Introduction

Orange DCC60080 brings the existential fragility of the rural experience into engagement with the lively, textural nature of the material world and it foregrounds a creative process that exceeds the traditional boundaries of artistic expression. Rural inhabitants are often depicted as lone or isolated figures either overcoming or succumbing to the fate of an unrelenting environment, but such depictions neglect the lively, textured material features of the rural. Orange DCC60080 seeks to evoke, what political theorist Jane Bennett refers to as “vibrant matter”: “the material agency of or effectivity of nonhuman or not quite human things.” The “vibrant matter” of the rural context creates narratives in which the individual and environment are no longer set apart but are constantly merging and exchanging roles. The insignificant acquires new meaning and the predominate norms and ways of being are eroded, diminished and redefined.

Almost nothing is ever new, clean, still or easily gotten rid of in rural settings. There is no autonomy; nothing is intact but rather infested, deteriorating, evolving. For me, as an artist, the rural has undermined the myth of personal autonomy—such rusts away in the complexity of the rural environment. Clean—lines, surfaces, identities—doesn't exist. Orange DCC60080 presents the “Implement Series” in which paint intended for use on farm machinery and farm implements, such as John Deere and Company green and yellow, is appropriated for expressive purposes. The paint itself is treated as an object with “vital materiality”, which resists the interpretation of the paintings as abstract, color field compositions. The paintings of the “Implement Series” could be executed with artists’ paints without significant difference to their “optical” appearance, but the creative process animating the work is directed by the history, nature, and meaning of the implement paint. The enamel implement paint, when factory new, is glossy and featureless like a candy coating. But when it is exposed to the farm environment it quickly starts shedding its inert coat and assimilating into the varied textures of the landscape.

The paint in “Implement Series” is not transformed into an artist material but is appropriated, repurposed experience; it is a vital part and exposed to a different set of environmental elements. “Implement Series” does not, or not merely, represent rural of its material processes. “Orange” in the book title refers to the expressive and abstract nature of art, while “DCC60080” refers to the identification code for a specific paint used in Allis Chalmers’ farm implements.

Much of Orange DCC60080, painted between 1999 and 2010, has been repainted many times. The initial layers may have been completely obscured in the current versions but those initial layers are significant in informing each new layer. The series is composed of subseries typically distinguished by size. Individual panels are modules that can be assembled and reassembled to function as new works, in new configurations, in response to the details of specific spaces. The pieces are individual, but the art work is the system itself and a system that only can be activated as engaged by a particular environment. The series is an exploration of rural conditions through artistic expression. This can feel at odds with the “vital matter” that directs us away from the human hand as creator. Orange DCC60080, however, seeks not to deny human creativity but to explore creativity in as a process for finding meaning in a complex more-than-human world.

The fundamental subject matter of Orange DCC6008 is the creative process. The rural experience played a key role in dismantling my idea of art as a distinct activity and shifted my focus to experience, materiality and activity. A working definition for my view of art might simply be “attentiveness”---attentiveness in perception and in action. Hence, Orange DCC60080 is meant also to address the role of the creative process as part of a broader notion of interdisciplinary design practice. Art and design are forces which apply far more broadly than in the production of things. Fundamental to their capacity is sensory cognition---learning in more holistic ways than traditionally allowed in many realms of research and practice. Rudolf Arnheim advocated for the “intelligence of visual perception” and the importance of conceptualization through artistic investigation. The notion of “vibrant matter” likewise challenges us to see and experience in unconventional ways. I believe that the creative process is critical for understanding and problem solving in any domain.