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THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Honors Program and the Degree of
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting

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ABSTRACT

Painting is one of the oldest forms of artistic expression. I wanted to use the medium of oil paints to create a body of work that elicited humor, because I believe it is an underutilized concept in the visual arts. I intended to accomplish this by portraying animals in surprising situations. Through the process of painting, I realized that this goal limited creative exploration, and I made the choice to paint intuitively. As way to balance this intuitive approach, I began to incorporate masked geometric shapes into my paintings, based on a grid structure. The result was a shift in my work toward abstraction, resulting from the attempt to balance intuitive impulses with rational thought. My process is similar to that of other contemporary abstract painters, including Julie Mehretu and Jeff Elrod, who explore arbitrary tendencies or situations within their own unique systems. I was ultimately surprised by the changes in my work and I realized that the central concept of my work is the actual painting process itself.

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THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

I believe that a work of art should speak without the compensation of a written explanation. This written thesis is, at best, an explanation of the process and evolution of the body of works I produced from the spring of 2002 to the spring of 2003. These paintings embody an attempt to balance intuitive impulses and rational thoughts, with the work being a result of my experience during the process.

INTRODUCTION

Painting is one of the oldest and most traditional forms of expression, encompassing many approaches. From the time of the earliest cave paintings, like those at Altamira, to the technical feats of the Renaissance, to the minimal works of Frank Stella, artists continue to express ideas and explore concepts within the matrix of this medium. In my art, I continue this process of exploration.

I chose to use oil paint as the medium for several reasons. The slow drying time of oils allows for reworking and mixing of the paint that is not possible with fast-drying acrylics. The luminescent quality of the paints is visually attractive, providing an array of colors with a great range of intensity and opacity, ideal for experimentation with the interactions of different color combinations. The variation of color and texture in large areas of a composition can be achieved using a number of methods of paint application.

Another quality of painting that makes it ideal for investigating concepts

visually is its immediacy. Rather than painting from a preparatory sketch or design, drawing with paint directly onto the canvas offers a way to convey an idea almost instantly. This capability enabled me to translate the immediacy of my sketches into my early paintings.

THESIS GOALS

The goals I set for myself at the outset of creating this body of work provided a framework for the artistic exploration to follow. I set this series of goals knowing that the nature of the artistic process is unpredictable. Once a painting is begun, an artist encounters unexpected situations. I recognized the inevitability of change, but I could not identify the main issues that would arise in the paintings. The original goals in my proposal were ultimately not the determining factors in the direction of my work, but functioned as the basis for exploration which ultimately revealed the deeper issues I wanted to address.

My first goal in this series of paintings was to "develop a personal style that would convey a visual message to the viewer about the human condition." At the outset, I was trying to achieve this consciously. Johann Goethe stated that man "is necessarily the subject of art, for art exists only through and for him" (Gage 54). Therefore, all art speaks about the human condition, even if it does not explicitly reference it. Through the process of painting and evaluating these works, I realized that I already possess a personal style. I now recognize that I cannot predict what my personal sensibilities will convey. Once I became absorbed in the process of painting, I found that I could not predetermine what message I wanted to

communicate to the viewer, but that the painting process itself functioned as the means to discover the concepts in which I was truly interested. Even with the absence of imagery, the painting is a marker of the artist's formal and conceptual processes.

As an artist, I wish to provide the viewers of my work with a positive experience. I do not want an audience limited only to those educated in the arts, but an audience that includes everyone. I value optimism and I hope that mine may be recognized in my work. I want to communicate honestly through my painting as if I were personally engaged in a conversation with the viewer. Regurgitating academic information or second hand experience could not provide the authentic expression I was seeking in my work. Translated into painting terms, I could not use another artwork as my only inspiration. The actual experience of the creative process contributed more to my work than my academic understanding of art alone. I realized that I could see similarities between my work and the works of others only in retrospect. This approach provides a better understanding of the painting process in which I am engaged than does looking at the work of others and trying to force my process along cerebrally.

Another goal was to understand "how the human mind functions and processes information and how we react by thought and emotion." It is clear to me now that what I really wanted was to understand how my own mind functions and processes information, through the experience of my own reactions. I cannot possibly understand or predict another person's abstract thought processes because they can only communicate with words and images that represent their

ideas. This intensive self observation provided insights into what stimulated me creatively, clarifying my interests in relation to the painting process. The more clarity I gain, the more integrity my work has.

From the beginning, I placed importance on craftsmanship. Attention to craftsmanship in a painting communicates to viewers that the artist takes the work seriously. The handling of the craft can also affect the meaning of the work. For instance, a painting can be intentionally or obviously sloppy to communicate a specific idea. I addressed this matter at the outset, recognizing that the effort invested in the craftsmanship of my painting supports was integral to creating quality paintings.

Humor was the original conceptual basis for my thesis project. I made this my central goal because I anticipated humor as the venue through which all other goals could be realized. I also thought that humor might be interesting because it is an underutilized concept in the visual arts. To elicit humor, I thought it necessary to convey a sense of optimism, and provide pleasure and enjoyment for the viewer. However, my true interests emerged through the process and led me in another direction. The process has helped me to refine my ideas and recognize that there are many ways to affect and engage the viewer while conveying my basic sense of optimism.

My most important initial goal was to develop a cohesive, meaningful body of work with a unifying concept. I completed about seven paintings before I could distill from the diversity of approaches and imagery a number of recurring themes and other constants that had begun to emerge. While identifying these concepts

allowed me to find a conceptual thread and develop a unified body of work, it also helped me recognize that the concept of humor was too confining, and limited my possibilities for authentic artistic investigation and expression.

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

The painting process has no conclusion, as it is a progression of choices. The artist makes choices based on his own thought and imagination which propel the work forward. The dynamic nature of the process is a result of the growth that happens when one makes a creative leap from one experience to the next. In order to maintain the integrity of my process, I cannot paint with a specific audience, museum, living room or gallery in mind. Whoever sees them and is able to enjoy them is my audience. I don't think about the destination of the paintings but, rather, I consider the direction of the process. This work is an exploration of my own aesthetic, but ultimately the paintings are a physical manifestation of a complex web of different processes.

