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7 Paintings for Spring

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Art

by

Mona Welch

Thesis Committee:
Professor Monica Majoli, Chair
Professor Kevin Appel
Professor Juli Carson
Professor Jennifer Pastor

2024

DEDICATION

This is for the matriarch whose reign was Lowry road, and with perfume and gentle haughtiness decreed one's wardrobe, whose Peugeot pronounced Rowena with a v to join the street's syllables; this is for love, lore, fancy, and firmament; beautiful objects that deliver a home and for the women who show me how.

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¹ Photographs from gallery installation shots by Yubo Dong; each painting dutifully cropped and edited to singular image by Jack Welch

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much as putting words on a page, or clauses, or at least the way I call upon writing (and revealing this may undercut all that in the proceeding pages), a hierarchy determines itself. When things shift, the clauses, the passive to active voice, positions align anew. This is to say that if I could hold all the chats and sunset sips in one breath, I would, as all the proper nouns to follow are those I pinch myself with luck to know.

Even still, my mother, as the mother must, gets first position:

Kathleen Salomon (of prowess and eloquence, speak day one, words are to revel, transfix, query, boldly be run astray at the evening roundtable); Robbie Rogers (whose celestial words form the dimensional, whose ardent friendship fervently taught how to believe, whose love crochets la cirque and verdict); Gintautė Skvernyte (for where had you been, where beets stain tongues, if soul were earnestly in vocabulary, hypnotic on this earth); Lari Pittman and Roy Dowell (cobras of inimitable brilliance and snark who teach the look of love and its inverse and total sincerity); Monica Majoli (the one with eyes that pierce and proffer from depths you falsely thought were merely astrological); Jennifer Pastor (the soothsayer who closes her eyes to penetrate the ether); Kevin Appel (encyclopedic wit, who knows surface is the crux and pleasure, looking is the dish best served hot, for whatever they now determine as abstraction has been nuked); Juli Carson (whose evening seminars whirred the head, daylight came, and the dark was indeed the stupefaction); Stephan Welch (my father, the assiduous woe-solver, of hand and head is the ethic); Jack Welch (brother dearest, whiz kid, the kindest heart); Francisca Salomon and Douglas Parker (as we wended around the city, yes, here's that history, remember when, who also said popular culture was the education, never mind it wasn't my generation); Stephanie Salomon, Claire Fishman, and David Fishman (the family in New York who dazzled the tour); Solita Harder-Montoya (who knows what the ears need before lips speak); Isabelle Beausang (the infectious smile that raptures hearth, nimble hands of the last century); the Hollywood Farmers Market (every Sunday's flowers); Elysian Park (the birds! the birds!); Jenny Gagalka (when painting gets its weekly report at the eight am marche, when the quotidian gets an update as that's what saturates the ground); Hanna Hur (the seer, for crystal vision speaks a rinse, for boldness in a body); Gracie Hadland, Phil Davis, and the devilish boys (the requisite sip at sunset, court finds itself in session on the boulevard); the sweet ones of the avenue (the morning gives the up and down); Martiniano Lopez-Crozet and Milena Muzquiz (an intoxicating kitchen, sore feet); Sasha Ussef (the stories that cackle and sizzle); Pilar Petropoulos-White (Berlin was the zeal, silver rings are the tell at dusk); Stretcher Options (the sweetest pair with skill that shimmers, elucidated by glue)

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

7 Paintings for Spring

by

Mona Welch

Master of Fine Arts in Art

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor Monica Majoli, Chair

What follows is an explication of the body of work displayed as *7 Paintings for Spring* in the University Art Gallery at UC Irvine between April 20 and May 4, 2024 as partial fulfillment of the MFA in Art. Through the aid of a written *Picture* of the practice that produced them, this thesis aims to weave and unwind the project of recording, situating painting and writing as symmetrical activity, though indeed each is autonomous in look. (In pragmatic assessment, the former is of course mute.) What I have found as compatible is the language used in the paintings' stead. Appended is a selected annotated bibliography in essay form that may illustrate my thinking through language, working through texts for which I have found a penchant and a vertiginous whirl, so to position my practice, the one that makes paintings. Because the paintings insist on the present tense, the verbal communication that flanks and constructs them has location in precedent, for a present cannot be translated by thin air, but by the brackets of time. This is the endeavor laid forth here.

To Preface

Words about, alliterations pulse, and commas puncture. While this written *Picture of Painting*¹ (figure 8) in most rudimentary terms visually appears other than the painted surfaces of *7 Paintings for Spring* (figure 1-7), the impulse is the same. What one may determine as a narrative in the *Picture*— that is the verbal description of how my paintings arrive — its construction, like that of the paintings, is driven at outset by the material. This impulse of language parallels that of paint, and what therefore may be avowed as a shared affect between the 78x63” bound painted surfaces and the typed twelve point sized words stringing sentences across six pages in the so-named *Picture*. This is the textuality of paint and the embodiment of text.

