



SARAH PUPO
WHAT IS CALLED SPIRIT

Sarah Pupo's Studio Experiments

The moon in the bureau mirror
looks out a million miles [...] into that world inverted
where left is always right,
where the shadows are really the body,
where we stay awake all night

Excerpt from *Insomnia*, by Elizabeth Bishop¹

When viewing Sarah Pupo's drawings, paintings and animations, I think of Annie Dillard's idea of shadow speed: the speed that the moon travels as experienced from Earth. In her essay "Total Eclipse", Dillard describes a darkness that rolls across the land, traveling at a speed unqualified by language (1,800 miles an hour)², a wall of moon shadow erasing the sun and obliterating the universe as she felt and understood it. Time ceased to exist and the world stopped. Then, less than two minutes later, the sun emerged, the shadow sped away and the world began anew.

Like Dillard's description of the eclipse, Pupo's material choices and processes conflate time. In her drawings, ink and gouache flood areas quickly, then seep and pool as they slowly absorb into the paper and dry. In her paintings, she applies inks and dyes that instantly enmesh in the silk and cotton surfaces. She swiftly adds warm wax, which hardens atop the washes, suspending the previous layers beneath. Therefore a pause occurs between each gesture and accumulating layer. Pupo's process is slow, using fast materials.

Feelings of stillness and sinking result. The pause between materials and gestures in Pupo's work is similar to the stoppage of comprehensible time that Dillard experiences when the moon covers the sun. In Western astrology, eclipses are portals to alternate universes. Similarly, the pause in Pupo's paintings creates a gateway to unknown time and space; this alternate universe is where the characters and settings of Pupo's drawings live. The paintings function like a slow motion vortex, slightly tugging us towards their surface and beneath it into an alternate universe. The repetitive layering of sinking materials and transparent colours reinforces this inward pull as the materials drop down through the porous fabric into the back body space of the painting. Materials do not build up as much as they build in.

We are invited inward and we are active. I lean in. I look for entrances: I enter head first through a circular form that is of similar scale to my head. If I turn sideways and wiggle I could squeeze through a yellow crevasse. If I shrink I could crawl through holes scratched into the wax.



Although we enter in, brightness radiates out. The paintings become still animations. Like a light box, light glows from the inner space through and around the forms, backlighting them. The forms are often suspended in the white surface, outlined. As a shadow references the form that casts it, the paintings become almost sculptural, shifting unstably between two and three dimensions. Moreover, the visible structure of the stretcher frame physically articulates a hollow inner space behind the fabric's surface, reminding me of Michael Fried's criticism of Minimalist objects for having "secret inner lives."³

If the lives of the paintings occur inside the stretcher frame and underneath the fabric, then what are we looking at? It seems we are viewing the back bodies of the forms. But what is back and what is front? If the forms are not of this world, then they are impressions of an internal world. They are pre-logical, obscure and unintelligible: shadow bodies, surrogate organs, unformulated landscapes, ghosts.

This internal world shares similar qualities to sleep space, where the unconscious and the unknown live. We access this world through falling asleep and we leave it through waking up. In Pupo's work, double movements—fast/slow, back/front, here/there, in/out, rising/sinking—are destabilizing and disorienting, and they mimic the double movement of falling asleep and waking up. In fact, the presumed ordinariness of these processes can make them all the more frightening.

Dillard compares viewing the eclipse to dying, which is like falling asleep: "it had been like dying....it was like slipping into fever or falling down that hole in sleep from which you wake yourself whimpering."⁴ The reappearance of the sun is a rebirth and a return to the ordinary. Pupo's work shares both the fundamental feeling of uncertainty aroused by the banal routine of sleep and the comfort of repeating such familiar movements. "The self is transformed in these processes," to borrow from O.F. Bollnow. "Every night [one] descends into a greater depth in which [one's] conscious self is dissolved [...] and every morning this self-together with the world around it - is built again anew."⁵

— Sherry Walchuk,

2016

Sherry Walchuk received a BA and BFA from Simon Fraser University and a MFA from Concordia University. She lives and works in Mission BC, and Montreal QC.

¹Elizabeth Bishop. "Insomnia" *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), p70.

²Annie Dillard. "Total Eclipse" *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982), p25.

³Michael Fried. "Art and Objecthood" (1967) *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp 156.

⁴Dillard, p9.

⁵O.F. Bollnow. *Human Space* (London: Hyphen Press, 2011), pp 165.

Sarah Pupo

What Is Called Spirit

May 19 - June 18, 2016

SARAH PUPO

Sarah Pupo lives and works in Montreal, Quebec. Her work integrates aspects of painting and drawing, installation and self-taught, provisional animation techniques. Her approach to making things prioritizes intuition, ritual, associative thinking; the flux of chance and control.

Pupo has exhibited at galleries and artist run centres locally and internationally. Recent projects include a solo exhibition at articule (Montreal), participation in the Symposium of Contemporary Art in Baie-Saint-Paul and residencies in Iceland, Finland and the Yukon.

Artist Statement

My practice uses intuition, associative thinking and the play between chance and control as tools to access an inner world. The repetitious action of drawing (sitting down in a particular place, using a set of special objects) and the rhythmic, meditative practice of animation open up a liminal space where time moves differently and it is possible to look and sense in a different way. Dream, emotion, memory, ghost, fantasy (all that can't be thought through in a linear manner) are addressed more easily through these rituals of making.

My work occupies a place between painting and drawing, incorporating provisional installation and self-taught animation techniques. It creates landscapes populated by soft, unstable forms that transform and morph; an internal body by turns tangible and abject in its decay and messiness and shimmering and dream-like in its ephemeral presence. These bodies move through thought spaces and dream spaces, telling of personal life events and emotional states in an abstract, intimate visual language. Shifting, doubling, fluid and uncanny, these elements could only live in a place that lies between the realms of sleep and waking, conscious and subconscious.



Images:

"Untitled" ink and dye on silk, 24x30", 2015

"Untitled" watercolour and ink on paper, 8"x10", 2015.

"Untitled" watercolour and ink on paper, 18"x48", 2014

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