Abstract

My artwork deals with my experience of everyday spaces. I include subtle color and translucent layers of white paint along with collage elements. Decorative patterns move across the surface in contradiction to spare architectural components suggesting an overlaying of interior and exterior spaces. The resulting image is an abstracted and atmospheric depiction of surface and space, time and memory.

I am most fascinated by images that document small histories, identifying where something once was and how it has been transformed or changed by time. Chipped paint, aged buildings, old signs, and the residue of flyers on a wall are all sources for my work. I am specifically interested in evidence of human interaction with spaces and how those interactions, however small, affect my experience of that space.
Dedication

to Tim for always being supportive, understanding, and amusing
and

to Mom and Dad for encouraging me to strive for success in everything that I do
I want to thank Pheoris West for all of his thoughtful advice and guidance in preparing this document. My committee: Laura Lisbon, Sergio Soave, and Alan Crockett for always forging interesting and enlightening conversations. I also would like to thank Alison Crocetta for offering up invaluable professional instruction and for helping me to grow as an instructor. And finally, thank you to all of the MFA candidates at OSU for creating the creative community that made my time here truly successful.
Vita

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2009.....................................Artful Spaces, Delaware, OH. “First Friday Gallery Hop”
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2009.....................................83 Gallery, Columbus, OH.
2008.....................................Roy G Biv Gallery, Columbus, OH. “Small Works.”
2008.....................................Ohio Art League Gallery, Columbus, OH. “Thumb Box Exhibition.”
2008.....................................OSU Hopkins Hall Gallery and Corridor, Columbus, OH. “Shift F7.”
2008.....................................Kuhn Fine Arts Gallery, OSU Marion Campus, Marion, OH. “From Painting.”

Fields of Study

Major Field: Art
Painting and Drawing
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I think of my images as a compression of time and an overlapping of spaces. They are invented, inexplicable, illogical, existing only in the realm of art. They relate to the complexities of individual perception more than linear narrative. The piece is reliant on the viewer to use his or her intuition in order to discover their full meaning. I create images that depict imagination, history, and memory; not single moments. These images also may encapsulate thoughts about the supernatural, which relate to experience and memory.

Most simply, the work is about residue, what once was and is not anymore. The act of editing, covering, and erasing are integral to the finished piece. It is important that elements from each layer convene into the final surface. It is also vital that this process result in a representation of atmosphere. I am concerned with how to depict air and space in a way that they become imagery in and of themselves.
Image 1:

Untitled 2008 acrylic, enamel, and collage on panel, 48”x32”
Chapter 2: Hauntings

There is a connection between ghost stories and what is commonly understood in the realm of art as a heightened sensitivity to one’s surroundings. This understanding of how visual perception may function, as fueled by emotion and preconceptions as well as seeing the material evidence, opens up the possibly for image making beyond the objects observed. In this way, my work deals with depicting experiences and not just visual qualities of environments. There is the addition of memory, imagination, and psychology.

A haunted space is one that has a history that cannot be divorced from its present state. It is also a place that raises questions that aren’t easily answered and can play into our fear of the unknown. A ghost story isn’t just frightening because of the narrative, the characters, or even the possibility that it’s true. It also relies on a setting to elicit a sense of foreboding. Environments whether natural or built are not only the backdrop for events, but are characters in and of themselves. These spaces are the physical representations of anxieties and fears which come out of not knowing.

I am fascinated with moments when visual and bodily perceptions become something other than the actuality of a space. Seeing *something* through peripheral vision or a figure in the dark, these perceptions of space come from
the inability to understand fully one’s surroundings and the origination of those images. They stem from the imagination, like a child who sees monsters only when the lights are out. They stem from a perception of space that is not only about what is there but what might be imagined there. History may certainly spur these sorts of perceptions; the prior knowledge of a place having had a tragic, not fully understood, or pertinent past. This knowledge colors future experiences of that space.

Although my work might not seem initially to depict haunted spaces, I do consider psychological and emotional responses to the spaces that I observe and create. I think that realizing these sorts of characteristics in a location is what makes it haunted. Hauntings are merely perceptions, but investigating their origins tells me a lot about my understanding of environments. I think of the Appalachian landscape that I grew up in, for example. It’s steeped in mystery, and the unknown. The steep hollows, dense hardwood forests, and foggy valleys, obstruct vision and open up the imagination. Each mountain ridge is the threshold into a new world with any number of possibilities. The landscape dictates a certain physical isolation and it makes one’s placement in it precarious. The natural environment is large and encompassing.

