

Painting from The Zabludowicz Collection, Interview, Exhibition Catalog, Edited by Ellen Mara DeWachter, published by Zabludowicz Art Projects, 2013

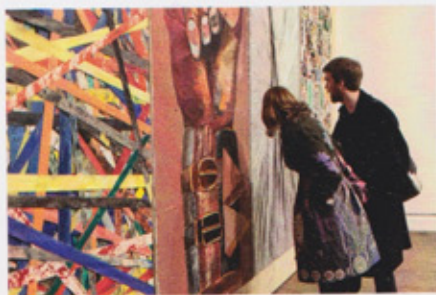
INTRODUCTION

Ellen Mara De Wachter, Curator, Zabludowicz Collection

Painting from the Zabludowicz Collection consisted of five solo exhibitions and one group show at the Collection's London exhibition space. It brought together displays of works by Francesca DiMattio, Matthew Chambers, Josh Smith and Albert Oehlen, as well as a group show entitled *Painting in the 2.5th Dimension*⁽¹⁾. While the solo presentations sought to engage with the attitudes and specific working practices of the artists in question, the group show focused on an exploration of what an expanded notion of painting might consist of today, taking into account the reciprocal influences of fields such as photography, sculpture and science. Spanning more than 30 years, the works in these shows invited visitors to enjoy one of the most established art forms through its current manifestations and its recent past.

This book of interviews accompanies the exhibitions as an invitation to consider the act of painting itself and the encounters that take place when we look at paintings. Numerous meetings and conversations with the artists in the shows revealed the intriguing ideas driving contemporary painting. For many of these works, the materials and processes deployed in their making count for more than just the shape of the finished artwork; they have an active role in the meanings these artworks generate. Most of the works in these exhibitions might on first reflection be categorised as abstract art. However, when considering this classification more carefully, it quickly becomes evident that the term 'abstract' falls short as a description. The fact that processes of making are such an integral part of the visual form of the works means that they do possess literal and representational qualities too, but without being a 'picture of something' *per se*. The meanings these works produce transcend the traditional division between abstraction and figuration and ask us to develop new ways of talking about contemporary painting.

The materials these artists use and the ways they use them exceed the physical realm; they are also – and to a large extent – the content and meaning of the works themselves. With these works, the kind of stuff – oil paint, acrylic, fabric, ceramic, digital paint tools, resin or found metal – an artist chooses and the way he or she applies it to the painting's surface do not serve an idea or image. In large part, they actually constitute the idea that the painting hinges on. Looking at how a painting has been made can sometimes tell us more than trying to make out what the painting represents, or situating it within the realm of art history. In **Albert Oehlen's** works, for example, each line has a meaning and a role, which convey the artist's attitude. They require the bodily presence of the viewer and a careful kind of looking in order for the work to make sense. Oehlen's *Untitled (9 ½ Weeks)* consists of the Hollywood erotic drama projected over one of his own paintings. It stages a competition between the forces of painting and those of film. The confines of these two disciplines bleed into one another, and the winner remains undecided. As Oehlen describes, 'you want to see the movie and you forget about the painting but actually you stare at my painting for an hour and a half and it is burned into your eyes.'



Matthew Chambers challenges himself to produce paintings that interest and surprise him, in which he 'can go beyond the image, or beyond the idea of an image into a state of catharsis'. Failing that, he tears unsuccessful paintings into strips, which he uses to compose what he calls his 'slash paintings', some of which are then painted silver and transformed into 'chrome monochromes', rising phoenix-like from the debris of frustration.

The materiality of **Francesca DiMattio's** works is also crucial to their meaning, and the cultural connotations of the paints, fabrics, ceramics and found materials she uses influence how we understand them. Her use of collage within a painting or a ceramic sculpture pushes materials past their comfort zones, and they acquire a totally new meaning, which 'calls for new adjectives', as DiMattio puts it.

