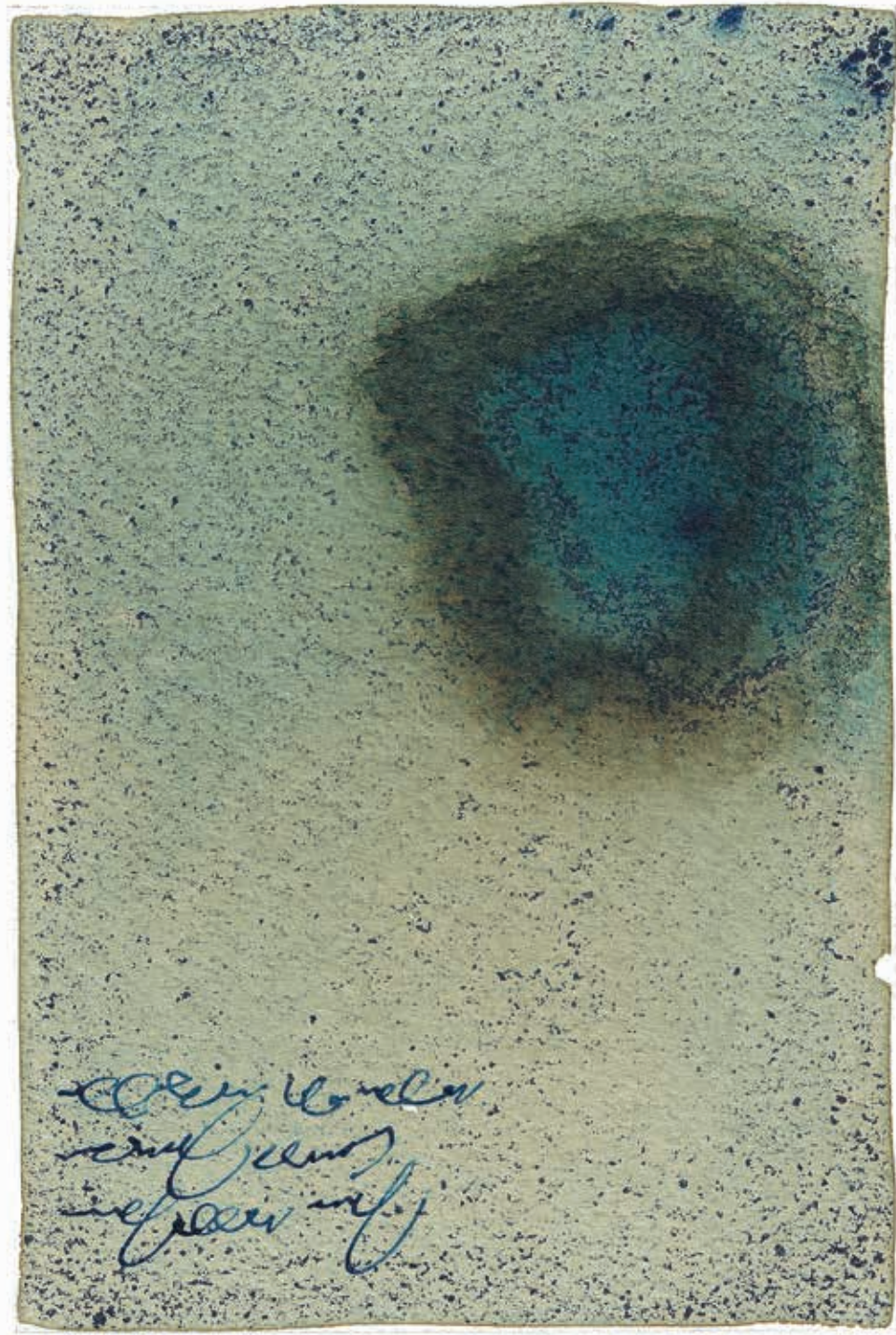


ASEMIC WRITING: ON THE EDGE OF WORD

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I've come to the river. I am in that space of feeling before words come, before I can craft some gesture of mark into literary or artistic meaning. The river has long been a place of sanctuary for me. This, the New Haven River, this bend in the river at Sycamore Park. When the summer sun shines I come to lay my body down alongside the moving water that has run off the Green Mountains. ***The river is the first line of poem, of song, of first gesture toward meaning without the need for meaning, or syntax, or even thought. The river is and I am grateful.***

