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ROBERT RYMAN - PAINTINGS 1976

by Naomi Spector

Project Studios One (P.S. 1)

January 26 to February 20, 1977

P.S. 1 is the experimental work center for contemporary art of the Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc.  
21-01 46th Road, Long Island City, Queens, New York

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on blue or black acrylvin, a plastic material similar to plexiglas but opaque and more flexible. Sometimes the paint has been applied with areas of relative thinness or translucency, so the darkness of the acrylvin underneath comes through. When the plexiglas reflecting layer is present in such a case, as in "Criterion I", the painting's richly active surface expands to make it seem to occupy more than the approximately two-foot square area it measures. The particular visual quality of oil paint, slightly shiny, is shown to have a great range of degrees of reflection depending on the thickness, the nature of the support, and the structure or pattern of the strokes. There are diagonal strokes, random strokes, horizontal bands of short vertical strokes, and strokes so smooth and even that there is almost no texture. The paintings with polymer paint, which is usually relatively flat and opaque, appear in different lights depending on the application, too. The reflecting plexiglas layer has been used with both kinds of paint.

Of course, not only the painted surface, with or without added reflective material, but also the fasteners and bolts as well are all integral parts of each of the paintings; and this is exactly the point. There is no physical part of a painting which Ryman takes for granted, treats only conventionally, hides, or does not consider to be something to be worked into the painting. At different times over the years a great variety of paints (including oil, polymer, enamel, enamelac, commercial, "house", and other specialized paints -- even baked enamel) and a number of different supports (including different weaves of cotton and linen canvases -- stretched and unstretched; corrugated, art waxed and "found" papers; cold rolled steel; aluminum; copper; vinyl; plastivellum; plexiglas; and stretch polyester fabric) have all been used. And these were not just exercises in variety, but efforts involving different ways of making paintings and different ways of seeing paintings. The different materials all became part of the visual meaning of the particular paintings. With a considerable number of paintings on thin supports, the visual result was the incorporation of the surrounding wall into the paintings.

Many paintings, even among those advanced contemporary works which are completely non-pictorial, are concerned only with the "face" of the work -- the area where the paint is. Ryman's work is concerned with all the elements which go into painting: not only what is done with the paint, but what is done with all the elements present. Everthing that is part of the painting physically is part of it visually, aesthetically.

So, the fasteners in these new paintings can be seen to be part of a continuing involvement with incorporating every element of painting into its visual content -- even the way it is hung.

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A note on the titles : it is perhaps interesting to note incidentally that the names of the paintings here, as always, are completely without association between what these words mean in their everyday senses and the paintings to which they have been assigned. They are common, standard names often found in the yellow pages as the names of manufacturers of such things as hardware, office, or even art supplies -- or companies dealing with services ranging from fire prevention to air travel: "Greenwich", "United", "Embassy", "Midland", and the like. In short, they are names originally chosen by businesses for their dignified or classical associations but which through gross overuse have unintentionally acquired just the sort of neutrality Ryman wants. They have no meaning in connection with the paintings except that they distinguish one from the other.

1. Alliance, 1974, oil on blue acrylics; window-plate glass fasteners and window-plate-steel bolts, 13-1/2" x 14"
  2. National II, 1976, oil on blue acrylics; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 11-1/2" x 12"
  3. Writing II, 1976, oil on blue acrylics with plexiglass; window-plate-steel fasteners and window-plate-steel bolts, 10 1/2" x 10"
- Naomi Spector
4. Midland II, 1974, oil on blue acrylics; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 10 1/2" x 10"
  5. Space II, 1974, oil on black acrylics with plexiglass; window-plate-steel fasteners and steel bolts, 17-1/2" x 14"
  6. Topic II, 1974, polymer on black acrylics; window-plate-steel fasteners and window-plate-steel bolts, 13-1/2" x 14"
  7. Federal, 1974, oil on black acrylics; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 14" x 14"
  8. Embassy I, 1974, oil on plexiglass; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 11" x 11"
  9. Alliance, 1974, oil on blue acrylics with steel; window-plate-steel fasteners and window-plate-steel bolts, 10 1/2" x 10"
  10. Greenwich, 1974, oil on black acrylics with steel; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 10 1/2" x 10"
  11. Embassy II, 1974, oil on plexiglass; steel bolts and fasteners, 11" x 11"
  12. Greenwich, 1974, polymer on acrylics with plexiglass; window-plate-steel fasteners and window-plate-steel bolts, 13-1/2" x 14-1/2"
  13. National I, 1974, oil mixed with acrylics on black acrylics; steel bolts and fasteners, 13-1/2" x 14"
  14. United, 1974, oil on black acrylics with steel; window-plate-steel bolts and fasteners, 14" x 14"

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WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION:

1. Midland I, 1976, polymer on blue acrylvin; cadmium-plated-steel bolts and fasteners, 48" x 48"
2. Criterion I, 1976, oil on black acrylvin with plexiglass; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 26" x 24-1/8"
3. Arrow, 1976, oil on plexiglass; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 13-3/4" x 12"
4. Alliance, 1976, polymer on blue acrylvin; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 15-5/8" x 14"
5. National II, 1976, oil on blue acrylvin; cadmium-plated-steel bolts and fasteners, 35-5/8" x 34"
6. Criterion II, 1976, oil on blue acrylvin with plexiglass; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 26" x 24-1/8"
7. Midland II, 1976, oil on blue acrylvin, cadmium-plated-steel bolts and fasteners, 50 1/2" x 48"
8. Tower I, 1976, oil on black acrylvin with plexiglass; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and steel bolts, 17-1/8" x 14"
9. Tower II, 1976, polymer on black acrylvin; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 15-5/8" x 14"
10. Federal, 1976, oil on linen with metal staples; steel bolts and fasteners, 74 1/2" x 70 1/2"
11. Embassy I, 1976, oil on plexiglass; black oxide bolts and fasteners, 63" x 63"
12. Advance, 1976, oil on blue acrylvin with vinyl; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 35 1/2" x 34"
13. Concord, 1976, oil on linen with metal staples, cadmium-plated-steel bolts and fasteners, 102" x 96"
14. Embassy II, 1976, oil on plexiglass, steel bolts and fasteners, 63" x 63"
15. Greenwich, 1976, polymer on acrylvin with plexiglass; sanded-plexiglass fasteners and cadmium-plated-steel bolts, 25-5/8" x 24-1/8"
16. National I, 1976, oil mixed with elvecite on black acrylvin; steel bolts and fasteners, 35-5/8" x 94"
17. Untitled, 1976, oil on linen with metal staples; black oxide bolts and fasteners, 55 1/2" x 53"