

January 17

Dear Pam,

I have been looking online for the particular John Marin images I had in mind when we met at your studio, when I made a connection to his work in relation to the two paintings you have been working on. The images that I am able to find are too directly dependent on landscape, whereas the paintings I in my memory were much more allusive and abstract, retaining only sketchy references to land forms and to the sky. Mostly what I recall finding in these wonderful remembered paintings were Marin's colors: he seemed to take colors from a sunset or a sunrise, clip them up, and scatter these bits of color across a swath of canvas; he did similar things with colors of water and sky and greenery. The result was, as you said to me of your paintings, "like what one captures out of peripheral vision," bare suggestions of shape that are seen in absolute clarity, with colors that impress themselves upon one's consciousness unnoticed, as through a side door.



**Pamela Jorden, *Tecopa*, 2013**

oil on linen, 72 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles

Thinking of your interest in peripheral vision, do you sometimes find that your eyes see best, and remember most deeply, things that one sees without looking? I think of this as locating the edges of sensory experiences, and I draw on these slight sensory experiences to make "sense" of the world. My looking at and photographing of the ground, and the suggestions of my pathway (and the memory of a pathway, captured by photographing behind me as I walk), all are ways for me to document my being, and also to imagine the histories of other people who have passed the same ways.

Lately you seem be engaging with color in a way that I have not seen you do in the past, do you think this is true? To begin to understand where this new thing might come from, I put together a question-narrative in my head: I know that in the past year or



**Pamela Jorden, *Cut Target*, 2013**

Oil and graphite on linen, 48 x 48 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles

so you spent time back home, in Tennessee, away from the Los Angeles and California landscape and light; I also know that you spent time in the summer heat of Parkfield, with its golden hills, clear blue sky, expansive sunsets and olive-blue green foliage; do you think these experiences have influenced your color explorations? Perhaps your peripheral vision picked these things up and, in the case of your time in the South, perhaps in the absence of familiar visual diversity, your unconscious memory replayed for you, in the background of your thoughts, all the flashes of action and chunks of color and visual noise of Los Angeles?

I recognize that I am preceding your email and images to me, and I hope this message doesn't throw you off track; I have been thinking about these questions since our studio visit, and as I looked for images to back up my thoughts, it occurred to me that I think in remembered images and in words, and that in any case, perhaps I should not try too hard to stick with any program, but trust to my instinct to inquire.

Sincerely yours,  
Geoff

*January 20*

*Dear Geoff;*

*Thank you again for your thoughts and for reminding me of Marin and his "sketchy references." I looked back at some of his paintings and I love the energy and speed in his description of space. They are like notations of an environment where colors and bits of lines and strokes give a sense of a landscape but also remain allusive. I love your phrase "remembered paintings" and that while not able to find the exact images of paintings you were looking for, your memory conjures how the paintings work, what the colors and marks do, and where they take you.*

*I think all this relates to my ideas about peripheral vision and how my memory of certain colors and forms, but also experiences I have had in a place informs how I go about making a painting. Like you, I collect images sometimes in a folder on my computer or in my mind, as places I'd like to come back to and*



photo by Pam Jorden

take a closer look. When I'm driving through Los Angeles, I note the address of a curious wall painting or building façade. I like it when I go back and something has changed. Like when a wall mural has been painted over, white washed, or repainted with brighter colors, or maybe it just looks really different at dusk than at noon.

I love your ideas about the “edges of sensory experience.” Your photographs of the ground resonate with me because they are markers of your travels. They describe the texture of a location and your movement through an environment. My paintings function somewhat this way for me as well.

Like you say, I have been engaging with color somewhat differently. While living back in my hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee for a year, I found myself thinking about the colors in my environment in a more particular way. I have made quite busy and colorful paintings in the past, but in more recent paintings I have combined these bright colors with stained raw linen, silk, and sometimes printed fabrics. Staining on a mid-toned ground gives an atmospheric effect, but hot and vibrant colors influence and direct your eye. My paintings combine the “visual noise” of my surroundings with subtle optical effects. I hope to suggest the transience of visual experience and changing effects of light and shifting perspectives.

Also, a little about the attached images. While teaching in Tennessee, I did a lot of research in the library thinking about ways to talk about abstraction with young painters. These are a few images that have stuck with me.

The first photo is of a neighborhood barbershop, and the other two are Sonia Delaunay designs. I love the familiar barber pole motif expanded onto the façade of the Echo Barber Shop. The single figure is a still from a film entitled *Le p'tit Parigot*, and the group is Sonia and models wearing her scarves in the studio of Robert Delaunay.

