

## Selfless: The Work of Damon Freed

The artist and poet, Damon Freed writes in his poem "Selfless, "the cynical mind is not mine to have, nor ours to dwell in. A life of joy can be had." From his vantage point as a creator, he advises his readers that the land of skepticism is barren, devoid of the immediacy and profundity of emotion that makes life resonate. Thus, the artist courageously reveals pain and elation, buoyancy and weight, acuity and confusion in a disarmingly openhearted manner. Walking into his exhibition "Obstacle and Void" is like walking into the artist's inner life coded in symbolism, form, color, mark and space.

All works on display were painted in acrylic and flashe on paper and have the ease and vibrancy of touch that these simple materials allow. The artist is interested in clarity and wants unmitigated interchange between his emotions and their translation into paint. To achieve this, he has invented a language unique to himself, composed of an off kilter geometry of grids, shapes, squiggles, dashes and clots suspended within a matrix of diaphanous pigment. The results are works that reveal themselves slowly, reading initially as visually appealing abstractions that speak the language of formalism and then morphing into strange dreamscapes that defy definition.

The work is wholly original, compelling and contradictory and puts me in mind of the words of psychologist D.W Winnicott who writes, "it is a joy to be hidden but a disaster not to be found." The work aches to be understood, undressed, taken in. For instance, in a work from 2015 titled "Her and Him", a hastily painted field of grey pigment is brushy and rushed, each loose skein of paint like blurted words in an urgent conversation. This fast field is bifurcated by a black line that separates one shape from the other. Clearly a stand-in for figures, one awkward form is a bulging, empty black puzzle piece, the other pink and concave in places where the first is convex. Yet, the forms would never easily fit together, and are separated by a line to exacerbate their alienation from each other. Splattered at the image's lower right is white paint, evocative of body effluvia. The piece initially reads as an organic abstraction with geometric elements, playful and loose, but reveals itself slowly to be visual memoir that discusses separation from a lover, worry over the capacity to connect, and grief.

In the works Relocation Portal 1 and Relocation Portal 2 bright, funhouse colors obfuscate a darker expression of self. At the center of each composition is a form, square or circular, filled with sections, each containing circles within circles. The imagery evokes circuitry, clocks, or mitochondria and is set into a jazzy grid of patterning. It seems that each of the central images is an escape hatch of some sort, a door through which a better reality may exist. The artist seems to be saying that time, genetics and/or psychic machinations all lead inward to the void that hovers as black space at the edges of the composition. That void is the nothingness at the edges of human experience that some attribute to God, others to death, others of the vast and expansive boundlessness of the universe. However one interprets the void,

the message the artist is sending is profound. We are caught in a distracting and cacophonous world but if we push inwards we can relocate ourselves to a more still and peaceful realm. The work puts me in mind of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century mystical poet Rumi who writes, “out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

A nocturne is a musical composition inspired by darkness. In each of Freed’s Nocturnes, a piece of paper has been coated in black paint and then sanded until the paint seems distressed and eroded. Against this matte darkness are implied grids composed of bright points of color. The grid in Freed’s work acts as the ground we are born into, but his use of bright marks within the grid seems to indicate that despite the limitations imposed on us by culture, expectation, embodiment and mortality, we can still be luminous and distinct. Musing on experience, the artist commented, “Do we ever reach understanding? Over the course of our lives we slowly receive knowledge but do we ever receive an abundance of that knowledge?” Freed’s work links the oppositions of human experience together visually so that knowing and unknowing coexist within one frame. And in that way, he speaks for all of us.