

That they would sit on a mans neck  
Till his body breath spirit gave out  
That they rendered him inaudible voiceless  
Even though he was saying  
I can't breathe  
That 8 minutes passed  
8 minutes  
And the police officers involved have not  
Been arrested  
That they showed that one officer casually  
Sitting on the black mans neck  
Grizzly/ a bounty/trophy subdued  
Until there was no wrestling no life left  
That the great AIDS activist Larry Kramer  
Would die days later  
That we all owe him something of our lives  
That the memorial went on  
That the chat closed before I could say again  
Thank you Larry Kramer  
Keep fighting  
Before I could type in George Floyd's name  
In the chat box  
Say the two were connected  
In the struggle for human rights.

-Pamela Sneed

**How to investigate orders that are different in kind? (How to say the two were connected)**

Of her drawings included in "The Quiet Show" at Elizabeth Leach Gallery Joan Waltemath says in an interview that the *Treaty of 1868: Lament Drawings*, "began with the idea of how to investigate systems or orders that are different in kind in terms of how they interact with each other." *Difference*, after all, is what produces a spark: a friction, a struggle, a frustration, violence or a conversation. For Judith Butler, it is precisely the rub of our opacities where she locates our recourse to ethics. In *Giving and Account of Oneself* she asks "If I find that, despite my best efforts, a certain opacity persists and I cannot make myself fully accountable to you, is this ethical failure? Or is it a failure that gives rise to another ethical disposition in the place of a full and satisfying notion of narrative accountability?"

Joan's drawings, which are the only works of hers I have seen in person, will be the focus of this essay. The series of drawings are a lamentation of the broken 1868 land Treaty between the United States government and the Sioux, Cheyenne and Arophae tribes. I believe her investigation of the Treaty is a process of *enactment* rather than of narration and I will do my best to describe the different rituals, which produced the drawings. In my own practice as a painter I have thought about how forms structure meanings, truths and expressions of all kinds but less time thinking about how systems and forms *interact* to produce both specificity and difference so this question of enactment or interaction seems important to me.

Joan grew up on the Great Plains of Nebraska where her German ancestors settled in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on land that was part of the 1868 Treaty. Some years ago she and her brother bought a building together in Nebraska where she and the architect Peter Ballman have collaborated on the renovation. The plans for the building are based on drawings she made in the 1980's. Joan spends quite a bit of time in the Dakotas and Nebraska and is deeply enmeshed in the Lakota community there although she has lived in New York since the 1980's and now lives part time in Mexico. By coincidence, The Lament drawings were made in Mexico not far from Puerto Angel and I happen to know this part of the world from reading David Rattray's "How I became one of the Invisible," and because my Mom and her husband built a house there that I have twice visited. Joan is a person who passes between worlds and her work as an artist holds the spiritual labor of integrating the disparate places she inhabits.

## **Trauma, 2020**

At the start of the Coronavirus shutdown Munro Galloway texted me to say he wanted to start a new online project... maybe a gallery? He suggested we call it "14 Days," the length of time you would have to go into quarantine should you come into contact with someone infected with the virus. The idea evolved into a different kind of website for slower deeper investigations into an artist's practice -- we would quarantine ourselves with an artist for 14 days so-to-speak. Right away I knew I wanted to write about the painter Joan Waltemath whom I had recently met in Baltimore as a visiting artist to the Leroy E. Hoffberger graduate painting program she runs at MICA. I went to visit Joan in her studio on the Bowery in New York and was moved by her work. What I saw was the group of drawings called *Treaty of 1868: Lament Drawings*. When Munro suggested the title "14 days" I latched onto *numbers* as an excuse to write about Joan because her work uses numbers as a way to order the space of the picture plane.

Now, it is late May and I am writing more than two months after these initial brainstorming sessions. I am daunted by the practice of painting during this lock down, and even more so, by writing.

