MOUSSE

Stubble and Ground: Amy Sillman in Conversation with Wayne Koestenbaum

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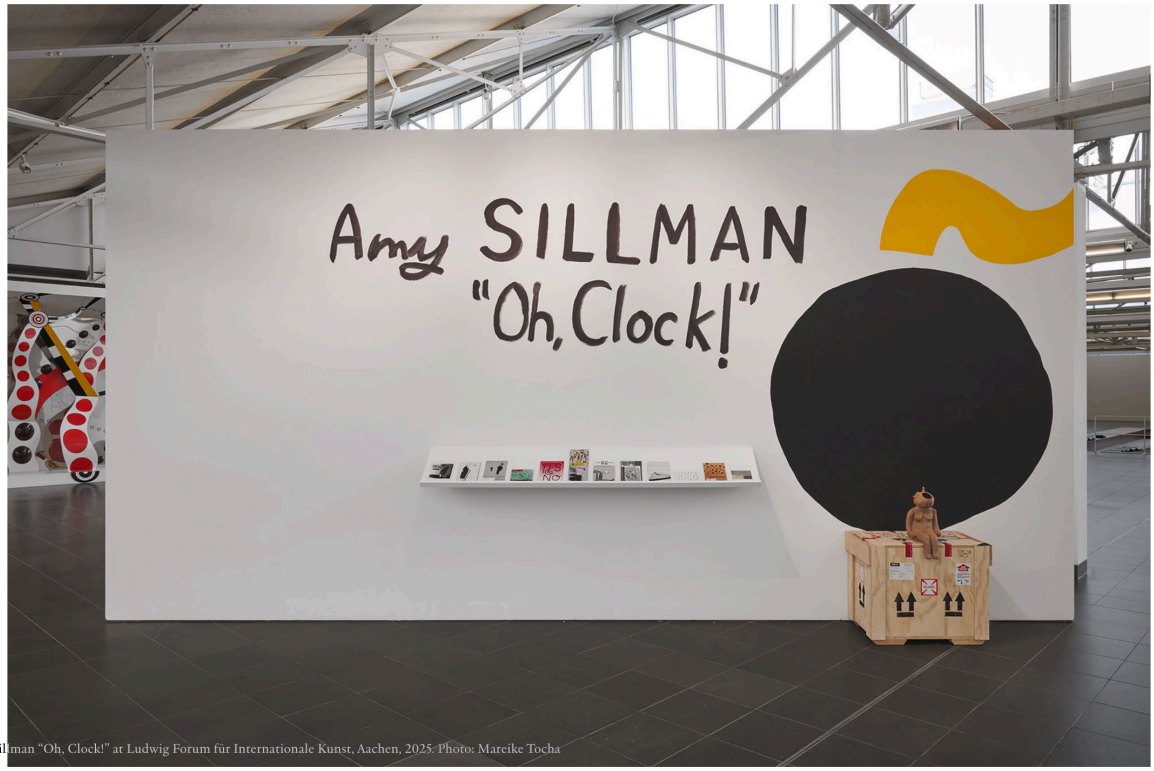

Amy Sillman "Oh, Clock!" at Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, 2025. Photo: Mareike Tocha

On the occasion of *Oh, Clock!*—Amy Sillman's first major solo exhibition in Germany, on view now at the Ludwig Forum Aachen—the New York–based painter joined writer, artist, and longtime friend Wayne Koestenbaum for a conversation that begins with a reflection on the emotional dirtiness of their artistic processes. Starting with Sillman's thoughts on the filth and murkiness in painting, she delves into the messy creation of the five "ginormous" two-sided walls featured in the show, and her "unmatching" relationship with abstraction. Together, Sillman and Koestenbaum explore language, speech, and the shame spirals tied to their respective bodies of work; how art school in the 1970s taught them to hate their own medium "the way one is taught to hate the government"; Sillman's distrust of the seemingly "knowing" quality of images; and the shared sense of disorientation that underpins both of their practices.

