At the Intersection of Painting and Photography

Thesis
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Abstract

The exploration of the relationship between painting and photography has played a significant role in the evolution of my studio practice over the last ten to fifteen years. Fundamental to my development as an artist is the process of revisiting my projects to search for a network of ideas that build toward a language of practice. The form of that practice has vacillated between painting and lens-based mediums. However, it is the ideas that determine the medium with which I work in any given project. I feel that investigating the elements in painting through photography and photography through painting allows me to gain insight on the underlying structure of both mediums. The points where the medium specific elements interweave are the most intriguing to me, as the results for each project build to form the foundation of each subsequent project.
Dedication

This document is dedicated to my parents, Patrick and Clare Smith, who have never doubted my ability to make it to this point, and continue to support the pursuits that lie ahead.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tony, Michael, and Kris for their tremendous insight over these past two years. I couldn’t ask for better mentors during this demanding, ambitious, and continuously rewarding experience.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................ ii

Dedication.................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements....................................................................................... iv

Vita.................................................................................................................. v

Table of Contents........................................................................................ vi

List of Figures............................................................................................... vii

Chapter 1: Rediscovering the Mosaic................................................................. 1

Chapter 2: Analog and Digital Beginnings and the Television Paintings.............. 4

Chapter 3: Abstraction in Photograph............................................................... 16

Chapter 4: The Surface of the Painted and Photographic Image........................... 20

Chapter 5: Realism/Abstraction; Composition/Anti-Composition.......................... 31

Chapter 6: Pixel Paintings.............................................................................. 39

Chapter 7: The Intersection of Painting and Photography................................. 48

References..................................................................................................... 52
List of Figures

Figure 1: *Match Game (Gene)*, Oil on Masonite, 32”x 40”, 2003.............................. 11

Figure 2: *Red, Yellow, White*, Color Photograph, 40”x 60”, 2010............................. 17

Figure 3: Documentation of *White Light* scene setup from above............................ 19

Figure 4: *Configuration of a Field #1*, Projection/Oil on Canvas, 30”x 40”, 2012......... 23

Figure 5: *Configuration of a Field #1*, Projection/Oil on Canvas, 30”x 40”, 2012......... 24

Figure 6: *Configuration of a Field #2*, Projection/Oil on Canvas, 30”x 40”, 2012......... 27

Figure 7: *Configuration of a Field #2*, Projection/Oil on Canvas, 30”x 40”, 2012......... 28

Figure 8: Jackson Pollock, *Number 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, Oil, Enamel and
 Aluminum on Canvas, 87”x 118”, 1950......................................................... 32

Figure 9: *Walden of Aurora, Aurora, OH*, Color Photograph, 32”x 40”, 2012........... 35

Figure 10: *Walden Village, Beavercreek, OH*, Color Photograph, 32”x 40”, 2012........ 37

Figure 11: Recently Discovered Mosaic of Huqoq, 500-600 A.D................................. 40

Figure 12: Andreas Gursky, *Rhein II*, C-Print, 73”x 143”, 1998................................. 42

Figure 13: *Rhein II 3200% (After Gursky)*, Acrylic on Canvas, 73”x 143”, 2012......... 45

Figure 14: Studio View of *Rhein II 3200% (After Gursky)*.................................... 46
Chapter 1: Rediscovering the Mosaic

On the day of my final class of my studies for the Master of Fine Arts, I found myself aimlessly wandering the aisles of the Fine Arts Library at The Ohio State University. A visit to the library for me has always been a humbling, yet exhilarating experience. I never return simply with the books I intend to retrieve. More often than not, I have difficulty carrying the number of books I have checked out at the end of a visit. It is truly overwhelming to think of how much information is contained on these shelves. I felt a sense of liberation on this particular day. For the first time in many months, I was without any directed reading on my agenda. I had finally been freed to dig into any title I desired and simply lose myself, meandering from aisle to aisle. After thumbing through a variety of titles, I discovered a small book of images called *Tunisian Mosaics: Carthage in the Roman Era* produced by the Smithsonian Institute. There I stood in the library, approaching the conclusion of two years of intense study and production of digital photography and high definition video, awestruck at the sight of these laborious, first millennium constructions, painstakingly assembled piece by piece from thousands of tiny limestone, marble, and colored glass tiles. For the next several days, I continued to research the process involved in creating those ancient pictures. The negotiation of the building blocks of the picture plane was just as fundamental to the creation of the image
then as it is in contemporary times, two-thousand years later—just as it was significant to cultures
as early as 10,000 to 40,000 years earlier.¹

I have learned to be very attentive to intuition over these first fifteen years of my emerging studio practice. In many instances, I have no specific reasons for venturing in one direction or another. At some point during a particular strand of research and practice—whether it be three days or three years in—a connection is made that reveals the reason why I decided to explore a seemingly incongruent idea or process. In this instance, it only took two days for me to draw a clearly thought-out link between this newfound preoccupation with ancient mosaics and my current practice: mosaic works possess very similar fundamental building blocks as a digital image. Magnified at several thousand percent of its original size, the digital image becomes a grid of millions of solid colors—a virtual equivalent of a variation of green, blue, and red colored-glass tiles. As digital technology so clearly demonstrates in its precision, its building blocks are perfect and seamless, with sharp corners and uniform colors. Ancient mosaics are composed of multiple elements, with varying luminosity and color vibrancy. If the idea of the mosaic was going to directly enter into my practice of digital imaging, I made a crucial decision to work at a safe distance from this 21st century medium of digital technology, which has been familiar and pervasive in my recent work. In other words, in order to adequately examine the digital image through the analog construction of the mosaic, I felt I had to work in a similarly analog medium. This medium had to be

less familiar than digital media, but a still a medium with which I have had some experience working in the past. For me that medium was painting.

To me, painting’s usefulness to this project ventures well beyond the fact that it is an analog process. Much of my research and practice over the past several years has centered on the relationship between painting and both film and digital photography. This written thesis will examine the various approaches toward a fuller understanding of this relationship, whether through manifold channels of painting and drawing, or via diverse avenues of investigation with lens-based mediums. Every path of exploration has led to a closer apprehension of this relationship, and occasioned countless unexpected and richly diverse questions. These ideas and questions would have never been revealed without a route as convoluted, but also as spirited as the one I have taken to arrive at this stop along the way. Thinking back to the beginning of this journey, I feel as if I walked into a library and was swept away into the stacks—my curiosity carrying me deeper into more unfamiliar aisles. But for me, this library hasn’t just contained books. It has contained studio spaces and computer editing stations. Of course there have also been fellow patrons to offer guidance and insight along the way. This essay is but a quick step outside of the stacks. A moment to reflect on how I came to this point, and where I feel this journey might be headed.
Chapter 2: Analog and Digital Beginnings and the Television Paintings

