

# VALERIE JAUDON

FEBRUARY 28 – MARCH 23, 1996

*Opening*

*Wednesday, February 28th 5 - 7 p.m.*

SIDNEY JANIS GALLERY

110 WEST 57TH STREET NEW YORK



## VALERIE JAUDON: 'REPRESENTING DIFFERENCE'

Some people begin where they leave off; instead Valerie Jaudon begins again. Her work exists within a scenario of 'returns', differentiations and revisions. Looking at the paintings she has produced over the last twenty years, you can see that these returns are never to 'sameness' but only to a semblance of what she has already done. The differences are not only structural but also conceptual. Each time she sets to work she establishes a point of origin, a nexus of concerns, only to move away from it. This point of course is not fixed — its qualities are a consequence of her past actions. She maps onto the surface of her canvases a record of these occurrences. This gives representation not only to her own systems but also metaphorically to those processes by which her paintings and their history are transformed.

ARTISTS AND MODELS 1995

oil and alkyd on canvas

72 x 72 inches

Although her paintings are a result of systemic variations, her work does not deal with mere accretion. Within the rhythm of the cycles of repetition, variation and difference, Jaudon establishes the operation and limitations of the forms she produces. This process marks off the limits of her possibilities and reveals the realms of chance and necessity within her practice. False starts as well as solutions once thought final reverberate with new potential. Definitions become cumulative rather than reductive. Each series of paintings become a particular segment of an on-going though indeterminate production. It is these qualities that are her subjects.

This spiraling course of 'return' and difference, chance and logic, that Jaudon charts in her paintings, is a pattern Modernism repressed. Modernism promoted rupture and linear progress toward a definitive state, over moving about or surveying the field. This made the return of themes and practices appear to be insignificant events, equitable with entropy and decay. With the displacement of Modernism, we find in these patterns of repetition and differentiation the means by which change is realized. Jaudon's works both literally and figuratively fill the empty space that Modernism's ideal of a totalizing unity once occupied. She does this without succumbing to the despondent appeal of a fractured or hybrid 'other:' nor does she return to those models of painting that claim formalism, self expression or transcendental values as their sole validating criterion.

Post-Minimalism, the milieu from which Jaudon first emerged, was itself a chaotic and sometimes raucous investigation into the specificity and arbitrariness of Art's forms and criteria. Implicit in the varied and assorted practices, grouped under such headings as Feminist Art, Pattern and Decoration (referred to as P&D), Process Painting, Anti-form, Eccentric Abstraction, Performance Art, Idea Art, New Image Painting, etc., was the assessment that Art in the age of mass production and tele-communications had no inherent criteria or standards to sustain itself. This doubt reverberates throughout what is called Post-Modernism. In place of the essentialism of Modernism, Post-Modernism proposes that Art is a means of representation premised on historical, formal and intellectual conventions. It is within this context that Post-Minimalism now returns, almost on schedule, reasserting its influence, not only as an aesthetic but also as renewed practices.

While the effect of Jaudon's work of the early 70's cannot be ignored this essay is not about recounting her place in that history. Instead it attempts to free her work from it while rooting it more firmly in it. In part this is necessary because her association with P&D has produced a limited understanding of her practice. This reading proposes that the foundation for her paintings continues to be a feminist challenge to the masculine-dominated aesthetic. Given that the viability of feminine (and Feminist) subjects, qualities and practices has been accepted, it is nonsensical to believe that Jaudon would continue to work within a premise whose reiteration can only be viewed as redundant. Instead it is better to acknowledge that this reading is a product of the intellectual and cultural environment of the late 60's and early 70's and that it ignores or plays down prominent aspects of Jaudon's work in favor of those circumscribed by Feminism. Jaudon's paintings engage issues beyond the questions of masculine and feminine aesthetics or the decorative versus the essential. Some of the issues she addresses were in the 70's considered either insignificant or were not yet as apparent.

