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Visual notes, fragments and allusions: drawing and painting thesis

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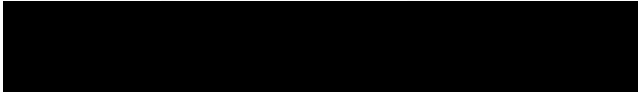
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Barbara Black for the Master of Fine Arts in Painting presented May 20, 1977.


Title: Visual Notes, Fragments and Allusions:
A Drawing and Painting Thesis

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:


Byron Gardner, Chairman


Craig Chesire


Betty Dodson


Richard Muller


Donald Wilson

The thesis discusses drawings and paintings completed during the period of study from October, 1975 to April, 1977 and presented at the Department of Art and Architecture Gallery April 21, 1977 to May 13, 1977.

VISUAL NOTES, FRAGMENTS AND ALLUSIONS:

A Drawing and Painting Thesis

by

BARBARA BLACK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

PAINTING

Portland State University
1977

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Barbara Black presented May 20, 1977.

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INTRODUCTION

For a year or so before entering the M.F.A. program I had been involved in a search for some kind of undefined change in my painting, but it would not come clear. Paintings began to appear intermittently which reflected a gradual 'emptying' of the canvas, with a large central geometric form beginning to grow and push other elements out toward the edges, leaving a few glimpses of imagery underneath the center shape. This need for uncluttered space is exemplified in the paintings included in the thesis exhibition. Now the large shapes have completed their movement to the edges of the canvas in almost every painting, leaving behind only several small areas of imagery.

At the beginning of this year I started several paintings in which I tried to incorporate as the content the process of making art, the materialization from the impulse or conception through the alternative possibilities considered, and the transformations that occur to the ideas and images in that process. It seemed to me that one way to get at this idea visually would be to use a preliminary drawing with notations of the possibilities for development in juxtaposition with a painted image repeating the same composition in some more advanced stage.

It had also been my intent to incorporate into some of the paintings some sculptural elements or objects, leading to a more dimensional quality or interaction with space, like a

wall relief. (The wall reliefs were later ruled out of the thesis project because of problems with time, technology and concept. Perhaps these will be solved at a later date.) It seemed at the time that the idea of a repeated element which could additionally be done three-dimensionally would work out very well for the wall reliefs.

However, what in fact happened was that I became very preoccupied with the preliminary drawings and their notations. This led to the idea that pages of such or any kind of written communication might be as fruitful a subject as any other, and could provide many implications to explore. I made many, many drawings exploring the qualities of line and cursive writing scribbled and erased, leaving traces and images of previous notations, games, images. The idea of change and process seemed to be implied in these drawings as well as in the paintings.

It seemed to me appropriate and irresistible to parallel the notations and process in the work by using some of the notes I made to myself in my drawing book as the text of the written thesis. These notations acquire a more cryptic quality when removed from their context among the drawings and diagrams which illustrated and continued their meanings. However, I feel they may be more relevant and illuminating than my retrospective musings would have been.

The following are excerpts from notes in my drawing book, covering the period of October 5th, 1976 through April 25th, 1977.

October 5, 1976

How little can contain all that I feel necessary? A ruthless suppression is what is necessary, to avoid clinging both to the "this" and "not-this". Simplicity and a few oblique references (hermeticism?) can perhaps refer more directly.

A CLEAR DECISION ON LIMITS
MUST BE MADE EARLY

. . .

Too much clarity obliterates the mystery (all of it?) at the heart of form-in-the-world.

2-dimensional or 3? or a shadowy place in-between?

Is that equivocating? (12/10/76-how about both, commenting on each other? JUXTAPOSITION)

Bored with the rectangle? usually.

Bored with illusion, wishing to come up against

'stubborn, irreducible matters-of-fact' . . .

October 12, 1976

How can clarity and ambiguity occupy the same SPACE?
By operating on different levels?

One or more pages from "drawing book" replicated in oil on canvas. Can become very verbal-visual. Can become very verbally anti-verbal-visual.

Paste illustration board (a mock-up of spiral page) on masonite? = more drawing (graphite, ink, and charcoal) and less painting.

Truly art about art, and about the process of creating art, the decisions involved--the way the mind works. Alternative or contradictory color annotations. Presenting the possibilities or alternative realities to be shared, visualized and completed by the viewer. Size alternatives, materials alternatives, compositional alternatives. Posing all the decisions to be made without making them?

A way of avoiding limitations.

