

Emily Carr University of Art + Design



Noticing and Notation

(on being affected and deciding to paint)

By

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To my Mom and Dad for keeping every drawing, even the truly dreadful ones,
thank you for the endless support.

To my brother and sister for the teasing that toughened me up for critique,
thank you for the constant encouragement.

And to Penny.

Abstract

Considering the potential of critical observation, the application of pigment, and the function of surface, this thesis project is a series of observations from life. This conceptual body of work consists of paintings, drawings, and artist's books. I am interrogating material value systems and engaging with the act of collecting. The recorded items include the minute, the preliminary, the ephemeral, and the peculiar. Contingent on the impulse to understand and record, the subject of the work is inquiry. Within the act of study, representational imaging occurs without the influence of the camera as a tool. This serves to strain the relationship between a captured moment and contemporary systems of image consumption. Affected by the labour and time involved in rendering, the paintings and drawings are a record to the capacity of a moment. These spaces left undone are for breath, for being made aware of nothingness, and to contextualize noticing. The painted images are grasping at the poetics of the everyday, and their materiality subsequently references a body in space.

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Acknowledgment

I reflect on the weight of occupying space and making art on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. In the wake of this privilege is a responsibility to thoughtfully approach the painted subjects, and to consider the cultural or environmental implications of the chosen materials. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to study on these lands and previously on those of the Siksika, Piikani, Kainai, Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina peoples. My education and research benefits from the archives, collections, and instruction from fundamentally colonial institutions. Through my shortcomings and biases, I am critically reanalysing the function of these spaces and the motivation of their collecting mandates.

Note

(on notetaking)

Notetaking is the underpinning of my creative research and a foundational structure of my artmaking. I am taking note to remember, to see deeper, and to understand. These motivations take the form of written and painted notation. The paintings are a visual record of my perception, elongated by the act of observing. The stretching out of these moments is revealed by the accumulation of marks, allowing a singular experience to be fractured infinitesimally. In this thesis document I provide support to the painted images, to the bound and experimental books, to drawings, to installation, and to process as content. I use short excerpts from my written notes to introduce the sections of this text. These statements situate my conceptual practice as central to the making and interpretation of this work. They follow the rhythm of my internal dialogue in the studio, a space integral to my material and pedagogical

methods. These textual expressions manifest as a mosaic of sticky notes, as diagrammatic lists, or as figurative line directly on the studio wall. This impulse stems from the capacity of my memory and my susceptibility to wonder distantly while fixated on the immediately affecting. My mind meanders while my body sits in place. In these moments, the weight of mental objects and physical ones equates. Thoughts of beauty or grief reflect back on themselves when my eyes lose traction or when my hand falters. In this text, the prefacing verses situate inquiry and theorizing as driving forces in a deeply material entrenched method.

Position and Reflection

*I am easily influenced and quick to love,
often on the outside,
previously heartbroken,
from a place I don't identify with,
living on someone else's land.

I am anxious but eager, overaffected, and compulsive,
struggling to express, yet overly emoting.

I am spending energy to reason, process, recall, and focus.

I am in my head.*

The idea of being visible, being perceived, is at the foundation of my most intimate struggles and coarsest shortcomings. To express and to be understood, to speak and to be heard, are each a distinct feat materialized by an anxious mind and untethered attention. I am theorizing the subtleties of the everyday by embracing my impulse to fixate. My work is a product of a

hyperactive disposition in which casual stimuli is overwhelming or too intensely experienced. I am choosing to sit with simple subject matter as a strategy to handle overstimulation. By looking outward, I am distancing myself from internal preoccupation, from shaky hands, and from the shallow reverb of a heartbeat. This process is actualized by embodied notation, which embraces my speed of output. The grounding capacity of my practice is making peace with processing delay, learning to pay attention, and embracing the equivocal influence of my surroundings. Notation serves to recall just a few of these significant moments, otherwise passed by hastily.

Through the process of making this thesis work, I have come to understand the function and privilege of positionality. Well into this academic pursuit, I resisted the need to make myself central to my art. If the work was not outright about me, then I questioned how my identity could have a significant effect on its viewership. If the art is about objects, space, and their laborious description, why might it matter who I was before that moment? Painting and drawing in this manner have been my passion for nearly my entire life, so to sit with the question, “why me?” was frustrating. In this academic setting, I have sat with and ruminated on each presumably intuitive, superficially spontaneous, and apparently thoughtful decision I make. Ignorantly accepted as random or impulsive, each move is a cog in a system, one in which I dictate and am dictated by.

Introduction

Over the span of my graduate research, my practice has evolved into a process of identifying and asking questions. These are directed at the studio space as a site, collected material culture, and the process of painting. Part of my artistic method involves making representational paintings, rendered through observation. In relaying the images of objects or space, I am demonstrating an impulse to represent. I am describing an effort to see and the significance of going through the trouble of describing. This involves listening for subtlety within the scope of my perception. Through a system of notation, and an impulse to record moments, my research involves investigating perception as integral to an embodied process of painting. I am asking what happens when poised to look profoundly at the already perceived or accepted. Choosing the subject of my paintings involves gathering the affectual, outside of distinct value systems, and recontextualizing their image. The loud is sifted through in the hopes of uncovering the quiet.

(the before)

To appreciate, sit with, or care for the qualities of objects, I work to be receptive, attentive, and open. I am resisting the intensity of everyday experience. I actively do this by lending attention to lesser stimuli and challenging myself to notice. There is peace in the singularity of an object's image, in something that gets to exist sincerely or ironically, poetically or analytically. Choosing what to paint is a mitigated value system based on these qualities. The subject *matter* is not about specific *matter* but on the nature of *matter*. I am in search and service of objects that hold with them the potential to affect.

The resulting images establish precedence for what can be found within the noise. By employing image, I am hinting at a very discrete slowing down of time and a simulated sense of affect. This is a lexicon of visual knowledge which honours fleeting quotidian minutiae.

Over the course of this degree, each artwork has been an opportunity for precedence. Each has been a reaction to and influence on another, leading to the understanding that my practice is primarily one of inquiry. Using short descriptions in place of titles, I have mapped out each piece to illustrate the chronological nature of my methodology:

