



A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

*Tableau Sublime*

Emma Hildebrandt

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Under the Supervision of:

Chairperson:

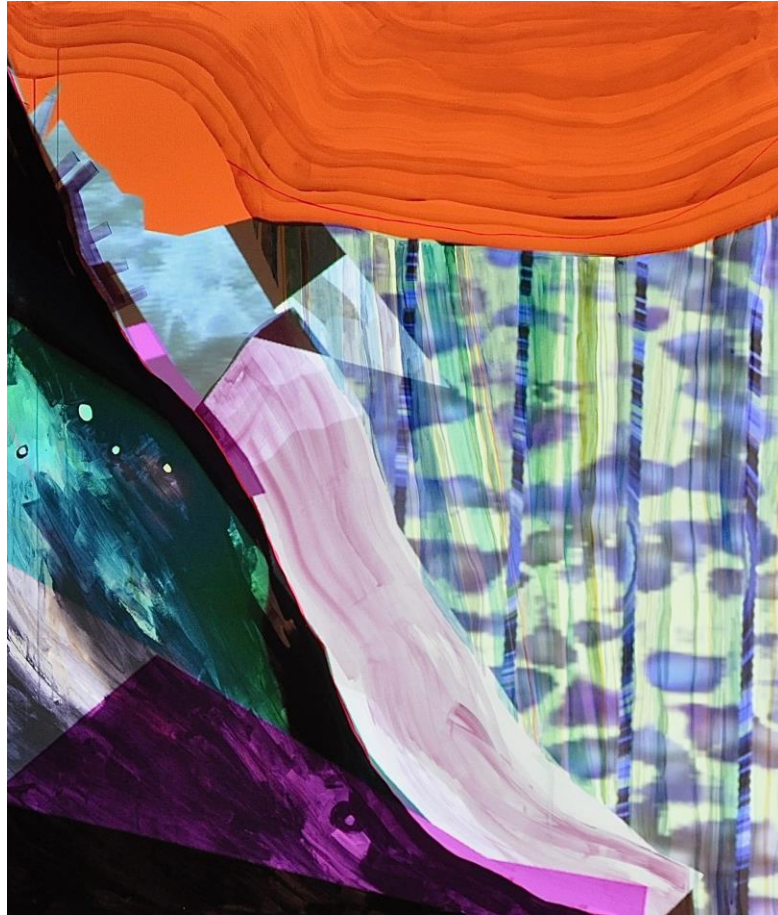
Peer Bode

Committee Members:

Stephanie McMahon

Andrew Deutsch





"Shifts", 5'x6', Watercolor on Paper, Projection, 2018

## Discovery

The past is not living. My position as an artist leaves me no less passionate than a historian. Despite the occasional discovery, history is a truth.<sup>1</sup> The factual evidence exists linearly however abstract our approach to it may be. What has occurred was shared knowledge at one time regardless of if it was forgotten. While it may not have survived long enough for us to know it, the information was shared at one point in time. Our preference toward non-linear perception makes it difficult for us to understand that actions are constantly finding an end.

In his famous 'Zero History' text, William Gibson advised that when making something that you feel is brilliant, one should negate any sensations of wonder often associated with it. While this seems to do-away with the culture of labelling, it shares a lot with post-modern choreographer Yvonne Rainer's 'No Manifesto'. Written in accompaniment to her work at the Judson Church, each sentence of this text begins with the word "No" followed by an assertion.<sup>2</sup> Rainer called for artists to negate spectacle or awe and suggests that patrons of the arts should abide by this as well and reject sensational content. The aesthetic of Yvonne Rainer's work

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<sup>1</sup> Sterling, Bruce. "Atemporality for the Creative Artist." Wired. February 25, 2010. Accessed March 15, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "MoMA Learning." MoMA. Accessed April 23, 2019.

perpetuated these concepts. Whether this was in reaction to the canon set by production and narrative driven choreography, Rainer's work called upon the expectations of legacy in order to subvert it with genuine movement. In removing the sense of novelty or heroism out of making, the work could undo its eventual "resting-place" in history.

