

The Living Picture

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The layers beneath the surface of a painting must move. Wood, glue, fibers, pigment and binders are breathing, drying and aging in close proximity to one another. When built in layers, paints create relationships, strong connective bonds interlaced with microscopic holes where off-gasses can escape. When a painting dries, it changes colour—the surface cures, hardens and darkens. Paintings will collect layers of dust and slowly bleach in the available light. The touch of fingers will accumulate on their surfaces over time, both wearing away and adding buildup. Regardless of preparations, whites can yellow, colours can shift, and paint can crack, flake and delaminate.

In painting, losses are formed when parts of a picture's surface begin to break away. As its support is revealed, it becomes both image and surface. The frayed edges of missing paint alter the 'face' of the painting, creating new and charged shapes. Its narrative is doubled because these holes push the composition into the present, and into a space for action.

In breaking apart the picture plane, losses expose the possibility for alternate pathways, undoing the finished quality of an artwork. With this loss, the work opens up again, entering a conversation with those who treat and care for art. It becomes a space for more work to be done, more treatments to be applied. For reintegration, the holes need to be stabilized, filled with gesso, leveled or textured to the surrounding topography, and colour matched.

Working across painting, sculpture and assemblage, the artists featured in *The Living Picture* employ practices of remaking, responding to losses, holes and patches as sites of inquiry. They each suggest change, destruction and obliteration as studio processes that can nudge and push towards something generative. How can change, decay and uncertainty be brought into an artwork successfully? What does the shape of the loss create?

The title *The Living Picture* is borrowed from Isabelle Graw's book *The Love of Painting*. Graw elaborates on the idea of the living picture from the discipline of visual studies to describe a uniquely special and complex relationship between painter and painting.

- Katie Lyle, 2023