



Untitled
Headless Art Practice

DOGtime Expanded Painting
Gerrit Rietveld Academy

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Gerrit Rietveld Academy
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Acknowledgements

“By creating relational webs that reinforce the values we aspire to, relationships can help us undo patterns that Empire has ingrained. Loving relationships can be what allows us to face the things we fear about ourselves.”¹

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¹ Nick Montgomery, carla bergman, *Joyfull Militancy. Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (AK Press, 2017), 96.

Introduction

This text will be boring, complicit, confronting and hopefully engaging, maybe at times humorous. It's my way of preparing for life after the art academy. Expect passages that draw directly from my painting practice; this text is my canvas, encompassing diverse encounters, among them struggles with paint as a material, environmentalism, the headless body, sunflowers, and more.

The following text replicates my thought process—loose, fragmented, and, at times, absurd. It doesn't require posing questions or complete understanding. Much like painting, it doesn't demand definitive clarity. Think of it as a form of associative writing that emerged after my encounter with Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*²—a rejection of singular, flawless code, a challenge to conventional thought and communication structures.

In her thought-provoking exploration of technology and its impact on our contemporary world, Donna Haraway presents a striking perspective on writing. She eloquently asserts that: "Writing is preeminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics are the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings that make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western" identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind."³

Embracing cyborg politics, I aim for the text to be somewhat noisy and disruptive—a cluster of narratives that mirrors the wandering thoughts, evening news, social media feeds, overloaded agendas, and uncertain memories that fill the mind. Let's enter the realm of Haraway's cyborgs.

2 Georges Didi-Huberman *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back* (catalog for the 2011 exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofia).

3 Donna Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 57.

Heads and Faces

Individual people are holding positions as heads of states, heads of departments, heads of corporations, heads of family but the body doesn't need a head. Obstacles are born and thrive in the heads. Bodies don't have eyes that gaze, nor mouth that conveys a message, nor ears that receive. Body is not limited by these senses. The face, located in the front, is not interesting; it is endlessly photographed, always in the public view, while we cover the body, that is more personal, private, more our own. We rarely live naked.

It is time to get rid of the pictorial aspects of the human face, which exhibit a certain hierarchical organization similar to that found in language. Language is shaped by grammatical rules, just as faces are structured through a comparable process. There is no universally fixed face, but rather an assemblages at which together, by necessity, generate the face, thereby establishing a specific form of social and political influence.⁴

The body and its flesh is enough in itself, it holds knowledge and memories: the needle pricking skin, the itchiness after wearing a wool sweater, first time burning a hand, sweating when stressed, the pressure in chest, the fainting sensation. Body constantly changes or (re)forms itself. Yet, many are constrained by societal expectations that constantly shift. We are in conflict with self image, our needs and desires. These might affect physical appearance, personal choices and aspirations. The body wants to be free.

The bodies expand as the form is elastic or even amorphous. Strength training builds the muscles, dermal filler enhances the volume, the body might lose weight or gain it, it grows when young and shrinks in old age. You inhibit your skin, the envelope. When we "Stretch out our arms and legs: our twenty fingers and toes attain in space a large rectangular frame or circle - we are starfish, octopus or gibbon's maximal hold on the world."⁵ The stretcher bars are the limits of the world to the painter, the canvas is the skin, the barrier between the inner and the outer. That obstacle in the form of a canvas might make the distances

4 Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 170.

5 Michel Serres, *Variations on the body* (Univocal Publishing, 2012), 4.

greater⁶, even unattainable. There are still uncharted bodily territories, both physical and conceptual, waiting to be uncovered.

Odyssey

“but sing no more this bitter tale that wears my heart away”
 -Homer, *The Odyssey*

The sense of wonder is the driving force that leads us seeking new vistas. Much like the explorations of the past navigating the vastness of the ocean, we yearn to venture beyond our own boundaries. The ships sail seemingly endless waves, and the horizon appears to recede as the journey goes onward. This echoes our pursuit of knowledge, progress and wealth, not necessarily in that order.

The idea of exploration was not confined to the realm of romanticism, the explorers were not romantic idiots but traders and colonizers; there were profits to be made. It could happen via trade, which encompasses not only the exchange of goods but also the intermingling of ideas and cultures. From the ancient trade routes that linked distant civilizations to modern global markets fostering collaboration across continents.

“The Silk Road, which runs through the mountains of the Hindu Kush, was used by the caravans that shuttled goods between East and West. Ultramarine was first bumped along the Silk Road by donkey and camel in the form of lapis lazuli. When these reached the Mediterranean coast in Syria they were loaded onto ships bound for Venice, and thence traded throughout Europe. Even the word ultramarine, from the Latin for ‘beyond’ - ultra - and ‘sea’ - mare - indicates that this was a color worth going the extra mile for.”⁷

There is another side to this quest, the darkest one dims undeniably the romanticism. Christopher Columbus discovery and the encounter between the “Old” and “New World” brought suffering on indigenous people. Later on the forced dislocation of Afri-

6 For me, painting is an extension of the painter, a silent manifestation of their inner world that is no less real than the outer world. It's this distance that I am writing about. When this distance is too great, it becomes escapism.

