



Unknown Maker
Albert P. Chol, ca. 1930
Gelatin silver print, with hand-written note on back
(in double-sided frame)
4.5 x 2.75 inches
The Evelyn S. and H. Wayne Patterson Fund
G.2017.15.5



Kowaliga School: Postcard of Woman Lounging, ca. 1914
3.4 x 5.4 inches
Museum purchase
G.1989.11.22.17



Kowaliga School: Postcard of Woman Sitting, ca. 1914
3.4 x 5.4 inches
Museum purchase
G.1989.11.22.18



Unknown Maker
Seaboard Air Line Railroad locomotive, ca. 1900
Albumen print
7.5 x 10 inches
Gift of a Friend of the Museum
G.2007.45.3



Unknown
Two Men in Horse Drawn Wagon, ca. 1914
Paper
5.4 x 7.75 inches
Museum purchase
G.1989.11.22.46



Unknown Maker
Morton Crump, n.d.
Silver Gelatin Print on Paper
3.25 x 3.75 inches
Gift of Miss John Maurice Thomas in memory of her parents John H. and Amelia W. Cantey Thomas and her sister Alma Woodsey Thomas
G.1994.20.24 B



Unknown Maker
Amelia Thomas and Morton Crump, n.d.
Silver Gelatin Print on Paper
3.25 x 3.75 inches
Gift of Miss John Maurice Thomas in memory of her parents John H. and Amelia W. Cantey Thomas and her sister Alma Woodsey Thomas
G.1994.20.24 A



Jonathan VanDyke
N v J
2015/16
[Brad and David canvas, studio session 13, whipping sequence, in gold; with over-dyed and painted canvas]
64.5 x 57 inches
Private collection, Rome



Jonathan VanDyke
Wallpaper for *The Patient Eye*
(detail), 2018
Unique photocopies, dimensions variable

The Patient Eye

1. When we speak of *attention*, we speak of *paying* and *turning*. To *pay* attention implies a transactional relationship wherein the attender receives something in return. To *turn* our attention towards something implies a physical movement, a condition of the body together with an object in space. The queer body has, historically, been conceived as mis-oriented, and for Sigmund Freud, who labelled homosexuals *inverts*, it was as if these bodies were upside down. As a gay man, I am aware that my body turns towards other male bodies in a way that is differently oriented than a normative body. The body turning “the wrong way” holds deep social and cultural connotations, as in the Biblical episode of Lot’s wife (Genesis 19), who was said to be turned into a pillar of salt when she looked back at the destruction of the ancient city of Sodom.

In our era of constant distraction, it can seem as if we are turning to everything and nothing all at once. There is a politics in deciding what we turn towards, one that requires noticing what we have turned away *from*. Attentiveness requires that we be open and mindful; not only that we practice noticing, but that we notice what we notice. Scholar Sarah Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomenology*, writes about the possibility of turning *differently*: “If we think with and through orientation we might allow the moments of disorientation to gather, almost as if they are bodies around a different table.... Indeed, to live out a politics of disorientation might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering.”¹

I’m writing this as I prepare to stand and silently contemplate 16 quilts in the collection of The Columbus Museum, three hours at a time over seven days. I call this 48-hour project a *performance*, but it might also be described as a shared act of attentiveness and a public display of research. I take a stand in front of a quilt each morning as the museum opens, without a phone, wallet, or keys, and I abide by a simple rule: once a quilt is on view, I won’t turn away from it. I designed the project to take place in the Museum’s gallery space, a three-story central atrium that I think of as the principal thoroughway of the museum’s exhibitions and programs, but a space that rarely houses works of art. Visitors may stand or sit next to me or wander and find vantage points from different levels, getting a long view on these rarely seen objects, some of which are more than eight feet in width. A team of students from Columbus State University’s art program and other volunteers will greet visitors at the entrance into the gallery and offer a voice for the project in counterpoint to my silence.

Ahmed notes that “orientations involve directions toward objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space.”² This 48-hour act of attentiveness towards quilts is meant to perform an expansive re-orienting around these objects. The museum and its staff labors on nearly every level of its operations to bring about such a project. I chose quilts that date to the early nineteenth century; their size and age require elaborate methods of care. The regular timing and ritualistic unfolding, mounting, and re-folding of the quilts gives a form to the complexity of this project, while clearing the way for something that is ostensibly simple—“looking.” For six months leading up to the performance, I’ve been in a training phase to prepare myself physically and mentally. Standing serves as a visual manifestation of the idea of “taking a stand” or “standing up for” something—in this case, a group of quilts. While I contemplate a quilt, it will be hung vertically, like a painting on a wall. This is different than the orientation that these quilts were made for: flat, on a bed. I want to mirror this change in position by putting my own body in a stance that requires a different type of support.

