

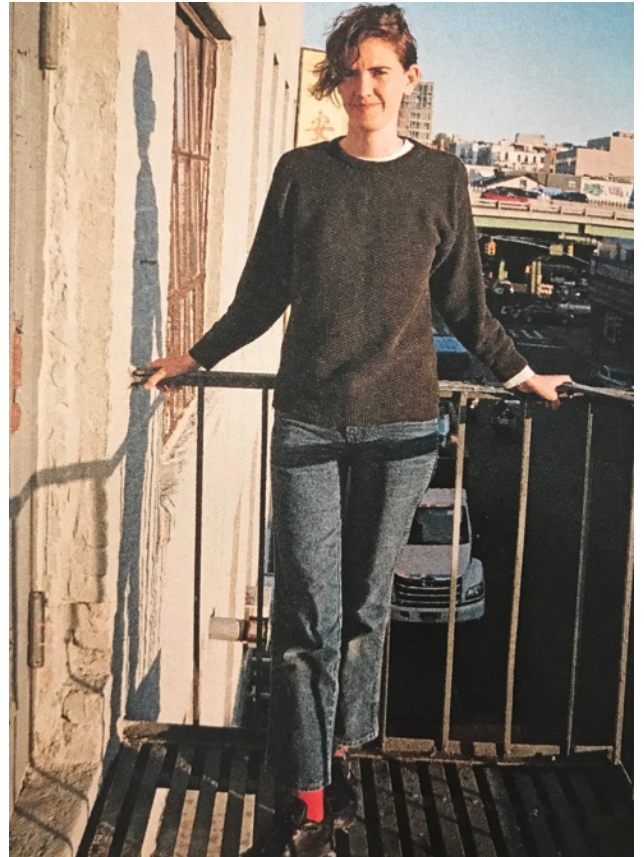
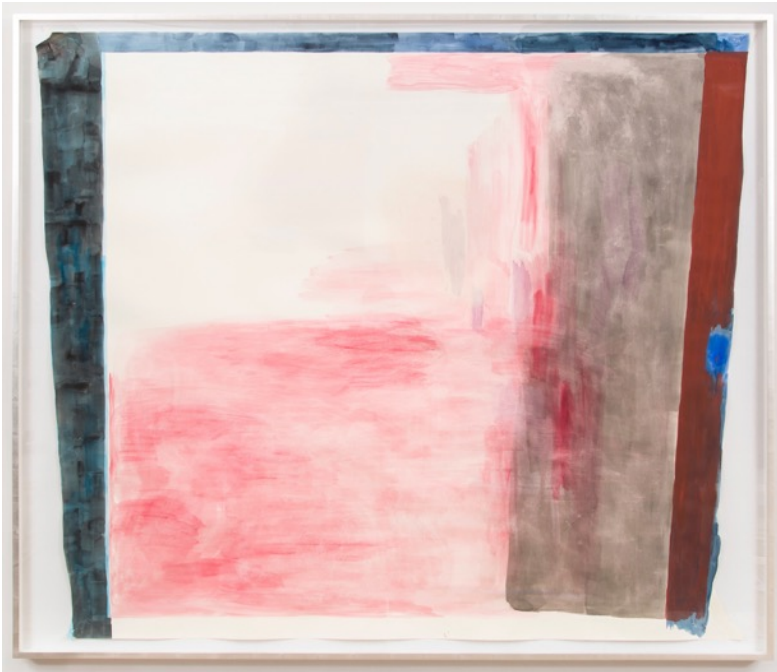
Adrianne Rubenstein, “Upon Closer Observation”, *Cultured Magazine*, Winter 2017, 138.



Upon Closer Observation

Artist Adrianne Rubenstein visits painter **Monique Mouton** to find a breakthrough body of work, slow in its process and loaded with emotion.

PORTRAIT BY MARY MANNING



Above, a recent work *Untitled*, 2017, by painter Monique Mouton, pictured at right outside of her Brooklyn studio.

In Monique Mouton's studio, her paintings on paper — large sheets with curled edges cut from a giant roll hanging above the doorway — fill her Gowanus space. The paintings are hung atop one another with pushpins, the shapes and lines from one work seeping into the next. Vast areas of rosewater wash and U-shapes curve from edge to edge without breaking the boundary of the frame. The paintings seem to be dealing with the expression of subtle relationships between material, hand and spirit.

“The thing I find interesting about art in general, painting specifically is that it's such a direct and subjective action,” says the 33-year-old. “Even if you remove yourself from it, it's still a mark of your intent or idea.” Her paintings have an air of tranquility; they're carefully crafted and tended to. The detail in them isn't so much descriptive as it is noticeable. They lull you into the deep poetics of the medium. In the studio I wrote quick descriptions of what I saw in the work: One painting is all green, another virtually entirely yellow with a black notch running midway through the right side. The brushstrokes are even and piled on one another. The density or transparency is always somewhere between 20 and 80 percent — never empty or dark. As such, the paintings themselves could be interpreted as windows with diaphanous screens mediating the space between yourself and another world.

“It will show signs of my hands,” she says, “how I moved it around the space, where I painted, where I rubbed it in.” Having known Mouton's work prior to her debut at Bridget Donahue Gallery in January of 2016 — her first solo show in New York — I remember being surprised when she suddenly started painting on paper. It seemed like a huge departure, a symbolic and daring move but now I see it as nothing other than a breakthrough. Up until that moment, Mouton had been painting on plywood cut-outs that hung on the wall or sometimes leaned, or lay on the floor, an attempt maybe to get away from formalist notions of the medium. The circles felt like mirrors, and the sticks seemed derived from nature, as with Agnes Martin's allusion to “straightening the lines on a leaf.” With the paper, however, there is less virtuosity. Brushing pigment on to paper is the calmest thing you can do, the least taxing and the most expansive.

In the coming months Mouton will be in the studio, subtly shifting the shapes and feelings that appear in her work. As young artists we feel so alone before things get started, but once you have a successful show and a review from Roberta Smith in *The New York Times*, it can quickly become a race to finish paintings. Being able to pause so you can analyze the motion or reduction of a single gesture is the most vital part of being an artist, so it's a pleasure when someone such as Mouton can make this both apparent and tangible through her work. A second solo show at Donahue's is planned for next season.

Lee Plested, “Elizabeth McIntosh, Monique Mouton, Silke Otto-Knapp”, *Artforum*, September 2017, 336-337.

ARTFORUM

VANCOUVER

Elizabeth McIntosh, Monique Mouton, Silke Otto-Knapp

CATRIONA JEFFRIES



As elsewhere, painting's status is still fractious in Vancouver's art scene, enough so that the press release for this recent group show at Catriona Jeffries — which featured an international, all-female lineup comprising Elizabeth McIntosh, Monique Mouton, and Silke Otto-Knapp — felt the need to reassure people that “painting is not a problem.” Even if the medium has died a thousand deaths and undergone a thousand revivals, it seems destined to continually negotiate its associations with social complicity, bourgeois complacency, market contingency, etc. — and to confront new possibilities in structuring meaning. At Catriona Jeffries, the works collectively pushed expression, gesture, and figuration into explorations of illusionistic space — not only in the pictorial field but also in the realms of affect, memory, and history.

The first work the visitor encountered upon entering the space was Otto-Knapp's *Monotones (Moonlit scene after Samuel Palmer)*, 2016, an expansive watercolor landscape of misty forms arrayed across a dark ground. In this homage to Palmer, who along with his nineteenth-century peers in the Ancients group was inspired by the poetry of William Blake, Otto-Knapp conveys the spirit of romantic contemplation through monochromatic reduction, delicately layering soft billows of white over a gunmetal-stained canvas. Installed on an adjacent wall, Otto-Knapp's *Schatten Theatre*, 2017, finds the artist inverting the layering technique employed in *Monotones*. An ethereal layer of white pigment covers a dark ground, so that the silhouettes of anti-Vietnam War demonstrators are surrounded by a veiled glow. The negative figures dance their protest, arms akimbo, as they surface from a shadowed past into a numinous present — bringing historical politics into a contemporary field of possibility.

Monique Mouton, Untitled, 2012, oil on plywood, 94 x 8 x 1/2”.

This play between figure and ground, mark and support, figured elsewhere in the show: A pair of oil paintings by McIntosh, *Green In* and *Out Hands Black*, both 2017, depicted arms entangled with rope set against monochrome grounds. Though each arm is nearly identical to the last, their varying configurations articulate contrasting moods of optimism and gloom. In *Green In*, the arms, each of which wears a pale-blue sleeve snug around its wrist, are aligned in two rows, their hands coming together at the center of the composition to guide a black rope across a lush, absinthe-green field. *Out Hands Black* is populated by eight prop-like arms similarly aligned in two rows — but this time, save for one outlier, they reach toward the top and bottom edges of the canvas. Segments of white rope lie on thick, black background, winding through and around the hands. The otherwise ominous atmosphere is disrupted by swaths of dull mustard that form the cartoonish arms and by the fleshy hands affixed to these props by the weight of the paint itself. As Otto-Knapp does with watercolor canvases, McIntosh experiments with formal and mnemonic layering, weaving rope in and around her strangely isolated arms to create spatial and temporal depth.

Mouton's contributions to the show — scraps of plywood cut into oblong shapes and enhanced with gently brushed undulations of oil and pastel — hung in conventional fashion on the walls but were also scattered across the gallery floor, rendering the architectural space itself a ground. Standing out in this gallery field were *Untitled*, 2013, a long, midnight-black rectangular panel that had been screwed to the wall, and *Untitled*, 2012, an ellipsoid shape painted purple on one side and left bare on the other. The latter work was installed in the center of the gallery, propped against a column, imposing a kind of brash vitality on the physical space. For *Untitled*, 2017, an oval-shaped painting treated with a white base, Mouton applied a thin sheen of black as a topcoat. The composition features, in the bottom-left foreground, an elongated L shape rendered in luminescent white pigment. This shape is echoed by a smaller L painted in black, which is positioned at the top-right section of the painting. The left edge of the oval is contoured by a cobalt line, sending a jolt of color through the work's largely black-and-white palette. Like Mouton's other plywood inventions, the understated piece demonstrates painting's compositional potential and echoes the medium's spill into sculpture, architecture and world.

— *Lee Pleded*

Tim Gentles, “Sputterances”, *Art Agenda*, April 13, 2017.

art agenda

by TIM GENTLES

April 13, 2017

“Sputterances”

METRO PICTURES, New York

March 17–April 22, 2017



View of “Sputterances,” Metro Pictures, New York, 2017.

In artist Sanya Kantarovsky's latest curatorial venture, an exhibition at Metro Pictures organized around the underappreciated Dutch painter René Daniëls, he continues to examine the mechanics of artistic positioning. Similarly, in his previous curated exhibition, "No Joke" at Tanya Leighton (Berlin, 2015), he grouped together work that, through humor and self-deprecation, cast a self-reflexive eye on the mythologization of the artist.

Daniëls, who suffered a cerebral hemorrhage in 1987 at the age of 37, and has only made work sporadically since, was initially received as a Neo-Expressionist, a movement known more for the expulsion of sweat and blood onto canvas than critique of the broader art field. Yet Daniëls's work—and the present exhibition, whose title "Sputterances," a portmanteau of sputter and utterance, derived from a poem written by the artist—suggests that this is hardly a neither/nor proposition, and that, rather, expression is tied to the mutual dependence of sense and nonsense, central to which is the question of the frame.