If the stuff expelled is propelled by sight, fed by temperament and conditions external of the body, then what follows are some notes on these factors: inherited speech, learned constructions, words told through the birds, a quest grounded in histories of the present tense. Here-now, in two-step, hindsight retrieves the hand’s responsibility and claims the first person as witness and culprit.

¹ Hereafter in the *Notes* referred to as *Picture*, in parenthetical citation, *PP*

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



The problem of course, which is to say the desire, is to catch a cloud and pin it down. Like Maria. To decide they are clouds, but for the sake of narrative we will oblige, is to suggest the paintings are not earthbound. But bound objects of 78 x 63 inches, shy of 2 inches protrusion from the wall, sturdy and rigid, they belong to the realm of touch. They may court the transcendental, whisper it, conjure it in their look, but that's not quite it. Their discussion is vision versus sight, the metaphysical. Somatic and tenuous, summoned through, to, and hovering atop and between their physical substrates.

With this, what is sought is not what but why. What can be given proper nouns. Oil paint, linen, marble dust, that rabbit skin glue I have found affinity for for that shimmer and sparkle. This is how they begin and for that matter how they end and appear. That *what* is all exceptionally consequential, but a preposition does not follow. For, to, at, none of these suffice because that is to throw into use or articulate as transitive verb. This for that, then, etc. We are stuck in the dative with nowhere to hide. The surface offers no action for relocation.

The linen is primed with that glue and dust in vertical three inch brush strokes. Top down, tapered, overlapping layers of opacity, yielding an uneven plane of cool blushed beige. Then cometh the washes, muddied hues resonant of the earth. Mixed together off site, contaminated and enriched by residual activity, pigments and tones of varying weights, warm and cool canceling each other out, vibrancy becoming distinguished through contradistinction as these colors find their way to their substrate. That dust, because of its porous nature, remembers everything. Attempts to remove through wiping away are always partially futile, but in vain this is worthwhile. We may recall the incestuous zealots of abstract expressionism here. Swiftly, unavailing stabs such as these enter the paintings' vocabularies.

That uneven, temperamental surface slowly begins to speak. Ultimately the paintings are silent, and thus speaking is not in opposition to this. More precisely, speaking is a reclusive report to the surface, is a dialogue with my hand as the surface advocates for itself, and shows itself shyly, at times coyly, revealing slowly what it is it needs. This is the vision versus seeing. It is the ouija board and divining rod, information appearing, cuing where and what quantity and quality of tone and mark. This is activity of the present tense.

Vision illustrates itself in this activity; for, what actually, concretely appears is of ill and misplaced significance. Eyes must be opened for relief from one's vision. Vision is internally driven, the cardinal points, the stuff appearing on the paintings' surfaces is sight (as through the retinae). When sight becomes too claustrophobic, and my physical body too close to the surface, my eyes are unable to step outside and assess what the painting needs. What it needs, beware, cannot be mistaken through my fickle eyes and equally fickle itch. Vision performs when the painting is the subject and author, unto itself and begetting its spiritual siblings, its mates on the walls. I am steward, reporting to them. The passive voice serves well as to oust personal fancy.

So it does not matter what they look like. If it did, time would be casual and mutable, instead of inwardly driven. Paintings could wrought, dry off, sit in the waiting room, be patient, wait for the hand's return with course of treatment determined and scheduled for awards season, as though it were Beverly Hills cosmetology. And so with the itch of why, time becomes audible as authority and visual as incarnate. If the hand is fallible, sight fickle, time may provoke temperament, indulge moodiness, but it is steady and linear. This is to say a constant variable, metronomic.

But of course the paintings are not read as linear. One may attempt entrance through cobbling together a narrative of their arrival, as in steps, but this is little victory. Flat, dry surfaces. Tamped down, then resuscitated, then obscured, then retrieved. Capricious in shifts of speed throughout the room. Through pulsation of volumes and the unrelenting warp and weft of the linen, time reinscribes the paintings' surfaces. Time outside and that within them is a mutually reciprocal dance. The lead is volleyed. That romantic cloud evidently unable to be pinned. Outline forms, the cloud game of free association should be refused, for when form is described, that desire falls flat as the cloud knows not its bounds. This is painting not picture, this is primary experience not a representation of. So the cosmetology services are not rewarded here.

