

Six Paintings

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1. INTRO

I don't think about what my work does as a whole when I am making a painting. I make pieces that may not seem related instead of making a list of standards to follow to make a painting. Instead, I realize that painting A has its own parts, both physical and conceptual, which may be different from painting B, painting C, and so forth. It takes time to figure out what the sum of the parts add up to in each individual painting, and I usually use metaphor as a guide to work out what the various points of departure are. Looking at my paintings together in an exhibition format, I see how they slip in and out of alignment with one another. Things, events, formative experiences in life are similarly not in alignment with each other.

My work is about the world, and what I can figure out about the human position in it. The sometimes lack of alignment in my work is reflective of the elusiveness of satisfaction in the world. No one action can ever fully satisfy a natural urge or impulse. This is melancholic, but is not all that complicated, and this is why we do most of the things we do in our lives. I like the 7th point in Keith Mayerson's *The NeoIntegrity Manifesto*, that "art reminds us that we are human and ultimately that is its function." (neointegrity)

At times, my paintings can be impulsive. I am not against this, because I want to channel the momentary energy that is part of an impulsive action and make it permanent through painting. The impulsive elements of my painting are usually in contrast with the way I paint, which has a lot to do with putting things together in a slower way. The areas of color meet in a way that is similar to quilting. The edges are defined and do not get muddy on the edge where they meet.

I do not like the idea of my paintings being “anti” anything, so there is no reason to be upset by them. I like them to be absorbent. Any idea I may have about life, beauty, and culture can be thrown at my painting and can be absorbed by it. That is why sitting and looking at a painting in progress is such an important step. This is when the painting becomes absorbent, when I can think of metaphors that stick to the painting. It is a rare occasion that someone brings something to my painting that I had not already thought about.

One painting can become easier to access than another, or can become easier to access in relation to another. This happened to the painting *Purple* when it was installed with the other paintings. *Purple* was the most different and the least worked in a show of heavily worked paintings, but resolved some of the issues that the other paintings wrestled with. It exists one way on its own and has a different life when it is with other things. This is true for all objects.

2. Things I Do

I look to the world for the subjects of my painting. I am very worldly. I love desire as a subject. I love the mystery there.

My paintings are thick and will take time to dry. This will add to the time that they are alive and breathing. I liked that in the gallery space, my paintings were sweating out linseed oil.

The large majority of progress and innovation happens during the action of painting. I mix a lot of colors. It is very intuitive. I use whatever I am thinking about to make decisions. I avoid literalness by letting a lot into the painting. When I think something has become too explicit, I cover or obscure it with something else.

I use text to start a lot of my paintings. The text comes from a lot of places. I like hand painted signs. On the streets of Philadelphia, the signs of small businesses often rhyme or use alliteration. They also stay simple and informational about what the store is selling. "HOAGIE," for example, is a word I've used. When the painting is completed, the words are rarely readable.

Words work well as basic structures to create a painting because they can be any scale or size. The shape of the word can be more geometric if it is all in uppercase. A word in lowercase has a more rigid form. Changing the style of the word is also a way to change the form. Words are flexible forms to work with.

I also sometimes paint a silhouette of the back of the painting, outlining where the support frame is. My goal is not to point out essentialism by pointing out the most basic structure to the construction. Like using text, the shape of the support is a readymade structure for the action of the painting to stick itself to (like a web) and

grow upon. The support may be an essential part of the structure, but it exists to capture a lot of nonessential stuff. However, starting with a strong structure keeps my intuitive paintings from becoming too based on whim. At the foundation level, they are based on something very real and fundamental to the painting's structure.

