



Felipe Fredes's  
The Seventh Moment:  
Walking Modernism's Dawn

TESE  
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Vestergade 49, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark  
[www.galleritese.dk](http://www.galleritese.dk)



## Felipe Fredes at TESE Gallery

For the 2022 summer exhibition, TESE gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of artist Felipe Fredes, titled *The Seventh Moment: Walking Modernism's Dawn*.

Felipe Fredes is a multidisciplinary artist and neuroscientist born and raised in Northern Chile. For nearly a decade, he has photographed and painted works that explore mortality, alchemy and mysticism, and the formation of self-image. His subjects include elusive landscapes, large-scale existential paintings, and abstract triptychs. He experiments using diverse materials, combining, for instance, silver gelatin, oil, and dry pastel. Many of his signature black-and-white silver gelatin works are derived from Fredes's scientific background using two processes called freeze fracture replica labeling, and Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM). To create these images, he uses an image of brain tissue at a subcellular scale. He incorporates these images in planning or executing works, often destroying them for the sake of constructing new painted elements.

Fredes's work examines his relationship with the mystery of life and the inner certainty that life has no transcendental purpose. His art is a personal alchemy—transforming anxiety and fear of disappearing into a mirror—reflecting death in spirit. Influenced by Impressionism, like Van Gogh, Abstract Expressionism, like Paul Cezanne, and Francis Bacon's converging of modernity and tradition, Fredes is inspired by their dramatic artistic breakthroughs and threads it into his work today. He pushes towards modernism, while drawing additional inspiration from philosophy based on Phenomenology, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. His work reflects his powerful intuition, contemplation, and feelings—with an infinite ocean inside of him that considers the impermanence of flesh. His images stare at us asking what will we do with this time we have alive?

Fredes currently lives and works in Aarhus, Denmark. His work has recently been the subject of influential exhibitions at Works Arts Fair in Aarhus (2020), Art Nordic Fair in Copenhagen (2021), Chilean Conexión (2021), Van Gogh Gallery in Madrid (2021), Luxemburg Art Fair (2022), and will be exhibited at the Clio Art Fair in New York City (2022).

## The Seventh Moment: Walking Modernism's Dawn

The 1839 invention of the Daguerreotype impacted society and the artistic world in such a way that not Daguerre nor anyone could have foreseen. By surpassing painting in its ability to represent reality, photography, in a way, released painting from the need to be realistic. Painting until then had a strictly representative role: to imitate nature as accurately as possible. When photography appeared, this was a relatively easy task, and could be done by anyone who owned a camera. This feeling can be summarized in Baudelaire words describing photography as "the refuge of failed painters with too little talent."

For this reason, the focus of painters shifted from representing reality to portraying emotions and impressions which finally led to abstraction. Photography can, for this reason, be seen as a great or perhaps the major drive for the reinvention of painting and the origin of abstraction, that began in late 19th century through the 20th century. In the same way, photography followed the same tendency towards subjectivity and abstraction, which contributed to its recognition as an art form of its own.

In this work, which took seven years to complete, I have taken steps to create a dialogue between painting and photography. This has allowed me to experience the mutual transformation of these mediums, from representative art to abstraction, which occurred in the transition of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For this purpose, I have made a series of seven iterative pieces that starts with a photograph representing a baroque painting by Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, which I transformed with oil painting, photographed again, printed with silver gelatin on canvas, mutated again, and so on until reaching complete abstraction.

Working on this series, I have experienced this colossal transit of humanity and twist of human mind, and it has helped me understand the pivotal and amazing moment that changed art and society dramatically, which secretly and continuously permeates into our daily lives.

- Felipe Fredes, July 2022



*The Moment I*, 2014  
photopaper  
43.3 x 59 in. / 110 x 150 cm



*The Moment II*, 2015  
silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 110 x 150 cm



*The Moment III*, 2018  
oil and silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 110 x 150 cm



*The Moment IV*, 2019  
oil and silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 9 110 x 150 cm

