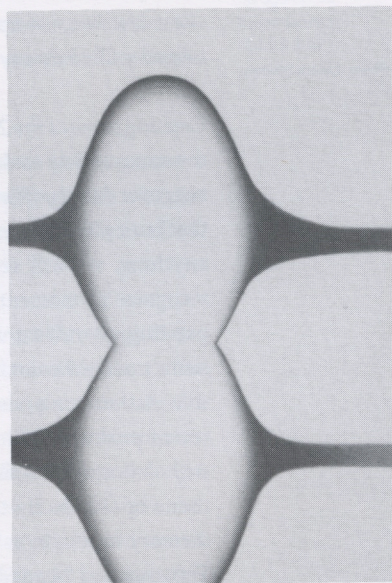
A being that isn't cracked isn't possible. But we go from enduring the cracks (from decline) to glory (we seek out the cracks).¹

Let's begin by way of an oversimplification: David Moreno's paintings are what they are about and are about what they are. In his variously scaled works there is a direct link between the physically disrupted, corrupted surface and a form of meaning that is essentially biological. Moreno fuses "pure" abstract painting, illusionistic imagery and a conceptually coded language onto a single surface. Despite his obvious technical expertise as a painter, a modest reticence prevails where a bravura flash might attract more attention. The paintings are clearly hand-made, sometimes roughly textured, with elements purposefully off balance, but Moreno has no desire to revel in mere human emotion *or* in any grand existential plea via his gesture, nor does he presume that painting can ever parallel some imagined universal perfection.

David Moreno is a master of the studied understatement. His paintings do not clamor, shout or beg for our attention — they earn it with a convincing blend of wit, craft, and metaphorical allusion. At a casual glance, several of his works could be mistaken for color field paintings from forty years ago or minimalist works from more recent years, recycled in keeping with current appropriationist practice. On closer examination the subtle and quiet surfaces of his paintings appear porous, teeming with life beneath thin translucent skins.

In Moreno's work, painting and the mortal living body have been fused at the molecular level. An almost genetic splice seems to have occurred, joining the skin of the painting with the skin of the human body — a skin subject to a variety of events and a whole range of catastrophes, permutations and abrasions.²

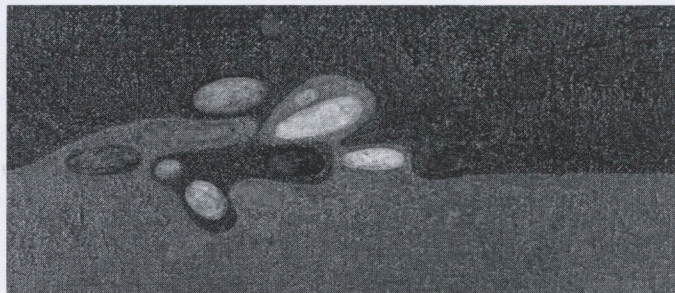
Everywhere ovoid blips, cracks, blisters and star-shaped ruptures break these otherwise flat and "sacred" surfaces. Often such entrances into the painting's surface openly display images — in other instances a membrane of barely visible imagery is collaged just beneath an outer layer of thinned paint. These works disclose their vulnerability, their need to speak. They exhibit a truth to the world in which they (and we) exist, by combining "real" information via collaged images, texts, sheet music and comics, with open fields and coagulated blisters of paint. They open wounds in what would otherwise be a sealed (quarantined, inaccessible) space; they challenge the notion of a pure and non-relational existence.



Untitled, 1988
(detail) oil on wood
22.5 X 17.5"
Photo: Debra Risberg

title page:
Untitled, 1990 (detail)
oil, tempera on canvas board, 22 X 18.5"
Photo: Debra Risberg
opposite:
Untitled, 1991 (detail)
silk, shellac, tempera on wood panel, 22 X 16"

Moreno's *Untitled, 1989* is a typically quiet and initially unremarkable painting. Two equally sized rectangles are poised within this human-size painting, the one below a ruddy red, the one above a lighter pink, the whole carefully and thinly scumbled to allow the underpainting of browns, greens and yellows to seep through to the surface. An illusion of cool detachment and structural regularity is broken by a colony of tiny



