

# FrameWork 9/15

Beth Stuart on Sandra Meigs



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My knowledge of what a gong is, what a gong does, has until recently been drawn – albeit at negligible demand - from a foggy cultural catalogue. In my mind there was a well-oiled, well-muscled man striking a huge golden disc. His tidy and heraldic emission announces the beginning of a moving picture show.

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That gong, the Gongman’s gong, was no gong at all. It was just a paper moon, a picture of a sound. That gong was quite literally made of sticks and spit and glitter-shine. That Gongman and his mimic offshoots are the only gongs most of us know, or care to know. I think we don’t know to care to know another gong.

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Seldom these days is there a thing that so vastly overtakes its various versions as to squish belief into the realm of feeling. As art ought to often do, and often winsomely fails to do, and painting almost never does.

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Now I know a thing, a thing that shakes your perineum, that gets inside, that forcibly fills up the cavities with something electric. It is not passive, it is not quiet, it does not ramble, it does not soothe. It is gigantic. It pinions you, really. Gets you out of yourself by getting you into yourself.

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I suppose I could recommend a nice recording, or to check out a video. But, even if that gong pictured there were not made out of paper, any semblance would just behave too well to jar the catalogue of reason. This gong here must be heard to be seen.

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I asked Sandra about the experience of practicing the gong vs. listening to the gong. I was curious about how much control she had, how much of a cognitive experience it was. The listening experience is the

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farthest thing from cognition. The immensity and edge-less-ness of the sound exist in stark contrast to the physical movements and objects that create them. She described a synergetic meeting of the gong and the striker, rather than a controlled or directed action of one against another.

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Here in the gallery the paintings are like loosed marbles. A big old bag of tigers-eyes gone tumbling. There are images and evocations. There are colours and shapes that might be migrating from one frame to another. There are pictures here of things, there are the hypnotized eyes of the 'toon, spinning into infinity, there are words and cells and PENTACLES let loose. And yet this is not the narrative that the Gongman announces.

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I think then about the constituent parts of painting, about the practice of painting, of transforming a liquid into the semblance of the always-shifting image in your mind's eye. There is something there quite akin in nature to that sweet-spot-gong-strike that Sandra describes. Two trajectories meeting again and again, marks making a whole, that whole neither the same nor completely different from its intent.

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And yet this painting here is so different from other painting I know. I try and pinpoint why, and it is like trying to dissuade the gong from emptying my mind. I can look back and analyze some aspects of this show, I can question irony, and ideas of abstraction, but inside the show something else happens. The work is boss, and it also gets me outside of myself. It does not get me into my physical self in the same way as the gong does. It does not shake my perineum, but it does shake the tightness out of my thoughts.

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I think about desire, and about control, and about how these are often paintings' most alluring of failures. The desire to possess: painting's innocent vice. The maker's desire to possess the image, the viewer's desire to possess that knowledge made visible. I have a hard time picturing, even in my wildest imagining painting that is simultaneously bossy and barely there? firmly itself and yet utterly ungraspable?

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And yet here it is. Here is the crux of it. Somehow, painting's most constituent of parts - EGO! - has been set free. Its relation to the rest of the world has been dissolved and reconstituted into a glorious and joyful cacophony, another substance all together. Here is not some romantic idea of alchemy. Here is not lead into gold, here is lead into (((GONG))).

