Terry R. Myers
Introduction//What has already been said about painting is still not enough

Writing in his journal on 15 May 1824 Eugène Delacroix claimed that 'what moves men of genius, or rather, what inspires their work, is not new ideas, but their obsession with the idea that what has already been said is still not enough'.[1] Written approximately a month after his twenty-sixth birthday, it might tempt our twenty-first-century perspective to assign youthful exuberance to such a statement, but then we would have to ignore that he was a mere three years away from completing *The Death of Sardanapalus*, a painting that, among many other mature achievements, pushed against the Apollonian dictates of academic, classical painting with full-blown Dionysian abandon. Boldly devoted to his mission, Delacroix would paint – and write – up to the very end of his life, lasting almost another forty years before his death in 1863, the year that the 31-year old Édouard Manet exhibited *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in the anti-establishment Salon des Refusés and emphatically pushed painting well on its way to modernist self-criticality while reinforcing Delacroix's still persuasive assertion that what had been said was – yet again – still not enough.

Most supporters and detractors of painting know well the story (and it may only be a story) of how the painter Paul Delaroche, upon first seeing a Daguerreotype in 1839, exclaimed: 'From today painting is dead!' Given the staying power of the death-of-painting narrative ever since, on the surface it would seem to make perfect sense to make this the rallying cry from which all that has been said about painting follows.

Painting since the end of the nineteenth century is inextricable from the parallel (if not superceding) story of the perpetual cycle of its deaths and rebirths in the face of photography, conceptual art, installation, digital imaging technologies, the world wide web, or plain lack of interest. It is this last 'enemy' that provoked my decision to focus the selection of texts for this volume on the most recent era, as no one could argue that painting captures our attention as it has in the past, despite how much of it is still produced and acknowledged. Like it or not, what has been said about painting since its last major re-emergence at the end of the 1970s is inseparable from the continuation of a (vicious) cycle of its death and rebirth. However, the texts in this volume come together, hardly in unison, to make an argument that despite the pervasiveness (and absolute usefulness) of the death-of-painting discourse during the periods we know as modernism and postmodernism, the most provocative things that have been said about recent painting reinforce Delacroix's earlier claim. But it is important to be clear that I am not totally convinced of this – doubt seeming essential to engaging with anything to do with painting, now or then.

With that said, the decision to anthologize texts written exclusively between the start of the 1980s and the present was made mainly because it had not yet been done. It is hoped that this is less the result of a misguided desire to be the first, but more a commitment to documenting the varying and even incongruous recent discourse that continues to impact most directly upon contemporary painting. The selection begins in 1981 at the beginnings of the most recent epoch that saw, in the wake of conceptualism, painting's resurgence and initiation of a dramatic expansion of its field – notwithstanding simultaneous and contradictory characterizations of that moment as both 'the end of painting' (Douglas Crimp, writing that spring in the journal *October*) and 'a new spirit in painting' (the title of the now infamous exhibition during the same spring at London's Royal Academy). Despite, myself, being a late arrival to this painting revival of the 1980s (my career as an art critic started in New York in 1988), it was not lost on me that as the 1990s were arriving, painting was perceived by many to be losing even more ground to photography, video and installation. Of course, since that time attitudes toward painting and its situation have changed yet further, as it has become more difficult (once again) to dismiss it outright, or even to decide what it is in the first place. In other words, the cycle continues.

A focus on these three decades also enabled me to commit readily to a chronological organization for this book, allowing voices of the times to articulate the insights of particular moments rather than succumbing to restrictive categories, given that every text included could fit into more than one. (Some of these possible categories are discussed below.) Forming a year-by-year narrative, the book begins with Crimp's provocative essay on 'The End of Painting' and ends with David Joselit's comparably timely observations on present conditions, in 'Painting Beside Itself' (2009), where he reminds us, via the work of Martin Kippenberger, that 'painting has always belonged to networks of distribution and exhibition'. In that sense this book could be seen as its own network of distribution, as these texts about painting (separated, let's not ignore, from images here) establish a trajectory that suggests painting may no longer be only about moving forward to find a new idea – if, once again, not enough has been said about where it has been.