Built environments and especially homes, are common sites of hauntings. I am attentive to how our psychological attachment to the home can personify it.
The house itself is thought of as haunted, not just the potential specters inside. I find old and decaying homes very fascinating, often these are spaces that are understood as haunted. The abandoned house is an abnormal space because we associate the home with the social interactions that take place there. The deterioration of the structure becomes analogous to the decay of the body after death. The abandoned home is seen as dead, with only passing evidence of a time when it was living.
Chapter 3: Mood and Color

I think of my work primarily as expressive. I am always most concerned with impact, an initial reaction. I have always been most captivated by artists who can create a mood or tone that becomes the primary subject matter of their work. Artists like Anselm Kiefer \(^1\) and Michael Raedecker \(^2\) have a way of animating a landscape so that the viewer can imagine what it is to be inside of them. It is interesting to me that they do this without direct representation. They maintain a fairly abstracted way of working but can infuse the materials and forms with history, psychology, and humanity.

A similarity between my work and that of both of the mentioned artists is the use of a very limited color palette. A description of Raedecker’s painting titled *insignificance* describes the relationship between his palette and the emotional impact of the piece.

“The street in the painting is empty, its paving slabs the same colour as the smudged grey sky. Blind-eyed buildings march sullenly towards the vanishing point, a last act of expiration in a scene in which everything – hope, life, colour – has huffed its last, exhausted breath.” \(^3\)

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\(^1\) Anselm Kiefer is a German artist born in 1945. A mix of materials such as: metals, dirt, fabric, and straw, give his paintings an alchemical quality. His large landscapes are metaphors for the social and political realities of post-war Germany.

\(^2\) Michael Raedecker is a Dutch artist living in London. He was born in 1963. His paintings include suburban landscapes that appear deserted and imposing. He sews into his canvases with thread adding line and texture while emphasizing the surface plane.

I use white and gray tonalities to generate a somber mood and make the spaces seem like either dawn or dusk. I also want the viewer to have a tactile sense of the air, its moisture level, temperature. Also similarly to Kiefer, I use texture to give the work a sense of age. I create degraded surfaces that feel as though they have been eroded by time. I want the piece to seem neglected and decayed.

It is the space between things that is the most activated and dynamic for me; the air, the negative space, the ubiquitous, the void. In my work this is investigated through the depiction of atmosphere. There is the sense of thick air, fog, or mist. This feeling certainly corresponds with my investigation of the unknown as air becomes a visual boundary leaving the viewer unsure of their location in relationship to the work. There is resulting illusionistic space of which the implied depth could be imagined as vast or quite shallow.
Chapter 4: Patterns and Mark Making

My initial interest in using decorative patterns was an impulse that I couldn’t easily define. My initial investigation of them had much to do with their possibilities formally. They have wonderful arches and curves; together they create a dynamic rhythm. They have the potential to be either figure or ground. I can work on top of the pattern or insert it over a ground. I can also limit the number of times the pattern forms appear, giving them a more individual character. And they are a perfect tool for maneuvering the viewer’s eye around a painting.

I view my process of art making as less about creating than about collecting, editing, or just being witness. My role in my art work is largely deciding what imagery, materials, and processes to combine and then realizing what new meaning has been created from this new context. By doing this, some certainty is lost. My understanding of the elements is further from language, it is less definable in such terms. Decorative patterns were another addition to this formula. I did not know what role they played in the work in terms of creating meaning. Through continual use of them I have realized multiple purposes.

Many of my patterns are created with drawing techniques. They are also not always carefully applied. I allow them to appear handmade and also to
demonstrate the textural possibilities of the material that I have used. The forms become a vehicle for juxtaposing indirect and direct mark making. In many pieces wallpaper collage is next to hand drawn patterns. In this context, there is a direct dialogue between the machine made and hand made. I set up a situation to realize the differences between the two.