This chapter examines the work that served as the overture for what has evolved into an intense ten-year period of studio production. It feels fitting that the work that I began in 2000—the moment I realized that I wanted to attain the tools to pursue a career in art—touches on so many elements of my research and practice today. They only difference is that I lacked the vocabulary and artistic maturity to understand the significance of this early work in relation to issues in contemporary art. The three mediums that have become predominant in one form or another over this time-span—painting, video, and photography—are all equally important to in my research and studio practice today. This wasn’t the case ten years ago. I viewed myself only as a painter. I was staunchly against viewing photography and video as an end result for my art practice. However, in a journal entry from May 2, 2000, I recall the fascination with the technological advancement of the digital camera, though without a hint of acknowledging the potential of the photograph as an end in itself as art:

*Today I started taking pictures with my new camera. It’s the first time I’ve owned a digital camera, and I’m just amazed at the immediacy with which everything is now being presented to me. Not only is the image instantaneous (all I have to do is plug the camera into my computer), but with the real-time display that gives me a video picture of whatever I am looking at through the camera. It basically tells me exactly how the image is going to look on the computer screen—how bright or dark, how focused or unfocused—so if I don’t like what I see, I can reposition or bring in more light. No more waiting for the image to be developed. No more worrying about the cost of each picture. I can take over 50 photos and then just unload them onto the computer. Then I can take 50 more*...
...I had the TV on while I was fooling around with the camera tonight. It was an old rerun of the Match Game. It caught my eye as I was scanning the room through the video display on the back of the camera. I saw the interesting waves from the tube of the Television... all of the amazing patterns of squiggles and lines, waving up and down, back and forth. I used the video screen in the camera to try to time when the waves would align with the people on the TV—something I just could not do with my film camera. I took a bunch of pictures of Gene Rayburn and Charles Nelson Reilly. I have no idea why. It just happened to be on, but the set on the show is so colorful that it made for a really good picture. Good painting ideas. It doesn’t make much sense to do that, but much of what is on TV doesn’t make much sense anyway.

Ten years later in 2010, I was beginning my MFA studies in the area of Photography. What interests me so deeply about these first few years of studio work is investigating how my practice has developed, as I still am concerned with the same kind of questions I was dealing with when I was first starting out as a painter, and up until my revisiting painting within the past year, most of those questions had been addressed through lens-based work.

I had always been interested in painting since I the time when I was very young. I recall having an obsession with drawing beach scenes with color pencils at the age of eight. Later that year I began working with paint-by-numbers, again of beach scenes. I still remember the excitement of seeing the image come together as long as I remained within the parameters of the number-scheme. A few years later I began taking drawing classes at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. I recall working with colored pencils in reproducing 19th century Japanese prints—particularly those by Katsushika Hokusai. I spent innumerable hours in the Impressionist wing of the museum, sketching the various versions of Monet’s Haystacks and Rouen Cathedral paintings on display. Throughout
my teenage years, I was very much involved in the art program at both my middle school and high school. However, I chose a liberal arts education path for college, with a focus on political science, and the intention of going to law school. During those years, art took a back seat to my education. It wasn’t until my final semester at Providence College that I resumed an interest in art, as I enrolled in an introductory painting class. My instructor, Professor James Baker, saw something in my work—a sense of color and composition—that he had not seen even in the work of many of his painting majors. This dedication from Baker gave me the confidence to pursue painting to the point where all of my free time was consumed working in my bedroom studio and reading as much as I could about art. I reverted back to the exercises of my youth, copying masterworks, only this time in oil on canvas. I was particularly drawn to reproducing Renaissance paintings and etchings, especially of Albrecht Durer, as well as stylistic realism of the Pre-Raphaelite painters of the 19th century. After several years of this foundational practice, I felt that I was ready to work toward developing my own style. This consisted of making paintings based on assembled collages of juxtaposed images from popular magazines, from 1960s National Geographic to 21st century Esquire and GQ.

As indicated in the above quote from my journal, my first ‘idea’ for a painting series resulted in the investigation both photography and video—particularly, the way in which digital imaging yielded immediate results, and the curiosity found in the frozen moment of the video still. In 2000 I purchased my first digital camera. It was a compact Samsung point-and-shoot with a 1.4 megapixel sensor. By today’s standards of 15, 24, even 36 megapixel camera sensors, or even an 8 megapixel iPhone camera, my Samsung created
a very low resolution. However, at that time, the quality of the image produced was astonishing to me. I had worked a bit in 35mm photography by that time, and I was well aware of the detail that film photography could produce, but it was the immediacy of the digital image that seemed so fascinating. Nevertheless, the camera was only used to create source images for my paintings.

I remember my interest in painting photographs had much to do with the gesture of the brush as an extension of the body. I knew that the images with which I was working were either photomechanically or digitally produced. There was an urge toward bringing the representation back to the physical world through the body that was very important to me.

At the time, I didn’t feel like I was interested in digital technology. I didn’t have personal access to Internet, I was against having a cell phone, and my computer was purchased second-hand and was manufactured in the mid-90s. The digital camera purchase was made simply to allow for quicker production of source images for painting. It paid dividends right away, as I came up with my first series within a week of purchasing the camera.

These first explorations in painting evolved into a series of paintings from 2000 to 2007 based on digital photographs of television screens. The origin of this project seems simple enough. As noted in the journal from May 2, 2000, I just so happened to point the camera at the television, and became fascinated with all of the waves and static of the image. The stillness of this one frame, captured by the shutter of the camera, presented a
spectral quality produced by motion blur, television feedback, and the poor quality of the standard definition cathode tubes. I wanted to preserve the mechanical flaws of the process of the television broadcast, the video projection, and the capturing of movement by the snapshot of the screen.

To me, it was more about exploring the language of these functions of transmission. Knowing that painting could ‘clean up’ the image through the choices made in the transposition of the image to canvas, I felt it was important to keep all of the flaws—even actually celebrate the flaws of these processes that happen all around us, but occur too quickly for the eye to perceive. I saw this act as creating a foundation where photography, the moving image, and painting could be positioned for further examination.

That inquiry has continued to today much of my work over the past ten years has addressed the relationship between the lens-based medium and notions of truth and reality. For the television series, painting further complicates these questions by disrupting conventional attitudes toward the mechanical and digital capturing of the world. It in turn exposes the underlying structure of painting by problematizing the way we expect to see a painted picture—one without the mechanical flaws of the moiré pattern and radio wave distortions from the video image, and motion blur of the moving image from the still photograph. Traditional depictive painting does not reveal those mechanical and digital distortions of the lens-based media. It has always succeeded in preserve the still image from an unrealistic, or perhaps hyper-realistic standpoint, free of
flaws of the machine or the eye. This series was an attempt to tangle these conventional assumptions about all three mediums.

