

Artist Statement

It is often said that painting is like a language—a visual language. While this is, on the one hand, a kind of truism, I believe it to be, on the other, a telling oversight that speaks more to the times we live in than it does to the practice of painting. A mode of painting whose sole function is merely giving expression to one's views, existing only as a mode of communication, is at best, poorly suited for the task, and at worst, neglects what is most singular and crucial to painting as a whole. For all its flaws, the cliché that “art is subjective,” has within it this kernel of truth: that even when art is not at its most subjective, that is, even when it is not exclusively *beneath* communication, it is always nonetheless in surplus to it—it does something more than what it communicates at the level of signification. It is precisely this difference, the way in which painting parts ways with the conventions of language, especially in our modern age, thoroughly saturated by “the sign” and endless hermeneutical maneuvers of “cultural signifiers,” that I believe painting finds itself anew, that painting, finally, finds its criticality, its *raison d'être*. Painting as such, is mute—it does not *say* what can't be said; it *is* what can't be said.

As a “representational” painter, my commitments lie there, within, but at the same time, beyond the confines of language, and towards the immediacy of experience, to perception, and to *form*. When I paint, I am engaged in a certain dialectics of looking—a synthesis of looking out at the world, and, in turn, looking in, not just towards the self, but at looking, itself—at the very sensuousness of sight. This entails investigating the whole experience of vision and the curious ways in which looking, as an extension of one's attention, is bound up with being, with presence and absence, with revelation and concealment, with intention, and ultimately, with painting.

The axiomatic presumption of the visual arts is that the imprint of light (and with it, vision) upon the individual and society, is profound. Paintings, beheld through sight, are thus entangled with its legacy. My project is a meandering one which seeks, in part, to entrench itself deeper with that history through the methodologies of painting, through ways of relating the representational to the abstract, and through the exploration of form—form, not merely as a means to content, but as content in itself. To paint in this manner is to engage critically with both optics and a physical process of applying paint to surface with made meaning. Painting's physical presence offers an aesthetic respite, a desperate counter to the virtual intangibility that grips our age, and gestures towards an insistence of a haptic and bodily world whose richness is near and ever present-at-hand but, all too often, perfunctorily overlooked. It is in this interest of what we tend not to see, that I take up painterly explorations of foundational but seemingly forgotten backgrounds—spaces, objects, and structures which are part and parcel of everyday life. Seemingly devoid of the human, mine is an oblique, poetic approach which only reaches the human through a series of refusals. If I am not painting humans in any obvious way, I am, instead, painting their traces, their absences, and their constructions, but in a given light, and always with the sneaking suspicion that whatever is elided in any given moment is what, in the end, matters most.

—John Holsinger