

Robert Ryman, paintings 1955 to 1993

Author

Ryman, Robert, 1930-

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ROBERT RYMAN PAINTINGS 1955 TO 1993

When we look at paintings, we are generally looking for something *in* painting, something that paint describes, or suggests, or evokes. It may be an image, a symbol, or an idea. Frequently it involves a synthesis of all three. Even in its most abstract form, therefore, painting has usually been *about* something outside or beyond itself. Consequently, it has commonly been regarded as a means to an end, the way in which the artist envisions reality or depicts things that may exist only in the imagination. For the past forty years, Robert Ryman has approached painting from the opposite direction. "There is never a question of *what* to paint," he once said, "but only *how* to paint. The how of painting has always been the image."

The radicality of Ryman's work results from the deliberate, even literal manner in which he has elaborated in the studio upon this simple proposition. His work's quiet poetry derives from the dazzling variety of form and feeling he has discovered by adhering to his faith in painting's inherently inexhaustible visual and emotional richness. Rather than ask what paint can represent, he asks only that one pay close attention to what paint does, and to the space it occupies. "To paint the paint," as he further defined his ambition, means giving absolute primacy to subtle specifics of a given application of pigment to a given surface. And, as he has shown in example after example, what seems obvious to the mind when explained in words may suddenly appear a marvel to the eye when closely examined in its material reality.

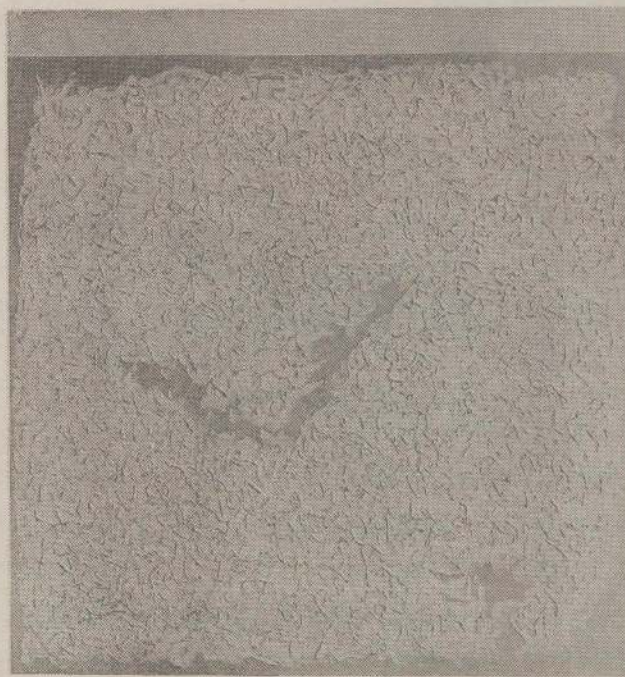
To achieve such heightened sensation, Ryman has severely limited his artistic vocabulary. Over the course of his long career, Ryman has for the most part stuck to white paint and square formats. Yet the term "white" only grossly describes the extraordinary range of substances and shades the artist has identified and deployed. Using traditional oils and water-based paints, as well as an expanding list of

commercial and industrial primers, enamels, and other types of synthetic coatings, Ryman's white can be crusty or suave, opaque or sheer, as warm as fresh cream or as cool as ceramic tiles.

In much the same way, the scale of his works can vary from handkerchief-size squares of paper, linen, metal, or plexiglass to vast sheets of fiberglass or stretched canvases measuring some twelve feet square. Significantly, Ryman treats these greatly differing surfaces as essentially equal in importance, because unique in the possibilities they offer. Small paintings are as "major" as large ones, since none are sketches or warm-ups, and each, whatever its dimensions, is pushed to the same degree of resolution.

