PAINTED IMPRINTS OF THE BODY IN TIME

By

MICHAEL HUBBARD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Fine Arts

MAY 2011
To the Faculty of Washington State University

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of MICHAEL HUBBARD find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Michelle Forsyth, Chair

Maria DePrano, Ph.D.

Marianne Kinkel, Ph.D.
PAINTED IMPRINTS OF THE BODY IN TIME

Abstract

by Michael Hubbard
Washington State University
May 2011

Chair: Michelle Forsyth

This thesis discusses the work included in my MFA exhibition. While several individual artworks are shown, I consider them collectively one piece. Each can be viewed on its own, but a network of relationships runs between them, and when viewed as a whole, aspects of one will add to the content of the others. By placing images appropriated from Yves Klein and Carolee Schneemann within a single space I am urging the viewer to see connections between them. I have also included myself in the conversation by placing the artifacts of my production on view. The goal of this project is to create a physical and conceptual space in which a network of ideas is between three artists and their work is made apparent. The connections I have highlighted involve the subject of painting as it pertains to representations of time, touch and the human body. The following pages will discuss in detail the relationships between Yves Klein’s Anthropometry paintings, Carolee Schneemann’s film Fuses and my own work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTIONS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Model</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Painter</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Other Painter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Plagiarist</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEMES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Time</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bodies</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Touch</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1; *Double Audience*, 2011 ........................................................................................................24
2. Figure 2; Michelle 27 February 1960, photographs by Shunk-Kender .................................24
3. Figure 3; Frame from *Fuses*, by Carolee Schneemann ..............................................................25
4. Figure 4; *3660 Paintings of Carolee Schneemann* installation view ...........................................25
5. Figure 5; *The Plagiarist* ......................................................................................................................26
INTRODUCTION

Approaching my section of the 2011 MFA Thesis Exhibition, the first thing viewers will see is an installation titled *Double Audience*. (Figure 1) Three large canvas panels hang from the ceiling, parallel to the wall and to each other. There is enough space between them to walk through. A collection of small black and white portraits hangs on the opposite wall. They are arranged as a sort of audience, looking out at the pieces of canvas suspended before them. Walking around the side, the viewer will see that the fronts of the panels are painted with loose grids of repeating imagery: on the first what appear to be miniature imprints of female bodies; second, a sequence of three paintings of a woman making the sort of imprint seen in the first panel, repeated in and out of order; and the third shows close-up views of the face of the woman in the second. There are images cut out of each panel, allowing views through, to other canvases or to the hanging portraits on the wall. These views shift constantly as the viewer moves around and through the piece. The essential purpose of this piece is to create a contrast between the frozen, painted audience and the living audience moving in the space.

Like all of my work included in this show, *Double Audience* makes reference to a specific moment in the history of painting. The basis for this body of work is the shifting of artists’ identities following World War II. I use appropriated imagery to access specific people and stories, and I combine and rearrange them to create new narratives. In much the way that imagery shifts in and out of view when maneuvering around *Double Audience*, various relationships, ideas and meanings become apparent when investigating my work as a whole. This paper will explore the most important of these shifting relationships and concepts – time, the body, and touch – as they relate to my work and to two particular
postwar artists. The works included in the exhibition function as a whole, creating conceptual connections between me, Yves Klein and Carolee Schneemann.

CHARACTERS

1. The Model

The images on the second and third panels of *Double Audience* are painted copies of three black and white photographs from a series of four. (Figure 2) The photos show a sequence of events, beginning with a young woman standing nude, arms lifted above her head. In this first image, the painted imprint of another model's body is visible on the wall behind her. A male figure, the artist Yves Klein, stands next to her, nearly cropped out, his hand balled into a paint-soaked fist. In the next two images, the artist covers the front of the woman's body with paint, starting with her right breast. The final image shows Klein guiding her away from the wall where she has just left a dark imprint of her body. Throughout the sequence, the woman's expression is distant and withdrawn. No emotion can be read on her face, and, paired with the constant presence of Klein's hand on her wrist, leading her, her consciousness seems absent from her actions.

