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A Remote Province: Between the Visible and the Sayable

A Thesis Presented

by

Jamie Macaulay

to

The Graduate School

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Master of Fine Arts

in

Studio Art

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Abstract of the Thesis

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The following thesis investigates the idea and practice of my painting from the point of view of the *uncanny* – that “remote province” characterized by Martin Heidegger as a paradoxical union of emerging and not emerging, concealment and unconcealment; described by Sigmund Freud as the way “back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220); and that Paul Celan reminds us is also the way of the abyss of heaven underfoot – *the abyss that opens up the earth* (*Selected Poems and Prose*, 407).

*

Chapter 1, “Analytic of Forms: An Attempt at Self-Criticism”, provides a critical and typological analysis, subdividing my work into two principle categories or genres: *abstract/landscape* and *still image*. Chapter 2, “A Remote Province”, situates the idea

and practice of my painting in relation to broader theoretical currents that aim to elaborate a conception of the work of art as uncanny, provisional, and poetic. Assuming with Jacques Rancière that every image presents a fold within the order of the visible and the sayable, I liken my approach to painting to a poetic practice of provisional naming and crossing out of names oriented towards what Heidegger calls the earth as opposed to the world.

For my grandfather, Archie, and my parents, Malcolm and Karin Macaulay,
whose generosity and support made this possible.

A Remote Province: Between the Visible and the Sayable

by Jamie Macaulay



There is something ridiculous and miserly in the myth we inherit from abstract art—that painting is autonomous, pure and for itself, and therefore we habitually defined its ingredients and define its limits. But painting is “impure”. It is the adjustment of impurities which forces painting’s continuity. We are image-makers and image-ridden.

—PHILIP GUSTON

Appreciation is a mode of recognition: we recognize but we cannot name, we cannot recall by any effort of will: the contents that reach us in the terms of aesthetic form have the “feel” of a dream that is otherwise forgotten...

—ADRIAN STOKES

Now you know, my friend, that I cannot measure anything, and of the beautiful, I am simply such a measure as a white line is of chalk...

—SOCRATES

Table of Contents

List of Figures	viii
Foreword	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Chapter I: Analytic of Forms: An Attempt at Self-Criticism	1
Part I: Abstract/Landscape	2
Part II: Still Images	3
Coda	6
Chapter II: A Remote Province	8
Figures and Illustrations	22
Bibliography	51

List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>East Bentinck Arm, Bella Coola, BC</i>	22
Figure 2. <i>Die spur eines bisses</i> 2012	23
Figure 3. <i>Subdivision of types</i>	24
Figure 4. <i>Landscape Study I</i> 2011	25
Figure 5. <i>Landscape Study II</i> 2011	26
Figure 6. <i>Landscape Study III</i> 2011	27
Figure 7. <i>Meridians Series #1</i> 2012	28
Figure 8. <i>Meridians Series #2</i> 2012	29
Figure 9. <i>Meridians Series #3</i> 2012	30
Figure 10. <i>Meridians Series #4</i> 2012	31
Figure 11. <i>Meridians Series #5</i> 2012	32
Figure 12. <i>Meridians Series #6</i> 2012	33
Figure 13. <i>Meridians Series #7</i> 2012	34
Figure 14. <i>Meridians Series #8</i> 2012	35
Figure 15. <i>Meridians Series #9</i> 2012	36
Figure 16. <i>Meridians Series #10</i> 2012	37
Figure 17. <i>Untitled</i> 2011	38
Figure 18. <i>Untitled</i> 2011	39
Figure 19. <i>Untitled</i> 2011	40
Figure 20. <i>Untitled</i> 2011	41
Figure 21. <i>Then I Will Execute Justice I (after Lawrence of Arabia)</i> 2010	42
Figure 22. <i>Then I Will Execute Justice II (after Lawrence of Arabia)</i> 2010	43

Figure 23. <i>Night Aerial</i> 2010	44
Figure 24. <i>Night Aerial</i> 2010	45
Figure 25. <i>Night Aerial I</i> 2010	46
Figure 26. <i>Night Aerial II</i> 2010	47
Figure 27. <i>Talk Show</i> 2010	48
Figure 28. <i>Dead Actor (after Ingmar Bergman)</i> 2010	49
Figure 29. <i>Dead Actor (after Ingmar Bergman)</i> 2010	50

Foreword

The following thesis purports neither to determine nor to explain, but to instruct – literally, *to pile up towards*. It is confessional in the tradition of religious divulgence, for it assumes a formative relationship between painting and authorial intent, and it attempts to formulate this intent as it comes into view through language. In other words, it aims to go the same way as the work that precedes it, to bring to light the sense, meaning, and direction of the work, but through a different economy of means. Intentionality, however, should not be mistaken for psychological clarity or perspicuity of representation. It is not my intention to provide a biographical account of creative genesis. Intentionality should be understood first and only as *directedness towards something*. In this sense, it is deeply entwined with understanding, understood as projective and throwing, and by no means incompatible with a vital and persistent “cloud of unknowing”. In conventional terms, nothing is truer than Duchamp’s claim that the work of art exists somewhere between the artist’s unintended expression and his or her unexpressed intention.

*

The assumptions of even development – coherence, consistency, intelligibility – remain hallmarks of subjective authority and intent. They are what typically promote a “signature style”. Their absence or compromise presents a difficult set of questions: Who speaks? To whom? On what grounds? More often than not, the expectation or the demand for unity and continuity continues to determine the legitimacy of authorial scope and intention. Denouncing such demands as forms of creative and intellectual

blackmail, Foucault long ago advocated for the radical transformation of the self in place of stylistic continuity and consistency, for the death of the author and the affirmation of multiple, contradictory, transformative practices instead.

*

An inconstant direction and approach is basic to the idea and practice of my painting. The pursuit of segmented, sometimes contradictory lines of investigation is in my mind a matter of creative integrity. I admire Manet for his “exceptional inconsistency”, as Greenberg puts it, more than anything else besides (in Armstrong, xi). In what follows, I have tried to maintain a similarly divided approach, giving voice to different dimensions of my practice through different currents of writing and text – literary, critical, philosophical, or otherwise.

