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The written portion of my thesis explores the personal ideas, historical background, and creative context for a body of abstract paintings created for my MFA thesis exhibition at the Weatherspoon Art Museum. This body of work comes from an investigation into the language of painting, the differences between the image and the painting object, consciousness and illusion, the relationship of pleasure to viewing, and how much of a painting's communication comes from its history and context. The paintings are objects made from wood, canvas, acrylic, enamel, and epoxy resin. Their meaning comes from the tensions between painting as a material object, as a way of creating illusionist space, and as an experience of the artist and viewer's visual thinking.

LIVING IN THE ORCHARD AND BEING HUNGRY

by

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Dedicated to the memory of Kim

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the
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PREFACE

The world is
not with us enough.
O taste and see

the subway Bible poster said,
meaning The Lord,
meaning if anything all that lives
to the imagination's tongue,

grief, mercy, language,
tangerine, weather, to
breathe them, bite,
savor, chew, swallow, transform

into our flesh our
deaths,
crossing the street, plum, quince,
living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking
the fruit.

- "O Taste and See," by Denise Levertov

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LIVING IN THE ORCHARD AND BEING HUNGRY

The balking of the intellect, the frustrated expectation, the break of continuity in the intellect, is comedy.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson (Emerson, 378)

In the summer of 2011, just before beginning my thesis, I was hired to paint two large monochromatic canvases. I took the job as a welcome relief from my own paintings which had become moribund.

The two canvases were eventually to be used in laboratory experiments to discern the effects of certain chemicals on old paintings. I was to use techniques and materials as true to nineteenth-century methods as possible. One canvas was colored burnt umber and the other was alizarin crimson. I stretched Belgian linen on wooden stretchers, and they were taller than my body and wider than my arm span. I sized the canvas with rabbit skin glue, layered white lead oil-based ground on top, and finally applied layers of paint that had no synthetic filler. My job was to accurately mimic the material realities of fine art painters working over 100 years ago.

Although I painted them as two paintings, my work was commissioned and painted with the understanding that they would eventually not be paintings at all. My canvases were destined to be cut into 2-inch squares and used as stand-ins for the surfaces of “real” paintings. Despite my intentions, however, I could not help but develop a relationship with these two paintings *as paintings*.

Applying the oil paint uniformly was nearly impossible; my brush strokes and application were visible as records of physical attention. In one flick of the wrist, the

alizarin paint over lead white ground had a color quality that ranged from the soft pink of a cherry blossom to the crusty blood of an old scab. The colors seemed to vibrate and take on a life of their own. I began to respond emotionally and intellectually to these purely functional objects. Toward the end of the painting, I was seeing them as finished works of art with which I was able to have a fresh but evolving and deepening relationship.

Sometimes I would sit in front of one of these canvases, and it would embody emotional states or spark mental responses. Other times, I was struck by the pure beauty of the materials and the way the surface looked. The burnt umber painting was the most interesting; the paint had been stubborn and gritty, creating a surface that seemed to have more physical and illusionistic depth. As the sun through the window came and went, the umber and alizarin had different relationships to the white wall against which they leaned. I came to appreciate the large scale of the paintings in relation to the architecture and the size of the studio in which they were painted. When I moved them and saw their wooden supports I connected them materially to the exposed wooden architectural supports in the Gatewood Building.

The whole situation was funny. I had been hired to research and paint single-color canvases -- not to make paintings, much less make "art." I not only became attached to the work, but the work itself had spawned complex reactions in me. What was supposed to be dry and unemotional became beautiful and provocative. My appreciation of these two paintings stopped only when two chemists arrived to take the work away. Having rented too small a van, they ripped the canvases off the stretchers

with an Exacto knife, folded them up, and drove away. It was the beginning of my thesis work.

When Emerson says comedy is an interrupted wholeness, he writes of our minds projecting a wholeness onto our experiences and measuring specific experiences against the whole of our imagination. The comic is an interruption to our imagined world over which we think we have mastery. We think we know what things are and how they are supposed to be. The comedian -- and the artist -- are interested in what we don't know, the ruptures, the things that don't make sense or are uncomfortable to explore. "All our plans, managements, houses, poems, if compared to the wisdom and love which man represents, are equally imperfect and ridiculous," says Emerson (Emerson, 385). I wanted to make a perverse comedy of painting.

