



ELISE ADIBI

Respiration Paintings

THE FRICK PITTSBURGH

APRIL 15–OCTOBER 15, 2017



INTRODUCTION

Robin Nicholson, *Executive Director*

Over the last two decades the Frick has worked with a number of contemporary artists, offering them opportunities for engaging and dynamic dialogues with our storied grounds and gardens, historic buildings, and diverse collections. The responses have been varied, imaginative, and always compelling.

Beginning with a residency by renowned Brazilian camera artist Vik Muniz in 1999, artists have included Christian Milovanoff, Aaronel deRoy Gruber, Félix de la Concha, Craig McPherson, and most recently, ceramic artist, Chris Antemann. While each has brought a personal and distinctive sensibility to their projects and created work that speaks to their own artistic vision, their work has, at the same time, been imbued with something of the essence that makes the Frick a unique and special place.

"Essence" is a word that features large in Elise Adibi's artistic vocabulary and it is fitting that as she considered the idea of an exhibition at the Frick she was drawn towards our historic Alden & Harlow greenhouse. Here, in the early 20th century, fragrant hot house flowers bloomed profusely before being sent by train to the Frick mansion in New York or the Frick's 100-room summer "cottage," Eagle Rock, in Massachusetts. The history of this architectural space is deeply imbued with scent and color, a fact that appealed to an artist whose work is similarly concerned with the physical and sensory interaction of color, material, and fragrance.

This exhibition/installation continues Adibi's exploration over many years of art as a volatile, mutable, and essentially biological act of creation and process. The Frick greenhouse offers a unique laboratory of light, heat, and humidity for experimentation and pushing the boundaries of painting as a medium. A museum endeavors to preserve art, unchanged, forever. Here we see art changing and transforming before our eyes...and noses.



Opposite: View into the south wing from the rotunda. Above: The Alden & Harlow greenhouse, April 2017.



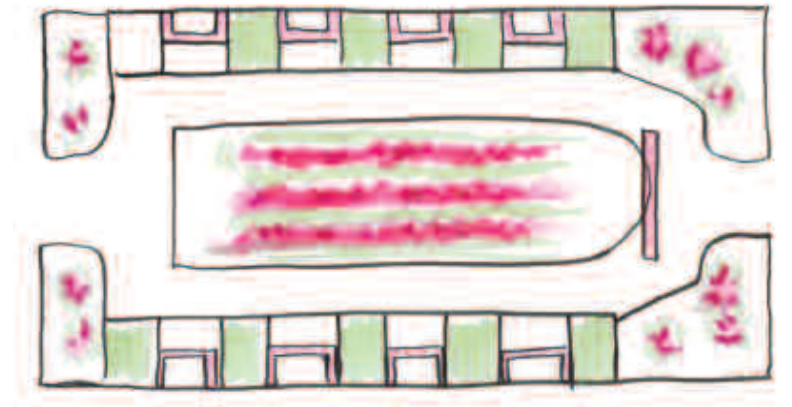
AN UNLIKELY PLACE FOR A PAINTING EXHIBITION

Sarah Hall, *Chief Curator, Director of Collections*

Elise Adibi: *Respiration Paintings* marks the happy confluence of the trajectory of the artist's work over the last several years and the Frick's desire to begin to creatively activate additional spaces on our site and engage artists from the community. Adibi, a Pittsburgh native with a broad educational and exhibition background—having studied philosophy, architecture, and painting at Swarthmore, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University respectively—returned to Pittsburgh at the perfect time for our interests to converge. Adibi's interest in incorporating plant materials into her paintings led to a natural affinity for our greenhouse space, which seemed the perfect laboratory to fully develop some of her ideas related to abstraction in art, nature, and biological interdependence. In *Respiration Paintings* we have done something highly unusual by installing paintings not in a museum, but in a greenhouse, immediately introducing a different level of sensory experience to the exhibition.

Over the past 18 months, I have been working with her to support her vision. We had many meetings in the greenhouse—in summer weather when the humidity and heat made spending more than a few minutes laborious, in the winter when the warmth and color was a treat, and on rainy days, when we noticed where there were leaks between the glass panes, and realized the greenhouse would never be watertight.

From the very beginning the exhibition was designed to showcase the paintings, the plants, and the architecture. Adibi quickly settled on a standard size for most of her canvases—30" x 30". A square, that, when, spaced at intervals with the plant material creates a visual rhythm and connects to the



strong horizontals of the building. The paintings also relate to the individual panes of glass in the greenhouse, each framing a fragment of the outer world, yet part of an interior microcosm. She also decided early in the process that she wanted to work with a mixed vocabulary of abstraction—rigorously structured paintings based on the grid; oxidation paintings created when a mixture of urine, vinegar, and salt is in contact with copper; and abstractions created by adding plant oils to pigments and doing controlled pours. The poured paintings and oxidations are connected to traditionally masculine approaches to abstract expressionism associated with Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol, but Adibi has made them her own through her attraction to the physicality of the materials and her interest in treating it as a natural or biological process which, “lets the painting make itself.”



which holds all of the oxidation paintings, was conceived as a more dramatically changing space—seasonally changing, as flowers peak and are replaced, and changing (perhaps even daily) as the oxidations respond to the elevated humidity in the greenhouse environment.

Adibi designed a specific shade of pink to help knit the built environment into the experience of the paintings and plants. The pink color used on the painting mounts, benches, and trim pieces in the rotunda is also infused with a custom-designed perfume created from essential plant oils—so that the artist's work is not confined to visually manipulating the space, but also manipulating our other senses as well.

