

THESIS

THAT WHICH SEES ME:

PAINTING'S UNIQUE CAPACITY IN AN AMBIVALENT AGE

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### THAT WHICH SEES ME:

### PAINTING'S UNIQUE CAPACITY IN AN AMBIVALENT AGE

I use the medium of paint to express my interest in problems for which I do not have the language to express. Born from my obsessive and indecisive tendencies, these preoccupations must be attended to at a distance from myself, a skill paint is specific to accommodate. Paint functions as a corporeal engine of thought, a notion expressed by French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, showing no distinction between the mind as non-extended or the mind as body/matter. Using paint to address my own disposition of ambivalence, its own ambivalent qualities provide a nuanced context for these interrogations. Paint exists both as itself, color made tactile and concrete, and decidedly descriptive with its illusionistic capabilities. These oppositions also provide a unique perspective to the fluid nature of our modern world burdened by the violence of its systematic naming and control as theorized by Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Paint is agile to speak of the implications to these ambivalent systems created in ordering our world. Secundino Hernández, Tomory Dodge, and Joshua Hagler are three artists who also deal with the medium of paint as a logic unto-itself. Like them, I explore the subtlety of ambivalence in search of a new constancy.

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## PART I: THEORY

*They are objects that are spaces, walls that are windows. They are the intersection of object and image. Painting maintains a physical anchor at a time when the image generally is becoming more and more ethereal- everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Tomory Dodge*

*Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions. Zygmunt Bauman*

Painting has a unique capacity to best function through its inherent contradictory traits. A medium simultaneously presented in its opaqueness, a dumb substance of tangible color, and a communicative tool transparent through its representational actions. These strange bedfellows of its circumstance elegantly parallel much of the contradictory essence that drives my relationship with the world. My obsessive and indecisive nature dominate how I navigate through life. Painting offers me justification for an acceptance of ambivalence, and with that, an opportunity to thematize my own struggles. Ambivalence is my template, and I am motivated by a pursuit of equivalents, seeking individual certainties to the myriad of possibilities I pose through painting. A picture or work reaches resolution when any number of disparate formal and theoretic elements level off in internal balance, painting's contrary qualities cooperating in unison. I avoid separating the perceived stability of reality and the shifting ways I might interpret it. Painting's bypass of a fixed viewpoint promotes a drifting between these "stable" states, allowing work to contradict itself over

time in “productive strife” as Martin Heidegger describes in *The Origin of the Work of Art*<sup>1</sup>. This strife is the essence of my process as the two dimensions of painting’s nature work fluidly in manifesting its creation.

Understanding that it is necessary for the medium to interfere with my deliberate intentions as it comes to art making, open susceptibility to something outside of myself has become much of my focus. I know what I am after once I see it but to manifest that realization I must let go; I allow the painting to dictate much of its making. This concept is also described by Heidegger as an “opening up...In the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work.”<sup>2</sup> I find comfort in this notion, the pressure of my own indecision lifted in favor of a fluid partnership. Painting allows me to see something familiar and sought after but only recognizable in the surprise of its appearance. By witnessing something new, a destination I could not have charted alone, I too am seen by the clarity brought about through a cooperation with ambivalence.

French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty reflecting on painting and its material investigations claims that the world of thought is not something that exists separately from the body, but rather recognizes an entanglement between aesthetics, thought and matter.<sup>3</sup> This idea is key to my process in accepting and utilizing ambivalence. Jorella Andrews recent book, *The Question of Painting, Re-thinking Thought with Merleau-Ponty* delivers an excellent case study for why he is so important to the medium, especially today. She introduces, “In broad terms, the aim of Merleau-Ponty’s project, which spanned the mid 1930’s to the beginning of the 1960’s, was to challenge the viability of so-called Cartesian dualism, that is, René Descartes’

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “*The Origin of the Work of Art*,” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, *Work of Art*, 295.

<sup>3</sup> Jorella Andrews, *The Question of Painting: Re-thinking Thought with Merleau-Ponty*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 12.

conceptual distinction between mind understood a non-extended (or non-corporeal) substance, indivisible but finite, (*res cogitans*) on the one hand, and on the other hand body/matter understood as extended (or corporeal) substance, divisible and finite (*res extensa*) as set out in the *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (*Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1641/*Méditations Métaphysiques*, 1647).<sup>4</sup> This notion posits paint as an ideal medium with regard to embodied thought. Ideas are conceived in partnership with the corporeal, a platform existing outside of the mind.

This is precisely why painting played an explicitly important role in clarifying Merleau-Ponty's philosophical belief with its ability to open new possibilities and destinations to the artist through its nimbleness as a physical and emotive material. Merleau-Ponty describes this process as a role reversal between interrogator and interrogated in the *Primacy of Perception*.

[The painter's question] is not a question asked of someone who doesn't know by someone who knows – the schoolmaster's question. The question comes from one who does not know, and it is addressed to a vision, a seeing, which knows everything and which we do not make, for it makes itself in us...The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him- those gestures, those paths which he alone can trace and which will be revelations to others (because the others do not lack what he lacks in the same way) – to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like the patterns of the constellations. Inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them.<sup>5</sup>

These painterly interrogations result in confrontations that bring me in contact with a knowledge that is only accessible from the inside out. By lending my body to the experience of paint, something else is expressed through me attained from this association. A visibility both familiar and enjoyable, yet surprising and uncomfortable.