Yves Klein was a painter and early conceptual artist. Throughout the late 50s, he had been producing mostly monochrome paintings, usually in his patented bold ultramarine blue. He was part of a wide-ranging movement of spiritually motivated monochrome painters, interested in creating representations of the infinite, the sublime, and, in Klein's case, the void.¹ In 1960 he began the project described above, which he titled *Anthropometries*. It involved hiring young women to press their paint-smeared bodies

against large sheets of paper or canvas. In the earliest examples of these exercises, Klein would apply the paint to the women’s bodies directly with his hands. He later removed his touch entirely, donning clean white gloves and directing the women to paint themselves and each other. The theatrical action of the Anthropometries was as important as the paintings themselves. Many of the sessions were documented with photographs, guests were invited, and a few were conceived as public events. Klein always appeared in formal attire, a stark contrast to the exposed skin of his models. His stated intent was to represent health and human vitality. He also suggested that the work was androgynous, though there were only two instances in which male bodies were used, and in the overwhelming majority of paintings, the curvy, voluptuous imprint is very evidently female.

I spent three months trying to identify the woman in the photographs. The photos I’ve described appear in many books and articles about Klein’s work, and they are readily available through Klein-themed internet searches, but her name is never mentioned. The Yves Klein archive identifies the date and location where the photographs were shot: it was the evening of February 27th, 1960 in Klein’s Paris apartment. The type of action is well documented in written descriptions and photographs of other such sessions (some of which do include names of other models). For a while, I was convinced that the woman in question was in fact Klein’s wife, based on visual comparisons of about a dozen photographs. I attempted to indentify her based on the imprint of her body, searching for similar forms in images of the many Anthropometry paintings, some of which are signed by the women involved. I sent letters to Yves Klein scholars soliciting information about this

2 Sidra Stich, Yves Klein (New York: Hatje Cantz, 1995), 177.
4 Stich, 177.
mysterious woman, and I eventually received an email from Kerry Brougher, curator of the 2010-2011 traveling Klein retrospective “Into the Void: Full Powers,” identifying her as Michelle. He could not find a last name. Here is a person whose image is firmly ensconced in the history of art, but her identity is almost completely absent. She shares this condition with countless other anonymous models throughout the history of art.

2. The Painter

Four years later after Michelle’s documented participation in Klein’s paintings, across the sea, in New York, Carolee Schneemann began working on a film. She and her partner, James Tenney, recorded a series of their sexual acts over the course of three years. They worked together, taking turns holding the mini Bolex camera, or else propping it up or hanging it from a lamp or ceiling fan. The light reflected from their naked bodies traveled through the camera lens and was chemically transferred to the 35-millimeter film. Their bodies were equal, and no experience was too intimate to show. Schneemann’s cat, Kitch, is a constant presence in the background, silhouetted on a windowsill, watching with detached disinterest or looking away.

This footage became the basis for Schneemann’s film *Fuses*, completed in 1967. It is essentially a filmic montage; shots of trees, windows, close-ups of the cat, and other imagery intercut the sexual images, which were themselves highly edited. For example, in the final version of the film, approximately 1.5 seconds of Schneemann performing fellatio is broken up in to four sections, interrupted by long shots of a window dappled with sunlight passing through the trees outside. The film footage was extensively worked over and altered by

---

hand through the application of acid, chemicals and paint, as well as the physical collage of multiple frames, baking and exposure to the elements. In its finished state, the film was so thick with extra material that it could not be copied by film printing technologies existing at the time. This process of applying other materials gives the film a painterly appearance. Recognizable forms are often lost as their colors are reduced to tones of green and blue or yellow and red, while their edges are obscured or swallowed entirely by strokes of paint or bursts of chemical burns. In many frames, the imagery dissolves into abstraction. (Figure 3)

The abstraction and painterliness of the film were no accident. Schneemann attended school as a painter, working then in an abstract figurative style. Much of her early work, as she moved away from traditional paint on canvas, involved the combination of paint and sculptural elements along with her own body. She was closely associated with performance artists and experimental filmmakers at the time. She worked with the Judson Dance Company, posed in Robert Morris's 1964 Site performance, and associated with Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg among others. Her friend Stan Brakhage was creating physically altered films well before Schneemann’s experiments. She has stated that Fuses was made as a direct reaction to Brakhage’s film of his wife giving birth. Like Brakhage, she has employed the visual language of painting, along with the physical action of applying material to a surface, to the medium of film to create what is essentially a moving painting. Describing the film, Schneemann stated: “As a painter, paint is the power of extending whatever you see or feel, of intensifying it, of reshaping it. So I wanted the

---

8 Ibid. 43.
9 Ibid. 45.
bodies to be turning into tactile sensations of flickers... resembling some aspect of the erotic sensation in the body which is not a literal translation. It is a painterly, tactile sensation...”

