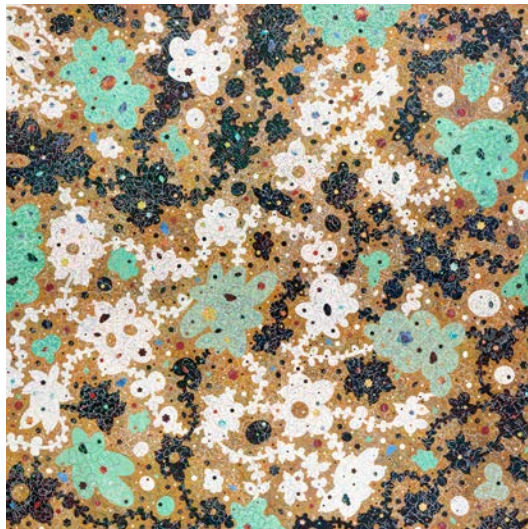


Bockley Gallery



Clarence Morgan

Thought Notes

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 6, 5 to 7 pm

Exhibition: May 6 through June 17, 2023

Gallery Hours: Wednesday through Saturday, 12 to 5 pm

Clarence Morgan's practice in drawing and painting creates spaces for speculation and unscripted modes of being and knowing. Welcoming a first engagement with Bockley Gallery, Morgan's solo exhibition, *Thought Notes*, brings together a more recent selection of works (2006–2015) from his fifty-year career. As the title speaks to Morgan's relation to and reverence for thought's fragmentary, temporary, and hovering nature, it materializes his consistent studiousness with thought as a mark-making practice that embodies sonic and scripted notes on life.

With eyes oriented above as his body moves around table-based surfaces, Morgan engenders a choreography of circumambulation that is naturally multiperspectival. In his words, "From my vantage point, the apparatus of thought is neither linear nor circular, but a series of interrupted forms or layered 'thought-notes' hovering in space." One line determines the next, one form gives way to a second, one color prompts another. This relational discourse is one of always becoming. In a layering process of revealing and concealing towards an all-over-ness that has no entry or exit point, each gesture carries a thought and each painting holds thought's accumulations.

Morgan's surfaces bring together affinities from confluent disciplines within his academic experiences in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, attunement to place, space and proximity is in part rooted in the pre-digital practices and technologies of commercial art's lettering and

sign making, as well as the hybrid geometric and organic abstractions in plotting architectural, landscape, and urban design. Further, his studies and early travels drew him towards the philosophies and ocular experiences of patterning and ornamentation within multiple cultural traditions, such as Islam's aniconic mosaics, Zen and Shinto gardens, Navajo weavings, Coptic sculpture, and a range of African textiles. The studied and embodied experiences with surface's power to abstractly cite beliefs, ideas, and language spoke to him as he sought a self-determined language outside of Eurocentric modes of narration, figuration, and perspectivalism. These influences were being shaped and shaped by the ongoing, socially, and politically charged times in the United States (and the United Kingdom, Europe, and elsewhere) within which African diasporic and Black artists questioned the complexities of visibility as related to Black representation, especially between its role in humanizing and justice work and its potentials of racial objectification and fetishization.

Morgan negotiates and balances visibility and opacity through a disciplined studio-based practice involving reading, thought-note taking, listening, and mark-making. He describes five decades of ritual and persistent labor attributed to the working women who raised him, his life-partner Arlene Burke-Morgan (1950–2017), and their couples discourse with three children. He notes that abstraction has never been staid to Western modernism, to form or to material; rather it has always carried thought-life—intellectual, civic, domestic, familial. Morgan's vocabulary has refused identitarian stasis in favor of identity as shapeshifting through relations, thus never singular and always reinvented. In his words, "The Black body has always had a thought-life, and its indecipherable language is valuable."

Morgan treats color as a temperature and a channel for inquiry. Like his thought-life, color changes and exchanges in conscious and unconscious ways. Achromatic paintings mark periods to correct what he refers to as a color malady—when harmonies and dissonances of color's "voices" fail to "extend the possibility of composition and its relationships." His pictorial terrain is plotted out by a vast vocabulary of stencils—tools of the trade from earlier noted influences, from architectural devices to lettering and crafting aids to culturally-specific motifs.

It makes sense that Morgan often languages his work relationally through kindred artforms, especially improvisational jazz's value of chaos and disruption, its rhythms of fragment and repetition, and the discipline and knowing that opens to intuition and experimentation. He cites poetry when it "leaves gaps, slippage, and space to imagine." In his painting's bold, redacted areas, there can be silhouettes, blooms, clouds, bodily fragments, liquid spills, chat spaces with invisible words and worlds to come, and everything else. Geometric or meandering lines may also be jewelry, orbits, toys, trails and circuits, budding stems, thorned wire, and anything else. Micro-arcs and paper-punched shapes are in-fill and overlay, noise, order, dimension. There are synthetic and digital and organic worlds, archeological sites, molecular registers, planetary views, transitional spaces between realms, and all else we make of them. Through Morgan's disciplined study, a laborious palimpsest keeps becoming, inviting our imaginations to improvise in relation.

Acknowledgements

Bockley Gallery wishes to thank curator Howard Oransky and contributors to the recent exhibition, symposium, and publication, *A Tender Spirit, A Vital Form: Arlene Burke-Morgan and Clarence Morgan*, at the Katherine E. Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (2023), including Teréz Iacovino, Christine Baeumler, Robert Cozzolino, Tia Simone-Gardner, Bill Gaskins, Nyeema Morgan, and many others, through which this solo exhibition, *Thought Notes*, was made possible. | *Thought Notes* exhibition text by Erin Robideaux Gleeson.

Artist Biography

Clarence Morgan's early career group exhibitions include *Perspectives of Black American Artists* at Black Enterprise Publications Headquarters in New York (1975); *Post-Modernist Metaphors* (1981) and *Southern Exposure* (1985) at the Alternative Museum in New York; *Visual Arts Encounter: African American Artists in Europe* at Galerie Resche in Paris, in collaboration with the historic conference of the same name at Grand Palais de Luxembourg (1994); and *Abstracted and Unfixed* at Art in General in New York (1997). Recent group exhibitions have been hosted at Loyola University (2022), the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2021), the Cleveland Museum of Art (2014), and the Walker Art Center (2007). Morgan's solo exhibitions have been numerous throughout his career at private and public university galleries primarily across the United States, including most recently the two-person survey and publication, *A Tender Spirit, A Vital Form: Arlene Burke-Morgan and Clarence Morgan* at the University of Minnesota's Katherine E. Nash Gallery in Minneapolis (2023).

His work is collected by the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Walker Art Center, among many others. He has held numerous residencies and received major grants and awards including from the Bush Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and the McKnight Foundation, and was named Distinguished Alumni by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Currently Professor Emeritus of Art at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, where he was Department Chair (2004–2010) and Head of Drawing and Painting (2010–2022), Morgan has also been visiting artist at numerous universities including the Beijing Academy of Fine Arts, Cooper Union, Stanford, and Yale.

Morgan was born in 1950 in Philadelphia, where he received his MFA from Pennsylvania State University. He lived and taught in North Carolina (1978–1992) and in Minnesota (1992–2022), and is based in Chicago.

For further information or press photos please contact Bockley Gallery.

image: *Are You Listening*, 2012