

***Simple Is Not That Simple***

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents my relationship to observed events in nature and how best I compose them as simple, dense and reductive paintings. Out in the world the space above the horizon line informs this work. Nature's dome provides conditions that have transformed my vision and writing. The sky continues to reveal sacred qualities and I trust more and more the inherent and sublime realities of the atmosphere to guide my instincts when painting. My hope is that the viewer will consider new assumptions about color amid the powerful and challenging task of capturing the luminescence of the sky. Thesis work represents a search for my own sublime. To make—with paint—a small slice of temporal property that is untended, give it requisite attention and offer it up as a respite to the always-on influence of day-to-day reality.

## INTRODUCTION

I make paintings to keep myself from dwelling on the things in this world that I cannot fix or have given up trying to control. The work resolves mental frustrations; it has required my little acknowledged unconscious to become a key player in this pursuit of an MFA. This other conscious self has been tapped as a tool in ways that I had never given much credence to, it was always behind the scenes of my artistic psyche. Toward the end of building this body of work and during the editing of my thesis, I discovered a common property: within practically every work made to date is a singular, dominant gesture somewhere within each composition. The solitary element represents me, hard edged or not, floating cloud-like in a field of some expression of color. When I look up and out at the sky it acts as a mirror to my subconscious; it reflects back an answer to long and short-term questions I ask. Looking at this distance at the horizon are conditions that exist to resolve the things that hound, frustrate, and stimulate. Through painting, I have embraced this other very powerful mental side to channel impulses that support instinctive moves with paint that are not always thought out but allowed to happen more automatically.

## INTENT

Ever inspiring, the sky motivates my color fixation. The resulting work, these paintings, invites viewers to simply pause, think and reflect. Alexander Mullen reinforces my artistic intent when he writes

“Humans live in a world of stimulating but skittish flux; our senses swirl, our brains twitch.” Over eighty years ago, T. S. Elliot observed that we are “distracted from distraction by distraction.” No wonder he prayed, “Teach us to sit still.” (Mullen)

Elliot's words, part of the quartet *Burnt Norton*, were a comment on time and humanity's obsession with it; *right now's* immediate moment is bound up with what was and what soon will be. The present, framed by the bracket of time that has passed and time yet to be; what *was* rolls into the *now* all the while predicting the maybe into *is*. How closely it describes our behavior today. Now, always-on digital media dominate our days, our attention, our minds. Graced with each day's finite bank of time, how likely are we to press an internal pause button, to put the world on hold, to stop all that *doing* for a moment, as we juggle complexities, levels, lists, relationships, and screens?

My paintings implore viewers to slow down, to consider their changing pearlescent layers—an offer of reflective reset as an alternative to the screen-based chaos that permeates our lives. This need to perform the mental act of checking in or out, taking the day's pulse, in a multi-tasking world—ruminating about a future issue or search engine bound for answers to a question of the past—fuels my fascination with what people “see” when this moment takes place. I do not wish to perform an act of pure voyeuristic observation, to record people realistically. I enact a temporal concept: humans' behavior of stopping—

or at least slowing down—time to look as an optical experience. When we are lost in thought; conscious, we still see within a particular moment of visual disengagement while still largely thinking about something in the world. Even in these brief moments of repose, time passes; are we focusing on details far away or lost within intricacies of a problem, all shades of grey as we look for answers providing black and white clarity. Elliot's poem speaks to my emotional senses as a visual muse: the world is not a flat black and white graphic but a dimensional mesh of individual and interlocking tones. The colors I use express moments of record, my hope being to depict brief periods of passing time and a feeling of depth.



Figure 1. *Summer Rain*, 2016. Acrylic on wood support. 48" x 36" x 1".

As important to me as the tone of the work I make is, equally critical is the tone of this writing and conversation that ensues. I strive for a lightness that mirrors and honors the expression found in the subject matter; since I am not

a luminous writer, it is imperative to me that our dialog here be as non-didactic and respectful as this work strives to be.

Less than a year ago, my thesis idea was unformed, unresolved; I thought my inspiration was purely the sky. Through my painted renditions in the studio, the subject evolved through a process of literally walking back from the work on the wall, to think from a distance. By my work being more symbolic than literal, my intent became to make the work more conceptually concise, more economical, more simplified, an abstract of representational thought about the sky. Distance is a constant I can work with, near or far, as a metaphor for the temporal and depth qualities of the sky—not so much as me recording the reality of recognized and accepted atmospheric conditions but the abstract idea of distance and extending to shapes of reflective water vapor. With a newly found self-agency, I began to repurpose aspects of the sky, the cloudy occupants and the expected colors. Influenced by observational conditions, my work portrays subjective and nonrepresentational views. Pushing beyond realism allowed a discovery that continues to inspire my work, and became one answer to the question, “Why do I look out to the horizon?” So I can abstract it.



Figure 2. *Line (Yellow Cloud)*, 2016. Acrylic on linen support, 14" x 11" x 1".

