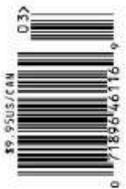


SKARSTEDT

BLOUIN **modernpainters**

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

MARCH/APRIL 2017



**DAVID
SALLE**
talks to
Dana Schutz

**SUZANNE
McCLELLAND**
analytical
abstraction

MARSHA COTTRELL
inkjet ingenuity

+ Estrellita B. Brodsky, Andy Holden,
and Walter Murch

David Salle, *Double Eye*, 2016, oil stick and flashe on archival digital print mounted on linen. 26 3/4 x 20 in. (67.9 x 50.8 cm.)



David Salle

Salle's practice involves a long-standing involvement with performance, film and criticism. Although best known for his paintings – which have been showcased at international venues such as the Whitney, MOCA L.A., Stedelijk Museum, and Haus der Kunst – he is also a prolific writer whose work has appeared in publications like *Artforum* and *The Paris Review*. His collection of essays, *How to See: Looking, Talking and Thinking about Art*, was recently published by W.W. Norton. The conversation with Brooklyn-based painter Dana Schutz on page 76 offers candid insights between two artists who hail from different generations and separate schools of thought, but who nonetheless harbor mutual respect.

“Dana Schutz’s pictorial intelligence is as natural for her as breathing.”

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PROBLEM PAINTERS

**TWO ARTISTS FROM TWO GENERATIONS,
DANA SCHUTZ AND DAVID SALLE,
DISCUSS HOW THEY SOLVE THEIR
PERSONAL PAINTERLY CRISES, AND HOW,
IN A TIME OF NATIONAL CRISIS,
THEY'RE THINKING ABOUT ART,
APPROPRIATION, AND FAKE NEWS**



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DANA SCHUTZ: I've known about your work for a long time. I remember arguing about it when I was an undergraduate.

DAVID SALLE: Where did you go to school?

SCHUTZ: I went to undergrad at the Cleveland Institute of Art, and later to Columbia. At

there's a house of modernism and then you find out that the foundation is all just made of shit and jelly beans.

SALLE: Wow. That's a great image.

SCHUTZ: I thought your paintings had a critical stance, but were also very much *paintings*, and they had the internal scale of

were the big news. I remember trying to make one – you know, my version of one – and my teacher, Allan Hacklin, came by and said, "Harder than it looks isn't it?" Turns out everything is harder than it looks. Or, as Andy Warhol used to say, "Easy to criticize, hard to do."

SCHUTZ:

Yeah it's true. I guess that's always the key. You want to make it look easy.

SALLE: Who did you work with at Columbia?

SCHUTZ: I worked with John Kessler and Gregory Amenoff, Archie Rand, Kara Walker, Rirkrit [Tiravanija]...

SALLE: And Ross Bleckner, right? That's

how I first heard about your work. He said to me, "I went to Columbia and met this girl who's really good."

SCHUTZ: Wow. That's so nice. I remember it. Bleckner was the opposite of how I thought he would be. I thought he would be really solemn and serious. And then we met him and he was so

Dana Schutz
Presentation,
2005,
oil on canvas,
10 x 14 ft.



Cleveland there was a class on postmodernism and Neo-Expressionism. I was very young, maybe 20, and I was probably misreading your work, but I was saying that the paintings were really cagey because they took the language of modernism but then made it – this is going to sound really convoluted – but its like

Abstract Expressionism. I liked that.

SALLE: That was the world of painting I thought I was part of, even if no one else did.

SCHUTZ: When you went to school what were people talking about?

SALLE: When I was in art school, the first year anyway, Brice Marden's monochrome paintings

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funny. He would be on his phone – and this was before people were on their phones – so he seemed like a celebrity. But he would go around very quickly and I remember he was like, [in a nasal voice] “So what do you do? It looks like you paint portraits that are funny and you paint landscapes with stuff in them. You paint portraits and landscapes.” It was actually really clarifying. Sometimes it’s helpful to simplify things especially at that age when everything is so overwhelming. It helps to have someone come in and say, “Oh yeah, you’re painting eggplants.” And then you can be like, “Oh, yeah, I didn’t realize that.”

