



GINNIE GARDINER
Variations on Self

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Variations on Self

Essays by
JW Phillips and Carter Ratcliff

with an introduction by
Cecil Touchon

*This catalog accompanies the exhibition
'Ginnie Gardiner: Variations on Self
at Nisa Touchon Gallery
Santa Fe, New Mexico*



Ginnie Gardiner: Variations on Self

Front cover: *Persian Muse*
36" x 24", Oil on Canvas, 2015

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ISBN 978-1-5323-0914-4

Printed in Canada.

Introduction

by Cecil Touchon

*"He who dwells in all beings and within all beings, whom all beings do not know, whose body
is all beings, and who, from within, rules all beings, is thy Self, the Inner Ruler, Immortal."*

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

If it can be said that all selves are variations on a single Self as proposed in the Upanishads, then the work of all artists is really the work of a single Artist of which we are each a part knowingly or unknowingly. In what we can now call ancient times, that is, any time before the dawn of the internet there were different rules, different ways of looking at the world that are now antiquated. We are still close enough to those times that we cannot fully appreciate the unfathomable transformation that our global culture is going through and the shift in our perception of the world we live in. The rules for this new world have yet to be written hence one can feel that there is a certain anarchy afoot.

Whereas before people used to be hungry for news from afar or to become informed of the latest developments in things, now it seems that we must shelter ourselves from the deluge of knowledge we are surrounded by. Individually we cannot take it in. Now it takes teams of people to study even small things. In the past it is evident that people believed that they had plenty of time; time to think, time to study, time to contemplate, time to dream. But for some reason it seems that now no one has any time, everyone is continually busy to the point of wide spread anxiety. This problem is no different for artists, especially young artists who all are living in a period when the world can only be experienced as bits and pieces of culture like fragments seen through a kaleidoscope. There seems to be no guiding principle, no north star by which we might navigate.

Never the less, there are those artists who accept our current circumstances yet still take the time to study, to focus, to contemplate, to experiment as if not rushed in the least. The present, as we now can know it, is filled with the continually unfolding details of the past allowing artists of today to converse with kindred spirits of previous generations as if they are having dinner together – a luxury that until very recently artists were not able to easily achieve. Ginnie Gardiner is one of those artists whose work is in leisurely conversation with artists such as Henri Matisse and Richard Diebenkorn who, both known as painters, were also collagists. It is well known that Diebenkorn was influenced by Matisse both in his figurative works and ultimately in his Ocean Park series for which he is best known.

Their 'conversation' in fact will be explored for the first time in upcoming exhibitions at The Baltimore Museum of Art opening in October and an expanded version at the SFMOMA from March through May, 2017.

Matisse experimented with the flatness of the painted surface in what was at the time a radical way looking for an honest and modern approach to figure and ground that gave play to the issues of pure composition with the figure. Diebenkorn followed in his path attempting to resolve similar issues.

Gardiner says: "Planar compositions that explore figure/ground issues and reductive palettes has been my primary area of focus for the last 5 years." And who better to include in the conversation than these two great masters who grappled with the very same issues, in such paintings as Henri Matisse's *Seated Pink Nude* and Richard Diebenkorn's *Woman with Hat and Gloves*.

Enter Ginnie Gardiner and the conversation continues... In the present set of collage studies and paintings Gardiner takes photographic self-portraits posing with herself not as Ginnie Gardiner but as the 'seated woman' in an outdoor lounge chair giving the conversation a twist and then does

a process of digital posterization to the image converting the photograph to an abstracted and flattened surface in order to achieve a painting like effect so that the collaged figure is able to coexist with her chosen backgrounds which resemble and even borrow directly from such sources as Richard Diebenkorn's Ocean Park series. Gardiner calls this a quotational style of working and is in fact a highly favored technique among collagists worldwide. One could call it appropriation or sampling as in music or you could even say it is a form of capitalism; that is to say, capitalizing on other artists' labor and insights or one could just say: joining an ongoing conversation that is happening across time.

It is the artworks having the conversation since they stand outside of time, one merely needs to bring them into proximity for the conversation to be over heard. All artists are having such conversations with the other artists that they admire and consider as influences. It is the imbedded ideas and suggestions of continued inquiry that keeps the conversation going.

Like any good conversationalist one needs to pick up and add to the conversation where ever it leaves off yet reference the important points made previously in order to continue. Gardiner does this brilliantly through her seated postures that often suggest geometric forms that echo the classic postures found in the figures of Matisse and Diebenkorn as counterpoint to the abstract compositions that serve as minimalist architectural backdrops, perhaps painted walls that appear drenched in light. One has the feeling of being close to a beach possibly on the French Riviera or the Southern California Coast or near a pool on a sunny day in the Catskills.

