

# Alexander and Bonin

Yau, John. "In Conversation"  
*The Brooklyn Rail* (December – January 2010)

## **THE BROOKLYN RAIL** CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

### INCONVERSATION

**SYLVIA PLIMACK MANGOLD with John Yau**

by John Yau

On the day before her exhibition *Natural Sympathies: Sylvia Plimack Mangold and Lovis Corinth Works on Paper* opened at Alexander and Bonin, Art Editor John Yau sat down with the artist at the gallery to discuss her recent work.

**John Yau (Rail):** This exhibition pairs your work with that of Lovis Corinth, a German artist (1858-1925). All of Corinth's work in the exhibition comes from your collection. Known as the "Rembrandt of Germany," he painted many self-portraits, sometimes in costume, and always did one on his birthday. He also painted scenes and figures from the Bible, as well as landscapes. In 1911 he had a stroke, and learned to paint with his other hand. He does many works in different media of Walchensee, a lake bordered by mountains, where he had a house. Although he is highly revered in Germany, his work is not well-known in America. For one thing, he is neither French nor an Impressionist. When did you start looking at his work?

**Sylvia Plimack Mangold:** I started looking at Corinth when I was making the drypoints and transitioning my work into landscapes. I was doing the drypoints outside, directly from observation. I don't remember where I saw my first Corinth. Maybe it was at Galerie St. Etienne, because I have always liked twentieth-century German painting and prints. He was before Expressionism, but his work has all this visceral emotion that's easy to access.

**Rail:** Both Cézanne and Corinth based their work on direct observation. Cézanne is regarded as an objective artist, while Corinth is more subjective in his work without becoming expressionist in some overt way.

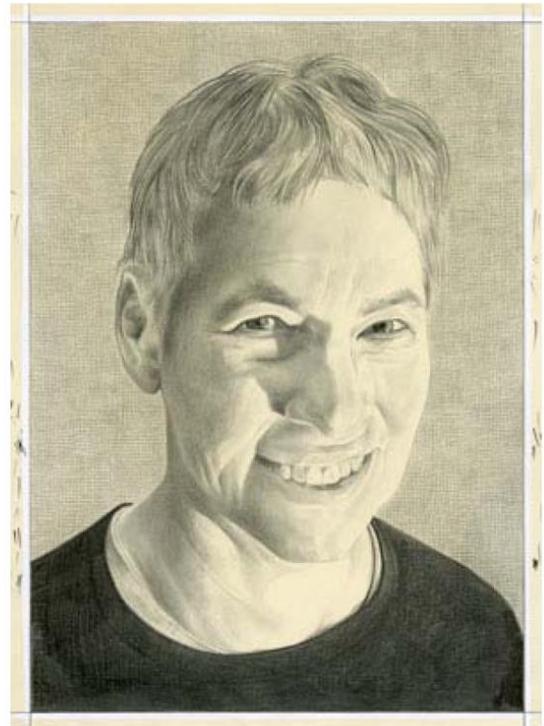
**Mangold:** Cézanne and Corinth are very important figures for me. For Cézanne, it's the struggle that he experienced in working, which I experience when I'm working, and the sense of real space he achieves. And with Corinth, it's the bravado, the emotion, and also this sense of real space by abstract means.

**Rail:** Corinth is responding to the landscape and making marks; he's not composing but interacting with the situation and the changes going on in it.

**Mangold:** I think I compose as I work on the trees but in a subtle way. I did compose the earlier landscapes by using the tape image to crop the rectangle. With the floor and the mirror paintings, which were strictly composed, I did drawings first and figured out the size of the canvas and then enlarged the drawing to scale. And then I did those ruler pieces—they were not so composed, but they were more planned than what I ended up doing with the tape landscape pieces.

