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On Selvage

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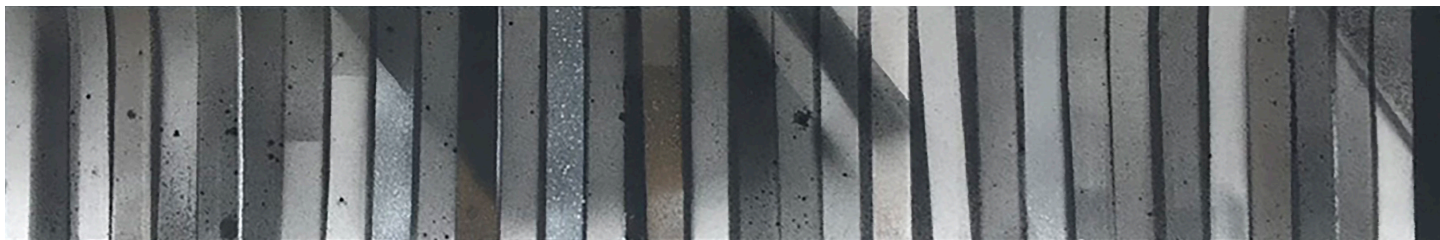


fig.1

On Salvage

I keep coming back to the titles. At the most basic level, it's simply a name – the title. It's what we call something so we don't have to go on describing at length to make ourselves clear, though of course at times a title can provide some description too, in shorthand. Other times the title does more – it might guide our approach, suggesting an idea, an angle, a point of entry.

One day in December, at the Huntington Museum of Art, where a few of the pieces gathered here in *Salvage* were on display, I had that last experience in reverse. I stood looking at one of Sandra Reed's paintings for what I'd guess was a full two minutes before I noticed the title. That's generally my way – I'll approach a painting, step through the door, as it were, and start looking around before I think to pop my head back out and find the sign alongside that says what it's called. In this case, the recognition felt profound. The painting was *A Place Where Time Passes Unnoticed* (fig.1).

I stood there nodding. Yes, I thought. That's what's happening. And it isn't so much that time slows down when I stare at the painting, but rather a feeling that time ceases to be – the pull of it drops off the plane of awareness. At the painting's invitation, one enters a kind of suspension. We encounter vertical bars, patterning and variation, ink spots, and slants that seem almost to fall like shadows (but shadows of what?) and we might feel called to imagine what could be happening here, what this "place" might be. Where is it that time passes unnoticed? There's a suggestion of music, maybe, shapes similar to piano keys. Or the slats of a fence, something on the other side – and I do feel like a watcher, trying to glimpse what's beyond. Or we might shift our gaze side to side, with an eye toward progression, the evidence of time's subtle passage in the form of variation, repetition, echo. What comes foremost to my mind, though, is process. Where, for me, does time pass unnoticed? As a writer, that slippage occurs in the creation of a thing, the immersion in process. As a viewer, when it comes to the intricate, delicately layered works on display in *Salvage*, I lose time in marveling, wondering, wandering with questions of what a thing might mean, sure, but also – still conscious of process – questions of how a thing of beauty comes to be.

Along the way, we can't help but make connections. We see gestures in these works that resemble pieces of the world, parts of ourselves, elements of nature. In *Topsail Horizon* (fig. 2), we might see shapes we can recognize. I see stones – the speckling of atomized ink lends itself nicely here. I see a tooth, complete with root. But nothing feels certain. The striping argues against the stone. The other shapes seem to suggest that we're best served not by seeking resemblance but instead by parsing in the realm of shape itself, of form, where the lines and curves and colors find balance.

I have a similar experience with *Sistering* (fig. 3). From a distance, I see bodies – something close to a mother and child, one comforting the other. Closer, the feeling shifts toward the celestial – planets and moons – but the universe is rearranged, layered, seen from new angles. The image of a body like earth, though, with its blues and greens and white, feels undeniable. But here, too, the pieces, the colors, are lifted, swirled, reapplied. Not quite a mother and child, not quite a mother earth ... so not a relation, then of mothering, but possibly one of sistering, a connection between elements that are equal, more or less, which brings to mind once more notions of balance. And perhaps that's how the piece resolves, in the patient touches of color and texture, the echoing curves.



fig. 2



fig. 3

We see echoes throughout the exhibition – shapes and colors and lines. We see transformations and forms that shift. Look at *What Do We Know* (fig. 4), another piece whose title struck me with a force, after I'd lost myself first for a time in the image itself. Note the lack of punctuation. It's a question but also not. My first thought – again lingering on the speckled surface – was rocks laid flat, side by side, in a drawer, or a box. But the center suggests something else. Here the relation isn't side by side, unless, perhaps, it's multiple levels of things side by side, a careful stack-ing, with edges nearly aligned. More likely, I'll say, we see not a stacking but rather things contained – almost like an x-ray vision in which what seems at a glance like a stone has inside of it another form, which, in turn, has inside of it another one, and so on. Which suggests, to me, not a stone at all, but an egg concealing its hidden charge. Eggs are speckled too, after all. And the title, *What Do We Know* – is there a suggestion here not simply of knowledge, generally speaking, but of the particular knowing that might be innate? Something we carry within, like instinct? Which takes me, in a way, back to the idea of rocks in a drawer, the kind of collection that seems, at least in my experience, instinctive to a child. Thankfully, though, the title isn't really a question. It brings us right to the edge and asks not for an answer but instead for us to engage there in a shared experience.

