

The Persistence of Memory in Materials

University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth
College of the Visual and Performing Arts

***The Persistence of Memory in Materials:
Past, Present and Future***

A Thesis in Fine Art: Painting

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Art

June, 2002

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ABSTRACT

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by Garth Richard Bariffe

I make paintings that are about my dreams. They are documentations of emotions or feelings about the unconscious mind on canvas. Through five stages, I use a process utilizing non-traditional materials to reveal the nature and meaning of my dreams, and the consequence this meaning might have for me.

The process allows me to create through these non-traditional materials, an illusion in surface, which simulates the dreams. The expression becomes the synonyms for dreams.

In the paintings, I investigate such sensations as loss, separation, travel, relocation, dislocation, isolation and alienation.

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INTRODUCTION

In my thoughts from visions of the night when deep sleep falls, I
while on my nocturnal frame fell into a dream. And in that dream,

*I dreamt that I was flying.
I was being chased.
Dogs were biting at my feet.
I was being stabbed at.
August 2nd. 2001*

Having dreamt, I rise from my sleep and seek to unravel the story of
my unconscious mind. I make the journey and come full circle, and I ask
myself the question, “each time I dream, what does this mean?”

With each dream, I have felt that I have in some way experienced the
body of images before. There always seems to be an air of familiarity
about the events and situations that I encounter in my consciousness. At
once I am traveling on a path and suddenly I am thrown off.

It is then that I set off on the process of trying to get back on track. In
re-experiencing the body of feelings¹, it seems, "that the angel of

¹ Researchers have theorized that one brain hemisphere registers information slightly sooner than the other hemisphere. It has been postulated to be partial delay mechanisms, such as the hypothesis that the subconscious receives information before the conscious mind. Another explanation embraces the notion of the collective unconscious, through which one is in touch with the universal experiences of the human race. An "already seen" experience may simply represent a resonance between a current experience and one of the archetypes in the collective unconscious. "Already seen" experiences are distinct memories of past lifetimes. The Dream Encyclopedia, James R. Lewis, Gale Research Inc., Thompson Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995. pp.62–63.

forgetfulness himself has forgotten to remove from my memory the records of former experiences." (Head and Cranston, 1961). My "senses are then haunted by fragmentary recollections of these experiences. These feelings drift like clouds over the hills and valleys of my mind." (Head and Cranston, 1961).

With each experience, through painting, I question the answers posed to me in my dreams. Through a series of accumulation of non-traditional materials, subtracting, drawing, adding, and layering of these materials on a painting surface, the process results in an expression, which is the illusion and feeling of the dreams. The paintings provide me with the connection between my dreams and my past experiences.

Chapter One:

Past

a. Recollections: A brief description of my childhood...

I grew up with my mother for the first nine years of my life in Kingston, Jamaica. I experienced a world that I remember to be full of adventure. On my daily walks from school, my friends and I went to the ‘duppy house,’ which was an old bulldozed building site with trees and shrubs growing in its place. It seemed so overwhelmingly tormenting and mystical to a young mind back then. The site seemed to be an image from a nightmare. We made trips to the ‘gullies’ and ‘fish pond’ to catch ‘perch.’ The ‘gully’ and ‘pond’ were beautiful oceans to us, though they were only ditches that gathered water over time. On certain days we were miles away from home exploring the city, or at the ‘board factory’ gathering ‘boards’ to make ‘skates.’ Just across from that old ‘duppy house’ was a record factory. We took the ‘cut outs’ of records to make our own toys. A piece of hose and wire from my back yard, fashioned properly, made an exciting toy, which kept me occupied for hours. We ‘carved out’ ‘fudge sticks’ to make small boats, which we raced in the ‘gullies’ and streets on a rain-stormed day. I remember playing drums on old paint cans. Swinging on a swing from a ‘sweet sop’ tree just outside the building where my mother worked. I would swing for hours. I felt like I was flying.

The second nine years of my life were spent living with my aunt. There I had the new experience of riding bicycles. My time there was marked by a period of alienation and longing. I longed for my former experiences. I went off to Teacher's College and my stay there was marked by a period of independence and probing. They seemed familiar. They reminded me of the freedom and adventures I had the first nine years of my life.

The years at the Art school in Kingston were an epoch of reaffirmation and bonding. There I developed close friendships. At the Art school in Kingston I can still recall those long foundation classes, and in particular, the design class. Whenever there was a critique, which would begin at 9:00 a.m. in the morning and last until 11:00 p.m. at night. In my painting class, I recall the occasions on which I used anything as a painting material. My car often provided me with the materials that I needed. A spark plug, brake fluid, fan belt, engine oil, etc. I used anything that was used by, in and on my car. In the absence of my car, I recollect the long walks scrounging around for wood to make stretcher bars, or annoying owners of cloth stores to allow me to have some of their 'cotton duck.' In Jamaica I learnt to 'tek mi han tun fashion,' become inventive, resourceful and adventurous.

b. Recollections: A description of a dream that...

And now, as it has happened so many times before, I look around and there seems an air of familiarity about the events of being here at Graduate School. I was to yet again, ‘tek mi han tun gully ina a pretty sea.’ I stand still for a second or two, and it dawns on me in a most convincing way that this is very familiar. I think to myself, “Why do I feel like I have been here before, done this before?” “Did I not dream this before?” My unconscious mind begins to play my life like a never-ending déjà vu². My dreams seem to be reminding me or predicting what is to come.

