

Mark Brosseau – 2017

My practice is driven by curiosity. I've always been more of a scientist and explorer than a storyteller or activist. My childhood was largely spent outdoors exploring the woods and hills around our Vermont family home. I was fascinated by how my sense of where landmarks or features were in relationship to one another was quite different from the reality of the space. I began college as a chemistry major, fueled by that sense of exploration and discovery. My interests shifted when I felt that *discovery*, the key element that drew me to chemistry, was being diluted in the classes that I was taking. Ultimately, I was brought to pursue art when that innate part of my identity was rekindled by the realization that the world was filled with visual anomalies just waiting to be discovered if you paid close enough attention.

It occurred to me recently that my goals as an artist are essentially the same as when I was starting college as a chemistry major. I was attracted to chemistry – and science in general – because of the sense of discovery that it gave me. I wanted to learn more about how the universe worked, about how each part related to another, and to gain a greater understanding about how *we* came to be where we are. I never had practical aspirations for studying chemistry. While I understood that I could apply chemistry to dealing with *real* problems – creating some new substance or curing a disease, for instance – it was the bigger, overarching unknowns that captivated me. I was drawn to the kinds of questions whose answers were another set of questions, not a solution to a problem.

When I was a student, I struggled with ideas of *content* in my paintings. I went through multiple phases chasing numerous red herrings trying to make paintings that were *about* something and that had some sort of socially relevant message. Each of those paths was an ultimately failed endeavor, as my interests still lay with exploring and discovering, as opposed to explaining or stating. My interest in making paintings wasn't because I had something to say; I was interested in making paintings because I wanted to better understand the world, the universe. It wasn't until I was in Iceland working on my own after graduate school that I realized that being true to my nature meant following a practice of inquiry, and that the exploration and questioning *was* the content. If I was true to this, and diligent in being critical and specific in my analysis, then this was a legitimate way to work for me.

In Iceland, a major part of my practice was just going for walks – first in Reykjavik and then in the lava field surrounding the residency program where I was – so that I could better understand this new and very different environment. The light was different. The atmosphere was different. The stuff that the ground itself was made of was different. The forces and energy that created the landscape were on display in a way that I hadn't experienced before. Every place that I had ever been before was all in one direction from where I was. Getting my bearings meant being open to what the environment around me was providing as opposed to forcing my expectations onto it. It took being dropped into a place that I had no preconceived understanding of to reconnect with the exploratory nature that had always been so natural for me.

I use painting to ask questions about existence and learn about how I relate to everything around me. The paintings are experiments, and I want them to be simultaneously vast and intimate – equally fleeting and precious. They are an abstract and physical extension of me exploring my experiences – furthering my understanding of how I exist in space. They function as both the result of asking questions and the impetus for asking more questions. I visually feel my way through the space of them. I touch them and feel their surfaces while I work on them. I consider every part of them with both my eyes and fingers. I invite the viewer to inhabit them, engage with the questions I have asked, and come away with their own questions about their space. When I start a painting, I do not know where it will go. A painting is finished when both the familiar and the undiscovered resonate.