

An abstract painting featuring a central, dark, circular shape with intricate, swirling brushstrokes in shades of dark blue and black. This central form is set against a background of vibrant teal and green, also created with expressive, textured brushwork. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and depth.

**Patrick
Chamberlain**
On Your Mark

ARTSPACE

50 Orange Street | New Haven, Connecticut | 06510

ARTSPACE PRESENTS

Patrick Chamberlain

On Your Mark

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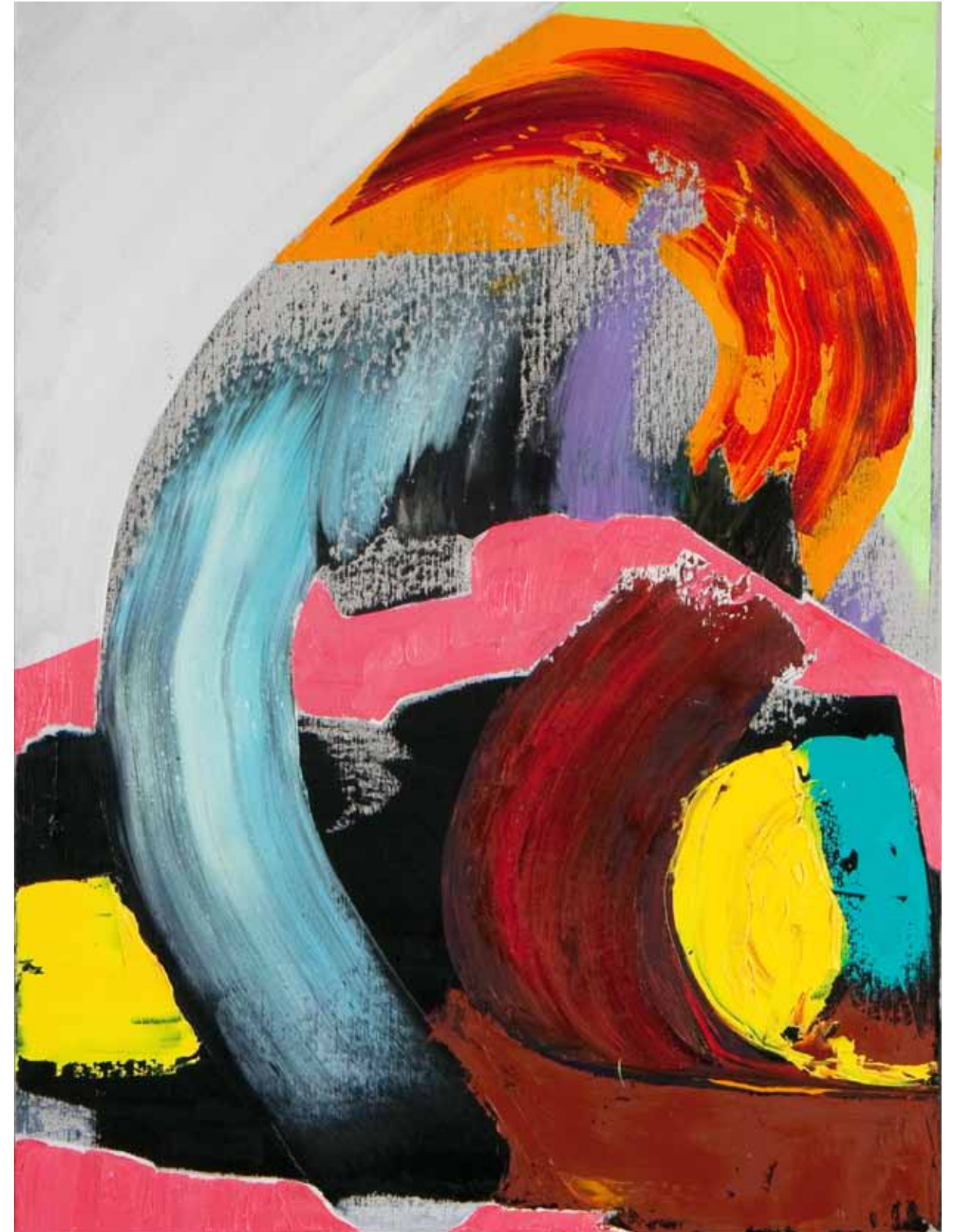
Foreward

