

Deep in the Forest of Space:  
Phenomenological Philosophies, Transforming Worldviews, and Analysis in Painting

A Thesis in Studio Art

by

Allie McMahon

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## Abstract:

Artists make choices or have urges instinctively to make things look, hear, or sound a particular a way. To some degree every artist takes into consideration perceptual experiences and the sensitivity and expression that exists in the way we experience the world with our bodies. We are artists because we have a need communicate visually. In this project, I have investigated what my interactions with the world mean to me as a painter. Phenomenological texts and particularly philosophical assertions made by David Abram in the *Spell of the Sensuous* have helped to articulate a kind of an instinctual approach I have had to painting and more importantly, have transformed and clarified worldviews that promote a sense of connectedness with our planet and our surroundings. Phenomenology and painting as recognition of direct experience are also explored as an opposition to the millennial generation's dependence on near-constant interaction with smartphones and computers. I also investigate the power of visual experiences, as something embedded in almost all experiences, to bring significant memories to the surface with deeper investigation. Reflecting, with phenomenological philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in mind, has involved a growth in my appreciation for what sensual experiences of the entire body mean for my experience of the world. These philosophies are also looked at in relation to how a way of thinking rooted in direct experience has the potential to make us as humans feel more connected to the "natural" world. As a result of the research, I have a greater sense of awareness of the interdependence between us and our physical and natural surroundings and that connection can come through as a theme in my work.

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## **Introduction**

Making reference to spaces around me, I paint images that fluctuate between abstraction and representation that fit into the category of landscape. Color relationships I create consist of saturated shapes alongside nuanced neutrals that are born in perceptual experiences of the world, but jump off from impressions I have into the realm of my imagination. I invoke psychedelic color and create environments that hone in on light experiences that feel magical with depictions of luminosity within darkness.

Approaching a painting I refer to photographs I have taken and memories I have of felt experiences in those photographed environments, as well as drawings and watercolors made from observation, or by combining elements of multiple pictures, as well as notes about color, dreams, and philosophies that I have scribbled in my sketchbook.

I place importance on the interconnectedness that exists within elements of ecosystems that are both built and natural. This interest comes into play in the work with varied depictions of a kind of flow of energy among shapes and/ or figures in each image. This “energy” takes form as a simple line in a few paintings that flows throughout an image connecting different elements and aiding a descriptiveness of atmospheric space. I have also continuously visualized the connection among elements of the landscape as a living matrix of energy that flows between us and our surroundings in the soil. Abstract forms sink into the ground level and are sometimes mapped out with spontaneity and imagination.

I started thinking about phenomenology as a result of a few paintings made early in the fall, although learning what it was and how to articulate what I was doing when I made those paintings did not come until a while after they were finished. Those early

paintings were made with a kind of instinctive phenomenological approach that unfolded as I worked with structures from photographs of familiar places as I thought about felt experiences I've had that I could connect to those environments. I have investigated how my memory of emotions has been rooted in my direct experiences that include how I exist as a part of a physical space that I perceive visually at the same time that I experience varied emotional states. I started my project thinking about the factors of a person's environment that contribute to how they interact with their surroundings and how they feel about the world and their lives. As I have come to identify myself throughout my early adulthood I have lived a few distinct periods of a few months shifting among varying set circumstances and environmental factors. I began making paintings reflecting on how I have experienced the world, periodically engaged in different interactions to be excited about; I (in September) looked at past excitement as only series of ephemeral experiences I could barely continue to hold on to.

Once I started to grasp what phenomenology is and how it was relevant to what I was after, I considered memory of felt experiences in a way that was less specific, working with a composition taken from a place in nature that I had only gone to once.

Decisions I made in the image were partially influenced by memories of a collection of experiences that had taken place in similar woodsy settings. Also important to how I expressed my subjective perception in this piece is the figure, which for me evokes being with a particular friend and being at ease while also explorative and curious because of the company. I continued constructing landscapes as I saw potential for much greater

variations in emotional fields that could come to being differently in each image. As I thought more about perceptual experiences constructing new landscapes I also became more observational, particularly about how I could describe color, in the very moments that I would have perceptual experiences as I spent time outside.

