



**Vincent
Romaniello**
Furrow Series
2008

with an essay
by Vittorio Colaizzi



Vincent Romaniello's *Furrows* Series

by Vittorio Colaizzi

Although Vincent Romaniello's *Furrows* series adheres to the physical format of painting (a rectangle on a wall), he claims an affinity with the expanded sculptural investigations of artists such as Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, and the more recent Urs Fischer. This affinity is visible in the directness and reflexivity of his forming activities. Romaniello draws a scalloped tool across a mass of thick gesso to create rows of tracks in relatively simple horizontal/vertical matrices, an austere design method that is significantly accented by curves and angles. The canvases vary in size, but the furrows are always scaled large against them, creating a sculptural totality instead of a pictorial collection of events on a field.



Dollops of less regimented material have been squeezed out between the sweeps of the comb and over the edges of the canvas, seeming imperfections that assert the paintings as objects ripe for a bodily rather than an optical encounter. Color results from sprinkling pigment or sand onto the wet gesso, most recently gathered from sites of personal significance to the artist. Romaniello's methods, like Smithson's earth moving and Serra's cast lead, are not without mediation, and do not perpetuate the Abstract Expressionist mythos of heroic, archetypal presence, but the final works still bear traces of his activity,

clearly wrought upon the material, as opposed to the highly finished surfaces of some contemporary painting.

Associations abound in these highly abstract works: biological principles of sex, brain chemistry, and agriculture form reciprocal allegories with tectonic motion, sprawling Art Nouveau vines, or the slow boil of volcanic mud. Amid such possibilities, assumed codes of meaning are refreshingly absent; neither the aforementioned gestural self-expression, nor the apparent transgressiveness of crisp imagery appropriated from visual culture.

But can a 21st century painter legitimately participate in the magnitude and reflexivity of Smithson and Serra? Does he not simply pictorialize them, reiterating their stylistic tics in a more palatable manifestation? At stake in the critical debates of the 60s was the mantle of historical imperative. Whose art was necessary? Whose art made sense in its defeat of constrictive standards? This was the Greenbergian legacy of anti-Greenbergianism. Romaniello is not bound by this paradigm, but is free to explore supposed backwaters of modernism, and to mine the formal, associative, and even expressive potential of strategies too quickly vaulted over in the rush of the late avant-garde. He shows that the much sought-after experiential primacy is still available to relatively humble formats, but that it is never guaranteed to any medium, no matter how "advanced." It can only be achieved with care and ingenuity.

Post-Minimalist procedures emerged from a deep skepticism toward the autonomous art object, which seemed to be an irredeemable commodity whose relevance was limited at best. Smithson, along with Eva Hesse and others, challenged understandings of physical coherence, continuing yet intensifying the interrogations of Minimalism. The latter's rigid formalism was exploded into the

re-admission of reference and association. Nevertheless, the forms of Earth, Process, and Anti-Form, while varying from dirt and rocks to latex to photos and texts, were anything but frivolous; they bore a logic that cast contemporaneous Color Field painting – and to many, painting in general – as an emblem of decadence.

Lost in the shift from Minimalism to its less rigid successors was the question of the objectness of painting. For the most part, the stylistic horizons of the 60s prevented the fullest exploration of what kind of an object painting could be. The uninflected surfaces of Minimalist painting quickly seemed to spell a dead end, but the *Furrows* rekindle this issue with visceral freshness. We apprehend them as objects in a way that cannot be primly categorized. It is certain that Romaniello does not intend to rehash an old argument; his work emerges from a back-and-forth between materials and impulses that occurs in the studio, today. However, the weight of history is inescapable for any artist of merit. Art historical threads enrich and complicate, but never “explain” Romaniello’s paintings.

Romaniello is no partisan crusader for the legitimacy of painting. This is one debate of the recent past that has thankfully been tabled in favor of the question of the particular necessity of each artist’s idiom. If any art’s status as painting was fruitfully in doubt, it is Romaniello’s *Furrows*. While it is easy to move “beyond” painting, Romaniello maintains a proximity to and a memory of the embattled art in order to keep the question in play, thereby achieving the critical tension that is also a tenant of modernism. For in all the re-treading of historical styles that, for good or ill, mark our epoch, one wonders if criticality is still present. How, like innovative artists from Courbet to Serra, does art still single out false consciousness, refuse to accept existing intellectual, economic,

