

SYNAPSE

by

ROMA MISRA

Bachelor of Fine Arts,
Mumbai University, Mumbai, India

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SYNAPSE

Thesis approved:

Susan Harrington

Major Professor

Jim Woodson

Cameron Schoepp

Marnin Young

Thanks to Vivek, Dad and Mom.

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Synapse - The space across which a nerve impulse must leap in order to become a thought for action

('Synapse' - An exhibition composed of paintings, a video and an installation.)

My connection with Texas began when we moved as a family to a suburb of Dallas-Fort Worth. Prior to this international move, we lived in Cairo and Dubai, and travelled frequently to Sydney, London and New Delhi. My cultural template was formed in India, my country of origin, and impacted by all the other countries I have lived and travelled in.

Living in countries other than the one where I grew up necessitates formulating a new mode of interaction for each place - coherence, understanding and insight not only into another culture but into myself. I am compelled to accumulate and reexamine memories, impressions and experiences. Cultural memories are put into a different context because of distance, the passage of time and new insights from the world I inhabit now. Similarly, I look at aspects of my present environment with filters of other experiences in place.

Present reality is the stuff of daily life, a subset of the larger world. A big part of daily living in Texas is the amount of driving that one has to do. The time I spend in my car is substantial. It is an isolated bubble where thinking and processing take place. In this elastic psychological space, the mind is free to roam and connect; tuned into NPR and local radio stations, I listen to debate on immigration, cultural difference, globalization, outsourcing, the present state of my adopted country, or reports of a country that I knew in some other history as a resident. Mentally, I am navigating a terrain that I am trying to map in a way that is meaningful. The process frequently throws me into uncertainty. Order may emerge,

or not.

In Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics, the painter's expression is linked to his experience of the world and relationship with it. "It is the expressive operation of the body, begun by the smallest perception, which is amplified into painting and art."¹ In my recent body of work, paint maps the experience of dislocation and finding my way. A constantly evolving map is made up of many layers, sometimes obliterating what is underneath, as in plate 5. Layers of the past and the present are constantly assimilating, adjusting and reiterating themselves, the possibility of change imminent. They coalesce into an image that 'hovers'.

The brain constantly makes new networks to accommodate new knowledge, allowing defunct ones to die out and disappear. Experience becomes an abstract thought or feeling somewhere in the brain and painting turns it back into action. The act of painting is a way to assimilate an experience and gain a perspective on it. Paint translates the meaning of something into form. In the process, the work becomes the information with which to propagate itself (plate 3). The artist Terry Winters says, "The act of painting is really a way to figure something out by making a picture of it. I'm taking information, synthesizing it, and putting it out. Everything starts from something specific that's seen. Then it gets respecified through the activity of making the painting."²

I work in acrylic. A characteristic of acrylic paint is its tendency to flatness. It cannot embody or build a form the way oil paint can. It does not embed into the surface the way water color does. It is a tool of instinct and intention. Acrylic paint sits on the surface of the canvas or paper, totally malleable and yielding until it sets into place as it dries. Then it gives itself up as a new surface to leave unchanged or work anew. I may work over a painting any

number of times, and it will retain its flat characteristic. Yet, the history of the rendering is evident in small, almost imperceptible ridges and strokes, a history of marks and the way they invade or recede over the space of the canvas, as in plate 2. It suits the way I think of memory, which I see as lightweight, floating and disembodied but sometimes dense and inescapable.

Line and grid form the structure of the paintings. The line acts as an expander of space but also a boundary. It is reiterated and given dimension by the application of glitter. In plate 4, the glitter, an ordinary craft item, serves the formal function of adding a relief dimension to the flat surface. It also activates the dense black areas and is reminiscent of twinkling city lights or asphalt.

A grid is a way to order the world and measure it in manageable chunks of space. In the paintings and the video, the grid is an underlying structure that seemingly gives coherence. The grid occludes and grows, ultimately taking over by replicating itself in a logic of its own. In plate 5, the superimposition of a known structure over another known structure causes a kind of gap/shift between two realities.

I want the viewer to sense that there is a complex experience at play. Worlds are claiming space, roads are coalescing, maps are being drawn and a way is being determined. In plate 5, entropy and regeneration occur simultaneously in a world crammed with too much, bursting with information, some of it being reprocessed and reformed into ever newer versions of itself. In this psychological space exist images of fragmented, disintegrating cityscapes and relics of what might have been important in another history. I want the viewer to be aware that there are many layers that go to make the composition,

that everything does not exist only on one surface (plate 2). In becoming aware that I want my paintings to be kinetic, I also realize that I am playing out a learning curve that many artists go through. Philip Guston said, "I do have faith that it is possible to make a living thing, not a diagram of what I have been thinking: to posit with paint something living, something that changes each day."³

The paintings are as much a visualization of process as they are about keeping memories or forgetting or letting them go and making space for new experiences. They are abstractions of personal connections, memories, reactions and insights. I put forth the stuff of my experience. Ultimately, the viewer will process the work through his own filters and experience and make his own meaning of it.

