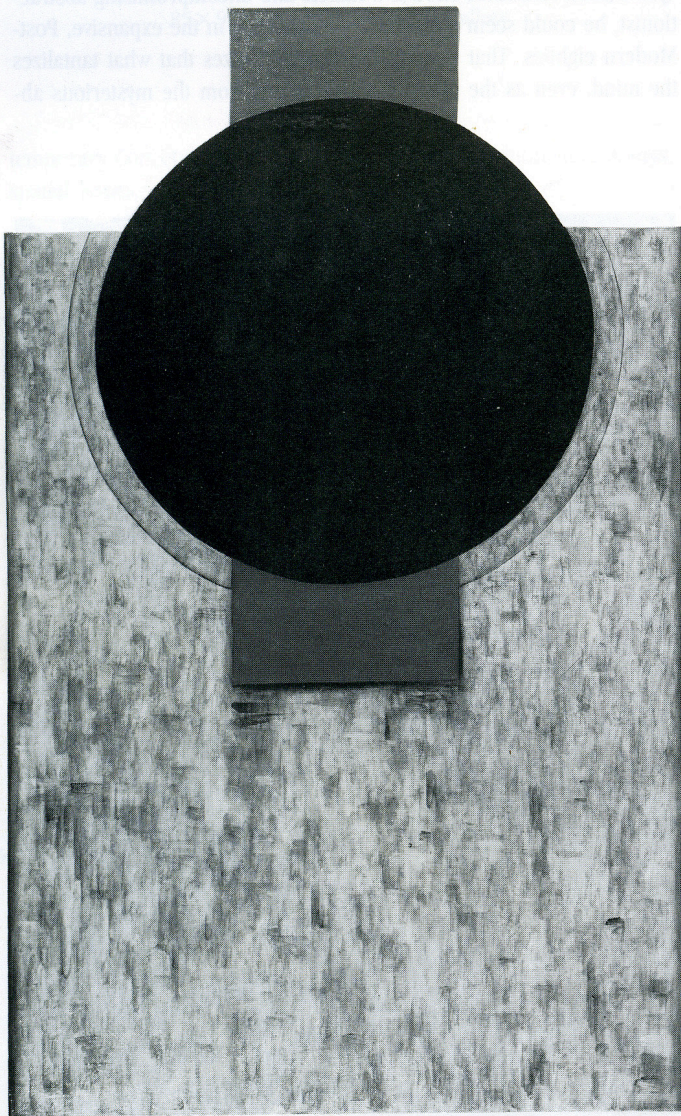


sense of texture to declare the hand of the pictorial wizard responsible for such marvels of facture and design. While sight may alert the tactile sense to expect a richly varied surface where, on the left in *Solomon's Justice*, the painting seen here, the artist has given a spectacular display of almost erotically excited brushwork, or to feel the ridged lines piled up along the edges of the tape used to paint the thin, cream-colored rod spanning the center field, actual touch discloses that, throughout, the plane is of a uniform, almost filmic smoothness. But even before approaching close enough to make physical contact with the picture, the viewer may note that the various parts of the incident-packed painting have been unified not only by compositional expertise but also by a strange bath of strobe light. In other words, what one seems to be looking at is not so much an oil painting on canvas as a photograph of one, with every element of its palpable reality resolved upon the same utterly flat, impersonal plane, just as in photography. But the complexities do not end there, for *Solomon's Justice* has in fact been hand-painted by Reed, who however used special emulsions that allow a surreally even dispersal of paint. Thus, impastoed though a passage may *look*, the strokes actually sit *in* the surface rather than *on* it. By appropriating the materials, if not the process, of a rival medium, Reed has denied his handling the clichéd immediacy of emotive self-reference

