



**VERNON FISHER**

**MARK MOORE GALLERY** | STATEMENTS

# VERNON FISHER STATEMENTS

# 19

**Mark Moore Gallery: *Statements* introduces a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in *Statements* act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.**

Fisher's preoccupation with archive, information transmission, memory, and taxonomy stems from an early interest in how people make sense of the world. His hallmark blackboard paintings recall pedagogical lessons or speculative renderings, oftentimes replacing sequential logic with disordered notations analogous to excerpts from an unrepressed mindscape. Fisher's work is often contextualized within a postmodern lineage, as expounded in Frances Colpitt's essay for the monograph, *Vernon Fisher*, University of Texas Press, 2010, which was produced in tandem with *Vernon Fisher: K-Mart Conceptualism*, the artist's career retrospective at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Fisher has had more than ninety one-person exhibitions including installations at the Museum of Modern Art, NY; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. His work has been included in two Whitney Biennials, most recently in 2000. In 1989, a mid-career survey organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego travelled to the Albright-Knox Gallery of Art, Buffalo, NY; the Miami Art Museum; the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. The artist lives and works in Fort Worth, TX.



*Swimming Lesions*, Dec. 16, 1994 - Feb. 12, 1995. Two-sided blackboard wall. Acrylic on wallboard, chalk. Each side 12 x 40 feet. Installation at Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX

# VERNON FISHER

Interview by: Marielos Zeka, Mark Moore Gallery

**I want to ask you about the blackboard paintings. They seem to hark back to grade school days. Are you alluding to the educational system in some way?**

The blackboards do remind people of the classroom. They can also be thought of as blackboards in a science lab – speculative notations in a state of revision.

**The chalk drawings, actually faux-chalk drawings, as they are created with paint, have a feeling of temporality, as if a gust of wind could remove the image from consciousness.**

I think it's because we're accustomed to the actual vulnerability of chalk on blackboards.

**Old film stills, early twentieth-century cartoons, and scientific renderings from encyclopedias are common motifs in your work. What is your relationship to these nostalgic images?**

It's mostly stuff I grew up with. When you're young you take things at face value. You don't see the complications and hidden agendas. As you get older and more sophisticated, you realize you'll never see the world like that again, and, of course, you wouldn't really



want to. Even so, there's a sense of innocence lost, but longed for.

**Why the blackboard specifically?**

The blackboard lends itself to my interest in the clutter that accompanies the mind at work. Seemingly random and disordered notations, for instance, are not unexpected on a blackboard because we're used to the notion that blackboards are where ideas are worked out and are often shared with others. I've never thought of the chalk marks as entirely my own. Drawing on the blackboards, especially early on, can feel a little like an actor playing a role. It's a way of being expressive without being self-conscious.

**The several things going on seem, not just different, but “categorically” different from one another. Some images are photorealistic, others loose and painterly. The juvenile or seemingly offhand is juxtaposed with suggestions of scientific rigor. I get the idea that something is being put together, but I'm uncertain as to what that is.**

That's kind of the point. The mind is always looking for connections and patterns. For the “story.” This process is the mechanism that switches on involvement with the images.

**In the University of Texas monograph, Michael Auping pointed out that there are “big jumps between ideas and images. It seems like there is often some kind of adventure or experiment taking place—boats, planes, parachutists, science projects.”**

I like the feeling of being dropped into the middle of things. And the more disparate the various elements, the more cognitive tension in the painting. At least, that’s my theory.

**Many of these “adventures” seem to end in failure, sometimes spectacularly so. A flaming plane crashes to earth, a rocket spins out of control, a damaged blimp is nose down in the desert. Ostensibly, they’re catastrophes, yet this impression is incongruous with how they feel. They seem more like pratfalls than actual tragedies. Some images are deadpan and matter-of-fact and others are outrageously overwrought. There’s a kind of emotional disconnect between them.**

It leaves the paintings syntactically unstable.

**And the depicted “catastrophes” recall the faux-calamity of the chalk being “rubbed out.” Both “deadpan” and “hyperbole,” by the way, are comic tropes.**

I don’t mind when friends tell me the paintings are funny.

