



2: Courting Complexity

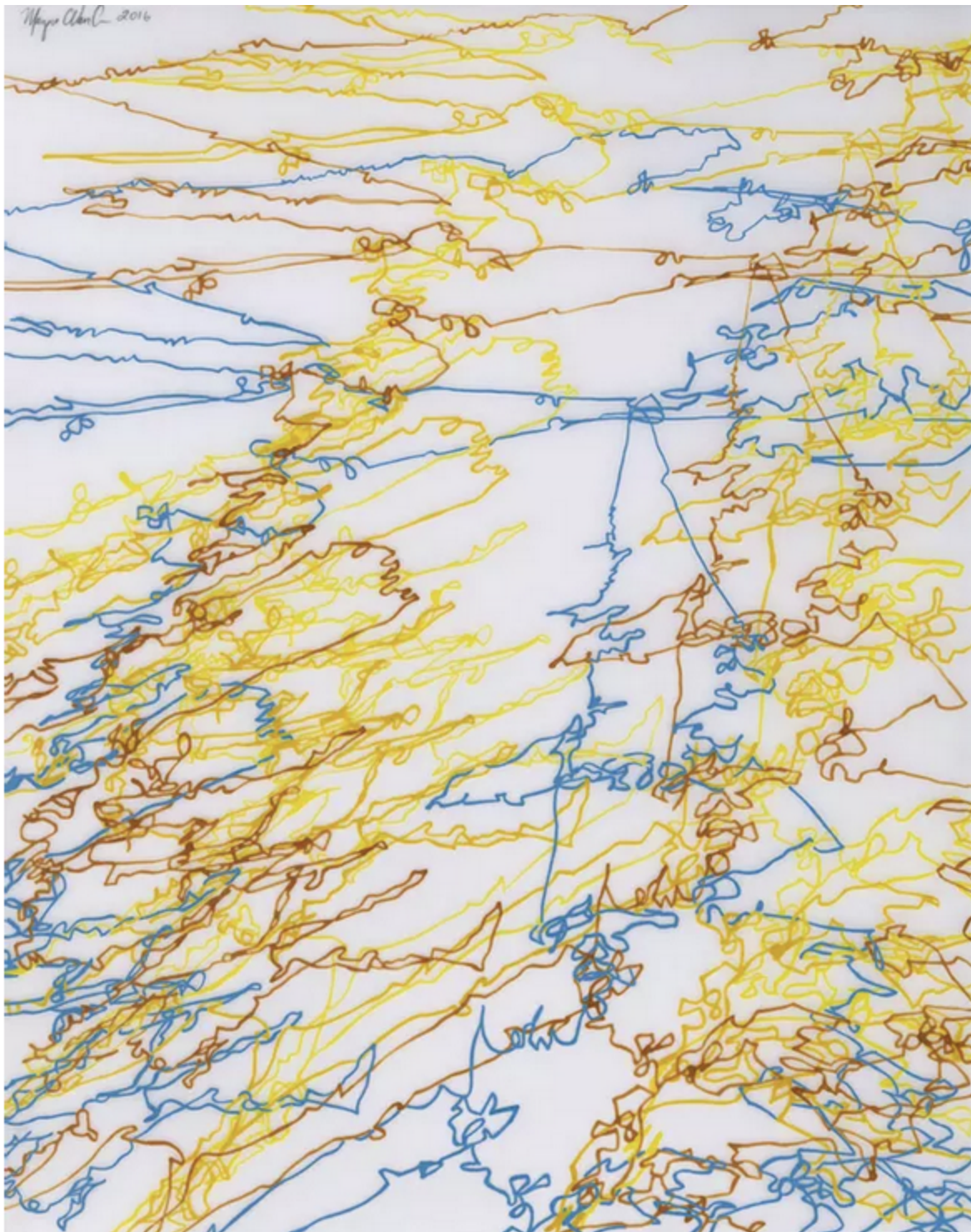


David Gibson

Mar 5 2

I've spent a great part of my life in the art world dealing with abstractions, both literal, formally demonstrative ones, and also conceptual examples. I started with Conceptualism, which was the main purview of my family's gallery, and worked backwards from what represented the aesthetic and ideological norm to which I had become accustomed. This resulted in several of my first curated efforts being about painting, and in particular about how contemporary artists were reinventing the ideas of painting for a New York audience and community of artists. I started doing studio visits, a lot of them. After I became more active, I could count as many as 100 studio visits per year on my calendar.

