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M.F.A

Thesis

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The new abstract painting says, "Fuck you we will not stand guard at the tomb of modernism but neither do we feel pressed to deliver the latest titillation..." The new abstract painting is in the same old boat the same leaking old boat the same perpetual crisis of inventing the new language to tell the brand new same old truth. We must grab this dusty skeleton of painting and (as Tom Nozskowski says) "make these bones speak..."

Chris Martin

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Can these dusty bones not only speak, but rattle with laughter, invigorated at their rising? This 'dusty skeleton' can cloak itself in the bright colored pigments of the history of painting and dance decrepit to Lady Gaga and Bonnie Prince Billy. This 'leaking old boat' will celebrate its lasting buoyancy, bouncing on these pacing waves, rising and falling whether dusk or morning. We are yelling through the wind "Patch the holes! The compass is broken! Good! Get lost! The paddles have sunk, the sails are battered canvases, the anchor has abandoned us miles ago, and don't worry about it. Sink and Swim!"



Untitled (smile) 2011

A List

paintings
studio paintings.
paintings in brush scrawled letters, spelling out the contents of a family goulash recipe,
little broken color wheel paintings on linen
DREAM BIG FUCK FACE paintings
paintings where the only solution is to be a monochrome painting paintings,
broken monochrome paintings,
paintings that take ½ a life and paintings that take ½ a day,
paintings in disguise,
white trash pissed off paintings,
painting storage racks
love letter lipstick champagne bubble bath paintings,
drop cloths
paintings for nerds and moms,
paintings to pay the bills,
“please buy me paintings”,
paintings that don’t pay the bills,
a beer
rahsaan roland kirks ‘bright moments’
“what the fuck are *you* looking at?” paintings,
2 4”x8” birch plywood sheets
self help and self effacing paintings,
tin coffee cans
paintings as absurd as they are boring, revealing as they are obscuring paintings, gratitude
paintings.
shelf paintings
pipe cleaner paintings
painting on strike
paintings on their day off
paintings that sag as much as they breathe
don’t paint me paintings
stretchers

The Good, The Bad and...The Ugly Painting

How can you tell a Good painting from a Bad painting? *Bad* paintings smell like fresh honeydew melons, light and green, with tiny fruit flies floating around them that you can just shoo away. *Bad* Paintings are sitting right next to the fuzzy peaches at the open-air market on a breezy Saturday Spring morning. *Good* paintings reek like two-week old pumpkins turned jack-o-lanterns, moldy and caved in, smelling of cheap candle smoke fumes and rot. *Really* Good paintings are on your next-door neighbors front porch along side a flaming zip-loc bag of shit about to be stomped on as a prank. Maybe I have the two confused? A lot of my work stems from this confusion.

As a self defined painting junky my work is concerned with re-evaluating this practice, even after its repeated re-evaluations. Hopefully freshness can be brought to painting in spite of the hilarity, irony and hand-ringing that accompanies this conundrum of an endeavor. Through a romantic materialism, which includes traditional, or variations on traditional painting materials, my work raises questions such as: What defines a Bad Painting? How do we determine the value of Good Paintings? The results of these questions are pieces that use tropes or semi-familiar approaches to mostly abstract painting that both challenge and welcome with tender open arms the canon of painting.

Subject matter comes from autobiographical sources, from the studio or childhood memories as well as art-historical references and influences. In my studio the painting of an over grown, sad jack o lantern face sits next to a small fucked up color wheel. Ironic and humorous text paintings poke fun at more genuine abstractions resting in close proximity. Loose gestural abstract drawings rest in piles on Monochrome painting 'shelves'. Drop cloths are canvases, can of house paints sit next to tubes of acrylic paints, torn linen is combined with cardboard

along-side nails, pipe cleaners and more. These materials utilized in a studio process of deconstructing, and playing among many works simultaneously seek to arrive at what the German painter Frank Auerbach refers to as "a unity one had not predicted". This type of art making lends itself to the possibility of constant play and varied outcomes as each piece finds a different route to exist.

