

June 2007
Residency Summary:
Rebecca Moran Brine
Paper I

June 22nd

The Beech Tree Inn is a quiet bed & breakfast in Brookline and was home for me for ten days. It wasn't that quiet when I came to breakfast and saw Judith Barry, Dike Blair, Michael Newman, Jan Avgikos and Oliver Wasow show up at the breakfast table. John Chang rang the doorbell at 7 am and woke me up as my room was on the front porch. He had flown in from LA that morning and we were the only two students staying there. We walked or took the 'T' to and from AIB.

The program began by signing in, greeting my fellow group two members and setting up my exhibition space. I planned out how I would display my work as I knew I brought more than the space allowed. The fluorescent lighting significantly altered all the colors in my paintings and gave them an unpleasant cold blue/purple cast with an inordinate emphasis on those colors. I paint in northeastern light and was really bothered that all the colors were off. I did find two incandescent spots which seemed to help neutralize some of the ill effects. I wasn't happy with the lighting...I let it go.

I wanted to show the conceptual threads running through the paintings, prints and digital media and planned to rotate the work every two days. Before I came to the residency my mentor helped me see how each piece was successively connected to the next. I was interested to see if my intentions for the work would be communicated. I was curious to see who would interpret it and what their interpretations would be. The feedback I received did overall affirm that I communicated my intentions. Some people shared their responses on a personal or individual basis.

That evening graduating students started their final presentations. I think it was Samuel Krotinger who briefly mentioned the idea that all animals start out as the same simple embryo shape, regardless of their species. This comment got my attention because I created a pastel and some digital prints exploring this idea. I was attempting to draw attention to the fact that as human beings we all start from identical physical form. The monotypes of war and death and were deliberately hung next to the embryonic pastel to signify regeneration and life, I am an optimist.

When critiqued on the monotypes, the group agreed the images had power and the message was clear. They felt the geode paintings were too pastel-y in comparison and were not discussed further. Oliver suggested I stay angry and continue to produce work with this kind of energy. I said that I considered anger a tool and carried anger in my pocket to take out and use when I needed it. The energy of anger applied consistently is inappropriate use of it and is destructive. I won't use it as the main impetus for my work no matter how powerful the images. The attraction to visually powerful images emotionally manipulates the viewer, and that was my intention.

I am alert to when another artist has the same idea I do and produces work along that same idea. I became aware of this happening more frequently but I have mixed feelings about it. Sometimes, I feel aggravated especially when I am invested in creating something new and different. Sometimes it is exciting especially when I think the idea or artist has merit. And sometimes I find it comforting particularly when I have self doubts. It reminds me that I am part of something larger than myself and am on the right path.

It happened with the *Letterform Series* when a Hartford artist by the name of Carol Padberg (see Art New England, April/ May 2007) created similar letterform compositions, and again when I saw Wegman's paintings at the Addison Gallery. There are differences, Wegman used postcards and I used digital photos of geodes, Padberg used encaustic paints, I used oils. The idea is still the same though and I am keeping a record of when this happens.

There is a name for a related phenomenon called the Hundredth Monkey Effect. The reference is from *The Hundredth Monkey* by Ken Keyes. The idea is that a learned behaviour spreads instantaneously from one group of monkeys to all related monkeys once a critical number is reached, regardless of time and place. I wonder if this phenomenon happens within the human species. I think it has relevance to Jung's theory of a collective unconscious. I'm documenting it, because it may be useful toward building a thesis.

June 23rd

Saturday morning was the first group critique. I was the only painter in a group of photographers. I didn't mind because I was able to take the feedback given on the photographs and apply it to painting. I also got a chance to think about issues related to photography, for example why the use of black and white photography vs. color when shooting digitally?

John Kramer led the critique. He initiated a re-organization of my art work with encouragement from the group. I was grateful he did. Letting him curate my work helped me see what was important by giving me some distance from it and allowed the strongest pieces a chance to be seen. I was having trouble figuring out what to hang and how much of it to hang. My experience of my work is that it is all equally important and this makes it difficult to choose what to display. After I explained how the work was connected, the group had no trouble telling me what to hang up and what to take down. I got better putting up work toward the end of the residency, but each time I put work up someone guided me. I was acutely aware of needing help.

