

An Exhibition of Painting, Sculpture and Video

by

Charles Baker

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in

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ABSTRACT

This M.F.A. thesis exhibition consists of painting, sculpture, and video completed over the last five months. In support of the exhibition, an artist's statement outlines my exploration of the interaction between artist and audience, stylization and mass production of image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DEDICATION

I wish to extend many thanks to Charles Baker Sr., Elizabeth Baker, and Deanne Butineau.---

Three individuals that have shown me unwavering support, continuous encouragement, and loving inspiration.

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My M.F.A. thesis exhibition consists of paintings, sculpture, and video completed over the last five months.

My creative energy is generated by the people around me every day, and that energy is fuelled by an environment that is richly social and interactive. In my work, both as a visual artist and as a musician, I have learned to respond to an audience; to feed off the energy, expectations, and attention span of its members. My musical creative energy relies on audience to sustain it. In my work as a musician I have learned to control my creativity, and I have come to expect it to function efficiently when I am exposed to an interactive environment for which it is required. Music, dramatic arts, dance, and other types of performing art are all temporal, and potentially interactive. Painting can be analogous to these art forms, and is full of potential for interaction between artist and audience. This exhibition is an examination of my creative energy in relation to painting, and my painting in relation to audience.

Daily Paintings (fig.1-14), a performance consisting of fourteen paintings executed in as many days from November 11 to November 24, 1996, are the earliest works in this exhibition. This performance took place within a situational construct which enabled me to explore the relationship between artist and audience. The construct consisted of a 220sq.ft. studio space containing: a stage; an audience area with six chairs; fourteen blank canvases (51"X39");

continual video documentation; a black *video line* dividing the stage from the audience¹; the artist's costume (a black shirt, trousers, and shoes); and a video surveillance monitor alerting the audience to the presence of the video camera. The *Daily Paintings*' sizes were determined by averaging the dimensions of 255 popular historical masterpieces that have been reproduced innumerable times. For example, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Monet's *Waterlily Pond*, Munch's *The Scream*, Warhol's *Marilyn*, etc. The act of painting began at 8:00pm every evening of the performance, and ended either when the painting was complete, or I was too exhausted to continue. Occasionally, a painting would reach a stage of completeness very quickly. If the audience was still in attendance, I would continue the performance, attempting to push the painting to another level, inviting my physical and creative stamina to either accept or decline the challenge. I find it "interesting to give the mind a command, then watch the body carry out the process" (Montano, p.781).

In the past, I have found myself entwined in a "love-hate" relationship with painting, stimulated by the assumption that painting is normally a solitary activity. During *Daily Paintings*, I turned the act of painting into a performance, and I encouraged the audience to be active rather than passive. As a result this performance became a communal activity. During the performance, audience involvement would include: critiquing, painting, and engaging in discourse addressing the role of the artist and of painting in contemporary society. The environment around my paintings became an open forum for this type of interaction. When the process of painting

¹ The video camera's field of view was carefully outlined in black paint on the walls and floor of the performance area, creating a tensive mid-air division between the *stage* and the *audience*. The stage area side of *the line*, where the paintings were executed, was painted white.

becomes a solitary act, isolated from the audience, vitality for me is lost. I negate the romantic notion of artist as “social outcast” (Wolff, p.11)². I think of my role in a creative act as one of mediator rather than author. In *Daily Paintings* this de-centring encourages the audience to play an active and participatory role in creating a finished product. “This de-centring, of course, increasingly removes the artist from the centre of the stage” (Wolff, pg.25).

The construct of *Daily Paintings* allowed me to de-centre myself from the act of painting, encouraged audience interaction, and temporarily acted as a substitute for my urge to deface, sabotage, or mock my own work. Although rigid, the construct of *Daily Paintings* provided a framework or a forum that permitted my paintings to be just “paintings”. By de-centring myself from the process, it was as though I was allowing the paintings to be what they wanted to be, and to evolve freely during the two week period. As Wolff states, “structures must not be conceptualized as simply placing constraints upon human agency, but as enabling” (Wolff, p.23). This duality of structure inspired a type of freedom which was rejuvenating, fresh, and promised distraction from the dilemma of how and what to paint. Upon reviewing the seventy-six hours of documentary video tape from the *Daily Paintings*, I found this uninhibited feeling to be dominant in the early stages of the performance. However, the aleatoric nature of the paintings became muted very quickly when the rigid construct surrounding them was combined with creative and physical fatigue.

² Wolff critiques the notion of artist as social outcast in *The Social Production of Art* -- It is in the nature of art that its practitioners are not ordinary mortals; that they necessarily work alone, detached from social life and interaction and often in opposition to social values and practices. The artist/author/composer as social outcast, starving in a garret, persists as a common idea of a social type, and one particular form of an historical figure is transformed into a universal definition.

At the mid-way point of the performance, *Painting #7* (fig. 7), I became creatively and physically exhausted. I simply wanted to sit. The performance dictated that I continue painting, but the physical construct of *Daily Paintings* would not allow me to sit and paint at the same time. *Painting #7* was created by painting from the audience area with a brush fastened to the end of a long stick (fig. 15). In my state of exhaustion I failed to realize that this long brush began to unexpectedly dissolve the division between the stage area and the audience area. I found it nearly impossible to assess or think critically about the *Daily Paintings* while engaged as the performer. Variance between the idea conceived and the image realized is an essential part of my creative process. *Daily Paintings* was an exploration of spontaneity versus control, a personal testing which resulted in a difference between the intention of *Daily Paintings* and its realization. Until *Painting #7* the stage and audience areas were very confrontational, and the artist/audience connection was very abrupt.³ This relationship created a very successful tension that accelerated the realization of how fragile the division between stage and audience really was.

