Portraits

Wesley Terpstra

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/art_design_theses

Recommended Citation
doi: https://doi.org/10.57709/7030626

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art and Design Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
ABSTRACT

The intent of this thesis is to draw particular focus to my fascination with seemingly unimportant, mostly flat paper surfaces. In the tradition of 17th century trompe l'oeil Letter Rack paintings, I create portraits of my experiences engaging with the subject matter of flattened cardboard boxes, large folded pieces of paper, and small found paper scraps of various, and often indistinct, purposes. These paintings are executed and arranged to draw attention to the inherent abstraction and the hints of the sublime, which I perceive through a Color Field approach to viewing. By producing oil paintings and watercolors that employ methods of illusion, I seek to draw the viewer into experiencing the depiction in a more engaged manner.

INDEX WORDS: Color-field, Trompe l'oeil, Cardboard, Sublime, Oil painting, Representational
PORTRAITS

by

WESLEY TERPSTRA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2015
PORTRAITS

by

WESLEY TERPSTRA

Committee Chair: Mr. Craig Drennen
Committee: Dr. Susan Richmond
Ms. Jess Jones

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2015
Dedication

To my wife, Ashley
Acknowledgments

I give sincere thanks to Craig Drennen, Susan Richmond, Jess Jones, Craig Dongoski, Joe Peragine, Matthew Sugarman, Pam Longobardi, Tim Flowers, Tony Mangle, John Decker and Michael White for the many great conversations that helped fuel this work.
**Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. vi

List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... vii

1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2 Earlier Work .......................................................................................................................... 6

3 The Personal Experience of Viewing ............................................................ 9

4 Painting as Portrait of Experience ................................................................................... 16

5 Process ................................................................................................................................. 24

6 Curation ............................................................................................................................... 25

7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 35

Bibliography ........................................................................................................................... 37
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Rothko, Mark, *Untitled*................................................................................. 4
Figure 1.2 Malevich, Kazimir. *Black Cross* ................................................................. 4
Figure 1.3 Mondrian, Piet. *Composition No. 1: Lozenge with Four Lines*.................... 5
Figure 1.4 Kelly, Ellsworth. *Black Panel II*...................................................................... 5
Figure 2.1 Terpstra, Wesley, *Kiss*.................................................................................... 7
Figure 2.2 Terpstra, Wesley, *Interrupted Monochrome: Tied*........................................ 8
Figure 2.3 Terpstra, Wesley, *Early Evening*................................................................. 8
Figure 3.1 Turner, Joseph Mallord William. *Fire Aboard Ship (Fire at Sea)*................. 12
Figure 3.2 Cole, Thomas. *Landscape with Tree Trunks*.................................................. 13
Figure 3.3 Kirkeby, Per. *Walden I*.................................................................................. 14
Figure 3.4 Kelly, Ellsworth. *Blue on White*.................................................................... 15
Figure 4.1 Van Hoogstraten, Samuel. *Letter Board*....................................................... 19
Figure 4.2 Gijsbrechts, Cornelius Norbertus. *Trompe L'oeil: Letter Rack*................. 20
Figure 4.3 Peto, John F. *Old Souvenirs*.......................................................................... 21
Figure 4.4 Harnett, William Michael. *Mr. Huling's Rack Picture*................................. 22
Figure 4.5 Esterly, David. *Quodlibet #1*....................................................................... 23
Figure 6.1 *Portraits*, Installation view 1........................................................................... 27
Figure 6.2 *Portraits*, Installation view 2.......................................................................... 27
Figure 6.3 *Portraits*, Installation view 3.......................................................................... 28
Figure 6.4 *Portraits*, Installation view 4.......................................................................... 28
Figure 6.5 *Black Paper 1*............................................................................................... 29
Figure 6.6 *Black Paper 2*............................................................................................... 29
Figure 6.7 Black Paper 3 ........................................................................................................ 30
Figure 6.8 Cardboard 1 ........................................................................................................ 30
Figure 6.9 Cardboard 2 ........................................................................................................ 30
Figure 6.10 Collected Series, Installation view 1 ................................................................. 31
Figure 6.11 Collected Series, Installation view 2 ................................................................. 31
Figure 6.12 Collected Series (Quarters) .............................................................................. 32
Figure 6.13 Collected Series (Name) .................................................................................. 32
Figure 6.14 Collected Series (Lips 2) .................................................................................. 33
Figure 6.15 Collected Series (Notepad) .............................................................................. 33
Figure 6.16 Collected Series (Receipt 2) ............................................................................. 34
Figure 6.17 Collected Series (Thank You) ......................................................................... 34
1 Introduction

The most pleasurable thing in the world, for me, is to see something, and then translate how I see it.

