

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

ON MAKING THE IMMEASURABLE MEASURABLE:
A SEARCH FOR SPIRITUALITY IN PAINTING PRACTICE

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

AMBER HARVEY

2009

Copyright © 2009 by Amber Harvey

INTRODUCTION

*The task of painting is to render visible forces that are not
themselves visible*

(Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation)

Conceptually my interests evolve around the theory of the spiritual in art; in part because of my religious background as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in part because of the influence that art has in my own life. Growing up in a musical family and in a faith where the power of music is often associated with that which is spiritual, I found myself wondering about the ability of art to do the same. Engaging in studio practice I struggled with the question of how to represent something seemingly intangible or ineffable, like the principle of faith or the feeling of the Holy Spirit, in a painting. The practice that has developed from this has been a search for a conceptual language to express these things.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could never have done any of this without the help and support of all those around me.

I owe much to the staff in the Fine Arts Department and would particularly like to thank John Di Stefano for his encouragement and guidance; Karin Van Roosmalen for her enthusiasm and advice; Mike Heynes for his expertise; and Richard Reddaway & Simon Morris for their help and support.

I would like to thank Molly, Greg, Catherine, Shelley, Virginia, Meighan, Mike, Justine, Hanne, Ruth, Fran, Gemma and Peter for their insights, encouragement and discussions throughout the year.

And also my family and good friends, for their patience and support. Particularly Jack, I could never have done this without your constant help and support. Thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	i	
Acknowledgements	iii	
Table of Contents	v	
List of Illustrations	vii	
Moments	1	
Observation	3	
Materials	5	
Windows	9	
Spirituality	13	
Maculae	17	
The Unemphatic Sublime		23
Presence	27	
Screen	29	
Light	33	
The Figure of Room		37
Conclusion	45	
Appendix*	49	
Bibliography	73	

*includes three DVDs.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- pg. 4 Caspar David Friedrich. *View from the Artist's Atelier Right Window*. 1805-06. Sepia on paper, 31.2 x 23.7 cm. Oesterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.
- pg. 7 Amber Harvey. *Detail of Observations*. 2008. Montage.
- pg. 8 Uta Barth. *Ground #30*. 1994. Ektacolor print on panel, edition of eight. 22 x 18 inches. Photograph courtesy of the Larry Qualls Archive.
- pg. 11 Amber Harvey. *Window Print*. Installation. 2008.
- pg. 16 Piero della Francesca. *Annunciation*. About 1470. Tempera. Collection of the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.
- pg. 19 Milan Mrkusich. *Painting Green*. 1972. Oil On Canvas. 1730 x 1730. Courtesy of The Fletcher Trust Collection.
- pg. 26 Milan Mrkusich. *Painting Dark III* 1971, acrylic on canvas, 224 x 173 cm. Courtesy of Rob Garrett Contemporary Fine Art.
- pg. 22 Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist*. c.1818. Oil on Canvas. 94.8x74.8cm. Courtesy of The Image Gallery. Original in Kunsthalle, Hamburg.
- pg. 30 Hiroshi Sugimoto. *Orinda Theater*. 1992. Courtesy of Media Art Net.
- pg. 32 Amber Harvey. *Screen*. 2008. Installation.
- pg. 33 Amber Harvey. *Details of Screen*. 2008.
- pg. 34 James Turrell. *Skyspace*. 2001. Installation. (From Series: One Accord 1995-9, Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston, Texas, USA). Image Courtesy of Art Net.
- pg. 37 Amber Harvey. *Window Space*. 2008. Installation.
- pg. 38 Edward Hopper. *Sun in an Empty Room*. 1963. Oil on Canvas, 73.7 x 101.6 cm. Private Collection.
- pg. 40 Adolf Von Menzel. *The Room with a Balcony*. 1845. Berlin, Nationalgalerie.
- pg. 42 Shellburne Thurber. *Gholson homeplace: Entryway with front door*. Chromagenic Print. 1998. Courtesy of the artist.
- pg. 43 Paul Winstanley. *Lounge A* 1997. Courtesy the artist and Maureen Paley
- pg. 45 Amber Harvey. *Documentation of Wall 2*. 2008
- pg. 46 Paul Winstanley. *Veil 20*. 2007. Oil on Linen. 243.8 x 213.4 cm. Image courtesy of Mitchell-Innes and Nash.

The insignificant is as big to me as any,

(What is less or more than a touch?)

Walt Whitman

MOMENTS

Turquoise curtains. The first four years of my life were lived in Auckland. I remember very little of those years; two maybe three things, the loquat tree, the sage green colour of the bathroom and that turquoise colour with the early morning light coming through it, to where I lay stomach down.

It made such a clatter; every noise was heightened in the lanæ; the humidity sticky. Large masonite drawing boards and clunky drawing stools awkward to manoeuvre at best. We positioned ourselves around the hallways and started to draw. Too soon, no hands just eyes; first of all we had to look. Look at what is in front of you; squint your eyes half shut; look again the details fail everything falls into tone, light and dark.

As we'd walked to the car that afternoon I'd noticed a dried seedpod on the footpath and picked it up – a habitual act from my childhood – and kept walking. I subconsciously turned it over and over between

my fingers as we drove familiarising myself with its brittleness and curves. We had to stop and you ran in, while I stayed in the car. It was then that I began to look. Look at it in my hands, at it held up to the window, at it with the light above, at it so close to my eyes it was all I could see.



Fig. 1, Caspar David Friedrich. *View from the Artist's Atelier Right Window*. 1805-06. Sepia on paper, 31.2 x 23.7 cm. Oesterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

OBSERVATION

*“Perceiving is the same as receiving and it is the same as responding.
Perception means all of them.”*

Agnes Martin¹

It may be helpful to start our discussion with some definitions, let's look at the words, see, perceive and observe. See, to perceive with the eyes, to experience or witness, to deduce after reflection or from information; from the old English. Perceive, to become aware or conscious of through the senses; from the Latin percipere to seize, to understand. Observe, to notice or perceive, to watch attentively, monitor; from the Latin observare to watch over or a watching over. Interestingly each definition is dependent on the other two definitions and within each the same idea that vision is not just a matter of our

eyes but of our mind. Let's hold onto these three phrases, to seize, to understand after reflection, to watch over. In philosophical terms observation is the process of filtering sensory information through the thought process. Information is received through our senses – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch – and then analysed by our thought patterns. Seeing, perceiving, observing. For the purpose of this work I wish to focus on these three inter-reliant definitions as one; but under the more passive tense of, observation.

This was the theme for a body of work engaged in over six years ago now. The methodology for the work sounded simple: to look through the window of the studio and to paint what I saw. When one painting was finished begin again and start the next one. The weeks passed, fourteen of them and fourteen paintings. The paintings are telling. With each one there is more there than I saw before. I found myself thinking, “Had that always been there? Why hadn't I seen that in the last painting?” The paintings increased in size, scale and detail until the semester was over and it was time to come home.

Now I find myself in the studio again, a studio with windows that face north and another simple sounding methodology: to observe materials in this studio space. There is something strangely familiar about this, the same methodology but a different strategy. One of the first

¹ Martin, A. (2005). Writings/Schriften. (D. Schwarz, Ed.) Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz. p. 89.

observations results in a quick pencil sketch of one of the windows in the studio.

As the summer morning sun intensifies, the heat becomes counter-productive to working in the space. I place large pieces of white paper over the window panes. The paper doesn't quite fit, slightly too small all around, like a jersey that's been shrunk in the dryer; it sits askew on the panes. Although oddly positioned the paper is successful in lessening the heat and as a result, there is a new light that fills the studio; diffused light.

MATERIALS

In thinking of observation as a methodology for studio practice I feel there is something akin to the practice of New Mexican artist, Florence Pierce whose studio practice involves a ‘stilling’ or ‘quieting of the mind’.¹ Such stilling of the mind allows for observations to be noticed that perhaps otherwise might escape our attention. Such was the case with the discovery that led to her monochrome resin squares. One day when working in the studio a drop of resin accidentally fell onto a piece of aluminium and as Pierce recalls she discovered, “I could manipulate resin and when I held it up to the light I found it itself was full of light”².

My observation in the studio began with materials; the ordinary everyday materials that I’d been surrounded by all my life but never really observed. Glad wrap, glass jars, cellophane, wax paper, paper towels,

¹ Florence Pierce, “the key is emptiness, working is facing the void, or infinity... I start everyday by just looking at a blank square. There are mental states that come from the stilling of the mind, the quieting of the mind” from Rodgers, T. R. (2004). *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press. p.48.

² Ibid., p.48

plastic tablecloths, discarded paper. Each was positioned around the studio space. In observation there seems to be implied an attitude of stepping back, a distance or retraction from creating something anew, as though the work is already there but waiting to be noticed, something about it that seems passive but yet subtly active also. Once the materials were positioned within the space, I stood back, to see how the materials and the space would interact. Those observations of the materials in space guided how I engaged with and developed the work, before stepping back again to generate the next step. This oscillating between artist and observer was reflexive and generative. Daily spending time in the space allowed me to ‘watch over’ the experiments, noting my observations primarily with a camera but also sometimes with words and sketches.

I began to refer to this process of noting observations as journaling. As the days passed my collections of observations grew. Each day there were multiple contact sheets for the images of that day and enlargements of what I felt were the key observations. The journal itself speaks of observation through the quantity of the collection, daily an hundred images and daily an hundred more; the everyday, the insignificant. After a time, patterns emerged and the observations began to group themselves into bodies of work.

From these experimentations with materials I found a kinship in the Arte Povera movement of the late 1960s. A slightly elusive movement to define or categorize it originated in Italy and was known for the use of simple means and the exploration of new materials. According to Flood and Morris, Arte Povera showed, “a remarkable appetite for new materials and a restless desire to explore new processes. Art could be made from anything: living things, products of the earth, and industrially produced materials as well as immaterial substances such as moisture, sound and energy” (Flood and Morris, 2001, p. 15). In writing of the approach of artists in Italy at this time to materials, Tommaso Trini wrote, “If they introduce materials previously unused in art – materials such as earth, asbestos, graphite, ice, birds, wax, tar, wire mesh and chemicals – it is for reasons of convenience, first of all, and then to make their relationship with reality as free and fresh as possible” (Lumley, 2004, p. 43).