**Is everything part of the story? I’m thinking particularly of the partially erased imagery.**

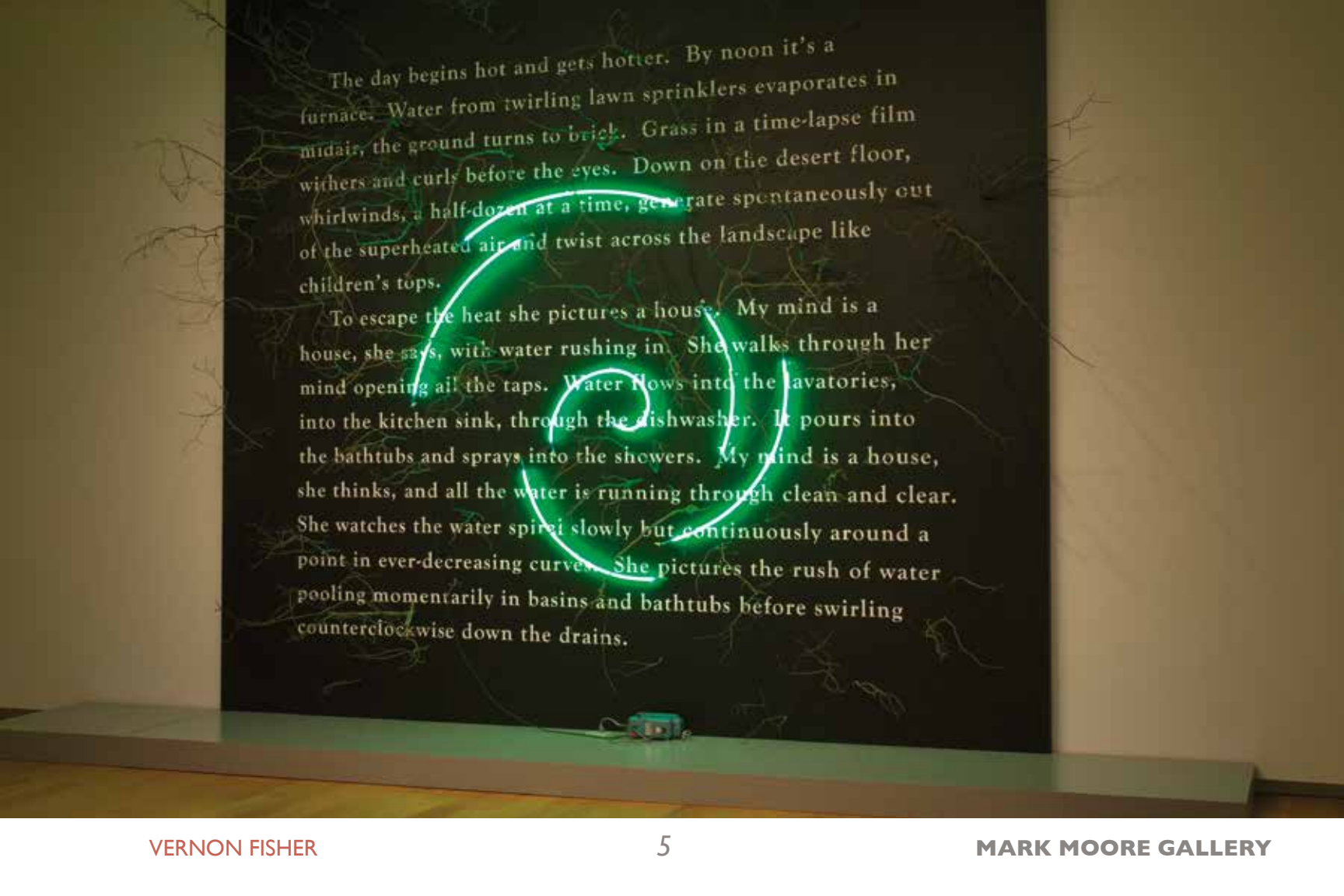
Those images suggest previous revision and may, or may not relate specifically to whatever implied narrative is present. The world is messy, and the extraneous, even if not part of the story, is still part of the meaning.