Patrick Chamberlain made his mark at the age of 3. "I scribbled with a yellow crayon on a screen door...That was it." Whether this gesture was simply a reaction or an intuitive response to the world around him, Chamberlain's early expression has served as a touchstone for the artist, who only fully returned to painting in recent years. Long hidden from view in various nooks and crannies of his basement studio, the work in *On Your Mark* invites viewers to experience painting anew through the eyes of a fantastic colorist with a deft hand.

I am grateful to Patrick Chamberlain for his incredible generosity and good nature. Our many studio visits allowed for engaging conversations that have become all too infrequent nowadays. His family and friends are equally supportive and kind. Jessica and Charlie were always encouraging and welcoming hosts; Jock Reynolds and Jennifer Gross provided motivation; and poet Jeremy Sigler, Chamberlain's long-time friend, kindly contributed a text that captures the untold spirit of Chamberlain's work to this catalogue.

Thank you to the Artspace Board of Directors for its invaluable support, and my colleagues Laura Marsh and Courtney McCarroll for their help with this fantastic exhibition.

Liza Statton
Curator



fully Hokusai, 2007
Oil on canvas

Patrick Chamberlain Unblocked

by Jeremy Sigler



Untitled (Detail)
Oil on canvas

I followed Patrick Chamberlain down to his basement and he flipped on the lights. I was looking at a wide range of works; some on the floor laying flat, drips of paint drooling over their edges and running down vertically, or in storage racks resting like bats, upside down, or leaning against the walls like bouncers outside crooner bars; some aggressive, others quaint; some probing and all mixed up in lunacy, others reasonable. It would sound insulting to blurt this into the live mic, so I'll whisper it: the paintings belong in the basement.

This is not to say that they wouldn't be welcome above ground in either the brightest of galleries or coziest of living rooms. It's just that they belong in the basement. They seem to be bred from a notion of the sub. The gut longing and indulging in the lost art of introspection. They wrestle with the urge to explore. They lose their way on purpose. Disoriented in the waves, exploring the caves, they follow the bubble as it bulges from the rim of nostril. In this way, they intrigue.

A jigsaw puzzle in progress, my daughter and I pass the time, but in Chamberlain's work there is no partner, only an unraveling, Bacon-esque mystery — the animation of technique, an excavation to the stillness of an inner dialogue, the grappling with one's dormant Popeye. A Popeye willing to face the paint, to mirror mentality, to get giddy, sloppy, or tuck in, simmer down. Havoc.

In the crepuscular light edges in a sharp contrast — a compressed, greedy geometry of rays. Clashing disparate patterns implode to motif. An expanse-like landscape, or maybe a vase full of flowers, an observed or imagined interior at a one-legged table, a Matisse-like fishbowl, like an eyeball in a coke bottle. Chamberlain is a proper descendent of Hans Homann, with a like-minded instinct for pure, juicy color and just-as-juicy gesture. He's a guesser of geometry, an interlocker of language, a smith of visual puns — the rectilinear canvas can be flipped any which way on the easel to create a vertiginous abstraction.

Chamberlain is in some ways making up for lost time. First there was philosophy, and then a private psychology practice in New Haven, at which time, in his own analysis, he was able to peel back a view, become unblocked. Floodgates were down, drive was way up, the past beamed like brights into the tangle of memories like diamonds rolled out as dice onto soft beds of black moss. The inchoate flickers of childhood: A YELLOW CRAYON RUBBED ACROSS A SCREEN DOOR; rolling down a hill in a barrel; standing at the neighbor's door with a Watchtower pamphlet in hand; the first painting, of an egg, made under the watchful eye of his mentor, Brother Claw; the discovery that his father-by-birth, a bit rocky, had in fact been a painter of nautical scenes, of an ocean that would stand up like the sea really does when it has something to say and somewhere else to be.