Notable exceptions to these general constraints do, nevertheless, occur. On occasion, Ryman has chosen vertical or horizontal rectangles, though frequently the divisions of space he has created within them square off the larger area. Moreover, in the mid-1950s, when he began painting, he often started by covering the support with combinations of reds, blues, greens, deep violets, ochers, and browns. In a single example, on which he labored from 1955 until 1959, Ryman left this saturated under-

coat of oranges, yellows, and greens fully exposed. Patches of color peek through the layer of white he superimposed on the chromatic grounds in every other work from this formative period, or an aura may flicker at the margins of a painting where the white tapers off. Meanwhile, the surfaces on which he has worked have their own coloration, such as the warm tints of drawing paper, cardboard, raw canvas, or wood, and later, from the 1970s onward, the translucent ambers and soft greens of fiberglass, or the luminous sheen of milled steel or aluminum. Along with applied tube color, these hues also contribute importantly to Ryman's palette. Contrasting "white" in all its shades and densities with such partially hidden backgrounds, Ryman

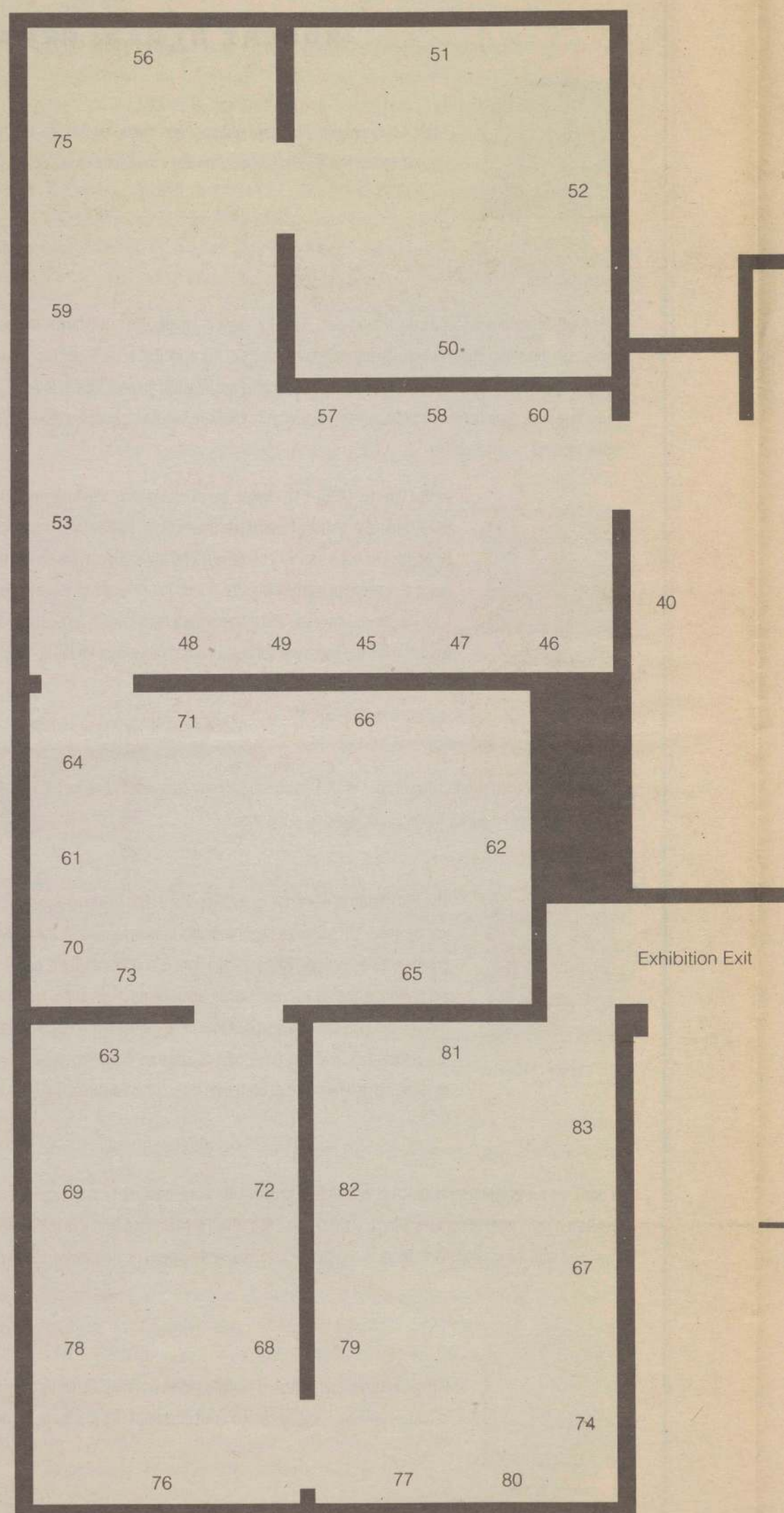


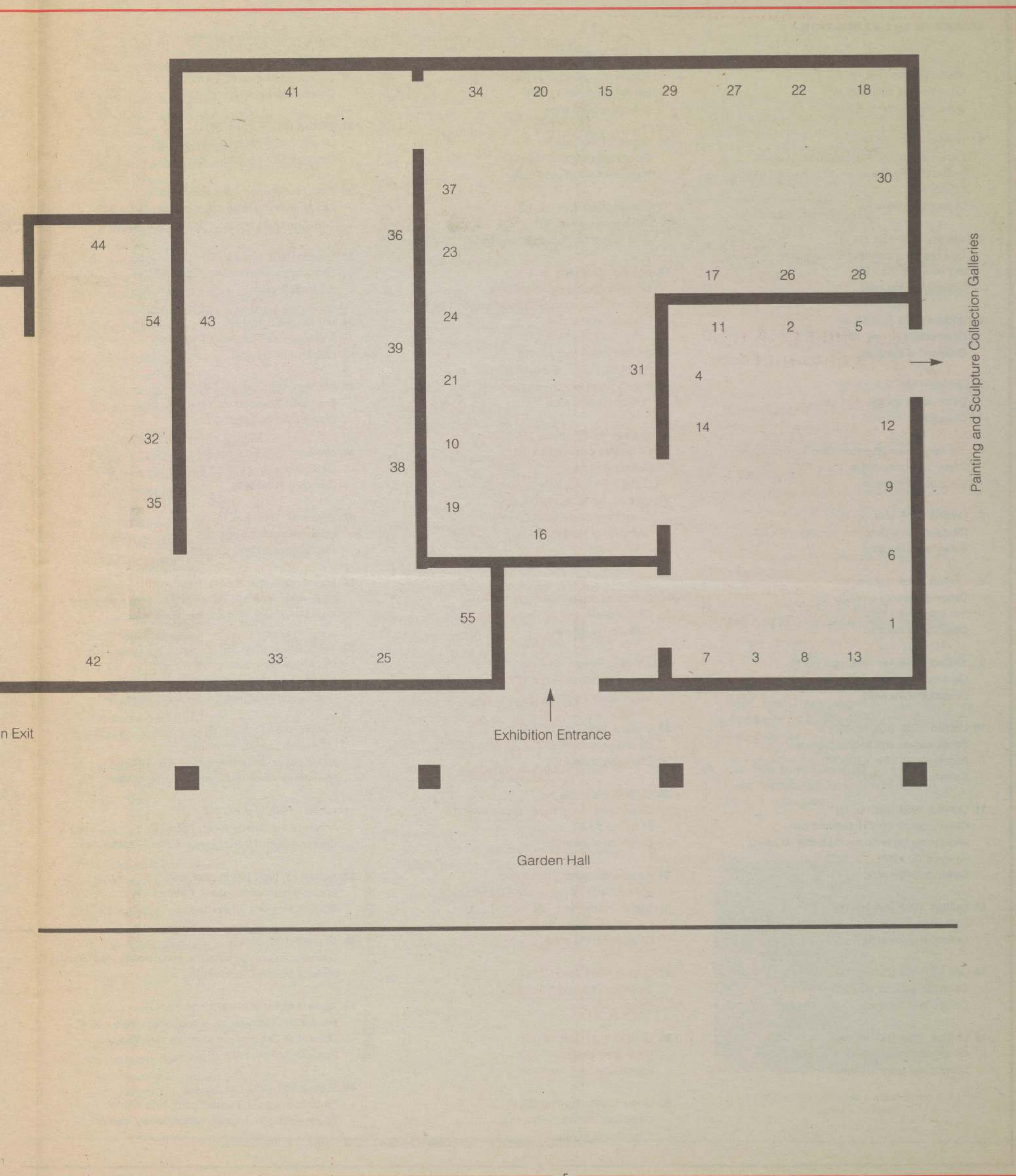
Versions VII, 1991

HOW THE EXHIBITION IS ORGANIZED

Robert Ryman has been painting for nearly forty years. The work in this retrospective covers the full span of his career, from his first mature painting of 1955 to work completed within the last two years. This exhibition traces his development chronologically, by clustering related paintings and series of paintings in the order they were made. Within each section, however, works have been taken out of sequence for the sake of greater visual clarity.

Since Ryman uses the wall space around his images as an essential compositional element, we have omitted individual labels that might intrude upon that already active area. To identify specific works, match the entries in the checklist to the numbers on this map, or consult the lists of works that appear by the entrance to each room throughout the exhibition.

