



# Dave Hickey

Dave Hickey is an art writer who lives in Las Vegas. His essays have most recently been collected in *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Art Issues, 1997).

Opposite page, clockwise from upper left: 1. Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1995-97, mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: Joshua White. 9. Clockwise from top left: Philip Argent, *Bug*, 1997, oil and acrylic on canvas, 62 x 50". Ingrid Calame, *fstCK*, 1998, enamel on aluminum, 48 x 48". Jennifer Steinkamp, collaboration with Jimmy Johnson, *Phase=Time*, 1999, screen 32 x 11"; room 39 x 38 x 24". Installation view. Monique Prieto, *Lovethink*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 72". 5. Vija Celmins, *Suspended Plane*, 1966, oil on canvas, 16 x 27". 2. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978, gelatin-silver print, 9 1/2 x 7 1/2". 7. Howard Arkley, *Illuminated Space*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 54". 3. Richard Serra, *Torqued Ellipse IV*, 1998, weatherproof steel, 12' 3" x 26' 6" x 32' 6"; plate thickness 2". Approx. overall weight 40 tons. 4. David Reed, *#212 (Vice)*, 1984-85, oil and alkyd on linen, 24 x 96". Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. 6. "Ellsworth Kelly: A Retrospective," 1996-97. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. 8. Giambattista Tiepolo, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1754, oil on canvas, 40 1/2 x 30 1/2". Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

1 "Robert Gober" (*Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1997*) Gober's installation, with its penetrated Virgin, subterranean tide pools, and waterfall stairwell, is my icon of the decade. In its intellectual rigor and plangent availability, it's as close as we're likely to get to the refinement and generosity of a seventeenth-century sculptural occasion. We may speculate on its wry deconstruction of Duchampian aesthetics, or we may, as one of the museum guards did, make a gesture indicating the flow of experience through the pipe and through the Virgin, and simply say, "*Clemencia, Señor.*"

2 "Cindy Sherman: Retrospective" (*Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1997-98*) Asked about the proliferation of artists who mimicked his style, Willem de Kooning said, "Hey! They can only make the good ones." (Meaning: Great artists have the privilege of failing.) Cindy Sherman, the most plagiarized artist of the last twenty years, should understand this. She can make triumphant work (and not many can), and she can crash and burn. Sherman's ratio of triumph to disaster is about ten to one, and since one triumph is worth a hundred disasters, she is, by my calculation, the artist of the fin de siècle.

3 Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* (*Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1998-99*) Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* belong on a Top Ten of the last half-century as the apotheosis of aesthetics as kinesthetics—the ne plus ultra of "you had to be there" art. As much sculpture for the inner ear and the pit of the stomach as for the eye, the ellipses invest the viewer in their presence with a level of acute physical self-consciousness that, at this moment, is all the more glamorous and exotic for being totally unavailable on the Web.

4 "David Reed Paintings: Moving Pictures" (*Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, 1998-99*) Gertrude Stein said, "Anybody is as their land and air is." The sheer, dazzling appropriateness of David Reed's painting retrospective installed in his hometown of San Diego makes her point. Just as Stein moved to Paris to be an American, David Reed, clearly, moved to New York to be a Californian. Everything impudent about Reed's paintings in Manhattan—from the fluid, stress-free gestures to the crisp fields of hot color—takes on iconic intensity in Reed's native land and air.

5 "Vija Celmins" (*Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 1992-93*) Oscar Wilde complained about the difficulty of living up to his blue china. I saw "Vija Celmins" at three of its venues; in each case, both the crowd and the institution were hard put to live up to the devotional eloquence of Celmins's work. It daunted people into silence and made the spaces seem tatty, smudged, and insubstantial. For all the work out there designed to make us feel less than moral, there's too little art like Celmins's, which shows us a way of being human that is stronger, quieter, braver, and less needy than we know ourselves to be.

6 "Ellsworth Kelly: A Retrospective" (*Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1996-97*) It could have been a fucking disaster: Ellsworth Kelly vs. Frank Lloyd Wright in a battle of eccentric autocrats. Kelly gracefully forestalled this eventuality by mounting his retrospective at the Guggenheim as a subversive homage to its architect, matching every nuanced curve and angle in Wright's building with a nuanced curve and angle of his own. In doing so, he established himself as the pivotal figure in mid-century American art—the master of an expressive, intellectual practice that never dissolves into concept or devolves into angst-ridden nostalgia.