AMY SILLMAN
Just to set the stage: we both make art, and we both write.

WAYNE KOESTENBAUM
You taught me how to wash brushes! In your studio, over a decade ago, you told me that you'd been Pat Steir's assistant in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and you washed her brushes, and you showed me how. You said it's all about the paper towels. You take the brush, vigorously remove the excess paint, then fold the paper towel, continuing to rub out the excess paint, folding the towel over and over again on itself. Whenever I clean brushes, I'm paying homage to that moment, to what you taught me about the material craft of painting. Painting starts from the ground up.

AMY
I'm attuned to the ground first. When I curated *The Shape of Shape* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2019, I designed a room that was conceived to start at the ground, with artworks sitting on shelves all the way down, such that you looked from down to up, instead of always seeing works floating in a void space on a wall, seemingly without gravity. I'm always interested in the weight of things, the ground as a condition of space, and territory, like dirt, because making a painting is basically a dirty pursuit. I remember Gregg Bordowitz once said in an interview we did together that he stopped being a painter because he preferred to turn clean metal knobs on video editing machines instead.

WAYNE
The painted walls in your exhibition *Oh, Clock!* are remarkably fixed and clean. There's no worry that whatever demure or anarchic play you're committing on the underlying wall will leak onto the paintings you've installed upon that wall.

AMY
Well, maybe they look clean and fixed because I didn't show you the pictures of what it looked like while I was making it! It was a huge mess. I painted these five ginormous two-sided walls in the back room of the museum, all by myself mostly, except for someone occasionally bringing me a new vat of clean water. There were many dirty disasters, terrible ones. That's how painting always is. I want to discuss this emotional dirtiness of process with you in particular, because your visual art and videos and online stuff is all emotionally very dirty.

WAYNE
The internal contamination that plagues me when I write comes in two flavors, both bad. One bad flavor comes with drafting, because I don't work from outlines, generally. The second bad flavor comes from the content—the subject matter about which I'm writing. The contamination arrives in every direction, from every source. A promiscuous abundance!

AMY
Like in *Stubble Archipelago* (2024), your newest book of poems.

WAYNE
Exactly. I like muck. I like investigating it, I like excavating it, and I have a certain exhibitionistic delight in knowing that I'm going to unveil this stuff for people, even if the scene of unveiling is far in the future, if ever. The third flavor of disgust, the most toxic, comes with revision. I'm often disgusted by the ugly materiality of my words. And I take the wretchedness of that materiality to be a direct reflection of my untidiness, my schmutz.

AMY
So it's not just the shame of the actually besmirched; it's also about a kind of queasy feeling? Inadequacy?

WAYNE
My syntax itself starts to seem like the stigmata of my unworthiness. For example, the prepositional phrase. We all use prepositional phrases, but when I look at a page I've drafted and I see the prepositional phrases all laid out there, dreary, flat, and uneventful, it's like looking in the mirror on a bad hair day, which is every day. The shame of self-recognition is sewn into my perception of syntax itself, as if I were the only one who must endure living in English syntax.

AMY
Do you have those feelings when you hear yourself speaking?

WAYNE
The shame is mostly bound up in written language, not in speech.

AMY
Funny, because for me the editing process is a joyous experience in many ways—those are the clean metal knobs for me! Maybe frustrating, but not self-incriminating. I feel love inside the invisible mesh that is language. It holds me together, like a bra or something. But painting is, as Howard Hodgkin famously said, "sheer hell." The beginning can be fun and free, but the middle period of making a painting is awful. But with writing, I feel like once I have something going, then there's this kind of great, magic time of rubbing the words together, like frottage. It feels like rubbing a genie's bottle with my bare hands, and it produces a new word, a better word, that pops out from nowhere. It's a nice process, not shameful, whereas painting is full of not-nice feelings. But you describe this shame of your written language, even though your visual art is so overtly revealing and could be seen as embarrassing—those videos you publish on Instagram! With your own voice! Very telltale. Do you think the sonic aspect, your own voice and music, makes it more okay for you?

