

MA CONTEMPORARY FINE ART
MODULE I: RESEARCH & ENQUIRY
REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

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JANUARY 2011

There are seven sections to my reflective statement. Following each section are the relevant points of **Research** and **Enquiry** for that section.

16 FIGURES

I set to work on a series of 16 drawings based on 16 pre-recorded improvised audio tracks. I began this work primarily as an experiment in association—applying the same physical response approach I have been working with for the past six years with relation to music, but whose final state would use the raw material produced by that approach to produce easily recognizable figurative line drawings that a viewer/listener could then associate back to the original track. Seeing all 16 figures in sequence, organized to match the final track listing, should create a narrative (either because the musicians gave thought to organizing the track listing or because the mind finds meaning given any sequence of information). That “narrative” can then be interpreted as giving the music additional context.

The fact that I was working from pre-recorded music, rather than from a live performance is significant in that there is no interaction between the musicians and myself. It’s a one-way system where only I receive information. Moreover, as the material I was listening to came in the form of a recording that transformed an improvised musical event into a fixed-media work, I considered my approach given the fact that I could listen/re-listen and scrutinize over the material. I was not responding to ephemeral, fleeting events, though music itself is time-based. I felt this needed special consideration and could warrant some deviations when compared to the way I usually respond to live interactive improvised music (Developing different approaches given these distinct scenarios is something I’ll continue to explore.).

To me, this meant that I had license to listen to the tracks more than once while creating these drawings. It was a fixed-media work after all. I had come to the conclusion (with regard to this particular work) that adhering to a time limit based on each track’s duration was an artificial association. Nowhere in these drawings did I

even want to represent or respond to their durations. I wasn't creating symbolic representations of the music, using the page as analogous to time, for instance.

At the time I was reading how other artists had approached using music as subject and came across several examples where artists were representing music in that way. Their concerns, processes, and results seemed to me very different from my own.

In one article by Pierre Karinthi, "A Contribution to Musicalism: An Attempt to Interpret Music in Painting", he discusses what he calls "rules of solomization" where he establishes the rules for the structure of the picture "so it functions similarly to a musical score". He states that, "which rules to use are a matter of choice by artists engaged in the transposition of music to space." One example he gives is where he corresponds sound frequencies to light frequencies. That kind of relationship seems arbitrary to me; there is no inherent relationship between the two. He also goes on to say how one picture is generally not sufficient for a whole piece, so here he is relating the surface of the page to the duration of a piece.

Another artist Stephen Jablonsky says something similar in the article "Graphic Artworks Based on Music: Musigraphs". He states that, "in thinking about the format...if I wanted to include complete compositions, I would have to limit myself to very short ones." Both of these artists are asserting that the space on a page is analogous to time.

The approach I finally took towards these 16 tracks was to listen to each one on a loop, yet still treat the creation of the drawing process itself as performance. I was conscious of where in the track I would begin to draw, and would not revisit a work after I had finished a performance, maintaining the drawing as a record of a singular event. Matthew Samson, in the article "Imagining Music: Abstract Expressionism and Free Improvisation" writes that "the concrete forms of Abstract Expressionism can be approached as historical references, or indeed 'scores' insofar as such paintings can be understood in their broadest sense as imagistic representations of past and potential performances of free improvisation."

I still wanted to keep a sense of the time-based nature of music, and specifically maintain an element of spontaneity given that the music was improvised.

I wanted to play with the music rather than create a literal diagram or representation of it. What is of interest to me is how visual art can contour, emphasize, and relate to music rather than creating symbols to represent the music.

I would try to pay attention to my responses in the moment, and try not to default to diagramming or symbolizing sounds using an arbitrary system. I need my marks to be physical, genuine, and appropriate responses to the music instead. I believe the strongest link between music and visual art is physical, and that's the aspect I want to explore as performance.

Some examples of the things I watch out for are following a melody over time from the left of the paper to the right of the paper, or always following a sound upward if it was high-pitch, or to the bottom of the page when it was bass-y. If I caught myself engaged in such actions I'd actively try to break from that action. Those default actions have been preprogrammed in me and I need to be aware of when I fall back on one of them, especially if I'm not as fluid as I need to be in the moment because of them. I have found that thinking that way limits my motions and options.

