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PAINTINGS OF PAINTINGS

In the *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes of the effects of snow upon a house;

The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, muffles every sound, conceals all colors. As a result of this universal whiteness, we feel a form of cosmic negation in action. The dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity.¹

Bachelard writes of the Winter House in negative, revealing the psychic state of interior space from the outside in. The walls, doors, apertures and corners of the house are thrown into relief by seasonal warmth, cold, closeness and distance. For the dreamer of houses, the foundations are always built upon a semantic equation. *We are*, as Bachelard so deftly lays out, *where we are not*.²

Mason is on the floor of his studio, casually shuffling through soft piles of hand-drawn sketches as if they are receipts, or quotes (albeit his own). He appears to be looking for—and finding—nothing in particular. He talks while he touches the paper. His process is to *flicker*—a jarring term he often uses to describe both the quality he is seeking to bring out in the paintings and the way he goes about bringing it—between the material and mannered spaces of architecture, the screen and painting. He wants the final images to *flicker* too. From the piles of paper quotations, he makes digital collages that form the basis of larger works on canvas, painted in acrylic and collaged with scraps of cheap synthetic fabric sourced from second-hand stores and torn and cut sections of his own painted canvases. He gleans from his own crops.

Kurt Schwitters saw collage as a shortcut between intuition and the artwork.³ William Burroughs used the cut-up to short circuit language. Freud sorted through our bins, looking for scraps to help us understand ourselves. Virginia Woolf made use of whatever fragments came her way. The connections between hitherto unconnected things, via the accumulation and arrangement of scraps, is what collage—bald and basic—so acutely achieves. In the context of Mason's work, slicing, splicing, compression and omission are processes that circumvent perception and certainly refer toward the image's own precariousness and decay.

Each painting is embryonic in the sense that it holds the key to its own potential. Each painting is historical in the sense that it is made from a collection of past parts. By being both the same as and different from versions of themselves in time, these paintings enter a third state—one of alterity—with each being defined by something other than 'the sameness of the imitative as compared to the original'.

Patterns, lines and relationships are scaled. A section of this one is swapped out for the architectural motif of that. A brick-skin grid from here is forced into a neat companionship with a blue isosceles triangle from over there. A balustrade is just as likely to be made from steel as it is from chalk. The slippages between works make the passage of elisions and ellipses nearly impossible to trace. And these slippages, along with an understanding of Mason's strategic use of the screen as an aid for process, could inevitably lead to a characterisation of his painting as a type of tab surfing, where information is arrived at through potentially endless hypertextual association. Such a restless search is prone to conspiracy, association and proof as coincidence (Wonderful!), but the budding and burgeoning Rhizome is not Mason's project. His vernacular glance—directed toward the screen as much as is toward the interior of a book or a room—is not circumscribed by the tabulated screen, but by the colour of his thought.⁴

These works make little distinction between the acts of painting and thinking. They are paintings of paintings. And I am so moved by the insularity of that pursuit.

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¹ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

² Jouve, Pierre Jean, *Lyrique*, as quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

³ White, Michael, 'Merzzeichnung: Typology and Typography', *Tate Papers*, no.14, Autumn 2010, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/merzzeichnung-typology-and-typography>.

⁴ "The Vernacular glance is what carries us through the city every day – a mode of almost unconscious or at least divided attention. Since we are usually moving, it tags the unexpected and quickly makes it familiar, filing surface information into safe categories. Casually self-interested, it accepts the miraculous as routine...[It] doesn't recognize the categories of the beautiful and the ugly. It just deals with what's there...Its directions are multiple...its disorder needs no order because it doesn't require thinking about or "solution"... it is superficial in the best sense. O'Doherty, Brian, "Rauschenberg and the Vernacular Glance," *Art in America* 61, no. 5 (September–October 1973).