As the days and paintings continued, so did the deterioration of this division. I began inviting members of the audience to aid in the act of painting; to fill in large areas, lay grounds or perform other tasks that would not directly jeopardize the progress of the painting nor delay its completion. Certain members of the audience felt an addiction towards the *Daily Paintings*, many of them did not want to miss a single performance. At the same time they felt suspicious as to whether or not this construct was “Art”. They enjoyed the transformation of my images, the

³ The stage area was only fifty-four inches deep and was divided from the audience area by a line not more than two inches wide, therefore, if I were to take more than one large step backward to view my work, I would literally be in the lap of a front row member.

anticipation of what was to come, the mystery of what they had missed⁴, the dialogue with other audience members and myself about painting, and the routine of the entire construct.

Over the course of the performance, the *Daily Paintings* underwent a transformation. The result was more degenerative than elaborative. As the limit of my creative and physical endurance was tested, I searched for ways to keep up with the pace I had initially set for myself before beginning the *Daily Paintings*. The images became more and more stylized as I quickly replicated them with the aid of flat stencils, and templates cut from wood or plastic. This method of replication had the effect of distilling the image as well as clarifying the audience's emotional interaction with the images. As such, the process corresponded to the methodology/theory articulated by R.G. Collingwood:

“If you want to produce a typical case of a certain emotion, the way to do it is to put before your audience a representation of the typical features belonging to the kind of thing that produces it: Make your kings very royal, make your cottages very cottagesque, your oak trees very oakish” (Collingwood, p.28).

I examined the essence of the motifs from *Daily Paintings*, and re-presented them in an increasingly more stylized and decorative fashion. My flowers became very “flowery”.

The concept of the replicated image carried over to the other works in this exhibition as a direct response to the *Daily Paintings*. To eliminate the solitude of an image, I tend to replicate or mass-produce that image. My paintings, as a result, are often repeated over and over, and thus

⁴ At the end of each performance, the finished painting was removed from the stage area and placed in storage where it remained until the installation of this exhibition. One audience member who was absent for painting #3 but present for painting #4, requested to view painting #3 but was refused. Upon refusal the audience gave that painting the title *The Mystery Painting*.

become stylized or somewhat of a manufactured trick. The referentiality of an image, when stylized, becomes more ambiguous, and allows for a broad range of interpretation by the viewer. The stylization of an image is valuable in that the communicative qualities of stylization are stronger than those of its derivative. Once I recognize stylization for this particular value, I tend to call upon it, take advantage of it, and manufacture it. My seemingly trite images are produced by tracing or by dabbing stencils with a brush. The stencils used to manufacture my decorative floral patterns usually produce positive/negative images, linear shapes or silhouettes. I am interested in how the silhouette addresses reality. It has an interior, an exterior, and an edge. This edge is very descriptive at first glance but always allows for a certain amount of mystique, similar to the unknown identity behind a cameo. Each object is subject to the viewer's imagination. As the images of my paintings became more stylized, I found *stencil rollers*, in which the image is carved in the negative, to be a more suitable process for the character of the image.⁵ Similar in nature to the silk screening process favoured by Warhol, the use of the rollers enables me to paint images that are infinitely reproducible, and to address the notion of art as commodity in my work.

In *Commodity Boxes* (fig.17-39), we see mass-produced paintings in a row, packaged for the public as if they were consumer items. Each painting is paired with a stencil roller inside a sealed plastic package, hung on a small metal hook. The stencil roller that accompanies a painting is usually a stylistic representation of that same painting, carved into the foam surface.

⁵ The image on the stencil roller is carved in the negative, and the majority of the rollers are made of soft foam to allow easy carving, optimum absorption of paint and multiple applications/printings.

When viewing the *Commodity Boxes*, a feeling of suspicion develops, similar to that expressed by the audience in the *Daily Paintings*. However, the *Commodity Boxes*, expand that feeling.

“This feeling, the suspicion that we are *being tricked*, is still a factor when viewing art that involves elements from popular culture today. But rather than using their art to mock or dupe the viewer, artists are embracing their own cultural experiences to bring their art closer to the everyday - through common icons and images- in order to study the significance of their work within the world they share with their audiences” (Genereaux, p.2).

The *Commodity Boxes* suggest that the audience/viewer can be both consumer and producer.

They were created with the assumption that they would be consumed. I was pushed by an

everything must go attitude in the case of the *Commodity Boxes*. Recalling Oldenburg’s *The*

Store, the *Commodity Box* items are priced to sell: *Rose*.....\$39.95; *Signature*.....\$19.99;

Veneer.....\$18.99; *Knot Plug*.....\$15.49. These prices include cost of materials and minimal

labour. In the case that the pieces do not sell, prices will be dropped absorbing any profits to

ensure the sale. The sale of the *Commodity Boxes* will consummate the act of production. After

the boxes have been *consumed*, these works further function as tools of image replication; that is

to say, the viewer can re-produce a stylized version of their newly purchased painting in the

comfort of their own home using, of course, the stencil roller. As in the *Daily Paintings*, I

encourage the audience to play an active and participatory role in creating a finished product.