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Chapter I

Analytic of Forms: An Attempt at Self-Criticism

My work can be subdivided into two principle categories or genres: *abstract/landscape* and *still image*. The abstract/landscape imagery is born from direct observation, memory, and imagination, while the still images are appropriated as ready-made from news media, film, television, literature, and other public domains. Broadly speaking, these two categories draw a dividing line in my work between figuration and non-figuration, or, more accurately, between more or less familiar and unfamiliar modes of figurative imagery. For, in the end, I draw no absolute distinction between figuration and abstraction. I see sense and concept as inextricably linked. Every image is already highly abstract, and, conversely, there is no “pure” abstraction. As Guston says, “painting is “impure”. It is the adjustment of impurities which forces painting’s continuity” (*Philip Guston Retrospective*, 37).

In either case, the idea and practice of my painting remains deeply rooted in my thinking about landscape as a pictorial genre and what that means to painting. Approaching landscape as a threshold of indistinction between the human and the inhuman, the comprehensible and the incomprehensible remains basic to my practice. From this point of view, to picture landscape is to picture the disappearance of the human and the prospect of something other and perhaps altogether other appearing in its place – *the place of the uncanny*.

When I say “landscape” I do not mean the picturesque. I mean *wilderness* – not only the physically remote wilderness, but the wilderness that’s all around us and even

in us, including the perception of things as forever changing, strange, and unstable – seeing things as odd, misfit, radically singular, and one-of-a-kind. From this point of view, landscape is inseparably bound up with “impure” forms of abstraction, to a tension between recognition and non-recognition, seeing something as familiar and seeing it as fundamentally strange.

For all of these reasons, landscape can be associated with a general thematic of birth and death, memory and mourning. It presents a limit condition that brings us face to face with our finitude as human beings and as inhabitants of a world. As Jeff Wall writes: “a picture of a cemetery is, theoretically at least, the “perfect” type of landscape” (169).

ABSTRACT/LANDSCAPE

My most recent and continuing body of work, *Meridians* (fig. 7-16), comprises a series of abstract/landscape paintings born out of my experience of the remote coastal landscape of British Columbia. Painted from memory and observation, the work shifts between recognizable features of landscape and more general modes of abstraction. What interests me in the landscape of the Pacific Northwest is its rugged namelessness and otherness, its immunity to common names and common forms of understanding. It's a landscape that bears the scars of heavy industry and years of myopic resource economics. In many respects, it's all used up, but it's still full of mystery and power. Maybe it's this uselessness that makes it especially approachable as wilderness.

Retaining only the most basic determinations of landscape – atmosphere, organic texture and form, the presence of a horizon – I wanted to work free from isometric constraints, without the restraint of *portraying* the landscape, to focus instead on the feeling of uncertainty that the landscape affords, the feeling of being situated within a remote and shifting terrain. In this way, I hoped to achieve what Keats called “negative capability”, or the capacity to withstand uncertainties “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 41).

STILL IMAGES

In broad terms, my work with still images (fig. 21-29) investigates the institution and control of an historical regime of visibility. Borrowing from contemporary news media, film, television, and so on, the work focuses on scenarios in which recognition is either complicated or called into question through technologies of surveillance and the production of evidence, on one hand, and instances of theatricality and spectacle, on the other.

The concept of “still image” is intended to convey both stillness and perpetuity, as in the capturing of an image and its repetition or dissemination. The still imagery remains decidedly within the realm of figurative representation, focusing upon its economy, communication, and duration. As in the expression, “I am still here”, or in the French, *encore*, this duration can be conceived in terms of an act of repetition,

reiteration, or re-inscription. The concept of still image should also be understood in an expanded sense as related to concepts of *film still*, *still life*, *instillation*, and *distillation*.

While my work with abstract imagery is in constant flux, like permanently changing constellations drawn from the same cluster of stars, the still images are more like *idée fixes*, but turned upside down or inside out. They represent a collective iconography that can't be entirely dismantled or dissolved, even as the meaning they represent is rendered fluid through strategies of de-contextualization and re-presentation.

After Lawrence of Arabia

In the series, *After Lawrence of Arabia* (fig. 21-22), I concentrate on Lawrence's sudden recognition of a previously anonymous tribesman and how this compromises his presumed exteriority and authority. In the scene from the film, when an Arab soldier kills a member of a rival tribe, Lawrence intercedes as executioner in order to preempt a cycle of retributive killings. He accedes to justice on the grounds of his presumed neutrality as an outsider (and no doubt his presumed superiority as a Westerner), but when he recognizes the guilty party as the man he risked his own life to save, having pitted his own value of the individual against the law of the tribe and the desert, Lawrence's position is compromised, implicating him personally. Justice becomes a cover for Lawrence's private revenge at having been disarmed by recognizing the tribesman's identity.

Night Aerial

In the series, *Night Aerial* (fig. 23-26), remote imagery taken from drone aerial bombing campaigns in Afghanistan serves as a starting point for a reflection on the relationship between authority, verification, and visibility – the will to make visible or disappear. The mediation of technological modes of seeing, capturing, and recording; the technological production of a visibility by darkness and night; and the reduction of information this implies (the gritty quality of night vision imaging) all interested me.

Talk Show

The sequence of images titled, *Talk Show* (fig. 27), references a brawl that broke out on the set of the 1980s television talk show, *Geraldo Rivera*. The fight was not staged per se, but nor was it unpredictable or unprovoked. Needless to say, ratings skyrocketed, ushering in a new era of spectacle-driven so-called infotainment television programming.

Dead Actor: After Ingmar Bergman

The painting, *Dead Actor (After Ingmar Bergman)* (fig. 28-29), is painted from a film still from Ingmar Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal*. It functions for me as an emblem of landscape representation in general, linking landscape, spiritual passage, and death. What attracted me to the image in the first place was its implicit association with early *cartes de visite* style representations of the North American landscape, depicting massive old-growth forests dwarfing tiny human figures. Recalling shamanic associations between the tree of life and the passage between worlds, the forest figures

for me as a vehicle transiting human life in and out of worldly existence. The forest clearing is in this case an *amniotic* and *earthly* clearing, preceding and exceeding human life. The overwrought theatricality of the film actor's death underscores the extreme artifice and spectacle of the scene, lending it an air of subtle irony and humor at the same time.