A phenomenological way of thinking and understanding our place within this world can contribute to a more aware and connected way of living. Exploring phenomenological thinking I am able to identify memories of my own emotional states by acknowledging the importance of visual sensations and perceptions. Studying philosophers and in particular, writing by David Abram has influenced my worldview and encourages me to think about implications of my work that can go beyond the personal. In this paper I will expand on a few sectors in the development of phenomenological philosophies.

The process of painting gives me as an artist a better sense of my own existence; its ability to do that is fixed to the notion that the act of painting is about direct sensation and visual interactions above other sensory actions.

## **Section I**

### **We lack some clarity about it, but we feel a lot.**

One reason people paint is to express something that cannot be put into words. Rainer Maria Rilke has written novels and poetry and a topic of interest in his writing has been the difficulty of finding a sound resolution for the ineffable; themes of solitude, disbelief,

and anxiety can be traced in his works. In his Letters on Cezanne, Rilke places an importance on expression through means besides his own medium of writing and discusses the impossibility to retrieve and express his memory of experiencing a Cezanne painting, [\*Madame Cezanne in a Red Armchair\*](#). Still he tries and writes about the painting vividly and with complexity; “Seated in this red armchair, which is a personality in its own right, is a woman, her hands in the lap of a dress with broad vertical stripes that are very lightly indicated by small, loosely distributed flecks of green yellows and yellow greens, up to the edge of the blue-grey jacket, which is held together in front by a blue, greenly scintillating silk bow” (Colour, 51).

Even with Rilke’s extensive descriptions of so many components of the painting, Rilke’s memory or a reader’s interpretation of his writing cannot create the same experience that Rilke had when he stood in front of the painting. Despite his inability to use words to describe the experience of viewing the painting with complete clarity, Rilke does say, “In my feeling, the consciousness of their (the painting’s colors’) presence has become a heightening which I can feel even in my sleep; my blood describes it within me” (51).

For Rilke, seeing a painting by Cezanne was something that remains with him and is felt intensely but is difficult to describe. Similarly I have memories of particular spaces that I have depicted in my paintings and extreme feelings that are associated with those spaces that are difficult to express through words with clarity. In particular, the photo that I used for reference while painting *Beachwood* (Fig. 2, p. 23) was a photo that was taken

from the doorway of my childhood bedroom. Compared to writing, it seems with painting I more easily express sensations as I play with the colors in the translation of the photo into the painting. For Rilke, the consciousness of color schemes became important for how he felt with the memory of Cezanne's work. My memories of specific places and particular kinds of perceptions I recall in relation to them is associated with consciousness of color schemes and how they connect to varied states of being. My color choices, then are an intuitive manipulation of observed color relationships because my understanding of color is laced with a lifetime of experiences, many of which have altered my sensual perceptions. Colors create mood and so I create a complex color scheme in response to observation (of the photo and real spaces around me), and memories of felt experiences. "I simply try to put down colours which render my sensation"; I think in my own process, I interact with color the same way Matisse does and so my paintings are very personal and psychological (Colour, 53).

## **Section II**

### **David Abram and Sensual versus Mechanical Interactions with the World**

I contend that a phenomenological mode of thinking opposes modern societies that have developed in which technological developments are crucial to societal values. A phenomenological mode of thinking is a more natural mode, before human interactions with nature become deeply altered by culture. Approaches to advancing technology have coincided with the consideration of the Earth as something that is separate from the existence of human beings. As David Abram puts it in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, the



“material reality came to be commonly spoken of as a strictly mechanical realm, as a determinate structure whose laws of operation could be discerned only via mathematical analysis” (32). Abram attributes this view of a material reality as a common understanding to Descartes’s *Meditations*. Emphasizing the actual importance of our sensual experiences and their relation to scientific and mathematical studies, Abram states, “Despite all the mechanical artifacts that now surround us, the world in which we find ourselves before we set out to calculate and measure it is not an inert or mechanical object, but a living field, an open and dynamic landscape subject to its own moods and metamorphoses” (32).

