

# ARTFORUM

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REPAIR OR REVOLT

MAREN HASSINGER

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

KYLE VU-DUNN

CHARLES GAINES

IN THIS TEMPLE  
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE  
FOR WHOM HE SAVED OUR DIXIE  
THE MEMORY OF JEFFERSON DAVIS  
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER



\$15.00





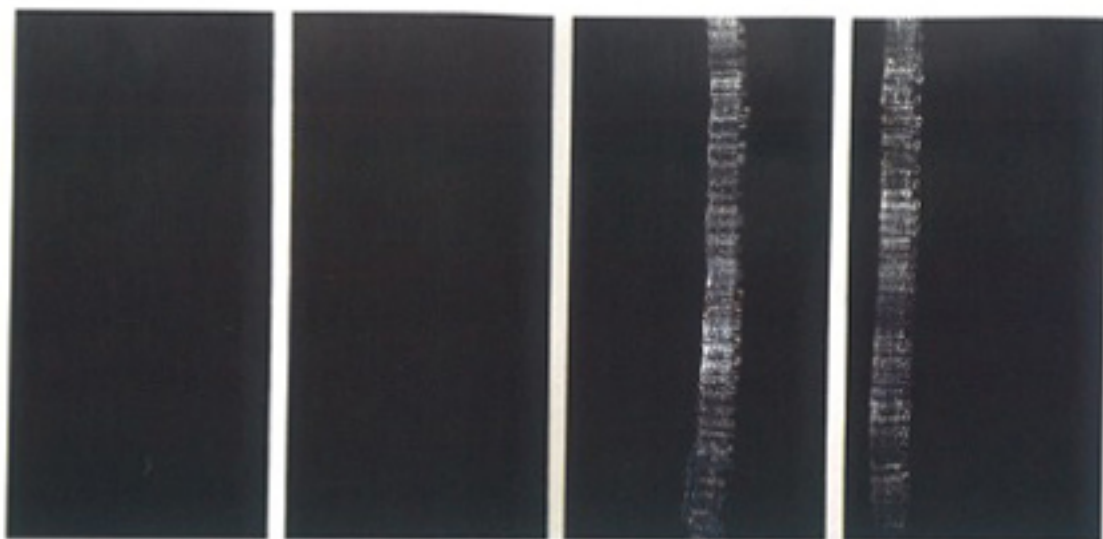




Opposite page: Rochelle Feinstein, *In Anticipation of Women's History Month, 2013*, acrylic, oil, and buttons on canvas, 60 x 60".

Right: Rochelle Feinstein, *A Catalog of the Estate of Rochelle F. Paintings 2009–2010 (detail)*, 2010, ink, charcoal, and collage on twenty-two sheets of paper, this sheet 20 x 17". From the series "The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009–10.

Below: Rochelle Feinstein, *El Bronco (detail)*, 1994, diptych, oil on linen, inkjet print, overall 5' 2" x 10' 6".



1000 WORDS

## ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN

TALKS ABOUT HER SURVEY AT THE BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS, NEW YORK

ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN'S paintings pack punches and punch lines, yet the jokes are so bleak they can be hard to laugh at. The ebullient, Helen Frankenthaler-esque *In Anticipation of Women's History Month, 2013*, may at first suggest earnest excitement about the commemoration of women's achievements that occurs every March. Round pin-back buttons—variously displaying a tiny curtsying Minnie Mouse and a suffragette—are stuck into the colorful stained canvas. Yet a glittering black heart at the painting's center gives the game away: The work is, in fact, acridly ironic and tinged with melancholy, meant to underscore the patriarchal system that deems "women's history"—the contributions of more than 50 percent of the human population—as a category distinct from "history" itself.

Feinstein's work is funny, feminist, and furious. As a painter coming of age in the 1980s, she struggled to find

her way with a medium long out of fashion, but she persisted, using painting to short-circuit masculine ideologies. Take *Flag*, 1993, a checked dish towel offered as an answer to Jasper Johns, or 1994's *El Bronco*, for which Feinstein created white tread marks on a blue linen support, marrying the LA freeway of the O. J. Simpson chase to the Barnett Newman zip.

Feinstein subordinates form to process. She shifts freely among painterly and prosaic techniques, incorporating everything from drop shadows to drips, stains, and zips, to everyday materials and stray, stranded language. This approach is in line with many younger painters' magpie strategies—unsurprising, given that for years Feinstein was the head of Yale's graduate painting program. She deploys pop-culture ciphers as a means of puzzling out their deeper meanings and restages older works in new constellations.