2. Jonathan Frederick Walz, Curator of American Art at The Columbus Museum, and I have corresponded for some time about working together, and a year ago he contacted me to ask whether I might consider a new project engaging the museum’s collection. He had been thinking about concepts of work and labor in relation to artistic process, ideas manifested by artist linn meyers in the monumental, site-specific wall painting, entitled *gazing has its limits*, that she produced at the Museum over the course of a week in early January 2018.

Artistic labor was at the forefront of my 2011 performance *The Long Glance*, in which I stood and stared for 40 hours at Jackson Pollock’s painting *Convergence*, created in 1952. Taking place at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, the piece was shaped around the 40-hour work week, codified by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. (While this standard still exists, the much-lauded “flexible” and “gig” economy of our present day often demands that we are, “flexibly,” always working.) I contemplated *Convergence* for eight hours a day. I became still in front of an “action” painting, and my labor was to look.

Like Columbus, Buffalo was once a center of industrial production. The Albright-Knox’s collection of modern art—with *Convergence*, at nearly 13 feet wide, as one of its



Detail
Sarah McGehee (1804–1868)
Mariner’s Compass with Reel Centers Quilt (Sunburst Medallion), 1830-1860
Cotton
98.5 inches x 97.75 inches
Gift of Mary Ellen Hill
G.1996.1



linn meyers
gazing has its limits, 2017
site-specific installation, The Columbus Museum
Sponsored by the W.C. Bradley Company with additional support from Marleen De Bode Olivieri, Marc Olivieri, Metro Power, and the Landrum Educational Endowment Fund



Jonathan VanDyke
The Long Glance, 2011
40-hour performance with Jackson Pollock’s *Convergence*, 1952
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

icons — serves as an ongoing reminder of the city's former wealth and power. Buffalo's population began its extended contraction around the same time that its art museum purchased the Pollock. *Convergence* is among Pollock's last great works, made before his own contraction in artistic output and his premature death, at the age of 44, in 1956.

Pollock made his best-known paintings by flinging and dripping enamel paint (some of it the type used to paint boats and decks) onto canvas laid out flat on the floor, using a set of implements, including brushes, sticks, and turkey basters, to obtain an extraordinary range of effects. He tuned his movements and physical gestures in relation to his materials, and to gravity. We know this because he was among the first American artists whose studio process was well documented, in a series of photographs and a film made by lens-based artist Hans Namuth. Seeing evidence of Pollock moving — “dancing” — around his canvases fostered the view of the artist as a progenitor of performance art. Pollock broke open possibilities not only for painting, but for other forms of making. The artist Allan Kaprow later wrote that, “Pollock, as I see him, left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street. Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch.”³

A year of preparation went into *The Long Glimpse*, but the idea for that project germinated years before, in my work as an artist who explores the performance, creation, and display of painting and painters. I had been making sculptures that drip paint very slowly onto the floor for about eight hours at a time when on public view, and I wanted to seek this slow intentionality and focus in my own body. I had puzzled over, and been fascinated by, Pollock's work since childhood, and as an adult I have methodically and instinctually explored and pushed forward ideas of gestural abstract painting.

Prior to establishing my studio in New York in 2001, I served as the curator and director of The Susquehanna Art Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, not far from the countryside in which I grew up. At the time, the museum occupied a space within a busy downtown shopping mall, just across from a food court where many state workers took their lunch breaks. The interface of objects of art with everyday work habits impacted my thinking about accessibility and display, and these issues became a subject of my practice. In my work at the museum, I engaged in conversations with viewers who puzzled over abstract painting and contemporary art — sometimes in passionate exchanges about why these things were art at all — and I came to fully understand how art objects are living works, not dead things deposited in vaults. Art objects literally change — all objects decay — but they also change their context, their home, and their relationships to viewers and publics. Could my artistic work exhibit a sense of constant unfolding and evolution?

