Dreamboats and Criminals

A Thesis
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the Degree Master's of Fine Arts in Painting in the
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ABSTRACT

This work was born out of the desire to use paint to create a language, both visual and verbal, with which to communicate, to organize, and to order. I have developed a paint vocabulary made of shapes, colors, and marks to name my everyday struggles. These works address the complexity of choosing, control, and contradiction. I have set out to look at the tension between opposing forces or ideas in my life. Through sorting these issues according to assigned symbols, I have found semblance and necessity in their relation to each other. I am most interested in the space where these things begin to overlap, become reversible and interchangeable. I am attempting to make paintings that address the fluidity between similarity and disparity.

The paintings in this thesis exhibit are a marker of the progression of this effort. Each painting is an investigation of paint and color centered around these themes. Each painting is an attempt to address similar themes but in varied ways and numerous recombinations. Each work is a slowly built investigation that is informed by the materiality of the process. This begins with the surface texture of the stretched fabric, carries through to the priming ground, into the background layer(s) and color(s), on to the specified pours, marks, shapes and line that make up each work. They are examinations on how the phenomena of paint can be used to create a narrative of details to bring attention to the things that are outside, and difficult to see or say. They use implication and are in formation. They are atmospheres, spaces, places that sum up while remaining formless. They infer the recognizable without ever giving a whole, clear, story. They are slippery and in-between.

In making this work, it is my hope to discover and question while creating something that is meaningful and sincere. It is my hope to investigate both personal issues and formal aspects of paint and painting through simplicity, subtlety, humor and honesty.
Dedicated to all those who have taught me about painting.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

These works are born out of the desire to use paint to create a language, both visual and verbal, with which to communicate, to organize and to order. I have developed a paint vocabulary of shapes, colors, marks, and to name my everyday struggles. These particular works address the complexity of choosing, control, and contradiction. I have set out to look at the tension between opposing ideas or forces in my life. Through sorting these issues according to assigned symbols, I have found semblance and necessity in their relations to each other. I am most interested in the space where these things begin to overlap, become reversible and interchangable. I am attempting to make paintings that address the fluidity between similarity and disparity.

The paintings in this thesis exhibit are a marker of the progression of this effort. Each painting is an investigation of paint and color centered around these themes. Each painting is an attempt to address similar themes but resolve them in varied ways and numerous recombinations.
CHAPTER 2

GALLERY SPACE

There are a total of ten paintings in the exhibit in Hopkins Hall Gallery. I choose to paint the windows of the gallery with several layers of acrylic matte medium to create a frosted effect. This acts to quite the space. It closes it off from the outside, so a viewer could only see the work once the gallery is entered. In this way, the presence of the work as a whole, the pattern, rhythm, spacing of this grouping and the lighting of the gallery, function in a similar way to the individual paintings themselves. I also choose to post a list of titles and the artist statement outside the gallery to allow for a viewer to draw his/her own conclusions from just looking at the paintings. The individual can choose whether or not to know this information.

The paintings’ titles are listed in a clockwise fashion that will lead a viewer around the room in a circle from the entrance. The paintings alternate in pallet pattern from pale, pale, dark, pale, pale, dark, dark, pale, pale, dark. Still, a viewer can enter the space and chose to view them in any manner they desire. The paintings chosen can communicate with each other in many ways. For example, the relationship between Either/Neither and Creep is very important. They physically oppose each other on facing walls where each is the only respective painting filling that space. They contrast each other in terms of palette: the first evoking a pale blue sky with white clouds; the other dark, black and barely visible, perhaps recalling night. Even though the results are very different, there are similarities in the application of paint and the size and shape of the canvases. But, for clarity, I will discuss each painting as listed in the clockwise fashion to create a picture of how they exist in the space.
CHAPTER 3
THE PAINTINGS

This untitled painting is oil on canvas 28”x36”. The background is a pale gray that is applied in a
washy manner that reveals the texture and weave of the canvas as well as remnants of a previous painting.
On the right side, towards the center of the canvas, there is a pile up of blobs of poured paint of varying
sizes and colors. These blobs are different from the other pours or cloud shapes used because they are
thicker, heavier pours that sit on top of and completely cover the gray under surface. The colors are more
experimental in combination than the other paintings. Gray, dark brown, mustard yellow, eggshell white,
pale blue, navy blue, pale pink sit next to or on top of each other in a melting pile that could reference too
many scoops of ice cream during summer. I poured small amounts of thick mixtures, each color one after the
other to see if they would spread or mix into the other. Unlike most of the other pours, these did not seep
and spread into the surface but remained relative to the shape of the pour. Some bleed a little into the color
form next to it but mostly remain contained, suspended, gelatinous, opaque, disks of color.

