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*Azul, Amarillo, Rojo*

by

Jorge Rios Morales

A thesis presented to the  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
Washington University in St. Louis  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

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*Para mi mamá y mi papá*

*Theory has nothing to do with a work of art. Pictures which are interpretable, and which contain a meaning, are bad pictures. A picture presents itself as the Unmanageable, the Illogical, the Meaningless. It demonstrates the endless multiplicity of aspects; it takes away our certainty, because it deprives a thing of its meaning and its name. It shows us the thing in all the manifold significance and infinite variety that preclude the emergence of any single meaning and view.*

Gerard Richter<sup>1</sup>

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## I

**Overture**

The main aspiration of my recent work is to generate a space of synthesis for my intermittent states of true belief and skepticism about the possibility that art can generate a transcendental spiritual experience—a mental state of ineffable knowledge, awe, and wonder. I understand *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo*—a group of four paintings made in 2023 as part of my MFA graduation thesis—as a non-symbolic piece that emulates the ambivalent nature of life (I consider existence both marvelous and tragic given its precarious condition). This tendency to refuse certainty is a result of my own belief system, which at the same time is determined by the ever-present uncertainty of my personal life.

I was born in Havana, Cuba in 1988, right before the collapse of the Soviet Union. I grew up between the Big Brother style propaganda of the totalitarian communist regime—mandatory marches, chants, slogans, uniforms—and the virtual exposure to the capitalist exuberance of the nineties: the promise of a colorful life through commercials of American television via homemade pirate antennas, Sears catalogues my father would bring from his travels, the stories of emigrates, and pop culture in general. At the age of 14, I attended the National Academy of Beaux Arts San Alejandro. This centennial institution had a curriculum heavily focused on contemporary art. The condition of double isolation—geographical and political—created a complex of being left-behind in the young art students that translated into an unquenchable hunger for cultural information. I did not have a lot of interest in the art made in Cuba at that time, since it was polarized between a formalistic, government-friendly, decorative dullness or in the service of the opposite: contextual and socio-political content-

driven work led by figures like Tania Bruguera. The Cuban artists that I admired and whose subjects were more akin to my emergent philosophical interests had left the country in the early nineties, establishing themselves mostly in Mexico or the U.S.—artists like José Bedia, Flavio Garciandía, and Tomás Sanchez.

In 2013 I found myself emigrating to the U.S. as well, further complicating the sense of identity that marked my previous life. As an immigrant, I am always in a state of flux, dislocation, adaptation, and expansion. It took some time for me to embrace those contradictions, intersections, limitations, and inconsistencies not as a dislocation of the Self, but as something that was central to my very essence. It is precisely because of the potential of the work of art to perform within the ineffable co-existence of opposites, of poetic ambiguity, that I couldn't be anything other than an artist—at least not happily. That is also why my work resists negotiating with certainties. It exists in a state of perennial doubt—an aesthetic interrogation.

## II

**Intermezzo**

What the hell is an aesthetic interrogation? Is there still a place for poetry within the artistic experience? Or is the inevitable over-exposure to sound, images, objects, and content irreversibly re-defining our relationship with the work of art as a tool for spiritual self-realization? Should art in general refrain from providing any concrete answers? Does a linear, linguistic interpretation transgress its richer poetic potential? Is the overall tone of my work one of skepticism, doubt, and uncertainty with sparkles of humor and satire? Are satire and irony more efficient tools to convey meaning in a world where moral values are in crisis? Are moral values in crisis, or is this idea an ever-recurrent generational cliché? Is meaning deeper than logic? Are most visual artists pseudo-intellectuals with no profound knowledge of the topics they deal with? Does the ultimate status of contemporary art as a luxurious good only affordable by a few privileged ones make it a hypocritical tool when used in the name of social justice? Is art the highest form of culture? Does art provide an indescribable connection to a deeper truth?



## III

**Recitative**

*Amarillo, Azul, Rojo* is a work about painting. The process, materials, and surfaces are the most important parts of its existence. In this sense, its “content” is self-referential and doesn’t exist elsewhere, except perhaps in the history of art and abstraction itself.

What is actually there? A horizontal arrangement of four vertical, abstract paintings. They are colorful. Full of saturated, thick, irregular lines that cross and intersect with each other. Sometimes the lines end at the edge of the plane, sometimes they appear to continue beyond it. These lines are observably made by a brush—in some areas the distinctive pattern of drier brush marks confirms it. Drippings of paint run out of the broader strokes in different directions. They reveal the once watery, fluid state of the surface. What appears to be the background color is homogenous and relatively even throughout each work. The first one (following a left to right order) I have painted a slightly light tone of blue, followed by an intense medium yellow, a primary neutral red, finishing with a rich warm black.

