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Curator & Writer

Writing: Aimee Parrott at Breese Little

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Meshes of the afternoon, 2016, Ink, fabric dye, batik, calico, 152.4 x 183 cm

Text first published alongside Parrott's solo exhibition at Breese Little Gallery, 30 September – 26 November 2016

The Weight of a Pigment (On the work of Aimée Parrott)

In her essay 'On Colour' Amy Sillman recites a story about her ability to ascertain a particular pigment from its weight. Blindfolded, Sillman could tell you whether a paint tube contained cadmium red or cobalt violet because, as the artist states, cadmium is the heavier pigment. If the spectator's role is to "beholden" colour then, as Sillman goes on to explain, the painter literally "holds" it. The chromatic, something so often articulated as purely optical, is described in resolutely material terms. In other words, a

painting is a way of pointing towards something while being a thing in itself, a body as much as something that depicts another body.

While painting has appeared immensely adaptable in the face of certain technologies it is still largely defined by the simple processes of putting pigment (applied with a brush and palette knife) to canvas. The density of a painterly surface is both metaphorical and actual. In an era defined by the liquidity of the digital and networked image, Sillman's anecdote calls attention to something so often overlooked — she asks us to consider the form as much as the content, to look simultaneously at the extended finger and the object being pointed at. In a world of too much stuff, production becomes a form of recognition and aggregation. The ubiquity of the curatorial here is symptomatic of a climate that foregrounds choice as a creative act (of course curating is so much more than simply choosing) If then, we're all DJs what are the benefits of becoming song-writers? How do we move beyond recognition to a more transformative relationship to the world around us? Perhaps the density of the autographic image can provide a stickiness that counters the slipperiness of so much digital imagery?

Kissing the Lipless

Beyond our lips and tongue, our hands have the most amount of nerve endings in the human body. There remains a deep connection between our lips and fingers, between the communicative potential of the voice and gestural agency of the hands. In infancy, as the baby sucks he or she clenches their fists and while we may grow out of this reflex the impulse to hold is still deeply embedded. From typing to touching, sculpting and painting, our fingers help us to manipulate the world. The urgency to touch, allied to the need to speak is a quest for intimacy between people and objects — to push ourselves up against the rich textures of the things around us. Through the process of painting (and making more generally) the artist increases these contact points between their skin and the surface of other materials and their affects.

Looking at Aimée Parrott's recent paintings I think about this impulse to think through the hands and feel through the eyes. To put herself up against the edges of things that surround her. In a world governed by information and data, these paintings look to establish a connection between the hands and the lips, translating the textural nature of speech into the gestural language of paint. One can imagine Parrott in her studio, her lips pursed in deep concentration, betraying an eagerness to speak beyond the tongue, sublimating the vocal into a visual language of images and materials. These paintings are full of fragments of bodies. I notice the inside of a mouth, a hand, maybe an arm, legs and the back of someone's head floating freely

within other nebulous forms. Repeated elements suggest different temporalities frozen under permafrost, awaiting re-animation or reconstructive surgery. They feel like reveries or sideway glances, images bleached out by the unreliability of personal memory. Parrott utilises a broad range of techniques including batik and mono-print alongside an array of painterly applications. Much is lost in the shift between object and its documented image, and this singularity is further amplified by the chromatic haziness of her paintings. Everything looks washed out or that it could be washed away at any moment, and lacking solidity, these images appear like mirages or impressions.

There is often no foreground or background and everything floats as if in a vacuum or deep underwater. The fabric is light and thin; un-primed calico, linen and more lately latex so that surface and paint are indistinguishable. The mono-print, of course, simultaneously produces an image through a process of obliteration, transferring the oil paint under pressure from a smooth surface onto the toothed surface of the fabric. One starts to think of an old sofa impressed by the bodily silhouette of a previous occupant or the smooth surface of some old steps – the habitual becoming sculptural and pictorial. One can see these painting as a type of sediment of speeded up time, indexing the micro-accumulations of studio life. Parrott works onto and through the surfaces, using the back as much as the front – the paint stained into them like an old tattoo.

For Parrott's most recent paintings the artist feeds two separate pieces of fabric through a press and sews the resultant monotypes together. Invoking an open book or artist's sketchbook, the openness here is more opaque than transparent. The hesitant, oblique forms feel like reading a story with every third page ripped out, narratives are redacted and we start to notice the frame as much as the content. The famously itinerant Francis Picabia would often say that his head was round so that his ideas could change direction. Similarly, Parrott's paintings bear the traces of an internalised conversation that meanders and stutters, that works backwards as much as forward.

The painterly density found in Parrott's paintings provide the stickiness of engagement that arrests the conditions of continual deferral and distraction. I'm reminded of a painting by Jeffrey Dennis called *The Artist Successively Levitating in the Studio* (2011) in which the British Painter provides a neat response to Bruce Nauman's famous photograph of himself "failing to levitate" in his studio. Dennis succinctly articulates that while the frame of painting has a gravitational axis, its content does not. If painting is a body, it one that is full of possibility.