

RAPHAËLLE GOETHALS
ANAMNESIS

A photograph of artist Raphaëlle Goethals standing in front of a large, abstract painting. She is a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a black long-sleeved top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. Her hands are clasped in front of her, holding a small object. She is wearing a watch and several bracelets on her left wrist. The background is a large, textured abstract painting with muted colors like grey, white, and red. In the foreground, there is a table with a similar abstract painting on it.

RAPHAËLLE GOETHALS

ANAMNESIS

by William Peterson

Photographs by Eric Swanson & Wendy McEanhen

“With its immobile, bordered presence, painting asks us for time, humility, patience, and reflection. In the vast space in front of us, in the field of consciousness drawing us in and yet staring back at us, we succumb to a powerful gravitational pull where we can recognize ourselves.”

—Raphaëlle Goethals

Invoking the Greek term “*anamnesis*” to characterize her recent work, Raphaëlle Goethals has produced a profound meditation on the interplay between mind and memory and the art of painting. The luminous and textured surfaces of her magisterial paintings seem to have come from somewhere in the depths of time, and they have arrived with traces of their history, perhaps even the imprint of the whole history of their medium, embedded deep within.

Memory attended at the birth of the art of painting. Its origins can be traced to our ancestors’ discovery that marks and scratches on a rock or a cave wall would remain in place and since they were held on a surface existing within the shared world, they could be more than just a lasting record. Made with intent and invested with meaning, marks could serve as both expression and communication. Hence it seems likely that meaningful mark making evolved in concert with the emergence of spoken language. Each of Goethals’ paintings begins with random marks, and both mark making and the roots of language are some of her central concerns.

Anamnesis refers to recollection, recalling to mind and countering forgetfulness (amnesia). In her commitment to abstract painting, Goethals acknowledges that painting can only grow from a firm basis in its tradition and the nature of its being, which must not be forgotten. But our present culture seems to have lost track of how it is that paintings have meaning. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell noted, “To speak now of modernism as an activity of an avant-garde... implies a conflict between a coherent culture and a declared and massed enemy, when in fact the case is more like an effort, along blocked paths and hysterical turnings, to hang onto a thread that leads from a lost center to a world lost.”

Goethals had called an earlier series “*Mnemosyne*,” after the goddess of memory, known to the Greeks as mother

of the Muses. Before the advent of writing, the arts of poetry, epic, music, dance and drama all had to be transmitted by committing them to memory. There was no muse for painting. Perhaps the Greeks thought that sculpture and painting simply were, at base, commemorative in function, since they were intended to stand in physically for an absent original that they only mechanically imitated. (This would be more or less

the way the nineteenth century regarded photography.) The kind of *mimesis* employed by Greek painters and sculptors was considered especially suspect by Plato, who felt that they trafficked in mere appearances and offered a false memory, twice removed from the soul’s innate memory of the eternal forms.

Plato used the term *anamnesis* to refer to the recovery of knowledge that is retained within the soul and is eternal, which was the basis of Socrates’ claim that what one perceives to be learning is actually the recovery of what one has forgotten. For the medieval and Renaissance Neo-Platonists, *anamnesis* was as close as the human mind could come to experiencing

the freedom of the soul prior to its being encumbered by matter as a body bound into the physical world. The shock of incarnation, the Neo-Platonists believed, causes the soul to forget its divine origins. “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,” wrote Wordsworth, “But trailing clouds of glory do we come.”

Modern research suggests these are clouds of the unconscious. Much of Goethals’ sense of *anamnesis* has been informed by Julia Kristeva’s theories about the evolution of consciousness and the acquisition of language. Probing beyond Freud’s work on the emergence of subconscious drives, Kristeva posited a pre-conscious phase that she called the “semiotic.” A volatile generative phase of psychic and physiological development within the evolving body, the semiotic occurs before any form of decisive distinction of separateness can be made. It operates within a mobile space that is ephemeral,





unstable, rhythmic and irreducible to any intelligible verbal translation, but it produces the threshold of mind and language and remains beyond any possibility of conscious recollection. Amniotic, perhaps, as much as it is semiotic, this originating space seems to be operating in Goethals' paintings.

