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**ROBERT RYMAN  
THE PARADOXICAL ABSOLUTE  
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## INTRODUCTION

Robert Ryman is a painter continually striving for absolutes, absolutes in all senses of what the word means within the given, self-made parameter of his work. Whiteness and squareness have remained constant features of Ryman's painting for over forty years now. They are the most obvious elements in his work, but in fact are only the primary building blocks in a practice of painting that is about the examination of painting itself. Ryman makes paintings about the elements of 'painting'; paint itself, the manner in which it is applied, surface, scale, materials and their relation to one another, for example, pigment to its support, the relationship of paint to the edge of the support, and so on.

The absolute in art is something which all art has dealt with in greater or lesser degrees throughout history. The ideal is the perfectly complete, pure work of art. This absolute is something which Ryman has worked for, hoping but knowing that he will never attain it. This is the paradox of the absolute, it can never be gained as it can never be measured.

Abstract art made by Ryman and his contemporaries today generates questions such as the relation of the work within the tradition of abstraction and the significance of that work in contemporary art.

Donald Kuspit in his essay 'The Abstract Self-Object' discusses the two distinct routes which abstraction has taken historically. One is gestural, romantic 'organicist abstraction':

Organicist abstraction regarded art as the articulation of the indwelling naturalness of existence, a naturalness difficult to grasp and ultimately



representable only in enigmatic - non-representational-symbolic form. [Kuspit, 1986, p.41]

The other route is its opposite, 'mechanicist abstraction', a formal linear geometric based interpretation of abstraction. Mechanicist abstraction had the appeal of having a seemingly endless amount of variations without any one system of formal functional relationships being regarded as absolute.

The conflict between these two distinctive methods of working can best be envisaged in Kandinsky's organicism and his fellow Russian contemporary, Malevich's mechanicism.

- equally sublime, ambitious, and absolute in their claims, both claiming a monopoly on the inner necessity of art - is the driving force behind modernist abstraction. [Kuspit, 1986, p.42]

Ryman in his work has been successful in marrying these two opposites and creating a synthesis of abstract art which has broadened our view of abstraction in a postmodern era. As such Ryman is always working toward perfection while being also preoccupied by spontaneity. This belief in a method of working and the desire for painting to generate an emphatic response which links with the viewer in a vital unconscious way is in keeping with contemporaries of Ryman like, Brice Marden, Sean Scully and Robert Mangold. All these artists believe in the transformational power of painting. The belief is that through their methods of painting and manipulation of materials a higher essence can be achieved, an essence beyond that of the material.

This belief in a transcendence through art by a very objective means is a phenomena in art which puts the artist and the viewer in a position where they can see a painting as relating only to itself and alluding to nothing else. In other words the paint on



the surface of the support is seen as exactly that, the work then becomes a 'thing', a phenomenon.

Ryman's work has spanned and been connected to two major influential 'movements' in art over the past forty years, abstract expressionism throughout the 1950s and minimalism in the '60s and '70s. This of course does not mean to say that he is or was a practitioner, or champion of either but it does give some insight into the critics and art historians who wish to put a label on Ryman's work. Closer inspection of his body of work will show that as much as some elements of his work made during both these periods can be likened to the ideals of one or the other, they can only be 'like' and never quite 'are'.

This difficulty in pin-pointing Ryman's work in terms of a particular movement in art only accentuates the strong individual qualities and unique working method and ideals Ryman has.

In terms of measuring creativity and creative achievement by an individual, this is validated in terms of the growth of that creative process, from its original goals and the growth towards that goal over a period of time. On reaching and mastering that goal the work and the artist are usually labelled mature. This method of measuring an individual's skill or success through their work in today's modern penchant for theatrical events and displays of 'art'. In many cases far too much media and critical attention has often wrongly become connected with the measure of that 'art's' worth and value within our society.

If Ryman's work is to be measured in terms of its growth toward self-set goals and the maturation of them, it is certainly not a

measure of giant leaps or major breakthroughs in the modernist cause. Yet Ryman has contributed greatly to our visual experience and awareness of particular values within his and other's modern abstract painting. His work has elaborated itself within the chosen methods of his creative procedure. It is wrong to measure Ryman in terms of a particular body of work or indeed an individual painting made at a specific time. Instead the measure of his work is its success in creating an increasing number of similar statements, yet, brilliantly individual, about what paint is able to do.

