

MEDIUM AS MEDIUM: A CONVERSATION WITH SARAH CROWNER

Bartholomew Ryan



Figure 1. Detail view, *Platform (Pentagon Leaves)*, 2016, during installation. Hand-painted and raw cement tiles, wood, cement board, mortar, grout, 348 × 348 × 7.5 in. (883.92 × 883.92 × 19.1 cm), unique.

Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

In May 2016, independent curator Bartholomew Ryan conducted an interview with Sarah Crowner via email discussing her exhibition at MASS MoCA and her practice in general. The two picked up a dialogue they began several years prior in conjunction with the 2013 group exhibition *Painter Painter* at the Walker Art Center, which featured Crowner's work.

Bartholomew Ryan:

Sarah, I believe you may have created the world's first wheelchair-accessible painting—the hand-painted, cement-tiled floor piece in your exhibition *Beetle in the Leaves* (installed on the top floor of MASS MoCA's converted factory space). Ascending the stairs, you enter a sun-dappled space with multihued brick walls and a raised tiled platform that operates as both a painting and stage (fig. 1). The front-right corner is ramped so that it is accessible to all. I'd like to start our conversation here, in part because I think as a painter you are not really interested in ideas of progress (as in the next innovation in a medium) or autonomy (painting made for itself in reference to itself) but, rather, pursue and present a very different attitude—one that nevertheless sees you identifying distinctly as a painter. I think it is important to state that you draw your legitimacy as an artist from a broad spectrum of influences. You have, like many artists working today, created your own canon, one that allows you to sidestep some of the more entrenched discourses in painting's late twentieth-century history and release the medium to be a space in which you can work freely and productively. The fact that your painting is, indeed, wheelchair accessible says so much about the pragmatism of your work, which is also a gesture of generosity to whatever lies outside the work (the environment,

society, architecture, history, and bodies). What role do you think this floor work/painting plays in the exhibition? And why should we consider it a painting as opposed to, say, a sculpture or a stage?

Sarah Crowner:

Bart, what you're describing is one of the things that motivates my work, the "how-to," practical side of painting—how to make a painting we can stand on, that our bodies can move on and into. Painting as a kind of architecture. Tiles are inherently hard-edged, geometric, abstract (joined geometries that create a larger composition), which is the kind of painting I have been fascinated with for a long time. But it's the how-to, or the methods, of making a painting that are also interesting. So, what are the practical means to achieve a different kind of painterly composition? Tiles are one possibility, and the "problem" of having to create a wheelchair-accessible ramp at MASS MoCA actually became a great challenge and, in the end, interrupted the balanced square composition of the platform—I think in a good way.

About the platform's role: yes, I do see it as a form of painting. I wanted to create a space within a space, a removed and elevated kind of pavilion within MASS MoCA's galleries. Also, I didn't want to cover up the museum's windows and walls. I wanted to let the old patterns in the building (the bricks, floorboards, ceiling beams, window panes) be apparent, and I wanted people to see my painting and the platform in relation to those existing patterns. The show is so much about motifs, both made and found, in nature and in architecture. I want my work to be experienced in a physical way, in an immersive way. I think the patterns on the floor guide the viewer into looking more carefully at the painting hanging on the partial wall that I had built adjacent to the platform, calling for an active looking. I consider the platform a painting

because the tiles are painted. The only thing that separates it from the other paintings is that it lies on the floor and you can walk on it.