These dreamy hints disturbed adult life, rose up in the canyon, brought end to the drought. Now umbrellas pop like bongos for patter. This is the curiosity, the novel vocation, quick to get legit — both matter of fact and a page-flipping fiction. Mental, but still intestinal. Still — and spill after spill. Paintings: they stumble into one another in the crowded waiting room. If Chamberlain stops, the experiment could lose momentum, bottleneck, a train wreck — clot.

So it's fast and furious, each opportunity seized to close the door, to gravitate to the damp underneathness where a furnace room gurgles, where wet takes wet by the hand, where flipper-flapping compositions go with the undertow and then get spat out in the corpsea — where the dead get the gaze and maybe a bit more, resuscitated, pushed a bit further; where painting is not just used to invent new neurons, but also employed to block up the backboard where flat tennis balls sit in unsatisfactory summers of the past; to obscure false hopes, duct tape wistful fantasies, gag them so the pragmatic brush can think its way across a smear and slop up another silky panty of painterly. The work then pulsates with the true scars and scabs of try-anything.

Education, after all, is wasted on the young. And manual labor on the old. I've seen men in their fifties throw a ball around with far more flare than their teenage sons. We aren't ready to learn till we're ancient, till we've earned our lessons and leveled with the honest ear. Confidence builds to a breaker at the shore where nothing is there to lose but the glorious swell. Time then tubing over itself, the chin jams the ramping shore. We may not be ready to love, either, till middle age, when the heart begins to bulge like a pomegranate and the nerves dull like useless fire crackers, when love becomes the act of doing anything beyond nothing. This is when the mind and body finally fall for one another in the dark shiver of mortality. This is when we take solitude to be great company, the ultimate conversationalist — voices in the slow wind unwind the clock.

And the other humans? They are ecstasy, along with a bottle of Malbec, a pot of fish soup, fresh cilantro heaped on a winter night, the moon's elegant toga tied at the plunging horizon.

But the painter must then delve back in, descend again to the guess-work of his greasy brushes with their oh-so temperamental bristles — paint tubes yes-ing or no-ing to rapid-fire interrogation. Unblocking, unblocking. Even while blocking in the next canvas.

The Body of Patrick Chamberlain

by Liza Statton



Isolate Flecks (Detail)
Oil on canvas

To experience the paintings of Patrick Chamberlain is to feel human. As you enter the pewter-gray gallery at Artspace, Chamberlain's radiant abstract paintings fairly burst from the walls, pulsating with colors that command attention. Feverish reds, turquoise blues, brilliant yellows, and flamingo pinks punctuate his canvases, arresting your gaze. The exuberant colors draw you into the darkened room where the artist's pictures offer moments of amusement, ease, agitation, desire, and desperation — a small sampling of the human emotional spectrum.

Ranging in scale from the small to the grand, Chamberlain's robust abstractions serve as a visual palliative to viewers in a time of pervasive anxiety. Unrelenting economic and environmental crises and 24/7 news cycles shape our daily existence. Somehow, Chamberlain's quirky panoply of colors and forms overwhelm yet engage. Perhaps it is the Technicolor quality of the canvases that enchants and ensnares us. Almost willfully, the paintings manage to divert and distract our eyes from the illuminated electronic screens and gadgets that increasingly enslave us to virtual reality. In this way, Chamberlain's work manages to "unplug" our web-surfing minds, allowing us to focus, just for a moment, on the here and now. Reaffirming the validity of human experience in the midst of a technologically determined age lies at the core of Chamberlain's artistic practice—one that relies on the primacy and physical sensation of intuition to capture the essences of objects, nature, and people.



fig i. *fully Hokusai*, 2007
Oil on canvas



fig. ii. *Perhaps a Garden*, 1997 - 2004
Oil on canvas

The difficulty and enjoyment of looking at Chamberlain's work comes from the artist's method of painting, which is neither purely abstract nor wholly figural. *fully Hokusai* (2007) (fig. i) and *Perhaps a Garden* (1997 - 2004) (fig. ii), for example, are two works that allude to the presence of the natural landscape, yet refrain from fully describing it. In *fully Hokusai* (2007), solid areas of gray and green hem in the arcing gestural strokes of reddish orange and icy blue that overwhelm the canvas. The artist's separate gestures appear to coalesce into one, which reads as a powerful, cresting wave akin to those depicted by the 19th century Japanese *ukiyo-e* printmaker, Hokusai.

