

Human Capital

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“The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem... There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.”

-Ludwig Wittgenstein¹

Whenever I write about my work, I almost always end up deferring to the Socratic idea that “words impoverish reality”. For me, the fundamental language of painting has always been visual rather than textual. Of course, the visual is also a kind of text, but it is not always nameable. I cannot find a word, for example, that describes the effect of pale cerulean blue’s encounter with raw umber. As much as I admire other artists who write (i.e. Smithson and Judd) my own interest in words has never been applied with much lasting success to my production of paintings. My attempts all seem to point to my shortcomings as an ‘art writer’, making me question whether I have any idea what I am doing (and in the realm of writing, perhaps I really don’t). Even so, attempts must be made, first of all because all ideas should be questioned – and also because the bridging of visual and verbal realities allows us to paint things like bridges and talk about them as such, even if the paint is pulsating on another wavelength altogether. Speech, impoverished though it may be, is still the primary language of culture.

When I first decided to pursue a Master of Fine Arts, I was naively expecting to eventually place my work in a nice relation



Skyline, oil on canvas, 44"x60"

with art theory – to systematize my art-making strategies so that they functioned in a way that was congruent with my understanding of art history and criticism. Just as I rely on my intellect too often in daily life, I believed that the intellectual language of art was essential to my art's continued existence as art. It followed that my work could make sense as art only as an extension of

the discourse. This is, of course, true. However, the conscious imposition of said discourse on the mind is not always a constructive endeavor (nor even a de-constructive one). The discourse is both here and there and always will be – it is unavoidable. So why should I so unconditionally cast my work in its image? In the end, I believe that art should have a double function: first as

¹ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971): 149-150.

² Gass, William, "The Baby or the Botticelli," *Finding A Form: Essays by William Gass* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996): 291-292.

³ Richter, Gerhard, "Interview with Irmeline Lebeer," *L'art vivant*, February, 1973: 15.

a cast, then as a mold. That way it can continue to propagate newer versions of itself. I am not talking about art as a commodity (which it will probably always be) – I am referring to human capital.

I am constantly wrestling with issues of self-doubt, largely born out of the gap between my aesthetic formation and my newfound uncertainty about the relevance of beauty. I am sometimes confused about the concept to which my art should remain faithful. But in the end I believe that aesthetic experience is never absent from art, even when other things are very present. Believing in art comes from believing in beauty - not the beauty of nature but of man. As the writer William Gass expressed, “The world does not provide beauty for its own sake - the loveliness of flowers, landscapes, faces, trees, and sky are adventitious and accidental... It is the artist’s task to add to the world’s objects and ideas those delineations, carvings, tales, fables, and symphonic spells which ought to be there...”² Painting affords a beauty that cannot be achieved by other means. For this reason, I remain optimistic about what my work might have to offer, beyond ‘interesting’ intellectual constructions.

Paintings are still important because we still look at them. If beauty were no longer a part our sensibility, then we would no longer look at paintings. Gerhard Richter said of his landscapes of the late 60’s that they were an attempt to “see to what extent we can still use beauty today. If it is still conceivable

today...” and he concluded, “It still has just as much impact.”³ Whereas my doubt comes from my inability to reconcile the opposing sides of the traditional humanist model of art and the contemporary derivations of Duchampian paradigms, my faith comes from the realization that this opposition is also imaginary. And that maybe I can have my cake and eat it too. Borrowing from Wittgenstein’s logic, the solution to the problem of art may be found in the vanishing of the problem. Then, art can continue to be the thing manifested “that cannot be defined” – that which is mystical.



Templo Mayor, oil on canvas, 58"x78"