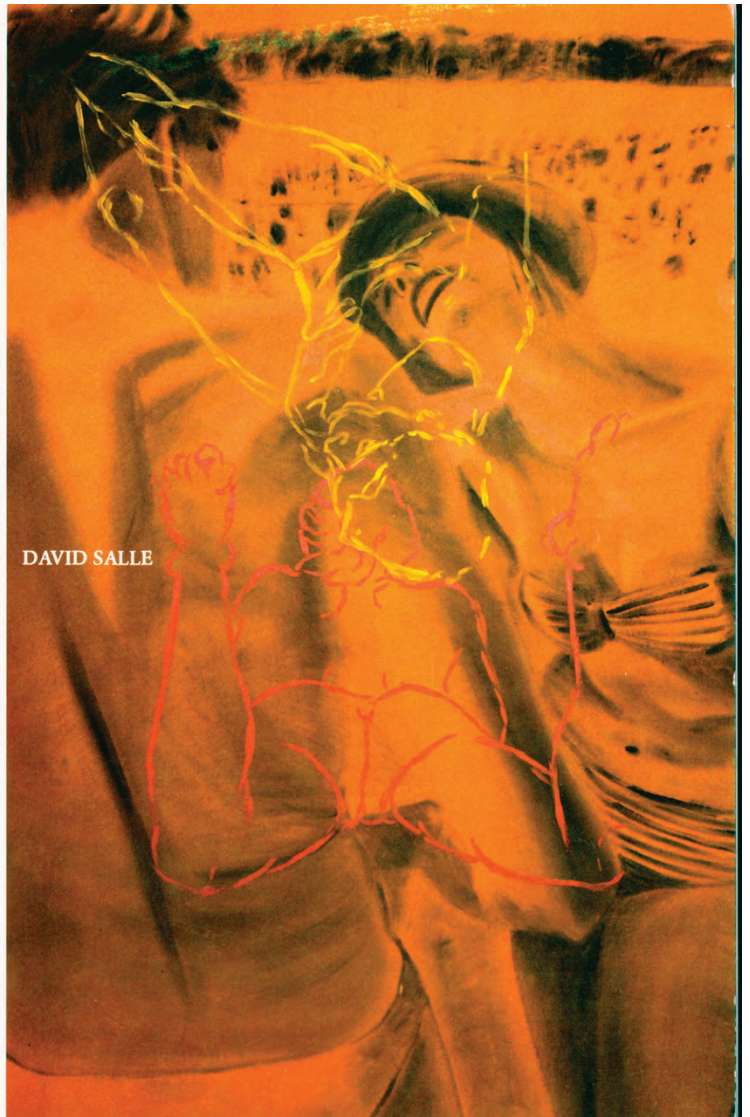


Museum Boymans-van Beuningen Rotterdam 26 februari-17 april 1983

DAVID SALLE



Schilderijen Paintings



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David Salle my view *W.A.L. Beeren*

This exhibition covers a short stretch of David Salle's output – produced mainly in 1981 and 1982 – the most spectacular aspect being how it has moved from a deliberate planning of the visual information within a rigid framework towards a violent presentation, aggressively rendered on a massive surface. There are constant elements in this striking development. One of them is the spatial and constituent connection and transference of such diverse elements as monumentally placed figures, staged groups, closed and open renderings, setups from the nineteen-fifties, fragments of 'style' in painting and utensils, realistic representations derived from illustrations and photographs, variations on works of art as part of a whole, the appearance of comic-strip figures.

The totality of these factors is quite often categorized in panels of different colours and style. As for the formal organization, the breakthrough to a new style is perhaps most striking in 'Hat(e)' (1982), a painting on a single massive canvas.

Another fascinating constant is the way in which a representation is emphatically present (in size, proximity and realistic precision), yet at the same time seeming loth to communicate. The more recent works also display this kind of remoteness, but their epic grandeur would appear to overcome the introversion.

The last few decades have seen such a tremendous increase of plastic methods and visual information both inside and outside art that artists apparently no longer feel the urge to express reality in terms of methods in order to develop such methods further. The effect, rather, is that artists express themselves in terms of terms, attaining a form of reality in that manner.