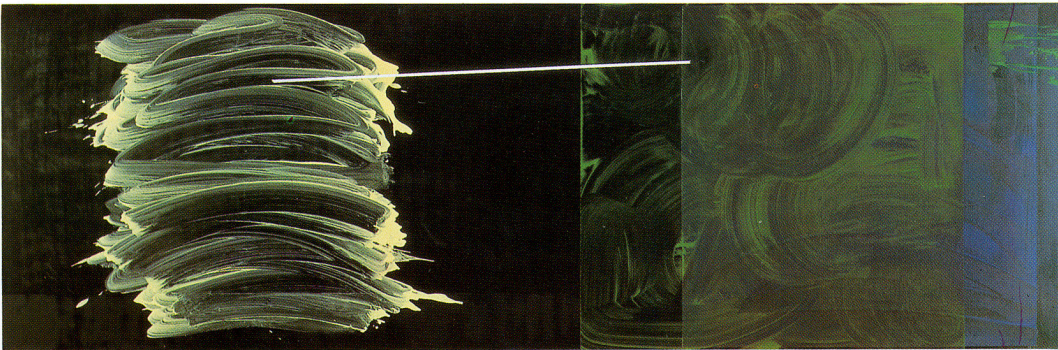
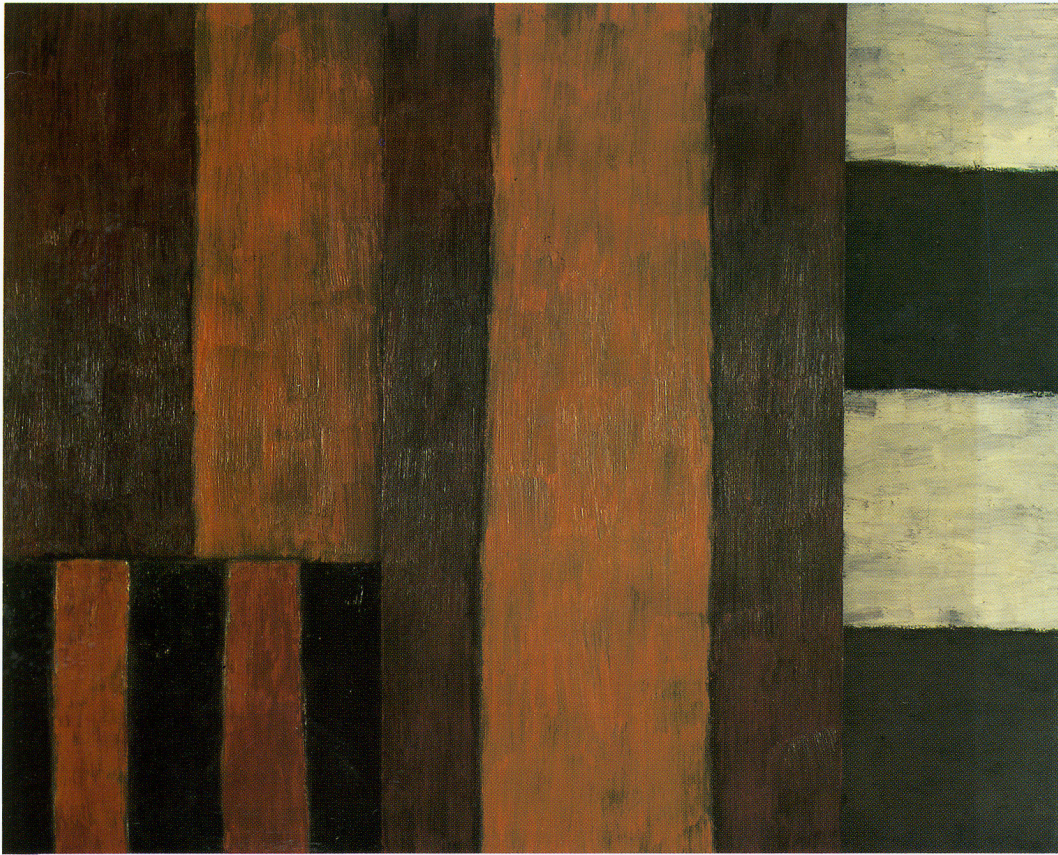
and, through unexpected anomaly, generated a mystery altogether at variance with the picture's overall lucidity of form. Right away, this implies a content more substantial than might have been assumed, related in part to a superficially concealed reality that the painting, far from its apparent instantaneity, required considerable time and thought to create. Reed has said: "I want there to be a sense of story in my paintings: that something has happened and is about to happen, that a crucial action is taking place." The story, of course, is how the painting came into being over time, and how, over time, the viewer comes to perceive the self-contradictory, and thus life-reflecting, nature of the creative process. Lying in the background and enriching the content of *Solomon's Justice* is Reed's devotion to the art of Caravaggio (fig. 9), a world of light and dark—where a crucial action is taking place, after something has happened and is about to happen—unified in a single, counterpoised moment of dramatic conflict.

