





Middle Distance

Leanne Shapton

I'm at my best at middle distance, he told the psychoanalyst. I'm not good with intimacy. He wanted to stretch out on the couch, but she was looking at him from her chair and it was their first meeting and so he didn't. He felt his phone vibrate in his chest pocket. He reached for it, but as his right arm darted across his body to reach inside his jacket, he stopped it and instead put his hand on his knee. I'm not very good at physical affection, he said to her. She wrote something down.

As he left her office afterward, he thought to himself: where can I get a salami sandwich and a coffee. He didn't know this part of town. He wanted one of those fancy prepared food stores with refrigerated rows of creamy side salads, overstuffed pre-made sandwiches and stacks of sugared baked goods.

Arriving home that afternoon, the light in the apartment was bright and warm, the living room had been tidied by his cleaner. There was a paper towel on the glass coffee table, but he ignored it. He walked over to the couch and laid the length of it, keeping his shoes on. I'm lonely, he said aloud. Then, he said: no I'm not.





Shadow

My baby
My Mother
My coffee
My work
Me
My shoes
My teenager
My hotel room
My new pillow
My dinner
Me
My shelf
Me
My shadow



Wipes

Returning home from a Christmas party, she
puts her head into her father neck
The purple sky is like her fingers and the
wind has age on it.

The streetlights streak across the windshield
and glide the car along until the next beam
touches down, she falls asleep and a woman
has the same dream.

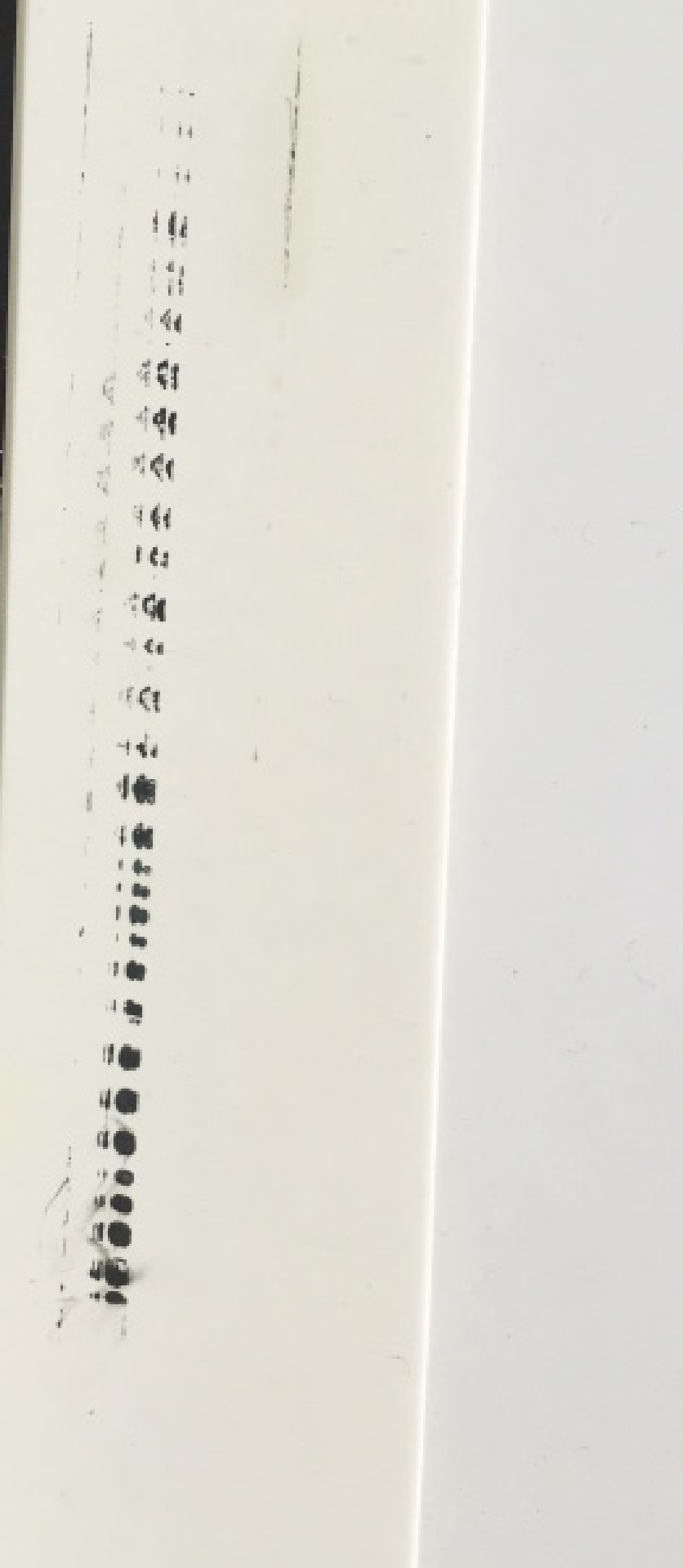
She smells like sweet hair and pee, little
birds that look like her turds, a shower cake.
Her lead levels are normal. Her sneeze like a
wet tissue dropped on the floor.

