Harvey Quaytman's Arc

Against the Static

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THE PAINTINGS OF HARVEY QUAYTMAN (1937–2002) are distinct for their novel explorations of shape, drawing, texture, geometric pattern, and color application. While his works display a rigorous experimentation with formalism and materiality, they are simultaneously invested with rich undertones of sensuality, complexity, and humor. Quaytman began his career in the early 1960s, making gestural abstract paintings inspired by Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky. His focus on the character and shape of brushstrokes eventually inspired him to develop a style in the late 1960s that blended minimalist abstraction with his interest in gesture—in color, movement, and tactility. In this sense, his wholly unique body of work, one that spans four decades, resides at the junction of abstract expressionism, minimalism, process art, and constructivism—a place where considerations of line, distilled geometric forms, materiality, atmosphere, and texture all coalesce. The totality of Quaytman's oeuvre places him squarely within the tradition of modernist painting; it also proves him to be one of its most capable and unsung explorers. Even as Quaytman inhabited the modernist idiom, he incessantly pushed its boundaries and expanded its formal and conceptual concerns in ways that appear even more innovative in retrospect.

A self-professed "classical modernist" (a witty oxymoron), Quaytman came of age in the downtown art scene of New York in the 1960s—a time when painting itself, and art in general, was undergoing radical transformations in form, style, and concept.[1] Pop art and minimalism were challenging the critic Clement Greenberg's abstract canon. The artist David Diao recalls that "Greenberg was a specter that hovered over all of us. We worked in opposition to him."[2] For painters committed to their medium this meant that, in Robert Mangold's words, "it was time to start over, to go back to the elements of painting."[3]

Upon arriving in New York in 1964 from Cambridge, Massachusetts, Quaytman moved into a loft on Bleecker and Broadway. He was quickly ensconced in the vibrant scene of avant-garde artistic production that made downtown New York its epicenter. Just a year later Quaytman moved to another loft at 74 Grand Street, where fellow building occupants were the similar-minded artists Brice Marden, Ron Gorchov, and Jake Berthot. In 1972 Quaytman finally settled in the legendary Jack Klein building at 231 Bowery, a former flophouse that had been converted into artists' studios where his neighbors included Diao, James Rosenquist,

Charles Hinman, and Max Gimblett; his studio would remain in this location until 1998.[4]

From Gesture to Shape

Quaytman was born to Polish Russian Jews in 1937 in Far Rockaway, New York. His father and grandfather died tragically returning home from the New York World's Fair on October 14, 1940, when "their car crashed through a faulty railroad gate and was hit by an oncoming Long Island Railroad train."[5] From the age of three, Quaytman was raised by his mother, a piano teacher and secretary, and his Yiddish-speaking grandmother. Quaytman's mother taught him how to play the piano and instilled in him a love for music, which would remain a great source of inspiration for him; he kept a piano in his studio and often listened to and played Beethoven, Chopin, Mozart, Schoenberg, and Schubert, among other composers. Both Quaytman's Jewish heritage and his love for music suffused his practice, often manifesting in the titles of his paintings, which also reflect his myriad other interests, ranging from literature, other artists, and his friends to the colors he used.

In 1958 and 1959 Quaytman attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Tufts University, where he became acquainted with other art students such as Alan Cote, Susan Howe, Joan Jonas, Marden, Murray Reich, and Jonathan Shahn.[6] Cote recalls that he and Quaytman used to frequent the Odd Fellows Hall in Cambridge, where they sought out and collected shapes from the Masonic emblems, in particular butterfly shapes.[7] Howe, who was in the same class as Quaytman (they were married from 1960 to 1965), remembers that Frank Stella's work was important to them in the early 1960s, when Stella's black paintings were first exhibited in New York at the Leo Castelli Gallery, along with that of other artists whom they considered heroes of painting: Hans Hofmann, Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, and Ad Reinhardt.[8] Marden, then a student at Boston University, recounts going to Harvard Square with Quaytman and Reich, where they would have coffee with Henry Geldzahler and talk about art.[9] In 1962 Quaytman, along with Howe and their infant daughter, Rebecca, went to London for a year on a Fulbright Scholarship; there he had his first solo exhibition at the Artists' International Association Gallery.

Throughout this period Quaytman was making small-scale paintings heavily steeped in abstract expressionism, particularly the styles of de Kooning and Gorky. Early works such as *Riley Mumbling to Himself at Night* (1961–63; pl. 2) and *Studio Still Life (London)* (1962; pl. 3) reveal his interest in gestural shape discovered through drawing and brushwork, and it was this interest in the distilled gesture that would inspire him to work more directly with his medium. As a result, he began making works in which he poured the medium directly onto the canvas or paper as a form of drawing, a method partly inspired by Morris Louis's poured paintings. Works such as *Mauverick* (1964; pl. 8) and *Untitled* (1966; pl. 10) indicate how the curved shape of the poured oil paint and ink, as well as the shape and quality of the gesture, determines the composition. He then started cutting out these poured shapes from paper, leading to a more sculptural relationship with his materials. This transition to working directly with his hands by pouring and cutting would prove decisive for Quaytman, inspiring him to apply these techniques to his wooden stretchers.

According to those who knew him, Quaytman's interest in the curve and the arabesque related to his love for pre–World War I airplanes, which he studied in books he collected. He further honed this interest with a collection of model airplanes that he kept hidden in a cabinet in his studio. Margaret Moorman (Quaytman's wife from 1985 until his death in 2002) said, "Planes had aesthetic meaning for him, [particularly] their aerodynamic curves, their wings."[10] Moreover, the artist R. H. Quaytman (his daughter) mused, "He liked a painting that took the eye for a stroll before inviting it to zero in, which may also be why he so liked planes and birds; they were the interruption in the expanse."[11]

Quaytman's application of the curved line expanded his paintings beyond the simple plane, opening up a dynamic new territory of visual expression. Gorchov (whose studio was just below Quaytman's on Grand Street) says Quaytman in the late 1960s was propelled forward in his work through his quest for "the swing," or the arc.[12] In fact, Quaytman had an actual swing in his studio, which the artist John Walker (a close friend) remembers as being for his daughter to play on when she visited his studio on the weekends (see fig. 11, p. 115).[13] The visual referent of the hovering swing in the studio underscores that the curves Quaytman sought were inherently related to movement, and it was the creation of a sense of optical movement that Quaytman sought to achieve throughout his career, even as he abandoned curvilinear shapes in the 1980s. Asked in a 1998 interview what his paintings

meant, he replied, "My paintings mean to me my victory, inch by inch and year by year, over the arbitrary chaos of visual life. I have slowly taken command of a way of ordering my composition so that with the slightest shift of shaped colored areas I can break symmetry or stasis or even death. My meaning resides in my own victory over the inert."[14] Capturing movement in a painting was the equivalent of bringing a painting to life.

