Artist Statement: Elizabeth Barnes

## The Persistence of Painting

My work is organized around a trio of generative systems and methods realized over time. These organizing systems are **abstraction,** the **grid,** and **colour.** These systems overlay, converge, and interact with each other through the process of painting.

Paint is essentially mud. If we look back to prehistory and the origins of the human species we see the marks left on the cave walls in paint. The persistence of painting can speak of interconnection across time and generations.

Painting is a language, and I've been developing my vocabulary over the past 40 years. Like any language, there's always more to explore and understand. Painting feels like breathing, and I'm constantly surprised at what I discover through this process.

Paint lends itself to experimentation. There are always new questions to ask. I encourage the paint to drip, splatter, spread, blend, or to stand alone and speak for itself. The painting is a site for building, excavating, destroying, and rebuilding. Forms emerge and recede over time, as the painted surface transmutes into new stories and identities.

### Abstraction

Abstraction in painting generally refers to the non-objective state of the image, or more generally, to paintings that are about paint, personal expression, or perception.

For me, the indeterminate nature of abstraction defines the uncertainty of the present moment. The paintings form through observation, presence, and questions, as they retain the traces of choices and delays. They give form to the feeling of something undefinable or uncanny. I create an abstract narrative via process, while the paintings exist as a springboard for the viewer to create their own narratives.

### The Grid

The Grid, was famously identified in 1979 by art historian Rosalind Krauss as "what art looks like when it turns its back on nature."

My work with the grid embraces nature. This began in the late 90s, as I became interested in what was called the New Physics. At the time, ideas about chaos theory, quantum mechanics, and fractals became popular as possible means for understanding our future.

My first grids were based in images I created through the use of a fractal generating applet (a pre-curser to the apps that now run our everyday lives). This Java applet used fractal equations

to produce vector images resembling trees and plants. I began to play with the equations, changing numbers to alter the images until they reached the point where they completely broke down. My intention was to conceptually allude to the idea that our intervention in the natural world was moving us closer to the future that we are now experiencing as a climate crisis.

As I began to look closer at these patterns and also to see computers as a potential tool for making art, I imagined an expanded grid. A grid defining patterns within nature, and also within emerging technologies. This grid allowed me to explore my human consciousness as it intertwined with my perception of everything I could see and sense.

I align my work with a larger network of women painters. Feminist artists have looked to the grid as a way of interconnecting human consciousness with the natural world, and also as a means to slow down and be present. They have used the grid to explore pattern and decoration, the garden or home, and the nature of women's work, such as quilting and stitching, in their investigations into cultural theory and artistic production.

I use the grid as an organizing structure, and find its versatility a potent form for expanding on my ideas as I allow the paint to speak through the process. Repeated intervals, rhythm, and colour can create stability and calm. They can also act to question and break down systemic structures, as new pathways towards understanding complexity emerge.

**Colour**

Colour, and how we perceive it, has always been a central focus in my paintings. Abstraction allows for colour to be received differently when it is not immediately understood as representing a known entity. Colour is light, and colour is energy.

Studies in neuroscience and embodied cognition have discovered that the perception of colour is, significantly, received first in the body, and then processed in the brain, to access a state of embodiment for both the maker and the viewer.

In my work I have been interested in how the interaction of colours can alter or manipulate the experience of viewing a painting. The transformation of how a painting can change through colour mixing, placement, and application has never ceased to intrigue me. While working on a painting, it can change dramatically with the shifting of just one small area of colour. The energy of the painting can create the illusion of movement. Colour can change the perception of depth and spatial relationships, or serve to create a mood.

The reception of colour is always subjective. People have many associations to colour which can reflect their own particular history. These associations can come from cultural experience, memories, or their personal preferences and imaginations.

To conclude, I make paintings to satisfy my own curiosity. They provide a way for me to explore my observations more intimately. The paintings are not intended to send a message to the

viewer. The paintings always begin from a place of not-knowing, as I work with paint to create objects that can resonate with the viewer and provide a space for them to explore their own experience in an embodied present.

--Elizabeth Barnes