This body of work exists from known ideas and materials. Chinese philosophers theorized the basic principles of optics and projectors as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.<sup>3</sup> Even farther back, we shared interpretations of our surroundings through cave paintings located on every continent except Antarctica.<sup>4</sup> Both technologies exist because of the events which predated them, leaving the response to become the notable landmark. The commodification of painting and video has taken many forms, high and low, in entertainment and art. The journey of painting may appear greater by the sheer volume which exists, how it is celebrated in museums, and the accessibility to the medium. However, our relationship to the flat image holds lineage in many disciplines. New media maintains a dense history, though the resources only became attainable within the last century, and painting was distinguished as a chosen medium or act to convey their ideas rather than an inherent mode of working.<sup>5</sup>

My experiences inform my choice of material and technique. I am the conduit for this work, as it was determined by the ethos of the time it was made in. The action of creation is interdependent with materials and themes, leaving the final product to be ambiguous in what influenced my decision making.<sup>6</sup> As painting has become a direct extension of our physicality, video has become a tool much like pencil.<sup>7</sup> Video art was once considered the untouchable medium in nature because of its intended uses and lofty origins. When broken down, it became another mode of making, though reinvigorated other practices as they acquainted themselves with the possibilities of the medium and explored its aesthetics in order to contend with their digital angst.

Being bombarded with images, we observe many constructs of time while faced with our present one. Amidst the digital flood, this series will honor quietude through many lenses. The work is grounded in contemporary attitudes towards painting and new media and explores our current relationship with landscape.

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<sup>3</sup> Bellis, Mary. "Learn the History of How Photography Was Invented." ThoughtCo. September 05, 2018. Accessed November 25, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> MacPherson, Cory, and Caitlyn Miller. *Inventions in the Visual Arts: From Cave Paintings to CAD*. New York: Cavendish Square Publishing, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred, Brian. Interview with Carl Ostendarp. *Sound & Vision*. Podcast Audio. February 27, 2017. Accessed March 10, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Lowry, Bates. *The Visual Experience: An Introduction to Art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961. 156

<sup>7</sup> Ross, David A. *Clicking In: Hot Links to a Digital Culture*. Edited by Lynn Hershman Leeson. Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1996. 356





"Sighting", 5'x6', Watercolor on Paper, Projection, 2019

## Landscape

This body of work is an investigation of place. Specifically, I was intrigued by landscape and the connotations the word held. The term has a dense history within painting. Some of the earliest cave paintings featured animals that determined the space surrounding space as its environment. Our conceptual depictions of landscape alluded to the effect of place on the figure or our own values adhered to place. Following this, painting shifted to suit demand for commodification and honed aesthetics. The rectangle became the agreed foundation from which pictures would be communicated. The shape could be an attempt to grasp the edges of our field of vision where our peripheral drops off. The rectangle could also be a geometry set in response to the horizon line. Establishing a shape provided a set stage for actions to occur within, thus initiating our fascination with the flat image.

This subject established a system where I could explore atemporality and its effect on form. Landscape encompasses natural structures, though also holds the burden of artificially imposed ones. The ecological themes in this body of work were derived from recent encounters though are of an accumulation of experiences.

Growing up in Southern California, the land was very dry for most of the year. Dense brown shrubs lay low while the bear grass poked out and produced beautiful blooms that looked like sparklers all along the hillside. The sky was blue for most of my childhood, gradually growing hazier until I could no longer see the tall sky scrapers of downtown Los Angeles. In the dry seasons, parts of the landscape were rendered unrecognizable as the fires scorched entire mountains. During the fires the sun could only be seen faintly through the veil of orange smoke and smog. Once the sun set, gridded lights of suburbia were challenged by the lines of fire winding down the hillside. When I moved to Upstate New York, I discovered the land was very different. Lush decidua and conifers surrounded my house. With the humid months came thunderstorms and crickets that hummed their nightly chorus, and in winter purple branches lay like lace against pale sky. It was evident the land had been worked. The mountains and valleys were carved by glaciers. Woods were cleared by Dutch settlers for farming and divided up with stone walls, now overgrown monuments to what once was.

