

CHAPTER 3: STORMS

by

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I think it's safe to say that I identify myself as a romantic. The content of my paintings are born from a very internal and spiritual place, one where my emotion and imagination take precedence. In my work I aim to understand my internal conflicts and to describe visually what this chaos would look like. It is a therapeutic tool, a journal entry to myself.

My relationship with nature is one that is profound, running as far back as I can remember. As a child I would wander aimlessly through the woods and along the creek that lived behind my house. I would spend hours in solitude. There was never any of the noise I found in daily life, just a kind of silence, a calm that only nature has to offer. Like the stillness and clarity of an Ansel Adam's photograph, I too, found clarity in nature.

Fast forward, I'm 22, and living in New York City. People, noise, surround me and I have a constant feeling of claustrophobia. I commute to school, fighting traffic morning and night. I'm exhausted. My personal relationship and my life has become a whirlwind. I can't decipher which way is up, forward, backward and that calm that I once knew is gone. All I can see is chaos.

Storm systems are a means for me to describe what this sense of chaos would look like. The painting "Snowstorm" by Turner portrays the untamed

power and spontaneity of nature as the men at sea are caught in the middle of the storm. I look at this painting and feel that this particular chapter of my life is a series of unexpected storms.

My work has become a coping mechanism used to examine my ‘personal storms’ in the hopes of understanding them. What would it be like if I could see what my anxiety looked like? My unhappiness? My sense of defeat? What forms would they take? If I could take a snapshot of my emotional terrain, what would it look like? In this way, my paintings are used to interpret my feelings and stressors. They have become a kind of confidant, or journal entry. My emotions and life itself is always in a constant state of flux and so too is my process. In this way I relate deeply with Amy Sillman’s approach to art. “Painting is a physical thinking process to continue an internal dialogue, a way to engage in a kind of internal discourse,”

In that same way, I too, am having a conversation with my paintings. I’m talking to them as I explore the events of my daily life. Due to the fact that all situations are subject to change based on the shift of individual perception, my paintings respond to new possibilities with questions. A passage that was

previously thought of as foe is now friend. My painting process allows my paintings to change as I do, to make revisions in accordance with my understanding of the events going on all around me. My paintings go through many stages in which parts are completely wiped out, while others stay the same. While the ghosts of the past are still visible they are much less poignant, leaving room for change. In order for me to learn from these antagonists my thought process must always stay open and never become fixed. This aspect of being in the moment corresponds to an important aspect of Buddhist philosophy. That is, I attempt to avoid living in the past or looking too much to the future. Being in the present is always preferable.

There is an aspect of spirituality that I attempt to explore and clarify within my work and in my life. In an effort to determine my relationship with religion, I've learned that I belong to no one religion in particular. Instead I feel drawn to several. Mystic philosophies of interconnectedness play a very important role in the way I approach my work. The idea being "that the world is one. Everything connects to everything; therefore, as we change, the world cannot but change with us," says Marianne Williamson. Aligned with this philosophy, I think of everything within my paintings as interconnected energy. I think of the color as

energy as it weaves in and out of itself. Visualizing these things helps me to understand my life as a whole. I begin to see every visual event as connected to the others. Because there seems to be so many sources of confusion and anxiety within my life, the energy collects, piles up, and sometimes explodes as it bombards the picture plane. There is rarely room for space or calm because my interior is often over populated with these antagonists. Visual ideas of interconnectedness, conflicts between light and dark, the forces good and evil reoccur in my work because they exist within me. The narratives that I create for myself are based on examining my own personal story, my own highs and low, trials and tribulations. Antagonists arrive in the form of ominous atmospheric conditions threatening the equilibrium of inner peace.

These themes also relate to Kandinsky's apocalypse motifs. I discovered Kandinsky well before discovering the content of my paintings. I was first attracted to his paintings on many levels, in ways that I did not yet understand. I found his use of color to be incredibly vibrant, imaginative, and fearless. He gave me permission to use any color I could conjure. I needed these colors to describe my inner worlds and perspective. Once I began to find my content these colors became a means to describe the emotional climate. They began to have specific meanings.

Yellow is clarity, orange is hope, and blues are the unknown, while browns tend to be adversity. “It is evident, therefore, that color harmony must rest ultimately on purposive playing upon the human soul, and this is one of the guiding principles of internal necessity.”-Kandinsky

——I especially connect with Kandinsky’s work of the early teens, 1910-1914.

This work appeals to me because while the paintings are abstract there is a definite sense of landscape, figure, and of narrative. The round shapes found in *The Sketch for Composition II*, gives the viewer clues that Kandinsky is describing hills. There are also shapes that could be seen as trees, people, a person riding a horse but it’s ultimately left to interpretation. The painting’s internal logic functions on an imaginative level in this way. Abstraction, or non-objective art has allowed me to create from an inner perspective where the world’s logic is not present.

While I consider a large portion of my paintings to function as snapshots, a single second of a particular narrative that I’m describing, there tend to be two strains. Because of my childhood, growing up with nature, some of my compositions have a sense of landscape. The natural landscape gave me clarity back then and still does today, I feel a sense of comfort. With landscape, I can understand the noise. Because of my history and the comfort I feel, it allows me to

live and create whatever fantastical world I can conjure. When my paintings are focused on landscape, I'm usually exploring the bigger picture, memories, time, and my life as a whole. The narratives are often about the interaction of 'storms' within the landscape.

A second strain of my paintings uses a smaller range of view. They become more like close-ups. They involve a single 'storm.' These paintings are how I examine isolated incidents, or individual hopes. The paintings are taking a closer look at overcoming personal struggles and experiencing individual triumphs rather than trying to view everything all at once.

As I enter a new chapter in my life, so too will my paintings. Because my paintings are a reflection of external stressors affecting my internal consciousness, I expect that they will continue to change as my life does. Many transitions are taking place as I finish my education and move on. I will live by the beach. My husband will start his own business outside of corporate America. There will be no more sirens, no more people rushing about outside my window. I will have a porch to sit on and quiet to sit with. What will my internal space look like then? I would guess less claustrophobic and chaotic. I would think there would be fewer storms

and more space. My life will possibly be filled with the landscapes of my  
childhood and with that same calm, I hope.