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by

Daniel Barlow Lane

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Painting in 2010

by

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Report

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This report is dedicated to

my Mother

and my Brother

Painting in 2010

by

Daniel Barlow Lane, M.F.A.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2010
SUPERVISOR: Daniel Sutherland

The paper is a report of the work done by Daniel Barlow Lane as a Master of Fine Arts in graduate school. The paper outlines his understanding of what painting is in today's world as well as his individual work. The paper describes three different series of work in chronological order. Pictures of the work at its different stages are provided for reference along with pictorial references of his major influences throughout his time in graduate school. The paper focuses on the reasons and decisions Daniel has made throughout his time at the University of Texas at Austin and documents in retrospect his understanding of what happened, what he made, and why.

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P a i n t i n g I n 2 0 1 0

Painting in the year 2010 is a difficult task. In fact the idea of it in general seems somewhat silly yet, I remain a committed painter. I think about this a while working, and when viewing the works of others. As a painter today it is hard to see what is important, due in part to the pluralist artworld around me, and the idea that constructing an unchanging object made of archaic materials seems unimportant and perhaps sentimental. There is also no accepted collective direction or purpose. I don't think there is any new content left to explore. It seems as if every move made in any painting is weightless and personal as opposed to universal and full of gravitas. This leaves painting without any sense of responsibility, where any direction is up as long as you can convince others it is so.

In today's art world as far as I can see an artist can do whatever he or she wants, and it essentially doesn't matter, no voice has substantial influence beyond a short period of time. There is too much art made, too often, and critics quick to pass judgment, digest it and move on. Even the most timely and talented of painters become flavors of the month. They become a consumable commodity. This is where I see the danger of a singular aesthetic. This is how I came to the conclusion that I will refuse to have an aesthetic signature. To repeat an idea or process over and over again as many painters do simply to accredit myself with an image sounds as inventive as working a repetitive nine to five job. Instead the format of having a project to work on seems more exciting, to take on one voice and see what comes of it.

Voice and attitude play a large role in the work I'm making. How I'm painting and what I paint changes drastically from one body of work to another. The basic questions about what it is to paint and how to go about it are at the core of my practice. I see painting as a magical act of creation, one that cannot be explained through logic or reason. The closer I am to the primary acts of creation the closer my viewers will be to the primary role of fine art, that of creation.

My tendencies when left on their own tend to lean towards a gestural abstraction where compositions and mark making logic is heavily modified throughout the process of painting. The use of change and improvisation keep the work on its feet, alive. A painting can be destroyed in a single stroke and that danger brings a level of mortality to image making and the process of making that maintain my excitement. This pattern of structural change using quick and forceful gestures refers directly to Willem De Kooning, Franz Kline, Phillip Guston and other prominent abstract expressionists.

I've come to distrust these tendencies in my paintings, my process and me. The world of abstraction based on emotive spontaneity and forceful formal language is entertaining when seen in the context of history, however associations with Abstract Expressionism as a movement generates nostalgic feelings. This style and all it entails no longer has the power to threaten a viewer's understanding of painting. The ideas presented have been digested by our culture. Forcing one to hearken back to a time of its power but without the original discomfort it produced. Though burdened by nostalgia I retain some of the basic elements of this practice. Specifically I've retained the elements of restructuring mid process, and emotive painting.

I've chosen to move mid process restructuring as a painting process from its role as a tool for single painting to a tool for use when developing a body of work. Instead of restructuring a single canvas I've decided it is more important to restructure the thought process of a group of works. For me this calls into question on a basic level of understanding the works as a body of individuals. This was and is an important step in understanding and developing my own work because it goes beyond the boundaries of a single canvas into the interaction of one canvas with another, when shown together. This change from thinking and developing one work, to a group of works has also made me realize that I should not show these works individually.

Prior to my commitment to dismantle style, my work utilized a brush to better define myself as an author using repetitions of similar marks. Since starting graduate school the application of paint has become a serious issue because so much of how a painting is looked at has to do with the hand of the artist. Exploring the unlimited subtle variances of paint application can take a lifetime. Most painters exchange this exploration for the refinement of particular methods. This doesn't seem to do justice to the possibilities of the medium.

Through the past 3 years my work has split into three distinct aesthetics with another in its infancy. The first appeared on the summer after the first year of graduate school. At the time I had been working in the most cost effective manner in order to produce as many body-sized images as I could. Each month the walls would be stapled with a new set of canvases, 5-6 at a time.