Before beginning a new drawing I'd listen to a particular track repetitively, usually over several days in order to familiarize myself with, and internalize the music as a listener, which is quite different from familiarizing yourself as participant. Then, once I began the process of drawing, I'd create multiple drawings over the course of as many performances. Each performance lasting up to 40 minutes (which at this stage in my development is more a reflection of my own endurance when engaged in this sort of performance drawing, rather than it being a consideration completely dependent on the work. This is something else I need to develop). With each performance, I'd gain understanding about the work in context of the physical act of drawing. This is why it was important to create several drawings for each track. In the article "About the Physical in Painting" Xanti Schawinsky addresses this phenomenon stating that "physical manipulation [correlates] to the creative process of the mind." I was internalizing the music physically as a participant.

Regarding the materials used, I limited my color palette, using only black ink, black house paint, charcoal, and used only paper. I tried working on large canvas first but found that because of the lack of dialogue and the "coldness" of working to

recordings I wanted to work small. There was definitely a palpable disconnect that I was experiencing not interacting with the musicians directly. Also, as I had no audience there was no need, and in fact an opportunity to work smaller. The sound was also “smaller” not coming from musicians in the room with me but from speakers or headphones instead. I found the tooth of the canvas interfered with my mark making on the scale I found most comfortable. From there, when approaching each track, I experimented within the range of sizes that seemed to work most successfully during these initial experiments – A2 and A1.

With regard to my decision to only use black and water, it is part of a thought process that still remains unresolved. I find that in responding to music I want to be as quick as the sound, which is loaded with information. I want to act with as little delay as possible. I can do this most effectively by manipulating line (I move and the line changes), less effectively when I have to switch from one color to another. Furthermore, color reads as emotional information and I want to remove the element of emotion from my works completely. I’m not trying to express anything. When I limit myself to just using black, I feel as if I’m choosing the most neutral of options. While black carries with it its own connotations, we’ve come to see black on white with the emotional neutrality of just writing or diagraming.

In the process I was engaged in all but the last drawing in each series was unsuccessful. Some of the reasons I’d find drawings to be unsuccessful were that they didn’t contain enough of the information found in the music. In these cases I knew I hadn’t created the final drawing because I’d be stumbling around on the page, unable to anticipate or respond to the sounds.

I have not completed this work. From these 16 initial performance drawings I have still yet to create a second set of finished drawings. Just like taking a Rorschach test, I’ll pick elements from those initial drawings and redraw them. It is my belief that the viewer/listener will find associations between these more figurative drawings and the music. Furthermore, that the viewer/listener will create a narrative or concept based on the sequence of images, which then they’ll apply to the progression of the whole album. Whether the association is substantiated because of the measures I took to relate them to the music, or whether the associations occur because people will just naturally link and fill in the gaps between one thing and another to form a gestalt view,

it just will happen. I'd like to think that the "narrative" is information I accessed in the music itself, but there's no way to know. This is another phenomenon that I find incredibly interesting and wanted to exploit in this work.

Enquiries:

Recordings vs. live performance

Consideration for a time limit

Sensitivity vs. default actions

Black & white vs. color

Paper vs. canvas (and size)

Facilitating association, or Gestalt in action

A system applied to a series

Research:

"About the Physical in Painting" by Xanti Schawinsky

"Imagining Music: Abstract Expressionism and Free Improvisation" by Matthew Sansom

"Graphic Artworks Based on Music: Musigraphs" by Stephen Jablonsky

"A Contribution to Musicalism: An Attempt to Interpret Music in Painting" by Pierre Karinthe

ONE PAINTING WITH A STRING

I didn't have as clear a concept for this work as I did for 16 figures. I just wanted to run a string on a canvas that was amplified with a piezo microphone, and to create a work where the emphasis was on the finished product instead of the process.

Admittedly, the painting was really a secondary consideration—though I was interested in seeing the gestalt effect in action. I wanted to see if I would read the sound as having to do with the painting, even though I took no effort to reference one to the other. I feel as if I want to test the limits of that phenomenon.

Never having added a string to a canvas, I built the structure thinking that the tension on the piano wire stretched along the length of the thing onto, would cause the whole thing to bow or snap. With this in mind I reinforced the back of the canvas and used a harder wood for the areas where the zither pins would anchor the string. In the end, the structure held.

When painting, I did not reference music as source material, though I tried to maintain a similar type of mark making. I paid attention to the attack and decay of each line, the rhythm at which I attacked the canvas, and the speed of my motions. At this time the canvas did not have a piezo microphone attached to it, so I could only hear the acoustic sounds.