This may explain why most of the texts included here can be directly reconnected to the history of painting since the late nineteenth century – especially if that narrative is considered in reverse. (From many conversations I've had in recent years, I know I'm far from the only person who often sees a new painting that looks as if it could have been produced a hundred years earlier, give or take a decade.) While working on this project I was influenced in

particular by an important survey exhibition organized in 2009 by Michael Darling at the Seattle Art Museum. 'Target Practice: Painting under Attack 1949–78' provided an opportunity to experience the thirty years of painting just prior to that discussed in this book, a period in which painting was being put through its paces to the outer limits, generating (contrarily) positive energy for what would follow despite its destructive intentions.[2] This becomes even more the case when looked at in reverse ...

If we start at the end of Darling's exhibition with an Andy Warhol *Oxidation Painting* from 1978 (urine on copper metallic paint), and work our way back (far too quickly) past works like Daniel Buren's *Exposition d'une Exposition* from 1972 (a section of striped wallpaper), Lynda Benglis' *Baby Planet* from *c.* 1969 (poured pigmented latex paint), Harry Shunk's photographic documentation of Niki de Saint Phalle shooting at an Old Master with a .22 rifle at the Impasse Roussin on 15 June 1961, and Jasper Johns' *Canvas* from 1959 (a small canvas attached face first to a larger canvas, painted all over in grey encaustic with collage), we end, at this particular 'beginning', with Lucio Fontana's *Concreto spaziale (C.49B2)* from 1949 (white paper mounted on canvas and punched through with numerous holes). Looking beyond this exhibition, for brevity's sake I'll skip over Abstract Expressionism, except to say that its influence over post-1981 painting is not as easy to define as one might think, and move on to Joan Miró, who from 1927 to 1937 used his equally destructive impulse ('I want to assassinate painting!') to reinvigorate painting. Before we know it, we're back to Marcel Duchamp with his notorious proposal for a 'reciprocal readymade: use a Rembrandt as an ironing board', and Aleksandr Rodchenko's three monochrome canvases of 1921 – *Pure Red Colour, Pure Yellow Colour, Pure Blue Colour* – heralding, as he thought, the end of painting, even though almost a century had passed since Delaroche's exclamation. That it is nearly a century now since Rodchenko's accomplishment may be another reason for taking Delacroix's claim to heart when considering what painting has been since the endpoint that briefly seemed its condition at the close of the 1970s.

Reviewing that decade Crimp claimed that 'photography may have been *invented* in 1839, but it was only *discovered* in the 1970s', and it comes as no surprise that photography remains a pressing concern throughout this volume, as painting continues to negotiate the terms of what will remain a complicated relationship. In the same year as Crimp, for example, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze meditates on Francis Bacon's 'radical hostility toward the photograph', while in 1992 Vija Celmins is anything but hostile when she confides to fellow painter Chuck Close: 'I feel that the image is just a sort of armature on which I hang my marks and make my art.' Howard Halle, reviewing a 1999 show of large-scale, digitally-manipulated photographs by Andreas Gursky, goes so far as to assert that "painting" is a philosophical enterprise that doesn't always involve paint', pulling double duty as a clear rebuttal to what he perceives as a false distinction between painting and photography, as well as an important example of daily, or in his case, weekly criticism. But by 2005 Jerry Saltz is calling for 'a 48-month moratorium on the reproduction of photographs with the aid of overhead, opaque or slide projectors in paintings (and this includes tracings too)'.

Writing in 1990 on the work of Marilyn Minter – an artist who still projects photographic imagery onto the metal supports of her paintings that are then produced by a team of assistants as well as her actual fingers – Barry Schwabsky appropriately brings up Abstract Expressionism, Pop and Minimalism as well as Australian aboriginal art and 'bad painting' (the name of another important show, this one organized by Marcia Tucker at the New Museum, New York, in 1978, the same year as Richard Marshall's landmark 'New Image Painting' at the Whitney Museum). Launching this book's second decade, Schwabsky's text also introduces the fundamental place of women painters at the centre of emerging discussions about identity politics and multiculturalism. In particular, I distinctly remember the impact of Shirley Kaneda's text, 'Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine', when it was first published in 1991, a criterion used for the inclusion of several other writings, for example, Marlene Dumas' statement 'Woman and Painting' (1993), Mira Schor's 'Course Proposal' of the same year, and in the next decade Isabelle Graw's 2006 essay on Jutta Koether's treatment of canonic painters. And just as it has become increasingly less possible for feminism and painting to be perceived as mutually exclusive, so a more diverse group of artists have also forged ways of expanding the socio-political boundaries of painting, as excerpts from conversations with Lari Pittman, Philip Taaffe, Katharina Grosse, Chéri Samba and Beatriz Milhazes make clear, along with discussions of new artistic tendencies in their cultural context by Geeta Kapur and Midori Matsui.

