

It was composed of lozenge shapes. The gentle ovals suggested portals to another world, pills, or clouds. The shapes offended my father. He never intended to allude to reality. He stood looking at his own canvases in the local museum. The owner of two of his paintings had died, leaving them to the permanent collection. The curator wanted to know the titles of these unmarked and undated paintings. My father recognized his canvases as having dated back to the year after school. The paintings had been untitled, excepting roman numerals. He was embarrassed looking upon them. He called them immature. He had recently thrown out a storage space full of paintings because he had wanted no one to see them.

After he left the museum, my father began new paintings from the lozenge remnants of the embarrassing canvases. Seven to eight lozenges comprised a roughly six by four foot painting. Ten lozenges would have been too many. The shapes lengthened, elongated. The lozenge stretched gradually into a stick. Until the canvas depicted a pile of flat long sticks. Less offensive stick shapes.

He has a traditional studio practice. The studio is a romantic and mundane place. There is no place he would rather be. The environment is comfortable. He works in a white room that is also a den in later hours, making three distinct categories of paintings. Sometimes as a distraction, he will wash his car or fix a piece of electronics. A chore is a peripheral thinking mechanism. It releases pressure from material decisions and focuses instead on maintenance. A chore ensures the occurrence of sub-conscious thoughts.

There are paper pieces, little canvases and big canvases. The paintings consist of similar units and colors. The paper pieces are watercolors. They are coated twice with

acrylic before a coat of rubbing alcohol. Rubbing alcohol acts as a cutting agent. It dulls the acrylic, a dull surface to which the watercolor adheres.

He paints a fully saturated mask of black-brown color. Next he sands this layer away until satisfaction. Sometimes he can sand for hours without anything seeming to happen. Over the sink, my dad makes a reductive painting. He installs negative shapes into the surface, understood simply as depth through value. On a scale of zero to one-hundred, the painted white ground represents one-hundred percent value. The darkest color saturation equals zero value. “In a watercolor, everything is movable and can be rethought, because it can be lifted with water.”

The bigger, acrylic paintings require more. The smaller acrylics are canvas stretched over masonite, but the bigger paintings are canvases stretched on stretcher bars and balanced horizontally on stools. The layers of fluid paint need the constant support of the stools. Both sizes require priming until they have the presence of a linoleum floor.

During the drying time, my dad walks to the top of the stairs and looks down on the large painting. Each shape takes twelve hours to dry. If the shape was a mistake, it is committed in acrylic paint. This series of commitments is pleasurable. The large paintings are about making commitments and adjusting those commitments. Only the next shape can remedy the last, and the first laid shapes originate from the shapes in the finished three-part painting series before.

Appearance is important to my father. The shapes should not reference. Shapes can only be abstract if they do not appear abstracted from. The painting’s look is particular to its construction. My dad knows that a painting is complete if everything recognizable within the painting is particular to itself and not particular to anything

outside. He refuses titles. Paintings that no longer have anonymous processes are mature. They will make the viewer wonder what they are made of.

I have never seen him begin a painting. He describes the beginning as sparse and awkward.

When the paintings go along too well, he becomes nervous. On the other hand, to do something extreme would be easily the opposite and if consistently shocking, not so different. While we talked on the phone, he described the structure of the painting in front of him. It had the undesirable look of an abstracted dancer.

For purposes of display, my father frames the paper pieces. The needed tools include extruded plexi-glass, Brilliance cleaner, an allen wrench, a rag. He finds a table without dust and static. He lays a towel down. While cleaning the plexi-glass, he watches the moisture dissipate in the light. The frames come in a multitude of finishes. While assembling the metal frame, he torques the screws, though not enough to strip. The last step of assembly is the insertion of brackets. They arch like a rainbow underneath the frame edge. A final time, my father rejuvenates the surface of the glass with a tight-woven rag.