An example of this was the work *Tent* 1967 of Gilberto Zorio, in which salt water was poured onto the flat roof of a blue cube shaped tent (made of canvas and scaffolding tubes) and left to evaporate, leaving behind crystalline deposits.³ This initial action of pouring the salt water could be likened to my placing of materials within the studio space, whilst the leaving of it to form crystalline deposits could be likened to

the stepping back from those materials and allowing them to act.

³ see Lumley, R. (2004). *Arte Povera - Movements in Modern Art*. New York: Tate Publishing. p. 45.



Fig. 2, Amber Harvey. *Detail of Observations*. 2008.



Fig. 3, Uta Barth. *Ground #30*. 1994. Ektacolor print on panel, edition of eight. 22 x 18 inches. Photograph courtesy of the Larry Qualls Archive.

WINDOWS

The eye is the window to the soul, well maybe. It may be an old cliché but it holds something of use; the fact that a window is used to suggest an opening, a portal, or even a screen. There are two artists, Uta Barth and Sebastian Di Mauro for whom the use of the window is fundamental in their work.

In speaking of Uta Barth's *nowhere near* series, some critics have observed that the window acts as a "meta-representation of sight" (Lee, 2004, p. 85). But what do they mean by that? Do they mean that the window is a metaphysical symbol for sight or vision? Barth has repeatedly stated that her work is about perception, "the question for me always is how can I make you aware of your own activity of looking" (Lee, Higgs, & Gilbert-Rolfe, 2004, p. 36). With this as a primary theme, it is not surprising that light, an integral part of our visual perception, is also a constant theme in her work.

Windows, in the basic format of a grid have occurred in the work of

Australian Installation artist, Sebastian Di Mauro. His work with grids explored issues of space and containment, often embracing the metaphysical and approaching ideas of death, regeneration and immortality. In speaking of the function of the grid within his work, Jane Barnes has said, "the grid produces a distancing effect and yet allows one to look past it into another dimension" (Drury & Voigt 1996 p. 163). In his recent work he has used the specific materials of light, water, metal, stone and coal because of their alchemical significance to act as an allegory for those metaphysical quests of transitions, transfiguration and immortality. My work this year has focused on just one of these elements, light and its power to transform and regenerate.

One of the first bodies of work to emerge from the observations was that of the *Window Prints* (Fig. 4). The initial impetus for this was the concept of using paint as a glue or adhesive; as part of the structure and support rather than merely surface application. I began by covering plain pieces of paper with paint and sandwiching them together; then hanging them on the empty window panes, adjacent to the large white paper that were already sitting there slightly askew. Holding the wet paint, the paper appeared so transparent; the light greedily flooded in areas that were normally more diffuse. Even as the paint dried, the areas of the paper that had paint on still allowed for greater transmittance of light than the areas without the paint.

As the prints developed I found myself using gesso rather than paint. This had the dual effect of reducing the palette to a neutral tone to allow for more subtle nuances and of elevating the gesso as a ground, from background to a more central position, in this case, an illuminated position. Even with the powdery white of the gesso there was plenty of colour; the off white colour of the paper; the changing daylight as it worked its way through clouds, glass and the layers of gesso, and the reflected colour from the walls, the bench and carpet below. Eventually I found I was making the prints to fit into the window panes; the size and shape of each window determined the design of the print—whether it was made from three or four pieces, arranged in a parallel or quadrant formation. It was from this work onwards that I began thinking in terms of the performative, of the residue of painting, and of light transforming space.

The exhibition of the *Window Prints* took place as an installation comprised of the twelve window prints and a projection entitled *Cellophane Work*.¹ The projection was an observational piece that emerged from my early observations. A piece of folded cellophane, creases crisp from the packet hung on a pillar between the two windows in my studio. Late April in the early afternoon for just over half an hour at a

time, light would pass through the window and hit the cellophane; falling in intricate patterns on the wall behind. The light acts as a catalyst in a distillation process whilst the use of the video camera acted as the distiller, extracting the essential elements of the interaction between the light waves and the cellophane, transforming a very ordinary object to something gently, intricately sublime. However in the very act of distilling this work I faced a dilemma: does allowing the camera to mediate limit or enhance my experience? Am I representing or allowing it to be re-presented? Is it possible to exist and present the present without representing?²

² Spending so much time in the studio with the *Window Prints* prompted me to film a time lapse of them. I wanted to document the way they interacted with the different kinds of light during the day, from first thing in the morning, to how quickly they would change with each cloud, to the end of the day when the lighting transitioned from the exterior to the interior. Two works emerged from this time lapse and can be seen in the Appendix, Disc 2, entitled, *Presence and Absence*.

¹ Refer to DVD 1 in Appendix



Fig. 4, Amber Harvey. *Window Prints*. Installation with gesso and paper. 2008.

SPIRITUALITY

The terms spiritual and spirituality are hard to categorize; as Timothy Rodgers said, “the most powerful words are those most difficult to define: happiness, friendship, perfection” (Rodgers, 2004, p. 14). They seem to resist categorization based on the very personal and intimate application that they have for each of us. As personally subjective terms our understanding and feeling for them are a result of individual cultural and sociological beliefs and background.

Often the word spiritual is avoided by artists who feel that it carries with it a lot of theological ‘baggage’ (Lippard, 2004, p. 48). Louis Kahn used the word ‘commonness’ over the word ‘spirit’ as “spirit is immediately assumed as understood, commonness makes one think” (Twombly, 2003, p. 234), while Agnes Martin opted for the word ‘perfection’. Spirituality, commonness, the immeasurable, infinity, the sublime, perfection and presence. I feel that these are all individual terms for talking about a common concept, but which we each experience so personally. Perhaps this is why Agnes Martin rejoiced in an art which is ‘wordless and silent’ because it enabled her to express the

inexpressible of her own ‘wordless and silent’ experiences?

Mike King in his work, ‘Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science’ defines the word spiritual into three terms: the religious, the occult and the transcendental; “the ‘religious’ is intended to convey traditional and organized religious spirituality such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism; the ‘occult’, an esoteric preoccupation with such matters as the paranormal, reincarnation, clairvoyance and disembodied beings; and finally the ‘transcendent’ as dealing with a shift in personal identity from the physical and temporal to the infinite and eternal, with mystical union or with nirvana” (King, 1998, p. 21).

The terms spiritual, spirit and spirituality are often used interchangeably but have subtle and distinctive differences which lend greater understanding. Bruce R. McConkie¹ described spirituality as “that state of holiness, purity and general perfection which enables (one) to enjoy the near constant companionship of the Lord’s Spirit... (a state of being in) tune with spiritual and eternal things” (McConkie, 1958, p. 760). Thus spirituality is a state of being, a condition or attribute, while the term spiritual relates to things of God or to things of the Holy Spirit, heavenly things as opposed to things of an earthly nature. The term

¹ An apostle for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from 1972 – 1985.

spirit is used to refer either to our individual spirit² or to the spirit of the Lord³. When speaking of the Spirit of the Lord, scriptural references tend to use words like see, hear and feel to describe the interaction. In a similar fashion King suggests that “the artistic response - an emotional one - (has) a closer affinity to the spiritual impulse” (King, 1998, p. 21)

In Latter-day Saint Theology there are two beliefs that help clarify these concepts. The first is the belief that we are dual beings, made up of both a physical body and a spirit, commonly called a soul. Just as we have parents of our physical bodies, God is the father of our spirits, we are his children and as such we all have a ‘spiritual’ nature or part of us. This is a belief common in Christianity and in many other religions. Secondly, the belief that the Godhead is made up of three separate and distinct individual beings, God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the traditional concept of the trinity, which the Athanasian Creed⁴ defines as three beings in one body, a belief which is still held by Christianity in general today but upon which the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ differs. Although a personage,

The Holy Spirit is most often described as a feeling which helps you to recognize truth. It may be experienced as a feeling of warmth, happiness, peace, light or clarity. Due to the doctrinal foundation and the experience of it as a feeling; my personal understanding of the word spiritual, lies between the religious and the transcendental as defined by King.

² Used here in the same sense as a more common term, soul

³ Alternatively referred to as the Holy Spirit

⁴ An amplification of the Nicene Creed written in 325 AD, “for the person of the Father is one; of the Son, another; of the Holy Spirit, another... yet there are not three eternal Beings, but one eternal being” *Important Creeds of Christendom - Athanasian Creed*. (n.d.). Retrieved 27 October 2007 from <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Creeds.html>



Fig.5, Hiroshi Sugimoto. *Orinda Theater*. 1992. Courtesy of Media Art Net.



Fig.6, Piero della Francesca. *Annunciation*. About 1470. Tempera. Collection of the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.

MACULAE

The eighth chapter of Laurence Simmons book, *The Image Always has the Last Word – On Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Photography*, entitled ‘Mrkusich’s Maculae’ has been a piece of writing that has remained with me this past year.

Simmons begins with the familiar story of the Annunciation – of the Angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary as found in the book of Luke in the Holy Bible. Identifying this as a story that is “a pure performance of words” which traditional theological commentary have interpreted as a “message” rather than a “vision”; Simmons invites us to question “the status of a painting that represents the Annunciation” (Simmons, 2002, p. 111). The word ‘annunciation’ in this sentence could be replaced with any other word of an infinite or intangible nature and the question would effectively remain the same, that is, what is the status of a painting that represents presence? What is the status of a painting that represents perfection? To paraphrase Simmons, does it have an earthly ontology because of the materials used and the space it oc-

cupies, or does it belong essentially to a spiritual realm because of its subject matter?

