

PROCESSUAL SLIPPAGE: AN EXPLORATION OF A PAINTING PROJECT MAKING
ITSELF.

Volume 1 of 2

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Susan Connolly, October 2019.

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Abstract

Processual Slippage: An Exploration of a Painting Project Making Itself, considers a new paradigm for hybrid painting practices within the context of twentieth and early twenty first century art discourse surrounding installation and sculptural expansions of the painting medium. I will explore through this thesis how painting has become a discipline no longer needing to validate its pre-modernist analogue status and how it has now found its unique visual language in a position of offering new methods of looking and understanding materiality in the digital age through old practices and traditions.

I have broken down the research into three key areas which have all been tested and informed from the practice element of the research in supporting the new knowledge within this written thesis. One: a historical contextualisation of how hybrid painting developed from doubt and a method of *making-itself* significantly since 1949. Two: I have established a framework for how this method of hybrid painting could fall into a category for a processual art, and finally three: I have developed a theory as to how painting visualises methods of *making-itself* in the form of material slippage.

Importantly, I will demonstrate how my research question: *how can an artwork/painting make itself?* has evolved through the exploration, testing and reflecting upon and through the practice methodology. I have endeavored to both visualise and contextualise the practice as equally as possible throughout this thesis by building an artist atlas alongside the written element. To exhibit and make visual methods of slippage and to show how process has evolved and unfolded throughout the research.

Introduction: Contextualising the $E+N$ Painting project



1. Susan Connolly, *Everything and Nothing*, 2015, acrylic on wall, 380x900cm approx., The Lab, Dublin.

“What you do is reinvent painting, give it a new meaning by acknowledging the crisis it is in and give the idea of painting, not the craft, new birth with each new canvas. You would paint, certainly, but what would you paint? Ideas are not visible: they have neither form nor color. Perhaps you would try to paint the fact that when the machine has supplanted the artisan and the photograph had provided the public with ready-made resemblances, then resemblance can no longer point at referents in the world. But how would you paint that fact, and make that loss visible? You would renounce resemblance, not empty the canvas of all concrete references. You would paint reflexively, not transitively....”¹

“If a painting comes to perform rather than merely represent some other thing, what is happening?”²

There are three bodies of material collated in this thesis.

Artworks: *E+N Painting project*

The *E+N Painting project* focuses on the space in-between what defines painting and sculpture as a contemporary hybrid within fine art disciplines. The artworks produced during the project involved the layering, cutting and peeling back of physical layers of paint from canvas, walls and miscellaneous structures. Through the use of appendages and the draping of the paint itself these props created a hybrid of the average two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional object.

The *E+N Painting project* explores the limits and the limitlessness of paint as a material.

¹ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1999), 149.

² Rosemary Betterton, *Unframed* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 41.

The methodology of working involved careful planning in the studio and the usage of a pre-determined number of primary materials and instructions, all of which will be presented in this document. This working technique allowed for the examination of the idea of material *slippage* to produce new knowledge through the process of painting itself and explored how a diverse range of artworks can arise from an original point of departure.

The artworks are documented in Volume 2 according to a model of an artist's atlas, described below.

Thesis

The textual component contextualises the work in conceptual and historical terms to answer the question *how can an artwork/painting make itself?* The investigation and the written thesis are divided into three approaches: one: making itself, two: processual and three: slippage.

The research undertaken in the studio importantly informed the way the writing of this thesis unfolded. There were for example many other artists, theorists, critics and writers that were consulted in the research process and who could have been included in this text, but the selection of the following research enquiry was first and foremost informed from the way the painting project revealed its visual analysis through its materiality, that thus informed the textual content which follows.

Visual Research: *Processual Atlas*

In my practice as an artist and in the development of this thesis, visual research has been

very important. I have collected and rearranged images of other artist's work, of my own work, and of other things altogether. These images are like a visual journal or the artist's wall of references found in a studio and are presented as three black and white processual atlases at the end of each written section within the thesis.

I have adopted a version of art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg's (1866-1929) "famous system of classification"³, the *Mnemosyne Atlas*⁴, as a conceptual and practical structure to show the documentation of my artworks, in Volume 2, and this additional visual research collection in appendices 1, 2, 3 to the respective chapters, *Introduction*, *Making-Itself* and *Processual*. In some instances, I cite images in these appendices as illustrations of the thesis.

With its two roles of demonstrating the visual research and the evolution of the artworks, the atlas deserves further introduction and contextualisation. I have used the atlas format in order to visually highlight and interlink tangential strands of significance and give equal importance to the text/language research and the visual/image research within the Ph.D. thesis. Art historian David Joselit⁵ has deemed such a methodology as "a shift from producing to formatting content.... the "epistemology of search", where knowledge is produced by discovering and/or constructing meaningful patterns- formats- from vast reserves of raw data".⁶

It was appropriate to adopt this methodology at this point in time, for this particular research, as I follow Warburg who strove in the early twentieth century "to set art history in motion...movement conceived of as an object and method... that includes jumps, cuts,

³ Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg: The Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 1.
⁴ Fig. 12, p. 23.

⁵ David Joselit's date of birth was not available online.

⁶ David Joselit, "What to Do with Pictures," *October* 138, Fall (2011): 81-94.

montages, harrowing connections”.⁷ Thus the visual outcomes and components of *E+N Painting project* could become a methodology of research in and of itself, as the painted outcomes make visible and become “things that are at once archaeological (fossils, survivals) and current (gestures, experiences) ...creating a “living” reciprocity between the act of knowing and the object of knowledge”.⁸

The creation of an artist atlas is embraced by many artists during the early twentieth century. From my research, it became apparent that this approach developed significantly following the invention of photography, given the opportunity that the photo image afforded to the *processual* stages of creation and archiving artistic processes and developments within one’s practice⁹. Art historian Kim Grant (1972-) in her book, *All About Process: The Theory and Discourse of Modern Artistic Labor*, credits artist Henri Matisse¹⁰ (1869-1954) as being the “...first important modern artist to publish photographic documentation of the stages of his work in progress”.¹¹

Matisse developed this method of revealing process as a way to show both audiences and younger artists that the effortlessness achieved within his paintings was actually a hard-won exploration which had “...no solution, no resolution, no final work, just an ongoing and laborious process”.¹² This was a process that took time and the photographs (all monochrome,

⁷ Michaud, *Warburg Motion*, 7-16.

⁸ Michaud, *Warburg Motion*, 17.

⁹ It is worth noting that I also explored how artists use the collection of images in their studios and as references for the making of paintings. I took some images of artist’s notice/creative walls and this was a line of inquiry, which informed my own creation of the atlas, which accompanies this thesis. Most, if not all, artists have such collections, images, notes, quotes, bits and bobs which they keep in order to reference and use at later stages. Each image informed and is thus head within the creative process and revealed in new ways through the subsequent artworks that unfold.

¹⁰ Fig. 14, p.24.

¹¹ Kim Grant, *All about Process: The Theory and Discourse of Modern Artistic Labor* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 36.

¹² Grant, *All about Process*, 37.

similar to Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*) allowed the "...significant stages"¹³ to be seen and explored. Matisse was to go on to exhibit such documentation alongside his paintings during the 1940s and this was recreated during the 2012 exhibition *Matisse: In Search of True Painting*¹⁴ at the Met Museum in New York.

The most well-known (and equally most published) contemporary artist atlas of the twentieth century comes from German artist Gerhard Richter (1932-), who began collecting his content during the early 1960s. There are to date 802 sheets¹⁵, which span many of the different artistic periods within Richter's oeuvre¹⁶. The atlas itself acts as an expanded artwork, one that is both archival and which is constantly in motion due to its arrangements and distribution method beyond the gallery context. Richter's *Atlas* has gone on to influence younger artists' practices such as Tal R's (1967-) 2016 installation titled *Garbage Man*¹⁷, which consists of 200 framed collage arrangements taken from his 25-year-old collection of images which had served as templates for his paintings and sculptures.

The atlas thus offers what art historian and theorist Phillip-Alain Michaud (1961-) refers to as "not a closed field of knowledge" but rather a "whirling, centrifugal field"¹⁸ and for the purpose of this research it has allowed me to develop an atlas of my own, Volume II of this thesis, which works as Matisse importantly demonstrated, to give visual language to methods of new knowledge within practice that reveal artistic labour and notably how this *processual*

¹³ Grant, *All about Process*, 38.

¹⁴ "A man looks at 'The Dream' 1940," Getty Images, last modified November 26, 2012, <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/man-looks-at-the-dream-1940-by-henri-matisse-on-display-in-news-photo/156976435?#/man-looks-at-the-dream-1940-by-henri-matisse-on-display-in-the-in-picture-id156976435>.

¹⁵ Gerhard Richter, "Atlas," accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/atlas>.

¹⁶ Fig.15, p.25.

¹⁷ Fig.20, p.26.

¹⁸ Michaud, *Warburg Motion*, 13.

activity can make itself (*making-itself*) through its materiality and notably through *slippage*.

One: Making-Itself

In 1968 artist Robert Morris¹⁹ (1931-) wrote in his essay *Anti Form* that “the process of *making-itself* had hardly been examined”²⁰ and that “only (Jackson) Pollock was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work.”²¹ Importantly for this research, he also claimed that to “think that painting has some inherent optical nature is (was) ridiculous.”²² and “equally silly to define its [painting’s] “thingness” as acts of logic that acknowledge the edges of the support.” After all, “the optical and the physical are both there.”²³

Anti-Form is an essay, which has had considerable influence on art history, theory and artists as it argues for an art (including its analysis) that is notably grounded in process and materials. Morris’ *Anti Form* importantly advocated for artworks, which embraced chance and even organic process as both a methodology and as the materialisation of the visual through material handling and “not a priori to the means” an art that is, that could “recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work.”²⁴

Art historian Richard Shiff (1943-) has said that “when critics harp on about rising commercial values or restrict their analysis to social critique, they deny life to the medium...it ignores the work’s manifest energy”²⁵ Many contemporary artists have developed methods of

¹⁹ Fig.17, p.25.

²⁰ Robert Morris, “Anti Form,” in *Continuous Projects Altered Daily*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995), 41-50.

²¹ Morris, “Anti Form,” 43.

²² Morris, “Anti Form,” 43-44.

²³ Morris, “Anti Form,” 43.

²⁴ Morris, “Anti Form,” 43.

²⁵ Richard Shiff, “Cliché and lack of Feeling,” *The Art Newsletter*, June 2015.

paint application, which support such a position, often taking their own hand out of the situation and “profoundly rethinking ...the role of both materials and tools”²⁶ in order to recover process as seen and understood by Morris.

It is no coincidence, therefore that many artists working in the 1970s were to test Morris’ theory through their painterly engagement. Artists such as Robert Mangold²⁷ (1937-) who uses/d spraying machines and rollers, artist Mary Heilmann²⁸ (1940-) who refined a method of paint application which involved a slapdash technique²⁹ or artist Lynda Benglis³⁰ (1941-) who developed a material which was akin to paint but also structurally something new, something closer to a sculptural form, that even situated its painting-ness into the sculptural domain upon the floor. What each of these artists’ work demonstrates and makes visual is a commitment to *processual* activity, often where the liquidity of paint becomes expanded beyond its optical form and ultimately making process visual.

Morris’ theory for a movement or types of art making which embraced such process and materiality over and above even content and form became very intriguing within this research because of its suggested possibilities within and for the *E+N Painting project*. What this theory did was to allow me to look at both process and the activity of making as an area where new knowledge could be found through testing the potential within the *E+N Painting project* outcomes. Having previously set strict limitations in advance for the materials and methods I had been developing in the practice (using only three colours and 3 shapes for example³¹), a

<http://www.alexandergray.com/attachment/en/594a3c935a4091cd008b4568/News/594a42cb5a4091cd008b8342>.

²⁶ Shiff, “Cliché.”

²⁷ Fig.22, p.27.

²⁸ Fig.22, p.27.

²⁹ Shiff, “Cliché.”

³⁰ Fig.24, p.27.

³¹ Fig.28, p.30.

methodology for *making-itself* suggested that there was an area somewhere between planning and output that needed to be analysed further.

Once I began to think about the possibility of *making-itself* as a potential methodology, the term began to appear in lots of other sources. For example artist John Cage (1912-1992) spoke of fellow artist Robert Rauschenberg's³² (1925-2008) work as *making-itself* in the sense that "the subject loomed up in several different places at once like magic to produce paintings"³³; art historian W.J.T. Mitchell (1942-) speaks about how "constructing pictures... ones that will allow specificity of materials, practices, and institutions to manifest itself"³⁴; while art historian David Joselit has referred to how "the gestural mark is turned outward, captured in the dynamic of becoming-picture".³⁵ I even discovered a quote by theorist Roland Barthes which hinted at methods of *making-itself* when he attributed to plastic (after all acrylic paint is a polymer resin form of plastic) "magical operation par excellence... it is less a thing than the trace of a movement".³⁶

Most importantly for me it was art historian, theorist and art critic Isabelle Graw (1962-) in her lecture presentation *The Economy of Painting - Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium*, at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2015 that reinforced that, "the process of *making-itself* has hardly been examined"³⁷, when she stated that the "...more artists have tried to erase themselves from the work the more subject like it is going to appear. The painting seems to

³² Fig.25, p.28.

³³ R.H. Brown, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist and his work, 1961," last modified January 10, 2012, <http://www.ayearfrommonday.com/2012/01/on-robert-rauschenberg-artist-and-his.html>.

³⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want? The Life and Loves of Images* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 198.

³⁵ David Joselit, "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)," in *Painting beyond Itself. The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burchard (Berlin: Sternberg Press), 17.

³⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Classics, 1993), 97.

³⁷ Morris, *Continuous Projects*, 43.

have painted itself. Agency shifts from the artist to the painting...the artistic procedure which aims at undermining authorship lead to the sensation that painting has self-agency.... painting keeps painting itself after it has been produced”.³⁸ But how can this be and what would it mean and imply for the *E+N Painting project*? how can an artwork/painting *make itself*?

Two: Processual (Why a Project?)

The artwork component of this Ph.D. research, which I have been referring to throughout this text as the *E+N Painting project*, is known in its full title as Everything and Nothing: A Painting project and refers to the practice element of this research over the last four years.

The reason for choosing to title my already established painting practice in this manner was to enable for a start, middle and end so as to structure how my Ph.D. question was to evolve over the allocated research period and for the research and written element of the thesis to evolve from the practice which has been informing the visual outcomes.

Choosing to retitle my practice into this new framework (as a project) has allowed for the individual paintings to act as a whole and for methods of micro and macro viewing and analysis within the Ph.D. question to evolve. Art critic, art historian and poet, Barry Schwabsky³⁹ wrote in his 2010 essay, *Object or Project? A Critic's Reflection on the Ontology of Painting*, that “a project by definition...its very nature is to be in progress, in development-to be incomplete and unfolding, and above all to be subject to revision...a project is not a

³⁸ Isabelle Graw, “The Economy of Painting- Notes on the Vitality of a Success-Medium,” (lecture presented at The Jewish Museum, New York, filmed July 20, 2015). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JDthDEcmAs>.

³⁹ Barry Schwabsky's date of birth was unavailable online.

program”.⁴⁰

By devising and setting a set of instructions for the paintings to unfold within and through each public manifestation of the *E+N Painting project*⁴¹ over the research duration has allowed for the paintings to become visually more about their *processual* activity (this is where all the questioning derived from), while also creating what curator and art critic Daniel Birnbaum (1963-) has referred to as “a space for conversation rather than a mode of producing objects”.⁴²

Schwabsky sees the benefits in such a methodology as allowing artists to explore painting within a network of its activities and not just as an object to be looked at, where the “artistic evaluation and analysis is the project rather than the object”.⁴³ Where “the word ‘painting’ can hardly be equated in any simple way with the words ‘picture’ or ‘image’”.⁴⁴

The paintings thus within the *E+N Painting project* became a sort of site-less pursuit, both as an idea and also beyond their objectness. Where the question of “does the artist have a project? And if so can I learn about it from this particular work?” is applied over and over again, seeking to allow the paintings to unfold to answer questions which have manifested through such *processual* activity, between material and maker “distinction lies in the act and not in the copy- in the project, not the object”.⁴⁵ Below I set out how such issues and concerns have been reflected upon and make up the Ph.D. research question of *how can an*

⁴⁰ Barry Schwabsky, “Object or Project? A Critic’s Reflections on the Ontology,” in *Contemporary Painting in Context*, ed. Anne Ring Peterson and Mikkel Bogh and Hans Dam Christensen (Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press), 69.

⁴¹ There were 8 exhibitions completed throughout the research period.

⁴² Schwabsky, “Object or Project,” 73.

⁴³ Schwabsky, “Object or Project,” 77.

⁴⁴ Schwabsky, “Object or Project,” 70.

⁴⁵ Schwabsky, “Object or Project,” 80.

artwork/painting make itself?

Material choices: the paint

In all the work I have made within the *E+N Painting project* I have used the same acrylic paint colours, Magenta/Cyan/Yellow, White and Black⁴⁶ and always the same brand⁴⁷, Daler Rowney⁴⁸ System 3 Process Paint.

My selection of this acrylic paint has been essential as it is a student paint of a very low-grade pigmentation quality, which claims to be a combination of colours that will allow the novice painter to learn about colour mixing and application. “The three primaries red, yellow and blue can generate, through mixing, virtually all hues; thus, they contain, in essence, the entire expressive range of the colour palette”,⁴⁹ but can these more contemporary colours, colours made from a polymer emulsion, colours which are mostly associated with printing and digital colour combinations do just that?

Contradictory to what the manufacturers of process paint profess it to do (make every colour) the truth of the material is that it is impossible to learn anything about paint, colour, tone, texture, etc. as the paint itself is quite awful to handle and cannot be mixed with white or black to give even tonal definition. My choice to use such a low-grade acrylic material is

⁴⁶ Fig.31, p.31.

⁴⁷ That is until I did the residency at Golden Artist Colors in New York, where I used their brand exclusively. Since returning to Ireland I have used a number of their products, mostly their mediums and fluids. More information about the full range can be found on <http://www.goldenpaints.com>, accessed Jan 11, 2018.

⁴⁸ “System 3- The Information,” Daler Romney, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://www.daler-rowney.com/content/system-3-information>.

⁴⁹ Robert Storr, ‘Of Which We Can Be Certain’, in *Gerhard Richter: Red, Yellow, Blue*, ed. Helmut Friedel (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 66-76.

in ways a method of testing in itself, to see exactly how this paint can be pushed to its limits, possibly enabling it to perform methods of *making-itself* through chance, traces of the activity undertaken or simply through the investigative approach I have developed within the *E+N Painting project*.

When starting each new work, the process of covering the entire surface of the support (be that a canvas, directly onto the wall or another object) with the three colours of paint (Magenta/Cyan/Yellow) begins. Through this research, I have considered significant artists such as, Barnett Newman⁵⁰ (1902-1970), Ellsworth Kelly⁵¹ (1923-2015), Jasper Johns⁵² (1930-), and Gerhard Richter to name just a few, who have explored the idea of the usefulness of primary colours, their potentiality and their possibilities, the history of which dates back to the late 1920s with Russian artist Alexander Rodchenko (1891-1956) when he painted what he referred to as his last painting, titled *Red, Blue, Yellow*.

What begins to happen after the 1920s within the exploration of the monochrome is that “artists who experimented...were aiming to renew painting from the inside, drawing on the essence of the medium, pure colour, and the painting process”.⁵³ Artists such as Barnett Newman who painted a series of works titled, *Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow, Blue* (1966-68), painter Gerhard Richter, developed a number of bodies of work⁵⁴ which explored the primacy of these primary colours, all of which he titled in relation to the combination of hues; to artist Mary Heilmann who during the mid-1970s began painting works such as *Little Three for Two*:

⁵⁰ Fig.34, p.31.

⁵¹ Fig.35, p.31.

⁵² Fig.36, p.31.

⁵³ Edelbert Kob, “Painting about Painting,” in *Painting: Process and Expansion*. ed. Kob Edelbert and Rainer Fuchs and Gabriel Hubmann (Koln: Buchhandlung Walter Konig GnbH & Co. KG.Abt. Verlag; Bilingual edition, 2010), 13-26.

⁵⁴ Gerhard Richter, “Atlas,” accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art/atlas>.

*Red, Yellow, Blue*⁵⁵ which exclusively used the primary colours so as to “avoid what she referred to as “pretty” colours”.⁵⁶

Material choices: the canvas

Each artwork within the *E+N Painting project* that has been made on canvas supports has measured approximately 200x180cm within the confinements of their frames⁵⁷. Their (actual) frames are constructed using store-bought ready-made stretcher bars⁵⁸, which are imported to Ireland from Italy.⁵⁹ The wood is a soft wood, and this is important, as canvases of this scale are difficult to move physically as their weight can be too much for one person alone and this allowed me to handle them with relative ease within the studio.

Within the *E+N Painting project*, it has been important that my own physical scale has been taken into consideration within the process of their construction. In other words, I have wanted to be in them when making them, I have wanted their expansive surfaces to envelope my physical and optical engagement, and I have wanted to be able to move them by myself if needs be.

Also important was that all the canvases on stretchers were constructed with the knowledge that once they were in the gallery environment that they would be free-standing or suspended

⁵⁵ Fig.39, p.32.

⁵⁶ Mary Heilmann, “RYB: Mary Heilmann paintings 1975-1978,” review of exhibition at *Craig F. Starr Gallery*, by David Rhodes, *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 7, 2017.

⁵⁷ Some have been larger, the twin works that were made for The Lab exhibition (April 2015) were 200x250cm, with this scale been chosen so as to hold the vastness of this particular exhibition space, similarly this was done with the large work made for the *over&over+overandover* show, at *dlrlexicon* (October 2015).

⁵⁸ Fig.41, p.33.

⁵⁹ To date I have purchased these frames from Evans Art Suppliers, Off Capel Street in Dublin.

from the ceiling or away from the gallery wall. This allowed for a unique method of viewing, offering the audience the opportunity to walk around them, something rarely associated with the viewing of paintings, a domain normally more associated with the viewing of sculptural and installation artworks. But this consideration and decision also added a new layer of complexity for me the maker, as I had to be not just aware of the image unfolding on the front surface, but also how (by-product) image/s were simultaneously developing on the reverse side of the painted canvas, as my intention was for it too, to be viewed by the audience once installed.

What is also worth noting here is that I don't use stretcher crossbars on the large canvases. This is because it alters the viewing experience of the back of the paintings and casts grid-like shadows, which are not a part of the consideration of the work (or rather, are a consideration which I have chosen to remove for purely aesthetic reasons). This elimination has caused some problems, as the purpose of the stretcher crossbar is to give structural support to such large and expansive canvas surfaces. Upon handling this has frequently led to an experience of movement within the frame (the rectangular structure that the canvas is wrapped around) due to not having said support. This has sometimes made the frame look a little off-kilter when I am making them in the studio with this problem later resolving itself once the work has been installed, but sometimes not.

The canvas that I have selected to use is a pre-primed canvas⁶⁰, again store bought and off the roll⁶¹. I stretch the canvas using traditional methods of pulling and stapling of the fabric to hold itself tightly upon the wooden support structure- this is always done flat on the studio

⁶⁰ I purchased this canvas from Evan's Art Suppliers, Dublin. The brand and type of canvas was: Universal Priming, Medium Grain-Dark Rear, H.210m-325gr/mq(12oz).

⁶¹ Fig.42, p.33.

floor. As the canvas I use is pre-primed it is impossible to get the same tightness one would normally achieve using an un-primed canvas weave, otherwise known as cotton duck, but I have selected this pre-primed canvas for its gessoed surface, as it is the best combination of fabric/ground I have found, which allows for the later stage within the painting when the paint (skin) is cut and removed from the surface of the canvas.

I experimented for a long⁶² time trying to get this right, having tried all manner of other fabrics (hessian, linen and found fabrics), gessos and grounds. What I have discovered is that the chalky, possibly cheap materials used upon the pre-primed store-bought canvas helps with the adhesiveness (or rather the lack of adhesiveness) of the paint on its surface. Basically, the paint once applied never really binds into the weave of the canvas, it sorts of sits upon it, and thus allows for the paint skin to be cut and removed at a later stage.

Material choices: a restricted palette

Seemingly there is a lot to be explored and tested through working with such a restricted palette. And I have investigated this within the *E+N Painting project* to seek new outcomes for how paint and its liquidity can perform in systems that appear to be the material *making-itself*, thus, directly demonstrating my Ph.D. question, *how can an artwork/painting make itself?* I have done this in several ways, which I will describe fully below.

One successful restrictive methodology that I adapted was through attempting to make the same painting over and over again, with the two most successful paintings (that both

⁶² This experimentation happened over years and I have tested many different products to get this combination as close to perfect as possible.

demonstrated this visually), *Painting 1 + Painting 2*⁶³, made during the first year of the Ph.D. research. This work was later exhibited in the exhibition titled, *When the Ceiling meets the Floor*, at The Lab gallery⁶⁴ in Dublin during April to June 2015. Both paintings measured 250cmx200cm, both were canvas stretched over wooden supports, hung using steel suspending systems and both were painted mark for mark, brushstroke for brushstroke, cut for cut in the studio.

I began each canvas by drawing a circular motif all over the surface, which I then painted each circle for circle, line for line using the Magenta, Cyan, Yellow⁶⁵ paint combinations. After each circle was painted I documented the surface of the canvas using my mobile phone camera, creating a low-grade archive of the activity that was taking place on each canvas surface, something akin to what artist Hito Steyerl (1966-) has referred to as “the aura...no longer based on the permanence of the ‘original’, but on the transience of the copy”.⁶⁶

In many ways I was taking artist Robert Rauschenberg’s *Factum I+II* paintings⁶⁷ as my starting point: two paintings painted mark for mark, the same painting, yet not the same painting. I began by asking myself, and the work what they (the paintings) would be if they were to be painted at the same time? Is it even physically possible to paint two paintings at the same time and how would they look different from each other if I was to consider their production to be simultaneous?

When I was making this work, I had already seen the *Factum I+II* paintings some years

⁶³ Fig.46, p.34.

⁶⁴ The curator of this exhibition was Sheena Barrett.

⁶⁵ Fig.45, p.33.

⁶⁶ Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image,” *e-flux Journal* #10 (November 2009), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.

⁶⁷ Fig.48/49, p.35.

previously⁶⁸ so they were like echoes in my memory, their surfaces only really accessible through images I found online. In this context, it is impossible to see the surface details and the *slippage* of the intention and materials, which both paintings record and reveal so accurately, in person. This helped in the conceptualisation of the two paintings I was painting concurrently. Through the documenting of the stages I was able to capture fragments of the process, to see their individual stages and to pinpoint and identify where both paintings began to make themselves, the same yet different, their visual outcomes extremely distinct due to the materials' unruliness.

Three: Slippage (the paint skin)

The paint skins that have been made as part of the *E+N Painting project* are exclusively made of paint and from paint, they have been stripped of any and all of their support. A paint skin, therefore now disembodied; liberated.... or possibility clinging for dear life (even if painting attributes do not allow its thing-ness to be alive in the human sense). A paint skin that has become an object (of sorts), specific to painting, it's paint after all so it cannot therefore be anything else. But now a paint skin with a disembodied physicality, a homelessness or sitelessness- no longer held within its rectangular confinements or within its long tradition of order from inside the frame. Limp, flat and utterly beyond traditional painting. Some thing between something. But what?

I made my first paint skin some time in 2001. It was an accident. A failure; one I chose to embrace because it suggested materialistic possibilities, something I did not yet know what to

⁶⁸ I had seen *Factum I+II* in MOMA in New York shortly after Robert Rauschenberg's death in 2008. The stood out to me because of their doubling, their attempt to be the same but only just and most of the questions that they seemed to pose regarding the statue of a painting and its objectness.

do with. A discovery, that only happened due to the studio and material engagement and a committed experimentation within the processes of painting. Here I was presented with something- the skin, a skin- and it stopped me.

The stopping resulted in pondering questions as to what now for this thing, a paint skin? A thing which visually and physically presented itself and even represented itself, a material that seemed to be *making-itself*⁶⁹ almost, but also a way of furthering my interest around the possibilities to be found within the properties of paint. I knew there was something to push and interrogate but how could I make this paint skin do something, how could I make it perform in some way beyond its limp fabric-like appearance?

⁶⁹ In 2001 I did not know anything about Robert Morris and I had not read *Anti-Form* until at least 2012, therefore the term ‘making-itself’ is something I have adopted in retrospect in relation to how this studio engagement was revealing itself to me.