CODA

Despite the varied subject matter and content of the still images, what they all share is a kind of meta-relationship to landscape representation and painting in general – insofar, that is, as I tend to view all painting through the lens of landscape. In order to fully appreciate the significance of landscape in this connection it must be thought in conjunction with what Jeff Wall calls the “politics of representation”, understood as a threshold between aesthetics and political economy, describing the placement and displacement of people and things across social and political boundaries. According to Wall, making landscape pictures is one important way of examining social, economic, and political patterns of settlement and distribution. Given the “uneven” texture of modernity, he argues, modern forms of development tend to be plagued by extreme forms of either underdevelopment or overdevelopment, extremes that find expression in stylistic forms of aesthetic representation. As Wall writes:

In a modern type of picture there will tend to be a distinction, or disparity (if not an open conflict) between the over- or underdevelopment of the motif or

phenomenon pictured, and the still successfully measured and harmonious nature of the picture itself. The experience of the tension between form and content records and expresses mimetically something of our social experience of tormented development, that which is not achieved or realized, or that which, in being realized, is ruined—and also all the unresolved grey areas in between, where hope and alternatives reside (170).

From this point of view, landscape is not only theoretically connected to memory; it is the *contested ground of memory*, marking the site of a political contest between belonging and unbelonging, inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, landscape is closely tied to realism, understood as metaphorical and polemical, and not simply descriptive. Indeed, if landscape is the contested ground of memory, realism is the contested ground of imagination.

Chapter II

A Remote Province

THE WAY BACK

“Remember that joke about the bullfighter who steps out into the ring and there’s no bull, no ring, nothing?”

— ROBERTO BOLAÑO

I want to start with the story of Olympia – not Manet’s Olympia, but Hoffman’s Olympia – the story of the automaton and the Medusa’s head. Everything moves between these two poles. The work of art is the work of an elaborate machine, a robotic doubling, a sleight of hand designed to provoke a sensible misrecognition. Art is life, but life doubled up and doubled over: a lifeless thing invested with the appearance of life and the exception of life, the arrest and excommunication of life and life frozen in the form of an image. On one hand, the desire to freeze life, to remember, to hang on, and on the other, the Pygmalion desire to create life from the lifeless stuff of the earth.

Here is that “remote province” of the uncanny, the border zone between emerging and not emerging that Heidegger locates in the contest between earth and world; the path of the automaton, the double, and the Medusa’s head, described by Freud as the way “back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220); and that Celan reminds us is also the way of the abyss, the abyss of heaven underfoot – *the abyss that opens up the earth* (*Selected Poems and Prose*, 407).

A REMOTE PROVINCE

It doesn't take much to see that a painting by Philip Guston or John Walker isn't entirely at home in the world. Integral to human culture and tradition, art is nevertheless essentially *uncanny* – *unheimlich* or *un-homely*. It operates in an extra-ordinary and remote terrain located outside the regular order of things, of mundane operations and expectations.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger describes the uncanny character of the work of art in terms of an overt tension or "counter-play" between emerging and not emerging, appearing and not appearing, in which the typically inconspicuous and stable relationship between figure and ground underlying appearances becomes protean, strange, and unpredictable. By allowing things to be seen in an unusual light, as dislocated from the everyday life-world of unreflective and habitual belonging, the work of art provides a necessary distance for a more authentic and insightful mode of being-in-the-world to develop.

Heidegger famously describes this plastic condition of emerging and not emerging in works of art in terms of an "essential strife between earth and world" (46), understood as a "battle" in which the "unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won" (55). While earth and world at first appear to present a straightforward opposition between concealment and unconcealment, Heidegger is clear that both represent, each

in its own unique way, a peculiar conjunction of emerging and not emerging, clearing and concealing. He writes:

The world is not simply the Open that corresponds to clearing, and the earth is not simply the Closed that corresponds to concealment. Rather, the world is the clearing of the paths of the essential guiding direction with which all decision complies. [...] The earth is not simply the Closed but rather that which rises up as self-closing. (55)

We can understand earth and world as two distinctive modes of belonging in which people or things are linked together in common accord. The world is the ethical and relational context, the “governing expanse”, as Heidegger puts it, of human history, culture, and tradition, informing a consensual vision of what is and what matters for a community of people – what we tend to think of in terms of a worldview. In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”, Heidegger identifies the world specifically with the institution of a scientific and technological world-order rooted in Western European modes of thinking:

The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world. The end of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization that is based upon Western European thinking. (*Basic Writings*, 435)

In sum, the world describes the collective domain of human belonging and the ordering that corresponds to this accord, as governed currently by technological and calculative

means-ends forms of rationality. It is what could be called the human-technological interface.

By contrast, the earth presents a poetic and haptic accord that isn't technological, but deeply physical, oriented according to haptic relations of proximity, pressure, and touch. As Heidegger writes: "A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world, *but they belong to a covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked*" (*emphasis added*, 45). In conventional terms, the earth is the natural world, the native sphere to which plants, animals, stones, and other natural things belong. In more cryptic terms, it's what Heidegger describes as the "sheltering and concealing" (48) ground that grounds human dwelling (46). In either case, the earth isn't simply concealment, but *appearing that resists appearance*, that dissembles and hides. For, as Heidegger says, concealment is always twofold, comprising both stubborn refusal and disguise (53).

This double concealment is directly opposed to the open transparency and forthrightness of the world. It's also what ensures that no interpretation – whether of works of art or the earth itself – can ever be considered absolute or immune to revision and change. Following the passage cited above, Heidegger proceeds to relate the earth's complex concealment directly to its haptic dimension: "A stone presses downward and manifests its heaviness", he writes. "But while this heaviness exerts an opposing pressure upon us it denies us any penetration into it" (46). The earth's denial is in this case precisely *world-denial* – *world-forgetting* and even *world-destroying*. Its resistance is a resistance to scientific and technological attempts at categorical reduction, mastery, and control (47).