Kaneda's text also participates in an ongoing discussion about abstraction that is represented extensively here. This begins with Hal Foster's 'Signs Taken for Wonders' (1986), in which he suggested that the new abstract painting of that time qualified 'the conventional reading of twentieth-century art in terms of simple paradigm shifts between "representation" and "abstraction"', by becoming a *simulation* of abstraction. An early dialogue between Gerhard Richter and Benjamin Buchloh on the rhetoric of painting is followed by 1990s re-evaluations of the 'pattern and decoration' moment by Michael Corris and Robert Nickas, and of formalism by Lane Relyea, while in a statement published at the decade's close the painter Mary Heilmann suggests that each of her abstract paintings can 'be seen as an autobiographical marker'. Sebastian Egenhofer's essay 'Figures of Defiguration: Four Theses on Abstraction' from 2008 provides another full-circle

moment, with his attempt, as he puts it, 'to recast the opposition between self-reference and referentiality in the engagement with abstract art'.

Another opposition that has been dramatically recast in recent painting is the one between abstraction and figurative representation, as aspects and approaches of one so-called category are increasingly put to use in the other within the work of influential artists such as Raoul de Keyser among others. In the catalogue essay for 'Unbound', the 1994 group exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, that he co-curated with Greg Hilty, the critic Adrian Searle introduces a discussion of de Keyser's work with the reflection that 'there are many kinds of paintings, some of which depict rooms, objects and people, things. And others from which every trace of the world we are familiar with has been expunged – although that is not quite possible.' Painting today is more comfortable with that inevitable trace of the familiar, and this may be a key reason why the 'return' to figuration of the late 1970s was especially reinvigorated in the 1990s. I'm not alone in my assessment that the 1991 exhibition that Jim Shaw organized from his collection of 'Thrift-Store' paintings at Metro Pictures in New York not only defined a moment of absolute permission to make painting even more weird (as embodied in the descriptive yet expansive titles he gave the paintings) but also provided a (wonderful or painful, depending on your point of view) slippery slope for identifying any consistent criteria for a good painting. Shaw's in-your-face presentation of sometimes clueless deskilling, however, only worked because of equally potent assertions of painterly prowess, represented here in the words of John Currin, Chéri Samba, Albert Oehlen and André Butzer.

Last but certainly not least, many of the texts in this book take on the 'expanded field' of painting, because there can be no doubt that its boundaries have become anything but restrictive. As Daniel Birnbaum states in his 2001 resumé of where painting is now: 'painting no longer exists as a strictly circumscribed mode of expression; rather, it is a zone of contagion, constantly branching out and widening its scope. Painterly practices emerge in other genres, such as photography, video, sculpture, printmaking and installation.' Birnbaum's use of the word 'contagion' aside, it remains unclear if the radical expansion of painting in our time is an act of viral desperation or a refusal of outdated notions of avant-garde separation, or even a reconnection to the longer history of how painting has functioned in various cultural contexts. To that end, it seemed important to include Meyer Raphael Rubinstein's 1991 text 'The Painting Undone' as an example of the historical reclamation that will always inform how we look at painting, in this case a reassessment of the late 1960s/early 1970s group of French artists known as Supports/Surfaces, as an antecedent for artists such as Polly Apfelbaum, Bernard Frize and Katharina Grosse. In his 1996 essay 'Cabbages, Raspberries and Video's Thin Brightness', abstract painter and critic Jeremy

I REMEMBER A FRENCH JOURNALIST TELLING ME THAT PAINTING HAD BECOME OBSOLETE IN THE WEST, AND THAT NO ONE WAS INTERESTED IN IT ANYMORE. THAT'S NOT TRUE FOR ME. I HAVE A SUITCASE FULL OF IDEAS!

