

Skyview

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Abstract

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Head Chair Helen O'Toole

Art-Painting and Drawing

This thesis paper aims to communicate my thought process as well as my methods used to make my recent body of work in Seattle. My paintings and drawings are based on my studies out of the Sky View Observatory in Columbia Center. I am looking to express the essential qualities of the scene such as through the atmosphere or the gesture of the buildings. I concentrated on Seattle's overcast weather in order to show the essential qualities that are unique to this area; thus, this body of work investigates a sense of a place. My paintings are a result of my observations and intuition; this body of work shows the impression a scene makes on my perception.

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¹ Kossoff, Leon. "King's Cross Storm Day no. 3." *Artnet*. Artnet Worldwide Corporation, 2016. Web. 05 May 2016.

² Giacometti, Alberto. "Landscape, Maloja." *TheArtstack*. ArtStack- art online, 2016. Web. 06 May 2016.

The city offers an endless variety of movement, through the clouds, people in buildings, cars on the freeway; the eye has a feast of things to look at. From a skyscraper I can view the distant forms on the horizon. When exploring and searching through Seattle my objective was to find a vast view where the eye could swim throughout the image, reminding them of a time and place. Henri Matisse expressed that art should be 'like an armchair';³ thus, painting should allow a viewer to mentally swim in a picture in order to give a pleasant moment of contemplation. Typically, on a rainy Seattle day at the top of Columbia Center, the second tallest building on the west coast, clouds obscure the horizon. The 73rd floor, 902 feet from the street, the tower Sky View Observatory offers a 360 degree panorama of Seattle which allows me to gaze at vast spaces and see the world from a different perspective. With the aid of my drawings, photos and digital collages I made studio paintings based on my experience in Sky View Observatory. Painting the landscape enables me to create artworks that combine my visual and experiential perception of a specific location. Being aware of—and open to—the phenomenological aspects of the landscape allows the work to manifest inner reflections of this outer attentiveness.

The act of observing and perceiving is a cycle in which there is an exchange between reality and the mind. The universe is expansive and vast; however, the mind is endless and it goes on forever inwardly. Reality is a tricky thing to put one's finger on and it is completely subjective from a particular point of view. Alberto Giacometti said

³ Matisse, Henri. "Notes of a Painter" Paris: La Grande Revue, 5 December 1908. Print.

that “the object of art is not to reproduce reality, but to create a reality of the same intensity,” thus, making art is about the impression reality makes on our perception. Reality can never be displayed fully on a canvas but the memory of the experience and the sensations received can be suggested in a painting. A painting is a construct in which artists translate their experience through visual means; art is a form of communication when words are not sufficient. Leon Kossoff said that a “painter is engaged in a working process and the work is concerned with making the paint relate to his experience of seeing and being in the world.”⁴ Experiencing and being fully conscious of the scene as well as reinterpreting the image in my studio is part of my process.

My concentration is on the impression of place. I am searching for the essence of a place such as through the atmosphere or in the gesture of the buildings and observation is necessary in order to experience different types of weather or time of day. Every place has a unique quality, based on its geography as well as its weather; thus, I am investigating the essential qualities of a place or scene. A sense of place is important to me because I am learning about the city and my own environment. Seattle has overcast weather most of the year, dealing with the rain is essential part of living here. I sought to convey that feeling of serenity since rain has a soothing effect on the mind. My paintings are a response to experiencing the inclement weather while being in the tower.

⁴ Kossoff, Leon. “Nothing is ever the same.” *Leon Kossoff*. London: The British Council, 1995. 25-29. Print.

My paintings are reactions to my drawings and sketches done on site, such as “Sky View East Study #1,” (see *fig. 1*) in which the white of the paper is the atmosphere. The graphite pencils gives the drawing a soft meditative quality; areas of focus are articulated with other elements fading into the white of the paper. This drawing was a jumping point for my paintings in that it made me realize the atmosphere in the landscape such as in the amount of air that existed between myself and the subject. Drawing is an essential part of painting, “each experience of drawing captures not only the image in front of the artist but the artist’s perceptions and emotions.”⁵ Drawing from observation not only leads my process but drawing is also integral while painting in the studio. The image has opportunities with every drawing and as Leon Kossoff says, “nothing is ever the same.”⁶