I made these paintings using a combination of professional watercolor and acrylic markers. By professional, I mean colors that are produced by a minimal processing of natural minerals and pigments; this is relevant because natural pigments dissolved in water is one of the oldest known painting media.<sup>2</sup> Watercolors have for me, then, a sort of primordial significance. They are juvenile (water-based paintings are the default choice for kids) and rigorous as well—watercolor has a professional institutional infrastructure (Royal Watercolor Society, American Watercolor Society). Besides these reasons, I choose watercolor for its intense luminosity. The transparency of the medium allows the white of the paper to act as a

lightbox which provides the surface with an incomparable brightness. Another property that is relevant about watercolors is how pure the pigments remain during the process of production. In contrast to other mediums, one can perceive the organic quality of the minerals used in some colors. Their smell, viscosity, and chemistry are present in a way that reminds me of the first cave paintings. Water is also a medium with a practical and symbolic relevance. It is the key component of life as we know it, yet we take it for granted and don't reflect much on its significance. As a solution, water is very recognizable given how familiar we are with its behavior—the way it stains, drips, and dries. In short, I use watercolors both because of their intrinsic beauty and their archetypical significance as a medium.

In contrast to these qualities, acrylic markers produce an impersonal uniform surface – they are opaque, constant, and contained. As a technology, markers are fairly recent. Their invention dates to around 100 years ago.<sup>3</sup> They are used mostly in what are commonly regarded as art-adjacent disciplines such as graffiti, illustration, and design. The support of the work is built from paper stretched on wood panels. Each piece measures eight by four feet, and there are a total of four pieces hanged with around 2 inches of separation. Paper is the ideal surface for both watercolor and markers. The vertical format and large scale intend to amplify visual impact, while the door/portal shape of each piece suggests an aperture, an entry point.

I have created these paintings in two distinctive steps. The first one is fast, gestural, and driven by chance. It is in this stage when the loose and washy watercolors marks are created. I approach the paper without a pre-conceived sketch or idea of the outcome, letting the physicality of the brush dictate its own path. The only restriction in place is to avoid figuration. If the marks are too loaded with pigment, I incline the surface and let it drip, mixing different strokes and colors in the process.



Work in progress (I). Photo courtesy of the artist.

After the painting dries, the second phase takes place. It consists of filling out any fragments of the paper untouched by the watercolor using acrylic markers. I'm in full control of this second step. It is mechanical, detailed, slow, and predetermined by what it is already there. The background then becomes aware of itself (it is no longer secondary but central). The marker's opaque and saturated quality contrasts with the fluidity and transparency of the water-based painting.



Work in progress (II). Photo courtesy of the artist.

For viewers that experience the work for the first time, unaware of its method, this contrast embodies a painting paradox: how can (for example) a bright, transparent, lemon-green brushstroke exist on top of a darker red tone? After further examination, the trick reveals itself—the red has been added afterwards. I hope for this experience to be a moment of joyful discovery instead of a pretentious aha moment, a gotcha punchline. I have no interest in creating a visual trope, I'm just sincerely attracted to a painting which resists revealing its own

creation process, at least instantly. As a painter, I perceive this approach as a gentle defiance, an invitation to the challenge of deciphering the mechanics of illusion. *Amarillo, Rojo, Azul* is created with this idea in mind. It intentionally destabilizes classic relationships such as background versus foreground, spontaneity vis a vis intentionality, accident and control, as well as fast and slow mark-making. But this destabilization is not rebellious in the way that a certain avant-garde spirit might embody reaction against tradition. In my work, the co-existence of two different modes of painting occurs as a sustained inquiry into painterly conventions,<sup>4</sup> not for the sake of innovation, but out of love for exploring the practice itself.

## IV

**Aria**

This is the first time I have made these paintings. *Rojo, Azul, Amarillo* is not the culmination of a research or experimentation process but the opposite. It's the building blocks for a project that starts now, one that I will continue evolving and changing as time goes by. It is only preceded by a handful of smaller scale studies. I have as many unanswered questions as I have responses. Although it is the first time that I have created work that can be perceived as pure abstraction, there are several reasons why it is also an organic extension of my previous practice.

