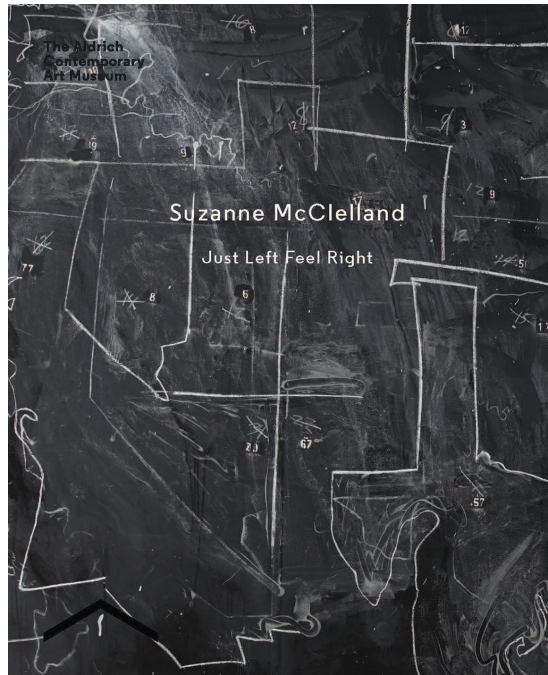


**The Aldrich
Contemporary
Art Museum**



Suzanne McClelland, *Just Left Feel Right*

THIRD PARTY

BY AMY SMITH-STEWART

January 01, 2017

I'm not sure what "coming out right" means. It often means that what you do holds a kind of energy that you wouldn't just put there, that comes about through grace of some sort. - Jasper Johns

Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be. - Toni Morrison

Suzanne McClelland has spent her thirty-year career collecting messaging. Words she overhears, sounds she absorbs, and data she gathers. Mining the methods of its application, and the implications of meaning, McClelland compiles research, combing what is said, what is streamed, what trends; hoarding symptomatic information that drops in and out of our lives.

This focused twenty-seven-year survey, 1990 to 2017, concentrates on works that range from painting to installation, glass, ceramic, and works on paper, from specific periods of her career that all share a distinctive commonality; they capture the eruptive and disparate voices of a shifting American vernacular and its rippling effect on the way we communicate and, hence, how we understand each other. Many of the works in the exhibition are being presented for the first time, others have rarely been seen, and some haven't been shown since their debut.

McClelland's rich and investigational practice tracks the ways we have changed our modalities of communication over three decades. She has said on numerous occasions that, for her, reading and listening represent "political actions" and her inimitable methodology envisages these activities. She places words within compositions that attempt to expose the immaterial field between voices, expressing an internalized language dependent on timing, tenor, and gesture. To decipher her meaning we must use multiple sensory receptors. As critic Barry Schwabsky summates, "McClelland is concerned not only with the visual and semantic aspects of language but also, just as much, with its acoustic form."

Throughout the 1990s, McClelland almost exclusively amassed words she lifted from conversations happening in real time. By the end of that decade, text messaging had become an increasingly popular way to dialogue, and, with the introduction of the smartphone, the most convenient way to have an instantaneous exchange. By 2012, she had turned her attention to data, easily available online, and a new language to snatch that introduced numbers into her repertoire, freeing statistics from plots, charts, graphs, and lists, to swim unmoored from their systematic use value.

McClelland is most widely known not only for her deft use of the linguistic, but also for her sensually textured surfaces. Her words dangle between materials; letters press up against each other, run off the surface, join together, dissolve, loop, twist, spin, descend, crash, rest, and collide into and onto themselves. She stains, spills, wipes, scrawls, scribbles, scratches, and tags her surfaces, over the years employing a wide cast of materials: acrylics, oils, pastels, stainless steel pigments, pigmented ink jet, paper pulp, clay, enamel, gesso, Conté, polymer emulsion, and glitter, and a varied range of supports: velvet, portrait linen, canvas, silk, paper, wood, sand paper, sheetrock, and so on. She uses her fingers and hands, as well as more unconventional means like hoses, blowtorches, and spray guns, to “let the material reach a point of chaos but maintain some sort of relationship to the weave of the fabric.” Her compositions pulse as the materials perform, throbbing and swaggering; they describe the pacing of our speech, mimicking the physicality of how we express ourselves. The inflection of our tone and the modulation of our cadence, our pauses, utterances and gesticulations, all are translated into compositions modeled after our oratory repartee. As McClelland elucidates, “[T]he way I use the material provides the intonation.” She seizes these audible sensations, stealing words, mining data, and even embodying our micro-expressions.