## CHAPTER 1 :      GUARDING MODERNISM

Ryman's introduction to painting came when he moved from his birthplace Nashville, Tennessee to New York in 1952. Not having any formal training in painting through art institutions, he began to paint for purely inquisitive reasons.

I was just seeing how the paint worked, and how the brushes worked. I was just using the paint, putting it on a canvas board, putting it on thinly with turpentine, and thicker to see what that was like, and trying to make something happen without any specific idea what I was painting. [Storr, 1993, p.12]

From these initial experiments with painting materials, almost aimless and care free in their approach, grew a body of work which has kept its roots in these simple unselfconscious beginnings.

A short time after Ryman's invitation into painting he signed on as a guard at the Museum of Modern Art in 1953. He held this position until 1960. It was during this time that Ryman used this great opportunity to educate himself both historically and aesthetically at his leisure within the visual art's.

It is significant to note that during the 1950s the Museum of Modern Art began to actually acquire abstract expressionist works and Ryman had the opportunity to study work by De Kooning, Rothko, Kline and Pollock. By the time Ryman took leave of the Museum there were examples of nearly every significant painter of that generation. Ryman was particularly struck by the work of Rothko which he found unique in its absence of reference to representation. The absence of a frame and the application of paint around the edges of the stretcher encouraged the reading of



the painting as an object in space and not a flat two dimensional plane. [Storr, 93, p.14]

In this light it is interesting to view Ryman's work of that period. Being predominantly educated and influenced through the actual visual stimulus of other's work and not academically inclined, Ryman observed much work at close quarters, concentrating more on the 'how' of it rather than the 'why'. Ryman was learning about how paint worked, its limits and the possible advancement of those limits. He took in all he saw but used that knowledge in his own work in a very individual sense, ignoring philosophical renderings of abstract expressionist discourse in his work.

Abstract expressionism came to the fore in America during the mid 1940s, emerging from a society which was no longer so comfortable with its meaning and structure. This came after events like the 2nd World War, the Depression and the witnessing of new dimensions of suffering and human cruelty to one another. Traditional notions of human nature and mental process in the face of recent historical events had become weakened and unsubstantial. New ideas from the realms of psychology, philosophy and anthropology were being put into discourse to make a new sense of understanding and order in society. The idea of the 'unconscious' within the human mind which was a powerful determinater of behaviour were studied closely along with ideas of links with primitive behaviour and mentality which could be paralleled with modern ideas of the human mind. [Leja, 1987, p.23] The new painting that came about at this time, it could be argued, was an attempt to deal with this new knowledge of the

complex inner self of the individual. The work of many painters of this 'school' at the time over a period became more gestural and larger in scale, creating mural size work, as in the case of Pollock and Newman. These paintings engulfed the viewer surrounding them with visual sensation. The viewer was confronted with a portal into an immense void, or conversely these areas could be seen as fields of colour projected toward the viewer activating the space between. Either way the paintings could be seen to create a sounding board from which the viewer could allow his or her psyche to engage in a process of contemplation.

Although Ryman's early work superficially resembled methods of procedure and execution which were prominent in much of abstract expressionist work his process was very much his own. Unlike De Kooning who added pigment and then scraped back into the surface developing an erratic, fussed surface, Ryman added pigment but did not remove it. Ryman's method of negating a part of the surface was to erase by covering over with more pigment. Similarly the broad gestural brush work in paintings such as those of Kline are paintings which could be compared to early works on paper by Ryman. But they are fundamentally opposite in their execution. Where Kline's marks and gestures emanate from the shoulder and arm, Ryman's smaller works are a product of his hand and figures clearly a more controlled and premeditative collection of gestures. The painting process for Ryman was a matter of application rather than one of action. Ryman wished to allow the paint to affirm itself, its own abilities rather than the ability of the painter affirming itself on the paint. In contrast to the painting being a statement of artistic intent, a



method of exposing the will, of laying bare a state of mind, Ryman wanted the painting to speak of itself. To ask other questions of the viewer, Ryman was attempting to defamiliarise our perception of what a painting was or should be. His paintings were not 'of' something but literally 'were' themselves. In an answer to a question of the intent of his work in terms of a philosophical and traditional painterly approach Ryman answered, "The painting is exactly what you see." [Bois, 1990, p.3] This remark is not Ryman being pretentious or evasive, he is simply being honest.