David Abram who is a philosopher, ecologist, performance artist and author, takes philosophical developments put forth by philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl early in the twentieth Century and puts them in a more contemporary and relevant context. *The Spell of the Sensuous* was published in 1996, several decades after Merleau-Ponty and Husserl had made crucial developments in the philosophy of phenomenology; by the time that Abrams was studying the earlier philosophers’ work, technology had developed in a great variety of ways that contributed to transformations in the societies and cultures of particularly North America and Europe.

Technology has developed even further since Abram weighed in on what it means to be human living within societies that have become so technologically advanced and dependent. It becomes interesting to trace those developments personally. *The Spell of the Sensuous* was published in 1996 and I was born in 1995. Reflections on my own life then

can serve as a way to trace, in some specific ways, how technology has become further embedded in how we exist as humans since the 1990s. I can even see how my process of painting, as something phenomenological, is an opposition to contemporary attachment to technological objects and being constantly connected to the online world.

Our dependency on iPhones and laptops and the stream of information we receive in whirlwinds isolates us from our complete selves that ought to be connected to much more than just the human race. It seems that we are now living in the virtual world as much as or more than we are interacting with the entire physical world outside of glaring into a screen. This further complicates and reinforces the common understanding of material reality as a strictly mechanical realm. Everything exists informationally within the online world and the understanding of phenomenon in that realm dismayingly precedes a real physical and sensual way to grapple with what things are. Painting becomes an acknowledgement of the living field that I exist as a part of, as I engage directly with my visual sensations and particularly when an element of my work is an in depth interpretation of sensual perceptions of the natural world.

### **Section III**

#### **Husserl's Phenomenology**

Husserl introduced phenomenology as a philosophical discipline early in the twentieth century as an approach to understanding things with the consideration of direct experience and the sensations we receive from the world with immediacy. An important

aspect of the new discipline was its opposition to the mathematical sciences in the lack of importance it placed on finding an explanation for how the world works. Husserl instead made phenomenology about description that would consider humans' awareness of the world; he sought to closely describe the way our surroundings are initially felt directly by our senses. It is a way of returning to subjective experience and placing an importance on it by paying close attention to and acknowledging the diverse intricacies that exist in the world and the variety of ways with which they are presented (Husserl). A great number of things we are sensing at any given moment contribute to how we perceive things and how we develop an understanding and explanation for phenomena. Husserl uses abstract language, with statements like, "to return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge"; the complex thought structure that Husserl develops and explores is made more easily understood with Abram's choice of words and specificity of examples.

Subatomic quanta are now taken to be more primordial and "real" than the world we experience with our unaided senses. The living, thinking, and feeling organism is assumed to derive, somehow, from the mechanical body whose reflexes and "systems" have been measured and mapped, the living person now an epiphenomenon of the anatomized corpse. That it takes living, sensing subjects, complete with their enigmatic emotions and unpredictable passions, to conceive of those subatomic fields, or to dissect and anatomize the body, is readily overlooked, or brushed aside as inconsequential. (32)

To think about the world mathematically, we direct our energy, effort, and focus to the development of understanding what we study and making progress in any field. When we apply ourselves to studying and analyzing a text, we don't separate a part of ourselves that thinks logically and organizes ideas from the rest of what we are. Engaging in a task

takes everything that a person is and that includes the subjective, emotional, and physical qualities that influence their existence.

The play of mechanical objects in human experience develops in a way that attempts to isolate us from those subjective, emotional, and physical qualities that are the core of what makes us human. Husserl addresses the importance of experience and interactions that are significant before they are defined and become part of a structural way of looking at the world that is embedded in what we “know”. The increased prevalence in the role of technology in the past few decades has solidified mathematical or informational thinking with easy access to gaining knowledge about pretty much anything with a simple Google search.

The way I feel and learn and grow when I paint is a significant expansion of my understanding of the world that I am unable to access surfing the web. Components of my emotional, physical, and subjective experience all take form when I make a painting. I even believe that my consideration of verbal academic research I’ve done is transformed when I address it in a painting or just think about its implications in the creative environment where expressions of emotionality, physicality, and subjectivity are given freedom.

