

NEW ARTIFACTS:
Investigations and Explorations into Painted Typologies
or Vocabularies Using Curatorial Methodologies and
Thought

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project is an exploration of contemporary painting vocabularies. I am interested in ideas proposed by artists and critics that painting is its own language, one that exists outside of traditional written or spoken forms. Employing a related dialect, that of the curatorial or museological, I attempt to translate or unpack these languages for the viewer. My paintings are built through a two-stage process of heavy studio production, play, and material exploration. First, I execute a variety of painted marks, gestures and forms on sheet material to amass a collection. In the second phase of production, I pull from this self-generated collection of painted moments to construct compositions reminiscent of an exhibition, adopting curatorial methodologies to construct paintings. Using the curatorial in a painting practice illustrates connections and collaborations across contemporary exhibition and production practices. The results of this investigation culminate in an exhibition of recent paintings, *New Artifacts*.

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CHAPTER ONE: PROJECT OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

I see my work as collected and curated artifacts of a studio expedition. I begin by generating material fuelled by spontaneity, intuition, and material exploration. These works are then carefully considered, reflected on and assembled, through editing and collage, into a reflection on painting. Drifting between abstraction and representation, these collaged pieces explore the vocabularies of painting, and how these vocabularies describe the relationship between components within the ecology of the contemporary art world. My work is informed by the theories or ideas, proposed by such painters as Gerhard Richter, that painting is its own language, one that exists outside of written or spoken traditions¹. To bolster this claim, I propose that my application of curatorial and museological methods to my studio practice is an effective strategy for exploring these languages and presenting findings. I adopt curatorial thought as a technique of art making in order to explore the relationship between artist, curator, studio and gallery.

My work presents a personal perspective in that it activates and attempts to reconcile many of my interests, influences and chosen materials. At the same time, a wide audience is sought as the work seeks to discuss topics of broad

¹ In the film 'Gerhard Richter Painting', the artist states "To talk about paintings is not only difficult but perhaps pointless, too. You can only express in words what words are capable of expressing, what language can communicate. Painting has nothing to do with that" (Gerhard Richter Painting, 2011)

interest, such as the creation and consumption of art objects. My works are self-reflective in that they present an awareness of their status as paintings by revealing their process, materials, sources and history. They are generated through trial and error, mistakes and successes—they are the products of rigorous editing, collecting, arrangement and reflection. The elements that make up an image are a hard copy transcription of a studio process and practice. Each canvas is a record of intuition, learned techniques and the painterly actions of its production, engaging in a form of communication that goes beyond of the tradition of written language.

I am using methods of presentation and display to present a process. These collaged pieces, which I also call “moments” or “artifacts,” sometimes come together in different ways. They may appear as seemingly free floating forms. They may appear to describe familiar art objects such as busts, ceramics or modernist sculpture, using the classical techniques of composition and framing found in still life painting and photography. These forms may also often rest within grounds recognizable as the studio or art gallery. The composition of each piece is deeply informed by my practical experiences in exhibition design and installation. The monochromatic palette refers to the representation of an artwork rather than the object itself, thus inserting itself into a historical narrative alongside grainy slides, half-toned textbook images and Xeroxed handouts. The finished work presents the viewer a layered narrative of images and references, capturing both studio and presentation processes. The collaged paintings

described here are the ones that will be shown in my thesis exhibition, *New Artifacts*.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THESIS

I am interested in the varying and competing views regarding contemporary painting, a medium that is “burdened by its own history” (Stuart 2013). Though this discourse is often overwhelming, particular statements by important artists have greatly influenced my understanding of how to talk about painting. Jean-Michael Basquiat claimed that asking him to describe his work was near impossible: “I don’t know how to describe my work...it’s like ...asking Miles Davis, ‘How does your horn sound?’” (Basquiat in Davis 2010). Gerhard Richter has repeatedly avoided engaging too directly in discussions about painting with statements such as this one: “Talk about painting: there's no point. By conveying a thing through the medium of language, you change it.” (Richter 2009) As a painter, I find these artists’ refusal to allow language into the process of art making and reception attractive. There is romanticism to it. However, as a student, educator, and gallery professional, I am left wanting more. If painting possesses its own language and is not easily read, is it possible that it could be translated so as to facilitate understanding? Specifically, how might my painting be translated? Perhaps if, as Richter claims, the application of language can change the meaning of a painting, we must invoke a related dialect, so as to more

accurately engage with the artist's intention.²

I propose that applying the language and methodology of curatorial and museological practices to a discussion of painting practice may serve to help translate the language of painting into something more identifiable to an audience, particularly that of contemporary abstraction. If the gallery is a place for conversation and reflection, could the artist approach the surface of a painting in the same way? In his article "The Grammar of the Exhibition," Robert Storr characterizes an exhibition as a "conversation setting" that can be built by being broken down into grammatical analogies. "Galleries are paragraphs," Storr explains: "the walls and formal subdivisions of the floors are sentences, clusters of works are the clauses, and individual works, in varying degrees, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and often as more than one of these functions according to their context." (Storr 2006, 23) If exhibitions are meant to facilitate conversation, and the components of those exhibitions can be likened to grammatical structure, it follows that reading an individual work as one might read an exhibition could help to translate that work. I will further explore the possibility that the language of exhibition making is present in the composition of

² This idea is inspired by Modernism and Clement Greenberg's statement, "the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." Modernism, something I am surely inspired by but not necessarily aligned with, "criticizes from the inside" (Greenberg 1993, 85). It could easily be said that curating and painting both exist inside of contemporary art.

my paintings and can be used to discuss my work.

When I speak of adopting the role of the curator in my practice, it should be understood that this is a metaphor. I am not literally positioning myself as a curator, saying that I am curating my own works or using the exact methodologies and approaches to the same end as that of a professional curator. Rather I am exploring and borrowing the thought, ideas and concept to fuel the thinking in my production. I am using the approach to make sense of my own practice, to reflect on and organize my own works. I am creating work through embodying this role, almost playing or envisioning a character when crafting these collages. It is a metaphor for how I approach my work when building paintings, much how Storr uses the metaphor of language when discussing exhibition making.

The thought process employed in building exhibitions and orchestrating conversation is different from my thought process as a painter. When constructing my works using a collage process, after all the shapes have been painted, I rely on my exhibition planning and installation skills, as well as my understanding of the curatorial process. The exact nature of curatorial thought, curatorial intelligence or “the curatorial,” seems to be subject of much debate within the field, but I am able to align myself with some of the proposed views. I will outline the points from this discussion of curatorial practice that represent my thinking and process.

The role of the curator is to make exhibitions. This involves working through the

practical and logistical requirements of placing objects in a space, but it also involves building and facilitating meaning, conversation, and reflection through an arrangement of artworks (and, in some contexts, building and/or working with a collection). An exhibition “generates meaning by the relationships between its parts” (Smith 2012, 49). Because my works are made through the arrangement of pre-existing parts, I feel that there are similarities between my process and the curatorial process. I assemble specific painted forms or “objects” in particular ways with the viewer’s experience in mind. I look to create relationships and contrasts between these forms through visual rhythms and layouts presented in the style of an exhibition so that the viewer may look at these painted gestures in new ways. Taking these objects out of their original context (the studio they were made in or the painting they appear in), they are “seen differently ... because of the ways the works are presented.” (Smith 2012, 41) In removing my individual painted gestures or shapes from their initial form and presenting them through illustrated modes of display on the support, their meaning is transformed by the experience and interpretation of the viewer.

I work from a collection of self-generated painted cutouts, shapes, objects or “artifacts” and within a practice with set rules and parameters. My palette, collection and work exist within the confines of a traditional painting support. Just as a curator must manage the spatial and logistical limitations of a location when planning an exhibition, I contend with similar limitations set by the physical

properties of a painting surface. Much can be learned by working under these conditions, as suggested by curator Paula Marincola when she writes that curatorial “intelligence, invention, improvisation, and inspiration are developed and refined by effectively engaging and reconciling these constraints as the inevitable limitations that accompany most exhibition making” (Marincola 2006, 10). By implementing constraints in my practice similar to those faced by a curator but not typically present in a painting practice, I am able to better understand and build upon this curatorial intelligence. Terry Smith states that curatorial thinking is “always deeply embedded in the practice of actually mounting the exhibition.” (Smith 2012, 38). I see this thinking echoed in my treatment of each painting as a miniature exhibition with its own parameters and limitations. Using the perspective and processes of an exhibition maker, I generate meaning through the arrangement of a collection of painted objects.

Though I often directly adopt curatorial thought in an attempt to unpack paintings (to better understand their seemingly cryptic language), I am not a curator. I do not curate exhibitions. Rather, I am using curatorial thought or intelligence in an attempt to understand and expand my painting process. I am enacting Maria Lind’s conception of “the curatorial” in that it can be “employed, or performed, by people in a number of different capacities in the ecosystem of art” (Lind 2011). How a painting is made—the actions taken in the studio, our relationship to objects and images, and the relationships between ground, form, and materials—

can be explored through this process of translation and examination.

