

Mary Scott

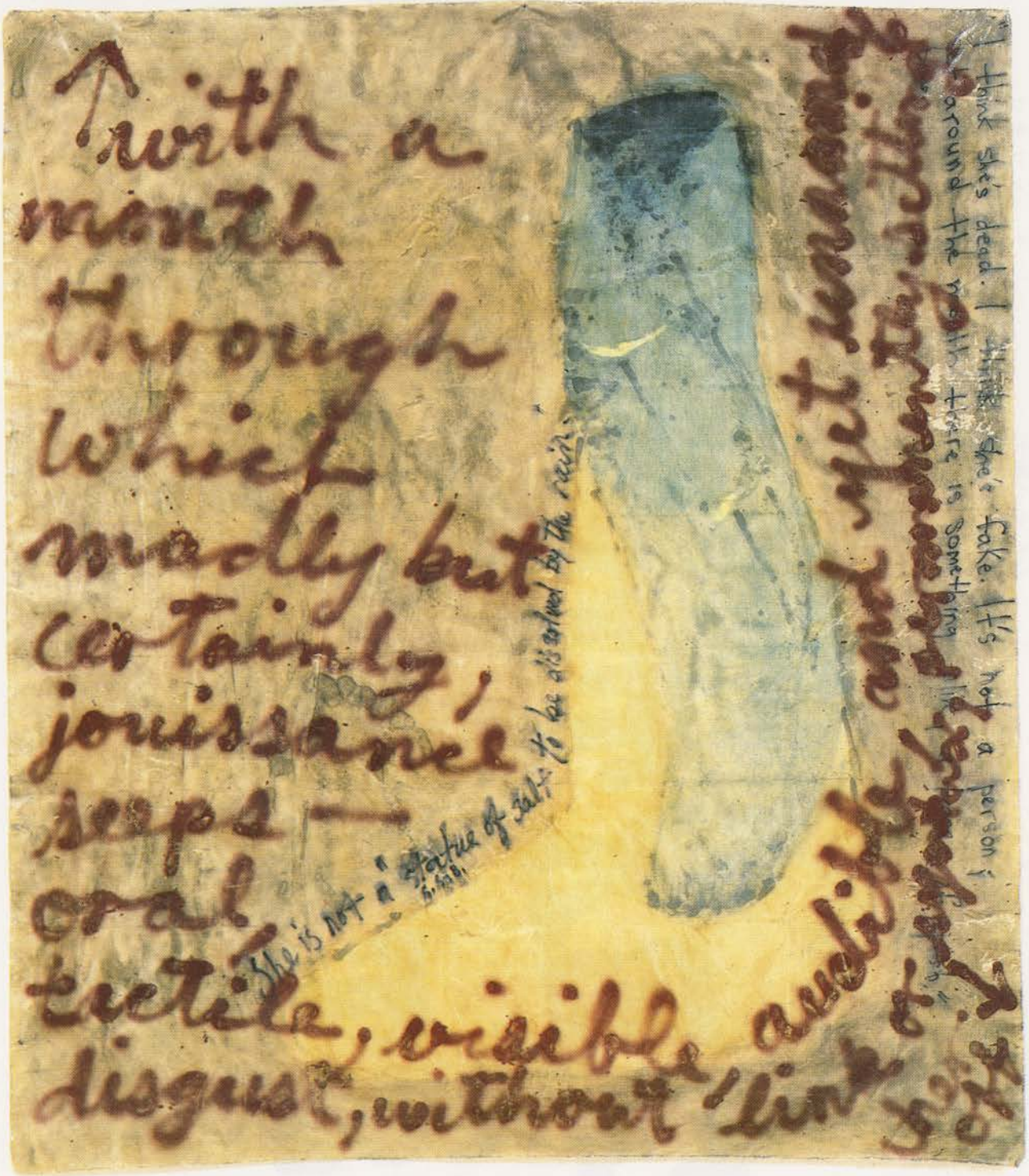
# TEXTURAL STRATEGIES

Gallery 1.1.1., School of Art, University of Manitoba, September 27–October 16, 1987

