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**Hey Baby I'm in the ER**

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**Hey Baby I'm in the ER**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

To Angela Valella and Daniel Payavis

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee members—Sarah Canright, Troy Brauntuch, Teresa Hubbard, Jeff Williams and Jack Stoney for their help and interest with my work. I would also like to thank Ann Reynolds, Mark Goodman and Michael Smith; in totality all have made my graduate experience a beautiful and fulfilling one.

## **Abstract**

### **Hey Baby I'm in the ER**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This report examines the history of my practice and interest in architectural and painting surfaces. It is intended to dissect language and the use of the screen as a way to understand different relationships of self to other, and self to architecture. Selected art works and writings I have produced are explicated as they relate to the ideas; both are used to describe my studio practice and process.

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My practice investigates source—image, network, input, registration, description—and different mediums, such as writing and forms of photography, to design and generate surfaces and objects. I recently created a five-point system that allows for different responses and actions for creating an object. The set criteria consist of: A kind of Architecture, A kind of Surface, A kind of Stragedy, A kind of Darkness and A kind of History. This system has become what I refer to when incorporating content.

These systems allow each series I produce, to mutate and transform as my practice evolves and I insert different inputs. I make work as series in which each object depends upon another, and all reveal signs of a previous history and relationship to each other. I am interested in a practice that roots itself not in painting particularly, but in surface and mechanisms of process that deal with construction and reference to the screen. I reference the word screen in two ways: (1) as a physical architectural device of signage (fencing, netting, and mapping); (2) as a backlit device (phone, computer). Surface to me represents light, texture and remnants of usage.

The selection of works titled *“Hey Baby”*, *“Hey”*, *“1800 Numbers”* and *“The 1800’s”* emerged from fields of interest and study to produce a new kind of surface and a language that could not only reference the screen, but also allude to an architectural history. The creation of a “call to response” language that poses questions as opposed to providing solutions influenced my decision to utilize the phrase “Hey Baby.” I consider this phrase to be the language that fills all architectural spaces and relationships. Implying

the self and the other, the phrase acquires meaning as its source changes: “The word in language is half someone else and the word in language is half someone else’s.”<sup>1</sup>

The stories in “Nevermind Tropical” use ‘*Architecting*’<sup>2</sup> as examples of building space through personal recollection and description (figure 1 and 2). I place emphasis and interest on how to look at and understand the navigation of description. I use ekphrasis (a literary description of space) to describe object and surface as a narrative structure that establishes viewing to become the subject itself. These descriptions become a “formidable sense of the picture as a surface, like a mirror or a map, but not a window.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Mikhail Bakhtin. *The Bakhtin Reader*, Medvedev Voloshinov (Hodder Arnold Publication, 1981) 293.

2. *Architecting as used by Gordon Matta-Clark describing the ruin and thinking of it as a productive foundation*, (See) *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings*, Author Gloria Moure (Distributed Art Pub Inc. 2006)

3. Svetlana Alpers. *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Introduction xxv.

### **The Mound**

The large mound of debris sits stagnant for months in the middle of the cul-de-sac. Surrounding the mound of materials are the remnants of cheaply constructed houses and objects. The once-private domain is released from all temporal barriers; all of the insides are out. Scraps of plywood leaning against the remaining parts of the foundations provide signage and screens for black spray painted gestures such as 'You Loot We Shoot' and 'State Farm Fuck You.'

Lakes By the Bay (by the landfill) was a South Floridian housing development consisting of 3,500 homes. It had artificial lakes, tennis courts, cul-de-sacs, xeriscape lawns and five different model houses from which to choose. The mold had spread from the ground up, creeping over and into microwaves, pieces of sheetrock, furniture, photographs, plates, knives, love letters, phones, TV's, beds, shirts, pants, vases, frozen food boxes, silk house plants, end tables, covering both smooth and rough surfaces. As the rains came in this sub-tropic climate, the mold and mildew spread at a rampant rate.

