

THE PAINTING'S JOURNEY

Sei Smith

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THE PAINTING'S JOURNEY

Introduction

I made a painting a handful of years ago. Now I think of this collection of writing as that painting. I also think of each piece of writing as an artwork of its own. This is my favorite kind of Art. Art with a murky sense of authorship, no clear medium and multiple identities.

Here is the explanation I gave to the 13 participants:

First, a painting is given to a participant for a couple weeks and in that time it is used as a writing prompt. Living with the piece for a small period of time, the participants are given free reign to react and draw inspiration from the painting in whatever way feels natural, a passing glance that sparks a thought or a sustained investigation. After their time with the painting comes to an end, their writing is collected and the painting continues its journey to another home.

Once all the writing is collected the painting will never be shown or photographed professionally again and will only exist publicly as the writing from it's journey. The painting, now free from its obligation as a canonical artwork, can be gifted, left in an airport, destroyed, or any number of things that would otherwise be frowned upon for an artist to do with a piece in their body of work.

The collected writing will be presented at a reading, open to the public. After the reading, the writing will live online and in [this] printed zine/book, that will be available at the reading with an accompanying drawing featuring an outline of the painting.

By the end of the project, viewers can “view” the painting by imagining it, using the writing as a guide. Like a good book, the painting may even become more vivid in your imagination than it was in reality.

- Sei Smith

1. STEPHEN LURIE

January 28, 2024 – February 4, 2024

Painting — 4PM January 28th 2024 to 4PM February 4th 2024

Stephen Lurie

My phone background behind the document I'm typing is an image of NGC 6822 as observed by the NIRCam. NGC 6822 is an irregular galaxy 2 million light years away. The NIRCam, Near-Infrared Camera, is a camera mounted on the James Webb Space Telescope, our \$16 billion dollar camera in space. What I see when I swipe this window away, when I click the lock button to check the time, is what the Webb page (no getting around the pun) describes as a "densely packed star field." It would be easiest to say it's uncountable dots and smears of blue and red and shades of silver and cream on a black background, but there are so many stars and nebulae and galaxies that the black doesn't feel background at all. I find it humbling, awe-inspiring, right-sizing – which all feel to be important reminders when I'm staring at a device that insists on the opposite of those things.

The problem is that this image is not real, or at least not real to me, to us, and not just because those stars are actually the distant past, but because our human eyes are incapable of seeing those things that way. If you're willing to look away from the bewildering infinity of space and scroll down the page where you can find this image, NASA offers a slider which can transform it into what it looks like in "optical" view. In that version, the color, definition, depth disappear — it's no fun at all, a terrible phone background, and the one we would actually "see." But click a link in the sidebar and there's yet another version of this image of NGC 6822, this time as observed by the Mid-Infrared Instrument, and it is yet more striking than the first: wisps of blue, pink, red, and white clouds filling the field.

Are those the real ones? Well, no, I suppose not those either. You can read that near infrared photography captures wavelengths beyond “visible light,” but the truth is that it captures wavelengths beyond light visible to us, not light that is visible generally. Various snakes, frogs, fish, and insects – not counting, perhaps, the abilities of species somewhere else in all those galaxies – can see parts of the infrared spectrum. Just not us.

So, I mean: what color is this painting? Is it the colors I see when it is across the room, perpendicular to my sight in indirect daylight. Is it the colors I see from below at dusk, or the one glowing hue I get from sunlight directly illuminating it – which is to say bouncing off the windows of the apartment building across from me and coming into mine. And how many colors is it? Two would be the easy answer, but when I hold it, the edge panels are never the same color as the face, and when I twist it, the colors swap. It is at least all of those. It is something else when it is hanging in the gallery, and also when it is still there in the dark, even if there are only mice to see it.

And isn't that a useful uncertainty, another necessary humbling. That very few things are just about us and an object(ive) – whether task, challenge, opportunity, art – and even fewer are just about us. Almost everything is that awkward three: the thing that we face, the thing that we are, and the light between. The layering of the paints and gels; the structures of our eyes, the way we are feeding, treating, resting, straining them. These matter, but they also only matter in the ways that the conditions of our viewership allows. The light that is relationship, the light that is body, the light that is sound, the light that is light. Remember to use your telescope.

2. ANYA TURNBELL

February 4, 2024 – February 23, 2024

Sei's Painting

Sei brought me the painting today. He has now left, and I have realized that I do not know what the painting is called, so we shall continue calling it “the painting,” or possibly “a painting,” so it doesn’t get too full of itself.