In discussing her approach to the act of painting, **Jessica Dickinson** describes a process of 'putting the surface through certain events'. This yields what the artist calls a "'radically cared-for surface", but it's cared-for and banged around ... painting is a surface on which a lot of time has been spent'. Dickinson's abstract paintings depict the processes of their own evolution, which are evident both in the finished works and via a number of by-products such as the wax rubbings of these paintings made at different stages in their production.

For **Nathan Hylden**, a decisive attitude in developing unique processes of production is an essential tactic for creating his own meaning among myriad other possibilities: 'I believe, as is common, that setting up certain parameters creates an opening for me to work.' Honing one's own unique methods is an essential approach in this day and age, when the historical significance of particular materials and tools risks foreclosing the meaning of a work. By developing their own recipes and ingredients, artists ensure the integrity and interest of their work.

These interviews also make it clear that the conceptual binary of abstraction versus figuration is no longer apposite to discussions around contemporary painting, and that other terms might be sought instead. These new expressions might circumvent the paralysing crisis in the discourse around representation by addressing materiality and meaning together, in one fell swoop. Concepts or words such as 'concrete', 'literal' or even 'narrative' might enable us to begin exploring the actual sequences and processes implicit – indeed, often explicit – in the works. In many of these works, the process of making is foregrounded to such an extent that it becomes central to the concept of the work. Finding a new way of talking about painting might involve telling the story of how works are made, or, better still, highlighting the ways in which they already tell the story of their own making.

This new way of looking would ask our imaginations to transcend what is given, in order to imagine how it came to be; to feel the difference between a static object and the processes that have fed into it during its creation. Such an approach might bridge the chasm between the artwork, taken as an object, and its meaning, taken as an immaterial thing in our minds. **Taubha Auerbach** couches this kind of expanded thinking in terms of dimensionality, and with a distinctly affirmative attitude: 'if a fractional dimensional state can be achieved between two and three dimensions – 2.5-D – that action might do something to just slightly erode the boundary that seems to divide these two seemingly discrete states. I don't want to wait until I die to be able to experience that, or at least to think about it more skilfully and joyfully.'

While searching for a new way of talking about painting is an exciting challenge, some painters are primarily concerned with the act of painting itself, leaving analysis and theorising to others. As **Josh Smith** puts it: 'I don't think you should paint abstractly or realistically, necessarily. You should be able to look at something and paint it, even though you don't paint it well. It's something artists should do more: just paint a building or a car.'

The search for terms to occupy the gap between the binary opposites of abstraction and figuration is a recurring theme in contemporary thinking about painting. For **Ned Vena**, the dilemma of abstract versus representational harks back to seminal works from the 60s, and extends well into today: 'I make target



paintings and I find the word target, used in the 60s to describe circular works with concentric circles painted on them, to be an interesting label for an abstract painting. It's an abstract object, using a relative and literal term as a title or description. It seems contradictory. It's like Josh Smith's name paintings, which exist in a really ambiguous grey area between abstraction and representation.'

The way we look at art – the how, when and why – plays an important part in building its meaning: we give a painting hanging in someone's living room a very different meaning from what we might give it were it hanging in a national museum. Looking is an active, changing and ongoing process, even after the artist has stopped working. As **Sam Falls** says about the ways in which an artwork lives on beyond the artist's studio: 'I like to think about how you engage time, not only in production, but also in viewing.'

This catalogue brings together interviews with artists, conducted in person and by email. It has been a privilege to work with artists on these collaborative conversations, which have enabled us to create meaning together by accounting for the intentions that preceded the work as well as the material results of those intentions.

Painting is not a fixed thing; it suggests a space, an openness, a field of enquiry that constantly remakes itself. It calls forth an active viewer, and invites us to engage with materials, processes and ideas in ever-changing ways. After the exhibition itself, this collection of interviews – in which every effort has been made to let the voices of the artists ring true – is the first port of call on an ongoing journey.