I incorporated color because it didn't reference anything, so responsiveness was not even an issue. I used a limited palette of reds, black, and white. I knew the string was only going to create a single tone, so I just wanted to use one color giving so the association would be simple to make. I wasn't going to make an effort to tune the string to the color either. Not only is there no need to, because I believe it's very difficult for the observer not to make the association, but also I really just wanted to be surprised myself.

I was going to create more of these paintings, using different colors on each, and not giving any consideration for the tuning of the strings, so their combined sound was going to be arbitrary. I was going to start each new painting by marking where another painting's marks came off the edge of the canvas. The canvases would appear to be a single work because of this "exquisite corpse" approach. It's something I've done in the past that I've found successful. *Interfacing with the Carcass* is one such work (seen below).

In this way too, I discover the image rather than inventing it. It would reveal itself as I worked onto more canvases, and I would make as many canvases as it took for the image to reveal itself completely.

The synthesis of these canvases would just be an extension of the initial enquiry on the one canvas already made. After listening to the one canvas too, I just wanted to see and hear more of them. The string resonating off the canvas was a really nice, deep, ominous sound. I wanted to create a wall of constant sound and decided that the stings would be played by small motors mounted on each canvas, and of course this being a paintings there would be constant image. The motors facilitated this analogy. I just had to trust that making something that I liked the look and sound of, and that was going to be enough of a hook. Laurie Anderson talks about how she trusts herself in this way:

“And many things that I try to do on a very basic level of—I like the way they look, or I like the way they sound, I don’t know what they mean. And I have to wait to see what they mean. I have to trust that they mean something, because I like them. That’s why I’m not a pamphleteer—I’m an artist.”

This work as a single canvas isn’t as strong as it could be as a series. So far I’ve made one, and I plan on making the rest.

Enquiries:

Addition of string

Reinforced canvas

Object self-generating sound

Emphasis on the final object vs. performance

Testing gestalt effect

Attaching motors

Mark making not referencing sound

Series

Research:

“Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews” by Nichols Zurbrugg

DIFFUSION

I was reading an article by Karen Frimkess entitled “Drawing with Sound”, where she discusses how she uses speakers hidden behind walls to create lines of sound that the observer can follow:

“By drawing with sound lines I mean moving the apparent, or virtual point source of a sound in a space so that it is perceived as describing that line in space.”

It was an interesting idea to me, making the analogy between a sound in space and a line. It’s something I have thought about, and the primary reason I started attaching piezo microphones to the back of my canvases during performances. So far I have only attached a maximum of two microphones with their own dedicated speakers, and I’ve oriented them with their position on the canvas (i.e. the left-most microphone feeds a speaker placed to the left of the performance space). By doing this, the sounds pan from one side to the other while I also physically move over the canvas in the same way. The intention is to create a stronger link between the lines on the canvas and their sounds in space.

A week before having read that article I had attended a Lunchtime Concert at the University of Manchester— “Darragh Morgan with MANTIS”—wherein five electro-acoustic composers debuted pieces written for violin. Several of the pieces emphasized sound diffusion, over the multiple loudspeaker system found in the hall, so the sounds moved around in the space.

I have attended ambisonic performances in the past but the time after reading this article was the first time I started thinking about using sound diffusion in my own work in any kind of real way. I think by doing this the lines could be described much more specifically as sound. I really like the concept that the space we inhabit would be transformed, and made analogous with the abstract space of the canvas. I’ve started to orient the canvas horizontally during performances for this reason. By

utilizing sound diffusion techniques the sounds in space would *be* the lines that the observers could actually hear and feel.

I started making a series of “Super Hard-On” signal boosters. I had previously wanted to clean up the sound coming from the piezos anyway, but instead of making just two (which is what I currently use) I made 8. I thought 8 microphones going to 8 speakers placed around a room, roughly matching their position on the back of my canvas, would more accurately describe the movement of a line being created on the canvas. I know this isn’t how sound diffusion works, but I wonder if I can approximate the effect for practical reasons. A true sound diffusion speaker arrangement is complex and expensive, though I am not at all opposed to the idea of using a pre-existing audio system, and may even contact some universities to see how I can perform using theirs.

I also started working through MAX tutorials, trying to teach myself how to use the program. I thought this would allow me to make a MAX patch that could recall paths that I had previously recorded.