or aesthetic structures, and propose alternatives? In Romaniello’s case, it is in his wall-bound objects’ very embrace of the place of painting as decoration, as an object of taste. There is something alarmingly tasteful about the *Furrows*’ unity of texture and sprinkled-on color. At times seemingly iridescent, it approaches the quirk that hangs over the sofas at Crate & Barrel. Romaniello’s courting of this kitschy realm is much more daring than the ubiquitous appropriation of robots and kitties, because it cuts so much closer to the bone, articulating our perpetual fear of the instrumentalization of abstraction as a trinket of middle-brow privilege. And the risk pays off, because Romaniello’s results are inextricably linked to his constructive methods; nothing is applied for effect, everything is integral, and therefore the work can never be as well-mannered as it at first appears. Again, this is not the result of Romaniello’s strategizing in order to fit into a pre-given scheme, but rather of his search for the most appropriate form for his interests. And yet even this verbalization fails, because it implies a split between form and content that is absent in Romaniello’s work.

Paintings were objects long before they were pictures, in the sense that sculpture and architecture are objects. All three arts were integrated in their materialization of the otherworldly. Art was a form of worship. As a child, Romaniello was put in a state of quiet reverence by an exhibition of Medieval polychrome sculpture. With his *Furrows* series, he has similarly created objects that are not objects, objects that by insisting upon their proportions, dimensions, rhythms, and color, transport the viewer to a here and now that, bereft of definitive iconography, is inexhaustibly mysterious. ■





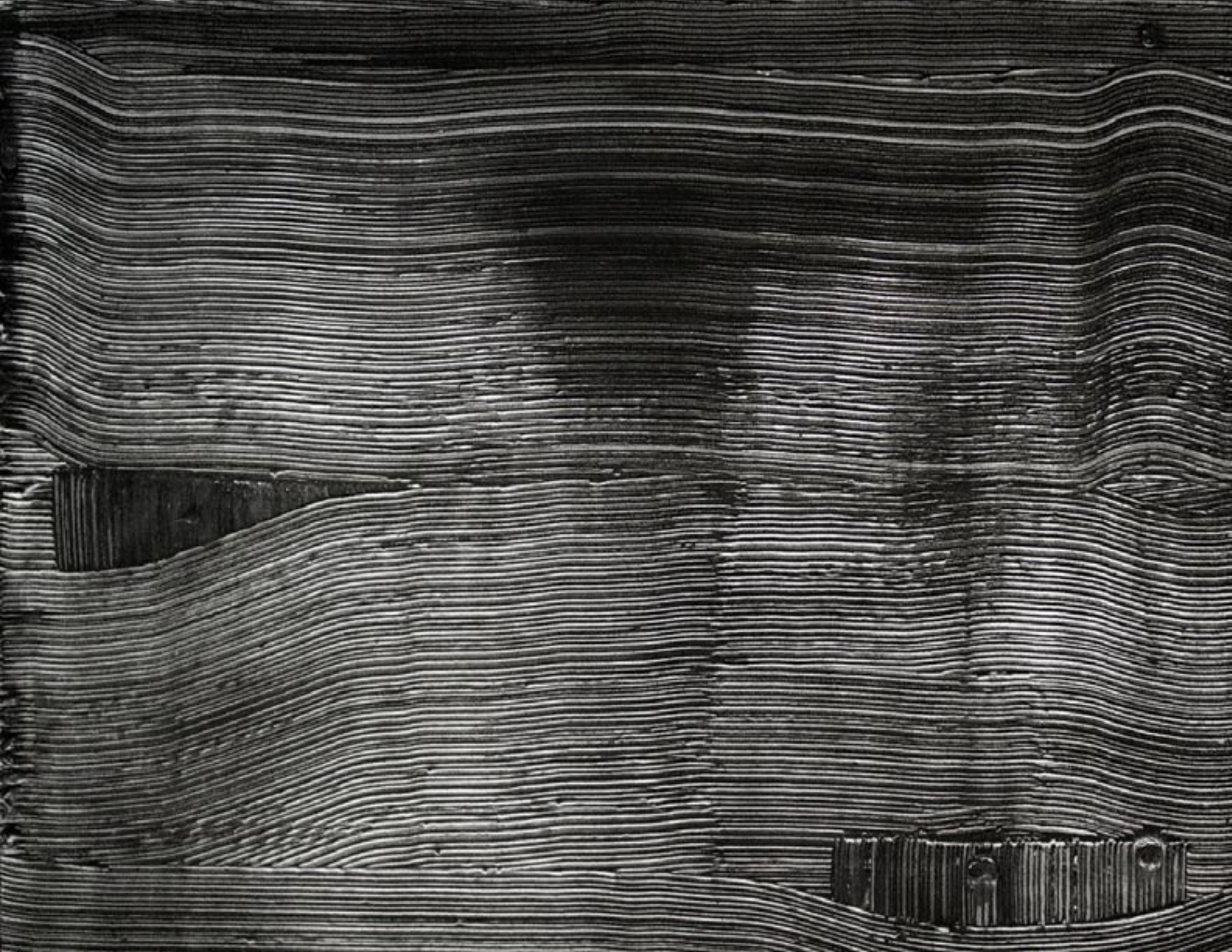
Father's Garden 1 (above) and Father's Garden 2 (right), 12x24 inches, soil, sand and stone, 2007.