The painter Laura Owens says, "It's odd to think of paintings as static, they are so much more. They don't move like film but seem to have a lot more movement than photography. Maybe it is potential movement..."⁴ The representational images I work with have potential structure. In plates 4 and 5, I deliberately choose images that refer to something within my memory as a starting point. These form part of the blueprint of the painting. In building up the painting, some details of the image get lost and some are preserved. In plates 1 to 5, the pictures are built up with color grids that are hand cut stamps loaded with paint impressed upon the canvas surface. The evidence of the history of the process is easily visible as small ridges and lines. The grids and images from lower layers appear between the grids of the upper layers, bits of images that become ambiguous in their fragmentation (plate 3). Mapping lines appear and disappear. Organic structure begins to resemble logical structure. There is an attempt at establishing order (which is on the verge of breaking down).

The choice of format comes out of the metaphor of the commute. The rectangular shape refers to the view I have from within my car. It also references a TV screen that is an accumulation of images. Each painting reads not only side to side, but into its surface. The layers compress a history into one surface (plate 2). “...(the painting) collapses the record of its development into an aesthetic singularity: it is its own memory, exactly. This is a creative strategy that is possible only in the static visual arts, most effective in painting, where the compression of accumulated improvisational gestures is experienced as a simultaneity.”⁵

A natural progression of the attempt to collapse multiple images led to experimentation with video. In this piece, a painting was made with the intention to deconstruct and rebuild it many times. Numerous small canvases made up a composite image that was used to make the video. The intention was to cause a feeling of discomfort in the viewer, a kind of minor dislocation of the senses. The viewer is put into a position of having more than enough information, yet not being able to pin down meaning. One second flashes of rearranged images make him realize some images are familiar, yet there seems to be no logic that he can hold on to (plate 9).

Some images from the video reappear in the installation in a second gallery. They are in a frozen moment of deconstruction or perhaps coming together to form a picture. The installation begins in the Moudy Gallery with a line that starts on the wall and leads out of the gallery (plate 8). The viewer enters a space that is an extension of the picture plane (plate 10, plate 11). He is in the psychological space he has encountered in the paintings, except that the space is taken over by lines that seek destinations in every direction. The way reveals itself, its direction becoming manifest, emanating from and ending in the

paintings (plate 12, plate 13). The title ‘*Synapse*’ refers to the split second formation of a thought - a movement through space, time and memory.

1 Quoted by Frances Colpitt, “Systems of Opinion,” *Abstract Art in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press) 166

2 Terry Winters, “Terry Winters,” *Inside the Studio*, ed. Judith Olch Richards, Independent Curators International 124

3 Philip Guston quoted by Russell Ferguson, “The Undiscovered Country,” Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles 20

4 Laura Owens quoted by Russell Ferguson, “The Undiscovered Country,” Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles 20