**Rail:** The night ones.

**Mangold:** It is kind of funny because the landscape tape pieces were composed, but on a large scale. I would go at it painting, as though I was making a landscape painting, and then I would freeze something at a certain stage in its progress and then I would re-trace my steps to paint the tapes and show the process of making that painting. But as I started painting directly from landscape without all that—you know, the rulers and the tapes or any of those conceptual tools—I would paint from left to right or up and down depending on where my eye went and how the light was. If the light is too strong, I try to focus away from the light or something like that. So it was a long transition but now, with these tree paintings, I just start working. But, of course, I'm painting the same painting over and over again so I don't need to compose it because it's so much in my psyche.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

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Lovis Corinth, "In the Zoo" (1920).

**Rail:** It's like each tree is a friend.

**Mangold:** But because it's a tree and because its nature is changing all the time.

**Rail:** It seems to me that you always see it fresh.

**Mangold:** I have to, because the tree is growing, the light is changing. There are all these external factors that are not the same. Actually the tree's got strangulated roots, which meant it wasn't getting nourished in a normal way so, for a year or two, the leaves got smaller.

**Rail:** I noticed something odd about the leaves.

**Mangold:** They're too small for a maple tree.

**Rail:** I was wondering about that.

**Mangold:** They are too small!

**Rail:** That came right across.

**Mangold:** Yeah, maple leaves should be like this size [holds hands up]. And these leaves are like this size.

**Rail:** You are translating into paint what's right in front of you. I realized that maybe I haven't looked so carefully at things. Like, are the leaves that size or not? I think it's interesting that you have always liked German painting, because in New York, the Museum of Modern Art is a Francophile museum. It's not a museum that gives even remotely near the same attention to German painting as it gives to French painting. And to come to German painting requires an effort, doesn't it?

**Mangold:** I guess my introduction was through reproductions, so the graphic work does not suffer the way painting does in reproduction. And I went to High School of Music and Art, so I was exposed to all kinds of painting early on. I also had this communist background or, a very progressive background that I came out of...

**Rail:** Leftist, Jewish, Socialist...

**Mangold:** Leftist, communist. And I grew up in a neighborhood that was intellectual and progressive. A lot of communists lived in my neighborhood. I mean Eugene Thompson, the secretary of the Communist Party, lived two doors down. It was from his daughter that I got my first oil paints. I traded my trading card collection for a set of oil paints. I was aware of the suffering and injustice in the world. My pictures were from my imagination but when I looked at art in a museum I was interested in pictures of human suffering. There was a necessity about art for me personally—and then the combination of my background, that world that I came out of—was one reason why I was attracted to strong graphic art.

**Rail:** Like Käthe Kollwitz?

**Mangold:** Yes, this caring for the expression of people's troubles or suffering. That's probably part of it. And also it was what I saw in the homes I knew. My parents had a Charles White lithograph in our house. But I think the black and white graphic quality was what I found so attractive. It grabs your attention rather than, you know, subtlety is something that I really started to understand after I was married to Bob [Robert Mangold].

**Rail:** You said that subtlety is something you learned later, but it seems to me that in your work there's always this struggle between the Cézanne and the Corinth, the objective and the subjective, although I don't see a heavy hand.

**Mangold:** I can have a heavy hand.

**Rail:** Where is that heavy hand?

**Mangold:** Maybe it's this way. Maybe what I think is a heavy hand isn't really heavy, but I feel a little self-conscious when my work gets very bold. So, it's good sometimes for me to step back and give myself time to process what I'm doing when that's



"Ruler Reflection" (1977)

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happening because sometimes it's really good but I want to hide it. I tend to think that's a gender issue. But that self-portrait, that very black and white self-portrait happened, and I think that I'm really happy with that.



"Floor with Laundry #2" (1970)

**Rail:** I like the graphic boldness of that self-portrait a lot. It's interesting to see, like the water print, and the two new mezzotints of leaves. You keep pushing yourself into something that you haven't done before and there's no sense that you "know how to do it" when you start.

**Mangold:** Well that's a refreshing thing. That's a way of getting new energy into the work because you have this new thing to struggle with. You never really want to have it slick, like you have done it before. But that's not why I did that. I did that because Doris [Simmelink] handed me these mezzotint plates and said "see what you can do"; a lot of times even when I was very young, I think new materials were always inspiring. A new set of crayons or a new set of paints or some kind of new paints. I love art supplies and paper, all kinds of paper, and I think I love a lot of the different disciplines that are visual.