Cubism, for instance, does not need to be developed any further, perhaps because it has been tested to the utmost, perhaps because there is absolutely no more interest in analysing plastic space in the cubist pattern. The same might be said of constructivism, surrealism, abstract expressionism, minimal art and, until recently, of expressionism. A large number of young artists, however, David Salle among them, follow in the footsteps of the theorist Malraux in acknowledging all methods and labels under which reality is formulated in a painting. In a non-hierarchical, non-totalitarian society such labels are the instruments which may be used freely in order to create a personal ambiance. Pop art was the first art form to employ the cliché of a

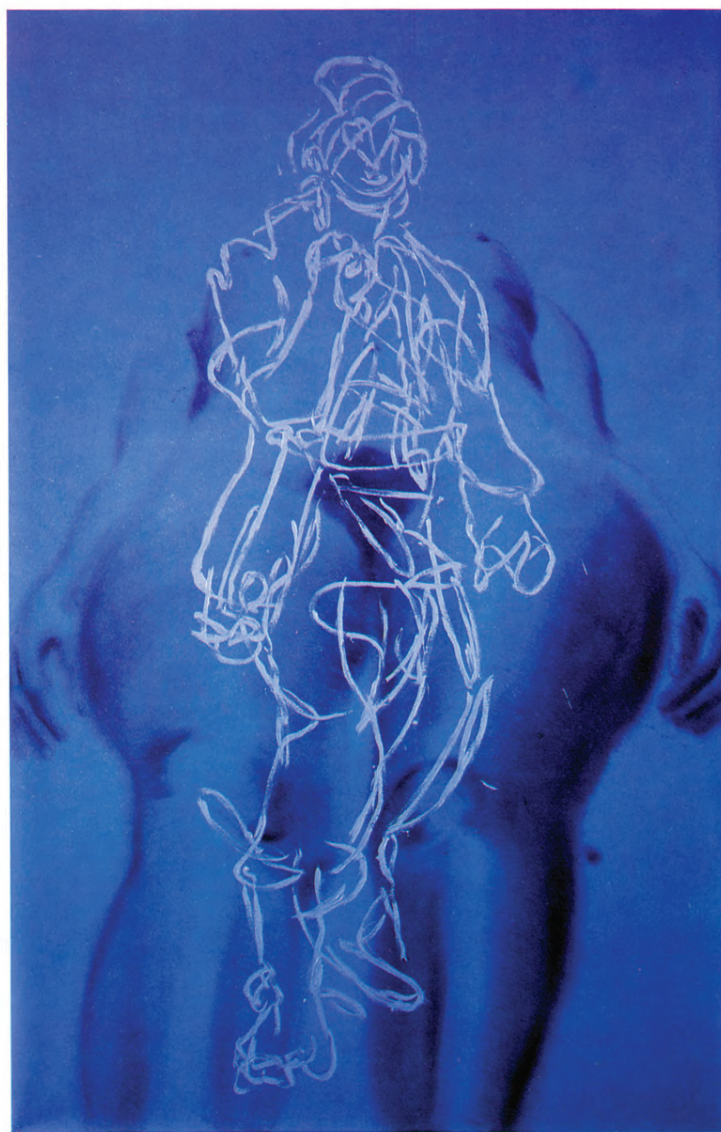


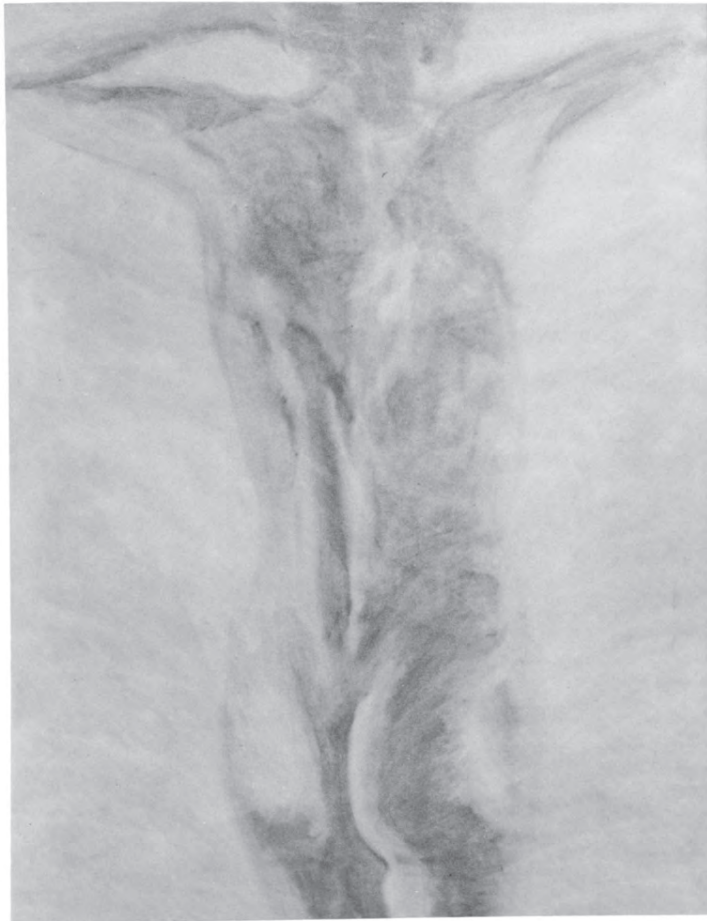
Rainy Night in the Rubber City, 1980 *cat. 3*