In general, I consider all my work as a visual artist to be an investigation of the potential of the aesthetic experience—a special state of mind that is qualitatively different from the everyday experience in which the attention is focused on the object while all other objects, events, and everyday concerns are momentarily suppressed—to provide an emotional response to the perennial question of meaning. In my previous body of work, this interrogation takes the form of paradoxical declarations of first events that are untraceable given their remote and metaphysical nature, such as the first sunset, the first color, the first fire, or the first sadness. The absurdity of performing an impossible taxonomy symbolizes our contradictory instinct for understanding the universe and the limitations of true knowledge through the subjective condition of the mind.<sup>5</sup> The fictional chronology is also a reference to time and finitude as existential premises. More importantly, it is a meditation on the relationship between truth and aesthetics as well as the potential of the artwork for spiritual self-realization (perfect knowledge of our relationship to the universe). My approach to these

subjects does not have a linguistic/conceptual nature; it does not provide statements of truth or value. It is not of a nihilistic nature either. I'm not interested in an ironic detachment from reality. My approach is one of poetic provocation: sensorial and phenomenological constellations of meaning that do not converge in an intelligible form but in an intuitive and pre-verbal one.



Jorge Rios, *This Was the First Reflection*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 98 x 120 inches. © Jorge Rios

During my education at Sam Fox School, I've been expanding the formal language of these series [*La Edad del Viento*] about "first events." In addition to traditional painting surfaces like

canvas, I also work mainly on cowhides to allude directly to nature and death without having to re-present it otherwise. In some cases, this is only the initial state of the piece, which is later combined with different forms of electronic light and sound devices such as neon lights, LED strings, keyboards, speakers, and electric candles. These elements act as signifiers of both pagan religious practices (in the case of cowhides) and modern-day technology—magnifying the passive contemplation of the work toward a spatial, immersive, multi-sensorial experience of the same. For example, in the piece *This Was the First Time*, 2023, a keyboard on the floor is activated by the weight of a metal figure. This abstract figure is replicated in the painting and represents the notion of God and divine creation. The specific key played corresponds to the sharp C note which opens Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*). The 1913 ballet depicts various primitive rituals celebrating the advent of spring, after which a young girl is chosen as a sacrificial victim and dances herself to death. This idea of the propitiatory and the ceremonial is one of the underlying interests behind the use of animal skin for this body of works.





Jorge Rios, *Untitled (This Was the First Time)*, 2023, Oil, oil stick, and watercolor on cowhide, neon light, keyboard piano, and found object, Variable dimensions. © Jorge Rios and Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts

Regarding the use of cowhides, I was inspired by how animal farming has been historically linked to human civilization. Cattle played major roles in many ancient religions, including those of Egypt, Greece, Israel, and Rome. Still to this day, the cow is considered sacred in many different belief systems. Since that body of work alluded to creation myths and theological revelation, cowhides activated the notion of mortality, mythology, the divine, and the sacrificial in an explicit way.

In the case of *Amarillo, Azul, Rojo*, I decided to explore a different technique and medium for the sake of it (the pure enjoyment and reward of diversity). Although these recent pieces are visibly different from my oil paintings on cowhide, it is important to mention that they overlap in their intention.

## V

**Chorus**

## On the Nature of Painting

I think painting and drawing are technically some of the most accessible means of visual expression. The direct and immediate action of making a mark on a surface was a primordial instinct of both early humans 45,500 years ago and myself alike.<sup>6</sup> I started painting around the same age that most children do; to say that I never stopped is both a cliché and a fact. The reason I continue to do it today—as an intentional decision—is because playing with the alchemic mechanics of pigments still makes me happy. Besides its immediate sensual character, for me, to paint is to mimic creation in the theological sense, to create something important out of nothing. It is also an attempt to provide the viewer the joy I receive from painting as a form of sensual, sensorial, and spiritual experience. These and other definitions on the nature of painting as a discipline and an action, although useful, are limited. They throw light into the history and sensorial implications of the medium, but as an art form, the experience of painting is not something you can use words to describe. I believe that's why Leonardo Da Vinci—who was as rigorously a scientist as he was an artist—said he wanted to be known as a painter rather than a scholar.<sup>7</sup> I believe there seems to be an inversely proportional relationship between a good painting and its logical discernibility. Lee Ufan mentions in his notes about Henry Matisse, "Since a painting is nothing but a painting, it should be a painting before it is anything else."<sup>8</sup> And Julian Schnabel stated, paraphrasing the late Ad Reinhardt, "The paintings are the paintings and everything else is everything else."<sup>9</sup>

## On the Painters I Think About

Maybe it was the circumstance of growing up under a Communist dictatorship that imposed an absolutist, totalitarian, and authoritarian narrative on its people that made me a skeptical person. For me, doubt is an ontological necessity and it is intrinsically related to my instinct of free will and self-determination. That's one dimension of my personality; another one—ironically a product of the same ideology—is that of a true believer, but not in a political system, moral creed, or religious dogma, but along with Plato, in that beauty is the splendor of truth.<sup>10</sup> For me, those opposites find synthesis in the experience of the work of art, which is artifice (construction, illusion, deception) and reality (actuality, emotion, transformation) simultaneously.