A greenhouse is an unlikely place for a painting exhibition. In museums and art galleries, the irreplaceable, one-of-a-kind creations of artists are treated reverentially. The climate is adjusted to 70 degrees (plus or minus 2 degrees)

and 50% humidity (plus or minus 5%) fluctuations are expected to consistently remain within this range. In galleries, daylight, with its harmful ultraviolet radiation, is eliminated or mitigated, and light levels are adjusted depending on the materials used. Paintings are typically lit at 15–20 foot candles. (For comparison purposes, the greenhouse is around 650 foot candles on an overcast day.) Just about every aspect of the environment of the greenhouse is anathema to the preservation of paintings, yet, in this installation, Adibi has embraced an idea she calls “the living painting.” The materials used to make the paintings are going to change over time, regardless of where the work is displayed. Here, the living painting is displayed in a living environment, and the changes to the oxidation paintings will be rapid enough and dramatic enough to be noticed on a weekly, sometimes even daily, basis. In parallel, the scents from the essential oils will wax and wane depending on the heat and humidity. The natural light creates a dynamic viewing experience and changes throughout the day and seasonally as well. Right now, on an afternoon visit to the north wing, at 2:30, the shadows falling on the central work, *Pink Grid Painting*, create a horizontal line that almost perfectly emphasizes the horizontal axis of the painting. Depending on clouds or blue sky the experience in the greenhouse can be calm and soothing, or dramatic and full of vivacity. This is an exhibition in which the forces of nature are both harnessed (in terms of materials derived from organic sources and the integration of plants and paintings) and unleashed (in terms of forces like sunlight, heat, moisture, and gravity acting on the paintings).

TRANSFIGURING AND TRANSCENDING

The paintings, which were all made specifically for this installation, work with the architecture of the space. The colors and the scents have been formulated with great deliberation, to work with the plants' own colors and aromas, and the placement has been orchestrated with a holistic vision. The Impressionist

artists famously attempted to capture the essence of visual perception and fleeting changes of atmosphere in the world—often working in series to document seasonal and weather conditions. Here, Adibi has attempted to manipulate the atmosphere itself, and is working with the seasons and the sun to create an artistic microcosm, that we as viewers are invited to inhabit.

I've watched the paintings develop in her studio—from deliberate grid-based structures, to pour paintings that both embody the artist's vision and the intervention of chance, as they are created through a process dependent on gravity and the movement of liquids of varying viscosities. I've been surprised by the introduction of bright yellow in the *Lemon* works and in the *Yellow and Pink Pour Paintings*, and I've seen the artist's affinity for the organizing system of the grid manifest itself underneath the structure of works—in graphite beneath a number of the monochromes, and in *Yellow and Pink Pour Painting I*. Since hanging the paintings in the greenhouse I've seen the combination of gravity and humidity quickly begin to transform more organically shaped compositions like *Oxidation Painting* into works in which the natural drip marks continue to graph the surface on a daily basis, with a new grid manifesting itself from within the structure of the painting.

If art is a way of heightening our experience of the world, this exhibition creates an almost mystical site. Merriam-Webster defines mystical as “having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence.” When I use the word mystical to describe the impact of the installation of *Respiration Paintings*, it has to do



particularly with the idea that the exhibition works on the viewer in ways that are not obvious to the intelligence, or perhaps even beyond intelligence. We look at the plants differently because of the paintings; we look at the paintings differently because of the plants. We notice the humidity in the room, perhaps even insects moving in and out of the space, or a waft of fragrance—from the plants? from the paintings? or from the scent-infused pink architectural elements? The installation makes us perceive through all of our senses, not simply visually. Together these experiences are both intimate and expansive, highly personal and interior, yet making us aware of the interconnection between the natural world and the created world. And, perhaps in a poignant way making us aware of disconnections as well. It is, however, an entirely celebratory installation. Harmonious, exuberant, and meditative simultaneously.

The earliest abstract artists sought a new route to communicating ideas beyond traditional representation and symbolism. They were exploring abstraction in tandem with the ideas popularized by Theosophy—an intellectual and spiritual movement that flourished in the late 19th and early 20th century (although still in existence today). Theosophy sought to understand the mysteries of life, nature, the spiritual, and the material. In many ways the aims of this installation—to create a heightened sensory experience, to better understand the interconnection of and interdependence of plants and people, and to create an environment of beauty, contemplation, and healing—all connect to the same philosophical and spiritual concerns that influenced that first generation of abstract artists.

During conversations in her studio, Adibi explained, “the ideas are all in the paintings.” Based on a conceptual foundation, the ideas are as much a part of the process as the physical making. And, thinking back to her broad academic interests, it’s clear that philosophy and architecture are as much a part of her artistic practice as painting. Early on she determined that for this project she wanted to make use of the “whole language of abstraction,” working with geometry, gesture, mark-making, and action painting. But, as she explains in her accompanying essay, “always starting with the grid.” The grid becomes a foundation for formalism, experimentation, and liberation. Adibi’s use of the grid also recollects the work of Agnes Martin—whose disciplined use of the structure of the grid did not preclude her from giving her works titles like *The Rose* and *White Flower*.

ARTISTS AND PLANTS

If you do a little research into the use of plant material in the arts, you’ll find that it’s fairly common for contemporary artists to incorporate plants into their installations, or use plant materials within gallery spaces. In Pittsburgh, back in 2004, artist Carsten Höller constructed a greenhouse outside the Carnegie Museum of Art (*Solandra Greenhouse*) as part of the Carnegie International. Höller planted *Solandra maxima* vines in an attempt to create an environment full of powerful plant pheromones that would induce in visitors the sensation of falling in love. Although there were no paintings or artist-made objects in the space, Höller, like Adibi, was exploring the invisible interdependence of people and plants. We coexist in ways more complex than we understand, and the plants we live with and spend time with at the most basic level help us breathe and, at levels we barely comprehend, impact our moods and emotions.

Plants and flowers have been subject matter for artists for centuries. There’s the famous tale from the fifth century BCE of the painting contest

between Zeuxis and Parrhasius in which Zeuxis painted a composition of grapes so realistically that birds swooped down to eat the fruit. There are plants in frescoes at Pompeii, which was buried in 79 AD, and closer to our time there are the beloved sunflowers of Van Gogh, and waterlilies of Monet.

There are also artists who work with plants as their audience, literally and conceptually. Artist Peter Coffin has been working with plants as his audience since 2002 when his installation *Untitled (Greenhouse)* was first created to investigate the influence of music on plants. He has continued to work with this concept and has involved a number of well-known composers (like Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson) to create compositions specifically to be performed for plants. He is now in the midst of creating volume 3 in his *Music for Plants* series. Coffin schedules periodic public performances, in which the musicians are typically performing in a temporary greenhouse structure surrounded by plants. He has also made the music available through recordings. Coffin’s work was inspired by the influential 1973 publication *The Secret Life of Plants: a Fascinating Account of the Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Relations between Plants and Man* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, which is also an influence on this installation, as discussed in Adibi’s companion essay in this booklet. She says, “I see my project as much more of a collaboration with the plants, the plants will make the paintings and the installation as much as I will.”