Chéri Samba, in conversation with André Magnin, 2004

Gilbert-Rolfe points painting in a different direction, claiming that 'from video it learns the secret of the electronic, that there are no gaps, that presence and deferral are indistinguishable in a sheet of clear Plexiglas, that there is movement in interruption', bringing us full circle to the long-term and ongoing concerns of painting, whether in an expanded field or not. And Ulrike Groos' text on Paul McCarthy's 1995 video *Painter* takes us yet someplace else – 'A collector appears at the gallery, sniffs around the painter's rear and shows visible satisfaction as he does so' – and at the same time reminds us that no new technology guarantees any permanent disconnection from the past.

There is indeed no assurance of breaking from the past and it is obvious by now that seldom is this more the case than with painting. In the process of making this selection, my initial exposure to Neo Rauch's work at his first New York show in 2000 came to mind several times, primarily because it was a moment when my reviewing commitment to the immediacy of the first-read (why I wanted some key examples of 'on-the-street' criticism in this book) dovetailed with an archival impetus to sketch out a critical perspective on the recent history that brought us to the moment. With apologies for self-referencing I include this short passage below as it sums up the rich experience that such convergences have offered me and that I hope the texts collected here will impart to others.

> Painting seems pretty together these days when it comes to its ability to accommodate multiple modes simultaneously, so it is not a big surprise that one of the more interesting 'post-reunification' painters would emerge from the former East Germany, given how quickly (and awkwardly) things have changed there since 1989. Moreover, it can be argued that a younger German painter would have a particular insight into the moment given the extent to which German painting since 1961 has determined how we think about contemporary painting in toto: from the 'crisis' implied in the separation of form and content in Richter and Polke, to the 'collision' of painful history and technique in Baselitz and Kiefer, to the deliberate 'collapse' of everything in Kippenberger. Weathering all this historical baggage (and then some), Neo Rauch's paintings emerge as markers of 'coalition' in the midst of the current 'post-reunification' of painting itself as some sort of nation-state unable (or at least unwilling) to rely upon either the supposed shock of yet another rupture, or an empty assertion of cultural authority.[3]

Ten years on, I am all the more convinced that painting, since the late 1970s version of its 'end', has not only survived but also thrived because of its embrace of the coalitional. What sometimes works for governments frequently works for painting, as nearly thirty years of recent activity that is considered to be painting has demonstrated by its ability to work with rather than against other media, even if the partnership is self-consciously temporary and provisional. Therefore, with the advantage of hindsight, that contradictory moment in the spring of 1981 makes perfect sense to me. It may be that the catalogue for 'A New Spirit in Painting' needed to proclaim that 'the artists' studios are full of paint pots again and an abandoned easel in an art school has become a rare sight'[4] at the same moment that Douglas Crimp invoked the troublemaking words of Gerhard Richter: 'Basically, painting is pure idiocy.'[5]

As someone who has also taught over the past two decades in numerous studio classrooms – for the most part light-filled spaces in which talented young artists have made work that they may or may not have considered to be painting – I can also affirm that the majority of texts in this volume have instigated the most provocative and useful conversations with them. These young artists have proven to me that if painting remains important today it is because its contradictions have been acknowledged – if not exaggerated – while artists have radically diversified the components of its production and presentation, all the while making it clear that it might be more than acceptable to *not* be out to destroy or assassinate painting. My hope is that the texts in this volume establish what I believe to be the necessarily paradoxical state of contemporary painting, alongside the expansion of its material and philosophical conditions – and, less definably but crucially, the continuation of everything about which still not enough has been said.

1 Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, ed. Hubert Wellington (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 1995) 41.
2 Michael Darling, ed., *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack 1949–78* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009). This section of my introduction is indebted to Graham Bader's essay 'Modern Painting, Modern Iconoclasm' that is included in this exhibition catalogue.
3 Terry R. Myers, 'Neo Rauch', *artext*, no. 70 (August/October 2000) 79.
4 Christos Joachimides, 'A New Spirit in Painting', in *A New Spirit in Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1981) 14.
5 Gerhard Richter in conversation with Irmeline Lebeer, cited in Douglas Crimp, 'The End of Painting', *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981) 73.