Chamberlain makes similar allusions to place in *Perhaps a Garden* (2004). The structure of his composition appears classically arranged: our eyes perceive foreground, middle ground, and background. Zippy strokes and skeins of evergreen and moss interrupt the opposing swipes, swathes, and patches of yellows and violets that dominate the canvas, creating a palpable tension. If the picture conjures mental impressions of fields in Provence or an English country garden, so be it. The artist neither denies nor affirms such associations; he simply invites viewers into another space through subtle gestures that function, in a literary sense, like phrases rather than sentences.

In this way, Chamberlain's works reveal only to withhold. His works offer a glimpse, or something beyond measure as Willem de Kooning once remarked, that speaks to the artist's observations and reflections within his own experience.¹ Provoking a bodily response in the viewer is integral to Chamberlain's work, as his paintings are very much about the body. The ten works exhibited in *On Your Mark*, which vary in scale, color, composition and texture, reveal formal methods developed by the artist that wrestle with painting's storied legacy of expressionism and objectivity that has existed throughout its history.



fig. iii. *Isolate Flecks*, 2010
Oil on canvas

Like Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Hans Hofmann, Helen Frankenthaler, Frank Stella, and Elizabeth Murray among others before him who plumbed the depths of reality to behold the abstract, Chamberlain confronts painting's inherent paradox: it is both an illusion and a physical thing. Chamberlain's grammar of marks and motifs is a visual response to a series of conflicts embedded within his pictures between abstraction and figuration, absence and presence, illusion and reality, and repression and freedom. For Chamberlain, such juxtapositions relate to human, bodily experiences — those which have no verbal equivalents — that the artist represents on the canvas.

Isolate Flecks (2010) (fig. iii), an expansive twelve-panel painting, confronts your gaze as you enter the gallery. The uniformly-sized canvases sprawl across one long wall, appearing like musical notes on a staff. A finger's width separates one ascending and then descending panel from another, and while the works connect visually, they do not physically. The spaces between the panels act grammatically, like commas that separate yet connect a string of objects and ideas together. Chamberlain strikes a balance between continuity and interruption through his use of a bold, contiguous contour line that defines an expansive cocoon-like form spanning many of the panels.

Chamberlain hints at life contained within this worm-like shape through his rendering of half-familiar forms resembling a pelvis, breast, shoulder, buttock, thigh, neck, and even an eye socket. We sense the presence of the body through intuition rather than overt representation, yet Chamberlain's use of artificial, high-key colors restrains us from actually seeing the body as we want or know. The vertical striping further alludes to the optical games afoot in Chamberlain's work. On the one hand, the stripes serve as

a screen that conceals and constrains, while on the other, they show us how the painting is constructed, reminding us that the picture is merely a surface.

The painting's title, *Isolate Flecks* (2010), when considered in a literary context, enhances our understanding of the work and the ideas underscoring Chamberlain's artistic practice. *Isolate Flecks* (2010) derives from American poet William Carlos Williams' 1923 panoramic poem, "To Elsie." In this free-verse poem, Williams describes his housekeeper Elsie, a working woman from the lower class, with alternating fondness and objectivity. Throughout the twenty-two stanza poem, Williams depicts the broad physical and sociological conditions under which Elsie developed, while describing the personal relationship that he and his family have with her.ⁱⁱ As scholar Stephen Tapscott suggests, Williams wrestles with the social class divisions that exist and views Elsie as "both a particular self and the representation of a larger general social condition which she personifies."ⁱⁱⁱ

The pure products of America
go crazy—
mountain folk from Kentucky

.....
that she'll be rescued by an
agent—
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in
some hard-pressed
house in the suburbs—