**Rail:** You seem to have made every kind of print—aquatints, woodcuts, lithographs, and now mezzotints.

**Mangold:** I have had trouble with lithographs because I like to put in and take out, and with a lithograph it is very hard to take out.

**Rail:** In these new paintings, one thing I notice is that they are more open, like the edges around the tree and leaves are just left, and you see this more immediately as paint than as thing. In some places the light is dissolving the leaves, but, at the same time, the paint seems to almost be dissolving. I feel like that is a bold thing for you to do given how, in your earlier work, everything was incredibly finished, tight and perfect.

**Mangold:** That's why I did those paintings where the paint goes over the tape, which, as you know, was paint—I was trying to get away from that enclosed feeling. I wanted to have it expand beyond the edges. The tape reminded me of the edges but bringing the paint over the tape was a demonstration that it was paint not subject, and it also opens up the picture plane. With the tree paintings, part of it is that that I'm really starting the painting probably in the center and working out. There's one painting that I started in August, midsummer maybe, and by the time I finished it in October, the leaves were changing color and falling off the tree, so I could either try to finish that painting that summer or leave it. If I finished it next summer, I would have to repaint the whole painting because I want to keep that skin uniform. But the painting's finished—it just took me a couple of weeks and some distance from the painting to let it be that way.

**Rail:** It's about time, about being in time, and being true to the time as it's changing.

**Mangold:** If you look at the painting that's just next to it, the leaves go right out to the edge and everything is painted more uniformly because it was done earlier in the summer so I didn't have that seasonal transition happening.

**Rail:** If you think of the mirror paintings and the floor paintings, there is an awareness of time because of the way the light is in those paintings, but the light is frozen on the floor. In these new paintings you seem to be trying to get the light to be more fluid, more in tune with the fact that it's changing or you feel like the tree is changing as you're looking at it, because it changes across the surface. These paintings are not fixed in the way the floor paintings or the mirror paintings were. It seems to me that those landscapes that you did with the tape become the breakthrough where you start to think in a different way.

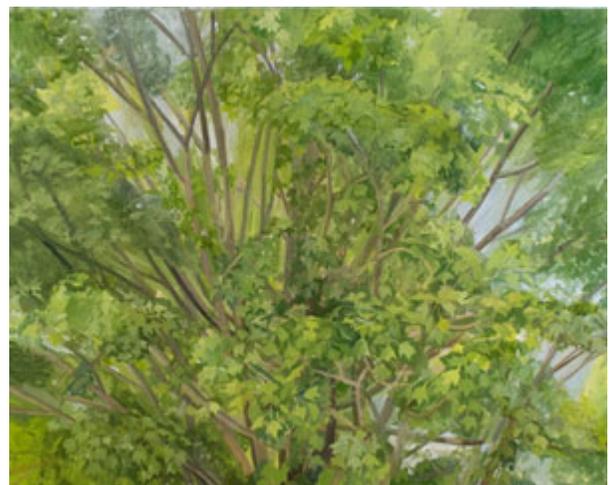
**Mangold:** I think that's true. The floors with light were about the way light is illusive and the floors or rulers are measured, and the poetry between those two elements became my subject.

**Rail:** You also once said to me—I don't know if you remember this or not—you said that you thought the landscape paintings with tape were too romantic.

**Mangold:** I do think some of them are, especially some of the sunsets. Still I had a good time with that palette and I would paint those skies numerous times until I felt I had it right.

**Rail:** It was a heartfelt admission.

**Mangold:** I don't really want to be a romantic painter, but I do like romantic painting. I mean, Caspar David Friedrich, but he has this other quality too. To me romantic means calendar art. I don't like that connection to anything commercial.



"Maple Tree Detail 2008" (2008)

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I'm really about looking, to see what I might not see with the eye but then discover as I paint.

**Rail:** It's interesting to hear you say that you like romantic painting because I don't think of your paintings as romantic. When you said that to me, I had just seen your show at the Albright-Knox, and for me it was the first time that I saw the tape paintings.