The feedback from the group on the *Letterform Series* was they looked like design exercises. I was taken aback that they didn't go beyond that obvious origin. Without my prompting, Coelynn McIninch went into a very accurate description of what she thought the *Sea Glass* painting was about. She described in detail what I was aiming for when I painted that painting. That conversation was one of the many highlights to come of this residency. I admired the paintings of Alison Williams and Brenda Van Der Beek from group one. Last semester, I discovered contemporary Swedish abstract painter Eva Ryn Johannissen, who makes the distinction between abstract painting and non-objective painting. I would like to see her work in person; I think it is extremely difficult to paint in this way and do it well.

June 24th

Sunday, I met with Julia Scher who was my last semester advisor. True to form, interacting with Julia is always a trip. She wanted to see what I was currently doing. I explained about my interest in Chinese brushing painting. This was a new development as I had not had a chance to share it with her before this residency began. She was very encouraging and ended up giving me a parting assignment. She asked me to create a piece of work called the "one mile project or one kilometer project". She wants me to base a piece of art work on the concept of spatially representing one mile or one kilometer. Unknown to Julia, I was walking exactly 1k to the bed and breakfast and had a very tangible idea of what that amount of space looked like. In addition, Mary Mayer bought me a small gift of a pencil called the "3 mile pencil", also not knowing about the assignment Julia had given me. The pencil is calibrated with a scale printed on the outside, to show the output in miles as you write, using up the pencil. I thought about painting a small ink brush painting showing overlapping shapes creating space to represent the distance of 1K. The level of synchronicity throughout this residency was extraordinarily high.

June 25th

The Space seminar began that morning and was another high point of the residency for me. I enjoyed the depth of conversation regarding types of space and the creation of the illusion of space. I was mainly interested in your ideas of more space being created and the different places physically and psychologically space can create. I became aware that space can work from a certain point of view and thought about implied and inner space. It was really fantastic the way other artists in the class shared their insights. It was thrilling to be in a class with other artists thinking critically and sharing their ideas about space. It was a great group!

At the lecture that evening, I was still thinking about space. I thought about how a person inhabits the physical space of their body, but can change their outward appearance to adjust to social and cultural norms. The title 'Virtual Immigrant' suggested two different cultural spaces in one physical body. Inner and outer space in this work showed up together in a very psychologically revealing way. It was fascinating how each person actually looked like different people just by changing their clothes.

June 26th

We met with our new faculty advisors in the morning. I was relieved to have been assigned my first choice. You asked me specific questions that showed me you understood what I was doing especially when you identified the text in the background of the *Letterform Series* as referencing bits of unintelligible conversation. You modeled what I am calling "long looking". It's a way to slow down and really take the time to figure out what is going on in an image. Frankly, it made me nervous at first. I thought I would

disappoint. Now, I see it to be a great way to sharpen one's perception and thinking. It is also rewarding as you don't miss what's there.

Spending three hours hard looking at the Weng exhibit at the Museum of Fine Art that afternoon finished off a truly splendid day. It was very hot and muggy when I got back to the bed and breakfast. I found that the housekeeper had darkened my room and turned on the air conditioner full blast. The room was cool, dark and quiet. I thought I would just lie down for a minute... and fell asleep. I never made it to dinner or the evening lecture on Jeff Wall. Luckily, I heard about the lecture the next day.

June 27th

That morning in Critical Theory II, we discussed the previous evening's lecture, deep philosophy and aesthetics in relation to modernism, mass production, the condition of how works of art become public and art as a form of social transformation. What was talked about seemed to be intellectual exercises in profound thinking. I did figure out the purpose of Critical Theory II was obfuscation. The discussions and readings were designed to make us think outside our comfort level. Michael Newman spoke eloquently and was kind and patient in addressing our group's questions and comments.

Contrasting nicely with the depth of Critical Theory II was Maureen Gallace's visiting artist talk. If students did not understand why it was important to think and write about their work before this lecture, I'm sure this artist's talk helped them recognize why it is so important to at least make an attempt. I was appalled as she struggled to articulate her ideas about her painting. I found myself wondering if she was depressed or just unwilling to share. What made it worse was I really liked her paintings, was genuinely interested in her work and had a visiting artist critique set up with her the next day. I almost cancelled it, but didn't. She was unprepared and it reflected poorly on her. Or maybe she was just burnt out, it was hard to tell.

