

# Interlocking Paint and Paint

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**Abstract**

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Painting + Drawing

I am exploring the materiality of paint and its likeness to flesh, as well as paint's ability to embody psychological sensations. I'm exploring the expressive qualities of painting and process that allow one to capture their emotional reaction to subject and experience. Most importantly, I'm interested in how my personal experience and relationships have shaped me and my understanding of the world. My research comes from my need to question and understand human behavior, human psyche, trauma, and coping. These questions have led to my interests in psychoanalytic theory, behavioral psychology, color psychology, phenomenology, and criminology. Much of my research began in my undergrad where I was originally double-majoring in psychology and art, consequently taking several classes in psychology, sociology, and criminology, which have aided in my understanding of human behavior and societies role in shaping it. These questions have followed through into my graduate studies as I continue to seek understanding of such questions.

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*“...attempting to make idea and technique inseparable. Painting in this sense tends towards a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa. Here the brush-stroke creates the form and does not merely fill it in. Consequently, every movement of the brush on the canvas alters the shape and implications of the image. That is why real painting is a mysterious and continuous struggle with change- mysterious because the very substance of the paint, when used in this way, can make such a direct assault upon the nervous system; continuous because the medium is so fluid and subtle that every change that is made loses what is already there in the hope of making a fresh gain.” –Francis Bacon (Tuchman 82)*

Through my paintings, I am exploring the materiality of paint and its likeness to flesh, as well as paint’s ability to embody psychological sensations. I’m exploring the expressive qualities of painting and process that allow one to capture their emotional reaction to subject and experience. Most importantly, I’m interested in how my personal experience and relationships have shaped me and my understanding of the world. My research comes from my need to question and understand human behavior, human psyche, trauma, and coping. These questions have led to my interests in psychoanalytic theory, behavioral psychology, color psychology, phenomenology, and criminology. Much of my research began in my undergrad where I was originally double-majoring in psychology and art, consequently taking several classes in psychology, sociology, and criminology, which have aided in my understanding of human behavior and societies role in shaping it. These questions have followed through into my graduate studies as I continue to seek understanding of such questions.

Through the process of trying to understand my personal relationship to my father, I found myself more and more interested in his line of work as an undercover police lieutenant. I began asking myself questions such as- what types of events has he experienced before coming home to his family? How can one experience such events and simultaneously lead a “normal” life? How does the complex nature of being “undercover”, keeping secrets, and the concealment of one’s real identity compound with what one considers to be true or real about themselves? But also bigger questions such as, how does a society define “morality”? And if those implementing laws based on what society deems as “immoral” are human and in and of themselves at times “immoral” are they no different than those whom they criminalize? These are just a few of the questions and themes I’m asking through my work and my research.

Historically speaking, other artists whom I look to who have explored themes of violence and captured such psychological torment in their work would include Goya, Edvard Munch, Soutine, De Kooning, and Francis Bacon among many others. I’m specifically influenced by Soutine’s ability to capture such a deeply haunting sensation within his paintings that completely embodies both the torment of the human experience as well as the breath that it takes to keep living. I find his paintings deeply empathetic to the struggle of human life. Contemporary artists who I look to in this regard include Daniel Richter, Jenny Saville, and Cecily Brown. Each of these artists, in their own way, captures a part of contemporary society that is visceral yet not always easy to communicate verbally.

For centuries, artists have likened paint to flesh. De Kooning famously said flesh is “the reason why oil painting was invented”. (Tuchman 95) Elie Faure, Soutine’s early biographer said

“The mystery of the greatest painting shines forth here.

Flesh that is more like flesh than flesh itself, nerves more like nerves than nerves, as if painted with rivers of rubies, fiery Sulphur, sparkles of turquoise, emerald lakes crackling with sapphires, streaks of pearl and purple, a flash of silver that quivers and shines, a scorching flame that mines the jewel-like essence from the material. The carcass of the beef gleams red and spreads open to reveal the jewels of Golconda.”