I hate the idea that I am wasting paint, or that any paint will be thrown away. I use parts of the canvas as areas to clean my brush off and some areas are sectioned off as areas to place paint. I think that bringing the utilitarian processes of making the painting into the painting highlights the beauty of what happens around the painting. The painting is able to become more reflective of its formative environment. I still use paint rags and glass palettes, and they go into the garbage when I am done with them. But, I try to get the energy on a paint rag or palette, which can be potent, to stay existent in the painting by replicating the function directly on the surface of the work. A glass palette can be very exciting to look at. In addition, I like the form and connotations of a small mound of paint. A handful of paint is like a handful of mud. Jacqueline Humphries phrases it this way: "The very substance of paint is a sort of abstract, formless thing that's very *other*, but physical and biological, too. It's very base." (bombsite)

The energy in the world around a painting is what paintings share with the viewer. A painting hanging on a wall can do very little, except to share its energy. The energy used to make a painting should radiate from the painting and give the person communicating with the painting that energy. This quote by Thomas Hirschorn is good: "For me, energy is neither physical, chemical or electrical, nor a

concept either. Energy of ideas, energy of a thought, of a project, is what matters to me, the energy and the will of transformation.” (Page 73)

3. Six Thesis Paintings

3.1. G-Spurt:

This painting is now several years old, and it went through many stages. It was a text-based painting. I made a vortex, picked out a bunch of circus colors, and draped burlap over a square that I had not finished. Then I cut the burlap off, flipped the painting upside down, and covered the painting with made up text. I took the text from the restaurant I worked at, except I made up a bunch of items that we would never sell. They were gross. I got the idea because I really wanted to do it at my stupid job, but I was validated when I heard that the Futurist Cookbook was filled with absurdist recipes. I never got my hands on the book, so it is not a direct influence, but I liked the idea and created my own recipes. I most clearly remember “beer battered cocktail onions in beer.” In 2007, I heard Lance Esplund on an artcritical.com pod-cast disparagingly referring to Elizabeth Murray’s process as “making a vegetable soup, then she throws in a banana, a tomato, a monkey head” (artcritical) and I was really into this idea. On Easter, I put on my Facebook status bar that “I found a plate of pink scrambled eggs with marshmallows behind a curtain.” An old friend replied in the comment section; “here we are, at the fine line between cute and vomit.” (facebook) True! I might not want to eat that but there is a lot to visualize and contemplate, for example, “what did the plate look like?” So, at this point, there was an image that was not actually on the painting; a pint of beer with fried cocktail onions in it.

At some point I forgot about this painting. It came back to me after I had really started considering Alfred Jensen, and after I had done the painting XX and Spongy which both use an X motif. I got into them giving off light through the gradation of the colors to black. Jensen does not do this as far as I know, but striped his paintings similarly with contrasting colors.

Jensen's work has been elusive in terms of how rare it is to see in person. I looked at him in book form, and tried to get how he was working with paint. I couldn't get my brain around his systems, and I am still not sure if I am getting the way he handled paint. Either way, whether it is a quotation or if it is an interpretation, the stripes add to the idiosyncrasy of the painting. Idiosyncrasy is something I want.

So I took this idea that I was working with and applied it as a motif on top of this formerly finished painting, except, where a colored X radiated out into black in the XX painting, I switched it so that a large black X radiated into several versions of yellow. It looks electric.

Atmospheric light has been coming off of my new paintings. I have memories of being in the city, Philadelphia, late at night in my teenage years and the experience of being in this type of light, surrounded by black. I think that this type of light, often created by shaped fluorescent bulbs, has "low" connotations due to its associations; bars, adult book stores, but also closed nail salons, civic decoration (lining a stairway in a subway station, etc.), closed deli shops, etc. The light changes when the business is closed, but the fluorescent is still on. What is being expressed in this context is "where this sign is exists a business, you just cannot access it now."

There may be a “low” association with this type of light because of its difference with the type of light normally found in “high” painting. An example can be taken from impressionist painting. The outdoor impressionists sought after an instantaneous sensation of light that they captured with a speed and acute awareness of time and space. This light was fleeting. It was less than momentary. In the material world, fluorescent lights most often produce the light I have captured in my recent painting. Although flickering, these lights produce a much more even, observable light that does not require the same type of contemplation. This is not to say that this type of light does not require any contemplation, and has been used effectively in artwork, especially film. It is the perfect type of light for science fiction as this type of light would not be out of place on and outside of a UFO.

It is also worth mentioning that this light completely fails in the more pragmatic function of light. That function is to combat darkness. While this light draws attention, it is completely ineffective in actually emitting light past a few feet of itself. This light exists in my painting. The uselessness of these types of lights mimics the ultimate uselessness of painting. Perhaps a painting has a slight use-value, but that value does not radiate past the objects immediate boundaries. I like the metaphor presented here, related to the basic Walter Benjamin idea of aura that a painting’s material presence has.