For "Sputterances," Kantarovsky has assembled 22 artists, ranging from his peers, elder statespeople of figurative painting's seemingly perpetual renewal, and historical figures both vaunted and obscure, alongside three works by Daniëls. It's not immediately clear what unites these artists, much less around Daniëls—few, if any, have had a direct relationship with the artist, but all seem to share with Daniëls (and, it should be said, with Kantarovsky too) an interest in the moments where figuration exceeds itself and spills into abstraction. Rather than placing other artists' work in a historical or conceptual lineage with Daniëls, "Sputterances" seeks to construct a transhistorical painting network on the basis of shared formal qualities and diverse modes of affiliation.

Formal resonances abound in this show, both across works in the exhibition and with Daniëls's oeuvre as a whole. Celestial bodies, a persistent motif in Daniëls's work following his stroke, are depicted here in his only work from this later period in the exhibition, 2006's *The Most Contemporary Picture Show*, as well as in two more recent canvases by Mathew Cerletty (*What's the Feels Like?*, 2017) and Walter Swennen (*Wind Blue*, 2015). The giraffes that occasionally appear in Daniëls's paintings, redolent with themes of colonial expansion, are echoed in Leidy Churchman's 2017 painting. Titled *Free Delivery*, it doesn't look like the elder artist's work so much as the three giraffes staring out at the viewer evoke its disorienting humor. A shared color palette of deep, earthy reds, blues, and greens leads to an unexpected synergy between the stunning nighttime tableau of Jacob Lawrence's painting *Christmas in Harlem* (1937), and the moody abstraction of Monique Mouton's *St. Patrick* (2016).



Monique Mouton, *St. Patrick*, 2016.

Besides Daniëls’s aforementioned painting, “Sputterances” contains two works completed in the initial phase of the artist’s career. The half-articulated forms of *Hey verloren huis teruggevonden (The lost house found)* (1982-83), where a wine glass seems to merge with a woman’s face amidst a sea of sickly green, collapse figure into ground and show the artist under the influence of surrealist automatism. More striking is *Zonder titel (Untitled)* (1987), part of a series of work in which Daniëls rigorously explored the art gallery as a kind of stage, insistently populating his canvases of this period with a mise en abyme-like diagramming of the white cube. Often, as in here, where they are set against a simple off-white background, these perspectival renderings of gallery walls are abstracted to form another immediately recognizable motif with its own rich set of performative connotations, the bowtie. Painting, this body of work seems to say, is at heart a theatrical practice. To return to an earlier question of framing, Daniëls’s painting isn’t expressive, but rather provides the parameters under which the artist can inhabit different modes of being. The present exhibition not only recontextualizes Daniëls’s work among painters who both preceded and followed him, but seeks also to bring a whole community into existence, however transitory it may be, through Kantarovsky’s own encounter with him.

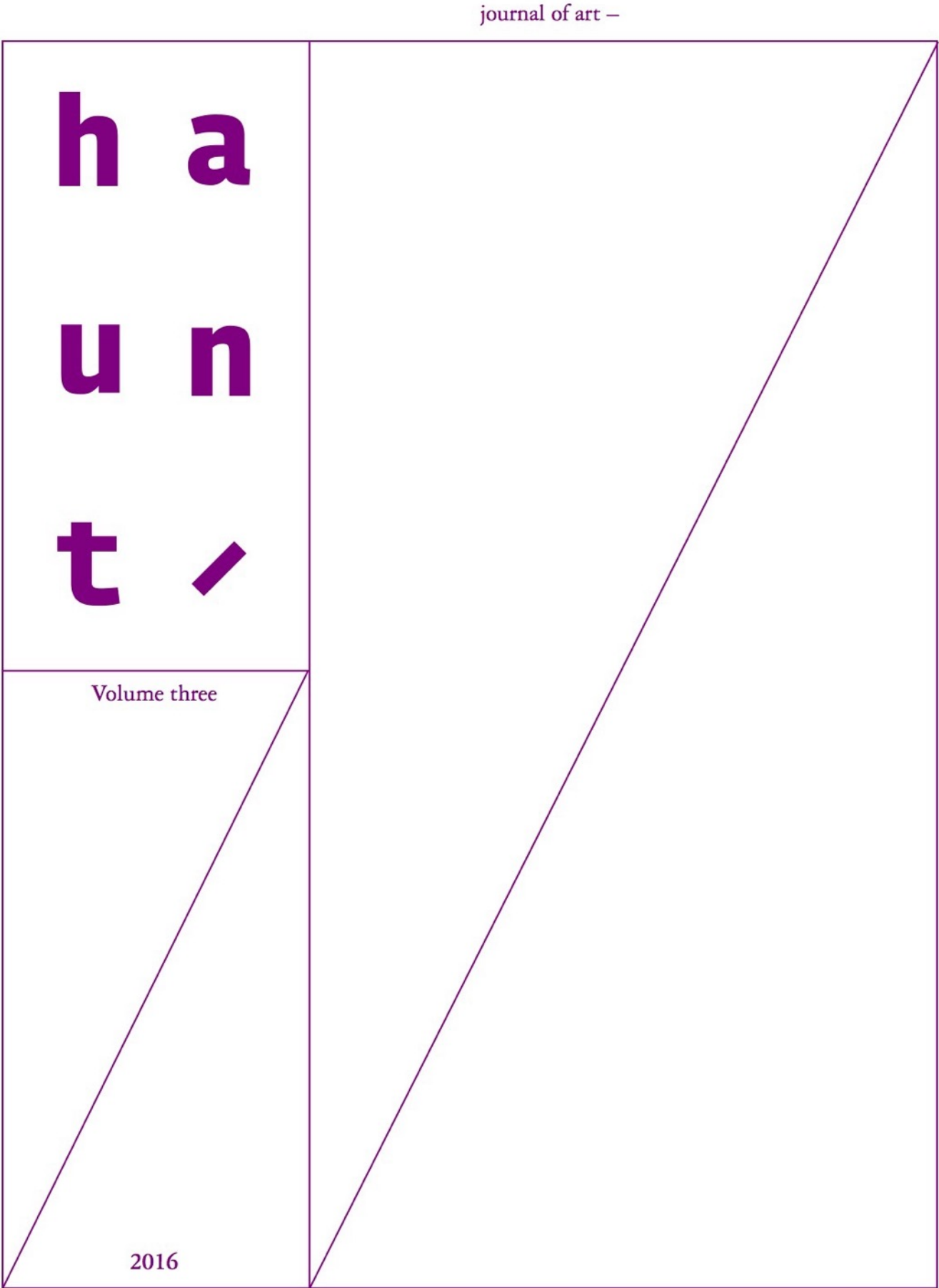
The complex, internecine role of community in defining artistic practice speaks to larger issues around the critical viability of figurative painting today. Daniëls’s earlier work transpired at that crucial early 1980s moment in which the utopian micro-communities of punk gave way to a more familiar image of the art world as a globally interconnected network. In this respect, one of the exhibition’s most disarming works is by the late Karlo Kacharava (1964-1994), still relatively unknown outside his native Georgia, whose *English Romanticism* (1993) depicts a bohemian-looking couple walking through long grass, while the word “London” and a cartoonish tugboat float mysteriously above them. This allusion to a particularly English mode of pastoral romanticism perhaps belatedly anticipates the global marketing of subcultural style in which the art world functions as its well-oiled R&D wing. If Daniëls’s work performs critique by taking as its subject the constructions that make expression possible, it’s not clear that a curatorial conceit that promises to revitalize and broaden the artist’s milieu is capable of a comparable operation. Nonetheless, “Sputterances” is a refreshing exhibition, reminding the viewer that figurative painting can be a vehicle for critique, beyond mere recourse to its sociality.

.....

Tim Gentles is a writer, curator, and archivist based in New York. He has an MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York.

.....

Alan Longino, “Painting is a Whale,” *Haunt Journal of Art*, Volume 3, Issue 1, October 19, 2016, 33-43.



Painting is a whale

By Alan Longino

Hålval

Valar vill vatten
 halrum i vatten
 lättnad i fettнад
 rymmen i späck

Hole Whale

Whales want water
 hollow in water
 lightness in fatness
 flight in blubber¹

—Aase Berg, *Forsla Fett* (*Transfer Fat*)

Painting is a whale when it is okay in its grandest fragility. In most environments, whales are okay with you touching them, but they are easily frightened creatures that, by too much force or too much accident or too much overt displays of pursuit or control, will make them immediately turn from you and the formal logic with which you approached them. Like the cetologist who studies whales, whose metrics and rationales for studying and quantifying other sea creatures fail when trying to understand the communities and cultures of whales, one must submit to the whale—to its terms, its histories and extra-histories—to allow its kindness and intimacy to take over, and for the form of itself to develop fully.

The older idea that form is only the visual composition, or that form is the explanation of the contained content, is insufficient for understanding painting and poetry today. Instead, what I hope to look at is the painted or written form as an ecology, one that materializes and moves along an intimate spectrum of nature and history. A kind of form that can be understood beyond itself and beyond either the painted or printed plane.

Set as my desktop background, the painting that most reminds me of intimacy or the touched essence of compassion, is Piero di Cosimo's *Perseus Liberating Andromeda*, an admittedly unlikely painting to behold such virtues. Within a triangle series of events, the viewer watches as Perseus descends from the skies in the upper right, as he then slashes at the scaly back of a sea monster to save the bound Andromeda, and ending with him and Andromeda closest to us (now in the lower right) as they enjoy the ceremony of their wedding. What is triangulated and focused on, though,

h a u n t

is the central, assumed foe of the story — the sea monster. Its head points, leers we may say, to Andromeda, as the body is turned away from and swells in defense to the mythic but already certain events of Perseus. The green and brown oils that cover its flesh are either the sliminess on the creature we should be in horror of or the birthing fluids still nurturing the beast into its specific role — a damned role for only a specific calling. Turned into a clown that we may laugh at with all those silly tufts of red hair cresting the nape, and already in despair at first sight, Perseus—here I may call him the father of the scene—slashes and torments it instead of nurturing or attempting to understand, and Andromeda—the mother to whom he looks for support and care—turns away from its gaze. But she does not turn away in an attempt to unbind herself or to attempt escape—she knows she is there to be duly saved—as she so much turns away from this beast in absolute embarrassment for its predicament and immediate end to its short life. The gaze that she does not meet—a gaze met by no one in the picture and which does not address the viewer—is entirely transformative of the picture and of the mythic event because, in the sea monster, referred to as *Cetus*, we see its eyes hope for some connection that would afford its short life some semblance of an actual being.

The connection that *Cetus* enjoys and that allows it to be removed from the story—which only cares about the certain events of Perseus and Andromeda—is equally triangulated by the multiple histories and definitions of language surrounding the creature. In Greek, *Cetus* was often called to as any large fish, or shark, or whale depending on its context. It is a word made fatty by its tender malleability and which equally carries over to the poetry of Aase Berg, where *Val* may equally refer to a whale, a voter, or an election. The understanding of which definition to use is dependent on the framing, context, and its movement along a fattened spectrum of meaning, as well as a history of that meaning. However, where the Greeks were insouciant in their definition—though equally fluid—Berg's usage of the word *val* in her poems is precisely cut but still flowing, contained but understood as larger than itself, fattened but not weighty and buoyed to the surface so that it may make sense of itself. This intimacy of language and approximation of form is immediately noticeable in the recent work by the painters Monique Mouton and Sydney Schrader. For both artists, the pictures are displayed as a grouping, or merely as a group, that by similar matter—the paper, the oil, the ink and pencil—allow not for one decisive picture to arise and maintain a central hold, but instead bind themselves together into a nature that does not allow the artist or the viewer singularly to decide where the next ridge, the next line or the next picture should begin or act. The more one reads, indeed looks at, Berg's poetry or Mouton (fig. 2 and 3) and Schrader's paintings (fig. 1), the more they even behave like a whale. With their own coda of language and behavior, the form of it produces a culture about itself that is not dissimilar from the way whales themselves interact and form intimate bonds between themselves.

