

IN FOCUS

JOE BRADLEY

INTERVIEW BY KATHY GRAYSON
PORTRAIT BY KAUZMI ASAMURA

SOMETIMES AN EMBARRASSING PREDISPOSITION CAN LEAD YOU TO UNEXPECTED INSIGHT: I BEGAN AN INTEREST IN JOE BRADLEY'S WORK BECAUSE OF MY VERY CHILDISH OBSESSION WITH EARLY VIDEO GAME AESTHETICS, BUT ENDED UP BEING ENCHANTED BY HIS ARTWORKS FOR LARGELY OTHER REASONS. DON'T GET ME WRONG: WALKING INTO CANADA GALLERY AND BEING DWARFED BY EIGHT-FOOT 8-BIT DUDES FULFILLED MANY A CHILDHOOD FANTASY. BUT JOE'S AESTHETIC PROJECT IS MUCH LARGER THAN THIS.

While Joe is indeed the exuberant vocalist from the very maximal band Cheeseburger, it is inadvisable to draw any conclusions about his art from that. Joe is a minimal man to the extent that he is interested in the least amount of action or work required to turn his materials into an artwork. In my favorite series of his, he explores how pared-down he can make an arrangement of colored rectangles and still have it read as a figure, or how changing the shape of one square slightly makes a standing man "run". In this way he plays with the gestalt of human perception in addition to the cultural norms of perception that differentiate "materials" and "artwork".

In the middle of an art moment characterized by folkly figuration and ramshackle expressionism, Joe's colorful quadrilaterals and refined compositions might be all the more radical, but how are we to understand these anachronistic minimal urges?

What is your connection to the '70s projects of post-minimal figuration, where artists were trying to stick the figure back into the boring rectangle?

I don't know. I find a lot of that stuff kind of dry and humorless. I'll take John Wesley over Joel Shapiro any day.

Does your work come from a similar urge? Or maybe comes from the opposite direction?

It seems those artists were working themselves out of some sort of theoretical cul-de-sac that was particular to the time, whereas I don't really have anything like that to kick against. I'm just making whatever I feel like.

How do you feel about people seeing the work as 8-bit? Is the context of the early video game a useful one to see the work in?

I don't really approach it from that angle. It comes up often enough, though.

Your early work seemed to be more about conceptual experiments in objecthood and highlighting the construction of the painted canvas... or ridiculing it? Or am I missing the point?

That sounds about right. At the time I was interested in seeing how little information I could put into a painting and still have it read as a painting. For instance, if you stretch a piece of denim and hang it at a 58" center, does it still function as a painting? How does it affect the space around it? That sort of thing.

What artists of your generation do you feel an affinity with?

I'm into what Jason Fox and Huma Bhabha are doing. Josh Smith's stuff is really interesting. I've been digging these pigeon shit paintings Dan Colen is working on. This could turn into a long list...

If a gallery offered to fly out any band you wanted for a big opening of your artwork, who would you pick?

The Plants.

You played at a video exhibition at Deitch Projects last year called "Tedious Limbs". What is your connection to new video art?

