Disintegrating Loops of Uprooted Plastic

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DISINTEGRATING LOOPS OF UPROOTED PLASTIC

A Thesis Presented
By
JACIN GIORDANO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MAY 2018

The Master of Fine Arts Program in Studio Arts
DEDICATION

To Eileen,
I'm eternally grateful to be by your side, thank you
for making every day feel like the first.

To Noah,
Your imagination, humor, and kindness are a constant inspiration.

To Ruby,
Can’t wait to meet you on this side of the rainbow.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To my parents, whose unwavering support afforded me the chance to pursue the life I’ve chosen and Aunt Suzanne for showing me the way.

Most notably my wife, Eileen, whose patience and encouragement at home along with her dedication at work have provided me the opportunity to complete this degree. You are the reason I continue to reach further.
ABSTRACT

DISINTEGRATING LOOPS OF UPROOTED PLASTIC

MAY 2018

JACIN GIORDANO, B.F.A. MARYLAND INSTITUTE COLLEGE OF ART
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Directed by: Department Chair Shona Macdonald

I’m interested in paint’s malleability. In my work, I transform the physical possibilities of paint in a literal way, using it as a tactile material to be cut apart, reassembled, or simply exposed for what it is. My paintings are labor-intensive. They are not predetermined, they meticulously evolve; crafted rather than executed. Remnant material from one painting, the result of a working process of cutting, gouging, or sanding, leads directly to the production of a new piece. In my work there is no illusion, material is meant to reiterate itself. Unlike abstract painters of the early 20th century, who hoped their work could aspire to spiritual harmony\(^1\). My paintings are much more pragmatic, every day, present, and real.

\(^1\) The best-known example of which is Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art.*
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CHAPTER 1
SOME BACKGROUND

Introduction

I often find it difficult to make a painting without considering the romantic mythology surrounding the history of painting. By literally tearing paint to pieces and uncovering the framework beneath my paintings, I intend to dispel these myths. Much of the time, though, my work contradicts these intentions, leading to further myth-making and reinforcing my romantic relationship to painting. In the following pages, I will attempt to write about my work which is made up of a thousand decisions, colors, shapes, and textures.

Part 1

Growing up, I remember a few pivotal experiences that motivated me to pursue art as a career. First was the realization at a young age that my Aunt Suzanne was an artist. Before that, it had never occurred to me that making art could be someone’s job. I remember seeing one of her old drawings from when she was an undergraduate student. It was a self-portrait in charcoal, about 18” x 24,” rendered naturalistically. I was amazed at her skills. I thought only the dead white guys in art books could draw like that. I cringe a little now when I think back to seeing that drawing and asking, “Why don’t you draw like that anymore?” The work she was doing at the time was batik painting and collage that hovered somewhere between abstraction and figuration. She also made jewelry with the leftover pieces of her paintings. It all appeared to be more experimental than the realistic self-portrait on her wall. Aunt Suzanne, with the help of my Uncle Garry, exhibited and sold these paintings, collages, and jewelry at arts and crafts fairs around the country (they still do). When the fairs were in Miami (where we lived), my Mom, Dad, brother and I would go visit. At
the fairs I got to meet other artists that were showing their work next to hers—I remember seeing handmade dolls, glass vases, glass sculpture, textiles, blankets, and other eclectic ways of working. When I got a little older, I got to “work” at the booth with my Aunt and Uncle a handful of times. A few things became clear to me during the time I spent at these fairs and in my aunt’s studio. First, I began to understand the wide range of what could be considered art. At the fairs there was no distinction between “high” and “low” art; you could see a booth of paintings next to a booth of puppets, next to a booth of sculpture, next to a booth of blankets. Second, I realized it was possible to make art your job. Last was that an artist is always trying new things. Just because you can draw a well-rendered self-portrait in charcoal doesn’t mean you shouldn’t keep pushing yourself in new directions. Aunt Suzanne has always used materials and process in ways that were eye opening for me. One memorable piece is a batik painting that she finished by leaving it outside in the rain. There was something mind-blowing about making a painting that didn’t require a paint brush and instead allowed nature and random weather to complete the work.

