

Doron Langberg: When I was in school, which wasn't really that long ago, no one was really looking at figuration. I feel like what was kind of "hip" was the process abstraction. Like, I feel like you all probably read the Jerry Saltz "Zombies on the Walls", etcetera. So I feel like- and even the show at MOMA kinda codified us from the moment of abstraction. And I feel like these things change so fast. I've only been in New York for maybe four years. And even in this short period of time, it's like figuration is suddenly back. I feel like the conversation- it feels really determinative when you're in school maybe. Or it at least felt that way to me and then I was so surprised to see that just everything changed so quickly and now there's all these kind of articles about like- oh, the return of figuration and like how figuration is meaningful again. And it really made me understand how meaningless all of these shifts are and they're just kind of market manufactured.

So I feel like there's kind of a herd mentality to the art world that I think actually made it a lot easier for me to focus on my work once I kind of understood that because it's so distracting to- cause you, I feel like, at least for me when I was a student, I really kind of almost took it personally that there's certain attention paid to- like even you were saying- like you were the underground or there was no "allowance" for you guys to make the kind of work you were making. And I feel like kind of understanding that that's not— kind of related to the quality of work or to the things that are really underpinning the work but just something that's really superficial was actually helpful to deal with kind of the madness of the art world and changing trends and stuff like that.

Most of my paintings are only like- three or four pigments and I'm kind of obsessed with only using single pigment colors so I can have better control over them, but I really- and I count them (laughs), so really every painting could, like some paintings have only like two colors in them or three colors in them.

Drew Beattie: But they can create a ton of color and...

DL: Right, because some of them are transparent, some of them are opaque, if you like scrape some of them on top of the other ones- like I feel like there could be like, within the layering, within the process, there could be so much variation so the world is- kind of becomes much more- much richer. But I feel like for me, it would be impossible to control more than that. So I feel like I really try to reduce as much as possible so I can have that freedom to experiment with other parts of the painting whereas the color is kind of really limited.

DB: This is a great thing to do actually. I have a favorite German painter— actually his name is Andy Hope 1930. He used to be Andreas Hofer and I was looking at a bunch of his paintings, I have this book on him, and I realized "Oh my God" all these paintings I've loved for years- they're- it's three primaries, black and white. That's all he's using and he's making this universe of color. I thought "Oh my God" he's just doing three primaries, black and white. And- you would never know, you kind of have to look at the paintings hard and realize "Oh my god, that's all that's there". You know, so I think looking at painters that you really like and figuring out "What do they use?"

DL: Yeah.

DB: You can just do the detective work. You can just say "Oh wow, these greens are all coming from just these two colors", but in variations of value, transparency and so forth.

DL: Well it's funny cause the opposite example would be someone like Bonnard. I actually tried to follow one of his palettes and it was completely impossible. Like there were just like every color in those

paintings and the idea that he was able to juggle all of them and create some sort of coherent structure is really kind of beyond me. Cause there isn't- there wasn't- I feel like with someone like Van Gogh you can really kind of detect like "Ok this is a complimentary base painting, this is red, this is green" and you can really follow his thought process whereas with someone like Bonnard there's just, it's almost impossible.

Well I feel like the thought process you're describing in terms of like "Well this means like the exterior intervention of like things that happen to us and this is like my [inaudible]. Like, the idea to assign concrete meaning to like this shape in the painting and this shape like this means this and that means that – I feel like that's not a way. I'm actually talking about it with a friend of mine as well like- that's not really a way that paintings are structured ever. Like there's no kind of like- I have no access to that and it's not really- it's not kind of coming out of this shared language of- to me, I'm like, when I look at these, the things that kind of signify meaning, right, are historical references to like Bacon or expressionistic lineage and then the images themselves, right. So, these people that are obviously kind of invented or surrealist, right? So I feel like you're placing me in a certain kind of world, right, that is obviously, like, imaginative and emotional. And I think there's a lot of... I think that the strengths of these is that there's a lot of specificity to the way you're using the paint whereas the figures feel- like here, right (gestures at painting) there's like a... declared emotionality to the gesture of the figures, right, so I'm like "Oh, they're sad and they're sitting at the table being sad." So I feel like just kind of as much, I feel like maybe it would almost feel garish for you to add like, more information to the figures and I can kind of relate to that cringing feeling, but even just as an attempt to sabotage this process and opening it up and seeing what more is there in it. Cause I feel like it's coming from rich experiences, but you're not giving it to me yet.

