Sum of two and three,
One more than four

Sherry Czekus
Lynette de Montreuil
Mike Pszczonak
Niloufar Salimi
Matthew Tarini

Contents

Introduction (shouting together)

The following text is a response to words or phrases provided by the artists, as well as to the exhibited artworks. Divergent moments of overlapping concerns and influence purposefully misdirect identification of and blur boundaries between artists and artworks.

Chasing and waving at space

How do figures wave at space? How does space chase bodies? I'm thinking of Roberta Smith talking about Willem de Kooning's figures: "skittish," "big, frowsy", which "invariably twist and often seem to shout, whether they are doing the Charleston or a high kick…"[1] De Kooning's 'Woman, I' (my brain inevitably lands there) isn't just about this visible mouthy shout. There is a lot of bodily noise. The shout, the dancing kick, the skittish, nervous twists and turns. They happen as parts of a whole, as words in a sentence about shouting. I'm thinking about de Kooning's TV drawings too – the gnarled, coiled, frayed lines of graphite rendered without looking up, blind drawings of starlets dancing or heads talking. These are not models of accuracy. Drawn or painted, these figures are of a figurative or figural reality in between artwork and external phenomenon. They also say something about how the eye chases what it sees. Cecily Brown, weighing in on de Kooning, says looking at his work is like looking at a crowd of people – the eye hardly registers and keeps moving and chasing. I think this says something about how we comprehend the weirdness of figures waving at space or space chasing bodies. We're not static machines, stolid and silent, accurately recording what we see and feel. We and space are shouting together, trying to chase each other, skittish and bellowing.

Close to the bone

Paper planes and forensic stains. An insect-like swarm of bullets through the slats of a window's blinds. But the swarm is of knife-like slips of paper, so they split, perforate, and disintegrate easily when met with resistance. Others get through, pasting and plastering themselves to walls, floors, people. Their flight is apocalyptic, but they fail to cut, slice, or stab. They're a can of exploding paper snakes. They peel off the skin, transient. They're skeletal and leave a mess, a map of their presence quickly swept up. They happened – that is the *why* attributed to their existence. Remnants of nature recorded, used, *processed*, have a similar forensic quality. The living forms attached to these bits and pieces can be theorized into being based on the behavior of evidence, which in time are predicted, anticipated. Stains have patterns. Too much evidence can be ground down or obliterated to form an essence, or a vessel in which vital information is more easily read. But in the case of these new forms made of essence: what happens when remnants are actively made part of the present? *They happened* becomes *they're happening.* Experience is passed on.

Translation, straight-up

Jam + goblin. A red that is not just "red", neutral, nor a green that has a relationship to "green" and so can simply stand in for green. There is a particular slew of associations here. Choices were made and *are* made. The pasty, light-cancelling quality of 1960s food advertising, the blinding blood-reds of Technicolor film, or the watery day-glow of green-screen editing and cheap villainous filters. "A red," says Suzan Frecon, "in my mind, as an abstract visual power, can propel the reason for doing a painting."[2] Colour is enough to provoke and compel, then continues to bleed over into the present. Colour performs and is performing in excess of personal plans or systems of order and

intent. The materiality of colour has a life of its own. To mean what one says about colour is to say it, straight-up. But what is straight-up colour? To be straight-up about colour might mean to be straight-up about where you're coming from, what your position is, and maybe even what you avoid saying about colour. All this talk about colour, but what about form and translation? Maybe colour is a loudmouth, holding forth and pontificating at length, drowning out other ideas, other plans and motivations. The best course of action may be to combine, to collaborate, to understand colour in relation to its shifting manifestations. Or in this case, what is the result of jam + goblin?

Holding and trapping time

A sighting of something in between being and not-being, without certainty of its distance from us, or even of its intended path; is it coming or going? This is about the multiple layers of voluntary and involuntary anticipation, or dread as wanting and not wanting. In the iconic early days of video game logic, anticipating the path of a digital specter on screen fueled anxiety and a kind of wonderful irritation. Phantom shapes making roundabout paths or straight shots: both are equally ominous and, in the end, rigged. The most heightened moment lies in direct contact. Wet leaves blown by weather. Discarded matter in zones of refuge. Stuck to buildings, windows, skin, the moment of touch breaches a comfortable distance. This happens when trying to hold and trap what is materially, physically determined to find something to cling to. Holding and trapping time could be about resisting or delaying these paths of contact. Attempting to visualize the moment of touch, with all its cold and squashy reality, could lead to absorption, melting, mutation. All roads and signs lead to this sticky finish line. Where matter and flesh make a third thing, a symbiosis.

