

Hell, Richard and Eugene Richards

"Being Christopher Wool"

Whitewall.

Third Issue, Fall 2006, Cover, pp. 88-101.

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AUGUSTINE

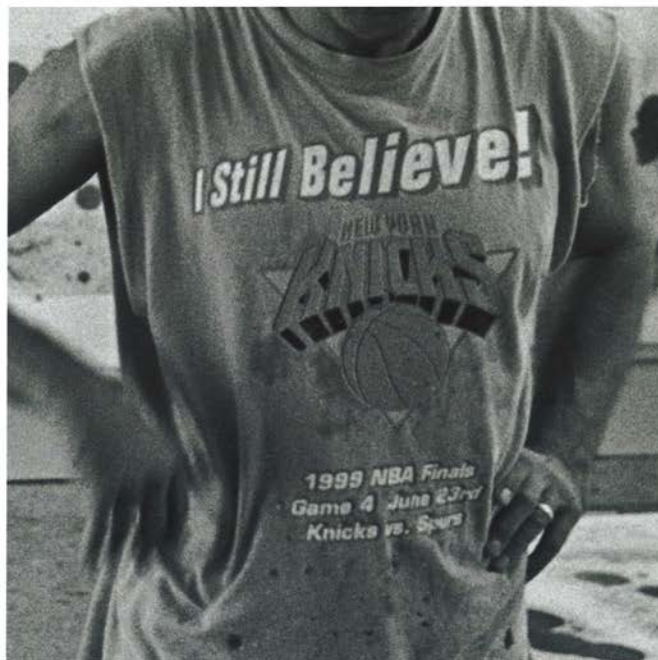
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THE UNSEEN WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY ART

THIRD ISSUE

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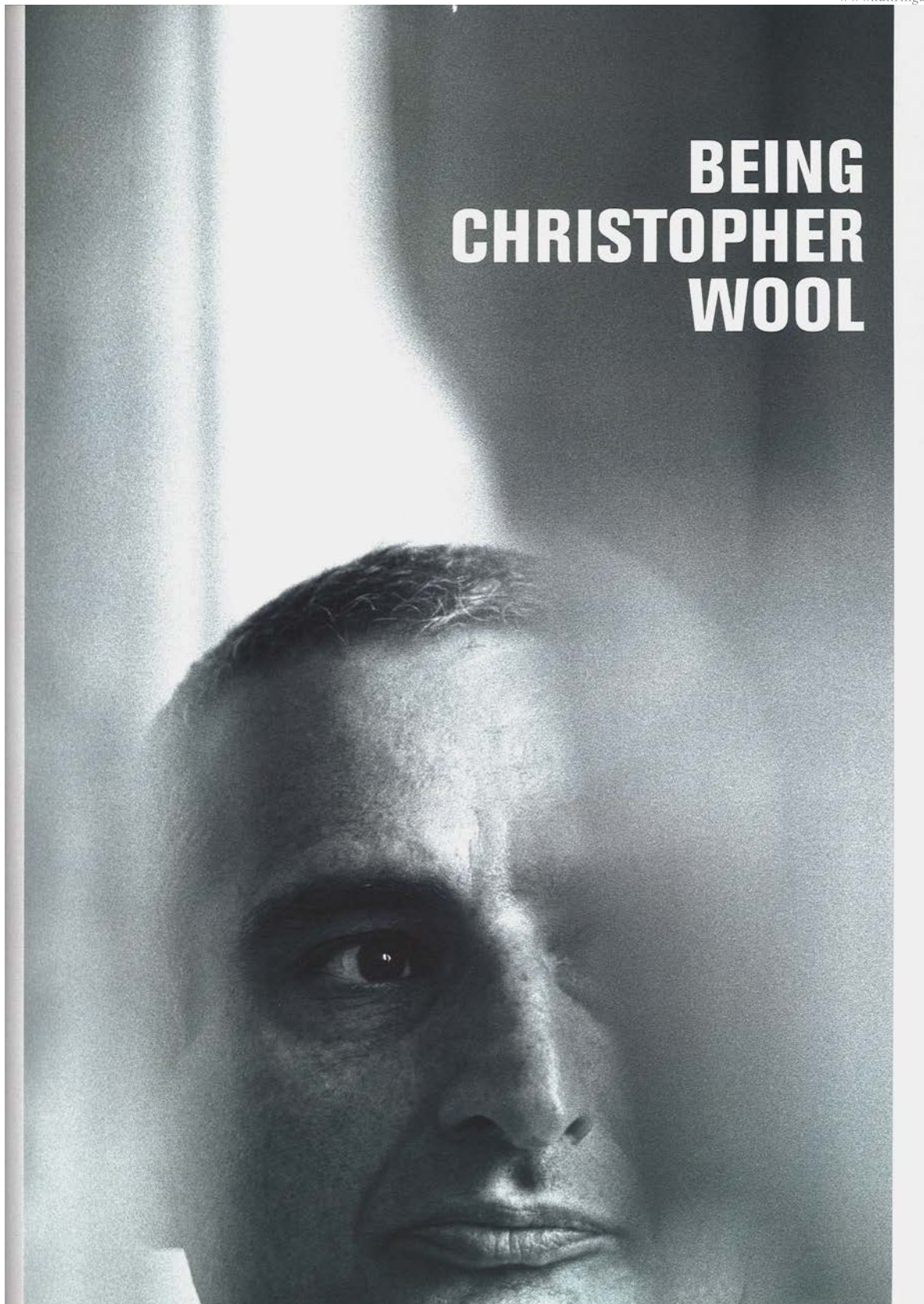


