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A practice of painting : living with the reception and generation of image on the visual threshold

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A PRACTICE OF PAINTING

LIVING WITH THE RECEPTION AND GENERATION OF IMAGE ON THE VISUAL THRESHOLD

By

GLADIN FRYER

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth

In partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Abstract

Glad Fryer

A Practice Of Painting

Living With The Reception And Generation Of Image On The Visual Threshold

My work as an artist takes an image on a journey beginning with a photographic source image and ending in a painted image, passing through the remembered, imagined and perceived. It is important for me that the images in my work are encountered physically through the materials constituting the surface of the painting and mentally through the 'language' of images. Each viewer uniquely completes the image's journey of becoming a painting. My paintings explore and realise the materiality of an image through the layering of paint, varnish, pebbles, gravel and found objects. Through the activity of painting these 'textured' images acquire particular material, photographic and ocular traits. The primary concerns of my painting practice are how the 'material image' arrests and textures our sensations, the reading of images and the implications of those experiences for ourselves, as receptors, repositories and generators of images.

An exhibition of paintings with the above title constitutes the findings of this practice driven research, which together with the definitions and critical reflections contained in this accompanying text, form my PhD thesis. The first stage of making a painting is to identify one's materials. The materials I have chosen to use in this text, which explores, defines and locates my 5 year enquiry into a practice of painting, are: my practical research itself (my paintings); the work and voices of other painters working in a similar field; three primary and many secondary texts. The three primary texts I used were: *Eye and Mind*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A. G.** (1993) pp.121-149); *Closure*, by Hilary Lawson (**Lawson, H.** 2001); and *Francis Bacon: Sensation and Painting*, by Giles Deleuze (**Deleuze, G.** 2003).

This text begins with 15 reproductions of the paintings forming the exhibition, followed by a framing statement. The text then describes the evolution of the practical research through the creation of the individual paintings. My practical research underwent four stages of development; these are evidenced in the curation of the exhibition and in the structure of this text. During these stages of my practice's development four central themes emerged – image, meaning, material and layering.

Finally the text reflects on "A Practice Of Painting" using the four central themes of my practice together with the themes identified in the three primary texts. The voices and images of the painters float alongside the body of the text as an illustration of the visual dialogue between my own work and theirs. The text closes with a final reflection and appendices containing my own surveys of the three primary texts. My painting practice is primarily concerned with the different modes of image reception and generation.

"It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain." (Bacon in **Deleuze, G.** (2003), p.35)

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Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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Presentations and conferences attended:

Research seminar, Dartington gallery, February 2005

Residency at The Stables Project, York, May 2004

Publication (or presentation of other forms of creative and performing work):

Solo show of paintings, Dartington gallery April 2004

Show of digital composite Photographs, The Gateway Gallery, York, July 2003

Group Show on the theme loss of a baby, littlefootprints, Ariel centre, 2005

Group Show, Dialogue, Dartington gallery, December 2004

Web site of paintings, (online for the duration of this study).

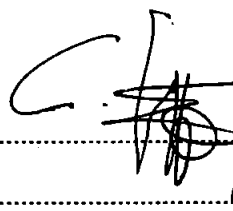
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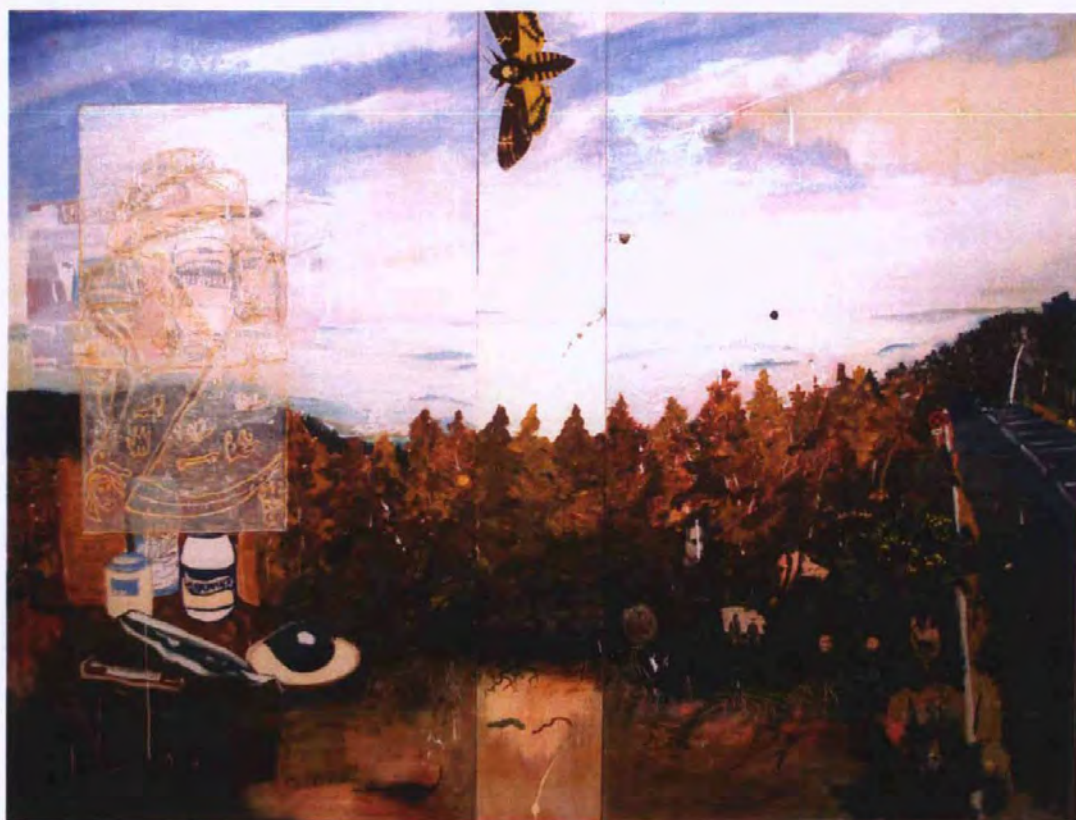


Plate no.1 – "Death Head" Oil acrylic and varnish on canvas 183cm x 138cm

2000



Plate no.2 – "The Fates After Goya" Oil, acrylic, acrylic and steel sheet on canvas 254cm x 170cm 2000



plate no.3 - Adam And Eve Banished From Interior Oil acrylic lead plaster

varnish + stones on canvas 176cm x 154cm 2001



plate no.4 - Spot Light Oil varnish + stones on canvas 217cm x 136cm 2002



plate no.5 - Master Copy Oil varnish + stones on canvas 175cm x 135cm

2003



plate no.6 - 100 - 1 Oil varnish + stones on canvas 242cm x 90cm 2003



plate no.7 - Slapton Oil varnish + gravel on canvas 120cm x 120cm 2003



plate no.8 - Babes In The Wood Oil varnish + stones on canvas 120cm x
120cm 2002

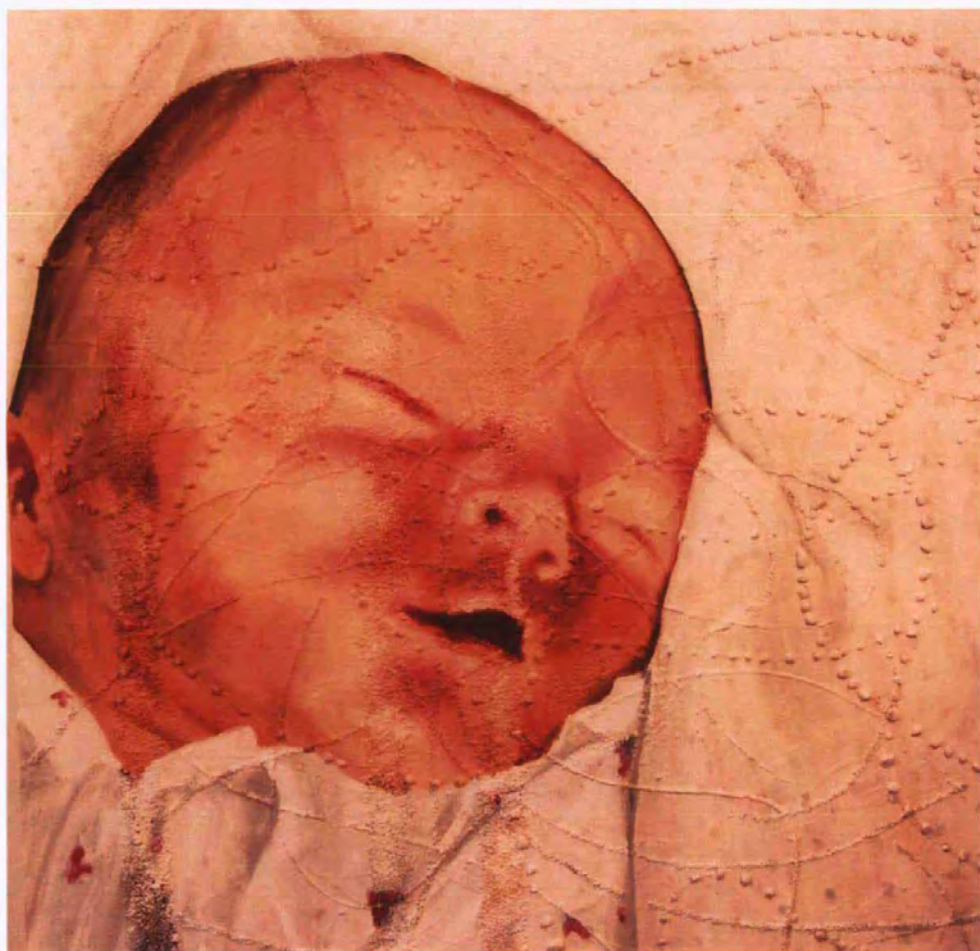


plate no.9 - Oskar Oil varnish + stones on canvas 100cm x 100cm 2003



plate no.10 - Pinkville Study Oil varnish + stones on canvas 100cm x 100cm

2003



plate no.11 - Pinkville Oil varnish + gravel on aluminium 140cm x 102cm

2003



plate no.12 - Virtual Body Oil varnish + gravel on canvas 190cm x 140cm

2003



plate no.13 - Painted Body Oil varnish brass fillings + stones on canvas

153cm x 135cm 2003



plate no.14 – Transparent Rotunda Oil varnish model utensils + stones on
canvas 196cm x 161cm 2004

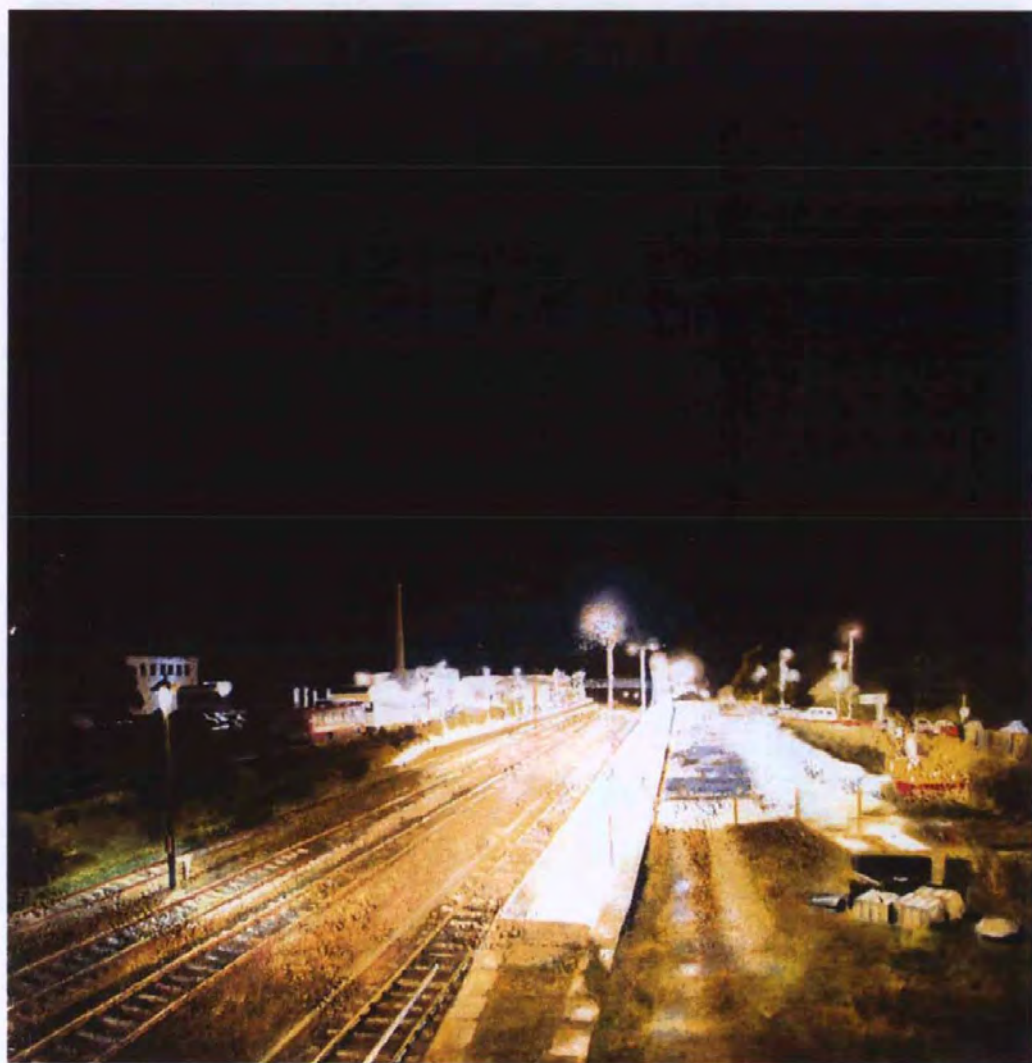


plate no.15 - Station Oil varnish stones and gravel on canvas 172cm x
172cm 2005

Framing Statement – How The Exhibition Comes To Look The Way It Does

I paint to be surprised. I paint to lose myself in seeing. I paint to turn photographs into paintings. I paint to gorge myself in image. I paint because I have to. I paint to make sense and to lose sense. I paint to talk to all other painters past, present and future. I painted a massacre in Vietnam so that I didn't have to be there. I painted my dead son because I love him. I painted a boy in the woods because I am a boy in the woods. I painted my partner and myself as one body because I didn't know what we would look like. I painted a boy in a landscape when I didn't know what else to paint. I painted a blown down hay barn just as I saw it. I painted an interior from my interior, somewhere for Adam and Eve to be banished from. I painted an intimate body in its absence. I painted sea and sky because sometimes they are enough.

What moves me to paint is paint itself; it is the manipulation and layering of materials on surfaces. What moves me to paint are images; the generation, deformation and layering of images in paint and in the mind. As a painter my instincts towards material and image are explored through the *process* of painting - the changing or evolving of lens-based images into painted images. My process begins with a photographic source-image; through its conjunction with materials and the plurality of images held in my memory, I transfigure¹ an image into a new state of being – a painting. For me painting encompasses the activities of layering, pouring, sprinkling, daubing and smearing in conjunction with sensing, perceiving, imagining and

remembering. All these activities constitute the layers in my painting and the subject of this research. *"It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain."*(Bacon in **Deleuze, G.** (2003), p.35).

The title of my research project is "A Practice Of Painting – Living With The Reception And Generation Of Image On The Visual Threshold ". The title cites a practice of painting, which is my own, and an imagined state of being where my visual perception is oriented in two directions – towards an inner space and towards an outer space. I paint in direct response to this state of being where images are received and generated - viewed and made. My painting practice can be defined as a process through which I make sense of seeing. This formative experience shapes who I am. Therefore, an understanding of my painting requires an understanding of how I see.

A long association with Dartington college and the concerns of the artists working there provided the context in which my practice evolved. This context, though not directly supportive of painting, was instrumental in my identifying a set of questions that could only be answered through the process of painting. Specifically, can my paintings meaningfully contribute to a dialogue on image in a culture dominated by the lens, when the media of photography and video seem more appropriate? Can my paintings generate sensation in my, and the viewer's, *whole* body, when performance seems to achieve this more immediately? Can my painting contribute to a dialogue on time and space, when installation seems considerably better equipped to do so? These questions, and the opportunity to explore and test them in the context in which they were formed, were my reasons for undertaking this research at Dartington.

¹ The idea of transfiguring images is of central importance to my practice as a painter and therefore to this research. Its specific meaning in the context of my research is introduced and explored under the heading The Strategies Of My Practice – An Outline (p38).

The exhibition of paintings constitutes the findings of this research, which together with the critical reflections contained in this accompanying text, forms my PhD thesis. The first stage of making a painting is to identify one's materials. In my own case, these are canvas, paint, thinners, varnish, gravel, a source-image and many layers of memory. The materials I have chosen to use in this text, which critically explores and reflects upon my exhibition of paintings, are: my practical research itself (my paintings); the work and voices of other painters; three key and several peripheral texts. The three main texts I used were: *Eye and Mind*, by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A. G.** (1993), pp.121-149); *Closure*, by Hilary Lawson (**Lawson, H.** 2001); and *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, by Gilles Deleuze (**Deleuze, G.** 2003).²

The paintings forming the exhibition are divided into four groups. This particular curation of the work explores the significant shifts and developments of my research. The first group of paintings, which consists of "Death Head" (Plate no.1 – p. 15) and "The Fates After Goya" (Plate no.2 – p. 16), demonstrates my earlier occupation with multiple images and canvases in one painting. They explore how images co-exist formally with each other and how these relationships affect composition and meaning. Merleau-Ponty's ideas on reversibility and Lawson's ideas on closure were particularly useful in exploring the concerns of these paintings.

In *Eye and Mind* Merleau-Ponty explores ontology and painting through two notions, "reversibility" and "flesh". Reversibility describes the processes through which the principle of being is realised; through sight a subject becomes aware of his status as object and also of the object's status as subject. Merleau-Ponty refers to this dual state of subject and object, or principle of being, as flesh. Vision is the opening up of both the world and the self in which reversibility or exchange occurs.

² A survey of all three texts is included in the Appendices p. 167.

My evolving phenomenological understanding seemed to conflict with my semiotic understanding of image and meaning. The structured system of semiotics led me to use ambiguity and paradox as strategies for avoiding the conventions of this language of signs. Lawson's ideas on closure and the subtle interplay of material and texture enabled me to clarify many of my ideas concerning meaning and the language of images.

The second group of paintings consists of "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" (Plate no.3 – p. 17), "Spot Light" (Plate no.4 – p. 18), "Master Copy" (Plate no.5 – p. 19) and "100-1" (Plate no.6 – p. 20). A significant development in these paintings is the discovery of gravel and stones as a material that I began using on the surface of the canvas. It prompts a shift from the layering of multiple images and a concern with meaning generated by their relationships towards an attention to the material surface of paintings and to a single image on a single canvas. This group of works marks a transition point, although it is only in later works that the effects of this transition become apparent.

Deleuze's ideas on negotiating the figurative givens in painting, which I identify as a significant objective in my own practice, were particularly relevant. Through the study of Bacon's paintings, ideas and strategies, Deleuze develops his ideas from a practical source, citing sensation as the primary mode of experience, and claiming that as such it should be the primary concern of painting. These ideas concurred with my own instinctual move towards materiality in my painting and with this move the challenge of meaning receded.

The third group of paintings includes "Slapton" (Plate no.7 – p. 21), "Babes in the Wood" (Plate no.8 – p. 22), "Oskar" (Plate no.9 – p. 23), "Pinkville Study" (Plate no.10 – p. 24) and "Pinkville" (Plate no.11 – p. 25). With this group of paintings, I wanted to explore giving individual images more 'space' and to shift the emphasis onto the images themselves rather than their relationships. I achieved this by working on two paired images simultaneously, a strategy I

termed 'Twinning'. Twinning works enabled me to have an ongoing concern with meaning and the relationship between images, whilst focusing my attention on a single image, its material surface and the sensations it could generate.

The final group of works consists of "Virtual Body" (Plate no.12 – p. 26), "Painted Body" (Plate no.13 – p. 27) and "Transparent Rotunda" (Plate no.14 – p. 28). This group is defined by the use of gravel and pebbles, which start to become part of the paintings' figuration, defining the images' structures and meanings. Another significant development in "Virtual Body" and "Transparent Rotunda" is the use of digital composite images, from which to paint.

Four central themes emerged from my practice, and in response to the set of questions on image, body, time and space, which were formulated by my specific context. These themes are image, meaning, material and layering. I have chosen to structure this paper according to these four central areas of my research.

Image: Images are the medium of exchange between seer and seen. They are the internal, carnal essence of the actual and facilitate what Merleau-Ponty refers to as "reversibility". These living images are the artists' currency, and the substance of their work.

Meaning: The image's meanings encircle the painting. With every manual intervention and every material consolidation during the process of its creation, the painting has absorbed meaning.

Material: I discover the painting through, and even in, the materials I employ – in gravel, in varnish, in thinners, in pebbles, in stones, in small objects attached to the canvas, and most importantly in paint. Through its material formulation, the image is returned to my body and I can re-sense, remember and rethink the experience of seeing.

Layering: Paintings consist of layers, each of which generates material and texture. The layers of a painting are potentially infinite, for with each new viewer's encounter with it more layers are inevitably generated. All the while the painting's texture becomes richer and richer.

In order to understand anything, we must place it in relation to something else. The three key texts and the referenced artists' voices and work are used to explore these four themes with a view to critically reflecting on and contextualising the exhibition of paintings.

The artist, their work and their quotes, which I have included here, perform the task of contextualising my work within a specific field of painting. They are also an indication of the sources I have drawn upon in the development of my work in general but more specifically this exhibition of paintings. A full representation of artists and works that has informed this research is impractical. Therefore specific paintings and quotations are included throughout the text only to illustrate particular aspects of the research, but should be taken as representative of a wider source of influence. Behind each selected painting is a painter's oeuvre; behind each quote is a practice committed to critically reflecting on paintings and their possibilities.

The Story Of My Research

I will begin the story of my research by outlining the strategies I employ to make paintings. I will continue with how these paintings were made, focusing on their material creation while also charting the significant developments within the work. The story of the research has four distinct stages of development, which is reflected in the final exhibition. In the last part of the story I will reflect on the four central themes which have emerged out of the activity of painting: image, meaning, material and layering. However, in the working reality of my studio these themes, along with the four distinct stages of practical research, were an interdependent clamouring whole. It should therefore be remembered that these themes are relational, having emerged out of the activity of painting. The division of that activity is only a device to organise reflection and clarification.

The Strategies Of My Practice – An Outline: The first stage of my painting involves finding an image. In most cases, choosing the source-image is a result of a subconscious process or instinct. I am aware only that a particular image generates sensations for me – it evokes a host of images from my “personal iconography”³ – and I sense that it will sustain my interest through the process of making a painting. However, choosing a source-image is also the function of my pre-existing visual knowledge. This visual knowledge is based on a continually renewed experience of images in relation to painting: from my ongoing generation of images in paint, i.e. composition, form, colour, tone and, to some extent, content, to my ongoing reception of images, i.e. the viewing of other painter’s and photographer’s work and the viewing of images in general.

³ Each person has his own unique collection of images. This vast collection of images or icons that our imagination draws upon will be referred to as our personal iconography. The imagination and memory are functions that access this body of images. Our personal iconography can be pictured as an internal diagram of the actual, which displays the world to us so that we may experience it more fully.

The next stage of the process is to represent the source-image within the confines of my own manual skill and my own sensitivity towards the material I have chosen to use. The rendering of the image is executed with an awareness of the conventions of image-making or the cliché, both in my own practice and in the context of the history of painting up to the present day. The influence of this awareness has both a helpful and adverse effect, which all painters must negotiate in their own way.

Having established a figurative image on the canvas, I often find the painting has become closed, consisting of only one level, one zone of experience. At this stage of the painting I arrive at a point of 'un-interest' in the work, which can lead to frustration. The painting is trapped by history, by cultural meanings/signifiers and

"...I have a feeling that what I do is very destructive, born out of the need and inability to construct. It is my wish to create a well – built, beautiful, constructed painting. And there are many moments when I plan to do just that, and then I realise that it looks terrible. Then I start to destroy it, piece by piece, and I arrive at something that I didn't want but that looks pretty good". (Richter, G. in Storr, R. (2002) p.297)

by my own creative ability or lack of it. To put it metaphorically, I have found my way into the painting but have not found how to get out. The un-interest arises from a lack of vision - the vision of how to realize the painting's 'fact'⁴. It is also an indication that figurative closure has restricted the work and it has therefore become a cliché. This moment can occur several times during the making of a painting. The restrictive nature of pictorial convention then demands my intervention, or even my destruction of what has gone before. In the earlier part of the research I predominantly used multiple images to disrupt figurative closures.

⁴ Deleuze uses the term "pictorial fact", from Bacon, to refer to the successful realisation of a painting.

Painters struggle with figurative closures by engaging in the physical activity of painting. This struggle is not a theoretical enterprise. Because a painter's closures concerning images condition the way he perceives, if these closures are not challenged, the painting is limited in its ability to realise multiple layers of sensation. My current strategy for generating texture⁵ in my paintings is to return to the physical body and to terrestrial materials. I make manual, non-figurative marks and sprinkle gravel into varnish. I leave stains or fields of colour on the canvas. These chance interventions in the pictures' optical space⁶ clear the canvas of figurative closures by generating texture.