**So the paintings aren’t supposed to add up in any ordinary sense.**

The paintings aren’t meant to be logical or conclusive. They’re meant to encourage interpretation, and the process of interpretation, in turn, to encourage a kind of semantic expansion. And at some level, they’re about externalizing personal interiority. I sometimes wonder if all this other business is mainly an armature to hang that on.

**Some art writers have linked your work to poststructuralist ideas concerning the destabilization of signs. Are the blackboards intended to comment on the idea of reality as a construct? Perhaps ideas about the slippery nature of representation?**

I’m not unaware that an implied critique is present, but it should be seen as incidental to what I’m doing. Like getting wet as a consequence of swimming.

A blackboard with white text and a glowing green spiral. The spiral is drawn over the text, starting from the center and moving outwards in a clockwise direction. The background of the blackboard is dark, and the text is written in a white, serif font. The spiral is a bright green color and has a glowing effect.

The day begins hot and gets hotter. By noon it's a furnace. Water from twirling lawn sprinklers evaporates in midair, the ground turns to brick. Grass in a time-lapse film withers and curls before the eyes. Down on the desert floor, whirlwinds, a half-dozen at a time, generate spontaneously out of the superheated air and twist across the landscape like children's tops.

To escape the heat she pictures a house. My mind is a house, she says, with water rushing in. She walks through her mind opening all the taps. Water flows into the lavatories, into the kitchen sink, through the dishwasher. It pours into the bathtubs and sprays into the showers. My mind is a house, she thinks, and all the water is running through clean and clear. She watches the water spiral slowly but continuously around a point in ever-decreasing curves. She pictures the rush of water pooling momentarily in basins and bathtubs before swirling counterclockwise down the drains.



**“Fisher’s illusions, created in both words and images, are those of a storyteller whose trail is always warm, but whose path is meandering and tangled.”**

–Sue Graze,

Gerald Peters Gallery catalogue:  
*Vernon Fisher, September 6 - October 11, 1997*

Page 5: *The Coriolis Effect*

April 23 - July 12, 1987

Green neon, text on wall with tree branches

17 x 15 x 5 feet

Installation at Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
Collection of Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