Reading Merleau-Ponty, I found a framework that painting was at once both the modality for thinking through ambivalence and ambivalent to my intentions. Because so much of what I

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<sup>4</sup> Andrews, *Question of Painting*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 167.

want to express is elusive from language, I stay open to the emergence of questions posed through this interrogation. I think of this as gliding through the work, melding the separation between subject and object. Whether I start a painting with a specific image or sketch in mind inevitably the painting begins to make its own demands, superseding my intentions, making me question my motives in consideration of outcomes I could not have anticipated. This dualistic approach, a knowing and then not-knowing what I am doing as I paint, acquits myself from singular obsessive negotiations in place of a healthier dialogue with the work. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty describes this inquiry as an effort associated by an encounter with the fragility of the world as it presents itself to us.<sup>6</sup> Andrews describes this idea further with regard to modern painting. “It is this which characterizes the difficulty of modern painting: the intermundane space it brings to expression is generative; it is ‘the formative medium of the object and the subject’ where a ‘spark is lit’ between the sensing and the sensible, the seer and the seen.”<sup>7</sup> This generative process allows me to embrace the frailty of indecision as a dialogue with the fragility of the world.

It is important that these same competing impulses that manifested in the making are also accessible to the viewer. I want others to experience this vision of the world as incomplete yet harmonious in their rhythmic interactions, a field composed of possibilities and potentiality. It is an invitation to the drifting experience that I find so much comfort in when I see something new for the first time in a painting. Merleau-Ponty describes in *Signs* how these same open negotiations in the making of a work should also be experienced by the viewer. “The accomplished work is thus not the work that exists in itself like a thing but the work which reaches its viewer and invites him to take up the gesture which created it and, skipping the intermediaries, to rejoin, without any

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis and edited by Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, *Question of Painting*, 242.



guide other than movement of the invented line (an almost incorporeal trace), the silent world of the painter, henceforth uttered and accessible.”<sup>8</sup> A work born from this openness invite an active participation from the viewer and in so doing illuminate its intense communicative powers.

Understanding work’s communicative powers through its ambivalence, an open circuit created through competing formal or thematic forces, I was interested in how this dialogue might also promote positive transformation through its mediation. Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman supports my desire to discover a more informed rationale of how these unintended forms and intermundane spaces might have greater political function, how thematizing my own indecision and depicting a world in flux might speak to deeper understandings. Bauman depicts our modern world as continuously trapped in a state of ambivalence and it is this trap that coincidently offers its own solution. Bauman describes this pitfall in *Modernity and Ambivalence* as being set by the clarity and classification that reason set to impose on humanity to create stability, progress, and control.

Classifying consists in the acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming splits the world into two: entities that answer to the name; all of the rest do not. Certain entities may be included into a class- made a class- only in as far as other entities are excluded, left outside. Invariably, such operation of inclusion/exclusion is an act of violence perpetrated upon the world, and requires the support of a certain amount of coercion... Ambivalence is a side-product of the labour of classification; and it calls for yet more classifying effort. Though born of the naming/classifying urge, ambivalence may be fought only with a naming that is yet more exact, and classes that are yet more precisely defined: that is, with such operations as will set still tougher (counter-factual) demands on the discreteness and transparency of the world and thus give yet more occasion for ambiguity. The struggle against ambivalence is, therefore, both self-destructive and self-propelling.<sup>9</sup>

I find painting to function as a vehicle in this naming exercise that requires perpetual states of exactness through its nuance. Its inherent ambivalent qualities offer distinct possibilities in broadening our understanding through the unintended questions it might pose, resulting in

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 3.

specificities and classifications of heightened refinement, areas reason and logic can't quite reach. Painting is built from relationships, and its limits are boundless in that regard. Artist Sean Scully speaks about painting working toward this end in the video *Painting*.

The subject of my painting, to say it in one word, is relationship. And of course, that's the problem with the world. That's why we are, where we are. In a crisis, a historical crisis. It seems to me that the issue that art can deal with is this... So instead of thinking about things in the world as fixed, or inevitable, one can think about things as being possibly in another configuration. As they can be. Because, you see, in all life, you see the way that all relationships are reconfigured. It's only a question of how you think about it.<sup>10</sup>

Painting offers something very special in this regard. Both a window and a mirror highlighting a perspective distinct from the reality we find ourselves in. An understanding that the only things fixed in our lives is the concept that everything is constantly changing. This attitude is an initiative for active participation in those changes.

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<sup>10</sup> Sean Scully, "Painting," filmed April 21, 2014, YouTube video, 34:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWMqrNidBRk>.