This interaction is essential to the success of the piece. In the *Commodity Boxes*, image, image

reduction, and means of image replication are all incorporated within one piece. When multiplied

by twenty, the wall soon presents a substantial inventory of choice. An image made

from a stencil reinforces a certain type of visual language. This language has potential for:

repetition which creates pattern and replication which expedites application of image. The use of

stencils in the *Daily Paintings* and *Commodity Boxes* sparked an interest in this language. As my images became more stylized and replicated, they distanced themselves from expressive mark and approached a definition of decorative pattern. Amy Goldin describes the effects of pattern on the image;

“Pattern is lethal and can kill the power of any image. Simply regularizing the interval between pictorial elements makes forms lose their individual meaning. They become motifs whose similarity overrides any differences among them. It is here, in the difference between motif and subject, that the true ‘mereness’ and ‘abstractness’ of pattern lies. Pattern trivializes and degrades its themes by turning them into aesthetic details within a larger, more inclusive form” (Goldin, p.51).

In my most recent works; *Still life with Styrofoam Balls*, *Still life with Trilliums*, *Still Life with Lavender*, *Still Life with Velour*, and *Still Life with Spray-Painted Rose*, (fig. 40-50) decorative motif fabrics replace canvas and provide a ground of repetitive, hypnotic pattern, on which to apply image. “Pattern is disorienting. It has no intrinsic shape, no body or geography of its own. It is a featureless field of equally stressed marks, a sea of notation that demands justification as a form before it can be investigated in detail” (Goldin, p.52). While creating these five works I soon realized that any image applied on top of these beautiful “grounds” rejected the notion of visual economy⁶, violated the expanse of colour, and interrupted the viewer’s “restless refusal to focus or, attempt to grasp the nature of the whole” (Goldin, p.51).

When I applied a variety of stencils and patterns to these decorative fabrics, the result was

⁶ E.H. Gombrich, “Sense of Order - A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art,” Oxford, 1979. P.151. “The perception of repetition and redundancy, presents a great economy. Faced with an array of identical objects, whether floral arrangement, beads in a necklace, paving stones, etc., we rapidly form the preliminary hypothesis that we are confronted with a lawful assembly, and we need only sample the elements for redundancies by sweeping our eye along the whole series and just taking in one repeating component.”

oppositional rather than complimentary. Pure pattern's only distraction is representation. I interpret this distraction as a positive tension in my work. In the *Still Life* series, this distraction took the form of large bouquets of artificial flowers placed in vases affixed to the fabric surface.

My interest in pattern painting is not stimulated by the object, but rather by what John Perreault calls the double-take effect. "The double-take effect has to do with cognitive readjustment - the time it takes to convert one 'set' into another, the shift from seeing something as non-art to seeing it as art" (Perreault, p.35). This double-take effect has been present in, "Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, Photo-Realism etc." (Perreault, p.35), but most notable in the work of Duchamp. It depends a great deal upon context. "A bottle-rack would have little or no effect in a junk shop, but placed in an art context and considered as art, it reverberates: and by questioning art, becomes art. Its presence is a dislocation of expectations" (Perreault, p.35). The double-take is similar to the feeling of suspicion in the earlier works and is present in the *Still Life* series when the viewer is confronted with decorative floral arrangements, perhaps similar to a decorative idea of their own. The use of colour in the *Still Life* series is a reference to the succession of colour application in commercial printing. This also serves as a subtle reference to mass production, suggesting that infinite colourful displays of decoration could be produced upon combining these five colours. However, each *Still Life* work seems as though it would be difficult to match with the viewer's home decor in terms of colour and pattern. This creates a tension that is amplified by the context of the gallery.

The colour co-ordinated flowers in the *Still Life* paintings appear real or authentic, but are

artificial. They reference the floral still life paintings of Ambrosius Brueghel, in terms of composition, and oppose his view of beauty as ephemeral. In a couplet from *A Flower Piece with Vanitas Symbols*, Brueghel writes, “art, beauty, riches, joy, and fame of majesty: indeed all things worldly, pass like a flower.” The paintings in the *Still Life* series become eternal memorials that preserve beauty.

In my work I constantly question the notion of authenticity, the real vs. the unreal. The *Commodity Boxes* are visually convincing as commercially packaged objects; they appear “real”. However, the audience is unsure if the objects are touchable, purchaseable, or, upon purchase if the object is to be opened or not. This uncertainty creates a tension that clouds the reality initially communicated. The construct of *Daily Paintings* permitted me to place myself in a situation which I considered to be more authentic than the solitary act of painting. My personal conceptual intentions were mixed with my reaction to this paradoxically “real” situation, to create the *Daily Paintings*. The “real”, interactive construct of *Daily Paintings* allowed me to de-centre myself during the act of painting. Parallel to this de-centring was the elimination of the autonomous, solitary image. Outside the construct, the *Daily Paintings* will become autonomous objects once again as they hang in a hallway or a living room. I find it interesting how an image, through replication and stylization, can lose its meaning and autonomy very quickly, then regain it instantly, upon purchase. The *Still Life* series is a direct reaction to *Daily Paintings* and *Commodity Boxes*, and can address two different audiences. The first audience may enjoy the *Still Life* work because it is visually interesting and it matches their wall paper. The second audience may enjoy this series because it addresses questions about traditional still life painting,

painting as decoration, or high and low art.