There was an effect of mimicry onto the objects creating waves and splatters onto the surfaces. Eventually, the materials could no longer visually operate alone. The hurricane allowed the materials a permutation of unbuilding and building; a transgression against form. At the bottom of the mound appeared an image of a baby in water. The 1991 Nirvana poster was still intact with the wavy lettering of "Nevermind" visible, it draped over a banister from a remaining stairwell. A large tanker ship, washed upon the shore, cutting the land in two. On the side read 'Tropical,' a distribution company for refrigerated and frozen food from the Caribbean.

### **Cat and Hotel**

In unit 105, a woman was buried in a lousy mattress in the right corner of the room. She was in a black silk nightgown that looked glued to her body. On arm was black and had purple dots from the bruising of the needle into her skin and beads of sweat ran down her body. She had blonde hair, and her age was impossible to discern: she could have been 29 or 60. The sun pushed against the curtains, casting a line down her body and visually bisecting it. The line of light highlighted and burned the dust in the air or skin scrapping, the smell of dust and skin scrapping.

Her flaccid hand barely held a smoking cigarette; smoke would occasionally puff into the air and saturate the ceiling. Her two bodily halves broke into the space. A compact mirror was on an end table with the chalky residue of makeup; beige film caked over the once-reflective surface. Joint compound applied to cover the cracks from the settling foundation was stained from smoke, its yellowish peeling surface veined throughout the walls.

There are so many stolen items in this tiny room that smelled like Pine Sol but was not clean. Linoleum flooring that had been placed over wood panels had a black filth exposed each crease of the previous floor. The man in the room was a construction worker who had been laying slabs of concrete on the new Miami Performing Arts Center, which was the view from the hotel window. The mid-afternoon heat was so intense she had fallen asleep. The land cooked during this time; all of the concrete absorbed the sun's heat

during the early day, but at 3:00pm it released back out, and heated its residents, felt through the pant legs of walkers.

The room's door led to an open courtyard filled with dead palm trees and Sparks energy drink cans. There were residents sitting along the doors and windows to their rooms. The three-story 1930's building was discolored and whitewashed from heat. The fabric of its awnings was neglected, leaving only the railings of the half domes to sit like arcs of metal.

**figure 1:** *Nevermind Tropical: Descriptions of Architecture (The Mound, Cat and Hotel)*, 2013.

### **The Cave**

There is a fence that runs along the building surrounding the perimeter lined with green windscreen for partial privacy and to hide construction materials. The screen is starting to tear and rip, allowing small pockets of visibility into the lower section of the building. The structure itself is covered with a black version of this screen wrapped from bottom to top and pressed against the scaffolding that would sway in and out as wind filled the interior. It seemed to breathe. Mostly construction workers and trucks are present around the property during the day. The building's dust spills out into the street, creating a powdered coating on the surface of the area. The coating tracks through the large radius and can be seen on the floors of local strip clubs, pawnshops and bodegas on the surrounding blocks. At night the building changes. It houses a different kind of transient life, one that operates in complete darkness. It becomes a space, which seemingly seems much larger than it actually is. Sound starts to carry throughout the cavernous spaces like an improvised kind of tower speaker. It projects and amplifies the actions taking place inside.

The sun is now down, the building's garage entrance opens to where a section of the black windscreen had been removed for construction trucks to enter. The passage is wide enough to be entrance and exit lanes for cars: the beginning of the underground parking system for the building. The descent down reveals small flickers of light and the sound of clicking carries. Sensory clues help one to navigate the space and situate the placement of walls. The flashes became closer—they are lighters—and the clicking and rolling sound is that of the thumbwheel grinding again and again. Everything in this space echoed and the sound carries in to the floors above.

A second image appears on the subfloor of the parking substructure. The remnants of the day's downpour left puddles of water that began to mirror the men, visible as silhouettes and the outline of the flame from their Bic lighters. The puddles are a cropping device for the reality of the space, the structure and its activities reproduced on an expanding scale. Some puddles reflect darkness while others mirror the transients and their actions. The puddles are to be understood as copies, their facsimiles modeled on the objectification of things external to them. The smell of wet sheetrock and limestone is

pungent. The men were all mumbling, sometimes to each other, and were in groups of two or three. Their mumbles became audible and, in a low deep voice, one of the men exhaled the word “Chiva,” its echo sounding like “Chivaaaaaaaaaaaaa” where the “aaaa” reverberated off of every wall and surface of the floor, mapping the space with sound. The ramp continued downward until everything fell silent and mute. The building no longer spoke and its muteness began to penetrate. The after-image of the small flames began to come again. It flashed and pulsated in the blank space.

