

The big paintings are hard to control. They always start out too proud and monumental, they want to have a personality but not my personality, and I fight them until we find a compromise. Of course I don't want these things to have my personality either. I've found myself taking elaborate steps to keep my own signature away. Every time I need a mark, I have to build the tool for making that mark: mostly stretcher bars to create a relief, sometimes a pillow of paper towels or just the painting folded back and stapled to itself. I rarely find that my own brushy gesture belongs on a painting. A mark made using the stretcher bars has a natural sense of belonging- at one time the whole painting was contained within its edges. So in layers it flatly and bluntly reveals time and a history of decisions.

Meanwhile, with more slowness to each mark, and more distance between hand and brain, I am a better editor, more apt to cover or chop a thing up, destroy it completely, blame the tool and not myself. It helps, having no attachments until the end. But I still remain perplexed at my constant refusal of my own hand's gesture, why I find it so excessive- yes it is personal, but the personal is what I am at such pains to bring out of these things, layer after layer. I think about Johns and Ryman and how they get away with making marks that are so signature yet so... at home on the linen. Who was it who answered that Johns was laughing when he made his marks, and that is why I accept them? While I am thinking and frowning when I put a brush in my hand. It was a good answer, but I want more, please bring them. Though I will accept them slowly, and only academically. For I have secretly become very attached to my layers and labor and tool-building.

-JR, January 2014

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