

# FrameWork 10/20

Pardiss Amerian, Ella Gonzales and Patrick Howlett

## *Notes on Process*

Something I find engaging in both your work is how, as I see it, a process of abstraction does not preclude narrative or a range of figuration. It can be hard to write out of that binary and I thought we could start by discussing the work in relation to the processes you engage with and different kinds of activities in the studio. What is a starting point for each of you?

I start by constructing drawings in AutoCAD, a software often used to design architectural proposals and then translate them into painting. My approach is intuitive, drawing interior spaces with inaccurate measurements and paper-thin walls. The structures I create are remembered homes, layered or reinvented to imagine alternate sites for a kind of inhabitation. When translating from memory to digital or digital to painting, divergences are created in its inability to replicate its source exactly. Information is lost, and what remains are simplified forms. They are reminiscent of objects and spaces, almost enterable, and nearly a memory.

AutoCAD places itself at odds with recreated and fictional structures of the past. I'm interested in its ability to ground space in three-dimensions when, in reality, it is the creation of new pixels with every slight turn, all surface and no volume. This back and forth conversation between mediums is a generative one for me, and analogous to my migrant experience. I've recently approached my paintings with this in mind, allowing for one single layer of paint to offer multiple ways of looking.

I often start by thinking through drawing with tales and poems, pulling from tropes employed by Persian illustrated manuscripts in which they appear. The forms I arrive at are used as cut-out tools for monoprinting. The process of pressing paper together creates suction and pushes diluted paint around when lifted off the flat surface; outlines are approximated and gaps are left behind while the material is animated by chance. Divergences, as Ella mentions become generative and determine the next steps. Objects, animals, vegetal and human-like forms suggest themselves as precarious constructions, and working into these formations becomes a dialogic relationship of adding and removing.

Ella, I'm surprised to hear you say that information is lost in the translation from the AutoCAD renderings to your paintings. It feels like information is added: moving from the thinness of the digital to the material complexity of paint, as well as the shift from an objective, emptied out version of place, to a medium that emphasizes the subjective. The way you describe the AutoCAD software, it is like you are using it as a kind of translator.

As a 1.5 generation Canadian, with parents who spoke predominantly in Tagalog, the home became a place of translation and, in many ways, represented a space of cultural negotiation. A similar negotiation happens when recreating my homes, working between AutoCAD and painting. When I say information is lost, I also mean to say that something new is created. As I mentioned earlier, this translation from memory to AutoCAD, or AutoCAD to painting is never one to one. In negotiating colour, form, and information, this non-linear translation creates divergences, slippages, and new forms that reference Homi K. Bhabha's "third space". A place where hybrid cultures coexist and offer new or alternative perspectives.

## FrameWork 10/20

Does the process also gain something from using AutoCAD, beyond a good tool to translate and negotiate architectural memories? Or could you see a translation happen in another way? Perhaps the negotiation itself is the most important thing? Are you saying the goal of the process is, in fact, the creation of a 'third space'?

I think claiming that as my main goal would limit any other novel interpretations that could come out of these processes and its interactions with the viewer. It is one of them, but not the only one. Many times, a goal is only identified and realized after making the work.

I should challenge my earlier language when describing AutoCAD as a translator and replace it with the word "mediator." There is an important negotiation in every translation, but there is a natural flow from point A to point B. It's funny jumping through different sections of this document. My description later of the process as a point of oscillation highlighted AutoCAD's activeness and influence in both the construction of personal narratives and my interest in painting.

Pardiss - is there something about Persian manuscript paintings, both formally and narratively, that makes particular sense with your process? The chance experiments you undertake with figures and motifs suggest to me a poetics that is very much *happening*. How much are you interested in re-animating those sources in your paintings or is it something else entirely? Is there a historical tradition in manuscript painting of different artists telling/painting the same stories?

There is for sure a lot of action weaved together that can't all be taken in at once. I'm especially drawn to those paintings where weight hovering lower in the composition extends upwards, characteristic of recurring scenes of ascension - as in to the throne or a spiritual realm. This motion is what might be re-animated through the painting's composition, which evokes a familiar sense of gravity and architecture pieced together momentarily. And yes, certain stories do return and are reiterated and mutated, but often within templates and formats that only slowly evolve over a long historical stretch. There is an accessibility that is visually declarative, yet the elements remain both individual (connected to stories) and archetypal (*a* king, *a* body of water, *a* rock, *a* rose). At the same time the directionality of line and systems of arabesques and geometric patterns allow for you to read and reread something both familiar and not. Like open wandering and discovering. I think this awareness continues in my process working with silhouettes that act as both forms *and* subtext to arrive at and remake a kind of still life.

