AN EXPRESSION OF ORDER:
JULES OLITSKI'S TRADITIONAL PAINTING

BY ALEX GRIMLEY

> We rise upon the earth as wavelets rise upon the ocean. We grow out of her soil as leaves grow from a tree. The wavelets catch the sunbeams separately, the leaves stir when the branches do not move. They realize their own events apart, just as in our own consciousness, when anything becomes emphatic, the background fades from observation. Yet the event works back upon the background, as the wavelet works upon the waves, or as the leaf's movements work upon the sap inside the branch. The whole sea and the whole tree are registers of what has happened, and are different for the wave's and the leaf's action having occurred… So our outlived private experiences, impressed on the whole earth-mind as memories, lead the immortal life of ideas there… being affected by the perceptive experiences of those living then, and affecting the living in their turn.[1]
>
> —William James

"What have I to say in painting?" Olitski asked himself. The question appears at the top of a handwritten, coffee-stained mid-1970s musing by the artist, never published. Questions such as these motivated Olitski. "An expression of order," he hazards: "But what does this order express and of what is it made?" Amidst a couple of false starts, crossed out, he continues: "Of expansions," and then, as if happening suddenly upon the metaphor he was grappling after, he writes in a flowing half-print, half-cursive script: "of an order that permits extensions, like the unfolding of waves—like the 'snap-back' of surface to space and space to surface—at once free and inevitable, as the ever widening ocean waves."[2]

Asked about the practice of his art by interviewers, he would often respond by sharing the questions he asked himself in the studio. In Emile de Antonio's 1972 documentary *Painters Painting*, Olitski walks around a length of painted canvas tacked to his studio floor, gesturing at the work in progress, holding a cigar in one hand and his cat, Kasha, in the other. He describes the process of determining the final size and shape of a painting: "The decision is: Where does it end? Where does it begin to taper off? Where is it still alive?" Later in the interview, Olitski sits with Kasha on his lap. "I find it irresistible to try and go that extra step to see, well, what will happen… if I spray some more varnish on it, spray a whole pool of glop over it," he ponders. The interview ends as Olitski looks up at the camera with a mischievous glint in his eye: "What will happen? What will it look like?"[3]

Olitski found an answer to those questions in a sentence by Ralph Waldo Emerson, from his 1841 essay *Compensation*: "Do the thing, and you shall have the power."[4] Words that had, for him, "an incantatory power."[5] Driven by curiosity, he was a restless artist, constantly experimenting. Olitski worked intuitively, planning nothing, not even the size and shape of a painting, in advance. "Inspiration can't be induced," he once wrote: "The only thing I could hope for was that I would be at work when it came about; so I worked all the time."[6] In a career that spanned seven decades, he worked ceaselessly, chasing after the realization of his vision—a visual vision, he stressed. To this end, nothing was off limits: no color, no texture, no surface no material. He painted with sponges, rollers, brooms, squeegees, mitts, leaf blowers: "You have some vision that has to do with painting and you can't rest until you try it,"[7] he explained. Year after year, the appearance of his painting changed, but underlying it all was a singular vision. "A man's vision is the great fact about him," wrote the nineteenth-century thinker William James: "The whole history of philosophy," or, for that matter, art or any creative pursuit, can be reduced to "so many visions, modes of feeling the whole push, and seeing the whole drift of life, forced on one by one's total character and experience."[8]

The current exhibition organized by Yares Art is the largest and most significant presentation of Jules Olitski's work since his retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art fifty years ago. The gallery's New York City venue features forty major works spanning the painter's career. The oldest painting in this show, *Self-Portrait with a Paint Brush* (fig. 1) dates from eighty years ago; the most recent works, created months before the artist's death, from just over fifteen. These, combined with sixty or so other important paintings concurrently on view at Yares Art, Santa Fe, and the Art Show, New York[9], afford us the opportunity to experience Olitski's work anew, by witnessing the many sustaining visions that he realized over the course of his life in art. Drawing unexpected connections between diverse works from the different stages of the artist's career, this Centennial exhibition allows new generations of viewers, unencumbered by the critical battles of the past, to bring fresh eyes to these paintings. Before reconsidering his achievement, let us first return to his Whitney retrospective, which opened as the artist turned fifty.

Opening Night

September 7, 1973, was an unseasonably warm Friday evening in New York City, the start of the first weekend after Labor Day. Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get it On" was the top song in the country and Muhammad Ali appeared as a guest on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. On the front page of that day's *New York Times*, President Nixon was the subject of four stories—none favorable. Elsewhere in the world, the paper revealed, communists in Cambodia took the city of Kampong Cham. An ominous photograph showed a group of hostages boarding a plane under the watchful eye of a Palestinian commando. Nestled deeper, next to advertisements for the films *Last Tango in Paris* and *Enter the Dragon*, the reporter Fred Ferretti told the readers of his "Going Out Guide": "Tonight you can have your choice of arts passive and otherwise." Among those he promoted: the Erick Hawkins Dance Company was performing to a "revolutionary percussion piece" for 101 novelty instruments at the Guggenheim; an evening of belly dancing was on offer at Lincoln Center; and "Up at the Whitney Museum, 945 Madison Avenue, the first retrospective of the work of abstractionist Jules Olitski opens."[10]

Organized by Kenworth Moffett, then curator of twentieth-century art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the show featured some sixty-two paintings spanning fifteen years of the artist's output, from 1957 to 1972. (fig. 2) Each of the diverse styles that Olitski developed during that period was represented: the heavily encrusted "Matter" paintings of the late '50s; the bold and playful "Core" pictures of the early '60s in which the artist first used the soak-stain technique associated with Color Field painting; the lush, atmospheric sprayed paintings that the artist began in 1965 and continued until the start of the following decade; and a selection of recently completed, nearly monochrome pictures including *Other Flesh – 1* (1972; fig. 3).

Despite their varied appearances, certain shared features unified the array of artworks: prime among them a focus on color as the sole determinant of space and shape, and the relation of painted forms to the bounding edges of the canvas. This focus on literal pictorial parameters and the abstract sensations they elicit was central to both Color Field painting and the critical methodology, "formalism," that took hold in the 1960s. Formalist critics maintained that Modernism in the visual arts had been a more or less linear development in which painting and sculpture had each dispensed with superfluous aspects like figuration and narrative until the essential elements of the medium—color, paint, surface, edge—were all that remained. Thus, formalist criticism detailed with exhaustive precision the subtle pictorial innovations of the Color Field artists, and it was through this lens that Moffett contextualized Olitski's achievement.

Fig. 2 Installation view of the Jules Olitski retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1973. From left to right: *Tender Boogus*, 1987; *Free Departure*, 1966; and *Bat*, 1965. Courtesy of Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Fig. 3 Jules Olitski. *Other Flesh – 1*, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 68 in. (254 x 172.7 cm). Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Olitski and the Sixties in Retrospect

The 1973 retrospective occasioned evaluations of Olitski's work by leading art critics. Reviews were mixed. Favorable commentators focused on painterly details such as nuances of touch and subtleties of color, while recognizing that the quality of Olitski's work remained a contentious issue. Acknowledging that Olitski was "one of the most controversial figures associated with recent formalist art," *ARTnews* reviewer Jeanne Siegel emphasized the unexpected variety that obtained among the works in the show.[11] "Despite their reductive formats, they *never* become monotonous," she wrote: "On the contrary, it is their individuality, the differences from one painting to the next that take one aback."[12] In a similar manner, *Studio International*'s Kenneth Carpenter zeroed in on *Darkness Spread – I* (Pl. p. 87), finding the minute contrasts of facture, color, and sheen of the elements along the painting's bottom edge "indicative of how thoroughly Olitski has mastered color and also of just how thoroughly *painterly* an artist he is."[13] Writing in *The Christian Science Monitor*, Diana Loercher described the subtlety of his recent (1971–72) paintings: "[It is] almost as if he were trying to define the limits of his approach by making the desired effect as difficult to achieve as possible."[14] Siegel cannily observed that "many of Olitski's most subtle effects are the result of inventiveness in regard to tools."[15] This ingenuity was a primary aspect of the abiding intuitiveness of his practice, a characteristic that Carpenter singled out for praise, writing: "Olitski is especially remarkable for his willingness to work with uncertain aims."[16]

Virtually all commentators acknowledged the strong grip that formalist criticism maintained on discussions of the artist and his work: "The problem for the spectator in front of all these Olitskis is not to let the formalists' pragmatism smother the pictures," Thomas Hess wrote in *New York* magazine.[17] In her review for *Art in America*, Barbara Thomsen admitted: "It is apparent that I feel more constrained to respond to what has already been written about Olitski's work than I do to the work itself as presented in this show."[18] Moving beyond the question of formalist criticism, these commentators also emphasized aspects of his oeuvre that had remained under-discussed in previous writing on the artist. Three somewhat related issues in particular stand out: the overriding qualities of playfulness and sensuality in Olitski's work; an iconoclastic quality relative to the rigor of contemporaneous abstraction; the persistence of his challenge to accepted standards and boundaries of "good taste"; and finally, the larger issue of abstract art's disengagement from social and political concerns.

Fig. 4 Kenneth Noland. *Sunwise*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 76 × 76 in. (193 × 193 cm). The Kenneth Noland Foundation.

