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iii-iv

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UMI
the ethereal surface:
[the act of making (painting + construction)]

by
isabel rios

a thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
master of architecture

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May, 2000
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iii-iv

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UMI
abstract

the ethereal surface:
[the act of making (painting + construction)]

by

isabel rios

...a prudent art. what a stupid idea! art is a compound of intoxication and madness.

__dubuffet (1945)__

the corpus of the thesis is two-fold;

on one hand it references and examines american existentialism in connection with my practice of plastic spontaneous dialogue, developing a typology of abstract expressionist gestural paintings.

the human body is the focal point for this investigation, as subject matter in both my paintings and installation. the task then is to mirror the human body not by default, but with purposeful cognizance, a result which stems simultaneously from plurality and spontaneity/immediacy/chance...

in addition, it proposes an environment that speaks to the preceding adjectives, establishing a dialogue between painting and architecture, with the hope that architecture might extend the narrow borderline between disciplines, and be persuaded to loop into a new realm—an articulated in-between-realm by means of making.

an environment that could be experienced directly without prior representation.
acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Carlos Jimenez, Darra Keeton, Doug Oliver, Basilios Poulos, John Casbarian, David Brown, Brian Burke and Kathleen Roberts for their help and support during my masters run. I would also like to extend a thousand thanks to Rachel Jensen for putting up with me this last couple of years, especially in this past year of frustration and angst...fruition.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>foresight thesis statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>on surfaces interface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>on form body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>on painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>why paint?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>constructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>plates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>installation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>catalogue of plates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
foresight. thesis statement

the corpus of the thesis is two-fold;

the thesis posits the notion that there is no architecture without event, without action, without activities, with-out functions... architecture can no longer be defined as form or walls, but as the ‘combination of heterogeneous and incompatible terms’, perhaps even the cross-pollination of other disciplines. in so far as architecture must be seen as the combination of spaces, events, and movements...

in addition, the thesis proposes making(constucting) an environment that can speaks to the preceding adjectives (re: def.), establishing a dialogue between the act of painting and the act of construction. It seeks to create a link among these adjectives with the goal of revealing, discovering, inventing the similarities and differences about the two disciplines:

edge environment, transitional environment, simultaneous (in)habitation of abstract and physical space, container, A to B.

with the hope that architecture might extend ‘the narrow borderline’ between disciplines, and be persuaded to loop into a new realm—an articulated in-between-realm by means of making(const.).

perhaps, a construction that could be experienced directly without prior translation into miniature or two dimensions....

keep in mind that the human body is the focal point for my investigation, as subject matter in both painting and architecture. this is not a novel idea. there has long been a tradition of reading architecture in terms of the human body...from the renaissance concept that the classical orders represented the proportions of the human body; through the enlightenment’s use of the simile of the man or woman with arms, heart, lungs, and muscles to guide designers in making buildings and urban plans; to the twentieth-century notion of architecture as a organism working according to rules inherent in its internal construction.

we see buildings, in other words, as extensions or versions of our own bodies. however, buildings can never be an accurate reflection of the human body: architecture is a construction, not a biological organism. the task then is to mirror the human body not by default, but with purposeful cognizance intentionally, or perhaps both...resulting simultaneously of plurality and intuition/immediacy....?

for the making(arch.) section of the thesis i will concentrate on the state of the body as a physical, organic entity, the somatic body:

(other body states: at rest, in motion and in equipoise—rest and in motion)
this is an organism that has many interconnected and highly specialized parts, all of which are melded together into a single entity. it moves and breathes through the fusion of many parts into a whole that do many things at the same time.

and is only when an act of violence, whether the cause is accidental or natural, that the body reveals the innards of the human body, its components and only then do we become aware of its nature, through the damage or deterioration of the body.

as the title suggest, the ethereal surface, is about the act of these two disciplines, act of painting and construction, but it is also about the ways one interacts with construction(arch.), about relations to the body, and about the physical and sensual experience of architecture.