SALLE: Or if it’s something you really don’t want to be doing then you can react against it in a clearer way: “I don’t want to paint eggplants; I really want to paint dogs.” I think when you’ve been painting for a while there are certain things you fall back on, certain habits. I remember talking to Alex Katz about this and he said he once went through a phase where he resolved every painting with yellow. So for a year he wouldn’t allow himself to use that color.

SCHUTZ: That’s so great.

SALLE: But I don’t know how much you can really move the needle. You can move it a little bit. And I don’t know how quickly it can be accomplished. There are some artists where you think, “God, how were they able to move the needle so far, so fast?”

SCHUTZ: Yeah, did you see the Picabia show [at MoMA]?

SALLE: Just yesterday. What did you think?

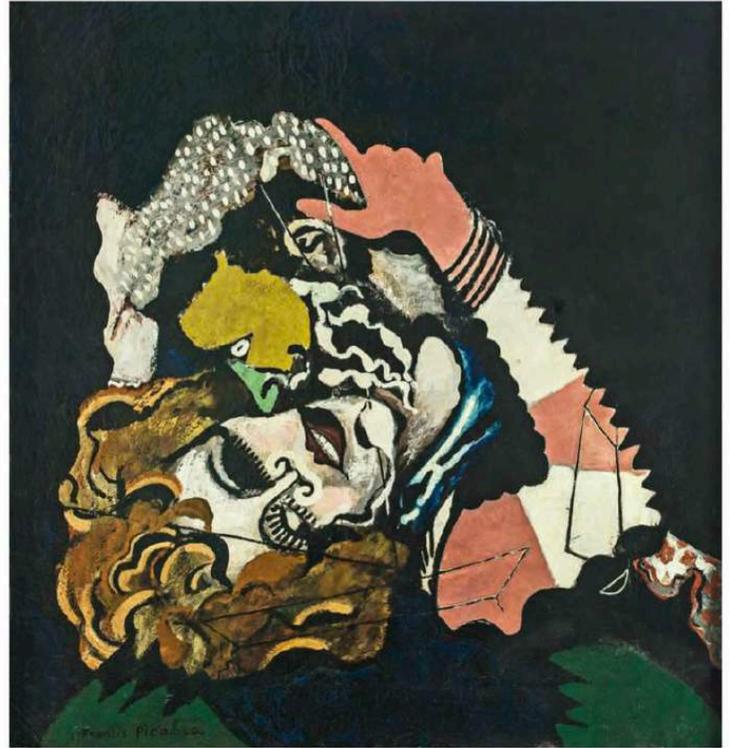
SCHUTZ: Oh, I thought it was great. It was really shocking how fast and how fully he would inhabit a whole new shift in his work.

SALLE: Yes, there was a fearlessness, or just disregard.

SCHUTZ: And it seemed like he had jumped forward and backward.

SALLE: Sometimes you do go backwards to go forward.

SCHUTZ: Yes. There was a logic too. You could see he started to use three-dimensional parts of objects after he started painting machines.



SALLE: I think there is a through-line to his style, which was partly derived from graphic design of the time. He was very attuned to design overall. There are many great things in the show, but what really struck me were the magazine covers and all the letters, his sense of graphic space and presentation. It was just first-rate. If he had never been anything else, he could have been the greatest graphic designer of his generation. Tremendous decorative power. It’s a very real force in art and Picabia had it in spades. Even when the paintings are so weird you can’t imagine what he was thinking, they still have great decorative

Francis Picabia
Les Amoureux
(*Après la pluie*).
1925, enamel
paint and oil on
canvas,
43 ¾ x 45 ¼ in.

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David Salle
Half and Half,
2016, oil, acrylic,
charcoal,
silkscreen and
archival digital
print on linen.
4 x 94 in.

power. I mean if you put one in a room it gives off a lot of energy.

SCHUTZ: Yeah, my favorite paintings in that show were the monster paintings, the frenetic kissers. And I loved the ones that were really flat and graphic.

SALLE: He was really sophisticated as a stylist. He could combine Neoclassicism and Dada in the same painting. Come to think of it,

maybe they're not so far apart at that.

SCHUTZ: I never think about this in shows ever, but this is the first show when I thought, "This artist might be really wealthy."

SALLE: It shows, somehow. He had a different kind of taste, more liberal.

SCHUTZ: Maybe it was a kind of playfulness and a bit of the sophistication that comes in there too. But he just had this sort

of, "Well I can just do this and I can do this..."