BR: The presence of the hand in both the materiality and surface of the painted tiles (fig. 2) creates a level of comfort for the viewer who steps onto the platform painting, a kind of accessibility through form and production. While I don't want to validate the idea of the handmade over the mass-produced, it's obvious that mass-produced tiles would have had a different register, more engineered and technocratic somehow. You have another tiled work in the next room that functions in a related way but is nevertheless quite different. It is blue-green-glazed terracotta rather than hand-painted; there's a simple chevron pattern with an upward-downward motion, and the grouting is perhaps a little thicker (see pp. 154–155). Curator Susan Cross's gallery text refers to it as a mural. That work is also pretty monumental in scale, but, in this case, it is set vertically against a wall, with a bench that people can sit on to observe. Both of the works have a portal-like quality. They are eminently present, but the glaze on the mural and the paint on the floor painting mean the works each move from a detailed surface quality, which is there to be intimately contended with by the viewer, to this radiant quality. For instance, the floor work seen from the mural gallery becomes somehow one with the windows behind it, the platform and the sunlight creating this shimmering verticality—an area of light where the architecture and paintings become one entity. The *portal*, in this context, is almost metaphysical and shamanic, like the shimmer of light that protagonists step into in sci-fi movies, to be transported to another place, another dimension, another time. I can't say if this effect is deliberate on your part, but

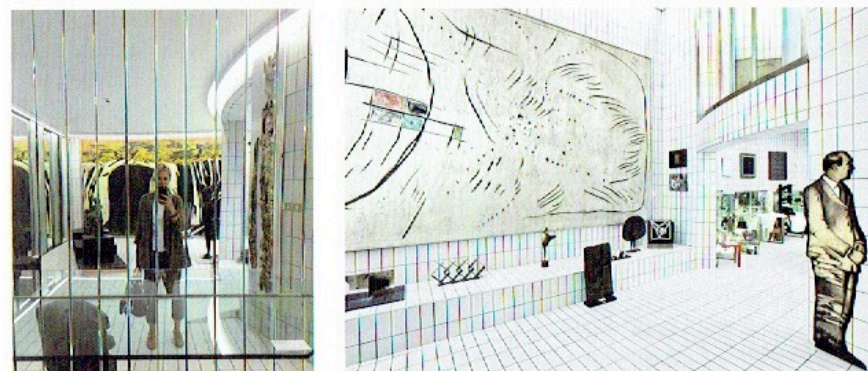
I don't believe it is an entirely accidental byproduct of your philosophy as a maker.

The exhibition's title takes its inspiration from the beetle-shaped house designed by Italian architect Gio Ponti, with a white-tiled interior by designer Nanda Vigo. Can you tell me about your visit to this house, and maybe unpack your thoughts a little on Vigo's use of tiles and your own?

SC: The title of the exhibition, *Beetle in the Leaves*, came after reading about a building in Italy called *The Beetle Under the Leaf*, designed by Gio Ponti in 1964, with interiors designed by Nanda Vigo. She covered the interior walls and floors with glossy, white, industrial tiles, where the owner then displayed his art collection. Through researching this house, I found another Nanda Vigo folly, a house built for the art collector Remo Brindisi in 1973 in a seaside town called Lido di Spina, near Venice (figs. 3–4). I found images online and in books, but when I learned the house was turned into a foundation and open to the public, I decided I had to visit the place in person. I liked the idea of a collector displaying his art collection (ranging from Picasso ceramics to works by Fontana, Manzoni, de Chirico, and others) over a distinct and repeating rectangular grid pattern. But when I arrived at the Brindisi House in September last year, I was struck by the overwhelming feeling of being trapped—the tiles not only cover the walls but the floors, stairwells, terrace, ramps, etc. Vigo covered many of the windows with faceted mirrors, and the lighting was '70s-era flickering fluorescent. There was a lot of aged and dusty plexiglass. Incredible artworks, but still the result was a feeling of foreboding rather than one of expansiveness and generosity, as I had imagined. The grids in the tiles repeated endlessly with all the mirrors, and with no real windows one couldn't feel the outside. It reminded me of *2001: A Space Odyssey*—era futurism. This



