

Brice Marden : [brochure] a retrospective of paintings and drawings : October 29, 2006-January 15, 2007

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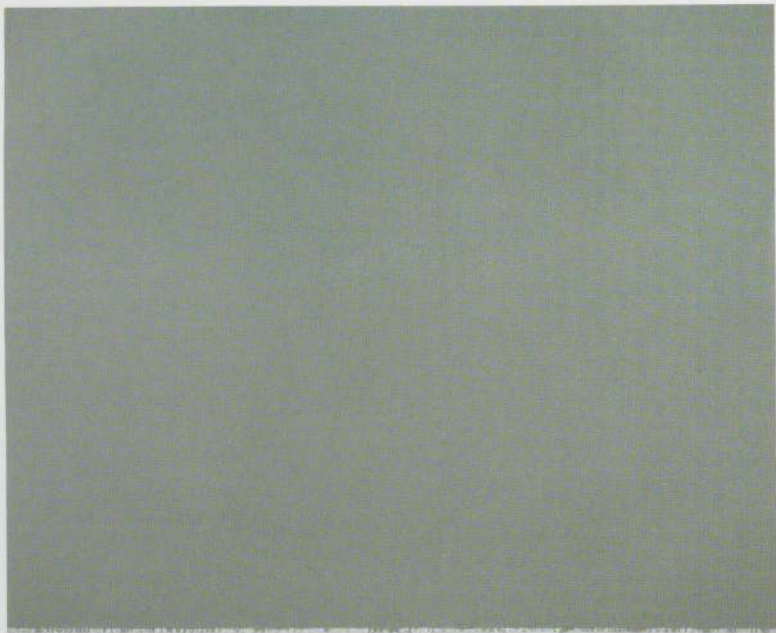


Brice Marden

A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings

October 29, 2006–January 15, 2007

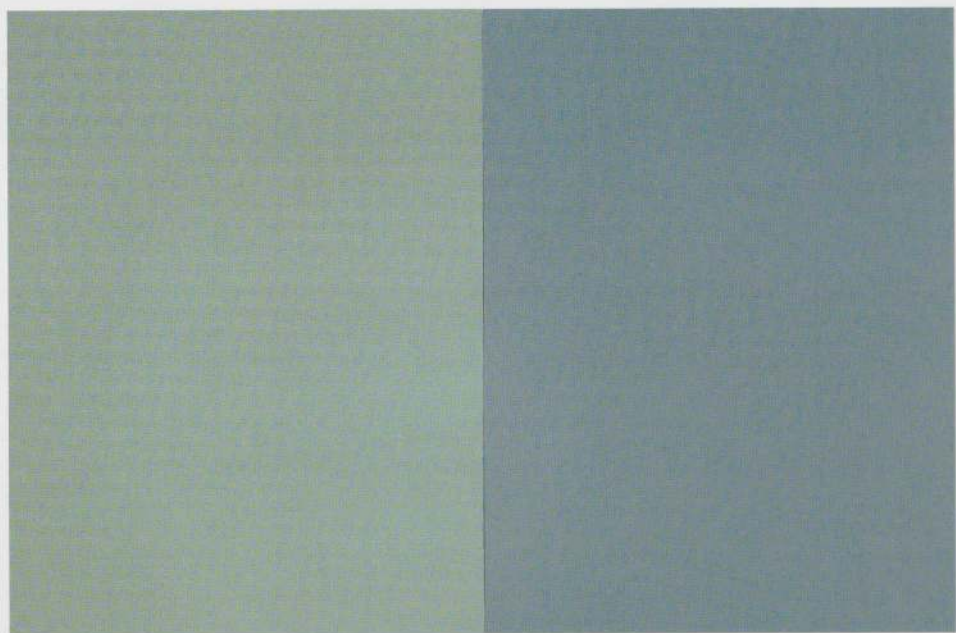
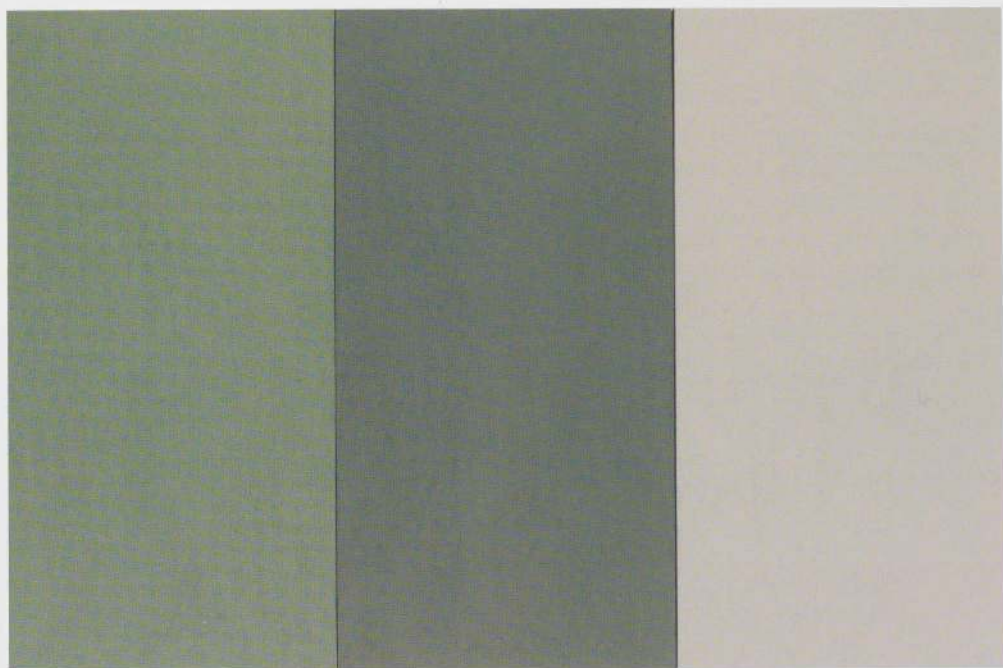
The Museum of Modern Art



