

WORK IN PROGRESS

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Issue 1

Introduction

This first issue of Work in Progress focuses on the medium of paint, presenting interviews with five artists who represent a range of approaches and styles within contemporary painting today. It's long been clear that despite Paul Delaroche's claim in 1839 that painting is dead, the reality is actually quite the opposite.

The artists showcased in this issue are all critically engaged with challenging and evolving painting's history both as a material and in terms of subject matter and representation. As a result, this issue allows for an exploration into a sampling of questions, issues, and ideas currently circulating among these artists working today.

Calli Moore's sculptural, 3D panels of woven layers of piped-out paint question paint's physicality and density as a form and object, while **Sean Downey's** nonlinear figurative paintings are involved with disorienting the viewer's narrative understanding of his pieces, experimenting with painting surfaces through creating ceramic panels and painting with underglaze. **Matthew F Fisher's** graphic landscape paintings are interested in examining personal and collective experiences of memory, challenging viewers to reexamine what they are perceiving as 'real'. This interest in 'real space' is dealt with also in **Jessie Edelman's** textured and gestural figurative paintings. Questioning what it means to make contemporary painting in the age of digital media, and layering perspectival windows within her works, Edelman's pieces engage the viewer as a mirror to the work itself, confusing space in subtle ways. Finally, **Paige Turner-Uribe's** vividly narrative works explore captured moments of 'inbetweenness'. Uribe's works play with a variety of captured images and source materials, thinking about found or random moments that are able to be transformed into evocative and personal scenes. This first issue was incredibly exciting and rewarding to put together, and marks the beginning of a long-term project in engaging readers with contemporary visual artists' work and practice. Thank you to all the artists included in this issue

for their time, energy, and support, and special thanks to Val Ocampo for partnering with me on the design and execution of this platform.

- Sholeh Hajmiragha

Jessie Edelman

Jessie Edelman's recent body of work plays with the relationship between the viewer and the figures within the paintings themselves. Painting perspectival layers and windows that confuse perceptions of real space, Edelman creates paintings within her paintings. Voyeurism is a heavy theme as both the figures and the viewer mirror one another in acts of contemplation, while remaining invisible to their viewing subjects. Edelman uses textured and gestural brushstrokes combined with highly developed and rich color palettes within her works. She is engaged with and references paintings and art throughout history, bringing them into the present contemporary moment, engaging critically with the medium of painting within this age of digital media and new technologies.



Windows, 2016. oil on canvas. 54 x 45 inches.

Based in Brooklyn, NY, Edelman received her BA from Skidmore College and her MFA from Yale University. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions internationally, most recently in her solo show Stills From “The End of Summer” at Denny Gallery in Fall 2016. I met with Edelman at her studio in Bushwick to discuss painting, her recent work and upcoming projects, and her studio practice.

How did you first become interested in making art and creating work?

I’ve been interested in painting since I was a little girl; I grew up in a very creative household where there was always a love for art, music, and poetry. I was always drawing, making ceramics, and working on creative projects with my dad around the house. My mom is from Mexico so there was always a Latin influence too. I grew up in Chicago until I was ten, so going to the Art Institute of Chicago had a huge influence on me. They have such an impressive collection of impressionist and post-impressionist art, particularly their Van Gogh and Monet paintings. I started oil painting in middle school, so I’ve been at it for a long time.

How did you start oil painting at such a young age?

I was always drawing when I was a child. For a long time, my dad was a single parent and he would be at work all day. I would call him and ask him what I should draw, and then I would spend all day making these drawings for him. I had a lot of freedom as a little kid. When my dad got remarried, my step-mom saw how interested I was in art and she suggested that I go to Interlochen Center for the Arts for summer camp, which is where I learned how to oil paint. That experience of going to Interlochen was really life changing, and I still know artists that I went to camp with when I was a kid who are here in New York making art. That had a huge influence on me.



Horses I, 2016. oil on canvas 54 x 45 inches.

How have the subjects of your works developed from your earlier paintings until now?

When I was about twelve I made a painting of two girls jumping into a landscape. It looks Van Gogh influenced, but I still see ideas from those early paintings in my work today. The figures are turned away from the viewer, which is something I’m still clearly doing today. But I’ve gone through different moments. In college I made abstract paintings and then in graduate school I returned to the figure because it felt much more relevant to deal with the human form but there is still an abstract influence on my work. I’m always thinking of Rothko and Joseph Albers, where space recedes because of a color relationship rather than something perspectival.