The course of my work developed into an attempt to give form to the nebulous mass of ideas I tapped into, some of which I tried to identify verbally in my thesis proposal. Over time, the organization of ideas and the formation of new ones allowed me to recognize my creative sensibilities. Each painting in this series provided a context for observation and decision-making that clarified the direction for the next.

CONCEPT AND FORM

The idea conveyed in a work of art is known as the concept. The subject of a work of art is the perceivable thing of emphasis in the work. For example, the subject of a Renaissance painting may be mother and child. The concept could be about spirituality. These aspects of painting are communicated through the formal qualities of a work. Formalism is not a story or concept, but the purely visual components, or form, of the work. The formal elements of painting are the physical embodiment, or visual language with which the artist expresses the concept of a painting. As in language, where words represent ideas, the handling of the paint and the canvas communicate the ideas. There are different and infinite combinations of words which can express a certain idea and an infinite number of ways to combine the formal and conceptual aspects of a painting. This endeavor has been a way for me to learn the language of painting so I may communicate my ideas successfully.

The formal elements should be balanced in order to communicate a concept in the most effective way. My approach to painting is circular, meaning that the formal (visual) aspects of my paintings help me to evaluate my ideas. Ideas can be transformed almost entirely through the physical act of painting. My evaluation of these ideas in turn guides the direction of my formal approach to painting.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

As a child of the digital age, I frequently played video games like Donkey Kong, Galaga, and Ms. Pac-Man. Ms. Pac-Man combines sequences of colored dots moving in a grid structure, a hypnotic visual that never failed to excite me. As an adult, I am immersed in the constant barrage of mass communications, with television and internet images permeating daily life. They become part of the mass of ideas filtered through my subconscious and onto the canvas.

Because abstract painting is not limited to representational subject matter, contemporary abstract painters have addressed technological evolution in a variety of ways. I have chosen to discuss the work of only a few artists, whose approaches to painting are similar to my own. *Abstract Painting, Once Removed* was an exhibition featured at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston in the fall of 1998, and included the work of twenty one abstract painters. According to Dana Friis-Hansen, curator of the exhibition, these painters have taken "a positive, comfortable approach to painting," taking "a broader view of painting's possibilities and a study of models outside painting."

Jeff Elrod, a featured artist, creates flat, monochromatic paintings through a process involving digital technology. Using a computer to create arbitrary and sometimes accidental marks, Elrod makes printouts of these images and then transfers them onto canvases. Elrod's paintings speak of technology through his process, but the images do not appear high-tech. The system he has derived results in an intuitive process that is then filtered through the medium of technology.

Another artist whose paintings are featured in this exhibition is Ingrid Calame. Her paintings are composed of large interlocking layers of brightly colored drips and splashes whose shapes are derived from the puddles and stains on the streets of Los Angeles.

Currently, I am most interested in the paintings of Julie Mehretu, who considers her "abstract mark-making as a type of sign lexicon" (Firstenberg 72). Her painting process involves mapping gestural marks into an architectural or geometric space, conceptually addressing the issue of "cultural deterritorialization" (Firstenberg, 72), addressing the way mass media has begun to dissolve cultural barriers. In an interview in *Flash Art* magazine, Mehretu explains that "the automatic and controlled aspects of [her] work are in constant negotiation" (Firstenberg 72).

Each of these artists explores arbitrary tendencies or situations within his or her own unique system to achieve balance. Perhaps the flood of information that has begun to form a global society has created in contemporary artists the need to form random bits of information into some kind of order.

AN OVERVIEW

Painting is a constant process of evaluating and responding to ideas and visual impulses as they emerge. I responded to my dissatisfaction with my attempts to convey humor in the first few paintings by abandoning my investment in a preconceived outcome. Rather than planning the compositions, I began to paint directly onto my panels, intuitively layering marks, colors, textures and

brushstrokes. I chose the colors arbitrarily, and let my imagination run wild. As I approached more paintings intuitively, my paintings became abstract and I began to address the ideas in my paintings intellectually, which led to the recognition of another idea that interested me.

As a means of making new discoveries with paint, I began to incorporate the layering process of my intuitive paintings creating random geometric patterns with masking tape. The integration of arbitrary patterns based on a grid structure in my paintings has revealed a multitude of new possibilities. I have begun working with geometry in an intuitive way. The addition of this structure leads me to wonder if I will begin to address this concept intellectually. This, in turn, could lead to the discovery of another idea that changes the appearance of my work.

THE PAINTING PROCESS

My Initial Approach: Surprise and Humor

The element of surprise is necessary in order to elicit humor. When painting my first painting, I had in mind a type of humor derived from a narrative depicting animals in ways that might surprise the viewer. The issue of subject matter had not been significantly addressed in my previous works since they were completed as class assignments. I noticed that throughout these paintings, however, animals were prevalent subjects and I concluded that since I was interested in them and often found them humorous, they might also provide that experience for the viewer.

Life in the Backyard (Figure 1) is the seminal work for my thesis paintings. I

based the composition of this large scale drawing on a painting by Marc Chagall. My drawing depicts a standing gray cat holding a large black spider in the center of the composition. Other multicolored cats, a horse and a person surround and frame these figures. The background is electric pink, dotted by small stars and flying insects in lighter variations of pink and yellow. I wanted to preserve the whimsical quality present in Chagall's painting in my drawing and I wanted to maintain the sense of exuberance present in the linear motion and color of the drawing in my thesis paintings.

I approached the problem I had set for myself by researching comedy, and found that seemingly spontaneous provocations of humor were, in fact, formulaic. I attempted to apply formulas to my own work in order to elicit humor, but found that basing the process on attempting to provoke a specific response from the viewer left little room for creative growth. I realized I had to be engaged and surprised myself to fuel the creative process. In both research and practice, it was the idea of play, more than the idea of humor that interested me.

In the humor research of Lefcourt, he states, "Somewhere in the perception of the humorous event there must be an element of play, whether physical or verbal, as in the responses we privately entertain as we observe the event."[6] It was the play that would continue throughout my paintings, but not in any way that was predictable. Rather than creating a stage where I depicted animals at play, the surface of the paintings became the playground here I could explore textures, colors, images and ideas. The element of surprise that is integral in eliciting humor would reveal itself in a completely different way.

