

# From “My Latest Adventures in Monochrome”

John Yau

1)

My fundamental self is at war with my multiple personalities  
I love everything that does not belong to me, which is to say my life

but I despise everything that belongs to me:  
education, inherited psychology, physical attributes.

In short, anything that is me because of exterior circumstances  
My multiple selves are at war with my fundamental personality

Because one is never only one. I am aware that in writing this  
I have committed an error of diplomacy

I recognize that people will claim these notes and thoughts are confused,  
poorly expressed (as if expression has anything to do with it), emphatic,

for they have been written day by day,  
even during the rain that threatens to close down the sky

I know that many will regard these statements  
as another example of bad taste

a poor substitute for poetry  
when in fact poetry is not what I am after

My fundamental self despises all that belongs to me:  
multiples personalities, butterflies, and silent hoarding

Each more poorly expressed than the previous error of diplomacy  
Who claims these notes are inherited circumstances

My multiple selves are at war with substitutes for poetry  
My fundamental self is at war with poems offered as substitutes

I know that many will conclude these statements do not belong to me  
I am aware in writing this during the rain that it is not raining

2)

At present my paintings are invisible.  
I do not speak  
In a utopian manner  
In proposing such a program.  
My paintings remain invisible;  
And I wish to display them  
In a clear and positive manner.  
Everything I write today  
Precedes this presentation.  
My propositions are landscapes of freedom.  
I will say it again.  
I want to show man in nature  
With the traces and marks  
He leaves behind,  
Traces and marks  
That are always marvelous, artificial,  
Ephemeral, and yet indestructible.  
Perhaps it seems to you  
That I am attempting  
The impossible,  
That I am throwing myself  
Toward something that is inhuman.  
I had no affection for oil paint.  
The colors seemed dead to me.  
Yet art is the glue that holds  
The entire universe together.  
At present my paintings are invisible,  
Which is why I decided  
To penetrate still further  
Into this landscape.

The physical painting

Gives its right to exist to one single fact,  
That one believes only  
In the visible,  
While quite obscurely  
Sensing the essential  
Presence of something else,  
At times almost invisible.  
The painter is the one who knows  
How to speak of that real value.

3)

I recently  
declared  
that the  
artist of tomorrow  
will continuously  
recreate herself  
by being able  
to levitate.

I have already  
made the first steps  
toward work of this type.

I commanded  
my living brushes  
by remote control.

4)

*I dwell in possibility*, Emily Dickinson

*I dwell in impossibility*, Yves Klein.

You should understand that I did not want you to read a painting. I wanted you to bathe in it before words domesticated the experience, and you turned to such stand-bys as “illumination” and “transcendent” to describe what happened to you. Painting should not be sentenced to sentences.

Painting is COLOR, I yelled at my first champion and biggest supporter. COLOR banishes words from its domain. When you read a painting, you turn it into language, but there is so much that cannot be turned into language that each of us experiences every day.

Red shadows leak out of rusting cars and collapsed bridges.

Green smoke rises from behind horizons and rooftops.

The spectrum of your mother’s voice the last time she spoke to you.

Everyday there are thresholds that you must cross to reach the domain where words mar every transmission, rendering them intangible. We put our memory of these reverberations aside in favor of what is known and, we believe, knowable. We say we are going to the beach and we will look at the ocean and leave indentations in the sand, but that is not what happens. We go there to ponder a blue parcel cut from infinity.

True poets and artists know where language ends, which is why they go there. Some settle for going beyond the possible into possibility, but others want to dwell in the impossible. I am not talking fantasy here, because that version of the impossible is

just a story about a girl named Thumbelina or a boy named Jack. The ones who go to where two roads diverge in a yellow wood are not poets, because they believe that experience can be reduced to a lesson about choices. True poets know that language is neither window nor mirror. The mistake is to believe that the opposite is true, that words (or signs) are arbitrary.

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This is my example of why words are not arbitrary. Charles Baudelaire believed that there are perfumes for which all matter is porous. These perfumes can permeate the air of one's dreams. Our thoughts quiver in the shadows that fall over us; they begin to free their wings and rise in flight, tinged with azure, glazed with rose, spangled with gold.

*Azure, Rose, Gold.*

I was not thinking of Baudelaire when I made my paintings, but the poet was clearly dreaming of me when he sat at his desk and wrote "The Perfume Flask."

Can't you see that this is how I, radiating outward, happened to appear on this planet, this speck of dust? Yves Klein was born because Baudelaire predicted this propitious event by naming colors, which, like all colors, escape the confines of their names, becoming more than an emanation of infinity. Even black can get away from its name, which is why Malevich had to surround it with white. But what is color that isn't surrounded by another color? What is that boundless world we catch a glimpse of whenever we look up at the sky? Is it so vast that we must turn away from it, afraid that it will swallow us up, which it will? Astronomy, the Greeks believed, was a royal science, which means I am a royal painter. Do not confuse me, however, with a painter of royalty, with Ingres, who used lines to hold and improve the faces of his sitters, who believed in the despotic power of beauty.

I am not interested in beauty. I am not Andy Warhol. He longed for possibility, but was afraid of what it might tell him. I dwell in impossibility, and I want to be embraced by what it will tell me. My name is Yves Klein. There is a photograph of me that you might know. I have put on my best suit and jumped out a window. My arms are outspread, but they are not wings. I don't need them to fly. Nor am I the prince of clouds, Baudelaire's albatross, fallen from the sky. Screw that fascist Marinetti. My arms are not the wings of a drunkard beating against the wall. Mine are the outstretched arms of a diver. I fall effortlessly through the air, but I never am completely fallen. The cobblestones and I will never meet. I hover in a miracle, which is why you believe in the photograph, even after you have learned how I tricked you. It wasn't that hard to do. The true magician shows everyone how the trick was done, and after seeing how you were deceived, you believe in the trick all the more. I jumped out the window and I stayed in the air, which is where you wanted me to stay. I dwell in impossibility—that zone that lies beyond here and there, while embracing both.