How Close the Ass of a Horse was to Actual Glue and Dog Food, 1980 *cat. 4*

Tight as Houses, 1980 *cat. 5*





Hurdle, 1980 *cat. 7*





Middle-Brow Literature, 1981 *cat.* 9



different style in order to express a personal content and a personal interest. David Salle is certainly indebted to this fact. He acknowledges Rosenquist's infiltration of realities, Andy Warhol's transposition of reality to cliché, the interest in the ambiguity of the object that intrigued Johns and Oldenburg. He has evidently learned from a later generation, like Sigmar Polke's, to trigger his own imagination by formulating an established art pattern. Finally, his immediate predecessors in age and his own artistic practice have set an example with their conceptualizing treatment of images.

18 With these factors Salle refurbishes and structures his plastic space, by which I mean no more than that he has felt free to treat plastic principles as clichés (e.g. by placing a shred of 'constructivism' in his painting as a 'figure'), contrasting the characters of different handwritings (e.g. a line-drawing with, or by means of, a sfumato); detaching incidents from a situation and transposing them to personal territory, thus alienating them (or at least displacing them); placing a realistically perceived activity beside (or in) a magisterial pose; producing the allure of painting by illustrative reproduction, crossing history, e.g. of a formed object, with an idyllic scene by relating eroticism to analytical diagrams. He has thus achieved a new form, partly aided by the film medium and electronic visual means and his capacity for design, none of which, however, is the main reason for his exceptionality. Salle's individuality can be seen from his value judgement in placing his derived or created items in his visual and spiritual field of tension. That is where the intrigue begins for me, the fascination, the emotion. Or rather, more significantly: that is how Salle expresses his emotional tension.

David Salle intrigues because of his subtlety and finesse, not without arrogance, in creating an environment which accommodates art and inspiration as clichés and endows existing clichés with the allure of art.

The nature of his emotions has a concealed character in his work. The fascination is due to the contrast between the obvious presence of an idea and the inaccessibility of what is taking place in those ideas. What I mean in practice is that Salle operates with fragments of emotion in the same way he operates with fragments of illustration, fragments of reality and fragments of style or, in paintings not on show at this exhibition, the way he uses letters. He controls these elements very strictly; in their original function they are

inaccessible. A fragment of illustration cannot be read as illustration. A fragment of 'style' can never pass for the concept of a painting, but it cannot be judged separately on, say, its constructive merits either. Nor do the fragments of emotion match our emotion. They are used as instruments in exactly the same fashion as the aforesaid elements. They bear a fraction of someone else's emotion, thus being partly responsible for giving form to Salle's work. To some extent they give an impression of overt emotional clichés, particularly in the idyllic poses of the nudes.

Things get more intriguing when the 'fragments', by their sheer size, display a completeness of their own, not constituting the painting itself but acting as mysterious partners in the dialogue of the total work of art. This is where Salles's work deviates from the historically familiar assemblages and collages in which – starting with Picasso and Braque – the fragments were subordinated to a whole.