ABOVE: *Nebraska*. 1966. Oil and beeswax on canvas, 58 x 72" (147.3 x 182.9 cm). Collection the artist

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: *D'après la Marquise de la Solana*. 1969. Oil and beeswax on canvas, three panels, overall: 6' 5 ¹/₈" x 9' 9 ³/₈" (196 x 297 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Panza Collection, 1991

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: *Grove Group II*. 1972–73. Oil and beeswax on canvas, two panels, overall: 72" x 9' (182.9 x 274.3 cm). Private collection. Fractional gift to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art





Diptych, 1986–87. Oil on linen, two panels, overall: 6'3" x 12' (190.5 x 366 cm). Private collection

Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings is the first overview of Marden's over forty-year career.

Organized chronologically, it explores the coherent and consistent development of Marden's work, which never settled into simple reiteration or repetition. For Marden, art wrests out of life an essence of experience, memory, thought, and feeling that attains its own autonomy. His work, like that of many artists, is deeply influenced by the places he has lived and worked, the people in his life, and the cultures in which he has immersed himself. Shaped by sharp syntheses and distillations of experience, his work offers viewers an incisive means by which to reflect on their own perceptions, knowledge, and experience.

Marden's work is fundamentally linked to light. Essential to vision, light is absorbed or reflected by surfaces, and it fractures into color. Observation, mediated by light, is essentially unstable and changing, just as experience is fleeting and subjective. The plane of a canvas or sheet of paper holds light. For Marden this plane becomes the stage on which to create a honed rendering of life—not a representation of observed experience, but a springboard for experience itself. Color, surface, gesture, and marks—often edges and divisions—transform the plane into an image, albeit an abstract one.

Marden was born in 1938 in Bronxville, New York. As an undergraduate at Boston University's School of Fine and Applied Art from 1958 to 1961, he had a thorough and traditional training. His work shifted fully to abstraction during his graduate studies at Yale University School of Art and Architecture, between 1961 and 1963. He moved to New York City in the fall of 1963, and New York has remained his primary residence.

Like many artists in the early 1960s, Marden struggled to find a way out of Abstract Expressionism, which had dominated artmaking for a decade. While Marden often was associated with Minimalism, which emerged along with Pop art, his work retained an interest in the traditional, handmade character of painting and in emotional expression.