Unrelenting in their comportment, though certainly upon encounter post their arrival impossible to discern, the surfaces are equally consequence not solely of time but of the body. If time propels omnisciently, the body reacts dutifully. Practiced, well-attuned, hyper-sensitive, trying so very hard not to give over to sight in its microcosmic steps across surfaces through vision. If vision is not secular, it is only not earthbound because it opposes the tangible and corporeal operation through which it is felt. When, for example, a sweeping horizontal gesture seen on the surface could be described as horizon, it was the gravity and wobbly calibration of the hand that felt it so. The body, off-kilter, perhaps was compelled to reorient though the split of the sagittal plane elsewhere in the painting. Landscape is naturally felt through our vertical posture. The look of landscape becomes for the paintings a residual effect.

This may be the most satisfactory description of the work. But the description is caught up in the embodied not the visual. Both the phenomenological encounter in their arrival and their viewership deliver these so-called landscapes or "clouds." In this way, time compounds in the

present tense. The defenseless surfaces further disarm as eyes scan them, as the viewer, like my hand in their making, must attune herself and her body to the work. The body is principle, eyes follow in short order. There is a rhythm of looking and remembering what it was that the body felt on one side of the surface as it addresses the other, the top, the bottom. And as the viewer encounters the paintings, this dance is rehearsed, though its composer is not paid heed.

This same occurrence is what happens with a tiny brush on a large substrate. Memory of antecedents both embodied and of sight is relied upon as different parts of the painting are revealed, with the ticking of the brush or the swabbing of a rag. With my body, my hand, and so too my sight all but a couple inches away from the surface as marks are made, washes laid down, and expunged, the entirety of the painting remains forever out of focus. At different moments, one appendage (either body, hand, or sight) takes control, contorting and physically eclipsing the others. Memory must therefore be relied on, and what allows a semblance of composition to emerge. What is composed, and indeed each mark is not thrown on, but diligently inscribed, is reaction. The hand is close, the eyes closer, the paint applied responds to what you thought was there when your body was standing back and your eyes could swallow the entire surface. The body moves forward, and blindness takes hold. Close focus, the zoom in, forgets the full painting. Amnesty to the mark violates a compositional grammar or at least usurps its import.

A grid is never predetermined. Nothing is a priori. A scaffold is a forever emerging specter vis-à-vis the body. Contingency is the grammar. This may be called the sensual as touch ushers in the surfaces, and sight is the faulty sidekick and crony. If contingency is how the paintings arrive, it is equally how they are received. It is not simply the immersive quality conjured in certain moments of the paintings as an experiential operation in their reception, but

more definitively in the loss of grounding in their inception. To keep from annihilation in the murky soup within and between the paintings' attended surfaces, the body may find anchor in the visual constant throughout the room. That being the size of the support of each discrete work.

Marking the outstretched tips of my wingspan at the horizontal, and the tips of my toes and protraction of my hand at the vertical, the paintings' size could be no other. If time is one constant, the other loud one in the room is the dimension of 78x63," courting a near one to one relationship between surface and body. While the same sensitivity and similar tendencies appear on each, and the paintings can be talked of as a group, they are different. Character may be similar, in a temperamental attitude, but the look, which is the most inconsequential part of this project but indeed visually apparent, shows dissimilarity and variance. This is of course a way to approach a room full of paintings, so that some narrative could be supposed for comfort, but that read must be quelled. They beseech you to look at and not for. For this is how they are made. Looking at requires a frontal address, pricked by this scale relationship.

The surfaces never arrive together, but consecutively. I stand at one painting, and with contingency and inebriation, it suddenly appears. The *for* that one may look for is already in plain sight, and whether or not it can be named is irrelevant. As much as I am in the painting, and I must be and this is why one is made at a time, I am still at its portico. If surface is everything in these paintings, an interior and exterior of the threshold is annihilated, and swiftly there is no more door. A *for* cannot be located for that would require entering something that does not have an interior. It is not that there is never depth in these paintings, but it is fictive and flat, as is the inherent nature of a bound painted surface. But this depth appears because of time and the unencumbered experience of each painting. Whether the body is face to face with the painting, or

standing far enough away to delineate its edges, I am still in the spell of the hypnotist. Depth emerges therefore as tangible points within the spell, to make clear the thing I cannot see that the painting seeks.

Sometimes it seems the most honest way to discuss the surfaces is through the language of the spiritual. And painting historically holds this vocabulary in delight, hello Kandinsky; and it is understood that the thing one witnesses in tangible fashion that cannot be retraced could be accounted for through spiritual measure. So if the paintings are earthbound, cue the palette and the look of landscape from some vantage point, then the spiritual description is to reaffirm that they are. Perhaps this is even exacerbated by their slowness, by the difficulty to put language both in how it is that they appear and where it is they ever came from.

