

THE PILGRIMAGE

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
LIST OF PLATES.....	5
ABSTRACT.....	6
PROJECT REPORT.....	8
PLATES.....	35
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	51

## LIST OF PLATES

- Plate 1. *The Gathering*, Oil on Canvas, 2012
- Plate 2. *The Great Trepidation*, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 36", 2012
- Plate 3. *Untitled 19*, Oil on Canvas, 78"x 90", 2012
- Plate 4. Sol LeWitt, *Corner Piece No. 2*, 2001
- Plate 5. Agnes Martin, *Untitled #3*, Acrylic and Graphite on Canvas, 2003
- Plate 6. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament, From the Palace Courtyard*, Watercolor on Paper, 1834
- Plate 7. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, Watercolor on Paper, 1834
- Plate 8. *Observatory*, Oil on Canvas, 78"x 90", 2013
- Plate 9. James Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*, Oil on Canvas, 1875
- Plate 10. Peter Doig, *Pelican (Stag)*, Oil on Canvas, 2003
- Plate 11. *Untitled 23*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013
- Plate 12. *Untitled 22*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013
- Plate 13. *Lodestar*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013
- Plate 14. J.M.W. Turner, *Norham Castle, Sunrise*, Oil on Canvas, 1845
- Plate 15. *Silence*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013
- Plate 16. Peter Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre*, Oil on Canvas, 2000-02

Summary of Project in Lieu of Thesis  
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*The Pilgrimage* represents a metaphysical inquiry exploring notions of illumination in the context of revelation, and the possibility of transcendence through painting. While *The Pilgrimage* is not a conclusion to a journey, it is however, a guide which suggests a *felt* reality; that which is unknown and can only be pointed towards. With this series of paintings I create indeterminate spaces which evoke mental states. Architectural remnants are used in order to suggest a location and act as anchor points. However, each painting is arrived at through a series of adjustments, i.e. painting and repainting, to find the “correct” image. In this way each painting becomes the crucible of my consciousness trying to make sense of a feeling-- that which is unknown. The spaces are enigmatic at times, almost ethereal in contrast to the light becoming more materially present.

In order to create this project, I traveled to Prague, Czech Republic to conduct visual research at the Strahov Monastery. This project focuses on my

experience of Strahov's two libraries, the Philosophical and Theological Halls. Both libraries serve as a reference point for investigating my feelings of uncertainty between the sacred and profane domains, and the space of the mind. By using the space of the library, I draw a parallel between the space of the library and that of the mind-- they are both spaces of inquiry and reflection, where knowledge is located.

Informed by the writings by Robert Motherwell and Enrique Martinez Celaya, existentialist aesthetics and philosophy of art, as well as painters J. M. W. Turner, James McAbbott Whistler, Edward Hopper, and Peter Doig, this project is grounded both philosophically and historically. *The Pilgrimage* is an attempt to understand the poetic nature of the mind and how painting reveals such poetry. My hope is for this project to bridge the ineffability of both existence and essence.

## PROJECT REPORT

### I Introduction

Let me first state that, for me, painting is a process of inquiry and reflection and I believe that a critical and disciplined practice does, or at least attempts to, move beyond being aesthetically pleasing. Painting, emphasizing the action, is the way I understand the world and myself-- it is the crucible of consciousness making sense of experience. Due to this position I desire a level of intentionality towards my practice in hopes of revealing something authentic. I am interested in how an artistic practice generates and sustains certain values which are transferable beyond the studio and into daily life-- values such as responsibility, discipline, and integrity.

*The Pilgrimage* is a painting project based on my experience of Strahov Monastery in Prague, Czech Republic. Specifically *The Pilgrimage* takes as its subject both the Philosophical and Theological Halls. In order to set the tone of this paper, I would like to define what “pilgrimage” means in this specific case. Pilgrimage is defined as: “a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person’s beliefs and faith, although sometimes it can be a metaphorical journey into someone’s own beliefs.<sup>1</sup>” As the definition stands, the pilgrimage sets up a metaphor for how this project was approached and developed, it serves to bracket my experience and the meaning of the work. As will be discussed later, *The Pilgrimage* is not a conclusion to a journey but rather acts more as a guide

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia

which suggests a *felt* reality. I have always felt there exists a reality behind the one I experience however unknowable it may be. It is something which I cannot penetrate fully but can only feel is present. Robert Motherwell wrote of such a feeling, saying:

*The function of the artist is to express reality as **felt**. In saying this, we must remember that ideas modify feelings...By feeling is meant the response of the "body-and-mind" as a whole to the events of reality.<sup>2</sup>*

In this thesis I am going to focus on three specific categories related to this project: the practice, the process, and the work. These categories trace a line of thinking and action that results in not only a finished painting, but an actualization of certain ideas. As I discuss each of the three areas I will connect significant shifts in my paintings to philosophy, influential painters, and writings by painters that have steered the course of my development over my three years at University of Florida. The practice will lay the foundation by which I pursue my work. The process will reveal my development over this past year with a focus on the *Codified: Art + Genetics* show and my research trip to Strahov. I will then end on the specifics of the *The Pilgrimage*.

## **II The Practice**

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Motherwell, *The Writings of Robert Motherwell*

In order to contextualize my practice, I use two quotes which emphasize action and articulation to situate what is it that I am doing; “The unexamined life is not worth living<sup>3</sup>”, by Socrates; and, “In the woods we return to reason and faith<sup>4</sup>,” by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Socrates’s quote forms the basic premise from which philosophy arises. Philosophy, in general, examines how one lives, should live, and why. The quote from Emerson suggests an intimate turn psychologically when one becomes isolated allowing oneself to observe the world but also the world within. Both philosopher and writer point towards the importance of a steady and true observation of how one lives and exists in the world. I wish for my painting practice to follow this mode of being, since to me, there is nothing more valuable than leading a life of integrity and authenticity.

Insofar as a practice is the re-enacting and application of an idea, belief, or method, my practice becomes a “metaphysical inquiry.<sup>5</sup>” Metaphysics is understood here as the study or engagement of ontology and epistemology, specifically concerning being, knowing, and beliefs. My painting practice is a pensive activity where external observation becomes the primary means of an internal observation to reveal an essence of being. I think of my paintings as being observations but not in the strict sense of visual perception; rather I mean observation as a careful awareness of the senses to receive new information or insight from one’s inner experience. In this way, my paintings are physical manifestations of my interior world. I use images corresponding to the exterior

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<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Apology*

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*

<sup>5</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

world, like architecture and light in order to find something resonant or symbolic of inner experience. Such images are anchored in lived experience so that I can move from *thinking* to *feeling*. The process of painting allows me to move inward, and therefore, bridge the exterior and interior world. Existentialist aesthetics points towards the value of artistic practices as revealing “one’s totality of being<sup>6</sup>” which is a revealing of the human condition. From this position it is easy to understand how painting can be a practice of examining one’s life, or one’s disposition towards reality.

Such concerns have lead me to consider the relationship of ethics and aesthetics within artistic practice. While ethics and aesthetics are systems of judgement and vary according to prescription, both are guiding principals from which one makes decisions when making artwork. As the activity of painting is a series of decisions, it is not only a question of aesthetics but one of ethics as well. Typically aesthetics and ethics deal with universal values or truths; I am concerned more with what I feel is correct rather than what is universal. To aid in my search for such values or truth I temper my practice with a critical disposition. It is not that I wish to claim a sort of truth, instead I am interested in the possibility that a painting might be able to access an unrealized or unrevealed truth. It is from this interest that I have structured my practice to fluctuate between thinking and feeling.

