



IN CONVER- SATION

MAGNUS
FREDERIK
CLAUSEN
AND
DANIEL
GRAHAM
LOXTON

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Magnus Frederik Clausen: Last time we met, you asked me if I thought of your paintings as too sentimental. This says a lot about how you look at your own work.

Daniel Graham Loxton: They are diaristic. They can evoke specific periods in time for me. For example, I have a deep fear of the cosmos and black holes. It's one of those things that upends my being. When EHT released the first-ever image of a black hole in 2019, I was on the train reading the news, and it set my heart racing. At my studio, even if it wasn't my intention to create something directly referring to it, I made a drawing of a man's face with a mouth that looked like an asshole. It turned out to be quite a funny drawing actually. I find it interesting that we can apply different degrees of sentimentality in our approach to painting.

In the past couple of years, you have been making these fantastic paintings with the help of others, where you could distance yourself from the work. But other paintings of yours are very '*romantic*', for example, the one with

your partner's pants across the canvas, which caught my eye early on in our time talking with one another. I don't mind that I give in to the way my hand moves, or that I'm referring to a certain life event. That is something I've come to accept.

MFC: Yes. For me, one side of sentimentality is how my vision is affected by the act of moving a brush on a surface. Stepping back from the action of painting and letting an assistant execute the work is reshaping my vision and my sentimentality – like looking at the painting through a new filter.

Currently, I'm conducting paintings without even being present in the studio. I am someplace completely different, and instruct the process via messages and images on my smartphone. Not being present in the studio helps me not to interfere with the process, which I can't avoid if I'm around. At the same time, the place I find myself in can affect how I orchestrate my work. Imagine finding yourself in a forest while making choices on a painting that is being created elsewhere in a studio. The place where I find myself can also be out of need, like taking a day job to pay the workers in my studio while instructing them. It echoes László Moholy-Nagy's *Telephone Pictures* – produced by factory workers, following instructions given via telephone. Still, I'm interested in the repetition of the motive continually on top of itself.

DGL: I can relate to the feeling of arriving at the studio after having not been there for a while, and seeing my works as if someone else had done them. These moments are often where I make the best decisions about which works will leave the studio, and which will remain. I've been searching for ways to keep my works away from the action of painting. I've put them in boxes and stored them in other rooms and opened them years later as if they were completely new to me. Some I've taken home with me to live with for a period of time, away from

my materials. While the painting process is open, there are endless possibilities, but time and distance do narrow the choices. Often, the choice is to do nothing.

MFC: Walter Swennen invited a person with a good eye for painting to come to his studio when he was not around, and put post-it notes on the ones which were done. This says how challenging it can be for an artist to decide when a painting is finished. Time is a fundamental factor. Often, it's not the painting that needs ripening, but my ability to look at it. By delegating the task of painting to another person, I get rid of the emotional relationship I have with the work and I can see it for what it is – even if the excitement for the final result is the same as if I had painted it myself. Also, what I'm searching for in my work has changed over the years. Even within the same body of work, such as the *Clock paintings*. There, the paintings have started evolving with the deeper relationships I've developed with the assistants.

DGL: When a body of work begins to transform, and it is going into the next one, but you're not quite positive where that is... that's an interesting turning point. It's like when different realities collide. That's the moment I'm looking for: when one thing ends and bashes into another. Like friction of thought. Sometimes, your brain has to come around to what you've been doing and trust that it will be understood.

MFC: It's notable that an artist is able to create something that they're not mentally prepared to take in. It is exactly how I feel with my kids. I can have the sensation that now I've got them figured out, I know exactly what their needs are and how I should handle them, but then something new comes up and here I am running behind again [laughs].

DGL: I'm not a Dad, but I can feel the rug being pulled out from under me sometimes. Suddenly, I'm lost in the studio.

MFC: When I look at your paintings – even your most straightforward works with only one brushstroke – I get the sensation that they are born from a long negotiation. I'm curious to hear more about your studio process. What are you searching for and what are the choices you follow?

DGL: The more straightforward works often refer to something that's outside of the painting. It can be collaged bits of things that I've carried around with me. *Zwallys* (2017) is a white canvas with a single orange stroke and two found post-it notes with the birth and death dates of two persons. A minimal gesture referring to something as deep as an entire lifetime.

MFC: How did this particular painting come to life? Was it like: *1, 2, 3, done?* Or were you playing around with stuff and it just happened?

DGL: I did not plan for the outcome. The mystery was in full effect there. The hardest part of creating this kind of work is keeping them clean once it's been decided that they're done. All that blank space surrounding the gesture...

MFC: [Laughs] I also have a problem keeping white paintings clean. You have to wrap them away immediately.

