

RICK ARNITZ

NEW WORK

OCTOBER 12, 1989

THROUGH DECEMBER 10, 1989

SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM

OF MODERN ART

A SERIES OF RECENT

WORK BY YOUNGER AND

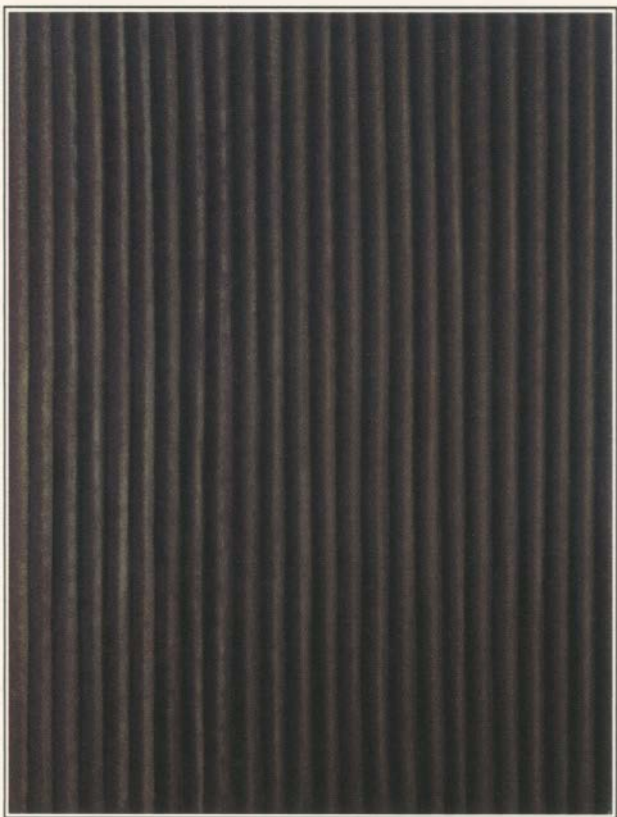
ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1949, Rick Arnitz hitchhiked to California at the age of nineteen. After an unsettled life typical of the 1960s in Los Angeles, he served briefly in the U.S. Army at Fort Ord, California, and resumed his education at Monterey Peninsula College. In 1973, he came to Berkeley to attend the University of California, where he chose, finally, to major in art, and received his B.A. in 1975. To support himself while he painted Arnitz took a job as a night guard, which he still holds part-time. He returned to the university in 1979, and received his M.F.A. two years later. Although he showed fairly regularly, his work received little notice until the spring of last year, when Kenneth Baker, art critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, praised his paintings in a two-person show at the now defunct Gallery 44 in east Oakland. Before that exhibition opened, Deborah Oropallo, a friend from art school at Berkeley, had helped Arnitz to arrange for her art dealers, Stephen and Connie Wirtz, to attend the exhibition. They have since shown his work twice at their gallery in San Francisco.

Through the mid-1980s, Arnitz's work was clearly figurative, a course he pursued consistently ever since he attended art school. As recently as two or three years ago, he was painting landscapes, but these were strangely, unexpectedly conceptual and quite unlike any landscape one might actually encounter. Typically enclosed in a painted border, they usually consisted of a broad band of large regular gray rocks beneath a sky that was sometimes featureless, sometimes partly filled with equally regular white clouds. Looking at the paintings one might extrapolate a seashore, though there was no hint of any actual location, just rocks and sky surrounded by a painted frame. Then as now, Arnitz's frames made clear that what they enclosed was art, but the landscapes themselves were unlike any in the art of the past. One could perhaps suggest a resemblance to the limitless, rocky plains often found in the work of Surrealist artist Yves Tanguy or the fields of wreckage-bearing rocks that occasionally occur in the Surrealism-influenced paintings of Francesco Clemente. Yet Arnitz's work, unlike theirs, was matter of fact, not dreamlike. His landscapes, if indeed one could call them that, referred to no mental state at all. Rocks and sky filled a painted frame, but they seemed deliberately uncommunicative, apparently designed to frustrate the expectation that art fulfill its traditional role of transmitting meaning.

Arnitz sometimes used an ordinary paint roller to create the rocks in these paintings, and he ascribes the development of his current style in part to his choice of this tool, which he now uses almost exclusively in making his paintings. Dipping only one side of the roller in paint, Arnitz moves vertically across the surface of the work, thereby filling it with horizontal bands or lines of monochromatic pigment. He sees a link to figuration in these bands, noting their resemblance to bridges or bars. For the most part the irregular bands of paint in Arnitz's work suggest a representation not of something from the real world, but instead, from the world of art. What the central zone of Arnitz's framed paintings really looks like is an abstract painting, rather as if the artist had chosen to paint a painting of such a work, but only in a particularly "abstract," almost generic sense, just as the rocks in his previous work were abstracted from any conceivable geological origin or geographical location.

