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Making Moves

An adventure through space, colour & form

An exegesis presented with exhibition as fulfilment
of the requirements for thesis:

Masters of Fine Arts

At Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

Gary Peters

2012

Abstract

This exegesis reveals a practice that has been driven by making as the means to address questions concerning colour, space, form, time and site. From an initial desire to create a sustainable and self generating painting practice this text plots the development of a systematic method that uses data derived from choose-your-own-adventure books. As the system is deployed across a variety of sites, wall drawing and paper folding become the focus where the rules based generation of form is fused with an intuitive sense of placement and use of colour. Further deployment explores the role of colour in response to site, the temporal nature of this work and it's engagement with the viewer resulting in a response to architectural site.

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Introduction

*...the writing, it is important to remember, follows after the real work is made. There is writing *because* certain work is made; the work prompts the writing.*
(Fuchs, 2000, pp98 99)

As the Dutch art historian Rudi Fuchs notes not only of the practice of the American painter and writer Peter Halley but also of Mondrian, Malevich, Judd and others before them, artists often write in order to provide a perspective from which their innovative new work can be approached. He also recognises how it is the making, the ‘real work’ that comes first. Mine is very much a making-led practice. I am consciously choosing the challenges that making brings – material concerns, placement, site, application of paint, colour relationships, questions of form and weight – constantly engaging with the ongoing adventure (the journey, the discovery, the challenges) that is the process of making painting. Initial ideas and concepts morph through making, through experimentation and iteration. This is a two-fold process – thinking with my hands, responding intuitively while in the act of construction followed by the analysis, contemplation and reflection that occurs with distance from the physical process of creation. Making work is how I define, explore and refine the questions of my practice to gain clarity. Such a process does not always give definitive answers, often deeper questions are asked of me and my work.

A SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE

...my impulse to make a work begins with my feeling that emotional life isn't allowed room in the world. This feeling is personal to me and my history, but I think it is also a modern issue in that a lot of people share those worries and feelings. So my work becomes a place to make fantasy and emotional life as concrete and real and important as a refrigerator, or the room that you are in.
(Stockholder, 1995, p132).

As the work of the Abstract Expressionists and more recently the spatial painting explorations of Jessica Stockholder show (Fig. 1), work initially generated from a place of feeling, from a desire to understand the emotional and psychological aspects of one's self can still be a valid making process however for me it one that was no longer sustainable. I found it limiting the development of my practice as my range of responses became a staid set of defaults while emotionally I was becoming exhausted and increasingly tired with my own work. I needed to find a means to create some autobiographical distance from my work and to rejuvenate my practice with the unexpected. Creating a sustainable, self-generating, non-exhaustive practice had become a priority.

GIVING THE GAME AWAY – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MY PRACTICE

Before we begin this adventure in to space and colour I would like to give you a brief overview of my practice, place it in a contemporary context and provide details of my prior work in order to provide an understanding of the platform from which I began my research.

I create systematic geometric wall drawings and cardboard constructions that are generated from playing a 'choose your own adventure game' book. The unseen and real spaces of the gamebook are transformed into painted or sculptural forms and deployed in response to a specific site. They employ the untouchable time and space in which the game takes place, the imagined world the reader inhabits through the game (the unseen space). The 'real' space is the physicality of the book, the number of lines in each paragraph, the distance of a drawn line and the architectural qualities of the site in which the work is eventually deployed.

My work investigates concerns similar to those of the painters Richard Wright, Simon Morris and Lothar Gotz. Wright for his considered placement of the work in response to the architecture of a space (Fig. 2) and with his embracement of the temporal qualities of his practice; Morris for his understanding of and response to site continuing to explore and expand the possibilities of geometric abstraction through a systematic engagement with canvas, wall, architecture, cricket ground and flower bed (Figs. 5 - 8); and Gotz (Fig. 3) who "sees colour as both beautiful and a key aspect of life that surrounds us" ("Lothar Gotz biography," n.d.) as he explores spatial



Fig. 1. Jessica Stockholder
#263 1995
Furniture, red buckets, bread basket, lamp,
yellow spool of thread, acrylic paint 127 x 187
x 203 cm

Fig. 2. Richard Wright
Untitled, 2000
Gouache on wall, 198.1 x 88.9 cm
Installation at Gagosian Gallery,
555 West 24th Street

Fig. 3. Lothar Götz
Don't Look Now 1990 – 2011
Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven Gallery

Fig 4. Gemma Smith
Chessboard Painting (Expanded Centre), 2010
acrylic on timber veneer, 180 x 180 cm



All works on this page by Simon Morris.

Fig. 5. Drawing for Stadia, 2002.

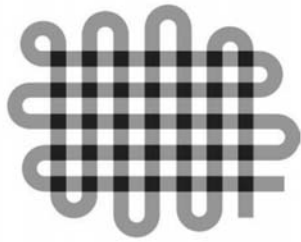
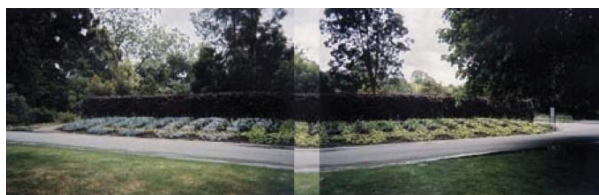
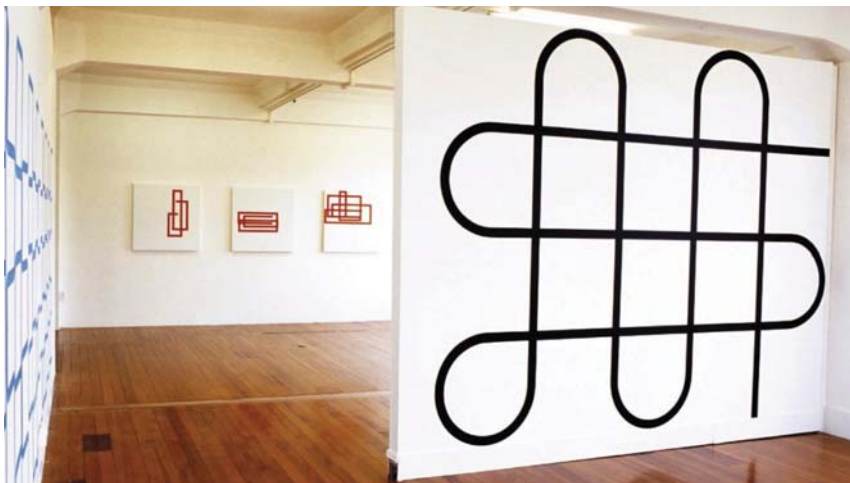


Fig. 6. Stadia, 2002 Jade Stadium, Scape: 2002 Art and Industry Biennial, Christchurch.

Fig. 7. From left Blue Line, 2005 wall drawing, Orange Line (23 minutes), 2004, Orange Line (33 minutes), 2004, Orange Line (48 minutes), 2004, all three acrylic on linen, and Black Line, 2004 wall drawing.

Fig. 8. Tilt and Grow, 2002, Christchurch Botanic Gardens, Scape: 2002 Art and Industry Biennial.