“Painting is a form of folk art in this culture. So much imagery is built from pixilated, non-corporeal events. Painting articulates its own position through material, through transformation.” – Terry Winters

My approach to the mark, and to material, and painting is similar. I feel that painting more and more is about phenomena when put against a backdrop of digital imagery. There is the presence of the idea from Action Painting of energy documented, but I also include some outside reference. The patterns take the viewer outside of the work with reference to interiors, and decorative arts. But the marks, the materials, and their visceral application are a documentation of process. It relates back to the materials and the moment.

I utilize the possibilities for expression and recording that mark making offers, but to use it as one tool of many. I want to know if a mark looses its

4 Terry Winters is an American painter and printmaker born in 1949. His work expands upon the mark making of Abstract Expressionism while also including metaphor and more complex spatiality.

possibility for expression when used along side recognizable forms. What I found is that the work becomes both illusion and object. This became one of many dualities in the work: interior/exterior, deep space/surface, painting/drawing, direct mark/indirect mark, handmade/machine made.

I understand the decorative patterns in my work as symbols that reference interiors and design. Instead of indicating specific histories in the decorative arts, I appropriate forms that seem as though they could be from anytime. I do not feel that my forms must have importance personally or that I even might fully understand their evolution. I do, however, understand the forms as referencing interior spaces and it is that association that I wish to contrast with exterior scenes. It is as if an interior is superimposed or projected upon a landscape. Cy Twombly\(^6\) comes to mind as an influence here. His paintings are full of references to text and symbols but the marks and forms are far from literal. It gives me an immediate, everyday connection to his marks. Instead of connecting to a grandiose tradition of mark making within art history, I think of everyday marks: handwriting, signatures, slashes and scratches.

Furthermore, the decorative patterns forge a connection between wallpaper, the wall, and the surface of a painting. I was very influenced by

\(^6\) Cy Twombly is an American Abstract Expressionist artist born in 1928.
Christopher Wool’s use of decorative pattern. I am specifically interested in when the pattern can be adornment and when it can be symbolic. It is within the context of art making that the forms become more than decoration and take on meaning as symbols in our cultural landscape. This idea is prevalent in Wool’s work as well.

“They depend on their surrounding context, which endows them with meaning—they are alternately ‘hidden’ as wallpaper and foregrounded as painting. The works’ vacillation between ornament and sublime pushed the age-old dialectic between the literal and the pictorial to the point where the status of the picture is constantly caught between marginalia and autonomy.”

This use of decorative pattern opens up possibilities for investigating how we structure our visual environment. I am especially interested in natural forms and the transformation of nature into design that is evident in, for example, a floral pattern.

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7 Christopher Wool is an American painter born in 1955.
Image 2:

Christopher Wool  *Little Birds Have Fast Hearts*  2001  Silkscreen ink on linen, 108” X 72”  

Chapter 5: Thesis Paintings

My thesis paintings consist of three large paintings on panel, approximately 6ft x 4ft, hanging next to one another on the wall with about two feet between them. The imagery in each is subtle and the most atmospheric of any previous work. They have several layers of thin paint in whites and grays. Each panel, however, has a slightly different tonality the first (looking from left to right) has cool grays, the second is the lightest, and the third is warmer and slightly brown.

The paintings started with the collage elements which contained: scraps of wrinkled paper, newspaper, muslin cloth, and cardboard which I adhered to the panel and then scraped and sanded away. On top of this texture I painted the several layers of white and gray paint washes. I often wiped away at the paint with a cloth which brought out the surface texture. I also applied glossy white spray enamel which softened the edges and gave the painting a silvery appearance. These processes were repeated over and over and I worked very quickly, always knowing that anything I applied could be easily covered. The process became a constant push and pull with additions and then deletions.
Image 3:

- paranormal steel and strings 2009 acrylic, enamel, and collage on panel, 70"x47"
- transformative beat, bang 2009 acrylic, enamel, charcoal, and collage on panel, 70"x47"
- what was and now isn’t or is but something else 2009 acrylic, enamel, charcoal, and collage on panel, 70''x47"
The later elements of each painting were less hurried and were created with more consideration. The application of the decorative pattern required a slower hand and also required me to constantly negotiate how many forms I would repeat on each panel. The bisecting lines which appear on two of the paintings were the most labored over. I wanted the lines to look like outlines of rooftops and to give a sense of distance. I also wanted them to be simple and not overly dominant visually so that they seemed to be inside the painting and not sitting on top of it. I painted and erased each line several times, finding the right value, placement, and shape of each. I knew a painting was finished when the seemingly contrasting elements (interior/exterior, surface/space) seemed to fit together coherently. I wanted them to make sense like a dream does, illogical but very rational when engaged in them.