Through these actions I induce chaos in the painting's figurative convention. However, by integrating

elements of this chaos, present in the non-figurative marks, blobs of paint and fields of gravel suspended in varnish, I am able to secure different layers of sensation in the painting. I have identified this process as passing through a crisis⁷ – for instance I may fail to see the resolution of the painting, or the validity of my current research. This crisis is really an encounter with openness, and from it I usually emerge successfully to the discovery or creation of a new layer of sensation in my work. This process requires a significant act of faith to which some risk is

When I stand in front of a blank canvas, it's as if I'm standing in front of a wall of fog. Before taking a brave step into this uncharted territory, the question arises what I will encounter there and what equipment I will need to undertake the excursion. As a rule, a relatively high risk should be guaranteed, and this is where the degree of your ability becomes apparent.

With a shudder I open the various contamination chambers and remove a variety of material from them to temporarily store it in the territories of my paintings. I lead frightened staffage out of quarantine barracks and offer them an opportunity to move into my chambers of fog. I make sure that it is comfortable there by instilling a bit of culture there, and in all these actions I am blissfully aware of the narrow ridge from which I could plunge headlong into absurdity, harmlessness, and embarrassment. And so in my own way I work in border territories, and it is worth noting here that an artist's workshop should always be installed on the fringe. I am also aware of the fact that the abysses into which I could potentially fall are already inherent in my oeuvre and by all means should be there. But anyone who is still fooling around with secure positions of postmodernism should show me where their risks lie. (Rauch, N. in Gingeras, A. (2002) pp.98 - 100)

⁵ I am using texture here according to Lawson's use of the word. Here texture refers to the openness contained in the work. See Appendix Two p 180.

⁶ I use optical space here to mean represented pictorial space but also to refer to Deleuze's ideas on the shifting relationship between hand and eye in painting. Optical space occurs when the eye is dominant. See section on digital, tactile, manual and haptic space in Appendix Three p 186.

⁷ This moment of crisis or deformation that my paintings undergo, which I had identified as of great significance in my practice, Deleuze also talks of as significant. This critical point was the reason for using Deleuze in my thesis.

attached. If it is unsuccessful, my ability to realise movement of sensation in the painting is lost. The work then remains defined by figurative closure or the cliché.

I find the stage of a painting's creation when the figurative conventions have to be abandoned both exciting and frightening, because I have to desert the structures that have hitherto held the painting together. My subsequent

Structures are no longer valid. The class that established structures is gone. This makes our profession so difficult: we have to establish rules and simultaneously fight against them. (Kiefer, A. in Stiles, K. and Selz, P. (1996) p.61)

interventions in the conventional figurative image are made with consideration for what is already on the surface of the canvas. Each intervention is a trauma or wound to the image, a subversive act performed against convention. It is through the process of repainting the image – through overlaying and incorporating the marks of its' partial destruction - that the painting's fact can be realised.

In my practice, realising a painting's fact is equal to successfully transfiguring an image from one state to another – from photograph to painting. I use "*transfigure*" because I am engaged in a figuration of images. In my paintings I am not changing the image from one form to another (transform). I am attempting to discover, between the figurative closures of images, the painting's fact – a new figure – an image beyond the conventions of its previous state and the potential conventions of its possible state.

"Thus the diagram (manual or material interventions) acted by imposing a zone of objective indiscernibility or indeterminability between two forms, one of which was no longer, and the other, not yet: it destroys the figuration of the first and neutralizes that of the second. And between the two, it imposes (discovers) the Figure, through its original relations" (Deleuze, G. (2003), pp.157-8).

By identifying the strategies I employed at the early stages of research, it was clear that images and how we live with them were of central importance to me as a painter. Over the following years, through the activity of making and viewing paintings, the other three themes established them selves in my practice as important. Meaning, material and layering all emerged

simultaneously and in relation to each other, as alternative strategies or approaches in the transfiguration of image.

How The Paintings Were Made

Ideally, when I walk round and view an exhibition of paintings I try to encounter their images openly – that is to say on their own terms – allowing them to awaken a host of sleeping images. It is then important for me to know the story of their creation: a story based on form and materials. After this introduction I begin to reflect on the work in conjunction with further looking. Consequently it is important to establish how the paintings in this exhibition were made.

"Death Head" And "The Fates After Goya"



"Death Head" (plate no.1 – p15)



"The Fates After Goya" (plate no.2 – p16)

"Death Head" and "The Fates After Goya" were the first works to be completed after undertaking this research. I have chosen to group these two works together because they can be seen as the context out of which the research has evolved. In particular Sigmar Polke and David Salle were two painters whose work I identified that used images in a similar way to myself at the time. Polke's "This is how you sit correctly after Goya" (plate no.01) and Salle's "Young Krainer" (plate no.02) demonstrate the strategy of using multiple images in a painting. As a painter, I was interested in an exchange of formal aspects of the image between the painting, the artist and the viewer. I was trying to induce an emphasis on dialogue, on an exchange of images and their meanings. I was trying to negotiate the reductive constraints of semiotics, whilst using its formal language.



It becomes easy to realize that everything is merely a question of connections! And further: that a progressive science such as mine is not after any pert causalities but rather after connections. For without connections, every causality could pack it up. (Polke, S. in Thistlewood, D. (1996) p.122)

Plate no01 - Sigma Polke "This is how you sit correctly (after Goya)"



Plate no.02 - David Salle "Young Krainer"

In the paintings that immediately preceded the research, I used materials to realise the structure and form of the image, and I did so in terms of

line. However, in "Death Head" and "The Fates After Goya" I began rudimentarily using materials to realise the body of the image, in terms of texture and plane. Perhaps this distinction offers a more visual way of understanding my shift of emphasis that marks the beginning of this research.

"Death Head" and "The Fates After Goya" show evidence of an emerging engagement with materials directed at the body, an engagement that can be traced through the following four years work. Although raw, these early works demonstrate a willingness to be adventurous while exploring materials in relation to image.

In "Death Head" it is not the layering of plastic materials that betrays an engagement with materials but the treatment of paint as a surface. The painting moves from bare canvas at top

D.C. – "Were you more involved at that time with the thought processes behind your paintings, the selection and juxtaposition of images, than with the act of painting itself? Did you feel at all 'distanced' from the medium?"

D.S. "I would never break up painting into those component parts. Painting has nothing to do with theory or with some notion of 'anti-theory'; it's just about making something worth seeing. That's all that matters."

D.C. – "Do you do any preparatory thinking and organizing, in terms of the selection and arrangement of images and the insertion of panels into the main canvas, before beginning work on the actual painting?"

D.S. "No I just begin. It's all completely intuitive. I never have a preparatory drawing or anything like that. It's all improvisation. The real way of working has so little to do with what anyone talks about." (Salle D. in Papadakis, A. (1991) p.136)

right, (plate no.1.1) through flat tonal undercoats at bottom left (plate no.1.2), to thick and cracking pigment in the central foreground (plate no.1.3). The treatment of the forest marks the first time I was able to realize the painted surface of the canvas in this way. I had always admired the thick visceral canvases of painters like Anselm Kiefer and Frank Auerbach but a tendency towards using paint sparingly prevented me from employing their strategies.



Plate no.1.1 Death Head detail (Bare Canvas)



Plate no.1.2 Death Head detail (Undercoats)



Plate no.1.3 Death Head detail (Cracked Pigment)

In "The Fates After Goya" the painting's surface does not possess the painterly presence of the forest in "Death Head". It has a seductive flat lustre from the steel (plate no.2.1) and a shiny flat surface from the acrylic in conjunction with other treatments of paint and canvas. These different materials and surfaces impress themselves onto the body through sight but also through the imagination. We do not perceive the material of this painting only through sight. We also realise the materials' touch, taste, temperature and density through the imagination, as it would be for the body. There is also evidence here of my first use of blobs of pigment on the painting's surface (plate no.2.2). These blobs of burnt coloured earth are only pigment masquerading as the spots of light in our eyes, which are the imperfections of these organs.



Plate no.2.1 The Fates After Goya detail (Steel)



Plate no.2.2 The Fates After Goya detail (First Blobs)

In "The Fates After Goya" the sensation of material is found in the acrylic sheeting, which lies over the canvas, lending an actual physical depth and transparency to the painting's surface (plate no.2.3). The materiality of the paint in "Death Head" and the actual materials of plastic and steel in "The Fates After Goya" come together in later works where the stones and paint mix together to form a textured skin.



Plate no.2.3 The Fates After Goya detail (Depth And Transparency)

"Adam And Eve Banished From Interior", "Spot Light", "Master Copy" And "100-1"



"Adam And Eve Banished From Interior"
(plate no.3 – p17)



"Spot Light" (plate no.4 – p18)



"Master Copy" (plate no.5 – p19)



"100 - 1" (plate no.6 – p20)

The above four works have been grouped together because they mark a period of reorientation in my practice. This movement can be broadly identified as a shift from the layering of multiple images and a concern with meaning generated by their relationships, towards an attention to the material surface of paintings and singular images. Up to this period in my practice I had instinctively associated pictorial space with figurative closure and consequently had always striven to disturb it. The result of this instinctual approach to pictorial space was that my paintings in that earlier period had a tendency to lack perceived depth and were dominated by line. In a sense they were drawings in paint. I had sought depth in the layered meaning of images.

However, these four paintings show a growing confidence to experiment with materials, painterly techniques and other strategies of resisting figurative closure. Discovering the use of gravel and stones facilitated this change of emphasis in my practice, although it might also be understood that material discoveries are made in answer to a formal or conceptual shift in emphasis. Through painting these four works I came to realise that pictorial space was not the agent of figurative closure and that far more subtle interventions could be employed to deliver a painting from it. I also came to realise, through using the stones, that depth is something sensed by the body and that this material component to the painting, in conjunction with paint, addresses itself directly to our physical organism.

One of the most profound experiences of the materiality of a painting occurred when encountering the physical surface of Anselm Kiefer's work, years after admiring them through reproductions. The presence of those materials that made up the surface of his paintings is still with me today. "Ash Flower" (plate no.03) shows this use of paint and material that so inspired me, but which took six or seven years before being discovered in my own use of materials. Another example of materials on the surface of a canvas is Julian Schnabel's use of ceramics in paintings like "The Sea" (plate no.04). When I started using gravel and stones, the memory of these paintings came back to me with renewed significance and appreciation.



Plate no.03 – Anselm Kiefer "Ash Flower" (detail)



All components of the work are part of a desire to transform the spirit; prior meanings, existing meanings, and newly attached meanings, all necessary to create in the work an accumulative meaning whose configuration is something no one has ever seen before. This doesn't mean you can't recognize it when you see it.

What artists can give to others, how they are of use in this life, is in their discovery of a point of convergence where the physical fact denotes a state of consciousness. This is how art is generative. (Schnables, J. in Stiles, K. and Selz, P. (1996) p.268)

Plate no.04 - Julian Schnables "The Sea"

The movement from a layering of images characterised by line, to material images characterized by surface/planes can be seen as an over-arching trajectory of my research. These four works are defined by the experimental beginnings of that shift.

I have chosen to group "100-1" here, because its material arrangements are most consistent with the objectives present in the other three paintings, despite its being painted over a three year

period, and its overlapping three of the four groups of paintings. The subject matter is personal and requires a different language or lens through which to explore it. "100-1" belongs to a small group of works, including "Oskar", "The Fates After Goya" and "Aftertime"⁸ (plate no.16), which respond to an event in my own biography: the loss of my son, who died, full term, in the moment of his birth from no apparent medical cause. These three works could have formed with "100-1" a different group based on their common theme. However, for the purpose of this exhibition I have chosen to group my paintings chronologically according to my research into image, material, meaning, and layering.



Plate no.16 – Aftertime

Materials are used quite differently in this second chosen group of four paintings. They are all material experiments with gravel and stones in painting. They begin to explore how materials in association with image can generate specific sensations for the viewing body. "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" uses the gravel and stones purely as texture. "Spot Light" begins to use the materials figuratively by suggesting visual perception, while "Master Copy" and "100 – 1" use the stones as formal devices to manipulate visual perception.

⁸ "Aftertime" is a painting on the subject of my son's death and was completed in 1999-2000, before

My intention in "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" was to create a thick, textured and painterly surface, similar to painters like Anselm Kiefer in particular, but also Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff. I desired a thick, oozing, caked body to the painting. Examples of these painted surfaces with a real material presence are Auerbach's "Catherine Lampert" (plate no.05) and Kossoff's "Head of John Lessore" (plate no.06). However, unlike Auerbach and Kossoff, who predominantly used paint to achieve this materiality, I used plaster, gravel, varnish and stones, more akin to Kiefer's alchemy of materials. It is in "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" that I first properly achieve the material presence of surface and the image. Here the stones obscure all figuration forming colourful piles, reminiscent of geological formations, semi-digested food or decaying debris (plate no.3.1).

The materiality of a work of art is important only as long as it imparts a quality of being, meaning, feeling, a recognition. It is appropriate only as long as it is true; it is modern only as long as it is true. Deeper than conversation, it has its own dignity.
(Schnables, J. in Stiles, K. and Selz, P. (1996) p.268)

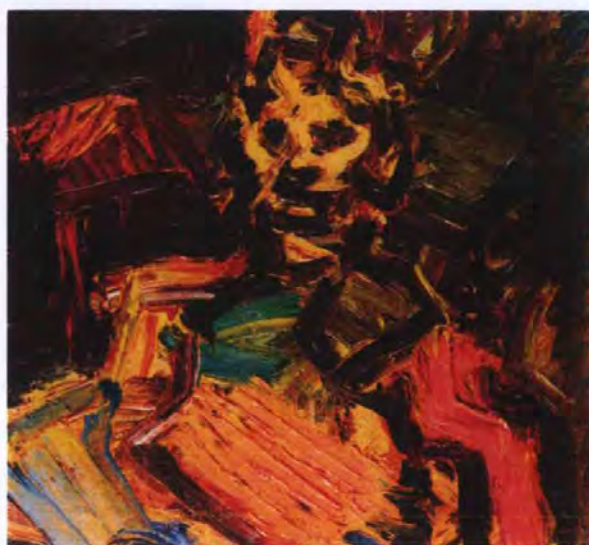


Plate no.05 - Frank Auerbach "Catherine Lampert"



Plate no.06 - Leon Kossoff "Head of John Lessore"

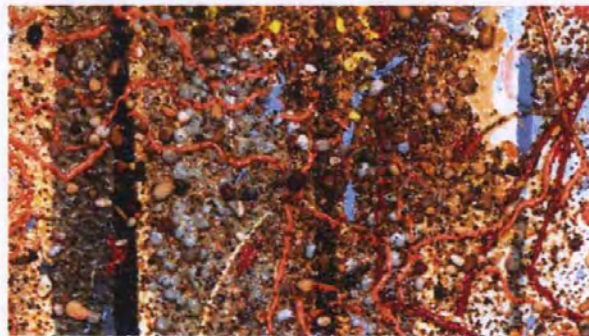


plate no.3.1 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior detail (Geographical Surface)

In "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" the layering of images and the use of a textured - material surface, the two prime concerns of my practice, meet in one painting. The lines and flat planes of the depicted space (plate no.3.2) and the erotic line drawings (plate no.3.3) compete with the paint and textured stony surface of Adam and Eve (plate no.3.4).



Plate no.3.2 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior detail (Interior)



Plate no.3.3 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior (Erotic Line Drawing)



Plate no.3.4 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior detail (Adam And Eve)

In "Spot Light", the next painting I made, the gravel and stones are not used simply to produce texture. The gravel is dispersed in a circular motion around the edge of the main canvas, leaving the centre relatively free. This layer of gravel and stones suggests the sensation of visual perception, with the dominant focus being in the centre of our field of vision, while our peripheral sight remains undefined. The stones in "Spot Light" are used to stimulate the sensation of sight. This use is taken up again and modified in "Transparent Rotunda". Another material element that supports the stimulation of the viewer's sense of sight is the spots of pigment (plate no.4.1), which I used in previous works without any real intention. There are a great many spots of colour in "Spot Light", raw pigment that has been lifted up off the pallet and thrown onto the surface of the canvas. The spots are part of the shimmering sea of liquid light and living colour that presents itself to the unconscious eye, before the mediating mind realizes vision, unimpeded by these visual ambiguities. For example, a spot of blood red pigment in the viridian branches of a

tree stands in the sappy greens and yellows of a grassy meadow bathed in sunlight (plate no.4.2). With "Spot Light", while exploring materiality through the landscape, I absorbed myself in the Pre-Raphaelite painters, particularly John Brett's "The Val d'Aosta" (plate no.07) but also in the work of Peter Doig and Michael Raedecker. Doig's spots and running dilutions were a particular influence, which are evident in "Blotter" (plate no.08), along with Raedecker's threads submersed in paint, which are evident in "Beam" (plate no.09).



Plate no.4.1 – Spot Light detail (Spots Of Pigment)



Plate no.4.2 – Spot Light detail (Red Spot In Green Field)

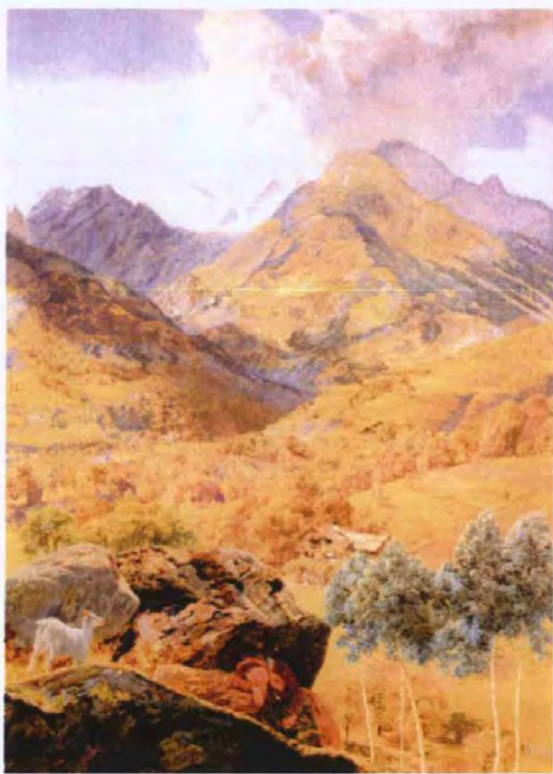


Plate no.07 - John Brett "The Val d'Aosta"



In some ways it is trying to find images that have some sort of resonance rather than meaning. (Doig, P. in Grenier, C. (2003) p.31)

Plate no.08 - Peter Doig "Blotter"



"I like to look at paintings where you are asked to come and discover their details at different distances. Some of my paintings are quite empty. There is hardly anything happening, with just a little paint and little thread I can concentrate on the details, to make small areas specific, the lamps in a room or a fern plant in it's blue pot. The balance between the yarn and the level of detail is very important. If all of the painting was made in this way, it would look kitschy. Sometimes I am on the edge kitsch. I don't want to go over that edge." (Raedecker, M. in www.smba.nl/shows/33/33.ht)

Plate no09 – Michael Raedecker "Beam"

In the left canvas of "Spot Light" the pictorial space is unchallenged by other images and is disturbed only by the stones and spots of pigment. However, when creating the work, I still felt

compelled to include another image, I was not yet prepared to make a single image/canvas painting. The right canvas, although separated by the frame, is distinctly part of the same work but contrasting in its treatment. The surface of the right canvas is flat and mono-toned, describing a very different space to the left canvas. (plate no.4.3)



Plate no.4.3 – Spot Light detail (Monotone Studio)

When I began "100-1" I had two contrasting elements. I had the transferred photocopy of the source photograph and a desire to be expressive with the materiality of paint. The transfer was quickly over-painted, except for the hands and faces of the figures, with expressive brushwork. These areas were over-painted with flat colour, the bed with dripping black gloss (plate no.6.1) and the bed covers with red and white (plate no.6.2). The flat areas of colour compressed the pictorial depth of the painting and focused greater attention on Rebecca's face (plate no.6.3), which I had painted in sympathy with the colour of the photocopy inks, using a little too much magenta for comfort. The treatment of the bodies attempts to transfer to the viewer the corporeal sense of their shock and distress. Rebecca's hands are unpainted, as if the soul's presence is only evident through the face and the breast, retreating from an active engagement with the concrete world of touch. The figure of myself has the use of his hands, but the lower body and torso are transparent and two-dimensional; the body contains no gut and no heart, only a black gash to the right side (plate no.6.4). This work was not constructed with symbolic or allegoric intent, but to make visible to the viewer's body certain sensations that are sensible not readable. Hanging over Rebecca's right shoulder are several drips that were lifted in gestured movements from my painting of the bed (plate no.6.5). They constitute an ominous presence in the painting and I am surprised that these manual marks have this pictorial and yet sensory quality.



Plate no.6.1 – 100-1 detail (Dripping Black)



Plate no.6.2 – 100-1 detail (Red And White Covers)



Plate no.6.3 – 100-1 detail (Rebecca's Face)



Plate no.6.4 – 100-1 detail (Black Gash)



Plate no.6.5 – 100-1 detail (Ominous Drips)

The left canvas was originally autonomous and remained in my studio for several years during which I would work on it periodically. I had taken several slides of Bilibin's⁹ work as source-images, and used one of these, a seascape, on a canvas of equal size to the one occupied by the

two figures. Painting the seascape became a real challenge for me. I was caught between Bilibin's illustration and a more abstract material rendering of the sea. The stones and the painterly marks built up with translucent washes of varnish and pigment (plate no.6.6) did not deliver the painting from convention. So, once the two canvases were put together, I brought the wallpaper into the seascape (plate no.6.7), then the sea a little into the room above the wallpaper border. Then I brought the sea a bit further until it had swept away the enclosed space of the room.



Plate no.6.6 – 100-1 detail (Washes Of Varnish)

⁹ Russian Illustrator Bilibin.



Plate no.6.7 – 100-1 detail (Wallpaper Over Sea)

The stones are reminiscent of the stones in "Master Copy" but form a more dynamic pattern, like a veil that covers the sea and the figure of myself. Some of the stones have childlike faces painted on them like decorative buttons¹⁰ (plate no.6.8). What is important in "100-1" is the presence of sensation that has been infused into the skin of the painting. It is not possible to quantify this presence in the materials of the painting through language, but only to sense it through sight.

¹⁰ There are 97 stones and two figures, making 99 and indicating one absent child for every one hundred born. These are the national statistics from The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society for infant mortality rates in the UK for 2000.



Plate no.6.8 – 100-1 detail (Stone Face)

With "Master Copy" my intention was to paint a single image onto a single canvas, something I hadn't done in this research. It was an act of conceptual faith to make a painting that did not use the strategy of multiple canvases, multiple images or both. I used the large stones because they gave me an assurance that the painting's pictorial space would be continually challenged by their physical presence on the surface of the canvas. The stones in this work gave me a great sense of freedom towards the image, which had hitherto been inhibited by painterly convention. This freedom gave me confidence in the way that I approached figuration in future works. This confidence deepened with my growing familiarity with materials in my work.

The sixteen flat pebbles were the beginning of the image and served as the foundation stones for this painting. The

"An image gets weight as it goes along." (Andrews, M. in Feaver, W. (2001) p.52)

function of stones in my work is always to bring mass, a physical presence, to a two-dimensional medium. In "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" and "Spot Light" the stones functioned primarily as texture, with the painted image and the material surface of the painting becoming one. In "Master Copy" I wanted to use the stones' actual presence as objects sharply to contrast with the painted image's imagined depth. There were a number of other images that could have

accompanied these stones but the image of the wrecked hay stack (plate no.5.1), with its drama and sense of foreboding, seemed best suited to complement their solid grid of sixteen. The stones' presence as objects was further emphasized by the ambiguous coding of the labels,¹¹ which eventually led to the inclusion of the plastic model figures of "Batman" over the label "Master" (Plate no.5.2) and "Robin" over the label "Copy" (plate no.5.3). With the painted image of the hay stack, I felt at liberty to explore paint both as material - particularly in the sky (plate no.5.4), where claggy pigment is rhythmically pushed over a shiny eggshell surface, leaving stylised brush marks - and as an agent of figuration - particularly in the darker shades of umber that describe shadows, and in the sap green of mould on the weathered roof beams (plate no.5.5). In this instance paint has a subservient function, which is to render image visible. The spots are again present as they were in "Spot Light", free just to be paint.



Plate no.5.1 – Master Copy (Source Image)

¹¹ I used sixteen labels from an audio tape case, which included the numbers one to ten and also master and copy.



Plate no.5.2 – Master Copy detail (Batman)



Plate no.5.3 – Master Copy detail (Robin)



Plate no.5.4 – Master Copy detail (Sky)



Plate no.5.5 – Master Copy detail (Roof Beams)

The titling of the painting adds layers of meaning to the work. The work now generates meaning in relation to a whole host of hierarchical relationships: originality and quotation, master and slave, ancient and modern in history and in the history of art, etc. Further meaning is provided by the two plastic figures of Batman and Robin – Master and Copy. These comic-book characters satirically personify the “Master Copy” relationship and imply that our quest for meaning is a futile, overblown adventure. Thus, the work seems both enticingly to promise and then stubbornly to thwart our desire for meaning in painting.