The people in my audience are all members of a visual culture; they have been exposed to more, and a greater variety of imagery than any generation that has ever lived. They can trust their senses: if they think something looks like dull, boring work, odds are, it is. For this reason it is important that my work is instantly visually interesting.

LIST OF REPRODUCTIONS

These reproductions are colour photocopies of original slides, and as such, are close approximations of the actual work. The original slides are on deposit in the University of Waterloo Fine Arts Department slide library.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Fig. 1 | Painting #1 Nov 12/96 |
| Fig. 2 | Painting #2 Nov 13/96 |
| Fig. 3 | Painting #3 Nov 13/96 |
| Fig. 4 | Painting #4 Nov 14/96 |
| Fig. 5 | Painting #5 Nov 15/96 |
| Fig. 6 | Painting #6 Nov 16/96 |
| Fig. 7 | Painting #7 Nov 17/96 |
| Fig. 8 | Painting #8 Nov 18/96 |
| Fig. 9 | Painting #9 Nov 19/96 |
| Fig. 10 | Painting #10 Nov 20/96 |
| Fig. 11 | Painting #11 Nov 21/96 |
| Fig. 12 | Painting #12 Nov 22/96 |
| Fig. 13 | Painting #13 Nov 23/96 |
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| Fig. 15 | Daily Paintings - Video Still |
| Fig. 16 | Daily Paintings - Video Installation View |

Fig. 17	Rose
Fig. 18	Rose - Detail
Fig. 19	Wood Veneer
Fig. 20	Wood Veneer - Detail
Fig. 21	Your Name
Fig. 22	Signature
Fig. 23	Blue
Fig. 24	Antique Lace
Fig. 25	Gold
Fig. 26	Vase
Fig. 27	Daisy
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Fig. 30	Knot Plug
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Fig. 34	Leaves 2
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Fig. 36	Tendrils
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Fig. 38	Wall

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- Fig. 40 Still Life with Styrofoam Balls
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- Fig. 48 Still Life with Spray-Painted Rose
- Fig. 49 Still Life with Spray-Painted Rose - Detail
- Fig. 50 Still Life Series - Installation View

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DAILY PAINTINGS
NOV 17/96 PTG 7

A blue-tinted photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, the backs of several students' heads and shoulders are visible as they sit at desks. The whiteboard in the background is divided into sections. The top center section contains a dark, starburst-shaped drawing with lines radiating from it. To the right, there is a sketch of a tree or a similar organic form. The text 'DAILY PAINTINGS' is printed in large, bold, white letters across the middle of the whiteboard. Below it, 'NOV 17/96 PTG 7' is printed in a smaller font. The entire image has a monochromatic blue color scheme.