1 husserl, demant architecture + disjunction
in the end i hope the text maps a conceptual territory for the act of...by building fragments whose composition, shape and materials are so exaggerated, allusive, and articulated that they clarify something that is inherent to the act of making (painting and const.): the fact that by making a shelter, a frame, a surface, or a defined place for ourselves we are in essence building a second fabricated version of ourselves, like painting.

the possibility of plural systems: the body in motion—an engaged situation.

the body at rest—
or both at rest and in motion—

fragmentation: particles, fields, corridors, sticks and things,...movements...
on surface.interface

surface

a surface is nothing more nor less than the relation between two things. two bodies touching each other. the surface is the relationship of one to the other, an in-between-realm. the in-between realm that i speak of is that of the 'ethereal surface'.

this relationship, if it be regarded as a medium would be a powerful means of transmitting vibrations, a dialogue, between two very distinct disciplines.

the ethereal surface, is not that of substance but of boundary(a node perhaps), the physical boundary of something, the limit of one form (as form that manifests itself as intuition, immediacy, or chance) and the beginning of another, or of receptivity of structure. it is this nodule that i shall reveal, discover, or invent with the intent to investigate it critically so that the (re)presentation of the goal at task is visible throughout the process.

i use the term 'ethereal surface' in the plural sense", advisedly because i believe it is possible to produce a theory on the act of making...surface/body...or the basis of a study, an exposition of multiple disciplines, a construction pure and simple of techniques of the body. by this expression i mean the ways in which, from painting to construction, we the painter/builder learn to use our bodies, as a way of making...
on form, body

form

form is always temporal, that is relative, form is nothing more than the means of the moment, whereby today's revelation is made known and given resonance.

— W. Kandinsky

if you are asked to describe an object, you answer that it is a body with a surface, impenetrable, shaped, coloured, and moveable. but subtract all those adjectives from your definition and what is left is of that imaginary being you call body.

— Denis Diderot, "Letters on the deaf and dumb"

body

the body, is not a field of forces in battle, but rather a series of multiple forces in mutual 'relations of tension'. the forces i speak of are composed of:

- dominant forces: active
  - dominated forces: reactive

all having relationships of social, chemical, biological, political impact yielding the body as a fruit of chance.²

i believe that form reaches its highest level of meaning and power only when it is in a stage of correct momentary manifestation offrom desired underlying forces. pushing, pulling, lifting...a multiplicity of forces, movements of the whole body.
on painting...

my objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of ideas...to provoke thoughts...the nature of (my work) is not fixed or finished. accesses continue in most of them: chemical reactions, fermentation's, color changes, decay, drying up. everything is in a state of change.

__joseph beuys__

a prudent art: what a stupid idea! art is a compound of intoxication and madness.

__dubuffet (1945) glimcher and dubuffet 1987:83,48__

my intent is to merge two immediacies: layered, heaped, granulated impasto, and scratches frequently scored marks into the paint or surface. where material and line collide...the paint pushing outward, the line digging inward...smashed and impacted between opposing forces ('ethereal surface', -medium)

keep in mind that the human body is the focal point for my investigation, both as subject-matter in painting and architecture. this is not a new idea. the female body, of all the objects in the world, is the one that has long been associated with a very precious notion of beauty (inherited from the greeks and cultivated by the magazine cover): now it pleases me to protest against this aesthetic, which i find miserable and most depressing.

i am concerned with the transformation of shapes and relational properties —such as nearness, containment, and inside/outside of the body but not just an inside and/or an outside—but an infolding of intracontainment and flow thorough each other thorough time and position?...through movement. studying the 'human body' duplicating, mimicking the whole, or part of it and creating a 'copy' which resembles the real in that it has some but not all the characteristics(both performance and gestural/postural) of the real thing.

gestural abstraction:
  jackson pollock, brice marden, antonio tapiés, cy twombly

geometric abstraction
  ellsworth kelly, donald judd, frank stella, dan flavin

figuration
  jean dubuffet, alberto giacometti, willem de kooning, francis bacon,
susan rothenberg

background
  parasite:
    noise, static, interference
  anamnesis:
    recollection, memory
  sexuality:
    violence, decay, diseases
    erection, orgasm, body-parts
    sense of trauma, loss and castration
why paint? do we need artists?

today has become so rich in means of expression that art has more or less lost its earlier
purpose...it has become absorbed into life itself, into modern civilization...the television,
cyberspace, movies, radio, all have taken its place. so what is the purpose of the artist?