In dreaming, it seems, “that traveling at high speeds under the cover of darkness, I arrived at my destination, days, weeks, months, or years ahead of the usually expected arrival date.” (Van de Castle, 1964). In re-experiencing the dreams in my consciousness, it seems, “that I had been given an aerial perspective that has allowed me to view the entire river of time laid out below.” (Van de Castle, 1964). I then set off on the path of re-examining the gradual metamorphosis of my life. Tracing the path and signposts in my dreams, allows me to examine the course I may take. It is

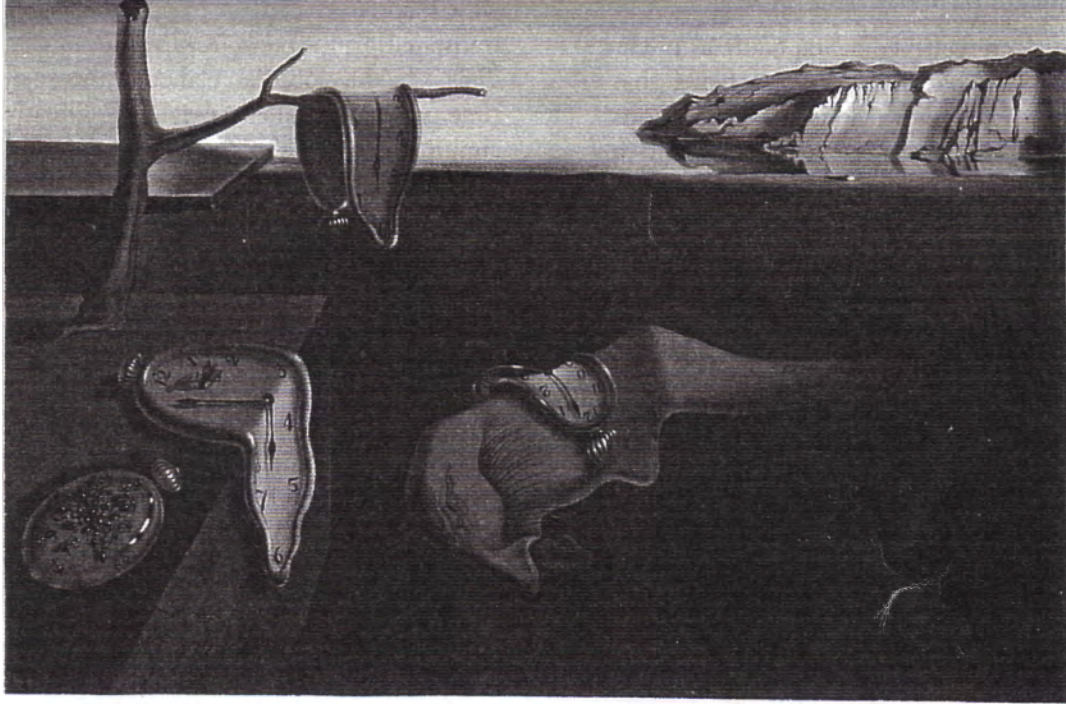
² Déjà vu is an eerie experience in which there is a feeling that a completely unknown place is familiar, as if one has been there before, or that a new situation has been experienced before. It can characterize events, dreams, thoughts, statements, emotions, and meetings, etc. Déjà vu. The Dream Encyclopedia, James R. Lewis, Gale Research Inc., Thomson Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995. pp.62–63.

the revelation of my state of mind, of things to come, which may have already been.

Along this river, there are thousands of dreams containing images familiar to me, but only when 'that day' approaches. Once,

*I dreamt that I was flying.
In that dream I was also hiding.
A dog bit my hand while I was flying.
I was being chastised for something I had written.
And in that dream I was putting my house in order with lots
of new things, especially new clothing.
It was at a new place, but it looked very familiar.
I broke the dog's jawbone with my hands.
March 31st 1999.*

In re-experiencing the feelings in the light of day, a strong sense of déjà vu overwhelms me. Why was I flying? What does it mean and why was I hiding? Whom was I hiding from? This dog that was in my dream; who could it be?



Dali is the master of Surrealist content and naturalistic technique. His manner of depicting the components of his picture is faithful to reality, but in their startling unions they turn out to be fantastically improbable... which reveals the strangeness of the dream world of man's mind.

Figure 1. The Persistence of Memory
Oil on canvas, 9 W x 13"
Salvador Dali, 1931.

c. Recollections: A discussion of the philosophies, which have shaped the making...

Carl Gustav Jung writes, the dream is a little hidden door in the inner-most and secret recesses of psyche, opening into that cosmic night, which was psyche long before there was any...consciousness, and which will remain psyche no matter how far our... consciousness may extend...there all consciousness separates, but in dreams, we put on the likeness of that universal, truer, more external man dwelling in the darkness of primordial night. There he is still the whole, and the whole is in him, indistinguishable from nature and bare of all egohood. Out of these all-uniting depths arises the dream, be it so infantile, never so grotesque, never so immoral. (Jaffe, Aniela, 1963).

Dreams can be thought of as a language. It is the language of the unconscious mind. In this language, I can sense and see in dreaming, the events that would be considered impossible or irrational in the physical world. When I come to my canvas to paint, I do not necessarily want to paint all these images as they would appear in the dream³. I would be attempting to paint my dreams. The surrealist Salvador Dali on the other hand, (fig. 1, pg. 7) objectively refers to his work as hand painted photographs. He ‘attempted to preserve his dream imagery on canvas...

³ Carl Gustav Jung speaks of it as a “semblance”. His exemplary case of illusion is not the reflected image, but the dream; and in a dream, there are sounds, smells, feelings, happenings, intentions, dangers – all sorts of invisible elements – as well as sights. Dreams do not consist entirely of images, but everything in them is imaginary; the whole experience is a semblance of events. Pt. II, The Making of the Symbol, Chapter 4 Semblance, Feeling and Form, A theory of art developed from Philosophy in a New Key, Susanne K. Langer, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1953. pp.48- 49.

the surrealists' goal was "the future resolution of these two states...dream and reality – into a kind of absolute reality or surreality." ' (Van de Castle, 1994). However, my aim is of a different nature. My approach is a more subjective one. It would seem to me, the only way in which my unconscious mind can communicate with my conscious mind is through these images⁴ and events familiar to me. Rather, what is the dream saying to me? In my dreams, there is always an overall theme⁵. My intent is not to render the irrationality of the dreams but on the contrary, the manifestation of the messages, the signs, the illusions and insights they contain.