Issues of value, taste, and talent are investigated through multiple approaches, varied materials and the language of abstraction as my main visual strategy. How aesthetic, historic, material, monetary value remain a consideration. In his Art in America article *Provisional Painting* (2009) Raphael Rubenstein sees an approach to painting "pervading the canvases of Raoul de Keyser, Alber Oehlen, Christopher Wool, Mary Heilmann and Michael Krebber, artists who have long made works that look casual, dashed off, tentative, unfinished or self cancelling. In different ways, they all deliberately turn away from "strong" painting for something that seems constantly to risk inconsequence or collapse."¹

I see many of these qualities in much of my own work as well. *Draped Painting* is the result of a multitude of failed attempts to work through a painting. After so many iterations the possibility of using the stretcher to mount fresh canvas became more valuable than the painting itself. During the unstretching of the unsuccessful painting the absence of the painting presented itself. I removed the entire image surface of this painting and all that remained were its edges sagging flaccidly in one final attempt to remain. Installed "*Draped Painting*" shares the wall and the floor in its grand gesture of being, but also of risking "inconsequence or collapse".

3 Rubenstein p.89



Humor

The painter Chris Martin suggests that the paintings of Mary Heillman (have) "... a sense of humor and a sense of the serious absurdity of things."² Chris Martin suggests even the work of the hard edged; heavy black paintings of Ad Reinhardt can contain a serious humor:

*Ad Reinhardt said this about his five-foot square black on black paintings, "This painting is my painting if I paint it. This painting is your painting if you paint it." He was a great painter and could be very funny. When I first came to New York in the 1970's people interested in conceptual purity and some kind of dogma negation had hijacked a lot of abstract painting. They had no sense of humor and consequently could never be taken seriously the way Ad Reinhardt was taken seriously.*³