My ongoing video project, titled *12600 Paintings of Carolee Schneemann*, is a faithful copy of the original film. (Figure 4) I am translating the film frame-by-frame into paint on canvas. Each frame, once painted, is photographed, and then painted over until the canvas becomes too heavily textured to work with, and the photographs are combined as a stop-motion video. The title refers to the ultimate number of paintings, or individual frames, that will be required to recreate the entire twenty-one minute film. This process will most likely take slightly more than three years, and the film is being shown in the museum exhibition at its current length of five minutes, with the number in the title changed to 3660. This project makes literal the original film’s close connection with the practice of painting by transforming the imagery into a massive accumulation of paintings arranged in a sequence to simulate motion. The change is evident in the visible texture of the paint as layers of images are built up on top of one another, and in a slight flickering quality due to subtle changes in light while photographing the paintings.

3. The Other Painter

There is one important character whose story binds the other stories together, though he is not visually present in the exhibition. This person is Jackson Pollock. He is an immediate artistic predecessor of both Klein and Schneemann, and the works I have described by both of these artists are, in different ways, reactions to Pollock’s actions and identity. Abstract Expressionism had been the dominant form of painting in America throughout the 1950s and it had the effect of setting up a standard of decidedly masculine

---

10 Ibid. 43.
artistic identity. This identity was tied to the gestural mark and physical movement of the action painters, chief among them, Jackson Pollock.

The painted canvas began to be seen less as an object or image, but rather as a stage for action. Pollock laid his canvas on the floor and walked across it, dripping, pouring and flinging paint, leaving behind footprints, handprints and cigarette butts. Harold Rosenberg stated, “what always matters is the revelation contained in the act.”

11 The canvas, once hung on the museum wall, only matters in that it is a record of the artist’s actions. As Fionna Barber has explained, photographs of Pollock at work reveal the masculine nature of the painter’s actions. He is dressed in manly working-class attire, boots, work pants and t-shirt. His body is often shown tensed in mid-gesture, his face focused. 12 The wet paint flung from the end of a paintbrush and splashed across the canvas surface is often compared to ejaculation, encoding the very gesture as stereotypically masculine. 13 Hans Namuth’s photographs and film of Pollock at work were widespread by the 1960’s and Klein and Schneemann, and both Klein and Schneemann were undoubtedly familiar with them.

In Klein’s Anthropometries, he creates a situation similar to the creation of an Abstract Expressionist painting, replacing the brush and physical hand of the artist with the nude body of a subordinate woman. The French artist, and friend of Klein, Georges Mathieu was one of the first to stage painting as a performative act. He was inspired by Pollock’s activities within the frame of the canvas, and Klein’s performances were inspired in part by Mathieu. 14 The figurative stage of canvas on which Pollock moved becomes a literal stage in

12 Barber, 153.
13 Ibid. 164.
the case of Klein’s public performances. In this way the Anthropometries created a different archetypal masculine artist. Where Pollock wore working class clothes and allowed himself to be splattered and spotted with paint, Klein separated himself from the physical action of the work, taking up the position of director. He dressed in formal attire, donned pristine white gloves and issued commands from a distance. While his masculinity in the form of physical strength was played down, the power of his social position was highlighted as he played the part of a powerful male presence controlling the movements of naked women.

In 1958 Allan Kaprow wrote “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” a text that would prove to be profoundly influential to artists of the 60’s. In this essay he describes Pollock’s impact on the world of art, ways in which his work changed the way art is approached. “What we have then,” he wrote, “is art that tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself.” Kaprow suggests that Pollock’s shift toward painting as a performance acted out on the painted surface will inspire artists of the sixties to be “preoccupied with ... the space and objects of our everyday life.” Schneemann was just such an artist. Her early work pushed the boundaries of painting into lived environments, and much of her performance work in the Sixties involved the “specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch,” that Kaprow predicted.

