Concurrence

Lisa Samuels responds to Anoushka Akel's exhibition "Wet Contact."

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Tāmaki Makaurau
Auckland.

LISA SAMUELS

On the ground floor of the Michael Lett gallery is the expansive *Wet Physics*. It's an arrival painting, coming across as a welcoming blue opening of physical vision. Its welcome is opaque, medium thick, strata and currents of feeling overlain and perfused with indeterminate arabesques of variant lines. In one perception you enter that painting to get to the further installation – it's a difference foyer, announcing forms that will recur yet not all the forms to come. In another perception, you walk down the narrow stairs and turn to the left and there are three more paintings, three events, in the first alcove of the Lower level gallery. The largest, *Protective Painting (2)*, presents a delicate vertical medial line – a form that happens in two other of the large paintings, though not in the same way. In my first experience of the installation, I had a strong sense of the work of this midline. Its precise placement performs a formal thematic announcement: the pervasion of individuated lines in the atmospheres, temporalities, experiences, and moving bodies of these paintings.

This first medial line form evokes the 'midline' of the human body, a physiological imaginary employed in medicine to help think of the body as an elongated structure. The midline is also like the 'gutter' in bound books: a bibliographic term for the anchor point where the pages on the left side (verso) and the pages on the right side (recto) meet, combine, and effectively disappear: where anchoring is also non-identity. So the medial line of *Protective Painting (2)* divides, doubles and joins the work, doubles, mirrors and tethers my viewing, and exponentially increases time, motion, exchange, transference.

This painting has also very lightly scored, and partial, horizontal midlines, yet to consider midlines I'll refer to the 'first' *Protective Painting*, displayed in the gallery's Vault. This painting can be perceived as a human torso figuration, shifting from upper to lower view, from blood to bone to a pubis both abstract and hirsute. Here the layering is not midline but layers, crossers, strata of body brought into relation with strata of earth and strata of the canvas. Seven shifts to go from clavicle to pubis and back again. Do I read the painting from lower to upper? How are the sides framing, holding my vision?

Underneath the human body's flesh is the 'linea alba', a midline in the torso this time. It's both 'white' (alba) as tendon and bone and, for this painting, white as conceptual, like a graphing translation of structure beneath the evident body surface. And like the flesh of the canvas that inheres with the art oils it's taken on. The two slight gestures to horizontal midline in *Protective Painting (2)* are, for this witness, in a reflective relation with such somatic midlines. Thus the dialectical exponential forces I mentioned before, in terms of the vertical medial line, are rushed across with alternative. That alternative can be seen as oppositional, as resistance forces clashing each other, and also can be considered as additive to the both/and energies of the painting.

These paintings are, in many ways, bodily: the body in atmosphere, the body in view and movement. They feature deep surfaces of resistance and thick occurrence – as in *Hiss*, another expansive painting in a different area of the gallery's Lower level. *Hiss* occurs with at least three depths of doubling: it's got mirror and shadow, and it's got re-occurrence in this doubling. Its movement feels baseline vertical, pushed into directional indeterminacy at the top areas. Yet this baseline is doubled over by purple wave, by filmic layers (as in direct film), and by an interruptive humour in representation such as a funny eel form curl in the lower right. The bodies in these paintings include nonhumanimals, too.

Anoushka Akel
Wet Physics
2021
(oil, pastel and wax pencil on canvas,
1000 x 1500mm)

Anoushka Akel
Protective Painting (2)
2021
(oil and wax pencil on canvas,
1000 x 1500mm)

This possibility of swirl, medium eel and thicker other-body, enters several paintings – another example is in *Passage*, whose visual relations are kin to Japanese. Not least because of the goldfish ghostbodies, but more because of the strong river move from the bottom of the painting, a continuation out from a dark river that is also, conceptually and perspectivally, on this perigee side of the painting where the viewer's body is standing, so that the thick swirl can be experienced as coming out from your own body fluids and energies. The river-thick line is an ascending firmness of black, emerging thick as definite ink, that expends toward the top when it narrows and joins some other imaginary continuance in apogee.

The more I think about the relations among these thirteen paintings the more their continuities and distinctions expand. They are both likeness and difference together. Artists have themes that are principally *formal*, whatever their media. Traversals in lines, bodies, strata perform movement, beckoning, continuation inside and outside the paintings. The beckoning stays with me in terms of the relation of the canvas itself with the paintings it supports, it hosts and invites and reflects, canvas merged with infusions. The canvas as flesh relating with its immanent guests, canvas as bone and sand (ocean's refined bones) and as granular film stock. These paintings perform with the canvas in these ways. Their framings shift lines of entrance, of movement, so that 'looking at the painting' becomes a matter of entering and connecting from sides, tops, bottoms, surface, depth – the penumbras of the paintings are intensely active. The 'frame' is forces all around the paintings. The two paintings on unstretched canvas intensify that perception, perhaps, though in those cases the penumbral force feelings are rendered gently slack, vulnerable, more subject with the breezes of exterior energy.