Art for Marden is highly personal. The processes of artmaking and of experiencing art are complex, but engaging with art offers a rich return: "As in anything . . . the more responsive, the more open, the more imaginative you are when you deal with something, the much better experience it will be. . . . It's hard to look at paintings. It's really difficult, a very strenuous kind of activity, but very, very rewarding. I mean just like it's strenuous to listen to a great piece of music. Very complicated. . . . You have to be able to bring all sorts of things together in your mind, your imagination, in your whole body. . . . It's something very deep and felt. . . . It's all questions that there are no answers for, it's that whole thing about mystery."

GALLERY ONE

Marden's first public recognition came in 1966 with a one-person exhibition of paintings at the Bykert Gallery in New York City. A selection of these works is shown in the first gallery of this exhibition. In most of these paintings Marden used a new technique, mixing paint, turpentine, and melted beeswax in an effort to tone the oil's sheen—material and technique he continued to use into the early 1980s. He worked the surfaces with a combination of spatula, knife, and brush, leaving irregularities, breaks, and marks as the medium flowed and shifted before hardening. The shape and proportion of each painting is distinct. Although generally akin to gray, the color of each work is unique and almost impossible to describe. The titles allude to people and places: *The Dylan Painting*,

1966/1986, in a bruised purple, was named in homage to the folk singer Bob Dylan; *Nico*, 1966, is a tawny evocation of the singer of the rock band the Velvet Underground, and of her "blondness and light tan pants suits"; *Nebraska*, 1966, honors the "mysterious greens of Nebraska," seen in a drive across the country that summer. The paintings have maturity and confidence as well as a sense of grandeur and ambition. They marked Marden's emergence as a painter to be reckoned with.

GALLERY TWO

Throughout Marden's career, family, friends, and lovers proved important sources of inspiration and reflection; love, emotional tension, ecstasy, and loneliness all abide under the surfaces of his works. A key painting made after the Bykert Gallery exhibition is the two-panel work *For Helen*, 1967, dedicated to Helen Harrington, whom Marden married in 1968. Each panel was the height of her body and the width of her shoulders. Leaving a small space between them, Marden hung the panels side by side to make a diptych. This painting was followed by the single-panel *Back* series, 1967–68, but by 1968 Marden had begun to make diptychs and triptychs of abutting color panels.

The art of the past has been an important inspiration throughout Marden's career. Marden notes that while studying in Boston he learned about color from looking at the paintings of Édouard Manet at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts—he was struck by "the idea of seeing a dark against a dark, what kind of color came of that." During two stays in Paris in the 1960s, Marden repeatedly studied a painting by Francisco de Goya in the Louvre, a portrait of the Marquise de la Solana: "A portrait of a severe woman standing in an awesome landscape on dainty feet with a big pink bow in her hair, not fooling a soul." Made in Paris, Marden's painting *D'après la Marquise de la Solana*, 1969, "has to do with Goya's color. A black, a green, and a pink. A full panel of pink." Probably the contemporary artist most important for Marden has been Jasper Johns. Soon after arriving in New York, Marden worked as a guard at the Jewish Museum, where he was able to scrutinize Johns's paintings during the artist's first retrospective, shown there in 1964.

GALLERIES THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE

In 1971 Brice and Helen Marden visited Hydra, a Greek island in the Aegean Sea, and decided to buy a small property there for a house and studio. Since then they have returned to the island almost every summer, and a corresponding shift in Marden's work in the 1970s is palpable—colors intensified, surfaces became lusher, canvases grew grander and bolder. Allusions to the Mediterranean landscape—the olive groves, the sea, the simple ancient structures of Hydra, the grand remains of classical Greek civilization—underlie many paintings and drawings beginning at this time, and remain primary through the early 1980s. The myths of the Greek gods, the cycles of nature—the seasons, the phases of the moon, the daytime intensity of the sun and of light and shadow, twilight enfolding the sea in evening—all can be seen and felt. In the paintings in the Grove Group series, completed between 1972 and 1976, Marden evokes a grove of olive trees in which the Muses might have gathered. Post-and-lintel architecture, common to ordinary structures on Hydra and fragments of Greek monuments, specifically inflects the composition and structure of Marden's work of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These sources underlie one of his most ambitious paintings, *Thira*, 1979–80, the title of which is the formal Greek word for door.