One quality that struck me in a number of instances, was of artists using drawing as painting. I say As Painting because it was clear to me that what was at hand in these works was a strong painterly concept. In terms of structure, mark-making, and obsessiveness, these drawing artists were creating paintings the only way they knew how. In doing so they were also opening up the perception of expressive meaning and playing with complexity.



Untitled 0516, 2016
Ink on translucent film, 14 x 11 inches

Over time my exhibitions morphed into explorations of different genres, and painting, specifically painterly abstraction, exited the stage of my curatorial intentions. It wasn't until a decade later that I felt the need to revisit the roots of my fascination with an exhibition about visual density and ambiguity in 2017, and from that point forward, I again became attracted to artists who established their bona fides through abstract intentions.

I have found an example of a contemporary artist working with the need for complexity in Marjorie Van Cura, who makes drawings inspired by and culled from real time events and their satellite suggested optics. Van Cura is one of a limited number of artists I have encountered who have access to internet based information dramatized by real life events, and not only informed by information systems and methods of documentation available through projective media, but have used it to create new forms of art.

Van Cura culls a variety of images from newsworthy events that may include natural disasters, man-made accidents, and social protests. She then completes an aesthetic examination of each photograph, mining it for certain visual structures that could be said to underlay the structure of each image, and she then undertakes a ghost tracing of these structures, creating sequential traces from each image until she has collected a rich aggregate of abstract forms.