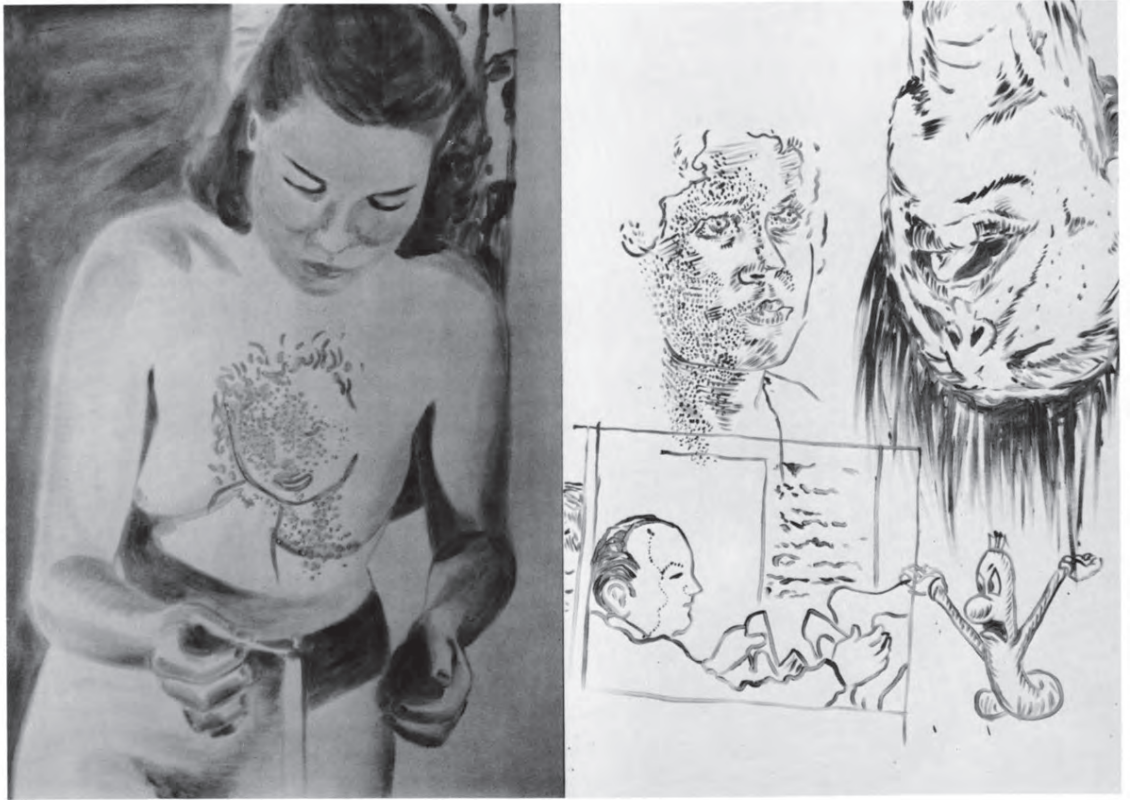
A fragment of newspaper in a Picasso collage is not meant to be read objectively, even if the odd word in such a snatch of text may possess emotional eloquence. The function of the fragments in a cubist collage (even when they are painted copies) is to be absorbed into a total image which is indestructible and in which the parts are plainly distinguishable, although inaccessible in their original function.

In the collages of the surrealists the accent was different; the derived fragments were completely absorbed in a representational narrative, the intrigue of which cannot be severed.

I could also mention Rauschenberg's assemblages and paintings in which a host of objects are palpably present and lead a fairly independent existence (a tyre, a goat, a fire-hose). The character of such plasticity is not narrative. It is partly constructively composed, but to a more important extent it displays the *encounter* of real things within the field of tension of a work of art.

What do I mean when I speak of the 'personal completeness of fragments' with regard to David Salle's work? In many cases his paintings are fragmented, consisting of two or more equal or unequal parts, each with its own basic colour and each with its own picture or representation. For instance, one depicts a seated female, the other a standing male nude. Another one shows a pictorially painted crowd, the second is almost a draughtsman's rendering of a couple. Or the contrast is sharper, one panel representing a formally

Feasibility, 1981 cat. 10



abstract composition and the other conveying an illustrative circumstance. Together the different visual units form the painting and in that sense are indissoluble. But each individual one is so emphatically present as to bring to mind components or partners rather than fragments, mature components, differing from one another but also referring to one another, complementing, relativating or hampering one another.

Although the same applies here as what I pointed out above – the subordination of fragments to a visual whole – we should not ignore the effect of presence caused by the use of a large surface and by the coordination of non-uniform fragments which are nonetheless of equal value. To what extent is it still possible to see twice 50% as not being 100% each (with regard to the personal idea and eloquence), even if we take relativation into account and consequently the internal discussion and consequently, perhaps, the mutual influence?

20 Subordination to the whole in Salle's work can be seen in the seriousness with which he acts out an original item, or the summary of an original item, i.e. the image, the icon, of the original item.