This concealment, however, should not be mistaken for *meaninglessness*. Even as the earth's accord involves what Heidegger calls a *not-knowing-of-one-another* between things (47), it is not a senseless heap or a mass of unrelated parts outside of parts. It is a fluid and dynamic, reciprocating accord that delimits one thing from the next without "blurring" any "outlines" between them (47) – even as it exacerbates or confuses every official attempt at classification. The earth is like the trickster in mythical tales: fooling, fumbling, questionably bright. It presents a uniquely differentiated field punctuated by countless nameless things. It's a wilderness that can only be mapped from the outside, yet remains intelligible from within to contact and touch.

*

"The Origin of the Work of Art" represents Heidegger's shift away from aesthetics, as rooted in the subjective experience of beauty, towards a rethinking of art as "the setting-into-work of truth" (36), where truth is not simply the direct representation or copy of something, but the disclosure of a "general essence" that brings to light a communal and historical world or worldview.

But what about works of art that simply blow apart the world – *known of old and long familiar*? That open up an abyss in their wake? Or that punch a hole right through the wall, as Zola so fittingly described the work of Manet?

There are paintings by Frank Auerbach, Philip Guston, or John Walker (fig. 30-33) that feel like black holes, that just keep moving further and further away, without emitting any light whatsoever. The longer I look, I'm not so sure that I could ever find my

way back from there to here. And no thanks to the painting, if I always do. Eventually, I just step aside and stop looking.

One of the significant problems with Heidegger's account of the origin of the work of art is that it's too one-sided, too preoccupied with the world. Despite his assurances that earth and world are mutually inseparable and indispensable to works of art, there is no real contest. In the end, it's emphatically a world that's cleared and held open as the privileged locus of meaning in the work. What's missing is a far more nuanced sensitivity to the concrete materiality and opacity of works of art, to their distancing from and even open hostility to the world, in addition to the uneven texture of the earth, to the unique meaning it affords, as rooted in haptic modes of intelligence and singular, non-repeatable phenomena.

Add to this the fact that the world is simply *untenable*, at least as Heidegger presents it in "The Origin of the Work of Art". It's impossible to dissociate Heidegger's rhetoric of nativity, belonging, and destiny from the policies and practices of National Socialism. As Levinas so succinctly puts it: "Heidegger's world is a world of lords" (138). For Levinas, it's above all Heidegger's all-too-comfortable and unquestioning sense of rooted belonging that betrays what he calls an "idealism of the haughty" that denies the possibility of "human wretchedness" (138) – of exile and exclusion.

"How to get out of the World?" Levinas asks. "How can the Other [...] appear, that is, be for someone, without already losing its alterity and exteriority by that way of offering itself to view? How can there be appearing without power?" (130).

One way, I've been intimating, is Heidegger's own conception of the earth as world-refusing and world-forgetting, as presenting a poetic and haptic accord of anonymous and undercover agency.

NAMING AND CROSSING OUT OF NAMES

You know and you see: The earth folded up here, folded once and twice and three times, and opened up in the middle, and in the middle there is water, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from even farther up, from the glaciers, and one could say, but one shouldn't, that this is the language that counts here, the green with the white in it, a language not for you and not for me—because, I ask you, for whom is it meant, the earth, not for you, I say, is it meant, and not for me—a language, well, without I and without You nothing but He, nothing but It, you understand, and She, nothing but that.

—PAUL CELAN

As familiar attributes of landscape give way to wilderness and abstraction, the possibility of uncovering a consensual and relational framework diminishes or disappears. Follow the work of art into the remote province of the uncanny and step off the path before it turns back. You may find yourself in a different company of the strange – not the uncanny vision of the world from afar, but the strangeness of singular things, a sensorium of meaning immune to common names and common forms of understanding. Here is the way of the abyss of heaven underfoot – *the abyss that opens up the earth.*

It's clear, it seems, that we aren't altogether at home in the "covert throng" of earthly things. *The world is too much with us*, to cite Wordsworth. And so it would be naïve to assume that you can just step outside the world whenever you want. Rather, you have to bore a hole through from the inside out.

*

To picture the earth is to proceed negatively, by turns, naming and crossing out of names. As poet and essayist Tim Lilburn states: "Wilderness can be enacted in language, but as it is enacted, language begins to seem less and less like language..." ("The Horse Hitting Its Stride"). Because wilderness reveals itself as an endless play between discretion and disguise, concealing and revealing *as other*, it defies any attempt at systematic definition or categorical representation. It's what you say about it and the cancellation of what you say. If there's any hope of attending to wilderness through language or linguistic modes of understanding and meaning, language first has to undergo its own dissemblance and disguise, must relinquish its tenure with the world and become ecstatic gesture, stammering invocation and praise, naming and crossing out of names.

Borrowing from the Christian tradition of negative theology, Lilburn recalls Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *epektatis* – the insatiability of desire. According to Nyssa, the desire to know God can never be truly satisfied, for infinite being can neither be limited or contained by finite understanding. Nevertheless, genuine desire persists under pressure in frustration and not-knowing. The failure to name and to possess, the

frustration of worldly desire, becomes the catalyst that propels desire's internal mutation and ultimately comes to stand for its own unique truth. Humbled by the awareness of its own failure, desire becomes *epektatic*, impossible and reaching, but culminating in mindful attention, nearness, and presence nevertheless. As Lilburn says, "Desire will be broken and will continue with a bright limp" ("Listening with Courtesy").

*

There is likewise an endlessness to painting that can never be fully satisfied except in its own undoing. From one painting to the next, there is a continuous yet broken chain of investigation and reaching. Motifs emerge, disappear, and reappear under different guise. The work shifts in spiraling, oblique ways. Parts and wholes are painted over, scraped out, and scraped down. Doubt becomes persistent to the point of appearing methodical and exact. The labor of painting becomes increasingly negative. Subversion and sabotage become standard operations. As the feeling of redundancy grows, recognition takes hold – less of familiar forms *per se*, than a singular order, a holding power akin to being singled out in a crowd. What draws near in this event of not-knowing is what John Duns Scotus calls *haecceity* or *thisness* – the radical singularity and unique difference of things – an uncompromising distinction that can only begin to be bridged by a flurry of names and their cancellations, a turning upside down and walking about on one's head, a paradoxical depth without depth – *an abyss*.

IN THE SEARCHLIGHT OF UTOPIA

What if the tether to the world was broken? What if the work of art wasn't a detour or a way back, but a world-forgetting instead? What if meaning gestured towards a poetics of earth instead of the disclosure of a world?

