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This paper follows the changes my paintings took over the course of my time in graduate school. My work questions how painting is experiential both for the artist and the viewer.

My paintings are about the space where there is no distinction between the states of matter and energy.

KNOWING THE UNKNOWN (UNKNOWING THE KNOWN)

by

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KNOWING THE UNKNOWN (UNKNOWING THE KNOWN)

Marcia Tucker, an art critic, writer and curator, said that art is not about what you know, but what you are about to know. This is how I've come to view my practice as a painter. My paintings are about things that I do not understand. The investigations revolve around finding a sense of place, and a self-awareness within those places.

I grew up looking at minimalist and post-minimalist work: Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman. My mom would take my sisters and me to the galleries in SoHo on the way home from school. I don't think that as a child I liked any of the work I saw then. I wanted something immediate; I wanted to be told a story or what to think. What I remember from the time I spent with those pieces is an intense awareness of myself, of what I knew and what I didn't know. That uneasy feeling has stayed with me. When I went to the desert years later, I found something similar to those works in the landscape. There is expansiveness in the desert. It is a terrain of things so far beyond my own self. It is ephemeral, but simultaneously there is an emphasis on materials; clay, sand, water, wood, fire, air. It is these elements that help me to remember myself in a different way. I am reminded of time passing, of impermanence, but also of our connections to both the past and the future.

My time in the desert echoes my experiences with art. When I stand in front of an Agnes Martin painting I am struck by the calmness and the enormity of the space in the painting. I know that on a physical level it is just a grid on a canvas, yet there is a space

created which is huge. Perhaps it is a mental space, or a spiritual space. Martin's toils through her materials, her endless endeavors to draw straight lines across the canvas, are how we access that space. The repetitive struggle within her paintings, the void that is created throws us as viewers back onto ourselves.

When I entered the MFA program at UNCG, I was painting self-portraits. By the end of my first semester, I knew something was amiss. I didn't want to be painting the figure. It felt almost vulgar, not in a bodily sense, but in a way that was presumptuous and arrogant about my importance. I was interested in corporeal experiences, but ones that have a tentative relationship with their surroundings. I no longer feel as if I know what is real. At least I don't believe the common notions. I don't believe that duality is a battle between two opposing sides, or that there are winners or losers in these battles. I believe in contradiction, in disparity and of these relationships opening up into more possibilities. My paintings search for something beyond the literal, beyond the logical. They are about orienting oneself, about grounding, about getting swept up in it all. They are about the ways in which we interact with our surroundings, and how we come to find our way. It is clear to me that my desire to paint stems from an interest in our perceptions of these spaces. My work questions how painting is experiential both for the artist and the viewer.

When I gave up painting the figure, I had to change how I painted. Painting was no longer about asserting what I know. Ironically, I have found an ally in an artist who finds it essential to work from life. In an interview with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, William Kentridge said

What does it mean to say something is a drawing – as opposed to a fundamentally different form, such as a photograph? First of all, arriving at the image is a process, not a frozen instant. Drawing for me is about fluidity. There may be a vague sense of what you're going to draw but things occur during the process that may modify, consolidate or shed doubts on what you know. So drawing is a testing of ideas; a slow-motion version of thought. It does not arrive instantly like a photograph. The uncertain and imprecise way of constructing a drawing is sometimes a model of how to construct meaning. What ends in clarity does not begin that way. (Kentrige, p. 8)

Drawing (or painting in my case) embodies ways of thinking, and the evidence of that process within the piece is necessary when one is talking about a view of the world that is filled with contradiction and uncertainty. It is through my relationship with the paint that the viewer can understand my thought, not necessarily on an intellectual, logical level, but in an intuitive, experiential way. My paintings don't claim to solve any questions. They propose ways of sorting through and coming to terms, and in doing so, ask new questions.

Throughout the past year I have been going through a process of challenging what I know about painting and how a painted space is created. I made a series of paintings that built up an atmosphere with small marks. These paintings had marks of thin paint that were layered in some areas, with the gessoed canvas left bare in others. They were about breaking down my desire to depict nameable forms, to place more worth on the air or space of a painting. Leaving the canvas bare in some areas challenged my idea of what was structure, what was real. In verse 11 of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu reminds us that it is the void inside of a cup that makes the clay useful. These paintings are about the space where there is no distinction between the states of matter and energy. It is where matter

and energy merge that we find purpose. I understand my process through this lens. The mark of paint and the mark on the bare canvas lend each other agency. This is how I start to understand space, with these first steps.

As I started new paintings, two things were clearly problematic to me about the way I had been painting. First, I was limited to a traditional earth tone palette of ochres, umbers, alizarin crimson, and ultramarine blue. These choices were too much of a literal translation of a landscape. I needed to expand my palette. Secondly, the paintings held up at a distance, but up close they lost their draw, and did not offer the viewer a more intimate look. The allure of the materiality was not strong because I was not using enough paint to give it its own life.

I was determined to find a way to make paint atmospheric, yet weighty. As I moved in with more paint, I found myself painting objects into my paintings again: namely sticks and stones. These building blocks are the most basic tools we have to work with and are what is left when things break down. They symbolize both the beginning of things and the end. My paintings attempt to find a space where it is unclear whether the action is one of forming or dissolving. In this search I have learned my painting process imitates these actions. I build up forms and then paint through them and obliterate them. The history of these events is told in the layering of paint, of the ghosts or ridges that show through layers of paint applied over them.

My most recent painting is taking a new route again. It is a painting on the inside of a curved plywood circle that the viewer can walk into. This painting perhaps more than any of the others, approaches how I would like to create an experiential environment.

From the outside the form is monolithic, yet understated. It is unfinished wood. In comparison to the painting on the inside curve of the structure, it feels ignored and forgotten. It is a form that can be seen from afar, but experiencing it demands that the viewer walks around it. The painting on the inside surrounds the viewer. One must enter into it, and can never see the whole simultaneously. The experiences of the exterior and interior spaces are both about restricting the viewer's access to everything at once. Understanding this painting must happen through the body.

As the thesis show at the Weatherspoon Art Museum approaches, I still find myself excited about what I don't know. The circular painting brings up new possibilities for investigating spatial relationships. It has sparked in me an interest in mapping or charting of territory, a curiosity about how a curved surface affects how we perceive straight lines, and a desire to investigate the many ways in which the form of a three dimensional painting surface can influence our physical experience of a space and a painting. I am also intrigued by how my experience of the circular painting will challenge how I paint on a two-dimensional surface again. I suspect these future pursuits will be tackled in the same way; with my arms out in front of me as if I were finding my way through a dark room.

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CATALOGUE

Rochon, Jules. *field (stack)*. Oil on canvas. 14" x 11.5". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *field (mound)*. Oil on linen. 14" x 11.5". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *lost sheep*. Oil on canvas. 68 " x 104". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *red wash*. Oil on canvas. 68" x 104". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *muster*. Installation shot 1. Oil on wood. 68" x 114" x 114". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *muster*. Installation shot 2. Oil on wood. 68" x 114" x 114". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *muster*. Installation shot 3. Oil on wood. 68" x 114" x 114". 2009.

Rochon, Jules. *muster*. Installation shot 4. Oil on wood. 68" x 114" x 114". 2009.