## PART II: PRACTICE

I want to describe two specific thesis works that display the intentionality I have outlined about ambivalence and my various contacts with it. The first painting, *Quarantine Houseplant Painting 3* (Fig. 1), one of two large paintings (73" x 63") that was made to speak of a specific time and place during graduate school as the starting point. *Quarantine* was conceived to negotiate psychologically with my experience at the start of the Covid 19 Pandemic, which began during my second semester of school. The idea behind the painting was to set up a field of activity that spoke about interior spaces, namely the idea of being quarantined indoors as well as the interior space of cyclical thought during this time, a psychological interior space. Having lost our graduate art studios, I found myself creating multiple watercolor variations and interpretations of the same houseplant that I had in my apartment. When I decided to create *Quarantine*, long after being back in my on-campus studio, I decided I would use some of these houseplant sketches as the starting point.

I begin all my paintings with very thin applications of paint. Covering the canvas with quick, gestural slashes, drips, and splatters. I quickly add moments of thicker paint, both dark and light accents to create areas to push back against as the painting goes forward. Slathering paint in my gloved hand and smearing it on the canvas, as well as brush, squeegee and thrown paint at this stage. I cover the surface and come to a resting stage where the activity sits in balance to a certain degree of satisfaction; a feeling that I should not manipulate the layer any further. I stop painting and wait for it to dry.

I work on multiple paintings at the same time so that I accommodate this starting and stopping to let the layered approach work to my advantage. When I re-enter *Quarantine* at the next

session, I introduced the houseplant sketches. Even though I realize much of what I am about to paint will be covered by subsequent layers I want to establish the houseplant forms.

I have set a simple enough matrix imbedded with a particular idea of interior space, and now I am free to build up layers and layers all while welcoming intervening moments of the painting making its own demands. I let competing thoughts or tactics run wild, providing the accumulated history of the story the painting must tell. My palette is relatively simple and narrow as to hold to some specificity with the theme of this work. It is based in greens for obvious reason (the entire hue category, warms and cools as well as light and dark values), as well as a lot of greys and tans that stand to represent the interior space of my apartment.

While I work, I continue to use a wide variety of tactics to apply paint; it is smeared and brushed thickly, plus thin layers are splattered and slashed, creating lines and spaces of activity. I also use stamping techniques by applying thick paint to an area, covering it with saran wrap and smudging, stamping it later into a new location by re-application. The heterogenous nature to the multitude of marks aid in creating the intermundane spaces previously referenced by Merleau-Ponty. Through all the visual competition I am creating a patchwork of forces that allow room for the viewer to imagine along with the work being viewed. I am also opened to competing thematic thought, allowing disparate emotional states to roam and inform the work. Although certain people's lives were more negatively impacted by the pandemic than others, collectively we felt a certain degree of fear, loss, and loneliness. These are emotions I wanted to intentionally explore with this psychological space, but I also wanted to push back against those with many of the positive revelations I had during quarantine. How I was forced to take inventory of the important things in my life and create new hierarchies out of necessity. There is much I am grateful for having experienced that part of the pandemic. As I continue working through the field, there are warm,

organic forms that grow, and bloom contrasted by elements of constriction and isolation. Hard and soft edges, geometric and organic, feelings of gratitude and growth paired with loneliness and constriction. This moment in time, my ambivalence towards it, is represented in this flood of activity on canvas.

I aim for compositional spaces to function in contradictory ways, so engrossed with activity that they almost come out the other end as minimal in nature. The all-over quality unifies the chaos. Often, I use pattern as motif to settle things, an endgame in resolving the competing activity. In this painting, I return to a pattern, much like one of the initial stages. Based on a drawing of the houseplant in pot, its scale in relation to the painting, I place nine evenly spaced plants throughout the composition by making a stencil. Although this stage seems quite deliberate, there is high degree of chance as to how this final layer will impact the image, as I smear the thick layers of paint through stencils I created.

Ultimately, the stencil forms both come forward and recede with lilting regularity reminiscent of the natural lines that inspired it. I feel the pattern motif simultaneously demands your attention and requires your searching for it. The painting has manifested a new space born from ambivalence and specific in its ambiguity, something chaotic and frustrated, yet serene and grateful. I can feel the monotony of drawing that plant over and over, both fatigued over the deficit of that time, and eager for the variation and opportunity repetition supplies. So much of our lives can be found in seasons, cycles, rhythms, patterns and seeing this painting finished I was able to reflect on the inherent ambivalence of those structures. There was an amenity to this moment of the pandemic, an unwanted break to the pattern of my life that offered new perspectives and insights having gone through it. I found my own rhythms during this interruption, but I had to search for them. The patterns were there but they required a closer look. The constriction of

quarantine opened something quite expansive in my studio practice, and for that I am beholden. Freedom, constriction, need, and inventiveness live in this work and my hope is that the viewer is to feel moved to reflect, to breath, to sit, to act. To question what they feel and take stock in those shifting personal spaces. It is through the union of positive and negative that a pattern or cycle emerges. There is no spring without winter and it is this ambivalent relationship of one being dependent on the other that I hope to express.