GALLERY SIX

The late 1970s through the mid-1980s was a period of transition for Marden, shaped by several significant projects. First, in 1978 Marden was commissioned to design new stained glass windows for the Basel Münster, the Swiss city's great Protestant cathedral. This absorbed him until the mid-1980s, when the project was canceled. Then, in 1981, Marden abandoned the use of wax, because of the fragility it imparted to the surfaces of his paintings, and developed a new technique using terpeneol mixed with oil to produce a pigment that dries to a flat surface. Marden also began to question his work's potential for development: "I got to a point where I could go on making 'Brice Marden paintings' and suffer that silent creative death. . . . You get to this point where you just have to make a decision to change things."

Marden's first trip to Asia—to Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India in late 1983 and early 1984—marked the beginnings of his interest in Asian culture and landscape, an interest that would develop rapidly and passionately, profoundly affecting his work over the next two decades. Later in 1984 Marden, at Helen's suggestion, visited the exhibition *Masters of Japanese Calligraphy, 8th–19th Century*, at the Asia Society and the Japan House Gallery in New York, and then immersed himself in the study of calligraphy.

GALLERY SEVEN

Marden's interest in Asia and his attention to calligraphy were synthesized in his Cold Mountain paintings, which he worked on in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the mid-1980s Marden began reading Chinese poetry, notably the work of the Tang dynasty hermit known as Cold Mountain, or Han Shan. A 1983 publication juxtaposed Chinese calligraphy with the English translation, and Marden for the first time perceived calligraphy as text rather than image. Using a scheme of four couplets across and five characters down, Marden embarked on a series of large canvases in which discrete calligraphic forms were gradually linked into sinewy, looping overall fields. As he did throughout his career when working on a series, Marden moved back and forth from one canvas to another until all were completed. Each painting was repeatedly worked on, the linear elements laid down, erased, and overworked, the grounds likewise wiped and sanded, and the color tones adjusted until an overall equilibrium was achieved—so that while multiple layers are intimated, the plane of the canvas is even and unbroken. The movement of the artist's body and arms in making the paintings is translated into a rhythmic, almost dancelike engagement of the viewer's eye and body. Yet the serenity and meditative character of the Cold Mountain paintings remains.

GALLERIES EIGHT AND NINE

In his work since the Cold Mountain group, Marden has returned continually to Asian art and culture for inspiration, just as in the 1970s he was consistently influenced by the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean. His paintings evidence the impact of not only calligraphy but Chinese landscape painting and Han and Tang dynasty sculptures. Perhaps most extraordinarily, in *The Muses*, a series of works from the late 1980s to mid-1990s, Marden melds Greek and Asian influences with New York School abstract painting in a seamless synthesis. Here again his inspiration was not only abstract or cultural but personal and specific. The *Muses* series was inspired by his two daughters, as were the related paintings *Virgins* and *The Sisters*, both 1991–93. Marden also had his father in mind and the memory of the experience of "nature and the outdoors through his father's eyes."

By the mid-1990s Marden had begun spending time in a studio in a renovated barn in rural Pennsylvania. The softer rural light, the colors of the landscape, the forests, the rock formations, and the animal life all made themselves felt. The painting *Bear Print*, 1997–98/2000, resulted from the memory of an encounter Marden had with a bear on his way to his studio, “the bear moving along, the kind of hulk and muscularity of it.”

GALLERY TEN

The final paintings of the exhibition include works from the Red Rocks group, begun in 2000. In 1995 Marden traveled to Japan, China, and Hong Kong, where he was particularly moved by the Zen gardens of Kyoto and the rock gardens of Suzhou. He began to acquire scholar's rocks, stones collected over many centuries for their qualities of unusual or beautiful shape, good color, and material and kept by Chinese scholars as objects of contemplation. While admired for their aesthetic character, these rocks also have spiritual significance as manifestations of cosmological time, and contemplation of them is a means to reach toward enlightenment.