Time emerges again, then, as speed and continuum. The attempt of defining chronology within the surfaces fails when what is appearing, what pulsates, is both in the present and sometimes what appears belatedly. Scrim, overlapping and crisscrossing layers, or at least different levels of saturation, obscure crisp focus. So even if something could be named belated, it is of course present, as present (to wax romantic) is to understand there was a past and future tense. Again, exacerbated by the two mirroring presences in the room: the painting and the body.

These tenses get productively confused in very real time not just in duration of making and receivership, but also in atmospheric condition. Place, much like the last component of the school taught German sentence trio of Time-Manner-Place, is the other circumstance. By that I mean light. Indelible marks sometimes look as though they have dissipated, but another constitutional around and through the painting an hour or two later, may find that mark, either one of addition or subtraction, stark and arrogant. The site of the surface is constant, but how it

looks is fickle, and what my eyes speak to me is what my body registers in immediate record. Daylight and stamina condition the report.

While surfaces undeniably arrive by way of the hand, authorship is displaced not to that which is presaged, but to where space self-describes through improvisation and immediacy. Reliant on muscle memory and the blinding capacity of the paintings' expansive and discrete fields, the paintings' vocabularies are dually rehearsed and resuscitated to invoke an abyss secularly anchored by surface. This is the business of at not for.

This latest suite of paintings is delivered under the title, *7 Paintings for Spring*. Concrete nouns, a crisp numeral adjective, and a declaration of the possessive. As close to a kiss of the flame as it may get to reveal nothing of their intrinsic character, save only of their mercurial arrival. And, if difference is supposed purportedly by sight and pronunciation glossed as analogous though then apprehended by that which is felt, their titles (*Red Painting, Brown Painting 3, Beige Painting, Brown Painting 2, Blue Painting 2, Blue Painting 4, Yellow Painting*) are to insist on their material presence, pulsating as things of felt gravity on the walls. Their titles of chromatic binomials for a sartorial springtime become placeholders. The tangible physically contained space of each of these seven 78x63" bound objects hovering on the walls reaffirms that here they are — and with their frontal address, that where we are is nowhere but. Still, this place is immeasurably indeterminate, so corporeal grounding must enlist sight as verbal proxy. It is thus in this linguistic deficiency that this exhibition's selection and pacing retrieves that daylight tense of each painting's arrival.

Wolf, Christa. *The Quest for Christa T.* Translated by Christopher Middleton. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1970.

.....
One couldn't force her, she couldn't force herself; nothing happened to her quickly, but much had happened already, so now she felt more frequently where it was leading, but this feeling was at once mixed, as was usual for her, with despair: *Suddenly she was seized by a great fear that she couldn't write, wouldn't be able to put into words the feelings that filled her.* In which case it's safer to talk of a third person, whether it's oneself or someone else whom one is calling, for example, 'she.' One can perhaps slip more easily away from that third person, one doesn't have to be drawn into the *misfortune of her false life*, one can place her side by side with oneself, observe her thoroughly, as one customarily observes other people. All this could become love, but the decision still has to be taken.¹
.....

Here, enter the third person. A story constructs itself within the volley of past and present and through the quest of the character behind *her* and *she*. *The Quest for Christa T* by Christa Wolf first published in 1968 only to be condemned by the East German Writers Conference though it had nothing expressly of political relevance, draws a negative portrait of a childhood friend through letters and the narrator's fragile memory. It is a novella I return to often, not for its plot which is quite banal (Christa T died of leukemia as was often the fate of GDR stories' characters), but for affect, tone, and texture of description. So I claim of the *Picture*, so too the paintings, this passage pulses not in any accentuated, climactic sort of way, but in the rhythm of homing in, proposing the speculative not as shy, but contingent. Who is speaking to whom. And for whom. With the third person vacillating between an omniscient narrator, an intimate, the reader, a rhetorical jury, the tense of the site of prose teeters, too. Whose eyes are reading, whose are privy, and whose - as if - are not fickle. When does observation self indulge; when does it have a velocity; what are those reverberations.

¹ Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, 116.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. Routledge, 2014.

As with up and down, movement is a phenomenon of levels, every movement presupposes a certain charge that can vary. So that is what one can validly mean when speaking confusedly about the relativity of movement. But what exactly is anchorage and how does it constitute a background at rest? This is not an explicit perception. Anchorage points, when we focus upon them, are not objects. The steeple only begins to move when I leave the sky to peripheral vision. It is essential to the supposed reference points of movement not to be thematized in actual knowledge and to be always ‘already there.’²

