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My thesis project is an attempt to make a theoretical connection between my working process and the image or object created as an emergent effect of that process. The focus is on primary art materials: graphite, gesso, hardboard and white or black pigments mixed with matte binders. The work is predominately two dimensional and will function diagrammatically as well as indexically in it's description of my artistic process.

PAINT BY NUMBERS

By

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APPROVAL PAGE

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PAINT BY NUMBERS

"I've learned to draw and I read a little bit, but I'm still a very one-sided person and I don't know a great deal. I have a limited intelligence and I use it in a particular way."

Richard P. Feynman

Pursuit of knowledge is a fundamental human drive. Richard P. Feynman was a nuclear physicist in the early part of this century. He worked on the atom bomb and also was at the forefront of nanotechnology later in his life. He won the Nobel prize for physics in 1965 and has written many books on science and life. I used his quote because he is humble about his knowledge and has a healthy skepticism about it. We categorize, interpret and decipher any and all things that we perceive. The drawings, events, paintings of my thesis project are an attempt to address the foundation of my artistic process with the premise that my "knowledge" is relative to my perception. Each series within the project has particular variables which contain the process and define it. The title of each work is a description of the event and or materials used in the process of making the piece. The work exists in three aesthetic forms: drawings, numeric grids, and paintings. The body of work addresses understanding through exploration, decision making, and execution. My process is modeled after the scientific method but has been

adapted to fit the model of art making and personal expression. Of these three categories, the most primordial is the drawing. The drawing portion of my thesis has two discrete forms. One form is traditional type drawing that consists of an image created by building layers of graphite that is determined by calculated arrangement erring on the side of prae-
ticum not whimsy. The second type of drawing is connected to data generation. It functions as a non-aesthetic application in the form of a numeric grid. The grid creates a boundary within each cell, where the number corresponds to a creative decision. The arrangement of numerals within the grid is not predetermined but rules are applied reflexively, corresponding to an aesthetic system of art making.

Painting is a form of letting go and at the same time getting back to artistic roots. I am "Letting the paint be paint" in an effort to learn through a directed dialogue with the material. The cans of paint are grouped according to color and then measured and poured into 2oz dixie cups, then poured evenly across the top of the panel. The application procedure removes any artistic style I could use to affect the surface of the painting. This type of application allows me to build the surface much like the series of drawings where a set activity determines the look of the work as opposed to my aesthetic preference. The paintings are finished when the can I am using for a particular painting is empty.

The investigation in my thesis work is a reflection on my practice as an artist, and reflects how observation and understanding of technique are not just part of the way I work in the studio but, is the way I approach every endeavor in my life. My father is an auto-body repair man. I grew up watching him fix the surface of cars. Hammers were

used to straiten the surface panels. I use hammer like tools now to build the surfaces I paint and draw on. I learned a procedural based work ethic from watching him fix cars. My thesis work is an adaptation of these methods and tools, translated into a body of art work. It is fairly easy to know when the panels of a car are fixed, however, a work of art has more subtle criterion for completion. This provides exploration not only within a system where my work teaches me, but also questions the process of making and knowing in general. I assume that there is a practice that is learned and its applicability makes sense within the institution of art making. This is tricky though, because my work is about taking institutional methods and forging something meaningful.

Opinions vary about what art should and should not be. Is it about the materiality, the process, the event, or the artist as a personal document? With my work I attempt to be inclusive about my background. I use primary artist materials and attempt to use them in a way that is not masterful or capricious. By accommodating the materiality, process and personal perspective within the practice, the work is explicitly biographical and somewhat universal at the same time. The *circle drawings* allowed me to repeat an action with limited materials on a designated surface to see what, if anything, can come from a series of circles drawn with graphite, sandpaper and the oil from my hands. The first twenty are sketches in which graphite and a white or black gessoed surface interact over time through the gesture of my hand. By choosing a continuous motion to create each piece, the image of the circle became the secondary but expected and the variation becomes the most interesting and evident thing in the work. This allowed me to focus on

the nuances within the system to catalogue them, and to make subsequent investigations in pursuit of knowledge rather than mastery. John Dewey claims, "The method of intelligence manifested in the experimental method demands keeping track of ideas, activities, and observed consequences... to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences." (qtd. Hudson, *Used Paint*, 20-21) From these sketches I can bridle a particular facet and make a series of more strictly guided works and investigate the variation potential that they present. The looseness of the work within boundaries allows for a more directed search in subsequent works. This practice of limiting my materials and methods has lead me to get at the fundamentals are in my work, which is observation achieved through the process of making.