Expanding on ideas of light and how people today experience it, I bring your attention to the computer screen. Because of the intimate relationships we have with computers, on the one hand, it often exists as an appendage to the body (especially in the form of a laptop) and, on the other hand, it provides a promise to satisfy the need

for connectivity. Light is the medium that transmits the information in a computer, therefore we are starting to have, or at least I have, a different relationship to light than ever before. With computers, we experience light as radiating from a thin sliver of the top of a box. In the history of painting this type of light, a light coming from within, has existed before. I could point it out in numerous Rothko paintings, but I am more interested in pointing it out in El Greco's "Adoration of the Shepherds", where the main light source is from the within the painting, channeled by the just off-center baby Jesus. In a way, the light (the formal property) emitted from the computer offers a type of salvation from human loneliness, how ever ineffective.

I think my handling of images in painting is the opposite of how images are presented on the computer screen, however. The idea of computers as modern Pandora's boxes, ones that we bring into our most intimate and domestic spaces, is one that reveals the relationship of the computer to the cultic object. In relation to this, the thickness of the paint gives my paintings a sculptural identity. The four Xs, which are sideways cruciform shapes, with light radiating from them, are not dissimilar from a kitsch religious painting. The "frame" surrounding the forms emphasizes this relationship further. The warped cruciform, with its slightly off-symmetrical but central composition shows another kind of similarity to my paintings, which carry paganism with them. The painting, as something to hang on the wall, calls attention to itself as an energetic object to be contemplated. It is no surprise that on March 30th, 2010 at the White Box space, that it was my painting, although kept secure, which came crashing off the wall, smashing my colleague's

monumental, pure, beautiful, wooden sculpture. To my horror (I will never forget this moment) Dionysus came crashing down on Apollo.

3.2. My Muddy Buddy:

This is a new painting. I made it in 2010. It is small and on denim instead of canvas. The idea for this painting was to take a small segment from the larger painting, specifically G-Spurt, and make it its own thing. It required a lot of mixing to get a substantial number of blacks.

Painting on denim is awesome! It feels dirty. Looking at smeared black globs of oil over raw denim feels as good as smearing black globs of oil over raw denim. I want it to feel like what Peter Schjeldahl once said about Elizabeth Murray. He said “Stand close when you look at the paintings. The sensation is like a full body massage from a beautiful Swede who is on the verge of forgetting his or her professional detachment.” (Page 20)

I like that Schjeldahl allows the gender of his Swede to be of either gender. It is that despite a lot of stuff (as Murray’s paintings are full of stuff) the sensation that the painting gives is essential. Even a concept like gender is negotiable, or does not matter, in the presence of a specific energy. The stuff can be on the surface, but it is driven by something else. I do not know if this black painting is successful, but I know I wanted it to feel like something from a primordial soup. Only when you come close do you see that it is composed and colored in a way that shows its choreographed structure.

An important move in the drawing of this painting was a thick gold colored chain. It made the original rainbow shape and was supposed to be a hanging

accoutrement that would lie on top of the painting once enough had dried. It never made it back into the painting, the color was wrong. I wanted to make sure the differences in the shades of black were highlighted, and the contrasting of the gold was too strong.

3.3. To the Grave:

This painting is the most complicated to talk about. I think it is about hiding things. Instead of creating space by layering images so they come out of the painting, I used a black wash to give the illusion of space that allows the viewer to enter into the painting. The space is very shallow, like a crypt big enough for a human to be buried in with a few worldly belongings. It has a very decorated front.

In this painting, the multiplicity and scale of brushstrokes asks of the viewer to try to find some hidden message. There is a camouflage that happens, with many strokes being less than four inches in length and one inch wide.

The act of painting felt different too. I felt like I was obsessively decorating a space. The original thought that created this painting was to take a section of the “frame,” an area that usually exists on the periphery of my work, and bring it into the middle ground. By doing this, I was making “the decorative” the subject of the painting. Decoration, as a subject, despite heightened critical attention and reevaluation, remains a guilty pleasure. I wanted to take that on. I kind of made a mess.