The work that grew out of this process existed in the end as a series of un-stretched oil paintings utilizing thick oil on flat paintings. The space in each of these works was extremely shallow and focused on the interaction of flat, organic shapes pushing upon each other. The subjects were based on fantasy creatures who had been greatly abstracted. The concept was to take a fantastic creature such as a Griffin or a Pegasus and make it the source of an abstraction, yet another fanciful construct. What has always interested me about fantastic creatures is the basic way in which they are imaginary constructions; they allow one to use the associative weight of their references in combination with the necessity to imagine them. The act of fantasizing about mythical creatures is something I would like to translate into process invention. The focus and definition of one particular form or creature became a way to anthropomorphize processes and the resulting abstract paintings.

During this time I adopted a method of mark making that had more to do with the texture of the brush in how it connected with the paint. The brushes would often be used to show a texture much like cloth since the bristles organized the paint into millimeter wide trenches. I embraced the repetitive act of tracing a circular mark with another circular mark on its exterior. I was making an analogy between the trance like state repetitive mark making can produce and a state of living in a fantasy world.

These paintings in their flatness came to be very much like the internal organs of a person, or a creature expressed like one would see from above an autopsy.

Much of the work was extremely symmetrical. The symmetry was approximate but very obvious. The organic symmetry of fantastic and real creatures was one aspect that seemed

pertinent to retain. The work in this first series was primarily vertical in orientation; it mimicked a mirror in its orientation and sometimes in its use of decorative edging. The association of the mirror-viewer allowed my painting to exist as a body.



fig1



fig2

At this time I became aware of the painter Baker Overstreet. His paintings were too similar to my own. It seemed as if many of the questions I was asking were answered in his work. While our paintings diverged in many ways, the resulting appeal of his work seemed underwhelming. It was like viewing an image of my possible future and realizing it wasn't everything I had hoped it might be. After viewing his works it became apparent that the

paintings I had been doing needed to change direction. The element that the work lacked was chaos. The symmetry and balance in his work reacted far better with his rigid rectilinear forms than they did with the work I was making which used organic forms set against symmetry. The opposite of symmetry is chaos, so chaos was the direction the next series took as its primary concern.

For the second series of work that I produced, I began with a change in format. All of the works were verticals, and I made a conscious effort to make them wider than my combined arms length. This was done to loosen the hold each work had over my movements. This new format forced me to move back and forth to cover the entire surface. The works were made about 5 times the size of the previous paintings. The height remained the same but the width was multiplied. While the size grew my desire to cover the entire surface of the canvas in an hour's time remained. My methods became much faster and rawer. I couldn't formulate the act of painting as much since I wanted to keep at the same pace as the old work. Expanding the space covered in a similar period of time made me adapt how I was applying paint, how I was mixing the paint itself, and how I changed the forms that arose from the speed and interaction with the canvas.

In order to better dissolve myself from control I modified the source material. Initially the references in the previous series had been taken from a creature in existence, one whose history and form were already decided upon. This work was derived from fantasy creatures created randomly through dice rolling. To better incorporate the form of the

creature into the paintings the randomly rolled attributes were applied to the painting individually as if it were the creature itself. Randomly generating attributes for the individual works allowed each painting to become a fantasy creature, that existed nowhere else in the history of images. Each one of a kind creature only existed in their one of a kind painting.

The use of brushes and mixing paint were completely abandoned so that the analytical process of choosing before acting had less influence in my process. The color knowledge of how one color should be organized next to another was replaced with experimentation directly upon the surface so that the choices and decisions would be present and perhaps become a kind of text to read. I believe this eliminated the concept of right or wrong color decisions. No longer was analyzing a decision a useful act. I tried as much as I could to decide how to paint based on my most basic momentary desires.

How the paintings actually looked changed as my thought processes did. The paintings became entirely about color and the desire to have particular harmonies. As each painting developed it became more apparent in each individual circumstance how each color interaction had to be resolved.

A strange association between the paint and my interaction with it occurred during the development of this process. The work was made with a reliance on line made with pure paint applied directly from the tube, and gloved hands to paint broader areas. The paint was squeezed from the tube and my hand experienced its mass being used up in a much more direct manner than simply squeezing it onto a palette. This process made me more aware of the cost of paint, and in a way 'the monetary generosity' necessary to produce an

object. The nature of taking a product that had just been bought for 20 dollars or more and using the whole thing in 3 minutes became a sort of release and sacrifice. The most costly paint was usually the brightest and therefore often acted as the most important compositional element in the paintings. Much of the early work on each canvas would be done with cheaper paint, applied by hand in smearing patterns which left finger marks and hand pathways visible to the eye. The speed with which this would all happen I would liken to a frenzy.