Another artist working under the influence of *The Secret Life of Plants*, Anne-Katrin Spiess, has done a series of botanical projects including, *Interviews with Succulents* (2012) in which she worked with the Wave Hill Public Garden and Cultural Center’s greenhouses. The artist, who is concerned with environmental issues and the disconnection between man and nature, borrowed a number of succulents from Wave Hill’s collection for short periods, took them to her studio and, “interviewed” them. Transcripts of the interviews are available on her website.

Artist Vaughn Bell created a number of mini-greenhouses in 2008 for

MassMOCA. The project, called *Village Green*, consisted of dollhouse-sized acrylic planters suspended from the ceiling. As described by the artist, “Viewers experience the landscape at eye-level by placing their heads within the terrarium-like structures. The experience is multi-sensory and immersive, with muffled sounds and smells of earth and moss. Viewers find themselves in intimate proximity to soil, plants, and each other, sharing the same air.”

This quick survey of projects is by no means exhaustive. These diverse artworks, however, seem more purely about appreciating nature, or understanding ecosystems. While the artworks described above include appeals to the senses of smell and hearing, Adibi’s interest in combining the 20th-century vocabulary of abstract painting with an environment intended for the cultivation of plants is unique, and creates a provocative series of contrasts and communions.

There are also artists who have worked directly with greenhouses—some constructing them. William Lamson’s *Solarium* constructed at Storm King Art Center, consists of a beautiful little building made from panes of caramelized sugar of varying shades of amber. It is intended as a place of contemplation, but the artist considers it an experimental greenhouse, conceptually related to the science of photosynthesis as the plants inside the greenhouse are fed by light that passes through sugar, while they create sugar through the chemical process of responding to the light.

Adibi herself is keenly aware of the precedent of Monet, who was involved in every aspect of the installation of his famous *Nymphéas* (waterlily) paintings at the Orangerie. In 2007 Adibi received a fellowship to live and work in Giverny, France, painting in Monet’s village. Monet famously divided his later years between gardening and painting, which were decidedly interrelated forms of artistic practice. He had a greenhouse installed on his property in the 1890s, around the same time the Fricks built their second greenhouse. The installation of the *Nymphéas* at the Orangerie in Paris marked the ultimate experiential immersion in Monet’s art. Monet worked carefully with the architect to design the display of his monumentally-scaled paintings.

The paintings were installed in an east-west orientation placing them in the path of the sun and bathed in natural light from above. The resulting installation has been revered for fostering a transcendental, mystical experience. According to art historian Louis Gillet, Monet had found, “the great ecstasy of the hidden side of the world, that secret of oblivion where our puny individualities lose themselves.”

Monet’s installation is extensively discussed by art historian James D. Herbert in his book *Our Distance from God: Studies of the Divine and Mundane in Western Art and Music*. Herbert imagines a visitor to Monet’s installation sensing that, “nature and art lift the relation of man to land beyond the contingencies of time and place into the realm of the eternally right and true.” A visit to a gallery, a stroll through a park or a greenhouse, these are ways we both refresh and reengage ourselves, connect with nature and with others, connect with ideas and connect to the planet. Here, with *Respiration Paintings* the web of interconnections is an intentional and provocative part of the experience.

Another artist Adibi specifically sites as a personal influence on this project is Matisse, whose painted paper leaf cutouts combine powerful natural form with the hand of the artist, in his use of color, and arrangement of the shapes. Matisse was very literally creating an indoor garden through combining and recombining his vocabulary of natural forms, “You see as I am obliged to remain often in bed because of the state of my health, I have made a little garden all around me where I can walk.”

Adibi is not only an artist, but a naturalist-philosopher interested in the coexistence of life, and a formalist who approaches her work with precision, deliberation, order, and a respect for materials and processes. It is an unusual combination. Here, in *Respiration Paintings*, Elise Adibi presents us with a garden of her own orchestration, where plants become artwork and a bouquet of paintings awaits us: to contemplate, to appreciate, to experience, to breathe in.



RESPIRATION, ROSES, AND THE SECRET LIFE OF PAINTINGS IN A GREENHOUSE

Elise Adibi, *artist*

R*espiration Paintings* is a set of 18 abstract paintings specifically created for the greenhouse of The Frick Pittsburgh. Designed by the architecture firm of Alden & Harlow, the greenhouse is a classic example of early steel and glass architecture. The greenhouse was built for the Frick family in 1897, placing its creation at least a decade before the first modern abstract paintings. Never would it have occurred to the architects or the Fricks that over a century later this airy space would come to house an installation of non-objective compositions made from essential plant oils.

The six-month exhibition comprises abstract paintings sited in the greenhouse, where they are displayed with plants and together suffused with natural light. Some of the paintings are made from oils distilled from plants and used for aromatherapy and natural perfumery; others are oxidized paintings made from urine, salt, and vinegar on copper. In choosing to use rose, lemon, and jasmine plants, my purpose was to create a continuum of matter between the living plants on display in the space and their essential plant oil in the air, emanating from the paintings. Plants and paintings, plants and people, people and paintings: we share many of the same elements, like carbon and even proteins. The paintings are in a sense “alive,” made from “living” materials, and they continue to interact with their environment and change over time, further



shifting our perceptual connection to them. In *Respiration Paintings*, this mutability is given form. Each painting does not exist solely in the material of the painting, nor solely in the viewer’s perception, but rather in the space between the painting and the viewer, between matter and cognition; it exists in the air.

We often don’t notice air until we smell it. In the greenhouse, the air is pregnant with scent. As soon as we enter it we are aware of the dense humidity of “plants breathing.” The word respiration has two meanings. Foremost is the act of breathing, “the inhalation and the exhalation of air.” Respiration on the cellular level also means the “process by which cells break down sugar to obtain energy.” All living organisms respire, but only plants can transform the energy of the sun directly into usable energy through the respiration process. With the

combination of photosynthesis and respiration, it could be said plants “eat light.” As the only beings that can directly transform the energy of the sun into food, plants are at the base of the food chain and the source of life on our planet. Plants also made our planet habitable. Over two billion years ago, in what scientists call The Great Oxidation Event, blue-green algae in the sea produced enough free oxygen to transform the earth’s environment, ultimately making it habitable for life forms like us.

Opposite: Evening view into the south wing. Above: Roses in the north wing are paired with rose-infused paintings, including Persian Rose Monochrome in foreground.