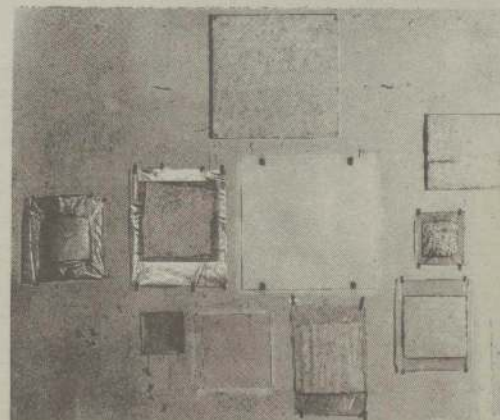




WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

- 1 *Untitled (Orange Painting)* 1955 and 1959 [cat. no. 1]
Oil on canvas, 28½ x 28½"
Collection of John E. Ryman
- 2 *Untitled* 1957 [cat. no. 2]
Casein and pencil on primed cotton canvas,
on board on manila folder, on glass, on plywood,
9½ x 8½"
Collection of the artist
- 3 *Untitled* 1957 [cat. no. 3]
Gouache on paper mounted on board
and plywood, 7½ x 8½"
Collection of the artist
- 4 *Untitled* 1958 [cat. no. 4]
Oil on cotton canvas, 53¼ x 32¾"
Collection of the artist
- 5 *Untitled* 1958 [cat. no. 5]
Oil on cotton canvas, 43 x 43"
Collection of the artist
- 6 *The Paradoxical Absolute* 1958 [cat. no. 6]
Casein on printed paper, 7½ x 7¼"
Collection of the artist
- 7 *Untitled* 1958 [cat. no. 7]
Oil, casein, and pencil on wallpaper, 9 x 9½"
Collection of the artist
- 8 *Untitled* 1958 [cat. no. 8]
Casein and pencil on paper on
mat board, 14 x 13½"
Collection of the artist
- 9 *To Gertrud Mellon* 1958 [cat. no. 9]
Casein and pencil on wallpaper, 11¾ x 12"
Collection of the artist
- 10 *Untitled* 1959 [cat. no. 10]
Pencil, casein, and tracing paper on
tracing paper, 10¼ x 10¾"
Collection of the artist
- 11 *Untitled* 1959 [cat. no. 11]
Casein, pencil, crayon, ballpoint pen,
and tracing paper on tracing paper on board,
on wood, 10 x 8½"
Collection of the artist
- 12 *Untitled* 1959 [cat. no. 12]
Oil on cotton canvas, 43½ x 43½"
Collection of the artist
- 13 *Untitled* 1959 [cat. no. 13]
Oil on jute sacking, 33 x 33"
Collection of the artist
- 14 *Untitled* 1959 [cat. no. 14]
Oil on pre-primed canvas, 8½ x 8¼"
Collection of Lucy R. Lippard
- 15 *Untitled* 1959 [not in catalogue]
Casein and gouache on paper, on board,
on wire mesh, 10½ x 10½"
Collection of the artist
- 16 *Untitled* 1960 [cat. no. 15]
Oil on cotton canvas, 65½ x 65"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 17 *Untitled* 1960 [cat. no. 16]
Oil on linen canvas, 52¾ x 52¾"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 18 *Untitled* 1960 [cat. no. 17]
Oil, gouache, casein, pencil, and
crayon on tracing paper on plain paper, 13 x 13"
Collection of the artist
- 19 *Untitled* 1960 [cat. no. 18]
Pencil, oil, casein, and tracing paper on
tracing paper laid on opaque paper, 10 x 10½"
Collection of the artist
- 20 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 19]
Oil on linen canvas, 38 x 38"
Collection of the artist
- 21 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 20]
Oil on sized Bristol board, 9 x 9"
Collection of the artist
- 22 *A painting of twelve strokes measuring
11¼ x 11¼" signed at the bottom
right-hand corner* 1961 [cat. no. 21]
Oil and gesso on linen canvas, 11¼ x 11¼"
Collection of the artist