Artists visiting my studio have been said the work suggests a window, panes, views to the outside world. (Jones) At the same time, the art exists as a painted object. My goal is that the work provides myself and viewer alike a bit of relief, a non-literal and expressionistic view of the sky. For a viewer expecting a photorealistic rendition, these qualities of what *I* think the sky is may be baffling. This work rests on principles of, "the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment." (Greenburg, 202 ) This is my *modus operandi*: give a viewer the same brief moment of respite that my looking off into the distance can, a painted alternative to an actual view full of detail and immediacy. If one wonders *what* as they drift into thought when looking at my art, in the same way one does when pondering life's complexities, I will have been successful. Still, we



will both likely experience some misalignment; this is a condition of the viewer-to-maker relationship. A little tension in a conversation can leave a lasting impression; a bit of disagreement among friends can be a good thing

Jennifer Roberts, writing for *Harvard Magazine* about slowing down, modifies the meaning of patience from the original definition, updating it from the acknowledgement of forces beyond our control through virtuous behavior: to be patient. Within today's hurry-up immediacy, patience can, and should be an empowering pause in its own right. (Roberts) Feel free to tell the world to back off. "I'm thinkin' here!" Roberts appears to say that patience has become sought after as an individual right. We choose moments to put this idea into practice; our packed lives need periods of respite to manage so much visual stimulation. This idea has become a major source of motivation for me: to provoke viewers to pause and reflect. In their initial pass over my work they will see one thing: strong color. Should they give subsequent passes, I hope to persuade them to reconsider their first visual impressions and experience a deeper degree of depth than originally thought. My ultimate goal is to have this body of work become a point of reflection for them.

Even if the viewer and I respond to the same properties in the world, will that viewer follow what I am saying? This question is not rhetorical. Their reaction to the elements we both see in common is illusionistic color, contained in my flat, windowed vignette of the sky. Color is the special sauce (Billow) that gives the work its presence, panache and an ability to generate a call and garner a response. I want the audience to look at the work and, just like any other form

of media, be taken to a point or place in time. Drawing in this work is limited. Chiaroscuro is absent, sculptural qualities of objective pictorial elements are missing. For the viewer, realistic representations are not present for them to recognize. What is there: the common experience of joint observations I share with viewer. I humbly acknowledge nature's greater ability to paint with light and atmosphere: not everyone may accept my premise of widely documented, readily accepted views of what nature does in a spectacular way, every day. What drives me to paint is to make quiet points between the viewer and the work for the life of the work for a long period of time. If challenging work can become familiar to the viewer, perhaps it will be through an intangible, non-descriptive attraction. My work uses non-representational color, tone and texture, subverts their objective mindset; I want them to like it but I am happy if they are not entirely sure why. It becomes *their* like, relevant to their life in a long-term way, and because it is a more personal connection, undefined, it makes a stronger bond.

Through today's technology, the artist has new tools to compress more and more complex visual information into whatever space they choose to build, occupy or project into. Given this variety of options, with so many thoughts written, spoken, recorded and available, it is no wonder today's artists feel the need to add another layer of paint, content or metaphor. The resulting work becomes a way to enable our overloaded media space. In practice, I reference my work's layers of translucent and opaque color arranged and worked in such ways as to harmonize to more simple visual modulations. This is the origin of my

concept of the logo-like, to symbolically show the subject at hand by distilling it down to an almost bare form so that it reads as an essence. But logos are sometimes quite abstract, too. The more complicated or intangible the subject they are representing, the more likely they are to be symbolic. Even with my process of building on layers of paint, I still strive to retain a sense of austerity. As my work has become more simplified, I rely on ideas read about more than examples of work from those artists that I have studied. I encounter examples of process and intent that seed ideas that contribute to my evolving methods.

In making this foray into the world of abstraction, I am working within and against history. The influence of my past personal history in the field of commercial illustration and graphic design suggests ties to formalist principles of realism, objective recognition, and the more literal depiction of the subject at hand. I connect to recently discovered Modernist and Abstract Expressionist movements and reference these points of influences and their application of the inner workings of the artist's psychological to the artist's physical efforts.

## CONTEXT

The sky as subject matter in my work is rooted in the less formal side of the Romantic School of landscape painting. The more naturalistic vistas painted by Theodore Rousseau and George Bingham offer a grounding that allows me to absorb and appreciate the more ethereal power of Joseph Mallord William Turner's work. Rousseau and Bingham provide a commentary parallel to mine on the influences of modern society and nature that I find ironic when applied to the digital grid of today. And, given my particular physical idiosyncrasies of eyesight, (I don't see with stereoscopic vision like most people) I respond to color and shape in the landscape more than seeking to depict depth. It is no surprise to me that the more flattened approaches of Fairfield Porter and Edward Hopper would find their ways to my hand's effort; I choose to be grounded in the naturalistic side rather than the more formal contemporaries of that era. Strong influence to my work begins through the work of Monet by way of Courbet and Manet. I believe landscape has been the single most important genre of Modern Painting, even as the act of looking, then depicting has become more loosely defined. If I was to render all that I saw, in great detail as a faithful ode to capture in photo-realistic terms, Nature's Pencil if you will, my work could not sustain itself. Like the Impressionists and Expressionists, I find resource as much from looking in as I do from looking out. David Batchelor writes in *Chromophobia* that the Minimalists tended to relegate color to a specific and special pared down duty within the whole of their idea. I maintain painting was the better for it, this

mono-coloring unlocked doors and minds that challenged convention and enlivened the conversation for the artists willing to innovate beyond it. It is against my nature to blindly follow tradition. This is another grounding reason to paint the sky using my colors as my own search for expressly unique color.