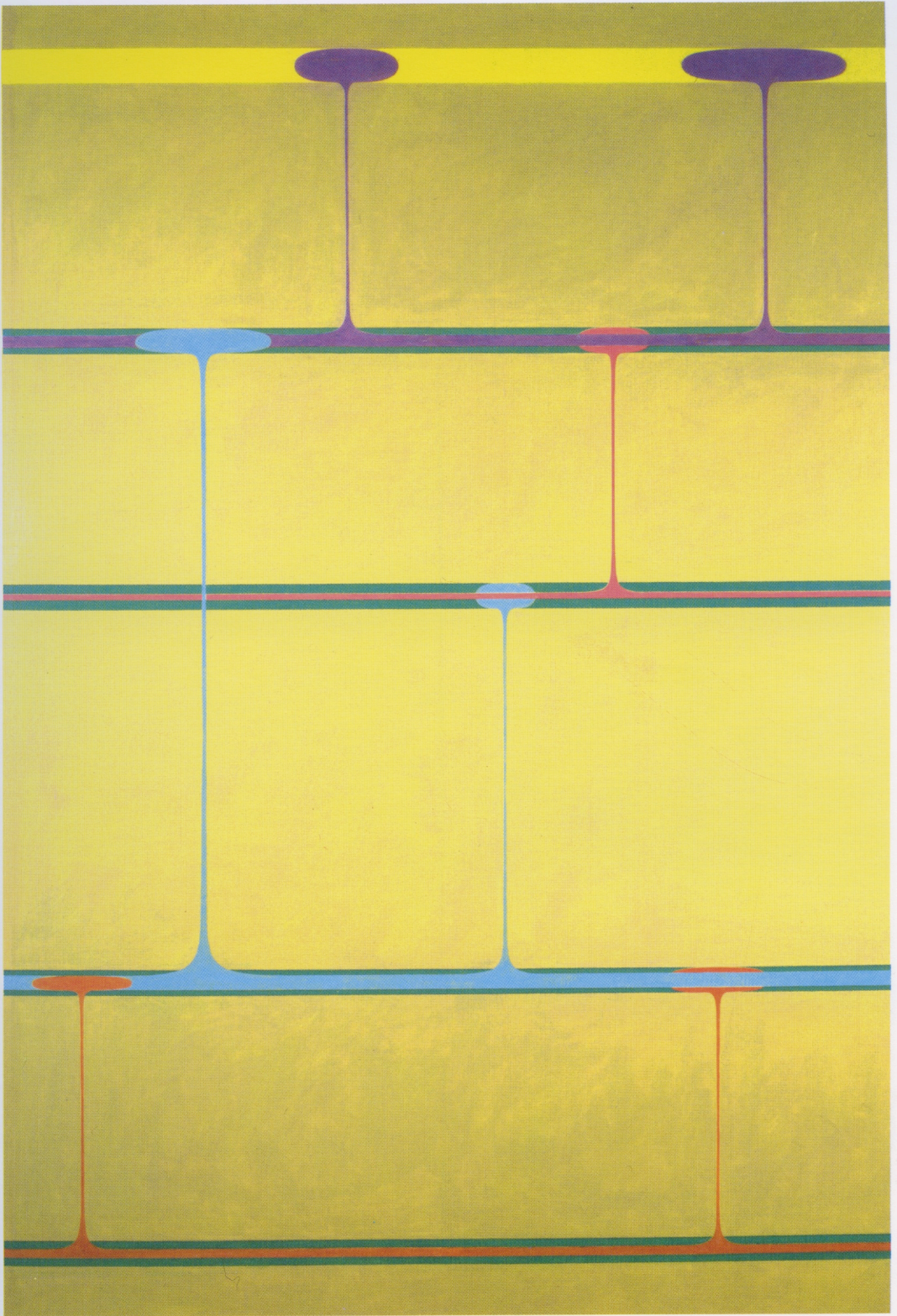
Untitled, 1989
(detail)
oil on canvas
74 X 48"
Photo: Debra Risberg

cell-like growths, innocent but menacing, suddenly appearing on the horizon. A smaller work (*Untitled, 1989*) features similar hues but is divided on the vertical axis. Appearing at first to be a model of reductive geometry, a growth allows the lighter (left-hand) field to seep through a meandering fissure into the darker field. Forced to reconcile this break in a field that could either be all-space or no-space, the viewer is led to consider possible points of view. Is this a cosmography, a topography, or the disclosure of some infinitesimal intra-body event?