Figure 2. Detail view, hand-painted and raw cement tiles in Marrakech



Figures 3–4. Casa Museo Remo Brindisi, Lido di Spina, Italy. With interiors by Nanda Vigo (with Sarah Crowner pictured on the left)

experience probably contrasted more extremely with my weekend before in Padua, a city where everything was made by hand, from the marble architecture to the brass window frames, cut stone and brick, and of course the painted Giotto frescoes. So, my experience was moving between two extremes: the slowness of handcrafted ancient architecture, which endures somehow, and the quickness of the factory-made tiles and their perfect repetition. In any case, I knew I did not want to directly reference the Nanda Vigo tiles in my exhibition; instead, I took what I learned from visiting the building and tried to transform the experience into something else. I liked the allusions to nature (insects, plants) and patterning in the title of the first Ponti building, and called the exhibition *Beetle in the Leaves*. The pentagonal tiles in the platform are geometric and leaflike, though made in cement and covered in paint. The large painting hanging over the platform alludes to insect legs, seeming to walk over the tile leaves.

BR: Your comparison of Vigo's and the Padua tiles is instructive, the industrial versus the handmade, a working through of the intuitive ways in which the body encounters material as variously alienating or inviting. I'm struck that, in choosing the tile pattern, you went for a recent innovation in design by some British mathematicians. Can you address this embrace of both the handmade and the scientifically innovative?

SC: Like you, I don't want to say that the handmade is somehow preferable to the industrially produced. Yet what I appreciate in things made by hand is the inherent slowness of making, which I think may translate into a slower, more contemplative or careful way of looking. As far as mathematics go, the tile pattern was discovered only last year by a group of mathematicians who were studying patterning over many years through physical trial and error. Math is a kind of craft, demanding time and patience.¹

BR: The handmade, the industrial, labor and leisure, the body in history and in space—all of these things seem to exist within the exhibition and within your work. I first came to it when Eric Crosby and I curated *Painter Painter* for the Walker Art Center in 2013.² That exhibition asked, in a contemporary art world where the artist-as-free-agent can work without obligation to medium, why choose the materials of painting today? It was also prompted by an older generation of critics, curators, and artists who were asking, when they encounter a younger painter's work, where is the criticality? In the art world of the last 30 to 40 years, there has been an expectation that a painter has to have some self-reflexive level or wry acknowledgment of the problematic status of continuing to paint in the postmodern era. Although this is an important approach, I think there are young (and old) painters out there who don't see painting as a hugely burdensome medium they somehow need to account for. In our studio visits, it became clear that many artists are approaching the medium in a very open-ended way, often exploring minor histories and relational nuances of making. I'm not seeking to revisit that exhibition, but during the process I became quite intimate with your work at the time. You were still very much constructing a world that would allow you to operate as a painter. And this sense of laboring, of tearing apart and remaking in relation to history, was viscerally present with your method of sewing together fragments of canvas. How did you get to this step?

SC: I arrived at this way of making paintings through actually stopping painting for a while and teaching myself ceramics. I experimented a lot and discovered the many ways to work with clay, and about building form. I learned about the term *plastic memory*, which refers to the way clay has a memory of touch. You

may work with it over and over, but when it's fired it remembers, and gestures and fingerprints often return. I liked the idea of a medium having a memory.

Around 2007, I made a body of work in fired ceramics for an exhibition titled *Handbuilt Vessels* inspired by the ceramist Beatrice Wood; she was a self-sufficient potter based in Southern California from the 1930s forward, who originally came out of the Dada scene in New York and had this long eclectic list of friends and lovers (artists such as Duchamp and Picabia, and later the theosophist Krishnamurti and the poet Anaïs Nin).³ Her life history was so much more interesting to me than her ceramic work, actually. Taking her biography as a starting point, I made a series of hollow, bottomless vessels, abstract and a bit anthropomorphic, that ended up as portraits of her friends and lovers (fig 5). Each chapter was dedicated to a different person in her life, with a different tone and attitude for each figure. I tried to translate her emotions into my work, and of course my own came through as well. This is another example of "making is understanding," and also getting to know history through a medium—the medium of clay. But also the spirit medium—a person or, specifically, an artist who can communicate with spirits, with ghosts. I do think artists channel different energies and bring those energies into their work. I let myself be open and irreverent with the material, but I think I kept a sense of reverence at the same time. Anyway, this practice led me back to painting. And with an emphasis on materiality and history, I was able to think about painting in a very different way, taking it apart, literally, and building it back again.