The idea of *resonance* is a central tenant of my art practice. Resonance, as I mean it, is the lining up of forms and processes with a certain set of conditions in the world, and with an inquiry into my own subjectivity and experience, such that this “lining up” creates something that reverberates with a stronger, more evocative tone than any one of those factors might on their own. I seek a clear and direct intention and action, and a form that serves as a surface marker for a complex web of deeper connections.

3. Was there, Jonathan Frederick Walz asked me, an object in The Columbus Museum's collection that might resonate with me and inspire an act of durational looking? Museums, as repositories and caretakers for objects, must constantly come to terms with what they attend to and turn towards: what is, versus what isn't, on view. Ann Temkin, Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, argues that “[o]ne of the contemporary museum's secrets—not exactly dirty but far from squeaky clean—is the storage dilemma resulting from the exponential growth of its collections.”⁴ Many collections are now reproduced online. While internet accessibility is an extraordinary resource, I would also argue that the experience of online research and of virtual looking should be named differently than direct experience of a primary source: these forms of “seeing” are not the same.

Since the presidential election of 2016, New York, where I live, has been filled with protest. Many of us find ourselves marching on streets usually reserved for cars, making noise and holding signs. Even if the effect of a protest can rarely be directly measured (a policy may be slow to change), bodies and voices that feel invisible assert their power by making themselves collectively visible. In the early days of the Gay Liberation movement, taking to the streets was a literal gesture of “coming out of the closet.” In the early 1990s, as the AIDS crisis ravaged the gay community, queer activists would chant, “we're here, we're queer, get used to it,” demanding space within a hierarchy that had pushed



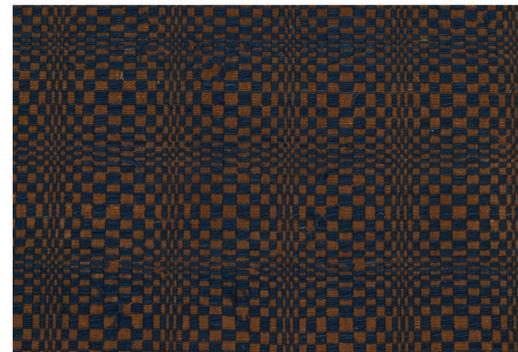
Jonathan VanDyke
Movements for Monoliths, 2015
Series of 3-hour durational performances
Presented at Storm King Art Center, NY, in collaboration with The Shandanken Project
Performed by Bethany Ides and Jonathan VanDyke



Jonathan VanDyke
Painting (No.2), 2011
Walnut wood, rubber, leather cord woven in spider weave pattern, and pigmented urethane in dripping sequence
31.5 inches wide x 46.5 inches high x 5 inches deep



Women's March, New York City, 2018
Photo: Jonathan VanDyke



Snails Trail Pattern Coverlet
Hand-woven by enslaved people on Lovelace Plantation
Mid-19th century
Unknown wool, indigo dye
The Mr. and Mrs. Perry David Watson Memorial Fund G.2017.74



Angeline Pitts
Lone Star Quilt (detail), 1875-1910
Cotton, plain feedsacks
82.5 inches x 75 inches
Gift of Mrs. Melvyn Ann Pitts Williams
G.2000.14



Bradley Teal Ellis, David Rafael Botana, and Jonathan VanDyke working together in his studio
2014
Photo: J. Makary

them aside. Marching is a key method of peaceful resistance; another is the refusal to move, or to speak. Student activist Emma Gonzalez's long silence while addressing a crowd gathered in opposition to gun violence on March 24, 2018, served as a gesture of radical visibility, one gathered around an absence.

As I sketched out possibilities for a performance that would resonate at The Columbus Museum, I decided to explore, in person, the Museum's vast holdings in storage, especially works that were seldom seen. The Columbus Museum has what might be described as two integrated collections—one of material culture, exploring the history of Columbus's Chattahoochee Valley region, and one of American art, broadly speaking. While selections from these “two” collections appear in different sections of the current layout of the building, with temporary exhibitions and other areas of overlap, Walz and Curator of History Rebecca Bush spoke to me of their desire that the institution not be bifurcated. The museum's entire collections team actively discussed with me the ways in which they must come to terms with historic notions of object classification, with what they do or don't put on public view, and with collection “gaps”: aspects of art and culture that aren't, but should be, represented. These questions resonate with the politics of our era, in which we must come to terms with issues of belonging and with histories of exclusion. A museum's collection grows in tandem with these factors and is in a constant state of re-interpretation and adjustment.

