Jordan Martins interviews Judith Geichman

**Ten** questions from **Jordan Martins** for **Judith Geichman** regarding her exhibition [**Solitaire**](http://regardsgallery.com/exhibitions/judith-geichman/)**.**

**JM**How long do you look at a painting that you love? How long do you want a viewer to look at your paintings?

**JG**My first thought in answer to your question is that it might not be about time, but then again, it might be. It really depends on the particular picture I’m looking at. There could be charged moments or even seconds with a piece. Then there is the residue of what the work gives, or leaves you with, that settles in your being, some quality that wakes you up, brings back memories, associations, emotions, warm, cool, or not so pleasant.

A few years back I read that Morris Louis was having a retrospective at the High Museum, where 27 of his large-scale paintings would be shown.  I knew I had to go and make a pilgrimage of sorts to see the show. I caught an early morning flight out of O’Hare to Atlanta, spent the whole day looking at ML’s paintings, and then caught a 7:00pm flight back to Chicago, and was back home my 11:00pm. What day of looking, where I could go back and forth, scrutinize the work, and give it time to settle. Not to rush, to look and take it all in was thrilling. I felt the same way when I saw the Yves Kline’s retrospective at the Hirshhorn, de Kooning at MOMA.

Standing if front of Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avigon* painting at M0MA, I can always expect a rush of excitement. When I look at the painting I am seeing something different in the piece each time. The act of looking, like the act of drawing, reminds you of where you are at the moment, in response to the piece.

The answer to the second part of your question is ‘a long time’, and if that’s not enough, there is definitely a need to come back for a second look.

2.  
**JM**Diebenkorn prepared *Notes to myself on beginning a painting,*with parameters such as “attempt what is uncertain”, “tolerate chaos”, and (my favorite) “The pretty, initial position which falls short of completeness is not to be valued-except as a stimulus for further moves” Do you have any rules for yourself on beginning a painting? Are they written or in your head? Do they change frequently or are there any commandments you’ve kept over the course of your career?

**JG**Yes, I have one rule that I try to honor at all times when I’m working in the studio. It’s not written down, but inside my approach to making my work. The rule is ‘if you get an idea, do it!’ Even if the idea sounds ridiculous, dumb, someone else has tried it, no matter what, take a risk, and do it! If so, the rewards will be plentiful.

3  
**JM**What do you like to look at when you’re not painting?

**JG**I take walks, sometimes long walks, go to yoga classes, and read novels. Right now I’m pretty caught up in a series of Neapolitan Novels, by the author Elena Ferrante that trace the relationship, bond, and life’s journey between two women who grow up together in Naples, Italy. I find Ferrante’s writing straightforward, psychological, insightful, and very moving. I recently found out that Ferrante is her pen name, and her true identity is not publicly known. Knowing this now, I can add mysterious as another quality to her writing. Reading how Ferrante talks about her writing practice she mentions, gesture, feeling, and flow of events, which I can strongly identify with in my own approach to painting.

For me, all the parts of living a life outside of the studio have a great effect on my painting practice. When I’m not painting, whether it’s consciously or unconsciously, spoken or unspoken, life finds it’s way into my painting. I am nourished by it all.

To flip it around the other way, I can paraphrase a quote of Phillip Guston’s when he says that painting duplicates, and is a kind of substitute for your life that is lived from hour to hour, day to day. Nothing is stable, all is shifting, all is changing.

4.  
**JM**Is your approach to color fairly democratic, or do you have any biases or judgments for or against certain permutations of hue/value/saturation? Do you find yourself drawn to certain colors, or do you ever strategically avoid colors?

**JG**I would say that I am very democratic and open to color, but sometimes color is not democratic and open to me. I make choices. Take the last four years, where my work has been all about black and white. Only recently, and more specifically for my show at Regards, has color, and my interest in color returned to the work. I think holding back from color these last few years, has now increased my hunger for it.

5.  
**JM**What do you do when a painting isn’t working?

**JG**I usually do something crazy, like close my eyes, or put on a blindfold, and start making marks on the painting with a loaded brush. For me, when a painting is not working that is the best time to work on it. I feel there’s nothing to lose, and that I can take tremendous liberties, and risk with the piece. I try and stir the pot to create some chaos to shake things up, shuffle the painting events around, and this usually helps to refresh, and remove the stale ways of seeing, and working. Almost always there is something that is not working in a painting; the need to edit, cover over, rebuild, and to make new is a constant.

6.  
**JM**Your large pieces in this show (Black and White I and II) are reminiscent of Dazzle camouflage which was designed to disrupt or confuse vision of an object, not to conceal it, and they otherwise create a feeling of vertigo when I stand close enough for them to fill my vision. How important is this de-stabilizing effect of painting to you?

**JG**Thanks for making that connection between the Dazzle Camouflage World War I war ships to my two Black and White paintings in the Regards show. Those WWI war ships are dazzling to my eye, I am reminded of Picasso’s cubist work, and at the same time Sol Lewitt’s wall drawings, and paper series that also refer back to the Dazzle Camouflage.

I must say that it is not my intention to give the viewer vertigo when looking at my pictures, but there are strong perceptual and formal concerns about movement, and constructing a space within the picture plane that both provokes, and helps to contain the movement in the work.

7.  
**JM**How many “deaths” has painting gone through (if any)?

**JG**So far, for me personally, there’s never been a death of painting. I have had at times been lost and stuck in my own painting practice, and this has felt very much like a death. I have weathered a few storms in that department, but I have never given up on the whole idea of painting, painting as a practice, or it’s rich history. The idea of the death of painting is an interesting, and recurring myth within Modernism, and Post-Modernism. It’s not about painting; great painters and paintings continue to exist. The question is more about how we think about history, how we use it, and how we allow ourselves to be used by it.

8.  
**JM**There’s an immediate visual generosity to the work shown at Regards, in that the paintings actively tug on my sight and the way my brain processes the surfaces, inviting hallucinations, head tilts, and zooming in and out. To what extent do you see this work as focused on this retinal-spatial experience, and to what extent do you see them pointing to something outside the canvas?

**JG**The answer is both at once; both the phenomenological, retinal-spatial experience, and the pointing to something outside that happen simultaneously. That out-sidedness is the materiality of the paint as well as the painting. Further steps outside are the experiences of things in the world, for instance, a walk in Rome where a certain black and white mosaic is encountered and seen, which carries its own potential for vertigo, the memory of which is carried back into the making of the painting.

9.  
**JM**What kind of work are you scared to make?

**JG**Scared implies fear, and I would prefer the word reluctance. I am reluctant to lose a certain focus. I could do many things, but I chose to do the work that I do.

10.  
**JM**Music or Silence in the studio?

**JM**Both. Music often, but not always. Sometimes I just like to listen to the paintings.

Judith Geichman is an artist living in Chicago.

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