For example, if I’d draw a line from the left of the canvas to the right of the canvas, I’d activate the patch and begin recording the volume outputs of each of the microphones being sent to the speakers. When I reached the end of the line, I would stop the recording. Now those volume levels would be stored in a bank and I could access that path using some interface I’d build, through those speakers. Even if my line stayed on the right hand side of the canvas, I could boomerang the sound through the left to right speaker path. While this patch wouldn’t be terribly complicated to build, I don’t know the language so there is a steep learning curve. I may just have to ask someone to make it for me.

I discussed this idea with several musicians who all cautioned me that creating a clear shape out of sound was not as easy as what I imagined—that the line would get lost. Wolff briefly touches on a similar bit of advice stating that:

“To be comparable to a graphic line, the sound line must stay as close as possible to the surfaces of the forms as possible. The louder the sound, the farther into the room it radiates and the more the linear quality is lost or diluted.”

While I continue to perform with my two-microphone/speaker set-up using two Super Hard-Ons, I have not yet tested this surround-sound set up. Primarily, this is due to the fact that only 2 of the 8 signal booster circuits worked. I need to finish rebuilding the other 6, whose components I had blown.

Enquiries:

Incorporating diffusion

Learning MAX

Building a signal booster

Research:

“Darragh Morgan with MANTIS” - Lunchtime Concert at the University of Manchester

“Drawing with Sound” by Karen Frimkess

Max tutorials

“Super Hard-On” schematic

TAKAHASHI’S SHELLFISH CONCERN PERFORMANCE

TSC is a group I belong to that includes two other musicians. This performance included the 2 microphone amplified canvas set-up I discussed in the previous section, but would also introduce the addition of a playable string that ran down the canvas, mid-performance. I had really liked the sound I had gotten by adding piano wire to a canvas (which I describe in a section above), so I approached the rest of the group with it and we started rehearsing with that element in order to debut it at this performance.

The way this performance situation works is that the sounds picked up from the canvas are the only sounds that the musicians have access to. They then manipulate those sounds using pedals and other electronic instruments. I like to think of the canvas as a gateway that I feed sounds through. Since this was the first time I had used the string in a live performance I had to decide how to integrate it so it wouldn't just be a superfluous gimmick.

One of the things to be considered was how to introduce it. I didn't want it on the canvas from the beginning of the performance in order to establish certain expectations with the audience. During rehearsals we tried out different ways of doing it and in the end I decided to pre-drill two inconspicuous holes into the canvas where I would then hammer in zither pins to attach the piano wire to. The hammering would change the feel of the performance with a big gesture. I knew that seeing the string added on the canvas would punctuate the idea that the canvas was an instrument too even though that's how I use it all along. To be sure, I chose an aggressive way to introduce the idea that the canvas was changing by hammering the zither pins in place.

This event was part of the simple compositional structure we had come up with. For the first half of the performance I would add material to the canvas. Then, when appropriate within the improvisation, I would mount the piano wire and remove the material I had added in the first section by washing it away using a sponge and water. Each time I reloaded the sponge I would thumb the string.

Removing material from my works is something I've experimented with from the beginning of my explorations with music. One of the biggest problems I've continued to try to come up with solutions for is that while there is nothing left of the music I reference, I end up creating an object that does not go away. Even its destruction would be *something*, so I've tried to work that erasure into the process.

My intention was that the sound of the string, paired with the removal of material would make the analogy that the removal of the image was like the decay of the sound. And since I would thumb the string each time I'd reload the sponge with water, the second half of the performance had a ritualistic feel to it. What adds to this feeling is that I think people generally find it shocking, or even sad or distressing,

when they witness erasure, as the assumption is that the work is going to be there forever, even if its just been made.

I came across an interview with Robert Rauschenberg discussing “Erased de Kooning”, where he describes his own anxiety at asking de Kooning for a work he can erase, and then a few thoughts on how the work was received. What an amazing thing to have done. To think, that decades after it was done, and with people being aware that a work like that exists, still responding so strongly to a work’s destruction—and not even a famous work. And of course the first person presented with the concept in any sort of palpable way was de Kooning. It’s unthinkable bold and incredibly beautiful. It is one of the works that’s influenced me the most as an artist.

See the “Erased de Kooning” interview here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpCWh3IFtDQ>

I was pretty happy with the performance, but found some areas where I very clearly needed to improve when I reviewed the video. I found that the majority of my gestures were defaulting to a certain form and that was really disappointing.