In my second time with the moving connected bodies of these paintings, I felt more aware of the formal theme of individuated lines – they flow through, as though realizing wet electric currents, arteries/veins, and nerves among many of the paintings. Medium fine lines slowly swirl, lines also reach, peak, and bunch, and also animalesque scribble bodies and slight partial encirclements move, and *current*. Lines too are bodies, of force, interruption, overlay and coexistence. In *Examiner (5)*, lines are liquid electric with the painting's cloud-water-perspex upper ground floating over its texture noise abdomen.

Another different-related feature of the paintings is this texture noise, or texture static if one thinks of treated signals (sonic signals, visual signals like static on old TVs). I prefer texture noise as it summons the multi-sensory and absent-presence energies of its occurrence in some of the paintings. This formal attention is like bringing out the flesh of canvas with differentiation (colours, oils) and overlay, a scraping effect to show depth and surface and emergence. This texture noise, in areas of *Attention Seeking, Examiner (5)* and *An Unfenced Place*, reoccurs to be a formal pattern in its areas – *Being Marthe* too has a band of texture noise. The emergence/scoring/evocation/creation of these texture noises is most curious to me, as it's a state of the painting and of the canvas – as though you could bring the canvas into a realization of itself via prinking, coaxing, and doing that organically, out of the available strata of dialectically infused canvas. In relation, that is, to vision and embodiment and movement and noise that co-occur and yet 'cannot' exist in the apparent silence, apparent surface stillness, of the paintings.

Visiting the installation is several kinds of experience, and there is another distinct aspect to note: the spiky obtrusions of *Hiss (2), Attention Seeking, and Group Portrait (Red Eye).* The first performs (among other energies) sound teeth sunrays arteries lateral rivers, and the second – which feels like painting actants breaking formation and forming anew – performs colour as the figure, a figuration tethered with two white cut-through lateral pourings like a river shifting its current and a twinned and provisional linea alba rendered horizontal like liquid bone. What I mean by painting actants shifting formation is that the two paintings come across like cousins or continuities of movement acts. The third painting has an outdoor world feel, batik, *ojos*, like many travels overlain: *Group Portrait (Red Eye)* intensifies its experience-thick reports by being an unstretched canvas, hence provisional. It performs a medial time-curtain roughly in its vertical middle. One effect of this mediality is to shift the visual fields left-forward and right-recessed. This shift is yet a different example of the layered kinetic dimensionality, and the legible properties of there-not-there film, drama, and dance, in the forms of these bodily paintings.

Anoushka Akel
Protective Painting
2021
(oil on canvas,
600 x 450mm)

Anoushka Akel
Examiner (5)
2021
(oil on canvas,
600 x 450mm)

Yet another angle of interaction is the wet touchpoints, gleaming that occurs. The installation is titled *Wet Contact*, and the wet electric interactions of our bodies come in to relation with the actual and conceptual wetness of these paintings. They like us have changed: they were wet all through, and they emerge presented now, their wetness (like our submerged bodily wetness) in abeyance at surfaces and in actuality, in time, in negativity (the unheard sonics of the paintings), in potential and constitutively. *An Unfenced Place*, expansive in the Vault room, is a big darker blue feeling painting encounter, chiming through difference with the cool blue atmosphere of the exhibit's first painting, *Wet Physics. An Unfenced Place* is more lazuli dance-body rivers moving with and 'under' an upper blue. It retains gleam streaks, thickened wetness points left and right, in upper and lower strata. These gleam streaks are wet-and-not-wet concurrently; they are another example of ontological antinomies, both/and, in these paintings. *Concurrence.*

Lisa Samuels works with experimental writing, multi-modal art, and relational theory in transnational life. Her many books include *Tomorrowland* (2009), *Anti M* (2013), *Symphony for Human Transport* (2017), and *The Long White Cloud of Unknowing* (2019), and her theories of deformance, autography, and distributed centrality have wide circulation. A new poetry book, *Breach,* was published in 2021 by Boiler House Press. Lisa is Professor of English & Drama at The University of Auckland.

Anoushka Akel
Hiss
2022
(oil on canvas,
1000 x 1500mm)

Anoushka Akel
Passage
2021
(oil on canvas,
350 x 450mm)

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