The title of this essay, *third party* (emphasis on the lower case), chosen by McClelland, seemed especially evocative when the exhibition was to open in October, just a month before the hotly contested 2016 presidential election. When it was pushed ahead to March 2017, we debated changing it, but in our divisive post-election climate it seems even more prescient. McClelland says that the “third party” emerges from her thirty-year history, pulling apart the word “right” throughout the 1990s and the word “left” throughout the 2000s; in the current decade, the 2010s, it can be construed as representing the stance of the viewer and the desire for political choice. The online Oxford Dictionary defines the third party as “a person or group besides the two primarily involved in a situation, especially a dispute; a political party organized as an alternative to the major parties in a two-party system.” Here, the third party is a witness, a spectator with a voice who holds the power to influence. This exhibition attempts to position the viewer as the “third party,” the “reader” after the author/artist has engaged and (re)framed the subject matter. Thus, the witness is in a position of functioning as a filter. The observer, McClelland says, must “snag” meaning, from her heady remix. As Faye Hirsch articulates, McClelland “snares words in performative action,” thereby, positioning us between our incongruent sociopolitical landscape, by mining the fractured and polarizing place where a culture of privilege, fear, and misinterpretation permeates our social fabric—and is specifically made apparent through our choice of words. As Nancy Princenthal explains, “When it [talk] is introduced as the instigator of a relationship between reading and looking, its ghostly but indelible third-party presence produces difficulties as knotty as they are provocative.” And so, McClelland propositions us, exercising the language she chooses to provoke and ultimately entangles us within a poignant yet befuddling slippage.

When McClelland arrived in New York City from Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1981, the city was gritty, colorful, and had a loud, energetic, and politicized street culture after the shock of the Ronald Reagan election. This made an immediate impression on McClelland. Influenced by the plentiful graffiti she encountered in the city and the hip hop and rap artists and spoken-word poets of the time, McClelland’s early works were ephemeral. Made for public consumption, they were wheat-pasted to city buildings, streetlights, temporary scaffolding, police barricades, and abandoned chalkboards. Her paintings in the early to mid 1980s were the result of rubbings made on the streets of Chinatown, where she lived. They reflected the rhythm and beat that had thrived from Piet Mondrian’s opus *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, through Ornette Coleman’s free jazz, to freestyle break dancing, ActUp demonstrations, and street art. McClelland was responding to the tempo of New York.

McClelland cites the many artworks and exhibitions she discovered in the galleries, museums, and on the city streets during these formative early years in New York as notable influencers—in particular, the immersive graphic installations of Barbara Kruger; public one-liners printed on broadsheets by Jenny Holzer (*Truisms*, 1977–87); the signature pictography of Jean-Michel Basquiat; the calligraphic mark making of Cy Twombly; Louise Fishman’s screaming name paintings of famous feminists (*Angry Women* series, 1973); Joan Snyder’s “stroke paintings” from the early 1970s; Mel Bochner’s *Theory on Painting* (1969–70), a dispersed field of blue spraypainted newspaper floor

arrangements; and Nancy Spero's epic twenty-four-part feminist scroll, *Notes on Time* (1979). Her work also cites the legendary male Abstract Expressionists, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, but a closer connection can be found to Robert Rauschenberg, in particular his transfer drawings from the 1950s and 1960s that used images from print media to create wonderfully complex compositions about the intersection of art and life. In the end, McClelland's methodology attempts to look beyond abstraction, pure gestural expressionism, and appropriation through the lens of conceptualism and feminism, as she collapses, expands, and ultimately releases language from itself, finding her greatest kinship in the explosive solos of Jimi Hendrix, the Last Poets, Jayne Cortez, Public Enemy, Bytches with Problems, and many other vocal artists. In doing so, McClelland is committed to making work that is informed in equal parts by personal history, cultural circumstance, and an exceptional technical virtuosity, in order to generate a painting that evokes a singular yet collective connection.