**Mangold:** That's not romantic painting. But nature can be very romantic; it's hard to get away from it. And the tapes function as transparencies and foreground, so they bring another dimension to nature: the nature of painting.

**Rail:** And you are trying to deal with that fact in your work.

**Mangold:** Without soiling nature, without bringing something strange or foreign into it. That's why I started doing black-and-white watercolors, for example, because of the green. As much as I love using all these greens, it is interesting to try and translate everything into black and white without doing it in a photographic way.

**Rail:** You try not to be photographic while, at the same time, you try to be absolutely true to the thing you are looking at.

**Mangold:** At the same point I was trying to figure out how am I using my grays and my blacks. Here I am, working away, but it ends up that the blacks are what come forward, and the lights go back, and I didn't have a plan. I just sat down with these pots of different grays and went to work and so you are using your brushes and drawing and painting and letting it—actually this is a point that I think is really critical for me—is that the process of working comes before the idea and then I might get an idea as I'm working,

**Rail:** I just saw a watercolor of a floor Yvonne Jacquette has and I was thinking about it and wondering which came first. In some sense it felt like there was an idea of what to do and then you meticulously followed your way through it.

**Mangold:** I do it meticulously. But that's not to say it's really planned. The structure, the drawing is planned but the painting part is done as I studied each floorboard. It's sort of an odd combination of my vision. I think I'm doing something. That watercolor Yvonne has is very abstract. I thought I was being very realistic.

**Rail:** Yvonne and I talked about that. She said, "Don't you think that it's totally abstract?" And my daughter, who is eight, said, "But it's a floor!" [*Laughter*]. It's interesting that you are so meticulous and that you have a show with Lovis Corinth that come from your collection because I don't think of him as being meticulous—there's bravado to what he does.

**Mangold:** But he's very specific.

**Rail:** He's very specific at the same time. In that way he is not an expressionist.

**Mangold:** No, he's not. It's not a generalized thing. It's very particular. Everything he does is very traditionally based. So, that's part of it.

**Rail:** You can be traditional and new, or fresh, let's put it that way.

**Mangold:** Well, it depends on what tradition you are talking about. I mean, Corinth wasn't coming out of an abstract tradition. I think I am probably a very abstract painter at heart. Well, you know, Sol Lewitt always said that Bob Mangold was the realist and I was the abstract artist because he deals with this line, color, shape—they don't refer to anything else. And what I do is more abstract—it's translating something that's out there to a flat surface. It is a process that's very abstract.

**Rail:** There is a small painting that Bob Ryman has of yours that seems to declare that it is the last abstract painting that you made.

**Mangold:** Oh, that one. The one that says "cancel" on it.

**Rail:** Can you talk about that particular painting?

**Mangold:** When I went to Yale, and for one or two years when we had studios on the Bowery, I was doing abstract paintings—red, yellow, blue paintings. I loved painting that way. It just seemed like the greatest activity in the world. Moving, shifting planes, creating space, letting your body determine what was happening. It was very physical. So it just seemed natural when in that little painting—I guess I was pregnant when I did the painting—I had started scaling down the paintings. Instead of painting it out, I wrote "cancel."

**Rail:** Did you change your work after that?

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**Mangold:** I think I started doing portraits actually. I did portraits of my friends. Self-portraits. They were like Alex Katz—I was influenced by his work, which I admired.

**Rail:** And you changed again?

**Mangold:** Yeah, I don't quite remember, how, oh, I know when. After our first child was born. Bob and I were superintendents of an apartment house, and I was busy running the apartment house and taking care of the baby. I didn't have much time for painting, and I did get very depressed. I thought, "Oh, now I am a mom and I have all these jobs to do." Then, a month later, I started going to Central Park with the baby in a baby carriage and as he slept I would do these watercolors of apartment houses and the park. Small things, and one thing led to another. So I would say the work really changed after our first child was born.

**Rail:** What's the date, Sylvia?

**Mangold:** It would be 1963, the year Kennedy was shot.

**Rail:** At that point Minimalism and Pop Art are dominant, big.

**Mangold:** That's right.

**Rail:** And you go in neither direction.

**Mangold:** I liked Fairfield Porter. The Tibor de Nagy Gallery was right down the street from us. I remember looking forward to those Porter shows.