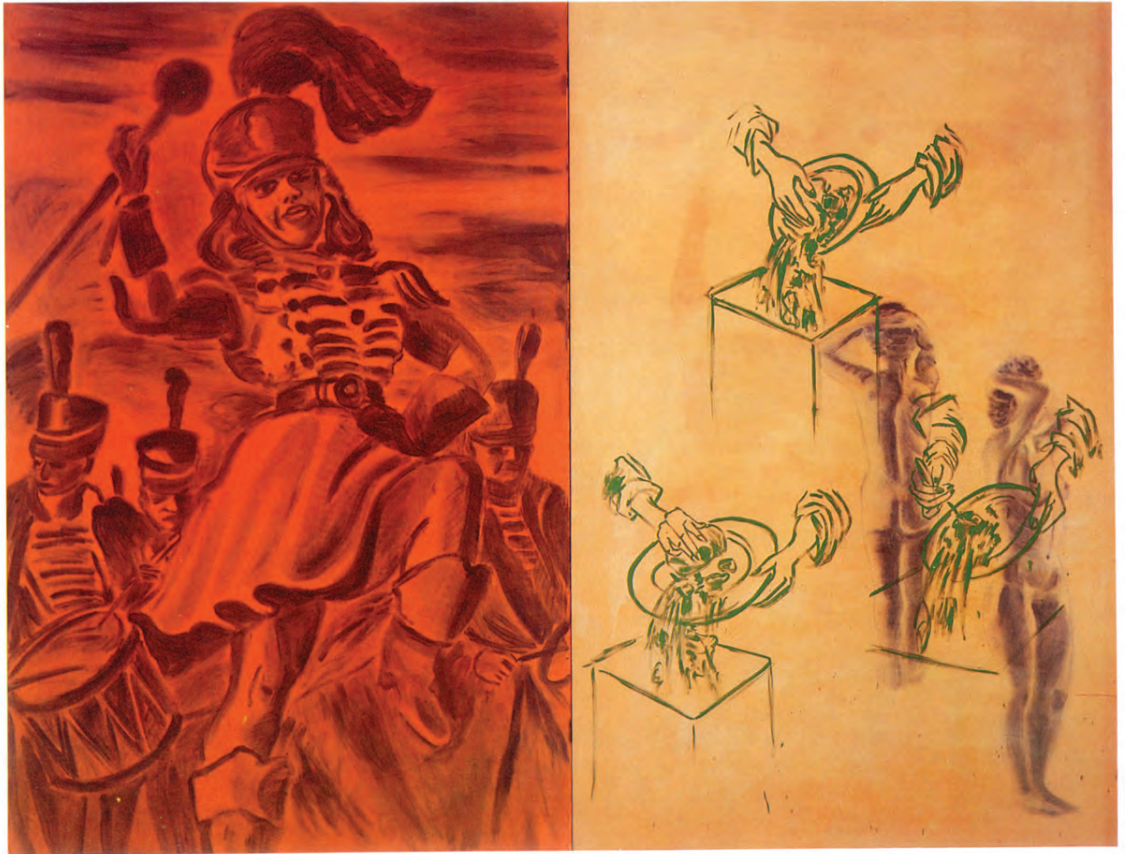
Acts out?

I mean acting in the sense of mimesis, i.e. rendering essentially recognizable. Acting, too, in the sense that he produces the allure of a presentation, taking what is real as the source for a new reality to which the source is inherent and which at the same time finds its strength in the present. In the understanding which the artist, in relation to his public, has with that original item. The quality of this event is in the serious identification which takes place at the very moment that personal influence – charging, reinforcing or debilitating – creates distance.

It is quite easy to realize this as far as the formal factors are concerned: one operates with an existing concept, does not surrender to it to such an extent as to disappear in it, but devotes one's own seriousness and formal strength to preserving one's identity. This is more than pastiche. It is not only deceptive imitation, the pastiche is a subordinate vehicle for displaying individual opinions. The characterization serves to present the individual personality in a role.

How does this apply in the representational scenes apparently derived partly from photographs and reproductions, but in which Salle sometimes introduces

Drum, 1981 cat. II



counter-forms? Highly characteristic is the remoteness of such pictures, in which the crux of the action or events is far beyond the spectator-painting relationship. There is no question of their being addressed to the spectator, nor, however, of being turned away from him. And yet such a connection does exist in painting, a conspicuous example being Velasquez' *Meninas* in which the dwarfs and a figure in the background are looking out of the painting, seemingly at the spectator – and consequently at the painter, one might conclude. The painted situation was suggested by the painter, though; perhaps he decided that the relationship should be between the portrayed and the beholders (of whom the artist was the first).