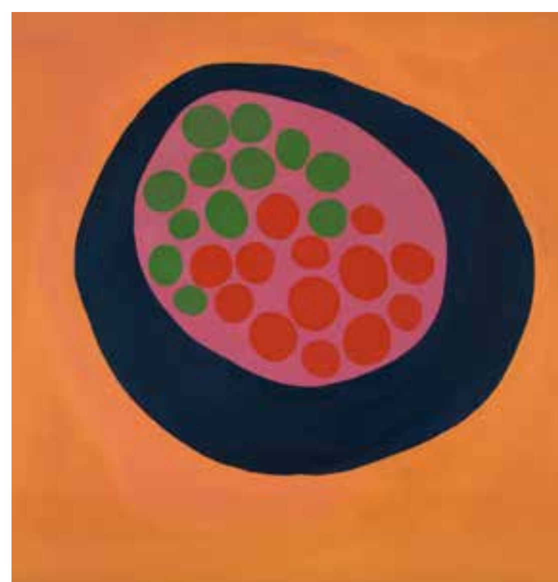

Fig. 5 Jules Olitski. *Prince Patutszky Pleasures*, 1962. Acrylic on canvas, 89 ¾ × 88 in. (228 × 223.5 cm). Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

Renegade Formalism

"It is no secret," Barbara Thomsen wrote in *Art in America*, "that Olitski's temperament has long been antagonistic to the deductive structuralism with which he has been made to rub shoulders in such exhibitions as *Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, Stella*."[19] A comparison between the early 1960s work of Olitski and Kenneth Noland is instructive here. When he made the shift to stain painting in 1960, Olitski began working, as Noland was, with circular forms. But the similarity ends there. Noland's early '60s "Circles" were spare, centered, symmetrical: a "self-cancelling structure" that would foreground the color harmonies that were the true subject of his work (fig. 4) In Olitski's painting from those years, circular shapes also prevail; but his are fragmentary, shifting, elliptical, oval, even ovular (fig. 5).

In the context of Noland and fellow Washington Color School artist Morris Louis's stately compositions, Olitski's paintings were aberrant, unorthodox. For example, *Black Magic Nut* (1964; Pl. p. 57), is a study in exaggerated asymmetry, where three small, boldly colored circles swim in an expanse of raw canvas, holding their own against a monolithic curtain of black that covers most of the right half of the surface. Outrageous color and playful drawing characterize his work of the early 1960s, as in *AB* (1960; Pl. p. 37), where, wrapped within a wavering warmly colored form, two maroon nuclei divide themselves into separate cells, as if near the end of a process of mitosis. In contrast to the spatial sequences of Noland's targets, the encircled circles of *Doll Walker* (1961; Pl. p. 41) and *Untitled #14* (1961–62; Pl. p. 40), sweetly colored and subtly differentiated, pulse among one another on a flat plane, like elements on a magnetic field. If Noland's circles were ostensibly involved in geometry, Olitski's took up cytology: they hover, they glom, they divide.[20]

The sensuality of Olitski's work further distinguished it from the austerity of his Color Field contemporaries. The haptic quality of his stain paintings is overwhelming—not in the form of autographic or indexical mark-making, but as an embodiment of physical contact. That is, the shapes themselves seem active, energized. They curl into one another, hugging, spooning, and canoodling: for example, the grasping blue form of *Cleopatra Flesh* (1962; Pl. p. 49) that reaches toward a small red circle, or, in *Green Jazz* (1962; Pl. p. 44), the tension among shapes as they wrap around the painting's central circle, almost but never quite touching. Olitski's titles underline the sensuousness of the paintings: *Ishtar Bra Box* (1962), *Ashtart Thigh* (1961), *Emma Amour* (1964), *Flaming Passion of Beverly Torrid* (1964).

Joseph Masheck's review in the September 1973 issue of *Artforum* was among the more incisive commentaries, touching on several of the issues above. "Olitski's predilection for flavorful tonality emerged within the context of a lighthearted and mock-Rococo indulgence contemporaneous with Pop art," the critic wrote: "Perhaps there is a whole abstractedly Pop side to Olitski."[21] Harold Rosenberg, writing in the *New Yorker*, characterized the artist's palette by its "candy-box colors [and] fever-flushed firmaments."[22] Here again, Olitski's work presents a strong contrast to his contemporaries. Frank Stella utilized the commercial colors of industrial paints, while Noland created tonal harmonies and sequences, with hues that called to mind natural phenomena. In his stain paintings of the early '60s Olitski often worked with brash contrasts of pungent colors: lavender, lemon, teal, mauve.

A parallel to Olitski's heterodox use of color is found in the work of his contemporary Donald Judd. The Minimalist artists with which Judd was associated tended to work in black, white, and gray—a neutral color palette, which coincided with the title of the first museum exhibition of Minimalist art in the US.[23] Judd's wall-mounted "Progressions," were often

Fig. 6 Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1968. Stainless steel and amber Plexiglas, 10 units. Each unit: 6 × 27 $^{1}/_{16}$ × 24 $^{1}/_{16}$ in. (15.2 × 68.6 × 61 cm); 6 × 27 × 24 in. (15.3 × 68.6 × 61 cm). Art Institute of Chicago.

covered in gleaming lacquers in colors ranging from chartreuse to Harley Davidson Hi-Fi Purple.[24] In his "Stacks," Judd employed sheets of transparent Plexiglas that cast shadows of glowing amber, violet, or light green (fig. 6). Judd and Olitski faced opposing extremes of critical reaction. The contingent effects of light and color in Judd's work were all too frequently ignored at the expense of its seeming coldness and austerity, while, as shown in the reviews above, the sensuous intensity of Olitski's palette led critics to dismiss his engagement with pictorial structure.[25]

Margins of Taste

> It is cool these days to deal in all kinds of grotesquerie, but no one yet can paint in worse taste than Olitski and command such a widespread reaction because of it.[26]
>
> — Barbara Thomsen

More complicated than Olitski's playfulness and eroticism was his engagement with commonly recognized standards of taste. Thomsen clearly stated the issue: "[His] paintings explore realms of taste with an audacity nearly impossible to assimilate in the way all other brands of shocking art are assimilated."[27] The question of taste had been broached by one of the

artist's most steadfast critical champions, the formalist Michael Fried, in his essay for the 1965 exhibition, *Three American Painters* at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. There, Olitski awkwardly "rubbed shoulders" with the geometrically precise painters Noland and Stella. Fried contended that, "Olitski is involved with both 'advanced' taste, the expectations of those who admire and support modernist painting, and also—something to be regarded as 'bad' taste—the exploitation of effects that, for better or worse, are no longer permissible.[28]

In the paintings included in the Harvard exhibition, Olitski was still working with the materials (diluted Magna and Aquatec) and applications (soaking and staining) shared by other Color Field painters. Put another way, he was still more or less a "conventional" painter, working within the boundaries of what was *already thought* to be impermissible. By that year's end, Olitski would leave soaks, stains, and even shapes themselves behind, introducing a new atmosphere of vaporous sprayed paintings with cosmetic colors like the sherbet tones of *Pink Alert* (1966; Pl. p. 69) as well as hues in extreme temperatures, like the neon pink of *Hot Majesty* (1965; Pl. p. 62) and simmering shades of orange in *Outlaw* (1966; Pl. p. 67).

Barbara Thomsen and Hilton Kramer, each in their own way, characterized the taste inherent in Olitski's playful palette, sensuous textures, and erotic titles, as an obvious contradiction to the formalist intellectualism they took—incorrectly—to be his aesthetic aim. "One wonders whether Olitski hasn't proved, at times, a trying case for his enamored critics," Thomsen wrote: "He combines an unnatural mixture of formality and finery with an unabashed indulgence in the lush instinct for play."[29] While Thomsen wrote approvingly of the quirky, jazzy character of Olitski's paintings, those same elements left Kramer, reviewing the show for the *New York Times*, cold: "The paintings have at times a certain decorative appeal," he wrote. "But it is the appeal of something superficial, something merely pretty. Beyond the prettiness of the color, one feels only the cold decisions and the mechanical calculations of an artist working to fulfill a narrow historical formula."[30]

Like Kramer, several critics suggested that Olitski was working at cross-purposes. Joseph Masheck's review in *Artforum* illuminated this view most thoroughly: "The verve of the color allows for a witty play on bourgeois good taste versus hearty vulgarity," he wrote: "Many of Olitski's works have an air of earnest opulence that is not altogether dignified, despite the fact that taste and luxury seem to be a central concern." There is in the work "a reticence struggling against vital desires," with the result having "a repressed character." Thus, Olitski was operating in self-contradiction, toward what Masheck called "the posh and the smart," and against his otherwise crass instincts.[31] The underlying assumption, then, was that the artist's incursions into bad taste were rooted either in ignorance or naiveté. Like the tastes of the *nouveau riche*, Olitski's manner was, to Masheck, earnest and opulent, not dignified.

How are we to reconcile these disparate readings of Olitski's project: Was he an arch-formalist, making doctrinaire paintings to fit into an ever-narrowing critical standard? Or was he an iconoclastic presence in the Color Field canon, motivated by humor, eroticism, and play? How could this group of paintings be both decorative and superficial, "merely pretty" *and*, as the reviewer for *Newsday* wrote, composed of "great voids of thickly stippled paint, like a lower-class apartment house wall,"[32] resembling "spotted linoleum or dried milk stains?"[33] Consider a third possibility: Could all of these observations have been partially true? Might Olitski have been motivated in equal parts by formalist concerns, pleasure and prettiness, and exaggeratedly bad taste? What if the decorative and the disgusting weren't opposed to each other: could the coexistence of these two qualities be Olitski's attempt to synthesize them into something else, something critical?

