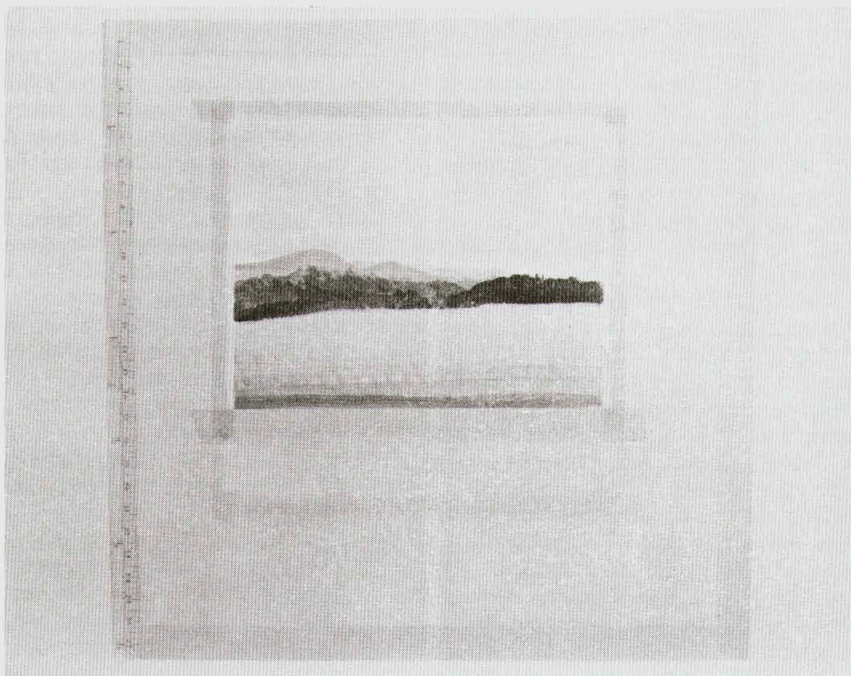


Wadsworth Atheneum
November 26, 1980 through
January 25, 1981

Sylvia Plimack Mangold
MATRIX 62

Untitled, 1977



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Sylvia Plimack Mangold takes special delight in the innovations and achievements of the traditional masters of art history. She unhesitatingly acknowledges that their efforts are a continuing source of inspiration to her.

Her admiration for James Abbott McNeil Whistler (1834-1903) makes perfect sense. Whistler sought to persuade viewers to experience a painting as a painting, not only as the representation of particular content-laden objects. It is useful to remember that the reduction of three-dimensional subject matter into paint on a two-dimensional, flat rectangular surface was for several centuries an unself-conscious, unquestioned convention. Though his theories were radical, Whistler's own efforts to change this convention met with only modest public success: his much admired Arrangement in Gray and Black (1871) is still better known as "Whistler's Mother".

The elusive distinctions between illusion and reality in art remain a lively issue today and Mangold eagerly joins in this historic debate. Her drawings and paintings, well-informed by the work of Jasper Johns and conversant with the issues of minimal and conceptual art, confront us with this same essential paradox in uniquely contemporary terms.

To this end Mangold has tenaciously explored the juxtaposition of geometry and nature in her work. The six drawings and eight paintings in this MATRIX exhibition sample the consequences of these explorations over the past nine years. In the early seventies Mangold contrasted painstakingly calculated measurements of real spaces, the straightedge of architecture and the rectangularity of the canvas with the warmth of various wood grains and the subtleties and softness of sunlight passing through a nearby window or reflected off a mirrored surface (e.g. Opposite Corners, 1973).

As Mangold moved from the portrayal of actual interior spaces

to fabricated situations she brought into view certain much relied upon tools of her trade. In Golden Rule on Light Floor (1975) and Exact Rules on Dark and Light Floor (1975) Mangold's introduction of the ruler, in her own words, "reaffirms the edge of the picture plane." The rulers, which measure the paintings themselves in actual inches, mark a decisive move "closer to ideas about the physical reality of the canvas."

Specificity, in other words, is shifted from an actual floor in Mangold's studio to the surface of the work itself. This idea is further advanced with the subsequent portrayal of graph paper and masking tape which "keep the frontality and imply a space in front of the picture plane."

The artist's intentions are clear:

In my recent work I have deliberately developed the deception of appearances. All the elements in the new work are constructed from paint:

1. The masking tape is paint looking like tape.
2. The rulers are paint looking like rulers.
3. The paper fastened by tape is paint made to look like paper.

My work is not about fooling the eye, but about questioning the nature of painting and thereby the nature of levels of reality. It is my dialogue with a particular set of circumstances which are not predictable when I begin each painting.

The only element which is true to itself is the paint when it is applied as a covering on a flat field.

The painted rulers, masking tape and graph paper provided Mangold with the same stability and control previously offered by the structure of the floor. This was important to her. Secure in the effectiveness of these studio-found straightedges she was then free to "puncture the picture plane, to imply distant space"

with an outdoor landscape (e.g. Untitled, 1977). The landscape, however, is presented with characteristically deft ambiguity: it is both the expansive view out Mangold's window and, as the masking tape insists, but a piece of paper taped onto the surface of the support.