The painting, *Cameron Peak Burn Scar* (Fig. 2) works as the opposite pair to *Quarantine* in the sense that they explore antithetical issues of this time and space of the pandemic. *Quarantine* was made to address interior space, conversely *Cameron Peak* was intended as an arena to locate thoughts and negotiations with what I would characterize as exterior, or natural environments during the start of the pandemic. The outdoors is important during this time for a very specific reason. Namely, here in Fort Collins, CO the beginning of the pandemic was compounded by the Cameron Peak Forest fire. The fire burned for 62 days, consuming 208,913 acres on the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests in Larimer and Jackson Counties and Rocky Mountain National Park<sup>11</sup>. During that time of quarantine, when many of us find a moment of solace in a daily walk or run, a way to escape the monotony of the day indoors in the same place, the Larimer County area looked and felt like dystopian future.

Having grown up in Colorado, the mountain landscape is one of my greatest loves and depicting it in such a damaged state came with an additional loaded perspective. The starting point for this painting is based off multiple sketches made one year following the Cameron Peak fire. I went to numerous locations within the burn scar and filled my sketchbook with what I saw. Although I was thinking of this much more like a window than a surface, my tactics in creating

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<sup>11</sup> Cameron Peak Fire Information, "Inciweb-Incident Information System," accessed March 10, 2022, <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/6964/>.

are largely the same. I followed much of the equivalent steps in building this work as described before, thinned gestural activity as a ground, followed by a locking of structures to push back against. In the second layer I introduced the tree forms that I had drawn from those locations. I picked various drawings to compose this one new landscape. Once the trees were laid in, the long period of collective layers and heterogenous marks built over time to create of matrix of crammed in visual information had begun. I did deviate from my approach in the last painting in that I made more of an attempt to use descriptive mark making to create the forest forms. Although, I was still able to interrupt those notions by taping off areas of negative space and painting those spaces as if it was a positive shape, creating a similar imbrication between object and ground that occurs in *Quarantine*. I find this important, whether I'm describing a specific space or an abstract one, this melding of figure/ground. It plays into my ambivalent intentions manifesting a field rather than a location. I think of a field as a space that is susceptible to forces, something pliable and in constant transition, intermundane. The burn scar from the Cameron Peak fire was the perfect setting to depict this impression. An area defined by its transitions; burned to the ground and slowly springing back to life one year after the fire.

The landscape forms interweave with negative spaces and a patchwork of movement cradles the viewer in the bustle. I see moments of sadness, loss, and fear; but the energy and vibrance in *Cameron Peak* certainly dominates the visual field. I think the viewer can relate to the unstableness of our world in a multitude of ways through this work. A reminder of our own mortality, but also a call to action to prevent furthering the climate crisis we have already set in motion. Hopefully it also brings inspiration and comfort in the ways life seems to continually find a way re-emerge.

### PART III: CONTEXT

As I situate my work among other contemporary artists, I gravitate toward an appreciation of those who obsess over painting's medium specificities and histories of its marks. I align myself with others who use how they paint, namely the entire gamut of paint application as a means of expression. Spanish artist Secundino Hernández born in 1975 is a painter utilizing the multitude of painting's marks in this manner (Fig. 3). Art critic Christopher Moore details the heterogenous nature of his marks and how they take center stage in a catalog of his work.

Lines fly across a canvas, violently, chaotically, obsessively and orgasmically- extraordinary how anthropomorphism attaches to descriptions of drawing, of mark making: an expression of being through mute signs. The ground gesso has been removed, scored, scratched. Paint strokes are wiped and smudged. Some trailing splatters have somehow even been removed. Sometimes there are scuffs from a shoe, the paint-pot's own footprint, dust and detritus. Sometimes the paint tube is used like a graffitist's thick oil pen, or lyrically, calligraphy, like a quill. Cartoons- color filled outlines- appear and disappear. There are murmurings from so many different artists: Salvador Dalí, Jackson Pollock, Cy Twombly, Antoni Tàpies, Paul Klee and Joan Miró, and older ghosts, El Greco, Titian, Michelangelo...If Groy's is right and contemporary art is in a state of auto-cannibalism, a religious obsession with its own body that traps it in its past, then the more self-aware artists are like forensic pathologists, admittedly with a want to use the parts for art. To look at art, to gaze at it, involves its destruction- its pulling apart, its dismemberment. And eventually, also rearrangement. It's what makes Mary Shelley's monster such a romantic figure too, a creation for the future whose past is already history- dead. The line between reality and dreams is precipitous: space and time. This is crucial. The marks on Hernández's canvases are marks in space but also with space. They are explorer's maps for travelling through art.<sup>12</sup>

This is another notion of ambivalence that is important to my practice. The medium of paint has its own history and its marks over time are not our own belonging only to the present. My painting *The Hashtag* (Fig. 4) sits very much in this category. I think of the marks, shapes, and spaces are almost caricatures of themselves, abstraction made real. I feel this work distinctly

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Moore, "Secundino Hernández," in *Secundino Hernández: All Is Too Much*, ed. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga (Madrid: Brizzolis, 2018), 150.



depicts marks as figures, and in that sense specifically highlights my fascination with the history of painting.

Another artist I find kinship with is American artist Tomory Dodge, born in 1974. Dodge's paintings straddle a line between abstraction and figuration (Fig. 5), an approach I utilize as well. This is a key part to the ambivalent nature of my work that I find the most satisfaction when I get these opposing elements to sing in harmony. Art critic Christopher Miles highlights some of these qualities in his work.