I had come upon something quite uncomfortable. In my personal life, I had suffered the loss of two close family members and this had shaken my relationship to art objects. In the face of real tragedy, the power of art objects had diminished. Yet, compelled to the studio, I had been spending time and effort trying to make meaningful work and instead making bad paintings. Then, when I was hired to paint two chemistry lab experiments, I had made two good paintings without even trying.

Was it ridiculous for me to have an aesthetic experience of beauty in front of these paintings? So much of my ability to interpret and respond to the two monochrome paintings seemed to come from their historically determined context of being big rectangular paintings on expensive linen and hung on white walls. If painting's personal power for me were mostly predetermined, then I wanted to better understand what my possibilities as a painter could be. What if the key element of painting -- paint itself --

were subjected to a distillation process that undermined the context of a painting? Could I make a painting without painting it? Could I experience a painting without seeing it? Could I use the material of paint itself as a collaborator in making meaning? How much of the meaning of painting was out of my control? These questions became central to my thesis work.

Background

The present painter is concerned not with his own feelings or with the mystery of his own personality but with the penetration into the world mystery. His imagination is therefore attempting to dig into metaphysical secrets. To that extent his art is concerned with the sublime. It is religious art which through symbols will catch the basic truth of life which is its sense of tragedy.

-Barnett Newman, "The Plasmic Image" (Stiles and Selz, 26)

Comedy is tragedy plus time.

-Carol Burnett (Burnett, 52)

My natural painting language descends from American abstract expressionism.

The generation of painters that included Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and Adolph Gottlieb were serious about their aims for abstract painting and the discipline of an artist's relationship to his work. They expanded the visual language of abstraction to include bravado gesture, dripping, splashing and throwing paint, and staining canvas. Much of this style was present before them, but the abstract expressionists married certain formal threads and isolated experiments from European abstraction with intellectual and spiritual attitudes that were righteous, idealistic, and individualistic. They were interested in transcendent experience

and believed in the power of painting to connect to something deep and eternal.

Newman, in the statement quoted above, says, “the subject matter of creation is chaos” (Newman, 24). In a different statement, Newman, Rothko and Gottlieb wrote, “We assert that the subject is crucial and only that subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless” (Gottlieb, 568).

My work in the years before graduate school was heavily indebted to gestural abstraction that grew out of the New York School of abstract expressionists. I thought of the picture plane as a place for abstract visual searching – with much *Sturm und Drang* - and of painting as a way to respond to chaos, embody nature, and investigate metaphysical issues. Despite my intentions, however, two monochromatic chemistry experiment canvases changed the way I looked at my art practice. I realized I was being too driven by a way of thinking that had not evolved with my personal experience or the historical changes in art since the 1950s.

Although my respect for the ambition and accomplishments of this generation is great, I feel like their work and sentiments were very much of their time, that is the 1940s and 1950s. Art critic Jonathan Jones said the abstract expressionists worked “when art became larger than life” (Jones). In retrospect, so much of their language and feeling about painting seems overblown, self-righteous, and self-promoting. Their goals were for art to be a vehicle for transcendence, but many decades later they just look like paintings. A lot of their goals feel momentary and historical, since there are no “-isms” today that dominate the art world. But my understanding of this work has evolved in a personal way, too. Today, for me, the tragedy in Mark Rothko’s canvases pales in comparison to the tragedy of his suicide, which was absolute and non-rhetorical.

This difference is one I felt acutely during the making of my thesis. I remember being attracted to the work of Robert Motherwell and Willem De Kooning as a teenager because the paintings seemed like rebellious and sensitive acts that were about possibilities and the freedom of subjectivity. As I have gotten older, they still speak to me but in a more complex way. When I was a teenager, art seemed larger than life. Now, art seems like it is just a part of it. I suffered the loss of two family members just before and during my thesis. These were the loss of actual human beings and not representations of loss. As I worked on my thesis, I would frequently return to thinking about how the material life of painting works in parallel to our own material lives.