"Slapton", "Babes In The Wood", "Oskar", "Pinkville Study" and "Pinkville"



"Slapton"

(Plate no.7 – p21)



"Babes In The Wood"

(Plate no.8 – p22)



"Pinkville Study"

(plate no.9 – p23)



"Oskar" (Plate no.10 – p24)



"Pinkville" (Plate no.11 – p25)

In these five works I continued to explore the material presence of a painting's surface and the potential layers of sensation within a single image. "Master Copy", which preceded these works, came close to presenting a single image, but was still occupied with the relationship between the image of the haystack and the stone grid, itself an "image". Image was – and still is – my first instinct. I prefer to let meaning gradually colonise any image I have painted on canvas, rather than allow it to tyrannise and confine that image, prior even to its creation. In these works, however, I discovered that through an association with materials meaning can address itself to

flesh and to the “carnal images”¹² that are invisible within us, rather than exclusively to the closures of optical perception and conscious thought.

Before making this group of works, the visual and linguistic strands of my research had remained largely separate. I had struggled to bring them together, but failed because I feared to impose artificial connections upon them. In the visual strand of my research, I had been trying to become more conscious of the way I made paintings – i.e. the strategies I employed and the ways I critically reflected on them. In the linguistic strand of my research, I had been searching through ideas that related directly to those strategies of which I was becoming more aware, in order to place those reflections in a wider intellectual context I was trying to find a new language with which to reflect upon, and communicate about, my painting. In the previous group of paintings, particularly “Master Copy”, I began to discover how the two strands of my research were informing each other. These realisations prompted me to test my established strategies in making paintings, which I did in “Slapton” and “Babes In The Wood”, and again in “Oskar”, “Pinkville Study” and “Pinkville”. This group of paintings sees the visual and linguistic strands of my research beginning to inform each other in a more transparent way.

One way in which I tested my strategies was to “twin” works. This allowed me to maintain a relationship between images, which had been a strong element in my earlier works, while also being able to work on autonomous single images that were not compromised by sharing a canvas with each other. Another strategy was to focus on the materiality of the painted surface, rather than on the structure of the painting and the layering of its images. Testing my strategies in this group of works resulted in a much greater awareness of my practice and the way I reflected on its workings.

¹² I am using the term carnal images to reference Merleau-Ponty’s images that are caught in flesh. See Appendix One, Reversibility And Maurice Merleau-Ponty p. 169.

The shift in emphasis – from images and their relationships, to the material presence of those images – is also evident in the different ways I have matched canvasses: bolting them together in my early works, and twinning them in later. I began bolting separate canvases together to explore how different images reacted to each other and altered according to their relationships. Bolting also served to destabilize some of the closures imposed by the conventions of painting.¹³ When canvases are bolted together, each joint upsets the illusion of pictorial space and reinforces their presence as physical objects. The strategy of twinning paintings arose directly out of re-evaluating the strategy of bolting canvases together. I wanted to explore giving the individual images more space and to shift the emphasis onto the image itself rather than its relationship with other images. The strategy of working on two different paintings with a shared theme – or, more accurately, a shared enquiry – allowed each work to be singular and autonomous, while enabling a specific relationship to emerge between the two. Previously, I had been unable to let these singular images exist on their own, because of my determination to impart them with meaning: this meaning was invariably generated by their immediate proximity to other images within the same composition. By twinning works, I discovered that meaning can be generated by the context of these images – first, in relation to the twinned work, and second in relation to the larger family of works that I produce.

I feel a degree of anxiety that “Slapton”, “Pinkville Study” and “Painted Body” (from the final group of works) have not been successfully delivered from figurative closures or fully resolved in some way; they feel like the weaker twins in their pairings. “Slapton” relies for meaning and significance on its relation to its twin “Babes In The Wood”, and on its place in the context of my whole practice. Even in the “Oskar” – “Pinkville Study” twinning, “Pinkville Study” predominantly acquires meaning from its relation to “Pinkville” and “Oskar”. This seems to suggest that there is

¹³ A very obvious closure is that of the frame, which decrees that only one clearly defined section of his visual field deserves the viewer’s attention. But a less obvious closure is the one imposed by a work’s physicality – less obvious because the fiction of pictorial space is largely dependent on its viewer’s forgetting that a canvas is a physical object

usually a dominant twin in the provision of meaning or that the cue to linguistic closures¹⁴ is usually provided by one of the twinned works. Such a hierarchical relationship between the twinned paintings made me uneasy, and led me to abandon twinning as a strategy after completing "Painted Body".

Establishing a manual space¹⁵ in my paintings, through an increased focus on materials, has enabled a type of non-figuration to find its way into my work, which is significant. There are now localized passages of non-figuration occurring within the larger pictorial structures at the level of surface rather than composition. Marks are now not only made to support a pictorial whole but exist as part of an integral surface. How other painters used materials was significant in shaping the development and refinement of materials in my own practice.

My journey to discover a material domain in my paintings was influenced by several painters, in particular Marlene Dumas and Peter Doig but also Michael Raedecker, Michael Andrews and Jock MacFadyen. Although these painters (Raedecker aside) do not use a wide range of materials other than paint, it is their manipulation of paint as a material that captured my attention. Their approach to the materiality of paint provided my own material research with a point of reference.

"Although the paintings are derived from the real world this is just the starting point. It is an entry or structure that is recognizable and familiar for the viewer and myself and therefore gives the painting a beginning that is tangible. This then allows the intangible or the atmosphere of the painting to exist. I am never setting out to create a real space – only ever a painted one. This is what interests me. Maybe this is why there is never really a specific time or space (or sometimes season) in the paintings as such, even though, if one was to see the actual source, it would be "real"." (Doig, P. in Gingeras, M. A. (2002) p.184)

What also attracted me to these artists' paintings was the familiar starting point of the photograph. They allow the play of intended and unintended paint marks to dominate the image,

¹⁴ See Appendix Two, Systems Of Closure p.179

¹⁵ See Appendix Three, The Digital, The Tactile, The Manual And The Haptic p. 188.

while retaining distinct qualities of the source image. Paint's two functions as a material and as a means of figuration are explored in great depth in all these painters' works. For example, some of Andrews's mid-career landscapes like "Glenartney: Sketch from the Harness Room" (plate no.010), which explores and perhaps knowingly celebrates a convention of figurative painting, contrast with late works like "Thames Painting: The Estuary" (plate no.011), where paint is celebrated as material with only a minimum of figuration. McFadyen's "Escalator" (plate no.012) also shows how paint can encompass both material and figurative domains. As viewers we move from representation to materiality in these paintings. I have spent a good deal of time with the images of these painters while in the company of my own paintings, absorbed in both – saturated by both.



Once one is launched on a subject everything you pick up seems to apply, and not at all remotely.
(Andrews, M. in Feaver, W. (2001) p.43)

Plate no.013 – Michael Andrews "Glenartney: Sketch from the Harness Room"



It's delightful to discover that paint will do more things than you thought it would do, and so of course you indulge it a bit. I feel that where I painted thick and occasionally very thick and then allowed the turps to carry away in lumps, which I've checked and stopped and altered. (Andrews, M. in Feaver, W. (2001) p.60)

Plate no.011 – Michael Andrews "Thames Painting: The Estuary"



Plate no.012 – Jock McFadyen "Escalator"

The use of materials in these paintings, which in the previous works was explorative, is now deliberate and assured. For one thing, fine gravel has been used in conjunction with varnish and paint to produce a material surface that is quite integrated; rather than inhabiting parts of the image, the material constitutes that image. For another, the colour and tonal ranges have been reduced to clarify particular aesthetic sensations – soft, cold blues and whites in “Slapton” and “Babes In The Wood”, and warmer maroons and flesh tones in “Oskar” and “Pinkville Study”. And for a third, the canvas sizes have been reduced to give the singular images a containment and intimacy in relation to the viewer’s body.

In “Slapton” I wanted to be economical with materials, using only what was required to realize depth in the material image. I achieved this through the different treatments of paint – from the flat graphic marks that describe the surface of the water (plate no.7.1), through the thick pallet-knifed yellow ochre of the reed bed (plate no.7.2) and the brushed gray and titanium white of the clouds (plate no.7.3), to the dripping white spirit of the clouds’ watery reflection (plate no.7.4). The painting also has a few blobs of paint sitting on its surface, along with a sprinkling of gravel (see plate no.7.1), which here takes on the representational function of depicting detritus on the water’s surface. Thus, paint and gravel together make their material presence subtly felt in this relatively empty canvas.



Plate no.7.1 – Slapton detail (Graphic Water)



Plate no.7.2 – Slapton detail (Reed Bed)



Plate no.7.3 – Slapton detail (Titanium Clouds)



Plate no.7.4 – Slapton detail (Watery Reflection)

When creating "Babes In The Wood", I had no objective other than to allow the painting to emerge out of its materials, namely gravel and paint. Initially, I wanted the painting to remain mostly non-representational with only a few suggestions of figuration. I wanted to paint a late Turner-like cumulonimbus, with little discernible form. I used a lot of oil paint over gravel and the surface quickly built up. I had momentary encounters of the sensations I wished to achieve, but they were not permanent. As the work progressed, I felt an increasing desire to evolve a structure of figuration. The forest, snow and boy eclipsed the cloudscape and the billowing nimbus became heavy drifts of snow. In the finished painting, the silhouetted forest divides up the patches of white and the dirty whites, grays and greens give the snow a shadowy depth (plate no.8.1). Using only the fine gravel in conjunction with thick layers of paint, unified the two materials into an integral surface or skin, which is not present in earlier works because of their separate and discrete materials or images.



Plate no.8.1 – Babes In The Wood detail (Snow Trees)

"Oskar" and "Pinkville Study" each began as a play of materials with no figurative constraints. Both paintings initially consisted of lines of paint, varnish, pebbles and gravel. Later translucent washes filled in the planes between these separate frontiers (plate no.10.1). For a time this play of materials represented to me a freedom from figuration, but this play was only temporary, I soon felt a need to return to the challenge of making figurative work, and to struggle with the image and its conventions. Having over painted the canvases with undercoat (plate no.10.2), I found the topographic surface of the forgotten abstracts intriguing to work on. Building up the flesh tones on Oskar's face, over the hard puddles of varnish, really began to feel like the matt lustre of skin. I used a photographic print to paint from so the colours have a fuller, richer and more subtly nuanced range than the pallets taken from a photocopy like "Pinkville Study", where the contrast is high and the colour range limited. This high contrast and limited colour range are accentuated in "Pinkville Study" and "Pinkville", because the source-image for both works was a colour supplement from which I took a slide and then made a photocopy of the slide.



Plate no.10.1 – Oskar detail



Plate no.10.2 – Oskar detail

In "Pinkville Study", it was important for me to retain some of the colour and tonal characteristics of the source-image, making it – as its title suggests – more a preparatory study than a preparatory drawing.¹⁶

¹⁶ In my earlier works, where the structure and composition of images were my point of focus, there was an emphasis on line, with the source-image performing the traditional function of a preparatory drawing.

I painted "Pinkville" while working on "Slapton", "Babes In The Wood", "Oskar" and "Pinkville Study", completing it only after the others were finished. Materially significant were the use of aluminium as a surface to paint on, and the building up of layers of paint, varnish and fine gravel to form the image. In the finished work, what immediately reveal that "Pinkville" is painted on aluminium are the rounded corners of the painting, and the join that runs through the centre.

In this group of paintings I was occupied with making integral, single-image paintings that responded to the fractured nature of the preceding works. The character of this later group of works is different from that of its predecessors, and this difference is the direct result of a change in methodology. Previously, I had sought to break up pictorial space in a single work with multiple images and canvases. This method realised sensation in the movement between the discrete, disconnected or anti-integral elements of a work. In this later group of works I sought to restore the integrity of a single pictorial space, which realised sensation through the material surface of the painting and its layers of meaning. The textured skin of these paintings is a scabbing over, a healing, of the breaks that had previously generated the movement of sensation.

"Virtual Body", "Painted Body" And "Transparent Rotunda"



"Virtual Body"

(Plate no.12 – p. 26)



"Painted Body"

(Plate no.13 – p. 27)



"Transparent Rotunda"

(Plate no.14 – p. 28)

"Virtual Body", "Painted Body" and "Transparent Rotunda" are the last three large-scale works I have completed as part of my visual research. I have grouped these paintings together because of that chronology, but also because they share a strong material and conceptual commonality. While "Virtual Body" and "Painted Body" continue the strategy of twinning, "Transparent Rotunda" marks a break from it. The combination of fine gravel and paint that was used in "Babes in the wood" and "Pinkville" is still prevalent, but in these paintings it is used figuratively, rather than only texturally. The twinned "Figure" paintings further explore the painterly treatment of skin that was used in "Oskar", "Pinkville Study" and "Pinkville", while "Transparent Rotunda" further explores the painterly treatment of landscape I used in "Slapton" and "Babes In The Wood". This group of works continues my primary occupation of transfiguring photographic images into painted images. All three aspects of my painting practice that I have developed for transfiguring images are employed with equal attention: layering, material and meaning. These three paintings have retained more traits of the lens than have the previous paintings, but display a richer and more accomplished engagement with the painted image; the scope of

transfiguration has become broader. I have achieved this through an engagement or absorption in materials, in my work and in the work of other painters.

During a residency in York I made eight digital composites of urban landscapes; one of these became a source-image for "Transparent Rotunda", and the project was an inspiration for the digital composite portraits and figure I made for "Virtual Body". This digital element in the making of "Transparent Rotunda" introduces a third stage in the transfiguration of image from cyclopic to stereoscopic. The digital image, although characterized by the lens that captured it, is only an index¹⁷ until it is manipulated. Once manipulated it becomes an icon, bearing many of the characteristics of a stereoscopic image.

Because of the way photographs have conditioned our perception of reality, we are still willing to accept a digital photograph as having an un-coded relationship with the represented object. Until very recently all lens-generated images were analogues of reflected light fixed onto a surface. However, digital technology renders a lens-generated image a code. It is no longer an analogue of light but a code of light that can be realised as an image. The code is such that every discrete part is mutable, and interchangeable with any other part. In terms of the transfiguration of cyclopic to stereoscopic image, the digital stage creates porosity between the two. Painterly activities can be performed at the digital stage, before the canvas is even stretched. Manipulating the source-image's cyclopic characteristics at the digital phase facilitates the disruption of the pictorial givens, by employing montage in the same way that it was used by the surrealists.

When I came to paint an image of the body in "Virtual Body" and skin over flesh and bone in "Painted Body", I referred back to Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Rembrandt van Rijn, Euan Uglow

¹⁷ An index is the un-coded image of an object's factuality, for example a reflection, shadow or un-manipulated photograph. The opposite of index is the icon, or a coded image with similarities to the object, but where its factuality is undecided, representational art for example. Text is the synthesis of index and icon, which gives meaning, which is a symbolic sign.

and Jenny Saville, Luc Tuymans and Marlene Dumas. This diverse range of painters have painted the body in many different ways and have all been influential in how I have rendered these two paintings and considered painted images of the body in general. Examples of these images that have and continue to influence me are Bacon's "Study for a Self Portrait" (plate no.013), Freud's "Naked woman on a sofa"(plate no.014), Rembrandt's "Self-Portrait"(plate no.015) and Uglow's "The Quarry, Pignano" (plate no.016). The images of these painters are present in my personal iconography and consequently are part of the figurative convention I must deform. These images both assist and hinder me. They assist me by demonstrating how paint can be laid on canvas. They show me how I can learn to paint. As a collection, they form a context to my work, a history, a shared concern. They inspire me. However, these images also hinder me by suggesting how I should paint. They formulate how I reflect on painting. They become conventions, clichés, that obscure the painting's fact from me, making it very difficult to find. They form a context which is present to the viewer and through which he makes a closure of my work.

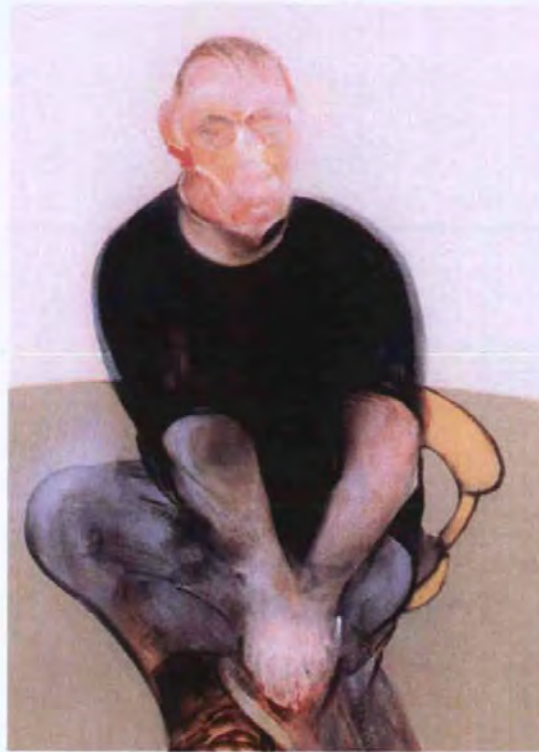


Plate no.013 – Francis Bacon "Study for a Self Portrait" detail



My object in painting pictures is to try and move the senses by giving an intensification of reality. Whether this can be achieved depends on how intensely the painter understands and feels for the person or object of his choice. Because of this, painting is the only art in which the intuitive qualities of the artist may be more valuable to him than actual knowledge or intelligence. (Freud, L. in Stiles, K. and Selz, P. (1996) p.219)

Plate no.014 – Lucian Freud "Naked woman on a sofa" detail

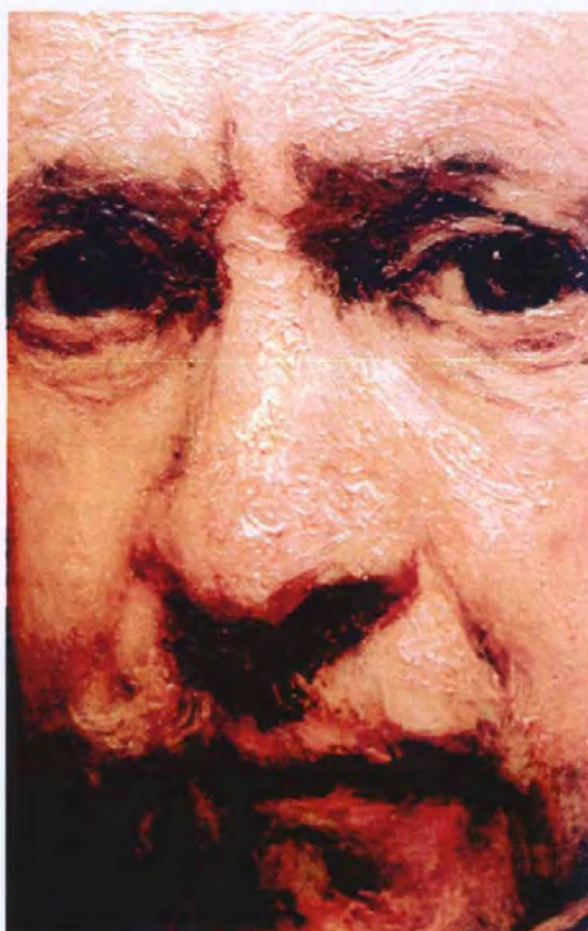


Plate no.015 - Rembrandt "Self-Portrait" detail



Plate no.016 – Euan Uglow "The Quarry, Pignano"

"Virtual Body", "Painted Body" and "Transparent Rotunda" are painted on the same scale as the works I made before beginning with the strategy of twinning. The first two paintings share a warm fleshy tonality consisting of crimsons, yellow ochre, burnt sienna and flesh tint – a similar palette to "Oskar" and "Pinkville"; conversely, cool blues, greys, whites and a strip of lurid green, dominate "Transparent Rotunda" – a similar palette to "Slapton" and "Babes in the Wood". The stones and gravel are used in different ways again in these works. The most noticeable innovation is the figurative use of gravel as shadow in "Virtual Body", and as the semi-transparent arc in "Transparent Rotunda". "Transparent Rotunda" also has several large stones (plate no.14.1), similar to those used in "Master Copy" but slightly smaller, and the background of "Painted Body" has much smaller stones, similar to the ones used in "100-1". The increased breadth of brush-marks, paint-smears, dilutions, smudges and dribbles are noticeable as well, contributing to a greater vocabulary of paint and material application.



Plate no14.1 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Painted Stone)

"Virtual Body" immediately imposes itself on the viewer's optical perception; it directly engages the viewer in the language of images and their meanings. It is important that the viewer

perceives "Virtual Body" in conjunction with the texture of materials, and beyond the purely optical closures of the image. The viewer's relationship to the life-sized painted image of a body and its textured shadow ensures that it is not only an optical one: it is also physical. The sensation of paint in this painting is generated materially by the dynamic of flat representational surfaces in the foreground and textured material surfaces in the background. The flat figure and the textured shadow are held in a contrasting relationship, in which the figure seems to be trying to differentiate itself from the shadow and the shadow to subsume the figure. The paint that has been used to describe the figure is relatively flat. There are few traces of its application and therefore few traces of the body that applied them. Several layers of paint have been brushed onto an undercoated canvas. While some of the first layers reveal more gestured brush marks, the top layer has been smoothed with fingers and a soft flat brush. At the borders between the figure and the heavily textured shadow, a strange phenomenon occurs. The gravel surface appears to be creeping slowly over the painted surface of the figure (plate no.12.1). This suggestion is particularly strong around the figure's left hand, which seems to be half-immersed in quicksand. These relationships between paint, surface and materials on this canvas generate sensations in the body that directly affect our experience of body and shadow¹⁸.

¹⁸ I understand the shadow, in psychological terms, to refer to the darker parts of ourselves, which we omit from the presented image of ourselves - aspects of our character that we are reluctant to own.



Plate no.12.1 – Virtual Body detail (Gravel Immersion)

The second shadow, studio floor and background are much more textured and painterly. Here little rivulets of pigment that, suspended in white spirit, were borne down the canvas are now left dry (plate no.12.2). They are visual reminders that this fixed image only became visible out of the fluidity of paint. As well, a question is asked of the represented figure by the washed-out appearance of the shins and feet (plate no.12.3). This ethereal quality of the lower legs suggests less a bodily sensation than a lack of such sensation. "Virtual Body" has no direct physical contact with the ground. It can't stand anywhere, because it is only an image of a body. This image seems to imply that the image of ourselves, which we cultivate to form our own identity and intervene in the world, is continually being repainted, polished, eroded and dissolved. Luc Tymans' series of paintings, taken from a diagnostic medical handbook, were in my mind while painting "Virtual Body", despite being opposite images of the body (plate no.017).



Plate no.022 – Luc Tuymans "Der giagnostische Blich V11"



Plate no.12.2 – Virtual Body detail (Rivulets Of Pigment)



Plate no.12.3 – Virtual Body detail (Washed Out Shins)

Because "Painted Body" is twinned with "Virtual Body", there are many material correlations. But there are also differences. In "Virtual Body", the material elements are predominantly formed by the dictates of figuration. For instance, in the textured shadow gravel is used not to question or undermine the figure as in earlier works, but to form it. While in "Painted Body" materials are used more fluidly, moving between non-figuration and figuration.

The paint that forms the skin of this painting behaves very differently on different areas of the canvas. Although, as the painter, it is hard for me to put aside the memory of the work's creation, as a viewer I am initially invited into the painting by the left-hand side of the figure, particularly the right arm and shoulder as I look at it (plate no.13.1). This is because an optical perception of the image is any viewer's first instinct. He encounters the world beyond his body through sight before bringing his body to the world through touch. In this area of the painting, the paint is occupied with its figurative charge. Two layers of paint describe a form: there are no over-layers of varnish, stones, brass filings or overt brush marks to disturb the surface. Pictorial space is realised in this zone of the painting, but is immediately brought into question by the

background of the studio wall. The stones on the surface of the canvas, which make up the studio wall, are at once part of the pictorial space, because they are the same colour as the background and do not become part of the foreground by covering the figure, and *not* part of the pictorial space – which, indeed, they reveal to be a fiction – because they have mass and are clearly fixed to the surface of the canvas. A small tension arises between these two different spaces, a kind of ripple in pictorial space, in which the figure's arm at one moment maintains its described form in the foreground and at the next loses its solidity to become a flat area of colour in the background, ceding the actual foreground to the manifest physicality of the stones.



Plate no.13.1 – Painted Body detail (Right Arm And Shoulder)

Below the figure's right arm and shoulder is a bent knee (plate no.13.2). Here the paint operates a little differently. There is a more suggestive quality to the paint in its figurative charge, as if it is primarily occupied with embodying the tension of actual material (in this case flesh), rather than

describing represented form. Brush marks and finger wipes are in evidence here among the more clearly defined blocks of colour. Areas of varnish and drips of white also cover the surface. I enjoy the influence of other artist's work that can emerge unintentionally; this knee for me bares an echo of Jenny Saville's work (plate no.018).



Plate no.13.2 – Painted Body detail (Bent Knee)



Plate no.018 – Jenny Saville "Propped"

Large areas of the figure's left side (the right side of the body as the viewer looks at it) are covered with varnish and a sprinkling of gravel. The figure's left forearm, left breast and left side of the abdomen have been treated similarly to the right; but the layer of thick varnish and gravel covering this area gives the body a warm light which glows through a transparent gloss (plate no.13.3). It is almost as if this part of the figure is behind glass or is seen through coloured glass. The knee and upper arm on this side, which are also covered in varnish, have been over-painted. The paint here takes on something of the actual qualities of skin (plate no.13.4). There is lustre to any paint covering varnish that always makes it sensual, particularly if it is depicting skin. Although the figure's right side communicates flesh to the viewer through the codes of representation, the figure's left side stimulates the viewing body's physical memory of flesh in the sense of its unconscious experience of being a body.