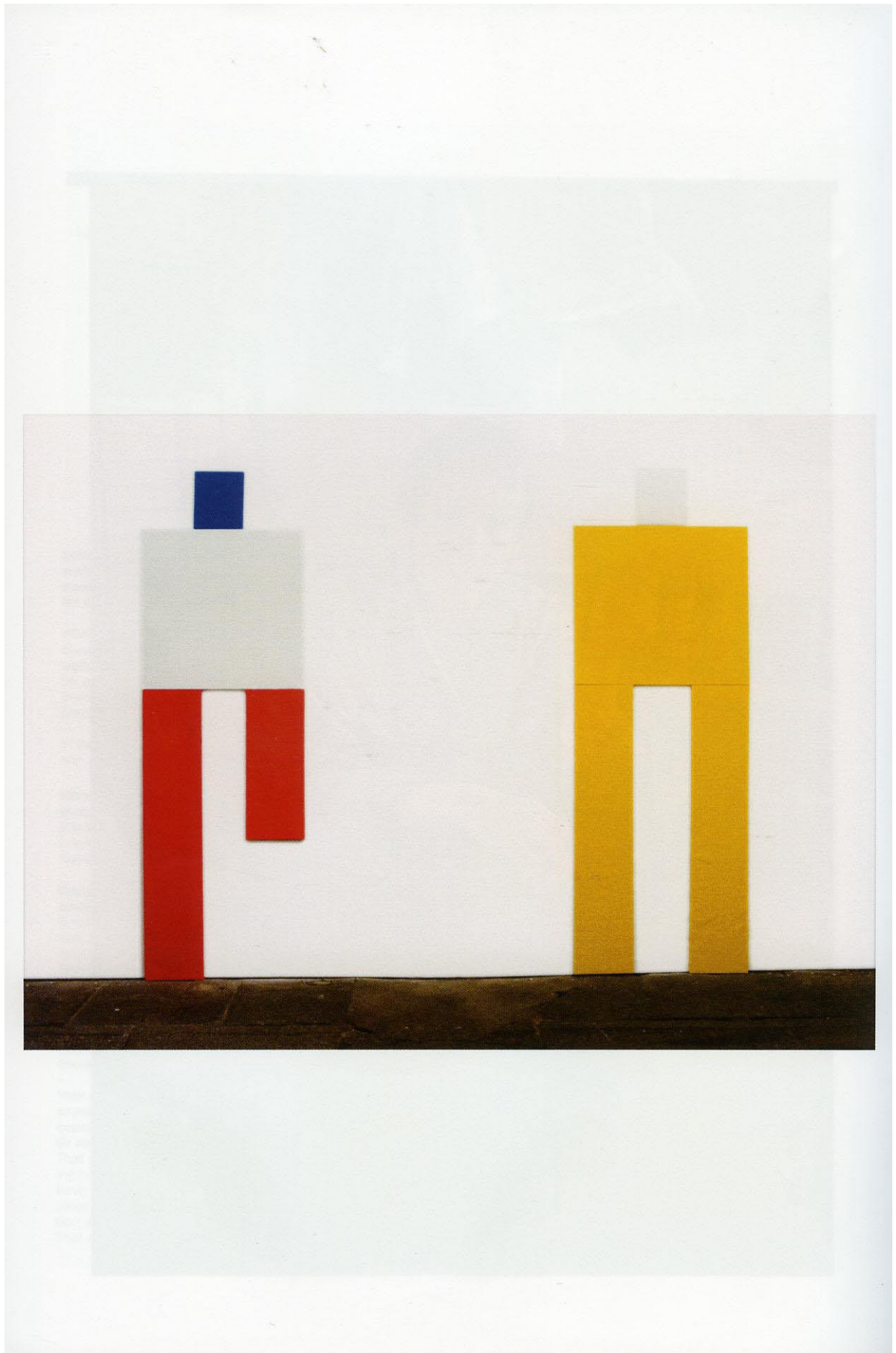
I usually walk in halfway through, and wonder if I should stick around for the beginning or watch the whole thing over again.

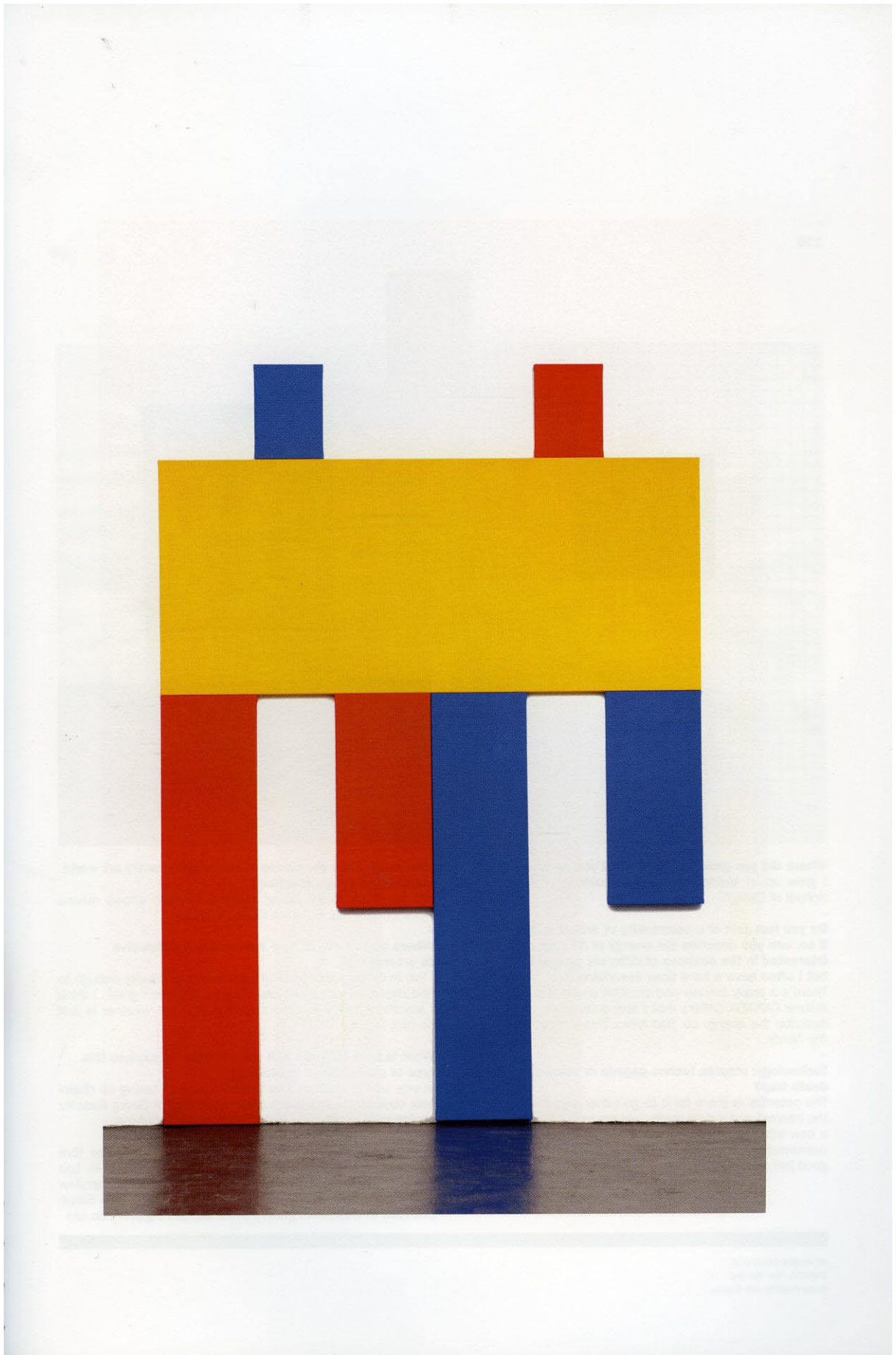
Your last exhibition at CANADA gallery featured a very non-figurative floor piece that seemed to puzzle people. What was the piece about?