Formless

Even if one no longer speaks of painting as a “window opened onto the world,” the modernist picture is still conceived as a vertical section that presupposes the viewer’s having forgotten that his or her feet are in the dirt. Art, according to this view, is a sublimatory activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body.
-Yve Alain Bois (Bois and Krauss, 25)

The biggest mental shift that came from those two “non-art” canvases was thinking in terms that were very material. I had literally investigated the molecular make-up of paint, where it came from, and how that related to the space it created in a painting. As my thesis developed, I began to realize just how firmly my lofty ideas began to deflate into specific earthly shapes. In “Formless,” Bois explores an idea first proposed by Georges Bataille: “...formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form” (Bois and Krauss, 5).

I began small experiments with paint media. The two big paintings had glowed—could I get a painted art object to emit even more light while preserving its properties of hue and value? My first guess was that the answer would lie in the relationship between the material of paint and sunlight. I researched ways to get paint as a medium off its historical and traditional supports. I imagined sheets of paint like stained glass windows. After experimenting with oil paint, I began to use acrylic paint as a medium because I found its flexibility suitable for different purposes. While oil paint stubbornly binds with the surface it is painted on, the chemical properties of acrylic allow for it to be peeled, stretched, folded, and held up to the light.

In the first phase of my thesis, I decided to do away with the frame and the brush and the idea of painting a painting. If I had stumbled into making good work by focusing on material properties, then I thought I could use that approach as a way to avoid the transcendent rhetoric I had inherited from painters from another time. I quickly learned that if I painted a thick layer of acrylic onto a plastic sheet, the paint could be peeled off and preserved in its pure color state. Unlike oil paint, which has an oblique relationship to our everyday material lives, acrylic paint is more like the objects we live with. The pigmentation of acrylic and oil paints are about the same, but the binder in acrylic paint is a polymer that is related to the ubiquity of plastic materials in contemporary life. Acrylic paint is cheap, pliable, and flexible with traditional and non-traditional additives. Acrylic, as a form of plastic, has a connection with the industrial and manufacturing realities around us. For me, using acrylic was a way focus on the material properties of my medium instead of my work's relationship to art history.

In a series of works I called *Ladders*, I created sheets of pure acrylic paint and made cuts on either side of the rectangle so the sheet unfolded into a ladder-like form that could be hung from the ceiling or the wall. The form of the “sheet” of acrylic mimics the form of a painting; we think of paintings as flat but they actually have material volume and substance. The weight of the acrylic paint itself stretched the ladders, making them longer and longer. Sometimes I would come into my studio to find that the material had stretched to the breaking point, leaving half the ladder hanging from the ceiling and half crumpled on the floor.

In a piece called *Rope (1/4 Mile + 1)*, I used a small brush to paint a cream-colored line of acrylic paint 1,321 feet long. I twisted the line of dried paint into a thick, three-strand rope tied at the ends. At a casual glance, it resembles a rope used to tie up a boat or play tug-of-war. The length of the rope was determined as a tongue-in-cheek challenge to Robert Rauschenberg’s piece at MASS MoCA called *The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece*. Seeing Rauschenberg’s painting reminded me of John Stuart Mill’s criticism of Immanuel Kant’s awe at the sublimity of mountains. We are sometimes only impressed by mountains because of their vastness, says Mill, but powerful, sublime experiences can come from a cultivation that is unrelated to scale (Mill, 27). I wanted to respond by making an illusionistic object that was both very small and very big at the same time as a way to address the idea of expectations. To me it was a funny way to “balk the intellect” and “frustrate expectations.” (Emerson, 378)

After spending two weeks making the quarter-mile rope, I made *Time Piece*, which was a kind of painting-as-performance installation. I was questioning my time in the studio. What purpose does my painting serve? Is it just a way to spend time? How

important is the act of communication in the paintings I make? Is painting a meditation for my own awareness and concentration? How does it relate to my body?

In *Time Piece*, I decided to spend an entire work day -- from 9:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. - making a painting a minute. Every minute, I would make a quick one-color painting of the clock face at the time it was painted. I took a lunch hour and two 15-minute breaks (after all, "real" workers get to rest sometimes!). At the end of the day, I had 380 clock faces painted. With a piece of black charcoal, I made a large circle on the wall of the Gatewood Gallery. It represented my body's reach and also a way to index and keep track of time. I attached each of the painted clock faces at the point on my clock when they were painted.