Though Dodge's paintings have at times been representational- quite singularly so in that they have seemed to deliver a lone or explicitly clear image- Dodge has never seemed concerned with delivering works, the transcripts of which might begin with phrases like 'a painting of...' or 'a painting about...' as he has seemed given to producing works more aptly described with phrases beginning with 'paintings that...' or 'paintings arrived at by...' It is arguable that matters of aboutness- to the extent that the paintings might refer chiefly or explicitly to some referent(s), or that agendas might be explicitly rolled out by paintings- aren't absent from Dodge's concerns, but they surely come in a distant second behind an inclination toward discovery and arrival.<sup>13</sup>

My modes of operation in the studio sit in complete agreement with this description of Dodge. I think of my painting *Mountain Lake* (Fig. 6) as an example of arriving at somewhere representational and specific by descriptor, but those intentions made themselves present during the process of painting and not by pre-meditation. My work has never been "about" the thing depicted, or a specific idea expressed. My intentions are only part of what goes into the work and it is through my negotiations with ambivalence, with paint, that any meaning is prescribed.

One last artist I want to highlight that I see my work sitting in conversation with is American artist Joshua Hagler, born in 1979. Hagler's work (Fig. 7) also straddles this line between abstraction and figuration while utilizing the history of painting's mark as a vehicle. His painting has a poetic nature to it that I find as inspirational in seeking nuance through

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Miles, "Caught in the Act: Tomory Dodge's Paintings in the Making and the Viewing," in *Tomory Dodge*, ed by Miles McEnery Gallery (New York: Miles McEnery Gallery, 2019), 4.

ambivalence, resulting in imagery rich with information. Art critic David Anfam highlights this trait to his work and our current need for poetry.

Joshua Hagler's recent works mark an important move forward into mysterious, more intuitive realms. Memory plays a key role, but so does Hagler's visceral contact with surrounding reality. This includes the deserted buildings and fire-scorched landscapes of southwestern New Mexico where he lives- as well as the birth of his daughter not long ago. Distant echoes from the Old Masters mingle with brooding chromatic fields to create a blurred yet vivid cartography of consciousness. At once dream-like and intensely physical, Hagler's painterly meditations on life, love, death and landscape could not be more timely as visual poems addressing existence in today's troubled world.<sup>14</sup>

I think Anfam articulates much of what makes painting so special, its inability to be quantified by language. It's made of stuff familiar to us, things like identify, memory, love, loss, place, and dreams; but painting comes to represent something new and certain in the amalgamation of all that went into it. The inner world made physical in ways that only its ambivalence could justify. I think of my painting *West Lake* (Fig. 8) in these terms. This was my first painting made after returning to my studio from quarantine. There are so many personal mythologies wrapped up in here, but this piece became something else entirely. It is fluid like water and its meaning is transparent only in its making.

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<sup>14</sup> David Anfam, "Forward," in *Joshua Hagler: This is the Picture*, ed. By Unit London (London: Unit London, 2021), 12.

## PART IV: CONCLUSION

Robert Motherwell definitively wraps-up my faith in painting as a medium of possibility, especially as it relates to its service during an age of ambivalence.

Painting is a medium in which the mind can actualize itself; it is the medium of thought...The greatest adventures, especially in a brutal and policed world, take place in the mind. Painting is a reality, among realities, which has been felt and formed. It is the pattern of choices made, from the realm of possible choices, which gives a painting its form.<sup>15</sup>

Looking back on this experience of graduate school, I find it quite invigorating that the obsession I have wrestled with throughout my life was only solved through embracing those indecisions as a solution. Just as Bauman described the problems created by ambivalence must require ambivalence as its clarification; so too were my complications with painting only solved through paint itself. Painting offers insights outside of language, and the lucidity it renders in this unjust world might bypass circuits and systems that have already failed us. Faith in humanity seems like an especially short-lived proposition, but perhaps, our problems are our solutions? They may be with us already; we'll know it when we see it.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Motherwell, "The Modern Painter's World," in *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*, ed. The Documents of Twentieth-Century Art. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

## FIGURES



Figure 1, Justin Price, *Quarantine Houseplant Painting 3*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 73 x 63 inches.