Painting doesn't freeze time. It circulates and recycles time like a wheel that turns. Those who were first might well be last.

Marlene Dumas, 'Woman and Painting', 1993

PAINTING

Douglas Crimp
The End of Painting//1981

Painting has not always existed; we can determine when it began. And if its development and its moments of greatness can be drummed into our heads, can we not then also imagine its periods of decline and even its end, like any other ideal
– Louis Aragon, 'La peinture au défi'

The work of art is so frightened of the world at large, it so needs isolation in order to exist, that any conceivable means of protection will suffice. It frames itself, withdraws under glass, barricades itself behind a bullet-proof surface, surrounds itself with a protective cordon, with instruments showing the room humidity, for even the slightest cold would be fatal. Ideally the work of art finds itself not just screened from the world, but shut up in a safe, permanently and totally sheltered from the eye. And yet isn't such an extremism, bordering on the absurd, already with us, everyday, everywhere, when the artwork exhibits itself in those safes called 'Galleries', 'Museums'? Isn't it the very point of departure, the end, and the essential function of the work of art that it should be so exhibited?
– Daniel Buren, *Reboundings*

On one of those rare occasions during the past decade when Barbara Rose abandoned the pages of *Vogue* magazine in order to say something really serious about the art of our time, she did so to vent her rage at an exhibition called 'Eight Contemporary Artists', held at the Museum of Modern Art in the fall of 1974.[1] Although she found the work in the show 'bland and tepid' and therefore something 'normally one would overlook', she felt compelled to speak out because this show was organized by our most prestigious institution of modern art and, for that reason alone, it became significant. But the work in the show was bland and tepid to Rose only from an aesthetic standpoint; it was more potent as politics:

> For some time I have felt that the radicalism of Minimal and Conceptual art is fundamentally political, that its implicit aim is to discredit thoroughly the forms and institutions of dominant bourgeois culture ... Whatever the outcome of such a strategy, one thing is certain: when an institution as prestigious as the Museum of Modern Art invites sabotage, it becomes party, not to the promulgation of experimental art, but to the passive acceptance of disenchanted, demoralised artists' aggression against art greater than their own.[2]

The particular saboteur who seems to have captured Rose's attention in this case is Daniel Buren, whose work for MoMA consisted of his familiar striped panels, cut to conform to the windows facing the garden, and affixed to the corridor wall facing those windows, and again to the garden wall, with leftover fragments displaced to a billboard and a gallery entrance in lower Manhattan. Impressed though she is by the cogency of Buren's arguments about the ideology imposed by the museum, Rose is nevertheless perplexed that his work should appear in one, which seems to her like having his cake and eating it too. For illumination on this matter, she turns to an interview with William Rubin, the director of MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture. In this interview, published in a 1974 issue of *Artforum*, Rubin explains that museums are essentially compromise institutions invented by bourgeois democracies to reconcile the large public with art conceived within the compass of elite private patronage. This age, Rubin suggests, might be coming to an end, leaving the museum essentially irrelevant to the practices of contemporary art.

> Perhaps, looking back 10, 15, 30 years from now, it will appear that the modernist tradition really did come to an end within the last few years, as some critics suggest. If so, historians a century from now – whatever name they will give the period we now call modernism – will see it beginning shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century and ending in the 1960s ... Perhaps the dividing line will be seen as between those works which essentially continue an easel painting concept that grew up associated with bourgeois democratic life and was involved with the development of private collections as well as the museum concept – between this and, let us say, Earthworks, conceptual works and related endeavours, which want another environment (or should want it) and, perhaps, another public.[3]

Rose assumes that Buren is one of those artists whose work wants (or should want) another environment. After all, his text 'Function of the Museum', which she quotes, is a polemic against the confinement of artworks in museums.[4] But if Buren's work had not appeared in the museum, had not taken the museum as its point of departure and as its referent, the very issues Rose is pondering would never have arisen. It is fundamental to Buren's work that it act in complicity with those very institutions that it seeks to make visible as the necessary conditions of the artwork's intelligibility. That is the reason not only that his work appears in museums and galleries, but that it poses as painting. It is only thereby possible for his work to ask: What makes it possible to see a painting? What makes it possible to see a painting *as a painting?* And to what end is painting under such conditions of its presentation?