You both use processes of abstraction that transform imagery in ways intimately tied to the conceptual development and import of the work. This seems aligned with a talk I was watching by Tim Ingold, where he speaks of 'thinking through making'. It is an understanding of creativity as improvisation, so that nothing is ever finished - but always on its way to something else. Does this resonate with what you do; and/or do you find it a useful way to think of painting?

I find working concurrently on a body of work renders each painting as a kind of open re-iteration of something previous. Mirrored or reproduced, often imperfectly, sometimes more obvious, and less so at others; a *way-station* to a further point as Ingold puts it. I am interested in how a dynamic following and losing of different loose threads at various intervals can be a part of both making and looking at paintings; where meaning is not inherent or preconceived, but unfolding when the object occasions a slow encounter that allows for multiple frames of mind.

## FrameWork 10/20

As Pardiss references, Ingold describes the process of making through the analogy of intricate loose threads unravelling with no beginning or end in sight. This reminded me of Deleuze's rhizome and ontological system of becoming, refusing any parameters, and continually in flux. I like how both Ingold and Deleuze propose nonlinear processes, suggesting what happens to a painting when it no longer operates under a singular narrative.

It makes me wonder if paintings ever have a single narrative? I think maybe the way we theorize or discuss things takes on a more singular or linear narrative but when painting is good there are always a few things going on. I am wondering Ella what you intend or hope for when you write that the spaces in your paintings can be a place to inhabit? It makes me think of visualization or meditation techniques in a way...

It's an intention that I am referring to when I say non-linear. For me, there's a difference between a predetermined painting and one that is an apparent accumulation of active mark-making. Does this make sense?

A "place to inhabit" is a subtle nod to Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, thinking about the home as a metaphor for memories to exist and linger. By referencing and collaging the many houses I've lived in, I think about the collision of memories that can occupy these fictional spaces. And I'm interested in how this reimagining can create "new" memories more accurately depicting an experience I resonate with and perhaps others who find themselves in a similar situation to me. I'm also thinking about it as a form of space making. Which could have numerous interpretations but, in many ways, goes back to Bhabha's "third space."

Hybrid form seems central to both your processes and the idea of making or visualizing another kind of space brings it back to a social as well as cultural realm. This resonates with Ella's practice and maybe in another way to Pardiss', in her reference to the visually dynamic and metaphoric use of space in Persian paintings. In our zoom conversation we brought up improvisation and the reliance on intuition and negotiation that it entails. I am interested in how time might be fixed in a work as a history of decisions, and how this might also open up an idea of space.

Bhabha's *Third Space*, as a space for the hybrid and its expression through *utterances (of the new?)* has been a formative metaphor in my thinking about painting and collage. I mostly make collages out of used wax paper palettes or old works sitting around the studio, so all these traces and accidents become part of the work. Later I started taking them apart temporarily, to use the actual fragments to reproduce. In a playful and quite literal way, this mirroring process works to produce offspring, lovers, or friends. The actual pressing of the two surfaces both connects and changes the reference and the imprint, and they can move toward and away from each other at the same time. It's not exactly like looking at oneself in a mirror, but a reversal, a making strange in order to defamiliarize something so it can be seen differently.



*Swing Sisters I & II*, oil and collage on paper, 30.5 x 23 cm each

I really like how the mirroring process plays both a defamiliarizing role and one of connection (family, lover, etc), highlighting the paradoxical and layered outcomes of a process. It strikes me that figures and architectures, shapes and spaces in your paintings are all integral to each other, sometimes flowing seamlessly, sometimes echoing, but definitely fitting together - not exactly like a puzzle - but with a certain inevitability. Can you say a few words about this?

Figures often emerge in the painting's development. I'll have a faint idea of a figure or an action, but start with building a setting or mood before they become determined in any way. There are a lot of accidents where figures or architectures suggest further decisions and possible 'actions'. *Cavalier* for example came from a loose interpretation of a dragon-slaying rider. The horse and the hero were gradually figured together leaping off the chest of this other character closing in around a knife. The knife then bends to suggest an archway in a sister painting and so on. So both as narrative anchors and visual functions, the forms continue to overlap and branch out. The whole coming together is a slow weaving of forms, what they might evoke of a narrative and what begins to gather around in the process.