Erosion and anywhere-ness

Cut and paste, insert your name here, but also generalize to the point of alarming malleability. This is a J.G. Ballard parable on parable. Soften all edges, knead and blend into a fine mist of consistency, where sharp corners and angles seem as "nothing more than a blunted wedge of pink-grey dough…split by apertures…like the vents of some curious bellows."[3] Anywhere-ness as a critique can easily become anywhere-ness fetishized. The eye searches wildly for an anchor or culprit. Or attitude. Something has been drained out of the picture. And as it happens, there is an air-tightening fixture, a valve or device for the sealing and closing of all cracks. Made central, this eyesore teaches us how to segment and compartmentalize nature, objects, buildings, space. Imagined, idealized space is post-apocalyptic. A pleasant house, a street, a highway…anywhere-ness is now part of collective zombie contagion lore. The look of timelessness seals over the signals of functionality. Signs of civilization are covered in soft felt, fossilized. A husk or plastic theme park village. This is crowd-pleasing plot-development through paths tunneled through oversized mythical shapes. Smooth or striated. With or without pulp. *KN*

1. Roberta Smith, *Willem de Kooning: The Figure: Movement and Gesture* (New York Times, 17 June 2011), 27.
2. Josef Helfenstein, "Interview with Suzan Frecon July 5, 2007", *Form, color, illumination: Suzan Frecon painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 93.
3. Ballard, J.G., "The Overloaded Man", *The Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 253.

Sherry Czekus revels in the chaotic. In bustling markets and crowded galleries, she is in her element. Posing as a tourist, Czekus snaps pictures of her peers moving this way and that. For her, these strangers' gestures say more about their identity than their facial features and more still about the world in which they reside. In painting them, she maintains a sense of anonymity for them, yet simultaneously reveals something deeper about their existence.

Czekus' paintings capture time in a way that no photography or video can. While she is interested in the increasingly digital world and how it affects the way we think and interact, it is the sense of expanded time at which she grasps. Czekus realizes a fictional time and place where coexistence is casually, yet expertly, displayed by layering figures from one moment over figures from another. The space is equally fictional as it changes slightly from one minute to the next as these bodies move through it, alter it by having been there, and disappear again. Czekus engages in a constant battle of push and pull as she negotiates these spaces and follows them along a kind of pathway through time. Each layer acts as another step forward. Yet, as it combines several moments, the painting remains reminiscent of the past. The linear gestures throughout the work suggest an architectural space yet at once point to this sense of movement, rendering them less static.

As neither landscape nor portraiture, these works emulate the kind of alternate reality where our true one can be further understood. Neither analog nor digital, even the materiality of the paintings lends itself to the subject being explored. Czekus works in a 3:4 aspect ratio, hinting at the influence of technology on these figures, their environment, and their culture. Her choice to work in oils also perpetuates the notion of a consistently fluctuating image. Even the act of putting brush to canvas, blending and manipulating the paint on its surface, and sometimes removing sections, mimic the ghostly presence of these figures in our everyday spaces.

Czekus' work is about the social environment and its unbreakable link to time. Studying our gestures, she is able to use the body language of her figures in conjunction with space to produce a work of art with clairvoyance. Her paintings, though physically static, embrace the passing of time as well as the essence of those portrayed within them, allowing the viewer access to much more than what any one element can offer alone. *KM*

"I was looking at different ways to show time, a moment, a span of time on the canvas. I read not so much the lines in these–oddly enough the lines I can almost block out of the work. But I'm reading the painting and the background as a deeper space. This is very fast painting, and there's not a lot of time to think about it. I could have been chasing more the perspective line but I started to chase the space. It kind of happened just out of the process and it made me think about what I was really chasing: I realized I was more interested in those tonal qualities all around where those lines were. I like to hinge between representation and abstraction. That's my goal: to kind of straddle those lines without going too much one way or the other way. I want it to look like I'm straddling because I really do love abstraction and those abstract spaces between representation. I think that's a rich area in any piece of art, when I find it. It's something that just sometimes happens in your work, and I think the thing is to recognize it and leave it alone."