**Gallery 1.1.1., School of Art, University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada**

**Mary Scott**

# **TEXTU(R)AL STRATEGIES**



1. Untitled (Quoting J. Kristeva, M. Duras, S. Schwartz-Bart, P. Modersöhn-Becker) 1985  
204.5 x 182.9 cm

## Mary Scott: TEXTU(R)AL STRATEGIES

**"Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue—this texture—the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web."** (R. Barthes)

Mary Scott does not paint pictures; she constructs "texts." Fabricated from fragments of images and writing taken from a variety of sources (art history, French feminist theory, psychoanalytic theory, literary criticism and literature), Scott's textual paintings betray a passionately involved and extensive reading practice. (Since 1981 she has spent more time reading than painting.)

Her paintings are not /re/presentations of randomly chosen, appropriated material. Rather, they mark out her reading practice, the process of her interaction with art history/writing/painting/theory. They contain the trace of her experience even as she traces the words and images onto the canvas.

**"Reading then is writing, in an endless movement of giving and receiving: each reading reinscribes something of a text; each reading reconstitutes the web it tries to decipher, but by adding another web. One must read in a text not only that which is visible and present but also the *nontext* of the text, the parentheses, the silences. Silence is needed in order to speak, to write. One phoneme differs from another phoneme, and in speaking, a voice traces, spaces, writes."** (V. Conley)

Using paint, as well as a wide range of non-traditional materials (plastic and vinyl letters, lettraset, spray-paint, felt pen, shellac, varnish, rhoplex and powdered charcoal), Scott layers these fragments onto large pieces of unstretched canvas. Images of art historical significance are quoted in a suggestive or referential manner—details from the original works are blown up and generalized almost beyond recognition. Textual quotations are transcribed into script and letters that vary in size, quality and medium so that each painting has many voices, both visually and literally.

Words trace around, score over, run over the image; an image which is only partially present. Numerous applications of shellac and varnish create an aqueous effect where letters and forms float and undulate, suspended. The painting quivers, trembles, elides, eludes, threatens to come undone. Its smooth, seamless surface—the site where discourse coheres—erupts, is cut through. It hangs in strips and tears; exceeds its own boundaries.

The texts and images are critically important. The words don't matter. What they do does.

Like the texts that she quotes, Scott's work refuses to be enclosed by categories. The terms "theory," "painting," "writing," "politics," "poetry," "text" are relevant,

but inoperative as a means of description or classification. Her work is all of these; it also is none of these.

Her painting practice takes place at the point where reading and writing become undifferentiated processes; where the text of another is kinesthetically made her own by painstakingly transcribing each letter and word; where abstract concepts and theories are embodied in the tangible materiality of paint and canvas.

**"Imagine someone... who abolishes within himself all barriers, all classes, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old spectre: logical contradiction; who mixes every language, even those said to be incompatible; who silently accepts every charge of illogicality, of incongruity; who remains passive in the face of Socratic irony (leading the interlocutor to the supreme disgrace: self-contradiction) and legal terrorism (how much penal evidence is based on a psychology of consistency!).... Now this anti-hero exists: he is the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure."** (R. Barthes)

Enter the pleasure of the painting.

Enter via speech. Femininity speaking. The voices rise and fall, whisper and shout. At times rendered inaudible by the amorphous layers of paint and shellac that trace over and obscure them; at times rendered invisible by the twists and tears of torn canvas that hide them.

Enter via the strategies that seep and course through the works. Read the writers (M. Duras, A. Smedley, C. Wolf, A. Rich, S. Schwartz-Bart, M. Wittig, C. Moraga, E. Bulkin) listed in the titles.

Enter via art history. Consider its inclusions and exclusions. Enter via the text. Multi-voiced and unstable its interpretation is not fixed or singular. It is written/painted even as each viewer reads it.