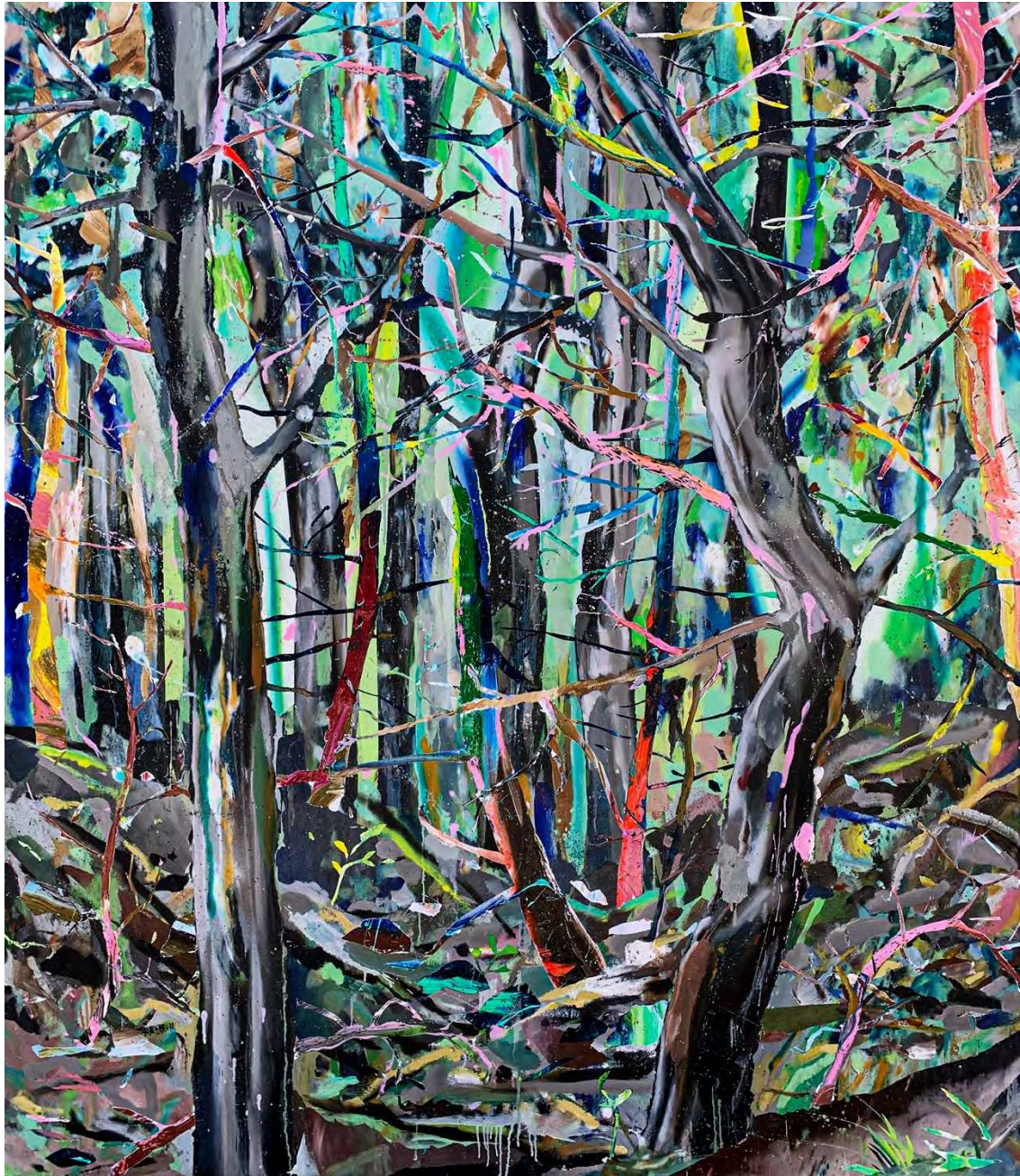


Figure 2, Justin Price, *Cameron Peak Burn Scar*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 73 x 63 inches.