The First Three Paintings

During work on my first painting, *Pups* (Figure 3), I assumed that I would continue using animals as the subject. This painting began with a complex sketch that included multiple animal figures and one person. Once the sketch was transferred onto the painting, the imagery lost its playful characteristics (Figure 2). I eliminated everything except two pups in the foreground.

As I painted over large areas, I realized that I was more interested in the act of painting than in the specific imagery. I was most engaged in choosing and applying the colors and mediums to the surface. Painting tiny repetitive stars in layers of red paint was very satisfying. I was influenced by a Chagall painting, *Painter to the Moon*, that depicts a curtain that divides the space of the viewer from the space of the subject in the painting. I included a simple curtain shape in pale yellow as an attempt to manipulate the formal elements into a humorous painting.

My second attempt at humor, a painting entitled *Kitty* (Figure 4), was also derived from a spontaneous sketch. Learning from Pups, I simplified the composition, including only one figure. It portrayed just one large yellow curvaceous cat stretching into the air, revealing six large teats. I painted the teats of the cat as sexualized breasts as a way to create an incongruency that I thought might elicit humor. While in the initial sketch, the humor of a cat portrayed this way engaged me, as I painted, the textured baroque pattern applied in thick yellow paint (Figure 5) onto the cat became my focus. The experience of painting the stars in Pups was echoed by my absorption in painting this pattern. Although I did

not achieve the descriptive humor I was after, my experience painting *Kitty* revealed interests that would surface in subsequent paintings.

When I commenced work on the third painting, *Blue Cats* (Figure 6), I decided to let my intuition guide the painting process. The resulting array of iconography consisted of palm trees, stars, clouds and birds. Because this painting began directly on the canvas with no preliminary sketch, I drew with the paint spontaneously, creating gestural marks over the entire composition. My interest in the work of Marc Chagall at the time contributed to the appearance of floating animals in an indistinct space.

While working on my first paintings, I studied a book about a collection of paintings found in thrift stores. The crudeness of the paintings, combined with the evidently earnest way in which the artists tried to capture classic beauty in paintings of people, still lifes and animals was humorous. These observations gave me the courage to be raw or even clumsy with my brushstrokes. I realized that I did not have to approach the evolution of my painting techniques in a conventional way, which contributed to my decision to paint intuitively, and ironically, led me away from my attempts at eliciting humor.

The Intuitive Paintings

Early in the painting process, I felt limited by the connotations of the animal figures in the works. The decision in my next painting to rely completely on intuition led, in my next painting, to the elimination of animals as subject matter. The immediacy of my sketches, which I had been trying to retain in my paintings was

now reflected in the intuitive mark making that had emerged in *Blue Cats*.

Star Trek (Figure 7) was the first painting that relied completely on intuition, with no preconceived subject. I noted as I painted layers of brushstrokes that some of the iconography in *Blue Cats* was present in the simple composition. Punctuated by a free-floating happy face in the predominantly black color scheme, the iconography disappears into dense dark layers of paint. Lighter marks of pink, orange, green, blue, and white flicker throughout the composition. In a critique of this painting, a fellow student said my work appears to be an "attempt to pacify a certain tension or chaos." His remark was perceptive, almost predicting what would happen in my subsequent paintings. The concept of balancing the chaos was in its embryonic stages.

I began working on *Beach* (Figure 8) while working on *Star Trek*. It began with a simple layer of automatic writing and drawing in red oil crayon. I kept the layering to a minimum in order to preserve the initial iconography. Palm trees tower throughout the large space of the painting, as words intermingle with wave patterns. A huge star floats near the top of the composition. Next to it, an agitated facial expression has been drawn in to a splash of paint. In this work I explored materials, incorporating epoxy resin, glitter, a photograph, and dried shrimp.

In *Princess* (Figure 9), I continued playing with iconography. This time, fleur de lys, curlicues, dog heads, and words floated throughout the composition. Shapes referencing lace or necklaces were painted at the top of the composition to divide the space of the picture plane from the space of the viewer, a device functioning similarly to the curtain in *Pups*.

I worked on *Hurricane*, *These Clouds*, and *E* simultaneously. All three paintings consisted of layers of intuitive marks. *Hurricane* (Figure 10) is a buildup of paint texture into a spiral shape that fills the entire panel. Bird shapes and words float within the spiral. In *These Clouds* (Figure 11), interlocking cloud shapes are rendered with happy and sad faces, and text. *E* (Figure 12) is the most significant work of this group. It is a surface covered uniformly with a pattern of various icons and text, mainly the letter E represented as it is used in eyesight testing charts. I did not recognize at the time that the "E" shape is based on a grid, and I was playing with the rotating movement and repetition of this shape within the grid. This idea would resurface in later work.

While searching for art that was created intuitively, I began to look at the art of Australian Aboriginals. For nearly fifty thousand years, Aboriginals have been painting their interpretations of the world around them, and much of it has been done intuitively. I was particularly interested in the contemporary dot-paintings that evolved in the 1970s, when Australian Aboriginal artists began painting on canvas. What is interesting, aside from the paintings themselves, is the makers of the paintings. Before contemporary times, the status of "artist" does not exist within Aboriginal groups. Rather, painting was an activity that everyone could participate in and meditate through.

Entitled *Right Now* (Figure 13), the next painting consisted predominantly of text and splatters of paint and glitter. After completing this painting, I felt that I had exhausted the totally intuitive approach. I failed to find any inspiration from Aboriginal paintings aside from noting their similarities with my own paintings, and

my own work was not offering any perceivable new avenues. When the compositions and layering began to feel overworked, I decided to balance the process by taking a more intellectual approach. *Right Now,* titled to describe the process, incorporates a line of text, partially hidden under layers of green paint which declares, "RIGHT NOW THIS IS AN ABSTRACT PAINTING."

I approached my next work, *Pink* (Figure 14), by applying thin layers of hot pink paint to the surface, using a palette knife to scratch into each layer. The white marks and lines that resulted were now abstract rather than referential.

This group of paintings offers an opportunity for continued discovery. It embodies the progression of thoughts, imaginings and sensations involved in the painting process. The intuitive doodling that began to appear in my paintings made these intangibles tangible.