Nowhere in my previous work is this condition more evident than in *Rojo, Azul, Amarillo*. This is also the work that references more evidently the artists that I admire the most. Artists whose oeuvre are statements on the ambivalent quality of the art-object as sleight-of-hand and true magic at the same time.

In this regard, no one has had a stronger influence on my work than Christopher Wool.<sup>11</sup> I discovered him in Cuba when I was a teenager. Back then I only had access to his “text paintings.” They were irreverent and sexy, original and simple, conceptually strong while visually striking. On my first trip to New York in 2013, I visited his retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, and there I encountered the work that became deeply relevant for me: large scale monochromatic abstractions made with a combination of digitally manipulated photos of previous works that were silkscreened and then re-painted or wiped in gestural

blurs.<sup>12</sup> The images were beautiful and aesthetically pleasant, but unlike Rothko's color fields paintings—which I also grew up admiring—these pieces were complicating their own perceptual experience in a way that connected more with the ambiguity and playfulness that is so fundamental to me as a creator. As Suzanne Hudson points out in one of the essays included in Wool's Guggenheim retrospective catalogue:

In the early 1980s, the question was how to paint after the conceptual turn and through a contemporary environment littered with panels given over to adolescent sexual fantasies and gratuitously repurposed myths, or festooned with broken crockery and dried flowers. That is, how to paint as though it mattered at a time when so many had reason to believe (pace Francesco Clemente, Julian Schnabel, et al.) that it didn't. The answer that Wool arrived at was to paint *how* to paint—"I became more interested in 'how to paint it' than 'what to paint'"—a formulation the basis of which obviates both the *what* of subject matter and the *why* of intention.<sup>13</sup>

If both subject matter and intention are pushed to a secondary role, then only the surface remains—the presentation of the art-object and subsequent aesthetic experience. But I believe this is not a display of nihilistic formality or technical virtuosity. For me, Wool's paintings are sincere simulations of expressiveness. They are self-aware of their condition of artifice in a way that, for example, a painting by Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning is not. It is this specific approach to the medium which informs *Azul, Rojo, Amarillo*. In contrast to Wool, I don't rely on the combination of different disciplines (photography, printmaking) to deconstruct a conventional approach to abstraction. My process stays instead within the realm of painting and uses different tools and treatments in an attempt to subvert pre-conceived notions of abstraction as a genre.



Christopher Wool. *Untitled*, 2000, Silkscreen ink on linen, 78 x 60 inches, Collection Sam Orlofsky. © Christopher Wool

Another artist who has had a profound impact on these recent paintings is Chris Martin.<sup>14</sup> His large-scale canvases are unapologetically beautiful. Along with oil and acrylic, he uses non-traditional art materials like glitter, newspaper, carpet scraps, and vinyl LPs to create colorful, abstract compositions that are reminiscent of modernism in their rigor and consistency, but also feel current given the use of non-conventional materials and the acid—almost florescent—color palette. I hope that my recent work (while being in direct conversation with Abstract Expressionism as a movement) feels contemporary and part of this day and age. In that sense, when making some of my technical decisions, I think of Chris Martin and his vibrant surfaces.



Chris Martin, Untitled, 2014, Acrylic, Oil and glitter on canvas, 88 x 77 inches. © Anton Kern Gallery, New York

Central as well to my practice is Rudolf Stingel.<sup>16</sup> His work debates in a more direct way ideas about artistic perception, the process of creation, and overall notions about painting. Using intricate mechanical processes as well as industrial materials, he creates paintings that are intentionally illusory and contain trickery. For example, in the late 1980s, Stingel began a series of works on paper using a technique of applying oil and enamel paint onto paper through a tulle screen to create monochrome paintings with texture and fine patterning. Later on, at the Venice Biennale in 1989, he published an illustrated “do-it-yourself” manual in English, Italian, German, French, Spanish, and Japanese, outlining the equipment and procedure that would enable anyone to create one of his paintings.<sup>17</sup> By doing this, he subverted the trope of the European Renaissance’s painter-genius or post-war American painter-hero as well as notions of originality and style linked to Western modern art.