Ascending, 2014
ink on mylar
14" x 20"

Momentum, 2014
oil on canvas
40" x 48"

Collective, 2014
oil on canvas
30″ x 30″

"My interest in the whole process is in creating a thing and then allowing it to deteriorate, with all of the materials being completely organic so that they can degrade back into the ground. I like this full-circle aspect of my work. I was reading Jane Bennett's* Vibrant Matter*, and I like what she says about 'the capacity of things to not only impede or block the will and design of humans, but also to act as quasi-agents.' I did a piece at the end of last semester that was onionskin paper. It had a high shrinkage rate, and that gave it a sort of autonomy or voice, an action enforced within the creation of its final form. I'm hoping to have more of that; more of a truer collaboration where I'm putting things out and allowing myself to play a role and then for there to be a response, whether it be through the elements of weather or through organisms acting on it. I'm going back to a lot of those homesteader values where every single material can be reused and recycled. I'm sometimes concerned that I romanticize that life, but those values are at the heart of my work. I've had experiences here with fellow colleagues or people who have visited my studio, who have asked questions that are quite poignant and that I haven't come to an answer. But this really pushes me to test the boundaries, to go to the edge. Somebody told me to work close to the bone, I liked that."

The work of **Lynette de Montreuil** takes what is, in many respects, a bio-regional approach to art making. Her methodology is largely process oriented, demanding a coherent set of limitations balanced with an openness to the unpredictable. A consistent parameter has been her use of local vegetation to serve as her material. Seeds, petals, sticks and other plant matter have played a primary role in determining the shape her work takes. She selects these materials while walking or grows varieties indigenous to the area to harvest. Since such a limit is rather broad given the breadth of vegetative life that occurs around her, further qualifications are necessary. Part of this qualifying process means cutting things down to a procedure, the product of which highlights the ambiguous distinction between artifice and the organic.

De Montreuil's work strips material forms culled from vegetation to something more raw. Sometimes she pounds her plants with rocks and mashes them, then meshing them with paper. Under the pressure of water and heat, matter imprints itself over a short period of time in a kind of accelerated fossilization process. Plants leave their outlines and smears of colour on her paper as they peel away and molder. Or the material can be flattened and stretched out into a porous surface. Sometimes she casts this as a form, transforming these surfaces into shells for the organic. This is a delicate balancing act, simultaneously setting a fugacious shape and fusing it to an equally friable material bound to decomposition.

Transience is an inherent part of each of her works. This is dramatically played out as the forms harden and wither. These procedures create a skin quality, scarred by contact and marked by the passage of life. But it is a skin without much of a body. There is little sense of bone but a strong presence of light. Her work tends to verge on transparency, suspending the fragments she has wrought from material in a loose architectonic plate. Running opaque to gauzy, the frayed remains of the process are suspended to exhibit what goes into their making. This is a second stripping away, one that makes its own production its subject and renders it an object that possesses no singular image and effaces itself. *MP*

Crown, 2013
natural dye on paper
48" x 48"

Onion skin, 2014
onion skin paper
dimensions variable

Untitled, 2014
natural dye and handmade paper
12″ x 23″ x 17″

"I'm concerned about straight translation: this light to this drawing to this sculpture to these paintings. I don't want it to feel too linear and I'm trying to find ways to make that translation confused. If I could make a hundred different works derived from a single drawing it distances viewers from the things I'm trying to distance myself from. It gets people out of a laptop and cell-phone mindset, questioning what they're looking at and slowing down vision. But you still want it to be grounded so people know what it is I'd like them to break away from. Maybe if people just come to it and enjoy something, the material, it's enough: to enjoy the way I dragged a brush across a surface in that one spot, to enjoy something that has some sort of tangible presence as opposed to all these artificial digital spaces. They might say, 'I just don't get that green mark there. It's so counter-intuitive.' Personally that's what gives me chills when I look at paintings, when I see how people construct these things. It's a document of their choices and their vision, and it's pretty remarkable."