The Geometric Paintings

While painting *Right Now* and *Pink*, I began looking at the art of Sol Le Witt. I completed a project based on his 1960s series of wall drawings. In order to prove that a work of art could be removed from the artist's hands entirely, his wall drawings were created by volunteers according to specifications he provided. My project included six panels, one with specifications for a volunteer to follow. When the volunteer completed these specifications on the panel, they were to rewrite them on the next panel, changing one of the specifications for the next volunteer, and so on. My point in this endeavor was to prove that art was not merely the product of a set idea, but the result of individual preferences that could change the

initial idea. I believed Le Witt's work was completely rational and unrelated to my own, and I wanted to understand its relationship to the intuitive processes that have played such a dominant role in my own work. This project relied on the intuitive tendencies of others integrated into a structure roughly based on the one in Le Witt's wall drawings.

Next, I completed a quick series of intuitively composed collages. I purposely selected the most geometric collages as a basis for small painting studies because, like the Le Witt project, they were significantly different from my intuitively-based series of paintings. The result of one small study, which I will refer to as *Green Painting* (Figure15), became the bridge between my intuitive painting and the type of work that I could engage in next. This process involved masking off geometric shapes in tape and applying paint. After painting gestural marks, the tape was removed to reveal an interaction of layers that would be visible my next paintings. These avenues of exploration were key in the development of every painting I have completed since.

In the next two paintings I set up an arbitrary geometric structure with 1" masking tape. Both panels were shellacked in order to preserve and enhance the natural wood grain. A layer of masking tape was applied to each panel in arbitrary shapes based on a grid. Gesso was applied over the masking tape, and when this dried, I coated each one with a thin layer of pigment, one violet and the other blue. Next, another layer of masking tape was applied. Over this entire surface, I used a fine small brush to paint a layer of tiny dark concentric squares. When the masking tape was removed, the paintings revealed a drastic change in structure from the

previous paintings, despite the fact that elements of them still remained.

In *Painting A* and *Painting B* (Figures 16 and 17), I have incorporated the natural wood of the panel into the painting revealing parts of the painting that is traditional considered structural. Once my paintings became abstract I started to think of them as objects rather than containers for images, so the materials are inseparable from the painting. These objects represent my intellectual and physical painting processes.

From this point forward, ideas from all the earlier paintings were reconfigured to fit under a basic structure. Repetition that appeared as recurring iconography in previous works had changed into controlled, concentric shapes. Repetition also revealed itself, inevitably, in the grid of the geometric masking. The masking clarified the layers, setting up a rudimentary and arbitrary framework in which layers consisting of different marks or colors or wood grain could interact. The role of intuition was transformed on two levels. No longer dominant in the work, it now functions in relation to the grid. Patterns, symbols and iconography are isolated into separate layers, allowing the marks to interact with some purpose. In contrast to the explosion of imagery that occurred in earlier paintings, the application of these marks has become a meditative process. The implementation of a changeable structure has refined the intuitive aspect of the work and provided the paintings with a greater balance.

The structure I set up for myself made the process of painting more meditative, allowing me to think about the painting freely as I worked on it, without addressing any issues in particular. My marks remain intuitive, but appear more

resolved, and I have begun to include concentric shapes. This may have occurred because I saw contemporary Australian Aboriginal art at the Ethnological Museum in Dahlemdorf, Germany. Seeing the work in person really made an unexpected impact on my work. The optical effects of the many concentric circles in the paintings, which dilated according to how the eyes are focused, were not noticeable in reproductions.

Naughty and *Nice* (Figures 18 and 19) begin the next phase of exploration. I worked on these paintings simultaneously, applying color and texture more freely. From the titles, the viewer may try to figure out what makes one painting nice and the other one naughty. Rather than using representation, I used combinations of color and pattern to intimate associations, personifying the paintings by the way the color and pattern were combined. For example, *Naughty* was painted with hot pink, black leopard print and gold curliques, and it is framed by a black feather boa. *Nice* does not have a feather boa and the colors are soft and clear, including pearlescent turquoise, white, pink, and yellow. As the grid-based paintings developed, color gained importance because it affected the interaction of layers. While painting *Naughty* and *Nice*, I began to make more subtle shifts in color, compared to the intense and varied color in previous works.

IN RETROSPECT

When looking back on my proposal I realize that I had some pretty lofty goals for this project. Reconsidering some of my initial goals resulted in greater clarity allowing me to recognize what truly stimulates me creatively. This body of

works, in my view, doesn't fulfill a preconceived plan, or solve a specific conceptual problem. It is the embodiment of the process of exploration in the medium of paint and the realm of ideas. This developmental process enabled me to discover and gain a deeper understanding of the concepts in which I am interested.

I could not have imagined nor predicted that my work would become abstract, or that it would be based on the grid. Ultimately, this was the surprise that occurred as a result of the process. The element of surprise then, is not obvious or even discernible to the viewer, but it is an integral part of the process and necessary for the creation of the work. The completed paintings reveal a logical progression of ideas. My experience with the paintings, however, involved a series of unexpected revelations. What I learned through these paintings is that the spontaneous approach I took was a way for me to capture the play occurring inside my own head.

In order to communicate with an audience, I first had to communicate with myself. To clarify what I was trying to say, I set up arbitrary structures to make sense of all the intuitive marks in the paintings from *Star Trek* to *Pink*. Adjustments to these geometric structures create organization without confinement. Because the arrangement of geometric structures is not preconceived, but intuitive, the arrangement is not predictable. The play that happens between multiple layers of paint is revealed as each layer is unmasked. The layers, which recur throughout the entire series, are, in the latest works, more structured, providing the framework for more complex and unpredictable interactions.

I set up structures and react to them in my most recent paintings. Since

Painting A and *Painting B*, I have focused on making one type of mark or shape per layer in each painting. In *Naughty* and *Nice*, I based my masked geometric structure on the concentric squares present in *Painting A* and *Painting B*. I am interested in the optical effects of concentric and repetitive shapes. The repetitive process has become more meditative for me, and has resulted in a more focused painting for the viewer, enabling the eye to enjoy the interaction of the layers that are enhanced by the grid. From a distance, the painting seems chaotic, much like the earlier paintings in the series, but when the viewer comes closer, a system becomes evident.

