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My work is concerned with memory and the aspects of a significant place or experience that impress themselves upon the mind of an individual. Pulling my imagery from places significant to my own personal history, I use abstraction and distortion to point to the distance between recollection and reality. I use very solid, clearly defined, hard-edged forms and highly specific color to translate places that are no longer accessible to me in any tangible way and exist only in the nebulous, and fallible, realm of my memory. Elements of these spaces are translated in a way that acknowledges the separation from the reality of the actual time and place, while still striving to make them feel concrete and present.

RESONANT SPACES

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INFLUENCES

Before I started making the work that would eventually lead to my current series, *Resonant Spaces*, I was exploring an intense interest in the architecture of my surroundings. I was making highly mimetic, representational paintings of buildings and other manmade structures found in and around my hometown. My interest in these paintings was not necessarily in the architecture itself, but in geometry and the spatial interactions between the planar, architectonic forms I found in the structures I was observing. Color and light—both invented and curated—were also an ever-present concern in these paintings.

While I continued to enjoy the kind of imagery I had created, I eventually felt that the work was starting to falter creatively and was becoming repetitive and predictable. I decided that a significant change was necessary, and began working more abstractly not long after beginning my time in graduate school.

My first year was spent working through a variety of technical, formal experiments with the goal of finding and identifying the elements of my work that were the most essential and most interesting to me. I did not know exactly what these elements might end up being, but figured that patterns would begin to emerge in the formal qualities and relationships that continued to reoccur in the work despite shedding direct

representation. The idea was that I would be able to develop a visual language and mode of working that would allow me to engage with these elements more directly, and in a way that was more open to exploration, less predetermined from the outset, less tied to the literal, and therefore more creatively sustaining.

The visual language that eventually took shape retained much of what was present in the previous work. My interest in precision and geometric, planar forms was as relevant as ever, as was my interest in light and color. Though the initial inspiration for much of the work was still rooted in actual places, and the depiction of space was still important, the work became more self-referential and the approach to depicting space became more oblique. I was less interested in a mimetic representation of a place than I was in its psychological resonance—the aspects or elements of a place that remain locked into a person’s mind when they are no longer there, when time has passed and the details have fallen away.

During this time of experimentation, I was looking at the work of artists whose formal concerns and interests appeared, on the surface, to be aligned with my own. My earliest abstractions were most heavily influenced by Richard Diebenkorn, particularly his *Ocean Park* series, which he worked on from 1967 to 1988. I was intrigued by his treatment of space within the series, both in terms of the overarching structure and division of the canvas and of the play between the figure and ground in the paintings. The compositions read mostly as flat, but within the flatness there is a feeling of things shifting into place. No element is taken for granted—everything is in play and is important. Forms appear to slide, fold, and interlock through the accumulated layers of

paint. The works in this series are highly exploratory—the final composition of any given painting was discovered through the process of its making. These paintings reward extended viewing by revealing evidence of the way in which they were created, and, by extension, allowing the viewer to intuit something of Diebenkorn’s thought process. Color shifts almost imperceptibly multiple times across a given plane, and underlying structures reveal themselves, allowing you to almost, though not quite, trace the artist’s progression through the painting. The edges in these paintings were of particular interest to me. The in-between spaces often feature shards and slivers of unexpected color, reveal more of the underlying structure hidden within the layers of paint, and help to emphasize the idea of space and subtle dimensionality within the compositions. While I found the evident layers in these paintings to be visually appealing, what really interested me was mode of thought implied by them. The open-ended way in which Diebenkorn worked on these paintings, allowing decisions to be made based on an active engagement with his process rather than a premeditated idea of what the work should look like, struck me as thoughtful and rigorous, and was something that I wanted to apply to my own work.

I was drawn to the work of Tomma Abts first by her striking use of geometry. There is a subtle way in which she plays with the relationship between figure and ground in the work. I appreciated the somewhat playful way she sets up and defies expectations within a given painting. Much like in Diebenkorn’s work, I was intrigued by the open-endedness of Abts’ process. I see her paintings as exercises in exploration. She doesn’t create any preliminary sketches for them. Instead, she intuitively layers elements into a painting until the final composition emerges and she feels that the work is complete.