It's that experience of an edge, finally, that *Salvage*, in its totality, allows us to consider. As a title, it struck me first for the beauty of its sound, its nearness to another word, "salvage," and with it the idea of saving, of rescue. Doesn't art have that power? To pull us back?

There's a connection here to the actual title, the word "selvage" – its most common usage in the context of fabric, the edge woven back on itself to keep the cloth from unraveling. An edge that holds tight and keeps together the whole. Can't art, created on the margins, have an effect that reaches far?

Throughout *Salvage* we see edges – within each work, in lines and curves, and in the arrangements on each wall, where pieces are brought together in groups that evoke connections, contrasts. Taken as a whole, the pieces here can be a kind of edge – all works created after the artist's move to West Virginia in 2014. For all that comes after, *Salvage* stitches together a dividing line.

Take the word back to its origin, though, and something else comes into focus: the combination of self and edge. As a writer, I'm reminded again of the creative process, what you might call an exploration – possibly an expansion – at the edge of one's known self. That's what art is, I think, for the artist. And possibly for the viewer too. *Salvage* gives each of us an opportunity to approach an edge, the point where one self meets another, and to linger there outside time for a while.

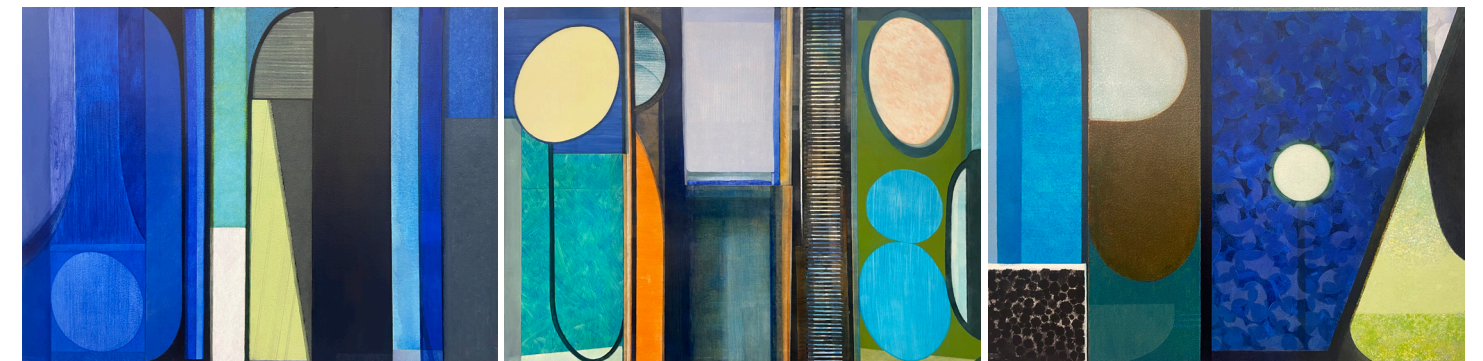
Daniel O'Malley | Assistant Professor of English | Marshall University



fig. 4

SELVAGE

Sandra Reed | Professor of Art | Marshall University



(fig. 1) *A Place Where Time*

Passes Unnoticed

Atomized Media on Paper
5" x 29 1/2"
2021
Photo Credit: Sandra Reed

(above)

Visual Exploration (Selvage I)

Mixed Media on Paper
3 3/8" x 11 1/2"
2019
Photo Credit: Sandra Reed

(fig. 2) *Topsoil Horizon*

Atomized Media on Paper
27" x 19"
2019
Photo Credit: John Spurlock

(front) *Selvage Triptych*

Oil on Panel
30" x 120"
2022
Photo Credit: Savannah Julian

(fig. 3) *Sistering*

Mixed Media on Paper
18" x 16"
2021
Photo Credit: Sandra Reed

(background)

Studio Photo
Photo Credit: Sholten Singer

(fig. 4) *What Do We Know*

Atomized Media on Paper
18" x 24"
2019
Photo Credit: John Spurlock

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March 21 - June 30, 2022

Reception: Reading by Daniel O'Malley
Thursday, April 14, 6pm-8pm

Reception: Gallery talk by Sandra Reed
Thursday, April 28, 6pm-8pm

Library Gallery
Marshall University Academic Center
100 Angus East Peyton Drive
South Charleston, West Virginia

<https://sandrajreed00.wixsite.com/flightselvage>