Reconfiguring the Canvas

The mid-1960s signaled a pivotal moment in art history when painting was declared "dead" by minimalist and conceptual artists who were seeking to assert the primacy of material form and of three-dimensional space. In his influential 1965 essay "Specific Objects," Donald Judd wrote, "The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall."[15] Judd considered the erasure of the boundaries between painting and sculpture to be the primary issue in art at this moment, which pointed toward a new understanding of medium itself. He declared that the shaped paintings of Stella exemplified this new paradigm. Rosalind Krauss explains: "Turning to the shaped, concentrically striped canvases that Frank Stella had been making since 1961, Judd saw these as moving past painting—with its inevitable illusion of space (no matter how shallow)—to become slabs that begin to exist as three-dimensional objects."[16]

For a period of roughly four years in the late 1960s, Quaytman worked with Cote as an art preparator at the Jewish Museum; their employment overlapped with that of Mel Bochner and Marden, who worked at the museum as guards. (Marden was later an installer as well.) Cote remembers that he and Quaytman helped install Kynaston McShine's pivotal exhibition *Primary Structures*, which in 1966 established what Krauss called "the breadth of Minimalist practice" in New York and helped to crystallize it as a movement.[17] The artists in the exhibition included Carl Andre, Anthony Caro, Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, Judd, Kelly, Sol LeWitt, and many others who would come to define aspects of this new belief in the primacy of unitary shape and matter.

Notwithstanding Quaytman's early shaped canvases—which he infused with his own playful curvilinear forms, realized in paintings such *Second Cupola Capella* (1969, pl. 29)—this belief in the "objecthood" of the painting informed much of his new work at the time. These compositions feature long arcing forms, varying in thickness from work to work, over rectilinear, U-shaped bases. Dore Ashton has noted that when displayed, the wall behind the paintings sharpened and helped to define Quaytman's sense of drawing, which thus stood out in relief.[18] Quaytman made each section of these paintings separately and then joined them at the corners. He fashioned these shapes from pieces of wood, scoring and steaming them to arrive at their distinctive linear forms, then stretched cotton duck fabric over them.[19] "The precise way in which a given bundle of scored laminated wood assumes its coaxed curve is a drawing decision," Quaytman explained.[20] The glossiness of the elongated, thin arc, made by mixing pigment with an acrylic resin medium, further contrasts with the matte paint of the wider base, while the edges of the arc reveal an affinity for an articulated, liquid line. To achieve these ridges of paint, Quaytman would affix pieces of aluminum tape around the given shape of the canvas to create a dike and then pour his paint into the trough, letting it dry before removing the tape.[21] Quaytman debuted these monumental canvases, which frequently extended to over twelve feet in length, in solo exhibitions at the Paula Cooper Gallery in SoHo in 1969 and 1971; he would begin showing uptown with the David McKee Gallery in 1974.

While living in his loft on Grand Street in the late 1960s, Harvey began dating the young artist and art historian Frances Barth (they would marry in 1972), who was working on her master's thesis on Matisse and Islamic art at Hunter College. She and Quaytman developed a passion for Islamic calligraphy, which they learned about from Ernst J. Grube, a professor of Islamic and Far Eastern art at Hunter, who, in 1965, became the first curator in the Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Barth and Quaytman began collecting Islamic calligraphy themselves through Grube's contacts. The elegant line of the calligraphic forms they studied began to inform the elongated, linear shapes in Quaytman's canvases created from 1969 and through the 1970s. Barth perceptively notes, however, that in "the momentum of pouring" and the movement of one form into another, his earlier work "was already calligraphic."[22]

In *Kufikind* (1970, pl. 30), Quaytman made the linguistic reference overt, with the title signaling the importance of Kufic writing (which can be traced back to sixth-century Kufa, Iraq; fig. 1). Atiq Siddiqui, a scholar of Islamic calligraphy, writes that Kufic script is "bold angular and majestic and was ideally suited for

Figure 1
Kufic script, page of the Qur'an, 9th century. Ink on vellum, 8½ × 11 in. (21.6 × 28 cm). Collection of Margaret Moorman.

Figure 2
Michael Thonet (Austria, 1796–1871), **Rocking Chair, Model #1**, designed c. 1860, manufactured c. 1900. Copper beech, leather, 39¼ × 22½ × 45 in. (99.7 × 57.2 × 114.3 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Caroline A. L. Pratt Fund, 69.79.1.

the oblong format of the early books [of the Koran]. It is suited for monumental use and on architecture, ceramics, tiles and stone. Kufic is easy to recognize, in that it is angular, using large horizontal and short vertical lines, and the curve."[23] In works such as *Kufikind, Little Egypt* (1969, pl. 27), and *Nishapur Store* (1970, pl. 31)—the titles of the latter two also allude to the Middle East—Quaytman combined various horizontal, vertical, and curvilinear shapes that resemble Kufic characters to form lyrical, unified structures—an entirely novel form for modern abstract painting. Of these curved paintings Barth explains that Quaytman was interested in the "speed of the curve in contrast to the density of the color."[24] While the artist collected Islamic calligraphy, *Pearls Before Pencils* (1969; pl. 12) suggests that he was looking at other forms of writing as well, such as the Hebrew alphabet, which he would have studied as a young boy.

In *Roadrunner* and *A Street Called Straight* (both 1970, pls. 32 and 33) a significant shift occurs in the scale and width of the forms, particularly in the blue, bracket-shaped bases. The large blue section that supports the attenuated strip in *Roadrunner* is dramatically diminished in *A Street Called Straight*, and the curving form on the top of the former grows into an exaggerated horizontal rectangle with a curved bottom edge in the latter—what one critic referred to as his "rocking rectangles," which later became known as his "rocker" paintings.[25] The result is a shield-like form that appears to balance on a scale below, as if it could tilt back and forth like a rocking chair. In fact, in one of his earliest shaped canvases, *M. Thonnet's Tonic* (1968–69, fig. 28, p. 134), Quaytman invoked the designer Michael Thonet, the Biedermeier-period innovator of bentwood furniture. The elegant curves and the incorporation of the arabesque in Thonet's rocking chairs greatly impressed Quaytman, and he may have seen the Thonet retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1953 (fig. 2). Interestingly, the curve at the base of the chair greatly resembles the shape of the thin arched section in *Roadrunner* as well as the bottom edge of *A Street Called Straight*. Quaytman adopted this eccentric rocking shape for a series of about thirty paintings, fifteen of which were shown in 1973 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. Within this series Quaytman explored two different shapes: One emphasized a stretched, horizontal format, with the largest canvas measuring about fifteen and half feet in width, as in *The Consolation of Logic* (1973, pl. 35). The other was closer to a square,

the largest of which measured about nine feet across, such as *Slow Sound and Light Show BP* (1972, pl. 37).