This immediate individual way of looking is a nucleus in Ryman's work. Doubtless he was influenced by much of the work which he saw around him. He was predominantly interested in the visual sense. The philosophical and dialectic arguments posited by critics such as Greenberg were not of much concern to Ryman. From the outset he concentrated on his own concerns and ideals and not the theories of others.

A small Gouache painting on paper made in 1957, 'untitled', like many paintings of this period has a visual impact not dissimilar to much abstract expressionist paintings of the time. There is a variety of brush strokes which activate the entire surface except for a small band of the paper ground along the bottom edge. There are brush strokes of different lengths and speed, direction and shape, some gestural and others controlled and methodical. Along the right side the signature 'R. Ryman' is incorporated into the ground as an element of the composition, stretching as it does from bottom to top. Turned on its edge and painted in white it becomes another abstract element in the painting. In





Untitled 1957

this painting all these elements are equally important and give the work a power which breaks its modest boundaries.

The use of symbolism and metaphor in abstract expressionist painting was another device in which colour and shape and the marrying of both into composition could be utilised to evoke and invoke a particular meaning or mood between compositional relationships. These could take the form of confrontation or unity, balance, imbalance etc.

Ryman has spoken of the use of symbolism in abstract painting. He uses the word 'abstract' in the sense of 'abstracting from' [Ryman, 71, p.57]. To him abstraction is very close to representational painting. The two share the same devices such as the picture plane and symbolism. There is a story there and often a frame is isolating the illusion from the wall plane. The aesthetic which this work holds for Ryman is an inward aesthetic. The painting is its own small world.

In contrast to these two prominent methods of painting Ryman subscribes to the method which he prefers to call "Realism". "I call it realism because the aesthetic is real." [Ryman, 91, p.59]

Unlike representation and abstraction, with realism there is no picture. The aesthetic is an outward one and in the absence of a picture there is no story. So the painting holds no myth and most importantly no illusion. In this sense Ryman is claiming that in 'realist' painting everything is real and alludes to nothing else, the lines, space and surface are real and interact with the wall plane. Ryman knows of course that all three elements of working share obvious devices, such as composition

and colour, surface and light. The element which is not shared is picture, the illusion, or if you like symbolism and metaphor. This particular way of seeing an art work becomes a central issue later on in the '60s, through 'minimalism'. For Ryman however it was a central concern long before this time. As much as this knowledge helps define the differences in Ryman's work in contrast to abstract expressionism of the '50s, it has to be said that his work of this period does hold distinct similarities to much abstract expressionist painting. What is so interesting is Ryman's willingness to take in and learn from all he saw around him but have the self-conviction to stick rigidly to his own concerns within the confines of painting. He kept working for what at the beginning seemed like a simple unambitious desire which was to see how "paint worked".

Towards the end of the 1950s, the desire for many abstract expressionist painters to have their paintings valued as sources of direct experience rather than as objects or symbols is evident in their statements and writings. Rothko spoke of: "The elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the observer." [Auping, 1987, p.148] Such a statement indicates an ambition to go further than representing something and into a way of creating an event or experience in and of itself. These intentions are something which became more evident in the art world of America with the advent of what came to be known as 'Minimalism'.



## CHAPTER 2 : A MINIMAL PERSPECTIVE

The term 'Minimal Art' was coined in the 1960s to describe abstract, geometric painting and sculpture. The label minimal could be construed as having negative connotations suggesting that the minimal in minimal art is the art itself. But practitioners of such work would argue that what is minimal in the art is not the ends but the means.

The phrase was a label that stuck to a type of work and group of artists who shaped similar concerns in terms of what their work was about and how that work was perceived. But it was not a term which could describe them as a unified group. They never thought of themselves as a group. Ryman is a painter who never has described himself as a minimalist, but it was in the light of this 'new' art that public attention finally fell on him.