From the late 1980s through the 1990s, McClelland concentrated on fragments of overheard conversations. For her, "words function simultaneously as guides and as obstacles." Most of her word choices were lifted from strangers: promises made between lovers, city playground tête-à-têtes, run-ins on the street, "telephone machines, family court proceedings, subway trips, and television," and stockpiled in pocket-size notebooks. Pregnant with implication but open-ended in isolation, words like they, them, then, never mind, my pleasure, yes, always, right, be there, no, alright, all right, owowow, tada, sure, I will, forever, oh, oh no, anymore, just relax, became latent with potentiality. These congested and primal compositions swing from abstract to representational, from landscapes to portraits, from vacuums to atmospheres, as letters run off the edge, gather in a corner, or are lifted up into energetic tempests of pigments and acrylic binders. Her actions denote "the struggle to render language visible." Her works position us as interpreter or eyewitness to a (re)vision based on an appraisal of what sh/we see/hear.

McClelland selects words and then loads them up with special effects, as she searches for a weight and gravitational pull to serve as a tone. Conjuring them within restless arrangements that feel almost discordant, creating conditions that she describes may be calm, cool, or even remote, they swallow up letters, belt them out, or buzz in our ears. She has said, "I have tried to organize certain pictures (painted, drawn, or photographed) as though they were conversations." The materials vibrate and pulse at our pupils' center and our eyes' periphery. They activate our neurotransmitters, implicating us in their demonstrative resonance. Her letters can be rendered in lowercase, all caps, script and/or print, and materialize as marks, notes or code, sometimes dissolving altogether. The letters can appear in reverse, spiral, stack, or hide inside gyrating washes, eruptive smudges, glittery expanses or boggy pools of acrylic polymers. Over the years, many of her paintings have been notably lacking in color, as the only color she employs is contained within her chosen material. She prefers white grounds with varying qualities of shine and or absorbency and favors a palette more often associated with the printed page: solitary expanses of far-ranging whites and mercurial blacks combined with tints of twinkling incandescence and hidden-hue peek-a-boos. In isolation, the letters float untethered; deserted they demand deciphering. The works state a rush that is often corroborated by a squally atmosphere. The surfaces give the impression of a sullied sidewalk, gritty, grimy, inherently animated, and always teeming. How we choose to construe her missive is up to us. McClelland strangles her opinions, asking us to unscramble her meaning, and consequently, we become indeterminately intertwined.

Her first mature work and the first painting she exhibited after graduate school, *My Pleasure* (1990), was included in a group show at the Jamie Wolff Gallery and utilized materials that McClelland has said exemplify the "basic ingredients of painting." Composed of dry pigment, clay, and clear polymer, *my pleasure* was spelled out in clay, the letters defying their own gravity. McClelland says this painting was her way of coping with the gender climate that existed in the art world at that time. She found herself drawn to qualities in both the male Neo-Expressionists then dominating the art scene, Julian Schnabel, Basquiat, and Anselm Kiefer—who used language as a means to mythologize—and the female Conceptualists, Fishman, Spero, Kruger, and Holzer—who used text to challenge existing power structures, but was "unwilling to adhere to the severe split in the public display of this division between the 'clean' surfaces of the women, who had so much to say, and the varied and expressive surfaces of the men." But McClelland wasn't going to give us a recognizable stance, nor was she going to tell us how to interpret her delineation. She pushed that responsibility back on the observer, squeezing us up inside a messy middle realm. *My Pleasure* emanates a perceptible humanity; the clay blemishes the weave, the clear polymer puddles around the letters. She bestows the colloquial statement with a primal instability, almost embryonic. For McClelland, "It's pleasure not owned by somebody specific, it's the automatic polite response to a request—to want to please." McClelland was experimenting with the clay material, shaping letters, forming words, dripping acrylic medium over them, and then either stacking them, as in *Perfect* (1995) or placing them inside a glass frame, like *Just Relax* (1995), a direct riposte

to Robert Morris's *I-box* (1962). From here, the artist began to ponder words that act as "responses or connectors," sure, relax, yes, and forever; words that, without context, just float in the air, waiting for us to bring them back down again.