The painting consists of a wooden frame, about 15 inches wide by 30 inches tall. The front surface and sides of the frame are covered by a shiny foil-like material, in two colors. Iridescent violet on the top half of the canvas area, gold on the bottom. It’s finished with a clear lacquer.

Upon receiving the painting, I immediately attack it in my mind. “Why is this a painting?” I think. Where is the paint? Where are the brushstrokes? It looks like it’s covered with foil. It looks like a gift-wrapped box. The painting sits on my desk, bouncing sunlight onto the walls of my room, while I brood. As the light fades, the violet part of its reflective surface changes to a bluish silver, like snow at night.

I may not have been to art school, but I have been to therapy, and suspect that my interrogation of the painting is actually an interrogation of myself. Where are my brushstrokes, I might as well be asking. Where is the evidence that I am art? And by that I mean, where is the evidence that I am worthwhile?

The roots of my “a painting must have brushstrokes” mentality grow deep, planted early by Russian primary school education. Russian school involves a lot of chanting and memorizing, and is best at producing students who, on a very deep level, believe them-

selves to be fundamentally incompetent. I hated it, but that didn't stop me from being shaped by it, which became especially clear when I volunteered one time as an arts & crafts teacher in a public school in Brooklyn.

We were in a low-ceilinged, dingy classroom, filled with multiple round tables, each seating groups of 5 to 6 kids. These were children whose parents did not have time to immediately pick them up from school, and our job as volunteers was to keep them occupied until the parents came. It being December, Christmas-time, the assignment was to draw reindeer.

I hurried to the supplies table and grabbed all the brown crayons I could find. Satisfied I had enough for each kid in my group, I returned to my table, where four little girls and one little boy were waiting with sheets of paper in front of them. "Why are all the crayons brown?" a girl named Nia asked as soon as I sat down. "Because we're drawing reindeer," I barked. "But my reindeer is going to be pink," retorted Nia. "Mine will be a rainbow", said curly Vanessa. "Mine will be sparkly," squeaked the little boy.

"Oh," I said, humiliated. I had actually been proud that I had managed to grab all the brown crayons (what the children at the other volunteers' tables were going to do, I did not care). Returning to the supplies table in search of non-brown crayons, I imagined how this reindeer drawing exercise would have gone at my own primary school.

The teacher, a top-heavy permed woman with an inexplicably cruel face, says, "What animal has antlers, children?" "A reeeeeiiiiin-deeeer," the children

reply, in an obedient, wispy chorus. “Correct!”, the teacher yells. “And what color are deer, children?” “Broooooown.” Suggesting a pink reindeer? Unthinkable. Invitation for ridicule and derision.

Well, dear teacher, Galina Vasilyevna, cruel-faced, unhappy, underpaid woman, apparently not. Apparently non-biologically-accurate reindeer are also acceptable here in the rotten West.

I look at the painting again. It is leaning against my wall, colorful and twinkling. It knows it has won. I am critical, filled with doubt and pathologically deferential to convention (paintings have brushstrokes! reindeer are brown!). The painting is bright, desirable, and self-sufficient. A tinted halo surrounds it. It changes with the setting sun. The painting knows it is a painting. It does not need me to agree.

3. JOE GOODALE

February 25, 2024 – March 20, 2024

Tuning Fork: Time Signature 2

I

To be the visited party, or to visit —
the neighborhood cat, a big
orange tom, slept in our room that night.

I was opening my drawer, very early,
and saw him slide out the window into the Bay Area fog.

Jorie Graham's self portraiture is always pointed outwards, never
with the "I" —

"Self Portrait as Hurry and Delay [Penelope at Her Loom]"

"Self Portrait as the Gesture Between Them [Adam and Eve]"

"Self Portrait as Apollo and Daphne"

and always in two, even when only Penelope is the subject, it is two
phenomena, and the space between:

"the done and the undone rush into each other's arms."

"the threads running forwards yet backwards over her stilled fingers"

II

My mother and I took the ferry to Governor's Island in 2016 to see a
show by Michael Richards, the sculptor and painter. He often mold-
ed versions of his own body — for example his most well known
work, "Tar Baby vs. St. Sebastian," has him cast in bronze, as a

Tuskegee Airman, wearing a fighter pilot's helmet and being run through by small model jets, the way Saint Sebastian was pierced by spears.