I make aesthetic decisions based on idiosyncratic preference. I make things that I want to see, but first I had to address what it was I want to see. Or, more accurately, what method I am using to decide what to make and how to arrange it. I was working in black and white materials. The Graphite functions as a light or a dark medium depending on background color and viewing angle, in this case a third option. I began to think of the relationship between numeric systems and artistic systems and how I might approach visualizing this. I had the visualization already, so I had to deduce the data. I had been working serially and arranging the work in grids. The point was to see nuance within the pattern. The nuance, random, chance or choice element are key. I decided to use a series of matrices where the primaries are used. The primary colors are red, yellow and blue. I had been working with black, white, and gray (graphite) which is another set of prima-

ries. The matrix would be a 3 x 3 square and it would contain a 1, 2, or 3 and would have to be balanced. So, each cell (3 x 3 matrix) would have 3 of each number. The limiting factor, in addition to each cell having 3 of each number, would be that it could not be above, below, or on either side of the same number. There were 12 permutations of this system within the cell. This provided the format for the project: a 12 x 12 grid of 3 x 3 cells. The large grid of cells also had a rule which carries over from the intercell rule that no number can be the same on either side, above or below it. The solution to the first cell can be any of the 12 possible choices. The first cell does not have to be the upper right hand cell it can be any of the 144 cells. For me this process of filling out the grid and investigating the structure, emulates the far more complex aesthetic system in which I work making art. The puzzle must be solved according to the rules. In works of art, however the rules are not all certain and may change depending on preference. Retrospect seems to be the most reliable source for judgement of intellectual profundity and physical beauty. The rules are subject to change in light of contemporary human achievements. Science and philosophy are my greatest influences concerning my cultural perspective. I wanted to set up a linear system where the rules could be extrapolated aesthetically but could be read diagrammatically, because I wanted the system to emulate the way I see human intellectual progression. We use finite terms to define the world around us. This makes communication about specific phenomena possible. The complexity of the number grids is deducible superficially but the mental picture quickly becomes too fractal-esque to be grasped as a whole. There are 4 discrete solutions to each cell on any of the four

sides of the initial 12 choice cell. This was exactly what I had wanted, a system of non-esthetic choices following guidelines to a quantifiable, yet, unimaginable, idiosyncratic end.

As previously discussed, circle drawings the paintings consist of dripped paint on hardboard. I measure 2 ounces of paint and drip it along the top of the panel to produce a variety of aesthetic affects. This variety is created by the color and binder of the paint. My hand also affects the outcome to a certain degree because I attempt to pour evenly across the surface at the top so that both sides has the same saturation. These methods are clearly observable within the work. The choice of having particular variables change from piece to piece causes the materials to become the constant and the method of application the nuance. These works are made on 11 x 11 inch pieces of hardboard. This size is specific to the square because it is a palindromic number. The surface area is also palindromic, 121 square inches. Most panels are about 1/4 gallon or a U.S. quart (32 oz. again 1's, 2's and 3's). The square paintings must be arranged with the drips descending because in most cases the paint has ran off the panel on to the shelf and pooled at the bottom creating an attachment to the shelf and painting. The painting and the easel have become one. This orientation and scale seems most appropriate to me for several reasons. The scale of the individual pieces within a larger arrangement imply specific attention. The works have no aesthetic or geometric orientation, they have a beginning and an end and a physical orientation. They are arranged on the shelves according to when the shelves were made and when the paint was procured and group depending on hue. The