When creating *Amarillo, Azul, Rojo*, I was attracted to the idea of a painting that anyone else could potentially do. Thus, in the near future, I would like to develop and document a workshop in which I teach middle and elementary school students to make their own abstract paintings following the set of parameters that led to my work.<sup>18</sup>



Rudolf Stingel, Untitled, 2015, Acrylic, Oil and enamel on canvas, 72 x 57 inches. © Paula Cooper Gallery



Although conceptually more distant than the artists previously mentioned, the work of Jackie Saccoccio has been a direct inspiration for my most recent work. Her abstract paintings are complex, layered, and profoundly seductive. Just like Wool and Stingel, the process itself was the vital motor behind her practice:

To make her giant paintings, Saccoccio relied on a process that could at various points involve scumbling, the use of dry pigment, the rubbing or pressing together of two still-wet canvases, the applying of mica (which lent her paintings a sheen in some areas), and the dripping of paint from one picture onto another. In the end, her paintings could include as many as 50 layers of paint, though not all of them were visible to the viewer.<sup>19</sup>



Jackie Saccoccio, Place (Switchback), 2017, Oil on canvas, 79 x 90 inches. © Rhona Hoffman Gallery.

Other artists whose oeuvres have had a significant impact on my recent work are Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Motherwell, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Gerard Richter, Jason Rhodes, Mike Kelley, Julian Schnabel, Sterling Ruby, Ugo Rondinone, Katharina Grosse, Katherine Bernhardt, Pablo Tomek, and Secundino Hernandez.

### On the Thinkers I Paint About

It is important to acknowledge that all the ideas I've been discussing in this text are not original or new. They have been conceptualized a long time ago by different theorists and art critics whose labor helped to shape my thinking. Since an early age, I've been attracted to art theory and philosophy, and I consider it a necessary companion to my work. These are the thinkers whose thoughts I've made my own.

Martin Heidegger is by far the most important philosophical influence of my career. This controversial German thinker is considered the founding father of existentialism as a philosophical movement.<sup>21</sup> In page 16 of his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger describes the artwork as ontologically connected to truth:

In the work of art, the truth of the being has set itself to work. "Set" means here: to bring to stand. In the work, a being, a pair of peasant shoes, comes to stand in the light of its being. The being of the being comes into the constancy of its shining...The essential nature of art would then be this: the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings.

This way of thinking about the work of art as a transcendental source of knowledge—by this, I mean a higher understanding of the nature of beings—has been the metaphysical backbone of my oeuvre. It also influenced my understanding of the art-object as independent from verbal

logic and interpretation. In this regard, I believe Susan Sontag's seminal text *Against Interpretation* legitimized and grounded in a very concrete way some of the thoughts which Heidegger implied in a more abstract and cryptic style. The way she describes the modern urge for interpretation as a reductionistic approach which limits a richer sensuous experience of the work of art is central to the thinking behind my practice. For example, *Amarillo, Azul, Rojo* is not conceived as a group of paintings meant to be logically analyzed but rather sensorially absorbed. If they are about anything, they are about the way they make you feel.

It is important to mention that although I haven't been directly exposed to the work of these influential critics until recently, Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg are responsible for the theorization of Abstract Expressionism as we know it today. Even if they were diametrically opposed in their interpretations of the movement, each interpretation was correct in its own way. In this sense, their theories were not mutually exclusive, but instead opposite ends of a kind of dialectic whole. Through two forceful positions argued in opposing language before the backdrop of Abstract Expressionism, they laid out the full definition of modern art together.<sup>22</sup> My recent body of abstract works mimics, in its dualistic creation process, the two conceptual premises behind Greenberg's and Rosenberg's thoughts: form and essence.

## VI

**Finale**

A painting must move beyond its subject I like to think my painting not only transcends its subject but abandons it completely moves to a different state and never pays child support there is no such thing as a free lunch there is also no such thing as pure abstraction all abstract works reference abstraction as an artistic movement tradition and ideology Keith Jarrett said that to believe music comes from music is like saying babies come from babies<sup>23</sup> now I don't have children but my paintings come from all sort of places like movies conversations music poetry sometimes other paintings too Pierre Bonnard was stopped by the police at the Louvre when brush and palette in hand, was about to improve one of his own paintings<sup>24</sup> I don't know if this story is true or not but I like to believe it is I always have a hard time saying the word world there is something about the phonetic quality of it that I just can't get right the Voynich Manuscript is a fictional natural encyclopedia written on a code that hasn't been deciphered even by the most capable cryptographers to date<sup>25</sup> I dislike when people think of a paintings as a code that has to be deciphered a common opinion is that we can't help but to "read" images while I have a very good time walking into a museum and engaging in pure aesthetic contemplation I was about to say something very important but I forgot we are sad because we cry there is an ethical dimension to art making<sup>26</sup> because by demanding people's concentrated attention we are taking away precious time out of their life boredom is the cardinal sin of painting you can call me many things but never boring when I was 17 I was half my current age my favorites painters back then were Vija Celmins Mark Rothko and Rene Magritte the first time I visited New York in 2013 there was a Magritte retrospective at MoMA I remember