The playfulness occurring within the layers does not reveal the process, but speaks of it. It is obvious that the paintings were created methodically, but there is no perceivable logic to the method. These paintings require that the viewer scan them for information, rather than drawing the eye to one particular area. The hidden and visible areas of masked layers of paint act as a kind of brainteaser, inviting the viewer to attempt to figure out how the system was set up and addressed by the artist.

All of the changes that occurred in my work are a result of physical engagement in the process, evaluation of and intellectual engagement in the process, and the intuition involved in the process. The first, and most significant in relation to these paintings, is the physical process, which involves time and action, and creates experience. Without the physical process, there would be nothing to evaluate. After working on each painting, I observed and noted its characteristics, and how it was different from the previous one. My paintings had changed from

being about animals to being about the process. The first step that allowed me to realize this was my attempt at simplifying the compositions in the paintings in order to remove extraneous issues that might have distracted me from developing my concept. Finally, intuition guides the painting process. Specifically, my tendency to work intuitively resulted in elimination of representational space as well as the figures of animals in that space. The layers of intuitive mark making, originally quite chaotic, led the paintings to unexpected simplification and abstraction. Looking back at the iconography that surfaced in my paintings, I believe that they were the result of an abundance of information in our technological age. My unique position in history, where signs and images from television, billboards and various other sources bombard us in daily life, is the source of the elements that are processed and reflected in the way I paint.

FUTURE PAINTINGS

Evaluation of my work and its iconography has made me especially interested in shapes and geometry, and their importance in different cultures and religions. The question I am trying to answer for myself as I paint now is: Is shape the optical embodiment of the connection between the rational and irrational? I may continue to explore the expressiveness of geometry through application and masking and, as my experiences, influences and ideas change, I may change the masking from geometric to curvilinear. A multitude of possibilities for exploring shapes and layers lies in the digital realm. Another way of looking at these concepts is in relation to mass-media culture. The possibilities are endless. The

next step for me in beginning this exploration is to paint on a smaller, more intimate scale, focusing on single masked shapes, rather than an amalgamation of many. By making these paintings I have set up a dialogue with my self. In my future paintings I hope I can extend that dialogue to the audiences viewing my paintings. The only real certainty about the future direction of my work is that the painting process is essential.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1. *Life in the Backyard*, November 2001. Pastel on paper, 58 x 30".



Figure 2. *Pups* (detail), March 2002. Oil on panel, 54 x 48".

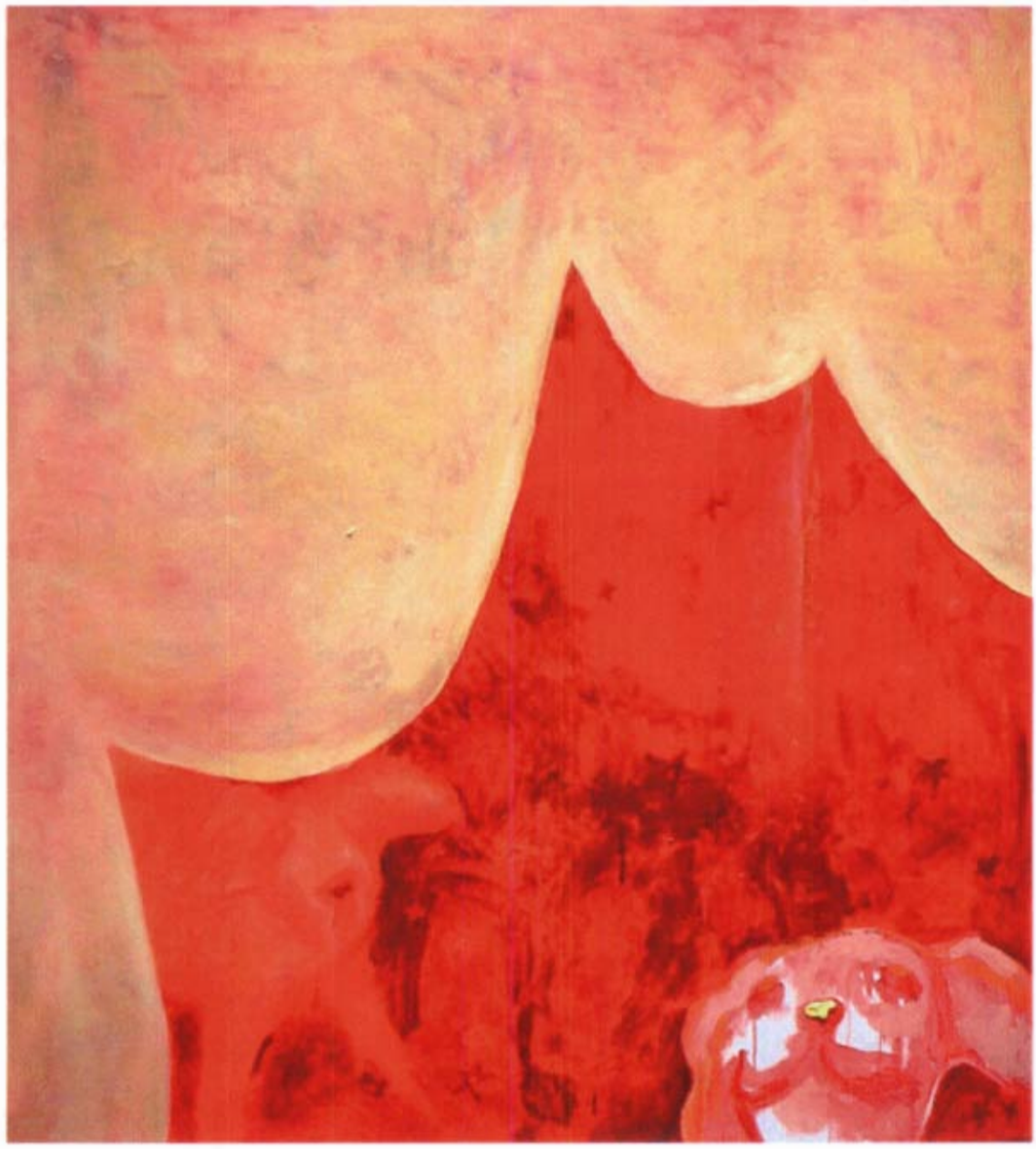


Figure 3. *Pups*, March 2002. Oil on panel, 54 x 48".

