



Blink

Writing about Judith is like trying to see something too close to see.

She's in my head and guts and all over my practice: a benevolent and probably unwitting arbiter that I want desperately to please, to resist and ignore and muscle away from and make proud. Serious enthusiasm about her work instigates this attempt at criticism; admiration and love require me to say that there's a reckoning at work here too, an encomium, an apology, a how'm I doin mama?. I will try to see everything clear and hard out of my own eyes but how and what I see with is partly Judith.

So I had a nervous breakdown when I was 18, and two years later I met Judith, and into the gaps left by whatever I lost swept all this incredible courage. Ten years later, I understand that what I grew into grew on top of this solid thing of her example. What exemplary courage there was was this: this artist and teacher giving herself out of love to a thing that was a thing to see and not say, the paintings a residue of gestures caught and held, gravity resisted and said yes to in an apartment that was both studio and domestic environment, with the city roaring on outside. Teapots, cats, sleds, piles of books and photographs, buckets of water, bits of rust from the street, all this accumulated history and a person not crushed but acting within it. This is a life, said the practice, this is a generous, legitimate way to mark out a life. Before I met Judith I didn't know that women like this were possible.

Analysis of work through character is a complicated procedure. For this exhibition, Judith has provided generous access to her thinking, her home and studio, and instead of separating it all out I want to tell you what drove her to art school, about Lee Godie, the stories about the bird and about that time in Iceland when they were driving, what we had for dinner. The practice of painting entails delineating a philosophical proof, the answer to which is yeah we die; to say I, and that I caused these stains and marks and isolated them from the loud world and leave them here. Anecdotal information, descriptions of archived materials in the studio help reassert the deliberate authorial I that is often lost in discussions of Judith's work. The intermittent interventions of the authorial hand indicate a freedom, a trust, a radical exemption from the direct manipulation of materials, it holds back and becomes torso, pelvis, feet, and everything a mortal active verb. So the I is actually bigger, the "natural" isn't natural which is natural enough.

The heavy emptiness of Tiepolo's skies, Morris Louis' exertion of order over clean pours, Frankenthaler's lyrical play, the rococo idylls of Fragonard (but here exploded) are obvious influences. Judith's work is fierce, interlocutory, patient, elegant, tough. During the last many years, the paintings have oscillated from super-heavy to diaphanous; oscillated not "evolved," because in Judith's practice time isn't evolutionary or forgetful, it's homogeneous-- each moment equivalent, charged with potential action and

each one new. Her practice is inquiry, not demand: it's resilient, resistant, an examination without figures, the schema all process, Kant's sense: perceptual. Its force is in the invitation that obligates gently beyond any obligation, by asking you to be there by being there.

Simone Weil says that beauty does what gravity does, out of love. The paintings in this exhibition are made with water, pigment, and latex, the gestures taking place above and around the surface. Tango, jitterbug, washing dishes: learned motions are identical, extra-lingual in the brain, but infinitely and imperceptibly variable in praxis. Unprimed cotton duck's absorptive properties, its sensitivity to each material event, works like skin and memory. Judith's paintings are high-stakes abstractions: the conditions set up to allow arbitrary happenings; liquid elements caught and released, held in the form of stains that build into images that are traces of vanished present tenses, and no erasure.

I gave Judith ten questions for the following catalog interview. Instead of sitting down to type up answers, she walked around her neighborhood talking into a tape recorder. I'm thinking of her walking fast around this crappy cement grid, viewing the gutter as transcendent, luminous, as packed with optical event and evidentiary of the relationships between things, provoked into explanation by natural and industrial detritus. This permeability to perceptual experience and its cues is the whole point: the world is where you are; things leave records, the studio is an arena where records of sensual impression are re-enacted. The outer edges of Judith's studio are jam-packed with catalysts, memorabilia, painting materials, stuff; the center is almost completely empty, the site where the action is, the dialogical give-and-take with the object. Joyce says ineluctable modality of the visible. Forget that oh-the-unceasing-death of painting stuff; there's another lineage of thing-makers, performers, where Geichman's work is most appropriately contextualized: Cezanne, Burri, Klein, Oldenburg, Kaprow, LeWitt, Brakhage, Rainer, Lozano, Benglis, Dieter Rot. We are vertical, but can choose to look down and hold to the ground, the terrain of our animal ancestors.

There's a story of a female bullfighter who killed over 750 bulls in 12 years. To end her penultimate fight, in 1950, in Franco's Spain where women were forbidden from fighting on foot, she dropped illegally from her horse, and grabbed the sword and cape from a waiting assistant. The bull charged. She raised the sword, deliberately dropped it, and caressed the huge black animal neck as it raced past. Orson Welles called it "a glorious burst of criminality"; she was immediately arrested and immediately pardoned. Hats and carnations rained down from the crowd. The bull was later killed by someone else.

I think Judith dropped her sword a long time ago. I tried to pick it up, thought maybe I could use it in writing this, slash out and correct the ache I feel at what I consider the critical neglect of her practice, because I couldn't understand why a person would be in a killing arena without a sword. I get it now. She's dancing.

- Dana DeGiulio
Chicago. April 2009

Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. So then I as a contemporary creating the composition in the beginning was groping toward a continuous present, a using everything a beginning again and again and then everything being alike then everything very simply everything was naturally simply different and so I as a contemporary was creating everything being alike was creating everything naturally being naturally simply different everything being alike.

-- Gertrude Stein, from *Composition As Explanation*



Conchita Cintron Verill. circa 1950.