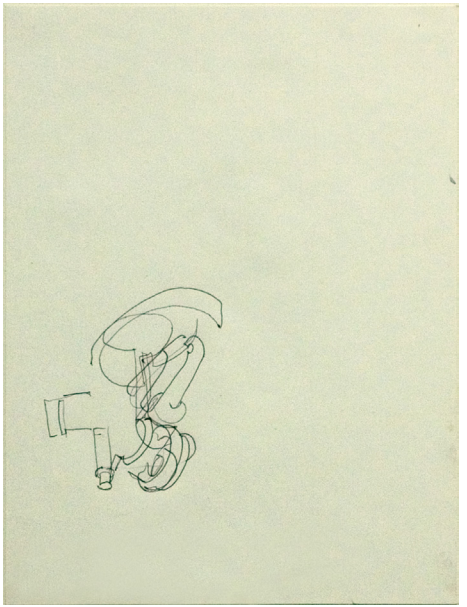
Mike Pszczonak insists that his primary content is light. The role of light as a mediator of things has been a major recurrent feature in his work. Light, as Marshall McLuhan used to note, is not so much content as pure information. In exploring light as both subject and mediator of experience, Pszczonak draws on our familiar contact with light from artificial sources like fixtures, phones, and computers. These experiences often occur simultaneously and perhaps go unnoticed in quotidian life, impressing themselves upon us until their visceral qualities become invisible. One of his favourite examples is the cell phone, an instrument that clearly demands the interaction of touch and light.

In trying to give light a body, he has to give it a weight. His consideration of the relationships between natural and artificial light, additive and subtractive colour all function as ways to visualize the gradations of light's weight. Pszczonak draws our attention to these relationships in a fashion so deliberately knotted that it needs to be actively worked out. For him, the process of translating the simultaneity of the tactile and the visual is paramount. By employing his sense of sight and creative faculties, he attempts to render the intangible in tangible physical form.

Pszczonak observes light and translates this non-conscious experience into a blind contour drawing. This procedure highlights the variance between perception and a disciplined reflex system whose capacity to be reflexive has been subordinated to a sense with severely reduced tactile powers. Doubling up, he translates this into a sculpture. These tactile objects can then be recast by being broken up and re-articulated in the varying weights of colour, each of which stand as a gradation of light. The final painting operates as a mediation of these two translations of the rendering process. By this, Pszczonak sets up a complex means for intuitive calculation out of which he could re-create the fundamental experience of light.

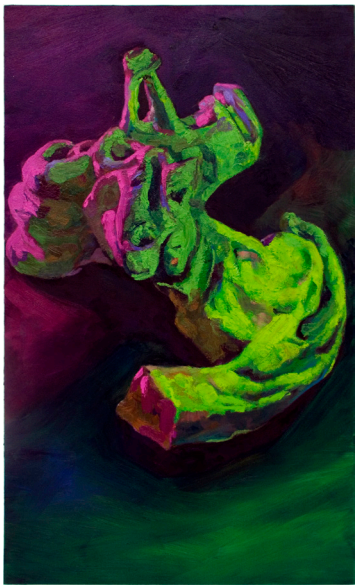
In playing with colour and form, Pszczonak combines multiple facets of visual experience and translates them onto the two-dimensional surface of the canvas to showcase how light can be discerned—its mediation of sight, its taking of form, its ever shifting influence on our perceptions. So, with their deliberate confusion of sensory experiences and their reduction of visual content to a kind of troll, Pszczonak's paintings functionally become about the act of misapprehension, about the capacity to miscommunicate facts about the world by tactile means. *MP & KM*

Galaxy, 2014
oil on canvas
16″ x 20″



Curve 9380, 2014
ballpoint on paper
12″ x 9.75″

ZTE Orbit, 2014
clay
10″ x 8″ x 5.5″



Apple, 2014
oil on canvas
54″ x 32″

Raspberry Pi, 2014
oil on canvas
54″ x 32″

Blackberry, 2014
oil on canvas
54″ x 32″

Memory and the act of remembrance are what drive artist **Niloufar Salimi** to create work. Her drawings—often ink on paper—echo her uninhibited desire to explore the past. Salimi focuses on gestures and mark making. Her work is deliberately nonrepresentational, thus eliciting in the viewer a sense of freedom to draw on personal experience. For Salimi, the act of remembrance is both universal, a chemical reaction in the brain, and an utterly personal, individual experience. Further, each recollection of a singular memory is different and influenced by more recent events, thoughts, and emotions. Like its subject, the artwork must be intuitive.

Salimi's approach to art-making is fluid and natural. Her material is likewise; she works in a variety of inks (including India and walnut ink) on a wide selection of paper. In order to create her marks, she must tap in to a highly emotional aspect of the human experience and translate that thought to paper, through her memory, her body, and her brush. The results are an intricate display of lines, oft times resembling hair or other organic threads. While not necessarily the intention, the reading connects well with the artist's exploration of time and history. As hair grows and evolves, so do the memories and thought processes that Salimi draws from. Embracing this notion, she has even worked with a variety of brush types in order to explore the kinds of marks her gestures may leave on the surface of the paper as well as on her viewers.