BR: I love the idea of the spirit medium, which chimes so much with the portal idea that I touched on earlier in relation to your installation. An important early work with sewn, painted canvas and also your channeling of another

artist was your Bridget Riley-inspired work at the 2010 Whitney Biennial (see pp. 56–57). What prompted it?

SC: At the time, I was looking at an old exhibition catalogue of her work and became fascinated by one photograph in which she is posing inside her large-scale installation titled *Continuum* (1963). It was a painted black-and-white zigzag, snail-shaped installation, larger than life. I imagine it to have been a little like a Richard Serra "ellipse" but made in wood and painted in black and white. I read that the installation had been destroyed and no longer exists. I was interested in the way the photograph flattened this painted sculptural object, which now we can reach only through reproductions. Also, the open pages of the book somehow warped the zigzagged lines in her work. What I did was look carefully at the warped triangular shapes and attempt to flatten them, first through drawing a pattern to scale on paper, then painting the pattern pieces with paint on canvas, then stitching them together again. Much of my work has involved taking apart and putting back together parts and fragments of other paintings, my own and those borrowed from other voices. So, these black-and-white paintings, though they came out of studying a photographic reproduction, became something else in the end. For me, sewing is a practical means to get to an end (a painting stretched over a frame). It is a sturdy way to join painted pieces of canvas together, and to get a very straight line. It's a method that has so far worked for me. In the same way that tiling is a pragmatic way to cover a floor surface, so is sewing a pragmatic way to join bodies of painted color and stretch again over a frame. The laborious process—the pattern making, cutting, painting, tracing, trimming, sewing, stretching, and then undoing that and doing it all over again—is a way for me to understand painting, both the history of painting and abstract form itself.



Figure 5. Installation view, *Handbuilt Vessels*, Nice & Fit, Berlin, 2008. Unglazed ceramic on wood table, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

BR: What I find so interesting in the work is that rather than build on a mainstream history of painting, which, whatever one's views on it, had been so thoroughly visited and revisited, you basically were aligning yourself via your work with a whole other art history—not in some naïve, “let’s reinvent history so it better reflects current values” sort of way but genuinely saying these are the voices and the people who I am inspired by and who I want to acknowledge and even pay homage to. As it happens, many of these artists are women, which makes sense, as a byproduct belief of our patriarchal society was that women artists could not attain to the “purity” of the painting masters of their day (had they even wished to). So, artists such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Sonia Delaunay, and others were (often by necessity) multitaskers, making a gouache one day, then taking the abstract properties of that painting and transferring it to a dress design the next. To many of us now, the hybridity of their production is interesting not only for the openness it represents but because it reflects the precarious reality of our lives rather than some idealized version of it. So, it’s not so much about inventing a history, or revisionism, as actually making visible what was always already there, even if these artists have never been centered within art-historical discourse. Through making, you have constructed a vision of the history that makes your work as a painter so crucial. You have literally modeled it.

SC: Yes, I am attracted to artists and designers who have a more open practice as it relates to painting, like Delaunay, Eileen Gray, certain Neo-Concrete artists in Brazil in the 1950s, like Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, as well as the artists and architects of the Bauhaus era or the Wiener Werkstätte. What is happening is that they are painting, or making stage sets, or fashion, exhibition design, and performance,

or even designing nightclubs, all at once with what seems to be little hierarchy. An embroidered pillow might make sense in one setting or a large-scale theater backdrop in another, but they all come out of the same two hands and mind in the end. This kind of pragmatic attitude to making art interests me a lot, and the idea of adjacency, or the adjacencies of histories and practices.