In this kind of work of art, in which those portrayed look so actively beyond their painted space, there seems to be maximum communication with the spectator. At the same time, however, one is forced to notice that their outward regard confirms the distance that exists between the work of art and ourselves. A bridge is crossed between reported reality and our reality. But it is the distance (the chasm between imagination and direct experience) that is bridged. The look that comes forth from a work of art leaves us; after the initial confusion we realize that we are outside.

In David Salle's work the spectator is not so much inside or outside, addressed or rejected; the spectator is ignored. By this I simply mean that the participants in a painted representation ignore us. Salle does not put them on terms with us, the spectators. We have no way of identifying with the quasi-reality of the painting.

In various scenes the remoteness is emphasized by the introverted manner of the 'actors' and by their lack of mutual contact, their absorption in what they are doing, the intimacy of a male-female relationship, the historical distance of certain 'quoted' scenes.

The distance is even more remarkable in the case of a turbulent scene whose characters, although open-eyed and looking towards the outside, seem to be entirely devoid of any sense of being watched by us (i.e. by the artist and by people looking at the painting). There is no question of 'appearing in front of' or 'display' in such a scene. We are merely faced with an autonomous scene with its own force-field of action and energy, which we perceive by the agency of the painting. And yet at the same time there is that immediate presence, not so much a framework for this fragment of reality as a window, a door set ajar, or a candid camera for us voyeurs to peer through. The bewildering

thing is how naturally, 'to scale' so to speak, we enter each other's circles without feeling the slightest contact, although we realize that we are looking at something very recognizable and not, for instance, at an extraordinary surrealist occurrence. The only thing that separates us is the direction of our respective attentions.

It is rather like performing simple actions at the foot of a big projection screen, in front of what is going on on that screen. The present relates to a monumental projection of the past. It is hard to address such a projection. Salle has definitely introduced such a piece of dissimilar reality as a part of his painting. The result is enervating: a distinct friction in our experience.

22 Evidently, a painting, whatever it represents that is outside ourselves, is plainly intended to be looked at (thought about, sensed) with the artist. The artist is the centre of what the painting represents. The centre is never represented by the centre of the representation itself. Every artist is aware of that, but in this twentieth century he often tries to increase the tension of his work by introducing external elements of existing reality into this conceptual reality. The effect is to make differently directed products coming from different structures collide. They are natural or other materials (wood, iron, plastics among the paint), manufactured products (fragments of newspapers, photographs, drawings), fully-fledged objects (stuffed animals, lamps, tables, crockery, etc.). The effect is threefold: formal or constituent integration, directed towards art; destruction of the aesthetic magic, directed towards life; confrontation of the phenomena and energies from art and reality, in the Rauschenberg procedure: to fill the gap between art and life.

In his paintings David Salle employs moments of film, photograph, work of art, reproduction, dance, event, situation, each with its own special interest, form, concept and material. All of them have different original meanings and functions, the authentic characteristics of which he preserves so that they break out of the painting, or at any rate disturb something in the attention of the spectator who expects everything in a painting to be geared to him. And yet it is definitely the case of a painting by Salle, conceived and painted by *him*, in which everything is therefore his, including all (painted) realia from the outside. The special thing about David Salle is hence that he conceptually manipulates images which owe their existence to somebody else's concepts. By alternately giving them a

subordinate position and identifying with them, 'grand plan', he produces that exciting intersection of axes – in works of art which to my mind are among the most 'autonomous' to have been made since abstract art. On the understanding that these works emanate a highly emotional radiation, and that we experience the mixture of emotions and Salle's 'summary' of them as a reality of the painting, interpreting it as such to suit our own needs.

What is this work all about, with its complex content, its film-like progression of objects and its literally monotonous rendering? And in particular: what does this monumental, frightening presence of senselessness mean?