A way of avoiding finish and overworking?

Following the artist's doodles related to automatic writing?

Closer to the initial impulses.

. . .

What other related subjects could be treated in the same way? Actual pieces or replicas from "Life Drawing" and "Advanced Drawing--AA 391" with annotations of the kinds of problems involved, judgements of outcomes.

Also, some relating to art history or art history

October 12, 1976 (cont.)

papers?

Same kinds of notes regarding:

Introductory Drawing (revisited--AA 291)
including instructional notes . . .

Also, notes regarding symbolism of all kinds--the things
Eliade referred to.

After all, this has to be related to one of my deepest
concerns--the process of making art. Making paintings about
the process of making paintings instead of end products.
Are these any less art objects? They acquire a public exist-
ence farther along than much conceptual art, but prior to
finished product.

Dptychs: one the drawing book page with annotated
drawings, and the other the finished painting made from the
compositional sketch? A process very much like Claes
Oldenburg's, but more mannered, especially if replicated in
paint. One important difference in the case of the
assemblages would be the permanent juxtaposition of the
sketch and the finished object.

To return to the diptych idea, if incorporated into one
'art object' then would they sufficiently avoid that reference?
The meaning seems adequately unrelated.

October 19, 1976

-working against window illusion-

If these doodles, musings are mounted, framed and put under glass (pencil or charcoal surface), does this give them a false preciousity? Like memorabilia from a defunct, important personage?

. . .

The decision to use real drawing book pages made unselfconsciously in the past vs. those created from now on --how would this affect the sincerity, integrity of the result? Think about it.

The ultimate punishment is having to write with a ballpoint pen . . .

The relationship to all conceptual art's instructions and diagrams: lacks pseudo-scientific orientation. More autobiographical. Not instructions for others to follow--self preoccupied.

. . .

Oldenberg got away with using a thousand different styles (of rendering) in his notes, as well as including magazine cut-outs.

. . .

What happened to all the chess games? (of last year)

I never did like to play it anyway.

Can chess remain a subject under the new rules?

Actually maybe more so. GAMES

October 19, 1976 (cont.)

Figure fragments can sometimes slip through--

figures compartmentalized, cut-off but not the
whole person--what is the philosophical
implication of that?

October 21, 1976

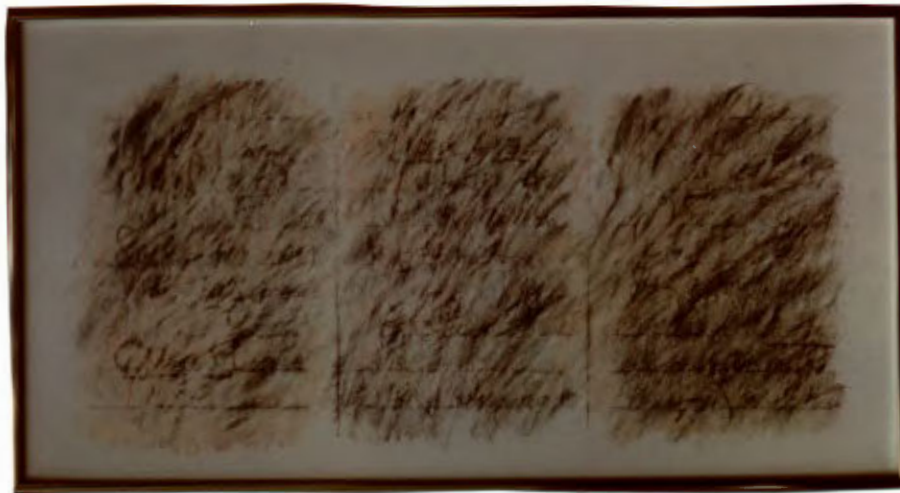


Obsolete Games

October 26, 1976



Obliterated Trio



Cancelled Games

November 1, 1976

Already--harvest time, lots of goblins and bogies, but
no aesthetic fruition for me--ideas remain green.

And the whole trouble seems to be:

THINKING TOO MUCH
with my head
and not
with my marrow bone

My mind is fogged in, and it might be a good day to let the
hand run free, but 'never on Monday'. Possibly 2 critiques
today, but somehow one survives.

Exquisite yellow-green-gold leaves of near tree against
orange-red-maroon darkness of tree beyond. Truly a day for
the floating mind in the floating world.

Erasing thought
Erasing imagery
Leaving old traces
Evidences of past moments,
Pentimenti.