7 Kassia St. Clair, *The Secret Lives of Colour* (John Murray, 2016), 182.

can slaves to the Americas caused ruptures in communities and their identities. “Histories of peoples colonized by the West have never since then become uniform. Their apparent simplicity, at least since the intervention of the West, and even more so in the case of ‘composite’ peoples like the Caribbean people, conceals the complex sequences where external and internal forces lead to alienation and get lost in obscurity. (...) One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West.”⁸ On that issue, Catherine McCormack elaborates. She points out, “In many art history classes, a similar norm uncritically centralizes Greek and Roman antiquity, which is very often taken as a definitive starting point for the ‘birth of civilisation’. The study of Western culture routinely begins in fifth-century BCE Athens, and follows a predictable story which suggests that after the fall of the classical civilisations the world was plunged into darkness (...).”⁹ Here, I am realizing that uncritically I titled this paragraph “Odyssey”. I can relate to this, from my history classes, I too can remember the whiteness of classical Greek sculptures, the distinct styles of the column—Doric, Ionic, Corinthian—prominent Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the Olympic Games, and last but not least, the invention of democracy in ancient Greece. What remains a mystery to me are untold stories of cultures and civilizations in other parts of the world. I did learn very little about those, and in terms of warfare, like the Persian king Darius the Great who invaded the city-states, later the Islamic Empire that entered Spain, and Genghis Khan in Eastern Europe. I find myself contemplating what aspects might have been overlooked upon entering the educational system and adhering to the prescribed curriculum.¹⁰

8 Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean discourse. Selected essays* (University Press of Virginia, 1989) 92, 93.

9 Catherine McCormack, *Women in the Picture. Women, art and the power of looking* (Icon Book, 2021), 183.

10 Here I find myself in a predicament. I don't want to write about personal growth, as capitalism has reduced the concept by suggesting that progress or success depends on individual effort and choices. There is a room for more comprehensive understanding but I don't know how to access it. I believe it might first require unlearning to break free from perspectives ingrained within the system.

Guilt

“Raw materials from all over the world are carefully treated and manually rubbed, sieved, scratched and filtered into powder.”

-www.kremer-pigmente.com

The quote above comes from the website of a known brand, a producer of pigment. It evokes conflicting feelings in me. The verbs bring to my mind notions of roughness and violence. For this reason, I found it important to tackle it. This text is also a way to amplify my quiet but persistent thoughts about the destruction of the environment. The issue is complex and seems to circulate without providing an answer.

The extraction process of certain pigments involves mining or quarrying to access pigment containing minerals or rocks. Once extracted, the minerals or rocks are crushed and ground into powder. Paint is pigment mixed with oil, sometimes fillers are incorporated. Pigments themselves are natural compounds that we see around us in living organisms. These pigments serve a range of functions, from aiding in survival and adaptation to attracting mates and providing camouflage. Pigment plays a crucial role in plants ability to undergo heliotropism. One of the primary pigments involved in heliotropism is chlorophyll, which is responsible for the green color in plants. Chlorophyll is critical for photosynthesis, the process by which plants convert sunlight into energy and fuel their growth. Chlorophyll absorbs light in the blue and red parts of the electromagnetic spectrum, but reflects green light, giving plants their color.¹¹

Usually painters look for high pigment content in their paint, the higher the number on the tube the more desired it is. Color is one of the elements of painting that many want to master, understand, control as it allows to create an atmosphere of strangeness or a realistic world, when interweaving light and color painters can create a tangible object. Color evokes feelings of intensity, loneliness, sadness, happiness and more. It goes far beyond visual appeal even though we might stand and stare

11 <https://www.mpsd.mpg.de/17628/2015-04-chlorophyll-rubio>

at the blobs of color while quietly contemplating or shouting in joy. It is an aesthetic experience, conveying meanings, symbolizing, narrating, and giving impressions. Every form has its color. The decisions of the painter are informed by bodily experiences. This is how Maria Lassnig described it: “The forehead is given a thought color, the nose, a smell color; back, arms, and legs are given a flesh color. There are colors for pain and colors for agony, colors for nerve fibers, color for pressure and fullness, colors for stretching and pressing, colors for hollowing out and bulging forth, colors for crushing and burning, colors for death and decay, colors for fear of cancer - these are the color of reality.”¹²

Another quality of paint is opaqueness/transparency. What are you allowed to see? What has been kept concealed? Transparency is the phenomenon when light passes through the layer of paint (Alizarin Crimson), whereas opacity is the situation in which the light strikes the paint film and is reflected back (as in Cadmium Red). This effect depends on the particle size of the pigment and amount of oil. “The refractive index of a pigment, which is the measure of light-bending power of particles as light passes through them, is important because the hiding power of a transparent pigment is proportional to the refractive index of its grains.”¹³ Painters aren’t magicians, they know and utilize this effect using glazes. “Glaze. When the quantity of medium is so great in relation to the quantity of pigment that light is refracted through the film produced by the mixture of these two and is reflected from the surface beneath it, such a film is commonly called a ‘glaze.’ The term has no precise meaning but it usually indicates a coating in which there is some pigment content. Its main characteristic is transparency. When the pigment used is opaque and pale, films of this general type are called ‘scumbles’.”¹⁴