My intention with the larger scale was to heighten the architectural nature of the panels, so that from a distance the viewer would notice the overall composition of the panels. There size and visual weight helped to anchor them visually while the picture plane remained very ethereal. As the viewer approaches the paintings, the patterns and forms become evident, and then finally the texture of the surface can be seen.

The title of the first painting, *Paranormal steel and strings*, is a reference to my recent purchase of a steel guitar. I saw a connection between how the
instrument searches out the note before landing on it and the way the forms in
the paintings seem to emerge from a fog somewhere behind the picture. Even
the process of building the painting has to do with searching in that I found the
imagery during the making of the piece. The titles of the next paintings are
deviseative beat, bang, and what was and now isn’t or is but something else
respectively. These titles deal with the evolution of the image, as it changes from
different positions. Additionally, there is reference to sound and music and
rhythm, all of which I considered in relation to the repeated pattern.

Representation of space in the work is varied. I use atmospheric
deviseptive perspective to create a sense of illusionistic depth while also building up a
surface texture. The layering of translucent paint leaves evidence behind of each
layer and creates a sense of an incomplete space, one that cannot be fully
realized. The space seems much like air, tenuous but present. What few forms
exist; appear to emerge from the fog like ghosts. I never include a point of
reference that would orient the viewer, such as a horizon line or any clearly
developed solid form. Consequently, there is a sense of the unknown, a mystery
that never becomes resolved.

Blurred edges also reference memory in my visual vernacular. This sense
of history is sustained by the residue left behind by layers of materials. I intend to
work with memories that stem from mundane observations. Photography has
recently become an important part of my work. I use photographs like a sketch book-capturing and collecting the things I find in my environment that are of interest. The bulk of my photographs show evidence of something that was once there; graffiti that has been covered by paint, traces on the side of a building from ivy that has since been cut down. Some of the other photos show decay and the wearing away of material. All show evidence of the passing of time. By preserving my observations with photography, I can better realize the commonalities between all of the things I find exciting in my environment.
Chapter 6: Other Recent Work

During the last two years, I have worked both on and off the wall. My interest in patterns came first from using wallpaper as a surface for paintings and drawings. I would hang the wallpaper in a rectangle on the wall referencing the space a painting or drawing would occupy. The first piece of this kind, titled *floral*, had an abstracted floral form crudely spray painted over the wallpaper that also went beyond the boundary of the wallpaper and onto the wall. This piece became the simplest representation of interior versus exterior in my work. The piece also had a flower-like form on top of floral wallpaper creating a very straightforward connection between the two actions. In this piece, these spaces seem to collide vulgarly and violently which came from the severity of the black spray paint and its contrast to the pattern which seemed very benign. It seemed almost as though someone had graffiti tagged a homey and intimate interior.

Later wall pieces used white paint to partially cover the wallpaper pattern and introduced forms on top of this altered ground. This way of working certainly influenced the way that I would construct a painting later on. Strategies for working with pattern would correlate quite a bit between paintings and wall pieces. I learned quickly the similarities and differences between the two methods. With the wall pieces, the pattern was always the starting point or the
ground. Because I was starting with pattern, the pieces were quite flat with the only depiction of space being very shallow and resulting from layering materials.

While working on paintings, I would start by building up layers of collage, marks, and white or whitish layers of paint and then I would introduce the pattern overtop. This way of building the piece created a very different association of space. The pattern would still be flat and skimming the picture plane but the background began to recede more. I later pushed this further to create a more atmospheric space and even later pushed the pattern into that space and off of the surface.
Image 4:

*Floral*  2007  enamel on wallpaper, 43"x54"
Even though the space deepened, I still incorporated layers of collage some of which were wrinkled or torn and they created an uneven surface texture. Now there was a seemingly contrasting depiction of space. The surface is referenced (and therefore the two dimensional picture plane), but there is also an illusionistic space depicted. The result is a painting which is both object and window. There is influence from the Hudson River School and the way that they considered the depiction of air and atmosphere to create a realistic depiction of space. Additionally, there is influence from Modern abstraction where the materials and processes become evident to the viewer and become part of the subject matter of the piece.
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Art Historical Context

