

**One Year Edit:** 'Erik Lindman and Paul Cowan', by Paul Cowan, March 12th, 2011

Paul Cowan: Alright. How are you doing Erik?

Erik Lindman: I'm good. A little cold.

PC: One Year Edit opened last night at Golden Age, great show. I'm also interested in editing and painting. I get excited thinking about editing as a tool, but I wonder about the ethics of modifying something. Is that a valid way to finish something?

EL: I think editing has become a more concise way of articulating the idea of destruction in the creative process. If a work becomes more specific and personal, it actually opens up to a wider audience. It is reductive editing, but it's not essential editing, where something is being distilled. It's editing out. I use materials that seem very transient, but formally the pieces are very direct. They have an authority. I create meaning and significance in the work through editing and selection and distance.

There is a directness in terms of lack of ornament that also becomes ornamental. I'm interested in the way that art and art objects can live in the world—especially the idea of a painting itself being a decorative object in its physicality, as opposed to just its visual decoration. I see that in your work too. It's like the painting hung askew in the door jamb, the other ones are doing that too even when they're not actually hung in the door jamb. They're obviously a physical thing that exists in the world that still needs to be worked upon and edited. They're a forced selection of things both real and imagined.

PC: We both have an interest in perception. The production of the work embraces some really nice literals, or even clichés. You're setting up a preface for us (the viewer) to see the editing in other paintings. It's a very generous way to access your work.

EL: The pieces in the show are also super indirect in terms of creation. I have no predetermined idea of what the work is going to end up being like or look like. I have an idea of the way I want paintings to function, a general set of concerns, latent tastes, and things. The work itself is all—it's a lot of chance. The chance is either acted upon or it's not, that's the editing. It's not an aestheticization of a destructive principle, which I think is kind of interesting. It ends up becoming positive in a way, instead of nihilistic. It's the way this leftover stuff becomes the material.

PC: It presumes that something happened. The work becomes about the excess or the peripheral becomes. It's an interesting way to subvert/challenge/question content.

EL: The leftover aspect is also a visual product; the leftover aesthetic experience that happens from this indirect object. The object is happening askew from, or incidentally to what it's referencing. But the work is also a literal thing. It's a one-to-one relationship between the thing and the work, but then it still functions imaginistically and within a painting language structure. The work is not necessarily questioning that language, it's using it, because it exists.

PC: That's a much better way to think about the work.

EL: Instead of saying that I understand that it is functioning this way, I understand that's a way that composition is happening. I understand that the pieces are framed and also framed within the art space, etc. That's almost beside the point, because I see the paintings and it becomes transcendental. And that's not a bad thing. Why does that have to be a bad thing? Why can't I just accept that for its happening and enjoy it? I'm trying to see if that can become productive instead of saying no.

The work says no to a lot of things, but it has to come out of a love of what's happening within a studio practice. That's really important, because these works don't exist within any sort of post-studio practice,

which is what we're supposed to be doing right now. Just painting and painting in the studio is political right now. So even though the work itself doesn't have any representation of politics, or anything political inside it, it's almost content-less, but it's not because in literally being a part of the studio, I'm aestheticizing studio space. I'm taking little bits of the studio space and making them travel to some other place.

PC: It's like a re-testing of those tactics. You're extracting them out of the canon of painting, almost, but still resting on it. I keep going back to the reception part. That's a huge concern for me in general. It stumps me. Another interesting part of accessing your work is that it does ask you to get up and inspect. I think that's a funny way to look at art. You're embracing the subjective in painting and still love making it and the real expressive elements that happen within it. You use the structure, the language of painting in a really fresh way.

EL: I'm interested in the way that the work makes itself, but I'm also making it. I'm making it become a representation. I'm re-framing, re-presenting it so that the presentation or expectation is a big part of the work.

PC: For others?

EL: Yes, for others. You come and you have an assumption of how the work is made from different perspectives, or expectations about what a painting does. That's either confirmed or denied through further engagement with the work in a material way.

PC: In a sense, there's a democracy to it. It does open up. Your work has that massive language of painting and can really navigate and live there. But it also backs up, or in, or wherever, and becomes more obtuse in order for the viewer to reconsider how he or she looks at any form of art. In another interview you used the word "prejudices," and I think that's a nice way to put it. When I encounter your work I become less concerned with looking at and inspecting it, but I start to notice how or why I'm even doing that.

EL: I've found more and more that I can't see what I make unless I see it through the reflection of other people in terms of their engagement with the thing. Even though it's something that I can make in with very, very selfish expectations. The work itself arrives at point where I see it as desiring another work of art. It's not like the work becomes an allusion to another work, it's more like the painting arrives as itself as a painting through my experience of other paintings.

PC: Other paintings in a museum or other paintings in a gallery?

EL: Paintings in my head.

PC: Paintings that you're going to make or that you've already seen?

EL: Paintings that I haven't made, that I've seen of other artists, and other... fantasies.