### **The Ship**

A sign welcomed the visitor with an architectural rendering of the condominium or timeshare. The image of the five-story concrete and glass building was partially destroyed due to weathering of the surface. The half-finished foundation sat low in the water, while a network of stairs led down into the sub floor. It is occupied, but not permanently. There are cots and buckets filled with clothing and books. Posters of Budweiser and Corona girls on the beach (American women in bikinis with beer but with Spanish phrases) plastered the unfinished concrete walls. The foundation had openings to the ocean, serving as a type of framing device; the openings crop the sea as it moves forwards and backwards. The real horizon and the horizon in the posters line up. This continuation occurs throughout the room. In the far corner, away from the ocean, are four five-gallon white buckets filled with photographs of swimmers—not the people who lived in Cozumel, but the people from the ships that go on a Carnival Expedition trips where one can snorkel and explore. The collection of images depicts tourists floating in space, awkwardly trying to pose underwater, which; in its setting, created an immortalization and apotheosis of tourist. They are stuck underwater floating in a bucket of other awkwardly posing people.

**figure 2:** *Nevermind Tropical: Descriptions of Architecture (The Cave, The Ship, The Farm)*, 2013.

This idea of the “picture as surface” became an important filter for the creation of an archive on a touch screen. The images in “The Digital Archive Two Screens Facing Each Other” are photos I took with my phone. The phone allowed for mobility in my practice by way of recording areas and situations at any given time and in any space. Placing the phone, with an image selected, onto a scanner bed resulted in solidification of the image and allows it to become permanent. The archive’s content consists of 24-hour

spaces or structures (ATM's, emergency rooms, cemeteries, night clubs) and past lovers. The insertion of lovers into this selection of non-closing spaces extracts the personal and alludes to the abstraction of relationship and viewership. It deals with the space between self to other and self to architecture—the pulling inwards, pushing away, objectifying, becoming attached, becoming dependent and disengaging. The ability to zoom in and out on an image imbues all images with qualities of permutation. The archive is no longer a collage or book, but a horizontal and vertical scroll similar to a digital palimpsest, which makes its way through format to surface. The scanner reveals on the screen not only these spaces and persons but also fingerprints evidencing a previous history of handling (figure 4 and 5).



**figure 3:** *The Digital Archive Two Screens Facing Each Other*, (ER.pdf Pg. 14 of 67).





**figure 4:** *The Digital Archive Two Screens Facing Each Other*, (Cemetery.pdf Pg. 16 of 67).

Hypodermic needles are used in making of these text and number paintings that I have obtained from the nomadic Needle Exchange Program. The borrowing and returning of this item became a way to connect to a larger system of operation. The need to return used to get new and the location of the mobile program constantly changing generated the pacing for the creation of this series. My interest in the needle as an image-making device came from its implications of immediacy as a one-time use mechanism, contrasting against the long-term operations of a building's construction and its possible degradation. It carried a fragility ranging from drug use to diabetes, disease-simulated antibodies to lethal injection. The needle afforded me a certain distance from the surface on which an abstraction and "mis-registration" could take place as I negotiated the clarity of text and image (see figure 5-8).