Right: *Shadow of Night*, 2012

Oil and acrylic on canvas

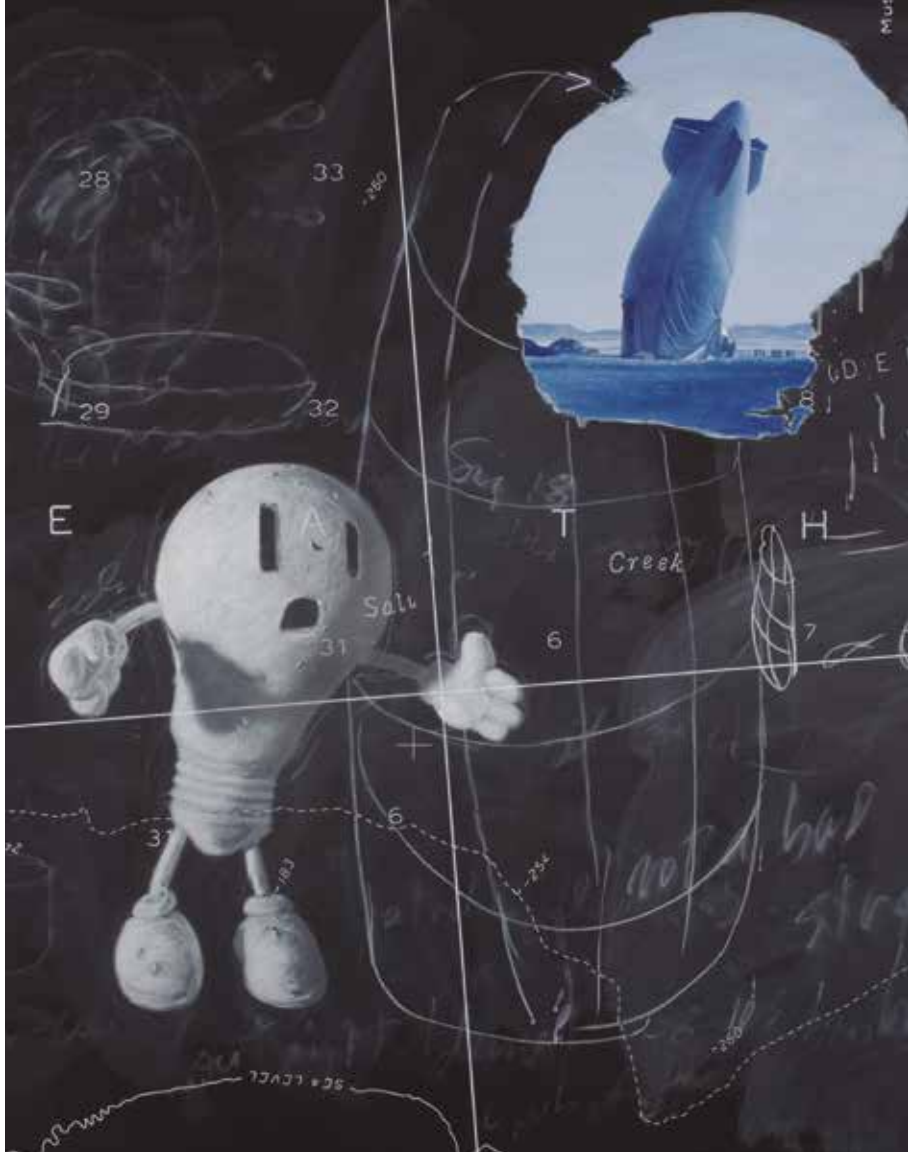
48 x 56 inches (detail)

