

# MODERN PAINTER

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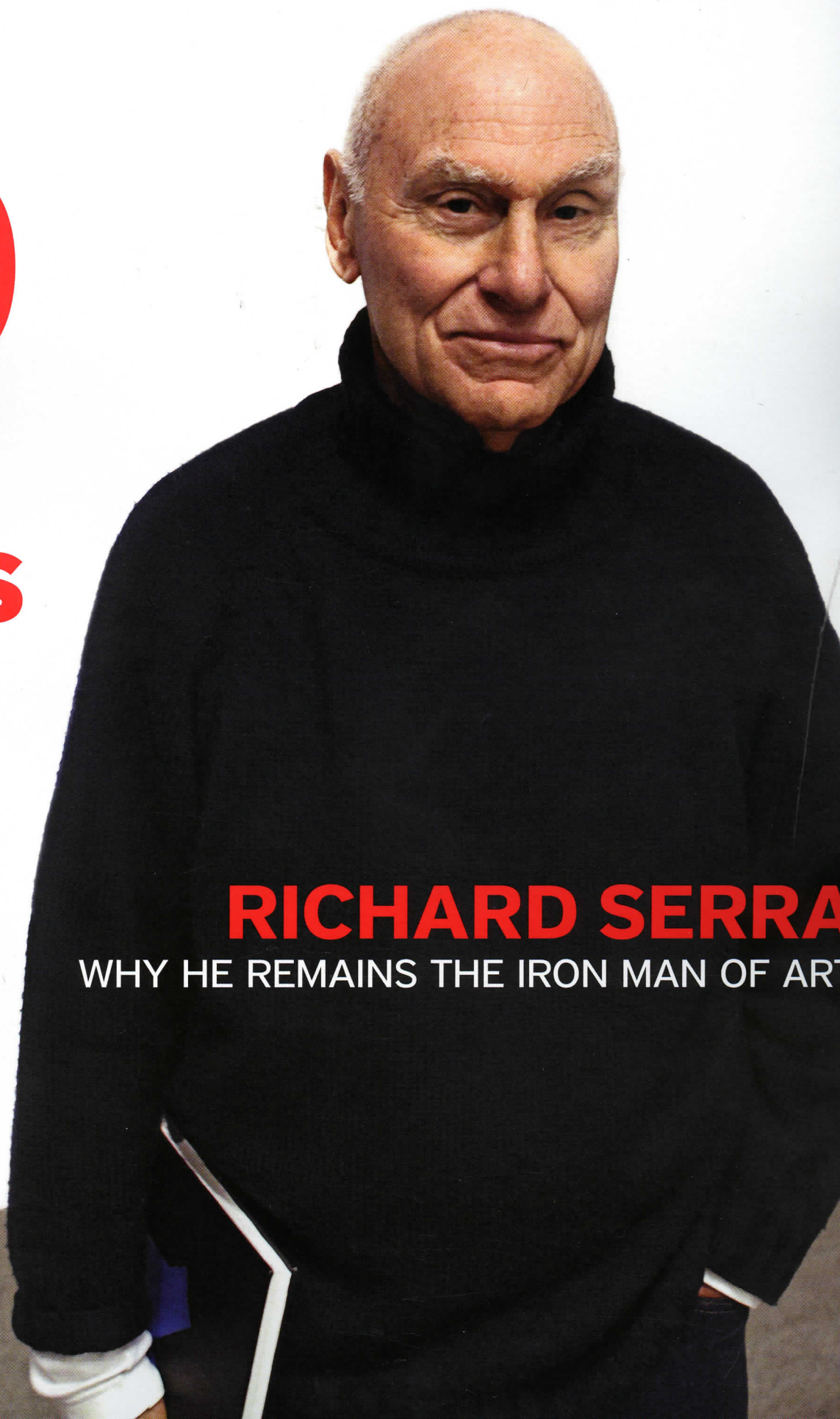
## THE 100 BEST FALL SHOWS

### VENICE BIENNALE

STEVEN HENRY MADOFF +  
MARCIA E. VETROCCO

#### PLUS:

Björk  
James Casebere  
Wangechi Mutu  
William Anastasi



## RICHARD SERRA

WHY HE REMAINS THE IRON MAN OF ART

LONDON

## Tala Madani

Pilar Corrias // May 11–June 18



FOR HER SECOND solo show, “Manual Man” at Pilar Corrias, the Tehran-born, New York-based Madani has set up a *théâtre de l’absurde* on canvas. Most of the characters in these paintings, all from 2011, occupy the shallow, confined space of a stage. They stand on it, peep out of prompt boxes or through closed curtains. Always in performance, they elicit our gaze in order to draw us into their plots. Gesturing at a theater tradition harking back to the *commedia dell’arte*, each of the men—and they are all men—looks like an archetype of sorts. The brash figures, with their cartoonish grins and furry eyebrows, have something of Punchinello in them. But they are simultaneously familiar and impossible to place, distorted reflections of humanity, touching and grotesque.

In *Stoneman Skinning Man*, a craggy demon excoriates an indignant character who appears to be shouting his objections to being torn apart. Who is the rocky monster? Is he attempting to become human? Or is he a doppelgänger of the victim, a Mr. Hyde attacking his alter ego? And is this victim taking his revenge in *Strangulation by Stained Glass*, in which he suffocates a gray silhouette made of bricks? The theme of the double runs throughout the exhibition, and one imagines these duplicates as mental projections so overpowering and unshakable that they end up taking center stage. Both *White Man with Manual* and *Instruction Manual* feature a character scanning an unfolded booklet from which emanates a geometric profile, like a human-shaped extension of it. Could the reader be so engrossed in his perusal that he incidentally gives birth to the “manual man” implied by the title?

Such open-ended narratives are encouraged by the sizes of the paintings. Most are very modest, displayed in clusters like comic strips. These are punctuated by large pieces that are often more abstract, although none completely rejects figuration. *Spotlight* focuses on a pair of white feet sticking out from under a blanket, which stands as a domestic equivalent to the picture plane, a swollen accessory so large that it has taken over the painting. The play between the two- and the three-dimensional is particularly striking in *Manual Grid*, showing three men with their heads protruding from a network of colored lines as if through the boards of a guillotine. The flatness of this ironic modernist grid simultaneously echoes the painting’s surface and plays a key part in the narrative. In Madani’s pictorial theater, compositional elements act as props as significant as the flawed characters of the endlessly reinvented stories. —Coline Milliard