#### **Section IV**

**Artifice is limited. Nature is not.**

For as long as I can remember television was an important part of my home life.

Everyone I know interacts with a screen every day and we all have smartphones that never leave our sides. Abram takes an interest in phenomenology in how it speaks to our collective-consciousness. I too am interested in collective-consciousness and the ability or the yearning to feel a sense of connectedness. As technology has developed since Abram addressed its relation to phenomenology, advancements developed so that focusing on bright screens close to our faces is now habitually embedded in people's regular sensual interactions. Human artifacts, even with their complexities such as those which exist within the interface of a smartphone, are limited. Organic forms, on the other hand, and the kinds of interactions that can occur among them are infinite. The accumulation of human sensual interactions today is much different than it was at the end of the twentieth century as a result.

The importance of the screen in modern technological advancement is as detrimental on our natural existence as the earlier mechanics of scientific thought Abram talks about. There are two technological stirrings of culture. The second is after Abram, during the 2000s when computers have a rapidly growing prevalence in our daily lives.

As addressed earlier, one way the accessibility of devices with easy internet access has changed the kind of connection that people have with the Earth is that it sustains the dominance of a mathematical or knowledge-based experience of the world. The alternative to mathematical ways of understanding is a more natural experience that consists of sensual interactions with the sets of intricacies that exist alongside humans as a part of nature. Beyond that, our common involvement in human artifacts such as the

smartphone is a very limited and isolated experience of all the beautiful complex interactions that take place naturally. In the following passage from *Spell of the Sensuous*, Abram articulates the beauty of the limitless experience we have the potential to understand with engagements with the Earth.

Even boulders and rocks seem to speak their own uncanny languages of gesture and shadow , inviting the body and its bones into silent communication. In contact with the native forms of the earth, one's senses are slowly energized and awakened, combining and recombining in ever-shifting patterns. (63)

A struggle to cope with the pervasiveness of the digital world has been a critical part of how I think and experience the world. Peers have always seemed as passionate about video-gaming as we were about being together, skateboarding or playing basketball. Technological entertainment is something I have been intrinsically opposed to even from a very young age and I think that's has a lot of weight in how I have come to build my own sense of an identity through painting. According to Abram, humans perceive mass-produced mechanical objects the same way we perceive everything in the world around us as animate and even living phenomena. These kinds of objects “draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself without variation” (64). The rhythms and forms of organic entities on the other hand engage our senses with a unique and stimulating depth. Patterns that exist in nature, such as the vertical stripes created in the woods by tree trunks, are repetitive, but they never exactly repeat themselves. *Tree Matrix* (Fig.10, p. 27 ) is a painting that exemplifies that natural pattern and addresses the metamorphosis of energy among the environment and evokes a dynamic movement of

color.

A skateboard and a basketball are both human artifacts, just as a computer is, but how we use those artifacts to engage with the world involves sensual interactions with nature. As I ride a board down the street, my skin is warmed by the sun and I hear and feel a subtle breeze. With basketball I also experience quickly shifting visual perceptions of the sky and the trees around the park where the court is as I look to pass or shoot the ball. Painting, like these two childhood activities is an interaction with manmade materials that also involves sensations and perceptions of the natural world. Painting is a way to interact with material reality, sometimes needing to get away, specifically from the screen and its piercing, blue light. The physicality of paint inherently places an importance on material and sensual interactions.