Part 2

As an undergraduate student at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) I remember a painting professor melodramatically mourn the “death of painting.” He was talking to a class of 10-15 students. We stood around him in a circle as he seemed to be reminiscing about the good old days, when painting “mattered.” I wasn’t exactly sure why this was such a big deal. Didn’t painting die a while ago? (Please see invention of photography mid-19th century, Duchamp’s ready-mades, Donald Judd and Minimalism of the 1960’s and 70’s, ad infinitum). Also, why was this bad? Couldn’t this be liberating for painting? It occurred to me that if painting was dead then the pressure was off, you could do whatever you wanted; as a medium, painting was wide open. I wouldn’t have to worry about making masterpieces for museums, that’s all in the past. I’ve always thought of ‘the painting is dead’ argument to simply mean that the primacy and hierarchy of the medium is dead.
Painting (and sculpture) are no longer the only options, every other medium, material, and approach to making art now starts with the same significance (or insignificance for that matter).

Part 3

When I was about 11, my parents bought a house. The first and only house they’ve owned to this day. It’s in the suburbs of Miami where the neighborhood elementary school has a magnet program. My mother persuaded me to apply to the school’s art department and once I got in I continued in magnet art programs through middle and high school. My parents have always been supportive of my decision to pursue art. When I graduated from college and had little money or prospects, they invited me to move back in to the house. They let me use two of the house’s three bedrooms, so I could have a painting studio. I have no idea how I would have otherwise had space and time to make work at that point. My parent’s ceaseless support has shown me that the old trope of the genius painter toiling away alone in the studio, just waiting for inspiration is nothing more
than romanticized mythology. My first “studio” was my childhood bedroom with my mother and father on the other side of the door watching TV, making dinner, and keeping house. This grounded my perspective in trying to balance a practical way of working. The materials and processes I used in my paintings around that time referenced my home life. I spent hours tying yarn into colorful knots on the couch while watching movies with my family or talking with friends. These knots would later be used as collage elements in my work. In my parent’s home, I made a group of paintings and eventually found opportunities to start exhibiting and obtain gallery representation.

To this day, recent work may still allude to growing up in my parent’s home. *Shredded Paintings* remind me of the terrazzo floors in my parent’s house. These floors were only revealed after extensive damage from Hurricane Andrew in 1992 all but destroyed our house, forcing us to rebuild. We dug up the existing tile and found the terrazzo below. I’ve always associated that floor with the helplessness I felt in the aftermath of that storm. For months, our home was surrounded by mounds of levelled trees, broken drywall, and rotting wood. These piles of debris seem slyly present in my recent *Dust Paintings*, which become reminders of the futility of keeping a tidy home.

These familial and academic experiences were crucial and continue to inform why and how I make paintings today. My Aunt Suzanne showed me that it was possible to pursue art as a career. She showed me a love of materials and playful experimentation that continues in my own process. Focusing on art in school instilled in me a rigorous and practical work-ethic. It seemed to reiterate what Aunt Suzanne showed me: this could be your job as long as you’re willing to work at it. My professor at MICA gave me something to push up against, I saw his dramatic declaration of painting’s death as an invitation and a challenge. He seemed to be presenting an antiquated history of what painting was. This made me want to consider how to make paintings that would be relevant today.
CHAPTER 2
GIVE CHANCE A CHANCE

*Our works are structures of lines, surfaces, forms, colors. They attempt to approach reality. They hate artifice, vanity, imitation, tight-rope walking.* (Arp, p.36)

Incorporating chance into the way I make paintings has been a part of my studio practice for the past several years. Sometimes I’m more excited about the residual paint splatters on the studio walls and floor than I am about the paintings themselves. I think it’s because these remnants are unintentional and free of self-consciousness. These marks are not pretending to be anything other than what they are, giving them a sense of reality. I look for ways to let these moments of process into my work. I use leftover paint from one painting to another, then another, then another and so on. The more I re-use these fragments the more they begin to alter in unanticipated ways. The once colorful leftovers lose intensity and wear down into smaller and smaller pieces. As this happens, the material, along with my initial decisions about color, composition, and shape, drift further away from my original intentions, inviting chance as a way to relinquish a certain amount of control.

