

KOENIG, CHRISTI ANN, M.F.A. Remnants of Experience. (2007)
Directed by Professor Barbara Campbell. 6 pp.

I explore formal relationships in my paintings that are derived from both the physical nature of the paint and my ever-changing experience with the physical world.

Arrangements of material objects that define my personal spaces permeate my consciousness as I work. Surface, color, and a sense of movement are some of my primary concerns, as well as the shifts in perception that occur between the flat, physical surface of the canvas and an illusionistic space.

REMNANTS OF EXPERIENCE

by

Christi Ann Koenig

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
2007

Approved by

Barbara Campbell
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____
Barbara Campbell

Committee Members _____
Patricia Wasserboehr

George Dimock

Richard Gantt

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
REMNANTS OF EXPERIENCE	1
CATALOGUE.....	6

REMNANTS OF EXPERIENCE

Within my paintings I am interested in creating an environment that is defined by both the physical nature of the paint and my experience with physical objects. I see the formal relationships in my work as a residue of my ever-changing experience with the world, and this makes painting perpetually exciting and necessitates its existence for me.

My paintings are approximately 32” by 42,” a size that allows me to feel as if I can enter them physically rather than peer into them. They do not describe a vast world contained by a small canvas, but a world that is as tangible to me as the real objects that occupy my space. I am primarily interested in the formal aspects of a painting. Though my work stems from a consciousness of the material objects that I surround myself with, neither color nor forms are indebted to a rigid origin. I work with the knowledge that paint has infinite potential. I navigate my way through both the physical surface of the work and its implied illusionistic space, always acknowledging and reaffirming the physical properties of the paint.

My work stems from a long-time interest in domestic objects and their innumerable arrangements. In the past while working in the traditional still life genre, I developed an appreciation for what physical objects could offer a painter. They are a continual source of new and unforeseen visual information. Groupings of material possessions have always been visually exciting to me regardless of their nameable qualities or imposed personal symbolism. Domestic arrangements fascinate me, as they exist based on the

possessor's personal sense of satisfaction and intuitive arranging. I view my own personal arrangements in terms of their overall structure, the rhythmic nature of items arranged according to scale, and also the world of space located amidst a clustering of vases, figurines, candles, and picture frames.

The vast amount of formal information that domestic objects have bestowed upon my painting practice have led me to appreciate them by simply being conscious of their existence. My own domestic arrangements permeate my consciousness in a way that reinforces my place within the world. Physical objects collect in my peripheral vision, telling me where I am and what the nature of my location is—whether it is comforting or threatening, relaxing or full of tension, stable or wavering, temporary or permanent. I eventually lost interest in painting objects based on their nameable or identifying qualities, and I realized that my experience with these objects was what truly had an impact on my sense of self. I began to see paint as a vehicle to revealing experience.

My shift into abstraction was also initiated by an intensifying awareness that the paint I was using was more than a tool or a means to an end residing in the conventional terms of representation. The intriguing forms, patterns, and shifts of light that fascinated me within domestic arrangements became overshadowed by the possibilities of the paint. I became less interested in forcing the paint to conform to expectations and limitations outside itself. I now look for solutions within the painted space. I allow the painting to make demands, although I am constantly aware of the world around me as I work. I see my paintings as an extension of my space, a space made real by the physical nature of the paint. The forms that I create within these paintings are remnants of my experience

within the world whether they are based in observation, memory, or intuition. The requirements of the outside world are always secondary, however, to those of the painting.

The movement that I strive for in my work is necessitated by my volatile perception of stagnant objects in my periphery, which cannot be realized by something literal, concrete, or still. For this reason, movement is important to my work as my perception is in constant transition. In the painted space, objects are not subjected to the natural laws such as gravity or the rules of perspective. My forms topple, churn, diminish, expand, and contract as I experiment with motion. They often converge and transform by way of transparency or the continuation of line. This is especially evident in the painting *Congeries* where many forms are not self-contained but are made up of elements of other forms. This creates a tension between foreground and background or between the flatness of the canvas and the painting's implied illusionistic space. A compositional rhythm created by the organization of forms generates the majority of the movement within *Cumulus*, a painting which is influenced by an imagined dialogue between two groupings of decorative domestic items. In the end, the formal demands of the painting dictate the ultimate fate of my objects, as they are transformed within the reality of the painted space, a reality that is both still and full of motion.

Because of my increasing interest in the physical nature of the paint, my materials have become a more significant part of my practice. Oil paint interests me conceptually because of its natural properties or its association with the earth and the primitive act of mark-making. This type of relationship with the material is evident in certain areas of my paintings including *Lot* and *Ebenezer* where some of the forms are created by a single

mark, whether it is made from a brush or a large knife. The density of the material allows the paint to sit on top of and acknowledge the surface that initially captured the mark while the angle of the mark allows it to recede into an illusionistic space. I use oil paint because of its intrinsic plasticity—it can be thick or thin, transparent or opaque. I can draw with the paint or apply it to the surface as an object in its own right. Forms often break free from the surface in these paintings by way of the actual surface texture of the paint. Above all, oil paint is unique as a material because of its high color quality and color possibilities.

By initially narrowing the scope of color possibilities for each painting, I am compelled to discover something outside my repertoire without relying on the most obvious choice. In these paintings, I began under the condition of neutrality, allowing saturated color to enter the painting only when the painting deemed it necessary. I began these works with black, white, and muted tones. Black and white interest me because of their symbolic connotations as well as their visual strength. I associate black with the freedom and experimentation of drawing and the insistence of outline. Black, to me, is highly charged and has all of the energy and dominance that white lacks. White is interesting in that it represents potential. I associate it with a surface ready to be marked upon. It is quiet, yet its power is in its ability to receive or embrace possibility. When I use white in these paintings, it feels as though I am freeing it from the surface of the canvas, allowing it in its passivity to describe bold form, shape, and to define structure. The muted color along with black and white eventually demanded the addition of bold color, embracing and accentuating its power and vibrancy.

Process is a significant aspect of my work. As I work, the painted world begins to make demands of its own, and a new reality emerges. My choices are always made in the moment of painting—the outcome cannot be predetermined or planned. When making choices I often follow my intuition by contemplating and reacting to previous decisions, making each mark on the canvas a response to those that preceded it. I walk away from the canvas periodically during a painting session. The marks, forms, and shapes within the painted space change in perception with each revisit to the canvas, demanding constant dialogue. For this reason, I consider painting to be a physically and mentally laborious endeavor. These four paintings, *Ebenezer*, *Cumulus*, *Congeries*, and *Lot*, were created through process—by thinking through the material with my experiences with domestic objects as armature.

My practice is enriched by a deep contemplation of my surroundings and an ever-changing awareness of myself within the physical world. I view the work of other artists as a means to see the world anew, as well as to discover new ways to use the material. All of these aspects contribute to the ultimate function of my paintings. I paint as a way to decipher my experience within my personal environments. Consequently, the painted elements become remnants of this endeavor. My work forces me to search, to look at objects and occurrences around me with an intensity that is rarely requested, and to gather information that allows me to experience the world in a more profound way.

CATALOGUE

Koenig, Christi. *Ebenezer*. Oil Painting. 2007

Koenig, Christi. *Cumulus*. Oil Painting. 2007

Koenig, Christi. *Congeries*. Oil Painting. 2007

Koenig, Christi. *Lot*. Oil Painting. 2007