SALLE: The work is free of a certain anxiety. Look at Magritte, for a comparison. He made some far-out paintings in the 1940s called *Vache* because they were meant to be "dumb as a cow." They were sort of pastiches of Renoir and that ilk. Some of them are ravishing, but when they were shown at his gallery in Paris, it was a total flop. Not one painting sold.

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And his wife said, “Ok, that’s it, back to the bowler hats.” He couldn’t afford to make paintings that nobody wanted. He had a family. But Picabia didn’t give a damn. I asked an art historian about Picabia’s late paintings, “Who do you think bought them at the time?” The answer was: “No one bought them. They were party favors.”

SCHUTZ: That’s it! The lack of anxiety. It’s interesting because Kippenberber was wealthy too, but I don’t have that same feeling when I see his work.

SALLE: Well, he had that existential angst. It’s a different thing. He was a big drinker. And he was German.

SCHUTZ: That’s true. Do you feel like there’s anxiety in your paintings?

SALLE: Well, sure. Hopefully there’s some idea of freedom, whatever freedom means in paintings, but they’re not cream-puff paintings.

SCHUTZ: But neither are Picabia’s.

SALLE: That’s true. I mean this painting [*Half and Half*, pictured at left], I made it over the summer, and when I was painting it I thought, “This is going to be quite a sunny, happy, upbeat painting” because of the color and the dynamic composition – they playfulness of it.

When I finished the painting and stepped back, I was surprised to see that it actually had a kind of melancholic tone, like much of my work.

SCHUTZ: With a lot of your new paintings there’s this simultaneity of events. In many of them it feels like there is an event but it’s all collapsed, or it’s happening all at once. There’s this collision, and almost a sense of horror.

And some of the early paintings felt like that, too.

SALLE: For one, the watermelon looks like a shark coming out of the water.

SCHUTZ: And there’s something bloody, like a wiped-off knife...

SALLE: Sometimes I don’t know what the hell I’ve made. Painting is something you really don’t know all at once. That’s one reason to do shows: You don’t really know what you’ve done until you see it in that neutral space.

SCHUTZ: And it can be totally surprising. There have been times when I put up work and I think, *Oh my god, what have I done? People will see this.* It’s like a stranger walking into your house and only then do you realize you’ve been living in squalor.

SALLE: So what’s the most embarrassing painting moment of your career?

SCHUTZ: Oh, that’s easy. It was the first time I showed paintings in a group show, at PS1. I was 24. It was right after September 11 and someone who had come through Columbia had recommended me to Klaus Biesenbach. I was such a spaz and so excited that I just put all my paintings in a U-Haul truck and hauled them to PS1 like a weirdo. I must have seemed really naïve. I remember being so sensitive. The work was so rough – there were fingerprints all over the sides and unintentional hair in them. They were bumpy and relatively expressive. They just seemed really out of place at the time. I remember watching people’s faces and they seemed grossed out. I was mortified.

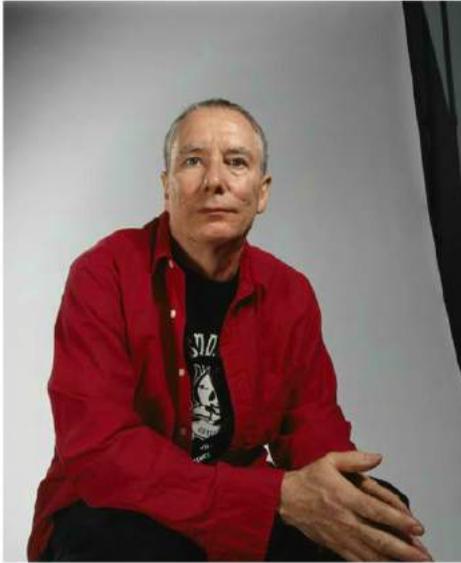
SALLE: Often the thing that’s been rejected ends up being the interesting thing.

SCHUTZ: Yeah, did you feel that way? I mean you were coming out of a time when there was a lot of Minimalism and conceptual art.