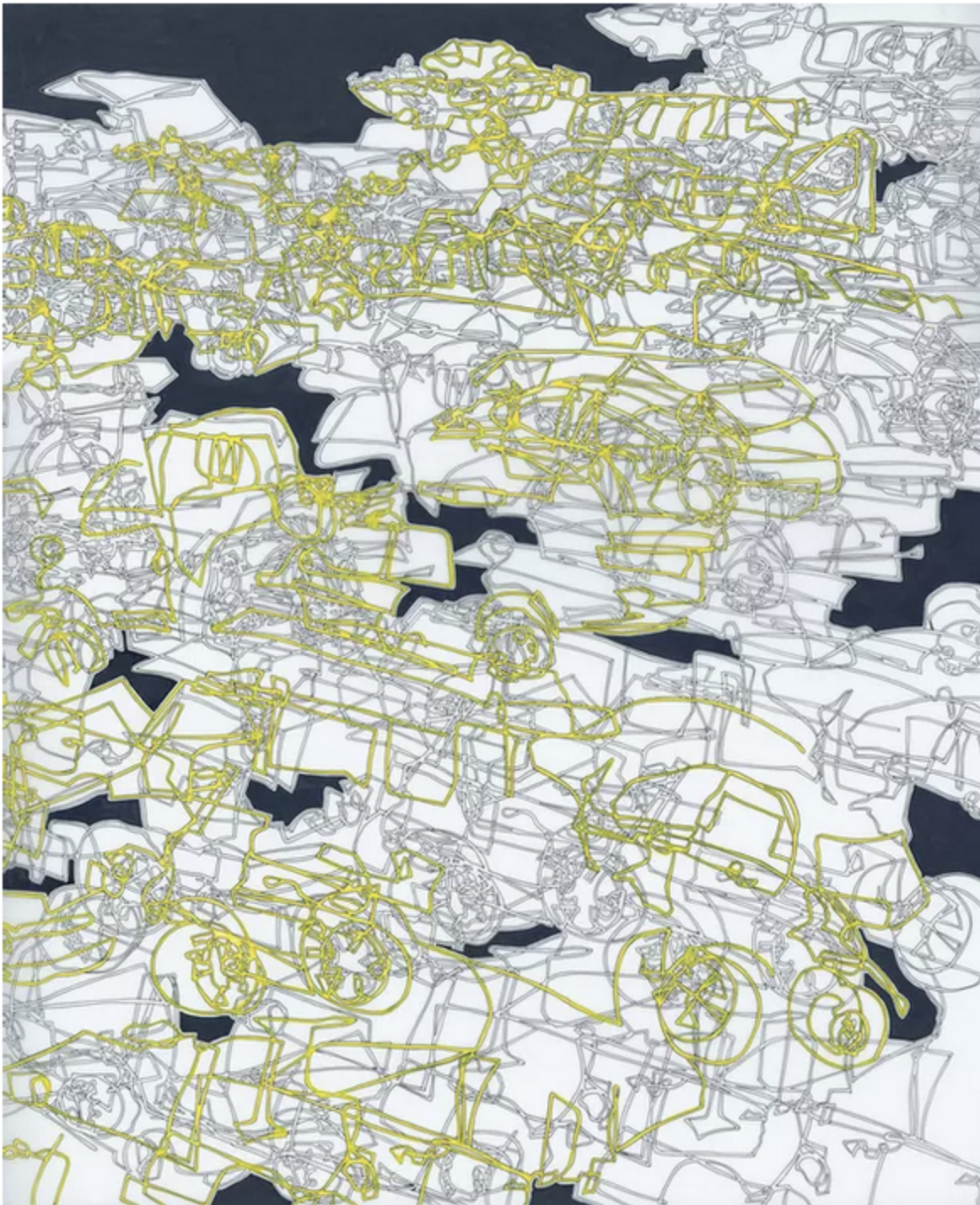
Untitled 0117, 2017

Graphite on translucent film, 17 x 14 inches

What Van Cura brings to her practice is a measure of restraint that manifests as a reductive aspect in the selection of forms. She pursues a variety of scenarios in which tragedy has transformed the everyday, prosaic appearance of ordinary locales, which she then mines for the multiplicity of possible vestigial tracings to inform a diverse and polymathic vision that expands upon our comprehension on the making of expressive marks. Even though her work utilizes source material culled from technology, her process

relies upon touch, gesture, and intuition. Her tracing of the suggested contours of images that are photographic in content—finding forms within commonplace scenes—creates a layer of form which, drawn on sheets of matte Duralar, can then be used to accrue meaning. Sometimes meaning can be extended with the use of a material proficient enough to facilitate production. The Duralar is reliable, creating a surface that is also a support for the drawings, whether in ink or graphite. What I have found over time, is that an artist tends to rely upon a surface not only as a means of support but as part of the medium, and ultimately the meaning of the work. Not only can a reliable surface material facilitate an ease of application, but it can also allow the artist to more immediately realize the direct purpose of their work.

The artist follows not only their own imperatives but also those dictated by history and by what they see around them, which is also to say because of market demand. It would be foolhardy in an environment such as New York to assume that what is evident is merely the myriad aspirations of a specific geographic community because all of these artists came to New York to ostensibly ‘make it’ and their signature styles are each a way of achieving that goal. Each artist’s vision is personal and idiosyncratic while at the same time representing an aesthetic strategy to achieve art world stardom. Uniqueness is its own reward.



Untitled 0120, 2020

Ink and Micron pen on translucent film, 17 x 14 inches

Such has been the case since abstraction first became recognized as an important stage in the progress of art. The figures that we celebrate to this day achieved their importance not only because they had outsize personalities, but because their formal accomplishments were an engagement with elements of complexity. The ones who specifically influenced Van Cura range from Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock to Terry

Winters, Agnes Martin; and in recent years, Julie Mehretu. What all of these artists have in common is a discipline that espouses layering graphic patterns and employing hand-drawn linear elements to underscore their painted results. Van Cura is also very attracted to models of organic geometry, especially in cases where the artist are admired as colorists with electric palettes, including Bridget Riley and Frank Stella. Each of these affinities, as have contributed to Van Cura's formal authority in her own work, draws a straight line through historical imperatives. Van Cura's inspired sources, as documents of real events, are fodder for sound bites shock value in print and media journalism, a sort of forgotten landscape that contains structured and coded form which Van Cura exposes as she draws through them, generating a structured yet amorphous complexity. If we can remain open to the hidden language of vestigial meaning in these tracings, our gaze will follow, and meaning will open for us.



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