Figure 3. *Scuttling Clouds*, 2016. Acrylic on linen mounted wood support, 14" x 11" x 1".

In reviewing *Women of Abstract Expressionism* at the Denver Art Museum, Karen Wilkin wrote,

"These painters all shared their male colleagues' convictions that the source of art was the unconscious and that the artist's role was to reveal the unseen, not to depict the known." (Wilkin)

In an appreciation of Agnes Martin's work, Kasha Linville writes, "Illusions of texture that change as viewing distance changes." (Linville, 72-3)

Rosalind Krause expands this idea with her essay "Agnes Martin: The/Cloud." (Krause, 75-89) She gives the work specific functionality: *material*—how Martin painted the work and left distinct evidence of her process through visible grid lines and regimented paint dabs; *atmospheric*—that feeling the viewer gets having stepped back far enough to just lose discerning the grid as the paint dabs

blend to create an impressionistic feel of color and tone; *opacity*—weight, as in the scale of the work; *big*—the edges Martin carefully manipulated on the supporting canvas, the whole thing-now from a distance.

What I attempt to replicate is how Martin's work encourages back-and-forth pacing but through a more side-to-side experience. The iridescent surface looks one way: head on, as the viewer passes the work. It moves a bit with the viewer, changing as the viewer's vantage points changes. As atmospheric conditions change in nature occur, this is something I want my viewer to experience. I want the viewer to revisit the variations caused by my intentional use of iridescent color to imitate the sky's natural and always-changing ephemeral properties. My colors do look different from one moment to the next as light alters the reflection over the surface of the work. Throughout the day, views of the work reveal color changes in subtle and marked ways. Given the unpredictable nature of the work's placement within interior spaces and their illumination, I take my responsibility to provide the work with presence seriously. Robert Ryman counseled his son Cordy Ryman, also an artist,

"Think before you work and never while you're working." (Kahn)

I hand lettered this wisdom on a small sign after discovering this quotation. I see it as I go in and out of the studio; it hangs near the door. This tells me that there is an obligation to think my way into the work and to inform myself as widely and deeply as I can about the context in which I make the work. In an early critique, the noted Philadelphia photographer and teacher Eileen Neff cautioned me that making art requires one be *present* for any and all

opportunities that may crop up as one works. The practice of diligent presence, being attuned to these things in front of us while we work, goes hand-in-hand with intent.

Slow down, stop, even. (Manutius) I have come to acknowledge the power of subconscious intent: the psychology of color, how it manifests within its place in the work. If agency allows me to be more present when treating these moments as a gift (time) rather than as an indulgence, it also challenges me to be patient, have faith, and wait a bit; the next touch of my hand might not even have to happen. Karen Wilkin writes about Ciao Fonseca:

"finding the painting" a process or practice of disciplining these unruly initial impulses, not by selecting particular configurations at the expense of others, but by forcing them to conform to new rhythms and to coexist with a new order of shapes created by canceling out large areas of the first image."

"As we look, they become windows in that wall, allowing us to see into a loosely gridded atmospheric space that exists beyond the confines of a differential account in which painting is defined in relation to what it is surface of the canvas." (Wilkin, 142-4)

Clement Greenburg relates, through his account of Modernist painting:

"the appeal of a material substratum, such as flatness or color. A pure optical experience, as an outgrowth of the Impressionists' manipulation of color through facets and fragmentation, a revolutionary optical experience in it's own right relied on the evolutionary break between color and drawing as intertwined elements in a painting. This pure optical experience, as an outgrowth of the Impressionists' manipulation of color through facets and fragmentation, a revolutionary optical experience in it's own right relied on the evolutionary break between color and drawing as intertwined elements in a painting. (Newman. 202-3)

My works that elicit the strongest response from people are the works that wait patiently, ready for a series of critical moments to be resolved.

## PROCESS

There are not a series of secret moves in the studio; it is just paint. One can see my footsteps in the snow, so to speak. I add layers of color to promote continued acts of discovery. Paintings in the hands of a private collector are seen in different ways when lived with over time, and the colors diminish with age. What will happen to the luminosity the longer they are exposed to natural sunlight is anyone's guess. I would like to think that the pigments, as they become less intense, still read as harmonious. I do not seek to become a painter of the reality-based sunset. Warmth? Yes. Cold light? Yes, and gradations and unexpected color. I aim to cultivate a mindset to push past accepted notions about painted representations of the sky. I share a fascination with the panorama of hue and light, the only difference between what I see and what viewers may expect is approach and material; I just happen to capture some of what they remembered on a flat, supporting panel or paper. That's the goal. Ironically, what I am asking the viewer to do is slow down. Consider my work, all the while in my own sped-up race against time. Being well aware of actuarial reality, I am governed by a limited number of years: my Thesis Committee members reading these words have more years left than I do to make their own meaningful contributions. These facts remind me to consider my own pursuits as finite, sacred and moments are not to be wasted.

