My process in the studio challenges notions of control versus chance. I work with fluid acrylic paint and inks applied to paper through pouring, throwing and dripping. I do this to maximize the spontaneity of the material and minimize my control. By manipulating the paint with squeegees, brooms, mops and other non-conventional mark making tools, I remove my preconceptions from the making of a mark. At this point, the information is created as the result of an event. This event is an external experience between the paint, the paper, and my body applying it, as well as the space we occupy. I am not proposing that I make paintings in which I am completely removed from decision making or control; rather I place myself in a dialogue with materials in real space and time, thus giving experience and movement the upper hand over my mind. Much of what I think about in regard to my practice parallels ideas of Phenomenology, the philosophy of experience. Specifically, I am interested in how my process relates to the concept of Aletheia, Martin Heidegger's ideas about thinking, and to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of active engagement in the world as a means of gathering information.

The term Aletheia is defined as "the unconcealedness of what is present, its being revealed, its showing itself (Phenomenology Reader 254). Pouring a wash of paint onto a piece of paper is one way I connect my process of making to the phenomenological concept of Aletheia. Paint and paper have definite yet flexible physical characteristics. I am present as the agent introducing these two materials. Once they begin to interact, I am removed from the event, my mind or ego is not responsible for the creation of information. Proceeding with the drawing I observe things revealing and showing themselves. I am interested in this phenomenon because it challenges the way we orient
ourselves in regard to the world. We generally have a very egotistical view regarding our value in life. For most of us our "place" is at the top. We view ourselves as the most intelligent beings, and we downplay the value of the world, viewing land air and water as things that are there for us: a stage for our lives to unfold upon. My practice is a refusal of this way of thinking. The physical world independent of our minds and egos contains information and meaning; we can engage in it but are not the creators of it.

When we fail to trust that the places around us have identities, needs and qualities integral to their existence, we create disaster. Anne Whiston Spirn comments on the importance of this in her book, *The Language of Landscape*. She says “Blindness transcends the eyes. Culture can prevent eyes from seeing and ears from hearing. Those who see nature and city as opposites or deserts and forests as disordered are blind to the natural processes in cities and the order in wilderness” (36) It is more productive to trust in the information the world provides instead of imposing selfish wants onto a place. This has become a type of cultural epidemic. There are many examples of people who lived much more mindfully. One example is given here in *The Language of Landscape*, “With knowledge one sees what is invisible to the unaided eye; the Wallabi desert dwellers of Australia find underground water by signs on the surface. A genealogist sees notches lining opposite hillsides as shoreline terraces cut by waves into the slopes and sees the glacial lake that once filled the valley.” (Spirn 36) This description of taking note of details occurring in the landscape directly relates to my process in the studio. Studying and reacting to the marks made by the pours and drips of paint, I am cultivating the information that is intrinsic to the material. I am also interested in the marks that give a
hint at what type of movement they were created as a result of just as the notches are created by waves on a shoreline.

Embodied experience allows us to accept the external world as a valid source of information. Specifically, this can connect us to the landscape that we inhabit. Anne Whiston Spirn reflects on this,

“The land offers us good reading, outdoors from a lively, unfinished manuscript…Records prophesies mysteries are inscribed there, and changes always changes. Even as we read from some selected page, whether mountaintop forest furrow schoolyard, dune, bog, we see changes; in stirring and silence, flavors and textures spacing’s tolerances and confrontations and tensions at the edges” (37)

In order to witness and focus on these subtleties we have to engage with our surroundings.

Phenomenologists believe that truth is something that slowly reveals itself to us and is also constantly retreating from us. Using transparent layers of paint and introducing tight line work to specific areas of a piece, I push the reality and truthfulness of the space in a playful manner. Often I use the white of the paper to represent the dominant forms in a given drawing. This can be seen in the center portion of Image 2. In this drawing, the white forms that push across the center of the paper were created because the paint did not reach this portion of the paper. I am interested in this area because these forms were not made in an additive manner. The forms emerge on their own accord, and they become a central aspect in the composition. This challenges beliefs and assumptions of the way things physically exist. I push this effect by layering and dissecting certain areas with linear elements. I use these lines to define forms and push depth. The layering of washes and introduction of tight line work is shown in Image 6. The top of this drawing contains two blue forms that appear to be bursting free from a
more central, solid form below. Upon closer examination the blue wing like forms possess a great depth created by layering multiple thin areas of paint. To push this space further, I used tiny lines and opaque shapes to go behind and through the atmospheric blue space. In this way the viewer is forced to question and observe what they are seeing and what they think they understand about the space in front of them.