Ellsworth Kelly

This body of work acts as portraits of my experience viewing the depicted subject matter. Paintings of recognizable subject are executed and arranged in such a way as to draw attention to the inherent abstraction that I find occurs during the viewing. In the tradition of the 17th century trompe l’oeil Letter Rack paintings, I am creating portraits of my experience engaging with subject matter and the hints of the sublime I perceive through a Color Field approach to viewing my surroundings. It is important for me to offer multiple points of entry into the work and to allow for a variety of experiences for the viewer. In painting these materials, which brought me to specific moments of inspiration, I am providing a catalyst for the viewer to have their own experience. Finding myself immersed in a diminished recognition of their surfaces and tangled in the potential interpretations, these objects slowly drift from their specific state into a more general existence separated from use or intent. This approach is making use of depicting physical material to point to non-physical experiences.

The distinction between representational and non-representational art is continuing to be recognized as generally irrelevant and, at most, secondary in discussing the intentions and achievements of a work. In the past, the relaxing of expected boundaries of perception and interpretation inspired a more passionate investigation of seeing and experiencing. Mark Rothko, in his notes, said, “I do not believe that there was ever a question of being abstract or

---

1 Grynsztejn and Myers, Clear-Cut: The Art of Ellsworth Kelly, 9
2 “Once again a basic principle asserts itself: “realism” in art is a form of pure abstraction; and those who try to warm it with the color of the human anecdote simply do not understand.” Alfred Frankensein, After the Hunt, p128
representational. It is really a matter of ending this silence and solitude, of breathing and stretching one’s arms again”³ (Fig. 1.1). I prefer to think of abstraction as a spectrum stretching from specific reference to non-specific reference or ambiguous application of meaning. This, of course, is not a rigidly linear progression but, rather, a way to recognize the fluidity of significance and the multiple interpretations of any signifier. People usually recognize objects, sounds, or actions as distinct things. This is how we navigate and organize our world. We rely upon common understanding of specific experiences to communicate and understand our relationship with other people, our environment and ourselves. Though there are generally large overlaps of understood meaning, there will always remain the possibility of peripheral references and individual interpretations. As these potential meanings increase, the sense of poetry grows within a work. A measure of distance from specificity can offer a greater sense of compelling relation.

The greater distinction in the art viewing experience, that I consider more important than differentiating between a representational or non-representational subject, is between the artist and the viewer. The work is their conversation and the totality of their relationship at the moment. Where is their common ground and what are their means of communicating?⁴ For these works, I look to establish the shared perspective of sight through recognizable subject matter.

The perception of space, even illusory, is the hinge between depiction and perception in this work. The recognition of space was of primary importance to the Abstract Expressionists and Color Field painters. As they continued the path of Malevich and Mondrian, the artist’s role became increasingly one of creating a sense of space (Fig. 1.2, 1.3). The capability we have to perceive an illusion of space is one that I find happens naturally and often. It is this back-and-

³ Rothko, Mark, “The Romantics Were Prompted” (1947), In Declaring Space, 25
⁴ A relevant and important lecture on the relationship between artist and viewer is “The Creative Act” by Marcel Duchamp.
forth of deepening space and re-assertion of a physical surface that produces the sense of awe in my viewing of the world. Rather than place a divide between abstraction and representation, the focus is on the common experience of simultaneously perceiving space and surface regardless of subject or depiction. I find that this produces an experience of ambiguous referents, gesturing toward space, place, mood, history, and communication but allowing those gestures to fall short of connection. A cloud of potential specificity produces an interaction with something more than the single subject.

I look on the development of this body of work as being less a progression from previous work and more an expansion of my investigating the spectrum of abstraction and how this relates to my personal interactions with subject, viewing, and interpretation. To paint something is an action that, despite its history and countless associations, seems to require justification. Paint is a laborious and time-consuming method of producing an image. It is a remarkably flexible medium that imbues its depictions with a sense of timelessness and importance. By painting something, it is being deemed worthy of time and consideration. If the effort of this work is to record the emotional significance of my viewing experiences, painting is a very effective communicator of the heightened appreciation I intend to give the subject.