In answer to this Simmons uses the example of the *Annunciation* from Peiro della Francesca’s Perugia Polyptych (Fig. 6). He notes two points of confusion, the first,¹ the placing of the Virgin Mary in a separate and enclosed space, restricting her view of the angel Gabriel and his view of her (which reiterates that this is a story about a message rather than a vision, which the painter has enabled us to see or witness). The second puzzling feature is that which is located at the centre of the painting; a corridor of columns down which our gaze travels until it is blocked by a panel or wall, decorated with “non-uniform, cloud-like brown splotches with black edging; marks which have a slightly pink underpainting showing through” (Simmons, 2002, p. 112); though unclear in what they represent Simmons presumes that must be simply more than decoration, more than representations of stone or painted marble. Referencing the work of Georges Didi-Huberman, Simmons points out that a large number of renaissance representations of the Annunciation “contain similar painted panels of nonrepresentational paint in their background or foregrounds” (Simmons, p. 112), and suggests that this may be because abstract forms are suggestive of the mystery that surrounds the Incarnation, a doctrine both unexplainable

¹ Influenced by Kenneth Clarks writing.

and non-representable. In finding a name for these marks, Simmons presents us with the following words:

Macula [L.] A spot or stain: Astron. A dark spot in the sun;
Min. a spot in a mineral due to the presence of particles of
some other mineral; Path. a spot or stain in the skin.

Hence Maculate v. to spot, stain, soil, defile, pollute.

Maculate ppl. a. maculated. Now only in antithesis to im-
maculate

(Oxford English Dictionary)

In a key sentence Simmons states, “The interesting question here is not what these maculae in the composition represent but how and why they do not represent something. What are the implications of their non-representativeness?” Turning again to the work of Didi-Huberman;² Simmons argues that these maculae are not only the precursors of western abstraction but that they also engage in similar discourses as to the mimetic and referential function of painting and the role of the spectator (Simmons, 2002, p. 113).

Within New Zealand painting these maculae are identified most mark-

edly in the work of Milan Mrkusich, specifically in his corner paintings of the late 1960s and early 1970s but also more subtly in his Grid and Arc paintings of the 1980s (Fig. 7). Describing these as, “maculated atmospheric effects in which geometric elements float or are positioned in an activated field” (Simmons, 2002, p. 114). Simmons claims that the paintings “raise fundamental problems inherent in painting or in painterly representation itself” and delves into the difficulties of deictics, the discursive mode of painting and its ability to interpellate the viewer. In regards to the renaissance Annunciation maculae, Simmons claims that they “signal the ineffable presence of the spoken word in mute painting” (Simmons, p. 117).

Michael Baxandall likened the five emotional states experienced by Mary during the Annunciation³ as *Conturbatio* (Disquiet), *Cogitatio* (Reflection), *Interrogatio* (Inquiry), *Humiliatio* (Submission) and *Meritatio* (Merit) to the visual experience of these painted representations of the annunciation. Simmons parallels this with the phenomenology of viewing Mrkusich’s work. Five moments or movements that are experienced as ones viewing distance changes, from the moment we walk into the gallery, make our way up to the painting and then move away again. I experienced something of this at the Hamish McKay Gal-

² Didi-Huberman claimed that these renaissance maculae are the forerunners to later western abstraction

³ Which originated from a fifteenth-century sermon by Fra Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce



Fig. 7, Milan Mrkusich. *Painting Green*. 1972. Oil On Canvas. 1730 x 1730. Courtesy of The Fletcher Trust Collection.

lery this semester with the show of Four Paintings of Mrkusich's work. Upon entering the room and at the far end of the gallery sat the work *Segmented Arc on Indigo Blue* (1982). As my viewing distance changed the work seemed to expand and contract accordingly. The indigo blue had within it the subtlest maculae which seemed as deep and ineffable as the colour itself. Although unclear about what I was thinking and feeling at the time, I was fascinated with this indigo blue and its maculae which seemed both immerse me and retract from me as I moved before it.

In conclusion Simmons turns to the naturally occurring 'stains of camouflage' as an equivalent maculae effect found in nature as identified in Roger Caillois examination of 'mimeticism'⁴. Caillois concludes that mimeticism is not used for protection (for which the tiger has no need) "but to attract and inveigle" its prey. Seen in the light of the interpellation of the spectator this function of mimeticism, not to protect but to inveigle is particularly interesting to me. In similar manner Simmons gives a further example of the skin of a boa constrictor; the stains of which "render it invisible because they are what shatter its linear and serpentine form" (Simmons, 2002, p. 122) allowing it to disappear into the surface or background.

⁴ The discussion of a photograph of a tiger that remains unseen in his natural habitat of bamboo, due to his alternating stripes and the alternating stems of the bamboo.

“The first line on paper is less...failing to capture either the
magnificence or the subtlety of the mind’s vision”

Louis Kahn¹

¹Kahn, L. (2003). *Silence and Light* (1968,1969). In L. Kahn, & R. Twombly (Ed.), *Louis Kahn - Essential Texts* (pp. 228-251). New York: WW Norton.

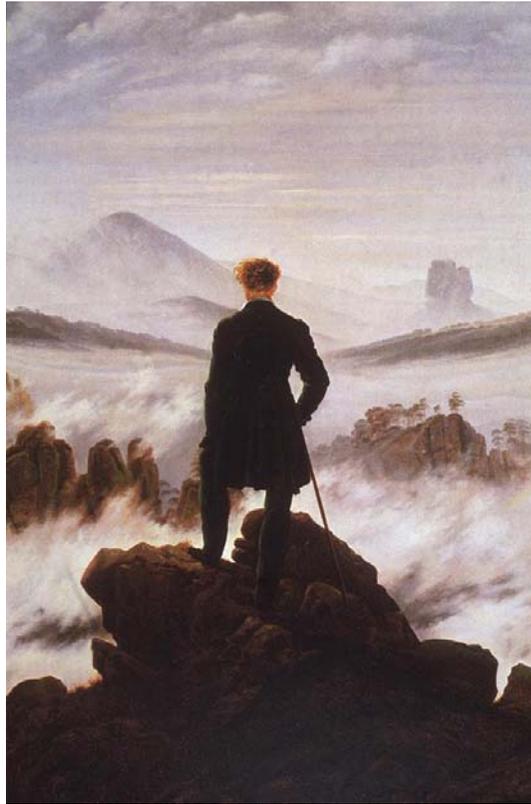


Fig.8, Caspar David Friedrich. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist*. c.1818. Oil on canvas. 94.8x74.8cm. Courtesy of the Image Library. Original in Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

THE UNEMPHATIC SUBLIME

“The idea of infinity cannot be expressed in words or even described, but it can be apprehended through art, which makes infinity tangible. The absolute is only attainable through faith and in the creative act.”

Andrey Tarkovsky¹

“Perfection is out of reach. It is the pursuit, the longing to create more and more powerful objects with less and less visual fanfare”

Lucy Lippard²

“The most powerful words are those most difficult to define: happiness, friendship, perfection. Agnes Martin’s contention that we all know what perfection is in our minds might be true, but, if surveyed, few would define perfection exactly the same. Perhaps because words such as these are bound by cultural constraints like time and place, education and class, it is impossible to create a universal definition... .A con-

¹ Tarkovsky, A. (1986). *Sculpting in Time - Reflections on the Cinema*. London: Bodley Head.

² Lippard, L. (2004). *Travelling Light - Florence Pierce*. In T. R. Rodgers, *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

sideration of perfection, for example, uncovers societal building blocks such as work, goals, standards, failure, power and spirituality”

Timothy Rodgers³

Seventeenth Century philosopher Edmund Burke was one of the first to write of the sublime. He associated the sublime with privations – conditions resulting from a lack or a loss of those things which are generally considered necessary, resulting in solitude, silence or darkness – and with infinity,

Another source of the sublime is infinity... Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime. There are scarce any things which can become the objects of our senses, that are really and in their own nature infinite. But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. (Burke, 1990, p. 15)

In regards to the sublime object, Burke felt that if the object was sim-

³ Rodgers, T. R. (2004). *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

ple and vast, the eye would not readily arrive at the limits of the object and have no place to rest, initiating the feeling of the sublime (Burke, 1990).

In writing of Arte Povera, Germano Celant described the movement as a “hymn to the commonplace” and later added that “what has happened is that the commonplace has entered the sphere of art. The insignificant has begun to exist – indeed, it has imposed itself” (Christov-Bakargiev, C. 1999, p. 220) In a similar manner Sarah Whitfield when reviewing the exhibition, *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972* at the Tate Modern in 2001 described it as “when the down to earth and transcendental meet and become indistinguishable” (Whitfield 2001, p. 545). An example of this is Giovanni Anselmo’s work entitled, “My shadow turned towards infinity from the top of Stromboli at dawn on 16 August 1965”. Jean Christophe Ammann later wrote of Anselmo’s experience: “On 16 August 1965, he witnessed the sunrise on the top of Stromboli. The position of the sun, barely above the horizon, caused his body, as it were, to become shadowless: the shadow was invisibly ‘projected into the air’. This unsensational fact was to have for him the significance of a revelation: ‘My own person, through the invisible shadow’ came into contact with the light, the infinite.” (Ammann, 1979, in Christov-Bakargiev, 1999, p.234)

In writing of the work of Florence Pierce, Lucy Lippard refers to monochromes as “the silent art” (Lippard, 2004, p. 46) and in our discussion of the ineffable perhaps this is well placed. Florence Pierce’s *Monochrome Resin Squares* are full of light. Light that seems to come from within. Although Pierce’s monochrome resin squares come in many luscious colours her white works have remained the nucleus. Dennis Jarrett has written of viewing her work, “depending on the strength and the angle of the light, they begin to breath and exhale colour at you” (Lippard, 2004, p. 47). Breathing and exhaling, these works are living; these are works with presence.