Each painting evolves differently, becoming a window to the outside, a vignette of an interior view to an outside experience. Some are clearly vignettes, some ambiguous in how they align, not either or. Are my works views from



indoors out? The framing, variety of scale and point of view seems to indicate more interior looking to the exterior. These works were not painted from a specific, methodical gathering of sketching outside, with detailed studies as a preliminary idea to be made into a work. I do observe the outdoors a great deal. I walk. For years I have been outside looking at the sky from the seat of a bicycle. From the shimmering heat of the Provencal sky to freezing, alpine Italian rain in the same month of May. Spain in March: wind. Vermont's cool summer mornings, Georgia blue sky-baking, winding roads and Central Park snowfall on New Year's Day, mist the color of Chardonnay, white thunderheads, heavy with a humid, opaque pale yellow haze during the mid-day heat, ready unleash wet havoc against a Cerulean (Golden) blue backdrop. Riding, with miles to go, soaked to the bone as rain clouds piss opaque sheets of lavender-grey murk is a distinct visual recollection in my memory. Pre-dawn light with low-key values that human eyes can see and a camera can only dream of capturing, the impossible gradations before sunrise—twilight clouds calling for attention like a peacock's plume, impossibly blue high mountain air. There seems to be so little time left to make, so many combinations of color inspire, so much light and luminosity that I need to work in a way that is respectful of the gift that light provides.

In tackling such a deceptively simple premise as luminosity, the Impressionists are an obvious source of color inspiration for my work. They had been influenced by Courbet's skies, which are very real but not of the strictly managed classical reality. Yet Courbet reinforces, with brushwork and color, the

temperature, sound and smell of a scene to exert influence on future movements of Impressionism through Expressionism. Monet's *Poplars* (Monet) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art completes this idea of specific process for the temporal capture of specific light that is as new and valuable to me, as an artist in, as it was when he painted it in. John Constable coined his own term of looking at the clouds, the sky and scanning to the horizon, *skying*. (Constable)

Agnes Martin's Abstract Expressionist works are inspired by the landscape color of New Mexico provided a meaningful link back to earlier readings about Minimalism's often closely defined presentation of color. I was able to segue back to the Minimalist Robert Ryman who says,

"I don't think of myself as making white paintings. I make paintings. I am a painter." (Hudson, 249)

A Colorist like Stanley Whitney explains his methodical technique of call and response to work out complex color juxtapositions. (Wilkin)

David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* showed me that one does have permission to be chromophilic; (Batchelor, 86) this initiated my liberation from the objective depictions of the sky. In *Basic Color Terms: Color Studies and Experiments*, Brent Berlin and Paul Kay reveal the wide gulf between the language of color and the identification of a particular color's scientific coordinates within light's color spectrum. (Berlin, Kay, 157) Their documentation that some colors, like red, appear in many languages while others are not present demonstrates that perception of color is culturally constructed. So why should I be constrained by rules about its use?

Philip Ball's *Bright Earth* refers to Henri Matisse's belief in the power of the impression, emotion, and meaning of color. "This expressiveness, he believed, could not be planned from theories of color use but must flow directly from the sensitivity of the artist." Further, "My choice of colors does not rest on any scientific theory; it is based on feeling, on the very nature of each experience; I merely try and find a color that will fit my sensation." (Ball, 303)

These thoughts motivate me to make the work resonate in the same way as the sky does. Humans inhabit the world with shapes that arc, undulate, and form endless rectilinear geometries. I have turned down most of the offers for these to inform my visual expressions. Given the contrasting choice between mechanical shapes the diaphanous luminosity of the sky, I choose the sky. This has moved me to acknowledge these properties. Looking at J. M. W. Turner caused a shift in my thinking; transparency, combined with reductive editing, adds exponentially to the potential range of expression: use acrylic paint with a *watercolor* mindset. JMW Turner's *Whalers* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, showed me not *the* way but pointed to this as a concept. I am inspired by Turner's stubborn determination to embrace and endure the outdoors and to become his own expressive library of atmospheric condition. As his watercolors were the basis of his in-studio easel paintings, the fresh lucidity of a watercolor sketch offers a humbling challenge to its more established gallery sibling, the oil landscape. I imagined Turner's watercolors placed adjacent the easel in his studio, propped up as references to the more formal paintings.

I took this and used it, albeit with acrylic paint instead of Turner's preferred oil. It allowed me to think things could be described as being as much about the result of "un-painting" (Crow) and cancellation as much as addition and accumulation. My unpremeditated, albeit slow and rigorously ordered paintings started to read as the product of accretion: not so much as leaving things out in the making but by painting areas out. I have evolved a fairly brutal mindset to remove parts of a layer's color by sanding, and scraping. If the color and medium is still wet, I wipe with flat-sided tools and squeegees or a six-inch wide paintbrush and I can cover areas with contrasting color values of dilute translucence through opaque, full-on masking of areas. Artistic process expresses depth to make atmospheric distance, but how to capture something that changes, with little consistent hard-edged shape? It requires depiction through an abstract construction. My answer is that the work must convey a sense of distance through color, through a sheen of luminosity. Working by instincts alone frustrates; color theory is essential but its concepts work best when paired with intuitive practice. I express visual constructions of light, appearing as expressed color, dictated to by my layering process coupled with of theory-based application using experiment, experience and instinct. My most successful work is able to transport the viewer to a certain period of time during the day—to see a color and equate it with a moment they have seen before and the feeling it evokes.