WAYNE
The sonic makes me feel much better, and for whatever reason, I don't have the same calculus of disavowal and shame in spoken words, or in hearing my voice. I like your sanguine, optimistic description of revision as happy amelioration, rubbing words together so that nicer ones will emerge. But for me, rather than seeing one of my written pages as an unfixed thing that is fun to revise, I sometimes think of it as Veronica's veil. The page is the wounded thing, and it will always be wounded.

AMY
And the veil is also your skin, an index of your self, right? You did it yourself. You made the veil. And yet a second "self" can also turn back and accuse.

WAYNE
It's indexical. It's an ineradicable reckoning, a fatality, accusatory. It looks back at me with the horror of its perpetual incompletion.

Once upon a time, in your paintings, as I saw them, shame seemed paramount—a comically rendered shame, housed within a magnificence of palette, form, and line, and tempered by a sophisticated relation to art history. When I wrote the essay about your work in 2006, "The Sexual Awkwardness of God: Sentences for Amy Sillman," it focused on the delightful awkwardness of the figures or quasi-figures within the paintings.[1] Each painting or drawing seemed a narrative of a situation that combined chromatic glory with a sense of a depicted or implied pratfall. I remember noticing, in your work, the presence of a falling figure, a leaning figure, an ill-at-ease figure, a figure in a state of deliquescence. But looking at the work you've done in this last year, and at your 2024 show at Barbara Gladstone, *To Be Other-Wise*, you're now cosmological and social. Even though we don't believe in transcendence, you seem to have transcended your plight.

AMY
I don't know about "cosmological." I think more about earthly things than celestial ones. But I think a lot about finding a kind of scaffolding to hold the work conceptually—even like a laundry line! Anything that feels like a structure. Maybe structure itself is a way to ward off the fall, the pratfall of the real, which is a dangerous fall, not a fun or comic one. I actually by the way *love* comedy, but I've always disliked physical comedy and slapstick. It just doesn't make me laugh. (Another subject for us: comic structures.) But anyway, you said you feel agony while editing, but in your art, you're cutting up slides, using used photographs, making portraits of sexy, flirtatious people, et cetera. You're so bold with things that are attached to what could feel very revealing, and close to not-nice.

WAYNE
I took a strange and fastidious pleasure in cutting out images from "found" slides (bought on eBay) and then scotch-taping tiny pieces of them onto blank 16mm film leader to make my "direct cinema" works, such as *The Group Tickling Experiment* (2023) or *I Started Selling Sadness* (2023).

AMY
I guess neither of us has a problem with the idea of *playing*, though that can lead to dark places. I sometimes go into shame spirals before shows open, even shows that were fun to make. Like the current show I have up at DIA in Bridgehampton, New York, *Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32)*. I really put myself through the wringer after I finished making that show even though I enjoyed the process. I was there mostly alone for two weeks, I had absolutely no plans, so I started squeegeeing the walls, sleeping in the building, experimenting with materials, and so on. But after I finished, before it opened, I had this incredible shame feeling. The curators, Jordan and Emily, and the people who work there, Chris, Robin, and Caroline, really had to prop me up. I think it was because for my other two painted-wall exhibitions this year, at Kunstmuseum Bern and at Ludwig Forum Aachen, the premise was that I would select works from each venue's collection and hang them on top of my own painted walls. But at DIA it was my own prints hanging on these crazy walls I made, so I was juggling relations between *me* and *me*. That felt more incriminating than using other people's work. Also, it was all improvised, which felt really—so much *me* and more *me*.

WAYNE
Auto-collaboration: congress with oneself! It also occurs to me that we're shaped by the métier in which we came of age, the field or medium in which we endured the hazing of professionalization, of trying to get the notice of the world, and hoping to receive attention in conventional ways. That hazing happened for you in visual art, and for me it happened in writing. The process of putting together a book, taking responsibility for it, editing it, and then reading the page proofs is horrifying.