I think that what brought this to light was that I was only using black. In the past I’d used color during my performances. This was also the first time in a performance where I committed to just using black and water (The significance of which I discussed in a pervious section.) So the color, I think, was masking the same-ness of my gestures. I guess I hadn’t noticed before because the color change must have read as a big enough change as far as I was concerned. Or maybe the fact that whenever I’d change color I’d also change brush, presumably to move more quickly, and thus I’d have to move differently because of the tool. Also, I was unaware of it because I hadn’t recorded and reviewed video footage of the rehearsals leading up to this performance.

In light of this disappointment I contacted a friend of mine, Ray Evanoff. He’s a complexity composer who’s also a plays improvised music using only one amplified cymbal. In the past we had discussed the similarity in approach with regard to his playing and my playing of the canvas. He shared with me some of the considerations he took when playing. We discussed entry point, decay, some of his

common licks and forms, as well as just general notions about improvisation. Both of our instruments are amplified with piezo microphones and are not decay instruments. This means I have to maintain control of the sound until I want it to stop. This is very similar to playing viola (which is something I'm a novice at), and thought I was aware of, but as Ray said it's very different to know something intellectually and then to know it when you're playing.

He also agreed to play the canvas as he would his cymbal, and I found that the sounds he was getting, as well as his percussion-y style, were definitely something I wanted to work toward. I definitely need to work on my technique especially if I am now placing much more emphasis to my own sound making (this emphasis started when I added piezo microphones to the canvas a year ago).

There is an article, "About the Physical in Painting" by Xanti Schawinsky that discussed this very type of gesture-centric physical approach. Much of what was said in the article resonated with me, and my process. One of the things discussed was the notion of "the action center" vs. an "inner eye". The distinction between the two is that in one (the inner eye), the creation of a work comes from "the projection and realization of an image born from an inner vision" whereas in the other (the action center) "instead of intellect and emotion giving expression to conscious experience, the new force seems to be motoric giving impulse to rhythmic and syncopatic powers coming from within. Knowledge and control give way to a more innate functional process". This is exactly from where I feel I am working. However, I feel that I can't just leave my body up to its own devices, because of the pre-programming to certain default actions (which I've discussed earlier) that inhibit sensitivity and appropriate action. I think you have to practice and train your body in this context. I need to become more physically and mentally sensitive as an improviser.

By practicing combining visual art and aural art I hope to gain a better understanding of both, and gain a sensitivity that I can call upon in the moment. Schawinsky echoes my concerns in this article. He writes: "Could it be...that painting has fallen behind music and that the painter can draw useful analogies between the two arts—not in their fundamentally different media—but in a more complete involvement of man in his totality."

Schawinsky also makes mention of my assertion that applying material to canvas is like playing a viola. He states, “[Paints] can be compared to the sounding body of a string instrument upon which music is produced by the art of bowing—the brush manipulation.”

Along similar lines, there’s this description a friend of mine, composer Timothy McCormack, gave in an online interview regarding the event of a brush on canvas. He states, “I identified the act of painting as a collision of forces, one active (the brush) and one passive (the canvas), with the paint documenting and solidifying the violent and microscopic space between them. I have come to identify this ‘violent, microscopic space’ as the catastrophe.” He then relates it to his own field of music by saying, “The musical situation is more complex, as the confrontation is not between an active and a passive force, but between two active forces (the body and the instrument), each having the ability to mediate and influence the other, and each having internal active forces which can operate autonomously of the others. Sound is the catastrophe, which traces the collision between these forces, and which assumes its textures and timbres from the violent confrontation.”

It’s such an eloquent notion. Thinking about the canvas, and the sounds I produce by vibrating the canvas when applying material, I am acting in the shared space between what he sees as two distinct arenas, bridging the two. He’s given me vocabulary by which I can express my own engagement of surface and sound, and validates for me the idea that can be a very real physical link between the aural and the visual.

Enquiries:

Incorporation of string to canvas during a performance

Constructing a simple composition including erasure

Default actions vs. technique

Using only black during a performance

Ray Evanoff’s approaches to improvisation with a cymbal

Research:

“Erased de Kooning” - Interview with Robert Rauschenberg

“Ray discusses scrapeology and improvisation” - Interview with Ray Evanoff

“Ray Evanoff on Canvas” - video of Ray Evanoff performing

“About the Physical in Painting” by Xanti Schawinsky

“Forcing the Catastrophe. An Interview with Tim McCormack”

SOUND RECORDINGS

Following the session with Ray I wanted to focus on my sound making technique. I miked up a canvas and recorded myself playing without using paint, or creating any kind of visual output. I explored the kinds of sounds I could get from a canvas and stretched it differently from how I normally would in order to create more bass. However, this colored every gesture with that same tone. In retrospect, I didn't like how much bass was generated and will continue to dampen the canvas surface. This activity, as well as continuing to practice viola, are exercises that I'm going to continue to engage in in order to better develop and become aware of alternate considerations.