Two books underpin my current studio thinking about color and have continued to influence my process, Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour* and

Batchelor's *Chromophobia*. Wittgenstein, writing from a point of questioning accepted logic, provides thoughtful observations on the meanings and codes embedded in language as applied to color, a sort of counter analysis about and of color, optics, and perception. (Wittgenstein, I-63)

Batchelor's volume has revealed my built-in bias and preconditioned thinking about color in a way that has altered my current process; I no longer zig and zag so much between phobic and phillic ideas about particular colors. If I am in love with a particular color, I am learning not to over-apply it. Since I have set out on a course of trying to convince viewers that they are looking up into the sky, arranging and layering specific colors to convey ideas about what we believe this ever changing subject looks like at any given time requires choosing color with great care.

This is not easy for me; the process often goes very wrong and I give way to doubts. Achieving this painted illusion requires layering very specific hues; I am hoping the viewer will accept my ideas of believable luminosity. Soft forms and non-forms make up my subject, an elusive, intangible thing that the sky is. Atmosphere, and changing light surrounding us from above is something so familiar that it is almost taken for granted, yet we don't. I wonder: can a sensation of moments in time be expressed through illusionist means? This is probably why I chase such an ephemeral topic. It's both hard and vague and yet so full of engaging potential, finding something that works through the alchemy of color combinations, tones, and essences. Wittgenstein and Batchelor are thoughtful guides, suggesting through words how color can be trusted,

expressed, manipulated, and twisted to yield fresh results. As a process, it takes persistence on my part –and I am often lost—to understand and work things out.

Again, in *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor writes:

How do you write about a thing that doesn't admit to language easily? Chromophobia is about how people perceive ideas about color, rather than the individual color themselves. Color exposes the limits of language. The human eye can perceive and discern billions of colors, yet language has a very limited range of words to describe those colors (Batchelor, 87).

Even though his interest in color is primarily within society's built environments (not so much in nature) his thought provoking words have unlocked doors. My work ethic is the only thing getting me this far along with the realization I get from continued readings, that experiments done with an open mind give me confidence.

Batchelor rallies to the defense of the color as an equal to design and composition. He gives convincing examples about color having been given second tier status. Logic, it seems, is very manly: part and parcel of the strong, hard, line of reality in the act of making an image. Color, on the other hand, requires support; it needs line, and requires form defined as an object, preferably a man-made one. Color is akin 'to the weaker sex, color is feminine, infantile, narcotic, primitive, or kitsch, color is the easy thing to do. Man conceives, then designs, builds, and offers the greater clarity of understanding.' As quaint as this may have been when originally stated, it most certainly has been ground into pigment powder, mixed with the many mediums of today's artistic voices to power social comment.

Batchelor presents the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau maintains

“it is the drawing, the imitation that endows the colors with life and soul.”

Should line–*disegno*–be granted the right to rule over color, as Aristotle stated?

To my mind, no. In my artistic heart, the same answer. Line, as a depiction of object, has parity with the color. Both are needed to support and enhance the other. Color is represented by the lower life forms, incapable of higher thought, confined only to their form, the lower classes with their lack of education and schooling in the greater reaches of society. Color requires less thought than line, *disegno* vs. *colore* (drawing versus coloring-in) and depictions of the highest forms of human expression. Color is a fall from grace if one becomes too addicted to it. And, if line is the masculine as stated by Aristotle and Le Corbusier, this runs counter to the new millennium’s artistic ideas and momentums.



Figure 4. *Hook (Unpainted Cloud)*, 2016. Acrylic on wood support, 12" x 12" x 1".

## MATERIALITY: A MINDSET

Q: David Byrne asks “how did I get here?” (Eno, et al)

A: Before this program I knew what materials–art materials–were as an illustrator but never heard or used the term materiality. (Cagill) I thought my affinity for materials from years of professional design and illustration, which provided a stable foundation wide use of media, would be enough. I was surprised at the amount of engagement and understanding of materials required when new and unspecified criteria were presented. Material use has given way to material mindfulness: paint recipes reveal information that leads to unexpected ideas about process. (DiBello) Building one's own support surfaces; preparing them beyond manufactured specification has given me a new willingness to take proper time and craft something better each subsequent time.

Conviction to paint what I want also comes with a caveat: I own it and must be prepared to walk it, talk it and defend it. A dedication to the examination of this whole–process, technique–*materiality*–creates a mindset that to achieve a satisfactory result requires sufficient rigor that consumes your life. "Your time spent is a representation of what you made. Your work is clear evidence of your effective or ineffective use of your time." (Johnson)

The history of color impacts my work beyond previous expectation. Color informs, through physical expression and emotional connotation, the viewer's experience. "Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feelings...



The chief aim of color should be to serve expression as well as possible.”

(Ball, 303) When I saw Gerhard Richter take a giant squeegee-like tool to what looked to me to be a perfectly good painting, and use it, window washer-like to reveal under painting while concealing parts of newly visible hues, I had to try this. (Belz) It worked well enough to prompt more practice with this technique of removal; it has since taken on a mechanized brutality when it comes to artfully removing paint.

