

*Extravagant Painting: Outpouring and Overflowing*

Extravagance, largesse, superfluity, crazy-beautiful, hyper-beautiful, and psychedelic are terms that inform my work as an artist.

Extravagance is a term I use for a constellation of concerns—including radical generosity, largesse, superfluity, flesh, materiality, painting, abundance, richness, wandering, and wild being—that is of central theoretical interest for me. These concerns continue to grow and expand fed by many sources, among the most fundamental: phenomenology, which I have been engaged with since the mid-1990s and painterly painters—especially the Italians, Flemish, and Spaniards of the 16th and 17th centuries—as well as the sometimes ridiculed Baroque and Rococo painters (especially Fragonard and Boucher) of the 18th century. Jean Starobinski, an expert in 18th century European culture, and his catalogue for *Largesse*, a small exhibition he curated for the Department of Graphic Arts at the Louvre in 1994, that contains his stunning essay on largesse further fired my interest in this topic. George Bataille's *The Accursed Share*—with his discussion of the restricted economy based on scarcity and the general economy based on superabundance—is also an influence. These ideas are important to me because poverty and austerity are matters of life and death—not simply for the basic survival of human beings but for our thriving. Extravagance is both a way to lave the wounds caused by a solely or primarily utilitarian approach to life and an entirely other realm of being.

Digging into the roots of words such "superfluous" (*super* over + *fluere* to flow) and "extravagant" (*extra* outside + *vagari* wandering) expanded my theoretical interest and gave me my personal vocabulary. (In fact, a general attitude toward my much-loved Rococo as frivolous and superfluous led me to dig into the word "superfluous" and fall in love with it.)

I use the terms "crazy beautiful" or "hyper-beautiful," with respect to color, and I attempt to push the beauty so hard that it becomes strange, absurd, or even approaches ugliness. I am especially interested in color that is beautiful but also sets your teeth on edge - "sweet-tart," and "sick" color that teeters between pleasing and repulsive and beautiful and ugly.

I use the term "psychedelic" (*psyche* mind + *deloun* make visible, reveal), not in relation to a drug experience, but again, closer to its root meaning of making the world visible to the mind.

With respect to composition, I am interested in the play of coherence and dissolution—in a composition that feels like it is barely holding itself together and could fly apart or slide off the support at any time. I use the edge—ignoring, meeting, falling short of, or exceeding it—to further destabilize the composition.

Taking the phenomenological attitude, my incarnated consciousness and the materials and space are all together. There is a performative/process aspect to pouring the painting—the process is all performed by me physically as an agent acting in space and time, using materials, and the result is a painting.

Being awake and alive and incorporating a degree of accident in pouring the paint is a way to immerse myself in intermundane space and the intertwining or tangling of vision, body, and world. "Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world since the world is flesh?" (Merleau-Ponty *Visible and Invisible* in the chapter "The Intertwining-The Chiasm") Being awake and alive is the state toward which I urge myself in the face of thousands of distractions and invitations to narcotizing fantasy that characterize our super-mediated world.

The most important thing for me with respect to the relationship between painting and ideas is that *the act of painting is an act of philosophy in itself* and painting can explicate theory. (I first wrote about this with respect to art as an act of theology in an unpublished 1993 paper.) So the act of painting, the act of writing, the act of being in conversation with other artists and writers, and all the many acts of living are all part of a total project of extravagance.

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