Personal & overt vs. Impersonal & hidden.

Just one of many dichotomies.

Just maybe it will be possible to work

and close the gap.

cryptic scripts

Notes: "written" and "erased"

November 8, 1976

. . .

Concerns of today: still erasures. Instead of erasing images: erasing old, forgotten indecipherable scripts--past messages--the languages and alphabets of which have now been forgotten.

Form and content remain the problem. All that remains is the energy and desire to work. Works that record the search to find a wedding of form and content that will have some visual, emotional significance may be the answer for now. Are all answers rapidly obsolete even before they can be given form?

November 18, 1976



Black Marigolds

November 26, 1976



Notes - November 26th

December 9, 1976

--illusion vs. object-ivity--
fragment(s) of working drawing?

From "Jasper Johns" - Abrams, Inc. N.Y., 1967

M/6537
.J6K6

...
Within their context here it is impossible to tell whether speech has usurped vision, or vision has capped speech. The probability remains that they are necessarily mutual reinforcements, components of an integrated function. But it is just as reasonable to suppose that they are displacements rather than extensions of each other, with all that suggests of resistance and disorientation. That either interpretation is possible is merely one attribute of the muteness of visual art--which can be literal and tangible, but not explicit, in its meaning. ... (p. 10)

December 10, 1976

Real spaces vs. surface drawing mostly... If these were interchangeable?

Do you realize you always IMBED the real object (3-D) in your formulations-compositions. The surfaces always lead, are closer to the viewer? What is the meaning of that?

What if the objects projected? In the round? Or relief? The matriarchal consciousness is interested in the shapes enclosed within shapes, is that why?

The "muteness of visual art" -- a moot point.

To be emphasized, contradicted,
pointed to?

. . .

That's how this relates to my thesis proposal--

juxtaposition of contradictory spaces.

In the constructions it will be real vs. illusion
space--ok?

What do niches contain?

January 6, 1977



Illusive allusions

January 17, 1977

Already--

To show or not to show--that is the question.

Titles are getting hard now.

Is the rook a threat to agriculture?

"Getting Rid of Old Games" (relates to cancellations!
-2/19/77)

"Most nests are built in March or April."

January 28, 1977

Beginning with either a cryptic script resembling cursive or an obvious scribble, there is then a succession of attempts to obscure the surface and further reduce clarity.

That is the process, what is the meaning of that process?

Things that are happening beneath, which can no longer be clearly discerned imply a passage of time--from a onetime clarity to a now almost total obscurity of content, of meaning. The form and its implications remain.

Catching glimpses, seeing 'through a glass darkly'.
 Obsolete, no longer relevant? The surface superimposed serves as a dark glass?

fragment(s) (ing) (tation)	maneuvers
script	notes
cipher	reminders
decoding	notation
encoding	practise sheets?
cursive-cursory	ruling out possibilities
allusive-illusivive	
messages	
writing	
lists	
remnants	
shards	
yesterday's	
past	
old	
obsolete	
superceded	
fading	
scribbles	
marks	
traces	
poems	
games	

February, 1977



Cancelled

March 1, 1977



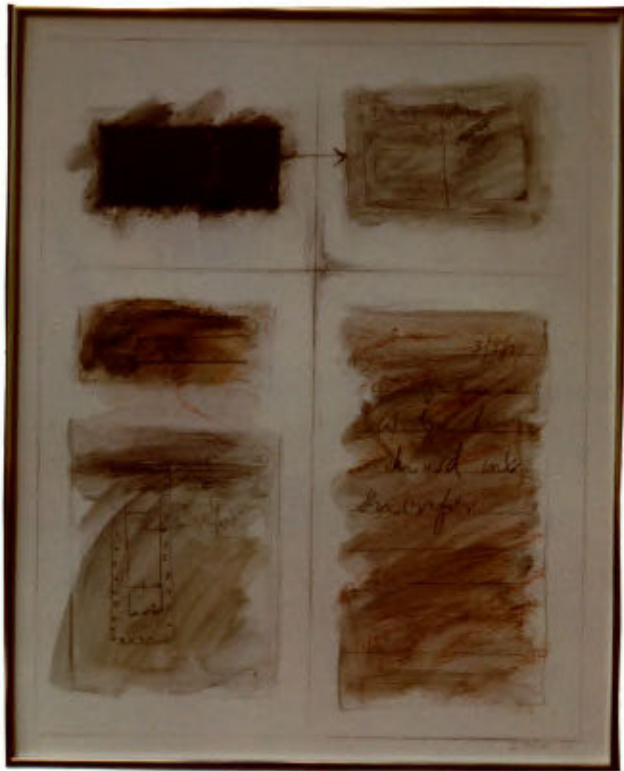
Irrelevant notes

March, 1977



Appearing, disappearing, or forever frozen?

