

Can't Stop Coyote

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Abstract

I work hard to keep language out of my studio. Language reminds me of my mom's voice, people telling me what to do, not having the right accent, critiques, criticism in general, mis-truths, and never being good enough. Language is the material of my thoughts, and most of my thoughts, or the ones on a constant loop anyhow, are all those voices over and over again.

Painting is where I get to be me, with myself, and in my body. Painting is my home, family, refuge, and best friend. I'm not looking at myself from the outside, no one can fucking tell me what to do, and I don't have to explain myself.

Naturally writing a "thesis" feels counterintuitive and is absolute last thing I want to do. It's a messed up hierarchy, where after two years of material investigations and dialogue, "schooling" is only complete with a written component. It feels like beating a dead horse or killing the whole damn thing.

I've thought of a lot of ways to do this part of my education without actually doing it:

1. Commission essays about my work
2. Conduct interviews and use transcripts
3. Provide a quick abstract stating my position followed up by a curated reading list
4. Write an exhaustive list of all the voices in my head that I have to shut down before I paint
5. Type up the notes from my Can't Stop Coyote book
6. Include other manifestos or make my own
7. Smoke a final pack of cigarettes one last time and "write a thesis" whatever that means
8. Try to get an exemption
9. Submit the exemption letter as my thesis

The bottom line is I'm not ready to write and have no desire to. As I lay here on my stomach and think about forcing myself to sit, reflect, and name stuff, I feel like I want to kill myself and smoke till I die. I don't know what the following pages that make up my "thesis" will contain. It might be linear, impressionistic, or fragmented. They might be my words or the words of others. It may describe my paintings or not. My compromise is that I am willing to try, for the sake of my "education", to explore some other possibilities for language in relation to my practice.

Thesis Body

I wake up in the morning and my first thought is how much I hate my parents. It's strange because we are actually really close and I love them a lot. I'm not entirely sure what it is about, but I don't doubt writing this has triggered some of my problems with authority.

My paintings hone in on the texture of strange intimate moments that make up the perceptual experience of being both an insider and outsider.

My paintings, installations, and performances focus on the paradoxical function of rhythm, movement, and repetition as tools to control the body as well as the way the body (nature) asserts itself.

My paintings focus on rhythm, repetition, and movement as form, content, and process.

My work draws from my Arab/American/Muslim upbringing, a personal history of eating disorders, and the windy path to recovery through horseback riding in order to understand the relationship between mind and body.

In my paintings, performances, and videos I use the relationship between horse and rider as a way to wrestle with conceptions of self: east and west, religious and secular, family and sociopolitical, and psychological and somatic.

These are some of the elevator pitch statements I have written over the past year. What a joke. Its so painful to read myself trying over and over again to find the words to say what the work is circling around.

When does a seed of self hate get planted? Why is it so hard to uproot?

It's also painful to think that everyone has a childhood. Which means that at some point everyone was at the mercy of fate, and might spend the rest of their life undoing that luck.

What exactly is the critique of your work?

Power is very complex and misleading concept apropos the reductionism of power re: Foucault, what critical models or concepts are you think of to critique this?

To which thinkers do you identify your work?

I usually ask for around a month's notice and attached materials/guideline to write a letter, and require all the materials (narrative statement and work) in order to write it, when will you have your narrative written? Who else is writing recommendation letters for you?

Well, fuck you.

I had to look up a couple terms after my first midterm. The first was scatological, which means means pooping around, and might have been in reference to the very serious book "Formless." The second was "piss and vinegar." At first I thought it was an insult, but then I realized it was a good thing. Later that year I submitted that painting to a group show in Abu Dhabi and they censored the piss, so the new title is "P. and Vinegar".

Key concepts:

Movement
Repetition Rhythm
Desire Acting Out Power Control
Performance Body
Refusal Changing Promiscuous
Cyclical Material Pussy
Memory Consent Pain Heavy
Nature Force Truth Laughter
Time Wet Burden
Faith
Impression

Every now and again, with the equestrian works, someone asks the question, “well what about class?”

what about it?