In 1992, curator Thelma Golden invited McClelland to create a site-responsive work of art in the gallery of the Whitney Museum of American Art branch at Philip Morris near Grand Central Terminal. McClelland targeted the word "right," which, at the time, she says, was being publicly debated in the media, and also "in the studios when discussing the completion moment in abstraction . . . when it 'feels right' like in music when the groove connects." Then-Vice President Dan Quayle famously blamed the LA uprising on a "poverty of values," recognizing the enormously popular TV show *Murphy Brown* as an apropos example when Candice Bergen's eponymous character endorsed single motherhood. McClelland was recently separated from her partner and raising a young daughter. This no doubt weighed heavily on her mind, but the word also evoked far-ranging interpretations: a (human) right (as in the freedom to express), a protest against the intrusion of the (far) right, or, even as Golden then suggested, "(the bill of) right(s)." In the end, it begged the basic question: who has the right (the artist, the mother, the politician, the public)? This was a time when politics entered the bedroom, a backlash against the gay, AIDS, and pro-choice movements then on the rise. Conceived over a three-week period, the work was made live, the build-ups and breakdowns of its creation perceived by the community (McClelland worked closely with the Whitney education department's Dina Halil to create workshops during the installation with children and teenagers living in the NYC shelter system), as its conception unfolded in real time. Its presence was unavoidable and all consuming, as it commanded the entirety of the gallery space. Using drywall, cardboard, sheetrock, and house paint, McClelland made a walk-in painting with elements that leaned and piled up, employing a symbolic palette of reds, blues, and whites that incited a line of questioning. Right appeared repeatedly and exhaustively, mutating like a virus, shifting from extra large loopy Rs, Is, and Gs, to tiny constellations of built-up marks, falling from the ceiling or huddling in the corner. Expressions with different pitches, ranging from hollers to hushes, they could be broadcast out in varying timbres. The installation was dismantled after the exhibition closed, and the only documentation that remains is a stack of just over forty Polaroids. At The Aldrich, the Polaroids have been translated into posters, pasted to the walls in the Small Space gallery. Installed upon them is a series of black and white paintings McClelland made twenty years later. This time, all four paintings (2011), ponder on the right's opposition, the left. After the *Painting* installation, McClelland exhibited several *Right* paintings in the 1993 Whitney Biennial, remembered as the most diverse and politically resonant biennial in recent history. *Right* (1992) hasn't been shown since. Entirely monochromatic, the color is the material itself, polymer, oil, and pigment on canvas; the letters, r, i, g, h, t, are sizeable and well built, rendered in contour, eating up the entire left half of the painting. McClelland shoved the letters up against the left side, so that they appear as though they might be pushing back a shadowy centrifugal force approaching from the right.

McClelland has frequently talked about her work in terms of the weather. Raphael Rubinstein quotes her as saying, "For me, language is more like a weather condition, something huge, much bigger than us." Barry Schwabsky has described her work as a "corporeal meteorology." McClelland belts out the chorus that vibrates in our heads, churns in our stomachs, and tickles at our throats. She weds the spoken word, which we are conditioned to control, with a spirited and unpredictable external force that is much vaster than us. This exploration is evidenced best in drawings on canvas that McClelland produced out in the open air from 1992 to 1999. In 1993, in a field on an East Hampton, New York, rental property, within eyeshot of the Pollock-Krasner House, McClelland intentionally left her canvases outside so mold could materialize, bonding premeditated intention with unforeseeable meteorological circumstances. This investigation culminated in *Plot* (1996). Harnessing the unknowable forces of nature, McClelland made four immense works. These charcoal drawings on unstretched canvases, measuring 30 feet long x 10 feet wide, were buried by friends at her request, interred in four distinctive points of the country: East Hampton; Indianola, Washington; Playa del Rey, California; and Stuart, Florida. A year later, they were exhumed by McClelland so she could study the evident changes that had resulted from the respective climates. This project occasioned an unbound book published in 1999. It also generated a new body of work, in which McClelland used the video transcripts of the burials as "material," reflecting the directional language used during the "funerary" performances. A decade later, in 2009, McClelland made work after Robert Smithson's *Heap of Language*, a drawing from 1966, which propositioned language as physical matter. Her canvases are 3 x 9 feet, the standard size of a burial plot.