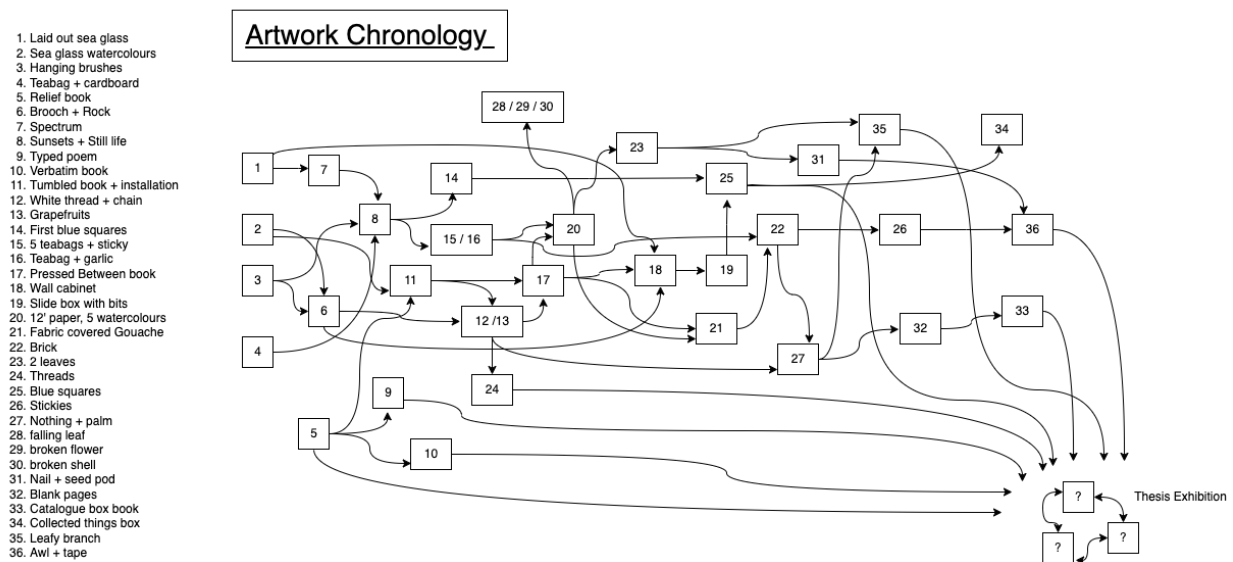


Fig. 1. Artwork Chronology.

Material Practice

I am attached to the affectual, the peculiar, and the ever-so-nearly unnoticed. I want to see them and be with them. I want to care for a moment by spending time with the smallest measurable data it gives me. When light is passing across the wall, and pigment sits in the path of shadow for only an instance, next to nothingness, on the brink of nonsense: I am there.¹ In this capture comes a desperation for rationale. A concept made concrete cannot exist outside of reason. The system, so carefully constructed, breaks down. Rules are made, then broken.

In my practice, paintings are a record of thousands of micro-decisions. I am concerned with the concept that each mark is a step towards resolve. Every minuscule touch has the ability to skew, stain, and misrepresent. This variability raises the stakes of notation. The medium, utensil and support are adversaries and colleagues not only dictating the virtuosity of rendering, but constantly changing my theoretical relationship to labour, language, time, and perception. Information is relayed through chicken-scratch brush marks that start slow and build. I am contemplating the visual, allowing understanding to settle and confidence to manifest. The layered accumulation of precise gesture is a result of proprioceptive ruminating.²

To visually satisfy is an underlying goal, an eagerness to relay care. Care is not a demand for treatment but rather a chance to access the system. In the making, to take care of the objects; to take care in building their image; to take care in preparing the support; to take care in

¹ This is an anecdote about #27 on the preceding diagram. To explore the necessity of the object being present, it was removed. All that remained as an image of the wall that surrounded it and the shadow it cast. Rather than copying lines from artificial light, chasing the effect of the sunlight gave the shadow an identity that challenged my understanding of objecthood.

² Following the object's form, rehearsing a line.

installation; is an attempt to translate a condition of warranted attention. I am asking others to care about an object as it parallels my relationship to being seen. The painting becomes a space to meet, feel, and be made aware of the encounter. Looking, seeing, and observing must therefore all be defined, as they describe different stages of the process. To “look”, describes the openness and active attempt to be met with objects of interest, those deserving of inquiry. To “observe” refers to the study of form, actively learning, and questioning what is actually there. To “see” is a condition of the experience, the resulting potential for understanding.

(system)

System is pervasive because it has the capacity to be infinitesimally complex.³ Each detail leading to an even more minute one. System is an organizational tool; it is the answer in- waiting when asked why. It teases the margin of legibility, backing the authority of intuition, denying the subsistence of the arbitrary. It is implied, applied, and challenging to define.

I have been setting up systems for myself and demanding to see them through for nearly as long as I have been trying to break and resist them. The choice to gently disrupt is a reaction to working through systems, typically visually obvious, but contextually obscure. These are usually watercolours of objects, alone, whole, centred, and legible. The oil painting contrasts this by pushing the understanding of space, weight, and focus to the point of near dissolution.

³ I imagine this as sharpening a pencil under a microscope. Each shaving makes the point more acute, yet the still blunt or jagged crystalline structure is revealed by a further magnifying objective lens. It reminds me that what I accept as finite is dictated by limited perception.

Painting and installation are strong visual ties within my practice. These are in support of three methods of engaging with system. This includes watercolours of objects, systematically composed with an ideal of control. It also includes oil paintings that resist control of the hand and allow the material, the paint and support, to take-on control. They are spaces with interruptions, layered, and questioning a rationale. Lastly, the daily practice of recording and notation is system in its most laid out form. For this reason, the information is resisted, the notes are written, the small paintings are organised but not laid. This collection of data driven information is engaging with the discipline of bookmaking and the role of artist books.

The following is a diagram that lays out the system I am working within (fig. 2). These are generalized steps in my artmaking process. Additionally, this is exemplified in a watercolour from the series *control is a brush, barely*, (fig. 3).