In my view, the strongest dichotomy within a compelling work is the manipulation of the tension between specificity and ambiguity. An example would be Diane Upright's assessment of the photographs of Ellsworth Kelly and how they, “... reveal his ability to objectify the insubstantial, to transform the shapes and spaces and shadows into compelling forms without sacrificing their spatial ambiguities”5 (Fig. 1.4). If viewing work can be summarized as keeping the eye and the mind moving, when this tension is best applied, there is a rhythm developed in

5 Upright, The Measure of Mystery, 29
viewing. Drawing the eye to the surface and releasing it back into the field and holding the mind on a particular thought before allowing it to drift in association.

Figure 1.1 Rothko, Mark, *Untitled*  
1967. Acrylic on paper, mounted on panel, 24in. x 18in. Kate Rothko Prizel Collection.

Figure 1.2 Malevich, Kazimir. *Black Cross*  
1923. Oil on canvas, 106cm. x 106.5cm. State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.
Figure 1.3 Mondrian, Piet. *Composition No. 1: Lozenge with Four Lines.*
1930. Oil on canvas, 75.2cm. x 75.2cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Figure 1.4 Kelly, Ellsworth. *Black Panel II.*
1985. Oil on canvas, 255.3cm x 317.5cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
2 Earlier Work

In summarizing the various attempts and successes that contributed to this body of work, there can be seen multiple approaches to the same desired communication. I have chosen three examples from different groups of paintings in order to demonstrate this. *Kiss* (2008), *Interrupted Monochrome: Tied* (2013), *Early Evening* (2014).

In this first example, *Kiss* (Fig 2.1), the interest came from the already obscured imagery of the found material. There remained recognizable space and subject within the photograph; yet, it was interrupted by the torn surface. The literal image was partially removed and, therefore, the illusion of space was also stopped short. This simultaneous moving in and forcing out demonstrated that dynamic relationship between surface and depth in both material and subject.

Later, with *Interrupted Monochrome: Tied* (Fig 2.2), there is a more specific art historical reference to the non-representational monochromes of the middle 20th century in the painterly and mildly gestural field of color comprising the majority of the surface. The invitation to view in the expected manner of immersing your gaze within the color and sensing the void is, almost playfully, prevented with the placement of a *trompe l’oeil* bow of twine that appears to be tied across the surface of the painting. The more painterly appearance of the field is first reinforced as a surface before the twine reveals itself to also be paint.

Lastly, the reliance upon observation is allowed to defer to material process with *Early Evening* (Fig 2.3). The subject of light shining through a window and onto a wall is apparent, even as it partially dissolves into the texture of the surface glazes. The more ambiguous sense of surface and depth pulled my interest back and forth between the flat subject of cast light signifying more than is depicted and the process of the painting, allowing it to drift and change in an effort to evoke the emotion I had experienced.
The interests in my work have never been about a defined communication or a simple trick. As excited as I am by the recognition of basic tendencies of viewing or our complete human reliance upon certain senses of perception, I see those as being means to find the common ground. In all of the projects I have completed, there is the common thread of a personal fascination or an ineffable experience and how it connects to humble means of perceiving and communicating.

Figure 2.1 Terpstra, Wesley, *Kiss*
2008. Acrylic on canvas, 24in x 40in.
Figure 2.2 Terpstra, Wesley, *Interrupted Monochrome: Tied*
2013. Oil on panel, 11in. x 14in.

Figure 2.3 Terpstra, Wesley, *Early Evening*
2014. Oil on canvas, 18in. x 26in.
3 The Personal Experience of Viewing

In traditional attempts to depict the sublime, as pursued by the Romantics of the 19th century, such as J.M.W Turner (Fig. 3.1) and Thomas Cole (Fig. 3.2), the subject matter was typically of the fearful power of nature over man. Storms, waterfalls, and mountains were all demonstrative of the fear and awe humans felt in their experience of helplessness against nature. Later pursuits of the sublime, by the Abstract Expressionists and Color Field painters of the mid 20th century, drew away from the depiction of nature or events and drew attention to the vast unknown of existence. Life, as we experience it, is both awe-inspiring and frightening. This sense of pursuing small meaningful actions while surrounded by the immense unknown and the forgotten constants is my understanding of the sublime. This is what I glimpse, often, as I consider life. Quiet contemplation of a great variety of subjects can draw me to this place of fear and awe where I am moved beyond words and feel both simultaneously connected and disconnected with the point of contemplation and my environment.