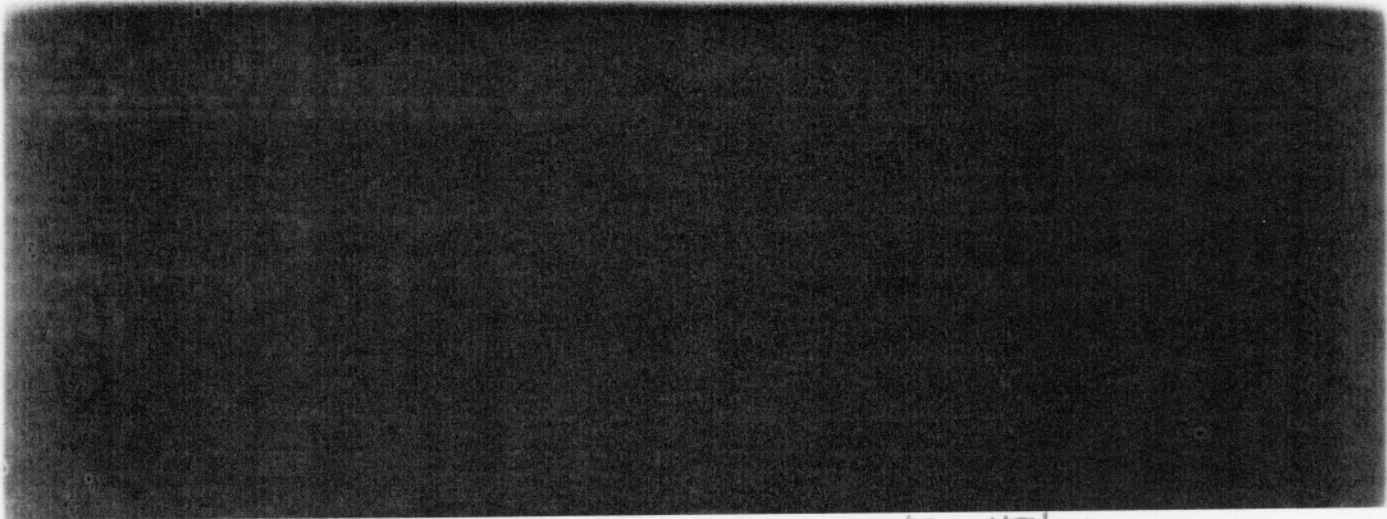
7 Howard Arkley (*Karen Lovegrove Gallery, Los Angeles, 1999*) Arkley's goofy-smart paintings of petty-boo suburban paradise have ranked high on my list of secret pleasures in recent years, and I was looking forward to more.

Unfortunately, two weeks after the opening of his first show in LA, Arkley died of an overdose in Australia. The show at Karen Lovegrove, happily, sadly, was just splendid, at once fresh and austere. *Ars longa, vita brevis*, dammit.

8 "Giambattista Tiepolo: Master of the Oil Sketch" (*Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1993*) Tiepolo is the artistic patron saint of deadline *litterateurs* like myself. With knowledge in his body and magic in his hand, Tiepolo did it fast, did it great, and never looked back. As a consequence, the exhibition of his oil sketches at the Kimbell was as wonderful a lesson in trusting your own talent as a book of Wilde's essays.

9 LA Spring (as in Prague Spring): Part I In recent years, the art world has been admitting young artists one at a time, cutting them out from the herd and quickly transforming them into high-dollar Vanity Fare. The dam broke this spring in Los Angeles. Dozens of bright young things mounted so many bright young shows that one actually moved from gallery to gallery, from month to month, with heady anticipation. Among the standouts: Kevin Appel, Philip Argent, Linda Besemer, Ingrid Calame, Jane Callister, Fandra Chang, Steven Crique, Sharon Ellis, Jeff Elrod, Jason Eoff, Jack Hallberg, Jim Isermann, Kurt Kauper, Penelope Krebs, Laura Owens, Aaron Parazette, Monique Prieto, Michael Reafsnider, Adam Ross, Brad Spence, Jennifer Steinkamp, and Yek.

10 LA Spring: Part II Even more amazingly, the LA scene suddenly has depth as well as breadth. The surf is up for frosties, too. During the past year there has been a steady stream of solid to splendid shows by my insouciant contemporaries. Among them, Peter Alexander, John Baldessari, Larry Bell, Tony Berlant, Mary Corse, Joe Goode, Craig Kauffman, John McCracken, Ken Price, Edward Ruscha, and Alexis Smith. It's almost like being in love. □



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