For the MFA installation in the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, I chose to include 5 drawings. My work occupied a corner space of the gallery. For this reason I chose to include a smaller piece to accompany the four larger works. Hanging the smaller drawing in the corner created an opportunity to play with scale and space. I felt that having this piece in a more intimate crowded area worked to convey the feeling of pause, of experiencing just one moment. In contrast, the larger works seemed to breathe and grow out, reaching towards one another, off the page, and to the work of the other artists around them.

Phenomenologists argue that the best way to engage in the act of looking and understanding is through active engagement with the world. I identify the experience of painting as an active engagement. These drawings become maps of my decisions, my actions, my body, the materials, and the space. Through the application of flat areas of opaque paint, as well as crisp detailed line work I respond to these loose gestural marks. In this way I begin to weave a narrative of motion, a documentation of a journey through space. The initial marks document a movement existing in real space and capture the energy and motion of materials and my body. The detailed areas such as the tiny lines and geometric shapes of flat opaque color reference a visual progression through pictorial space. The large gestural marks complement the areas of more intricate detail, spaces
where micro and macro perspectives are referenced. Pairing these contrasting marks allows my work to oscillate between the intimate and the immeasurable, establishing a sense of being in the natural world based on learning from doing. Actions strengthen the belief that we exist in a state of intertwining with the world rather than separate from and above it. In this way our care for the natural world is strengthened.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty talks about perception and observation; he says "Natural perception as I live in it is, in moving about my world is for the most part not a detached observation and scrutiny of things, but is rather absorbed in dealing with the matters at hand concretely and practically. It is not self-contained; I do not perceive in order to perceive but in order to orient myself, in order to pave the way in dealing with something. This is a wholly natural way of looking in which I continually live," (Merleau-Ponty 259)

I relate these concepts to issues I am dealing with in the drawings. The idea that perception and observation are not self-contained relates back to my process of beginning pieces with loose marks. These marks become the "matters at hand" that Merleau-Ponty is referencing. When I go into these marks to define and bring forth certain elements, I orient myself and deal with the information that exists. This modality becomes a true way to ground my practice in the reality of the corporeal world. I enter into a conversation with the physical materials and work toward a balance between my hand and the freedom of the material.

An embodied approach to experience can potentially change the egotistical orientation humans have towards the world, and show us the knowledge that we can acquire from the spaces around us. In Ideas II, Husserl writes that the body is “the medium of all perception; it is the organ of perception and is necessarily involved in all
perception” (18). The connection to our surroundings starts here; we are physically connected to the world through our bodies. Maurice Merleau-Ponty digs deeper into this topic through his ideas of Embodiment. In *Eye and Mind* Merleau-Ponty writes, “Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body”. Merleau-Ponty demonstrates the give and take, the connection between ourselves and our surroundings. Having a physical body and existing in the world is only possible in relation to objects and other physical things that exist around us, understanding that without the other physical bodies our physical body would not make sense, and ultimately could not exist. This humbles us and allows us to see that we are not the center of the world. Furthermore we realize through embodied experience that we are responding to the character of the world. We see that the world, not our mind, provides us with much of the information that we use to understand.

Anne Spirn writes about the physicality of the human body in space and how it guides us through the world.

