

**Bob Nickas:** Which are all works you weren't making towards a specific exhibition. They were only for yourself...research and development, rather than production. You have a certain approach, to be sure, and we can identify the sort of moves you make, yet you don't follow any formula. It's clear that you take chances, that your process involves embracing chance operations. You don't always know how things will turn out, and you don't want to know. You may be as surprised by what you've done as the viewer, and at times it seems you almost welcome disaster. There are paintings where you orchestrate a collision, and it may or may not turn out well. Am I right about any of this? It's a kind of will to misfit.

**Sally Ross:** That's right! One of the things I discovered when making these paintings is that in moments of chance, or setting things in motion without knowing what will happen, the surprise outcome seems to live on in the piece. Looking at the evidence, it's like you're discovering something too, or you can't explain why but there's something unexpected that you can feel as a viewer. When I was working on Big Pink, I didn't know it would be three-dimensional until the very end, when it gained a second life. I didn't know if it would work. I just had the question: What if it were opening up and pushing out and something else had to fill in those empty spaces? Essentially one idea invaded another.

**BN:** This sculptural, topographic quality elevates the painting. You can't imagine it flat. And in fact the bedding makes me think of how sheets and blankets twisted around in a bed, with a cocooned body, can resemble a mountain range. At least that's how it might appear when you first stumble out in the morning. At the risk of taking this reading too far, the creamy drips below the peaks and valleys in the center of that painting resemble melting snow.

**SR:** Often in the studio I'll have something going in a certain direction, which was the case with the beige painting, Holy Roller. The original thrust of it was black brushstrokes on white canvas, deconstructed and scrambled. Then I wanted something dramatic to occur, not completely in my control, which would almost wipe out the painting, though not entirely. There's a desire to sabotage. But the sabotage can be it's own thrust, too. Since my concern has become more about the process and less about the outcome it's been easier to take chances. A loss of control can be exhilarating, and it's easier to access when my hand is not as present.

**BN:** With Holy Roller, which is also true for Betsy's Gift, the wiping out, or erasure you're talking about, subverts its opposite: a defacement. The dark, gestural loops and blocks that are somewhat reminiscent of Franz Kline, appear to have been "boarded over" by the stitched beige canvas, and they now peek through from behind, even if they join with the other parts to comprise a basically even surface. The illusion is an illusion. There is no painting behind the painting. If we think back to Split Seascape, what I referred to as representation interrupted, with these paintings, and actually everything you do now, we can characterize this approach as abstraction interrupted. In terms of the intentional loss of control, as you say, part of what you do is de-limit, or handicap, the presence of the hand. The scratchy, semi-scribbled drawing in Goodbye Old Friend, for example, was created by attaching clusters of color pencils to a broom and sweeping canvas laid out on the floor. You've gone from mundane image as subject to mundane task as a purposeful means to an end. Knowing your representational work, my guess is that you have a facility for drawing, so this was one way for you to remove the hand's accuracy. You then went on to introduce an aspect of game-playing in your work, as when you placed paint-filled balloons on a canvas and shot arrows from the far end of the studio. Sometimes you hit them, sometimes you missed, and the punctures in the canvas are traces of both your marksmanship and how archery, indoor archery!, was a new pastime. Although this must have been enjoyable, I don't know that having fun was your main aim with these works. What else, or who else, was on your mind?

**SR:** What I meant by fun was a letting go of self-imposed restrictions, with the aim of discovery. That's what defines play. Archery wasn't a new pastime that I happened to use for a painting. I learned how to do it specifically to make that painting.

(excerpt from "A Map To Get Thereed" Sally Ross in conversation with Bob Nickas, exhibition catalogue)