Sonia Delaunay's work is vibrant and colorful, but these black and white images really fascinated me. The figures are camouflaged within a collage of juxtaposed pattern. In all of these photos, pattern wraps around surfaces, bodies, and architecture. I've been thinking a lot about the influence of color,



Sonia Delaunay



**Geoff Tuck, *Book, May, 2013***

cardboard, gift wrapping paper, scrap wood, photograph of the ground printed on shiny paper, 7 x 10 x 3 inches

*I think books are an obvious choice. They started everything for me. The wrapping paper was worn when I got it, and has grown more so since that time. The cardboard protected Mark Hagen's obsidian during a move from home to my studio. The photo was taken at Mission San Miguel. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council*



**Geoff Tuck, *Polley No. 2, February, 2013***

acrylic paint with Parkfield dirt, envelopes and note cards, newspaper mounted on paper 34 x 23 inches

*Many are the Polleys, and none the Drooluses. When I was twenty, I began to mail drawings and books I made to people - friends, artists whose work I admired, relative strangers. The postal system holds promise and mystery, desire and pride, and hope. Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council*

*and how color and pattern directs or bends the eye to create motion and form. I suppose these photos, like my paintings, picture a particular moment, a physical and phenomenological interaction with space.*

*Sincerely,  
Pam*

*May 19*

*Dear Geoff,*

*You are in Parkfield this weekend! I'm sure it is gorgeous there today! After my long weekend of family and general craziness of life, I'm finally settling back into a routine and also in the studio this weekend. AT LAST! Also happy to resume our conversation!*

*Thank you again for visiting the show with me at Samuel Freeman. It has been fun to revisit the show with friends and see the work through their eyes. You brought up an interesting idea about how the round paintings brought to mind cinema or film. Maybe because the shape is like an oculus—a framing device that captures motion as marks travel though and across. I think we also talked about the transparent washes of color in some of the small pieces and the tension between atmospheric and solid space in the paintings.*

*Maybe all this talk of the optical is in contrast to the physicality and grittiness of your paintings made with dirt, acrylic paint, found paper, various and particular objects that you come across in your daily travels? Or not? I love the texture in your work and how it invokes the senses. You convey your subjectivity with the work, but the viewer can pick up the pieces and take them somewhere too.*

*More soon,  
Pam*

*July 21*

*Hi Pam,*

*Thanks for mentioning my paintings at Commonwealth and Council. As you suggest, I emphasize the disparate materials I use—dirt, photos of the ground, found*



**Pamela Jorden, *Shadow Painting*, 2013.**

Oil on linen, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 17 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery



**Pamela Jorden, *Astrid*, 2013.**

Oil on linen, 11.375 x 11.375 inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery



**Pamela Jorden, *Jet*, 2013.**

Oil on linen, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 10 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

and gifted objects, etc. - to give evidence of my path through the world, and also to make clear my reliance for content on the materials, and on the people around me. I have to start somewhere, so I begin with what captures my attention. It's like paying attention allows me to become real.

Thinking of *Notes on Looking*, and of my photos of the ground, I would seem to be an observer, and yet, I think, an active one. In *Notes*, I write about people whose work gives me the power of understanding; and in my art, I feature the dirt and the photos and the names of people to make clear that support goes two ways—even as I depend on these wonderful characters, and on the objects, and the ground, I also show them off, I bring them to the attention of others. In a very strong way, I feel I might not exist without the people I love and admire, and without ground I walk on, and the objects that I pick up. The reality of that emotion is so strong for me, and I want to return their favor.

Geoff

Hi again Pam,

Gee, it feels odd to jump back into a conversation

that I've let lapse so often, and for so long. We began when you were first working in the paintings for your Sam Freeman show, and now that show has come and gone and so has a show of work for Commonwealth and Council, that I began around the same time.

I have been thinking about the painting *Field* in your show. It is such a strong expression of pale light—almost all in whites, with pale grey lines that suggest sticks and dry plants in a landscape. I'm grateful for your title, which allows me to "see" a landscape. In the title I feel you declare your intentions; I feel that such a statement from an artist has the effect of opening my mind to other interpretations—this is curious and delightful in a world where often definition is resisted by the artist, or all choice for interpretation is left up to the viewer. I can take your "Field" in, and to it I can say "Yes, I see a field, perhaps the memory of a distant morning or evening, when light is filtered through haze and it's cool. Yes, I find these things, and also I can find a formal composition of lines and shades of white, of barely present iridescence, of greys like shadows; and I can find an exploration of—a representation of—the effects of light, and of the experience of light. If you had titled the painting for instance, "Untitled" or if the words in the title had been less a direct reference to

June 10

the content of the painting, I might have been frustrated and would not have looked for so long.