The two most recent paintings in the exhibition come from the group *The Propitious Garden of Plane Image*, begun in 2000 and continuing to the present, and are the largest paintings Marden has ever made. They are on view publicly for the first time. Each is composed of six panels explicitly exploring a spectrum of six colors—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet—in their grounds and in their intricate, layered bands of color. The word “propitious” means “favorable” or “giving promise of success,” and the garden is an ancient motif for constant change, growth, and renewal. “Plane image” is a term Marden has used for decades in reference to his work as a synthesis of the plane and the image. Marden sees these paintings as a culmination of his work over the past decade, but still as only the most recent stopping point in more than four decades of work.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of a single one of Marden's paintings exemplifies on a small scale the challenge he has set himself throughout his career. “When the painting really lives, has a right to exist on its own strengths and weaknesses, I consider it finished,” he says. “When I have put all I can into it and it really breathes, I stop. There are times when a work has pulled ahead of me and goes on to become something new to me, something that I have never seen before; that is finishing in an exhilarating way.”



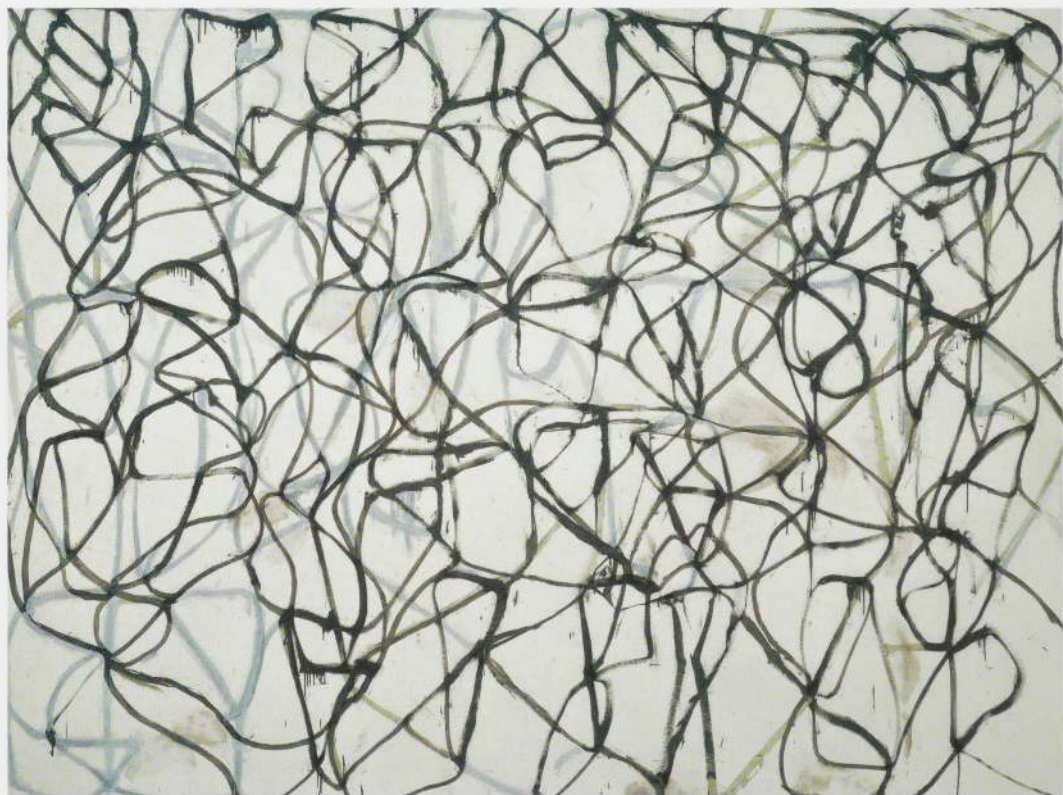
MoMAudio: SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

Listen in to a conversation between artist Brice Marden and curator Gary Garrels as they discuss Marden's paintings and drawings from the 1960s to the present. Art historian Richard Shiff punctuates this with a discussion of Marden's drawings.

