

A Body for Your Thoughts

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These paintings and drawings begin with a vision of how thought, language, and reason might relate to the biological ground of the body.

Maybe the words that make up my thoughts are channels. My mind is made of tracks carved by letter sounds; particles of potential thought tumble into meaning like gum balls cascading through a dispenser. Maybe the illumination of a mental image caught in my brain is like a pocket of fresh air held in my lungs. Maybe it makes sense to picture a chain of reason as a network of wires that lifts itself above my cortex.

This body of work contains language, but it's hardly legible. If I'm trying to envision an account of how language and thought come to be, I can't start with these phenomena as given. I have to catch the word before it coalesces, or cut open and expose the mechanical space just beneath thought, or get so close to speech that I can see its parts. The actions I need to take to explain a thing tend to dissolve the thing itself.

Each work starts as an attempt to model a reply to the puzzle of how a body makes a mind. A model generalizes. It strips away the incidental details of the system it represents so that we can see the relevant elements clearly. But these are models made of paint, a material with a tendency to exceed the task of representing what I say is relevant. These are models of mind thrown into a textured world of shadows, iridescence, moisture, and grain. These contingent particulars have nothing to do with understanding the mechanics of the system. But perhaps they have something to do with understanding what it feels like to be a system that lives.

I cycle between directing the paint in a search for the most coherent picture of thought that I can muster and letting the paint lead the search. The tension between my plan and the image I ultimately make opens up the possibility for the painting itself to set thought into motion.

- Dana Lok

"Sieve", "Vessel", "Stair", and "Net" were originally commissioned by Triple Canopy (Issue 30: Not Nothing, 2026)