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High Times, Hard Times New York Painting 1967-1975

Exploring a time of radical new directions in abstract painting

High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975 is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International).

February 15 – April 22, 2007

(New York City) November 2006 The National Academy Museum presents *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975* bringing together over forty significant works by thirty-seven artists living and working in New York between 1967 and 1975. Opening on February 15, 2007, the groundbreaking works presented in this exhibition were created by painters who courageously crossed disciplines to take a nontraditional approach to the medium.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the New York art world was an exciting place to be. "Painting is dead!" was a popular slogan. New mediums such as performance and video art were developing, and sculpture was quickly expanding in many different directions. However, experimental abstract painting actually was thriving, energized by a diverse group of New York artists. Influenced by new



Alan Shields, *Whirling Dervish*, 1968-70.
Acrylic and thread on canvas over wood, 38 x 107 in.,
estate of Alan Shields

artistic freedoms and the tumultuous political and social changes of the time, these pioneering artists created paintings of great joy, fury, and intellect.

High Times, Hard Times also reflects the impact on the art world of the civil rights struggle, student and anti-war activism, and the beginning of feminism. The works included in this exhibition represent some of the most experimental art of the time. These artists' re-examination of art through new approaches to the medium of painting was very much in keeping with the era's radical aesthetics and politics.



Jack Whitten in his studio on Broome Street, 1977
Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Half of the artists in the exhibition are women, several are African-American, and some are artists from other countries who lived temporarily in New York; many of whom were not recognized at the time or, conversely, were excluded from paintings' canonical history. These artists' identities are not incidental but essential to grasping the possibilities of the period. (Perhaps part of the reason painting at this time has been left out of the history books; subsequent painting revivals have been adamantly male—as Joan Snyder, a National Academician, complained about macho neo-expressionism's sudden revival of painting, "It wasn't 'neo' to us.")



Dorothea Rockburne installing *Intersection* (1971) at the Spoleto Festival, Spoleto, Italy, June 23-July 9, 1972
Photo: Ealan Wingate

Exhibition Sections

The works in **High Times, Hard Times** are divided into groups that are at once formal and chronological. The works in the first group, dating from the late 1960s are large, rectangular, stretched canvases hung on the wall—a format based on conventions challenged later in this exhibition—to elicit the mood of euphoria and optimism so prevalent in the late sixties.



Louise Fishman, *Untitled*, 1971, acrylic, chalk, and string on canvas, two parts, 34 1/2 x 7 in. (87.6 x 17.8 cm) each, courtesy of the artist and Cheim & Read, New York

In the second group, artists begin to take painting apart. These paintings are often super-thin or made of soft unsupported cloth and some come off the wall into the room, sit on the floor, or are suspended from the ceiling. The wild array of structures and formats take liberties with the medium of painting in ways that challenge its history and expand its future.

Installation and performance are emphasized in the third selection of works, stretching the elastic definition of painting even further, as painters experience the pressure and possibility of new mediums such as installation and performance. The artists use their bodies and the space around the physical projects, incorporating the viewer into the environment of the work. The performance pieces are documented by photographs or video and in some cases the original works have been recreated according to the artist's instructions. These works have an intensity and expansiveness that springs from a willingness to doubt fundamentally what a painting is.

Film and video exerted their own pull in the early seventies; many if not most avant-garde artists experimented with these new mediums. The fourth group of works includes paintings that reflect this influence. Using unusual techniques including spraying, iridescence and visual interference, the surfaces of these works suggest filmic effects such as speed, flicker, and distortion. Many of these painters also used film and video directly, and this section includes film and video works that connect with the paintings through their sense of color and movement.



Carolee Schneemann performing *Body Collage* in her loft on West 29th Street, 1967, Photo: Michael Benedikt, courtesy of the artist, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

No artistic culture could indefinitely sustain either the total possibility or the intense doubt of the early 1970s. By the mid-seventies, painters had returned to more traditional stretched-canvas formats, but many brought the innovations of deconstruction, performance and installation with them. Some of the work in this final group carries with it a frankly elegiac mood marking the end of the previous moment of limitless horizons. Other paintings are infused with bold color, a celebration of paint's physical properties, and even imagery.



