

Hyperallergic: 'Painting's Patriarchal Spirit', by Mika Ross-Southall, October 20, 2018

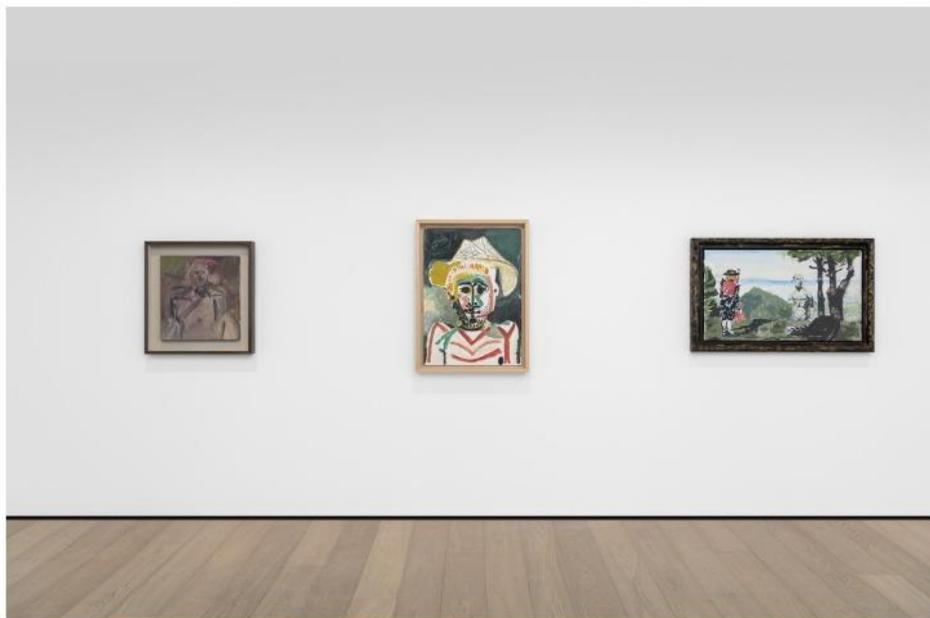
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Painting's Patriarchal Spirit

Thirty-seven years after the original exhibition at London's Royal Academy of Arts, *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now* proves painting is still a boys' club.



Mika Ross-Southall 2 days ago



Installation view, *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981–2018* at Almine Rech Gallery, London (image courtesy Almine Rech Gallery)

LONDON — In 1981, the Royal Academy of Arts in London put on an exhibition of 20th-century painting that changed the art world. *A New Spirit in Painting* was “a manifesto,” the accompanying catalogue said; it showcased a set of contemporary, mostly European painters, whose work possessed qualities — figurative, narrative, emotional, personal — that were being undervalued by the western art world the time. There were 38 artists from three generations on display: the grandfathers, such as Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon, Roberto Matta, and Willem de Kooning; the fathers, including Andy Warhol, Cy Twombly, Frank Stella, and Lucian Freud; and the sons, who were less familiar names at the time, such as Georg Baselitz, Julian Schnabel, Francesco Clemente, and Gerhard Richter.

Nearly 40 years later, one of the original curators, Norman Rosenthal, has revisited this seminal exhibition with *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981–2018*, a two-part show spread across two of the Almine Rech Gallery's spaces. Earlier this year a few paintings from the 1981 exhibition were on view in New York, comprising the *Then* portion. In London, currently, are more recent works (*Now*) made by the same artists.

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Julian Schnabel, "Ascension IV" (2015) (image courtesy the artist and Almine Rech Gallery, photo by Argenis Apolinario)

Some of the best paintings in the London show appear in the first room. Howard Hodgkin's unassuming diptych "Hello and Goodbye" (2014–15) features two small wood panels joined side by side. On the left, a black arc — made from three thick, rough brushstrokes piled almost on top of each other — is painted on bare wood. On the right panel, which is slightly shorter in length, the arc is wider and green, and sits on a black background. With just a few lines and colors, Hodgkin suggests the sun rising and setting, or, perhaps, a timid greeting when you first meet someone, followed by a more heartfelt goodbye after getting to know them. (Rosenthal explained to me at the opening that he put Hodgkin in the *Now* show in London — instead of the *Then* show in New York — because he thinks that "Hodgkin's greatest paintings are his last ones".)

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Francesco Clemente, "Tower of Song" (2017), oil on canvas (image courtesy the artist and Almine Rech Gallery, photo by John Berens)