"The Estate of Rochelle F.," 2009–10, is a series of thirteen paintings Feinstein recycled and remade from her own work as well as from presents from other artists, such as a birthday gift from Rachel Harrison. Created during the financial crisis, "The Estate" is a recessionary take on the Rauschenberg Combine: a meditation on value and a way for Feinstein to probe her own worth as a woman artist.

After touring Europe, her survey "An Image of an Image" finally comes home to New York's Bronx Museum of the Arts, and so, too, does Feinstein, who grew up nearby.

—Jennifer Kabat

I WAS BORN IN THE BRONX at Fitch Sanitarium, which no longer exists. My parents lived on Featherbed Lane, and years ago their building collapsed. It no longer exists. My stepmother taught at a junior high on Sheridan Avenue. That school no longer exists. My father, a Golden Gloves boxer, lived with my stepmother in an apartment building on Grandview Place at 167th Street. It no longer exists either. Their synagogue closed, and was converted into the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Soon, I, too, will no longer be around. That's the point of a retrospective. The show will include parts of my 2009–10 pre-posthumous work "The Estate of Rochelle F." The paintings were





made from a massive, varied amount of surplus stuff, such as cardboard, packing materials, tarps, ground glass, paint, and unfinished work accumulated over time. "The Estate" ended when this material was depleted. I was thinking about the 2008 market crash, and about my own value as a woman painter. When do assets become an estate? How does ephemera become valuable?

Those ironies of estates and histories and celebrations are present throughout my work. Take *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*. I'd heard on the radio, "Upcoming is . . . in anticipation of Women's History Month, where so-and-so will . . ."

I thought, *We're going to anticipate the celebration, to claim it as happy, and then it goes away?*

Often, I let enigmas shape my art. Recently, I've been preoccupied with Amazon's corporate language: They've created a whole new vocabulary, with job titles such as "content managers" and "sortation associates," who pull things off shelves in "fulfillment centers." That's enigmatic. I've been pacing my studio thinking about the artist as content manager. How do artists manage "content"?

The paintings *Plein Air I* and *Plein Air II* [both 2018] came from that question. When I was at the American Academy in Rome last year, my studio had

a beautiful terrazzo floor that needed to be protected with a drop cloth, but I found that art supplies were hard to come by. The only way to get a drop cloth? An Amazon fulfillment center. The tarp I bought was the thinnest cotton, quite beautiful, with an open weave and deep folds from the packing. I thought, *I could actually use this as the ground for a painting*. The Amazon box became to me like paint tubes were to nineteenth-century plein air painters. Paint tubes brought the Impressionists out of the studio and into open fields and city streets. The Amazon box brought supplies to me, from anywhere in the world. Then I began thinking of airbrush painting in the 1970s, and