Above, clockwise Untitled 757, 758, 764, 765, 12x24 inches. Right, Untitled 767, 54x70 inches. All sand and charcoal, 2007.







Above, Untitled 727, 28x54 inches (irregular), charcoal and gesso, 2007.
Left, Untitled 739 (detail on page 5), 64x96 inches, charcoal and gesso, 2007.



Above, Untitled 740. Right, Untitled 741. Both 54x64 inches, pigment and charcoal on canvas, 2007.





Above, Untitled 732, 54x64 inches. Right, Untitled 726 (detail on cover), 54x54 inches. Both pigment and charcoal on canvas 2007





Above, Untitled 730. Right, Untitled 731. Both 54x64 inches, pigment and charcoal on canvas, 2007.



List of Catalog Works

All works were created in 2007, on canvas supports.
Measurements are in inches.

| | |
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| Cover | Detail of Untitled 726, 54x54, charcoal |
| Page 2 | Detail of Father's Garden 2, 12x24, soil, sand, stone |
| Page 3 | Father's Garden 2, 12x24, soil, sand, stone |
| Page 5 | Detail of Untitled 739, 64x96, charcoal |
| Page 6,7 | Father's Garden 1 and 2, 12x24, soil, sand, stone |
| Page 8 | Clockwise, Untitled 757, 758, 764, 765. All 12x24, sand and charcoal |
| Page 9 | Untitled 767, 54x70, sand and charcoal |
| Page 10 | Untitled 739, 64x95, charcoal |
| Page 11 | Untitled 611, 28x54, charcoal |
| Page 12 | Untitled 740, 54x54, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 13 | Untitled 741, 54x64, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 14 | Untitled 732, 54x54, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 15 | Untitled 726, 54x64, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 16 | Untitled 730, 54x64, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 17 | Untitled 731, 54x64, charcoal and pigment |
| Page 22 | Untitled 736, 12x24, beach sand and charcoal |

Solo and Two Person Exhibitions (partial list)

- 2008 DEEP, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia PA
2005 The Urban Canvas, paintings, works on paper and video. Gallery Siano, Philadelphia PA
2004 Philadelphia Museum of Art, Artworks Gallery, 2 person exhibition, Philadelphia PA
Thomas Properties, Commerce Square, 2 person exhibition, Philadelphia PA
Westminster Seminary, Glenside PA
2003 Terra Spirtius, Parallels Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
1996 Classical Duet, two person show, Devon PA
1995 Five Year Survey, Markheim Art Center, Haddonfield NJ
1994 Old World, New Dreams, Academy of Art, San Francisco CA

Group Exhibitions (partial list)

- 2008 Intuit: Towards a Redefinition, Salisbury University Art Gallery, Salisbury MD
2007 Patterns in Painting, Diamond Newman Gallery, Boston MA
6 Painters, Carbon 14, Philadelphia PA
Color Reflex, Artizen Fine Arts, Dallas TX
2006 Order(ed), Gallery Siano, Philadelphia PA
allTURNatives: Form + Spirit, Wood Turning Center, International Turning Exchange exhibition, Philadelphia PA
2005 Engaging the Structural, Broadway Gallery, New York, NY
2004 Works On Paper, Bentley Projects, Phoenix AZ
New Talent, Rosenfeld Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
Inner Circles, traveling group exhibition, Susquehanna Art Museum, Harrisburg PA
Inner Circles, The Sharadin Gallery, Kutztown University
Luminosity, Art In City Hall, Philadelphia, PA
2003 Journey Within, Susquehanna Art Museum, Morrison Gallery, Penn State University, Harrisburg PA
2002 Nature Reined, Butters Gallery, Portland Oregon
Critic's Choice, Critic-In-Residence Gerrit Henry, Mainline Art Center, Haverford PA

