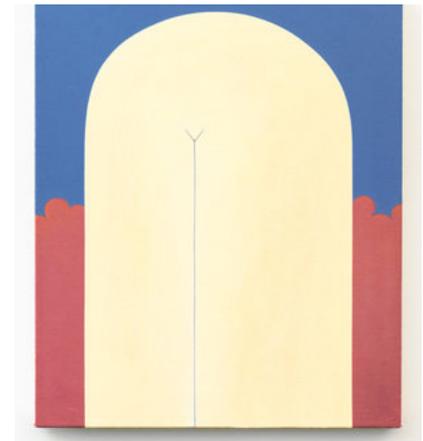


Alice Tippit



## STATEMENT

My artistic practice is informed by my interest in language creation and the application of meaning. In my paintings I employ a graphic, hard-edged style and a restrained color palette, using simple, recognizable yet relatively neutral shapes. From afar, the effect is flat and clean but closer examination reveals a surface that is not so much flat as it is filled in with visible brush marks and slight variations in color. The images function as signs in which the interaction of form and color produce visual relationships that seem to project specificity while remaining ambiguous enough to allow interpretation and inquiry.

Ambiguity of meaning in an image that otherwise indicates it can be easily understood poses a question for the viewer. How does one solve the image? The drive to conquer an image through definition is perplexing to me. Rather than provide solutions I prefer to complicate or compound potential readings through the associations that may be created between works.

When selecting work for exhibition, I focus on the formal qualities as well as the question that each piece poses. While each work has its own possible answers, these can be manipulated further through curatorial choices. To this end I create pairs or groups, forcing direct associations between some works, while others I install alone. I employ found text and images as well as objects in order to establish potential lines of inquiry. The result is an arrangement that evokes language because it appears to employ a system that might be mastered and understood, yet is always shifting just out of reach.



Installation view, *ESS ENVY* at Nichelle Beauchene, 2016

## Q&A with Alice Tippit

by *Kaveri Raina and Jenn Smith*

**Hi Alice! We are curious about how you got started. How did you become interested in being an artist? Could you give an introduction to your practice please?**

My preschool activity was art classes at the Nelson Museum of Art in Kansas City. I kept with it until about half way through high school and then stopped taking art classes because I did not like the teachers. Following that there was a period of time lasting until about the third year of my first stab at college during which I did not engage much with art.

Regarding that period, even though art was something that I had always done, I don't think I thought I could be an artist. I was not encouraged in that direction. Once I returned to art making the idea of returning to school for art came about naturally, although it took me a while to get around to it. While finishing my undergraduate degree I became more interested in art with language as a basic element. Over a period of years I began to move away from work that employed text to where I am today, an image based practice that is strongly rooted in language.

**How is Chicago treating you as an artist? Are you satisfied? Is Chicago the ideal city for you?**

Chicago is fine. No place is ideal, and I don't really worry about it not being good enough. It's a good place to live and make work, and one cannot say the same for other large cities with more vibrant art communities. I do wish there was more art press for Chicago, because there is a lot going on here.

**Can you talk about your thinking process? What is the importance of having signs and signifiers in your paintings? They are ambiguous yet telling; they seem to be holding back, or veiling and yet sometimes revealing.**

I intentionally create images that use all the tools of signs: clarity of appearance, simplified forms, bold use of color. At the same time I work in degrees of ambiguity through various pictorial means. As I develop an image I try to think about the associations that could be made from the form itself, the color, and other relationships within the image. I think about whether I want those associations or not, and then work towards that oscillation you hit upon in your question. Painting itself also has a set of conventions that I keep in mind as I work through an image.

**Where would you situate your work and is there a specific framework that you identify with or concepts that you're trying to examine?**

Hmmm. I don't think about where my work sits very often, but if pressed I say that it has an affinity with language-based work. Frameworks interest me so far as they can be manipulated. I can definitely say that I am against aboutness. I try to tread lightly because in the end it is the viewer who makes the meaning, not me. Not surprising, but figures of speech such as metaphor and many other conventions of poetry are important concepts that I keep close by.

**Do you feel that the strength of work comes when the pieces are in proximity to each other like in exhibition or as a whole? Or can each object stand on its own?**

I like for both possibilities to be available to me with any given work. It's all in the arrangement. A kind of rhythm or dialogue is created between works, and certain ones might want more space to themselves given what else is happening in the exhibition.

**We saw images of your solo show currently on view at Nicelle Beauchene, very intriguing. Congratulations on the New York Times and Artforum reviews! How does it feel to show in New York vs. Chicago?**

We come back around to press. Showing in Chicago is not different to me in any essential way except that the community here is smaller. I realize not every New York show gets reviewed in two major publications, and know that I am lucky. Still, if the show had been here I doubt it would have been reviewed at all. Not to say that we don't have great writers in Chicago working to cover what is happening here, because we do, we just don't have enough!