## **Section V**

### **Subjective experience is embedded in visual perception/ memory.**

Technology is an incredibly prevalent development that has shaped the identity of my generation (millennials) and it is a key component influencing how we live. We are the first generation raised with the internet and we have been called the “anxious generation” (Markowicz, ‘They Can’t Even:’ Why Millennials are the ‘anxious Generation’, *New York Post*). There are a number of components to the interactions we have with technology that can contribute to increased experiences of anxiety. I initially attribute the harmfulness of our connection with technology to the way the light of the

screen impacts visual sensations. It seems however that there is a greater complexity to how regularly checking our smartphones can be detrimental to our wellbeing. I personally, intuitively place interaction with technology in the visual realm of my thought-structure. By this I mean that when I think about how I experience technological objects, I think most vividly about my visual experiences of them. Every anxious experience I have with a phone or computer, even if it's caused by how social media impacts self-assessment, occurs along with a visual sensation of digital light. Many experiences I have had interacting with smartphones and computer screens have provoked symptoms of anxiety. An inability to concentrate on reading and to complete tasks is something I struggle with even when I am not using a computer, but it becomes more difficult with the abundance of distractions that can lure me into a hole of unproductivity.

A significant contributor to anxiety is poor sleep. One way the prevalence of technology has made millennials more anxious is by messing with our ability to get a good night's sleep. Spending time on phones or laptops before bed is a common cause of insufficient sleep, particularly for young people (Dworak, Schierl, Bruns, and Strüder). As we can see, technology does have real physical effects that play into its harmful effect on psychological well-being. The physical effects are not just visual either. According to a Huffington Post article, "screen-based entertainment increases central nervous system arousal, which can amplify anxiety" Beaton.

I parallel the complexity of these kinds of experiences with smartphones and computers to a similar complexity of components that come into play with my paintings. Paintings are visual expressions but mine are built on memories and my perceptions of the



places in which the experiences happened. Nudging of updates and notifications from Facebook, group messages, and the New York are contributors to how anxiety can be caused by technology, for me personally, that go beyond the physicality of humans' interactions with screens.

## **Section VI**

### **Phenomenological Intersubjectivity**

The body is the true subject of experience. Anxiety, physicality, and painting are all related. Painting has an importance in how I cope with anxious experiences and plays a key role in my ability to resist anxiety symptoms. This is rooted in the fact that painting is an acknowledgement of my sensual existence. Allowing myself to feel more completely and even to see beauty in complexities of interactions that are happening within my surroundings, I can control to a greater degree my resistance to the pain or incapacitation that the condition may cause.

Painting is problem-solving in a way that can become much bigger than the personal. Some anxiety I have had has consisted of an obsession about my identity or worth based in how I interact with other people. Thought processes indicative of anxiety include intense self-criticism and doubt about any real self-merit. Social anxiety is fear of criticism or lack of approval from others. Experiencing unease in that context has kept me from making connections with others. A repetitive cycle of this has left me with actually very few connections to others and an inability to believe in a sense of significance.

We exist first and always as people constantly interacting with our surroundings. Human intellect is incredibly advanced and is what makes us such unique creatures. It is illogical to neglect that fact and to know our bodies only by the way they can be broken down and charted out anatomically, or by how we might chart out or classify what and how important, successful, or interesting we are in relation to our peers. More than what we're composed of physically, we are what our physical sensations are composed of, as well as how those sensations become perceptions that have potential transform and mold how we think about most anything.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, another phenomenological philosopher clarified and expanded on ideologies of Husserl. A significant contribution to the field, Merleau-Ponty rejected the idea that mind and body are separate entities and calls the body "the true subject of experience" (149). Many people grow exposed to modes of thinking that would make them accustomed to considering the truest essence of self to be psychological.

Despite the fact that people are brought up to consider true identity to be the soul, mind, or spirit (something intangible), it is easy to grasp the simple fact that everything we know and feel comes from our bodily experiences in the world.

Merleau-Ponty claims that "the body is a creative, shape-shifting entity" that is the core of our existence and place in the world (169). I am part of the culture that is accustomed to an understanding of identity and human existence as something incorporeal, within the mind or spirit. I take phenomenological assertions about the implication of assuming an importance of mind over body into consideration and

reevaluate how I think about some important aspects of my life. Instead of thinking just about personalities and spirits or souls of people that I have relationships, I consider how I know my friends and family physically and sensually. People's eyes, voices, and hugs can be so important to creating positive meaning in relationships. Likewise, when I paint I also dance and in a variety of ways use my entire body and consider all multiple kinds of sensing interactions I could have with a piece. Interacting with people with all of what I am (all of the sensations that affect my subjectivity) feeds a need to feel connected and helps build a resistance to anxiety or depression. Similarly, painting while in touch with my whole body feeds a need to feel connected to the world around me.