Alongside her word collection, McClelland compiles an archive of images, photos, maps, charts, and so forth. Functioning like an atlas, it is a place of refuge, where work originates and restarts. In 1994, McClelland made three portfolios composed from articles gathered from the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, specifically stories

that covered the Rodney King beating and subsequent uprising in 1992, and the Mike Tyson and William Kennedy Smith rape trials in 1991 and 1992, each handled by the media in very different ways. Employing various mixed media, the newspaper pieces were arranged in grids, like a storyboard; her gestures were reflexive responses to the printed word. *LA Uprising* involved a grid of twenty parts, incorporated pages lifted from the LA Times about the riots (the newspaper published a total of forty-three articles about this catastrophic six-day event) in April/May 1992. McClelland painted the words THEY, HE, NO, and THEIR on top of several of the sections, the letters intentionally masking the text. Upon other pieces, she obscured or shrouded the content in black ink and white spray paint with instances of red blots. When the uprising came to an end, there had been fifty-five deaths, 3,600 fires were set, and 1,100 buildings were destroyed; tens of thousands of lives were impacted. McClelland left areas visible so as to reveal her source and the date; in some sections, partial headlines and images are discernible. A year later, McClelland created a single *New York Times* newspaper piece, titled *Shot in DC* (1995). This article reported on the tragic death of thirty-three-year-old Marcelino Corniel, a homeless artist who was fatally shot outside the White House by a Park Police officer four days before Christmas in 1994. McClelland, employing Acrylex and clay, made a large, festering wound that oozed over the print, rendering the heartbreaking details illegible; a metaphor for a questionable murder of a disabled man by law enforcement.

On a ramp in a corridor within The Aldrich's exhibition is a line of eighty-four 7 x 4 x 1/4 inch sandblasted, fused Bullseye glass objects with photo resist, *Runners Up* (2014–16). Their scale impersonates the iPhone 7. Arranged on a narrow shelf, each piece—made in technical collaboration with Dorie Guthrie and assistance from Brian Kibler at UrbanGlass—is rendered in alternating degrees of opacity to reveal figure(s) in motion. McClelland's installation is experiential. The works emote vacillating shades of transparency and expose shifting degrees of (mis)representation. The placement of the work in a transitional area obliges the viewer to observe it on the go. Our eyes scan, our feet shuffle; like a live stream, these anonymous "runners," recreational joggers, marathon competitors, as well as persons that look to be running scared, fleeing the scene or moving in haste, have been compiled from media sources and Google image searches and assembled over several years by McClelland's studio assistants. The artist leaves it up to us to judge why these men and women are compelled to run.

The painting series *Action Objects* (2010) contemplates single words that function as both nouns and objects and verbs and actions simultaneously. Words like bore, pump, drone, and drill. They call to mind Lee Lozano's drawings and paintings of tools, displaying—up close and tightly cropped—overtly phallic screwdrivers, wrenches, hammers, screws, nails, clamps, and so on. Through a simple game of cataloging, McClelland bestows the words with vitality, so they perform for us. But as with Lozano, there is something sexy about her presentation. Juicedup signage, the words are inescapable, eye candy. The letters appear cartoonish, stretching end-to-end and edge-to-edge like dishy body parts. Dig asserts McClelland's signature girly Gs (seen in other works like *Painting* at the Whitney at Philip Morris, mentioned above), *Drill* sports Ls that extend like legs, while *Bore's* vowels and consonants are doughy and bubbly, and *Pump's* characters run up the side, slightly inflated. They are intended to materially elevate drawing and formally question intent, with context left available for the taking. Immediately following these works, McClelland created the *Internal Sensations* paintings (2013), which revisit words first considered more than twenty years ago: ache, throb, fume, yearn, rub, brood, burn: an endeavor to externalize our innermost vibrations.

Music has been an ongoing source of inspiration for McClelland, moving her to make work reflecting back on the female hip-hop artists she admired in the 1980s. *Rap Sheet* (2010–13) is her tribute to these women, many of whom have been overlooked: MC Lyte, Tam Tam, BO\$\$, Da Brat, Hoes with Attitude, and Jayne Cortez. McClelland presents us with the names they chose for the stage, merging the emblematic with the abstract, wedding their sound to her haptic reactions. *Roxanne Roxanne* (2011), a diptych, celebrates the infamous succession of hip-hop rivalries, known as the "Roxanne Wars," that exploded in the mid-1980s in the South Bronx. It generated the most answer records (response songs) in history, as the female rappers debated the identity of the "real Roxanne" through their lyrics. At that time, McClelland explains, there was an "an ongoing debate in their music about who and what is more real . . . more authentic, who did what first, and, at the same time, the sampling is always from somewhere else!" The relationships they shared through their music blended hard-knock life experiences with an intoxicating dollop of artifice. This was what attracted McClelland, a dialogue that flipped between the archetypal and the enigmatic. These women chose their names rather than living solely with what they were given. *Rap Sheet* can be interpreted as a memorial. As McClelland maintains, a "voice is a synthesis of thought, desire, and body."

