

Melissa Chandon
Professor Newman
December 1, 2009

Residency I
Semester Review

Random Works – Or Not



Figure 1. Melissa Chandon, Organics – untitled, 2009



Figure 2. Melissa Chandon, Organics – untitled, 2009

In a world which continually reduces the discursive and non-discursive complexities of art to the reconciliations of entertainment, fashion and (recently) social theory, this self-criticism is an ethical necessity.-- John Robert¹

During this first semester I have focused my studio attention on a series of abstract paintings which I now call my organic series. It was suggested during my first residency that I use this time to work in a new direction, experiment with materials as well as visual content. My starting point for the new work and experimentation was inspired when I attended a friend's exhibitions at the Center for Contemporary Art in Sacramento. Terry Berlier who is an Associate Professor at Stanford University,

produced an exhibition that incorporated tree cookies in an interactive series of sculptures. Tree slices or tree cookies provide a full narrative of a tree's age, health, and environmental conditions. Berlier's work was inspired in part by her discovery that there are 63 trees per person currently on this planet. It is with this information and Berlier's exhibition together with a documentary on architect I.M. Pei - *The Museum on the Mountain* (1997)², which presented me with a starting point and dialogue for my new work.

The film in essence is about the process of constructing a museum in Japan, located within a forest where some of the trees are one thousand years old. The movie presented an additional and interesting component as Pei, who was born in China, discusses the challenges that occurred with the fusion of two cultures with different sensibilities or aesthetics. The idea of building a museum within a forest, trying to disrupt the natural environment as little as possible, combined with thinking about these trees living for millennium was a concept that really grabbed my attention and stayed with me. I have found comfort in thinking about this forest being able to sustain itself for such a period of time. It has provided me with a psychological counter balance to the concern that I have about the environmental issues that we face today due to global warming.



Figure 3. Early work

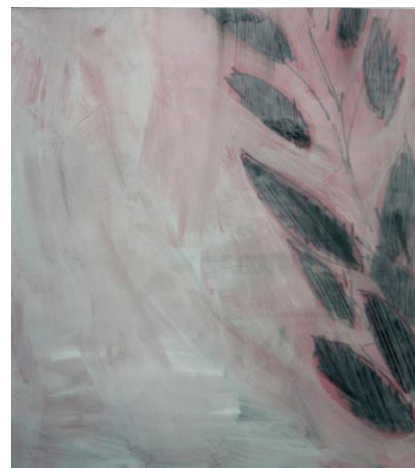


Figure 4. Early work

Upon the advice of my mentor, Tom Holland, I began experimenting with mixed media works on paper using tempura paints, glue and water as the medium, along with black marker, chalk, charcoal, pencil and ink, working on primed Arches cold press water color paper. The goal was to work quickly and produce a lot of work. The first paintings were rough and a bit clunky, with a few offering some interest because the technique was not apparent. With these by-chance pieces I dove in further with experimentation in materials, process and random elements in nature. My goal was to include a narrative component based on nature like the tree cookies that would in some way date stamp each painting. It was not clear to me just how I was going to achieve this.



Figure 5. Works in the garden



Figure 6. Works in the garden

Half way through the semester I moved my studio to a different location. I'm now in a smaller space and since I live in California I decided to take advantage of our mild weather conditions. I started hanging my work out in my garden to dry, along the fences and where ever I could, to give myself as much work space in my studio as possible. I also wanted to be open to chance or accident, rather than just approaching painting in the usual way that I already know so well. Because I was hanging my work

in the garden on the fences unexpected creative opportunities were presented by the sprinklers, sun, and wind. I noticed that as the work was hanging in the garden the plants were casting shadows on the paintings. The shadow added an interesting random component and one that was constantly changing. I felt perhaps this could be the window into my date and time stamping idea. I began incorporating the cast shadow into the painting by quickly painting the shadow itself. It is interesting when you think about the seasons affecting the lifecycle of the plants, the shadow being unique at every moment, every season, never to appear exactly the same again.



Figure 7. Work in process cast shadow

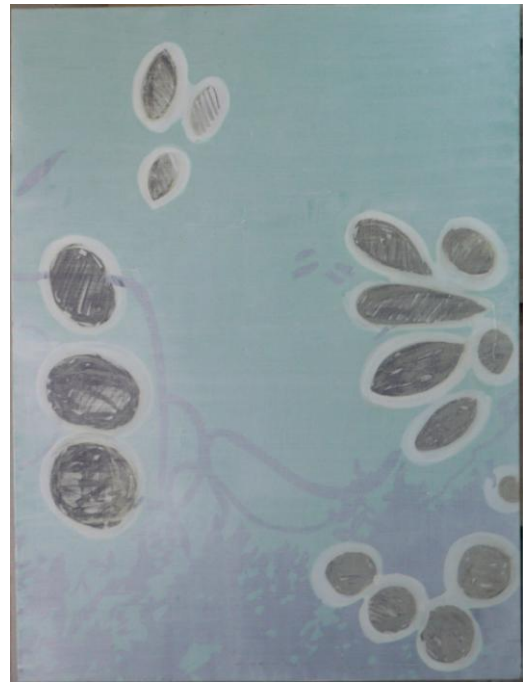


Figure 8. Green, finished painting with wisteria shadow

The mentor component of the Art Institute of Boston's MFA program from the start particularly appealed to me. I found it very helpful to work with a professional who provided me with an independent view, generous critiques, observations and encouragement. This allowed me to push the

limits of my work, take my time, experiment and be open to the unexpected. Writing the research papers also provided me with the opportunity to think about my work in an entirely different way. As a painter I primarily looked to the paintings themselves to provide the narrative content and through research and writing I have been able to contextualize my work more clearly.



Figure 9. Melissa Chandon, Blue with Trumpet Vine Shadow, 2009



Figure 10. Melissa Chandon, Organics -White, 2009

¹ John Roberts, "After Adorno: Art, Autonomy, and Critique" Roberts delivered this paper at apexart on March 8, 2000 <http://www.apexart.org/residency/roberts.htm>

² I.M. Pei - First Person Singular/The Museum on the Mountain, 1997, Directed by Peter Rosen. <http://reframecollection.org/films/film?Id=363>