Applying this lens to a painting practice will also illustrate the inseparable link between artist, curator, gallery and studio as components of an “art ecology”. I seek to investigate these relations by building paintings through a two-phase methodology: a primary phase of intuitive creative production, and a secondary phase of strategic planning and deployment, informed by the roles of the curator and exhibition planner (i.e. preparator, installer), and the display environment. I am not opposed to an idea of a distinct language of painting. I embrace it along with ideas of painting for the sake of painting as well as contemporary movements or ideologies such as those of the New Casualists³ These histories of painting are fuel for the first phase of studio production. The second phase is the one inspired by a critical curatorial strategy. It is not my intention to immediately translate the marks made in the studio into a concrete written language; instead, this phase teases meaning out of these marks by bringing them into proximity with one another and provides a space where the resulting vocabularies can be reflected upon and discussed. The language is generated in the studio and the tools for understanding I am borrowing from the curatorial, the same we use for exhibition planning. The final production of meaning or “translation” occurs with the viewer’s interaction with the work.

³ Sharon L. Butler’s identification of a group of like-minded emerging New York-based painters as “The New Casualists” will be discussed in depth further on.

By borrowing thinking and processes from exhibition making, and suggesting their direct and considered application to a studio practice, I believe that insight into both the studio and the gallery (and how they function together) can be achieved. As I adopt the role of the curator while also working as the artist, I am better able to understand the relationship between the two roles. Inspired by the increasing connections between these two realms of cultural practice within my own personal and professional work, I am interested in further exploring the relationship between artist, audience, gallery, and studio, to determine how these forces facilitate the potential translations of an artwork. I see these bodies as interdependent parts of a larger system, which I illustrate in my works. I am narrating a studio practice as well as describing the relationship between this practice and a larger system.

I am interested in relationships of support between space and object, in how a work is dependent upon the context in which it is shown and vice versa. This interest encompasses both the installation of art and the art of the installation. Discussing Mike Nelson's exhibition *Amnesiac Hide* (2014), The Power Plant's Head of Installation Paul Zingrone and Curator Julia Paoli explained that exhibitions are often being composed as they are being installed through a creative collaboration between the artist, curator and installation team⁴. I have experienced this process first-hand and witnessed major changes occur during an

⁴ "Behind the Scenes at The Power Plant." Jodie Elliot, Doug Moore, Julia Paoli, Paul Zingrone. Panel discussion, *The Power Plant*, Toronto, Ontario, February 5, 2014

installation process. When working at the Walter Phillips Gallery on adapting a major component of Mark Leckey's exhibition *BigBoxGreenScreenRefrigeratorActions* (2012) the installation team alongside the artist adapted the original piece to include a large slab of mountain rock instead of the original material. When recently working with Duane Linklater on his exhibition *Decommission* at McLaren Art Centre (2013), the sculpture transformed from an indoor work to a site-specific one. A wall mural and new photography were developed during the installation week as well. I am interested in representing this stage of the creative process, which is integral to any work but rarely accessible to the viewer.

Another area of investigation within my work is the different relationships a viewer and an artist may have to an art object. Audience members serve to activate the conversation proposed by exhibitions. I am interested in how we as an audience view these art objects and exhibitions and what is lost or gained through the process of reproduction and documentation. I explore this by directly referencing documentation in my work. My interest in relation of an image to its "original" source grew organically from parameters I set in my studio practice, inspiring me to consider how art is predominantly consumed through reproductions, whether they are in catalogues or documentation found online. As I make works referencing diverse art movements or styles that I experienced either in books or on the Internet, it seemed necessary to explore the aesthetics of

documentation. In the viewing of art second-hand by creating original works that mimic their own documentation and that of historical works.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED

My main inquiry is into the application of curatorial thought and exhibition planning methodology to a painting practice. I am interested in how this can transfer the language of painting to present a “readable” work, which displays a narrative of its process. If painting is its own language (Richter), as is often proposed, how can it be discussed? Because my work arises from a number of different forces within contemporary art’s ecology, additional questions requiring further investigation include:

- What is the value of artists adopting the role of curator/archivist/preparator in examining their own practice?
- What new ways of making might emerge from thinking in this way? What discoveries can be made?
- If the gallery is already a site for conversation and reflection, and the role of the curator is to orchestrate these reflections and facilitate a conversation, can these same things happen within each individual work?
- How does our relationship to an object differ from our relationship to an image of that object?
- How is this relationship affected when the documentation is the original?

I have used these questions and ideas to motivate my research and fuel my studio explorations.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND CONTEXT

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In my investigation of painting as its own language, I am following the lead of artists who have put this theory into practice by generating work they claim to exist outside of written or spoken language. Using these ideas, I seek to build and explore my own painting languages by creating marks and moments through trial and error, experimentation and play, thus creating a vocabulary to later unpack and translate.

From the numerous examples of Richter discussing his work, I focused on *Gerhard Richter: Writings* (2009) to get a sense of his philosophy in his own words. The irony of discussing my work using a man who dismisses discussions of his own work⁵—building my theory upon someone who said, “theory has nothing to do with a work of art” (Richter 2009, 32) is not lost on me. However, highlighting these ideas and problems demonstrates the difficulty of discussing a predominantly abstract painting practice.

My exploration of this position isn’t limited to that of Richter. I refer to other modern and contemporary artists’ considerations of how one should talk about

⁵ See earlier quotations by Richter.

their work and the motivations behind it. I am influenced by contemporary painters with similar philosophies and practices,⁶ such as the Brooklyn-based New Casualist movement. I also draw on painters such as Robert Rauschenberg, Willem de Kooning, and Henri Matisse to provide a historical context for my conceptual approach to painting practice. These have encouraged me to paint freely and to explore the possibilities of expression within the medium of painting.

My painted collages are directly motivated by the pedagogical approach of Josef Albers as detailed in *The Interaction of Color* (1963). In this text, Albers advocates for practical exercises and exploration rather than overly didactic, theoretical lessons. His exercises exploring how colours inform, alter, complement and contrast one another influence my collages. I employed the process of moving pieces around, exchanging parts, and exploring variables directly from Albers' exercise model.

In addition to Albers' recommended explorations, curatorial thought informs my process and the conversations I am building from painted language. Although the traditionally defined role of the curator as a caretaker of artworks is one that I also work from, I have chosen to focus on more recent iterations of the curatorial role. *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012), a collection of essays by professor and curator Terry Smith, strongly informs my understanding of contemporary

⁶ See following artist section in Chapter 2.

curating. I chose to focus on this text because its teachings were the immediate result of a large international curatorial conference and reflect thoughts beyond those of just a single author in that they were written with the multiple presented positions in mind. My understanding of curatorial work is also informed by first-hand experience I have gained over the last three years working on contemporary art exhibitions as an installer at various institutions.⁷

I am interested in the function of a curator in relation to a work of art or an exhibition. A curator relies on intuition inside the gallery to build conversations through visual rhythms and spatial relationships (after much research). A role of the curator is to propose and generate conversations, rather than to provide answers or solutions. According to Robert Storr, a good exhibition as crafted by the curator has a “definite, but not definitive point of view that invites serious analysis and critique, not only of the art but also of the particular weights and measures used in its evaluation by the exhibition maker” (Storr 2006, 20). In this regard, I want my works to function in the same fashion: inviting reflection upon individual objects, as well as how these objects are arranged, and what this communicates about exhibitions and studio practices.

⁷ I have worked at The Art Gallery of Windsor, Art Gallery of Ontario, The McLaren Art Centre, OCADU, The Power Plant and Walter Phillips Gallery, and several private and commercial galleries.

CONTEXT OF ARTISTS AND CONVERSATIONS IN PAINTING

As already noted, it has been suggested by artist Beth Stuart that painting is burdened by its own history. The multitude of motivations, intentions, histories and styles present in the field can be incredibly daunting. The “death of painting” has routinely been declared in contemporary discourse, only to be quickly resurrected by another critic. Every identifiable trend seemingly becomes prefaced with neo- or post-, requiring knowledge of past movements to investigate current ones. This can make the discourse surrounding contemporary painting practices murky.

The flipside is the rich and diverse history upon which to draw, be influenced and respond to. Carroll Dunham, in conversation with Chuck Close at the Museum of Modern Art, talked about how he was drawn to the multitude of painting histories. As a young painter, he felt he could jump right into this ongoing conversation and adopt the historical vocabularies in his own work (Dunham 2007). This observation inspires me to illustrate a selection of moments from the recent history of paintings, which have influenced and helped to establish my identity as a painter, as well as my working methodologies.

