

Thoughts on (my) professional painting in 2012



By Michel Alix, class of '69

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I want paint – that is, liquidity, liquid colour and stringy lines where needed – but also an overcoating, an archaeological reflexion in real time on the act of thinking with paint, judgement atop of judgement. Why start from scratch like an apprentice sorcerer when you can total up accretions like Old Man Time?

The principle behind “re-painting” (my current stylistic program) is discovering the individuality of a form (or a contrast, or any other aesthetic element or concept) through modelling an arbitrarily created configuration of existing, splattered, or rolled-on paint (collage, roofing, or tin siding). In the tradition of Surrealism and Dadaism, re-painting establishes a preliminary dialogue with form (line, blob, or photograph) and develops a qualitative relation, a growth or reduction, a poetic link, and a sequential or burgeoning process.



“twins sitting”

The attitude of the painter is usually to build, fabricate, construct, and add paint to paint in minute glazes. However, paint is the skin of things and deserves to adapt to the “thing” rather than to itself. In ancient times, the Greeks painted their temples and statues, giving paint a vivifying role. And the Egyptians painted their casket covers to give a permanent skin to the mummy within and

in order, presumably, to bring it back to life. Today, when science has discovered the essential emptiness behind all matter, the painted skin can be a response to that hazardousness of being, to the roulette of the substrata, and to the emptiness at the core of the onion. It is time to bring dull matter to hologrammic life.

I've developed operative formulas that work at the same time as superficial themes and as the roll of the dice that enables further response. I use doodling, scratching ("scrachitis" instead of graffiti), ideograms, diagrams, and cartograms. I paint on collages and draw on paint. I color outside the lines. I pass from the analytical "break up" stage to the final synthetic "make up" stage. From strife to reconciliation, I explore ritual contrasts, which like the notes in music operate in rhythm with visual expression -- contrasts, such as harmony/disharmony, intention/chance, forefield/backfield, frontlit/backlit, juxtaposition/contiguity, et cetera. I find the "pixel" works as an esthetic element in drawings and paintings -- structuring/deconstructing.

I propose looking at art as airily as watching a movie, listening to music, making love, and falling in love. I propose avoiding the bellyful of details, the brickload of incomprehensible icons, aimed at mystical relations with the visible, or the embodiment that sits heavy and obtuse at the margin of understanding, rich with metaphysical belief, or living among the potent mysteries of neo-superstition, replacing the intelligible hints of a deeper more intelligent world with balderdash. Let your emotions reason, let your mind play in the fields of the Lord (the painter as God). Art becomes a synthesis rather than a fragmented vision – rather than something that reminds you of something you once saw, or of a sum or of nihilistic views.



"bon feu ou bonfire"

I also say: "out with things" and perhaps "in with the themes, concepts, and counter-concepts." I say, "in with the skin of creation": the light embodiments -- mathematics and electronic designs, painted visual trails, art as something that dances before the eye like a theatrical display, with newborn temporary iconography and a new language of signs to replace the repetitive monoliths of the past, the symbols and euphemisms of Renaissance and classical painting – the flutter of still-born *avant gardes* – the language of nothingness (because art has become the realm of

saying nothing too, and many have made a fortune from it, are making a fortune from it).

Nothing but nothing starts from scratch. There are no blank pages, only white ones, no blank canvasses, no spaces to fill, and no beginnings. "Nature abhors a vacuum." In a sense, the traditional painter is pretentious and unrealistic in wanting to "start" a picture (and in suggesting that he or she has finished one). To imagine a *tabula rasa*, a point of ultimate departure is frivolous. Rather, to paint is to over-paint, to replace one substance with another, one substrate with another, and one vision with another. And who knows where the ultimate vision leads?



"grill friend 1"

Re-painting seeks to avoid the prescriptions of traditionalism: the carefully-constructed, pristine, and pontifically-approved middle product, as a proof of the pull of craft and collective cunning of human institutions, the work that sprouts multiple hydra heads or replaces one hydra head with another; art as the mercantile object of a promoter or producer's dreams, as a conceptual object in a laboratory of pure forms, or as the objective residue of the glue of human discernment, synthesized in a public laboratory.

No, art doesn't need divine approval, or to meet a benchmark of antiseptic labor. Art can be messy, and sometimes *must* be messy. Consider the early work of Jean Dubuffet, his woman on the half shell, his handheld landscapes. A good beginning. Art doesn't need an official blueprint, copyright or bureaucratically polished pedigree, or a bank account. It spurns the craftsman's worktable as well as the lofty heights of seraphic distillation -- it goes where life is a dialectical

challenge to reason, but still lives with reason, in a cacophonous music of contrasts and contradictions.

But, someone will tell me, art like this can come to life of itself. I answer: art like this *must* form itself, *must* play the roulette of chance, randomness -- the ups and downs, and in and outs of existence. The artist then operates as the one who directs and exploits the opportunities of birth, growth, or reduction; the one who molds art's living flesh, knuckles dripping. Could such a prodigy be tame enough to please?

Biographical Afterword

This year I painted and drew on dictionary pages (Dicographies). I played the electronic god and devised scrambled TV images, pixels and all (Service Brouillé). I spent several months researching and writing a series of conferences called "Understanding Art". Points of focus included the Renaissance, the Baroque, and Neoclassicism. I still have to write something about contemporary art. The lectures may be amplified and rewritten in book form next year.

Recently, I began a series of green paintings. Fire green as grass, I suppose.

Current appreciated artists include Baselitz, Alechinsky, Richter (who's not so high on my Richter scale, however), De Kooning, Rauschenberg, and Saura.

I continue to live on the edge of existence. Just my cat and I.