In the end, perhaps there is only the one Artist at work, having a conversation with Self through the hand of every artist, all of whom are Variations on Self.

The Self As Collaborator in Vision & Image

by JW Phillips

In Ginnie Gardiner's art the self is in relation to the envelopment of the image or painting itself. The image and its abstract implications to which the self is interacting and subordinate is consistent and complete, intentional and selected. It is as deliberate at the alternative takes of a jazz variation.

The tradition of the self-portrait is, on a practical level, an outgrowth of the simple and practical truth that using one's self is a practical tradition taking advantage of the most freely available model for every artist. We are always present to ourselves. "I is always the person always here."

In similar passages of connubial practicality, our mate is the second most available, as demonstrated by Mrs. Bonnard (almost always 'Madame' in titles rarely 'Marthe'), or Amélie Matisse.

But, convenience of the self for the artist also presents a fundamental question of consciousness in relationship to that self. It is a question more easily subordinated to live process when using a model other than oneself traditionally, because observation is less mitigated by the interactivity of observing oneself observing oneself. Photography, working from drawings (as Bonnard always did) and the distances provided by modern technology have both widened and closed that ontological expanse.

Beyond its ontological implications, the use of the self as a prop or model versus the use of

the model as a projection of the self, is also the unique provenance of the artist. Cindy Sherman has explored one half of this trope and dress up and morphology has been her oeuvre. But, in Ginnie Gardiner's art the self is in relation to not a costume but to the envelopment of the image or painting itself – the act of placement and imagery with the artist in the role of the knowing collaborator and manipulator. The mirror, the camera, and the image have merged in our world. In Gardiner's art we are asked to enjoy that, in fact revel in its potential for discovery and re-contextualization of art, self, and painting.

Scale and Intensity

by Carter Radcliff

There is something reassuring about a child's stick figure. With a circle and a few lines, long and short, it reminds us that we are hard-wired to recognize the human presence. The trouble with a stick figure is that it has no convincing way of inhabiting its world. It takes an artist of Ginnie Gardiner's brilliance not only to flesh out the figure but also to make it fully present in a particular place. I am tempted to say that in the collage entitled *Spectator III*, 2014, the artist's image of herself merges seamlessly with its surroundings. But if this were literally so, she would be lost in the play of form and color. In fact, she is vividly conspicuous: the form around which those of furniture and architecture organize themselves. Throughout this exhibition, we see Gardiner bringing the body into a relationship with its immediate world that is comfortable and ever so slightly unsettled. It is this latter quality that leads us to recognize her form not only as human but as intensely self-aware.

Because Gardiner layers her collage-elements, the images in these works often have palpable edges. The collages are more assertively physical than her paintings, which take an airy impalpability from the light that fills them. And the forms in her collages take on a virtual weightiness in the course of her adjustments and readjustments. In the two collage-studies for *Purple Dress*, the figure is nearly identical. The chief differences between these two works are to be found in the stripes of color that signify with elegant economy the figure's setting. In one study, these stripes run

vertically, along the left-hand edge; in the other, they are horizontal and thus echo the upper edge of the collage. In the painting, from 2014, Gardiner opts for the vertical placement and she heightens the stripes' color key with a salmon pink that heightens, in turn, the purple of the dress. All three variations are successful, with each displaying its own, precisely calibrated degree of spatial expansiveness.

Nearly always, the formal structure—and space itself—is more compact in the collages than in the paintings. The collages, of course, are smaller and yet that is not the entire explanation, for the details of Gardiner's images acquire a charge of condensed pictorial power from having been developed and refined in the more intimate medium. Transposed to canvas, her images gain not only in size but in scale. They feel larger, more open. Yet they lose none of the intimacy or the intensity bestowed on them by their origins.