Painting was never easier to persuade as it is today. The knowledge is widely available, in books, YouTube videos, workshops. Pigments are cheaper to obtain and most of them widely accessible. The invention of paint in the tube revolutionized the art world, providing artists with a convenient and portable way

12 Maria Lassnig, *Dialogues* (Hirmer Publishers, 2017), 96.

13 Rutherford J. Gettens, George L. Stout, *Painting Materials. A short Encyclopedia* (Dover Publications, 1966), 144.

14 Rutherford J. Gettens, George L. Stout, *Painting Materials. A short Encyclopedia* (Dover Publications, 1966), 22.

to carry and use paint. Before this artists had to prepare their paints from scratch, a time consuming process that involved grinding pigments and mixing them with binders. The convenience offered by paint tubes allowed artists greater mobility and spontaneity in their work. They could now paint outdoors, en plein air, capturing the nuances of light and atmosphere using the paint which pollutes the very thing they paint. This advancement was crucial in the development of Impressionism.¹⁵

There Is No Water in the River

At times, reading the news can make me feel like panicking. It appears to be an unending string of catastrophes. I ponder whether one day we might vanish from the Earth's surface, without us fully comprehending what went awry, as these events unfold and gradually render our environment inhospitable. But then, after a few hours of this emotional rollercoaster, I usually come to my senses and start checking out the flood maps of Amsterdam, calculating how long I could survive on top of my furniture, eating canned food, with my two dogs by my side, without running water. I feel unable to influence anything in a meaningful way, and I know it is a shared sentiment for many. T. J. Demos writes about it in the following manner: "(...) nuclear-war exterminism differs from contemporary eco-catastrophism. The former depends on a different calculus of agency and temporality, with a threat that can be abated via political regime change. (...) Ours is a catastrophism that seemingly comes about by simply participating in everyday life."¹⁶ In my situation, it involves painting on a daily basis and consistently squeezing out, as well as buying new tubes of paint.

Solvents are yet another environmental concern associated with oil painting. They are used to thin the paint, create varnishes, the

15 Katy Hessel, *The Story of Art Without Men* (Penguin Random House, 2022), 111.

16 T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature. Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Sternberg Press, 2016), 246.

effect of transparency, it aids the blending of colors, and allows removal of unwanted elements. Rags are soaked with turpentine to clean the brushes and palette, while the leftovers are stored in a sealed jar for reuse, again and again, until it's depleted, leaving behind only a film of pigment and oil at the bottom. Solvents evaporate quickly, leaving behind a paint layer that retains its color and texture. Common solvents are mineral spirits and turpentine. These solvents release harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that contribute to air and water pollution, as well potentially harm the painter's health.¹⁷ The description of Tauro turpentine bottle informs about the following:

“Danger: Flammable liquid and vapor. May be fatal if swallowed and enters airways. May cause respiratory irritation. May cause drowsiness or dizziness. Harmful to aquatic life with long lasting effects. If medical advice is needed, have a product container or label at hand. Keep out of reach of children. Keep away from heat, hot surfaces, sparks, open flames and other ignition sources. No smoking. IF SWALLOWED: immediately call a POISON CENTRE doctor. Do NOT induce vomiting. Store locked up Dispose of contents/container in accordance with local regulations. Repeated exposure may cause skin dryness or cracking.”

These substances are a product of distillation of resin harvested mainly from pine trees. Turpentine essential oil is also derived from the same pine resin used to produce turpentine solvent. Turpentine essential oil is utilized because of its aromatic and therapeutic properties. The characteristic smell of turpentine is also something that warns of the danger. The odorless option might give a false feeling of a safe environment, conceal the chemicals in the atmosphere.

17 Dikshith, T.S.S. and Diwan, P.V. (2003). *Industrial Solvents. In Industrial Guide to Chemical and Drug Safety* (eds T.S.S. Dikshith and P.V. Diwan).

Homecoming

Pigments are not limited to art and painting. They are an integral part of everyday life. They are used in clothing, cosmetics, coloring plastic and adding color to processed foods we eat and digest.¹⁸

Synthetic organic pigments come from coal that is in essence accumulation of organic particles on the earth's surface, it used to be plant material. To be exact, the substance derived from coal is aniline. It is an oily, toxic liquid extracted from the distillation of coal tar compounds. It was the starting point for a broad range of synthetic organic pigments and early pharmaceuticals such as aspirin and synthetic quinine. The first of these colorants was mauve, a purple dye developed by Sir William Perkin in 1856.¹⁹

The pharmaceutical, chemical, and fine art industries are intertwined. Products for these sectors were once available at the same stores. An example of this can be still seen at the Manuel Riesgo store in Madrid on C. del Desengano 22, which was founded in 1866. Here, you can find products for personal care, fine arts, home and garden, as well for laboratories. You'll come across items like rabbit skin glue next to coconut oil, plaster next to rose water, essence for candles next to roundup herbicide, and hyaluronic acid next to chlorine, along with a wide selection of national Spanish pigments.