SALLE: I’m not sure I remember how I felt. I came of age at a time when the modernist belief system was still intact so there were certain things that were OK to do and some things that were not OK. The people in my



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Mike Kelley
in 2005

circle had a very healthy sense of themselves as rebels. Our motto was “don’t tell us what to do.” I remember meeting Richard Serra on a panel for *Artforum*. He got very aggressive and said, “Oh Salle, I know what you guys are up to. You’re just trying to combine Warhol and Pollock.” Almost like an insult – like he’d seen through us. And I said something lame like, “You don’t get to tell me what to do!” Of course, he was absolutely spot on. It was the best analysis anyone has made.

SCHUTZ: But could he see that that’s actually interesting?

SALLE: He thought it was wrong, historically, which is how people thought about things then. He just thought it was barking up the wrong tree. But it was, in its way, an accurate description, and anyway would probably be

a great project overall, if someone could pull it off. It is of course, only one way of looking at things.

SCHUTZ: Maybe all the art that came after that from the 1990s did that – hold two contradictory things at the same time. Although maybe art has always done that.

SALLE: Has it? Certainly much of the art from New York that was valorized did not do that. But if you feel like complexity is more the norm today, I’m glad. I’m on the side of simultaneity.

SCHUTZ: Appropriation now is more about, “I like this or I like that,” rather than critique.

SALLE: Well that’s the new curatorial mind. We’re all choosers.

SCHUTZ: I’m thinking of an artist like Josh Smith, speaking of Pollock and Warhol. People always want to locate his intentionality, probably because they can’t quite determine the sincerity in the work. He really complicates people’s notions about gesture. A lot of what’s made now seems like celebration and critique have folded in on itself. I don’t know if it was like this before, in the

1980s. Maybe it was more critique then.

SALLE: Yes, everything was viewed through the lens of critique – a procrustean bed if there ever was one.

SCHUTZ: Was there ever a moment where you felt crisis?

SALLE: Oh god, probably once a month.

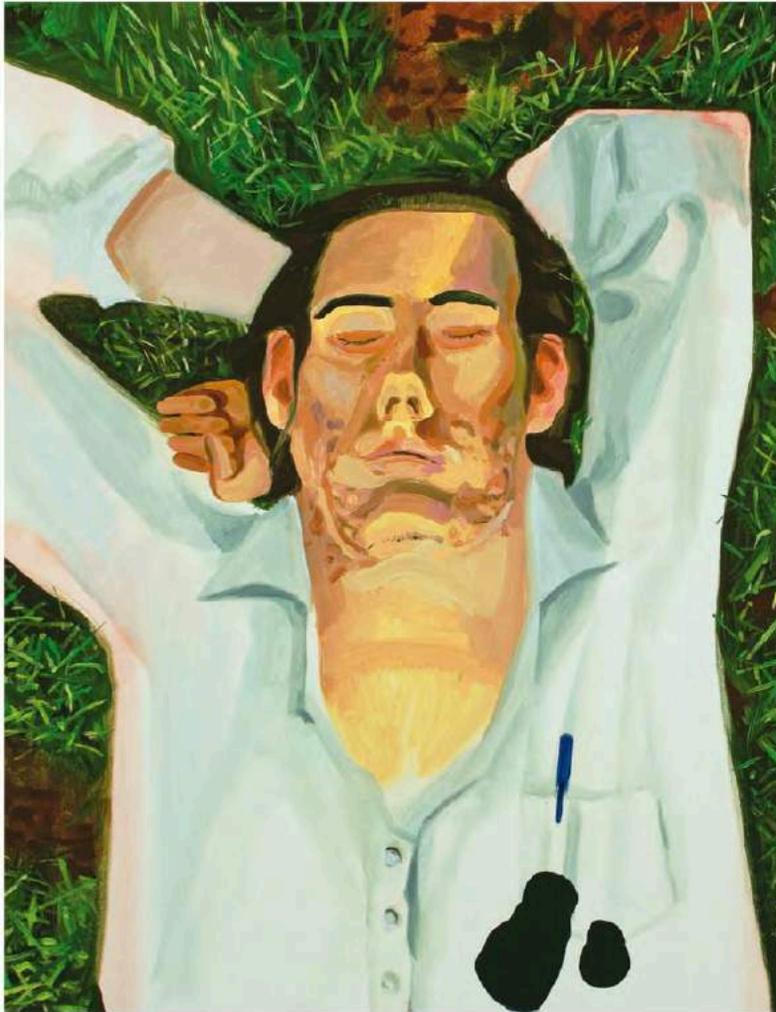
SCHUTZ: What’s the latest crisis?