### **On the Distinction Between Thinking & Feeling**

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<sup>6</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

Dictionary.com defines thinking as “to have a conscious mind, to some extent of reasoning, remembering experiences, making rational decisions, etc;” whereas feeling is defined as “the general state of consciousness considered independently of particular sensations, thoughts, etc.” I want to discuss the importance of these two modes of being as it relates to my practice. On one level, painting is a way to balance thinking and feeling. I cannot approach painting or a painting and expect it to yield under rational judgement. Instead it requires the flexibility of mind in order to grasp it. This is why I believe, like Enrique Martinez Celaya believes, painting is more “a location of mind<sup>7</sup>”-- it’s a mental activity more so than a physical activity. Even Agnes Martin speaks of painting as a development of one’s sensitivity, which deals with mental states of feeling. The possibility of transcendence that I speak of stems from approaching painting through feeling rather than thinking. I don’t believe it is possible to approach painting solely through thinking and find some sort of transcendence; instead immanence is found. But transcendence and immanence are intimately linked, and I am most interested in how I might move from immanence to transcendence. So when I place priority on what is correct or right within my paintings, it has to do with trying to articulate an ethical position. Such an ethical position, to me, fluctuates between thinking and feeling as no one system of ethics is without its limitations. Each painting stakes out what is most correct for the practice and individual paintings and does not attempt to follow trends or become gratuitous. I would say that such a position leads to an authentic

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<sup>7</sup> Enrique Martinez Celaya, *Collected Writings and Interviews, 1990-2010*

practice that instantiates responsibility, discipline, and integrity as I have mentioned earlier.

For me, painting operates at its fullest when it reveals some aspect of the human condition. That is, painting reveals individual truths which may or may not be universal. Inherent in its materials and processes are the conditions for which one encounters something familiar yet unknown. Painting that does this best is poetic; its meaning flickers between stability and instability. This type of work requires patience and consideration on part of the painter and viewer. I am interested in those conditions which are simultaneously known and unknown within a given experience and why I would have a particular response. The activity of painting helps me to “derealise<sup>8</sup>” that experience and reform it into something new which is closer to my initial response. Much in the same way as the existentialists think of derealising as turning “to the world in such a way that it takes in from it certain elements and blanks out others.<sup>9</sup>” This is the richness offered by consciousness through artistic practices. Enrique Martinez Celaya, writing on the activity of painting, says:

*Painting is a crucible where we place ourselves only to burn that which is ourselves. Our soot, inhuman testimony of our burning, is the material that makes the Heart of painting. The burning that is painting reveals not teachings*

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<sup>8</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

<sup>9</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

*nor politics but the instability inherent in the human condition, an awareness that is difficult to unconceal any other way than through art.*<sup>10</sup>

Celaya's articulation of painting is poetic and suggests painting is a key to something which unlocks the nature of what it is to be human. I take his idea of "the Heart of painting" to mean ourselves fully surrendered to the painting so as to reveal that human condition. This is why it does not reveal "teachings nor politics" but that which is ineffable. It is through the activity of painting that I have begun to understand painting as a process of inquiry and reflection. So as I engage in a metaphysical inquiry I explore such dichotomies as thinking/feeling, presence/absence, or reason/faith to better navigate the human condition.

### **III The Process**

When it comes to my process there are many way in which I could speak about it, but I wish to point out only the most significant components. First, I must begin with an image. Secondly, that image is not necessarily the "idea" but rather the impetus to arrive at a *felt* reality. Thirdly, I typically paint and repaint one image or many on a single canvas because I have a sense of disbelief towards what I have painted. This manifests the problem of distance between myself and reality, and image and painting.

In the past I worked primarily from personal or found photographs. Found photographs interfered with me entering into my painting causing a distance

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<sup>10</sup> Enrique Martinez Celaya, *Collected Writings and Interviews, 1990-2010*

between myself and the reality of the photograph. This was the case before I began painting library interiors and while I continued to paint them. I had no actual sense of what I was looking at. Even though I could infer information about the space I still could not work on an intimate level with that image. I was having to invent which lead to disbelief in the image rather than a pensive activity where the image is dismantled into something more fundamental. I would paint and repaint over all my paintings just trying to paint that image, that found photograph. The surfaces were heavily worked by scrapping out and moving around images. My uncertainty with what I painted made me feel I somehow missed something from this image and needed to adjust until I found it. From this constant adjustment the paintings moved from descriptive to indeterminate. This is particularly true, for instance, in *The Gathering* (Plate 1) or *The Great Trepidation* (Plate 2). Both exemplify heavily worked surfaces with more opaqueness and pockets of previous images causing the space to become overlapped, dense, and indeterminate. As I would not be satisfied with what I was painting, a new image would be painted on top making use of what was already in place. This particular way of working felt too arduous as I was throwing any image I could at the painting hoping it would stick.

Since my process has always been one of reworking, rarely do I set out with a clear idea of what a piece will be. Instead I must find my way to it, I must reveal that image through painting. I am not interested in knowing before hand what the painting will look like; I encounter less of myself that way. What revelation does for my practice is to keep me honest and present when painting.

I want there to be a visual openness to the paintings; almost an airiness that generates an atmosphere within the paintings. Glazing does just this by creating a stronger sense of depth and diaphaneity. So as the light becomes more materially present and the architecture begins to dissolve, the painting oscillates between presence and absence. What is typically thought of as concrete is ephemeral and what is ephemeral becomes concrete. And since glazing keeps the paintings open more, *pentimenti* maintains a presence thus re-enforcing my search for the “correct” painting. *Pentimenti* is the visible change a painting has gone through, the evidence of a change in composition or form. In this way the paintings are more honest and notion of immanence plays an active role in the development of each painting. From this change in process the sense of space becomes more enigmatic as well.

Since in my mind, painting and thinking are intimately connected, there is always going to be a level of reason to the process. I see the activity of painting as the movement of one’s thoughts-- a thinking in and through the material and process. So the idea of immanence has become an important way for me to approach painting. Robert Motherwell speaks of this very notion, stating that painting is his “thought’s medium<sup>11</sup>.” In this way, it becomes clear how painting becomes a metaphysical inquiry. As I am concerned with the movement between thinking and feeling, I have tried to articulate my process in such a way as to exert a level of pragmatism to keep balance between being either too rational or too expressive. My goal is to be situated between both.

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<sup>11</sup> Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists*

While painting is my “thought’s medium” as well, I also temper this idea with Agnes Martin’s idea of painting which develops an awareness of one’s sensitivity. Through a rigorous approach to painting one can find transcendence. Here the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence takes full form in painting. It is my belief that a rigorous and disciplined painting practice can and does move from immanence into transcendence; that the conditions of transcendence are at all times present and possible in the material and process. This allows “incidents” to move the intention of an image into it’s potential image, the thing which is *a posteriori*.

In an interview with M. A. Greenstein, Enrique Martinez Celaya discusses the relationship between painting, mind, and the world. He says:

*There is not a one-to-one correlation between the space of the paintings and actual space. Paintings need different strategies to extract truth from experience than those that the physical universe presents. Paintings are products of the mind in physical form. Their rules and their powers are based on components of the mind, with out a one-to-one translation beyond itself. This is why illustrations always fail; they impose the logic of the things as they seem to objects of the mind.<sup>12</sup>*

Celaya’s statement seems in keeping with Motherwell’s idea about painting being a thinking medium. Both are not only painters but intelligent

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<sup>12</sup> Enrique Martinez Celaya, *Collected Writings and Interviews, 1990-2010*

thinkers making the connection of painting to mind. This is why I cannot escape thinking that if one allows one's mind to be fully present within painting, the poetic nature of the mind will become instantiated. Celaya's distinction between the space of the mind and actual space also sets free the painting from necessarily adhering to physical reality. It is this distinction which allows me to move away from drawings and photographs into what the paintings needs to be and more towards something transcendent of the mind.

### **From Lab to Library**

There are many steps along the way which lead me to this current body of work. My interest in knowledge and how one comes to know and understand either the world or oneself lead me to consider the library, and laboratory, as a space where the pursuit of knowledge was attended to. I also wanted to have a lived experience in such a space so that I had something tangible to work with. This is why the making of *Untitled 19* (Plate 3) was significant in my development towards *The Pilgrimage*. During November 2012, I collaborated with researchers at University of Florida's Genetics Institute to create a painting specifically for the *Codified II: Art + Genetics* show. I was allowed access into three genetics labs for visual research with the goal of understanding current research in these labs and how the space of the lab, both physically and conceptually, is a model for generating knowledge. Both scientific inquiry and artistic practices share similarities in modes of working through ideas as the lab and studio are used to facilitate critical thinking. Aside from my interest in science, the decision to create

this painting was a trial exercise for my planned research trip to Strahov. I immersed myself into an unknown space, becoming familiar with that space and the activities held there, made drawings, and returned to the studio to create a painting based off drawings and experience.