Enter via touch. The canvas's slippery "skin," thick with wet shellac and cut open with gaping wounds, demands, invites a caress.

Enter via the body. The female body which is spoken and celebrated in and of and through the shifting text and texture of each painting.

**"Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word 'silence,' the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word 'impossible' and writes it as 'the end.'" (H. Cixous)**

This is Scott's strategy. It is a textu(r)al strategy that she shares with the writers she quotes, particularly the French writers H. Cixous, L. Irigaray and J. Kristeva. Their concern is nothing less than "to read and write texts in order to displace

the operating concepts of femininity in major discourses governing (Western) society."<sup>1</sup> Scott brings this strategy to painting practice.

**"A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter."** (H. Cixous)

Because...these discourses are the foundation of all that we take for granted. They make "the way things are" seem "natural" and "inevitable." They make the status quo seem the most logical and reasonable and the *only* alternative.

Because...these are the discourses that privilege the coherent, unified author/ity/ as centre of a universe which he names/controls/explores/dominates/writes/paints. All experience is measured by his experience.

Because...these are the discourses that silence women; that position her as a negative, an "unman"; that invalidate her experience as un-sense-able and il-logical.

These are the discourses that are concerned with nothing less than /re/presenting her, this hole/absence in his image, for his pleasure. She is the tabula rasa upon which he projects. Where is she?

**"She sleeps, she is intact, eternal, absolutely powerless. He has no doubt that she has been waiting for him forever."** (H. Cixous)

A strategy is of critical importance.

Scott unravels the text in which the author/ity/ has the final word. In which reading is an innocent act; in which writing and painting "tell the truth," in which woman is constantly imaged but always absent.

She constructs an 'other' text whose texture is woven from the silences, the edges, the gaps, the unmarked territory. A text which speaks the silence of her body in its play-pleasure-mobility, in its multiplicity, for herself.

**"One must listen to her differently in order to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized."** (L. Irigaray)

Mary Scott doesn't paint pictures. She constructs texts.

*Sigrid Dable*

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* p. 5

## Bibliography

Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. 1973. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, p. 64, 3.

Conley, Verena Andermatt. *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, p. 7-8, 5.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms*. Edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken Books, 1981, p. 256, 258.

Cixous, Hélène and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. 1975. Translated by Betsy Wing. Introduction by Sandra M. Gilbert. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 66.

Irigaray, Luce. "This Sex Which Is Not One," in *New French Feminisms*. Edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken Books, 1981, p. 103.

John Dean





3. Untitled (Quoting L. Irigaray, A. Hunter, D. Azapadu and Others) 1986  
182.9 x 396.2 cm





2. Untitled (Quoting L. Irigaray, H. D., J. Kristeva; image—Jean Bondol, circa 1375) 1986  
182.9 x 182.9 cm: strips (3) each 7.62 x 182.9 cm



4. Untitled (Stealers!) 1986  
 diptych: each panel 223.5 x 180 cm



5. Like Hadrian's Memories (Quoting M. Duras, M. Yourcenar, S. Griffin; image—Dorothea Lange, 1958) 1986  
182.9 x 182.9 cm

## Mary Scott

Born: Calgary

Residence: Calgary

Education: University of Calgary, B.F.A., 1978  
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax,  
M.F.A., 1980

## Related Professional Experience

1980- Instructor, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design,  
1981 Halifax

1981 Summer Program Co-ordinator, Art Studio, The Banff  
Centre, Banff

1982- Assistant Head, Art Studio, The Banff Centre, Banff  
1984

1984- Instructor, Alberta College of Art, Calgary

## Solo Exhibitions

1980 Halifax, Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College  
of Art and Design

1980- Calgary, Glenbow Museum  
1981

1981 Lethbridge, Alberta, Southern Alberta Art Gallery

1983 Lethbridge, Alberta, University of Lethbridge Art Gallery

1985 Banff, Alberta, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies,  
**Marking Out: Recent Work by Mary Scott**