Homeopathic Painting

> Any number of things happened to combine to vulgarize the thing; but vulgarizing a thing does not really make it vulgar.[34]
>
> — G. K. Chesterton

Olitski's first critical champion, the art critic Clement Greenberg, noted as early as 1962 "the shocked distaste that the painting of Jules Olitski elicits."[35] The occasion of his 1973 retrospective exhibition exacerbated critical incomprehension and repulsion with respect to the artist's engagement with standards of taste—this during a period that saw artists foregrounding sex organs and using human waste as material. The abjection and debasement characteristic of art from the late '60s and afterward—Piero Manzoni's cans of shit (1961), Vito Acconci's masturbation work *Seedbed* (1972), Lynda Benglis's nude, dildo-wielding portrait in *Artforum* (1974) may have shocked the intended parties—the uninitiated public, the pious, and the political class—but these qualities hardly stalled the work's integration into the canon of contemporary art. Greenberg explained this dynamic in his 1971 essay, "Counter Avant-Garde," distinguishing what he called "avant-gard*ism*" from the ongoing project of advanced art carried on by the genuine avant-garde:

> With avant-gard*ism*, the shocking and scandalizing became embraced as ends in themselves. The first bewildered reaction was to be the sole one; the avant-gardist work was to hold nothing latent, but deliver itself immediately, and the impact more often than not, was to be on cultural habits and expectations, social ones too, rather than on taste.[36]

The challenge of Olitski's work, by contrast, was a challenge *addressed to taste*; its effect wasn't "avant-gard*ist*" or merely vulgar. He pushed his art toward the tacky and the tawdry, the garish and the gauche, in painterly expressions offered with unapologetic confidence and authority. The substance of Olitski's work was with taste "conceived of as a potentially creative force," Michael Fried wrote, "and nothing prompts the accusation of tastelessness faster than taste used creatively."[37] It is, finally, with Olitski's creative use of taste that one finds the most incisive and critical aspect of his practice, running not only through his work of the 1960s and '70s but throughout the entirety of his artistic career.

Olitski's art represented a homeopathic critique of the incursion of pop culture and material culture into the realm of high art. Homeopathy in this sense refers to the artist's engagement with qualities toxic to high art: the tacky, middlebrow styles, colors, and textures of contemporaneous material culture used not as ends in themselves (as in Pop Art) but as a means to reach the broader public (fig. 7). These elements, grossly and aggressively exaggerated, painted with recognizably pedestrian materials like industrial brooms, paint rollers, and epoxy flooring flakes, serve to capture the viewer and enliven and sharpen their aesthetic intuition, as if despite themselves. In a number of penetrating essays, art historian Richard Shiff has elaborated the notion of homeopathy found in Greenberg's art criticism of the 1940s:

> He associated American materialism with the pronounced materiality of [postwar] American art. Greenberg understood that this type of painting had come to represent the empiricist mentality, flattened emotion, and coarsened sensation that modern social and material conditions had for decades been inducing not only in artists, but also in the broad public.... The only way to shock a materialistic culture out of its restrictive cultural identity was through a radically homeopathic appeal to its materialism.[38]

Fig. 7 Jules Olitski. *Arisu 1*, 1976. Acrylic on canvas, 60 × 40 in. (152.4 × 141.6 cm). Private Collection.

Olitski's art thus functions as a corrective to both the dulling, desensitizing effect that results from the constant bombardment of imagery in mass media and commercial advertising, and to high art's surrender to this condition in the form of Pop, Op, Photorealism, and the other styles of "novelty art" that emerged in the 1960s. From this perspective, these artists and their advocates had relaxed their resistance to the stultifying economic conditions of the society in an attempt to capitalize on the ever-expanding art market. On the contrary, what characterized modernism in the arts ("modernism" being a catchall term to refer to the most ambitious and advanced, inspired and effective, challenging and fecund artistic pursuits) was for Greenberg its:

> ...continuing endeavor to stem the decline of aesthetic standards threatened by the relative democratization of culture under industrialism... [What gives Modernism] its place and identity more than anything else is its response to a heightened sense of threats to aesthetic value: threats from the social and material ambiance, from the temper of the times, all conveyed through the middlebrow demands of a new and open cultural market, entrenched and dominant, without significant competition.[39]

This decline of "aesthetic standards" affected not just the fine arts, but society at large. The "democratization of culture," was, for Greenberg, the source of ongoing "threats to aesthetic value" that Modernism sought to quell. At its best the openness of a democratized culture made Olitski's "high art" available the broad public; at its worst, democratization laid the groundwork for mass production, the homogenization of cultural output, and the abolition of hierarchical values, aesthetic and otherwise. Though later commentators would identify a critical edge in Pop art, in its original context in the 1960s, Pop led the way toward the commodification of art, the factory-style studio, and other lamentable trends that remain with us to this day. At the same time, the latent sociopolitical import of Color Field abstraction was lost on its contemporaries, who lumped the art together with Greenberg's writing and formalist criticism more generally and indicted all of it with the high crime of political disengagement.[40]

In a blistering critique of formalism and abstract painting, Australian-born conceptualist Ian Burn bemoaned that "the tradition of formalism [has] eradicated every possibility of a social practice in relation to art."[41] The conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth concurred, singling out Olitski and Kenneth Noland by name and declaring that "for them, art and politics were separate and their practice reflected that."[42] While neither of those artists used their art to broadcast political concerns, it does not follow that their art was apolitical. The social intervention of their paintings took place on the level of the individual rather than the collective. That is, if

Fig. **8** Jules Olitski. *Pleasure Ground – 3*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 75 × 109 in. (190.5 × 276.9 cm). Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Fig. 9 Jules Olitski. *Broom Vision – 2*, 1980. Acrylic on canvas, 32 × 92 ½ in. (81.3 × 235 cm). Private Collection.

conceptualists and other socially engaged artists used their platforms to raise consciousness or draw public attention to particular issues, the Color Field painters created art that individuated the viewer and vivified their senses. Olitski's work in particular presents the viewer with complex sensorial experiences—bold in impact, clear and direct in their address. Renewing and rejuvenating well-established artistic conventions, his paintings offer the viewer new avenues for active, embodied perception. The effect of his painting is to concentrate attention, to heighten awareness of sensory stimulation, and to sharpen visual acuity. The social consequence of his work is to increase the agency of each individual viewer by amplifying and sensitizing their perception, uniting visual intuition to mental comprehension—a valuable corrective in a period characterized by mass production and cultural homogenization. Olitski was clear about his goals:

> Art is about communication. You're trying to communicate. You don't paint for yourself, you paint for the someone whom you will speak to and who will hear you, who will see…. Art has to alter you in some good sense. Great art in its most profound meaning means it will change our lives. It will give us a new way of seeing, of experiencing.[43]

On the role of artist in society, Olitski was unequivocal: "There is a responsibility, maybe even a heightened responsibility, for the creative artist, because they're speaking to us on a very important level. [They're doing] something that heightens our lives."[44]

Olitski continued painting in a homeopathic vein throughout the 1970s and into the early '90s, employing pedestrian materials, exaggerated surface textures, a color palette that ranged from lurid to saccharine, and, most importantly, a mischievous sense of taste.[45] In the range of muted earth tones of Olitski's '70s paintings, it is possible to see allusions to French Rococo painter Jean-Antoine Watteau, but it's just as possible to envision Formica countertops and faux-wood paneling[46] (fig. 8). Olitski's restless experimentation with new paint materials and tools was another way he kept current with visual and material culture. As quickly as new acrylic mediums, pastes, and polymers were developed, Olitski was finding ways to use them excessively and aggressively. In the 1970s, using paint extenders, he found he could run gobs of paint through a sprayer and pulverize the canvas surface, as in the pockmarked surface of *Yarmuk Wall – 5* (1975; Pl. p. 94). No sooner did acrylic gels hit the market than he started slathering them across acrid-tinted canvases, in near-monochromatic slabs like *Darkness Spread – 1* glazed so pallidly as to seem beyond description.

Subsequently, the textures and colors of Olitski's work of the 1980s reflected the opulence and excess of that period, though the gleaming, glistening metallic pigments he used at the start of the decade (fig. 9) would come to look like an exercise in restraint by the middle of the decade, when his project of recapitulating the worst taste of the time reached its apotheosis in a series of paintings on diamond shaped, neon-colored sheets of mirrored Plexiglas (fig. 10). Though Olitski was never a tastemaker, his body of work amounts to a chronicle of the changing tastes of the second half of the twentieth century. Its appearance changed dramatically, year to year, season to season, sometimes painting to painting, as can be seen in the three works from 1988 in the current exhibition: *Mochee* (Pl. p. 127) with its sinuous scrawls; the dark and dramatic *Storm Goddess* (Pl. p. 129); and the exuberance and radiance of *The Krystina Mystery* (Pl. p. 134). In a late interview, he said that one had to be willing to take risks in painting—to risk creating the world's most beautiful painting, one had to be prepared to end up with the world's ugliest painting. In Olitski's work these two horizons became one and the same.

Fig. 10 Jules Olitski. *Rake's Progress – 6*, 1987. Acrylic and oil-based enamel on Plexiglas, 69 ¼ × 69 ¼ in. (175.9 × 175.9 cm). Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Radical Conservatives

> Little by little the conservative is becoming quite radical.[47]
>
> —Morton Feldman

The composer Morton Feldman, roughly contemporaneous with Olitski, was an astute observer of the visual arts. In a number of perceptive articles written for *ARTnews* and *Art in America* in the late '60s and early '70s, he described the dynamics at work in painting of the time, emphasizing aspects of sensuousness and materiality, and illustrating the searching, intuitive method that gave rise to this art—a method that entailed being reflexive to the work as it developed rather than telegraphing it at the outset. "Music is not painting," he wrote: "but it can learn from this more perceptive temperament that waits and observes the inherent mystery of its materials."[48] Like Olitski, who described his experience in the studio as "being out of one's self, truly out of my self," when, "somewhere along, in the making, the painting makes its own demands,"[49] Feldman observed that "[t]he painter achieves mastery by allowing what he is doing to be itself. In a way, he must step aside in order to be in control."[50]

In his mid-1960s Spray paintings, Olitski developed a manner of working that allowed a painting to take shape based on color alone. Working on an expanse of canvas taped to his studio floor, he would spray, sweep, and spread materials across the surface, then crop or cut the painting from that larger surface. Unlike so much previous painting, in which an artist began with the precise boundaries of a canvas or panel, Olitski would find the scale and size of a painting through the stages of working on it. Determining its dimensions was the last step in his process rather than the first. Feldman intuitively understood this painterly process: "A painter will perhaps agree that a color insists on being a certain size, regardless of his wishes," he mused.[51] The issue then became "to *find* your structure and your subject by becoming involved with the material rather than [creating a structure] a priori," he explained.[52] Finding a structure meant *arriving* at order, establishing a sense of cohesion based on the necessities of the material itself, rather than fixing or imposing order beforehand. "Material suggests a certain treatment," Feldman observed.[53] Thus, Olitski's mark-making along the edges of a picture—sometimes boldly asserted as in *Suspension* (1967, Pl. p. 72) other times quietly contrasting as in

Cythera – 5 (1977; Pl. p. 100), serves a structural as well as an aesthetic function, indexing the artist's drawing up of the boundaries of the painting after having worked over the large spread of canvas.