watching *The Treachery of Images* for the first time in person and feeling pure joy that's the same trip when I saw the Christopher Wool exhibition at the Guggenheim every single work of art that has ever existed and will ever exist one day will disappear they say you can never actually experience death because we cannot perceive it when it happens to others and we don't actually feel it when it happens to us when you really love someone you believe that person is going to live forever I really enjoy being an artist but I wouldn't recommend it to anyone my favorite colors are Turquoise and Payne's Grey poetry is a great example of how symbols can transcend meaning blah blah blah did you notice how the title of my work kept changing throughout this text this is not automatic writing there's a madness to my logic the self-awareness of artificiality Plato didn't want any artists in his ideal city<sup>27</sup> contrary to what most people think Picasso had long periods of creative blocking during which he could barely leave his bed during a studio visit a curator once told me that being pretentious wouldn't take me anywhere I strongly disagree my work is full of meaning but unfilled of content identity is an illusion we are literally not the same person we were seven years ago to the account that every single molecule of our body has changed ever since Heraclitus said that you can never step in the same river twice my work changes radically from series to series I used to think of it as a moment of discovery but now I consider it more a frustrated devotion or an ironic meditation an ode to artifice I used to be happier before so maybe I'm just sad and that's why now I have a harder time believing these days I made an entire exhibition about James Joyce's *Ulysses* but I never finished the book when I was fourteen I wrote an essay on postmodern painting but it didn't age well last year I took a theology class but I still don't believe in god in contrast to some people's opinion American Abstract Expressionism does not symbolize heterosexual white man's dominance some of their greater exponents were women and a lot of the male artists

were Eastern European immigrants who came escaping the devastation of war I believe language is the vessel through which meaning takes place but as any other receptacle is limited by its own structure most feelings and thoughts we experience are untranslatable through verbal language in my paintings I hope to remind myself and others of how the aesthetic experience acts as a bridge into that which cannot be otherwise communicated we experience life in a multi-dimensional way consciousness and self-awareness are complex systems in which multiple states of being co-exist simultaneously for example while I'm writing this text I'm both thinking about the text itself but also about the way I feel tired hungry happy nervous because of its linear nature ordinary verbal language is an incompetent tool to re-present this quality of existence ambivalence provides both the artist and the audience with a direct link to the simultaneous nature of life itself it is hard to find a clear notion of certainty in the words of truly wise people Socrates famously claimed to know nothing in my experience the arrogance that comes from a claim of monolithic absolute truthful knowledge is usually associated with oppressive systems i.e. a communist dictatorship aggressive de-humanizing capitalism or absolutist leftist social discourses my work is an attempt to claim back a space of uncertainty doubt and skepticism the absurd frees the mind of the dictatorship of the ordinary the pre-established the dogma the quest for the absurd is the most important exercise of the human intellect towards the liberation of the Self art is responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of humanity along with science art pushes the limits of our possibilities imagination and knowledge more importantly it throws light into the very nature of Being in a way that no other endeavor can.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Richter, "Quotes," accessed March 1, 2023, <https://gerhard-richter.com/en/quotes/art-1>.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Gottesman, "A Brief History of Color in Art," Artsy, May 20, 2016, <https://www.artsy.net/article/the-art-genome-project-a-brief-history-of-color-in-art>.

<sup>3</sup> "History of Marker Pens," History of Pencils, accessed April 20, 2023, <http://www.historyofpencils.com/writing-instruments-history/history-of-marker-pens/>.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase "a sustained inquiry into painterly conventions" is a quote from Suzanne Hudson's commentary on the work of Christopher Wool and Alberto Oehlen. Suzanne Perling Hudson, *Painting Now* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018), 69.

<sup>5</sup> I consider myself philosophically skeptic as I don't believe that complete knowledge of the real world outside of the mind is possible. Philosophical skepticism is a family of philosophical views that question the possibility of knowledge. It differs from other forms of skepticism in that it even rejects very plausible knowledge claims that belong to basic common sense. Juan Comesaña and Peter Klein, "Skepticism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, December 5, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/#ArguForCartSkepEmplClosPrin>.

<sup>6</sup> Amy McDermott, "What Was the First 'Art'? How Would We Know?" PNAS, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.21175611118>.

<sup>7</sup> Lee Ufan, *The Art of Encounter* (London: Lisson Gallery, 2018), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ufan, *The Art of Encounter*, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Schnabel, Exhibition Vinyl Text, *Predominately Natural Forms, Mexico, 2022*. Vito Schnabel, New York, September 10 - October 22, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Plato and Gottfried Stallbaum, "IX," in *Symposium* (New York: Garland, 1980), 46.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Wool (born in Chicago, 1955) is an American artist. Since the 1980s, Wool's art has incorporated issues surrounding post-conceptual ideas. He lives and works in New York City and Marfa, Texas together with his wife and fellow painter Charline von Heyl. "Christopher Wool: Moma," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.moma.org/artists/6448>.