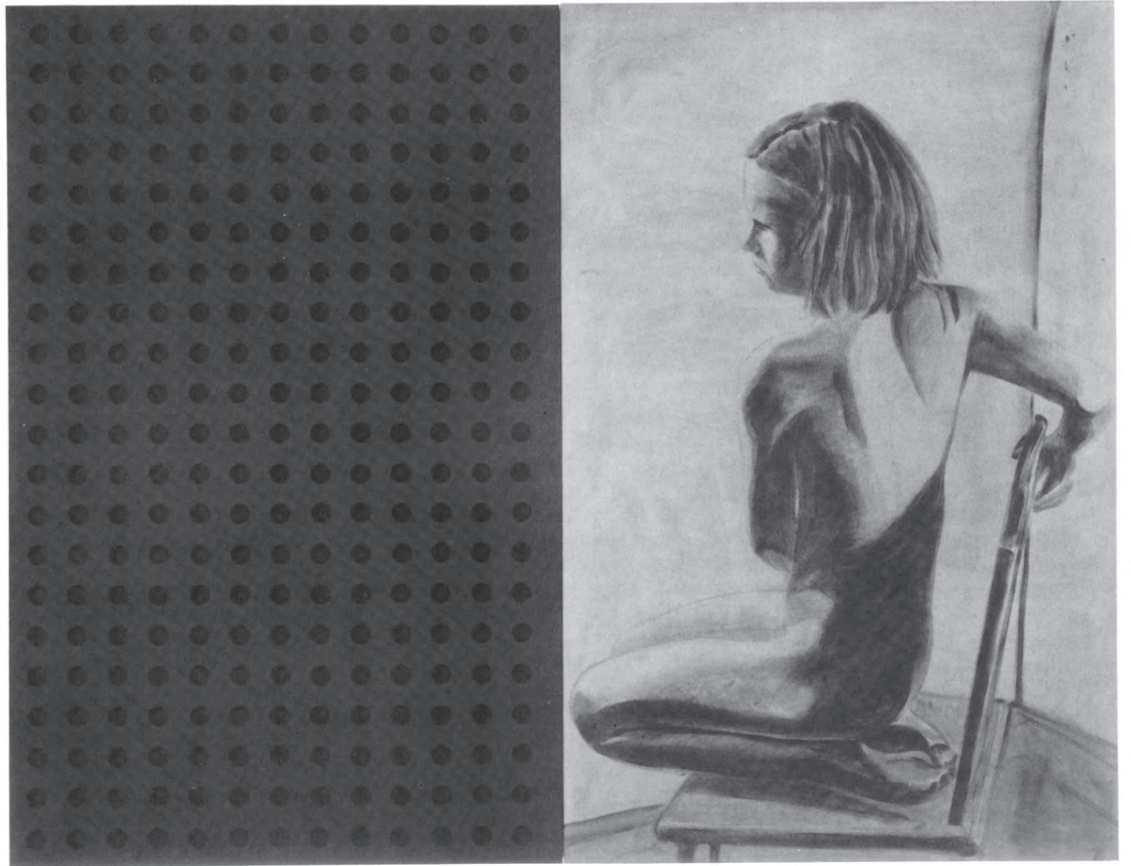
If so many elements in his painting are quotations from society, are we conducting a society discourse with him, in which sense and non-sense cannot always be distinguished, and every opinion, mimicry and gesture is intended to become importantly present for a brief instant? Or does the world appear to David Salle as Hades?

I tend towards the latter interpretation. I see the phantoms of the dead loom up, forms fleeing from the corpses of modern art, strayed social events which once possessed the validity of being topical, heroic poses gesturing hopelessly in an aesthetically coloured void. History's incapability to reach us. Salle's incapability, too, to gain a hold on it with his delicate scepticism.

In accordance with Teiresias' instructions, Odysseus dug a pit measuring one ell by one ell to catch the dark blood of the lambs and sheep he had sacrificed. Thus Odysseus sat down in Hades, jostled by 'the spirits of the dead, rising from Erebus: young brides and youths, sorely-tried hoary old men, innocent maidens wounded by pain for the first time, many warriors killed in battle...' Nobody dared look him in the face. 'Tell me, prince (Teiresias), how can she (Odysseus' mother) be made to realize that it is I? He answered me at once: 'Listen well, I shall show you an easy way. Every spirit who allows you to approach the blood will pronounce the truth. But whoever refuses will turn away from you and retreat.'

The blood can only mean the mystic force in our physicality and earthliness. Whoever drinks the dark sacrificial blood takes part and identifies. It seems to me as though Salle, in his new work, has sacrificed his lambs. He has abandoned his delicacy, but his work is inundated with energy, drama, aggression, love and glory. The epic has ousted the story.