I am driven by the mantra *less is more*: art with quiet presence through what is not represented, yet all the while remaining metaphorically complex and relevant in its modernity. The paint, through objective color underscores the simplicity. The subjective shapes, while also represented as color, are able to appear as forms; random but also playing on the human trait to see things within non-literal shapes; *nephelococcygia*—finding shapes within clouds.

Sigmar Polk did this from bare bones compositions of subject matter through technically complex expressions of experimental media. Mark Godfrey writes that Polke likely discovered shapes through chance spills of paint or lacquers, and that finding shapes from the artist’s hand is a subjective activity—one viewer may get the shape that another cannot see—and that the process of pouring liquid media across a support may not end up as originally landed. (Godfrey, 139)

Rothko's layering of paint at larger-than-life scale allows you to walk toward the horizon in his work, all illusion through under layers supporting the immediacy of the surface color one sees at the onset. (Phillips)

David Reed, a painter who uses technology in a very specific, personal way, assigns the technique of cinematic backlighting to his fascination with classical painting's traditional folding of drapery. This sounds obscure and yet, having found it's way into his undulating forms, it provides a feeling of translucence that emanates from within his paintings. (Reed)

Materiality becomes not the materials but the act of thinking about the materials, using the materials, analysis about the physical properties they possess and their ability to remain malleable when an illogical idea comes along about possible connectedness to them—that's materiality to me.

A comment during an early critique in the summer of 2014: just *looking* at an artists' work is one thing, *reading* about them through their writing unlocks influences, their process and motivations. (Neff) You get a glimpse of 'the work they do to make the work.' (Martin, 67-74) This single piece of artist-to-artist advice has paid strong dividends like an investment: reading their words converts the inspirational reference of their work into value-added ideas and growth for this body of work. Reading allows greater insight. I can carry on a type of conversation with their work: the artist's words acting like a translator for more elevated thought.

## CONCLUSION

Subjective thinking about simplification has been found through reading. My search is for the sublime—to be able to give a bit of attention and capture a moment that is untended to—and give the viewer a chance to sit with it.

I believe one must treat each conversation with visiting artist and colleagues alike as having potential to contain valuable advice if one is smart enough to hear it. I firmly believe that tasking trivial and inconsequential studio practices to have sacred qualities elevates them beyond tedium; they become trusted process partners.

My future work will be derived the same way the present work was built: *from what preceded it*, but that can't be the only thing. I find myself these days emulating the best students I have been fortunate to work with: in a search for answers. As I ruminate about the many years I have spent as an artist, I realize I don't know nearly as much about making art as I thought I did, and there is still so much left to learn.

To quote an old Polish saying, the further you go into the forest, the more trees you will find... (ARTS/ Macuga)

IMAGE LIST	PAGE
Figure 1. <i>Summer Rain</i> , 2016.	6
Acrylic on wood support, 48" x 36" x 1".	
Figure 2. <i>Line (Yellow Cloud)</i> , 2016.	8
Acrylic on linen support, 14" x 11" x 1".	
Figure 3. <i>Scuttling Clouds</i> , 2016.	13
Acrylic on linen mounted wood support, 14" x 11" x 1".	
Figure 4. <i>Hook (Unpainted Cloud)</i> , 2016.	24
Acrylic on wood support, 12" x 12" x 1".	

## WORKS CITED

ARTS: *Artist Goshka Macuga Resists Branding* / WSJ online, Weekend Edition, May 14, 15 2016

"A high point of the New Museum show is "Lost Forty," a 2011 tour-de-force that Ms. Macuga created during a residency at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Among its images are Uncle Sam, the museum's lumber-baron founder Thomas Barlow Walker, a champagne-swilling Marcel Duchamp and the vast woods of northern Minnesota. For this intricate work, Ms. Macuga was inspired by a Polish adage that fits her sensibility: "The further you go into the forest, the more trees you find."

Ball, Phillip H. Matisse, quoted in A.H. Barr Jr., *Matisse: His Art and His Public*. New York: 1951, p. 119 From: Ball, Phillip, *Bright Earth*, Mind Over Matter p. 303

Baird, Christopher S. Ouora.com / How far can the human eye see on perfectly flat land? ScienceQuestionsWithSurprisingAnswers.org Aug. 21, 2015, accessed online Aug. 23, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2evezaD>

It depends on atmospheric conditions, since air itself and things in the air block and scatter some of the light passing through. If you look horizontally you can't see as far as if you look vertically because there is more atmosphere in the horizontal direction. In very clean air, horizontal visibility is about 50 miles. More typical visibility levels are 2 to 20 miles. In a strong rainstorm or snow storm, visibility can go down to a few feet.

Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia* Reaktion Books, Publisher.  
Apocalypstick, pp. 23. Charles Blanc, quoted in Charles A. Riley II, *Color Codes* Hanover and London, 1995. pp. 6

Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia* / *Chromophobia*, Reaktion Books, Publisher.  
pp. 30 (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourses and Essay on the Origins of Language*. Gourevitch ( New York, 1986 )) pp. 239-94, 279

"colors nicely modulated, give the eye pleasure, but that pleasure is purely sensory. It is the drawing, the imitation that endows the colors with life and soul, it is the passions which they represent that succeed in affecting us. Interest and sentiment do not depend on colors; the lines of a touching painting touch us in the etching as well: remove them from the painting, and the colors will cease to have any effect."

Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia*, Reaktion Books, Publisher.  
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Belz, Corinna. *Gerhard Richter Painting*  
March 14, 2012 (USA)

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<http://bit.ly/2b5vWB7> accessed August 7th, 2016

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Caygill, Howard. *Materiality, Theories of Media*, University of Chicago. 1995. A Kant Dictionary. Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell.

The moment when material acquires physicality as a central meaning is captured in Hegel's understanding of the term. Hegel's *materie* refers to physical matter, in contrast not primarily to "form," but to mind or spirit and to the abstract or ideal. It is interesting to find the irony residing in this transitional moment when the Kantian notion of material gains its physical/tangible aspect.

Constable, John. Skying Tate, London [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

"John Constable, best known for his preoccupation with recording clouds at different times of the day and year, once wrote 'I have done a good deal of skying.'"

Crow, Kelly. Caio Fonseca, Home As Studio, Wall Street Journal, RealEstate Section Online. March, 30 2012  
"...Un-painting the painting by cancelling out the work underneath."

DiBello, William. Major Studio II, The University of the Arts Studio Arts MFA program. June, 2015. Philadelphia, PA

Eno, Brian. Frantz, Christopher. Bryne, David. Harrison, Jerry. Weymouth, Tina. Once In A Lifetime, Remain In Light. Talking Heads Publisher: Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group 1980

Godfrey, Mark. Sigmar Polke. *From Modern Kunst to Entartete Kunst: Polke and Abstraction*. Abstract and Figuration. MoMA Books, 2014 pp. 139

Greenburg, Clement. *Modernist Painting*

Forum Lectures (Washington, D. C.: Voice of America), 1960

Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting -- the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment -- were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly. Manet's became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted. The Impressionists, in Manet's wake, abjured

underpainting and glazes, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colors they used were made of paint that came from tubes or pots. Cézanne sacrificed verisimilitude, or correctness, in order to fit his drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas.

Greenburg, Clement, Phenomenality and Materiality  
in Agnes Martin / Michael Newman. pp. 202

Hoek, David. David Batchelor, The Luminous and the Grey  
<https://youtube>

Hofmann, Armin. Armin Hofmann, Power of Signs, Magic of Color  
On My Silkscreen Portfolio–Armin Hofmann, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery,  
The University of the Arts, USA August, 2016

"Where as most well-known theories of color evaluate measurable phenomena according to analytical schemes, these color compositions explore the elusive poetry of color concealed within the realm of artistic-aesthetic perception. The fundamental color contrasts were subject to exacting study and set in diverse carefully orchestrated constellations. I eschewed the one device that is currently most prominent in the worlds of advertising and entertainment—as well as signage systems of architecture and traffic control: the light-dark contrast."

Hudson, Suzanne, P. *Robert Ryman / Used Paint*. An October Book, MIT Press  
Cambridge, MA, 2009. pp. 249

"It's not really monochrome painting at all. The white just happened because it's a paint and it doesn't interfere. I could use red, green, yellow, but why? It's a challenge for me to use a paint and make something happen with it, without having to be involved in reds, greens, and everything which would confuse things. But I work with color all the time. I don't think of myself as making white paintings. I make paintings. I'm a painter."

Johnston, Kier. Professional Practice, FINA 740, Amber Art and Design: panel discussion on *Exhibitions Panel*, The University of the Arts Studio Arts MFA program August 5th, 2016. Philadelphia, PA

Jones, Jennie C. Guest Lecturer and Visiting Artist: Major Studio II, The University of the Arts Studio Arts MFA program. July, 2016. Philadelphia, PA  
Studio visit; Room 818 @ 10:00 AM, July 6th, 2016

"Is this a painting of the sky as a window or. a painting as an object?"

Kahn, Howie. "Home Is Where the Art Is: The Ryman Family  
Culture / WSJ Magazine November 17, 2015. Print

Linville, Kasha. "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971), pp. 72-73; Rosalind E. Krause "Agnes Martin: The/Cloud/," in *Bachelors: Essays on Nine Woman "Bachelors" Who Challenged Masculinist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000, pp. 75-89)

Manutius, Aldus. "Festina lente" "Hasten Slowly"

In 1501, Aldus adapted the image from the reverse of ancient Roman coins issued during the reigns of the Emperors Titus and Domitian, AD 80–82. The dolphin and anchor emblem is associated with "Festina lente" (Hasten slowly), a motto that Aldus had begun to use as early as 1499, after receiving a Roman coin from Pietro Bembo, which bore the emblem and motto "Make Haste Slowly" from Latin; *Festina Lente*. A classical adage and oxymoron meaning "make haste slowly"

Martin, Agnes. 1991. *On The Perfection Underlying Life in Writings*, Distributed Art Publishers, USA, pp. 67-74

"Our best opportunities to defeat pride is in our work, in all the time that we are working and in the work itself. Work is self-expression. We must not think of self-expression as something we do or something we may not do. Self-expression is inevitable. In your work, in the way you do your work and in the results of your work your self is expressed. Behind and before self-expression is a developing awareness in the mind that effects the work. This developing awareness I will call "the work". It is the most important part of the work. There is the work in our minds, the work in our hands and the work as a result."

