



Annual Report

JAMES RIECK

2008

LYONS WIER ORTT GALLERY

NEW YORK

To Our Shareholders

Lyons Wier Ortt Gallery aims to discover and champion contemporary artists who bring fresh interpretative visions to their genre. Our focus is on Representational artists whose insight to form and color is buttressed by the iconography and conceptual context of the work. It is our intention to continue our stewardship of younger artists and to serve as an important exhibition venue for the development of their vision and careers.

Dear Friends,

Once a year, companies have a unique opportunity to communicate with shareholders in the form of an annual report. At its most basic, the annual report is a document disclosing financial and operational information. But it is also a place to assemble the data, images and narratives that form a public image—to paint a corporate portrait with photographs, pie charts and client testimonials.

From business to domestic life to the art world, the annual report as an informational model is ubiquitous. We encounter its equivalents when we receive holiday newsletters from family members, read year-end “best of” lists or watch entertainment industry awards shows. We also find its counterpart at art fairs and solo gallery exhibitions. Like the annual report, these yearly offerings serve as documents of specific moments within the context of a broader on-going narrative.

The annual report offers an opportunity to reflect upon and organize the past while fueling a vision for the future. It also addresses questions of uncertainty. What is the state of a specific industry, or of culture in general? Where does a company or an entity stand? Where is it headed? Maybe the answers lurk somewhere beneath the annual report’s enthusiasm for its subject and its attractive cataloguing of achievements. Or the answers may, in fact, exist right on the slick surface of its pages.





Management
72" x 144"
Oil on Canvas
2008

(previous page)
Chairman
84" x 60"
Oil on Canvas
2008

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

BY DOMINIQUE NAHAS

James Rieck deals with the modes of address once endemic only to the corporate world, which now (he implies) are endemic to everybody. Rieck's paintings find a way to allude to the commercial art and corporate styles of the business world as a way to re-introduce a discussion of the viability of fine-arts as a cultural tool for political awareness.

His masterfully close-cropped oil paintings are derived from corporate photography as well as from year end corporate reports. There is a keen attention paid to specific types of details such as the finish of the paintings which have a sensualized, even fetishized, old-master type of resonance which seems out of character with their overall, intense neutrality. In looking at *Merger*, *Chairman*, *Management*, *Committee* we can see that Rieck takes evident care to treat the images of people depicted in corporate promotional materials as subjects re-objectified and re-subjectified through the painterly process.

James Rieck's current exhibition of dead-panned paintings *Annual Report* takes its cues from the corporate world and the promotional material it generates. Commercial photography and the semiotic visual codes it follows arrives at a "commercial realism" whose purpose it is to persuade through the elision of perception and reality. Observers such as the eminent sociologist Erving Goffman have tracked these now-normalized codes of artificiality used in advertising and have enriched our collective vocabulary by popularizing such terms as "conventions of self-presentation..." and "the stylistic ceremonies" and "behavioral displays" that are undertaken for the "typification of the self..." to take place. Sounds a lot like the current art world, Rieck seems to be implying through his witty and sobering work.

The artist has evidently studied and mastered the visual conventions for the presentation of the corporate-self. A field for indications and indexical

signs are tweaked, given a make-over and buffed to a high shine as iconic features of body-parts, spaces and places are tailored to fit the symbolic space of the gallery show room instead of the corporate boardroom. Rieck is particularly sensitive to the re-production of signs of opulence through the measured display of textures and finishes of carpets and leather-tufted chairs, the glints of shoes, the decorum of hands placed against crotches, the creases of pants and folds of French cuffs. That being said he is aware that his great-looking paintings on how to appear great-looking will undoubtedly be bought by the very system he is addressing. It is the ultimate paradox that his work would look entirely at home in a corporate boardroom.

