

Purchase College

Translations of Vulnerability

Jackson Gautreau

Advisor: Sharon Horvath

Second Reader: Esteban Cabeza de Baca

December 2022

I paint translations of translations of translations: people, people-like objects, and animals with flurried, layered mark-making of varying speed and pressure. Each subject acts a conduit for energy and emotion, a vehicle to carry touch and movement. Electric, acrylic neons quickly glide across smooth panels and primed canvases, always with a flourish, sometimes peeking through muted oil color palettes. I don't like to think about how I'm going to approach things, and I don't like to hide brush marks—I want my touch to be on full display.

My painting process is the expulsion of energy, an exercise of transformation using representational forms. Images of living things, people, anthropomorphized objects, dolls, and lawnmowers assume roles they have been assigned. These characters take on and are drenched in the self— vessels that hold my thoughts, desires, and neuroticisms.

I consider my painting process to be a form of 'projection,' in both the psychological use of the word and in the physical sense through the act of painting itself. Psychological projection is denying one's own qualities while simultaneously attributing them to someone else, or in this case, a painting. Subconscious changes in pressure, speed and handling of forms exhibit small 'Freudian slips' of paint — Transforming an image back into the world it "wants" to belong in, re-shaped in my form, through my projection.

For me, painting is bodily. It is a physical process, as images from my iPhone's camera roll, Google, and social media are reproduced, translated, into the physical world. The digital (from the physical) is projected onto my surfaces, in paint. As I paint, I feel I am translating translations of translations. I am projecting onto projections of projections. I relate this

back-and-forth projection dance to the push-and-pull factor of paintings that I consider to be so important. The paintings communicate between themselves and back to me.

Somewhere in the process of flipping a proverbial pancake over and over, again and again and again, the cool, insouciant distance I like to consider to have over my subjects starts to blur.

Carefully-crafted layers of irony in my paintings of horses, or lawnmowers, or babies peel back a bit, soften, and warm. Whatever ironic, sarcastic one-liner I planned on titling the painting falls away. I use the process of painting to trick myself into vulnerability. But after I get my wave of snark out of the way, what is left? I start to place, project myself or my emotions onto my subject, and relinquish conscious control.

Sometimes I'll have to shake off the inhibitions and fears of forcing my feelings and thoughts onto a subject. "Making love" is a term that I have heard artists use to describe their work, and that resonates with me occasionally. Many popular queer painters today, specifically the white, attractive, cisgender young men that I dub the "Twink Painters," are focused on depicting scenes of tender, queer, white male intimacy in a "post-AIDS" America, resulting in soft, safe-spaces, warm and rich with color and sensual touch. Doron Langberg, high in the ranks of the Twink Painters, says in an interview with *Artspace* that his paintings are "giving material form to caring about someone." I consider my process of painting, to describe it most accurately and vulnerably, to be often more similar to a sexual assault than to the consensual "making of love." I do not get permission to paint what I am painting, the subject just takes what I project onto it and into it.

I am fascinated by power and control. This realization hurts— but is also cathartic. I am, in a sense, reclaiming control over past experiences through painting, transforming it into a type of perverse role play in which I flip the power dynamics. Painting inherently places the subject in the submissive role and I, the artist, in the dominant role. It is the dominant role that I associate with abuse and I, as a painter, feel the need to be in that dominant role more often than not.

When my nude painting got stolen the last week of the 2022 semester, a connection was made to earlier feelings in my life of having my lack of consent overruled and being subdued into a state of begrudging compliance. I felt the control I had over my painting vanish after it left my possession. I now see that my art was and is a direct outcome of my sexual trauma. I experience painting as a reversal of roles. I assault an image with paint, beating it until its attitude suddenly changes and it plays along... sometimes I am more gentle and romantic. My paintings are ejaculatory—a power struggle to imbue the painting with myself, transforming them. They “become male”...at least partly. The self portraits depict varying states of restraint and are the most blatantly myself, even when I depict myself as a spider. Fluorescent colors burn through muddy mixes. Streams of puff paint are draped over acrylic flourishes, or sandwiched, bound between acetate sheets, held captive.

A tradition of ‘Male Ejaculatory Painting’ does exist. Warhol’s Oxidation paintings (1977–78), urine and metallic paint sprayed on six 14 x 10 inch canvas, emulated Pollock’s ab-Ex seminal drippings. According to Phaidon, “Warhol claimed, ‘It’s a parody of Jackson Pollock’ ... referring to rumors that Pollock would urinate on a canvas before delivering it to a dealer or client he didn’t like. Andy liked his work to have art-historical references.” The urine was

collected mostly from young gay men recruited in nightclubs. De Kooning's 'splashy' manifestations of women slashed with paint evoke feelings of sexual submission—control over another person.

