



Score for Threshold, SouthWest - One : dark days [spectrum in red],
2020-2023
Oil on canvas. 23 x 19.5 inches

JULIA FISH

Hermitage Threshold/s — scores + bricks

May 19 - June 24, 2023

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present *Hermitage Threshold/s — scores + bricks*, the gallery's fourth solo exhibition with artist Julia Fish. The exhibition consists of six recent paintings that further Fish's investigation into her 1922 two-storey storefront home on Hermitage Avenue in Chicago, designed by Theodore Steuben.¹ As the exhibition title denotes, the paintings expand upon the artist's ongoing *Threshold* series (2009-present). Since 1992 when Fish moved into her Chicago residence, which doubles as her studio, she has meticulously studied the building's architectural motifs and structural configurations. Entryway tiles, staircases, landings, walls, and various interstitial spaces throughout the property serve as structures to be observed and traced, their subsequent reflections and daily tonal changes manifesting in spectrums of color upon the canvas. Fish's daily encounters with her surroundings have resulted in a site-specific archive of paintings and works on paper that methodically document home and studio, surface and texture, color and light.

Although Fish's paintings are based upon literal spaces of the home that the artwork titles reference, they exude mystery and complexity. In a 2022 *Hyperallergic* review, John Yau aptly stated: "The referents can become incomprehensible because Fish's attention to surface, pattern, texture and light, as well as her transformation of them into sign, diagram, and spectral light, pushes her work out of the pictorial into the realm of abstraction."² This remains true even in Fish's 1:1 brick rendition paintings on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery. The largest painting in the exhibition, *Studio Threshold with Hermitage spectrum [east to west]*, is an iteration of a painting of the same size and subject that was exhibited in New York in 2022.³ The painting measures ten feet in width and renders to scale a brick threshold on the floor of Fish's studio. The 20th century threshold, buried for decades within an exterior wall, was discovered in April 2016 as the studio was under renovation. Fish's home in this way has proven a generative

¹ John Yau, "Julia Fish's Architectural Abstractions Are Joyful Enigmas," *Hyperallergic*, March 23, 2022, <https://hyperallergic.com/718956/julia-fish-architectural-abstractions-are-joyful-enigmas/>

² John Yau, "It's Okay Not to Be a Member of a Club," *Hyperallergic*, May 30, 2020, <https://hyperallergic.com/566911/julia-fish-bound-by-spectrum/>

³ Julia Fish, *Threshold/s with Hearth* at David Nolan Gallery (New York), March 10 – April 16, 2022

artistic subject; areas that appeared thoroughly investigated in fact continue to reveal new surprises and possibilities. The irregular bricks that populate the largest painting and the smaller painting, *Epitaph : Studio Threshold : [B A C H]*, further root themselves in their Chicago locality with the knowledge of their BACH Brick Company, Inc. production.⁴

Within the exhibition there are also Fish's *Score* paintings, which reinvestigate six thresholds or liminal spaces in the home in their relative locations of east to west. *Capriccio, after Epitaph [from J.S. Bach BWV1080 – "in contrario motu"]* is an intimately scaled pale orange and blue painting that presents as a sheet of music. As the title notes, the painting references Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080 Canon per augmentationem in contrario motu*, an incomplete musical work written in the 1740s during the last decade of the composer's life. Other *Score* paintings on view allude to music more abstractly; colorful squares, or 'chord stacks' as Fish refers to them, punctuate and dance rhythmically across the canvas in geometric patterning. BACH bricks and Bach scores commune in harmony in Julia Fish's exhibition that seamlessly melds art, architecture, and music.

Julia Fish (b. 1950, Toledo, OR) has been the subject of twenty-nine solo exhibitions since 1980, and has twice been the subject of 'ten-year' survey exhibitions: most recently, *Julia Fish : bound by spectrum*, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, 2019-2020; and *View*, The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, 1996. Selected curated exhibitions include, among others: The American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, NY; The Menil Collection, Houston, TX; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; MAK Center for Art and Architecture / Schindler House, Los Angeles; Tang Museum, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY; Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin; Galerie Remise, Bludenz, Austria; the Whitney Biennial; and the MCA Chicago.

Fish's work is included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Denver Art Museum; Yale University Art Gallery; The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; University of Michigan Museum of Art; and Illinois State Museum, Springfield. Her work is also represented by David Nolan Gallery, New York. Fish lives and works in Chicago. She is Professor Emerita, School of Art and Art History, and UIC Distinguished Professor.

⁴ "Emil Bach, along with his five brothers and parents, immigrated to Chicago from Germany in 1883. Bach's father opened the Bach Pottery that same year, which became Bach & Sons in 1893. By 1905, the company name transitioned to the Bach Brick Company, producing 200,000 bricks in a day and patenting the closed top kiln burner." Mathew Powers, "Emil Bach House," *Clio*, May 17, 2018.