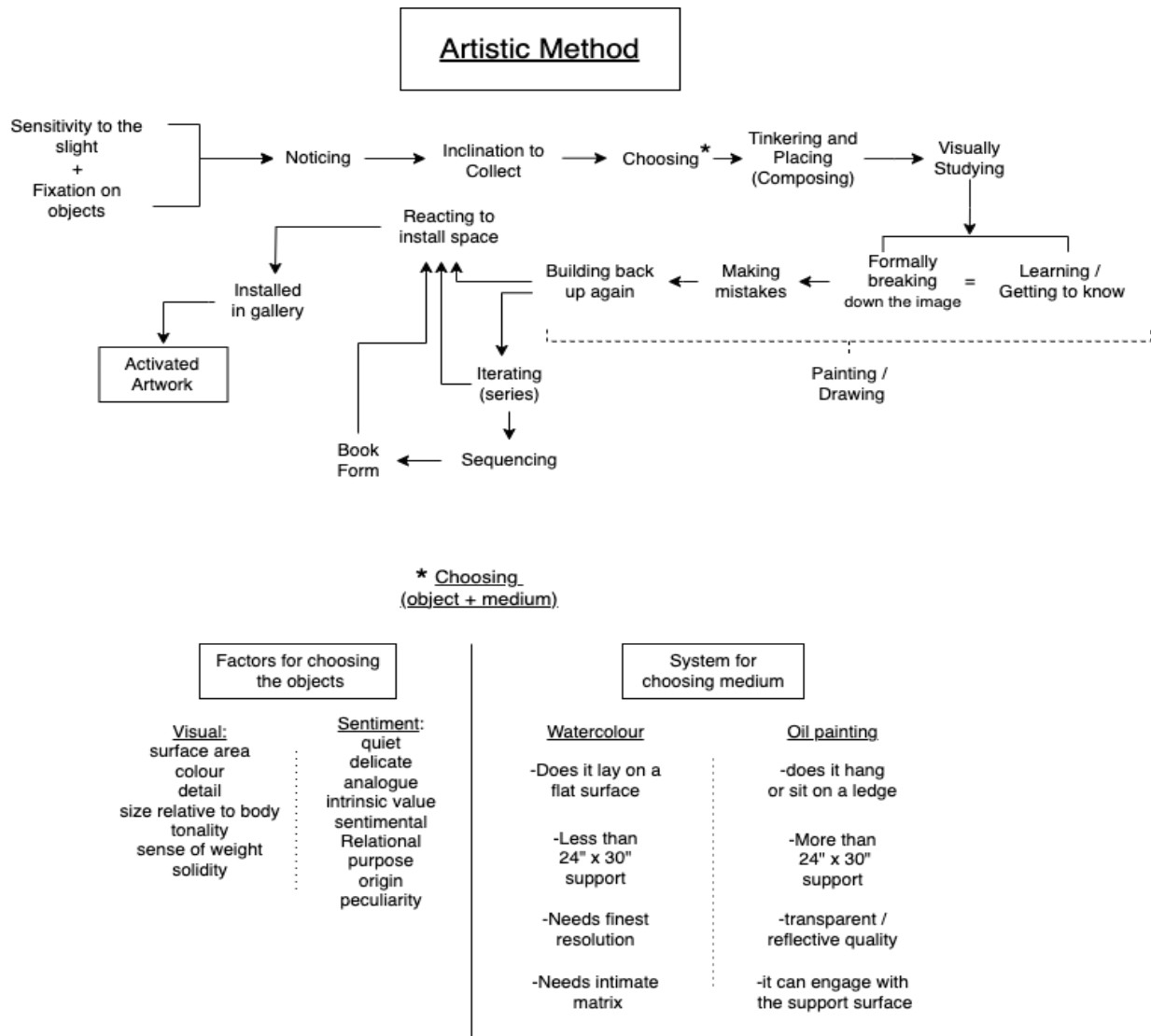


Fig. 2. Chart of Artistic Method.



Fig. 3. From the series *control is a brush, barely*, watercolour, #23 on diagram (fig. 1), 2023.

Things

(the everyday)

The painted image is a signifier of a single moment, broken down into thousands then realised as one again. The moment is sentimental and repetitive. It stood out, would have been lost, and gets to be recorded. It is worth spending time with and remembering. It is a fraction of the everyday. Everyday is not empty but immensely dense. It is unrelenting and typically banal. It is the potential for each extraordinary experience. It is always within reach yet endlessly ending. It is quotidian.

I sat in my studio in early spring 2023, gently antagonized by a brick hanging from a string. It is a mortar caked, partially painted, previously weight bearing piece of a recently razed structure. From a series of paintings called *oh beautiful infrastructure*, (see fig. 4) this untitled painting was an experiment in assemblage. My understanding of this philosophical interaction has been formed by the writing of Jane Bennet in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. With a somewhat animate sensibility, the brick demanded to be pulled away from the floor. In these moments, I find myself observing myself. I am experimenting and tinkering. I have found that an object's relationship to space is best understood by pushing the boundaries of how it sits, hangs, clings, or balances. An object seems most activated when the effect of gravity and weight are brought into question. So, I placed the brick in a piece of scrap netting, hung it on the wall, and eventually gave it a canvas backdrop. I contemplated and tinkered before I decided on the composition. This painting became a moment of departure, where the oil medium facet of my practice would become a source of confusion and surprise. When I bring an object of interest, something typically stumbled upon or collected, into the territory of "study", it transforms. The identity of the object falls away when its relationship to space becomes more relevant. This separation of an object from its function or meaning, is pushed further by the act of capturing its image.

This painting exemplifies how I engage with "why" not "about." The painting is about *why* study a brick, *why* situate it just so, or *why* spend so much time with its image. The objects are tools, playing a role similar to the brushes, support and palette. The mass-produced brick, net, and canvas are detached from their matrix, and put into a space of unrest. The opportunity to generate curiosity in this gap between knowledges is made possible by separating object from meaning. I do not anticipate absolute disassociation between a brick and its social context. I am

aiming to exploit the viewers recognition of the form and its signified concept. Further, I am playing on their inclination to speculate about the nature of the applied relationship. By employing peculiarity, drawing out a such narrative is intentionally tricky. In each step of this image making system, I am considering how to place the viewer in a state of confusion without veering too far into a realm of dissatisfaction. I want it to be clear in the composition that I am making a set of decisions, not necessarily what those are or their justification.



Fig 4. *oh beautiful infrastructure*, oil on partially stretched, partially primed canvas, #22 on diagram (fig. 1), 2023.

This painting became an unexpected interrogation of making and undoing. Where the other works in this series explored the temporary dissolution of imagery, this painting challenged the physical conventions of oil painting. As a place of departure, I am situating this inquiry within minimalist thought and abstraction in 1960s painting discourse. I have looked to the work of Eleanore Mikus as she scrutinized painting's material givens (Staff 9). Her compositions, such as *Tablet 164* (see fig. 5), and much of the abstract imagery that came out of this era differs visually from my work. I am interested in how they encountered and reassessed the surface as a participating visual concept. Mikus was particularly keen on the resonance enacted by a worn surface (Staff 11). In accepting the ridges and valleys of creased canvas and exposing the sutured edge of the wooden frame, I am conceptually centering the material qualities of the support.



Fig. 5. Mikus, Eleanore. *Tablet 164*. 25 Sept. 2017. *Blanton Museum of Art*,
<https://blantonmuseum.org/2017/09/25/a-life-in-tablets-eleanore-mikus/>. Accessed 28 Apr. 2024.

This is a way of engaging with the “real.” Rather than the object models being present, the canvas structure is playing that role. In consideration of objects and their relationship to metaphysical experience, my work is influenced by Bennet’s endeavour. It brings together many arguments about an ontological view of spaces and the materials that fill them. The book has many facets and approaches to understanding why people keep, care about and associate with objects. Her description of assemblage has shifted my understanding of still life as a discipline and object relationality. I am drawn to her description of matter as passive versus animated, spontaneous, and entangled. This speaks to the capacity of “things,” and the value in considering their agency. I appreciate how this brings the human body into the conversation of objects but explores how their roles are distinct. Additionally, I am engaging with her fixation on representation as detached from objecthood.

The philosophical interrogation of this text is foundational to the subject of object-oriented ontology, an idea that I both draw on and resist. My work is more entrenched in the interaction with objects and the observation of their image. An important characteristic of this pursuit is that they are not meant to allude to a greater identity or significance. To approach representational painting ontologically, creates a challenging relationship to metaphysics, which I navigate in the process-oriented and writing veins of my practice. I am drawn to Bennett’s thoughts on this subject as it confidently describes objects as separate from human perception. I would argue that the experience of being with things, the motivation to understand them, and the impulse to represent them elsewhere in the world is wholly tied to perception.

Through her text, I have come to the argument that an object is independent from perception until acted upon by “view.” I am using the word “view” to describe the experience of being perceived and the scope of perception. To make something the subject of view is the

context of my research inquiry. The significance of this act is integrally linked to the subjectivity of the viewer and subsequently transformed when recorded. I am quietly subjecting objects to the vulnerability of being seen.