Plate no.13.3 – Painted Body detail (Transparent Gloss)



Plate no.13.4 – Painted Body detail (Quality Of Skin)

The figure's left side, through the varnish and the gravel, dissolves into its own shadow (plate no.13.5). Meanwhile, the figure's shadow becomes flesh, because both the shadow and the figure share the same materials. The paint that makes up the figure's shadow is only nominally occupied with its figurative charge. It is primarily occupied with materials, surface and colour. The perception of the paint's function shifts slowly for the viewer from the physical presence of

detritus on a liquid surface, through pattern and abstraction to the representation of shadows on a studio wall. Finally, it absorbs allegory from the viewer's own mind.



Plate no.13.5 – Painted Body detail (Body And Shadow)

"Painted Body" and "Virtual Body" have contrasting shadows, and each work is in many ways concerned with a body's shadow. In "Virtual Body" the shadow is a dominant presence. It is a block of undifferentiated texture of burnt and raw sienna, raw umber, some indigo and Payne's grey. In "Painted Body" the shadow is more differentiated and subtle with varied textures, tonality and colour. In this image of the body the shadow is part of the flesh; there is porosity between figure and shadow rather than conflict.

At the beginning of the painting-process, "Transparent Rotunda" had a black and white photocopy and ten stones attached to its surface.¹⁹ The stones float in pictorial space like planets orbiting an invisible point of gravitational pull at the painting's core, while also being static objects that do not belong to the reality of pictorial space. These objects seem a little redundant, like relics left over from a retreating glacier. They do not perform the function of disturbing the picture plane, which is accomplished by the gravel field (Plate no.14.1) and the stone diagram (plate no.14.2). Their surfaces are painted, allaying them rather with the paint spots (plate no.14.3).



Plate no14.1 –Transparent Rotunda (preparatory drawing of arc or field)

¹⁹ See Appendix Four p.190

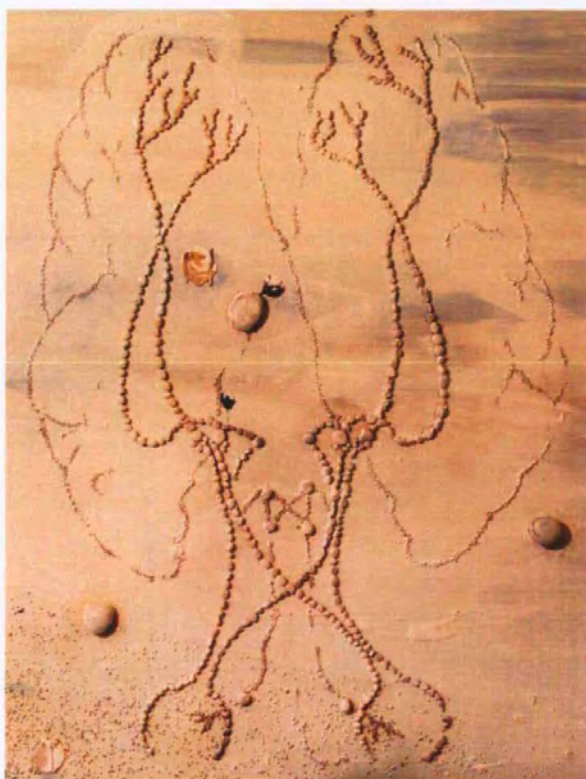


Plate no.14.2 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Stone Diagram)



Plate no.14.3 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Edible Paint Spots)

To create the gravel plane I used the material in a figurative way rather than simply as texture. I had first tentatively tried this in the scum on the water of "Slapton" and more effectively in the

shadow of "Virtual Body". The gravel in "Transparent Rotunda" suggests a 360-degree plane that arches around the viewer like a large semi-transparent wall.

The diagram made out of small stones was included in the painting to solve a visual problem.²⁰ Originally I used different coloured stones to depict the right and left visual pathways. However, this made the stone diagram too dominant of the pictorial space. After I had painted over the stones the diagram became more ethereal and began to shift in and out of the picture plane. The stone diagram had been incorporated in the painting and its function of deforming figurative closure secured.

I chose the image for "Transparent Rotunda" because its form and content was minimal: a sky and two stripes of colour that barely depict a fence and a lawn. Its minimal form and content allowed me to concentrate on the materials I used to realise it. This strategy of using three dominant bands as a rigid compositional device, through which materiality and abstraction can be explored, is a favorite of Peter Doig's. A good example of this is "Daytime Astronomy" (plate no.019). I also wanted to know how empty I could leave a painting. In the finished work, the upper area of sky is built up of many layers, including some gestural brush marks that use thick raw pigment, and some diluted washes that trickle down the canvas in rivulets (plate no.14.4). Others are semi-transparent layers of varnish and pigment brushed over the entire surface. The paint strives to emulate an ethereal cloudscape that we sense has depth but that our eyes can't determine. The lower area of sky holds heavy storm clouds (plate no.14.5). These are also made up of many layers of paint that give the clouds mass despite being partially hidden by the gravel arc. The fence and lawn are deliberately flat (plate no.14.6), concealing the horizon and so denying perspective. Spatial relations are marked by the sky as background, the fence and

²⁰ At one point in the painting-process, the sky shape – as defined by the edge of the gravel arc and the upper frame of the canvas – seemed to suggest a solid convex object. I needed some device to prevent this illusion. I remembered the line drawings I had used in "Death Head" and "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" and wondered if a stone diagram might be successful.

birches as middle ground and the fennel as foreground. Depth is realised through the subtle lines that delineate the arc's boundaries and the painting's layered materials. The material effect of the photocopy on the painting's surface was not significantly different from painting directly onto varnish.



Plate no.019 – Peter Doig "Daytime Astronomy"



Plate no.14.4 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Ethereal Sky)



Plate no.14.5 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Storm Clouds)



Plate no.14.6 – Transparent Rotunda detail (Flat Fence)

Image, Meaning, Material And Layering

Four interrelated themes emerged directly from this described activity of painting. They were rooted in this specific practice of painting but were developed and refined by my research into other painter's work and the writing of the theorists I had identified as exploring similar ideas. I have chosen to categorise these themes as image, meaning, material and layering. Each theme has necessitated the next, and although there is a sequential logic to their arrangement here, they emerged and were tested simultaneously in the studio and on the page.

Image

What lies at the heart of this research is the transfiguration of image from one state to another – from a photograph to a painting. My compulsion to use photographic source-images from which to make paintings has driven this enquiry since I returned to painting in 1998. All the strategies I have employed have sought to explore and clarify the intervals of the image's transfiguration from one state to the other.

“Why am I changing the quality of the photograph? Because it is too small. (Laughter) I am a painter, I love to paint. Using photographs was the only possible way to continue to paint. I couldn't have just used a model. That was impossible and an untimely endeavor that would have cut everything short. I can't do that. Not even Mr. (Lucian) Freud could do that. I have to use photographs. They provide new contents that were relevant to me and to others. That was my conviction.” (Richter, G. in Storr, R. (2002) p.293)

Images only exist in relation to other images.²¹ They belong to large groups, made up of smaller “family” groups. Images are continually evolving. They do not die, though they can be lost and if lost, they can be rediscovered. Consequently long genealogies of image can be traced, while also being present side by side. In this way images can operate similarly to ideas, but in a visual language rather than a verbal one. The transfiguration from lens to canvas is a further evolution of an image beyond its lens-based referents, an evolution that can alter our perception of whole

families of images. One of the most powerful means of altering our visual perception in painting is by bringing the body to the image, via the physical surface of the painting.

In the early stages of my research I was concerned with the language of images, and their power to transfigure self and world through their passage between personal and cultural space. I understood, through painting, that images generate sensation, but what I did not fully understand was the significance of the whole body in this process.

The effectiveness of my painting to explore the reception and generation of image has been the focus of my research from beginning to end. Merleau-Ponty²² describes the function of painting as *"essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible"* and says that *"Painting scrambles all our categories, spreading out before us its oneiric universe of carnal essences, actualized resemblances, mute meanings"* (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.130). As a painter I had always understood these processes visually. I knew that if I made a painting about an idea it could only ever be an illustration of some theory. It would be closed before it was even begun. What was important for me, as a painter, was to explore the sensation of vision as it occurred - the genesis of my own sight from the outside and from within. Not as a representation or something after the event, but as an experience or sensation in itself.

The Formation Of Carnal Images: The starting point for my research into image, which arose directly from my findings as a painter, was an understanding of the passage of images from external or cultural space²³ to internal or personal space and vice versa. I understood these findings as the reception and generation of image. These findings were reflected on and refined

²¹ Here image encompasses all forms - image, symbol and icon.

²² For a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty's Ideas and their significance to this research, in this and the following section, see Appendix One p.169.

²³ It is perhaps on the one hand misleading to talk of cultural space in relation to a collection of images or an iconography, but when we talk of a movement of images from one location to another, or inside and outside as Merleau-Ponty does it makes sense.

further in relation to Merleau-Ponty's ideas on images. Of images he says "*are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and imminent visibility which makes up the whole problem of the imaginary.*" (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.126). Merleau-

Ponty also explores the shifting status of images' interiority and exteriority in relation to flesh. Of the generation of images in flesh he says, "*They arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence...a carnal essence or icon of the first.*"²⁴ (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.126). According to Merleau-Ponty these carnal icons, or images as I understand them, are not faded copies of the world but the doubling of the world in flesh. Thanks to my direct experience of painting images, my reflections

on that activity and my reading of Merleau-Ponty's reflections on painting from a Phenomenological perspective, I came to understand what continued to engage me in painting - namely, how to make these carnal images visible.

Berger on Rembrandt

His best paintings deliver coherently very little to the spectator's point of view. Instead, the spectator intercepts (overhears) dialogues between parts gone adrift, and these dialogues are so faithful to a corporal experience that they speak to something everybody carries within them. Before his art, the spectator's body remembers its own inner experience.

Commentators have often remarked on the 'innerness' of Rembrandt's images. Yet they are the opposite of ikons. They are carnal images. The flesh of the *Flayed Ox* is not an exception but typical. If they reveal an 'innerness' it is that of the body. (Berger, J. (2001) pp.109 – 110)

Cyclopic And Stereoscopic Images: Central to my thesis is the transfiguration of lens-based images into paintings. I have come to categorise these two types of image as cyclopic²⁵ and stereoscopic after the lenses that generate them. In the case of photography it is the single lens

²⁴ By "first" Merleau-Ponty is referring to the actual object perceived.

²⁵ I chose the word cyclopic to partner stereoscopic and ally the single lens of the camera with the single lens monster from Greek mythology. The Cyclops is an old god, a Titan and represents mythic or primitive consciousness. I found these two definitions of image and the consciousness they induce very useful in my research into the perception of images in painting and photography. I later found a passage in Adorno, T and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*, 1979 (p.64) that also explores these two forms of consciousness. "...the Cyclops Polyphemus, bears his cartwheel-sized eye as a trace of the same (Lotus eaters) prehistoric world: the single eye recalls the nose and the mouth, more primitive than the symmetry of eyes and ears, which, with the security guaranteed by two unified perceptions, is the virtual prerequisite of identification, depth, and objectivity. Nevertheless, in comparison with the Lotus-eaters, Polyphemus represents a later stage in world development – the barbaric age proper, one of hunters and herdsmen."

of the camera and in the case of painting it is the dual lenses of the eyes. The way the image is generated is fundamental to its character and consequently to the influence it exerts on its receiver or viewer. In stereoscopic vision two images or perspectives become unified. These images are characterised by plurality, sensible depth and objectivity by virtue of having two points of view. In cyclopic vision there is only one image or perspective. These images are characterised by singularity, imaginary depth and subjectivity.

The photograph: The first thing to say concerning photographic images is that I love them. No, I desire and am stimulated by photographic images. I am seduced by their fiction. Culturally and individually our relationship to the photographic image is always shifting. Initially, it was heralded as an objective optical truth; a truth that liberated our perception, previously conditioned by the subjective vision of representational painters.²⁶ This perspective continues to exert an influence on everyone to a greater or lesser degree. We all perceive cyclopic image as a truthful analogue of an objective reality in some way some of the time. This perception enables us to maintain multiple layers of closure and consequently we can intervene in the world. An alternative perspective realised through postmodernism sees the endless creation, reproduction, circulation and recreation of cyclopic image/sign. This perception denies any objective truth in the original and establishes the simulacrum, a copy for which there is no original. The cyclopic image then refers to itself and its internal aesthetic construction, as well as to all the cyclopic images we have ever seen. However we have first encountered these images – by chance or intent – we allow them to form referents in our minds that condition both our memory and our imagination. So we in turn experience the cyclopic image as having conditioned our perception and at times we may seek deliverance from this tyranny. Equally, we are all too willing to subjugate our personal vision to its seductive promise of singular and universal truth, even though that “truth” holds good only till we look beyond the frame. We are all in love with the Cyclops (Plate No.020).



Plate no.020 – Dumas “We are all in love with the Cyclops”

In his book on painting and sensation, Deleuze describes paintings as instigating many levels or zones of sensation, but photographs as instigating only one. The question in relation to looking at cyclopic images is: are photographs capable of instigating multiple layers of sensation or are they capable only of a singular sensation? It is in the nature of the photograph to be flat, thus minimising any physical sensations induced by surface texture, manual or otherwise. This quality of a photograph's surface means we fall unimpeded into its imaginary space. More accurately we are reflected back into our own imagination supported by memory. Our memory of other photographs, or a language of photographs, conditions further viewing of the photograph. We are refining our perception of the photograph predominantly from memory using our imagination, which along with the memory has been previously conditioned by cyclopic images. We understand that we are looking at a flat surface with different areas of colour or tone on it that represent objects in space. Our body knows there is no space or texture to the objects. In contrast to this flat surface are the material surfaces of paintings, where the viewer perceives texture to the depicted objects and where many zones of sensation are open to him.

²⁶ Painters themselves have been attracted by this “objectivity” since this technology began.

Transfiguration Of Images In Painting: In the early period of my research, I understood the function of the imagination to be to generate image. However, as I reflected on the paintings that were emerging in my practical research, I realised that the function of the imagination has more to do with changing or working with images. This quote from Bachelard aptly described and confirmed my own findings.

"Imagination is always considered to be the faculty of forming images. But it is rather the faculty of deforming the images, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of changing images. If there is not a changing of images, an unexpected union of images, there is no imagination, no imaginative action. If a present image does not recall an absent one, if an occasional image does not give rise to a swarm of aberrant images, to an explosion of images, there is no imagination." (Bachelard, G. (1998), p.19).

The process of transfiguring a lens-based image into a painted image requires particular faculties of the imagination. In order to change the photographic image, I believe the painter, through his own unique activity of painting, must double the carnal images of his flesh²⁷. In so doing he returns these images to himself but in a renewed and altered state. He achieves this through the manipulation of his materials. Those materials can include many things beside paint. It is also of vital importance that the painter spends time intentionally looking at, and reflecting on, the painted image as it emerges, repeatedly exposing it to his own "flesh".

Merleau-Ponty's ideas on reversibility and a doubling of being have been of great importance to me in understanding the process of transfiguring images in painting. I think what Merleau-Ponty is trying to describe is the generation of carnal images through sight. As human beings, we are always forming a carnal equivalent to the world within ourselves that in many ways is more real for us than the actual concrete world we inhabit with our bodies. This generation of carnal images stems from the root of our experience of seeing, and is critical to the orientation of our

²⁷ See Appendix One, Reversability In Painting, page 169.

physical bodies in a physical environment. Imagination and memory, which both form and transform carnal images, deliver us the ability to see. However, they do not allow us the possibility of reflection on this formative experience as it occurs. With our imagination alone we are unable to revisit the genesis of world and self that occurs through the formation of carnal images. Having formed these carnal images, however, the body is blind to their existence. So, relying on our sensory experience alone, we are unable physically or mentally to encounter this realm of carnal images that is so vital to the quality and condition of the awareness we have of the world and of ourselves.²⁸ It is important to realise, however, that we only understand things in relation to the body and its encounter with the material world. The materiality of painting, through which the painter carries out his transfiguration of images provides, through its impact on the senses, an experience and therefore an understanding of sight. Paintings afford the viewer the possibility of bringing together his physical sensation of material and his mental encounter with image, allowing real access to the realm of carnal images that lies between body and mind, or in “flesh”. In order for a painting to provide clarity and durability of sensation in a sensing body (viewer’s), it needs to involve that body in its making and in its material construction.²⁹

It is only now when summarising my findings that I understand why it has been necessary for me to use photographs as the beginning of a painting – why it is so important to me to transfigure cyclopic images into stereoscopic ones. Through painting I seek to explore the nature of images and how we live

“I think that the way that the paintings come out is more a way of trying to depict an image that is not about a reality, but one that is somehow in between the actuality of a scene and something that is in your head.” (Doig, P. in Bosch, P. (2003) p.18)

²⁸ See Appendix One, The Image And The Actual, page173.

²⁹ In *Francis Bacon, the logic of sensation*, Deleuze explores Bacon’s conception of the diagram. The diagram is a collection of elementary visual forms that disrupt figurative closures and modulate sensations. A diagram involves the viewing body. It is the individual artist’s means of extracting the painting’s fact from its figurative closures. It derives structure from the painter’s body occupied with activity, but also from the figurative space it has disturbed. The way that the diagram integrates and modulates the sensation of both manual and optical space determines the realization and clarity of the painting’s fact - a fact that is accessible to both body and mind. (Deleuze G. 2003, pp99-110)

with them as individuals.

We understand the photograph as an analogue or copy of the world; it is an index and therefore has an un-coded relation to its object. The way we perceive this image is to imagine our self – i.e. our body – thrust into its depicted space. Because the photograph invites us to imagine this space, unimpeded by any coded relation to its object – such as a painting (icon) possesses – or by the materiality of its construction, our perception of the cyclopic image is predominantly realised by the mind's eye in the inner space of personal iconography and according to the reproductive imagination or memory. This inward perspective is the single, subjective and all-encompassing view of the Cyclops.

We understand painting as a material construction in the world; it is an icon and therefore has a coded relation to its object. The way we perceive this image or icon may seem similar to the way we perceive the image or index of a photograph; but there are essential differences. Firstly, we understand that we must perceive the painted image in relation to a code, as defined by our – or some other – culture. Secondly, we sense that the painted image has an actual, material presence in the world. Some images have this presence more than others, but each must be encountered by imagining the body as physically sensing it as an object. Because the painted image makes these two perceptual demands upon us, we are frustrated if we approach it solely in an optical fashion out of our reproductive imagination – that is, as though it were a photograph. Rather, we must *actually* look at the image, rather than reproduce it, and form it anew with our creative imagination. Our perception of the painted image is realised between our single mind's eye and our two physical eyes, in the inner space of our personal iconography and in cultural space on the exterior surface of the painting. This internal-cum-external perspective is the plural, objective and relative view of stereoscopic sight.

Meaning

Working with images necessitated me working with the meanings they inevitably generate. In particular how meaning is authored – lived with and owned – abandoned or changed. Nowhere is our instinct towards the realisation of closure more intent than when encountering images. We are so focused on imposing our linguistic closures or preconceived meanings onto the image that we deny its essential nature, that of openness.

In the early part of my research I perceived meaning as an inevitable consequence of producing images, and the relationship between images and their meanings as a problem to be negotiated and resolved. The principle strategy I employed in achieving such a resolution was to generate ambiguity and paradox within the image. I realised this negative strategy by layering multiple images that had ambiguous and paradoxical relationships with each other, as though to

“Yes, all these layering of images were supposed to neutralize the authorial charge. This kind of painting supposedly negated the author by using conflicting visual languages; they played lip service to the idea that meaning is constructed by “interpretive communities”. Culture is made of interpretive communities or consensus and not by individual geniuses. I wanted to make work that came directly from the center. I wanted to make a situation that purged my guilt about this context. (Curran, J. in Gingeras, M.A. (2002) p.76)

resist the generation of meaning – resist signification. In contrast to this antipathy towards meaning was my desire to make connections between images and engage in the formulation of meaning in my painting. The first painting of my research shows my antipathy towards meaning, while the second shows my desire to formulate it. “Death Head” is a collection of disparate images in which I deliberately failed to realise narrative meaning between the painting’s layers. But “The Fates After Goya” is a collection of images from whose interrelationship I eventually formed a narrative full of meaning. I have explored that narrative in the relevant section of this text³⁰. It was important to me that I had no prior intention of meaning towards the images, because such an approach would inevitably lead to a closed work or the dead illustration of some preconceived thought. Also important to me was the viewer’s freedom to realise meaning in the

images, or to fail, or to refrain from doing so. That is, I wished him to be involved in the painting's creation. I wished to invite the viewer to realise his own meaning in the work. These two instincts of antipathy and desire were the starting points of my research into how meaning ought to function in my painting, and from which my later findings evolved.

My understanding of meaning in relation to image has been refined and deepened by an ongoing practical exploration in conjunction with my discovery of Lawson and his ideas on closure. Of particular relevance to my understanding of meaning were his ideas on material and texture.³¹

Lawson's ideas not only helped to contextualise my reflections but also informed the strategies I employed to resolve problems I had

encountered in my work. Lawson's theory of closure confirmed my own understanding of the necessity of meaning – or the generation of material by closure – when encountering the world and seeking to intervene in it. But at the same

The small gap between the explanation of a picture and a picture itself provides the only possible perspective on painting. My comments refer only to its ambiguity. Behind some pictures there are ten other paintings from different years. I can't project myself completely into the picture; if I did that I wouldn't be detached enough to paint it. Explanations come later. Thinking and feeling and working out feelings are different elements, each with a rhetoric of its own. A memory-free zone arises between conception and execution.
(Tuymans, L. in Looock, U. (2003) p.112)

time his theory also confirmed my

understanding of the necessity of ambiguity or texture, to destabilise the reductive influence of meaning or the material of closure. Destabilising closures through the proliferation of texture allowed me to realise new layers of meaning and hence to recreate and refresh old images. These findings on the function of meaning helped me to identify and understand the process of transfiguring images, with which my practice was deeply engaged.

I realised that if we understand image as a complex network of closures, then significance and meaning are its material while ambiguity and paradox are its texture. Lawson's description of the

³⁰ See section Titles, Images And Meanings p123.

³¹ See Appendix Two, Material And Texture, page182.

relationship between material and texture summed up well my contrary instincts towards meaning and ambiguity. In the early stages of my research I understood the sensitive relationship of meaning and ambiguity in the wider context of images and their transition from a person's inner mental space to his outer cultural space. This capacity of images to alter their material through a change of context was of great interest to me. How meaning is exchanged between personal iconography and culture was a question I hoped to explore – but not to answer – in my research. Such questions will occupy my practice as long as I paint. Of specific interest to me was – and will always be – how images and their meanings are renewed and given further layers of significance by the painter's reworking of them.

One of the reasons I engage in the activity of painting is to enter a state of reverie³², a condition outside space and time in which my images are rejuvenated and I can dream with intent. I also wish this state to be an experience attainable by viewers of my paintings. Through reverie I am able to transfigure the image and its signifiers from one state to another far beyond anything I can have consciously envisaged. The evolution of how meaning is able to function in my work is evident in the paintings themselves. I think this state of reverie or unconscious looking is similar to what Laura Owens (plate no.022) describes as "*a space of personal freedom*" (www.believmag.com/issues) and Neo Rauch (plate no.021) talks of in relation to viewers of his work – "*...give them an opportunity to diverge from the course of reason.*" (**Gingeras, M. A.** (2002) pp.98 - 100)

³² See Reverie – Looking For Meaning p.125



Plate no.021 – Neo Rauch "Die Wahl"

Paintings the way I would have them are in position to lead viewers off the path at a right angle. They captivate them in their rational behavior and give them an opportunity to diverge from the course of reason. It is one of this author's obligations to design this intersection with a sense of responsibility, and I believe that a reduction of these devices to novelties and pure progressiveness would be of little use. The characteristics of quality that I consider important are originality, suggestiveness, and timelessness; the predicate "one hundred percent zeitgeist" to me has the ring of an execution cry. Zeitgeist painting scrapes at spots that are already sore, while timeless art elevates us from the commonplace and at most incites a delicate phantom pain that indicates the presence of archetypal wounds. (Rauch, N. in Gingeras, M. A. (2002) pp.98 - 100)



Plate no.022 – Laura Owens Untitled

"I feel like there's a space of personal freedom for me where my art-making happens. When I go to that space, I'm completely in this world of possibility. There's no inner emotional state that I could compare it to; it's a space that has its own properties, and they don't have to do with happy or sad or any of that. I would never say to myself, "Okay, let me go into this space of freedom in order to show you about the pain I have." Do you know what I mean? I'm not in the space of freedom if I'm in pain. I'm in sort of a contracted, negative, or dark space. My work gets created in this space of freedom, and that's why a lot of it has to do with experimentation, invention, and sort of a juxtaposition of things you wouldn't normally juxtapose." (Owens, L. in www.believmag.com/issues)

Material

There has been a long tradition in the history of painting that reduces the material presence of paint by laying it thinly over

a flat surface, in order to facilitate an optically dominant encounter with an image. The privileging of optical perception has meant the denial of the physical, three dimensional and material properties of paint, which in part has contributed to the traditions and conventions of image making and reading that are our visual heritage today. The photograph is the epitome of that tradition. However, the painter knows in his flesh, in his waters and in his bones that paint is material, even if this is unacknowledged on the canvas: he knows because he must handle paint to make a painting.