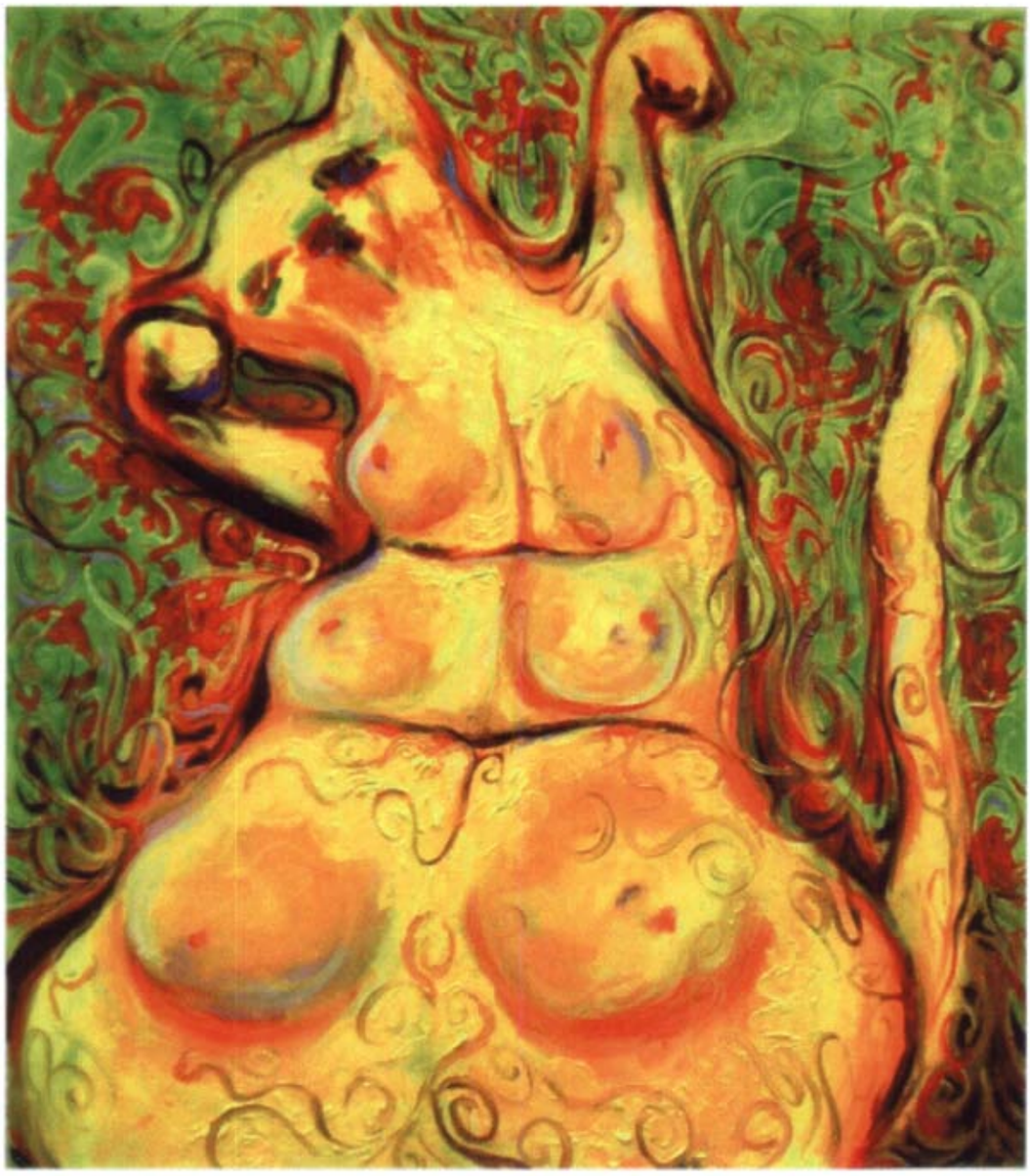


Figure 4. *Kitty*, March 2002. Oil on panel, 48 x 41".

