

Unfolding Terrain

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In 2006 I began this series of work prompted by a dream, in which I was standing in a flowing stream trying to pull the strands of pigment I encountered that floated down to me onto a sheet of paper. I was trying, if you will, to access and embrace the thoughts flowing by in the stream of consciousness to settle in a form that would reveal themselves to me, and perhaps that also could be communicated with others. The stream makes the painting.

After much exploration and experimentation with encountering water and color, I have discovered a way of working with materials that has begun to evolve into a kind of visual lexicon. Building on traditional Japanese suminagashi (“floating ink”) techniques, I gradually add pigment drop by drop on the surface of water, allowing the dynamics of fluidity to occur, and then draw the image from the water by lifting it out with paper, similar to a moveable monoprint.

For centuries art education involves mastering the use of traditional materials such as pencil, brush, carving tool, film to impose the mark to paper by direct contact with a surface. As I mature as an artist I find this approach to involve too much ego, too much intentionality, too much ‘doing’. The contents of consciousness are too subtle to be captured by this mode of representation. Rather than make the images as an act of will, this experiential way I work now strives to cultivate a state of mind that relinquishes the ego self towards inner freedom. The interest in neuroplasticity, the process by which experience sculpts the brain is of great interest to me.

I begin each session with a period of sitting meditation, allowing the mind to empty, a deliberate mental stillness to more purely examine the thought thought the sensation felt

and from this practice gradually a separating out of what is the effect of conditioning of habit. I will then spend several hours in a state of tranquil alertness, adding color to the water and scry into the bath. Each moment the milieu changes, as the variety of colors expand and contract in unknowable ways. Much like lived experience itself, when closely observed, it is a process of waiting, observation, encountering and allowing, as one image after another forms and reforms itself in interdependence with all local conditions.

When something that feels sublime at last emerges, I then begin the process of applying and removing the paper to transfer the image, sometimes only once, sometimes in multiple iterations. It feels as if half-glimpsed layers of my own psyche are peeled from the surface of the water and draped onto the paper—stories and landscapes, truths and illusions, familiar emotions and shockingly alien constructs. The final phase of the process is when I enlarge the images and can stand before them and I wander into their depths.

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