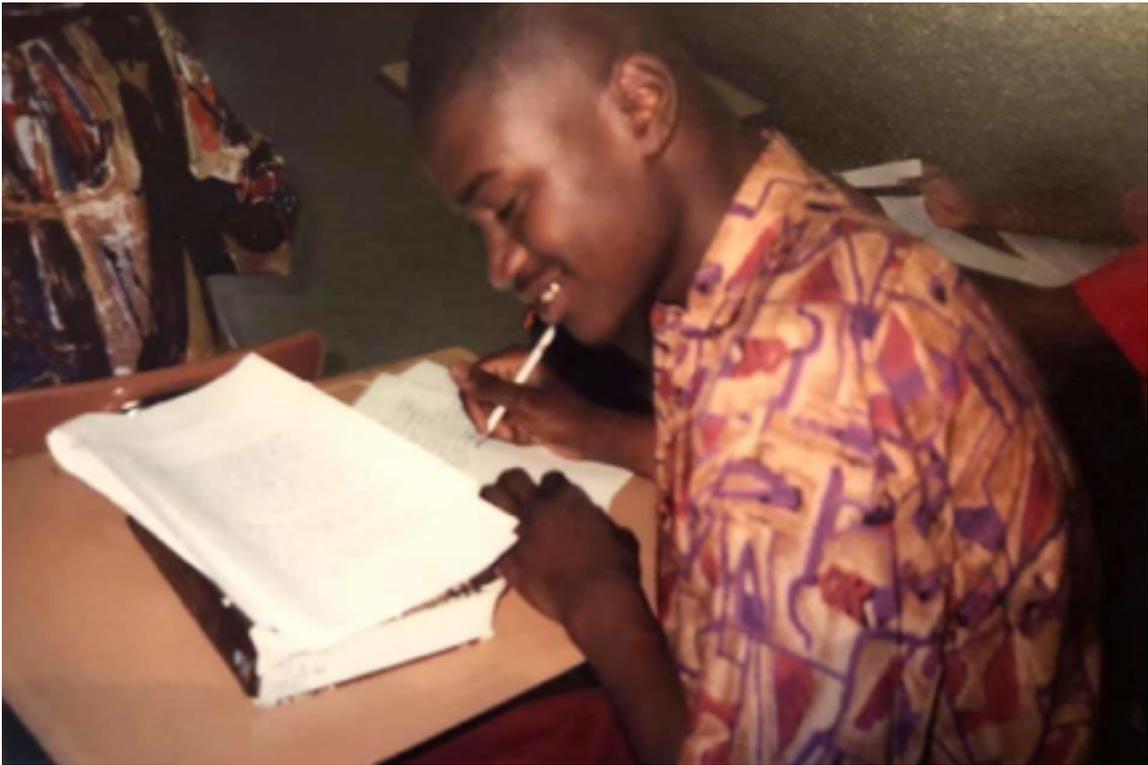
At the start of the shutdown I was tracking the number of virus cases on the New York

Times website obsessively. I told myself to remember the number 600; that was on March 14<sup>th</sup>. As I write this today the total number of cases is 355,000 and 28,100 people have died in New York. Not by reading these numbers, but by writing them down, I am overcome with sadness for all the people who have lost loved ones and an intense anger for the stupidity and incompetence that caused these deaths.

To write this essay, in the midst of the grief of the pandemic, I am confronted with a sense of weightlessness—a loss of structure feels like a loss of gravity and direction. Rosalind Krauss says that form is like a swimming pool and that the edges of the pool are what an artist pushes off from. Perhaps this weightlessness is a sign of that a transformation is underway. I think we make art as a way to get some distance—we make objects not to displace or discard intense or subtle feelings but to contain them at a slight remove. Art structures feeling—forms reflect us back to ourselves. These paragraphs that I attempt to formulate now, if I can muster any grace or intelligence, might even do the job of holding or structuring me in this time and place. In the United States we have police boundaries, state lines, and property that are supposed to do the job of structuring the society. However, these forms harm our sense of place and identity. For example to structure identity around mapped boundaries dulls our senses to subtle changes in environmental sounds and climates and immunizes us to the pain outside our own communities by keeping us separate.