I feel like truth is an undeniable feeling of a force beyond language like farting, laughing, or getting a period. Maybe language can never be the container for truth because to put something in language means it's been metabolized, abstracted, and interpreted. I think painting can do that, bypass language, in the experience of making or viewing it.

“We have different lifestyles,” is what he said when he dumped me. What he should have said is, **“I haven’t been honest with you or myself. I’m questioning my sexuality and I’m in no position to be starting a long term committed relationship. I’m sorry I didn’t bring this up sooner. I’m sorry I used your body. I’m sorry I spoke to you like shit when I felt like shit about myself. I’m sorry I lied to you. I hope you can understand.”**

Instead, I believed the problematic lifestyle was mine. That summer I walked around New York wishing I was one of those white, waspy, Brooklyn girls that went to St. Annes and dressed really cool and wasn’t Arab or Muslim.

November 9, 2021

I had a very intense visit with Fox. They kind of really went at me about the control and repression and then we talked about de-sublimation. They were saying I need a lot from these paintings and that’s when I started to cry. Its because yes, I do need a lot. What I’m looking for feels urgent to me because its deeply personal.

It’s also on my mind that sex somehow might be central or another thing, but I don’t really know other than its not ever felt 100% safe. I guess the sexual feelings have always felt overpowering and threatening and sexual attention always felt invasive or inappropriate.

As for periods, I got my period when I was playing soccer and I remember feeling sort of dismissive and fed up with the whole thing. I think it just marked this difference that meant I would have to behave differently from the boys.

Fox ended the visit with the frame, **“what can you learn from the painting instead of what can you do to the painting?”**

I must have been feeling pretty worthless at the time and I really needed the work to make me feel worthwhile.

I met Emerson in the spring of 2021, she helped me trailer a bunch of paintings to the stables. She was a senior in high school and I thought she was the coolest. I was so impressed that she could hitch and drive a trailer. She really loved the “Equitation” painting.

At the recommendation of the store clerk I reluctantly got her an astrology notebook/journal as a graduation gift. Emerson loved it and I was shocked. She seemed so tough and I was sure she would have thought astrology was stupid.

In the spring of 2021 Kerry seemed to always be asking, **“what drives the action?”**

I found it confusing to answer because I just wanted to say a force or drive. That answer didn't feel specific enough, but I also couldn't name the forces or drives because it's never just one or the same one. Sometimes it's not nameable in the moment of action and that might be the point.

I still don't know how to answer that question.

In September of 2021 Emerson went off to college and I ended up leasing her horse Nellie, formally known as “Can't Stop Coyote”. Nellie is an 18 hand chestnut mare and had recently experienced a bad case of ulcers that caused her to lose a lot of weight and muscle. She reminded me of a chestnut mare I leased when I was around 15 called Belle.

I started a notebook called, “Can’t Stop Coyote”, and would write down lessons from our lessons:

Sept 2, 2021

We both go stiff and that’s how you lose muscles and then you are tense. To become supple is ‘to find elasticity in movement.’ That means you are using all the muscles and building muscle while being relaxed. I think we both need conditioning on how to use ourselves and stay within ourselves.

March 5, 2022

Still having a rough time with the weather. I cried on Nellie yesterday out of frustration. I was frustrated that she wouldn’t help me out and that I couldn’t figure out how to get out of our little fight. At the end I couldn’t really look at her. Internally I was frustrated because I really wanted/needed the ride to feel good. In the end, I can’t control the weather and she can’t control her injuries. I guess the lesson is that my self worth and care for her and myself shouldn’t be and isn’t determined by the quality of the ride. I guess it’s about trust and faith and meeting our bodies where they are at. We are both learning.

It’s almost as if I came into the ride hoping to find this magic button, correct rein length that I can keep the whole time and things will be perfect. That ~~is~~ approach is incorrect because actually everything is a constant adjustment.

“I have high expectations for my paintings,” was the first sentence of an artist statement I wrote in 2020. Being one of my paintings must have been an insufferable experience.

