

# METRO PICTURES

Silverthorne, Jeanne. "Renée Daniels, Metro Pictures," *Artforum* (March 1986).

## ARTFORUM



René Daniels, *Innodiging*, 1985, oil on canvas, 59 x 43 1/4".

### René Daniels Metro Pictures

René Daniels' paintings refer to art, music, literature, performance, and architecture; they demonstrate the dilemma of delineating perspectival space in two dimensions. The antithetical spaces depicted in these paintings—diagrams of an archetypal "gallery"—solicit suggestions for breaking the perspectival deadlock; impasses are experienced, but solutions—here being a referral to cross-discipline—remain speculative.

Daniels abridges the essential means of painting with a linguistic/iconic discourse to tell a story about formalism—an oxymoron that would damn formalism were it not that the visual satisfaction of these works depends on their taciturn reductiveness. His technique is so dryly economical that you can almost hear the scraping of a palette

knife, and the wit, too, is dry. Although the frequently overlapping rectangles that line the walls of Daniels' rooms translate primarily into paintings hung and then removed, they also imply fenestration and, therefore, an avenue of escape from the claustrophobia of the shrinking perspectives.

It's also funny that paintings so full of boundaries (including Barnett Newmanish edging stripes) should concern themselves with the erasure of borders between artistic disciplines. That one of these proposed crossovers is into music was immediately clear in this installation. The first canvas encountered, *Innodiging*, 1985, was a sketch of a piano and a microphone (stereophonic meets stereoscopic) in the archetypal Daniels gallery, so that we seem to be in some recording or performance studio. The other images in the painting, although still near-abstract illustration, are more three-dimensional and outlined in black as if to spell something out. *Innodiging* is an amplification of Daniels' theme, a "Cliff Notes" for his other paintings. Present in an upper "box" like an interpreter for the deaf is a diagram that is emblematic of the meeting of walls, floor, and ceiling, the confluence of possibly irreconcilable planes of reference that, in one form or another, is Daniels' subject. He treats the arts as a pangeneric revolving door, like the one suggested by the arc lines in *Painting on the Missing Bosch Painting of the Flood*, 1985. In effect, he reverses the generative cycle of composer Modest Petrovich Moussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," a suite of piano pieces that was inspired by an exhibition of architectural drawings—which is certainly what Daniels' sketches are.

Daniels takes destination—perspective's exit—and places it just out of sight, around the Einsteinian bend. The unmixed colors and primary shapes of early Modernism and the Renaissance corridor on which Daniels has hung them debate flatness and depth. *Three Paintings on the Flag*, 1985, has no flag but may refer to the one in Jasper Johns' keeping: in placing a keyhole shape at the top of the central "painting" Daniels not only punctures Johnsian surface (by replacing "looking at" with the imagined act of "looking through" the small aperture of the keyhole into a larger space beyond) but also perverts traditional drawn perspective (which starts wide and then narrows). To some extent, Daniels may be suggesting that our reaction to a painting, like our automatic response to a flag, is more a correspondence (through the semaphores of conditioned response) than an intimate conversation.

Finally, Daniels places his own work "in perspective." By depicting the gallery space and consequently digesting it, his paintings symbolically escape co-optation. Through this, he takes issue with the formalist tactics and contextual exposés of Louise Lawler and Allan McCollum—who, by the way, exhibit in the same New York gallery as Daniels.