Rieck is addressing his projections of the fate of most artists whose careers end by the way-side if we were to look at the large historical arc. In speculative terms appropriate equivalencies can surely be made between the needs of art world commerce to turn a profit consistently and of artmaking itself as a career whose ambitions and drives are fueled and stoked by consumer culture and that of the corporate (read “capitalist”) structure with its short-term needs, goals and gains. Contemporary reality—in which cultural capital and monetary capital are seen to be more synonymous with each other than ever before has to make us pause and wonder. Is this conflation the worst possible fate that could have befallen art, in a long-term manner of speaking?

Rieck’s *Annual Report* series of paintings is multi-leveled. His paintings play off and work on the semiotics of dress and style of the corporate world with its decorum that is sensed through semiotics of posture and gestures. In his work Rieck pays attention to the dynamics of what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has termed habitus, a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. These are deep-tissue, deeply imbedded ingrained patterns of behavior (“structured structures” is Bourdieu’s term) within the social qua corporatized body. James Rieck’s cultural work entails pointing to the illusionistic tools of the trade of commercial photography in his own painterly work, taking the ideological premises and needs of the public relations world and framing them as an allegorical setting for the degenerative condition of the contemporary art world that must be dealt with as it victimizes everyone it comes in contact with. This uneasy art world situation (presently abetted by a tremulous financial market) can be given the proper feeling tone of despairing lamentation by way of Samuel Beckett. He refers to the mirthless laugh as the “laugh of laughs... [the one that] laughs...at that which is unhappy.” So, indeed, here we are.

Dominique Nahas © 2008

DOMINIQUE NAHAS is an independent curator and critic based in Manhattan. He teaches critical studies at Pratt Institute and at the New York Studio Program. He is currently critic-in-residence at Maryland Institute College of Art’s Hoffberger Graduate School. His most recent exhibition at The Rose Art Museum (co-curated with Margaret Evangeline) is “Empires and Environments” (January 24 – April 13, 2008).



Committee
36" x 108"
Oil on Canvas
2008

(next page)
Management
72" x 144"
Oil on Canvas
2008



LOOKING FORWARD

BY LUCY HOGG

James Rieck's paintings are large. Their slices of suited bodies, sourced in annual reports depersonalize their already impersonal sources. Found together in a room, these paintings' monumental, pristine surfaces make the rest of us feel just a bit smaller and a little too tactile. Maybe even mortal.

The paintings' cropped compositions remind us of the impersonal capture of the camera's lens. They focus our attention on the gesture of the body. These are bodies all too aware of the ritual moment at hand, the posed-corporate, post-corporeal moment.

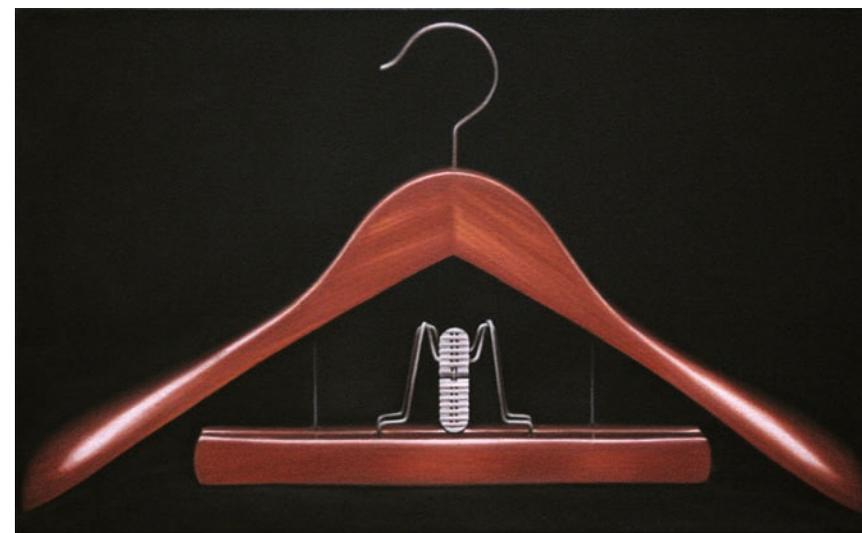
Like all the people in Rieck's paintings, these headless men and women are trapped in their clothes. Across an adagio of pinstripe, discrete plaid and a dominate matte black, our attention is drawn to a series of hands at rest. The gestures are chaste, hands resting on laps as if not knowing what to do with themselves. One can hear the panty-hosed

thighs rubbing together, or the gabardine pant legs crossing and uncrossing at a long board meeting. The climate is controlled, the coffee is predictable, and casual Friday is nowhere in sight.