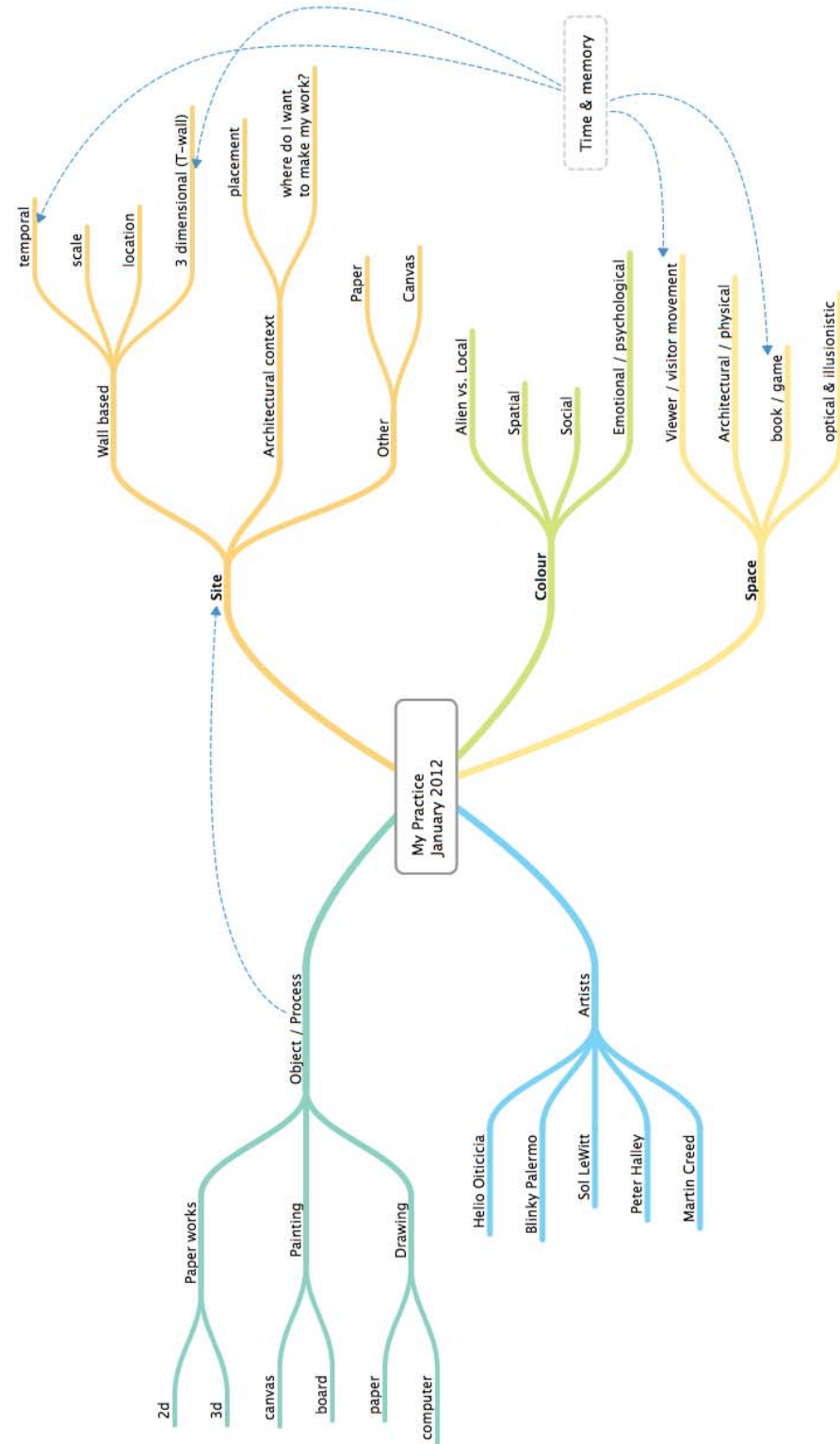


Fig 9. Mind map of my practice
Author, 2011

ideas of both the reality of the imagined qualities of site. Parallels can also be drawn with the work of Australian painter Gemma Smith (we both share a fusion of the systematic and the intuitive in our practices) and the work from Sydney Non Objective contemporary art projects (SNO), an artists run space with an international reputation. Smith, who in her production of colourful geometric work has used the chessboard as a base upon which to play out her own intuitive painting rules, “I used a series of rules that kind of made themselves as I went ... I remember accumulating rules such as: to not use the same colour twice, only use mixed colours rather than from the tube ... These rules would change... If I’d feel like the work was becoming formulaic in any way I’d consciously try to shake the rules.” (as cited in Pennings, 2010). The SNO group currently consists of 16 artists exploring the non-objective, including John Nixon and Billy Gruner, and actively encourages innovation and the sharing of contemporary thinking around the non-objective through an exhibition program and a studio residency for emerging artists. Later in 2012 I’ll be doing the six month studio residency and look forward to the conversations that will occur around our respective practices.

BACKGROUND

Prior to starting my Masters in Fine Art (MFA) I was making colourful internal landscape paintings (Figs. 10 & 11) of imagined game spaces inspired in part by the text only video games I used to play as a kid. These games with only limited text (two or three sentences) created a truly immersive environment, that I was somehow able to mentally map, retain and recall the space I was exploring. With simplified shapes and flat colours the paintings were reminiscent of early computer graphics, visual realisations of the unseen. Adventure game formats provided a framework on which to build and construct my work. If I became fixed in my painting, uncertain of what to paint next, I imagined what the next location would look like by moving on from my current position / painting. What would I see if I “Go North” or “Look West”?

The structure of these games involved exploring spaces and places, finding and picking up an object or piece of information in one location to then use it to solve a problem in another. For example, a key found outside



Fig. 10. *Castle*
Acrylic on canvas, 300 × 300mm
Author, 2009

Fig. 11. *View*
Acrylic on canvas, 300 × 300mm
Author, 2009

Look at fig. 10 and imagine the scene from the edge of the left hand edge of the castle structure. This will give you the panorama seen in fig. 11.

by the river will open the locked trapdoor in the cottage to reveal a hidden tunnel and a way into the castle. Each problem solved not only meant your known world became larger but often meant you were a step closer to your goal. Although I didn't realise at the time the narratives spoke to archetypal coming-of-age myths where the hero would enter into a perilous quest facing demons and monsters, challenges and puzzles in order to find and return with the treasure whilst unwittingly discovering something of his true self. My painting was a parallel with my quest for the hidden treasure of self awareness found through the exploration of the unknown territories of my own internal landscapes, an environment I was simultaneously discovering and creating as I felt my way through this new world, thinking with my hands, seeing what had occurred and responding with my next move.

Another genre within this early world of adventure was the choose-your-own-adventure book. In New Zealand the books are known as "pick-a-page" or "pick-a-path". In the UK, where I grew up, they are known as "Fighting Fantasy". I discovered these books when I was 14 years old, busy discovering music, girls and spot cream. The fighting fantasy books – part story, part game – were single player games where "YOU are the hero!" (Fig. 12) and not as complex as the multi-player, role playing games of Dungeons &

Dragons. My interest lay not in the story but in the process of navigating the book as, I was captivated by the challenge of solving problems, finding my way through the uncharted territory of the book, avoiding death and finding my way to the triumphant finish. In terms of the mechanics of the book – the story was split into 400 numbered chunks of text, 1 – 400, with No 1 being the introduction. It sets the scene and started you on your journey. The unique character of these books is that you get to choose what happens next:

Mungo steers the boat towards a small inlet at the eastern tip of the island, hoping that it will remain concealed between the high rocks. You both put on your backpacks and clamber out of the boat to begin your quest to find the Lizard King. If you wish to scramble around the rocks to the beach in the cove to your left turn to 24. If you wish to clamber over the rocks on the other side of the inlet to the beach in the cove to your right, turn to 33.
(Opening paragraph from the Island of the Lizard King,
Livingstone, 1984,)

And so your adventure begins...

