



SUSAN CHRYSLER WHITE

STATEMENT

There is a basic human tendency to seek order in the current of experience in which we are constantly swimming. There is a variety of languages (scientific, artistic, and spiritual, as well as ordinary discursive) by which we attempt to organize our worlds, and they frequently borrow from one another—thus the richness of metaphor.

My passion for collections in natural history museums has driven me to build compendia of intimate mementos in my paintings. Using acrylic and enamel paints as my primary media, I create a vocabulary of small organically inspired figures. Arranged on a painted field, these “symbols” are at once anatomical, botanical and spiritual as they slip back and forth between references to the personal body and abstracted images of the Buddha. I use patterns from women’s textile work and images that are sometimes insect-like or mutations of some hybrid futuristic organism. Some paintings are static and have a dense, drawn, almost woven element that recalls both crocheted materials and diagrammatic metaphysical drawings, while others have a linear gestural motif that becomes an animated armature holding its elements together. These equivocal figures mark the precarious intersection between my intentions and the unique constellation of responses brought to the work by the viewer.

My paintings are constructed by accumulating layers of acrylic and enamel paint on transparent glassine paper. I cut and tear these laminations of glassine and collage them on canvas. The paintings are not preconceived compositions. My process is inherently messy, paint is dripped and poured and laid out to dry throughout the studio—and then I begin the process of collecting and arranging the fragments to form a visual narrative. As I continue to work around the studio and discover what I have made, I begin to shape a narrative with it. The individual elements can appear at first glance to be mechanically generated, and I am interested in the tension between appearance and process in the work. It somehow speaks to our human condition and our recognition of ourselves.

My incorporation of textiles into the paintings harkens back directly to an embroidery cooperative I developed in Mexico to help women’s communities. All of this, of course, is an overlay on a fundamental feminist language I bring forward from the traditions of 20th and 21st century western art.

I have been mining the resources I have accumulated living in different cultures a large part of my life. Growing up in Spain with ornate Arabic filigree in my home and the city around me, my time working in India, and teaching at Tyler in Rome for two years with regular access to the Vatican Museum have all influenced me deeply. In these cultures, as well as our own, I have been drawn to the incredible range of visual form employed in all kinds of altars. The way people organize everyday objects in and around their homes to express some ritualistic meaning is deeply fascinating to me. I realize I do much the same in both my home and my studio and even in my garden.

My new paintings which began at the start of the pandemic, as I coincidentally retired from teaching after 35 years, reflect a more contemplative, interior investigation. Extensive, uninterrupted time in the studio forced a reckoning of what is

important and what is not in my practice. Pressing into a more cosmological / interior space of interweaving lines / energy fields, I mean to suggest additional layers of meaning and new realities. I have returned to an earlier element, the universal symbol of the circle and the use of bilateral symmetry. My interest in its' reference to the body, two circles side by side become eyes or breasts, holes, organs, multiply them they become virus, seeds, stars, scale them up, they become globes, planets, solar systems, cosmological charts or as with my granddaughter's obsession, the repeated sound of a train's horn.