For this reason, I am particularly attracted the works of the Color Field painters. Their conversations about distilling the importance of a shape or color to a commanding essence resonate with my viewing experiences. However, I find the same inspiration of being drawn into a field of experience in a great variety of paintings. What are my human tendencies of viewing? How do I perceive depth and form? These tendencies can convince me into believing I am viewing something else. Other times, I know exactly what I am seeing but those tendencies give an impression of something more. This is what, so often, contributes to a perception of broader significance.

For the subject matter of this group of works, I chose primarily flat surfaces with little variation of color. They are recognizable and fairly common. By making a more direct reference to the formal characteristics of monochrome or Color Field painters, I imply an association. The expectation is laid that there is more to be experienced than simple recognition and categorization. I intend for the subject matter to be nudged into the conversation of Color Field painting as well as having that language pulled out of its arena and applied to a much larger world. Carrying around the ideas of Color Field painting as a method of viewing is a summary of my personal experience with our shared environment. Our tendency of prioritizing types of viewing stands in the way of this experience. Being able to recognize commonalities and differences across methods of depiction or perception produces a level footing for interpretation and experience. Per Kirkeby writes, “If you place yourself at the centre of a sphere and locate all your points of reference on the outer shell, you avoid hierarchical order; it is the same distance between the central figure to any of the points on the shell. You thus avoid the adoption of a 'higher' point of view that precludes 'lower' but perhaps more 'vital' ones” (Fig. 3.3).

In an effort to achieve “purity,” artists have championed the avoidance of representation, form, content, etc. Reduction has been employed by countless artists throughout history in an effort to clarify or strengthen an approach. In my mind, these are noble pursuits that, at times, lead to incorrect interpretations. For example, as Madeleine Grynsztejn writes, “Kelly's reductivist methodology is not to be mistaken for a universalizing or generalizing exercise. On the contrary, the result is always specific, for out of a pared-down strategy emerges a particular thing, even a particular feeling. Kelly's works are less the distilled representations of an object's formal outlines than they are the physical embodiment of the sensation—often elation—initially

7 Kirkeby, *Per Kirkeby–The Writer*, 141
experienced by the artist at the sight of the object. He takes this sensation through its paces until it assumes emphatic physical form as color and shape⁸ (Fig. 3.4). The reduction, whether through the process of representation or the mediation of viewing, is not intended to confuse something with nothing (or everything). It is the affirming of something specific and all that it can convey. There is no possible removal of form in a material world. Our perceptual tendencies apply a sense of form and depth to the most flat, colorless square. It becomes a window into a dark room. There is nothing that is not, or will not quickly be made into, a signifier. Self-reference is the first step of the signifying of a subject. The experience of “reduced” paintings is sincere and powerful, but I don't feel that this is a result of an absence of content. They are entirely content. In my opinion, their intended effect is most powerfully attained in gently pointing in the direction of specific interpretation. By engaging my mind in possible applications, the drift beyond is more noticeably experienced.

This experience is not something that can be directly shared and would, quite possibly, be diminished by exhaustive description. At most, the work functions as a catalyst of a new experience. The paintings in this body of work depict the idea of a significant viewing of the subject rather than the significance itself. They point to the existence of meaning without stating what that meaning might be. The works, therefore, become portraits of individual experiences. They are there, portraying the information of the experience while remaining largely unknown. Their depiction implies their significance without answering the question of how it was deserved or attained.

Figure 3.1 Turner, Joseph Mallord William. *Fire Aboard Ship (Fire at Sea)* 1835. Oil on canvas, 171.5cm. x 220.5cm. National Gallery (Great Britain).
Figure 3.2 Cole, Thomas. *Landscape with Tree Trunks*
date unknown. Oil on canvas, 26 ¼ in. x 32 in. Rhode Island School of Art and Design, Museum of Art.
Figure 3.3 Kirkeby, Per. *Walden I*
Figure 3.4 Kelly, Ellsworth. *Blue on White.*
1961. Oil on canvas, 217.5cm. x 172.1cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.
4 Painting as Portrait of Experience

Every painting is a record of its production. The self-referentiality of Modernist painting increased the presence of the signifiers of action in painting. The record of brushstrokes reminded the viewer of the physicality of the material while also pointing to the process of the making. Each visible brushstroke marked a point of thought, decision, or action. Even in work where the painterly qualities are not as immediately noticeable, the decisions of what and how to depict stand as records of the creative process. Every painting is a thoroughly mediated image; a view filtered through the interpretation of the artist. Whether this process results in distilling the original input or adding further confusion, the result is a distinctive expression of a perception foreign to the viewer. In contemplating a painting, the viewer is asked to adopt an entire grouping of another's thoughts. They are offered the experience of the record with minimal context and allowed to develop their own responses surrounding the work.