circumstances dictate when the project will end. This painting was over when all the paint was out of each can and on the panel/shelf. All the materials have all been used or transformed and are all shown. This consists of 45, 11x11 in panels making 5,445 square inches of surface and roughly 11 gallons of paint. Some of the cans of paint were not completely full and $44 \times 11 \times 11 =$ a non palindromic number. The only thing missing is my energy, which is there in the form of known characteristics of the material and its current arrangement. This process is indexical of my time spent and the choices I make in the creation of a work of art. I take into account that the paint starts out as a liquid in container and becomes a solid on the surface of the object I make. The physical characteristics of the material used are shown in the finished work because of gravity and a trajectory I determine which is pouring the paint so that it is even across the top and the surface affects the break up of it over time. The systems I use to make the work are self referential in this way because the materiality is shown.

Artworks are part of art history. For works of art to be appreciated on levels deeper than aesthetics some of that history must be present in new way so the observer has a point of reference to judge it and so the work is not historically redundant. My use of white paint in another project references the prolific artist Robert Ryman. The book *Used Paint* describes his work as an investigation and exploration of materials and surfaces. In Ryman's work the space where the work is hung and the physical properties of the object, including light from the windows, are incorporated into a working process. My work is more fundamental the paint in my case comes from a can and is closer to its

liquid state. I transform it into a solid by pouring over a tilted surface and letting it dry. The amount of paint is just enough to evenly cover the top portion of the 121 square inch surface and then, about half way down break into streams which eventually run in lines off the surface and pool on the shelf which supports the painting. My work is about doing and looking, so this experience would be the same in almost any light or setting.

What I extract as a an artist from Ryman's working process is his duty to exploration and discovery. However, objects on display function to a different end because the exploration is limited for the museum or gallery observer. They are presented with the product of the experiment. I wanted to make this idea of exploration more accessible by using materials readily available so that the idea itself not the specific process may have potential for the viewer. The works are not how to make a painting but the steps are seen and the process could be repeated with any liquid that dries over time. I like to think of my work like the fishing trip not the taxidermy bass over the mantle.

As an artist I watch the things I make grow. I raise them like a garden. I know all the facets that allowed them to become what they currently are and in the end I have to present them as a thesis. The exploration of a particular work is over when the work stops and goes on display. What can it tell us about how it was made? I had been working in a mirroring technique where similar actions took place on both sides of a surface, denoting repetition and translation. I wanted to internalize the translation that takes place in scene painting. I mirror image paintings and the translation as well as the thing being translated are presented as equals, as one singular object with 2 sides. But the Rorschach

type image effect of the work was distracting from my procedural concern. I needed to get away from images, they are inappropriate for the concept of my practice. An image is a reproduction and my work is about production. I like them very much I just chose not to work with them any more. In an artist statement Lawrence Wiener introduces his work by saying, "I do not mind objects, but I don't care to make them. The object - by virtue of being a unique commodity - becomes something that might make it impossible for people to see the art for the forest." (qtd Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, pp) I limited my materials and methods when I made the first circle drawings which are still unique commodities but, because they are the first attempt at this concept and the uniqueness within them is arbitrary. This allows them to remain in line with Wiener's statements to a degree. Anyone can make circle drawings. They were minimal and maximal simultaneously. I was attempting to pile up the intensity in one spot as opposed to spreading it over the entire surface. I see this body of work as a denotation of time marked out through use or wear not in tic marks. The way a rubbing erodes a surface over time, which exactly what I did with the sandpaper. One of my professors remarked; "There is not much to look at." I felt like I could agree to a degree. The way a haiku is not as prodigious as *Paradise Lost* yet both are a form of artistic insight and inquiry. Format in all works of art, literary and visual, function relative to a system of interpretation. To accurately assess the form which a particular work of art takes an appropriate context the work must be decided by the creator. The context I had constructed was a working method where efforts were condensed formally. This serves as an analogy for