I think about this in a new way as I contemplate how to write about ***asemic writing, a developing art movement that***



depicts writing-like markings within artworks. At first, I am heady about the subject, how it inhabits an essential space of expression, depicting what is not yet fully denotational. But the very thing that draws me to asemic writing is the place it rises from. For me it embraces the mystery between silence—what is yet to be spoken—and the semantics of known language. What is represented are the feelings or ideas that the words, or markings, suggest to the artist and to the viewer. And so, when I undress my brain, toss aside the shirt and shorts of my thoughts, I arrive at the river. Ready to lay down along the dazzling line, the bend, the sharp corner of the oxbow. I let the sun work on me, heat my skin to burn and roll into the cold water that carries the song I long to interpret, which brings me, with its stinging cold, into the experience of my body. The quick inhale. The river is a place of meditation, that deep going into the place of being, and I long for this place that informs me.

It is a place before creation, the place of tuning into what is within me that wishes to be expressed. **I am a person who needs expression to stay sane. That’s a dramatic statement, but I have come to believe that this is the state of an artist, the particular fountain that artists drink from, the need and definition of an artist.** At the very least it seems to be what my life has been about, been driven by. **I look deeply in and I follow what rises to be expressed, letting it come, as it requests, onto the page or canvas.** I am an artist and also a poet. What is expressed is set down by mark and line. **As a dreamwork analyst, I have learned to be a deep listener to the unconscious and what desires to be understood or brought into consciousness, with dreams often being the messenger of that knowledge.** Also, an understanding that this knowledge has its own unfolding when we are open to its flow and path. **It has been my way to let this unfolding happen when it comes to expression on the page or canvas.**



The river is the first line, but there are many lines and marks in this landscape. I am closing my eyes now and bringing myself to the river's edge. It is winter at the time of this writing and the snow and cold keep me inside. But in my imagination I can visit and notice the wealth of patterns: **the sun arrays reflecting on the water, the tree's branching into blue sky, the heron's footprints in the wet sand, the pebbled bank, the diving sweep of the kingfisher's flight, the jungle of Japanese knotweed, scattered driftwood.** These are all marks I can draw from. In some sense they are the alphabet of this landscape I love so, which lives in me and is often the language I utilize to describe my inner landscape in poetry.

But there are times when I do not have words. Yet I have the need and desire to write. It is to asemic writing that I turn in these moments. To the gesture of writing. Here I find the mark carries the feeling state that cannot be or cannot yet be put into poem. It keeps me in practice. The practice of paying attention to what is often the uncomfortable state of allowing the feelings within to be experienced. Our culture doesn't generally support this with so many ways of distracting ourselves at the tips of our fingers. And yet we die of it everyday, for without experiencing who we are and how we are in relationship to the world, we walk around separate from ourselves. What is the point of being alive when we are dead to the experience of being alive? And so I come to the river, on a cold snowy day or in the heat of summer, metaphorically or literally. I come to the state of being that the river holds for me. A kind of silence and stillness that is full of sound, the water rushing by, the birds' calls, the sound of children playing, far-off traffic, trees rubbing their branches, and always the hum of insects. All this like the busy mind set aside.

I listen into this empty and full space and then I place my pen or brush to the page and let my hand move. This is the practice



of communicating with what is within me. **With asemic writing I do not need to know anything more than this. No word required. No sense of meaning required. Just the willingness and desire to be in the process of making marks . . .**

Looking back through my artwork I see I engaged with asemic writing for years before I understood what it was. But recently, I turn to asemic writing deliberately as a way to not be silenced in the current political atmosphere where day after day horrific things are done in my name; it's unbearable. What can be said? It feels like too much, but I refuse to be silenced; it is a radical act to not be silenced. And in this moment it's the best I can do. I move my hand in radical gesture.



As a reader or witness to the writing, do I need to know through the understanding of my mind? The spell works by giving me a feeling. That my feeling may be different than yours is not of importance. **These works engage the viewer in a unique way, beyond more traditional abstract work, because it seems as if the marks should be able to be read; it seems as if the marks are meant to be read. This awakens the part of the mind that engages with language and in lieu of being given words with known meaning, the viewer creates their own translation or meaning of what is written, entering, in a sense, a conversation with the piece, their own relationship with the piece.**

In the branching tree limbs, in the waves, in my hand's scratching across paper, we each read the feeling that rises in us. **Code, mark, emerging word, the experience of our being translates us into some form of knowing. Is that not the power of this asemic work? ❖**