My cityscapes are inspired by Leon Kossoff’s gesture drawings of London (see *fig. 9*) in which he stretched and manipulated the structures in order to create fluidity within the scene, a reference to how he experienced the urban landscape. “Sky View North Study # 2” (see *fig. 6*) is a gesture drawing directly influenced by Kossoff. This type of drawing can create fluidity in image, especially while working on the painting. Nicholas Serota, director at the Tate, commented that Kossoff offered an “unexpected vision of the metropolis.”⁷ The shapes of the buildings react and relate to one another in order to create fluidity within the landscape. Leon Kossoff said that by “keeping the drawing in the painting alive” he can be “prepared to respond to the unexpected

⁵ McKenzie, Dr. Janet. “Leon Kossoff: Drawing from Painting.” *Studio International*. 6 July 2007. Web. 5 May 2016.

⁶ Kossoff, Leon. “Nothing is ever the same.” London: The British Council. 1995. Print. (pg.25)

⁷ McKenzie, Dr. Janet. “Leon Kossoff: Drawing from Painting.” *Studio International*. 6 July 2007. Web. 5 May 2016.

movement of the sitter or experiencing the landscape in an entirely new way.”⁸ The process making drawings while painting is imperative to thinking through issues. My studio drawings aided in identifying the essential features of the buildings as well as overall flow of the composition. I first started to move buildings to suit the composition in my studio drawing “Sky View North Study #1,” (see fig. 5). Keeping in mind space and atmosphere, I treated the buildings like shapes and marks that could be manipulated and moved to serve the flow of the composition. The objective was to find the essence of the scene, stretching and manipulating the buildings to serve the composition.

Bringing the work back to the studio enabled me to reinterpret the scene. Agnes Martin said that “experiences recalled are generally more satisfying and enlightening than the original experience. It is in fact the only way to know one’s own whole response.”⁹ The process of looking and recording creates connections that are not revealed until the work is underway and this way of reflecting creates spontaneity and endless ideas. Art extends beyond the bounds of its medium; it is something that can be carried inside the mind. Martin’s work, as well as her statements about art, influenced how I thought about life and art. I first encountered Martin’s work at the Dia Beacon last year during the school trip to New York and my reaction to her work was unexpected. If I saw her work in print it would not have had the same impact; thus, my direct experience was essential to viewing her work since certain aspects of paint cannot be reproduced. Her paintings seem to vibrate with humility and joy; her compositions and colors are harmonious and pleasant. Martin said in her 1976 lecture ‘*What is Real?*’ that

⁸ Kossoff, Leon. “Nothing is ever the same.” London: The British Council. 1995. Print. (pg.25)

⁹ Martin, Agnes. “What is Real?” Yale University. New Haven, CT. 5 April 1976.

“Joy is Perception. Perception, reception and response are all the same. Sometimes we perceive, sometimes we receive and sometimes we respond but it is all the same. It is all awareness of reality.”¹⁰

My studio paintings reflect this idea of the “beauty in the inner mind” in that I am looking for the essential qualities that express the scene and how the atmosphere makes me feel. “Sky View” is about an overcast day in Seattle that is recalled in the studio. Giacometti (*see fig 10*) used a limited color palette to express his impressions, which influenced how I approached color for this body of work. Through vibrant colors, my painting “Sky View,” (*see fig. 4*) expresses the joy of looking at a calm, atmospheric landscape. Being inside and sheltered on a rainy day gives a feeling of comfort like in sipping a warm coffee. “Sky View North” (*see fig. 7*) looks at the gesture of the buildings in order to find the essential qualities of the scene, I moved buildings to accommodate the composition. The painting is based on my sketches, photos, videos as well as digital collages. I used photoshop to make “Sky View North Study #3” (*see fig. 8*) which utilizes photos from different days and angles. By using various perspectives, I am expressing the essence of the scene.

While painting on a large scale in the studio, I became intrigued by oil paint as a medium; paint is only pigment and binder that is smeared on canvas. From studying James Abbott McNeill Whistler’s paintings, I learned about creating an oil paint mixture, which he referred to as a ‘sauce.’ After stirring turpenoid natural and oil paint for a few minutes to get a smooth consistency; the paint is applied either by brush, rag or palette

¹⁰ Martin, Agnes. “What is Real?” Yale University. New Haven, CT. 5 April 1976.

knife. I also poured the sauce from the top of the painting which produced semi-transparent drips. For larger marks I used a shower squeegee in which I laid the painting on the ground, poured the mixture and used the squeegee for a swipe at the canvas. The most exciting part of the process is choosing whether or not to lift the canvas while the paint is drying. Lifting right after applying paint produces drips; whereas, not lifting creates a distinct mark. The drips reference the painting's surface, an artist must always be aware that a painting is a two-dimensional surface; lines and colors reference things in the world.

