

## DEFINITE ARTICLE

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Exploring how we know what we know, and wondering what relation there might be between what I know about something and the thing itself—this is in part what my work as an artist has been about for the past few decades. The “definite article” to which I refer is both an acknowledgement of the concreteness forming the basis of artistic experience, as well as that part of speech used in English before nouns with a particularizing effect. In the interest of demonstrating how questions about information being explored in the scientific sphere play out within a broader cultural context, I wish to discuss a body of my own paintings that are based on twenty-six separate compositions, a catalog of themes and variations sorted and arranged as letters of the alphabet. In this body of work, the alphabet offers an organizing structure for compositions that have taken on a life of their own, allowing me to improvise on them as individual images or group them into pictorial “words.” The letters are an index for my pictorial lexicon, more visual engine than phoneme.

The horizontal and vertical sequences of linked images in these paintings are, for me, musical incantations and ceremonial processions. Shapes, motifs, or entire images might repeat within a sequence or recur in different sequences. This repetition fosters attention to small variations, affording the pleasures of recognition while also recalling how images are altered by context. Repetition also creates measure and tempo. It taps the deep spiritual power of rhythmic structure and roots our experience within the visceral body.

I am puzzled by the relationship of language to visual images. If images are to be based even distantly on words, then not any word will do. The words I am most comfortable representing as a painter fall into a class that linguists call “empty signs” or “shifters” because they are non-referential with respect to reality. They don’t directly name a thing or an action in the world. IN. They don’t assert anything. THE. They are neither true nor false. WHICH. They are unique each time they are uttered because their references are dependent on their context. THAT. Their fluid state suggests a way of thinking about painting that deeply appeals to me. THIS.

I value language and have been formed by its diverse and ravishing beauties. The visual moment, on the other hand, seems to hover just beyond my reach, holding out the prospect of momentary contact with a world unmediated by the insistent weight and particular forms of thought that language fosters. It promises a suspension of judgment, emotional honesty, immersion in experience still too fresh to bear a name. Visuality has come to represent the idealized and unrealized Other Life.

My personal struggle as an artist is to negotiate the asymmetries between language and vision, and as a human being to understand how they both connect me to the world. The images in this body of work can be seen as an allegory of that struggle.

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*WORLD*, 2004  
oil on canvas  
32 x 100 inches



*WHICH*, 2004  
oil on paper  
17 x 44 inches



*THIS*, 2002  
oil on canvas, mounted on four panels  
49 x 184 inches