The history of the commemorative, corporate moment goes back at least to Frans Hals, although his businessmen seemed like they were having more fun.

But Hals' compositions have much in common with the corporate portrait of today. Rieck's paintings draw our attention to the abstraction that can be found in both: the rhythm of gesture, the angle of pose, the neutral formality of dress and the relation of one body to another. But we can get a little too close to these modern bodies. Replacing their lost heads with our own, we take on their gestures. We are 'holding' ourselves for the camera, but the instant of the shutter's release is extended into the painful posterity of a painting.

Lucy Hogg is an artist and curator living in Washington, D.C.



Merger
24" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2008

Hanger
22" x 36"
Oil on Canvas
2008

GOOD GROWTH AND STEADY RESULTS

BY ERIC LOPRESTI

When I met James at graduate school in 2001, he was just starting *Perfectly Lovely* a monochrome canvas based on a 1965 Sears catalog advertisement for a woman's suit. James had cropped the model's head to exclude both her facial expression and her identity, and enlarged the image so that it loomed, parent-like above the viewer. The painting was rendered with virtuosic skill, and included obvious Freudian overtones. I was immediately struck with how the clothing dominated the model's individuality, replacing it with signifiers of gender, age and class. With this painting James initiated the post-modernist strategy that has sustained his work ever since. By re-painting advertising imagery on a large scale, James had subverted its original commercial intent and exposed a threatening landscape of constrictive social roles and repressed desire.

Perfectly Lovely was the first of many paintings in which James employed this strategy to deconstruct conservative ideals of mid-20th century American womanhood. The series included works like *One Pleat* and *Greenwich* (both 2004), which magnified details of fashion accessories to emphasize menacing, sexualized properties. James has also critiqued expected male behavior. *The Shareholders* (2004) featured a trio of rigidly posed suits whose wearers, though projecting the aura of success, are clearly imprisoned within their occupational uniforms. James's treatment of corporate propaganda undermined its intended message of wealth and security and reveals instead a

constrictive patriarchal subculture in which reserve and polish are taken to an oppressive extreme.

Recently, James has leveled his social critique on the art world, filling his paintings with intimidating profiles of collectors, dealers and auctioneers. This is treacherous territory for an artist, but in its midst is a humble piece called *The Painter* (2007). The painting presents two figures, painter and muse, in a studio crowded with easels, unfinished canvases and brushes—props congruent with the popular image of artist as creative bohemian. It is based upon an image from a university alumni report, but in its resemblance to James and his wife, it functions readily as a self portrait.

As a painter myself, I think that James has depicted our profession in a particularly nuanced light. Although the scene is casual, the pose of the artist appears a little stilted and his muse slightly off-balance. Compared with the other imposing characters in this series, these two appear less comfortable with their assumed roles and more than a little vulnerable. The strength in James's work is that it demonstrates to the viewer how one's gender, class and status are constructed by the trappings of fashion. In his most personal painting to date, James has portrayed his own role as maintaining a tricky balance between the rigors of artistic production and the demands of the contemporary aesthetic marketplace.

ERIC LOPRESTI is an artist living in Brooklyn, New York.