Perception shapes my process and in turn, my process informs the image of the painting. My studio paintings are reactions to the on-site drawings and sketches which represent my experience of reality from my own point of view. A landscape is all about the space and the fleeting light, as an artist observes "time unfolds in space."¹¹ Time is fleeting, the drawings serve as record for a series of moments as well as a record of my consciousness. My studio paintings provide interpretation of my observations combined with memory and intuition. Everyday provides different spectacles and events along with varied weather, especially rain; however, there are some aspects of landscape that remain such as light and atmosphere, especially for a particular place.

¹¹ Rothenberg, Sarah. "Unfolding Time Into Space: The Paintings of Rackstraw Downes." *Rackstraw Downes: Onsite Paintings, 1972-2008*.

Illustrations

Figure 1



Figure 2

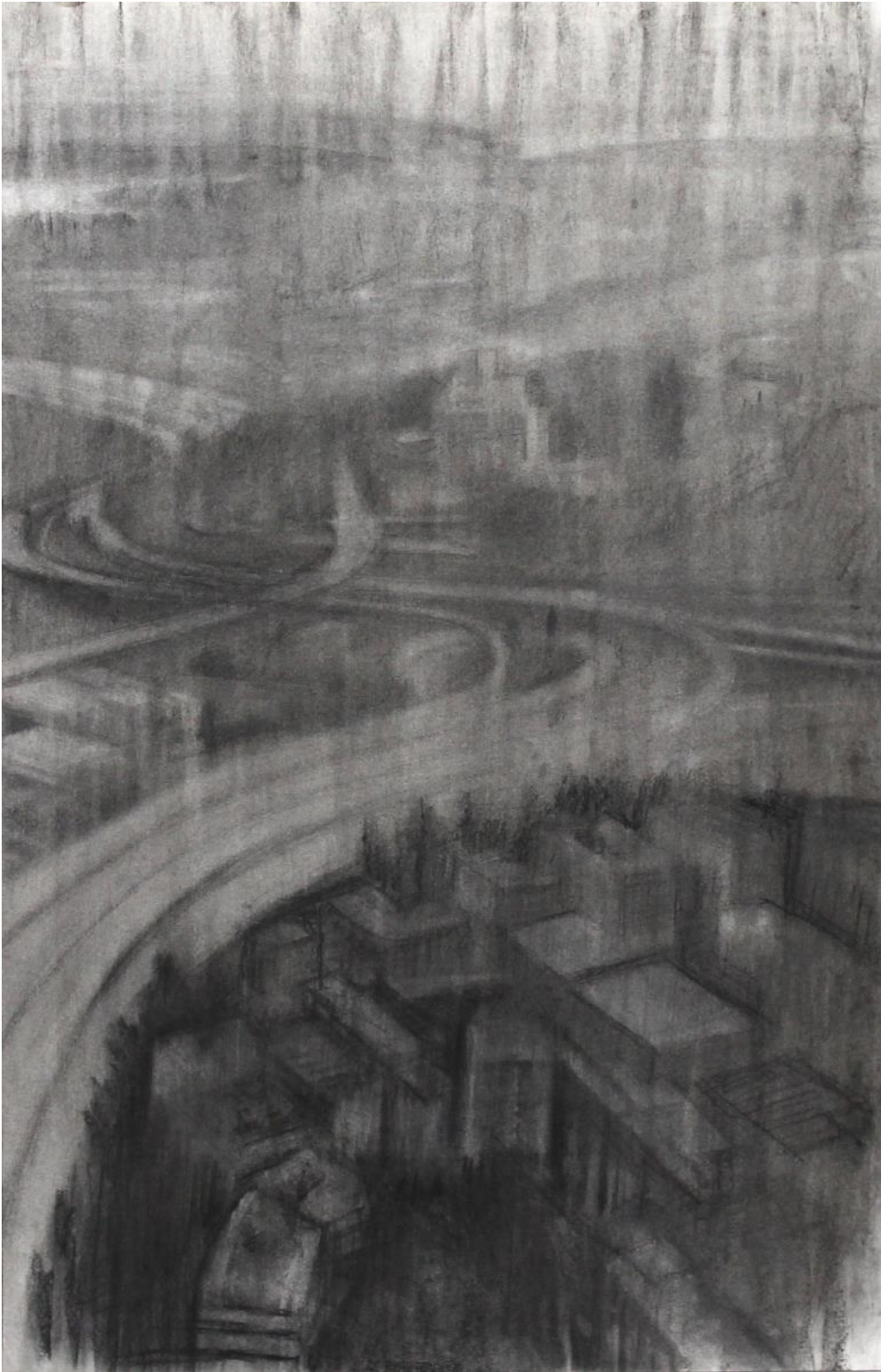


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

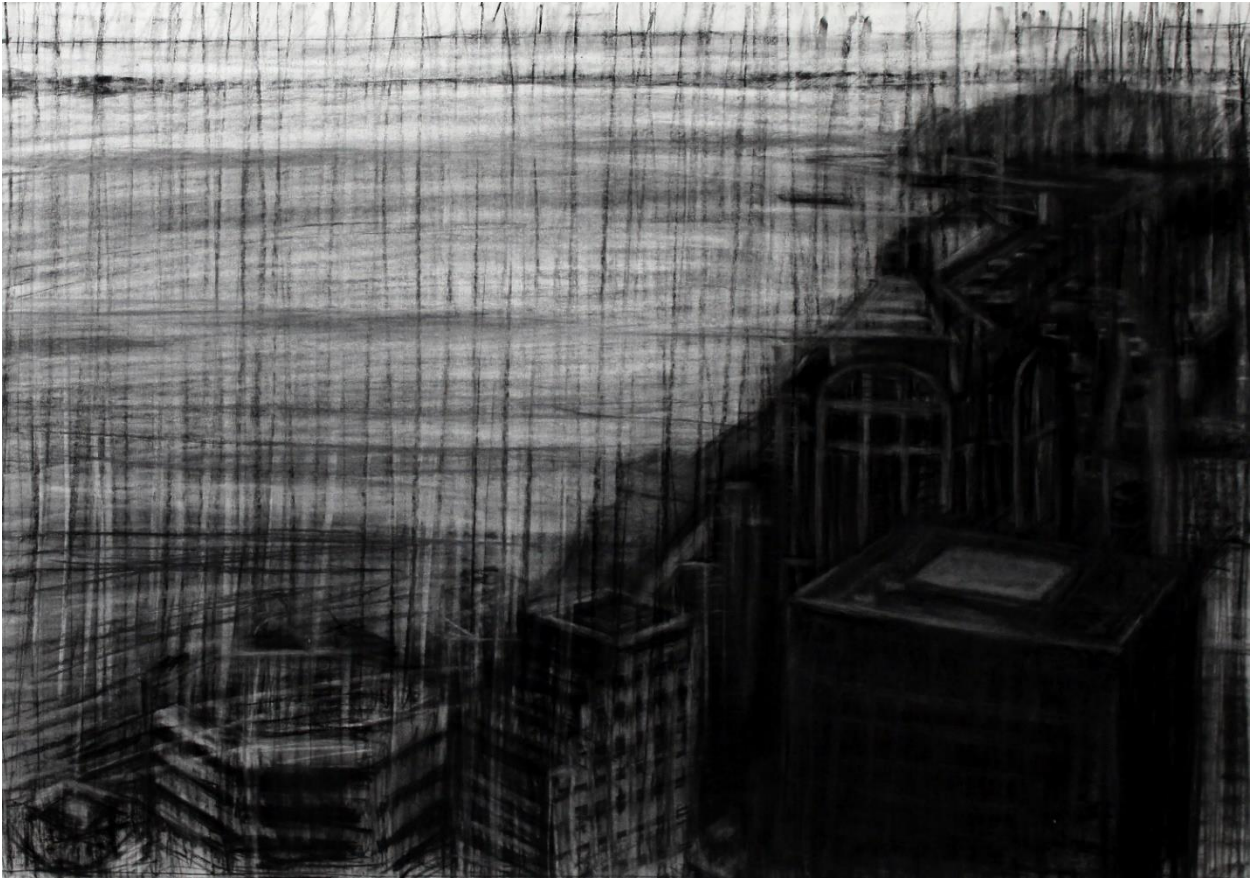


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



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