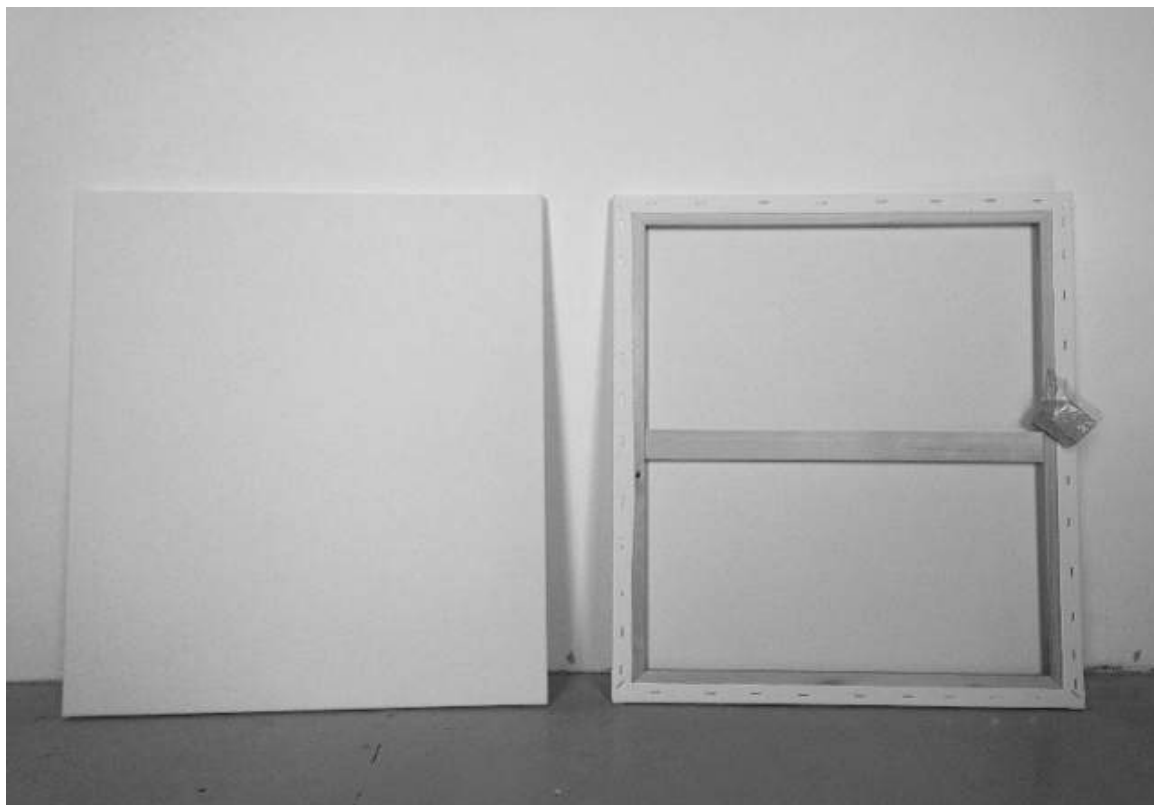
Appendix 1: Processual Atlas I

Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig.12

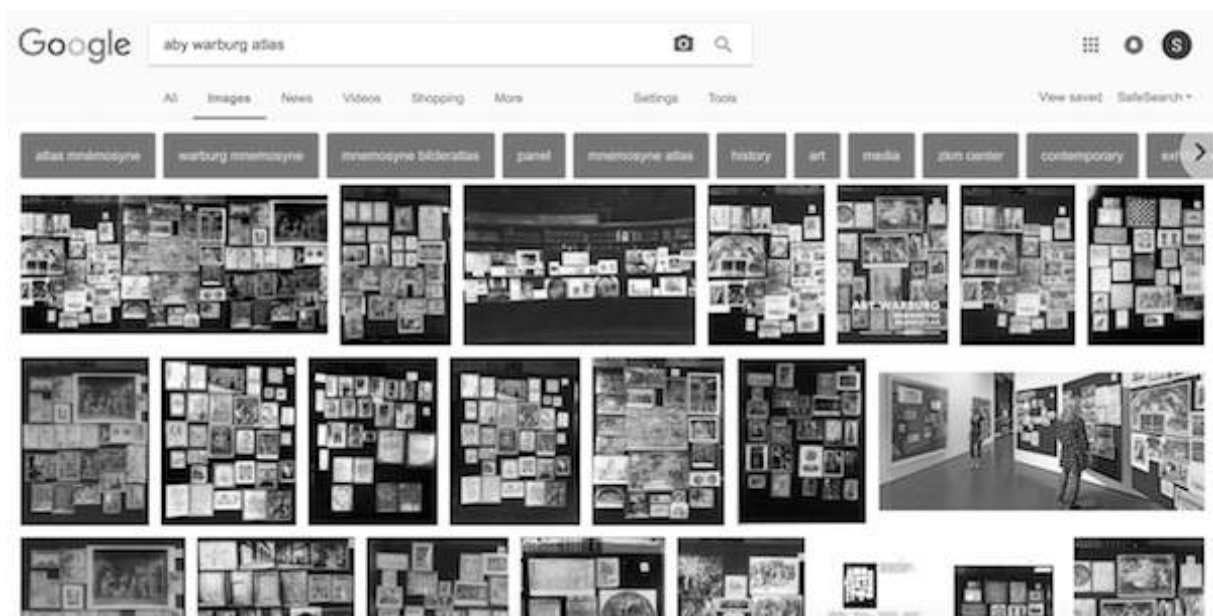


Fig.13

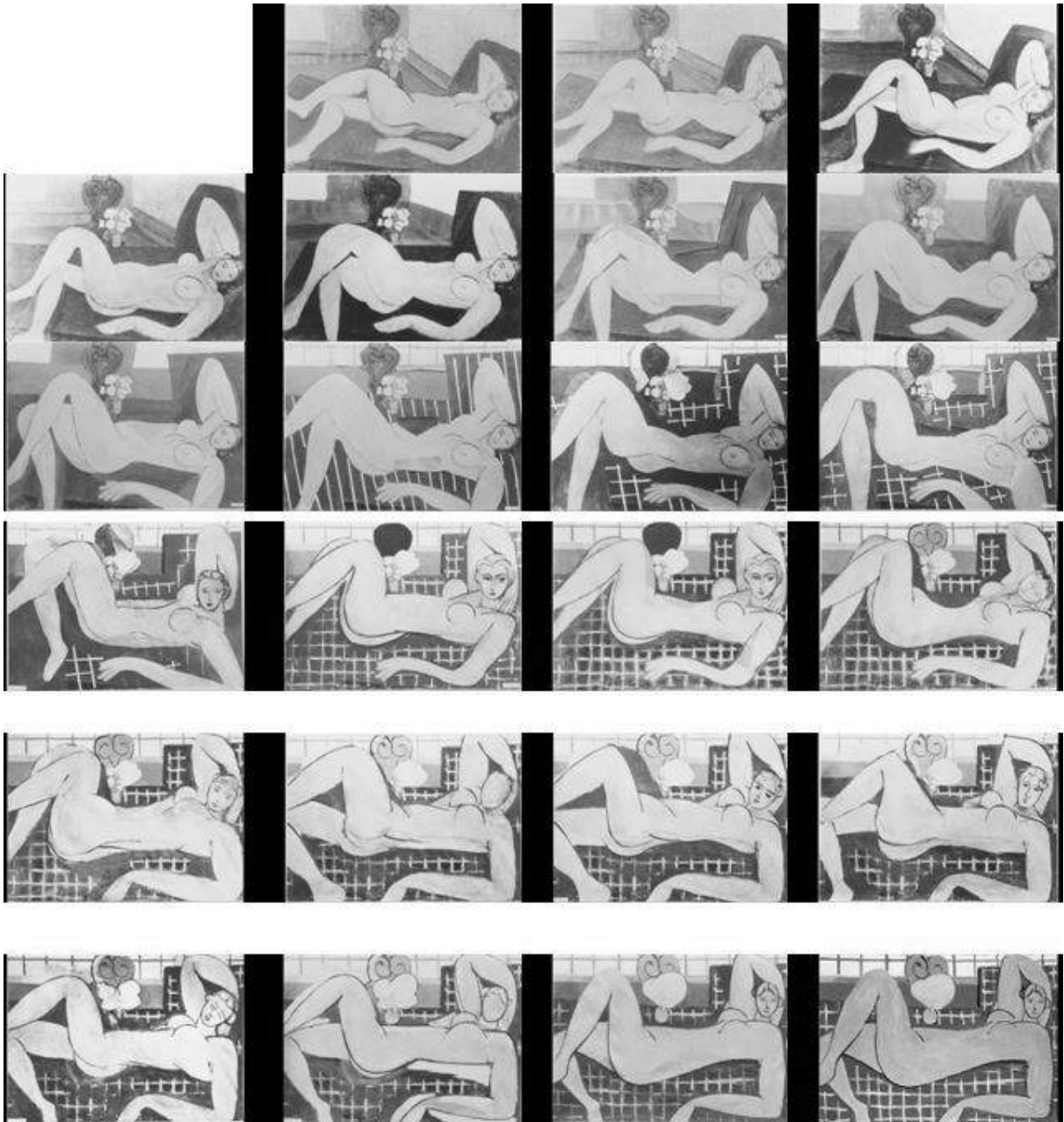


Fig.14

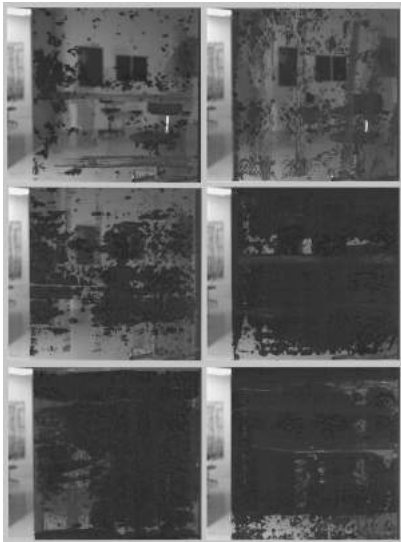


Fig.15



Fig.16



Fig.17



Fig.18



Fig.19



Fig.20



Fig.21

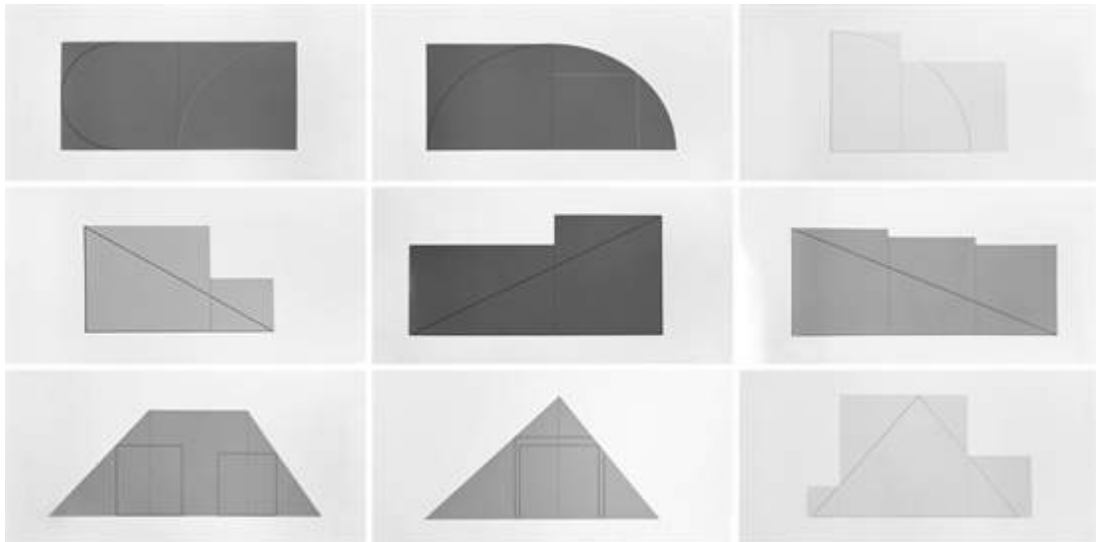


Fig.22

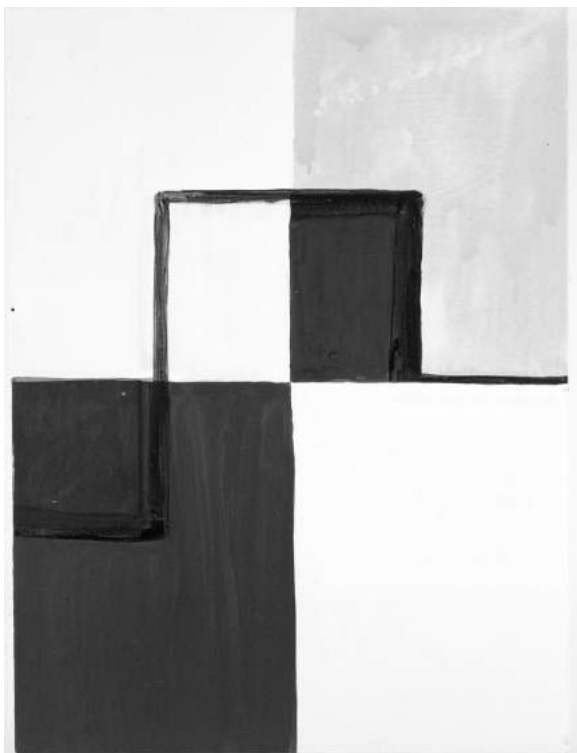


Fig.23



Fig.24



Fig.25

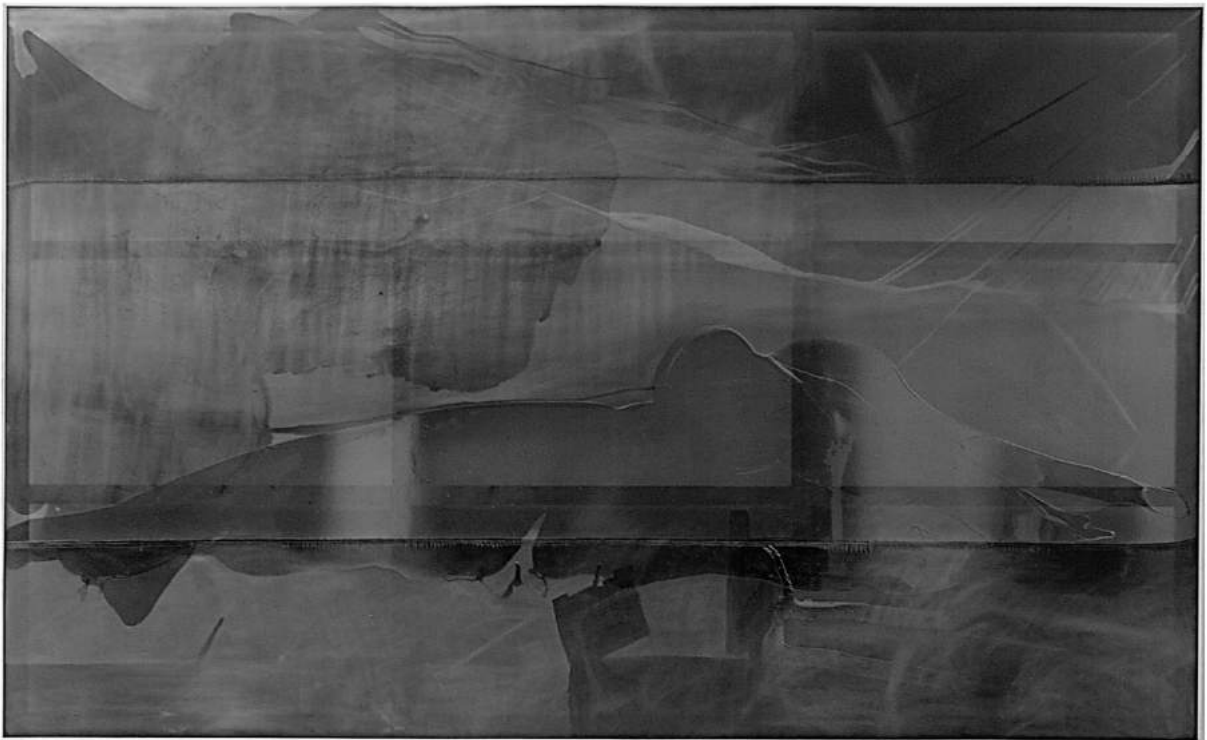


Fig.26



Fig.27

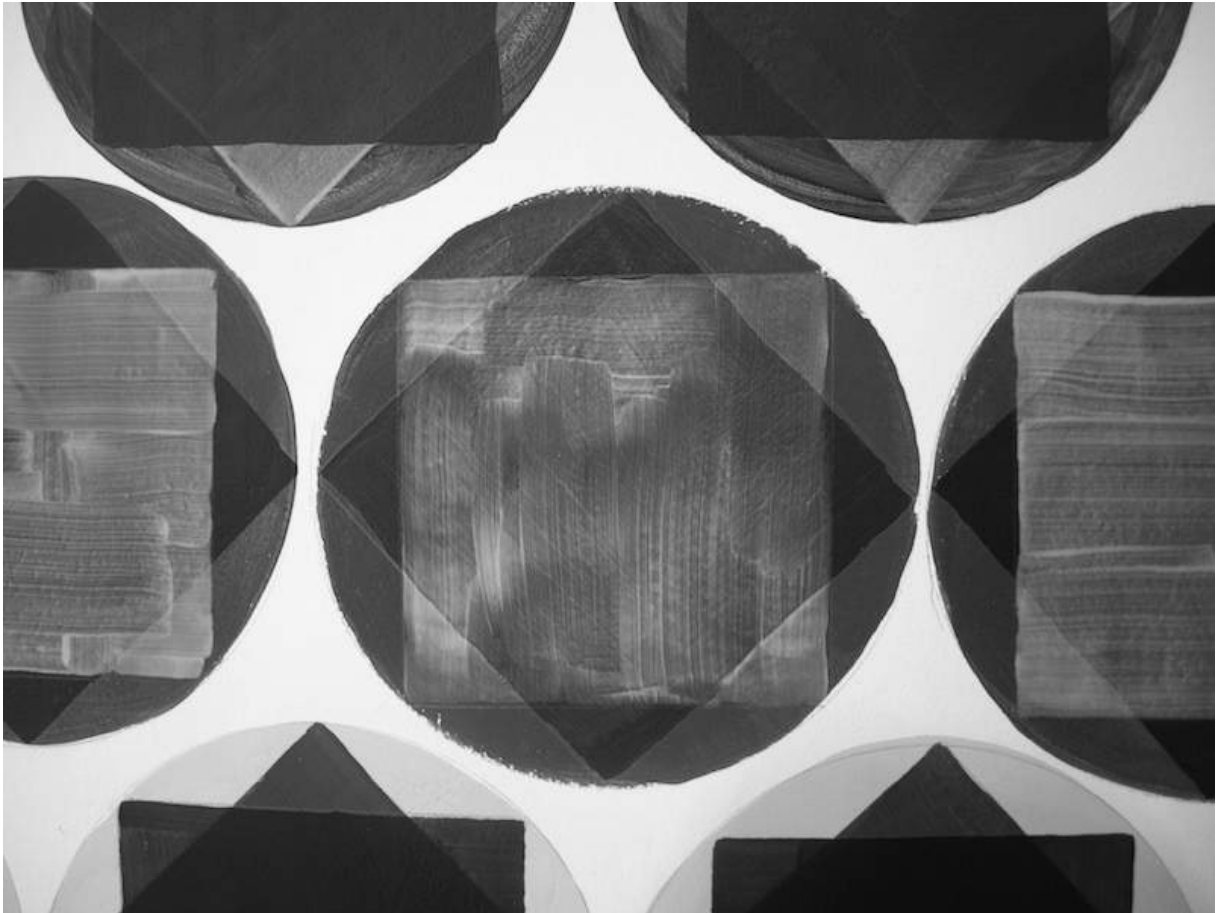


Fig.28



Fig.29

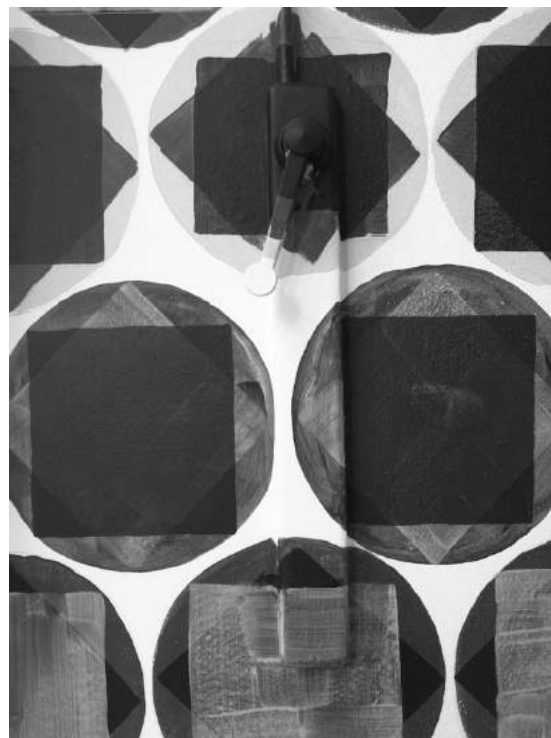


Fig.30



Fig.31

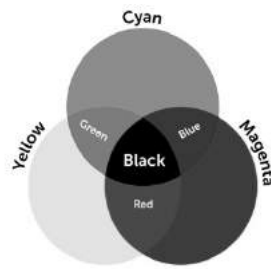


Fig.32

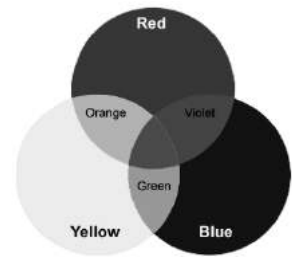


Fig.33



Fig.34



Fig.35



Fig.36

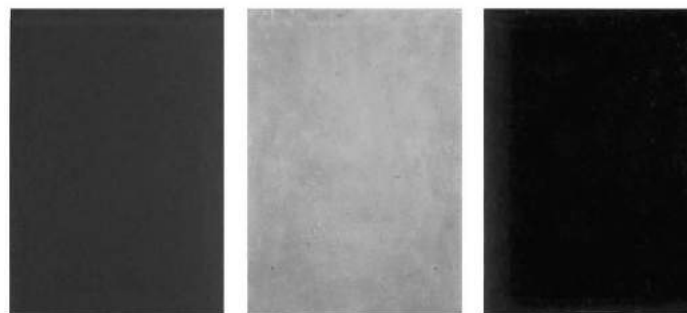


Fig.37

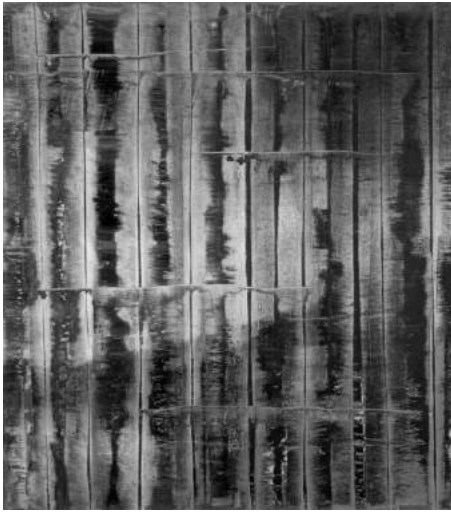


Fig.38

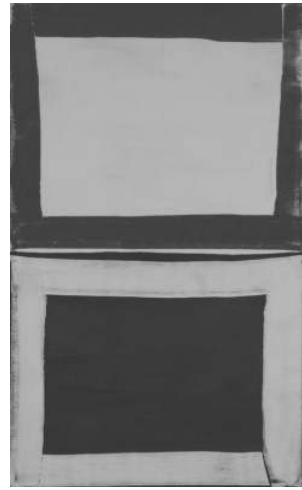


Fig.39

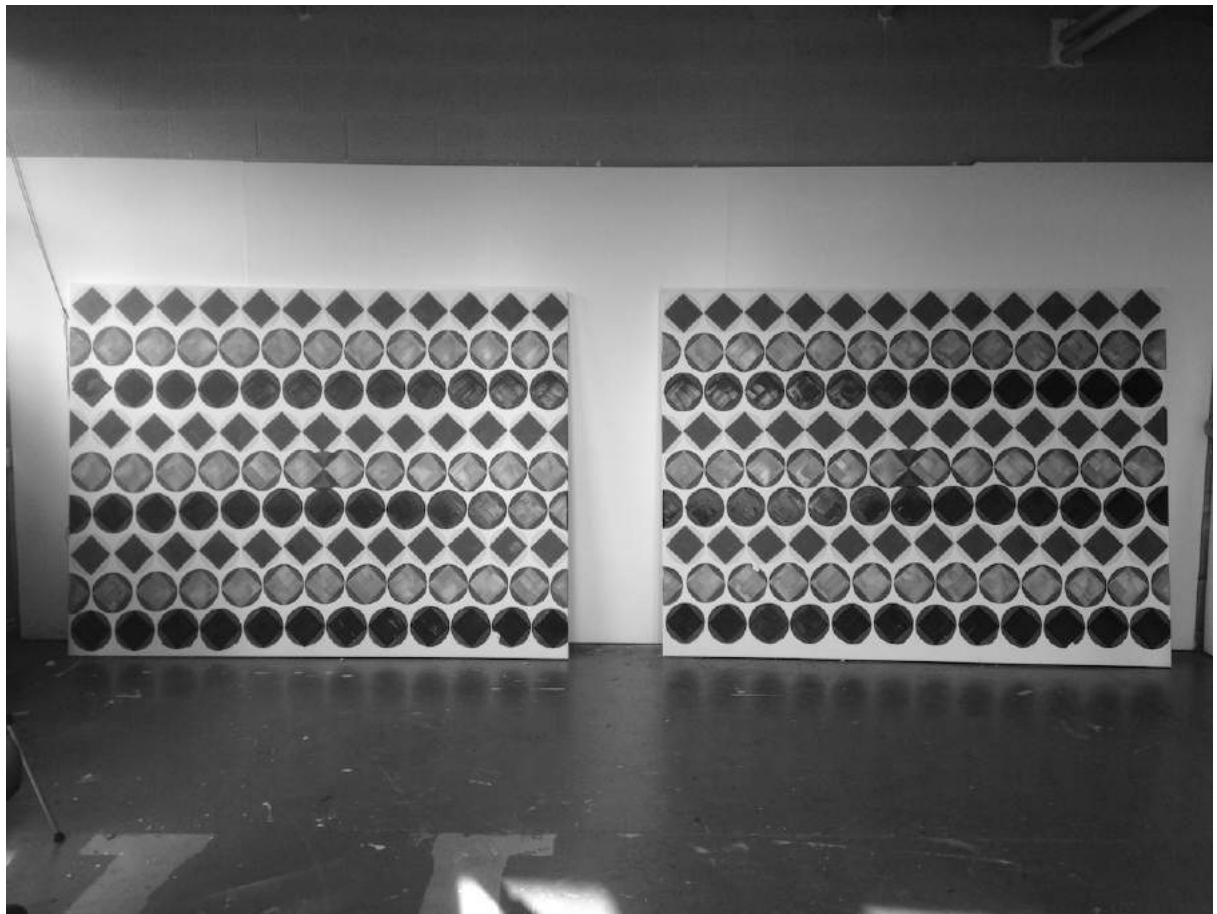


Fig.40

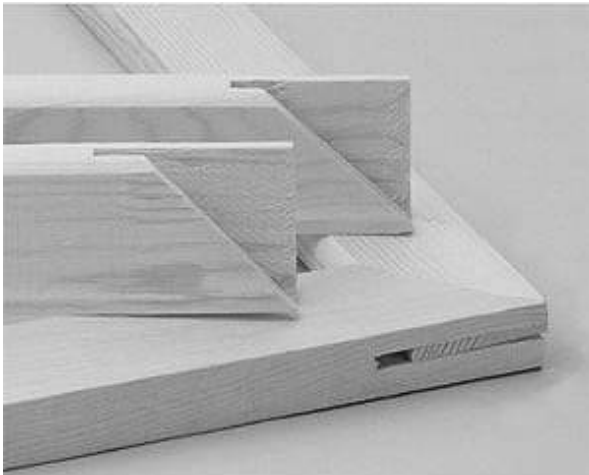


Fig.41

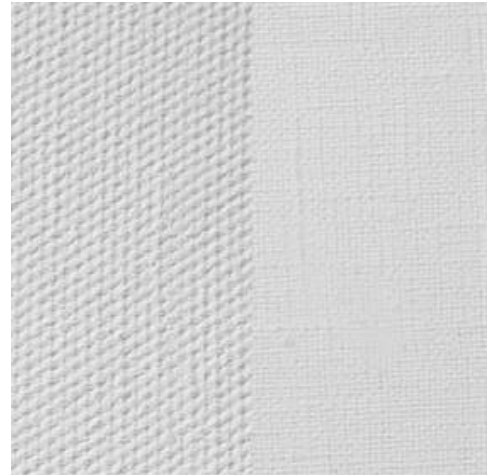


Fig.42



Fig.43



Fig.44



Fig.45



Fig.46



Fig.47



Fig.48



Fig.49

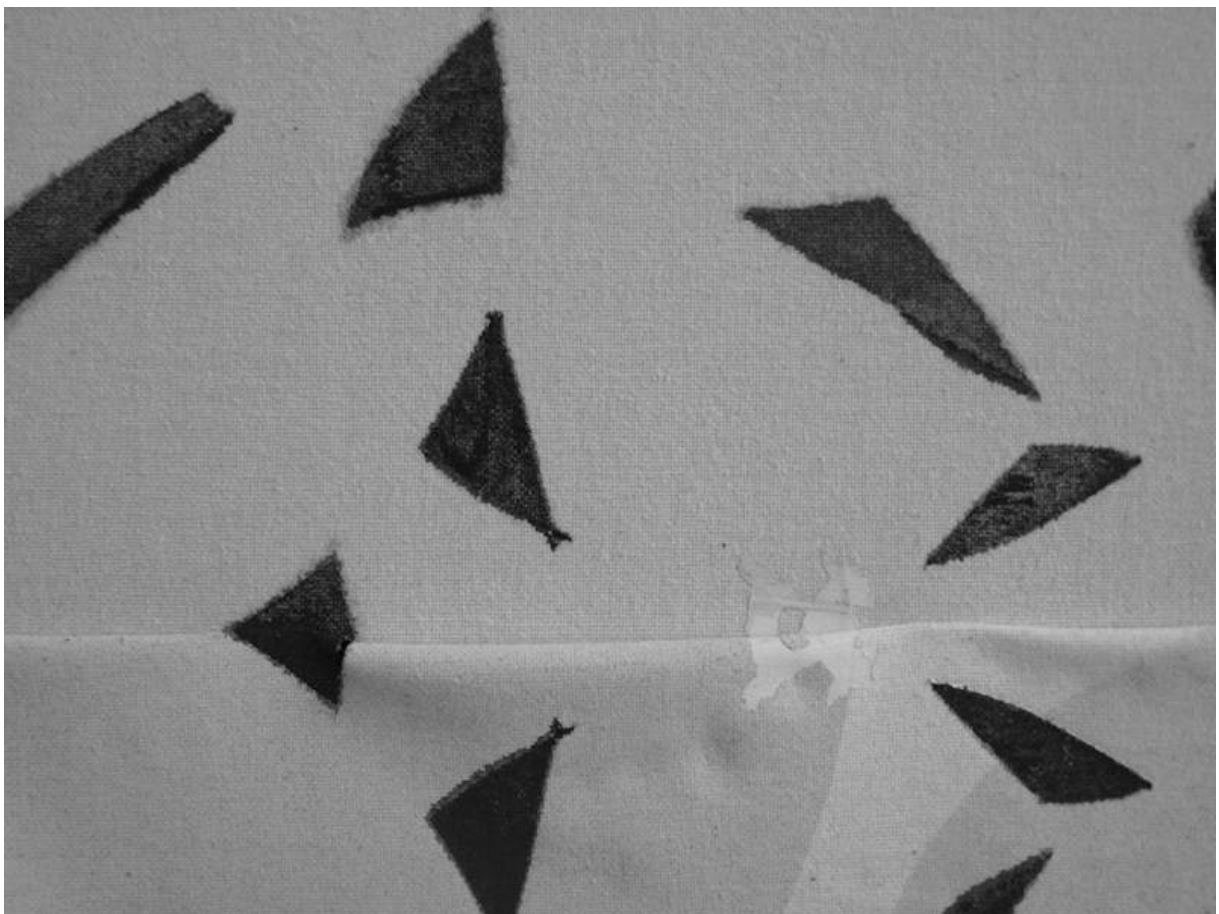


Fig.50

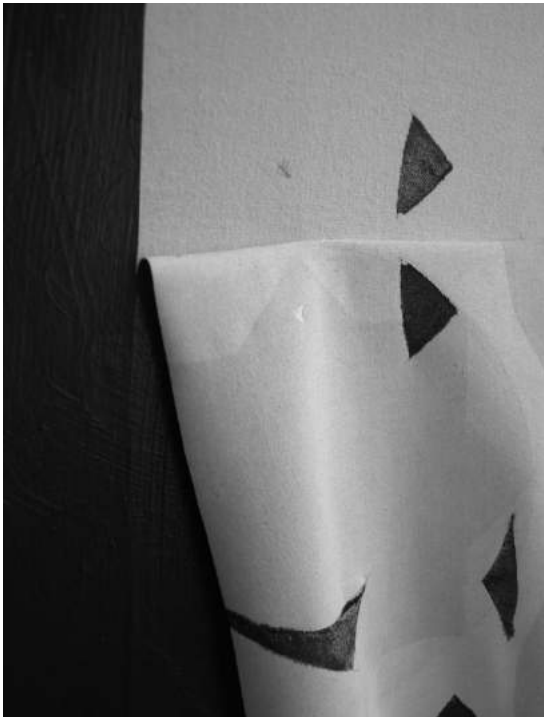


Fig.51



Fig.52

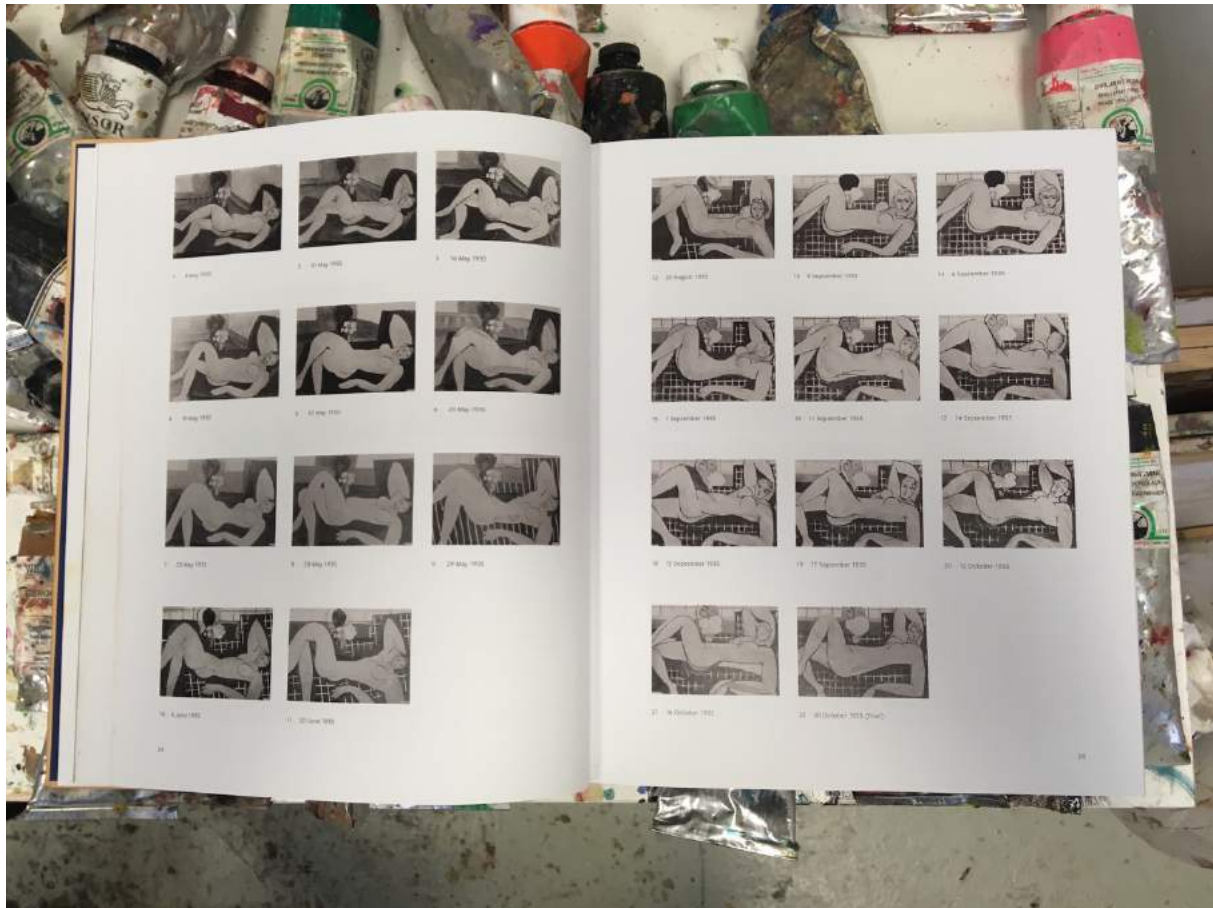


Fig.53



Fig.54

Chapter 1: Making-Itself



2. Susan Connolly, Studio image taken from Kramer, F. (2017) *Matisse- Bonnard:*
"Long Live Painting", Prestel.

Introduction

“Roughly speaking, the history of painting from Manet through Synthetic Cubism and Henri Matisse may be characterised in terms of the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality- or of reality from the power of painting to represent it- in favour of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself”.⁷⁰

The discipline of painting and its value, the suggestions of its demise, even its death have been much declared, analysed, tested and debated in twentieth century art history and theory. With this doctrine still influencing and persisting and ultimately continuing into 21st century discourse around contemporary painting practices.

For almost 150 years the discipline of painting has been supposedly dying while finding positions (sometimes uncomfortably) within visual arts’ development and art history. But since the introduction and development of abstract forms during the early years of the twentieth century - most notably with the invention of collage understood and accepted as having originated from the work of both Georges Braque (1882-1963) and Pablo Picasso⁷¹ (1881-1973) during their development of the Cubist art movement in or around 1913, both the medium and surface of painting within the traditional canon of picture making was and could be seen to be in disrepute.

When objects entered the surface of painting our understanding of picturing, pictures and images⁷² changed forever. With this, a seemingly simple addition to the surface of painting, a

⁷⁰ Michael Fried, “Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, Stella,” in *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 213-265.

⁷¹ Fig.5.2, p.62.

⁷² Fig.6.2, p.63.

new paradigm for the medium was established (some new hybrid): a concept of images beyond their picturing became possible. What both Braque and Picasso enabled for the first time on the skin of painting was literally to let the world into and onto the surface of the painting frame via non-traditional materials and objects, such as paper and cardboard in their case, with later additions of raised objects, such as everyday utilitarian bric-a-brac, especially in Picasso's work. This new hybrid painting was to uncomfortably sit somewhere between painting and sculpture, something akin to wall reliefs, but not quite.

This new permissibility, of actual objects, into the illusionistic space of the historically accepted norms, presented a challenge to the traditionally held values within the medium and discipline of painting. I propose that this is when abstract paintings/pictures started to become images (something akin to an idea or concept) and I will demonstrate through the research carried out within the *E+N Painting project* how this continues to inform and develop a method of painting beyond itself⁷³.

So, what is the difference between a picture and an image and why is it important in relation to a theory of *making-itself*? Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell refers to such a definition in his book, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, as “want(ing) to erase the distinction between high and low culture”⁷⁴. This would appear to be an issue worth exploring in the *E+N Painting project* as within our contemporary society we have become so saturated with pictures and images in ways that are unprecedented compared to previous generations. Mitchell sees abstract paintings as the site for such an exploration as they are “pictures that want not to be pictures, pictures that want to be liberated from image-making... (and intriguingly) pictures

⁷³ Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

⁷⁴ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, 47.

want(ing) equal rights with language, not to be turned into language”.⁷⁵

Mitchell maintains that there is a clear “vernacular distinction between images and pictures....as Wittgenstein (1889-1951) puts it, “An image is not a picture, but a picture can correspond to it”⁷⁶. Mitchell asks the question of whether the picture or the image holds value and demonstrates this through the well-known “Walter Benjamin’s (1892-1940) argument that the reproduction cheapens the work of art, draining value and “aura” from it”.⁷⁷ Mitchell states, “What, then, is a picture? Let us start again from the vernacular. You can hang a picture, but you cannot hang an image. The image seems to float without any visible means of support, a phantasmatic, virtual, or spectral appearance. It is what can be lifted off the picture, transferred to another medium.... the image is the “intellectual property” that escapes the materiality of the picture when it is copied. The picture is the image plus the support: it is the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium”.⁷⁸ Thus, the image can hold an idea of painting and still be deemed a painting. However, this definition also suggests an origin of a contemporary doubt.

Doubt: Medium Possibility or Medium Abandonment

At the beginning of the twentieth century when objects began to enter the otherwise traditionally flat surface of the canvas, what appears to have happened was that artists were presented with an original possibility. This new medium brought immense potential, but it also brought a doubt. A doubt in the meaning of what was understood to be painting, a doubt in the potential and power of the illusionistic pictorial sphere, a doubt in the viewer’s ability to engage with surface, something philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) deemed “the first step

⁷⁵ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, 44- 47.

⁷⁶ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, 84.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, 84.

⁷⁸ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want*, 85.

towards finding out is to acknowledge (that) you do not satisfactorily know already”.⁷⁹

Doubt first began to emerge among painters sometime during the mid- nineteenth century. Such doubts notably emerged soon after the invention of photography⁸⁰, which was heralded by many as the medium of the future. With its popularity and rapid cultural acceptance, photography soon became the new dominant medium in portraiture a position held up until this point within painting genres.

With the invention of photography and especially because of its accessibility to everyone (people who previously would not have been able to afford paintings of portraits before photography), this new medium lead artists such as Paul Delaroche (1797-1856) in 1839 to declare; “from today, painting is dead!”⁸¹, a statement often repeated and echoed right up to painting discussions and debates today. Ultimately though photography didn’t kill painting, despite painting as a discipline having since this period experienced many more declarations of its demise it is still now showing a vitality for newness.

Arguably though what photography’s invention did do to the discipline of painting was to allow the discipline to open up and ultimately question its viability as an illusionistic medium. Painting as a discipline began to turn its meaning in on itself, embracing new methods for making images and ultimately making painting anew. Art critic Barry Schwabsky said that this has led to a situation where “after the invention, first of printing, then of photography and- last but not least- of digital technology, the word ‘painting’ can hardly be equated in any simple

⁷⁹ Shiff, *Doubt*, 18.

⁸⁰ Fig.8.2, p.64.

⁸¹ Marvin Heiferman, “Photography Murdered Painting, Right?” produced by The Smithsonian Institution Archives, last modified February 2, 2010, <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/photography-murdered-painting-right>.

way with the words ‘picture’ or ‘image’”.⁸²

In other words, not just picturing things, but instead creating a set of circumstances that led theorist Thierry de Duve (1944-) to comment that “the moment photography was invented, painters had lost their job as purveyors of resembling images”.⁸³ He goes on further to describe how the tradition had to reinvent and push painting beyond itself in order to prove its position and value within the plastic/fine arts.

Masters of Doubt

“a doubt is a weak belief but also – a belief is a strong doubt”.⁸⁴

The above definition of doubt comes from art historian Richard Shiffs’ (1943-) 2007 publication of the same name, *Doubt*, a book that I found myself often reassessing throughout the *E+N Painting project* as it helped to situate my own method of doubt through two very distinct possibilities. Below I have interrogated what my own interpretation of this suggestion relates to by selecting and analysing two celebrated, yet very different artists – both of which have been much written about and theorised in relation to twentieth century art history: Paul Cezanne⁸⁵ (1839-1906) and Marcel Duchamp⁸⁶ (1887-1968).

Within this section, I will articulate and illustrate the theory I am building in relation to how painting as a discipline separated into two distinctly different and equally important pursuits

⁸² Schwabsky, *Object or Project*, 70.

⁸³ deDuve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 148.

⁸⁴ Shiff, *Doubt*, 24.

⁸⁵ Fig.16.2/19.2, p.66.

⁸⁶ Fig.20.2/22/2, p.67/68.

within late nineteenth and early twentieth century art making, which began with both of these artists. Cezanne representing a form of bodily or cerebral examination while Duchamp argued for a form of conceptual euphoria⁸⁷ beyond the surface and materiality of the medium.

In Shiff's quote above, doubt somehow implies a questioning and the possibility of a belief in something you do not yet know and therefore opens the potential of an artwork to an abundance of hidden, or rather yet unknown possibilities. To doubt is not to distrust and within the modernist painting tradition to doubt is nothing new. Critic Barry Schwabsky has said, "doubt is the one idea in art that never goes out of date because it's the one idea that's sure to keep reacting to changing circumstance".⁸⁸

Questioning, created through material experience, and skepticism, concerning one's visual knowledge and handling of this wet, messy and (often) fugitive material, leads to such crises: what should one paint and even why paint at all? Angst sometimes resulting in "work(s) of art as...a seismic record of the artists' anxiety"⁸⁹ or an abandonment altogether of the medium and discipline, therefore presenting a situation where painting became redundant after Duchamp.

Shiff embraces "doubt as an epistemological tool, he poses the question of how specific histories of art come to be constructed"⁹⁰ and below is such a construct, an art historical narrative which has been informed and developed through the practical element within the *E+N Painting project* visual outcomes. As Shiff has said "the art historian [artist] is as immersed in

⁸⁷ Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (LA: University of California Press, 1998), 78.

⁸⁸ Barry Schwabsky, *The Perpetual Guest: Art in the Unfinished Present* (New York: Verso, 2016), 274.

⁸⁹ Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (LA: University of California Press, reprint ed. 1995), 38.

⁹⁰ Shiff, *Doubt*, 3.

history as is the art object under consideration; the way in which professional art historians [artists] respond to art works reveals their own cultural and social formation”.⁹¹

Therefore Shiff’s working methodology is very attractive to an artist such as myself, as it gives equal priority to a “materialist approach to the art object, to the making of the art object, and to how the art object figures through art writing”.⁹² Shiff also claims that “the art historians build up their knowledge gradually, over time and through the arbitrary accumulation of information”⁹³ which is similar to that of the painter building up methods, process/handling, even technique and imagery, through repetition, chance, slippage and tacit knowledge, “a painter more interested in questions than answers”⁹⁴ unfolds.

After all, an artwork can never really be said to be complete; it’s not complete in its inception, it’s not complete in its production and it’s not complete in its viewing. The *E+N Painting project* has tested this very notion through its repeated instructional procedure (painting the same painting over and over again) something Shiff would call analogy⁹⁵. But it is Shiff’s awareness of embodied subjectivity, situated knowledge and the phenomenological inter-subjectivity of the interpretative act⁹⁶ of both making and writing about art that has allowed for this project to unfold.

Importantly within a reading of Shiff’s work and throughout the *E+N Painting project*⁹⁷, “seeing and making, and writing about seeing and making are equally stressed and materially

⁹¹ Shiff, *Doubt*, 7-8.

⁹² Shiff, *Doubt*, 8.

⁹³ Shiff, *Doubt*, 10.

⁹⁴ Schwabsky, *The Perpetual Guest*, 276.

⁹⁵ Shiff, *Doubt*, 11. ‘... because it involves a set of discrete elements, distilled from an array of facts, creating resemblances that in turn imply sequence, evolutions, oppositions and reactions’

⁹⁶ Shiff, *Doubt*, 11

⁹⁷ Fig.25.2/27.2, p.69.

linked practices: all take time; all are built up over time; all attest to physicality and process”.⁹⁸

Doubt introduced with Cezanne

Within a Modernist reading of a theory of such doubt, Paul Cezanne’s doubt was famously “infinite and agonizing”.⁹⁹ His exploration of painting’s mark making and chaos, resulted in what would become a radically new way of looking and seeing, through both the materiality of painting and the world we inhabit.

Notably, Cezanne’s¹⁰⁰ contribution to painting evolution resulted in a whole new proposition within traditionally held views concerning perspective and how one experiences paint and even paintings, within one’s whole bodily being, a view that artist and academic Barb Bolt¹⁰¹ has referred to as his “abandoning of himself to the ‘chaos of sensation’... (and thus) continually reinventing the language of painting”.¹⁰²

Art historian David Joselit has likened Cezanne’s doubt to a method of “Marking... and...Scoring”¹⁰³ and sees this as the foundation of what French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) called *Cezanne’s Doubt*¹⁰⁴. In Cezanne’s painting what this makes visible for a contemporary audience is a form of “distracted spectatorship”¹⁰⁵ combined with the

⁹⁸ Shiff, *Doubt*, 13.

⁹⁹ Thomas Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2003), 272-289.

¹⁰⁰ Fig.29.2, p.69.

¹⁰¹ Barb Bolt’s date of birth was not available online.

¹⁰² Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Preformative Power of the Image* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 47.

¹⁰³ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, 272-289.

¹⁰⁵ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 12.

“painstaking process of transposing sensation into form”¹⁰⁶. Joselit sees Cezanne’s¹⁰⁷ continued relevance to painters today as being that of the age-old existential question: “How can an artist mark the flow of experience, first as a producer (painter) and then as a consumer (spectator)?”¹⁰⁸

There is something to be said here about how painting¹⁰⁹ holds time rather than demanding it like so many other contemporary mediums. How the painter, through their decision-making concerning their use of material, process, and duration (of his or her own time) reveals within mark making¹¹⁰ not just an image but a visual outcome which challenges our perception of how we both experience and exist within the world. The language of brush-marks, therefore, leaving what theorist Isabelle Graw has referred to as “the ghost-like presence of its author ...traces of an activity to the eye”¹¹¹ and therefore “marking, scoring and storing”¹¹² painting’s activity.

Painting’s time is thus different, it unfolds in a way that is slow, and “slowness works against all our prevailing urges and requirements”¹¹³. Paintings are, therefore “a resistance to the contemporary mandate of speed”¹¹⁴, with this tension remaining visible upon the surface and within the skin of painting. Joselit has declared this to be modern painting’s “privileged format of negotiating attention, for exploring the regulation and deregulation of effective time in an era of massive image production and circulation”¹¹⁵.

Over a hundred years ago what Cezanne made visible upon the skin of painting was not just

¹⁰⁶ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁷ Fig.33.2, p.71.

¹⁰⁸ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 13-14.

¹⁰⁹ Fig.32.2, p.70.

¹¹⁰ Fig.30.2/31.2, p.70.

¹¹¹ Graw, *Painting beyond Itself*, 79.

¹¹² Graw, *Painting beyond Itself*, 79.

¹¹³ Graw, *Painting beyond Itself*, 79.

¹¹⁴ Joselit, *What to Do with Pictures*, 86.

¹¹⁵ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 14.

an image, a picture or even surface tension, as Joselit sees it, but rather his paintings reveal how this slow medium “stores an exorbitant stockpile of effect”¹¹⁶ and meaning that unfolds into a/the future. Cezanne’s doubt, therefore, can be said to have become an “ontological aporia of painting as a procedure for marking time”.¹¹⁷

Duchamp’s Skepticism

Marcel Duchamp was from an early age recorded as wanting “to be a great painter”¹¹⁸ but he is also often quoted as using such derogatory terms such as “stupid as a painter”¹¹⁹, believing painting to be an art form that exclusively cultivated the visual¹²⁰. Hence his contribution to my theory of *making-itself* is therefore very different to that of the artist Paul Cezanne because his, Duchamp's doubt, led to an actual abandonment of painting¹²¹ and paint for a wider exploration of the meaning of art solely through intellectual expression, what the art critic Barbara Rose (1938-) has referred to as “his search for an alternative to what he disparagingly termed retinal art which appealed only to the eye but not the mind”.¹²²

Marcel Duchamp’s doubting in the early twentieth century, unquestionably created the greatest doubter of them all. And importantly within art history, Duchamp’s uncertainties and resulting questioning of the meaning for and of painting during this period would change not just painting but art-making forever. Specifically, our (the audience’s) acceptance of the art object as a ready-made; that found object already of the world, already in the world, waiting to

¹¹⁶ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 14.

¹¹⁷ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 17.

¹¹⁸ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 17.

¹¹⁹ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 17.

¹²⁰ Fig.34.2/37.2, p.71/72.

¹²¹ deDuve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 149.

¹²² Barbara Rose, “Rethinking Duchamp,” *The Brooklyn Rail* (December 18, 20014), <https://brooklynrail.org/2014/12/art/rethinking-duchamp>.

be chosen, to reveal its reality or meaning through both artistic license and often applied philosophy.

What Duchamp is historically noted as doing with his doubt was to create an alternative new (a new new) in the form of this new art material: the ready-made. With the discovery of the ready-made what is introduced within the visual arts is something that had not been done since the invention of easel painting. Something which would radically change the way art was made, accepted and seen.

As a material, the ready-made offered an abundance of new potential. After all, it could be found anywhere and everywhere, it was (or rather could be) inexpensive, often utilitarian and therefore, free from artistic baggage such as viscosity, liquidity, beauty, craft, skill and even tradition. The ready-made really was a new medium/material that could hold and make visible the artist's ideas without the messiness of traditional material handling and therefore this makes Duchamp's doubt different as it "begins when the work enters the world"¹²³ and not during its production.