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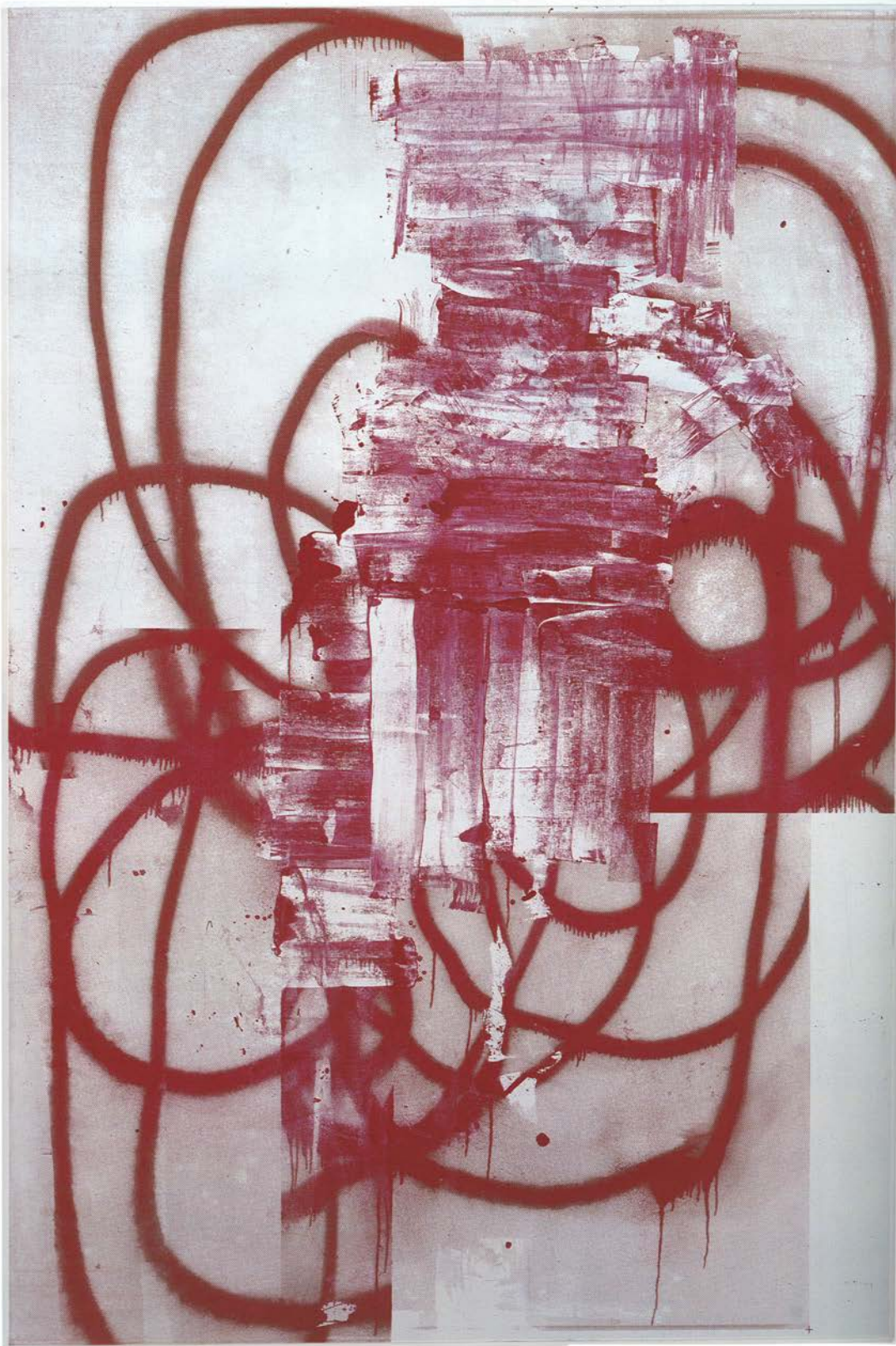


