

Aidan Wright and Phoebe Collins – Artist Statement

Brooms Piece, 2022 originated from a brief conversation on the third floor of the Smith College Museum of Art. We were revisiting some favorite pieces and came across Florine Stettheimer's *Henry McBride (Art Critic)* 1922. The painting is lively and full of many small details that cause you to have to spend a decent amount of time with the work in order to take them all in. Our favorite vignette was immediately the little man in the lower right who is painting a fence. We laughed about the scale of the brush because it looked as if he were painting with a broom. One of us then said out loud, "I wonder what it would be like to paint with a broom?" And thus, *Brooms Piece* was born.

On Sunday April 24th, beginning at 10 AM, we undertook this performance piece. We began at opposite ends of a 6ft x 30yd stretch of unprimed canvas rolled out across Davis Lawn. Phoebe had one gallon of yellow paint and Aidan had blue. We brushed the paint onto the canvas with one utility broom each. The intention was to sweep-paint our way toward each other, meet in the middle, and then brush past each other and go into the other person's already laid down paint— each of us having painted on all 540 ft of the roll. This action painting took about one hour. Afterwards, we waited for the paint to dry and then began cutting the canvas into square foot measured sections. The sections were chosen by audience members who stopped by in a continuous stream throughout the day (professors, family, and friends). Onlookers could decide which section they wanted us to cut from, based on shapes and color intersections that they visually enjoyed.

The most intriguing part of the performance for us was the way in which the length of the canvas created a distance between us, despite this being an ultimately collaborative work. We had no way of knowing the other person's process or what their broom strokes looked like until we got much closer to each other and began physically standing on the other person's work. We were also less concerned about making a "good painting" and more focused on this as an experimental process in which we explored what could be done with the broom itself. We worked barefoot so as to leave evidence that our physical bodies were there participating in this work. Many footprints can be seen in the final painting and the cut-out squares.

We were inspired by the friendship between Henry McBride and Florine Stettheimer and the way it mirrors our own as Aidan studies Art History and criticism while Phoebe is predominantly a maker and artist. We found McBride's noted appreciation for the new and the expressionistic quite compelling and felt that our piece could pay homage to one of the most influential early supporters of modern art. We would not be studying performance art, abstract expressionism, action painting, or conceptual art without pioneers like McBride in the field of criticism. In Frazer Ward's classes on Postmodernism and Performance Art (both of which we have taken together), we studied how performance intersects with other artistic disciplines like action painting (a la Jackson Pollock) and how evidence of process triumphs as the most important formal quality. Similarly, we were considering Yoko Ono's *Promise Piece*, 1966, in which she asked audience members to take away pieces of a broken vase with the promise that they would each return in 10 years' time to fix and patch it together again. By cutting the canvas into square feet and giving the pieces away to disparate groups of people, we were creating a similar sense of shared but dispersed ownership between strangers.