With only sound as my concern, I found that the duration of each piece was significantly shorter than if I had been creating a visual work. Most recordings were between 1-5 minutes rather than 15-40 minutes. There are several reasons for this. I had run out of ideas after a shorter while, having less experience with solo sound generation than image generation, and it was also probably due to the fact that the vast majority of music I listen to falls under 5 minutes. So I'm used to that as a standard duration.

Even in these recordings there was a pattern to their form. Usually, the climax would be followed by a long period of silence, then the whole shape would repeat in that same manner. That much could be clearly seen just by looking at the wave files.

Since I am not accustomed to working exclusively with sound, or being the sole sound producer where there is no one and nothing else to bounce ideas off of, I don't know where to generate new ideas from yet when working in this way. I'm doing just what sounds good, I think, but the danger here is that since my tools and experience are limited I'm doing the same things again and again. It's just another manifestation of the default patterns that I want to avoid in my visual work. Not only am I going to have to explore sounds but also my chaining of those sounds towards some whole, or at very least short phrases.

At this point I also started thinking about how the work can just be the sound, or that I could make recordings that would be *paintings*. Here I'm trying to explore the ever-present problem of process- vs. object-emphasis, and swing back to an object focus. Because of the nature of my work, this is an issue I think about often. I've found a quote from George Brecht that helps me be not so uptight about defining my work as object or process. He talks about the "shared event" quality of both actions and objects. "Every object is an event...and every event has an object-like quality".

The recordings would be fixed, permanent accounts of the mark making in sonic form, just as my paintings serve the same purpose in visual form. In thinking about this, I was considering mounting short strips of audiotape that could be heard by running a tape-head pen over them. The listener (performer?) would control the speed of the pen by following the line of the tape. This act then reintroduces the performance element. Thus far, I've created the tape-head pen attached to a ¼" jack and have transferred one audio recording to tape. The tape is just free-flowing at the moment.

Laurie Anderson has manipulated audiotape in her performances by replacing the hairs of a violin bow with a length of tape. The tape-head is located where the bridge would be on the body of her violin. As she is a skilled violinist she brings a great deal of control to her movements by adapting a familiar interface. I really like the sound of the way she manipulates the tape in "Ethics is the Esthetics of the Future and Song for Juanita". The sound becomes distorted dependent on the speed she moves the tape over the tape-head, and she precisely controls where on the tape to land.

The discriminant control of my own body is another aspect which giving consideration to sound is going to aid me with. Violinists are so incredibly accurate with regard to how they place their fingers on a string—the tolerances they deal with are hair thin. While their chief concern is sound, what they are incidentally doing is training their bodies to move in incredibly precise ways. In a footnote to a lecture Yoko Ono gave in 1966 she recognizes this relationship and wrote “When a violinist plays, which is incidental: the arm movement or the bow sound? Try arm movement only.”

I want to attain that level of control with regard to my own hands and movements. By practicing the way I play a canvas while simultaneously creating visual art I am training myself to not only gain that physical dexterity, but to also gain access to the well of ideas that stem from engaging in that physical action. To this end I will not only continue to paint with a consideration to the sounds produced, but also continue to engage in exercises with my canvas where there is no paint involved, as well as continuing to practice viola.

Enquiries:

Sound making techniques

Recordings as paintings

Canvas with more bass

Research:

“Yoko Ono: Have you seen the horizon lately?”

“Handmade Electronic Music: The Art of Hardware Hacking” by Nicolas Collins

“Airwaves” by Laurie Anderson

CANVAS WITH PLASTER

After having done several sessions of sound recordings without consideration for visuals (which really highlighted my limitations as a solo sound-maker) I wanted to return to sound making while painting. I've made myself understand those sounds in the context of painting, so I felt really exposed not having that crutch. However, while I reintroduced painting/drawing I wanted to keep sound making at the forefront.