I do think the history of painting is something not fixed, something porous and still changing. Almost malleable. Taking this idea one step further, what if art history could be seen as a medium itself, in the same way that clay or paint is a medium? A medium to reach the spirits of dead artists also. One could move it around and, in the words of Sherrie Levine, collaborate with these voices and “make them speak again.”⁴

BR: I’m glad you brought up Levine. I think it’s useful to think of your work in relation to hers, something that frankly hadn’t occurred to me until I was in your studio recently and saw an install shot from a 2015 group exhibition at Simon Lee Gallery in London. I was struck by an image showing a small Egon Schiele drawing, *Reclining Nude* (1918), hanging beside a larger, monochromatic cut-up and sewn painting of yours with a watery and deep-blue surface (fig. 6).

SC: I chose this coupling—Egon Schiele’s drawing and my blue monochrome, *Untitled* (2015)—because I wanted to say something unexpected about desire (and even maybe longing). Seduction plays a big role, an obvious one, in Schiele’s work because of its erotic nature. My work is also about seduction, and the body, in a different way. The blue monochrome is made of the clippings and remnants of painted blue canvas (of past paintings) and then stitched together. This particular sapphire blue has

a depth and complexity to it that makes it look like velvet. Some people, when they see it from afar, inevitably want to move up next to it and touch it. There is also the "plastic memory" of paint on canvas, and the mark of the brushwork, a record of the body. And this is what I mean by seduction, the material seduces the viewer to move closer. A different seduction-impulse might make you want to move closer to the Schiele. Anyway, I thought the two pieces would prompt two different types of desire, and I wanted to underline that difference.

BR: It's hard not to look at Schiele now without thinking of Sherrie Levine, and her appropriation of his work through re-photography back in 1982 (*After Egon Schiele 1–18*). Levine famously appropriates works by celebrated male artists of the twentieth century, though Egon Schiele was something of an outsider to the Brancusi and Duchamps of the world. A crude explanation of Levine's project might be to say that in co-opting the works of male artists, she is placing herself, a contemporary female artist, as a kind of historical insert into their past production. She filters them, and they become mediated by her gaze, rather than the more typical framing of women via male constructions of desire and history. Yet, of course, she also has some admiration for these figures, and an encounter with her works certainly functions as more than one-liner parody, as she has such a keen engagement with materials, or what have you.

Levine, who has variously acknowledged an Oedipal relationship to some of the artists she appropriates, has another beautiful line in an early interview where she is discussing the notion of originality: "It's not that I don't think that the word originality means anything or has no meaning. I just think it's gotten a very narrow

meaning lately. What I think about in terms of my work is broadening the definitions of the word 'original.'"¹⁶ For me, this reveals something of her project, which, rather than a nihilistic attack on originality, is a sidestepping of the terms of originality as they had become prescribed via modernism.

I think we are in a time where artists' conceptual underpinnings have become less programmatic, and, to my knowledge, while you've almost exclusively worked with female artists, you've also worked with fashion backdrops created by Ray Johnson, for example. Artists like Levine helped create the foundations that you are, in your own way, building upon; if she expanded notions of originality, you are expanding the idea of whom and what should be valued. I've never thought of your engagement with these artists as constituting art about art in some banal way but more art about artists and consequently—potentially—anything.

SC: It has often been said that Levine's work lies in the space between the original and the appropriation; it's a kind of invisible veil between both, which is where the art lies. To my mind, there is real emotion, a kind of shifting of the aura of the original to another place. The aura, in her work, becomes located in the space between the original and the copy, or in their "vibration."¹⁶ She herself operates as a medium.