Another development on the late 1990s led to my interest in this studio project. As I witnessed the rate of proliferation of images on the Internet, and the dramatic increase of the number of channels on cable throughout the late 1990s and into the millennium, I started thinking very deeply about the saturation of imagery—the flicker of the screen from the multiple browser windows opening and closing, or the short-attention-span television programs with rapid cuts and visual effects. Image media was entering a new realm of multi-processing for the multi-tasking 21st century image-consumer. One had more options in all media—in television, movies, video games, websites. Content producers were forced to adapt to this saturated image-market, employing strategies to grasp the attention of the viewer. This mass media eye candy was fascinating to me—browser pop-ups, flash graphic and GIF animated advertisement banners on the Web, scrolling stock numbers and headlines on the television news channels, the fast-paced narratives and rapid-fire cuts of reality television, or the repeating images and sequences of true-crime programs.

My first instinct in responding as an artist was to pull back, to remove myself from the digital age and its accompanying technology. I remember wanting to hearken back to a time when I felt technology was developing at a more reasonable pace. I found the medium of painting to be a very suitable form with which to work because I felt the organic gestures of brushwork to be more personal and the act of painting to me felt like I
was achieving a closeness to the work—whether physically or emotionally—that I felt I
could not achieve if I thought my job was complete with just the photograph. My
perspective on this line of thought had obviously changed dramatically within the next
eight years. However, I still believe there is a certain intimacy with material and the
tactility that I feel when working with painting that is missing from digital imaging. I do
certainly approach that feeling with processing of film photography, but not to the degree
that I feel with that kind of palpable experience of materiality and texture with painting.

The subject matter was also initially dictated by it’s relationship with an earlier time—a
time when the saturation found in the imagery was not due to the bombardment the
seemingly endless variations of image, but from the garish color patterns of 70s
television. This was particularly evident in the sets of television game shows, where
glittering hues across the color spectrum radiated through the screen. These were network
shows at a time when one had three or four channels to choose from, and the focus was
centered on letting a scene, a story, or a joke unfold. *The Match Game* interested me
particularly because of the colorful personalities of its panelists, like Charles Nelson
Reilly and Brett Somers. This combination of vibrant hues and photogenic personalities
paradoxically filled me with a sense of the real. While these panelists were hemming it up
for the camera, and the sets presented the viewer with a quintessential simulacrum
environment, the lack of special effects and quirky editing that was so prevalent heading
into the millennium allowed the spectacle to remain in a material world. The set was real,
nothing more than objects painted in flashy colors, and the panelists, while seemingly
fictional characters were true, albeit utterly eccentric personalities.
The television paintings are elaborate, composed of several small wood panels to create a large-scale image, with each mark of the brush dabbed in the tradition of the Impressionists—particularly Pointillist—painters of the 19th century. Each mark replicates the red, green, and blue of the photons exposed through the cathode ray tube onto the light-sensitive screen. This red, green and blue color filtering is similar to the process of the image being captured by a digital camera sensor. This is an additive process, which is difficult to replicate in painting, which uses a subtractive red, yellow, and blue color mixing. In order to reproduce this effect, I needed to ensure that one color
dried before the next color could be applied to avoid any mixing of wet paint marks. As a result, I was able to achieve a resemblance of the digital and cathode ray tube process found in digital imaging and television projection, respectively. This was a time-consuming process, with some of the larger-scale paintings taking over a year to complete.

I often struggled to apprehend the point of making these paintings, especially for the length of time spent on the entire series. After all, it is nothing more than an exact copy of a photographed image of a television screen. Of course, as affirmed in the introduction, there is always a reason for why I choose to venture down a certain path of inquiry. Looking back, I see the connection of photography, video, and painting in these works, and how this action of painting the images problematizes the ontological function of the lens-based and time-based sources, while simultaneously calling attention to the questioning of the legitimacy of painted image. Ten years ago, I was searching for answers as to my motives. This frustration is echoed in the entry of the journal entry at the beginning of this chapter, but also revealed in dozens of other entries around this time. In pondering why I am photographing television screens, I write in one entry that it “makes no sense”, in another that “it is senseless”, and in still another that “I don’t understand the point of doing this”. These questions were mostly surrounding the relevance of using painting to represent a photographed image of a video.

To this day I am still not sure exactly why I decided to actually paint these images. It makes sense to me now (as described in the upcoming chapters), after years of reading
and research about the nature of these respective mediums, why I have gone back to this kind of process. However, back in 2000 I only considered myself a painter. The only photography I engaged in was to create source images for these paintings. I was not very fond of art photography, but I remember having difficulty understanding photography as art at that time. I knew very little about art history and contemporary art practices. I had no idea that photography had struggled for so long to gain acceptance as an art form. Nor did I know that photography had enjoyed tremendous success as a formidable medium in the art world from the 1980s onward.\(^2\) I simply did not understand photography.

Considering that I did not have any formal art training by the age of 24, let alone a BFA, I felt that I had already been behind in my art education. My focus was on learning everything I could about painting and its history. Aside from an article or a chapter here or there about photorealist painters like Chuck Close or Malcom Morely, very little of that research touched on the relationship between painting and photography. Perhaps the answer to the question ‘why’ might be closer to the one that Gerhard Richter provided when he considered why he first started making paintings based on snapshots: “Painting from a photograph seemed to me the most moronic and inartistic thing that anyone could do.”\(^3\) His reasoning was twofold. At that point in his young career in 1964, he was having difficulty working with the freedom and subjectivity of painting:


I hate the dazzlement of skill: e.g., being able to draw something freehand from life, or – even worse – inventing or putting together something entirely original... it’s all too easy to get carried away by one’s own skill and forget about the picture itself. There are legions of painters who are just too talented to paint good pictures. Being able to do something is never an adequate reason for doing it. That’s why I like the non-composed photograph. It does not try to do anything but report on a fact.4

Richter’s account refers to style, which he claims is absent in a photograph, but is the essence of a painting. This style in painting alludes to the imperfection of painting. It is the work of the hand through brushstrokes that creates the image. No two strokes are the same. With every mark, every attempt to create a “straightforward copy”, Richter asserts that “something new creeps in, whether I want it or not: something that I don’t really grasp.” Richter is interested in this uncertainty in his process of faithfully copying photographs as paintings. Thus, he sees painting as “simpler and more full of potential” for his practice than the end result of photography, which he views as “too bound up with easily repeatable tricks.” I found that my experience in painting photographs to arise from this same line of thinking, even though at the time I had not known of these passages of Richter’s on painting and photography.5

Perhaps I shared the same kind of lack of interest in the value of photography as art at that time. However, I was puzzled as to why I had difficulty articulating this viewpoint. I found myself in conversations where I would easily dismiss photography as being too easy, and too instantaneous. I thought of photography as a medium of little labor, even if it took a great deal of time searching for and framing the image, or developing that image

4 Ibid, 23.
5 Ibid, 23.
in the darkroom. I wondered how a photograph, taken in a split second, could be more important than a painting that needed to be build up to an image over days, weeks, months, even years.

