

Margie Livingston
“Too Soon for Hindsight”

“Gravity is a sweet taste of mortality and our strength to resist it, a luxuriating in the pull of the earth and the pull of muscles against it...” writes Rebecca Solnit in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Gravity and its direct somatic link to the body dominate the trajectory of my recent work. The distance between stacking planks made out of paint, draping sheets of paint on a peg, and dragging a painting down the street may at first glance seem vast, but they are connected in multiple ways. All these works reveal the force of gravity and the patina of time as if they were actual living flesh. Moreover, there's my frequent material: “skins,” of acrylic paint, rolled, cut, draped, or tacked onto stretchers. Most important to me is the experimental nature of their origins -- pushing acrylic paint to do what it's not supposed to do – a quest that has dominated my work since 2009.

Dragging a painting down the street marks the surface with the pull of gravity – a record of getting from point A to point B. In 1979 Barbara Rose wrote of “Painting’s capacity to materialize an image.”* Although this description could apply to the *Dragged Paintings*, more precisely, they embody the image of their making. The marked surface records the strain of my muscles, the resistance of their faces against the earth.

The first impulse for these new performative works was to harm a painting so I could examine the potential of mending. Enacting the gesture, I found the content transformed into a study of guilt and shame. When I pass people on the street while dragging a painting, I feel more like the Log Lady from *Twin Peaks* than an artist. Sometimes I just put my head down, so my hat hides my face, and try to ignore that passersby cross the street to avoid me. Other times I take someone with me, as if to demonstrate that what I’m doing is worthy. Some days I just can’t face putting on the harness and going out in public.

These new working methods also connect me to art historical influences. I love how the act of dragging a painting invokes Harold Rosenberg’s term, “Action Painting” thereby connecting me to Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. The violence of that action brings to mind Christian Marclay’s 1999 “Guitar Drag,” which was made after James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old black man, was dragged to death by white supremacists.

Art history connects me to these macho gestures but my quest is for something more personal: a meditation on entropy, aging, and death.

I live with the discomfort of not knowing. Not knowing where the work is going. Not knowing how to reconcile the darkness with the comic gesture of dragging a painting. Incorporating the dark as well as the light, the guilt, the risk of going too far, being too serious one minute, and silly the next, living with the collage of disparate parts that makes up my practice. I may not know where this is going, but I’m curious about what I’ll find.

*Barbara Rose, *American Painting: the Eighties*, Buffalo: Thorny-Sidney Press, 1979.