Jean Arp’s collages, *According to the Laws of Chance*, have influenced the way I think about chance in my own work. He composed these works without a predetermined outline, tearing paper into random shapes and adhering them in whatever arrangement they fell to the surface.
Arp’s approach illustrates his comfort with doubt; understanding that he may not have all of the answers, it was important for him to embrace uncertainty and natural phenomena (much like my Aunt Suzanne’s batik painting finished by the rain). This seems a central tenet of Dadism. In a short essay titled *Talk*, Arp wrote: “When Dada revealed its eternal wisdom to man, man laughed indulgently and went on talking…After a fine speech he feels hungry and changes his mind…He is forever making definitive statements on life, man and art, and he has no more idea than the mushroom what life, man and art actually are” (Arp, p.49). Arp viewed people’s ego and vanity as megalomaniacal. He thought that obsession with logic, science and technology were major reasons for the world falling into World War I. As a way to counterbalance the violence of war, Arp intended for his work to show people they are a part of nature rather than above it. “Dada aimed to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order. Dada wanted to replace the logical nonsense of the men of today by the illogically senseless…Dada is senseless like nature. Dada is for nature and against art. Dada is direct like nature” (Arp, p.48).

While chance is an element of Arp’s works, it isn’t the sole determining factor. There must have been decisions that Arp made in the process of his collages. What type of paper to tear? What color paper? When to stop ripping? What is the size, format, and shape of the final piece? These
choices point to the inevitability of human intervention and perhaps the futility of trying to completely detach the artist’s intent from art making. Even though this attempt may be futile, I still think this contradictory ‘space’ is worth exploring. What makes Arp’s attempt important is that it does away with hierarchy and romantic mythology of the artist as an all-knowing genius or as a tortured soul looking to turn suffering into transcendence. Instead, Arp’s straightforward approach allows gravity, uncertainty and chance to ground his work in the everyday.

Another aspect of Arp’s work that has influenced my own is his aggressive and literal act of tearing things to shreds. When Arp began making his chance collages in 1916-1917, Europe was in the middle of World War I. The irrational violence and meaningless chaos of the war could be witnessed by all when injured soldiers returned home. In the context of the war, Arp’s collages are not only about chance as a formal experiment, but also about realizing one’s own lack of control in the world: reflecting the reality and randomness of why some people are selected for death while others are not. The so called “real” world becomes incomprehensible to the point of abstraction. By contrast, Arp’s collages, though apparently abstract, are in fact more concrete than the failed promises of society. They are not pretending to be anything other than what they are. In one of his essays titled *Man loves what is vain and dead*, Arp writes: “Man calls the concrete abstract. This is not surprising, for he commonly confuses front and back even when using his nose, his mouth, his ears, that is to say, five of his nine openings…a picture or a sculpture without any object for model is just as concrete and sensual as a leaf or a stone” (Arp, p.50). During the course of making my work, it’s important for me to handle paint and paintings as concrete objects, to be reminded that there is nothing abstract about my approach.
"Untitled (Reverse Paintings)" is a series of nine canvases measuring 12” x 9” each. These pieces of have been floating around my studio for the last 3 or 4 years. In that time, they’ve gone through drastic changes as I continued to repaint their surfaces over and over. As I worked on them, the backs of the canvases recorded my fingerprints, haphazard paint marks, and other studio residue. Eventually, these marks became more interesting to me than what was happening on the fronts of the paintings, so I cut the canvases off of the stretcher bars, turned them around and glued them back down. This allowed the unintentional moments of chance to complete the work, at the same time levelling any hierarchical distinction between the front and back of a painting.
CHAPTER 3