While at the lab, I noticed how light was being used to illuminate different areas of cells and organisms to retrieve information. The idea of working in the dark until light reveals something struck me as being rather poignant. I felt a connection to the process of trying to illuminate knowledge from the unknown as this is what I have been trying to accomplish for the past three years. Before visiting the labs I was already thinking about knowledge and the uncertainty of knowing something but how to make a painting about that was still problematic. Being in the lab, however, made clear my need to have an experience from which I could work and thus resolved my issue of making paintings about the pursuit of knowledge.

I found drawing to be incredibly helpful in supplementing my observation of the labs as this became a way of knowing. Slowing down to observe more intently heightened my awareness as to where I was and what the space held. This method of visual research coupled with talking with researchers in the lab offered a more holistic experience from which to work.

Working between drawings and experience showed me I would ultimately begin with the drawings as reference points but move beyond the drawings into memory and eventually into a new state of experience. The experience of being in the labs collided with the studio conditions producing new potential images,

those which were not readily accessible nor knowable until the act of painting began. In order to access the potential images I had to go through a process of unpacking that experience to find what was so intriguing or essential and start from there. I needed to process what I experienced, what I thought I experienced, what I felt about that experience, in addition to what the lab seemed to be and what it actually *is*. In the same way that *Untitled 19* came about, *The Pilgrimage* has as well.

As I have stated before, *The Pilgrimage* is both a physical and metaphorical act. My going to Strahov was the physical embodiment of the pilgrimage whereas working in the studio is the metaphorical journey. The reason Strahov was chosen came from my interest in why this monastery had two distinct libraries housed within its complex. The Royal Canonry of the Premonasterians at Strahov are dedicated to the promotion of “education and culture,” and the libraries are contextualized within their mission to teach and become a center for learning for the public. Strahov promotes a holistic learning environment instead of separation between the sacred and profane domains; this attention to a holistic account for learning, and therefore, the pursuit of knowledge, initiated my decision to travel there. Today, however, the libraries at Strahov are typically off limits to visitors. Very few people are allowed inside the libraries, most visitors stand at the door peering in. Research can be done there via request of books brought to the reading room. This is due to the preservation of both libraries as both are historically and culturally important to Prague.

I was given permission to draw in the libraries at Strahov. Typically this is off limits to many visitors. Once at Strahov I spent four days drawing in both libraries from morning to late afternoon. I began by walking around to become familiar with the space, then drawing for the rest of the day. I wanted to observe and feel out the space in much the same way I had with the genetics labs. I should note here that the first two days were spent making observational drawings and the last two days become the sensation of light and space. This shift was important as I felt the architecture and light lends itself to a particular understanding as the libraries are symbolic of what it contains. I wanted to observe and understand the space, taking note of how my experience was presented to me and what I thought and felt about such experiences. Drawing from observation became a way of knowing the libraries and thinking through the space, whereas painting became a way of feeling the space of the libraries allowing me to excavate my experience at Strahov. In this way Strahov became the subject through which I could investigate my own sense of understanding about the secular and sacred domains.

### **Grid, Light, & Place**

As my goal in these paintings has been to find what was most essential or what was the essence of my experience in both the lab and library, I need to discuss my use of the grid. The grid came from deconstructing the bookshelves I was painting from the library interiors. Rather than paint individual books I felt the structure on which the books were placed was more important. The grid is

what contains or holds the knowledge, i.e. the books, but also constructs the space. It's form is rigid, objective, and democratic. By using the grid as both a reference to the library space and something which contains knowledge, I could then move away from merely representing the library and into a *felt* reality, expressing what I felt was the essence of the space and true of my experience. The grid also became a concrete structure in the paintings since my process tends to go through a series adjustments until I reach the correct image.

Asserting the grid began to establish something concrete among the sense of uncertainty and indeterminate spaces, meaning the grid functioned as a reliable form which stabilized, to some degree, the painting. It also revealed another dichotomy of which Rosalind Krauss's essay, *Grids*, points out. The grid fluctuates between "values of science and those of spiritualism" by becoming either an "object of vision" (subjective) or by "refer(ing) to the world beyond the frame" (objective). Reflecting on Krauss's words I saw how the grid was dichotomous. On the one hand the grid is unwavering and democratic and on the other hand its form is repetitive and leads to meditative qualities. Krauss discusses the work of Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin to exemplify the dichotomy within the grid's form. For LeWitt (Plate 4), the grid is objective and his use of it is consistent with this belief. LeWitt was a process artist who began with a form, like the cube, and would make a decision followed by another, followed by another and so forth; his practice is fundamentally rational. In contrast, Martin's use of the grid is far more subjective than it is objective. Extended contemplation

on her work reveals this to be the case, for Martin's work is highly sensitive and nuanced.

*Untitled #3* (Plate 5) is one such painting as it first appears to be divided by a horizon line just below center, however the horizon line is not straight but wavers ever so slightly as it cuts across the surface. Upon closer inspection one finds subtle vertical lines striated across the upper half of the painting. These lines, often executed in graphite with washes on top, lift the upper half of the painting while the lower half holds its position at rest. Even the value range is narrow; the upper half is mainly white with the vertical graphite lines provided the value whereas the lower half is of a warm brown-gray- almost a sandstone color. *Untitled #3*, at least for me, suggests a landscape without the use of perspective and achieves this by the horizon line and the vertical movement of the lines contrasted against the flat, horizontally read lower half.

The grid also refers back to Filippo Brunelleschi's invention of perspective which became the way the world was mapped onto a 2-dimensional surface. For the Renaissance artist could now know the world through the use of this objective system. It became a sort of mastery over nature. Thus the grid is a way of knowing; that is to say, it is a container of knowledge. And like the bookshelves in the library, the grid in this way contains and organizes knowledge present in the books.

I want to touch on the element of light and space within my paintings since both have become the subjects of my work, especially as both are intertwined. As I have already stated, the genetics lab spurred an interest in light, and the

illumination of something, be it information or a space. Illumination suggests revelation of something unknown. The context of illumination reaches back to Medieval biblical scene paintings where to illuminate is to reveal some divine knowledge or revelation of the Holy Spirit. Light has also played a part in Romanticism and the sublime, even though its presence is strictly limited to the symbolic meaning like religious themed paintings; nevertheless, it is a tool for creating atmosphere. Thus, light has been the revealer of some aspect of human and divine interaction or human and nature interaction. Light as a physical property is what enables our perception, without it, we are lost/ blind. My personal interest in light stems from a variety of phenomena, including but not limited to, waking up in the middle of the night and having my eyes slowly adjust to the space, or the snowfall in winter which diffuses the light causing the subtlest of glows. Not only do both these experiences share how one perceives a space through low light situations, but also how one feels a space without necessarily *perceiving* that space. I would like to believe that I am familiar enough with my own apartment to walk comfortably in the dark, yet I still hesitate to some degree despite knowing or feeling that space. There is an uncertainty when one cannot see but can only feel.

### **Artist Influences**

To address the notion of expressing a *felt* reality, I would like to discuss three artists which have impacted the development of this project. In my opinion, these artists exemplify highly developed sensitivities towards a *felt* reality. It is

from their lived experiences that we are able to encounter ourselves and the world in new ways. Joseph Mallord William Turner, James McAbbott Whistler, and Peter Doig all went out into the world to gain lived experience and brought that back into the studio and painted. That is, these artists made the decision to work with a particular experience of being in the world.

Turner travelled extensively throughout his career making watercolors by boat off the coast of Europe. He even painted plein air occasionally, but most of his oil paintings were executed in the studio. It was his travel and broad experience which enabled him to produce the powerful and magnetic works of landscape. Turner demonstrated a painterly fury that captured the sublime through the balance of light and simplified forms. “While observing nature closely, and continuing to work from nature, he began to give greater rein to his imagination, focusing on fugitive aspects and creating extraordinary atmospheric effects<sup>13</sup>.” He painted what was *felt*, not what was *perceived* and it is by this distinction that I am most influenced by him, specifically his watercolors of *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, 1834 (Plates 6 and 7). From the expressive washes to the luminosity and into the abstraction of forms, Turner’s influence on my paintings is easily seen in *Observatory* (Plate 8).

