

About Thor Rinden

ARTIST STATEMENT



Date
Location



December 1994
"Small Works" Show
Atlantic Gallery

"WOVENS, BEVELEDS, & SLABS" 1997

The desire to make paintings inspired by the physical characteristics of the support has been the basis of my work since the late 1960's. At that time, this notion generated what I called "woven" paintings. Canvas strips of various widths were interwoven around square stretchers to form an actual basket weave surface. What amounted to checkerboard configurations early on evolved into large interior square areas "framed" by narrow, interwoven strips around the edges. Some supports in the mid-1970's were built with these edges beveled to the wall.

By 1983, the woven surfaces gave way to those resulting from the joining of two canvas "slabs"--slabs in the sense that each was a piece of canvas stretched around a solid wood support which could be rubbed, sanded, scraped and worked with trowels and spatulas, much like the plastering of a wall. In these works a smaller square canvas slab is set into a larger one, forming a kind of framed square. The configurations and colors are arrived at by working wet oil paint into wet, directly on the resistant support with spatulas, just as if the slabs were pallets. As I wrote in the brochure for a show:

"My intention is to work a canvas slab until it reaches a state that astonishes me, and despite much consideration, prevents me from going further. If, after a time, I still feel mystified, excited and gratified, yet wholly comfortable with it--well, it's a painting."

The support-inspired idea for all my paintings germinated in my Hunter College M.A. modern art courses in the mid-1960's. Johns' "flags" and Stella's "black" canvases were also on my mind at that time. While relishing my courses at night, I spent my days teaching art in a Brooklyn junior high school. In 1974, in order to spend more time painting, I took a part-time job as a laborer-helper at The Guggenheim Museum, where I found carrying around Picabias and Kandinskys a very heady experience. But the most influential event at that time was a two-week trip in 1975 with my wife to the Soviet Union. I was overwhelmed by the painted-wood icons at The Russian Museum in Leningrad and The Church of the Assumption within the Moscow Kremlin. We were also fortunate to visit the collector, George Costakis, and see his astonishing Russian and Soviet

avant-garde pictures filling every wall of his Moscow apartment. I loved the purist, “manifesto-charged” quality of these works and the “isms” they inspired: “Suprematism,” “Constructivism,” and “Rayonism.” How can a painter in the last decade of the twentieth century seriously contemplate a “manifesto” or an “ism?” Perhaps in rhyme?

SLABISM MANIFESTO

1997 Brooklyn, New York

O, slab
O, resistant prism
You are my palette
And my “ism”
You and gesso
And paint espresso
Upon your face
My manifesto