

So, for my modest contribution to *What Is Painting?* I want to share a few quotes that are exciting recently; ideas just a little outside of the discourse that nevertheless strike a chord in me as a painter. These are mostly my motivations, reasons to build up layers of paint, endlessly adjust blues and pinks and grays and all the rest of my activity as an artist. Before starting I'd like to thank Norbert, the other painters who have written for this project and those of you reading.

First one: "*Some dilemmas produce vivid images in our heads.*"

This was a science reporter on NPR, Shankar Vedantam. He continues, "*And we're wired to respond emotionally to pictures. Take away the pictures--the brain goes into rational, calculation mode.*" He's talking about a study on the effect that mental imagery has on how people process moral dilemmas. The linking of imagery to morality--visuals to values--is pretty amazing to me, and one of the most convincing arguments for the relevance of painting today. Painting seems uniquely able make visual our contemporary dilemmas. There's no more direct way to make values tangible--whether a thought is disturbing, consoling, uplifting, whatever. If it's important enough to paint it's worth thinking about. And, in painting there are just so many ways to visualize values, so many to get what is inside the head out, through the hand, and into the world of objects and images .

Let's think about that quote on more time: "*Some dilemmas produce vivid images in our heads.*" Isn't it fun to think maybe the inverse is true as well? Vivid images are a way to get a grasp on the dilemmas in our heads. Which I think is what the poet William Corbett was getting at, writing about late paintings by Philip Guston: "*Guston's bewilderment at what he had painted and his desire to continue to be bewildered are driving forces behind the late work.*"

Next one, Robert Sapolsky, biologist and Stanford professor, on metaphor:

*"What are we to make of the brain processing literal and metaphorical versions of a concept in the same brain region? Or that our neural circuitry doesn't cleanly differentiate between the real and the symbolic? What are the consequences of the fact that evolution is a tinkerer and not an inventor, and has duct-taped metaphors and symbols to whichever pre-existing brain areas provided the closest fit?"*

We've learned to see art as so many either/ors: Is a painting an image or an object? a commodity or a concept? of the body or of the mind? Essentially this, or self-actualized that? and so on. And one way or another, a lot of these boil down to a debate between the literal and the metaphorical. Here though, what Sapolsky is writing is that the brain doesn't differentiate between the two. The best we can *know* always contains certain confusions and ambiguities, because of the way our brains are built. As a painter I deal with that ambiguity, but I don't accept it. So the paintings are an unholy mess on purpose, wrong-headed literally and

metaphorically. The mission is: how much uncertainty can a painting contain--pictorial, conceptual, contextual--and still arrive at some honest, authentic clarity?

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