**Rail:** Who was seen as really not in the mix—he was a very independent painter. And yet you paint so differently.

**Mangold:** I do. It was the way he just painted his surroundings and people. The way he dealt with the world. He was a writer and was very involved in abstract painting. I think that I felt some relationship to him as opposed to the guys painting those big paintings. I didn't connect so much to mainstream art. But it was all around me. We saw all the shows and knew everyone.

**Rail:** That's what I'm talking about.

**Mangold:** No, I didn't connect. I loved going to the shows and being part of the circle of friends that was then. But no, I didn't, it wasn't what I wanted to make. It didn't have the connection to me; I wouldn't know where to take it, or how to start.

**Rail:** That always seemed to me, or what was always interesting about your work to me is that you weren't mainstream from the beginning. You found a way to be yourself.

**Mangold:** That's not to say that people who are mainstream are not themselves.

**Rail:** But you somehow found this way and it wasn't reactionary. Your work absorbed, but didn't become like what else was going on. In your work you are clearly aware of conceptual art, minimalism. In the ruler paintings and works on paper I felt that you were commenting on conceptual art—that you were saying that conceptual art can be turned into painting.

**Mangold:** It was also conceptual in a sense that I would say about relationships. I was involved especially then in relationships, and truth, and how you experience something and how you can experience the same thing any number of ways. In the end, the kind of decisions that I made that I liked, that were most personal, were color decisions like the metallic quality of the exact ruler on this vinyl material, so that the palette is more of a decisive part of the work than what seems to be conceptual.

**Rail:** It gave you a way to think in painting terms. And that's always been foremost in everything you've done—how can you think of this in painting terms.

**Mangold:** Yes, I think in terms of painting. I'm not an original thinker, but I think I'm an original painter. The painting language comes naturally to me, I understand and think through this form. And it is where I feel the most freedom.



"The Maple Tree" (1998)

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**Rail:** I guess because I'm trying to get at something here—people seem to think that you have to be an original thinker, which is often predefined, but they are unable to acknowledge, much less pay attention, to the fact that you can be an original painter.

**Mangold:** But you can.

**Rail:** It seems to me that that way of thinking about painting is neglected or overlooked.

**Mangold:** That's because we live in this media time where artists are expected to write articles and talk about their work, sell their work, and promote their work. The thing is painting is a language but it never really ever translates. I love the world of verbal language, but it's not what I do.

**Rail:** As someone who writes about art, it's always interesting to me the relationship between language and the thing you are writing about, because it seems important to acknowledge that you can't domesticate it. If you can domesticate it, maybe there is something wrong with the thing you are writing about.

**Mangold:** The media does dilute everything. Although it also integrates it into our time so that it becomes the signature of a generation or particular moment in history. There are artists who never seem overexposed by domestication. I guess that's the point: a really great artist can't be domesticated.

**Rail:** Right. Exactly. You are talking about primary experiences—I mean that's what John Cage's "4:33" makes so clear. Here's a piece in which the piano's never struck and it's never the same. Which is different from Käthe Kollwitz.

**Mangold:** Yes, Kollwitz for me is a little too literate, you always see it in terms of your experience of her sadness. I do have a problem with things when they get too close to sentimentality. That's why I say that about romantic painting.

**Rail:** Well, Corinth isn't sentimental at all.

**Mangold:** No. It's his marks, you know, the way he uses his tools. To me it's so liberating. It's just exciting the way that paint flies across the surface and just lands. It's just enough to keep moving. It lands and it takes off again [*laughs*].

**Rail:** [*Laughs.*] And there's this other thing about Corinth, which is that he painted in so many different ways but you always feel it is a Corinth. They didn't become rigid styles. He does this amazing range of portraits, and these extremely contorted figures, which are radical, when he's teaching academic drawing.

**Mangold:** You know, I really like Lucian Freud, for example, and I didn't know that he was influenced by Corinth until I read it somewhere. And in a similar way, he has these outlandish paintings that he does, but I like his portraits. That's what I think he does so brilliantly. I prefer Corinth but I think Freud is a really interesting artist too.