EXPANDING SURFACE/EXPANDING TIME (VISUAL TOUCH)

After completing my undergraduate degree, in the Fall of 2000 I went backpacking across Europe. Like the formative experiences I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, this trip was pivotal in the way I started to think about how paintings could be read. On a visit to Galleria dell’Accademia, in Florence, I saw Michelangelo’s *Prisoners or Captives or Slaves* sculptures (they are known by all three names but going forward I’ll refer to them as *Prisoners* for the sake of brevity and what seems like the most accurate reflection of Michelangelo’s process). These works are “unfinished” marble sculptures and because of their unfinished state, they reveal the artist’s process and tools. Parts of the sculptures are refined, smooth, and polished, while other parts are roughly textured. I was fascinated by the way the marble oscillated between its physical materiality and its transformational possibility.

While I was in the museum, I witnessed a group of blind people touching Michelangelo’s *Prisoners* sculptures. The contrast in texture allowed the tour group to experience the sculptures by running their hands along the surfaces. Besides the initial surprise of seeing someone put their hands onto a Michelangelo sculpture in a museum, I was struck by the intimacy and time spent as the group of tourists, one by one, moved around the works. This made me consider how important an artwork’s surface could be. Until then, I thought of surface as synonymous with superficial, shallow, and trivial. Now I was seeing how surface and texture lengthened the amount of time each person spent with these works. I wondered if it could be possible to create a similar experience within painting. I wanted to draw people close to my paintings, I wanted to invite visual ‘touch,’ and the experience of viewing my paintings from multiple angles. Texture could change a painting’s appearance when viewed from different vantage points and by walking around a painting and looking at it from all angles, a viewer could experience a painting over time. It occurred to me
that emphasizing these elements could push against the traditional notion of a painting as a static image, predominantly frontally viewed.

Texture and surface have therefore become important elements in my work. In the past I’ve made black paintings with varying striated texture that reveal an image from one angle but from another, appear like minimal monochromes. I’ve built painting surfaces so thick that they begin to blur the lines between painting/relief/sculpture. I see these paintings as different experiments with prolonging viewer engagement and creating duration with a painting. I’ve continued these experiments in recent works such as Cutpaintings and Paint Samples.

The Cutpaintings textured surfaces are a result of cutting, digging, and carving into thickly layered paint to create actual depth. This process alludes to the “uprooted plastic” in my thesis title. I think about the way I make a Cutpainting not unlike the way an archeologist excavates. I dig into their acrylic exterior to uncover the multiple layers of color and “natural” wood structure below. The material mix of wood and acrylic paint are meant to point to a changing landscape in which synthetic man-made materials and structures entwine with the natural world.

Figure 4. Cutpainting 85, Detail, by Jacin Giordano, 2017
Paint samples, is meant to be painting distilled. It is an attempt to distinguish and give physical presence to parts of a painting that are generally only seen as an end product. Some of the Samples are universal elements used by most painters, like color, brush strokes, texture, pours, drips, drops, and splatters. I have also included more idiosyncratic components that are specific to my own work, like rocky chunks of a leftover painting completed several years ago, the shredded scraps of Cutpainting 85 (during the exhibition this painting was hung in close proximity to Paint Samples, so viewers could make the connection), or an accumulation of paint chips clumped together at the bottom of a bucket that’s been laying around my studio. The three rectangular Samples were made by layering acrylic on top of three separate paintings. Once the paint dried I removed the paintings, so the negative space and imprinted texture of the absent canvases was all that was left. The samples are arranged with meticulous care resembling both a natural history display and personal treasures laid out for a yard sale. During the opening I invited people to touch the work and rearrange the display. I imagine this work will continue to evolve as I include new ingredients from my studio practice, experiment with alternative groupings, and find ways for it to become more interactive, thereby lengthening the viewer’s experience with the work.
We are constantly replaying, reusing, and transforming found materials (in language and in aesthetics alike), we quote and re-quote ourselves as we reiterate phrases and stories distorting them slightly each time, and this reuse and referentiality is not opposed to production, but is in actuality the core of production; it is through this that individuals and things are linked together, that new outcomes are produced, and on the surface of every discrete object is the evidence of a multitude that preceded it, whose marks are present on it like a sequence of runes; these points of connection draw the world along with the work wherever it may go. (Beshty, p.133-134)