SELECTED PAINTING IN THE 20TH CENTURY

I am deeply influenced by Robert Rauschenberg's painted assemblages. These works entered my conscience just as I was beginning to paint, instilling in me the idea that a painting could be made of anything—a welcome idea to a young artist balancing art school and an interest in graffiti. Rauschenberg's building works with found objects, printed materials, and multiple surfaces has influenced my collage practice. Despite the appearance that his wild assemblages are made indiscriminately from everything and anything, much of his work was crafted using a limited palette. I see similarities between Rauschenberg's practice and my own, in that our work is often the result of building, rather than painting.

Jean-Michel Basquiat is another important influence of mine. I often felt limited by graffiti art, which I see to be a culture informed by a spirit of rebellion, and simultaneously obsessed with conforming to its own cultural borders. Basquiat's work under the pseudonym "SAMO" defied this. He broke with the traditional "wild style" lettering he was surrounded by in 1970/1980s New York City. He spoke about his painting practice in a similar way to Richter's proposition that painting exists outside of spoken language and cannot be adequately articulated through the written or verbal (add footnote to see quote in introduction). Basquiat's background and motivations differ from those of Richter, but the idea of painting being its own language is something that links them.

Williem de Kooning has also influenced my work. Listening to a talk given on his work at The National Gallery of Art (USA) by Richard Shiff, I was exposed to a part of his practice that is not unlike mine. De Kooning would paint on vellum papers and transfer these paintings to new paintings, cropping them, collaging them and repurposing them. He generated a self-archive to pull from and re use in new compositions. De Kooning's clear positioning of himself is also influential to my practice. He is regarded as a leading Abstract Expressionist; however, he worked in a number of evolving styles and rejected any label more explicit than simply "painter" (Shiff, 1994). As my works are built through unconventional means, using non-traditional media like spray paint, it can be unclear whether they are abstract or representational, paintings or collages. I propose that they are simply paintings.

Toward the end of his career, mostly as a result of physical limitations brought upon by declining health, Matisse created a body of collage works. These works differed aesthetically from his paintings, but his approach to them wasn't entirely contradictory as he referred to his collage process as "painting with scissors." (<http://www.henri-matisse.net>) This echoes my process of building paintings, rather than a traditional conception of collage building. Matisse spoke of the freedom this process granted him, after struggling with a more traditional painting process, saying "Only what I created after the illness constitutes my real self: free, liberated."(Matisse.net) The process of collage allows the freedom to play, move

and experiment. These elements are also present in the process of painting, but feel more committed due to the wet paint. Robert Motherwell, Kurt Schwitters and Pablo Picasso are also painters whose experiments or transitions into collage have informed my practice.

Gerhard Richter's *October 18, 1977* cycle (1988) translated archival documentation into a painted medium. Through this translation from one medium to another, we witnessed a distortion or loss of information. My work is informed by this example of translation through documentation—the relationship between an original and a reproduced image—a process Richter inverted in *October*.

Richter also often works in pure abstraction, exploring the interactions and capabilities of the medium by moving paint around the canvas. The fluidity of his approach to painting is of particular interest to me, as he continues to work through all of these styles today.

CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN PAINTING PRACTICES

There are a wide variety of sub-categories within painting. Subject, intention, and motivation are widely varied. I have stated that my works oscillate between representation and abstraction, but this is still very broad language. I wish to narrow down the position of my paintings and to describe the contemporary artists and movements, specifically within Canada, I believe my

work is in conversation with.

As a research method, and in an attempt to situate myself in dialogue with other artists and practices, I try to visit as many exhibitions as possible. I'm constantly scouring relevant websites and blogs to take in as many images of paintings as I can (no doubt this motivates me to create work that can function as an image, and references its own reproduction). However, seeing works of art in person is a singular experience. I have found myself particularly drawn to the works of emerging and mid-career artists, as I find myself to be most in conversation with the practices of my peers and contemporaries. One reason for this affinity could be that we are new to professional practice and are still discovering the painting process, in a physical, material, as well as a theoretical sense.

My research into the Canadian art scene has led me to conclude that the RBC Painting Competition has been instrumental in shaping the landscape of contemporary Canadian painting for the past 15 years (this is of course debatable). Each year this competition highlights the best emerging Canadian painters. Looking through recent finalists I am able to identify a number of artists whose practices I relate to. The finalists are always diverse in their subject matter and process, which is why I am drawn to following the results of this competition. I am interested in all the languages of contemporary painting as I construct work that attempts to engage and often mimic other painted typologies. I am studying these works to explore the painted dialogues. An interesting example of a

technique I found to be similar to my own is that of Toronto-based artist Sarah Cale (2008, 2010 finalist) All of Cale's painting is done on disposable material, and then transferred to the final support. She lays her acrylic marks down on plastic sheets, peels them off and then collages the resulting forms onto wood, canvas, or linen supports.

Like my process, Cale resulting forms onto wood, canvas, or linen supports. support. She lays heJulie B proce calls a isless, Cale resulting forms onto wood,"caBcalls 2013). Cale).a isless, Cale resulting forms onto wood, canvas, or linen supports. support. She lays her acrylic marks down on plastic sheets, peels them off mporary Canadian painting for the past 15 years (this is of course deBCale). observes, less, Cale resulms and engages the viewervas, or linen ing it to detect the disparity, to perceive the trompe-le-lhe trompe-l collage"coBobserv 2013). Similarly, I am building forms and compositions from painted material explorations, while leaving the individual pieces visible. I desire a tension in my work between the forms, their parts, and the support. In this way I relate to Caleil material process.

Vanessa Maltese, an RBC Painting Prize winner (2012), practices painting as well as sculpture, each informing the other. I see this as similar to the ways in which my painting and exhibition planning/installing practices go hand in hand. Erin Stump describes how Maltese's "sculptures and paintings engage with formal elements, by acknowledging and toying with the boundaries of the frame

and the architecture of the gallery”allery Maltese, an RBC Painting Prize winner (2012), practices. My paintings explore both real and imagined exhibition spaces. The forms in each work test the boundaries of their support, so as to draw attention to those boundaries and transgress them, thus make a further connection with the architecture of the exhibition space. In much the same way that Maltese explores potential space and form in sculpture through the pictorial frame of painting, I use my painting to explore potential relationships within a space between objects, audiences, and the artist. Other similarities can be observed in our shared interest in perspective and patterning.

Though Toronto’s Scott Everingham’s (RBC finalist 2009, 2010, 2013) work differs from my own in appearance more so than the above mentioned artists, I believe that our methodologies are quite similar. Intuition and spontaneity are key components to a painting practice. Everingham’s abstracts are composed of a handful of decisive and confident strokes made across a gradient space. He explains his motivation for working quickly, capturing these actions and moments, often finishing a painting in a single sitting: “I’m interested in having this moment that’s very immediate. It’s just a sliver of time. I feel like the brushstrokes are living” (<http://www.studio-beat.com/artists/scott-everingham-painter/>).

I often describe the pieces I make as “moments,” because I am capturing and

presenting quick actions that take place in the studio. The paint records a gesture or movement. My spray-painted vellum sheets are moments that attempt to record the history of the material as it is manipulated. I do not execute these marks immediately onto the canvas like Everingham does. Instead, I make a large variety of “moments” and then bring a selection into a painting. Similar to me, Everingham creates more paintings than he needs, embracing failure and exploring the materials. “I don’t always succeed,” he observes, “There’s some works that I’ll never show because I approached them mentally as warm-up pieces. You make those, and then bigger things happen” (<http://www.studio-beat.com/artists/scott-everingham-painter/>). Through a process of trial and error, Everingham can find the successful moments or actions. These quick strokes and marks are a painted vocabulary that he brings together in planes where the “viewers are surrounded—or directly involved in—the language of paint” (<http://generalhardware.ca/scott-everingham/>). Another shared interest comes in our explorations of abstract paint marks as building a language or vocabulary.

Another point of interest in the Canadian painting landscape is *Painting Project: A Snapshot of Painting in Canada*. This exhibition, mounted at Galerie de l’UQAM, (May 9-July 13, 2013) sought to present “new knowledge and provide an updated view of Canadian painting as it is being practiced at the present time” (<http://www.galerie.uqam.ca>). The curators of this exhibition selected sixty artists for participation, grouping them to reflect identified movements and interests in

contemporary Canadian painting. The four categories were: Figures of Reality, Fictional Worlds, Painting as Subject, and Hybrid Practices. The last two categories present a useful frame to discuss my practice.