What's at stake in any poetic encounter, Levinas writes, is "an uncovering that is not truth," but darkness, blindness, night, emanating a singular light, "a black light, a night coming from below—a light that undoes the world" (137), just as poetry "make[s] language explode, and then mean[s] among these broken bits" (142).

*

The nomadic and errant condition of un-belonging to a world, of being at once here and nowhere, of occupying a border zone of indistinction, is what Celan and Levinas after him calls *utopia*. Utopia is the namelessness and placelessness of the earth, but also the hope of encounter, of encountering another guest and visitor along the way, along the way towards the other – the "wholly other" and the "not all that distant" other – the other who can never be the last among the discounted or missing and the near other, oneself as another whom one aspires to welcome and to liberate (Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose*, 408).

This "light of U-topia" (411), as Celan calls it, is a searching and researching light, an anxious and interminable lighting that proceeds alone along glacial paths and mountain ridges. In this sense, "art is light" after all, but not clearing "light from on high", as in Heidegger's world-centered view, as Levinas puts it (137), but a cavernous, cryptic

searchlight, a ghostly miner's light, that leads interminably down and out under night skies. From this point of view, the remote edge or cessation of the world does not end in meaninglessness, but in renewed contact with the earth — a connection that may lead to an acute sense of responsibility without destination or end, a kind of courtesy without residence, without limitation of propriety or conditional belonging to a world — a connection too often lacking in our current worldview.

HANDS STUFFING A MATTRESS

But why *light* after all?¹ “The place in his memory that's labeled *immediate* past is furnished with mattresses scarcely touched by light” (Bolaño 33). One of the best definitions of painting I know comes from Franz Kline, as related by Guston. *Painting*, Kline said, *is hands stuffing a mattress* (“Philip Guston Talking”).

In a similar vein, the painter Frank Auerbach has described his own approach to painting as a kind of *touching in the dark* (Hughes, 86). Recalling his teacher David Bomberg's interest in Berkeley's philosophy of vision, Auerbach notes that,


¹ The metaphorical light of truth and goodness is a central trope of Western metaphysics and Enlightenment faith in reason. Even as Heidegger tries to distance himself from metaphysics and Enlightenment thought, his own conception of truth as unconcealedness or *aletheia* reinstates this old metaphor as primal lighting or clearing — “the lighting center [that] encircles all that is” (“The Origin of the Work of Art”, 53). In “The Origin of the Work of Art”, “lighting” also doubles as a synonym for the world — attesting to the degree to which Heidegger, in practice, privileges world over earth, fusing and confusing the disclosure of a world with the advent of truth in works of art. See, for example, p.62: “Truth is present only as the conflict between lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth”. Even as Heidegger identifies the conflict *between* earth and world with the advent of truth, his use of the same terms for truth and world, alternately, betrays his valorization of world over earth.

“on the back of the retina we get a reverse image, so that the newborn infant will reach down for something that’s up and up for something that’s down. It’s only by crawling across the floor, touching things, judging distances *haptically*, by grasp and contact, that it will relate the sight to the physical world”. (in Hughes, 32)

Not incidentally, it’s in exactly these same terms that Levinas describes Celan’s poetry: a language of “pure touching”, he says, “pure contact, grasping, squeezing.... A language of proximity for proximity’s sake” (41). Levinas has in mind here Celan’s confession that, “I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem” (in Levinas, 40). Poetry, in other words, is haptic speech, breath-whisper, gesture and touch before or beyond coherent discourse or systematized language, just as painting is craning in darkness before or beyond world-picturing.

From this point of view, the act of painting is precisely the act of relating, even deferring, sight to touch, of rehearsing a passage in all directions, a passage rooted in “all fours”, in the body’s mobility or immobility. The idea of painting as an insatiable desire and endless attempt to draw near to things in their highest regard, in the “dull pressure and bulk” (“The Origin of the Work of Art”, 47) of their namelessness, can be seen as an act akin to *combing*: touching and disentangling; brushing wool or hair; combing the scene of an accident or the scene of a crime for traces of lost evidence, for some clue that tells of someone or something lost.

WHITE LINES

"When I was a boy I used to dream something like this
— " ... "The straight line is the sea when it's calm, the wavy line is the sea with waves, and the jagged line is a storm" ...

— ROBERTO BOLAÑO

In the province of painting, one has to take seriously the possibility of private language. The more I paint, the more I feel I'm looking for the same sensation I had as a child, running my hands across the sheets, half asleep: smooth, calm, and flowing, then interrupted by massive shapes that loom like stumps of cut trees. I collide with them on all sides, becoming horribly entangled in their grasp. Just as it threatens to become unbearable, I free myself and manage to establish a smooth and uninterrupted motion once again.

PROVISIONAL GAMES

Provisional operation. Provisional statement. Provisional investigation. Rigorous because persistent, mindful, and repetitive (*if you thirst after bread, you will not receive stone*). Inexact because vague and wandering – traversing a terrain by foot, crawling across the floor, gauging its pressure and texture, rather than laying out coordinates or mapping points. And playful because endless, as well as inherently responsive and adaptive to variations within the game or the field in which it unfolds.

*

The uncanny and playful movement painting presents, flowing between figure and ground, familiar and unfamiliar forms, passes through both language games and looking games. As Jacques Rancière suggests, a painting is a fold in the order of words and things, the visible and the invisible, the visible and the sayable. It's hopeless, then, to try to segregate the coherent meaning or text of an image from its matter of fact presence or presentation. It isn't a matter of choosing between world and earth, but of affirming the lyrical zone of indistinction between them.

*

The problem, as Baselitz says, is simply to keep going, to keep painting. The era of endgames has passed. The game of chess has given way to the game of go. If you assume painting as a daily practice and medium, then you open the door to just about everything and anything. Who can say in the end what's what or what's where? *You leave the door open and things come in.*



Figure 1.

East Bentinck Arm, Bella Coola, BC



Figure 2.