I have always identified with your fluidity, your will to make more, to do it again and again, to keep trying. I'm interested in the DNA of your persistence, your will to produce. Not to destroy, even though you destroy in the process of making. A fruitful undoing!

AMY
My method of writing is always to read into my given subject until I identify a thing I do *not* agree with, and then I begin with an identifiable argument—finding my problem with something. But with painting I don't find my problem so easily, and then I have no *subject* exactly. But my problems are always there, so there's always a way to continue working.

WAYNE
From my visits to your studio in the past, I have a vivid memory of watching you move—walk, point, gesticulate, lift, rub—in relation to your work. Even today, when you moved paintings from one corner of your studio to another, I marveled at your physical relation to them—your arms, your gestures, your handling of the materials. Call it the choreography, or the agon, or the embrace, that you extend to your work. When I think of your persistence, I don't think of it as polemical, as *against* something. I see it instead as a matter of your body language and your will and wish.

AMY
Well, I like wrestling, and I also like crossword puzzles.

WAYNE
You said that you hate painting, and, yes, I do hate language. In *Stubble Archipelago*, I got over my hatred of language by pushing toward compression, and that push was fueled by, or motivated by, a flight from the stickiness and grubbiness of language. I discovered that everything could be hyphenated. So, in my book, I said things like "Fitbit-interpellated," or "my origins-of- / totalitarianism lech-amble," or "syntagm- / bumps my kindred's / Botox stigmata, Yuletide / Juvéderm AZT / joy-enwrapt $-pubis." I was thinking of Gertrude Stein and Paul Celan, those two energies at once—loving materiality and the turd, but also being death-haunted, and feeling the need to disavow one's mother tongue.

AMY
But you love painting.

WAYNE
I do! And I have to constantly reinvent the kind of writing I'm doing so that I can love it again. Each book, even each phase, is a rediscovery of how much I really do love writing based on a new way of doing it.

AMY
Well, part of hating something is committing to it. Of course I also love painting. I learned everything I know from going in through the painting doorway and mining that territory for my whole worldview and knowledge base. It's just that we who went to art school in the 1970s were trained to hate our own medium. Just like you're supposed to hate your government, and authority figures. You're supposed to work *in spite of* them, not *for* them. I always say I hate images, too, because I don't trust images. Their seemingly "knowing" quality really bugs me. Who cares about "how to draw." But then I also hate it when someone *doesn't* care about drawing enough to even think that there's "better" drawing and try for it. Yet my kind of "good" is not capital-G by-the-book Good. It's something much stranger, something you have to discover. To me, the whole thing about being an artist and looking at art is: there's a secret at the bottom of everything. A paradox in your connection to the thing you're doing.

WAYNE
I agree—a secret at the bottom of everything. And sometimes the entryway to that secret is one's own nervous energy, a drive toward excess, almost hyperactivity, and—

AMY
—and your vocabulary.

WAYNE
Yes. When I'm possessed by what I want to say, I can't stop speaking or shut my mouth. I can't slow down, or phrase it politely. It's very hard for me to say something in an ordinary way. Which is why fiction is so hard. If I want to just describe somebody walking over to a table and sitting down, I don't know how. "He stood up and walked five feet in this direction and then turned right." I don't know how to orient things in space. I obviously like the art of song, and I like the non-denotative aspects of language—the parts of language that aren't contained in the word, the meaning of the words, but that happen in the vocalization.

Roland Barthes writes about the grain of the voice and (I'm paraphrasing here) the way that the voice skids against language. Or how the voice itself causes language to skid, to veer. Voice prevents the coalescence of language by keeping language volatile, unstable, and bumped against. Vocalization is exciting because you're not having to face language; you're tossing phonemes up in the air.

AMY
The vocal skid, the sliding against—that's kind of sexy, but then super embarrassing. To accept it, you have to feel the discomfort, the awkwardness, the shame of that friction within oneself, that tension inside you where ideas and feelings collide. And in that collision, things are made.

