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Suzanne McClelland *PLOT*
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Plot (plot) n. 1.A: a small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose. B: a measured area of land; 2. a ground plan, as for a building; chart; diagram. 3. a series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or a drama. 4. a secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme. 5. to represent graphically as on a chart, a graphic representation.

– *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*

Suzanne McClelland's *PLOT*

In autumn, 1997, Suzanne McClelland arranged with friends to bury four of her large, recently completed drawings on canvas. The burials were widely dispersed in locations around the United States: near East Hampton, New York; Indianola, Washington; Playa Del Rey, California; and Stuart, Florida. She requested that these interments be videotaped, the tapes sent to her and that the canvases be buried in the fall and left until spring. No other instructions were given. The volunteers at each site directed, acted, framed, and conceived their own burial ceremonies. During the spring and summer of 1998, McClelland traveled to each of the sites, exhumed the canvases and examined them to see how the climate had affected the drawings.

– *From the introduction to the Plot Portfolio*

The words that Suzanne McClelland paints are not written words meant to be spoken, but spoken words written down. Plucked from the air and drawn upon a surface, they appear to have dimension and contort as if animated. They flow, as if seeking direction through some strange typography, like water flowing on Mars – torrents forced to the surface under pressure, pooling, freezing and evaporating into a thin atmosphere.

Adding to this sense of dimension is McClelland's contention that words have physical effect. This notion of words having impact has been long appreciated in psychology. But McClelland extends this force beyond an affect upon the psyche. Occasionally, for explanation and emphasis, she will use the phrase "words can hit". By this she means that words can not only hurt feelings or change behavior, but that language can disturb molecules. For her, letters are particles, not only individual sounds and inflections, but bodies of different weights and electromagnetic polarities.

The phrase on her buried canvas was "boys will be boys". It is a perfect McClelland phrase: a cliché found in the language, more often spoken than written and vulnerable to inspection. The implication is that a boy has done something inappropriate, but that is to be expected because that is just how boys are. The phrase angers women because it grants absolution of bad behavior by men because they are men. It is doubly irritating to any man who believes in acting responsibly because it allows some clod to

get away with something and assumes that all males will behave badly because it is in their nature to do so.

McClelland became so incensed by the phrase that she sent people to bury it at the furthest points of North America. The burial and resurrection of the canvases inspired a new series of meditations on the phrase. The boys of the original canvases grew harsh and in the new paintings they strut as sexual slang words for men – dick, stud, hunk, tool. “Boys will be boys” still appears, scattered at the base of these harsh monikers like dried cocoons.

Other words appear as well. McClelland transcribed the sounds of the burial tapes and fragments appear in the new paintings: How deep? How long? How close? How far? The questions arise from ceremonies left undefined. McClelland responds as she would to the accidents of her painting gestures or her overheard words. She gathers them together and presents them back to us.

In McClelland’s hands the words have assumed a force independent of their origins. Such transformation, amplification and clarification of the everyday is the artist’s job. Suzanne McClelland seems intent on continuing her project with what has become a familiar grace, humor and rigor.