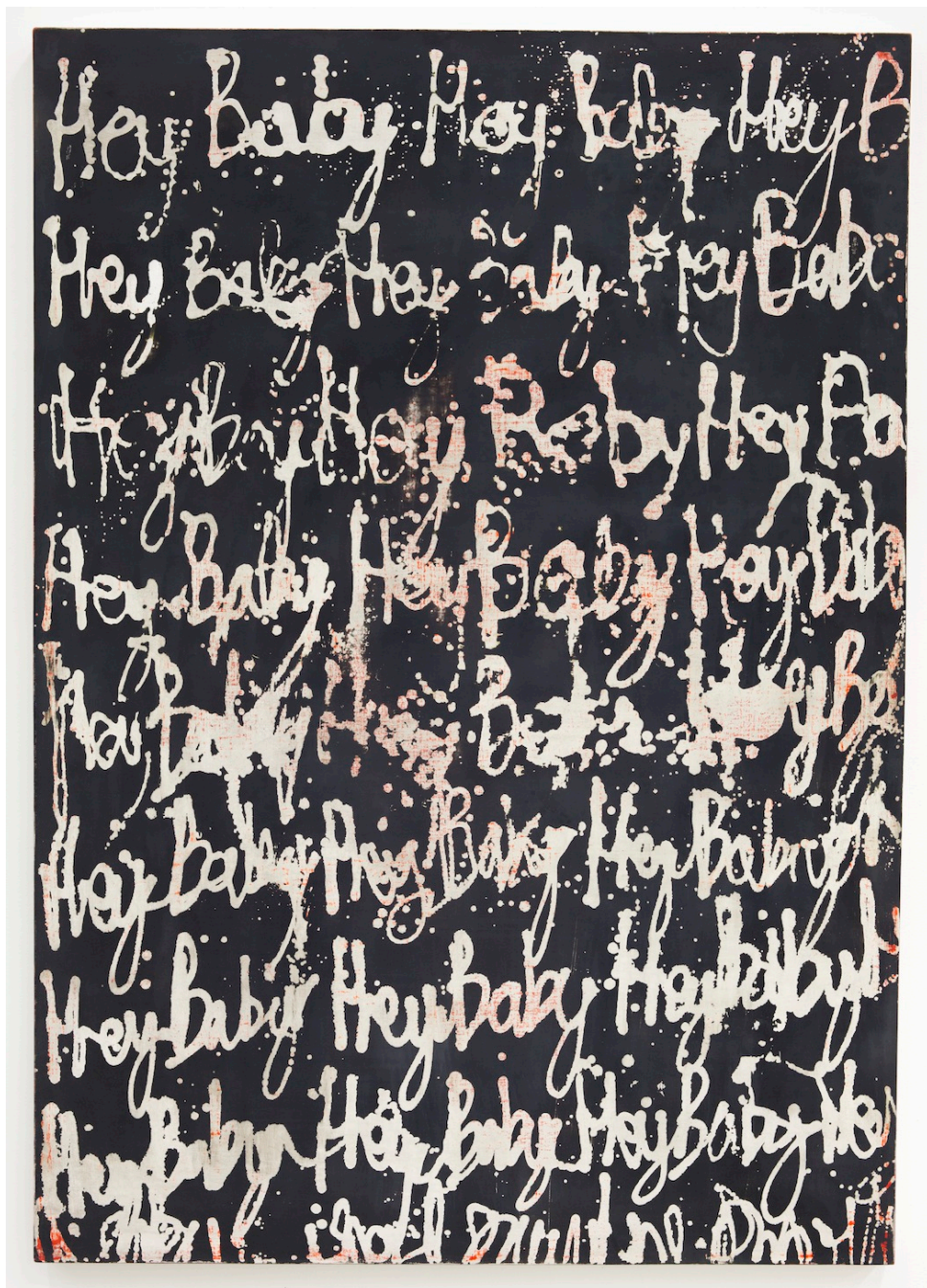
At this juncture, I became aware of my practice as one that continually tries to make an image/painting that operates outside of itself while also carrying an implication of personal experience. In an essay on "transitive painting," David Joselt describes this phenomenon of a painting embracing networks beyond itself as one that "capture[s] the status of objects within networks which are defined by circulation from place to place and their subsequent translation into context."<sup>4</sup> If "Hey Baby" acts as a "call to response" with the use of vertical and horizontal correspondence on the surface, what would happen if a modern organized solution and or a government organization were inserted?

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<sup>4</sup> David Joselt, "Painting Beside Itself" *October Magazine* (2009): 125-134, 130.