Hybrid Practices are defined within this exhibition as those "in which painting develops through contact with other artistic disciplines"

(<http://www.galerie.uqam.ca>). I see my work as a hybrid practice because of its connection to collage, installation, and sculpture. The influence of curatorial thought and production in my final compositions and the ways in which I adopt different roles in my practice (painter, planner, collector, curator) also suggests a hybrid—or interdisciplinary—practice

From this group, I see a connection with the work of Wil Murray. He creates unconventional and wild painted collages, marrying a collection of varied marks, patterns, and images into a chaotic balance. His work (unlike my paintings, which only suggest it) breaks past the rectangular support, jutting out, hanging down, and building up. In *Canadian Art*, John Bentley Mays called his work "extreme painting"(Mays 2010). A stretcher or board will often appear in Murray's works, referencing this traditional support left behind. His brush strokes are often outlined in a complimentary colour, highlighting the action that created them, therefore teasing apart the distinct pieces that make up the whole.

The pieces making up these works are also from a collection. The Curator of the exhibition, Julie Bélisle comments, "Murray assembles disparate elements from among the objects amassed in his studio". Much like my own, his works are built rather than painted. Similarities can also be drawn from the exhibition's observation that Murray's "resulting works are three-dimensional collages, in which even the support becomes a component of the composition" (Bélisle 2013). My works are very flat, but appear to have depth, space, and volume. In my work, the multiple frames within the frame and play on the boundary of the physical support suggest that components are extending past that support. My paintings are also executed on a slim, 3/4" panel painted white to match the wall on which it hangs, to merge the work with the gallery space. In Murray's work the support is part of the composition, in mine, the physical exhibition space becomes part of it as well. There is also a connection between Murray's work and that of the 'anything and everything goes' methodology that Rauschenberg seemingly applied to his assemblages.

My work is also an investigation of practice and process of painting. I am interested in mark-making vocabularies and the languages of paintings. Because of this, I identify with the Painting as Subject group from *The Painting Project*, who Julie Bélisle defines as "where, by means of quotation, gesture or abstraction, the 'how' of painting becomes the subject matter." (Bélisle 2013). My work draws from the varied marks and languages of painting and attempts to

unpack and represent this process. Below, I discuss a selection of artists in the Painting as Subject group, with whose work I believe my own is connected.

I have been interested in the work of Anthony Burnham since viewing his 2011 exhibition *Even Space Does Not Repeat* at the Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff, Alberta). I am particularly drawn to Burnham's exploration of the relationships between the object and the image, as well as how this relationship shifts through layers of mechanical reproduction. His work is extremely self-referential in that he often represents his own paintings and their creation in his images. He paints from scenes of his own creation, such as maquettes, drawings, photographs and even his own painting supplies. As his drawings, photographs and sculptures inform his painted images, he seeks to better understand objects by representing them in multiple media and through layers of representation. These drawings, maquettes, and photographs become a collection or archive that he draws from and reinterprets. He uses these multiple media as a lens to "reexamine the practice of painting." (Bélisle 2013) The display of Burnham's work is also interesting. He will show some works, for instance *Not Yet Titled* (2010) on a wooden block and leaning against a wall, as if to be hung later. Even the title of this piece, something often left until the very end of the process, suggests something incomplete or in transition. The image, display, and title of this work all function together coherently. Burnham has also presented works depicting the installation and exhibition of other works, in a sense breaking the fourth wall by showing

installation and exhibition practices that not usually displayed to the public. This is a conversation I wish to engage with and continue in my work.

I want to show the process of painting in my work. I am using the modes of exhibition and display to present an exploratory studio painting process. This methodology is born out of my belief that the process of creating a work or an exhibition is as important and interesting as the final product. In this sense, I appreciate the work of Saskatoon-based Tammi Campbell. Campbell's works act like studies in form, line, and value but also hard-edged modernist abstraction. They appear incomplete, masking tape still needing to be peeled off or awaiting another stroke of paint. Actually, the tape is created entirely from acrylic paint using a *trompe l'oeil* illusion. The tape "highlights the production process and challenges the viewer's power of observation" (Bélisle 2013). By presenting a work that appears to be incomplete, yet is meticulously crafted, Campbell challenges our expectations of what an artwork should be. The illusion of masking tape is one of the many tools she uses to "engage in an open conversation with Modernism" (Bélisle 2013) and hard edge abstraction practices. Like Anthony Burnham, Campbell breaks with the conventional modes of painting display. For instance, works from the series *Studies* (2011) are shown flat and unframed on a wooden worktable, much as they would appear in the artist's working studio.

As an interdisciplinary artist, working in painting, sculpture, and collage, and strongly influenced by curatorial and musicological methodologies, I feel that I

am in close dialogue with these Canadian painters. My main point of reference in the United States is the contemporary abstraction movement called the New Casualists. Sharon L. Butler originally coined this term in discussing a group of young painter's living and exhibiting in Brooklyn (Butler, 2011). While subject matter and technique links my work to many of the artists above, I align myself more explicitly with the motivations, intent and expectations of the New Casualists. I find a resonance with their theories and attitudes towards the practice of painting. I will discuss this group further in the literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While researching ways to better define my process, I encountered Sharon L. Butler's essay on the art blog, Brooklyn Rail, "New Casualists." It was affirming to find a group of artists who appear to share my intentions and motivations. In the essay Butler identified a group of young painters, primarily based out of Brooklyn, united and categorized by their use of "new modes of abstraction" (Butler 2012). Rather than be defined by a particular style or subject matter, the movement seems to coalesce around attitude towards contemporary painting, many of which I can relate to. Butler describes the work of New Casualists as non-linear, without resolution, and in possession of a "passive aggressive incompleteness" (Butler 2012). I work without a specific outcome in mind and only come to my final compositions through exploration and play. The configuring of each element and the composition is spontaneous.

Butler discusses the artists' play with technique, paint application, and a fluidity of style. I often attempt to engage with the larger history of painting by adopting recognizable styles, techniques, and applications. According to Butler, many young painters borrow style and technique from previous generations because, simply, we can. These techniques and styles are borrowed but repurposed "by reassessing basic elements like color, composition, and balance, based on 1920s-vintage Bauhaus principles taught in every 2-D foundations course, the new painters are exploring uncharted territory. They are looking for unexpected outcomes rather than handsome results" (Butler, 2013). In my own work, the process of moving around unfixed painted pieces often does just that. Butler characterizes the New Casualists' playfulness and lack of intended outcome not as unserious, but as an important working methodology. Working without a specific goal or intention has led to more honest and successful results in my own works thus far.

The collected edition of Gerhard Richter's *Writings 1961-2007* provides first hand accounts of an artist's practice over a decades-long career. This collection of essays, statements, interviews, quotations, personal notes and exhibition writing presents a history of Gerhard Richter's views on his studio practice and approach to painting. His statements are of great influence in my thinking towards my own practice and theory underlying this thesis paper.

A number of exhibition catalogues and included essays have helped to inform my practice. UQAM's catalogue for their Painting Project exhibition (2013) contained essays that helped me to better understand the current painting trends. Naomi Potter and Diana Nemiroff's essays in the catalogue for Anthony Burnham's *Even Space Does Not Repeat* (2011) have made me think about the relationship between painting and other images as well as painting as a gesture (both physical and conceptual).

The process of arranging my forms across the painting support is influenced by curatorial intelligence, a spatial awareness, and eye for placement. Working through the variables ways in which these forms can interact is also influenced by the writing of Josef Albers. Albers used practical experience and trial and error to explore, study, and teach colour. He is adamant in his claims that a hands on approach is the best way to learn or search, and promotes the "recognition that no theory of composition by itself leads to the production of music, or of art" (Albers 1975, 2). His book "does not follow an academic conception of "theory and practice" (Albers 1975, 2). Instead it "reverses this order and places practice before theory" (Albers 1975, 2). This method of exploring possibilities and interactions through moving paper around is one that I employ in the creation of my paintings. Rather than immediately applying paint to a support, I move painted parts around, exploring their relationship to neighbouring pieces. The perception of a colour changes in relation to what other colours it is paired with,

much like the reading of an artwork can change based on its display context. It is impossible to see a single element by itself and not interacting with its surroundings.

Through a statement made by Albers on discrepancy between what is physically present and what we see, I wonder more about the relationship between object and image, and what is real. “And experience teaches that in visual perception there is a discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect. What counts here -first and last- is not so-called knowledge of so-called facts, but vision- seeing” (Albers 1975, 2). I wanted to explore this discrepancy more in my research and studio practice.

I am interested in the contemporary condition of viewing art whereby we do not always view exhibitions or artwork in person. When I shifted to working within a strict black and white palette, my works began to resemble old black and white images. I pushed this resemblance further by trying to make paintings that referenced documentation. As such, I am exploring the relationship between object and image; the documentation of an exhibition versus the exhibition itself and what is lost or gained in these experiences. My work documents unseen processes that occur in the in between space of studio and exhibition. It is an image or representation of this built space but is also a unique and original artwork.