Painting, for me, is a self-healing act which allows me to reconsider things and recast myself into new roles, exploring new outcomes. It allows for feelings and thoughts I have suppressed to be released, and projected onto a horse, or a cat, or a lawnmower, or a baby. Dolls and animals are wonderful for projecting emotions onto. Although our emotions cannot be applied to most animals (and all objects) we are often convinced that they can be—that our cats feel extra confident about their appearances on this particular day, or that our candles feel sad if we don't burn them. The same can be said for babies because they have arguably just as many thoughts as cats or candles too. (I've never had one— I may be wrong.) I do know that babies can be whatever it is that you want them to be, and feel whichever way it is that you decide they are feeling about it, as can cats or candles. Some of these forms I project onto are vulnerable, reacting to my touch and control by freezing, or complying, such as *White Dream Horse (Death)* and *Night*. Some, like *Gas Can*, *Puffed Cat* and *Haircut Babies*, are aggressive and, not allowing themselves to be controlled by a circumstantial power imbalance, fight back. Some forms appreciate my touch and attention and experience it sensually, like *Max*, *Fluorescent Red*, and some are intrigued by it, like *Dream Cat*.

The forms within my paintings are primarily composed of flurried, layered acrylic glazes—soft, quick strokes of diluted pigment that create a buzzy optical mix of colors. Aggressive slashes à la de Kooning are minimized, restrained to a flick of the wrist and at most, extending to the elbow.

I prefer using many small marks to one large one. The optical color blends and small marks vibrate on a similar frequency. Charcoal and colored pencils are used to delineate structure and expel rhythmic hatching, steadily lunging amid the wet expanse of chromatic glazes.

My subjects are washed in, drenched with the self, shaped in my image, akin to offspring. In my active, dominant role as a painter, bodily drips of paint draw life and light in and out from crevices. This role allows me to balance my self-perception and redefine preconceived definitions and borderlines of identity. Through paint I can caress, assault and stroke, I can abuse, impregnate, love and condemn. I can, through paint, experience as many rewritten lifetimes and transformations of the self as I can make paintings.

*White Dream Horse (Death)*: oil on canvas, ~60x45" 2022

*Wall Melter*: acrylic on canvas, 36x48" 2022

*Crying Wojak*: acrylic and oil on canvas, 12x12" 2022

*Puffed Cat*: acrylic and puff paint on canvas, 18x18" 2022

*Bug Box*: puff paint on acetate, 12x12" 2022

*Self-Smoosh*: puff paint on acetate, 3x6" 2022

*Turtle Box*: acrylic on Masonite panel, 18x24" 2022

*Self Portrait as a Spider*: acrylic on panel, 9x12" 2022

*Night (90 min self portrait)*: acrylic and oil on panel, 9x12" 2022

*Day (90 min self portrait)*: acrylic and oil on panel, 9x12" 2022

*Handstand*: acrylic on canvas, 9x12" 2022

*Untitled self portrait*: acrylic on canvas, 24x36" 2022

*Gas Can*: acrylic on Masonite panel, 24x36” 2022

*Lawnmower*: acrylic on Masonite panel, 24x36” 2022

*Haircut Babies*: acrylic on canvas, 24x36” 2022

*Horse Stamp*: acrylic on Masonite panel, 20x16” 2022

*Max, Fluorescent Red*: acrylic on canvas, 24x30” 2022

*Max, Upside-down*: oil on canvas, ~65.5x71.5” 2022

*Self, Upside-down*: charcoal, acrylic on canvas, 24x36” 2022

*Untitled self portrait*: acrylic and puff paint on cradled wood panel, 12x12” 2022

*Untitled self-portrait*: acrylic on found cradled wood panel, 20x24” 2022

*Untitled self-portrait*: acrylic on board, 16x20” 2022

*Post-Neighsal Drip*: acrylic, sequins on canvas, 36x24” 2022

*Clay Baby*: acrylic on canvas, 24x36” 2022

*Dream Cat*: acrylic on panel, 9x12” 2022

*Cauliflower Angel Baby*: 24x30” colored pencil and acrylic on cradled wood panel, 2022

#### Works Cited:

Editors, Artspace. “Doron Langberg on the Love That Inspired His New Edition.” Artspace,

Artspace, 12 Apr. 2022,

[https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews\\_features/meet\\_the\\_artist/doron-langberg-on-the-love-that-inspired-his-new-edition-57016](https://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/meet_the_artist/doron-langberg-on-the-love-that-inspired-his-new-edition-57016).

Printz, Neil. “How Pollock and Mapplethorpe Shaped Warhol's Oxidation Paintings.”

PHAIDON, 2018,

<https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2018/november/12/how-pollock-and-mapplethorpe-shaped-warhol-s-oxidation-paintings/>.