- 23 *Wedding Picture* 1961 [cat. no. 22]
Oil on Bristol board, 12 x 12"
Collection of the artist
- 24 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 23]
Oil and gesso on linen canvas, 16½ x 16½"
Collection of the artist
- 25 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 24]
Oil and graphite on brown paper, mounted
on board, 8 x 8"
Collection of the artist
- 26 *An all-white painting measuring
9½ x 10" and signed twice on the left
side in umber* 1961 [cat. no. 25]
Oil on linen canvas, 9½ x 10"
Collection of the artist
- 27 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 26]
Oil on Bristol board, 10 x 10"
Private collection
- 28 *Untitled* 1961 [cat. no. 27]
Oil on linen canvas, 13 x 13"
Private collection, New York
- 29 *Untitled* 1962 [cat. no. 28]
Oil on linen canvas, 16½ x 16½"
Collection of the artist
- 30 *Untitled* 1962 [cat. no. 29]
Oil on linen canvas, 69½ x 69½"
Collection of the artist
- 31 *Untitled* 1962 [cat. no. 30]
Oil and vinyl on linen canvas, 63 x 65"
Collection of the artist
- 32 *Stretched Drawing* 1963 [cat. no. 31]
Charcoal on unprimed cotton canvas, 14½ x 14½"
Collection of the artist
- 33 *Untitled* 1965 [cat. no. 32]
Enamelac on linen canvas, 62½ x 62½"
Private collection
- 34 *Untitled* 1965 [cat. no. 33]
Enamel on linen canvas, 10½ x 10½"
Collection of the artist
- 35 *Untitled* 1965 [cat. no. 34]
Enamel on Bristol board, 7¾ x 8½"
Collection of the artist
- 36 *Untitled I* 1965 [cat. no. 35]
Oil on linen canvas, 11 x 11"
Collection of the artist
- 37 *Winsor 34* 1966 [cat. no. 36]
Oil on linen canvas, 63 x 63"
The Greenwich Collection Ltd.
- 38 *Mayco* 1966 [cat. no. 37]
Oil on linen canvas, 6'3½" x 6'3½"
Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- 39 *Twin* 1966 [cat. no. 38]
Oil on linen canvas, 6'4" x 6'4"
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Charles and Anita Blatt Fund and purchase, 1971
- 40 *Adelphi* 1967 [cat. no. 39]
Oil on linen canvas with staples,
waxed paper, and masking tape, 8'6" x 8'6"
Museum für moderne Kunst, Frankfurt-am-Main
- 41 *Lugano* 1968 [cat. no. 40]
Acrylic on handmade paper, 7'6" x 7'6"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 42 *Classico 3* 1968 [not in catalogue]
Acrylic on handmade paper, 7'8½" x 7'4¼"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 43 *VII* 1969 [cat. no. 42]
Enamelac on corrugated paper, seven panels, each 60 x 60"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 44 *General 48½ x 48½* 1970 [cat. no. 43]
Enamel and Enamelac on cotton canvas, 48½ x 48½"
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Panza Collection, 1991
- 45 *Surface Veil* 1970 [cat. no. 44]
Oil on fiberglass on Featherboard, 19¾ x 19¾"
Private collection, courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