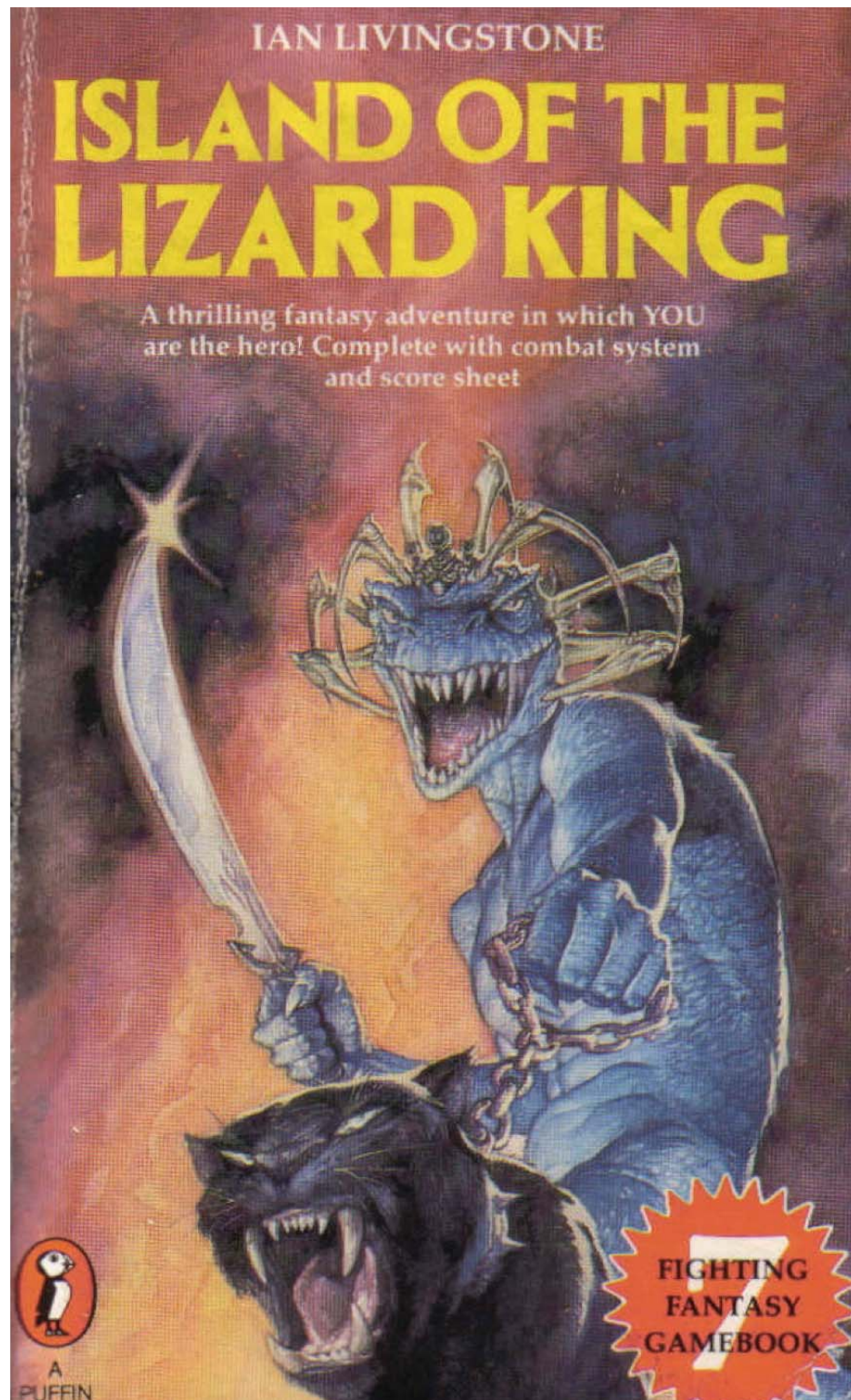
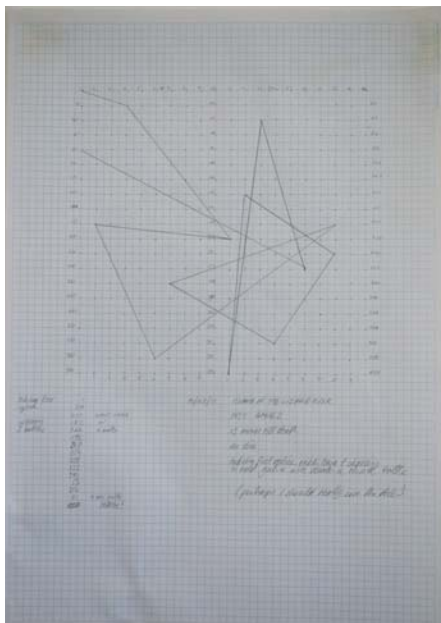
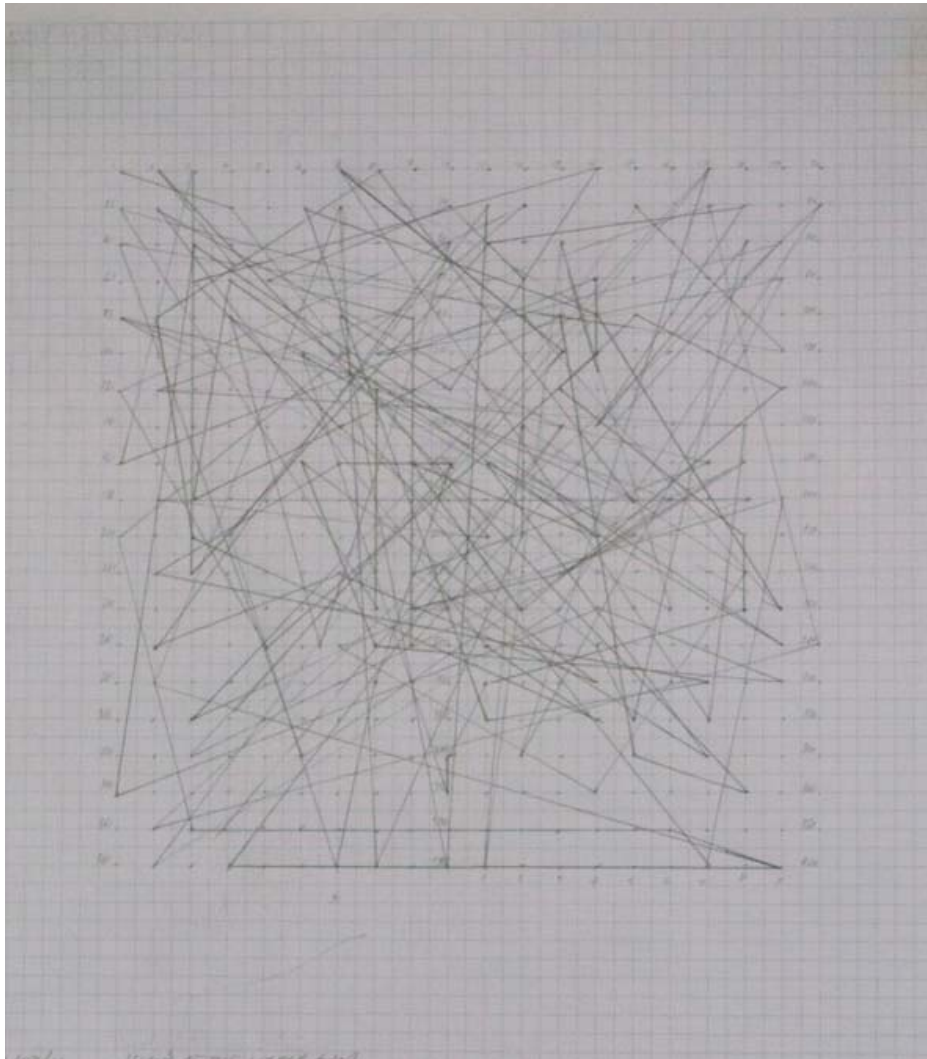


Fig. 12.
Island of the Lizard King cover
Author 2011



This page:

Fig. 13. Victory. 135 move game.

Fig. 14. Headhunters. 13 move game

Both pencil on A3 paper.

Author, 2011

Overleaf page 15:

Fig 15 & 16 Folded paper works

Vivid marker pen on A3 paper

Fig 17. Origami paper work

Fig 18. Studio shot

Author, 2011

Opening moves

During the first four weeks of the MFA 52 week year I ran several experimental tests to explore different possibilities for the initial ideas put forward in my proposal.

For my Masters I'd like to bring the gaming elements in my work, the engagement with my audience and my painting practice together.

I propose creating different vehicles to engage and interact with my audience. The resulting data from these interactions will feed into my painting and generate the work.

(Author, 2011)

These tests included the making of a rudimentary online game based on the structure of *The Island of the Lizard King* game book in an attempt to explore choice and narrative through a purely visual means. However I felt these experiments were unsuccessful as the resulting game simply failed to hold my attention and the intuitive geometric / crystalline paintings while being visually intriguing were, for me, not moving my practice forward in any discernible manner. Of value though was the folded paper technique I had utilised to create forms as they proved to be the germination for future series of work.

Maptastic drawings

By playing fighting fantasy game books from my childhood I was able to generate data to create drawings that became a record of my moves. My method being that by playing the book I was able to record my numerous moves (1, 135, 288, 14, etc). On an A3 grid of 400 points corresponding to the 400 locations in the game location data is then applied. one move at a time, replaying the moves of the game. The resulting game map of 135 moves (Fig. 13) revealing a complex mesh of competing lines intersecting with each other a frenetic cacophony that is perhaps a visual metaphor of the activity of human thought ricocheting through this long spatial journey. In contrast a game of only 13 moves (Fig. 14) yields a less frenetic line, quieter yet spiky – reminiscent of the jerky flight path of a somewhat angular fly – the partially defined planes providing illusions of space and depth. These line

maps are a visual record of personal choice, of the moves I made and of the time taken playing the book resulting in a transposed geography, a map of an unseen space and time.

