

# Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting

Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism



Edited by JONATHAN HARRIS

Liverpool University Press + Tate Liverpool

CRITICAL



## Temporal Hybridity MARGERY AMDUR

With regard to my own creative work, I have been interested in the temporal modes and the spaces between feminism and femininity: the space that exists between what is revealed and what is veiled, the crossroads that exist between abstraction and representation.

These formal elements involve issues of labour, obsessive activity and immediacy. I have been interested in the temporal persistence of

patterns, and the fractured codes of conduct that continue to permeate our culture's frayed fabric decade after decade. Think of the Victorian era, which was so filled with visual patterns and dense detail, and which enjoys an afterlife today. I continue to use some of these aesthetic patterns as metaphors for larger issues that we as humans continue to struggle with in contemporary times. In the past three years I have incorporated video projections and videos within monitors that were imbedded into my installations. Those settings were primarily made from aluminium window screening used as if it was textile

yardage. In addition, light elements found their way into these environments. I was interested in the tension between the nineteenth-century notion of the hand and 'Craft Movement', intersecting with a more modern time-based medium, such as video. In addition, I chose to photograph and videotape through a kaleidoscope. The hybrid installations began to explore more abstracted and poetic aspects of human nature within environments that speak to man's mediation of nature in divergent ways over the last three centuries.

For the past twenty years I have created installations. However, I have currently returned to making paintings as if they were constructions. I am moving forward in my personal development as an artist by advancing back to initial explorations as a visual artist: painting. However, I find that I am called to investigate these new 'old' interests



1 Margery Amdur, from the series *5 Across 4 Down (rows)* (2003), mixed media, layered wax, photo transfers, oil, resin on canvas, individual components 8 x 8 inches



2 Margery Amdur, from the series *5 Across 4 Down (rows)* (2003), mixed media, layered wax, photo transfers, oil, resin on canvas, individual components 8 x 8 inches

3 Margery Amdur, from the series *5 Across 4 Down (rows)* (2003), mixed media, layered wax, photo transfers, oil, resin on canvas, individual components 8 x 8 inches



within the expanded domain of painting. Actually, for the first time in many years the 'new so-called hybridisation of painting' is extremely alive and vital. Contemporary painting as an expanded medium has absorbed, as well as fed, much of the current time-based work. Contemporary painting and sculpture have intersected as well to disclose areas of friction, uncomfortable places that speak for and against beauty. Fabian Marcaccio has coined the term 'Paintants', which is composed of the words 'paintings' and 'actant' or 'mutant' to offer a coherent yet heterogeneous and abstract-based history of telling. He states that 'Paintants use digital and analog means to define concepts such as micro and macro representation and new materiality from the extroverted urban scale to the introverted art space. Paintants are complex paintings; they are action paintings for the beholder.'

Similarly, my layered artistic process incorporates photo-based transfers, acrylic and oil-based paint, resins, and beeswax, as if several periods in art history have converged in my paintings. I am taking the negative spaces that exist in lace patterns, enlarging them, then turning them into hand-carved relief patterns that both become integrated into the surfaces of the paintings while still sitting on the surfaces, as if they were a kind of beautifully pimped skin that took decades to grow

In this new millennium, we have established room, we even stand for the

4 Margery Amdur,  
*Pots of Color* from the  
series *5 Across 4 Down*  
(rows) (2003), mixed  
media, oil, resin on wood,  
variable dimensions



heterogeneous contradictions that could not be accommodated in previous generations. Until the recent past, we looked at narrative paintings as episodic, an approach which brings together key events in a story, presented in comic book fashion. Now we also use continuous narration, which brings together several scenes with a single character from different times within a single setting, and simultaneous narration, which juxtaposes two or more events occurring in different places in a single setting. Today, narration is far more complicated; hybridity entails the convergence of issues of time, cultures, politics, aesthetics, and pictorial materials. This new site of syncretic convergence and

temporal hybridity has reinvigorated the art-making process for so many artists, myself included.

Where does all this leave us? With an anti-narrative narrative, a structureless story about temporal hybridity. When confronted with the anti-narrative look of a film by Jean-Luc Godard, a spectator asked the French filmmaker if his movies have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Godard replied: 'Yes, but not in that order.' The hybrid structure of his film was based on the fragmentation of the storyline in order to multiply the number of narratives that it could harbour. Godard's cinematic hybridity, which contradicts the linear narrative, reminds us of what Freud observed about the temporal parallax: that is, the way in which all of us continually reinhabit not only a conscious present in time, but also various other moments and pockets of the past from different times, both unconscious and conscious. Stimulating images or notable events intensify, as Freud noted, the impure temporal process of parallax. Suddenly something from the present recalls part of a story from the past, in conjunction with a desire seeking accumulation in a future moment yet to be.

In our current 'post – medium' condition, the richness of temporal hybridity has become ever more encoded as pictorial materials from one era or culture are fused with media or cultural practice from another place and time. This multicultural mix that is helping to revivify the visual arts recalls such things as syncretism in the religious sphere or cultural heterogeneity in the aesthetic domain.