Horns rise in a chorus on 5th avenue then
fall. I've opened the kitchen window
So the paint fumes don't linger with the
fettuccine, the strawberries, the waterlemon

Petal line of mouth, petal line of eye, petal
line of eye
Her breath is eggy. I can barely decipher the
blooms of clarity. A defrosting windshield
in Bavaria.

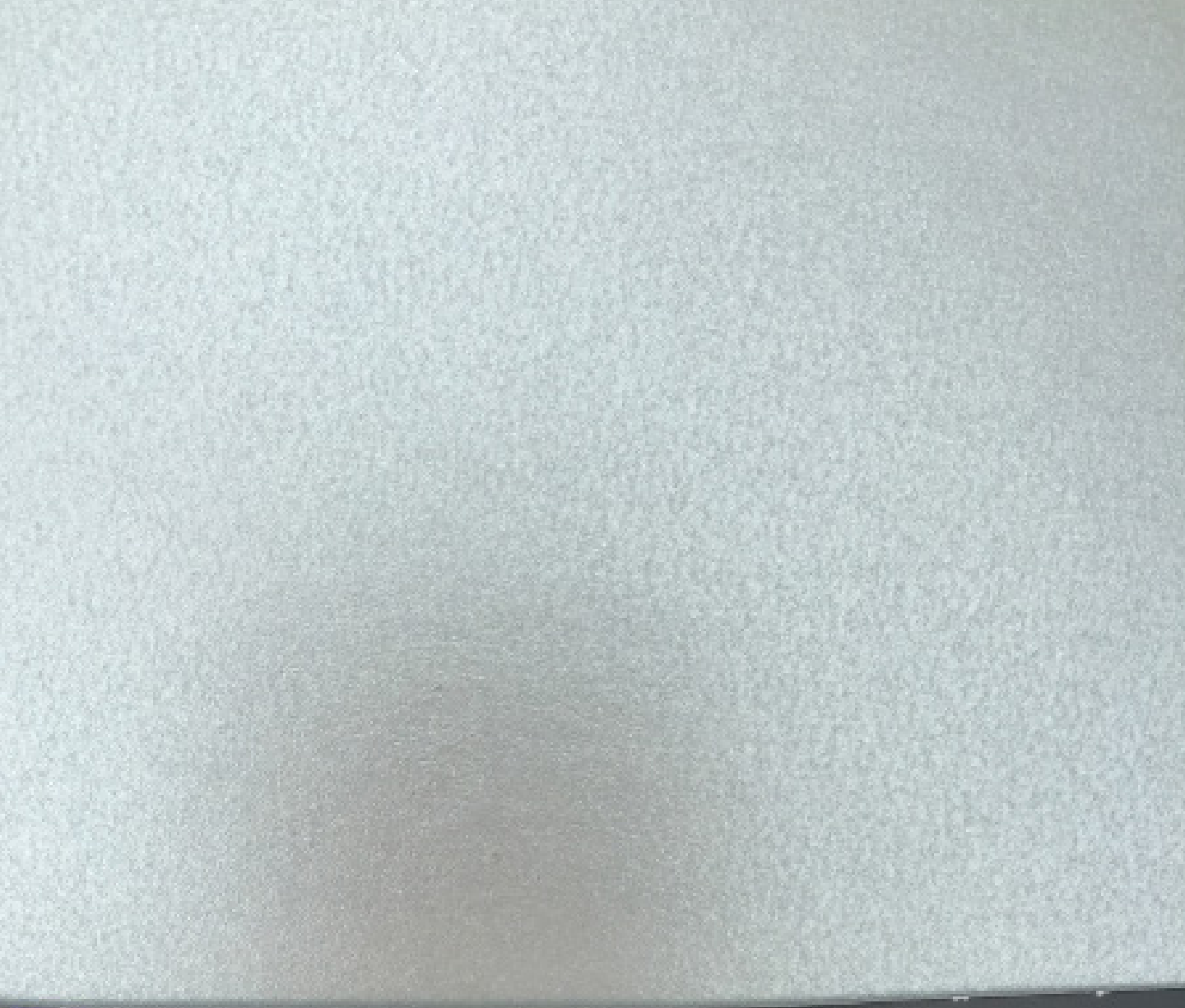


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Mary Ramsden

(In / It)

For her first solo museum exhibition, British artist Mary Ramsden presents a new series of paintings arranged in groupings that investigate associations between scale, imagery, and space. Expanding on her interest in prose, social media, and our daily interface with technology, Ramsden's painterly, gestural marks echo the physical residue left when swiping the touch screen of a tablet or smart phone. Within this, the artist examines the playful space between the painter's mark and the accidental smears of our screen-based world. Setting these urgent scorings among seemingly fixed geometric planes, Ramsden alludes to our pervasive relationship with the screen in daily life.