Starting in 2012, McClelland began to incorporate numbers into her work. A hoarder of communication, in particular emotive and directional information, she began researching the data that personifies the individual and vice versa. This is how we, a civilized twenty-first-century society, forecast outcomes: from steady news spills that flood our imaginations, engineering distorted images about identity and body type, and (in)forming biased estimations and postures. With the rise of social media as a primary source of content, opinion is now often misread as “news.”

Content now travels at a hyperkinetic pace, and we can see this in McClelland’s practice. The onslaught of published material online is titanic. Shout-out headers and top-ten list makers have a daily presence on social media outlets. Text seems to keep on shrinking as investigative journalism becomes buried. Lists are massively popular ways to feign superficial knowledge of a subject. Entirely subjective, they are dated the instant they are released. McClelland explains that “her transitions are long gestation periods of settling in on that gap between the physical body and the information that enters the brain about a human.” What’s missing is the “temperature of a being, its heat, moisture, and humidity.”

So McClelland began to pursue lists, first making her own top ten, and dubbing it *A Paranoid World of Top Ten*. An ink drawing, it is titled *The Shape of Fear* (2012), a handwritten list, it parades in descending order the nations that have the greatest percentage of GOP in US dollars and are the most prominent generators—and representations—of fear. It is no surprise that the top three notated are the USA, China, and Russia.

McClelland’s initial turn to numerical information stemmed from a fascination with a singular painting by the prominent artist Sigmar Polke, *Solutions V* (1967), which she visited in Polke’s retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum in 1991. Polke’s nine simple solutions, $1+1=3$, $2+3=6$, $4+4=6$, . . . intentionally don’t add up, and McClelland became obsessed with their deliberate infeasibility. In an attempt to unravel his objective, she decided to make her own “solutions” to his painting. She doubled the numbers, isolated the equations, and even invented her own calculations. For *Solutions V from Sigmar Polke* (2012), McClelland made a ten-part oil and graphite on canvas paper comeback for each of Polke’s operations. The tenth sheet contains her answer key. This was her breakthrough moment as it cemented for her a motif that had been persistent and constant by visually manifesting the gap that exists between the carnal thing (object/subject) and its representation (words/numbers). Subsequently, McClelland interrogates our messaging, disembodimenting our voices, and separating data from its sources, to empower us to cross-examine the “evidence.”

During this time, McClelland became invested in making work that explored the gap between the numbers and estimated worth. Her conceptual portraits are not realistic depictions of famous individuals framed in opulent interiors and surrounded by the objects of their sizable achievements, but abstractions that describe their (e)valuation based on figures. For the *Ideal Proportions* series (2013–14), McClelland made portraits of celebrated body builders, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Frank Zane, Roy “Reg” Park, Ed Corney, Ronnie Coleman, and Lou Ferrigno, among others, that used their “perfect(ed) figures,” their flawless body measurements, as pictorial elements. Bodybuilding, to some a sport, to others an elaborate performance, is a choreographed routine of posturing, an incremental tensing and flexing of the muscles in a routine of sculpted “pose-offs.” In order to attain the ideal physique for competition, bodybuilders must undergo an arduous and deliberate practice that involves weightlifting, purposeful dehydration, the eradication of fat, carbohydrate overloading, and excessive tanning, all to accentuate their superhuman musculature. Within McClelland’s compositions, numbers are sprayed or sketched, in intense color or matte black, touting the dimensions of their arms, calves, wrists, ankles, neck, thighs, and chest by the inch, the figures scrolling downward or jamming up inside gestural gusts that sometimes entirely fade to white. When the numbers get giant and heavy, they perform like the exaggerated muscles they’re meant to characterize. McClelland explains, “Bodybuilders disconnect from their selves. They objectify their own bodies. Hence, she is not necessarily questioning why a person may choose to go to such extraordinary depths to acquire such an unreal figure, but is confirming how imperfect the stats can be.