DAILY PAINTINGS
NOV 17/96 PTG 7







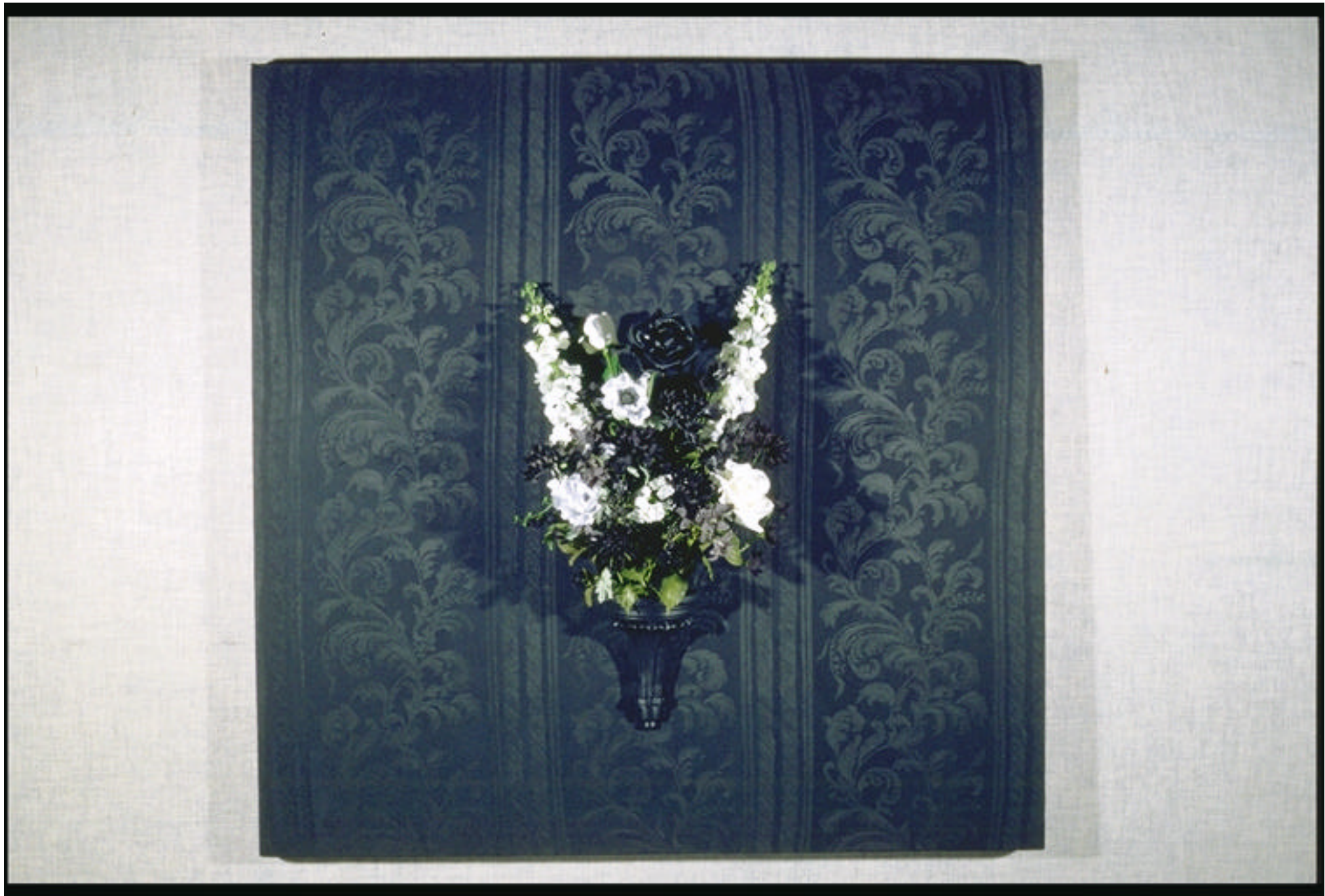
















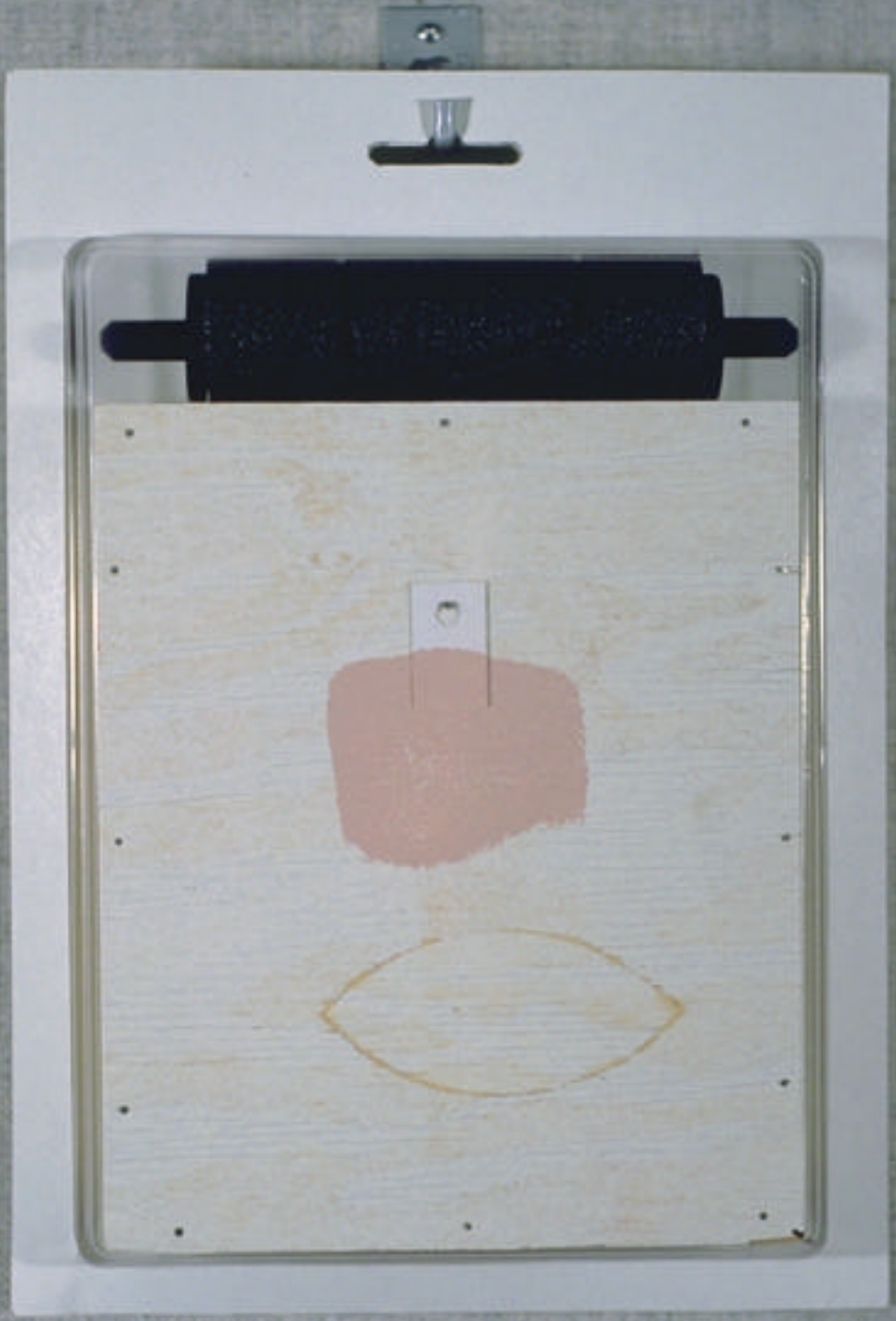