The Benefactor 36" x 94" Oil on Canvas 2007



The Shareholders 46" x 120" Oil on Canvas 2004



The Painter 36" x 94" Oil on Canvas 2007



The Dealer 41" x 120" Oil on Canvas 2006



The Auctioneer 36" x 94" Oil on Canvas 2007



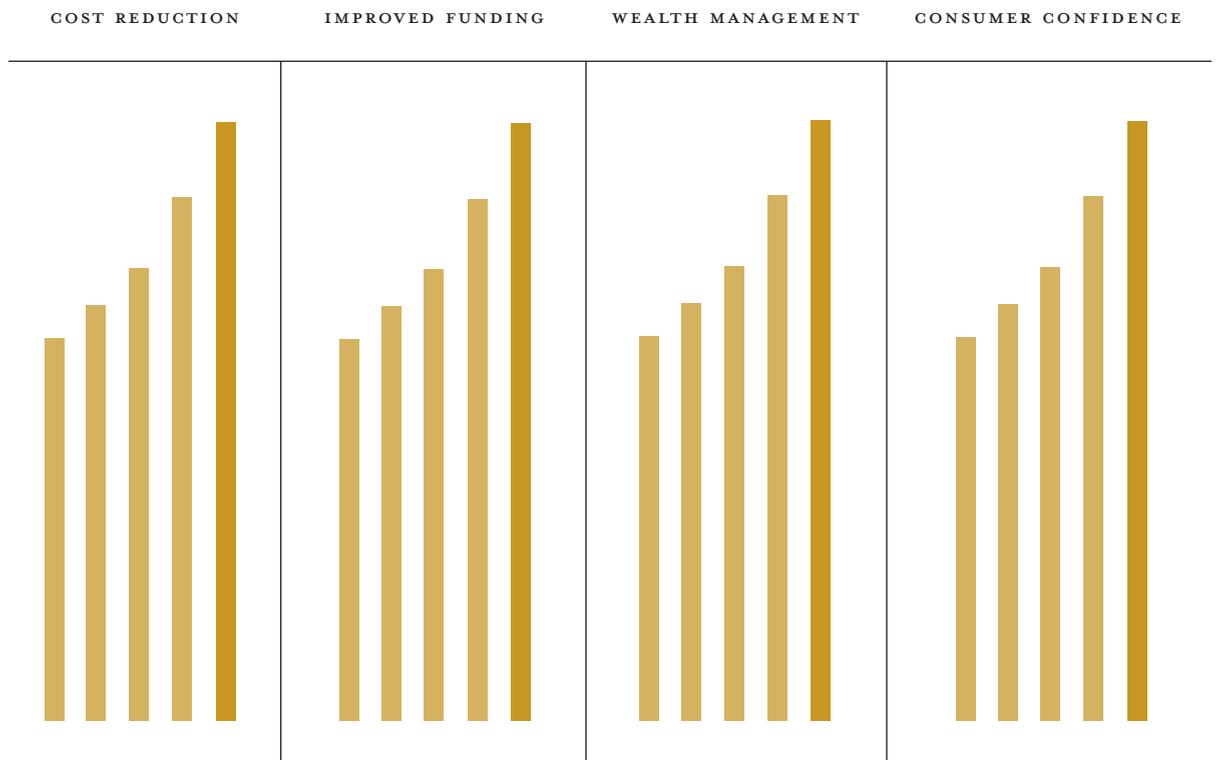
The Collector 41" x 120" Oil on Canvas 2006

JAMES RIECK, BORN 1965, PITTSBURGH, PA

James Rieck is an artist based in Baltimore, MD, where he earned both his BFA and his MFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). He studied at the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland, and attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. For more than 10 years, James was a commercial muralist in San Francisco, CA.