In 1973, Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird published *The Secret Life of Plants*. The best-selling book (and documentary film by the same title) captivated the popular imagination in proposing the theory that plants are sentient. The authors call the life of plants “secret” because we do not “see” their lives with our eyes; it takes another kind of “seeing” with feelings. In the movie version, we also “see” plants in a new way with time-lapse photography. We see that when sped up, to match the speed at which we move, plant movement looks a lot like our own. Since the book’s publication, the field of plant communication has found firmer scientific footing. Though plants do not have nervous systems, scientists have shown that plants communicate through the air by releasing odorous airborne chemicals, technically referred to as VOCs (volatile organic compounds). Plants use scents as protection against insect predators. The scents plants release can drive away certain insects, or else send a distress call to other insects that will respond and eat the pests. Scientists have discovered that plants also communicate through underground networks of mycorrhiza fungi that connect through the roots of plants. These underground webs connect plants allowing them to transfer water, carbon, nitrogen, and other nutrients and minerals. These forms of plant communication reveal that plants are attuned to one another and to their environments. It may not be “feeling” in the human sense of the word, but it is a language of communication and connection. The discovery that plants participate in non-verbal forms of communication is a message to us, a reminder that we too, as life forms on this planet, communicate non-verbally with each other and with the cosmos.

The authors of *The Secret Life of Plants* propose a “supersensible”—as in, “being above or beyond perception by the senses”—world of plants. Today scientists consider this book New Age pseudo-science, but its legacy lives on, as does its underlying message of attunement. The premises of Tompkins and Bird remain accepted: that we cannot “see” plants communicating with the naked eye; we need to communicate with plants with a combination of our senses; and with our feelings.

This “secret” life of plants and the idea of a supersensible world connects directly with the “roots” of abstract painting. Wassily Kandinsky historically has been considered the first abstract painter. He made paintings that were not pictures of people, places or things, but rather expressions of the artist’s “inner need.” Kandinsky claimed to be a synaestheliac, which means that his senses were interconnected. In his case, his perception of color was linked to his hearing. When he saw certain colors, he heard certain sounds. Kandinsky’s synesthesia is what opened the doors of perception for him, giving him the experience of sound and color as detachable from specific things, and a deeper awareness of his own subjectivity. In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1912, Kandinsky describes the perception of color as two-fold, initially a physical sensation provoked by material objects, but with attunement, the sensitive viewer could have a second level experience of color. Kandinsky wrote, “to a more sensitive soul the effect of colours is deeper and intensely moving. And so we come to the second main result of looking at colours: their psychic effect. They produce a corresponding spiritual vibration...” Both books, one about plants, one about art, had similar aims, to provide access to the experience of attunement and sensorial interconnection.

In recent scholarship, Kandinsky has been called a “pseudo-synasthete.” It is believed he did not actually have synaesthesia but rather used it as a conceptual model in his art. That he may not have really had the condition supports the idea that in fact everyone has synesthesia to a degree. For everyone, the senses are interconnected even if there is not a one-to-one correspondence. *Respiration Paintings* aims to provide an intersensory experience for anyone who visits it. It combines the sense of sight and the sense of smell into one simultaneous and interconnected experience.

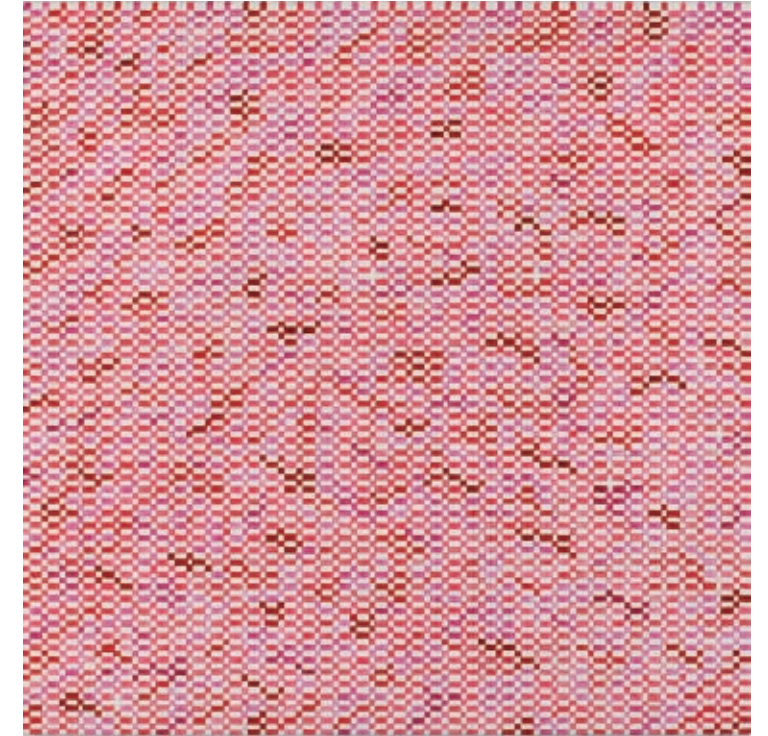
In *Respiration Paintings*, rose is used as a color and a smell. Long symbolic of beauty and love, the rose is an abstraction: a flower, a color, a smell and an idea. In *Respiration Paintings*, the rose is a flower, growing in the greenhouse. It is a color, used as paint (and as a color it exists as a wavelength of light).

It is smell, used as an essential oil (existing in the air as molecules). It is used as a proper name in the paintings (for instance the title *Rose Grid*) and it is an idea (a symbol of love and beauty) that has the power to arouse feelings in us.