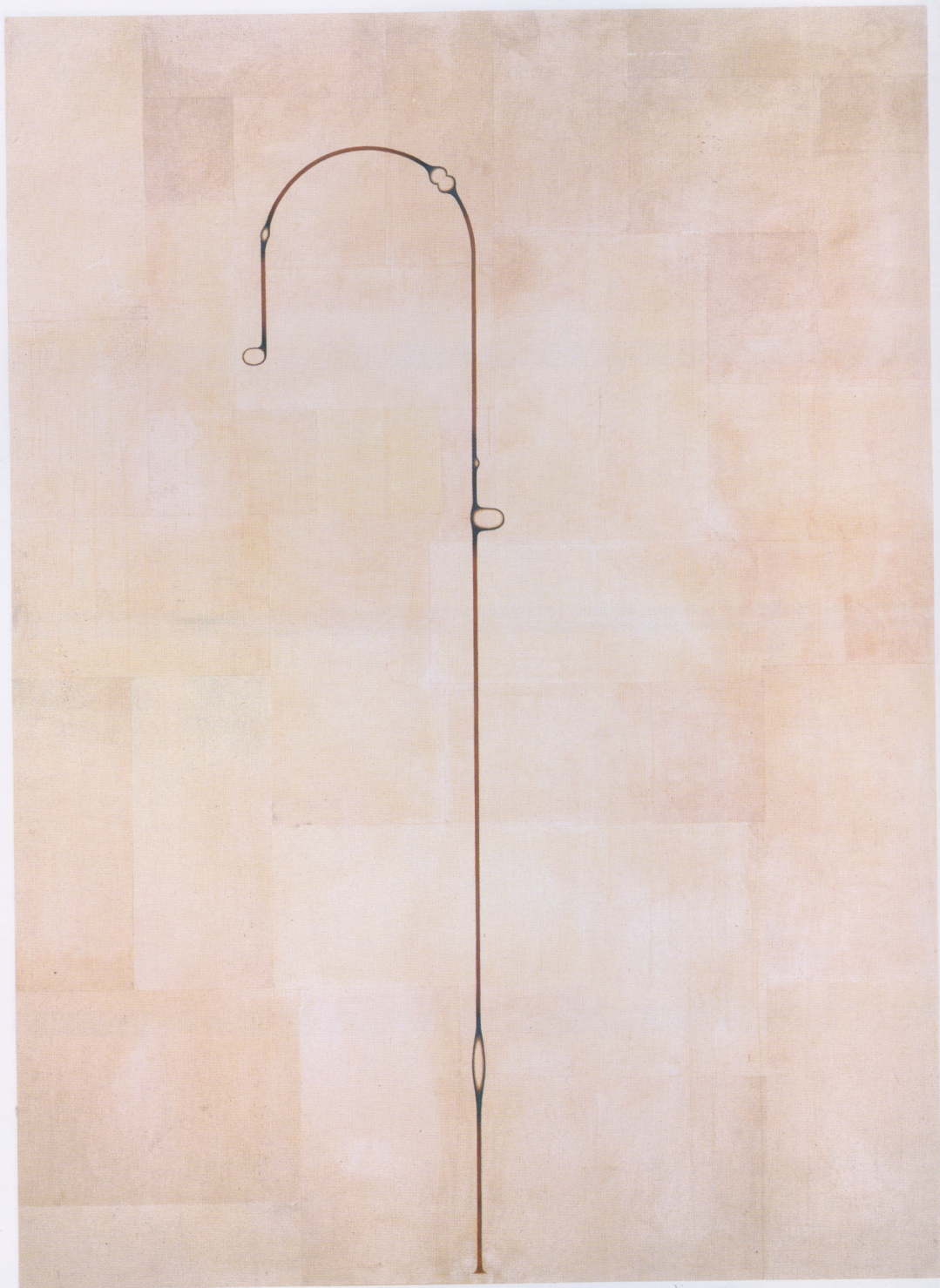
*We say that nature is beautiful. But this aesthetic judgement, which not all peoples have shared, is another defense formation, woefully inadequate for encompassing nature's totality. What is pretty in nature is confined to the thin skin of the globe upon which we huddle. Scratch that skin, and nature's daemonic ugliness will erupt.*⁶

The predominately quiet and minimal surfaces of Moreno's paintings are a trope, a veil for a host of active and communicative physical/linguistic relationships. If his historical reference is to field painting, then the field has been tilled, scarified and opened for business.