There had to be a reason why photography is a legitimate art form—and perhaps even more important than any other medium in the past 30 years. Thus, my interests turned away from painting and toward lens-based art. In 2008 I started over. I began to assimilate every bit of information I could about photography, just as I had done eight years earlier with painting. As a result, much of the studio work in the following years were intended to be experiments in response to research on the attributes inherent to photography—particularly its indexicality, and the truth-claim of the photographic image.
Chapter 3: Abstraction in Photography

Despite the turn toward a photography practice by 2009, the dialogue between painting and photography actually strengthened as I delved deeper into lens-based work. By this time, I felt equipped with the knowledge and technical skills to address the subject through photography and video. One of the first projects to do so, executed late 2010, was an inquiry into surface and the notion of the photographic image as a transparent window to reality. The series of large-scale photographs called White Light, stands out as a precursor to my most recent investigations into the surface of the image. In a statement on the work, I wrote:

_In a certain light, this investigation may be a play on the limits of photography – while at the same time delving deep enough to face many anxieties concerning those confines. From another perspective it may form a cyclical dialogue between photography and the conditions of painting – possibly in an attempt of reconsider 40-year-old questions like ‘Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue’?_6

The interest of the conventions of photography in this series focuses on the representation of a three-dimensional reality ‘out there’ through the flatness of the surface of the photograph. The photograph is commonly viewed as a window that reveals everything beyond its surface as three-dimensional, but there is nothing beyond the two-dimensional surface of the picture plane.

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6 Artist statement for the exhibition, Recent Arrivals, January 2011, at Hopkins Hall Gallery, Columbus, OH.
These photographs resemble color field paintings in their abstraction, and that they depict the similar flatness that Clement Greenberg viewed as essential to painting.\textsuperscript{7} Photography cannot escape that flatness of surface, but it also cannot escape the presentation of the trace of the three-dimensional world that it captures. One might take a picture of a wall, and thus a flat surface is represented in the photograph. However, a picture of two intersecting walls, while occupying the flat surface of the photographic print, will be recognized as an imprint of a three-dimensional space. The \textit{White Light} photographs

attempt to reverse this trace by capturing three-dimensional space to remain flat within the photographic picture plane. I placed flat, colored materials in a wooden box so each sheet would meet at a 45-degree angle. I then directed the sunlight through a window to shine right on that intersection, obscuring the corner with a white light. Instead of the depiction of two sheets meeting at a right angle, the result is the appearance of a continual plane with a light beam cutting through the intersecting corners. These photographs are abstractions, revealing an image that inherently possesses indexical qualities (the scene that was actually in front of the camera), but complicates the iconic qualities (the image doesn’t resemble the three-dimensional scene set up in front of the camera). As scholar and curator Lyle Rexer articulates, “the guarantee of a photograph is not its image, its representation, so easily conflated with it subject; it is its surface, its utter two-dimensionality… no longer looking through the photograph, but seeing with it”.8 Thus the photograph is less a window, with a three-dimensional world beyond the surface of the plane of glass, than it is a mirrored surface, with the image created on a two-dimensional plane of the surface. This project sought to divert the attention of the photograph as a record of absence, or what Roland Barthes would describe as photography’s ability to present what is no longer there, or something that once was.9 It seeks to disregard the construction of the image from reality. Instead of emphasizing a captured moment as documentation of the real, it focuses on the apparatus’ creation of something entirely new: a two-dimensionality within the image space that is at once

illusory and true to the photographic process. Rexer concludes, “abstract photographs may record or register but do not testify or bear witness except to their own presentness, which has its own poignancy”.10 In this instance, the window becomes clouded, and on a certain level the photographic image is freed from the anxieties of truth-claim, bringing it closer to the essence of painting, which makes no claim to indexical representation. No longer simply information, the abstracted photograph veers closer to occupying a purified image; one that is not required to lean on a referent in the world, but may reside in its own reality; one that speaks only to the manipulation of its own conditions; and one that celebrates a degree of opacity that approaches painting.

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10 Rexer. 195
Chapter 4: The Surface of the Painted and Photographic Image

The previous chapter examined the way in which my first experiments on abstraction emphasized a surface that complicates the traditional notion of the photograph as a transparent window to the world. This chapter investigates both the photographic and painted surface, confronting the conventional notion of the photograph is seen as a window, and the painting as an image of layered substance.

While it is true on a strictly physical level that the surface of most photographs are thinner than that of painting (even a watercolor painting on paper), there is most certainly still a substance on the surface of every photograph, whether in the form of photochemical emulsion or printer ink. The choice of paper or surface is perhaps more significant for a photograph than it is for a painting, as the surface on which the photograph is printed is more apt to remain exposed due to the thinness of the ink or emulsion. Therefore, the difference between a matte paper and a glossy paper will have a significant impact on the way the ink or emulsion interacts with the surface, and the print will have very different final appearance. This is similar to the texture of a canvas when paint is applied very thinly. A rough-texture canvas will show through differently than a smooth-texture canvas if the paint is diluted. However, paintings are typically built up in layers, so as to obscure the texture of the canvas or paper surface. Thus, the argument goes beyond simply the texture of the surface, and toward the degree to which texture, thickness, and opacity is created through paint. This can be controlled and manipulated
in a painting, but rarely is presented in a photographic print.

It is plausible that the surface texture can be built up in a digital photograph through multiple runs through an inkjet printer. The amount of ink can be controlled in each pass by digitally masking segments in one part of the image, while allowing ink to be built up by leaving another part to be printed. However, there are limits to this accumulation of ink through digital printing, since printers, inks, and paper are not configured to handle multiple print runs with the same sheet of inkjet paper. Painting possesses a control of the surface texture that cannot be duplicated so accurately or to such a degree of thickness through the photographic printing process. This raises obvious questions about the tactility of painting in relation to the photographic print, which points more to the question of objectness than image. A painting will always possess a materiality in the revelation of the brush stroke on the surface.

However, it is possible for photographic images to possess this kind of materiality and tactility, not through the accumulation of physical substance, but through the obfuscation of the transparent window to the world attributed to the photographic image. This question of surface relationship is the main focus of a studio project begun in the spring of 2012. This also marks a return to painting in my studio practice for the first time in over four years. While my work from the past several years has either directly addressed or at least referred to the medium of painting, it has done so through photography and video. Revisiting the act of painting in my studio practice continues the investigation of medium specificity—in this case, the structural and surface conditions of the projected
moving image and painting. By creating the conditions for type of fusion of projection and painting, the ways in which we are accustomed to viewing these mediums are accentuated, producing a unique viewing experience in which the spectator cannot fully engage one medium or the other. This results in an instability in the viewer’s experience of the work, in which the focus is less on the window within the picture frame, and more on the interaction between the inherent elements of both mediums—opacity/transparency, stillness/movement, analog/digital, shadow/light, smoothness/sharpness, brushstrokes/pixel.