Guilt and decoration feel common in Catholicism. This painting looks like something out of a Catholic church that does not want to give up ornamentation but is ramshackle and dilapidated.

3.4. Purple:

Purple is a purple monochrome. I think purple is the strangest color of the six colors on the color wheel. The way the word sounds is ridiculous: “Purr-Pull”. I imagine a cat *purring*, and then I imagine myself *pulling* its tail. Similar to the reasons I like the word “Hoagie,” I also like “Purple.” They are ugly and funny, they sound like soft forms. “Violet” sounds annoyingly regal and hard-edged. The sound made when enunciating the word violet more likely describes a deep shade that is more towards blue. *Purple* has reddishness to it. It is the word I use for a shade of violet that has been intensified by magenta. In the history of color, what I refer to as purple is fairly new. Magenta, the pigment and color “began in 1859, when a new pigment was isolated from coal-tar and called after the nearby town of Magenta.” (Greer)

All of the secondary colors have an impurity to them. They are all polluted primary colors. But purple, along with orange, is in a special place, because, unlike green, there is very little about it that appears in nature. An argument can be made that it appears in the sky at sunrise and sunset, in flora in the spring, and of course these instances are true. But, when compared to the primary colors and green, purple’s occurrence is rare.

Purple is only secondary to pink in contemporary culture as a female color.

The painting has a cartoon element because of the funny shape of the stretcher. It is a Colorfield painting made in Bedrock. Purple intensifies this.

3.5. Spongy:

This is the oldest painting in the exhibition, made almost a year ago. An earlier version of it, which I do not have an image of, was the first painting made at Mason Gross. It was an obvious painting. I scrapped it down and changed it into a sci-fi pyramid painting.

I named this painting *Spongy* for two reasons. One reason was that I realized at the time of making this painting that I liked the metaphor of my paintings being absorbent, and the other reason was because at one point the painting had a kewpie doll face made of black brushstrokes over a solid banana yellow background. It looked like all it needed was two legs and two arms protruding from the square to look like the jacked-up drawing of Spongebob Squarepants that was on the ice cream truck that parked outside of my apartment all last summer. I have zero interest in this character, but the representation of it was so raw. I really wanted to feed off of its energy.

That truck was shady. I suspect they were selling drugs in addition to Choco-Tacos. It mostly played Beethoven's Fur Elise but one day I heard them playing a X-mas song, like "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," "Jingle Bells", or something similar. I wanted to put an idea of Christmas in the painting so I took the red-orange X and made the stripes go on a scale from hunter green to yellow green. I framed it all up with a red border that was further framed by ephemeral areas consisting of passages of color and abstract pattern. These areas also have the functional uses of palette and brush-cleaning spots.

3.6. Grey Painting:

Of all the paintings exhibited, this painting was the wettest. The change in temperature caused it to sweat.

The thickness made it look like it was breathing. The color is mostly grey, covering up a rainbow.

This is the newest painting in the exhibition. It looks like a landscape mixed with a patchwork leather purse. I think that the gold chains, which were used as a pendulum to trace where the drawing would go, are a good addition. They add a gaudy glamour to the painting, but also, since they were used to create the under drawing, that glamour is at the core of the painting. I like the dual use of these chains. What seems to be the most unnecessary and tacked on decoration, a seeming afterthought, is the guide that started the painting.

Common in basic talk of abstract painting is commentary on how Americans hate it; the “my-kids-could-do-that” syndrome. But, the truth is that abstraction exists everywhere. It is often used to make things appear more beautiful. I once had an idea that the worst, most over-the-top of women’s winter coats, the kind favored by old women in Northeast Philadelphia, would actually make pretty interesting abstractions. The painting looks like that a little, a patchwork leather coat that has gold fringe on the side. The sensation of smell is half perfume and half cigarette smoke.

4. In Conclusion

My paintings have a lot of ideas jumbled together. Every idea at the end of a paragraph leads me somewhere else. I could write a thousand pages on one painting, chasing my tail the entire time.

Some things are not comfortable in words, but I am OK with things that are not comfortable.

Here we are. I could go on all day about my paintings. Call me sometime, 215-410-1225 (also the title of a new painting.)

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