- 46 *Surface Veil* 1970 [cat. no. 45]
Oil on fiberglass on Featherboard, 12¼ x 12"
Private collection
- 47 *Surface Veil* 1970 [cat. no. 46]
Oil on fiberglass with waxed-paper frame and masking tape, 33 x 33"
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of the Denise and Andrew Saul Fund and the Scaler Foundation
- 48 *Surface Veil* 1970–71 [cat. no. 47]
Oil on fiberglass with waxed-paper frame and masking tape, 22 x 19"
Private collection
- 49 *Surface Veil 4* 1970–71 [cat. no. 48]
Oil on fiberglass on Featherboard, 39 x 39"
Collection of Emily and Jerry Spiegel
- 50 *Surface Veil I* 1970 [cat. no. 49]
Oil and blue chalk on linen canvas, 12 x 12"
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Panza Collection, 1991
- 51 *Surface Veil II* 1971 [cat. no. 50]
Oil and blue chalk on linen canvas, 12 x 12"
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Panza Collection, 1991
- 52 *Surface Veil III* 1971 [cat. no. 51]
Oil and blue chalk on cotton canvas, 12¼ x 12¼"
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Panza Collection, 1991
- 53 *Untitled* 1973 [cat. no. 52]
Baked enamel on copper, five panels, each 15¾ x 15¾"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 54 *Untitled* 1973 [cat. no. 53]
Double-baked enamel on oxidized copper, five panels, each 9½ x 10½"
Collection of Emily and Jerry Spiegel
- 55 *Untitled* 1973 [cat. no. 54]
Enamel on aluminum, 39½ x 39½"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 56 *Embassy I* 1976 [cat. no. 55]
Oil and Elvacite on plexiglass, black oxide fasteners, and bolts, 63 x 63"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 57 *Advance* 1976 [cat. no. 57]
Oil on blue Acrylvin with vinyl, Elvacite, and sanded plexiglass fasteners with cadmium bolts, 35½ x 34"
Collection of Franz Meyer
- 58 *Untitled* 1976 [cat. no. 58]
Pastel and pencil on sandblasted plexiglass with black oxide steel bolts and fasteners, 49½ x 49½"
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Fractional gift of the PaineWebber Group Inc.
- 59 *Monitor* 1978 [cat. no. 59]
Oil on cotton canvas with metal fasteners, 69 x 66"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 60 *Phoenix* 1979 [cat. no. 60]
Varathane on steel, 17½ x 14½"
Collection of the artist
- 61 *Archive* 1980 [cat. no. 61]
Oil on steel, 13½ x 11¾"
Private collection
- 62 *Paramount* 1981 [cat. no. 62]
Oil on linen canvas with metal fasteners, 7'4" x 7"
Courtesy Thomas Ammann, Zurich
- 63 *Crown* 1982 [cat. no. 63]
Enamelac on fiberglass panel with aluminum fasteners, 40½ x 38"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 64 *Access* 1983 [cat. no. 64]