Mangold's strategy in recent years evinces a rare combination of intelligence, risk and skill. She heightens illusion to the breaking point and, at the same time, employs devices which emphatically assert the true nature of the surface of each work. It is, of course, an exquisite irony that these same devices which are so didactically useful to the artist and so reliable--the graph paper, masking tape and rulers--are, in fact, bold deceptions in themselves. The viewer comes full circle to the realization that illusion is delusion. Reality, it must be acknowledged, is Mangold's arsenal of pencils, paint, paper and canvas.

Mangold's fruitful experimentation has continued. In 1979, having carefully considered the light and color of various seasons in the fields beneath her studio, she turned her attention to a most difficult task--the landscape at night. In search of greater luminosity and range Mangold switched from acrylic to oil.

Evident over the past few years is Mangold's growing inclination to incorporate into her work an open dialogue with the viewer about the process of how the work itself came into being. The double entendre Changing Colors (1977) openly documents the artist's considerable frustrations and difficulties in rendering the correct colors of the fall landscape; Untitled (1979, Collection of Sol LeWitt) is a demonstration of how she paints the masking tape.

Said Mangold in 1978, "My primary concern for the works of the last two years has been that they have the appearance of becoming, and that despite all the deliber-

ate choices, they should look casual." Nevertheless, it is precisely the remarkable series of "deliberate choices" made by Mangold over the past decade that has led to such an impressive body of work.

Born in New York City in 1938, Sylvia Plimack Mangold attended Cooper Union and received a BFA from Yale University in 1961. She lives and works in Washingtonville, New York and is represented by the Frank Kolbert Gallery of New York City.

Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of MATRIX

All quotes are from remarks prepared by the artist for a panel discussion, The Conceptualization of Realism, at the College Art Association annual meeting, January 26, 1978, New York City.

Works in MATRIX:

Studio corner in the morning with window light across the floor, 1972, acrylic and pencil on paper, 9" x 12". Study for a painting; signed "For Herb and Dorothy." Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Floor at Noon (first version), 1972, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 30" x 30". From the collection of Sol LeWitt, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Study for Painting "Opposite Corners", 1973, acrylic and pencil on paper, 28½" x 23½". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Opposite Corners, 1973, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 78" x 63". Lent by Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, Susan Morse Hilles Fund.

Untitled, 1974, acrylic and pencil on paper, 18" x 24". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Untitled, 1975, acrylic and pencil on paper, 14" x 20". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Golden Rule on Light Floor, 1975, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 24" x 30". Lent by Andrew Mangold, Washingtonville, New York.

Two Exact Rules on Dark and Light Floor, 1975, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 24" x 30". Lent by Frank Kolbert Gallery, New York City.

Painted Graph Paper, 1976, acrylic and pencil on paper. From the collection of Sol LeWitt, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Untitled, 1977, pencil and acrylic on paper, 33½" x 43½". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Changing Colors, 1977, acrylic and pencil on canvas, 30" x 36". Lent by the Bendix Corporation, Southfield, Michigan.

Untitled, 1979, oil on masonite, 12½" x 17½". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Untitled, 1979, oil on canvas, 15" x 20". Lent by Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, New York City.

Untitled, 1979, oil on canvas, 24" x 24". From the collection of Sol LeWitt, courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Selected one-woman exhibitions:
Fischbach Gallery, NYC '74, '76;
Daniel Weinberg Gallery, San Francisco '74; Droll/Kolbert Gallery, NYC '78, '80; Annemarie Verna, Zurich, Switzerland '78; Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, Columbus '80; Young Hoffman Gallery, Chicago '80.

Selected group exhibitions:
Vassar College Art Gallery,
Poughkeepsie, NY Realism Now '68;
Fischbach Gallery, NYC Direct

Representation '69; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT 26 Contemporary Women Artists '71; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture '72; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT Seven Realists '74; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA Anonymous Was A Woman '74; The Clocktower, NYC (Institute for Art and Urban Resources) The Herbert and Dorothy Vogel Collection '75; Genesis Galleries, Ltd., NYC Close to Home '76; Rosa Esman Gallery, NYC Photonotations '77; Kassel, Germany Documenta VI '77; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY American Painting of the 1970s '78 (travelled); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Eight Artists: The Elusive Image '79.

Selected bibliography about Mangold:

Nochlin, Linda. "Some Women Realists, Part I," Arts Magazine, vol. 48, no. 5 (February '74), p. 46+.

Blau, Eve. "Sylvia Mangold," Seven Realists, Yale University Art Gallery, '74, p. 16+.

Kramer, Hilton. "Realism: 'The Painting Is Fiction Enough,'" The New York Times (Sunday, April 28, '74), Section D, p. 19+.

Dunham, Judith L. "Sylvia Mangold: Light, Rules, Floors," Artweek (September 25, '75), p. 6.

Lyons, Lisa. "Sylvia Plimack Mangold," Design Quarterly, nos. 111/112, '79 (in collaboration with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis), p. 35+.

Stevens, Mark. "Beautiful Deceptions," Newsweek, vol. 95, no. 12 (March 24, '80), p. 93+.

Siegel, Jeanne. "Sylvia Mangold at Droll/Kolbert," Art in America, vol. 68, no. 4 (April '80), p. 132+.

Bass, Ruth. "Sylvia Plimack Mangold," Artnews, vol. 79, no. 4 (April '80), p. 181.