These massive canvases are a testament to Quaytman's rejection of Greenberg's belief in the flatness of the canvas, which was prevalent in 1960s New York. Instead, Quaytman imbued his abstract canvases with volume, mass, and physicality—qualities identified with minimalism. Yet, minimalism was also associated with a distancing of the imprint of the artist's hand from the physical object through the use of manufactured items, such as steel, fluorescent lights, and bricks. Quaytman's insistence on craftsmanship and form molded by the human hand could be seen as allying more closely with process art, or postminimalism. Artists such as Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Bruce Nauman were investing their abstract work with subtle allusions to the body. Like these artists, Quaytman created works whose canvases similarly recall the curves of the female body and yet remain rooted in the subject that formed them.[26] Moreover, as Hal Foster has written, "If some Conceptual artists 'dematerialized' art, most Process artists rematerialized it with a vengeance. . . . [And] as for intentionality, some Process artists saw new materials as mere vehicles for expressive intent."[27] Indeed, when looking at the surfaces of Quaytman's "rocker" paintings, which resemble lunar landscapes, they appear to pulsate—a product of the artist's rigorous manipulation (or rematerialization) of his acrylic- and pigment-based medium. Additionally, Quaytman left fragments of tape, frayed edges, smudges, stains, and fingerprints visible in his early paintings and drawings. These were all self-evident aspects of his process and, contrary to the more purist modernist impulses of someone like Piet Mondrian, the mess didn't bother him.

Experimenting with Pigments

Referring to his rocker series, Quaytman remarked in 1971, "Recently I did a series of twelve paintings all the same formal idea, in this case shape, to enable me to ignore that problem and concern myself with only one element, the colors. The form of these paintings is my 'Reinhardt's cruciform'"—a form he developed in order to focus on the color subtleties occurring within the composition, just as Ad Reinhardt had with his red, blue, and black cruciform paintings from the 1950s until his death in 1967. Quaytman continued, "That is to say it is a *donnée* that I've given myself. The result is that I want to make twelve more."[28] Shape remained a constant of these paintings so that Quaytman could invest all his variability into his palette and his experimentation with materials. "These forms," he said, "are my way of making space for a color to be in. An outrigger on a canoe isn't there for decoration. It is there because the water's rough."[29] In addition to Reinhardt, Matisse, known for his adeptness with color, was an important influence for Quaytman. Like Albers, Matisse believed that the strength of a color was augmented or reduced depending on the colors around it: "All the colors sing together. Their strength is determined by the needs of the chorus. It's like a musical chord."[30] Quaytman would have undoubtedly appreciated this analogy, and about Matisse he confessed, "His late cut-outs are especially important for me, because of their coloristic generosity. Some colors he uses you can see in my works, like the blue, the yellow . . . and the red and black, too."[31]

Quaytman had a predilection for working with pure pigment. He never mixed colors beforehand but would instead apply layers of different pigments, usually ranging from two to four different colors, on top of each other so that the blending occurred optically in the painting rather than on a palette. In order to achieve the tactile density of these shaped canvases, Quaytman poured Rhoplex, an acrylic adhesive (now known to be highly toxic), onto his surfaces and then dusted the pigment over the medium until it set enough for him to sweep his wallpaper brushes—which he would sometimes bind together to create a wider brushstroke—across the plane.[32] The striking fissures that developed on the surface of these paintings, revealing ridges of pure pigment, were intentional, a result of the underlayer not completely drying before the next one was applied and thus pulling apart.[33] Of the texture and brilliant color present in these paintings, Dore Ashton wrote, "Immersed as [Quaytman] is in the alchemy of color, something of the absolutely arcane resides within their crusty depths. They are on the verge of violence, but the kind of violence we mean when we say a violent pleasure: something urgent enough that the line between pain and pleasure fades while ambiguity of the most acute kind lingers."[34] The transgressive quality of these surfaces is striking, and Ashton's reference to alchemy here is apt. And yet Quaytman noted, "It is very important to me to be reminded that I am not an alchemist but a man engaged in coded, layered conversation with my fellow men on what I hope to be [on another] level than words or music."[35] Quaytman was an effective visual and emotive communicator, and his

Figure 3
Leonard Bocour and Harvey Quaytman, n.d. Photograph by Frances Barth.

paintings convey a new language steeped in his knowledge of material behavior, which he cultivated with his wry wit and artistic integrity.

Quaytman experimented relentlessly with color combinations, and he had distinctive ideas about what colors should go together to achieve the most optimal, luminous effect. Indeed, the enigmatic luminosity that emanates from his rocker paintings seems to have its source deep within the canvas. His titles often hint at his associations and layered color combinations, as in *Harmonica YP* (1972, pl. 34), with *YP* likely representing yellow and purple. Quaytman was always on the hunt for new pigments. The artist Sean Scully remembers going with Quaytman to the famed London art supply store L. Cornelissen & Son, where they reveled in the twelve-foot-high walls filled with hundreds of jars each containing a unique pigment.[36]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Quaytman got most of his paint from Bocour Artist Colors; Leonard Bocour (fig. 3) would give him and Frances Barth Aquatec paint (an acrylic polymer solution) in exchange for their work.[37] A huge benefactor of artists in New York, Bocour (along with his nephew and partner Sam Golden) became famous for the development of Magna acrylic paint in the late 1940s, which many abstract expressionists used. He likened Quaytman to one of his "wards of state," recalling that Quaytman, Cote, and Reich—whom he referred to as the "Three Musketeers"—would come to his store to barter their work for paint. In 1969 Bocour directed curator Marcia Tucker to their studios to select a painting, which resulted in the Whitney Museum of American Art acquiring their work and Tucker selecting the artists for inclusion in the museum's annual exhibition of contemporary American painting.[38]

Later, in the mid-1980s, Quaytman obtained much of his pigments directly from Georg Kremer in Germany after a friend pointed out an advertisement for Kremer Pigments. Kremer recalls:

