

TYPING, PAINTING, MEANING **by Neil Haddon 2104**

I have recently returned from a three-month period of living and working on Manhattan Island, New York. Many of my days were spent walking the streets between stopping points: a gallery, a food stand, a park, and another gallery. The stopping points could be thought of, abstractly, as forming the letters and words of a brief poem that describes that day, the act of walking between those letters as the grammar that holds the words together. It might be reasonable to think of syntax and punctuation as the rules that govern the route and the speed of that journey, pedestrian lights and crossings as full stops or semi-colons. If I were to visualize the linear trajectory of this poem it might be best done through the trace left by the GPS signal of my roaming mobile phone, or the GPS coordinates embedded in my photographs, drawn out in two dimensions on a map.

Artists have long been interested in this recording of movement; of mapping the pathways that the body describes in regarding its environment. We can trace lineages that span centuries, from the calligraphic traditions of Zen through the gestural abstractions of Robert Motherwell or Brice Marden digressing to Francis Alÿs walking a leaking can of paint around the streets of São Paulo. In these examples a line becomes the essential formal component of the work, its rendering shaped by varying intentions and contexts, between a focus on gesture born of 'no mind' meditation or intense focus on physical location. The gestural strategies that these artists use engage in a variety of ways with what Steve Woodbury refers to as 'information transfer'. He situates his work within these and other related lineages.

Woodbury's intention is to navigate or perhaps *transcribe* a line that offers a duality of intention. On the one hand his paintings are made literally from the words of poems (his and others) or from classical texts and Sagas. His paintings also employ a line traced when spelling out words taken from the titles of these texts on a qwerty keyboard: an understandable, logical act of communication rendered as a flowing line. On the other hand the resulting painterly aggregation of words and keystroke gesture depart from this text-based communication and propose an emotive space of intuition and feeling. It is in the tension between these positions that Steve Woodbury places the currency of his work, maintaining that the paintings do not ultimately represent the originating poems and texts but that through his meditative agency the final gesture reveals an essence of subject. Also, and most importantly I would add his paintings present the precise location wherein the experience of holding together concurrent 'readings' may be encountered and indulged.

It occurs to me as I sit here tapping away on the keyboard that with every word my fingers create those qwerty gestures, or the 'swipes' of certain mobile device keyboards. Every gesture contributes to meaning and, when my touch-typing proficiency allows it, my hand eye coordination becomes tacitly intuitive. Then, I no longer look at the keyboard to create meaning; meaning becomes visually present on the screen before me without needing to consider the mechanics of its production. This is how we might consider Steve's paintings: as the embodiment of a process where meaning is suspended and detained, visually present in painterly gesture.