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Antecedent:

### Diagraming a Painting Practice Through History and Process

When considering my creative impulses, as well as the intellectual and art historical preoccupations that have been formed through my studies over the past year, I like the ideas that start to percolate around my brain when I think about the various definitions for the word *antecedent*.

*Antecedent*

#### **Definition**

#### **Noun**

1. A thing that existed before or logically precedes another.
2. A person's ancestors or family and social background.

#### *Grammar*

3. An earlier word, phrase, or clause to which another word (especially following a relative pronoun) refers back.

#### *Logic*

4. The statement contained in the 'if' clause of a conditional proposition.

#### **Adjective**

5. Preceding in time or order; previous or pre-existing.

#### *Grammar*

6. Denoting or counting as an antecedent.

From this, in my mind's eye, I start to see a vast web-like and interwoven diagram, or maybe a colorful abstracted tapestry or map interspersed throughout with glimmering imperceptible threads that contain within them all of my personal history, interests, knowledge, and belief systems. I see my ancestors along my family tree and wonder if they are the progenitors of my specific creative preoccupations and abilities.

Along those lines, I have tried to think in a more linear way about my art practice in general and have come up with three areas that I feel span my process and thinking: connection;

discovery; and structure. In this way, I hope to be able to convey the thoughts on my creative, intellectual, and material impulses, as well as to draw a link to other artists and artistic schools of thought along the art historical timeline from whom I draw inspiration, make reference to in my artwork, and feel aligned with creatively and emotionally.

### **Connection**

From a purely visual standpoint, the word connection makes me think of *connecting the dots*, or of *multitudinous lines intersecting*. Intellectually, I see how it can lead from one idea to the next, or how many ideas can intersect to form a perspective. We can have multiple perspectives, and how we experience anything depends on the lens through which we are viewing it. For example, my perspective may change depending on whether I am looking at something through the lens of being a woman, mother, wife, daughter, sister, white middleclass American, artist, graphic designer et cetera, et cetera. Although, I suppose that many times I am looking at events through the lens of more than one perspective at once. Either way, perspective is gained through the absorption of social conventions, cultural codes and signals, knowledge, and life experience. I am very interested in how, depending on a person's perspective, we can view the same events and have a totally different experience or come to drastically different conclusions about the same thing. In my artwork, I try to translate these connections and my own perspectives abstractly through the use of pattern, mark making, text, collage, gesture, and color.

### **Discovery**

Discovery can be thought of along two lines. There is the *discovery* in my studio practice, where I experiment with new materials, tools, and gesture. Constantly working towards the authentic creative voice that lies within. This method of discovery is made tangible through the physical form of my paintings and other artistic output. And then there is the *discovery* that comes with

education and accrued knowledge. This type of discovery is gained in multiple ways by an artist, and I have found that this part of my practice is the aspect that requires the most persistence, as well as patience. While concrete information is gained through my academic reading and research, there is also much to be gained through observation and experiential discovery. As I go about my day-to-day life, I am constantly reminding myself to really look at the world around me. To train my artist's eye. To look up and to look down. To change my visual perspective in order to *not* miss anything. To be in the moment, and to remember to slow down and really *see*. I am also very interested in other artist's creative processes and have been trying to go see as many exhibits and artist talks as possible. Through this practice, I have learned that how I think, the way that my very brain works, is kindred to other artist's minds and ways of seeing and thinking. I didn't go to art school, and therefore have not spent a lot of time with other serious artists, so this has taken me a long time to realize. Needless to say, this has been an interesting revelation to me. And it is hard to believe it took me over half my life to truly figure this out. Now I am left with the feeling that I have a lot of time to make up for.

### **Structure**

There is a materiality to the *structure* in my creative process, which I add to many of my paintings and that consists of a layer of spackling compound into which I etch texture and pattern. I like to think of this element, usually added as the first layer to a canvas, as the skeleton or vertebrae to the underpainting. I then add the layers of paint and other mediums on top of this "skeleton" until it is completely covered. Eventually though, usually towards the end of my process, I spend considerable time looking closely at the background textures that this creates, and I then choose to bring parts of it back to the forefront of the painting. This process turns the "skeleton" into more of an "exoskeleton" or an exterior structure. Structure can also refer to underlying *cultural and*

*social structures*, those sometimes invisible, but most often times glaringly obvious, through lines that run just beneath the surface of all institutions and systems. This type of structure can condition our thinking and cultural presuppositions. This type of structure can affect how our social rules, education, innovative, legal, medical, technological and value systems function, as well as the core of our individualistic thinking. Sometimes these structures support inherent biases (like sexism and racism) that we are not even aware of. And even when we are made aware of them, they can be so ingrained to our ways of thinking and behaving that it can be hard to alter them even after having been exposed as being flawed. The author Ursula K. Le Guin made the statement that, “resistance and change often begin in art,” and I believe that it is by shining a light on these flawed and ingrained ways of seeing and thinking that an artist can make the most important cultural impact with their work. The key is finding the correct “voice” from which to project one’s message so that it will most effectively be understood.

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