The works of Agnes Martin run in two parallel streams, her paintings and her writings. Neither are intended to explain the other yet “their interaction stems from an understanding of reality that is common to both, so that they mutually illuminate each other.” (Liesbrock, 2004, p. 34). Her paintings have been described as evocative, spiritual and lyrical, words that could aptly refer to her poetic writing as well (Rodgers, 2004, p. 18). As I read her writing I felt as though I had been given a key, not an explanation but a key to unlock a door and begin my approach. In her writings she speaks often of ‘perfection’ (a word that for her was synonymous with the sublime), of perception, inspiration and the mind. The concept of perfection was something that she traced back to the classical period of the ancient Greek civilisation:

They discovered that in Nature there are no perfect circles or straight lines or equal spaces. / Yet they discovered that their interest and inclination was in the perfection of circles and lines, and that in their minds they could see them and that they were then able to make them. / They realized that the mind knows what the eye has not seen but that what the mind knows is perfection (Martin, 2005 p. 117).

Although our minds may be aware of the concept of perfection - however we each define it - it is another thing to achieve perfection and herein lay the divine calling and personal dichotomy for Martin, for as she would say “we can see perfectly, but we cannot do perfectly” (Martin, 2005 p. 32) and humbly admitted that “perfection, of course, cannot be represented” This is what made her calling as an artist so very challenging:

The work is so far from perfection because we ourselves are so far from perfection. The oftener we glimpse perfection or the more conscious we are in our awareness of it, the farther away it seems to be. Or perhaps I should say that the more we are aware of perfection the more we realize how very far away from us it is (Martin, 2005, p. 69).

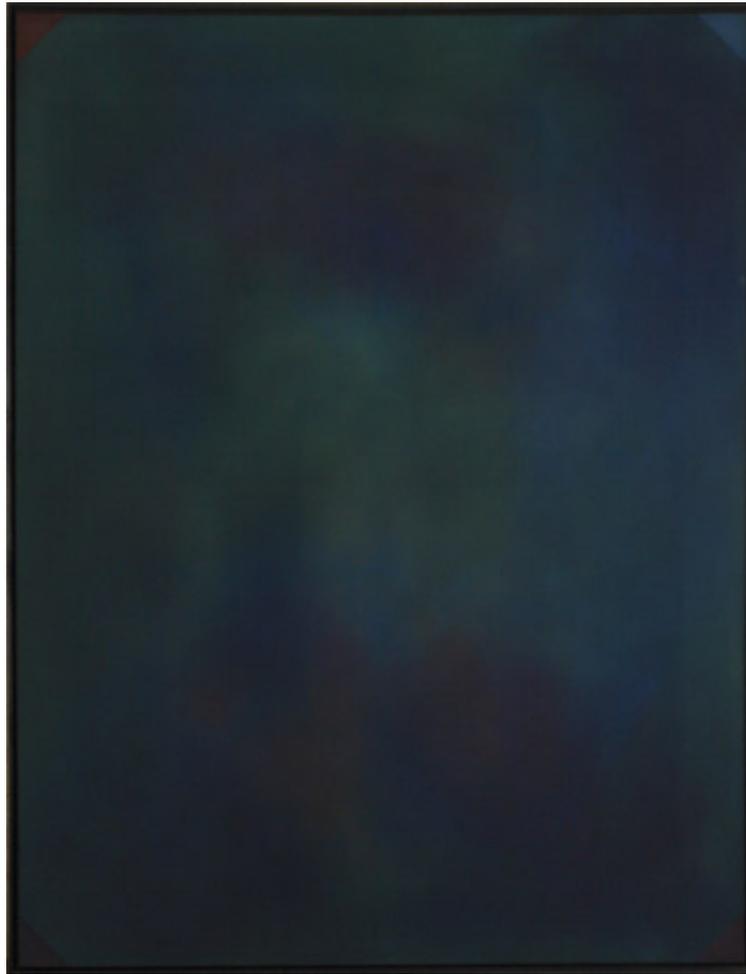


Fig.8, Milan Mrkusich, *Painting Dark III* 1971, acrylic on canvas, 224 x 173 cm. Courtesy of Rob Garrett Contemporary Fine Art.

PRESENCE

Edward Hanfling's writing, *Animating Abstraction – Recent Paintings by Milan Mrkusich* accompanied an exhibition of Milan Mrkusich's work at the Sue Crockford Gallery in Auckland from 27 May – 21 June 2003. Indebted to the writings of James Elkins, Hanfling speaks of the six paintings in the exhibition as “having eyes”; by which Hanfling means a section of the painting or composition that has a luminosity or intensity to it that seems to reflect our gaze when we stand before it; seeing us all the while that we are seeing it.

The reason for this personification is based on an obscure idea that Hanfling wishes to maintain - the idea that paintings can have a presence and that they (particularly in abstract painting) can have the capacity to “affect us profoundly or even alter who we are” (Hanfling, 1).

To discuss the aesthetic affect of abstract paintings, Hanfling cites David Carrier and his appropriation of the division that Roland Barthes

first coined,¹ that of the ‘studium’ and the ‘punctum’. While the ‘studium’ refers to the basic structure of the painting, the ‘punctum’ “is that quality which renders the image compelling; it attracts our attention arising from the scene, shooting out like an arrow and piercing us”. It is this ‘punctum’ which is often said to give a painting presence, however, Hanfling refines this to say that the presence doesn't exist in the ‘punctum’ alone but in the ability of the ‘punctum’ to return our gaze to us.

In his book, *The Object Stares Back*, James Elkins proposes that vision is not confined to those things that have eyes but that inanimate objects stare back at us through an absence or empty space and are activated by our seeing of them. Elkins points out that this is a basic principle for how all eyes – including our own eyes function – they do not see unless they are connected to our brain. Unless there is that connection they are an inanimate. It is our act of seeing that activates them, allowing them to see us as we see it, animating it.

Although Elkins points out that all inanimate objects can see, Hanfling reserves the title of ‘eyes’ for the sections of Mrkusich's paintings that are the most intense. These areas of intensity function as eyes, by be-

¹ This distinction by Roland Barthes was first made in relation to photography

ing contrasted to the more muted areas of the painting. According to Hanfling, the gaze that is returned to us from these 'punctum' or 'eyes' within Mrkusich's paintings is our own gaze, but our own gaze modified by that which is reflecting it back to us. Thus our gaze returns to us modified and as we receive it we are no longer the same as we were before we looked, affecting us profoundly.

SCREEN

The *Wall Prints* fluctuate between painting and printmaking and it was from them that I began thinking of distillation as a process in my studio practice. Although a familiar word and process, the dictionary definition of the word distil gives some interesting insights into the words application, “to subject to a process of... condensation, to transform, to concentrate or purify, to remove, to extract the essential elements of, to refine or to abstract”. They consist of two processes, one involving gesso on the surface of the wax paper as an adhesive, the other a process of layering, folding and building up. Where the gesso is applied they become an almost imperceptible skin on the wall; once peeled off they bear the imprint of the wall in intricate detail, and the wall bears the detail of their construction.

They began as singular pieces but evolved into a singular larger piece entitled *Screen*, (Fig.10) which was removed from the wall and positioned in the space between the window and the wall on which it was created. The front of it was positioned to face the window, with just enough space for a person to move through and sit; even

on an overcast day it reflected the light and created an intimate and intense space; while from the other side the light diffused by layers of wax paper and gesso was subtle and varied. This imprinting with wax paper and gesso is an act of distillation; removing the texture of the wall through an imprint, leaving an imprint of the painting process on the wall, extracting the essential element of each, abstracting it. This process of painting has become central to my studio practice and later projects.

Reading of the work of Florence Pierce, I found that there was an affinity between this process of distilling and one aspect of her studio practice. In making her monochrome resin reliefs, “a sheet of vellum is laid on top of the layers or resin... and then removed, (giving) each work its final skin” (Lippard, 2004, p. 47). Doing so gives the surface of the resin more subtlety. This method of placing and removing is similar to imprinting, the placing and removing of the wax paper. This modality of working also engages with the notion of presence and absence; by the absence of the vellum or the wax paper its presence is more strongly evoked than if it had been left there. This principle seems an underlying one in the discussion of presence and absence and is echoed in Andrey Tarkovskys words “to tell of the living use that which is dead, to tell of infinity use the finite” (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 38).



Fig. 10, Amber Harvey. Screen. 2008. Gesso and wax paper.

In her article, *Body and Screen*, Margaret Morse discusses screens as ‘thresholds’ that divide “the ordinary and the everyday from other realms that seem truer or larger than life” (Morse, 1999, 63). Thresholds, Interfaces, Apertures, Portals, Cinemas, Videos, Computers. Screens function as windows between this world and the other. As Morse writes, “masking off part of the world permits images and symbols to invoke the other scene – not what is, but what could or might be or what was in some other time and place” (Morse, p. 63).

Morse traces the screen back to the theatre and claims that the theatrical tradition of a proscenium arch originated from a primordial threshold into a space which was dedicated to ritualistic transformation. “To cross inside was to enter the liminal or in-between stage in a rite of passage from one mortal state or condition into another – while coming into contact with another realm that signifies the immortal or eternal”. (Morse, 1999, p. 65) In the development of cinema from theatre, Morse states that the separation between the “spectators and the other scene unfolding on the screen is absolute” “leaving only phantom characters to haunt an illusory third-dimension” (Morse, p. 65). In speaking of the advent of electronic media in the arts Morse states that “if electronic media introduced new possibilities for presence, it did the same for absence, and even more for the play between the two (Morse, p. 72).