In terms of championing this new form of art with its tendency toward formal severity, serial production and manufacture, the main spokespersons were artists Donald Judd, Sol Le Witt and Robert Morris. The fact that all three were sculptors or 'object-makers', resulted in minimal art being perceived as a mainly three dimensional rather than two dimensional project.

Ryman was still very much a painter. Everything you could see mattered. Anything you could not, did not. The artist was the only one responsible for making the work visible. These beliefs go against those of Le Witt who believed that aesthetic concepts need not necessarily be rendered in the physical. Also, in terms of manufacture, the artists hand may not have been involved in any of the physical process of making the object and only have been present in the blue-print. Nevertheless Ryman's paintings

when confronted for the first time do give the appearance of paired down, minimal objects. Predominantly they are white pigment on a square ground. On closer inspection many separate nuances can be seen. The use and handling of materials can vary considerably from painting to painting giving each its own distinctive look.

A characteristic of much minimal art, predominantly sculpture, is the tendency to locate the content of a work outside itself, in its surroundings or the response of the viewer. In a sense this depersonalises the object, it becomes a mirror for the reality, around it. It reflects the viewer's gaze and response back on themselves. The response that a minimal work evokes flies in the face of the modernist, concept of 'truth to material' [Colpitt, 1990, p.7]. The belief that the form of a sculpture is found in the material used to create is redundant. The artist's responsibility to be aware of the potential of the material and ensure that both form and material coincide no longer applies. This ideal which proclaims the mastery of the artist gives little credence to the idea of concept.

Ryman falls between two stools in this respect. On the one hand he is very much concerned with the objecthood of his paintings. The actuality of the phenomenon of pigment applied to a ground. This phenomenal approach to making art objects is something the minimalists were concerned with. This can be seen through their use of nonnatural industrial materials which were preferred over suggestively organic materials, such as carved stone and wood or modelled clay. The minimalist sculptors succeeded in making work which alluded to nothing else but itself.