Materiality emerged as a response to the challenges I was encountering with images and their meanings. In the paintings that preceded my research, I used materials primarily to describe the structure and form of an image. My intention with paint was to use it to fulfill my pictorial requirements. The emphasis was on image rather than the materiality of paint.

What is the material component of an image, and what is its function in figurative painting? A “material image” is generated when paint performs more than its purely figurative function, when it is allowed to behave according to its nature - when the material of paint simultaneously present and represent form. The material image in figuration is what brings the sensing body to the image so that it can re-encounter its own carnal images in materials. This re-encountering of carnal images is for me the formative function of the material image. When a person encounters an image without a material component, that is, an image that’s surface texture or materiality has been minimised, their experience is dominated by the eye and by memory, or their personal iconography. Our experience of material images, via the eyes, involves the body through imagination.

The Imagination: The imagination is our capacity to generate images. There are two ways in which we can do this. We can recall images from memory, and we can create and reconfigure images. Bachelard identifies these two functions of image generation as the reproductive

imagination and the creative imagination. We frequently perform both functions simultaneously. For instance, in sight everything we see is generated within us as an image. This image is, however largely the product of our memory; it is a reproduction of some previous image similar to what we are actually seeing. Only a small portion of this new image is created out of our present sense perception.³³ The reproduced image, or collection of images, are the material that enable us to see/experience space and motion, which is an act of creative imagining. For us to perceive movement or space for example we have to create it - for ourselves - within ourselves. We do not actually sense motion or space because we only optically sense the actual as a series of still, two-dimensional images of form. The creative imagination gives texture to these images from memory and joins them seamlessly together in the realisation of movement and space.³⁴ From a neurological perspective it is impossible for the brain to process all this new information making it more efficient to concentrate on its synthesis, filling in the gaps with previously processed information. However the creative and reproductive functions of the imagination have far more significance for us than the division of brain activities.

By differentiating the functions of the imagination, the quality of their respective natures is revealed. We live on a "visual threshold"³⁵ between two worlds, the outer and the inner. It is the purpose of the imagination to open up these worlds to us, so that we may have visions of them, and also to facilitate an exchange between them. Through vision we may discover form, depth and colour. Bachelard suggests that the faculty of the imagination that is oriented to encounter the external world is engaged with realizing new form, while the faculty of the imagination that is oriented to encounter the internal (the world of carnal images), is engaged with touching

³³ See. Appendix One, *The Image And The Actual* p.171, in which an experiment is described that seems to prove this.

³⁴ An example of this is our ability to see movement in film. If we are presented with a series of 25 or less images per second we fail to see movement.

³⁵ The visual threshold, which is proposed in the title of my thesis, is an imagined border between external and internal space. See *An Image Of The Visual Threshold*, p. 162.

material. Bachelard identifies these faculties as the formal imagination and the material imagination.³⁶

Bachelard's conception of the formal and material imagination has parallels with Lawson's ideas on the relationship of material and texture. If we conceive of Lawson's principles of material and texture at work in the imagination, we would have one type of imagination oriented towards closure and the material it has realised, and the other oriented towards openness or texture and the potential new form it can realise. I find Bachelard's suggestion that formal imagination is outwardly oriented and material imagination inwardly oriented very interesting in relation to my own understanding of material, form, internal space, external space and the visual threshold. However, Lawson's ideas suggest that all these notions are impermanent closures, and that there are no external or internal worlds beyond these closures we realise and share. Material and texture can be equally realised in the closures of internal and external space, or it is equally possible to discover new form in memory and personal iconography, and materiality in our visual senses of "the world".

The Sensation Of Material On The Body: The importance of paint takes on a new significance in the context of the material imagination. Paint and the composition of materials on a surface have the ability to engage our sensing body in the process of perception: thereby bringing the material imagination to an encounter with the carnal images that are encrusted into flesh. The carnal images that Ponty describes as being '*encrusted into flesh*' and as being '*the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside*' (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993)

³⁶ Bachelard sees the principles of form and material at work in the imagination, just as they are in nature. In nature the formal principal is responsible for all that has new form, for variety and formal beauty but which is not essential to being, while the material imagination is responsible for that which is necessary and eternal. In the mind the formal imagination is attracted by novelty, the picturesque, and the unexpected, while the material imagination is attracted by the composition and permanence of things. Bachelard sees the material imagination as generating "germs" that contained form, a formal principle that is deeply embedded in substances. "*In the heart of matter there grows an obscure vegetation; in the night of matter*

p.126), are the fruits of the material imagination as it labours with matter; they are the forms of material discovered deep in substances. Sensations are the exertion of impermanent forces on the body; the character of these forces result from the principle of form according to Bachelard or texture according to Lawson. The sensations of paint and materials on the body in painting can be an encounter with a layered nature of being, with a doubling and reversal of flesh, with the inside and outside of image and the encounter of one principle of imagination by the other.

Through the use of gravel and paint, I have been trying to discover "form" in materials, in the sense of the physical substance of my paintings. That is, I have been trying to discern the "form" of carnal images, those images that are caught in my flesh and held in my memory. I have also been trying to give a material presence to the "forms" of my imagination. I have been trying to do these things by addressing a work to the whole body as well as to the eye, through a concentration on the material surface of the painting.

I have used gravel as a material in two ways. Principally, I have used it as texture, and where I have done so the viewer must imagine his whole body encountering the material surface of the painting in an experience of touch. But I have also used gravel figuratively. There the viewer must encounter the texture or materiality of the painting through an optical experience of the image. In my practice, this is how texture or form is discovered in material, and how material is discovered in texture or form. The formal imagination operates in an experience of optical perception, and the material imagination in a hypothetical or imagined encounter of physical touch.

How I worked with materiality and meaning during the research period seemed to grow increasingly polarised. At the beginning, I was focused on meaning and how it functioned in

black flowers blossom." Bachelard felt that it is the functions of the material imagination and its "images of matter" that are not properly understood by philosophy. (Bachelard G, (1998), pp.10-11)

image, while discreetly – almost unconsciously – exploring materiality. It felt like a change of allegiance, then, when I shifted my focus to the materiality of images, while discreetly exploring meaning. It was only later that I realised the importance of this relationship in my painting. The dynamic relationship of meaning and materiality was responsible for the breadth of engagement in my work, and for the structure of my research. I learned that to work creatively with apparently opposing perspectives, and to bind them in a paradox of difference, can lead to a new perception of depth and objectivity. Such perception is a quality of stereoscopic sight.

Layering

The strategy of layering, which began as a way of resolving figurative closures or conventions, has become a principle by which I make paintings. The more paint that is laid on the surface of the canvas the more texture it generates. The more layers of meaning that are realised then the richer the texture of understanding becomes.

The principle of layering is determined as much by the process of perception as by the process of painting itself. At the beginning of my research I was engaged with layering images, either on one canvas or by physically joining canvases together. Then I began layering multiple images to generate textured meanings or new ways for the viewer to read the work. I also used layered images to generate texture in pictorial space. There I simply sought to generate enough texture to destabilise or deform the material realised as meaning and the material realised as pictorial space.

Layering then is an activity that realises and/or manipulates material³⁷; this could be the sensible material of paint or the reflexive material of meaning. From the activity of layering, texture³⁸ is

³⁷ Material in the sense Lawson uses it. (Lawson H, 2001)

³⁸ Texture in the sense Lawson uses it. (Lawson H, 2001)

inevitably generated. Texture can be realised in painting in very different ways. When the painter paints figuratively an image is only ever partially achieved, the part of figuration that is unrealised remains in the work as texture. Texture exists here, where material ceases to be material – at the surface of its disintegration. Texture also exists in the space or moment between the viewer's experience of figurative space and the material surface of the painting. Finally, texture is present for the viewer in their reflection of the painting and the way they negotiate meaning within it.

Artists have employed numerous strategies of generating texture in their work. In painting this has been predominantly realised through meaning and the choice of subject matter, but also through the treatment of paint and the actual layering of materials to form physical texture.

Layering is a process of forgetting and rediscovering, of obscuring and highlighting, rather than erasing. Most painting involves the building up of an image using layers of paint. These layers of paint are necessary and present in the formation of the painted image; the layers of paint below the surface are only partially hidden, but their presence is sensed throughout the whole painting. Painting is often the play of visibility between these layers. Priming,

"I've already pointed out that I deal primarily with existing images in my work in order to demonstrate the inadequacy of memory. I still remember that, in the context of a symposium on recollecting and forgetting held several years ago at Amsterdam University, I happened to speak about whether we shouldn't ask ourselves, since the contemporary world is so imbued with its contemporaneity, whether there is still a need for recollection at all. When we go to the seaside nowadays, we are also visiting the image of the sea and, as a result, some images are obviously more archaic than others. I believe that painting is primarily concerned with archaic or iconic types of images." (Tuymans, L. in Gingeras, M.A. (2002) pp.119 - 120)

undercoating, over-painting, and highlighting are necessary acts of layering, in which two or more layers come together, forming a new layer that contains texture. A painter understands and uses layering directly from an experience of memory and a layering of images in their personal iconography.

Within the creative imagination and the reproductive imagination (**Bachelard, G.** (1998), p.13), images move in and out of visibility; they are layers of awareness that generate texture in the other images that relate to them. It is a necessary function of the creative imagination that it forgets, laying new images over old. By forgetting we commit these images to flesh, where they become the layered carnal images that form the foundation of our personal iconography. Through forgetting, these images become the material of the reproductive and creative imagination.

Layers Of Images, Meanings And Materials – A Summary: My findings on layering concern the three other central themes of my research – image, meaning and material. A summary of these findings is set out below. First – layering multiple images could be used to disrupt pictorial space. Second - layering could explore how images relate to each other in terms of meaning, composition and sensation. Third – layering could be used narratively.³⁹ Through layering images I could explore the narrative of a painting's construction, and so come to understand the importance of painting as a process occurring in time. Fourth – layering could be used to treat areas of a painting differently. The layering of several images within one painting in the earlier works was directly responsible in the later works for deliberately treating areas of a painting differently and thereby generating distinct zones or domains of sensation. And fifth – layering could be used to depict the experience of seeing, with each perceived image becoming a layer in a person's image of self and world or iconography.

Initially I used multiple images to generate layers of textured meaning that disrupted singular readings of the figurative images in my paintings. It was necessary to frame the layers by titling

³⁹ In some very early paintings (early 90's) I used multiple images in one painting to describe a physical journey or tell a story. In those early paintings, I enjoyed the challenge of depicting time – i.e. the successive events of a narrative – in a medium that was not time-based. In this research, however, I have not tried to do that.

the work lest the generated texture deform the image's meaning completely and the painting become meaningless. In later paintings that consisted of only one image, instead of meanings being attached to disparate images, they were layered within that single one. This approach led to single-image paintings rich in layers of meaning and terrestrial materials, rather than paintings comprising a collection of multiple-image layers whose character was more sign than image.

Initially, I used the material gravel in conjunction with the painted image, while maintaining both as separate layers, to texture the painting. As my research developed, however, I began forming the image itself from layers of material, rather than treating it as an entity separate from those layers. These material findings, alongside my exploration of Deleuze's ideas on the importance of sensation in the perception of a painting and Merleau-Ponty's ideas on carnal images, led me to reflect on two things. First, I realised the importance of addressing the painting to the viewer's whole body through the materiality of the image; and, second, of providing the viewer with different zones of experience in which to encounter the work.

Through layering, the viewer is brought closer to the actual – or, more correctly, to the experience of seeing, for we see by the layering of sensation, imagination, memory and linguistic reflection in thought. Perhaps this is what Merleau-Ponty means by 'Hyper-reflection'⁴⁰, a moment of awareness at a point of genesis, where self and world come into being through sight. It is vital to remember that this awareness is not linguistic but visual. A painting can open up this layered moment of genesis for exploration.

Having narrated the story of the research and established the theoretical frameworks with which I have critically reflect on the work. The remainder of this text will be concerned with "opening up" the individual works comprising the exhibition and show how these paintings evidence my findings.

A Practice Of Painting

The central themes of my practice, which the curation of this exhibition has sought to evidence, and which my research has sought to establish, are here explored in greater depth through the individual works from where they emerged. These short texts are collected together under the four groupings of works forming the exhibition and follow the four themes established in the narrative of the research – image, meaning, material and layering. It is important to reiterate that the work and the themes are all relational, and that each theme could have been explored in relation to any of the paintings.

I hope that having described the “materials”, “tools” and “narrative” of the research, the reader - and viewer - will be better able to explore and reflect on these paintings, either in the flesh or in the reproductions that accompany the text. These paintings and this accompanying text *are* my thesis. They are open to view, open to an exchange⁴¹ and open to closure.

The final section of this paper is concerned with reflecting critically on the exhibition of paintings. Through this collection of short texts the theoretical frameworks that have emerged from the different strands of my research - the central themes of my practice, the work and voices of the other painters and the ideas of the theorists, are grounded in the individual paintings and in my practice.

⁴⁰ See Appendix One, Sensation p. 169

⁴¹ This exchange is the exchange of images between the painter’s personal iconography, the painting, and the viewer’s personal iconography.

"Death Head" And "The Fates After Goya" – Three Reflections On Meaning

Titles, Images And Meaning: With most of my paintings, meanings only fully emerge at the end of the work when the title discloses itself to me.

My titles function as invitations to the viewer to realize meaning within a suggested framework, as defined by the images of the paintings and the viewer's personal iconography. A painter determines the parameters of a viewer's visual experience of their painting. For me titles are a means of applying further layers of meaning – further parameters – to the visual closures already present in the work. It affords a way into the image, but one that linguistically conditions an experience of the painting for the viewer.

Coming up with titles is often an arduous process because my interest in the etymological roots of even the most banal terms leads me to sediments of meaning that sometimes introduce unexpected impulses to the intentions of the painting. But occasionally a word can trigger a painting. It can happen that a word develops an incredible atmospheric undertow in the direction of a painting that produces itself, where my only duty is to assist. Such moments are precious, and they bring me even closer to my mother tongue, for it is only here that such experiences can occur. (Rauch, N. in Gingeras, M.A. (2002) pp.98 - 100)



Plate no.023 Goya "The Fates"

I have used a very loose interpretation of Goya's original image in this painting (plate no.023), but the image retains his allegorical meaning. Goya's fates were painted in the context of political

turmoil and social tragedy. Goya's fates reappear in my work in the context of personal turmoil and tragedy. They float over a snowy Devon landscape with two faces, the old crone's and the young innocent's (plate no.2.4). The painting is only partially seen on the canvas; it is seen fully in the viewer's mind, in a space formed in part by the image from Goya and in part by the image he creates in his own imagination of the painting in front of him. The painting is thus seen at the juncture of imagination and memory.⁴² Both images and painters undergo a renewal process, elements of which recur every time an artist paints. They happen every time he enters the canvas and "paint through" the figurative closures of his culture or his individual psyche – that is, through his public or personal iconographies.

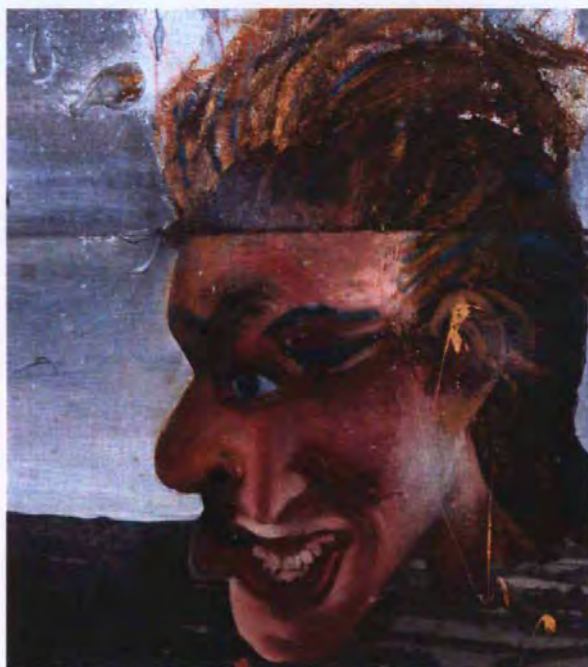


Plate no.2.4 – The Fates After Goya detail (Crone And Innocent)

⁴² This is the case even if the viewer is unfamiliar with Goya's painting, because we construct much of what we "see" from memory, see Appendix One, *The Image And The Actual* p.173. The viewer who is familiar with the original will have further layer of images and meaning to draw from.

The concept of Fate is an invisible image, an idea that provides human beings with meaning so that we can interpret the world in a particular way. This invisible image⁴³ can be made visible to the viewer through the use of archetypal images that bring with them a shared cultural meaning. Specific meaning can also be realised through personal iconography. The power of our personal iconography is felt keenly and often unquestioningly. The images of our personal iconography can be deeply enriched when the person re-encounters them in art, particularly if those images are re-encountered materially – that is, they have a material dimension in the physical world, which is where they originated.

Reverie – Looking For Meaning: If meaning arrives late in the making of a painting, what purpose do the proceeding painterly activities fulfil and what is the function of the unrealised images and over-painted surfaces? Over what terrain are the Death Head Moth and the Fates hovering? A painting is a landscape, over which hovers meaning, but through which we can often sense the “historical body” of the painting. The “body” of this work – its materiality – is made up of barely distinguishable layers, forgotten or partially forgotten elements, or “living species”, whose genealogy only now bears fruit and whose bones form the soil on which the image is now firmly rooted.

I spent a long time making “The Fates After Goya”. For much of that period, I was searching for the right set of images, and searching in vain. I was both conscious and unconscious – unconscious of what those images might be, but conscious that I was failing to find them. Yet this process of conscious-yet-unconscious looking has yielded an image of surprising integrity. For example, the image of my daughter, my flesh, my future (plate no.2.5), the landscape, my

⁴³ My understanding is that images can be encountered through different modes of awareness, as an idea, which is invisible, or as a visible image in the mind, which itself has many particularities. It can for example be a memory, a dream, a symbol, and so on. This plurality of images share a common genealogy.

environment, my home (plate no.2.6), the two faces, my relationship (plate no.2.7), the album covers, my sensory enjoyment (plate no.2.8), and the art space – my occupation (plate no.2.9).



Plate no.2.5 The Fates After Goya detail (Daughter)



Plate no.2.6 The Fates After Goya detail (Snow Landscape)



Plate no.2.7 The Fates After Goya detail (Two Faces)



Plate no.2.8 The Fates After Goya detail (Album Covers)



These half-awake moments in which the flotsam accumulates in my catch basin and rearranges itself to a new organization are the essence of my painting. Perhaps it is understandable that for instance a conscious and deliberate discussion of issues of domestic German cultural policy would have to take place far outside the borders of my workshop. As a private person I would have something to contribute, but other worlds are reflected on my canvases.

What is deeper, though, is the question of the circumstances of our collective memory. I expect that the special characteristics of the apparatus I so elaborately described greatly facilitate the identification of archetypal ciphers, and that the measured influx of memory and perception particles can lead to visual condensate of surprising and unpredictable intensity of expression. This is why I believe I can view paintings as the continuation of the dream with other media. (Rauch, N. in Gingeras, M.A. (2002) pp.98 - 100)

Plate no.2.9 The Fates After Goya detail (Art Space)

There is an integral logic to the above images, which suggests conscious intention and deliberate construction. But where does this logic come from? If I construct a painted image that comprises of several component images in an unconscious manner, and then introduce a final image or title that imparts a logical meaning to all the other images and the painting as a whole - what is happening? Can I as painter find a unifying meaning or logic to *any* collection of images however disparate or random they may be? Or is there a guiding intelligence at work in my subconscious, which curates the images of a painting? Do I subconsciously choose images that relate to a particular subject from a state of reverie, which are later consciously realised with a title or by the inclusion of an archetypal image? Perhaps the reason I, and other painters engage in the activity of painting is to enter a state of reverie, a condition outside space and time where our

images are rejuvenated and we can "intentionally dream". As Merleau- Ponty says of reversibility in vision *"Seeing is not a certain mode of thought or presence to self. it is the means given me for being absent from myself, for being present from within at the fission of Being, only at the end of which do I close up into myself"*. (Merleau-Ponty M. in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.146)

What is being worked with in any human experience is a plurality of sensations, images and linguistic thought-structures. But in painting these are framed by a single mode of experience - that of image. Painting, as an image-based philosophy-in-action, is intimate with Merleau- Ponty's system of reversibility and the principle of flesh. The painter knows or senses that he must "take" (imagine) his body into the world and the world into his body in order to make visible the invisible images or carnal images, which are the inner structures of his flesh. For the painter to take his body into the imagined depth of exteriority and interiority he must leave the visual threshold, the site of reflectivity and authorship. We as human beings are capable of reflection and self-awareness only through our passage to the oneiric world of image. Only by dreaming are we capable of sight – indeed, of vision. For the painter to realize his work he must dream it. It must be at once beyond himself and of himself.

Material And Texture In Relation To Meaning: In my own work, I have always been interested in the sensitive interplay of what Hilary Lawson refers to as "material" and "texture" throughout the different elements of the painting – that is, its images, meanings, materials and layers. In these works I was primarily focused on exploring material and texture in the meaning and reading of images.

For example, in my painting "Death Head", I present the viewer with several layered images, or a number of separate closures. There are the two still lives after Warhol and Basquat, one of which is inverted. There is the landscape that claims the pictorial space of the painting (plate no.1.4).

There is the icon of death from the Tarot, whose head has been erased (plate no.1.5). There is the image of the Death head moth (plate no.1.6), which together with the Tarot icon shares the meaning with the title. And there are the photographs of family members (plate no.1.7). All this material is the result of perceptual and linguistic closures. They are my closures, derived from my own experience, which is unlikely to coincide with the viewer's. The viewer's desire to realise all these closures as one, to generate new material in the form of an overall meaning to the painting, is inherent to his nature as a "closure machine".⁴⁴ However, he is thwarted in achieving an overall closure, because of the disparate nature of the realised material. The more he seeks overall meaning the more he implicates himself in the work by his reliance on formal linguistic closures, whose temporal nature only generates further texture. The material of the painting thus "vibrates" with the movement inherent in its texture, and the stability of the realised closures – both mine and the viewer's - is threatened. At this point we must cease from reading the painting and choose to explore it in another way or abandon the whole encounter.



plate no.1.4 Death Head detail (Misty Landscape)

⁴⁴ See Appendix Two, Systems Of Closure p.179



Plate no. 1.5 – Death Head detail (Erased Head)

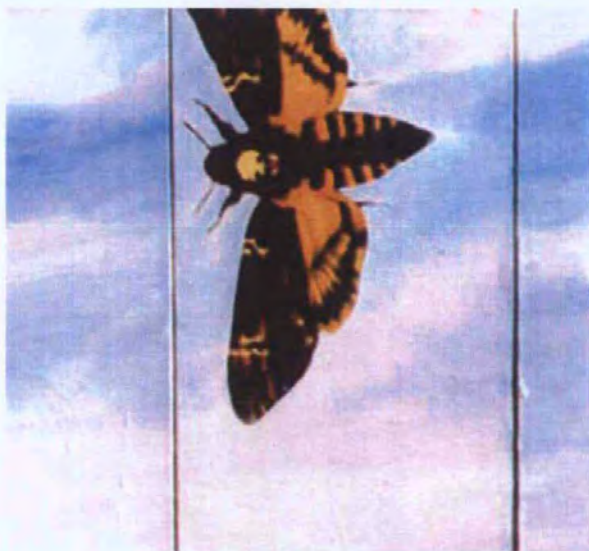


Plate no. 1.6 – Death Head detail (Moth)



Plate no. 1.7 – Death Head detail (Family Photographs)

"The Fates After Goya" and "Death Head" explore an exchange of images and meanings between the painter, the painting and the viewer, which at the beginning of my research was addressed primarily to the formal imagination. As the research progressed, I also began focusing on the relationship between material and texture in paint and the physical construction of an image, as it inhabited the surface of the canvas and was sensible to the body through the material imagination.

**"Adam And Eve Banished From Interior", "Spot Light", "Master Copy" And "100-1" –
Three Reflections On Layering**

Disrupting Figurative Closures By Layering: In making "Adam And Eve Banished From Interior" I used the layering of materials, images and their meanings to disrupt the figurative closures that can beset my work. In this painting I have laid three images over each other, all of which share one pictorial space, while maintaining a degree of separation. The first image is the interior, a hallway in a hotel or block of flats. The image of the interior dictates the dominant pictorial space of the painting, which was originally derived from a photographic image⁴⁵ (plate no.3.5). The perspective of the interior image is distorted, with the vertical walls seeming to splay outwards towards the top of the painting. My intention in using it was to achieve a sense of spatial distortion and therefore unease. This sensation is partially obscured but is still present and complements the angel well, as if the ceiling of the hall were opening up to receive the descent of this heavenly creature (plate no.3.6). The erotic line drawing forms the second image, which hovers between the other two images, and thus does not really occupy pictorial space at all. The third image is an interpretation of Masaccio's painting, "Adam and Eve banished from paradise" (plate no.024). The three figures inhabit the space of the interior image but at the same time point beyond it.

⁴⁵ Art Image – film still from Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980)



Plate no.3.5 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior (Source Image)



Plate no.3.6 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior detail (Angel)



Plate no.024 – Masaccio "Adam And Eve Banished From Paradise"

The light box (plate no.3.7), lead sword and gravel form the painting's material layer, giving the work a very physical presence, which includes the viewer's whole body in sensing the image. Rather than simply incurring an optically dominant experience (or an experience dominated by the eyes), which is what a conventional, two-dimensional image induces.