(Tuchman 95)



Figure 1 (Tuchman 94)

This quality is important for me in my paintings because flesh is the single common denominator between every human being. If someone cannot relate to my painting on any other level, they can at least feel the fleshiness of my painting and that alone can resonate with them. Moreover, what moved me about this quote by Faure is that she’s saying that every single mark of Soutine’s painting is embodying something else in the world; the nerves are not just descriptive of nerves, but every brushstroke is charged with his experience and uncovers the beauty that’s deep within life. Individually, we experience a painting in a similar phenomenological way that we experience the world. (Parry 27) Our bodies want to feel and experience a painting in the same way that it experiences anything else. Therefore, I try to

create paintings where every individual mark is charged with emotion, pulling inward from the world to create a more compelling and personal experience for the viewer.

The fleshiness of paint also just simply relates to my subject matter as I'm dealing with bodies and human experience. In my current explorations, I have begun working from images from crime scenes, documentaries, and movie stills. I take specific photos, sometimes altering the color in different ways, then I slowly rip the images apart, taking them out of their original context and reassembling them with other crime scenes, bodies, and imagery from daily life. By combining several images, people, and scenes, I am exploring how these specific events can coexist in one's mind, and how individual experience influences



Figure 2 Collage, process by the artist

one's perception and understanding of the world. By taking images apart and overlapping other images, I'm also *concealing* specific information that I don't want the viewer to see or more importantly that I don't want to see. Part of the fractured imagery also has to do with the fact that I just don't know all of the information; because I'm trying to understand my father's state of mind, I can only piece together so much.

Francis Bacon is one artist whose processes have been a great influence on my own. He worked from photographs of people and animals in motion, usually painting from the photographs but not painting them



Figure 3 (Dawson 76)

directly. I too work indirectly from photographs, often drawing different iterations of the photos, warping the spaces and figures into new haunting worlds before I begin painting. Cecily Brown is another artist whose processes have influenced my own. She works from many different photographic and art historical references at any given time. She takes bits and pieces from many different paintings and images and pieces them back together as necessary for the painting, sometimes reflecting upon historical paintings, other times creating her own new space within a painting. My process involves a similar piecing together of imagery through the use of collage.



The collage acts as a source for the painting. Rather than

*Figure 4 Process by the artist*

copying the imagery directly, I use it as a starting point from which my paintings evolve.

Moreover, the process of making the painting is about my emotional connection to the subject matter and less about the imagery in a pictorial sense. I allow the imagery to be secondary to the expression and gesture of the paint. This is where I allow the paint to hold the content. In this sense, I have been greatly influenced by abstract expressionist painters such as William de

Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Lee Krasner. De Kooning often drastically altered his paintings in a single day, allowing them to constantly shift as he changed them to his liking. This allowed his paintings to take on a life of their own. Joan Mitchell allowed paint, color, and gesture to combine into a single movement, recording the energy of her response to the world. Francis Bacon similarly combines the movement of a single gesture of paint into the twisting movement of the human body as he tried to capture the violence of life as he saw it.



Figure 5 (Elderfield 457)

The representation of color in a painting plays a strong role in determining the psychological effects that a work will evoke. In many of my pieces, I have tried to liken the paint to flesh using colors that relate to the body and that simultaneously have a strong psychological sensation such as the glowing orange of light shining through an ear or the yellow-green of a sunken eye socket. I have found that in many of my paintings I tend to be drawn to very hot colors like reds, oranges and yellows. To me, hot



Figure 6 The Blonde, painting by the artist

colors permeate energy and passion, forcing a viewer to look, not allowing one to simply pass by.

Through this body of work, I have been searching to understand something, reaching into places with a lot of uncertainty. Part of what I've been looking for is a certain amount of clarity and resolve to the questions that I'm asking within my subject matter. At the same time, I've been searching to understand how to make a painting, how to construct something out of nothing, how to use color in a non-representational space, and how to interlock paint as image and paint as paint.

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