Like Turner, Whistler also would travel to sites of interest to draw or make watercolors. With his *Nocturne* series Whistler would go out at night to observe by boat various areas long on the Thames river. This gave him the lived experience needed to then return next day to the studio and create a painting.

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<sup>13</sup> Katharine Lochan, *Turner Whistler Monet*

Whistler worked towards a highly refined aesthetic where atmosphere and the reduction of forms became key in achieving deeply contemplative paintings. He favored the indeterminacy and ambiguity of place that such reduction of form resulted in. For instance, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*, 1875 (Plate 9), “exemplifies the creative indeterminacy and imaginative play with the aesthetics of place that characterize the entirety of the Nocturne ensemble<sup>14</sup>.” The paintings use of a gestural, dark green atmosphere with flecks of yellow, orange, and red paint, and the suggestion of a horizon line by yellow mark, *The Falling Rocket* “embodies the painter’s effort in all the Nocturnes to preserve the ephemera of perception through the resources of art<sup>15</sup>.”

While Peter Doig has traveled and painted from lived experience as well, he also supplements his studio process with drawings and photographs. The photographs are either personal or found, enabling him to recount certain experiences but to also move into a more universalizing experience. Doig’s use of drawing and photography is where he alters from Turner and Whistler. And it is Doig’s process where mine most strongly connects. Doig develops a painting through a series of “incident’s<sup>16</sup>,” or the chance elements of image combination or material interaction. “Were he to paint without mistakes, each work would come to its resolution without emotional stretch<sup>17</sup>.” It is the mistake, or “incident”, that leads both painting and painter past the fixed reality of the photograph and

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<sup>14</sup> John Siewert, *Turner Whistler Monet*

<sup>15</sup> John Siewert, *Turner Whistler Monet*

<sup>16</sup> Richard Shiff, *Peter Doig*

<sup>17</sup> Richard Shiff, *Peter Doig*

further into imagination. Doig's paintings often confuse mark/ image relationships as can be seen in *Pelican (Stag)*, 2003 (Plate 10). This painting capitalizes on the "most perceptually and emotionally evocative mutations"<sup>18</sup> of material interaction - that of the blue runny drips at the bottom of the painting. It is as if the paint brush slipped and made a forceful impact with the surface. The viewer is left to negotiate the surface facture of the blue paint cutting through the middle of the painting. Doig's process brings together memory with either personal or found photographs while the "incident's" produce disparate information, yielding new ways thinking, seeing, and ultimately interpreting his paintings.

Although I primarily use drawings and occasional personal photographs, my use of such images is more of an attempt to anchor experience and move towards an intuitive and sensitive state. I simply reach a point where I must "let go" of the image and paint. My decision to "let go" partially relinquishes control in the painting allowing the paint to behave in unexpected ways. This allows potential images to emerge, not unlike the "incidents" of Doig's process. Letting go enables me to *feel* in and through the painting pushing me towards the possibility of transcending both image and *felt* experience.

What each of these three artists have done is to turn "to the world in such a way and take in from it certain elements and blanks out others."<sup>19</sup> The decision

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Shiff, *Peter Doig*

<sup>19</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

to have a particular experience and then to unpack that experience through painting reveals to one the richness and mysterious nature of consciousness.

#### **IV The Work**

Since visiting Strahov and repeating a similar process to that of the genetics lab visits, I have created numerous paintings which address issues of experience and essence. These paintings have shifted from indeterminate, obscured spaces with overlapping architecture to more subtle, enigmatic spaces which reach for poetic resonances. Distillation of images and experience into fundamentals is of importance. I keep asking myself whether or not the fore-knowledge of Strahov created a context for my experience. Was it the architecture, the light, or the presence of historic documents? Why was my experience of Strahov the way it was and what does that mean about me or Strahov? These questions have lingered around while working. All I have been able to infer is that there is something about the way experience gets grouped together creating new connections to previous experiences, and therefore, generates new associations and meanings. The conditions surrounding my visit to Strahov, conditions such as winter, my psychological state, or expectations have played a role in disguising and revealing what I experienced.

The five paintings that constitute *The Pilgrimage* were all created roughly between late February and the beginning of April 2013. For me, these paintings exemplify what *The Pilgrimage* has sought to do. That is, to look at certain areas of my experience at Strahov by excavating them to the point of intuition rather

than logical conclusion. These paintings hold together the conditions which reveal various locations of mind. As a result, *The Pilgrimage* represents a metaphysical inquiry and acts more as a guide than a conclusion to a journey. It was important to me that this exhibition be cohesive in the sense that the paintings are directly related to my experience of Strahov.

While drawing in the Philosophical Hall I experienced a sense of disconnect from the library. There were small cameras watching me and I could not touch the books. Even though I had permission to be in the space I definitely felt as if I was confined. *Untitled 23* (Plate 11) evokes a sense of imprisonment. The possibility of freely wandering through books is closed off keeping any visitor at arms length from the intent of the library. Here, the viewer is looking down and into the space of the library from the viewpoint of the balcony. There is a sense of distancing from the harsh structure of the layered grid and one feels as if one is not welcome - the grid which contains knowledge, in this case, is threatening.

*Untitled 22* (Plate 12) is an emergent space. There are traces of architecture underneath various areas of green and the strong perspectival grid on the right hand side pushes the viewer into the space. One gets the sense that this interior is present from the grid, however the green scattered across the surface suggest this space is merging two domains. Even the yellow gestural mark on the upper left hand side shifts back and forth from mark to light source. As both the gestural mark and the grid are yellow, this suggests that the grid and light are not so unlike as one might think. Nothing is static here; the physical

and immaterial exist in one another. *Untitled 22* I consider to be successful as it feels like my mind is trying to make sense of, or merge, two distinct domains.

In the case of *Lodestar* (Plate 13) and *Silence*, a step towards a more poetic space is found. While *Lodestar* still retains the initial structure of the Philosophical Hall, it however loses the grid and much detail favoring instead a suggestion of its structure. *Lodestar* rides the cusp of presence and absence as the space is made up entirely of washes with the heavier flecks of paint on the surface keeping the viewer moving in and out of materiality and image. This piece also carries similarities through suggestion of space and form like Turner's *Norham Castle, Sunrise*, 1845 (Plate 14). However it is Whistler's *The Falling Rocket*, which *Lodestar* makes a strong reference to. Both paintings share in the aestheticized reduction of forms into a quiet and solemn atmosphere which point towards a deep contemplation. *Lodestar* may register on a more poetic level, but it does not fully reach the sense of light I wish it to. Instead *Lodestar* embodies a contemplative and reverent atmosphere. The ceiling fresco in the Philosophical Hall was grand, not only was it illuminated to see the painting but more importantly, it's narrative of the development of human knowledge is grand. The fresco illuminated the pursuit of knowledge and those who have been pivotal in the development of human knowledge. I imagined standing in the Philosophical Hall and having that knowledge fall down on me like snow.

Going one step further towards a more poetic image than *Lodestar*, *Silence* (Plate 15), retains only the slightest recognizable structure. The glowing forms seen receding into the painting feels like a congregation of spirits with a

subtle suggestion of architecture in the upper half of the painting. *Silence*, unlike other paintings, creates depth and mystery without perspective and is the only painting in the exhibition to be of the Theological Hall. This painting exemplifies the most mysterious atmosphere of all the paintings exhibited. For me, *Silence* keeps me in a state of wonder as its forms simply exist in a quietude that permeates the space. Of the group of paintings present, *Silence* reaches a state of contemplation.

*Observatory* is the most recent painting of the group and also the largest. As I was painting *Observatory* I kept thinking about the collapse of philosophy and knowledge. How philosophy attempts to define the unknown but only reveals a gap between known and unknown. It seemed to me that while philosophy attempts to answer questions which are not all scientifically proven, that it is no different than a spiritual faith. Both look at the world and individual in different capacities while trying to understand the fundamental premise of what it means to be sentient and be in the world. *Observatory* loses its structure and coherence from bottom to middle and middle to top. The bottom is dark and washed out almost not present. The balcony is collapsing and fractures the space. When I was in the Philosophical Hall, I was not allowed access to the upper levels of the library. In this painting, the viewer is not allowed access to the upper levels either as the balcony is collapsing. It is that desire to ascend to the upper level that the viewpoint is placed as an upward gaze. The light is above and interacts with the upper level of the library suggesting that despite a collapse, there is still something to be gained or revealed. This section of the

painting with gestural marks of light also makes the strongest connection to Turner. When I painted this area I thought of Turner's expressive washes to the luminosity and into the abstraction of forms, Turner's influence on my paintings is easily seen in *Observatory*. Even Peter Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (Plate 16), is referenced for its other-worldliness.

