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Artist Statement

Film as Sculpture, Process as Object

Art objects are a record of an activity. Paintings and sculptures are in fact layers of decisions made by the artist to form a complete end product. Every instance of movement the artist makes in process follows through to the object, even if the action is covered, hidden, unseen, or forgotten. The material action is undermined by the finishing of the object. The art object is dead. There is life in artistic creation, but not in the final outcome. I do not think that the art object is valueless. I appreciate it as a document of an artist's practice and manipulation of material. When I see a painting, in its marks and gestures I have a desire to see them being made, not at their resting point.

The art object is an end point and appears permanent. It is a fixture that signals the end of creation. End points are not significant—what interests me in art is the making, and the activity of the materials the artist is engaging in. My SMP work culminated in a video installation in Boyden Gallery. The moving images are of paint being poured down strips of fabric. Streaming forms collapse upon each other until they fall out of view. These are extremely restricted views of a greater action occurring outside of the screen: the viewer is only provided a small portion to regard in the space. The space itself contains three elements: a projector mounted on the wall, the projected image, and a cloth scrim that is projected upon. The video can be seen on both sides of the cloth, and walked around in order to see it from all sides.

Throughout the first half of my SMP, I created sculptures that danced around the idea of being active. Glossy surfaces, undulating shapes that hinted at movement—the work imitated activity, but was an illusion of just that. Despite my best efforts to hint otherwise, the sculptures were still, dry, finished, and dead. *Interior/Exterior* is a culmination of these issues. I wanted these objects to read as narratives of process, but they were just artifacts.

Art objects are passive and motionless. The viewer makes the choice to regard the static as active. This video captures action and represents it to the viewer. I attempt to turn the video into something that is still there and active, but also impermanent. Action, impermanence, the dispersion of the art object: all of these are elements of the Process Art movement of the 1960s. The artists linked to this movement include Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and others who were concerned with the means of art, rather than the ends. A culmination of these concerns occurred in 1968, when Morris organized an exhibit that included his own work alongside Richard Serra, Eva Hesse, Alan Saret, and Bruce Nauman. The works consisted of industrial-type materials such as felt, rubber, and fiberglass that took their shapes according to gravity. They conformed to physical laws around them. In Morris' 1968 statement, later titled "Anti-Form," he introduced the idea of art works existing in time and the making, rather than as static icons¹. Although

¹ Hoffman, Katherine. *Explorations: The Visual Arts since 1945*. IconEditions, New York: 1991.

these process artists still present objects for the consideration of the viewer, the finished object is not top priority, nor is the artist's hand: the individual gesture that defines his skill and his style. Robert Morris' felt pieces aren't ever really "finished", they settle differently each time they are hung, and are respondent to forces within each individual space. The language of hanging cloth is also continued in my scrim which flows to the floor and gathers as it will. It will move along with those who enter the space. Another artist in the movement who worked with pouring was Lynda Benglis. Some of her pieces—including works such as *Blatt!* (1969) and *Baby Contraband* (1969)—consist of the artist pouring and allowing the pigmented latex paint to seek its own forms. The paint appears to still be oozing over the gallery floors. It is not regulated; it has spread outward in strange but familiar shapes. The "once-liquid materials have found their own shapes, defined with a minimum of artistic intervention."² She does not manipulate them further than her rate of pouring, the paint can spread as thin as it may. What I enjoy about her work is the denial of the artist as a grand creator—but an observer of what occurs in a simple action.

Although I work with paint, I refer to my work as sculptural. A painting sits on canvas or wood, and may create the illusion of a deeper space, but it will never break from the physical plane that restrains it. A painting is flat, but paint is not. The forms that undulate in waves past the eye of the camera do not ever land onto a flat plane and settle. It is in constant and fluid motion, always changing, and is relentlessly impermanent. It never becomes something substantial that can be seen in isolation from the entire system. I give the viewer something that has happened and continues to happen in front of them. The video provides a closer examination of what things are and what things may be, and transforms the recognizable into something new and unexpected. There are instances in the video that the paint does not show itself at all. For five to thirty seconds between segments, nothing is projected. The entire "object" vanishes and reappears at random intervals. I acknowledge that I am constructing and presenting an object and illusion, but I do not see it as an endpoint. It is an object that is simultaneously present and absent, real and projected. It is not discounting the actions that were made that culminate in this final presentation to the viewer; in fact the action of the material is the focus of the piece. It has been made into an object in order for the viewer to better see the possibilities of these images.