[Thornton] This approach runs counter to the way I had been approaching my more representational work, and I was excited to adopt my own version of it into my practice.

I explored the work of quite a few artists in addition to Diebenkorn and Abts, and while I found their work to be exciting, and it helped me to think about the materiality of my paintings and push my process forward in some satisfying ways, I gradually realized that they were only feeding my work formally. The conceptual core of my work was not being explored nearly as thoroughly as it could have been. While I was considering ideas of time and the simultaneity of layers of history and human experience following a month spent in Europe, the work was veering closer to being purely formal exercises than I was comfortable with. There was a disconnect between what the work was and what I wanted it to be, and it was stalled.

Researching the work of Byron Kim and reading about his conceptual approach helped me to unlock new possibilities within my own work. The idea of cataloging in Kim's work, and his way of tying formal elements in his paintings to ideas of memory and specific places and experiences were very exciting to me. Where abstraction in my work became about distillation—peeling away unnecessary or distracting elements to engage more directly with the ideas and formal concerns that are most essential to my work, Kim's impact was largely one of granting permission. Ideas of memory and specific places that would later work their way into the *Resonant Spaces* series were there before I knew anything about Kim or his work, but I'd convinced myself that I should spend my time on other things. I was worried about bringing in inherent sentimentality to the work and somehow undermining it with that. While I do not believe that

sentimentality has no place in art, I do feel that it can bring about a perception that the work lacks any further curiosity or intellectual engagement. There is an inherent sentimentality present in much of Kim's work, but it does not come across as saccharine. There *is* a further curiosity and intellectual engagement in the work. It pushes beyond its sentimental aspects—without denying or dismissing them—to explore broader themes, such as the nature of memory itself.

Kim is described by curator Eugenie Tsai as working on the threshold between representation and abstraction. Since his time as a student at Yale in the 1980's, he was fascinated by abstract painting and its impact on our culture. [Tsai] While he was generally intrigued by the work of the mid-century modernists and “the notion of the sublime in painting,” he was frustrated by what he perceived as a tendency in Western art to prioritize form over content, and felt that modernist abstraction treated content as a bit of an afterthought. He was also frustrated by this work's claim to universality. He felt that this work, while interesting to him personally, was far from universal in its effect on viewers, and required special knowledge or even a kind of indoctrination to understand it. [Miller-Keller] In his own painting, Kim seeks to use the same visual language as the modernist abstract painters he admires, turning it from something more intangible and supposedly universal toward content that is highly specific and directly linked to referents in the real world, in his own surroundings and memories.

Much of Byron Kim's work has explored a link between color and memories of places and events. [Tsai] An example of this exploration is his 1996 painting *Miss Mushiniski (First Big Crush)*. The canvas, painted in stripes of dull green and a dark navy

blue, reconstructs from the artist's memory the pattern of a turtleneck sweater he once wore as a child. In describing the work, Kim recounts a story of wearing the sweater to school and receiving a compliment from his teacher, and how this prompted him to insist on wearing the same sweater every day for the next three weeks. [Kim]

His painting titled *1984 Dodge Wagon* is a kind of memorialization of the Dodge Aries he once drove. Speaking about this piece, Kim said that he didn't particularly care for the colors of the car, but felt a strong attachment to the car itself. While color is the dominant formal element in this painting, it is not the central focus of the work. It is relevant in that it serves as a kind of document of the car he is remembering. As with the colors in *Miss Mushiniski (First Big Crush)*, the palette here was taken from the artist's memory. [Miller-Keller]

Kim refers to paintings like *Miss Mushiniski* and *1984 Dodge Wagon* as "spots of time." Perhaps the most interesting of these "spots of time," and probably the most relevant to my *Resonant Spaces* series, is a painting titled *46 Halsey Drive, Wallingford, CT 06492*. This tall, narrow panel features horizontal stripes of varying shades of pink applied by the artist with a paint roller. Kim describes this piece as a portrait of the house he grew up in. He presented the three family members who lived there with him—his parents and his sister—with identical charts of paint chips from a hardware store. He asked them to circle the one they thought was the color of the house, and presented seven of their choices as the stripes of the paintings. [Kim] This speaks to the variations in perception from individual to individual—how different people can remember the same, shared experience in different, individualized ways. It also points to the unreliability of

our memories to accurately reconstruct images of the places we have experienced, and how our recollections shift over time, altering slightly each time we attempt to remember.