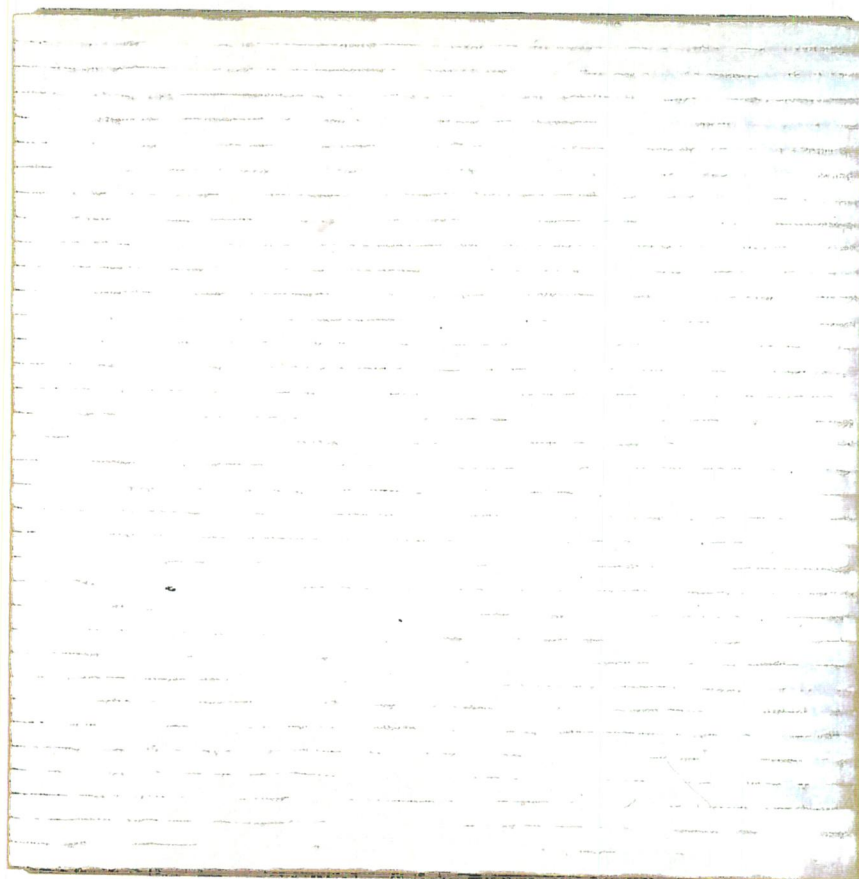


This decision to make work from materials that had not previously been associated with art was not something new. A work of the Dadaist Art Movement in the early years of this century, Duchamp's 'bicycle wheel' of 1913, is one of the first examples of the use of non-art materials for purely idea orientated purposes. The wheel and the stool remain as such but the viewer is being asked to reassess their idea of what is art and what is their role in realising the object as such. The difference of course with the minimalist use of 'new' materials was that they were not anything else before being used for the purpose of sculpture. They were still 'raw' materials with no decided function. These materials were cut to size and pieced together by technicians often, working from artists' drawings and plans for a particular work. This work was usually carried out in a workshop designed for the purpose of industrial fabrication rather than the fabrication of art objects. This became a very dominant factor in the look of much minimal work: the lack of the artist's personal touch, the dispensing with the signature mark of the artist's hands.

Here is the second stool Ryman's falls between, as much as his painting procedure can look methodical and tread a fine line between action and inaction, nevertheless the pigment is applied by him and as such must involve the presence of his will. The resulting painting is imbued with the presence of the artist, directly.

In 1965 Ryman began to develop his paintings in groups with specific titles, both individually and as a group. A painting from this time and part of a group of four is titled 'Winsor 34'.





Winsor 34 1966

This was completed in 1965 and is a good example of a painting which has strong elements of a systematic controlled procedure. Pigment was applied to a specific ground, in this case linen canvas, and at the same time the nature of the pigment was followed to keep its own obvious properties, within the formal process of the making.

Using a two inch brush laden with white Winsor and Newton brand oil paint, the brush was dragged across the surface from left to right starting at the upper left hand corner and repeated over until the surface is completely covered in horizontal bands of paint. Each band consists of several brush strokes joined where the last ended due to the paint running out on the brush. As a result the left edge of the painting has a more uniform look than the right. This painting asserts itself in very clear matter of fact terms. There is no element of secrecy or trickery involved. It is clearly seen how the painting is made. There are two clear components involved, the paint, changed only through its application from tube to brush to ground, and the ground itself, linen canvas. The materials retain the reality of themselves. The paint is the content of the painting as well as the form.

In relation to Ryman's 'Winsor' series of 1965, it is instructive to compare Frank Stella's 'Black Paintings' which were exhibited in 1959 in the Museum of Modern Arts 'Sixteen Americans'. At this time Ryman was still working in the Museum and was interested in these works. "I thought they were good paintings. I didn't really know what they were about, but I thought they were okay." [Storr, 1992, p.25]

Stella's Black Paintings can be seen to inaugurate the 'look' of minimal painting. The differences in approach to how the work was made is a strong factor in understanding Ryman's personal concerns in his work compared with those of the minimalists. Stella's approach was theoretical and formal in contract to a more lyrical and even serendipitous approach by Ryman. Stella's pin-stripe like Black Paintings are rooted in a very concrete symmetry. Many of the works sides could easily be reversed and look no different. The works are also orientated around the centre of the canvas rather than from left to right, all corners mirror one another. Ryman's 'Winsor 34' however is painted from left to right and invites reading in that manner and as we have learned to look in the west through the structure of our written language, the painting could not be reversed without changing this reading between left and right sides as both vary considerably in look and feel. Unlike Stella's paintings which revolve around the ideal of non-relational composition, the printing is not looked at in parts but as a whole. Because of the 'lyrical' approach that is taken in the making of 'Winsor 34' and the others in the series, the application of paint and how it is allowed to act, running out toward the right creates a composition which is relational, that is between the left and right.

The idea of non-relational composition was something that minimal art pushed to the limit. The desire to do away with the balancing of a picture which is most evident in the history of modernism through 'Cubism' which by juxtaposition of flat planes parallel to the picture plane an image is made. Each angle is countered with an opposing line creating a tension which spreads



to the four corners of the canvas [Colpitt, 1990, p.41]. Other examples of strong relational composition in abstract painting can be seen in the 'Checkerboard' paintings of Piet Mondrian. A red rectangle in one corner balances a black square in another. Jackson Pollock equalized all sections of the canvas in his drip paintings. Relations still remain but the significance of these is minimalised by the overall effect. In non-relational paintings, separate parts and effects take a back seat to the overall image as a whole.