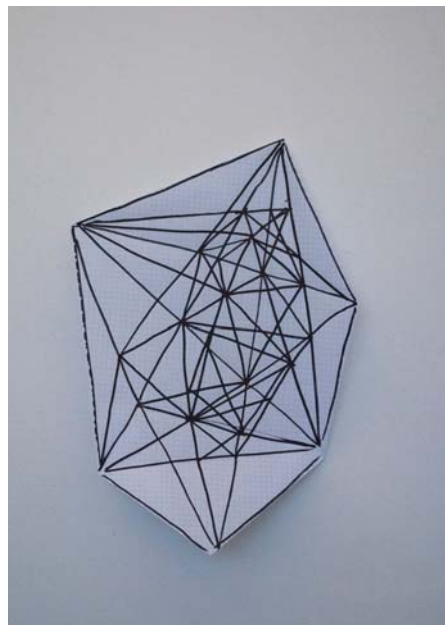
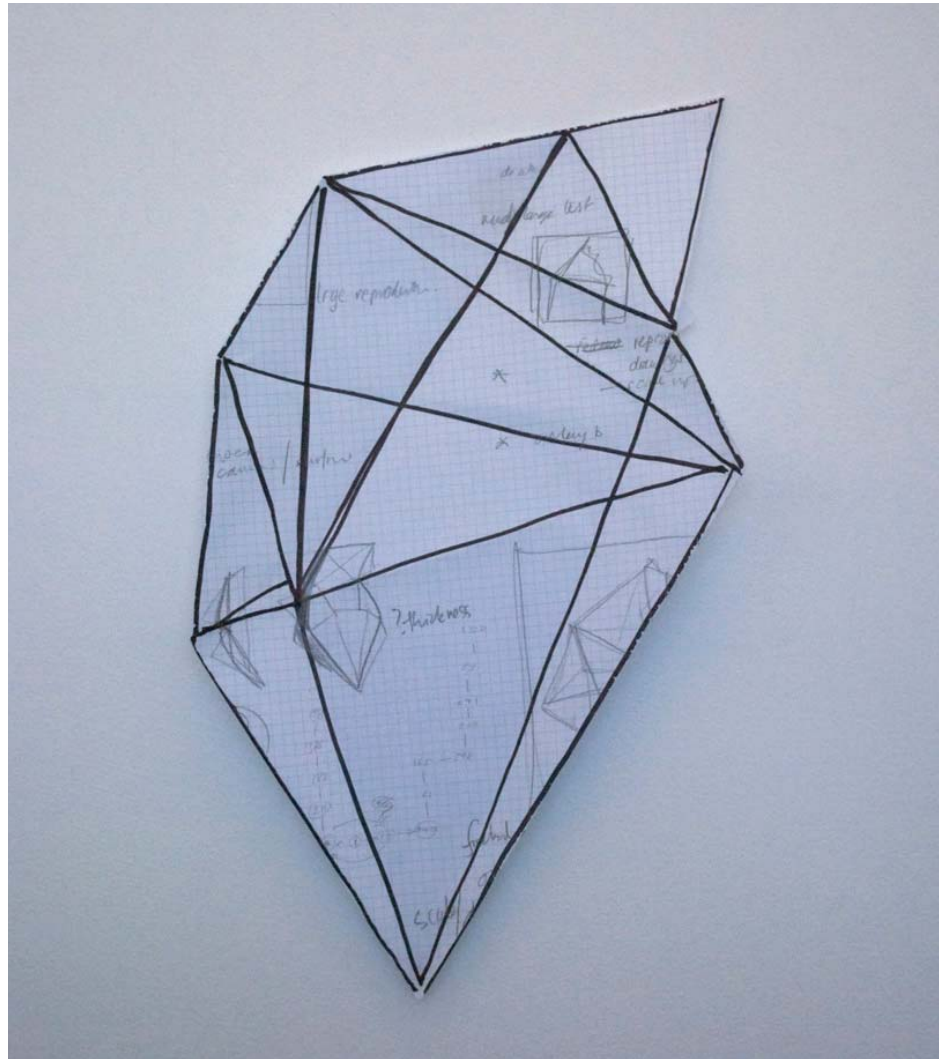
Paper folding

The experiment of paper folding came about quite suddenly one afternoon while trying to make an enlarged crystal like doodle as I wondered if I could fold some A3 grid paper to the same shape as my drawing (Figs. 15 & 16). Further folding ensued with different paper resulting in several flat polygon cell like structures that when butted together created a biological cell like series with an implied aptitude for infectious spreading and replication (Fig. 17). In my work I could now witness an underlying system that was beyond my regular comprehension. Auckland based artist, Jim Speers noted in the catalogue for *The Crystal Chain Gang: prismatic geometry in recent art* about his body of work, crystal forms were “evidence of a maths I don’t really understand but can touch. It’s about entering a rule based world.” (Smith, 2000). I found myself considering turning these irregular (non-rectangular) paper shapes into a painting surface, while questioning the practicalities of making such forms, such as the edges and my inherent fascination with these forms. At the time I wrote:

If I had to try and place my work, as varied as it currently is, my drawings could be seen as taking the strategies used by minimalism, by Sol LeWitt, mixing in some John Cage in an attempt to inject the human into the geometric in order to find meaning. I see subverting the system [my own systems] as having the potential to allow for that “something human”, something carrying feeling and meaning to occur.

And:

Getting underneath my working experiments it feels as if the core [of my practice] is made of several parts. The first being an interest in using systems and rules from games to provide a framework around which to build and develop my work. The second being a desire to break these rules, to intervene in someway and inject something of



the human into the game. To allow for intimacy. The third (and I'm thinking of the crystal works here) allowing for personal rules and systems to reveal themselves through making and to find meaning. For creation to happen outside or within the gaps of an established system.

In these works and notes I was already identifying the key areas of my research and a way of working. I'd be taking the idea of using systems as a means to generate work from LeWitt and would contrast this with a Cagian use of choice, free-will and wilful subversion of the system while paring back the elements I was using to the essential. I had begun my engagement with various types of space, including the mapping and re-mapping of space and started a process that would see the development of my ideas through at least two different mediums / sites. From the experiments I'd made the Maptastic drawings had, I felt, the most clarity, so it was these I chose to develop for the first critique and in doing so I began to lay the foundation for developing my own systematic approach to making work.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE DATA SOURCE FOR THE WORK?

The data source could come from anywhere – the high and low temperatures in Wellington for a week for example – yet the fact that I've chosen the game books I used to play as a child is important. It gives the work a dialogue with the themes of quest, exploration, self-discovery and coming of age in my previous work. Such quests, as Joseph Campbell notes, have a recurring pattern of separation, initiation and return. Separation sees the hero set adrift from the known, cast into the wilderness and as Jules Cashford observes, “one can simply wake up to find oneself lost... But we are at least set free to wander... in a strange land... And we have to encounter whatever happens there”. Through the encounter the hero enters the initiation stage of his journey, sooner or later having to slay his own personal dragon(s). Of course there will be setbacks and (hopefully) eventual success. With his new found gift, often a change of perception, the hero is able to return to the origin of his adventure, no longer a boy but a man. Putting it another way, the hero leaves the everyday space, moving

into an other (sacred) space (often via descent) and eventually returns to the original world with a new, earned perspective – a journey my work offers for those willing to accept it. I don't see the work as a wry comment on the idea of the painter as hero. Instead I see the association with quest as a means to bring another conceptual layer of space, time and understanding to my work and with it room for narrative and the poetic. Rather than the work being called *Wall drawing #1* it is titled *The battle is over and victory is yours (One false move)* and provides an imaginative route into the work, a clue to the source and underlying story.

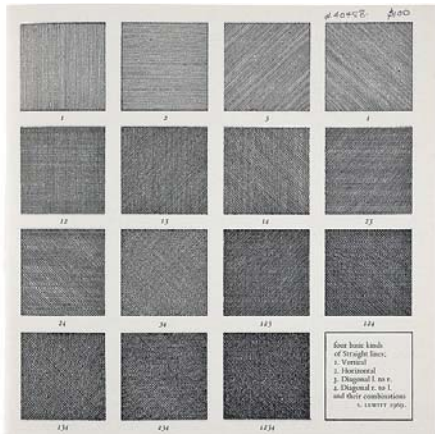


Fig. 19.