Back to Fox’s question:

“what can you learn from the painting instead of what can you do to the painting?”

My therapist keeps telling me to “let go” and I have no idea what the hell that means. I also don’t know what it means in religion. Sure, Islam means to submit, which is to let go. I pray and try to do most of the things, but I know deep down some part of me is not truly submitting or letting go, and I don’t know what that is or how to do it.

I started to think about painting the way I approach a set with Nellie. The paintings are their own entities, they are alive, have their own potentials and desires. The thing is, maybe it's not the paintings, but it's my body in the studio I'm really talking about. Like the mirror is Tala and Nellie, Tala Mind-Body and Tala Physical-Body, Tala-Body and Painting.

It strikes me how curry combing feels the same as sanding a canvas.

In April 2022 I went into the month of Ramadan with so many expectations: I would lose weight, stop smoking, start running, be spiritual, cook an Iftar for people once a week, write my thesis, show with Nellie, enjoy nature, plant a tree, be grateful, pay my charity, go to taraweeh every night, keep my apartment clean, stretch canvases, hang photos, do laundry, be in the moment and not think about the future.

Reality

The day I paid the entry fee for the show, which I had been on the fence about, Nellie got injured forcing us to take a two-week break.

I decided to end my fast two days before Ramadan actually ends because my body and mind were breaking down. For the first time in 3 years I missed a full day of prayer.

I smoked a cigarette at day 39 (apparently it takes 40 days to break a habit) to punish myself for being tired and as an archaic act of general rebellion.

Tom, my riding instructor, had a funny comment that went along the lines of, “**you think you are having a good run, then you show up one day and your horse totally humbles you.**”

Some other Tom-isms

- **you can't teach feeling, well watch me**
- **beginner riders work on expert skills and expert riders work on beginner skills**
- **wrap your leg around the horse like a wet towel**

After the break up, which also coincided with the second time I failed at quitting smoking, I started a painting that I wanted to title "Discipline and Punish" or "Doing Bits". It was supposed to be a mindless painting of an intricate, repetitive, mirrored pattern of a tablecloth from my childhood and horse riding equipment. I hated painting it, but I felt like I needed to defend it as well. So I kept going for another six months, trying to "finish it" or "make it work."

Looking back it feels like using an image or pattern as a ground for action is a way to give my gesture historic, conceptual, and intellectual value as well as cultural and geographic specificity. *I'm not sure I really give a shit about any of that and I think a canvas is ground enough.*

October 7 2021 - "Bad Britches"

Today was a good day. I feel like I'm a dream and the day feels like a mirage or just passing air. I made a painting that felt like the day, just made me laugh and gave me pleasure. It's of the butt breeches, but in a pattern. I think what made me laugh is for all the seriousness of everything and how much I'm thinking of god and divine love and searching for that meaning, I ended up with a painting of butts. It's humbling and humorous that things are totally out of control and you don't know where you are going to find something.

I started having good sex recently and its great.

A list of likes and dislikes:

Likes

Horses

Music

honesty

Pattern

Big paintings

Adventure

Fast painting

Drawing

Intention

Color

No apologies

Humor

Ambition

Ease/coming up

at the same time

Ritual

Wet into wet

Decisive fluid action

Sensuality

Dislikes

overly labored

over thinking

too many studies

constipated paintings

no feeling

disembodied distance

tricks

illusions

I took on a commission to re-make a painting from 2019. It was a 8 x 6 ft painting titled “One Thought Turns Into Another.” I took it on, despite my hesitancy about trying to slot it in with my “thesis” work, because something in me felt like it was important to revisit it. At the same time I had Nellie’s blanket and a cowhide up in the studio.

March 25, 2022

Painting was really weird today. I felt like I was in a flashback. I couldn’t really figure it out. In the studio for the first bit I was crying. Something about the “commission” painting made me feel sick. It reminded me of Nyc and the Greenpoint studio and it made me realize how much of that I’ve been trying to block out of my life and self. I think I still feel very confused about what that all was and weirdly don’t feel safe. Today was difficult painting abstractly, or really “painting”, which means walking in without a concrete plan and painting for a few hours till it’s enough for the day.

