A Piece of Vocabulary

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

Through my eyes, I capture the world. Through my body, I experience the gravity. With my hands, I recreate my physical experience into abstract languages. My mark is fragment vocabulary that exists as color and gesture. Within the canvas the power structure is built in mark making, color saturation and speed. When the structure collapses in space, the void creates new vocabulary. By exaggerating contrast and simplifying shape I search space. Repetition of marks next to one simple stroke, color vibration between warm and cool colors, and neutral grey that connects the void: contrast and harmony creates painting. I often find a moment when mark and color is removed from my hands and then begins to exist within the space.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my family.
Acknowledgments

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Thank you everyone from the bottom of my heart.
Vita

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Fields of Study

Major Field:  Art
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Creation is dominated by three absolutely different factors: First, nature, which works upon us by its laws; second, the artist, who creates a spiritual contact with nature and his materials; third, the medium of expression through which the artist translates his inner world. (Hofmann)

My research deals with cultural studies in communication and the environment: particularly in the process of learning foreign languages and translation of my physical experience into visual languages. When I came to the United States, languages (English, Chinese and Spanish) were for me an undefined sound in a hollow space. With time, I have learned to synthesize tone, repetition and gesture with the sounds to gather more comprehension of the languages. In graduate school I investigated the relationship between color and language, specifically as painting. Clear and simple words could be captured in primary colors and neutral tones could be described in grey. By exaggerating color contrast, simplifying form and repeating shape, my abstract language develops. Each gesture remains a specific note on the canvas. Once I remove my hand from the canvas, mark and color remains to speak its own language. Color and mark guides my hand shifting speed and pressure and I, instinctively, know what color to put next. The painting functions as a painting. I have tried to recreate my physical experience in nature
and the city in a representation manner. However the image and space often fragmentized as I was applying my gesture. The color balance and mark making gesture would create a new space.

**The moment that I lose myself within a painting, the abstraction is discovered.**
Chapter 2: Mark Making

The body we observe in the act of writing may indeed be communicating a message or completing a task, but it is simultaneously measuring space, monitoring pressure and friction, accommodating shifts of weight. (Noland 2)

A mark is a record of my action that remains as color and shape on canvas. In order to shift speed of gesture and pressure on a surface I create different brushstrokes and indications. I often apply the technique in Japanese calligraphy: stop, skip and release. Slowly, quickly, as if cutting the surface, as if repairing the surface, I push and touch my brush on canvas. Color absorption and interaction between my body and canvas change through the process. The canvas creates more resistance when I press hard on the surface. While pressing my brush on canvas, I search for a deeper space. The canvas creates less resistance when I touch lightly on the surface, and the color quietly sits on the surface and retains its flatness. When a mark sits on top of the color, I feel there is hierarchy between an old stain and a new brushstroke. When a brushstroke that merges with another brushstroke, they create harmony and equality. When the marks repeat without any overlapping, they create emphasis, rhythm and movement in space.

In the painting Gravity 1, I was interested in contrast and harmony in mark. First I covered the whole canvas surface with dark green to create a ground. While the green sits
on the surface, the black brushstroke creates deeper space and raises a green oval that has been outlined with a dark stroke. To simulate a cutout of the green oval, I painted an emphatic dark outline. On the right top, a yellow grey mark contains a small grey mark and they begin to merge together. There is a slow transition and sense of harmony produced that only grey, because of its neutral qualities, could create. Several repeated orange brushstrokes on the left edge of the canvas are evidences of my movement from left edge to center. These strokes overlap the edge of a dark stroke. Although orange strokes are on top of the black stroke, the black stroke repels orange and rejects interaction. The contrast in value often creates a sense of uneasiness. While orange strokes are rejected by the black stroke, the blue oval mark sits confidently on top of the black mark and shows its hierarchy. The blue oval merges with the green background, repeating the shape next to the green oval. Each brushstroke creates an action on the canvas.