Fuses, more specifically, uses the vocabulary of experimental film prominent at that time. Artists described as “Structural” filmmakers worked directly with the surface of the film to make its material apparent when projected. This kind of filmmaking is connected

---

16 Ibid, 7.
17 Ibid.
to Abstract Expressionist painting in two ways. First, there is a similar gestural act in the alteration of the film surface. Second, the focus on characteristics unique to the medium of film parallels post-war abstract painting’s trajectory toward medium specificity. In *Fuses*, the Abstract Expressionist gesture is present in the application of paint and other materials to the surface of the film. Some frames, in which recognizable imagery is covered or dissolved, could pass for abstract paintings. In this way, Schneemann is using the language of painting, often specifically the forms of painting developed by Pollock and other Abstract Expressionists (the gesture, the act of painting as performance) and using them to carve out a space for a female identity.

3. The Plagiarist

I am a male painter working in the early part of the Twenty-first Century, looking back at two previous moments in time and taking things from them. This isn’t really plagiarism. My work is my own, and I give credit where credit is due, but I don’t mind identifying myself (with some irony), as *plagiari*st. The word derives from the Latin *plagiarius*, meaning kidnapper or plunderer. It would not be unfair to accuse me of plundering the past, kidnapping images, histories and stories. I take and remake images; I rewrite histories. The root of *plagiarius* is *plaga*: “net.” The plunderer and the kidnapper capture with a net, but I like to think of what I do as building a net, or more appropriately a network, taking images, ideas, stories, weaving them together to create something new (or a new way of approaching something old).

My work consists primarily of paintings, and my paintings are predominantly copied from appropriated imagery, ranging from other paintings to photographs to video stills. The works tend to be focused around individual moments in time, taking characters from
the history of art and placing them in conversation or contrast with others. There is a strong element of storytelling in this. This is similar to current trends of artists described by Nicolas Bourriaud as “semionauts,” as their work involves explorations of symbols and signs borrowed from various areas of human culture.\textsuperscript{19} The borrowed content is then remixed to create a new whole.\textsuperscript{20} I see my work as a collected narrative composed of individual stories appropriated from history. They are visual stories and tend to be less literal, more difficult to read and more open for interpretation than the written word. The story I’m telling now involves the aforementioned Michelle, Carolee Schneemann, Yves Klein and myself, along with a cast of secondary characters.

At the surface my interest in these two people revolves around the subject of painting. I am fascinated with the fact that painting can be many things at once. It can be both object and illusion, and the viewer can recognize these contradicting conditions simultaneously. Throughout the latter half of the Twenty-first Century there was constant debate about the ideal function of painting. The arguments were often ridiculous, but I have found a limitless source of intriguing material in the complexities and eccentricities of the characters involved and the vitality and rancor of the debate. The specific works I’ve discussed from Schneemann and Klein are positioned at key moments in painting’s history. Klein’s \textit{Anthropometries} occurred at the end of painting’s reign of supremacy over other media (when formalism faltered, just before painting’s supposed death) and Schneemann’s film was made just after its fall from grace when a world of new artistic possibilities was opened and painting was generally not among them. Beyond the generalized subject and

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 41.
history of painting, these two artists, and the specific works, represent two other key ideas: the body and time, which will be dealt with in detail later.

First, I want to discuss myself in relation to the two artists. The three of us are separated, me from them much more than they are from each other; the points in their lives I’m discussing are only separated by a span of seven years and, as Schneemann lived for a while in England, a minimum distance of the divide between London and Paris.\textsuperscript{21} Approximately half a century and (at this point) several thousand miles divide both of them from me (and of course the forbidding barrier between life and death separates Schneemann and I from Klein), but I feel a sense of nearness nonetheless. It is a sort of proximity only possible in our contemporary moment, provided by an unimpeded access to information. Plagiarist that I am, I throw out my (inter)net and pull in pictures and texts. I am able to know the artists and the model based on my ability to read words written by and about them, to see photographs of them, and to view their work without ever being in the same place with it. This is a limited sort of nearness and knowingness, and I am keenly aware of its limitations. The perceived proximity is an illusion because the distances between us are real and my access is mediated.