In the height of colonialism, there was incentive to discover new land and capitalize on the feat. It was assumed that these new places would boast abundant natural resources and phenomena only theorized about in writings. Shortly after independence, America constructed its own artistic renaissance to capture the new and radical nature of their country. Founded in the early 1800s, a group of painters were interested in capturing the fresh energy of the land. Be it the mystique of uncharted land, the promise this young democracy held, or subtle propaganda to encourage the economic opportunities; the paintings manifested from a shared pride. The Painters of the Hudson River Valley seemed to know their place when creating. While appearing revelatory in its newness, the work was highly self-aware as a historical emblem. At the forefront of the Hudson River Valley School Painters, Thomas Cole and Fredrich Church chose to elevate this new landscape with dynamic content.<sup>8</sup> Of them, the paintings depicted a rich new kind of light, as if to christen the infant country. They maintain contemporary spiritual and transcendental undertones without expiration.

Bearing witness to the same natural phenomena, I understood the sense of awe that compelled artists to record their surroundings with honesty as well as augment them. Our environment is a shared experience. This body of work investigates the shared perception of unique light. Of the many landscape painters throughout history, the Hudson River Valley painters set the cannon for those who succeeded them and reinvigorated this historical muse. My work re-contextualizes this light in contemporary means, as if to capitalize on the eternal qualities of light. I engage with the current tools available. The landscape paintings radiate from projected light and the burdens of our ecological hysteria. The landscape is a continually receptive entity which holds our history in physical form.

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<sup>8</sup> Avery, Kevin J. "The Hudson River School." MetMuseum. October 1, 2004. Accessed April 2, 2019.



"Rhythms", 5'x6', Watercolor on Paper, Projection, 2019

### **Painting and Time**

Leading up to the creation of this series, I spent a lot of time painting small scale Plein-Air watercolors. Pure looking and embodied research was a vital practice in the creation of this work. Upon returning to school I was able to pick up my investigations through video and resumed working with oil painting. This allowed me to delve into color and explore other modes of expressing landscape through installation. I eventually returned to watercolors as I was attracted to the range I could find with the pigment and the luminosity. I found that projected light could accentuate these qualities.

The twenty-first century brain is characterized by anxious impulses and overstimulation. To honor my subject, it was imperative that I reversed the priming my mind had been subjected to. Working in multiple mediums I could approach my practice through different modes. I found the most joy when using water media because of the pace it lent itself to. The finicky nature of the paint forced me to work quickly. I arrived at large scale watercolors through a desire to explore large scale gesture. As a performer I constantly engage my body and take satisfaction in living out a brush stroke across a surface. Because we can trace the



motions, we can sense the human qualities within the gestures track the recording of the event.<sup>9</sup> These improvisations are in direct response to the architecture of the rectangle. The uniform size provides opportunity to react differently with each iteration.

I consider our visual experience to be a series of images which is why we have assigned the nature of this object is to be flat.<sup>10</sup> These works remain within set parameters. The paintings settle into a space that is not on the surface of the wall, though doesn't come forward, leaving a space that floats in ambiguity. The landscape we are in has borne witness to our action, represented by an ephemeral kinetic scrim of accumulated imagery.

While seeming ever-present, these paintings still are grounded within set parameters. The term 'Tableau' translates to painting. Roland Barthes described a tableau to be a 'pure cut-out segment', implying that any surrounding environment is left out.<sup>11</sup> Though this suggests that the image functions independently and has no residue of reality. The tableaux I create are multifaceted and bear their surroundings regardless of guidelines. My first introduction to the tableau was through Richard Foreman's film "Once Every day". The openness of the digital medium allowed Foreman to create a dynamic singular image by including unedited scenes with prompts from the director and repetitive elements that gave better perspective for how the space functioned. Most paintings feature a degree of directing on the maker's part though fail to show how time and manipulation factor into the end product. This was also evident in the Pier Paolo Pasolini film, "The Gospel According to St. Mathew". Pasolini allowed for parameters to be broken within the visual structure and placed emphasis on its ability to be unstable yet still convey the message. This was done most notably through mismatched sound mixing, making for a more psychological inlet rather than a one-dimensional narrative.