Although I feel that *Rope* was a success, I immediately understood *Time Piece* as a failure. So much of the finished piece was predetermined. Because it was conceived as a piece determined by process, there was little room for spontaneity or subjectivity after the rules were made and followed. The piece asked viewers to understand it only on the terms by which it was made. I wanted more freedom, openness and imagination. My visceral reaction to *Time Piece* led me to come back and reevaluate the character and identity of "traditional" painting.

My central problem in these works was defining the importance of materiality to painting, and the importance of materiality to our experience of art. Were the *Ladders* more or less successful when gravity tore them apart? (More.) What role did the material's transformation have on transforming the viewer? (None.) Did the fact of *Rope* (*1/4 Mile + 1*)'s material and knowledge of its scale change my perception of the object?

(Yes.) Did my material change of the object allow for an imaginative space in the object?

(No.)

Ultimately, my question was: what role does the structuring of materiality play in the success of a painting on transforming a viewer—especially the first and most important viewer: the artist. As the artist, I structure my medium (acrylic paint, in this case) into a form. The medium has specific possibilities, and I want to discover forms that reveal a relationship. Between what or whom?

I had been trying to use painting as a sculptural medium, as a performative medium, even as part of a photography/video project, in order to explore the possibilities. Why give up the process and material of painting itself. I had been trying to make a comedy in this work by using something in a way it was not meant to be used, like a comedian humorously misusing a prop. With limited success, I had been trying to find new forms for paint material other than on a flat surface to discover for myself what its limitations were as a physical material. I came to appreciate that its greatest success is its most obvious: it is an almost inherently pictorial medium.

As my thesis developed, I wanted to return to the canvas and abstract painting on the wall, where there is an developed painterly language of interiority and subjectivity. My two “non-art” canvases had pointed towards the possibilities that simple material interest could hold. I had been exploring the possibilities of acrylic paint but realized that in experimenting with paint as an object I had lost the possibilities it held as a way to make a picture. The context for painting on a canvas in a rectangular format has a long history. How could I return to the idea of the picture plane while incorporating more physical use of paint as a material object?

Painting as Painting

I think everybody starts out by seeing a few works of art and wanting to do something like them. You want to understand what you see, what is there, and you try to make a picture out of it. Later you realize that you can't represent reality at all – that what you make represents nothing but itself, and therefore is itself reality.

-Gerhard Richter (Richter, 59)

Acrylic paint has material properties that allows for a unique range of visual forms. For example, it can be applied with a brush, mixed with water and made fluid, and sprayed from a can. These different ways of using the material contain different possibilities for communication that are discovered and used by the artist. These possibilities are not something “out there” but are natural qualities inherent to the materials.

In Yve-Alain Bois's essay “Painting as Model,” he proposes a “technical model” of painting where the thickness of the plane “implies a knowledge and speculation” (Bois, 250). The surface of the painting becomes “inaccessible as such to pure vision” (252) – it plants our feet on the ground and our bodies in the world. [According to Bois, most theories of representation depend on image, which is a surface effect, and ignore materiality and construction.

The first part of my thesis focused on discovering personally expressive ways of emphasizing the three-dimensional material qualities of acrylic paint. For the second part, I continued this investigation with an emphasis on the pictorial and spatial qualities that come from acrylic paint. Was there a way to use paint as both a two- and three-dimensional object within the same work?

I wanted to simplify the figure-ground relationship by painting the canvas a flat color and have the thickness and free activity of the paint be the ground. Unlike the abstract expressionists, I did not want to think about the pushing and pulling of color as an artistic activity to be worried over. I sought simplicity and directness. The integrity of the material process lay in the idea of sequence and stacking; what was applied first would be furthest away from the viewer and what was applied last would be closest.

I thought of wet acrylic paint as a medium that could record my body's movement in time. If I run my brush through a pool of wet paint, my gestures are recorded from first to last and the order of the painting is apparent to any one looking. One mark covers another and leaves a trace as sure as footsteps on a beach.