Sol Lewitt

Four basic kinds of straight lines

1969 photo-lithography

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

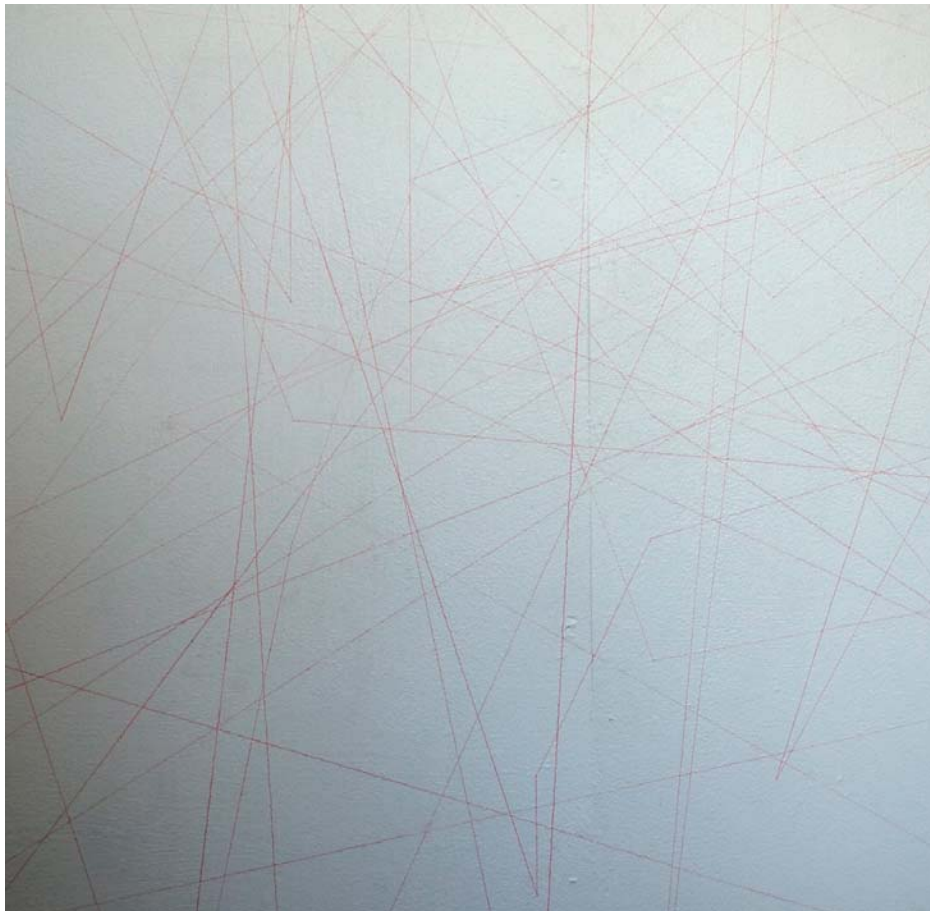
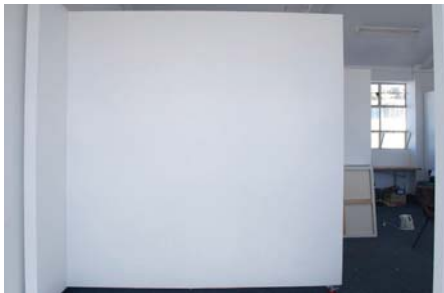
Fig. 20. Location of *The battle is over, victory is yours* (*One false move*)

Fig. 21.

Detail of *The battle is over, victory is yours* (*One false move*)

Red pencil on T-wall

Author 2011



Systematic / system addict

Sol LeWitt : ...The system is the work of art; the visual work of art is the proof of the system. The visual aspect can't be understood without understanding the system. It isn't what it looks like but what it is that is of basic importance.

(Ostrow, 2003)

Systems and a systematic approach in wall drawings have an established history as evidenced by the oeuvre of Sol LeWitt. Be it the instructions: “with pencil, draw 1000 random straight lines, 10 inches long, each day for 10 days, in a 10 x 10 foot square” (Smith, 2009) which anyone could then carry out or the logical progression of applying vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines (Fig. 19), for LeWitt the system was the work, the wall drawing being the visual realisation of the idea. Both were of equal importance, of equal status. This is where I differ from LeWitt. In my practice the system is the first part of the process – a necessary part yet one the viewer doesn't need to know of or work out in order to appreciate the work. Often the system is the last part of the work that is revealed, if at all. If the system becomes dominant I do not consider it to be the work of art as the final work on the wall is what is important. It's position in space, the selection of colours and how they have been used – these are subjective choices made outside of and subsequent to the deployment of the system.

The work *The battle is over and victory is yours (One false move)* (Figs 20 & 21) took my drawings off the page onto the wall and into a new direction, proving the viability of using systems to generate my work. The following piece, *HeadHunters* (Fig. 22 & 23), built upon this systematic approach generating new, previously unseen forms. *HeadHunters* arrived from the desire to expand my initial game drawings. The addition of another data point (the number of lines in the relevant paragraph sections of the game) gave the work a second dimension (height) giving rise to the creation of previously unseen shapes. The resulting geometric forms were read together as “a rocket” and also as simple walls reminiscent of those present in early video games providing the work with additional spatial facets: an illusionistic depth created through shape and form enhanced by optical push/pull colour relationships.

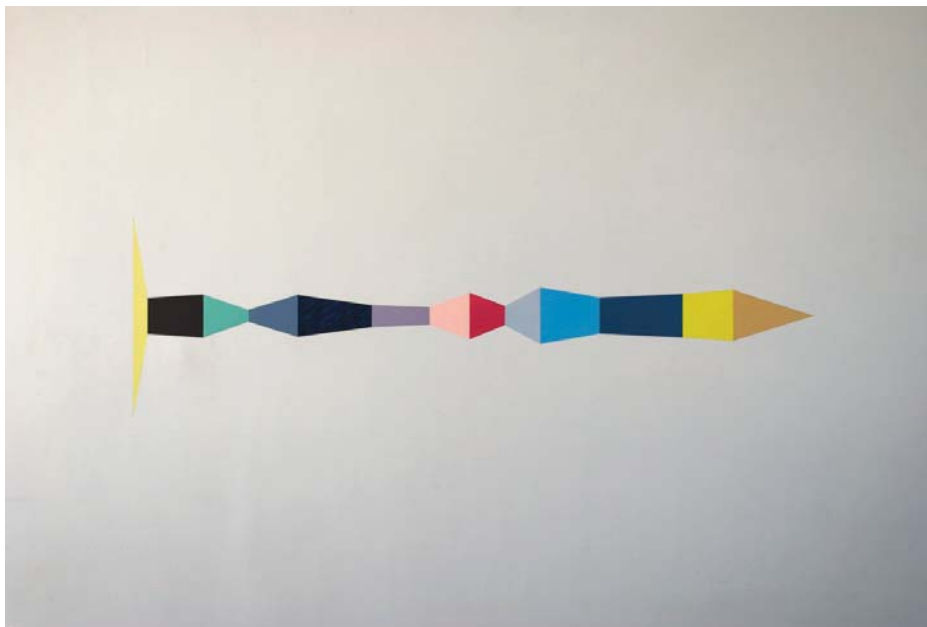
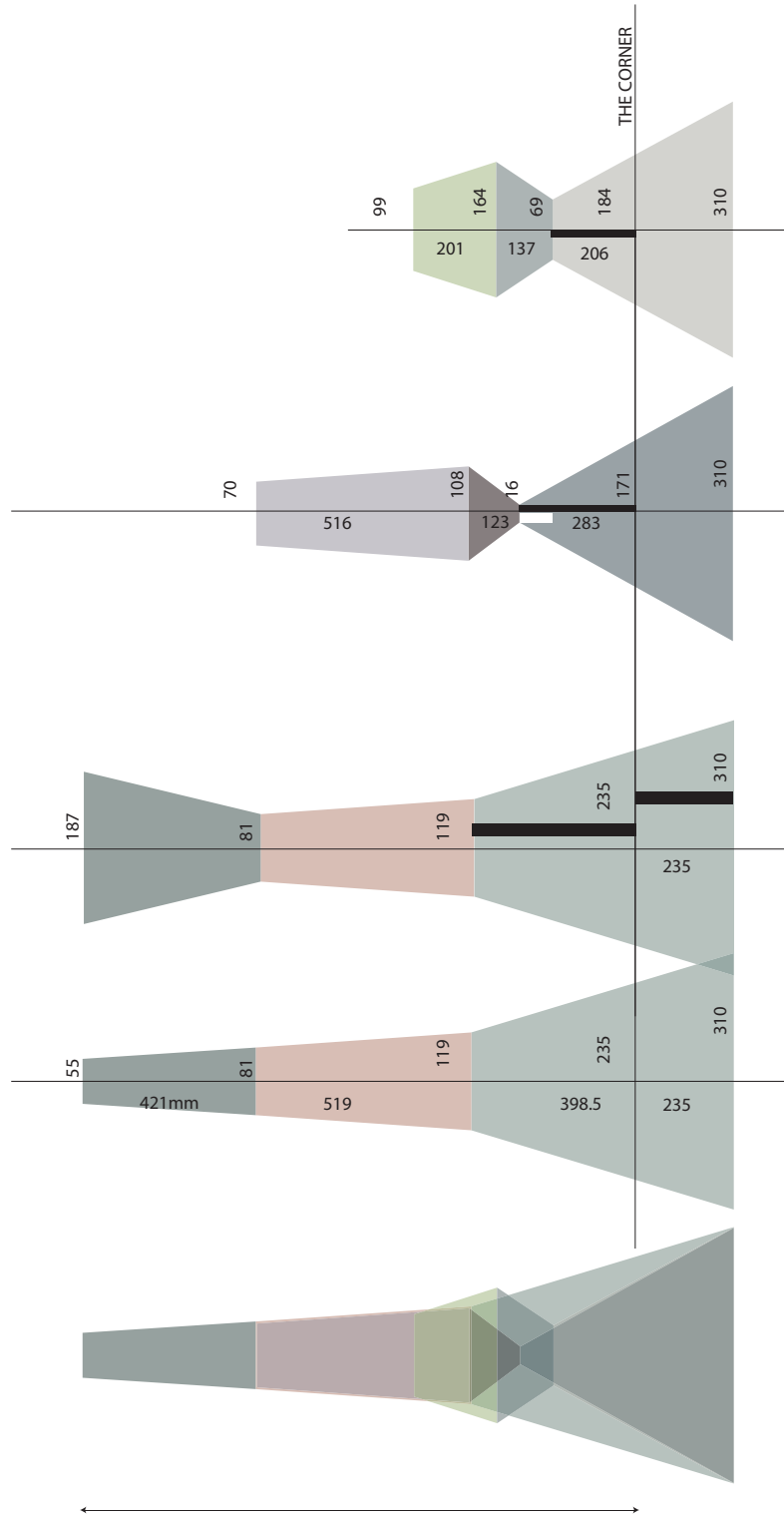