While the idea of working with memory may be romantic, Salimi takes up a more realistic approach. She includes every aspect of memory: the good and the bad. Since her work is abstract, the less pleasant elements of remembrance come into play in a subtle way. Salimi employs a range of quietly violent methods, including cutting, collage, and needlework. This technique complements her unimposing yet powerful aesthetic. It does not scream of pain but whispers, quietly inviting its audience into a more intimate space.

The exhibition of this work is equally important as the subject for Salimi. Only the perfect offering of the piece can do its subtly justice. It is not enough for the work to be beautiful. It must engage the viewer and draw him or her into its presence. There, it can be fully experienced as a unique encounter as well as something more universal.

Salimi's elegant investigations seek to express the personal, yet, succeed in laying bare our similarities. *KM*

"Ink reacts very differently in different situations, and when it dries it changes again. It has a very long life. Although these are unusual marks, they're not accidental. I want to emphasize the time and the preciousness of them. The concept of time is always in my head, how time is more powerful than anything else in our lives. Like gravity, we're so used to it that we don't question it because we don't know if there is any alternative or way of being in the world. We experience it in different ways, but we are the same animal that reacts to situations in similar ways. In life instinctively we calm ourselves when we're in danger or panicked. Maybe this is the way that I was raised, that you learn life is not beautiful but you make it beautiful because you realize, 'I decide to go on, so I better make the best of it.' If you get disoriented you get lost, in your routine or in the balance in your life. But that's a chance for you to find a new balance, to reorient. I think about reorientation as making another layer to life, to your book. And you have to be brave to let it happen."

digital video still

ink on draft and rice paper
54″ x 27″

ink on paper
5.5″ x 4.5″

ink on paper
5.5″ x 4.5″

ink on paper
5″ x 4.5″

"Making a painting quite detailed is just the way I like the image to end up, with enough visual interest to draw people in. In some ways I would like them to know that I took a long time to make these paintings. I would like the viewer to think, 'this person, this artist, spent a good chunk of their life painting the suburbs. Why would they do that? Why would they go about painting a whole bunch of houses that are so similar, very close together, with a whole bunch of cars packed in between?"

Matthew Tarini has been honing his technique as an oil painter for years. Although much of his practice has involved working from photos, he has begun to integrate plein air sketches into his studio work since moving to London. The latter is more spontaneous, but also more stressful. The result is work that is less composed and looser in its application of paint. This has also led to the size of the work shrinking to meet the conditions of its production, the fluctuations of weather and light. Tarini has sought to capture the sights of what is in close to where he lives. Running through his work has been a consistent sense of evocation.

They are paintings that aim toward an evocation of silence, halting on the way. They capture a kind of hushed rumbling. As images, they suggest a broadness of effect, low on the impressions made by specific details. They tend to be empty of substantial shadows. A shadow insists on the presence of its object, but his objects are inevitably muted. This persists in his landscapes and his interiors. Rather than sculpting his objects out of solid volumes, his brushwork diffuses everything. Greying rooms and opaque skies break down solidity and leave space recorded as its tactile echo.

His affection for the light of winter is modulated by the exaggeration of rimy forms; rimy as the colour reflected on ice in the morning or the frost thawing on mud in spring. Northern light is pushed to create an illumination that does not glow. Rather than offering the solidity of objects, his images are filled up with the soft receding thrum of what is scarcely recollected. They assume forms rather than possess them. There is a passiveness in this that suggests the curious distance of a spectator who is never sure they were really there. There is an over-riding haziness that allows them to suggest specificity without rendering it. The retained image is almost inevitably hushed, often thanks to a diffused depth. Lines tend to the lightweight. His urban images in particular are determined by a suggestion of found, rather than rigid, geometry. This gives them a sense of being tangential, stumbled on, almost nondescript. It also makes them seem more organic and the buildings gain a greater sense of ephemerality. *MP*

"I also like that idea of anywhere-ness. These paintings could be a variety of places. I guess my hope is to have people look at these paintings and picture themselves in the space, and what that might feel like, and to keep the compositions as objective as possible, and to not force anything on them."

High Park Station, 2013
oil on linen
32″ x 48″

Freeway, 2014
oil on linen
14″ x 20″

Apartment Building, 2014
oil on linen
14" x 24"

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