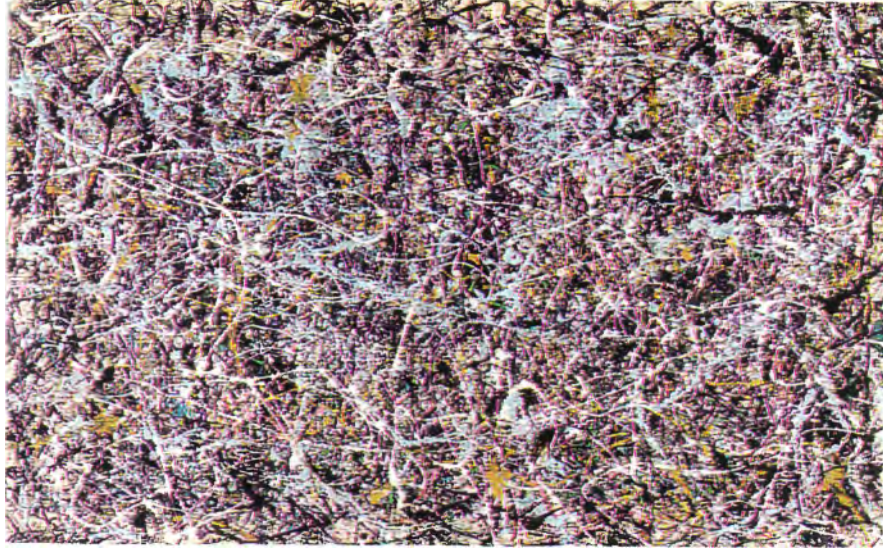
This illusion contained in the personal unconscious, which is part of the conscious mind, is a vast reservoir of individual memories, perceptions, and experiences. I gain access to them as they surface into consciousness through dreams or sudden flashes of recollection.

⁴ Whether we view dreams as arenas within which we act out repressed desires, as communications from the unconscious to the conscious, or simply as reflections of everyday concerns, they are symbolic and indirect. The part of the mind that directs dreams often chooses to embody meaning in dream images by "literalizing" metaphors. Images as metaphors. The Dream Encyclopedia, James R. Lewis, Gale Research Inc., Thomson Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995. pp.157-158.

⁵ [Dali stated]: "If you will study the entire series of cards you will find one theme runs through almost all – the butterfly. The butterfly is not present only because it is in itself a thing of beauty or [image] but the butterfly was the symbol [metaphor] of the soul. The ugly, ungainly caterpillar, our body, enters a form of the grave, the cocoon. Out of death emerges the butterfly – beautiful, free, and no longer earthbound. Extract from an article "Dali greets the world" by Ben Martin – appeared in the N.Y. Herald Tribunes magazine Today's Living, for January 24, 1960, being a report of an interview with this famous artist: Salvador Dali (1904-1989). Spain, Part Two, Western Thinkers on Reincarnation, Reincarnation, An East – West Anthology, compiled and edited by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, Aeon Publishing Company, Mamaroneck, New York, 2000. p.129.

Through the unconscious mind, one is not bound by time or space, and is occasionally privy to the destination, days, weeks, months or years ahead of time. For me that is where the irrationality comes in. It is the ability to see past, present and future in the same instance in my dreams. The dream offers me multiple viewpoints. In my paintings, these multiple viewpoints may be purely accidental, but my first intention is to paint the illusion⁶ or feeling of my dreams.

⁶ ...the emotion in the work is the thought in the work...so the content of a work of art is the non-discursive concept of feeling, and it is directly expressed by the form, the appearance or illusion before us. Pt. II, The Making of the Symbol, Chapter 5, Virtual Space. Feeling and Form, A theory of art developed from a Philosophy in a New Key, Susanne K. Langer, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953. pp.82-85.



Jackson Pollock broke with the traditional notion that a picture is the end product of an idea first conceived in the mind, and then slowly and painstakingly worked out on canvas. For Pollock, a painting was in itself a spontaneous creative act. Action Painting - painting as a physical act. The picture grows out of the unpremeditated, uncontrolled gestures of the painter himself.

Figure 2. No. 1
Duco and Aluminum on canvas 63
1/8" x 102 1/8", Jackson Pollock, 1949

Chapter Two:

Present

a. Process: A brief discussion of why process is important to me as...

I am thinking about how to arrange my next series of paintings. My burning concern right now is about my dreams that I have been having. There are two categories - spiritual and natural dreams. Spiritual dreams leave a great and lasting impression on me. They are very clear and seem to affect the way I look at my life. I have natural dreams as well. Natural dreams come to the mind as a multitude of businesses. They are crazy dreams. Spiritual dreams seem to be pointing me in a certain direction.

In working through the ideas of my dreams, I write them down upon awaking. In any number of ways I convert the words into poetry, make sketches or just simply write what is on my mind. The writings are the dialogue with the paintings. I think about the dreams. I write. I make sketches, and then do the act in stages, through process⁷. The paintings are just the product of a lengthy process that may have been years in developing.

When I arrive at the process of painting the dreams, or the illusion, I approach them with the same idea of stages. I break down the process

⁷ Process art was prevalent in the mid 1960's and 1970's in which the process of a work's creation is presented as its subject. (fig. 2, pg.11). The seeds of process art were in action painting: the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock clearly conveyed to the viewer the creative process that lay behind it. The earlier paintings, however, were intended to be seen as expressive of the artist's psyche, with it stripping bare the creative process merely as a by-product of the artist's ingrained individualism and reliance on his or her own emotions. The Dictionary of Art, Pittoni to Raphael, Vol. 25, Jane Turner, McMillan Publishing Ltd, New York, 1996. pp.645-647.

into separate parts. I put the paintings together by a series of layers. A layer on another layer until they feel like my dreams.