.....
It is only in isolate flecks that
something
is given off

No one
to witness
and adjust, no one to drive the car

(Williams, "To Elsie,"
stanzas 1, 12-13, 21-22)

Tapscott interprets the poet's achievement with "To Elsie." He writes, "Williams negotiates between a purely external objective interpretation of Elsie's presence and a purely subjective, private sympathy with her experience. Elsie is that nexus between public and private worlds: her presence is an intrusion of the outside into the inside world, and yet the family had been "hard-pressed" like the rest of the world before she appeared."^{iv}



fig. iv. *For Leo*, 2007 – 08
Oil on canvas

Like Williams' Elsie, Chamberlain's *Isolate Flecks* (2010) embodies conflict and repression. Williams' language reveals the intimacy and distance with which he beholds his subject. Chamberlain juxtaposes abstraction with figuration and objectivity with expression to convey a similar tension between the sensual and mental experiences of living in the body. In the painting, the cocoon-like form is an organic container for body parts that are neither fully formed nor connected. Areas of transparent color contrast with opaque patches of paint, and the alternating densities of color suggest expressive states of being, ranging from the exalted to the depressed.

If *Isolate Flecks* (2010) conceptually embodies the conflicts inherent in our own physical existence, it also provides us with the pictorial elements and devices that Chamberlain repeatedly employs to convey such tensions. Elliptical and ovoid forms appear in seven of the painting's twelve panels, including the first and the last. At times, the egg-like form is legible and explicit, as in *For Leo* (2007-08) (fig. iv) and *OOF Vert* (2008)(fig. v), and at others, less so, as in *fully Hokusai* (2007). For Chamberlain, the egg forms often serve as the subjects and objects of his pictures, and their presence is symbolic.

In *For Leo* (2007-08), the olive-like mass hovers against a semi-transparent, pastel yellow-colored background. A similarly shaped small, red form appears above the ellipse, balancing between two geometric planes. These egg-like shapes, metaphors for the possibilities of the unformed life within, are equally constrained by their physical

surroundings. The gray, pseudo-architectural setting in which the ovoids appear, serves as a physical barrier to the form's potential and eventual expansion.

As with *Isolate Flecks* (2010), in *For Leo* (2007-08), Chamberlain is invested in rendering the world as he experiences it, rather than as he sees it. In this way, Chamberlain's work connects to the generative ideas of pictorial construction as revealed by Paul Cézanne, whose works were later interpreted by twentieth century French phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merlau-Ponty. Rejecting the Impressionists' technique of recording the temporary sensations of their experience, Cézanne attempted to render the processes of how we interpret these sensations visually.^v Cézanne's use of faceting was one such technique that describes pictorially how we perceive our environment. And, while Cézanne's paintings are both the product of vision and about vision, he never fully relinquished using recognizable objects and forms to demonstrate his point.

For Merlau-Ponty, Cézanne embodied the interdependent nature of human existence: art, artist, and the artist's life are interconnected—each aspect explains the other, and the others explain each in turn.^{vi} Cézanne, too, believed in the symbiotic relationship between logic and intuition and vision and perception.^{vii} His paintings argue that such oppositional forces cannot be separated, and his work is often a depiction of the tension between the two.

Cézanne chose to render the processes by which we perceive reality through his use of dynamic form. In his humble still-lives, numerous views of Aix and L'Estaque, and introspective, alienated bathers, Cézanne sought to explore and exploit the structural mechanisms of line, space, and volume, creating pictures that, as poet Rainer Maria Rilke once remarked, "achieve the conviction and substantiality of things."^{viii}

The tension Cézanne created in his pictures derives in part from his use of use of flat planes and their arrangement within the picture plane. In many of his still-lives, Cézanne distorted the scale of his objects. For example, objects in the foreground appeared smaller or more compressed against the enlarged objects in the background — an inversion of the Renaissance compositional technique of rendering illusionistic depth through linear perspective. Cézanne's use of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines reveals the construction of space in his pictures, while creating a juxtaposition between dynamism (diagonal lines) and stasis (horizontal lines).^{ix}