The context Kim provides us regarding his thought process is vital to the work. Without knowing the artist's intent, it is easy to misinterpret paintings like these as purely formalist works. The same could potentially be said about the work I have produced so far in my *Resonant Spaces* series, though my work is more connected to pictorial representation than Kim's, making it easier to intuit something close to what I am after. As with Kim's work, though, I acknowledge that much is lost without knowing the intent behind my work

## CHAPTER II

### RESONANT SPACES

My current body of work, titled *Resonant Spaces*, is made up of paintings that deal with ideas of memory and abstraction. The images I produce are fragmentary, alluding to the distortion and degradation that occurs within our memories over time. The work was in part sparked by two main questions: What aspects of a place or experience impress themselves upon the mind of the person within them, and what does it mean to translate the mental reverberations of a time and place into paint?

When setting out to explore these questions in my work, I decided that the best course of action was to pull inspiration from places that were significant to my personal history, ones to which I no longer have physical access. I felt that it was important to rely solely upon my own memory as the source of my imagery, foregoing the use of photography as reference material, which would have tied the work to observation and undermined the idea of painting aspects of memory.

While several locations have been mined for these paintings, the primary subject of these paintings has been my grandmother's house as it existed prior to Hurricane Katrina's landfall in 2005. The house still stands, though after the storm it was gutted and changed significantly throughout. In addition to that, the house was sold following my grandmother's passing in 2015. The period of time I'm drawing from in the work was before digital photography was as ubiquitous as it is today and, because we were more

judicious with our use of film, there are not very many photographs in existence for me to reference. My memory of the house is the best resource I have for recalling the specifics of its various rooms as they were when I experienced them, making it an ideal point of focus for this series.

The paintings seek to find an appropriate balance between representation and abstraction. This balance can be different for any given painting, though my overarching aim in this series is to provide just enough information and namable elements to place the viewer in an interior living space, while maintaining enough ambiguity and confusion to keep the viewer from establishing a full, clear idea of the space being interpreted. This ties the work formally to the idea of the degradation and shifting that takes place in our memories over time. I employ solid, clearly defined, hard-edged geometric forms and highly specific color to depict places that are now intangible to me and exist only in the nebulous, highly fallible realm of memory. I am stating with confidence that which has become unsure. I am acknowledging my separation from the places being described and their unreachable quality, while still giving them a sense of solidity and presence.

I consider my painting *Ponchatoula, December* to be a precursor to this current series. (Figure 1) I approached it thinking of the ideas of tying abstraction to highly specific points of reference and of cataloging that I had found in Byron Kim's work. This piece was made on a single panel, though I addressed it as if it were a diptych. The left side of the painting features a series of twelve vertical stripes. Each stripe represents a color that was collected from somewhere in the landscape surrounding my mother's house in Ponchatoula, Louisiana. The right side of the painting was meant to be a

synthesis of the colors I had observed and collected with structural, compositional elements taken from the same location. This painting is different from my current series in several ways. I was basing it on a place that is presently accessible—I was actually in the location for half of its creation, and allowed myself the use of photographic references for the other half. Because of this, the ideas of memory that would later become important were not present. The actual content was not as important here as it would be in my later work—I could have referenced anything, in any other location, and achieved the same outcome with this painting. What was important, however, was the way I translated the things I was observing. In terms of my handling of the paint itself, it was a rejection of the needless complication that I felt was stunting my previous abstractions. This economic approach to the formal elements in this painting would carry over into the current series. The idea of collection and synthesis would carry over as well—my memories and experiences being the collection, and the paintings themselves a kind of translation or synthesis. The idea of arranging a collection of observed (or recollected) colors into a series of vertical stripes was directly relevant to the first painting of the series.