In the early 1970s, the boldly colored spatiality of his Spray paintings had given way to decidedly flat, muted surfaces. Olitski pushed pictorial incident to the far edges of the canvases, as in *First Love – 9* (1972; Pl. p. 85) and *Divine Hostage – 21* (1973; Pl. p. 86). A long painterly mark is inscribed along the bottom edge of the former picture, with the left corner defined by the meeting of small pale light blue and ochre bands. And in the latter work, an ever-shifting line meanders around the edges, with thin scrawls at the top, bolder brush marks on the right edge, and a range of colors scraped along the bottom. In addition to the structural aspect mentioned above, the edge-drawing common to Olitski's work in late '60s and early-to-mid '70s serves a crucial aesthetic function: as a vivid register of the artist's hand, it illuminates by contrast the color, facture, and texture of the interior of the painting.

Conservative in temperament but experimental in practice, Olitski didn't conceptualize his work. The questions he asked of himself were practical and straightforward: at the outset, "How to make the vision real?"[54] Then, after painting, considering the results, "Does it work?"[55] He sought insight into these questions only through the activity of painting. Feldman captured the mechanism of this intuitive process, describing it as "action and thought as a simultaneity,"[56] and likening it to anxiety: "The anxiety of art is a special condition, not actually an anxiety at all, though it has all the aspects of one. It comes about when art becomes separate from what we know, when it speaks with its own emotion."[57] Lecturing a couple years later, Olitski echoed Feldman's thesis: "We want what we don't know in art… Originality does not come about by conscious, deliberate thinking. It comes about almost as if by itself in the making of the work."[58]

Throughout the 1980s, Feldman and Olitski entrenched their art as a bulwark against the deluge of postmodernism and cultural relativism, affirming the continuing importance of artistic conventions and aesthetic standards. Olitski welcomed this station: "Creative energy can thrive," he wrote, "when there is a culture to go up against."[59] In the context of a cultural moment defined by process, conceptualism, social engagement, and interdisciplinarity, their reassertion of tradition and excellence subverted the status quo, turning both artists into countercultural figures. Greenberg articulated this unlikely situation: "What is authentically and importantly new [in recent art] comes in softly as it were, surreptitiously—in the guises, seemingly, of the old," he wrote.[60] Lecturing to an international group of students in the early 1980s, Feldman cautioned: "The people who you think are radicals might really be conservatives, [and] the people who you think are conservative might really be radical."[61]

Fig. 11 Jules Olitski. *Eminent Domain – 4*, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 118 x 42 ½ in. (299.7 x 108 cm). Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Fig. 12 Rembrandt van Rijn. *A Woman Bathing in a Stream*, 1606–69. Oil on oak, 24 1/3 x 119 1/3 in. (61.8 x 47 cm). National Gallery of Art, London.

Fig. 13 Jules Olitski. *Camillus Banished – 15*, 1974. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 47 in. (213.4 x 119.4 cm). Collection of Audrey and David Mirvish, Toronto.

Eternal Traditions

> Faced with [these] pictures, one realizes what a radical statement Olitski has been able to make, motivated as he is by conservative ambitions and working with traditional means transformed.[62]
>
> — Charles W. Millard

"To my mind art is a democratic situation," Jules Olitski wrote in 1975: "anyone can look at it or make it."[63] It was a theme that he returned to again and again. There was no elitism in art, or, if there was, it was an "elite available to *everyone*."[64] When he wrote these sentences, responding to a series of questions posed by *Partisan Review*, Olitski was creating what were seemingly his most difficult works to date: massive walls of muted color, often speckled and spattered, with streaks of paint sometimes meandering around the edges, other times slashing down the center of the surface. It is easy to get captured by the recognizable marks of rollers and brooms, as in *Repahim Shade – 2* (1974–75, Pl. p. 93) or the all-over splatter of sprayed paint in a work like *Iron High – 5* (1975; Pl. p. 95). Perhaps as common an experience is to be mystified by the artist's otherworldly color in *The Queen Kandace – 4* (1977; Pl. p. 100), or the virtually indescribable surface Olitski creates in paintings like *Jan Three* (1982; Pl. p. 110). In short, qualities both quotidian and alien commingle in the artist's works of the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s.

And yet, throughout this period, Olitski stressed the open, available aspect of his art. How, then, can we reconcile the tough, obdurate quality of his paintings with the democratic accessibility the artist discussed? Several avenues open to the viewer when considering the artist's observation of pictorial conventions and artistic tradition generally. "I feel related to tradition, to previous art," he remarked.[65] "New art comes from past art—in other words, from tradition. Modern art is the most recent turn in the path of traditional art. It is not, so to speak, a new tradition. Modern art is inconceivable by itself."[66] The historical conventions of picture-making were not a limiting condition for Olitski as they were for artists who turned from painting to three-dimensional work in the 1960s, but rather a motivating factor. Two of the main currents that underlie the whole of Olitski's painting are its engagement with the techniques of Old Master painting and the persistence of naturalism as both a pictorial end and a painterly means. His encounter as a teenager with Rembrandt's art at the 1939 New York World's Fair became a perennial source of inspiration, setting a standard and a challenge of aesthetic excellence. At different times, revelations that came to him from other Old Masters inspired his work, El Greco and Delacroix prime among them.

Around 1974, Olitski introduced a new painterliness to his work, using an array of newly developed gels, pastes, glazes, and polymers to expand the effects of acrylic paints (fig. 11). An interviewer, visiting the artist's studio in June of that year, noticed a large reproduction of Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* (ca. 1654; fig. 12) on the wall and told Olitski he sensed a connection between the Rembrandt and the artist's recent work. "I hope you're right," Olitski replied, laughing: "You can't translate its qualities into a work consciously, but it has a lot of chiaroscuro in it. And maybe that's where I'm going now. I would like to bring chiaroscuro back into my painting (fig. 13)."[67] Working in a large, newly constructed studio on Bear Island in Lake Winnipesaukee, New Hampshire, during a period of restless experimentation and tremendous productivity, there emerged in

Olitski's paintings of the mid-1970s an efflorescence of centuries-old techniques thought lost to abstract painting. Not only chiaroscuro but underpainting, modeling, half-tones, impasto, tinting, glazing—all returned, writ large, recontextualized as abstraction and presented in isolation without the steppingstone (or stumbling block) of figuration. The avenue opened to Olitski by his rejuvenation of Old Master techniques sustained his practice throughout the decades to come.

Repahim Shade – 2 is an early example of the artist's exploration of chiaroscuro. Using translucent paint, Olitski covered areas of the surface in patches of dark brown made opaque by the buildup of pigment; elsewhere, he spread the paint thinly, so that the painting's cream-colored background emanates from beneath the dark glaze. These zones of greater or lesser accumulation of paint generate gradations of light and darkness. Though these shadows serve no representational end, they register in the same manner as the chiaroscuro of Rembrandt's *Polish Rider* (ca.1650s; p. 120)— a favorite painting of Olitski's—in which an enveloping architecture of glowing light pushes some areas toward the viewer and pulls other areas deep into the recesses of pictorial space. "In representational art, you can see a Madonna holding a child, or Jesus being taken from the cross," Olitski told an interviewer in 1990: "In abstract painting, you can't point at that. But the *same things are going on* in an abstract painting as in a Rembrandt: shaping the structure of the painting."[68] Working toward a similar end but with different means, particles of light pulse as if from within the lunar surface of *Iron High – 5*. The slate gray ground, visible near the bottom corners, imparts a cool tonality to the milky glaze sprayed across the surface that appears illuminated by a seemingly infinite gradation of phosphorescence. Art historian Charles Millard describes the manner in which chiaroscuro functions in these paintings: "[T]he object defining and defined by light in traditional chiaroscuro…had been dropped from the picture completely, leaving pure light miraculously inflected from highlight to dark without the presence of an interrupting object."[69]

The spray technique that Olitski advanced in the mid-1960s amounts to a transformation of Renaissance *sfumato*, the blending of colors without contours. In his "Curtain" paintings of 1963-64, Olitski used rollers and sponges to spread large areas of stained color, blending them as seamlessly as the medium would allow (fig. 14). *Three Rectangles* (1964; Pl. p. 61) features several shades of cadmium orange and cadmium yellow, paler near the left center, increasing in saturation to the right. To make a painting structured entirely by color, he felt, would necessitate the elimination of drawing: lines bound shapes and forms, which in turn become a composition of related parts. Though he tried to minimize evidence of transitions between shades and hues in *Three Rectangles* and other "Curtain" pictures, these traces seem always to remain. When, late in 1964, he began painting with a compressed air spray gun, he was able to more fully realize this pictorial aim. The blazing pink of *Hot Majesty*, for example, gives way to fuchsia around its edges, darkening to indigo in the top right corner. Boundaries between colors are totally dissolved. Spraying also allowed Olitski to include a more expansive range of colors within a single painting. In *Tut Thief* (1965; Pl. p. 63) tones shift from warm, muted yellows and oranges to cooler hues—purples, blues, and the suggestion of green—that encroach from the edges. As in *Hot Majesty*, it is as if the central expanse of color is suffused with its own shadow.