It seems as long as I have painted the process has been an acknowledgement of my own existence as corporeal. Along with other phenomenologically-addressed issues, latching on to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body as a "shape-shifting entity" that is at the core of what we think and how we feel, I can think more logically and expand my personal philosophies and approach to painting. The influence that my consideration of some earlier academics' philosophical claims becomes clear in how I am currently developing my approach to making a painting.

I love being reminded of my sensing-self as I interact with paint, a canvas, and color. The experience can also serve as a reminder that other humans also think often with particular attention to any one kind of sensation and become involved in investigating all kinds of questions people could be preoccupied with. I have no right to assume people care how I act or what I do and I have no reason to fear judgement. The kind of

expression I can make in painting also points to a significance of knowing something or someone outside of verbal thought. I have relationships that go beyond topics and intellectual and emotional conversation and the way we look at and touch each other and other animate phenomena is as essential to the intimacy humans depend on as words are.

## **Section VII**

### **Verbal interactions are felt by our bodies.**

In a conversation about a relationship between friends, a claim is made that the two have good “body chemistry” but not good “brain chemistry”. The brain chemistry could become “violent”. Shortly after this is said, it is corrected, insinuating that violent is descriptive of bodily actions but not intellectual ones. This brought me to question the intersection of verbal interactions and physical interactions between two people:

Verbal interactions are bodily interactions. Even if we’re not touching, even when we are not seeing, even when we’re connected only by machines when we’re not within real audible distance of each other. We sense another’s verbal expression with our whole bodies, but we often don’t sense the other’s whole body.

Hand gestures, posture, stance, and facial expressions during a verbal confession, for example, transform and deepen what’s being said. We hear tone and know it, but at the moment that you heard your friend’s angry exclamation, it was intersecting greatly with a forceful frustrated sensation that was happening for your friend at that moment.

You sense her anger, but that sensation of anger does not (always) transform into a

feeling of anger for you. In that very moment, though, that sensation of her will give you chills on your back or a sudden need to jump back a little. Phenomenon like the chills or an instinct to jump or to excitedly throw your hands up, then, essentially are the feelings they come with.

I have composed two descriptive sentences that convey essentially the same thing to convey how mental states and physical sensations are all interconnected:

- She sat on the bench slouchy, eyes toward the ground with a resting mouth that was turned down slightly at the edges.
- She sat on the bench looking defeated and sad, maybe worn out.

Emotions are not in the brain, but part of the whole person, brain and body. The way we share ideas and emotions is an interaction of both the mind and body.

## **Section VIII**

**Drawings and paintings I make promote my personal sense of community among all natural phenomena.**

In addition to the opposition to an accustomed understanding of self that comes from the recognition of the importance of our bodies and its sensations, Merleau-Ponty and the way he teaches us to think opposes traditional scientific norms that neglect the importance of core experience. Phenomenology and attention given to direct experience changes an appreciation of bodies and how they interact with surroundings in their entirety. Some precise thoughts from Abram are very influential in changing the way we

think about our relation to the earth and all that inhabits it alongside us:

The breathing, sensing body draws its sustenance and its very substance from the soils, plants, and elements that surround it; it continually contributes itself, in turn, to the air, to the composting earth, to the nourishment of insects and oak trees and squirrels, ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where this living body begins and where it ends. (46-47)

The elegance of these insights inspires a genuine love for the harmony of Mother Earth and evokes a sense of community. The community cares for me and I, in return, must care for it.

Sophisticated prose about the universality and dependency of earthly interactions on one-another has been considerably influential to my world-view. It seems discovering how I have addressed phenomenology with my natural inclinations and familiarizing myself with the beautiful connectedness among the intricacies of the world has pushed me to explore more ubiquitous truths.