> Harvey came to Germany, Aichstetten, in February 1986. He worked two days with the pigments, made sample after sample, and we became friends. He invited me to come to New York and stay at his home. I visited him in the fall of 1986. On this trip I brought a box—like an aluminum box—with about 400 different samples of pigments. I left this box with Harvey at his studio. This box became sort of famous on the Bowery in the late eighties. We met in the following years in Europe and the US, and in May 1990, I started Kremer Pigments Inc. in New York.[39]

Informed by Matisse's and Albers's belief that the properties of color were relative and were affected by others in close proximity, Quaytman explained that "colors must have an optimal dialogue with each other. This applies to the particular white and blacks also."[40] In one of his notebooks Quaytman kept a hand-drawn, graphite (monochrome) version of the wheel of complementary colors by Ogden N. Rood, a nineteenth-century pioneer in the chromatic effects of mixing pigments, which he had no doubt committed to memory.[41]

Quaytman's interest in specific colors changed over time. Early in his career, Quaytman loved purple—or what he often playfully referred to as "aubergine."[42] Many of his rocker paintings were done in various

shades of deep purple and blue. In an interview with the Finnish artist and curator Kimmo Sarje, Quaytman explained, "I used to use purple when I was 35, deep purple, with the thought that it's a color which gives profundity to painting. It's funny the ideas you have when you are growing up as a painter. It was a mistaken idea."[43] Early on Quaytman also used green, as seen in *Untitled* (1981; pl. 42), but he later rejected this color, saying in 1987, "One color I will never use again is green. I think I dislike green for exactly the same reasons that Piet Mondrian disliked it. He hated green even in nature. I like it in nature and I like it to stay there, but I can't even imagine it in a painting of mine."[44]

While the range of colors Quaytman worked with was vast, he was highly selective. "A color must mean something to me before I use it," he said. "I must love that color and it must strike me."[45] Quaytman was fond of hot pink, in particular the Kremer pigment called Quindo Rosa, which is cited in several of his titles, as in *Q. Rosa* (1987; fig. 4). Yet his fondness for the color also related to his ability to invoke it as a pun on the name of his mother, Rose Quaytman.

He experimented with synthetic and organic colors alike. He was known to love cobalt hues, particularly for their saturation, no matter how toxic they were to inhale in their powdered form.[46] Quaytman sought out unique colors that were not obviously recognizable. In a 1997 interview he said, "I've been working with old colors, like antimony, which was used to paint reliquaries. I like using these old, old colors, and resurrecting them. Some of them have never been seen in an abstract painting, not that that helps the painting, but it's a private pleasure, like burying a gemstone beneath the canvas. It pleases me."[47] (See the color glossary, pp. 144–51, for more on Quaytman's colors.)

Materiality: Acrylic, Rust, and Glass

Quaytman was fascinated by the material properties of paint, and he used an acrylic medium in combination with his pigments, often crushing and grinding the pigments himself before mixing. Acrylic was a new medium for painters. It had been made commercially available in the 1950s by manufacturers such as Bocour Artist Colors and Rohm and Haas, which had first patented a variety of acrylic resin in the 1930s.[48] Diao recalls that he and Quaytman would buy fifty-five-gallon drums of the acrylic adhesive Rhoplex from Rohm and Haas in Pennsylvania, which Quaytman then mixed with his pigments. Free of the associations of traditional binders such as oil and tempera, acrylic was the medium of choice for painters such as Quaytman seeking to redefine painting.

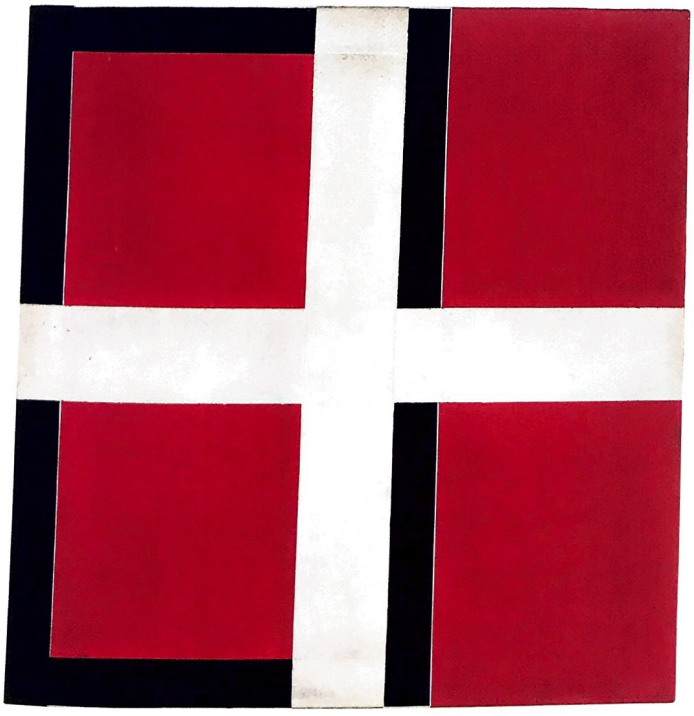


Figure 4
Q. Rosa, 1987. Acrylic and glass on canvas, 37 × 37 in. (83.4 × 83.4 cm). Harvey Quaytman Trust.

The visceral properties of paint and material experimentation were essential aspects of Quaytman's practice throughout his career. He spent long hours in his studio working with various mediums and varnishes to create work that brought forth new qualities of paint itself, whether utilizing sheen or matte finishes or incorporating ground glass, marble dust, sand, or wax into the medium to create rougher textures, augment luminosity, or increase opacity. In fact, it was Quaytman who suggested to a young Brice Marden, whose studio was just above his on Grand Street, that he try using wax after Marden mentioned he wanted "his color to read clearer" and to eliminate the shine on the surface of his canvases.[49]

As early as 1969 Quaytman's adventurous approach led him to experiment with using iron filings, which he would flock onto a paper or canvas ground and then spray with water so that they would rust directly on the surface. The resulting effect was velvety and tactile, with subtle color modulations produced by the process. Early examples of this type of work include *Untitled* (1969; pl. 13), *Rust* (1970; pl. 14), and *Nishapur Store* (1970; pl. 31). Indeed, rust became a signature medium and color for Quaytman, and his work with it continued into the 1980s and 1990s, when he applied it to square and rectangular canvases with geometric patterns and luscious surfaces, as in *Age of Iron* (1986; pl. 51). He also used steel filings treated in a similar manner, as in *Hook, Ivory Chrome* (1986). Of this process curator Ned Rifkin, who in 1987 included Quaytman in the Corcoran Gallery of Art's *Fortieth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting,* observed, "Ambient moisture in the air will eventually oxidize this flecked field, producing a slow patina like the rust on corten steel, making it prey to time and environment."[50]