I view this collection of my paintings as records of memory and emotion. Not as the emotive records of the act of painting so important to Abstract Expressionists but related to what Karen Wilkin, in discussing Color Field artists, refers to as the “anti-Malerische”, or anti-picturesque, painters. In describing the difference in approach and intent, Wilkin says, “…for the painterly Abstract Expressionists, gesture declared individuality and carried emotion; layering was a visible indication of the painting’s previous and future states, a sign of the existential instability of the moment. For the Anti-Malerische Abstract Expressionist, overt gesture was largely expendable. Expansiveness, clarity, all-overness were more crucial than evidence of past and future change. All-overness announces that the painting was both a self-sufficient entity and a fragment of a larger continuum, which suggested endless possibility. If painterly abstraction
evoked the agonized indecisions of the present, anti-Malerische abstraction yearned for the infinite, even the eternal.”

My painting relates to this application of feeling in viewing used by the Color Field painters. They used their paintings as signifiers of something far beyond and much broader than their painted surface. Yet, the entirety of the subject matter was contained in that surface. They point beyond themselves and back at the viewer at the same time. My paintings are intended to portray the indistinct cloud of personal impressions and thoughts inspired by viewing the subject. They stand as markers of significance without speaking any of their contents and are equally available as a mirror to the viewer. Their quiet insistence of worthiness acts as an urging catalyst for new experiences of viewing.

If the sensation of viewing and the occasional confusion of surface and form is the common ground between artist's initial experience and viewer's subsequent experience, it is due to the method of depicting that mediated perception. Trompe l'oeil methods of depiction allow for the viewers to more easily suspend their separation and, for a moment, place themselves into an edited experience of the initial subject matter. The depiction of a very shallow depth-of-field provides a perceived space that does not require the more complex mechanisms of viewing used in our everyday lives. The use of a low-dimensional form, variation in surface, and “humble” materials recalls the tradition of the Letter Rack painters that began with 17th century European painters including Samuel Van Hoogstraten (Fig. 4.1) and Cornelius Norbertus Gysbrechts (Fig. 4.2) and continued in America during the 19th century with artists including John Frederick Peto (Fig. 4.3) and William Harnett (Fig. 4.4). The contrast of seemingly random collections of items and the rigid grid comprised of ribbons, in my mind, produces another bridge between the artistic happenings of the 17th century and the abstraction beginning in and continuing on from the 20th

---

9 Wilkin, Notes on Color Field Painting, 45
century. As shared by sculptor David Esterly, “Seventeenth-century letter-rack paintings, with their free-and-easy inclusiveness, came to be called quodiblets (Latin for “whatever you please”). This carte blanche quality is part of their charm. But there seemed to be a philosophic resonance in the tension between those fleeting particularities, shored up against loss, and a Mondrian-like grid that suggests the fundamentals of existence” 10 (Fig. 4.5).

The formal structure of these paintings was rigid and still allowed for a great deal of freedom in choosing subject matter. Part of the usefulness of the letter-rack structure was to position forms within a narrow field and have them appear to be held in place. This allowed for the illusion of form to be more readily accepted by requiring a less specific viewpoint in order to maintain a believable perspective. By making the field of depiction very shallow, the potential for the viewer to sense the dimensionality of the forms is increased. Though their primary interest remained in the “trick” of the portrayal, there is a common interest in understanding how we view. 11 What are the strengths and weaknesses of our viewing tendencies? Samuel Van Hoogstraten, the 17th century painter said, “I claim (…), that a painter, whose task is to trick the eye, must understand both the essence of the objects as well as the means by which the eye can be deceived.”12 As a practical means of momentarily transporting a viewer to a specific experience of the subject, the trompe l’oeil method makes sense for my work. Formally, the flat, gridded structure is compelling for its reassertion of a two-dimensional, even slightly abstract, space. It is an early example of the back-and-forth between immersion and surface that would be so important to Modernism, including the Color Field paintings.