Fig. 14 Jules Olitski. *Hot Ticket*, 1964. Acrylic on canvas, 139 x 81 in. (353.1 x 205.7 cm). Private Collection.

The range of effects facilitated by Olitski's sprayed *sfumato* preoccupied the artist for years to come. Working on near-monochrome painting the early '70s, he used the spray gun to execute nearly imperceptible gradations between related colors. In *First Love – 9*, the accumulation of milky off-white paint creates large bright and opaque zones in the center. Near the bottom edge, where the paint application is less dense, the color becomes cooler. A warmer, cream-colored tone enters from the right edge and blends into the larger field almost microscopically. Spraying afforded Olitski new ways to suggest degrees of space, light, and volume. In *Sargon's Dream – 3* (1981; Pl. p. 103), for example, a warm magenta enters along the

left edge, and more faintly, on the right and at the bottom of the picture, hinting at a surface and submerging an ultramarine passage into the depths of the picture. *Second Stride* (1970; Pl. p. 80) glimmers with a flaxen yellow glow; in contrast to the fine-grained shades of *Tut Thief* made five years earlier, this later picture transforms light into something palpable, tactile, heavy with its own substance. Here, the saturation of paint near the top of the canvas corresponds to the intensity of its brightness. In contrast, the overall dark spray in *Night Rider* (1983; Pl. p. 116) turns its ruggedly textured surface into an agile rhythm of dampened light. Hints of golden light appear woven throughout the surface but are engulfed by a spray of shade.

The extent of Olitski's radical rethinking of how to employ Old Master techniques to abstract ends is again evident in a pair of works from the early 1980s, *Jan Three* and *Second Fate* (both 1982; Pl. pp. 110, 111). A warm and effulgent ochre appears to glow deep within the surface of *Jan Three*, as if alit from afar. From the effervescent bottom right corner, the composition takes shape. The blue spray that covers the extent of the surface creates a vast range of tones—tints of periwinkle land atop bright white splatters and shades of indigo cover areas of the darker background. The several campaigns of sweeping, splattering, and spraying converge as if in a single expansive gesture that takes possession of the surface. Similar to Rembrandt's chiaroscuro in the painting *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (1647; fig. 15), in which a gradual heightening of light illuminates a space distant from the viewer, *Jan Three* affords the viewer a glimpse into vast pictorial depth, an almost cosmic space.

Though similarly sized, with a color palette and gestural composition related to *Jan Three*, Olitski presents a sharper and dramatic structure of light and shade in *Second Fate.* Thick spatters of cobalt blue and metallic silver, made warm by a blend of pale pink, swoop in from the top right corner and traverse the canvas diagonally. The contrast between all elements is stark; the silver tones enter the picture like a beam of light, with fluttering shades of blue surrounding it like a shadow. All of this remains distinct from the black ground, visible throughout, upon which these colors lie. Departing from the subtleties of chiaroscuro in *Jan Three*, the bold pictorial light of *Second Fate* is nearer to the *tenebroso* of Caravaggio's *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, (ca. 1595–96; fig. 16).

On a trip to Toledo, Spain, in the early 1990s, Olitski saw several paintings by El Greco captured his attention, most notably the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (ca. 1607–13; fig.17). Spreading paint by hand with a fuzzy painter's mitt, Olitski translated El Greco's dramatic modeling—as in the garments of the Virgin and Angels, where folds of blue, red, and tan fabric all shine with highlights of nearly pure white—into a comprehensive abstract language. In *Code of Shem*, *Ark Dancer*, and *Lives of Angels* (all 1990; Pl. pp. 136, 137, 139). Olitski literalizes the stark contrasts of light and shade of El Greco's painting in dramatically swooping gestures of inches-thick impasto. Despite their being the most densely textured and physical paintings the artist ever created, the "Mitt" paintings afford some of the most subtle, fleeting visual effects to be found in his oeuvre. Throughout these pictures, individual colors blend into crests of metallic sheen, with interference pigments shifting in hue and radiance, sinking into valleys of sprayed darker hues that evoke shadowy terrains. Olitski's transformation of traditional techniques links his art to the past while projecting into the future. Lecturing in 1975, he told an audience: "Our art, one hopes, will be the traditional art of another time."[70]

Fig. 15 Rembrandt van Rijn. *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1647. Oil on wood panel, 13 ⅓ × 18 ⁹⁄₁₀ in. (34 × 48 cm). National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

Fig. 16 Caravaggio, *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, ca. 1595 –96. Oil on canvas, 36 ⅖ × 50 ⅓ in. (92.5 × 127.8 cm). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT.

Fig. 17 El Greco. *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*, 1607–13. Oil on canvas, 137 × 68 ¾ in. (348 × 174.5 cm). Museo Santa Cruz, Toledo, Spain.

Sensations of Nature

> There is at the back of every artist's mind something like a pattern or a type of architecture…. It is a thing like the landscapes of his dreams; the sort of world he would wish to make or in which he would wish to wander….This general atmosphere, and pattern or structure of growth, governs all his creations however varied; and because he can in this sense create a world, he is in this sense a creator; the image of God.[71]
>
> — G. K. Chesterton

Olitski took inspiration from nature; his art resembled and reflected nature. Like the natural world, his paintings are sprawling and infinitely varied, capturing organic effects in paint, and presenting them in the abstract, outside the context of representational imagery. Not only elements of landscape painting, but the artist's experience of nature as well entered his work, mediated through an array of painterly techniques. In Olitski's work, naturalism has little to do with verisimilitude; instead, it refers to appearances, qualities, and processes of nature that emerge from the interaction of paint, surface, and the artist's mark-making.

It was during the 1970s that Olitski's naturalistic approach developed—in keeping with the Old Master techniques described above— in works disparate in style and appearance. Using an industrial broom to cover the surface in broad, repetitious marks of translucent paint, Olitski presents an onrush of naturalistic effects in *Third Manchu* (1974; Pl. p. 92), readable alternately as a gale of wind; sea foam washing ashore; a sky overcast with clouds; or the curtain of a rushing waterfall—all of them suspended, frozen in a moment, seeming to have only just taken shape. Traces of the broom's bristles remain evident across the painting, an innumerable amount to each mark, their microscopic particularity opening a single hue into an infinitely graded range of intermediary tones. An organic sense of wholeness in the painting is forged through the allover similarity of mark-making and, simultaneously, the world of variations—of color and light, of translucency and opacity, of motion and suspension—that emerge. The painting's holistic visual appeal, in concert with the emphatically tactile quality of the artist's gesture, together yield an overall naturalistic effect.

Approaching representation from the opposite end, the nineteenth-century Realist painter Gustave Courbet likewise portrayed aspects of the natural world using the organic properties of paint, its texture and viscosity. In *The Source of the Loue* (1864; fig. 18) a river surges forth from a mountainside cascade. To render rushing water, Courbet used a palette knife, applying thick impasto where the water accumulates in pools, and scraping away at the surface in areas where there is a cliffside fall. In a similar manner, he depicts rock faces by scraping a range of earth tones across the dark underpainting. In the absence of crisp linear drawing and smooth color modeling, the broad, rugged paint handling in Courbet's landscapes captures the random specificity of nature's incidental detail. Parts of the picture appear brittle, coarse, and dry, while other areas seem still wet with glossy oil paint. Such apparent contrasts forge fictive space while creating a visual parallel to the variability of tactile sensation. The optical sensations that the painting affords—of variety, solidity, gravity, motion—emerge primarily from the contingent and organic circumstances of the materials of painting.

Like Courbet, Olitski used unconventional tools and techniques to clear the way for an immediate and sheer presentation of naturalistic effects. The two artists meet in their use of abstraction to mirror the feeling of nature and elicit corresponding sensations in the viewer. Like Courbet, Olitski handles paint in a practical manner, but with broader and more expansive gestures. Instead of a landscape scene, Olitski presents a landscape sensation. *Fertile Crescent Flesh – 6* (1975; fig. 19) approximates both the craggy cliffs and cascade of Courbet's *Source of the Loue* by means of an allover spread of dark raw umber atop a thick, fissured surface. Indexical without an external referent, Olitski's paint handling has the impersonal quality of a natural process. The form it takes, the image that his gesture creates, is transparent to the processes that yielded it.

Particularly in works of mid- to late-1970s, Olitski employed repetitious gestures to cover the surface of the canvas and create an edge-to-edge painterly texture, a technique evident in Abstract Expressionism but rooted in the work of post-Impressionists like Cézanne, whose late paintings typically comprised a pattern of individualized brushstrokes. In *The Grounds of the Château Noir* (ca.1900–04; fig. 20), Cézanne blends foreground boulders and background foliage through areas of *passage* that compress space and flatten the image. The description of recognizable objects emerges through color (generally warm near the foreground, muted and cool in the background) and the directionality of Cézanne's atomized brushstrokes. Olitski employs both of these techniques throughout his painting of the 1970s. His mark-making in

Fig. 19 Jules Olitski. *Fertile Crescent Flesh – 6*, 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 98 × 54 in. (248.9 × 137.2 cm). Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

Fig. 20 Paul Cézanne. *The Grounds of the Château Noir*, ca. 1900–04. Oil on canvas, 35 ¾ × 28 ¼ in. (90.7 × 71.4 cm). National Gallery of Art, London.