*Resonant Spaces no. 1 (Kenner, 89-05)* is a translation of the main living area in my grandmother's house as it existed prior to 2005. (Figure 2) It is the first of my paintings to explore an entirely remembered space. A blue-gray triangle acts as a floor plane and leads the eye up, past horizontal bands of beige and gray, toward a collection of luminous white, green, and blue stripes with an underlying floral pattern, which dominate the right half of the painting. To the left of these stripes is a somewhat more subdued

collection of vertical bands in subtly shifting shades of tan and gray. Below this is a set of horizontal stripes of tan, sienna, and dark brown.

The series of blue, white, and green stripes reflect ideas that were carried over to the series from the Ponchatoula painting and from studying the work of Byron Kim. They are meant to be a kind of representation of the curtains that used to hang in this particular room. They are presented here in a way that acknowledges the painting's, and as well as my own, separation from the reality of the fabric as it actually appeared. I will never be able to accurately recreate the actual pattern—its exact details have escaped my memory, the fabric itself was destroyed by flood water, there are no clear photos of it that I am aware of, and it would be nearly impossible to find the same pattern in any store or database. With that in mind, I formulated a kind of system for translating what I remember of it instead. I began by finding a floral pattern that was similar to the one I remember to act as a kind of approximation of it, and applying it to a section of the canvas. On top of that, I painted the blue, green, and white stripes—cataloging the colors of the original fabric as I remembered them, in places concealing the borrowed pattern and allowing elements of it to show through. This section of the painting has a particularly luminous quality. It appears that there is a light shining through it, and that there is a world that exists beyond it, tying it to an idea of a kind of illusionist space, as well as to the original point of reference I am translating. There is also a veil-like quality here that goes beyond it simply being a translation of some curtains. As I painted it, I was thinking of a kind of shroud laying across my memory, obscuring the finer details while allowing glimpses of it to show through.

The vertical tan stripes that dominate the left two thirds of the canvas are meant to represent wall paneling. The depiction of this paneling came to be an important device for making the spaces in this series namable as lived in, home spaces. It is the most directly representational element of each painting it appears in, while simultaneously remaining a direct, abstract gesture on the canvas—stripes of pure, solid color. This kind of wall paneling was common to homes built in the 1970's, like my grandmother's was, and is easily recognizable to people who lived in them at some point. This extends to the viewer a potential point of connection, and lends the work a namable element and a kind of relatability.

The gray-blue triangle at the bottom of the painting presents itself as a ground plane, pushing a kind of perspective and helping to further establish the feeling of space within the painting. This came to be a fairly consistent element throughout the paintings as well.

The subtle variation in texture seen here in the thick, horizontal band of tan directly below the paneling is another feature that became important to the series as a whole. I incorporated a cold wax medium into the paint for this particular element. Cold wax medium thickens paint, makes it appear perfectly matte, and retains brush strokes, allowing for an easy manipulation of the paint's texture on the canvas. This helps to solidify and emphasize certain forms, and can contribute to the illusion of space within the painting. By increasing the thickness of the paint in this band of tan, giving it more visual and literal heft, it appears to move forward, seemingly pushing the vertical stripes behind it further back in space.

The disjointed relationship between the horizontal elements in this painting also help to emphasize a sense of space. The horizontal bands of beige and grey fall lower in the composition, and align with the blue-gray triangle in a way that makes them appear to move forward, ahead of the bands of tan, sienna, and dark brown.

As I worked my way through this painting, I also began working on *Resonant Spaces no. 2 (Kenner, 01-16)*. (Figure 3) It was the first of the larger paintings in the series, and was instrumental in helping me to figure out the amount of visual information necessary to represent a space in a way that feels sufficient. It rejects a lot of the needless complexity that was present in quite a few of my earlier abstractions, opting to include only what was absolutely necessary to convey a sense of the room I was depicting. This discerning approach to its composition served as a kind of guide for subsequent paintings. It helped me to further my realization that the complexity in my previous abstraction was more of a hinderance and a distraction than it was an asset. It became a guiding principle of the series to include only what was necessary and to vary the texture and application of the paint only when it made sense in relation to the space I was aiming to translate.