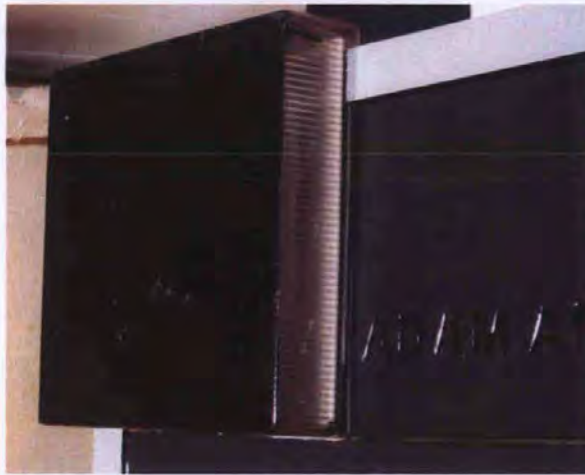


Plate no.3.7 – Adam And Eve Banished From Interior detail (Light Box)

The title of the painting “Adam And Eve Banished From Interior” provides a further linguistic layer to the work. The title is materially layered or placed on the canvas behind the angel’s head, but it also generates layers of meaning for the viewer. The duality⁴⁶ of the title unites the two dominant images of the painting, Adam and Eve, with the interior. The closure that the title imposes on the painting also frames a set of questions or is an invitation to make a further set of closures. The potential meanings generated by the conjunction of these two layers of image are rich in texture and are distinctly subjective, because our individual response to any archetype can be uniquely personal.

Layers Of Sensation: I began the work “100-1” in 2000, a year after my son Oskar died. For a long time, the left canvas (as it is now) remained in the studio. Normally I feel an urgency to finish a painting but with “100-1” I felt that it was right that it remained unfinished until a particular stage of grieving was complete. The image of myself and Rebecca in the hospital on the day Oskar died haunted me. I was not able to relinquish this image until I painted the sea

⁴⁶ The title is a symbolic sign and has characteristics of both index and icon. An index in that it defines an un-coded relationship to the painting - i.e. the painting depicts Adam and Eve as they are banished from an

nearly three years later, which released it. The evolution of this work shows how a particular image can be caught in flesh and then re-encountered through painting.

The image of the sea in "100-1" is open to symbolic readings, but through an attention to materials, it should also stimulate sensations in the body of the viewer, formed by his own physical encounters with that body of liquid. The sea image should transport him to his own sensations of the sea but this movement is impeded by figurative closures, which my lack of skill or vision was unable to deliver from convention. However, the painting works because the point of focus that generates sensation in the image is initially Rebecca's face; it then widens to embrace the two figures. The fact that the sea is a conventional optical image – an illustration, rather than a living image that has resonance for the body – is acceptable in the context of the whole painting, indeed desirable, because a more unorthodox rendering may have detracted from the principal point of focus.

Normally, my intention when making a painting is primarily to work with materials and an image on a surface, allowing the image to become transfigured by texture – by both textured meaning and textured materials. However my intention for "100-1" was more specific. Through the image I wanted to stimulate and explore layers of sensation associated with loss, and to test the viability of paint to accomplish these things. This specific intention determined specific meanings for the image from the outset, an approach that is unusual in my work. Over the three years in which the painting remained unfinished in my studio, the sensations the image generated for me became surprisingly plural and textured. The singular sensation of pain gradually turned into a plurality of sensations that moved through progressive and mutually pervasive stages: pain, loss, acceptance, compassion, love and sorrow. I was at last able to work with this image, because it was no longer singular in its meaning or sensation. In fact, to my surprise – because my own

interior. And an icon in that it has a coded relationship to the painting – i.e. it requires the viewer to engage with a set of culturally coded meanings. See footnote no.17 p.81.

sensations in response to Oskar's death, which had initially prompted it, were of course still vivid – the painting had come to have little meaning beyond the plurality of sensations contained within it. And because of its long gestation, "100-1" is occupied less with the specific situation that sparked its creation than with how we human beings live with images – it is occupied with the invisible images of pain and loss, the sensations those images have upon the body, and how we hold them in our flesh. Luc Tymans' work "Embitterment" is another painting, which seems to deal with these formative emotions in relation to the body (plate no.025).



In *Embitterment* three paintings forming one work are hung above one another. The middle one is the most important, since it looks like an ornament. The middle passes through all three vertically arranged paintings, creating the impression of a spine – the three paintings seem to be connected into one. The colour is radiant orange, very deep at the same time. They show embroidered flowers, lying flat. They give a sense of beauty and grief – something that has sunk very deep and continues to sink, something that could be a soul, a dark soul. This work gives an idea of embitterment. The three units of the picture should be considered as an emotional self-portrait that coincides with the body, showing the inside of the body. One the one hand beauty, the possibility of creating it, and on the other hand the impossibility of understanding it. The picture came out of a feeling of rage, and the feeling of being excluded from oneself, incapable of conveying this to anyone else. It was a kind of regression. In this sense it is a very existential work. It seems to me that the picture is painted to last, because it has changed from rage to grief. The form is completely determined by the intensity. It no longer represents, but only exists. (Tuymans, L. in Looock, U. (2003) p.142)

Plate no.025 – Luc Tuymans "Embitterment"

"Slapton", "Babes In The Wood", "Oskar", "Pinkville Study" and "Pinkville" - Three Reflections On Image

Testing My Practice Of Transfiguring Images: As I pointed out before⁴⁷ in the course of rendering some figurative image I often experience a sudden "uninterest" in it. At that moment, if the painting is to proceed creatively, I must rid myself of – at least partially – the conventional characteristics of the original image, in an apparently destructive act of the type Deleuze termed "Deformation" or "Crisis". It is in the resolution of that state of crisis inflicted on figuration that the image's "transfiguration" can occur. But I wanted to test if it was always necessary in my painting to bring an initial image into a state of crisis.

I decided to take two similar images as my starting points (plate no.7.5) and allow one painting, "Babes In The Wood", to evolve after my established strategy. With the second painting, "Slapton", I resolved to realize the chosen image without any transfiguration by the introduction of other elements. By observing the evolutions of these two paintings in relation to each other I hoped to question and clarify particular aspects of my practice. These were: the act of bringing crisis or trauma to the figurative image; the use of materials; the placing of two or more images in relation to each other; the construction of successive but contrasting layers; and the absence of conscious intent, allowing the work to evolve without any preconception.

⁴⁷ See *The Strategies Of My Practice* p.38.



Plate no.7.5 – Slapton (Source Images)

Painting "Slapton" was an exercise in avoiding that moment of uninterest, which necessitates a process of deformation followed by transfiguration. Painting "Babes In The Wood" however, explores these moments with very close attention. In this second painting, the destruction and transfiguration of the original image involved first covering a rudimentary cloudscape with gravel (plate no.8.2), then painting the forest over the cloudscape (plate no.8.3), and finally over-painting a figure – the little girl (plate no.8.4) from the Babes In The Wood fairy tale.



Plate no.8.2 – Babes In The Wood detail (Gravel Over Clouds)



Plate no.8.3 – Babes In The Wood detail (Forest Over Clouds)



Plate no.8.4 – Babes In The Wood detail (Girl)

During the second sequence of transfiguration in "Babes In The Wood", painting the woods over the sky, I struggled to make the sky and wood images work together dialectically⁴⁸. Slowly I

⁴⁸ The way I made paintings, before making "Slapton" and "Babes In The Wood", was to set up a dialectic relationship between the images in a work. A dialectic relationship of images in my painting addressed the

painted over more and more of the original skyscape image until it was forgotten. It was perhaps not the case that the images did not work together, but rather that a dialectical approach to image-making no longer interested me. What *did* interest me, and increasingly interests me now, are single images consisting of a plurality of layered elements all in dialogue with each other.

Some aspects of the strategy I tested in "Slapton" and "Babes In The Wood" were confirmed and clarified, while others are rendered irrelevant. Looking at the painting today, I can identify two critical features of "Babes In The Wood" that show the effect of this creation on my practice. Firstly, how the material surface of the painting functions: the gravel and surface texture creates a dynamic between the painting's optical image and its materiality that generates a movement of sensation. This affirmed the way I was working with materials in my practice. The material surface critiques the optical space of the image in a dialogic rather than dialectic way, basing the relationship on exchange rather than resolution of conflict. Secondly, how the time-based elements of the work function: duration is apparent in the typography of the surface that relays to the viewer the evolving nature of the image – an evolution that is continued by the viewer through an engagement with his own imagination. The time-based elements of the painting - its process and narrative - were confirmed as being of critical importance to my practice. Integral to the work's process and narrative was a state of reverie, or the unconscious looking for, and eventual discovery of, the painting's fact – the transfigured image.

In "Slapton", where the source-image is rendered according to an original intention, there is no evidence of the painter's transfiguration of the image – the sense of a body engaged in an activity is not present and therefore not sensible by the viewer. "Slapton" contains no trauma or wound, no new layer of protection, no material presence or narrative of its making; consequently the work's ability to engage the viewer on a number of different levels is limited. Painting

conflicting autonomy of each, opening up a metaphorical space between them that generates movement - the movement of sensation as it passes from one image to the next.

"Slapton" in conjunction with "Babes In The Wood" revealed to me those aspects of my strategies that were relevant and those that were not.

I sometimes reflect upon all the images that have been lost under new layers of paint. They seem a sad and secretive collection, invisible ghosts or forgotten memories of places that have been covered over by rising water levels and sedimentation. Clues to their existence can be detected or sensed in the typography of the surface of the painting; and, in the case of "Babes In The Wood", also in the title. To the left of the solitary boy there once stood a young girl, whose presence still haunts the work. Going further back in time, through the layers of paint, the viewer could find – and partially senses – a whole other landscape of cumulonimbus and sky: the same sky, land and water which are still visible in "Slapton".

Over-painting or layering is not an act of erasure, as the images are still present in the painting. It is a necessary act in the process of transfiguration. Abandoning all or parts of the figurative image, by overlaying them with paint or materials, only destabilises particular closures associated with that image; it is the beginning of the transfiguration of the image. Discovering the "fact" of the

I literally have to feel that I am there, that the photograph is the place in my mind's eye. There's minimal but very important transformation in the photograph as it sits on the table. (Andrews, M. in Feaver, W. (2001) p.46)

painting is the conclusion of transfiguration, this occurs when the painter successfully paints from the original figuration, and the manual marks made during the deformation of the figurative convention of that image, and finishes the painting.

The Appeal Of Non-Figurative Images: By placing a greater emphasis on materials in my painting I am becoming more interested in the non-figurative possibilities of paint or abstraction. The non-figurative image also has conventions, perhaps not as conditioning to visual perception as those of figurative images, but present none-the-less. In the previous two paintings I had

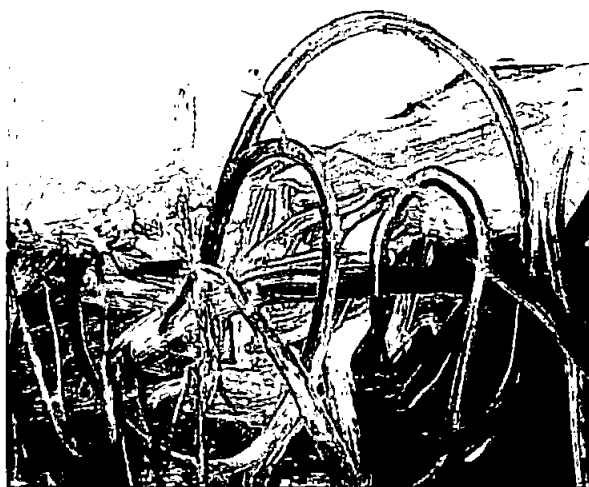
intended to make the overall image non-figurative, which is why I chose a large expanse of sky in one and of water in the other. These intentions were unrealised, as my figurative instinct dominated, leaving only local areas where paint was simple a material. In the twinned works "Oskar" and "Pinkville Study", I was determined to explore my desire for the materiality of paint. For many figurative painters this attraction of paint is continually present and evident in his work. It exerts a force on the creation of his works, but what is the nature of that force and how is it made manifest? I see this presence in Gerard Richter's

"Not actual pictures. I just want to reemphasize my claim that we are not able to see in any other way. We only find paintings interesting because we always search for something that looks familiar to us. I see something and in my head I compare it and try to find out what it relates to. And usually we do find those similarities and name them: table, blanket, and so on. When we don't find anything, we are frustrated and that keeps us excited and interested until we have to turn away because we are bored. That's how abstract painting works. that was my argument with Buchloh because I said that's how Malevich and Ryman work as well. And only like that. You can interpret the *Black Square* of Malevich as much as you like, but it remains a provocation; you are compelled to look for an object and come up with one." (Richter, G. in Storr, R. (2002) p.304)

abstracts and am equally unsure of its critical validity, as I was with it in my own work. It was important for me to explore the appeal of non-figuration in the making of these two paintings, and to test the critical validity of figuration in my own practice.

What is the nature of my desire to be free of figuration? The desire for non-figuration is the anticipated joy of paint becoming itself – a material, free from its auxiliary role as a visual support to representation. Non-figuration reveals a manual space, where the judgment and execution relationship of eye and hand is reversed from the traditional optical and tactile space of figuration. Here the eye is subordinated and the hand generates or inhabits a manual space where visual reality is lost and the body senses its manual self through paint. The subordination of the eye by the hand can be a very appealing proposition.⁴⁹ When I began painting these two works, particularly the work that would later become "Oskar", I experienced the joy of paint being manipulated by the hand for the sake of colour and movement and their resulting relationships. My eye was captivated by these passages, by the wet liquids as they settled on the

horizontal canvas. However, when the paint was dry and the painting made vertical they held little interest. This transitory quality in the eye's delight is also my experience of many of Richter's abstracts; I am initially enticed, but that enticement is unsustainable. An example of this is "Bush" (plate no.026). Richter's work has been very influential to my own over the years, particularly the relationship between photography and painting. Predominantly, Richter's strategy has been to separate figuration and abstraction into two separate modes of expression. This is contrary to my own, where I have sort to bring these two instincts or modes of expression together. In these twinned works, in which I separately explored abstraction and then figuration, I was testing my strategy of bringing the two modes together. In Richter's paintings of "Moritz" (plate no.027), he does brings abstraction and figuration together very successfully.



"I never wanted to capture and hold reality in a painting. Maybe at a weak moment I did, but I don't remember. However, that was never my intention. But I wanted to paint the appearance of reality. That is my theme or my job. (Richter, G. in Storr, R. (2002) p.297)

Plate no.026 – Gerhard Richter "Bush"

⁴⁹ See Appendix Three, The Digital, The Tactile, The Manual And The Haptic p.188.



"I painted all the time, sometimes with a very bad conscience. I painted to find out what painting can still be and can still be allowed to be. It was an act of defiance, to paint although it seemingly led to nothing... In using banal snapshots for pictures I wanted to establish the quality of the photos, that is, what they have to say. I wanted to show the things that are always overlooked in a little snapshot. Snapshots are not thought of as art, but if they are transported into art, they take on a dignity and they are regarded. That was the point, or it was the concern, if you like, in using photos." (Richter, G. in Papadakis, A. (1991) p.190)

Plate no.027 – Gerhard Richter "Moritz"

The polarity of manual and optical space is central to what interests and sustains me both as a painter and as a viewer of painting. In the latter role, I initially see an image that addresses itself optically to my imagination. Afterwards I perceive paint and surface, which declare in manual marks the history of a body engaged in physical activity. The evidence of that activity and the quality of that engagement are critical to the quality of the sensations they then provoke in me. It is very important to me that the movement of the initial sensation – i.e. its metamorphosis into other sensations – is encouraged and sustained. This movement occurs between layers and zones of sensation. In the painting "Oskar" there are two primary zones of sensation: the topographical evidence of the abstract phase of the painting, and the lens-originated painting of a baby's face. Within these two zones of sensation there are many layers. Each of these, invite further movements of sensation. For example, someone encountering the painting may first perceive the painted face of a baby, and experience a resultant sensation. His eyes may then encounter the surface texture of the painting, which could directly confront his sense of the face,

shifting his sensation from represented image to physical object in the form of the stone trails or onto the contours of the paint lines that have been over-painted by flesh tones, bringing his attention back to, say, the rendering of a nostril. This journey of shifting sensations goes on into the layering of interpretation and meaning in the viewer's iconography.

While exploring my desire for non-figuration, I was continually aware of a need to impose the structures and conventions of representation onto the work. Without these structures I felt abstraction's expansive tendency would lead me to make an artwork whose delight in colour, form and materials was only passing. What really excites me about figuration is the struggle with its conventions. Figurative closures can easily destroy a work, but they can also be used to provoke the most passionate and original of paintings.

Prior to making "Oskar" and "Pinkville Study", I had been working on the painting "Pinkville": it had become very illustrative and staid. Instead of abandoning the figurative givens within the work, I decided to try resolving "Pinkville's" problems by using one of the twinned abstract paintings that I had already begun. "Pinkville Study", however, had a reverse history. I began with an abstract base, over which I painted a figurative image. The qualities of the abstract could still be experienced through that image, in the flowing lines of gravel and paint beneath it. As a result, "Pinkville Study" was far more gestural and expansive than its static and illustrative twin. Often the question for me when working with a painted image is this: how to imbue it with vitality, movement and depth? Ironically, this is most often answered successfully by allowing the manual marks to support the pictorial structure. At the same time, I must allow those marks to operate on their own terms, and even to slip into non-figuration.

The ambition of abstraction to free painting of its pictorial conventions dictated by figuration, limits the scope of its ability to generate different qualities of sensation. While I am drawn to the promise of abstraction and I am endlessly seduced by colour and the manual mark, I also need

the conventions of the figurative image with all its dictated meanings and ambiguous interpretations. In my own painting I strive for an exchange between the polarities of figuration and non-figuration. Many of my paintings have areas of the canvas that threaten to dissolve into non-figuration or, to put it another way, are concerned only with paint and surface. The twinned works of "Pinkville study" and "Oskar" are not failed abstracts, but are a very real, time-based dialogue between these two polarities in my work.

What is most characteristic of these works and gives them their vitality and movement from a material perspective, is the presence of the topographical, manual lines. This material presence, along with the manual power that formed it, is sensible to the viewing body. While these non-figurative lines make sensible the traces of the painter's manual activity, the figuration of the image makes sensible his optical activity: within the painting a fusion or exchange occurs between these two layers of the work. This is a haptic⁵⁰ vision, which is the aspiration for myself, and the viewer of my work.

Transfiguration Of Image In My Own And In A Cultural Iconography: "Oskar" was made in response to a photograph that sits on our mantelpiece at home (plate no.10.3). When I first encountered the image, in the days after my son died, it had the effect of further stimulating the acute sensations of pain and loss that I was experiencing. My initial response was to look away, in an attempt to forget. This action was futile, of course – and strangely iconoclastic. Because of my partner's insistence that the photograph remain on the mantel, I grew accustomed to encounters with the image – at times unexpected, at times the result of reluctant resolve. The punctuation of this image in my domestic life and the pain it induced, became a way of stimulating sensations in periods of emotional numbness. It became iconic. The image framed

⁵⁰ See Appendix Three, The Digital, The Tactile, The Manual And The Haptic p.188.

the moments in which I beheld the face of God (not in the sense that my son was God but that those moments began to condition the sensations and thoughts I had towards the invisible, towards mortality, towards faith, and towards the place of those things in my own personal iconography). I made an early attempt at painting the image, which was an abject failure. I think this was because I was still possessed by the image. I was possessed by the cyclopic traits of the image but I was also possessed by the invisible formation of the image in my own personal iconography.



Plate no.10.3 – Oskar (Source Image)

I lived with the image for four years before making the painting "Oskar". During this time I made "Aftertime", which has a painted image of Oskar (plate no.16.1) from the same source-image, and also "100-1", which explores a similar subject. Both these works contributed to the transfiguration of the Oskar image in my own personal iconography. When I came to consider images for the two proposed works that eventually became "Oskar" and "Pinkville Study", I projected a series of slides onto the colour and textured surface of both canvases, onto which I had already placed non-figurative marks. The image of Oskar in conjunction with the Pinkville detail of the mother and baby (plate no.9.1) made sense. One image was of loss and tragedy

from a cultural iconography and one was from my personal iconography. I began by over-painting an area of the abstract in white and projecting the image onto it. Encountering an enlarged image of my son's face in glowing light was very moving for me. I started painting. Slowly the image - a changed image - took shape, acquired depth and was realised in materials. Eventually, the non-figurative marks were over-painted. The form and colour of the original abstract were forgotten; but the materiality of that abstract remained as traces of a body's manual activity. Now the materials of that forgotten abstract image inhabit the pictorial space of the "Oskar" image, forming dynamic relationships between the layers of the painting. It is this relationship between the terrestrial materials, which I arranged after making the initial manual marks, and the gentle treatment of pictured surfaces – like the flesh described with colour and tone – that successfully generates sensations for the viewer.



Plate no.16.1 – "After Time" detail



Plate no.9.1 detail (Mother And Baby)

Making the painting "Oskar" changed my perception of the image and the sensations that it generated. As with the "100-1", instead of generating a singular sensation of pain, the image now stimulates a plurality of sensations, including love, tenderness, loss, pain, etc. These sensations are now present in the painting and open for me to explore. The way that terrestrial images, realised through materials, condition the perception and sensations of our personal iconography, and the way our personal iconography condition our perception and sensations of the image, are both un-quantifiable. An exchange of influences is undoubtedly present between these two sorts of image – terrestrial and personal. The place of this exchange is what Merleau-Ponty calls "flesh". As human beings – i.e. beings of "flesh" – we cannot perhaps become fully conscious of just how this exchange occurs.⁵¹ But it takes place whenever we try to realise an image in internal or external space – in a personal or a cultural iconography.

In the painting "Oskar", I explore the transfiguration of an image in my own iconography. In "Pinkville" I explore how painting can transfigure an image in a cultural iconography. When viewed, any painting operates both in personal and in a cultural iconography. Consequently the

⁵¹ See Appendix One, Reversibility And Maurice Merleau-Ponty p.169.

"Oskar" painting enters a cultural iconography and "Pinkville" necessarily impacts on my own personal iconography.

An image is born of an event. This is usually the event of perception, or the advent of some desire to perceive in a particular way. The image then becomes part of a language, a system with a history, a function and protocols. In the case of the Pinkville image it would be impossible to trace the history of its transfiguration through the great many public and private iconographies. However it is perhaps interesting to imagine the image's passage.

The Pinkville image was born in the photographer's eye, and similar images were undoubtedly perceived and kept by other parties involved with the original massacre. The massacre at Pinkville in Vietnam was of innocent local people, including women and children, by American forces, witnessed and recorded by a journalist travelling with the army. The photographer took the image, which for a moment only existed in a private iconography, and turned it into language. He gave it currency, made it shareable – communicable. When that image was published, it entered a public iconography and because of the context into which it was introduced, it stimulated an intense public reaction arising out of millions of private sensations - sensations of horror. Many events took place in response to the image and the sensations it had stimulated. There were attempts to censor the image, court martials and shifts in political policy. Histories were written. The image remained, however, for decades in both public and private iconographies. It was reflected upon. Then, long after the original event, a painter rediscovered that image as an impetus towards a new work. In each of these metamorphoses, the image was first experienced in a private iconography; there then occurred some event whereby it was moved into a public iconography. Each time it shifted context, the way it was perceived also changed. But always the horror of the original event remained imbedded in the image.

I nearly began a painting about the Pinkville massacre on two earlier occasions, but shied away from its image for two reasons. The first reason was that I was daunted by the prospect of living with the image for the duration of its painting. When one first encounters a photographic image – especially one showing the human body in an extreme state, as in the original photograph of the massacre – the sensation it stimulates is immediate and profound. This is the nature of the photographic image. The sensation it stimulates is predominantly singular. The sensation stimulated by the image is initially intense; but it then degrades unless re-intensified by further viewing. Metaphorically, the way we experience a photographic image is from hot through warm to cold; rarely do we make the image hot again without re-viewing it. Much less do we transform the metaphorical nature of that experience: we do not normally find it changing from hot to sweet, say, or from hot to bright. Paintings, however, though they may struggle to establish the initial intensity of cyclopic images, protract that intensity through their much longer presence before the artist's eye in the course of their creation. They do not degrade from hot to cold but maintain the same "temperature". Moreover, they

lead the artist through a plurality of different sensations, often of extremely different metaphorical natures. They can easily move from hot to sweet, from hot to bright. My anxiety over using the image of a massacre arose from a reluctance to continue stimulating a sensation of horror in myself, and from the very real possibility

How do you see a picture, why do you retain a picture in your mind? How is it that we only respect ugliness rather than beauty, why do we not wonder what beauty is or what it could be? We deal with reality because of a stimulus, with a conscience, a point of view. The picture has become urgent, gripping, unpleasant. I've always been interested in going for the extremes of a painting, to see how far you could go. (Tuymans, L. in Loock, U. (2003) p.126)

that the project of translation that sensation of horror from the lens onto the canvas would fail. The second reason for my reluctance to use the image was that I feared its effect on the viewer. Although my work sometimes involves difficult subject matter – like death, pain, love etc. – I always mean it to be an invitation to the viewer. I never want it to be provocative or sensational for the sake of it. The image of a massacre could easily slip into that territory. All these concerns eventually formed themselves into a set of questions, as well as challenges, which had to be

responded to. More importantly, the image had already stuck in my psyche. It had its hooks in me and the only way to free myself of the image was to make the painting. The first – and for some time the most important – of these questions seemed to be: what can painting bring to this image, that photography has not already explored?