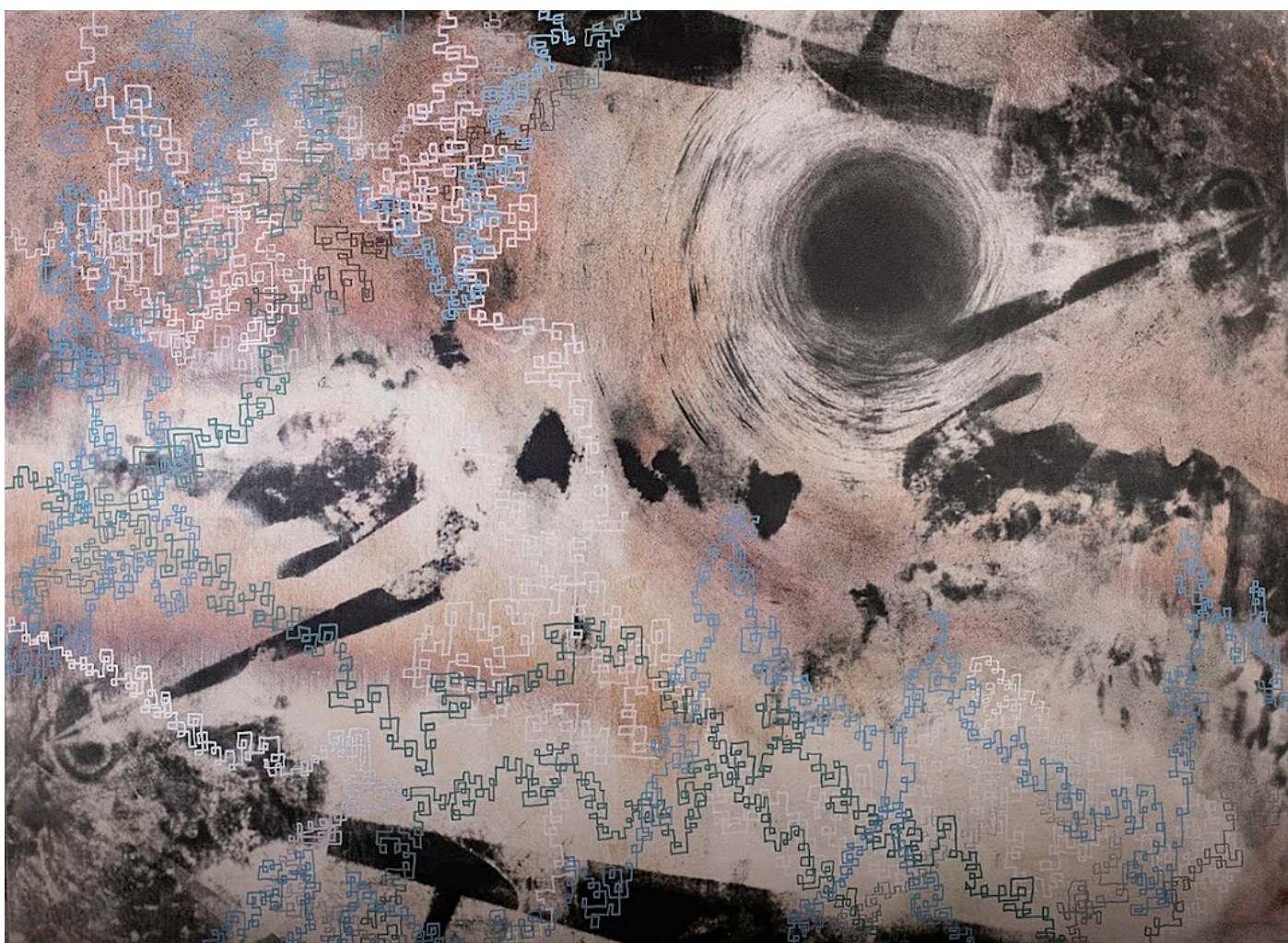




*The Moment V*, 2020  
oil, dry pastel, and silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 9 110 x 150 cm



*The Moment VI*, 2020  
oil, dry pastel, and silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 9 110 x 150 cm



*The Moment VII*, 2021  
oil, dry pastel, and silver gelatin on canvas  
43.3 x 59 in. / 110 x 150 cm

## Felipe's Walk to the Edge of Modern Art

What I am trying to translate to you  
is more mysterious; it is entwined in  
the very roots of being,  
in the impalpable source of sensations.

- J. Gasquet<sup>1</sup>

Why do museums exist? This poses the larger question of why do masterpieces, or even art exist? One of the oldest mosaics in the world, found in the ancient capital of Macedonia, Pella, has one simple answer: the light created it. This mosaic, called *The Stag Hunt* mosaic, was created in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE by "Gnosis epoesen." While little is known about the artist, his signature means 'light or knowledge created' in Greek.<sup>2</sup> The statement the "light created it" can be carried over across centuries to any masterpiece or work of art, whether the artist was pursuing light by paint or photography.