**Rail:** I would suggest that there are not a lot of painters in New York City that would say they like Freud. I mean it is a kind of generalization but there's something about his touch—it's a testament of decay. The French seem to celebrate voluptuousness, but he's acknowledging decay, the weight of time on the flesh, especially because he's getting older. When he was younger you see the kind of spontaneity, the bravura of the brushwork was a bit more active, more alive, more immediate. As he has grown older, he began referencing his love for Rembrandt, an artist that Corinth also admired. Well, it seems to me there's something different about the way you're putting the paint on now then, say, even five years ago or ten years ago, and you feel like—like with the painting of the leaves—it's like you're looking at every leaf and yet you're not making it pictorial. It's still paint.

**Mangold:** If it were pictorial I wouldn't leave it. I work hard to keep the pictorial element out of my work, but how to paint the leaves, how to paint the foliage, has been a dilemma ever since I started painting trees. I would get so I'd be looking forward to winter where I wouldn't have to deal with this dilemma because I could look at the form of the trunks and the branches because it's so sculptural, but then if you get that degree of form in the structure of the tree, what do you do with the foliage that is really filling out the upper part? I guess I gradually got to this issue through the watercolors.

**Rail:** Because the last show had a lot of watercolors where the leaves were evoked.

**Mangold:** Puddle. I would puddle the color. And then I just sort of faced up to painting every leaf [*laughs*].

**Rail:** Yes, because what struck me is there's no shorthand of "this is a leaf," which you would say with Fairfield Porter, you'd feel like there's a shorthand for it, which is not a put-down. It's just the way he painted.

**Mangold:** He had a style.

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"The Maple Tree" 7/00 (2000)

**Rail:** He had a style that said "leaf" and you don't have a style that says "leaf." You say leaf and it's a leaf but it's also paint. It's not pictorial.

**Mangold:** For that I have a technique. Like I might paint the leaf and then paint what's around it. Then I might take a palette knife and flatten it out so it's like this, and I might scrape it out and leave part of it showing.

**Rail:** That's the evidence of your original thinking in paint.

**Mangold:** Right. That's the fun part. It's like trial and error, trial and error—does this work?

**Rail:** That's the thing that, as you say, you didn't do before. You used to look forward to winter, and you finally said, "All right, what's this thing I didn't do? Now I have to do it."

**Mangold:** That's right.

**Rail:** You delayed it for a long time, but you have to deal with it now.

**Mangold:** I dealt with everything else so if I'm going to go forward that's what I have to do.

**Rail:** When you explained that the tree's been ill, you know, how would one know that? But there is that strange shifting of scale. And you manage to negotiate the leaves by painting them one by one—they become a flickering of flat things.

**Mangold:** That's right—they become planes of leaves. And they're accurate. Like if you went to see that tree that would be a grouping of leaves.

**Rail:** The leaves and space between hold that frontal plane as real as the way the rest of the painting in the background changes the total scale—it's almost like a Mondrian in the back.

**Mangold:** Mondrian's another artist whom I admire, but the abstract paintings. When I saw the trees that he painted I thought he was not such a good tree painter [*laughs*].

**Rail:** Interesting. Is that when he's at his most romantic?

**Mangold:** Yeah, those trees. But they do look—that's the other thing—when you go to these different locations around the world and you see the paintings that come from those places, they really make sense. Looking at the light and the trees from another country doesn't have as much meaning until you've been there.

**Rail:** Why do you think you have a kinship, for instance, with someone who had been an abstract painter before, like Rackstraw Downes?

**Mangold:** I love Rackstraw's work. For all his accuracy and observation there is also a sense of the hand and the mind, which is unique. His best paintings have space you enter and I admire the way he elevates convention.

**Rail:** Yeah, I mean Rackstraw made that commitment to really invest in perceptual experience. To go at it in terms of duration, that time established the condition of every occasion he goes to paint the landscape, all of which are different, specific places: the city, urban, uptown near Harlem. These are established locations and he's really willfully going after them at different times of year, the shifting of seasons, but there is a time element like the way you described your own painting of the tree.