Thus, it is certainly true that every perception of a thing, of a form, or of a size as real, or that every perceptual constancy sends us back to the positing of a world and a system of experiences in which my body and the phenomenon would be rigorously connected. But the system of experience is not spread out before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator of it, I am a part of it, and it is my inherence in a point of view that at once makes possible the finitude of my perception and its opening to the total world as the horizon of all perception. If I know that a tree on the horizon remains what it is in nearby perception, that it maintains its real form and size, this is merely insofar as this horizon is the horizon of my immediate surroundings, insofar as the perceptual possession of things that it contains is increasingly guaranteed to me. In other words, perceptual experiences are linked together, motivate each other, and are involved in each other. The perception of the world is nothing but an expansion of my field of presence, it does not transcend the essential structures of their field, and the body always remains an agent in and never becomes an object of this field.³

My hand, my body, my sight can be named. The *I* as agent is only hesitantly indulged. *I* can be used experientially; as, for example, to reflect on what it is the paintings look like; or where my body as a subject is vis-à-vis the paintings in their arrival; or, as in the second paragraph of the *Picture*, to express basic gratification. For this last instance, my pen writes, “What can be given proper nouns. Oil paint, linen, marble dust, that rabbit skin glue I have found affinity for for that shimmer and sparkle” (*PP*, 9); this is to free this material, and therefore me, from a romantic essentialization of painting. Ostensibly, this first utterance of *I* provisionally

² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 292.

³ *Ibid.*, 317.

attempts to thwart authority and position. It rings once, only for it to then ditch, when ultimately it (*I*) describes my experience of painting's activity. In this way, *I* becomes a placeholder in this fabric of contingency. It is not to deflect even in these *Notes* here, but it is to claim involvement and participation that is complicit and indeed also of rapturous, indulgent painterly jouissance.

The horizon of perception, so Merleau-Ponty, is perpetually contingent, the seeing body upon it equally of its own conditional one. Therefore, when *I* is used (as I write it on the page) it performs as a placeholder for the embodied parallel experiences of writing and painting, at least as I see my description of them. The visual word (*I*) owns my sight and anchors site of both my paintings and *Picture*. For me, it visually and practically becomes a "supposed reference point of movement."⁴ Its seldom cameos index pulse, but are not frequent enough to yield to allegory; rather, its stubborn elision tells that it is "already there."⁵ This is the act of suture the language is after but already within, and why, "This is the business of at not for" is irreverently laid down (*PP*, 15). Transparently, it is what I am peddling in, but as for registering it and its wares, a fraudulent endeavor.

Linville, Kasha. "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation." *Artforum*, vol. 9, no. 10, 1 Jun. 1971, pp. 72-73. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/agnes-martin-appreciation/docview/2579362577/se-2>. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Although Miss Martin dispensed with surface colors other than off-white and colored lines after 1963-64, there is one atypical painting done with red pencil. This canvas, *Red Bird*, 1964, has close drawn, horizontal red pencil lines on a uniform white surface. The lines begin less than an inch from the edge of the canvas, creating a delicate border. Because of their color, softness and closeness, they go atmospheric very quickly as you move back from the painting. But I don't mean 'atmosphere' in the spatially illusionistic sense I associate with color field painting. Rather it is a non-radiating, impermeable red

⁴ Ibid., 292.

⁵ Ibid., 292.

mist. It feels like, rather than looks like atmosphere. Somehow, the red lines dematerialize the canvas, making it hazy, velvety. Then, as you step back even further, the painting closes down entirely, becoming completely opaque.⁶

In Kasha Linville's 1971 *Artforum* essay, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," we are again already in what it is we see. Language is found by sight — *atmosphere*, but corroborated by that which is felt. Strategically using the first person to denote a trap door or an antithesis that does not have a predetermined counterpoint, Linville shifts to physical description as she experiences Martin's surface. In phenomenological approach, the painting comes into its own. Viewer and painting make the painting; *you* steps outside (and of course into the sentence) to report the embodied encounter. In my *Picture*, I employ it to what I measure as similar means: "The hand is close, the eyes closer, the paint applied responds to what you thought was there when your body was standing back and your eyes could swallow the entire surface" (*PP*, 12). Sight and body now tethered to and composing the aforementioned continuous horizon of perception, it is opaqueness that takes hold. In the exemplary Martin, swallowed by it and producing it, "the painting closes down entirely."⁷ Transcribing the body's response, this atmospheric density comes into being; as though this description were penned on a postcard, we know the painting is not opaque, but it was one of those days the sender wished we were there. Linville's greetings send word we are missing out as she performs *Red Bird*'s encounter. It is precisely this "becoming completely opaque,"⁸ that reinscribes the continuous present within the paradigm of body and sight. Moving in time, the body is led into sight, but the description of sight alone, explicitly as opaque,

⁶ Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

arrestingly reaffirms verbal description as proxy. Again, “It feels like, rather than looks like atmosphere.”⁹

Brecht, Bertolt and Kurt Weill. *Die sieben Todsünden (The seven deadly sins)*. Translated by W.H. Auden und Chester Kallman. Oregon Symphony, 2024. https://www.orsymphony.org/globalassets/media/1819/mkt-426_insert_translation_sevendeadly_sins.pdf. Accessed 19 May 2024.