5 Doug Harvey, “Contemplative Frenzy: Sticking to the surface with Lari Pittman” 52-53

Plates

Plate 1



'...finding...'
Mixed media on canvas
36x48 inches

Plate 2



'...gauging...'
Mixed media on canvas
36x48 inches

Plate 3



'...shifting...'
Mixed media on canvas
36x48 inches

Plate 4



'arriving/leaving'
Mixed media on canvas
36x48 inches

Plate 5



'accelerate/decelerate'
Mixed media on canvas
48x60 inches

Plate 6



Gallery view

Plate 7



Gallery view

Plate 8



Gallery view

Plate 9



Untitled
Video

Plate 10



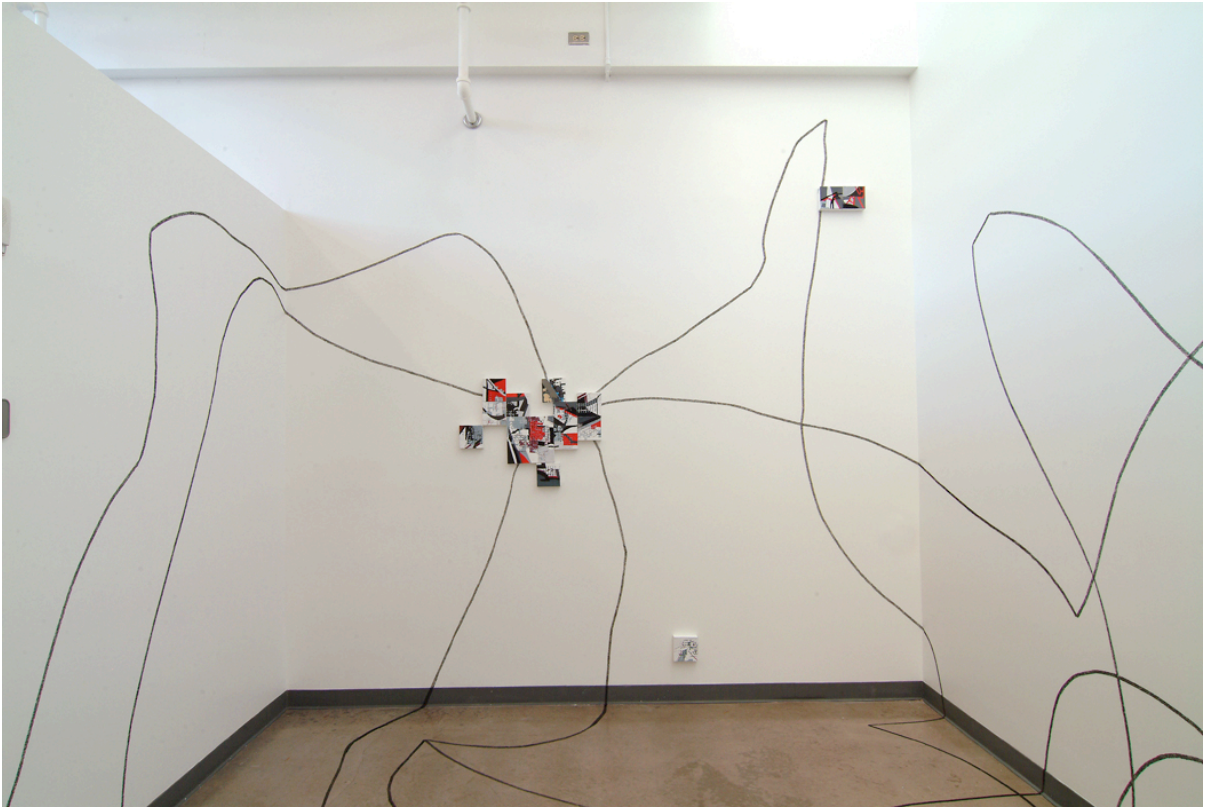
'Synapse'
Installation
Dimensions variable

Plate 11



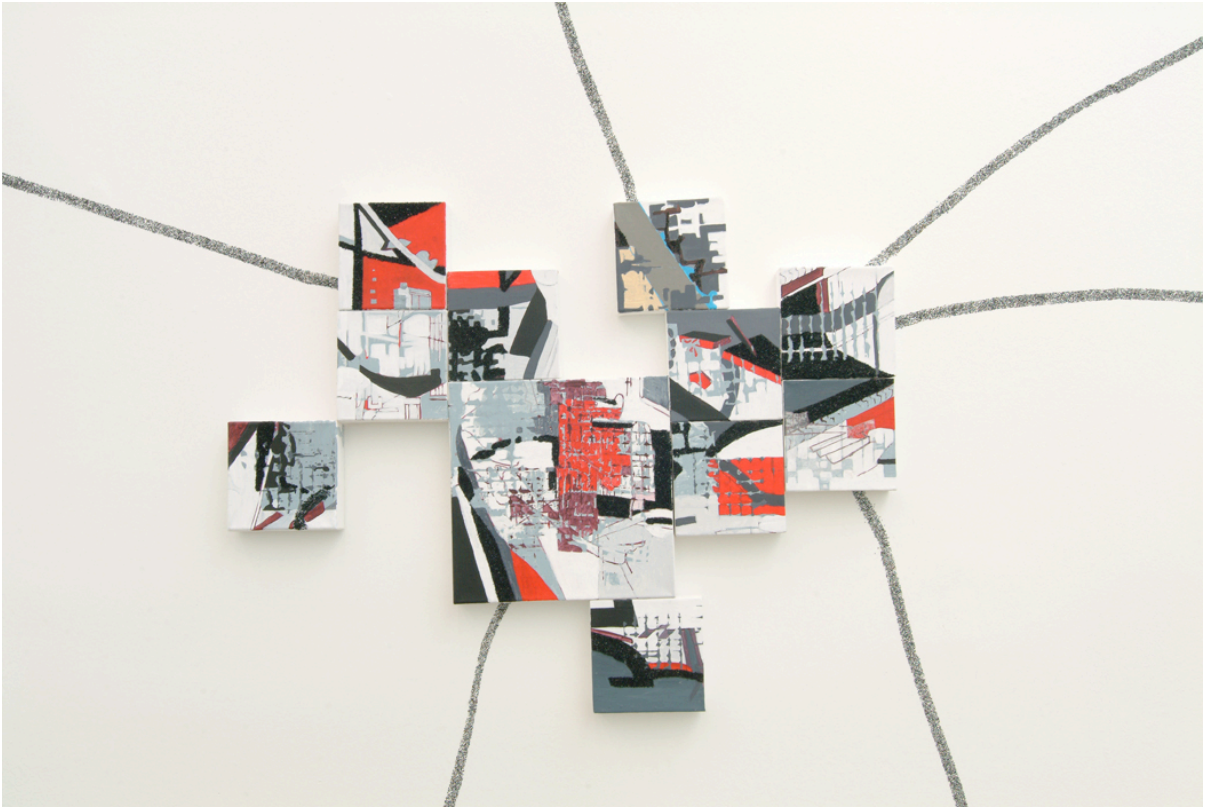
'Synapse'
Installation
Dimensions variable