Duchamp made his first artwork with his/this new material, the ready-made, in 1913¹²⁴. It was titled, *Bicycle Wheel*¹²⁵ and materially consisted of a bicycle wheel mounted on a sitting stool. Importantly¹²⁶ the actual original artwork was later lost, probably dismantled and discarded to the trash, the fate of so many of Duchamp's early ready-mades. But like so many others, this artwork was later reproduced from photographic images taken of the artwork during

¹²³ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 17

¹²⁴ The first 'ready-made' is credited as being the 'Bicycle Wheel'.

¹²⁵ Fig.35.2, p.71.

¹²⁶ This becomes very important to the aspect of the idea of the 'original' and debates around the 'authentic' in relation to painting. I will explore this further when looking at Robert Rauschenberg's White Painting Series from 1949.

its brief lifetime within the studio.

In this coming together of everyday objects, the beginning of what we now call Conceptual Art was visually given form when the artist's idea became transitive, and when authenticity moved from object to author. But the term itself, Conceptual Art, was not fully realised nor for that matter named until the 1960s, when a generation of younger artists such as Donald Judd¹²⁷ (1928-1994), Robert Morris¹²⁸, Robert Smithson¹²⁹ (1938-1973) and John Baldessari¹³⁰ (1931-) began to look back to the past to overcome their own uncertainty and doubts about their own futures¹³¹. Joselit sees this as one of the ready-mades' greatest accomplishments, "regarding the aporias of circulation rather than those of production and perception".¹³²

Most importantly for the development of painting though, is Duchamp's abandonment¹³³ of the discipline after his invention of the ready-made. Duchamp's¹³⁴ questioning of the medium is one that was far broader than simply being about painting as a tradition and did not manifest overnight. Rather it started with a doubt in a system, in the mode and conventions of making art, and on an individual level a doubt in his personal ability and notably in his own peer acceptance¹³⁵. Therefore, we can see Duchamp's doubt as a very different method (and reasoning) of doubting, not just painting but art as a method of communicating some "social

¹²⁷ Fig.38.2, p.73.

¹²⁸ Fig.39.2, p.73.

¹²⁹ Fig.40.2, p.73.

¹³⁰ Fig.41.2, p.73.

¹³¹ Especially after the dominance of the Abstract Expressionist movement, which had preceded them in the late 1940s well into the 1950s.

¹³² Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 17.

¹³³ Thierry de Duve in 'Kant after Duchamp' says '...*The ready-mades (and to some extent the Large Glass) are the other side of Duchamp's abandonment of painting...Obviously, the ready-mades are, among other things, Duchamp's way of registering his abandonment of painting, of getting It on the record. If only for this reason, they belong to the history of painting and not, for example, despite their three-dimensional appearance and qualities, to that of sculpture.*', p.150.

¹³⁴ Fig.42.2, p.74.

¹³⁵ Two of his own brothers had been on the selection committee who rejected his work for the Salon des Independent

utility”.¹³⁶

Duchamp’s abandonment of painting is announced in this quotation from art historian Thierry de Duve when he proclaims “The ready-mades are the other side of Duchamp’s abandonment of painting...[his] way of registering his abandonment”.¹³⁷ Therefore Duchamp’s contribution to the discourse of painting doubt can be said to be a very different one to that of Paul Cezanne, with “the issue of specificity- or purity- attached to the word painting”¹³⁸ and becomes what David Joselit has referred to as “...a form of speculation”.¹³⁹

Doubting, Painting: early to mid- twentieth century

Upon further examination of twentieth century art history, a number of alternative histories to do with the narrative concerning the relationship between doubt and avant-gardism within painting can be discovered. Art historian Richard Shiff refers to, “artists making work from his or her, own perspective, according to his/her interests, values, and even emotions”¹⁴⁰. The artist David Salle (1952-) has referred to the same hypothesis as “when an artist sits down to write about another artist, he is also writing about himself”¹⁴¹ with the author of such history equally bringing his or her own enthusiasm, ideas and concerns to our broader understanding of painting’s recent development.

Doubt, therefore, is something that can be seen as a modernist trope, an eternal search for

¹³⁶ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 148.

¹³⁷ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 150.

¹³⁸ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 151.

¹³⁹ Joselit, *Marking, Scoring, Storing*, 20.

¹⁴⁰ Shiff, *Doubt*, 25.

¹⁴¹ David Salle, *How to See: Looking, Talking and Thinking about Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 8.

a/the new. Doubt thus both propels and has informed many artists' experimental practices, Pablo Picasso¹⁴² (1881-1973), Alberto Giacometti¹⁴³ (1901-1966), Joan Miró (1893-1983), with doubt also incurring casualties to accumulate along the way, George Braque (1882-1963), Pierre Bonnard¹⁴⁴ (1867- 1947), Eva Hesse¹⁴⁵ (1936-1970). But ultimately what doubt consequently does to an artist is to create the space for questioning within the visual arts and has, in fact, encouraged many of the inventions and breakthroughs of our time.

Doubt it would seem has given visibility to many new methods of working and experiencing art beyond its intention, meaning, and site. And through this research, I propose that doubt has enabled materials to make themselves¹⁴⁶ (*making-itself*), as it acknowledges that the artist does not yet know, but that they believe in the material (paint) and its ability to show its meaning through its transformation into form.

The *E+N Painting project* has throughout the research period, embraced a method of doubting both the materiality of paint and its specificity, it has enabled the work to consistently re-evaluate its position within the canon of art history and painting while exploring new possibilities within the elasticity of the paint medium. This methodology has allowed for the work to evolve from a reductive concept (three colours, 3 shapes) to a paint idea that has the potential to embrace the chaos, chance, and uncertainty of the relationship and subjectivity of the artist and materials in the making of the work. It has revealed a method of allowing the process to “renew painting from the inside, by drawing on the essence of the medium....

¹⁴² Fig.43.2, p.74.

¹⁴³ Fig.48.2, p.77.

¹⁴⁴ Bonnard is known to have huge difficulty finishing off paintings, sometimes taking years to do so. Fig.44.2, p.75.

¹⁴⁵ Hesse started her art career as a painter, before moving towards work, which was more relief like and ultimately abandoning painting in favour of a more sculptural practice. Fig.46.2, p.75.

¹⁴⁶ Fig.47.2, p.76.

material and method are so clearly displayed that the support can almost be mutating into a platform...the only goal is to demonstrate the process itself".¹⁴⁷

Doubt thus comes with and from innovation, it manifests from within the unknown, it celebrates uncertainty and has allowed artists (including the *E+N Painting project*) to forge new paths and directions using the medium of paint. I will demonstrate here that such new pathways are and were historically littered with artists' uncertainty. What follows is a synopsis of twentieth century painting doubt discovered during the research period in an attempt to identify the key moments, crises and innovations that have moved painting beyond its framing and into an ever-expanded field.

Painting doubt

As previously discussed, by the 1920s the surface of painting has changed forever and therefore we can view the 1920s as a period when painting doubt became manifest in multiple painted forms. There was for example Spanish artist Joan Miró and his *Anti-Paintings* which revealed and made visible Miró's battle with his material choice, his "violence and resistance".¹⁴⁸ Miró famously declared, "I want to assassinate painting", his struggle with the material and his quest for a new becoming overwhelming within his studio pursuit.

During the 1930s there are the recorded stories of artist Alberto Giacometti who doubted and experienced painstaking struggles while handling the medium of paint. Struggles that would during this period become visible as almost scarring marks and traces within his endless

¹⁴⁷ Kob, *Painting about Painting*, 13-20.

¹⁴⁸ "Joan Miro: Painting and Anti-Painting 1927-1937," MOMA, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/33>.

obliterations and restarting of his portraits. Giacometti's doubt¹⁴⁹ pushed him increasingly towards an obsessiveness within the pursuit of the medium and the image outcomes he pursued.

In the 1940s and early 1950s what is seen both in Europe and America, particularly after the Second World War, is a new sort of doubt becoming apparent. A doubt that was physically evident and increasingly visualised as violence both within and towards painting. A doubt which pushed artists further and further away from any form of an ideal or beauty that could be found within its accepted norms - towards some form of truth within the medium, described by art critic Clement Greenberg¹⁵⁰ (1909-1994) as: "the essence of modernism".¹⁵¹

For example, during this period in Italy the sculptor Lucio Fontana¹⁵² (1899-1968) introduced into the surface of painting his first hole and with this action, he directly broke not just the skin of the paint, the structure of the canvas support, but also art history's perception of the relationship between painting and sculpture. In Fontana's biography, *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch*, Anthony White (1976-) notes Fontana as "having grave doubts about his chosen path"¹⁵³, Fontana confirming such a position in his own writings as his "terrible doubt"¹⁵⁴ in relation to his artistic decision making.

In America, during the same period, the celebrated Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman¹⁵⁵ (1905-1970) "wanted to see how far (he) could stretch (the colour) before it

¹⁴⁹ Felix Baumann and Poul Erik Tojner, *Cezanne and Giacometti: Paths of Doubt* (Berlin: Hatje Cante, 2008).

¹⁵⁰ Fig.49.2, p.77.

¹⁵¹ John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol 4, Modernism with a Vengeance 1957-1969* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 85.

¹⁵² Fig.50.2, p.78.

¹⁵³ Anthony White, *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 171.

¹⁵⁴ White, *Lucio Fontana*, 118.

¹⁵⁵ Fig.51.2, p.78.

broke”,¹⁵⁶ while fellow Abstract Expressionist and recently displaced European artist William de Kooning¹⁵⁷ (1904-1997) amid working on the now much celebrated painting, *Woman I*, confessed “I’m not particularly happy about this one. I’m still working out of doubt”.¹⁵⁸

In the 1940s and into the early 1950s what can be seen in these and other artists’ work is an almost full rejection of the illusionistic nature of painting and an embracing of process and materiality of medium (paint) in a quest to find some new essence of painting. Thus, this painting pursuit and inquiry (crises and doubt) later becomes known as the Abstract Expressionism movement, producing a group of very different artists who were loosely associated with their interest in abstraction, in an all-over-ness; the skin of paint, the best known of whom being Jackson Pollock (1912-1956).

The 1950s became a time when painters such as Helen Frankenthaler¹⁵⁹ (1928-2011), and Morris Louis¹⁶⁰ (1912-1962) fully began to embrace the nature of the medium’s own materiality it would seem. Importantly through, during this period of research and discovery, acrylic paint¹⁶¹ was first developed and become the new painting material of choice and offered new possibilities within many younger artists’ studios. After all, acrylic paint had no history as it was genuinely a new product similar to the readymade a few generations before. It, therefore, had no weighted association and importantly artists did not yet know its full potential, allowing for all manner of successes and failures to enter picture/image making.

¹⁵⁶ Shiff, *Doubt*, 45.

¹⁵⁷ Fig.53.2, p.78.

¹⁵⁸ Shiff, *Doubt*, 95.

¹⁵⁹ Fig.54.2, p.78.

¹⁶⁰ Fig.55.2, p.78.

¹⁶¹ Fig.56.2, p.79.

Doubting, Painting: beyond 1949

Younger generations of American artists during the 1950s begin to reject previously inward and destructive manifestations of the previous generational doubt. Artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Robert Rauschenberg¹⁶², Jasper Johns¹⁶³ and Ellsworth Kelly¹⁶⁴ were to embrace all of painting's inherited doubt, accepting its materiality with gusto, experimenting further with painting's specificities, its physical medium, through staining, pouring, soaking, shaping, deconstructing and re-constructing.

What we see during the 1950s is the beginnings of the evolution of a kind of painting which moved further away from its previously confined structure, developing and embracing the possibilities to be found in the early forms of what we now call a mode of conceptual painting. Painting begins to firmly establish itself beyond its picturing of the real, developing into the language of its materiality and the potential this offered/s for a new. The 1950s thus becomes the decade of celebrated doubt, doubt without anxiety, doubt with possibility, where new materials such as acrylic paint are being tested and new possibilities within the handling of this new, fast drying liquid can be found.

But come the 1960s these possibilities shift, and painting began to experience what is often considered as its most difficult phase since the invention of photography in the mid nineteenth century. The 1960s with hindsight therefore can be viewed as a time when whole generations of artists turned their backs on the medium of painting to experiment and embrace more ephemeral, performative and textual forms, as viable mediums to communicate the urgency of

¹⁶² Fig.57.2, p.79.

¹⁶³ Fig.58.2, p.79.

¹⁶⁴ Fig.59.2, p.79.

their (that generation's) political and artistic messages, as a counter-revolution against what many view as Greenbergian theory.

This amounted for some to an abandonment of the medium within a rapidly changing cultural and social landscape on both sides of the Atlantic. Interestingly and importantly for the canon of painting and what came beyond the 1960s is that many of this younger generation of artists¹⁶⁵ (Frank Stella¹⁶⁶ (1936-), Donald Judd¹⁶⁷, Dan Flavin¹⁶⁸ (1933-1996) and Carl Andre¹⁶⁹ (1935-) for example) were still very much interested in exploring what could be viewed as painterly concerns such as form, surface, texture and the problems associated within the illusionistic space of painting's framing.

What this generation of artists would collectively go on to do, was not just to systematically abandon the medium of paint, its materiality, for methods of production which saw them “depart from the two-dimensionality of painting by adding a three-dimensional element to it”¹⁷⁰: they were also to take art (and thus painting) out of not just the confinements of the illusionistic frame but the cultural restrictions and structures of their day.

This was first seen in the development of what we now call Minimalism and the later development known as Conceptual Art practices. The pursuit of painting it would seem had now become not just about its limitations, but also its re-construction as something else

¹⁶⁵ With many of the now celebrated artists of the time; Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt and John McCracken having studied painting and starting out their careers as painters, wanting to emulate and create painting beyond the work of artist Frank Stella and especially his black painting series of 1959.

¹⁶⁶ Fig.60.2, p.80.

¹⁶⁷ Fig.61.2, p.80

¹⁶⁸ Fig.62.2, p.80.

¹⁶⁹ Fig.63.2, p.80.

¹⁷⁰ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 205.

altogether. Notably what artist Donald Judd referred to as an “arbitrary object”,¹⁷¹ which he believed to be a paradoxical art, where “half or more of the best work ...has been neither painting nor sculpture”¹⁷²but something related to both sculpture and painting.

A new methodology for painting was rapidly making its presence known. Accordingly, this period was to fully recognise and embrace painting’s potential and possibilities to become temporal or expanded, to go further still by embracing an/the idea of painting as a viable material in and of itself. An idea, which was one of interest and offered new possibility for the medium’s continued relevance.

Hence it is during the 1960s that we see a huge cultural shift away from the acceptance of the painter, the importance of subjective agency and individual activities upon and within the frame, towards notions of the painterly, leading Judd to say that, “new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting”.¹⁷³ A hybrid practice becomes fully established at this time I would argue.

During the 1970s what we see are a diverse number of art practices emerging and artists such as John Baldessari¹⁷⁴ establish a painterly language through his hybrid use of painting and photography. Artist Lynda Benglis¹⁷⁵ goes even further with painting’s actual materiality by expanding the medium and paint’s physicality through its very liquidity. Thus, she established a mode of moving painting off the wall and across the floor (usually the domain of sculpture)

¹⁷¹ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *The Collected Essays, Vol. 4*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 85-93.

¹⁷² Donald Judd, “Specific Objects”, in *The Complete Writings; 1959-1974* (New York: The Nova Scotia Press, 1975), 181-189.

¹⁷³ Judd, *Specific Objects*, 181.

¹⁷⁴ Fig.64.2, p.81.

¹⁷⁵ Fig.65.2, p.81.

so that the distinctions between painting and sculpture become more and more difficult to define¹⁷⁶.

What occurs within such experimental hybrid painting practices is a firm moving away from painting's confinements and associated limitations within picturing things. A move beyond those found inside of the canvases' rectangular frame, and importantly a move away from purely holding walls to embracing what philosopher Marshall McLuhan¹⁷⁷ (1911-1980) describes as "content". When the idea can hold or manifest within multiple forms and/or mediums with the "content of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph."¹⁷⁸ A concept of painting¹⁷⁹ thus becomes both expanded and potentially beyond itself.

¹⁷⁶ Darling, *Target Practice*, 69-70.

¹⁷⁷ Fig.66.2, p.82.

¹⁷⁸ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 1964), 1.

¹⁷⁹ Fig.67.2/68.2, p.82.

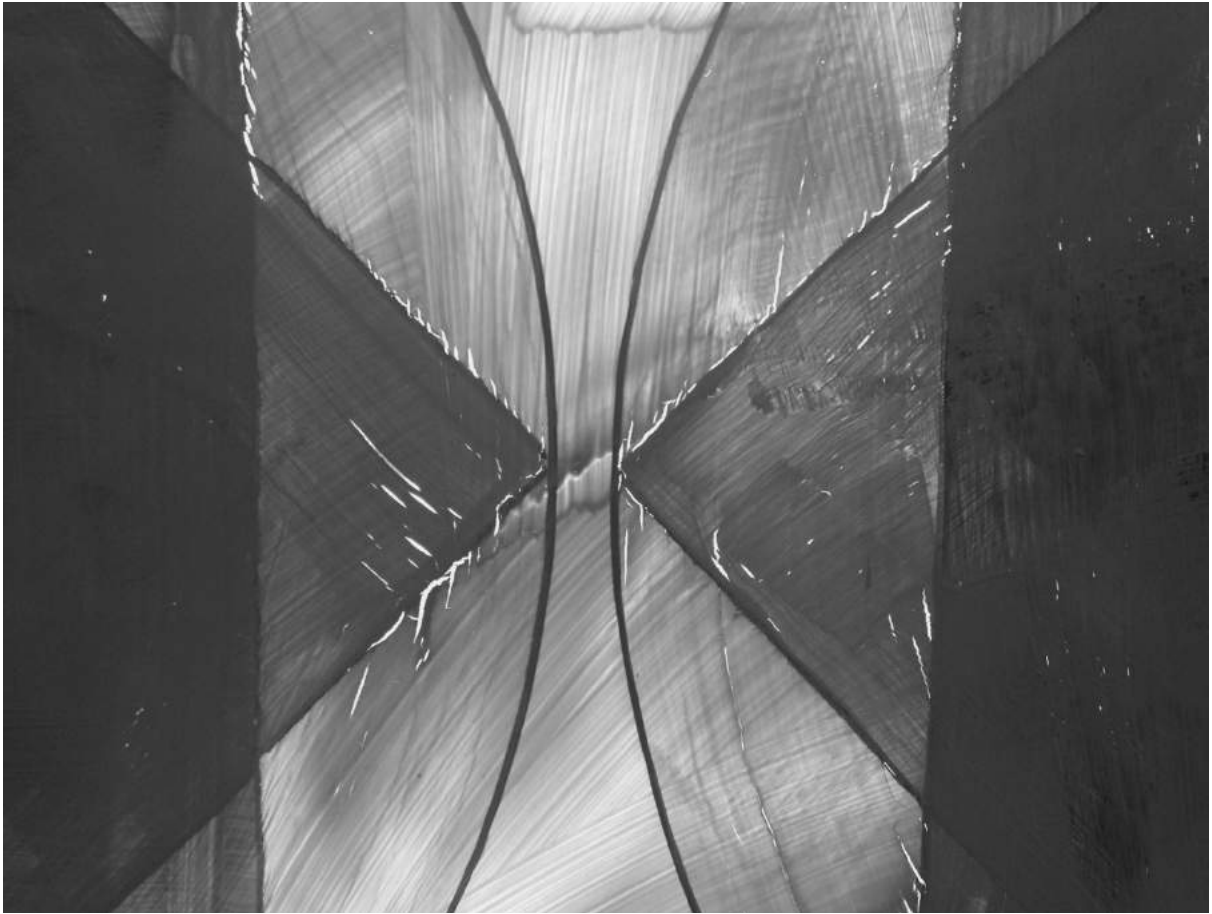
Appendix 2: Processual Atlas II

Fig.1.2



Fig. 2.2

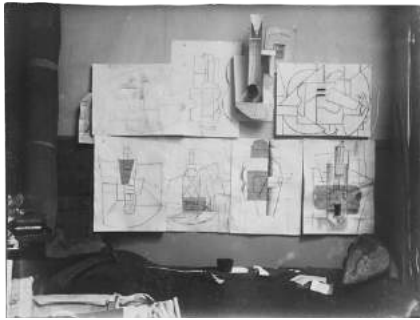


Fig.3.2



Fig.4.2

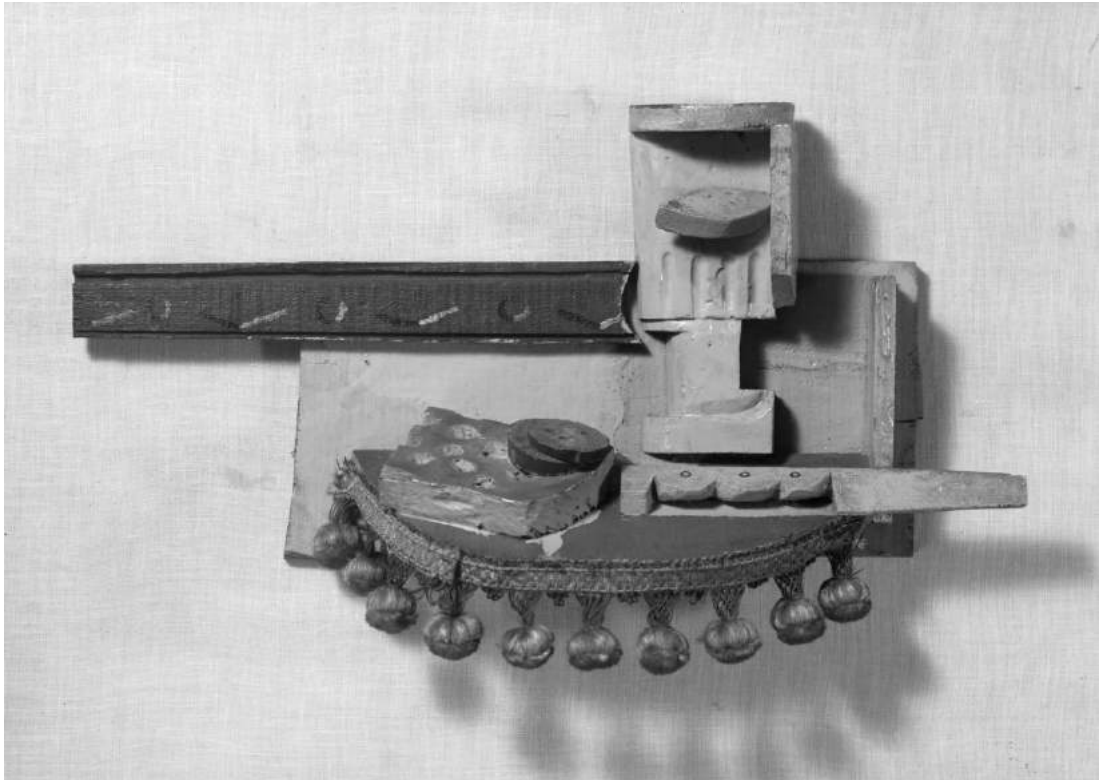


Fig.5.2

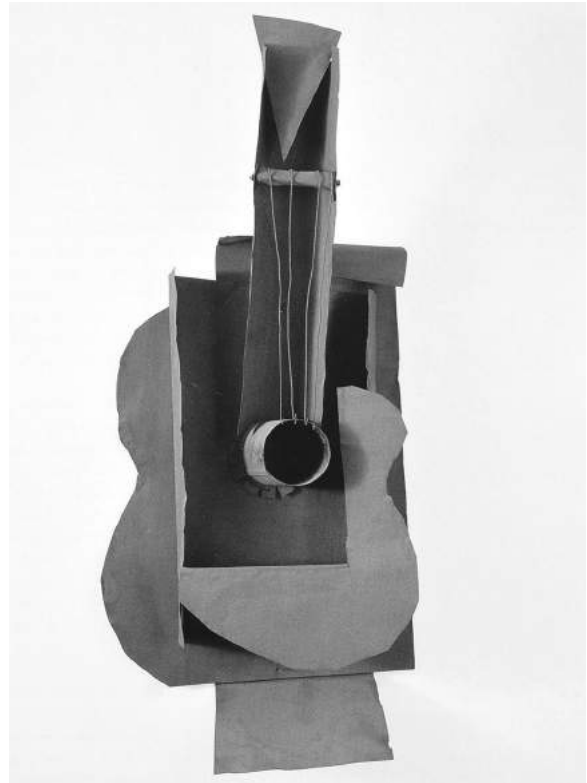


Fig.6.2

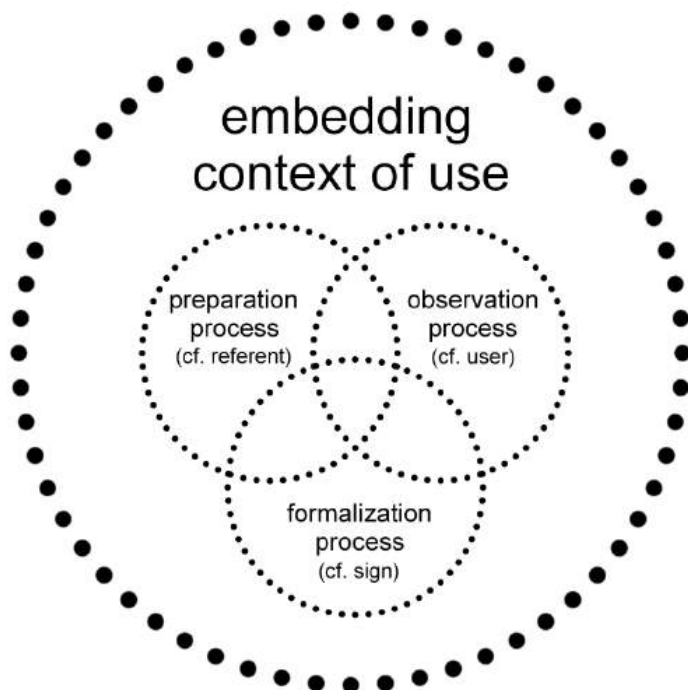


Fig.7.2

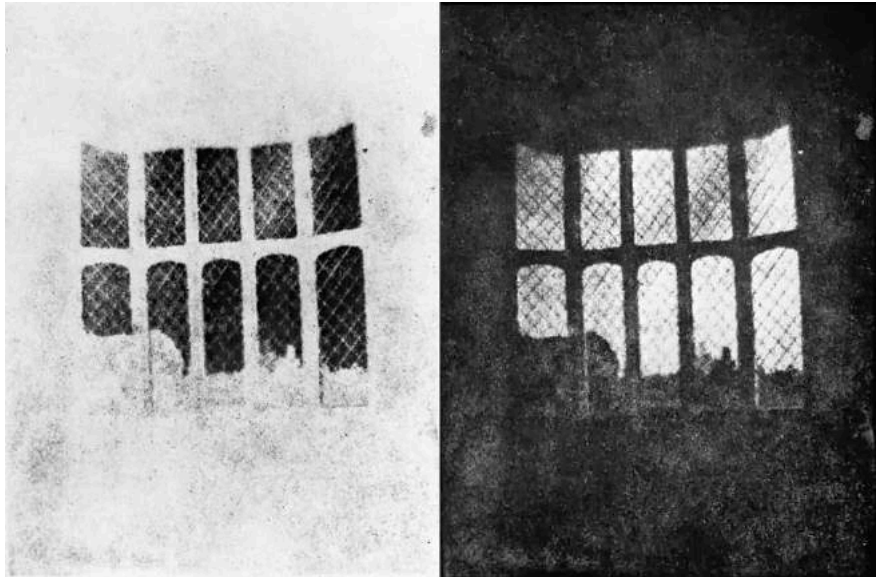


Fig.8.2

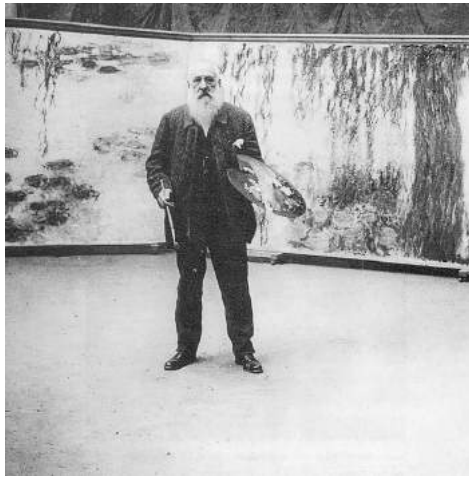


Fig.9.2



Fig.10.2



Fig.11.2



Fig.12.2



Fig.13.2



Fig.14.2

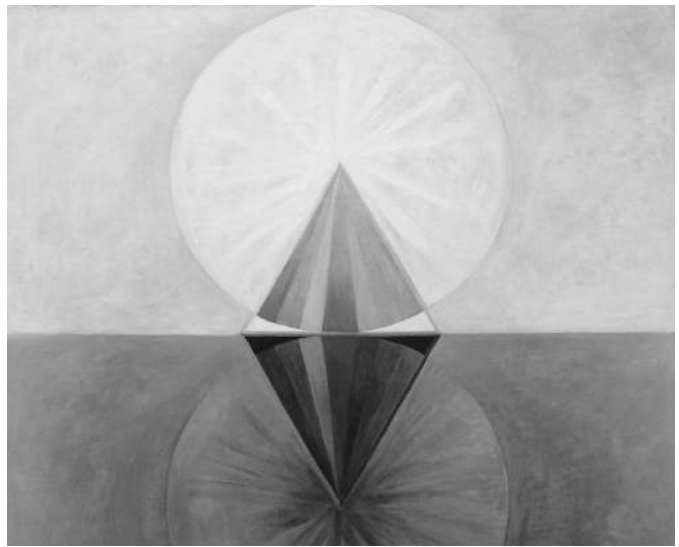


Fig.15.2



Fig.16.2



Fig.17.2



Fig.18.2



Fig.19.2



Fig.20.2



Fig.21.2



Fig.22.2



Fig.23.2



Fig.24.2



Fig. 25.2



Fig. 26.2



Fig. 27.2

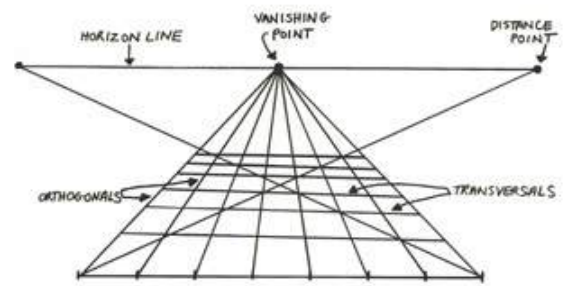


Fig. 28.2



Fig. 29.2

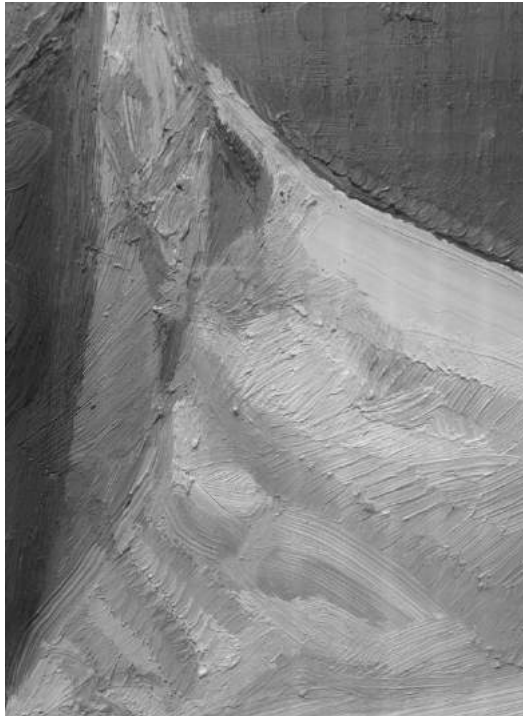


Fig.30.2



Fig.31.2



Fig.32.2



Fig.33.2

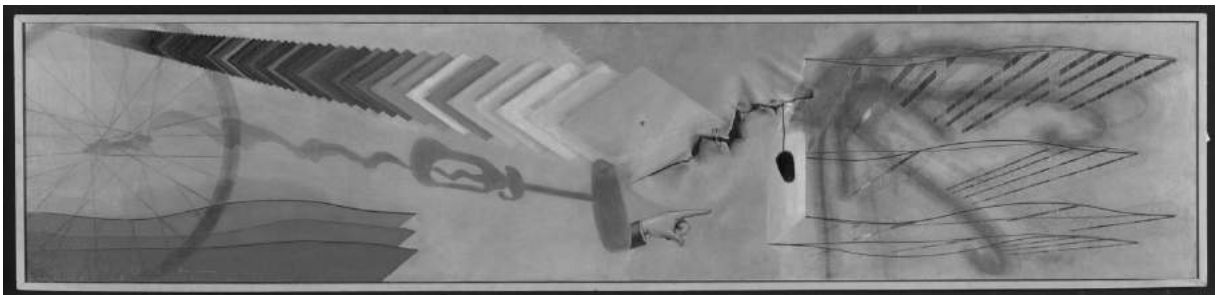


Fig.34.2



Fig.35.2



Fig.36.2



Fig.37.2



Fig.42.2



Fig.43.2



Fig.44.2



Fig.45.2

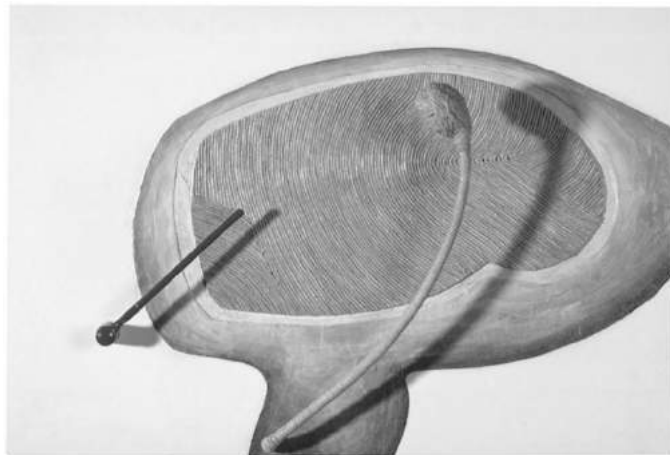


Fig.46.2



Fig.47.2



Fig.48.2



Fig.49.2



Fig.50.2



Fig.51.2



Fig.52.2



Fig.53.2



Fig.54.2

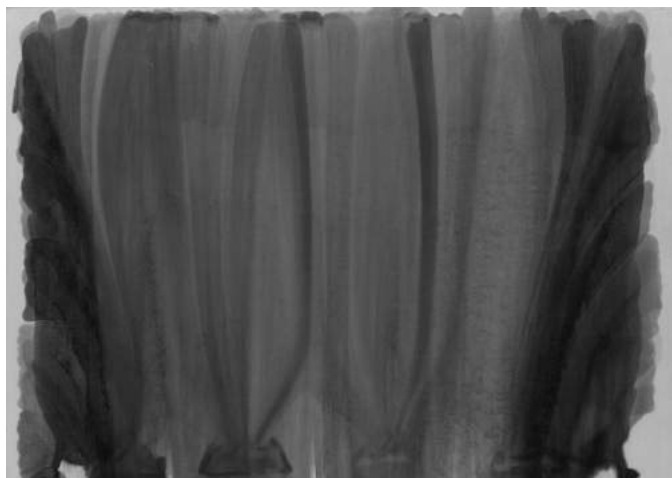


Fig.55.2

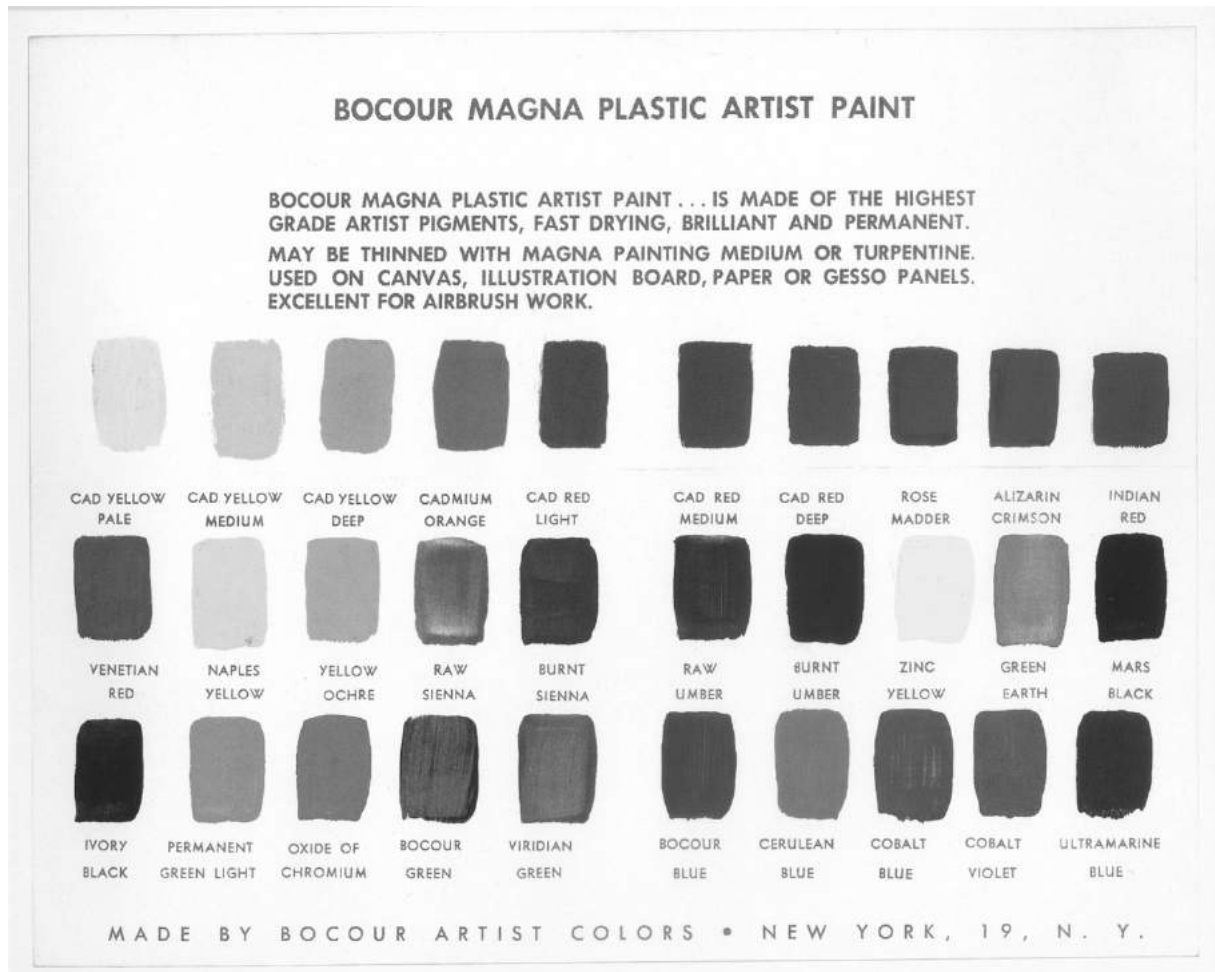


Fig.56.2



Fig.57.2



Fig.58.2



Fig.59.2

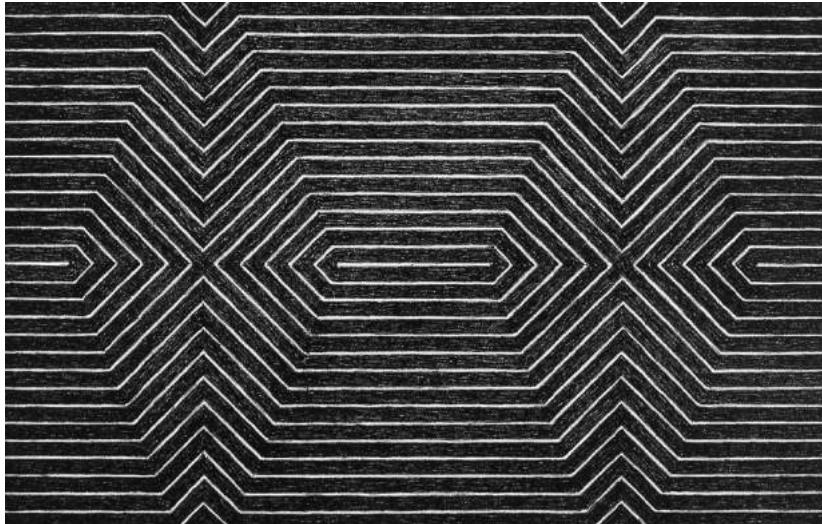


Fig.60.2



Fig.61.2

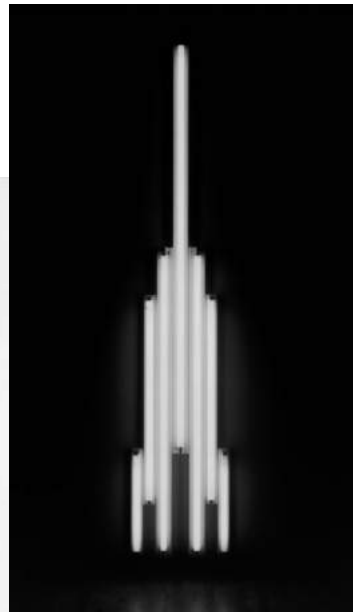


Fig.62.2



Fig.63.2



Fig. 64.2



Fig. 65.2



Fig.66.2



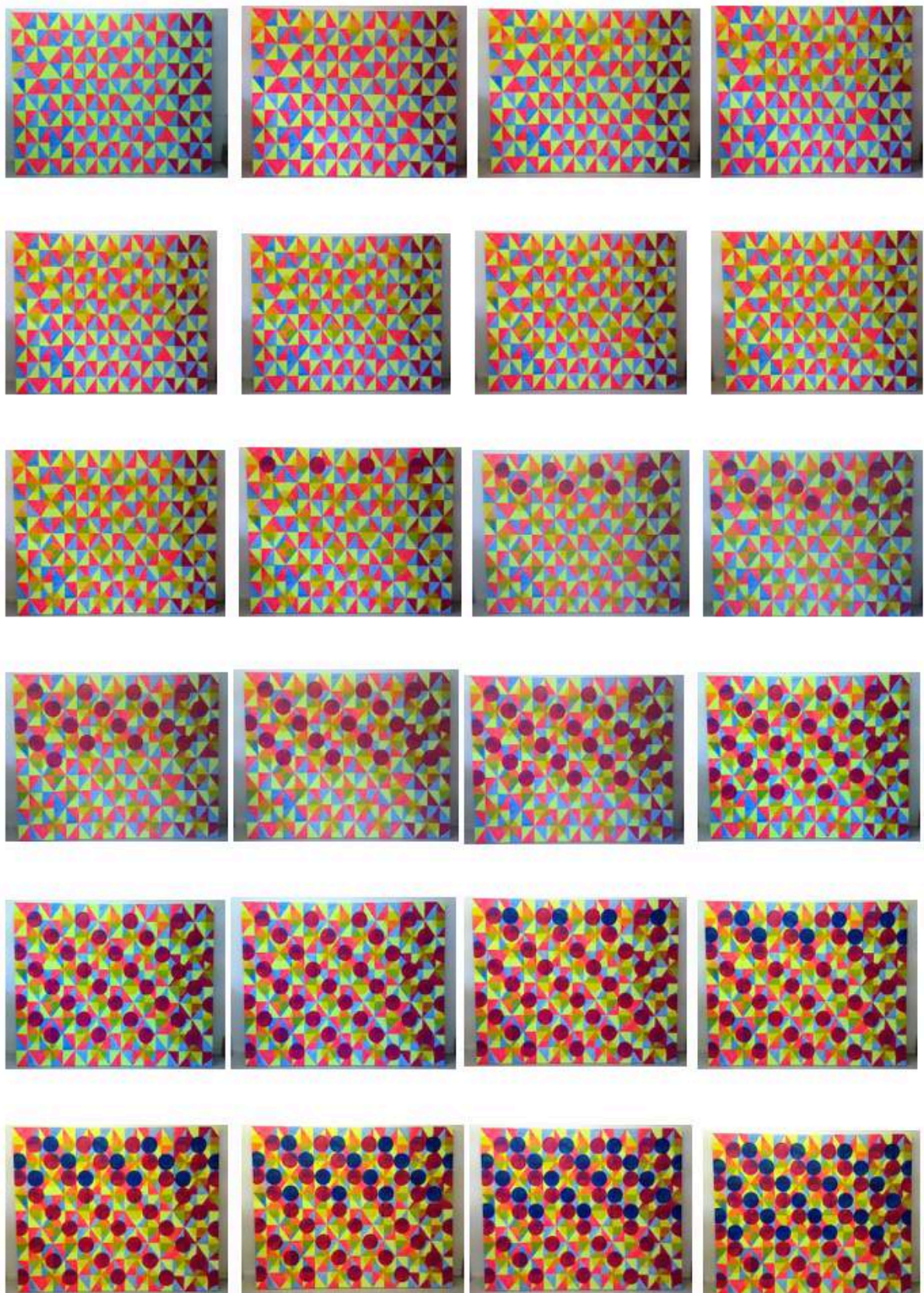
Fig.67.2



Fig.68.2

Chapter 2: Processual¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Kob, *Process and Expansion*, 14. The full quote is “Unlike the terms analytical, radical or essential painting, all of which crystallized in the 1970s, processual painting has never become an established art-historical term...In its most extreme manifestation, it forgoes all internal pictorial relationships such as composition and illusion, and replaces them with the monochrome, chance and serialism. This radical, self-referential, analytical type of painting provides the frame of reference...”.