Opposite Page: *Painting in the Pacific*, 1994

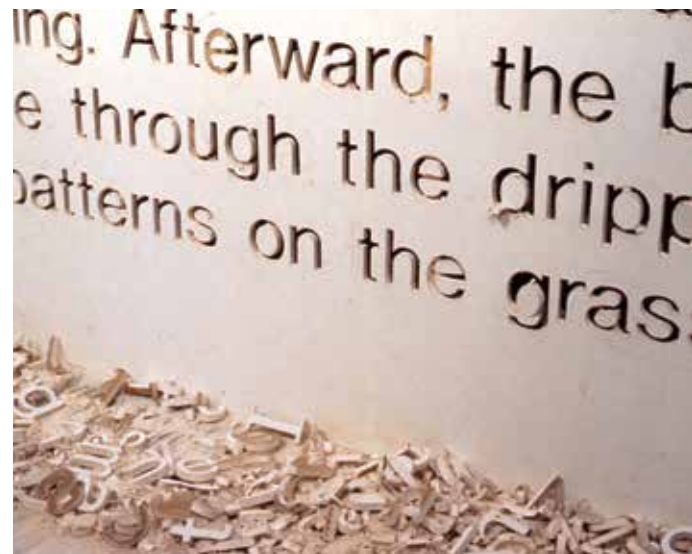
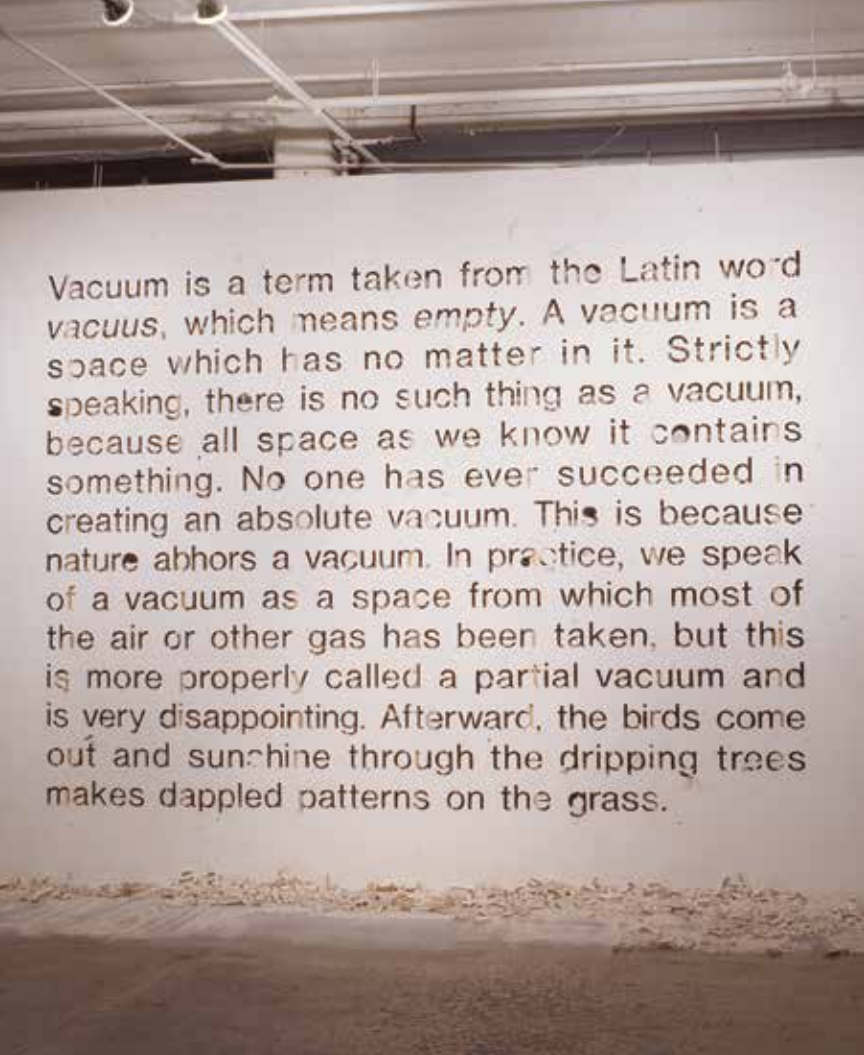
Oil, acrylic, wood, laminated paper

68 x 96 x 4 inches

Collection of Dallas Museum of Art, TX







Left and above: *Vacuum*, Dec. 16, 1994 - Feb. 12, 1995  
Cut drywall  
12 x 25 feet  
Installation at Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, TX

Opposite Page: *We Don't Go Anywhere Anymore*, 2013  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
48 x 48 inches (detail)







Above: *Interruption in a Field*, 1986  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
82 x 109 inches  
Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

Right: *Tutor to a Lunatic*, 1996  
Oil and blackboard slating on wood, procelain knobs  
103 x 84 inches  
Collection of High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA

Opposite Page: *Gemini*, 2012  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
44 x 48 inches (detail)





**“Fisher’s paintings are the equivalent of a pinball machine; disparate subjects and stylistic disjunctions force our attention to rebound from one aspect of his imagery to another.”**

–Matthew Bourbon, *Art Lies*, No. 67

Left: *Movements Among the Dead*,  
Jan. 19 - Mar. 6, 1990

Oil and acrylic on wall  
11' 3" x 42'6" x 22'6"