There have been different motifs that I’ve worked through and have then come back to. I made window paintings I was painting them over and over again. I made paintings of fields in order to explore with the idea of a color field in a very literal way. I was also making paintings of young women for a long time. The ideas have re-circulated back together after I graduated from Yale. But I am always thinking about the possibilities of what a paintings can to and trying to push that.

There’s an interest in the figure, specifically the female figure, in your work. Can you talk about how this has developed?

I like thinking about the figure because I’m interested in a new humanism or a new sincerity and a way of showing feeling and expression in painting. I think by having the figures in my work, I’m able to do that.

I’m also interested in the concept of the viewer looking at a painting or into another space. I like the idea that the figure is doing what the viewer is doing when they’re looking at the painting. There is a doubling and also a filtered effect that

occurs, where the figure can see more than what the viewer can see. The figures are voyeurs looking at some other virtual space. I want there to be an illusion of what they're looking at, and then I feel that becomes a question of what is real. Are they in a more real space than the framed space that they're looking at? I'm exploring ideas of virtual space as a way of addressing the age of digital media that we live in.



Los Enigmas IV, 2015. oil on canvas. 72 x 60 inches

Your figures are often shown from behind; they have no faces and are unidentifiable. Can you talk about this choice?

When I was at Yale, Rob Storr was giving a talk about Cezanne's figure in *The Bather* – how that figure was stepping out of the picture frame and that it was the first modern painting. I was interested in that, and I was thinking about a desire to step into a painting. I think that led me to this turned-around figure. As these paintings have been out in the world people have asked me if they're self-portraits, which I think is so funny because I actually think of the figure as the viewer - the figure is a portrait of you. I definitely see the figure as a viewer, as somebody looking in, and I think I've always been attracted to a figure in a state of contemplation and thought. They also have this sort of non-identity and they definitely tackle this idea of paintings of the figure. There are paintings throughout history of turned around figures, but not a lot, so I'm interested in engaging with that. In modern painting there's this idea of breaking the fourth wall, where the image is looking at you. I think that this is also a way of reversing playing around with that construct. I also love Vermeer's paintings of a figure looking at a window, and I think I'm also playing with this idea of the painting as a window within the framed space and the figure as voyeur.

Landscapes are also prevalent in your works. Do you think of landscape as a subject, or is it a backdrop for the figure?

The landscape plays into the ideas humanism and sincerity that I am interested in. I like this sense of romanticism, and I feel like the figures are in a contemplative state or are, for me, in their own heads. I think having the landscape there amplifies that. A person looking at nature has been a construct throughout art history; there are certain archetypes of a figure looking at a landscape that I am engaged with and am playing with from Casper David Friedrich's paintings to Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World* (1948), or the flaneur of Baudelaire's poetry, which often describe a lone figure wandering the streets feeling disconnected from all the people in the city. I'm trying to explore what that means for me and why I'm attracted to that.

I have noticed water in particular is a common motif in your work. Can you talk about your interest in that as a subject?

With my last show I wanted to work in a series. I was working here in my studio in Brooklyn, and I was imagining where I wanted to be traveling. I am interested in the concept of desire and that painting is an object of desire and was trying to follow my own. I was looking at my friends' Instagram photos and seeing people in the Mediterranean, and I imagine the Mediterranean to be this idealized subject matter that's been repeated throughout history. I went back and reread *The Odyssey* this summer, which holds so much weight with its imagery. I'm really attracted to the Mediterranean and I wanted to explore it. It's a place that I've been to and it's very romantic to me and a place of desire. I was looking at Godard films, particularly *Contempt* and this other Italian film *L'Avventura* that I was drawn to, and then I was also looking at Cezanne and Matisse paintings. I just wanted to delve into it. I think it's also interesting for an artist to deal with something that has already been grappled with so often. How do you make it your own and how do you do it again? I love that challenge, and that's kind of the inherent challenge of painting. How do you make a relevant painting with oil paint on canvas today?

Where do you get your images from - do you source them from external sources, do you take your own photos, are you making drawings?