RON JANOWICH (b. 1948) Among eighties abstractionists, one of the most original appropriators is Ron Janowich, who in the black oil technique of Flemish and Dutch Old Masters, from Jan van Eyck in the fifteenth century to Rubens and Rembrandt in the seventeenth, found a lucent means of endowing Constructivist form with a spatial and spiritual fullness rarely encountered in modern secular times. Along with his medium, Janowich has also adopted from ancient traditions a set of forms and formats that resonate with mystical associations, all the while that they also remain as blockily palpable and objectlike as anything in Minimalism. Although a true "painter's painter," with an expansive technical and conceptual range, Janowich tends to develop his art within the context of two complementary series, one as hard-edged, angular, cerebral, and direct as a Byzantine icon and the other round-headed, painterly, elusive, and Rembrandtesque (plate 313; fig. 1068). With color providing their active principle, however, the two series converge toward a unified, if ineffable, meaning, as jeweled intensity ignites geometrical coolness on the one hand, while, on the other, dusky ochers and lambent saffrons bank the fires of a richly sensuous facture. Either way, this is powerful color, suspended in glaze layered upon glaze of clear, crystalline substance that, like a prism, traps and refracts light until the hue it emits glows with a mysterious radiance as full-bodied as it is immaterial. Reinforcing the magical effect is the artist's masterly brushwork, which seems capable of applications as smooth and enameled as Robert Mangold's, as dynamically curvilinear as a Delacroix drawing, or slablike and loosely hatched in the manner of High Analytic Cubism. But whatever the stroke, Janowich so employs it as to reify the flatness and rectilinear axes of the plane, while evoking a sonorous, light-filled volume, a volume that can be as unspecific as an emblem or as chambered as a late Turner interior. Consistent with the artist's command of light, color, space, and surface is his sense of scale, a faculty comparable in painting to the poet's "true ear." It can be seen in the two paintings here, both monumental in impact, even though one stands seven and a half feet tall and the other measures only thirteen inches high. Such are the dualities and resolutions of this lavishly nuanced art that while savoring one of the most delectable painterly cuisines to be served up since Matisse, the viewer risks being rewarded less with a hedonist *frisson* than with a moving, poetic exposition of the strange, unifying presence felt to inhabit a world torn between dross, delicious matter and an elevated, transcendental vision.

SUSAN LAUFER (b. 1950) In her search for meaningful content beyond that offered by modernist rationality, Susan Laufer has traveled to Afghanistan and Iran, looked at primitive cultures, Surrealism, and Jungian archetypes, and freshly created a kind of encrusted, scored,



1068. RON JANOWICH. *Untitled*. 1985. Black oil on linen, 90 × 54". Private collection



top: Colorplate 311. SEAN SCULLY. *To Want*. 1985. 8' $\frac{1}{8}$ " \times 9' $\frac{5}{8}$ " \times 9' $\frac{3}{8}$ ". The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Justin Smith Purchase Fund

above: Colorplate 312. DAVID REED. *Solomon's Justice, #200*. 1981–83. 3 \times 9'. Collection The Chase Manhattan Bank, North America

left: Colorplate 313. RON JANOWICH. *St. Augustine*. 1984. Black oil on linen, 13 \times 9". Collection Marilyn and Herman Schwartzman, New York