A recent acquisition demonstrates how an object can resist long-held notions of object classification and reconfigure entrenched power dynamics. Last year, the Museum purchased a woven textile, made by an enslaved African American (or Americans) living near Columbus in the early part of the nineteenth century. It is woven in a non-representational geometric pattern, sometimes referred to as “snail's trails,” which gives the effect of generating optical shifts in one's visual perception. I recognized this effect from “Op art” paintings, such as those of artist Victor Vasarely, that were surveyed at New York's Museum of Modern Art more than a century after this textile was made, in a 1965 exhibition called *The Responsive Eye*. This coverlet is both a textile that displays extraordinary artistry, and an object that offers an aspect of material culture that has been overshadowed by painting, as well as by entrenched structures of exclusion.

4. Over my three research trips to the Museum, I was given full access to its collections storage vault, which resonated with an experience from my past. During my freshman year of college, I applied for a special program that chose university students as full-time summer interns at The State Museum of Pennsylvania, and it paid them a fair wage for their work. I was chosen to serve under the newly-appointed curator, Lee Stevens, and that summer opened up an entire universe for me.⁵ Whether out of necessity or because of my own enthusiasm to be directly involved with primary source material, Stevens entrusted me to re-organize, catalog, and archive the entire collection of works on paper.

Being able to touch and view hundreds of art objects was empowering to me as a 19-year-old, despite being sunlight-starved in a windowless space with concrete-block walls. At the time, I had just read Carmen Martín Gaité's *The Back Room*. Gaité's autobiographical novel captures coming to terms with her own girlhood in politically-repressive, Franco-era Spain. The protagonist takes refuge in a “back room” in her family's apartment, a happily disordered space littered with objects, where young people bypassed the rules of adults. She remembers it as a place of imagination, of “objects that become friends through being used and being allowed their freedom, that recovered their identity on ceasing to be in their right place.”⁶

Gaité's opening up of this back room is a metaphor for the opening up of a repressed, under-known self: “The memories that may come to us as something of a surprise live in hiding in the back room.”⁷ The author manifests the unseen, the stuff of the closet and of the back room, as a methodology for sorting through unseen parts of herself. At The State Museum, I felt the sense of possibility as I opened drawer after drawer of works on paper — watercolor landscapes from an anonymous artist's travels, erotic charcoal drawings of nudes, and Victorian mourning prints, with a blank space where the purchaser could fill in a loved one's name. I became restless, spending so many hours trying to make sense of objects that usually lay in the dark. At the time, I was trying to make sense of the confusion and repression I was facing as I explored my own sexual identity and my desire to become an artist. Working my way through this repository of objects was both thrilling and unsettling.

After looking at hundreds of objects on painting racks and rolling shelves at The Columbus Museum, I asked the Collections Manager, Aimee Brooks, if the Museum had any quilts in the collection. She pointed me to a large stack of archival boxes for textiles. The Museum, in fact, holds a diverse collection of quilts, including one especially significant group that, according to the persons that donated it, was found in an attic and just spared from a bonfire.

Brooks and I unfolded a late nineteenth-century quilt with a “Lone Star” motif, a popular pattern in which radiating, interlocking diamonds form a star shape. Depending on the arrangement of colors, the small diamonds can appear to pulsate from the center. Made by Angeline Pitts, an African American quilter from the Columbus region, this quilt features a quadrant in which the regular alteration of colors shifts entirely. Whereas the Lone Star typically utilizes symmetry to move the eye evenly around the whole pattern, Pitts unapologetically broke from convention, and directs the eye back and forth to a place of disorientation, of difference.

5. Quilts sit neatly on the cusp that The Columbus Museum negotiates as a repository of art and of history: quilts are both artworks and functional objects at the same time. Had the museum not been founded with an all-encompassing, encyclopedic mission, these important objects may have been overlooked. In 1971 the art critic Hilton Kramer wrote, “The history of American art in the 19th century is still, as a general rule, written almost exclusively in terms of ‘high art’—that is, in terms of painting and sculpture created on the model of European predecessors.”⁸ In 1971 Jonathan Holstein and Gail van der Hoof curated a breakthrough exhibition, *Abstract Design in American Quilts*, presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Holstein writes of their conviction to bring their collection of quilts to a major American art museum: “I was quite certain the attitude of the marketplace, which gave moderate value to highly decorative, early and historically important quilts, and little or none to those we thought the most important aesthetically, would mirror attitudes of the museum world.... Museum curators would say they belonged in institutions which showed craft and Americana.”⁹