I'm curious about this idea: having a conversation between an earlier artwork (inert, made long ago, buried) and my hand (which can unpack, unfold, and examine). This is why I love that quote earlier by Sherrie in which she discusses "voices made to speak again." I'm attracted not only to art made by women but, more aptly, to "minor" modernists who



Figure 6. Installation view, *Faux Amis*, Simon Lee Gallery, London, 2015, with Egon Schiele, *Reclining Nude*, 1918, pencil and charcoal on paper, 18.35 × 11.61 in. (46.6 × 29.5 cm), private collection, courtesy of Richard Nagy Ltd., London; and Sarah Crowner, *Untitled*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, sewn, 48 × 36 in. (121.9 × 91.4 cm). Private collection, Monaco

have been overlooked and deserve to be looked at again (many women fall into this group). In 2013, I was part of a show including Larry Bell and Marlow Moss at Kunstverein, Amsterdam (figs. 7–8). The show involved three different generations of artists who each employ a kind of geometric abstraction in their work. Marlow Moss was part of the *de Stijl* movement in the Netherlands, was a poet, painter, and transvestite, and many people do not know her work even today. She made these Mondrian-esque reliefs and steel sculptures. The painting I made was hung across from Larry Bell's plexiglass and mirror sculpture from 1965, which in turn mirrored Moss's work. It was a kind of hall of mirrors and reflection of the three artists. Another example: my friend Paulina Olowska introduced me to the work of Maria Jarema, a Polish artist active in the 1950s who collaborated with Tadeusz Kantor on theatrical sets in Krakow (her theater curtain from 1956 was a primary source for an entire body of my work in 2012) (see p. 76). As for Ray Johnson, MoMA librarian David Senior curated a small exhibition a few years ago of Johnson's early graphic design and illustration in magazines, posters, and books, which I saw and couldn't forget. Before Johnson became (better) known, in the 1960s, he worked as an illustrator and graphic designer. He created a series of large-scale calligraphic abstract backdrops used for a photo shoot of fashion models in a 1957 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* (see pp. 130–131). I made paintings based on these backdrops to what I imagine is original full scale. My impulse is more about appreciation—art history as a medium to be worked with and certain things brought to light. The critic Jan Verwoert might call this the "anti-Oedipus complex," not killing the father(s) to achieve a linear progression upward—instead, sidestepping that heroic impulse and painting in the present tense, yet glancing over one's shoulder and looking at the past.⁷

BR: This gets me to your comment on wanting your work to be "immersive." Well, there's immer-

sive and there is *immersive*. What does it mean to desire this for your work? Curator Dieter Roelstraete has a really strong critique of the "aesthetics of immersion" that he's landed on in a few texts.⁸ Effectively, he accuses the immersive artwork of being the dominant artistic project post-1989, and states that it, in effect, reproduces the totalizing effects of capitalism. The viewer being enveloped by the artwork, or the environment established by the artist, reproduces the sense that there is no outside, no escape from the vicissitudes of life today and thereby serves an inertia or an entropy in relation to action and change and such. He calls for an art that allows the viewer to step back, to engage critically with the artwork, but also to step outside, to escape the immersion, to literally model the possibility for an alternative to the artist's (ergo society's) vision.

SC: This is hard to explain. I have said that I desire a certain kind of immersion when it comes to my work, a realization of the body becoming part of the painting, or the installation. The realization that you, the viewer, by standing on the patterned tiles, are suddenly part of a composition—so that you are no longer passive, you're active. Or with the monochrome paintings, the way that the painting comes alive as you move up next to it, realizing it is an object rather than an image. That happens only when the body engages. So, the participation of the viewer makes it immersive. I also see my work as a call of attention to the world outside it, so it's not only an immersion in my work but also an immersion in the world, the work being a sort of door—or portal, if you want to use that word—to the rest of the world.