James is currently a faculty member at the Corcoran College of Art + Design in Washington, D.C. In 2006, he received the prestigious Trawick Prize. James has been represented by the Lyons Wier Ortt Gallery since 2003.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TOWARD GROWTH



JAMES RIECK, BORN 1965, PITTSBURGH, PA

EDUCATION

- 2003 Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture
2003 MFA, Maryland Institute College of Art
1987 Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, Scotland
1987 BFA, Painting, Maryland Institute College of Art

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Solo Show, Dust Gallery, Las Vegas, NV
“Annual Report” Solo Show, Lyons Wier Ortt Gallery, New York, NY
- 2007 PULSE Art Fair, Miami, FL
Preview Berlin, Berlin, Germany
“Farewell 511”, Lyons Wier Ortt Gallery, New York, NY
SWAB, Barcelona, Spain
PULSE Art Fair, New York, NY
- 2006 PULSE Art Fair, Miami, FL
Scope London, London, England
Art212, New York, NY
“Paraskavedekatriaphobia”, Like the Spice Gallery, Group Show, Brooklyn, NY
“Flower Girls” Solo Show, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY
“The Exhibitionists” Gallery Imperato, Baltimore, MD
Trawick Prize Finalists, Creative Partners Gallery, Bethesda, MD
Bethesda Painting Award Finalists, Fraser Gallery, Bethesda, MD
- 2005 “Slice, Dice & Adhere” Boggs/Hampton/Rieck, Samson Projects, Boston, MA
“Auto Show” Charles Campbell Gallery, San Francisco, CA
“Damn Good Painting” Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, NY
Creative Alliance Juried Biennial, curated by Thom Collins, Baltimore, MD
- 2004 Lyons Wier Gallery, Solo Show, New York, NY
Corcoran Faculty Biennial, Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, DC
Mid-Atlantic New Painting 2004 curated by Stephen Bennett Phillips, Mary Washington College, Fredricksburg, VA
“The Material World” Arts Club of Washington, Solo Show curated by Stacey Schmidt, Washington, DC
- 2003 ACADEMY 2003 (MFA/BFA Invitational) curated by Michael O’Sullivan, Conner Contemporary Art Gallery, Washington, DC

COLLECTIONS

- Burger Collection, Switzerland
Bollag-Rothschild Collection, Switzerland
Chadha Art Collection, The Netherlands
The West Collection, Oaks, Pennsylvania

HONORS

- 2008 Individual Artist Grant, Maryland State Arts Council
2006 First Place, Trawick Prize
2006 Second Place, Bethesda Painting Awards
2006 Individual Artist Grant, Maryland State Arts Council
2005 Individual Artist Grant, Baltimore City Arts Grant
2005 Mid-Atlantic Arts Council, Artist Exchange (Mexico)
2004 Individual Artist Grant, Maryland State Arts Council
2004 First Place, Mid-Atlantic New Painting 2004
2003 The Henry Walters Traveling Scholarship
2003 The Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture Fellowship
2003 Honorable Mention, MICA Graduate Painting Award
1987 MICA Painting Fellowship

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The Baltimore Sun
- Sept. 7, 2006 “Rieck Wins Trawick Prize”
The Washington Post
- Sept. 7, 2006 “Artist Takes \$10,000 Prize”,
The Baltimore Sun
- Sept. 6, 2006 Critics Choice, “The Exhibitionists”,
Baltimore City Paper
- April, 2006 Harper’s Magazine
- March 3, 2006 “The Listings: James Rieck: Flower Girls”,
The New York Times
- Feb., 9, 2006 “Gallery Going: James Rieck: Flower Girls”,
Arts & Letters, The New York Sun
- Winter 2005 “James Rieck, Lyons Wier Gallery”,
Eric LoPresti, Zing Magazine, Issue 20
- Oct., 2005 American Art Collector Magazine
- 2005 New American Paintings #57
- March 21, 2005 “Life-Like”, The Boston Globe
- Aug. 20, 2004 “Our Picks”, Michael O’Sullivan,
The Washington Post
- May 12, 2004 “Steppin Out”, New York Sun
- March 31, 2004 Artworks This Week,
Maryland Public Television
- Dec. 21, 2003 “A Show of Endurance”, The Baltimore Sun
- Dec. 17, 2003 “The Year in Art, Top Ten”,
Baltimore City Paper
- Nov., 2003 “Something’s Going On”, a-n Magazine

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Lyons Wier • Ortt Gallery

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