**Mangold:** But for example, Suzan Frecon, I really connect to her work in an emotional way. When I went to see that show she had in New York at Peter Blum Gallery I got this incredible rush of excitement. Now that doesn't often happen to me. When I go see Rackstraw, I'm in awe but it's not that emotional thing that happens to me with someone like Suzan. Somewhere, and I love both of their work, but somewhere in that sphere is where I live. Then there's Catherine Murphy, now she's a dear friend, so I'm so close to that work too, but I must say that I think my recent leafy work owes something to Cathy's paintings. When I look at Cathy and I think about how meticulous and diligent she is—I say if she can do it, you can do it.

**Rail:** That's interesting.

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**Mangold:** There is a level of competition that spurs me forward there with Cathy, although sometimes I have paintings that I love more than other paintings of hers and when it's close friends, it's hard to have any distance on their work.

**Rail:** That's true. But it's also interesting to say that there's a level of competition because it's a competition that comes out of respect.

**Mangold:** It does, absolutely; it comes out of great respect.

**Rail:** And the challenge: "Oh she can be that meticulous, I can be that meticulous."

**Mangold:** Well, it's also about punching the clock. [*Laughs.*] She puts in so many hours. "Oh, you've been painting in your studio *all day!*!"

**Rail:** Suzan Frecon's work seems so different than any of the other painters you mentioned.

**Mangold:** I just have this real sense of exhilaration when I see her work.

**Rail:** Oh, I understand that.

**Mangold:** It's wonderful. It's the size. I mean I love the watercolors and brush drawings she does because of their gesture and life, but this physical response I get is from the paintings because of the color and the scale.

**Rail:** I would say that your paintings, the trees, for example, are about a close looking that at least goes back to the floor paintings. You almost feel like you're looking at this world and you're aware that it's part of a much bigger world and that you haven't looked at this familiar world that carefully. I feel like with the floor paintings they always went beyond the edges.

**Mangold:** But I have to say this. I'm a painter, you know, I'm not a poet. I'm not a writer. So you're coming at it how you see these paintings, but when I did the floors, I wanted to learn about perspective because I did not know how to draw things in diminishing space—three-dimensional space. So I would set up this grid that was like the floor of my bedroom or living room and I would learn about how to place things in space. When I had my first show of floors and mirrors, I remember Mel Bochner came in and he was saying all the things I was doing with these mirrors, about illusion, and I didn't know I was doing all those things. So then I went back and thought about what he and other people said and wrote and it started to open up another way of thinking about my work.

**Rail:** I also feel like in your paintings that you feel your way through the paintings.

**Mangold:** I do. I feel my way through my life [*laughs*].

**Rail:** I feel like there's a tactility that's not just coming across in the painting but like you make each leaf, you feel your way across the surface, you feel your way back and forward in the painting. Too often painting is thought of as a purely visual thing.

**Mangold:** For me, it's about space because I think I was drawn to art because I wanted to create my own space. I grew up in a little house—it was difficult to have a personal space, there were three children and my parents, so real space was a luxury. So it starts off like that and then it grows. And then whenever I do anything in my work I really want the viewer to enter the space and then come back to the surface. That's like a rule and so it is with the trees, the floors, the mirrors, whatever. You always want to go in or with the trees you want to be a bird. Fly in, come out.

**Rail:** That's nourishment. The space of your paintings is warm. Even if you're painting the tree in the winter, you feel like it's a warmer, nourishing space. The tactility of it is warm. At the same time, I think that as an observational painter there is this side that's conceptual.

**Mangold:** Don't you think all really interesting painting has a conceptual element to it?

**Rail:** Absolutely. I think it just gets left out of the discussion about painting. Like somehow you can't be conceptual and observational at the same time.

**Mangold:** I think conceptual doesn't just mean that it's minimal. Conceptual could mean having layers to what is obvious. It is like the machinery that you don't always see but gives the work endurance so the viewer's attention is held. It could be a memory or a relationship or a system, whatever it may be it needs to be intrinsic, not applied.