June 28th

I figured that I better prepare a list of questions for Maureen if I wanted to make productive use of the visiting artist critique. I asked her the following questions to get the conversation rolling:

Q: What was it like living in the New York art scene? A: "Very busy, hectic, production all the time. Selling all the time, no down time"... *Q: What do you have to do to succeed as a painter? A: "Going to graduate school is a good place to start, network with everybody, and get to know people"...* *Q: Is being female a hindrance to succeed in the art world? A: "Well, ha ha...it's a man's world... pick and choose when to take a stand"...* *Q: Do you have any advice to give an emerging artist? A: "calm down, don't be so intense..."*

She gave me generic answers to all of my questions and admired a small abstract landscape I had lying on the floor. She was friendly and did say she wished she had done some research on this MFA program before she gave her lecture. It felt like an apology.

In the afternoon we went to the Fogg Museum. It was another intense three hours of long looking. I did not realize as art students, we could request certain original works from master artists to study. I saw a photographer take out Weston's' original photographs, a student studying a Michelangelo drawing, actual prints of Dürer, watercolors by Blake, it was overwhelming! It was such a rich environment to be in with other artists. I appreciated that you insisted that we look and look and look some more. The set of tall angels were wonderful; I loved how they were out of the standard canvas shape and the painting was exquisite. Nancy McTaugue Stock wrote down the artists' names and I concentrated on getting photographs of the work. Our plan was that she would give me the names once I posted the photos online, they would be accessible to all of group two and Neva and Hala would have access. Thursday's dinner was a working critique. We each brought in a piece of work related to the discussion of space we had been having all week. I brought down that small abstract landscape painting to discuss. It was the one Maureen Gallace liked. I was tired, really tired from the heat and the intensity of the day and did not rely on my own intuition about which piece to bring. I was really irritated with myself for choosing that small abstract landscape because of Maureen's response to it. In addition, I hadn't figured out how to talk about the space in that work.

Likening a student's work to a master's work is a compliment, even if it is not necessarily meant as one. It caught me completely off guard and my ego took over, eliminating any hope of a rational conversation. When you mentioned Cézanne and lumpy forms, I changed the subject to his color palette. It was defensive and off topic.

I am aware of how I treat volume in painting. It has developed over the years and seems to be one of the few consistent things I do when I paint. When I went back to my room that night, I did an internet search on Cézanne. After reading through the normal content about him being the father of modern painting etc. there was a small footnote that talked about how undergraduate students in the 70's were taught to paint "like Cézanne". I thought, oh great! Why *do* I paint like this? Cézanne didn't stick with lumpy forms, he moved on to Cubism. Was I unconsciously imitating something I learned in an old painting class? Is this my true visual voice? How would I know? This is an important inquiry and an opportunity for learning. Maybe brush painting will provide a way to reveal insight to these questions.

At that evening's lecture with Dike Blair, I observed that he worked in a minimalist abstract style and then alternated to a detailed highly realistic style. This drew my attention, as I experienced a similar back and forth between tight and loose work, this past semester. My tightly planned paintings were the counter balance to my loose abstract work. I need both to keep producing. In Dike's last slide, I really got a sense of how his sculpture was like 3-dimensional painting. It reminded me of Jessica Stockholders work. It was intriguing how the sculpture integrated with the painting as both were shown in the same space. The painting and sculpture resonated and somehow became one work. His low key, self-deprecating comments about his work contrasted sharply to the ego-y remarks I made at dinner.

On the walk home, I thought about humility. I thought about you kneeling in front of the art work to settle in for the long look. Kneeling before a work of art is a reverent gesture regardless of why you are doing it. The respectful nature of that powerful gesture moved me. My knees ached and I contemplated what Louise Hay said about mental thought patterns that cause physical symptoms: "*Knees represent ego and pride*". I reflected on how our language supports that. "Down on my knees", "cut off at the knees", "on bended knee" etc.

June 29th

"*Ignorance on fire is stronger than knowledge on ice*" comforted Coe when I worried about lumpy forms. Getting a good night sleep and having some compassion for myself put me in a better frame of mind.