I do come from an industrial region. I was born and raised in a Roman Catholic "traditional" family in Upper Silesia, where my grandfather worked as a coal miner. Every winter, our family used coal to warm the house. I remember the blocks being shiny in appearance, resembling glitter. During the winter, Silesian villages are dusty, moody like a black and white photograph. The smog hangs over the pastures in the valleys, and it would crawl between the same looking houses. The smell and the

18 <https://www.pantone.com/articles/color-fundamentals/how-do-we-see-color#:~:text=Light%20receptors%20within%20the%20eye,perceive%20only%20the%20reflected%20colors> The chemical structure of pigment determines its color. Pigments work by absorbing certain wavelengths of light and reflecting others. The color that we see is the result of the wavelengths that are reflected. For example, a red pigment absorbs all colors except for red, which is reflected and appears as the color that we see.

19 Kassia St Clair, *The Secret Lives of Colour* (John Murray, 2016), 169.

view was so overwhelming I can recall it today. Michael Taussig writes about similar views in a different place and time: "(...) the very same chemical revolution of the nineteenth century that emerged from the search for color and drugs from coal tar, this very same chemical revolution polluted those broad strokes of remaining nature with new texture. The sunsets never looked so stunning as they did through the haze of factory smoke and soot. (...) Surrealism arrived long before the surrealist caught on. The moon radiated chemical purple, streams ran with phosphorescent blue or thick green sludge. A stench and pall clung to the air."²⁰ Still today, in Silesia, coal is extracted from the earth through mining, causing destruction not only to ecosystems but also to public infrastructure and private houses. From time to time, pictures of destroyed roads or houses with craced walls, accompanied by upset residents, appear in local newspapers or TV stations.

The act of burning coal has a negative impact on the environment due to the release of harmful gasses and particles, which, ironically, creates the kind of atmospheric diffused light that some artists seek. Michael Taussig references Monet's paintings of the Waterloo Bridge as a result of the Industrial Revolution's influence. Monet's fixation with the rural landscape and the 'fogs' (smog) of London is evident in his artwork.

20 Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 43.



21



22

21 Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*, 1903, oil on canvas, Worcester Art Museum collection.

22 Claude Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*, 1904, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art.



23

The primary emission from burning coal is carbon dioxide. While carbon dioxide is a component of our planet's atmosphere and is known as a greenhouse gas, it has a detrimental effect on the environment when released in excessive amounts. The extraction and burning of coal and other fossil fuels disrupt balance in the atmosphere. This leads to a build-up of greenhouse gasses, which has negative impacts on climate.^{24,25} Nevertheless coal mining is still celebrated in Silesia. Barbórka, a Miner's Day is a traditional mining holiday, celebrated in Poland on December 4, St. Barbara of Nicomedia, patroness of miners, artillerymen, military engineers and others who work with explosives because of her legend's association with lightning. In addition Barbórka is also celebrated by geologists and other people performing professions related to the exploration of fossil fuels. In the mining tradition, St. Barbara's Day begins with a mass in the morning in the church. Then the mining band marches playing its anthem in housing estates inhabited by miners and their families (familok) and in front of management houses. The miners wear a characteristic uniform with a high hat. It has a mining emblem on the front with tools that miners used to break up coal. It has rooster feathers on top, which once served as a broom to sweep fine debris. The mining flag is black and green. Black symbolizes the underground darkness, and green the longing of forest and fields while working under the surface of the earth.

Threshold

The moments of transition aren't clear to me. The divide between public and private, self and other, and the dance between paint and body create tension. While I hold my individual views, engage as a citizen through voting and protest, and stand as a self-commissioned painter in this era of artificial intelligence art, I exist as a paradox—a relic, a radical, merely a fragment in the vast insignificance of our contemporary society. Is this a defeat? I am afraid that I might be perpetuating some kind of myths about myself and the paintings I create. Yet, within that fear lies a glimmer of hope—call it cliché, but I yearn to articulate it nonetheless. I

24 Armaroli, N. and Balzani, V. (2011), *The Legacy of Fossil Fuels*. Chem. Asian J., 6: 768-784.

25 Holtzmark, B. (2015), *A comparison of the global warming effects of wood fuels and fossil fuels taking albedo into account*. GCB Bioenergy, 7: 984-997.