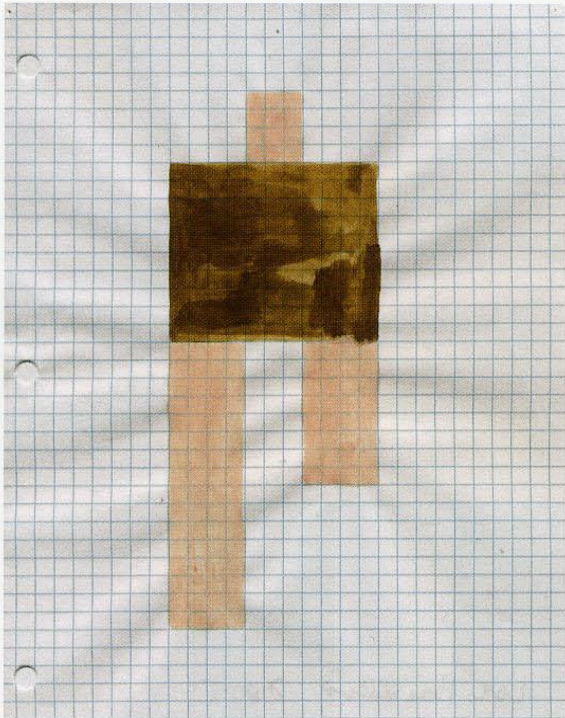
It's titled "Mirror". It's a stretched canvas painted blue that lies on the floor. I thought of it as an upturned mirror reflecting the sky, when of course there's just the ceiling up there. Kind of a cheap special effect.

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Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school?

I grew up in Maine and studied painting at Rhode Island School of Design.

Do you feel part of a community of artists in New York?

If so, can you describe the energy of it? I am always interested in the nuances of different groups here, but I often have a hard time describing it...

There's a really friendly and creative scene that's happening around CANADA Gallery that I feel quite at home in. I would describe the energy as *Bad News Bears* meets *Revenge of the Nerds*.

Technology: utopian techno-pagoda or state-surveillance death trap?

The potential is there for it to go either way. I wonder if with the Internet and virtual reality, we are unconsciously creating a new world in preparation for the day when this one is too overcrowded/polluted/nuked to live in. Or maybe it's all just good jerk-off fodder for the end days?



How much does the bustle of the contemporary art world invade your studio practice?

Not so much really. Being involved in more shows means more time in studio, which is fine with me.

Where do you live in New York and is it conducive to art-making?

I live in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and have been lucky enough to find cheap space to live and work in. It's been great. I think I am about ready to jump ship, though. The weather is just so nice in L.A..

What is next for you? Will you continue to explore this type of post-minimal figuration?

In one way or another. I've been thinking of taking up chainsaw sculpture. I saw these photos recently of Georg Baselitz chainsawing a giant log and it looks really satisfying.

Joe has recently exhibited at CANADA Gallery in New York (www.canadanewyork.com) and at Peres Projects in Los Angeles (www.peresprojects.com). At the time this interview was recorded, he was in a two-person exhibition with Sarah Braman, at Dicksmith gallery (www.dicksmithgallery.co.uk)