Anna I

Meine Schwester ist schön,
ich bin praktisch.

Sie ist etwas verrückt, ich bin bei Verstand.

Wir sind eigentlich nicht zwei Personen,
Sondern nur eine einzige.

Wir heißen beide Anna,

Wir haben eine Vergangenheit und eine
Zukunft, Ein Herz und ein Sparkassenbuch,

Und jede tut nur, was für die andre gut ist.
Nicht wahr, Anna?

Anna II

Ja, Anna.

She’s the one with the looks. I’m realistic.

She’s just a little mad, my head is on
straight.

But we’re really one divided being,
even though you see two of us.

And both of us are Anna.

Together we’ve but a single past, a
single future, one heart and one
savings account

and we only do what suits each other best.
Right Anna?

Right, Anna.

If I may assess difference within the suite of *7 Paintings for Spring*, it is in visual dissonance. But still, what could be glossed as analogous—I would locate a visual congruency in sensibility and approach—is apprehended by that which is felt. In any case, they are made consecutively. One after the next after the next. Each a singular experience in time, in a different set of days, with residual memory of how it was to make the antecedent of the painting that is at hand. Yet, feeling is not to be deciphered because too much conflation would occur — for fear, a very grey landscape! Rather, it is that feeling is felt.

⁹ Ibid., 73.

To bow to parable, to remember feeling knows only precedent and is forever bound in the here-now, Anna I and Anna II in Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's 1933 ballet chanté, *Die Sieben Todsünden*, enact the zeal, at least my desire as a viewing subject, for each encounter of a painting in the room to mirror that of each in their making. If it does, if this is what I want of painting, time accelerates to collapse receivership in the present tense. And to this tune, as two speaking bodies on the stage, Anna I and Anna II match this mirroring in their call and response as they unify and disambiguate through verbal and visual act. In this prologue and in the sins they perform to follow, they implicate each other, the chorus which is their moral family, and the audience in equal measure. Here, feeling arrives in accountability; as for the paintings, it arrives neither in what you nor I speak to them, but how they, now, speak me.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1998.

We are here in space *partes extra partes*, which always provides such an objection to the apprehension to the object. In this direction, the thing is irreducible. Yet there is a phenomenal domain — infinitely more extended than the privileged points at which it appears — that enables us to apprehend, in its true nature, the subject in absolute overview. Even if we cannot give it being, it is nonetheless necessary. There are facts that can be articulated only in the phenomenal dimension of the overview by which I situate myself in the picture as stain — these are the facts of mimicry.¹⁰

I must, to begin with, insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject in the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which — if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form — I am *photo-graphed*.¹¹

¹⁰ Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 98.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

Indeed, there is something whose absence can always be observed in a picture—which is not the case in perception. This is the central field, where the separating power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision. In every picture, this central field cannot but be absent, and replaced by a hole—a gaze. Consequently, and in as much as the picture enters into a relation to desire, the place of a central screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which, in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometral plane. This is why the picture does not come into play in the field of representation. Its end and effect are elsewhere.¹²

This is the paradox of suture. For me, this is the cautious use of *I*. With activity of painting and writing (what in sum may be called seeing), my hand and sight compress, and the image and screen elide. I, as constituting hand and sight, perform the suture, to concurrently puncture and stitch within the painting. When I propose that, “The look of landscape becomes for the paintings a residual effect” (*PP*, 11), I mean that causal “field of representation.”¹³ What is principle and not effect, is the embodiment sustained during the painting activity, “where the separating power of the eye is exercised to the maximum in vision.”¹⁴ While this procedure (what is generally categorized as process) certainly affects the look of the paintings and the look instigates this psychoanalytic report, elision inscribes accountability in the project. In this operation, sight is subverted by vision. Sight is the afterimage, the always deferred; vision is the immediate pursuit, blindingly present. If deferral is the written word, the explication already late, to say “what my eyes speak to me is what my body registers in immediate record” (*PP*, 15), is to attempt to locate the Lacanian stain. If the gaze is both conduit and emitter, then sight and body

¹² Ibid., 108.

¹³ Ibid., 108.

¹⁴ Ibid., 108.

realign to fragment once again. In this way, I perform the stain perform the *Picture*, heed—
through circumspect elision—the first person anew.

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text / Roland Barthes; Translated by Richard Miller; with a Note on the Text by Richard Howard*. Translated by Richard Miller, First American edition., Hill and Wang, 1975.

