

# Jennifer Bartlett

**Pennsylvania Academy  
of the Fine Arts  
Philadelphia**

Some young artists agonize over how they will separate themselves from the pack, even before they enter graduate school. Not Jennifer Bartlett, whose intense search for originality began in the SoHo district of Manhattan two full years after she graduated from Yale's M.F.A. program in 1965. She eventually discovered the foundation for her artistic vocabulary: baked-enamel steel plates on which she could silkscreen or paint,

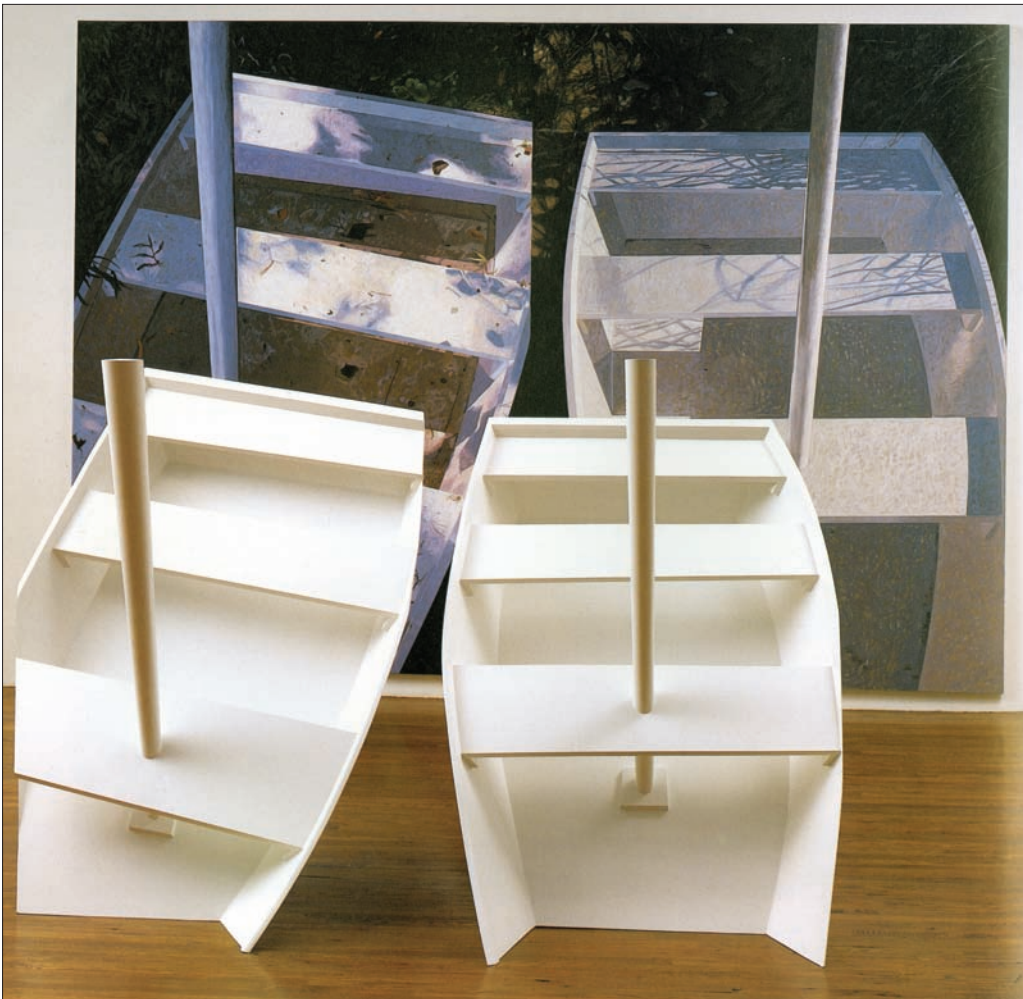
established Bartlett's appeal. Whether working abstractly through a grid of dots, or figuratively, as in a painting of a section of a room, the artist creates compositions that are so tautly organized that they seem to simultaneously acknowledge the possibility of their own disruption. In the show's catalogue, Joan Didion, a fellow California native and likewise a veteran of earthquakes, recognizes "Bartlett's most persistent imagery" as an "apprehension of the potential for disaster in the everyday," and traces it to her California upbringing.

Many of the works in the show demonstrated this uneasiness, offering a sense of ground shifting beneath one's feet. Two 1987 works, *Boats* and *Double House*, feature an oil on canvas hung on the wall that is mirrored in a wood-and-steel sculpture installed on the floor in front of it. In both works, space appears to fracture—forcing a rowboat to tilt awkwardly at an angle and splitting a house in two. The sculptural objects and their painted counterparts shift before viewer's eyes, as if displaced by a geological event.

Bartlett's paintings of domestic life suggest the same curious blend of coziness and impending trouble. A series from the early '90s depicts the inside of her house at differ-

ent times of day and night. In *Eleven A.M.* (1991–2), a seemingly ordinary view of wooden crates on a floor occupies center stage, while unread copies of the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* are tossed peacefully nearby. But the headline "Baby Who Beat the Butcher," screaming from the cover of the *Post* in this otherwise calm, everyday scene, strikes a powerfully ominous note.

—Edith Newhall



***Boats*, 1987, oil on canvas, enamel on wood, and steel, dimensions variable, installation view.**

wiping away unsatisfactory results with paint thinner.

Soon after she signed on with Paula Cooper Gallery in the '70s, though, she added painting on canvas to her repertoire. This show, subtitled "History of the Universe—Works 1970–2011" and organized by Klaus Ottmann for the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York, featured 22 works, many of them breathtakingly large, and immediately