The content of Jaudon's work, and that of most abstract painters working today, has its origins in the agendas of Minimalism and Formalism. It is within and against the view that painting's only relevant subject is its own inherent qualities that Jaudon works. Seeking to maintain abstract painting's aesthetic autonomy in the

face of an increasingly fixed logic, her embrace of the systemic as a means to produce seemingly decorative motifs is not simply an inversion of Modernist prohibitions but a subversion of them. In rejecting Formalism's emphasis on the purely optical and Minimalism's stress on the literal, she premised her painting on a non-anecdotal, analytic Conceptualism. Framed by a concern for the relationship between standardization (the rationalized) and the intuitive (the erratic), her reformation of abstract painting's objective maintains, as painting's primary sphere of activity, the organization and synthesis of visual information. This stance has allowed her to generate a content that is simultaneously self-referential, experiential and narrative, without being literary or literal.

Intriguingly her work uses the same complex and shifting semiotic system to engage painting's identity and to address issues that reside outside the limits of self-referentiality and aesthetics. Her superimposition of three differing systems, each mapping their own logic, produces not only non-hierarchical, all-over decorative motifs (as they crisscross and intertwine) but also a sign system that sometimes subverts itself and at other times questions its own coherence. Jaudon's configurations are not used to represent their own making. Instead she applies the principles of repetition and difference to create structures that conceal or cancel their conceptual and logical base. In this manner, order and specificity are retained at the cost of formal logic, while sameness and dissimilarity become the shared qualities of a single entity.

Jaudon's practice of return, repetition and variation results not only in structural and iconic changes but also effects the execution and materiality of her paintings. Her approach has always been straight-forward and literal, maintaining a consistency between paint handling and structural content. For example, the circular and architectural patterns of her early monochrome works are done with a mechanical all-over brush work whose uniformity emphasized that these motifs are without beginning, middle and end. In the paintings of the 80's, the variety and fragmentation inherent in both her eccentric geometry and glyph-like configurations were accented by the contradictory use of either monochrome or multicolored banded grounds, executed in the same uniform manner. In contrast, the

