

ELI BORNOWKSY & YU NISHIMURA

KING'S LEAP JUNE 26 - JULY 25 2021 TEXT BY ALAN LONGINO

Some evenings ago, after a dinner with an artist couple in Cologne—one a painter, the other a sculptor—I brought up a proposition that I had naively and drunkenly discussed sometimes before. The discussion on this evening though has since stayed with me.

The proposition I made is this:

Painting is the mother of the arts and always has been. Always considerate to its age, it is what constantly seeks to redefine and reformat what is considered beautiful to its time. However, it cannot actually say anything to its time. All other forms of art—sculpture, film, poetry, performance, whatever you wish to add—can indeed say something to their time, but they cannot redefine what is seen as beautiful or obtain a level of beauty that painting desires and finds for itself. But, to repeat, painting cannot say anything as the other forms may.

It was gently agreed with by the painter in the couple and resoundingly hated by the sculptor. Being such a ridiculous argument, there may then be some merit to it. Though, thinking on it the last few years—mulling it over—I have not been swayed to believe otherwise.

Having never put these ideas to writing, the opportunity to consider painting and this argument in depth through Eli Bornowsky and Yu Nishimura's work granted me the

chance to finally imagine what I may have meant. As such, this is mostly—for better or worse—a loose cohesion of nascent thoughts on the subject. However, it is a subject I hold dear, as the necessity to reignite a conversation about beauty appears increasingly relevant in the surplus of discourse that disregards or removes it from consideration.

However, there are too many words in the argument that would themselves need to be defined first. Most obvious, the definition of beauty would need to be extrapolated, which would take too many references and obfuscations to clarify, and the reader would become lost. Instead, I'd prefer to let the reader define the words how they see fit.

The works of Eli and Yu are well balanced to this argument. On the one hand, Eli Bornowsky's paintings rely on a purely mathematical form. Patterned after Delano numbers and, as the artist says, relying on a sense of "multistability" that is akin to experimental music, such as Autechre or free jazz, the paintings refer to abstracted tiling and tessellating patterns that are as rhythmic as they are controlled.

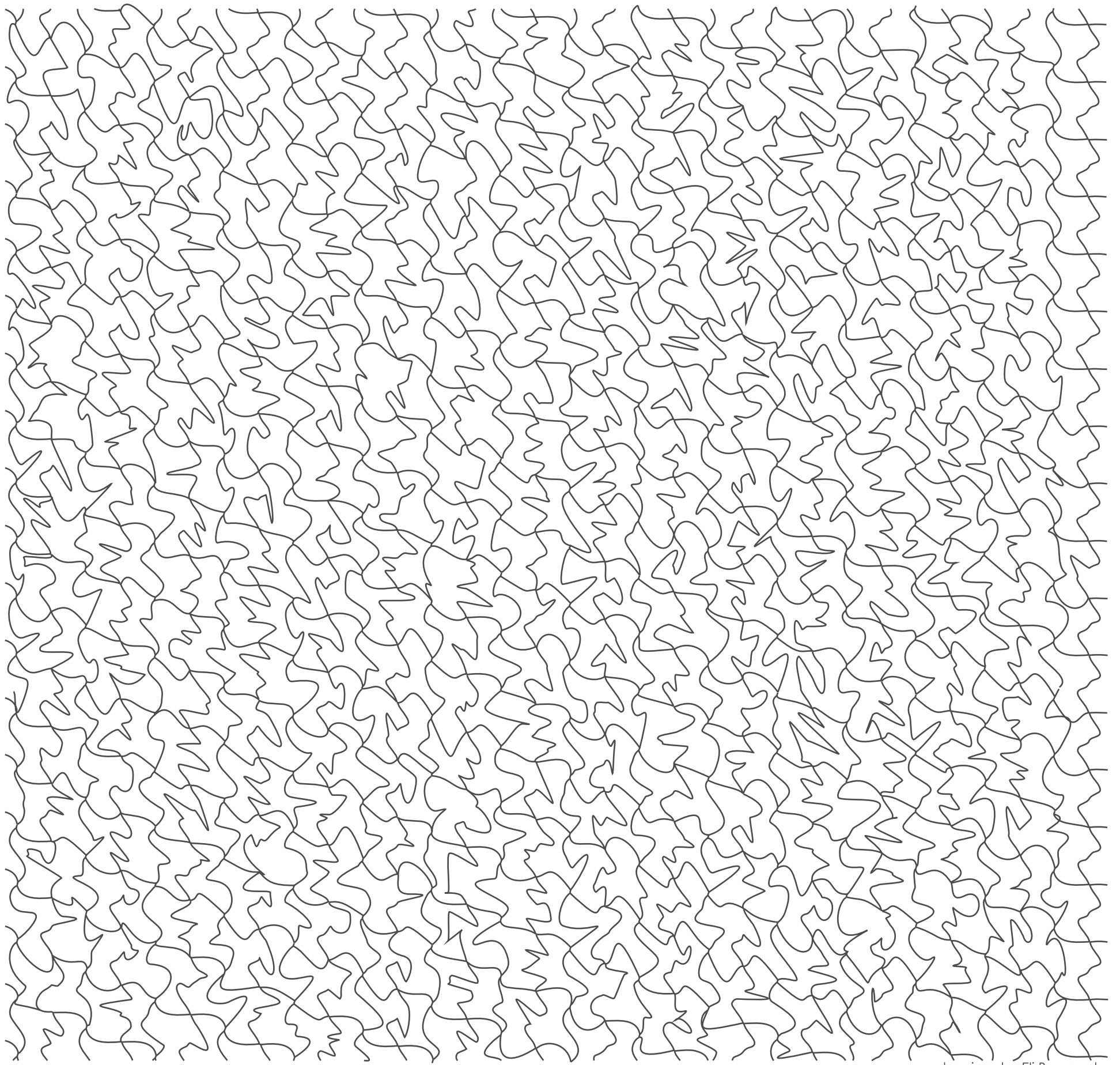
Yu Nishimura's pictures are instead hazy, ambiguous in their forms, but most definitively in the realm and history of figurative painting and portraiture. I could write that these paintings carry the sensibility of the Nagano-born, interwar painter Kai Higashiyama, or that they re-up the

consideration of the portrait in a window differing from that of Yoshitomo Nara. But, this is not an exercise in revisiting art history, regardless of how enjoyable that may be for the art historian.