Acting as an introduction to her Aspen Art Museum exhibition through an intuitive experience with image and text, the preceding pages of this guide were produced in conjunction with Ramsden's exhibition *(In / It)*. Expanding on the notion of language structures and the mediation of technology, this series of seventeen "drawings" are iPhone photographs shot by the artist and paired with commissioned texts written by author Leanne Shapton.

Ramsden's drawings and Shapton's texts play supporting roles for open-ended structures through opposing methods. Ramsden's images are accounts of the non-specific or of what might have been left in the margins of the wall or floor after a painting is made. Shapton's texts are accounts of specific moments, but because of their lack of context and brevity, nothing but the substance of the moment can be drawn from them. In the same way that we never quite get the full story from information displayed on a screen, we also never get the full story of Ramsden's works or Shapton's texts. Rather, all possibilities remain open.

Margins

Sherry Black

I, too, dislike it.

*Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it,
one discovers in it, after all, a place for the genuine.*

—Marianne Moore, *Poetry*, 1967

(In / It), the title of Mary Ramsden’s Aspen Art Museum exhibition, originates from the artist’s observation of space between two words in Marianne Moore’s infamous poem. Moore’s spare, precise language is sustained by the spacing—an arrangement that holds tension between the “in” at the end of the second line and “it” at the beginning of the third. The line break between the two words, consequently, draws readers into the white of the page. Refusing to illustrate a particular moment or thing, Moore’s poem is about language itself and the complicated task of imbedding and extracting meaning.

The punctuation of Ramsden’s title (*In / It*) not only reflects the spacing found in Moore’s poem, but also suggests that these two words can be placed together as well as in contrast (either/or). Considering Ramsden’s work in tandem with Moore’s poem incites the tenuous relationship between language and image. The artist’s practice falls squarely into the category of abstraction, definitively refusing to describe the particular, much like Moore’s *Poetry*. Color is non-referential and flat, while geometric planes obscure what might be beneath, or partially abbreviate intentional gestures. Margins appear decisively within and between canvases. Edges of works are often articulated with a strip of color or tone—particularly evident in the two-part work *Daylight Licker and Prime Mover* (2016)—and spaces between pieces in each grouping display additional margins, whereby proximity becomes a ploy, not unlike punctuation.

The structural influence of language is also evident in Ramsden’s work. Works are arranged into groups of paintings and multiple canvases become a single piece. Titles reference these groups and associations, with each word denoting each work (for instance *Tight Lines, Hoik and Dice* [2016]), or what the artist considers to be “chapters,” such as *Wine Dark Sea and Violet Sheep* (2016). A multitude of combinations of gestures and fixed planes

play out across the space of the gallery, from chapter to chapter. If syntax is considered infinite and grammar is considered finite, the emotive speed of her gestures assumes the boundless role of syntax, while the geometric planes echo the fixed rules of grammar. And rather than tell a story, Ramsden's works reflect what might be left over if we were to strip away plot and character.

Ramsden also addresses the device through which we experience much of the fiction and nonfiction of our lives—the screen. If we take away the stories that screened devices set out to tell, we are left with the structures and action by which information is experienced. Scrolling through texts, emails, and social media feeds, swiping through photographs, layering windows of information on top of one another, windows minimized, expanded, text over and under images. All of these actions are present in the making of Ramsden's works or appear as visual devices.

When the screen is on, our focus enters the electric glow of what seems like an endless world of material and space. When the screen is off, the black, inactive surface becomes a mirror. What we then see instead is our own reflection or the messy traces of our interactions with the virtual. By employing the mechanics of how we experience information as mediated through technology, Ramsden draws on notions of language in its most modern form—increasingly devised to interrupt attention spans, divorced from actual source and context, yet making all of the meaningful or frivolous data available at our fingertips. Sifting through an information deluge requires a sort of blank space for scrutiny or what Moore refers to as “a place for the genuine.” What results is thought taking place in the margins.

This publication accompanies Mary Ramsden's exhibition (*In / It*), curated by Sherry Black, and on view in Gallery 6 at the Aspen Art Museum from November 4, 2016–February 19, 2017.

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Mary Ramsden, *Drawings 1–17*, 2016. iPhone photographs. Courtesy the artist

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Mary Ramsden lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include: *Vanilla and Concrete*, part of Tate Britain's relaunch of the Art Now series; *I am here but you've gone*, curated by Milovan Farronato with Stella Bottai, Fiorucci Art Trust, London (2015); *Panda Sex*, curated by Tom Morton, State of Concept, Athens, *New order II: British Art Today*, Saatchi Gallery, London (both 2014); *Consommé*, Kinman, London, *Open Heart Surgery* at the Moving Museum, London (both 2013); Temple Bar in Dublin (2012); and *New Contemporaries*, UK (2009).

Leanne Shapton is an author, artist, and publisher based in New York City. She is the author of *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion, and Jewelry* and *Swimming Studies*, which won the 2013 National Book Critics Circle award for autobiography.

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