For Richards, everything that moves also moves in its opposite direction. In one of his pieces, model airplanes hang careening straight down to the ground, but there to receive them, painted with a bull's eye, is a mirror, sending them back skywards. And when we hear "Tuskegee Airmen" and remember the thrill of that story, whose two disproved villains were American racism and German Nazism, we have to remember why else Tuskegee was famous during and after World War II. Strangely, Laurence Fishburne stars both in *The Tuskegee Airmen*, in 1995, and also a movie about the Tuskegee syphilis studies, called *Miss Ever's Boys*, in 1997. At the end of the first, now a hero, he opens a newspaper to read about the terrible fate of the character he would play two years later.

Jorge Daniel Veneciano writes about Michael Richards that "Each of his works engages the notion of flight in at least two important senses: as a form of flight away from what is repressive, and as a form of flight toward what is redeeming."

Every article on Michael Richards that was written after he died mentions the final unsettling fact of his life: that after developing a body of work that centered on flying, simultaneously positing an escape to freedom via flight and questioning the possibility of such an escape, always returning to the Tuskegee Airmen and the figure of the airplane, he died on September 11th, at work in his studio in the North Tower, having slept there on the night of September 10th.

On our way to the ferry my mother and I walked downtown, through that neighborhood: now of course the one building where there had been two. (Samuel Delaney describes them in his essay “Ash Wednesday” as “the great tuning fork in the sky.”)

III

Every conversation is in two even if one party does not respond:

“Actually I excoriated him recently on my blog,” Joel said, and I thought *who would read that*, and he took a spoonful of his mushroom soup.

He said, “this neighborhood is impossible at this time of day,” then, “did you ever have a real father figure?”

On the phone with my mother again:
“Well that wasn’t backstabbing, it was treachery”
“But obviously you can’t trust anyone in Vienna.”

Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:
“O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell,
and count myself a king of infinite space,
were it not that I have bad dreams.”

IV

In order to coat the string thoroughly,
it must be passed back and forth sometimes more than once.

Cut a hole in the bottom of the tube and thread the string
from there up through its regular opening.
The paint may need to be spread by hand as well
and the tube will be covered in paint as it changes hands over the
canvas,
but that, though it too is a result of the instructions,
is not the piece.

When the string is saturated with paint,
hold it taut over the canvas, and one assistant must
pull it up and let it snap back down.
and this must be repeated in parallel every $3/8$ inches
until there is no room left.

Each finished painting is an even row of lines, but
a viewer can see where a paint-covered gloved hand
pinched and pulled the string.

There is a collection along each vertical edge, right and left,
of thumbprints. S and I have different ways of holding down
the string, so the painting is always asymmetrical.

We wonder if we should switch sides.

Tension makes it happen,
Communication is gestural.
transfer the tube,

three hands:
two hold tight and one snaps.

4. AMAUTA FIRMINO

March 21, 2024 – May 3, 2024

SHINY BASTARD

Written by

A. M. Firmino

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A small and warm apartment -- twinkling lights shining through the steamy windows.

SOMEONE is tying their shoes at the door, getting ready to leave.

A YOUNG MAN on his way out.

He checks his outfit on a wall hanging mirror, trying on a GREEN BASEBALL CAP.

Not satisfied, he switches to a BLACK BASEBALL CAP.

He tosses the GREEN CAP over his shoulder, spinning like a lopsided frisbee, onto a LARGE SOFA as the light CLICKS off and the door slams shut behind him leaving us in...

Complete DARKNESS and total SILENCE.

The room is empty.

And we linger on the furniture in the dark.

The SOFA.

The floor LAMP.

The messy coffee TABLE.

Suddenly small sounds start to rumble through the space. Something is... MOVING.

The SOFA starts to BREATHE... Its cushions moving up and down with each rumbling breath, looking very much ALIVE.

And a VOICE echoes into the empty room.

COFFEE TABLE

Is he gone?

The SOFA jiggles.

The floor LAMP flickers on, illuminating the room again.

The coffee TABLE shakes its surface like a gentle earthquake - skittering all the random junk across its surface: overdue bills, loose change, keys, and a single dirty air pod.

SOFA

Anything good today?

COFFEE TABLE

Let's see... bills, bills, trash...

The floor lamp FLICKERS on and off, trying to get their attention.

FLOOR LAMP

Pst... Guys...