This question was wrongly formulated; however, for having worked on the painting for some time I suddenly became stuck. I could not find my way out of its figurative closures. As a result, the painting was constrained, static and uninviting; it did not allow the viewer's sensations and iconography to be stimulated or engaged. I had not yet begun the real act of painting, which involves a process of transfiguration. It is always necessary for me as a painter metaphorically to find my way into a work and then paint my way out. What I, or any artist, leaves behind during this "in-and-out" journey becomes a vital element of the work's fabric and later success. In this case, the real act of painting involved abandoning my figurative assumptions of how the painting might work, coating the surface with varnish and gravel, and then re-painting the whole work. Upon its completion, I realised that the quality of light had significantly changed from hard and flat to a soft light with real depth. For me there is a small area of the painting where the light of that day shines through from the memory of the photographer who witnessed that horror (plate no.11.1). This strange light illuminates the horror, the beauty and the madness of that moment. It is a peculiar light, one which is absent from the photocopy – i.e. from the cyclopic image. This is the plurality of sensation which painting – or stereoscopic image – is capable of stimulating, and provides the answer to the question originally framed by the work, before paint was laid on a surface. In retrospect, that question should have been: in what way do I want painting to transfigure the photographic image, and for what reasons?



Plate no.11.1 – Pinkville detail (The Light Of That Day)

"Pinkville" was begun before I made "Pinkville Study" and "Oskar" but was completed after. Consequently, the conceptual enquiries of "Pinkville" have informed the other two works. "Pinkville" takes an image from a cultural iconography, an icon, and explores how it operates, and how it changes as it become part of a personal iconography or part of our own personal iconography before being reintroduced into a cultural iconography. The "Oskar" painting approaches the subject explored in "Pinkville" but from the opposite direction. It takes an image from my own personal iconography and explores the transfiguration of that cyclopic image into painting, with the intention of showing it publicly or placing it in a cultural iconography.

"Virtual Body", "Painted Body" And "Transparent Rotunda"

Layers Of Meaning In "Virtual Body": My first instinct towards the image I had imagined creating was to ask two questions: what will it look like, and what sensations and other images will it stimulate? Having acquired the two source images of my partner and myself, I compiled a single image from which to paint. I made a portrait first (plate no.12.5) and then the whole body. (plate no.12.6) This image of a naked figure with dual gender, part self-portrait, part model, is packed with layers of overt and ambiguous meaning. Much of the image's texture⁵² was generated at this digital stage, even before paint had been laid on canvas.



Plate no.12.5 – Virtual Body (preparatory digital composite photograph)

⁵² Here texture refers to the ambiguous meaning generated by the digital synthesis of two images.



Plate no.12.6 – Virtual Body (preparatory digital composite photograph)

Before I had even finished the digital composite image, my imagination had already begun colonising that image with meaning: it was assimilated into networks of images in my personal iconography, and networks of meaning in my language. The first layer of meaning I associated with the image concerned long-term sexual relationships because I was creating the image from a photograph of myself and another of my partner, showing each of us naked. The image was a visual exploration of two bodies, each bound by the conditions of a relationship, becoming through that relationship a single body. These meanings were absorbed into the developing image. The image of the self of every person forms his identity as an individual, and conversely shapes his body. When two people enter into and sustain a long-term relationship, their once

separate self-images coalesce to shape their new shared identity, and conversely the new shared body of that relationship. These ideas too were absorbed into the meaning of the developing image.

Once the image had been created, I recognised that gender identity dictates a set of meanings that must inevitably be realised by any viewer of that image – including myself. I was not overtly occupied with these meanings in the course of the work's creation, nor am I overtly occupied with them now when the work is completed. But it is impossible to ignore the dictates of gender identity. So those meanings are realised in the image, both by myself and by subsequent viewers. They are ineluctably present in it. Moreover, these layers of closure cue more layers of meaning that further formulated the image of "Virtual Body". These new layers of meaning were concerned with how cultural images of the body are generated, presented and received. Hence, "Virtual Body" pictures the social dimension of body and image, from a healthy concern with exercise and hygiene to the cult of perfecting "the body beautiful" through cosmetic surgery, hormonal manipulation, trans-sexual operations and cloning. Anyone who possesses social awareness today is engaged with the realisation of a "Virtual Body", if only in reaction against it. At the heart of what interests me most about this image is the idea of a super body.

I only realised this ideal of a super body artistically when I finished the painting and found that the image I had digitally composed had become on the canvas an integral – rather than a composite – body. The super body is an image of the body that we all consciously or unconsciously subject our own bodies to a comparison with. As a result of this subjection, we either spend time polishing and presenting various facets of our subjective image in the hope that we will one day be the proud owner of a body that perfectly repeats it, or denigrate facets of our own body-image or our physical body itself. Of course, we can never completely reproduce this image in our physical body, and so are ever more conscious of – and haunted by – the

"darker" aspects of our body that fail to match the image. Hence, the super body is always accompanied by its shadow.

The last material element of the painting I completed was the shadow. It led me to realise the painting's fact: "Virtual Body" is a painting of the shadow. Indeed, there are *two* shadows in "Virtual Body". Both are made up of gravel, which forms two amorphous masses, each with its own tone and colour. Though vague, each has a clearer physical dimension than the painting of the body. The figure in "Virtual Body" occupies optical space and addresses itself to the mind, while the shadow occupies actual physical space and addresses itself to the body via sensation. We do not *see* the shadow; we only *sense its presence*. How we seek to colonize it with meaning is a matter for our own private sensation and reflection.

Images have varying degrees of texture, which determine their porosity towards meaning and their absorption of it. "Virtual Body" has absorbed many layers of meaning for an image of a figure with its shadow. It is not the painting, however, that contains meaning, but the image – the invisible image that exists as much in the viewer's iconography as it does on the canvas. The meanings I ascribe to the evolving image as a viewer are subjective, but because I am also the painter of the image, I am responsible for the painting's visual cues by which other viewers of the work will realize meaning. The authoring viewer will perceive an image that is separate from mine, in consequence of the mingling of my cues with his web of currently realised closures – that is, between my web of held images (the painting) and his web of held images (his iconography). This exchange of carnal images is what I attempt as a painter to make visible through the materials and images that are my paintings.

Discrete Layers Of Sensation And Allegory: In the twinned paintings "Virtual Body" and "Painted Body", two dominant principles emerged during the painting-process: those of sensation

and allegory. Sensation and allegory are principles I have long explored in my work, but only through the maturation of my material engagement did I come to view them as forming a polarity. During the painting-process, when I am occupied with reading and generating meaning from an image, its allegorical and narrative capacities seem autonomous. Conversely, when I am occupied with paint and the materiality of a painting, its surface and ability to generate movements of sensation seem autonomous. Since working on twinned paintings, the focus of my attention has been on developing the way I use materials. However, all the while I have continued making works that explore the complex ways in which we human beings as viewers generate meaning from our perception of image.

Having recognised the polarity of sensation and allegory, however, I then found myself caught in a theoretical conflict. I only resolved this conflict by trusting my instinct and continuing to paint through the period of uncertainty. I found through painting these twinned works that Deleuze's suggestion that painting should be primarily concerned with sensation does not conflict with my long-standing occupation with allegory. These two principles do not have to conflict. "Painted Body" is predominantly concerned with paint, sensation and the body, while "Virtual Body" is predominantly concerned with allegory, meaning and images of the body. In my paintings I try and envelop a plurality of layers. After all, paintings can successfully operate at many different levels. Rather than look at painting in terms of some polarity, which can be useful but is potentially reductive and inhibiting, I have found it more useful to look at my paintings in terms of stimulating three different modes of experience. I would categorise these three experiences of painting as the following:

Sensation – generated by the body's encounter with the painting's materiality.

Allegory – generated by the imagination's engagement with the painting's image.

Concept – generated by the mind's reflection in language on the painting's referents.

These experiences of a painting occur in cycles, as our sensation and attention move between the layers of the work. For me the success of a painting is determined by its ability to generate movement between these three layers of experience – not in a fixed sequence a-b-c, but more freely, passing from one to another and back again. When as viewers we revisit a layer of a work, we bring to it texture from our experience of some other layer: for example, our experience of materials textures our experience of allegory, and our experience of allegory textures our experience of materials.

An Image Of The Visual Threshold: “Transparent Rotunda” is the last painting in this research. To make this painting I revived some of my earlier methods, including: having more than one image in a work; using objects, blobs of paint and pebbles on a painting’s surface; having textured line drawings floating in pictorial space; and using an enlarge photocopy on which to paint. All these elements in “Transparent Rotunda” align the painting with earlier works, but the way the material surface is treated clearly locates it at the end of my visual research-process. Thus, in many ways “Transparent Rotunda” is a summary of that process – a reflection on the methods I have tested, and on the conclusions I have drawn.

Any painting an artist makes is a summary of, or response to, all his previous works; but as well as remembering backwards, a painting should also dream forwards. “Transparent Rotunda” is a response to the preceding paintings, particularly “Painted Body”. In “Painted Body” the pictorial space is dominated by flesh, while in “Transparent Rotunda” I wanted the pictorial space to be largely empty of represented objects. However, it became full of indeterminate form, a form embodied by the gravel arc which I projected in the midst of the painting’s minimal and uncanny landscape. Initially, I included the gravel arc for purely formal reasons. But after I created the diagram of the visual system from strings of tiny stones, I began to realise a relationship of meaning between the diagram and the gravel arc. The gravel arc suggested to me a delicate

plane, through which the world becomes visible to its viewers. This image, to my complete surprise, described the Visual Threshold – by which I mean the imaginary boundary between human beings and the visible world, a boundary over which images pass from internal to external space and vice versa. This notion of the Visual Threshold, which I had long ago conceived of as a spatial allegory for the process of visual perception, was in fact the starting-point of my whole research.

I made a piece of work in the third year of my B.A. titled "Watch and look to see", which arose out of the clarification⁵³ in my own mind of these three modes – or three successive stages – of visual perception. "Watching", the first stage, is the subconscious act of scanning and filtering indistinct form. "Looking", the second stage, is more conscious: recognition has occurred, and there is an intention towards the realisation of more distinct form. "Seeing", the third phase, denotes the conscious realisation of form.⁵⁴ For me the gravel arc is our subconscious perception of indistinct form, an imaginary screen through which we perceive an imperfect image of the world and onto which we project an inaccurate image of the world from our memory. I suggest that the symbiosis of these two images creates our vision of the world – part memory, part stereoscopic image decoded from a jumble of optical sensations.

The gravel arc is a material manifestation of the viewer's visual threshold, through which his received and generated images pass – the arc is both actual and representative, sensation and allegory. The presence of the visual system diagram gave meaning to the arc, which up to that point had consciously been only structural, with no allegorical significance. But meaning can colonise a painting through free association, as well as through prescription, which is what happened here. Then, with the diagram and the arc generating the layers of meaning of the painting, I added another layer with the title. The word "rotunda" refers to the architectural

⁵³ The definition of these three words was provoked by a question asked of me by a non-english speaker.

device developed in the 19th century to house 360-degree murals known as panoramas. I could have titled the painting "Transparent Panoramic" to refer to the sort of painted mural such a rotunda would have housed. But I chose rather to call it "Transparent Rotunda" to refer to the building, because I thought of that circular construction as an image of the skull. As human beings, we look through the transparent walls of our cranial rotunda – i.e. the transparent lenses of our eyes. These lenses are the physical location of our Visual Threshold.

"Transparent Rotunda" is clearly concerned with visual perception, but the composition also invites many ambiguous readings and leaves many unanswered questions. For instance, does the gravel arc allow the viewer to see the world through its surface? Or do we only perceive a grainy analogy of the world beyond it according to our currently held set of linguistic closures? What is the status of the two objects encircled by the gravel arc – i.e. the fennel plant and one of the ornamental cherry trees? What is the relationship between the two ornamental cherry trees? Is one real and the other not? Are they both representations of the same object? Or are they separate and located in different spaces?

Other aspects of "Transparent Rotunda" operate on several different levels. The diagram, for instance, plays many parts. It is a drawing of a function; it is an experience that is as well the subject of the painting; and it is the preoccupation of painting in general. Within the frame of the painting, the diagram is an imposition – because it has three-dimensional attributes in a two-dimensional work. It is a relief, and an assemblage constructed chiefly to communicate an idea. There are also ten large stones on the surface and many blobs of paint, some of which have model kitchen utensils in them. The stones seem to have little function, other than to punctuate the surface of the picture plane like inversions of Fontana's holes. The ambiguity of this painting is the presence of texture in meaning. The texture of the painting or its ambiguity invites the

⁵⁴ This three-stage process can also be understood as the realisation of visual closure, which is held in a complex network of other visual closures and allows us to interact with the world.

viewer to continue looking – to continue revisiting the plurality of layers of the work through qualitatively different experiences. Through continued looking he generates further layers of material and texture that change not only the work but also himself.



"Station" (plate no.15 p.29)

My painting "Station" was completed in December 2005 and was painted over the course of that year, the same year that the majority of this thesis was written. I have deliberately not reflected theoretically on this work, choosing instead to concentrate on the act of painting. The act of making this work anchored me in my practice, when the processes of writing and thinking seemed to be leading me further away from painting rather than closer to it. This painting is included in the exhibition un-reflected upon: the silent member of a family of paintings.

When the marks and colours forming the surface of the canvas begin to vibrate together in a barely perceptible way, and the painting's surface seems both intact and alive – i.e. working successfully – I know my task is complete. I must then emerge from the body of my painting and relinquish its corpse. The rhythm of the work then begins to leave my body – my eyes - my hands - and in its place an optical psychic relationship with the painting begins to assert itself. I am then a viewer among many.

A Final Reflection:

I have used the images of particular painters and the ideas of particular theorists to establish a language with which to explore, develop and contextualise the central themes of my research. The images of the painters formed a visual or material language that addressed itself to my practical research, while the ideas of the theorists formed a specific language that enabled me to reflect on that practical research. The significance of these established languages was their ability to translate between the visual and material layers of my research and how I reflected on my research, which at times had seemed untranslatable. Through Merleau-Ponty's ideas of flesh and image I was able to explore and communicate the significance of my material images as embodied experience – that is, as an experience of images according to the body and not simply to the mind. Through Deleuze's ideas of pictorial fact I was able to communicate the process of transfiguration that was and remains so central to my practice. Through Polke's images I was able to explore and communicate the significance of layering materials and the generation of meaning in my paintings.

In my practical research my aim was to make paintings that clearly displayed their own "fact", while in the written research my aim was to complete a text that clearly reflected the research-processes. Like my paintings, this text has gradually emerged from an engagement with material. Consequently my research findings are not the results of pre-conceptions applied to an existing body of knowledge in order to support, justify and maintain it. My findings on a specific practice of painting were discovered through process – at its origin – and are therefore able to deepen, enrich and contribute to the furthering of this specific body of knowledge. The significance of my thesis' contribution to wider bodies of knowledge lies in its relevance to the individuals that encounter it.

I began my research with a set of open questions. These questions were: can my paintings meaningfully contribute to a dialogue on image in a culture dominated by the lens? Can my two-

dimensional painted images generate sensation in my – and the viewer's – whole body? Can my paintings contribute to a dialogue on time and space? The purpose of these questions was not to induce direct answers but to initiate research and set the direction of discovery. Throughout that research, my original questions have served as the invisible lines and structures of its composition, a hidden armature without which my research would have had a very different shape. I have not experienced their influence as prescriptive or formative, but as a peripheral influence from which relevant form has ultimately arisen.

My reason for undertaking this research was to critically reflect on my practice within a formal framework, in order to discover, explore, develop and establish how that practice might contribute to wider bodies of knowledge. These bodies of knowledge are not located in a single place. They are not a body, or dead *corpus*, at all; it is a living field, or a dynamic, existing between the practitioners of different modes of art-making. It has significance for multi-disciplinary artists working with time, space, image and the body – indeed, such art-making was the immediate context of my research at Dartington. But it also has significance for painters working in the seemingly narrower discipline of materiality and figuration. This dynamic exists as well between the ideas of theorists concerned with visual perception and ontology, particularly those interested in the reception and generation of image. During this research I have not only discovered, explored, developed and established my practice, as I had originally wished: I have transfigured it. And I hope the outcomes of that research – my paintings – have, and will go on making an original contribution to the living dynamic of knowledge where it exists – for individuals in the moments that they encounter it.

The Vision Of A Work

Birthing a conception stalking perception.

I am dreaming awake a thing of beauty by mistake.

The work is always stillborn, inventory, inventory.
Pickled and labelled by inspection,
it exists between two reflections.
...to connect beauty to history,
to connect history to man's psychology,
man's psychology to the workings of the brain,
the brain to the neural impulse,
the neural impulse to chemistry.
Lately, time has passed rather sedately.
His last laugh is to laugh at art,
heartily - and beyond the furious connecting
he continues soberly collecting, collecting, collecting.
Labelled and loved, cradled and shoved
- shoved and cradled, loved and labelled.
Even at levels below the zone of definition and clarity,
measures and relationships exist.

It arrives like the crackle of burning air,
fairly squarely,
I am awakening,
a thing of beauty so surprising.

Appendices

In the appendices I have included a survey of each of the three key texts with which I have chosen to relate my work. These surveys explore and emphasize those parts of the original texts that have relevance for my research, providing a deeper understanding of the body of ideas referenced in this paper. I have also included eight images that document the making of one of my paintings to provide a visual reference to the processes described in the paper. My decision to use particular texts in this research was not the direct result of objective logic according only to the mind but was made in *"the site, the soil of the sensible, as it is in our lives and for our bodies"* (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G. A.** (1993), p.122).

Appendix One - Reversibility And Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Reversibility In Painting: I shall summarise the key ideas from Merleau-Ponty's *Eye and Mind*. These have been most useful in providing the work, and the way I have reflected on that work, with a point of reference. I shall also refer to my own ideas and other research where relevant.

There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place - when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible, lighting the fire that will not stop burning until some accident of the body will undo what no accident would have sufficed to do...
(Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.125)

What is the nature of this "blending" described by Merleau-Ponty, and what are the conditions in which this blending occurs? The author believes that a study of the creation of art tells us something of the nature of being. The mixture of "the seeing and the seen", in his view, actually defines us ontologically as both subject and object - indeed, simultaneously as one blend. The human body is the site at which this ambiguous blending takes place, but the human body exists only in relation to this blending. The body is initially a sensor, but is then aware of its sensibility. The sensor becomes sensible – a sensible sensor. It then becomes aware of its own sensibility –

a self-sensing sensible sensor. This threefold identity, or compound of being, Merleau-Ponty calls flesh.

Flesh occurs through the reversibility of subject and object. This reversibility or exchange with the world arises from an innate ability to project our selves beyond our subjectivity; to perceive depth, to be self-aware. This is the principle of flesh. The experience of the reversibility of subject and object is a fundamental manifestation of being. This arises directly out of being a body. The experience of right hand touching left hand is a very tangible example of the reversibility that also occurs in vision. We touch and are touched by the world in sight. I do not mean – nor does Merleau-Ponty – that we are literally seen by objects, but rather that we experience ourselves sensing objects from beyond the sensing body, or that we are aware of ourselves sensing the world from outside of our selves as sensing beings.⁵⁵ The exchange between subject and object generates a situation of paradox. The process of exchange leading to that paradox is not one through which separate substances are changed into different states of being, but one throughout which paradox is instinctively maintained and a doubling of being occurs. We simultaneously experience ourselves as sensor and sensed. This doubling of being or maintaining of paradox between self and world is the fundamental experience of being that Merleau-Ponty calls flesh.

Flesh is the site where this strange phenomenon of reversibility occurs, where it becomes a system of exchange and the paradoxes of vision are illuminated. What is exchanged between body and world is limitless. It is visible and invisible, sensible and beyond sensibility. It is the limitless array of closures that are possible in our attempt to approach openness.

⁵⁵ This reversibility is called "chiasm" from the Greek, meaning overlapping, criss-crossing, inclining or reclining and characterised by the letter X (chi). The criss-crossing or overlapping of chiasm is the metamorphosis of sensor into sensed, of subject into object, and the erosion of our image of autonomous self. (*Ontology and Painting* Johnson, G A, 1993 p48)

Sensation: *"What I am trying to translate to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensation."* (Cézanne in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993) p.121)

This quotation from Cézanne that prefaces *Eye and Mind* captures the intentions of the painter and also the philosopher. Sensations emanate from the body and are its primary mode of experience. In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty is directing science and philosophy to return to "...the site, the soil of the sensible" (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993), p.122), which is, after all, where the activity of painting takes place. We experience self and world as sensation, which is always in relation to the body. The body is constructed from the same material as the physical world that surrounds it. Our understanding of the physical world is formed in relation to a common experience of materials. We understand the physical world only in relation to the body. We are able to experience the physical world only by placing it in relation to the physical senses of the body. We understand material objects only in relation to the body because we cannot conceive of them as separate from physical experience. When we think of our hands, we can only think of them as touching the physical world. Similarly we can only conceive of our bodies in terms of sensing materiality and its conditions. Thus all understanding is physical. It is no less sensory or tactile than grasping or holding an object with our hands.⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty describes the body as being *"caught in the fabric of the world, things are an annex or prolongation of itself, they are incrustated into its flesh"*. (Merleau Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993) p.125) The vital point here is that within this exchange of flesh and matter, vision occurs.

I engage in the activity of painting because it not only records that exchange of matter and flesh, and evokes that vision, but enables both the viewer and the artist to encounter the mysterious processes of vision in a new way. All human activities require an exchange of matter and flesh,

but we are normally oriented in the direction of flesh. When I paint, however, the direction is reversed. What has become flesh reverts to matter. It "reverts", though, in a new way – for what I physically see in the painting is not what I saw that induced me to paint, but the experience of seeing that is normally lost in the moment of a perception. Painting, then, allows vision, which has arisen from the body, to return to the body. Through painting, consumption can become secretion: the process can go full circle. Perhaps that is why very particular sensations arise for me in the creation of paintings, sensations that I experience in no other human activity. It is the uniqueness of those sensations – the sensations of vision restored or returned to the body – that essentially compel me to paint.⁵⁷

When images are given form and represented to the body, the act of remembering is made material and the carnal images of the world that are caught in flesh and held in memory, are illuminated and shared. For me the expression of this fundamental experience of being is a necessary function of painting. Painting achieves this expression because it can accommodate reflective thought and sensation together in a space outside of time. Sensation precedes any other experience of the painting, but soon one begins to reflect and have sensations simultaneously.⁵⁸ However, Ponty points out, "*...painting is never altogether outside of time, because it is always within the carnal.*" (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, G.A.** (1993), p.145).

⁵⁶ Indeed the very words "grasping" and "holding", which we use to mean both the comprehension of an idea and the relation of an object to the body, show the corporeal, sensory and tactile nature of our understanding.

⁵⁷ The reason I am primarily a painter rather than a photographer, video/film maker, performance artist, installation artist or sonic artist, is that in my experience painting is the most adept and flexible medium in which to explore these exchanges of images between matter and flesh – between materials and images.

⁵⁸ When we reflect upon a sensation we have previously received, we "re-visit" that sensation, and also the thing from which it arose. Our reflection cannot correspond exactly to that earlier sensation in immediacy or force; nor can it approach in actuality the thing that caused it to occur. When we try to make sense of sensation – that is, to reflect upon it, or revisit it in some way – we experience only an echo of the actual. An interval of time exists between an event and the realisation of that event by the self. An interval also exists between the realised event and the self in genesis. The generation of self and world is beyond reflection and lost in openness. "Hyper-reflection" is Merleau-Ponty's term for our attempt to approach these "in-between spaces" that belong to openness. By exploring these spaces, he turns aside from a post-modern authority of the self. His position is therefore more allied to the painter's project for an image-

If, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, we return to the *"site and soil of the sensible"*, we find that sensation is not, as abstract scientific thought supposes, a pale copy of the actual but instead a profound encounter with it. When we perceive something initially, we do in fact generate an image that is in many ways less substantial than the physical phenomenon that gave rise to that image as a picture. For instance, the visual impression we absorb through our sense of sight is much less material than the object our eyes have perceived. But when we engage our creative imagination, this image becomes even more physical or material than the raw information our individual senses provide.

When a painter returns an image to material – that is, when he embeds that image in paint upon canvas – by degrees he makes that image more material. And each subsequent perception of that image in his painting – by himself, or by a viewer – still further enhances its material actuality. Hence, painting does not take the artist or viewer further and further away from actuality, but instead takes him further and further into it. And with each new perception of that actuality, the level of its being is exponentially increased.

The Image And The Actual: There are many ways to understand visual perception and the relationship between the actual and the image. One way is as an exposure of the actual or concrete world to us via light. We perceive an analogue of the external world. This model asserts that our mind need only use a metaphorical "camera in our head" to apprehend an analogue

based presentation (exploration? Expression?) of being than it is to the philosopher's speculative reflection upon it. (Johnson G A, (1993), p.46)

copy of the world.⁵⁹ This is an effective picture that works very well for us most of the time. However, science now seems to suggest that sight is not analogues but created.