Ella's process relates here, I think, in that she is animating memories of places and spaces with AutoCAD, moving through them before fixing them in paint, even if temporarily. There are multiple stages and points of view so lots of interesting things can happen between a starting and an ending. I am interested in how a composition, and then a body of work can be both finished and continue to contain a sense of many possibilities. It brings me back to the idea of a 'resting point' and how this might be understood in relation to a finished work.

## FrameWork 10/20

I understand “process as a resting point” to be an active position. It is a point of oscillation, moving back and forth, probing it's way to the next point. It is restful to settle, but even the pause is an engaged position—a continual vibration between the already made and the things to come.

So this point is ‘resting’ somewhere between the past (where it came from) and the future (where it might/will go next). Could another way of considering the continual vibration be thinking of painting as ever in the present? What is ‘possible’ is imbued in a painting's material presence as a space of action - not simply a picture or image.

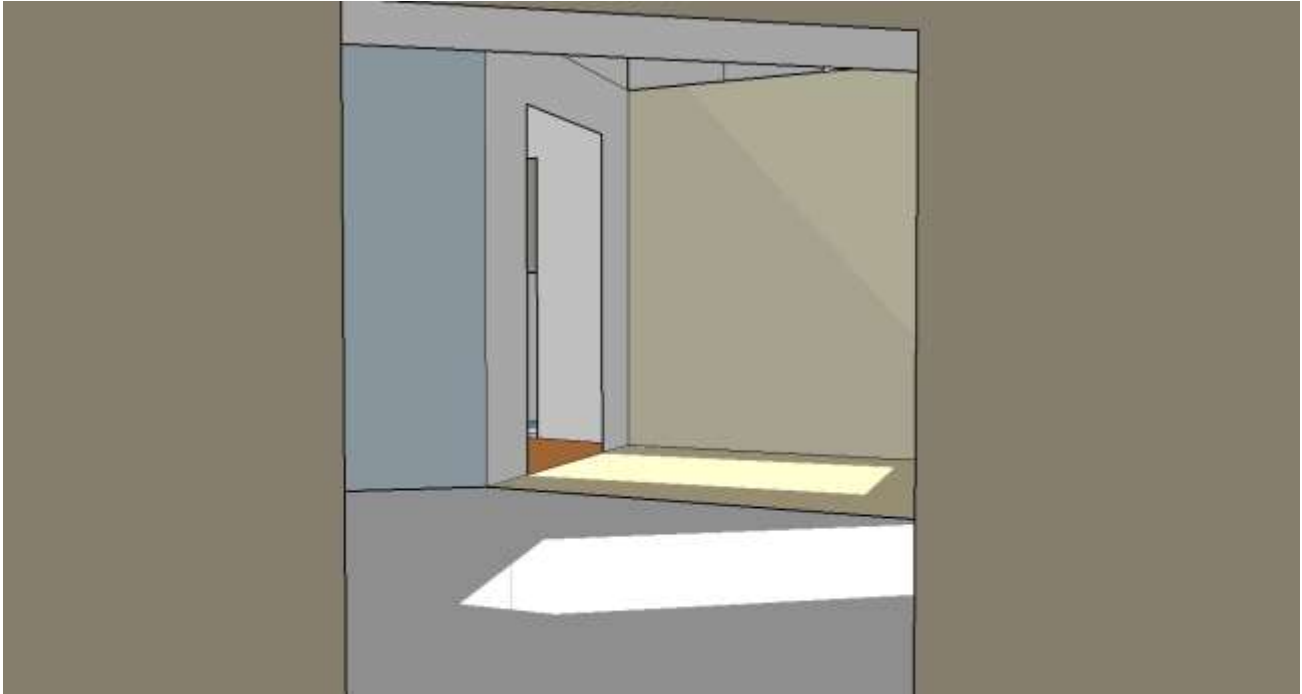
I find thinking about resting points in relation to a conception of space very interesting. There is perhaps something that distinguishes the way my work orients viewing from Ella's *almost enterable* spaces, or the idiosyncratic weaving of distinct layers in the paintings in *Texting the Humors*. In my work, the interior and the exterior meet, merge and fold together on the surface. The surface accumulation pushes out and denies entrance to some extent; yet intimations of space exist. Actual references to architecture in a painting might evoke a transitive space outside of it, akin to a passage between moods that is paralleled by the viewer's movement, in real life, between familial works.

I agree that describing when something *feels* finished is difficult. I think for me it is when the craving to respond to a painting gives way to a sense of urgency and presence of something that I cannot add to nor subtract from. The process driving the work is happening more than planned. I lean on the improvised, and traces of transformation from the beginning become part of the painting's life force, which is mirrored by an internal shifting equivalence that reshapes my awareness.