If I read this sentence, this story, or this word with pleasure, it is because they are written in pleasure (such pleasure does not contradict the writer's complaints). But the opposite? Does writing in pleasure guarantee—guarantee me, the writer—my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.¹⁵

Tmesis, source or figure of pleasure, here confronts two prosaic edges with one another; it sets what is useful to a knowledge of the secret against what is useless to such knowledge; tmesis is a seam or flaw resulting from a simple principle of functionality; it does not occur at the level of the structure of languages but only at the moment of their consumption; the author cannot predict tmesis: he cannot choose to write *what he will not read*.¹⁶

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do.¹⁷

But if I believe on the contrary that pleasure and bliss are parallel forces, that they cannot meet, and that between them there is more than a struggle: an *in communication*, then I must certainly believe that history, our history, is not peaceable and perhaps not even intelligent, that the text of bliss always rises out of it like a scandal (an irregularity), that it is always the trace of a cut, of an assertion (and not of a flowering), and that the subject of this history (this historical subject that I am among others), far from being possibly pacified by combining my taste for works of the past with my advocacy of modern works in a fine dialectical movement of synthesis—this subject is never anything but a 'living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall.¹⁸

¹⁵ Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

To be with the one I love and to think of something else: this is how I have my best ideas, how I best invent what is necessary to my work. Likewise for the text: it produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else. I am not necessarily *captivated* by the text of pleasure; it can be an act that is slight, complex, tenuous, almost scatterbrained: a sudden movement of the head like a bird who understands nothing of what we hear, who hears what we do not understand.¹⁹

The birds are not just proverbial; they are metaphor as used by Roland Barthes, and they are also my paintings' neighborhood council. This is not merely tangential, or it is as tangential as much as Barthes weaves his fragments, anchoring self to site of proper nouns. If the text and the reader, like the painting and the viewer, mutually form the construction, it is to affirm that the player in the game is not impervious to whims and, to continue the little drama, the hum of the birds. Neither viewing subject nor text are dormant, they must be caught, simultaneously off guard: "I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is.*"²⁰ The experience of the text in receivership is the site's possibility of "an *unpredictability* of bliss,"²¹ and for me, it is in the making of the paintings that is also this receivership, materialized by the birds' chatter outside the door as morning light floods the room in which I am working.

This is all quite romantic, but it is to confirm the paintings' "mercurial arrival" (*PP*, 15). Conditions external of the body produce, for the "subject is never anything but a 'living contradiction': a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall,"²² and the body that holds and enacts these contradictions,

¹⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid., 13.

²² Ibid., 16.

becomes, through practice, conditioned by them. The writing by/of the body therefore is at once already there and has yet to arrive — pleasure is the proxy, practice extinguishes it, bliss is whispered, and practice refreshes to sustain itself. This is the present tense upon which I insist in the *Picture*, and within which I find congruency with Barthes' tmesis: "it does not occur at the level of the structure of languages but only at the moment of their consumption; the author cannot predict tmesis: he cannot choose to write *what he will not read*."²³ The birds' chatter reprises as atmospheric condition, a provisional stage for daylight.

Morris, Robert. "Notes on Sculpture Part 2." *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1 Oct. 1966, pp. 20-23. *ProQuest*, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/notes-on-sculpture-parts-2/docview/2579369421/se-2>. Accessed 19 May 2024.

.....
One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether it be set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.²⁴
.....

In Part II of Robert Morris' four part essay, "Notes on Sculpture" (published in *Artforum* between February 1966 and April 1969; this part published in October of 1966), the phenomenological approach is in high gear. The viewing subject may no longer fixate finitely upon the object in sight. The object, Minimalist sculpture here, is in flux, contingent upon external conditions. These are not just circumspect contexts, but integral discursive elements that compose the site at-hand. In this way, the viewer is also apprehended. She must be, for she attunes her body, her sight, moment by moment, during the activity of encounter (*PP*, 4). And

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part 2," 21.

thus, she emerges acutely aware of her body just as it is eliminated, “to the degree that these details pull [her] into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.”²⁵ Reciprocally, this dance squelches authority, of both parties, collapsing in a time-space continuum just as it is reaffirmed in the continuously provisional address.

It is this non-static essence of light that I hope perfumed the room full of the *7 Paintings for Spring*, and certainly it is what I feel in the duration of each one’s arrival. While I mean light in manner (encompassing the temporal and fugitive), it is worth noting that the lighting of the show was stable, even, fixed—in contradistinction to the room in which the surfaces arrive. This fickle light, to which I have become accustomed, pricks the phenomenological contingency that makes the paintings, “The body moves forward, and blindness takes hold. Close focus, the zoom in, forgets the full painting”(PP, 11). Here, the body in space engages bilaterally, configuring in both making and receivership. If for Morris this contingency is of the latter, I propose it for both vantages; not with the intention to dissolve distinction, but to argue sight as the present tense of site.