It's a mix. Some of them come from my own images or my own drawings while traveling. I'm also looking at certain films that have influenced me, art historical paintings, magazine images, people on the street and I'm always collecting books with interesting images. I try to pull things together. Sometimes images or ideas seem to just appear in my mind.

What's your process for creating a work start to finish?

It depends. For some paintings that feel more complicated I'll do sketches first, and then others I'll just jump right into. But I'll often do a traditional under-painting with yellow ochre and then I'll make adjustments and build up the paint over time.

What is your biggest challenge of painting?

I am a die-hard paint lover, so I find it really fun to paint. I also find it really challenging that there are so many great paintings and such a long history of painting, but it's exciting to be a part of that conversation and to do something engaging and relevant. I feel like one of the big questions today is, how do you make painting in the age of digital media? I like to think about Cezanne trying to understand what it meant to make painting in the age of the camera. Today I think it's digital media, and thinking about still engaging with the medium of oil paint and seeing what you can do with it - what does it do differently, what can it mimic? I think all those questions are interesting. Ultimately, I am trying to stretch what a painting can do.



Still, 2016. oil on canvas. 72 x 60 inches

How do you tackle making painting in the age of digital media?

People have become used to living in a world of reproduced images and digital devices. I am interested in addressing this new way of seeing in my work and is why I use the framing devices in my paintings. There is always some sort of filter in my paintings and element of longing for another virtual space. Through social media people have become voyeurs and flaneurs looking in on the lives of others.

I also feel a general move where a lot of painting has become less engaged with how it looks in real space and more concerned with how the image of the painting recirculates in the world. I think both are really interesting and captivating, but personally as an artist, I never want to lose sight of what it means to stand in front of a painting and see how a painting really looks. At the same time, reproduced images are so powerful and reach so many people, and I think it is an important format for spreading visual imagery. Now more people than ever are photographers. Everybody is a photographer, which is so cool. I think technology is important and can do great things, but I think that people need to maintain their critical

thinking skills because sometimes media can do dangerous things. It's up to human beings to moderate what is happening in the world.

What are you working on at the moment?

After my last show came down in October, I definitely felt that I had the opportunity to explore and to see what will happen. One of the ideas I had in my head was this image of an impressionistic field and playing with that as something that feels really blurry, so I'm starting to work on those. I want them to feel a little bit like a pixelated screen, but very impressionistic.

Do you generally work on pieces in series?

I like to. Right now it's hard because I feel like I can go so many different ways, so I'm trying to explore all of them. I feel like it's a good time to do that. I worked on a series of paintings that led up to my show at Denny Gallery and I played around with different devices in that show - some figures were looking out, some were looking back in, and it kind of all fit around one idea for me. Right now I feel like I can experiment and try out some things I haven't gotten a chance to do and see where I want to go next.

With the last series I was playing with patterns around the frames of some of the paintings. I'm going to play with the patterned-frames and see where that goes. I think that different image sources and different references are going to come into the paintings.

Are you thinking about how your work will develop in the future?

I want to feel free to do what I want to do and not feel limited or pressured to repeat something over and over. I want to feel open to doing whatever I'm doing.

Can you talk about your other work beyond painting and the other materials you engage with?

I'm interested in making sculptures. I've liked to work with clay since I was a kid, and when I have time to I do. I did get a pottery wheel. Painting is my number one passion, but I do like working in other mediums. I like to do sculpture and I wish I had more time to do it, but I've done some other fun projects. I actually made swimsuits. I may think of them as editioned prints. I'm really excited about those. I'm going to do something with them, but I don't know how to define it yet.

I also like to make monoprints, which are oil on paper. That's an easy way to make a quick sketch. I really like to sketch. I started a novel a year ago...I can't say what it was about, it's a secret. But I like to write and read and, when I'm home, I try to draw. When I get stuck in painting, I start doing something else and then I'll start writing or making ceramics. Sometimes I'm just tired of painting. If painting starts to feel like a chore, like it's work, then I get frustrated and working with clay or writing or doing something else that feels like an outlet. It's the best when you're excited about whatever it is you're doing, so if I get really excited about something, then I'm just going to throw myself into it. And I'll get carried away with it and then I'll get excited about painting again.