





# Cimarron

Martha  
Tuttle

Henry  
Chapman

*Cimarron*

Martha Tuttle Henry Chapman

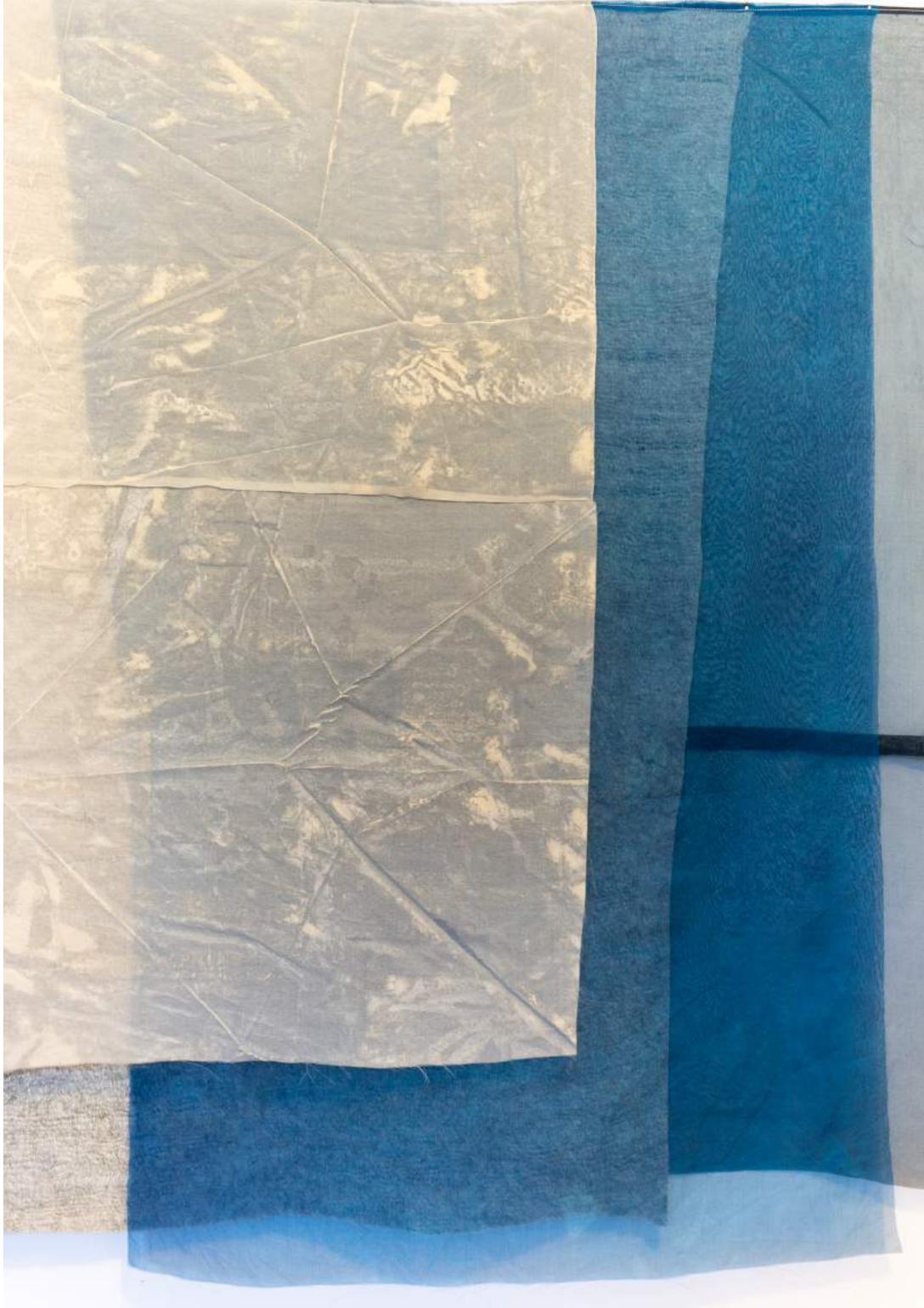
Efrain Lopez at Rhona Hoffman Gallery

July 14 - August 11, 2017

Thank you

Rhona Hoffman  
Kristin Korolowicz  
Greg Lindquist  
Efrain Lopez  
Lee Ann Norman  
Margaret Ross  
Jack and Connie Tilton  
Anastasia Karpova Tinari