Eventually I settled in. I still remember how much I would love the feeling of coming home covered in paint and needing to shower. It just weird because I keep feeling like I keep forgetting who I am all the time and feeling like I’m worthless or guilty.

March 27, 2022

I HATE the “commission”, or a part of me does, when I look at it I really don’t like it. It’s too chaotic and is annoying me and looks like a cow. A small part of me says I might like it later but then another part says its derivative of Laura Owens.

In the process of making it I saw and remembered a bunch of paintings I made last year. I guess I don’t like it because it feels “old”, but then when I look at it compared to the “old” one, it’s better and I like it better.

The thing is though, I think I enjoy the one I’m making now, or the process of it more, of just sort of rhythmically applying paint and color and watching it move.

“Well I’m obviously interested in abstraction,” is how my most recent visit with Angela started. There were five-ish abstract paintings in the studio. The “commission” now titled “Ashk”(an Arabic word that translates to a mixture of love, desire, and passion) was one of them. I also have decided that I officially like that painting and want to make another.

We talked about polaroids, exposure, impression, sex/sexuality, consent, and Robert Delaney. I started to read Delaney’s auto-biography and I was struck by how free and autonomous he seemed as a young adult in the 1960’s. In his introduction he presents two sentences about when his dad died, one is emotionally true and the other factually true. This dissonance made a lot of sense to me.

Angela, **“Female sexuality is the devilish penetration of the social space that painting creates. People are still horrified of pussies.”**

My notes from my last visit with Angela :

- Suzan Frecon
- Hugette Caland
- Marsden Hartley
- Molly Zuckerman -Hartung “95 Thesis on Painting”

Saif and I talked about self-portraiture. He paints himself all the time, I’ve painted him a couple of times. He came to my childhood room in Abu Dhabi to help me make a new memory there and is painting that. I used to paint self-portraits all the time, they are hanging all over the house in Abu Dhabi.

April 1, 2022

Today is the first day of Ramadan. My stomach + pelvis + and uterus are a mess. I’m very anxious about painting. I really do want to try this thing, but then I hear a voice in my head telling me to stop and leave everything alone, but then the other one just has this curious itch, and its almost like I want to see it now before people comment on it and I get confused. I guess I’m also inspired and curious but the problem is I’m too tired and uncomfortable. I’m really sad I burned out to be honest, I don’t want to do that again.

April 24, 2022

I'm really stressed, sad, and nervous. Every time I see my face and the three pimples it triggers me and makes me upset. My body feels so weak and tired but my nervous system is agitated. I keep forgetting to change my period pads or whatever. I'm just so tired and annoyed and want everything to be fucking over.

Now I feel so hopeless that all I want to do is run myself to the ground. I feel like I can't succeed at "resting" because I'm still tired and I want to paint so why not just fuck the whole thing and do that. I'm going to be ok. It's going to be ok.

There's about 100 words left and I don't know how to end this thing. Mostly I'm curious about what it means to live my life on my own terms. To be within myself, look at myself, and listen to myself. What will it look like when I am at rest in my own skin? How will my body feel when I am in an elastic relationship with myself? What kind of time defines the paintings? How does a body of work accumulate when I am connected to my rhythm? Who is my family? What kind of relationships do I want to be engaged in?

April 27, 2022

It feels like a ridiculous statement, but I've realized how omnipresent, fast, and determined that voice is. It also made me rally that I need to stay away from family for a while and build my own life. It feels like it's important that I build my safety and define and feel that for myself before I see or engage anyone. It's sad, but it is what it is at this point.

I rode a little bay quarter-horse/thoroughbred mix called Patrick and it was fun. I had a feeling a second horse would come my way. I hope I can ride him more. He reminds me of Tixie, a bay gelding I also rode when I had Belle. Very strange how these things happen.

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