MASH, 1978
Photograph: Eric Pollitzer
In Stanley's Barrow, 1976, the object is glimpsed through the triangular space of the shaped canvas, half buried in the grass. However, the paint, dragged and stirred, evokes the tactile presence of objects in the world, even when, as here, they are only partially seen. The sense of plastic bulk continues in Morley's new work, but the naturalistic object-references are opposed by his interest in a discursive mode.

In Christmas Tree (The Lonely Ranger Lost in the Jungle of Di-sires), 1979, Morley's title spells out an allegorical landscape that includes a train wreck, a toy train but a toy given substantial object-weight, a severed cobra, and a bunch of women's bare legs at the top of the picture, like a kind of Hopfroga chandelier. In MASH, 1978, we have the paradox of substantial paint used to depict a landscape of toys, as if Soutine were to paint children's games. Morley creates a kind of theater out of toys, animals, and dressed-up schematic figures: there is a sense of turbulent enactment, of psychic stress shaping both the scenario and the painting process.

Florida has been on Morley's mind for years. In 1974 he painted Miami Postcard, based on a fold-out postcard that had been ripped and crumpled. He simulated all the damage in a big, loose-jointed painting of multiple parts. He has returned to compact rectangularity, but preserves the ecstatic discontinuities internally as scale-changes and spatial jumps. One example of this is the high eye-level street scene that lurks at the center of Out Dark Spot, 1978. Recently Morley has been working in Florida, the source of the blazing birds and luxuriant foliage of the jungle of erotic desires.

Morley's work of the last 15 years represents a prolonged enquiry into the possibilities of representational art. To appreciate the speculative aspect of the new paintings, let us consider their place in his development. As a founding Photo-Realist, with The Empire Monarch (first version), 1965, he painted bright, clear polychrome images of ocean liners that resembled closely the photographs from which they were taken. The handling of paint matched his photographic models point-by-point, yet retained an organic suppleness of manual touch when viewed close up. In 1968 he paraphrased minutely Vermeer's Portrait of the Artist in his Studio and followed it in 1969 with Chateau, a painting based on a postcard of romantic European architecture. Thus he separated Photo-Realism from its common urban and technological themes, taking images of past culture as subject matter. (This may account for his absence from the special issue on Photo-Realism of Art In America, November-December, 1972, and his being downplayed in Linda Chase's Hyperrealism, 1975.)

In the late 60's Morley's closely-worked paint surface and composed presentation relaxed. He maintained photographic equivalences in composition and tonal values, but opened the work up by painterly inflections. This tendency culminated, to abbreviate a longer story, in 1971 with Los Angeles Yellow Pages. The painting is an image of the cover of a phone book in as ruinous condition as the Miami postcard: a tear runs through the cover picture of the city to make the painting a metaphor of earthquake. Expressionistic handling and catastrophic imagery mark many of Morley's paintings of the 70's. One variant of the theme of catastrophe was to repaint his early tranquil marines in situations of imagined disaster, such as a (toy) plane crashing on a (real) ocean liner, both bodies painted in the same way.

It will be seen from this chronological sketch that Morley is not given to the endless polishing of a single apple of style as many of the Photo-Realists are. On the contrary, Photo-Realism
is one episode in a development
to which the expressionistic
element is essential. He has
always pressed image and technique
beyond their accustomed points.
In the new paintings there is a
convergence, not a parallel, of
schematic drawing with natural-
istic pigment; of abbreviated
and derealised forms with a sense
of dense, full mass and color.
After having, more than anyone
else, concentrated time in paint-
ing to the instant of a camera's
click, he is now expanding art
discursively, into narrative,
allegory, and time.

Lawrence Alloway
Guest Curator
New York City
December 1979

Works in MATRIX:
Stanley's Barrow, 1976, oil on
canvas, 41\(\frac{1}{2}\)" x 47".

Parrots, 1978, oil on canvas,
47" x 58\(\frac{1}{2}\)".

MASH, 1978, oil on canvas, 36" x
48".

Out Dark Spot, 1978, oil on can-
vase, 72\(\frac{1}{2}\)" x 98 3/4".

Christmas Tree (The Lonely Ran-
ger Lost in the Jungle of Di-
sires), 1979, oil on canvas,
72" x 108".

All works are on loan courtesy of
the Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New
York City.
Selected one-man exhibitions:
Kornblee Gallery, NYC '57, '64, '67, '69; SUNY, Stony Brook, Art Gallery As Studio, '72; Galerie Gerald Piltzer, Paris '73; Stefanotti Gallery, NYC '73, '74; Clocktower, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, NYC '76; Galerie Jollenbeck, Köln, West Germany '77; Galerie Junka, Amsterdam, Holland '77; Nancy Hoffman Gallery, NYC '79; Suzanne Hilberry Gallery, Birmingham, MI '79.

Selected group exhibitions:
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC The Photographic Image, '66; Sao Paolo Biennial, Brazil Environment USA, '67; Vassar College Art Gallery, Realism Now, '68; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC 22 Realists, '70; Riverside Museum, NYC Paintings from the Photo, '70; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago Radical Realism, '71; Wurtembergischer Kunstverein, Frankfurt Kunstverein, Kunsthalle Museumverein, Wuppertal, Germany Amerikanischer Fotorealismus, '72-'73; Serpentine Gallery, London, England Photo-Realism, '73; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark Ekstrem Realisme, '73; Akademie der Kunst, Berlin, West Germany Downtown Manhattan, '76; Kassel, West Germany Documenta VI, '77.

Selected bibliography about Morley:

Calas, Nicolas and Elena. Icons and Images of the 60's, E.P. Dutton (New York) '71, p. 157+.
Perreault, John. Review. The Village Voice, October 4, '73.


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