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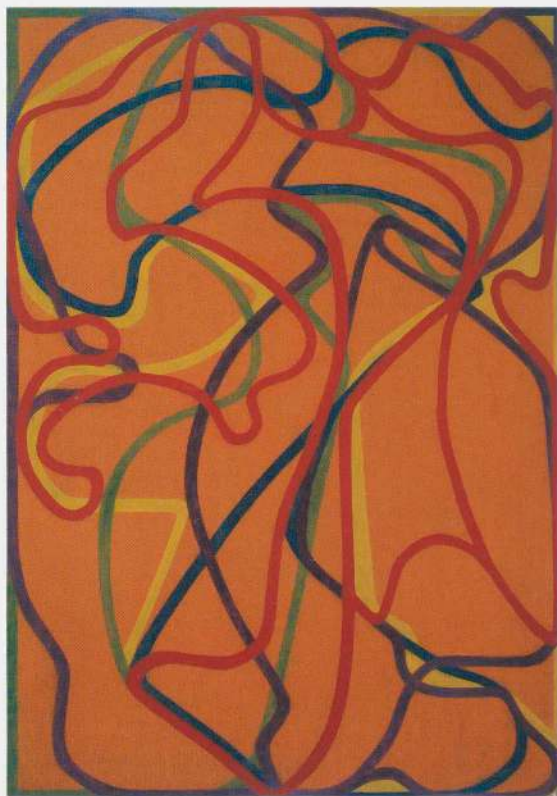
ADDITIONAL GENEROUS FUNDING IS PROVIDED BY THE HENRY LUCE FOUNDATION AND BY JERRY AND EMILY SPIEGEL.



Cold Mountain 6 (Bridge). 1989–91. Oil on linen, 9 x 12' (274.3 x 365.8 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Purchased through a gift of Phyllis Wattis



The Muses, 1991–93. Oil on linen, 9 x 15' (274.3 x 457.2 cm), Daros Collection, Switzerland



6 Red Rock 1, 2000–2002. Oil on linen, 8'11" x 6'3" (271.8 x 190.5 cm). Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection, Phoenix, Maryland

Public Programs

PLANE IMAGE: A CONVERSATION WITH BRICE MARDEN

Wednesday, November 1 | 6:00 P.M. | Titus 1

Brice Marden and Gary Garrels, curator of *Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings*, discuss the artist's work and the exhibition.

AN ARTISTS' PANEL

Monday, November 13 | 6:00 P.M. | Titus 2

Artists Francesco Clemente, Luc Tuymans, and Christopher Wool discuss the impact of Brice Marden's work through individual presentations and a conversation moderated by Gary Garrels.

PLACE AND LIGHT: FROM NEW YORK TO CHINA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Monday, December 4 | 6:00 P.M. | Titus 2

Critics and scholars discuss the influence of geography and culture on Brice Marden's work through individual presentations and a discussion moderated by Gary Garrels.

The New York School

Richard Shiff, Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art, The University of Texas at Austin

China and the East

John Yau, poet and author of *Paradiso Diaspora* (2006), *Ing Grish* (2005), *Borrowed Love Poems* (2002), and *Brice Marden: Drawings and Paintings 1964–2002* (2003), among many others

The Mediterranean, the Classical, and the Renaissance

Jean-Pierre Crique, art historian, critic, and editor of *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* of the Centre Pompidou

Tickets are \$10, \$8 for members, \$5 for students and seniors, and can be purchased at the lobby information desk and the Film and Media desk. Tickets are also available online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

Publication

PLANE IMAGE: A BRICE MARDEN RETROSPECTIVE

This book, published in conjunction with the exhibition *Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings*, is the most complete visual survey of Marden's art yet published. By Gary Garrels. With essays by Richard Shiff, Brenda Richardson, and Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, and an interview with the artist by Michael Duffy. Includes a comprehensive chronology, bibliography, and exhibition history.

10 1/8 x 9 1/2"; 330 pages; 261 color illustrations, 13 duotone illustrations

Hardcover \$65, members \$58.50. No paper edition

FRONT COVER: *Epitaph Painting 5*. 1997–2001. Oil on linen, 9' 1/2" x 8' 8" (275.6 x 264.2 cm). Collection Richard and Betty Hedreen

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