In many of my projection works previous to the projection paintings, the frame of the screen was the central point of investigation. The works created prior to this current series interrogated the painting-like, rectangular wall-piece through which projection has traditionally been presented in the history of cinema and in the majority of examples of projected artworks. Many of my video projections from the past couple of years have endeavored to interrogate the conventional rectilinear positioning of a projected image on the center of a wall. The objective was to subvert the prevalent form of the projected image by projecting works into corners, onto three-dimensional surfaces, or in various anamorphic perspectives. This new series of projections on paintings instead embraces the rectangular projection screen, while simultaneously addressing its relationship to the stretched canvas in painting. However, the work intends to move beyond the shape of the screen or canvas, and delve into deeper questions about the inherent conditions of the photographic and projected image and painting—particularly, the perceptual effect of the fusion of the two mediums on the viewer.
In the essay *Film and the New Psychology*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes our ability to “form a system which tends toward a certain constancy and a certain level of stability—not through the operation of intelligence but through the very configuration of the field. I do not thing the world in the act of perception; it organizes itself in front of me.”¹¹ When we see a projection onto a screen our perceptual faculties automatically adjust to recognize that the white surface of the screen has changed due to the different frequencies of light produced by the projector. We see films and videos projected on to this screen so often that we rarely give thought to the actual structural elements of the resulting image. These projections on paintings attempt to forestall the automatic, normative perceiving and processing of screen-based work. This “certain level of

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Figure 4: *Configuration of a Field #1*, Projection/Oil on Canvas, 30” x 40”, 2012
stability” is interrupted, as the conditions of the conventional projection of the image on the screen have been reconfigured. Since each one-minute video seamlessly transitions in a cross-faded loop, there is no stopping point where the painting can be contemplated in a light removed from the projection. Thus, the viewer will always be introduced to the work from a distance as a video projection. The painted image begins to emerge only when the viewer steps closer to the canvas. Depending on which medium the viewer grasps as an anchor, the image makes sense perceptually. As Merleau-Ponty articulates, “the looked-at object in which I anchor myself will always seem fixed, and I cannot take this meaning away from it except by looking elsewhere. Nor do I give it this meaning
through thought.” Thus, if from a distance the viewer sees a video, the painting will be seen in relation to the moving image projected onto the screen. However, as the viewer closely inspects the screen, the light from the projection glistens off of the thickness of the brushstrokes, and the viewer tends to be more aware of the stillness of the painted image. Importantly, even when the viewer recognizes that it is a projection and a painting, it is difficult to anchor one’s attention solely on one medium or another. This is primarily due to the shifting position of the projected image, through the shaking of the hand-held camera in the tree video, and the movement and contraction of the iris in the eyeball video. The painted image and projected image become out of sync, and the viewer must recalibrate his or her anchor, as the doubling of the image interrupts the stability of any one perceived medium.

This results in a confounding oscillation of focus, from painting to projected video, which creates a heightened awareness of the components that make up the work. When one of the canvases was hung on a small a column (which allowed for the rear of the painting to be exposed) in a recent exhibition, I witnessed viewers walking behind the work to see whether the light from the projection seeped through the stretched canvas. Others approached the image at a sharp angle as they examined the light reflecting off of the impasto brushstrokes. Unlike Michael Fried’s notion of the screen in his seminal essay *Art and Objecthood*, these screens very much exist in a physical form in relation to us. The work remains in line with self-reflexive works such as Michael Snow’s *Two Sides to"

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12 Merleau-Ponty. 52.
Every Story, in that it explores what Kate Mondloch articulates as the “apparent paradox of media installation spectatorship”, in that it is “simultaneously material (the viewer’s phenomenological engagement with actual objects in real time and space) and immaterial (the viewer’s metaphorical projection into virtual times and spaces).”\(^{14}\) The iconic image on the screen is still present, but due to the excess materiality of the screen surface in the form of the painted image, it is difficult to access the immaterial realm in these works without paying at least equivalent attention to the material elements.

This interaction of the viewer is to an extent reminiscent of the viewer’s experience of Anthony McCall’s Line Describing a Cone, where the viewer assumes an interactive role, repositioning the body in relation to the projection, and focusing more on the nature or structure of the work, than on the actual image represented on the screen. In McCall’s work, the screen is no longer a transparent window. The objective was to find the irreducible elements of film through the projection of solid light. Thus, the focus was on the space between the projector and the screen, where the viewer interacts with the sculptural form of the projected light.\(^{15}\) The goal of my projections on paintings is to bring the viewer back to the screen, but still avoid the illusion of the screen-as-window, as was so successfully achieved by McCall.

In my projection on paintings, the screen as a seemingly transparent surface is called into question because its smooth, white surface has been in a sense contaminated by the marks of the brushstroke. These marks refer not only to the opacity of the medium of painting,

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 17.

but to the actual opacity of the perceived window into the world of the projected image. The screen in a conventional sense might refer to a sense of transparency in the way a photographic image would, but it is still an opaque material. Thus the painted surface directs the viewer to the way in which the screen is perceived as a window into another space.

The paintings by themselves are incomplete. Compared to my highly detailed photorealist paintings, these paintings are hastily executed over a period of a little over week for each canvas. Without the projection, they could be viewed more as underpaintings than anything approaching finished works. As a dedicated painter in the early to mid-2000s, I
would build the painting up from the sketch, to the more substantive underpainting, to the finished work with glazes and smoothed-out brushstrokes. However, this process took dozens, if not hundreds of hours, over several months to complete. It seems fortuitous that I faced time restrictions with these new works. The unfinished state of the paintings allows for the surface to interact with the projection in a way that one depends on the other.

I would never display these particular paintings alone in a gallery setting. I would feel embarrassed to have them seen without the projection. However, when the video is projected on the paintings, the simple, unresolved marks are activated. The hand-held camera shot of the trees merge in and out of synching up with the position of the painted image. The quiver of the projected video of the close-up eye varies in and out of
alignment with its painted representation. The video illuminates the relatively monochromatic color palate of the paintings.

Yet, the projection is also defined by the marks on the canvas. This is most evident in the shadows in the painted image. Most average-quality projectors will yield a poor contrast ratio, and a true black is only achieved through projectors that cost several thousand dollars. Even at the highest contrast setting, the projectors I have been used to working with will not approach a significantly deep black. However, with the combination of the dark portions of the video image and the dark shades of the painted canvas, the deep shadows are attained in a way that could not be achieved with the projection alone.

Beyond the increased contrast brought about by the painting, the lines of the painted marks on the canvas provide a sharpness to the projection—a kind of sharpening tool—that cannot be obtained through the projection of such a magnified digital image. The pixels from the blown-up video are more obscured by the solid definition of the painted image.