As soon as I begin on the canvases, I start with a series of accumulation of materials on the surfaces. ‘That’s a painting!’ Ah, but not the feeling of my dreams. I have to begin by sifting and scraping away at materials to get at my dreams. In my first stage, the accumulation of materials is followed by sifting and scraping. The process is repeated several times. The result is, surfaces that are dominated by colours, textures and spaces. They still do not feel like my dreams. They could be considered paintings as well.

In the second stage, through layering, I break the surfaces apart by way of composition. It is a way of seeing one thing at a time. By concentrating on composition and pulling forms from the surfaces things begin to look familiar. The surfaces can look like landscapes. Other surfaces can be reminiscent of interiors of a room. The composing of the

surfaces helps to trigger recollections⁸, memories⁹, déjà vu's and dreams.

A space on the canvases can remind me of the time when,

*I dreamt that all my teeth were
coming out in small pieces.
Jan. 8th. 1999.*

I then begin by pulling these forms out by drawing them in. In the other surfaces, I may sense a greater undercurrent of something else. The feeling of the surfaces may be so overwhelmingly familiar to a particular dream, or series of dreams, that I begin to pull shapes. I begin to subtract, bleach, stain, glaze, draw on and scrape etc., the surfaces to get at this idea.

⁸ To remember an event is to experience it again, but not in the same way as the first. Memory is a special kind of experience; it is composed of selected impressions, whereas actual experience is a welter of sights, sounds, feelings, physical strains, expectations and minute, undeveloped reactions. Memory sifts all this material and represents it in the form of distinguishable events. Sometimes the events are logically connected, so that sheer remembering can date them with respect to each other; that is, in a vivid recollection. Part Two, The Making of the Symbol, Chapter 15, Virtual Space. Feeling and Form, A theory of art developed from Philosophy in a New Key, Susanne K. Langer, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953. pp.262-264.

⁹ (i). Actual experience has no such closed form. It is usually ragged, unaccentuated. ...but there is a normal and familiar condition, which shapes experience into a distinct mode, under which it can be apprehended and valued: memory. Past experience as we remember it, takes on form and character... Memory is the great organizer of consciousness...the recognition of the past as a completely established fabric of events, continuous in space and time and causally connected throughout. Part Two, The Making of the Symbol, Chapter 15, Virtual Space. Feeling and Form, A theory of art developed from Philosophy in a New Key, Susanne K. Langer, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953. pp.262-264.

(ii) ...“our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. In the theatre of the past that is constituted by memory, the stage setting maintains the characters in their dominant roles. Here, space is everything, for time ceases to quicken memory. The unconscious abides and memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are...at times, dreams go back so far into an undefined dateless past, that clear memories of our childhood home appear to be detached from us. Our past is situated elsewhere”, but memory, recalls them so fervently. The Poetics of Space. Gaston Bachelard, The Orion Press, New York, 1964.

I introduce the personal iconographies, symbols or images in the third stage. I work through all the paintings, with my dreams and past experiences at the forefront of my mind. The fourth stage is a series of repetitions of any or all of the previous stages. The fifth stage is a refinement of the surfaces such that they feel like residues of stage one.



Dubuffet defined his link with reality by drawing inspiration directly from the materials he used. He is especially fascinated by the diverse forms matter can assume, recognizing and exploiting this magical power of suggestion in pictures put together out of sand, iron fillings, leaves and the like.

Figure 3. The Cow with the Subtile Nose
Oil and Enamel on canvas, 35" x 45 %"
Jean Dubuffet, 1954.

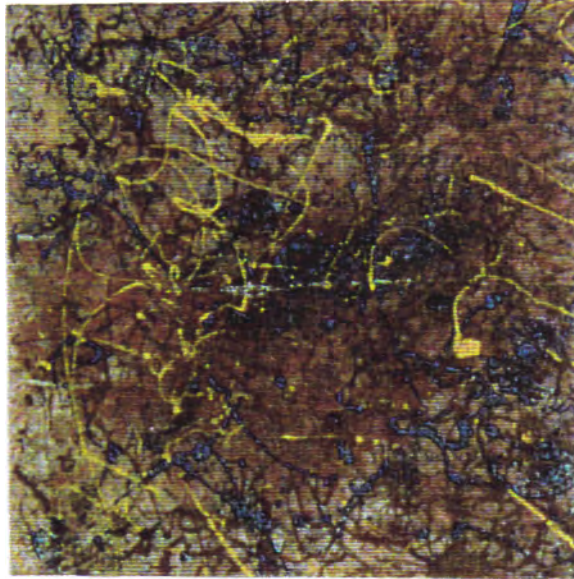


Figure 4. Stage 1: Process
Mixed Media on canvas, 24" x 24"
Garth Bariffe, 2001

b. Process: A description of the five stages, detailing the process through...

Stage 1

I returned to the studio from my adventure at the dollar and hardware stores. ‘Mi jus buy a whole heap a sumptin fi noting.’ At two stores, I purchased non-traditional materials¹⁰. They will give me the same results or even better results than oils or acrylics. I think back to when oils were the materials of the day. Artists then shifted to materials that could be bought in hardware stores. Soon acrylic paints followed in use. I have taken it a step further. I went to the dollar store where I purchased glass and surface cleaners, hydrogen peroxide, dishwashing liquids, spray starch, and my favourite; bleach. Can you imagine the chemistry that is going to take place on these surfaces?