Imaging

In this process of painting, notation is translation through imaging. Imaging is a fixed view. It is making visible. It is the articulation of space onto surface. It is specific and limited. It is the process of making flat, permanent, and didactic. It is searching through space and deciding on a framework for visual language. In this process, the camera is removed as apparatus. The imaging of objects and space is direct with the hand as tool, the mind as interpreter, and the eyes as non-objective sensors.

In relation to being seen, the overtly representational image demands an understanding of what becomes “view.” By reflecting on the camera as a methodological tool, I am defending my material decision to paint. I am bringing into focus typically unnoticed compositional techniques, from which representational imagery thrives and suffers. This is influenced by the visual language of photography, a tool I am consciously resisting by studying from life. In this labour-intensive process, the cadence and conventions of framing are brought into question. The lens is referenced but not used, the role of camera is filled, the demand to see is satisfied yet simultaneously refused.

My relationship to the photographic is informed by the writing of Joanna Zylińska. In her text “The Creative Power of Nonhuman Photography,” she speaks to the role and conceptualization of images. This is useful for my research as it considers the act of imaging the

world from the perspective of photography not as a discipline but as a tool. Within a pre-existing knowledge structure, images act as a method for perceiving and understanding the world. She is considering the effect that the visual framework of photography, based on the parameters of the apparatus and lens, has on the production of images. Zylinska describes this act through the writings of Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. In her argument, she engages with the concept of image production as the potential for differentiation. The image, or way of seeing, encounters itself in the world, revealing difference. She goes on to describe that captured images are a fragment or cross section of a broader passage of existence. This implies the perception of experience over time and the function of photography to stabilize this flow without losing its traces of life. I am invested in this process as a means of breaking down overwhelming, or even sublime, stimuli into manageable perceptible portions. This attempt at singling out a fraction of experience, or cutting into duration, has the potential to demand relationality. To see only one moment is equivalent to matter in a vacuum, to see one in relation to another constitutes flux. The remaining image is therefore described as an interruption of flow, the document of that movement, rather than a memorial or artifact of it.

She also speaks to the intuitive nature and commonality of the camera as apparatus. This is relevant to my critique of its quick affirmation of singularity. In this context, singularity is the simulation of one frozen moment relative to another frozen moment, making it possible to perceive the uninterrupted passage of time. The images, mostly digital and perceptually pervasive, (asserting themselves in our hands at any moment, without context) are alone yet presented together. They are not relational yet in immediate association, disrupting the perception of time, rather than interrupting it for the purpose of understanding. This pause in experience makes me aware of the limitations of cognitive and sensorial capacity. The resulting

images are therefore more than representation and less than things. They exist in a middle ground of matter and form.

I am comparing this understanding of photographic structure to the methodology of artist Andrew Grassie. He makes images about the discipline of photography while instantaneously denying the nature of capture. By labouring over each rendering using tempera paint, the work is able to refer to storytelling, cinematics, and narrative, while being filtered through the language of painting. Grassie's works are precise but matter of fact, formal but still staged. He uses past projects and the studio space as the subject, thinking retrospectively about practice and himself as a character.

I am situating my work in relation to the series, *Still Frame* (see fig. 6), from 2020, where Grassie presents this developed imagery as a cohesive exhibition. The work is important to my research as it demonstrates the function of scale, repetition, and installation as a compositional technique. The choice of painting is relevant as it points to labour, time, and the function of camera as apparatus. Each repeated image calls into question the value of reproduction, representation, and the experience of looking. These are subjects that I am working through, however distinct from Grassie's work given my relationship to the photographic image. I am not working from photographs; however, his work demonstrates how the role of the camera is undeniable in contemporary image making. The comportment of visual language is swayed and resolved by the camera's intuitive framework. By continuing to paint despite this influence, both Grassie's and my work play on confusion, perception, and the legibility of a two-dimensional image. By referencing the linearity and cadence of the camera roll, these paintings question the act of image making, describing place and moment.

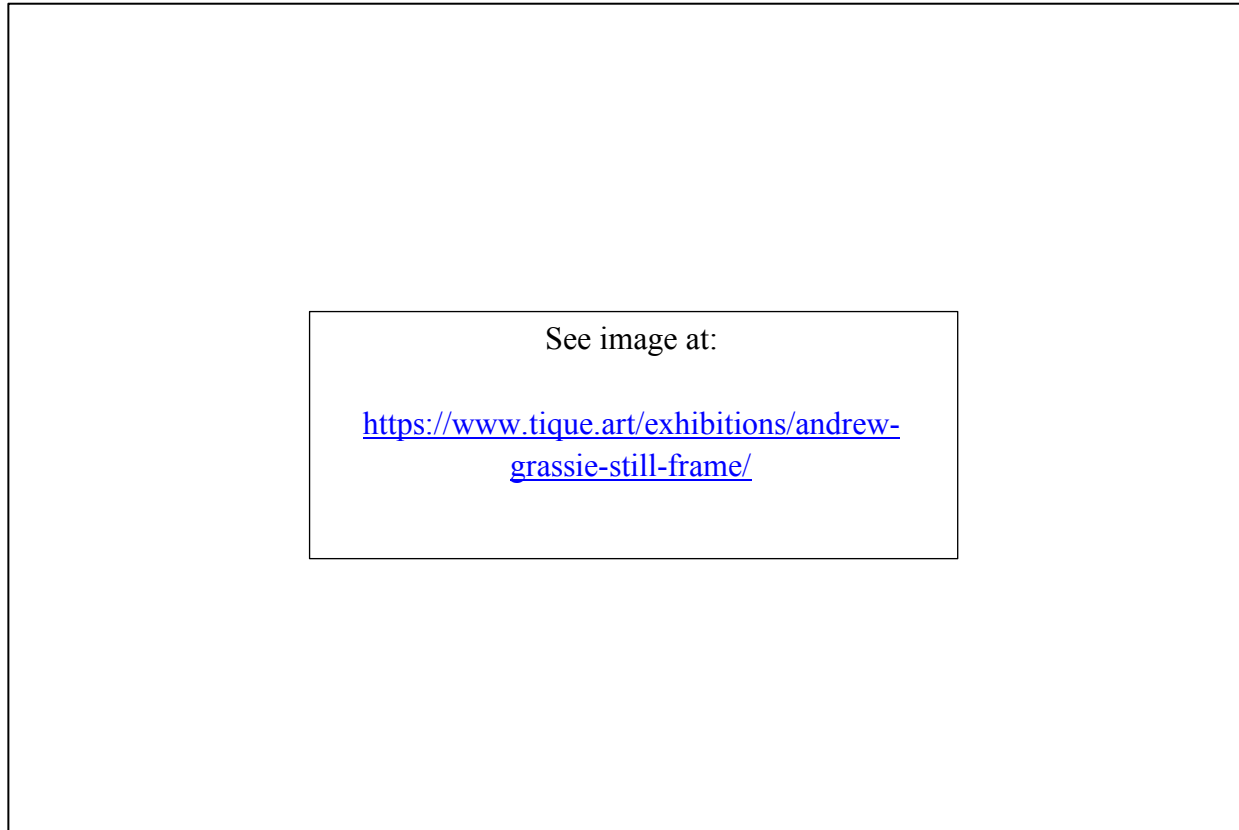


Fig. 6. *Still Frame*. 2020. *Tique Publication on Contemporary Art*, Berlin,
<https://tique.art/exhibitions/andrew-grassie-still-frame/>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

Relating to my choice of ordinary and quiet subject matter, many of Grassie's paintings seem awkward and unremarkable with reference to the subtlety of light. In contrast to the conventions of painting, he makes multiples of the same image, referencing the snapshot and making the viewer aware of the slow nature of his method. The resulting images feel frozen in time because of the opportunity to compare. Pushed further by the small scale, both our paintings are about the experience of looking, capturing, and obscuring view. Grassie takes this concept in a slightly different direction than mine when he forces questions about what is beyond the frame. I am, however, interested in how this method pushes the viewer to question the surface of the

picture plane and the framing. Additionally, I am considering how he approaches the concept of one-to-one representation. In his work, this occurs between a painting and a photo, not “life.” The photo is therefore the subject. By referencing the transformation of “archive,” the photo is the object, but still a part of a larger body. The result is imagery with a similar relationship to context which my work is presenting.