Like there is a tension in painting between flatness and illusory space, the sculptural space contains tensions between present-ness and flatness. My work establishes a dialogue between painting, sculpture and time-based media—and with each of these media a narrative is brought about. First, with painting there is a denial of flatness that I have already discussed. The work becomes sculptural by incorporating elements of the room and space through methods of projection. While it may be projected flat onto a wall, the expanse, scale, and intentional placement gives the images a sculptural sense of object-ness. The work implements and incorporates different elements of painting, sculpture, and video.

² Nichols, Matthew Guy. "Lynda Benglis at Cheim & Read." *Art in America*, v. 92 no8 (September 2004) p. 123.

The video reveals the history of an object, and at the same time becomes transformative images. This is executed by stripping away all other elements that may interfere with that revelation.

It is the hand of the artist which starts or stimulates an action to begin, and which guides it. It is the role of the artist to guide the viewer's eye, or to refocus it. The objects that I have filmed are active. My experience in making correlates directly with the audience's viewing experience: process is a real, changing thing that is not able to be ignored or passed over in order to view a finished object. It allows the viewer's eye to trace movement down a form, or center onto contours of action where paint rapidly builds up and then breaks apart, streaming off out of view. I am not acting upon the medium, forcing it to do things that are physically unfamiliar or unnatural. I am observing it in a natural state, conforming to the demands of physical laws of gravity and the rules of the material itself. If I interfere too much in this action, the feeling of dislocation is broken. The disorientation of scale is interrupted when the viewer can identify what things are. By being able to place it back into the context of just paint on fabric, the work no longer speaks outside itself. The further my hand is away from the work, my intention is to encourage a willingness on the part of the viewer to accept that paint could flow as something greater, and could reference something on a much larger scale—the body, the earth, geological events: things close to and far from the original object. When offered something precise or limited, the opportunity unfolds to reach for meaning beyond what is presented.

Contemporary sculptor Roxy Paine works with machine and functional art-robots in order to explore elements of painting, sculpture, and drawing. I believe his work is an extension of the Process art movement, but takes advantage of technology in order to have a more controlled execution of an action.

There is a level of absurdity in his works that at first I took at face value. He is, after all, programming these machines to carry out tasks. But when an installation includes a machine that is squirting out art, and that art is placed on a pedestal, questions are raised. These objects are mass produced and repetitive. The machines can never change their task, or evolve their process.

They carry out a single task again and again, such as spraying or dipping objects in paint, in order to make an object that is complex and sophisticated. The resulting objects are incredibly minimal because of the simplicity of the tasks. The way I move or control my actions is modeled on the manner of mechanical devices. The materials are left to their own means, like Paine whose "materials—paint and polyethylene—are given their own say in how each work turns out."³ The materials are allowed this say because the artist's hand is minimal or absent. In my case I am pouring and observing. In Paine's work, a machine is doing that job. Both *PMU (Painting Manufacture Unit)* (1999-2000) and *Paint Dipper* (1996) are very similar in their processes. A precursor to *PMU*, *Paint Dipper* is a machine that, with a robotic arm, takes a canvas and dips it repeatedly into acrylic paint. After each dip, it is let dry, and then the task begins again. *PMU* functions

³ Neil, Johnathan T.D. "Do Androids Dream of Making Art?..." *Art Review*. August 2006

in a similar layering fashion, except the robotic arm sprays paint on, lets dry, and then repeats. With his machine *SCUMAK (Automatic Sculpture Maker)* (1998), a machine squirts out hot polyethylene in layers, with time allowed between each for cooling.