Despite his colorist bravado, Chamberlain adopts Cézanne's reductivist approach to painting. In *On Your Mark*, works such as *For Leo* (2007), *Untitled* (2008), and *Bar none* (2008) reveal the artist's interest in the construction of space and its pictorial effects. In *Untitled* (2008), Chamberlain creates a palpable tension between notions of expansion and contraction through his use of vertical and diagonal lines, which extend upward and outward. He situates the ovoid forms between two contrasting vertical planes of color, whose seemingly transparent hues contrast with the darkness and solidity of the elliptical forms.



fig. v. *OOF Vert*, 2008
Oil on canvas



fig. vi. *Untitled*, 2008
Oil on canvas

While an emphasis on flatness permeates these pictures, reminding us that the canvas is simply a repository for shapes and colors, Chamberlain alludes to spaces and places beyond what we see. His conscious use of borders, visible in paintings such as *For Leo* (2007), *Untitled* (2008), and *Bar none* (2008), assume an architectural function. The frames read as both thresholds and enclosures; they denote areas for open passage and the potential for movement, yet simultaneously deny such possibilities.

In this way, Chamberlain's minimal pictorial constructions are deceptively complex and contradictory in nature. He rejects mathematical, geometric abstraction, yet does not fully embrace figuration. Suggestions of movement, introduced by line and gesture, are denied by the presence of static volumetric forms, ushering forth a visual conflict between solidity and insubstantiality. And, while the canvas may often serve as an arena for conflict and confrontation for Chamberlain, it is also a physical expression of empathy.^x Through his selection and application of color to the canvas, Chamberlain relates the emotive disjunctions and connections to a life lived; he leaves it up to us to navigate the experiences of his world.

ⁱ Willem De Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," (1951) in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 556-561.

ⁱⁱ Stephen Tapscott, *American Beauty: William Carlos Williams and the Modernist Whitman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v Taylor Carmon and Mark B.N. Hansen, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Merlau-Ponty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 294-5.

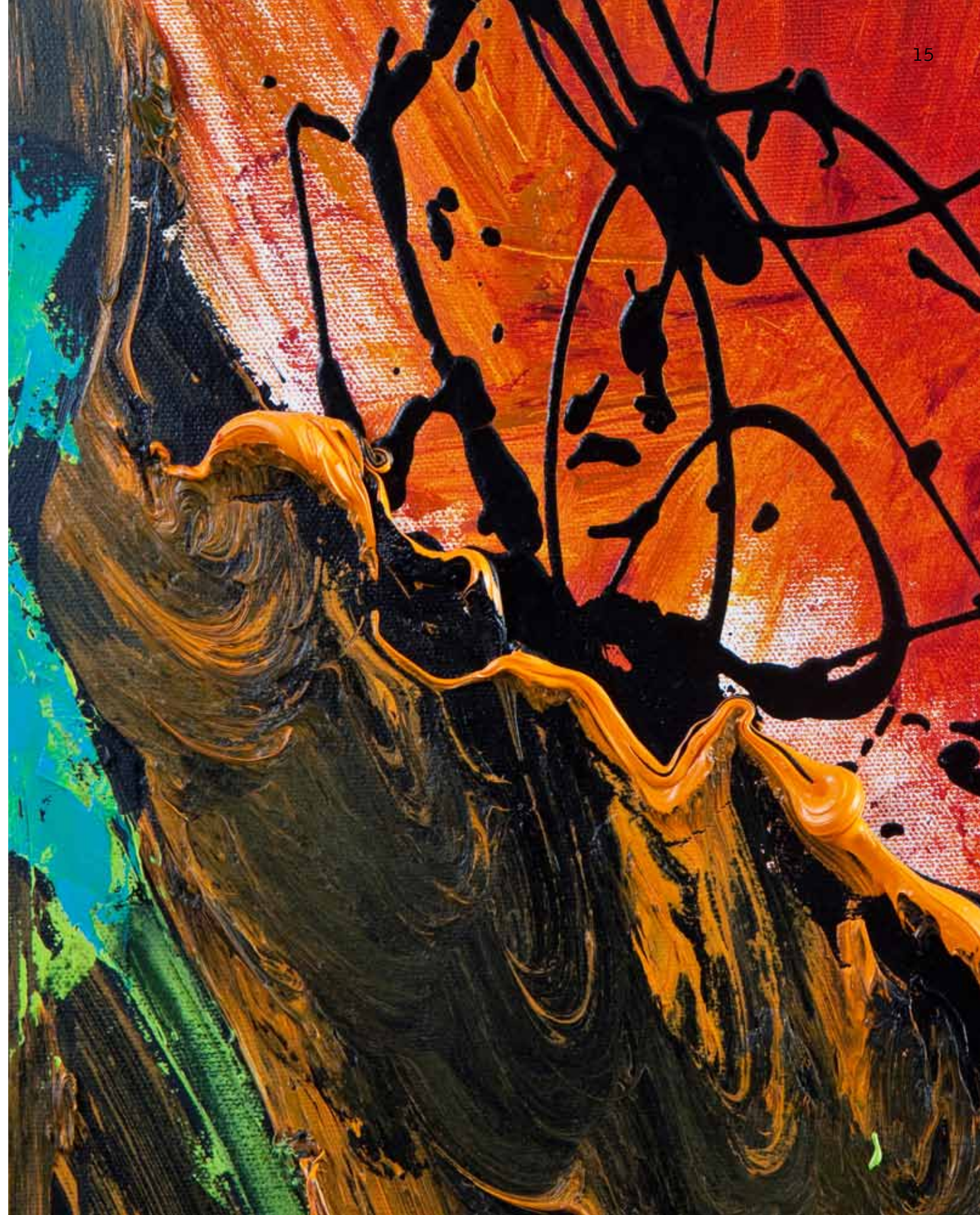
^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Emile Bernard and Paul Cézanne, "Une Conversation avec Cézanne," (June 1921) in Chipp, 13.