the question of whether or not we need artists today leads at once to the question of the influence
of aesthetics—the force of aesthetic values. the moment one touches on the question of the
impact of aesthetics, another question arises, one that is somewhat delicate and that bears upon
the contacts—and the cooperation
—that can exist between architect, painter, and sculptor. the architect is not self sufficient: in
earlier times he was closely allied with both the painter and sculptor
— the finest often combining all talents in one person.

due to the conditions imposed upon painters, sculptors and architects by the 19th century, they
have become accustomed to work in complete isolation. most painters consider a building merely
a necessary shelter for their work; most architects, encumbered with organizational detail, think of
the artist only when all else is finished.

this underrating of the artist’s role in an integrated creation is utterly absurd.

civilization develops only when man consciously or unconsciously establishes an emotional and
intellectual equilibrium. this condition is only possible after equilibrium has first been achieved in
the emotional sphere: in other words, not until some common basis of understanding has been
established between the arts.
my most recent paintings have shifted to a abstract re-presentation of a continuous surface of plural nature...continuing to reinvent body(form) and surface, in an effort to develop a pictorial language that could or may evolve out of a combination of intuition/immediacy, imagination, experiences, + memory/re-collection—chance. form that has evolved thru the visible and the circumstantial, developed out of underlying relationship, forces, or interference of rhythms...

efforts were made to make form less auto-biographical—by beginning to conceal characteristics of the figure that relate to body or that of identity. so that i could concentrate on the physical qualities of the human body that inform me:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>surface</th>
<th>fantasy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>space</td>
<td>sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>texture</td>
<td>residue of the body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stroke</td>
<td>excavating the body</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in the end, nothing is planned, it is self derived, spontaneous. i mean to stress the intuitive, unmechanical, approach, rather than the predetermined one.
construction.01

the following constructions are exercise in miniature of the act of making so
construction.03

the following constructions are exercise in miniat
parasite series:

these particular paintings are, as the title implies, a response to michel serres, 'the parasite'. in his essay serres describes the parasite as being a plurality of things and notions:

i.e. interference
    severe weather warning sound
    static
    visual, the gray dots that appear on the television when one no longer gets good reception
    noise
    the beeping sound of a vehicle driving on reverse gear — beep, peep, beep...

the surface, in these particular painting, has been obfuscated by the mark, which has essentially taken on a parasitic nature. thus, on the surface the mark appears to infect the figure, the canvas, the space and as a result creates a type of newness that begins to speak to this plurality that serres writes of.

    the research
    the figure
    mark-making

figure-scapes:

the figure finds itself in a postural-stance. which at first glance seems motionless but a closer study reveals that it is very much in motion. it is possible that the figure is ready to break free from the canvas or perhaps it has just step in, and is on its way out...

in this triptych, i continue to look at the human body in a state of rest:

    as figure:
    as silhouette

    as landscape
    again plurality played a key role in the developement of this series. — in previous pieces i had been using two-dimensional topographical map fragments, while at the same time looking at landscape painting. specifically the abstract landscapes of diebenkorn, oliviera...

the reference in these painting is often the contemporary practice of painting itself. at times, i am, inspired by specific paintings in history. alternately, a retrograde painting device will evoke in me a new imagined procedure subject. (diebenkorn)
plates
installation
**catalogue of plates:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>interference.01 \no. aoc, aoc, spraypaint 38 x 60 in. private collection austin</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>static.02 \no. aoc, aoc, spraypaint 38 x 60 in. private collection japan</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>noise.03 \no. aoc, aoc, spraypaint 38 x 60 in. private collection japan</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>parasite series: triptych \no. acrylic, oil, pencil, charcoal on masonite 24 x 24 in. private collection houston</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>untitled.04 \no. acrylic, oil, pencil, charcoal on masonite 24 x 24 private collection houston</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>untitled.05 \no. acrylic, oil, pencil, charcoal on masonite 24 x 24 private collection houston</td>
<td>f 98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>s 99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
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<td>s 99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>s 99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>untitled.14 \no. aoc 38 x 60 collection the artist</td>
<td>s 99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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