¹⁰ (i). At the turn of the Twentieth Century science provoked artists into revolutionary activities. It was an interest in materials, materials of all sorts and kind, materials in which no previous artists had seen anything worth dealing with...but which had been arrived at by an audacity of imagination, bold enough to formulate concepts far outside the range of conventional common sense. In the early 1920's and 1930's, some artists explored the use of certain modern synthetic materials; use of modern science based media, particularly various kinds of fast drying paints or emulsified pigments. Their use of commercial wall paints, distempers, and metallic paints. In their attempt a protest against conventionally accepted aristocracy of oil paint as the only material worthy of being used in high art... Dubuffet, (fig. 3, pg. 15), usually as a result of an experimental exercise produce pictures in which the material is the sole interest. His interest in surface is obtained by combining materials with different properties, superimposing layers, with various intervals of time between their application, of quick and slow drying paints, a procedure which leads to a whole range of degrees of wrinkling and contraction of various surfaces, or combining oil and aqueous media, materials which induce precipitates in one another. It is a physico-chemical process, which involves the playing with of the sophisticated products of the chemical industry. Texture and Material, The Scientists, Chapter 4. Behind Appearances, A study of the relations between painting and the natural sciences in this century, C. H. Waddington, MIT Press, MA, 1970. pp.172–176.

(ii). Solvents, Diluents and Detergents. Painting Materials: A Short Encyclopedia, Rutherford J. Gettens and George L. Stout, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1966. pp.185–217.

I had already laid out my six stretched, two feet by two feet canvases on the floor. They made one big six foot by four-foot canvas. I had to break them into smaller canvases. The studio spaces here are so small. I normally work on large surfaces. With the smaller stretched canvases, however, it is easier to pick them up. I can allow the materials to move around. I may want the canvases to dry face down or dry face up separately.

I stoop to the floor with my yellow carpenters wood glue. It is my primer. I proceed to pour it onto the unprimed surfaces. With a massaging motion, I spread the glue all over the surfaces, covering every inch of the canvases. The raw canvases are white so I do not prime the canvases with white paints anymore. I work first on the floor because the materials go on the surfaces in a watery state. If they were done on the wall or easel first, nothing would hold to the surfaces. Not too much primer goes on the surfaces. I apply just a thin film of glue. I apply just enough to seal the pores. Too much glue in the first instance would start to crack too early. I had to learn that after many surfaces. I am looking at the surfaces, but there is nothing familiar there yet. They are quiet monotone surfaces. They are ready for my experiences to be put upon them.

With a feverish frenzy, I begin to spray the canvases with liquids of all different colours and textures (fig. 4, pg. 16). Such a burst of energy, joy

and spontaneity, but I exercise my actions with careful precision. I think to myself that this is ‘Action Painting’¹¹: filling spaces. I wish to go further than ‘Action Painting’ by reversing the process. I start by finishing the paintings first. Then I will work backwards. I swing my arms across the surfaces releasing the dishwashing liquids, ammonia, the dollops of melted wax, the bleach, dyes, rubbing alcohol, oven cleaner, spray starch, and toilet bowl cleaner, etc. I flash a sprinkle or two of salt. Why not! I splash a wink of hydrogen peroxide and the glass and surface cleaner, etc. Some drips of house paints with a stick from a can. A spurt or two more of the toilet bowl cleaner, hydrogen peroxide and rubbing alcohol, etc.

There is ‘a chaos’ of colours on the surfaces. It begins to add to my experience. Still it remains just ‘a chaos’ of materials on the surfaces. Nothing is recognizable or familiar as a dream yet. The colours and textures begin to mix and settle into each other. I can hear the popping and crinkling on the surfaces as the vapours rise up into the atmosphere. There is such an unbearable toxic stench that my nostrils become numb.

¹¹ At a certain moment the canvas began to appear as an arena in which to act – rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or “express” an object actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached the easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter...but [rather] there is more to action painting than mere action. To be truly vanguard, the action must arise from a “personal revolt” – a liberation not only from the object but from art itself, from society, and from the past; in short, a personal and political revolution. Each painting re-enacts the drama of liberation; each is an art of self-creation. Chapter 41. *Against the World. Jackson Pollock: An American Saga.* Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Clarkson N. Potter Inc./ Publishers, New York, 1989. pp.704–705.

The chemicals react with the glue and unprimed surfaces. They start to change right before my eyes. I take a breather and allow the first layer of my experience to dry.

I return to the canvases to add another layer of my experience. Glue in hand, once again, I add another layer of primer and the experience begins to come alive. It is like looking below the surface of a glass. Like that 'gully' and 'pond' back home. I crush some paper and light them. I allow the burnt pieces to fall to the surfaces. Stooped very low to the floor, I spray some starch to the areas where the burnt paper fell. The pieces will adhere fully to the surfaces. Another splash of hydrogen peroxide, ammonia, rubbing alcohol, and bleach, and I can hear the cry of the canvases. I drop a sprinkle or two of sawdust and candle wax. At this point, there is a limitless illusion of space and colour on which I can begin to compose. This accumulation of materials throws me in a state of total engagement.

Another layer of primer and I bleach all six surfaces. It quiets the colours and textures. I rest once again. Up on the easel or wall they go and the scouring pad and grater takes to the surfaces. At this point, they are separated, but hung such that they are still in a group. I continue scraping, grating and etching with razors and nails. Only materials firmly

fixed to the surfaces remain. The floor takes most of the materials. All that is left is a residue of space, colour and texture.

With such materials, I can be as extravagant as I want to be. They are not expensive. They seem to work differently from traditional acrylic or oil paints. Acrylic and oil paints leave an opaque quality about them. These non-traditional materials generate a high level of transparency. They emit a soulful feeling. They do not seem to act in a physical way like traditional materials¹². When I think of my dreams, there are no limitations to the nature and inventiveness available when I dream. When I am flying that high up, how can a dog bite my hand? Much less for me to be flying! I sense the same freedom with these non-traditional materials.