Paintings

Persian Muse
40" x 30"
Oil on Linen
2015





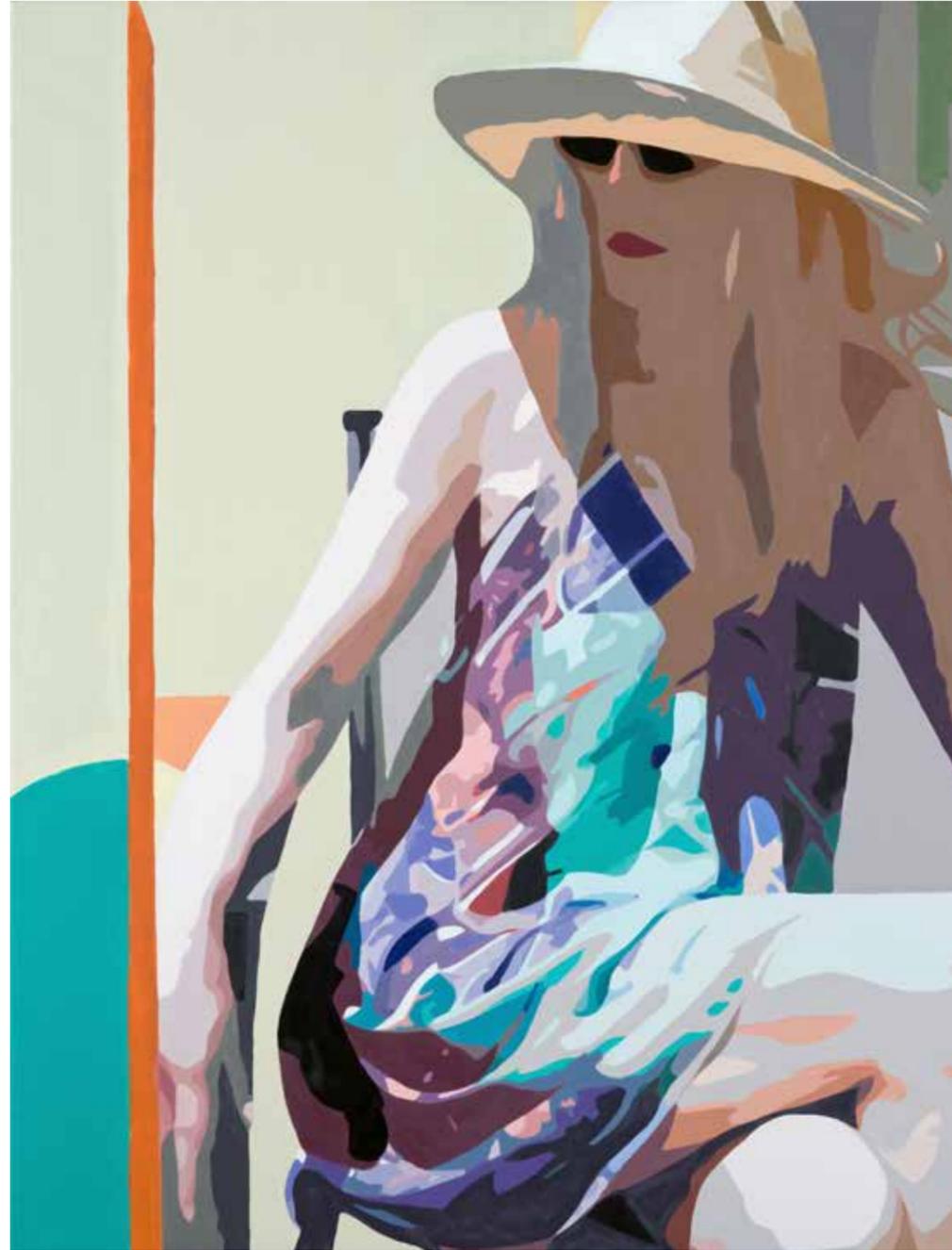
Midday
36" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2014