“We see hear, smell touch and taste what our human eyes, ears nose skin tongue, and tools permit and our cultures condition. The sense of up and down, forward and backward, left and right is determined by the form of the body that perceives them: by head and feet face and back, by the distinction between one eye, one leg one breast and the other. Our human bodies predispose us to recognize symmetrical patterns. Had humans different bodies and minds we would sense different qualities and read and respond to different meanings” (37)

Spirn gives us an example of a physical experience of space as she writes “In *Touching the Rock*, John Hall who is blind describes relying on his hearing for spatial
perception and orientation. The sound of rain reveals the surrounding landscape: “Rain has a way of bringing out the contours of everything….Here and there is a light cascade as it drips from step to step ….I can even make out the contours of the lawn, which rises to the right in a little hill. The sound of the rain is different and shapes out the curvature for me….everywhere are little breaks in the patterns obstructions, projections where some slight interruption or difference of texture or of echo gives an additional detail or dimension to the scene” (36). This example of experiencing the physicality of space through hearing would not be possible if we didn’t have all of the accumulated knowledge of space that we have acquired from our body’s interaction with things like rocks, contours, gravity, the properties of liquid and how it acts when it comes into contact with solid forms. This knowledge allows these possibilities to manifest. This becomes a sort of recorded echo of nature in ourselves.

The philosopher Martin Heidegger talks about thinking as something man has the capability to do yet doesn't always engage in completely. He explains the complex relationship between thinking, the human, and the world in his essay "What is called thinking"? Heidegger says, "man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so" (Heidegger) this possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking. (Heidegger) This presentation of the concept of thinking uncovers the idea that just because we have the tools, or wiring to do something does not mean it is going to happen. There is another step that needs to occur and for Heidegger it is about our orientation toward things. He shows us that things present themselves to us in order to be thought about, the world is as much in control of what we think about as we are.
Humans "tune in" to or notice different things as they present themselves to us based on our interests or ways in which we care about the world. These are the things we will then attempt to think about. Heidegger says that even after this we are still not thinking, "man still does not think and this is because what is to be thought about turns away from us. Withdrawing is not nothing it is an event (Heidegger 9). This act of withdrawing is actually what draws us in to a closer engagement with the subject. This idea connects to the duality between presence and absence, a concept that informs many of the decisions in my work. I use bits of blue painters tape as a mark-making tool. By applying the tape before a layer of paint, a barrier is created resulting in a negative mark. Once these same bits of tape are peeled up and relocated within the same piece (or another) they become positive marks with a direct relationship to the negative mark they leave behind. This process references issues of absence and presence and the physical quality of a mark. I am most intrigued when the tape and its outline exist together in an area; this invokes an idea of motion, continuation, deterioration and time. Merleau-Ponty speaks about perception; he says, "For the perceived thing exists only insofar as I perceive it, and yet its being is never exhausted by the view I have of it. It is this Simultaneous presence and absence that is required for something to be perceived at all," (O’Neil 16) We might think of withdrawing as something that would remove us or take us away from thinking but the opposite is true. Even though it is a sort of negative action, withdrawing is an action, and that is what we hold on to and follow in pursuit of thinking about the thing. This idea of action and event connects back to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, and supports his idea of physical engagement or action in the world as a way of gathering information. Our physical engagement with the world is a meaningful
and valid means of obtaining information, and this process is led by the body. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: [T]o move one's body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation.” (Dreyfus) Here we see that knowledge is coming from the act of doing. It is not something that we know beforehand or devise a plan for in our minds. Rather the experience is bodily, we engage with the world because of our body and examine what occurs second. We are learning through this specific process of engagement. Merleau-Ponty’s comment regarding the way the body aims at things, and responds to this action further stresses the idea that the world (external from our mind) contains meaning, and through the moving of our body we have an opportunity to uncover and access that meaning.

Veronique Foti says in her essay *Painting and Merleau-Ponty* "Paul Klee has spoken of painting as a bringing to visibility of what might not otherwise be seen. The painter he reflects, discloses to the eye an inter world lying beyond the boundaries of visible existence, a region into which not all men may gaze." I relate to this way of thinking about painting, visibility, disclosure and existence. In my process of making drawings and paintings I create scenarios where the interaction of materials presents to me a world full of information. It is this information that I engage with and set out to cultivate. I use mops, large squeegees, brooms and strings dipped in pigment to begin my pieces. By using these unconventional brushes I relinquish most of my control in order to allow marks full of motion and energy to exist. Often these marks become the backbone or structure of my painting, the element that I reflect on and respond to. The act of making, doing and experiencing is what is giving us information about our surroundings.
I am creating an experience of space that situates meaning in a place where it is gradually revealed, but never fully understood.
SOURCES