⁽¹⁾ This expression is taken from: Aude Launay, 'Tauba Auerbach – Realist Abstraction', Dossier, 02 no. 61, Spring 2012, page 16. 'The *trompe l'oeil* works, the Folds waver between 2D and 3D, floating in what Tauba Auerbach calls the 2.5th dimension.'



JESSICA DICKINSON

Ellen Mara De Wachter: The element of time is really present in your work because the viewer can surmise a real investment of your time, but also because your works ask the viewer to spend time with them in order to make some sense of what is going on in them. This has a lot to do with the way in which you make the works. How did you develop the processes by which you made *Full-See* and its accompanying *trace* works?

Jessica Dickinson: It took a long time for me to figure out how to do what I wanted to do. I had wanted to make a painting whose physical surface could absorb time, accident, chance, intention, and some paradoxes, a painting that could be a space of projection, thinking and recording. I have an interest in decayed frescoes, which are paintings made partly with the specific intention of the artist but also with the accident of time going into them. Working with fresco-like surfaces, into which oil paint is absorbed or built up, or into which I can cut, was a way to put the surface through certain events. The *trace* works are chromatic rubbings of the surface made at intervals during the process to mark certain states or illuminate potentials. With a painting like *Full-See*, as with all my works, I don't know what they are going to look like in the end, so the process of making them makes the painting. I do have specific stages I want them to go through, things I want to do to them, maybe colours I want to work with or specific forms. With *Full-See*, I wanted to make a surface that was like a concrete wall. I etched two rectangles into it and then I patched over it. There was an uncovering and layering in the first part, and we can see that stage in *trace (Full-See 1)*. I was thinking of opening up the surface. The paintings I made at that time were about thresholds and limits – visual, mental, sensory – and I wanted to open them in a different way.

I had been thinking of Rothko's Seagram Murals at the Tate. He thought of them as things that were sealed up. I was thinking about my paintings as things that had been sealed up in one way and then opened up in another. They were made to be shown at the Frieze art fair in 2010, and I was thinking about showing at an art fair, which I didn't want to do at first. I thought the only way I can do it is by making a space that is slow. I really was conscious of this context and of them being walls that were sort of opening up. *Full-See* was the biggest one I made for that show and I realised I needed to notch it open, literally open up the surface with little bits through a slow marking of time. *trace (Full See 2)* marks the clarifying moment of this event. Then I replastered it and painted it blue, which is a pretty expansive colour. The painting is sort of scintillating. I think this is felt in the lightness of the other two traces.

There's a mix between accident and intent with the work. I start off with something I am trying to follow and the painting itself is processing that idea and processing that thought. Things come from my own life, for example the rectangular forms were two windows in my apartment, and the concrete wall was a wall I know. A form like a rectangle becomes an opening, and a window in our daily life can be a space where a thought can be expansive or closed.

EMDW: I think phenomenology is a useful term because it alludes to something that no other term gets quite right. I am fascinated by the phenomenology of art, which I would say is a term for the processes by which we tell, describe and explain to ourselves and others – through words or images in our own heads – what it is we are looking at when we look at a particular work and what it does to us. This has to do with the way we re-present someone's work to ourselves in our own minds, which is something you, as the artist, have little control over. Do you think about other people's perception of your works as you are making them, or is it a solitary and individualistic process?

JD: I did study Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in school, and it was influential. The work I do is solitary and it comes from a sort of inexpressiveness in my own life, something that is like a recurring thought over several years, which you can't fully articulate or you're trying to process. There's an internal logic while I am developing the paintings, but ultimately I feel like they are for others, to be shared and be in the world, and to become something other than me.

I do take into great consideration how others perceive the paintings. They develop sometimes for up to a year or a year and a half. For the first two thirds of that time, I work with no feedback in some weird zone of putting the work through a lot of events, but after that is when I get a lot of feedback. I have people come and look and I really pay attention to the speed at which they are approaching them, the references they are getting and their responses to them.