Work photos: Bryson Rand  
All images courtesy of the artists



## Contents

“A Tryst of Delicate Imperfections” p. 8 - 15  
Kristin Korolowicz

“Cimarron” p. 16 - 29  
Henry Chapman & Martha Tuttle

Works p. 31 - 49

# A Tryst of Delicate Imperfections

Kristin Korolowicz

*Within my work, an imperfection is a failure when it is a symptom of my uncaring, and an imperfection is a success when it helps a piece find its own life.*

– Martha Tuttle

The works of Martha Tuttle and Henry Chapman both evoke a meditative quality and quiet stillness that appear distant from today's loud and fast society of spectacle. There's an alchemical beauty in the layering and draping of hand spun wool and other natural fibers in Tuttle's tactile compositions. In some pieces, she paints silk with a dusting of black and grey graphite that complements the earthy hues of the incorporated swaths of handmade wool. Chapman's large-scale paintings recall the interplay between visual form and language found in concrete poetry. With subtle depth and texture on the white expanse of his heavily gessoed canvases, he combines fragments of screen-printed, partially autobiographical texts with an economy of paint spills and the ever so slight echo of a brushstroke.

This two-person exhibition, entitled *Cimarron* (after Cimarron, New Mexico) is a culmination of an on-going dialogue between Tuttle and Chapman. Shortly after the two graduated from Yale University School of Art's MFA program in 2015, they shared a studio in Ridgewood, Queens and discovered complementary interests in the long history of contemporary painting. Late night conversations about the economy of mark-making within Agnes Martin's oeuvre unfolded into tangents on

their fondness for Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and François Jullien's *The Great Image Has No Form*. In late spring of 2016, Chapman moved to Berkeley and Tuttle stayed in New York. Despite their geographic separation and individual travels, they managed to craft ways of keeping their practices in conversation. In the spirit of a collaborative travelogue, they sent handwritten letters to each other, exchanged photographs from their travels, and archived their correspondence with the intention of ruminating on the question, "How does the negotiation of geographic distance emphasize the dialogue between our works?"

Although Martha Tuttle's practice is firmly rooted in a conversation about painting, she works primarily with fiber-based materials, using an array of textile techniques such as spinning, weaving and dyeing. She combines pieces of handmade wool and industrially produced silk dyed with indigo, walnut, ink and graphite to create her paintings. Her material investigations into the unique qualities of wool expand her formal and conceptual interests in painting to an exploration of the permeable networks between animals and the natural world. Many of her works begin with the process of spinning wool using a drop spindle, which allows for a variation of line depending how she uses her body to spin the raw material. Once the wool is woven, washed, and pounded, it creates surfaces of wavering density from which she selects and augments these materials to compose her paintings. Tuttle describes being drawn to the variation of material that comes with the practice of spinning wool: "The wool that I use is from the New Mexican Churro sheep, and the color changes depending