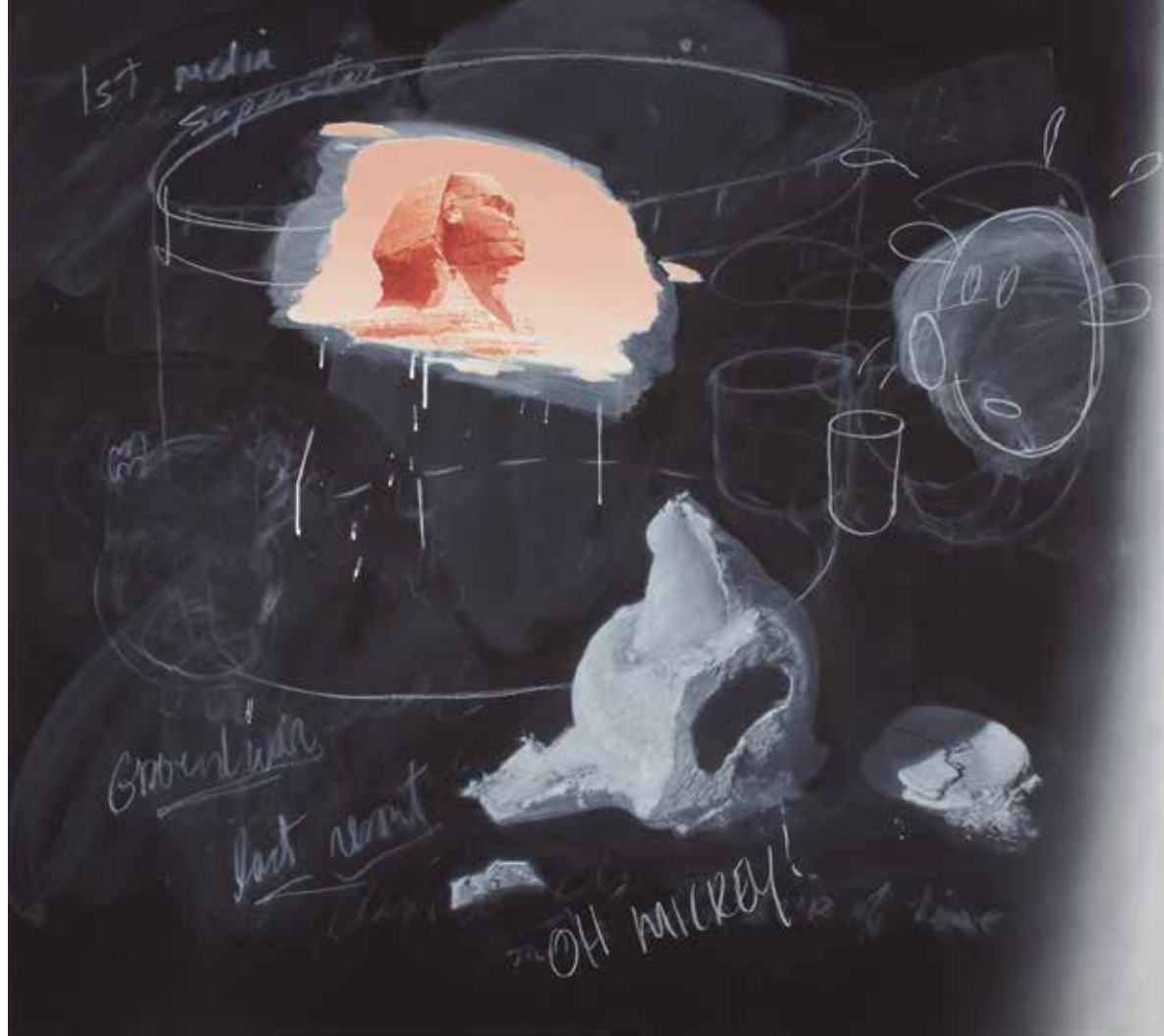
Installation at the Museum of Modern Art:  
Projects 20, New York

Opposite Page: *Movements Among the Dead*,  
Jan. 19 - Mar. 6, 1990

Oil and acrylic on wall  
11' 3" x 42'6" x 22'6"

Installation at the Museum of Modern Art:  
Projects 20, New York (detail)







Above: *Tipping Over Into Grace*, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas  
48 x 56 inches (detail)

Right: *Tipping Over Into Grace*, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas  
48 x 56 inches

Opposite Page: *Time Trails*, 2012  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
44 x 48 inches







**“Images drawn over images,  
narratives next to images, objects  
standing for a whole different  
story, occupy the same space, and  
in this way Fisher brings  
literature and art  
together as equals.”**

– Dina Sorensen,  
*Arts Magazine*, October 1991

Left: *A Picture of My Perfect Life*, 2012  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
42 x 46 inches (detail)