## **V Conclusion**

I entered Strahov with no reservations; I was only there to observe, experience, and draw. From this sense of a *felt* reality both interior being and exterior world became synthesized in my paintings. And because I paint to be present, there is a kind of revelation of the *felt* reality which takes place in the process of painting; that *felt* reality is made known from the painting. These paintings are not arrived at *a priori*, but rather *a posteriori*-- through a consistent working over of the images until I reach a final "correct" image, one which carries a psychological temperature. This suggests a truth in the conditions presented in the painting. That truth is neither a fact nor a direct representation of physical reality, but something liminal transcending into the unknown and poetic. Again, I could not have produced this work *a priori*. So it is by unpacking my experience of Strahov that I move from thinking to feeling. As drawing was a way of knowing the external world by observation, painting, however, is the way of knowing the internal world by sensation, or feeling. The act of observing my interior state of being is one of excavation; I am trying to find the underlying structure of a feeling through painting.

It was the light which allowed me to first of all see the laboratory and library in a physical way, but it is light as an idea which allows me to move into that *felt* reality. I used drawings to anchor my experience so that I could guide my self into a space of contemplation. From there, the process of painting allowed me to begin my internal observation and finally exercise sensitivity. If I have been successful, at all, the viewer should come to the work feeling as though one foot is in a physical reality while the other is stepping into the unknown. That there is a sense of deep reflection and searching, and that to exist is to be in a dynamic, never stable relationship with reality. I want the viewer to feel there is something simultaneously coming undone and forming, that my paintings are ripe with dichotomies such as, representation/abstraction, presence/absence, known/unknown, or thinking/feeling, to name only a few. Each painting attempts to merge these dichotomies and to exist holistically. I have tried to paint a metaphysical space by taking the library as a form to explore my interior being.

I have since believed Strahov was a single manifestation of what this “pilgrimage” is to confront. It is but one point along the way towards confronting myself-- the true unknown territory. Part of this project has been a realizing and acceptance of my feelings of uncertainty, a “metaphysical ambiguity of the human condition<sup>20</sup>.” By re-presenting my primary experiences of uncertainty, these paintings point towards the human condition- the search for meaning for one’s life. Painting, in this instance, becomes the bridge between the ineffability

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<sup>20</sup> Duranty, *Existentialist Aesthetics*

of both existence and essence. It is my hope that these paintings would at the very least, cultivate some inner knowledge.