SALLE: This is maybe something shared by anyone who makes collage-type compositions – where you’re not making edge-to-edge reality and you’re not making abstraction. The question is, how do you imbue something that contains bits of different realities with a convincing overall pictorial reality. That’s a very specific painterly problem. You have a similar problem in your work sometimes in that you don’t want to be beholden to edge-to-edge realism. But, without that, how do you ensure the painting has enough autonomy and conviction without pointing to something outside the painting? But that’s kind of technical. What’s your crisis?

SCHUTZ: Oh gosh, right now it’s how to paint this terrible leg before all the brown paint gets sticky. I know what you mean though, about pictorial



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Dana Schutz
Daydreamer,
2007, Oil on
canvas,
33 x 27 in.

crisis, the edge-to-edge realism thing. You never want the painting to be totally sealed off from the world, yet it has to have its own presence, like a *thing*. Your paintings have this, even though they combine various disparate imagery they feel so physical, they have a great body relationship to the viewer.

A while ago, I had another crisis where I felt like my paintings were too stuffy and heavy, like bricks. I wanted them to have more air, but I was having trouble squaring

that with a desire for volume.

SALLE: It's interesting you say that because you are a painter of volume. You're a describer of volume and you do it in a very efficient, energized and convincing way. The reality of your paintings is rooted in your description of volume, and that is something that not everybody can do. So how did you come to that? Because I would say that's a specific talent.

SCHUTZ: Talent always seems slightly derogatory.

SALLE: I know, but people still respond to it even if they deny its existence. I don't care what it's called, but some people are good at certain things – their body/brain connection is wired in such a way that allows them to develop a skill. Someone else might really want to make a painting sort of like yours, and then realize its not working. The paint doesn't have the sense of a real world. Making the translation from the volumetric image into paint calls for a specific talent.

SCHUTZ: I do think that's true. Every artist has a specific touch. I do think having will is huge.

SALLE: If I could choose, I would have been a different kind of painter all together. I'm too wedded to the way things look, to a kind of literal depiction. And I'm not much of a drawer.

SCHUTZ: Really? You don't think you're a drawer? I think you totally are, in a way.

SALLE: Maybe "in a way." But you're being kind. You're a good draftsman. Most of the painters I admire are good draftsmen. Some good painters never made a drawing, like Clyfford Still for example, but if you don't draw it's harder to invent form. Stella never

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drew in any traditional sense. My way of inventing form is to collide it together. But I think that's a second-rate way of creating form.

SCHUTZ: No, that's how you create form with space.

SALLE: Now it makes me unhappy. It's too complicated a way of working, for one thing.

SCHUTZ: So you feel like it's outside of your control?

SALLE: It's fate.

SCHUTZ: One thing I wanted to say before is that your paintings always have a sculptural quality to the image and the painting itself. This is something that I really admire – that they extend outward in almost this sculptural, acoustic way, and I think it's something about the scale inside.

Amy Sillman
Elephant, 2005.
Oil on canvas,
78 x 66 in.



SALLE: Well, thanks. That's sort of what I've been after – that the images take on a different, specifically pictorial quality – in the painting, and only there. Scale is a big part of it. I like the idea that there could be an acoustic presence. And I'm reminded of a painting of yours that I always come back to – a man lying in the grass, seen from overhead.

SCHUTZ: It's supposed to be Mike Kelley sleeping in the grass.

SALLE: Oh yeah, it sort of looks like him. I didn't realize that's who it was.

SCHUTZ: Yeah, I was just thinking about his acne scars, the light, and texture of the grass.

SALLE: Is that the title, *Acne in the Grass*? That's a great title.

SCHUTZ: That would be great! No, it's called *Daydreamer*.

SALLE: When I first saw the painting I thought it was a brilliant bit of pictorial invention: when you're walking along and you see someone lying in the grass and you're looking over at them like that. The fact that you had the idea of visualizing that as a painting and executing it – it was sensational.

SCHUTZ: I was thinking about L.A. and places with back-road histories in a free

associative way. I had never been there but started to wonder, what is in L.A.? I thought, Mike Kelley lives in L.A. – I mean, he is actually from Detroit but he had a sort of darkness that felt like L.A. – and you know what people do there? They probably sleep in the grass. So I wondered what would happen if I made a painting of Mike Kelley sleeping in the grass. And then I thought his shirt could be like a palette – it's flat like canvas.