Fig. 2:

Monique Mouton, **More Near (V)**, 2015, watercolor, gesso, ink, pastel on paper, 66.25 x 60 inches (168.28 x 152.40 cm), photograph copyright Monique Mouton, courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.



Fig. 3:

Monique Mouton, **More Near (III)**, 2015, watercolor, tempera, pencil on paper, 58.5 x 67 inches (148.59 x 170.18 cm), photograph copyright Monique Mouton, courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.



As the cetologist Hal Whitehead recently discusses, in an interview with writer Rachel Allen, this interaction and intimacy within the culture and social forming of whales is noted in how these groups, or clans—all matrilineal in nature—keep tightly to themselves and do everything together, communally caring for each other's young, babysitting, and moving together, with Whitehead saying "if one turns left, they all turn left."² The limbic systems, which is associated with emotional and behavioral effects, as well as the storing of memories, in the brain of Killer (Orca) Whales, is made up of three separate lobes. This is in contrast to the cingulate gyrus (the limbic lobe) of human brains that only consists of one lobe. In addition, the relative number of spindle cells within the limbic lobe, capable of processing social behavior and empathetic effects, is more than 4x that within the human brain, and this possibly explains why violence or competition are much less observed within these groups (though there is some).³

Whales spend the majority of their time diving deep for feeding, all by themselves, but when they are on the surface—the only place that we are able to adequately study them—they spend their whole time socializing, cuddled up in tight clusters and communicating through a very specific coda of clicks that are produced or occur regardless of what they are doing. For Whitehead and other cetologists, these clicks, which are produced by one whale and then responded to by another after a pause, form bonds between them that are performed almost like duets and are simply about bonding rather than directing or organizing. Whitehead characterizes living in these small, tightly bound communities as related to "staying for times in small, isolated fishing villages, where everyone knows everyone and everyone knows what's going on around them . . . there's not a whole lot of new information to convey. But there's still a lot of talking. What is said doesn't seem to matter; that you say it, and who you say it to, and how you say it is what matters."⁴

In painting and poetry, where participants are often insiders or specialists, there is an environment of insularity. Everyone equally knows what is going on, and there is often not so much new information to convey. The problem, however, is the disregard for this culture of closeness and intimacy, favoring individuality and separation, procedurally categorizing by some verifiable metrics, instead of looking at what a community of contact and participation invokes and produces by its close-knit being. One solution is looked to in Friedrich Kiesler's as-yet unpublished texts on *Magic Architecture*—what he describes as an "architecture of exuberant being"—that emphasizes "contact, not separation" and "participation, not isolation."⁵ Even more interestingly is that, as Spyros Papapetros writes for a preface to the texts, Kiesler offers not a definition of magic, but the magic poly-potency of definitions: "the book is not about the magic of architecture, but the tectonic thought processes of magic that retraces the pat-

terns, enclosures, and (re)definitions of magic's projective environment."⁶ The original exuberant being of architecture is then realized as a tool that makes space and forms by its own energy. By near proximity, this exuberance—regardless of scale, be it a local fishing village, a clan of whales, a poem or a painting—may necessarily multiply definition and produce from within itself simply by forming bonds through its near immanence. It would be important to note, then, that the exhibition of Mouton's work to which I am mostly referring was aptly titled, *More Near*, a title that precisely spoke to the ability of the paintings to bring themselves nearer to each other and produce between them a shared form that allowed an escape from each of the planes of paper, and equally displayed an almost telepathic intimacy between the paintings that spoke of an immanent form running throughout those same planes.

This immanence of meaning and production from within itself, I had originally read in the poems of Berg, but while the poems may deal with themes of surrealism and speculative futures, it is again in the language of Berg, and particularly Mouton's paintings, that an escape, like di Cosimo's *Cetus*, is made. Berg writes:

Mamma val

Amma val
Valyngelskal
Ge harmjölkk,
alla val är
samma val

Mom choice

Nurse whale
Whalebroodshell
Give hare-milk
all whales are
the same whale.⁷

In such condensed and looping language, the shared energies of these near intimacies crack through the written and painted form, like the cuts, ridges, and tears in the paper of Mouton's paintings. It is by these energies and cracks and tears to material and lingual forms that the ability to read and look to their contents of history makes sensual their trajectory along the fluid spectrum of meaning and material. For each of the painters and poet, this material is the paper—a gentle material whose entire history is based on chains, links, and bonds, and things woven and cuddled together—that allows words and ridges to pass to the next painting or to the next poem,

effecting a similar biology and formation of culture between the works and writings. However, though influences of painting can be immediately identified in Mouton's work—I would like to think to Moira Dryer, Giorgio Cavallon, or Stéphane Bordarier—the notion to simply proceed along a linear timeline of modernity visible at the surface of the painting should be disregarded. What is regarded is the exuberance, at every scale, of the paper and of the painting to carry itself into and out of different contexts and framing devices, producing similarly exuberant cuts, tears, and forms that bind, nurture, and self-generate, because they are so near to and inextricable from each other.

For Kiesler, magic architecture was a story of human housing (though not exactly utopian like he feared it would be applied) of living like whales, and small fishing villages, in closer and closer community to one another. This was in effort that our participation in communication and being would become so commonplace among each other that hierarchies would dissolve and, by our intimacy, we would produce a being of poly-definition and grander compassion. In each of Berg's poems, or Mouton and Schrader's paintings, there is an immediate sense of contained compassion as the language and form repeat and travel through seasons and moods together, as they do in Schrader's groupings, and generates ideas by the touched intimacy they have within themselves. This generation and repetition in turn produces difference by constraint or confinement. Ultimately, I imagine, this would be the forming and binding of the group by participation of itself as an individual—a composition that Berg mentions in "all whales are / the same whale."⁸ This participation and formation from itself is, as Lucien Levy-Bruhl determines, what allows the participant to be both themselves and other than themselves, saying "in a fashion no less incomprehensible, they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities . . . which make themselves felt outside, without ceasing to remain where they are."⁹ This principle of participation allows for multi-numeration, and consubstantiality and, further, as being able to exist in multiple locations. Between Mouton and Schrader's paintings, where the former's exists as individually spaced-out objects within a gallery, and the latter's as a comprehensive, uninterrupted grouping, the forms and colors of each work participate in the generation and forming of each painting beside it or among it. This participation allowing the paintings to extend themselves beyond that of a network, and into a sensible ecology where no node or area of the paintings are privileged over or independent from one another. Instead, the paintings find themselves as self-recombinatory and self-interpretive.

This sensible ecology can be realized from the cautionary phrase of great harm that Berg writes:

The Whale Squeezes Its Sluggishness Through a Certain Room.

*The white blubber; the pain. You Whale you Voter your deed breaks holes in calm shapes.*¹⁰

In this passage, I picture the whale as pinched by pincers between different rooms and passageways through a house; a house of rationale that has compartmentalized and has broken apart the whale into logical and easily understood parts—here, a dorsal fin in the living room, and here, its blubber on your bathroom stool. However, the whale is hurt and the whale cannot participate as itself (if it can even live) when it is subjected to logical interpretation and categorization—its calm lumpy shape has been broken apart by a home that cannot let it live. Its grandness is dissected by logic and its fragility has been done away with by empiricism. Among Whitehead and other cetologists, general metrics and logic have not been able to explain the social behavior and cultural formations of whales—even the way space is determined by whales is different from us, as the clicks and songs they produce travel across oceanic distances in a speed that we cannot imagine on land.¹¹ Funnily, though, it is the empirical language around whales that suggests this inevitable fact (as well as allowing one final escape from rationale), as Baleen whales, which includes the largest living mammal, the Blue whale, are commonly referred to as the taxon of their parvorder, *Mysticeti*, a word that enjoys multiple, unknowable qualities outside of itself.

For the *Mysticeti*, or *baleaneus mysticetus*, this unknowable quality is due to the same duet of definition and meaning that the words and translations of *val* or *cetus* enjoy. When dancing over the divisions of the dictionary, one finds around the prefix of *mys* - the immediately identifiable *mystic*, explaining its origin as the Greek *mystikos*, or “unknown.” This, suspiciously, is not the word that originates the life of the Mysticete into being, as its name is further implicated in mistranslation and historical entanglement. From Aristotle’s *Historia Animalium*, which was one of the first texts that sought to classify the objects and pictures in nature, the *o mus to kētos*, or “the mouse, the whale so called” was mistranslated into *o mustikētos*, “the Mysticetus,” by D.W. Rice, assuming the mouse was an ironic reference to the creature’s size or its baleen “whiskers.”¹² At any scale, the exuberance of the unknown, or the mystical, turns human rationale and mistake into its own fortune, by allowing one step further for the *mys*- to weave itself fully into this sensible ecology.

Hopping up and over on the page of the dictionary, like a foxtrot, *mys-* finds itself attached to a curious *Mysis*, an opossum-shrimp or small crustacean of the Arctic and Baltic seas that is none other than the principal food source for the Mysticete, or baleen whale. Pulling into its mouth large amounts of seawater and *Mysis*, then, using its baleen to sieve out the water, the whale traps the *Mysis* in its mouth. The *mys-*, the *mysis* and the *mystic*, adds to its weight, its blubber, its fatness, its being, and exists through its body, just as it does support its taxon and our classification of it. This is the sensible ecology that is realized, as a full coursing of causes and relations that is *not* unknowable, yet only hides itself in deep *mysticism*. As sustenance and as a word, the form spreads around the life of the whale forming bonds outside of itself simply because of its own participation, and it does not direct or organize the whale in any way, as it simply supports and gives life to it for no other reason than it wills.

In the paintings, this ecology is built upon the logic and understandings of Modernism. However, instead of attempting to will forth some form for themselves, the painters and poet allow for already given pictures to participate and will themselves about. Keeping intensely connected to each other and speaking or recombining at incredible speeds, the source of information in the pictures and poems appear simple and natural and presumably unknowable. And, it is the last part about which I am most concerned because this presumption of an art that is unknowable is one that is still being restricted to those same general metrics and classical formations that attempt to separate and reduce the artwork from its polynomial being. In the paintings and the poems, this sensible ecology runs and courses itself throughout as a visible process of gyrification—the process that forms the characteristic folds and ridges in the brain. It is as though through the paper and each of its ridges, valleys, and natural cuts—such that equally happens in either the brain of a whale or on the page of a dictionary—these excavations and excursions of language intensively circle in and out of these paintings and poems, condensing them to shared points like the oscillation between William Burroughs, “*when you cut into the present, the future leaks out*,”¹³ and responded swiftly by César Hidalgo when discussing the work of Ilya Prigogine, “*there is no past, and no future, but only a present that is being calculated at every second*.”¹⁴

A few days ago, I was thinking back to *Cetus* and the predicament in which the beast unfortunately found himself, between Perseus and Andromeda. Numerous artworks depict Andromeda’s grave situation, with the sea monster either squeezing around her body or glaring at her naked form from below. This is an intensely sexualized scene so it is no wonder that many painters and sculptors have focused so heavily on the scene. However, it is equally important to remember the original source of this entire predicament—the classical understanding of hierarchical beauty, as Cassiopeia proclaimed her daughter the most beautiful among both gods and

men, obviously infuriating the women of Olympus. Cassiopeia eventually found her fate in the stars—as she turns over in her chair for eternity—but so figured *Cass*, *cass*, I always confused her with *Cassandra*, the Trojan princess-fortune teller who suffered to have no one believe her visions of events that lay before their eyes. *Cassandra*, a minor character of a particular mythological set, finds herself bound in language to another set far apart, instantiated by that language into a history of mythology that extends past her particular story and persuades her character to find another present to then exist. Eventually into a present that was only foreseeable and allowable by the language she herself existed and continues to keep, made only slightly more intimate as she participates and interprets herself.