^{viii} Rainer Maria Rilke from "Letters on Cézanne," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: an anthology of changing ideas*, eds., Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 37.

^{ix} Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Composition: analysis of his form with diagrams and photographs of his motifs* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 41.

^x See Hans Hofmann, "Search for the Real and Other Essays by Hans Hofmann" in Chipp, 540.



Plates

from the exhibition



Little Pink Guy, 2009
Oil on canvas



For Elizabeth, 2007
Oil on canvas



For Leo, 2007
Oil on canvas



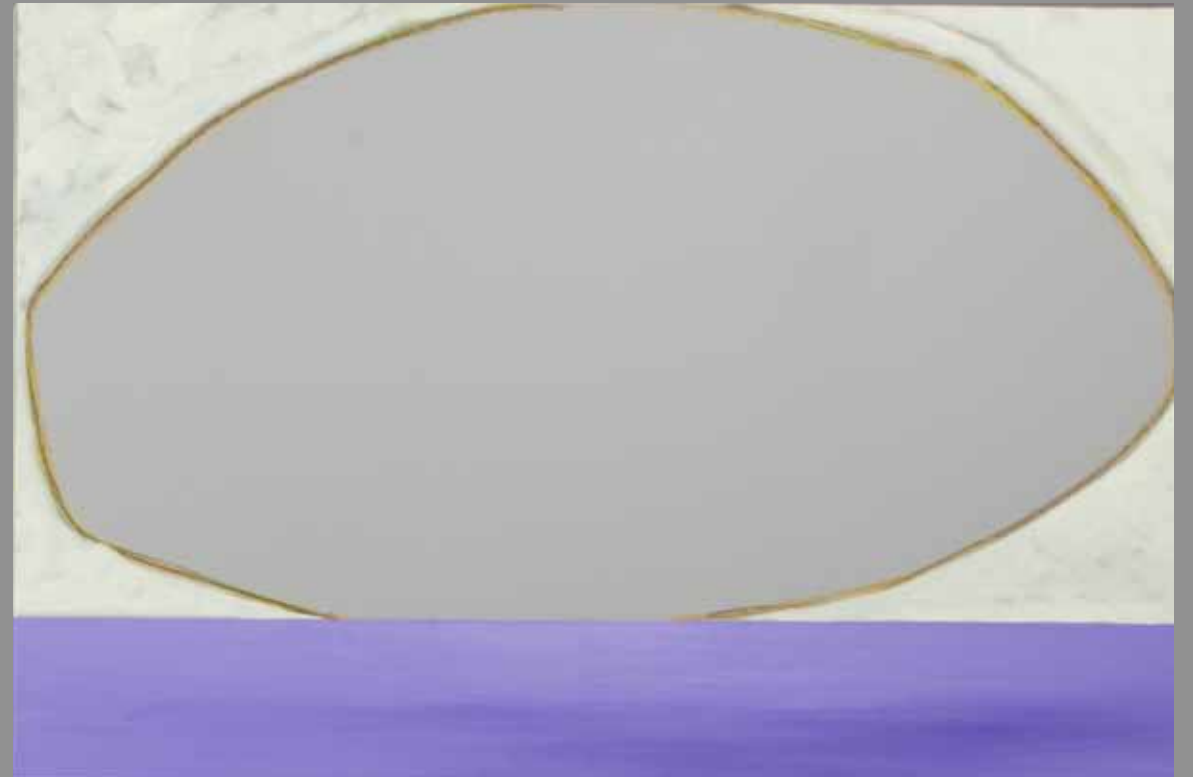
The One Right Next to "For Leo", 2009
Oil on canvas