Once removed from my hands, the mark exists only within the canvas.
Chapter 3: Language without Context

Dependence on inspiration means dependence on consciousness, a growing consciousness that develops from awareness of beauty and happiness. To live and work by inspiration you have to stop thinking. You have to hold your mind still in order to hear inspiration clearly. (Martin 137)

When I first arrived in America, I often found myself in a void not knowing the meaning of the words that people would pronounce. I developed my own communication system. Body gesture, volume and tone of voice, facial expression and repetition became major factor to understand the context. Important information (familiar words) had to be emphasized slower and louder. I often repeated words in my head, very much like the ways I catch the word and automatically understand its meaning, I record my notes on canvas. Some marks are made as direct gesture: confident, large, high contrast or high saturation. Other marks are uncertain; this searching mark could be small and neutral. My paintings are not fluid sentences. They are collections of many words.

In Gravity 2, the space is simple and clear. There is an orange foreground and a green background. The largest shape is black that resembles boots or shoes that holds the weight of color and sits on top the orange ground. There is a sense of order, starting from black shape, the dark green on top, moving right to the light blue, grey blue, and accent of red ends within the space. I like words that are short, chunky, clear, charming, simple,
and strong. Strong colors are often saturated and contrast the area of rest. Grey is my connector. It forms a bridge between various contrasts (of value, of saturation). It also fills the void between two distinctive spaces on the surfaces. Grey also slows the overall speed of color connectivity.

In *Collage 1*, I was interested in the contrast of color and line with blue and complementary orange next to each other, dark brown marks sitting on yellow marks and with an emphasis on weight. A light orange vertical line enters from top center and divides horizontal space into two spaces. While emphasizing the contrast in color, value and structure, a grey brushstroke starts to travel around and search for harmony. This collage has both the direct mark/line and the searching mark/line. Brown and yellow horizontal lines repeat their movement entering from left to right, the grey mark keeps searching the void to connect, and dark red and blue stripes which create its stable ground. Color contrast brings clarity of accent and emphasis, while the complexity of collage establishes the connection to the fragmented speech.

**My mark is fragment vocabulary that exists as color and gesture.**
Chapter 4: Physical Experience/Line

Your two lines carry multi-meanings:
They move in relation to each other.
They have tension in themselves.
They express active mutual forces.
This makes them into a living unit.
The position of this unit bears a definite relation to the entire paper.
This in turn creates tension of a higher order.
Visual and spiritual movements are simultaneously expressed in these tensions.
They change the meaning of your paper as it defines and embodies space.
Space must be vital and active—a force-impelled pictorial space, presented as a spiritual and unified entity, with a life of its own.
This entity must have a life of the spirit without which no art is possible—the life of a creative mind in its sensitive relation to the outer world.
The work of art is firmly established as an independent object: this makes it a picture.
Outside of it is the outer world.
Inside of it, the world of an artist.
(Hofmann 46)

I grew up in a small valley in central Japan where everything was surrounded by tall mountains. My living experience in Midwest brought an awareness of horizon line and a sense of a physical and a psychological distance from the world. Space and scale of my paintings shifted deeper and larger and my research was focused on the relationship between the environment and my body. Since I moved to Columbus, I have been investigating my physical experience in the environment with lines. I connected my body to nature and to the city to create my paintings by receiving information through my eyes.
and feeling the gravity from top of my head to my feet. Last summer, I had an opportunity to study art at the School of Visual Arts’ residency program in New York City. I noticed that while being surrounded by skyscrapers in New York City, I repeatedly made a gesture of holding my head up. Vertical lines not only directly movement from bottom to top, but influence viewers’ eye level. In New York City, the horizontal plane, isolated in the Ohio landscape, seemed to function as a pressure forcing the exaggerated verticality of the massive skyscrapers.