BR: Yes, and maybe that's what I was getting at earlier. Now, when I was sitting in front of your green mural, I had this discovery. I had checked out the Alex Da Corte exhibition downstairs,



Figure 7. Invitation image for the exhibition *Larry Bell and Sarah Crowner, Meet Marlow Moss*, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, 2013



Figure 8. Installation view, *Larry Bell and Sarah Crowner, Meet Marlow Moss*, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, 2013, with Larry Bell, *Untitled*, 1967, canvas, wood, coated glass, 36 × 36 in. (91.4 × 91.4 cm), published by Pace Editions; Larry Bell, *Ein 12*, 1981, mineral coatings on Stonehenge paper with black Arches paper insert, 52.5 × 35 in. (133.4 × 88.9 cm); and Sarah Crowner, *Corner Painting for Larry*, 2013, acrylic and gouache on canvas, raw canvas, sewn, two panels, each 82 × 82 in. (208.28 × 208.28 cm). Courtesy of the artist

which is tangential to this story except that there was a video that had Leonard Cohen's *Chelsea Hotel #2* as a soundtrack. I was looking at your mural, a haptic joy in its own right. It includes, along with many other incidental marks, several chihuahua paw prints made while the tiles were drying in Guadalajara where you had it produced. I was thinking that it would be an amusing and satisfying way to go to have that large work collapse on top of me and to expire doing what I like best—engaging with art. Then, I noticed the Cohen soundtrack leaking into the room. It is a depressing song, of course, and probably subconsciously helped drive the previous thinking. I was kind of irritated at this intrusion into some kind of “purity of looking,” but then I realized what I guess should have been obvious, that this was all part of it. And then I began to look at *everything*: the raw painted plaster wall and windows to the left of the mural with the strong, glass-brick grids and exclamation-point verticality of the window casings (fig. 9)—why was the glass here opaque? The various ways in which your own architectural works and paintings made way for the architecture of the space. And, of course, the sense of stepping up onto your painting, approaching your other paintings, feeling the desire to examine them closely, and just to rest in the space on your painting and watch how others engaged it.⁵ Yes, you had drawn me into your world; technically, you had made me a participant in the work, but in such a matter-of-fact and clear way—with literally an invitation to step up or not—that it was somehow empowering rather than controlling. The exhibition calls for a geometry of attention that I find more and more necessary today.

You and I are part of that unfortunate generation that carries in our bodies the memory of

what it was like *before*, while still being able to navigate and adjust to how it is *now*. To remember a time before the endless information flows, the distribution of our subjectivity into the ether, the countless beautiful and dispersed intimacies of the present that are also combined somehow with dissolution and loss. This show is very much about the present with all its promise, exclusions, and particularity. It invites one to step outside, to look beyond the ego of the artist and his or her production, to step outside the endless regurgitation of a *prima facie* art history, to step outside our capacity to conquer information. To step through the portal and find oneself transported—or to not do that. It's neither a conservative gesture nor a radical one. It's keenly aware of the limits of its own knowledge, and the desirability of engaging a world.

SC: I love the idea of “geometry of attention.” It makes me think of an exclamation point! I've been making paintings lately that I call “monochromes”—raw canvas pieces stitched together with brightly painted colored frames around them that are bright orange, neon red, electric yellow (see fig. 10). How the frames function is to point to the spaces outside and around the painting, as the bright color reflects on the wall, like a neon tube. The tile floors do the same thing; they make you aware of your body standing adjacent to the artwork. They make you slow down and pay attention to the world outside the painting.