But Buren's work runs a great risk when it poses as painting, the risk of invisibility. Since everything to which Buren's work points as being cultural, historical, is so easily taken to be natural, many people look at Buren's paintings the way they look at all paintings, vainly asking them to render up their meaning *about themselves*. Since they categorically refuse to do so, since they have, by design, no internal meaning, they simply disappear. Thus, Barbara Rose, for example, sees Buren's work at the Museum of Modem Art only as 'vaguely resembling Stella's stripe paintings'.[5] But if Rose is myopic on matters of painting, blind to those questions about painting which Buren's work poses, that is because she, like most people, still *believes* in painting.

> One must really be engaged in order to be a painter. Once obsessed by it, one eventually gets to the point where one thinks that humanity could be changed by painting. But when that passion deserts you, there is nothing else left to do. Then it is better to stop altogether. Because basically painting is pure idiocy.
> – Gerhard Richter, in conversation with Irmeline Lebeer

As testimony to her faith in painting, Rose mounted her own exhibition of contemporary art five years after the MoMA show. Given the forward-looking, not to say oracular, title 'American Painting: The Eighties' (the exhibition was mounted in the fall of 1979), Rose's exhibition expressly intended to show the public that throughout that grim period of the sixties and seventies, when art seemed so bent on self-destruction, intent as it was on those extra-art concerns gathered together under the rubric *politics* – that throughout that period there had been 'a generation of hold-outs', survivors of 'disintegrating morality, social demoralization, and lack of conviction in all authority and tradition'.[6] These noble survivors, painters all, were 'maintaining a conviction in quality and values, a belief in art as a mode of transcendence, a worldly incarnation of the ideal'.

Now, as it happens, Rose's evidence of this keeping of the faith was extremely unconvincing, and her exhibition was an easy target for hostile criticism. Biased as her selection was toward the most hackneyed recapitulations of late modernist abstraction, the show had the unmistakable look of Tenth Street, twenty years after the fact. Given the thousands of artists currently practising the art of painting, Rose's selection was indeed parochial; certainly there is a lot of painting around that *looks* more original. Furthermore, favouring such a narrow range of painting at a time when stylistic catholicity, pluralism, is the critical byword, Rose was virtually inviting an unfavourable response. And so, as was to be expected, she was taken to task by the various art journalists for whomever of their favourites she failed to include. Thus, Hilton Kramer's review asked: Where are the figurative painters? And John Perreault's asked: Where are the pattern painters? And Roberta Smith's asked: Where is Jennifer Bartlett? But the point is that no one asked: Why painting? To what end painting in the 1980s? And to that extent, Barbara Rose's show was a resounding success. It proved that faith in painting had indeed been fully restored. For, however much painting may have been in question in 1974, when Rubin was interviewed by *Artforum* and his museum staged 'Eight Contemporary Artists', by 1979, the question clearly had been withdrawn.

The rhetoric which accompanies this resurrection of painting is almost exclusively reactionary: it reacts specifically against all those art practices of the sixties and seventies which abandoned painting and coherently placed in question the ideological supports of painting, and the ideology which painting, in turn, supports. And thus, while almost no one agreed with the choices Barbara Rose made to demonstrate painting's renaissance, almost everyone agrees with the substance, if not the details, of her rhetoric. Rose's catalogue text for *American Painting: The Eighties* is a dazzling collection of received ideas about the art of painting, and I would submit that it is only such ideas that painting today knows. Here, then, is a litany of excerpts from Rose's essay, which I think we may take as provisional answers to the question: To what end painting in the 1980s?