---

10 Esterly, Lost and Found Illusions, 96-103
11 For further writing on the characteristics of the Letter Rack trompe l’oeil painters, please refer to Alfred Frankenstein’s book “After the Hunt: William Harnett and Other American Still Life Painters 1870-1900.”
12 Hollmann, and Tesch, “What Can I Do For You?”, In A Trick of the Eye, 38.
Figure 4.1 Van Hoogstraten, Samuel. *Letter Board*.  
1666-78. Oil on canvas, 63cm x 79cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.
Figure 4.2 Gijsbrechts, Cornelius Norbertus. *Trompe L'oeil: Letter Rack…* 1664. Oil on canvas, 101.9cm x 83.4cm. Museum voor Schone Kunsten Gent.
Figure 4.3 Peto, John F. *Old Souvenirs.*
1881-1901. Oil on canvas, 26 ¾ in x 22 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Figure 4.4 Harnett, William Michael. *Mr. Huling’s Rack Picture.*
1888. Oil on canvas, 25in. x 30in. Minneapolis College of Art and Design Collection.
Figure 4.5 Esterly, David. *Quodlibet #1.*
5 Process

The process for both the watercolors and the oil paintings are methodical and involve layering of paint in increasingly translucent washes or glazes. The represented subject is physical surface that has been affected by elements of age and light both of which are acted upon the base material. Glazing and washing strikes me as a logical means of reproduction. With the oil paintings, there is an under-painting to block in the areas of light, dark, warm, and cool within the shapes. The next layer is the thickest of all and involves opaque paint and strives to include as much of the information of the base surface, major variations and the sense of light. From this point on, each layer is increasingly translucent as I adjust values, color temperatures, and add in finer details. Some of the layers of glaze are almost a single color in order to unify and distance some of the contrasts. It is this tension between individual details and the complete whole that creates the visual interest for me as well as much of the practical concern in painting.

The watercolor paintings are much smaller in scale as they are the actual size of the found scraps of paper such as small notepads, matchbooks, wrappers, and receipts. Whereas the production of the large oil paintings can feel as though I’m wrestling against a formidable power, the watercolor paintings have me approaching gently, and with great attention, a subject that is fragile in my hands. The relationship moves from being surrounded by fear and awe of the large fields to being asked to find a similar sensation within these tiny and discarded items. The method used with the watercolors begins, also, with the establishment of the shape and base material’s color. The subsequent washes of translucent color make the necessary adjustments and add the depth resulting from surface variation. The finer details, in this case, are achieved by very small brushes with almost no water in the paint.
6  Curation

Of course, a primary consideration in preparing to display this body of work was how the works would be regarded in relation to each other. This is an extension of the goal on the individual scale; to create an immersive experience of a moment and subject while noting the tension between perceived surface and depth. Having the pieces arranged carefully and within the context of the “white cube” of the gallery provides an additional layer of finish. This pulls the subject further from their original state and places them, for consideration, within a new context (Fig 6.1-6.4).

The initial view of the exhibition is that of the enlarged paintings of Black Paper 1, Black Paper 2, and Black Paper 3 (Fig 6.5) (Fig 6.6) (Fig 6.7). Increasing the scale of the subject in the larger depictions is a method of conveying significance and alludes to the immersive experience of the original viewing. This was a strategy to allow for easier shifts in the viewer’s perception. On a larger scale, the illusion of the painting falls apart more readily and the paint becomes more evident. To begin with a painting that fills most of the immediate field of vision allows for the illusion of being immersed in a color regardless of subject. However, the illusion of the depiction will, potentially, draw the viewer back to the surface. In this case, I am letting the illusion of image be the reason for entering into the painting as well as the reminder to the viewer that this is paint on canvas.

Transitioning between the enlarged black paintings and the small watercolors of the third portion, I have placed the two paintings entitled Cardboard 1 and Cardboard 2 (Fig 6.8) (Fig 6.9). As they are only slightly larger than life size, they do not fill the field of vision to the same degree as the Black Paper paintings. They have much more variation of depicted surface texture
providing more to occupy our eyes within the perceived shallow field of the portrait. As a result of the more recognizable elements of texture and form, there are clearer divisions of the picture plane. The entirety of the image becomes broken into smaller portions and the surface asserts itself in a much stronger manner than in the *Black Paper* paintings. This carries the risk of creating an imbalance in the surface depth tension and holding the viewer solely on the surface of the subject. With that risk, there is also the opportunity to create more striking illusion of light and its implications of a deeper atmosphere containing the subject.