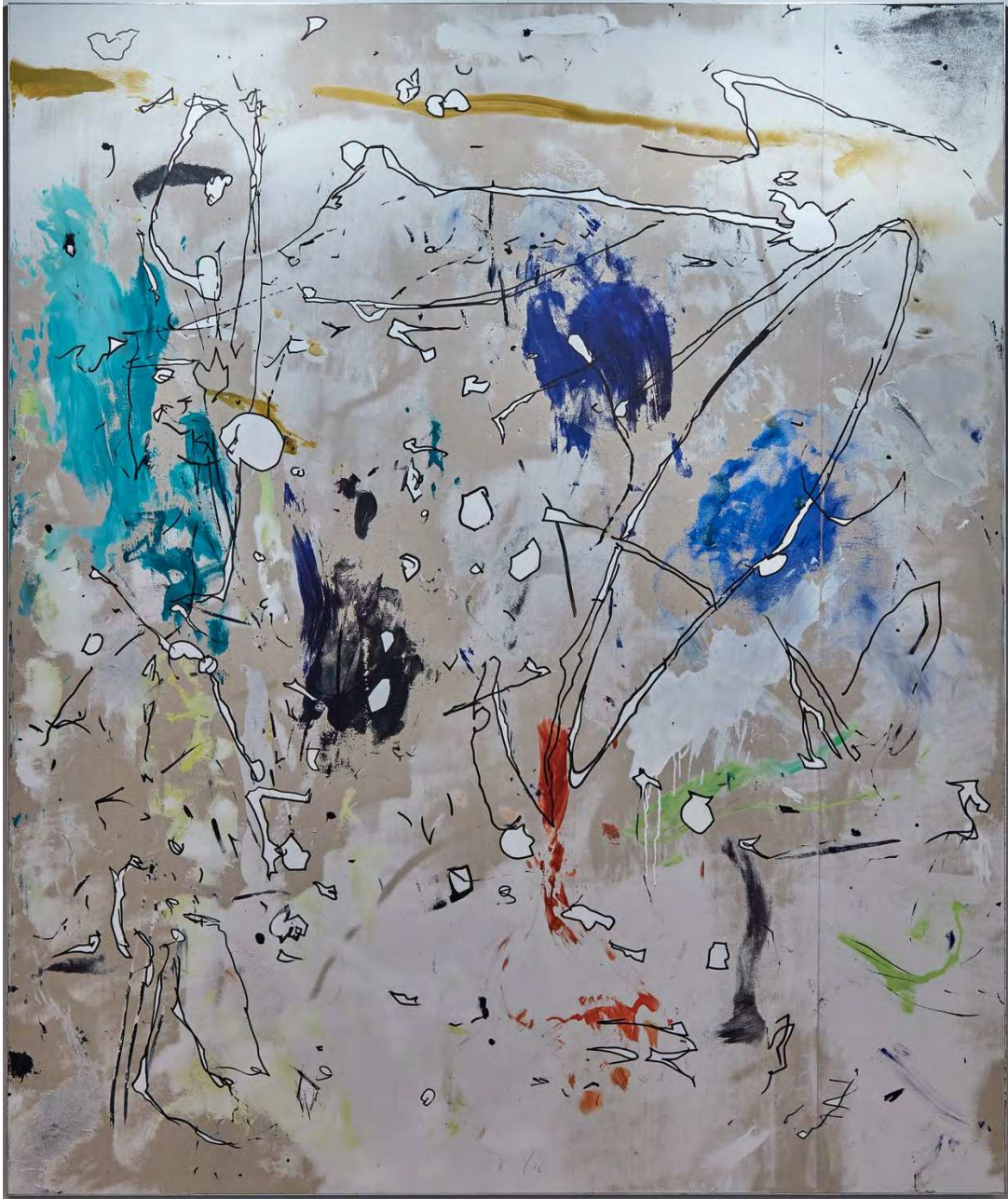


Figure 3, Secundino Hernández, *Un día en la vida*, 2016, Acrylic, oil gouache, and resin on linen, 300 x 250 centimeters.