Stage 2

Now I am ready to compose the surfaces, (fig 5, pg. 22) but first on the floor let me put a thin film of glue on them. I pour some glue into a plastic orange juice bottle that I have fashioned to look like a water container. I add a little water. With a three-inch house paintbrush, gently wipe glue across all the surfaces. I do not like using brushes. They feel

¹² Artists Pigments: A Handbook of their history and characteristics, Robert L. Feller, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, London, 1986.

impersonal in my hand. With my hand or some other tool I feel I have more of a primal experience with the surfaces.

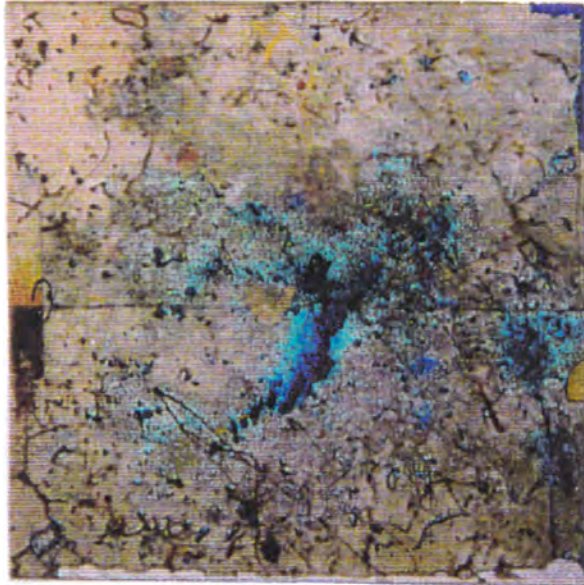


Figure 5. Stage 2: Process
Mixed Media on canvas, 24" x 24"
Garth Bariffe, 2001

After they are dry, I put them back on the wall or easel. Looking at all six surfaces at the same time, I contemplate where the horizontal line should go. The line can be high up in the picture or very low, but all six surfaces will exhibit a certain movement of the horizontal line from one surface to the next. Sometimes when the horizontal line is not working in a particular spot, I will move it. The residue of the other line becomes part of the geometric structure of the picture plane. I am very much concerned with the structural organization of the picture plane¹³ (fig. 6, pg. 24). The horizontal, vertical, diagonal lines, and edges give structure to the colours, textures and spaces. I find putting the horizontal line close to the center of the canvas, such that it cuts the picture plane into halves, most comfortable to the eyes. I begin to draw a vertical line, such that it cuts the horizontal line at a perpendicular angle. Both these lines become compositional devices. They hold the picture

¹³ The Post-Impressionists understood...that art should represent the world, “as seen by a temperament”, to include inner vision as well as extend sensation. They emphasized abstract qualities, symbolic content and expression over the representational function of art, pushing the basic elements of colour, line and composition. Paul Cézanne, faithful to the ethos of sensation, but increasing his concern for solidity and spatial organization, as in his still life, made compositions that were anthropomorphic, expressive of psychological tension, resolution and imbalance, sensation, and ponderation through careful juxtaposition of lines, colours and shapes. Post-Impressionism. Paul Cézanne. Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. James N. Wood. Hudson Hill Press, New York, 2000. pp.136–139.



Cézanne strove to decipher the true essence of reality by reducing natural forms to geometrical prototypes, firmly articulated in formal constructions, to reveal order and unity beyond mere visual experience, - in doing so, he strove to penetrate the heart of nature.

Figure 6. Aix: Rocky Landscape
Oil on canvas, 25 W x 32 1/2"
Paul Cézanne, 1885-87.

plane together. The vertical line works best close to the edges of the canvas. It unknowingly creates an asymmetrical design.

I am looking at my compositions and things are starting to come to me. The colours, textures and spaces are starting to look like cells, organs, biomorphic shapes, bicycle, toys I fashioned from a hose and records, heads and people. The horizontal line is making it feel like a landscape...home!

At the same time, I am looking at the edges and they feel like torn paper. A Book. My diary. The canvases are quiet and airy. I will decide whether a geometric edge in an opaque colour will work in the composition or that an organic edge works better. It is my new approach to space, drawing and composition¹⁴. I once again, and on the floor, and with my three-inch brush, gently apply a thin film of glue over the second stage.

Stage 3

¹⁴ ...a desire to use...linear distortion for expressive means, together with the broad areas of [materials] and reorganization of space, indicating the new interpretation of reality that the Fauves were shortly to pioneer. To suggest air and light by leaving areas of the canvas unpainted, so that the white ground becomes as much a part of the composition as the [material], which creates a sense of fluctuating space, while using the essentials in line and colour to achieve the purpose of contradictory spatial effect. Composition is the art of arranging in a decorative manner, the various elements at the painter's disposal for the expression of his feeling. In a picture, every part will be visible. Fauvism, Concepts of Modern Art, Edited by Nikos Stangos, Harper and Ron Publishers, New York, 1974. pp. 11–29.

Now, I am thinking of it. The multiple viewpoints in my canvases may be the result of working back and forth from floor to wall. At this stage I am

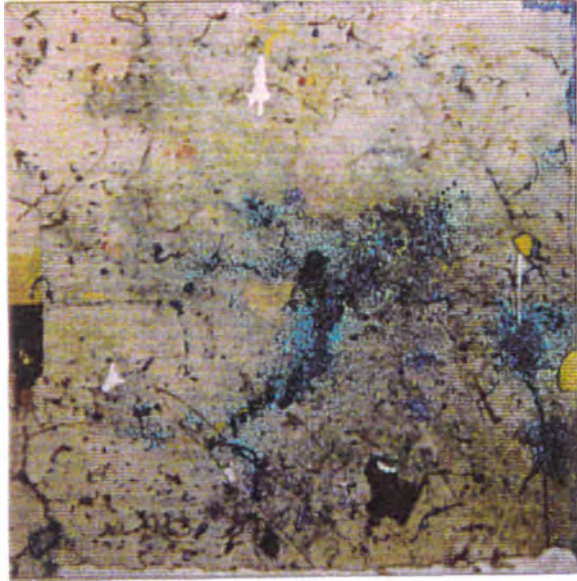


Figure 7. Stage 3: Process
Mixed Media on canvas, 24" x 24"
Garth Bariffe, 2001

trying to make the life on the canvas compatible to mine. I have no fears about making changes in them. Stage two was the acquaintance period. In this stage, I try to enhance the values of colours in the painting. I define them and redefine them. I begin to stare at the canvases. I can see shapes resembling eyes, heads, inside of the body, and aerial views all at the same. It suddenly triggers a memory of one of my dreams.