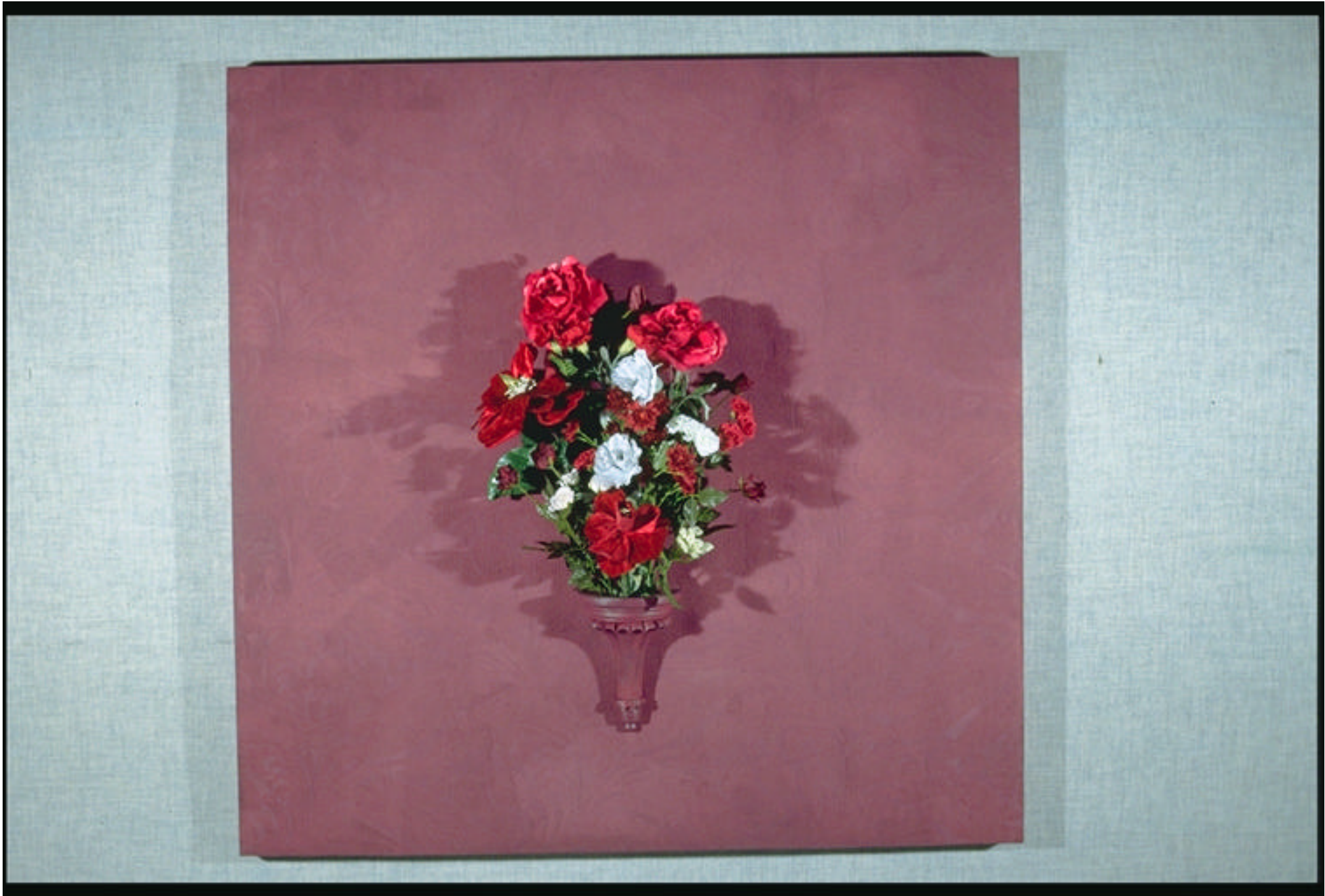




















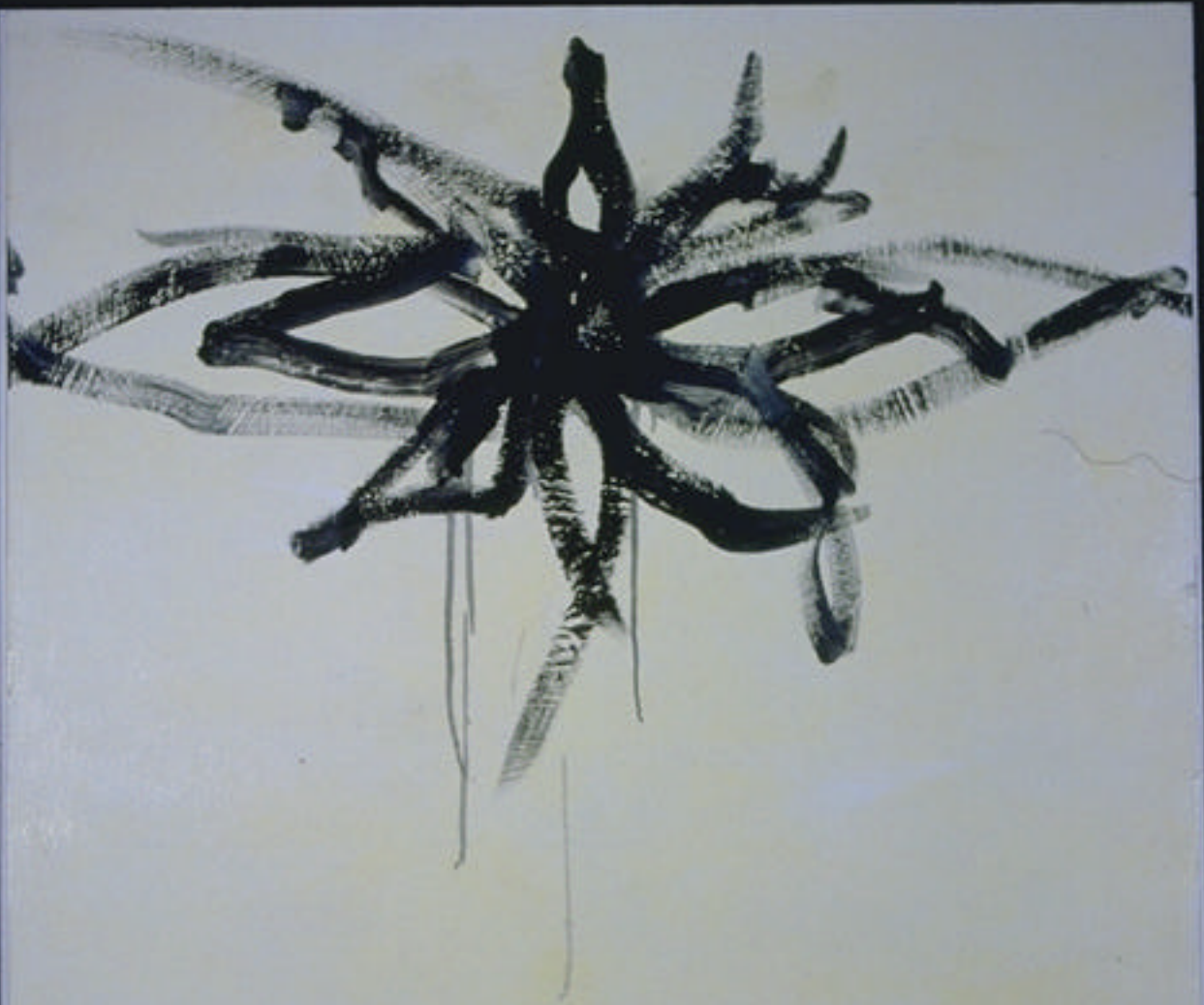