I was working with a different focus so I tried using white paint on white canvas instead of black. At the time I was reading a book on Yoko Ono, and came across a passage where she says that "white is the most conceptual color...it does not interfere with your thoughts". So I thought it was worth a try to see if it would help divorce any affect from my work, which is a constant consideration. I'm not convinced that using white has any more advantage to it than using black with regard to the absence of emotion, but its also not that much worse.

This change made my markings seem much more severe on the surface of the canvas. This is because I was making fissures in the surface that cast shadows (albeit small ones) and exposed the canvas underneath to make my lines, instead of just drawing lines. This made the experience more physical.

Very soon I found that I wanted to make more satisfying fissures, on much thicker and drier material. I loaded the canvas with a layer of plaster and let it dry to see if that surface was more satisfying. The sounds were different. Plaster sounds just like it looks—crackly and thin, but then you can also get these high pitches by running palette knives over smoother, large areas. It also dampens the canvas quite a bit so there isn't as much bass. Unfortunately, all the great sounds I have access to by scraping raw canvas aren't available to me until I dig at the plaster for a while. I just changed the instrument so of course I have to get to know it.

My intention during these sessions was to purely focus on the performance in the moment and specifically my explorations of sound. So the way I was reviewing myself was to just listen back to the audio recordings. The painting as an end product wasn't important. It was just a tool, so I'd normally wash the paint off the canvas to just use it again next time. Then when I incorporated plaster rather than removing all the plaster to then have to reapply another layer, I just left the canvas as it was to work on it later.

By avoiding the canvas as a finished work I was hoping to avoid a phenomenon that John Cage describes in the book “Noise Water Meat” by Douglas Kahn. He says “there is a tendency in painting (permanent pigments), as in poetry (printing, binding), to be secure in the thingness of a work, and thus to overlook, and place nearly insurmountable obstacles in the path of instantaneous ecstasy” (p. 265). I want to remain sensitive to the moment and if anything has to be compromised it will be the work as an object, a finished product.

One day after I had finished listening to a recording with a friend of mine, he asked if he could see the painting, though mid-sentence he caught himself and said that it really didn't matter. He was familiar with the kind of work I did—the painting didn't matter. The work was the performance, and at this point the emphasis was on the sound—which he'd just heard—but we went to see it anyway.

After having listened to the 15-minute audio recording of its creation just moments before, I found that seeing the canvas didn't measure up. I opened the door and all at once was confronted by the really bizarre sensation of its silence and its small-ness. I thought the final product didn't matter, but that feeling was worth paying attention to. I don't think I had noticed before then, because I didn't think to consider looking at the painting so soon after listening to a recording. All the sounds, with their big-ness, and room-filling ability were all fresh in my mind. I'd never before felt that a painting was *too* quiet. As if I was trying to hear something in outer space.

After that experience these are the things I wrote down:

- The painting is missing its sound, but it is not retrievable.
- The audio recording is not the sound of the painting because the painting is seen all at once.
- The two are divorced from one another.
- The only way to associate sounds with the painting is to be there when it's made, and hear the sounds for the marks as they're being made.
- The completed painting has no sound.
- The two are related: the recorded sound and the complete painting.

- Listening to the recorded sound creates the impossible and obvious silence of the completed painting.

Trying to run with the idea that the painting itself had some value I followed an urge to rub the fissures with graphite powder in order to emphasize them.

I then rehearsed with Takahashi's Shellfish Concern with the amplified plastered canvas. I placed the canvas flat on a table instead of upright as I normally had in the past, just because this is how I had been making the sound recordings. Since the musicians now had my sound to work from and not just my visuals, I felt justified in not necessarily having to have the paintings "on display".

During these rehearsals some faults came to light, at least in the way I was used working the surface in relation to the combined sounds of our trio. Because I was responding to other musicians and not just my own sounds, we happened to approach a pace that turned large sections of the surface into a chipped mess. It felt very similar to having over-saturated a section of a paper with so much paint that it is unable to accept more material, and thus a dead area that needs to be removed so the work could evolve. So I pushed around the chips that would bounce off the surface of the canvas. Those sounds were great, but the contact mikes weren't picking them up. They were only picking up the boom from my hitting the surface to make them jump. To make those smaller sounds audible I'd have to set up a mike above the canvas that would pick up the surface acoustic sounds. This would introduce the sounds of my palette knives and the water on the surface of the canvas. It's worth doing. When I do incorporate that third mike I'd also have to add a volume pedal to my set-up so I can more precisely control the volumes of the different mikes I have set-up.