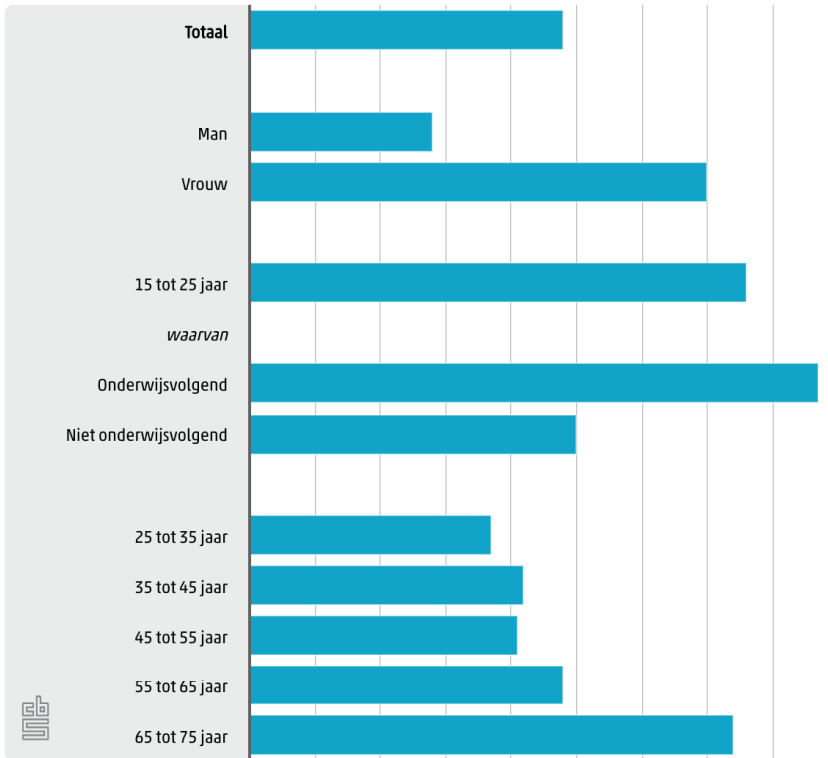
hope that painting still holds value, perhaps greater than ever before. Working against oneself, pursuing, being puzzled and not knowing is a wonderful thing in itself for the painter and has the power to affect and shake the audience.

Navigating these diverse themes results in rough transitions, mirroring the fragmentary nature of both my text and my paintings. I find myself becoming increasingly self-conscious, which isn't beneficial. It is challenging to separate the ingredients, and moments arise when I crave the clarity of stability, or the singular focus—one thing at a time. The overload doesn't generate a calming white noise; instead, it forms a disorienting cacophony that makes you dizzy and disoriented.

Threshold is a plank, a stone, a horizontal piece that divides or establishes a framework, providing support for a structure or an obstacle against which you fall (for example the threshold of a door). A threshold represents more than just a physical division; it is the point when experiences commence, when events unfold. It's the critical point of transformation. It is a moment when you realize if it's significant or if it is nothing. One such pivotal moment in history was the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries,, which marked a shift in human civilization, fundamentally altering economies, technologies, and social structures. "Most production gradually moved out of the household and into the factories and mills where men, women and children worked for wages. Consequently, domestic labor became primarily reproductive rather than productive activity. (...) Many women did enter the industrial workforce, but their wages were always lower than men's, and this led to conflict. Men argued that they should not have to compete with women who were cheaper to employ, nor settle for lower wages themselves. The idea began to gain ground that men should be paid enough to support a family, while women should prioritize their domestic responsibilities, ideally working outside the home only to supplement the wages of the family breadwinner."²⁶ Below, you will find a table published by CBS, a statistical agency of the Netherlands, illustrating the makeup of part-time workers.

26 Deborah Cameron, *Feminism. Ideas in profile. Small Introductions to Big Topics* (Profile Books, 2018), 57-58.

Part-time workers, aged 15-75, 2021



Heliotropism of the body

The common sunflower showcases an impressive diurnal rhythm in plants through solar tracking ability. During the day the shoot apex constantly adjusts its position to align with the sun's movement, causing the heads to track from East to West. Conversely, at night, the heads reposition themselves to face East in anticipation for the sun to rise again.^{28,29}

Our bodies too almost unknowingly turn towards the light, like heliotropism of the plants. We expose our bodies to the rays, in the parks and beaches. Architects position homes in a way that light will penetrate the interiors at a certain angle. It can be a factor in keeping your home cool and bright. During winter, we make use of tanning beds. The sun is the bestower of light and life. We harvest solar energy to generate renewable electricity. Photographers hunt for "golden hour" - specific warm sunlight that occurs when the sun rays have to travel at a shallow angle though a longer distance in the atmosphere, across particles of water, gasses and dust pollution. That kind of sunlight is warm, diffused. Last but not least, painters paint the light. At the beginning of modernity they traveled to the South for light. One example is Van Gogh, who went to Arles, where he painted sunflowers in 1888 and 1889.³⁰ For that he used a color familiar to many: chrome yellow. Fittingly, Van Gogh's sunflowers are sensitive to light exposure too and are changing in color from bright yellow to brown.³¹

28 J.P. Vandenbrink, E.A. Brown, S.L. Harmer, B.K. Blackman, *Turning heads: The biology of solar tracking in sunflowers*, *Plant Sci.* 224 (2014) 20–26.