COFFEE TABLE

More bills... a greasy napkin...and... an air pod--

SOFA

That's mine! Mine!

COFFEE TABLE

Yours?!

The Floor Lamp FLICKERS some more. The other furniture is oblivious.

FLOOR LAMP

Guys!

SOFA

You got the air pod last week!

COFFEE TABLE

That's why I'm taking this one-- this'll complete my set.

The LAMP FLICKERS harder this time.

FLOOR LAMP

Hello!! Dudes. Listen!

SOFA

Set?! Why do you need a set?!

COFFEE TABLE

Because I know you've been hiding stuff from us. What's under that cushion?

SOFA

Nothing.

The SOFA pushes its cushion down -- clearly hiding something.

COFFEE TABLE

Oh, nothing!?

SOFA

Yeah, I said nothing!

The FLOOR LAMP, running out of patience, thunders and flickers with an explosive rage.

FLOOR LAMP

DUDES!

The room is shaken. The coffee table shudders.

There's silence again. Until...

FLOOR LAMP (CONT'D)

Have you seen the new guy?

The LAMP adjusts itself, shining a spotlight on a small painting hanging just over the sofa.

It's rectangular and iridescent - glimmering like the underside of a fish scale. There's a bit of yellow, a bit of pink, and a bit of blue scattered across it's mostly silvery surface. But it's not smooth. There's a slight wrinkled texture across its face that only accentuates the light, the way each ripple catches the beam and shoots it back out in a dozen different directions casting a scattered glow across the room, like some kind of disco ball.

The lamp stays this way for a while.

The furniture studies the painting.

But nobody moves. It's a real Mexican standoff.

SOFA

What the fuck is that?

The furniture inches closer to the painting...

COFFEE TABLE

Do you think he can hear us?

They inch even closer...

LAMP

I don't think so.

SOFA

He's so shiny...

The Coffee Table stretches out one of its corners like a hand, cautiously trying to touch the shiny surface...

But just before he can--

CLICK! The front door swings OPEN.

The sofa, table and lamp all TUMBLE over one another!

CRASHING on the floor in one big heap.

The SOFA flips over.

The TABLE CRACKS in two.

The LAMP's bulb shatters as it SLAMS into the floor.

Loose change, old notes, greasy bills, lost remotes, and all sorts of forgotten treasures fall scattered across the floor.

And the YOUNG MAN stands in the doorway -- shock on his face.

YOUNG MAN

What... the fuck.

He looks up.

And we follow his gaze up...

To the one thing in the living room that's still in place...

The mysterious little painting hanging on the wall.

END.

5. DAN ROSEN

May 9, 2024 – June 4, 2024



This felt like a bookshelf piece. It's length and width seemed in harmony with the books I mostly hadn't read on the bookcase by the window. I don't think I oriented it the right way, but in my house it's my rules, and so horizontal and on the shelf it sat. My windows face south, so I have intense, blinding light in the afternoon. The piece acted as a reflector shield, turning from a two toned, textured work into a single plane of blinding, shimmering light, like a cyclists vest as it's caught by a car's high beams. At night it, rested, rejuvenated, recharging as it geared up for the next days burst of vitality. Perhaps the work could find a second life as solar panel, or a tanning device for the aging mothers at a local pool. Now it's gone and the book covers behind it resume their slow fading, the piece giving brief respite from the piercing sun.

6. SOFIA THIEU D'AMICO

June 6, 2024 – July 3, 2024

Sei Smith, *Traveling Painting* (2021)

Sofia Thieu D'Amico

3 July 2024

At its center, a graceful crease glides along the canvas, bisecting the two foils. Just behind, a smaller crease swims to the side. They are a mother whale and her small calf seen from above, traversing an open, iridescent sea.

In the late evening, the painting's top half is a deep orange, brandishing almost burgundy, or black. Then the bottom becomes an icy aquamarine horizon line on a deep slant. What if the night sky glowed a little orange, like this one does? Maybe we would look up and see little solar flares or the gentle lick of intergalactic fires from lifetimes away.

Aside: When I look up at the night sky I always wonder how many me's stacked on top of each other it would take to reach a star. Feeling so small in scale with outer space is a delight.

What if gravity refused the ocean to lay flat, and instead the vanishing edge of the sea sat on an upwards tilt as it does here—as if the holder of the world tipped the whole globe to the side, the way one might tip a snow globe or a glass of water to make its edge dance left or right?