The painting is not complete with brushes and pigment. Placing light atop the image is an extension of painting. The visual form of these works is true when the painting and projection are present. While it is moving, we are still viewing set parameters of time like the dimensions of the painting.<sup>12</sup> The finished work is a composite of imagery, method, and time. Each video component functions similarly to pigment, though maintains a singular meter. As a static image, time allows a piece to unfold for the individual upon first acquaintance, however, each work contains kinetic elements that satisfy action before being viewed. The images I've created maintain the still qualities associated with a tableau, though suggest depth beyond a single image through their movement. The event in the painting will occur regardless of someone's engagement, as it would with a static piece. However, the digital element allows this idea to be exaggerated in a kinetic form. Despite the constant flow of these pieces, the experience is still highly individual as there is no spectacular moment to indicate a climax, start, or end which is often associated with film or narrative driven work. The perception of the piece

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<sup>9</sup> Lowry, Bates. *The Visual Experience: An Introduction to Art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961. 238

<sup>10</sup> Lowry, Bates. *The Visual Experience: An Introduction to Art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961.

<sup>11</sup> Fer, Briony. *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art After Modernism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004. 91

<sup>12</sup> Lowry, Bates. *The Visual Experience: An Introduction to Art*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961. 228

is dependent on the concrete structure as kinetic elements dance within them and improvise with the greater space. Each piece has a different duration, so the engagement each piece has with one another is constantly changing.

In attempt to break the expectations of the audience I looked to John Cage. Music usually occurs in a set duration, and the space in between is filled completely. Cage explored how silence could take form in a medium dependent on sound but not on volume. This challenged listeners to be attentive to open space and consider it with the same weight as densely filled sound.<sup>13</sup> Cage's work prompted more active listening and challenged the entertainment qualities often associated with art.

Painter Laura Owens also employed this sort of attentiveness with her 1994 work 'Untitled', where the orientation of the piece was to be determined by the one installing it. This does leave process to be determined by a specific type of viewer, likely familiar with gallery spaces. The painting has a harsh horizontal through the rectangle, leaving for one half to be turquoise and the other a sandy beige. Depending on how it is installed it asks for a justification by the viewer as to what these fields of color signify.<sup>14</sup>

Post-modern dancer, Trisha Brown, also practiced a different engagement by asking the audience to audibly respond with their presence in the piece 'Yellowbelly'. When the audience yelled the phrase "yellowbelly!", Brown would dance and the piece would conclude when the audience stopped.<sup>15</sup> Knowing the ways that this has taken form across mediums I sought to create a piece that could call upon the viewer to experience the work as an individual, though place no preciousness on their viewership because the piece would continue on after they had departed from it.

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<sup>13</sup> Pritchett, James. *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art*. Compiled by Carla Plasencia. Edited by Ana Jimenez Jorquera. Barcelona: Museu D'Art Contemporani, 2009. 176

<sup>14</sup> Rothkopf, Scott, and Laura Owens. *Owens, Laura*. New York, NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017. 74

<sup>15</sup> "Yellowbelly (1969)." Trisha Brown Dance Company. Accessed April 13, 2019.



"Lilith's Playground", 5'x6', Watercolor on Paper, Projection, 2019

## Color

Color offered opportunity to manipulate the space beyond the surface of the painting while still honoring the containment of activity. The sheer size of this work already dominates a measured space, though the psychological kinespheres these works hold are influenced by color.

Different saturations and hues determine our experiences. Be it subtle or blatant, our associations with color are intertwined with our subconscious as ruled by judgement. In an essay, curator Nato Thompson discusses the various associations the color yellow holds. Thompson notes the color's practical uses, with signage and other cautionary tools. Though he also explores its spiritual connotations, even granting it a personality with behavioral qualities.<sup>16</sup> It is a given that the viewer will draw associations with colors regardless of if it is conscious or not. Within each color are layers of cultural significance and social values, leaving for a kaleidoscopic experience of a single color.