In this series, it is no coincidence that the moving images projected onto the painted canvases are magnified 600-800% of the scale of the original HD image. No matter how sharp the quality of the image, it breaks down into an abstraction of jagged pixels if it is blown up to a large enough scale. Painting as a material is more resilient to this kind of magnification; it may lose its ability to function iconically, but its texture still retains a fluidity unachievable through digital processes. Even the grain in a magnified photographic film frame still possesses an organic quality. The comparison between the
denticulated pixels of the digital image and the fluent cohesion of the painted marks may not appear to be the most compelling comparison between digital and analog forms. This series is seen as yet another step in an ongoing project to examine the structure of images—whether through the abstraction of binary code, or the physicality of film, paint, and object-based components.

Though the projected and painted images in these works still possess iconic qualities, the experience still points to a reduction to the inherent qualities of the moving image, projection, and painting. The focus of the viewer is more on the components that make up the work—the marks of the brush, the thickness of the paint, the opacity of the screen, and the perceptual and embodied relationship to the work—than on the content of the image projected and painted on the screen. This merging of the primary functions of each medium brings about an increased curiosity in the structure of the work, and how the perceived strengths and weaknesses of both mediums came together to produce a hybrid form of representation.
In his influential Mellon Lectures at the National Gallery of Art in 2003, Kirk Varnedoe extols Jackson Pollock’s large-scale drip-painting *Lavender Mist* as showing “a nearly even dispersal of pictorial incident over the entire field of the canvas, yielding a new “allover” wholeness that seemed a kind of anti-composition”\(^\text{16}\). This ‘allover-ness’ suggests a lack of conventional structure, or hierarchical form, that leads to a traditional interplay between tension and harmony. As David Hopkins further explains, “a continuous visual ‘field’ was created which was accented by the fluid syntax, and associated punctuational concentrations of line and color, rather than distinct compositional foci.”\(^\text{17}\) Thus the viewer, accustomed to a sense of space, with a foreground, middle-ground, and background, is faced with an entanglement with dizzying, comprehensive detail—a physiological and psychological encounter with an image that engages the viewer in a three dimensional space. As Allan Kaprow proclaims, “we do not enter a painting of Pollock’s in any one place (or hundred places). Anywhere is everywhere, and we dip in and out when and where we can.”\(^\text{18}\) Kaprow further explores the boundless nature of Pollock’s paintings: “The four sides of the painting are thus an abrupt leaving off of the activity, which our imaginations continue outward

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indefinitely, as though refusing to accept the artificiality of an ‘ending’. “It is as if the physical limits of the painting extend beyond the borders into a delirious, imaginative realm, surrounding and enwrapping the viewer.

Pollock’s canvases are achieve the scale to the grand Renaissance, but must not be conflated with this earlier era of painting, which Kaprow observes as glorifying “an

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19 Ibid. 5.
idealized everyday world familiar to the observer, often continuing the actual room into the painting by means of trompe l’oeil. Kaprow argues that the inscrutable nature of Pollock’s paintings reverses the Renaissance illusion, preventing the viewer from seeing in. Rather, in Kaprow’s words, “the painting is continued out into the room”. Furthermore, Kaprow argues that the effect of Pollock’s “confronting” surface space complicates the work as a traditional painting, in that the “picture has moved so far out that the canvas is no longer a reference point.”

Thus the vital components of the medium, the paint, and the canvas become subsumed by the experience of the space created by the picture.

These particular experiential qualities were an underlying element of a series of photographs that comprised a portion of my MFA thesis exhibition. The photographs were taken in places in Ohio that are named after Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. It was part of a larger exploration of the familiarity of place. For the purposes of this essay, instead of describing the subject matter in relation to Walden Pond, I would like to remain on the topic of medium, which itself was just as significant to the meaning of this series.

The photographs are fairly large in scale, at 34” x 42”, and depict heavy wooded thickets. There is no vegetation growing, just the bare branches and twigs, exposed to the elements of a gray, cold Midwest winter. The colors in the image reflect this environment, with a neutral, barren palate, barely reflecting the diffused light of the overcast day. Only a few

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20 Ibid. 6.
21 Ibid. 6.
stray colors wind through the space. Surprisingly, these odd strands of color are unnaturally vibrant, with fluorescent greens, neon pinks, and radiating cobalt blues winding through the middle-gray surface.

The comparisons to Pollock’s drip paintings are visible in these Walden photographs. The surface reveals a consistency of complex lines and forms from border to border and there is no sign of a hierarchical structure within the image. The entire surface is a network of crisscrossing forms, obscuring any background or foreground—only a middle ground.

The picture resembles a hall of mirrors. As the thickets trail off into an amorphous background toward the zero visibility like a reflected figure standing between two mirrors, reflected ten or twenty times as they fade toward infinity. But like a hall of mirrors, that depth is an illusion. It is only surface. In these photographs, the thickness opens miniscule paths beyond its middle-ground membrane. And what lies beyond is something of a haze of that middle gray.

There is too much information at the surface to venture into those tiny spaces of depth, leaving no way through beyond the picture plane. No singular form will give way, but only an intertwining the branches and vines, chained together like a broad, barbed wire fence. Similar to the experience of a Pollock painting, the viewer becomes surrounded, left with a feeling of confrontation as the surface works outward. However, unlike the experience of Pollock’s canvas, the Walden pictures are photographs, inherently viewed
As described in the previous chapters, the photograph with its window to the world obscured, ventures more toward the opaque surface of the painting. But these images are not digitally, nor photomechanically manipulated. Instead, the Walden photographs present both an indexical and iconic strength in their existence on the wall. They possess an indexical purity in their sharp, but unmanipulated imprint of a scene. And they also claim an iconic presence in the way that Kaprow describes the familiarity of the Renaissance paintings in relation to Pollock’s work.
Yet there is something unsettling about the truth claim of these images. A scene of thicket is an unusual source of imagery for contemplation. They are seen as more of a nuisance if they are noticed at all. But the framing of this mass of weeds, twigs, and branches reveal a complex system of networks found all throughout nature. Whether one sees it as a well-formed ecosystem, or a mass of chaos in nature, it is so deeply representative of the brilliant structure of the world we experience everyday, but so rarely stop to recognize.

These thicket are trails, carving out new paths within the immediate world. It is as if it is nature’s form of resistance, much like Marcel De Certeau’s famous passage of the “all-seeing power” looking down from the top of the World Trade Center at the network of the people walking in the city.\textsuperscript{22} Like De Certeau’s people on the street level, the meandering vines and thorns create a text, however illegible it may be. Similar to those city dwellers, each twisting branch is unaware of its role in creating the environment. But the collective thicket as a whole provide the meaning—in the form of an immediate ecological system, paralleling De Certeau’s tactics in defiance of the strategy set by city planners. Thus, the Walden photographs could be viewed as a topographical map, luring the observer to step forward to examine the details—to charts the network of tactics within this particular system in nature. It is the reality of the image that provokes inspection. This is the index of the intricacy of the world happening everywhere, but only in this distilled moment captured in an all-encompassing form in the photograph are we pulled in to contemplated the points of connection in these branches, which reflect such

\textsuperscript{22} Certeau, Michel De. \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}. Berkeley: University of California P, 2011. 92.
invisible points of connection throughout the world. A fundamental goal of aesthetics is to reveal those hidden networks through such contemplation.