29 M.L. Stanton, C. Galen, *Blue light controls solar tracking by flowers of an alpine plant*, (1993) p. 983–989.

30 <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0031v1962>

31 Kassia St. Clair, *The Secret Lives of Colour* (John Murray, 2016), 78,79. Although artists were using saturated reds and blues at that time, they lacked a comparable option for the third primary color, which is yellow. Only from the year 1804, they had access to chrome yellow.

Always changing or not?

When it is cold in a house the heating is on, when it is too hot the fortunate enough put on the air conditioning. Technology allows people to regulate their immediate environment. We switch the winter duvet for summer one, we turn on mister, dehumidifiers, and ventilation that allows fresh air to circulate indoors, removing odors and pollutants. It seems that we are sealing off our homes from the external world, our environment. The hotter it is, the bigger the demand for cooling systems. While air conditioning provides temporary relief from the heat, the energy it consumes contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. This cycle creates a feedback loop where the need for cooling contributes to the very problem it aims to alleviate. People change their surroundings for consistent comfort but the pressing question is: can we change ourselves, our habits of consumption, give up the yearning for constant growth? "(...) our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature."³² Here, I would argue that it is not a war. Life on Earth and our habitat are being annihilated. Animals aren't launching an offense against high frequency trading companies' offices or our governments. Instead, activism serves as a means to protect and restore the planet.

"Climate change is a multifaceted (from drought to flood) and multidimensional (from local to global) hazard that has short-, medium- and long-term aspects and unknown outcomes."³³ It is posing significant challenges not only for humans and animals

32 Naomi Klein, *This changes everything* (Penguin Books, 2014), 21.

33 O'Brien, G., O'Keefe, P., Rose, J. and Wisner, B. (2006), *Climate change and disaster management. Disasters*, 30: 64-80.

but it is affecting the distribution of less mobile plant species. “Animals can respond to environmental factors by moving to a new location. Plants, however, are rooted in place and must respond to the surrounding environmental factors.”³⁴

There are some opportunities for plants to adapt and thrive. Plants have evolved adaptations to help them survive the heat. Transpiration is the process of a liquid flowing in narrow spaces without the assistance of, or even in opposition to, external forces like gravity. It allows some species to survive in arid regions like deserts. Plants lose water through small pores on their leaves called stomata. The stomata can be closed during the hottest part of the day reducing the water loss. The same process happens in the smallest weed and the tallest tree.³⁵ Like plants, our mobility is ultimately confined to this one planet. How are we going to adopt? What is our equivalent of stomata?

For a budget prepper it is recommended to stock up the pantry, have medical equipment like contact lenses and herbs, arsenal of ammunition to protect yourself, paper documents like warranties in case your power generator won't work, (this you are supposed to get as well). The list could go on and the more there are items on it the more futile the preparation seems to be. Probably there is more to survival than this, but for now it seems to me to be overrated. Maybe it is not about “making it” but something else and it might be different to everyone.

When words fail painting

The effect of transpiration can be seen as well in the drawing up of liquids between the hairs of a paint-brush. It occurs because of intermolecular forces between the liquid and surrounding solid surfaces. The intermolecular attractive and repulsive forc-

34 *Plant Sens. Syst. Responses.* (2022, April 9). (n.d.). “Plants have sophisticated systems to detect and respond to light, gravity, temperature, and physical touch. Receptors sense environmental factors and relay the information to effector systems—often through intermediate chemical messengers—to bring about plant responses.”

35 Leisner, C. P., Potnis, N. & Sanz-Saez, A. (2022) *Crosstalk and trade-offs: plant responses to climate change-associated abiotic and biotic stresses.* *Plant, Cell & Environment*, 1–18.

es arise also between the hand of a painter and the handle of a brush. The brush is part of the hand and is taken for granted. It is a part of a painter's body, his/her/their extension. It can be forgotten about, just like one may forget about one's leg, stomach, neck or any other body part that is not currently in use. The hand wants to hold the brush, just like the tongue wants to speak, eyes want to see and feet want to walk. I don't want to elaborate in depth here on the relationship between a brush and a painter. There is a part that is unknown to me and it should stay uncharted. It feels wrong to write about it, as it would be too explicit. There is no need to engage with words when painting. You can't understand everything in words. Silence and observation can lead the process. This approach is more fluid and takes into account that you are evolving in the process. What is penned down today may not hold true tomorrow because you are not the same person who revisits it. This is how our world is: fluid, everchanging. "Fluids travel easily. They 'flow', 'spill', 'run out', 'splash', 'pour over', 'leak', 'flood', 'spray', 'drip', 'seep', 'ooze'; unlike solids, they are not easily stopped (...) These are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present (...)"³⁶ This is how we experience and how this feeling needs to be transferred. It is fine to lose track, be uncomfortable, not understand how we got here, to this point, to this sentence, to the moment of admitting not knowing, when the paint becomes formless. Yet here we can not get back anymore, we crossed the tipping point of transformation, we can't erase the paint, we can only continue to move.