The rose essential oils that are used in this installation are grown on farms in Turkey and Bulgaria where roses have been farmed and distilled for generations. Most of the oils in *Respiration Paintings* are steam distilled. Steam distillation is a process by which solid plant matter is cooked at high heat producing a steam, which is then cooled, turning it into a liquid. The distiller consists of two chambers connected by a tube. They are traditionally made of copper and called alembics. Alembics date back to medieval alchemy, and were used by alchemists to search for the *prima materia*, a substance they believed to be the primordial substance of life. Alchemists were trying to find the immaterial essence of life, the substance in matter that animates it. *Respiration Paintings* participates in this alchemical history. Plant oils can be thought of as a form of embodied light, since plants “eat light.” With this metaphor, adding sunlight to oil paint makes the painted matter more animated.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPIRATION PAINTINGS AND INSTALLATION

When selecting plant oils to use in paintings I start by matching scent and color, like the scent of rose and the color red. I mix the plant oil into the paint as a medium, creating a colored paint that is also fragrant. For instance, I made *Rose Grid*, 2017 by mixing a variety of red pigments with two plant oils: rose otto and geranium rose essential oil. The plant oils resonate with the pigment, augmenting the vivacity of its color by increasing its vibration. Since plants “eat light,” in a sense their distilled essence can be thought of as light



in liquid form. By adding the plant oil to the oil paint, I am adding “liquid light.” Using the actual rose matter, and combining it with rose-color, this painting is at once both an abstraction of a rose, and a manifestation of one.

Along with the *Rose Grid*, there is *Rose Chord*, *Rose Monochrome*, *Persian Rose Monochrome*, and *Rose Painting* all made by blending rose essential oil and rose colored paint, all manifestations of rose, in different forms. These different forms are likewise different types of paintings; there are grid paintings,

Above: Rose Grid, 2017



poured paintings, oxidation paintings, and monochromes. Each employs the language of abstraction, if differently. The grid is the mainstay. It is always there from the beginning in the weave of the canvas. The grid is itself an abstraction, defined as a coordinate system made of straight lines at 90-degree angles. The grid is also a term used to define the system of electrical distribution, which could be thought of analogously to the “super-sensible” interconnected world of plants and colors. In my work the grid is always embodied, and as embodied, it is living. I make the grid either with graphite, a pure form of carbon essential to organic life, or with paint infused with plant oils.

The horizontal and vertical also manifests in how I make the paintings. While I make the grid paintings vertically, standing up with the painting on the wall, I make the poured paintings horizontally, with the painting on the floor. For instance in *Supermoon Painting*, 2016, I poured lemon, sandalwood, cardamom, jasmine, and neroli oils into a gold-green pigment. I poured this painting on the eve of November 14, 2016, during a “supermoon.” Supermoon is a term used when this full moon looks particularly large. This fall’s supermoon was the moon’s closest encounter with the earth in 68 years. I chose this evening to harness the gravitational forces from the moon. When I pour the plant oils into the pigment, they exert an agency. I select the oils and I do the pouring, but once poured, I do not manipulate the outcome. It is

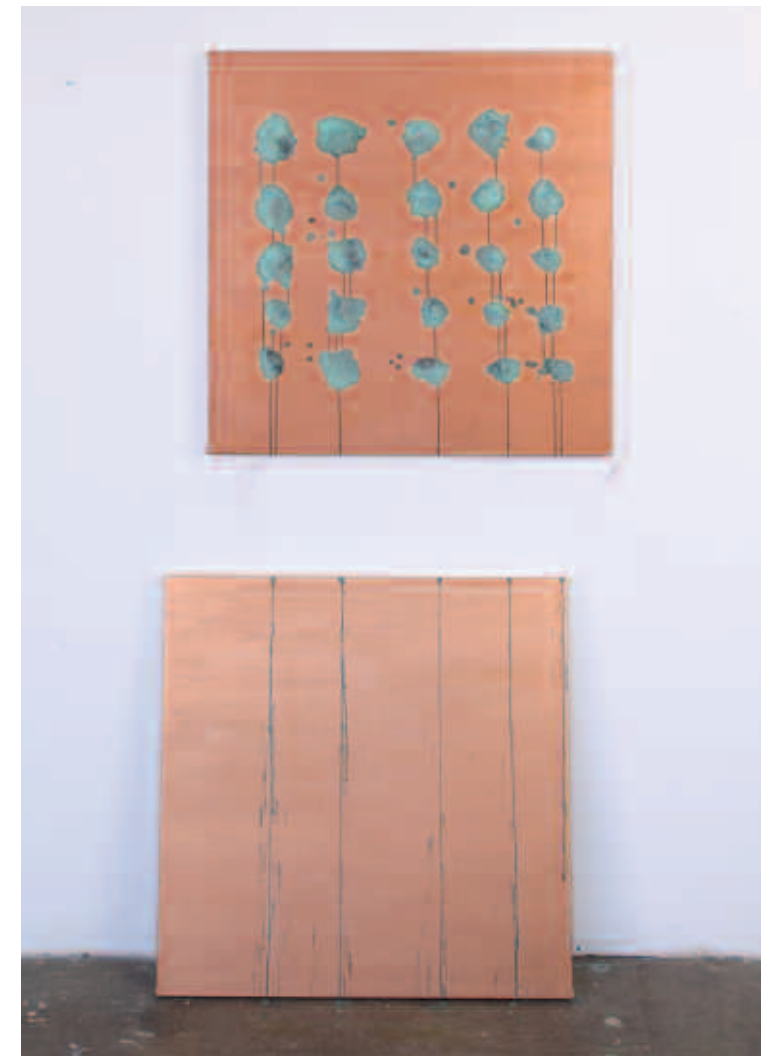


Top: Installation view of the south wing. Bottom: Installation view of north wing. Right: Installation view of Supermoon Painting.

as if the plant oils make their own image, and the image they make is mysteriously plant-like. The plant oils in the different paintings are used as mediums in the multiple senses of the word—both as an intervening substance and an intervening agent. In all the types of paintings, the plant oils are an animating power.

The grid in my work is a formal idea as well as a process. To give an example of this, I made *Oxidized Grid Painting*, 2016 by pouring the urine mixture onto a copper ground, and letting it oxidize on the floor. The painting developed into a pattern of organic forms arranged in a grid. I had the painting on the floor for several days and I thought it was dry, so I hung it on the wall. I had another painting with a copper ground resting on the floor below it. There must have been some moisture below the surface of the oxidation that I could not see, because when I left the studio, and returned a few days later, the *Oxidized Grid Painting* had dripped onto the prepared ground beneath it. The drips fell in vertical lines over the horizontal lines of the ground, creating a new painting. I call it *Painting Made by Another Painting*. The way the drips fell gives them the feeling of being suspended in time, as if they were caught in the act of falling. The grid, like the rose, is many things: the forces of nature, an idea, a human construction, a device used to order space, and so on. It is in the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, and the paintings we look at. The grid is in the architecture of the greenhouse. The steel framework supporting the glass panes is a grid. The grid is in some ways like the air, it is all around us, and yet we don’t always notice it.

