

For me, the space between perception and idea is a spectrum. While we separate form and content linguistically, their distinction is—as Thomas McEvilley said, quite beautifully—more like the fade between two colors.¹ But a “mind over matter” culture constantly reinforces their distinction. One might suppose how this split between the physical and mental in Western culture can be traced back to the formless, idealized space of the Platonic realm. The ebullient, pleasurable aspect of these paintings can make one feel skeptical or guilty.

1) Thomas McEvilley, “Heads It’s Form, Tails It’s Not Content,” *Artforum* 21, no. 3 (November 1982), 55.2)

Do we resist such pleasure in part because we are puritans? Or is our collective suspicion toward beauty justified? Visual pleasure is an effective cultural tool to seduce and influence us in the realms of religion, politics, and consumerism, but let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are so many visual and material phenomena still uncorrupted by ill intentions that are worthy of wonder and investigation.

As a young artist, inspired by Agnes Martin, I made a depiction of a hand-painted woven houndstooth pattern, a kind of Duchampian critique of modernist painting, a fusion of high and low. My use of the woven pattern stemmed from my interest in the decorative and domestic, but its modularity ultimately spoke more

directly to digital images. Later I learned about the connection of weaving to early computing technology; Jacquard looms had laid the groundwork for the earliest punch card computers. The cheap piece of houndstooth cloth that inspired the painting had its own historical memory—its own intelligence—that revealed to me the work's ideas.

Now I paint with a customized steel trowel, akin to a large comb. Its notch/tooth pattern is a binary system: gesturing with it feels like wielding the screen in my hands, a game of human versus machine. Raking through wet paint makes many parallel lines in a single gesture, spanning the width and length of the painting. The overlay of offset shapes intentionally creates the interference patterns that we consider a defect in digital imagery.

At the beginning of my career as a painter, I studied the influence of Islamic art on early twentieth-century European modernism and directly quoted Islamic geometry, painting gestures in the form of six-pointed asterisks and three-pointed tripods. I grew up around patterns in embroidery, rugs, and saris. My interest in pattern painting came from Persian and Moghul miniatures, although I came to these via Matisse. Islamic geometry is willfully anti-iconic, whether developed in antithesis to Christian icons, in adherence to the historical ban on images, or as mathematical perfection describing weightless, infinite space. I turned to them because of their ability to yield geometry through painterly and calligraphic mark making. When I started the moiré paintings, I thought I had left this reference behind. So it was a surprise when the interlocking stars of Islamic patterning re-emerged from phased interference, albeit in a pulsating and blurry screen-like field. I have long considered Islamic atomism a forerunner of the pixelated screen, but now I see unexpected evidence of

that hypothesis. I am interested in how the iteration of modular bits of information, the dissolution of figure and ground, the integration of color and form, and the use of multiple viewpoints and axes of symmetry provide a counter-history to the monocular vision of perspectival drawing and analogue photography.

Some masterworks of the medieval period, such as Cosmatesque pavements in Roman churches, were the byproducts of cultural competition between Byzantium, Islam, and the Western Roman Empire, fusing all three visual traditions. It is fascinating that some of these designs include the “Sierpinski triangle,” popularized in the 1980s as a fractal diagram, a triangle with its own inversion inscribed within it recursively. While the Roman mosaic artists had to stop fragmenting the triangle when the tesserae became too small to handle, their designs presented the logic of infinite self-similarity. This instance of medieval artists intimating what twentieth-century mathematicians eventually expressed is the kind of thread I like to follow. Increased computing power in the 1980s allowed for the mathematical demonstration of fractal geometry, which in turn transformed computer graphics. Prior to this, drawing natural forms, such as trees and mountaintops, on the computer was unconvincing. Then the fractal algorithm systematically expressed what had previously been so complex to our eyes that we called it chaos.

Did the desire for knowledge lead to this new type of image? Or did the desire for the image lead to this new type of knowledge?

Translations between the theoretical and the tangible, between the virtual and the physical, are central to my work. These would be very different paintings if there were no excess, no errata, no corruption. These interruptions read simultaneously as painterly gesture,

material accident, and electromagnetic corruption, crucially animating these paintings. Yet, these events are captured in an uncanny picture plane that is almost as impenetrable as the screen: the paintings' milled surfaces indulge the seamlessness of the technological and the metaphysical, an insidious desire toward digital and material perfection. The surfaces are alien. Like science fiction, a lived past and unfolding present are decoded to the point of futuristic transformation.

In this way, the paintings frustrate a still widely held modernist ideal of exposing process as a progressive value (in the sense of Roland Barthes's healthy sign, Bertolt Brecht's theater, Clement Greenberg's idea of painting, and Laura Mulvey's films). "Exposing the guts" of something as a way of asserting the cultural construct- edness of an image is one of the most enduring modernist contributions. Yet so much of cultural production and technology (mainstream cinema, video games, human voice simulation) marches solidly toward seamlessness, toward "virtual reality." The work meditates on, rather than retreats from, this cultural desire.

Moiré is a self-generating phenomenon: the layers of patterns self-sort as they overlay and interfere with one another. The paintings thus have a life and mind of their own. They are not images of interference: they are interference. This is the wonder and anxiety that much of contemporary life provokes: a hint of animation and sentience inside the technology.

The moiré paintings confuse the distinction between color and drawing. In the Italian tradition, the visuality of *colore* was subjugated to the rationality of *disegno*. But then one thinks of Florentine court painter Bronzino, whose use of opulent color and pattern serve as a counterpoint to the compositional structure of Raphael. (Some surfaces in the studio echo the corduroy fabric in

a Bronzino portrait that I saw in Rome.) Or let's consider the seventeenth-century Dutch tradition which utilized the Italian innovations of realism with a different tenor, scale, and content, allowing for another way to describe reality that, for me, is much more vivid than Raphael. In our experience of the world, not everything is subjugated to the rationality of space: there is also luminosity, reflectivity, surface, and materiality.

In the moiré paintings, as in the work of George Seurat and Bridget Riley, the module (the crosshatch, dot, or line) structures the drawing while it also holds the color. The colors and their contrast will drastically alter what composition you perceive. Take two similar circle compositions: the one with more light/dark contrast will create the effect of a reflective topographic surface, while the other with less contrast creates the atmospheric effect of diffuse white light passing through a lens or prism. In describing Seurat's translation from drawing to painting, Riley comments how he moves from more light /dark contrast in drawing to less contrast, the "Impressionist mid-tone" in his painting.² The drawing effect is one of volume, while the painting effect is akin to low light or dusk.

2) Bridget Riley, "Seurat as Mentor," in *The Eye's Mind: Bridget Riley; Collected Writings 1965–2009*, ed. Robert Kudielka (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 69–72.

There are many observations that inspire and structure these paintings. What may be classified as an everyday observation has expanded exponentially due to our access to immediate screen information: we often gaze upon the moons of Saturn, the aurora borealis, or sci-fi killer robots, more readily than we do the water waves, sunsets, prisms, or spotted insects in our immediate surroundings. The challenge and surprise is in seeing how this wide continuum of observations, both direct and indirect, find their way into the work.