In 2014, Felipe Fredes began a seven-year heuristic journey to understand the relationship between painting and photography, and naturally, the light captured by both mediums. Turning to the Greeks again, he recalled the root of the word photography, which is derived from the Greek word 'photo' meaning 'light,' and 'graph', meaning 'to draw.'<sup>3</sup> If photography was essentially "drawing with light" and could mechanically capture the light, Fredes asked: why did painting not become obsolete after the invention of the daguerreotype, or the first publicly available camera in 1839?<sup>4</sup>

Fredes turned to one of the Italian masters, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610), to inspire his monumental series.<sup>5</sup> Caravaggio is considered one of the European masters of light who painted moments of sudden drama and forged a new relationship between the subject and the beholder.<sup>6</sup> In addition to *how* the viewer should experience his paintings (as the beholder), Caravaggio also aimed at *what* should touch the viewers senses. Caravaggio in a rare statement about his art once exclaimed, "All works, no matter what or by whom painted, are nothing but bagatelles and childish trifles... unless they are made and painted from life, and there can be nothing...better than to follow nature."<sup>7</sup> Fredes tears a page from Caravaggio's playbook,

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gasquet, Cézanne quoted by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Wolfe, "The Stag Hunt by Gnosis, Pella Mosaic (Late 4th Century BCE)," *Furman University: Scholars Exchange* (2015), viewed on 06-01-22, available online at <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/art231/54/>.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the artist, June 6, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Daniel, "Daguerre (1787–1851) and the Invention of Photography," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), viewed on 06-06-2022, available online at [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dagu/hd\\_dagu.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dagu/hd_dagu.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Keith Christiansen, "Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi) (1571–1610) and His Followers," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 2003), viewed on 06-05-22, available online at [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/crvq/hd\\_crvq.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/crvq/hd_crvq.htm).

<sup>6</sup> David Sylvester, "Daumier" in *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-96* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> John Rupert Martin, "Naturalism" in *Baroque* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), 5.

and formally pays homage to the master by following nature in a way that was not possible in the 1600s.

To begin, Fredes “follows nature” from a photograph of posed models, and reproduces Caravaggio’s famous *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*.<sup>8</sup> Like St. Thomas doubting Christ’s resurrection, Fredes questioned painting’s relevance considering the power of photography to capture light mechanically. For Fredes, it would require transforming light and shadows of a photograph to redeem and renew painting’s virtue in the realm of abstraction and modernism.

The first photograph, *The Moment I*, was taken in Fredes’s studio in Vienna using a Horseman 4 x 5 field camera in 2014.<sup>9</sup> Fredes took 6 total negatives that were individually developed, a craft whereby he extends the exposure time and under-develops the negative to increase the contrast. This resulted in the vintage and enigmatic work on photopaper, *The Moment I*, which beautifully depicts a full palette of greys, even silver-like quality in St. Thomas. *The Moment I* would be the foundation for the forthcoming six works. Setting this image as the backdrop of every variation is significant because it creates a work of absolute photography that will evolve into painted abstraction.

Fredes began the arduous task of creating six additional variations of *The Moment I* by first asking a simple question: how can I break it?<sup>10</sup> Behind each work, Felipe ruminated on the solidity and order of the photograph against the color and chaos of painting. In 2015, Felipe took the first valiant attempt in breaking the photograph with his second work of the series, *The Moment II*. He creates *The Moment II* by printing the source negative, *The Moment I*, using silver gelatin applied on canvas. The copper, burnt umber wash on the canvas appears rusted; time and chance involved in printing have taken a toll on the figures. Fredes’s abstraction erodes the visual unity of the original image depicting a rusted effect, a cracking of the photographic shell of *The Moment I*.

This leads to the second question Fredes contemplated in this series: how can there be visual balance?<sup>11</sup> To answer this question, in 2018, Fredes made another significant leap to the series: printing *The Moment I* using silver gelatin applied on canvas, but this time, adding colorful oil paint in *The Moment III*. This painting depicts the black-and-white figures of the photograph with an array of painted green, blue hues in the background, red drapery of the apostles, and greys and whites that make up the figure of Christ.<sup>12</sup> The color added to the background has an omnipresence against the black-and-white figures, specifically, amid the green hues and complementary red hues that illuminate the canvas.<sup>13</sup>

Combining photography with painting, Fredes must reckon the organization of one medium, with the chaos of the other. Fredes uses color to balance, harmonize, and render new sensations around the work. Fredes sought to make *The Moment III* “lost in space” and was inspired