WAYNE
In my new novel in progress, *Domestic Science*,there's a paragraph in which, in earlier versions, I kept repeating the word "lament." I had a hate-shame response when I looked at the paragraph. I thought, *You can't have a paragraph with "lament" ten times*. So I made sure that I never reused that word. And I played all these games with the language to make it do other things, to avoid saying "lament." Now, when I look at that paragraph, I actually like it. I don't *lament* it. The paragraph is now an object with curves and detours that happened because I successfully pushed against the banality that stained the original.

AMY
That's funny, because earlier today you specifically made a positive comment about the "curves and detours" of the walls in my show at DIA, admiring their ornately confusing relationship of ground/figure, back/front, wall/artwork. Actually, the way you were just describing your own curves and detours reminds me of how sometimes people don't like Frank Stella's late work, where he gets really ornate, ridiculous, baroque, with the protractors and layers and wheels and bells. But I think you appreciate *over*work, and an over-the-top aspect of art?

WAYNE
When we were in your studio and you were showing me some new paintings, you described them as "overworked." But in every painting of yours that I've seen, even the ones that you described as overworked, there is an exciting tension and animation, and never stagnancy. Energy comes from the tug between color and line. The instigators of energy—the signs of animation's presence—in your work are quite specific. The friction isn't just a general gestalt. A viewer open to the playful delirium can receive its bounty.

AMY
I worry about play, though. About this fun, creative act that I'm engaging in. How it is going to help the people being taken away by ICE agents? Does play or humor only do something important in a limited way? I ask this with full awareness of the danger of the comic, since Stephen Colbert's show was just canceled, likely for his mockery of the government, but sometimes people think humor is frivolous. At the same time, weirdly, I think that what's funny also reveals conflicts, a human problem. But one wonders nowadays how the struggle to make art is tethered to the tragedy that is actually happening.

WAYNE
A squandered life, or a life lived through delusion and thwarted energies—that's the worst thing. It's a slow suicide. To not live fully is a terrible, terrible thing to do to karma in the world. But to work not with self-aggrandizement as the aim, to dwell in a state of maximum acuity, without hurting others, and without careerist, fiscal-minded manipulations—that's the difference between conscious life and numbed obeisance. Not following local dogmas, not capitulating. Not letting shame thwart your art. Let shame *fuel* your art instead.

AMY
I'm conflicted all the time by my own overworked-ness. But I also think that to worry about how to make something worthwhile is essentially a very good thing. It's our job to figure out what the aesthetic is in our work, and where aesthetics are attached to ethics, to modes of refusal. I think about overworking in relation to that ceiling that hangs over us all: our finitude. And the recognition that there's no shame in working, yet there's no correct or absolute answer or ending to a work either, can be freeing.

WAYNE
I'm developing a theory. Poetic closure happens when a gesture goes to the bottom of the earth. It could be one word, maybe an incomprehensible word. Or it could be a rhyme, a sound, a rhythm. Or it could be the subject matter itself, a turn the topic takes. Closure needn't coincide with the ending. Closure doesn't have to happen continuously. It can happen just once. That fundamental reaching-downward could be overshadowed by clutter that happens later. But if that bottommost moment exists, if you feel it somewhere in the work, that painting or poem has earned its place in the world. Somewhere within the work's visible or audible labyrinth, a reckoning needs to hit the bottom.

AMY
I think that's the difference between what the mystery is versus what's merely secretive. The secret is undisclosed stuff, hidden, maybe coy, or passive-aggressive. I used to do that all the time in my old work in the 1990s: put a million things in and then cover them all up. The cover-up *was* the work. But it felt after a while like a neurotic knee jerk, without any useful exit. But when you say "mystery," it is very clear to me—the search for a chime, a reverberation, in doing the work. I do love that my work is both antic and very grave. I want to achieve that gravitas, but not by losing the comical human sense of the mess that happens along the way of things, and these are, to me, interesting problems. The question of finding and then destabilizing oneself.

