

Katy Moran
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(This article was written in 2009)

Katy Moran: Wasabi Without Tears

Katy Moran is an artist who works on small-scale acrylic canvases. Her paintings are buttery, sensual, energetic and rather seductive. I saw her recent show at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York. The painting I wanted to take home with me was *Wasabi Without Tears*.

She is quoted on the Tate website as saying the following:

'They're finished when I can see a figurative element in them ... through the paint I'm searching for the thing it reminded me of, or suggested to me, and trying to get close to that thing.' The exuberant spontaneity of the gesture is genuine rather than contrived, Moran comments, 'When I'm making a painting, I get quite excited by how close to awful I can push it, while getting something quite lovely from it as well'.

As a reference for her conviction that 'somehow unintentional paintmarks convey a more convincing reality,' she cites painter Francis Bacon's comment during an interview with art historian David Sylvester, 'An illustrational form tells you through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas non-illustrational form works first on sensation and then slowly leads back into the fact.'¹

Painting for me is an alchemical notion where form can simultaneously come to exist and fall apart. Her mode of working is one I can relate to in the sense that it is almost an alchemical searching in the material itself. A presence of physical form is sought in the mark: which alludes to the sensation. The merge and the magic happen when this doesn't function as an illustration within the painting, but it integrates, becomes associative form and therefore open for the viewer.

But what exactly are unintentional paint marks? Are they marks that aren't pre-thought, that appear to come into being by themselves? That they appear to have this self-accountable quality both in the eyes of the painter and of the viewer? Are they fluid, or perhaps a jarring fluid friction? These painterly decisions stem from the materiality of paint, as well as a response to the activity, which has already taken and is taking place on the canvas. It is a searching to a point where form works first on sensation and then slowly leads back into the fact.

I don't think Bacon means by this the *fact* of the materiality or the *fact* of the content but the merge of the two. Bacon's *fact* finds its precursor in Cézanne. They were both pre-occupied with painting sensation, with recording the *fact*. 'Cézanne said that the painter must look beyond a landscape to its chaos: he spoke of the need to always paint at close range, to no longer see the wheat field, to be too close to it, to lose oneself in the landscape, without landmarks, to the point where one no longer sees forms or even matters, but only forces, densities, intensities.'² In his essay examining Deleuze on Bacon, Daniel W. Smith proceeds to explain that

'what Deleuze calls *haptic* vision is precisely this "sense" of colours. *The tactile-optical space* of representation presents a complex hand-eye relation: an ideal optical space that nonetheless maintains virtual referents to tactility (depth, contour, relief). From this two types of subordination can occur: a subordination of the hand to the eye in *optical space* (Byzantine art)³, and a strict subordination of

¹ Katy Moran, Tate website:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/artnow/strangesolution/essay.shtm>

² Daniel W. Smith, Deleuze on Francis Bacon: The Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*

³ Smith illustrates that '*Deleuze shows how, in the history of art, this tactile-optical world [is broken*

the eye to the hand in a *manual* space (Gothic art). But what Deleuze, following [19th century Austrian art historian Alois] Riegl, terms *haptic* space (from the Greek verb *aptō*, to touch) is a space in which there is no longer a hand-eye subordination in either direction. It implies a type of seeing distinct from the optical, a close-up viewing in which “the sense of sight behaves just like the sense of touch.” Riegl argued that haptic space was the invention of Egyptian art and bas-relief, in which form and ground are experienced as being on the same plane, requiring a close vision. Deleuze in turn suggests that a new Egypt rises up in Bacon’s work, this time composed uniquely in colour and by colour: the juxtaposition of pure tones arranged gradually on the flat surface produces a properly haptic function of the eye (the planar character of the surface creates volumes only through the different colours that are arranged on it). In this regard, Deleuze will place Bacon in the great tradition of Turner, Monet, Cézanne, and Van Gogh – the great modern colourists who replaced relations of value with relations of tonality.’⁴

Fact implies truth, that it is already a given. But for me, the act of painting is a searching for what is not a given (to me). And at the same time I strive for the works to inhabit a certain self-awareness in order that they can function alone and are deemed finished. I am aware that this is such an abstract notion and it is one that will no doubt continuously be a question within my practice. Perhaps drawing on Moran’s title *Wasabi Without Tears*, you can see this as a metaphor for the abstract suspense state in which the painting has to remain in order to function. That moment of suspense: the hot sushi accompaniment that is wasabi hitting the tongue: the unintentional sensational aspect. The tears being the moment that washes this away. To have no tears is to allow the unintentional to remain in a state of suspense: an optical relational-climax where hand and eye merge to access *fact*.

down and developed into] two different directions: toward the exposition of a purely optical space, in which space is freed from its references to even a subordinate tactility (Byzantine art); and toward the imposition of a violent manual space, in which the hand begins to express itself in an independent way, producing a line that delineates nothing, and which the eye can barely follow (Gothic art).

Extract from Daniel W. Smith, Deleuze on Francis Bacon: The Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*

· idem Daniel W. Smith