I work with special handmade brushes. They are made of the hairs of deer, elk, and fox. They have their own life. After dipped in a solution—like India ink or dried pigment mixed in water—with a slight pressure on museum board, they make very fine, thin lines. With greater pressure a brush’s bulbous base releases a swath of pigment on to the surface. I usually have a general idea of what the painting will look like. But the materials take on a life of their own. They suggest their own possibilities. The unintended spontaneous movements of my fingers and arms allow brush and pigment to respond as they may. Sometimes the unintended emergent results are welcome, sometimes not. Sometimes brush and pigment respond with extreme delicacy, variety, and wit. Other times they respond with ponderous contortions. Sometimes the result is a scene that I could not have imagined. Sometimes the scene provides a space that invites my entry.

As I work on a particular piece, I do so with the foreknowledge of its place in a series of works. Just as a single work may give rise to emergent features, so too may a series of related works give rise to emergent features. These features may become apparent when the series is viewed as a whole, as in a solo exhibition. Creating a given artwork provides an occasion to discover and explore its emerging scapes.

My art-making has a history closely related to my self-transformation. In 1971, I had a nondualistic experience in the studio of a friend. When being surrounded by her large abstract shaped canvases, I suddenly experienced myself in the space of the work instead of looking at it. More than that: I experienced an ‘interpenetration’ of my self and the space of the painting.¹

¹ I borrow this apt term from John Dewey, who describes such experiences as: “complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events,” in Art as Experience (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), 19.
In that space, I suddenly became much more highly visually sensitive—to spatial relations, to coloration and more. As a consequence of that nondualistic experience I needed to paint. As a matter of ‘inner necessity,’ I had to paint. After one year of intense work, I had my first one-person exhibition. Since then, I have had twenty.

As a consequence of my nondualistic experience (which I shall discuss later), I now experience more clearly, more expansively, more richly, more perspicuously. Such changes in my ways of experiencing in turn affect what I produce. What I produce has affected my ways of experiencing. I think of my art-making as a process in which who I am is enriched and transformed. In short, my art-production fosters my self-transformation, and my self-transformation fosters my art-production.

Upon reflection, the reader may be tempted to distinguish several distinct transformations whereby one transformation took me into the space of the painting. Another would have involved the interpenetration of myself and the space of the painting. Yet another transformation would have involved my becoming visually sensitive, and a still further transformation would have involved my need to paint. Could I have had a transformation in how I experience as opposed to what I experience, and not associate it with anything particular to art? Could I have had the same experience but not be compelled to make art myself? Could I have had that experience but simply develop a need to experience more of my friend’s work and that of others? Could I have had that experience and not have any related experiences when making my art? In my experience, these logically distinguishable possibilities are inextricably intertwined and symbiotic.

More fully, my painting is integrally related to my self-transformation, and my self-transformation is integrally related to my painting. I value both painting and self-transformation as ends in themselves. My artistic production motivates my self-transformation and my self-transformation motivates my artistic production. Such is my personal program.

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