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WHAT I WOULD SAY IF I WERE CHRISTOPHER WOOL

BY RICHARD HELL PHOTOGRAPHS BY EUGENE RICHARDS

I don't want my work to feel all sweat-soaked and tortured. I'd like to be like a crooner, effortless seeming, smooth. That doesn't mean it actually is easy. And it doesn't mean you don't have backbone, or even aggression. Like Frank Sinatra. Or Miles Davis, maybe. It's like magic. I want my things to just appear. Not be painted. Just appear. And that is scary, too. It's not magic like Tinker Bell. It's more like the writing on the wall.

Why do I sometimes leave empty space at the bottom of the word paintings I make? It's a question. It's like the huge margins in old illuminated manuscripts, or early printing. That's where the commentary goes, the reader's reactions. Or like the silence in the room after something unexpectedly emphatic has been said. It's the pause for the laugh! But really, you answered your own question. It's the Q & A after the lecture. It's the gutter for the runoff. I'm starting to feel like Cole Porter—it's a Bendel bonnet, a Shakespeare sonnet, it's Mickey Mouse. It's a kind of respect for the viewer. You want to give them a moment to compose themselves. To absorb what just happened. Between you and me, it's more technical. I like things "off-register." I like to disrespect the boundaries, the edges of the surface, and let things trespass or ignore them. So the picture, and the markings, is not hemmed in, not so defined.

One thing that can work is to take one idea, one quirk, or technique, you've noticed in someone else's work, and make a series of paintings exploiting that, using it as a starting point and exaggerating it, or exploring it. Sometimes I see the starting point in the world, or sometimes in my own work. Why not? No one ever knows about any of it unless you tell them. Or maybe they do, but it's legitimate. Like what the Cubists did with Cézanne. Sometimes it's all a kind of exciting fashion-game. That offends some people. They think it's disgusting. But everything you do in life is a kind of game. Nobody really

understands anything. The only reason to go on is because you're interested in the course of the game. You want to see what's going to happen next, and possibly try to influence it. Or at least play your cards.