This painting is untitled because I am really just experimenting with paint and color and never
intended for it to be in the show. As I was putting the space together and hanging the paintings, it became
evident that this canvas was needed as a contrast to the other paintings. The color choices and paint is
handled differently than the others. It helps to further emphasize the importance of materiality and the
variety of solutions I am exploring.
CHAPTER 4
PINCHES AND PULLS

This painting consists of small brown markings drawn on a thinly brushed on layer of pale pink oil paint over a white gessoed ground on a 36”x36” canvas. The thin pink layer does not touch the edge of the canvas revealing a white gessoed ground border and creating a new edge within the picture plane. This pink layer creates an atmosphere or a pillow which floats in the space of the canvas. On top of this atmosphere are drawn curved lines made with a liner brush and oil paint mixed with mediums that resemble eyelashes or a sewn stitch that is being pulled out. They also reference cursive handwriting or a curl of hair. These markings are placed in a vertical line on the right side of the canvas, closer to the center, and vary in application from darker heavy lines to light, seeped-in marks. They float upward, from largest and farthest apart, to smallest and closest together. The largest are the darkest, and the small marks are less visible and most tightly aligned.

This kind of mark-making and the thinness of the pink layer draw attention to the texture and snags in the canvas. This texture becomes a clunky, horizontal visual element to contrast with the softness and upward motion of the rest of the painting.

In naming this painting, I was thinking about how one squeezes an eye when blinking, wincing, an exaggerated wink, and the whispering, clicking, sound of that action. I was also thinking of the loop of thread that is made when a stitch is pulled out. These acts are small and fleeting. They are reactions to something uncomfortable or mistaken. I wanted to create a space for those actions to exist and to be examined.
CHAPTER 5
SNEAKS AND SLUGS

The oil color of this painting is made by mixing payne's gray and burnt umber. This appears black on the linen surface. The background of this 20"x24" vertical rectangle is slick, dark, shiny and reflective. To achieve this effect, I added an alkyd medium to the mixed black. At the bottom of the picture plane, on top of the shiny background. is a matte, silhouetted, grouping of bulbous forms dragging or laying heavily across the surface. This change in surface is difficult to see. It is only visible from certain positions and in a certain light.

This painting is quiet but has a definite presence. The color and thickness of the paint and shapes allude to a sloth-like heaviness, a slow moving, unpleasant, but innocuous presence. I am interested in playing with how the paint could be subtle but menacing, dark but humorous. These ideas are reflected in the title and how I have used paint.
CHAPTER 6
TONGUE-TIED

This 24"x32" horizontal rectangle is comprised of five components over a pale gray- lilac background. In the upper right section of the painting, there is a swarm of small tan and pale peach pours dotting and seeping into the surface. This creates a mass, a space that floats above two, round, poured, white, cloud-puffs that sit on top of each other on the lower left side of the canvas. The white pour underneath is thinner and more seeped into the surface. The cloud on top is thicker and shiny. These are anchored by a brown/black elongated vertical pour at the lower center of the picture plane. This pour is thin and has bled into the canvas disclosing a snag in the texture of this surface. This snag becomes a vertical line which acts as a spine to hold up the rest of the information. This mark functions both as a force to lift up and drag down. Over top of all of these pours, are a series of very tiny, white, pin-point dots that when linked together create a swirling line that references a curl of hair or a cursive letter or the beginning of a knot. These dots waver over, almost becoming its own shape, and tying together all the elements.

This painting is the most complex visually because of the variety of elements used. In using paint in these ways, I hope to evoke the feeling of being unable to communicate clearly, of feeling confused, hesitant, or speechless. This idea is again reflected in the title.
CHAPTER 7

EITHER/NEITHER

The background color of this 48”x48” oil painting is pale periwinkle blue. It is flat and expansive and covers to the edge. Centered towards the bottom of the canvas are three white cloud shapes. The largest shape is the most centered, the furthest away, and the most transparent. The pour that created this shape was an uneven mix, mostly turpentine to a small amount of pigment. As the pour dried, it created a halo-like effect around the shape that pulled up some of the background color to reveal a pinkish-orange underpainting. This shape is flanked by two smaller, thicker, shiny white pours to its upper right and to the lower left. Before these pours were completely dried, I hung the canvas vertically on the wall which caused the paint that was not yet dry to run and drip down the surface. This created holes in the clouds as well as lines that run down to the bottom edge of the canvas. In contrast to the sky-like softness of these colors and shapes, there are brown, curly lines drawn, layered and piled on top of each other. They resemble lines of a letter written in cursive, repeated and written over and over again. Or they could be read as curly locks of hair blowing across, tangling and knotting in the wind.

The way this painting is painted relates to the title in that I tried to implicate the formless feeling that happens when trying to make difficult decisions through the use of space, contrasts of marks and colors and by poking holes in formed things. The title and paint refer to the hesitancy and gaps that happen when one takes too long to choose.
CHAPTER 8
GRIT AND GRIN

The background color of this 36" x36" canvas is built from thin layers of van dyke brown and burnt umber oil paint. This method creates an uneven texture of reflective spaces. Centered in this space float two opposing components On the left is a mass of pale gray, long, swirling, tendrils that reference smoke or hair or cursive handwriting. In the center, they are met and contrasted to very dark gray, small pin-point dots that form a series of lines. These dots are shiny and barely visible unless very close to the surface. They reference something written in a linear, formal manner and punctuation.