Spectator
24" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2014

Akimbo
48" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2014





Aside
40" x 30"
Oil on Canvas
2014



Purple Dress
36" x 24"
Oil on Canvas
2014

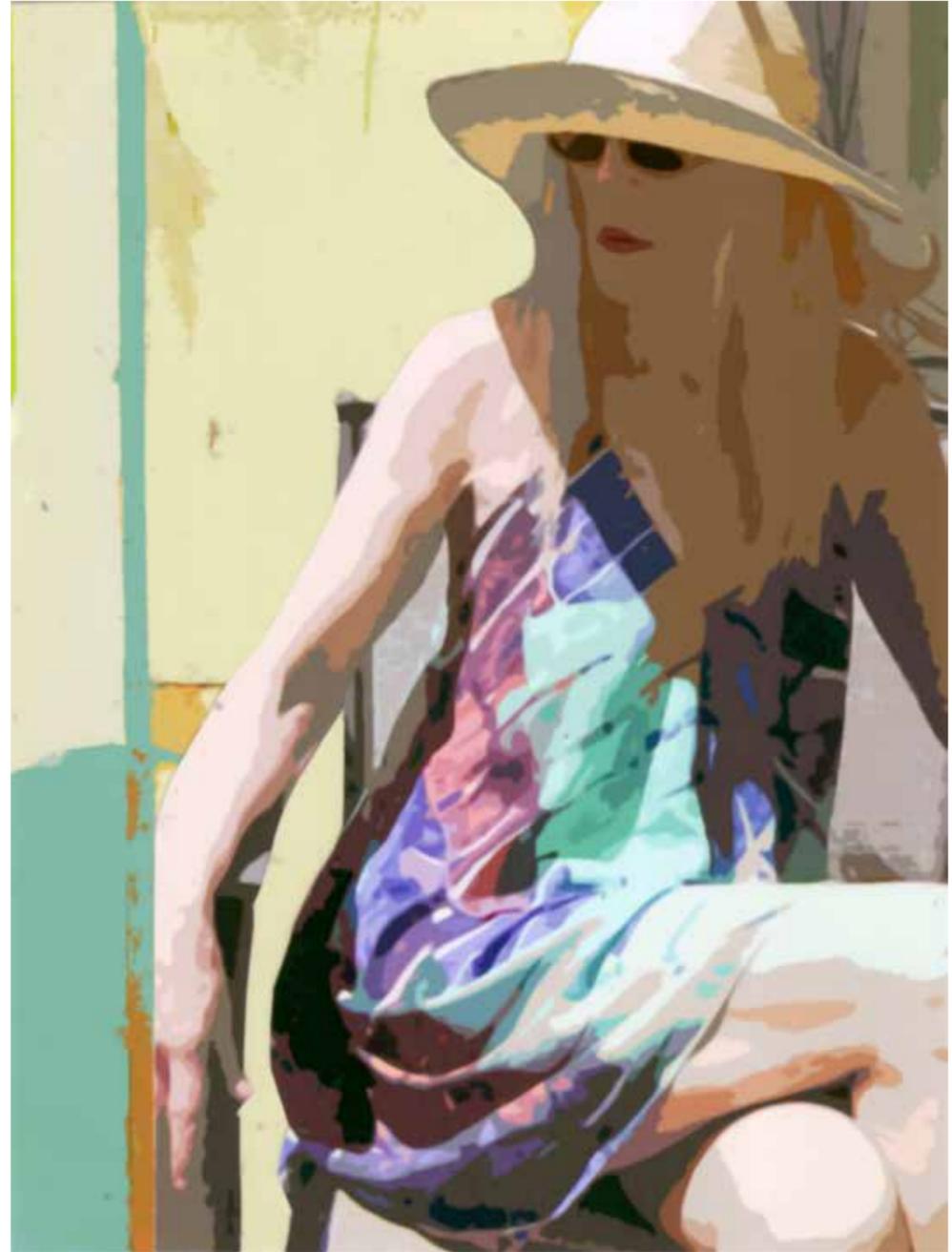
Collages

Study for Akimbo
9" x 7"
Collage
2014





Study for Persian Muse
9" x 7"
Collage
2015



Study for Aside
9" x 6.75"
Collage
2014



Study for Midday
7" x 7"
Collage
2013



Study for Spectator
7.5" x 9"
Collage
2013



Left II Right
8.25" x 6"
Collage
2015



Akimbo Variation
8.75" x 6.25"
Collage
2014



Purple Dress Variation
7.75" x 6"
Collage
2014



Purple Transitions
6.75" x 5.75"
Collage
2014

Aside Variation
8.75" x 6.75"
Collage
2014





Akimbo IV
9.75" x 6.5"
Collage
2014

Ginnie Gardiner

Biography

Ginnie Gardiner is a mid-career New York artist who has shown in numerous solo and group exhibits for 30 years. Gardiner graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1974. From 1978 to 2005 Ginnie lived in a Chelsea loft in New York City. In 2005 she moved upstate to Catskill, New York, where she and her husband renovated and restored the Catskill Lyceum, a Federal era building located in the historic Village of Catskill. This large, light filled home, studio and courtyard has inspired her recent figural and landscape work.

Style

Gardiner's distinctive style of color notes of optically mixed oil paints produces shimmering, figurative abstractly coherent works. Gardiner cites the American Modernists and 2nd generation New York School Artists and specifically Alex Katz, Louisa Matthiasdottir and Lois Dodd, with their reductive treatment of form and clarity of light, as influences. "Of course each artist has a distinctive way of unsettling our habits of seeing. With the sunlit stillness of her paintings, Gardiner seizes our attention and holds it with pictorial subtleties that show us, by stages, that stillness is not stasis. Presenting a precisely calibrated balance between figurative images and the harmonies of sheer form, each of her paintings oscillates between these two ways of seeing. Subliminal at first, this oscillation becomes conscious as we begin to see ourselves seeing. Encouraging us to be aware of how we make sense of the raw data of vision, Gardiner reminds us of our responsibility for the look—and the meaning—of our world." excerpt from "Sunlit Stillness: Ginnie Gardiner's Transformative Vision," Carter Ratcliff, 2014.

Statement

"My working method since the mid 1990s' has been to create equivalent color palettes from my collage and montage studies for translation into the medium of oil paint. In all of my paintings I have sought color mastery and color is the subject of my work. Both Josef Albers and Charles W. Hawthorne were obsessed with creating the illusion of transparency in the opaque medium of oil paint. Both their teachings and their daily practice continue to inspire me today."

www.ginniegardiner.com



\$20.00

ISBN 978-1-5323-0914-4

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