Subject

(interruption)

Everyday is interrupted by the poetic. Poetics activates perception in place and moment.

It is the encounter that demands being aware of a body in space. It is slipping on ice,⁴ the static shock from a doorknob, or the warmth of the sun in august. It is being affected by a weed between pavers⁵ and distracted by the tapping of crow’s feet on an aluminum roof.

To be affected by the minute is inherently accompanied by an immense influence of the grand, impending, and existential. A strategy I have developed to manage this immense feeling is to dial in, slow down and breathe. The effect this has on the imagery is a parsing down, giving the images similar space to breath. The result is emptiness. By resisting overwhelming sensation, I found myself trying to get as close to nothingness as possible. I did sketches of threads and rice-sized fragments of glass. By indulging and prolonging the lull between moments of anxiety or pressure, I am facilitating an interruption of the everyday.

⁴ Based on an anecdote from Professor Jamie Hilder.

⁵ Based on an anecdote from Professor Randy Lee Cutler.

Interruption is not always a beautiful, poetic, or productive thing. Sometimes it is the emotional nudge or physiological turbulence that result in tail spinning. Sometimes these interruptions thwart attunement and the system abruptly destabilizes. This is reflected in the installation process. The work is interrupted by gallery architecture,⁶ by remnants of the making,⁷ or by the models themselves. These decisions are meant to be subtle but sophisticated. The paintings are surrounded by surprises, confusion, and exterior influences.⁸ This is a result of gauging the obvious, the visible, and the satisfying.

As a model for interrupting text and situating it in relation to the discipline of poetry, I am looking to the work of Jen Bervin. In her limited-edition artist books, she pushes the subtlety of tone and tactile materiality to present a tailored, yet quiet object. In her work *The Desert* (2008) (see fig. 7), she makes the viewer aware of surface by physically intervening in printed text. Her machine-sewn redaction is an interruption of the mundane gesture of reading. I am engaging with this play on bodily senses in which the seen, felt, experienced, and understood are rarely straightforward. To see something and then make it unseen references the impact of visibility and what happens when our confidence or expectation of legibility falls apart. I am considering how the potential for obstruction brings language into question.

⁶ Pillars, windows, ledges, etc.

⁷ The fabric that protects the paper from the oil of my skin, pencil drawn notes, etc.

⁸ Daylight, movement, etc.

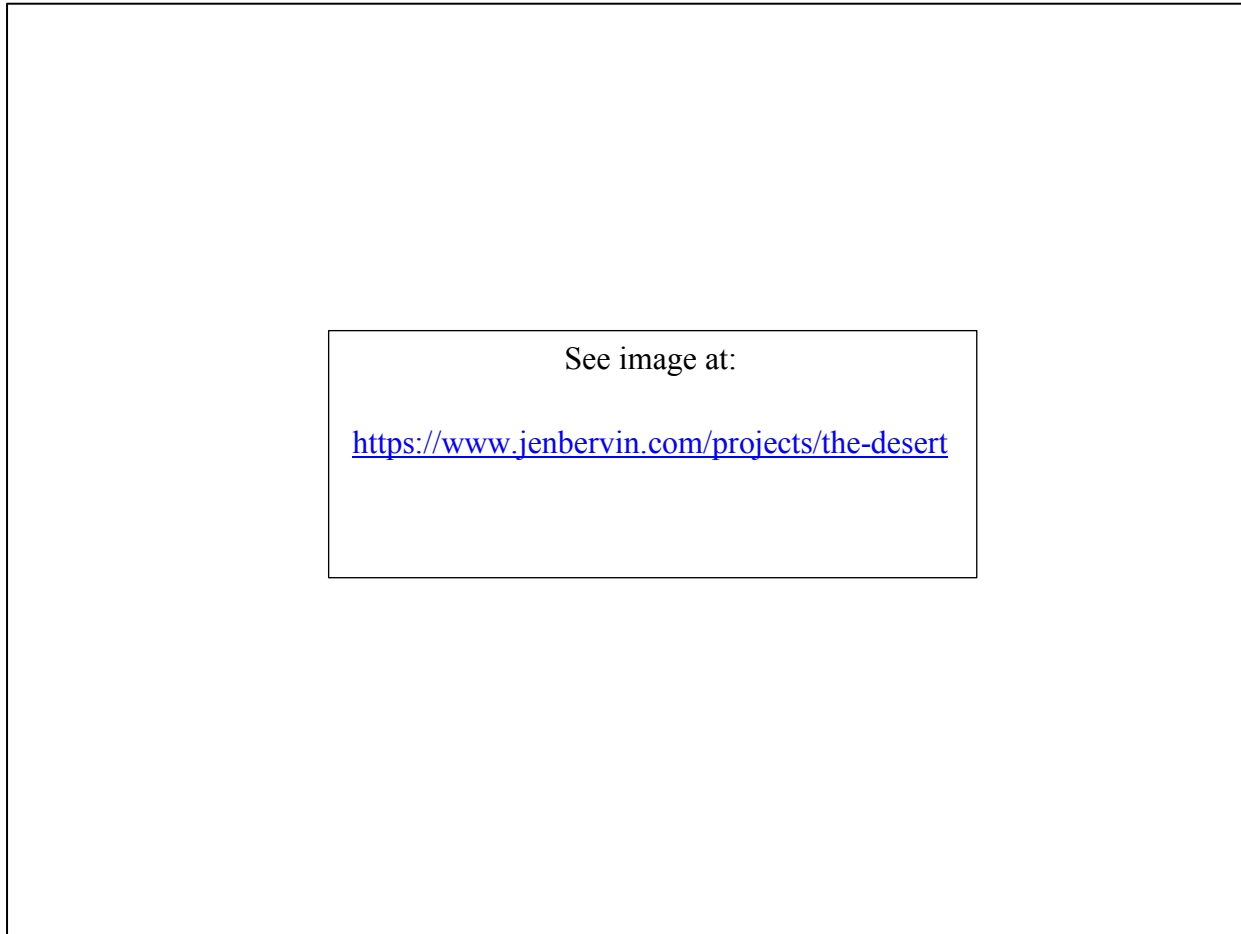


Fig. 7. Bervin, Jen, “The Desert,” Jen Bervin, 2008, <https://www.jenbervin.com/projects/the-desert>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

(beauty)

Poetics is an opportunity to access beauty. Beauty is singularity, experienced then lost. The moment is affectual because it is noticed then passes. Within this brevity, beauty is perceptible only when punctuated by the grief of loss. It is contextualized by nothingness. It is the encounter with newness, revealing that more of the same does not excite. What remains is the ordinary. Beauty is gratifying then immediately humbling. It satisfies, then

leaves. And in its place is emptiness and blankness. This tabula rasa which desaturates sensibility is activated by grief. Grief of no longer having, of being denied. In this polarizing is perspective; of what can be had, known, lost, and missed. Beauty is discreet. Beauty is a verb.