McClelland next turned her interest from competitive sports to extreme terror. The Southern Poverty Law Center tracks the movement of hate within the borders of the US—according to their research, hate groups have been on the rise since 1999. A map posted on the SPLC website traces hate activity in each state, and McClelland used this as the basis for an ambitious painting, which she titled *Since Oklahoma After Johns Before Tomorrow (SPLC)* (2015). The work references critical junctures of time, Jasper Johns’s 1961 Map painting, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and the 2015 SPLC hate map, to denote a portrait of a nation broken by the presence of fear. McClelland made a blind contour drawing of the American map using chalkboard paint, pastel, and spray paint on linen. Her execution is shaky, imperfect, and wobbly, edges are smeared and smudged, lines overlap, noticeable ghostly traces of missteps

and restarts. Settled inside each of the fifty states are numbers—hand drawn, hand stenciled, some crossed out—to indicate the volatility of the facts, as fanatical hatred flares up.



My Pleasure, 1990

From here, McClelland moved on to the FBI's domestic terrorism most-wanted watch list. Deemed homegrown terrorists and fugitives on the run, their crimes were committed for a radicalized ideology. What McClelland discovered back in 2014 (the list has evolved since), indicated that more than half of the suspects were women, most of their crimes were committed back in the late 1960s through the early 1980s, and many were members of left-wing activist groups: the Black Liberation Army, May 19th Communist Organization, the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional), the ALF, and the ELF. Using these explicit posters as her primary source, McClelland made a pair of paintings for each of the seven individuals on the 2014 list, as well as a "file" on each, a portfolio of paper works produced during a residency at Dieu Donné Papermill. The paintings show faint traces and violent shards from their files: NCIC numbers, known aliases, height, weight, hair color, eye color, visible scars and markings, and cash rewards. Each painting attempts a portrayal of a human being whose very existence is unknown and unreachable, an identity entirely in fluctuation. Whirling inside McClelland's paintings, with imagery that looks like smoky infernos and scenes of night combat, is extracted data that is as elusive to grasp as the runaway subjects the FBI seeks to snuff out.

After spending time digging into America's most-wanted criminals, who all had pricey bounties on their heads, McClelland began to survey high-net-worth individuals: superstars, televangelists, politicians, and tech innovators. Many of these paintings have never been seen before and none of them have been shown together. Two sets of paintings from the Top Ten series are exhibited at The Aldrich as pairs. The first set features portraits of actors who received the highest recorded annual salaries in 2015: American actor Robert Downey, Jr.: *Top Ten: Robert \$80,000,000.XX* (2016), who was paid \$80,000,000.00, and Chan Kongsang, familiarly known as Jackie Chan, the Hong Kong martial artist, actor, film director, and producer: *Top Ten: Jackie \$50,000,000.XX* (2016), who was paid \$50,000,000. For *Top Ten: Robert \$80,000,000.XX*, McClelland wiped, poured, dropped, and splashed charcoal, oil, polymer, and glitter onto the linen. Appended to her hot-blooded strokes and spry maneuvers, physical traits materialize (a strategy studied in previous bodies of work, like *Ideal Proportions* and *Domestic Terrorism*): dark brown (hair), 172 lbs., 78k (weight), 10 (shoe size), 5'8" (height). The painting reads like a poster that has been defaced many times. In rejoinder to the earlier Rap Sheet paintings, in the second pairing McClelland aimed her attention to The Forbes Five richest rappers and vocalists, all males: *Forbes Five: Dr. Dre \$710,000,000.XX* (2016), prominent rapper, record producer, entrepreneur Andre Romelle Young, a.k.a. Dr. Dre, whose net worth is estimated at \$710,000,000 and ranks number two on the "The Forbes Five wealthiest hip-hop artists 2016 list," and *Vocalist: Eminem \$243,000,000.XX* (2016), rapper, record producer, and actor Marshall Bruce Mathers III, better known as Eminem, whose net worth is estimated at \$243,000,000, and who "dropped off the 2016 Forbes Celebrity 100 list."