Last week, May 18<sup>th</sup>, Gregg Bordowitz gave the commencement speech on Zoom for the Yale School of Art Graduation and he reminded us that there are still 36 million people worldwide living with HIV/AIDS. He also made the point that there would not be enough time during his speech to convince us that institutional critique—the critique of our institutions, is meant to bolster and strengthen those institutions. Governments can and *don't* save lives. *Organization* saves lives. Larry Kramer, the AIDS activist and playwright who died on Wednesday May 27, 2020 who is commemorated in Pamela Sneed's poem in the epigraph, was a friend of Anthony Fauci. In Kramer's obituary I learn that he played a crucial role in helping Fauci to see how the bureaucracy of the United States Government was killing his friends. In "An Open Letter to Dr. Anthony Fauci," published in the San Francisco Examiner, June 26, 1988 Kramer wrote, "You are responsible for all government funded AIDS treatment research. In the name of right, you make decisions that cost the lives of others. I call the decisions you are making acts of murder."

## Anger



George Floyd in High School

A group of five women, including Simone Kearney, who is also writing about Joan Waltemath for this same zine, have formed a reading group around Roland Barthes', "The Neutral." As we unpack the text, which is fleeting and nuanced, I feel each of us being curious and open to that which we cannot understand in each other. Within the group I feel held and am reminded how much I enjoy learning from smart friends.

Barthes writes about anger as a "state" that is perfectly anti-neutral. Anger "has three 'versions' that he knows of: "... escape, hygiene and fire. Anger as escape refers to Sartre's *Theory of Emotions*. "Anger is a type of fainting, a loss of consciousness, thus of responsibility, through excess." As hygiene anger is a necessary (extremely everyday) release of toxic energy, *letting off steam*. Fire refers to a god-like vengeance, a *fiery wrath*—"transforming the interior of the earth, you will find the hidden stone, true medicine."-

Today is June 4<sup>th</sup> the day of George Floyd's funeral. George Floyd was a man who grew up in Houston, TX. He was a fantastically tall, lighthearted and gregarious man who excelled at both basketball and football. Although Floyd and his family lived in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods he was able to attend college at South Florida Community College on an athletic scholarship. And although he did not end up finishing

college, and once spent ten months in jail for selling \$10 worth of drugs, at the time of his murder he was living in a new city with his girlfriend and struggling to find steady work. He ended up in Minneapolis by way of a Christian program that provided drug rehabilitation and job training, where he had also been a mentor. In the months leading up to his murder he had been sick with coronavirus but was in recovery. On Monday, May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck, while handcuffed and face down on the ground, for over nine minutes.

In "The Uses of Anger," Audre Lorde writes:

Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change. To those women here who fear the anger of women of Color more than their own unscrutinized racist attitudes, I ask: Is our anger more threatening than the woman-hatred that tinges all the aspects of our lives? It is not the anger of other women that will destroy us, but our refusals to stand still, to listen to its rhythms, to learn within it, to move beyond the manner of presentation to the substance, to tap that anger as an important source of empowerment. I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger; it is a response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it becomes no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness.

It is not easy to write about Joan at this time. My reading group has switched to reading *Carceral Capitalism* by Jackie Wang. I am still thinking about Joan's question which began the series of drawings: "...how to investigate systems or orders that are different in kind in terms of how they interact with each other?" Anger turns suddenly into mourning. Are these changing affects or "states" as Barthes calls them, orders of a different kind? Can my feelings be organized for social change? I think about who has a right to claim fear or anger, who has the right to emotional and physical boundaries and who seem not to?

## Lament

"Let us dwell for a moment on this ancient female task of discharging unspeakable things on behalf of the city, and on the structures that the city sets up to contain such speech." Anne Carson from *The Gender of Sound*

To Lament: late 14c., from Old French *lamentacion* "lamentation, plaintive cry," and directly from Latin *lamentationem* (nominative *lamentatio*) "a wailing, moaning, a weeping," noun of action from past participle stem of *lamentari* "to wail, moan, weep,"

from *lamentum* "a wailing," from an extended form of PIE root *\*la-* "to shout, cry," which probably is imitative. De Vaan compares Sanskrit *rayati* "barks," Armenian *lam* "to weep, bewail;" Lithuanian *loti*, Old Church Slavonic *lajati* "to bark, scold;" Gothic *lailoun* "they scolded."