- 2001 Biennale Internazionale dell'Arte Contemporanea, Florence Italy
Introductions, Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia PA
Art For Artists' Sake, Philadelphia Art Alliance, Philadelphia PA
2000 From Realism to Non-Objectivity, Furlong Art Gallery, University of Wisconsin-Madison
1999 Pedestrian Gallery, Jacksonville FL
1998 Works on Paper, Philadelphia Sketch Club, Philadelphia PA
1997 24th Biennial, Allentown Museum, Allentown PA
1995 In The Italian Tradition, Leslie Eadeh Gallery, Devon PA
1994 Small Works, Pentimenti Gallery, Philadelphia PA
1993 Small Works, Roger Smith Gallery NYC
Issues of Identity, Marymount University NYC
1992 The 1.5 Show, Tribeca 148 Gallery NYC

Education

- 1993-94 The New York Academy of Art, New York, NY
1991-92 School of Visual Arts, New York, NY
1975-79 Academy of Art, San Francisco, CA

Collections

Morgan Lewis, Philadelphia, PA
Kleinbard Bell & Brecker LLP, Philadelphia, PA
Coventry Corporation, Fort Washington, PA
Park Hyatt Hotel, Philadelphia, PA
Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA
The Wood Turning Center, Philadelphia PA
Private collections nationally and internationally

Awards/Residencies

- 2006 International Turning Exchange, Residency Program, photojournalist (video), Philadelphia PA
2004-05 Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Special Opportunity Stipend
2002 Abington Annual, Winner of Claire Breheme Memorial prize, Abington Art Center, Abington PA
1996 Art of the State, 1st prize in the painting category, State Museum of Harrisburg, PA

Selected Bibliography

Johnson, Richard "Backlash to Affirmative Action" Daily News, NYC, 7 April 1993

"Art Imitates Marketing" Wall Street Journal, Chicopee MA, 13 May 1993

Schroeder, Tracy "Guest Artists Enliven AAC Galleries" Academy Publications, San Francisco CA, 14 February 1994

"Exhibition-ists" Art Matters, Philadelphia PA, December/January 1995
Wilkinson, Sharron

"Collaborative Artists on the Internet" Art Calendar, Upper Fairmount MD, May 1996

Hudson, June "He 'sacrifices' in art and wins" Haverford News, Haverford PA, 7 August 1996

Donohoe, Victoria "Exhibit boosts Harrisburg's cultural scene" Philadelphia Inquirer, 18 August 1996

Sozanski, Edward "Art In PA" Philadelphia Inquirer, 23 August 1996

Endick, Kenneth J. "Art flows free at Allentown Museum" The Express Times, 20 February 1998

Gehman, Geoff "Hungry for Art?" The Morning Call, Allentown PA, 25 January 1998

"Masterpiece Shows Keystone Artists" Beacon, Hunderton County PA, August 2000

"Simply The Best" New Hope Gazette, New Hope PA, September 2000

"BCCC Artmobile Tour" Doylestown Patriot News, Doylestown PA, January 2001

Donohoe, Victoria "Show Reflects Communities Transitory Nature" Philadelphia Inquirer, 15 April 2001

Strauss, R.B. "Painting the Picture" Around Philly, Philadelphia PA, 5 June 2001

Bowland, Andrea "A True Artist" Around Philly, Philadelphia PA, 29 April 2002

"Modern art comes full circle" The Keystone, Kutztown Pennsylvania, February 2004

"Inner Circles" and Alexander Calder' Alternative Central, Harrisburg PA, May 2004

Lewis, Zachary, The Patriot News, "Art to bring you full circle" Harrisburg PA, July 2004

Soblove, Ricki "360 Degrees of Unity" Alternative Central, Harrisburg PA, September 2004

Wei, Lilly "Geometry Reloaded" NY Arts Magazine, New York NY, May-June 2005

Ashley, Chris "Interview with Vincent Romaniello" Look, See September 25, 2006

Fabbri, Anne, "New York, New York" Art Matters, Fort Washington PA, June 2005

Hill, Lori, "Gallery Siano" City Paper, Philadelphia PA, 6-12 October 2005

Strauss, R.B., "October calls its own inside" Weely Press, Philadelphia PA, October 2006

Sozanski, Edward "Partners in art" Philadelphia Inquirer, 21 October 2005

Fabbri, Anne "Order(ed)" Art Matters, June 2006

Newhall, Edith "Creative styles of their own" Philadelphia Inquirer, 26 May 2005

Rice, Robin "One Good Turn" City Paper, 10 August 2006

This catalog was prepared in conjunction with the
exhibition "DEEP" at the Philadelphia Art Alliance
in Philadelphia PA.

February 7 - May 18, 2008

Satellite Gallery, The Rittenhouse Hotel

210 W. Rittenhouse Square, 3rd Floor

All works by Vincent Romaniello © 2007

Vincent Romaniello

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