3. Susan Connolly, *Processual Activity*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 250x200cm. Dublin: dlr Lexicon.

Introduction

“The challenge, of course, is not the actual destruction of the painting itself, but rather its transformation into something else”.¹⁸¹

In this chapter, I am going to present painting practices from the middle of the twentieth century which sit comfortably between the art historical periods known as modernism and post-modernism. I will do this to establish a way of looking at painting practices from that time and how they individually, through their processual procedure, forged new methods of both handling and seeing paint. These new methods saw the shift from imaging and picturing to a more conceptual preoccupation with ideas such as specificity and subjectivity. I will explore how painting through its individual handling, investigation and exploration of materials led to early examples of *making-itself* concerning both the surface and visual outcomes experienced within such painted artworks.

The work I have chosen to support the theory I am building for a methodology of *making-itself* was all produced around the same time during the late 1940s into the early 1950s and the three artists chosen to establish and support my theory for *making-itself* are Lucio Fontana, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Rauschenberg.

In this chapter, I will examine how each artist came to contribute to an idea of *making-itself* through examining how they each developed methods of painting which is somewhat beside itself¹⁸². I will look at individual examples in relation to how each artist created new paradigms,

¹⁸¹ Darling, *Target Practice*, 14.

¹⁸² David Joselit, “Painting beside Itself,” *October* 130, Fall (2009), 125-134.

which inform and support the *E+N Painting project* and how aspects to do with their material handling, tool selection and methods of hybrid painting practices contribute to this overall research project.

Interestingly, Fontana, Pollock and Rauschenberg, were born 13 years apart suggesting not just different generational attitudes and culture, but very different levels of maturity and experience concerning painting and its production in what was a time of rapidly changing social contexts. Below are short biographical case studies on each artist, which highlight and contextualise their contributions to my theory of *making-itself* and how it has unfolded in the practice component of this Ph.D. research.

Particularly important for this research is the fact that each of these artists had a very different experience and knowledge of the art structure and its system in the late 1940s. By then, Fontana was already an acclaimed Italian sculptor. Pollock, by comparison, had only just overcome his many years of struggling to make a living as an artist in New York City and by the latter half of the decade had rapidly become known as “the greatest living artist”,¹⁸³ thanks in part to art critic Clement Greenberg and also to the publicity he had received after an article about his life appeared in the *Time Magazine* publication. Whereas Rauschenberg was the fresh young art student working under one of the most influential artists of the time, Joseph Albers¹⁸⁴ (1888-1976), at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, an experimental art school set up in 1933 which became synonymous with many future important cultural figures such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) and Cy Twombly (1928- 2011) to name just a few.

¹⁸³ This was the title *Time Magazine* gave him in the infamous article they published about Pollock in 1949.

¹⁸⁴ Rauschenberg is noted as saying of Albers, that he influenced him to ‘...do exactly the reverse’ of what he was being taught.

In my selection of these artists, I have primarily chosen them because each in their own way transformed rather than destroyed painting. They each contributed to painting's continued relevance within and beyond this period, with each becoming significantly influential upon subsequent generations of artists.

Fontana, Pollock and Rauschenberg therefore and very obviously within their acclaimed careers bring extremely different approaches to the discipline of painting and their contribution to any future idea of a hybrid painting practice.

This is notable to the theory I am proposing of *making-itself* as Fontana, Pollock, and Rauschenberg each through material engagement introduced and established original methods of making images using paint where the process was given priority over an expected outcome and importantly where the process becomes the outcome, the visual, “these paintings not only visualise process but show you an explicit record of their own creation....so it gives you time, but not a linear time”.¹⁸⁵ Fontana had his cuts, Pollock his drips and finally Rauschenberg his combines. What each artist was to do was to introduce new means to both make and present painting beyond its traditionally accepted picturing of things, what art critic Leo Steinberg (1920-2011) had referred to as “verification of its own opaque surface”.¹⁸⁶

Fontana

Sometime in 1949, in Post-World War II Italy, artist Lucio Fontana made his first hole or buchi¹⁸⁷ painting/canvas. Fontana was by then an eminent Italian sculptor, best known for his

¹⁸⁵ Siegel and Wool, *Painting Paintings*, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Bill Berkson, *Without the Rose, DeFeo in Sixteen Americans* (California: The California University Press, 2003).

¹⁸⁷ This is the Italian word which Fontana himself ascribed to the Holes.

interest in the materialistic specifics of both sculptural and ceramic materials and his experimentation with new technologies in the work he called Spatial Art.¹⁸⁸ Therefore and somewhat surprisingly he came to paint as a medium rather late in his artistic career.

Up until then, before his first hole or buchi appeared upon a canvas surface, there is no documented evidence of him ever having shown any interest in making paintings and the question as to whether or not these works are actually paintings can, therefore, be contested somewhat. In his own documented narrative of what he was exploring and attempting to achieve within the surfaces upon the canvas he worked with he has said of such works, "who told you it is a painting, the holes are painting to you? To me, they are punctured canvases that represent a sculpture, (and therefore represent) a new thing in sculpture".¹⁸⁹

Fontana's development and interests in what he called Spatial Art thus seem very different to that of his Italian peers, many of which were involved in the European Informel Art Movement. What the Informel Movement did was to celebrate the pictorial frame and the canvas becoming a site, which would hold the artist's individuality and touch, their authorship. It could be said that the Informel Movement appeared not all that different theoretically from its American counterpart Abstract Expressionism, which was simultaneously developing across the Atlantic Ocean in 1940s New York City.

But for Fontana his action, firstly of holes and later cuts into the surface of the canvas held little or no interest for him in an ideal of the artist as genius or creator extraordinaire. He rejected

¹⁸⁸ White, *Lucio Fontana*, 170-300. Spatial Art, 'a new art based on new techniques and media, forms contained in space in all third dimensions, a new aesthetic is taking shape, light forms in space'.

¹⁸⁹ Anthony White, "No Form can be Spatial, the origins of Lucio Fontana's Spatial Concept," *NGV's Art Journal* (2005), <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/no-form-can-be-spatial-the-origins-of-lucio-fontanas-spatial-concept-2/>.

the notion of an identity or even the artist's documented presence upon and within the illusionistic flat picture plane of painting, believing such theories to be utterly and completely irrelevant to his own exploration and interests within material handling.

Fontana was a sculptor bringing his sculptural sensibilities to any material means possible in order to further develop his inquiry into physical space and also, how this in-between space or rather how a site could be experienced by an audience, in ways that were not already present in art. His interest and inquiry into this new space stemmed from a lifelong exploration of fine art (or high art) materials and how such materials could be activated into inhabiting architectural environments. His interests in painting expanded to those everyday spaces where often the viewer's physical body interacted with modern lighting technology.¹⁹⁰

Fontana it would seem wanted to look beyond and "clung tenaciously to the fantasy of an art that would take place beyond the object".¹⁹¹ He also described his holes in the canvas as "the beginning of a sculpture in space"¹⁹² and it is from these two propositions that I conclude that contrary to commonly held beliefs that the holes and cuts were acts of aggression, carried out due to the (his) frustration of and at the illusionistic and flat surface of the picture plane of painting, that actually these holes, these cuts were in fact careful systematic openings into some expanded understanding of art and therefore painting.

Fontana's actions resulted in marks of inquiry, created upon canvas surfaces to liberate and look beyond and into a new space within both sculpture and painting which had up until this point not yet been explored. This is and was Fontana's new. His contribution to visual

¹⁹⁰ Developed roughly around the same time as he began painting, 1949-1951.

¹⁹¹ White, *Lucio Fontana*, 20.

¹⁹² White, *Lucio Fontana*, 20.

knowledge and through his lifelong inquiry into the in-between space, not sculpture and not painting, his holes worked to break the closed form of sculpture creating what look like paintings in a new sculptural language.

Cutting

“I did not make holes in order to wreck the picture, on the contrary I made holes in order to find something else”.¹⁹³

Curator Michael Darling (1968-) in his 2009 curated exhibition and book of the same title, *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack 1949-1978*, makes a case for artist Lucio Fontana as being the artist who introduced into painting a new realism. A realism achieved through his holes which revealed the vulnerability of paintings’ very “sacrosanct veil which the genius of the artist’s hand recorded”.¹⁹⁴

Fontana’s holes, his later cuts, and subsequent punctures have since their first appearance upon the painted support of the canvas, almost always caused differences in opinion. Some, like Darling, see them as the marks or rather remains of the frustration and aggression recorded onto the canvas support and towards the discipline as a whole, whereas others like artist and writer Nora Griffin (1982-) regard and describe Fontana’s holes as “delicate, like traces in sand...never expressionistic”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Elizabeth Mangini, “This is not a painting: Space Exploration in Postwar Italian Art,” in *Target Practice: Painting under Attack 1949-1978*, ed. Michael Darling (Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 89.

¹⁹⁴ Darling, *Target Practice*, 19.

¹⁹⁵ Nora Griffin, “Spatialism in Action: Lucio Fontana at Gagosian Gallery,” *artcritical*, July 5, 2012, <http://www.artcritical.com/2012/07/05/lucio-fontana/>.

Within my own work, the cutting and subsequent cuts have been problematic on a number of levels throughout the *E+N Painting project*. They have caused all manner of problems concerning re-assessing and re-evaluating how the larger works are viewed, experienced and perceived once they enter the world through exhibitions, therefore causing much doubt in relation to intention and intentionality.

My cuts, like those of Fontana, are intended, pre-planned and implemented, but the breaking of the canvas weave is a completely different situation as these cuts are the result of a slippage between my intentions and action onto and upon the paint material. Fontana's cuts, by comparison, are predetermined and his new, his cuts, "reassert painting as an object and not just as an image".¹⁹⁶

The act of cutting, of course, is not a traditional method of either handling or making paintings. Yes, Fontana may have been the first to be celebrated as giving the cut mark, or hole, subjective like stature, but in understanding how the cut plays a significant role in painting's development beyond itself, one needs to go back even further to the cropping of the image in works by early modernists such as Édouard Manet (1832-1883) or Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and the importance of the invention of photography and how it made both the maker and viewer reassess pictorial compositions.

Within my own visible cuts, the close relationship between the tools of production- the scalpel and the artist's hand- is evident. The scalpel is also most definitely not a traditional painting tool, in fact it is more akin to a sculptural apparatus, which allows an artist to remove substance and matter to reveal their image/form as art.

¹⁹⁶ Darling, *Target Practice*, 20.

Within this work however, I have used the scalpel to delicately and systematically separate the paint skin from its canvas support once the paint medium is dry. A process that curator Michael Darling has referred to as giving “an elegance to the cuts that some have equated with the primacy and uniqueness of the painterly gesture, noting that the cuts are as unrepeatable as the brushstroke”.¹⁹⁷

So why use such a tool in painting in this manner? Like Fontana whom through his cuts, “brought the space behind the painting into play, reasserting painting as an object, not just as an image”¹⁹⁸ I am keen to push the painted surface to its very limits, to its minimal means, to reveal something about the relationship between all its component parts: medium, gesture, composition, support, orientation, and presence.

The cuts hold and make visible this struggle. They reveal the battle between the artist (me), the materials and the process. The cuts also leave traces upon their canvas support (that one truly specific and unique material to painting- I will discuss this further in the next chapters). These cuts are never uniform or conforming and are always full of action and movement (they happen fast and often in various and unpredictable directions). The *E+N Painting project* thus declares through its cuts all of the conceptual and physical embracing of chance, of slippage in both materials and handling, and importantly through its systematic process, *making-itself* beyond the maker.

But no matter how delicate, elegant, playful, or teasing¹⁹⁹ I myself think of or find these visible marks the viewer can never get away from the scarring, the skinning, the disfigurement

¹⁹⁷ Darling, *Target Practice*, 26.

¹⁹⁸ Darling, *Target Practice*, 20.

¹⁹⁹ Darling, *Target Practice*, 20.

and the wounding upon the same paint surface. I have watched audiences uncomfortably engage with the absent paint and once the realisation of the cutting, the slicing and the dismemberment occurs, their ideal of beauty is put into question and this certainly seems to happen within the macro/micro viewing that the larger works demand.

The most recent large-scale painting²⁰⁰ completed for the exhibition titled *Traces of an Activity*, in The Ashford Gallery²⁰¹ at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA), Dublin,²⁰² in 2017, seemed to insist upon more of the viewers' embodied engagement, almost demanding their physical movement up and down the paint surface; bending to see, stretching to look and hovering so as to experience both sides of the freestanding canvas. This is viewing painting but over and above its frontality, a phenomenological investigation using the edges of painting itself to explore possible answers to questions concerning expectations of image, structure and, illusion(ism). Where equal importance is afforded to the painting for viewing from the dual perspective of anterior and posterior positions.

This is where Fontana's cuts have allowed me to review what it is I often took for granted and deemed a mere consequence of the process. The cuts once made, appear almost casual, but how can they be casual when there is always a chance of slippage in the material handling? Within the *E+N Painting project*, the cuts hold an in-between space or rather absence of space - their nothingness. Making their absent space appear on both the frontal and posterior planes; they invite the viewer to peep through, to catch glimpses and to be reminded that a painting is never anything more than its fibres, its structure, and specifically (in this case) its canvas.

²⁰⁰ This work measured 200x180cm.

²⁰¹ The curators I worked with at the Ashford Gallery were Ruth Carroll, Patrick Murphy and, Victoria Evans.

²⁰² *Traces of an Activity*, Ashford Gallery, RHA, Dublin, 7th Sept-1st Oct 2017.

Pollock

Jackson Pollock from the mid-1940s onwards bequeathed to painting the importance of the drip as a foregrounded and integral part of the painting process. Importantly for the *E+N Painting project*, Pollock's drips were to become the sole component within the all-over visual outcome of his work, which saw process being given priority over the image. Of course, he was not the first artist to use dripping as a method of allowing the paint to organically move upon the surface of the canvas²⁰³, but he was the first to be celebrated for his method of dripping as a means to cover the canvas completely and allowing both the action and material to create and hold the painting image.

He was also notably the chosen artist, the supported artist, the critically acclaimed artist, and the artist that the most influential and important critic of the time, Clement Greenberg, had selected and championed to support his own writing and theory created around art making (predominantly painting) in New York City from the late 1930s. Writings that, subsequently, were to have a profound effect upon future generations of both artists and art writers, which continues to this day and is commonly known as Greenbergian theory.

Greenberg, although he himself did not coin the term Abstract Expressionism²⁰⁴ (at that time the movement was referred to as non-objective art), did champion and go on to create much of

²⁰³ There is a female artist, Janet Sobel (1893-1968) who was working in New York city during the same period as Pollock and who was exhibiting paintings using an all-over dripping method as early as 1943. Three years earlier than Pollock's first exhibited drip paintings. Greenberg even credited her with inventing this process, it is also recorded and known that Pollock saw her work which was regularly exhibited in the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery. More information can be accessed from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/15/arts/art-in-review-janet-sobel.html>.

²⁰⁴ The term was first used in America in 1929 by the art historian Alfred Barr in describing the work of Wassily Kandinsky, it was later (1946) used by art critic Robert Coates with the term going on to establish the 'ism' of American painting during this period.

the theory and subsequent mythology around the movement through his writings and essays such as: *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939), *The Crisis of the Easel Picture* (1948) and later in *Modernist Painting* (1961). Theories which gained a powerful influence in the art world, that both celebrated and ultimately destroyed artists like Jackson Pollock.

The Abstract Expressionist movement established many displaced and newly relocated European artists to America, such as German artist Hans Hoffman (1880-1966)²⁰⁵ (whom Greenberg saw as the first artist to fully embrace his theory of ‘overall flatness’ within painting by eradicating any trace of picturing a real), and Dutch artist William de Kooning²⁰⁶ (whom Greenberg says was past it by the late 40s)²⁰⁷. Firmly positioning abstract art making and especially painting practices in America as a true cultural force²⁰⁸ of magnitude and influence. Abstract Expressionism was to become a term that subsequently had an enormous impact on painting in particular. It would develop as a theory, representing all that was unique and powerful within American art making and later go on to inspire the next generation of artists (those of the 1960s) to revolt against the dominance of what had become known as this Greenbergian theory.

Greenberg argued in his 1948 essay, *The Crisis of the Easel Picture*, for the value of flatness, what he saw as the only truly “unique and exclusive” aspect “to pictorial art”,²⁰⁹ declaring that “the dissolution of the pictorial into sheer texture, into apparently sheer sensation, into an

²⁰⁵ Hans Hoffman, a German national whom immigrated to America in 1932.

²⁰⁶ William de Kooning was a Dutch national whom immigrated to America in 1927.

²⁰⁷ Greenberg, “Art Criticism.”

²⁰⁸ Interestingly in the *Art Criticism and Art Today*, Greenberg says that it was ‘Pop Art’ alone that was truly an American art invention, citing the rise of its importance and success due to the 1962 stock crash in America, which he credits as stopping the continued influence of Abstract Expressionist work, as people stopped buying, ‘all the bad’ painting that was then being made.

²⁰⁹ Clement Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 221-224.

accumulation of repetitions, seems to speak for and answer something profound in contemporary sensibility”²¹⁰.

Within Jackson Pollock’s painting, Greenberg’s theory became visible, even visual, with this work seemingly perfectly performing and illustrating Greenberg’s theory for such a flatness. From an art maker and audience’s point of view, what is made visible for the first time in Pollock’s work is the importance of process and materiality. Both of which have been given complete authority over the pictorial outcome within the production of any predetermined image making possibility. This is what Greenberg referred to as “purity...[which] would result when an artist strove to respect the core conditions of his or her particular medium, the nature of its physical existence”²¹¹.

Pollock’s work was of course already abstract by the late 1940s and clearly, there is a visible breaking down of the method over that of picture making through the materials in the period leading up to the production of these over-all drip painting/works. Artist Donald Judd who was himself to go on to write many theories concerning process and materiality, in 1967 said of Pollock’s importance “I think it’s clear that Pollock created the large scale, wholeness, and simplicity that have become common to almost all good work. ...Pollock used paint and canvas in a new way... this use is one of the most important aspects of Pollock’s work”²¹² What Pollock made permissible in the discipline of painting through his all-over-ness and his “subjecting of the paint medium to the will of gravity”²¹³ was to go on to have a profound effect on further generations of painters wanting to define the painterly through the material means of painting.

²¹⁰ Greenberg, “Easel Picture,” 222.

²¹¹ Shift, *Doubt*, 46.

²¹² Judd, *The Collected Writings*, 193-195.

²¹³ Judd, *The Collected Writings*, 193-195.

Conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (1945-) wrote in 1969 of Pollock's contribution as "important...because he painted on loose canvas horizontally to the floor. What isn't important is that he later put those drippings over stretchers and hung them parallel to the wall",²¹⁴ therefore, Pollock's drips become meaningful within the theory of *making-itself* because "...in diverse ways they are a primary source"²¹⁵ created through a performative engagement between artist and materials in non-traditional ways allowing chance and slippage, resulting from the material's liquidity, and the unknown outcome to dominate this new methodology of materiality and processual activity within painting.

All-over-ness

Almost all painting is but a skin. A skin created from pigment that has been mixed with a binder, which (normally) covers the over-all-ness of the shaped support. A skin that is, that covers the fragile weave of the fabric: canvas or the prepared surfaces of walls, ceilings and sometimes floors.

This skin, a skin of paint, conceals its very material fragility. A fragility often caused through natural means, one, which leads to decay, and ultimately long-term destruction. A skin, that both protects and camouflages the innards of the painting's making, maker and materiality.

Pollock created an over-all skin-ness with paint through his process. He covered huge

²¹⁴ Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," in *Art in Theory: 1900-1990, An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Woods (Cambridge Mass: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1992), 840-850.

²¹⁵ Judd, *The Collected Writings*, 31.

surfaces with vast amounts of paint, in a method which held all manner of evidence such as movement (both the materials and his own), gravity (the space between himself and his materials) and evidence of authorship (but whose? His? The materials?).

As early as the 1940s what becomes evident in Pollock's painting is his commitment to this over-all-ness upon the surfaces of his paintings, an over-all-ness, which becomes both the picture and Pollock's image that "represented an attempt to add paint as a material to the material world, which is entirely bound to the laws of gravity".²¹⁶ This over-all-ness would become the basis for Greenberg's theory of medium specificity.

But as I have noted 'all' paintings can be considered mere skins. Skins holding not just medium specificity but also content, ideas, materiality and processual activity. Every painter through the layering of paint hues and the material's liquidity, builds up such skins that ultimately hold the work's image or its picture, be that abstract or otherwise.

In the *E+N Painting project*, there has been an insistence on the over-all-ness and this has unfolded in two ways. Firstly, in the commitment to starting or beginning each new work in the same way as the previous works, three colours/ 3 shapes which are methodically and systematically painted onto the surface of the canvas (or other support) until the motif covers its surface from edge to edge. With this method of repetition, almost tautology, becoming what art historian Briony Fer (1956-) refers to as "a time-based strategy that privileged time over space".²¹⁷ This in some ways references my own concerns with the idea of ready-made materials, namely the three colours and the 3 shapes which "demonstrates the interminable work of the

²¹⁶ Judd, *The Collected Writings*, 30.

²¹⁷ Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Remaking Art after Modernism* (Yale University Press, 2004), 68.

work”²¹⁸ and the *E+N Painting project* makes this visible.

The second commitment to over-all-ness throughout the *E+N Painting project* can be found in the idea of the framing devices, which appear visually and have been constructed within the edges of the physical canvases’ frames. The introduction of false territory and new edges allows the work to never reach the insistent boundary (the true border). With this in-between space now visibly evident as both illusionistic and real, a place is established for exploration through playfulness within material processes.

This strategy is repeated throughout the *E+N Painting project* so as to make a distinct and decisive border (the artist’s self-imposed boundary) and for new framing to work within. This new border thus becomes the one the viewer is consistently aware of, and where the artist’s (my) clumsily handling (between blueprint and actuality) can be experienced and importantly where material leakage becomes visible and evident somewhere between intentionality, chance, and slippage.

The significance of the effect of over-all-ness within the *E+N Painting project* has allowed for the viewer to enter in new ways the surface of the canvas, its very skin. This new was embraced, tested and reflected upon throughout the *E+N Painting project*, akin to what art historians have said to be a phenomenological²¹⁹ approach. With this pathway consistently

²¹⁸ Fer, *The Infinite Line*, 58.

²¹⁹ Joseph Parry, *Art and Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2011), 5-6. “For phenomenology insists that my consciousness- my awareness of myself, others, objects, all of the things that make up my world- is rooted in my experience in the world, and this experience is, in turn, rooted in my body. I am fundamentally an embodied being, and any attempt I make to understand or explain what, where, why, how, or even that I am must build on this “fact” of my being.”

having what historian Alex Potts²²⁰ has referred to as “a body of work which dramatises the experience or the encounter of the spectator...the difference between seeing the thing that is the artwork and spending time with it”.²²¹

What has become evident is how this influences the meaning of what is being seen beyond the process of *making-itself*. After all my experience of making the artwork, even my embracing of process over content in relation to image outcomes, although evident as traces and fragments of slippage upon the surface of the artwork, can never truly be understood beyond the moment of becoming in the act of making. The attempt here lies in the “material and method (becoming) so clearly displayed that the support can almost be seen mutating into a platform...the only goal is to demonstrate the process itself”.²²²

This I would suggest is Pollock’s legacy, his seeming control of the over-all-ness, but his actual lack of it. Importantly within Pollock's painting practice, he embraced intuition which art historian Richard Shiff refers to as the “power of guessing”²²³. Pollock’s understanding of his whole bodily activity is very important, the activity of which resulted in the activation of his materials and their potentiality as artworks. All of which became the source for the visual outcomes upon the paintings’ surfaces, their frontality.

Pollock allowed for painting to be just a skin. A skin made from mere pigment mixed in medium. A skin that is never a human skin, but rather a skin with the potential to carry the viewer to an embodied space beyond the mere formalist reading of abstract painting.

²²⁰ There was no date of birth available online.

²²¹ Parry, *Art and Phenomenology*, 66-67.

²²² Kob, *Painting about Painting*, 21.

²²³ Shiff, *Doubt*, 20.

With each new reworking of the instructions within the *E+N Painting project*, the (my) skins have gone from being delicately removed from their site, to tentatively working their way down and finally off their support and outside of their frame. All paintings are but a skin and it seems to me that it is what the artist does to activate this skinning process that makes the skin become art. It is this slippage between image, surface, action and skin that calls into question where the object of painting lies.

In researching the *E+N Painting project* I have found very few artists (almost none) who have managed to activate with any great success the residual and removed paint of a skinning process. One important reference however is to be found in artist Christoph Bruckner's²²⁴ essay *The journey is its own reward on the Processual Aspect of Painting*²²⁵, which confirms my own research and findings, when he says “with the exception of Sigmar Polke’s experiments with hydrosensitive and thermosensitive paints that maintain their malleable nature- thus returning the notion of process to its roots in chemistry as well as alchemy- painting processes must at some point come to an end. The beginning of this end is the drying process”.²²⁶

The *E+N Painting project* challenges this assumption, as it has confirmed that the painting process need not end once the drying stage, the liquidity of paint, has reached its presumed conclusion. Rather that there can be new knowledge within processual painting practices, attested once this stage has been reached. A further stage, a new stage, within painting practices is thus possible, one which goes beyond the painting of a surface (even its brush-marks) to reveal a hybrid painting outcome that goes beyond its support without sacrificing the materiality or even the specificity of the paint skin.

²²⁴ There was no date of birth available online.

²²⁵ Kob, *Painting about Painting*, 27-31.

²²⁶ Kob, *Painting about Painting*, 35-36.

Rauschenberg

Robert Rauschenberg is best known for his combines, a term he himself coined in the 1950s to describe his new, innovative and experimental art works. His practice can be seen as both within a painting and a sculptural terrain, which Rauschenberg's friend and fellow artist, Jasper Johns, referred to as "painting playing the game of sculpture".²²⁷

During the 1950s Rauschenberg experimented extensively and developed new methods of how a painting can inhabit space and exist beyond or within an expanded understanding of its modality. There are a number of key works from this period, which all contributed in some way to establishing this new hybrid working method. A method that was to see an idea often followed by a question and material concerns becoming the process of making painting anew.

Thierry de Duve in his book, *Kant after Duchamp*, poses the question, "...was Duchamp's urinal a joke or a test? Or was it both?"²²⁸ and for the young Rauschenberg, the same question could very well be asked. Only in Rauschenberg's case, his jokes and tests were methods enabling discoveries, new ways of seeing old materials rather than a Duchampian resignation of the limits within painting's potentiality.

Throughout the 1950s Rauschenberg would go on to produce works which demonstrated, revealed and visualised ideas, notions and importantly questioned the painterly rather than the painted. Rauschenberg's investigations about painting's possibilities reveal themselves visually

²²⁷ Caroline Armstrong, "Painting Photography Painting." In *Painting beyond Itself*, edited by Isabelle Graw + Ewa Lajer-Burchard (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 123-143.

²²⁸ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 91.

in works such as *The White Painting Series* (1949), which tested the importance of the artist's touch, *Erasing de Kooning* (1953), which asked questions of the artist as author, and *Factum I/II* (1957), which teased painting's materials into performing and revealing their uniqueness. Within each new working what we see is a presentation of painting as an idea and demanding the material's liquidity to visualise the answer by any means necessary.

The first of these influential works can be credited as the *White Paintings Series* that were first produced²²⁹ at Black Mountain College in 1949. The *White Paintings Series* comprises of a number of white painted panel combinations (one, two, three, four, five²³⁰, seven). Each series is treated and made exactly the same using store-bought, Benjamin Moore²³¹ household paint, which is applied using a roller rather than a brush. Each of the panels in each of the series is precisely the same size, meticulously covered in even amounts of the paint through the roller application. This Rauschenberg said "...eliminated gesture and denied all possibility of narrative²³²", "with systematic attention made to the consistency external reference"²³³ and

²²⁹ I am using the term 'produced' as these artworks are not intended to last beyond the 'exhibition'. They are produced for the exhibition under a set of instructions, they are painting produced and revealed as an idea.

²³⁰ It is disputed whether there is a five-panel painting, with conflicting historical accounts from both Walter Hopps and the San Francisco Museum.

²³¹ From my research there are a number of conflicting accounts of the paint used by Rauschenberg to make these paintings. In some accounts it is referred to as 'Oil Paint' where in others it is referred to as 'Household paint', importantly for this research there is a brand of paint mentioned, Benjamin Moore, which appears to be a good quality household paint company founded in 1883 and based in New Jersey, <http://www.benjaminmoore.com/en-us/welcome-to-benjamin-moore> I think the importance of this point is that it is conflictingly referred to as both artist quality paint and everyday use paint, very pertinent in relation to how 'high and low' art is written about and what this means in relation to the viewing, contemplation, and understanding of artworks in general.

²³² Through this research I have not found any reasonable explanation as to why artists like Rauschenberg used household paint. One suggested reason is to do with household paints generally being inexpensive compared to that of artist's quality paints. Another possible explanation is that the product allowed for a liquidity to the material that again artist quality paint did not yet have, it is important to note that Acrylic paint had only recently been developed and that it too had a rather thick viscosity. One of my own hypotheses is that some of this work was simply not made to last, that artists like Rauschenberg had not yet reached a stage where their primary concern had to do with longevity or legacy, a mistake that many young artists make, and which later has become a real problem for conservationists.

²³³ "Singular Forms", Guggenheim Gallery, accessed Jan 31, 2018,

within these works, Rauschenberg initiated and embraced the blurring of the lines between the importance of the artist's hand (his or not his- the author), and therefore any possible signature. This work established an engagement within the potential for new meaning being gained from methods of instruction and the possibility of the labour of others through future duplicate productions.

Upon completing the first of the *White Paintings Series*, the artistic community of Black Mountain College²³⁴ is recorded as having seen these works as quite controversial. Rauschenberg would soon after²³⁵ write to his New York City gallerist Betty Parsons (1900-1982)²³⁶ declaring his excitement about a newly found conceptualisation for this new work, stating: "...the results are a group of paintings that I consider almost an emergency. They bear the contradictions that deserve them a place with other outstanding paintings and yet they are not art because they take you to a place in painting that art has not been".²³⁷ He goes on further to declare, "It is completely irrelevant that I am making them- today is their creator".²³⁸

Rauschenberg's concern within the *White Paintings Series* shows for the first time the conceptualisation of painting and how it lay in the surface's ability to contain and hold a nothingness, which he called "the plastic fullness of nothing".²³⁹ Rauschenberg's inquiry here into the potential of the monochrome appears to be more about the "with or without image

http://pastexhibitions.guggenheim.org/singular_forms/highlights_1a.html.

²³⁴ Black Mountain College, founded by John Andrew Rice, 1933-1957.

²³⁵ In October of 1951.

²³⁶ Betty Parson Gallery, which existed on East 57 St, New York between 1946-1981.

²³⁷ "Robert Rauschenberg, letter to Betty Parsons, October 18, 1951," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, accessed January 31, 2018, https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.308.A-C/research-materials/document/WHIT_98.308_034/.

²³⁸ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, "Rauschenberg letter."

²³⁹ Kristine Stiles, "Rauschenberg, Looking Long and Thinking Hard," Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, accessed 31 January 2018, http://shuffle.rauschenbergfoundation.org/exhibitions/nasher/essays/Stiles_introduction.

aesthetics and its politics”²⁴⁰ and due to the somewhat shiny²⁴¹ nature of the paint employed, the event of the room and the work only becomes activated upon the viewer’s bodily engagement, allowing for what Rauschenberg referred to as today becoming their maker.

This was to become a concept of primary concern within Rauschenberg’s oeuvre, with the “integrity of his art depending upon bringing the viewer into the work”.²⁴² Rauschenberg himself referred to this as “put(ting) my trust in the materials that confront me because they put me in touch with the unknown”.²⁴³

Hybridity

“In Painting the first step towards finding something out is to acknowledge that you do not satisfactorily know already. The working it out through the act becomes the essence of the object form presented to the world”.²⁴⁴

What does it mean to both the artist and an audience for painting to have become a mere idea? Painting expanded into a dematerialised notion of art making, where the materiality of

²⁴⁰ “Rauschenberg, Collecting Connecting,” Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://shuffle.rauschenbergfoundation.org/exhibitions/nasher/>.

²⁴¹ I saw a version of the White Painting Series (5 panels) in Tate Modern in February 2017. I can confirm that they were not ‘shiny’ at all. They were quite neutral, and they did not hold any of the claimed information that has been attributed to them. Which was disappointing. The striking difference within the painted panels can be found in the stretcher frames and the fragility of the materials. They are warped and don’t fit together evenly. I later emailed the Tate to find out if the work had been constructed on site or if the paintings had been touched up, which was later confirmed that the work had been sent from America directly from the Rauschenberg Foundation. This I found curious as I have read elsewhere that the work could be constructed via a set of instructions. It would seem that this is not the case and changes the meaning of ‘...today being their maker...’ as today, or rather yesterday can never be their maker as the authorship is attributed to Rauschenberg’s lifetime and the White Paintings constructed during it. Value has been attributed to the artist’s hand.

²⁴² Stile, “Rauschenberg, Looking Long.”

²⁴³ Stile, “Rauschenberg, Looking Long.”

²⁴⁴ Garry Garrels and Richard Shiff, *Plane Image: A Brice Madden Retrospective* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 29.

paint and its specificity of discipline are no longer requirements for viewing painting as painting?

Rauschenberg in his exploration and experimentations throughout his career introduced and embraced an idea of painting as being a concept, capable of fluidity (not just in the liquidity of paint) and therefore capable of new meaning. Art critic Leo Steinberg referred to this in stating, “what he invented above all was...a pictorial surface that let the world in again”,²⁴⁵ something that many critics of the time felt had disappeared within the brushstrokes of the Abstract Expressionists and their propensity for over-all-ness within abstraction.

Through letting the world in, Rauschenberg opened up the frontality associated with painting. He asked questions of it, demanded answers from it and ultimately expanded painting’s meaning and methods beyond its then current self. By embracing painting as an idea, or rather a concept, painting becomes a transferable ideology and breaks with tradition. When Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings Series* were first exhibited in 1954 artist and musician John Cage wrote of the work “to whom: no subject, no image, no taste, no object, no beauty, no message, no talent, no technique, no why, no idea, no intention, no art, no object, no feeling, no black, no white, no and”.²⁴⁶

There are many artists, especially those concerned with abstraction, who have embraced the strategy of repetition, one of making the same artwork over and over, as a way to test, reveal and make visible materiality, even chance, and especially difference. For example, artists such as Mark Rothko (1903-1970) with his stain paintings (especially his series of paintings known

²⁴⁵ Leo Steinberg, “Reflections on the State of Art Criticism,” *Art Forum*, Vol.10, No.7, March 1972, <https://www.artforum.com/print/197203>.

²⁴⁶ “Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends,” MoMA, accessed November 23, 2017.

as the *Seagram Paintings*); artist Eva Hesse with her latex hanging sculptures which she recognised as “just another way of repeating absurdity”²⁴⁷; to more contemporary artists such as French painter Bernard Piffaretti (1955-) who literally paints the same painting twice with each new configuration within his abstract canvases.

What each of these artists makes visible are their individual material investigations and struggles with each new reworking of their process (their ideas/their concepts) and importantly what is left for the viewer to see and experience is their very authorship. The artist’s subjectivity thus becomes an integral part within the painted outcomes.

One of earliest example of this form of doubling, this repetition, can be found in the 1957 works by Rauschenberg titled, *Factum I + Factum II*. What the *Factum* paintings introduced into painting and allowed for is a questioning of the very act of why an artist would choose to make a painting in double. They also ask what the point of repetition is and what it can reveal both for painting and the viewing of painting anew. Artist Christopher Wool (1955-) has referred to the *Factum* paintings as “a single painting with two panels and the second is a version of the first. So, the first canvas is a process that becomes a picture and the second one is all picture, or at least a very different kind of process- remembering rather than inventing”²⁴⁸.

Once one analyses and considers Rauschenberg’s work output during the 1950s it suggests a sort of research project in and of itself around painting and painting’s possibility into the future. The whole decade can be viewed as a time when his painting truly became expanded

²⁴⁷ Stephen Feeke and Sophie Raikes, *Undone-Making and Unmaking of Contemporary Sculpture* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2011), 4-10.