A description of the drawings: Square handmade paper, thick, the paper had to be thick so that she could etch lines into it. These rough-edged slabs of paper have tiny penciled numbers along their margins. At 22 x 22 inches, they are bigger than a record album, and smaller than many of Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* paintings. They are reminiscent of a ledger, plot map, or floor plan, mapped out with penciled grids. The combination of penciled lines and numbers reminds me of photographs I have seen of Agnes Martin's mathematical notations. Joan's Bowery loft is located on the same street as the studio of the artist Dorothea Rockburne, whose practice engages with folding paper to produce geometries. Joan's process is slow and mathematical in its beginning stage and I wonder what kind of thoughts and feelings the careful geometries produce? Tedium, boredom, exhalation, quietness? The paper is thick enough to hold embedded or inscribed ruled lines that represent harmonic progressions. She says a mathematician can look at the drawings and identify these progressions, such as the Golden Mean. This first phase is a plotting or mapping of the space of the paper. The ruled graphite lines intersect to make boxes that appear like rooms.

Joan's father ran a lumberyard in Nebraska. She grew up around numbers that represented the dimensions and quantity of lumber (milled trees) that would produce volumes of space. Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, wrote a book called *The Origins of Geometry*. In this book, he describes the way the Egyptians measured the land with their bodies; they learned to survey the land by way of empirical experience, before they built the pyramids. Joan is a reader of Husserl.

A Lament: How do these drawings invoke a treaty between the Sioux and the United States?—A failed treaty, a traitorous relation. One of the drawings is titled: *(1 3 4 7 below) Ferro Pharoah*. The two words are homonyms – they sound the same, but share no overlap of meaning. Like in Hanne Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte*, where thousands of different objects co-exist but with no overtly meaningful connection. Incidentally, Darboven is from Hamburg Germany where Joan lived and worked for a few years in the 80's not far from where her father's ancestors come from. Their name from the 10<sup>th</sup> century *Wohlzumasz* means literally well-being to measure. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after the treaty was sign two brothers emigrated to the US and homesteaded in Nebraska – on part of the land contained in the Treaty of 1868. The United States has often been described as a melting pot. Assimilation of immigrants over generations, along with Westward Expansion, are the dominant narratives of American history. These drawings sit squarely amidst those same histories and organize them differently.

The mapped lines on the thick paper are organized according to harmonic progressions

and seem to me like like musical notations, like cords that are also coordinates. Layered over top the gridded area, suddenly, are jabs and drips of paint, scribbles and smears of oil pastel: *visions* provoked by the ordered grids/harmonic progressions below.

### **The Black Hills: A Betrayal**

As per the Treaty of 1868, the Sioux agreed to settle around the Black Hills of the Dakotas.

Accompanied by my oldest friend—a woman I have known since we were both infants, since before either of us could speak—I once visited the Black Hills. The two of us drove across the country aided by a book she had brought along called *Guide to Ancient Native American Sites* by Michael S. Durham. As an undergraduate in the art department at NYU I had been obsessed with the book *Black Elk Speaks*, specifically the part where Black Elk says how the European had brought squares and were therefore destroying the wisdom of the circle. This coincidence of traveling across the country with my dear friend and this guidebook to visit the Black Hills felt like a pilgrimage. In the Black Hills Black Elk had received his “great vision” at the age of nine. My friend and I hiked up to the panorama from where Black Elk spoke and I remember the whole place was covered densely with a thick undulating layer of ladybugs.

The following are Black Elk's words about his vision as recorded by Neihardt:

"I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world, and while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.

Once back in the car, we noticed that the roads were crowded with tourists. We were surprised that so many people came to visit this sacred place. Most of the vehicles were RV's and trucks with camping trailers toting American flags and this seemed especially odd— why in the middle of nowhere in South Dakota on a winding two-lane road would there be such tourist traffic? Finally, as we came around a curve we saw, in glaring contrast to the other side of the hill, that we were at Mount Rushmore. The 1868 Treaty had set aside the Black Hills as a sacred site and as a reservation for the Sioux people but the US took it back when gold was discovered there— The violence and cruelty of the defilement that is Mount Rushmore is incomprehensible to me.