Walter Benjamin, in “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, discusses the relationship between the original and the image. He suggests that the original has an “aura”—something that is not present in the image of the object. This makes visual reproductions lack authenticity. According to Benjamin, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 1968, 220). My works contain fictional art objects in imagined spaces. They often appear to be documentation of exhibitions that never really took place in physical space, and thus never possessed Benjamin’s conception of authenticity. However, I propose that the painting of a documentary image picturing a work of art that doesn’t exist does possess authenticity. In a world where we consume art mainly second-hand, my proposal challenges the location of “aura.” I want my paintings to be successfully experienced in person and in reproduction.

How I am framing or viewing my own work in the larger context has been important to think about as my research has moved forward and the work evolved. In 2008, Jan Verwoert published, “Why Are Conceptual Artists Painting Again? Because They Think It's a Good Idea”. This crucial text looks at examining an art practice in two different ways, one that is medium specific and one that is rooted in concept. In making art in a post modern and post conceptual world, does materiality make sense? I wrestle with the idea often of whether my interest in the

curatorial or whether my interest in paint as a material is what is driving my practice. With all of the history, motivations and reasoning behind either one presented here, I do not believe it to be necessary to choose a side. In the series of talks Verwoert conducted on this essay, he unpacks an idea he presented about artists playing a game in order to win, much like chess. He talks of conceptual artists strategizing their 'moves' to win the game and make a successful work. (Verwoert, 2010) These works are an idea, often a one liner. The way in which these formulaic artworks are crafted is something I wish to avoid.

Following the New Museum conference organized by Independent Curators International (ICI), critic, curator, historian and theorist Terry Smith published a collection of five essays that "Comprehensively explore what is distinctive about contemporary curatorial thought" (Smith, 2012). They set out to explore what makes the methodology and intellectual processes of contemporary art curators unique from other creative professions such as historian, critic or director. In Smith's opening essay "What is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?" he discusses the criteria that makes the work of the curator what it is. It is here that I find my definition of what makes a curator a curator, and from that definition what I am adopting in my own practice. He provides some ideas on curatorial thinking, how that thinking is learned and how it is performed.

The essay, "Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists" is of particular interest to me. Here, Smith discusses the history of curators acting as artists, artists as curators,

and each adopting the various positions in between. There is long a history of the collapsing and intertwining of these two roles, and a number of artists whose hybrid practices could be seen to exist in this dualistic space. I do not wish to explicitly align myself with these practices, but to note certain affinities.

As I have noted previously, I am not a curator, but an artist whose practice adopts curatorial thought. This is an important distinction, which Smith mathematically represents by stating “a mistake in logic is being made when acting like x is (mis) understood as being x ” (Smith 2012, 136). He gives some troubling examples of people stating they are curators for arranging a website, movie night, retail store or party. Nonetheless, curatorial thought does occur in Smith’s conception: “if is the exercise of curatorial thought within the practical exigencies of making an exhibition, then whenever anyone does this, they are curating-artists included” (Smith 2012, 136). Most artists play a role in deciding the placement of their own works within a display. However, this does not mean that they become a curator. I apply this thought and logic to each of my pieces within the studio rather than in the context of a gallery or exhibition.

Exploring the relationship between curator, artist, and space leads me to question how all of these elements come together to make an exhibition. Indeed, an even more difficult question (and the title of Paula Marincola’s anthology) is “What Makes a Great Exhibition?”. Robert Storr wrote “Show and Tell”, an essay in the

anthology. I agree with Storr's opinion about how art should be viewed: rather than considering its history and theoretical position, receiving a work visually is the most important step towards understanding it. In Storr's words: "The primary means for 'explaining' an artist's work is let it reveal itself. Showing is telling" (Storr 2006, 23). Similarly, I build works that reveal themselves, encouraging the viewer to unpack further meaning by exploring visually. The larger context of an exhibition sets up an environment in which these interactions and explorations are possible.

Storr uses an analogy to discuss how the gallery functions as a conversation:

Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation. Galleries are paragraphs, the walls and formal subdivisions of the floors are sentences, clusters of works are the clauses, and individual works, in varying degrees, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and often as more than one of these functions according to their context. (Storr 2006, 23)

This passage echoes my thoughts on using a curatorial or museological approach in order to translate these languages of abstract painting. If we can look at building an exhibition as Storr proposes, I believe that we could build a painting in the same fashion.

I also wish to apply Storr's thoughts regarding the function of an exhibition to my individual works. I see these works as conversations or as facilitators for further discussion. I am proposing translating these paintings through the modes of

presentation or display. These modes present ways they *could* be read, but not only one absolute translation. “A good exhibition is never the last word on its subject,” writes Storr. “Instead it should be an intelligently conceived and scrupulously realized interpretation of the works selected.... In short, good exhibitions have a definite, but not definitive, point of view that invites serious analysis and critique, not only of the art but also of the particular weights and measures used in its evaluation by the exhibition maker”(Storr 2006, 20). I want my work to be open to interpretation. I am not proposing any definitive or absolute answers to my research questions, but adopting exhibition planning methods as a tool to do so.

Jon Wood’s essay “The Studio in the Gallery?” gives some historical examples of ways in which the studio and gallery have come together. In it, Wood provides examples of the studio being literally uprooted and re-installed in a gallery. For instance, such as has been done with Francis Bacon’s workspace. Wood also explores exhibitions transform a gallery into a studio space, such as Mike Nelson’s *In Memory of HP Lovecraft* (1999) where all the work is executed within the gallery and becomes connected to it⁸. I believe that this logic could be extended to most substantial exhibitions, as many exhibitions shift, change, and

⁸ The gallery space of Collective Gallery (Edinburgh, Scotland) was damaged and destroyed by the artist. Holes and lacerations marked the walls, often right down to the framework. The debris strewn about from the attack was left scattered around the space.

are reimagined during the process of installation.

I am particularly interested in Wood's thoughts regarding the studio—wherever that physical space may be. He begins the essay by explaining what he perceives to be some functions of the studio, positioning it as, “a complex site of convergence and dispersal for people, ideas and things. About people as much as places, and about the changing relationships between artist, art object and environment” (Wood 2005, 160). The studio is a place that reveals “the intellectual history of artist's identity” and because of this fact...It is the studio's status and function as an exhibition space in its own right” (Wood 2005, 159). I believe the link that the studio can create between the object, environment, artist, and gallery further supports this idea of an interconnected ecology. Wood proposes that the studio is a place of journey, both in a theoretical and physical sense (Wood 2005, 160). The work changes, grows, and progress concurrently with the artists thinking. The studio journey is one of research through practice.

Continuing my readings into the gallery and museum space, I read “Spatial Culture, Way Finding, and the Educational Message: The impact of layout on the social and educational experiences of visitors to museums and galleries” by Sophia Psarra. This essay studies how museum layouts and architecture in art institutions have “the power of space to influence the visitors' experience in museums and galleries.”(Psarra 2005, 78) I found the case studies presented by

Psarra to be a useful tool in my touring strategies, as an arts educator. It was also useful to understand viewing and perception patterns, as I am often constructing imagined exhibition spaces in my work and I am interested in how they relate to real exhibition spaces.

Psarra notes that there is a “relationship between the architecture and the ways in which visitors circulate, locate the collections and grasp the exhibition content. Apart from the strength of individual displays in influencing the pattern of the visit, spatial organization has a strong role to play.”(Psarra 2005, 82) I refer to this statement when I am arranging the individual pieces within each of my composition, as well as when I develop a series of works and am considering what patterns will shape the audience’s reception of the work as a whole. I’m interested in creating moments of reflection and conversation. Psarra’s study provides useful insight into how I can better facilitate these experiences through visual rhythms and spatial layouts.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

HISTORY OF RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS

This project is a culmination of past influences and methodologies. My simultaneous studio practices have provided me with creative freedom and flexibility, and given me the opportunity to build a diverse skill set. Unfortunately, at times I felt that my work lacked focus and identity. In the past, I have employed a wide variety of tools, applications and surfaces (similar to the techniques present in my collage pieces). My painting process used to be reactionary, each mark responding to the previous one in an attempt to complement, contrast or balance the entire surface of the painting. This resulted in a constant tension that manifested as a feeling of struggle and stress that I wasn't particularly fond of. Eventually, I came to realize that there were parts of this process—small actions and gestures—that I was particularly drawn to. I decided to make work that focused on these elements.

Using this new process, I attempted to paint without considering the final product. Unlike my previous strategies, I did not rely on intention, planning, formal or abstract representation. I felt a work was complete when all of the white gesso underneath was covered. In this way, I filled the picture plane but did not overwork its surface. At this point, I loaded a brush with a neutral grey and circled the parts of the painting I found to be most the successful. I saw this stage of the

process more as editing than as painting. Once all the successful moments were highlighted, I used the same grey, applied opaquely, to completely cover all of the non-circled areas. The circled moments became both painted objects resting on a surface and also windows into that surface showing the actions hidden beneath.