PC: I think our generation is total effect sometimes. I like thinking that cause and effect have sort of been reversed. We are the ones making paintings because we're acknowledging how informed we are and how many paintings we've seen and how fast we've seen them because of the internet. I can go to ten different countries and look at all these paintings, then go to my studio and make one, and then find its source later. It's like I know how to function socially because life imitates art now. I can act like Jerry Seinfeld. Now I know how to sit and function, and that becomes how I define myself or how I define my painting practice. I accept that it's totally balancing on this weird painting tower.

EL: I was talking to Martine about this, sometimes I don't understand if my experience of love comes from an idea of a representation of love, or a relationship from the history of film, something I was brought up with, or from experience. It's almost like it doesn't matter, because that has become my experience. You spend a lot of time looking at art and the experience of the time looking at the art also becomes your experience.

PC: It substitutes that or becomes a stand-in.

EL: It can be a stand-in, but then it isn't. It's its own thing. It becomes enmeshed.

PC: It's like, there are people that actually deal coke, there are rappers that sing about it, and then there's me listening to it. I'm allowed to have this new experience of this hyped, amped situation. I get stuck there. I want to make a parallel between that and this new theoretical painting that's happening. It's so informed by all these different angles that it can't help but be this really obtuse thing.

EL: [Laughing] It's definitely an exciting time to be making paintings, because everything that seemed to be a problem about it is exactly what's interesting.

PC: Everyone's embracing it.

EL: Painting is totally absurd right now and that's precisely where it gets its power and why it's interesting. It makes absolutely no fucking sense. There's absolutely nothing pragmatic about it right now. Or about its development, which seems to have had some sort of pragmatism from a historical standpoint. In no sort of judgment or anything, but everything should be Paint FX or just not exist. Still somehow painting exists, you know despite itself. [Laughs]

PC: How much does that fuel your work? Something that also gets me stuck in a nice circle is knowing how to paint, but not knowing why to paint. That helps me trivialize subject, or content, or the medium, and build off of that.

EL: For a long time I was trying to figure out some sort of content. I also never learned to paint properly.

PC: You're not trained? I didn't study it either. I've studied photography and sculpture. After all of it was said and done, I was in my house without a studio and just being like "Oh. Painting." And it came through— I can't think of the word... the household, works in the house well— blanking on the word right now... goes above your couch.

EL: Domestic.

PC: Domestic! That's where I started and where I think you started.

EL: That domestic thing is super interesting. I think it's great.

PC: I think you reference it really well in your dimensions. There's brevity in the work. It asks for that strange gaze that's so familiar to how we look at painting. It assumes that position, which makes me think about this corny idea of ends and means.

EL: The domestic scale is really interesting because it's something that's not specific, it's general, but it's understood what it is and what it means and it comes through the filtration of a lot of other things coming together. It just is and I'm going to use it that way.

PC: Rather than try to understand that aspect?

EL: Rather than feeling that I have to point it out. I use it because it's there. I'm interested in scales and sizes that seem very specific, but remain general. That scale is precisely the size of a poster of a work.

PC: It's also very accommodating to the brush. I like to squirt straight out of the tube, so I can't make a huge painting, because it will instantly fetishize the paint. In your work there's this healthy, but weird relationship with painting. You're like "Whoa painting, I'll go get a drink with you, but we're not going home together." Like make it a brunch, you know what I mean. There's this weird distance between it. You acknowledge the limits, of painting's language and painting's modes. I'm always wondering how to manage, or to avoid, being didactic. I want to learn how to talk with people rather than at them. How can it become more social? How can we all embrace those practices?

EL: The limit is super, super, super important. There's an idea that freedom will come from anything. That you can do anything you want. You can do whatever. And you can somehow justify it. This is what our culture wants us to do. Whatever. It's all good. But everything is not good. You need rules and limits in order to create meaning.

PC: And to even break the rules you have to have them in the first place.

EL: You need limits to have any semblance of freedom to make stuff. Otherwise it's just unbearable.

PC: That introduces another type of freedom. That "ignorance is bliss," assuming bliss is happiness.

EL: You want things to be simple, to be direct, but there's a crazy desire when you make something and it's perfect and just enough to stop and move on. I think that's what's interesting about the music note paintings. There's an anxiety about stopping. For me, sometimes the work will arrive at itself, but I can't stop. I want to keep going and it gets really, really bad. That really, really badness and cluttered-ness can come back to having the simplicity that it had at first, but it will now be a complex simplicity. Or it just gets worse and I have to throw it out. [Laughs]

PC: That's how the editing turns into a resolution. You're reacting to the reaction you had in the first place.

EL: It's a whole series of reactions against previous incidents.

PC: Ok, what about failure? Let's go to that zone for a minute. What's that about for you? I think what is more interesting in your painting is what the painting isn't doing rather than what it is doing.

EL: I like that because it's tricky.

PC: It is. If someone asked me that I wouldn't know how to answer it either. I guess I'm wondering if we can try to answer it.

EL: When I think of failure and painting, I think of Michael Krebber, just from people telling me that's what his work is about. I'm not so interested in failure. Failure is associated with the non-confrontational attitude, which can be very good or very bad. I think it's very bad when it gets in the zone of whatever world. On the flip side this thing exists as it happens so I'm going to work with that, instead of having some slacker art aesthetic.

PC: You're not trying to achieve failure.