Aside: I had a dream once that gravity on earth reversed itself. Horizontal movement across space or over fields or the sidewalk was limited and we would all hit an invisible wall after a few feet. But, we could move up and down vertically into the air, over hills and buildings, infinitely and as far as we wanted. I woke up disoriented and cried.

Being partial to black, I think the deep nighttime colors are my favorite permutation of this painting.

Aside: I sat in a monastery in upstate this weekend and felt like I could inhale the thick, quiet, luscious night, like a warm tonic before sleeping.

Sometimes it is daytime and the bottom hemisphere is almost white and the top grows a golden yellow. A canary's wing bows over an icy field. Could that ever happen in real life? Colors grow deeper with the passage of the sun. In the shadow, when I walk close, an emerald green comes out, like a damp forest floor. How quickly snow grows into moss.

A few days later, the whales look different. Maybe it's the warmth by the window shifting the air beneath the film? I think that the mother and child whales have grown, actually, and gotten longer and more rectilinear. They have straighter backs, they've improved their posture. I pick them up and put them down to feel the change in my home. With its creases and bubbles, the work doesn't feel too precious. I think that's what you intended, and it's a relief.

Like a jewel in my apartment, the painting threw light and color in the summer sun with generosity. It was like watching a small wizard reach into its infinite pockets, grasping fistfulls of magic dust and lightning rods to scatter into the air. The painting gave me company and color each day, what a gift. I hope the mother whale and her baby get to where they are headed.

7. JEMMA ROSE BROWN

July 7, 2024 – August 15, 2024

8. ALISON BRADLEY

September 3, 2024 – October 19, 2024

Sei Smith

The Painting's Journey

The painting appears strange at first, iridescent, seductive and quizzical. Is it on canvas I wonder? As the ambient light crosses, colors shimmer and disperse, elusive and fugitive under observation. Struck with memories - ones personal to the artist, others to an experience I had while visiting Walter de Maria's *Lightening Field*. The memories make me smile to myself. This "painting" is a happening made by Sei Smith.

I had the honor to know Sei's grandfather, Tadaaki Kuwayama. Between themselves, Sei referred to him as friend. Tadaaki was a prodigious artist, humble and brilliant; truly avant-garde. His language was color and spacial arrangement. Sei was integral to his grandfather's late practice, for many years - making stretchers, assisting in all manner of ways, one of the few people who had his ear and knew his mind. There were surely many spoken, and unspoken, conversations about art and making. The fact that Tadaaki denied the conventions of painting, yet spent decades using paint and painterly materials, infuses *The Painting's Journey*. Not to say that these two Artists make Art that is similar. Rather, a conversation is taking place within the Artwork, a resonance reflecting upon other Artworks, Art History, society and the now. For me this was the quality of fleeting color in Smith's artwork.

Visiting the *Lightening Field* by De Maria is a pilgrimage, it was created that way. One must drive for hours from a point of urban life to arrive at a small town. Once arrived, one is obliged to leave their own mode of transportation, of their own volition, and is "transported " to the site of the *Lightening Field*, 1977. The long drive concludes at a house where one stays for 24 hours,

immersed in this site specific work. The field consists of 400 polished stainless-steel poles installed in a grid array measuring one mile by one kilometer. The poles—two inches in diameter and averaging 20 feet, 7 1/2 inches in height—are spaced 220 feet apart and have solid, pointed tips that define a horizontal plane. As DIA writes: A sculpture to be walked in as well as viewed, *The Lightning Field* is intended to be experienced over an extended period of time.

During the day ambient light moves across the poles in the sun's trajectory, causing shimmer, glare, movement and trace of color and shadow - this spurred my initial thought of "family resemblance" , a term used by Wittgenstein , which applies across both Artists' work. Not only in the sense of the transitory light but also because both Artists invite us to do the work to perceive it. Each instance offered the experience of thinking that the Artwork itself was between the viewer or observer and the world outside and that my perception of the world outside was likewise informed by this Artwork.

Committing my reflections on *The Painting's Journey* in writing, solidified my memory, immeshed in memories I have of other Art and specific works, somehow making them vivid once again. Iridescent colors moving from front to side to verso in unforeseen diagonals. Sunset and sunrise colors, springtime and winter white. Strange how thinking about this work has made it so vivid. Friend would smile.