Fig.22. & 23.
Headhunters
 acrylic wall drawing
 Author 2011



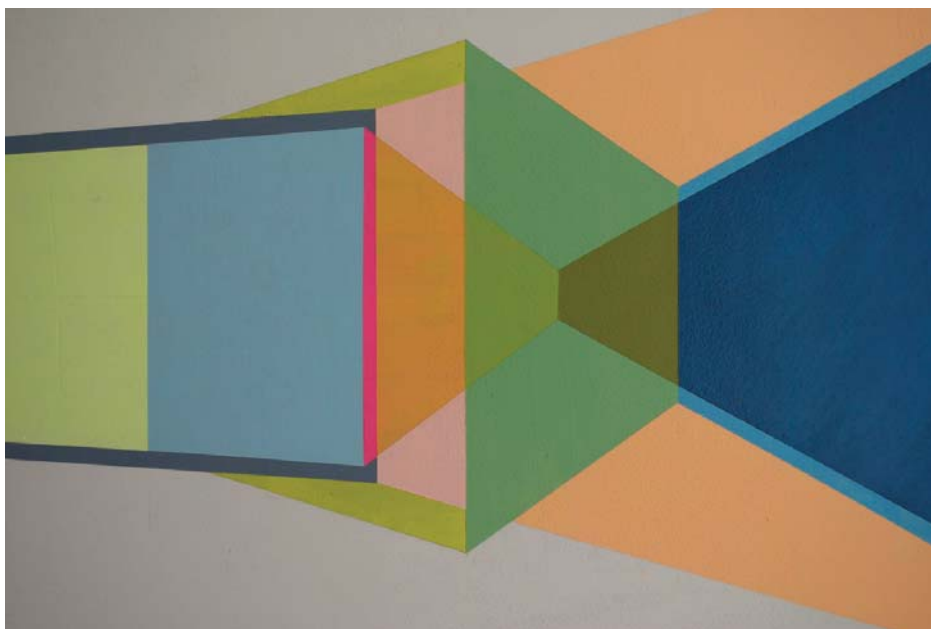
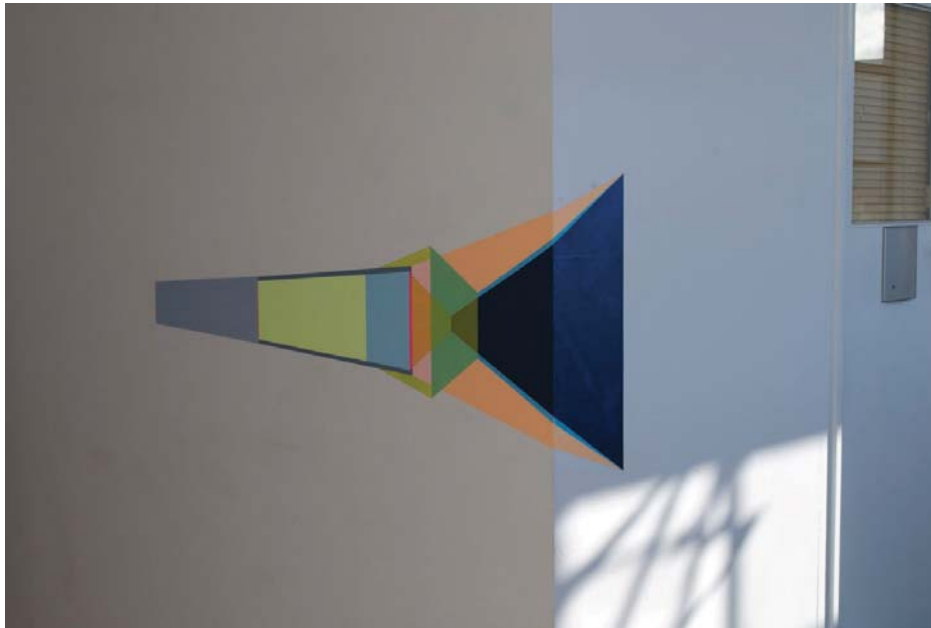


Fig. 25. *Three Step*
Acrylic wall drawing

Fig 26 *Three Step* detail
Author 2011

Previous page:
Fig. 24. *Working drawing for Three Step*
Author 2011

Where *The battle is over...* and *HeadHunters* are records of complete individual games, *Three step* is a record of the beginnings of several games (Fig. 24, 25 & 26). Every book/game has many possible paths and death is an all too common occurrence so the first moves in each game become increasingly repetitive. *Three step* engages with these elements of repetition and memory through overlaying the shapes generated from several restarts creating a colourful overlap of time, movement and memory producing an increasingly complex visual and conceptual space. Placing the work on the corner of a wall brought an increased engagement with the architectural site adding another level of complexity. American Mel Bochner, a first generation Conceptual artist and writer, ended his short text on wall drawing, *Walls* (1981) with the sentence “Lived space is challenged to a direct confrontation with pictorial space” (as cited in Stiles & Selz 1996). In *Three Step* illusionistic walls wrap around the physical wall directly, connecting the imagined space with the material world, while simultaneously remaining as flat colour forms, actual size, 1:1. The work is here and now, life size, challenging perceptions offering an opportunity to see the world differently.

WHY USE A SYSTEM?

One of the attractions of developing a systematic approach to making my work has been the opportunity to refocus when subjective decisions are either brought to the foreground or moved to the background of my process. My previous work was often generated from an exploration of my own psychological and emotional state, a systematic approach frees me from such concern, it is through the deployment of the system that initial forms (beyond my control) are generated. If new forms are needed I simply play a new game, recording my moves to construct a new data set. This process of creating work that is one step away from myself is one part of the sustainable practice I have created with another element being how I’m able to deploy the same system across a variety of sites.

System + New site = New Work

My notion of site is expansive – a piece of paper, a canvas, a single wall, an entire gallery, a city or even the palm of your hand. Each site requires

a unique response producing a unique work. Ideas and discoveries are no longer restricted to a single medium but rather deployed across a variety of different sites, feeding and ricocheting off each other from one site into the other (paper to wall) and back again forming a sustainable virtuous circle.

THE HAND & THE WALL

By following the set of instructions provided by LeWitt anyone could, in theory, make a LeWitt wall drawing, rendering the visual proof of his system. Would a work created in this way be a genuine LeWitt is an argument for another text but what is relevant is that my work does not have instructions, that it cannot be carried out by anyone else as I have chosen to be a key element in the making of the work. I make the work as it is my response to site that provides the subjectivity that is central to my practice as evidenced through my mixing of colour in situ (colours are not pre-planned) and dealing with the challenges of wall quality (or lack thereof). There is no escaping details such as the quality of the wall surface, which range from being riddled with pin holes, dents and imperfections to the inescapable orange peel surface of roller painted walls effecting direct paint application. Preparation of a minimal nature (the painting of a coat of gesso) is essential with larger imperfections being able to be approached in several ways a) ignore the imperfections and make the work, b) try to remove or fix the imperfections or c) accept the blemishes for what they are and incorporate them into the work. My preferred option is the latter for by acknowledging and incorporating the nature of the site into the work the final piece becomes much more effectively embedded into the location. Such a direct response also opens the possibility of the work taking a new direction beyond my original expectations. In *First steps on Fire Island* (Fig. 27) there is a join in the T-wall, a line where two panels meet. By accepting this line and using it to mark a changing point for my colours the wall is integrated into the work, the line is no longer a distraction as it becomes part of the work. The colour change gave the work an additional dimension, an element not present in previous work occurring through a breaking of the established system. As Bochner noted in *Walls* (1981), the wall and by extension, the space is something to be engaged with.

