

Jac Lahav's *Foster Paintings*  
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August 2023

We tend to forget things. Forgetting can be a coping mechanism, a survival response, a way for the brain to prioritize what is necessary to move forward. It happens naturally and often, with only the most emotional and unique memories holding fast: firsts, trauma, triumphs.

It takes work to remember.

It takes effort to stave off the disillusionment and detachment that might develop when something has occurred over forty times and you're sleep deprived from caring for an infant. When you've been in contact with a government agency forty times and counting, that first call will be memorable, but the impact of each subsequent call decreases, sharp edges rounding and ultimately disappearing.

In an ongoing series of over forty blue velvet *Foster Paintings*, Jac Lahav makes a concerted effort to remember. Each painting represents one point of contact Lahav and his partner had with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) regarding the potential placement of a foster child. Not all calls result in a placement, a complete story, or even a loosely defined picture of who the child is or what might happen next. But each call does evoke a cacophony of feelings ranging from anticipation to excitement to heartbreak. Each call is a seed, containing wild potential. In turn, each painting represents one touchpoint in a twisting, unpredictable journey.

What does it mean to foster a child? By definition, you are promoting the child's development. You are responsible for their care, usually in the short term, in a stable, safe, and nurturing environment. You are also required to cooperate with DCF's decisions. Ultimately, you are responsible to start, stop, love, let go, and start all over again. You are responsible to say "yes" when you can and "no" when you cannot. Through painting, Lahav records the intense challenges of being a foster parent and the constant care (of a child, of oneself, of one's family) required to continue such physically and emotionally difficult work. Time in the studio is time to process, offering a space in which the unpredictable path of creating home, family, and community can be examined, confronted, and contained.

If you know Lahav's previous figurative work, it may come as a surprise that the canvases are oriented as portraits (vertical), yet the images are abstract. Upon further reflection, however, it is clear that the decision was necessary. Aside from the technical prohibition on representing a foster child's likeness, the abstract nature of the work emphasizes the ambiguity of each call and the open-ended nature of each decision. Through a combination of printing on velvet and lusciously painted strokes in Flashe, Lahav alludes to the restraint required of a foster parent and, simultaneously, the ability to let go within that restraint. The soft blue paintings hold hard edges to protect the vibrant, emotive, bodily strokes within. The swooping gestures of paint explore within predetermined limits. They appear as confident, coded glyphs, protecting tender

details. Each painting represents a singular experience, full of contradictions. Together, the growing accumulation of paintings forms sentences and paragraphs, telling a story of growing community and capacity.

To care for a foster child requires hope for the future and a belief in collective responsibility. Fostering requires a willingness to be vulnerable and accept uncertainty. Perhaps the ritual completion of these paintings serves as a way for Lahav to control the chaos, release the emotional burden, and remember the stories. Akin to Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work exploring memory, loss, and love; On Kawara's recording of time; and Mary Kelley's Post-Partum Document, Lahav is marking time to remember and better understand the journey. While the paintings may change shape or color or texture someday, for now they remain soft and vibrant, commanding our attention and demonstrating a growing record of one human's capacity to love.