²⁴⁸ Siegel and Wool, *Painting Paintings*, 83. In this quote Siegel is speaking of the 1975 paintings by artist David Reed, she is in conversation with artist Christopher Wool who follows up this assertion by saying “Exactly. Robert Rauschenberg’s *Factum I and...II* (1957) play with that relationship....”.

through what many refer to as his letting the world in. His new-found methodology allowed him to combine both new materials and ideas, with the possibility of “painting to meet the challenge of mechanical reproduction.... truly embody(ing) the contemporary sublime”.²⁴⁹

Philosopher Walter Benjamin first associated painting with a form of “focused concentration and photography...with disruptive distraction”.²⁵⁰ Rauschenberg’s practice embraces a very early form of what we now would call a Postmodernist strategy (images within images, from images and about images), one that developed into a new hybrid art form that was to have a significant influence upon future generations of artists. An art form that is not quite painting but neither sculpture, one where the viewer is presented with a “world transformed into the sheer image itself”.²⁵¹

Benjamin proposed that the reproducibility of the photographic image was foremost leading to the decline and decay of the aura, which W.J.T Mitchell (1942-) cites as the “loss of the unique presence, authority, and mystique of the original object”.²⁵² Therefore what Rauschenberg’s paintings *Factum I + II* make visible and visual was and is this very issue. They attempt to both ask and answer the question, what is the original? What is unique and where does authority come from? This was achieved in *Factum I+II* through the act of doubling and what they declare is how painting can challenge doubts concerning presence, authority and importantly reproducibility through its very materiality and processual methodologies.

Theorist Rosalind Krauss (1941-) sees Rauschenberg’s combines as being the “assemblage

²⁴⁹ Joselit, “Painting Beside Itself,” 127-128.

²⁵⁰ Shiff, “Cliché.”

²⁵¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso Books, 1992), 18.

²⁵² Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* 319.

or collage of found objects within a picture frame”.²⁵³ *Factum I+II* repeats this strategy through the aforementioned doubling and the placing of found objects (here newspaper cuttings, calendar pages, mass-produced fabric fragments) upon what critic Leo Steinberg identified as the “flatbed receptor”²⁵⁴ of the picture, so as to leave the viewer in no doubt as to the decision making of the artist.

What *Factum I+II* become are traces of each other, traces of an activity²⁵⁵, and ultimately traces of “culture rather than simply a pictorial space”.²⁵⁶ They importantly manifest and make visible the artist’s thinking process, and the relationship between their material collection and handling, followed by intentionality and the lack of control through their processual handling and making.

What is revealed is some new aura, an aura accessible through duplication, through repetition, through the activity of doing the same thing over and over again. This is done through the breaking the idea of uniqueness through a singularity. Importantly for the *E+N Painting project*, *Factum I+II* makes this possible through a material slippage, recognising that the “happy accident is one that artists have always prepared themselves to recognize”.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* 319.

²⁵⁴ Robert Rauschenberg and Susan B. Davidson, *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* (New York: The Guggenheim Museum), 21.

²⁵⁵ Graw, *Painting Beyond Itself*, 79.

²⁵⁶ Rauschenberg and Davidson, *A Retrospective*, 21.

²⁵⁷ Graw, *Painting Beyond Itself*, 124.

2.1: Specificity of Medium



4. Susan Connolly, *Processual Activity*, 2018, acrylic on canvas no support, 180x100cm. Belfast: The Golden Thread Gallery.

Introduction

“Maybe we’re back to the modernist/postmodernist idea. Postmodernism pointed out and reminded everyone that there are no absolutes, and that the modernist idea of the absolute was ridiculous in the end. There were no perfect paintings. What was dying was the idea of the masterpiece, not painting as a practice”.²⁵⁸

Questions arising from and concerning the very idea of medium specificity have throughout the *E+N Painting project* been recurring as the work both seemed to be embracing and questioning age-old concerns and subsequent theories to do with both medium and its specificity.

As previously explained my painting practice for the purposes of this research has been redefined as the *E+N Painting project*. The reasons for this renaming and redefinition happened early in the research, after it became apparent that a practice, the one I had and was bringing to this Ph.D. research, had already been developed and established over a very long time immersed in studio engagement. The Ph.D. question thus resulted from that work so as to intellectually understand and attempt to solve some of the questions the practice had been revealing and proposing over the last number of years.

The questions that had arisen were and are extremely varied and often very obvious ones, primarily addressing things such as: 1. Is this a painting? 2. If not why? 3. If so, why and how? 4. How can this be painting when the work is no longer permanent, or evident, or painterly? 5. Define painterly 6. When can a painting no longer assume the name/title of the painting

²⁵⁸ Siegel and Wool, *Painting Paintings*, 89

discipline? 7. What are the conditions that allow this slippage between terms; not painting and also not yet sculpture? 8. Is this a medium that is expanded, and if so define? and 9. ultimately an uncertainty, and a doubt in the practice I had established being just that, painting.

The obvious answer is: of course, it's painting, but this would be the easy answer. My approach and attitude to my painting supports (stretched canvas, always store bought, which I typically cover in paint) are in line with what the French collective known as Surface/Supports, from the 1970s, refer to as those "...two essentialist poles around which many varied investigations took (take) place".²⁵⁹ I position my work within such terms of reference, which have the singular purpose of holding walls. This literalness of paint and supports links to the work of artist Frank Stella, when he said, "what you see is what you see".²⁶⁰

But what of art that is merely described as painterly? Often defined not by the medium of paint or even by the above-mentioned material tropes associated with the discipline, but rather by ideas and theories associated with painting's many and varied theoretical definitions, and importantly how can the *E+N Painting project* attempt to resolve and make visual such theories within a pluralist understanding of what a painting practice can be?

"What emerged with modernity is that the practice of painting gradually became more and more regulated by the idea of its own specificity, or purity, or autonomy, in a reflexive application of the idea of painting upon its name".²⁶¹ And since Marcel Duchamp's abandonment of painting and his introduction of the ready-made into visual artists' vocabulary and consciousness, the discourse around painting's specificity has become, it would seem, ever

²⁵⁹ Darling, *Target Practice*, 67.

²⁶⁰ Salle, *How to See*, 166.

²⁶¹ de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 155.

present. This has led to many doubts (as presented in the aforementioned chapter) about paint, what artist Jan Rydén²⁶² has referred to as “a sense of lack of belief in what can be accomplished on the canvas”.²⁶³

Such doubts concerning intentionality, and importantly within the *E+N Painting project* doubts regarding an expansion beyond the frame, lead to a reading of specificity that can no longer be credited as the art of picturing things. Twentieth century painting production and practices might be viewed instead as one long exploration of the processes (or processual) within the medium and how a relationship between material and maker has evolved into the experimental painting practices we have come to know and consider painting practices today.

As the previous chapter has shown, this new urgency for a definition of painting and its acceptability in early twentieth century art history was importantly being played out in most modernist artists’ studios, creating all types of ‘isms’. Avant-garde artists need to reinvent and make new, leading to all manner of circumstances in which, according to theorist Isabelle Graw “...each attempt to question painting’s boundaries in the past ended up contributing to its revitalization”.²⁶⁴ Art Historian Thierry de Duve has referred to this painting challenge as the artist “reinvent (ing) painting, give (ing) it a new meaning by acknowledging the crisis it is in and gives the idea of painting, not the craft, new birth with each canvas”.²⁶⁵

It seems that once the public started to accept and appreciate modernist works by artists such as Édouard Manet, Claude Monet (1840-1926) or Paul Cezanne, the surface of the canvas

²⁶² There was no date of birth available online.

²⁶³ Jan Ryden, “A Comment on David Joselit’s *Painting beyond Itself*,” last modified August 19, 2011, <https://janryden.wordpress.com/2011/08/19/a-comment-on-david-joselits-painting-beside-itself/>.

²⁶⁴ Graw, *Painting beyond Itself*, 83.

²⁶⁵ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 149.

evolved from picturing the world within its frame to allowing the world and its materiality to enter upon the surface of the canvas. But how were these painters using ready-made methodologies, especially considering many of their works pre-date the invention of the ready-made object?

There are a number of points to be made here, the first of which is the fact that the Impressionist painters mostly worked outside, a practice known as *en plein air*. This is extremely important as it highlights their collective rejection of traditional painting methodologies (which were for the most part studio based) and their shared acceptance of the then newly produced oil paint in tubes. When these artists started using mass-produced paint they started the relationship between artist and commercially ready-made materials in a manner that had not been done before.

Notably what occurred was a fundamental change in the relationship and understanding of materials, especially that between the tube of paint and the surface of the canvas. Clement Greenberg refers to the relevance of this in his essay *Modernist Painting* as “abjur[ing] underpainting and glazes, to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colours they [The Impressionists] used were made of paint that came from tubes or pots”.²⁶⁶ By embracing the ready-made tube of paint artists, therefore, had been freed from the restrictions of academic painting of the day and importantly the confinements of the studio space. Thus, literally letting the world into the surface of the canvas, in new and unprecedented manners and “establish(ed) the illusion of a purely visual or “optical” space, one addressed by eyesight alone”.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 754-760.

²⁶⁷ Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 754-760.

Training and knowledge of painting's preparation: from pigment to binder, support and technique, was to be deemed no longer such an academic necessity. With a new set of instruction and rules prevailing, what fundamentally altered for the artist with this new mass-produced material was their relationship to medium and material: to colour and to liquidity. American artist Amy Sillman (1955-) has referred to this as a situation where "what I think of as "my" palette is, in fact, a ready-made, informed by the manufacturing choices made by a paint company".²⁶⁸

It is also interesting to note here that having spent some time in 2017 at Golden Artists Colors factory in New Berlin, Upstate New York, I came to discover that the paint "choices made by a paint company"²⁶⁹ often come down to user requirements and research into the possibilities often suggested by other artists. New products sometimes start their lives as custom made products, which artists co-produce, before going into mass production. At the time of writing this, Golden Artist Colors have over 1000 custom products²⁷⁰ that they make for individual artists.

What follows here is an exploration of how the ready-made tube of paint as an art material and a concept of both medium and specificity co-exist and how they have informed the evolution of what we now commonly refer to as expanded painting. I will introduce and consider Greenberg's influential theory of medium specificity, before going on to compare Greenberg's theory with more contemporary commentary and understanding of both medium and specificity. I will then go on to analyse how these theories have informed and been made

²⁶⁸ Amy Sillman, "On Color," in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 103-116.

²⁶⁹ Sillman, "On Color," 113.

²⁷⁰ I got this information during one of the workshops I attended at Golden Artist Colors factory in Upstate New York.

visual through the *E+N Painting project*.

Greenberg

Dictionary definition of medium and specificity:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| Medium: | 1 | An agency or means of doing something. |
| | 2 | A liquid (e.g. oil or water) with which pigments are mixed, with a binder, to make paint. ²⁷¹ |
| Specificity | | The quality of belonging or relating uniquely to a particular subject. ²⁷² |

Within modernism the term ‘medium specificity’ is implicitly linked with the art critic Clement Greenberg, the term having first made an appearance as an insistent theory/methodology in his 1940s essay *Towards a Newer Laocoon*²⁷³. Greenberg within this essay adopted the term from philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s (1729-1781) 1766 essay, *Laocoön*, where Lessing had argued that “ut pictura poesis, as is painting, so is poetry...these media are inherently different because while poetry unfolds in time, a painting exists in space...contending that an artwork, in order to be successful, needs to adhere to the specific stylistic properties of its own medium”.²⁷⁴

This became the nexus to Greenberg’s formalist writing and allowed him to build both a theory and a critical argument, which supported and explained painting’s evolution towards

²⁷¹ “Oxford Dictionary,” OED, accessed August 15, 2018, <http://www.oed.com>.

²⁷² OED, “Oxford Dictionary.”

²⁷³ John O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. I, Perceptions and Judgements 1939-1944* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 23-37.

²⁷⁴ Emma Bee Bernstein, “Medium Specificity,” Chicago School of Media and Theory, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/medium-specificity/>.

abstraction within late modernism. In his 1962 essay *Modernist Painting*²⁷⁵ Greenberg states: that sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century a crisis within painting occurred (a crisis which was in fact to impact all the arts). Artists felt threatened that the fine arts, otherwise and also known as the plastic arts, were coming under threat of becoming merely devices for the public's entertainment and "that they (the arts) could save themselves from this fate, 'only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other activity'".²⁷⁶

Greenberg saw the answer to abstract painting's problem to lie within "the limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment [which] were treated by the old masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only by implicitly or indirectly. Under modernism, these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors and were acknowledged openly".²⁷⁷

For Greenberg, American Abstract Painting, which was to become known as Abstract Expressionism, was both the perfect demonstration and expression of how the contemporary artists of the time (1940s/50s) were still grappling with, while also evolving, painting through this modernist crisis. The modernist enterprise according to Greenberg demanded such "testing

²⁷⁵ I am inserting this full quote for context as much of it is used indirectly within the writing "Each art, it turned out, had to effect this demonstration on its own account. What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this, each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time, it would make its possession of this area all the more secure. It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of every other art. Thereby each art would be rendered "pure" and in its "purity" finds the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. "Purity" meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance."

²⁷⁶ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 34.

²⁷⁷ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 34-35.

(of) a wide range of norms and conventions in order to determine which were inessential ...and which on the contrary constituted the timeless and unchanging essence of the art of painting”.²⁷⁸

“Thus, painting became an autonomous force that communicated nothing outside of its own self-contained properties”²⁷⁹ what could be said to be the practice of painting embracing a method of *making-itself* through its specific materiality. Greenberg developed this doctrine into a theory of and for ‘medium specificity’ and explored how questions, to do with both medium and specificity were being tested and played out within the abstract painting of the day. Greenberg believed that within this new form of painting (Abstract Expressionism and later Color Field Painting) there was a source/method that he felt was “uncontaminated visually from the influence of other media”²⁸⁰ and that this was to be found in painting and painting’s flatness alone.

Contrary to Greenberg’s theory, art historian Thierry de Duve, sees this step towards abstract painting and its materiality (of both its medium and its specificity) as happening within art history much earlier. De Duve cites it as having occurred sometime during the 1910s when a schism developed within painting’s development and a “switch to abstract painting comprised the crucial step in the recognition of painting’s demise as craft and its instant rebirth as an idea”.²⁸¹

Important for de Duve’s theory of painting’s progression and development is artist Marcel Duchamp’s total abandonment of the discipline (painting) and his new-found reliance on

²⁷⁸ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 35.

²⁷⁹ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 35.

²⁸⁰ Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 35.

²⁸¹ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 149.

“chance as a substitute for craftsmanship”.²⁸² De Duve sees the introduction of the ready-made as Duchamp’s registering to the world of this abandonment of painting and that “the birth of abstract painting is the relevant context, and as such, it is theoretical and aesthetic as well as art-historical...it revolves around the issue of specificity”.²⁸³

De Duve claims that painting was the first of the arts to strive “for purity, for self-referential ...the all-encompassing subject matter of practice”²⁸⁴ and that painting was the site where abstract art truly came into being. He sees in painting the missing link between the connection of “the generic and the specific, between art in general and one or more of the arts in particular”.²⁸⁵

Canvas

The discipline of painting, it would appear, is still striving to understand this break within the art historical narrative. The pursuit of pushing paint around a canvas surface still raises lots of questions to do with what is specific and what is the medium in relation to what allows a painting to be called a painting. Within the *E+N Painting project*, I have tested this question over and over to see what can be deemed specific to painting and if the medium can still play a distinctive role within such a definition.

Writer and curator Anthony Huberman²⁸⁶, in 2016 defines²⁸⁷ painting as “...always already

²⁸² de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 150.

²⁸³ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 151.

²⁸⁴ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 151-152.

²⁸⁵ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 152.

²⁸⁶ There was no date of birth available online.

²⁸⁷ Anthony Huberman, “Laura Owen: Ten Paintings”, Wallis Foundation, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.wattis.org/view?id=332>.

art. As soon as we see one, we know what to do and recognise it as art...Even the unprimed stretched canvas for sale at Wal-Mart is a signifier of art, before any marks are made on its surface. Objects, images, or videos need a frame or a context in order for them to seem like art. Painting doesn't".²⁸⁸

This definition of painting is not the first to cite the "unprimed stretched canvas" as "already art", for this we need to return to Clement Greenberg's 1961 essay, *Modernist Painting*, where he proclaims: "by now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture, thus a stretched or tacked- up canvas already exists as a picture- though not necessarily a successful one".²⁸⁹

It is interesting to compare these two similar, yet differing statements made over 50 years apart concerning a definition of painting. Consider for example that in the 1960s the blank canvas was not yet established as an accepted or acceptable norm, as a/the signifier, within a contemporary sensibility and vocabulary of art making and in Greenberg's statement, it would seem he is preempting such an acceptability within painting practices.

Painting, or rather the blank surface of the canvas in both statements, is already, in fact, an object of art; it is in the world already, ready to be seen as art- after all it is solely produced by its manufacturer to supply the art market, what scientist Jacques Monod (1910-1976) refers to as a situation where "object(s) rendered in material form the pre-existent intention that gave

²⁸⁸ Huberman, "Laura Owen."

²⁸⁹ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, 222.

birth to it, and its form is accounted for by the performance expected of it even before it takes shape”.²⁹⁰

Yet it is also not in fact painting, or what curator Lisa le Feuvre (1970-) in her book aptly titled *Failure* has referred to as “an empty canvas, the ultimate symbol of the failure of art”.²⁹¹ This challenges Greenberg and Huberman’s hypotheses. In fact, both theories are reducing and identifying the discipline of painting within their statements towards a form of a ready-made. Both are linking the processual nature of painting to its network of signifiers as Huberman suggests.

In Greenberg’s case, he is reducing the activity of painting to an idea of painting, which you could say was and is a more radical proposition than that suggested by Huberman. By declaring that a tacked- up piece of canvas can be viewed as a painting through just one material (and notable that one material is not paint), the weave of the canvas becomes a painting without paint or even the support of the/a wooden structure.

Greenberg seems to be proposing that it is the canvas alone which reveals the primary essence of painting, as opposed to the “two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness”.²⁹² This is relevant because the fabric (here canvas) holds the liquidity of the medium and makes visible upon the surface the activity of the artist (author) through the skin of the painting.

²⁹⁰ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 3.

²⁹¹ Lisa Le Feuvre, *Failure (Documents on Contemporary Art)* (London :Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 25.

²⁹² Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, 754-760.

It's very picture, its image depends on this combination of activities; liquidity and author, and by author here I am not just referring to the hand of a human (the brushstroke) but to all and the many tried and tested methods of paint application since Jackson Pollock: methods such as pouring, staining, smudging, spraying, squeegeeing and most recently printing in the case of artist Wade Guyton's (1972-) paintings, to name but a few methods.

Greenberg, however, does in this statement link the "un-stretched canvas"²⁹³ to an human-author; he does this by linking the limpness of the fabric as having to be tacked-up.²⁹⁴ By tacking- up there are two things suggested, one: the author (this could both refer to the artist-maker and curator/gallerist- after all someone needs to place the tacks into the canvas) and two: verticality (which is historically a requirement of painting to be viewed), through his use of the word 'up'.

By referring to the 'tacked-up' canvas Greenberg is implying that the canvas is still holding walls and consequently can be considered to be a painting. It is still within its traditionally acceptable conventions of a site and therefore not yet expanded, more reduced. Greenberg's statement here would also go on to link future painting practices and developments from American artists such as Richard Tuttle (1941-), with his tacked-up pieces of canvas and on to Sam Gilliam (1933-) who is credited as being the first American artist to take the canvas literally off the stretcher frame by tacking and suspending the physical canvas into a site or space, truly making canvas the specific within a definition of painting.

²⁹³ Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 754-760.

²⁹⁴ Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 754-760.

Tacked up

“In the late 1960s, the stretcher was something of a magnet for interrogation of the tradition of painting. From the prevalent fascination with the shaped stretcher to the spare, poetic, and flimsy ruinations...artists were not taking for granted the parameters of the painting’s support or its relationship to the wall”.²⁹⁵

Sam Gilliam and Richard Tuttle fully embraced the potentiality of the, ‘tacked up’ canvas suggested by Greenberg and by the mid to late 1960s both produced bodies of work which were reductionist, in strategies and appearance but also intended “to occupy a space where painting, object, and architecture intersect”²⁹⁶. Both artists did this through their use of colour (pigment) and shape (canvas), embracing these specific elements of painting by literally only using unstretched canvas (cotton duck) to hold the paint. These works are known as *Draped Paintings* (1965) in Gilliam's case and *The Cloth Pieces* (1967) in Tuttle's.

Both artists appear to have seized the potential of canvas alone as the sole medium that was specific to an idea or concept of painting. What one sees in both artists’ work is an exploration of the potentiality of this raw material (canvas), which begins to act and to hold the skin of the paint in new and what later become known as expanded methodologies, through embracing methods of chance, fracture and importantly for this research allowing the material(s) to make themselves (*making-itself*) and their image through process or processual means.

Both Gilliam and Tuttle's work literally were just that: the embracing of process and

²⁹⁵ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 25.

²⁹⁶ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 46.

specificity simply through the cloth tacked directly to the wall or suspended (depending on how you chose to view it). Within their work what we begin to see is a method of painting that goes beyond what was then considered a painting, where it can now simply be permissible as “a tacked-up piece of canvas”.²⁹⁷

In fact, both Gilliam and Tuttle stained²⁹⁸ the canvas with dyes and pigments rather than painting directly onto the surfaces using brushes. This allowed for painting to begin performing as some sculptural form or rather as a “low relief”²⁹⁹ upon and importantly with the support of a wall, rather than simply being placed on a wall; this could be seen as “artistic promiscuity that allowed painting to open out and become receptive to separate disciplinary fields...against Greenberg’s edicts as to the necessary ‘Purity’ of the medium”.³⁰⁰

Gilliam described how he began to develop his *Draped Paintings* after visiting the Colour Field artist Kenneth Noland³⁰¹ (1924-2010) and how he (Noland) “sort of suggested that there was no difference between painting and sculpture at all...that’s what led to the drape paintings; I mean, trying to produce a work that was both about painting and sculpture”.³⁰² Gilliam achieved this by “tendentiously playing the two-dimensional off the three dimensional to make work which was about both”.³⁰³ This was an important move that took painting away from the confinements of illusionism and the frame into an actual real. He achieved this new hybrid

²⁹⁷ Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*, 754-760.

²⁹⁸ Neither Sam Gilliam or Richard Tuttle were the first to do this, for this you’d have to look towards Louis Morris, Helen Frankenthaler, and the Color Field painters. But although Gilliam and Tuttle removed the canvas from the stretcher, from its support, they both allowed the paint and importantly its liquidity to define the end image.

²⁹⁹ Michael Dempsey, *Richard Tuttle: Triumphs* (Dublin: Hugh Lane Gallery, 2011), 38.

³⁰⁰ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 61.

³⁰¹ Was a well-known painter associated with the Color Field movement in Washington, DC during the 1950s?

³⁰² Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 23-24.

³⁰³ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 25.

painting form it has been said by making paintings that “one enters...almost as if one would enter a room”.³⁰⁴

Importantly both Gilliam and Tuttle abandoned any if not all, unnecessary materials associated with painting to create paintings which both challenged and were about medium and a new specificity. This new specificity was one where the sole medium, canvas, and its materiality were embraced. What both artists did was to enfold a certain degree of slippage as a methodology within their processes to make paintings anew.

This slippage, or rather what I have come to consider as methods of *making-itself*, could also be seen as a new and original interest in materiality and could only have come about through these (and other) artists’ collective abandonment of all traditional painting methods and tools such as small brushes, oil paint, drawing, composition, imagery and eventually stretcher frames in favor of acrylic paint and an abstraction which went beyond “mere formalism in the sense that art simply and immutably leads to other art, or even a parody of formalism, but (towards) something else”.³⁰⁵ What art historian Craig Staff³⁰⁶ sees as “a more open-ended inquiry that centered upon testing out the physical parameters of painting”.³⁰⁷

Expanded hybrids

This new, this hybrid, something beyond painting but approaching sculpture, seems to have been of the utmost importance to artists during the late 1950s and beyond, what curator and writer Achim Hochdörfer (1969-) has deemed “the transition period (and) the starting point for

³⁰⁴ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 24.

³⁰⁵ Fer, *The Infinite Line*, 29.

³⁰⁶ Craig Staff’s date of birth was not available online.

³⁰⁷ Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 25.

several strands of painting's development for decades to come".³⁰⁸

Artist Donald Judd had by 1964 identified, in his influential essay, *Specific Objects*³⁰⁹ that "...half or more of the best new work in the last few years had been neither painting nor sculpture. Usually it has been related, closely or distantly, to one or the other. The site for this new exploration into and through theories associated with both medium and specificity can, it would seem, be found within an interest in making painting revitalised as a site which sought "to disarticulate painting from the confines of the support's surface".³¹⁰

In the 1960s Judd and artist Robert Morris both in their art making and art writing begin to work towards establishing a definition of and for this new hybrid artwork, something beyond the rationale of an 'ism' and importantly at a distance from the dominance of the looming Greenbergian theory of the day. They did this through writing and theorising as a method of/for making art objects anew in their studios and with this, it would seem, something unique began to happen.

Theorising, that once controlled domain of academics, critics and art historians, begin to be reclaimed by the art-makers of the time and a new meaning for and of process, materiality and specificity begin to be defined and understood from a maker's perspective. This has been of the utmost importance within the practice element of this Ph.D. research because it has allowed me to understand how painting can move beyond the influence and understanding of art history (narrative and linear) to possibly embrace methods of performing and revealing theory as a visual language in and of itself.

³⁰⁸ David Joselit and Manuela Ammer and Achim Hochdörfer, *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age* (Munich: Prestel, 2015), 17.

³⁰⁹ Judd, *Complete Writings*, 181-189.

³¹⁰ Judd, *Complete Writings*, 181-189.

Robert Morris argues for this in his 1968 essay *Anti-Form*, when he suggests the idea that art can somehow “make itself”³¹¹ and as a whole, I have found that within the writing of both art history and theory the writer’s understanding and perspective (mostly) comes from the position of a non-maker and importantly the art is mostly written from the position of already in and of the world. I have found very little writing from the artist viewpoint about how an art object comes into existence; how it evolves, how it reveals visually its complexity of process, its materiality, its research and its formation. How it (the outcome/the object) makes visible all manner of complex contradictions, its failures, and its successes and importantly declares knowledge visually and anew.

In many ways, the *E+N Painting project* has used the still “dominant Greenbergian-influenced discourse” as a critical point of departure by whichto formulate... ‘my own’ painterly language”.³¹² Curator and writer Achim Hochdörfer has referred to the use of such methodologies as leading to circumstances where “painting after painting, series after series, is subjected to complex processing; each is contrasted, superimposed, undercut, and recombined”.³¹³

³¹¹ Morris, *Continuous Projects*, 43.

³¹² Staff, *After Modernist Painting*, 55.

³¹³ Joselit and Ammer and Hochdorfer, *Painting 2.0*, 22.

2.2: Traces of an Activity



5. Susan Connolly, *Processual Activity- Colour Chart GAC*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 50x30cm. New York: GAC Factory.

Introduction

“...to leave the eye under no doubt as to the fact that the colours they used were made of paint that came from tubes and pots”.³¹⁴

In this chapter I will take art historian Isabelle Graw’s theory of and for painting, especially to do with the importance of the brushstroke which she singles out as being evidence of an activity to the eye³¹⁵ where because of “the indexical quality of its signs, painting seems to suggest the immediate presence of its creator”³¹⁶. I will do this so as to begin to see how the reductionist strategies of contemporary painters and that deployed within the *E+N Painting project* can be viewed as being traces or evidence of process and how engagement with materials can reveal and make visible methods of *making-itself*.

Within Graw’s theory the painterly activity develops into the evidence of some unknown and possible unknowable interaction between the artist and their material choice and where the canvas acts and becomes the site that can reveal fragments through its processual engagement. Fragments thus become traces of the artist’s supposed intention, activity, and labour, something that art historian David Joselit refers to “as a passage of force through matter- typically situated within the domain of expressive subjectivity, where objects dissolve into a texture of pure human effect”.³¹⁷

So how can paint reveal such traces? What can such traces reveal and how can they bring

³¹⁴ O’Brian, *Collected Essays Vol 4*, 86.

³¹⁵ Graw, *Painting beyond Itself*, 79-101.

³¹⁶ Isabelle Graw, “The Knowledge of Painting: Noted on thinking images, and the person in the product,” *Texte zur Kunst*, Issue No.82, June 2011, 114-124.

³¹⁷ Joselit and Ammer and Hochdörfer, *Painting 2.0*, 170.

new knowledge within painting practices?

Within the *E+N Painting project* I have tested this in three ways; one through the examination of ownership to do with the brushstroke; two through the exploration of the idea of making paint charts and; three through the wall painting, titled; *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY*³¹⁸, which I have now made in four different venues but which I have chosen to call and refer to as the same work having become an idea of painting, a set of instructions which can be read and executed for any site or venue and still exist as the same artwork.

White Paintings- Rauschenberg

In 1951 Robert Rauschenberg said of his *White Painting Series* that, “if you don’t take it (the concept that painting can transcend or rather dematerialise itself into being or becoming an idea) seriously, there is nothing to take”.³¹⁹ Thus Rauschenberg’s *White Painting Series* fundamentally rely on a sense of trust to be seen as painting (after all, all they really show is nothingness) or even as art at all. Trust not just in the artists who call this painting, but also in the materials in revealing and making their meaning visible and viable.

Importantly, when the *White Painting Series* was first devised the paintings were made using non-traditional methods of both material and application. For example, Rauschenberg used a domestic household paint and applied it using a roller, in thin and even layers, so as to leave little or no evidence of the artist’s hand. Thus, eliminating any association or suggested importance of the brushstroke and importantly the artist’s signature.

³¹⁸ Fig.25,2/27.2, p.69.

³¹⁹ Judd, *Complete Writings*, 117.

By eradicating the brush mark, what French art historian Hubert Damisch (1928-2017) refers to as being the “indicator of subjectivity in painting”,³²⁰ the surface of Rauschenberg’s canvas becomes a series of works that can be constructed by anyone via a set of instructions (or at least they were- see footnote³²¹). This as a method of making a painting draws the audience’s attention to a number of questions concerning the meaning and positioning of painting as a product and as a set of conditions, even networks within what could or can be viewed as high art, and reveals painting expanded beyond Damisch’s theory that painting is nothing more than a trace of activity to the eye which he believed was in stark contrast to that of “verbal utterances”.³²²

I visited Tate Modern in February 2017 to view the *Robert Rauschenberg Retrospective*. This exhibition brought together a large number of key works from Rauschenberg’s oeuvre, which celebrated his contribution to art production especially through his development of what became known as combine paintings into a hybrid practice³²³. I was specifically interested in experiencing the *White Painting Series* and how they could unfold in real time and if they did, in fact, become “airports for shadows and dust particles”³²⁴ as proclaimed in 1952 by artist John Cage.

³²⁰ Graw, *Painting Beyond Itself*, 79

³²¹ I contacted the Tate gallery in London to confirm how the White Paintings had been constructed for their recent showing at the Rauschenberg retrospective in February 2017. I was informed that the 7-panel version that was on the show had in fact been loaned from the Rauschenberg Foundation in New York. It would seem that Rauschenberg’s own doctrine of “today is their maker” is no longer true and that since his death in 2008 all the remaining versions, painted either by him or his studio assistants (it has been documented that they, including artists Jasper Johns and Brice Marden, had manufactured some of the earlier incarnations of the White Painting Series) are now of significant value (high-art) and thus no longer can be a ‘site-less painting idea’.

³²² Graw, *Painting Beyond Itself*, 80.

³²³ Robert Rauschenberg Retrospective, Tate Modern, London, 1st Dec 2016- 17 April 2017. I visited the exhibition on the 15th February 2017.

³²⁴ Brandon W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), 33.

In the Tate Modern exhibition, the *White Painting Series* on view was a 7-panel³²⁵ version. In the interests of the *E+N Painting project* I was curious to see and experience this work in person, as in the documentary images it is very difficult to establish the surface qualities of the work and also because I want to consider to my own white painting within the *E+N Painting project* titled: *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY* and its particularities in relation to how it is constructed and manifested visually.

Below are the notes and responses I took on the day:

7-panel- the paint marks are still visible. The surface is flat, but you can still see the canvas weave. The shadows create different appearances of scale.

Each canvas pushes differently against the next, giving the appearance of deeper meeting points in different areas. The separation of approx. ½", these become very black but also create depth within the perspective.

It is only ever your head and shoulders that appear upon the bottom section of the painting as you walk across, people lean to look from the angle from where the text is placed and then walk away. This was of interest to observe, as the work was read as text far more so than it was visually. I spent at least a half an hour looking at the work, really looking and my observation was that the audience was for the most part unaware of this work. Other than the text that is.

³²⁵ When I began writing this section I was convinced I saw a 5-panel version of the work, after later consultation of my notes I discovered I actually saw a 7-panel version. This is important, as it shows how the works numbering does not really matter- even to me; it is a work that solely depend on the 'idea' of itself as a gesture to painting.

How is the paint different on the canvas than it is on the wall which the paintings have been? placed upon/within?

The weave of the canvas is horizontal, slightly dragged upwards. The wall is blotchier, it also shows scars embedded in the wall. With the way the lighting is used the wall seems slightly grey, possibly because of the amount of paint on the wall, layer upon layer, built up over time.

The corners of the canvases are smooth, round and there are 4 shadow lines ever so slightly thrown onto the walls surface.

The white paint on the canvas is softer, flat but not completely covering the canvas.

John Cage's statement doesn't work because the world never really touches or gets close to this surface (their surfaces) because in the gallery/exhibition the work is viewed behind ropes, which are hooked up to the alarm (I set it off accidentally which was amusing as it enabled more of the audience to 'see' the White Paintings because they were actively made aware of them through sound). White it would appear is the most vulnerable of colours when it comes to painting.

At the bottom of the canvas there is a shadow gap of approx. 2 inches.

White Painting: E+N Painting project

Art historian W.J.T Mitchell in his book, *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, asks the following questions: "What does this picture lack? What does it leave out?"

What is its area of erasure? Its blind spot? What does the frame or boundary exclude? What does its angle of representation prevent us from seeing, and prevent it from showing? What does it need or demand from the beholder to complete its work?"³²⁶

The answer to every single question that Mitchell poses in relation to Rauschenberg's *White Painting Series* could be within a contemporary sensibility: everything. And below is a list of reasons of how and why I have come to this conclusion through developing this inquiry within the *E+N Painting project*.

The *White Painting Series* lack, for example, everything to do with the visual, its erasure is everything to do with content, its blind spot is everything to do with its demands, its frame and boundary exclude everything to do with the real by not allowing the world in, or rather it is supposed to let the world in yet fails (this was observed at the Tate exhibition), it prevents us from seeing by showing us everything to do with nothing and it is ultimately in control of how we the viewer or beholder activates and allows its manifestation as an idea to be and become a painting. In so many ways this is not painting, but rather a set of questions about painting, whose answers have been made visual.

The same set of questions have been applied to the *E+N Painting project* in the work titled, *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY*³²⁷. But the answers below are very different for two reasons. One; I am responding and answering them from the artist's perspective, and therefore not as an art historian or theorist (in other words I have been involved in the processual element of the artwork) and two; I am doing so with full knowledge of works

³²⁶ Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* 49-50.

³²⁷ Fig.25.2/27.2, p.69.

that have gone before, like that of Rauschenberg and Frank Stella's *Black Paintings* made over 50 years ago. So naturally, when I answer Mitchell I am responding to them in relation to a position of knowing rather than known.

What does this picture lack?

An image

What does it leave out?

The canvas. The item I have deemed specific to a painting practice to be read and deemed as painting.

What is its area of erasure?

Surface, or maybe space. But its erasure is also making it present.

Its blind spot?

The materiality and its ability to dictate how the work manifests and changes via each new, or rather reworking or reconstruction of the idea.

What does the frame or boundary exclude?

There is no frame or boundary, as a site-specific work, painted directly onto the gallery wall it is inclusive of all its habitual boundaries. It rather uses framing as a device to make visible its presence, "suspended in an indeterminate space...quite literally affront (ing) Greenberg's call for a painting which rejects the easel and yearns for the wall".³²⁸

³²⁸

Maia Damianoviv, "Painting on the horn of a dilemma," *Art Press* 211, March 1996, 30-36.

What does its angle of representation prevent us from seeing, and prevent it from showing?

There is no prevention in seeing, only if you miss it or rather don't read it as art, similar to how Rauschenberg referred to his White Paintings. The work doesn't allow the viewer to see something into or something in-between. Rather it holds negative space, making its absence and its nothingness have a physical presence.

What does it need or demand from the beholder to complete its work?

I don't think it demands anything. If I am honest I think it seeks to be present, but it is not necessary for it to be seen for it to be completed. The site enables this.

White Failing

All artwork holds and reveals failure, and both Rauschenberg's *White Painting Series* and my own white painting, *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY*, hold and make visible their own failures (*making-itself*). In Rauschenberg's case, artist John Cage believed them to be anything but mute, he saw the *White Painting Series* "acting like mirrors on the world, or like nets for catching fragments of ambient light and shadow and by extension all other traces of transient information".³²⁹ Whereas Irish art critic Aidan Dunne³³⁰ wrote of *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, YMCCYMMCY, YMC, CYM, MCY* in his Irish Times review in 2015 that the work "most radically... seems to undo the fabric of the gallery itself, apparently peeling back a layer of wall-covering to reveal bare plaster. But the peeled layer is actually paint, and we realise we are looking at paint. It's a visual conundrum worthy of dialogue".³³¹

³²⁹ Andrew Bonacina, "Airports for Shadows," accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.artuner.com/curations/airports-for-shadows-and-dust/>.

³³⁰ There was no date of birth available online.

³³¹ Aidan Dunne, "Painters who break the rules," in *The Irish Times*, May 5, 2015. Accessed December 17, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/visual-art-round-up->

On the other hand, Rauschenberg's *White Painting Series* are not the indexical reflections of the world ³³²that Cage once professed them to be. At the Tate exhibition (2017) the work was missing this very thing. There were no shadows reflected from their surroundings, there was no dust upon their white roller painted surfaces, there were no reflections other than a very small area on the far right of the work which echoed the corner of its frame multiple times. The world it would appear was completely missing and the limitations of the frame now suggested as a multiple highlighted boundary.

Subsequently, what they did do was nothing. All seven white painted panels were barely present, mostly not seen and thus quietly and reservedly holding their wall and their position within the display of all the other early work. They had become a work, which inhabited space rather than revealing it, they were now silencing themselves through their surroundings (of course this could have been the fault of the curatorial team at the Tate, restricting the viewing positions with a rope for example and using very low lighting to illuminate the painted panels). Failures and even the "act of looking long and thinking hard in order to bring fresh vision"³³³ became challenging.

But what the *White Painting Series* had maintained, since their first incarnation and critical review during the 1950s, was their ability to make visible questions about painting; What is a painting? What should a painting reveal? What do pictures want? Therefore, could these paintings be the first works to make such questions visible in such a radically reductive manner, and perhaps with my own contemporary lens they seemed passive compared to how radical they must once have appeared. After all Rauschenberg said 'the strongest thing about my

[painters-who-break-the-rules-1.2193910.](#)

³³² Bonacina, "Airports for Shadows."

³³³ Stiles, "Looking Long."

work...is the fact that I chose to ennoble the ordinary³³⁴ and the *White Painting Series* give priority to this very ordinary in a way which embeds painting within a system of networks and ultimately as a nomadic idea or concept of medium. Traces of an activity, but only just.

The traces that can be found in my own work, *Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y*, *YMCCYMMCY*, *YMC*, *CYM*, *MCY*, make visual and embody the actual failure of the process within the piece, while also “a tension arises between two contradictory readings of the work: as either a pictorial surface or a solid object”³³⁵ Of course for the viewer, the audience, this is impossible to know, as without prior knowledge or some sort of verbal utterances³³⁶ how could they. The work creates a complex relationship between the art object and the wall to establish a “new and undefined experience of space...a fusion of painting, architecture, and sculpture”³³⁷ ensues.

Y,M,C,C,Y,M,M,C,Y, *YMCCYMMCY*, *YMC*, *CYM*, *MCY* was first intended as a site-specific wall painting or rather, an intervention. It was tried, tested and worked out before the event/exhibition in my studio in 2014 where the visual aesthetic was first explored and sampled. The studio manifestation involved directly painting the *CYM* pattern on to the studio wall, followed by the layering of medium gel mixed with household paint, before directly cutting into the skin that had been created. This was followed by the peeling and removal of the actual paint skin, which was not fully disembodied, but removed to a stage of allowing it to cling to its support (the wall) through the use of wooden armatures.

³³⁴ Stiles, “Looking Long.”

³³⁵ White, *Lucio Fontana*, 34.

³³⁶ Isabelle Graw, “The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy,” in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 79-101.

³³⁷ Pia Gottschaller, *Lucio Fontana: The Artist's Materials* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012), 15.