The quilt as a form resonates with the history of Columbus, a former center for textile production. There are almost certainly quilts in the collection that include scraps of fabric that were milled in the region; bits were sold as seconds to factory workers. While the practice of quilting began for many American families as a necessity, it went out of favor early in the twentieth century, as industrial blankets became more available, and then made a comeback during the spare years of the Depression era. While a resurgence of interest in handcraft predated the Whitney Museum quilt exhibition, Janet Malcolm reported in a review in *The New Yorker* in 1974 that “[a] kind of quilt craze followed the show: dealers in antique quilts proliferated, prices of quilts soared, further exhibitions ensued, [and] quilt making itself was revived among young people....”¹⁰ Today there are quilting guilds and shops in both the Columbus region and New York City alike.

As I explored the collection in Columbus, I homed in on pieced quilts—those made from multiple, small pieces of fabric cut into a pattern and stitched together as a “quilt top,” and then sewn to a backing, often made from surplus fabrics, such as feed bags. When I returned to making paintings in 2012, I worked with two dancers, Bradley Teal Ellis and David Rafael Botana, who are also a couple, producing marks on canvas spread out on the studio floor. Together we created choreographies and improvised movements that would generate specific types of marks. While I found many areas on these wide swaths of canvas that interested me, I rarely felt that the entirety was convincing as a painting. As a result, I began cutting these canvases into pieces and sewing them back together.

I grew up with Pennsylvania German roots in the countryside of south central Pennsylvania, not far from the Amish, a religious community that has produced some of the most celebrated American quilts. Quilts and handcraft were ubiquitous in my childhood. I can remember the homes of elderly relatives with embroidered linen doilies placed over the arms of chairs, and recall talking with my grandmother while she sewed, the movement of her needle underlining our conversation like a ticking clock. I now utilize quilt patterns in creating my paintings: the jauntily named “Roman Stripe” pattern of the Amish is modified in my work *N v J*, on view in the Museum’s Leebern Gallery in an installation that accompanies my week-long performance.

My paintings display the residue of bodily contact. When Brad and David visit my exhibitions, they can identify certain marks as their own. This quality resonated for me in looking through functional quilts that were clearly stained by bodies and household wear. While the Columbus Museum collection contains many fine quilts originally intended as works of art, I decided to limit myself to quilts that were intended for, and showed clear signs of, use. Such quilts must have provided a graphically resplendent visual motif to a workaday household. The fabric scraps that populate such a quilt might be left over from the making of a garment, so that a person’s dress might echo the fabric found on a bedcover in the same house (and vice versa). A body stationed in front of a quilt can serve as a reminder of the labor of their makers, and their use as objects of protection and comfort, that adapted to and covered those who slept, dreamt, rested, copulated, perhaps gave birth or died adjacent to them.



Verso (detail) of *Star of Bethlehem* quilt, ca. 1970
Stella Mae Pettway (born 1952)
Cotton
94 inches x 93 inches
Gift of Calynne and Lou Hill
G.2002.41.2



Jonathan VanDyke
Glazier
2014
[Brad & David performance canvas session 6 / flagellation sequence]
50.75 inches high x 36.25 inches wide



Jonathan VanDyke
The Painter of the Hole, 2013
Installation view of exhibition
Scaramouche, NYC



Jonathan VanDyke
L. blue N. black I. green M. orange K. violet, 2015
Installation view of exhibition
1/9unosunove, Rome



Martha Caroline Miller (1842–1909)
Postage Stamp Quilt (detail), 1856-1875
Cotton
95 7/8 inches x 76 3/4 inches
Gift of Mr. A. Stephen Johnson in memory of Mrs. John T. (Ola Miller) Johnson, Miss Lura Frances Johnson, Mrs. Aldine S. (Mary Johnson) Johnson
G.1996.18.27



New Hope Methodist Church Ladies Auxiliary
Flower Basket Quilt (detail), 1859
Cotton
84.75 inches x 94 inches
Gift of Mr. A. Stephen Johnson in memory of Mrs. John T. (Ola Miller) Johnson, Miss Lura Frances Johnson, Mrs. Aldine S. (Mary Johnson) Johnson
G.1996.18.21

6.