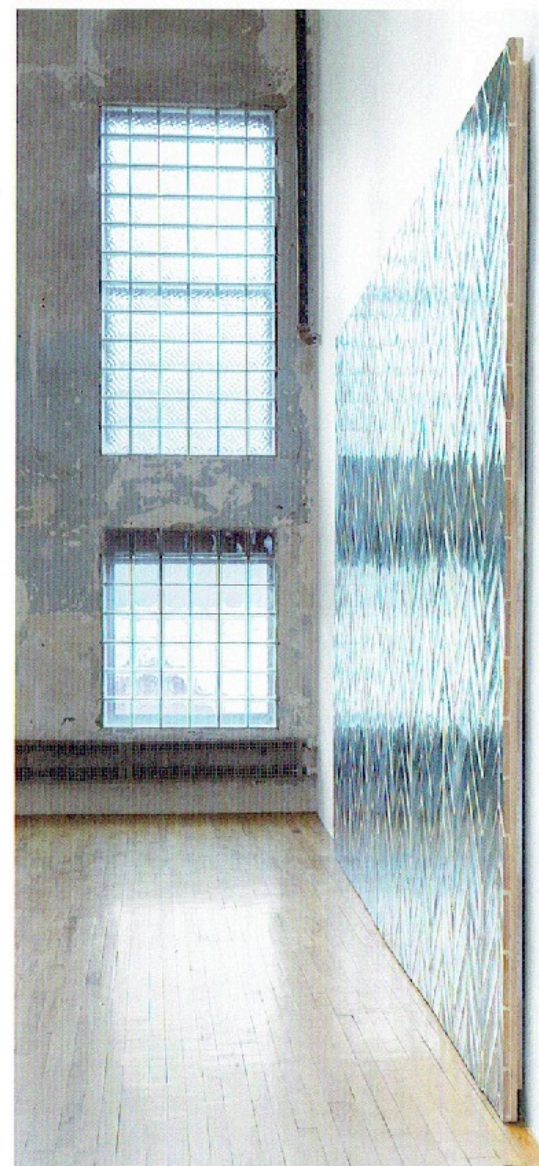


Figure 9. Installation view, *Beetle in the Leaves*, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA Wall (*Hot Blue Terracotta*), 2014–16. Glazed terracotta tiles, wood, aluminum, mortar, grout, 120.23 × 240.8 in. (305.4 × 611.5 cm), unique. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York



Figure 10. Detail of *Untitled*, 2016. Acrylic on canvas, sewn, with acrylic-painted wood frame, 78 x 70 in. (198.1 x 177.8 cm). Private collection, USA

1 This discovery was made by three mathematicians at the University of Washington Bothell: Casey Mann, Jennifer McLeod, and David Von Derau. For more on this topic, see <https://www.theguardian.com/science/alexs-adventures-in-numberland/2015/aug/10/attack-on-the-pentagon-results-in-discovery-of-new-mathematical-tile>.

2 *Painter Painter* featured the work of 15 abstract painters from the United States and Europe and was curated by Eric Crosby and Bartholomew Ryan (Walker Art Center, February 2, 2013–October 27, 2013).

3 Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1985). Crowner's exhibition on the subject, *Handbuilt Vessels*, was on view at Nice & Fit, Berlin, in 2008.

4 Sherrie Levine as quoted in Johanna Burton, "Introduction," in *Mayhem* exhibition cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2012), 1 and 14. The full quotation, from a 1997 interview, reads: "I don't think it's useful to see culture as rigid and unchanging. I'd rather see it as having many voices, some conscious and some unconscious, which may be at odds with one another. If we are attentive to the voices, we can collaborate with them to create something almost new."

5 Levine as quoted in Constance Lewallen, "Sherrie Levine: Interview," *Journal of Contemporary Art* 6, no. 2 (1993): 59–83.

6 Levine as quoted in Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: MoMA, 1999), 140. The full quotation reads: "The pictures I make are really ghosts of ghosts; their relationship to the original images is tertiary, i.e., three or four times removed... I wanted to put a picture on top of a picture so that there are times when both pictures disappear and other times when they're both manifest; that vibration is basically what the work's about for me—the space in the middle where there's no picture, rather an emptiness, an oblivion."

7 Jan Verwoert, "Without Oedipus," *Parkett* 82 (2008): 213–215.

8 See, for example, Dieter Roelstraete, "On Leaving the Building: Thoughts of the Outside," *e-flux journal*, no. 24 (April 2011), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-leaving-the-building-thoughts-of-the-outside/>.

9 Ryan is grateful to Misa Chappell, MASS MoCA gallery attendant and teacher (also former guide at the Walker Art Center), for relating some history of the building during his exhibition visit.