Counter-intuitively, your directness allows me more freedom than indirection would have. This is a long way of saying that I am tired of artists—especially painters—who refuse to declare themselves. I think it's okay for a painting to “mean” a particular thing, and I think this does not shut down further wandering and consideration by a viewer. Hm. I recognize that this all may be more about me than about you and your paintings (-:



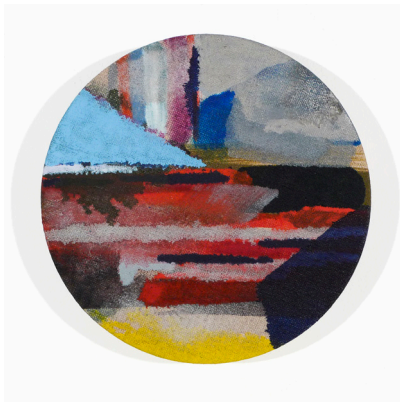
By the way—I love that I came across a detail of *Field* on John's (John Pearson's) website. This makes a special painting even more special

to me. I think it lovely that John pursues his own image-making, and his investigations into light, through your work. Yours seems a marriage of ideas, and of bodies, and of spirit, if you will allow me to say so. I also feel encouraged to see your paintings as investigations of light, as well as of mark-making.

In some of your early, calligraphic paintings—especially in your show at London Street, when Dave Hughes did a reading—I recognized an interest in language, in the physical poetry of written sounds; is this understanding something you agree with? The image of Dave making sounds that aren't words but that communicate nonetheless is indelibly printed (pun intended) on my brain as him “reading” your paintings.

I think that as your work developed you brought your focus to the expressive power of the mark—not anymore as a reference to language or to voice, but to the physical motion of your hand, and to the ability of paint to offer a view of the activity of painting. (I think...)

Thanks for sharing your observations of my work! I like the grittiness you mention. I like that using dirt from Parkfield relates the work to my person, and to experiences with my friends.



**Pamela Jorden, *Sundial*, 2013**  
oil on linen, 7½ x 7½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery



**Pamela Jorden, *untitled*, 2009**  
monotype, 15 x 11 inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery



**Pamela Jorden, *untitled*, 2010**  
bleach on fabric, 13 x 13 inches

Courtesy of the artist and  
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

The same is true of the found objects—I relate to these very emotionally, and I also associate the things to people who dropped them into the street, and to the stories—specific and banal—of those people and others who might have passed.

I'm laughing at myself Pam. Lately all this art stuff has gotten so difficult for me to talk—and write—about. The closer I get to making a statement of my own (a physical statement), as with the show at Commonwealth and Council, the more frightened I am to declare myself. It's like I've been hiding, and hesitate to reveal myself. Ha. How's that for psychologizing the work?!

Cheers,  
Geoff

June 18

Hi Geoff!

*Our conversation is like one of those old fashioned exchange of letters that have to travel some distance with time in between for mulling over—meanwhile life happens. That's ok with me. I hope so for you too. A lot has happened since we began our exchange, but I'm also happy to be back in my studio where I began working on the show and back in a private space with my work again.*

*Thanks for your thoughts on the Field painting. That was one that I began during 2009/10 on a stretcher frame that I inherited from David Patton when he closed his gallery in Chinatown. David had used it as a projection screen for an installation in the gallery, and it was this amazing expanse of bright white space to work into. I had been working on a lot of dark monochromes at the time. Blacks and blues with subtleties and light play going on. Because of the dark grounds, those paintings really asserted their shape and physical presence. Working into this big white canvas, I wanted to allow for space that was light and open with a more subtle relationship to the wall.*

*Around the time we were preparing to leave town for a year, John took a lovely photograph of a detail of this painting that was included in his solo*



**Pamela Jorden, *Night Owl*, 2011**  
Oil on linen, 74×50"

Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

*show at WPA. I felt like I was leaving behind a large unfinished painting, but John's photo helped me recognize how the immediacy and simplicity of the gesture was really working. So I felt ok about leaving it in its current state.*