9. ASHLEY HAMILTON

October 23, 2024 – December 6, 2024

When I wake up in the morning it's because I feel the presence of my dog sitting next to my head, fully upright. She knows that she gets breakfast at 7 am so at approximately 6:55 she starts trying to shoot lasers out of her eyeballs and into my brain. Instead of setting an alarm clock I like to rely on my ability to sense her looming and when I open my eyes I pat her on the head and say a long goooooo morningggg because it makes her waggle her little tail knowing her laser eyes worked.

Her breakfast is a mix of two types of food but when I'm assembling it I pretend one is a special ingredient like on iron chef. I reveal it with flair and she stomps her tiny toes with anticipation. She's supposed to take a bite, contemplate the flavor and give me a rating out of 10 but she's too excited and I do such a great job mixing such unusual flavors that she scarfs the whole thing in seconds flat.

We come home from our morning walk and she takes a seat in the middle of the kitchen. Her head hangs in shame because I have to do a quick wipe of her four tiny paws. She's sensitive about how often I clean them. I assure her that everyone gets their paws cleaned when they come inside and no one is judging her. No one sees her paw cleanings as a condemnation, no one thinks she has dirtier paws than any other dog out there. In fact most dogs watch her walk by with envy and rage because she was born with pristine, naturally snow capped feet and some dogs pay thousands, if not millions, of dollars to have their paws dyed to look the same.

When I get back from the gym I pretend I can't find her. I search under all my pillows for the world's smallest dog and when I spot her we have a good laugh. The fun comes to

an end when I ask how her novel is coming along and she admits that while I was gone she didn't even pick up a pen. That's better than the days I come home and find out she's making negative progress, having had a panic attack and shredded a chapter or two that she'd been so proud of just days before. I don't know why she's so self conscious about her writing, having had so many stories published in a highly acclaimed zine someone she knows from the dog park puts out every quarter. Of course I've never read her work because she's too nervous to show me just yet but from the way other dogs at the park talk to her I'm sure what she's doing is going to change the world.

Sometimes I have to go to the office or even just to a coffee shop to get some work done. Either way she takes it extremely personally. As a business owner herself she doesn't understand why so much of my work has to take place outside the house. I tell her it's because, no offense, she's extremely chatty and it's hard for me to focus when she's running her shark tank presentation over and over and over again. I know she's a perfectionist but it's extremely distracting and the apartment just isn't big enough for us to both be running moderately successful businesses from the couch.

Dinner can be a bit of a struggle. She's supposed to eat at 5 pm sharp but the negotiation begins around 4:35. There's no reason to not at least have a little appetizer, she says. I try to stay firm and she starts flinging wild accusations and threatens to call the SWAT team. I say she doesn't even know the SWAT but she says she knows everybody. Once dinner is served we apologize for everything that was said between 4:45 and 4:55 and we give each other honest feedback about how to maybe handle things better tomorrow.

She was supposed to pack her suitcase before bed because she had a flight first thing in the morning for a major modeling campaign but she's decided not to go. She tells me how guilty she feels perpetuating an unrealistic beauty standard for young dogs. She's never had any work done but who would believe her? She looks like the puppy version of a barbie doll, her proportions are entirely unrealistic and even though her contribution to the rent would have been nice I tell her how proud I am that she's prioritising her values.

I leave to go to a party she's not invited to. She's quite accepting of alone time in the evenings because she likes to do silent meditation from 6 to 8 pm and then she tucks in for bed at 8 pm sharp. If there's any noise at all in the apartment after 6 she gets quite irritated that I don't respect her process.

Finally, when it's time for me to go to bed, her petite body is curled up right at the base of my pillow so I scooch her body out of my spot and she pretends she doesn't care. Then, right as I'm drifting off to sleep she jolts up and says wait, I have to go to the bathroom real quick so we hop out of bed and walk towards the door. As soon as I'm 6-8 steps from my bed she says oh never mind and hops back in, right where I was comfortable just seconds before, and I rearrange the pillows so she can have my side.

Usually these conversations are just between me and my dog so it feels kinda crazy to let a new painting in to observe.