In the late 1980s, Quaytman started mixing finely ground glass beads with acrylic medium. The shimmer the glass created when mixed with paint augmented the luminous effects of his compositions while also heightening the contrast between the various surface treatments produced in any given work. In *Little Dutch Schoolroom* (an homage to Mondrian) and *Angel's Hair* (both 1987, pls. 62 and 63), for instance, Quaytman constructed a dense, shimmering field of ground glass in the form of a cross, the extremities of which are defined by contrasts of light and dark edges. In *Untitled* (c. 1987; pl. 60)—perhaps the closest he ever came to producing a monochromatic painting—Quaytman achieved variation in his blacks by shaping the cross on the left side

Figure 5
Letter to Uccello, 1975. Mixed media on canvas, 99 × 64 in. (251.5 × 162.6 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Gay Block in loving memory of my friend Harvey Quaytman.

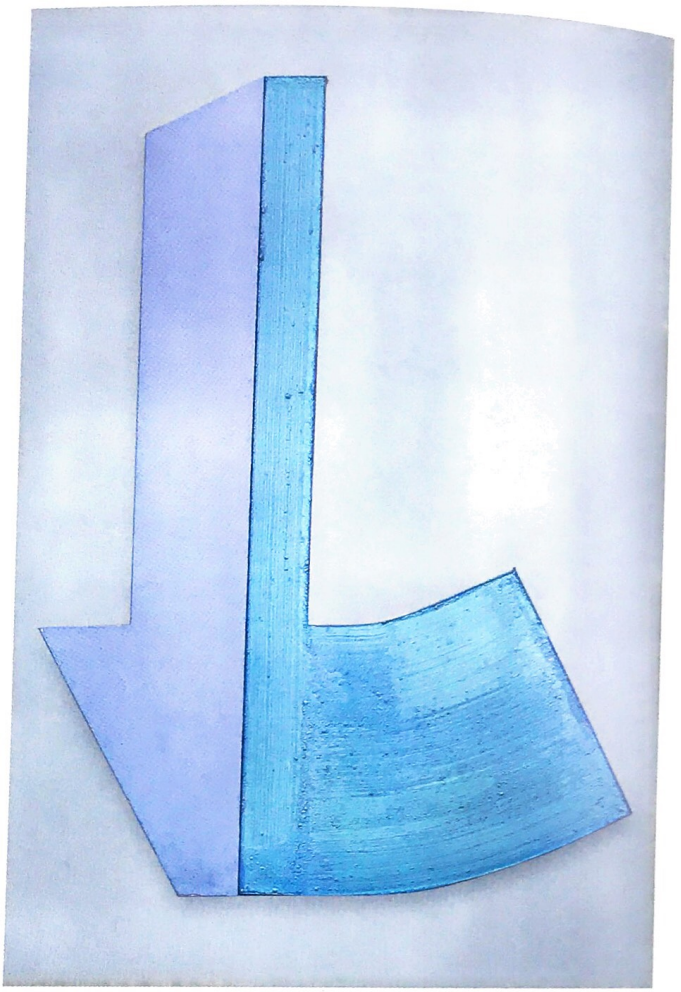
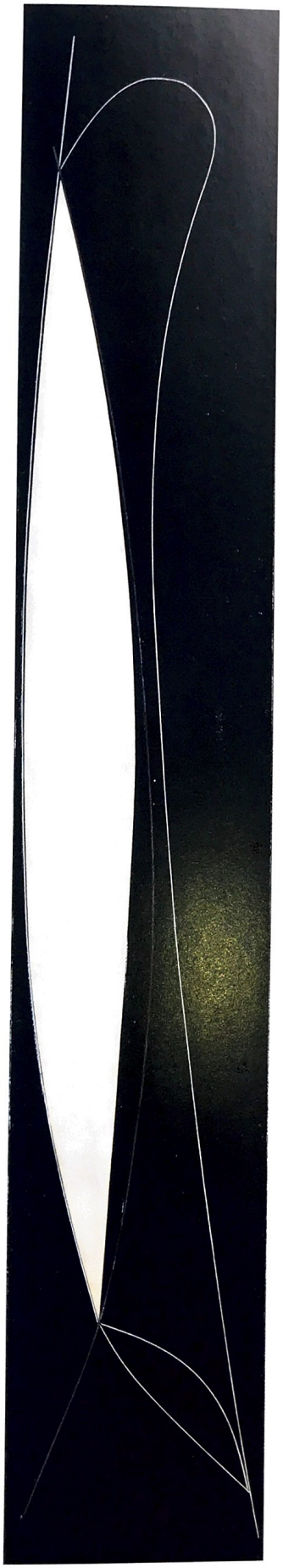


Figure 6
Glissando, 1980. Acrylic, tubes, paint and wood on wood, 96 × 20 in. (243.8 × 50.8 cm). Harvey Quaytman Trust.



of the composition out of ground glass: the shimmering cross plays off the deep, dry bone-black matte that looks as if it has been baked into the canvas.[51]

Eliminating the Curve

Quaytman continued to experiment with shape in the late 1970s and early 1980s, yet the nature of this project took a turn: the curve evolved into discrete forms and then gradually disappeared. After his rocker paintings he began working on a series that deployed a form resembling a pendulum or an anchor, as in *Letter to Uccello* (1975, fig. 5) and *Zhili-Byli* (1976, pl. 19), where again a sense of movement is implied in the shape. The width and length of the elements vary from painting to painting, but the shape remains constant, allowing Quaytman to explore a range of chromatic effects.

A related series of drawings makes Quaytman's process clear, demonstrating how he arrived at this unique form. In studies such as *Untitled* (1974, pl. 17) and *Untitled* (c. 1974, pl. 18) Quaytman arrived at a curve through his overlaying of rectangles and isosceles triangles. The shape of the slightly rotated rectangle determines the width of base, which also aligns with the edges of the triangle. The curve is drawn from the bottom right corner of the tilting rectangle to the base of vertical lines that bisect the center of the triangle and the opposing corner of the rectangle. Later works such as *Plumbline* (1977, pl. 20) also relate to this shape, however, the curve on the lower right turns into a soft conical shape found in his drawing *Becky's Drawing* (c. 1970s, pl. 16). The L shape in these paintings also interestingly resembles the elegant curve of the wooden pipe Quaytman smoked and filled with Barking Dog tobacco. These works reveal how Quaytman developed his pendulum form through his manipulation of geometrical intersections and overlapping forms, giving insight into his rigorous process. Furthermore, they demonstrate how he deployed the curve as a connecting line to signify movement between rectilinear shapes.