In my painting *Toledo* (Figure 1), I wanted to do a cursive “m”-shaped brushstroke with a flourish that emphasized the order in which I painted the gesture. First, I painted the canvas a flat, mustard yellow. Then, working horizontally, I spilled red, purple and brown paints, running my brush over the surface in the “m” gesture. I was dissatisfied with the colors at first. I was searching for something lighter—a different feeling that came from color. Because paint color gets muddy very quickly and I was using thick paint, I found myself having to wait a full day before continuing. Yet I wanted the work to look fast, fresh, and immediate. To do this required sanding, using alcohol and a scraper to remove failed layers of color. Although the construction of the painting is apparent in layers, there is an interesting pentimento of color choices visible around and underneath the dominant blue “m” gesture. The pentimento creates a record of the attempt for directness, and so complicates the simple gesture.

In *Mountain* (Figure 2), I painted a flat background of light, candy pink and green separated by what could be considered a horizon line. Working with the canvas horizontally, I arranged spills of darker reds, greens, and whites on top of the ground. With this layer of pure wet color, I manipulated the canvas using gravity and scrapers for the colors to run together from one side of the canvas to the other. With the paint pooled at one end, I then flipped the canvas over. The wet paint flowed over the thin layer that had already been scraped across the canvas, creating a color form that looks like a kind of mushroom. The paint has both the illusion of dimensionality as well as actual dimension that comes from physical layering.

Although these works have some degree of three-dimensionality, I wanted more. I began to look at the work of several artists who themselves are indebted to expressive abstract traditions and yet have expanded the language by material experimentation: Jonathan Lasker, David Reed, and Gerhard Richter.

Lasker has reduced his painting to the simple elements of figure, ground, and mark. He uses paint as a drawing tool, but emphasizes the material of oil paint; using sketches of doodles and gestures, he builds up line to be thick, goopy walls of color that can seem awkward and ugly.

Reed, on the other hand, uses painting mediums to emphasize beauty, exploring the limits of his reach and touch. After straightforward experiments that were confused with minimalism and process art, he embraced the sensual visual and tactile qualities of abstract painting.

Richter builds layer after layer of gesture in the belief that abstraction can be a generative painting language with the artist's role just to say when it is done. "What

counts isn't being able to do a thing; it's seeing what it is," he says (Richter, 257).

Richter's approach seems speculative about materials and how they communicate. He used a power drill with charcoal to make a series of drawings, for instance. The method of application is not the point, but rather figuring out how and why certain approaches say something. The drill makes marks unlike those from any other process, and these marks themselves have an expressive power.

In *Waterfalls* (Figure 3) and *17 & Drive* (Figure 4), I made gestural paintings on sheets of acrylic paint that were then applied to stretched canvas. In *Waterfalls*, the canvas ground features a soft gradation of white to blue reminiscent of a sky. The green acrylic sheet has connotations of the earth and features whites, yellows and oranges that ran together while liquid. I also made a circular gesture through the paint. I took the dried acrylic paint sheet and physically squeezed together lines that met pictorially. The green sheet folds out and over the picture plane. I wanted to emphasize the paint's physicality as both a wet agent creating pictorial space and a dry agent in our "real" space.

17 & Drive came from thinking about the phenomenon of running out of ink. What do you do when the pen runs dry? I once signed a personal check by basically carving out paper with a dry pen; the paper was shredded where I signed my name. It was only legible to a person holding the check and looking carefully and not to a scanning machine. In this painting, I wanted to run out of paint and run out of physical space for the painting. I painted a snake-like blue and white linear gesture on a green acrylic sheet until the paint faded out. I then stretched the dry acrylic sheet over a similarly-green

colored canvas until the sheet tore. The part of the painting where I ran out of paint is delicate and exposed in both a pictorial and material way.

These two paintings feature gestures both pictorial and physical that could not have been accomplished in the same painting session. They took days to work out. This is a subtly perceptible point that I hope connects the viewer to my choices made over time as an artist. In exploring the material aspects of painting, I am interested in highlighting my own material life as an artist – *look at me!* – but also engaging the viewer's perception, which is both visual and existential. Descartes' *cogito* began with the assumption that our thinking is the one thing that cannot be doubted (Rorty, 51). We experience our thoughts and this, too, is a sensual experience.