A useful assignment in Paulette Phillips' studio seminar instructed the class to create a work driven by the idea of "remix." For me, this was an opportunity to further explore methodologies of trial and error, play, editing, and selection. I approached the word "remix" from the perspective of hip hop music, which uses sampling, rearranging, adding, and reorganizing to make a song that is recognizable at moments but ultimately unique. The idea of moving parts or samples⁹ around was most important. Using archival photo vinyl leftover from an installation job... as my painting surface, I painted a large variety of shapes, colours, and patterns to cut up and collage. This process allowed me to move, overlap, explore, and rearrange visual elements in ways that I couldn't when working applying wet paint directly to a support. This way of working felt less committal to me. It allowed for experimentation and the ability to explore all potential variables and compositions. As I was painting on a disposable surface, I could make more and therefore have more material to work with. The idea of building of a collection to pull from and work with was born here and immediately informed my current body of work. I continued to work through this

⁹ When I say "samples" in painting I am thinking about historical painting styles and using them to influence some of my marks.

process and explore the materials in new ways.

PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

Practice-based research is my most significant methodology. I learn through doing, making, and exploring. My research occurs when I am making, drawing, and painting. Beth Stuart called painting a “thinking space” (Stuart 2013) during a lecture on contemporary Canadian painting. I would suggest that painting could also be a research space. I paint an excessive amount of material, generating more than I could possibly use. This is partly to create a collection from which I can pull in the building of my works. This technique is also a learning tool. I am improving with each studio expedition or collection-generating phase I conduct. I repeat techniques and develop new ones, exploring what paint can do, and what applications, techniques, textures, and processes I can utilize. These extensive studio investigations into painting uncover the possibilities of the medium and how I can control it. Each successful work is the result of many “failed” projects and investigations in the studio. I find trial and error to be a useful methodology and it is important not to fear failure in this process. If I make ten works and only one is successful, the process has ultimately been worth it. I reached this way of working as a result of time in this interdisciplinary program.

RULES

Discovering this direct working methodology has not slowed down my practice-based research. Material investigations, trial and error, and play are still my studio mantras. However, they now exist within certain parameters. The more I worked in the palette, the more I thought about the implications and what this could be referencing. This thinking led to a whole other topic in the work that I explore and expand further on. I also attempt to limit building my compositions from the collection I have generated. I do not create specific pieces or objects for specific works. This keeps the first stage of painting production free from planning or too much strategy. It is about spontaneity and play.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Following the generating of all this material is a self-reflective stage. I am examining these marks and beginning to think how they will come together or what forms they will take. I am learning from the examining of these marks what works and what does not, what I am drawn to. Through repetition I am improving in my painting techniques and discovering new techniques branching out from old learned ones. Examining these parts informs how I will proceed, what more I need to make and how to improve the previous mark making process the next time around.

TRIAL AND ERROR, PLAY

My practice-based research extends to the exploration of interactions between the shapes and pieces. Much like Albers taught students to do with colour, I am working through my own potential interactions by researching a multitude of possible compositions. I test all the available possibilities, working through ones that do not work to discover those that do. Because of my paintings are built through collage, each work goes through a series of trail and error periods not possible when painting immediately onto a support. I find this process similar to design and illustration work in Photoshop; swapping layer orders, moving parts around, changing fonts, adding, and subtracting without consequence. I must also acknowledge the potential influence of digital technologies on this material process. I have been using Photoshop longer than I have been painting.

DIRECT OBSERVATION RESEARCH OF GALLERY PRACTICE

Curation and museum practices have shifted from being an influence on my work to becoming a central interest. This professional practice has informed my studio practice in different ways and at varying degrees over recent years. What has functioned as employment or professional opportunity has also functioned as first-hand account research into gallery practice. I would like to briefly outline my experience in gallery work and how this has shaped my artistic

practice.

During my undergraduate degree I completed a curatorial internship at the Art Gallery of Windsor. For the following year I programmed and facilitated all exhibitions at The University of Windsor Student Gallery. These experiences sparked my interest in the other side of art-making: exhibiting, something previously unknown to me. I began to recognize all the moving parts that come together in an arts ecology and this recognition informed my practice. I began to make better decisions when making my work, as I possessed this new knowledge of how it would be presented and viewed.

My most significant learning experience occurred while participating in the Work-Study Program at the Banff Centre, where I held the position of Preparatory Work-Study in the Walter Phillips Gallery. Working alongside a mentor, Head Preparator Mimmo Miaolo, and a small gallery team, we planned and installed exhibitions by international contemporary artists while also caring for a large permanent collection. The installations were complex beyond merely mounting a piece in a room. We were working to creating something by building elements to add to the artwork, configuring the architecture of the gallery space to suit the work, working collaboratively with artists to present the finished artwork in an exhibition. Here, I discovered that often an artwork is not fully realized or activated until it becomes part of the exhibition. As my spatial awareness grew, I began to think of every artwork I made in relation to a space, how that space

complemented the work or could add meaning.

I was curious as to how artwork, artists, and installations come together. I was interested in the decisions that were made to create exhibitions and to facilitate subsequent conversation and reflection. I became interested in exploring curating—not necessarily in becoming a curator myself—studying the practice in the hopes of better understanding how all these parts came together. I was aware of my own thought process as an artist, but what was curatorial thought or curatorial intelligence? While also exploring some reading on these concepts, I was able to get first-hand experience mounting exhibitions curated by Naomi Potter, Jesse McKee, and Kitty Scott.

This growing interest in curatorial practice, as well as my experience in installation and exhibition planning, began to influence how I made work. I was unable to make a work without envisioning it in a space, considering how that space would inform the work, and how the work would be situated within that space. I attempted to think like a curator in terms of about how my works interacted together within a space to generate a dialogue. Now, I apply that same thought process to each individual work. I arrange forms pulled from a self-generated collection around the space or ground I have designed for these objects to inhabit. I treat each painting as a micro-exhibition; considering how artwork and space interact with each other, how this process is a creative collaboration, and how they can affect meaning within each other.

Curatorial and exhibition-making thought shifted from an underlying influence to motivating factor, informing the second phase of my production much more than my role as an artist. Now, I am bringing them even closer together, to where they directly confront each other. From here I can draw conclusions about how these roles function simultaneously within both my practice and the larger ecology of the art world. Curatorial methodology and installation practices informed how I made work and became tools to examine the practice of painting.

During this last year of study at OCADU, I have continued to work on exhibitions, though in a limited capacity compared to my time at The Banff Centre. An important aspect of my exhibition work is assisting artist Duane Linklater on projects and shows. Linklater's practice and his thoughts on art and exhibition-making are very different to mine. However, working with him has been thought provoking and has challenged me take greater risks in my own practice. My time with Linklater has informed future projects.

EXHIBITION VIEWING AND ENGAGING AUDIENCES

I am fortunate to have been in positions where I have been able to view and interact with so much artwork. I continue to work in the galleries through projects with Linklater and others, and I am currently a Gallery Attendant at The

Power Plant and Instructor at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Studying objects and images within these contexts has an obvious influence on my work. By attending as many exhibitions as possible, I am able to better understand preoccupations and conversations within contemporary art. My work enters into a dialogue with both abstract painting and exhibition practices. Visiting exhibitions, as well as associated lectures and public programs, serve as research trips to explore those dialogues. At both the Power Plant and the Art Gallery of Ontario, I lead conversational-style tours of the galleries. In this role I am able to engage with not only the public, but with artists, curators, and installation staff. This provides me with a nuanced perspective of work or exhibition. Engaging people at different levels, by both working in and participating in a larger arts community, has helped to shape the way I think about the arts ecology and how all of these factors influence one another.

APPLICATION OF METHODOLOGIES

The pieces are constructed through a two-phase working methodology: one of production and one of strategic planning and deployment. The production phase involves painting and extensive studio-based investigations. When painting, I enter a state of flow¹⁰, learning from each action, building a collection by

¹⁰ Flow is a learning strategy developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Ph.D. “The flow experience is when a person is completely involved in what he or she is

following intuition and responding to spontaneous marks. The successes and surprises motivate this investigation. Though, my work drifts between representation and abstraction, the painting stage is entirely abstract. My work is reflective of this continuous exploration and learning process. I freely paint pieces to later be cut, collaged, and built into final works. No individual stroke, piece, or sheet is created with the intended of affixing it to a specific support or for a specific composition. These elements simply to enter a collection to subsequently be pulled out and arranged in a conversation.