**We are curious about your title selections. The title for your show at Nicelle Beauchene is *Ess Envy*. Could you talk about how you select titles? They are so captivating.**

Titling is very important to me. A good title adds to the work without defining it. Selection is a process in which I think about an individual work, the associations that can be made, and then make lists of words that work with those associations, but are not necessarily related. For instance it might be a word that rhymes with or has a similar structure to a word that is more directly related to a concept the image invokes. I like words that have more than one definition, the more divergent the definition the better. For the most part I stick to one word titles. When you add other words it start to get specific, which is not desirable for the work.

**What has been said/written about your work that surprised you? Or, what's the difference between how you see your work and how other see it?**

I am most often surprised by the associations people come up with for a work. Usually I try to think through all the basic ones, those that might be shared at large within culture, but I can't account for the experience of an individual that results in an oddball interpretation of the image. I allow for this. As long as it is not an association I tried to eliminate I try not to get hung up on it. After all, the work is supposed to allow for flexibility in interpretation.

As far as the difference between how I see it/others see it, there are always going to be some who won't allow for that flexibility. This faction will attempt to solve what they see as a puzzle, and then move on. Others treat them as facile signs and do not linger very long over them. I don't consider either of these issues this a failure on my part. I don't want to please everybody.

**What is your routine in the studio? Do you feel like it is necessary to get into a particular headspace when in the studio? If so, how do you get there?**

I have magical headspace time and making time, and in general they are two separate activities. For the former, it's practically meditative, and involves a lot of drawing. As for the latter, the activity of painting for me is a lot like coloring is for a child who has learned to stay inside the lines. The image is already developed, and transferred to the canvas. From there it's a matter of finessing it to a point of doneness.

**Have you ever had an experience looking at a painting (or other work of art) that you would describe as supernatural, spiritual, profound, paranormal, strange, or uncanny?**

Profound feelings occur often enough that I can't recall anything in particular. The closest I have come to a spiritual

experience is while viewing Michaelangelo's *Pieta*, appropriately enough (or cliché, as you might have it). It is rare to see sorrow so exquisitely portrayed. Uncanny happens, obviously, but the others, no.

**You received your MFA in Painting and Drawing from School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Did graduate school change your life? What do you know now that you didn't know then? Any particular advisors that really influenced you?**

Yes and no. I came into graduate school with a lot of my ideas and work pretty well defined, but I felt I needed additional insight to expand my thinking. All of those individual meetings with faculty helped me to understand a lot of concepts in painting that I had ignored previously, like figure-ground relationships. Hearing how they saw the images as painters was super helpful. The advisors with the biggest influence on my work in general are from my undergraduate days, Scott Reeder and Gaylen Gerber. All of my advisors from graduate school were great as well, but Barbara Rossi really took the time to help me understand how manipulation of form and color can complicate the reading of an image.

**What are some artists you are influenced by currently, and some that you keep going back to?**

More so in the past few years I look at a lot of work by other artists without a lot of focus on anyone in particular. On occasion I am compelled to take a closer look at a particular artist. Recently some Tom Wesselmann catalogs passed through my hands at the library and flipping through them thought, "Why have I not looked at his work more?" So there was a Wesselmania moment. An artist whose practice I admire is Barbara Bloom. Magritte though, is my all-time favorite number one artist to return to. The sense of mystery in his images is the quality I most aspire to in my own. And his titles are amazing.

*(Jenn and Alice met while working at the SAIC library.)*

**Do you still work at a library? How has being around libraries affected your work, if at all?**

I still work at a library. It has affected my work, mostly in that a lot of material passes through my hands that I never would have seen otherwise. Fundamental to libraries is organization by subject, but one can actively have a random experience with information that is not really possible with the internet. I can head into the library stacks and move from one section to another without being directed from an outside source. I often head into the large section of a particular subject, because this is where the books with images will be, and pick books off the shelf to flip through. I particularly enjoy old color photography. The printing process at the time was imperfect enough to yield some interesting effects.

**What do you listen to in the studio? Is this an important part of your practice?**

Not really. Much of the time I listen to nothing at all. If anything is on it is usually NPR.

**Do you have any suggestions for up and coming artists?**

Oh gosh! My best advice is to hew closely to yourself, and try not to worry about what others are doing, or receiving attention for doing, or whether you are getting enough attention. These are mind killers. The best conversation you can have is with yourself. Above all don't forget to feed your intellect.

**Any upcoming shows you will be in?**

I have a show at PRINTtEXT in Indianapolis. It's part of a series of shows with the overarching title Syntax Season, featuring artists who work with language.

**Thank you so much for letting us ask you questions and also having us over for a studio visit!**

*To find out more about Rema and her work, check out her **website**.*

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