For *Puffers Pond* (Figure 5), I set out to create an improbable gesture that would begin as one color (red) and end as another (green). The beginning and end are perceivable from the gesture ending "on top" of the beginning. This material reality is played against the pictorial reality of the picture plane, which is divided into pale yellow on the bottom and stripes of dark blue and green on top. I thought of the dividing line like the surface of a pond and the gesture's progress across it a kind of transfiguration. I built up a series of color spills, letting them dry between applications to preserve the color quality of the white, greens, and red. When I thought I was finished, I decided to experiment with a layer of epoxy resin as a varnish. I wanted to see if a layer of resin would have the visual effect of making the paint seem like it was floating. The experiment was a success but I realized I wanted something more from *Puffers Pond*. I added spills of white paint and concentric rings of blue on top of the epoxy in order to

add to the pictorial interest and also see if I could separate my visual decisions in a way that spoke to their sequential nature.

In the paintings *Delivery* (Figure 6) and *Hiding Loops* (Figure 7), I try to use epoxy resin to separate different layers of painting decisions. *Puffers Pond* uses paint spills as records of movement across the horizontal picture plane but they also created definite associations in my memory. During a studio visit with the artist Tom Burckhardt, we spoke about the phenomenon of pareidolia, which is our brain's innate desire to make order from shapes. We see animals in the clouds and Jesus on a piece of toast. This is part of our perceptual toolkit, and I became interested in the material possibilities of paint spills as tools for memory and recognition. Part of my desire to embrace this, and what I had spoken with Burckhardt about, was how taboo it had been for an abstract painter to accept a shape if it looked like something else. I could hear that abstract expressionist in my head: *We are supposed to be making art that is pure and undeniably itself!* So I made a shape that looked like the man on top of a pizza box (*Delivery*) and a surprised Goofy (*Hiding Loops*).

In these paintings, the shapes of paint were layered with epoxy in order to discover how the different surfaces, one on top of another would react pictorially. In *Hiding Loops*, I began with a pattern with the question of whether I could make a flat repetition appear in different pictorial spaces by slicing and isolating parts with different color combinations and shapes. In *Delivery*, I was interested in how I could take shapes that created an illusionistic space and turn it back into a material space.

I was disappointed by the pictorial malleability and softness of *Hiding Loops* and *Delivery* and embraced the stripe as a hard-edged way to organize the picture plane. I

didn't want to just create clouds for people to look at or a sequence of moves that could be traced. I am interested in making pictures closer to the precipice of failure and discomfort. So I decided to take ideas from these two paintings and push them further in the piece *No Galaxy (Window)* (Figure 8). Beginning this piece, it was important to me that I wouldn't know what the physical presence of the painting object would be.

Talking about the division of embryos, evolutionary biologist Sean B. Carroll has called stripes one of the most fundamental organizing tools in nature (Carroll, 91). Measured stripes like I used are strong and definite places that emphasize the shape of the rectangular canvas and also create a spatial rhythm pictorially. For *No Galaxy (Window)*, I wanted a simple way to organize the picture plane in a way that could then be physically unraveled. At the same time, my attitude towards stripes is ambivalent. They give pleasure and form but at the same time can seem nondescript and lackluster. My challenge was to make stripes personally interesting to me and specific in their use. Thinking of Carroll's book *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*, I imagined how stripes could be used as an unending way of layering and evolving paintings. I thought of the pictorial space created by one color of stripe beside another and the material space of one stripe over another. On the underlayer, I limited my palette to three colors (magenta, phthalo blue, and hansa yellow). In order to tie together the under- and over-layer of stripes, I used black paint in a gesture that appears like one move but is in fact two. This material move, where stacking was purposely made ambiguous or illusionistic, became a key component in my next two paintings.

I set out to make *Map to Baltimore* (Figure 9) and *Combat Zone* (Figure 10) to experiment with the specific oppositions between a hard, rigid structure and flowing,

amorphous liquidity. I wanted to see how the stripe could be pushed to become more of a material and less of a measurement. Just as the striped separation of embryos becomes more complicated as they grow, I wanted to explore the pictorial and material complications of painted stripes.