The absurd extends into my work. After all, I am watching paint drip. I am asking the audience to contemplate a simple, and often overlooked action. I admit that when people would ask me what this body of work involved, I would blush and stammer, and say I was filming paint pouring. Why was I embarrassed? I was also amused at times at the lengths I went to in order to construct a set that would minimize my own presence. I constructed a structure that allowed for one action to be executed simply. And that action was just pouring.

But reaching further, I believe that there is more than the absurd present in Paine's work, and in my own. Time and time again, I read about the organic forms his machines had created.

Both painting machines create works that have a clean, machine-made look, but reference organic or geologic elements. *Paint Dipper* layers so much that horizontal striations appear at the bottom of the canvas, pulling it into a much more organic field of vision. In order to form these structures time was taken, and the resulting painting or sculpture reflects a "greater frame work of geologic time and structures."⁴ With *SCUMAK*, a sophisticated build-up of form and undulations of organic shape are created by a machine that performs a simple act again and again. And the shape of the sculpture is determined by what the materials do and the forces that act upon them—including gravity, evaporation, humidity, surface tension, and thermal dynamics.⁵ Because the artist has removed himself, at least in any expressive way, from the course of creation, the materials naturally take on very specific forms that are also echoed in my work. The flowing paint in both of our works references, among other things, the movement of water, masses of natural forms through time, molten earth pouring downward, and the unrelenting force of gravity upon these materials. The simple observation of a natural event extends that imagery outward into fields of geological time.

The first distinction between Paine's work and my own of course, is the machine. The mechanisms enable his actions to be constant and real. I am physically pouring the paint, but I also implement digital video and projection techniques in order to give material action a presence. By filming and representing my video in specific ways, the activity I display can be transformed once again into something present and constant.

Constancy is harder to pin down because it reveals no beginning or end; it is full of continuous time. Each segment in this video piece is a "catch and release." I cannot prolong process without undermining the material's ephemeral qualities. A single moment cannot be preserved to regard in isolation. The video I have made is less than half an hour long—but consists of both moments of moving paint and moments where nothing is being projected. The image does not simply roll onward for the viewer's

⁴ Volk, Gregory. "Roxy Paine: Dreams and Mathematics" *Second Nature*. April 25, 2002.

⁵ Volk.

pleasure. I have incorporated instances of absence intentionally, so that these happenings don't seem so perfect or planned. I have made the video loop and repeat, which at first seems to collide with the idea of impermanence in material activity and in process. But the video is my attempt to flip this impermanence, to elevate this action to the status of something continuous and constant and worth seeing. We walk away from a painting knowing that it is still and will probably not change. From this work, we must know that it will constantly be flowing and re-interpreted by others in very different ways.

Because each of these segments all look very similar, they might seem to tell the same story of movement. However, with further examination each presents individual levels of action. There is a duality between repetition and change in this work. There is also no frame that keeps it in the language of television or projection screen. The video is not projected at size. The change in scale naturally makes these events larger than life. The bodily relationship to the object is changed from small into a scale that is larger. Scale becomes a transformative element, a tool that can redirect the object's nature and what it is and may be. Projecting on translucent cloth gives an impression of present-ness, avoiding the expected language of television or projection screen. There is a predictable language of projection and video that I want to break out of in order to create an active object. We have the ability to come at this work from all sides.

In this work, organic forms present themselves and vanish and reappear in different forms. Although movement is constant, it *is* impermanent, because nothing is repeated exactly. The feeling of impermanence is a central element to Earthworks of the 1960s and 1970s, which place themselves outside the realm of the gallery, into a real world of accumulation and erosion. By locating the site of an artwork outdoors, sometimes in extreme environments, the piece will not always remain. Like the work of the Process artists, these art objects have a life of their own, and a death of their own: accumulation erodes away. Additionally, the actions are never repeated exactly. Time, environment, the method of execution—overall situations change.

Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* was constructed in 1970. It is built of about 6500 tons of rock and earth, and still persists to this day, sometimes overcome by the tide of the Great Salt Lake in which it is situated. It disappears and reappears—a man-made landmark that conforms to the demands of the environment around it. It is not always there, and when the water recedes the form has been altered by natural processes.

