



BENJAMIN KLEIN — ARTIST STATEMENT — SEPTEMBER 2022

I started making art at the beginning of the year 2000. Since then, I've often concentrated on figurative painting and developed a body of work located in a kind of fantastical landscape cosmos. I've also always made abstract paintings, but until recently, I never managed a group of works I could accept. I've never exhibited my abstract paintings before. I've always wanted to, but couldn't. I can't really say why, but wasn't ready until now. I've never understood this, and honestly still don't. Painting and "why do it" are both mysteries to me. But in the last couple of years, I've become compelled to do this new work in abstraction, to commit to it fully and now to show it.

Being in Montréal during my formative years as an artist meant seeing and learning about *Les Automatistes*, and putting them in context and kinship with artists from elsewhere, most of all with nearby New York, that has also played a big role in my artistic formation. I've always identified with *Les Automatistes* in crucial respects, loved their work and felt great admiration and sympathy for their project and philosophy. And I've profited greatly from reading *Refus Global*, especially Borduas' crucial text, whose message, to me, has been liberating and motivating, communicating across time and cultural lines with inspirational purpose. Borduas' phrase "make way for objective mysteries... (and) for love (and) magic." has always stayed in my mind, compelling me to rethink and reimagine things again and again.

While I was an undergraduate, the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal held retrospectives of the work of Jean Paul Riopelle in 2002 and Françoise Sullivan in 2003, both of which I saw several times, and meant a great deal to me, and still do. They helped me to set the standard for what abstract painting can accomplish, how powerful it can be to interact with, how emotionally complex it can be, how imminent.

I don't know what painting is or what it's for, but I believe in it. Painting has proved itself to me, and I want to prove myself to it. This body of work is definitely related to *Les Automatistes*, but rather than trying to create an homage to them, work in quotations or referentially, somehow address my own belatedness as though it's absolute when it isn't, I made this group of paintings in the spirit of the *Automatiste* method of creation, to the best of my own understanding and ability. I think that really good ideas are always contemporary, you just have to see how. And then a magic door might open to the objective mysteries that we need. I have concluded that we need *Automatisme*, that it can provide a radical and persuasive approach to making art, once again. And that after decades of discussion and critique, analysis and deconstruction, reverence and irreverence, that there remains in the *Automatiste* idea a deep potential that was and is alive and is there to be discovered, potentially again and again. That's what I tried to do with this body of work, "Spots".