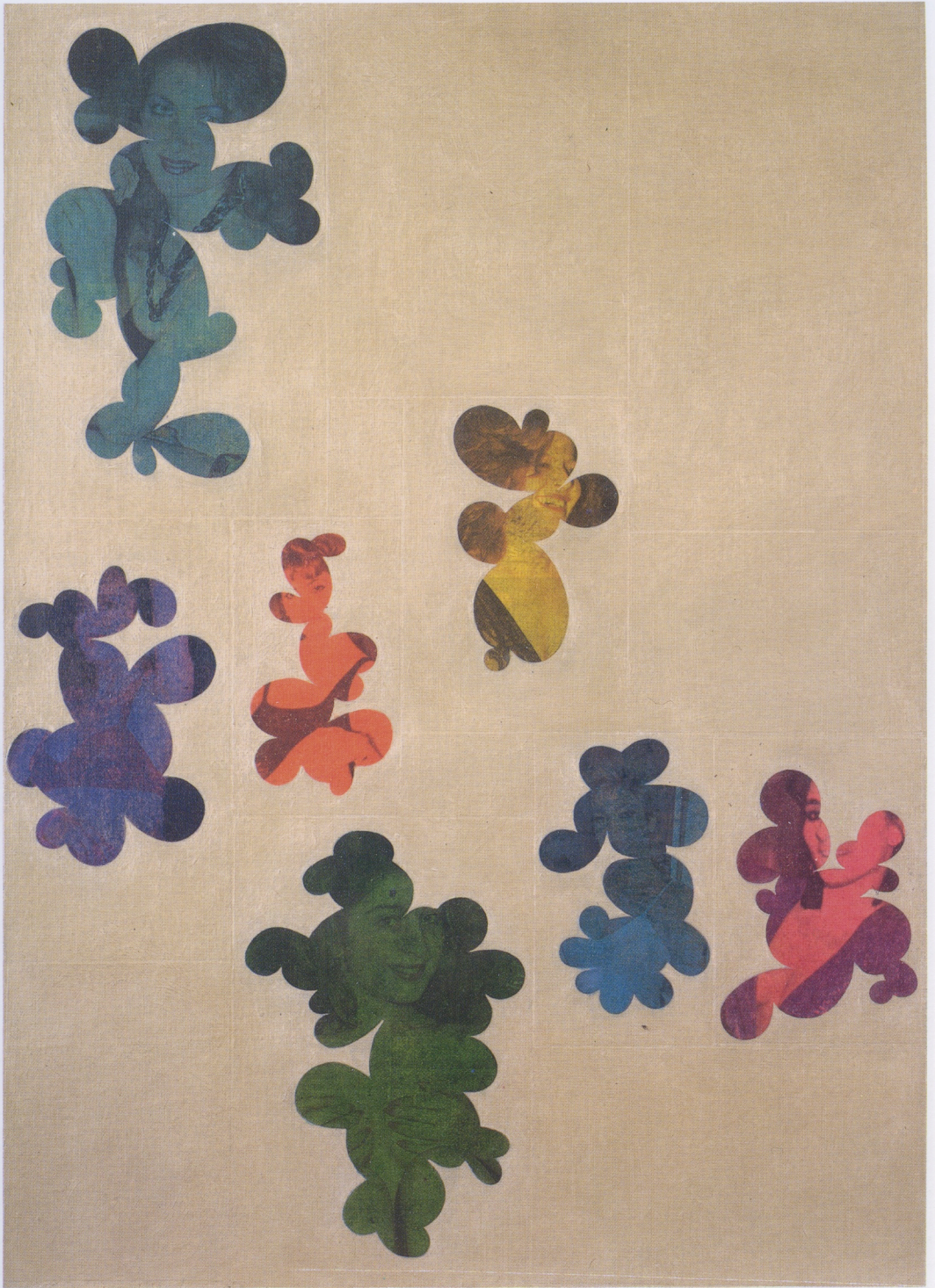
Slightly above human scale, *Untitled, 1988* is constructed from three major elements: an edge-to-edge field of off-color (neither bright nor earth) green, a fat band of pale blue which runs from top to bottom just to the right of center, and three brilliant yellow fuzzy-edged ovals. A reference to Barnett Newman's "zip" paintings, *Untitled, 1988* refuses that artist's serious abstract expressionist heroism. In Moreno's painting the band is too thick — less a zip of light and more a broad flow of matter — the colors lack weight and contrast, and one of the oval shapes divides itself in a sort of painterly mitosis, literally breaking the vertical band in two. Newman's calculated philosophy, which relied on a divestiture from the painting of anything extraneous to a singularly decisive (heroic) gesture, is shown by Moreno to be a difficult (if not impossible) kind of simplicity. In a work from the following year (*Untitled, 1989*), a thinner and more elegant line divides a sedate, paper-paneled canvas. Unlike a Newman "zip", which runs edge-to-edge and literally slices across the surface, Moreno's originates an inch or so above the bottom edge, gathering (as if through roots) energy from the field and growing out of it, a permutation or a denser concentration of matter. Moving toward the top of the off-white field Moreno's line bulges with transparent, bubble-like growths, curving around on itself, expanding a bit, and finally stopping.