Fig. 21 Théodore Rousseau. *The Forest in Winter at Sunset*, ca. 1846–67. Oil on canvas, 64 × 102 ⅜ in. (162.6 × 260 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Kristina Type – 7 (1976; Pl. p. 97) and *The Greek Princess – 8* (1976; Pl. p. 99), vast and legible, covers the canvas, with inflections of pressure and direction yielding indications of space and light. A kind of abstract equivalent of *passage* is evident in *Yarmuk Wall – 5*. Surface and space commingle, with broad areas of translucent pinkish beige splattered atop the white ground, seemingly pulverized by the same bright white as the surface. That final campaign of sprayed white reasserts the ground from within the depth of the painting. It is as if Olitski sprayed surface back into and through the painting; it reenters, disjunctively, as neither a material nor its support, but instead something shifting and unfixed.

One finds further resonances in Olitski's painting with the work of Barbizon school painter Théodore Rousseau. It was the innovation of the Barbizon artists, and Rousseau in particular, to evoke human drama through landscape phenomena alone. Drawn to harsh environs, bleak weather conditions, and untamed forest interiors, Rousseau's brooding, unpeopled landscapes are characterized by moody color and expressive drawing. His massive *The Forest in Winter at Sunset* (ca.1846–67; fig. 21) envelops the viewer in a stark forest clearing near dusk, surrounded by a tangle of barren trees, the amber glow of daylight far off and fading. The oak branches take shape in exaggerated gestures, angular and brittle here, curving and entwined there. The low-to-the-ground perspective of the picture, its sheer size (the largest painting Rousseau ever made), and the scale of the interwoven gnarl of trees overwhelm the viewer. One doesn't gaze at the forest from a distance, but rather is compelled by the artist to become part of the setting.

Working at a comparable scale, Olitski likewise creates dramatic scenes of singular naturalistic phenomena in paintings like *Approach of Storm* (1982; Pl. p. 107), *Creation Flood* (1983; Pl. p. 117), and *Storm Goddess* (1988), which feature bold mark-making, a stark color palette, and misty sfumato. In *Approach of Storm*, Olitski's expansive gestures, sweeping in from the top left and out toward the bottom right, suggest turbulent winds. The warm-toned underpainting is covered with a finely grained spray that accumulates in pools of blackness like a darkened sky. While the movement of *Approach of Storm* faces the viewer, the unearthly, subterranean surface of *Creation Flood* appears as if viewed from above, flattened by footsteps which create luminescent ridges that arise from a dark shroud of sprayed paint. Olitski draws the viewer's eye into the pictorial depth of *Storm Goddess* with a tangle of gestures that spring from the edges and converge near the center, where the painting's warm metallic earthen tones are muted by areas of sprayed gray, suggesting shadow. Hints of gleaming light appear in the top corners, and, disjunctively, in passages of sky blue on the bottom and right edges. Critics at the time noticed the congruence between Olitski's painterliness and the naturalism it evoked. Reviewing the artist's 1985 Knoedler show, Michael Brenson noted that his "responsiveness to the natural world also seems to have intensified in these works. Olitski's paint evokes the four elements here," he wrote: "[I]t also communicates a belief that it is through paint that the artist can touch the elemental world. It is as if Olitski has stopped fighting the attraction to the natural world that was present in his work all along."[72]

What Olitski's naturalistic abstraction shares with the Courbet, Cézanne, and Rousseau is the quality of approximating the feeling or sensation of nature, its somatic and tactile effects, through the corresponding physicality of paint. In his widely reproduced "Letter to Young Artists," Courbet stressed the materiality of painting as one of its defining characteristics, describing the medium as primarily a "physical language," and a "concrete art." An approach that emphasizes precision in the representation of nature "can only alter its natural form, falsify and weaken it," he wrote. Courbet associated such artistic practices with "artifice," extolling the diversity of nature as "superior to any artistic convention."[73] Detailing a conversation with Cézanne, Émile Bernard recalls him saying "Painting after nature is not copying the objective, it's realizing our sensations…in an aesthetic that's at once personal and traditional."[74] Rousseau described his process in similar terms: "One does not copy with mathematical precision what one sees, but one feels and interprets a real world."[75] Each of these artists developed new ways of visualizing nature, a process of experimentation that entailed challenging accepted conventions and tastes. The work of each artist seemed at first radical, later classical, ultimately inevitable.

Contemporary Resonances

Kenworth Moffett opened his essay for the 1973 Olitski retrospective by asserting: "Over the past two or three years the painting of Jules Olitski has begun to seem decisive. For a surprising number of younger painters [Olitski] is like a block, *the* influence that has to be gone through or overcome if any fundamental innovation of breakthrough is to be achieved."[76] In this rather severe context, Moffett refers to painters Walter Darby Bannard and Larry Poons. But the impact of Olitski's art ran through seventies painting—and beyond—in a more generous way. Beyond the younger formalist-type artists that more directly followed his example, Olitski's work helped loosen the grip of conceptual ideation that, as mentioned above, encroached not only on abstract painting but on art in general during that decade.[77] The lush palette and increasing painterliness of his work in the '70s was undoubtedly a catalyst for the development of what collector Larry Aldrich characterized as "lyrical abstraction" in his 1970 exhibition of the same name. Paging through the catalogue of that show, or through art periodicals of that time, one senses Olitski's influence in artists as diverse as Jake Berthot, David Diao, and Sherron Francis.

The painter Peter Bradley capitalized on Olitski's innovations and extended them into a personal idiom, using a spray gun to execute turbulent color-field paintings in the early '70s before introducing, later in the decade, rugged painterly textures that recall forces and effects of nature (fig. 22). In the summer of 1971, Bradley organized a groundbreaking exhibition, *The DeLuxe Show*, in a predominantly black neighborhood in Houston, Texas, notable for being among the earliest racially integrated shows of modernist painting in the United States. In his book *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (2016), art historian Darby English noted that "Many of the works Bradley brought together to form *DeLuxe* showed effects of spatial extension linked to the self-disclosing color sensibility [Rosalind] Krauss discerned in Olitski's first Spray paintings."[78] English further elaborates upon the depth of the dialogue between Bradley's and Olitski's art, describing the dimensionality, mobility, and depth of color generated by Olitski's Spray paintings, and how those innovations helped spur the development of comparable techniques in a number of artists, including painter Frank Bowling[79] (fig. 23). Like Bradley, Bowling internalized Olitski's example and built upon it, in thoroughly non-objective paintings comprised of interpenetrating colors and dense textures.

Aspects of Olitski's painting—his use of the spray gun to create ethereal mists of color; the sherbet palette that so disturbed critics of the 1973 show; the utilitarian surface-making typical of his mid-1970s pictures—can be sensed through a range of disparate contemporary artists. In 2015, Gagosian Gallery in London organized a group exhibition titled *Sprayed*, which showcased works executed in full or in part with sprayed paint. Though the exhibited artists included, in addition to Olitski himself, his friends and colleagues David Smith and Dan Christensen, the work of Tauba Auerbach (fig. 24) seemed closest to that of Olitski. In her "Fold" paintings of the 2010s, Auerbach sprays canvasses that have been crumpled and folded before ultimately stretching them flat. The result is a two-dimensional vestige of the earlier creases and contours.

I began this essay by revisiting the complicated reception of Olitski's 1973 retrospective at the Whitney Museum. Half a century later, the current exhibition at Yares Art, the largest New York showing of the artist's work since then, affords us the opportunity to reconsider Olitski's achievement.

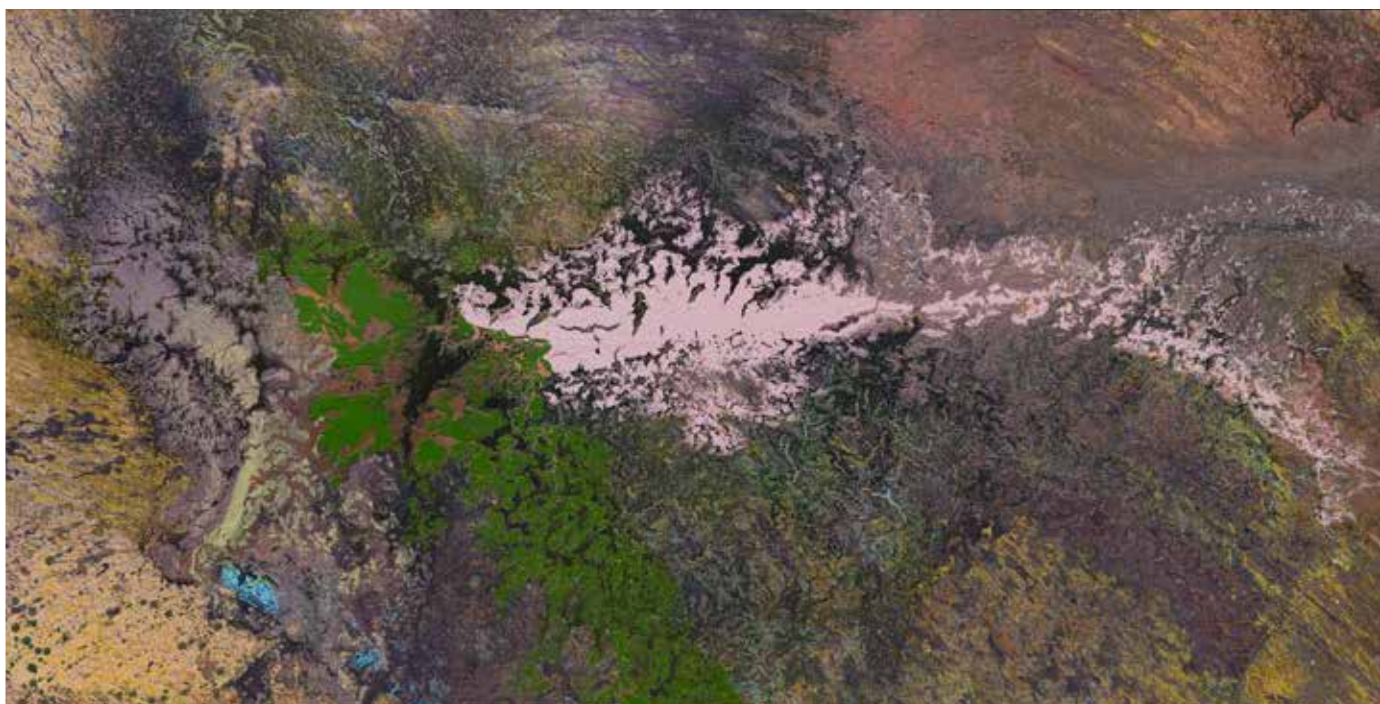

Fig. 22 Peter Bradley. *Circle of Fifths*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 66 ¼ × 131 in. (168 × 333 cm). Courtesy Karma, New York.