My Subjectivity, 1981 *cat. 12*



The Wild Bunch, 1982 cat. 13



## Lijst van werken

### List of works

1

Hundreds of Tons, 1980

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 215 x 140 cm

coll. Arthur en Jeanne Cohen, New York

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

2

Archer's House, 1980

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 210 x 300 cm

coll. Robert en Doris Hillman, New York

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

3

Rainy Night in the Rubber City, 1980

acrylverf, contékrijt op doek/acrylic, conte crayon on canvas

145 x 220 cm

coll. Mera en Don Rubell, New York

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

4

How Close the Ass of a Horse was to Actual Glue and  
Dog Food, 1980

acrylverf, contékrijt op doek/acrylic, conte crayon on canvas

180 x 120 cm

coll. Dupuy Warrick Reed, New York

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

5

Tight as Houses, 1980

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 200 x 127 cm

part. coll.

courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zürich

6

Bushels of Diamonds and Emeralds, 1980

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 200 x 310 cm

coll. Gene en Barbara Schwarz, New York

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

7

Hurdle, 1980

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 210 x 150 cm

coll. Douglas S. Cramer, Los Angeles

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

8

The Old, the New and the Different, 1981

acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 240 x 375 cm

coll. Janet en Michael Green, Londen

courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**9**

Middle-Brow Literature, 1981  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
215 x 270 cm  
coll. Carroll Janis, New York  
courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery New York

**10**

Feasibility, 1981  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
145 x 210 cm  
coll. Charles en Valerie Diker, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**11**

Drum, 1981  
acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 218 x 284 cm  
coll. American Graffiti Gallery, Amsterdam  
Barbara en Jules Farber

**12**

My Subjectivity, 1981  
acrylverf op doek, masoniet/acrylic on canvas, masonite  
215 x 280 cm  
coll. Donald Marron, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**13**

The Wild Bunch, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
225 x 250 cm  
coll. Perry Rubinstein, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**14**

The Hardness of Style, 1981  
acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 155 x 200 cm  
coll. Barbara Jakobson, New York

**15**

Untitled, 1981  
acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 175 x 318 cm  
coll. Dianne Salle, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**16**

Savagery and Misrepresentation, 1981  
acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 200 x 155 cm  
coll. Eli en Edythe L. Broad, Los Angeles  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**17**

How to Use Words as a Powerful Aphrodisiac, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
225 x 442 cm  
part. coll.  
courtesy Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zürich

**18**

Hat(e), 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
270 x 420 cm  
coll. Larry Gagosian, Los Angeles  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**19**

Pure Difference, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
240 x 390 cm  
coll. Janet en Michael Green, Londen  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**20**

A Couple of Centuries, 1982  
acrylverf op doek/acrylic on canvas 275 x 400 cm  
coll. Doris en Charles Saatchi, Londen  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**21**

The Burning Bush, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
234 x 300 cm  
coll. Doris en Charles Saatchi, Londen  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**22**

Before no Walk, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
215 x 400 cm  
coll. Perry Rubinstein, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

**23**

The Blue Room, 1982  
olieverf, acrylverf op doek/oil, acrylic on canvas  
225 x 442 cm  
coll. Angela Ho, New York  
courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, Leo Castelli Gallery

## Bruikleengevers

### Lenders to the exhibition

American Graffiti Gallery, Amsterdam  
Eli en Edythe L. Broad, Los Angeles  
Arthur en Jeanne Cohen, New York  
Douglas S. Cramer, Los Angeles  
Charles en Valerie Diker, New York  
Larry Gagosian, Los Angeles  
Janet en Michael Green, Londen  
Robert en Doris Hillman, New York  
Angela Ho, New York  
Barbara Jakobson, New York  
Carrol Janis, New York  
Donald Marron, New York  
Dupuy Warrick Reed, New York  
Mera en Don Rubell, New York  
Perry Rubinstein, New York  
Doris en Charles Saatchi, Londen  
Dianne Salle, New York  
Gene en Barbara Schwarz, New York  
particuliere collectie

## Colofon

### Colophon

organisatie tentoonstelling  
exhibition organized by  
Wim Beeren  
David Salle  
Talitha Schoon

redactie catalogus  
catalogue edited by  
Wim Beeren  
Talitha Schoon

ontwerp catalogus  
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Amsterdam

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Jean Kallina, New York  
Alan Zindman/Lucy Fremont, New York

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Machteld Schrameijer, New York  
i.s.m. Cor Blok, Amsterdam (Engels-Nederlands)

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