In both paintings, initial layers of stripes, made of epoxy resin and acrylic, are so thick they create a material barrier to paint flow. In both paintings, I re-poured the color of the underlayer in order to create pictorial ambiguity that could find resolution in material investigation. *Combat Zone*, for instance, features yellow and green paint shapes that appear from a series of material decisions. The untouched yellow underlayer interacts with successive pourings of green and yellow shapes that were allowed to dry, a layer of green and yellow that were allowed to mix while wet, and the yellow underlayer that has been revealed only by my sanding down the pourings on top.

In *Map to Baltimore*, I expanded this approach from two colors to three and included the different mediums of acrylic, epoxy, enamel, and latex for their mixing and drying properties. Knowing the stability of epoxy and acrylic as an underlayer, I wanted to explore the material collisions of soupy and weak acrylic blue, the tough elasticity of latex orange, and fast-drying brittleness of enamel black. Making this picture was like cooking a meal; once the ingredients were together I stood by to watch and adjust as the ingredients developed. The latex came plopping up like tarballs; the black enamel paint wrinkled, dried, and broke; the blue kept retreating from the creep of the orange, and all the while a dazzling range of greens appeared. The painting's pocked surface was sanded down until I became satisfied with the balance between a picture that seemed like a lunar map or weather pattern and an object that is just paints on canvas.

Conclusion

The aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.

-Jacques Ranciere (Ranciere, 23)

In his book *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Ranciere says all art is political in that it speaks to an audience and has the capacity for change. It is a political idea about individual consciousness and imagination (Ranciere, 60). Towards the end of my thesis, I returned with new eyes to look at older ideas I had inherited from the abstract expressionists. Art might not be bigger than your life, I realized, but it can change it. John Berger summarizes this transformational power:

After we have responded to a work of art, we leave it, carrying away in our consciousness something which we didn't have before. This something amounts to more than our memory of the incident represented, and also more than our memory of shapes and colours and spaces which the artist has used and arranged. What we take away with us – on the most profound level – is the memory of the artist's way of looking at the world. (Berger, 372)

In the first part of my thesis research, I was very interested in expanding the limits of the picture plane to include the wall and physical space that had as much to do with the ceiling and floor as the wall. In coming back to the rectangular canvas, I affirmed the material power of condensing an image and the ability for a rectangular picture plane to focus interest. While expanding the world of painting into larger dimensions activates the world outside of the usual purview of the art picture, I discovered a personal interest in developing small scale, intimate relationships related to the size of the canvas. There are some artists who go retail; I have decided to go door-to-door. Remaining on a

smaller scale, as most of my thesis canvases are, allows for direct, intimate viewing and an empowering relationship to perception.

My thesis has transformed my art practice. It has involved many wrong turns and closed doors as well as successful paintings and promising avenues for further exploration. Although it is always nice to have another good painting, my most important accomplishment has been a radical shift in my thinking about materiality and my relationship to contemporary art and the history of painting.

I want the work to be empowering because our species is the only one that reads self-help books, takes night classes, goes on diets, and looks at art. We perceive a wholeness to the world that includes possibilities towards which we strive, which means there are realities from which we turn. This thought relates to the Denise Levertov poem I've included at the beginning of this thesis.

Why should we lie in an orchard and go hungry? Painting is an affirmation that asks nothing more than the fruit in an orchard. Painting is a way to delight in the sensual pleasures of living and nourish my own personal needs. It is a way to live in the moment and be present to the full material realities around us. It is about an encounter, and this encounter has been the focus of my thesis.

I want viewers to discover a space where the paintings create a sensual self-awareness that includes vision as a projected space (illusion), a real space (material), and time space (perceiving and thinking). All of these are sensual, particular spaces into which we bring the wholeness of our lives.

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CATALOG OF IMAGES

1. TOLEDO
2. MOUNTAIN
3. WATERFALLS
4. 17 & DRIVE
5. PUFFERS POND
6. DELIVERY
7. HIDING LOOPS
8. NO GALAXY (WINDOW)
9. MAP TO BALTIMORE
10. COMBAT ZONE



TOLEDO

Acrylic on canvas on wood.