In a lot of ways my work begins with gesture. For years one of the first steps in making my paintings has been to pour layers of acrylic paint onto glass. In contrast to the action painting of Jackson Pollock, say, where you see evidence of fluid movement across his canvases, when I pour paint on glass I think of it as freezing, stiltling, and pausing that movement—like capturing it in amber. After a day or two when one layer has dried, I will pour another on top, continually burying my original gesture deeper and deeper below the surface. After several weeks these layers of paint become a thick blanket that can be peeled up and handled. Gestural marks in painting tend to be thought of as the physical manifestation of something without physicality—an emotion or the artist’s expression. I prefer to start with something more solid and plain. As opposed to the rigid brush that Pollock used to drip, when I lift my blanket of paint off its bed of glass it feels alive, perhaps a bit sleepy and saggy—but definitely alive.
There are a few artists in particular that have influenced the way I think about turning gesture into object. First is Roy Lichtenstein, who in direct defiance of the action painters, made giant cartoonish monuments depicting brush strokes. Laura Owens twists our perception of object and image by using drop shadows under thick impasto marks. She also points out the overtly sexual and masculine nature of Pollock’s drips by co-opting his signature all-over composition and filling it with adorable kittens rather than stringy splatters. Finally, Roxy Paine has segregated brush strokes from their natural environment and methodically turned them into specimens to be categorized like artifacts. I identify with the way these artists find innovation in the painterly gesture while considering its history and all the while adopting a sense of humor.

When I make my paintings, I use a variety of approaches; pouring, layering, grinding, sanding, cutting, stapling, peeling, ripping, sprinkling, sweeping, heating, gluing, carving, amassing. Out of fear of falling under the spell of painterly expressionism, I’ll try anything except putting brush to canvas. A paint brush might as well be a magician’s wand, used to create illusions. In an attempt to counter this, I use utility knives and power tools to create my marks in a gesture of removing material rather than adding. I intend for this action to be a metaphor for erasing, deconstructing, and deteriorating those painterly gestures that have come before.

There is precedence for removing and tearing as a kind of anti-gesture in the work of décollage artists François Dufrêne and Raymond Hains, among others. The word décollage is French meaning to “unstick” or “lift-off,” referring to a process that is the reverse of collage. From the 1950’s through the 1970’s, Dufrêne and Hains both used street posters as their medium, and in
their work, these cultural artifacts acted as everyday ready-mades. Opposed to what the Abstract Expressionists were doing in the United States around the same time, these artists aimed to do away with their own subjective mark as the center of their paintings. Dufrène’s series, “Dessous d’Affiches” (Bottoms of Posters), were made by rubbing the backs of posters in order to transfer imagery and material onto canvas. As the writer Alain Jouffroy describes: “…the result obtained, even when it suggests elaborate abstract paintings, does not fall within the perspectives of abstract art so much as those of a new way of perceiving the world in which the ‘I’ is no longer the romantic despot, and in which man, freed from all moralistic inhibitions, is at one with his environment” (Jouffroy, p.84). Hains further distanced himself from the “I” by simply collecting torn posters from Paris streets and randomly placing them on panels. He referred to this approach as ‘poetry composed by everyone’ in a series called “La France Déchirée” (France torn apart).²

![Figure 8. Chant de l’heure, dessous d’affiches, by François Dufrène, 1978](image)