Enquiries:

Using White paint

Using plaster

Potential for live performance with TSC?

Canvas positioning for performing

Research:

Yoko Ono: Have you seen the horizon lately?"

"Noise Water Meat" by Douglas Kahn

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

David Lynch

I've been looking at the art of David Lynch. He'll add cotton, tar, meat, insects, dead animals, etc. to his paintings, not to be morbid but because "they are textures, pure and simple." His paintings have an incredibly tactile quality to them that I've just started to explore in my own work. In the movie "Pretty As a Picture" there's footage of him working on his painting "Rat Meat Bird", and that's exactly what it is, with a billion ants running all over the meat.

While I enjoy his drawings and paintings, as well as his movies, on an aesthetic level, what has influenced me the most about David Lynch is his willingness to trust in accidents. He is very receptive to new information that presents itself and is willing to take risks based on that information. In Twin Peaks for instance, one of his grips accidentally comes into frame during a shot so he includes him in the episode only to find that you can see that same grip's reflection accidentally in a mirror in another scene, giving that scene new meaning.

Since I'd like to believe that the work I create comes from a place that is primarily not my conscious mind, David Lynch's process, from what I've seen, is something that greatly appeals to me. With each new work I hope to create a situation where ideas will present themselves and hope I can take advantage of them. Here's an interview where he discusses this phenomenon:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPc1N7kf_AQ

There are similarities between his description and the way Ray Evanoff talked

about how he finds moments to take advantage of while improvising. I don't find it to be a coincidence that both of them practice meditation.

Abstract Expressionism and Improvisation

There is a palpable link between abstract expressionism and improvisation. While improvisation is not relegated only to music, I've chosen to draw upon musical improvisation in my own work. Furthermore, at the moment what interests me most is improvisation within a composed framework. I'm interested in the situation that allows genius improvisation and generation of content. In the book "Imagining Music: Abstract Expressionism and Free Improvisation" by Matthew Sansom, is this quote by Ornette Coleman: "Well, you just have a certain amount of space and you put what you want in it."

That is the most basic framework, and I can't think of a single work where that isn't true. With music the space is temporal (fill the space between the beginning and end)—in visual art the space is viewable area. Or more broadly, in both circumstances the space can be conceptual space and you fill it how you will by manipulating thoughts and ideas.

English composer Michael Nyman wrote in the early 1970s:

"Experimental composers are by and large not concerned with prescribing a defined *time-object* whose materials, structuring and relationships are calculated and arranged in advance, but are more excited by the prospect of outlining a situation in which sounds may occur, a *process* of generating action (sounding or otherwise), a *field* delineated by certain compositional "rules."

Ultimately, that is what I'm working towards in my own work. At the moment I feel as if I am discovering my vocabulary, and discovering the rudimentary elements of what will later comprise my system(s). I see this as an exciting appropriation into

visual art an idea that has most notably been seen in music. It's the idea of composition, the overlaying framework.

John Cage

Having seen the artwork of John Cage in Huddersfield, even though [some of] his paintings and drawings are beautiful at face value, what was of most interest to me what the framework he chose to employ in order to create them. He chose to follow an intricate set of rules, incorporating the I-Ching, in order to produce them. He created the circumstance, and then created drawings that are poetry—by doing this he simultaneously had control over the series and gave up partial control to the dictations received from the I-Ching. Whether he may feel as if the I-Ching is spiritually significant or not, I believe the point was to have adhered to a system of chance operations. That was something he was fond of doing throughout a variety of media.

In an interview he gave in 1990 he said that there was something that he was looking towards that he wasn't sure he could verbalize. He described it as an "amorphous, shapeless kind of mystery" and goes on to say, "I think the thing that we're getting prepared for, more and more, is the absence of control" and there are examples he gives where he's seen glimpses of it in music he's heard.

Its difficult for me to grasp the full extent of what he meant since he felt it was something that was happening then and hadn't been happening for a while. Its something I'm going to have to continue to try to understand. Moreover, I feel the work I'm producing needs me to specifically research his ideas as I develop.

RESEARCH:

"Pretty As A Picture: The Art of David Lynch" (movie)

"David Lynch - The Air is On Fire" (book)

"David Lynch: Ideas" (interview)

"Imagining Music: Abstract Expressionism and Free Improvisation" by Matthew Sansom

"John Cage: Everyday is a Good Day" (exhibition)

"Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews" by Nicholas Zurbrugg (book)