This work was far more explosive and personal in contrast to the last series whose flat colors seem now like shields. In dealing with this work in critique and conversation I've often referred to the process as sexual in nature due to its crescendo in cost, determination as well as the vast amounts of physical energy it required.



fig3

The major influences for this work came from two painters from Europe, both of whom live in Copenhagen. I had seen a show shared by them in New York before attending graduate school. Jonathan Meese was the most influential to me. He is a hedonist in his use of paint and canvas. I assimilated the manner in which he creates his paintings through some videos of performance painting he did earlier in his career. He shared this show with Tal R, an Israeli painter whose use of paint is so dense and wet that when you enter a room of his work your nose is the first thing to be assaulted. This duo of painters obsessed with the material of paint making work connected to Abstract Expressionism peaked my interest. It was this hyper-sensual interaction with the material of paint that felt new in a tactile and visceral manner.



fig4



fig5

This work led me into the halfway point of graduate school. At this point the work was evaluated by a group of professors in front of the entire graduate community. I was unable to intellectualize this process at the time and feared that the work was simply a repeat of my

earlier interests in gestural abstraction. I decided to make changes in my practice at this point and headed for a more reason-oriented method of painting, focusing on a conceptual framework.

I reached an idea for a series that combined several ideas I hadn't used before. The first was a directed use of consistent imagery, the second an investment in pictorial space, and the third a series of formal limitations to maintain a focused language to construct with. This new series was named *Space*.

Unlike previous work this series was planned out. Each painting is the exact same size and uses the same color relationships and forms. The language and structure of the painting would come from science fiction based sources that I began dealing with prior to grad school.

The earlier process of constructing paintings using hands, fingers, paint tubes, and other primal tools didn't fit the concept of presenting a clear and clean intellectual looking work. To reproduce the sense of cleanliness that was appropriate for science fiction I found that hard edges, tape, and controlled, repetitious brushwork were useful tools. Oil paint proved to be too difficult to control because it lacked the ability to be totally removed. I switched to acrylic, which allowed me to use fluorescent color, something I had been playing around with earlier in my studies. The fluorescent color's main purpose in this work was to act as an oppositional and analogous color to white; the two colors that exist throughout the series. Next to each other they create a groundless flatness that became important in opposing pictorial space.

I began the Space series with the intention of making five total paintings that used what I will call pictorial space, imaginary space, and relational space.

Pictorial space is what is created when a three dimensional space is mimicked by a two dimensional space. Previous work of mine had shied away from this since the creation of this space requires a particular technical control as well as an acceptance of observation or representation, neither of which interested me. What allowed pictorial space to fit into this work was its subversion through color, tactility, and imaginary space.

Imaginary space is what a person can think up in their head without actually using anything for reference. This space is important in relation to pictorial space since our thoughts are always governed by experience in lived space. The sources for these paintings are informed by years of passive absorption of science fiction input through different media.

Relational space is an intellectual space that is the product of the interaction between objects and/or images. It is thoughts and correlations reached between things as well as the associations created through repetition and binding of a particular object to ideas, images, or sounds.



fig6

The theme for the series arose from my tendency to imagine futuristic landscapes. What fills this world is a series of relationships between spaces and objects that take on a simplified language of symbols in order to maintain their place in my head. This world is developed from and related to a number of fantasy television shows and movies I've been watching since my childhood which use similar images to symbolize complicated themes.

The imagery in each painting is repeated throughout the series. The images in one

piece help to inform the reading of the images in another. Each painting informs other paintings in its immediate vicinity, which furthers the use of relational space between each image in each individual painting. The paintings as a group help to define the meanings of the images embedded within the paintings.

The main image used for this purpose is the tower, which recurs in a number of the paintings in the series. The tower functions as an object to determine the distance of the viewer to the horizon as well as a brand for the series. Another of these images is that of the planet. They play a double role in pictorial space. The planets are used both as a reference for an impossible distance beyond the horizon, as well as a flattening formal device whose lack of detail is equaled by the flattened arena of the landscape. All of the images that I am using are ambivalent; they are present without imposing or betraying an emotional, political, or moral stance.

While the goal hadn't been to create a series of images that could be looked at without consideration for the images, the paintings were constructed with an eye for visual language that felt far more conservative in terms of elaboration, decoration, embellishment, and spontaneity. What replaced the language was one steeped in discernment for positioning, a control over application leading to straighter lines, more precise shapes, and a desire for the unification of the image as a muted sonic boom.

Through these paintings whose foundation is conceptual, I've realized that my ability to consider my decisions has overtaken the embrace of desire and immediacy in some of my other groups of works. While the idea of returning to the gestural nature of my past often seduces me, the ideas I feel are my strongest are those that I sit on and consider over time.

I hope in the future to be able to challenge myself as directly as I have with this latest series, for the results satisfied my need to gain new perspective on a medium that can seem linear until you turn the corner, to new opportunities.

VITA

Daniel Barlow Lane was born in Silver Spring, Maryland. After completing his work at Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Bethesda, Maryland, she entered Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia. He received the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University in December 2006. During the following year he was employed as an artist assistant in New York City.

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