Plate12



'Synapse'
Installation
Dimensions variable

Plate 13



'Synapse'
Installation detail

VITA

Education

- 2008 MFA Studio Painting, Texas Christian University (TCU), Fort Worth, Texas
- 2004-06 Studio Painting, Photography and Sculpture graduate level classes (part-time) at Texas Woman's University (TWU), Denton, Texas
- 2005-06 Mixed Media, TCU
- 1989 Apprenticeship in Stained and Leaded Glass, Warwickshire College, UK
- 1986 BFA in Graphic Design, Bombay University, India

Awards

- 2006-08 Graduate Student grant and stipend, TCU
- 2008 Best of Show, Texas and Neighbors Regional Art Exhibit
Juror: Pamela Nelson
- 2008 2nd Place, 'Crosstalk', TCU Student Exhibit, Moudy Art Gallery
Juror: Mark Smith, Austin College, Sherman
- 2007 1st Place, 'Crosstalk', TCU Student Exhibit, Moudy Art Gallery
Juror: Rachel Cook, founding editor, Glasstire
- 2005-06 The Sue E. Comer Endowed Scholarship in Art, TWU

Exhibition Record

- 2008 Master of Fine Art solo thesis show, 'Synapse,' Moudy Gallery, TCU
- 2007 'Plural' TCU Student Show, M J Neeley Business Building, Fort Worth, Texas

'Preservation is the Art of the City', Fort Worth, Texas

500X Gallery Open Show, Dallas, Texas
- 2005 Voted Solo Student Show, 'Frozen Kinetic,' Gallery 010, TWU

Voertmans Art Student Competition, West Gallery, TWU - Juror: Marcie Inman,
Director of Exhibitions and Educational Programs, Irving Arts Center

TASA 'One Square Foot Show,' Richland College, Dallas, Texas

500X Gallery, Open Show, Dallas, Texas

Irving Arts Center Member Show, Irving, Texas
- 2004 500X Gallery Open Show, Dallas, Texas

- Irving Arts Center Member Show, Irving, Texas
- 2002 Participated in 'Le Salon de Printemps,' Lyons, France
- 2001 Solo Studio show, 'The Mask', Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- Group show, International Art Center, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 2000 Group show, International Art Center, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- Studio show of sketches, glasswork and paintings, Cairo, Egypt
- Group show, Community Services Association, Cairo, Egypt
- 1991 'Kala Mela', Group show of Mixed Media work for Southern India, Chennai, India
- 1990 Solo show of leaded glass combined with terracotta, Grindlays Bank Art Gallery, Chennai, India

Teaching Experience

- 2007-08 Teaching Assistant, Painting 1, TCU
 Professors: Susan Harrington, Jim Woodson
 Duties: Assist in development and implementation of class projects

Related Experience

- 1991-97 Studio for experimentation and commissions in Stained and Leaded Glass, Chennai, India
- 1988-89 Visual Artist for Rediffusion Advertising Agency, New Delhi, India
- 1986 Graphic Designer for Hindustan Thompson Associates, Mumbai, India
- 1983-86 Freelance Illustrator for various publications, such as children's story books for India Book Trust, Target children's magazine and the Indian Post

Bibliography

- 2005 Interview for 'Frozen Kinetic' show by Lucinda Breeding, Denton Record Chronicle, October 13
- 2000 Interview with Gulf News, Dubai, on the series of paintings, 'Vessel
- 1991 Interview for glass work, 'Inside Outside' magazine by Geeta Doctor, Chennai, India

Professional Service

- 2003-08 Concept and Art direction of four all-school Art Auction projects for the Barbara Gordon Montessori School involving 180 children

ABSTRACT

In my current body of work, the daily commute is the metaphor for a continuously evolving map, and a movement through space, time and memory.