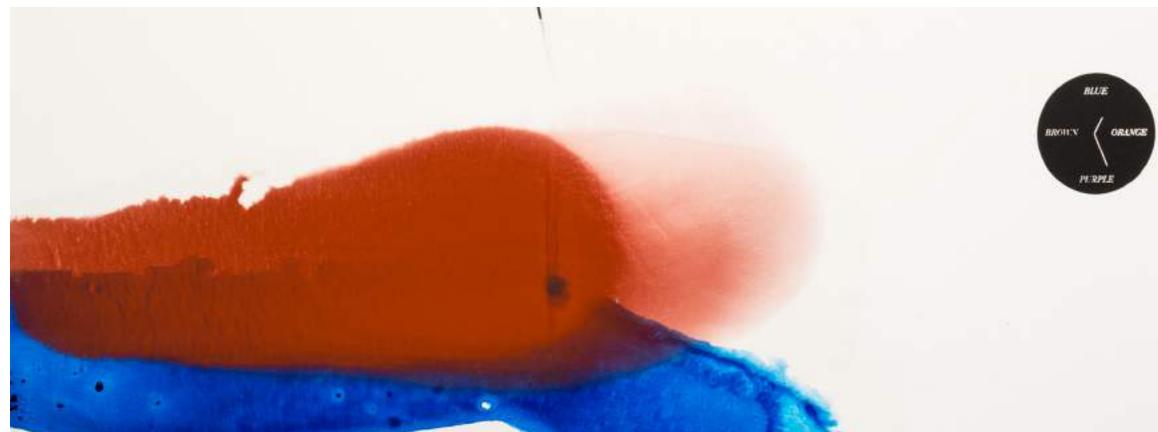
Detail: *Weather (5)*

on something as seemingly inconsequential as the distance from one valley to another." In other words, the same sheep could produce five different colors of wool depending on which valley it grazed in. Not quite a collaboration between man and nature, but it lies somewhere along those lines. This relationship recalls Donna Haraway's preoccupation with the tangled networks of human and animal relations, or even Rivane Neuenschwander's early works like *Carta Faminta* (which in Portuguese could mean either starving letter or starving map), where the artist created compositions that resemble continents, which were created by the eating patterns left over from a snail's meal—a kind of automatic drawing with nature. Similarly, Tuttle's work is intimately engaged with notions of touch and the fluidity of form.

In her recent series of paintings *Like Water I Have No Skin* (a direct reference to essayist Gretel Ehrlich), Tuttle combines swaths of handspun wool and silk painted with grey and black graphite, and stretches them onto traditional wood frames. She has recently decided to incorporate industrially woven silk components and dyes them with indigo, walnut, and ink. The artist describes her choice to weave together the machine-made and handmade fibers saying, “I am interested in how the consistency of standardization can create a discourse with the inconsistency contributed by my hand and body.” Emphasizing the tension between difference and repetition echoes throughout many of her other works. Her compositions also play with the opaque versus translucent qualities of the different fibers, and at times her aesthetic decisions create color gradients that are formed by the overlapping materials. The muted colors and somber palette of her paintings give these works a ghostly presence comparable to the quiet confidence of a burial shroud, particularly in larger unstretched works such as *Weather 6* (2017).

Henry Chapman’s series of large paintings comprised of oil, acrylic, and silkscreen ink on canvas include the technique of layering spills of paint, which visually mirrors the overlapping fibers in Tuttle’s works. Within the past few years, Chapman shifted to painting on larger six-foot tall canvases with the intention of relating the size of the canvas to his own body. The effect of the scale and layering spills of paint appear to quote Morris Louis’ iconic stained canvases. However, unlike a color field painting, from afar, it’s the sheer expanse of negative space on Chapman’s canvases that is most notable and draws the viewer closer. Upon

approaching the work, one notices fragments of texts, sentences here and there, and at times whole paragraphs that appear on the canvas where one might expect a brushstroke of paint.



Detail: *Rain Resin Perfume*

His recent body of work considers the relationship between writing and painting. In early 2016, he began incorporating prose accounts of his travels in Europe, China and the Western United States into his practice. The artist screen-prints sections of these texts onto stretched canvas surfaces that he meticulously builds up with layers of gesso. (He often creates a preparatory sketch of the compositional structure beforehand in order to determine the layout of the text.) Among the aforementioned color spills are mysterious excerpts that appear to float on the surface of the canvas due to the wavering density of the lettering. According to

Chapman, “. . . such surfaces absorb and hold ink, which appears to be both within and on top of the surface. Material choices like this allow me to imbue the writing with as much physicality as the painted marks around them.” This effort he describes toward drawing a stronger relationship between the painting and the body is also evident in his decision to liken the canvas to a page from a book, offering a layer of intimacy between the viewer and the work. Some of the passages in the paintings are derived from excerpts of Chapman’s travelogue correspondence with Tuttle, including the two smaller paintings *4:30 or 5* (2017) and *Samantha* (2017) (both twenty-six by twenty-three inches). Both works are loosely inspired by John Cage’s indeterminacy writings. Whether ideas are communicated in the nature of the writing or spills of paint, Chapman is interested in invoking chance and potentially the happy accident of “errors” that produce variation.