² Jouffrey is referencing a direct quote by Raymond Hains in the essay *The Paris International Avant-Garde*
Continuing along similar lines today is Mark Bradford. His paintings are layered with posters from his hometown South Los Angeles which illustrate the predatory economic practices that target this underserved urban community. There are clear parallels between Bradford, Hains and Dufene’s found subject matter. The French artists sought to “…unveil the psychological, political, and social chaos of French society” (Jouffroy, p.84) while Bradford hopes to shed light on systemic economic inequalities that disproportionately affect African American communities in the United States. My own work may be more ambivalent, however. While I’m empathetic to these ambitions, I am far more ambivalent about art’s ability to affect real and lasting social change. An artist whose approach, I think, runs closer to my own in this respect is Liam Everett. I appreciate the extreme undoing that exists in his work. Everett’s paintings can sometimes look as if they are in danger of dissolving or disappearing altogether and I can’t help but see this as a metaphor for the existential precariousness that painting consistently finds itself in. During an interview with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Everett described his gestural approach this way: “We all have this kind of autobiographical mark. We recognize…our human stain, and this is what I want to erase.” In other words, pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.

Figure 9. *Untitled (Lharos)*, by Liam Everett, 2014
My title is meant to mirror my ongoing painting process. I borrowed the title, *Disintegrating loops of uprooted plastic* from music composer William Basinski’s albums *The Disintegration Loops*, which Wikipedia describes this way: “The music was recorded from a series of ambient music fragments played in tape loops that gradually deteriorated each time they passed the tape head.” The bulk of my work during grad school has been made up of three series of paintings, *Cutpaintings*, *Shredded Paintings*, and *Dust Paintings*. These three series are connected literally and physically. I use remnant material from one painting to form the beginning of a new one. My reused paint may degenerate slightly with each use but, more importantly, it re-animates and carries a vital history with it into its next iteration. Beginning with the *Cutpaintings*, I layer successive coats of acrylic paint onto a glass table top for several weeks. Once dry, I adhere the colorful blanket of paint to a wood surface, then methodically and laboriously cut the paint away with a utility knife. To begin the *Shredded Paintings*, I gather those cut-off fragments and randomly scatter them onto a flat canvas, covering the surface with as much material as it will hold. Once the paint is firmly glued down, I grind and sand the paintings to a smooth finish. Finally, I collect the remaining dust and studio detritus from the floor and glue it to canvas to make *Dust Paintings*.

I originally began working on the *Cutpaintings* series several years ago. At the time, I was working on thick paintings that involved pouring and layering gallons of acrylic onto them as they hung on the wall. As a result of this process, excess paint would spill all over the floor. Instead of letting it go to waste, I started to put blank panels under the dripping paintings to catch the runoff. After several weeks, the panels on the floor built up thick marbleized surfaces. Since I wasn’t controlling where and how paint dripped onto these panels, it was the first time that it occurred to me that part of my process could be left up to gravity and chance. At first, I was satisfied with these
paintings as a collection of random splatters. Eventually, though, I became interested in cutting into the paintings in order to reveal the time and process that lay frozen below their surfaces.

When I returned to the Cutpaintings during graduate school, I became more assertive about removing material compared to their earlier versions. As a result, their underlying wooden structure has become a prominent part of recent Cutpaintings. When I work on them, I’m not trying to reach a preconceived end, I’m cutting, tearing, gouging, marking, and recording the history and action of their own making. This action is at once aggressive and anxious. I don’t really think of these paintings as ever finished. Sometimes I return to them after weeks, months, or even years, continuing to uncover layers of color to see what lies deeper. Any painting made today must somehow contend with every painting that has come before it. Each new painting builds upon an
accumulated language of marks, imagery, materials, process, and conversations that already exist. In the Cutpaintings series, I want to embody this history in the frozen layers of paint. My act of cutting and removing the painted layers is a way for me to continue moving through this history without getting weighed down.