Eventually, the curve appears inside the quadratic shape of the canvas, as in works like *Postcard to Chardin* and *WHrondo* (both 1979, pls. 41 and 43). Here Quaytman torqued the bottom right corner of the square, accentuating the tip and only slightly modifying the shape. In *Glissando* (1980, fig. 6), the arabesque form is inserted into a vertical rectangle and no longer defines the canvas's shape. Rather he established a tension between the curved interior form confined by rigid edges. In works such as *Study for My Life and*

Figure 7
Study for My Life and Music, 1979. Acrylic on canvas, 67¼ × 23½ in. (171 × 59.5 cm). Nordea Norway Art Collection, Oslo.

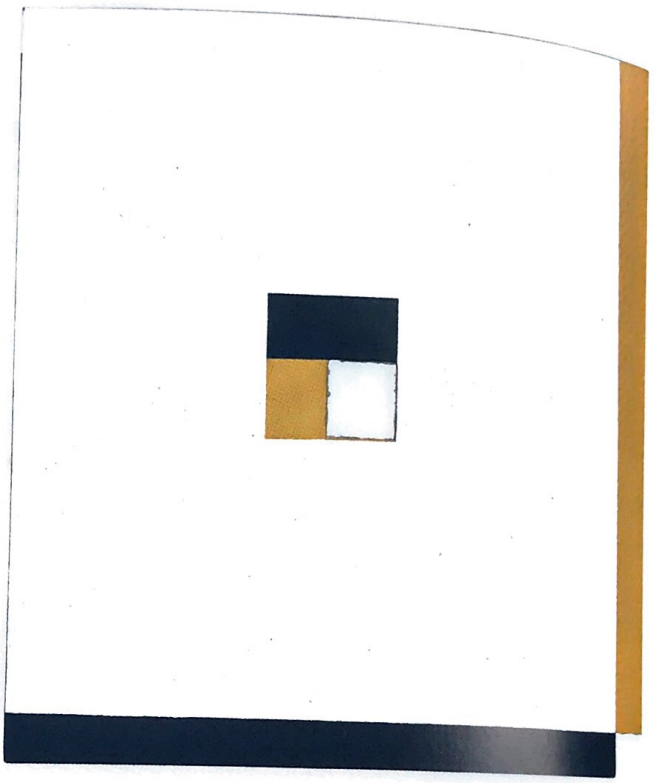


Figure 8
The Gift, 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 38 × 37½ in. (96.5 × 95.3 cm). University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Gift of Renee and David McKee.

Music (1979, fig. 7) the curve at the bottom right is abandoned in favor of interacting lines that form tilting rectangles, yet still movement is implied through color and the shift of the linear patterning. In *Angelogic* (1983, pl. 44), Quaytman completely eliminated color in order to explore the tension between the curve and the stark black frame he painted within the picture. In the 1980s, Quaytman's interest in the rectilinear form gradually overtook that of the curve, leading him to play with negative space in the center of his paintings. The white canvas in the center of works like *Angelogic* becomes open negative space in *Vermillion Choir* and *The Gift* (both 1984, pl. 45 and fig. 8). In perhaps his most extreme deconstructed form, *Bordering Text* (1984, pl. 46), Quaytman made just the frame, with the painting consisting solely of its border—and yet a hint of movement is still implied with the addition of the red triangle on the left that shifts the stark form.

From Paintings to Pictures

Quaytman's style in the mid-1980s heralded a new direction in his painting, yet his systematic investigation of form, materials, color, and shape was still pronounced. The new definitive shape, assuming the form of an equilateral cross, manifests within the confines of the more traditional square and rectangular formats, effectively dividing the canvas into many sections. These works, entirely committed to perpendicular geometric configurations, present an austere contrast to the sinuous, playful forms that mark his early paintings. Quaytman observed this development was a natural outcome of making paintings with enclosed negative space, explaining:

> In my older paintings I used to have a hole in the middle. At some point I dreamed this cross idea which covered the hole. Since then my whole aesthetic has changed. What my

paintings are now I call pictures and not so much paintings. They can be paintings, but they are pictures in a way my shaped paintings could never have been pictures. They have all the stuff I was proud of not dealing with: an old-fashioned [sense of] space and allusions.[52]

Although a loaded symbol in Western art, the cross for Quaytman was purely a structural form to work with and not a signifier of meaning or feeling, much as it was for Reinhardt and Malevich. On this subject he stated, "The cross used abstractly is quite an image, free to roam and to become an emblem for abstract painting. But I don't like to make emblems."[53] He believed the pictures worked best when the figure/ground relationship—a fundamental component of illusionistic painting—dissolved, so that the cross was no longer visible as such but rather seen as an integrated component of the work.

Quaytman invested his cruciform paintings with an exacting study of the interplay between symmetry and asymmetry. It is in the activation of this relationship that Quaytman located his rhythm—realized with color, shape, repetition, and texture—propelling him into his quixotic, serial experimentation of the grid, which remained predicated on his interest in movement. In a review of one of Quaytman's exhibitions the critic Ken Sofer aptly noted, "The tension between these opposing tendencies is intensified with breathtaking color, dense surfaces and, especially the singular and striking use of metal and rust as colors."[54] Subtle compositional shifts occur from painting to painting, such as in *Geometry of Desire* (1986, pl. 49) and *Fast Front* (1987, pl. 50); the black areas in the former become the white areas in the latter, and vice versa, with the rusted cross remaining the constant. Similarly, the geometric design remains relatively consistent in *Wanderer* and *Dumka* (both 1987, pls. 52 and 53), yet Quaytman set the former on a diamond, recalling the signature shape developed by Mondrian in his geometric compositions.

When looking at works from this prolific period (about 1985 to 1990) as a group, the high degree of interconnectedness across the paintings becomes apparent. Moreover, the extent to which Quaytman was working with repetition and seriality is striking, given these attributes were key developments in the 1960s associated with minimalism and postminimalism, as witnessed in the work of artists such as LeWitt and Hesse. Quaytman's compositions from this time possess a great deal of complexity, revealing the intelligence that lay beneath them. Like his earlier rocker paintings, he made shape his constant, which in this body of work more closely approximates "Reinhardt's cruciform."