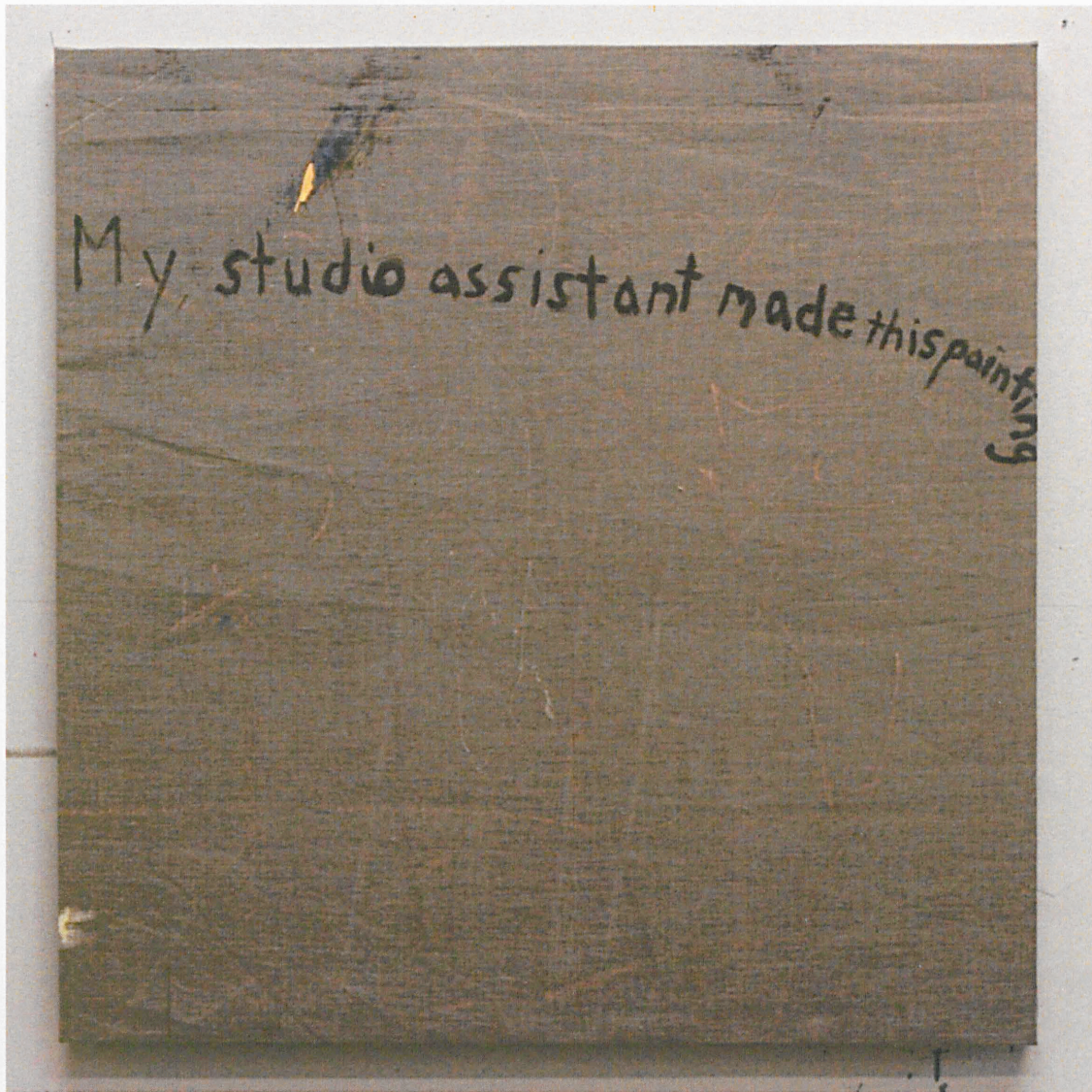
Painting is funny. It's a funny activity. The activities surrounding making paintings are funny, but you have to take it seriously. When the idea presents itself to make a painting that reads, "yes this is a jason osborne painting" and title it *Who Cares*, how can I resist. Why would I? To receive a recipe for a family goulash recipe and turn it into a painting is a humorous gesture, as well as one that works metaphorically as a wall text against a growing body of work. More than this *Goulash* has a scent of the personal, and nourishes us with its warm oranges and browns. *I Wish* is a modest sized painting on linen that reads, "my studio assistant made this painting" in brown scrawled letters squeezed into the confines of the frame. It is an absurd and dumb painting brimming with spite and self-consciousness....and hope. As funny and humorous as the text paintings are they risk shallowness and one-linerism. The word paintings sometimes mock their maker.

Abstraction can be funny as well, a brushstroke can turn into a crooked smile and a loosely stretched canvas can let a paintings guard down. I've been using pipe cleaners in my abstract paintings for a while now. Everything about a pipe cleaner

² Martin p.3

³ Martin p. 3

seems incongruous with painting. They wriggle and bend in a garish palette, resisting adherence to the canvas. When you finally get them coated with matte medium their fuzziness stiffens and shrivels. They don't want to be there for so many reasons. It is this out-of-placesness that makes them so at home and in their awkwardness, they are funny. The paintings with the pipe cleaners look like some weird kid made them.



"I Wish" (2012) Acrylic on Linen



Untitled (together) 2011

“When Painting isn’t enough”; Paintings Day Off

The painter Rochelle Feinstein says that for herself “painting just isn’t enough”. Feinstein makes this claim even while being known as a painter first and foremost. She bounces around to other mediums, installation, video and extreme relief. Although my practice is less expansive, I still relate to Feinstein’s sentiment. This is often why my paintings stop short and seem to barely move beyond the materials, resulting in an object that is barely a painting. Some of these paintings exploit the history of their making with equal or higher value than the painted marks on their surface.