I am granted more freedom by painting on a more disposable surface than a standard support such as canvas/linen on stretcher or wood panel. Painting on sheets of Mylar, vellum and vinyl feels non-committal, so I feel that I can take risks and try new techniques. These painted moments exist outside of a “painting” (noun) and are just snapshots of “painting” (verb). They are spontaneous strokes, actions, or gestures recorded in paint. I execute marks in smooth strokes, quick and messy spray paint lines, detailed patterns, soft blends, and choppy zigzags. Then, once I have finished painting, I consider how and why they fit together.

doing, when the concentration is very high, when the person knows moment by moment what the next steps should be... And you get feedback to what you're doing.....So there's concentration, clear goals, feedback, there is the feeling that what you can do is more or less in balance with what needs to be done, that is, challenges and skills are pretty much in balance.”
(<http://www.edutopia.org/mihaly-csikszentmihalyi-motivating-people-learn>)

The self-reflective step (examining my own paintings not as complete images but as actions) allows me to discover what works and what does not. I can make sense of seemingly disparate vocabularies within my own painting practice. Much reflection and self-learning takes place in this stage. I come back to Beth Stuart, a painter and inter disciplinary artist, who positions painting as a “thinking space.” This idea is echoed by Richter, when he said more directly “painting is another form of thinking” (Richter 2009). Working in collage, particularly the editing and selecting, allows me to examine what makes a painting work. Consequently, I feel that I am bringing the most successful moments of my studio practice together to build a composition. I see the creation of a great painting as a nearly impossible challenge. By selecting the most successful moments of a larger painting project, I am attempting to “build” a great painting.

I intuitively cut out pieces I deem successful from much larger sheets, collecting details and moments in the painting I’m drawn to. No specific agenda is set when selecting and I do not begin a production stage with a particular finished image in mind. I’m acquiring pieces for a collection that may or may not be pulled together to form a composition in the future. I am playing the role of the collecting institution. Shapes that appear somewhere between organic and geometric are pulled out and set aside. These painted shapes are then organized, entering a collection. The collection is housed in a series of binders or bags. They are organized by technique, texture and whatever else sets it apart from the one

before. This is also a reference to an original function of the curator, a collection caretaker (Smith 2012, 19). I am building, managing and working from a collection I have built and maintain.

The strategic planning begins in the second phase of my working methodology. This stage is informed by my first-hand investigations into exhibition planning, as well as my research into curatorial practice. At this point I am entirely removed from the action and thought patterns of painting and am employing spatial, planning, and design knowledge to arrange pieces into a specific dialogue. I begin this stage by pulling the painted pieces from my collection, moving them around, overlapping them in different ways, alternating arrangements and compositions to facilitate new discoveries.

My exploration of how the pieces come together is inspired by Josef Albers' *Interaction of Color* exercises. The pieces are slid across a ready surface of the painting support. I often lay out a simple ground (a larger background collage sheet) to confine the composition or to provide these forms with a base to interact with. The relationship between ground and form and the relationship between object and gallery are not unlike one another. I compare this process to planning an exhibition; pulling works from the vault or a crate, moving them around the gallery to play with space, visual rhythms, and physical and intellectual navigation. I alter both the forms and the ground to better suit one another. An object may be trimmed or turned to better rest within the confines of the support,

and a background may be altered to suggest an architectural feature for the form to rest against. Again, this technique is inspired by the way an artist would tailor a work to fit a specific exhibition space, or even create a site-specific work. It is also inspired by the architectural alterations an institution would undertake to accommodate work, such as building or demolishing walls, creating rooms, altering paint and lighting.

Interactions between shapes in my work reflect familiar gallery or studio scenes, but are arrived at spontaneously, without a specific outcome in mind. I am looking for “unpredictable, playful encounters” (Butler 2012) that cannot come about through rigorous planning. The work dictates the layout, much like the work in a group show or collection exhibition may dictate a floor plan. Once the shapes have been moved around and the possibilities of their interactions exhausted, I photograph the best composition. Then I build the image from using this photograph for reference as I apply each piece to the support, cutting and trimming where necessary to accommodate the next, and working my way up. I see this stage of my process to be aligned with exhibition planning, preparatory work, and building or sculpture, rather than painting or collage.

DATA COLLECTION AND RECORDING

Drawing has always run concurrently to my painting practice. My pen, ink, graphite, and coloured pencil drawings are similar in appearance to my

painted and collaged works. They retain the same black and white palette and are made up of a number of varied patterns and marks, resembling the variety of a collage piece. Though the compositions are also similar, my drawings are not intended to act as studies towards my paintings. I am not creating rough sketches of “finished” works—they are imagined possibilities for what my paintings *could* be. Much like my painting practice, I make a great number of drawings (over 100 this academic year) to generate ideas. I imagine my painted forms moving about painted grounds and use drawings to record all the potential interactions and compositions. The bulk of these drawings are done in galleries, either at the Art Gallery of Ontario or The Power Plant. I borrow elements of their architecture or exhibitions and insert these components into my drawings alongside my own imagined forms. I also draw from the photographs I take during installation and later reimagine the scene, draw it in my own way. Eventually I may bring these elements into a painting. These drawings are a visual journal clouded by layers of memory and representation. I revisit all of these drawings regularly, as they are an archive of my ideas and inspirations.

In the same way I reference my drawings, I often record painted pieces for later inspiration. I photograph the painted pieces as I generate them, as well as simple compositions or interactions of tone and pattern that I find interesting. These photographs serve as reference for how to find and pair the pieces I will eventually put into my collection.

The most important part of my data collection process is the physical painting collection I generate. As stated above, I paint a much larger amount of pieces than I could use. I go through all of these painted sheets of vinyl, Mylar and vellum and organize them. I group all of these sheets by technique or paint application. Once sorted into groups, I place them into binders so that I can access them later to build my paintings. Larger sheets that could function as backgrounds are hung on the wall. Smaller pieces are placed into Ziploc bags using the same organizational techniques.

I collect and catalogue all of the pieces I generate. I do not exclude or eliminate anything I have painted. I have even begun to collect the off cuts from finished collages. Once I have gone through a cycle of production and restocked my collection with new painting, I will revisit them with the possibilities generated through my drawings in mind. Mainly I look for a painted piece that will inspire a composition. Some painted pieces immediately stand out as a form that I could build a composition around, while other pieces may just contain a small sliver of something that will be used to complete a work. I am archiving all of them, regardless of how insignificant they may seem, on the off chance they may be of use later. I see a connection between my methodology and Micah Lexier's *Working as a Drawing* (2012). In this piece, Lexier presents selections of sketches, notes, drawings, and thumbnails from three decades. These individual pieces served as correspondence, planning, and thinking about other projects.

However, Lexier collected and archived them all and eventually present them as a series of finished drawings. This work exemplifies of how things made without the intention of being a finished or refined piece may gain new life and purpose. Lexier's practice also demonstrates the significance of an artist acting as a collector and archivist. The ways in which these pieces come together in the final paintings is a recording and presentation of data. I am using the methods of presenting a collection to show a process

CHAPTER 4: THE *NEW ARTIFACTS* PAINTINGS

THE PAINTINGS

I have explained the process that brings me to arranging the compositions and now will describe what happens once a final composition of interacting forms is reached. The investigations, research and experiments above describe my process and how I reached the current state of my practice. The following will illustrate how the works in the exhibition *New Artifacts* have been formed and are viewed.

The composition rests on a linen-wrapped panel painted titanium white, to create a neutral ground that matches the wall the final work will be mounted on. As the surface of the painting projects only three quarters of an inch off the wall, the white of the ground blends into the white of the wall to further the conceptual connection between each work and the space in which it is shown. I lay a simple background (often a sheet with a black rectangle sprayed on it) on top of the painted linen, leaving slivers of the white visible. This framing within the framing of the support mimics the edges of a stretcher, frame, or wall but is noticeably off kilter. Thus the physical edges of the painting blend into the wall and the new, shadowy, form within the frame become the perceivable edge of the canvas. Approached straight-on, they appear off balance and uneven, or as though you

were approaching them from a harsh angle. This illusion is broken when the viewer steps to the side and sees the exposed, clean, linen edges of the support. This strip of fabric lifts the work from the wall and reveals the straight, sharp, and level sides acting as another framing device.

These distorted perspectives recall the multiple ways we experience a work through documentation by referencing rough photographs, grainy slides, worn-out books, and quick scans. The way we view these documents is imperfect, quick, and filtered through another's eye. Our memory of them fades and becomes distorted as the image does. The experience of seeing my work in person is unique from seeing it in documentation. Though they reference forms of documentation and mechanical reproduction, they also contain elements that can be only seen in person. Each work rides the line between object and image, challenging Walter Benjamin's location of the aura. *Trompe l'oeil*-inspired techniques mimic printed halftones and folded pages. The black and white colour palette further references historical mechanically produced images.

Objects and images made up of individual pieces representing moments in the studio are located within this frame. Each collaged piece looks as though it could be a thing: a sculpture, a still life, studio refuse, or an architectural feature. They are perfectly flat but still recall objects. By repositioning these quickly painted pieces as objects, I am elevating their status from throwaway studio experiments to important moments. I am giving form to ephemeral painted actions. These

objects or studio artifacts reflect successful moments from the pursuit of a painting. These objects are assembled and constructed like the sculpture, installations or environments they present.