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<sup>16</sup> Thompson, Nato. "Yellow." Cabinet. 2006. Accessed April 14, 2019.

Stan Brakhage also notes the power of color, and claims that color holds connotations beyond our general bias. In my work, projected color can act alone on the bare white paper or transform pigment painted onto the surface. As Brakhage notes, the result can evoke sonic qualities.<sup>17</sup> As we may associate the color pink with an emotion, it can fill the space with sound that is not literally there, though exists in the ether for individuals to grasp. Depending on the opacity, I can experiment and choose when to bring elements forward or make them recede for a cacophonous experience.

The colors present in these works are a combination of neutrals derived from their source and fluorescent dayglow counterpoints. As we manipulate the landscape it reflects our values. Currently, our culture is obsessed with bright LED lights and neon. While these may have been successful at gaining attention at one point, media has assimilated to appeal to the current viewer. Projections allow me to mimic these manmade totems and delve into their obtuse nature. I seek techniques contemporary with my time by using projections, monitors, and sound. In using the vernacular, I can portray the subject with greater accuracy to its time.

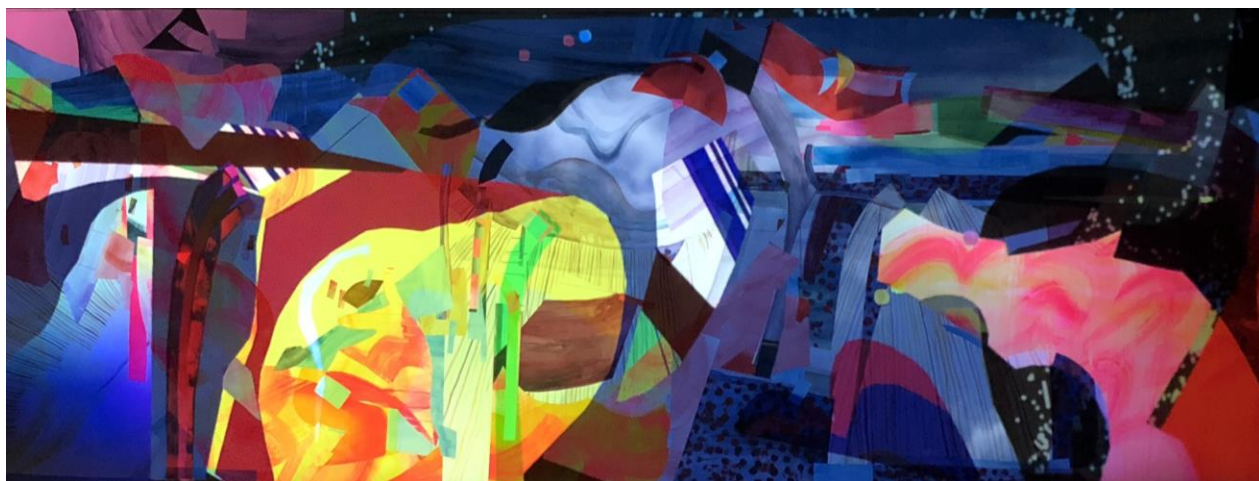
My work acknowledges certain aspects of the form, though utilizes color to offer different perspective to something known. A work has greater emotive qualities when it is not true to its form because it counters the expectations set by a viewer.<sup>18</sup> In retreating from its known qualities, color confronts the viewer with a different understanding of the form in totality.

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<sup>17</sup> Brakhage, Stan, and Robert A. Haller. *Brakhage Scrapbook: Collected Writings 1964-1980*. Documentext, 1982. 49

<sup>18</sup> Phillipps, Lisle March. *Form and Colour*. 2nd ed. New York: C. Scribner's and Sons, 1925.





"Tableau Sublime", 15'x6', Watercolor on Paper, Projection, 2019