Just as he had in his earlier shaped canvases, Quaytman carefully thought through his palette in the rectilinear geometric abstractions, layering up to four or five layers of pigment. The sharpness and depth of the edges are again created by tape that he laid down on the canvas to get a clearly defined straight line. Often, flecks of color that lie beneath the topmost layer can be seen through the sensuous facture, and the extent of the layering is visible as the variegated sections do not lie entirely flat. This is witnessed in a work such as *The Miller's Delight* (1992, pl. 58), where each different color suggests a new layer of paint, with the central rust cross—the final stratum—stretching over the black and dynamic red hues. In this painting, among the largest of his square canvases from this period, the thin intersecting lines appear more suggestive of window mullions than a cross, as if we are looking into a new spatial dimension defined by saturated vermillion.

Quaytman's use of the grid directly relates to the abstract compositions of Mondrian, whereas his invocation of the cross harkens back to the paintings of Malevich. In this synthesis of European modern styles, combined with his own material investigations, Quaytman found a novel voice within geometric abstraction. As the Norwegian art historian Øivind Storm Bjerke has noted:

Quaytman's work transitioned from accentuating the painting's objectness to creating the premises for a continuation of the constructivist tradition, with Suprematism and de Stijl as the most essential points of departure within European art. The progression of artistic styles that Quaytman belongs to is intimately connected to the fusion of European nonobjective, and American postwar painting, creating a synthesis where the specific experiences that the American postwar painters contributed were integrated.[55]

Quaytman's interest in geometric abstraction was not an ironic rehashing of modernist concerns, as in the postmodernist manner of his contemporary Peter Halley, but rather an authentic exploration of the potential of twentieth-century abstraction. On this point, Quaytman remarked, "My paintings assert what pictorially cultured paintings in a geometric mode might look like today, devoid of irony or parenthesis. What a surprise it is to me, today, to find that my

Figure 9
Untitled, 1993 (detail). Acrylic on paper mounted on aluminum, 20 × 20 in. (50.8 × 50.8 cm). Harvey Quaytman Trust.

growth as a painter has hopscotched across my earlier loves/idols: Soutine, de Kooning, late Matisse and the Rothko chapel towards a constructivist idiom."[56]

Return to Shape

Eventually, Quaytman's interest in the cruciform led him in the 1990s to return to shaped paintings, which would again reach a monumental scale—a size and form the artist intended "to confront" the viewer.[57] Quaytman began constructing the shaped crosses after a series of small drawings (see fig. 9) in the 1990s, utilizing ink, varnish, and pigment. After laboring in such an intensely concentrated manner he wanted to work on a much larger scale: "It was a feeling of wanting to stretch my wings, after this long period of these small, meticulous drawings."[58] Indeed, the form of the airplane again comes to mind in these works, the largest of which span about nine and a half feet. In paintings such as *The Illusionist* and *Redwing* (both 1997, pls. 66 and 67), we again see the artist playing with symmetry and asymmetry and the opposing weights of varying colors. In *The Illusionist*—the title of which refers to the moniker Philip Guston gave Quaytman[59]—the intersecting black lines appear just left of center; whereas in *Redwing* Quaytman shifted the crossing to the right, establishing a counterweight to the deep cadmium red vertical with a strong black horizontal on the left.[60] Similarly, in *The Illusionist*, the red on the left horizontal arm balances the perpendicular white and black lines on the right.

Commenting on these shaped cross paintings, the art historian Leo Steinberg stated:

> It was during his 1998 show at the McKee Gallery that I first saw Harvey Quaytman's startling abstractions, most of them featuring a large dominant cross, but not as an emblem. On the contrary: its intersecting coordinates, the arms variously challenged and fortified, seemed to withstand differing weights—immovable limits to match irresistible pressures. The stand-off was exciting to watch; astounding to see the most familiar of signs de-semanticized, de-centered, de-Christianized, and emancipated to exercise its own territorial power. This really is Painting. Long may it live.[61]

Through his often subtle chromatic and linear shifts, Quaytman was able to inject novelty into the most stable and historical of forms and keep the viewer's eyes roving. "One of my main concerns," he declared, "is that the cross not be static, and not read as a cross first and last. I mean, one can recognize it as a cross, but I like to do things to it visually, and make it appear either longer on one side or shorter on another. In other words, not square, not static. My whole enterprise is against [the] static."[62]

Throughout Quaytman's oeuvre, which touches upon and absorbs abstract expressionism, minimalism,

process art, and constructivism, one finds a relentless experimenter—an artist always on the move. One body of work led him intuitively into the next. By following his interests in color, materiality, surface, shape, and intricate patterns, he honed an idiosyncratic lexicon for painting while continually plumbing the possibilities of modernism. Writing about Quaytman's work in 1988 for a catalogue produced in conjunction with one of Quaytman's many solo exhibitions at the McKee Gallery, the philosopher and art historian David Carrier perceptively noted, "Now Quaytman's paintings teach us something about both the history and the possibilities of abstraction. . . . Until it is possible to understand that abstraction has a history, so that Quaytman can build upon the achievement of Mondrian, it may be hard to understand Quaytman's art." This first retrospective exhibition of Harvey Quaytman's work is a giant step in that direction. However, even if we may not yet have a fully historicized foundation on which to gauge the depth of Quaytman's significance, we can in the meantime appreciate the sensuousness, complexity, and intellect that dances across and through his paintings.

When asked by Kimmo Sarje about his work in relation to "social values and criticism," Quaytman responded,

I'm interested in making paintings with a one hundred percent guarantee of moral integrity, which I think is the only contribution a painter can make to social justice. I mean, if you are able to concentrate everything you believe into your work, then it's ethically and socially valuable. . . . The sense of integrity and avoidance of easy answers—these kinds of paintings can be like moral sign posts in society. . . the moral is the result of the aesthetics. When the aesthetic decisions are made with absolute integrity, then I hope they also have a moral resonance.[63]

Quaytman never sought easy answers, and he continued to paint modernist abstractions throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, despite perennial proclamations of obsolescence (concerning both modernism and painting itself). His authentic approach, perseverance, and unwavering focus allowed Quaytman to remain committed to his artistic principles and sense of experimentation. Indeed, he possessed a rare degree of integrity, reflected in the dramatic term he coined for himself: "art soldier."