The Shredded Paintings begin with leftover paint fragments from Cutpaintings. I cut, shave and sand the Shredded Paintings using power tools. During this process, the sander may rip holes right through the canvas, showing the stretcher bars behind. When this first happened, I thought that I may have made a mistake or damaged the paintings by going too far. Eventually, though, I started to think of these damages like pulling back the curtain on my process and materials. I’m interested in showing the underlying structure and substance of my painting because it seems to serve two functions. First, seeing the frayed canvas, wooden edifice, and sliced paint reveals the ordinariness of the materials used to make my work. At the same time, looking through the holes in a canvas to see the wall beneath immediately connects a viewer to the architecture and space outside of the painting; allowing the viewer to draw personal connections between themselves, the painting, and their surroundings.

Unlike Cutpainting 85 and Shredded Painting 56, Dust Painting is made through an additive approach. This painting emphasizes its surface much more emphatically than most of my work. In many of my paintings, paint will spill over the sides, top, and bottom, giving the viewer
the impression that they aren’t just looking at a painting, but an object. With Dust Painting, however, its sides are clean and untouched, in order to reiterate its front. This painting resembles a dirt terrain where one would expect deep soil below, but it is the sanded dust from previous Shredded Paintings collected from my studio floor. I like to think of the parallels between the studio ground and the ground outside, since Dust Painting does suggest a return to earth as the once liquid paint has been dried, layered, glued, sliced, shredded, sanded, and minced back to pigment-like dust.

These three series of paintings allude to ground in different ways. When considered together, ground becomes a multi-layered metaphor that at once points to the foundation of abstract painting’s history, the levelling and chaos of rebuilding after a natural disaster (Hurricane Andrew mentioned on page 4), and at the risk of being completely obvious, finally being ground down to dust in the end. In this context, digging becomes an act of renewal, an attempt to rebuild with the accumulated piles before it all crumbles again.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

_The Rainbow Goblins_, by Ul de Rico, tells the story of seven colored creatures that hunt rainbows in order to consume their color. Aiding them in their hunt, the goblins use their crafted tool, lassoed ropes, which transform ethereal rainbow light into physical form. Each color is captured one at a time and trapped in buckets for feasting. After depleting most of the world’s rainbows, the goblins venture to the birthplace of color, the “Valley of the Rainbow,” in search of more ideal and saturated plunder. Along the way though, the flowers, trees, grass, and water learn of the goblins’ intent and plan a counterattack. When a rainbow lures the goblins into a field, the surrounding flowers (which had previously absorbed the rainbow’s color) let loose a violent deluge, drowning the goblins in a giant swirl of color.

There are numerous parallels between the Rainbow Goblins and my own working practice. Within the studio, the goblins take on different forms. Sometimes I am the goblin: I too have tools/weapons used to harness color and material in order to make my work. Sometimes the figures of art history are the monsters, and the swirling pools of paint I pour onto glass or freeze in paintings, like _Cutpainting 85_ or _Shredded Painting 56_, approximate the end of the goblins. In my work, I’m attempting to give substance to the accumulation of painting’s history and the negotiations of everyday life, giving space to these monsters. I question if any of this is reflected in the paintings at all. Then again, how can it not be?

Figure 13. Illustration, _The Rainbow Goblins_, by Ul de Rico, 1978
Sometimes I question whether a painting ever be *about* anything other than painting. With such a long history, a certain amount of cannibalism is inevitable. Does this self-referencing have diminishing returns, though? “Disintegrating loops” simultaneously refers to my ongoing process of reusing the seemingly endless leftover material from painting to painting (reflecting the endless possibilities of painting itself), as well as the swirling day to day loops that can go so fast that they spin off axis. These loops, or layers, are completely ordinary, frustrating, beautiful, and absurdly life changing. The “plastic” of my title signifies transformation of light and color (the rainbow) into tangible material, inviting a long and visceral visual touch. Above everything, it is the tangible possibilities of paint that I celebrate. I hope to show its transformational possibilities can be physical and literal, and therefore *real*. I sometimes think of the way that I cut, stab, saw, grind, sand, and tear paint as a kind of ritual bloodletting, and it just keeps lumbering back for more.³

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³ Refer to Figure 1
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VIDEO

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ARTIST AT WORK