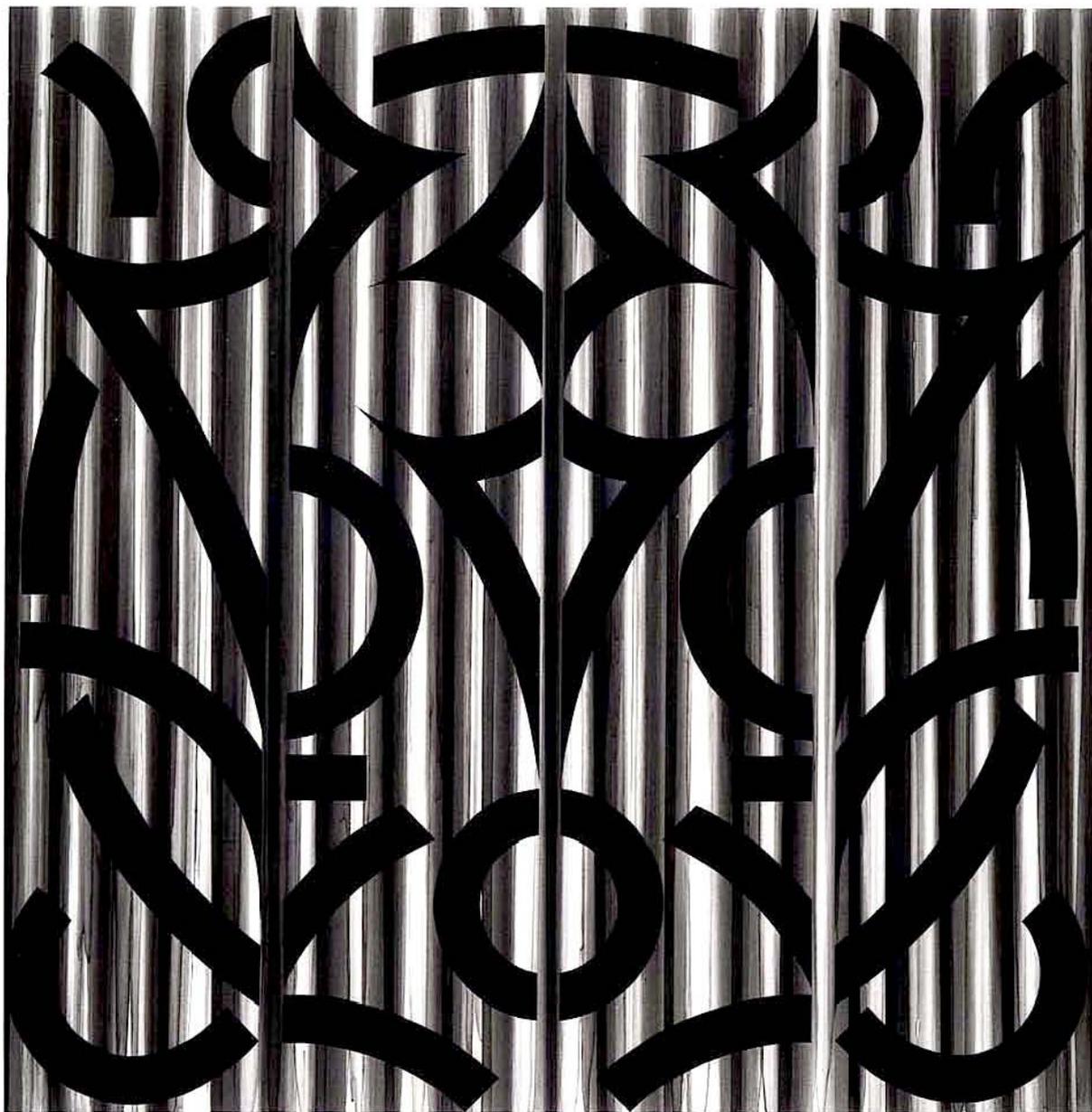
paintings presented in this exhibition represent a radical shift. She uses a fluid process for the ground upon which she arranges repeated rows of densely-pigmented, quasi geometric figures. This combination establishes a traditional figure-ground relationship, and with it the theme of infinite expansion, indicating still another type of fractured unity.

Long implicit in Jaudon's work but, obscured by the continued use of modernist criteria, has been her replacement of the dialogue of necessity and specificity with a discourse of difference, representation, signification, interpretation aesthetics, and taste. She brought the content and subject of these post-structuralist terms to her work without recourse to irony or evoking a sense of loss. Her practice does not suppose a mythic rupture or apocalyptic end to abstract painting. Jaudon's work, instead, is linked most profoundly to a quest for a new sense of authority and authenticity premised on an experiential gratification that is neither purely aesthetic nor intellectual, but the product of their interaction.

Saul Ostrow  
*New York, January 1996 ©*

THE BEST OF  
EVERYTHING 1995  
oil and alkyd on canvas  
82 x 106 inches





## CATALOGUE

- TROUBLE BOUND 1994 oil and alkyd on canvas 48 x 36 inches
- ABOVE SUSPICION 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 72 x 72 inches
- BOOM TOWN 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 48 x 36 inches
- THE AWFUL TRUTH 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 22 x 22 inches
- THE AMAZING MR. X 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 40 x 30 inches
- BIG STREET I 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 22 x 12 inches
- BIG STREET II 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 22 x 12 inches
- ARTISTS AND MODELS 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 72 x 72 inches
- RUN SILENT, RUN DEEP 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 72 x 72 inches
- WALK DON'T RUN 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 54 x 54 inches
- MADE FOR EACH OTHER 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 48 x 36 inches
- GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 22 x 22 inches
- ON THE DOUBLE 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 84 x 72 inches
- THE BEST OF EVERYTHING 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 82 x 106 inches
- BODY AND SOUL 1995 oil and alkyd on canvas 84 x 108 inches
- NIGHT AND DAY 1996 oil and alkyd on canvas 86 x 78 inches

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