To recall or sit with beauty is a privilege. Beauty allows for the perception of an affecting moment because it sits in relation to the banal. It is understanding why one thing or moment affects while others may not. Each brushstroke, hue, or form is placed in relation to another. Beauty is therefore a tool for revealing difference. Difference acts to reveal variability and is the reason for repetition. Perceiving these nuances makes legibility possible.

Painting through observation is an antagonistic play between subjectivity and objectivity. Revealing truth or representing honesty is virtually impossible. This is complicated by cultural connotation and visual sensibilities such as beauty or intrinsic value. A beautiful object is challenging within my process as it distracts from any inherent objecthood and further clouds objectivity. The thing loses its identity and self-referential potential when its beautiful qualities are louder than its fundamental vibrancy. My practice involves attuning myself to the quietest disruptions, to bring them onto the same playing field as the typically beautiful.

*A leaf,
whose beauty was to me never in question,
was to another, just a leaf.
This jarring influence fractures view,
spreading doubt through the system.*

I am however motivated by the question: what can painting do for an already beautiful thing? I am teasing the multitude of definitions for beauty and the unexpected objects to which they are applied or not.

(narrative)

To be intercepted by such a falling leaf, that it detached, following its evolutionary skill of prioritizing the larger body, exactly when you happen to be there. I question if this is happenstance or a grand narrative, however this difference is arbitrary. The power to affect is dictated by attention and a willingness to care. It makes me feel like a background character in the life of a leaf. This thought is a method of perceiving the existential by challenging the boundary of the inconsequential.

As a collector of trinkets, bits, and peculiar things, the urge to collect must be tempered. This inclination to covet, keep, and linger is constrained by practicing *detachment*. This is a process of separating myself from objects and recognizing difference. The space made between gives way to the unexpected, to learning, and to newness. This manifests as confusion, contextualized by satisfaction. In this emotional separation is the opportunity to explore more objectively, still influenced by the histories and stories of each object, but not bound to them conceptually. This is important because it is my relationship to narrative. In a representational painting, the need to associate each image to a moment is key, however problematic. Using shadow and layered spaces, I am aiming to present a sense of captured time that is affected by

each object's story, but not confined to that as a subject. I care about the *sonder*⁹ of the inanimate, how it came to me, and how I felt compelled to keep it. The involvement of narrative exists in a middle ground between *why* and *about*.

My need to assign narrative is so intense that I have begun altering the visual framing and interacting with the physical support of the painting. Exemplified by the painting of the brick (see Fig. 4), the canvas surface is no longer a singular plain but rather it is coming to terms with its own objecthood. Physical layers of time are visible in the creases from stretching and re-stretching and from the empty staple holes. It is implied that the fibres took on the form from repeated stress and prolonged tension. Each wrinkle is an extended gesture, marking points in the timeline of making. This self-referential quality is tied to the imagery with the inclusion of registration lines that mark the visual field, the unprimed margin, the clear gesso background, and the draping that reveals the frame. These material interruptions are meant to confuse. I am laboriously painting an illusionistic space and then intentionally disrupting it to cause tension.

(difference)

Difference is an invitation for perspective. It is becoming aware of your body because you perceive what is beyond it. It is dependent on openness and capacity. It is unfixed and fleeting, observable only in contrast to the permanence of the body.

Comparable to the synesthetic experience of the steam from a kettle hitting your cheeks, the velocity of a train rushing by, or a foghorn reverberating in your chest, the phenomenology of sensation is grounding. Usually missed, these moments are opportunities to respond to our place

⁹ This is the perception that the experience of others is equally as complex as our own (Koenig 7).

in the canon of knowledge formation. Light, shadow, and texture are the visual elements I use to transpose a fragment of this affective experience, of collecting and caring for things. The painting is an invitation to honour the scraps, bits, flotsam, and junk of which our value systems cannot easily entertain.

I am deeply affected by Magali Duzant's artist book, *Light Blue Desire: A Manual for the Color Blue*. This text is an expansive description of the colour blue in the form of an artist book. In the final portion of this text, the author gives an additional comment on the process of recording and the feat of capturing the colour of the sky. Speaking to the creation and use of cyanometers, she describes the determination to measure "blueness." This impulse to possess and control could be critiqued as a tool of western imperialism, which her brief caption does not reference. However, I see the value in relating back to the drive to represent honestly because it reveals limitation. To sit with the sky as a singular moment, endlessly visible and changing, is to become aware of subjectivity and its pervasiveness. Contrary to the motivations of Horace-Bénédict Saussure and Alexander von Humboldt, whom Duzant references, the pursuit to represent the "scattering of light" or the texture of a leaf is to sit with failure. Studying is therefore a practice in pushing my tolerance for mistakes, for erasing, and for redoing. The result is a surrender to the differences.

Inquiry

Inquiry is contingent on curiosity, on acknowledging the limitations of knowing. It is being comfortable with the vulnerability of learning, of asking to understand. It is sitting with the non-tangible, the less-than-defined, or the trials of questioning what is already accepted. To inquire is to invest in pedagogy. Pedagogy is a commitment to process, to

making and undoing. It comes back around and talks about itself again. This practice, although ouroboric, is not fixed. It expands outward again to reconsider the already assumed.

In my practice of collecting and learning, I spend much of my time seeking out and spending time with objects, light, shadow, and space. The objects are often small, lesser, residual, and referring to process. I have questioned why collecting is important and why I chose to paint. This is demonstrated by presenting a slide box with my scraps and bits carefully organized, (see fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Slide box with collected bits, #19 on diagram (fig. 1), 2023.

Collecting is the critical moment. It sets into motion the collaboration with *things*. By literally filing away my scraps, I am bringing them into a new context where only form and relationship to the other remains. Through installation of found objects, Mark Dion is bringing into question dominant ideologies around collection, taxonomy, and value systems within institutions such as museums and universities. These knowledge sets shape an understanding of history, how information is shared, and how the natural world is perceived. He challenges convention by working through the language of classical archeology and the scientific method. Often nearing mockery, he is making the viewer aware of the histories and systems of organisation that are understood and likely blindly accepted. The conceptual driver of his work is to compare what might be considered objective versus subjective and rational versus irrational.