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<sup>8</sup> Rupert Martin, “Naturalism” in *Baroque*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the artist, June 6 2022. The team behind this photoshoot included a make-up artist to prepare the two Argentinians, Guatemalan, and Peruvian who would assume the roles of Christ and his apostles in the photograph. In the same way Caravaggio used posed models and most likely use vermilion red to paint the cloaks of the biblical characters, Fredes with his discerning eye for details, had his friends model for him, used cloaks of a similar red (although the photograph would be black-and-white), and even used similar dimensions of the original masterpiece.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, June 27, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Throughout the series, it will be increasingly difficult to distinguish between the black-and-white of the silver gelatin print, and the precisely mixed black-and-white oil paint of Fredes’s palette. A playful illusion, even residual humor that resulted from working with both mediums.

<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth and comprehensive study of Cezanne’s influence on Fredes’s work, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt,” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 11. Merleau-Ponty describes how Cezanne did not isolate local colors and used the phenomenon of modifying contrasting local colors in nature instead. Fredes deployed the same color technique, as Merleau-Ponty describes: “Furthermore, by a sort of reversal, every color we perceive in nature elicits the appearance of its complement; and these complementaries heighten one another. To achieve sunlit colors in a picture which will be seen in the dim light of apartments, not only must there be a green—if you are painting grass— but also the complementary red which will make it vibrate.”

by the paintings of another largely self-taught artist, Vincent Van Gogh.<sup>14</sup> The broad impressionist-like strokes of color fill up space, and he intensifies the figures with going over the swells of drapery with color.

In 2019, Fredes takes a photograph of *The Moment III* and prints the image on silver gelatin applied on canvas. For the first time, the black-and-white photograph encompasses both painting and photography in *The Moment IV*. The original photograph of the figures are less in tact and the previously painted colors are reverted to black-and-white as well. Moreover, Fredes paints a new layer that depicts rays of light emitting from the wound of Christ. *The Moment IV* equates the divine light with painted color, an idea that Fredes will continue to express in the rest of the series.

In *The Moment V*, *The Moment VI*, and *The Moment VII*, Fredes continues taking a photograph of the preceding work and paints over it. He discovers a new rhythm with this Fibonacci-like sequence, and each work presents an original expression of our lived experience. Fredes does not grow weary from observing the photographic backdrop of the previously painted-over work, instead, it allows Fredes to enter a heightened state of observation.

This is evident in *The Moment V*, which demonstrates how the viewer's eyes meet the work, hence, creating a new moment. It's demonstrated in plain sight—the lines of the freehand green pastel versus calculated red pastel—illustrate the optical function of how our eyes see fine details, or our "foveal vision."<sup>15</sup> Fredes understands that our foveal vision is not a passive process, and instead explains that "movement is a consequence of vision."<sup>16</sup> Our eyes naturally connect-the-dots through color, information, and details that will explain the narrative of the image so we can decipher its meaning. This work brilliantly recreates the small movements of the eye, called "saccades" through multiple layers: the dry pastel layer, and all the layers contained within the silver gelatin image, particularly the rays of light in the backdrop.<sup>17</sup>

Fredes makes his final transformations by using multiple exposures and adding eye-striking elements in *The Moment VI* and *The Moment VII*. *The Moment VI* features two exposures like the preceding work, however, Fredes turns the canvas around by 180 degrees for each of them.<sup>18</sup> He takes a new negative of *The Moment VI* and turns it into a positive for the final cumulative blow in *The Moment VII*. Moreover, *The Moment VI* and *The Moment VII* both have what Fredes calls a "black-hole" off-centered in both compositions. This is symbolic of the original *The Moment I* (which is barely visible) and the portions of our sight that are lost to the blue and green freehand pastel on canvas.

Ultimately, Fredes's first step is how to break, and his second, is how to balance (where balance extends 'to make' equilibrium). For instance, Fredes breaks and balances the painting by adding vibrant color and movement to a black-and-white photograph. He does this in both directions by taking photographs of the preceding work and reverting his carefully mixed and colorful palette of oil paint to black-and-white silver gelatin again. Like Caravaggio's infamous

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with the artist, June 27, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Neault, "Tracking The Gaze," *Art21 Magazine*, 1 (2013), viewed on 07-14-22, available online at <http://magazine.art21.org/2013/01/07/tracking-the-gaze/#.YtAveOzMLdp>.