While using administrative writing in memos, emails, rapports we are adhering to established formats and primary goal is to ensure that the intended message is communicated effectively, leaving little room for ambiguity or misinterpretation. Here the purpose is to show that, thoughts come and go, they are almost like events, periods of time. End of one period marks the beginning of the next. It is how we can perceive it. "Because it is absolute, the presenting present cannot be grasped: it is not yet or no longer present. It is always too soon or too late to grasp presentation itself and present it."³⁷

36 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press 2000), 2.

37 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman* (Penguin Books, 1991), 59.

Dead art

“Since art is dead in the actual life of civilized nations, it has been relegated to these grotesque morgues, museums.”

-Walter Gropius

Museums are mostly static, they collect, preserve, display, interpret. They proudly promote historical and national heritage, just recently expressing some remorse. This is what intimidates sometimes and stops us from entering these spaces. The impressive buildings and its contents are of national importance, it's a show off of achievements, national heroes, and in some cases stolen items.³⁸

“At the turn of the century, museums displaying primitive objects resembled department stores during clearance sales: items were displayed en masse, in no special order; they were on view, but not exhibited lavishly or enticingly. (..) Today, museums and galleries of what we have agreed to call primitive art resemble jewelry stores. Objects are displayed, singly or in groups, in glass cases. Dramatic spotlights isolate the objects, from each other and us. We peer at them, sometimes walk around them, but with the glass marking a distance between us and them.”³⁹

These days museums and galleries are like linear writing, aiming for transparency. When we enter art spaces the art is usually presented in a grid manner. We easily fall into a set of prescribed rules or a choreography (see for example how the visitors behave in any museum, they form a line to see an object, sometimes at a certain distance). Crowd has its own, let's call it choreography. Individuals know they should keep a distance, that we should look mostly from afar.

Usually I can't connect, understand, or feel the art contained in these spaces. It seems cold, isolated, aloof. Yet, sometimes there are good moments. It's when the painting draws you inside, and the space around—the white walls, high ceilings, the noises, the

38 Examples of that could be Benin Bronzes. Still in the possession of the British Museum. See their website for more information: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/benin-bronzes>

39 Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone primitive* (The University of Chicago Press 1990), 75,76,78. The author later states that this wasn't a neutral presentation but indicating that “African life was messy, chaotic, in need of Western order.”

crowd—all disappear. That's when the painting comes to life, unfolding in front of your eyes. Every so often it tells you a story, and other times, the paint itself and its materiality are enough. As you turn your back, moving to the next room, you catch another glimpse, and you almost feel the presence of the painter. You start seeing their "fingerprints" all over the canvas—the speed of the brushstroke, the care for the line, the balance or lack of it in the composition, you see so much. You may even think you're tapping into the painter's thoughts and emotions. You consider the possibilities and dead ends of the painting, and perhaps you believe you understand it now, or maybe you know less than when you first looked at it. Whether you like it or not doesn't matter; it has stopped you, made you look slowly, think slowly, you are conscious, deliberate, intuitive, just tuned in.



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Narcissus

Brushes are utilized for cleaning, grooming hair, and applying make-up. In a household, a variety of brushes serves different purposes. They are there to sweep, cover up, buff, scrub, and to treat surfaces in order to reveal an improved version, to rectify something. Makeup aids people in enhancing their look, concealing imperfections, or even adopting an entirely different persona. It has become an integral part of many people's routines. The act of applying makeup promotes self-care and self-love, as individuals take time to indulge themselves and enhance their features.

It is said that:

... the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus... What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?

-Alberti, De Pictura, 1435

Narcissus' story is a cautionary tale about the dangers of self-love and vanity. Narcissus, a handsome young man, became infatuated with his own reflection in a pool of water and was unable to look away. He eventually died of thirst and starvation, unable to leave the pool or even drink from it.

Painting goes beyond the mere depiction of physical objects or scenes; it serves as a medium for expressing intangible feelings and concepts that can not be perceived by the naked eye. It acts as a visual representation of the artist's inner self. A Matisse stated: "The harmony of all the elements of the picture that participate in a unity of feeling brought about by working on it imposes a spontaneous translation of feeling, which comes not from a single thing but from a complex thing, and which is simplified by the purification of the subject and of the mind of whoever translated it."⁴¹ Painting, and the emotions and concepts that Matisse writes about, should, for me, be reached by the simplest possible means. However, here lies contradiction: Paint is a force that is able to charge, open up, strangle, tell a story, bounce joyously,

41 Jack Flam, *Matisse on Art* (University of California Press, 1995), 107.

conceal and reveal, twist and surprise, change a point of view, drip, fall apart, be real and illusionary, complicated and simple, smooth and rough, go over and under, transparent and opaque, it can be all of this at the same time or none of the above. Paint is not a simple matter.