In his work, *Cabinet of Marine Debris*, (see fig. 9) from 2014, Dion uses the historic features of Wunderkammer to call into question why and how material is collected. The juxtaposition of organised detritus in the place of culturally significant artefacts is a tactic in questioning the authority of science, taxonomy, and collection. He is using humour, irony, and metaphor to emphasise and challenge the biases engrained with the western pursuit of truths and universals. This challenges the viewer to reconsider the effect that keeping and presenting material culture can have on collective knowledge, especially about nature. This is an element of his work that relates less to mine. Dion is using the voice of “nature” to examine what can be deemed “neutral”. He goes even further to evaluate how ideology is tainted through assumptions based on desire, fear, and self-interest.

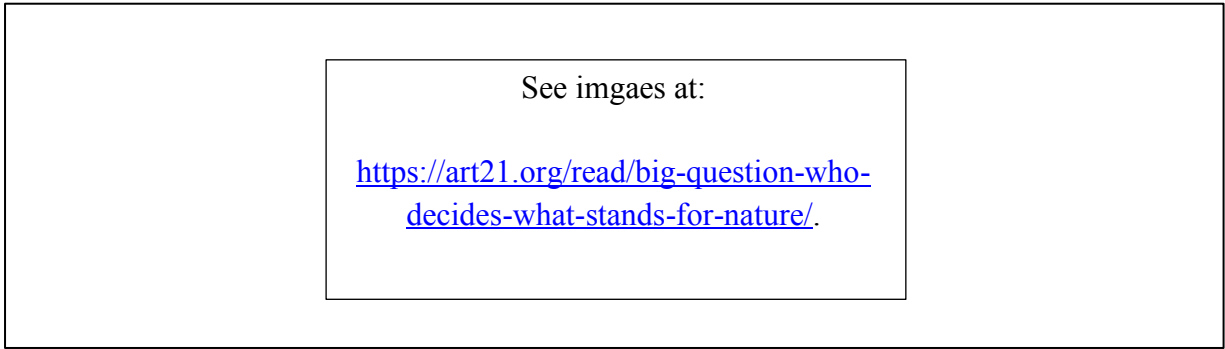


Fig. 9. Hanson, Genevieve. *Cabinet of Marine Debris*. Oct. 2019. *Who Decides What Stands for Nature*, Art21, New York / Los Angeles, <https://art21.org/read/big-question-who-decides-what-stands-for-nature/>. Accessed 23 Nov. 2023.

Dion uses nature as a social category, rather than something to be just categorised and used. In contrast, I am employing aesthetics and the visualisation of data. Both our practices are driven by a methodology of collecting and organising that leads to a distinct value system. We are both looking to point out the pitfalls and weaknesses of knowledge pursuit, and the dangerous potential for lies within knowledge production and reproduction. I feel a kinship to his work as he pursues these subjects not as a pseudoscientist but a dilettante of inquiry. We are both working to find what is worth questioning, what is unquestionable, and what requires suspicion. This is a mode of interrogating structures of knowledge-keeping based on retrospective criticality. Questioning power structures associated with the institution requires active curiosity, unapprehensive confusion, deliberate concern, and dissatisfaction with available understanding.

(to keep)

I have always struggled to describe the objects I typically paint because of how I interact with and describe the objects I collect. My system of categorizing is unfixed yet the boundaries are typically profound. This ontological approach is demonstrated in the slide box. Each thing holds a similar value, plays a similar role, and receives a similar treatment. They exist outside their original purpose or significance, and they have been recontextualized by the encounter. Collecting is a system in itself, deserving of a dedicated thesis. In summary, the encounter is an assessment of what that object holds in it: an interaction with a person, an act of care, or a moment worth remembering. It might have fulfilled its function and now its future is unclear. Choosing to keep ends many of these questions as it presupposes finality. The collection is a coveting, a relationship, and an attachment. The objects are protected, and all transformations are accidental and predestined (based on an inclination towards linear time). Breakages and losses are examples of further interruptions. They are likely welcomed given it is not the result of my own carelessness.

Theorizing

Theorizing is a fracturing of the presumed, the understood, and the not-yet-properly interrogated. It is grappling with the noticed. It is the callus on my left middle finger from each resting brush. It is the place in time that a shadow implies. It is a blank sticky note on the wall, and the frayed corner of a well-loved book. It places consideration as the central issue. Opposite to the expanding fractures of difference, theorizing is a narrowing. It brings one specific idea into question. This process requires situating the subject as focal, as layered. To theorize the mundane is a conscious overstepping into the

boundary of the peripheral. It is a fixation on the barely there and the otherwise unimportant.

This thesis unknowingly became an endeavour in learning to sort. I learnt to evaluate the small in place of the large, exchanging the demanding for the quiet. The peripheral has become the subject of focus, although contradictory and bound to theoretical space.¹⁰

Returning to the work of Duzant, specifically on the experience of the colour blue, in which I am heavily invested, she brings into question what is “real.” The colour of the sky has become a case study in my practice of theorizing. It has challenged how far *questioning* can be expanded outward. Duzant goes on to explain how the blue of the sky seems stable but is actually unending and unbound. To grapple with an abstract concept such as the sky is to rationalize perception. The sky can only truly be what someone’s capacity allows them to understand. This rarely naturally occurring colour, almost always reflected or refract, is not material or tangible. It is, however, described in images and language in a nearly identical way. This level-playing field for representation is a valuable dialogue for painting. In the earlier moments of searching for an object or the encounter with the sky, I consider: what can be asked of this thing and what can painting do for it? This question is consciously rhetorical. In the work, *sitting with it*, 2023, (see fig. 10), I presented 150 attempted representations of the sky. Through this process, I was able to describe two specific moments from each day over the course of 75 days. The assembled body of hues acts as a description of that period of time. Each holds the represented information of the time of day and the season, laid out as a verse. Materially, they are indexical of the tired body that painted them, the concentration of water, and

¹⁰ As focal points are assigned by attention, peripheral status should be negated.

the commitment to portray accurately. Each recorded moment is not translated, but rather interpreted, synonymous, or referential.



Fig. 10. sitting with it, slide case, panels, gouache, notebook, canvas, #25 on diagram (fig. 1), 2023.

Returning once again to Duzant’s text, I am using her examination of the colour blue as a model for the expansive capacity of language. Using historical, linguistic, and cultural references, she explains the variable role that a colour can play in formulating perception. On the subject of “blue,” she highlights how having names for widely experienced concepts alters the ability to re-imagine and re-produce them. It is far more challenging to represent something that

lacks formal or concise language to accompany its mental queue in one's mind. She goes on to illustrate the effect of lyrical subjectivity on the perception of colour. This brings up a question I often ask myself in the moments after painting: do I have the words? I am considering if the correct language is available to accompany the field of view I am aiming to represent. In the text, this challenge is explained in a linear way. The more a concept is experienced, the more people try to understand it, eventually representing it, and subsequently finding its place in their vocabulary. She presents this in relation to the social and emotional effect that a colour can have on people after it has carved its place in language.

Returning to Bervin's work, I am interested in translating her attitude towards textile process and drawn-out labour, as it relates to the structure of language. The suturing allows the viewer to contextualize care in relation to destruction, and refusal with revelation. In both Bervin's work and my own, what remains after the gesture is language that demands grappling and rationalizing by the viewer. The revealed language becomes a process of poem making, leading to a slowing down and recontextualizing. Sometimes manifesting in my compositions, writing by hand plays a significant role in my notetaking practice. Opposite to this, Bervin uses industrial printing and sewing machines to distance the gesture from the body. Embodiment is made possible by the involvement of the hands when engaging with the book form, which she pushes further through the tactility of the threads. My investment in an embodied material practice is further validated when the artwork is returned to the hand.