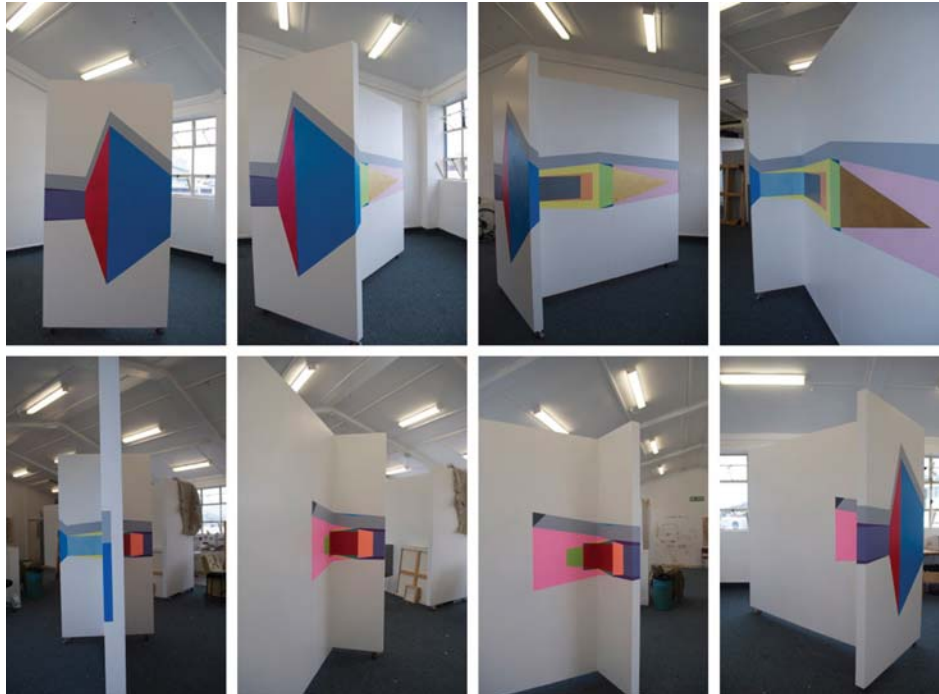


Fig. 27.

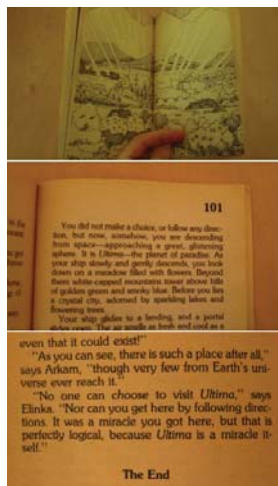
First steps on Fire Island

Lured to move around *First steps...* the work reveals itself.

Author 2011

BREAKING THE RULES

There's an American choose-your-own-adventure book which unlike most other game books has a unique ending – the Ultima ending. In the book *UFO 54-40* it's your mission to aid your captors in finding Ultima, a mysterious, hidden planet, 'the planet of paradise'. Like Parzival, who "fails to find the Grail the first time because he obeys the code of manners expected of a knight, and thereby disobeys the deeper laws of his own being" (Cashford, 1993), you won't find your grail, your planet of paradise by playing the game in the traditional sense "by making a choice or following instructions" (Swinehart, 2010). Finding Ultima is set up in such a way so that by following the story and making choices as you would in every other game book you get no closer to your goal. Hopefully frustration will drive you to flick through the book and examine every page to find something you may have missed. In doing so you will discover a double page spread with no words – the only one in the book – illustrating a landscape full of sun rays, mature forest, mountains and castles. A paradise perhaps? Turning back a page (to page 101) you discover that you have indeed found the planet in the only way possible – by not making a choice, by breaking the rules and the established system (Fig. 28). Some may see this as cheating, others as a philosophical statement. I believe there's something more important at play. More than breaking the rules it's to do with freedom – freedom



of choice, freedom I have as an individual, as an artist, to do anything I want with my work. I can't help but recall the exchange between Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston at the first showing of Guston's cartoon like hooded figures, "Philip," he [de Kooning] said, "do you know what the real subject is?" And Guston told how both exclaimed at the same time, "Freedom!" Guston added, "That's the only possession the artist has — freedom to do whatever you can imagine." (Ashton, p186, 1976)

Fig. 28.
The Ultima ending
Swinehart, C. (2010)

MISSED ACHES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

The draftsman may make errors in following the plan. All wall drawings contain errors, they are part of the work.

(LeWitt, 1971)

One of the challenges in making systematic wall works is dealing with mistakes. In painting you often have both the time and space to amend or even destroy your work to overcome mistakes and produce the final piece. With wall works, yes the work could be destroyed and started over if need be. However, when working under a deadline I've found it best to incorporate any mistakes into the work.

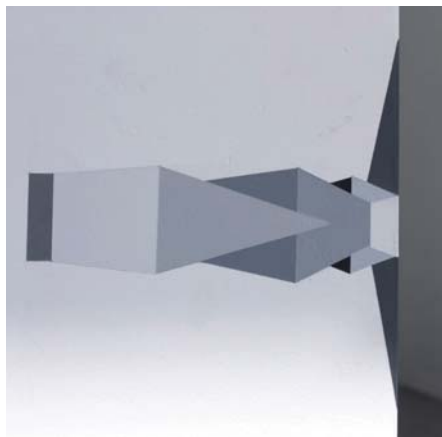
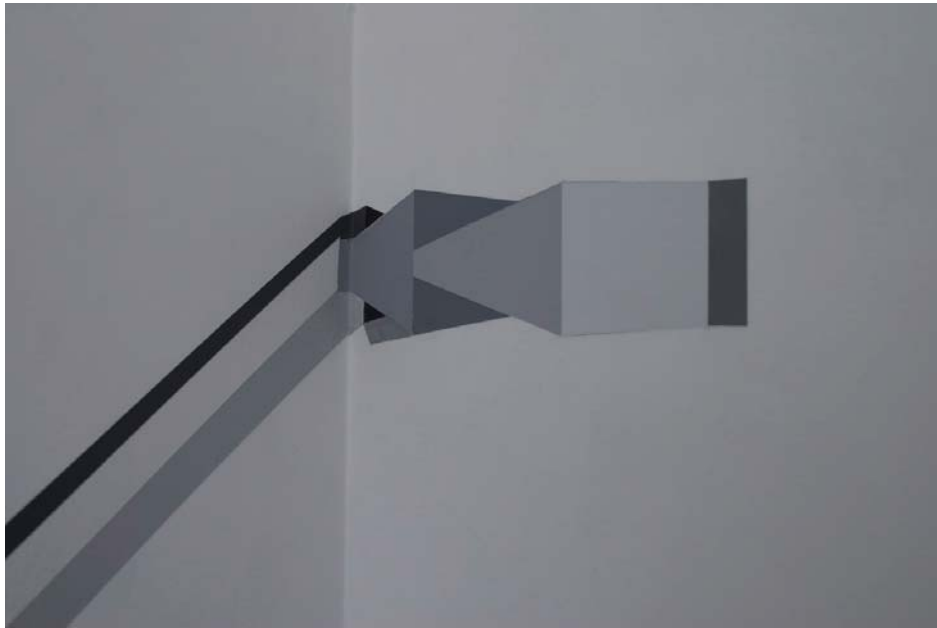
In *The battle is over...*, there was one mistake, an extra line, the one false move. Erasing the line would have been problematic, destroying much of the drawing so better to include it. These are not works made by machine, they are not sharply cut vinyl (though I did test this) with its computer generated perfection they are made by me. Accidents can and do happen as an unintentional part of the process, an unconscious desire perhaps to subvert the system, to break the rules and allow for the unexpected to emerge.

In Simon Ingram's *Machinic Paintings* we see painting become machine (Fig. 29). The system takes over, yet is built in such a way to allow for, to encourage the inclusion and manifestation of errors. The materiality of the work and the process of making introduces glitches into the system so the established rules are broken, the machine (and therefore the work) becomes more human. In my work, I'm (unintentionally) introducing the technical glitches when responding to the physical conditions and challenges of the surface I'm working on. Like Ingram's machines being built