Untitled (Behind) consists of the usual components of painting-canvas, wooden support, and paint. The canvas is tugged around the top and the sides of the support exactly how we expect. There is a disruption happening at the bottom of the painting. The weary ground (a used drop cloth and remnant of the studio) is tugged toward the bottom of the stretcher by scraps of canvas, framing wire and pipe cleaners. A rusty, orange wash of paint exposes the supports like a blinking sunset eyelid. This study of the *procedure* of painting as much as the painting of the painting releases the unmediated poetry of the materials. Or rather not fussing with the already beautiful nature of the drop cloth, stretcher and unintentional drips is enough. I consider arranging materials to be as critical to my practice as the process of painting itself.

Throughout studio visits the question “Why Painting?” has been raised in response to some of these more skeletal and bare bones pieces. This is a good question. The better question is “why can’t the wall, the paintbrush pissings on the studio drop cloth, the stretcher, and the staples operate as abstract marks?”

Painting Storage Rack (2012) was constructed simultaneously for pragmatic purposes as well as it’s potential to be a sculpture. The rough-hewn pine built structure stands in the corner, -housing finished and yet to be completed paintings in my studio. It can fit from 15 to 25 paintings in its 36” x75”x89” frame depending on

how you arrange them. It sits in the world of the studio unassumingly doing its job. Here it has an air of accessibility as pieces are pulled from it to undergo more changes and iterations. The construction of *Painting Storage Rack* nods visually to the supports that the actual paintings exist on. The canvases rest lightly, lazily, or tautly on the stretchers.

Outside of the confines of the studio the painting storage rack loses its function. In the museum it becomes frustratingly inaccessible. There is no potential for pulling these paintings out and working on them more, or for even viewing them. One cannot see the individual works in their entirety. However much the storage rack is a gesture of hiding it is also revealing. The paintings stored in the unit are living the lives they do much of the time. They are yawning in their youth, resting in their painting storage apartments. Maybe they are a union of paintings on strike chanting "Hell No We Wont Show" in solidarity with all the other unviewed and forgotten paintings the world over. The paintings in the rack are on their day off here in the museum. Perhaps, as Raphael Rubenstein, suggests they are "painting for a casual Friday". In the studio they are always working. Can a painting have stage fright? What don't we see? Does it stay in our mind?



Painting Storage Rack (2012)

How to Quit Painting

The last one ever made was sappy.

The wind blew and bent the tree over just enough for the branches to write the title in the dirt.

From there it was only a matter of listening to the sounds of sizzling bacon, then comparing it to the sound of the rain on the car windshield.

Remember last Thursday slut painting/gigolo painting.

Last Thursday when you told me to build a boat out of art history books and sail around the neighborhood with hair brained ideas for paddles.

That book boat didn't work because there was no water.

You somehow managed to leave out that little fucking detail.

That was your fault Kurt Cobain painting.

So I'm gonna shove your little ostrich head in the dirt where it belongs painting.

I hope I shove it so far down it bumps into Satans head and the Son of the Morning Star does everything to your stupid ostrich head that his mignons did to all the losers

In that famous Bosch painting.

Painting you're a terrible fuck. Yeah I said it.

Painting you have the littlest dick I have ever seen *and* lopsided titties *and* smelly balls

Painting you snore and fart in your sleep not in an endearing way.

Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.... Painting.



Words that have been used to discuss my paintings and objects by viewers have included, dumb, sophisticated, pathetic, beautiful, effacing, outsiderish, playful, failure, high artish, and sincere. These are descriptions that I welcome. It is these dissonant responses, as well as the dissonance in my work that makes me question whether the ideal audience is someone walking by a dumpster or someone stepping into a gallery...or someone stepping on a flaming bag of shit on their neighbors front porch.

Bibliography

Martin, Chris. *Everything is Finished Nothing is Dead: An Article About Abstract Painting*, The Brooklyn Rail, 2003

Rubenstein, Raphael. *Provisional Painting*, Art in America 2009