Oil and Enamelac on fiberglass with steel fasteners, 20 x 18"
Private collection, The Netherlands
- 65 *Range* 1983 [cat. no. 65]
Oil and Enamelac on fiberglass with aluminum, 51¾ x 47¾"
Collection of Hannelore B. Schulhof
- 66 *Pace* 1984 [cat. no. 66]
Lascaux acrylic on fiberglass with wood and aluminum, 26 x 26 x 26½"
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York
- 67 *Spectrum II* 1984 [cat. no. 67]
Ink on anodized aluminum, 8¾ x 8¾"
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- 68 *Catalyst III* 1985 [cat. no. 68]
Enamel on aluminum with steel bolts, 23 x 23"
Private collection
- 69 *Courier I* 1985 [cat. no. 69]
Enamel on aluminum with aluminum fasteners, 47¾ x 44¾"
FAE Musée d'art contemporain, Pully/Lausanne
- 70 *Expander* 1985 [cat. no. 70]
Oil on aluminum with black oxide steel bolts, 28 x 28"
Private collection
- 71 *Administrator* 1985 [cat. no. 71]
Lascaux acrylic on Lumasite with black oxide bolts, 48 x 48"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 72 *Transport* 1985 [cat. no. 72]
Oil and Enamelac on fiberglass panel, redwood, and non-anodized aluminum fasteners, 51¼ x 47¾"
Private collection, Paris
- 73 *Credential* 1985 [cat. no. 73]
Oil on aluminum with steel bolts, 62¾ x 22 x 2"
Collection of Ralph and Helyn Goldenberg
- 74 *Express* 1985 [cat. no. 74]
Oil and Enamelac on fiberglass with black oxide steel bolts and fasteners, 8'11¾" x 47½"
Crex Collection, Hallen für neue Kunst, Schaffhausen
- 75 *Constant* 1987 [cat. no. 75]
Lascaux acrylic on Gator board, 17 x 16⅞"
Collection of Barbara Gladstone
- 76 *Journal* 1988 [cat. no. 76]
Lascaux acrylic on Lumasite and plastic with steel fasteners, 8 x 8"
Bonnenfantemuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands
- 77 *Initial* 1989 [cat. no. 77]
Oil on Gator board with wood, 23¾ x 23"
Private collection
- 78 *Locate* 1989 [cat. no. 78]
Oil on Gator board and aluminum with painted steel fasteners, 20 x 19"
Collection of Linda and Harry Macklowe
- 79 *Versions VII* 1991 [cat. no. 79]
Oil on fiberglass with waxed paper, 44½ x 41"
Collection of Constance R. Caplan, Baltimore
- 80 *Versions XII* 1991 [cat. no. 80]
Oil on fiberglass with waxed paper, 18¾ x 17"
Private collection
- 81 *Versions I* 1992 [not in catalogue]
Oil and graphite on fiberglass with waxed paper, 7'7" x 7"
Collection of the artist
- 82 *Versions XVI* 1992 [cat. no. 81]
Oil and pencil on fiberglass with waxed paper, 14¼ x 13"
Private collection
- 83 *Case* 1993 [not in catalogue]
Oil and Enamelac on Lumasite, 48 x 48"
Collection of the artist