What results from the encounter of the Walden photographs is tension—a push and pull experienced by the viewer. On the one hand the density of the surface the photographs images possess the same sense of confrontation and outward envelopment of the viewer as Pollock’s drip paintings. On the other hand, the straightforwardness of the photograph in its clear presentation of a purer element of indexicality provokes the viewer to move
closer to examine the miracle of nature, even in its most mundane forms. This tension is the source of the contemplative experience of an artwork, as the most engrossing works encourage a sort of choreography from the viewer—a back and forth of the changing perspective, which reveals new elements from different positions. It is this movement that activates the space around the observer—a space that takes full advantage of the areas both before and beyond the window of the photographic frame.
Chapter 6: Pixel Paintings

In the most recent phase of the exploration of the relationship between painting and photography, I began to assess the ways in which painting destabilizes the photographic image. This has been addressed from many perspectives in painting, particularly in calling attention to simple everyday visual encounters with the image, such as motion blur, depth of field, or lens flares and light leaks, or more complicated attributes of the photograph, such as the post-production manipulation. However, the destabilization I seek to emphasize is at the microscopic level, or with the building blocks of the digital image: the pixel. This exploration came at a time when I had just completed the painting-projections, and was thinking more intently about mark-making through the brushstroke as another kind of building block for the image.

At this point I would like to return to the introduction of this thesis essay, and expand upon my discovery of the ancient mosaic images. I view the mosaic as a painting that resists blending in its mark-making. It is an accumulation of stones or glass, placed side-by-side, top-to-bottom, to build a picture. There is physical mixing of colors in the creation of the mosaic. The stones and colored glass are opaque and solid. One cannot layer one stone atop another to create a new color, nor can one add definition to a line by overlapping stones. The elements of the mosaic must work independent of one another to

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23 Some of the countless examples of painting photographic attributes would include Monica Tap (motion blur), Chuck Close (depth of field), Isca Greenfield-Sanders (lens flares and light leaks), and Michel Majerus (post-production manipulation).
create the image. If one were to view a mosaic at a very close distance, one would only see a collection of colored stones. Only when the viewer steps back to a distance where the entire picture is in view, can the stones work together to form the image. Thus, the blending of color in mosaics is created by distance and visual adaptive process. Does this not sound very similar to the magnification of a digital image? The pixels of the image are opaque and solid. One pixel is never layered on top of another, and each pixel works independent of one another to create the image. If one were to view a digital image at a very high magnification, like 3200% (which is the maximum scale of display in Photoshop), one would only see a collection of colored squares. Only when the image is zoomed closer to 100% scale do the pixels come together to form the image. Similar to
the encounter of the mosaic, the blending of color in digital images is created by scale created by distance and visual adaptive processing.

The digital photograph magnified at 3200% reveals the abstraction at the molecular level of the image. I thought of millions of Rodchenko monochrome red/yellow/blue paintings, column after column, row after row, forming an image that could only be deciphered from a distance, but can only be built from abstraction. I sought to emphasize this by breaking down a digital image. But what image would suffice for this exercise? I don’t know why Andreas Gursky’s Rhein II photograph popped into my mind so quickly when I searched for potential source images. It may have been because it is such a popular photograph in the art world, as it was the most expensive photograph purchased at auction at $4 million in November of 2011. It may have been because of its scale, at six feet by twelve feet, it defies the logic of photographic printing, a size unattainable twenty years ago. It may have been a result of its digital nature. Gursky has acknowledged the use of digital tools to add, remove, and ‘clean up’ inconsistencies. This well-known, digital image would be the perfect subject for this type of project. It may have been because of Gursky’s consistent allusion in his body of work to both the grand landscape painting tradition of the 19th century, and pure abstraction painting of the 20th century. It also could have very well been the sleek, attractive, abstract-like feeling from such a

26 Fried, Why Photography Matters as Art As Never Before. 179-181.
Figure 12: Andreas Gursky, *Rhein II*, C-Print, 73”x 143”, 1998

sharply detailed photograph. What drew me to this image so quickly as the subject for such an ambitious undertaking in my practice was every one of these reasons. It was the perfect representation of photography, digital imaging, and painting coming together in one picture, and I sought to deconstruct it in a very literal way.

I downloaded a JPEG image of Gursky’s *Rhein II* and opened it on Photoshop. The default setting allows the magnification of an image to center in for every plus-click of the keyboard command for increasing scale. Each press of the command hones in on the center of the image, from in increments of about 100% until the maximum of 3200% is reached. At this direct center of the image, only about one thousand pixels are shown on the screen. To give a sense of scale at this magnification, there are at least three hundred additional distinct groupings of this scale within the entire image. What is interesting
about this particular strategy of magnifying down the middle of the image, is that even
zoomed at 3200% of its original scale, the three major elements of the full-size
photograph—the sky, the land, and the sea—are still contained within this miniscule
sample, indicated by pixel colors.

There was little question as what form this work could take. It would be very easy to
magnify this image to 3200%, crop it to a particular size so that only the one thousand or
so pixels in the very center of the image was framed, choose an arbitrary size to print it
with an inkjet printer, and hang the final result on the wall. The result would be a matte or
luster digital image that represents another digital image abstracted by manipulated by
scale. The print would be an interesting enough work. However, I still had the thought of
those ancient mosaics in my head—the time that must have gone into locating the source
stone or glass, the shaping of each piece, and the organization and placement of the
pieces to form the image. I could not help but think that the few taps of a command key
and a couple of clicks of a button to produce a digital image of this work simply wouldn’t
be satisfying method of production for this project with the laborious mosaics so
stubbornly preoccupying my mind.