Derrida, Jacques. “Signature Event Context .” *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press, 1988.

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical non presence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains this having-been present in a past *now* or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future *now* or present [*maintenant*], thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental from of presentness [*maintenance*]. That general *maintenance* is in some way inscribed, pinpointed in the always evident and singular present punctuality of the form of the signature. Such is the enigmatic originality of every paraph. In order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of a signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event. Is there such a thing? Does the absolute singularity of signature as event ever occur? Are there signatures? Yes, of course, every

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

day. Effects of signature are the most common thing in the world. But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, utterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [*sceau*].²⁶

(Remark: the—written—text of this—oral—communication was to be delivered to the *Association des sociétés de philosophie de langue française* before the meeting. That dispatch should thus have been signed. Which I do, and counterfeit, here. Where? There. J.D.)²⁷

Fifteen paintings were produced between the Summer of 2023 and early April of 2024; seven of them were hung for the exhibition. Those that were culled were taken from two, while not dissimilar but mildly distinguishable, batches of output. The first batch concluded as the calendar year came to an end, and the second emerged at its heels. As one painting begets the next begets the next, and the surfaces arrive consecutively and never together, batch is perhaps a misleading word, but a shift occurred that only at the conclusion of the fifteenth painting marked distinction, what may more aptly be named by approach.

The earlier paintings (*fig. 5, 7*) were found to hold the trace of a tool, the disposition of drawing, the marking of time. Lines, thin and long or sometimes staccato, were dually so entirely evident of my hand and also of some other agent. In both estimations, a higher degree of articulation of record was on display. In the later ones (*fig. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6*) drawing became vestigial. What took hold was the body. No longer did mediation of brush deliver the surfaces; instead, the body (quite literally — with my hand pushing a sullied rag across them) became the tool. These paintings became quicker to make as my body brandished its speed against that of the materials

²⁶ Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

involved. With my body physically closer to the surfaces and the acceleration of time, the project shifted between the two batches from noun to verb, from record to recording.

And here enters the performance of Jacques Derrida's signature. The shift, where indeed his *différance* is also at play, is for the paintings what the signature is in its moment of pen to paper. As much as I am in the surfaces in both batches, the look of mediation in the earlier and then its disappearance in the later one is what I think illuminates, "this having-been present in a past *now* or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future *now* or present [*maintenant*], thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental from of presentness [*maintenance*]."²⁸ This site of transition paired with the look of the later paintings reinscribes the first person. At the beginning, I, with my hand, ushered the surface forth, then with this articulation through viewing difference on the walls, *I* no longer served to describe the paintings' composition, but now was reinscribed within. The body that once approached the painting became the painting became the body, "[H]ere. Where? There."²⁹ Thusly, so is the *Picture* (fig. 8) is the paintings (fig. 1-7).

Carrington, Leonora. *The Hearing Trumpet*. New York Review of Books, 2020.

The woods are full of wild anemones now, shall we go? no Darling. I didn't say wild enemas, I said wild anemones, flowers, hundreds and thousands of wild flowers all over the ground under the trees all the way up to the gazebo. They have no smell but they have a presence just like a perfume and quite as obsessive, I shall remember them all my life.

Are you going somewhere Darling?

Yes, going to the woods.

Then why do you say you will remember them all your life?

Because you are part of their memory and you are going to disappear, the anemones are going to blossom eternally, we are not.

Darling stop being philosophical it doesn't suit you, it makes your nose red.

²⁸ Ibid., 20.

²⁹ Ibid., 21.

Since I discovered that I am really beautiful I don't care about having a red nose it is such a beautiful shape.

You are hatefully vain.³⁰

It is now near summer and the anemones at the Sunday Hollywood Farmers' Market are few as their season wanes. In a varying palette of fuchsia, violet, and citron-white they are brought home and arranged. Through the week, their heads crane; as they stretch and their six petals unfurl, an impenetrable cluster of stamen debut; in cunning order, they disrobe, their foliage descends. The slow, vigilant watch of their score all of a sudden crescendos: where were my eyes at the skirts' drop? The sight of the folded leaves tell me I was there as they turned, but when — “Then why do you say you will remember them all your life?/Because you are part of their memory and you are going to disappear.”³¹

If the witnessing of these wood elves may at this conclusion momentarily stand in for the befuddlement of painting and language's cavorting attachment, then it is to proffer intimacy, an ounce of mysticism, a secular tempo, and a zeal of quest as mutually inclusive registers. In the 7 *Paintings for Spring* and the *Picture of Painting*, these proclivities hum in duration and delivery. In the beseechment to look at, here they have already been—pulsing as the next painting begins, as the next word is selected.

³⁰ Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, 21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 21.