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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

RM269

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Rebecca Monarrez

Committee in charge:

Professor Ernest Silva, Chair
Professor Alain J. J. Cohen
Professor Teddy Cruz
Professor Ruben Ortiz Torres

2013

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

RM269

by

Rebecca Monarrez

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Ernest Silva, Chair

RM269 is an installation that condenses three spaces (the apartment, the studio, and the gallery) into two rooms through an interpenetration of their functions (living, working, exhibiting) and their respective visual tropes (upholstered, open-ended, whitewashed). The collapsing of these spaces reflects my interest in creating a dense, hallucinatory, hybrid place (like the amphibian grotto), that serves as an interlocutor between interior and exterior (conflating indoors and outdoors with psychic space and material reality, like a Cartesian Theater). Employing both filmic and literary imagery, combined with an all-absorbing painterliness, RM269 as an installation is a working-towards creating a thought-place like Aby Warburg's *denkraum*, "a space for thinking," or Nietzsche's "architecture for the perceptive," a place that functions as a buffer between psychic space and public space.

CATALOGUE ESSAY

RM269 is an installation that condenses three spaces (the apartment, the studio, and the gallery) into two rooms (VAF 269 and VAF 452) through an interpenetration of their functions (living, working, exhibiting) and their respective visual tropes (upholstered, open-ended, whitewashed). The collapsing of these spaces reflects my interest in creating a dense, hallucinatory, hybrid place (like the amphibian grotto), that serves as an interlocutor between interior and exterior (conflating indoors and outdoors with psychic space and material reality, like a Cartesian Theater). The title — RM269 — alludes to another famous portal in our popular culture, Room 237 of the Overlook Hotel, in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. At a certain point in the film, the hotel's chef, Dick Holloran describes the peculiar quality of Room 237:

Well, you know, Doc, when something happens, it can leave a trace of itself behind. Say like, if someone burns toast. Well, maybe things that happen leave other kinds of traces behind. Not things that anyone can notice, but things that people who "shine" can see. Just like they can see things that haven't happened yet. Well, sometimes they can see things that happened a long time ago.

Setting aside for a moment this issue of overlooked traces, I'd like to highlight that the two people in the film who "shine" are Dick Holloran, a Black man, and Danny/Doc, an (abused) child. Supernatural phenomena aside, it isn't difficult to imagine why Holloran and Danny might see things unseen by most. When you are not the ideal audience of a narrative, building, or institution, you might witness easily ignored patterns or events, seemingly having visions — seeing ghosts or omens. If Holloran or Danny explain their visions to those who don't "shine" they would be judged as superstitious, sick or crazy (Cassandra-like). Thus, I am not only interested in a dense, overly inscribed place, but also in its implied partner, a specific kind of subject: the empath, the outlier, the drugged or diagnosed. If this reading of *The Shining* seems cursory or hyperbolic, I'd like to quickly mention other fictional characters that had to move through or live in such extra-institutional spaces in order to maintain their sick or mad (proto-critical) perspective of their society: the Underground Man and the Invisible Man (both nameless, almost phantoms themselves) living in their respective holes and caves, and Toru Okada in

Murakami's *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle* who is able to pass through the wall of a well and directly into a hotel room, Room 208 (perhaps another nod to Kubrick). Employing this kind of filmic and literary imagery, combined with an all-absorbing painterliness, RM269 as an installation is a working-towards creating a thought-place like Aby Warburg's *denkraum*, "a space for thinking," or Nietzsche's "architecture for the perceptive," a place that functions as a buffer between psychic space and public space.

The germ of this project was a desire to see an exploded view of my painting practice. I began with the most foundational assumptions I had about painting. The first was a deeply ingrained distinction between draughtsmanship and painterliness. Draughtsmen work from the center outwards, usually focusing their attention on an object, carefully delineating its borders. Painters work from the edges inwards, focusing their attention on voids (negative space), concretizing space with color. This strategy has been looked upon with suspicion because of its tendency to undercut, make a mess of, form. Painters like Bonnard or Monet were dismissed under this rubric. However, identifying myself firmly as a painters' painter, I wanted to exaggerate the potential in the gap, the difference, between color and form. For instance, if a form is bulging forward, its color can push it back. Depending on the relationships, this play of color *over* forms can create a kind of tension, dynamism, and liveliness that is particular to painting. In RM269, I intended to immerse the viewer in these relationships. As with a painting, I worked from the edges inwards, working from the corners of the room, using color and pattern to distort and manipulate the space. Through these experiments and trials it became apparent to me why *colore* would be so maligned (in comparison to its cooler partner, *disegno*). Painterliness and color are extremely persuasive, *relatively inexpensive and accessible*, and can be applied over anything (suddenly making everything vulnerable to revision, to be marked, stained by my perspective, graffiti-like).