A PERFORMANCE BY C. BAKER



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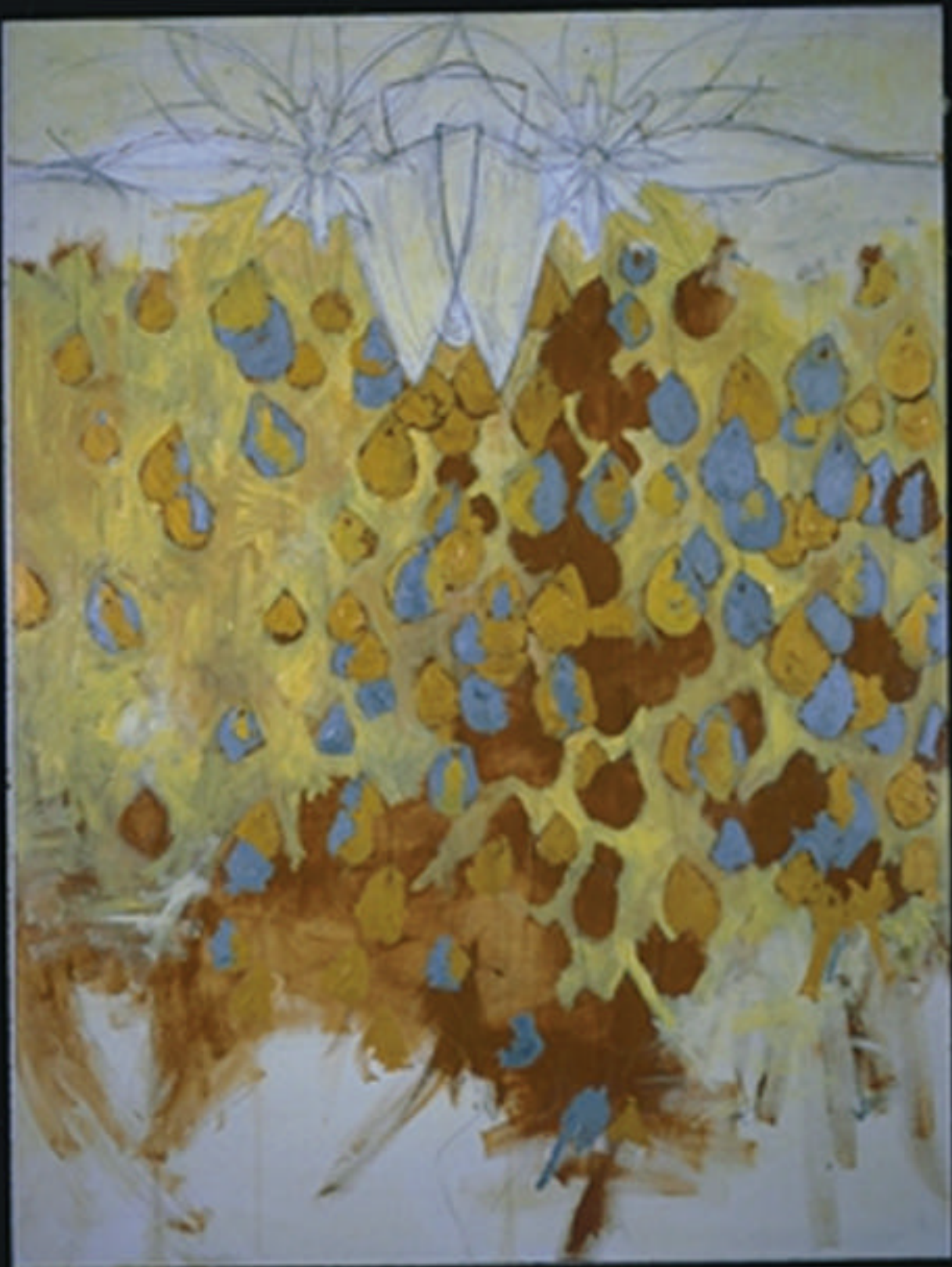