In *Collage 2*, I was interested in collaborating and dividing space using horizontal and vertical lines. The horizon acts as timer with its continuity and equality, calmness and speed. I am surrounded by large corn fields in Ohio. My body, then, functions as one vertical line that stands against the gravity implied by the horizon. The vertical line is a symbol of power—pressure from horizontal lines, rejection to the gravity, strong existence being higher and taller to reach the sky. A light dry black line divides the collage in the center with a blue line repeating its action on the right side. Between the black and blue line, there are several short pink horizon lines that respond to the pink stain on the left side. Each line has the function of moving the viewers’ eyes; vertical line travel top to bottom (or bottom to top) the horizontal line shifting us right to left or left to right (or left to right). The process of creating collage is similar to my writing. Spreading words on a small piece paper, breaking down a structure and borrowing words from other sources, I start my new sentence and complete my idea. In order to tear paintings and link images I find new vocabulary: a great surprise from puzzling a fragment of color, line and structure from other paintings.
The use of line in my paintings is a direct representation of my body balance and weight. When I practiced Japanese archery I often imaged a pole that connects the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. That spiritual sensation influences me to straighten my back and to keep the balance of my weight in the center part of my body. I think about that stance and the way my arms stretched out to shoot the arrow when I use vertical and horizontal lines and shapes to convey the sensation of gravity and spirituality.

**Higher and deeper, my line is the embodiment of physical and spiritual sensation.**
Chapter 5: Abstraction

Just one mark can start to pull together something that has no structure. It’s weird game of control- trying to get to it- to suck it out of yourself and out of the painting. There is a moment when the painting starts to breathe, it gets a kind of presence. (Saville 128)

While using landscape photography as the reference for the image, I learned exaggeration and simplification in form, value, and color saturation. My abstract language develops through the process of painting. By repeating lines, exaggerating colors, I enter into the painting. Vertical, horizontal, diagonal, quick, slow, warm, cold, red, yellow, black, my mark send me a signal to break the space, connect the space, push the value, and change the speed. Each brushstroke builds its own characteristics and tells me what movement, line and color to interact next.

In Winter Landscape 1-2, the slow flow of the water, the sound of the wind, and the reflection of the sunlight are my inspirations. While looking at a piece of driftwood in the river, I thought about its life span: how it started, and how it would end. I took several photos along the Olentangy River and used it as my references. I found beauty in the water reflections, interesting shadow shapes under the bridge, dry bushes, and the driftwood that brought me a sense of beginning and ending. By using earth colors such as moss green, light blue and brown, I described dry winter in Columbus. Rather than
exaggerating colors and structures, I emphasized the river’s quietness with darker grey tones and horizontal lines.

There is a point where the image that I seek fragmentizes with my gesture. To fill the void, I move my hand and search for space by pushing my brush on canvas. The moment when the painting becomes painting, I allow myself to listen to painting. I stop making the image in my head.

The color guides my hand, my body searches for interaction.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

I have been searching for an abstract vocabulary in my painting: a fragment in structure and a void in space. My mark records my gesture, the physical interaction between my body and canvas, as well as, color and time. By investigating my cultural heritage, and translating the experience into abstract languages, my painting sends my physical experience back to the environment. Brushstroke, color and line, when each element are exaggerated and simplified, they fragment structure and set the new foundation for my approach to language.

The color guides my hand, my body searches for interaction.

Higher and deeper, my line is the embodiment of physical and spiritual sensation.

My mark is fragment vocabulary that exists as color and gesture.

Once removed from my hands, the mark exists only within the canvas.

The moment that I lose myself within a painting, the abstraction is discovered.

I see beauty in fragment words.

Short, charming, and strong.

I assemble pieces of vocabulary in my paintings.
Appendix: Figures
Figure 1: Gravity 1

Oil on canvas
18x24 inches
2011
Figure 2: Gravity 2

Oil on canvas
18x24 inches
2011
Figure 3: Collage 1

Mix Medium
14x20 inches
2011
Figure 4: Collage 2

Mix medium
13x15 inches
2011
Figure 5: Winter Landscape 1

Oil on paper
42x60 inches
2010
Figure 6: Winter Landscape 2

Oil on paper
42x46 inches
2010
Bibliography


