

JULIA ROMMEL *Man Alive*

by Phong Bui

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"I don't believe in history, that's his story.
I believe in mystery, that's my story." Sun Ra once declared.
My Stories, Your Semi-Autobiographical First Novel, that's her story.

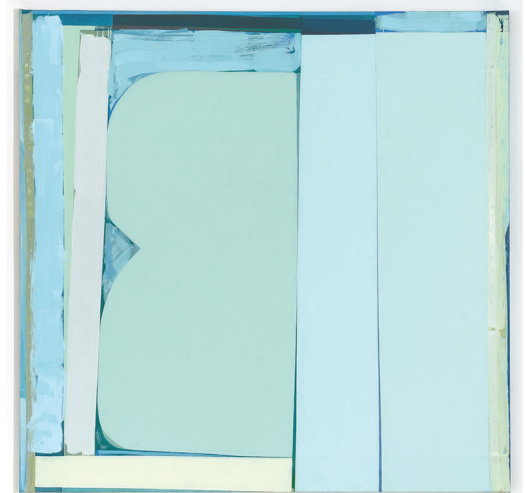
This mystery is told by a folded history that
unfolds the story
With time and duration before
the *stories* begin.

Duration requires tightening the surface tension like
Membrane stretched over a conga.
Time depends on duration for its existence.
Each particular story is made by horizontal and vertical selections
With occasional diagonals or slanted Byzantine interiors that would
Drive Mondrian mad like *The Unbelievers*.
Outrageous! Folded lines, painted lines, lines that behave like edges,
And vice versa. It's the mystery of labor.

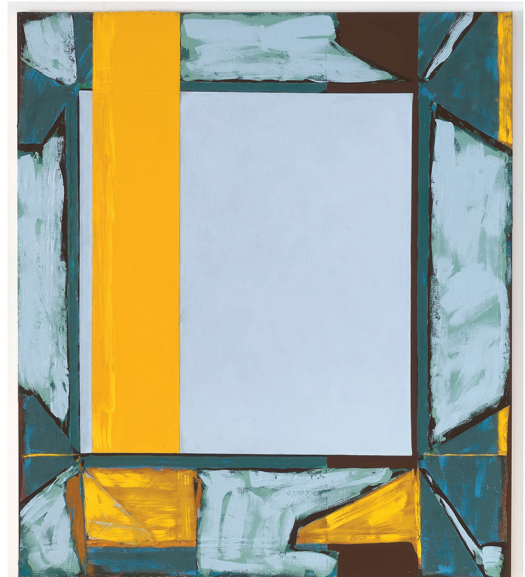
Porcelain-like luminosity emerges after a massive snail-trail on
The entire glass window in a foggy afternoon.
I remember she wrote, "my hands are growing broad, veiny,
Hands of bricklayer, with weak, lady-like wrists."
Who can really decipher the differences between work and labor?
Vita activa and vita contemplativa,
Or between a sand dune and a mound of marble dust?

She prefers, it seems, blunt vernacular speech;
Her gestures articulate why things appear as they do.
Deliberate partisan resources, probing to gain dignity and repose.
The temperature dry and moist, the texture smooth and rough,
Of the door or window with an unknowable view.
Hubble and *Perfect Attendance* bring home a familiar response,
Something that lies between the men on their knees scraping
The floor of a bare, sunlit apartment in Gustave Caillebotte's painting
At the Musée d'Orsay and *The [Silent] Seasons* monochromes of Brice Marden.
Bright lime, frosty mint, Carribean mist, cumulus cotton
Are the colors of her invention.

Countenance without resonance. Absolutment!
Pace without haste. Se mettre d'accord!
Precision without rigidity. À droite sur!
In the middle of Norfolk Street I hear Manet whispering
"When it works, it works. When it doesn't, you start again.
All else is nonsense."
Meanwhile, a torrent of water is quietly rebelling against
Two sudden curves in *Electric Blanket*.
The irregular stable marks, evermore subtle,
Dictate the rhythm of the whole tonal scale of this second visit,
Please show me how to hug.



Julia Rommel, *Electric Blanket*, 2016. Oil on linen. 77 x 77 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bureau New York.



Julia Rommel, *My Stories, Your Semi-Autobiographical First Novel*, 2016. Oil on linen. 78 1/2 x 68 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and Bureau New York.