In addition to all that, or despite it, there is so much of interest in the world. You almost have to filter a lot of it out. You do have to filter it out. Or anyway be attuned to the things of interest that are currently being neglected. In a way art is nothing but that: the drawing of attention to interesting things in the world that no one seems to be noticing at that moment. That's your "style," your "character," your individuality as an artist: what things you can see as interesting that are being overlooked, that you can bring to attention. And if you're lucky enough to succeed, you not only make some good paintings, but you've literally enlarged the world a little bit, or slightly altered it. Andy Warhol, for instance, made grainy newspaper photographs—the kind we were surrounded with all the time—beautiful, so that suddenly everybody in the country was newly surrounded by beauty every day. Because they were surrounded by smudgy newspapers.

Then again, even though I don't think about it as such, I can't deny that I am aware that the paintings are about how "beauty" might be completely abstracted, separated from all the world, and completely empty of everything, even prettiness, or you could say even beauty. For painters like me, the visual is a condition of its own, separate from thought at all, which is kind of frightening, too, like ghosts, like hallucinations. But "beauty is the beginning of terror," they say. I actually don't like the word "beauty" at all. "Beauty" is something that should be seen and not heard. **W**

Richard Hell is a friend as well as an admirer of Christopher Wool. He wrote the text for the catalogue of Christopher's recent show at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Christopher Wool has supplied the cover art for a couple of Richard's books.

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Artist
CHRISTOPHER WOOL
in his Manhattan studio



<
Christopher Wool
...
Drunk
1990
Enamel on aluminum
108 x 72 inches

>
Christopher Wool
...
Untitled
2000
Enamel on aluminum
108 x 72 inches

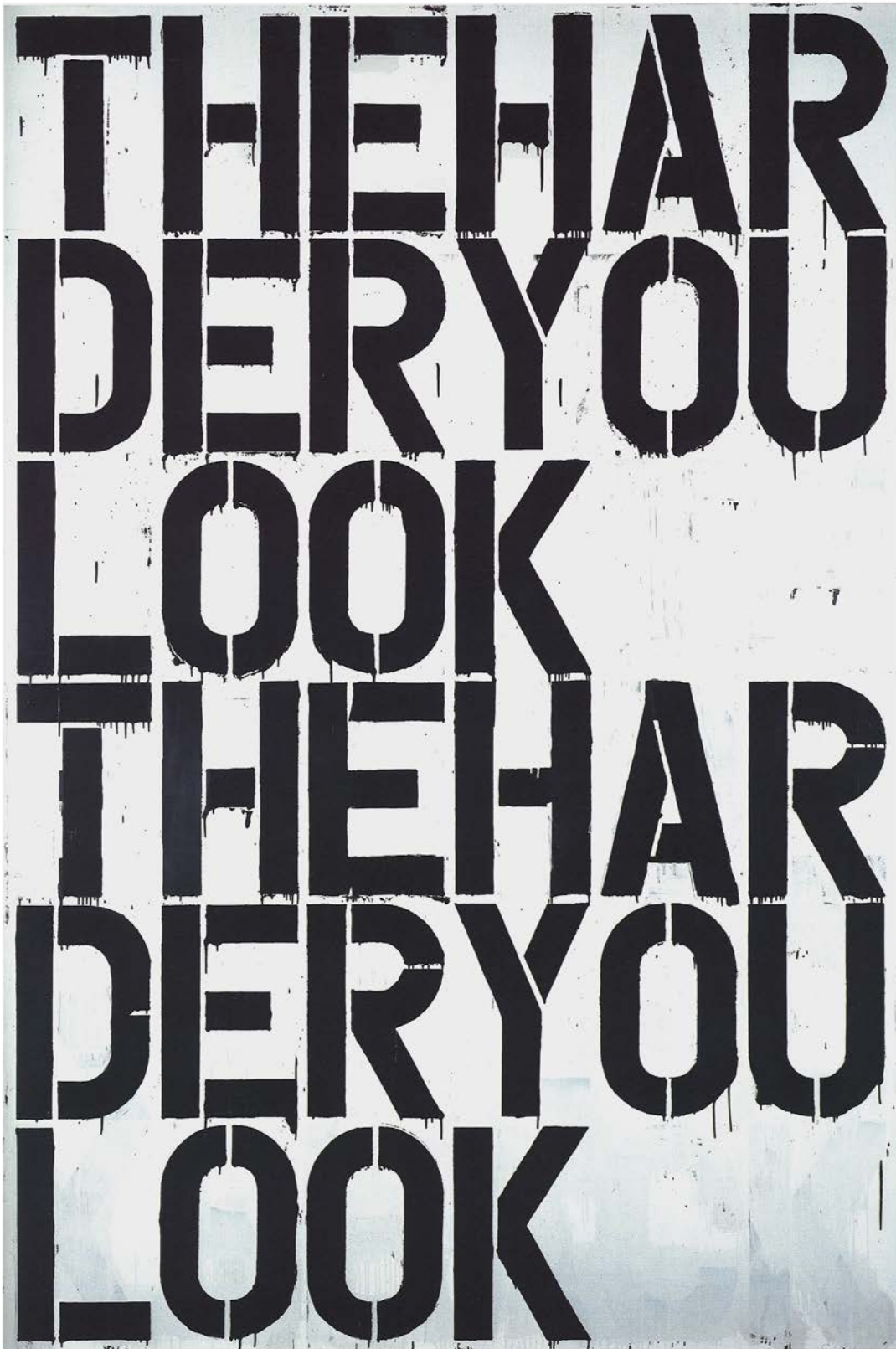
Previous page
Christopher Wool
...
Untitled
2001
Silkscreen ink on linen
90 x 60 inches