SALLE: Did you make some drawings first or you just went at it?

SCHUTZ: I just went at it. I think I made one little sketch.

SALLE: Do you draw on the canvas with charcoal before you start painting?

SCHUTZ: No, no. I draw it out with thinned-down, usually red, oil paint. But I sort of miss the surface of the earlier paintings – not necessarily the big thick paint, but just how the one thing is put on top of the next. I think it's like the crisis we were talking about before and wanting to have it look like it all just appeared at once. So for a long time I was just wiping things out and trying to make them look like it was happening all at once. I still paint this way but I think I miss the *pentimento*.

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SALLE: It gave things a more hard-won feel.

SCHUTZ: That's something I like with other people's paintings so I wonder, what's my problem? Why am I trying to hide my process? It's like I'm trying to hide the stress.

SALLE: Amy Sillman's work has that.

SCHUTZ: Yes, it has a really strong physical body.

SALLE: It's like there are 10 paintings under each painting.

SCHUTZ: Something that fed into my crisis was when I saw a Rauschenberg painting at Gagosian and it just had this giant expanse of blue that was put on so fresh.

It was huge and airy and I thought, *Wow, that's how I want to paint.*

SALLE: Sometimes you can take things like that from other people that rhyme with where you're at in a certain moment. I don't have any problem with feeling influenced or expressing it.

SCHUTZ: Yeah, me neither.

SALLE: I had this argument with somebody in I think 1980. Julian Schnabel had repainted a Tatlin painting but did it with a palette knife on velvet.

SCHUTZ: That's awesome.

SALLE: Some clever journalist thought they were catching him out by

reproducing both images side by side in the *Village Voice*, the Tatlin and the Schnabel, the same size, and in black and white, so they looked very similar. People thought: "Aha! See – he's just a copier!"

SCHUTZ: They should be hung next to each other.

SALLE: I said at the time that even if he'd copied it exactly, it would still be a totally different painting.

SCHUTZ: Totally different.

SALLE: That being said, I think appropriation as an idea – just for the record – has really run its course.

SCHUTZ: That's something I was wondering about: whether your issues that were there

when you were beginning are still there after the world's changed?

SALLE: I think so – maybe even more so. My starting point was how things looked in books and magazines. It occurred to me when I was around 20 that there's a reciprocity in

David Salle
Nadar's Grey,
1990. Acrylic
and oil on
canvas. 84 x
114 in.



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life between things-tat-are-pictured and things-in-themselves. I wanted to get in and drive a wedge into the divide, to split them apart.

SCHUTZ: Split them apart?

SALLE: A little bit. I grew up in ad culture and, in high school, I worked as a commercial artist. My father did the ads for a clothing store. We used to compose ads for the newspaper together when I was about 10 years old.

SCHUTZ: That's amazing, I didn't know that.

SALLE: I was always attuned to the language of presentation; that was my visual environment, and I guess it stuck. But the idea that you would re-paint someone else's painting because originality isn't possible anymore, I mean, did you ever buy that?

SCHUTZ: Nobody ever bought that. I don't think that was the thing even when I was a young student talking about your work, David, with my friend. I always felt like it was more about throwing meaning off.

SALLE: Hopefully a painting gives access to a kind of feeling or emotion that would otherwise be hard to access. Otherwise what's the point?

SCHUTZ: Artists are different in each



David Salle
Lustre-Creme,
2016. Oil,
acrylic, charcoal
archival digital
print on linen,
74 x 60 in.

generation, but the world is also different.

SALLE: True. The idea that everything is pictured, as opposed to a primary experience, wasn't a commonplace 35 years ago.

SCHUTZ: Now everything is primary.

SALLE: Maybe everything is primary – for an instant.

SCHUTZ: That's why there's all this fake news.

SALLE: Unfortunately.

SCHUTZ: I remember thinking in 2006 about how there was a different form of appropriation, or

that the conversation surrounding appropriation felt more loose. It felt more like a form of Expressionism.

SALLE: Originally it was driven by a wish to infiltrate power structures, language being one of them. It's a nice idea, if a bit simple-minded. But anyway, that's old rhetoric, almost quaint. Now, the fake news people are the infiltrators. Artists could never be that hardcore – we don't actually want to mislead people, let alone control them.