PLATE 1: *The Gathering*, Oil on Canvas, 2012



Plate 2. *The Great Trepidation*, Oil on Canvas, 36"x 36", 2012

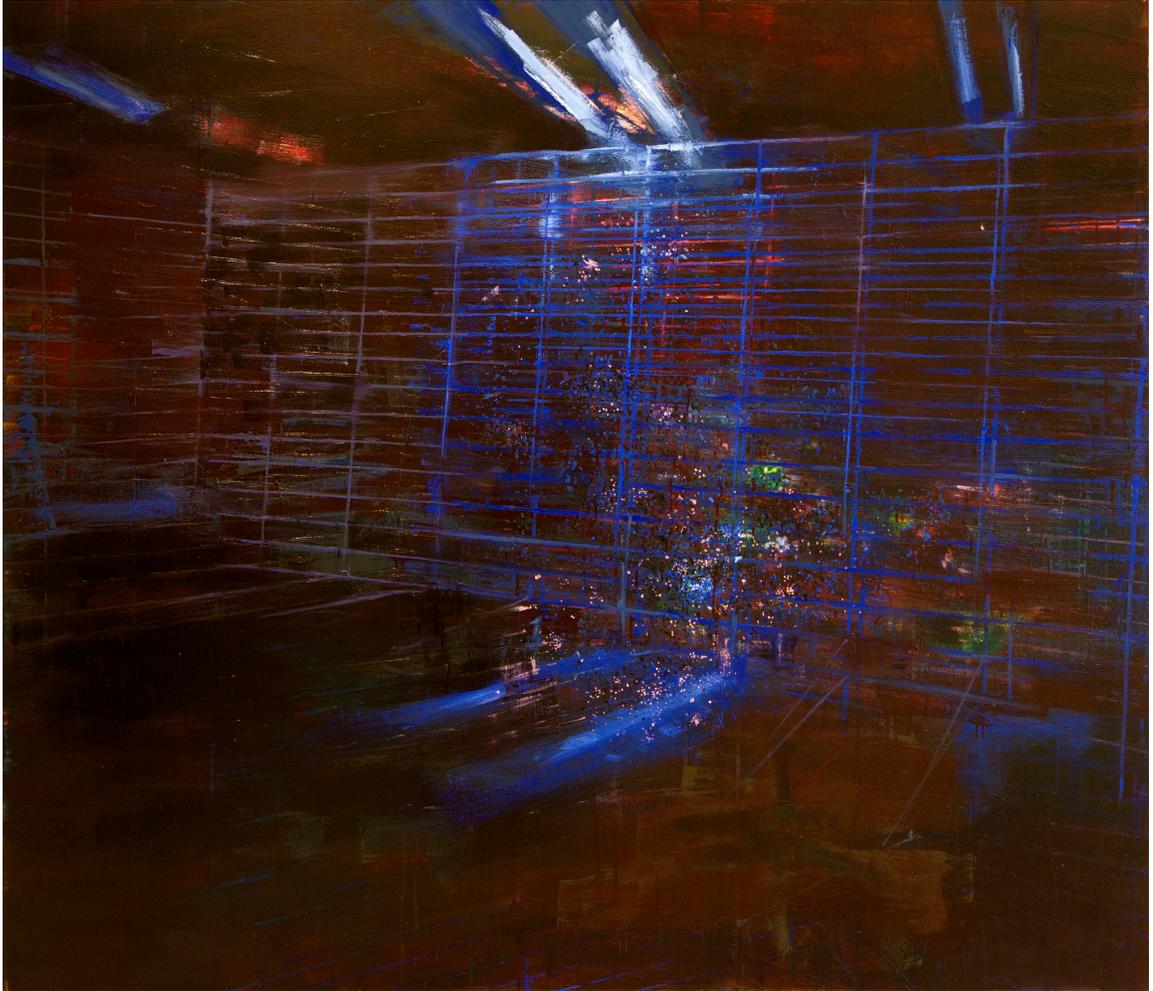


Plate 3. *Untitled 19*, Oil on Canvas, 78"x 90", 2012

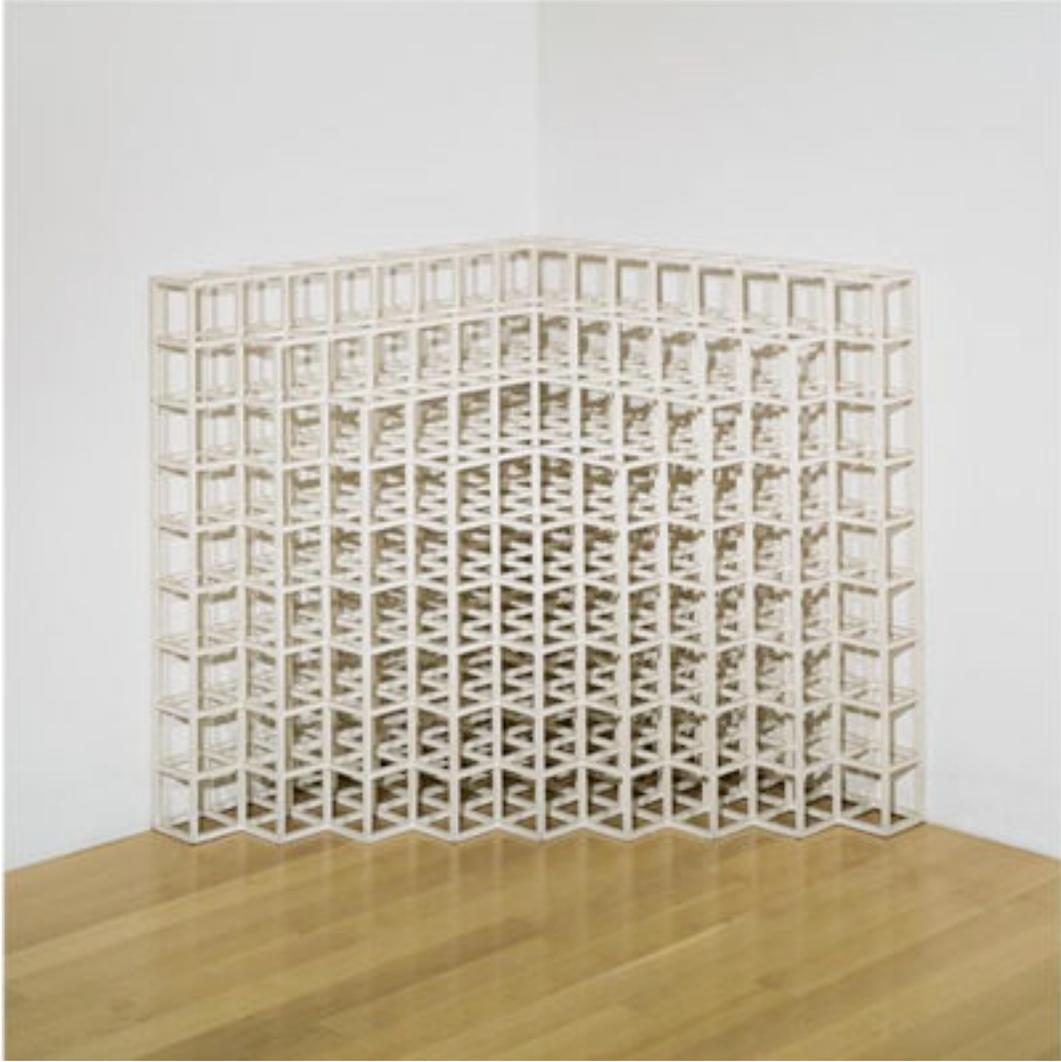


Plate 4. Sol LeWitt, *Corner Piece No. 2*, 2001

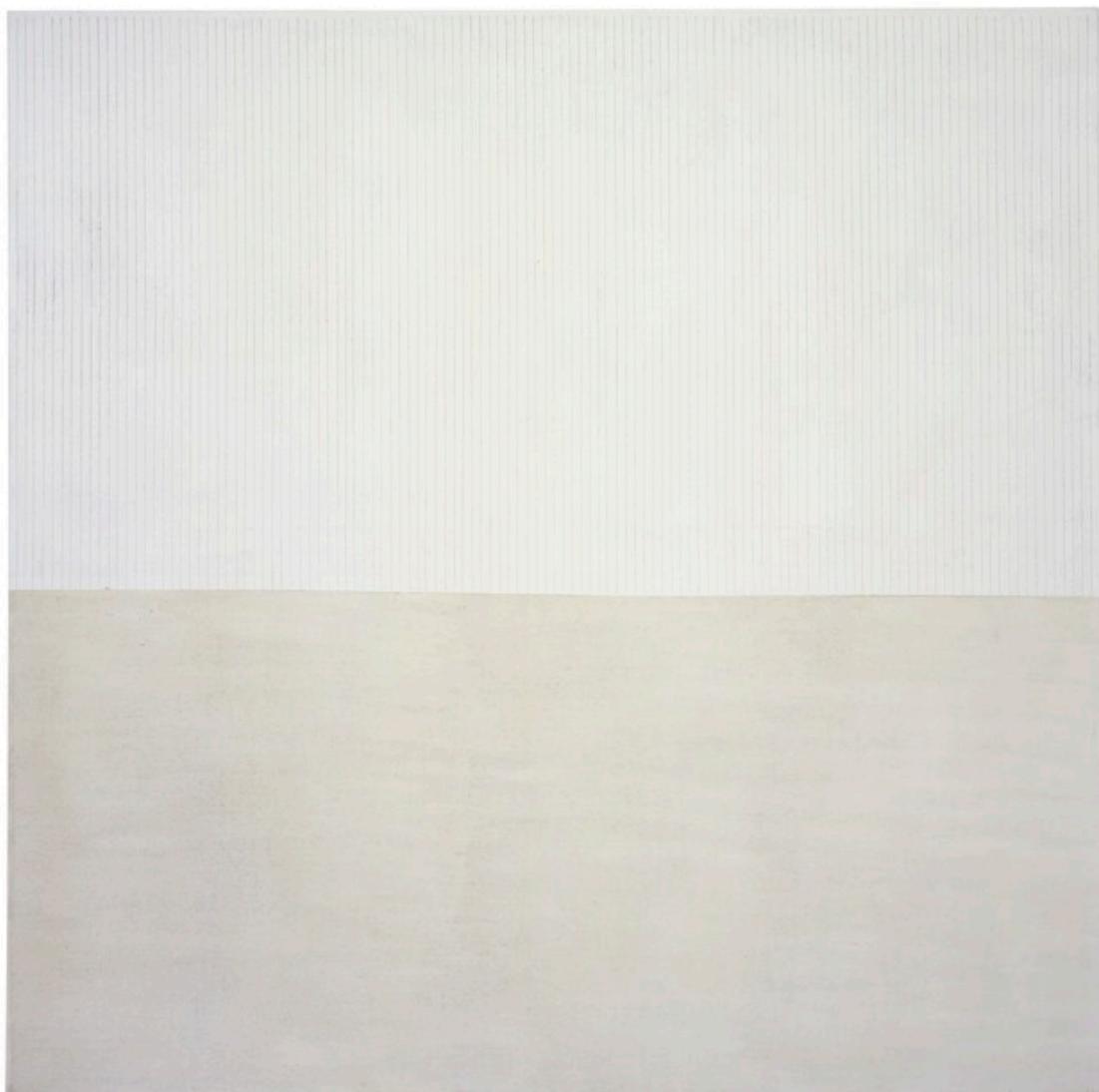


Plate 5. Agnes Martin, *Untitled #3*, Acrylic and Graphite on Canvas, 2003

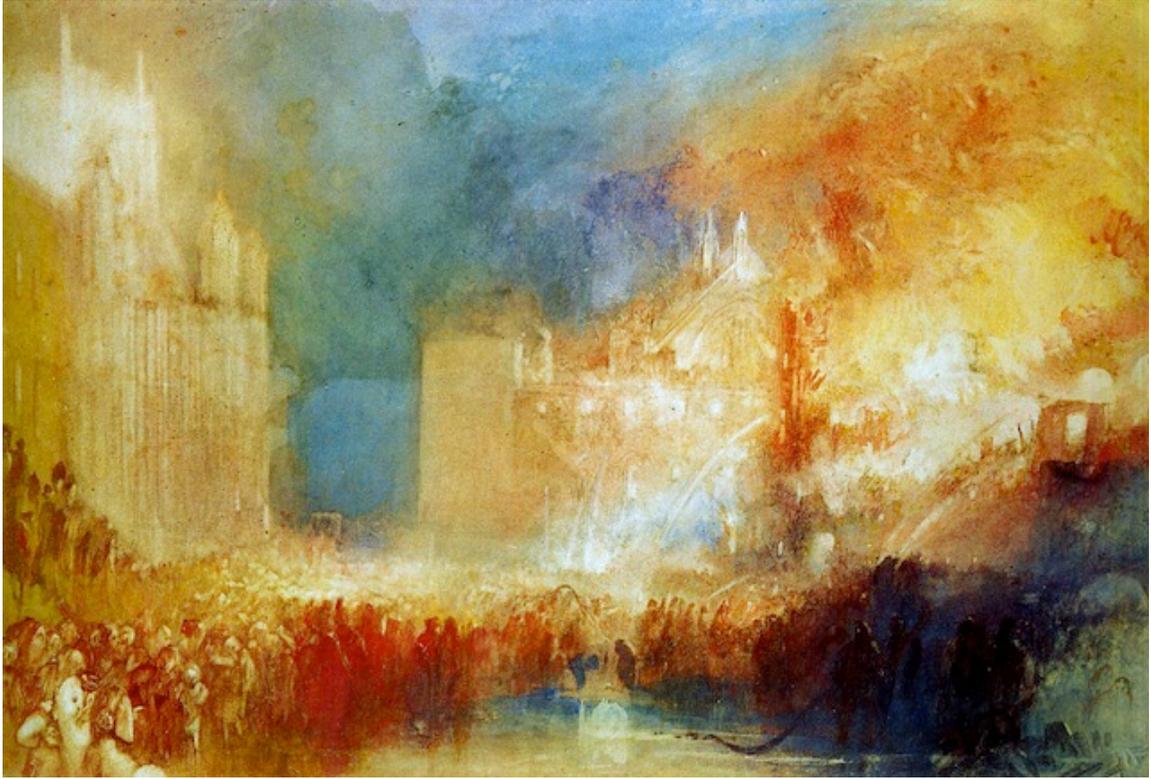


Plate 6. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament, From the Palace Courtyard*,  
Watercolor on Paper, 1834