Monet, Claude. *Poplars*, 1891 Oil on Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA. The Chester Dale Collection, 1951. Masterpieces from the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Impressionism and Modern Art (Thompson, Jennifer A. Masterpieces from the Philadelphia Museum of Art: Impressionism and Modern Art (2007), p. 76.)

Using a shallow rowboat that had slots in the bottom capable of holding several canvases at once, Monet painted twenty-four pictures of the poplars from his floating studio. The resulting paintings reflect the view at different seasons and times of day and were known as the Poplar Series when they were exhibited in February 1892. Monet's efforts to record the scene were so exacting, one friend reported, that the artist sometimes had only seven minutes to work on a particular canvas before the sunlight shifted on the leaves. This particular painting is distinguished by the strong vertical presence of three tree trunks in the foreground, offset by a sinuous line of trees that winds along the riverbank in the distance. Vigorous diagonal brushwork in the reeds lining the riverbank and in the leaves of the receding trees suggests a windy day in autumn.



Mullen, Alexander. "A Playful Pattern of Polymaths"  
Books, Peacock and Vine, A.S. Bryant  
Wall Street Journal, Print Saturday/Sunday September 10/11, 2016  
Eliot, T.S. FOUR QUARTETS / BURNT NORTON / (No.1 of 'Four Quartets')  
III  
Only a flicker  
Over the strained time-ridden faces  
Distracted from distraction by distraction  
Filled with fancies and empty of meaning  
Tumid apathy with no concentration  
Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind  
That blows before and after time,  
Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs  
Time before and time after.

Neff, Eileen. Major Studio I, Anderson Hall; Open Studio critique, July 2014

Newman, Michael. *Phenomenality and Materiality in Agnes Martin*,  
*Agnes Martin / Essays*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. pp. 202-3

Paint, Golden. Acrylic Heavy Body. Cerulean Blue Deep, Series 9  
From the Cobalt family. Extremely lightfast, traditionally prized for its use in skies  
and as a part of many landscape palettes. The Cerulean Blue Deep is deeper and  
greener than the brighter, more traditional shades.

The Phillips Collection. *Mark Rothko. 1903-1970 Ochre and Red on Red, 1954*  
American Art @ The Phillips Collection. Online: [www.phillipscollection.org](http://www.phillipscollection.org)  
In Rothko's compositions, the rectangles and their surrounding space are  
given equal importance as presences. Beginning with no preconceived vision  
of the painting's final state, he intuitively adjusted his forms, always working  
with the frontal arrangement of horizontal or vertical rectangular forms.  
Rothko paid close attention to their height, width and edges, their distance  
from the edges of the canvas, and their interrelationships. All of his shapes  
have soft edges that fuse into their surrounding space. The dominance of  
these elements depends entirely on their color, which Rothko masterfully  
blended and layered to create varied luminosity and surface texture. He  
frequently applied paint with rags, rubbing wet colors together, so that few  
gestures were visible; at times he painted with slightly built up brushstrokes  
for textural variation. In many cases translucent under layers of color are  
visible, evoking a quality of inner light.

Reed, David. David Reed-Recent Paintings, [art-tv.ch](http://art-tv.ch), YouTube June 11, 2013  
online

Roberts, Jennifer. "The Power of Patience" Harvard Magazine  
November / December 2013 / accessed online August 7th, 2016

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Slade School of Fine Arts, Contemporary Art Lecture Series 2011-12  
David Batchelor, Remarks on Colour  
University College London  
<https://youtube/9Xo9X3ZxkAQ>

Vartanian, Hrag. / INTERVIEWS: The Center of Art: A Conversation With Critic  
& Curator Karen Wilkin / January 5, 2010  
Whitney, Stanley. Online interview

Wilkin, Karen. "Women of Abstract Expressionism' Review: Blowing Up  
the Boys' Club (An important reminder that women played a major role in the era's  
radical rethinking of aesthetic possibilities)  
Wall Street Journal, Arts, Arts In Review, Art Review  
Aug. 15, 2016. Denver, Colorado

Wilkin, Karen. "Painting a Paradox, Ciao Fonseca" / Art in America, September, 2005  
pp.142, 143, 144

"Finding the painting" appears to consist of disciplining these unruly initial  
impulses, not by selecting particular configurations at the expense of others,  
but by forcing them to conform to new rhythms and to coexist with a new  
order of shapes created by canceling out large areas of the first image... As  
we look, they become windows in that wall, allowing us to see into a loosely  
gridded atmospheric space that exists beyond the surface of the canvas...

Turner, James William Mallord. *Whalers* Metropolitan Museum of Art

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on Colour* Blackwell Publishing

60. "Imagine a painting cut up into small , almost monochromatic bits which  
are then used as pieces in a jig-saw puzzle. Even when such a piece is not  
monochromatic it should not indicate any three dimensional shape, but  
should appear as a flat color-patch. Only together with other pieces does it  
become a bit of blue sky, a shadow, a high-light, transparent or opaque, etc.  
Do the individual pieces show us the *real colors* of the parts of the picture?"