Patricia Treib

Interview by Timothy Hull · Bureau, New York · Interstices (2017)



Patricia With Vase. Photograph by Kai McBride.

Aujourd’hui is pleased to release this exclusive interview with Patricia Treib by Timothy Hull during Treib’s latest exhibition of paintings titled Interstices at Bureau in New York. Treib’s work explores the malleable boundaries of the picture plane and plumbs the depths of forms, both familiar and distant. Her paintings have an irrepressibly active surface, as colors dance about in melody and forms arrive at destinations heretofore mysterious. Treib’s current exhibition furthers her intimate and dynamic research into the secret life of objects and motifs.



Installation view, Interstices, Bureau, New York.

TH: Your paintings are so beguiling to me because they appear so limber, quick and insouciant. Yet, I get the feeling there's a slow and deliberate process to them. Can you talk about the relationship between slow and fast, labor and ease in your painting?

PT: I want the works to have a feeling of immediacy and simultaneity, as if all aspects of the painting are happening at once, in the present—yet, if you look closely, there is an underlying sense that they are studied, planned—a structure that has been thought through and deliberated. They are both fast and slow. All of the large paintings have a corresponding work on paper as a point of reference, which I see as a script or score that could be performed in innumerable ways. Having this foundation or anchor frees up the making of the work, allowing for more improvisation and interpretation, since there's a wide gap to traverse between a handheld, compact painting on paper and the more physical, body-sized paintings on canvas.

TH: I think often of the notion of 'plasticity' when looking at paintings, as in the ability to move shapes, have malleable surfaces and push and pull competing planes. It seems like there is a lot of plasticity within your work—can you speak to that?

PT: A sense of movement in the work is one of the most important aspects to me. I'm most concerned with the moment where one area or mass ends and another one begins—the moment when we perceive a thing versus a non-thing—a moment of discerning, of seeing. It all hinges on the edges between things. I'm interested in how a painting can allow temporal contradictions to live together. I want every edge to be in question, a continual fluctuation between solidity and ephemerality—to emphasize contrasts between things and to also allude to a collapse of distinctions.



Installation view, Interstices, Bureau, New York.

TH: I have found your use of shapes to be one of the more intriguing and stylistically recognizable aspect of your work. Can you divulge a little of the inspiration for those

shapes?

PT: All of the paintings begin with a source that I work with from observation. It's important to me to have this anchor to something observed in a particular time and space. In these sources, I'm trying to focus on the space between things and to make these non-things concrete through the means of painting, lending them a type of solidity. I then use these observational paintings as the source for further paintings, burrowing further into those initial works. The shape vocabulary grows out of this process of searching and trying to extract these difficult-to-name spaces. Of course these spaces and shapes indirectly imply things, as they are contingent on what has cut out their figure. I want the painting to indirectly move or flutter around a thing without naming it or making it explicitly recognizable.

TH: I feel the energy and spirit of the arabesque in your work—maybe through the calligraphic line, perhaps through the repetition of Islamic architectonic motifs... and there seems to be a hint of Arabic glyphs as well. Am I way off on this?

PT: I'm not intentionally quoting Arabic glyphs or other forms of script, but an interest in calligraphic marks with the speed and rhythm of handwriting has developed over time. After spending many years working through different variations, I've come to develop the paintings through rehearsals. I practice the way an area is made over and over again, almost choreographing how a form is constructed internally. Repeating these gestures over a condensed period of time has made the marks more fluid and rhythmic. I'm drawn to Chinese ink painting and the idea that a lifetime of practice and study can be contained within a seemingly simple and terse gesture.

TH: I've heard you talk about the concept of mémoire involontaire as described by Marcel Proust. However, to me your paintings, via their repeating motifs, seem to point to the incessant and voluntary rehashing of a memory. Are you trying to perfect through art something that is only perfect in memory?

PT: I sometimes think of my sources and starting points as catalysts, possibly analogous to Proust's conception of memoire involontaire, that is: to come across a sensation that calls to us without us knowing how to answer it. It is speaking to a nearly lost moment of our past experience—something that escaped our conscious mind but is lodged in a bodily memory. I feel compelled to spend time with these sources and objects—an old clock of my father's, a 35mm camera, a detail from a Russian icon painting—so that I can look directly into a mystery, something that does not have an easy answer, but opens up more mysteries, compelling me to look deeper.



Patricia Treib, Pendulum, 2017.



Patricia Treib, Asturian, 2017.

TH: The press release for your show Interstices says that your paintings skirt the lyrical. Yet they seem so wonderfully lyrical to me! Can you elaborate on that?

PT: ‘Skirt’ can also mean to exist at the edge of something, to go around the periphery. It does not necessarily mean avoidance, but it is not cutting directly through either. Similar to the type of temporal contradictions I want to create within the paintings, I thought ‘skirt’ could contain a similar contradiction.

TH: What do you find is the hardest part of making a painting?

PT: I'm not sure if I have a meaningful response to this last question—I feel that every part of painting is difficult—and every part can be rewarding and joyous as well.

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