By mentioning coping in our zoom call, I meant perhaps a desire to slow down and consider possible other resting points and externalize the process more. A need to repeat whole sets of disparities from painting to painting as a way to indicate that it is not random and there is a lucidity that is evolving.

In my practice, every procedural step could be an endpoint: digital renderings, videos of those digital spaces, the first layers of paint, reversing the canvas and so on. I understand that any point in the process can exist as an autonomous state that adding more layers can't take away. Seeing resting points as exactly that, but also as places for emergence and wholeness.

Drawing in AutoCAD, it is easy to create the illusion of space. You can look and see a corner, a shadow or a doorway with a sense of place and perspective. But there is a flatness to the screen that challenges the 3Dness of the digital renderings. The corner becomes a shape, the shadow becomes a figure and it is more difficult to place yourself. This flatness is further challenged when translated into paintings. Creating, hopefully, a similarly active looking experience. One that oscillates between two existing finalities.



Screenshot of AutoCAD drawing

Patrick, I was thrilled to see your exhibition in person, and since visiting Susan Hobbs, I can't stop thinking about *Texting the Humours* and your *Loaf* works. I feel like the "continual vibration" we discussed earlier is prevalent in both paintings, but operating antithetically. I'm curious to know more about your process in making your *Loaf* works, and perhaps the potential mirroring between these two paintings.

One thing they have in common is that they emerged very slowly - over years. They are the result of two different processes - but I hope they both create a question or optical pause to how the figure(s) emerge on or out of the surface. The *Loafs* come out of earlier paintings on panels where a figure or shape is routed out of wood and filled with gesso. Instead of filling in the routed shape, they have fabric stretched over them and the paint is applied in thin layers, rubbed, scraped and sanded. Figure and ground are not distinguished in the treatment - just these edges that are physically hidden end up asserting themselves in an indexical way.

I was certainly thinking about vibrations in *texting the humours*. At some point I decided the painting had more to do with the cell phone shape at its centre than I had previously thought and the noise between layers, as well as the circular movement in the composition made sense to me in a new way. It has a buzz...maybe like a phone perpetually ringing in silent mode because of how the various parts, layers and surface treatments are juxtaposed. It's actually a really hard painting to take a picture of, I don't think the 'vibration' you see in the image is the same experienced in front of the painting.

I like the analogy of a continual ringing in silent mode. There's no inherent noise, but it's the tangibility of the vibration that creates a distinct tone. It would be tough to describe the noise a vibration makes since it depends on where the phone sits but in hearing, do you also feel it. I think you're right - now having seen it in person. I think one of the many things that make these works so tantalizing is their sensational associations. If we continue with our analogy, viewing them through a screen is like hearing someone else's phone vibrating in a Zoom call.

## FrameWork 10/20

Referring back to these two works, what continues to linger for me, is the emergence of an image from a place I can't understand or locate. This is partly due to the additive/reductive process messing with the temporal understanding of how paint is applied. I see strong assertions of indexes but have difficulty narrowing down what their implied symbols are.

Using more symbolic visual imagery than I have in the past has been a challenge. In using diagrams, representational motifs and language, I try to think of how they operate literally, abstractly or metaphorically and try to build on that, layer the painting as a more complex response to an idea and in turn an idea that changes throughout the process. I think what you both have written about processes being generative, creating divergences, finding two ways of looking at something, creating new narrative directions and so on, are all things I try to do as well. My inquiry into when you think a work is finished might simply be a way of talking about aspects of the work that are otherwise elusive, and how a body of work comes together. I think painting between abstraction and figuration is full of possibility - but wonder how useful they are as concepts.

I agree, Patrick. Considering all of its previous steps and processes, can we observe the inner workings between each layer - what makes them necessary, separate, compatible, or complete? Concepts of abstraction and figuration are still useful for me as I find my work teeters between both. I don't find my paintings overly figurative, but there is an implied viewing that allows one to imagine the spaces in front of them.

I wonder if one can allow forms to also be ghosts of recognizable objects or places without making comparisons between the abstract and the figural; asking rather, how useful such distinctions are when our experience is not reducible to singularities? I find not knowing something, the awareness that a knowledge is in there, but you haven't gotten around to thinking it, an active and suggestive state; of a soft sense of mystery, that suggests the process of its becoming rather than settling.

I'm with you, Pardiss. I like a dichotomous looking of art, and I feel the blurriness in such distinctions more accurate of any experience, or at least the ones I'm interested in illustrating.