Die spur eines bisses, 2012
acrylic and gouache on photograph printed on paper
17 x 13 inches

Still Image

Subject:	World Image (<i>l'image encore</i>)
Lighting:	Black
Moment:	The proverbial night in which all cows are black
Chronology:	Recurrence/Repetition
Text:	Visibility, Power, Politics
Scope:	Technology/Mediation
Disclosure:	Seeing in darkness

Meridians

Subject:	There is/It gives (<i>Il y a</i>)
Lighting:	White
Moment:	Daybreak/Dawn (<i>Alba</i>)
Chronology:	Recollection/Instantaneity (the acute present)
Text:	Wilderness, Homelessness, Earth
Scope:	Veil/Blindness
Disclosure:	Touching in light

Figure 3.

Subdivision of types



Figure 4.

Landscape Study I, 2011
oil on panel
9 x 12 inches



Figure 5.

Landscape Study II, 2011
oil on panel
9 x 12 inches



Figure 6.

Landscape Study III, 2011
oil on panel
9 x 12 inches



Figure 7.

Meridians Series #1, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches



Figure 8.

Meridians Series #2, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches

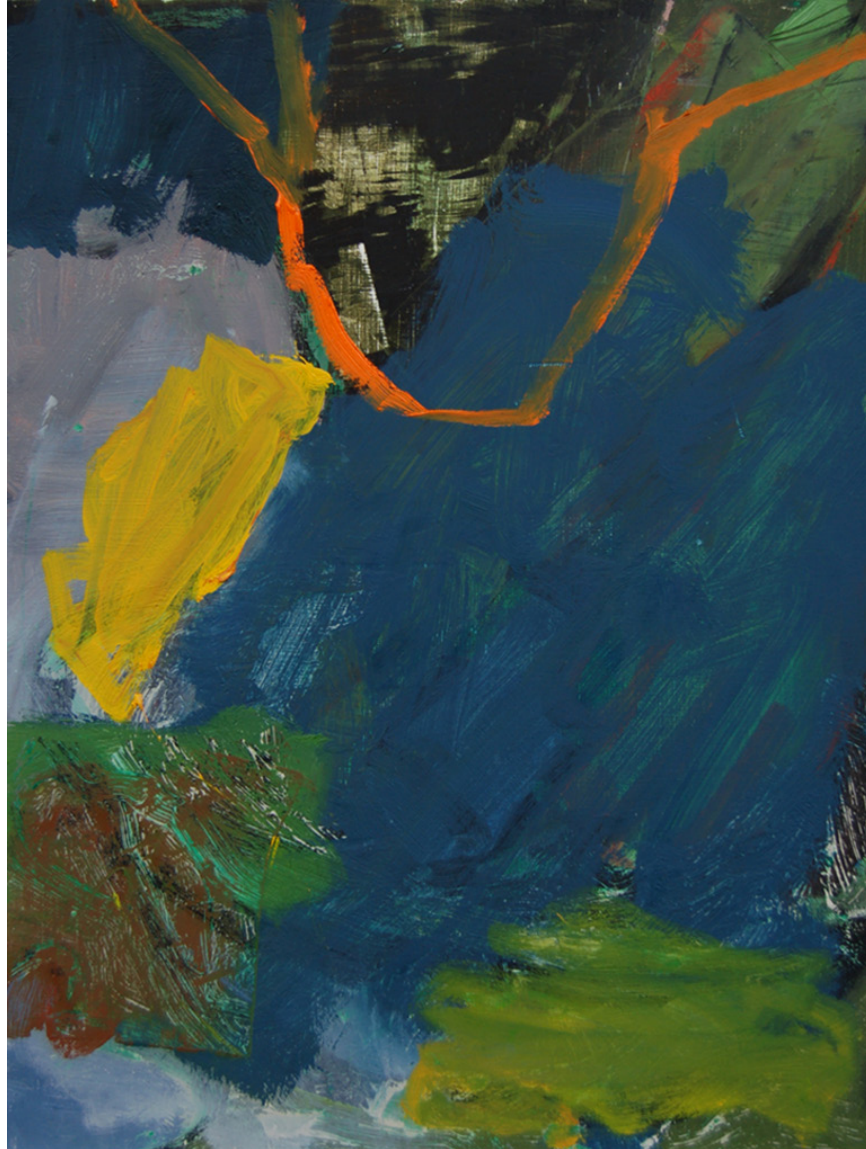


Figure 9.