"I have a deep conviction about the power of painting to realign one's brain cells and to connect us with our core," Goethals has said. "I believe we have in our cellular memory an inner awareness of a universal language. And our artistic mind is made up of a mosaic of thoughts and images collected over the years, which can then be forgotten or put aside to reach the emptiness from which new work can manifest itself. But, in opposition to the 'tabula rasa' necessary to the early modernists, my work is about integration and distillation, and reinvesting the constituents of painting as a space of contemplation."

Goethals has revived the ancient medium of encaustic to produce her muted and masterful panels. A technique known to the Egyptians, encaustic employs ground pigments mixed with heated beeswax and resin, and Goethals' paintings always retain a memory of the earth through the presence of these natural materials. Wax is an especially sensuous and receptive substance. Worked in a semi-molten state, it can be poured or brushed onto the smooth wood surface, scraped back and reapplied in multiple layers, scratched and etched or flooded with brush strokes, rubbed off and built back again. And as the layers accumulate, traces of earlier events are buried and yet still visible in the translucent wax, which wears its history on its delicate skin. Cloudy or clear, the surface sometimes congeals into tiny ripples here and there, like water or windblown sand. Occasionally, Goethals gently brands the skin of hardened wax with a heated tool, leaving a rhythmic



mark like ritual scarification that joins the ripples to reestablish the surface plane.

An atmosphere of archeology hovers around Goethals' recent work. In part, this can be a factor of the range of earth pigments she uses, the ochres and siennas, beiges, grays, and sun-bleached whites, and her richly textured surfaces suggest faded frescoes and dusty mosaics. But many of her titles also call to mind ancient Mediterranean cultures. *Thera* is an island near Crete where archeologists discovered fragments of beautiful wall paintings in a city destroyed by a volcanic eruption that may have wiped out the entire Minoan civilization, spawning the legend of Atlantis. *Marinka* is a place on Corsica. And Goethals' brooding black *Bosphorus* identifies the straits separating Asia from Europe. Although nothing is illustrated, Goethals has steeped *Bosphorus* in the tragic history of that critical crossing,

from the ox that swam it and gave it its name, to today's massive oil tankers passing through, dripping with the dangers of the devastating political and environmental consequences of their contested cargo.

History, politics, memory, and the language of paint all fold together. Goethals is able to pour a wide range of feeling into her wax surfaces. While remaining resolutely abstract, *Flag, Scrambled* can be seen to contain another charged political commentary. The old red, white, and blue of the American flag have been dispersed in a field of chalky white. Painted in 2008 after the financial debacle, it may also be a delayed reaction to the distress and confusion of the events of 9/11, the choking cloud of plaster dust, and the government's unhinged global reaction. But Goethals' practice also confronts issues in the history of painting. If Jasper Johns famously countered Jackson Pollock's heroic and expansive abstractions by condensing all that was dispersed in them into a solid emblem of Old Glory, Goethals has given Johns' waxy *Flag* a Pollock treatment, scattering it over the field.

“At the intersection of the expressive and the minimal, these paintings celebrate uncertainty and flux.”

The internalized landscape is reduced to its minimal resonance: the sound of the wind, the dust on a windshield, and the further abstracted notion of nature.”

— Raphaëlle Goethals

While excavating, archeologists often stretch a grid of string over their dig site. Goethals also incorporates a grid, although it is often so subtle that it can escape notice until it flashes almost subliminally into your awareness. Composed mostly of small widely spaced dots in sparse rows, and suspended over the unstable indeterminacy of her formative surfaces, the grid is almost more implied than present. If you blink, it might disappear. Like pinpoints of light pulsing in deep space, it hovers on the edge of perception.

But Goethals' grid does not function in the expected manner. Instead of flattening and unifying the space, it often does the opposite. Instead of harmonizing, it adds a note of modernist dissonance. Sometimes she will introduce slight aberrations, selecting a seemingly

random dot and enlarging it or giving it a bright color. Enlarged and spaced at irregular intervals, these dots destabilize the grid. Seemingly fleeing away from the eye, or coming unexpectedly forward, the dots can actually increase the sensation of deep empty space. It's an almost acoustic effect, like intermittent water drops echoing in a cave.

Usually the grid appears to float over the surface. Like the screen coordinates on a monitoring device for some high-tech weapon or deep-space probe, the grid superimposes an alien presence over the field surveyed. It is Goethals' reminder of the ever-present rational order of the western mind, imposing itself on the external chaos of the unknown.

