



CLEARING

Sebastian Black
Circle and Square
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Hi Justine,

A brief note about the novel, and the paintings, and the relationship between them.

My initial plan was for the paintings to depict the contents of the novel. Conversely, the novel was largely written so that I'd have something to paint. I hoped that, when taken together, both my paintings and my writing would become useful supplemental materials for one another. Put more simply, I was trying to become an illustrator. Illustration seemed like an efficient conceptual framework for organizing form and content, a way to avoid the turbid puddle of aesthetic forms and discursive formations which typically produce artistic meaning. My painted forms would be tasked with serving my written content, and vice versa. What a seductive notion! What a way to work! For once I'd have a reason behind my grasping, rather than be always grasping for a reason.

Then I actually got down to work and, as is always the case, the obscure intentions of my materials took over. My novel digressed from its outline. Unplanned characters appeared like swindlers in a foreign city and pulled the narrative off course. In my paintings analogous interlopers grew from the shadows. They crept up to the sides of people's noses and hunched in their eye sockets, stubbornly present as birth marks. Looking back now, form and content, which I'd imagined would appear as parallel tracks carrying me here, to the exhibition, instead seemed like a great big meandering mess.

Everybody wants to have a purpose, and one conspicuous problem with art is that it is one of those rare activities you can pursue for your entire life without one. That such purposelessness is one of the founding articles of art's constitution is cold comfort considering that it is an article art shares with despair. Pretending to be an illustrator was a good way to avoid this latter condition, and I recommend it to anyone who has the (mis)fortune of calling their workplace a studio. It doesn't matter if you really become an illustrator. Actually, it's better if you don't. The performance of the farce will keep things light enough, and this light might even illuminate something important about what you are really up to. For example, you might notice that for art to happen, form and content don't always have to coincide. In fact, maybe for art to happen, form and content can be like old friends who, though their lives have taken different courses, still meet for a drink now and then. When they reconvene, of course, there will be happy chatter, harmony, and laughter. But there will also be lags in the conversation and even some awkward silences. And though it isn't always the most fun thing to do, I think artists should revel in the quiet. They should embrace these lulls where form is picking aimlessly at its coaster, where content's incessant babble has finally run dry.

Hope that helps!

Sebastian