Notes:

1 Aase Berg, *Transfer Fat*, trans. Johannes Göransson (New York: Ugly Duckling Press, 2012), 41.

2 Rachel Allen, “Deep Sounds: Rachel Allen Interviews Hal Whitehead,” *Guernica: A Magazine of Art and Politics*, March 15, 2016, accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/deep-sounds/>.

3 Lori Marino, Richard C. Connor, R. Ewan Fordyce, Louis M. Herman, Patrick R. Hof, Louis Lefebvre et al., “Cetaceans Have Complex Brains for Complex Cognition.” *PLoS Biology* 5 (5) (2007): e139. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0050139.

4 Allen, “Deep Sounds: Rachel Allen Interviews Hal Whitehead.”

5 Spyros Papapetros, preface to “Frederick Kiesler: Magic Architecture Excerpts,” *Pidgin* 19 (Spring 2015): 58.

6 Ibid, 59.

7 Aase Berg, *Transfer Fat*, 53.

8 Ibid.

9 Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Claire Lilian (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 76-77.

10 Aase Berg, *Transfer Fat*, 37.

11 James Nestor, "A Conversation With Whales," *The New York Times*, April 26, 2016, accessed [April 16, 2016], http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/04/16/opinion/sunday/conversation-with-whales.html?_r=0.

12 John L. Bannister, "Baleen Whales (Mysticetes)," in *Encyclopedia of Marine Mammals*, ed. William F. Perrin et al. (Burlington: Academic Press, 2009), 80-81.

13 William S. Burroughs, *Break Through in Grey Room*, composed by William S. Burroughs. Sub Rosa SR 008CD, 2001, CD. This is a collection of recordings of Burroughs and Brion Gysin discussing the cut-up method between 1960 and 1976. The audio track that recalls the phrase I refer to is "Recalling All Active Agents (with Brion Gysin)," which is an original Gysin composition that Burroughs samples and talks over.

14 César Hidalgo, *Why Information Grows: The Evolution of Order, from Atoms to Economies* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 40. This specific passage is a summation directly following an excerpt from the work and theory of Ilya Prigogine—concerning the entropy barrier our world exists in—this "entropy barrier" extending from the theory that in "the steady states of out-of-equilibrium systems minimizes the production of entropy." This was central to the theory of Prigogine, and now Hidalgo, that information is produced, computed, and recombined naturally.

† Alan Longino, a native of Biloxi, MS, is an art historian and writer working in New York.

journal of art —

Haunt Journal of Art

Volume 3

2016

ISSN 2334-1165 (PRINT)

Address:

Haunt Journal of Art
Department of Art
Claire Trevor School of the Arts
University of California, Irvine
3229 Art Culture and Technology
Irvine, CA 92697-2775

Email:

hauntjournal@uci.edu

Website:

www.hauntjournal.org
http://escholarship.org/uc/uciart_hauntjournal

For more information on forthcoming calls and submissions guidelines please visit our website.

Haunt Journal of Art is a graduate student run, peer-reviewed, open access journal from the University of California, Irvine, published online through eScholarship and in print for this special edition. We believe speculative and innovative art writing practices are paramount to the development of radical thinking and imagination.

Funding provided by the Department of Art and the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at the University of California Irvine.

Copyright 2016 by *Haunt Journal of Art*

Barry Schwabsky, “Monique Mouton”, *Artforum*, May 2016, 332.

ARTFORUM

Monique Mouton

BRIDGET DONAHUE

Although she’s exhibited regularly over the past decade on the West Coast (most often in Vancouver, where she studied at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design), Monique Mouton only recently received her first solo show in New York, her home now for several years. The slight awkwardness of the exhibition’s titled “More Near” — you shouldn’t need Strunk and White to tell you that standard usage would be “Nearer” — sat well with the works themselves: eight large, framed paintings on paper and six small, eccentrically shaped panels, three of them installed on the floor. The ostensible linguistic slipup, a kind of speed bump on the road to comprehension (I kept reading it, for some reason, as “More Noir”), works similarly to the way the paintings posed as familiar (“near”) even though you could hardly miss their eccentricity.

Mouton likes to paint with thin, washy layers. The veiled translucency of the color gives it a sense of ethereality, while the clunky irregularity of the jigsawed forms bespeaks a dumb materiality, an opaque, bodily density and inertness. What’s surprising is that one doesn’t feel that the color “clothes” the support, one material atop the other; these analytically distinct aspects of the painting are experienced all at once, as a single manifold.

Composition is often elided. For instance, one of the wall pieces, *A Neutral*, 2015 — the title again a telling one — had the shape of a distorted plus sign and is vaguely reminiscent of a tree trunk with three stumps of limbs branching off it; the work was painted with a few pale, caressing vertical strokes of nameless translucent hue on a white ground, a bit of black smudging one corner.

The paper works, all but one belonging to the series “More Near,” 2015, were mostly on irregularly cut sheets; their fluid, floaty fields (mainly rendered in watercolor, but also in chalk pastel, gesso, pencil, tempera, ink, and charcoal) incorporated numerous small incidents. Fluidity, unpredictability, and poly-directionality were emphatic qualities, except in *More Near (III)*, 2015, whose simple orange-above-blue composition conjures a radioactive sky above the ocean; its static quality makes it less engaging than its sisters. Numbers six and seven have vigorously marked edges encompassing more nebulous activity. The paper works and panels felt complementary, in that the former put the accent on the pictorial without neglecting objecthood, while the latter are very distinctly objects but without eschewing pictorial qualities. The irregularly shaped, fragmentary planar works of Richard Tuttle and Blinky Palermo are obvious points of reference, but if



there's a presiding precursor spirit hovering over this art, it's Moira Dryer, for her delicate way with translucent color and eccentric shape. In fact, at times I wondered how Mouton, using oil paint, managed to elicit dry, washy effects reminiscent of Dryer's preferred casein.

Vancouver-based artist Eli Bornowsky has written thoughtfully about the "powerfully reticent" quality of Mouton's work. What makes this near-oxymoron particularly apt, but in a surprising way, is that the power is not in the artist's effort of restraint — one feels the muteness and neutrality come quite naturally, even almost casually determined struggle — but rather in the effect of that reticence on the viewer: The paintings contain activity or movement that is difficult to discern, forcing the perceptual apparatus into a state of heightened alert. The apparent vulnerability of paintings placed on the floor, eliciting in viewers the desire to keep an eye on them to avoid mishap, is just part of this. Mouton's concern, as she puts it, is with "an attention not just to the nuances of the paintings, but to the subjective act of looking." These works are like mirrors, their subject not so much the artist's consciousness as the viewer's own.

— *Barry Schwabsky*

Roberta Smith, “Monique Mouton ‘More Near’”, *The New York Times*, March 11, 2016.

The New York Times



Monique Mouton's “More Near (VI),” from 2015, at the Bridget Donahue gallery. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.

Monique Mouton, ‘More Near’

By ROBERTA SMITH

Monique Mouton belongs to a long tradition of painters who approach their medium with a healthy dose of skepticism. They stretch it, whittle it down, undermine it or maintain a conscious distance. Past masters include Francis Picabia, Lucio Fontana and Enrico Baj. Mary Heilmann, Richard Aldrich and Sadie Benning are among the many current contributors.

Ms. Mouton's penchant for understatement reminds us that Agnes Martin, who avoided the materiality and texture of paint, was also, quietly, of this ilk. In the work dominating "More Near," her show at Bridget Donahue, Ms. Mouton starts by replacing canvas with large, slightly off-square sheets of paper. To these she applies brushy washes of color in shifting, often pale tones. These are layered with more specific incidents, including small shapes, vivid drips, stark abrasions, wide zigzag lines.

In "More Near (VI)," a mostly white field, short black lines climb the right edge, like rungs. Longer bars of black intrude at the left and along the top, a partial post-and-lintel that also squares off the central field. The squaring is four-sided in "More Near (VII)."

You can't underestimate the importance of these borders, whether within the drawings or echoed by their customized frames, which are painted black or white, left natural or finished with gold or silver leaf. This awareness of the physical world is reflected in several paintings on long, irregular slivers of wood that have been placed on the floor and tend toward preciousness.

On the wall, Ms. Mouton's work needs to be more personal and less familiarly beautiful — less inside the Agnes Martin-Richard Tuttle-Cy Twombly triangle. But the extent of her meticulous deliberations on painting both as object and illusion are very impressive.

Bridget Donahue

99 Bowery, Lower East Side

Through March 20

Thomas Micchelli, "A Painter's Progress: Monique Mouton's Rough Edges", *Hyperallergic*, March 5, 2016, <http://hyperallergic.com/280710/a-painters-progress-monique-moutons-rough-edges/>

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES • WEEKEND

A Painter's Progress: Monique Mouton's Rough Edges

by Thomas Micchelli on March 5, 2016



Monique Mouton, "More Near (II)" (2015), watercolor, ink, tempera, chalk pastel, pencil on paper, 74.25 x 62 inches (all images via bridgetdonahue.nyc)

Deceptively casual and casually deceptive, Monique Mouton's abstract paintings at Bridget Donahue on the Lower East Side are simple statements wrought from a density of decision-making, starting with the often irregular shape she chooses as a surface.

In *More Near*, which is the title of Mouton's solo exhibition as well as the series that includes most of the works in the show, the paintings are on either wood or paper. The ones on wood are shaped and can be found on the floor just as easily as on the wall, and the ones on paper — hand-cut sheets that are, for the most part, fairly large, fairly thin, and frequently distressed — compensate for their ramshackle state with formidable shadow-box frames.

I mention the frames because in many ways they complete the work: where the sheet of paper is irregularly cut, usually into a quasi-trapezoidal shape, the frame either distracts you from noticing the atypical format, or, once you realize that the support is off-kilter, it encases the painting like a natural history specimen, lending it a fetchingly organic feel.

The shape of the paper and how the artist incorporates it into her imagery serve as markers in the progression of the works in the *More Near* series (all of which were done in 2015 in various combinations of watercolor, chalk pastel, charcoal, gesso, tempera, and pencil). In "*More Near (I)*," the paper reaches all four edges of the frame, making it the most conventionally presented piece in the show. It is also the only one that brought to mind another artist, namely Joan Miró, with its washes of sky blue interrupted by an off-center orb made from white sgraffito lines incised into a dark, nebulous circle.

The orb seems to exert a gravitational pull on the array of broad, pinkish, horizontal swipes surrounding it, while rust-colored squiggles appear to escape their orbit and float off the painting's surface, like pieces of collage. These seemingly independent scraps are in fact surface abrasions, areas of the paper that have been scraped off and then caked with pastel — a clever inversion of expectations.



With "*More Near (II)*" the artist anchors the field's brushy grays, blues and greens, and the streams of maroon and light blue lines traversing them, inside of a black border edged in yellow. The weightiness of the dark colors belies the lightness of the paper, while the black border disappears into the frame's black mounting board, which extends an inch beyond the edge of the sheet. You have to look very closely to discern where one ends and the other begins.

The next two paintings in the sequence are the first to feature irregular sheets. "*More Near (III)*" is a two-part composition with an orange field on top and a curved, washy blue section underneath, as if it were the ocean viewed from the stratosphere, while three white zigzags dominate "*More Near (IV)*," hovering like stylized thunderbolts above layers of violet-pink, chalky blue, and orange-red. In these two works, the picture plane is squared off and the trapezoidal edges are left blank.

