

KOCOT AND HATTEN

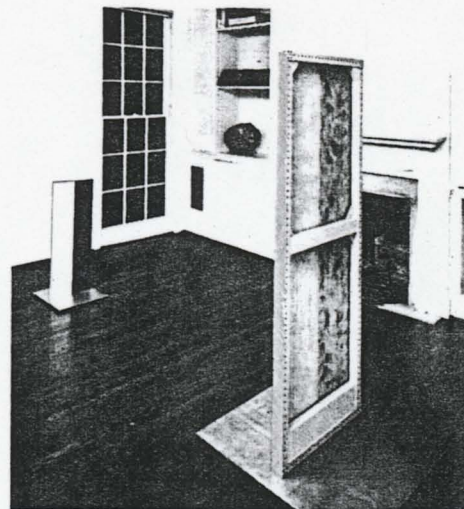
JESSICA BERWIND GALLERY; LEVY GALLERY

Scale/Ratio, 1988–89, is a collaborative installation by the artist team of Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatten. Its most demanding and rewarding feature is that it occupies the exhibition space of two distinctive galleries and relies on the viewer's having seen both in order fully to experience the piece. The Levy Gallery at Moore College of Art is a large institutional space, beautiful (by contemporary standards) in its white readiness to receive works of art. The Jessica Berwind Gallery is a small 19th-century residence-turned-gallery made up of two nearly square rooms, complete with fireplaces and original architectural details. The difference in the size and character of these spaces affects the reception of the work and quickly identifies the issue of context as a primary concern. Furthermore, it establishes the scale/ratio theme as central to this work's visual play of resemblance and comparison.

The same elements — two freestanding paintings and a graphic diagram — are placed in both galleries. The paintings are divided vertically — half black, half white — and supported by a flat steel base. The black and white sides line up across from each other, as if in a mirror. All the elements line up to reinforce the 2:1 ratio. Canvas, linen, weave, tack head, stretcher bars, corner braces — all are subject to the scale/ratio factor. This factor extends to

the graphic image, which is painted a high-pitched yellow and flat black and which illustrates a diagram of iron filings shaped by a magnetic field. At the Levy Gallery, this piece directly covers a large dividing wall and is seen before one reaches the paintings behind it. At Berwind, the same piece, only half the size, lies like a rug on the floor. The paintings stand directly over that piece on the floor above it. In both cases, the graphic image seems to represent the energy generated by the two facing canvases. This connection comes to the viewer, however, as an afterthought, and one has to approach the image a second time looking for its relationship to the paintings. The strength of the freestanding paintings is less a result of the implied field of energy than of their enigmatic physical presence.

The artists remove the paintings from the wall, exposing both front and back and providing more than one point of approach. With their traditional attachment to the wall broken, the works' materiality is reinforced. The surface as carrier of illusion and meaning becomes secondary to the real space of the installation. By dislocating these paintings, Kocot and Hatten have shifted our attention to the language of sculpture. The objects stand alone in real space and relate to one another in terms of size and presence. This notion of presence is central to the viewer's experience of the work, and links it with the current reevaluation of '60s conceptual approaches. It is, however, less a critique of those original issues than a direct participation in them. In particular, the work evokes Barnett



Kocot and Hatten, *Scale/Ratio*, 1988,
mixed media. Installation view.

Newman's idea of presence. For Newman, scale functions to deny the physical boundaries of painting, and to bring the viewer in touch with pure concept. Here the concept is housed in the paintings-turned-objects and their real boundaries address the viewer. And again the self-referential system implies that meaning lives in how and not what we perceive. *Scale/Ratio* leaves the impression that if there are few new questions in this territory, there is convincing evidence that the old ones remain valid.

—Eileen Neff