Robert Smithson was a critical figure in the rising Earthworks movement in the late 1960s. While I see parallels in his work in some aspects, I think it is important to point out that Smithson's grander gestures of pouring asphalt or carving out parts of the landscape are not aligned at all with my intentions. What I am activated by is the pouring in *Asphalt Rundown* (1969) and the idea that this action is part of a larger process of accumulation and erosion. The pours in my own work also seem to be part of something larger—because we can only see a limited amount of the action. It is not clear why or how the paint is changing course or moving faster. In Smithson's work, I am not interested in the photograph of this gesture, the document that I have seen time and time again. The movement of the gravel is not reproducible, and it is also not predictable.

There is an attempt by Smithson, which is similar to my attempts, to predict what the asphalt will look like: to capture a brief moment of action that has not yet occurred but will pass in an instant. There is a struggle captured in the sketches that Smithson executed that I believe I have a connection to. We want to predict movement, and it is that movement that is central to our work. Once the asphalt is done pouring down the hillside, it ceases to move—and slowly collapses back into earth.⁶ Even though there is a continuation of movement after the artist/actor/truck dumping asphalt has left the scene, I am finding a relationship between my work's impermanence and the impermanence of that single moment in the movement of Smithson's asphalt and earth pours. This is because my action becomes nothing—there is only a film that captures the movements. Smithson's pours would be more interesting to me if they were more transient, and didn't express human manipulation or conquering of the natural landscape. I am skeptical of his work here because of his destruction and alteration to the hillside. My work is not garish, or I don't want it to be so. The flows I make are something that can be gentle, and sometimes extremely fast and insistent. It has been displaced from its original setting in order to give it to the viewer.

In the procedure, gravity does not have identical effects twice. Of course, it always pulls downward on the paint, but it flows in infinite variations. With a looping of film, the viewer can watch this again and again, if so inclined. The forms course onward and eventually will reappear, but not after even more instances of flowing paint and inactivity. By staggering and splicing the film, expanding the length of segments, and taking that feeling of control over time away from the viewer, I can further express that these are single instances in time, single events of a material reacting to its physical limitations and in that displaying an array of organic shapes and references to natural occurrences.

The viewer will never see process in its true form. I turned to film in an effort to match the viewer's experience or scrutiny to my own, but it became much more than that. I discovered that what had so seduced me in the past years, the making, was finally able to be made a priority over object. But the minute evidence of the making is reintroduced, it becomes a performance; it becomes something out of the context of just plain studio work. The feeling I had pouring paint with no one in the room was different from the feeling when someone else was watching, or when there was an eye of a camera. An outsider's gaze, human or mechanical, changes a process into a performance.

The presentation of an action through objective means allows for a closer glimpse of true process. By introducing the aspect of video into this conversation between paint and sculpture, my work became more complicated, but also more resolved. The final object embodies the tensions of the work in context of its making, and in time itself. There is a dichotomy between consistency and impermanence, which also mirrors the disjunction that I have felt existed between the ends and the means of art. There is continuity and yet there is change in the forms that pass before the viewer's eyes. I have taken strides to prove to the audience that the film does not function as a documentation of my action or

⁶ *Robert Smithson*. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. University of California Press: 2004.

the material's action, it is a presentation of process that brings the object forth where it can be transformed from paint into something greater. My work can be seen as repetitive or changing, absent or present, real or projected, past or current as each medium furthers and simultaneously undermines elements of the other media. The simple action of pouring paint becomes a complex examination of what is valued in art, and what is expected out of creating it and viewing it.

Where do we, as artists and viewers, find art? Is it in a painting? Is it the object? Or is it in the act of making?

How do we approach art objects? We may assume that they are not created through some absurd action because they are presented to us in a gallery, on a pedestal or in a frame. But what if the object was squirted out like toothpaste from a machine, or painted by an animal? Or, created through an action as simple as pouring paint through a funnel?

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