Opposite Page: *Krazy*, 2013  
Oil and acrylic on canvas  
44 x 48 inches (detail)



# BIO

## VERNON FISHER

Born 1943, Fort Worth, TX

### Education

- 1967 BA, Hardin-Simmons University, TX  
1969 MFA, University of Illinois, IL

### Selected Solo Exhibitions/Installations Since 2000

- 2013 *The Long Road to Nowhere*, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA  
2011 *Vernon Fisher 1989-1999*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
2010 *K-Mart Conceptualism*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX  
*Vernon Fisher*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX  
2009 *Dead Reckoning*, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
2008 *Descent of Man*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY  
2007 *Heart of Darkness*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
*Two Decades of Prints and Drawings*, Landfall Press Gallery, Santa Fe, NM  
2006 *North American Birds*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA  
2005 *Notes for a New Novel*, Sarah Moody Gallery of Art, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL  
*American Tragedy*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY  
2004 *Vernon Fisher 1977-1982*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA  
2003 *New Work*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Brainiac*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
2002 *Mark Moore Gallery*, Santa Monica, CA

- 2001 *Charles Cowles Gallery*, New York, NY  
*Angel Face*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY  
*Vernon Fisher*, Bentley Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ  
2000 *Vernon Fisher's File 00*, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
*Zulu*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX

### Selected Group Exhibitions/Installations Since 2000

- 2013 *Ex Libris*, Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas, TX.  
2012 *Dissecting Nature*, Quint Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA  
2011 *Second Nature: Contemporary Landscapes from the MFAH Collection*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
*Silver*, Gallery at The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX  
2010 *Tethered to My World—Contemporary Figure Painting in Chicago*, The Art Center in Highland Park, Chicago, IL  
*Cinematic Bodies*, Zolla Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Mapping: Memory and Motion in Contemporary Art*, Katonah Museum of Art, Katonah, NY  
*Floor Plan*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
*Private Collections 2*, Gallery at The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX  
2009 *Sight Mapping*, Herter Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA  
*Trouble in Paradise: Examining Discord Between Nature and Society*, Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ  
*Masculine: Interpretations of Manhood*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY  
*American Concepts and Global Visions/ Selections from the AT&T Collection*, The Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, TX

- 2008 *The Death of the Propane Salesman*, Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Fort Worth, TX  
*Something Geographical: Vernon Fisher, Buzz Spector and Xiaoze Xie*, Zolla Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL. Traveled to South Bend Museum of Art, South Bend, IN
- 2007 *Lone Star Legacy II: The Barrett Collection of Contemporary Art*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX  
*Fast Forward: Contemporary Collections for the DMA*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX  
*Sheldon Survey: An Invitational, New Works from Twenty Contemporary Artists*, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE
- 2006 *MMoCA Collects*, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, WI  
*Collectors X 3*, Art League of Houston, Houston, TX
- 2005 *Masters of Illusion: 150 Years of Trompe l'Oeil in America*. Kresge Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI  
*Land*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
*Summer Paper*, Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX  
*A Summer Group*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY  
*Christmas in July*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas, TX  
*Artists Interrogate: Race and Identity*, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI  
*Revising Arcadia*, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL. Traveled 2005-2007.
- 2004 *A Sharp Eye: An Art Dealer's 40-Year Journey*, Evanston Art Center, Evanston, IL  
*Water World*, South Bend Regional Museum of Art, South Bend, IN  
*Misleading Trails*, China Art Archives and Warehouse, Beijing, China. Traveled to various art museums in US.
- 2003 *Perspectives @ 25: A Quarter Century of New Art in Houston*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX  
*5th Anniversary Exhibition*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
*Texas Vision: The Barrett Collection*, Meadows Art Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX  
*Beyond the Academy: Encouraging New Talent from TX* Arthouse, Austin, TX  
*Pairings: Artists' Selections from the Dallas Museum of Art Collection*, The Dallas Center for Contemporary Art, Dallas, TX  
*Selections from the Permanent Collection*, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX
- 2002 *The Cultural Desert: Inside Contemporary Sculpture*, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ  
*Time/Frame*, Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.  
*Labyrinth*, Hiram Butler Devin Borden Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Lateral Thinking, Art of the 90's*, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA. Traveled to Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, Colorado Springs, CO; Hood Museum, Dartmouth University, Hanover, NH; Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH  
*Text/Tile*, Deutsche Bank, New York, NY  
*Next*, Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
*Summarize/Summer Eyes*, Jan Weiner Gallery, Kansas City, KS  
*Made in USA*, Hiram Butler Devin Borden Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Systems Order Nature*, Hiram Butler Devin Borden Gallery, Houston, TX  
*110 Years: The Permanent Collection of the Modern Art*, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX  
*On the Edge*, El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, TX  
*Rembrandt to Rauschenberg*, Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art at the