The plasticity of the new headless body

“All the masters of the Renaissance achieved great results in anatomy but they did not achieve veracity in their impression of the body. Their painting does not transmit the body, and their landscapes do not transmit living light, despite the fact that bluish veins can be seen in the bodies of their people.”⁴²

-Kazimir Malevich

As my awareness of environmental issues grows, I experience an interplay of emotions, including guilt and internal struggle. Balancing convenience with sustainability, navigating conflicting information about the most effective actions, and coping with the limitations of individual efforts in the face of systemic issues is overwhelming. I am grappling with personal responsibility and trying to reconcile conflicting values.

I have many questions but one comes forward more often than the others: Why wouldn't we consider that in our current world the strongest capability is compassion, ability to feel and empathize? Those are the qualities that we teach our children and that we value the most in our relationships and communities. We have high regard for intelligence in both humans and machines.⁴³ I would like to reimagine our bodies as inside out bod-

⁴² Alex Danchev, *100 Artists' Manifestos From the Futurist to the Stuckist* (Penguin Books 2011), 110.

⁴³ Lex Friedman Podcast #390 with Yuval Noah Harari, *Human Nature, Intelligence, Power and Conspiracies*. This talk delves into the concept of compassion and its utilization by AI to manipulate

ies. Instead of the organs being tucked away neatly inside the skin, they should be exposed to the world. This means that the heart, lungs, and even the brain could be visible for everyone to see. The body would be gifted with a great sensitivity. The organs would shift and move in response to the elements of the outside world, including sunlight, pollution, noise, wind, temperature, rain. The bones could provide a sturdy structure, forming a protective cage around the organs, some of them would have the space to move like the lungs expanding and contracting with each breath of the body.

Hesitation

Every action is recorded on the surface of the canvas; it can't be retracted. Painting possesses a flawless memory and a long tradition. Once the image is completed, it can't be undone. Each of your foolish movements is preserved. It constitutes a collection of surplus images. This is why, at times, confronting your own work can be challenging and destruction of some canvases necessary.

In a painting forces can be applied to a body; there could be a formal logic to the experience. The logic I apply to my paintings is not always consistent; I forget myself, change my views and approaches, and feel differently on a given day. My logic is foolish, with intervals and glitches. Thoughts might not always be productive but occur in a loop. These unpredictable forces mould, repeat, respond, interact, and dismantle my subject/object.

Painting employs visual elements that compose the artwork, such as lines, shapes, colors, and textures. These elements can be composed in a settled or unsettled manner. The allure of instability lies in the moment of uncertainty, unease, ugliness or tension. I perceive an interplay between formal logic, which I want to apply and control to some extent, and my human psyche which creeps upon me in unexpected moments. It's the quiet whisper, an echo that reverberates through the corridors of the mind when least anticipated. What then occurs within spaces on the canvas, or as commonly phrased, 'in between the lines,'

human behavior by creating the illusion of consciousness, simulating human-like qualities.

is hesitation—a pause. If it is too long, the heart starts racing, the mind rationalizes, and manages the physiological responses to avoid panic. Those moments must be overcome.⁴⁴ The work seems to me to never reach completion, never achieving the perfect moment, a lasting situation that could be tolerated as time is passing.

There is the brief illusion that this moment might come as you are adding deeper shades on the edges so the lines disappear in the darkness, making the color appear warmer, separating the forms from each other, wiping them off, slightly moving the composition lower, nothing works. You hide the painting somewhere dark, then come to visit it later at a different time of the day. Maybe it is that you are tired and it is generally your fault, maybe the painting is just good enough.

Painting changes even though you stopped working on it. It seems to be living its own life, it ages, becomes grumpy or pleased with itself, sits comfortably or laughs at you.

Beginning at the end

“Being alive is the main event.”
–Alok Vaid-Menon⁴⁵

I perceive the world as interconnected. To fully understand certain events is impossible; for me, it is overwhelming and at times, daunting. I acknowledge that my understanding is constrained and biased by my influences, outdated beliefs, and privileged circumstances. I thought this sentence will make me feel somehow absolved, yet my limitations do haunt me.

⁴⁴ I want to admit that these emotions are a natural part of the creative process, and although I understand that the unsettling feelings are part of my painting practice, I am finding myself repeatedly in the state of self-doubt.

⁴⁵ <https://alokvmenon.komi.io/>

Through associative writing and my painting practice, I aspire to unlock new doors and possibilities to communicate, feel, see differently, and to unveil relationships that were previously concealed from me.

It might seem like I am not writing, painting, or concluding here anything specific and not willing to commit to the recognizable. It's about not being able to make up one's mind, weigh every step, hesitate, and overthink constantly. Not moving forward but rather sideways, trapped in a zigzag motion, changing direction frequently and falling in the gaps where no logic presides.

Embracing confusion is at the heart of this endeavour.

This approach may seem cliché, yet it is about the ongoing journey. There's no certainty or predetermined destination. Painting exists without a name, untitled.

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