Works from the *Surface Veil* series, Robert Ryman's studio, New York, early 1970s

(continued from page 2) peculiarly American pragmatism. In that sense, he is an empiricist of beauty, who, painting by painting, proves that however far skepticism has encroached upon our faith in art's capacity to make the world coherent, aesthetic and emotional balance still remains within our grasp. Though it may appear that he is pushing painting to the point of invisibility, Ryman is actually making painting fully visible; rather than pointing toward painting's end, he is demonstrating its infinite fecundity.

Thus, while a retrospective normally looks back to summarize an artist's career, this one looks back in order to look forward and to



To Gertrud Mellon. 1958

show how, even at its most reductive, painting itself continues. Most of all, however, this exhibition encourages the "simple" act of looking. With nothing hidden, Ryman's work is an open invitation to immerse oneself in a rare but immediate serenity. Instead of taking us elsewhere, his paintings bring us back to our senses and encourage us to delight in them. Finally receiving his full public due, Ryman at sixty-three continues to pursue that constant ambition, making work that is a marvel of intuitively achieved surprise, plainness, and grace.

Robert Storr

Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture

BIOGRAPHY

May 30, 1930: Robert Tracy Ryman. Born Nashville, Tennessee.
 1948: Enters Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, Cookeville, Tennessee.
 1949: Transfers to George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee, where he studies music.
 December 12, 1950: Enlists in the United States Army, assigned to an Army Reserves band. Plays the tenor saxophone.
 February 14, 1952: Is discharged from active service.
 March 1952: Moves to New York City with the intention of becoming a jazz musician. Works odd jobs in New York.
 June 30, 1953: Begins temporary employment as a guard at The Museum of Modern Art, and stays on full time for the next seven years.
 1953: Makes his first paintings.
 1954: Quits music and begins painting in earnest.
 1958: Participates in a staff exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in the Museum's penthouse. This is the first public showing of his work. His work in this exhibition is purchased by Gertrud A. Mellon, a member of the Museum's Painting and Sculpture Committee.
 May 15, 1960: Resigns from staff of the Museum. On June 17 begins work as a clerical assistant at The New York Public Library, in the Art Division.
 May 31, 1961: Quits job at the Public Library to devote himself to painting full time.
 September–November 1966: Shows work in *Systemic Painting*, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. This is the first time he is included in a major museum exhibition.
 April–May 1967: Has first one-person exhibition, at Paul Bianchini Gallery, New York. He shows the Standard series, thirteen paintings on rolled steel.
 October–November 1968: Has first one-person exhibition in Europe, at Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich.

March–April 1972: Has first solo museum show, *Robert Ryman*, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Exhibition includes works from 1965 to 1972.
 January–March 1974: *Robert Ryman*, retrospective exhibition, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
 June–August 1975: *Robert Ryman*, one-person exhibition at the Kunsthalle, Basel.
 January–February 1977: *Robert Ryman: Paintings 1976*, exhibition at P.S. 1, includes seventeen recent works and inaugurates P.S. 1's more formal exhibition wing.
 September–October 1977: *Robert Ryman*, retrospective exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.
 June–August 1980: *Robert Ryman*, retrospective exhibition of fifty-seven works done between 1955 and 1979, at InK. für internationale neue Kunst, Zurich. Travels to Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf.
 October–November 1981: *Robert Ryman*, retrospective exhibition at Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.
 October–June 1988: *Robert Ryman*, one-person exhibition at Dia Art Foundation, includes thirty-three works, mostly from the 1980s.
 October 1990–July 1991: *Robert Ryman*, exhibition at Espace d'art contemporain, Paris. Includes works from 1958 to 1981.
 February 1993–October 1994: *Robert Ryman*, retrospective exhibition organized jointly by the Tate Gallery, London, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Includes eighty-three works done between 1955 and 1993. In addition to its London and New York showings, the exhibition will travel to the Reina Sofía, Madrid; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. It is the first comprehensive retrospective of Ryman's work to be held in the United States.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The following panel discussions will be moderated by Robert Storr:

Thursday, November 4, 8:30 p.m.
Painting After Progress: The Painter's Predicament
 with
 Stephen Ellis, painter and art critic
 Marcia Hafif, painter and art critic
 (Other participants to be announced.)

Thursday, December 9, 8:30 p.m.
Abstract Painting: End or Beginning?
 with
 Arthur Danto, art critic, *The Nation*
 Linda Norden, art historian, Bard College
 Peter Schjeldahl, art critic, *Village Voice*
 Naomi Spector, independent critic

Panels will be held in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Tickets \$8.00, Members \$7.00, Students \$5.00, available at the Lobby Information Desk. For more information, please call the Department of Education at 212-708-9795. The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York.

PUBLICATION

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