The next question that emerged concerned the edge – the edge of the canvas, the room, the picture (the edge of a coherent point of view). While learning to paint, I participated in numerous excursions out into *plein air*. It was fascinating to see people react to the landscape

with this mission in mind. What scenes are fit to be pictured (picturesque)? What details, objects, and places are omitted or unseen? Was a decision the result of a formal issue (erasing a part of reality that does not fit the composition)? Or did this blindness reflect a deeper bias about what really exists for us? It was as if people were already looking at the world through an internalized Claude glass. The Claude glass, named after landscape painter Claude Lorrain, is a small, tinted, slightly convex mirror that when looked into, abstracts the scene *behind* the viewer through the distorting qualities of the glass: shape and color. The resultant image was usually a charming, ready-to-paint picture. While effective, the glass distracted the viewer from engaging the environment directly, maybe forging more idiosyncratic routes towards abstraction. In RM269, I began to explore these issues by contrasting two (sometimes simultaneous) experiences: being in an environment, and being pictured in an environment. In this case the picturing was not done with painting. The scene is viewed through the lens of a closed circuit camera, and bound by a TV screen. Not surprisingly it is the neater, flattened, framed version of what's happening that most people find compelling and engaging. Perhaps that is because the feed from the CCTV is composed as picture, and more easily understood and digested. In contrast, within the environment (both on and off screen) there were moments of excess material: globs of hot glue, gloss and paint; folds of excess fabric, soft to the touch; and growths of stuck together bits (cardboard, gum, anything that could be thoughtlessly discarded). The response to these things as they existed in the environment (not on the screen) was surprising. The most common response to a close viewing of the material was one of disgust expressed verbally, while excitedly exploring (poking, nudging) the environment through touch. This was exciting to see because for me painting has always meant seeing with the hands, looking while imagining holding and touching.

In this way I feel that taking on this project set me on a path towards creating a space (a thought-space) that encourages people to engage their environment as painters. Why would I want to do this? It is not driven by some sense that deep down "we are all artists." I am interested in what a painting practice can teach us about *how we are choosing to see reality*.

What aspects of material reality (that we can touch and feel) do we make ourselves blind to because we don't need them to make sense of our day-to-day lives? In the case of our hole dwellers, the Invisible Man, the Underground Man, and Mr. Okada, they themselves (as bodies, identities, positions and subjects) were invisible in their societies. Doc and Holloran are also unseen and unheard by more powerful figures in their environment. However, these characters' invisibility also bestows upon them a hypersensitivity. (The flayed body is a major recurring image in *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle*.) With that in mind, I'll return to those overlooked traces, the burnt toast that Holloran mentions. These traces, leftovers and excesses – the stuff not fit to be pictured – can only be seen by those who can sense that there are other worlds “off-screen.” Thus, looking forward, I can imagine a thought-space functioning as a kind of second-skin or invisibility cloak that allows the participant to take the risk of becoming flayed, raw, an empath, a student/teacher.



Image 1: RM269, detail. Manipulated digital photo. Collage. Source for wallpaper painting.



Image 2: RM269, detail. Styled, stretched, and glued wig mounted to wall.

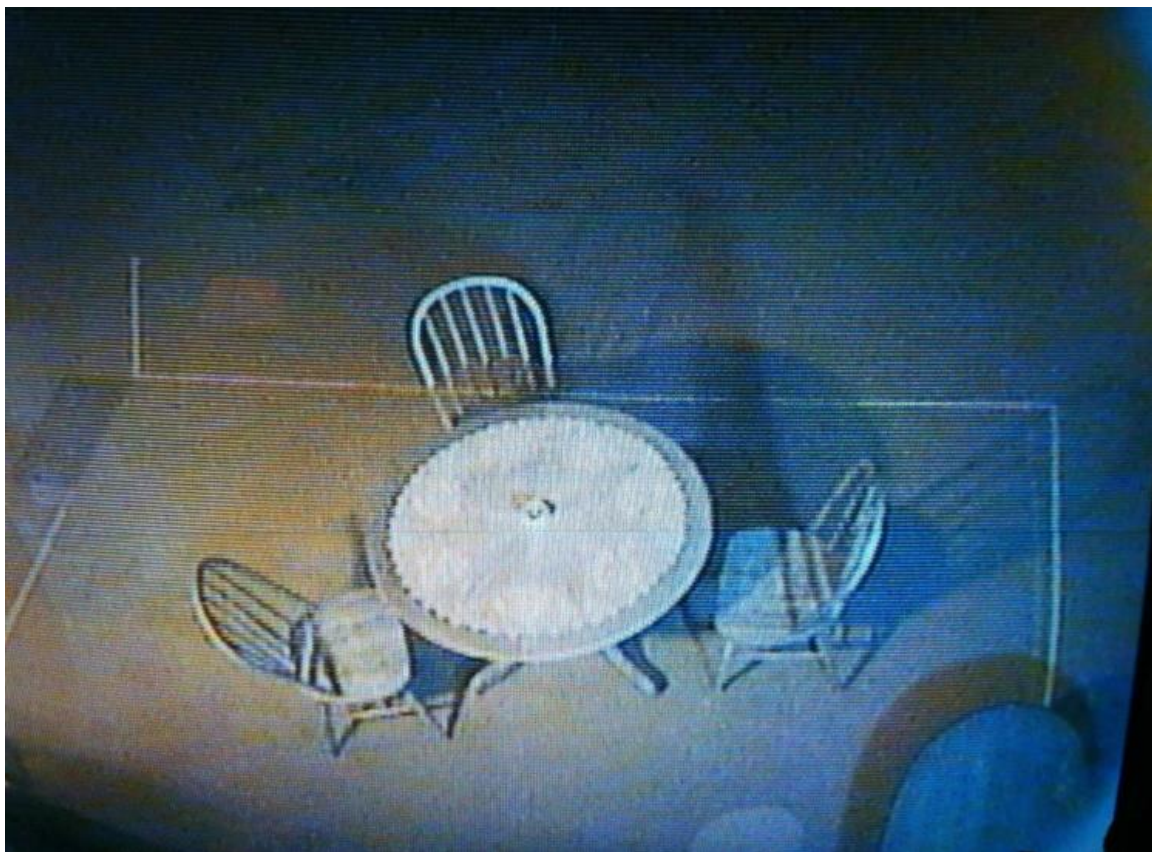


Image 3: RM259, detail. View of dining area outside of studio/home.