That first time the paint skin was removed it revealed some of the residual painted pattern on the reverse side of the paint skin, which I had intended (or rather hoped) to make visible. But the first time I installed this work in a gallery context, following the set of instructions I had penned from the previous studio work, the process completely took over and made the in-between layer where the pattern was, completely disappear. It failed.

But it also unfolded a new set of inquiry and questions, my past efforts becoming filtered and influenced by the present and what it had been revealed through its processual activity. By revealing nothing the painting became quite loaded and my planned set of procedures showed me that I am not completely in control of my own visualisations and definitely not in control of the materiality and liquidity of paint, site, and process - all of which were fugitive, something I hadn't really considered in the prototype. As artist John Cage had observed of Rauschenberg's *White Painting Series*, "this paradigm shift moved the definition of art as a fixed object in time and space to an intuitive experience of time and space".³³⁸

Importantly what remained both on and off the wall was a paint skin. Clinging to the gallery wall, its now structural support, furthermore also propped upon a makeshift armature, framing its failure to reveal its intentionality by embodying its nothingness. It had become some hybrid of painting, not quite a sculpture or even a relief, all of its maker's intentionality now gone, with methods of slippage and the material process somehow having become its creator, the processual *making-itself*, what artist Gerhard Richter has deemed as "always planned, but also always surprising".³³⁹

³³⁸ Margaret Iversen, *Chance (Documents in Contemporary Art)* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 93.

³³⁹ Iversen, *Chance*, 159.

Appendix 3: Processual Atlas III

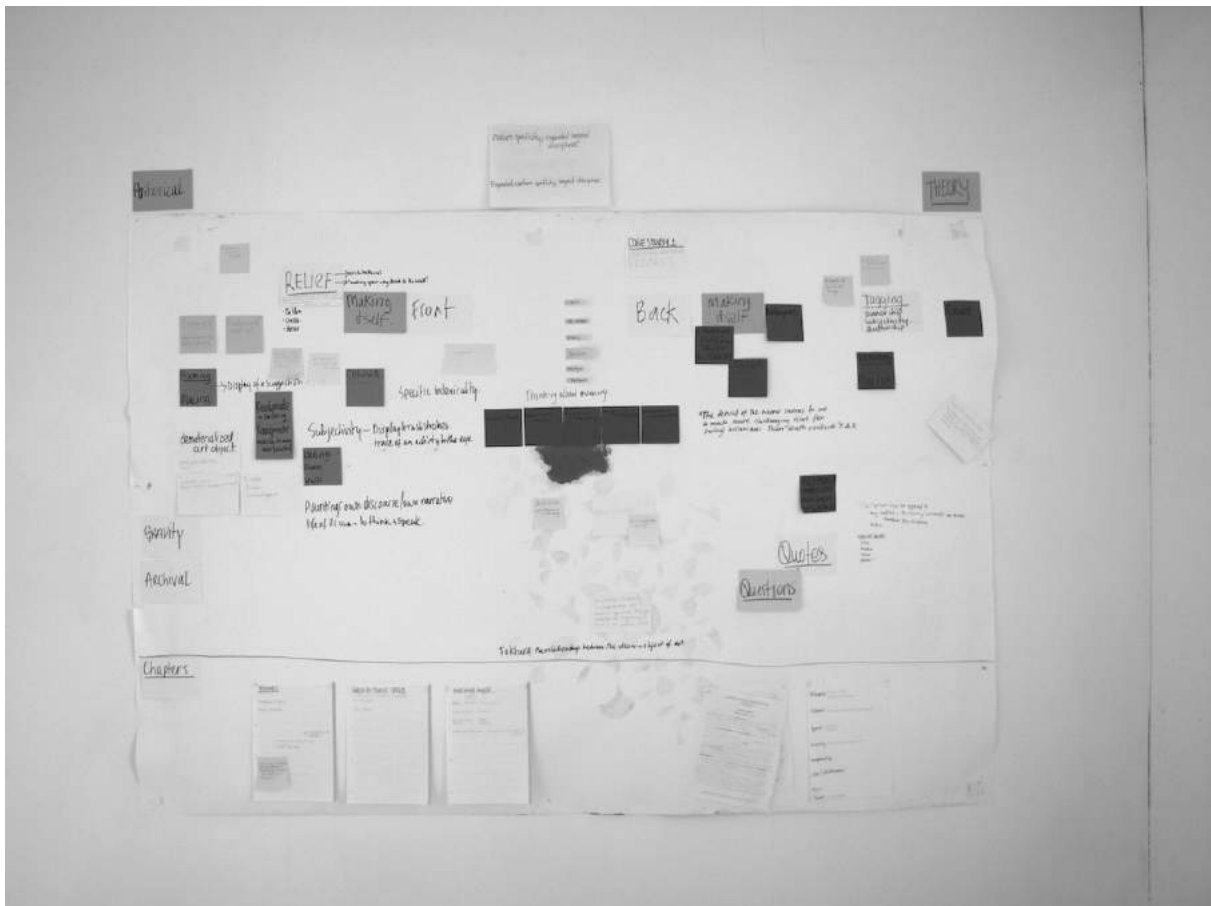


Fig.1.3



Fig.2.3

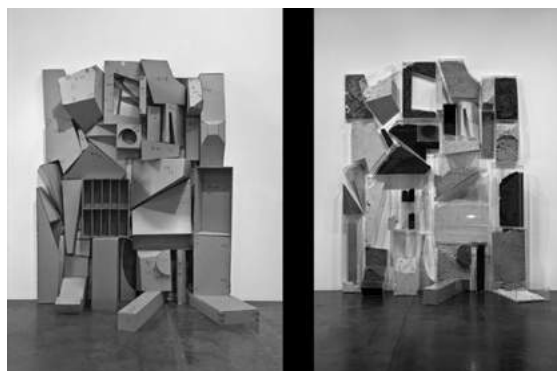


Fig.3.3



Fig.4.3



Fig.5.3



Fig.6.3



Fig. 7.3



Fig. 8.3



Fig. 9.3



Fig. 10.3



Fig. 11.3

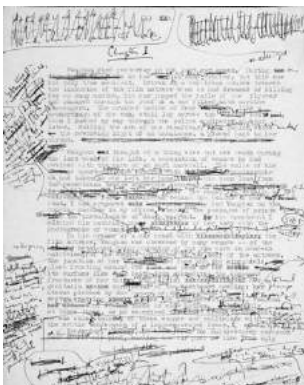


Fig. 12.3



Fig. 13.3



Fig. 14.3



Fig.15.3



Fig.16.3

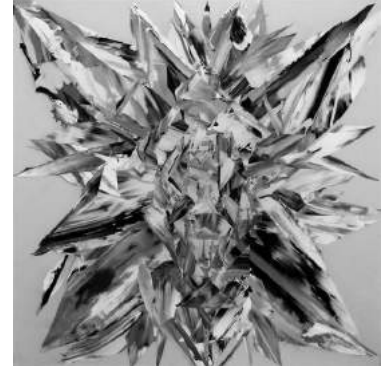


Fig.17.3

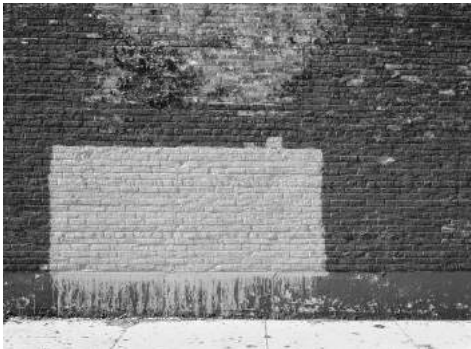


Fig.18.3



Fig.19.3

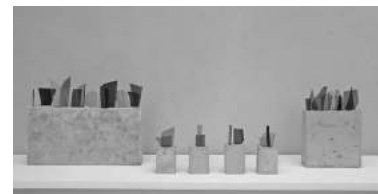


Fig.20.3



Fig.21.3



Fig.22.3



Fig.23.3

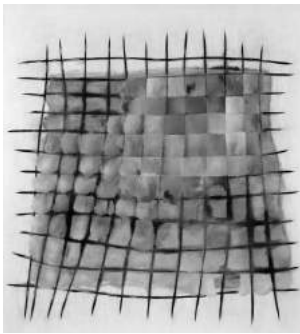


Fig.24.3



Fig.25.3



Fig.26.3



Fig.27.3



Fig.28.3



Fig.29.3



Fig.30.3



Fig.31.3



Fig.32.3



Fig.33.3



Fig.34.3



Fig.35.3



Fig.36.3



Fig.37.3

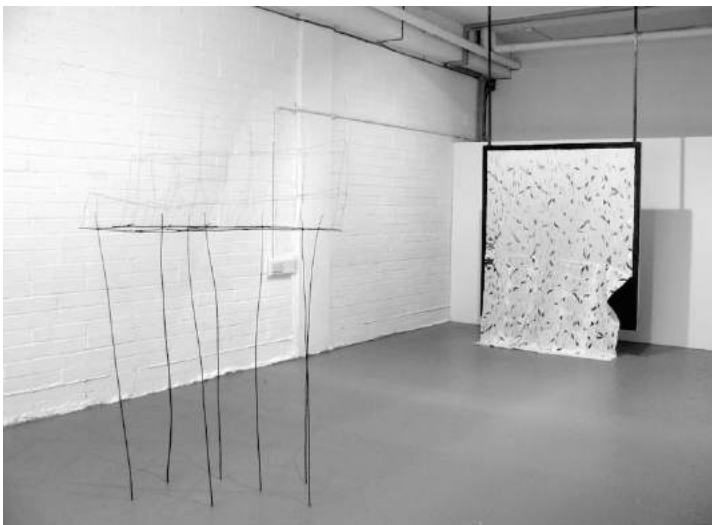


Fig.38.3

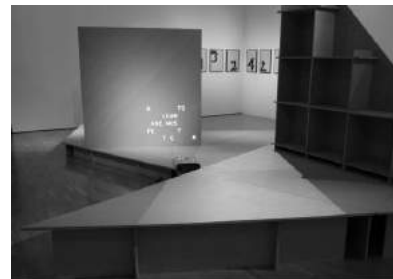


Fig.39.3



Fig.40.3



Fig.41.3



Fig.42.3



Fig.43.3



Fig.44.3



Fig.45.3



Fig.46.3

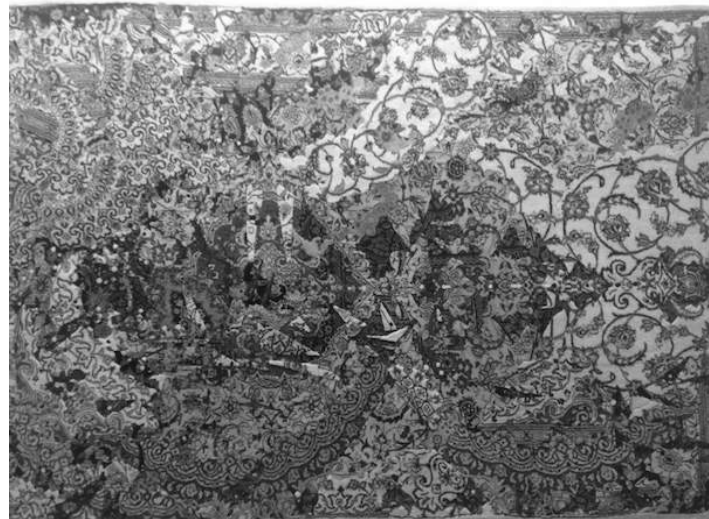


Fig.47.3



Fig.48.3



Fig.49.3



Fig.50.3



Fig.51.3



Fig.52.3



Fig.53.3



Fig.54.3



Fig.55.3

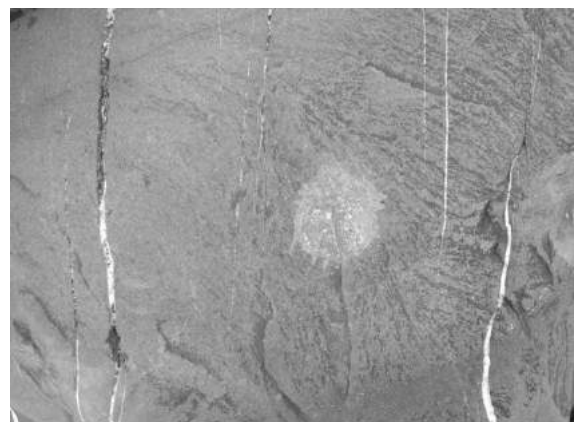


Fig.56.3



Fig.57.3



Fig.58.3



Fig.59.3

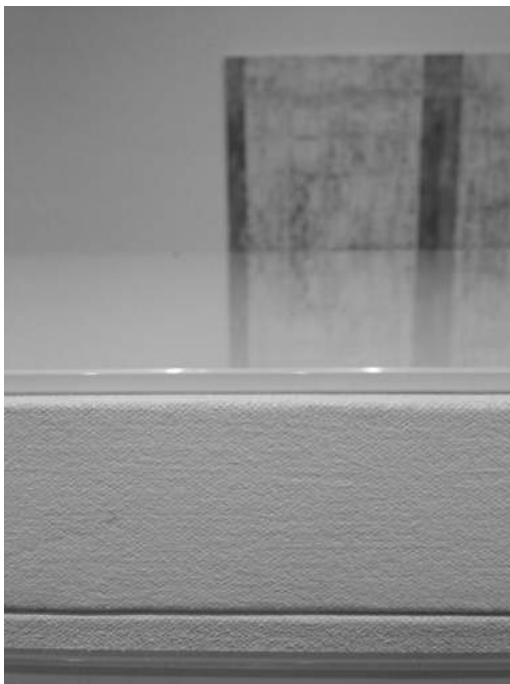


Fig.60.3



Fig.61.3



Fig.62.3



Fig.64.3



Fig.65.3



Fig.66.3

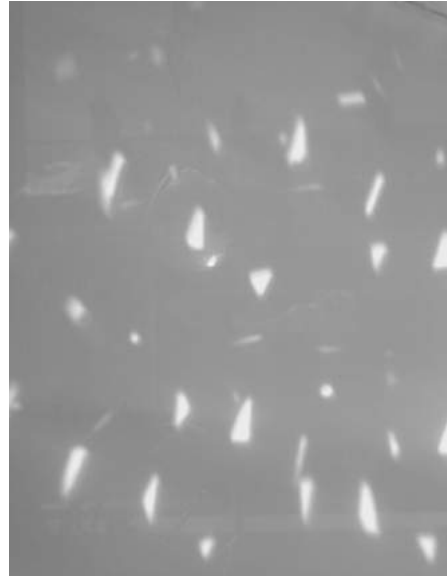


Fig.67.3



Fig.68.3

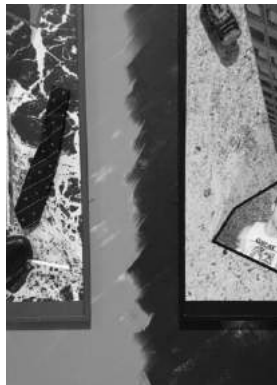


Fig.69.3

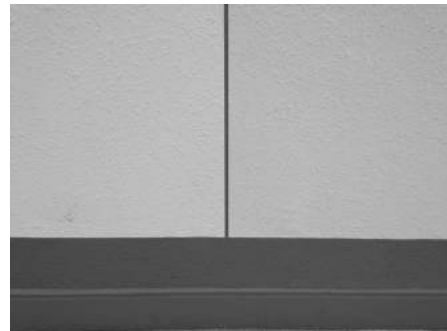


Fig.70.3



Fig.71.3



Fig.72.3



Fig.73.3



Fig.74.3



Fig.75.3



Fig.76.3

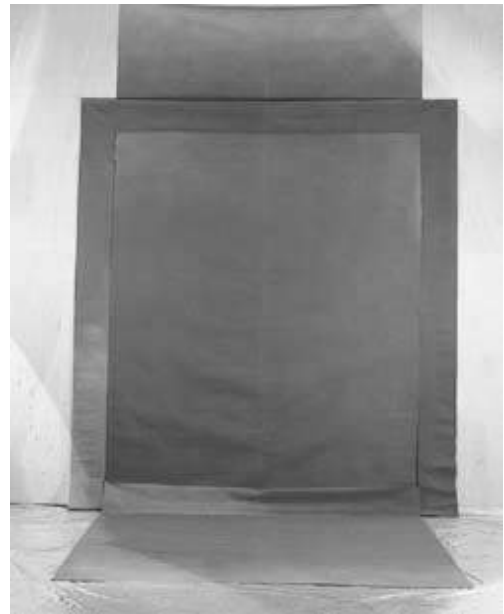


Fig.77.3

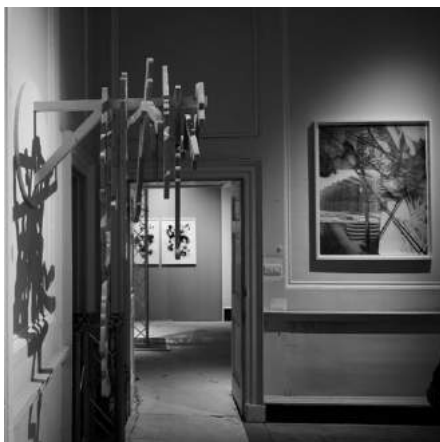


Fig.78.3



Fig.79.3



Fig.80.3



Fig.81.3

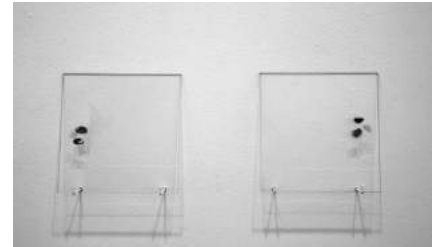


Fig.82.3

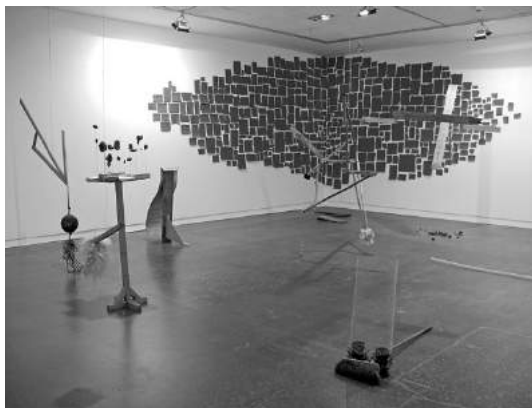


Fig.83.3



Fig.84.3



Fig.85.3



Fig.86.3



Fig.87.3



Fig.88.3



Fig.89.3



Fig.90.3



Fig.91.3



Fig.92.3

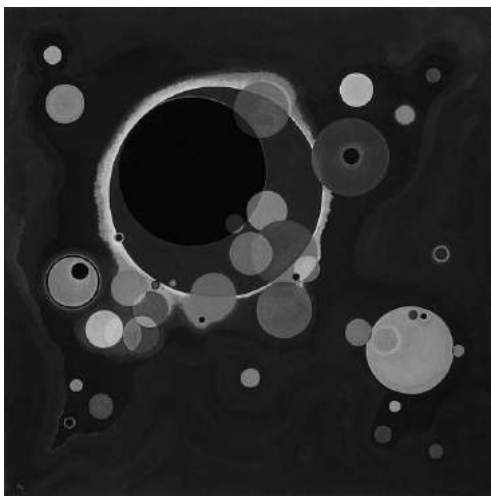


Fig.93.3



Fig.94.3



Fig.95.3



Fig.96.3



Fig.97.3



Fig.98.3

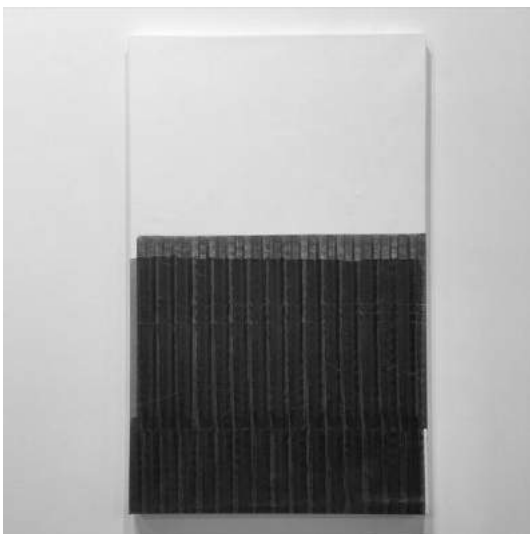


Fig.99.3



Fig.100.3

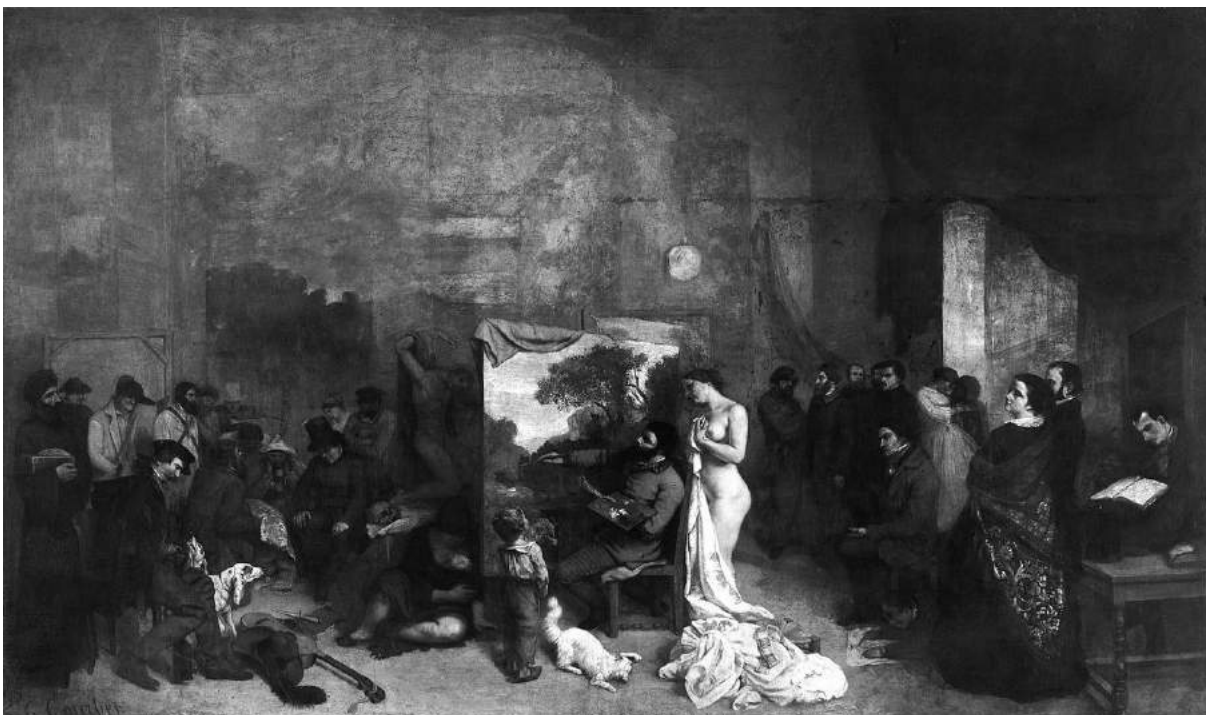


Fig.101.3



Fig.102.3

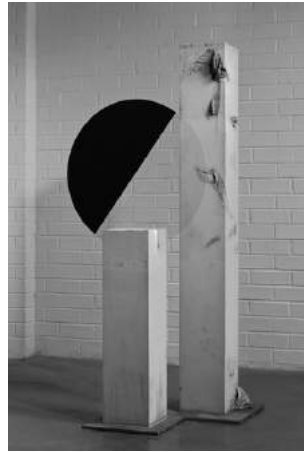


Fig.103.3



Fig.104.3



Fig.105.3

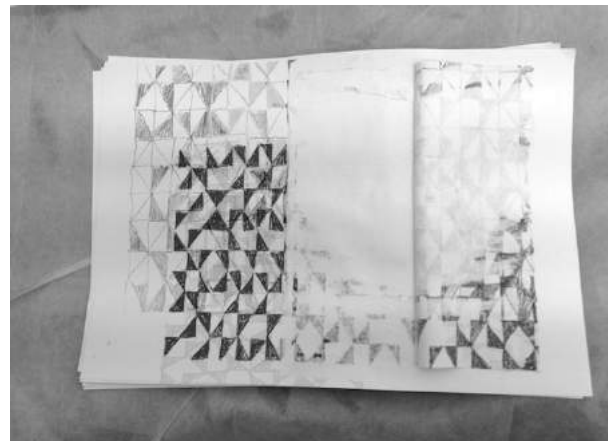


Fig.106.3



Fig.107.3



Fig.108.3

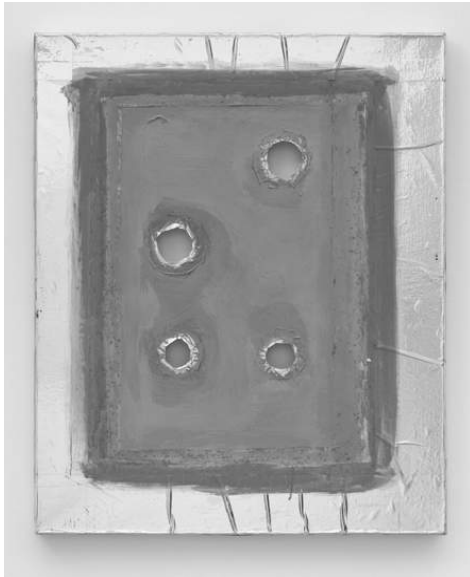


Fig.109.3



Fig.110.3

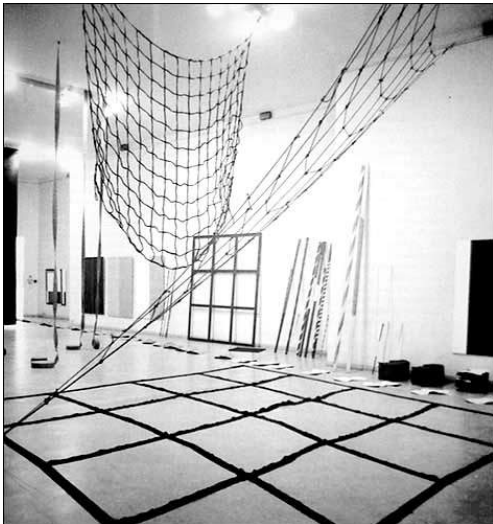


Fig.111.3



Fig.112.3



Fig.113.3



Fig.114.3



Fig.115.3



Fig.116.3



Fig.117.3



Fig.118.3



Fig.119.3



Fig.120.3



Fig.121.3

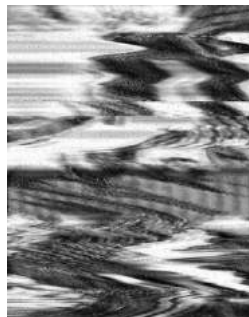


Fig.122.3



Fig.123.3

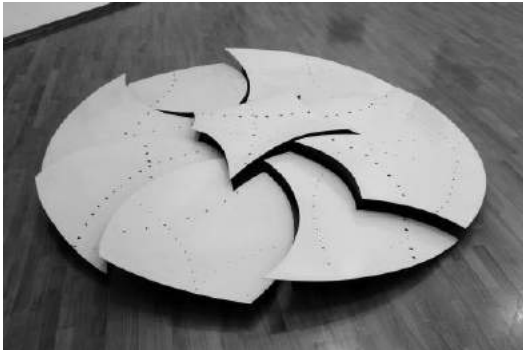


Fig.124.3



Fig.125.3

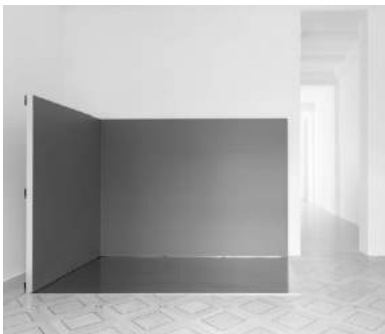


Fig.126.3



Fig.127.3



Fig.128.3

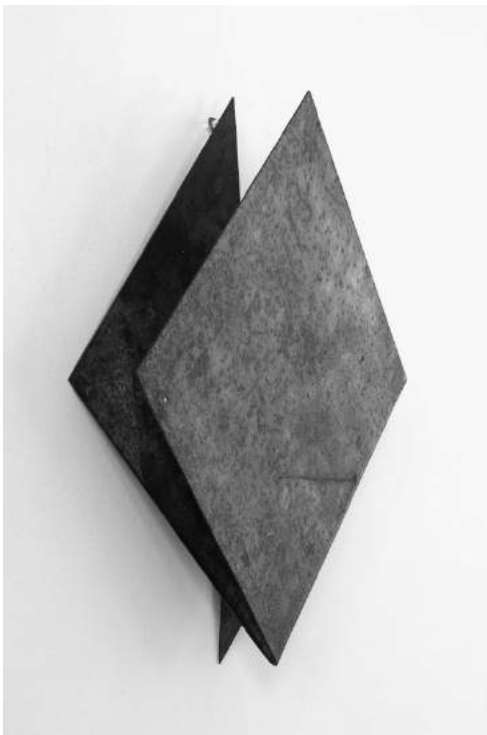


Fig.129.3



Fig.130.3

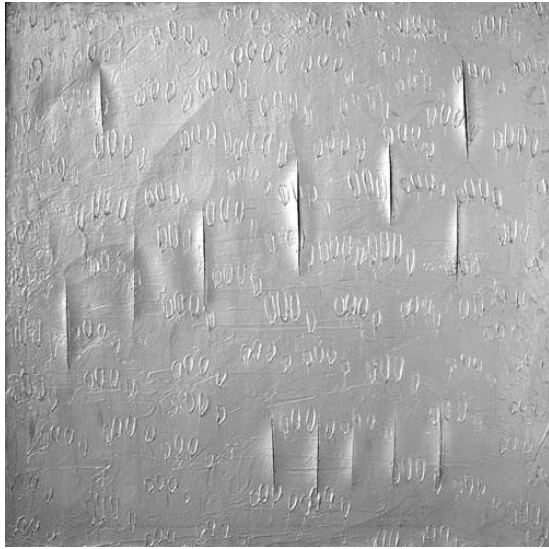


Fig.131.3



Fig.132.3

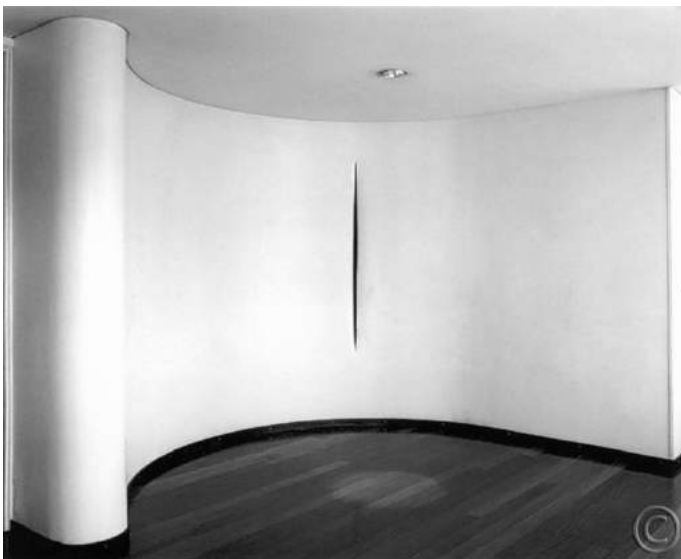


Fig.133.3



Fig.134.3



Fig.135.3



Fig.136.3

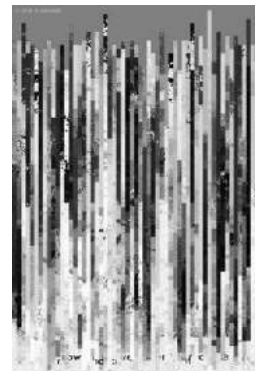


Fig.137.3



Fig.138.3



Fig.139.3

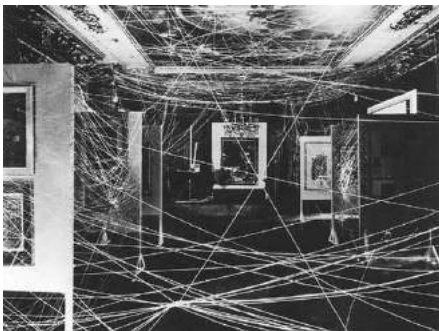


Fig.140.3

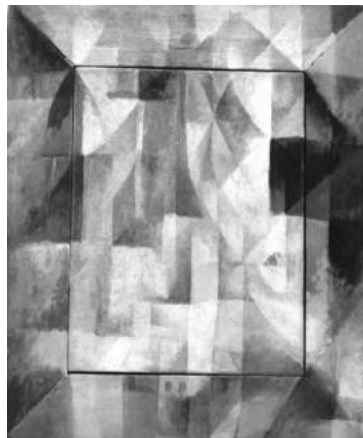
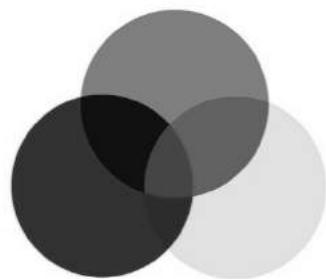


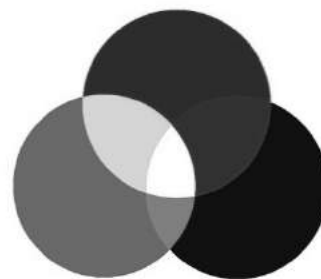
Fig.141.3



Fig.142.3



Subtractive color (CMYK)



Additive Color (RGB)