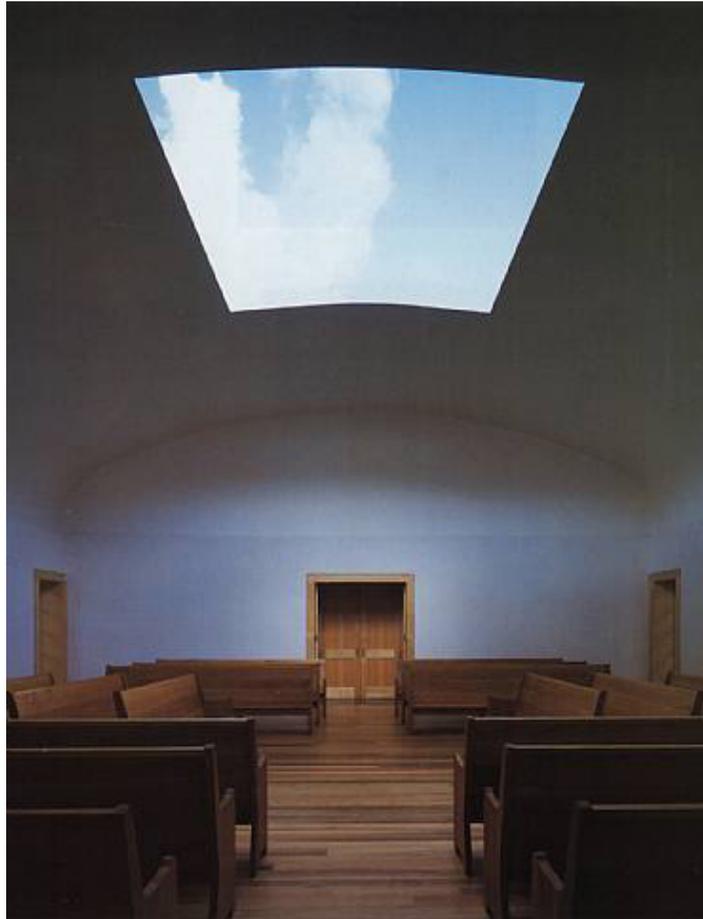


Fig. 11, James Turrell. *Skyspace*. 2001. Installation. (From Series: *One Accord* 1995-9, Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston, Texas, USA). Image Courtesy of Art Net.

LIGHT

In his article, *Framing the Absence of Space* David Anfam stated that “Light is the age old sign of presence” (Anfam, 2004, p. 12) and nothing could be more true when it comes to the religious use of the word. In this sense it is synonymous with revelation, knowledge, truth and the presence of the divine. In scriptural accounts, light is usually always mentioned as preceding the arrival of a heavenly messenger or of signifying the presence of deity¹

In the biblical creation story, the advent of light marked the first day² while Jewish tradition states that when God led the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, he chose a pillar of fire as the symbol of his presence, “a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night”³. Fire was often used as a symbol to describe the brightness of the light which accompanied a divine messenger. This was also

¹ “Light is an attribute of deity and shines forth from him; in him it is found in its fullness and perfection. He is known as the father of lights.” (McConkie))

² Genesis 1:3, King James Version of the Holy Bible

³ Exodus 13:21

the case with Moses when the Lord appeared to him in what has now come to be known as ‘the burning bush’, the bush seemed to be burning and yet was not consumed⁴. In the New Testament the account of Saul’s experience on the road to Damascus involved a light that shone down around him before he heard the voice of the Lord,⁵ whilst the disciples who walked unaware with the Saviour of the road to Emmaus, reflected afterwards that their hearts ‘burned’ within them during the time they spent with him.

Within my own faith, light has both a universal and personal application, with additional synonyms to those mentioned above, as the ‘light of truth’ or the ‘light of Christ’. The term ‘light of Christ’ is frequently used to refer to our conscience, to that which helps us to know right from wrong; while in a broader sense and as synonymous with the simple term ‘light’ it is believed to be an active part of all the light that we see around us.⁶

To use the measurable means of composition and design to find the

⁴ Exodus 3:2

⁵ Acts 9:3

⁶ “Light of Christ is not a personage...it fills the immensity of space and emanates from God. It is the light by which the worlds are controlled, by which they are made. It is the light of the sun and all other bodies. It is the light which gives life to vegetation. It quickens the understanding of men”

immeasurable was a personal quest (Steele, 1999, p. 1) for architect Louis Kahn who wrote and spoke often of light. His design process was focused on the ideal of perfection – perfection that he knew was unattainable and yet for which he always sought (McCarter, 451). He insisted that light was a generating force in his architecture and frequently used “a bi-lateral diagram in which the words, silence and light were written on either side of a central, axial line” (Steele, p. 18). Acknowledging the sun as the source of all light and shadow as the result of the interplay of light with materials, Kahn described light as the “giver of all presences”.

Presence was a word often mentioned by Kahn, who believed that art embodied both ‘existence’ and ‘presence’, one of which referred to the spirit, the other to the tangible (Kahn, 2003, p. 223). In speaking of light as the giver of presence, Kahn shared the following allegory, “when we hear the strains of a familiar musical masterpiece it is as though one familiar has entered the room. But still, as you must see him again to believe his presence, so must the music be played again to remember all that touched you before. (Kahn, p. 234)

As a student James Turrell was reportedly more interested in the beam of light that came from the slide projectors than from what was on the

screen⁷. His approach to light is as a sculptural force where “the material is light but the medium is perception” Turrell was interested in the “thingness” or “objectness’ of light” (Turrell 2002, p. 40). Turrell often speaks of observation in relation to his work, particularly in regard to his Skyspaces, and has stated that observing means making a choice of what to select (Pelli, 2004). This led me to think about orientation and the way in which one approaches a work.

After the Wall prints and the construction of *Screen I* began to think of my work as having a positive and negative residue or being reciprocally residual, with residue of the painted experience left on both the paper and the wall. A new work, *Window Spaces* (Fig.12) emerged to test the theories of distilling, residue and the role of observation, particularly to see if both the positive and negative of a distilled painted experience could coexist within the same work or whether one needed to be removed in order for the other to be effective.⁸

⁷ Zacharias, L. (2004). Shellburne Thurber’s Southern Home. *Southern Cultures* (Fall), 31-51.

⁸ After making this work I realised that the floor should have been removed to more accurately focus the observation of the space.



Fig. 12, Amber Harvey. *Window Space*. 2008. Installation.



Fig.13, Edward Hopper. *Sun in an Empty Room*. 1963. Oil on Canvas, 73.7 x 101.6 cm. Private Collection

THE FIGURE OF ROOM¹

“Are we, then, in a latter-day variant of the cells of the monastery of San Marco in Florence where, on the wall depicting The Annunciation, Fra Angelico figured the epiphany of spirit as the luminous blankness between the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary?”²

David Anfam

In its older and more traditional sense of the word, ‘room’ means ‘available space’ both literally and figuratively. It originally descends from an Indo-European word meaning space and the verb meaning to open, or to make room. Light within a room is an ancient metaphor for thoughts in the human head (Anfam, 2004). The painting of Adolf von Menzel, *The Room with a Balcony* (Fig. 14) shows this metaphor well, we see “signs of vacated space, the arisen from chairs, open window, the in streaming curtains, the trace of presence of spirit, of wind

¹ For this title I am indebted to the writing of John Hollander ‘Hopper and the Figure of Room’ Hollander, J. (1981). Hopper and the Figure of Room. *Art Journal*, 41 (2), 155-160.

² Anfam, D. (2004). Framing the Absence of Space. In J. Turrell, *James Turrell - Projection Works 1966-69* (pp. 5-17). London: Albion.

(,) the spills of light on the floor” all of which appear, “now that there is room for them” (Hollander, 1981, p. 157). Due to the vacated space the light spills have an inhabiting and surveying presence. They have the effect of creating from an enclosed room a meditative space.³

The concepts of room and light were very important to Kahn, who believed that “no space, architecturally, is a space unless it has natural light” (Kahn, 2003, p. 225) and rejoiced in the fact that natural light enabled a room to be a different room every second of the day because of its changing qualities (Kahn, p. 232). In speaking particularly of the value of a room, he believed that “architecture creates a feeling of a world within a world which it gives to the room” such a feeling that enables one to be immersed in the world of the room and to forget of the world outside the room (Kahn, p. 224). In expressing the significance of the room he would often paraphrase a poem by Jalal ad-Din Rumi⁴, which tells of a priestess who returns to her home after walking through her garden. When encouraged to “Look without and see the wonders God has made” she replies, “Look within and see God”⁵. This

³ “Walter Pater used the term lightfall for the positive counterpart of cast shadow which has a hard-edged shape but no convenient name”. These lightfall constitute presence through their painted substance. Hollander, J. (1981). Hopper and the Figure of Room. *Art Journal*, 41 (2), 155-160.

⁴ Jalal ad-Din Rumi was a thirteenth-century Islamic poet, storyteller and teacher.

⁵ “He tells of a priestess walking through her garden. It is spring. She stops at the threshold of her house and stands transfixed at the entrance chamber. Her maid in waiting comes to her excitedly, saying, ‘Look without, look without, priestess and see the wonders God has made’. The priestess answered, ‘Look within and see God’”. see Kahn, L. (2003). Space and the Inspirations (1967). In L.



Fig.14, Adolf Von Menzel. *The Room with a Balcony*. 1845. Berlin, Nationalgalerie.

linking of the interior and the divine can be seen in the layout of the Hebrew tabernacle which the Children of Israel built while travelling to the land of Canaan. The most sacred part of the complex was known as the Holy of Holies and was synonymous with the presence of God. Situated at the very centre of the Tabernacle it was surrounded by the Outer Courtyard and the Holy Place. It was within this room that the Ark of the Covenant was kept and into this room the Prophet or High Priest would come into to converse with the Lord (CES, 2003, p. 153-4)

In her photographing of derelict homes, photographer Shellburne Thurber, explores similar issues of presence, absence, light and room. Like Turrell and Winstanley she also has an interest in empty space, “space that is used to evoke what is missing from it” and by so doing “their presence is felt more powerfully for their palpable absence” (Zacharias, 2004, p. 40). Similar to Tarkovsky she views her photographs as portraits of mortality and says, “absence gives significance to the ordinary, for it is the disruption of ordinary life that allows its quality to be captured most acutely.” (Zacharias, p. 35)

For Thurber of the metaphor of the room or interior is a metaphor for the ‘body’ and for ‘human presence’ and envisions the home in par-

ticular as surrogate for a mother’s presence because of its ability to shelter and protect (Zacharias, 2004, p. 36). Hence in Thurber’s metaphysics the home stands in for the feminine. In this approach there is something reminiscent to Agnes Martin’s unemphatic approach to the sublime, “there is something about the western landscape that’s all about projecting outward and these landscapes that I’m interested in are much more about pulling in (Zacharias, p. 42).