Since I had taken up painting once again in the previous month, I had already recently
been considering the layering and sequencing that was needed to build a painted
composition—how fragmented the form of a painting really is. As a result of these
meditations, I began to intensely examine this process of mark-making in relation to
photograph. Like the practice of painting, there are several steps involved in the creation of the photographic print: the capturing of light through the emulsion on the film or the digital sensor, the development of the film or conversion of information into digital data, the enlargement and printing of the film onto photosensitive paper or the digital post-production and ink-jet printing onto photographic printing paper (of course, I am glossing over many other steps in the photographic process). The major difference at the heart of the relationship between the process of painting and photography is in the point of creation of the image or depicted subject. The photograph is inherently indexical in its production of the image. The index is the trace of the real world that is captured by the exposure of light on the emulsion of the film or the digital sensor in the camera. What is captured is an trace, footprint, or indication of the actual scene in the real world that is framed by the viewfinder in the camera. It is at this initial stage—the click of the shutter—when the indexical image is created in the photographic process. Painting is not indexical, as it has no properties that bear an actual imprint of the actual scene or object being depicted. It is an interpretation of reality, mediated through the artist’s mind. In depictive painting, the picture is created with the aid of a photograph, a scene, or a memory. In all three instances, the application of paint to canvas is facilitated through the creation of the image filtered through an interpretive mind rather than a mechanical or digital process. Thus the image is never complete until the painting is complete. In the photographic process, the image is created nearly instantaneously as it is exposed onto the film in the camera. Because it is indexical, the photographic image is immediately imprinted on the film, even if it requires several steps to be transferred onto photo paper.
Figure 13: *Rhein II 3200% (After Gursky)*, Acrylic on Canvas, 73”x 143”, 2012

...as a final print. Since the image in painting is iconic, it does not manifest itself until the end of the process.27

Art historians have linked the photographs work of Andreas Gursky to the history of painting from many perspectives.28 I saw this project as an opportunity to dissect a highly detailed, photograph by breaking the work down to its digital building blocks through the medium to which the work indebted. However, the act of painting goes beyond historical relevance. In the case of this painting, the canvas is gridded off by tape to replicate the sharp edges of the digital pixels. Each painted pixel represents a digital counterpart from

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27 I stress that the creation of the photographic image in the camera is near instantaneous because the shutter is always open to record light for some period of time. It might be 1/5000 of a second, or 10 minutes, depending on the availability of light. It is absolutely feasible for a painting to be made in the same amount of time as a long-exposure photograph. However, my argument is working on the assumption that in general, a painting takes much longer to complete than the exposure of a photograph.

the source image. It is a solid color. Like the pixels of the computer image, and the pieces of the mosaic, the marks on the canvas are not blended to bring to bear blending found in most depictive painting. These marks are more akin to the painterly process of Gerhard Richter’s color scale works or Piet Mondrian’s geometric abstractions. The solid colors and unblended, sharp lines occupy a lineage in abstraction rather than realism. Yet this method of application still yields a depictive image. It is not the act of painting that abstracts the work. Rather, it is the act of strictly adhering to the photographic image that allows for the work to appear abstracted.

Finally, the scale of the original print of Rhein II is significant in the choice to create the work as a painting, because of the historical implications associated with the relationship
between painting and photography. Before the 1980s, it was rare for an art photograph to exceed 8” x 10” in size. Photographers like Andreas Gursky began exploring scale in relationship to traditions in the painted canvas. Gursky’s photographs in particular commanded a presence similar to massive historical landscape paintings. I felt I could not faithfully explore all of the elements that I required in this project if I wasn’t also working in such a large scale. Moreover, Gursky required a unique, large-scale printer—one of only a few in the world—to print at a size as large as 73” x 143”. Such a large print would cost tens of thousands of dollars, which, aside from being unaffordable for me at this point in my career, is also not fiscally responsible as a preliminary experiment in my continuing exploration of painting and photography.

29 Fried. Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before. 143-144.
30 Fried. Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before. Fried discusses several photographers in relation to historical painting throughout this book, particularly Jeff Wall, Thomas Struth, Luc Delahaye, and Hiroshi Sugimoto.
Chapter 7: The Intersection of Painting and Photography

I was careful to point out in the introduction that this essay is not intended to be a culmination, but more of a brief stopping point. I see this as an opportunity to assess the many ways in which painting and photography have entered into the discourse of my studio practice over the past decade. This is the first time that I have had the opportunity to reconsider the significance of my earliest paintings in setting the stage for deeper investigations into painting and photography as I have continued to gain a fuller apprehension of the nature of these mediums.

What has been most important to me in revisiting these projects from the past several years is the fact that I am able to ponder the significance of these series with a more complex vocabulary. I am able to meditate on my earlier work with the knowledge that has accumulated over the years, building from my own personal studies, to as studio-based year-long post-baccalaureate program at Burren College of Art in Ireland, to the intensive two-year MFA program at Ohio State University. Through my dedication to absorbing new information through research and practice, I become more equipped to revisit my previous works in new contexts. As a result, I can consider different patterns that allow me to build upon these investigations in future projects.

In my practice, one thing always leads to another. This exploration began with an interest in the way an analog technology like television could be captured through an analog medium like painting. My most recent work has examined how that same analog
process of painting can articulate elements of digital imaging. In twelve years I have come full circle, recently returning to painting, but still enmeshed in photographic-based media. However, the distinction between the television paintings of a decade ago and the pixel paintings of this year is very clear. I am no longer ignorant of the significance of photography as an end in itself in my studio practice. I knew it was important even back when I saw myself as a painter, but I didn’t know exactly why. I saw it as a responsibility to undertake an intensive and immersive examination of the lens-based medium, even if it meant stepping away from painting for several years.

Now I have returned to painting for the moment, but knowing that I am not just a painter—or a photographer—but an artist who is competent enough to allow for the ideas to serve as a precept for the medium with which I work. Photography has a special capacity to meditate upon different phenomena of the world—ways in which the camera can make visible the invisible, or look at the overlooked, as seen in the *Walden* series. It can capture an instant in time and recontextualizing a still moment from life, creating its own reality. The indexical nature of the photograph forever links the picture to the subject, and its “intractable reality” transcends its material nature to make present an absence of what once was. Painting has given me the freedom to follow the gestures, the organic movements in creation of an image. It allows me to explore different forms of mark-making and a particular engagement with materiality that is seldom achieved in working with photography. Above all, it is a continual meditation on process.

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Michel Foucault has described the space at the intersection of painting and photography as “pure image”. He refers to the late 19th century painters and photographers who emphasized a focus on image over medium, which opens a creative freedom to break away from the restrictive parameters of medium specificity. According to Foucault, these processes does not “incorporate images through their painting technique, but extend technique itself into the great sea of images… not a painting based on a photograph, nor a photograph made up to look like a painting, but an image caught in its trajectory from photograph to painting… the new painting takes its place enthusiastically in the circulation of images which it does its own part to drive on”. Thus, the importance of this exploration is found in the liminal state between painting and photography and the creation of a “beautiful hermaphrodite”—a new image that raises questions about medium and its own nature as an image.

It is not a question of which medium is better, rather how can one medium emphasize the language of another? How can painting complicate the conventional assumptions about the stability of the parameters of photography, and vice versa? And how does that in turn affect the assumptions of the nature of the appropriating medium? I feel I have made great contributions toward answering these questions through reflection and the adjustments made in continually adapting, reconfiguring, and responding to my process over the past decade. Yet, these are questions that I continue to struggle to answer. And I will continue to approach these problems by recalibrating in response to my own work.

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33 Ibid. 91.
34 Ibid. 83
and creating new paths of exploration. Each project yields a bevy of information with
which to move forward. There is no one answer; there may not be any answer at all. The
process itself may be the answer. If that is the case, then my endeavor is to continue to
build upon that response by trusting my instinct and listening very carefully to that
process.
References