At the end of Alfred Hitchcock's “North by Northwest” Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint are chased down the face of Mount Rushmore. No mention of the Black Hills of course. I suppose most popular culture helps implicitly to cover up these horrible atrocities.

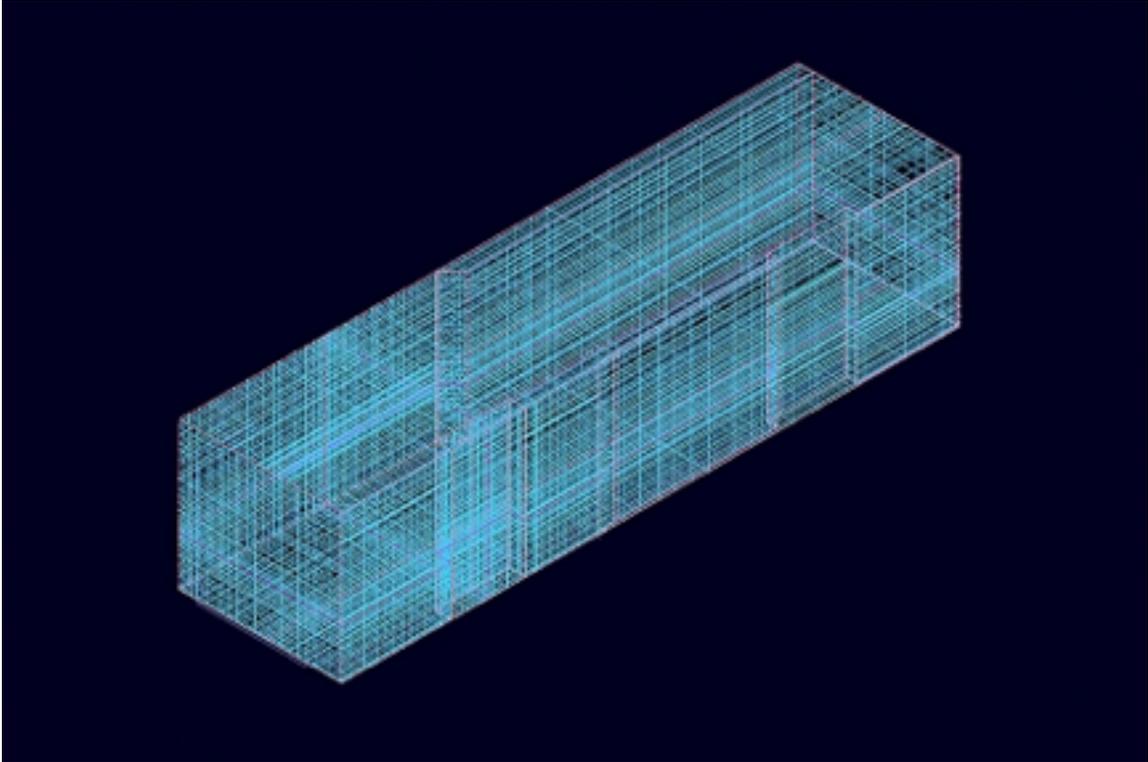


Chief Lone Wolf of the Kiowa Tribes

### **Progressions**

I had suspected there was a numerical correlation between the 1868 Treaty and the series *1868 Treaty: Lament Drawings*, however the numbers refer only to Harmonic Ratios or Progressions. The relationship between the harmonic system and the events is what Joan calls *incidental*.

In a phone conversation Joan tells me that the drawings are made using sections from a project called *Grid Wrap*, which was developed as a *ground matrix* for interventions in all her works. In painting a *ground* is a word that describes the material onto which the painting is applied. A traditional ground for oil painting, for example, is gesso. The *support* is a word that describes the stretched canvas or panel to which the ground is applied. An absorbent ground such as gesso would have been applied to a rigid support such as a wooden panel. In the case of the *Lament Drawings* a piece of thick 22 x 22 inch handmade paper constitutes the support and the *matrix* is the ground.