Fig.143.3

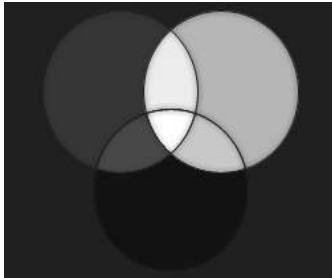


Fig.144.3

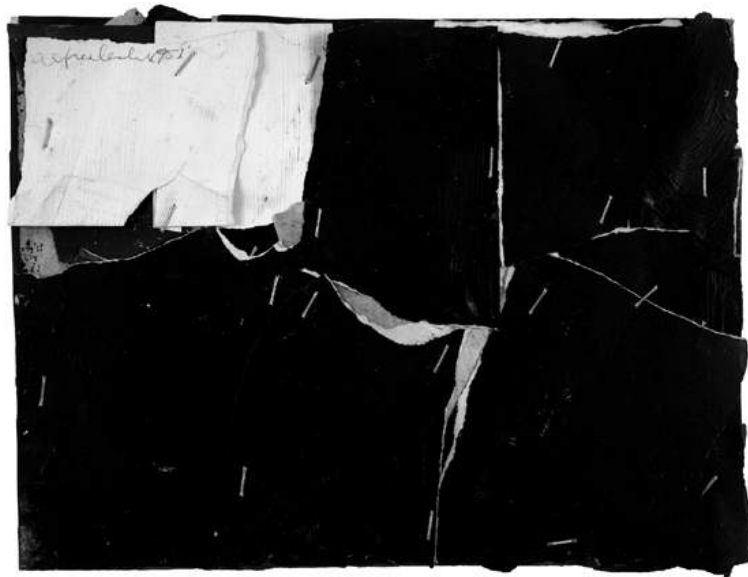


Fig.145.3



Fig.146.3



Fig.147.3



Fig.148.3

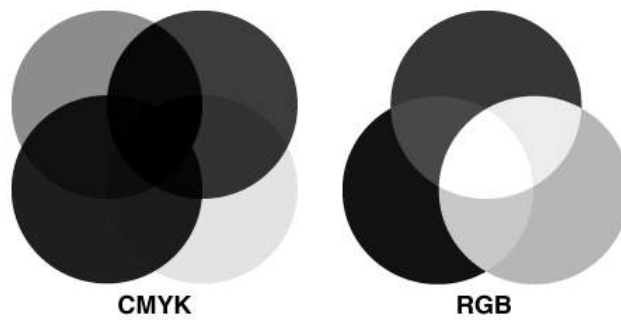


Fig.149.3



Fig.150.3

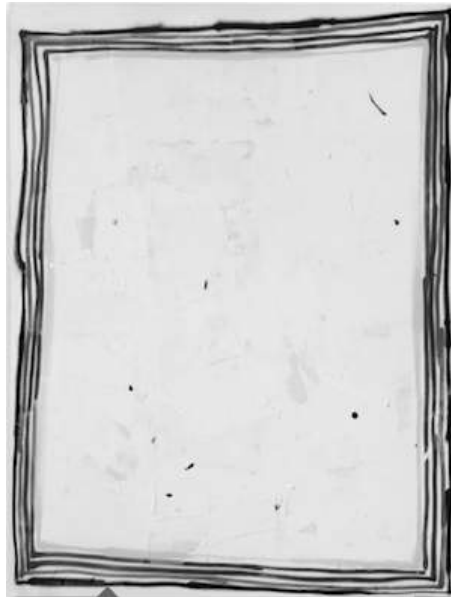


Fig.151.3



Fig.152.3



Fig.153.3

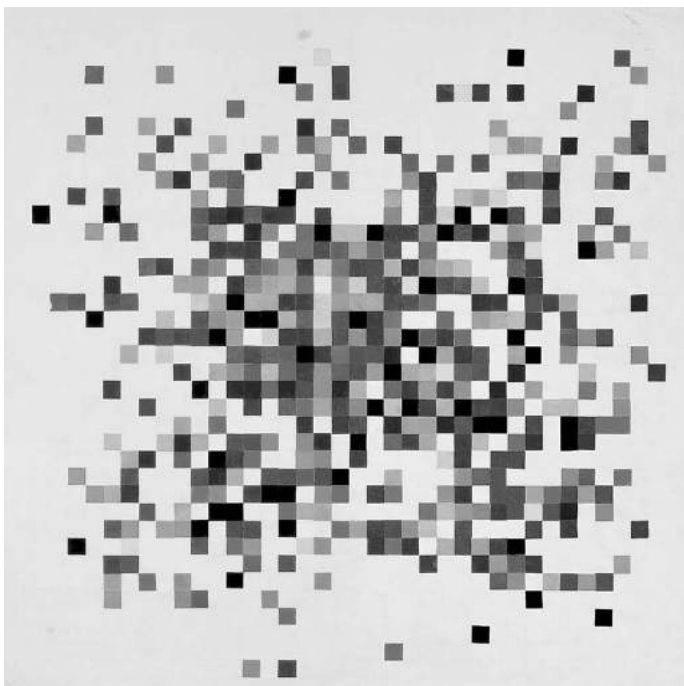


Fig.154.3



Fig.155.3



Fig.156.3



Fig.157.3



Fig.158.3

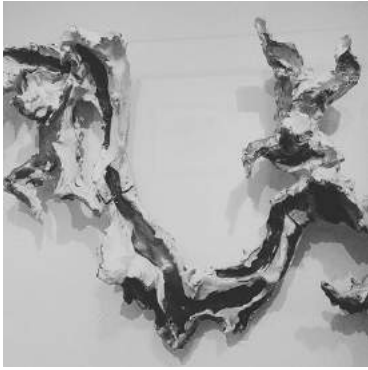


Fig.159.3

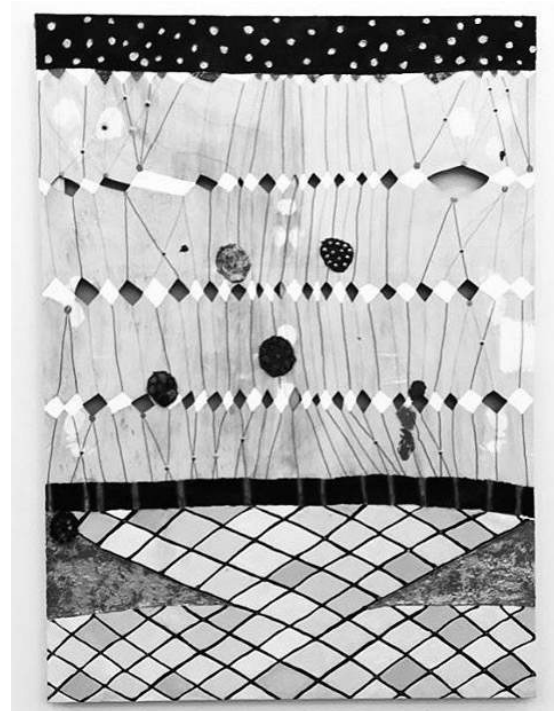


Fig.160.3



Fig.161.3



Fig.162.3



Fig.163.3



Fig.164.3



Fig.165.3

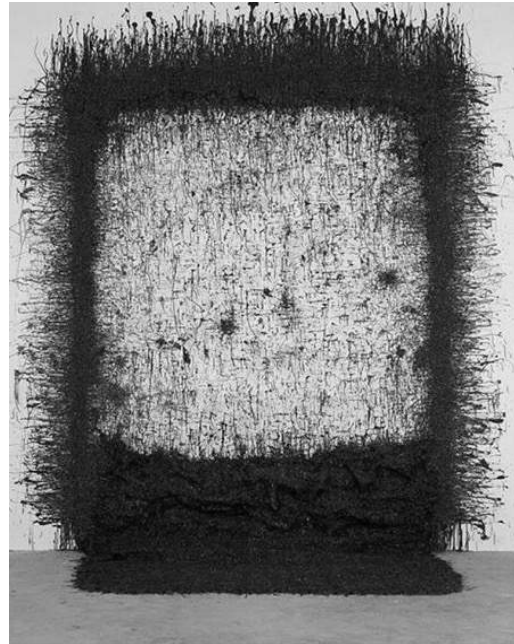


Fig.166.3



Fig.167.3



Fig.168.3



Fig.169.3



Fig.170.3



Fig.180.3



Fig.186.3



Fig.187.3



Fig.188.3



Fig.189.3



Fig.190.3



Fig.191.3



Fig.192.3



Fig.193.3

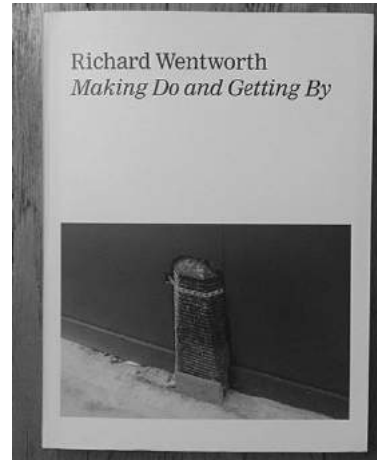


Fig.194.3



Fig.195.3



Fig.196.3



Fig.197.3



Fig.198.3



Fig.199.3



Fig.200.3

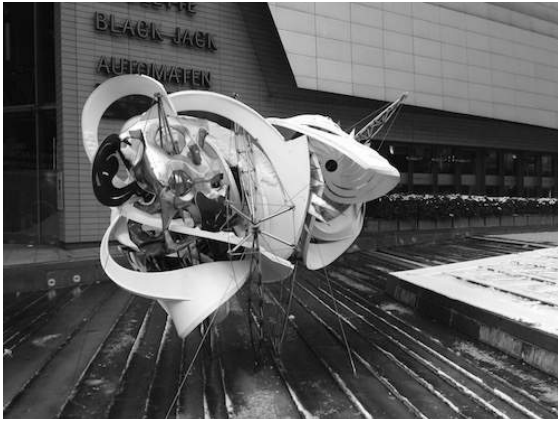


Fig.201.3



Fig.202.3

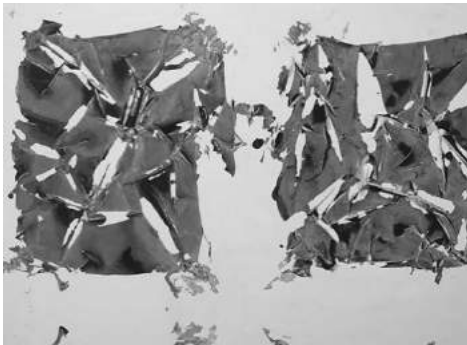


Fig.203.3

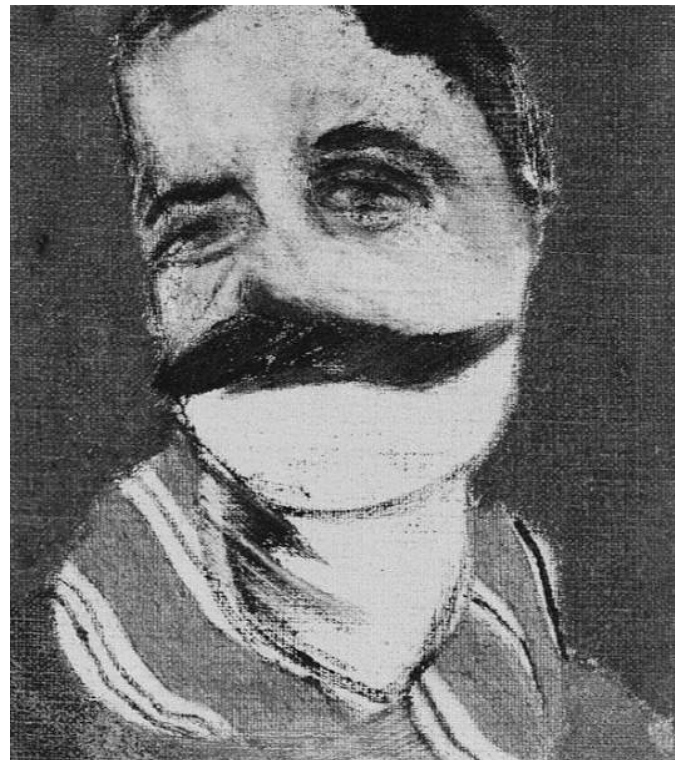


Fig.204.3



Fig.205.3



Fig.206.3



Fig.207.3

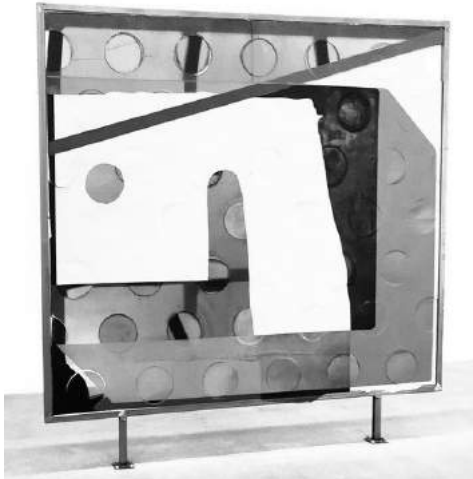


Fig.208.3

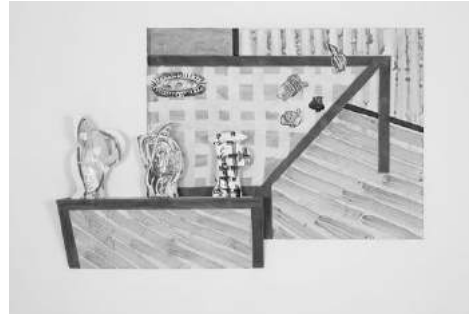


Fig.209.3



Fig.210.3



Fig.211.3



Fig.212.3



Fig.213.3



Fig.214.3



Fig.215.3



Fig.216.3



Fig.217.3



Fig.218.3



Fig.219.3



Fig.220.3



Fig.221.3



Fig.222.3



Fig.223.3



Fig.224.3



Fig.225.3

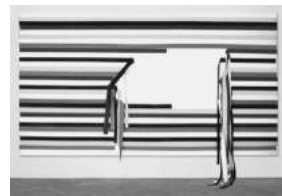


Fig.226.3



Fig.227.3



Fig.228.3



Fig.229.3



Fig.230.3



Fig.231.3



Fig.232.3

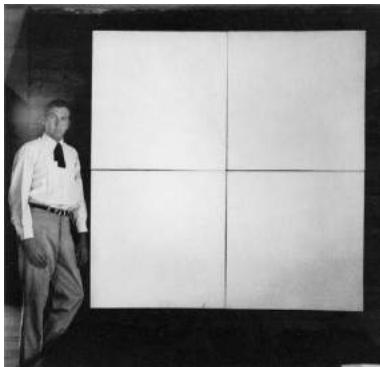


Fig.233.3



Fig.234.3



Fig.235.3



Fig.236.3





Fig.237.3



Fig.238.3



Fig.239.3

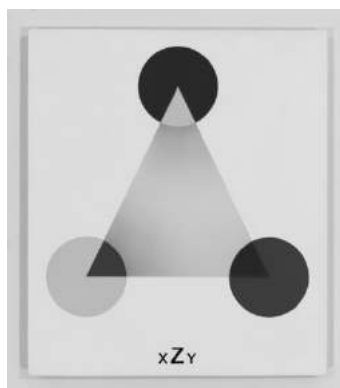


Fig.240.3



Fig.241.3



Fig.242.3



Fig.243.3



Fig.244.3

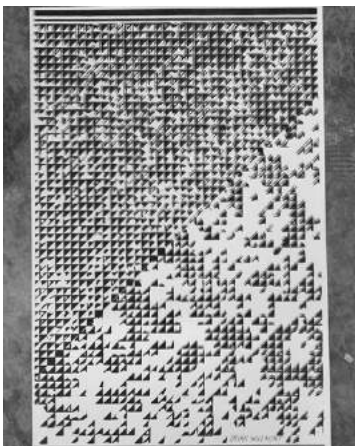


Fig.245.3



Fig.246.3



Fig.247.3



Fig.248.3

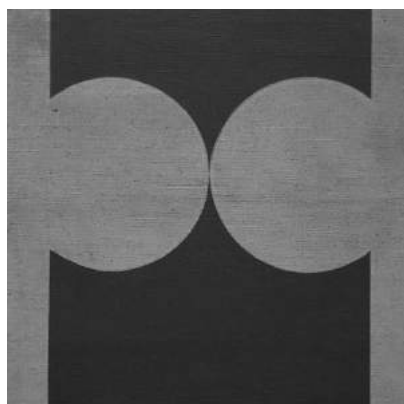


Fig.249.3



Fig.250.3

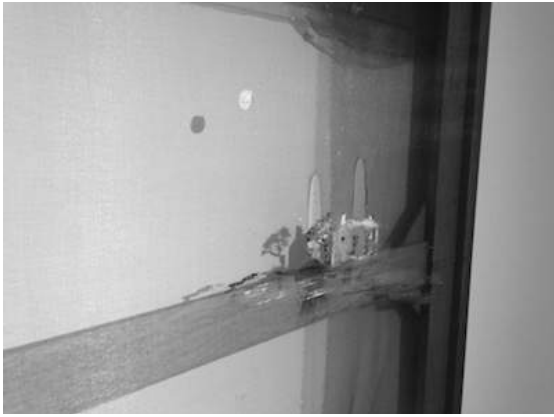


Fig.251.3

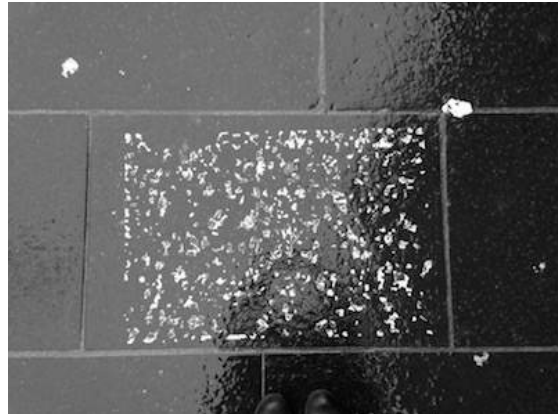


Fig.252.3



Fig.253.3



Fig.254.3



Fig.255.3



Fig.256.3



Fig.257.3



Fig.258.3



Fig.259.3



Fig.260.3



Fig.261.3



Fig.262.3



Fig.263.3



Fig.264.3

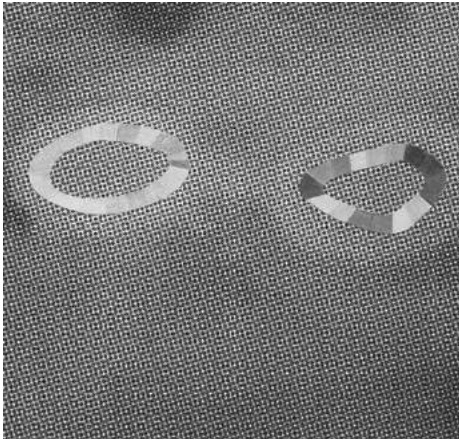


Fig.265.3



Fig.266.3

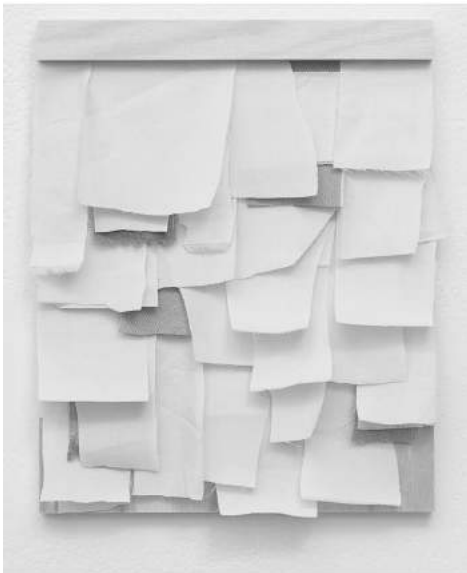


Fig.267.3



Fig.268.3



Fig.269.3



Fig.270.3



Fig.271.3



Fig.272.3



Fig.273.3



Fig.274.3



Fig.275.3

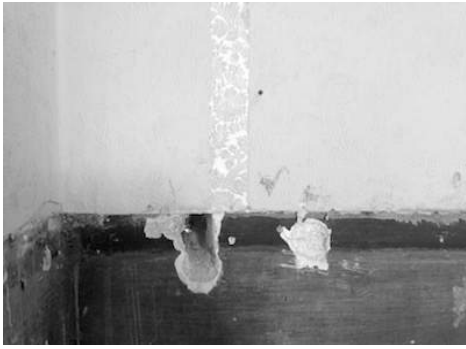


Fig.276.3



Fig.277.3



Fig.278.3

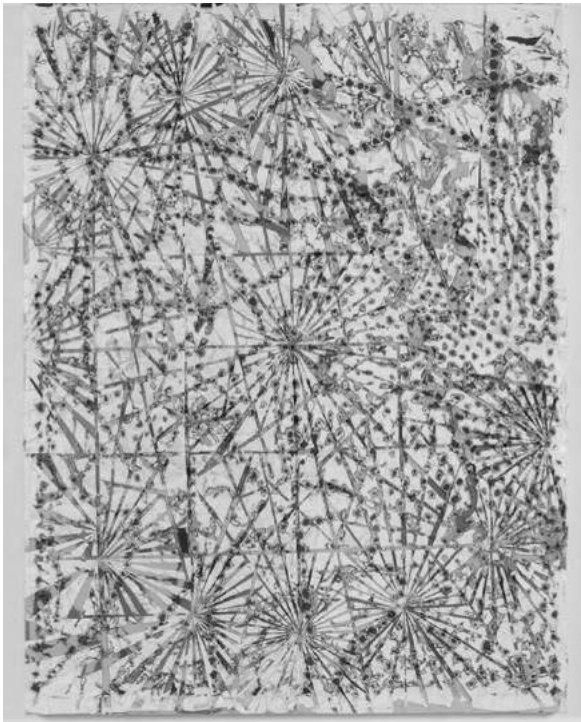


Fig.279.3

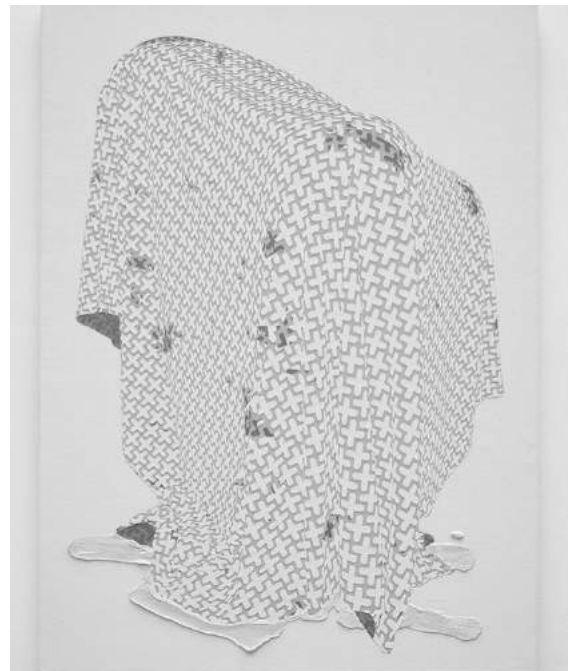


Fig.280.3



Fig.281.3



Fig.282.3



Fig.283.3



Fig.284.3

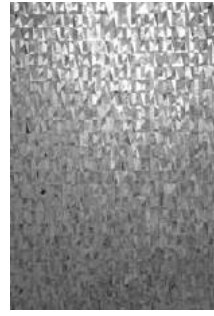


Fig.285.3



Fig.286.3

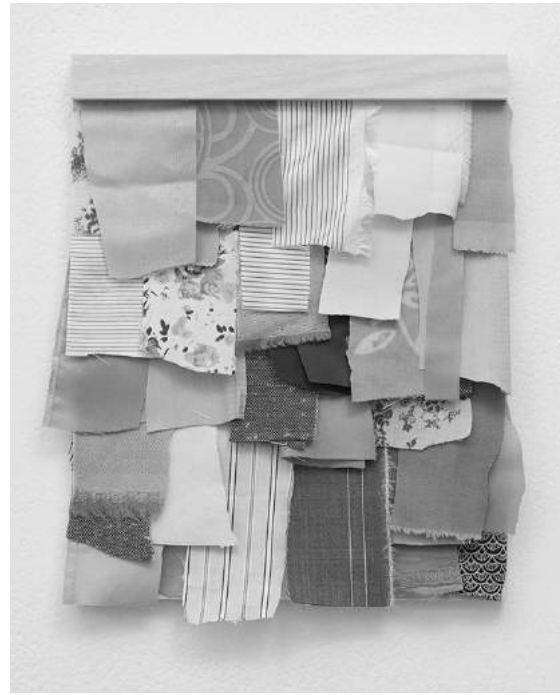


Fig.287.3



Fig.288.3



Fig.289.3



Fig.290.3



Fig.291.3



Fig.292.3

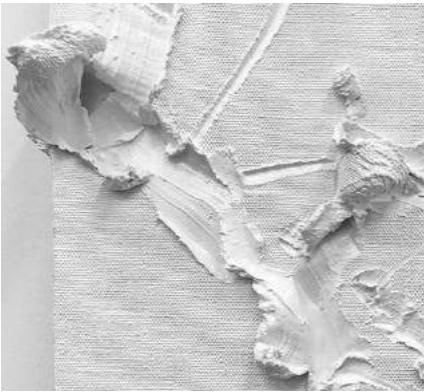


Fig.293.3



Fig.294.3



Fig.295.3



Fig.296.3



Fig.297.3



Fig.298.3



Fig.299.3

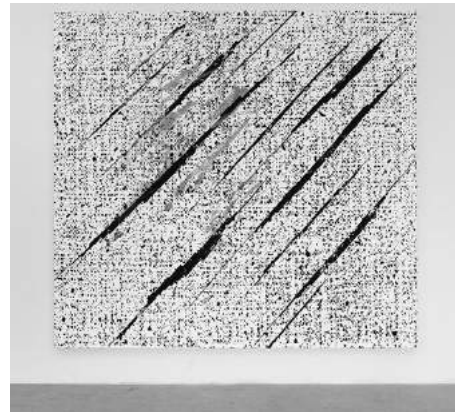


Fig.300.3



Fig.301.3



Fig.302.3

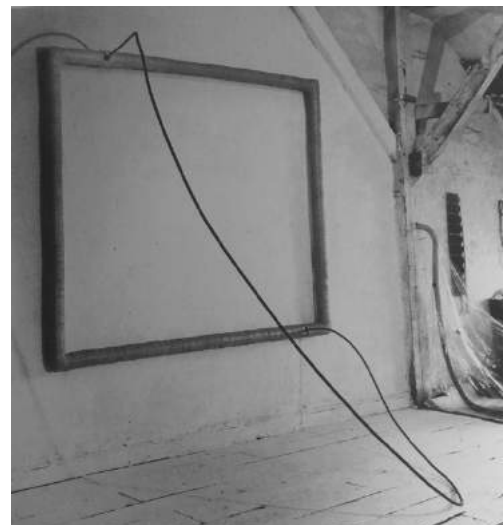


Fig.303.3



Fig.304.3

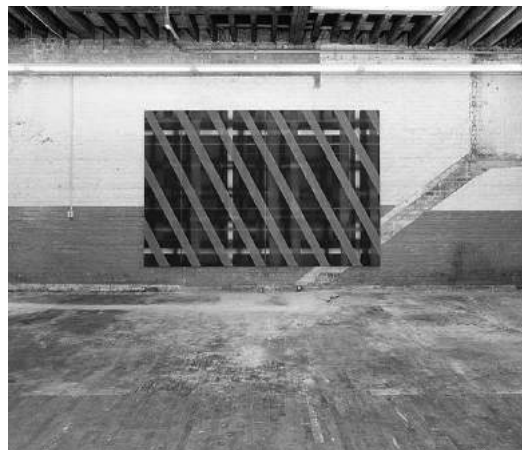


Fig.305.3



Fig.306.3



Fig.307.3

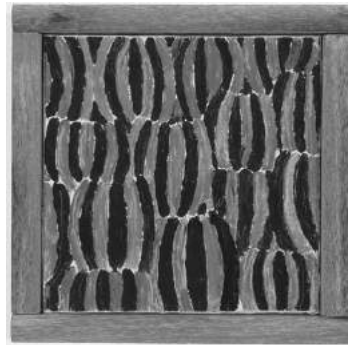


Fig.308.3



Fig.309.3



Fig.310.3



Fig.311.3



Fig.312.3

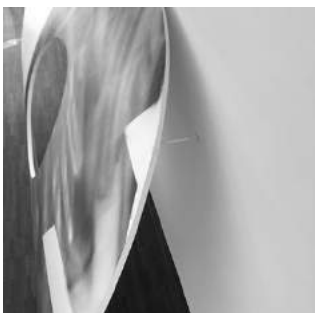


Fig.313.3

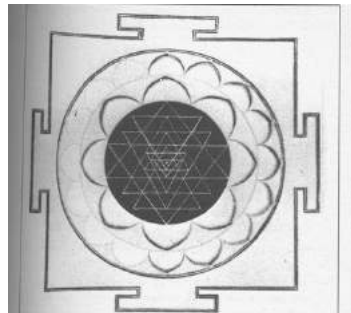


Fig.314.3



Fig.315.3



Fig.316.3

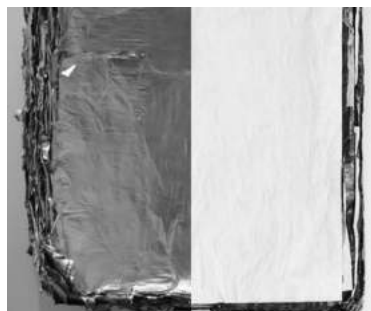


Fig.317.3



Fig.318.3

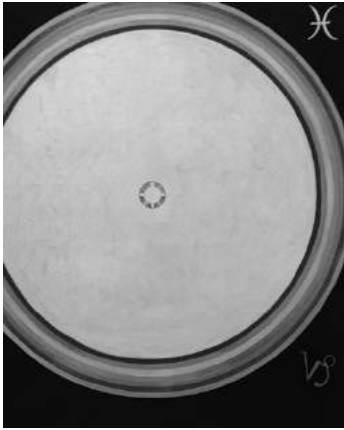


Fig.319.3



Fig.320.3



Fig.321.3



Fig.322.3



Fig.323.3



Fig.324.3



Fig.325.3

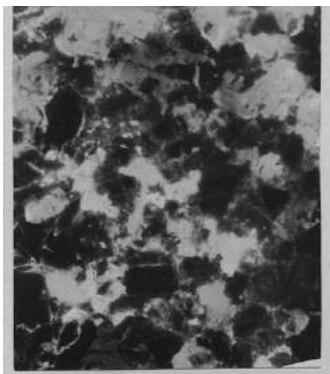


Fig.326.3



Fig.327.3



Fig.328.3



Fig.329.3



Fig.330.3



Fig.331.3

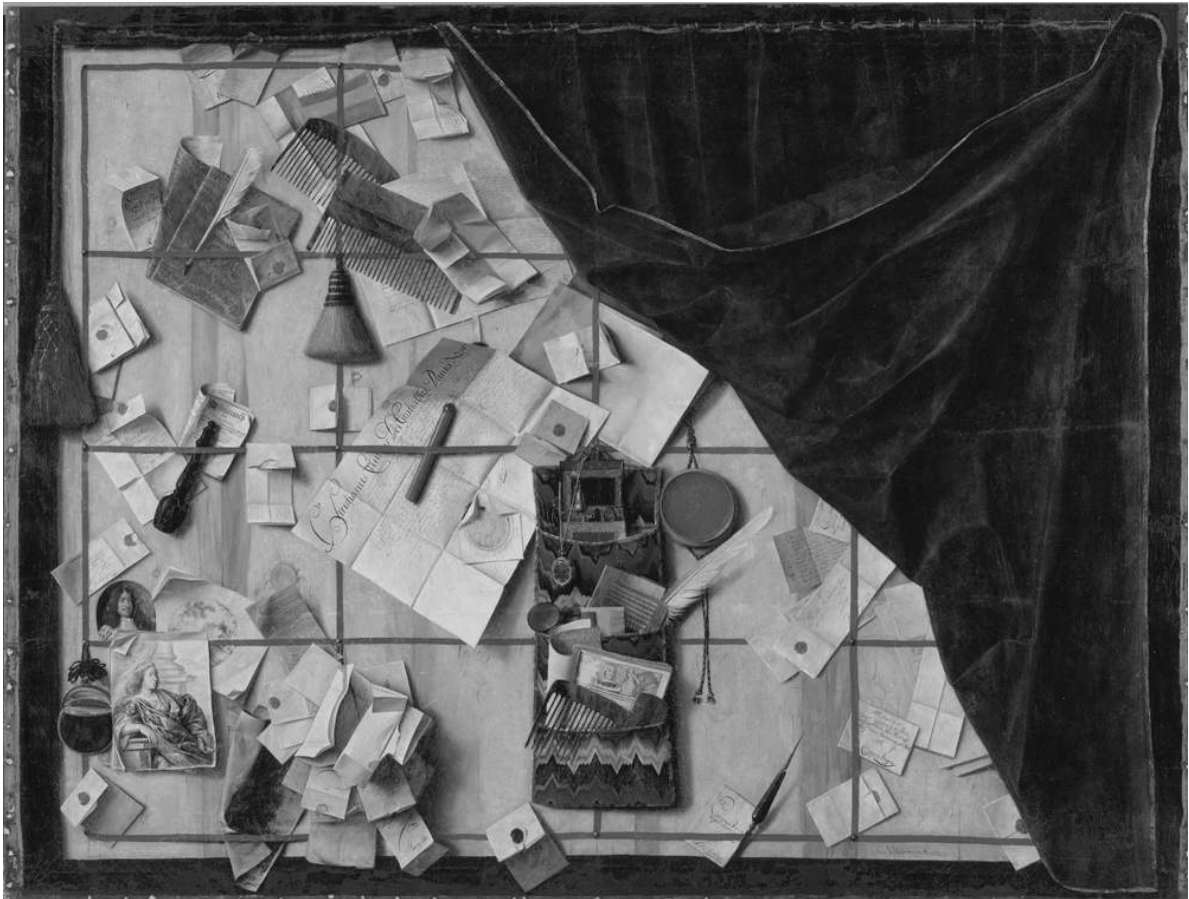


Fig.332.3



Fig.333.3



Fig.334.3



Fig.335.3



Fig.336.3

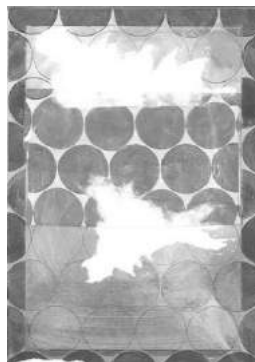


Fig.337.3

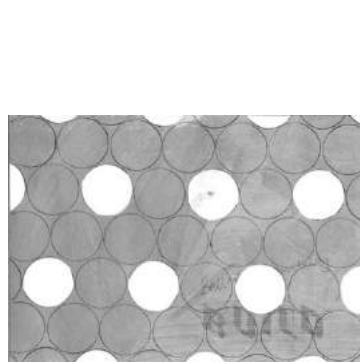


Fig.338.3

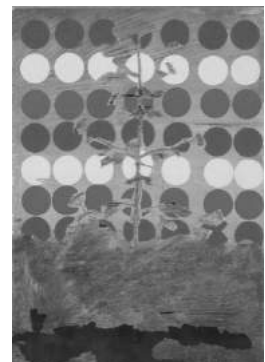


Fig.339.3

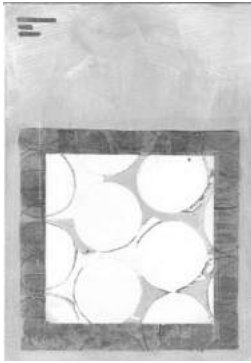


Fig.340.3

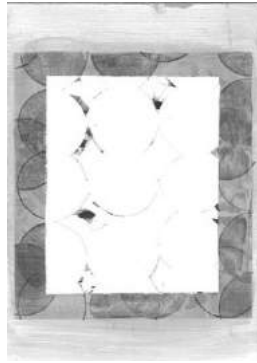


Fig.341.3



Fig.342.3



Fig.343.3

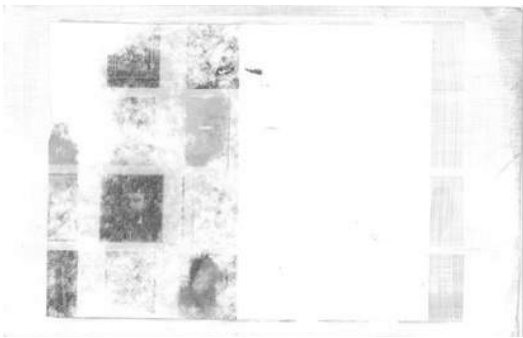


Fig.344.3



Fig.345.3

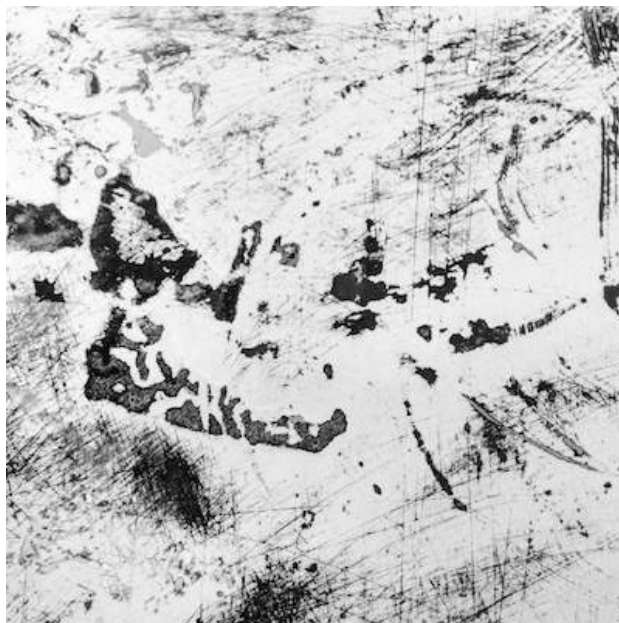


Fig.346.3

Chapter 3: Slippage



6. Kathrina Grosse, *detail of painting*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

Introduction

“Times of great achievement in art are often a matter of slippage...”³⁴⁰

Dictionary definition of slippage:

- 1 an act or instance of slipping.
- 2 the amount of slipping or the extent to which slipping occurs.³⁴¹

“often examples of slippage and so-called failures, rather than detracting from our estimation of the work, lead us into the heart of its true significance”³⁴²

One of the methods of *making-itself* and how processual activity reveals its image can be found in forms of slippage within the very material painters choose to make their work, paint.

Material slippage is something we see everywhere in everyday life. Something we have become so accustomed to that we often don’t even see it anymore. It often appears as glitches, mishaps, flaws, even as defects. Other forms of slippage that can be more alarming are often found as visible cracks within structural materials such as concrete or plaster; in our homes, on both old and new buildings, often said to add character. Attributes assigned to cracks, now a sort of unique status, gravity revealing itself in our trusted building materials.

A more straightforward visual form of material slippage can be frequently seen in the world around us on the likes of advertising hoarding; with their layers and layers of paper no longer

³⁴⁰ Salle, *How To See*, 35.

³⁴¹ OED, “Oxford Dictionary.”

³⁴² Gottschaller, *The Artist’s Materials*, 5.



7. Lucio Fontana, *details from painting*, 2016. Munich: Lenbachhaus.

able to hold their materiality under the weight of their own past purposes. You can also find slippage within the cracked and crumbling paint surfaces that are everywhere; especially in household paint, a product designed to fail so as you'll renovate, paint over and continue to purchase new and ever expanding colour ranges, often with ridiculous names such as Elephant Breath, Mermaid Net or Salty Tear.

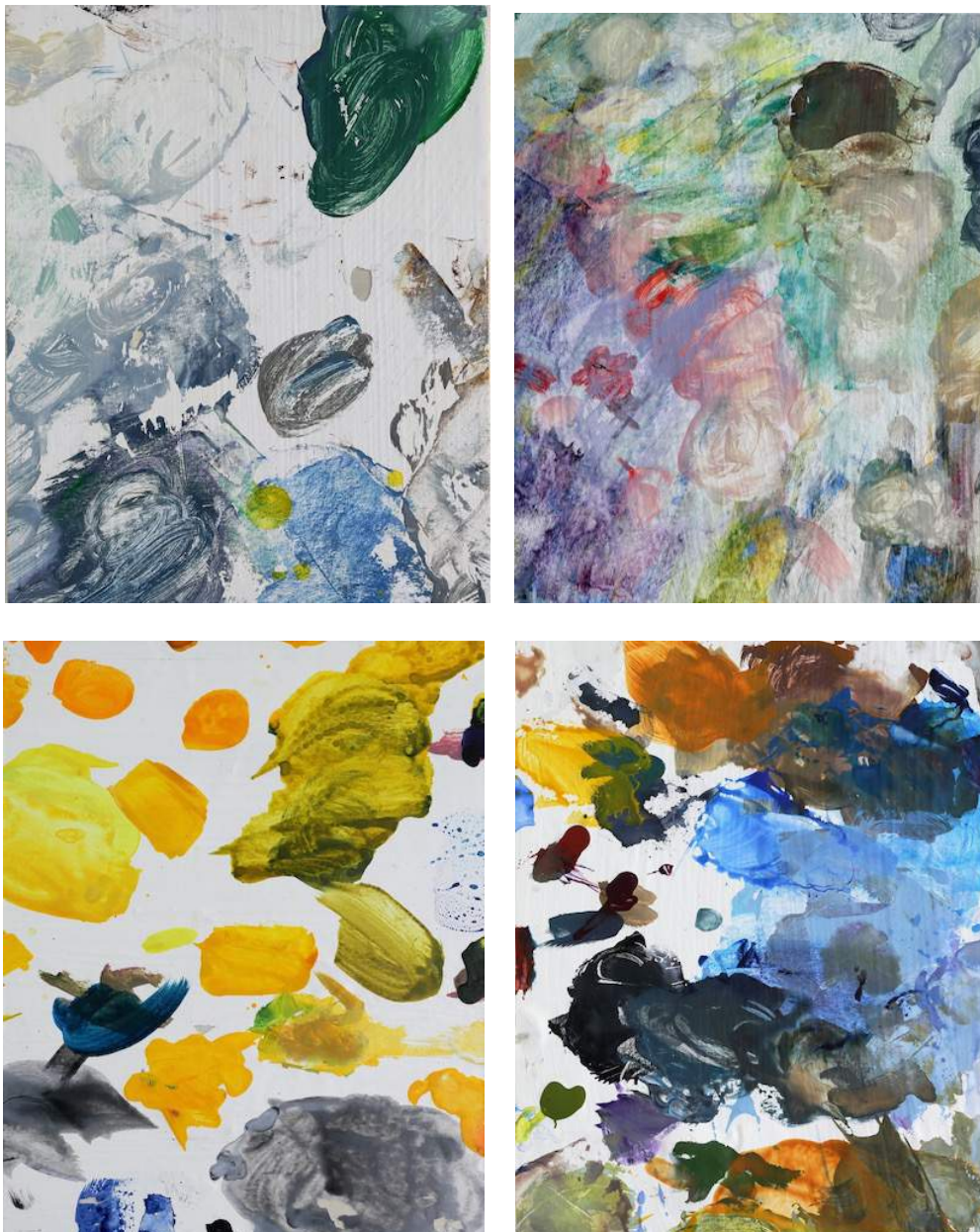
Slippage notably can also affect how we use language and how we understand what others say to us, or what they mean by the simplest misunderstanding of how a singular word is applied. There is no better example of this form of slippage within meaning than the disagreement between artist Donald Judd and art historian Michael Fried (1939-) during the late 1960s, after Fried in his seminal 1967 essay, *Art and Objecthood*, misinterpreted Judd's use of the word "interesting"³⁴³. Judd went on to say, "I was especially irked by Fried's ignorant misinterpretation of my use of the word 'interesting'. I obviously use it in a particular way but Fried reduces it to the cliché 'merely interesting'."³⁴⁴ But I have to question and wonder how Judd's use of the word was obvious? Every viewer or reader after all brings their own interpretation and understanding to that which they read or even view, an instability of meaning, what philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) has pursued as the "slippage of meaning"³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Thomas Kellein. *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955-1968* (New York: D.A.P., 2002).

³⁴⁴ Judd, *Complete Writings*, 198.

The full statement reads, "...Judd himself has as much acknowledged the problematic character of the literalist enterprise by his claim, "A work needs only to be interesting." Fried is not careful and informed. His pedantic pseudo-philosophical analysis is the equivalent of Art News' purple poetic prose of the late fifties. The prose was only emotional recreation and Fried's thinking is just formal analysis and both methods used exclusively are shit..."

³⁴⁵ Claire Colebrook, *Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2014), 109.



8. Susan Connolly, *Traces of an Activity*, 2017. Belfast: Platform Arts.

Slippage: Artist Materials

“Despite having names of Greek shepherds (Polystyrene, Polyvinyl, Polyethylene) plastic is in essence the stuff of alchemy...magical operation per excellence: the mutation of matter...it is less a thing than the trace of a movement”.³⁴⁶

Slippage in artist quality acrylic materials/paint is often down to a misuse of said materials or lack of knowledge, understanding, and training on the handler’s behalf. Every³⁴⁷ painter knows that you need to use a good quality primer, be it the traditional rabbit skin glue or gesso, or more contemporary plastic/resin materials such as GAC products³⁴⁸, all of which allow for the paint’s ability to sit upon the canvas/fabric support that most paintings (more or less always) require.

It is for this reason that I have been thinking and wondering if slippage can only occur within materials that hold liquidity by their very nature? Or if slippage can be a concept applied to a broader more general way of thinking about art. Could slippage be a happening or phenomenon that only really occurs or can be made visible in materials that start their very existence as a wet liquid, say paint³⁴⁹, for example because of the metamorphic nature of the material/maker/made engagement? And if so, can this be said to be medium specific in its method and process in making work which is said to have *made-itself* or revealed itself through both its materiality and handling?

³⁴⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 97.

³⁴⁷ I am assuming here, as I am also equally sure there are people who also don’t know this most basic of painting *rules*.

³⁴⁸ “Golden Artist Paint,” GAC Inc., accessed August 16, 2018, <https://www.goldenpaints.com>.

³⁴⁹ Slippage can also occur in the photography process, but this is due to the chemical handling which is somewhat different to the painting process. It is just relevant to mention that I have also considered this along with almost all art process there is a chance of slippage within the materials.



9. Susan Connolly, *Traces of an Activity*, 2017. Belfast: Platform Arts.

Slippage in the contemporary production of the product we know as the ready-made tubes of paint is technically referred to as a form of fugitivity³⁵⁰. This term I first heard of during my one-month research residency at The Golden Foundation, in Upstate New York, during Feb-Mar 2017, from the artist and Golden Artist Color expert technician Ulysses Jackson³⁵¹. As part of my stay at The Golden Foundation, I was introduced to all aspects of the history, production, and best practice of both acrylic and oil paint at the paint factory. It was a fascinating trip and a unique experience to learn all about the research and development that goes into the production of acrylic paint products at the Golden Artist Colors factory and an opportunity that has informed a lot of how this Ph.D. research has unfolded.

One of the requirements at the Foundation was that all the invited artists would present their individual practice/work to the expert team within the lab. Interestingly, there was another artist presenting the day I did, Canadian artist Brandon Dalmer (1984-)³⁵², whose own interests involved wanting to create paint that would disappear, something you could say already naturally occurs through time, environment and site (after all there is a whole other industry in art conservation, which Golden are equally a part of, whose main focus is to slow down the effects of art materials disappearing). Dalmer's interests though seemed to me to hold a similar interest to my own in the aspect of painting as an ephemeral object or event. With both of us wanting to embrace paint's fugitivity and its slippage as a potential methodology for making new work.

³⁵⁰ Fugitive pigments are impermanent pigments that lighten, darken, or otherwise change appearance or physicality over time when exposed to environmental conditions, such as light, temperature, humidity, or pollution. This information was attained during one of the Golden workshops on the 7/03/17.

³⁵¹ I gave an artist presentation to the technical team at Golden Artist Paints on the 28/02/17, more information about Ulysses Jackson's own artwork can be found at <http://www.ulyssesjackson.com>, there was no date of birth available online.

