Jed Perl on Art

I. What does it mean when a gallerygoer says that an artist has made a leap in some new work? What does it mean when a painter says, “I want to complicate my imagery”? The meanings of these remarks, some would argue, could not be plainer. The leap to which the gallerygoer refers might be a leap from good to better or from better to great. The complication that the painter is talking about probably has something to do with incorporating more elements in a composition, with putting greater emphasis on the articulation of those elements. But of course there are others—artists and gallerygoers of a more philosophical turn of mind—who will insist that the meanings of these comments are anything but plain, that they are comprehensible only because we accept, almost unconsciously, a great variety of assumptions—about quality in