By questioning the convention of a book as a container for knowledge, the words are no longer surface level. In terms of the presented subject, this work is in reference to John Van Dyke's book from the end of the 19th century where he praises an arid land. This is relevant to my thematic pursuit as it is a model for "less" to become the subject. In my work this presents

itself with mundane or residual objects. In one of my artist's books, *Pressed Between*, (fig. 11), the pages hold a collection of small sea glass fragments. They are quiet and detailed. This is an example of a series in which images of the mundane are repeated to draw attention to the object's individual potential.



Fig. 11. Pressed Between, watercolour, thread, canvas, loop, #17 on diagram (fig. 1), 2023.

Conclusion

(the after)

I argue that my paintings, although teasing finality but never quite arriving, are translations. My methodology of painting involves breaking down the object's image from observation, then reconstructing it on a two-dimensional plain. To filter through subjectivity, emotion, and bodily limitation, animates the interaction between eye and object. The resulting image is a fragmentation of moment, a breakdown of language, and a documentation of the interaction.

To simply look is equivalent to small talk. To paint is the meaningful dialogue between object, eye, mind, and hand. The resulting image is an iconography of encoded abstractions. By painting, I am breaking down an image into its most basic formal elements and building towards an illusionary rendering.

I am ritualistic and spiritual.

I am content within parameter, routine, and minimal stimuli.

I am a learner and striving to unlearn.

I am someone who feels, thinks, overthinks, and ponders.

I am working to pay attention.

I am affected by material. It is revealed in how I set down my tools and arrange mementos on the wall, and it reaches beyond my painting practice. It affects how I choose apples at the grocery store, why I travel a beach from one shard of glass to the next, and why I fill jars with dried, spent tea bags. Because the choice matters, the search matters, the act of keeping

matters. This sensibility generates a demand to navigate space with sensitivity, mindful that the potential to excite may be hidden behind more of the same. I have always been seeking out the banal, the otherwise underwhelming and that which a pre-existing value system has already blinded perception.

I am a painter because it's what I have always known.

I am a practitioner of language, it's the lens that orients my perception.

I am often lost in vast blank spaces, grasping at sentiment.

I am settling quietly on the surface, reminding myself to breathe.

Relating to the experience of anxiety, this act of grounding through observation is a coping mechanism. I exercise patience, allowing me to break the cycle of cause and effect in which I often cannot function. I work to stop, think, and process properly. This has led to my practice of constant reflexivity and peripheral analysis. By allowing myself the chance to think and not be rushed, I can see far clearer. In these moments, I am able to be with the poetic, the beautiful, the singular, and the gently crushing. Rather than fighting to 'keep up,' I am embracing breath.

Response

(confluences)

This document is evidence of trajectory. It is a collage of my stubbornness, insecurity, and boldness. I struggled to separate the repeated gesture of writing about my practice, from the material investigation in the studio. At a certain point, anxiety was muted, and I allowed this separation to become immaterial and undefined. My interdisciplinary inquiry has required pulling from, entertaining, and grappling with an overwhelming number of disciplines and their socio-historic implications. I acknowledge that my work engages with areas of study, such as poetry and bookmaking, each requiring substantial future study. This document, as academically satisfying as I could manage, is an extension of my material and philosophical practices.

However, painting is still the catalyst. I have to be entrenched in form, saturation, light, and texture. Painting is the language that I know best. However, by being required to produce this document and diving heavily into the features of language, I found an appreciation for how text may compliment my studio practice. Where my painting exists quietly in a creaking house, my writing is the unanticipated ceramic dish crashing against tile floors.

For the thesis exhibition, I managed to distill these creative trajectories into three main categories. The textual work is where my philosophical thought is laid out simply yet deceptively entangled. The compositions on a table are a description of system, referencing process. These are illusionary but resisting conventional display and therefore reducing their referential capacity. The hanging painting is a demonstration of a moment before, of one that never happened, and of painting colliding with its muses. Here is a place for the “real,” after having been previously questioned, to assert itself again as objects pinned directly to the surface. Here, the system falls apart.

The relationship between these pieces and the space around them was initially anticipated as a confluence of theoretical understandings. This absolute finality of my research was somewhat naive. I soon realized that the three facets were meant to approach each other but never collide. Installation interventions allowed me to blend the streams of thought into the architecture. The preexisting circumstances for display allowed me to let go of control in an extremely controlled way.

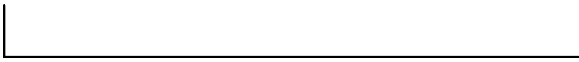




Fig. 12. From thesis exhibition: *reaching for a slowing down, coming to terms*, Rollodex of notes and watercolours on custom plinth, 2024.



Fig. 13. From thesis exhibition: *making light of the quiet, starting to slip*, oil on canvas and pinned readymades, hanging from the ceiling by a string, backlit by daylight, 2024.



Fig. 14. *settling in the in-between, being reminded*, oil on canvas and watercolour on custom table, 2024.

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Appendix A

(on dedication)

If I had the luxury of tangents and a better economy of this word count, my dedications would easily be pages long. I would thank each of my classmates for their influence on my practice that will remain for a lifetime. Each conversation, critique, passing comment, and follow-up contemplation have been the most potent form of theoretical practice. Thank you to everyone that patiently waited as I filled a sticky note or looked for the appropriate space to scribble on the studio walls.

Thank you to Beth and Jamie, for your time and patience, for lending perspective and for quietly screaming the obvious when I so often could not see it.

Appendix B

(love letter to the studio)

The studio is a place where affecting is a three-dimensional contract. Where everything is a tool and the nothing is concrete, the space needs to respond and evolve yet be constant and predictable. Here is the place the story is written. It is volatile, messy, at odds with permanence, and desperately attempting containment. This is the challenging reality of objects of interest. They become sorted and enclosed, so they can play their new role unaffected by process. They are equal to the tools,¹¹ the consumables¹² and the substrate.¹³ Each ebbs a complementary wavelength with treatment unvarying. A found leaf receives the same reverence as my favourite brushes.¹⁴

¹¹ Literal: brushes, knives, toothpicks, awls etc.

¹² The paint, tape, oil, water, etc.

¹³ The canvases, paper, and walls.

¹⁴ Writing “brush” in singular form feels equivalent to choosing a favourite child.

Appendix C

(a thought on “place”)

I have become grounded by the consistent pace of this city. The Chinese dry goods being rolled onto the sidewalk each morning across from my window, the garage door of their shop acquiring graffiti then a week later being painted over and the cycle restarting again the next week. I found solace in the crows, in their work ethic and structure, everyday commuting in and then traveling home together. They are a constant. No matter the events of a day, the sun will start to set, and the crows will pass over. They are a hyperbody of feathered airfoils and a mythical fraternity. Seeing the river of black specs made me aware of time passing, adjusting by daily minute increments, reminding me that the seasons are changing.