Mediation is an important aspect of my work, and, as a subject, it ties together all other aspects. The works of art I am appropriating and making reference to all have indexical beginnings.\textsuperscript{22} Mary Ann Doane describes an index as “evacuated of content (because it) designates something without describing it.”\textsuperscript{23} Physical examples would

\textsuperscript{21} This explanation of geographic separation ignores their temporal separation. Klein was already dead when Schneemann showed her film at several London venues in 1967, but it is possible that Michelle was still in Paris at that time.
\textsuperscript{22} An index is a type of linguistic sign that indicates an existence by direct reference without visually representing it.
\textsuperscript{23} Doane, 133.
include footprints, which are records of the presence of feet but which do not resemble feet. Klein’s *Anthropometry* paintings are indexical references to living bodies. The prints were made from a physical mark left on sheets of paper by contact with paint-soaked human skin. The photographs of Michelle taking part in the imprinting action are indexes made by light touching a photochemical surface. In both cases a sense of authenticity is leant to the object because the process of their creation dictates that their subject was present. Schneemann’s film is a bit more complicated. At its beginning stage it also uses photographic processes, imprinting the image of the two lovers’ bodies on a strip of film through reactions between light and chemical, but after that point, the film was altered by the artist. This action obscures the photographic index without necessarily taking away its authenticity, and, at the same time, it adds a physical mark, an index of the presence of the artist’s body in the second stage of the film’s development.

By the time I access the images of the artists’ work, their indexical nature is already degraded by passage through digital media – downloaded from the internet, scanned from books – and the imprint of a female body in one of Klein’s paintings has been converted to a complex cipher of ones and twos in a computer file. Further mediation occurs as I make work based on the imagery, fluxuating between manual and digital means.24 On one panel of *Double Audience*, for example, I recreated several of Klein’s *Anthropometries* in miniature, using stencils made from digital prints of the originals. The presence of the original body is removed, and an unrepeatable image is made repeatable through the intervention of the stencil. At the same time, the repetitions are all unique, because the brush marks within the stencil’s borders are made by hand. In making paintings of digital images I am retrieving

---

24 The word *manual* comes from *manu* for “hand” while *digital* originates with *digitus* or “finger.” In its contemporary definition, *digital* refers to the use of numbers in computer systems and the two have become opposites, fingers removed from the hand.
them from the digital while also marking the presence of my body through my application of paint.

I am also interested in the expansion of the medium of painting that happens in the works that Klein and Schneemann created. In her essay “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” Mary Ann Doane states “a medium is a medium by virtue of both its positive qualities (the visibility, color, texture of paint, for instance) and its limitations, gaps, incompletions (the flatness of the canvas, the finite enclosure of the frame).” 25 A medium is defined by its limitations, and definitions are subject to change because the boundaries are permeable. 26 Most artists will remain within the comfortable confines, but a few will break through and find new spaces. When the boundaries of a medium are breached its definition changes, and the new possibilities are extended to everyone working in the medium.

Pollock's work expanded the medium of painting to include the action itself. In transforming the medium, according to Allan Kaprow, “he also destroyed painting.” 27 He challenged the previous definition of the medium and succeeded in changing its boundaries. Klein and Schneemann then challenged the standards set by Pollock.

THEMES

1. Time

The traditional definition of the medium of painting is pigment suspended in a binder dried on a support. This does not leave room for motion. Movement can be represented, but once it has dried the paint itself does not move. The painting is still. They

25 Doane, 130. Parentheses are hers.
26 Ibid. 131.
can capture an eternal moment, a scene cut out of time, or offer the suggestion of narrative through depiction of a sequence of events. The viewer can imagine time stretched out before and after whatever was depicted in the painting or read connections between individual panels or sequential images, but the painting itself is forever still. Pollock’s action paintings function as a record of his movements in their creation, but when hung on the wall, they too only allude to action. Schneemann and Klein (along with many others at the time and since then) challenged this limitation.