Another way of understanding visual perception takes into account the impact of memory and imagination on the process of sight. In an experiment conducted on a university campus in the United States it was found that a surprisingly large portion of perceived reality is supplied by memory and imagination **Greenfield, S.** (2000), p.65). According to scientific research, large parts of the brain functions associated with accessing memories are utilised in the process of visual perception. Consequently, memory profoundly determines how we perceive things in the present, for we perceive them through the senses only in ways familiar to us from the past. Hence, we might encounter something so unlike our previous experiences that we should be unable to perceive it. Our bias towards relying on memory or the reproductive imagination⁶⁰ weakens our creative imagination and consequently our ability to perceive the actual. This leads us to assume that our human perception of the actual is an authoritative and universal sensibility.⁶¹ However, we have to accept that our mode of perception – which is largely determined by our reliance on memories,⁶² is a very relative experience, and gives us an extremely partial understanding of the world as it actually is.

Our tendency is to denigrate image as an impostor, as being only a copy of the original or the actual, and as therefore having less value. Current scientific research, then, not only seems to

⁵⁹ Science pictures light, reflecting off solid objects, being focused through a transparent lens and onto the retina, where special cells convert the image into small pulses of electricity. These are then carried through the optic nerve via the optic chiasma to the lateral geniculate nucleus and the primary visual cortex. Here some sorting takes place before data is sent to the surrounding association visual cortex, where it is converted into a visual map of the actual. (Greenfield, Susan. *Brain Story*, 2000, p66)

⁶⁰ Bachelard defines the functions of the imagination and memory as the creative and reproductive imagination – seeing memory as a function of the imagination. (Bachelard, G. *On Poetic Imagination And Reverie*, 1998. (third edition). p13)

⁶¹ Snakes, for instance, which perceive with their tongues, have a very different experience of the world, and theirs is neither more nor less accurate than our own.

embrace the idea that visual perception has as much to do with the generation of image of the memory as it has to do with any direct experience of the actual, but also seems to prove it. Our personal images of the actual, made up of mediated impressions of our eye and the constructions of our imagination and memory as they plunder our memory, are far more real to us than a supposedly direct and unmediated perceptions of the actual that we mistakenly believe to be attainable and universally shared. Merleau-Ponty says of images: *"They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and imminent visibility which make up the whole problem of the imaginary."* (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993), p.126) Images are the medium of exchange between the viewer and the viewed.

Visual exchange occurs between the viewer and the viewed, between the object and the subject – that is, between a world that generates images and an imagination that consumes and secretes them. When the viewer apprehends the world through his senses, he "falls into" it. He must in part surrender his self-consciousness in order to be conscious of the phenomena he perceives. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, there is a reversal or exchange of object and subject in sight that necessitates a reversal of the process of apprehension. Here we "fall into" our imagination and make visible the self to the world through image. These enigmatic exchanges between body and world are integral to the artist's project. They are central to the process of perception and the process of painting. Merleau-Ponty says of this dynamic between the body and the world, *"Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence. This is a carnal essence or icon of the first."* (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993), p.126)

What Merleau-Ponty is talking about here is the function of images in the relationship between our imagination and the actual. Imagination is our inner wellspring of images. It is private and personal to ourselves – for each person has his own unique collection of images – however we

⁶² Our memory comprises of both personal and cultural histories.

are compelled to share these images, rendering us "open" to the world. This vast collection of images or icons⁶³ that our imagination draws upon will be referred to as our "personal iconography". The imagination and memory are functions that access this body of images. Our personal iconography can be pictured as an internal diagram of the actual according to the body, which displays the world to us so that we may experience it more fully. However, Merleau-Ponty also suggests that through the imagination we are unable to reflect upon or re-think "*the constitutive relations of things*" (Merleau-Ponty M in **Johnson, A.G.** (1993), p.126), because the imagination only offers a visual image of the world, which provides no more than the imaginary texture of the actual. The imaginary, then, is closer to the actual, because these carnal images exist within us as a textured diagram of the world, but further from the actual, because we are unable to re-think the constitutive relation of things. For me these observations are what is of central importance to Merleau-Ponty's reflection on ontology and painting, and therefore of most significance to this research. My conclusion is that it is possible through painting – in particular through the use of materials – to offer the creative and reproductive imagination, an occasion to explore the constitutive relation of things. And in so doing, returns our carnal images to the world, where we may reencounter them complete with actual texture.

Images are the internal, carnal essence of the actual and facilitate what Merleau-Ponty refers to as "reversibility". These "living" images are the artists' currency, and the substance of their work. Paintings are image-based philosophies of vision and being. They take as their material our loves, desires, pains and fears. They express our perceptions of the actual and our fantasies of the imagined.

⁶³ I use iconography to ally these internal images of flesh to paintings and to allude to our uncritical relation to them as symbols that signify meaning.

Appendix Two – Closure And Hilary Lawson

Closure And Openness: This section explores Hilary Lawson's ideas on closure and openness, which are found in his book *Closure: A story of everything*.

It is through closure that openness is divided into things. It is the conversion of flux into identity, the conversion of possibility into particularity. It is achieved by holding that which is diverse as one and the same (Lawson, H. (2001), p.4).

The failure of modernism and post-modernism derives from the premise that the world is made up of things, and therefore that truth or an accurate perception of the actual is dependent on a continual refinement of our views as we test them against reality. This faulty premise has led to paradox and a collapse of meaning that threatens to destabilise our core ideas of the nature of being. Lawson's philosophical proposition that human perception can be seen as the realisation of openness through closure is a response to the current situation of crisis in critical theory. He claims it is the process of closure that forms our experience, affording us sensation, thought and language.

The world is not a thing, defined and awaiting discovery, nor is it empty. It is open and full, a space of potential in flux. Closure is the process of generating something out of openness. Lawson posits several stages in the hierarchy of closure. Preliminary closure, the first stage, is the realisation of a state or the absence of that state. Sensory closure, the second stage, is realised by the individual senses. Inter-sensory closure, the third stage, is the combination of closures between the various senses, so that meaning is pooled from closures that have already been made separately by individual senses on their own. For example, we see water with our eyes and perceive its colour; but we also feel its wetness when we touch it with our hands. Each of these perceptions comes to us separately. But together these separate sensory closures of sight and touch participate in an inter-sensory closure that includes them both. Linguistic closure,

the final stage, allows us to share complex structures of layered closure with other people in the form of words. It is therefore the most sophisticated form of closure. It relies on the stability of all the other layers of closure - preliminary, sensory and inter-sensory.

Each new closure realises "material", while simultaneously generating new "texture". Texture is that which remains open in material. Openness is therefore present in any structure of closure and cannot be eradicated. Consequently the process of closure will ultimately fail in its attempt completely to define something or eradicate openness.⁶⁴

Closure has three primary characteristics. One, its realisation is limitless. There are a limitless number of closures possible to be made in the infinite expanse of openness. Two, each of its realisations is unstable and destined to fail. As closures become more layered and sophisticated, they are likely to undermine earlier and more primitive closures. So the fact that closure is limitless means that every closure will eventually be undermined and abandoned. Three – in apparent contradiction to this second characteristic – each realisation requires stability.

The reason closures require stability is that material generates activity through texture, and in the physical world this activity always manifests itself as change or disintegration. We cannot imagine material without activity, or the world being still, because texture cannot ever be eradicated. In the face of their ultimate failure, closures require stability or at least the appearance of being permanent. So it is assumed that a closure is complete or that the texture

⁶⁴From the scientific viewpoint, which adheres to notions of universal truth and complete closure, the answer to what the world is made of is elements, atoms, electrons, quarks and so on. The search for an elementary "building block" will be endless because with each new layer of closure new texture will always be generated. A spiritual perspective seeks to include everything presently excluded from closure, as though it were possible to perceive or circumscribe a universal openness. To accomplish this task, it posits the existence of "gods" or "spirit". But these terms are better understood as indications of openness, than as definitions of closure or its content. Working with a spiritual perspective does not produce material, because "god" and "spirit" do not refer to things. Many people with a spiritual perspective have believed themselves to have successfully defined these terms but they have always been proved wrong. Because a spiritual perspective deals directly with openness it generates so much texture that no material can be realised. (Lawson, H, 2001, pp15-16).

generated supports the closure, rather than undermines it. Therefore the world realised through material has the appearance of stability, but any proper examination reveals a seething sea of flux. We have to assume that closures are at least temporarily secure in order to operate in our environment from moment to moment. So one of the primary motivations of human behaviour is to create spaces in which our closures are – or appear - secure.

Systems Of Closure: A “closure machine” is a mechanism for converting openness into some form of definition or meaning. We human beings are the only closure machines that operate all layers of closure described above; after all, it is only we who can achieve linguistic closure. As mentioned above, Lawson gives the name “preliminary closure” to the first layer in his hierarchy of closure. The preliminary closure mechanism is only capable of being in one state and then another, or in one state and then the absence of that state. For instance, off-on, open-closed. A preliminary closure mechanism is only capable of generating material without texture. In its operations, texture remains outside of material in openness. The sense organs realize preliminary closure, which provides the first layer of material in the complex system of closures that constitutes the human closure machine, by being either stimulated or not.

The second stage of closure in the human system is sensory closure, which realises infinite patterns of primary and sensory closure, generating layers of both material and texture. In the visual system, for example, we sense a shape, because of the prior closures of edge and colour, which in turn are supported by the preliminary closure of our sight sense being stimulated or “switched on”.

The third stage of closure in the human system is inter-sensory closure, which is the realisation of a concept based on prior sensory closures. For example, we can link a particular sound with certain visual sensations of shape and colour – a loud blare, a unique series of contours and a golden shine – to produce the idea “trumpet”. While sensory closure realises material in the form

of sensation, inter-sensory closure realises material in the form of thought. Thought is a new form of material that is not sensory.

From inter-sensory closure we have developed linguistic closure, which is the realisation of material in the form of meaning. In the same way that inter-sensory closure allows us to share the material generated by separate senses by way of thought, linguistic closure allows us to share material with other closure machines that use language to communicate and exchange meaning. Language is therefore inherently social.

Language can be seen as a system of marks that function initially as "cues" to the realisation of linguistic closure, and then as "tags" to those closures. Our perception of reality is directly dependent on our layers of realised closures and the combined interaction of all the system's closures. While linguistic marks serve to label the things that make up our reality, they also act as cues to new linguistic closures. These cues that prompt the realisation of new linguistic closure consequently affect our perceptual closures and therefore the way we encounter openness. We often overlook the function of language, to act as a cue to alter perception, because we focus too much on its more passive task of serving as a label or tag. This means that we make the relationship between meaning and reality too superficial – and hence unfathomable.

Hilary Lawson divides linguistic closure into two separate types, practical and formal. Practical linguistic closure holds the marks of language to be one with sensory closures in the realisation of meaning. Formal linguistic closure holds different linguistic marks together as one in the realisation of meaning, allowing marks from separate linguistic closures to be combined. The temporary nature of formal linguistic closure provides the flexibility for the organisation of space. The meaning realised from formal closure is held before being confirmed by practical closure, abandoned or modified. Formal closure temporarily forms our perception of space until it is verified or denied by sensory and practical closure. Through formal closure, language is liberated

from its immediate context, allowing closure to be extended to incorporate the experience and closures of others. This opens up a wealth of possibilities for new closures, and again alters the perception of our own space.

The Search For Openness: The evolution of both visual and verbal knowledge can be located at the edge of closure, where new closures are realised from openness. In most fields of knowledge, this positioning at the edge of closure arises primarily from a desire to experience anew the dynamic of openness before realising a new closure, one that will appear to embrace a larger body of knowledge than did its predecessor. But in much contemporary art, visual knowledge is paradoxically extended instead through a strategy of resisting closure, instead of securing it. Many contemporary artists accept the ultimate failure of closure and unlike verbal knowledge deliberately employs strategies that approach openness without utilising the process of closure. These artists deliberately destabilise systems of closure by manipulating material and texture without completely losing meaning.

As artists, our search for closure is characterised by a desire for material in the presence of texture, while our search for openness is an escape from the constraints of material realised through closure.

There are three modes of approach to openness. The **first** belongs to every human activity, and is marked by a desire to locate our verbal knowledge at the edge of closure, where the exciting genesis of newly realised meaning occurs.

The **second** mode, which is specific to art and visual knowledge, is concerned with an acceptance of the ultimate failure of closure and an avoidance of any attempt to complete or maintain it. This strategy consists in the provision of marks that systematically evade the

realisation of closure. Consequently, artists are acutely concerned with texture and its relationship with material.

The **third** mode is concerned with describing openness directly and is inherent in religion. Surprisingly, for the two often seem at odds with each other, it is also inherent in philosophy. In religion there is an intuitive assumption that closure ultimately fails. This failure is then provided for by faith. In philosophy and a critical discourse on art, there is a critical awareness that systems of closure ultimately fail, but this failure is acknowledged and attempts are made to provide for it.

Material And Texture: *"Material is an enclosure that on the one hand takes place in openness – which lies outside of it – but on the other hand contains openness – which lies within it"* (Lawson, H. (2001), p.8). Lawson refers to the openness contained in material as texture.

Material is that which is held by the realisation of a closure. Sensations, our perceptions of physical objects, and meanings are all realised as a result of closure and are therefore material. Closure is the act of grouping or connecting discrete things together. The resulting material is a holding of two or more things as one-and-the-same or as belonging to the same group. The first layer of closure (preliminary closure) realises material from openness. All subsequent closures realise new material from existing material, which is the result of previous layers of closure. The realisation of material is the result of layers of previous closures – for example the shape, size and colour of an object is realised by three separate closures, which are themselves the result of previous closures. If we fail to identify an object, it is because insufficient material is available to realise a closure. If we see an object in the road from a distance our material is limited to some general shape and colour, but such material is insufficient to help us realise the identity or closure of the object and our mind may offer closures in its absence; it might be, say, a cat or a

dead body. When we get closer and more material is available - i.e. more definition of shape and colour - we are able to make a closure and realise the material of an old plastic sack. Likewise, if we fail to understand the meaning of something somebody says to us, because of an unfamiliar word or arrangement of words, we are unable to realise a closure for lack of material. But if we ask him what he means, or consult a dictionary, we are able to embrace and absorb the material we require. In both instances, the new material we need is realised through new and previously unavailable closures.

Material maintains the openness of its provisional layer of closure. Because all subsequent layers of material are in addition to the provisional and do not replace its inherent openness, further layers of closure are always possible. Lawson refers to this openness inherent in material, as texture. At each layer of closure new material is realised out of texture. However, with each new layer of material there comes more texture, and the possibility of further closure. This may give the appearance of openness disappearing with each new layer of material realised, but openness only becomes more textured with the addition of each new layer. Complete closure, which is the aim of conventional knowledge, or the possibility of knowing everything there is to know about something, is impossible, because the more we know, the more texture it generates.

"Closure provides the discreteness, the things of the world, but without texture, without openness, these would have no content." (Lawson, H. (2001), p.13). In order that openness does not disintegrate or swallow up our closures it is necessary that they appear to eradicate openness, at least with the promise of further layers of closure. Stability can be seen as a requirement of closures if they are not immediately to collapse into openness. Most closures avoid a confrontation with their failure, because their stability remains unquestioned. If we were able to realise complete closure, we would lose texture and with it the substance and content of the world. We live in a world realised through closure, which has the character of openness present as texture.

My paintings are fundamentally occupied with this sensitive relationship between material and texture.⁶⁵ Before proceeding a clarification or summary of these terms may prove useful. Lawson uses "material" to refer to everything generated or held by the realisation of a closure. In my paintings this is the image, it's meaning, the Materials and the layers that the painting consists of. All four of these sets of material contain texture. In fact I am using layering of meaning and material to generate texture in a painted image. When I use the word material, if not directly referencing Lawson's ideas, I am referring to terrestrial, physical, concrete materials.

⁶⁵ Lawson suggests that the history of painting can be understood in terms of the interplay of material and texture and the changing value or emphasis we place on one or the other. The principal relationship between material and texture thrives in the constantly shifting dynamic between meaning and the mixing and application of paint. In icon paintings, for instance, material can be realised as symbolic meaning and texture as God. In the Renaissance, material can be taken more as a representation of "objective reality". Impressionism can be understood as a realisation of material as sensation and of texture in paint as colour. Modernism can be understood as a return to the preliminary closure of shape and colour, thus avoiding the interrelations of material and texture, which remain unrealised in openness. (Lawson, H. 2001, pp206-215)

Appendix Three - Sensation And Gilles Deleuze

"It is the nature of sensation to envelop a constitutive difference of levels, a plurality of constituting domains". (Deleuze, G. (2003), p.37)

Sensation And Painting: In this section I explore and respond to Gilles Deleuze's ideas on painting as expressed in his book on Francis Bacon (Deleuze, G. 2003). There is much shared territory between this section on sensation and the earlier section on reversibility - i.e. between the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. Both philosophers agree that the importance of sensation has been ignored by science and philosophy in the pursuit of empirical knowledge. As stated in Section One, Merleau-Ponty directs science and philosophy to return to "...the site, the soil of the sensible" and along with Deleuze looks to art and particularly painting for a greater understanding of sensation. Deleuze derives many of his ideas of sensation from Phenomenology. Phenomenology is at once concerned with the subject's "instinct" and the object's "fact" (or, in the context of my research, the painting's fact). Instinct is the ability to move between different levels or zones of sensation unmediated by objective thought. Fact is the object's essential nature or its defining character.

Sensation – The Primary Mode Of Experience: Because sensation acts immediately on the nervous system, it is our primary mode of experience. It is unmediated. It can't be closed – in the sense that it cannot be contained or held as a concept - and is therefore characterised by temporality and movement. Because sensation is temporal, it must move from one state to the absence of that state or to another state. Hence, it has no difficulty with plurality. In a painting these domains of sensation are present in many different forms. Ensuring that sensation is the primary mode of experience in a painting necessitates abandoning its figurative closures by

destabilising their structures. However, when figurative closures⁶⁶ are secure thought is the primary mode of experience. While the act of abandoning figurative closures is necessary, according to Deleuze it is never complete, because traces of figurative closure – the conventions of figuration or picture making – always remain on the canvas and in the mind. In my own experience, the act of destabilising figurative closures is a vital and creative act; but it is always a temporal one, because as soon as I start painting again I re-establish traces of their structure. This process of abandoning and re-establishing structures is of critical importance in my painting, and will be explored further below.

"For sensation to exist a force must be exerted on a body. Force is closely related to sensation." (Deleuze, G. (2003), p.56). Deleuze uses force to mean that which a sensation is generated by. Lawson would describe Deleuze's force as openness. If the intention of the painter is to generate sensation he must make visible the invisible forces that bring sensation into being. The painter's challenge is primarily to make visible the invisible (Deleuze, G. (2003), pp.56-58). He must visually describe these forces and their effects on the body – he must "record the fact" (Bacon F in Deleuze, G. (2003), p.35) or as Cezanne said "paint the sensation" (Cezanne in Deleuze, G. (2003), p.35). Human beings experience these effects as sensation. No sensation is static. No sooner has it occurred than it starts to change. Every sensation is temporal: it comes in and out of being, decomposing and recomposing in time. Sensation is thus the agent of relinquishing closure⁶⁷ – or "deformation" as Deleuze calls it. Without making visible the decomposition and re-composition of these effects, without recording the fact, painters cannot grapple with the forces that produce them. In my paintings I engage in the process of decomposing and recomposing images, I make visible the maintaining and abandoning of the optical closures that define our visual perception and consequently our understanding of self and world.

⁶⁶ Deleuze refers to the conventions of image making and viewing, as figurative givens. I am using closure instead of givens to link Lawson and Deleuze's ideas.

Optical Closure: My paintings are the result of an activity that realises, maintains and abandons optical closure they are knowledge made visible and material. In representational painting, without layers of sensation, without the rhythm of realising and abandoning closure, the conventions of figuration are unchallenged and generate the spectacle or the cliché.

In our culture we are suffused with predominantly lens-based images that are illustrative and/or narrative. According to Deleuze they function in two ways: by resemblance, or by convention. Our perception is conditioned by photographic images, with their seductive yet implausible singular truth. Bacon says of photographs: "it is not a figuration of what one sees, it is what modern man sees" (Francis Bacon quoted in **Deleuze, G.** (2003), p.11). These images rule over the eye and mind completely, because they reduce sensation to a singular dimension incapable of movement. Photographs rarely allow us to transcend our optical closures of them. Even film, which does on occasion provide the possibility of movement between layers of sensation, is not capable of the kind of fluid realisation and abandonment of closures that painting can achieve.

Manual Intervention In Optical Space: In my paintings I make manual interventions in optical or pictorial space by using materials such as gravel, which is sprinkled or thrown into areas of poured varnish. I integrate the traces of these manual interventions – these acts of deformation – by forming layers in the painting. These layers are also stages in the painting's construction, periods of time marked by a body engaged in materials. For example, the first layer may consist of a representation of a photographic image, complete with figurative closures. The second layer may consist of gravel, suspended in varnish and laid over the image in a particular

⁶⁷ The preliminary closure of sensation is an encounter with openness. It is necessarily temporal, save for the texture that remains in the material resulting from that primary closure.

way. In this second layer, no figurative closures occur. There may also be stones on the canvas or blobs of paint thrown in a gesture of controlled chance. All these layers, which in places are discreet while in others are indistinguishable from the layers beneath it and the layers over it, encourage the differentiation and movement of sensations. The plurality of differences that these layers envelop, subverts the codification of abstraction and figuration, allowing the pictorial fact to emerge. In my work, such emergence is not possible in abstraction alone, because here manual space is dominant. Nor is it possible in figuration alone, because here optical space is dominant.⁶⁸

The Digital, The Tactile, The Manual, And The Haptic: The relationship between the mind, the eye and the hand in their creation of a painting cannot be defined simply in terms of judgement and execution. The conventional model whereby the mind conceives of the painting in advance, the hand realises that conception on the canvas, and the eye/mind judges if the concept and realisation have been visually successful, is far too reductive. It is logical, but inorganic. *"This relationship is infinitely richer, passing through dynamic tensions, logical reversals and organic exchanges and substitutions."* (Deleuze, G. (2003) p.154). Deleuze identifies four different types of relationship between eye and hand: the digital, the tactile, the manual and the haptic. The digital phase of the relationship occurs when the hand is completely subordinate to the eye and its occupation is purely functional. Here the eye, in its autonomy,

⁶⁸ Deleuze suggests that Abstract art transcends figurative given by employing manual, non-figurative marks that depict traits of sensation but do not represent any specific figurative object. These marks are produced at random, but the abstract artist reduces the chaos ensuing from their chance creation by organising these marks into a code. This code is "digital" - not in the sense that it uses the fingers, but in the sense that it consists of units - units of elementary visual form. The Abstract Expressionists utilised chance in their making of marks, but out of the resulting chaos they discovered a rhythm: a manual power that fills, and to some extent goes beyond, the frame of any particular painting. With this manual power, a reversal takes place in the conventional relationship between the hand and the eye or between manual and optical experience, in painting. In figurative art, optical space is predominant, and the hand is made subordinate to the eye. In action painting, however, this relationship is reversed. Manual experience takes precedence over optical experience, and the eye is made subordinate to the hand. The optical space of the painting is challenged by the manual space of the artist. (Deleuze G, (2003), pp.111-161)

creates an ideal optical space. Between ideal optical space and manual space lies a tactile space. Here the hand and eye inhabit a visual reality, where depth, contour and relief captivate the hand, but where the eye can never rest, because its dominance is lost. During the tactile phase of the relationship, sensation is unclear, because both hand and eye have lost their authority with each undermining the other. In manual space, the judgement/execution relationship is reversed, and the eye becomes subordinate to the hand. In that situation or phase of the relationship, visual reality is lost. The haptic phase of the relationship occurs when an organic exchange takes place; there is no subordination. In haptic space, the eye discovers touch and the hand realises judgement.

Figuration is the result of tactile-optical space. This space is ever present for the painter. It is pre-existent in the established closure of the eye/hand relationship. Manual interventions disrupt this space with non-figurative marks, patches of colour or materials. Pictorial fact – the painting's fact – emerges out of this process, not as representation or copy but as a new presentation from which sensation is generated. For the painter or viewer to experience a haptic exchange of eye and hand, the manual intervention must be temporal, while its traces remain visible and functioning in the painting. Then, sensation can be clear and precise, because some areas of the painting generate sensation from the dominance of the hand and some from the dominance of the eye. The manual intervention into tactile-optical space slowly secretes into the painting and as a result we can achieve haptic vision. The intervention modulates only the possibility of pictorial fact, but the painting realises that fact when all layers or areas of a painting are working together to generate the movement of precise sensations. Paintings may still have figuration that can be read and be found interesting but what is necessary is a haptic vision of, or exchange between material and image, which belies the forces that fashion the paintings fact and the processes undergone in its realisation.

Using Deleuze's terminology, the tactile-optical space has been established and brought to a point of crisis through the intervention of manual marks and/or materials. Having secured areas or layers of manual space within the picture, it is possible to engage with the haptic aspect of the eye/hand relationship. It is at this stage of the painting, when an internal dynamic has been established, that a particular reversibility begins to take place between the self and the work, between the painter and his painting. For the painter it is now a question of engaging with haptic vision, in order to realise precise movements of sensation and thereby discover the painting's fact. I am always most excited to return to the studio the day after a manual intervention into pictorial space has been made, when I know the varnish will be dry and the stones or gravel will be part of the visual whole. Texture will then have been incorporated into the work and new unexpected closures will be waiting to be realised.

Appendix Four - Documentation Of The Creation Of "Transparent Rotunda"



plate no.14 (stage 1) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 2) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 3) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 4) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 5) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 6) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 7) – Transparent Rotunda



plate no.14 (stage 8) – Transparent Rotunda

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