Siting the paintings in the greenhouse is unlike displaying them in a gallery or museum. In those “white box” environments the climate and the artificial lighting are highly controlled. The institutional “white box” creates a “pure” environment to experience art. Seeing paintings in a greenhouse is a very different kind of context. In the greenhouse, the paintings are bathed in natural light. They will change in appearance as the light moves from morning to evening, on days with sun or cloud cover, and as the seasons change. The oil



Above: Studio view of Painting Made by Another Painting showing how drips were created from Oxidized Grid Painting hanging above.

paintings made with plant oils will invisibly change as the essential plant oils continue to evaporate, a process that can take months to years, depending on which oils are used. Some of the more resinous oils such as sandalwood and patchouli are very long lasting, whereas the citrus and floral oils such as lemon and jasmine are much more fleeting. When the oil paint dries, the painting becomes stable. Exposing the paintings to excessive heat and humidity is a risk, but the experience is worth the introduction of such uncertain fates.

In contrast to the oil paintings, the oxidation paintings will continue to visibly change. The urine mixture oxidizes the copper creating a verdigris patina. Unlike oil paint, the oxidation does not stabilize when dry. If subjected to humidity, the oxidation process will continue until it reaches a stabilization point with the moisture in the environment. I anticipate that the oxidation paintings will continue to oxidize during the six-month course of *Respiration Paintings*, turning greener over time, effectively blooming. I have also made two *Copper Monochromes* without any urine mixture; these two paintings will be oxidized entirely by the air and moisture in the greenhouse.

The Frick greenhouse is divided into two apse-shaped wings; a north wing and a south wing, joined in the middle by a rotunda. There will be three seasons to the installation of *Respiration Paintings*: spring, summer and fall. The north wing is designed as a rose garden. The roses will remain throughout the installation, going through cycles of blooming and fading over the six months. In the south wing we have three seasonal floral designs:



starting with tulips in the spring, dahlias and begonias in the summer, and chrysanthemums in the fall. The palette of the flowers resonates with the palette in the paintings. In both wings, surrounding the paintings in planting beds there will be mix of herbs and flowering plants including, dianthus, nasturtium, lantana, rosemary, and lavender. The installation is interspersed with fragrant flowers such as day lilies, sweet pea, phlox, lily of the valley, and hyacinth.

I have created pink-scented perfume for the installation. The perfume will infuse the pink wooden architectural stands supporting the paintings, as well as the rosy hued viewing benches created for this exhibition. The essential oils that I have used for both the paintings and the perfume in *Respiration Paintings* are rose otto, geranium rose, rose absolute, geranium, jasmine, ylang ylang, bergamot, red mandarin, yellow mandarin, sweet wild orange, neroli, cardamom, lemon, Peru balsam, benzoin, agerwood, aged patchouli, highland lavender, Himalayan cedarwood, and Australian sandalwood. These plant oils were inspired by the primarily pink and yellow colors that I used to make the

paintings. Because the perfume is made with 100% pure plant oil, the oils will change with the weather and fluctuations in humidity. Like the oxidation mixture, the plant oils will react to the varying levels of humidity in the air. When it is humid more smells will come out and when the air is dry it is harder to detect them. Like the plants, the fragrance too, will blossom and fade.

Above: Installation view of Oxidation Spiral Painting

ABOUT THE GREENHOUSE

The Frick greenhouse is a renovation and partial reconstruction of one that served the Frick family from 1897 through the 1970s. Henry and Adelaide Frick built their first greenhouse on the property shortly after they purchased Clayton in 1882. In 1897, the Fricks engaged architects Alden & Harlow to undertake several building projects on their estate, including construction of a new, larger greenhouse. The firm, which had offices in Pittsburgh and Boston, made minor renovations to the main house and created a playhouse for the Frick children as well as the new greenhouse. The interior fittings of the greenhouse were provided by Lord & Burnham, who built and fitted many of the most notable public conservatories and greenhouses in the United States, including Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh.

It was not unusual for a wealthy family at the turn-of-the-twentieth century to have a greenhouse or conservatory on their property. Reasons were many: an interest in decorating with fresh flowers year round, cultivation of favorite fruits and vegetables, and even propagation of specific specialized varieties of plants, or the collecting of rare botanical samples, a reflection of the post-Darwin world's fascination with genetics.

In the Frick's early years at Clayton, suppliers for the greenhouse were almost exclusively local. The first major purchase outside of Pittsburgh was in 1885 when Peter Henderson & Co., Seedsman of New York shipped over 1700 tulips, 900 hyacinths, 100 narcissus, and 300 jonquils to Clayton. Over the years the greenhouse provided the family with the flowers they loved as well as the



vegetables they wanted for their table. David Fraser, employed by the Frick family as head gardener and horticulturist, managed the greenhouse and the grounds at Clayton from 1896 to 1935.

After the family moved to New York, shipments were sent by train two or three times a week, a practice that continued into the 1970s. Seeking to reduce operating costs, in 1942 Helen Clay Frick reduced the size of the 1897 greenhouse, by removing the north and east wings. As part of the preparations for opening the

property to the public in 1990, the greenhouse was renovated and partially rebuilt (using some of the original materials), resulting in the building you see today, which remains somewhat smaller than it was in 1897.

Conservatories, greenhouses, and hothouses were all popular during the Gilded Age, and in having one the Fricks were indulging in a popular pastime. Hothouses are, obviously, heated, while a greenhouse may or may not be heated. All three shared the more functional objective of producing varieties of plants for observation and use. Conservatories are typically more elaborate and romantic environments, meant to serve as parlors for the enjoyment of nature, where visitors discover new species, explore created exotic habitats, or simply lose themselves in the intoxicating mix of fragrant flowers.



Center: Greenhouse, c. 1901, photo by Lewis Stephany. Right: Interior of the greenhouse c. 1900, photo by Childs Frick. Both images courtesy The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.