In my completed paintings, expressive mark and rigorous geometry reach a point of active tension: the work brings together repetitive pattern with organic, intuitive mark making. The contrast between restraint and expressivity in mark-making is present throughout the history of painting. The minimalist, geometric painting of artists such as Frank Stella served as a cool repudiation of the expressivity of Pollock and his peers. Stella and similar artists were celebrated for their originality, but exhibitions such as the 1971 quilt show at the Whitney demonstrated a more complex truth. “Formerly regarded, on the one hand, as cozy, folksy relics of a cozy, folksy agrarian past and, on the other, as busywork for elderly women,” Janet Malcolm noted in a 1974 review, “patchwork quilts are now associated with twentieth-century abstract art (Noland, Stella, Albers, and Vasarely) and, in their most artful manifestations, are felt to be works of abstract art.”¹¹

Pollock’s paintings utilize an “overall” composition—the eye wanders over the entire surface of the work, finding areas of incident and interest throughout rather than a clearly prioritized focus. His works, as well as those of his many predecessors, such as artist Piet Mondrian, depart from the qualities of dimensionality and pictorialism that dominated early modern Western painting. The flattened composition invites a sense of endlessness, an impression that it could go on forever. The overall composition is found in many of the quilts that I will view; in examples such as Martha Caroline Miller’s “postage stamp” quilt, thousands of pieces come together to create what feels like one section of a potentially endless field. Each small fabric piece, in turn, has its own formal properties.

Quiltmakers often use “blocks”: uniformly patterned, rectangular sections of pieced fabric, that, when sewn side by side, bring an array of pieces together into a richly complex whole. The use of the block is also practical—the maker can focus upon one at a time, working at a table or in her lap, and a set of blocks-in-progress could be easily stacked and tucked away. The pieced quilt, in this sense, serves as a visual map of accumulated bits of “spare” time. For many women, this was the interval after dinner had been served and cleared and children were put to bed.

We often don’t know the author of a quilt—and in some cases, quilts were the result of shared labor by a group of women making a “gift” or commemorative bedcovering.¹² The practice of stitching the quilt top to its bottom—which often brought an almost invisible, secondary design stitched into the regular, geometric pattern—required additional hands. The quilting “bee” could be an all-day affair, in part because the host had to clear out an essential room to serve as a workspace. To participate in a bee was an opportunity to come together and trade stories and gossip as heads were bowed together over the quilt frame.

Despite compositional breakthroughs that rival those of post-war male painters, art that is the product of women’s labor, or that served a functional purpose within domestic life, has not (to put it mildly) been readily assimilated into the canon of art history. I can only recall seeing a couple of exhibitions in which modern painting and quilts were hung in the same room (The Columbus Museum includes a Gee’s Bend quilt within the recent re-installation of its modern and contemporary galleries.) The way in which quiltmakers labored historically and their openness to communal practice diverges from the romantic ideal—imposed upon art historical figures from Vincent Van Gogh to Jean-Michel Basquiat—that the expressive male painter works through his passions and channels long bursts of energy within a devoted studio space.

The romantic story of the New York School painter is that of the exceptional individualist, autonomously expressing himself. Various structures reinforced this ideal.¹³ Pollock was one of the first American artists to be photographed extensively; he was featured in a consequential *Life* magazine spread in 1949. Pollock is shown in denim jeans and jacket, smoking a cigarette. Kirk Varnedoe wrote that “[t]he appearance of the *Life* article fuel-injected [Pollock’s] difficult ego, and encouraged a fresh sense of entitlement.”¹⁴ The CIA covertly financed overseas traveling exhibitions devoted to abstract expressionist painting as a statement of “freedom” that repudiated the conformity of Communism. “The Central Intelligence Agency used American modern art—including the works of such artists as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko—as a weapon during the Cold War. In the manner of a Renaissance prince—except that it acted secretly—the CIA fostered and promoted American Abstract Expressionist painting around the world for more than 20 years,” Frances Stonor Sanders has confirmed in *The Independent*.¹⁵

Among the New York School of painters in post-war America, there was a fear of the feminine and the effeminate. This was often coded through discussions about “the decorative.” “I was reminded, uncomfortably, of amateur Victorian decoration”¹⁶ explained the critic Clement Greenberg in writing about Clyfford Still’s early work. He argued that Still’s work “asks to be called Whitmanesque...indulging as it does in loose and

sweeping gestures.”¹⁷ Pollock himself showed concern about a *Vogue* magazine feature entitled “The New Soft Look” in which models, photographed by Cecil Beaton, posed in front of his drip paintings. The evocation of things and qualities “soft” might alarm a self-conscious, hypermasculine male painter who worried that his work could be associated with flaccidity, or the “loose and sweeping.”