I take from my experience of the landscape and spaces around me, making paintings that share a connectedness I have to the physicality of my surrounding and to the Earth. Katy Siegel addresses connectedness as she talks about a current way of thinking that exists in academia, a shift from or an abandonment of earlier modes of ultimately anthropocentric thinking, that is aligned with climate change concerns. She is critical of the dichotomy of people as subject and everything else as object, a problem Abram has also touched upon. Phenomenological modes of thinking developed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty contribute significantly to an ability to understand the world and approach

problems more organically. Phenomenologists promote the awareness of human sensations as the core of our existence and attention to our bodies' interactions with our surroundings. In doing so they exemplify intellectual steps that when taken are beneficial to the development of more environmentally conscious conversations and decisions that need to be taking place globally.

As I push my ability to portray the energy of the interactions of my ecosystem, among humans and all of our surroundings, I am pushing the potential I have to convey something significant with my work. With a recent painting, *Tree Matrix* (Fig. 10, p. 27) I think the influence of this research becomes more clear than before. Abstract collections of colored lines that to me evoke kind of harmonic vibrations portray a sense of energy that flows between different aspects of the environment. Here my work moves beyond reflections on specific experiences in specific places. I have realized that a subjective emotional quality will always innately exist as a part of my work and while painting will continue to help me cope with anxiety, I can now push to give my work themes that go beyond the personal.

As academics that believe in an ecological connectedness are pushing towards a more universal existence of opposition to anthropocentrism Siegel hones in on a dichotomy of nature versus culture and organic versus inorganic. I represent, particularly with the painting, *Gambier* (Fig. 4, page 24), a natural, organic, environment with inorganic, geometric shapes merging into the fluidity of the atmosphere. Geometric shapes can reference technology-- which becomes analogous to culture as it merges with

nature, rather than existing as something that is distinct. I present both ends of the dichotomy and I integrate them or allow them to exist more smoothly alongside one another. Mixed personal emotions that I evoke in myself as I paint allow me to signify the mixture of good and bad that comes from the merging of the organic and inorganic.

Looking at *Gambier*, people have expressed that some of my geometric appear as laptops. Perhaps there's a connection to the concern for people being consumed by excessive interaction with this blaring artificial object, full of enough information that we can easily forget that there are other kinds of information worthwhile to engage with. I look forward to how more purposeful consideration of that shape and its bright color can help me address technology as intrinsically woven into our consciousness.

After Merleau-Ponty established our bodily existence as the true core of human experience, intellect, and emotion he articulates the philosophy that people are part of the same kinship as the environment we inhabit. What Merleau-Ponty calls The Flesh is “the mysterious tissue or matrix that underlies and gives rise to both the perceiver and the perceived as interdependent aspects of its own spontaneous activity” (Abram). It is impossible to imagine a landscape without implicating our own senses because forming something in the imagination intrinsically means we would envision it from a particular perspective that can only be subjective. This interdependency of the perceiver and the perceived debunks the harmful dichotomy of subject and object that insinuates that humans are hierarchically above the earth which we have a codependent relationship with.



**Images**



Figure 1: Allie McMahon, *Florence*, 2016, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.



Figure 2: Allie McMahon, *Beachwood*, 2016, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



Figure 3: Allie McMahon, *Madison*, 2016, oil on canvas, 14 x 11 in.



Figure 4: Allie McMahon, *Gambier*, 2016, oil on canvas, 32 x 38 in.



Figure 5: Allie McMahon, *San Gimignano*, 2016, oil on masonite, 12 x 10 in.



Figure 6: Allie McMahon, *Collapse*, 2017, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in.



Figure 7: Allie McMahon *Green*, 2017, oil on masonite, 10 x 12 in.



Figure 8: Allie McMahon, *Violet*, 2017, oil on masonite, 12 x 10 in.



Figure 9: Allie McMahon, *Hocking Hills*, 2017, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.



Figure 10: Allie McMahon, *Tree Matrix*, 2017, oil on canvas, 48 x 61.5 in.



Figure 11: Allie McMahon, *Grounded*, 2017, oil on canvas, 42 x 48 in.

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