Fig. 23 Frank Bowling. *Giving Birth Astride a Grave*, 1973. Acrylic and vinyl paint on canvas, 6 ¼ × 48 ¼ in. (183.5 × 122.7 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 24 Tauba Auerbach. *Untitled (Fold)*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 72 ⅛ × 54 ⅛ in. (183.2 × 137.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Most importantly this exhibition reveals the continuity of his vision of painting. His expansive, world-creating gesture can be felt throughout works hung in unexpected groupings, with, for example, the sweetly colored *Tut Thief* (1965) sharing a wall with the dark, brooding *Creation Flood* (1983), and both hanging in proximity to the monumental *Joy of the Mount* (1981; Pl. p. 105). Despite their divergent palettes and textures, and despite the fact that little trace of the artist's hand is evident in the '60s Sprays, all of these works forge an intimate contemplative space that reaches toward the viewer.

Elsewhere in the exhibition, one can observe techniques subside and reemerge, transformed, in works of different periods: in one gallery, the densely textured *Late Madness of Wentworth* (1958; Pl. p. 32) hangs near a painting, *Against Apion* (Pl. p. 125), dating from three decades later. Though the crusty chiaroscuro of the former picture soon left Olitski's work as he shifted toward stained color, a new kind of smoky light and dark contrast is evident in the later picture. *Late Madness* is constructed around one sweeping transition from a clearly defined hanging white form to its darkening surrounds; the ethereal *Against Apion* features a patchwork woven of interpenetrating zones of shimmering metallic light and sprayed shadow. In another gallery, the pairing of an early "Core" picture, *AB* (1960), with late paintings like *With Love and Disregard: Voices* (2002) and *Prince Patutsky Memoir: Pink* (2004; Pl. p. 156) helps to contextualize the nebulous forms and shocking color contrasts in the latter pictures.

The range of styles, textures, and appearances among the works in this exhibition allow us to observe Olitski's aesthetic ingenuity—his ability to internalize the art of the past; to square it with present possibilities; and to create something entirely new. The epigraph of this essay, a passage from William James's *Pluralistic Universe* describes how present events affect not only the future but the past as well. Elsewhere James writes of our experience, that it "may actually be said to retroact and to enrich the past."[80] In a similar manner, Olitski's art opens new pathways for our experience of past art. His painterly touch helps sensitize us to surface-making in general, helps us to recognize, for example, the abstraction inherent in the landscape painting of the nineteenth-century, or the scaffolding of chiaroscuro around which Rembrandt constructed his pictures.

The sequence of 1970s paintings hung side-by-side in Yares's New York space—*Repahim Shade – 2* (1974–75), *Iron High – 5* (1975), *The Greek Princess – 3* (1976; Pl. p. 98), and *Third Manchu* (1974)—show Olitski at his toughest. Together with the works of the first half of the seventies, including *First Love – 9*, *Radical Love – 8* (both 1972), and *Divine Hostage – 21* (1973) they are among the most challenging paintings in the artist's body of work. Serious, obstinate, difficult, they reveal themselves slowly, rewarding concentrated attention. In Olitski's paintings of the early '70s, Walter Darby Bannard recognized "the tough conservatism of absolute high quality, of the highest standards in art, of baffling, sustaining innovation."[81] The passage of time has only served to enrich these works. They've resisted categorization: unlike latter day abstract expressionism, their drama is more inward and remote; compared to the abstraction that took center stage in the '70s—the coolly reductive paintings of, for example, Robert Ryman and Brice Marden—Olitski's paintings of that decade offer a world of sensation. In a short introduction to an exhibition in 1998, Michael Fried asserted, "The oeuvre [Olitski] produced during those decades [the 1970s and '80s] will eventually be recognized as one of the glories of twentieth-century painting."[82] The current exhibition not only affirms but extends Fried's prediction.

Coda: The World to Come

What a pouring there was
And what a spreading
At that instant when
the Inscrutable
met
the Unimaginable and
God poured
In all directions
Spreading and pouring
and spreading[83]

— draft of a poem, "Big Bang," by Jules Olitski, early 2000s

When, in the mid-1990s, Olitski turned to landscape painting in earnest, in a series of small pastels, he took as his subject romantic renderings of the lakeside environs of his New Hampshire studio and, during the winter months, the coastal view from his Florida studio (figs. 25 & 26). As he continued working on landscapes, and as they became visionary in character, depicting imagined and antediluvian scenes, Olitski stressed the continuity of his practice, minimizing the distinction between abstraction and representation. His paintings from this period demonstrate the fluidity of the boundary; recognizable imagery ebbs and flows, for instance, in *Halcyon Surge* (1997; Pl. p. 145) and *Bear Island Spirit* (1998; Pl. p. 144). Land, sea, and sky shift in substance, melting and merging into one another. The artist's hand is virtually absent in these pictures. They seem to have been brought about by natural forces.

Olitski spoke often, especially in his later years, of his belief in the Creator, of a force beyond himself: "I believe there is a power, a creative force that surrounds us and that we are all part of," he told an interviewer in 2000: "I believe the very act of creating art is a religious experience."[84] Nearing eighty, he had just recovered from a life-saving surgery following a cancer diagnosis the previous year. In the paintings of the years that followed, Olitski worked with an unfathomable strength and vitality. "With Love and Disregard"—the title of a series of paintings he made in 2002—describes his approach during this period: steadfast, ambitious, unwavering in his confidence. When these paintings first appeared, the artist contributed a short statement for the catalogue, paraphrasing the philosopher William James, who wrote: "When once a decision is reached and execution is the order of the day, dismiss absolutely all responsibility and care about the outcome. Let go your hold, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all. Resign the care of your destiny to higher powers."[85]

The energies captured in these paintings are vast and heroic, seemingly superhuman. In the late paintings, more than ever before, Olitski seems to have become a vehicle for the forces of Creation. Forms thunder forth like primordial forces: molten pools of full-bodied color, crackling orbs hurtling through cosmic space (Pl. p. 155). Some years previous, he had written of the experience of surrendering himself while at work. "It would feel as if I were being given over to something, to a force, working through me," he recounted: "It was as if without knowing how or why, I had stepped from one level of consciousness into another, [one] powerfully charged with concentrated energy. All I needed to do was let it happen."[86] Perhaps *With Love and Disregard: Voices* (2002; Pl. p. 150) brings us to the moment of Creation, when, as the Book of Genesis tells us, the earth was formless and dark; or, calling upon another title from this period of Olitski's work, perhaps we are bearing witness to an eschatological vision of the Rapture.

It's tempting to see these late works as a summation of his life's work, a return to the brash colors and circular forms of his "Core" paintings from four decades previous. Indeed, the title of a painting like *Prince Patutsky Memoir: Pink* (2004), referring back to paintings like *Patutsky Jazz* (1963; Pl. p. 48) and *Patutsky in Paradise* (1966), suggests as much. But these pictures are without precedent in his work: they are apparitions of moments before time, a manifestation of the next world from this one, a vision of the transition between. Olitski knew his time on earth was limited. "It verges on the miraculous that I'm here at all," he remarked in 2003.[87] Yet he was obstinate in his commitment to his work, to the realization of his vision. Surely, Olitski was "communing with the power," as he was fond of saying, a communion that sustained him through his final years. Olitski left this world in 2007, but his energy is palpable and his presence unmistakable in the paintings included in the current exhibition. The vision that sustained him through his final years remains as vital as ever, a vision Olitski offered in these last paintings: a glimpse of the world to come.

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Fig. 25 Jules Olitski. *August Tenth*, 1995. Pastel on paper, 20 ½ × 25 in. (52.1 × 63.5 cm). Private Collection.

Fig. 26 Jules Olitski. *Rising Sun*, 1998. Pastel on all rag paper, 30 × 22 in. (76.2 × 55.9 cm). Private Collection.

1. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 79-80. Edited for clarity.

2. Jules Olitski, handwritten studio note, undated. ~~Archive of the~~ Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

3. Olitski, in *Painters Painting*, dir. Emile de Antonio (New Yorker Films, 1972).

4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Compensation," in *Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. (New York: The Book League of America, 1941), 39-40.

5. Jules Olitski, "The Courage of Conviction," in *The Courage of Conviction* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 191.

6. Ibid.

7. Transcript of Jules Olitski lecture and Q&A at Edmonton Art Gallery, September 22, 1979, 11. Archive of the Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

8. William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 14–15. Edited for clarity.

9. The works will subsequently be rotated among these venues.

10. Fred Ferretti, "Going Out Guide," *New York Times*, September 7, 1973, 40.

11. Jeanne Siegel, "Olitski's Retrospective: Infinite Variety," *ARTnews*, vol. 72, no. 6, Summer 1973, 61.

12. Ibid. Italics in original.

13. Kenneth Carpenter, "Footsteps of a Master: the Jules Olitski Retrospective," *Studio International*, vol. 186, no. 958, September 1973, 77. Italics in original.