Unlike Pollock's approach to this method, minimalist painters and sculptors wanted to get away from gestural signature means. This was best achieved in painting through monochromatic painting, something Ryman had been dealing with since the '50s.

Kasimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko are usually discussed as being forerunners of monochromatic painting but their concept of space is quite evidently pictorial. In contrast the minimalist monochromatic paintings, in their simplicity and objectness were completely unspatial, doing away with the idea of painting as a window. Here in monochromatic painting the focus is outer, environmental rather than inner. This is something which Ryman has dealt with but would not be an obvious visual factor in a retrospective of his work. On the contrary, most of Ryman's painting in its use of gestural paint application calls attention to its interior.

His work is often read to be based on exclusion. But no other work seems to be more inclusive. The belief that everything matters in a painting has been his prime concern from the outset. The dominant use of white is not to incur a sense of simplicity

but instead a way to dispel unnecessary fuss over hierarchical relationships. Nothing that is seen is insignificant.

The point at which Ryman becomes similar to the minimalist approach is closer to that of its sculptors, in their use of new and unusual materials in making their work. Many materials more generally associated with sculpture become those of a painter in Ryman's hands.

In 1967 Ryman made a departure in terms of his use of materials. Comprising of 13 paintings known collectively as 'Standards', they were painted on four foot square panels of cold rolled steel. These panels were loosely painted over with enamel to give a very simple direct effect. To arrive at the final number of 13 panels Ryman produced almost fifty panels altogether, pulling a three inch brush across the chemically prepared surface so as the enamel would adhere to the smooth steel. Where errors were made and the enamel did not have the desired effect the panel was destroyed and another began. This struggle with the material belies the apparent simplicity that these works in their completion hold.

On completion of the 'Standards', they were immediately exhibited in the Paul Bianchini Gallery in New York. This was Ryman's first one-person show and his introduction into the serious world of the commercial art market and art criticism.



### CHAPTER 3 : THE PARADOXICAL ABSOLUTE

In 1958 Ryman made a small painting in casein on paper. It is predominantly white with the exception of a band of black paint along the bottom with the words 'The Paradoxical Absolute' printed in white over this area. At this time it was unusual for Ryman to title his work because with the exception of a rare participation in the Museum of Modern Arts staff exhibition he had not shown work publicly. This fact made Ryman see no reason to title work if it was not on show. It was not until later in the early 1960s that titles began to be given to work and then these were for purely identificational purposes. What is unusual about this early printing is not simply the fact that it is titled but what the title is. Ryman commenting on this painting unselfconsciously said:

I was interested in the word 'absolute' and its meaning and how things were not exactly that way. Somehow I came up with that phrase and I thought it interesting and I wrote it on this painting.

[Ryman, 1993, p.58]

The phrase could be connected with any one of Ryman's works over the past forty years. It is interesting for the fact that it exemplifies at such an early stage of his career the paradoxical concerns of his painting. As was said in the introduction to this theses Ryman has always strived for the ideal of the absolute, knowing "How things were not exactly that way".

This knowledge however has not swayed Ryman from his path. The temptation to reassess his unique vision and unswaying belief in the transformational power of painting in favour of more fashionable trends which have come and gone in the span of his career have never been entertained. It is not that Ryman





The Paradoxical Absolute 1958

dismisses what has gone before or is happening now in art historical terms. They are simply not factors in his particular artistic concerns. He is not convinced that abstract painting requires a sense of historical or aesthetic direction. Undoubtedly a knowledge of what has gone before is important in terms of assessing his work and what is being achieved in contrast to others. But he is sceptical of the belief in a philosophy which encompasses all.

With the advent of the '70s things began to slowly change in the art world. Western economics moved into a recession which had major repercussions in terms of sales of art and the types of art which were being produced. Ironically the art market survived by opening its doors to the type of work which rhetorically had been made in opposition to it. These included documentation of art of a transient nature through photography or printed text. Evidence was given of particular artists actions outside the confines of the studio and gallery. This evidence on sale in limited editions ensured that the economic system of art survived.

