

As an introduction to my work, it's appropriate that my first solo exhibition at Peter Blake Gallery gathers together a number of creative currents that have prevailed in my art-making. Vibrantly colored and sometimes intensely composed pieces coexist in this body of work with much more starkly minimal and restrained paintings. But I hope that the continuity of process that unites this work is equally in evidence.

It was almost twenty years ago that I came upon a concept that helped me to clarify the idea that the diversity within the consistency of my working activity could be seen to have a metaphysical grounding. This was something I had been looking for. I had long felt that there was some kind of a philosophical substrate to what I was doing. But that opinion felt a bit presumptuous, and I did not have a firm conceptual framework to draw upon. Years earlier I had consciously determined that I wanted to slow down my process as much as I could, both to imbue it with a kind of devotionism and to, as much as possible, remove myself from the equation, that is, to have the work unfold as if on its own, without any particular decision or gesture of mine carrying any more weight than any other. That was when I began to apply small dollops of paint to canvas with a palette knife, and to allow thousands of these marks to accumulate and coalesce into a unitary piece. As my method became quite simple, so did my mode of visual expression, the field painting. I felt that my subject matter was that which underlay that world of perception, and field painting struck me as most well-suited for such content.

As I continued to work in this way, by chance I came upon an idea that belonged to the field of medieval Jewish mysticism. There it was maintained that the *Shekinah* (the "Divine Presence") was that which gave rise to and sustained the perceptible world, but whose source was entirely imperceptible and immaterial. What particularly engaged my interest here was that the *Shekinah* was seen to be in constant flux based upon a certain dynamism within the immaterial world; this was seen as the explanation for the impermanence of states of being in the perceptible world. It was this idea that helped me to understand how it was that I could execute a seemingly infinite number of paintings, all apparently devoted to the same ineffable subject, but with each one proceeding in a different direction. This constant flux to the *Shekinah* also functioned as a ready explanation for why I encountered such difficulty in getting to the bottom of my subject matter. It had been this difficulty which had given rise to what I earlier referred to as a devotional

practice. In this first inkling of a connection between my work and the field of Jewish mysticism, one which provided the impetus for much study and writing and, eventually, a Ph.D., I rather tenaciously (perhaps desperately) grasped on to the notion that the *Shekinah* was my subject matter. As the years have passed, connections like this initial one have only multiplied, while nevertheless the sense has grown for me that painting inevitably remains painting while studying remains studying; those connections draw their vitality not primarily from their being literally true or accurate but from their being useful, inspiring and enriching analogies.

Jewish mystics (or “kabbalists”) from the middle ages on have held that the mercurial nature of the *Shekinah* is identical with that of the inner life of all human beings. The structures within the divine are seen to be mirrored in the human psyche. This idea has been a great help to me in breaking free from the former belief that I paint something that exists in some transcendent state, something *other*. I’ve found that it is possible to arrive, at least in finer moments, at an awareness that the perception of a self and of an “other” - “out there” somewhere - is a mental construct. Such moments of awareness allow delineations of every kind to fall away or collapse into one another. The firm conceptual framework that I initially located in my studies has turned out to be subversive in this way, ultimately informing my view that my true object of study ought to be my own relentless activity of conceptualizing, establishing connections and synthesizing frameworks for my activity. My work always continues on, despite its different guises and the formulations that I ceaselessly bring to it. These rise and fall away, and the mind is always seeking fresh explanations and answers. I pay attention as much to this process as to the unfolding of the painted object. To formulate another connection, I’m reminded of the Zen impulse within Buddhism, which recognized that the genuine enactment of that doctrine which was studied entailed its (often irreverent) overturning. What could then remain as the realization of prior mental formulations was simply an attunement to the moment of one’s own mental processes. For the moment at least, this is where my relationship to my work resides.

I now locate my impulse to count, to note my work activity, in the self-reflexiveness of my process. I count every mark that I paint, and the tally for each painting becomes its title. My changing attitude toward this counting also illustrates the shifting perception of my work that I’ve been describing. For when I first began to count my mark-making years ago, the debt owed

was much more to philosophical ideas about the transcendent perfection, the immaterial “otherness,” of numbers. Nowadays, the activity of counting has become another lens by which to focus the mind on its own activities.

As for an ultimate goal or objective to my work, one can say, paradoxically, that the goal is to have no goal. Jewish mystics granted the appellation of *Ehn Sof*, “Without Limit,” to the uppermost echelon of the divine realm. “Thought travels to the *Ehn Sof*,” they wrote, which is also be translated as, “Thought travels *endlessly*.” In this, they too suggested that thoughts of arrival at a destination were misplaced in this type of creative process. I seek to make pieces that engage the viewer in a similar fashion, to sustain the view and, with any luck, to provoke an inquiry that can continue ad infinitum.