Percolator, 1987
oil on canvas, 86 X 53 inches
Photo: Debra Risberg



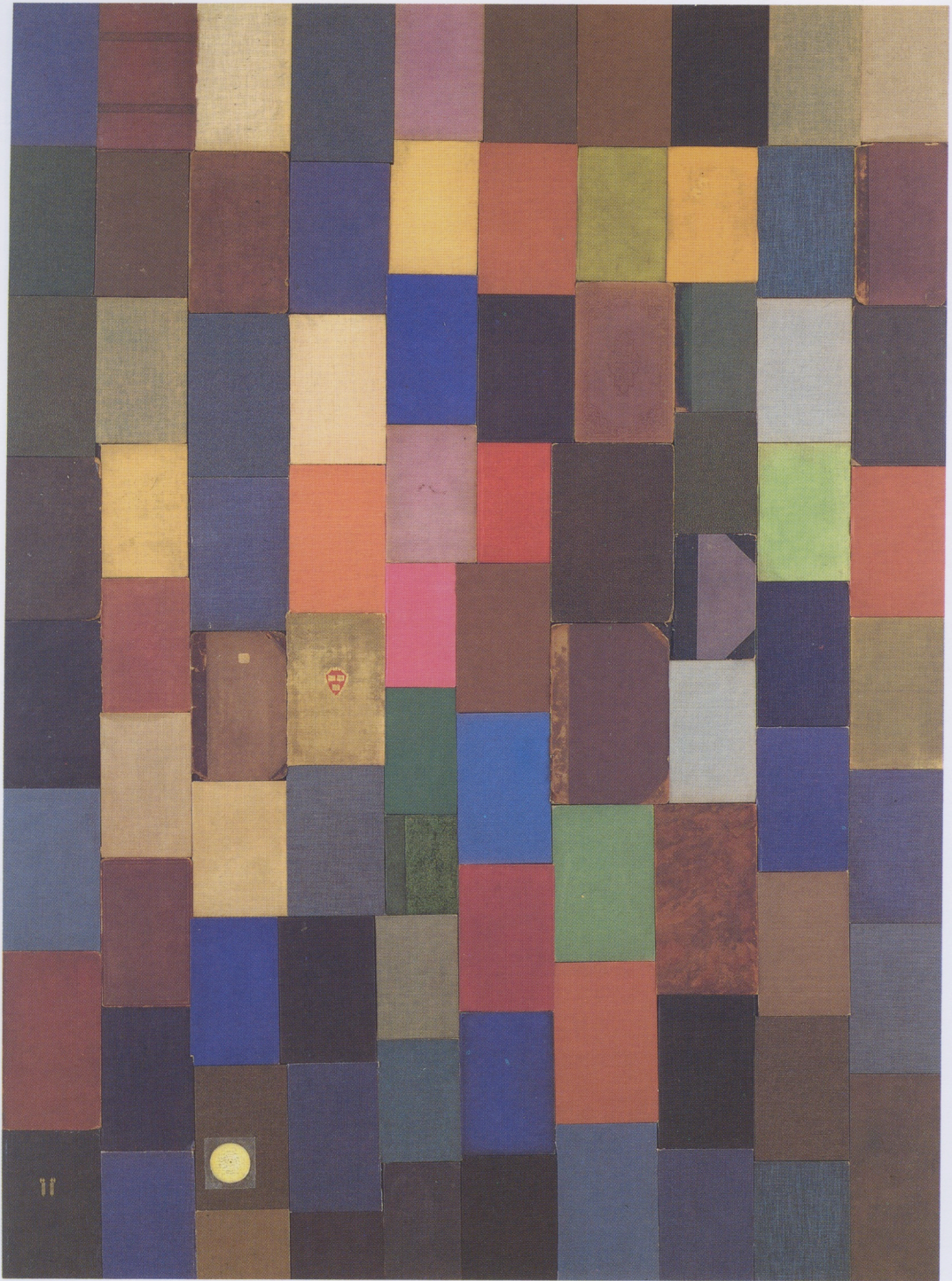
Untitled, 1989
oil, collage on canvas, 74 X 54 inches
Photo: Donald Waller



