

**APPROACHING A WORK: POSITIONING THE PAINTING OF JOANNA JONES \*  
1994, Laura J. Padgett**

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*Surgeons must be very careful  
When they take the knife  
Underneath their fine incisions  
Stirs the culprit, life.*

Emily Dickenson

Writing about the work of an artist can lead the reader along false venues. At best, if the artists' work has been understood, and even here the word understood does not adequately describe the experience one has when looking, it can serve as an indication, nothing more. Working within a time of specific context and reference, it is necessary to keep our concerns in mind, yet all the more so to place ourselves within the larger historical context. What has brought us to our current situation, what have we chosen to leave behind, and therefore, what are we consciously disregarding in order for us to work within this context of ours? Does disregarding eliminate forces? What really causes awareness to change? All these elements play a part in writing about visual objects, thereby leading to the question when regarding works of art of what it is that one is looking for linked with what it is one is looking at. These considerations, although they might seem to be more than obvious, have nonetheless everything to do with the way one goes about looking. With these observations as a conscious background, the topic at hand shall be presented.

Joanna Jones's paintings appeal to their viewer to be approached: motion is unequivocal for both the painter and the viewer. The movement involved is the way one nears and the travel one takes within the work. It is not a question of recognizing, but looking and perceiving. Taking time to locate, to travel into the depths, the heights, and, in terms of both mind and body, to return to oneself again. These two elements of our natures are what Joanna Jones undertakes to unite through her painting process.

The idea of the mind being contained in a woman's body and what that means to the external world is an essential factor that Joanna Jones consciously addresses in her work. It is an issue that has influenced the way a woman sees herself within the larger art context. "She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others....is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another."(1) "It is women who assume this position of 'otherness': the structures of seeing and being seen, with their implications of ego preservation and gratification, become aligned with sexual difference." (2) Joanna Jones has been able to transcend the dilemma arising from this duality of self by consciously bringing the body per Se into direct play with the canvas. Joanna Jones paints blind while using the body to create her images, thereby reversing the process of what a painter primarily does and upsetting the mode of reception of the woman, turning the tables while turning oneself inside out. Physicality as opposed to ocularity, feeling out a composition by direct transference of bodily energy onto the canvas: eyeless movement used to create a visual object is the process Joanna Jones has chosen to employ in order to bring mind and body together: physical immediacy replaces the glance. "There is a common effort in each of the arts to expand the expressive resources of the medium, not in order to express ideas and notions, but to express with greater immediacy sensations, the irreducible elements of experience." (3) "You have to reorder things - what you have

experienced - into the sense of the material through which you express yourself."(4) It is exactly this reordering that Joanna has realised in her painting.

As the painting process is constituent to the creation of a visual realm of experience for Joanna Jones, the process of entering the finished painting is fundamental to comprehending her work. This entails letting down one's guard, allowing oneself to be drawn in. This is essential. How much is contained in the world she has created can only be discovered when the viewer allows this to occur. If so, a myriad of experiences unfolds. Joanna Jones's paintings, so much a discovery for the creator of them, need also to be discovered. For the viewer they are comparable to an expedition through archaeological sights: populated with references to an acquired art history, while remaining expressions of presence. This immediacy lures one into the painting, to the painting's being. "Being is only found as a whole composed of particles whose relative autonomy is maintained...being imposes on reflection more than the precariousness of a fugitive appearance." (5) It is precisely this fugitive appearance that effects a labyrinth of complexity representing both the energy of creation and its inherent condition of leaving something behind. The action of the painting evokes immediacy, it is the transferral of energy to the canvas through colour which evinces references to art history and places.

Joanna Jones, in her simultaneous position of dissent and inheritance, does not quote or comment, she works directly through corporeal means within the history of painting, which is precisely what awakens the viewers associative skills. References to the modulation of space by Tiepolo, the shapes of Blake's figures and objects, together with his thematic treatment of the duality of human nature, the sense of Turner's abstraction of nature, the use of tonality to delineate form as in Daumier's painting, reminiscent also of the brilliance of Hindu religious painting in its clarity of pigment and seductiveness of colour; in its radiance Joanna Jones's painting creates visual and historical spaces that one slips into and through. References that are closer to our current era are those to action painting for example Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, or Dekooning recalling Joanna Jones' years of early development and education and her association with performance art. All these remembered elements are part of Joanna Jones' work, are literally incorporated into the work by the unique process of the living brush that she has chosen to use. The culmination of abandoning certain processes in order to define her own space has resulted in painting that is intrinsically a part of art history, thereby creating a dialectic of vision. Joanna Jones hoodwinks the prescriptions of self that have been established over the years while claiming title to the aesthetics of art that cross all boundaries. These accumulated forces are what confound those looking for simple equations, while delighting those beholding the unfolding of a painting so much a part of art history and absolute individuality.

#### References

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2. Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality", *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, the New Museum of Contemporary Art. 1986
3. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon", *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, The University of Chicago Press, 1968, p.30
4. Irma B. Jaffe, "A conversation with Hans Hofmann", *Modern Culture and the Arts*, Hall and Ulanov, Eds. McGraw Hill Book Company. 1972, p. 170
5. Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927 - 39*, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp.173-4

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