1 Harvey Quaytman, "All in the Family," *ARTnews* 97, no. 2 (February 1998): 36.

2 David Diao, in discussion with the author, January 2017.

3 Robert Mangold quoted in "Balance," *Art in the Twenty-First Century,* video, released May 5, 2012, https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s6/balance/.

4 The New Museum, 235 Bowery, now stands next to the building where Quaytman had his studio.

5 R. H. Quaytman, *Spine* (Berlin: Sternberg Press; Basel: Kunsthalle Basel; New York: Sequence Press, 2011), 7.

6 Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, have shared a partnership in accredited degrees since 1945. Recently, in 2016, Tufts formally acquired SMFA. Unlike the artists noted, Marden attended Boston University's School of Fine and Applied Arts from 1958 to 1961.

7 Alan Cote, in discussion with the author, November 2016.

8 Susan Howe, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

9 Brice Marden, interview by Paul Cummings, October 3, 1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-brice-marden-11908.

10 Margaret Moorman, unpublished notes on Harvey Quaytman, courtesy Margaret Moorman.

11 R. H. Quaytman, unpublished eulogy written for Harvey Quaytman's memorial service, 2004.

12 Ron Gorchov, in discussion with the author, January 2017.

13 John Walker, in discussion with the author, February 2017.

14 Harvey Quaytman, "Interview with the Artist, March 3, 1998," in *Harvey Quaytman* (Scottsdale, AZ: Bentley Gallery, 1998), unpag.

15 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd: The Early Works, 1955–1968,* ed. Thomas Kellein (New York: DAP, 2002), 86–97; originally published in *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965): 94.

16 Rosalind Krauss, "1965," in *Art since 1900* by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, and David Joselit, vol. 2, *1945 to the Present: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 493.

17 Cote, in discussion with the author, November 2015; the quote is taken from Krauss, "1965," 495.

18 Dore Ashton, "Paintings by Harvey Quaytman," in *Harvey Quaytman: Recent Paintings* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 1973), 6.

19 Sean Scully, who was a close friend of Quaytman's in the 1970s and 1980s, remembers that Quaytman used cotton duck because it is "more forgiving, it follows you." Sean Scully, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

20 Harvey Quaytman, "Statement," *Art Now: New York* 2, no. 5 (1970): unpag.

21 Diao, in discussion with the author, January 2017.

22 Frances Barth, in discussion with the author, February 2015.

23 Atiq R. Siddiqui, *The Story of Islamic Calligraphy* (Delhi: Sarita Book House, 1990), 9.

24 Barth, in discussion with the author, February 2015.

25 April Kingsley, "Harvey Quaytman at David McKee," *Art in America* 63, no. 5 (September–October 1975): 96–97.

26 In one of his notebooks, Quaytman included a newspaper clipping of a women's underwear advertisement, which suggested that he was interested in the curve of the female form.

27 Hal Foster, "1969," in *Art since 1900,* 2:534.

28 Harvey Quaytman, "Artist Statement," in *The Structure of Color*, ed. Marcia Tucker (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1971), 16.

29 Ibid.

30 Henri Matisse, "'As Inspiration Dictates': Henri Matisse on Color," *The Iris: Behind the Scenes at the Getty,* blog, November 14, 2013, http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/as-inspiration-dictates-henri-matisse-on-color/.

31 Harvey Quaytman, "In His Own Words: Harvey Quaytman and Kimmo Sarje," in *Harvey Quaytman* by Dore Ashton (London and New York: Phaidon, 2014), 21.

32 Frances Barth, email to the author, January 18, 2017. John Walker similarly recalls that Quaytman would bind four or five brushes together and affix them to a wooden stick; Walker, in discussion with the author, February 2017. Additionally, Sean Scully remembers the implements resembling brooms; Scully, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

33 The technical term for this phenomenon is *alligatoring*, named for the cracks in the paint that resemble an alligator's scales. The paint on Quaytman's works, however, is thicker than usual and thus much more sculptural in effect.

34 Ashton, "Paintings by Harvey Quaytman," 17.

35 Harvey Quaytman to John Baker, October 3, 1977; courtesy of John Baker.

36 Scully, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

37 Barth, email to the author, January 18, 2017.

38 Leonard Bocour, interview by Paul Cummings, June 8, 1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-leonard-bocour-12884.

39 Georg Kremer, email to the author, July 30, 2015.

40 Quaytman, "Interview with the Artist."

41 Ogden Rood was a reputed nineteenth-century physicist and color theorist who taught at Columbia University and wrote on chromatics and color systems. Almost all of Quaytman's sketchbooks and notebooks were destroyed in a flood after Hurricane Irene in 2011. Only one sketchbook remains, but it contains notes he kept on colors and gives a rich sense of his color experimentation, as well as how intricately he sketched out his shaped paintings in terms of scale and proportion before executing them.

42 Rene McKee, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

43 Quaytman, "In His Own Words," 21.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Scully, in discussion with the author, December 2016.

47 Judd Tully, "Interview with Harvey Quaytman," in *Harvey Quaytman: New Works* (Portland, ME: Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art, 1997); also available at http://juddtully.net/interviews/interview-with-harvey-quaytman/.

48 Ralph Mayer, *The Artist's Handbook of Materials and Techniques* (New York: Viking, 1970), 201.

49 Brice Marden, in discussion with the author, January 2017.

50 Ned Rifkin, ed., *The Fortieth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1987), 46.

51 Generally speaking, if a painting of Quaytman's was left untitled it was not exhibited during his lifetime. Although the paintings themselves were finished, he often didn't title them until they were sent off to be shown in an exhibition.

52 Quaytman, "In His Own Words," 19.

53 Tully, "Interview with Harvey Quaytman."

54 Ken Sofer, "Harvey Quaytman," *ARTnews* 86, no. 4 (April 1987): 159.

55 Øivind Storm Bjerke, *Harvey Quaytman* (Oslo: Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1996), 38.

56 Harvey Quaytman, *Harvey Quaytman, 1937–2002: A Tribute to the Man and His Work, Four Decades* (Boston: Nielsen Gallery, 2002).

57 Tully, "Interview with Harvey Quaytman."

58 Ibid.

59 Renee McKee, email to the author, September 12, 2017.

60 See Deborah Everett, "Harvey Quaytman—New Paintings," *NY Arts*, October 2000, unpag.

61 Leo Steinberg, *Harvey Quaytman* (New York: McKee Gallery, 2000), 3.

62 Tully, "Interview with Harvey Quaytman."

63 Quaytman, "In His Own Words," 21.