14. Diana Loercher, "Olitski and his unique contribution: a major display, a talk with the artist," *The Christian Science Monitor,* September 15, 1973, 14.

15. Siegel, "Infinite Variety," 63.

16. Carpenter, "Footsteps," 77.

17. Thomas Hess, "Olitski Without Flattery," *New York*, vol. 6, no. 40, October 1, 1973, 76.

18. Barbara Thomsen, "The Strange Case of Jules Olitski," *Art in America*, vol. 62, no. 1, January/February 1974, 64.

19. Thomsen, "Strange Case," 64.

20. As it happens, Olitski's "Cleopatra Flesh" was featured on the cover of the biology textbook *Becker's World of the Cell: 8th Edition* (San Francisco: Benjamin Cummings, 2011).

21. Joseph Masheck, "The Jules Olitski Retrospective," *Artforum* vol. 12, no. 1, September 1973, 59.

22. Harold Rosenberg, "The Art World: Dogma and Talent," *The New Yorker*, October 15, 1973, 116.

23. Organized by curator Samuel Wagstaff at the Wadsworth Atheneum in January 1964, "Black, White and Grey," featured work by Robert Morris, Tony Smith, Dan Flavin, Frank Stella—but not Judd.

24. This information comes from the description of the work on the Whitney Museum's website. "Donald Judd: Untitled, 1965," whitney.org (accessed Oct. 22, 2022)

25. Lucy Lippard summed up this view in her review of the 1968 Whitney Annual: "One can hardly take seriously the voices raised in Olitski's defense on the grounds that he is really a 'structural artist,' that his vapid veils of sweet color are formally mitigated by the blobs of nostalgically gummy paint lurking at the corners." See Lucy R. Lippard, "Constellation by Harsh Daylight: The Whitney Annual." *The Hudson Review*, 21:1 (1968), p. 18

26. Thomsen, "Strange Case," 64.

27. Ibid. Edited for clarity.

28. Michael Fried, "Three American Painters," in *Art & Objecthood: Essays & Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 245.

29. Thomsen, "Strange Case," 64. Edited for clarity.

30. Hilton Kramer, "Jules Olitski: A Sectarian Scenario," *The New York Times*, ~~Sunday,~~ September 16, 1973, D25.

31. Masheck, "Olitski Retrospective," 59.

32. Emily Genauer, "Two Retrospectives of a Narrow Idiom," *Newsday*, September 28, 1973, 11A.

33. Rosenberg, "Dogma and Talent," 116.

34. G. K. Chesterton, "Robert Louis Stevenson," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. XVIII (San Fransisco, Ignatius Press, 1991), 42. See also note 71 below.

35. Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 134.

36. Clement Greenberg, "Counter Avant-Garde," in *Clement Greenberg: Late Writings*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2003), 7.

37. Michael Fried, "Three American Painters," in *Art & Objecthood: Essays & Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 245.

38. Richard Shiff, "Unexplained," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. XCIV, no. 3, 341; and Shiff, *Doubt* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 118, 124. Stated another way, Shiff explains: "The idea in Greenberg is: You can't take a culture which has been beaten down into pure consumerism and lift it up with ennobling art, like pictures of Venus and Adonis. You've got to hit them with something that they actually might like, because it's so direct. [Abstract Expressionist painting] has the quality of directness which attracts the public, and the public becomes sensitive inadvertently. They're not *trying* to learn from Pollock, but by being attracted to it because it's big and bold, subliminally, their taste is improved, and they become more sensitized to aesthetic values." (In conversation)

39. Clement Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern," in *Late Writings*, 30–31. Edited for clarity.

40. Commentators sympathetic to Olitski's art read it in this way as well. To take but one example, in his review of Olitski's January 1971 show at the David Mirvish Gallery, Michael Greenwood remarked that "Olitski's world is infinitely remote from the quotidian experiences of modern urban life, with its horrors and vulgarity, its unprincipled materialism…. [It is] an art totally withdrawn from the wrenching issues of our time, asocial and impracticable; addressing itself to an aristocracy of the senses." Greenwood, "Jules Olitski's Sculpture," *Artscanada* vol. 28, iss. 152/153 February/March 1971, 62.

41. Ian Burn, "The Art Market: Affluence and Degradation." *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 326–327.

42. Joseph Kosuth, "Intention(s)," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, 462.

43. Jules Olitski lecture, Edmonton Art Gallery, 1979, 17; 27; 21.

44. Ibid., 30

45. The homeopathic quality of Olitski's art was undoubtedly one of the prime reasons that Greenberg continued holding the artist in high regard. As late as 1990, Greenberg maintained that Olitski was "the greatest painter alive."

46. In her catalogue essay for the 2015 exhibition "Jules Olitski: On the Edge, A Decade of Innovation" at Leslie Feely Fine Art, Mary-Dailey Desmarais draws an extended parallel between Olitski's works and Watteau's 1717 painting "Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera."

47. "Morton Feldman: The Johannesburg Masterclasses, July 1983, Session 2," 1. PDF. Morton Feldman Texts, cnvill.net/mftexts (accessed Oct. 22, 2022).

48. Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art," in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 2000), 26.

49. Louise Gauthier, "Interview with Jules Olitski," *Perspectives: écrits sur l'art*, no. 8, printemps 1990, 83.

50. Feldman, "Anxiety," 26.

51. Morton Feldman, "Vertical Thoughts," in *Give My Regards*, 12.

52. Morton Feldman, "A Haunted House with No Ghosts," in *Morton Feldman in Middelburg: Words on Music,* vol. 1, ed. Raoul Mörchen, (Köln: Edition MusikTexte, 2008), 254, emphasis added.

53. Morton Feldman, "Between Disney and Mondrian," *Words on Music*, vol. 2, 632.

54. Olitski, in Barbara Rose, "Interview with the Artist," *Jules Olitski: Recent Painting* (New York: Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, 1993), 10.

55. Olitski, in Jennifer Sachs Samet, "Making Art that Works," *New York Sun,* April 17, 2006, 18.

56. "Morton Feldman: Speaking of Music, 1986" 13. PDF. Morton Feldman Texts, cnvill.net/mftexts (accessed Oct. 22, 2022).

57. Feldman, "Anxiety," 32.

58. Jules Olitski lecture, Edmonton Art Gallery, 1979, 21.

59. Jules Olitski, "How My Art Gets Made," *Partisan Review*, vol. LXVIII, no 4, Fall 2001, 623.

60. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes," in *Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 4*, 300.

61. Morton Feldman, "Darmstadt Lecture, July 1984," in *Morton Feldman Says*, ed. Chris Villars (London: Hyphen Press, 2006), 192.

62. Charles W. Millard, "Jules Olitski," *The Hudson Review*, vol. XXVII, no. 3, Autumn 1974, 408.

63. Olitski, in "Then and Now," *Partisan Review*, vol. XLII, no. 4, 1975, 561.

64. Gauthier, "Interview with Jules Olitski," 76. Italics in original.

65. Ibid., 82.

66. Olitski, handwritten studio note ca. mid-1960s. Archive of the Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

67. Olitski, in "Interview with Friedrich Bach," in Moffett, *Jules Olitski*, 217.

68. Gauthier, "Interview with Jules Olitski," 84. Italics in original.

69. Millard, "Jules Olitski," 407.

70. Jules Olitski, "Speech delivered by Olitski at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, March 27, 1975," in Kenworth Moffet, *Jules Olitski* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1981), 220.

71. Chesterton, "Robert Louis Stevenson," 53. Olitski was particularly fond of this passage, quoting it in lectures and interviews from the 1980s onward.

72. Michael Brenson, "Art: An Old Master Show from the Albertina," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1985, C27.

73. Gustave Courbet, "Letter to Young Artists," in *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison, et. al. (Malden: Blackwell Press, 1998), 404.

74. Émile Bernard, "Paul Cézanne," *L'Occident*, July 1904, reprinted in Jane Watkins, ed., *Cézanne* (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996), 37.

75. Théodore Rousseau, quoted in Charles Sprague Smith, *Barbizon Days* (New York: A. Wessels Company, 1906), 173.

76. Kenworth Moffett, *Olitski* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1973), 7. Italics in original.

77. John Elderfield enumerates the younger formalists that followed Olitski in his article, "Painterliness Redefined: Jules Olitski and Recent Abstract Art, Part II," *Art International* vol. 17, no. 4, April 1973, 36-41; 101. For an extended discussion on "Idea painting" versus "purely aesthetic" abstraction, see Whee Kim, "A Personal Definition of Pictorial Space," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 49, no. 3, November 1974, 74–78.

78. Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 222.

79. Acknowledging the "normative reluctance to give such relations [as between Bradley and Olitski] their due in our accounts of black modernists and US culture formation more generally," English's book is perhaps the most thoroughgoing examination of "modernist" and color-field painting's place in the context of the highly politicized art of the 1970s. Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*, 23, and especially 210-222.

80. William James, "Humanism and Truth," in *The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 57.

81. Walter Darby Bannard, "Quality, Style and Olitski," *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2, October 1972, 67.

82. Michael Fried, introduction to *Jules Olitski: New Works* (Baltimore: C. Grimaldis Gallery, 1998), unpaginated.

83. Draft of a poem, "Big Bang," by Olitski, ca. early 2000s. Archive of the Jules Olitski Art Foundation.

84. "Derek Sprawson talks to Jules Olitski," in *Jules Olitski: Expect Nothing, Do Your Work, Celebrate* (Nottingham, UK: Future Factory Far Ahead, 2000), 25.

85. William James, *On Vital Reserves* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899), 69; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 108. Edited for clarity.

86. Olitski, "The Courage of Conviction," 191.

87. Jules Olitski, "Interview with John Walters, September 20, 2003," in *Jules Olitski: The New Hampshire Exhibits, Autumn 2003* (Marlboro: Four Forty, 2005), 14.