

Skyline

January, 1979

The New York Architecture and Design Calendar

In the fall of 1977, an exhibition at Artists Space in Manhattan entitled *Pictures* introduced the work of five young artists involved in the production and manipulation of recognizable images. As curator Douglas Crimp stated in his catalogue, the artists—Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith—all work with the image as a culturally coded, conventional phenomenon, rather than a natural, analogical reproduction of an object in the world. As such, the picture itself and not what it depicts functions as the subject of their work.

Now, nearly a year and a half later, the Whitney Museum has at least recognized the existence of this extremely significant aspect of contemporary art with its exhibition *New Image Painting*, curated by Richard Marshall, on view through January 28. Although Marshall's catalogue essay depends heavily upon that for the Artists Space exhibition—sometimes to the point of paraphrase—none of the artists from that show have been included. Instead, Marshall's selection—Nicholas Africano, Jennifer Bartlett, Denise Green, Michael Hurson, Neil Jenney, Lois Lane, Robert Moskowitz, Susan Rothenberg, David True, and Joe Zucker—proves highly problematic; these artists fail to demonstrate any shared concerns in their approach to the image, despite Marshall's assertion that "the artists assembled here are related more in sensibility than in style, and an aim of this exhibition is to present their paintings with a view toward understanding them individually rather than collectively."

Individually, then, some of the work is quite provocative. Michael Hurson's paintings juxtapose the conventional techniques of the illustrator or cartoonist with the issues at stake in so-called high art and thus whimsically pose serious questions about the status of the image. Robert Moskowitz's *Swimmer* is an extraordinarily beautiful, ambiguous, and equivocal image which hovers between abstraction and representation, between the painting as a powerfully present material object and as a sign (for an absence).

It is unfortunate that the rest of the exhibition does not come up to the standards set by such work; the Whitney offers us an uneven and unfocused view of the role of image-making in contemporary art.