10. WILL HEINRICH

December 8, 2024 – January 4, 2025

Portal

I didn't connect to the portal right away. An 8" x 12" box about 2" thick, it was delivered to my wife in a black tote bag by the artist who made it and she, following his instructions, placed it upright on the back of my desk, where I found it that same evening. I stared at its reflective surface, divided by a tilted slash across the middle into a golden upper half and pinker or more silver bottom, and wondered how to turn it on. My wife said the artist hadn't mentioned it. Over the next few days it caught my eye a few times, a dead, mysterious object, and I wondered if it had been broken in transit. But then, one afternoon when the sun fell at the right angle through my living room window, a buckle in the portal's surface lit up. It was a Y-shaped fold in the plastic membrane, tipped over and crossing from edge to edge, so that the letter's base touched just below the upper left corner and the cup stretched out to embrace most of the right half. It was a glittering copper color, and it arrested me not only because it might mean that the device was powering on but because the effect itself was so evocative. I won't say it was "unrealistic," because I saw it with as much or as little certainty as I've ever seen anything. But it seemed to issue from a different echelon of experience than the rest of the room. For a few days more the shimmering of this Y, along with a similar bend lower on the portal's face, was all that happened. It restored my faith that the machine was active, but as I waited for more

I grew impatient, even angry. I tried sneaking up on it, talking to it, adjusting the window shades, turning the overhead light on and off. I had expected to be communing with my younger self, my dead grandmother, great spirits of the past, the mind of God. Meanwhile the calendar year was coming to an end. Work stopped, school finished. We put up a New Year's tree, went away for a couple of days, lit candles, drank Champagne, ate chocolate, stayed up late. The night after we returned my small daughter didn't go to sleep till nearly midnight and within a few hours she had gotten up just long enough to wander into our bed. At seven I woke up, listened for a while to her and my wife breathing, and finally grabbed my notebook and moved to the couch. The shades were down, the room was dim. When finally I turned my gaze away from the windows, I saw that the portal was glittering like a treasury, like a Christmas ornament, like an apparition. I felt that if I had been able to count and measure all the separate fragments of light it was throwing off, they would add up to fill a space a mile on every edge. This rectangular fire sliced through the familiar scene -- my untidy desk, the other pieces of art leaning against the wall or hanging on it -- and fully possessed my attention. For a moment my mind cast back or wandered, and I found that any memory I took up was vivid, almost electric. An old friend, a trip to Memphis, sledding down 147th street on a piece of cardboard with my first love. But then I dropped all that and simply looked. I wasn't aware of myself or of the room.

The portal was almost all golden, with a thick horizontal stripe of copper color one third of the way down, under the Y-shaped buckle that now looked like the angry eyebrows on an owl.

I realized that my expectations had been wrong. I could commune with my younger self or dead grandmother or someone on the far side of the globe. I could jump back in time to half-forgotten moments of ecstasy or dreams of the future. I could slide through the golden doorway into fantasies of my own creation. I could, but I would be missing the point. What I was looking at was a portal to the present moment.

11. WILLIAM CORWIN

January 7, 2025 – February 5, 2025

Narnia in the Snow

There is that thing of paintings pretending to be windows, or some kind of portal, or a memory. It's the premise of painting: portrait or landscape, the portrait is self explanatory, and the landscape, with some cows and trees or maybe a waterfall or sunset, adds an alternate space to your space, injects some nostalgia, or some color into the room. But what do you do about a painting that offers the intrusion of something that shouldn't be there, a presence that you feel is competing for your attention and maybe with you. So Sei's painting landed in my living room, and kept looking at me.

A mirror is already an equivocal premise for an artwork. You think about the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, the tessellated expanse of reflectivity meant to expand the room infinitely. Sei's little painting reflected me everytime I looked at it, making me think "who do you think you are?" It was a mottled, colored mirroring, and so even if it was impersonating me, It was a sketchy impersonation. Another thing about mirrors is that while they impersonate portraiture, they also have the indifferent attitude of saying "I don't really care what form I take, I'll reflect anything." So as I said, it competed because it was also another introvert in the room, and it imbued a light Edgar Allan Poe feel to my living room.

During the day, Sei's Painting was very aware of changes in the light. It would become brighter and more responsive when I turned on the lights as the sunlight petered out. If light was streaming through the window's the paintings would sit quietly in shadow, but it would wake up in the evening, and it would change color. It's a blunt abstraction—a rectangle of two colors, or sheens, with a gently diagonal line—and because it's a pure abstraction,

one who's subject was actually whoever was looking at it at the moment, my eye sought a subject. I saw a field of snow at dusk. During the day when the room was dark, the snow became a kind of luminous greeny-yellow, with a deep copper sky and then, during the more illuminated evenings, the sky became gold and the snowfield white with a ghostly blue cast. I thought about standing in that snow, I thought about Narnia all frozen because of the White Witch. I noticed that the shiny surface bent around the edges, forcing Sei's Painting to become a three-dimensional object, and I meditated on how that conflicted with my sense that this was a depiction of Narnia in the snow. I was all very complicated.