> ... painting [is] a transcendental, high art, a major art, and an art of universal as opposed to topical significance.
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> ... only painting [is] genuinely liberal, in the sense of free.
>
> [painting is] an expressive human activity ... our only present hope for preserving high art.
>
> [painting] is the product exclusively of the individual imagination rather than a mirror of the ephemeral external world of objective reality.
>
> ... illusion ... is the essence of painting.
>
> Today, the essence of painting is being redefined not as a narrow, arid and reductive anti-illusionism, but as a rich, varied capacity to birth new images into an old world.
>
> [painting's] capacity [is] to materialize an image ... behind the proverbial looking-glass of consciousness, where the depth of the imagination knows no bounds.
>
> Not innovation, but originality, individuality and synthesis are the marks of quality in art today, and they always have been.

> ... art is labour, physical human labour, the labour of birth, reflected in the many images that appear as in a process of emergence, as taking form before us.

> The liberating potential of art is ... a catharsis of the imagination.

> ... these paintings are clearly the works of rational adult humans, not a monkey, not a child, or a lunatic.

> [the tradition of painting is] an inner world of stored images ranging from Altamira to Pollock.

For Rose, then, painting is a high art, a universal art, a liberal art, an art through which we can achieve transcendence and catharsis. Painting has an essence and that essence is illusion, the capacity to materialize images rendered up by the boundless human imagination. Painting is a great unbroken tradition that encompasses the entire known history of man. Painting is, above all, human.

All of this is, of course, in direct opposition to that art of the sixties and seventies, of which I take Buren's work to be exemplary, which sought to contest the myths of high art, to declare art, like all other forms of endeavour, to be contingent upon the real, historical world. Moreover this art sought to discredit the myth of man and the ideology of humanism which it supports. For indeed these are all notions that sustain the dominant bourgeois culture. They are the very hallmarks of bourgeois ideology. But if the art of the sixties and seventies sought, with its open assault upon the artist as unique creator, to contest the myth of man as an eternal essence, there was another phenomenon which had initiated that assault in the arts at the very founding moments of modernism, a phenomenon from which painting has been in retreat since the mid nineteenth century. That phenomenon is, of course, photography.

> You know exactly what I think of photography. I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable.
> – Marcel Duchamp, in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz

'From today painting is dead': it is now nearly a century and a half since Paul Delaroche is said to have pronounced that sentence in the face of the overwhelming evidence of Daguerre's invention. But even though that death warrant has been periodically reissued throughout the era of modernism, no one seems to have been entirely willing to execute it; life on death row lingered to longevity. But during the 1960s, painting's terminal condition finally seemed impossible to ignore. The symptoms were everywhere: in the work of the painters themselves, each of whom seemed to be reiterating Reinhardt's claim that he was 'just making the last paintings which anyone can make', or to allow their paintings to be contaminated with such alien forces as photographic images; in minimal sculpture, which provided a definitive rupture with painting's unavoidable ties to a centuries-old idealism; in all those other mediums to which artists turned as they, one after the other, abandoned painting. The dimension that had always resisted even painting's most dazzling feats of illusionism – time – now became the arena in which artists staged their activities as they embraced film, video and performance. And, after waiting out the entire era of modernism, photography reappeared, finally to claim its inheritance. The appetite for photography in the past decade has been insatiable. Artists, critics, dealers, curators and scholars have defected from their former pursuits in droves to take up this enemy of painting. Photography may have been *invented* in 1839, but it was only *discovered* in the 1970s. [...]

1 'Eight Contemporary Artists', an exhibition of the work of Vito Acconci, Alighiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Robert Hunter, Brice Marden, Dorothea Rockburne, organised by Jennifer Licht, at the Museum of Modern Art, 9 October 1974 – 5 January 1975.
2 Barbara Rose, 'Twilight of the Superstars', *Partisan Review*, vol. XLI, no. 4 (Winter 1974) 572.
3 William Rubin, 'Talking with William Rubin: The Museum Concept is Not Infinitely Expandable', interview by Lawrence Alloway and John Coplans, *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (October 1974) 52.
4 Daniel Buren, 'Function of the Museum', *Artforum*, vol. XII, no. 1 (September 1973) 68.
5 Rose, 'Twilight', 569.
6 Barbara Rose, *American Painting: The Eighties* (Buffalo: Thorney-Sidney Press, 1979) n.p. All following quotations from Barbara Rose are taken from this text.

Douglas Crimp, extract from 'The End of Painting', *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981) 69–76