Ron Gorchov, *Tenderhook*, 1975, oil on canvas
21 x 27 x 7 in. (53.3 x 68.6 x 17.8 cm)
Courtesy Vito Schnabel

While the exhibition's ending represents a "return" to more traditional forms of painting, it captures not only the discoveries of earlier experiments, but also the tremendous opening-up of painting in the 1970s. With the distance now of more than thirty-five years comes an opportunity to bring new research and perspective to the history of the time. *High Times, Hard Times* proposes to insert a new critical perspective on the subject, and equally valuable, the opportunity for audiences to have a fresh look at work sometimes little seen since it was first *exhibited* – and completely unseen by a whole generation of viewers. The paintings in this exhibition connect our present moment to a rich and exciting past that continues to resonate today.

Artists in Exhibition

Jo Baer
Lynda Benglis
Dan Christensen
Roy Colmer
Mary Corse
David Diao
Manny Farber
Louise Fishman
Guy Goodwin
Ron Gorchov
Harmony Hammond
Mary Heilmann
Ralph Humphrey

Jane Kaufman
Harriet Korman
Yayoi Kusama
Al Loving
Lee Lozano
Ree Morton
Elizabeth Murray
Joe Overstreet
Blinky Palermo
Cesar Paternosto
Howardena Pindell
Dorothea Rockburne
Carolee Schneemann

Alan Shields
Kenneth Showell
Joan Snyder
Lawrence Stafford
Pat Steir
Richard Tuttle
Richard Van Buren
Michael Venezia
Franz Erhard Walther
Jack Whitten
Peter Young

High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975 is a traveling exhibition organized and circulated by iCI (Independent Curators International). The guest curator is Katy Siegel, with David Reed as advisor. The exhibition, tour, and catalogue are made possible, in part, with support from the Peter Norton Family Foundation, the Dedalus Foundation, Inc., the iCI International Associates, and the iCI Exhibition Partners, Kenneth S. Kuchin, and Gerrit and Sydie Lansing.



Howardena Pindell in her studio on West Street, ca. 1972 in front of her work, *Untitled* (1968-1970), courtesy the artist

Public Programs

Please visit the National Academy's website for information about the public programs and special events for *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975*. www.nationalacademy.org

Catalogue

The 176-page publication which accompanies the exhibition is co-published by iCI and D.A.P. (Distributed Art Publishers). The publication features scholarly essays by curator Katy Siegel and advisor David Reed on the artistic and political context of the work. Additional essays, written by Dawoud Bey and Anna Chave, focus, respectively, on African-American and women artists in the New York art world during this period. Statements from 17 artists in the exhibition are also featured, as are texts by critic Robert Pincus-Witten and recently deceased curator Marcia Tucker who each reflect on the art, its meaning, and the social scene of the New York art world. Color illustrations of each work in the show, along with supplementary historic photographs from the period, are also included.

Exhibition Itinerary Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina
American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, D.C.
National Academy Museum, New York City, N.Y. (additional venues to be confirmed)



About iCI

Founded in 1975, iCI is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the understanding and appreciation of contemporary art through traveling exhibitions and other activities that reach a diverse national and international audience. Collaborating with a wide range of eminent curators, iCI develops innovative traveling exhibitions, accompanied by catalogues and other educational materials, to introduce and document challenging new work in all mediums by younger as well as more established artists from the United States and abroad.

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The National Academy was founded in 1825, and is currently an honorary association of professional artists, a school of fine arts, and a museum. The Academy has an outstanding collection of American art, and its holdings represent all of the major and minor movements from 1830 to the present. The Academy Museum presents changing exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, and architecture. Fashioned after the great European academies of art, The School of Fine Arts offers classes in painting, sculpture, and printmaking for students of all ages and levels of experience.

Web site: www.nationalacademy.org

Where: 1083 Fifth Avenue at 89th Street

When: Wed. & Thur. 12 - 5pm; Fri., Sat. & Sun. 11am - 6pm. Closed Mon. & Tues.

Admission: \$10 adults, \$5 for seniors & students. Free for children under-12.