



Lauren Quin: Clutches

Early March

I'm in Lauren Quin's studio, and Peter Harkawik is staring hypnotically at one of her canvases. "I don't want to go behind the door to see how the sausage is made," he blurts out. This one is of purple forms that look something like yes, sausages, the kind that are made behind a door too. The kind connected by those little strings (one long string that goes all the way through?) made by the butchers in mafia movies who look up when the gunshot goes off. But the forms are not sausages, they're worms, intestines, and worm intestines and shit and what it feels like to drive around on the freeways and what the freeways look like from above. These organisms are involved in a process that is the painting that contains them. They're moving towards something but not always finishing, just moving to move. I think of graphic renderings of the human body in an advertisement for cosmetic surgery, a glowing blue spot indicating where the pain might be. Or of 2-dimensional maps that extract a particular block and zoom into it in a detailed circle on top of the map. This shift in scale is constantly happening in these paintings; it's like looking at the big picture and the details all at once. "Rubbing a sticker for a few weeks till it's white," Lauren responds while looking at one of her paintings. There

is something perverse in this process of obsessively rubbing, something essential to painting. It's not a process of erasing but of chipping away at something until what's left is not nothing, it's still something but it's just white.

Late June

All we seem to know is before and after, fixated on the instant that something became something else. Pre-quar, pre-Fairfax protest, pre-November 2016. We don't really know what day it was, but we know if it happened before or after.

For years, my richest uncle has talked about wanting to freeze himself. Every year for Christmas, he gets the women in my family anti-aging cosmetics so advanced that they don't yet come in nice, pleasing packaging, but rather in a generic scientific box with big words impossible to pronounce and graphics of humans evolving. He's rich from computers. He has no wife or children. He has a small house where he lives alone with a backyard full of rotting weeds. Freezing himself would presumably eliminate having to deal with the change that happens between before and after. If all goes according to plan, after would be the same as before.

I saw Lauren Quin's paintings before. Right before, when I had to cancel my birthday party and my reservation at Musso and Frank's. Then the world changed—actually, the world broke open. I saw the paintings again after, thinking mostly about the recurring image that is printed on the back of many of Quin's canvases: hands holding two eggs or hands holding a bat, an image she pushes to abstraction with paint. They are images of precarity just about to break open. Eggs are just as close to life as they are to death, cracking and splat. Each painting identifies something that's hardly there, just about to slip through your fingers, but, “clutch.”

—Gracie Hadland