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Love Mooney-Martin, Lucia. "Muscle Memory: Kim Dingle talks about her Blindfold paintings with Lucia Love Mooney-Martin." *www.artcritical.com (artcritical)*, 1 March 2018.

## artcritical



Installation shot of the exhibition under review, Kim Dingle: *Painting Blindfolded*, at Sperone Westwater, 2018

In case anyone is wondering if the title of this show is metaphorical, Kim Dingle has actually chosen to create an entire body of work blindfolded. These gestural, immediate, expressionistic compositions are formed by a few sweeping brush strokes dashed across Plexiglass panels, mostly in black and white, with the occasional accenting fleck of a primary color. But while the title is literal, the action of taking a brush to these industrially uniform surfaces without the aid of sight is nonetheless a meditation on where knowledge is stored.

For most of Dingle's career, the artist has been known for sculptures and images of a pugnacious little avatar she has named Priss, a character inspired by her niece whose formative years were a pendulum swing between prim Sunday special attire, and head banging flights of havoc. Unfortunately, when an artist becomes known for some specific content, they often feel obligated to produce visually related material in perpetuity. As a joke about feeling the pressure to maintain continuous mechanized production to feed this media leviathan, Dingle tells me, she would exclaim to friends, "I've done these Priss works so many times already, I could do them with my eyes closed. I could do them blindfolded... oh. Wait. Is that true? That's an idea! I will do them blindfolded!"

The result of this initial frustration eventually gave way to emotional discovery. "When I take the blindfold off, the first thing I do is laugh with relief. Nothing comes out right. The girl's socks are off to the side, and well, that dress is floating a little high. Each piece is a challenge, but I end up showing every one."



Kim Dingle, *Untitled (not to worry)*, 2017. Oil on Plexiglas, 51 x 41 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater

This all-inclusive attitude comes from an experiment put forward by Tom Hatten, a television personality from the 1950s. As host of the Popeye Show he staged a contest where kids were invited to draw a squiggle that Hatten was then required to transform into a character. If he was unable to do so, the squiggler won a free bike. Usually, however, through free association, he found something within the kiddy abstraction. This stuck with Dingle, who now believes that every move is imbued with the possibility for recognition. As a poetic gesture, the artist has also been writing blindfolded on an iPad. While the writing is illegible, upon inspection some intonations arise from the garbled text. Fingers miss their mark on the keyboard, but the rhythm of speech is still evident. This led Dingle to muse upon the underlying muscle memory guiding all physical expression. “The thing about muscle memory is that I can’t be blindfolded and expect to paint Picasso’s *Guernica*. His figures aren’t within me. I haven’t practiced that dance. But I could imagine the composition, and make my own *Guernica*, with my girls.”

Muscle memory is formed through habitual repetition and is stored in the cerebellum, way back behind our verbal centers. It is this subconscious experience that David Salle prizes in the seasoned painter. In “How To See” he argues that time spent in repetition enriched the output of painters like Alex Katz and Malcom Morley. Their practiced movements smoothed with the confidence of a lifetime of committed depiction.

For Dingle it is remembering the steps of a dance that resonates through her fully intuitive process.

According to Professor Patrick Haggard (of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience in London) when a ballerina commits a routine to memory, proprioceptive cognitive ability runs its course. This is an automatic function of the brain. It receives signals automatically about the physical makeup of each moving part of the body, and creates a spatial model of it within our subconscious mind in order to navigate. This activity in the cerebellum is heightened for anyone who periodically runs the same physical routine.

As a final barrier to her conscious, verbal mind hijacking a state of free figuration, Dingle makes sure to occupy her frontal cortex with some trashy talk radio. “I can’t listen to any heartbreakingly beautiful music while I’m making these paintings. It would distract me from becoming distracted, send me down a river of feeling.” Much of this process of stripping away the usually integral senses tied with viewing art seems tied with eradicating socially elicited emotions. After decades of living with Priss, Dingle has made her way to the deepest memory center of her mind, the one that can operate without rational calculations of audience approval or shame.