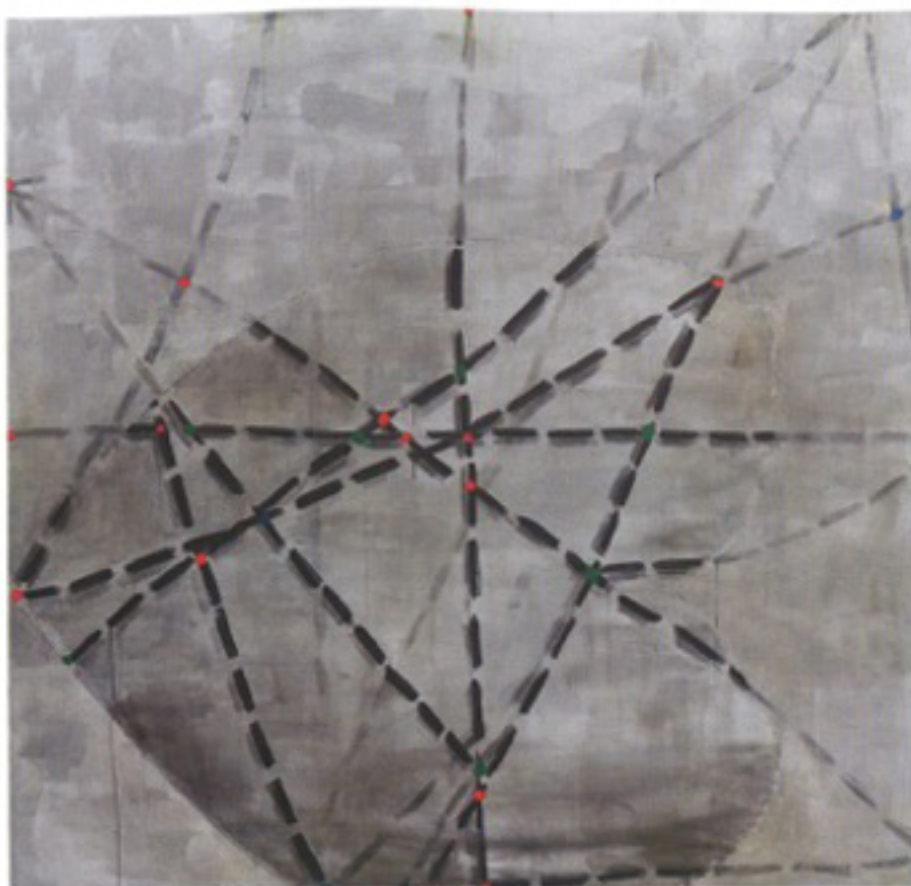


Work

Opposite page: Rochelle Feinstein, *Plein Air I*, 2018, acrylic on cotton, 8' x 10' 10".

Clockwise, from above: Rochelle Feinstein, *Love Vibe* (detail), 1999–2014, oil on six canvases, each 74 x 74"; Rochelle Feinstein, *H(e)art Island*, 2017, acrylic, oil, and thread on canvas, 82 x 84"; Rochelle Feinstein, *Timing* (detail), 2013–18, buttons and Plexiglas, 36 x 12 x 12"; Rochelle Feinstein, *Timing*, 2013–18, buttons and Plexiglas, 36 x 12 x 12".

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of camouflage patterns as a ubiquitous landscape. I wanted a plein air painting, but of today. I ordered spray bottles used to kill aphids on plants from Amazon. *Plein Air I's* color is based on Vietnam-era tiger-stripe camo. *Plein Air II* is the camo used in Operation Desert Storm. I left the drop cloths unstretched, and the creases remained. They now fold up nicely into carry-on-size packages, and that's that. Amazon inspired and fulfilled, and shipped via carry-on baggage.

If you have a chaotic childhood, you teach yourself to read signs, to sift through them for significance, and to study phrases and images to ascertain what may be concealed. This requires endurance. And it always leads to mistranslation—to abstraction, as in painting. I came of age later than most of my peers, at a time when *Why painting?* was the question. How do I understand my medium? How do I understand its social conditions? Endurance and mistranslation were in my nature, and I applied them to painting, too.

*Love Your Work*, 1999, is part of that sifting for meaning. The phrase is often empty speech—perfunctory small talk. It's a vernacular. I'm a very vernacular person. The speech bubble is a way to communicate in a comic panel where you have very little room.

I've realized form is my thing, not abstraction—like the heart of *H(e)art Island*, 2017. The form of the heart has historic meaning as a symbol of fidelity, but the shape bears no likeness to the physical organ in our

chests. I love that the heart shape continues to exist as a symbol in a brave and stupid way. Today, emoji hearts are everywhere—meaning anything—so I couldn't work with the straight-up form. I had to turn it on its side and make it sag. A sagging and bottom-heavy symbol. In the painting, the heart also represents a physical place: Hart Island, New York, a burial ground dating to a few years after the Civil War that is a potter's field run by the Department of Correction. Only family members can visit, and you can't take a camera. It is a place with histories. I went there in late 2016 with maybe six other visitors and had to think of how to hold on to this place without photography. After the visit, the painting evolved, becoming map-like. I added ferry routes that cross over the heart in the painting's center. I did rubbings that resembled an aerial view or a zoomable user interface. The painting *ZUI*, 2017, became a legend for *H(e)art Island*.

Shortly after making *In Anticipation of Women's History Month*, I made Women's History Month commemorative buttons along with a Lucite column to house them. Every year, a new batch of buttons will be thrown into this time capsule. Maybe one day Women's History Month won't need crappy buttons. Then the time capsule can be buried. But I doubt that's going to happen in my lifetime. □

*"Rochelle Feinstein: An Image of An Image," curated by Antonio Sergio Bessa, is on view November 7, 2018–March 3, 2019.*