Klein’s *Anthropometries* combined painting with performance so that a key part of the project was the physical movement of nude models in space. He repeatedly placed emphasis on the action and his part as choreographer and director of the models’ movements.\(^\text{28}\) The creations of the paintings were set up as events. The most famous instance, dubbed *Anthropometries of the Blue Epoch*, took place at the Rive Droit gallery in Paris. It was attended by a group of social elite and included the performance of Klein’s *Monotone Symphony*. For forty minutes, three nude women covered themselves with paint and made imprints on paper tacked to the walls and floors, to a mixture of disapproval, confusion and bemusement among audience members.\(^\text{29}\) While not all of the paintings were made as large-scale public spectacles, there was always some sort of audience in attendance, if only photographers, and the process was always a critical part of the work. The paintings themselves remain within the traditional confines of the medium; they are static paint on paper, existing only as a record of the movement and the time-based spectacle. In this way they are like any painting. This innovation acts more as a merger of

---


\(^{29}\) Ibid.
media than a redefinition of painting’s limitations, but it does serve to expand the understanding of painting beyond the object and into its creation.

Schneemann also made several performative works in which bodies (hers and others) interacted with paint and painted surfaces, but her film went further. *Fuses* moved outside the boundaries of painting. The altered photographic imagery still resembles painting, and the surface of the film is built up with material (paint, chemicals, collage), keeping the work within the realm of painting, but it is not static. When projected, it moves and breathes. In its motion the painting is more alive, but it is also fleeting. It is no longer an eternally paused moment, but it instead begins and ends.

My stop-motion video creates an interesting contradiction, existing as both a moving image and as a collection of still images. The vast majority of frames seen in the video have been painted over with subsequent frames, but I periodically pull the canvas off of its stretcher and start fresh, so for each minute recorded one or two physical paintings remain. Even those that have been over-painted exist as still images in a digital file. In “The ‘Pensive Spectator’ Revisited,” Laura Mulvey argues that the digitization of historic cinema makes possible new ways of looking at old material in the ability to easily slow or freeze the motion, actions not readily possible with film. “A new fascination comes into being when the moving image is stilled. The new, from this perspective allows a fresh and unfamiliar insight.”  

Similarly, a new view of *Fuses* is produced through the painstakingly slow study and reproduction of each individual frame.

The works of both artists make reference to rhythm and sound. There is rhythm present in the performative movements of bodies in the *Anthropometries*, motions precisely

---

30 Laura Mulvey, “The Pensive Spectator Revisited: time and it’s passing in the still and moving image,” in *Where is the Photograph?*, ed. David Green (Brighton: Photoforum, 2003), 121.
choreographed by Klein. Curiously, on the occasion when music was included in the performance (his monotone symphony), it was sound without movement, a single note stretched out for 20 minutes, followed by 20 minutes of silence. Schneemann explicitly likens the organization of her film to that of a musical score. Arranged in montage format, the individual segments of footage are carefully timed. Discussing the process of editing, the artist said, “So I had all these crazy notes, and that is how I would be editing and counting. There are beats … there are counts, frames of color, of gesture.” In this case, the film is visually musical, but literally silent.

In my installation, Double Audience, three types of time are present. First there is the historical notion of time, represented by a contrast between the audience of the past, frozen in painted form, and the present, living audience in the gallery. Within this structure there is a second aspect of time, that of the viewer moving through the space, time spent looking at, but also interacting with the artwork. The third representation of time is in the painted panels themselves. A temporal sequence of images is represented on the second and third panels, showing three stages of Michelle’s movements in the production of an imprint. The images are shown a few times in sequence and many times out of sequence, dulling or confusing the illusion of movement in the picture. There are also instances when the same image is repeated two or three times in a row or column. Each image is ostensibly the same, but there are small differences as each was painted by hand. These differences offer a sense of filmic time, suggesting the nearly imperceptible changes that occur from one frame of a filmstrip to another, much like the individual paintings in my video.

31 Akbar.
32 Schneemann, 22.
2. Bodies

The human body was central to both Klein and Schneemann’s work. In the decades following both of these projects, painting became a subject of great debate among feminist artists and theorists. Painting was historically the domain of men. John Roberts describes it as “a masculine regime ... that actively institutionalized the oppression and marginalization of women.”33 More specifically, both Klein and Schneemann’s projects include representations of the nude female body, a subject that has been particularly problematic within the realm of feminist art theory, particularly in the male dominated medium of painting. According to Rosemary Betterton, in male representations, the female body was “eroticized, objectified, fragmented and sometimes abused.”34 The fundamental act taking place, when a male artist made an image of a woman, created to be viewed by a male audience, was the loss of the woman’s subjectivity.