Despite this turnabout in a preferred taste for 'concept' art, the role of painting still generated a lingering interest. Not for the first time had painters dissenters been wrong about what was by some the belief in the redundant nature of painting. Although modernist painting in the '70s failed to keep centre of attention, due partly to a slackening in critical support and lack of a younger generation of modernist critics, some painting practices managed to keep their place.

Doubtless because of Ryman's unflinching interrogation into the accepted assumptions of modernist painting and his constant

striving to hold the spectators gaze in a new way of seeing painting, his work has managed to maintain a critical interest. To many Ryman is an enigma, it is this partly which has helped sustain an interest in his work. By no means does this imply that he is an odd ball, stubbornly working against the odds of critical change and development. On the contrary, his success lies in the ability to prove within a limited set agenda just how much can be achieved while remaining faithful to an unselfish desire to open up the secret of painting to others.

By the time the '80s had arrived a renewed interest and desire for painting was steadily growing. The seeming lack of cultivation of painting throughout the previous decade had wetted the appetite of a new generation of artists, critics and public. The majority of this new painting was figurative and bold in its execution. It was a no holds barred celebration of the joys of painting. The work of the American painter Julian Schnabel are a good example of the type of painting being pushed to the fore and exemplified as the way forward for painting. In an interview in the mid 1980s Schnabel remarked: "I've always said there's no personal language; only a personal selection of language."  
[Wood, 1993, p.233]

This statement sums up the doctrine of the post-modern. Through the assimilation of many separate cultural signs and imagery, something can be produced which has a coherent message and valid place in our modern Western culture. The paintings juxtaposition of separate unrelated imagery a reflection of the confusion and meaningless of many things we surround ourselves with.



Ryman's answer to this visual overload however was to ignore it. His paintings are still hung on the traditional modern white walls of the gallery, flinching from walls which might detract from the 'outward aesthetic' of his paintings, such as unfinished brick or rough finish. The attraction of the modern white gallery is the same for Ryman as his preference for white paint, that of neutrality. The uncluttered space which his paintings require is at odds with our modern urban environment. But to Ryman this is a luxury and one in which he wishes us to share. This is another paradox in Ryman's work as the absolute of the work in the gallery cannot be sustained, it or we must move on.

In the 'Versions' paintings of 1991 and '92, Ryman is painting on thin fibreglass sheets. This shows a desire to hold the relationship between the painted surface and the wall as close as possible, re-establishing the importance of the environment which the work is shown in.

I guess if you could go into outer space and paint in space without gravity, it would be quite amazing, you could do something very clear without any problems....

[Storr, 1988, p.217]

Again the constant emphasis on the importance of the actuality of painting. The simplification down to its basic elements. Through this clarity Ryman hopes to evoke a primary experience: "The primary experience is that experience that you receive of enlightenment." [Storr, 1988, p.220]

Ryman is convinced of the endurance of abstract painting in today's post-modern climate. To him abstraction is still relatively new and the possibilities for its advancement are immeasurable. It is hard to argue with this when he himself is

providing the proof: "A painter is only limited by his degree of perception Painting is only limited by the known." [Storr, 1993, p.39]

This quote could also relate to the audience of any Ryman painting. To see it as it should be seen one must approach the work with an uncluttered mind. Free of expectancy in relation to others work or any learning which may bog down the viewer and hinder that direct experience of enlightenment.

### CONCLUSION

Robert Ryman is one of the most serious and innovative painters working today. In his belief in the transitional power of direct perception, the painting as object, he is one of few. His desire for clarity and simplicity in his work shows honesty and lack of pretension. The element of surprise in Ryman's work is as important to him as it is to the viewer. The surprise in being able to make seemingly ever more subtle discoveries and break new ground in his work, after forty years of dealing with white and the square as the two basic components of his work.

His paintings have a presence which holds the viewer in contemplation, for many a rare state of mind in today's modern life. If one is willing to give these paintings a chance, to stop and simply look, you will be rewarded with a simple honesty which in its directness is refreshing and restorative.



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