March 5, 1977



Past Reminding

March, 1977



← Red →

March, 1977.



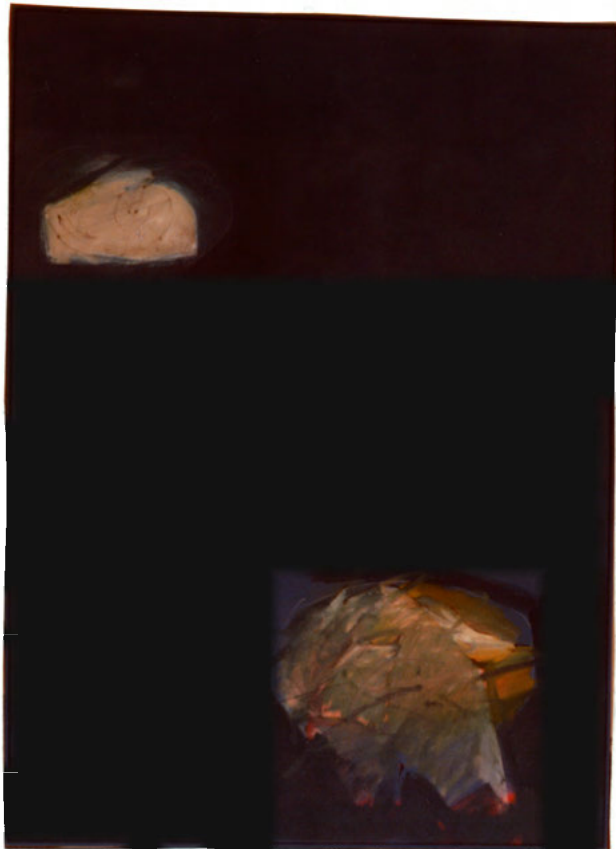
Foursquare

March, 1977



Trinitarian concerns, with slippage

March, 1977



Blue Implosion

March 30, 1977

Drawings of page measurements for lettering (finding the golden section--Dynamic Symmetry, etc.)

Are the images appearing, disappearing, or hovering? In front of the "skin" or "field" or in back? or alternating? Ambiguous location. Varying levels of illusion (allusion) reference to process? (Different levels of 'finish'). Spontaneous vs. deliberative, sketchy vs. elaborative. Do the images continue behind or underneath the color field? Does the field encroach, engulf or just wait there for some sort of solution, solidification--why the mystery of what's behind? Is there anything behind this?

March, 1977



Transmigration of a pair of squares

April, 1977



Exotic ports of call, drawn and quartered

April, 1977



Expanding spiral = infinity?

April, 1977



Horizon line denoted

April, 1977



Another Reference to Black Marigolds

April 25, 1977

Why can't I use extracts from the notes to myself in my drawing book as the text for my thesis?

CONCLUSION

Many questions were raised in the notes, without receiving explicit answers. It seemed more important at the time to keep track of the questions I was concerning myself with since the works themselves would record a succession of mute answers.

One of the answers the drawings and paintings offer back to me is how much of the primary meaning of the work is in the form. The actual subject matter of the imagery play a subordinate role, and so provides me with a new freedom in that area. It is what is happening to the images, not what they depict, that carries the underlying meaning which is intended to infuse the works. The way in which the materials have been used to paint over, in or out, with arrows, lines, words, erasures is meant to refer to change and process.

I feel in the drawings the direction of change is toward dissolution or the gradual erosion of once specific images and ideas. A very formal presentation records a transitory moment in time when notations in images or language were made casually which have now lost their specific content. They then may remind us more generally of the ways we make, use and discard that kind of information or, even more abstractly, how all forms materialize, function for a time, and then change their original form and meaning. For me, the drawings imply the passage of time, and refer to the past.

In the paintings the potential direction of the imagery

is more ambiguous. Will the color fields expand to blot out the images, or will the imagery expand and multiply to fill the canvas and crowd out the color fields? One answer is that if the form can maintain implications of both emergence and disappearance, the paintings can contain reference to both the past and the present, to on-going and even future possibilities.