WAYNE
The antic and the grave: we reach gravitas through the winding path of antic motion, nervous behavior. Filmmaking and figure drawing (both are antic activities) take me away from the hermitage of self-hatred because they are collaborative, and permit me to be engaged with others.

AMY
I love teaching for being with others. Or zine making, or animation, as a collaborative project. But I do not want to collaborate with anyone in my studio as a painter because, one, I am too picky, I want to make my own decisions, and two, I am already collaborating there with abstraction as a force. That is already an encounter, or a schism. Like the space between knowing something and feeling it, or between silence and a kind of inner narrative. This schism provokes some sadness, some loneliness, and sometimes a feeling of impossibility. Like that painting of yours that's composed of slides, the found slides where the picture is cut out, destroyed, or displaced, but the slide is still printed with its named "contents." I found that very sad, somehow.

WAYNE
We're very sad people.

AMY
But we're funny. [*laughs*] That cutting and sadness go so well with the cheerfulness and optimism of your colors, and how you're always bringing such optimism in the idea of being able to render individuals in your work.

WAYNE
Can I say something more here about closure and Gertrude Stein? The plumb line goes to the bottom in everything she writes, because she has designated the sentence or the noun as her home and location. Anytime Stein gives you a noun, it's a Stein noun, and she is the noun, the stone-noun. A writer, or artist, who works steadfastly within an idiom stretched to its furthest point achieves a reverberation effect, where one gesture has the weight of fifteen. You've dwelled within an idiom uniquely and recognizably yours, you've toured the circumference of that idiom's circle again and again, to make each instant of "perching" (like a bird's arrival) more deliberate, more resonant. Resolution takes place not just in one painting, but over a whole life.

AMY
Well, you don't know if it's really resolved, but the encounter is getting more, um, thick. Sticky.

WAYNE
The encounter is sticky, and the encounter has weight and a kind of majesty that repays curiosity. I learned stickiness by studying Andy Warhol, whose work is the easiest to think trivial, but the collective weight, the size, of his idiom means that small gestures have enormous impact. When I first saw his early films, I thought, "Why am I not making films? I'm learning from his screen tests how to be a human being, but why am I not making screen tests myself?" I'm a secret structuralist masked as a fake clown. The antic quality is balanced by an inner regime of weights and measures.

AMY
Maybe that's true for me, too. It dawned on me about five years ago that I can borrow from structuralism and Minimalism as much as I want, and that I want to borrow from them a *lot*. I realized that I was just as close to the Minimalists and to poststructuralism as I was to the Abstract Expressionists—or actually closer, age wise, in my real life.

WAYNE
Exactly. Even though we've spoken today about our shared reluctance to make plans and outlines, we're not random.

AMY
But improv?

WAYNE
Right, improv—I look random, but I'm not.

AMY
We're animated.

WAYNE
We're animated and restless. I want to say one thing about the systems here. The system for *Stubble Archipelago* was sonnets, and that system rescued me. I thought, I don't know how to write, but I know I like this notepad and I am going to write fourteen lines on it. So I wrote fourteen lines, and I thought, I need to do that again. I will collect lines as I go about my life. I will have a year of collecting lines, and they will be enclosed in fourteen-line boxes. The saving grace is finding a new way of putting words in boxes, in poem boxes, by discovering a procedure. Peripatetic sonnets was the procedure—pedestrian sonnets, gathered while wandering. I was convinced that each day I would find evidence in the world to stick into the poem. And I feel that way in terms of filmmaking too: collecting.

Having a system, however, prevents me from going overboard with the attempt to make the chaos comestible. (Sonnets are a system; three-minute Super 8 film rolls are a system.) The system's governance prevents me from "doctoring" the evidence. My loyalty is to the particles that arise—the evidence in the world and in language—and to the system in which the evidence is contained.