³⁵² Brandon A. Dalmer, accessed August 16, 2018, <https://www.badalmer.com>.



10. Susan Connolly, *Traces of an Activity*, 2017. Belfast: Platform Arts.

This seemed to horrify some of the technical team when I confirmed my own use of household products within some of my installation works. In their own words “household paint is made to fail!”³⁵³ But it is for this very failure that I chose to use this product. I had previously discovered that most household paint is sort of chalky to the touch once dry and allows me to remove the paint skin made from artist quality materials more easily from the canvas/site support underneath as it makes the paint a little less adhesive and plastic to the touch.

What I learned during the conversation that day was that the technicians are obsessed with; pigment load, durability, and best practice. A combination of factors most artists also want to achieve and embrace. But also, a combination of factors that artists are trying to test within the studio (their labs), often pushing and pulling against within their material engagement.

This seems to me where new knowledge is found, experienced and developed for the first-time concerning paint and therefore painting. This idea was confirmed to me during further information sessions that I participated in at GAC factory, when the technical team members individually discussed how certain products had been informed through processes developed in artist studios and then researched and further developed within GAC labs for mass production.

Products such as the silvery liquid³⁵⁴ found in the studios of the Colour Field painters of the 1950s, that magic product³⁵⁵ which allowed for the pouring of paint for the first time without

³⁵³ A direct quote taken on the day, 27/02/17, I presented my work to the team in Golden Artist Colors factory in New Berlin.

³⁵⁴ This ‘slivery liquid’ was referred to in the Sam Gilliam Retrospective book on p.62. It discussed how Gilliam had seen the ‘secret’ product in artist Louis Morris’ studio and how he’d been directed to ask Bacour Paints about the product.

³⁵⁵ Sam Golden had previously worked with Bocour Paint in New York City and it was during the later 1940s that an artist (possibly Louis Morris) asked could they produce a product using a runny liquid resin they had found, this became the ‘magic’ product, which allowed the Colour Field painters to develop those almost touching colour expanses.



11. Susan Connolly, *Traces of an Activity*, 2017. Belfast: Platform Arts.

the bleeding and making a brown mess within the colour combinations, now known as GAC200. Or other products such as GAC800, which was solely developed as a prop product for the Hollywood film about the celebrated artist Jackson Pollock³⁵⁶. GAC800 for example allows the artist quality paints to have more viscosity, which makes the paint pouring appear closer to that of household paint which Pollock is well known to have used when making his drip painting. The same household paint it has to be added that is now causing so many problems with Pollock's works' restoration³⁵⁷ and preservation, due to the bad quality of the material to begin with.

This problem is unfortunately now a very common occurrence found amongst paintings made in the 1950s and could be said to be another form of slippage, what art historian Isabelle Graw has referred to as "painting has (having) self-agency....that the painting keeps painting itself after it has been produced".³⁵⁸ If you look at some of the conservation issues concerning painting from this period, there are many test cases and research projects that have been examining such works in an attempt to understand material fugitivity and how many of the products used by artists at that time were not fit for purpose in relation to longevity.

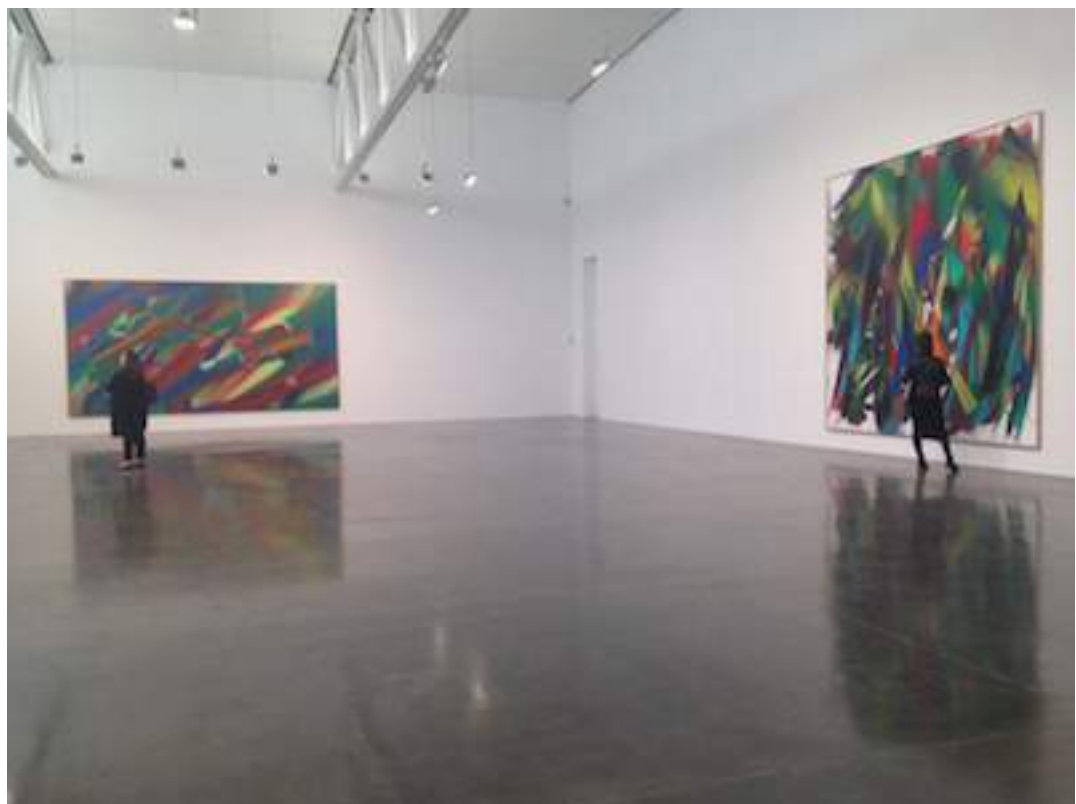
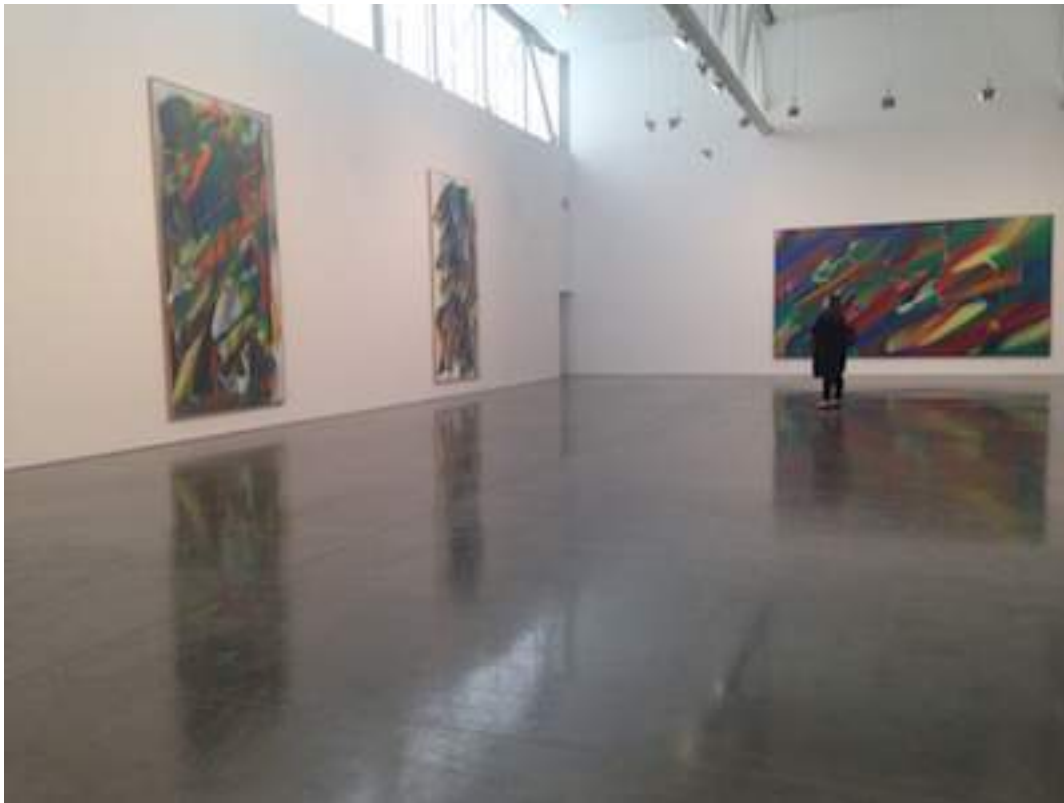
Two excellent examples of such research are firstly from New York's MOMA team when they restored Jackson Pollock's painting, *One: Number 31* and secondly the Guggenheim's conservation team which turned the unfortunate self-destructing Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) *Black Paintings*³⁵⁹ (1960-66) into a research project. It confronted all the possible

³⁵⁶ Ed Harris, dir. *Pollock* (CA: Sony Picture Classics, 2001), film, 2hr 20mins.

³⁵⁷ James Coddington, "MoMA Jackson Pollock Conservation Project: Looking Closely at One: Number 31, 1950," MoMA, last modified January 8, 2013, https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2013/01/08/momas-jackson-pollock-conservation-project-looking-closely-at-one-number-31-1950/.

³⁵⁸ Graw, "Economy of Painting."

³⁵⁹ I visited this exhibition in July 2008.



12. Kathrina Grosse, *installation image*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

mutations of the paints' failures in the hope of helping conservation develop new methods for working with artwork from this period and beyond.

It would seem that for all the artist's experimentation and intention in relation to slick minimal and industrial materiality and the process that thus revealed the image, the actual materials are still working (or rather not working) some 60 odd years later! Still, making-themselves (*making-itself*), be it now in a destructive sense, through the very fault of the actual material product.

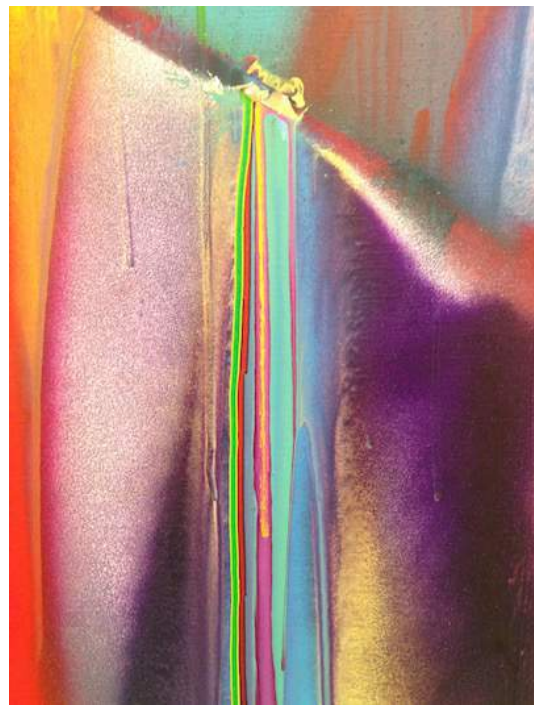
Grosse's *slippage*

Urban environments are full of visual hodge podge or what curator Ulrich Loock (1953-) has called the "illegal tattooing of public space"³⁶⁰ and New York is a city full of many forms of such material slippages.

This brings me to the work and exhibition of German artist Katharina Grosse (1961-) at the Gagosian Gallery in New York City in late February 2017. I'd never seen Grosse's work in person up until this exhibition, but I have admired the experimental and expanded nature of her painting installation practice for a long time. I have nevertheless had my suspicion that this is a form of painting that translates best to both event/spectacle (you need to be there in other words) or on a computer screen as a digital image. This makes Grosse's paintings a perfect manifestation of what theorist Rosalind Krauss has referred to as a post-medium condition, even though painting and sculpture were both banished³⁶¹ mediums from such consideration.

³⁶⁰ Ulrich Loock and Katharina Grosse, *Katharina Grosse* (Köln: Walter König, 2013), 18.

³⁶¹ Loock, *Katharina Grosse*, 19.



13. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

Therefore, I was extremely curious how this new work would translate into a more traditional form of a painting practice, these were after all conventional paintings in the sense that they were made by applying paint (albeit with an industrial spray gun) to the canvas, stretched over a structural support and frontally holding their image upon a wall. What is it about Grosse's work then that demonstrates a "new, post-medium articulation in the field of painting?"³⁶²

Curator Ulrich Loock in his essay, *The Painting of Katharina Grosse*³⁶³, for Grosse's 2013 publication, raises the question as to how Grosse's work directly addresses these historical issues especially in relation to specificity. He proposes that this issue is "unavoidable if one is unwilling to allow the institutional context alone to decide whether something should be considered painting or something else"³⁶⁴ with Grosse's work referencing and visualising alternative methods of "esthetic formlessness".³⁶⁵

The reviews I read before I visited the exhibition at Gagosian Gallery were mostly negative, with one going so far as to call them "bad painting without irony".³⁶⁶ My impression upon first encountering them was that I would agree, but I often find that work which causes such a reaction in me is work I need to give more time to. This is often because there is something about things that we visually don't get first off that can be very rewarding. Forcing one to work harder to comprehend what you don't understand and especially I find this in work that I don't immediately like.

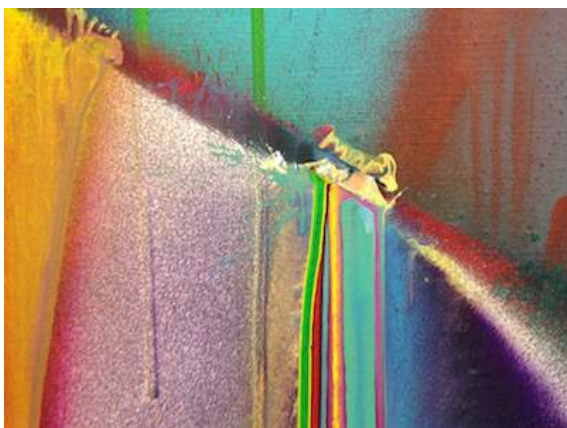
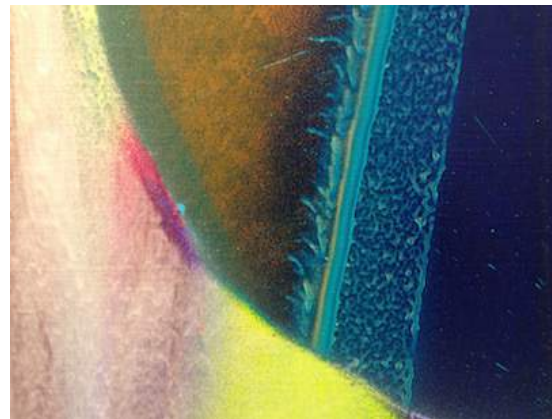
³⁶² Loock, *Katharina Grosse*, 19.

³⁶³ Loock, *Katharina Grosse*, 18-19.

³⁶⁴ Loock, *Katharina Grosse*, 52.

³⁶⁵ Loock, *Katharina Grosse*, 52.

³⁶⁶ Cathy Nan Quinlan, "Katharina Grosse: Bad Painting without Irony", Talking Pictures, last modified February 13, 2017, <https://talkingpicturesblog.com/2017/02/13/katharina-grosse-bad-painting-without-irony/>.



14. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

The paintings that Grosse made for this exhibition were gigantic canvases, measuring up 300x557cm. They were created specifically for Gagosian's mammoth 20,000 square ft., West 24th St Chelsea architectonic space. The paintings thus looked curiously proportional when you considered these two elements together. This caused and made their scale, and your viewing of them, sort of strange. Their macro/micro viewing seemingly creating some viewing space beyond the bodily movement they demanded and the close up viewing they required! What Loocke has referred to as "the stepping through the membrane of the picture plane the viewers' encounter things in their own reality",³⁶⁷ and what Grosse herself has deemed as "painting as a mode of thought".³⁶⁸

Macro and Micro viewing is very much a part of the way I have/had been developing aspects of the *E+N Painting project*, and upon viewing Grosse's paintings I was reminded of the work I made in response to the main gallery space of The Lab galleries³⁶⁹, in Dublin, in April 2015, during the exhibition titled *When the Ceiling meets the Floor*. One of the problems I experienced at the time was how over-all abstract motifs can appear wallpaper like and therefore decorative, especially when using repeated patterns, and how this changes the relationship the viewer has when viewing work from a distance in comparison to close up viewing.

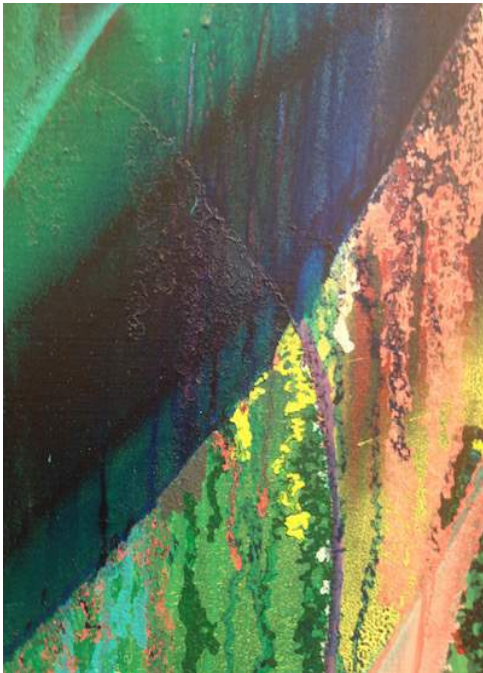
Grosse's work has such problems. Once her experimental process of applying vast quantities of acrylic paint onto surfaces using an industrial spray gun is confined within the frame of the traditional stretcher and structure, their painted surfaces create an almost decorative appearance similar to wallpaper. And could be considered what curator Jean-Charles Vergne³⁷⁰ has coined

³⁶⁷ Looock, *Katharina Grosse*, 70.

³⁶⁸ Looock, *Katharina Grosse*, 92.

³⁶⁹ Fig.46, p.34.

³⁷⁰ There was no date of birth available online.



15. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

as “ornamental vandalism”.³⁷¹

This over-all-ness can be viewed as problematic, which has of course been historically rooted in many arguments related to over-all abstract painting surfaces since both Pollock and Morris. What is apparent in these paintings by Grosse is their seeming lack of weight and this was very disappointing to me. But I forced myself to look, to take time and to allow each of the paintings to reveal their processual activity.

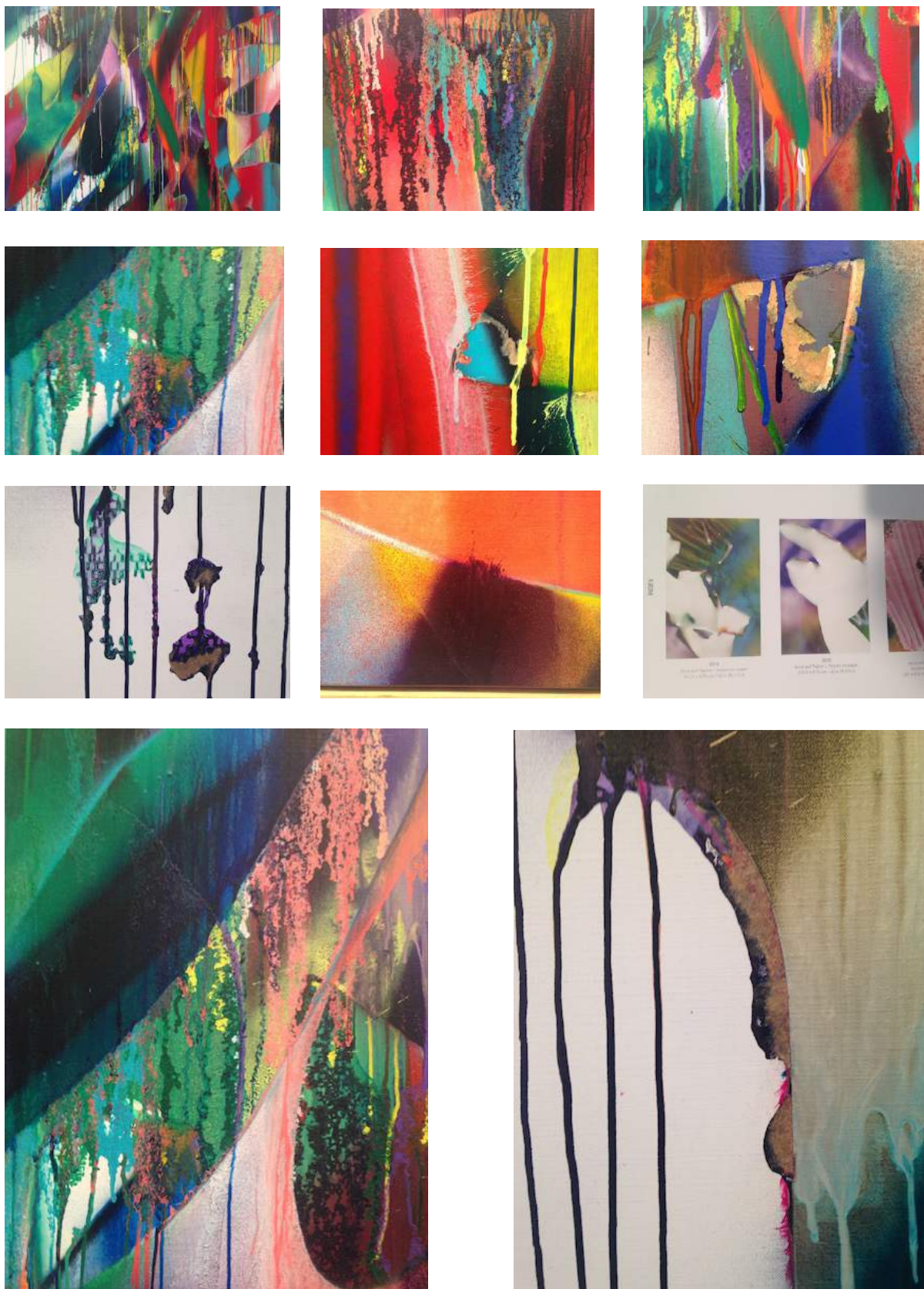
This is work which is indebted to process, it is work which similarly to the best contemporary processual abstract painters such as Gerhard Richter, Bernard Frize (1954-), Natasha Kidd (1973-), Alexis Harding (1973-), achieves the difficult task of holding onto process as the visual and the work’s image outcome. Grosse does this notably by her material handling (paint) and tools (spray guns and stencils) which are the foundation upon how this work reveals its image, how it seemingly makes itself (*making-itself*), the activity between artist and medium suspended in both colour and paint.

Below are the observations and words, which I wrote on the day (24th February 2017) in response to spending time looking at Grosse’s work. It is also noteworthy that it was during the looking and writing from Grosse’s paintings that I first used the word slippage:

Room 1+2

‘Slippage. There is so much slippage in this work. The paint falls downwards holding gravity, it sprays outwards, leaving traces, residue of the power that must go into their

³⁷¹ Loock, Katharina Grosse, 39.



16. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

Construction. She uses some cardboard stencil which once removed does not always shift smoothly, it leaves brownish fibers of paper, meshed, with the residue of the fallen paint- the dripping.

The colours bleed, creating swirls within otherwise hard-edged shapes and forms.

The edges created between the shapes are beautiful. These are the most interesting aspect for me. Their ability to draw you in to 'very close' looking, drawing your attention to surfaces and textures that actually so 'make themselves'.

Their colour is not traditionally beautiful; they are brutal, applied quickly and from a distance I would think. It would be amazing to see the frames that are left behind in her studio once these canvases have been removed.

The layering conceals and reveals at the same time. Veils almost. It allows you to see the transparency of the colours and this makes new colours simply through this layering process.

They appear simply made- but are not...the paint is doing ALL the work.

Areas appear like a pointillist painting, but none of this paint has been applied by hand...but the machine has been defeated by the organic liquidity of the material- the paint.

They are hard to see as a 'whole' once you start looking. They feel like drips with purpose (like those of Jackson Pollock, drips very much with purpose) but the intent is absent- again the paint is revealing itself.



17. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

I can imagine how immersive this work is when it's made directly within a 'site'. It must be extremely powerful and beautiful.

The paint is juicy, scaly, smudgy, transparent, yet dense, it both reveals and conceals its action. It is full of information about its making- it is its making.

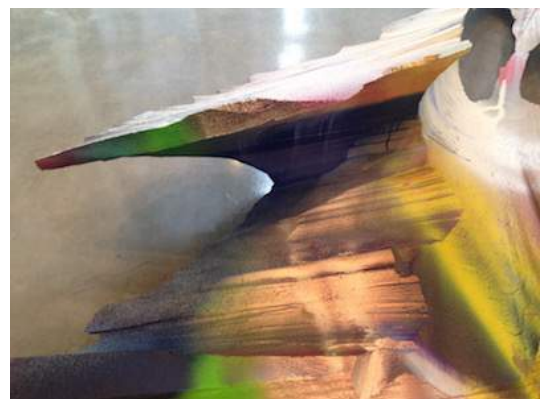
The wall absolutely holds them.

Room 3

Styrofoam- not wood, not concrete but it looks like both.... especially the drift wood aspect.

It's really interesting the way it is, the process now holding itself in 3D. Placed on the floor, your physical engagement is so different. (This is something I witnessed when watching viewers both looking and engaging with my work in the RHA Gallery in May 2017, the way the work was both an image but also an object for inspection, viewers moving in and out to try and figure out exactly what they are looking at. In the work on view, there are hundreds of small cuts into the paint upon the canvas. In each of the removed paint sections the canvas is visible and some small hints of paint colour, this invites the viewer into the canvas for closer inspection and makes the viewing a rather physical bodily experience) In this room I lean against the wall to take these notes.

*It is the 'idea' applied to something beyond the materiality of paint. Sort of how I've been thinking about how the painting can perform beyond itself- as both sculpture and painting. (It is interesting here that I chose to write *sculpture* before *painting* in the sense that I was looking*



18. Kathrina Grosse, *details of painted sculptures*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

at a painting that had manifested itself in a sculptural form- as I supported myself against the wall, as the space within the gallery became a sculptural space to engage with.)

The dripping here is less dramatic, it is more drawn- or dragged, dirtier somehow.

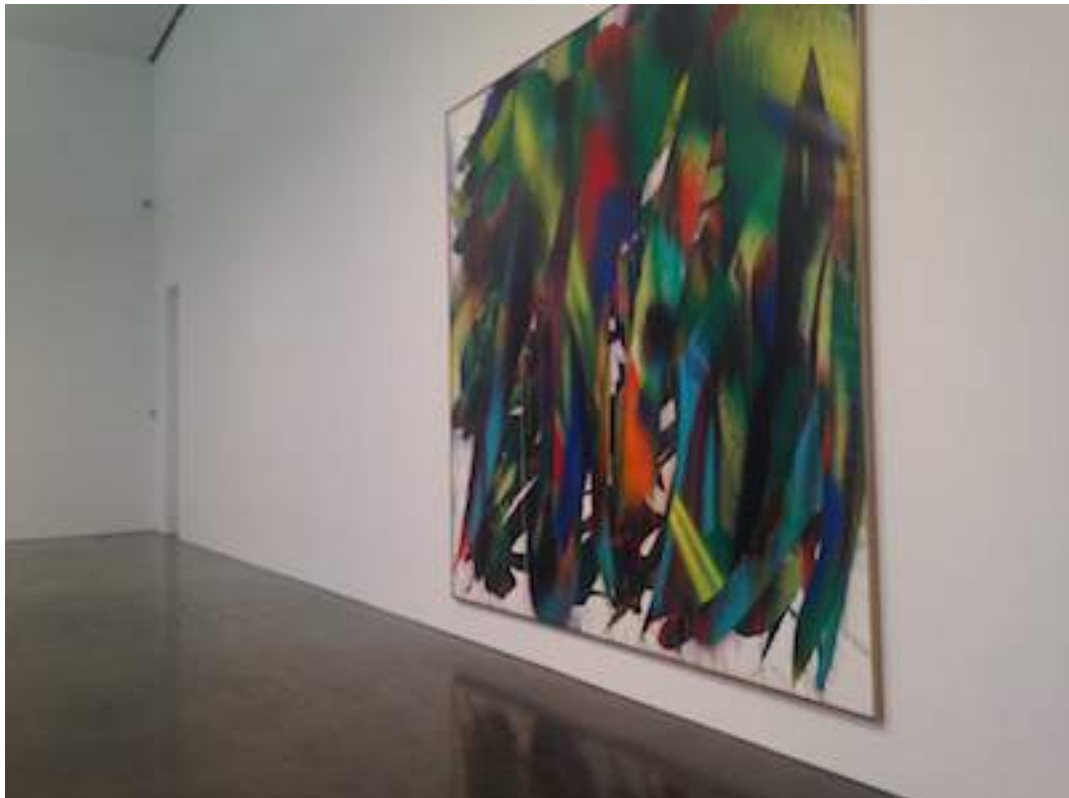
*The shadows this work creates upon the floor of the gallery remind me of the shadows my own large skins reveal when they are installed (...within the E+N Painting project the skins once removed from the canvas are often installed propped upon rudimentary armatures, made from scrap pieces of wood that are repeatedly recycled from piece to piece. One of the discoveries made during the first install of these large-scale paintings in The Mac in Belfast in 2014 during the exhibition titled, *Something about some thing to do with Paint*, was that the lighting in the gallery space added another dimension to the free-standing paintings as the shadows worked to reveal a space beyond the real physical space that the painting occupied. This expanded the viewing experience.)*

Room 4

The really large ones have so much more paint applied to them. There is a lot more evidence of the stencil residue.

They really look like paper cut outs, layered, rather than evidence of the paint that has been left behind. These are paintings only visible because of their negative use of space they've had taken away.

They also look reminiscent of 'de-collage', but at the same time as something organic,



19. Kathrina Grosse, *details of paintings*, 2017, oil on canvas. New York: Gagosian Gallery.

almost shapes from nature (leaves, petals, waterfalls or more accurately puke that someone has produced or expelled after eating all the M+M's in the M+M Store).

Your eye wrestles, it is hard to see, even harder to like them from afar.

Their power lies when you (the viewer) are inside them, so close up to their surfaces that you have no choice but to be immersed in them. There are so many different colours, distinct surfaces and diverse textures, literally unfolding before your eyes.

There is delicateness to the paintings once you are up close, but it is so hard to view this as a whole because they are so large, they are paintings full of contradictions. Up close their once organic shapes seem so much more brutal. Cut outs, weird shapes that can only exist because of the human hand, you begin to experience awareness to their ugliness. There are glimmers of Gerhard Richter here. Especially in the last few paintings I viewed. There is something of his dragged surfaces and the paint's insistence and resistance to holding onto the canvas surface. (The comparison to Richter came from the fact that I had seen his paintings in Tate Modern in London the week³⁷² before I saw Grosse's exhibition in New York.)

“A Painting is simply a screen between the producer and the spectator where both can look at the thought processes residing on the screen from different angles and points in time. It enables me to look at the residue of my thinking”.³⁷³

Unlike the organic slippage found outside of the gallery space, this work is laboured, hard-

³⁷² Research trip to see the Robert Rauschenberg Retrospective in Tate Modern, 16th February 2017.

³⁷³ “Katharina Grosse,” Gagosian Gallery, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/katharina-grosse--january-19-2017>.



20. Gerhard Richter, *painting details*, 2017, oil on canvas. London: Tate Modern.

won, it readily makes visible all the material stress and failures. It could be deemed ugly (for all its juicy colour combinations). There is nothing easy to the viewing of these works and I can see how the reviews were not kind or favorable for Grosse's first New York City show within this major gallery.

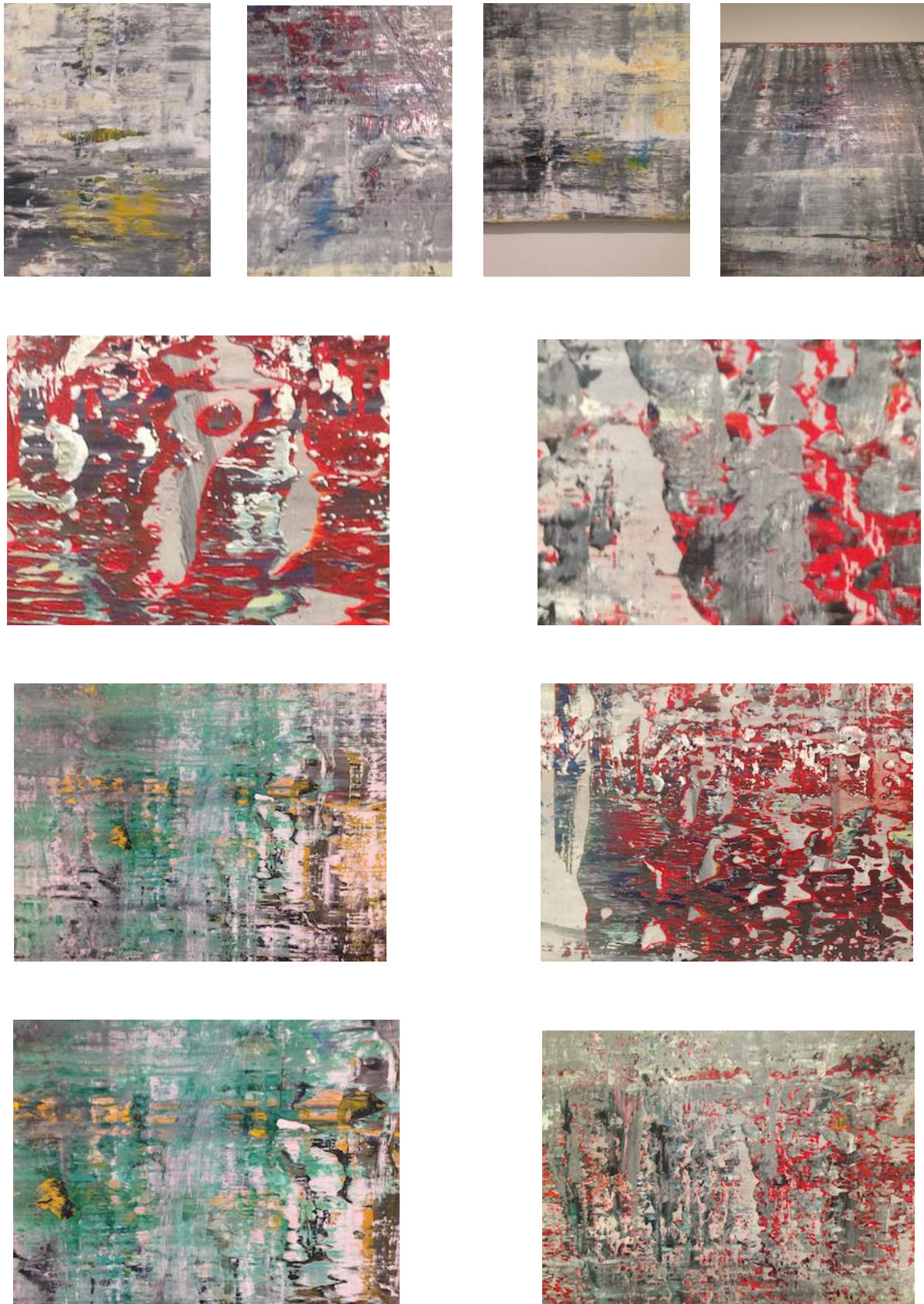
But what Grosse shows us is that materials are messy, paint's liquidity is tricky to control, and handle and it is even more so when you allow your paint to dictate its whereabouts via an industrial strength spray gun, a tool normally associated with the application of paint onto and upon cars or heavy machinery, associated with a finish, a perfection, a glossiness which is missing intently from this work. Art critic Barry Schwabsky refers to such processual handling as "poignant, thanks to the recurrent imperfections and slippages in the realization of what seemingly should have been a clean and systematic allover structure"³⁷⁴

Thus, Grosse's painting methodology is one of visually tracing her whole bodily interaction between material, tool and surface as she "has to conform to the conditions"³⁷⁵ of the spray gun device and the reality of her given site. What Grosse does is allows both her material and tools to reveal their relationship to each other through her method of handling both. Her bodily engagement becomes the conduit. She allows the paintings, and sculptures for that matter, to make-themselves (*making-itself*) in a tradition of allowing the process to mediate the image.

This methodology or rather practice dates back to the drippings of Jackson Pollock's tools and to the soaking of paint in the work of artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis and importantly to the pouring and the occupancy of paint upon the floor and in sites in

³⁷⁴ Schwabsky, *Perpetual Guest*, 274.

³⁷⁵ Looke, *Katharina Grosse*, 92-93.



21. Gerhard Richter, *painting details*, 2017, oil on canvas. London: Tate Modern.

works of artists such as Lynda Benglis and Sam Gilliam, all of whom I discussed earlier in this thesis.

Grosse has firmly established her painting practice as an idea, which is transient and therefore can be deemed homeless in relation to any of its given sites, thus it never has to be a specific. Grosse has said of her practice that it is a covering of any given surface rather than a way of making compositionally coherent images. Paint sits upon things, a form of painting over any given object, place or thing occurs. This process of making her work reveals the complex relationship between these things and distinguishes her painting practice by the fact that “where ever it appears it has no need of the indicators of art in order to be seen as what it is”.³⁷⁶ Suggesting its specificity to be that of an idea or concept of painting rather than as a material or medium, “what is revealed is that art itself is an activity of change, of disorientation and shift”.³⁷⁷ Ensuring that a method of *making-itself* becomes visible through processual slippage that consequently has been made visual.

³⁷⁶ Loocke, *Katharina Grosse*, 39.

³⁷⁷ Morris, *Continuous Project*, 153.

Conclusion

Within this thesis, I have undertaken to test and challenge the theory of how and if an artwork can possibly make itself (*making-itself*) through its processual activity and what this might mean for the intentionality and visual outcomes within a specific contemporary hybridity of abstract painting.

Processual Slippage: A Painting Project Making-Itself presents and establishes such a hybrid painting practice through demonstrating and evidencing such a methodology through breaking down the textual research into 3 sections: 1. *Making-Itself*. 2. *Processual* and 3. *Slippage*. The text is further supported through the use of image atlases which support and document the processual activity, the material slippages and methods of *making-itself* that were revealed during the research period.

In chapter 1: *Making-Itself*, I have constructed an art historical narrative from the twentieth century which has shown how and why a particular type of modernist painting, once it established the breaking into the skin of the painted surface around 1949, began to inform and construct a new paradigm for the medium of painting. Of course, this narrative has historical limitation and there were and could have been many other art movements and artists consulted during the research, but the text has been informed first and foremost from the practice and the visual outcomes discovered during the studio engagement. Hence the choices of artists, theories and writers has come from an exploration of the materiality and the specific new knowledge, (*how a painting can make-itself?*) that presented in this PhD painted outcomes.

In chapter 2: *Processual*, I explored theories concerning medium and specificity and how

this unfolds in painting practices which examine methods concerning process as the visual and visible outcome within abstract painting. Through the work of artists such as Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana and Robert Rauschenberg and the writings of art historian Clement Greenberg and curator Anthony Huberman, I examined a theory for medium specificity and what this might mean or implicate in an early twenty first century hybrid painting practice such as the *E+N Painting project*. I questioned and researched in depth what exactly could and can now be deemed specific to such a painting practice, in a quest to understand if to make a painting (now) does one need for it to be about the specificity of medium?

I notably identified and made the claim that canvas, and not paint, is the material that is specific to an idea of painting and tested this through the *E+N Painting project* by literally removing the acrylic paint skin from the surface of the canvas, stripping the canvas in order to find out what would be revealed through such a process. Importantly what remained were traces of an activity³⁷⁸. An activity which had in fact been made visible and gave visual presence to both author and material, revealing imagery that suggested: “the indexical quality of its signs”³⁷⁹ which made itself (*making-itself*) through such a processual activity.

In chapter 3: *Slippage*, I explored how contemporary abstract painting practices such as those of Katharina Grosse and Gerhard Richter manifest methods of *making-itself* through material slippage. I found that such slippage occurs and results both on and off the canvas due to processual activity and notably through each artist’s individual development of non-traditional paint application and tools such as industrial spray guns and squeegees. I went on further to prove how such an activity can make artworks/paintings that can only exist because of such a

³⁷⁸ Graw, *Painting Beyond*,
³⁷⁹ Graw, “Knowledge”, 115.

material slippage, even if that be fugitive or even transitory. My own contribution to new knowledge resulted from the exploration of how the *E+N Painting project* can perform as an ideal of painting beyond its site (canvas) as a mere paint skin an object literally made from paint “playing the game of sculpture.”³⁸⁰

By testing standard perceptions that have been historically associated with in the traditional framework of painting, this Ph.D. demonstrates how the *E+N Painting project* has challenged these conventional and long-established tropes, in order to combine new information on the processual element of painting in the context of materiality, slippage, sensory perception in a physical and spatial capacity, art historical paradigms and the influence on how a painting can be seen as *making itself* when a synthesis of all of these factors have been thoroughly examined theoretically. The Ph.D. research thesis thus demonstrates these theories effectively through the artworks created as part of the comprehensive research and have been made visual in Volume 2.

³⁸⁰ Armstrong, “Painting Photography Painting”, 130.

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