Meridians Series #3, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches

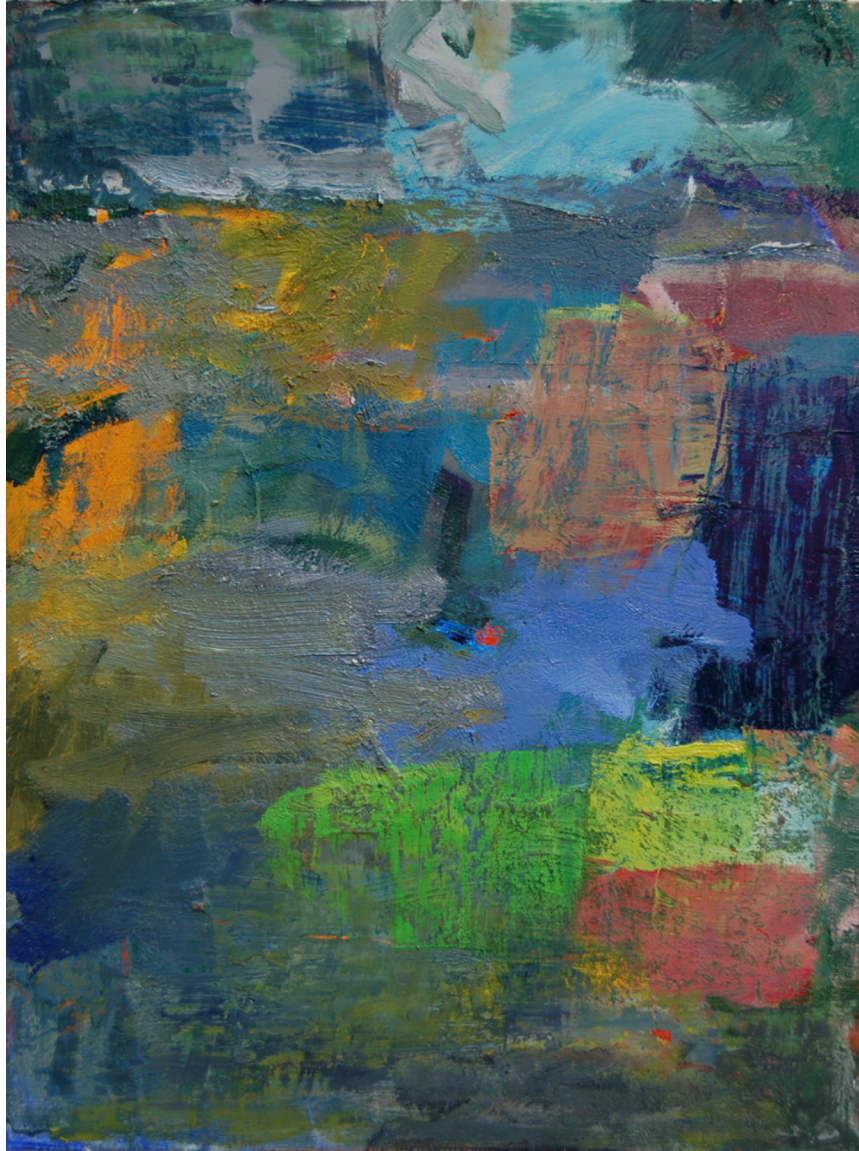


Figure 10.

Meridians Series #4, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches

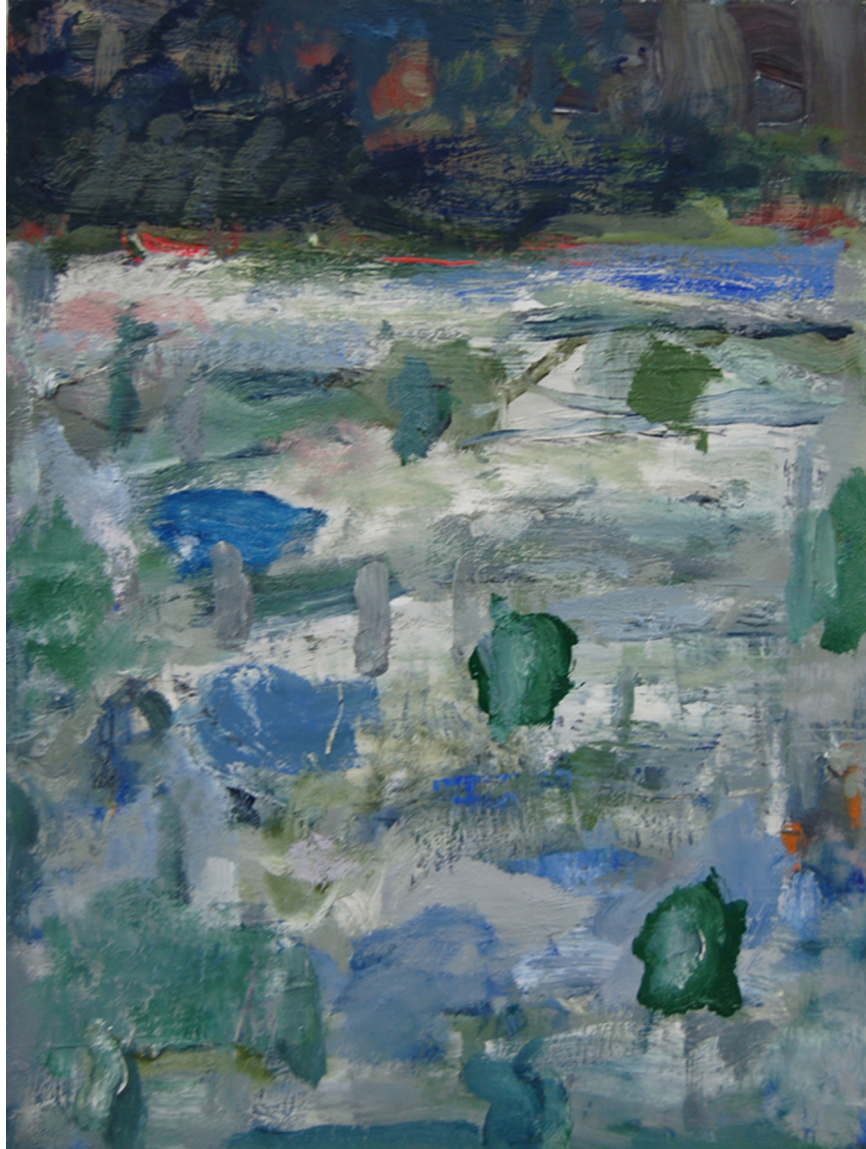


Figure 11.