The photo research McClelland gathers on the celebrity artists is always affixed to the back of the canvases like a pin-up wall or a crime board, a visual citation.

Entrepreneur televangelists and technology pioneers symbolize a sort of twenty-first century spiritualism, an embodiment of a yearning within society for a talking head, a person who can make us feel as if we are part of something important, linked in a progressively estranged biosphere, a contemporary frontier we think we all may share. This series, all silkscreens joined by polymer and archival glitter on portrait linen, demonstrates McClelland's long-standing attraction to how people move when they speak: the hand signals, hip rotations, leg lurches, and facial deliveries. These charming human peacocks preach to us, bait us with their sales pitches and promotional promises—which are mistaken for something we think we seek, something we believe stitches us all together, but which has no basis in reality. McClelland uncovers the "disconnect between what we think someone is about or what information we have about them and what they feel like when we are with them physically in space." These new paintings, titled *Houses of God* (2016–17), organized as a grouping of three, include an image of Facebook's co-founder, CEO and chairman, Mark Zuckerberg, one of the world's top five billionaires, midspeech; multi-millionaire televangelist, pastor, and the founder of the non-denominational World Changers Church International, Dr. Creflo Augustus Dollar, Jr., preaching; and a drone's-eye view of millionaire pioneer televangelist Jimmy Lee Swaggart's estate in Baton Rouge.

The newest work, made especially for The Aldrich, is a site-engaged installation titled *third party* (2016–17). Incorporating glass and ceramic, it is displayed in an existing window on the Balcony Gallery, measuring 9 feet 7 inches x 4 feet 5 inches, with idyllic views onto the Sculpture Garden. Modeling the work after Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1915–23), McClelland chose an iconic image of the pioneering trailblazer Shirley Chisholm, the first African American Congresswoman, and the first woman to seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. Chisholm was someone she had deeply admired as a young girl—her image was a symbol of an era when anything seemed possible for women and which was reproduced numerous times by the media after Hillary Clinton won the nomination as the 2016 Democratic Party presidential candidate. The black and white photograph depicts Chisholm in 1972; she stands before a crowd in Washington, DC, mostly white male Vietnam veterans, with an upsidedown American flag blowing in the distance, her back to us, arms raised, and fingers asserting a signal of peace. McClelland has translated this arresting image into different glass treatments and reveals it in three notably splintered parts that rest on a shelf that bisects the middle section of the window. The central motif and the middle section of the image, which includes the considerable figure of Chisholm, is sandblasted into float glass. The other two pieces, which flank Chisholm, are sandblasted kiln-fused Bullseye glass with enameling and appear polychromatic when backlit. Chisholm is looking outward, through the glass, addressing the crowd, and the "world beyond." We have to look through her to see this seemingly more perfect, better place that she rallies. Dangling from above are many molten glass "pulls" of various lengths, human intestines, umbilical cords, and other fleshy things, which are in fact McClelland's attempts to shape or "handle" language, using hot molten glass dropped onto a cold hard surface to write out "third party" and "yellow." Her outtakes are not entirely decipherable, but their legibility is in fact irrelevant. It is their presence physically that matters, and the prospect of probable transmission. At the bottom of the window are what McClelland has called her "slumps," clear glass and buttery glazed ceramic pots that might be McClelland's substitutes for Duchamp's Bachelors, as Chisholm is most certainly our Bride. The glass pots contain charred wood chunks (burnt during the making) that McClelland found in her yard and used to drop into the hot-ladled glass, creating the containers' negative space. Inside the glass and ceramic pots are percussion mallets, porcelain rods, and forsythia; the color yellow signifying a third party "presence."

The third party, as a work and as a conceptual framework, can be understood as a culmination of the multi-dimensional yarns that have become singularly interlaced in a thirty-year practice. First, there is the voice with its many gradations of filminess; secondly, the watcher/recipient of this striking and befuddling interface; and thirdly, the perception of a momentum that traffics through time, history, and circumstance. Ultimately, McClelland harnesses the rapidity of our message systems as they slacken and accelerate, distend and deform; like a fast car with a high definition camera attached, McClelland hits us head on, but we still receive the full-blown visual delivery. It is a slow, surging charge.

Suzanne McClelland was born in 1959 in Jacksonville, Florida; she lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



Since Oklahoma After Johns Before Tomorrow (SPLC), 2015