Perhaps a Garden, 1997 - 2004
Oil on canvas



fully Hokusai, 2007
Oil on canvas



For Heizer, Judd and Hirst, 2007
Oil on canvas



Untitled, 2008
Oil on canvas



Untitled, 2008
Oil on canvas



Installation view
Isolate Flecks, 2010
Oil on canvas

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I thank Professor Kay Bonathan for giving me a formal vocabulary and Professor Mowry Baden for providing a conceptual foundation under my practice. My deepest gratitude to Jessica Stockholder whose work convinced me, some twenty-five years ago, of the power and importance of the artistic life, and whose subsequent presence, and as Jerry Salz put it "modest courage," has been a challenge, support and an inspiration for more than twenty years.



Happy Flower Painting for Georgia O'Keeffe, 1997
Oil on canvas

PATRICK CHAMBERLAIN

Lives and works in Hamden, CT

Patrick Chamberlain was born in Vancouver, Canada in 1955. He was raised in Los Angeles as a Jehovah's Witness. From the age of five he did missionary work as a Jehovah's Witness. After reading Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth" he left the Jehovah's Witnesses, age twenty-six. In 1985 Patrick completed an undergraduate degree in philosophy with an interest in studio practice and aesthetics at the University of Victoria in Canada; he was particularly influenced by Merleau Ponty. Patrick's work life has taken him from sheep farming to housepainting, to gallery assistant, through to the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The past several years have revealed that the ongoing painting practice that accompanied all of his other endeavors is core to the painter that he is. After ten years in New York, Patrick moved to Hamden, CT where he currently lives and paints. Patrick writes of his movement through life:

"Kierkegaard postulated a progressive model of human development that begins in the aesthetic, moves through the ethical, to end at the theological. Each succeeding stage incorporating and completing its predecessor. He is perhaps correct. Certainly his argument provokes productive reflection. In my experience, however, he has the progression wrong way around. My development is better expressed as a torturous and twisted movement from the theological through the ethical to culminate in the aesthetic."

JEREMY SIGLER

Lives and works in New York, NY and New Haven, CT

Jeremy Sigler is a poet, writer, musician, and filmmaker. To date, Mr. Sigler has published four books, and has just released a fifth, *Crackpot Poet* (Black Square Editions/Brooklyn Rail, June 2010). In 2006, Mr. Sigler was the recipient of a Lannan Foundation residency in Marfa, Texas. He is currently the Associate Editor of *Parkett Publishers*, and was recently appointed Lecturer in sculpture at Yale University School of Art.

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www.artspacenh.org

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