Detail: Left: *Moab* Right: *Weather (6)*

Chapman and Tuttle toil over the degree to which chance and control impact their works. Perhaps the bleeding pool of pigment on one of Chapman’s canvases becomes unwieldy, or Tuttle’s weaving looks too perfect and loses its hand-spun character. There is a necessity to find a balance between these forces visible in their works. Both artists share an interest in the tension between the mechanical and controlled in relation to the handmade and gestural quality of their work. This is at the heart of the work of their mutual source of inspiration Agnes Martin; some have said that the imperfections in Martin’s hand-drawn lines allow her paintings to “breathe.” In this way, Tuttle and Chapman’s works could imbue a metaphysical conceit where what it means to be human might lie exactly in those imperfections or variations that give way to life: An Agnes Martin grid wouldn’t be an Agnes Martin grid were it not for the ever so slight wobble of a hand-drawn line.



# Cimarron

MT:

My mother tells me of climbing a mountain when she was my age, during a period of drought. She picked up a rock from which she heard a buzzing sound, as if there was an insect trapped inside of it. Looking up, she realized she had in fact been surrounded by a storm cloud. She ran down the mountainside, her braids standing up straight. The electricity of the lightning as it prepared to take form caused the vibration in the molecules of the stones, and the static in her hair.

HC:

We could see storm clouds in the south when we arrived, and streaks of grayish rain beneath them that Margaret said are called *virgae*. We drove past a bus depot and an old school bus that seemed to be a convenience store, shuttered. A few miles west was the earth ship, a squat, irregular cabin made of wood, concrete, glass, and tarp. We arrived at sunset and sat watching the sky, its color turning between orange, purple, and brown. Margaret stood on the wood bench and took a few photos with her phone, but it didn't really translate.

Eventually the rain reached us, splattering into the dirt and over used coals and ash of the fire pit. We found the key, as instructed, in the cartridge of a broken staple gun and brought our few bags inside. The earth ship was surprisingly comfortable. We lay in bed listening to the rain pass heavily over the fabric roof. I was thinking of a room in the villa de Medici we'd stayed at the previous spring, when Josephine was at the French Academy and I'd had the show in Naples. It was a tiny room at the top of a winding staircase so narrow our shoulders brushed the walls as we climbed. I remember looking out at the gardens of the villa, both messy and precise.

I thought of it because we'd arrived at sunset then, too, and had lay in the room as the light faded to dark, quiet and unfamiliar. I got up to find the switch for electricity in the earth ship, using my phone to see. It took a few seconds, then cast a yellow light from a lamp hanging in the center of the room.

Margaret found a dog eared copy of "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People" by the bed stand and started to read. I stood looking at electric guitars which were hanging in a line along the paneled wall. I picked one up and held it like I might play, but didn't, not knowing how.



MT:

Our collaboration started shortly after Henry moved to Berkeley. To make sense of an exhibition together, we sent each other letters, emails, photos. Henry photographed New Mexico storm clouds. I rode the Staten Island Ferry and sent him images of the churning wake. I imagined Henry driving on the highways in my home state while I rode the subway in his.



Traveling influenced what we wrote to each other and what we were making. I thought about what it meant to be in one place when Henry was moving—my forms and his formlessness. We had been writing to each other about the idea of absence in art. We were also narrating our absences to each other.

We read some of the same books, and sent notes on what we read. Most significant were Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* and François Jullien's *The Great Image Has No Form*. *Dictee*'s language

and fractured speech had to do with something we were thinking about, although from a different context than ours: communicating a difficult thing— or the difficulty of communicating. François Jullien pointed to what some of those difficult things might be: transformation, states of in-between, and constant change.

Collaboration in our case has been to look for different solutions to shared concerns. Quieter parts of the spirit benefit from facing out, although the tone and pace of conversation might

be different than we're used to.

Our subject matter is elusive, indeterminate; we each look in our own way for clarity in parts of our process—to really know a mark, or a material— to allow for that “difficult thing” to be felt. I look at the way J.M.W. Turner paints the spray of a wave, or how Agnes Martin’s horizontal graphite lines hold emotional resonance.