DGL: Yes, and get them far away because my studio is often like a volcano. I'm working with many different things at once: oils, wax medium, dry pigment, house paint, watercolor, collage, charcoal... But the further from the action, the less material seems necessary. I can enter into a more cerebral space in the vicinity. Those dates on *Zwallys* aren't personally significant, and because they were far enough away from any impetus, I was able to make three moves without any judgment, keep it clean, and then allow it to exit the studio. I work on twenty / thirty paintings at the same time. And almost everything makes it out of the studio as a finished work. A painting may be left open for a long period of time and completed years later. There is no rule here; some are ready

Opposite:

Daniel Graham Loxton
Master
 2019
 Oil, wax, gypsum board
 with found text, and
 watercolour on paper
 20 x 25 cm





sooner. But in a sense, it's like tending to compost. I'm not always consciously working on them but they develop anyhow. There is a certain quality I'm looking for which I can't always explain and it perhaps changes even in the course of one painting's creation.

MFC: You also write about art. Recently you sent me a text titled *Unendliche Zigarettenpause*, written for the Japanese artist Tenki Hiramatsu's solo show at Castle in LA. The text has some inside knowledge about the subject that only another painter can have, and this made me think of Amy Sillman, an artist who beautifully writes about painting. Will we see more writings on painting by Daniel Graham Loxton in the future, or was this a one-time performance?

DGL: I'm happy to share that I have future writing projects. I feel proud that other artists trust me to embody their processes through my point of view. I think Sillman relates her writing to her studio practice and that it's very

correlative. For me, it's a totally different state of mind to outline texts and communicate them in a concise way.

The editing process is arduous for me. I'm so drawn to poetics, the uncanny, and the unexpected, and, in writing, that can be difficult to capture. Maybe what drew you to that text is that it felt like I was sitting next to Tenki in his studio, observing things that were going on.

MFC: Recently I've become curious to see the possible reflections my work could offer as writings done by different people, since language is a tool we use to approach painting. While working with one of these writers, I got the idea of commissioning a writing the same way I 'commission' a painting from my assistants. For example, I would ask the writer to wipe half of the text out and write it again; or write it in a certain span of time as an experiment, like 'conducting' a text. Or like a Chinese calligraphy painting: you practise for years and then, finally, you can perform it in one perfect go.

Magnus Frederik Clausen
Tentotwelve (Noah)
2021
Acrylic and collage on linen
87 x 139 cm

Courtesy of Claes Reiss Gallery, London
Photo by Damian Griffiths

But I think that with the money I have available, none of the writers I worked with would agree to such a process [laughs].

DGL: Talking about writing, I found out that we had a similar trajectory as artists: we both switched from filmmaking to painting. What have you taken from the medium of film that relates to your current projects?

MFC: I don't come from a film school background, but I started to work with the medium early in my artistic career. Opposite to film, painting can be a very fast medium, and this was one of the reasons why I shifted to painting from film. I got attracted to the fact that I could execute something in ten seconds, and then have time to reflect, while making a film – that could take months. And I kind of died in the process. But from film, I've taken with me the collaborative element. I always appreciated that the result was never something I could come up with alone, but was a work that mirrored several people's minds. I liked the feeling of unity and the rope of relations that the making of a film is able to create.

I approached making films being aware of my lack of formal education, so I had to work with it very conceptually. For example, I didn't know how to work with an actor, so I would never cast an actor. The funny thing with my current body of work is that I'm kind of learning to be an instructor or a director now.

DGL: Early on, I did go to film school and I was taught the craft. We were shooting 16mm film, learning 'the rules', and watching a lot of movies. But I almost instantly broke away from classical filmmaking because they made it seem so difficult and laden with history. I basically would grab film and walk around with it in my pockets, and then I'd pull it out all scratched up and exposed. I would develop it and run it through the machine, projecting abstract images on a wall which I would record on video. For

the final cut, I'd hang out with my friends and we'd make a weird instrumental soundtrack. It was all very beatnik and not at all linear or planned out, and I didn't get particularly good grades. Part of the reason why I switched to painting is that I failed as a filmmaker. Almost no one was interested in what I was doing film-wise except for painters.

MFC: Installing exhibitions can remind me of cutting a film. When you cut a film, you're putting images in order similar to installing a painting show. You play with the possible narratives of how the work can be experienced.

DGL: Absolutely. And that narrative can be complex. When exhibiting my paintings, I want to refer to a larger constellation of my works. While only a fraction of them are visible in the show, each one affects the story. They ideally enter into a more cerebral or theoretical space which the viewer can explore.



Daniel Graham Loxton
The Importance of Being Loxton
 2022
 Artist's book
 Text by Chris Sharp
 Edition of 300

Published by Jir Sandel Copenhagen