*I pulled out the painting again when preparing for the show at Samuel Freeman Gallery. Long before we even knew what the gallery space would look like, I proposed to Alice that it could be a backdrop for the sculptures in the show. Ultimately, I think there was an active relationship between the painting and other work in the show. The painting kind of lifted the horizon line from the gallery floor where most of the sculptures were grounded. There was a nice contrast between the silvery grays and whites of the painting and Alice's colorful geometric floor piece, but also similarities to the dry and tumbling qualities of Jeff's sculptures.*

*So, a roundabout way to address your ideas about titles and intention, I decided on a title for the painting after it was installed in the space. Field is a nod to large flat expanses of color field paintings, but the gestures in it can lead the viewer towards the pictorial allusions that you mention. Sometimes I give paintings a straightforward descriptive title, other times a more personal associative word or phrase. I became more comfortable titling work when I realized that the titles are not the key to the work. Kind of the way that song lyrics work with music—they give you an understanding of a sentiment, but the tones, sounds, rhythm can give you another personal and physical experience outside of the meaning derived from language.*

*Thanks for bringing up Dave's reading of his poetry and its relation to my earlier work and ideas of gesture and written language. When I first read a long piece that Dave wrote called NO X, I felt a strong affinity to his process and the use of words to carve out a space. It seemed to me that each word, phrase, sentence, stretched out my understanding of his narrative without becoming overly descriptive or explanatory. The story is happening as you read it. Gears are moving, turning, spinning. The book is somewhat difficult to read because of its density both narratively and visually with single-spaced typed pages, sporadic punctuation, and a quirk of the*



**Pamela Jorden, Untitled, 2010**  
Oil and enamel on linen, 12 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery



*typewriter that replaced the letter g with x throughout the book. So there is a pattern that you have to give yourself over to. My understanding is that Dave sat at a manual typewriter to write each page through a stream of consciousness with not much editing afterwards. His writing now makes sense to me as a painterly process, related to my experience of charting out in a direction with knowledge, a set of tools, and a particular interest in mind, but also a fascination with not knowing what I may encounter.*

*Until soon,  
Pam*

July 2

Pam,

You've mentioned pattern twice now (at least!), once in reference to Sonia Delaunay, and once in your writing about Dave Hughes. How do you understand pattern? Let me elaborate: Delaunay was using pattern in a physical sense—her abstractions occupy space (albeit two-dimensional space) she filled flat areas with repeating blocks and slashes of color and tone. It's interesting that she often draped these abstraction on bodies, this gives them volume without really giving them depth. Her models and actors look like pages from a book put in motion. Surfaces slide past and against each other in ways that must have flickered when one observed them. I think of that book, *Flatland*, for example. Does this sound right?

Dave Hughes, as you describe his work, uses pattern as action. While the result might appear on the page as a visually recognizable arrangement, it is derived not by arranging shapes, rather Hughes' actions are his means. The chance of a broken typewriter key has one effect on his patterned text, and his understanding of language has another. Funnily enough, in contrast to Delaunay's flat, visual abstraction, the pages of Hughes' book become deep space in one's imagination, as one reads.

My question to you about your calligraphic paintings was directed at your mark-making. I could

“see” your hand moving in the manner of making letters; the arrangements of color and shape felt (in those early paintings) as though they were the result of your actions.

Later on—and still today—the paintings appear to leave this relation to language behind, and the marks are less reliant on motions of lettering; it is as though your hand has learned to encompass larger concepts in your mark-making.

You seem more aware of the boundaries of your paintings, too. If in the past your abstract fields were cropped into a rectangle or a square, and so seemed like the “picture” might continue indefinitely, in the show at Sam Freeman the patterns bump up against the edges: the round, ocular paintings vibrate, the marks push against the boundary; if the marks on the canvases were circular they might continue their spin—but they can’t.

I see landscapes in many of those new paintings. All of the round one’s feel like landscapes to me (and this is concerning, since a classical landscape would be shaped like *Tecopa*—a wide rectangle). Even the *Target* painting has a wedge that reminds me of sculptors from a few decades ago, who made such shapes as references to land, and who often placed such shaped objects in the land.

Finally—is the painting *Sundial* a reference to your time at Parkfield, and to the sundial that David made?

