



CUT, COPY, AND PRINT: MAGALIE GUÉRIN ON REPLICATING HER OWN PAINTINGS

BY BRADLEY RUBENSTEIN

I first met Magalie Guérin in the early 2000s in Greenpoint, Brooklyn—long before Greenpoint was made famous by the TV show *Girls*. She ran a small gallery called GV/AS, and curated shows that fused serious painting with something personal and quirky (Rodney Dickson's exhibition of paintings of Tanya Roberts still stands out as one of his most interesting exhibitions). One could always find Magalie sitting the gallery and working on drawings—in retrospect, combining elements of art making, collecting, and curating, are all aspects of her present work. Her recent book of studio writing, *NOTES ON*, was published this spring, giving us the perfect opportunity to catch up on her recent work.



Magalie Guérin, *Untitled (hat-pizza)*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches.
Private collection. Courtesy of the artist and Corbett vs Dempsey

BR: I want to talk about your background and influences, but I think that there is an aspect to your work, your current work, that incorporates a lot of that, so let's start there and work backwards. Can you talk a little bit about the work that I saw at Lyles & King last fall in New York and the “copy drawings” that relate to them?

MG: The paintings at Lyles & King were the continuation of a series I called the Hat Project, as well as a few from the Bondage series. In a nutshell, the project started about three years ago when I decided to start every painting with the same specific shape. The original sketch for that shape came from a chair design but ended up looking more like a big cartoonish hat in two parts, hence the name. After fixing the “hat” with thick layers of gesso on 16-by-20-inch canvases, I add oil colors and build forms around and against the main shape until it all comes together. The work is abstract in nature, but it's not until I've recognized something representational in it that I can call it quits. It's an intuitive process with a lot of unknowns, which is not very easy considering that I'm a bit of a control freak. I don't really understand how the image develops and becomes final, and I'm often left feeling as if I didn't quite make these paintings. That's how the Copy Drawings came to be—as a way to repossess my own work. I decided to make color pencil drawings of the paintings, rebuilding them from the beginning, but this time with a clear understanding of where they will end up, what they look like. The image of the painting is a known fact; the drawn layers are the reconstruction of that fact.



Magalie Guérin, *Copy Drawings*, Installation view at Sector 2337, Chicago, March–May 2016.
Photo: Clare Britt

BR: Related to this work you have a book of your studio notes (*NOTES ON, The Green Lantern Press, 2016*). I see this as part of a larger conceptual project, like, you create the paintings, copy the work, write about the process. It seems like the OCD aspect of the project is as important, if not more so, than the discrete aspect of a single painting.

MG: Probably OCD, yes! The book project started as a kind of drawing exercise. I transcribed six different studio notebooks, starting when I moved to Chicago to go to graduate school, into one Moleskine book, weaving the separate entries into an achronological timeline. It took quite a while, so as I copied away I continued to write in my current journal, and the NOTES project was analyzed as if it were a painting. I talked about how I disliked the look of my handwriting, that I would have preferred black ink instead of blue, how I felt about the content, etc. I then copied those current thoughts into the book-object. I did two versions of it a few months apart. The second book was presented as part of an exhibit at the Glass Curtain gallery in Chicago, which was seen by Caroline Picard of The Green Lantern Press. She offered to publish it, so I made a third version of the book under her supervision—this time typeset.



Magalie Guérin, *Notes On*, March 2016, Published by The Green Lantern Press. Photo: Sonia Yoon

BR: All of this brings to mind an article Angela Dufresne wrote last year about irony and sincerity, positing that there was “a third pill”—a reference to the film *The Matrix*—basically saying that there might be a form of sincerity that was cloaked in irony. It is a very post-meta view of aesthetics and art making. It brought to mind Charles Bukowski, who published his first book with a preface of all the rejection letters that he had collected while trying to get it published. That would have been a very meta aesthetic act—except that he had actually written all the rejection letters himself.

MG: I love Angela’s “third pill”! But I don’t relate to this thesis in regards to the work described above. There’s no irony. It has more of an emotional resonance—a way to hang on to the work, to not let it go, to recirculate it from within. I understand that the circular aspect of the production cycle might have a meta or post-meta aspect, but my feeling is that most studio artists work in a generative manner.

BR: I agree, but I think that some artists have more of a sense of building on previous work, while others take a more experimental approach. The first position kind of presupposes a strategy that might seem more calculated; the second might allow for more unexpected directions in the work. Where do you see yourself on that spectrum?

MG: Definitely more on the side of building from previous work—one thing leads to another. But I see this as a result of a daily studio practice more than a calculated strategy. But yes, predetermined systems of production help me move the work forward.

I'm more into repetition than experimentation, if we must consider these two approaches to be exclusive of one another.



Magalie Guérin, *Copy Drawings*, Installation view at Sector 2337, Chicago, March–May 2016.
Photo: Clare Britt

BR: Before you moved to Chicago you ran a gallery in Brooklyn for quite a while. At that time you were making these really interesting drawings that were both weirdly personal and something of a nod to appropriation strategy.

MG: Yes, the drawings appropriated images of famous photographs in which I inserted myself. I was trained as a commercial photographer, and to be completely honest, I wouldn't have known what "appropriation" art was at the time I made them (2003). It only seemed like the most direct way for me to create images and link all my interests together: photography, drawing, and psychology. They were my very first pieces of art. I was a late bloomer. Soon after that series I began to create my own environments, and the drawings became more surreal. You have to understand, I had not studied art at that time; my education came from meeting artists, running that exhibition space, and curating shows where I had to decide what I liked and didn't like based purely on taste and not any kind of understanding of art. That's how I became an artist, by looking and making. It was a slow process. It's not until I went to graduate school at the age of 35 that I had my first "critical" conversation about what I was making.



Magalie Guérin, *Untitled (hat-Flintstones)*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist and Corbett vs Dempsey

BR: I think that has been more of a strength than a liability with your work—it really does come from a genuine place, even when it seems ironic or deconstructed at times. One last question, the obvious one: What’s going on in your studio now?

MG: That’s nice to hear, thank you—although I still don’t see where you see the irony! My studio at the moment...well, more paintings. I’m trying a slightly bigger size, 24 by 30 inches, and hoping that the scale shift will make sense—still with the same process of starting the paintings with a fixed shape in gesso and building around it. I’m also making graphite drawings using a similar method of layering and erasing, which I have not done before with graphite. It’s very satisfying to have found a way to translate the paintings in drawings instead of copying them. But I still want to do more copy drawings. There are a lot of new paintings I haven’t had a chance to copy yet!

—Bradley Rubenstein

Bradley Rubenstein is a New York-based artist and writer.

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