An orange, triangular floor plane establishes a sense of space by leading the eye into a kind of corner made by two vertical strips of blue. A progression of other colors sits to the left--a deep, dark red, bright white, two different blues, a creamy, yellow-tinted white, and an expanse of still another blue. Three subtly shifting bands of beige present the only horizontal elements in the composition.

In this painting, as well as the one preceding it, my color choices became more deliberate and more specific. They were now tied to specific points of reference in my

memory, as opposed to being tied to a particular palette I had refined through the process of making paintings. There are six different shades of blue in this painting, none of them repeating. They are close enough to each other to form a cohesive whole, and different enough to create a sort of tension and vibration between them.

The scale of this painting allowed me to create a more enveloping feeling of space--particularly in the vast expanse of blue on the left side of the composition—allowing the viewer to place themselves within the piece in relation to their own scale.

The horizontal bands of beige and gray are a representation of the baseboard that ran the perimeter of this room, and serve the same purpose as the paneling in the other paintings. It is the most explicitly described element of the painting—readily namable, yet not overly rendered, remaining a direct, abstracted element within the composition.

*Resonant Spaces no. 5 (Kenner, 89-05)* continues my depiction of the main living space in my grandmother's house. (Figure 4) It is the largest painting of the series so far, and presents a more enveloping, more complicated space than any of the other works. The blue, white, and green stripes from the first painting in the series appear again in this one, establishing that they are depicting the same space. By using the same palette and similar forms, the paintings are referencing each other. The left half of the composition presents the most literally descriptive example of perspective in the series, which abruptly folds upward and becomes flattened on the right side of the canvas. The white triangle in the center of the composition serves as a second ground plane, and leads us into the shallow space of the right side of the painting. This second ground plane, and the

horizontal stripes of beige, blue, and brown contribute to a sense of space on the right side of the canvas, preventing it from feeling entirely flattened or compressed.

This piece also presents the most overt play with texture in the series so far, opening up a new way of alluding to different kinds of surfaces within these paintings. Transparent washes of sienna and umber allow the underpainting to show through, evoking wood grains and tying these sections of the painting more directly to their point of reference.

Light is a highly important aspect of this painting and the series as a whole. The space within the painting appears to be bathed in natural light, bringing it a certain stillness and sense of openness and calm that is tied very closely to the way I remember the space being depicted here. The light in each of the spaces I depict in this series feels very particular, and is one of the stronger aspects of my memory of them.

In the context of my artistic practice as a whole, the *Resonant Spaces* series is still very new. There is still room for exploration of my memory of places from my personal history—my grandmother’s house, as well as other places I have yet to address. It could be worthwhile to explore places that extend beyond my own personal history as well. Having based the series upon my own memories, I have not yet explored what it could mean to incorporate the experiences and recollections of others into the work, and feel that it could potentially lend itself very well to a collaboration of some kind. Whatever direction I decide to take the work, I feel that it has great generative potential, and I am excited by the possibilities it presents.

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## CATALOG OF IMAGES

Figure 1. *Ponchatoula, December*, Oil on Panel, 16"x42" , 2018

Figure 2. *Resonant Spaces no. 1 (Kenner, 89-05)*, Oil on Canvas, 26"x44 1/4" , 2018

Figure 3. *Resonant Spaces no. 2 (Kenner, 01-16)*, Oil on Canvas, 48"x60" , 2018

Figure 4. *Resonant Spaces no. 5 (Kenner, 89-05)*, Oil on Canvas, 53"x70 1/4" , 2018



Figure 1. *Ponchatoula, December*, Oil on Panel, 16"x42" , 2018



Figure 2. *Resonant Spaces no. 1* (Kenner, 89-05), Oil on Canvas, 26"x44 1/4" , 2018



Figure 3. *Resonant Spaces no. 2* (Kenner, 01-16), Oil on Canvas, 48"x60" , 2018



Figure 4. *Resonant Spaces no. 5* (Kenner, 89-05), Oil on Canvas, 53"x70 1/4" , 2018