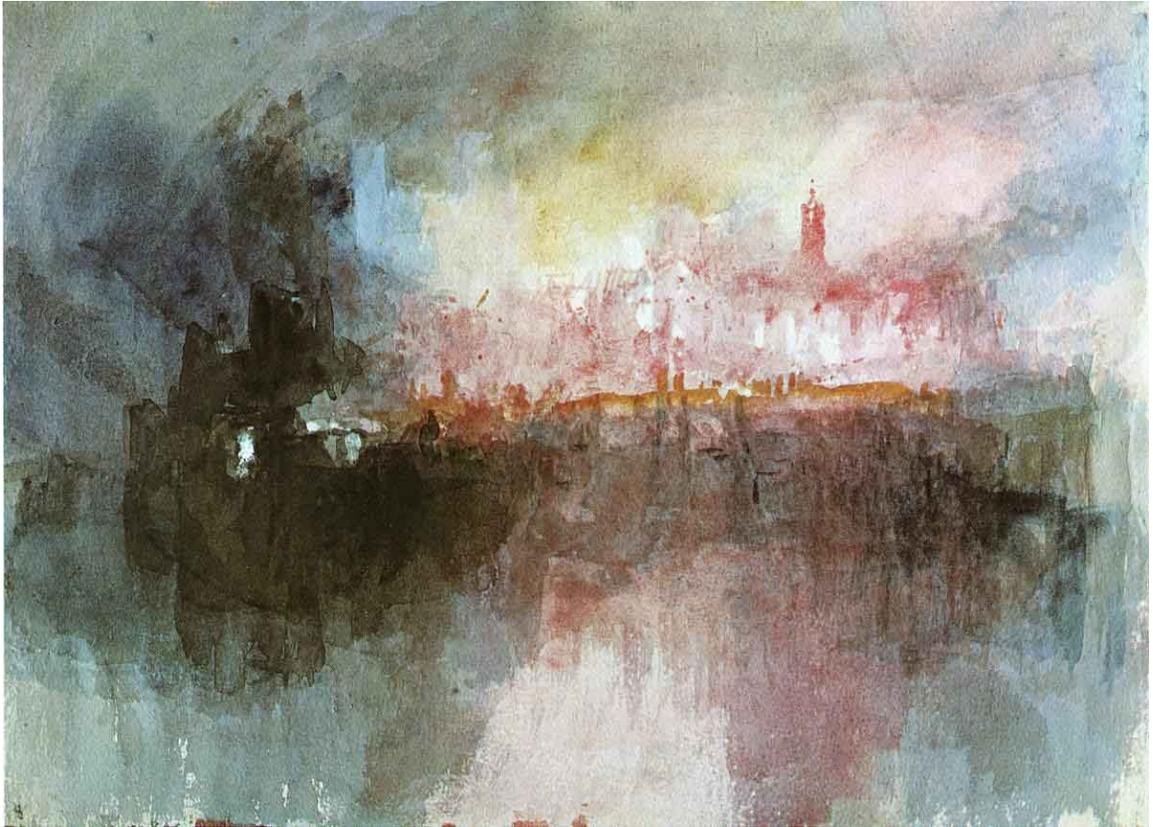


Plate 7. J.M.W. Turner, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, Watercolor on Paper, 1834



Plate 8. *Observatory*, Oil on Canvas, 78"x 90", 2013

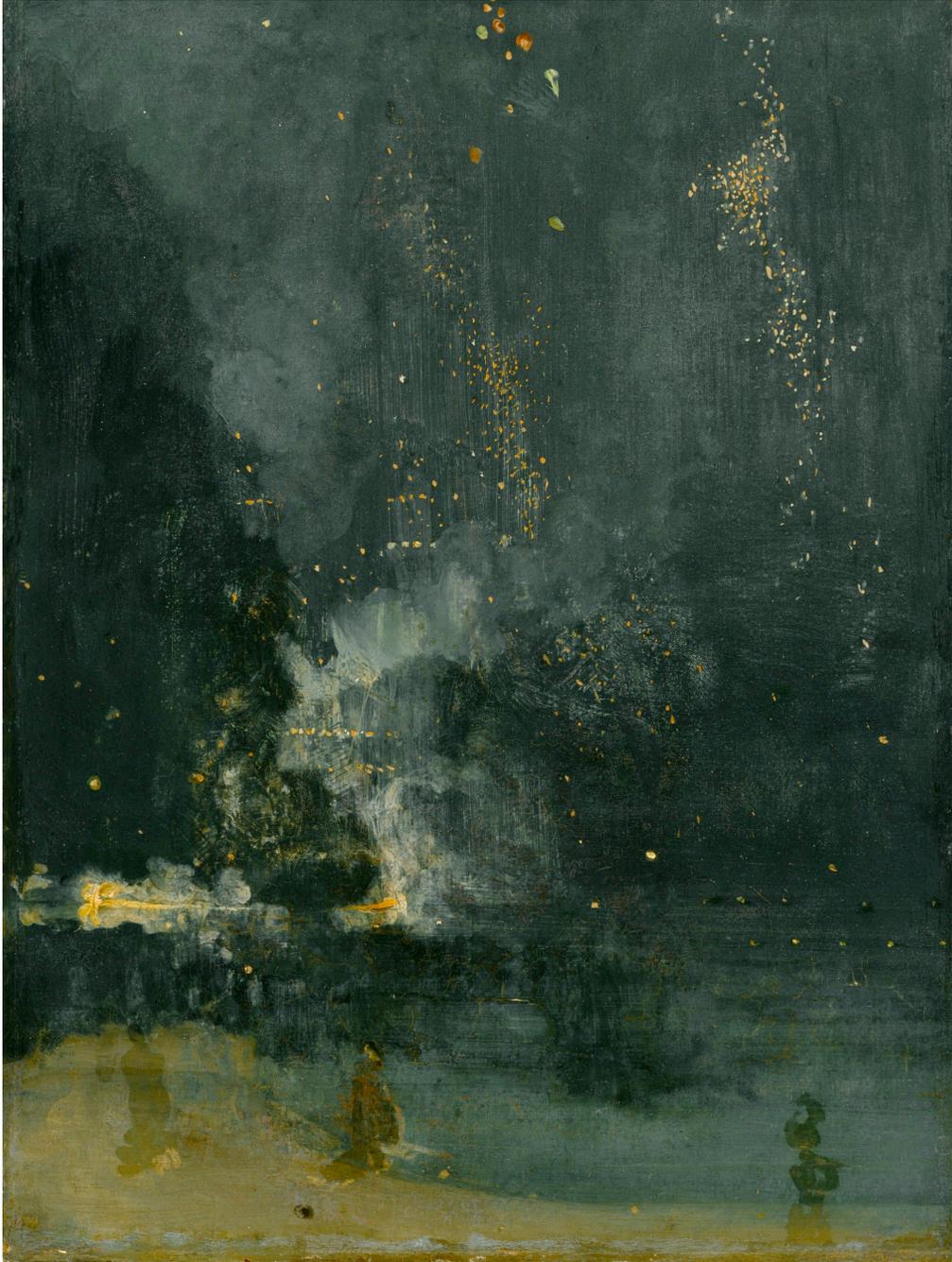


Plate 9. James Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*, Oil on Canvas, 1875