1986 Regina, Dunlop Art Gallery, **Mary Scott: Paintings  
1978-1985**

## Selected Group Exhibitions

1979 Halifax, Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia College  
of Art and Design

1980 Edmonton, Edmonton Art Gallery, **Alberta Now**

1980 Calgary, Shell Canada Gallery

1980 Albuquerque, New Mexico, University of New Mexico

1981 Calgary, Glenbow Museum

1983 Edmonton, Martin Gerard Gallery, **Connection**

1984 London, England, Canada House/Brussels, Belgium,  
Canada Cultural Centre/Paris, France, Canadian Cultural  
Centre, **Seven Artists from Alberta: Art in this  
Region** (cat. by Nancy Tousley)

1984 Edmonton, Beaver House

1984 Calgary, Alberta College of Art, **Faculty Show**

1985 Banff, Alberta, The Walter Phillips Gallery, **She Writes  
in White Ink** (cat. by Barbara Fischer)

1985 Calgary, Off Centre Centre, **5 x 5 Show**

1986 Calgary, Alberta College of Art, **Faculty Show**

1986 Calgary, Off Centre Centre, **Words**

1986 Edmonton, Latitude 53, **Politically Speaking**

1986 Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, **Songs of  
Experience** (cat. by Jessica Bradley and Diana  
Nemiroff)

1986 Calgary, Glenbow Museum, **Aspects of Contemporary  
Painting in Alberta** (cat. by Vince Varga)

## Selected Collections

Glenbow Museum, Calgary

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

University of Lethbridge Art Gallery, Lethbridge

Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa

## Awards

1980- Canada Council Arts Grant 'B'

1981

## Bibliography

Glown, Ron. "Mary Scott, University of Lethbridge Art  
Gallery," **Vanguard**, vol. 12, no. 9 (Nov. 1983), p. 50.

Laing, Carol. "Songs of Experience," **Parachute**, no. 44  
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Taillefer, Hélène. "Mary Scott," **Parachute**, no. 46 (March,  
April, May 1987), p. 118.

Tousley, Nancy. "Roots, Rejections and Rewards in Calgary,"  
**Canadian Art**, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall/September 1986), pp. 72-79.

Wood, William. "Skin Jobs," **C Magazine**, no. 11 (September  
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### Works in the Exhibition

1. **Untitled (Quoting J. Kristeva, M. Duras, S. Schwartz-Bart, P. Modersöhn-Becker)** 1985  
Oil, spray paint, shellac on canvas  
204.5 x 182.9 cm  
Collection: Canada Council Art Bank
2. **Untitled (Quoting L. Irigaray, H. D., J. Kristeva; image —Jean Bondol, circa 1375)** 1986  
Spray paint, letraset, oil paint, varnish and shellac on canvas panel 182.9 x 182.9 cm; strips (3) each 7.62 x 182.9 cm  
Collection: The artist
3. **Untitled (Quoting L. Irigaray, A. Hunter, D. Azapadu and Others)** 1986  
Powdered charcoal, oil pastel, spray paint, gel medium, metal and vinyl letters, varnish and shellac on canvas  
182.9 x 396.2 cm  
Collection: The artist
4. **Untitled (Stealers!)** 1986  
Powdered charcoal, spray paint, varnish, metal letters and shellac on canvas  
diptych: each panel 223.5 x 180 cm  
Collection: The artist
5. **Like Hadrian's Memories (Quoting M. Duras, M. Yourcenar, S. Griffin; image —Dorothea Lange, 1958)** 1986  
Metal and vinyl letters, letraset, rhoplex, watercolor, powdered charcoal, felt pen and shellac on canvas  
182.9 x 182.9 cm  
Collection: The artist

### Credits

**Exhibition Curator:** Sigrid Dahle

**Catalogue Essay:** Sigrid Dahle

**Catalogue Photography:** Bob Talbot, John Dean,  
Ron Marsh and Don Korman

**Installation Technician:** Tom Wood

**Catalogue Design:** Leo Simoens