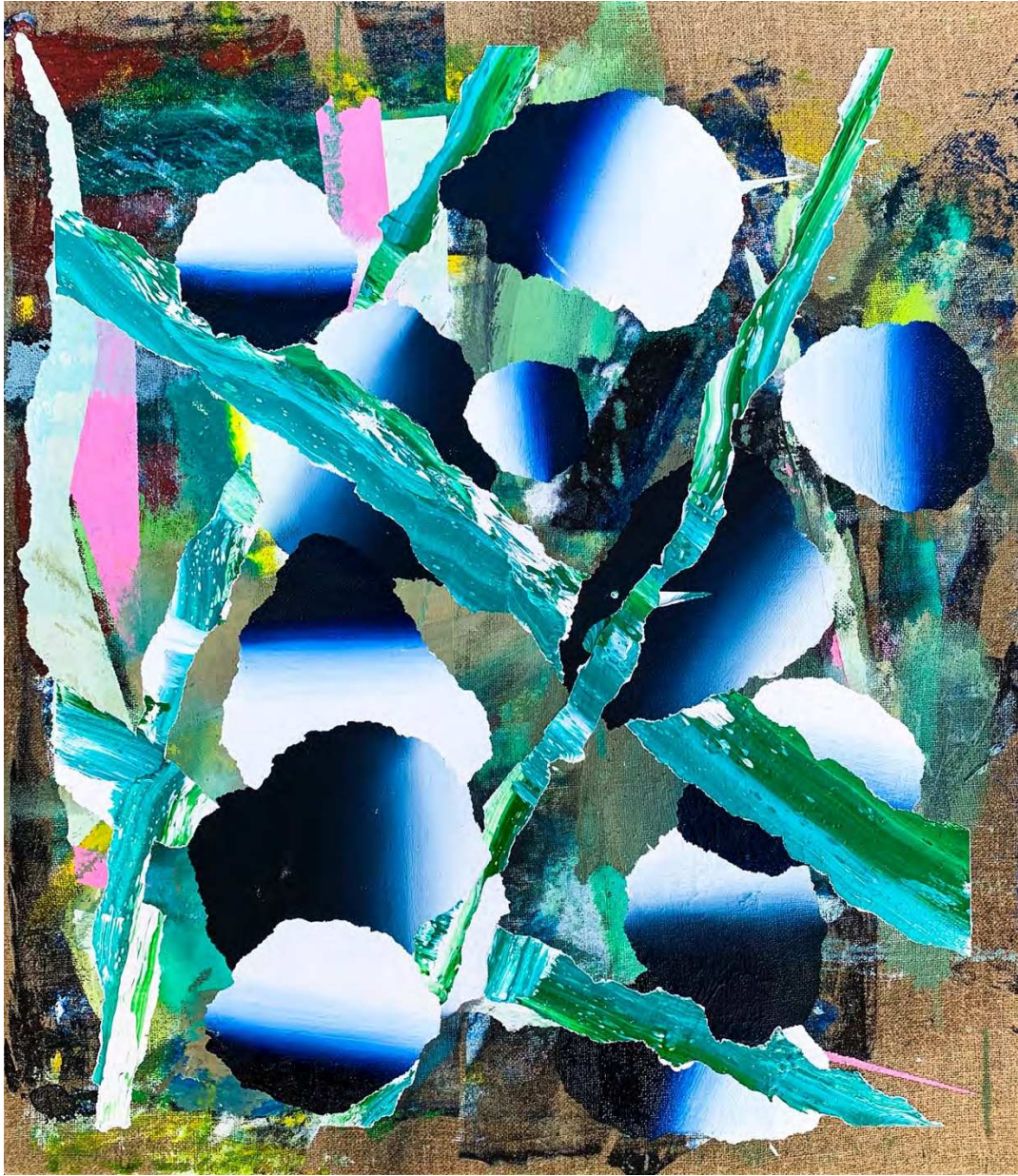


Figure 4, Justin Price, *The Hashtag*, 2021, Oil on raw linen, 22 x 19 inches.





Figure 5, Tomory Dodge, *The Tek*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.





Figure 6, Justin Price, *Mountain Lake*, 2022, Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches.



Figure 7, Joshua Hagler, *Between Earth and Here*, 2020, Mixed media on canvas and burlap, 269 x 462 centimeters.



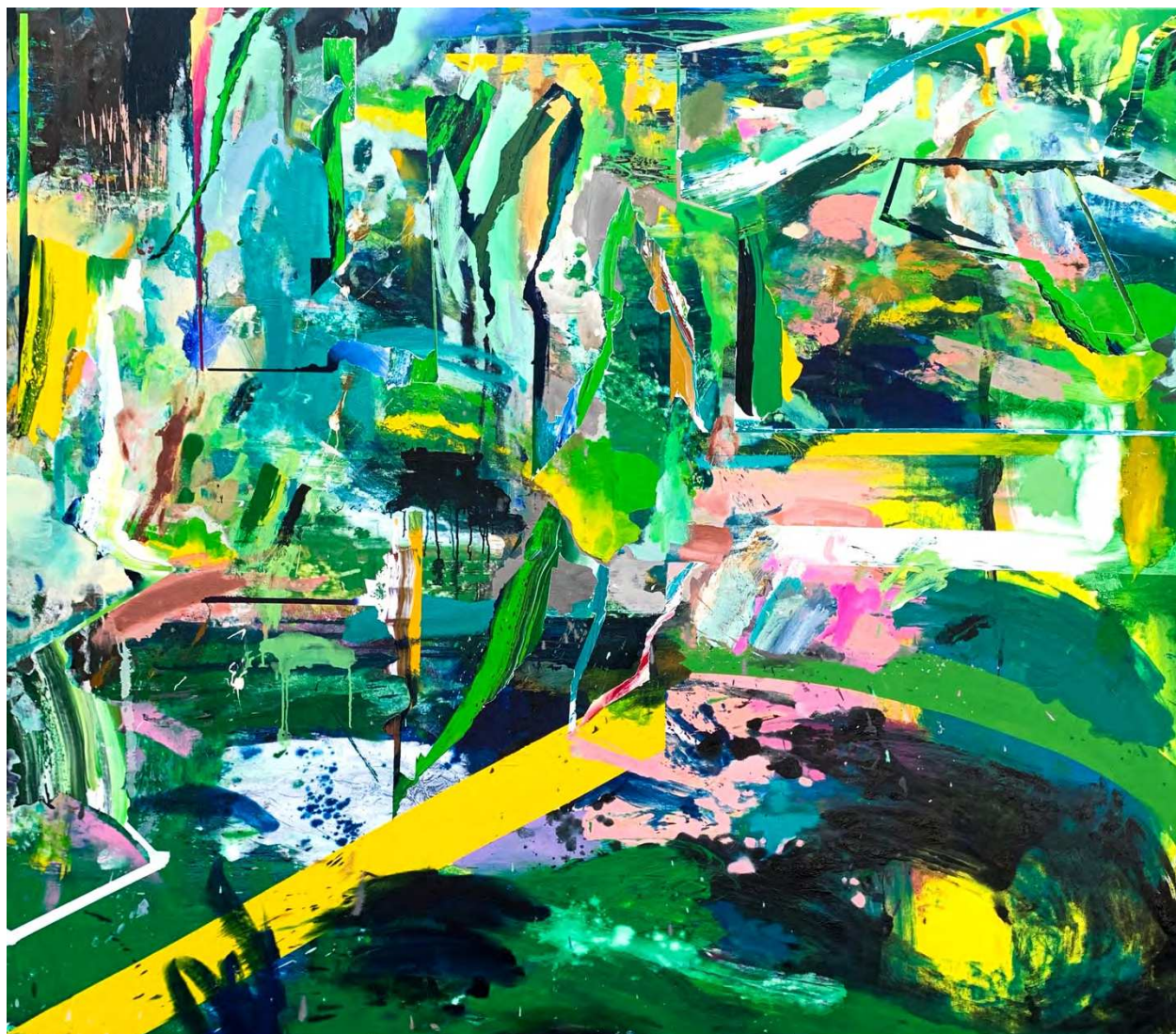


Figure 8, Justin Price, *West Lake*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 62 x 70 inches.

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