Plate 10. Peter Doig, *Pelican (Stag)*, Oil on Canvas, 2003

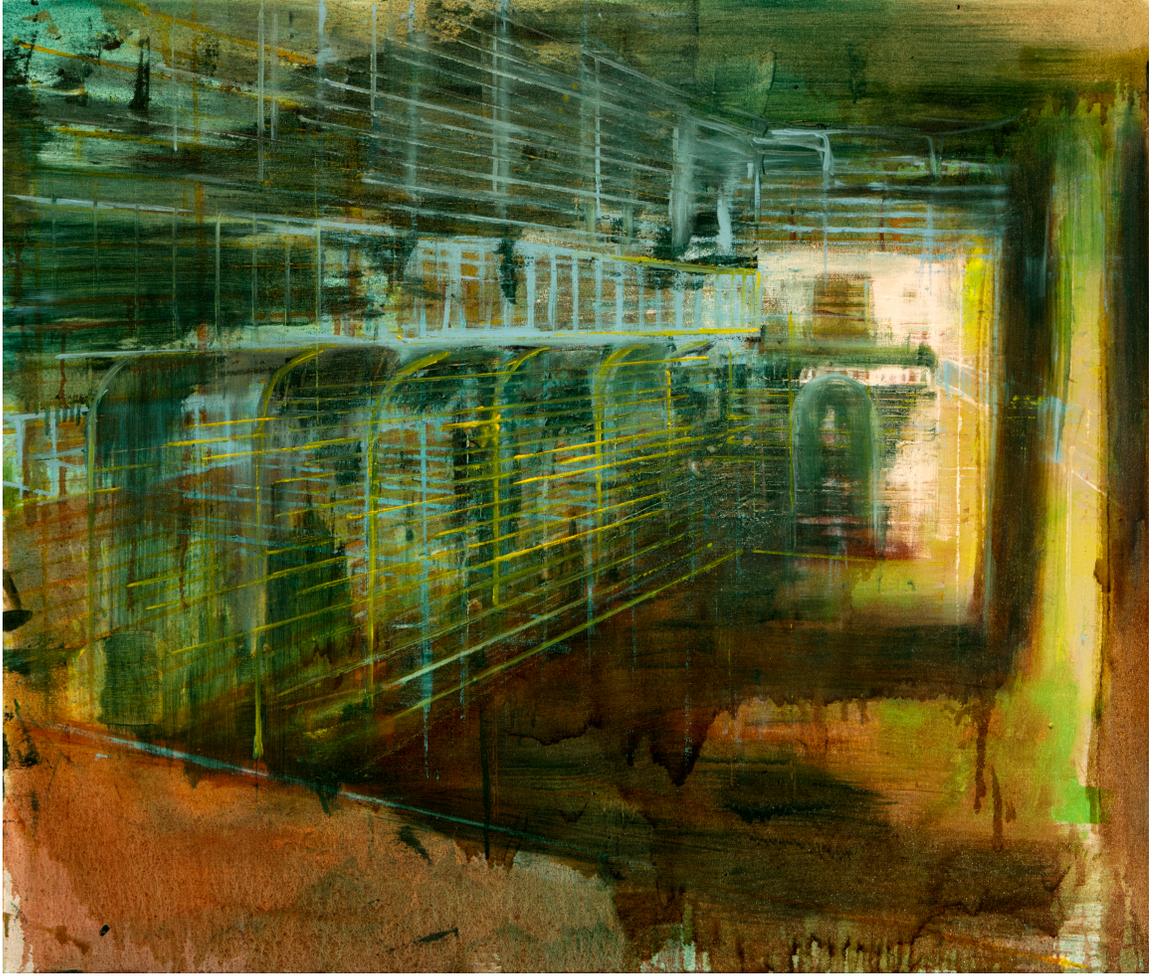


Plate 11 *Untitled 23*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013



Plate 12. *Untitled 22*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013



Plate 13. *Lodestar*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013



Plate 14. J.M.W. Turner, *Norham Castle, Sunrise*, Oil on Canvas, 1845

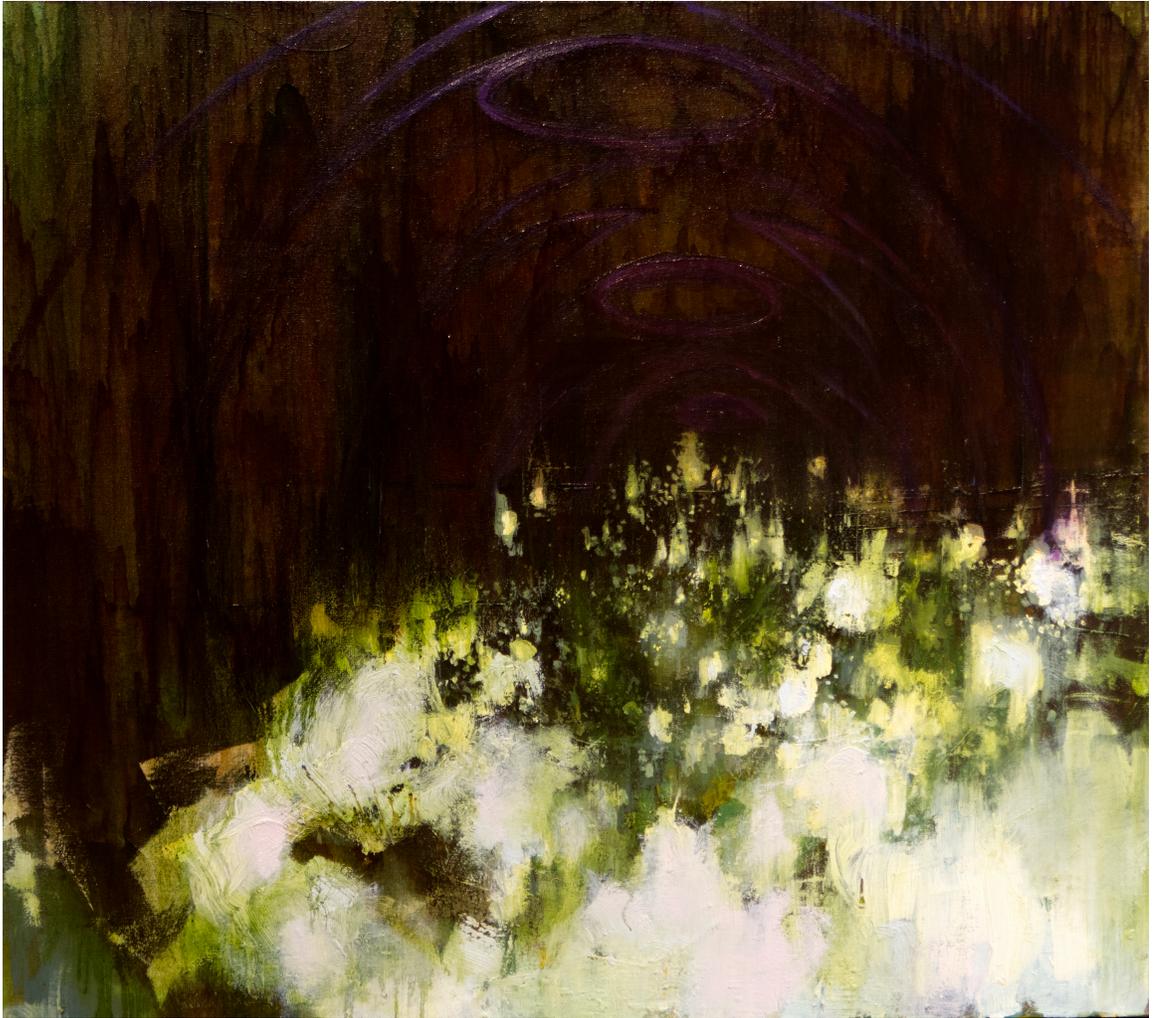


Plate 15. *Silence*, Oil on Canvas, 40"x 46", 2013



Plate 16. Peter Doig's *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre*, Oil on Canvas, 2000-02

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Logan Marconi was born in San Francisco, California in 1984 and was raised in Indiana. He attended Herron School of Art & Design/ IUPUI in Indianapolis where he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting in 2008. In 2013 he received his Master of Fine Arts from University of Florida in Painting.