<sup>12</sup> "Christopher Wool," October 25, 2013–January 22, 2014, The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/christopher-wool>.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Wool et al., *Christopher Wool* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013), 54.



<sup>14</sup> Working from a different array of cultural traditions, Chris Martin (born in 1954 in Washington, D.C.) makes paintings that serve as living documents of the eternal present. He privileges stylistic diversity and immediacy over predetermined aesthetic ideas, generating an art that can be as primal as it is knowing, as vibrantly joyful as it is meditative and hermetic. Jennifer Samet, “Beer with a Painter: Chris Martin,” *Hyperallergic*, March 26, 2014, <https://hyperallergic.com/115587/beer-with-a-painter-chris-martin/>.

<sup>15</sup> Although my work has been inspired by the aesthetic premises of the abstract expressionist movement, conceptually, I’m interested in the kind of critical approach to painting as a discipline which can be found in some post-conceptual artists like Christopher Wool and Rudolf Stingel.

<sup>16</sup> Stingel (born in Merano, Italy in 1956) is an artist based in New York City. His work engages the audience in dialogue about their perception of art and uses conceptual painting and installations to explore the process of creation. Using readily available materials such as styrofoam, carpet, and cast polyurethane, Stingel creates art based upon an underlying conceptual framework and challenges contemporary notions about painting. “Rudolf Stingel,” Paula Cooper Gallery, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.paulacoopergallery.com/artists/rudolf-stingel#tab:thumbnails>.

<sup>17</sup> “Rudolf Stingel.”

<sup>18</sup> This project also resonates with Sol LeWitt's series of wall drawings by instructions. Instead of executing the drawing himself, LeWitt would develop a plan or set of instructions. He then handed over the written plan to his assistants, and they constructed the work. LeWitt's instructions are both specific and open-ended so that the resulting piece varies according to the interpretation made by the person producing the work. "Sol LeWitt's Concepts and Structures," National Gallery of Art, accessed April 26, 2023, <https://www.nga.gov/learn/teachers/lessons-activities/new-angles/sol-lewitt.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Jackie Saccoccio's (born in Rhode Island in 1963 and died in New York in 2020) abstract paintings deal with gesture and color. Saccoccio filled her canvases with vivid networks of drips and chromatic smears of mixed color, which she created through a variety of inventive processes and materials, like applying mica, scumbling with dry pigment, pressing together wet canvases, and dripping paint from one painting onto another. The late painter drew both on the mid-century abstraction of artists like Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler as well as more distant forebears such as Gustave Courbet and Titian. "Jackie Saccoccio: Portrait (Invisible 2) (2017)," Artsy, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/jackie-saccoccio-portrait-invisible-2>.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Greenberger, "Jackie Saccoccio, Acclaimed Painter of Elegant Abstractions, Has Died at 56," ARTnews.com, March 6, 2023, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/jackie-saccoccio-dead-abstractions-1234578300/>.

<sup>21</sup> Existentialism is an intellectual movement that exploded on the scene in mid-twentieth-century France. It is often viewed as a historically situated event that emerged against the backdrop of the Second World War, the Nazi death camps, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, all of which created the circumstances for what has been called “the existentialist moment” where an entire generation was forced to confront the human condition and the anxiety-provoking notions of death, freedom, and meaninglessness.

Kevin Aho, “Existentialism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Stanford University, January 6, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/>.

<sup>22</sup> James Panero et al., “The Critical Moment,” The National Endowment for the Humanities, accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2008/julyaugust/feature/the-critical-moment>.

<sup>23</sup> *Keith Jarrett: The Art of Improvisation*, directed by Michael Dibb (EuroArts Entertainment, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Jane Librizzi, “There's a Word for It: Bonnarding,” THE BLUE LANTERN, accessed April 23, 2023, <http://thebluelantern.blogspot.com/2021/03/theres-word-for-it-bonnarding.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Jo Livingstone, “The Unsolvable Mysteries of the Voynich Manuscript,” *The New Yorker*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-unsolvable-mysteries-of-the-voynich-manuscript>.

<sup>26</sup> I heard this term for the first time at Meleko Mokgosi's artist talk at the St. Louis Art Museum.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Republic*, ed. D. J. Allan (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 56.