The objectification in Klein’s work is clear: the women he hired became objects – paintbrushes. Issues of gender and power are central to the understanding of the Anthropometries. In the creation of the works, Klein is a clothed male artist controlling nude women. In the performance pieces, the women’s bodies are presented to an audience as aesthetic objects, but even in the more private instances, the women are recorded on film so that their bodies (and Klein’s position as director of their bodies) can be presented at a later time. Klein’s increasing distance from the act of making the work, further accentuates his power over the models involved.35 He is quoted as saying, of one performance, “I personally

would never attempt to smear paint over my own body and become a living brush; on the contrary, I would rather put on my tuxedo and wear white gloves. I would not even think of dirtying my hands with paint. Detached and distant, the work of art must complete itself before my eyes and under my command.”

The models, as their movements are dictated and tightly controlled, lose their subjectivity. This power dynamic may be less evident in the painted objects, where the mark of the female body is isolated from any male presence, but they cannot be separated from the performance.

I feel that the loss of subjectivity is particularly evident in the photographs of Michelle. The hand of the artist guides her movements. Her face is blank, her expression distant. The documentation of these images is telling. Representations of Michelle linger in the history of art, but all other information about her has been left out. There are abundant accounts of Klein’s thoughts on his part in the making of the Anthropometry paintings, but Michelle’s experience (and those of his other models) is conspicuously absent. The closest I can come to suggesting the model’s missing story is by comparison to an account of the experience of one of Vanessa Beecroft’s usually silent models. Clover Leary described the experience:

“In the end it was damaging to be so directly viewed as more object than individual. There was an air of scrutiny, assessment. Some people in the audience openly discussed our individual bodies, postures, and appearance with one another as if we couldn’t hear them. The gaze of the audience felt both violating and impersonal, but in an intensely objectifying way that I had never experienced. There was a profound separation between the audience and the models.”

The experience of the women in Vanessa Beecroft’s performance pieces is undoubtedly different from that of Klein’s models, and Leary is a contemporary artist, well acquainted with the forty years of feminist literature written since Klein’s time. But there are enough

---

36 Akbar.
similarities in the projects – hired nude women positioned in front of an audience, their bodies painted, their movements controlled by an artist physically separated from the action – that I feel the comparison is useful in attempting to imagine the thoughts of Michelle and Klein’s other models.

While the focus of *Double Audience* is on Michelle as a subject, I know that it is impossible for me to give her subjectivity. I cannot create an identity for her, so instead I am calling attention to its absence while deconstructing the gaze of the audience. The essential purpose of this piece is to create a contrast between my invented fictional audience and the real audience moving around the space. The view of the fictional audience is pre-determined by their placement. They are looking at the first panel, the *Anthropometry* paintings. Through this panel they have a limited view of the nude body of the model in the process of the paintings’ creation. It is possible for a few of them to see through the second panel (if the holes line up just right) to Michelle’s portraits. The portraits represent the closest I could come to suggesting Michelle’s subjectivity, the recognition of her existence as a person rather than just a body. So the painted audience’s understanding is set: they see the finished art work, they see the body used to make it, placed before them for their viewing pleasure, and they might barely see her as a person. The real audience, moving around the living space of the installation, can view the situation in multiple ways. They can stand in front, taking on fictional audience’s point of view. They can stand in back, looking through the space where Michelle’s face would be, lending her their own subjectivity. They can also move between, looking either way, seeing the audience members, the bodies or the faces drift in and out of view.

In *Fuses* issues of objectification are more complicated while power dynamics ceases to exist. By using her own body in the work, Schneemann is in control of her own image and
her subjectivity remains intact. In her use of film, Schneemann also establishes an opposition to the paradigms of filmed pornography. Traditionally, in pornography, the woman’s body is a site of pleasure, while the male participant is essentially a stand-in for the male viewer.\textsuperscript{38} The problematic power dynamic mentioned above is at work here. The male pornographer and the male consumer hold power over the female performer, and this power is mirrored by her role in the film. In \textit{Fuses} the male and female bodies are both equally object and subject, while their sexual pleasure is shared. Moreover, the structure of the film – its choppy editing and the disruption of imagery by paint, corrosion and collage – work to deny the viewer any simple voyeuristic pleasure.