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Artist
CHRISTOPHER WOOL
all geared up at work



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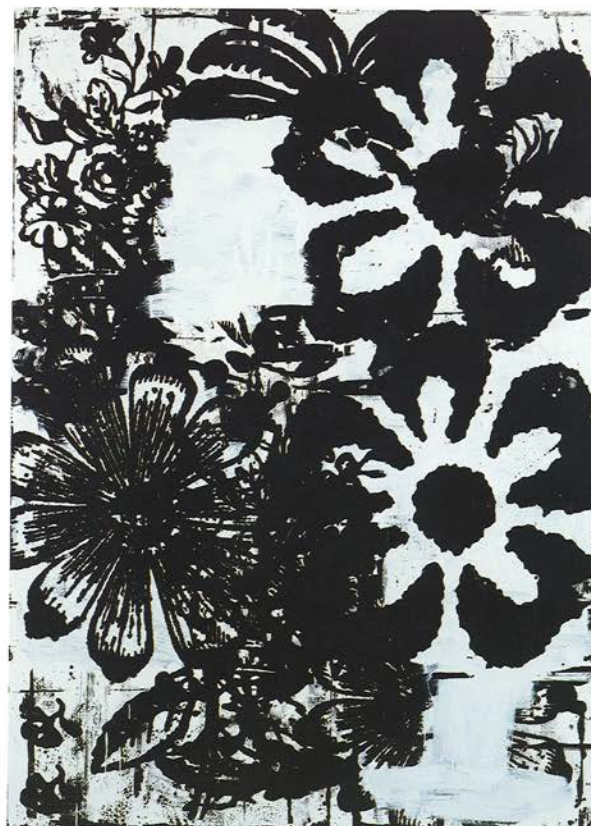
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V<
Christopher Wool
...
Untitled
1991
Asylid on aluminum
90 x 60 inches

V>
Christopher Wool
...
Untitled
1993
Enamel on aluminum
84 x 60 inches

Following page
Christopher Wool
...
Untitled
2005
Enamel on linen
104 x 78 inches



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