The pieces I use are flat, however the patterning and strokes within them suggest contours and contrasted tones imply form and volume. Sometimes drop-shadows or a three-dimensional edge will suggest weight. They are silhouette-esque, without actually being silhouettes. These techniques around the edges are at odds with what's happening within the objects. Representing these moments as objects worthy of presentation elevates their status. They are at once objects, images of objects, and nothing at all.

The shapes of the objects are purposefully ambiguous. They reference a number of things, but remain open so as to invite the audience to inject meaning or personal connotations. Because their origins, scale, and material are fluid, they are suggestive without being conclusive. For me, they reference different artistic movements including Modernism or Futurism, as well as classical tropes such as still-life paintings and portrait busts. Portraiture also references the figure, a common painting subject. The forms also resemble ceramic bowls or vases often pictured in still-life paintings. Another influence is New York-born wild-style graffiti lettering. This was my first experience with abstraction and informs how I approach it today. These pieces, much like the pieces shown in a museum or gallery are arranged to facilitate a conversation.

The compositions often take the structure of a collection. They are contained within a frame and organized in a seemingly random but balanced order. They suggest objects floating against a white background, as if mounted on a wall. However, their alignment against invisible vertical and horizontal lines suggests a shelf or a plinth—familiar methods of presentation and storage. As a collection of objects they act as both acquisitions stored away in the vault and selected works out on display. By picturing both without definitively labeling them I am referencing the process of planning an exhibition and suggesting that it is an artistic practice in of itself. I am displaying a representation of a hidden collection and in doing so, exhibiting that collection. I am playing with the context in which a work is shown, questioning where the art happens and how it comes to be.

The compositions often represent working spaces such as sketchbooks, studios, or installation spaces. They reflect how they have been built and speak to how an exhibition is built, thereby linking the two processes. The works occupy a space between initial conception and final exhibition, often resembling an installation or a storage space. They are the physical manifestation of arrangements, conversations, and reflections. I seek to highlight the process of making an artwork and the process of making an exhibition because I believe them to be of great importance and indelibly linked. My work attempts to occupy this middle space, rarely seen by art audiences. Though the forms or objects have left the studio (marks executed and actions recorded) they are not fully complete. The

forms are not quite right and the space they occupy seems rough, unfinished, or shifting. Illusionary techniques and experiments with perspective add to this and connect the work to the physical gallery space it occupies. There is a tension in the way the works are presented as finished (and they certainly are) while at the same time depicting an image of something that isn't completely resolved. They document a physical and metaphorical in-between space.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

This body of work has a number of implications. Many of the implications are located in the changes to my studio practice as well as the shifts in my thinking about art making. I hope, however, that the work also provokes broader discussions. I will first discuss personal implications, and then I will go on to detail the questions I hope my work elicits from its audience.

My practice has developed by greatly exploring my competing interests, simultaneous practices, and stylistic influences in this project. By amalgamating all of my learned painting techniques into one process, and then examining the resulting work using the skills I have learned from my professional gallery practice, I have achieved a state of reconciliation. The works presented here in *New Artifacts* bring all of my skills, interests, and influences into conversation with one another. By designing a mode of production with built-in rules and parameters, then and applying a specific thought process to what has been produced, I am able to make spontaneous marks, reflect on them, and bring them together in a cohesive way using a thought process that is outside that diverges from that of a painter but is still very much my own.

I imagine this body of work may have two possible readings. On one hand, this

work could be read as an investigation of painting, using curatorial and museological lenses. On the other, it could be read as an investigation of gallery practices and modes of display, with the use of painting relegated to a secondary concern (insert footnote). I appreciate both these readings and believe it reinforces my claim to the link I am exploring between the gallery and the studio, the artist and the curator. Stepping outside myself as a painter and investigating other approaches to art has helped me to understand how many elements work together in a larger system. My understanding of the curatorial has grown through my research and practical exercises, and my interest in this discipline has been reinforced. In my own practice my interest in one side over the other oscillates and believe that it only makes sense that the artworks do as well.

I believe that the building these works using Albers's model, serve as practical exercises in exhibition planning, and thus allow me to better understand how my work will be received. The painted pieces I use to collage don't really have meaning or context until they are contextualized in the compositions. This is similar to the way an artwork relies on the dialogue generated by a curated exhibition.

Using a black and white palette was initially a parameter set to simplify my practice and unify the variety techniques used within a single frame, but it has emerged a conceptually important. There is an obvious reference to the image images produced through mechanical reproduction, whether it is the photograph, a

silkscreen, risograph, Xerox, or other pre-digital print technology. The works resemble documentation because they are an imagined documentation of this unseen process. Black and white photographs suggest memory or a historical image. I imagine these works being inserted into texts or slides amongst genuine historical works, creating a smooth intervention. I am interested in how the audience views these works and how they may feel about the ways in which these works could be viewed or how that may change an experience. I look forward to discussions about this following the exhibitions opening. This body of work is the history of my studio investigations and thought process, but it also represents a history of painted languages or typologies. As I investigated the concept of originals and reproductions, I began to consider how art is consumed predominantly through online sources, and how this affects our perception.

This work is not a final translation but an attempt at unpacking the translating processes, breaking things down to their parts and presenting them for reflection. The idea of translation suggests a one-to-one conversion and this simply isn't possible. Painted marks are not translated through a curatorial approach, but rather are arranged in such a way that the viewer is able to develop or inject ideas of their own. I am presenting an unpacking of a painted language for the audience to then translate for themselves. I am not able to give a definitive translation of these marks, actions, or painted vocabularies, nor do I intend to. Instead, I want to invite the viewer into these built spaces and develop their own.

DISCUSSIONS

I believe that through the investigation of this thesis project some interesting discussions arise. I would hope that the look at this process as well as viewing the works in the exhibition could facilitate some conversations such as:

Look at ways and measuring in which we about how we make and consume art.

Examining the relationship between all the moving parts and factors of an exhibition.

Explore our positions within the long and burdened history of art.

What constitutes a great painting or a great work of art? How is this measured?

Do the means by which we encounter a work change our reception of it? What happens when the work mimics the documentation?

Some of these questions may have a more straight-forward answer than others, perhaps even one that may be explored in further research.

FUTURE WORK

This latest body of work has brought me to a point where I feel more comfortable with my painting practice than ever before. I feel as though competing styles and influences, as well as my interest in exhibition-making have

been reconciled. I will continue to create paintings using these methodologies and I look forward to seeing where this will take my practice.

I have also been inspired to create complimentary work in other mediums. As much of my work suggests a three-dimensional space filled with objects or sculptures, it would be interesting to explore creating actual sculptures. If painting is a “thinking space,” have I been thinking about making sculptures and installations? I worry that translating these objects into three-dimensional forms would be too literal, and may take away from the mystique located in their ambiguity. Rather than directly translating the forms found in my collages into larger three-dimensional forms, I imagine creating the space in which these imagined sculptures would have been made, stored, or installed. I plan to make a crate that would house one of these sculptures, as well as worktables and vitrines. I am interested in presenting an exhibition that looks like the installation of an exhibition; a space that works towards becoming one of my imagined spaces. I wanted to first establish this world through my paintings before staging them as sculptures.

Another potential project is to use slides to present my work. Further exploring the relationship between original and copy, works would only exist for the viewer as a visual replication of the object. Using a slide projector, black and white images of painted pieces would be shown in a similar way to a presentation of ancient ceramics or sculpture. I am interested in further exploring the historical

conversations by making work that appears as if it a part of a past conversation. Inspired by Geoffrey Farmer's sculptures or video and Mark Leckey's presentation of art and "dumb things"¹¹ I may mix my own work in amongst existing sculpture, ceramics, and photographs.

Stepping away from my studio practice, this research has made me interested in also exploring some curatorial work.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The research and investigations into my own painting practice has resulted in some significant changes in how I view my own work, but also painting and contemporary art in a much broader sense. Applying the methods of a curator or an institution into my studio practice and using their tactics when executing a painting, has furthered my understanding of the multiple components of the contemporary art ecology. Although a direct or linear translation of the supposed language of painting was not possible in this process, I believe that the curatorial methods created ways for myself and the audience to better examine explore and

¹¹ I am referring to Geoffrey Farmer's *Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell* (2013) and Mark Leckey's *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* (2013).

unpack these painted vocabularies, perhaps resulting in some personal translations or reflections. I also believe that the presentation of this research can suggest new ways for artists to consider their own work, and perhaps for the curator to consider the work done in the studio. The reflections or discussions that come out of this body of work needn't just be about painting, but can go across disciplines in considering how we make and consume all art forms generated in the studio and presented in the gallery. I look forward to continuing this body of work and research into painting, the curatorial and beyond.

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