That's one reason I like abstraction: I like the space in which things are not so easily defined and a rectangle could be a luminous shape, but also a blanket with texture, or a window seen from an angle. I like that it can have multiple references. I do try to control it, if people are seeing things too quickly, or things are too easily named. I think about the painting as being a space for other people to move around and have different references. They might not be the ones I am working on but I like double or triple associations that come up.

Painting is a space where you can try to make something still, but it's also where a lot of movement can happen. With the phenomenology of looking, I think about different viewing distances and how things change according to different approaches of the physical body towards the artwork. One criticism of Merleau-Ponty is the idea of the single subject, and some more current readings of him allow for the possibility of multiple subjectivities. For me the work doesn't have an end. Whereas Rothko would say, 'my work will perform and become unified', I don't think of my work being unified. Part of this is the multiplicity of things that spin off the paintings, like the remainders, the traces, the works on paper.

Even though I am alone a lot in the studio, I am working with the material, and so it's not just me. That's a collaboration in itself, because I work with a lot of chance operations. Everything I've read, every conversation I've had, integrates itself into the work. I don't really feel like I'm alone. The process of working for me is a process of losing my sense of self, and going outside of my identity. I feel like the painting is finished when it becomes something that is outside of me.

EMDW: The relationship between the viewer and the work is central here, because that's where the magic lies. It's maybe not in the work *per se*, but it's in the act of looking or being with the work.

JD: I think of the surface of the painting as something very specific. I call it a 'radically cared-for surface', but it's cared-for and banged around. There are all these surfaces in the world and a painting is one on which a lot of time has been spent. I think about how it can be mute until it is seen in person. Paintings can have a muteness as disembodied images.

EMDW: They are like an acceleration of time, because they have all the accidents you've imposed on them. They are like the effects of entropy, which you have controlled as far as you can. I like the idea of putting on the accident, which then becomes the essence of it, rather than the essence being damaged by the accident.

JD: I call it 'setting up a situation' or putting it through a procedure, even though it's not always so rational.