With a more positive outlook, I was scheduled for an individual critique with Debra Marek. She went straight to the *Letterform* paintings and said she thought they were quite beautiful. She insisted that they were paintings and gave compelling reasons why. She appreciated me playing with the differences in painting and design. She mentioned she had training as a designer and intimately knew the difference. From what you and Debra said about the *Letterform Series*, I knew you both saw that work the way I intended it.

Mary Mayer created a unique photo board book with a self binding system using duct tape. Hala Wittwer created a book with photos with pieces of drawing paper in front of the photos in order to trace the contour lines of the shapes found in the photos. These books were distinctive and I was attracted to them. Mary and Hala showed me how they made their books. I decided to reconsider my sketchbook size and look for a smaller one. John offered to help me find rice paper that can only be purchased from China.

That evening Mary, Nancy and I had gone to Porter Square early to see the graduate show. We wanted to look at the work without bodies blocking the view. After the show Tamara Gurevitz, Hala and I made our way back to our respective accommodations via Baskin Robbins and the Harvard Square Book store.

June 30th

At the morning new advisors meeting, you asked me a difficult question, "what did I think my work was about?" For a brief moment, I stepped outside myself and saw my work. I answered "transcendence". I answered unguardedly and was rewarded with a reading list I honestly want to read.

In the afternoon we went back to the Museum of Fine Art and did more long looking. I brought the camera along and was able to take pictures of both the 19th century paintings and the Weng exhibit. I walked back to the inn from the museum and thought about how nice it would be to live in this city. I resolved to come into the city at least four more times before the end of this semester to take advantage of the resources here.

At the final graduate celebration that night, I ended up sitting next to Julia...she gave me another assignment! She ordered, "Keep a visual record of what is happening right now", so I did. I showed it to her and she started talking about mind mapping and an artist who did work in the mid-60's using colored blotter acid (LSD) paper on a grid and how beautiful it was. I laughed, but then got serious when she mentioned something about rice paper. I found myself thinking about image making way beyond ink brush painting.

June 31st

I was going to get up early and write my plan of study, but was too tired from being up late packing. We met as a group to review your expectations for the coming semester. You were clear and my plan of study got written up, then and there. I had gathered resource material to refer to while writing it, but couldn't find it. I stressed about writing it and felt like I wanted to re-word it better. It was good enough the way it was and it was done.

I had an informal meeting with Stuart Steck. He visited my exhibition space just after I had taken all the work down. We had this remarkable conversation about my invisible work. We slung around art speak and aesthetic ideals and historic references as we pointed to the blank wall. It was great fun and I know Stuart enjoyed it by the twinkle in his eye. Sometimes critiques get so heavy and it was entertaining to not take ourselves so seriously. I was startled at how believable it was to do a critique on nothing.

One of the things that we were asked to do in preparation for Critical Theory II was to pick out four artists we thought illustrated concepts discussed in the readings for the class. For my fourth artist I chose Blue Man Group. Not one artist but a true collaboration of three. They deal with issues of technology, installation, theater and social commentary. Their performance touches on mass culture, identity and marketing so said the critics. I had been thinking I would like to see a performance by them to see if this was accurate.

Hippocrates said: "*Life is short, the art, long...judgment is difficult. It is not enough to do what is necessary...the circumstances must be favorable.*" As I was checking out of the bed and breakfast, the innkeeper mentioned that a couple had left the inn early due to a death in the family. She had two tickets to an afternoon performance of Blue Man Group, was I interested?

This residency ended with me seeing Blue Man Group before traveling home to the quiet corner of rural Northeastern Connecticut. The circumstances were favorable; I could not have planned a better residency even if I tried.

July 9th 2007

Hi Tony,

I am sending you the first paper Residency Summary by regular mail. I was concerned that sending it in an email would change the format. I am sending you a CD which has some photos of the Weng exhibit.

I can send you a Microsoft document of this paper if you prefer. I believe your Mac can read that. Please drop me an email to let me know you received this paper. My email address is: rebeccabrine@charter.net or regular mail is fine, too. My street address is:

Rebecca Brine
300 Spring Hill Road
Storrs, CT 06268

I wrote this paper while this residency was fresh in my mind. And thank you for the Space seminar, it was a treat.