AMY
That makes sense. I think it's against "taste"—and against ego. And against the simplistic idea of subjectivity that a lot of art depends on. This idea that you simply work from something like "talent." *Ew*.

WAYNE
Mm-hmm. Or "Wayne is sad" or "Wayne is gay."

AMY
Wayne isn't the "premise."

WAYNE
No.

AMY
At some point I made a "score" to tell me how to end a painting, and it was when certain things could be checked off a list—I'd done them and they did not need to be redone again in that particular painting. For example, when painting, I tend to change the colors around a lot, but that can lead to painting as a kind of endless mood ring, with no end in sight. So I devised a limit: I would let myself work on color—I mean, where color really prevails over other considerations—in two passes per painting. It didn't always work, and I didn't always obey the rules, but it felt like an almost mathematical way of stopping myself from endless fiddling. And then I got really into various kinds of 1960s production systems. For instance I became a bigger Daniel Buren fan after reading about his systems of stripes. And I always loved the Judson Memorial Church dancers, for example, for using what was called "facticity"—at least in tension against what was called "narrative"—to construct work. For example, the Judson dancers would make a dance out of the gestures of brushing one's teeth, walking or running, or reading the paper or opposing the war. It's like they were "grommeting" subjectivity and desire onto the real.

WAYNE
I'm all about grommets. I have a grommet puncher. It's life-changing, hugely liberating. You don't have to be beholden to gravity anymore. I'm thinking of Yoko Ono's 1966 film *No. 4*,showing various people, in twosomes, putting their butts together. The film is a sequence of buttock cheeks. That's absolutely a structuralist film, except it's butts.

AMY
Well, the butt is a grid, too.

WAYNE
Exactly. Ono's film adds evidence to the dossier of "We don't have to get rid of subjectivity just because we're getting rid of subjectivity's trappings." There'll still be buttocks in this new universe.

AMY
Probably this connects to our mutual commitment to the embarrassing, awkward body that we have to live within, which will eventually change to something even worse—as we fuck, sag, and decline. It's in direct opposition to the cleanliness of 1960s systems, though. It's in 1970s art, which we grew up with, that this inevitable sense of decline comes to mess up the clean facticity.

WAYNE
Like Legacy Russell's *Glitch Feminism* (2020). Speaking about the glitch: you'd mentioned to me that at the bottom of the wall you painted in your DIA show, you at first used copper, and then changed it to white. But a little bit of gold remains as a residue at the very bottom. That was the glitch. It was so beautiful.

AMY
That was a really fun ending to that wall process. What happened was, I silkscreened the wall all the way down to the ground with actual screens and these linear patterns and structures that I loved making, but then I hated it, because the wall was too decorated, it reminded me of floral tattoos or something. I had to fuck it up. So I scraped this beautiful copper ink over the whole bottom part with a rubber scraper, and then I hated *that* because it was too dark. So I rolled a big line of plain, crappy white latex house paint over it with a thick-pile roller, which left a kind of ghost of the linear structures but not "nicely." It had this ragged kind of "underwear" of copper slip sticking out at the bottom, like a mistake. I thought it had the right mistake/fussy quality.

It's somewhat related to a big wall of red and black drawings I made every day for one calendar year, which I showed in *Oh, Clock!* and at Barbara Gladstone. In that wall of drawings, the top is all pink and beige, but as the year goes on, the drawings descend into red, black, and blue. I hung it in chronological order, so it read as this descent from pinkness into darkness. That's also part of both of our work. And in my work there is also a kind of libidinal struggle—pink to dark. But I think your work is more about desire than mine. Although we both use a grid to hold that kind of thing.

WAYNE
Your work reveals how spatial relations involve dramatic encounter, whether an anthropomorphic encounter or an abstract encounter. Actually, I don't think of you as an abstract painter. In your paintings, things are actually happening. Even though we don't need to interpret these encounters as literal events or figures or scenes, the clashes and discontinuities and dramas are not abstract.