It can be easy to forget the degree to which gender expression was socially codified during the time Pollock made his drip paintings, or that homosexuality, for that matter, was illegal. *The New York Times*, in a long article about homosexuality in 1963 (they utilized the terminology of “inverts” to describe homosexuals) reinforced stereotypes around gender and sexuality: “Inverts...are most concentrated—or most noticeable—in the fields of the creative and performing arts and industries serving women’s beauty and fashion needs. Their presence in creative activity is not, as an old myth fostered by homosexuals would have it, because inverts tend to have superior intellect and talent.”¹⁸

7. Looking and making can both be forms of pleasure. To claim pleasure for yourself can challenge entrenched power dynamics and the normative demands of everyday life: a complex set of social, religious, state, and cultural ideologies and expectations. We can assume how norms associated with gender affected nineteenth- and early twentieth-century quiltmakers, but it would be impossible to know how individual makers themselves internalized such norms, or to what extent they viewed their own labor and artistry within the performativity of gender. We do know that quilt-making occurred across lines of class and race. Whether creating a quilt was a form of personal empowerment, the results of this labor are sometimes so spectacular that a viewer can share in a sense of wonder and visual power. It is rare to find evidence, historically, of male quilt makers, and the extent to which such artistry was viewed not as an art form but as “women’s work” had an impact on the slow course of canonization of these objects. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, does not have a single Amish quilt in its collection.

I write these things as a way to pinpoint the way two extraordinary genres of American abstract art—quilts and abstract expressionist painting—are made alongside, and even despite, structures that enforce and amplify *who* should make *what*, and *what* should be displayed within our most powerful cultural institutions.

The gay male and queer culture of which I am a part carries its own expectations about masculinity and the body. The story of painterly machismo, which was still part of the conversation around abstract painting when I was a child in the 1980s, resonated with me. Rather, it “dissonated” with me as a young person, because I felt I couldn’t be *that*: I puzzled over American abstract paintings while puzzling over my emerging queer identity. A project such as *The Patient Eye* requires that I examine, and be responsible for, my own subjectivity: I am a man bringing my gaze to work made mostly by women.

I grew up in a household in which normative gender roles were largely absent. My brother and I were expected to take part in cooking and cleaning, yardwork and construction projects. Labor was never defined or demonstrated as masculine or feminine: I can remember my father sewing as much as I can remember my mother taking on “handyman” tasks. The family ironing was one of my teenage chores. My mother had re-entered the work force and recognized the degree to which her clothing needed to express confidence and power (but, as she said, not *too* much). We looked together at the book *Women’s Dress for Success* (written by a man, John T. Molloy, and first published in 1977). She taught me how to iron the pleats and bows on her work blouses, and when she drove me to school, because we were both often short on time, she would give me two handbags—yesterday’s and today’s, which would match her outfit—and ask me to move the contents from one to the other, a practice which we affectionately called “switching purses.” This gave me a much greater understanding of the pressures she routinely faced as a woman in the workforce, and intimate access to the things she needed to get through a day. My parents’ best friend when I was a child, a man named Gary—who was like a surrogate uncle to my brother and me—would dress up in my mother’s clothing, not “for success,” but as a coquettish drag performance. None of this seemed remarkable until I was teased by other kids in school. My family defied gender binaries, but culture caught up with me.

If artistic expression was valued and encouraged by my parents, it was to be done so with rigor and patience. We were allowed to watch television if we were working on an art project at the same time. My most ambitious childhood art project was to re-interpret one of my abstract watercolor paintings (made on the blank back of a sheet of copy paper) as a large-scale, latch-hooked yarn rug.