By slowly applying and reworking multiple layers, Goethals makes paintings that contain evidence of their long evolution, like strata of the earth's surface. Deep within, there is a sense of both accumulation and loss. Memory wants to hold on, but along with the impulsive bodying forth of innovation and intention, there is also the effect of its remorse, of purposeful rubbing out, and of time's indifferent and ineluctable erasure. "From dust to dust," with an errant narrative in between, sums up a life. "Dust Stories" is the title of Goethals' current ongoing series of paintings, whose surfaces seem swept by an archeologist's broom. Dust is partly cleared away, but remains undisputed. And through its diffuse blur can be glimpsed all the evidence of ages, of culture's distracted forgetfulness, and of nature's idle reclaiming.

But there is also undeniable evidence of renewal, seeds and flashes of regeneration. And throughout the milky matrix you also feel the brilliant creative energy of Goethals' innovation, her successful redemption of the modernist project of *anamnesis*. She has been able to seize the soul of painting and give it new life.

"Maybe my practice was informed just as much by the Flemish masters or by the Romanticism of



Detail of *Thera*

Turner and Caspar David Friedrich from my early European upbringing as it was by Clyfford Still, Brice Marden, or Richard Serra," she said, taking stock in her new studio in Santa Fe. "I am at long last able to reconnect those two worlds; yet perhaps, a vague sense of longing and rootlessness defines me. (Which is why the unfinished openness of the American West suits me, I am *not there yet*). My practice is what gives me boundaries — without it I float, dissolve in the landscape. Sometimes I think that the vast, anonymous desert is not meant for us, not in the long run. After the initial euphoria of such physical and emotional space, we obscurely long for structure—thus the compulsion to make a mark, an underlying grid or matrix."

William Peterson is an adjunct professor of art history at the University of New Mexico and former editor of *Artspace* magazine.



RECLAIMING TERRITORY

Encaustic on birch panel

26 X 23 inches



THERA

Encaustic on birch panel
78 X 69 inches



LUMENS XXIX

Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 54 inches



GRAVITAS

Encaustic on birch panel
40 X 38 inches



DUST STORIES 0201

Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 50 inches



COMPLICITY

Encaustic on birch panel
65 X 57 inches



DUST STORIES 0302

Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 50 inches





UNDERCURRENTS
Encaustic on birch panel
20 X 18 inches



RIPTIDE

Encaustic on birch panel
20 X 18 inches

ANAMNESIS
Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 94 inches





DUST STORIES 0910

Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 50 inches



MARINKA II

Encaustic on birch panel

44 X 48 inches



DUST STORIES 0115

Encaustic on birch panel
60 X 50 inches



OF TIDES AND WANDERS

Encaustic on birch panel

60 X 50 inches



DUST STORIES: BREATH

Encaustic on birch panel

60 X 50 inches

Private Collection



DUST STORIES: FALL

Encaustic on birch panel

72 X 64 inches

Collection of the artist



FLAG, SCRAMBLED

Encaustic on birch panel

37 X 40 inches

Private Collection



LUMENS XXVIII
Encaustic on birch panel
40 X 37 inches



BOSPHORUS

Encaustic on birch panel
69 X 78 inches



RAPHAËLLE GOETHALS

BORN 1958 Brussels, Belgium
Moved to the United States in 1981

EDUCATION

1983 Otis Art Institute, Associates of Arts Degree,
Los Angeles, CA
1980 Atelier 75, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Honors,
Brussels, Belgium
1976 Centre des Arts Decoratifs, Brussels, Belgium

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 *Anamnesis*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID (catalogue)
2012 *Dust Stories*, 212 Gallery, Aspen, CO
Dust Stories, Elins Eagle Smith Gallery, San Francisco, CA
2009 *From Here On*, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
2008 *Adrift*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
2007 *Quiescence*, Lemmons Contemporary, NYC, NY
2005 *Mnemosyne*, Elins Eagle Smith Gallery, San Francisco, CA
2004 *Borealis*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Borealis, Lemmons Contemporary, NYC, NY
2003 *Reclaiming Territory*, Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta, GA
2002 *Raphaëlle Goethals: New Work*, Gail Severn Gallery,
Ketchum, ID
2001 Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Galisteo, NM
Blurred Boundaries, Sioux City Art Center,
Sioux City, IO, (catalogue)
1999 *Lumens*, Linda Durham Contemporary Art,
Galisteo, NM, (catalogue)
1997 *Reasons for Praying to an Empty Altar*, Linda Durham
Contemporary Art, Galisteo, NM
Erickson and Elins Gallery, San Francisco, CA
1995 *Towards a Reconciliation with Beauty*, Linda Durham
Contemporary Art, Galisteo, NM