Monique Mouton, "More Near (I)" (2015), watercolor, chalk pastel, charcoal, gesso, tempera paint mounted on sintra, 56 x 55 inches



Monique Mouton, "More Near (III)" (2015), watercolor, tempera, pencil on paper, 58 x 63.5 inches (left); "More Near (IV)" (2015), watercolor, chalk pastel, gesso, pencil on paper, 62 x 68 inches (right)



Monique Mouton, "More Near (V)" (2015), watercolor, gesso, ink, pastel on paper, 70 x 64 inches

Blank, but not empty. In "More Near (IV)," the irregular border is stained by drips and fingerprints, pushing the painting process to the foreground and prompting the impression that the works on display are peeled-off stages of the artist's thought. The formal ideas, wrangled from improvised splashes of pigment, confound abstract flatness with spatial illusion, simultaneously playing it straight and fooling the eye. The thinness of the support raises the stakes on how much can be done to the surface before it falls apart.

"More Near (V)," a blue-toned field encircled by diagonal strokes resembling black sunbeams, fully embraces its trapezoidal format, the paint reaching all four edges of the quirkily cut sheet. In an interesting twist, the next painting in the series, "More Near (VI)" reverts to the squared-off presentation and blank edges of "More Near (III)" and "(IV)." However, it is mounted on a black board that complements the Suprematist-looking horizontal and vertical black bands comprising the composition. The mounting board and the paper's blank, white edges are thereby transformed into additional formal elements, and the painting and the frame become indistinguishable as aesthetic objects. Clearly the show's standout, "More Near (VI)" is a

rigorous, crisply realized work that consolidates the freewheeling figure/ground relationships of the preceding works into a balanced, geometric classicism.

This sense of balance is carried into “More Near (VII),” the final work of the series, in which the picture plane is squared off but the uneven edges are colored green at the top and gray on the three remaining sides. Within this border, clouds of orange paint billow over a yellow and pink field.



Monique Mouton, “More Near (VII)” (2015), watercolor, charcoal, chalk pastel, pencil on paper, 69.5 x 63.25 inches

While there are no other “More Near” paintings in the show, the remaining works on paper — the yellow, four-part grid, “Sun Window” (2015), and the black-on-violet “Black Diamond” (2016), both hanging in the gallery’s back room — are also made on irregularly cut sheets, keeping the continuity alive, as well as the impulse toward simplicity and geometry.

Although I said earlier that “More Near (I)” was the only painting that reminded me of another artist, Mouton’s works emerge from a lineage that can be traced from Helen Frankenthaler’s spills to Mary Heilmann’s blocks of color. But there is another, more unlikely artist who came to mind while looking at these works, and that was Philip Guston, and not simply due to the funkiness their paintings share.

Guston's late works exude a sense of fecundity, of dipping into a well that would never run dry; similarly, it is easy to imagine Mouton reconfiguring this particular formal vocabulary indefinitely, if she so chooses. Her decisions feel both unexpected and grounded; her restrained set of factors results not in incremental development but imaginative leaps — a motley mix of off-beat imagery that, in each instance, generates its own conclusions but never ties off debate.



Monique Mouton, "More Near (VI)" (2015), watercolor, ink, gesso, pencil on paper, 62 x 68 inches

Monique Mouton: More Near continues at Bridget Donahue (99 Bowery, 2nd Floor, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through March 20.

Howard Halle, “Critic’s Picks: Monique Mouton”, *Time Out New York*, February 3 - 9, 2016.



The top five New York art shows this week

Check out our suggestions for the best art exhibitions you don't want to miss, including gallery openings and more



Monique Mouton, “More Near”

The artist keeps her engaging, washy abstract compositions on paper and irregularly shaped canvases simple and light. The works creep to the edge of pictorial associations without quite going over, and have a tossed-off quality that masks a deep engagement with painting.

Blake Gopnik, "Monique Mouton Paints Painting's Death", *Artnet News*, January 26, 2015.

artnet[®] news

ART WORLD

Monique Mouton Paints Painting's Death

Blake Gopnik, Monday, January 26, 2015

SHARE



THE DAILY PIC: I don't believe that painting is dead. I do believe that every substantial painting has to acknowledge—visually—the pathogens threatening it: Its painfully close ties to the .01%; its long-time ownership by guys wielding big hairy sticks; a vast, overshadowing history of past excellence; a vast, overshadowing present of gross mediocrity (the worst mall art is almost all painted). The second I saw Monique Mouton's picture called "Rose", now in a [group show at Wallspace](#) in New York, it struck me as wearing its symptoms with pride. A classic, Greenbergian shaped canvas, ultimate symbol of painting-for-painting's-sake, becomes the bearer of clutching, bloody hand prints, as though the medium has been shot and is trying to keep from bleeding out.

For a full survey of past Daily Pics visit blakegopnik.com/archive.

#blake gopnik #exhibitions #galleries #painting

Monika Szewczyk, “Vancouver Reviews: ‘Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey’”, *Artforum*, Summer 2014.

Vancouver Reviews

ARTFORUM

“Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey”

EQUINOX GALLERY



Elizabeth McIntosh, *The Girl*, 2014, oil on canvas, 73 x 49". From "Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey."

What does it mean for works of art to talk to one another? How did “Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey,” curated by the artist Mina Totino, achieve the sense of a conversation—or, more precisely, several intimate and casually intermingling exchanges—that might arise at an informal gathering, probably in a garden, sometime in spring? This may sound frivolous, but stay with me. Imagine going to a party where each guest is so adept at communicating that only a few words are ever needed. The rest is gesture—that wordless language Giorgio Agamben found to be, by the end of the nineteenth century, “irretrievably lost” to the Western bourgeoisie. As technologies of reproduction developed, Agamben argued, the neurotic recording and subsequent overanalysis of gesture compromised its ease, its liveliness. Totino’s exhibition gathered more than thirty silently eloquent “guests”—largely paintings—that seem to recuperate this lost gestural mode. Indeed, it is testimony to the strength of the nine participating artists that each of their works emerged as a fully fledged persona. No snobs (too self-conscious about their status), no nerds (calculating each move), and no squares (in either sense of the term).

Totino eschewed a singular argument about painting; instead, her organizational logic centered around connecting dots among a group of practitioners who have encountered one another in various ways. Elizabeth McIntosh and Silke Otto-Knapp studied together at the Chelsea College of Arts in London, and Otto-Knapp introduced Tomma Abts to McIntosh, who met Totino when she moved to Vancouver. Totino and McIntosh both teach at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, where they met Aaron Carter, Monique Mouton, and Rachelle Sawatsky—former students who have become colleagues.

Raoul De Keyser, Mary Heilmann, and Bernard Frize serve as important figures of reference here, as Totino describes them as having “removed the quotation marks that held painting in a confining endgame.” Obliquely tracing lines of influence, Totino encouraged gestures from distinct geographies and generations and across materials and processes to forge alliances and dialectics.

The ludic stains and meanders of Sawatsky's *Imposter*, 2013 (ink, dye, and bleach on cotton), appeared as deft intentional marks alongside the scratchy vertical strokes of De Keyser's monad *No Title (8 Verticals/6)*, 2010, whose abstraction in turn highlighted the figure in Mouton's reductive oil on round panel *Hare*, 2013, and those in Otto-Knapp's barely there watercolor and gouache on canvas *Every Afternoon*, 2009. On the opposite wall, McIntosh's large and liminally figurative oil on canvas *The Girl*, 2014, announced a different dexterity, making a virtue of awkwardness, and finding company in Carter's watercolor-and-gouache paintings on irregularly shaped plaster-coated panels, rendered anthropomorphic by such titles as *Lulu* and *Farm & Mott* (both 2014).

Laura Owens's *Study*, 2013, features a bicycle wheel unceremoniously stuck onto a painted canvas. No doubt a nod to Marcel Duchamp, the work also conjures Thierry de Duve's 1996 essay “The Readymade and the Tube of Paint,” which draws attention to the readymade quality of commercially available colors of paint, and thus foregrounds the readymade aspect of all paintings. (Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko evidenced a version of this point in 1921 with three monochrome canvases—*Pure Red Color*, *Pure Yellow Color*, and *Pure Blue Color*—in which he intended to distill the elements of painting to their logical end point.) Totino's exhibition seemed to insist, conversely, that there is nothing pure about color—it is expressed, and perceived, on an infinite gradient. By extension, there is no end to what might constitute the palette for painting as a communicative gesture. If a wheel can be part of the spectrum, or if a chair can double as a stretcher (as was the case in Heilmann's juicy orange *Clubchair 34*, 2007), then the territory available to painting is boundless. Indeed, Persian Rose, Chartreuse Muse, and Vancouver Grey are not hues available from Williamsburg Homemade Oil Colors. The exhibition title is pure poetry, meant to sensitize a viewer to an expanded palette, and to the nuance of the gestures that were on display.

—Monika Szewczyk

Michael Turner, "A Look at Painting as Journey in Vancouver", *Canadian Art*, April 9, 2014.

CANADIANART

MAGAZINE | ART WORLD | ARTISTS | GALLERIES | LEARN | FOUNDATION | ABOUT

SEARCH

HOME REVIEW A LOOK AT PAINTING AS JOURNEY IN VANCOUVER



"Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey" (installation view), 2014. Courtesy Equinox Gallery. Photo: Scott Massey.

[REVIEW](#)

A Look at Painting as Journey in Vancouver

Equinox Gallery, Vancouver March 22 to April 19, 2014

By [Michael Turner](#)

POSTED: APRIL 9, 2014

Since its debut at El Castillo some 40,000 years ago, painting has remained the medium of choice for most of the world's artists and, perhaps as a result, is the activity most recognize when conferring the words artistic talent on children. Yet despite its long run and its relative measure, painting has endured its knocks over the years; not only from artists, writers, historians and curators who regularly pronounce it waning, superfluous, irrelevant or dead, but especially from those who work within its constraints, who continue to shift its ballast from one end of the hold to the other.

It is a serious journey, painting, no less serious in Vancouver than in other cities large enough to float art schools, commercial galleries and collecting institutions, where paintings are acquired to keep those that came before them on course.

And so it was that Vancouverites both aware and unaware of this journey braved grey wind and grey rain to converge at the recently super-sized [Equinox Gallery](#) for the opening of an exhibition where the artists finally matched its mass: "Persian Rose Chartreuse Muse Vancouver Grey," a collection of works by senior contemporary moderns [Raoul De Keyser](#), [Bernard Frize](#) and [Mary Heilmann](#); mid-career practitioners [Tomma Abts](#), [Elizabeth McIntosh](#), [Silke Otto-Knapp](#) and [Laura Owens](#); thirtysomethings [Monique Mouton](#) and [Rachelle Sawatsky](#); and the emerging [Aaron Carter](#).

These artists, through various means and gestures, evince what painting has concerned itself with since the late

1980s, when the medium, like the Western and Eastern ideologies that shaped its century, gave up on names; when divisions, to use the terminology that curator Mina Totino applies in a statement both bold and diffident, could be reduced to a) painting that finds itself in a “confining endgame” (i.e. painting in “quotation marks”) and b) painting that “embraces doubt, produces questions rather than conclusions,” of which the latter was on display.