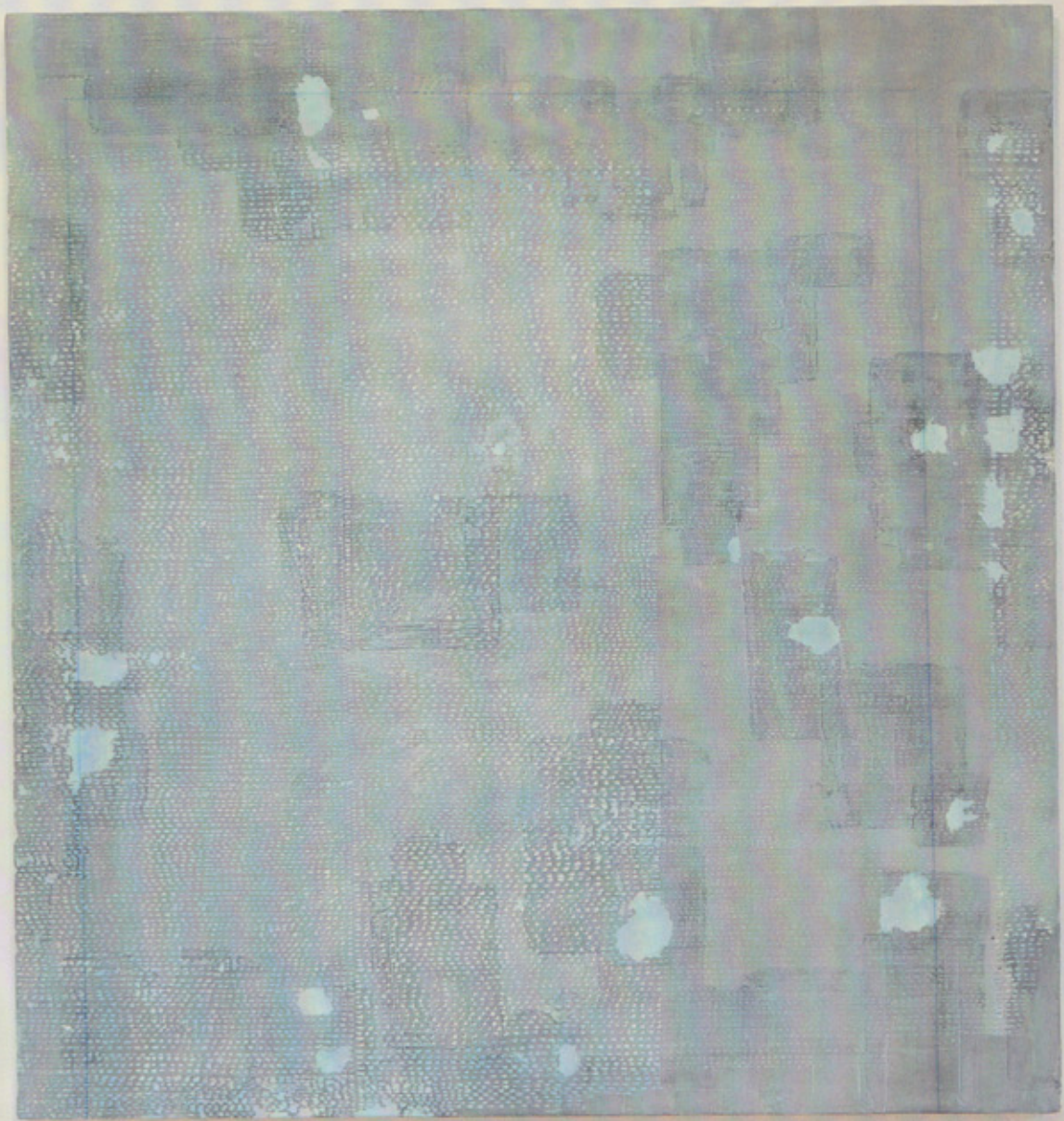
EMDW: Is there a place for emotion in your works? They draw people in and can provide a meditative space in which thoughts or feelings can emerge.

