

The relationship between abstract painting and the idea of the transcendent has been at the core of my art practice for decades now, though my understanding of and approach to both has shifted considerably over time. From my first forays into abstraction as an undergraduate, I had felt that there was a particular subject matter toward which my efforts were directed, that being the apprehension of the metaphysical. By this I refer to the notion of an imperceptible immateriality underlying physical reality. Something about both the practice of painting abstractly and the visuality itself of field painting, for me, seemed to reference this nevertheless ultimately inaccessible transcendence. The sense that the full apprehension of this metaphysic (for lack of a better term) was an impossibility was accompanied by the tantalizing intuition that there was nevertheless a fruitful path there to be pursued. I believe it was this tension that led me to push my painting process to ever greater extremes, to where mark upon mark would come to accumulate for months on end in a single piece, with a growing emphasis as well upon the sensuality of color and the physicality of mark-making.

Much later, as a graduate student, I learned that an analogous tendency was often operative in the realm of mystical practice, where those so engaged would frequently find recourse to highly sensual, even erotic, descriptions of their efforts, as their mystical experiences themselves would often also partake of these same qualities. Feeling an affinity with medieval mystical practice, I pursued the academic study of Jewish mysticism, earning a Ph.D. along the way. What drew me to the practices and thought of Jewish mystics in particular was their impassioned effort to elaborate a dizzying system by which to conceptually and experientially bridge the gap between the transcendent, or divine, and the terrestrial world. I found that a full immersion in the effort to fathom this system was an effective tool for focussing my efforts in the studio along what seemed to me to be remarkably similar lines. As well, the great stress laid by Jewish mystics (kabbalists) upon the bringing forth of hidden meanings and symbolic motifs out of scripture was compelling for me, as it came to feel more and more that my studio practice was very much oriented toward pulling forth fresh meaning from what always struck me as a puzzling, even absurd, way of working. Often kabbalistic motifs would resonate for me, but just as often the practice of hermeneutical inquiry itself seemed to be something I held in common with these practitioners.

Despite what I see as my initial impetus toward the study of mysticism, the effort toward metaphysical apprehension, over time I've come to recognize that the theme of non-arrival, of the ultimately inescapable alterity of the transcendent, is something that is fully embraced in many Jewish mystical texts. To take but one notable example, medieval kabbalists referred to the highest-most realm of the divine as the "Ehn Sof" in Hebrew, literally the "Without Limit," laying emphasis upon its endlessness and the fact that it may only be encountered indirectly, in terms of what it is not. That is, one can say of it only, for instance, that it lacks any limit. By analogy once again, my studio practice today more and more seems to embody a similar sense of non-arrival, of continuity and flux without the fixation upon an achievable destination. Because my sense of a reachable objective has become ever more clouded over time, my practice more than ever feels to have taken a non-referential turn.

Today my painting practice presses forward with what I think of as different lineages of work that extend back in time for many years and proceed onward into indeterminacy. In terms of color modalities, composition, method of paint application, material usage or, sometimes, recourse to imagery, each painting today perpetuates prior ways of working. In some cases, prior threads intersect and merge within a given piece. So, for instance, pieces with color gradations often now have compositions of swirling, undulating marks, or pieces executed in silicone and pigment that were once always monochromatic now consist of color gradations. Sometimes modalities that had been set aside for years reemerge, as in the case of multicolor works composed simply of horizontal marks. As these different ways of working are combined and recombined, notably new threads arise. For instance, 21,629 from this exhibition contains a kind of organic, even off-kilter tonal gradation that I had worked with in a much more monochromatic way before but which now is so polychromatic as to feel like the beginning of an entirely new vein of work. Similarly, the mandala-like symmetrical patterning of 8,689, combined with a color gradation, feels like something very new for me. These kinds of iterations seem inexhaustibly fertile to me, products of a work practice that feels eminently "without limit."