I search from my diary, the list of images that occur in my dreams. That is when the images, icons and symbols¹⁵ find themselves in the work (fig. 7, pg. 26). It is my particular way of seeing things. It is such an irrational thing, but it makes me think of the importance of my psychic life, imagination¹⁶and experiences¹⁷. Whenever I find an image suitable

¹⁵ (i). d. Meaning in the Garden: Symbolic Usages, Gardens and Language, The Garden as an Art, Mara Miller, State University of New York Press, New York, 1993. pp.158–159.

(ii). Symbols, Carl Jung. Part 3, Dream Theories in the Twentieth Century. Our Dreaming Mind, A sweeping exploration of the role that dreams have played in politics, art, religion, and philosophy, from ancient civilization to the present day, Robert L. Van de Castle, Ballantine Books, New York, 1994. pp. 158–165.

(iii). Iconography, Part III, Glossary of Concepts, Art History and Its Methods, a critical anthology, selection and commentary by Eric Fernie, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1998. pp.345–346.

¹⁶ A particularly good example of the association between art and dreams is the surrealist movement, which began in Europe in the early 1920's. This movement closely paralleled Freud's ideas about dreams, the unconscious, and the repression of irrational urges by the conscious mind. According to Andre Breton's Surrealist Manifesto (1924), "The absolute rationalism which remains in fashion allows for the consideration of only those facts narrowly relevant to our experience...Boundaries have been assigned even to experience"...surrealism attempted to challenge those boundaries and to discover new possibilities of human perception and creativity. Surrealism considered the unconscious its primary resource and surrealist artist were particularly interested in dreams and their powerful sense of freedom. Art and Dreams. The Dream Encyclopedia, James R. Lewis, Gale Research Inc., Thomson Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995. pp.19–20.

¹⁷ This experience occurs continuously because we interact as live creatures with our environment. It is the process of living. Situations of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are involved in this interaction qualify experience with emotion and ideas so that the conscious intent emerges. Sometimes things are experienced but undeveloped in such a way that they are not composed into an experience because of distractions, interruptions and lethargy. Chapter 3, Having an Experience. Art as Experience, John Dewey, A Wide View/ Pedigree Printing, 24th. Impression, 1980. pp.35–57.

for the surfaces, I draw them in and begin masking them with transparent paper. I like working with transparent papers. They make great textures. Transparent papers push things back into space. They shroud things as well. The pictorial element of shape alongside texture, creates the illusion that they come forward at the same time. I like the subtle changes in the surfaces. It allows my eyes to glide from one area of the canvas to the next with the greatest of ease. At this stage the surfaces are intended to tell the stories of my unconscious mind. The meaning of the paintings is in the way they feel. I may not even know what they mean. The more I repeat the images in the paintings I may haply, some day, sense what the pictures might be saying to me.

Stage 4

It is always important that after every stage that I apply a thin film of glue to the surfaces. This separates them. It is also important to bleach the surfaces often. This quiets them. At this stage I may repeat any or all of the previous stages (fig. 8, pg. 29). They may be repeated in any order. At this stage, I try to bring out such relationships as a hard/ soft, transparent/ opaque, cool/ warm feeling of the surfaces. These relationships express the



Figure 8. Stage 4: Process
Mixed media on canvas, 24" x 24"
Garth Barffe, 2001

duality of my experiences. I like this idea of working on six to twelve canvases at a time. They remind me of the way my dreams are at times arranged, in series: repetitions¹⁸. In these six pieces I am excited by the reference to organic structures, balanced by the geometric undertone of the surfaces by vertical, horizontal, diagonal lines and edges. At this point I really sense the multiple viewpoints as the colours and textures create a luminous, floating cloud-like feeling of the surfaces. The quiet airy surfaces, informally gives me both an aerial and frontal landscape perspective. They remind me of home, and the profound aspects of my experiences. The adventures of the ‘duppy house’ and bicycle rides. They are my dreams: my loss, separation from friends and family, travel, relocation, dislocation, isolation, and alienation. The surfaces are a warm/cool, provoking feeling fading from microscopic to panoramic views. The interiors of the paintings are a mixture of peaceful open organic shapes at times translated into edges. The pale images become entwined with the surfaces unconventionally yielding movement in and out of the pictures.

¹⁸ The encounter between psychoanalysis and artistic practice is therefore staged, but only insofar as that staging has already taken place. It is an encounter, which draws its strength from that repetition, working like a memory trace of something we have been through before. It gives back to repetition its proper meaning and status: not lack of originality or something derived, nor the more recent practice of appropriating artistic and photographic images in order to undermine their previous status; but repetition as insistence, that is, as the constant pressure of something hidden but not forgotten – something that can only come into focus now by blurring the field of representation where our normal forms of self-recognition take place. Steve Edwards. *Art and Its Histories: A Reader*, Yale University Press, London, 1998.