I was sorry to see it go because even though it had intruded into my lair—a strange visitor who had asked to stay for a few weeks—it hadn't actually asked for much despite its confrontational nature. It also made me aware of one of the intrinsic facts of landscape painting, even though it wasn't a landscape, per se, nor was it a painting. That landscape paintings are hyper-nostalgic, that's how they work. Just the fact that they exist makes us remember looking at something "like that," and memory triggers nostalgia. Sei's Painting also played with that kind of indifferent portraiture that mirrors offer you, which is probably what caused me to go down the rabbit hole of Narnia. There was I, a middle-aged man looking at himself reflected in what he thought was a snowy field at night. Next to Sei's Painting in my living room was a little poster the Metropolitan Museum had produced of The Boxer when it had been in New York, hanging by a thumbtack. The Ancient Greek bronze also was unnaturally shiny, and green, for a human figure, but again, the subject of the artwork won out over its odd materiality. It's nice to change the subject from aging to materiality.

12. MEGAN ZOE BILLMAN

February 21, 2025 – March 30, 2025

A Little, Too Late: **The Mouth of Potential**

I met Sei in Bushwick in January. It was a birthday party for a friend from college, and my brother had gone with me. We danced and ate cake, and then, slightly drunker, exchanged numbers on the street.

A few weeks later I was walking in the Botanic Garden when he sent a text introducing the premise for an exhibition: did I want to write something about a painting that would never be shown?

We met next in a coffee shop for the drop off. Once again, my brother was with me. After that, the visit began....

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Things started as usual, with me waiting til the very last minute – leaving the painting on the threshold of my consciousness until the morning Sei was due to pick it up. The remaining hours were regret-filled, ecstatic, a sort of grief-stricken exaltation of the communion I'd missed. I hung the piece on my wall, and hurried to form an impression.

I wish I could say this wasn't the prevailing pattern. To walk right up to the edge of something, and then leave it there, untended, ambivalent, for far too long.

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In *Missing Out*, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips writes that “the exemptions we suffer” – not just forced, but also chosen – “make us who we are.” That “we are always [in relation to] the myth of our potential.”

In writing myth, I wrote mouth. A fun slip, a gaping openness. The missing painting, summoning the imagination through its absence.

Hanging in my room, it glittered and refracted with undue generosity. Purple and green, or orange depending on where I stood. It was abundant in a way I hadn't anticipated, and I felt pangs of guilt, faced with this irrepressible sparkling.

During the weeks that followed, I fell back on habitual comforts – combing psychoanalytic texts about loss and paradox in search of a redemptive narrative. I hoped to find a generous explanation for my (neurotic) avoidance... or maybe just something to write about.

In her 2025 book, *On Breathing*, analyst and writer Jamieson Webster considers D. W. Winnicott's model of infant development. In the third of three stages he outlines, he describes a young baby holding and then repeatedly dropping a shiny spatula onto the floor, delighting when it is returned to them.

Webster posits that "only after the glittering object is ready at hand can the infant explore not-having, losing it, dispensing with it – a breach that opens onto the wider world... She continues, "We are thus born thrice – into the world as a being, a being who can have and be had... and as someone who can then have the courage to not-have, to give some things up and look for others, to speak about what is not immediately there."

In *The Painting's Journey* the mouth gaped open, the glittering object was offered and then lost. An invitation was extended to give something up and look for words to describe it – to summon the courage to speak – and to experience communion, collectively imagining one painting, alone, together.

13. LAURA DANAE

May 14, 2025 – June 12, 2025

Blue and Rose Delight

A traveller
A little hard to reach at times
Though she means well
If you can catch her
Radiating double time
Shades of blue and rose delight

A cheeky side glance
A full frontal show
For those lucky few who wish to know
The ones who patiently wait
To see a different side than previously shown

A performer, a starlet
A centrepiece, a follie girl
captivating her audience
She'll treat you right
And show you her care

Ever changing
Never here nor there
Dancing through those sunshine rays
She shows you her way
Peaceful undulations
Holy sage

She reflects her rays upon your skin
Connecting you to her warmth within
Comforting your now
Listening to your whims
She hopes to speak to you
Her ever changing mind
Those shades of blue and rose delight