

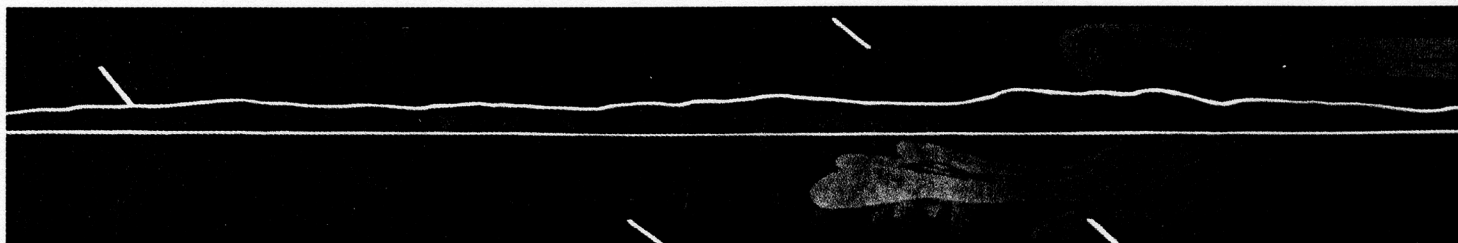
In 1988, **Frances Barth** started thinking about this question: How could she make a painting that was both panoramic and an object at the same time? How could a painting be expansive and feel weighty in terms of the landscape? What size would it be? The paintings on exhibit are a continuation of that investigation. Each of the two formats on exhibit has specific meanings. *ylo.brk* is 96" high x 52" wide. It is installed just low enough so that the viewer gets a sense of entering the space of the painting. However, there is no 'space' in which to enter, there is a brick wall.

"The motif of the brick comes and goes. It is a map sign for sedimentation. Millions of years would have happened from the top of the painting to the bottom.

The bigger paintings almost become signs for things that have happened. They tell geological stories. The smaller paintings (10" x 60") have more of a way in for the viewer. The slight shifts of weight are considered. I don't think I am in one place. I am moving around and can't see everything in one view. But, the canvas is just wide enough and pretty much right at the edge of your peripheral vision. It keeps trying to move away. That makes it seem vast with a space that has expansiveness."

In a conversation regarding *g/blk plane* Barth reveals some of the complexity of thinking that goes into each painting. "The weight of and association attached to every line is considered in exacting detail. The idea for the painting is

based on the premise that something that was there is no longer there. Every painting is different for thirty years. I do studies to gear up some courage. I make a fault or make signs for sedimentation. I used a stencil to create the small line on the diagonal. I used a stencil so that it would feel more like an artificial line than a hard drawn line. I wanted it (the line) to be more removed. The white waving horizon line is somewhere between a silhouette and a hard painted line. The brown sweep looks like a reproduction, but it is not. I painted it to look like a reproduction. I want to be Liechtenstein and Turner at the same time."



Barth, *g/blk plane*

Talking with Frances Barth about color, I get the sense that each one is a protagonist in a drama. Barth knows all of the strengths, associations, insecurities and motivations of any color in her paintings. She is aware of the art historical, the contemporary, the emotional and the psychological references that each color will bring to bear on the reading of the painting. She knows how one color rests against or activates another. She claims that a certain red is "disreputable" and that a certain combination of orange and brown is a "bit grotty." She is concerned that colors not make a painting too pleasant, that all of the colors she uses be related to real spaces. Whether playing a lead role or a bit part, she knows how each color advances the story line and the plot. The dramatic arc begins and ends within the expanded reality of a painting. Barth has spent her life in New York City, yet chooses to paint unpeopled abstract landscapes. She succeeds in creating quietude in the midst of the city, meaning in the midst of turbulent contemporary art practice. These are the paintings of an artist who has discovered and nurtured what every great artist must—her own voice. I am simply in awe of these paintings.

— Barbara O'Brien