British artist Paul Winstanley also shares Turrell’s fascination with ‘semi-public’ space⁶. Human figures are noticeably absent in his paintings which do however contain “the potential for human drama” according to his own words. It is the absence which fills them with presence. In his paintings *Veil 14*, he “attempts to create a meditation on the nature of seeing, on what can only be partially understood”. This is reminiscent of Lyotard’s definition of the sublime, as that which is not entirely consumable.

Lounge A, (Fig. 16) painted by Winstanley in 1997 perhaps merits particular mention. Here in this student lounge the sunlight filters through the thin curtains, reminiscent of Adolf von Menzel’s *The Room with a Balcony*. On the back wall hangs a sepia reproduction of Caspar David

Kahn, & R. Twombly (Ed.), *Louis Kahn - Essential Texts* (pp. 220-227). New York: WW Norton. p. 224

⁶ “I have to confess that I have great love for civic space that is emptied of use” James Turrell, *Interview with Esa Laaksonen*, Blacksburg, Va., 1996.



Fig. 15, Shellburne Thurber. *Gholson homeplace: Entryway with front door*. Chromagenic Print. 1998. Courtesy of the artist.

Friedrich's painting, *Traveller looking over a Sea of Fog* c.1818, which one author has suggested “acts as window onto another reality...an escape route from (the) banal” (Kinley).



Fig. 16, Paul Winstanley *Lounge A* 1997
Courtesy the artist and Maureen Paley.

As a result of the *Window Space* work, I decided to focus on the negative residue of the painted experience, the imprinting or the maculae as I had begun thinking of them, on the wall, and on this technique of distilling as a methodology for painting practice. I started preparing two of the t-walls in the studio, sanding, washing and recoating each with two layers of gesso; eight surfaces, a painted object. Once the gesso was dry, I began painting using the imprinting/distilling method developed in my *Wall prints* series. Rather than vertical strips however, this initial work consisted of horizontal pieces⁷. The process consisted of painting the piece of wax paper – this time in long horizontal strips – onto the wall, waiting for it to dry completely, peeling it off and beginning the next layer by painting another long piece of wax paper to the wall. A separate work, entitled *Annunciation* was made from part of this process.⁸

This work returned me to the window of my studio which had been the genesis of all this years work. I prepared and painted another two t-walls in the studio, and translated the measurements of the windows onto the surface of the wall. The painting or imprinting took place within these measurements of the translated window panes; sixteen panes for each wall. A performative ritual, a layer of the work would

⁷ Influenced by the exhibition, *The Perception of the Horizontal* as seen in, *Museion*. (2005). *The Perception of the Horizontal*. Bolzano: Koln: W.Konig.

⁸ See DVD 2 in Appendix

take place each day; measuring and cutting the paper for each pane, painting the paper onto the wall with watery paint, waiting for it to dry, peeling each piece off, revealing the painted surface, beginning again. Documentation of this process can be seen in the works, *Painting One Square*, *Painting Three Squares*, *Painting Three Squares - version 2*, and resulted in the separate works *Distillation Wall 1*, *Distillation Wall 2* and *Renunciation*.⁹

The paintings titled, *Wall 1* and *Wall 2* (Fig. 17) enabled me to refine techniques for my final project. On *Wall 1* a variety of different colours were used with each pane a separate shade of white (alabaster, half concrete, bleach white, buttery white) and each differing in the number of applications it received. I experimented with neutral bases versus tinted bases, with different types of paper and with multiple applications on a single piece of paper (which proved not to be as successful as single applications on a single piece of paper). On *Wall 2* I limited the palette to just two colours of white which I found to be more effective on *Wall 1* and layered them over each other in each pane. Ultimately, wax paper proved to be the most successful in transmitting the painted residue and in removability. During these works, a small written journal became invaluable, noting my process each day.

I found this process to be fulfilling, both to do and to watch, despite the repetitive nature of it. There is something in the repetition that seems to lend itself to the quest for the immeasurable, the sublime. It was not unlike the repetition of that earlier project, that of looking and painting and looking and painting, each time learning to see more than what I did before. That consisted of a looking outward through a window whereas this was more of a pulling inward, of the light coming in through the window and transforming the space, the room, the painting within. It also linked back to both the window prints and the wall prints, integrating the role of the window and also the method of painting, of imprinting or distilling used in those earlier works.

⁹ All of which can be seen on DVD 2 of the Appendix



Fig. 17, Amber Harvey. *Wall 2*. 2008.



Fig. 18, Paul Winstanley. *Veil 20*. 2007. Oil on Linen. 243.8 x 213.4 cm. Image courtesy of Mitchell-Innes and Nash.

CONCLUSION

Observing materials in my studio space at the start of the year was an act of faith. I didn't know where it would take me, if it would lead me to the discussion of the infinite, the immeasurable and even if it did, what I would find when I got there? Would it result in a failure, a falling short that seems such an inevitable part of the search for the sublime, of the infinite, which often exceeds representation and has to be abandoned? And even if it did, what would I find along the way?

Such a journey has been a search for a conceptual language to express values and beliefs that are not only deeply personal but which are also fundamental to my identity as an individual and as an artist. Using painting practice to search for these things has made it possible for me to more fully integrate or embrace my position as an artist *with* my values and beliefs. It has caused me to strive to articulate those things that I would usually refrain from articulating. But this articulation came not with words, but with image, with painting, as Martin aptly put, "my interest is in experience that is wordless and silent, and in the fact that this experience can be expressed for me in art work which is also wordless and silent." (Martin, 2005, p. 89)

In this search I found I was not alone, but that there existed a long and full history that I could connect to:

What they [Rothko, Reinhardt, Newman and Martin] are seeking is a form of irreplaceable image, a language that is exclusive to the pictorial image. The sublime experience which all of them seek as the ultimate goal of representation, cannot be captured. Since it is itself dumb and devoid of visibility, it is only amendable to indirect representation... The aim is to develop an autonomous pictorial language, to convey meaning in purely sensual terms, in a language in which aspects of that experience of happiness are inscribed in terms of visual analogies (Liesbrock, 2004, pg.38).

And that everything was already there for me; a window, light, room, paint. What I gained were personal practical methodologies for searching for it; methods of observation, and distillation, concepts of absence and room and of course light as a central catalyst, affecting, transforming materials and observers. And if anything perhaps I have found that personally, the immeasurable is to be found in the searching for it, in the process, rather than in the outcome. It is not a destination to arrive at but that which is there all the while, waiting to be seen; just like the light as it dances on a piece of cellophane, diffusely

filters through paper and gesso, illuminates subtle markings of paint on a wall; or in the watery paint as it is absorbed by the paper on the wall, binding the two as one; in the absence of the paper, in its peeling back and removal, in the residue that remains.

In writing of the exhibition *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*, at the Museum of Santa Fe in New Mexico, Timothy Rodgers wrote,

These women use the concept of perfection to establish their aesthetic standards, pursue their artistic goals and explain their spiritual and cultural concerns. The conclusion...is nearly the same: none of the artists achieved perfection and none claimed that they had. But in the pursuit of this elusive concept, the artists called upon their deepest beliefs to create their art. (Rodgers, 2004, p. 15)

And the sublime comes down
To the spirit itself,

The spirit and space,
The empty spirit
In vacant space

Wallace Stevens

1

¹ Anfam, D. (2004). Framing the Absence of Space. In J. Turrell, *James Turrell - Projection Works 1966-69* (pp. 5-17). London: Albion.