I am a queer man who was raised in a family that defied gender norms, an artist who practices piecing and sewing and collaboration, a person who grew up in and around the religious and crafting traditions (and work ethic) of the Pennsylvania Dutch. None of



Detail of found family photo, 1980’s, of my Uncle Gary wearing my Mom’s sundress
Taken by Elizabeth VanDyke



Pages from *Vogue* magazine, March 1951
“The New Soft Look,” photographs by Cecil Beaton with paintings by Jackson Pollock



Detail from the article “Growth of Homosexuality Provoking Rising Concern”
The New York Times, December 17, 1963



Jonathan VanDyke
Some Were Caught Up, and Some Were Not, 2017
Installation view of exhibition
Look Galerie, Berlin



Jonathan VanDyke
Self Portrait as My Mother, as an Actress, as a Painter, as a Stranger
Version 6, 2017
Performed by Terri Lynn Philips
Durational performance for the exhibition *The Invert*,
Tops Gallery, Memphis
Photo: Andy Schlesinger



Jonathan VanDyke
With One Hand Between Us, 2011
40-hour performance for three actors & installation with three sculptures
Performed by David Rafael Botana, Laraysia Husiak, and Anthony Wills, Jr.
Performa 11, NYC. Curated by David Everitt Howe
Hosted by Scaramouche
Photo: Heather Shelley

this washes away the power dynamics of gender, and I take on this project knowing that my gaze carries its own weight. It is the responsibility of institutions, and the individuals that depend upon them, to think through how their choices inherently reinforce power dynamics. As artists we can insist on seeing what has not been seen, what has not been seen clearly, and what has not been seen enough. Recognizing the rich complexity of context, I also hope to come to each quilt with an open mind, and listen to what it has to say.

8. Shortly after my first research trip to Columbus, I had a serious accident in which I broke both of my wrists and needed surgery to piece my shattered bones back together. For weeks I was unable to feed myself, dress myself, or open a door; for months I put my studio practice on hold. I grew up around chronic illness, but I had never been a patient myself. To be this kind of patient requires an absurd type of patience; the body heals gradually, its work mostly invisible, the recovery drama only becoming apparent as you suddenly realize you can again perform a task that was long out of reach.¹⁹

The *patient* of *The Patient Eye*, then, is both a noun and an adjective. The eye is multiple—that of the maker of the quilt and the eye of the watcher (“I”), giving back to these objects a bit of the concentrated focus that went into their making, both of us employing patience to achieve our task. And the eye is the eye of the needle, zig-zagging in and out of fabric, piercing and pricking through the surface, marking time, making meaning.

Notes

1. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 28.
2. Ahmed, 24.
3. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7–9.
4. “The Museum Revisited,” various contributors, essay by Ann Temkin. *Artforum International*, vol. 48, no. 10, Summer, 312.
5. The program, like several forward-thinking public educational programs in Pennsylvania that I benefitted from (the other two being The Governor’s Schools for Excellence and The William Penn Performing Arts Institute in York), was long ago eliminated through legislative budget cuts and a growing emphasis on privatization.
6. Carmen Martín Gaité, *The Back Room*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 71.
7. Gaité, 85.
8. Hilton Kramer, “Art: Quilts Find a Place at the Whitney,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1971.
9. Jonathan Holstein, *Abstract Design in American Quilts: A Biography of an Exhibition* (Louisville: The Kentucky Quilt Project, Inc., 1991), 26–27.
10. As quoted in Holstein, 95.
11. *Ibid.*
12. The Flower Basket Quilt in the performance, made by The New Hope Methodist Church Ladies Auxiliary, is a fine example of a collaborative work. The quilters signed individual blocks.
13. Even though Pollock and company were held up as individualists, one of Pollock’s major works, *Blue Poles* (1952), was apparently started in collaboration with Tony Smith, Barnett Newman, and others. Historically, the quilter may also spend many hours working individually and in solitude, and while quilt patterns were often sourced from women’s magazines and adapted, and fabrics scraps were appropriated from pre-existing materials, many quilters were wildly inventive and used such patterns as a departure point—pushing us to re-think Western ideas of what is “original.”
14. Kirk Varnedoe, “Comet: Jackson Pollock’s Life and Work,” in *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 60.
15. Frances Stonor Saunders, “Modern Art was CIA ‘Weapon,’” *The Independent (UK)*, October 21, 1995.
16. Clement Greenberg, “American-Type Painting,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 222.
17. Greenberg, 223.
18. “Growth of Homosexuality Provoking Rising Concern,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 1963.
19. Once objects enter a museum collection, their every move and condition are recorded. In my research on the Albright-Knox’s Pollock painting, I was allowed to sort through its museum file, with the exception of its “condition report,” a document that, like the health record of a patient, remains private.