These marks and the use of paint and color are used to further communicate the tension represented in the title. I was thinking about the facades that are used when doing something I do not wish to do. Everything on the surface that is dark alludes to how I try to hide this discomfort. The pale gray marks refer to the appearance I want to give, through the confidant, flowing line. The meeting of these things remain awkward and, though slightly difficult to see, visible.
CHAPTER 9
FITFULL-FISTFULL AND BEAUTY QUEENS...

Fitfull-fistfull and Beauty Queens and other Naked Ladies are two separate paintings that are meant to be viewed together. The first is 10”x12” horizontal rectangle, with a burnt umber vertical wash in the background that is repeated in some of the pours in the larger canvas. A bright candy-pink, silhouetted, decorative motif that evokes a flower or paisley or voluptuous figure, fills up a majority of the space. It hangs above and to the left of Beauty Queens ...

Beauty Queens... is a large 36” square painting. There is a thin, pastel green-blue wash in the background that allows for the textured weave of the canvas to show through. It is a contrasting backdrop to the grouping of painted and poured clouds that start in the lower left corner and float upward on the diagonal. Dark blue, gray and brown, shiny and matte, puffs overlap each other in a jumbled succession that starts larger at the bottom and gets smaller as they float up and away. The painted clouds hold a more specific edge and contained shape. There is evidence of brush work in these shapes. The poured puffs are diluted and seep more freely into the weave of the canvas, making their shape less predictable and more transparent.

This odd diptych was intended to raise questions. They need each other because the contrast in size, shape, space and color make the viewing strange and uneven. They address, in a sarcastic way, an ideal I am lured into believing is a necessity. In the end, the thing I desire turns out to be something I do not expect or even want. This is a behavior pattern that happens over and over. It is frustrating but humorous. In addition to there construction, the naming of these pieces is an effort to communicate this idea.
CHAPTER 10
HURRY UP, STOP

The gessoed ground of this 36”x36” canvas makes up the majority of space in this painting. Entering on the lower right of the picture plane are many thinly drawn, burnt umber, lines that develop into swirls that are repeated and overlapped. These marks were made with a striper brush with the brown oil paint thinned, some with turpinoid, some with linseed oil. This thinning determines how the individual marks react to the gessoed surface. Some pull forward, some fade into the background, giving some allusion to depth. This mass becomes a cloud made of cursive handwriting or perhaps a knotting of hair that is rolling over on top of itself. The drawn element is thin and see through but fills up its space and contrasts itself with the empty white space of the ground. This empty ground reinforces the edges of the canvas, the contained shape of the square.

The title of this piece is illustrated in the way these two elements meet. The rolling, swirling implied motion of the mass is quickly paced and ends abruptly in the vast whiteness, which leads the viewer to the edges and reemphasizes the idea of an unsatisfying finish.
CHAPTER 11

CREEP

The background color of this 48"x48" oil painting on canvas is built with many layers of Indian red and van dyke brown to achieve a deep, dark, smooth, consistent surface. On top of this are countless small drips of close values of deep browns and grays. This painting was made entirely while laying flat on a table and dripping repeatedly to accumulate a form. Yet, this accumulation remains formless, suspended and about to become and moving slowly across the surface.

There is great variety in each individual drip. The variety of values were mixed with many different mediums that each had its own effect and way of drying. For example, an asphaltum oil color was mixed with pure cold-press linseed oil and dripped with a small brush around the canvas. That created small, round shiny, bumps. The outer layer dried too quickly, leaving a still-wet pocket of paint sealed inside. Over time, as the paint dried more thoroughly, these drips became wrinkled with a raisin-like texture and more matte. Other drips that were mixed with varnish and alkyd mediums remained smooth domes. Some drips spread becoming more like pours. This variety of texture and play of surface is barely visible because of the closeness of dark values used. A viewer needs to be very close to the canvas in order to see this information. But, because of the size of the painting, one must step back a few feet to see it as a whole. This play between detail and size, shape and color, make this a difficult painting. This idea is referenced in the title in that a creep is someone who gets on your nerves and plays mean tricks. I also like how the title references something that is slow moving and dark. Again, this is also communicated with the paint.
CHAPTER 12
CONCLUSION

These works are slowly built investigations that are informed by the materiality of the process of painting. Each begins with the surface texture of the stretched fabric, carries through to the priming ground, into the background layer(s) and color(s), on to the specified pours, marks, shapes and lines that create each individual work. They are examinations on how the phenomena of paint can be used to create a narrative of details to bring attention to things that are outside and difficult to see or say. They use implication and are in formation. They are atmospheres, spaces, places that sum up while remaining formless. They infer the recognizable without ever giving the whole, clear story. They are slippery and in-between. The recurrence of shapes, marks and colors draw bridges to one another so as to relate and navigate this unfamiliar place.

In making this work, it is my hope to discover and question while creating something that is meaningful and sincere. It is my hope to investigate both personal issues and formal aspects of paint and painting through simplicity, subtlety, humor, and honesty.