The third portion of the exhibition is a grouping of 24 smaller watercolor paintings entitled *Collected Series 1-24* (Fig 6.10) (Fig 6.11). The desire with this group is to draw the viewer down from the immediate impact of the large oil paintings into the more contemplative and intimate portraits. Whereas the large paintings may be conducive to a shared experience, in that more than one person may view them at a time and they are larger than the viewers, the scale of the watercolors asks for individual consideration. This is the same “voice” at different “volumes.” I imagine the oil paintings compared to the experience of hearing a sound in a larger space while the watercolors are asking the viewer to listen carefully to a softer, closer sound. I'm also hoping for the viewer to take their experience and methods of viewing with them from the large paintings down to the size of the small paintings, to change their own sense of proportion. Perhaps, they will take some of this experience with them as they leave the gallery, as well. To be able to shift perspectives and allow the occasional and beautiful confusion of surface and depth is to carry the Color Field viewing approach with you into the world.
Figure 6.1 *Portraits*, Installation view 1
“Portraits” Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design Gallery, March 2015

Figure 6.2 *Portraits*, Installation view 2
“Portraits” Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design Gallery, March 2015
Figure 6.3 *Portraits*, Installation view 3

*Portraits*” Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design Gallery, March 2015

Figure 6.4 *Portraits*, Installation view 4

*Portraits*” Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design Gallery, March 2015
Figure 6.5 Black Paper 1
2015. Oil on canvas, 88in x 48in.

Figure 6.6 Black Paper 2
2015. Oil on canvas, 87in. x 42in.
Figure 6.7 Black Paper 3  
2015. Oil on canvas, 78in. x 42in.

Figure 6.8 Cardboard 1  
2015. Oil on canvas, 60in. x 26in.

Figure 6.9 Cardboard 2  
2015. Oil on canvas, 84in. x 20in.
Figure 6.10 *Collected Series, Installation view 1*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in. each

Figure 6.11 *Collected Series, Installation view 2*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in. each
Figure 6.12 *Collected Series (Quarters)*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.

Figure 6.13 *Collected Series (Name)*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.
Figure 6.14 Collected Series (Lips 2)
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.

Figure 6.15 Collected Series (Notepad)
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.
Figure 6.16 *Collected Series (Receipt 2)*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.

Figure 6.17 *Collected Series (Thank You)*
2015. Watercolor on paper, 9in. x 11in.
7 **Conclusion**

Offering portraits of personal experiences heightened by painterly emphasis upon significant elements is one method for depicting my approach to viewing. With this body of work, I explored this method of demonstrating my observational tendencies while also providing an opportunity for the participation of others. The importance of allowing multiple points of entry into this work is connected to my hope that viewers would have a natural experience of being drawn in deeper as their senses drift back and forth between surface and depth. There is no force or strong expectation of a specific experience. Neither is there desire, much less means, to dictate the references or sensations a viewer may perceive. The hope is that the use of illusion in representation would draw the viewers’ gaze past the surface of the painting and into the next field of the depicted surface. Whether their attention travels beyond that border is entirely up to their viewing tendencies. This group of paintings is an offering of potential engagement facilitated by a range in scale, delicate depictions, use of illusion, and the opportunity to draw into a more encompassing experience.

By making references to both abstraction and representation, or multiple portions of the previously mentioned “spectrum,” I demonstrate the exciting tension of experience I find in viewing. The layering of references, and the resulting possibility for confusion, demonstrates the echo between perceiving the abstract in the specific or the sublime in the minutia. How is it best to hold or record these often fleeting sensations? Again, Ellsworth Kelly talks about the elusiveness of particular perceptions and understanding, “I want to capture some of that mystery in my work. In my paintings I'm not inventing; my ideas come from constantly investigating how things look.”

Capturing the quality of mystery is not to be confused with solving a mystery or

---

discovering its secret. It is creating a signifier of that feeling so that the presence of the mystery might become more recognizable rather than passing and forgotten. Whatever words we choose to explain the feeling of “sublimity,” they are guided by our ability to be awed. If we are able to experience wonder through the simple act of viewing mundane material and allowing for our perception to shift between seeing and knowing, we may find ourselves near to the ineffable at all times.
Bibliography