EL: I love Sergej Jensen's paintings, but not because they're lame. Despite their lameness something

happens that's not lame, that's powerful. That's not a failure. I'm not interested in painting that directly accesses a Rothko-esque didactic experience. Which would be a painting that wouldn't conceptualize itself as a failure. I'm trying to find a way of working that can become productive, but not didactic. A painting that didn't consider itself failed would probably just be an uninteresting painting. The paintings that I consider failures, the ones I throw out, the paintings that don't work, are failures because they don't exist in terms of a popular ideal. They may be relatively good paintings for someone else, but they're not functioning in an interesting way.

PC: You're offering a spectrum of ways to think about the work.

EL: Art exists in the world and the painting exists in the world, so when the art is making itself seem like it's part of the world and also not part of it, it's kind of inescapable.

PC: It's problematic to even want to become involved in it.

EL: The goal is to re-evaluate or redefine the idea of beauty in terms of failure, in terms of impotence, in terms of power, in terms of everything. It's a pretty contemporary goal and it's also a goal that is timeless. No one is talking about beauty because of political correctness, but it reveals itself again and again. We're back at it. There's a beauty that parallels taste in your work. Your paintings are weird. They feel like very specific references, but then there's something very wrong about them at the same time. They oscillate between just right, just enough and like "what crazy person decided that this was a painting." It's weird, but I because it exists it's worth doing. Anything that's worth doing a little bit is worth doing. It goes back to what you were saying before about having every single image or Deleuze's read of Bacon, but then I want to see this thing in person. I want it the way I want a really nice bicycle. I want it to be worn and I don't want to buy a pair of pre-ripped jeans. That's crazy.

PC: There's no integrity in that.

EL: I want my basic Levi's that I bought and then I wear them in and they become mine somehow, even though they're the same thing.

PC: That is the basis of my practice.

EL: I want that time when I'm in the studio by myself, and I feel totally by myself, alone but not isolated.

PC: Like when you're at a coffee shop.

EL: No, better than at a coffee shop! It's really, really fun and challenging to make paintings. It's not challenging to be at a coffee shop. Painting is so fucking hard.

PC: Because it's so easy.

EL: Sometimes it's really easy and sometimes it's the hardest thing in the world because there's no end. There's no end to it. I think there's so much pressure to make work that you already know how to talk about it before you make it. And somehow thinking that... I don't know, I think people think that they're too smart. [Laughs] And then you overlook the thing that's so dumb. But the dumb thing is more complex than you can understand. The simplest thing is mind-blowing.

PC: You almost have to talk your way out of something rather than into something. You have to kind of say what they're not doing rather than what they are.

What else? I found another interview where you said at the end, "I'd rather give someone the key to get out of hell, than show them the door to get to heaven." That's a really nice introduction to your work.

There's a nice clarity to that statement. It goes to this spiritual place rather than staying in the theoretical, because you have to practice what you preach. When you use that statement, what are you thinking?

EL: I love the idea of a key and a door, because they are functional in terms of image. They also allude to the idea of a painting as a prop. Although I agree with the attitude behind that thought, a painting is not a prop. The problematic of failure is exactly why it's interesting. A key is functional. It's not a fake key. There's no such thing as a fake key, it just wouldn't be a key.

PC: The key metaphor makes me think about access and escape. You're saying, "let's get out of hell," and asking us to leave that. This key helps you get out of something, rather than get into something. I think that's a really eloquent way to describe the beautiful, problematic state of making and receiving painting.

EL: I don't want to be afraid to discuss spirituality. That's also something you're not supposed to talk about. [Laughs] But anything worth doing has to have some sort of spiritual dimension to it.

PC: Totally. I see that integrity in your work. I think about hitting the end of a painting. There's only so much to engage in and when I leave there I want to question more than just morals and ethics and how relative they are. You instantly go to this spiritual place, you instantly start to question life.

EL: We say that there are no words to describe things, but I think there are words, we just overlook these words. "God" and "spirituality" are words conjure a lot of the things that we mean, but we want to avoid that because of the connotation.

PC: You want to be PC. It's interesting to know that heaven and hell start to have capital H's to them. Where does that come from for you?

EL: I see a relationship between working alone in the studio and the historical idea of a religious experience. In regards to art, there is a history of objects existing in a Catholic liturgical practice that connect objects and architecture to God. Objects are interesting themselves, but they are also guides to meditation, to thinking. This is all parallel to contemporary dialogues about art. Relational aesthetics—give me a fucking break, people have been doing this for years. I want objects. I don't want to get rid of objects. This is how people have been experiencing the world so long that we forgot about it. Art and life have always been there.

We have to come up with new limits. I'm never really trying to specifically make something frayed, pre-worn, like the pre-made vintage shirt. It's more like these things are happening from being around.

PC: That's how the integrity is developed.

EL: I think so. With the materials that I'm using, it's interesting it hasn't really happened before in terms of the language. It's not the aestheticization of trash and garbage in terms of [Ed] Keinholz and it's not the aestheticization of shopping like Jessica Stockholder. It's a middle ground and there shouldn't be meaning in that, but then there is. So that becomes right now.