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2012 *Preview 2013*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Eastern Traditions, Western Expression,
Boise Art Museum, ID
The Palm Springs Art Fair, Elins Eagle Smith Gallery, CA
SF Art Market, San Francisco, CA, exhibited by
Gail Severn Gallery
2011 *Marks and Conversations*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Art Chicago, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Gail Severn Gallery
Commence: a philosophical détente, Bill Lowe Gallery,
Atlanta, GA
Gallery Artists, 212 Gallery, Aspen, CO
2010 *Contemporary Painting*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Gallery Artists, 212 Gallery, Aspen, CO
Thirty Years of Collecting: Recent Gift to the Museum,
Scottsdale MOCA, Arizona
Art Chicago, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Gail Severn Gallery
Contemporary Highlights, Gerald Peters Gallery,
Santa Fe, NM
SITE Unseen, James Kelly Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, NM
2009 *Surface VI*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
2008 *Encaustics*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Art Miami, Gerald Peters Gallery, Miami, FL
Art Chicago, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Gail Severn Gallery
Silver Lining, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
SITE Unseen, James Kelly Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, NM
2007 *Surface V*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Order in Motion, Lemmons Contemporary, NYC, NY
Strata, Lemmons Contemporary, NYC, NY
Richard Nonas, Linda Flemmings, Raphaëlle Goethals,
Lemmons Contemporary NYC, NY
Hot Wax, The Rooms, St. Johns, Canada
2006 *Surface IV*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
2005 *Surface III*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Art Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
New Acquisitions, NM Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM
San Francisco International Art Fair,
Elins Eagles-Smith Gallery, CA



Borealis, Solo Exhibition, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID 2004

- 2004 *Marks and Materials : Raphaëlle Goethals, Squeak Carnwath, & Marcia Myers*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
New Directions, Lucas de Bruycker Fine Art, Ghent, Belgium
San Francisco International Art Fair, Elins Eagles-Smith Gallery, CA
SITE Unseen, James Kelly Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, NM
Art Chicago, Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL
- 2003 *Past as Prologue*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Contemporary Views, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
The Los Angeles Art Show, Los Angeles, CA
Gallery Artists, Linda Durham Contemporary Art, NYC, NY
Art Chicago, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Linda Durham Contemporary Art and Fay Gold Gallery
Art Palm Beach, Palm Beach, FL, exhibited by Fay Gold Gallery
The Armory Show, exhibited by Fay Gold Gallery, NYC, NY
Gallery Artists, Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Galisteo, NM
Group Show, Fassbender Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2002 *Surface II*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Art Cologne, Cologne, Germany
New Faces, Robert Kidd Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
Art Chicago 2002, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Fay Gold Gallery
Rocky Mountain Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Fort Collins, CO
- 2001 *Between the Lines*, Bushlen Mowatt Gallery, Palm Desert, CA
Six in the City, Linda Durham Contemporary Art, NYC, NY
New Paintings and Works On Paper, Keith Jacobsen, David Shapiro and Raphaëlle Goethals, Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO
Art Chicago 2001, Chicago, IL
Art Miami 2001, Miami Beach, FL (also 2000)
- 2000 *Surface*, Gail Severn Gallery, Ketchum, ID
Art Chicago 2000, Chicago, IL, exhibited by Linda Durham Contemporary Art, Galisteo, NM (Also 1999-1996)
Abstraction, Hot and Cool, Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO

- 1999 *Past, Present and Future*, Gail Severn Gallery,
Ketchum, ID
Three NM Artists, Margo Jacobsen Gallery,
Portland, OR
San Francisco International Art Exposition,
San Francisco, CA (also 2000)
SITE Unseen, James Kelly Contemporary, to benefit
SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
Art Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
- 1998 *San Francisco International Art Exposition*,
San Francisco, CA
Ida y Vuelta, Musée Denys Puech, Rodez, France;
(catalogue)
- 1997 *State of the Questions*, NM Museum of Fine Art,
Santa Fe, NM
Seattle Art Fair, Seattle, Washington (also 1996)
Art Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM
- 1995 *Synesthesia: A Collaboration*, Linda Durham
Contemporary Art, Galisteo, and OffSite,
Santa Fe, NM
Visions of Excellence, Albuquerque, NM
- 1994 *Studio B7*, Santa Fe, NM
Visions of Excellence, Albuquerque, NM
- 1993 *The Site*, Praxis, Los Angeles, CA
Summer Salon, Spirit, Santa Fe, NM
- 1992 *Community Wellness Art Auction*, Venice, CA
Westminster Art Space, Venice, CA
- 1991 *International LA*, Directors' Guild of America,
Los Angeles, CA
Gallery Five, Santa Monica, CA
- 1989 *Faultline*, Los Angeles County Art Museum,
Los Angeles, CA
- 1987 *Narrative Aspects*, Ariel Gallery, NYC, NY
Salon des Independents, Richard Bennett Gallery,
Los Angeles, CA
Attack Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 1985 *Farewell to the Bridal District*, LACE, Los Angeles, CA

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- Brandauer, Aline. *Ida y Vuelta*, catalog essay, 1999
- Carlisle, Susanna. "Critical Reflection," *THE Magazine*, Oct. 1999
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- Frérot, Christine. *Art Nexus*, No. 31, Feb.-April, 1999
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The New Mexican, April 21, 1995
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April 09, 2004
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- Laget, Mokha, "Below the Surface," *The Santa Fe Reporter*,
March 14, 2001
- La Palma, Marina, "Dust Stories," *THE Magazine*,
Oct., 2012
- McCloud, Kathleen. "Her Own Call to Prayer," *The New
Mexican: Pasatiempo Magazine*, Sept. 26, 1997
- McCloud, Kathleen. "Not About Answers," *The New Mexican*,
Feb. 28, 1997
- New American Painting*, number 24, November, 1999
- New Mexico Millennium Collection II*, Albuquerque, NM:
Fresco Fine Art Publications, 2001
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Nov. 21, 2001
- Peterson, William, *Anamnesia*, catalog essay, Feb., 2013
- Reed, Arden, *Paradoxes of the Visible*, catalog essay,
July, 1999
- Stapley, Caprice. "Realism in the Abstract,"
The Kansas City Star
- Sardy, Marin. "Critical Reflections" *THE Magazine*, Oct., 2009

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID
Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ
Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, MO
Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, NM
Albers Enterprises, Oakland, CA
Paul Allen Collection, Portland, OR
Mitchell Brown, Scottsdale, AZ
Blue Oak Capital, Palo Alto, CA
Context Inc., CT
Chesterman Company, Sioux City, IA
Carolyn Eason Collection
The Four Seasons Resort, Scottsdale, AZ
Henis Technologies, St. Louis, MO
Hewlett Packard, San Francisco, CA
Holdenried Collection, Grünwald, Germany
Hutchinson Telephone, MN
Herstand Collection, FL
Kennedy Group, TX
Lincoln National Corporation
Metz Collection, Sioux City, IA
Manulife Wood Logan, Inc., Santa Barbara, CA
Millennium Group
NB Design Group, Seattle, WA
Propel Insurance, Tacoma, WA
Ritz Carlton, Palm Beach, FL
Regent, Bal Harbor, FL
Ring and Associate, Douglas Ring, Los Angeles, CA
Time Warner, NYC, NY
Pachulsky, Stang and Ziehl, Los Angeles, CA
Ruth Ziegler, NYC, NY
Weill Cornell Medical Center, NYC, NY
Stephen A. Wynn Collection, Las Vegas, NV



Installation view of *Thirty Years of Collecting: A Recent Gift to the Museum* (September 4, 2010 – January 23, 2011), Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. © SMOCA



Photograph by Herb Lotz

RAPHAËLLE GOETHALS

ANAMNESIS

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Front & Back Cover:
ANAMNESIS
 Encaustic on birch panel
 60 X 94 inches