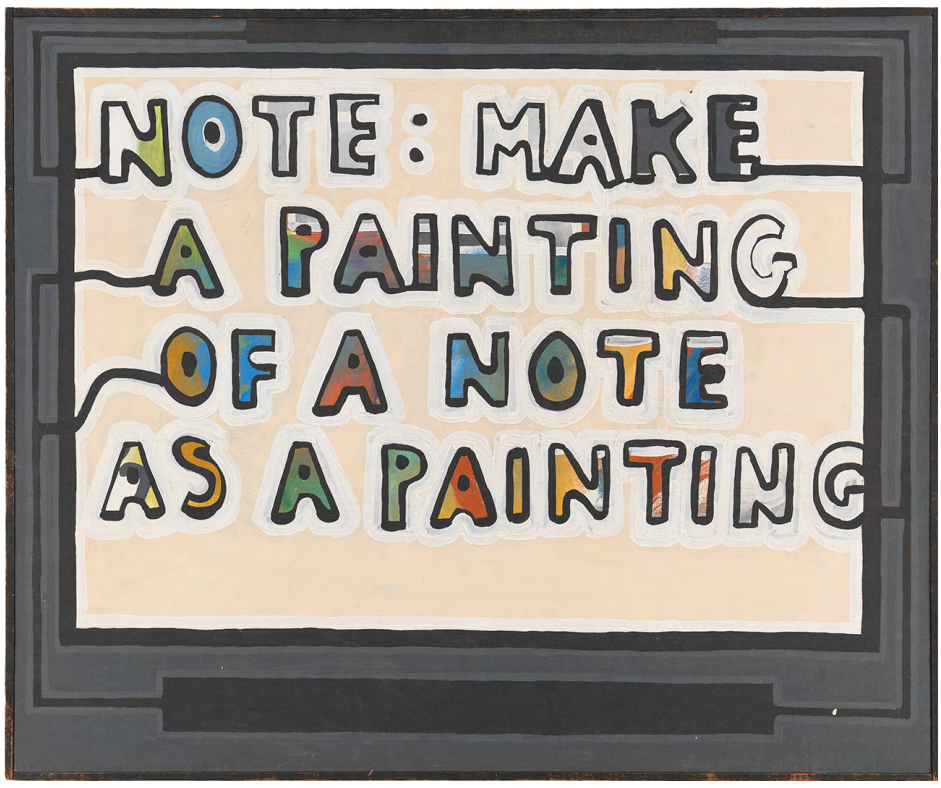
Revisions and resurrections: “The Silo” curated by Raphael Rubinstein at Garth Greenan

BY SHARON BUTLER JANUARY 14, 2016



Gene Beery, *Note*, 1970

Getting recognition in the art world is difficult, but remaining relevant over the course of a lifetime is nearly impossible. Raphael Rubinstein is fascinated by old art magazines from the 1960s and 1970s, where he finds images of work by artists who were once widely admired but have fallen off the art world’s radar. “I can’t quite explain the strange allure of vintage art magazines, though I think it may have something to do with the satisfaction of knowing what people back then didn’t: which artists were destined for fame, which critics would be proved embarrassingly wrong, etc.” he wrote in a recent essay. “I’d see a reproduction in an old Artforum article or an ad with work reproduced in *Arts Magazine* or *Art in America* and think how contemporary the sculptures looked.”

Rubinstein has an uncannily acute eye for artists whose work is germane to the contemporary conversation. In 2010 he began an online project called “The Silo” to publish brief essays about the artists he has rediscovered or, in some cases, reinterpreted—what he calls a “revisionist dictionary of contemporary art.” The following year the project received a Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation Arts Writer Grant.

This month Garth Greenan is hosting a show of the same title that includes work by 29 of the artists whose work Rubinstein has featured on his blog. They range far and wide: Europeans who came of age in the 1960s and have had impressive careers in Paris but have never been widely known in the United States; Americans whose work was overlooked during the onslaught of Abstract Expressionism; and outliers like Gene Beery and Llyn Foulkes who have never fit comfortably into dominant trends. Some of the artists, in Rubinstein’s mind, are simply under-recognized or misinterpreted.

The exhibition, hung in a loose salon style, comprises mainly small work. So presented, it scans as a diary or scrapbook, or perhaps Rubinstein’s private collection. (Although Rubinstein borrowed most of the work in the show from galleries and artists, he does in fact collect artists’ books; the publications located in the vitrine near the gallery entrance are from his own stash.) The personal feel of the exhibition is warm and charming. It induced me look more closely at the work, read the text, and imagine the circumstances of each piece’s creation.

The idea that there are alternative narratives to those that critics and art historians have crystallized is a compelling one and seems to be gaining currency. Dushko Petrovich recently wrote an essay in ArtNews noting the recent curatorial inclination to put dead artists alongside emerging artists in contemporary surveys like “Greater New York” and the 2014 Whitney Biennial, which he dubbed the ‘Biennial of the Dead.”

For individual artists, this new interest in older, late-career, and dead artists furnishes some hope that even if their work is not immediately celebrated, due appreciation may be merely deferred or submerged rather than denied. For the collective, it suggests that the conventional critical wisdom and market trends are but two possible filters for the work of a generation, subject to challenge and revision by those, like Rubinstein, with the intellectual curiosity, patience, and diligence to look beyond the status quo. It’s easy for an artist to be cowed by the art market’s stark exclusivity and swayed to produce work in thrall to the art fair and the auction. Rubinstein’s poignant endeavor reminds us that the best art has value whether or not it gains contemporaneous recognition.