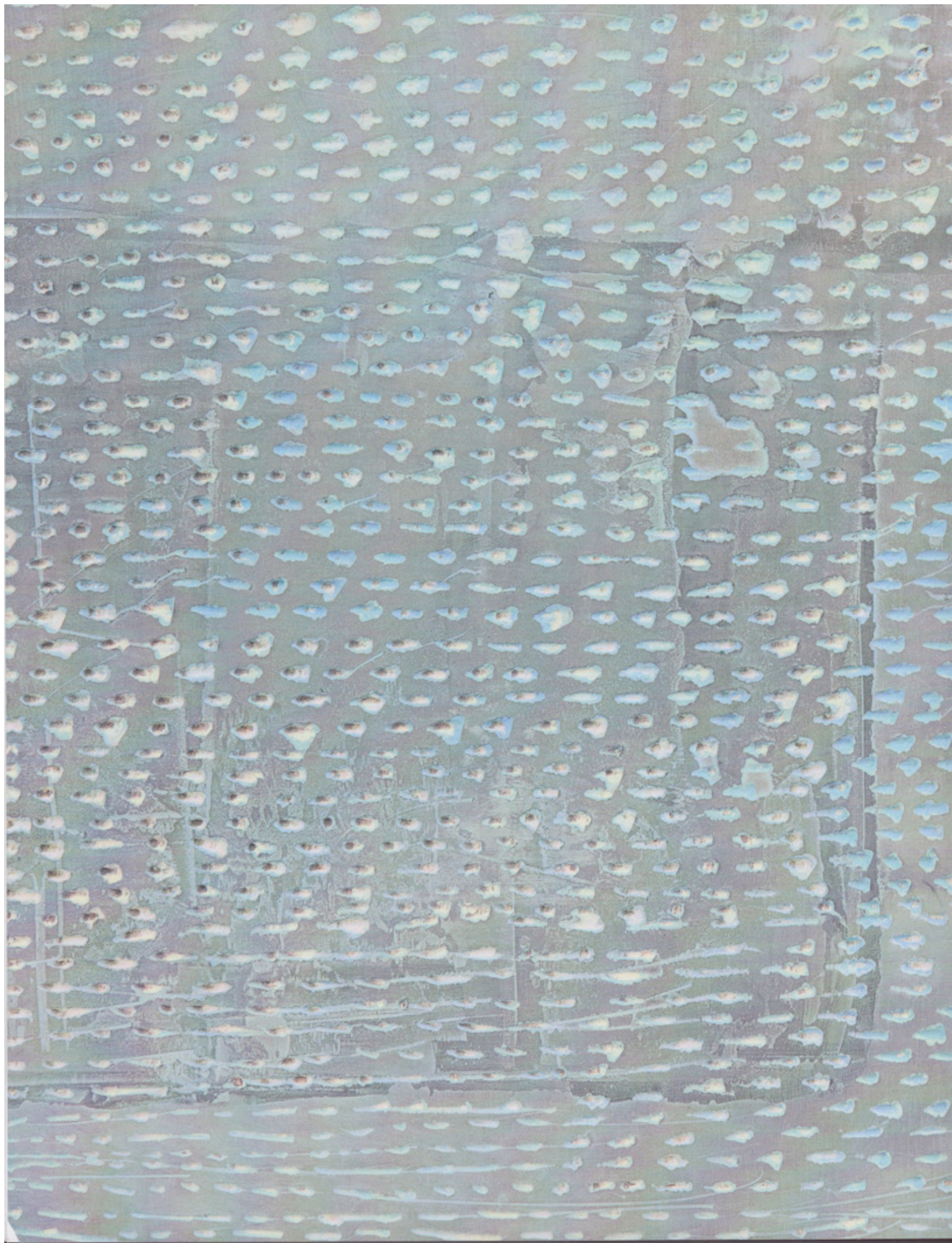
JD: Emotion is a taboo word. I don't think of emotion as pure, I think of it as complex and integrated into something physiological, psychological, perceptual. It is part of our functioning and how our brain works. But in art it's almost always equated with Abstract Expressionism, looking a certain way or being 'raw'. It's often linked to the identity of the artist. I think I'm dealing with emotion because I'm dealing with feelings and sensations. There may be a repressed emotion in the work, but I also go back to this word 'inexpressiveness', something felt which can't necessarily be defined. Part of the process of making the paintings is trying to define what it is like to think or feel or understand. The way we talk about art is not quite up to date with the way things are, and what we know from science, neurology, and other things. I am interested in the physical thing, rather than the transcendent. The history of abstract painting with people like Barnett Newman, talking about his work in a very didactic manner in terms of what it is supposed to do – I'm constantly trying to work against that.

EMDW: Issues of representation are central to discourse around painting, and often the debate is centred on the binary opposition of figurative versus abstract. But it seems to me that in order to talk about your works it might be more useful to use a concept or word like 'concrete' or 'literal' or even 'narrative', because there is an actual narrative sequence and process in it. The process of making is foregrounded to such an extent that it becomes the content of the work.

JD: I think I was always drawn towards abstraction. Abstraction is a space I like to be in because it's the space of the not-known or the not-easily-definable. But I like the term 'concrete'. For me there is no simple answer to the work, and I accept the classification of abstract because the work does not have figures. The way I work with abstraction is to work with the referential within it, so it isn't just paint or it isn't just a rectangle within it. I deal with the materiality but also other readings within the work. And I don't think the past of painting is the best of painting; I think there's a whole future. I'm interested in the margins of paintings and things outside the canon. Works by people like Emma Kunz, Hilma Af Klint, Agnes Martin, Simon Hantai, Eva Hesse, or Judit Reigl's Guano series or Jay DeFeo's *The Rose* (1958-66). These are different things on the margins of abstract painting but where abstract art has a particular potency.