Meridians Series #5, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches

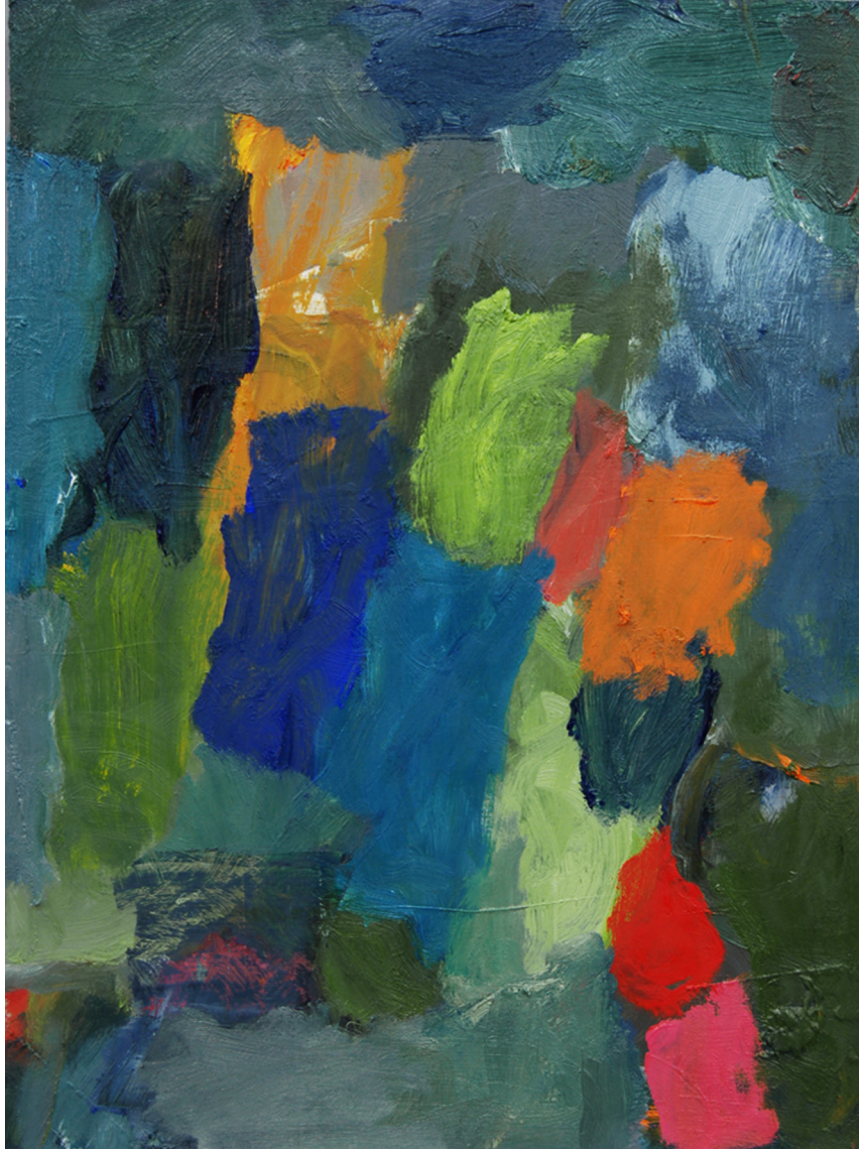


Figure 12.

Meridians Series #6, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches

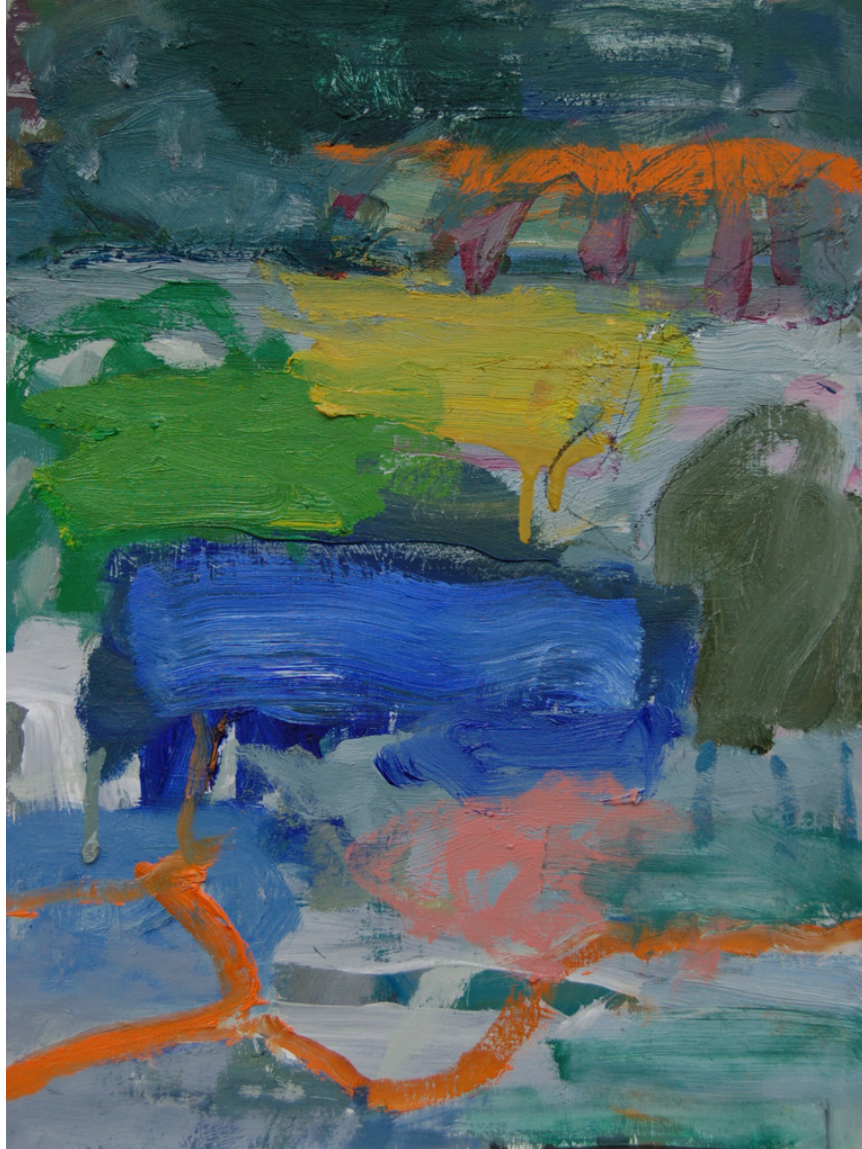


Figure 13.

Meridians Series #7, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches



Figure 14.

Meridians Series #8, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches



Figure 15.

Meridians Series #9, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches



Figure 16.

Meridians Series #10, 2012
oil on panel
12 x 16 inches



Figure 17.

Untitled, 2011
gouache on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 18.

Untitled, 2011
gouache on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 19.

Untitled, 2011
gouache on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 20.

Untitled, 2011
gouache on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 21.

Then I Will Execute Justice I (after Lawrence of Arabia), 2010
gouache on paper
8 x 6 inches



Figure 22.

Then I Will Execute Justice II (after Lawrence of Arabia), 2010
gouache on paper
8 x 6 inches



Figure 23.

Night Aerial, 2010
gouache on paper
8 x 6 inches



Figure 24.

Night Aerial, 2010
oil on canvas
24 x 20 inches



Figure 25.

Night Aerial I, 2010
monoprint on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 26.

Night Aerial II, 2010
monoprint on paper
6 x 4 1/2 inches



Figure 27.

Talk Show, 2010
gouache on paper
8 x 6 inches



Figure 28.

Dead Actor (after Ingmar Bergman), 2010
gouache on paper
8 x 6 inches



Figure 29.

Dead Actor (after Ingmar Bergman), 2010
oil on canvas
72 x 54 inches

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