The explanation of the *matrix* gets a bit complicated but it is important to remember that the relationships are incidental and not causal.

In *Grid Wrap*, shown above, a harmonic progression is mapped onto a digital model of the space of the parlor inside the home of former Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in Boston. Wendell Holmes was one of the associate justices who decided over the 1903 case of Lone Wolf vs. Hitchcock in which the chief of the Kiowa people sued the US government on behalf of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes for violating Medicine Lodge Treaty and defrauding his people of their land. It was common policy for the US to promise land to people and then to take it back again whenever they wanted. Native communities who were often starving were tricked out of their rights to the land by agreeing to sell it for pittance.

Lone Wolf, as the principal member of the sovereign nation protected by the treaty, accused US of violating the treaty. Wendell Holmes's decision in the case argued that because the Kiowa had accepted food rations from the US government they had forfeited their rights as a sovereign people. The court maintained that because they had accepted welfare they had *indebted* themselves to the US, invalidating their status and therefore their rights to the land.

Lone Wolf was incarcerated in the Marion concentration camp in St. Augustine, Florida after being found guilty of rebellion. At the camp he contracted measles and was released shortly before his death.

Although I have not asked Joan why she mapped the harmonic progression onto a digital model of Wendell Holmes' parlor, if I were to guess I would say that this type of intervention functions like a healing prayer; that if you change the frequency or vibration at the source of the affliction then you organize history differently. I think what I am calling a prayer or a healing vibration is the *ground matrix* for the drawings.

### **Touch/Process**

With any art object there is a difference between seeing photo documentation and witnessing the work in the flesh. Before visiting Joan in her studio, I had only seen pictures online and was not prepared for how overcome with feeling I would be.

I entered the spacious calm of her studio from the packed streets of Chinatown. Joan made me some hot tea, and soon I was feeling relaxed. We sat in two chairs in this large room drinking tea and she started telling me about a group of oversized paintings she had worked on at Bemis, the artist residency in Nebraska.

I asked if she had work in the studio that I could see and she walked me over to a large drawing table and took out a stack of drawings. In the presence of these objects I was filled with their powerful spirit. Their presence both quieted and excited everything in me – they hummed loudly like the rustle of leaves or sound of rushing water.

I am reading an essay by Gabriel Josipovici from his book *Touch*. He writes in the essay called “The Lime-Tree Bower and the Virgin of Amiens”:

Sight is free and sight is irresponsible. I can cast my eye to the far horizon and then back to the fingers I hold up before my face, all in a fraction of a second and with no effort at all. And I can repeat the operation at will. On the other hand, were I to walk to that point on the horizon it would take time and effort, time and effort which I might feel I could better employ doing something else. To look costs me nothing but to go involves both a choice and a cost.

I think of myself as a person who sees a lot of art but few experiences are should shifting like the one had with Joan in her studio that day. Maybe it was the tea or glamour of her Bowery loft but it was the rare kind of experience that rings out clearly and reminds you why you became an artist and how much of that we have lost to the noise of competition, capitalism and image production.

Joan says of her work: “It’s not so much what it looks like but what comes into our mind while looking at it.” Agnes Martin also writes about the condition of the viewer in relationship to art:

When we go to museums we do not just look, we make a definite response to

the work. As we look at it we are happier or more sad, more at peace or more depressed, A work may stimulate yearning, helplessness, belligerence or remorse. The cause of the response is not traceable in the work. An artist cannot and does not prepare for a certain response. He does not consider the response but simply follows [her] inspiration. Works of art are not purposely conceived. The response depends upon the condition of the observer.

I like thinking about this Agnes Martin quote in the context of what Josipovici calls the cost and choice of going, and reminds me of a question I asked earlier in this essay: can feeling be organized for social change? Joan's work does not rely on sight, speculation, or the spectacular; it relies on touch and presence. Her work is *ground-work*, it attempts to formulate relationships that interconnect and reintegrate subjects by way of formalizing a shared environment. The day I visited Joan in her studio I left with a different set of feeling than I came with.