15 March 2013, New York, NY







Painting in the 2.5th Dimension

TAUBA AUERBACH

Untitled (Fold), 2010 (p. 120, 121)
Acrylic on linen
254 x 191 cm

JESSICA DICKINSON

Full-See, 2010 (p. 151, 152–153)
Oil on limestone polymer on panel
142 x 135 cm

trace (Full-See 1), 2010 (p. 155)
Wax crayon and pastel on paper
102 x 92 cm

trace (Full-See 2), 2010 (p. 155)
Wax crayon and pastel on paper
102 x 92 cm

trace (Full-See 3), 2010 (p. 155)
Wax crayon and pastel on paper
102 x 92 cm

trace (Flash-Here-Full-See), 2010
(p. 155)
Wax crayon and pastel on paper
102 x 92 cm

SAM FALLS

Untitled (blue and pink, Joshua Tree, CA), 2012 (p. 103)
Pastel on archival pigment print
23 x 28 cm

Untitled (black and pink, Joshua Tree, CA), 2012 (p. 103)
Pastel on archival pigment print
23 x 28 cm

Untitled (Eight Tires, Black, Los Angeles, CA), 2011
(p. 97, 104, 105, 106)
Polyester and metal grommets
762 x 305 cm

Untitled (Model Painting, Light Green),
2012 (p. 102)
Acrylic on archival pigment print on
linen
152 x 107 cm

Untitled (Model Painting, Black No. 2),
2012 (p. 102)
Acrylic on archival pigment print on
linen
152 x 107 cm

ALEX HUBBARD

La Califia, 2011 (p. 112, 115)
Acrylic, resin and fibreglass on canvas
209 x 178 cm

How It Is, 2010
Two-channel video, colour, sound
9.00 minutes
Courtesy the artist and MacCarone,
New York

Just to Complete the Thought, 2011
(p. 112, 114)
Acrylic, resin and fibreglass on canvas
213 x 158 cm

*The Paranoid Phase of Nautical
Twilight I-III*, 2009 (p. 116)
Single channel video, colour, sound
9.33 minutes
Courtesy the artist and MacCarone,
New York

NATHAN HYLDEN

Untitled, 2011 (p. 142)
Acrylic on aluminium
197 x 145 cm

Untitled (NH2912A), 2012 (p. 143, 144)
Acrylic on aluminium
197 x 145 cm

ROSY KEYSER

*Eve's First Confusion Between Penises
and Snakes*, 2012 (p. 95, 96, 97)
String, sawdust, wood, enamel, dye
and snakeskin
254 x 254 cm

Moby Dick, 2012 (p. 93, 94)
Enamel, spray paint, polycarbonate,
aluminum, wood on found, rolled steel
260 x 215 x 27 cm

MICHAEL E. SMITH

Untitled, 2012 (p. 124)
Cotton t-shirt, sweatshirt, plastic,
enamel
52 x 41 cm

Untitled, 2012 (p. 124)
Cotton t-shirt, sweatshirt, plastic,
enamel
52 x 41 cm

Untitled, 2012 (p. 124)
Cotton t-shirt, sweatshirt, plastic,
feathers
52 x 41 cm

Untitled, 2012 (p. 124, 126)
Cotton, plastic, electric cord
52 x 41 cm

NED VENA

Untitled, 2011 (p. 132, 133)
Vinyl on aluminium
244 x 122 cm

Untitled, 2011 (p. 135)
Vinyl on aluminium
244 x 122 cm

Untitled, 2012 (p. 137, 138, 139)
Garvey ink on canvas
213 x 123 cm

Untitled, 2012 (p. 137, 139)
Garvey ink on canvas
213 x 122 cm