8" x 13"

2012



MOUNTAIN

Acrylic on canvas on wood

12" x 15"

2012



WATERFALLS

Acrylic and canvas on wood

12" x 12"

2012



17 & DRIVE

Acrylic and canvas on wood

12" x 18"

2012



PUFFERS POND

Acrylic, epoxy and canvas on wood

24" x 21.5"

2012



DELIVERY

Acrylic, epoxy resin, and canvas on wood

26" x 24"

2012



HIDING LOOPS

Acrylic, enamel, epoxy resin and canvas on wood

26" x 22"

2012



NO GALAXY (WINDOW)

Acrylic, enamel, and epoxy resin on canvas

30" x 24"

2012

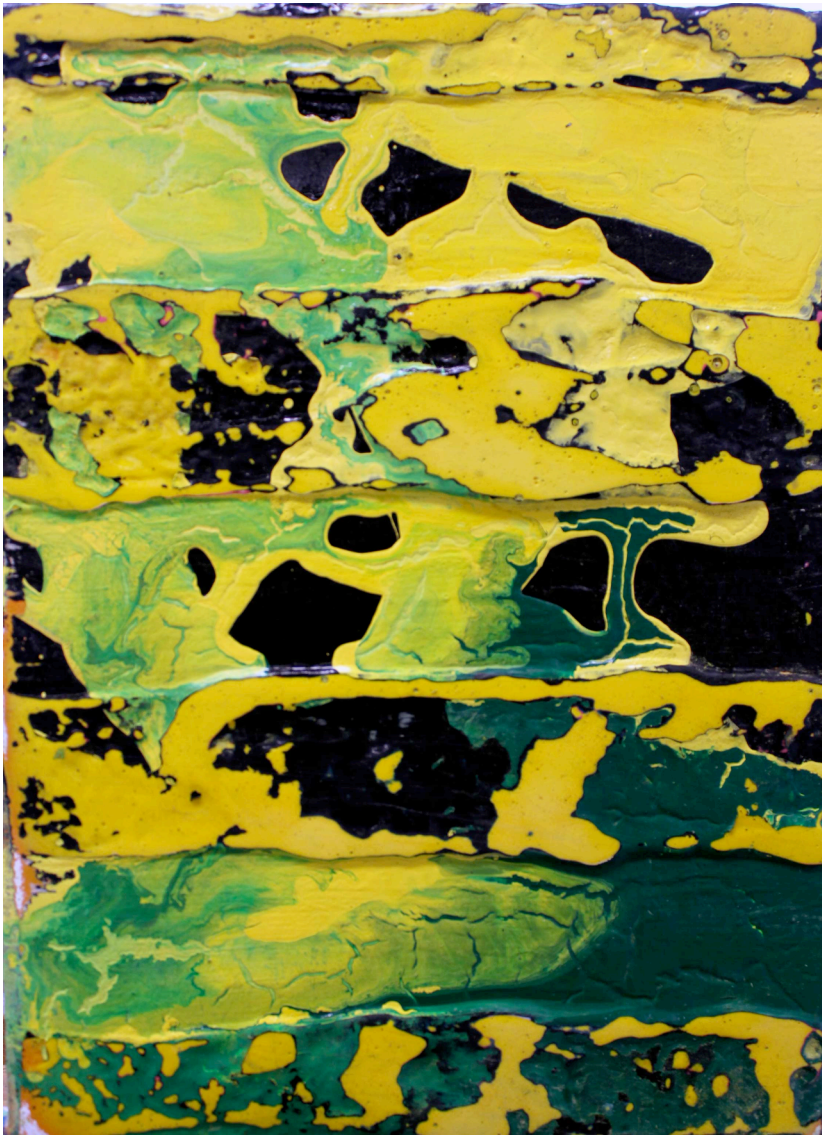


MAP TO BALTIMORE

Acrylic, enamel, latex, epoxy resin and canvas on wood

24" x 22"

2012



COMBAT ZONE

Acrylic, enamel, epoxy resin and canvas on wood

15" x 12"

2012