When I last spoke with Joan she had left Mexico for South Dakota. She tells me that the Lakota people are not surprised by the pandemic and that they had long predicted its arrival.

My great pleasure and fortune of the last months has been to garden. Gardening literally is about working with the soil, it is *grounding*. Whenever we talk Joan asks me about the garden. She is focused on the ground and the immediate experience of gardening. Leroy Little Bear notes that one of the differences between Western and Native thought is that in Western thought *time* is always the reference point, you can travel anywhere and time is the point of connection to others, but that in Native thought *land* is the reference point. In Native culture even if you travel far away the land where you were born is always your home. Joan grew up in Nebraska on land that was part of the Treaty between the European settlers and the people native to the land, the Lakota. She has spent years in community with the Lakota, participating in sacred ceremonies such as purification rituals and vision quests and as a result has become attuned to things in life that I know pass me by.

## **Scale**

Because I have not seen the large-scale paintings that came after the *1868 Treaty: Lament Drawings* I called the painter James Miller who works part time as an art handler in New York City. Recently, he helped to install one of Joan's large paintings in the American Academy of Arts & Letters in Harlem and so I asked James if he could describe the painting to me: it was so large, he said, that it took five guys and a cherry picker to get it up on the wall. It was constructed out of different sections sewn together —he called them *tectonic geometries*. Joan's painting was one of the first to go up and so as he installed the other work in the room he had the chance to spend days with it.

He described the painting as changing over time—like a large movie screen or projected space that eventually separated into layers—James makes abstract paintings of projected images that look photographic. In Joan's work, the raw sewn canvas parts transformed from something flat to something with deep space, he began to see a phosphorescent quality emerge.

Through art handling, James has also spent a lot of time around Chris Martin's immense paintings, which he described as having a different relationship to scale. Chris Martin recreates the look and feel of a smaller painting on a much larger canvas, whereas Joan's paintings are not reducible. Again, he calls the sewn together sections tectonic, like pieces of moving earth.

### **Latency/Conclusion**

The titles of the drawings begin with a series of numbers and are followed by words: (1 3 4 7 below) Ferro Pharaoh. The numbers refer to the numbers in the harmonic progression; this matrix is used to ground the surface of the paper and the two words that follow are unrelated to the numbers. Ferro the etymological root for the word Iron and a Pharaoh is an Egyptian ruler. Unlike Agnes Martin, or Piet Mondrian, whose stripes and grids are determined through intuition, Joan's grids are representations of pre-existing formulations known as harmonic progressions. The second, directly intuitive or free-associative drawing or performance follows on top of the gridded progression. This second round of marks is gestural and expressive; the work of the matrix is to structure that which is expressed. The free-associative phase releases what is latent or dormant in the harmonic progression.

The Lakota express a relationship to the land on sacred sites through the performance of ritual songs and ceremonies. If patterns found in nature lay the groundwork for Joan's drawings, the second phase expresses the performativity or affective latency bound up in that ground. A dancer responds to the harmony and rhythm of a song and the two become interrelated — the two systems interact. -

Since the early 1980's Joan has been traveling to Mexico to study the ruins of ancient architecture. The Aztecs designed the things they built around cosmology and astrology. The two main buildings of the city of Teotihuacán were called the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon and the latency of these sites is bound up with the astrological coordinates on top of which the buildings were constructed.

As of today 2,000,500 people have been infected with the coronavirus in the United States and 112,600 have died. The earth is 94.391 miles away from the sun and 238,900 miles from the moon. In 2019 statistics showed that if you are black you are nearly 3 times more likely to be killed by the police than if you are white. How do we consecrate these numbers? How do we say it's all connected? And how do we organize them differently? I am left with the same question I started with: How do we

investigate orders that are different in kind, and how do we say they are connected? I wonder if what we mean by “finding common ground” is finding systems which hold a latent potential for organizing ourselves differently.



Joan playing the accordion