APPENDIX

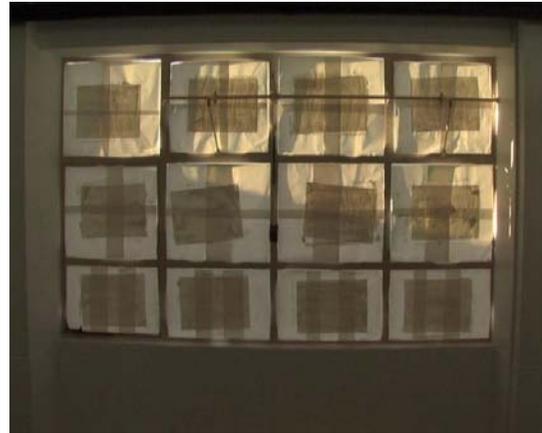
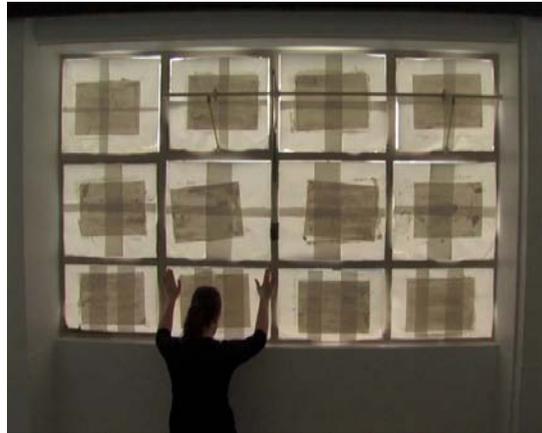
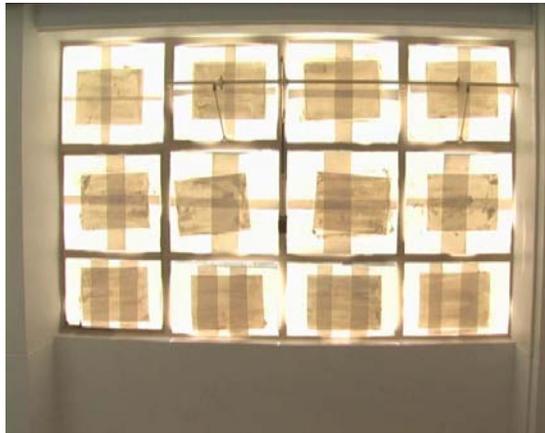
pg 50	Amber Harvey. <i>Documentation of Window Prints</i> . 2008.	pg 66	Amber Harvey. <i>Wall 1</i> . 2009
pp 51-53	Amber Harvey. <i>Window Prints</i> . Installation. Gesso and paper. 2008.	pp 67-71	Amber Harvey. <i>Detail of Stilling the Light - Painted Observations</i> . Final Installation. 2009.
pg 54	Amber Harvey. <i>Presence and Absence</i> . Digital Stills. 2008.	DVD 1	Amber Harvey. <i>Sketch for Cellophane work - versions 1 - 4</i> . DVD sequence. 2008.
pg 55	Amber Harvey. <i>Cellophane Work</i> . Projection as part of Installation. 2008.		Amber Harvey. <i>Cellophane Work - Final</i> . DVD sequence. 2008.
pp 56-57	Amber Harvey. <i>Paint Jars</i> . Photographic print. 2008.	DVD 2	Amber Harvey. <i>Painting One Square</i> . Documentation from Wall 2. DVD sequence. 2008.
pp 58-59	Amber Harvey. <i>Diffraction Series</i> . 2008		Amber Harvey. <i>Painting Three Squares</i> . Documentation from Wall 2. DVD sequence. 2008.
pg 60	Amber Harvey. <i>Details of Screen</i> . 2008		Amber Harvey. <i>Painting Three Squares, Version 2</i> . Documentation from Wall 1. DVD sequence. 2008.
pg 61	Amber Harvey. <i>Utensil</i> . 2008.		Amber Harvey. <i>Distillation Wall 2</i> . DVD sequence. 2009.
pg 62	Amber Harvey. <i>Documentation of Wall 1 and 2</i> . 2009		Amber Harvey. <i>Distillation Wall 1</i> . DVD sequence. 2009.
pg 63	Amber Harvey. <i>Documentation of removing paper from Wall 2</i> . 2009		Amber Harvey. <i>Annunciation</i> . DVD sequence. 2008.
pp 64-65	Amber Harvey. <i>Documentation of Wall 2</i> . 2009	DVD 3	Amber Harvey. <i>Renunciation</i> . DVD sequence. 2009.
			Amber Harvey. <i>Presence</i> . DVD sequence. 2008.
			Amber Harvey. <i>Absence</i> . DVD sequence. 2008.





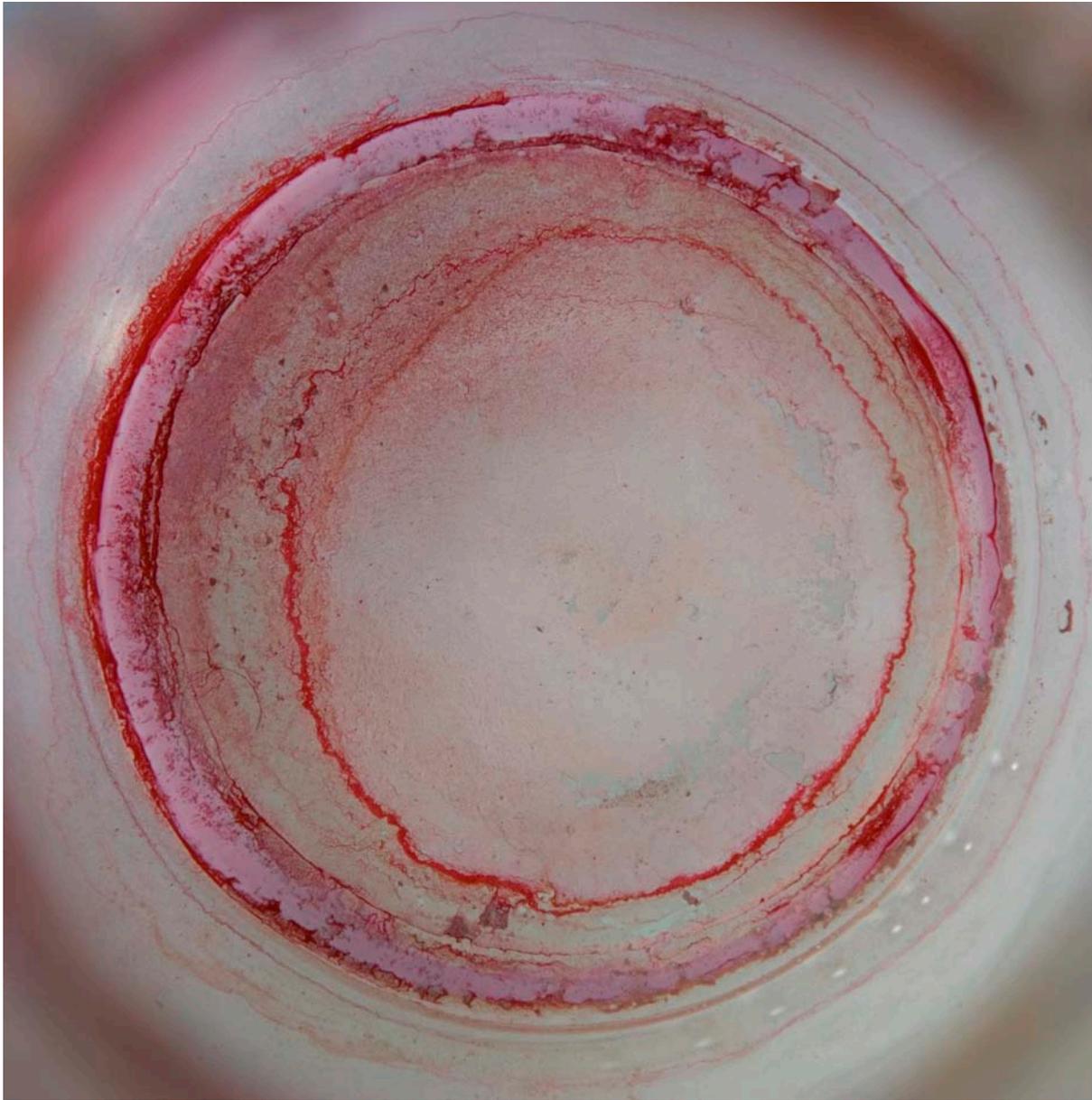










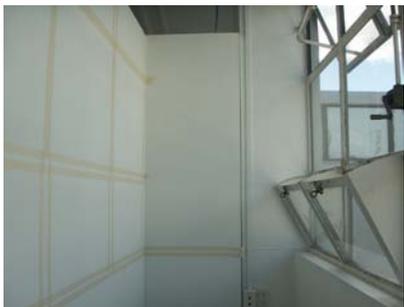
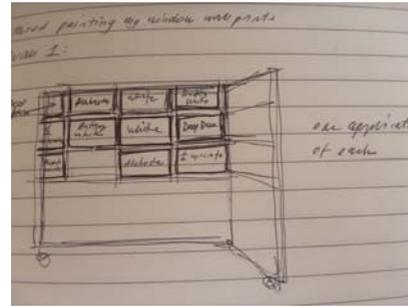
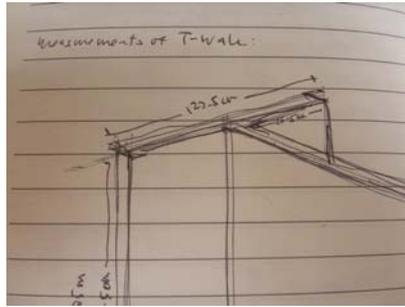


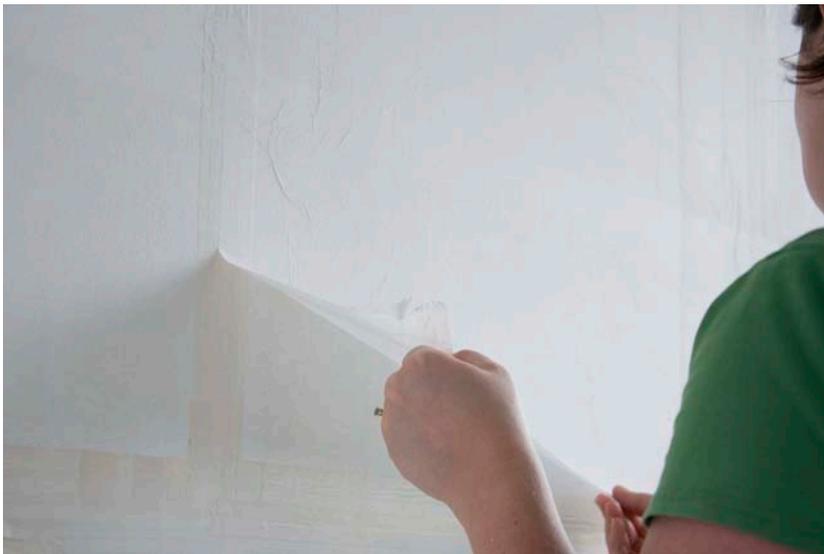




























BIBLIOGRAPHY

6 Degrees of Separation - Imi Knoebel, Callum Innes, Karin Sander, Helmut Federle, Stephen Bambury, Gunter Umberg. (2001). Auckland: Jensen Gallery.

Amman, J. (1979). Visualized thought processes. The young Italian avant-garde. In C. Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*. London: Phaidon.

Anfam, D. (2004). Framing the Absence of Space. In J. Turrell, *James Turrell - Projection Works 1966-69* (pp. 5-17). London: Albion.

Angelico, F. (1440-45). *Annunciation*. Fresco. Retrieved January 20, 2009, from www.artes.com/c/html/treepflight.aspx?id=les

Armstrong, P., Lisbon, L., & Melville, S. (2001). *As Painting: Division and Displacement*. Columbus, Ohio: MIT.