Stage 5

I am looking at a piece in the series. It is much like that dream I had in December of 2002. A broad tinted band of otherworldly colours and textures cuts the picture plane such that it is divided into three parts. To the top and left of the canvas, the suggestion of space and air, drizzled with incomplete irregular ochre marks. Below these marks, a large X makes full connection with the edge and invisible vertical line. This vertical line sections to the top left half of the canvas, a pale yellow from horizon line up; the yellow signifying my perturbed state of self. Below this yellow, the vertical line sections to the bottom left half, a pale brown from horizon line down; the brown signifying the idea of nostalgia. An irregular lyrical linear mark descends from this faint brown area, down the picture plane and exits the canvas. The illuminated horizon line, which separates yellow from brown, runs from left to right into the center of the picture. It disappears into the highlighted colours and textures of the spaces. The horizon line greets a lucent area of orange; this space, a suggestion of an interior distance. A small red X sits as a signature in this new space. Above this area and to the right, a vertical line in the distance

channels up, and becomes incomplete biomorphic shapes dancing their way to the horizontal edge of the canvas. This lends itself over to the right where it becomes an opaque edge of blue. The opaque edge leads vertically through and behind this luminous space or band. The blue reappearing at times in this open space as linear marks, as they run through to the end of the canvas. At the bottom and closer to the left, a red vertical line indicating support, intersects the lower horizontal line of the band. Biomorphic lines sweep close to this red line from the interior space and channels off the picture plane. The red vertical line replaces a now invisible vertical line higher up and to the right. The new cloudlike band replaces what once existed there.

“Now that feels like my dream!” (fig. 9, pg. 33). Finally, I thinly apply glue to the surfaces. “They look like encaustic surfaces.” I leave my studio to once again dream and think. To once again, ‘tek mi han mek style.’

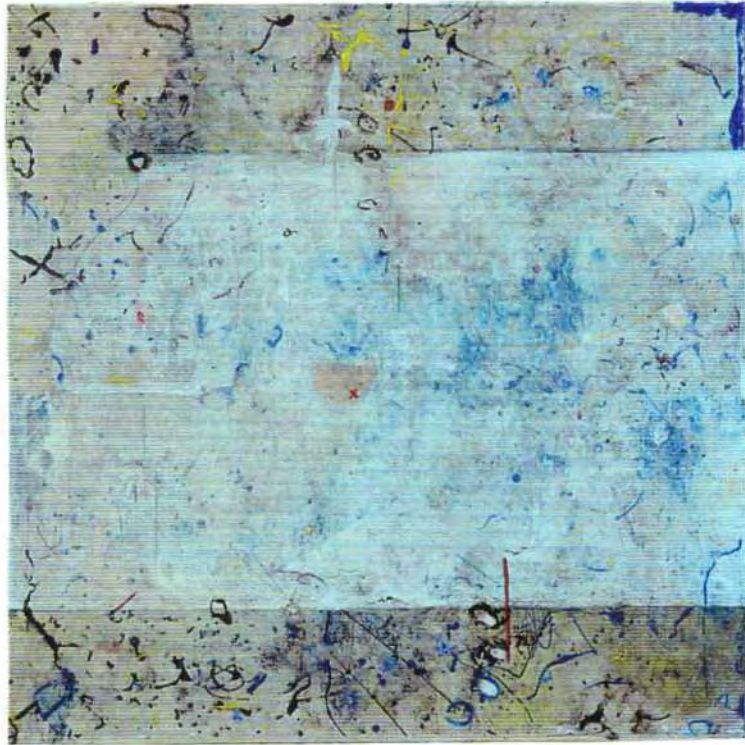


Figure 9. Stage 5: Process
Mixed Media on canvas, 24" x 24"
Garth Bariffe, 2001

Chapter Three:

Future

a. Premonitions: A brief discussion of my thoughts about...

In my paintings I sense the emergence and development of new ways of approaching pictorial space. This pictorial space is the emanation of an illusion, which is as real as the one experienced through the unconscious mind; that of dreams.

The unconscious mind seems to contain premonitions and insights, which once unrestrained, becomes invested through the conscious mind with intelligent creative abilities. This space or illusion in the dream is of a ceaseless time where past, present and future is one. In this space where the drama of life is played out one may grasp at the messages the dreams so desperately try to tell us.

This 'dream space' is not a physical space but one that contains information, which later is set down on a physical two-dimensional plane. The dream seems to be the language, which informs the mind of the contents of this space; its memories and once familiar paths. The dream is the doorway to this space.

b. Premonitions: A brief discussion of my thoughts...

The use of non-traditional materials is the dream, which simulate the illusion or information. These materials are no strangers in their uses because they have become much apart of modern culture and everyday life, and have a connection to the mind as much as a far off studio with traditional materials in mind.

Through the experiments and the experimental nature of the process, the activities will push the possibilities even further. No doubt, dreams will always be a part of my life and so they provide a rich stimulus to unraveling the messages they contain, and taking the paths that lead to new discoveries.

CONCLUSION

The process of working through my paintings is very integral to the way the paintings turn out. Through the stages, I am able to break down the whole into parts and then sense its re-construction. It is in a sense reverse painting. I imagine the painting in its finished state similar to that of my dreams. The answers are contained within the dreams. I then set out on the task of sifting through the messages to arrive at the feeling of the dream.

My childhood memories, recollections and experiences provide me with a good source for working through these *deja vu*'s. Being inventive, resourceful and adventurous marked my creative tendencies and self-discoveries as a child and young adult. The use of these non-traditional materials is a way of reclaiming those formative years of my life. They are significant because they became part of the everyday process of my living. They became very much apart of the household chores, as they found their uses through work and play. It is the structure versus the freedom as they developed into the structure of modern life. These allusions repeat themselves as themes in my paintings - that of a hard/ soft, transparent/ opaque, cold/ warm, geometric/ organic, panoramic/ microscopic and introverted/ extroverted qualities of the surfaces. The reclamation of these memories, recollections and dreams guide my destiny through process. I can

see the destination but I have to make the journey. The experiences then become part of my psyche. They in turn set new dreams in motion.

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