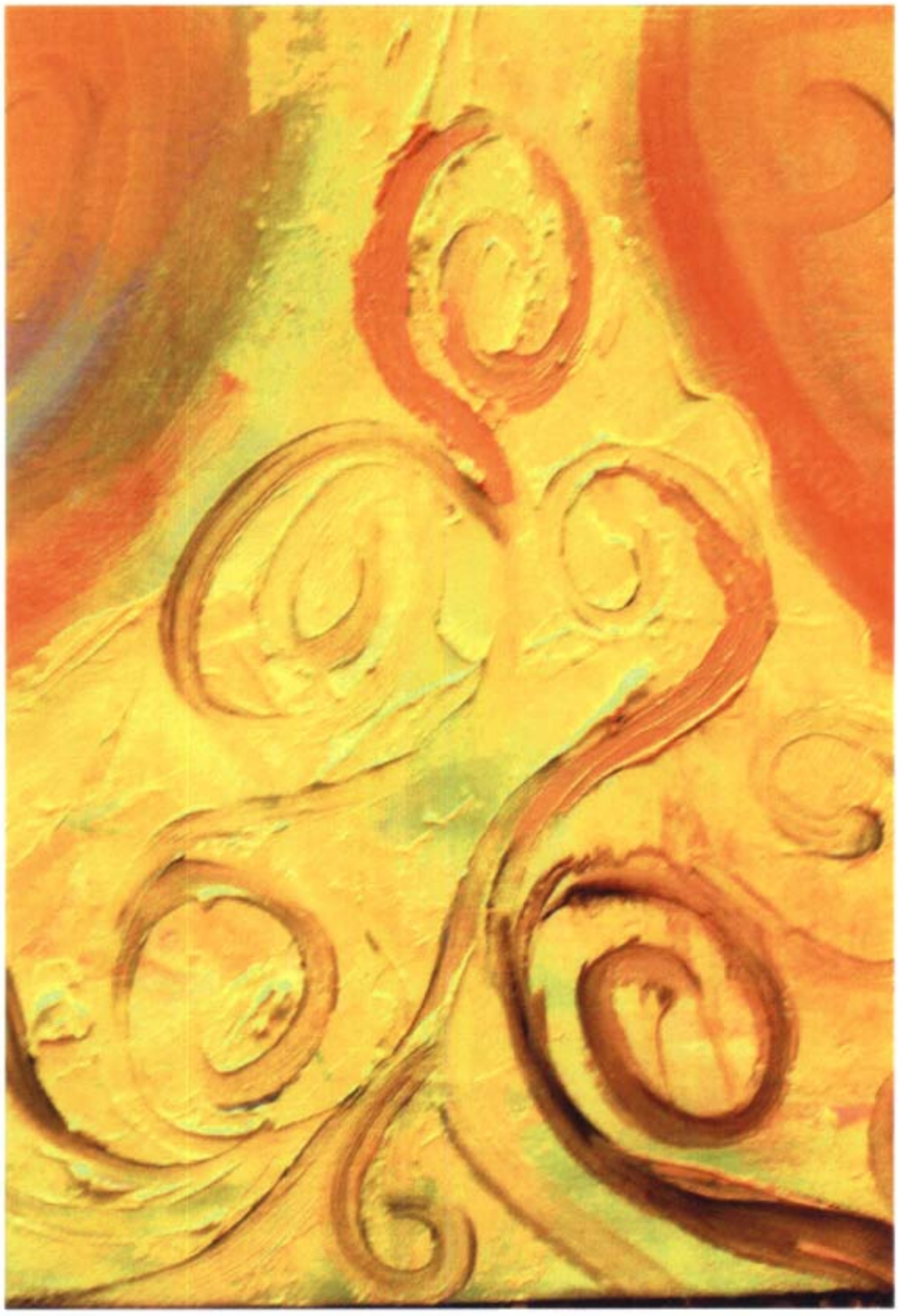


Figure 5. *Kitty* (detail), March 2002. Oil on panel, 48 x 41".



Figure 6. *Blue Cats*, September 2002. Oil on panel, 2 panels, 17 1/2 x 34 1/2" each.

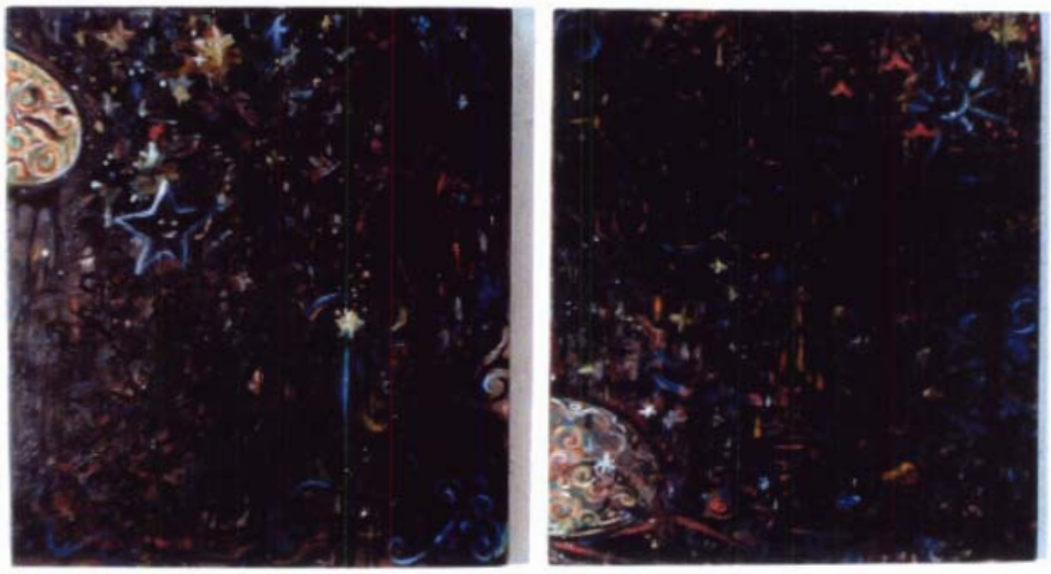


Figure 7. *Star Trek*, September 2002. Oil on panel, 2 panels, 20 1/2 x 23 1/2" each.



Figure 8. *Beach*, October 2002. Oil, epoxy resin, photograph and shrimp on panel, 54 x 47 1/2."



Figure 9. *Princess, October 2002. Oil on canvas, 52 x 30".*



Figure 10. *Hurricane*, November 2002. Oil on panel, 31 1/2 x 29 1/2".



Figure 11. *These Clouds*, October 2002. Oil on panel, 31 1/2 x 29 1/2".



Figure 12. *E*, September 2002. Oil, feather boa on panel, 29 1/2 x 31 1/2".



Figure 13. *Right Now*, December 2002. Oil on panel, 47 1/2 x 47 1/2".



Figure 14. *Pink*, December 2002. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".



Figure 18. *Green Painting*, February 2003. Oil and liquid leaf on panel, 32 x 12".