Auping, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Declaring Space - Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein*. New York: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Prestel.

Barth, U. (1994). Ground #30. Retrieved January 29, 2009, from <http://library.artstor.org/library/welcome.html#3|search|1|uta|Multiple20Collection20Search|||type3D3126kw3Duta26id3Dall26name3D>

Beckley, B., & Schapiro, D. (1998). *Uncontrollable Beauty - Towards a New Aesthetics*. New York: Allworth Press.

Breuvart, V. (Ed.). (2002). *Vitamin P - New Perspectives in Painting*. London: Phaidon.

Burke, E. (1990). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chiaromonte, G., & Tarkovsky, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Instant Light - Tarkovsky Polaroids*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Christov-Bakargiev, C. (Ed.). (1999). *Arte Povera*. London: Phaidon.

Church Educational System (2003). *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis - 2 Samuel*. Salt Lake: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Composite Realities Amid Time and Space: Recent Art and Photography. (2007). Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia: Centre for Contemporary Photography.

Cross, D. (1998). *Beyond Standard Issue Abstraction: The Art of Simon Morris*. The Waikato Polytechnic.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Robinson, R. E. (1990). *The Art of Seeing*. Malibu: J Paul Getty Trust.

della Francesca, P. (About 1470). *Annunciation*. Tempera. Collection of the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia. Retrieved January 27, 2009, from Artstor: <http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/library>

Drury, N., & Voigt, A. (1996). *Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art*. Roseville, N.S.W: Craftsman House.

Elkins, J. (1996). *The Object Stares Back*. Sydney: Simon and Schuster.

Fer, B. (2004). *The Infinite Line*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Flood, R., & Morris, F. (Eds.). (2001). *From Zero to Infinity, Arte Povera 1962-1972*. London: Tate Modern.

Friedrich, C. D. (1805-6). *View from the Artist's Atelier Right Window*. Sepia on paper. 31.2 x 23.7 cm. Oesterreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna. Retrieved January 27, 2009, from <http://library.artstor.org/library/welcome.html#3|search|1|right2owindow|Multiple2oCollection2oSearch|||type3D3126kw3Dright2owindow26id3Dall26name3D>

Friedrich, C. D. (1818). *Wanderer Above the Sea of Mist*. Oil on canvas. 94.8x74.8cm. Courtesy of The Image Gallery. Original in Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Retrieved January 20 2009, from Artstor: <http://library.artstor.org.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/library/welcome.html#3|search|1|c2oda vid2ofriedrich|Multiple2oCollection2oSearch|||type3D3126kw3Dc2oda vid2ofriedrich26id3Dall26name3D>

Golding, J. (2000). *Paths to the Absolute*. Washington: Thames & Hudson.

Hewitt, P. G. (2006). *Conceptual Physics* (10th ed.). San Francisco: Pearson Addison Wesley.

Hollander, J. (1981). Hopper and the Figure of Room. *Art Journal* , 41 (2), 155-160.

Hopper, E. (1963). *Sun in an Empty Room*. Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 101.6 cm. Private Collection. From *James Turrell: Projection Works 1966-69* (p.15), Turrell, J. (2004). London: Albion Gallery.

Josef Albers Museum. (2004). *Agnes Martin - The Islands*. (U. Growe, & H. Liesbrock, Eds.) Dusseldorf, Germany: Richter Verlag.

Kahn, L. (2003). Silence and Light (1968,1969). In L. Kahn, & R. Twombly (Ed.), *Louis Kahn - Essential Texts* (pp. 228-251). New York: WW Norton.

Kahn, L. (2003). Space and the Inspirations (1967). In L. Kahn, & R. Twombly (Ed.), *Louis Kahn - Essential Texts* (pp. 220-227). New York: WW Norton.

King, M. (1998). Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art and Science. *Leonardo*, 31 (1), 21-31.

Kinley, C. (n.d.). *Art Now: Paul Winstanley: Annexe (4 December 1997 - 15 February 1998)*. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from Tate Britain: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/artnow/paulwinstanley/default.shtm>

Koerner, J. L. (1990). *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape*. London: Reaktion Books.

Lee, P. M., Higgs, M., & Gilbert-Rolfe, J. (2004). *Uta Barth*. London: Phaidon Press.

Lippard, L. (2004). Travelling Light - Florence Pierce. In T. R. Rodgers, *In Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

Livingston, J. (1998). *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn*. Hong Kong: Whitney Museum of American Art and University of California Press.

Lumley, R. (2004). *Arte Povera - Movements in Modern Art*. New York: Tate Publishing.

Martin, A. (2005). *Writings/Schriften*. (D. Schwarz, Ed.) Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz.

McCarter, R. (2005). *Louis I. Kahn*. New York: Phaidon.

McConkie, B. R. (1958). *Mormon Doctrine*. Provo: Bookcraft.

Menzel, A. V. (1845). *The Room with a Balcony*. Berlin. Nationalgalerie. In J. Hollander, Hopper and the Figure of Room (p. 156).

Morse, M. (1999). Body and Screen. *Wide Angle*, 21 (1), 63-75.

Mrkusich, M. (1971). *Painting Dark III*. acrylic on canvas, 224 x 173 cm. Retrieved January 29, 2009, from Rob Garrett Contemporary Fine Art: <http://www.robgarrettcfa.com/milanmrkusich.htm>

Mrkusich, M. (1972). *Painting Green*. Oil On Canvas. 1730 x 1730. Courtesy of The Fletcher Trust Collection. Retrieved January 29, 2009, from <http://www.fletchercollection.co.nz/?q=Mrkusich&display=label&x=10&y=5>

Munnally, L. (2003). *The Aesthetics of Immersion - Time, Process and Performance in Practice*. Wellington.

Museion. (2005). *The Perception of the Horizontal*. Bolzano: Koln: W.Konig.

Myers, T. R. (2007). *Mary Heilmann - Save the Last Dance for Me*. London: Afterall Books.

Painting Zero Degree. (2000). New York: Independent Curators International.

Paul Winstanley at ARTSPACE New Zealand. (n.d.). Retrieved January 14, 2009, from Mitchell-Innes & Nash : http://www.miandn.com/#/news/2008_4_8_paul_winstanley_at_artspace_ne/

Pelli, D. G. (2004). What is Observation? James Turrell's Skyspaces at PS1. In A. M. Torres, *James Turrell* (pp. 55-57). Valencia: IVAM.

Pollock, G., & Corby, V. (2006). *Encountering Eva Hesse*. Munich: Prestel.

Rodgers, T. R. (2004). In *Pursuit of Perfection: The Art of Agnes Martin, Maria Martinez and Florence Pierce*. Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press.

Simmons, L. (2002). Mrkusich's Maculae. In L. Simmons, *The Image Always has the Last Word - On Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Photography* (pp. 111-126). Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Simon Morris - Painting Projects 2000-2005. (2005, November). The Physics Room.

Simon Schama's *Power of art* [videorecording] / a BBC/Thirteen/WNET co-production. (2007). New York: BBC Video.

Smith, J. F. (1954). *Doctrines of Salvation* (Vol. 1). Salt Lake City: Bookcraft.

Soanes, C. (Ed.). (2000). *Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (Second ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Steele, J. (1999). Louis I. Kahn: Salk Institute La Jolla 1959-65. In *Twentieth Century Classics*. London: Phaidon.

Sugimoto, H. (1992). *Orinda Theater*. Retrieved January 28, 2009, from Media Art Net: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/assets/img/data/2237/bild.jpg>

Tarkovsky, A. (1986). *Sculpting in Time - Reflections on the Cinema*. London: Bodley Head.

Thomas, D. (Ed.). (2007). *Composite Realities Amid Time and Space: Recent Art and Photography*. Victoria, Australia: Centre for Contemporary Photography.

Thurber, S. (1998). *Gholson homeplace: Entryway with front door*. Chromagenic Print. 1998. Courtesy of the artist.

Torres, A. M. (2004). *James Turrell*. Valencia: IVAM Institute Valencia d'Art Modern.

Turrell, J. (1996). *Interview with Esa Laaksonen*. Blacksburg, Va. .

Turrell, J. (2002). *James Turrell - Into the Light*. (C. Giannini, M. Olijnyk, & B. Luderowski, Eds.) Pittsburgh: The Mattress Factory.

Turrell, J. (2004). *James Turrell: Projection Works 1966-69* [text by David Anfam and James Turrell]. London: Albion Gallery.

Turrell, J. (2001). *Skyspace*. nstallation. (From Series: One Accord 1995-

9, Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston, Texas, USA). Image Courtesy of Art Net. Retrieved January 27, 2009 , from Artnet: <http://www.artnet.com/artwork/424855666/sky-space.html>

Walker Art Gallery. (n.d.). Retrieved January 14, 2009, from National Museums Liverpool: http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/johnmoores/23/exhibitors/paul_winstanley.aspx

Whitfield, S. (2001). *London and Minneapolis Arte Povera*. Burlington Magazine , 143 (1183), 545-6.

Winstanley, P. (1997). *Lounge A*. Courtesy the artist and Maureen Paley. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from Tate Britain: <https://www.tate.org.uk/images/cms/xib/5744paulwinstanleyloungea17.jpg>

Winstanley, P. (2007). *Veil 20*. Oil on Linen. 243.8 x 213.4 cm. Image courtesy of Mitchell-Innes and Nash. Retrieved January 14, 2009, from Artnet: <http://www.artnet.com/Galleries/Exhibitions.asp?gid=761&cid=137281>

Yates, S. (Ed.). (1995). *The Poetics of Space*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press .

Zacharias, L. (2004). Shellburne Thurber's Southern Home. *Southern Cultures*. Fall. 31-51.

Zajonc, A. (1993). *Catching the Light - The Entwined History of Light and Mind*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Zegher, C. D., & Teicher, H. (2005). *3 x Abstraction - New Methods of Drawing: Hilma AF Klint, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin*. New York: A Drawing Center.