While \textit{Fuses} preceded the major feminist art movements beginning in the 70s (it is often considered proto-feminist), the work directly takes on the problematic issues of representation of the female body while also confronting the male-dominated field of painting. The general trajectory of feminist art in the 70’s and 80’s was an abandonment of painting in favor of performance, photography, film and text, areas lacking the association with male-domination and bourgeois society.\textsuperscript{39} Schneemann also moved in this direction, working with performance and film, but she brought painting with her, suggesting that the problem of gender representation was not an issue of painting, but rather of the society surrounding and supporting the medium. This position was backed by Linda Nochlin’s

\textsuperscript{38} Andrea Dworkin, “Pornography,” in \textit{The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2010), 480-481. My view is a dulled version of this particularly vitreous polemic against pornography. Of course there are many kinds of pornography today, and some of them break away from this construction, but, while I haven’t performed an exhaustive study, I believe that the majority still fall into the structure I have described.

\textsuperscript{39} Roberts, 170.
essay, “Why Have There been no Great Women Artists?” in which she focuses on the institutional basis for discrimination in art.40

With my video, beyond my formal interest in paint-like film turned into film-like paint, I am also working with issues of representation and gender. Fuses was made in direct opposition to attempts by male artists to represent female sexuality. It is my hope that in the Twenty-first Century it is possible for a male painter (me) to reproduce this very personal work without taking possession of it or objectifying, fragmenting and dominating the film’s subjects. It is intended, in part, as a sincere homage to what I consider a beautiful and profoundly important work of art. As such, it is a collaboration between Schneemann and I (though she doesn’t know about it) and my physical presence, the touch of my hand and paintbrush, parallels the touches of the lovers on screen.

3. Touch

I have separated the subject of touch from that of the body, because I associate it more with the subject of mediation than with feminist critique. Touch, as I wish to talk about it here, also represents actions of the body in time, acting as a meeting place for my first two themes.

Several kinds of touch are present in my project and in those I refer to. There are represented touches. In the photographs of Michelle, there is Klein’s hand, touching her arm, her breast, her stomach, and her body touching the paper. The filmed footage of Schneemann and Tenney consists of sexual encounters in which their bodies touch constantly. We also have the indexical touch of painted body on paper, marking Michelle’s

physical presence, and that of Schneemann’s treatment of the film in editing, the mark left behind by her hand. Stretching the definition of “touch” a bit further, in the photographs and film, the photochemical effect of light touching film to leave an imprint can be included in the discussion. There is also my touch.

In much of my earlier work I have kept myself removed, taking the position of a distanced observer of events. With my current projects, inspired in part by Schneemann’s bold use of her own body and Klein’s conspicuous removal of his, I have chosen to include myself as a central part of the work. More than just making reference to myself as a character in the overarching narrative, I have consciously worked to include reference to my physical touch. The painted works included in Double Audience are made with loose, visible brushstrokes, calling attention to the act of their creation, and on two of the hanging panels I have left behind the tape separating individual frames. In some places my fingerprints and notations are visible on the strips of tape. There is also the piece titled The Plagiarist, (Figure 6) a table strewn with artifacts left over from the creation of the other works in the show. It includes several individual painted canvases from 3660 Paintings of Carolee Schneemann, revealing the process not readily visible in the finished video. There are also stacks of images cut out of Double Audience as well as stencils used to create the repeated images. These stencils are covered with fingerprints and random marks. By revealing my processes I am also calling attention to my role in creating the work and highlighting my relationship with the two artists.

CONCLUSION

While several individual artworks are shown in this museum exhibition, I consider them collectively one piece. Each can be viewed on its own, but a network of relationships
runs between them, and when viewed as a whole, aspects of one will add to the content of
the others. By placing images appropriated from Yves Klein and Carolee Schneemann
within a single space I am urging the viewer to see connections between them. I have also
included myself in the conversation by placing the artifacts of my production on view. The
goal of this project is to create a physical and conceptual space in which a network of ideas
is between three artists and their work is made apparent. The connections I have
highlighted involve the subject of painting as it pertains to representations of time, touch
and the human body.
Figure 1; *Double Audience*, installation views.

Figure 2; Michelle 27 February 1960, photographs by Shunk-Kender.
Figure 3; Still from *Fuses*

Figure 4; 3660 Paintings of Carolee Schneemann, Installation view
Figure 5; The Plagiarist
BIBLIOGRAPHY