In a work like *Eastern Front* (1988), one possible reading of Arnitz's work is as a deadpan "painting" of a painting by Mark Rothko, around which he has carefully painted an absurd yellow frame as if to subvert any tendency of the viewer to enter the world of the painting,



Stokes, 1989

to escape, as it were, into the abstract expressionist sublime. The illusional depth of Arnitz's frames both contradicts and reinforces the flatness of the luminous central zone of the canvas. Even though Arnitz's countless, necessarily very careful applications of paint create a subtly beautiful surface, the bands of paint are repetitive and essentially arbitrary. One is reminded of the beautiful but deliberately meaningless brushwork of Jasper Johns's *Flags and Targets*.

In more recent work, Arnitz's frames are not so insistent. In *Huck*, for example, which was completed last winter, the frame is vestigial and the canvas seems almost to be filled with the mysterious, early morning light of Mark Twain's Mississippi River. In another painting from that time, *Taps*, the frame is absent entirely, as it is in a number of Arnitz's recent drawings, and the work seems more direct and even without irony. In yet other, newer work, for example *Twenty-Seventh Army*, there is an unexpectedly beautiful and insistent chromaticism, as there is in *Down Town*. Arnitz, it seems, is developing in unexpected, highly promising ways, and one senses in these paintings a heightened confidence in his powers within a broadening range of expression. At thirty-nine he is growing consistently stronger and more assured.

John Caldwell
Curator of Painting and Sculpture

RICK ARNITZ

Born in St. Louis, 1949
Lives and works in Oakland

EDUCATION

University of California, Berkeley, B.A., 1975, M.A., 1980,
M.F.A., 1982

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1980
Worth Ryder Gallery, Berkeley
1983
Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland
1984
Union Gallery, San Jose State University, San Jose
1988
Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1980
27th Annual Exhibition, Richmond Art Center,
Richmond, California
1981
Beyond Words, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art,
San Jose
56th Annual Crocker-Kingsley Exhibition, Crocker Art
Museum, Sacramento
Spring Juried Exhibition, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley
Rick Arnitz, Nancy Footner and Gustavo Rivera,
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Rental Gallery
Rick Arnitz and Violet Fields, Recent Work,
Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley
1982
Twenty-Nine Degrees (M.F.A. Show), University Art
Museum, Berkeley

13th Annual 2-D Art Show, San Jose Art League, San Jose
Small Format, Richmond Art Center, Richmond, California

1983

Beyond Words, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art,
San Jose

San Francisco Art Fair, Fort Mason, San Francisco

30th Annual: *Painting*, Richmond Art Center,
Richmond, California

1985

Rick Arnitz and Roland L. Worthington, University Art
Gallery, California State University, Hayward

60th Annual Crocker-Kingsley Exhibition, Crocker Art
Museum, Sacramento

1985 Pro Arts Annual, Pro Arts Gallery, Oakland

1986

Chain Reaction II, San Francisco Art Commission Gallery,
San Francisco

First Aid: Rick Arnitz and John Ferrell, 1078 Gallery,
Chico, California

1987

Exhibition 1987, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley

1988

Two East Bay Painters, Peter Almeida and Rick Arnitz,
Gallery 44, Oakland

Chatchke: A Source Show, Nexus Gallery, Berkeley

1989

Group Show, Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco

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November 9, 1985, p. 4.

CHECKLIST

- Eastern Front*, 1988
oil enamel on canvas
72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Purchase, 89.50
- Huck*, 1988
oil enamel on canvas
72 x 72 in. (182.9 x 182.9 cm)
Collection of Gerda Roth, Greenbrae, California
- The History of Glorious Achievements*, 1988–89
oil enamel on canvas
72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm)
Collection of Stephen and Connie Wirtz, San Francisco
- Taps*, 1988–89
oil enamel on canvas
60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Collection of Steven and Nancy Oliver, Orinda, California
- Big Talk*, 1989
oil enamel on canvas
84 x 60 in. (213.4 x 152.4 cm)
Courtesy of Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco
- Country Joe's Mother*, 1989
oil enamel on paper
22 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (57.5 x 89.2 cm)
Courtesy of Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco
- Down Town*, 1989
oil enamel on canvas
72 x 96 in. (182.9 x 243.8 cm)
Collection of Bill and Martie Carleton, San Francisco
- Going Down (24 Stories)*, 1989
oil enamel on paper
35 x 22 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (88.9 x 57.5 cm)
Courtesy of Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco
- Stakes*, 1989
oil enamel on canvas
96 x 72 in. (243.8 x 182.9 cm)
Collection of Byron R. Meyer, San Francisco
- Twenty-Seventh Army*, 1989
oil enamel on canvas
71 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 96 in. (181.6 x 243.8 cm)
Private collection, San Francisco
- Mental Hygiene*, 1989
oil enamel on paper
35 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (89.2 x 57.5 cm)
Collection of Merrill and Sybil Conn, San Francisco

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