Greeting viewers near the entrance of the exhibition’s long, rectangular space are three smaller works arranged diagonally as well as horizontally. Their contents suggest an index of the materials used in the making of the work inside, to say nothing of their marks. The support and surface of Carter’s To Do (2014) is a miniature construction site of plywood, fibreglass mesh and plaster, onto which is drawn, in gouache and watercolour, landscape’s green rectangle, a purple-grey dot, a brown squiggle and a chartreuse vertical line. Following that, Abts’s Untitled (Triangle) (2009), a colour spit bite aquatint print where a wood-grain brushstroke form and a similarly wood-grain field join not through the four dots (dowels?) that hover in a square above, but through the flatness of the medium that both brought them into being and, as such, provides the print its parenthetical subtitle. Finally, upwards at the far right, Sawatsky’s Untitled (2013), a tamped-down vase shape made of what looks to be fired clay, against which a floral bouquet of purple, blue and ochre powdered dyes have been pressed.

With these works and their display in mind, the larger space opens into what feels at first like a room with one too many works in it, if not for the relatively uncluttered and mostly flat, impasto-less surfaces of its constituent parts.

Most notable, and to the far right of the room, is Frize’s huge acrylic-and-resin-on-canvas Compass (2001), a multicoloured woven grid made with what appears to be a very wide brush and a great deal of patience. At the opposite end of the room, a few feet from the wall, is Mary Heilmann’s orange-stained polypropylene-webbed Clubchair 34 (2007). Between them, another instance of the grid, this time in the form of two long wooden tables by Monique Mouton, each of which contains a set of spare and perhaps preliminary pencil and watercolour drawings arranged in a 2-by-7 unit regime.

But this is it for grids—at least in their more immediate form. Like the diagonal display gesture outside the larger exhibition space, these patterned works act as much as reference points as works unto themselves: from Frize’s technical accomplishment, to Heilmann’s place of meditation (viewers are welcome to sit in her chair, as Heilmann might when contemplating her work as she is making it), to Mouton’s exercises in advance of the paintings and the serrated left-margin boards that hang on and lean against the surrounding walls.

And what of the remainder of the works on these walls? What boldly steps forth? What remains comfortable in its diffidence? What, as Totino writes at the opening of her statement, “connects the dots of influence that have contributed to a complex and refreshing development in painting and its fraught history”?

Apart from Carter, who is barely out of (graduate) school, there is little question that the painters in this exhibition are well-read in their medium, and that most have experienced the kind of modulation that occurs after a concentrated amount of time at the library, the museum and the studio. This is particularly true of those who question what comes easily to them, who have struggled to refuse assonance and symmetry in favour of that which is angular, obtuse, difficult or wrong; who have, in many cases, eschewed the more traditional forms of paint for ink, dye and, in the case of Sawatsky’s one-way-maze-containing Impostor (2013), bleach.

A good example of the modulated artist is McIntosh, whose abstract paintings over the past decade are less monuments to completion than documentation of the arguments, altercations and injuries she has experienced while at work on her canvases. Her contribution to the exhibition consists of three new oils, each of which are less instances of emergent figuration than repurposed abstract forms that unite to suggest just that: the figure.

In McIntosh's The Girl (2014), the viewer might sense the presence of Abts's parenthetical triangle in the V-shaped crook between its subject's bicep and forearm, to say nothing of its yonic form. Something similar occurs between her Cubism (2014) and Otto-Knapp's Every Afternoon (2009), where in the latter painting ballet-dancing boys occupy a slightly recessed, though no less malevolent, centre, their feet planted firmly on the ground, while ballet-dancing girls are (as girls have often been raised to be) "on pointe"—an action that is echoed in the former painting, where the "on pointe" gesture is not so much rendered through a cubed array, but assembled from its shards.

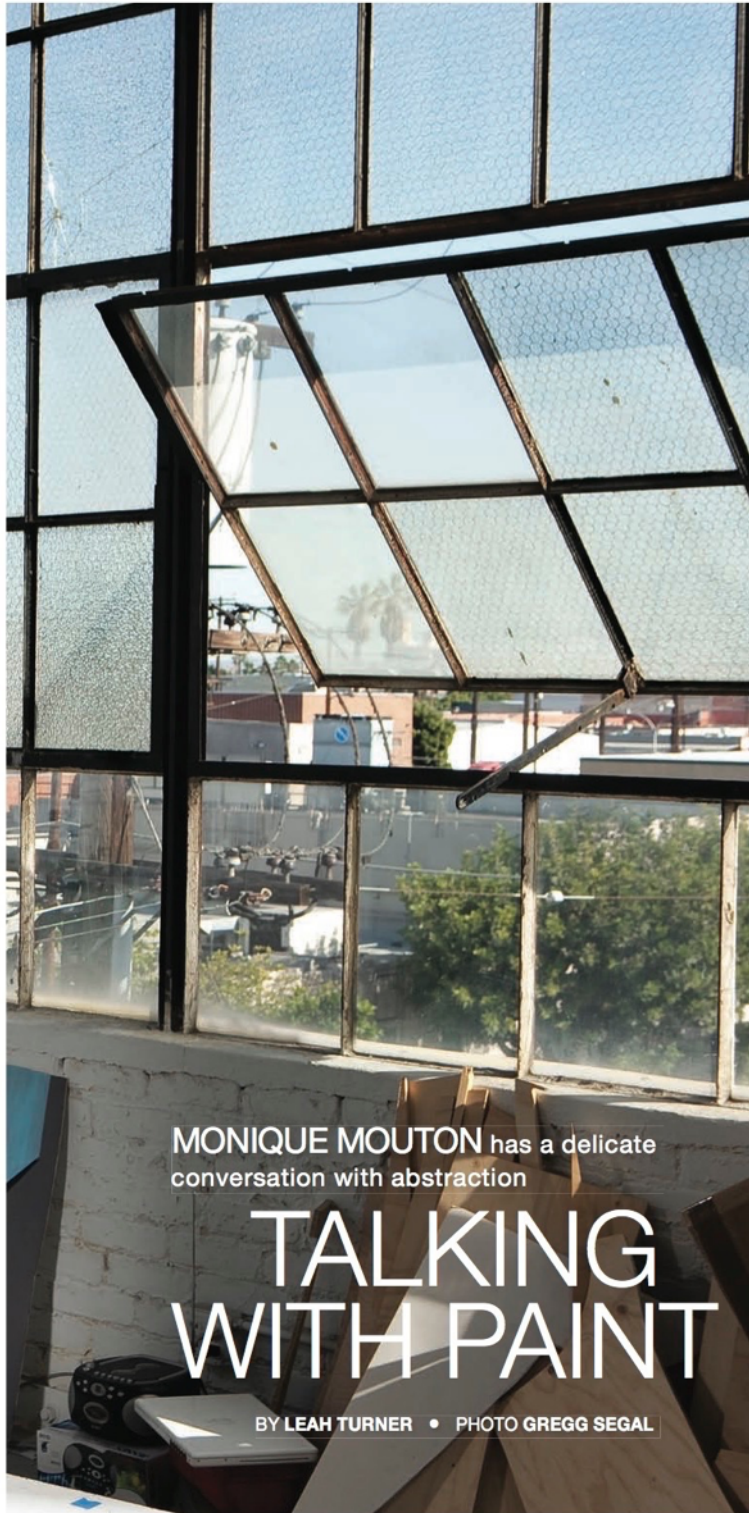
As is often the case when associations present themselves, when dots are to be connected, the viewer looks for more. In another of Sawatsky's ceramic wall works, the viewer is reminded of the aqueduct in the background of another Otto-Knapp painting, Group Portrait (2013). One remarks on the shadows cast by Sawatsky's additional wall works (situated in a horizontal line above a row of paintings), and how their shadows, more than the gouache, dye and pigment marks upon them, lurk like the shadow cast by the bicycle wheel attached to the centre of the floating tertiary field of Owens's Study (2013). Or if viewers do not see associations, then perhaps recognizably contrasting

yet unifying gestures, such as the fragile horizontal weft lines in Mouton's Salvage (2013) that beckon the warp lines in De Keyser's No Title (8 Verticals/6) (2010). Visitors may proceed onwards, until upon leaving the larger space they are again met with the modern grid's adversary—in the form of the diagonal display outside.

Leah Turner, "Monique Mouton has a delicate conversation with abstraction: 'Talking With Paint,'" *Canadian Art*, Spring 2012.

CANADIANART





MONIQUE MOUTON has a delicate
conversation with abstraction

TALKING WITH PAINT

BY LEAH TURNER • PHOTO GREGG SEGAL

A balmy southern California breeze streams through the large loft windows of Monique Mouton's industrial studio space in downtown Los Angeles. Noise from nearby freeway traffic filters in, and the ubiquitous, hazy horizon of palms wavers in the distance. Then my vision focuses on a collection of unusual shapes, sharp angles and vivid, luminous brushstrokes. Half a dozen small, irregularly shaped abstract paintings are displayed along Mouton's studio wall: oil painted on thin wood that has been cut into uneven shapes with a jigsaw. Mouton's surfaces are so matte they look almost raw. In many places, the base layer of gesso is visible through the light washes of colour.

An icy-blue-and-black composition stands out, a would-be rectangle disrupted by an inverted triangular peak that juts out from the bottom of the panel. *Untitled (Banff)* (2010) is actually the most figurative of Mouton's work to date. She relates that this was her first use of a referential starting point; while she was in residence at The Banff Centre, the sublime mountain landscape crept into her iconography. Indeed, it's not a huge leap to visualize a mountain slope and the deep, striated basin of a glacier lake within the otherwise abstract composition. But abstraction flops in and out of focus. Cast another eye and *Untitled (Banff)* is once more a deceptively simple composition of textures and shapes. Look longer still, and the picture becomes gradually more dynamic, revealing Mouton's playful, subtle variations of shape and colour. In the centre of the piece, a large black field floats atop more fluid, watery strokes of blue, appearing momentarily at rest before butting up against a sheer ribbon of pale lavender that veils a darker shape beneath. Mouton's paintings ask you to take your time, to approach each image slowly, even cautiously, if only to match the degree of thoughtfulness the artist invests in her work. In other words, she asks for the undivided attention of her audience.

It's early autumn and Mouton is fresh from her first semester in the prestigious Bard College MFA program, which runs over three consecutive summers with independent study periods in between. She shows me some of her new work, noting that it's quite a departure for her. She's right: her

Monique Mouton in her Los Angeles studio, December, 2011

BELOW: *Hinge* 2011 Oil on panel,
two panels 1.21 x 1.11 m overall
COURTESY THE ARTIST

OPPOSITE: *Untitled* 2009 Oil
on panel 53.3 x 40.9 cm COLLECTION
DON ELLICOT PHOTO SCOTT MASSEY



paintings have begun to break away from the wall. *Hinge* (2011) could almost be a deconstructed version of one of her earlier works. Literally sliced into pieces, extracted and pivoted sideways, it comprises two incongruous pieces that lean precariously against the wall: the larger, whitewashed trapezoidal shape balances delicately *en pointe*; behind it stands a wobbly concave rectangle, lent dimension by means of an incomplete edging of contour lines. This foray into sculpture is at once a natural progression and a radical departure for the young artist, a contradiction that speaks to a compelling tension, inherent to her practice, between what painting is and what it could be. The surface texture of Mouton's paintings is flat, barely there—she applies just the thinnest layers of colour. Yet upon closer inspection they possess an incredible physicality and dynamism. Outer and inner contours begin to disassemble; it suddenly becomes difficult to distinguish between concave and convex forms, and the layers and planes of colour appear poised to shift, or to slip into the areas of blank space.