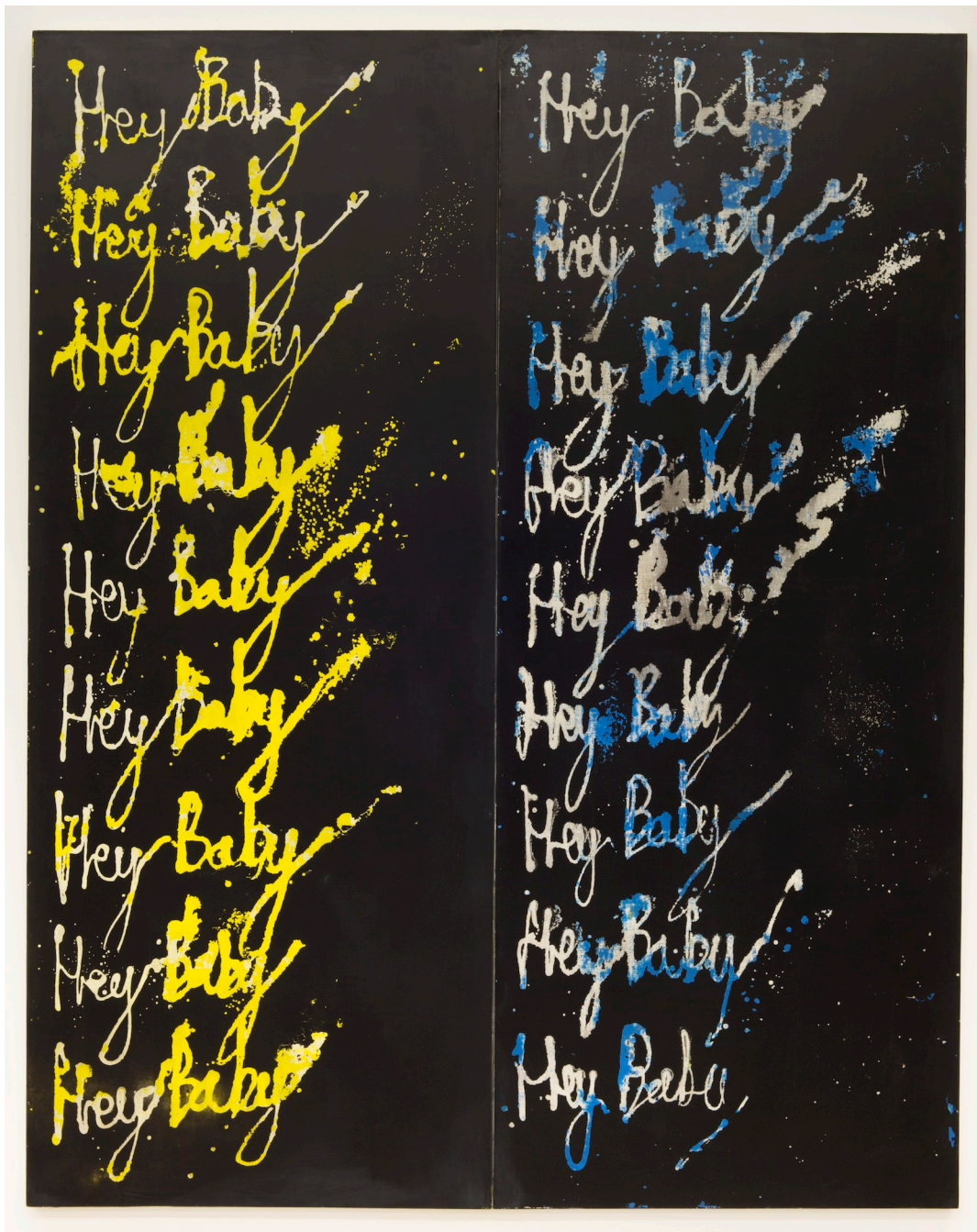


**figure 5:** *Hey Baby*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 27" x 22" 2013



**figure 6:** *Hey Baby*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 44" x 31", 2013.





**figure 7:** *Hey Baby ER Vehicle Doors*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 64" x 50", 2013.

The “1800” number paintings are in direct relationship to “networks beyond,” and negate actual space, carrying varying responses and architectural mapping of a dial-key informational system. From Carnival Cruise Hotline to the Dissolution Company (a company one uses to dissolve ones own corporation), these networks provide different levels of communication and meaning. They become abstract spaces and lands because they do not have recognizable or traceable area codes (see figure 8 and 9).