the thesis program and for the boundaries inherent in that process. This working method also allows me to address artistic fundamentals in way I had not done recently. Which is when I first started working abstractly. I ask the question, What is abstraction? My process seems more indexical of a process than working with geometric forms arranged according to personal preference in a rectilinear plane. Illusory affects of color and shape arrangement can potentially dilute the effect of a process oriented practice. For me abstraction is about point of view and context not the way something looks. I began to think this way because the references for abstract mark came from residual effects in the studio such as paper pulp collected on the rim of a bucket or a spot not the wall where I had been cleaning my brush for a period of time. The method I have chosen is an attempt to reduce illusory clutter that looks abstract and highlight the personal behaviors of an artist working through an idiosyncratic scenario with specific materials. So the paint or graphite looks more like paint and graphite and less like an image. This is why I choose the primary form of a circle. The surface is indicative of my working process and history, not only as an artist, but as the son of an auto-body repair man. This type of work is dirty. I adopted some of the materials my father and his father had worked with. The circle drawings are made with graphite and sandpaper on hard flat surfaces. The graphite reminded me of metal and is a one of the first materials I worked with as an artist. There is a divide here between the artistic skills I learned in school and the vocational fixing of automobiles I learned from my father.

My work is an attempt to bridge the gap between these 2 types of learned skills and their contextual spaces. I contrast the use of traditional artist's graphite, paper and oil paint with my adoption of traditionally non-artist procedures and non-artist materials like sandpaper and house paint. This nostalgia led me to think of foundations in art and simple systems used in primary learning. For this reason I prefer to use primary shapes and colors. Because they are fundamental not because they are simple. In the circle drawings the motion of application affected the image and all of them would be circles. The motion was dictated by the intensity I wanted to achieve and the intensity with which I wanted to make the work. I wanted to tap into my natural rhythm. This circular motion provided the boundaries for this action to take place. I had a lot of time to think while drawing circles. I realized I was performing the "act" of art making. The early circle drawings and new pour paintings are a product of condensed residual effects that are pre-determined as a set of linear events that must take place for the work to be completed. I couldn't help feeling a bit like a marionette making these drawings. In opposition to this performative process work where time is layered the numeric grids are diagrams of artistic choices marked out linearly where each moment is seen as individual. This contrast was necessary for me to see my artistic practice clearly. I feel that the numeric grids give the physical work theoretical structure. They also feel the most like sketches in this body of work because the graphite and paint pieces both have physical presence like sculpture. I was trying to gather my personal history, the way I worked and my vocation for the first

time. This body of work is an exploration of socio-procedural ideals and how art functions within that context.

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CATALOGUE

1. 20 Circle Drawings arranged in a 5 x 4 grid, Graphite, pigment, black and white gesso on hardboard, group 48 x 48 in. individual panels measure 8.5 x 11in
2. Circle detail 1, graphite and white pigment on black gessoed hard board, 8.5 x 11in
3. Circle detail 2, HB graphite on black gessoed hardboard, 8.5 x 11in
4. Circle detail 3, water soluble graphite and black pigment on white gessoed hardboard 8.5 x 11in
5. Circle detail 4, graphite, white and black pigments, and walnut oil on gessoed hardboard, 8.5 x 11in
6. Solutions for cell variation 1, ink on xerox, 8.5 x 11in
7. Numeric grid filled in with marker and graphite, ink and graphite on xerox, 8.5 x 11in
8. Solved grid 1, graphite and marker on xerox, 8.5 x 11in
9. Solved grid 2, graphite and marker on xerox, 8.5 x 11in
10. Pink Key, graphite and marker on xerox, 8.5 x 11in
11. Example of drawing storage, wood and hardboard, dimensions variable
12. 5,445, 11 gallons of paint on 5,445 square inches of hardboard cut into 45 11 x 11inch panels on 8 shelves, approximately 8 x 12 feet
13. Making a painting with 1 gallon of paint, paint, wood, hardboard, and one gallon paint can, dimensions variable