Born in Fort Collins, Colorado, Mouton was trained in Vancouver. She attended the Emily Carr University of Art and Design, where, like other artists of her generation, she encountered the instructor and abstract painter Elizabeth McIntosh, whose fresh and expansive approach to abstract painting has played a critical role in Mouton's art. (McIntosh would later include

Mouton in "Working Title," the group exhibition she curated for Toronto's Diaz Contemporary in 2008.) McIntosh's influence should not be overlooked here. Given Vancouver's dominant lineage of conceptual and post-conceptual art practice, McIntosh became somewhat of an alternative model of success, one that indirectly gave a young generation of artists (Arabella Campbell, Jeremy Hof, Eli Bornowsky and Rebecca Brewer, among others) permission to take up painting as a so-called serious contemporary art form. In 2009, Mouton was included in "Enacting Abstraction," an important show at the Vancouver Art Gallery that traced the strategies of Canadian and American abstract art from the early decades of the 20th century to the present, and, significantly, placed young painters in dialogue with this tradition.

I'm repeatedly compelled by the desire to ask young painters why they chose their medium. What is left to see in a painting that we haven't already seen? More than any other type of artist, painters have been assigned the dubious task of innovation; they are challenged to propel the medium forward to a mythological, projected endpoint that has been continually asserted by art historians, critics and curators alike. (Of course, when the end of painting inevitably fails to materialize, it is always announced that painting is possible once again). Painting is forever in some kind of competition—with itself (its own lengthy history and ever-morphing historiography), as well as with a virtual culture that is already completely saturated with flattened images.

Given this cumbersome context, painters grapple with a vast obstacle when attempting to achieve the goal of all great artists: to put forward a new perspective. Gallery-goers continue to ponder what abstraction is really about; a fair question, especially for the uninitiated, as abstract paintings neither relay narrative nor contain obvious subject matter. Painting in particular exists beyond language—its subject always seems to elude easy explication, being much more suited to the realms of experience and phenomenology. So what about looking at something and just *looking*? Having it reflect itself and the present moment instead of referring to something outside of itself? Rather than asking what an abstract painting is about, we may want to consider instead what it *does*.

Mouton speaks of her paintings as "unfinished," of using "just enough" material (designations that Bornowsky has also used in an eloquent essay on Mouton's work produced for a 2007 solo exhibition at The Bodgers' and Kludgers' Co-operative Art Parlour in Vancouver and later published in *Pyramid Power* magazine). Mouton employs the bare minimum of material: a thin subsistence of translucent layers, washes and traces of paint. Within this bareness, though, her hand manifests ever so slightly, giving us a glimpse into her process of layering by leaving visible the various brushstroke textures on the panel's gesso base. Gesture is only hinted at in the squiggly strokes of a painting such as *U* (2011), an enclosed U-shaped purple panel whose form also suggests a heraldic shield. Here, a thick black contour line is scratchy in parts where only a few bristles were sufficiently laden with paint, and stops just short of the top right-hand corner of the "U."

The impression of incompleteness also extends to Mouton's sense of geometry—her shapes are rough and imperfect, defying any notion of idealized form or modernist quotation. It is this very character of unfinishedness that lends her paintings their potency. They hold a mystery of form



Diptych 2010 Oil on panel
47.9 x 79.3 cm COURTESY BLANKET
CONTEMPORARY ART

that impedes instantaneous recognition; they decelerate the ever-quickenning speed at which we perceive, negotiate and understand visual stimuli. With familiar or recognizable forms (this designation of the familiar, I believe, extends to painting) our synapses fire even faster; conversely, “unfinished” things are not immediately recognizable and thus don’t accord with our daily modes of perception. Mouton’s paintings not only appear unfinished, but in their simplicity and subtlety, they are also decidedly quiet. Their challenge is slowness; their reward is the pleasure of focused attention. Her paintings thus become antidotes—or prescriptions, perhaps—to the speed and distraction that characterizes contemporaneity. To appreciate the subtlety of her gestures requires the development of careful focus and sensitivity—a specific type of attention that seems to be rapidly diminishing in our daily lives. In this way, Mouton’s paintings are about the awareness of time: time as experienced by the artist, evident within her visible process of mark-making, as well as time in the subjective sense, experienced by the viewer through the act of looking.

Inquiry into the subjective act of looking is paramount to Mouton’s practice. She says that she often considers what is asked of the viewer: “What kind of experience can one have that doesn’t require special knowledge?” Indeed, abstraction has long been couched in a connoisseurs’ language, but what abstraction might actually provide is more akin to an inclusive perceptual and optical experience. Far from seeking a universal aesthetic—and her practice is perhaps closer to ethics than aesthetics—she is interested in the intuitive experience of looking at art. In conversation, she often makes reference to the various psychological and physiological responses that are triggered by perceiving shapes. “New Shapes,” her 2009 solo show at Blanket Contemporary Art, comprised a small selection of paintings, each roughly the size and shape of a traditional portrait. The

works were deliberately hung lower than the standard 56-inches-on-centre height; this reinforced the sense of intimacy already at work in the shape of her panels. When Mouton’s works are installed as an exhibition, the visual relationships between the shapes of the individual paintings become apparent. As when looking at single puzzle pieces, the eye inevitably attempts to assemble the pieces into a whole.

When I ask Mouton which artists have inspired or influenced her, she answers tellingly that Agnes Martin’s ability to glean so much from simplicity has been an ongoing fascination. By the early 1960s, Martin had established her painting style, which was to remain consistent throughout her life: elegant abstract canvases composed of pencil-drawn lines or grids and uniform washes of pale colour. Martin used the minimalist grid as a means to explore her profoundly spiritual ideas about art, which she wrote about lucidly and poetically throughout her life. She believed that the purpose of art was to provide a glimpse of a transcendent reality, and her contemplative visual language sought to evoke what she termed “moments of perfection” in which one experiences beauty, happiness and joy. For the 21st-century cynic, to whom even the act of trading multi- for mono-tasking might seem utterly unfeasible, speaking of transcendence through art sounds beyond lofty. Yet art does hold a singular ability to displace our faculties of perception and observation so that, if even in the slightest flash of recognition, we might be leant a new way of seeing. Mouton’s insistence on creating sensitivity to the present moment—via economical but remarkably beautiful means—is an ethical proposition that increasingly warrants our close attention. ■



Aaron Peck, “Monique Mouton”, *Q1 \ Magazine*, October 26, 2011.

Q1 \ MAGAZINE

[Current Issue](#) [Blog](#) [Shop](#) [About](#) [Contact](#)

MONIQUE MOUTON ISSUE (5)

by Aaron Peck in Art Review

I have an ambiguous relationship to the paintings of Monique Mouton. There are many things I admire about them, but I haven't always felt that way. The first show of hers I saw was *Measure* at the now-defunct Bodgers and Kludgers Co-operative Art Parlour in 2007. An essay by fellow painter Eli Bornowsky accompanied the exhibition, and Bornowsky had handed me a copy of his essay a few weeks before I went to see the exhibition. I had been taken by the simplicity with which Bornowsky described her work, but my experience of the paintings did not match the lucidity I had admired in Bornowsky's text. In fact, it created an expectation about what kind of experience I would have when I encountered Mouton's work. When I finally encountered Mouton's painting at Bodgers, I was nonplussed. I had wanted more but I had difficulty explaining what exactly that more was. Perhaps one problem was a text had prescribed what kind of experience I expected to have. The experience I had was, of course, different.

What I needed to do was live with Mouton's paintings longer. And successive group exhibitions *Making Real* at the Or Gallery, an eponymous two-person show at CSA Space with Michael Morris, and *Enacting Abstraction* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, plus her recent solo show *New Shapes* at Blanket Gallery in 2009 all gave me longer. So perhaps the more that I had unfairly demanded of her paintings was nothing in the paintings themselves but simply more time. Mouton's paintings concern themselves with time—in the time it takes to view them, because they are so subtle, and how the paintings make visible the time it took to paint them. The more time I've spent with Mouton's work, the more I've appreciated it. So when *Q1 Magazine's* Nathalee Paolinelli suggested the interview, I was eager to ask Mouton a few questions.

We had begun a conversation the last time Mouton was in Vancouver (she now lives in Los Angeles), and I had wanted to continue that conversation. The interview was, unfortunately, conducted via Facebook's "Message" feature, a sort of bastardized form of email that is not conducive to the kind of lively discussion that she and I had had a few months earlier in a friend's home (the walls of which, it must be mentioned, sported a number of Mouton's paintings from the same period as the exhibition *Measure*), though Mouton's thoughtfulness carries through in any medium.





When you last visited Vancouver, we were at a friend's house with co-founder of O1 Magazine Nathalee Paolinelli, and you and I somehow got on to talking about your recent interest in kombucha tea. Nathalee suggested this may be an interesting topic for the interview, so I'm going to start there. How did you learn how to brew kombucha? And what got you into it?

I learned to brew kombucha while I was living in Austin. I actually think it was at someone's studio that I first tasted it—bubbly, tart, and refreshing. I acquired a culture from a friend and started my first brew about a week before I moved to Los Angeles—just enough time to complete one batch. I think the drive through the desert made it even better as it continued to ferment in the bottles. It's supposed to have lots of good health benefits thanks to pro-biotics and enzymes. It certainly makes me feel good, it tastes good (to me), and I kind of have the feeling for my kombucha culture that I do for my vegetable plants: excitement, gratitude, and even a bit of awe at what sustenance I can get from so little material.







Your paintings take a lot of time. They are deceptively varied, and they seem almost meditative. Is it your intention to place the viewer in a state of observation or reverie?

Neither, in a way. I'm more interested in sensitivity, an attention not just to the nuances of the paintings, but to the subjective act of looking at art. When I started making abstract paintings I thought about how much our attention is drawn away from us with the speed of information these days. I wanted to make paintings that were slow. I didn't want the paintings to wash over the viewer or tell a story, I wanted them to be more acute yet self-reflective. All this somehow led me to the sizes, shapes, and colors I've worked with.





At your recent show at Blanket Gallery, I noticed that you hung your paintings about three inches lower than standard height. What led you to that choice?

I think the size and shape of my paintings give them a lightness and vertical momentum that was balanced by hanging them lower. Jill [Pritchard] was helping me install, and as we put them up we both felt they could go down a couple inches from 56. I think our intuition served the show well in that case.





The fact that you installed your paintings in that way implies that the viewing, or even installation, of your paintings is an important part of exhibiting. Do you think of your paintings as objects in space or are they pictures that can be viewed any way?

Yes, I sometimes take for granted that not all paintings or two-dimensional works are considered in terms of installation, but it is critical to me. The paintings are singular objects, and when I'm painting they are considered individually, but installing them is an opportunity for me to tone the work with another set of relationships. The show becomes a composition in itself. But it's not just about design—the effect of each piece really changes based on what it is next to and how it is hung. When I was part of a show at the Or Gallery, the work and installation had a stillness to it. Recently at Blanket the paintings were almost like syllables—rhythmic and contained.



I'm curious about your choice of materials. Your choice of paint (oils) is very traditional, very painterly, while your choice of surface (scraps of wood) is not. What led you to choose these materials?

It's a matter of practicality for me. It is the aesthetic quality of the materials, more than their history that suits the way I work. Painting is like tracing a thought process, so direct, and I can get a lot done with not too much material. I needed to make rounded surfaces and it was a lot easier to cut plywood than try to make shaped canvases. And it turned out that the sort of clunky nature of the wood was a good way to contain the infinity of paint. I like the way that the paint sits on the surface of the board, and the thinness and frontality of it all.

I've often felt that painters put themselves in one of the most difficult positions possible in contemporary art. There are only a few examples of painters in the contemporary art world (John Currin, Tomma Abts, Peter Doig, Luc Tuymans, to name a few; Hirst and Murakami don't count as painters). The challenge not to seem reactionary or conservative in a post-studio art world, to me at least, seems daunting. One can no longer "just paint." Or rather, we live in a world where anything can be art. To quote Jeff Wall's formation of it, "the object from which the name art cannot logically be withheld." And so to choose a practice such as painting seems a deliberate move because in order to seriously consider its role to contemporary art, the painter needs to confront what it means to practice painting as a contemporary form. The painting's status in contemporary art is no longer a given. It may still be so in hobby painting but not in contemporary art. So what do you find valuable about painting in contemporary art?