Student: Right.

DB: It's like, you know, what happens when you let some really alien disruptive thing in. Is then all of your creative forces are marshalled to solve a good piece of trouble. I don't think these are giving you enough creative trouble. You have a system—

Student: Mm-hmm. Right.

DB: —and you want the system to bend, but it can't bend.

Student: Yeah, so I just have to...

DB: So you have to throw something in there that's like a monkey wrench like "Oh my God, what are you doing in my house?"

DL: Yeah, I think it's a more productive problem to have where you're trying to kind of just throw everything at something and then figure out a formal way to make it work together. Yeah.

DB: School can unfortunately sometimes encourage you to keep your competency instead of disrupt your calm and your sort of plateau. Right, there's things come along like "Hmm, a BFA show." You know, why not— not think about that, perhaps.

DL: Like, I feel like there's something about like this figure as— that does feel like a stand in or like a metaphor that I feel like could be really successful. Or there's something kind of, that at least to me in a way that's kind of hard for me to articulate that kind of clicks with an internal reality that's being kind of externalized through again kind of a metaphorical image. Cause you're talking about an internal reality that you have with your body, right, that you're trying to communicate to the outside world. Whereas I feel like what I was trying to do with the Tyler painting was take something that has a certain social perception, right, like someone showing you their asshole has already a role in our life, right? Whether it's like a defiant role or "it's gross" or whatever and I wanted the way that it was painted to kind of change that perception or change that role. So I feel like maybe it would be useful to start with something that already exists as – if you're like oh- if you're thinking about- not necessarily something that's internal to you but something that's external or a perception that you're kind of making you feel self- like, self-conscious about hairiness or whatever, right. Like something in the world that you desire to be or you want to fight against or- you know what I mean? Kind of connected not only- cause' this is too internal for me to understand that that's what it's about. Whereas I think something like that does read to me as like, from the inside out. Whereas I feel like my process is more from the outside in, in a weird way, or at least that particular painting.

DB: There's been a whole thematic thing with this, your whole session. What responsibility goes to the artist to actually embody, physically and visually and sensorily, the wishes- such that become communicative or readable by others who are willing to read them, be willing look into them and see these meanings that are pertinent to the artist but aren't delivered fully enough yet by the artist to be present, right? I mean, that's been a theme in a lot of the work that you're talking about and it also goes to something else. When I look around the room, you know, coming back to sort of a little bit of history, I'm reminded of something that many of us felt. I mean, my father was a painter, I came along early on, back in the 60's and 70's thinking "What are we gonna do when high art has eliminated emotion?" And there was a point where it felt like everything's about a certain kind of theoretical or material or object-y philosophy innovation when we're all just as emotional as we ever were. Everyone is tracking and living through their emotional experience as much as a cave person or a French farmer in 1310. Right, so art has to keep answering to that and it is answering to it, right. So you guys are coming along using all this personal signifier, all this personal history and all this figurative imagery to try to find a way to embody and capture your experience in an abstracted form, as you were doing I think brilliantly in your paintings. It's like- that's really great, I mean, I'm so Pollyanna about this, but I mean it's just, it's great because there was a trap. There was a trap- there was a trap that I have to do. There was an art police. There was a theory police. They said "You can't." Artists were told "If you want to be taken seriously, you can't do..." and there's a long list, and that's going away.

DL: At least for me, I try to think about the kind of shared languages that we have. Obviously, our history is one of them and kind of like our-kind of cultural realities another- but there's so many kind of touchpoints to hold on to that I feel like could be useful in terms of getting that out from the surface.