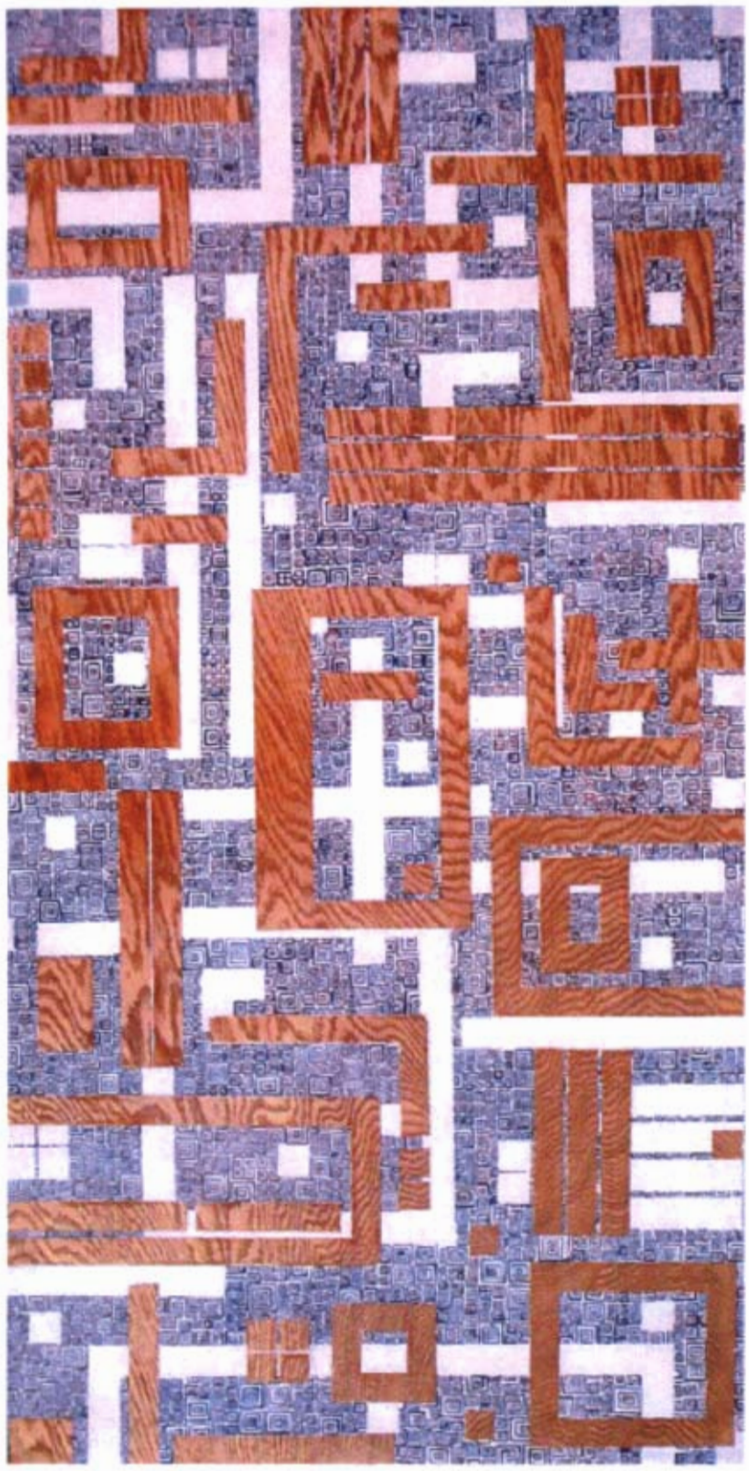


Figure 16. *Painting A*, March 2003. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".

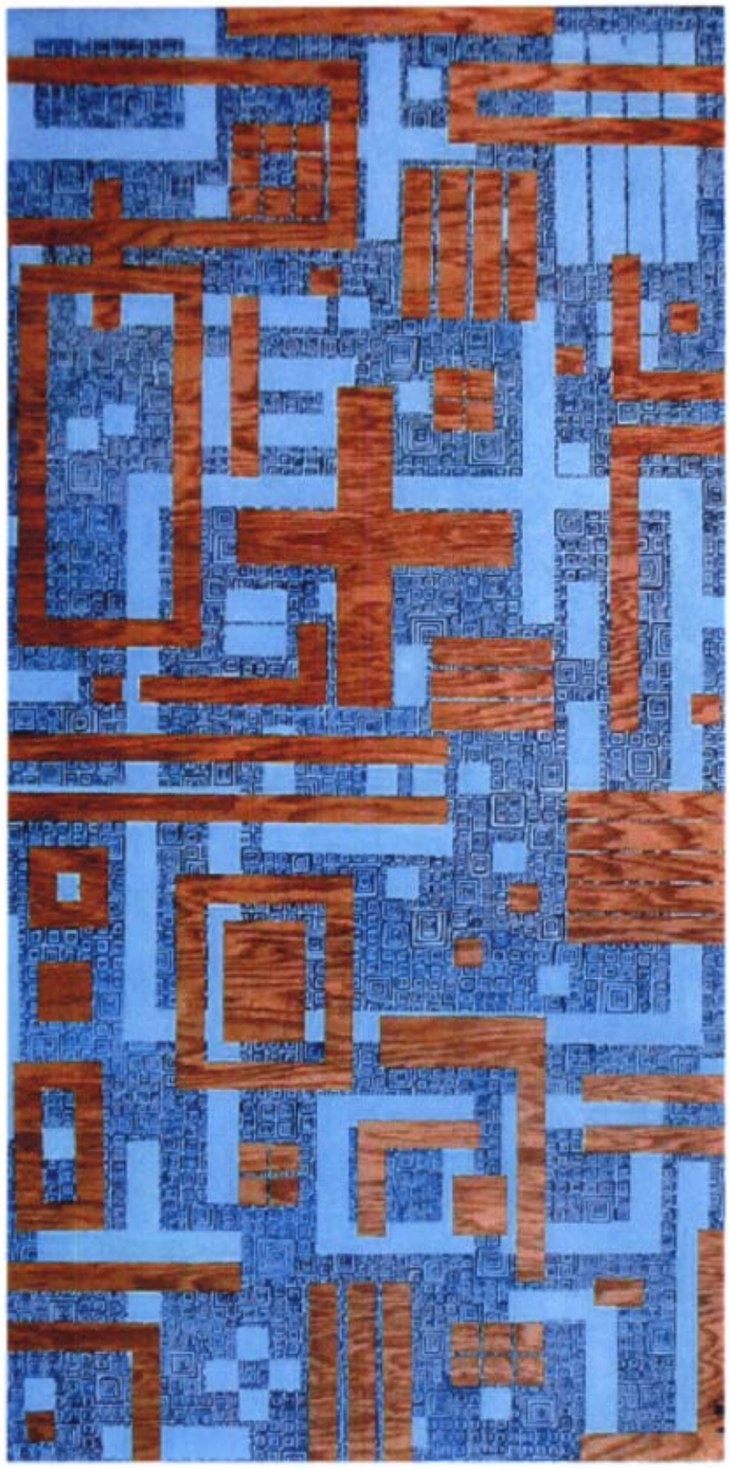


Figure 17. *Painting B*, March 2003. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".



Figure 18. *Naughty*, April 2003. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".



Figure 19. *Nice*, April 2003. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".



Figure 20. *Nice* (detail), April 2003. Oil on panel, 24 x 48".