While there is a tendency to more easily dismiss it, I don't really view painting as any different than any other medium in terms of validity in contemporary art. I think that an artist of any medium has to contend with that question. It's in the use and the context of the work that the value is revealed. Perhaps there are painters who are only concerned with painting who might fall into the traps mentioned above, but there are others whose concerns have to do with the present field of art and use the medium accordingly. Maybe the fact that painting has gone through a struggle to validate itself in contemporary art is useful to my project. That the medium no longer has an inherent value in art really forces one to be considerate of its use. But isn't that what any artist must consider in the present? It is not easy, and I am not enamored of painting in itself, but it gives me a means to translate some small spark of the ineffable, inevitable potential of art right now. That's just the most basic question, isn't it? So I suppose it is only apt to use one of the most elementary mediums.

I couldn't agree more. But I guess I should try to wrap this up. So does this, as I may think, have anything to do with kombucha?


Well it is only tea and sugar after all, with a little transmutation thanks to yeast and bacteria.

Monique Monton- Blanket Gallery

Gary Michael Dault, "Working Title at Diaz Contemporary", *The Globe and Mail*, July 26, 2008, R12.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

R12 **Review**

 *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday, July 26, 2008

VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW



GARY MICHAEL DAULT
GALLERY GOING

mail@garymichaeldault.com

WORKING TITLE
AT DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

\$2,000-\$12,000. Until Aug. 2,
100 Niagara St., Toronto;
416-361-2972

This is a very stimulating exhibition of new forays into abstraction (almost a contradiction in terms, these days), guest-curated by Elizabeth McIntosh - who is a very good abstract painter herself.

The exhibition, as McIntosh has conceived it, showcases the work of three painters, each of whom strives with considerable panache - and yet with varying degrees of success - to head boldly into the noble modernist arena of "Painting as Paradigm," and then to labour skillfully and earnestly to subvert modernism's entrenched ideas of what advanced painting is.

I wish there were more space here in which to give them their due: Vancouver-based painter Mina Totino makes the prettiest but least forceful pictures here: pastel-light, brush-worked confections that are too reminiscent of other painters (chiefly Karen Davie). But Texas-based painter Monique Mouton makes little wall-mounted lozenges of scruffy colour that drive you mad with their insouciance, while Toronto-based artist Sally Spath once again demonstrates her almost demonic genius for the spatial dislocation of an entire room by the way she insinuates a few strips of pale yellow pigment onto its white walls.

Spath is dazzling, and probably dangerous!

Leah Sandals, "Working in Abstractions", *Now Magazine*, July 30, 2008.

NOW

painting

Working in abstractions

Bold Diaz Contemporary show puts life experience on the walls By LEAH SANDALS



Mina Totino's Gremlin 2007 suggests the exploration of the painted touch.

WORKING TITLE at Diaz Contemporary (100 Niagara), to Saturday (August 2). 416-361-2972.

Abstract painting isn't the most audience-friendly genre. It's easier to relate to realist paintings, which show us the world the way we are used to seeing it photographically.

Yet if abstract painting can show us anything, it's that the image is not everything. Experience - of life and, for the painter, of painting itself - still matters.

These are the themes explored in *Working Title*, a show organized by former Torontonians (and accomplished abstract painter) **Elizabeth McIntosh**.

Vancouver-trained, Austin-based emerging painter **Monique Mouton** provides the best in show. Her oils are arrayed on roughly circular boards, with a strong sense of colour and texture. In Mouton's circles, neon pink is overlaid with messy brown, muddy beige splays like a miniature river delta into melted-snow white, and dry-sky blue is scraped across light cumulus grey. All exhibit a love of the irregular - the sideways-slumped or paintbrush-clumped - that doesn't always work in large doses but shines in Mouton's treatment.

Toronto painter **Sally Spath**'s work, thin yellow stripes painted directly onto the south wall, marries conceptual strength with material delicacy. Though some minimalist installation artists are fanatical about even paint application (or just use vinyl cutouts), Spath integrates a human-process quality. You can see where her brush got dry and then was wetted again. One is reminded of the human hand that exists behind even the most precise architectural lines.

Established Vancouver painter **Mina Totino** rounds out the show with some oil paintings on canvas. Her creeping, squiggling, uncertain lines seem to collapse under their own weight. What's imparted is a delight in the mark, in the exploration of the painted touch.

Artists like these aren't going to take down Flickr any time soon, but they do provide a nice switch from lens-based ideas of reality.

art@nowtoronto.com

Eli Bornowsky, "Just Enough", *Pyramid Power*, Issue #4, 56 - 63, 2007/2008.

PYRAMID POWER

56

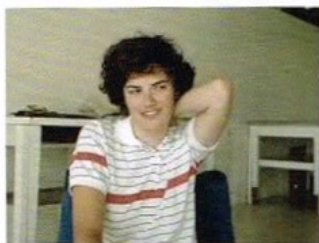


Above: *Untitled*,
2007, oil on
wood, 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
Right: *Untitled*,
2007, oil on
wood, 18 x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

57

Just Enough
Eli Bornowsky on Monique Mouton





Monique Mouton's work is difficult. In order to address this difficulty and for the purpose of this essay I will refer to a small body of paintings that I have visited occasionally, throughout their development in Mouton's studio over the last year. Our conversation about the work is often quiet. Her paintings do not wait to be seen, nor do they perform for attention. Mouton has said, "Everything is visible in my paintings; nothing is hidden."¹ This may seem obvious on the first encounter with the small, simple looking paintings. The panels are made of thin wood, which has been cut somewhat unevenly with a crude jigsaw to form portrait-sized ellipses. The panels sit an even half inch



from the wall, supported invisibly from behind. The brush marks are loosely applied, and made with similar sized brushes between half and one inch wide. Each painting is comprised of only a few colors; the oil paint is thin, translucent and directly applied. The surfaces are matte and raw with wood grain visible around the edges. As I consider these basic materials I become sensitized to a wide range of subtleties across the paintings: tiny scratches and drips, ridges in the gesso visible through the translucent layers of color, lines where a single brush hair escaped from the rest of the flow to draw its own line. What is first perceived as a simple colored field is actually a wash of varied consistency, bright and dark, thick and thin, more or less translucent. It becomes difficult to know the intentionality of each mark. Already we have a list of observations to complicate the paintings apparent simplicity.

Nevertheless, the sensitization to the paintings most minute detail is a different experience from the sensations, feeling or affect of the painting as a whole. Perceived frontally or even from the corner of one's eye, the paintings are powerfully reticent, confusing, with a softly iconic presence, like blurry emblems without dynamic features. Mouton has suggested that she attempts to make "things", not compositions.² The obvious materiality of the paintings, which I have described above, contributes to their thingyness. This "thingness" Mouton attempts is an important variation of presence, distinct from the illusionism of the picture plane. However it is not the purity and truth of painting aspired to by the modernists. Neither is Mouton concerned to expunge every single drop of illusionism from painting. In fact, many of her works contain references to ambient, ethereal space. Mouton's concern is an uncanny experience of art, which in general terms is a presence concomitant with the experience of experience.



Opposite top:
Stills of Monique
Mouton from her
online interview
with Mat Bushell
Opposite bottom:
Untitled, 2007,
oil on wood,
23¼ x 24"
Above: *Untitled*,
2007, oil on
wood, 23¼ x 24"



Untitled,
2007, oil on
wood, 23¼×24"

The simplicity of her surfaces and scant composition comes from an earnest concern to make important pictures. If we imagine the blank painting surface as a *tabula rasa*, we are faced with the incredible nature of potentiality itself, and the myriad of conventions for image making are revealed to be ideologically constructed. The artist's studio then, is an aesthetic and ideological battleground where the artist must struggle with the ethics of every mark and gesture. It is clear in Mouton's paintings that she has begun with a blank surface and added "just

enough,” studying towards important gestures, precluding the superfluous. Mouton has said that she avoids making her paintings “too set” or “finished off” because viewers already know what that is like.³ The speed of signification we receive from familiar, “finished” images is enough to look briefly, “recognize” and move along. Mouton would prefer we spend more time with her work, leaving the paintings “unfinished” in order to avoid the speed of semiotic recognition and instead make time for poetic understanding.

The “enough” of Mouton’s accomplishment is imperceptible in relation to the spectacular opticality and commanding signification of cinema, television, graphic design and advertising, which today influence our perception more than we would ever admit. We are beset by the speed of our transportation, which blurs our ability to observe our surroundings, and the excess of our communication, exhausts our time for contemplation. Daily we consume a mass of images, which have no other purpose than to signify instantly the orders we must obey. With this redundancy, the form of our vision is pressured, if not administered and controlled. From this point of view we can isolate one specific way in which Mouton’s paintings are challenging and exacting. The works do not sit comfortably with our daily perceptions. The paintings are slow. They do not seduce nor distract yet they require sustained attention. Unfinished but just enough, Mouton’s work is quietly set apart.

We have seen the historical transition in art from the illusionism of painting to the “thing” of sculpture, but this is not a route Mouton wishes to retrace. Instead Mouton has chosen a more intimate endeavor. This endeavor involves her communion with the things she creates. According to Mouton, the minimal amount of brushwork on her surfaces is the result of a maximum amount of looking and being with the paintings in her studio throughout their production.⁴ Mouton negotiates the thing.

The paintings are slow. They do not seduce nor distract yet they require sustained attention.

The circle has only one edge. Without individual edges joined by corners, the ellipse drastically reduces the possibilities for compositional relationships. Yet each of Mouton's panels is unevenly cut creating small sections of edge along the round panel's contour. Narrow painted areas occasionally border these edges, however, they do not become figures. The paintings do not have a figure/ground relationship. Instead there is an object/ground relationship. The painted marks either mirror the form of the ellipse or are extensions of the edge itself.⁵ At the same time, there is a logic of difference (which is an improvised "nonsensical" logic, poetry) that interrupts the generic form of the painted surface in relation to its support. For example, an irregular green edging (not a border) which nearly surrounds an untitled painting from 2007 is interrupted just before its closure by a thin blue line. The surface of a second work is nearly covered with a repetition of translucent white marks running left to right, however the field is interrupted by a quick vertical mark on the left and a small gap

on the right. It is here that Mouton negotiates, and contemplates her "things". This negotiation is a tightening and condensing of the work so that it may be present.

Each time I experience Mouton's paintings, throughout the duration of that experience there are periods where I question my own decision to admire the work. But the work, silent as it is, instigates this questioning in me. An internal dialogue develops (which is sometimes a battle) that has a distinction particular to Mouton's sensibility. This sensibility is her poetry and it relies on the self interrogation of the viewer in order to operate. It is also feminine; it resonates with the potentiality of her youth, and it grows out of a struggle: I do not believe that painting, for Mouton, is fun. The distinct non-signifying sensibility of the paintings is precisely where my language breaks and I long to leave this text and return to the works themselves.



Left: *Untitled*,
2007, oil on wood,
16½x12¼"

Opposite page:
Untitled, 2006,
oil on wood,
18x22¼"

- 1 Whitehot Magazine Online Video Interview with Monique Mouton. Conducted by Mat Bushell. Available: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw-mMtyzAgw>
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 From a personal conversation with the artist.
- 5 I owe this formal analysis to personal conversations with Jillian Pritchard.

63