"Hello and Goodbye" hangs cleverly next to works that also focus on line-making. The shoulders, torso, knees, and head in Frank Auerbach's portrait, "David Landau Seated" (2013–15), emerge with dark, angled brushstrokes from a sludge of pastel-colored paint. Haunting, hollow eyes and an expressionless face match the mask-like figure in Picasso's "L'Homme au chapeau de paille" (1964), one of the exhibition's only paintings not created in the past couple of decades, but included for its influence on the others. Picasso's dashes

and dots denote stubble on the man's face and texture in his straw hat. His upper body is formed from bone shapes, as if we're seeing through to his skeleton. A. R. Penck takes this pictographic style further in "Plato, Sokrates und Aristoteles – 6" (1996), which is made up of Keith Haring-esque bold black lines on an off-white background. Penck creates a compelling labyrinth of human bodies, faces, and eyes, along with circles, stars, and triangles. A huge figure, for example, slumps down the left-hand side of the canvas, with its legs stretching along the bottom; inside, are the silhouettes of three smaller bodies, all in the same position, sprouting eerily from each other. Less evocative among this group of paintings is "Vision des Poussin" (2012), a rural landscape by Markus Lüpertz; yet it has the same sunken eyes (here, they appear on the head of a Renaissance statue, positioned incongruously beneath the canopy of a tree), and swirling pencil lines peek out from under blocks of bright color.

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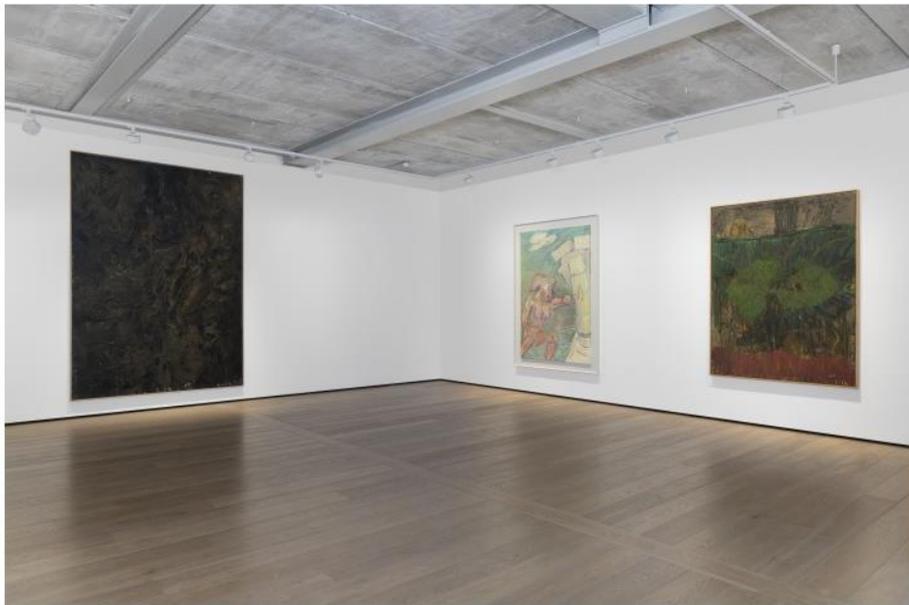


Susan Rothenberg, "Pink Raven" (2012), oil on canvas, 62 3/4 x 48 inches (image courtesy the artist and Almine Rech Gallery, photo by James Hart)

A large black and brown painting by Georg Baselitz dominates the second room. Unlike his signature upside-down figurative work, "Wo ist die Haselnuß?," completed in early 2018, is a chaotic mass of built-up and thinly-spread paint, contoured across the canvas with a wide palette knife. In a 1995 *Artforum* interview, Baselitz said that his art is informed by having been brought up in Germany after the Second World War: "I was born into a destroyed order, a destroyed landscape, a destroyed people, a destroyed society. And I didn't want to re-establish an order: I had seen enough of so-called order. I was forced to question everything." He takes this sentiment to an extreme in this new painting.

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Biblical stories and the supernatural guide many of the other works in this room. “Ascension IV” (2015), an inkjet print modified with ink and spray paint by Julian Schnabel, is an aerial view — perhaps of the earth, the moon or a rock — obscured slightly by a purple haze; the result is like something out of a science-fiction film. Susan Rothenberg’s “Pink Raven” (2012) could be an illustration for Edgar Allan Poe. The scrawny, pinkish bird balances precariously on a green wire; one foot hooks on, while the other looks ready to lash out. Rothenberg has left faint marks next to the raven’s back, as though it is blurred in movement. And in “Samson” (1983), Maria Lassnig inverts the strength of her subject — clad in armor, pushing over an ionic column — by using a light-hearted palette of pale blues, pinks, yellows, and greens. Cartoon clouds and a V-shaped bird float in the left corner.



Installation view, *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981–2018* at Almine Rech Gallery, London (image courtesy Almine Rech Gallery)

Rothenberg and Lassnig are the only female artists in this show and none were included in the 1981 exhibition. “I did go to Lassnig’s studio back then,” Rosenthal admits, “but thought her work was too crude.” The art world “was white, male, small,” he says, adding, “We were all prisoners of this.” As I walked through the exhibition, however, I found myself wondering why, with this new perspective on female painters, Rosenthal didn’t take the opportunity to add in more — and to rewrite the history of painting, as he did 37 years ago. *A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981–2018* is, nonetheless, a fascinating relic of a distant time.

A New Spirit Then, A New Spirit Now, 1981–2018, curated by Norman Rosenthal, continues at Almine Rech Gallery (Grosvenor Hill, Broadbent House, W1K 3JH, London, UK) through November 17.