HC:

I’m writing down places we have in common, ideas, excerpts. Your photos from the Staten Island Ferry at night, the greenish-black harbor. Our Troutman Street studio. “Earth ships.” Petrichor. Cimarron, New Mexico. The Agnes Martin retrospective at LACMA. A carpeted room at “Radical Abacus.” Ghost ranch.

MT:

A shadow through an empty window at night telling you your cat has come home. The left slope of a mountain coming into view, while the rest of the range is shrouded in mist. A line from a Rilke poem saying in a few words how you have always felt about God.





HC:

At the Fox Head, we drank in the afternoon at a rickety table carved with the names of lovers, incomprehensible jokes. I rested my glass within an amber ring of beer that had stained over time into the table's varnish.

I saw Margaret's face, tiny strands of her hair flickering in the light from the window. We recounted how, when Margaret had been studying in Nanjing, we traveled to the apartment complex where she'd lived for eight months as a girl. From the courtyard we'd looked up at the green-painted buildings. "There," she said, pointing.

In the morning we drove to Nebraska because she knew someone in Lincoln we could stay with for the night. Further west, when we ran out of people we could think to call, we slept at Best Western, Motel 6. It was typically \$60 - \$70 for the night. In Moab we stayed two nights at the Red Star Inn, comparatively upscale, at \$110 a night. In the dining area we ate damp, cold eggs and miniature sausage links out of a buffet tray. On our drive, canyons drifted across the landscape, sturdy and immense. The desert surprised us by its depth, expanding outward in every direction and sparkling like the sea.

Our second morning in Moab we drove the single road back toward Arches in a downpour. Water filled the road and obscured our vision, forcing us off into a large, unmarked turnout. We sat with our head beams on, dispersed weakly in the rain. After a few minutes, the heaviest of the rain passed and I turned the key. "Just wait a couple more minutes," Margaret said, touching my hand.

MT:

When I was maybe three or four I asked my mother in an airport what would happen if she lost me. She said that because she was my mother she would always be able to find me again. I took this to mean that everybody is connected by threads, like angel hair or spider silk, forming flexible but unbreakable bonds to our kin, and also leading us to everyone we will know in our lifetimes. For years afterwards, while in crowds, all I could do was imagine thousands of strands stringing in and out of bodies until they became like shadows cocooned in silver reflectivity.



HC:

Dear Martha,

It's 4:30 or 5; the tree by the window is turning black. Sometimes I look at that tree from bed in the mornings. When I'm feeling blue, I think there's something ominous about the way it moves in the wind. Its slow tilt. When my alarm goes off, Margaret is already in the pink chair writing, or I can hear her in the kitchen making her morning tonic, a bright orange drink, powdery around the lip of the glass.

MT:

I like to ride the Staten Island Ferry at night in the summer because I've never really had air conditioning and it's reliably 10 degrees cooler on the water. When it's raining, I like to watch the wake froth and churn like the description of the witches' brew in Macbeth, and watch as a silhouetted lower Manhattan begins to merge into one large geometric form studded with hazy window light.



Works

Henry Chapman  
*Earth Ship*, 2017  
72" x 54"  
Oil, acrylic, silkscreen ink on canvas



Henry Chapman  
*Magnolia*, 2017  
 72" x 54"  
 Oil, acrylic, silkscreen ink on canvas





Henry Chapman  
*Rain Resin Perfume*, 2017  
72" x 54"  
Oil, acrylic, silkscreen ink on canvas





We could see storm clouds in the south when we arrived,  
and streaks of grayish rain beneath them  
that Margaret said are called zigzag.  
We drove past a bus depot and an old  
school bus that seemed to be a  
convenience store, shuttered.

A few miles west was the earth ship,

Martha Tuttle  
*Weather (5)*, 2017  
Wool, silk, dye, pigment, steel





Martha Tuttle  
*Weather (6)*, 2017  
Wool, silk, dye, pigment, steel



Martha Tuttle  
*Like water I have no skin (2)*, 2017  
10" x 12"  
Wool, silk, dye

Martha Tuttle  
*Like water I have no skin (5)*, 2017  
10" x 12"  
Wool, silk, dye, clay