“There’s a cognitive frame that I’m trying to work inside of, and that frame is always shifting and hopefully evolving in order to create new situations within which to improvise, experiment, and play. And it’s really about testing and playing within a framework that I feel has some sort of conceptual traction. Once the parameters are established, either about the medium, size, support, or reference materials, I feel free to paint.” -Terry Winters 10

I similarly consider the conceptual process as separate from the painting process. Constraint is necessary to open up the possibility to experiment and to paint without over thinking each move. It’s important for me to decide on things such as scale, materials, and procedure before I begin painting. With this framework in place, I can paint with little consideration of content. My conceptual understanding of my work develops in between paintings. That is, it is considered after one piece is finished and then determines my framework for the next.

“I became more interested in ‘how to paint it’ than ‘what to paint’.” –Christopher Wool 11

This statement was very familiar to me when considering my use of pattern. My concern was always first and foremost what materials to use and how to apply them. Only after working with patterns for awhile could I realize how they affected the piece conceptually. Wool’s ‘how to paint’ included reproduction

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as an important element. He would often reproduce painted images as silk screens where the images could be adjusted digitally. My patterns are reproduced by hand or traced. The process of transfer also becomes important to the quality of the final form. Similarly to Wool’s work, the mishaps become points of tension and consequently the most important elements in the piece.

Such appropriation places his work (and my own) in a context for painting they can include influence from multiple art historical practices and theories.

“Wool’s work has drawn from a variety of experiences both inside and outside art, within a framework that is concerned with history, conventions and problematics of making a painting in the 80’s and 90’s-his work embodies and encourages its own contradictions.” 12

There is a collapsing of history that informs my process. Influence can be found from theoretically opposing strategies: art about art, art about everything else, removed from the body, and closely related to it. Wool comes to mind again when considering this self-conscious approach to painting. His work simultaneously makes a case for contemporary painting while also being critical of the current context that it exists within. He considers painting in a time of simulation. It becomes important whether the image is reproduced, original, illusion, or reality. However, I reject the idea that painting has become symbolic of expression rather than expression in and of itself. Certainly we live in a time

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when representation seems more real than reality. However, Wool’s work addresses this while being expressive at the same time. It’s almost as though noting the problem helps to obfuscate it.

There is also a connection between my use of pedestrian imagery and that of Christopher Wool. His patterns are certainly pulled from decorative design, but his smears, smudges, and loops have reference to urban environments. His series of photographs *East Broadway Breakdown* allows the viewer new insight into the sources of his images. The photographs are taken in Chinatown in New York where his studio is located. At times the images very directly relate to his handling of paint showing evidence of graffiti tags, spilled paint, and stained sidewalks. Ultimately, both his paintings and photographs become constructions of everyday experiences and ordinary relationships to space. Instead of being entirely of the imagination, his forms stem from a direct note taking of his surroundings.

“Wool seems interested in precisely the historical moment, when gestural abstraction was no longer self-evident or ‘natural’, but our belief in some of its devices and effects still existed. He similarly endeavors to mediate between subjective and historical experience. I would go so far as to suggest that Wool aims to unearth suppressed or displaced ties between Pollock and Warhol, rendering the affinities between, say, Pollock’s use of house paint and the glam grit of street culture.” ¹³

¹³ Hochdorfer, 159.
I experience my environment and then replicate portions of it, acting as editor. I might also relate different spaces or moments and merge them into a single memory. I use shapes, forms, sources, materials that are ordinary to me. The rooftop forms are a good example. While they are forms that are easily recognized, they are simplified enough that they become generalized. However, in the painting they seem to emerge from the fog and take on a very dreamlike, not so ordinary, character.

I want the process of art making to be analogous to the process of living. This means that it is not a single statement or concept. It also means that it is somewhat random, and sometimes confounding. They are not single moments but a compression of many. The time that went into their production is evident in the final image. I consider that the past is always affecting the present, and that memory and any current moment are inseparable.
References


