

## A CONVERSATION BETWEEN BEVERLY FISHMAN AND MATTHEW BIRO

January 2009

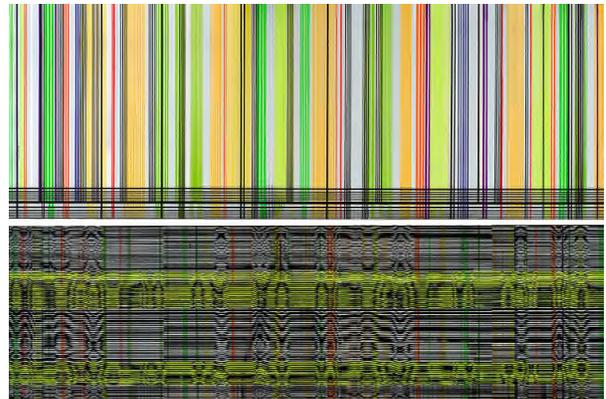
**Matthew Biro:** Describe your most recent work and tell us a little about how it has changed over the past few years.

**Beverly Fishman:** *My most recent paintings consist of silkscreen on polished stainless steel. They mark a significant development in the paintings that I have been making since 2002. Since that time, I have been making modular paintings on powder-coated aluminum with either silk-screen or vinyl-collage. All the paintings I make contain trace representational elements – morphed pharmaceutical logos, pill shapes, EKG and EEG patterns, letters evoking genetic code, acoustic sound files, and circuit board diagrams. This mostly appropriated imagery is chosen to get the viewer to think about the ways in which science and technology represent the human body and its processes today as well as how the pharmaceutical industry sells us the promise of changing our mental and physical states through chemistry. These associations, I hope, help to guide the viewer's experience of the formal aspects of the paintings, which use repeating patterns and contrasting and harmonizing colors to evoke a rhythmic and flickering experience of sensory overload. In addition, I hope the viewer will also think about how I combine the hand with the machine when making the paintings and how this reflects the growing connections between humans and technology that forms the primary theme of my work.*

**Biro:** And how do the new paintings on polished stainless steel mark and evolution of those concerns?

**Fishman:** *I have always been interested in having my paintings produce a strong physical reaction in the viewer. Through their optical patterns and color relations, I want them to produce a deeply visceral and drug-like effect and to prod the viewer to think about how science and medicine have historically gained more power to affect us. Since the surfaces of the new paintings are reflective, they now bring the image of the viewer's body and the environment as seen from his or her particular perspective into the*

*work itself. Not only does that make the formal experience of the painting more mutable and responsive to the viewer's movements in front of the work, but the reflections also emphasize one of my main conceptual preoccupations – that our minds and our bodies are constantly being pictured and affected through different forms of representation. When looking at my new paintings, I want you to see yourself existing in a technological space of medical imaging technologies, computer-driven manipulation processes, and chemical panaceas.*



**Biro:** Do you still think of yourself as producing discrete paintings or are you now thinking more about creating an overall environment?

**Fishman:** *While I still think in terms of producing discrete paintings, I don't see them as divorced from environmental concerns. Painting shouldn't just sit on a wall and inspire passive contemplation. Rather, painting should be active; it should energize and mobilize its site; and it should attempt to physically engage with its viewers. For this reason, I don't see a clear-cut division between paintings and environments; and, as a result, I have over the past few years also designed wallpaper upon which my works can be sited. Because the modular character of my paintings already moves towards activating the wall and transforming the experience of the work*

*into an environmental one, I see the creation of combined painting and wallpaper environments as a logical outgrowth of my process.*

**Biro:** Are there particular painters with whom you see yourself to be in dialogue with?



**Fishman:** *Well, generally, I think of my work as participating in a dialogue with multiple figures that came before me. In terms of my interest in the mechanization of the handmade painterly gesture, the most obvious inspirations are Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, although, if you look closely at my work, you'll also see a definite interest in Roy Lichtenstein as well. As far as the idea of appropriation goes, and the ways in which you can use the strategy to examine the myths that the mass media tries to sell you, Warhol is again the primary point of reference – although I've obviously learned a lot from the painters and photographers who emerged in the 1980s. Op Art has also been a huge*

*inspiration – I'm fascinated by the subtle strategies of Bridget Riley, Richard Anuszkiewicz, and Julian Stanczak, who created powerful effects with pattern and color. Minimalism and Postminimalism have also been important in terms of my engagement with industrial fabrication techniques. Finally, I've found the work of Ree Morton, Judy Pfaff, and Elizabeth Murray, who were my mentors, to be particularly inspiring because of the various ways in which they've pushed painting beyond its traditional limits without losing sight of the issues and concerns with which the medium has historically grappled. The important point, however, is that if you're going to make paintings, you need to be aware of the history of your medium and to the questions and solutions that have been raised before you.*

**Matthew Biro** is a writer, art critic, and Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Michigan. Among his many publications are articles and reviews for Contemporary (London), Art Papers (Atlanta, GA), and New Art Examiner (Chicago, IL). His first book, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1998. His new book, The Dada Cyborg: Figures of the New Human in Weimar Berlin, is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. This essay/conversation is one in a series of the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.

Images:

**Dividose: Flour Y.O.R.G.B.**, 2008, Silkscreen on polished stainless steel, 55-3/4 x 84 inches (2 panels)

**Beverly Fishman**, in her studio, Michigan.

#### ABOUT THE GALLERY

Bruno David Gallery is a contemporary art gallery and one of the most important places to see art in Saint Louis. The Gallery represents some of the best artists that Saint Louis has to offer, along with artists of national and international reputation. The editors of the St. Louis Magazine awarded the Gallery: *Best Gallery in St. Louis* in 2008. The gallery is located in the heart of the Grand Center arts district, directly opposite the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

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