

To Gloucester with Love

Permanent marker on white fabric

69 x 3.75 feet

2008-2010

I came to Gloucester for four months in 1995 and am still here almost 30 years later, still trying to understand why I fell for it so and why it is the only place I have ever felt at home. In about 2008, I decided to read Charles Olson's epic homage to the city, the *Maximus Poems*, thinking doing so might help me understand. I decided to transcribe it, to immerse myself in it physically as well as visually and intellectually. That transcription is *To Gloucester with Love*.

Hand copying is a process I have used extensively, primarily with Kafka's writings when I needed to respond to them artistically. Often transcribing turns words and the letters they contain into solely visual forms carrying a mystery within them. I find text beautiful as image. Hand writing is a means of research for me, and a feedback system, as writing by hand always is. It is also a way to keep the practice alive.

I spent about two years transcribing the *Maximus Poems* and, though I still don't completely understand the magic of this place, I do have a sense of another artist's obsession with the land and sea it encompasses. *To Gloucester with Love* is my ode to Olson and his passion, and to Gloucester through him. He said so well what we have, have already lost, and still can lose in this wonderful city and in our lives. I have respect and awe for Olson's momentous work, and this piece is my attempt to communicate the depth and profundity of a great literary work of art.

A Precise Notion

Pencil, acrylic, and acrylic transfer on paper

11.5 x 15 inches, each of 10 similar

2019-20

I FEEL AS IF
I SHOULD SOMETIME
ATTAIN A PRECISE NOTION
OF THE MEANING
OF NATURE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL DISPLAY

Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), the brilliant nineteenth century American journalist, critic, and women's rights advocate wrote the above words in a letter. Fuller became friends early in life with Emerson and other transcendentalists, and she shared their perception of nature as an expression of divinity.

For me, her words describe a state of mind I experience in nature, a sense that I can never feel or appreciate it enough, see it well enough. I want to understand its beauty and wonder, to incorporate it into my being. I was grateful to Margaret Fuller for soothing my emotion and allowing me to hold it.

But there is more about Fuller that draws me to honoring her power, as I try to do by putting her words in public. Fuller was the first editor of the transcendentalist journal *The Dial*. She was a literary critic for the *New York Tribune* under Horace Greeley, and then its first female editor. She addressed art, literature, political and social issues, such as slavery and women's rights. Later, she became the *Tribune's* first female correspondent in Europe.

Fuller believed in equality, in the same civil rights for all, for men, for women, for African Americans and Native Americans, both of whom she believed wronged by America. She stayed overnight in Sing Sing prison to report on an effort to develop a more humane system for female prisoners. She was concerned for prostitutes, the homeless and poor. She advocated for reform at all levels of society.

Fuller, as one can imagine, was often critiqued in her lifetime. She was certainly radical in her views. She was termed, in the *History of Woman Suffrage* by Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, "... the precursor of the Women's Rights agitation."

All of the above went into *A Precise Notion*. Concern for the rights of women, people of color, the disabled, the poor, the homeless, and for civil society in every way is high, and the effects of our unthinking impact on and lack of appreciation for nature is taking an increasing toll on our lives.

Hiding Place

Mixed media on canvas (burnt paper and deposits, pigment, acrylic, pencil, pen, paper, lead)

38 x 42 inches

2021

By 2021, the pandemic was in full swing, my husband and I were in the middle of COVID aftereffects, and we were reeling from the previous four years, from being sick, trying to contribute to the fight for good, and from the news of every day. All I wanted to do was hide, and I thought it would help to make a painting in which I could do so, as well as hide my friends. This was the result. The words that make up the steps, from fragments of old German books and from Franz Kafka's letters, refer to the destruction of the formally revered, and the need to make do in its aftermath.

1.6.21

Mixed media on canvas

34 x 38 inches

2022

I was incredibly lucky in 2021 to spend two weeks in residency at MARS and used that time to try to understand how to approach a national crisis we were all living through. January 6, 2021 is still with me everyday. At MARS, I allowed myself to explore, think and start drawing and conceptualizing. The two pieces I did there helped me approach and struggle with the material. The histories I have studied of fascism and hate kept (and keep) clashing with the present, and I see the past come alive in the most unsettling ways. I don't really know how to be or to live in this, and am so grateful for the relief of books, nature, and most importantly, making art.

I had to paint *1.6.21* because of my father. He was an immigrant who was lucky enough to get here, to America, and survive. He loved this country, saw it as the Promised Land, and taught me to love it. He would have seen the attack on that day as a desecration of the Capitol, the Cathedral of Democracy, the People's House. He lived through threats, violence, and threatening mobs in Ukraine, but could not imagine them after World War II in America.

This is a mourning piece for America, and I put Kafka's words into the piece to say what I couldn't — that there is always something to complain about, always something to criticize. The point is to recognize that destruction is not necessarily the best response. It can also be the worst.

Thankfully, in every work of art, no matter how complex or disturbing the subject, there is a point when the work becomes an aesthetic process, one in which the most important thing to do is to make honest art, to reach for something beyond words, even when they are part of the aesthetic, and take a viewer to a place that transcends where we are. Thank goodness for the process.

fear/anger/hate (working title)

Ink on paper

@ 45 x 56"

2023 (in process)

I often think about how people have turned to othering as a way to deal with fear. It has happened over and over. People become afraid of losing something, including their positions in society. What would happen if all Americans have equality of opportunity? What would those in positions of power, those who have homes, wealth, privilege, the right skin color or ethnicity or religion or ability to vote and elect those who govern, what would they lose if they had to share all those things more? What do many here think they will lose if we pass voting rights bills? Power.

I know what happened to those who did not go along with autocratic regimes in history. I wonder if that will happen to us. Would I turn my own fear into hate? How does one fight such a development?

I am doing this piece to explore those themes and to acclimate myself to addressing our own society in my work. It was easier to address historical events, to have the distance of time and location from them. I am using only words in this piece because it is meant to be taken literally, but in any piece using text, the text itself must be an aesthetic element. In *fear/anger/hate*, the words have tasks beyond their meanings. They have to convey the feelings behind those words, the speed with which hate seemed to take over in our country, and how easy it is to slip from one into the other.

fear/anger/hate is about half done. I hope showing it in process will focus viewers on how every letter, every word and accretion of words makes for visual patterns. Because I come from a tradition, Judaism, in which text is sacred, and a book replaced the Temple as a site for worship, treating words as special beings is in my psyche. That part of Judaism took hold of me, and I worship books as symbols of civilization and safety. If I drop a book, I still kiss it when I retrieve it, as I was taught to do with books considered holy. Working with words is, for me, a devotional act.

Words have power and need care in handling. Many in our country use them recklessly and without thought of long term consequences. *fear/anger/hate* is my plea to think and my attempt to do so, myself.