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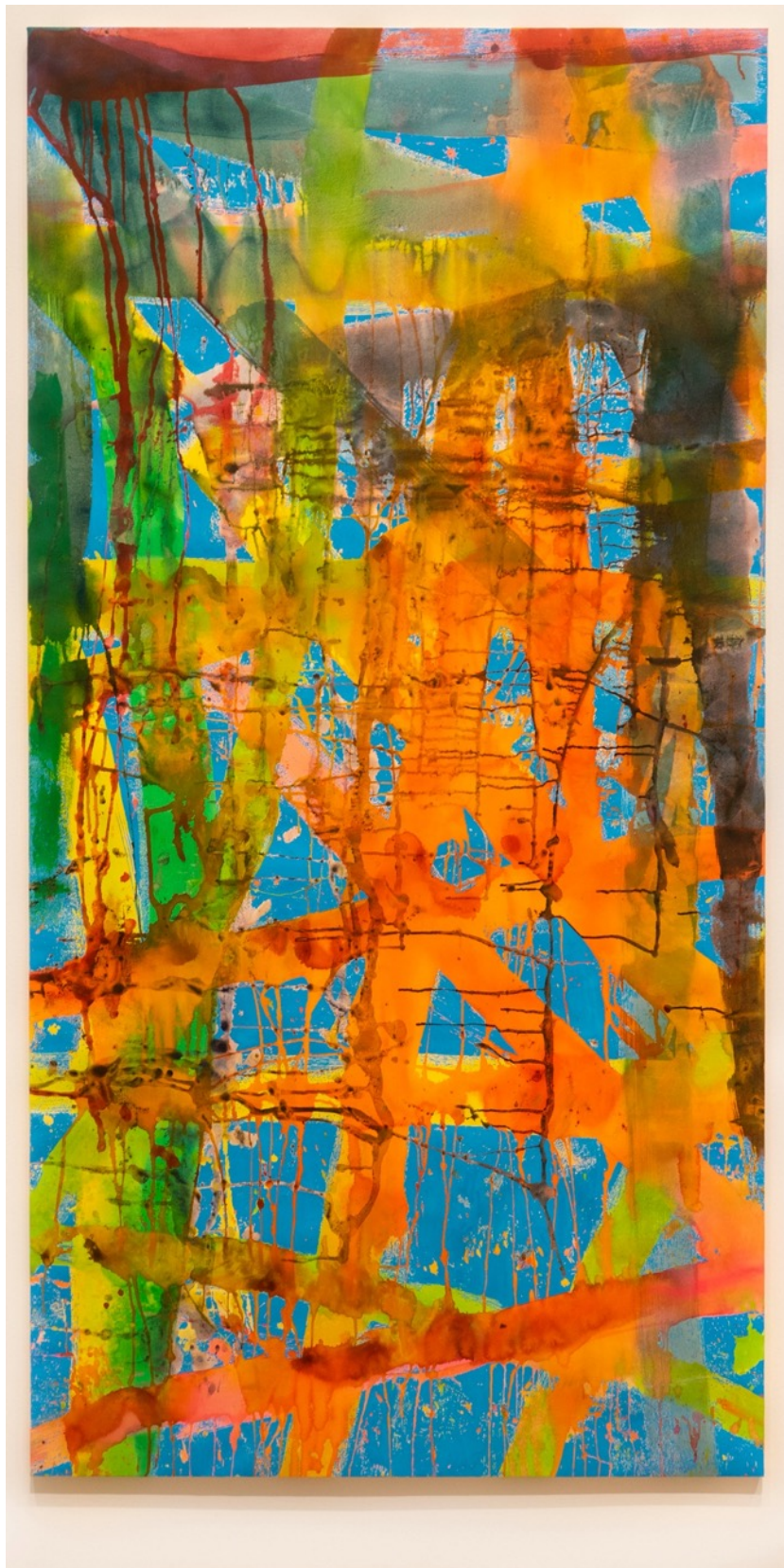
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Jorge Rios, *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo* (suite of four paintings), 2023, Watercolor and acrylic marker on paper, 96 x 200 inches. © Jorge Rios & Mildred Lane Kemper Museum of Art.





Jorge Rios, *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo (detail I)*, 2023, Watercolor and acrylic marker on paper, 96 x 48 inches. © Jorge Rios & Mildred Lane Kemper Museum of Art.



Jorge Rios, *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo (detail II)*, 2023, Watercolor and acrylic marker on paper, 96 x 48 inches. © Jorge Rios & Mildred Lane Kemper Museum of Art.



Jorge Rios, *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo (detail III)*, 2023, Watercolor and acrylic marker on paper, 96 x 48 inches. © Jorge Rios & Mildred Lane Kemper Museum of Art.



Jorge Rios, *Azul, Amarillo, Rojo (detail IV)*, 2023, Watercolor and acrylic marker on paper, 96 x 48 inches. © Jorge Rios & Mildred Lane Kemper Museum of Art.