Above: Elise Adibi

BRIEF CURRICULUM VITAE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2017, *Respiration Paintings*, The Frick Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA
2016, *Respiration Paintings*, Full Haus, Los Angeles, CA
2014, *Substance*, Louis B. James, New York, NY
2013, *Metabolic Paintings*, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
2012, *Da Capo*, Churner and Churner, New York, NY
2010, *A Priori*, Southfirst, Brooklyn, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015, *NEW NEW YORK: Abstract Painting in the 21st Century*, University of Hawai'i at Manoa Art Gallery, curated by Debra Drexler and Liam Davis, Honolulu, Hawaii
2015, *Performative Process*, curated by Ryan Steadman, Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, NY
2013, *Paint On/Paint Off*, Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, NY
2013, The Drawing Center Benefit, NY, NY
2013, *The Armory Show Focus*, curated by Eric Shiner, Churner and Churner, NY, NY
2013, *Rebirth*, Standard Toykraft, curated by Daine Coppola, Brooklyn, NY
2011, *Drawing Gifts*, 8th Annual Benefit, The Drawing Center, NY, NY
2011-2012, *Gertrude's/LOT*, The Andy Warhol Museum, curated by Eric Shiner, Pittsburgh, PA
2010, *Gold in Braddock*, UnSmoke Systems Artspace, Braddock, PA
2009, *recess!*, Recess Gallery, curated by David Muenzer and Tucker Rae-Grant, NY, NY
2007, *Pattern vs Decoration*, Hosfelt Gallery, NY, NY

EDUCATION

2007, Columbia University, Master of Fine Arts in Painting
1994, University of Pennsylvania, Master of Architecture
1988, Swarthmore College, Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2016, The Heinz Endowments and The Pittsburgh Foundation
2013-2014, David and Roberta Logie Fellow, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University
2013, The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
2010, The Fine Foundation and The Pittsburgh Foundation (for *Gold in Braddock*)
2008-2009, The Pollock-Krasner Foundation
2007, Terra Foundation for American Art, Giverny, France

CURATORIAL

2010, *Gold in Braddock*, UnSmoke Systems Artspace, Braddock, PA
Gold in Braddock, Photos

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Piejko, *Elise Adibi*, Blouin Modern Painters, October/November 2016
Suzanne Hudson, *Painting Now*, Thames & Hudson, 2015
Megan Cerullo, *Radcliffe Institute Fellow returns to Brooklyn for new solo show*, The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, January 19, 2015
Culture and Capital in Dallas, Art in America, April 2014
Harry Choi, *A Conversation with Elise Adibi*, Notes from 21 South Street, The Harvard Advocate Blog, March 28, 2014
Suzanne Hudson, *Openings*, Artforum, January 2014
William J. Simmons, *Notes on Queer Formalism*, Big Red and Shiny, Volume 2, Issue 15, December 16, 2013
Cate McQuaid, "Scent of a painting" in Playfulness from late painter Olitski, The Boston Globe, December 10, 2013
Cate McQuaid, *The Week Ahead: Theatre, Galleries and Museums*, The Boston Globe, November 20, 2103
Elise Adibi, (Untitled) Aromatherapy Painting, The Harvard Advocate, Fall 2013

Caroline B. Hubbard, *Adibi Commands an Unusual Palette*, The Harvard Crimson, November 11, 2013
Karen Rosenberg, *Homages, Giddy Humor and Less Clutter, The Armory Show at Piers 92 and 94*, The New York Times, March 7. 2013
Brittany Salsbury, *Elise Adibi, Churner and Churner*, Artforum.com Critic's Pick, June 201
Reid Singer, "Slideshow: ARTINFO Staff's Pithy Takes on Shows by Helio Oiticica, Cindy Sherman, and More," Blouin Artinfo, June 2012
Jane-Claire Quigley, "Practice Makes Perfect: 'Da Capo' Paintings by Elise Adibi," Animal, May, 25, 2012
Mary Thomas, "22 women artists deliver provocative show at The Warhol," The Pittsburgh Post Gazette, December 21, 2011
Suzanne Hudson, "Elise Adibi, Southfirst," Artforum, February 2011
"Artist Strikes Gold in Braddock," The Pittsburgh Post Gazette, April 30, 2010
Jennifer Baron, "Gold, not Smoke, in Braddock," Pop City, April 28, 2010

PUBLIC LECTURES AND TEACHING

2016, *Respiration Paintings*, The Phipps Conservatory, Biophilia Network, Pittsburgh, PA
2014, Adjunct Professor, Advanced Painting, Brooklyn College
2013, *Painting as a Site of Resistance*, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
2013, Artist Talk, Art Department and Department of Cultural Studies, University of Massachusetts, Lowell MA
2008, Adjunct Professor, Painting, Columbia University
2007, Adjunct Professor, Painting, Brooklyn College

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

- 1

Copper Monochrome, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint and copper on linen
- 2

Lemon Monochrome, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and lemon and Peru balsam essential oils on canvas
- 3

Lemon Grid, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and lemon, bergamot and yellow mandarin essential oils on canvas
- 4

Persian Rose Monochrome, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint, rose oil, bergamot, sweet orange and lemon essential oils on canvas
- 5

Pink Grid Painting, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and rose otto, geranium rose, aged patchouli, benzoin heart note, ylang ylang, highland lavender and lemon essential oils on canvas
- 6

Copper Monochrome, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint and copper on canvas
- 7

Rose Chord, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and red mandarin, jasmine, agerwood, Australian sandalwood, bergamot, sweet orange, rose absolute, rose otto, geranium rose, geranium, aged patchouli, benzoin heart note and highland lavender essential oils on canvas
- 8

Rose Grid, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and rose otto and geranium rose essential plant oils on canvas
- 9

Rose Monochrome, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint, rose oil, bergamot, sweet orange and lemon essential oils on canvas
- 10

Painting Made by Another Painting II, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas
- 11

Oxidation Painting, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas
- 12

Yellow and Pink Pour Painting II, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and lemon, Peru balsam, red mandarin, ylang ylang, bay laurel, and palo santo essential oils on canvas
- 13

Supermoon Painting, 2016
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint and lemon, cardamom, sandalwood, jasmine, and neroli essential plant oils on canvas
- 14

Oxidation Painting, 2017
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas
- 15

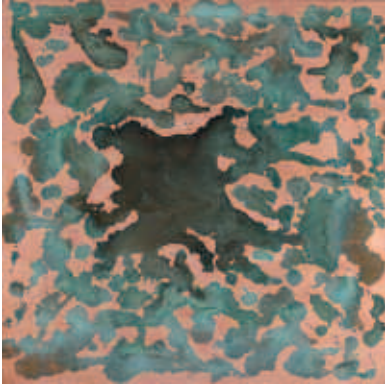
Oxidation Grid Painting, 2016
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas



1



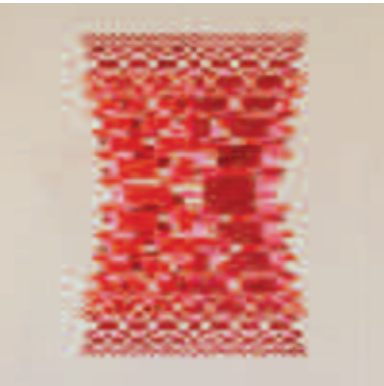
6



11



2



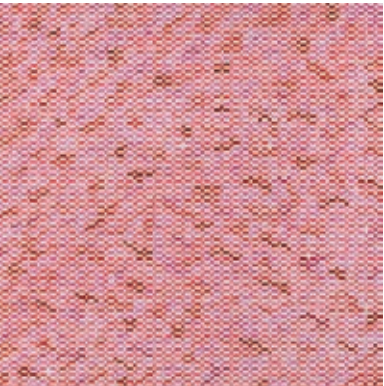
7



12



3



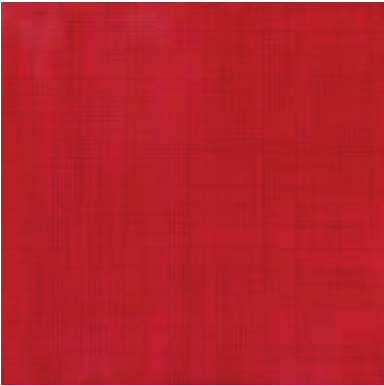
8



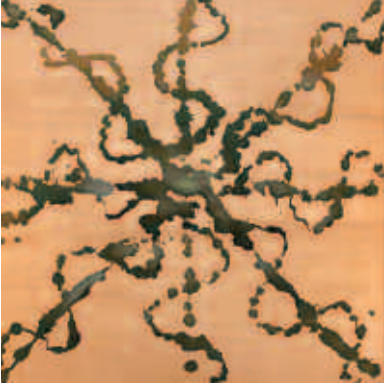
13



4



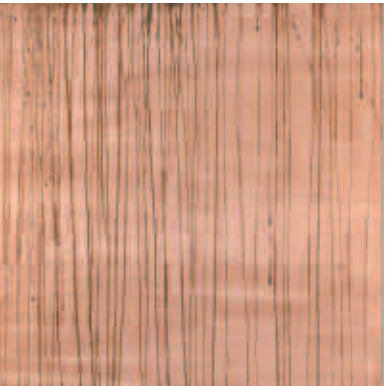
9



14



5



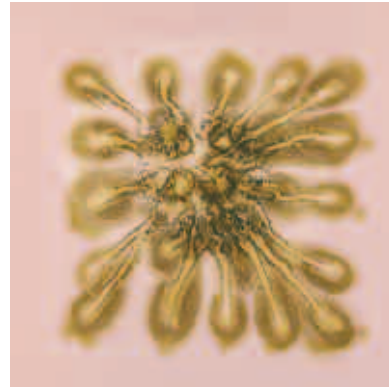
10



15

16 ***Wolf Moon Painting***, 2017

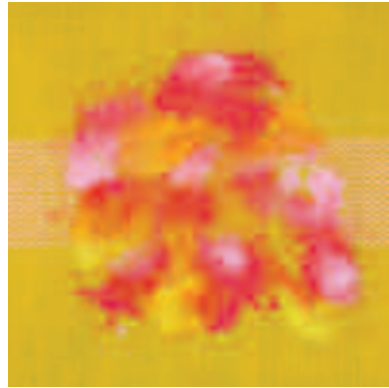
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint and lemon, cardamom, and sandalwood essential plant oil on canvas



16

17 ***Yellow and Pink Pour Painting 1***, 2017

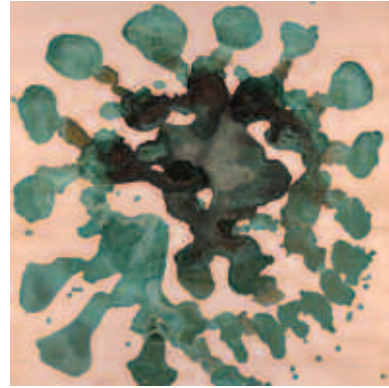
Rabbit skin glue, graphite, oil paint and lemon, Peru balsam, red mandarin, and ylang ylang essential oils on canvas



17

18 ***Oxidation Spiral***, 2017

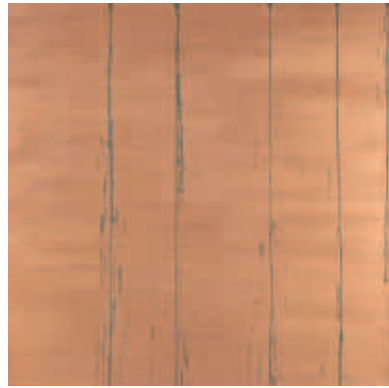
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas



18

19 ***Painting Made by Another Painting***, 2016

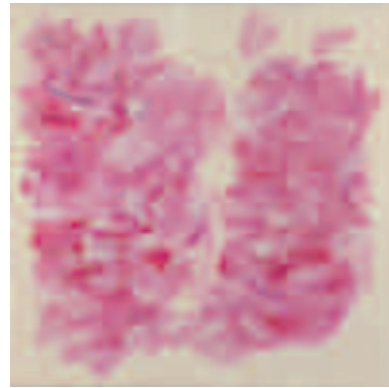
Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, urine, salt, vinegar, and copper on canvas



19

20 ***Rose Painting***, 2016

Rabbit skin glue, oil paint, rose otto, and geranium rose essential oil on linen



20

THE FRICK PITTSBURGH

ELISE ADIBI: RESPIRATION PAINTINGS

APRIL 15–OCTOBER 15, 2017



Most photographs: Richard Stoner

Inside cover, pp. 4, 8, 9: Sarah Hall

p. 13: Elise Adibi

p. 16: Heather Mull

Inside back cover: Greg Pytlik

Above: Elise Adibi in her studio



THE
FRICK
PITTSBURGH

7227 REYNOLDS STREET
PITTSBURGH, PA 15208-2923

*Front cover: South
wing installation*

*Left: Yellow and Pink
Pour Painting II, 2017*