These processes eventually lead to objectification of the entire number. Certain surfaces contained “Hey”; others just “1800s.” I isolated the term “1800” and realized that it could carry two meanings: one a reference to a hotline system, the other to a time in history (see figure 8 and 9).



**figure 8:** *1800 764 7419 Carnival Cruise*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 9” x 45”, 2013.



**figure 9:** 1888 381 8758 *Dissolution Company*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 9" x 45".

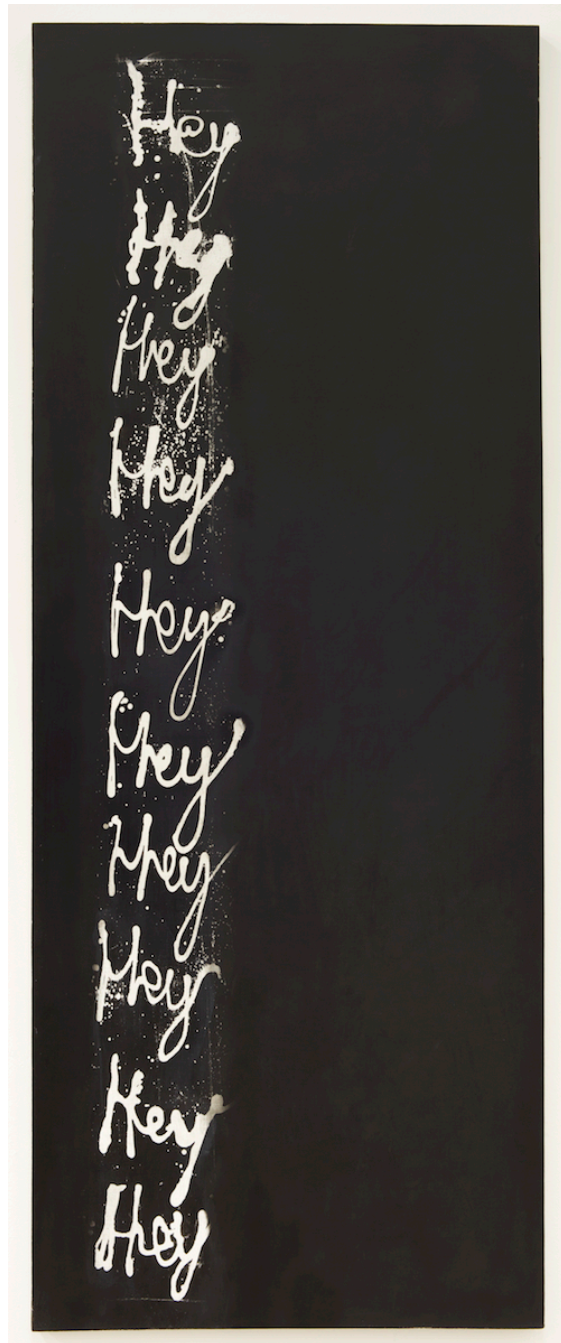
The Industrial Revolution became an historical marker for production; this series transformed into screens and became a reference to the residue of industry. In Lewis Mumford's description in "A Close up of Coketown," we see the residue of industry of the 1800's as "smudges of soft coal spat everywhere; even those who washed their hands left a rim of undissolved grease around the side of the washbowl."<sup>5</sup> This darkness made its way onto the objects as a final sprayed screen. The combination of 1800 and the 1800's was an idea of a "light technology" pushing through heavy industry (see figure 10 and 11). When installed, the objects map out the space and allude to one another. Their circular position becomes their meaning and a mode of navigating from Light to Heavy: "The second industrial revolution, unlike the first, does not present us with such crushing images as rolling mills and molten steel, but with 'bits' in a flow of information traveling along circuits in the form of electronic impulses. The iron machines still exist, but they obey the orders of weightless bits."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis Mumford. *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations, and its Prospects*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. 1961). Pg. 449

<sup>6</sup> Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Pg. 4





**figure 10:** *Hey*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 64" x 25", 2013





**figure 11:** *1800's*. Sprayed oil, enamel on linen, 64 x 25", 2013

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