University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX  
 Texas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
*Kinds of Drawings*, Herter Art Gallery, University of  
 Massachusetts, Amherst, MA  
 2000 *2000 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New  
 York, NY  
*Reconstructions: The Imprint of Nature/ The Impact of Science*.  
 Sidney Mishkin Gallery, Baruch College, New York, NY  
*Paint, American Style*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA  
*Natural Deceits*, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort  
 Worth, TX  
 Hiram Butler/Devin Borden Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Almost Warm and Fuzzy*, Des Moines Art Center and  
*Independent Curators International*, Des Moines, IA. Traveled to  
 P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, NY; Fundacio la Caixa,  
 Barcelona, Spain; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
 among others.  
 Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX  
 Arthur Rogers Gallery, New Orleans, LA  
*Dealer's Choice: New New York*, Robert Kidd Gallery,  
 Birmingham, MI  
*A Lasting Legacy: Recent Additions to the Collection*, Orange  
 County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA  
*Crossing State Lines*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

### **Publications by the Artist**

2010 *Vernon Fisher*. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas.  
 Introduction by Frances Colpitt,  
 Interview with Michael Auping, Foreword by Ned Rifkin.  
 2000 "Moonrise Hernandez, New Mexico, 1951." *ArtLies* (Summer  
 2000): 4-5.

1992 "From 'Navigating By the Stars.'" Edited by Kirk Robertson. *Neon*  
 (Summer 1992).  
 1989 *Navigating by the Stars*. Chicago: Landfall Press, 1989.  
 "Navigating by the Stars." *American Way* (August 1, 1989).  
 1981 "Four Stories: 'Deaf Mute,' 'Desert Malevich,' 'Lecture on  
 Photography,' 'President's Golf Lesson.'" *Paris Review*, 23, no. 80  
 (Summer 1981).  
 1980 "A Childhood Friend." *Whitewalls*, no. 4 (Summer 1980). (Cover)  
 1979 "Five Stories." *Whitewalls*, no. 2 (Winter-Spring 1979).

### **Public Collections**

Albright Knox Museum, Buffalo, NY  
 Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
 Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD  
 Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, Stanford, CA  
 Castellani Art Museum, Niagara University, New York, NY  
 Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ  
 Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.  
 Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX  
 Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO  
 Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, IA  
 Edwin A. Ulrich Museum, Wichita, KS  
 El Paso Art Museum, El Paso, TX.  
 High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA  
 Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
 Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
 Hunter Museum, Chattanooga, TN  
 Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas, Austin, TX  
 Kansas City Art Institute, Kansas City, KS  
 Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, IL  
 Lannan Museum, Los Angeles, CA

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA  
Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, WI  
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI  
Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX  
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA  
Newcomb Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA  
Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, Logan, UT  
Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA  
Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ  
San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, San Angelo, TX  
San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX  
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, San Diego, CA  
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY  
The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, HI  
Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX  
Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, AZ  
University Art Museum, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA  
The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
Weisman Art Museum, Minneapolis, MI

**Front cover:**

*Starry Night*, 2013

Oil and acrylic on canvas

60 x 64 inches (detail)

**Back cover:**

*Private Africa*, 1995

Oil and blackboard slating on wood

92 x 94 x 4 inches

Collection of Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth (detail)

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