More, I am interested in the desire to picture, and perhaps find in the picture, the sense of beauty that I am so wonton to chance across as a viewer and art historian, as this is what really keeps me most interested in and enjoying of art.

Why does it feel so cheap and dirty to use the word "beauty" these days? And, why does it so rarely cross our conversational thresholds in contemporary discussion? It is difficult for me to imagine anyone gets into art from the get-go in anticipation of the theoretical and discursive divergencies it will set them upon, and yet that is where we currently set ourselves to be most comfortable. However, as I sit and look at a painting—even while attempting to bring rationalized criticisms towards art at the institutional level—I am forever most attracted to its presence as something aspiring towards beauty.

This attraction rests squarely in the idea that painting continues to redefine what beauty is. However, as stated, I have never found it to have the ability to say anything like sculpture and other media impart from themselves. I am less interested in the choice of materials or abilities of



drawings by Eli Bornowsky

a painter, as these are all just techniques (*techne*), which have augmented and aided in the pursuit of redefinition. While they have assisted in the pursuit, they are always a means to the end and never the sole cause for the end. I'd even argue they often get in the way of, and sometimes even hinder, this pursuit.

Attraction rests primarily in the ability to identify, and by identification to enjoy or detest. Carl Sagan believed it was our ability to recognize and perceive others' faces—a pareidolic sense—that was an element to our survival. To look for the human, or the human-like, in an object or entity is a method of survival. Painting, more than any other medium, allows for this identification of the human—the face of the artist—to be perceived and therefore attractive. But the identification, the visual recognition of a painting, is ultimately philological and mathematical.

Giovanni Morelli, the 19th Century art historian and connoisseur, pursued the identification of paintings in such a way. Setting out to observe, chart, and make certain distinctions used by painters, he came up with what is referred to as the "Morellian Method" of discerning and attributing artworks to painters. This method stemmed from his earlier anatomical and mathematical leanings and attempted to restore in art history the scientific basis it had lacked. His books were different from any other writer on art, less textual and more visual, incorporating numerous drawings and illustrations of fingers and ears, carefully recording the idiosyncratic nuances by which an artist gives themselves away. His methods at the time were compared to that of the detective qualities of Sherlock Holmes, and as Edgar Wind has written on Morelli's methods: "our inadvertent little gestures reveal our character far more authentically than any formal posture that we may carefully prepare."

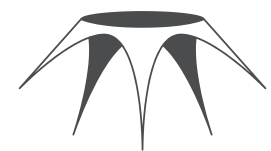
In painting, it could be said, the human—and the beauty attributed to it—is all the more identifiable because of our ability to discern, trace, and assign nuances in a picture. These abilities are geometric in nature, arising from the ability to discern shapes, forms, and figures as separate from one another. In more than one sense, the painting becomes textual, and always dependent upon language to describe what is occurring. However, this language is not purely *verbi-voco*. It is not even oral or sonorous. It is a language prepared for and prescribed by images, existing in a realm that is both pre- and post-scientific. It is the painter who becomes most in touch with this language when attempting to define beauty.

Whether a painting and its picture take on the visual presence of geometry and its inherent abstraction, or a painter takes on the qualities of the figure and portrait, the process of their pursuit is rooted in the same language that cannot be spoken but only renewed. As information becomes more and more surplus, the images and pictures created demand a higher sense of identification and recognition. And, it is not only the public that demands the immediate identification and authentication of the artist, but technologies of deep-learning and AI that rely on annotation and set parameters to identify a form and its relationships. This increase of identification from parties both human and non-human progresses even further the re-establishment of beauty as a primary desire within pictures.

While some scholars would argue that a participation in politics is necessary for forming an avant-garde identity, it remains all the more important today that beauty—and the pursuit of beauty—be central to the political program of the arts. I believe that this constant redefinition of the program helps not only resist against permanent identification and classification—which only adds to authority

and power, but increases the abilities of human understanding and bonding that feel forever political.

- Alan Longino



Eli Bornowsky (b. 1980) is an artist based in New York and Vancouver. Over the last ten years, Bornowsky has shown extensively in Canada. He received his MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of Arts at Bard College. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *White Columns Online* (New York, NY), *Burnaby Art Gallery* (Burnaby, Canada), *Canton Sardine* (Vancouver, Canada), and *Unit 17*, (Vancouver Canada). Bornowsky will be in a group show this summer at *KAYOKOYUKI Gallery* (Tokyo, Japan).

Yu Nishimura (b. 1982) is a painter living and working in Kanagawa, Japan. Nishimura recently staged solo exhibitions at *KAYOKOYUKI Gallery* (Tokyo, Japan) and *Galerie Crèvecoeur* (Paris, France), both in 2020. Selected recent exhibitions include *The Ueno Royal Museum* (Tokyo, Japan), *Tokyo Arts and Space (TOKAS)*, *Hongo* (Tokyo, Japan), *Gallery Vacancy* (Shanghai, China), and *Shane Campbell Gallery* (Chicago, IL), amongst others.