Cheers Pam!  
Geoff Tuck

July 20

*Hi Geoff,*

*Yes pattern! I guess I would say that I think of pattern as a structure, a means for me to construct and organize my paintings, thoughts, and ideas. But this is always a starting point for me. I’m really drawn to the complicated space in the Delaunay photos. By layering pattern upon pattern, I see this as a disruption in the flatness of the plane creating movement and a flicker like you say. I have made*



**Pamela Jorden, *Horizon*, 2013**  
Oil on linen, 6 x 8 in

Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery

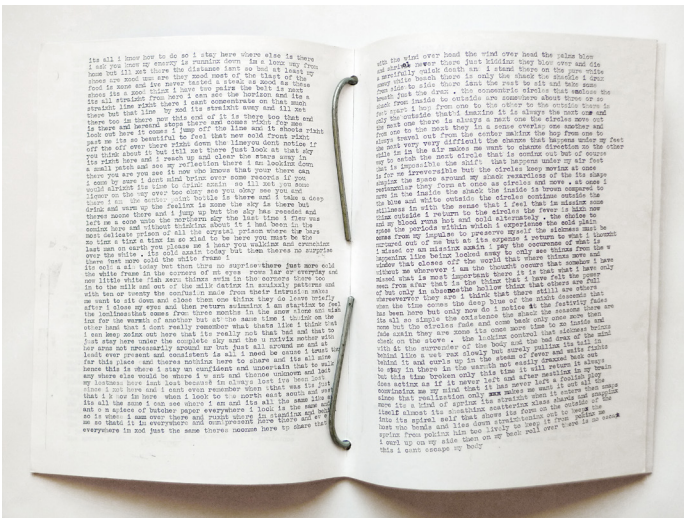
*a few paintings on printed fabrics. This gave me a predetermined and flat space borrowed from the world that I could bend or rupture.*

*You mention action and motion in relation to the work of Delaunay and Dave Hughes and this is definitely something that I think about too. In the Delaunay photos, the composition of the image is arranged like a painting. There is a flattened 2-dimensional space and the patterned scarves drape over and camouflage bodies. But a body is there, and in spite of the structure, it is clear that this is a moment in time. There is an interesting potential in that staged space too. It is a proposition of a narrative—but also, it is what it is: figures in the midst of lines, shapes, angles.*

*In NoX, Dave writes from within the space of the narrative, carving his way through it rather than describing from an idealized or distant perspective. This first person voice and focus on sensory experience has always drawn me to Dave's work. Also, the book is very much about a landscape, maybe an imaginary or psychological one, but definitely about a place, its composition, and how a person exists in that space. Again, I really relate to Dave's writing as a painterly process. There is no draft followed by revisions, only an accretion. You can listen to Dave read NoX here: [http://www.guidedvd.com/david\\_hughes\\_nox.html](http://www.guidedvd.com/david_hughes_nox.html), and see pictures of the book pages here: [http://www.wpala.com/artist\\_david\\_hughes.html](http://www.wpala.com/artist_david_hughes.html)*

*In my earlier work that contained calligraphic lines, I do think of this mark making like a kind of handwriting or a language, but also a trail or a path leading the eye through and around the paintings. I love how you describe “the physical poetry of written sounds.” There is a transformation going on, a translation from direct experience to an object or a text. The color, shape, and pattern I use in my paintings might come from a particular and personal association, but the viewer brings their own understanding of this too. I hope for my paintings to remain experiential rather than descriptive.*

*With my new work, I paint with thin washes of paint and sometimes with shaped stretcher frames. The painted linen wraps around the edges of the frame or pours over the sides. I still think of these*



**David Hughes,  
NO X, 1991**  
(second printing 2001),  
Xeroxed and bound book,  
(cover art by Rafe Mandel)

Courtesy of the artist and WPA LA

paintings as fragments. I want the shapes to have a quickness to them. I guess I mean I don't want them to feel necessarily fixed or architectural. The circular paintings that I call "cut targets" have a compositional break in them. I want to create an optical disruption like a jump cut. Again there is that flicker that happens when the whole fragments and then becomes whole again.

Recent travels to Tennessee, Parkfield, and to the Spiral Jetty in Utah have definitely influenced my work in relation to light and color. Driving to Tennessee from California, it is amazing to experience how color in the landscape changes slowly but still so dramatically. Also, I've made many trips to Death Valley with John and participated in his exploration of light and

landscape as we stumbled around and over rocks in the desert. "Internalized geometry" was a phrase suggested by Jeff or Alice when thinking about commonalities in our work before the Samuel Freeman show. This relates to my experience with abstraction as a way to give shape and physical presence to a subjective experience. Maybe I want my paintings to work kind of like a sundial: in relationship to light, reflecting and embodying what is moving and changing

Thanks Geoff for all your thoughts and patience in our exchange.

My best,  
Pam