AMY
No. I see what I do as entirely "realistic," but as a depiction of feelings, not pictures. But feelings *grommeted*, as you put it, to the outer world. Also, I do have some kind of optical problem that makes dimensional space hard for me to see, such that my paintings look "realistic" to me even though they are not spatially correct. Flatness looks correct to me.

WAYNE
The spatial relations of bodies in a room in my fiction is very murky. When my editor Jackson Howard line-edited my novel *My Lover, the Rabbi* (forthcoming 2026), he asked things like, "Are we still in their house? Or have we gone somewhere else?" And as a painter, I've likewise struggled with three-dimensional space, with perspective.

AMY
Well, your paintings are also very tactile. The joy and the strangeness of being a painter is that, in a way, you can't really be sure you see anything "correctly." We both have trouble with space. I think both of us consistently ask what "knowing" is.

WAYNE
But we're not having a problem with what colors are.

AMY
Right. Colors are vivid. And neither of us has a problem with memory, the passage of time. We're both mapping forward and backward motion beautifully. We have a sense of sequence and trajectory. We're good at remembering, we're good at looking around. But we're not sure we know what the world actually looks like.

WAYNE
It also means that one will be given to pratfalls. And the fall into comedy happens because of spatial disorientation. Space trips us up.

AMY
There's a level of disorientation that we're both making our work rest upon.

"Amy Sillman: Oh, Clock!" at Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen
until August 31, 2025

"Amy Sillman: Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32)" at Dia Bridgehampton, New York
until June 28, 2026

Amy Sillman (b. 1955, Detroit) is an influential figure in twenty-first-century painting, as she seeks to complicate the medium by adding in language, humor, context, and other media. Sillman considers drawing the point of departure for all her work. She has explored gestural modes of production in inkjet-printed and silkscreened canvases, zines, and animated iPhone videos. In 2024–25 she mounted the major two-part exhibition Oh, Clock! at Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland, which traveled to the Ludwig Forum Aachen, Germany, where it on view until August 31, 2025. Half of each show was an exhibition of Sillman's solo work, and the other half was a curatorial intervention with the artist's selections from each museum's collection hung on her own hand-painted walls. The third and final wall-painting project of this series is her exhibition at DIA Bridgehampton, New York, Alternate Side (Permutations #1–32), currently on view. In 2022, a comprehensive selection of Sillman's paintings on paper was part of The Milk of Dreams, curated by Cecilia Alemani for the 59th Venice Biennale. Faux Pas (After8 Books, 2020) Sillman's book of writing on art, is now in its third printing. Sillman lives and works in New York.

Wayne Koestenbaum (b. 1958, San Jose, California) is a poet, critic, artist, filmmaker, performer, and author of twenty-three published books, including Stubble Archipelago, Ultramarine, The Cheerful Scapegoat, Figure It Out, Camp Marmalade, My 1980s & Other Essays, The Anatomy of Harpo Marx, Humiliation, Hotel Theory, Circus, Andy Warhol, Jackie under My Skin,and The Queen's Throat (that last was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award). His next book, a novel titled My Lover, the Rabbi,will be published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (US) and Granta (UK) in March 2026. Koestenbaum has exhibited his visual art in solo shows at White Columns, New York; 356 Mission, Los Angeles; the University of Kentucky Art Museum, Lexington; Millennium Film Workshop, Brooklyn; and Gattopardo, Glendale, CA, as well as in many group shows. His first piano/vocal record, Lounge Act,was released by Ugly Duckling Presse in 2017; he has given musical performances of improvisatory Sprechstimme soliloquies at The Kitchen, New York; REDCAT, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Artist's Institute, New York; Renaissance Society, Chicago; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Poetry Project, New York; and the Francis Kite Club, New York. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship in poetry, an American Academy of Arts and Letters award in literature, and a Whiting Award. Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library has acquired his literary archive. He is a distinguished professor of English, French, and comparative literature at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Koestenbaum lives and works in New York.