Untitled, 1990
oil, collage on canvas board, 18 X 13 inches
Photo: Debra Risberg



Untitled, 1990
oil, collage on canvas, 80 X 58 inches
Photo: Debra Risberg



Untitled, 1991
mixed media on canvas, 74 X 54 inches
Photo: Peter Muscato

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Percolator, 1987

oil on canvas, 86 X 53"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1987

oil on canvas, 38 X 29"
collection of Nancy Chunn,
New York

Untitled, 1988

oil on canvas, 74 X 50"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1988

oil on wood, 22.5 X 17.5"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Three Color Stratum, 1988

oil on canvas, 74 X 52"
courtesy of CCA, Chicago and
Feature, New York

Untitled, 1988

oil on canvas, 28 X 18"
collection of Paul Anderson,
Chicago

Untitled, 1989

oil on linen, 32 X 25"
Private Collection, New York,
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1989

oil on canvas, 74 X 48"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1989

oil on wood panel, 41 X 32"
collection of Chase Manhattan
Bank, N.A., New York

Untitled, 1989

oil, mixed media on canvas,
74 X 46"
collection of John Robertshaw,
New York

Untitled, 1989

oil, collage on canvas, 74 X 54"
courtesy of CCA, Chicago and
Feature, New York

Untitled, 1989

oil and collage on canvas, 74 X 50"
collection of The Progressive
Corporation, Cleveland, OH

Untitled, 1989

oil on canvas, 78 X 52"
collection of Paul Anderson,
Chicago

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvasboard,
19.5 X 14.5"
collection of Eileen and Michael
Cohen, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvas, 61 X 41"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera on canvasboard,
22 X 18.5"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera on canvasboard,
22 X 18.5"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvasboard,
19.5 X 14.5"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvas, 80 X 58"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvas and felt on
canvasboard, 93.5 X 58"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, collage on canvasboard,
18 X 13"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera, collage on canvas-
board, 22 X 18.5"
courtesy of CCA, Chicago and
Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera on canvasboard,
22 X 18.5"
courtesy of CCA, Chicago and
Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil on canvas, 19.5 X 14.5"
courtesy of CCA, Chicago and
Feature, New York

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera, collage on canvasboard,
16 X 12"
collection of Comdisco, Inc.,
Rosemont, IL

Untitled, 1990

oil, tempera on board, 19.5 X 14.5"
collection of Jack and Wiesje van
Hulst, Old Tappan, NJ

Untitled, 1991

mixed media on canvas, 74 X 54"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1991

oil, collage on linen, 39 X 28"
courtesy of Feature, New York

Untitled, 1991

shellac, silk, tempera on wood
panel, 22 X 16"
courtesy of Feature, New York

LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

Paul Anderson, Chicago
CCA, Chicago
The Chase Manhattan Bank, N.A., New York
Nancy Chunn, New York
Eileen and Michael Cohen, New York
Comdisco, Inc., Rosemont, IL
Feature, New York
Private Collection, New York
The Progressive Corporation, Cleveland, OH
John Robertshaw, New York
Jack and Wiesje van Hulst, Old Tappan, NJ