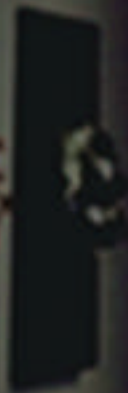
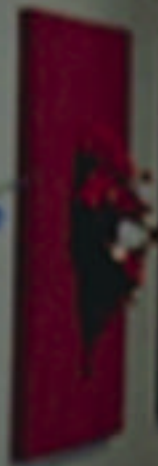






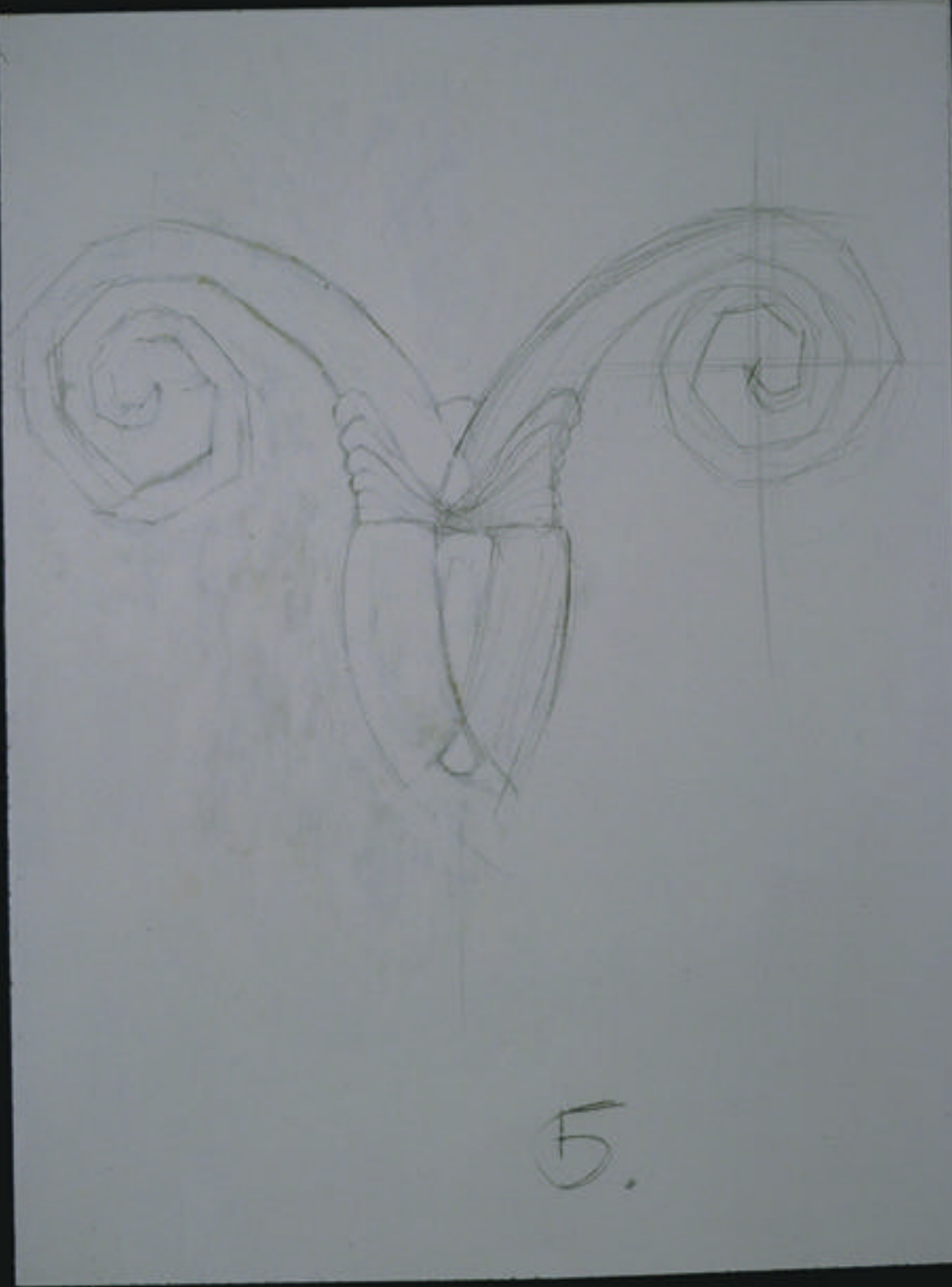












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