<sup>16</sup> Felipe Fredes quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The artist explains over an email 07-07-22: "The eye gazing is called "fovealization" given that the human eye has a spot where acuity is maximum, and it is also where most of the color photoreceptors are. This spot is called "fovea" and is in the retina (...) In common-sense, vision is a passive process. This experiment and others have clearly shown that this far from true, vision is active. In animals, people demonstrated that if you stop some micromovements of the eye, called "micro-saccades," they cannot see at all! Movement is a consequence of vision, says Merleau-Ponty."

<sup>17</sup> Neault, "Tracking the Gaze." The photographic backdrop of *The Moment V* and *The Moment VI* depict two exposures, wherein one is out of focus. We can hypothesize that perhaps the movement of our eyes go beyond the dry pastel's rendering of "foveal vision" to our eye's processing of an image between two exposures as well.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with the artist, June 17, 2022. In the darkroom, flashing a non-exposed negative together with the one already developed, Fredes transformed the exposed negative into a positive.

sword, Fredes breaks and distorts the image into precise fragments.<sup>19</sup> This is how Fredes's walks to the ever-receding horizon of modernism, and transforms images in a step-by-step, break-and-make dynamic movement. As an artist, he walks in this way to create, and the viewer, experiences a reborn work with each painting. Paradoxically, he breaks and makes the painting with each new variation—like terraforming the surface of each canvas and finding new worlds within each. This world is our lived experience. Each work is engulfed in thought, and he transforms the fragments into something fundamentally deep and whole again.

The mosaic first mentioned in the introduction of this text encapsulates the power of "the light created it," and it should be noted that its ostensible theme is the hunter being hunted.<sup>20</sup> Upon the invention of the camera, we assume the camera is the new 'hunter' of light, and painting, the former hunter of light, now falls to 'hunted' and its legitimacy is questioned. Fredes transforms one to find another. Fredes valiantly approached this pursuit like the first painter behind a canvas and camera, and crisscrosses the chasm between photography and painting, or reality and our lived experience altogether.<sup>21</sup> *The Moment I* is reborn six different times, a thread that runs through the series like our eyes moving in saccades before any one of the works. Pulling fourth into the realm of abstraction, Fredes bravely walks over the photographic and painted terrain of each canvas, and spontaneously, burst through order and chaos. Fredes "joins the wandering hands of nature" by making visible the way the world moves and opens itself up to our eyes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letizia Treves, "Caravaggio: His life and style in three paintings," (London: The National Gallery, 2016), viewed on 07-21-22, available on <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio>. Notably, "Caravaggio's technique was as spontaneous as his temper" and his sword got him in trouble for most of his life. Unlike Caravaggio's sword, however, Fredes aims to "break" his canvas with each work reminiscent of the Baroque master he was inspired by.

<sup>20</sup> Ovid, 43 B. C.-17 A. D. or 18 A. D., "Actaeon sees Diana naked and is turned into a stag," in *Metamorphoseon Book III*, trans. by A.S Kline (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Library, 1999), 165-205, viewed 07-15-22, available online at <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph3.htm#47697570>. The "hunter being hunted" theme stems from two Greek mythologies. Some believe the Hellenistic mosaic represents Alexander the Great (on the right) and his dog, the god Hephaistos (on the left), and the stag represents the Persians that Alexander the Great would seek to hunt after they wreaked havoc in Athens. In other Greek mythologies, like in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it is believed that the Greek hero Actaeon saw the goddess Artemis unrobed and she turned "the color of clouds stained by the opposing shafts of sun, or Aurora's brightness." (165-205) In vengeance, she turned him into a stag so he could never speak of the incident and he was hunted by his own hounds wishing he could cry out 'I am Actaeon! Know your own master!' but instead his hounds hunt him—hence, the hunter being hunted theme present (206-231). This theme coupled with the "light created it" signature has inspired artists and writers alike, and the "hunt" for light is manifested in Fredes's exploration between photography and painting.

<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt," 19. Fredes was able to breakthrough into modernism by questioning and creating from the start, which fulfills what Merleau-Ponty defines as Cezanne's ideal artist: "Cezanne's or Balzac's artist is not satisfied to be a cultured animal but takes up culture from its inception and founds it anew: he speaks as the first man spoke and paints as if no one had ever painted before. What he expresses cannot, therefore, be the translation of a clearly defined thought, since such clear thoughts are those that have already been said within ourselves or by others. 'Conception' cannot precede 'execution.' Before expression, there is nothing but a vague fever, and only the work itself, completed and understood, will prove that there was something rather than nothing to be found there."

<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt," 11.

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