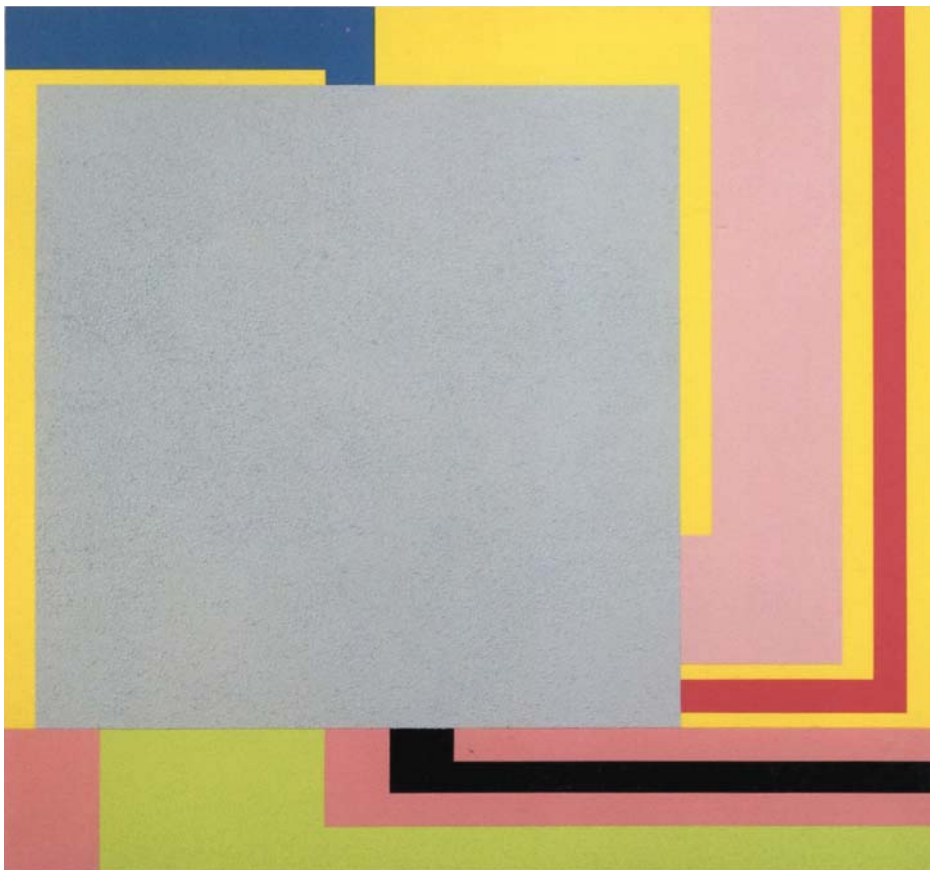


Fig. 29.
Simon Ingram
Painting Assemblage No.6 (detail), 2007
Painting machine (lego, aluminium and wiring), paint brush, oil on linen
195 × 195 cm

to withstand such glitches, my approach is robust enough to withstand errors. While making *Engine Room remix* (Fig. 41) in the Engine Room foyer the removal of some lo-tack tape brought with it not only my painting but also the underlying painted surface to reveal bare plaster. I redrew and painted the work choosing to paint over the point of the original triangle – a practical solution minimising the need to stick more tape to the wall and risk revealing yet more plaster. Eliminating the triangle point effectively changed the original system and offered a new interpretation of the separated anchor forms. Previously identical in form the now different anchors read as male and female forms, joined together yet separated across space (and time) (Fig. 30 & 31). As with Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*), more commonly known as *The Large Glass* (*Le Grand Verre*), by honouring the mistake, embracing and embedding the accident into the completed work new readings are activated and welcome.



Details of *Engine Room remix*
 Fig. 30. Top corner piece. Missing point.
 Fig. 31. Bottom corner piece
 acrylic wall drawing.
 Author 2011



Works by Peter Halley

Fig. 32. *Stairway to Heaven*, 1993
 Acrylic, day-glo acrylic and Roll-a-Text on
 canvas, 240 × 215 cm

Fig. 33. *A Dangerous Game*, 1992
 Acrylic, day-glo acrylic and Roll-a-Text on
 canvas, 210 × 228

Colour

Halley: After I do them I sometimes think of the associations with bad taste. But what really interests me is that the use of colour can be transgressive. I find it exciting if I can make some awkward colour or combination of colours work. The other thing I have been interested in since 1988 is the idea of spatial ambiguity, a confusion between background and form, that's like the phenomenon of synaesthesia or psychedelic overload.

(Halley, 1992 as cited by Bathcelor, 2008)

As the neo-geo painter Peter Halley, known for his use of Day-Glo colour (Figs. 32 & 33) notes, there is an excitement to be found in making difficult and unusual colour combinations work. They are dangerous, unusual and complex. Viewers are required to work in looking at the colours, drop any preconceptions (“I really don’t like colour”) and allow the colour (and space) to reveal itself in surprising ways. Colour plays a significant role in my work where I use it to seduce or repulse the viewer, creating space within the work itself, surprising and physically moving the viewer and as a means to embed my work into the site or to highlight the alien nature of the work.

In each consecutive work on the MFA I’ve consciously pushed my use and understanding of colour. Simply at first, the intuitively chosen red pencil line for *The battle is over...* (Fig. 21) quietly alluding to the thread Theseus used to retrace his steps to escape the labyrinth after defeating the Minotaur. As our eyes attempt to follow the thread, the tracks of our hero, from start to finish the game like nature of the work is obliquely tied with the maze myth.

The single colour became 13 in the following work *HeadHunters* (Fig. 23). With colours subjectively chosen from the cover of the book used to generate the data from which the work was created, the work and the data source become connected, making significant leaps that allow me to explore the ambiguous visual colour spaces that I’d been discovering in previous paintings.

Immediately after the colourful realisation of *HeadHunters* I spent two days making experimental paper drawings in the room 1C08, giving me the opportunity to explore form in a way that I couldn’t with paint on a wall (Fig. 34). There were no rules or systems to follow here, instead I explored

and thought with my hands. Here, colour was built into the paper I'd bought - quite a different colour from the wall works, including fluorescent and pearlescent paper and by making work with these materials important questions around colour emerged resulting in three groups of work: *Flirty fluorescents*, *Fucking hardcore minimalism* (FHM) and *Seductive surfaces* (Figs. 35 - 38). While the white FHM works were very austere, the *Flirty Fluorescent* works highlighted potential problems in using such bright, garish colour. Is the work light hearted or merely light weight? Were the *Seductive surfaces* with their reflective, alluring pearlescent finishes shallow? Is this work all surface? Is there anything at all beneath the shiny exterior? Does there need to be? Strange things to ask of coloured paper perhaps – was I becoming chromophobic – a condition coined by the artist and writer David Batchelor In his book *Chromophobia*. Batchelor eloquently argues that “since antiquity colour has been systematically marginalised” in Western culture and intellectual circles due to “a fear of contamination: chromophobia”. The following passage from Charles Blanc, the 19th century French critic and colour theorist, Batchelor cites as “near-perfect textbook chromophobia”

The union of design and colour is necessary to beget painting just as is the union of man and woman to beget mankind, but design must maintain its preponderance over colour. Otherwise painting speed to its ruin: it will fall through colour as mankind fell through Eve

Colour is seen as dangerous, so dangerous it must be banished. As Batchelor asserts, “Chromophobia manifests itself in many and varied attempts to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish it's significance, to deny its complexity.” Such elimination of colour is often achieved on one of two ways. Colour, through the chromophobe's eyes, is seen first seen as foreign – it's feminine, primitive, vulgar, alien and therefore dangerous. It is a constant threat to be avoided or controlled at all costs. Secondly colour is denigrated by being portrayed as superficial, trivial and for the lower (the therefore less intelligent) classes, it is colouring-in, embellishment and merely cosmetic, the inference being it lacks any intellectual worth or credibility.

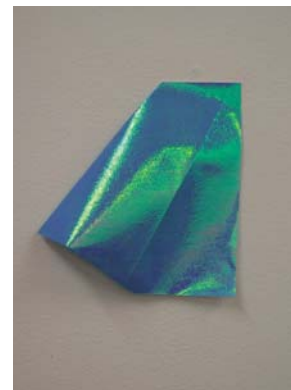


Fig. 34.
Experiments in drawing, Room 1Co8
Author 2011

Fig. 35 - 38. (left to right)
Flirty Fluorescent, post-it notes
Seductive surfaces, origami paper
FHM work, folded A3 paper
Author 2011

...It is also worthy of remark, that savage nations, uneducated people, and children have a great predilection for vivid colours; that animals are excited to rage by certain colours; that people of refinement avoid vivid colours in their dress and the objects that are about them, and seen inclined to banish them altogether from their presence
(Goethe, translated by Eastlake, 1970 as cited in Batchelor, 2000)

Despite the many developments in our understanding and appreciation of colour – the work of Georges Seurat in the 19th century, the development of colour theory, the work of Joseph Albers and the colour field painting of the 1940s and 50s, along with our increased scientific understanding of colour and our awareness of cultural differences around colour – it would seem such prejudice still exists:

More recently the American painter Peter Halley was reported as saying that ‘over the last few years he has felt a bit out in the cold because of what he recognises as a general art world aversion to painting. But also because maybe collectors and critics find his colours too working class. They think muted colours are more tasteful.
(Batchelor, pp111-112, 2000)

Whether colour is an internal quality threatening to spill out engulfing reason and logic or if it’s merely an external cosmetic, deceitful yet seductive slap of paint the contemporary chromophobe seeks to banish the vulgar beast that is colour. In contrast the chromophile turns the chromophobe’s notions on their head, embracing colour and its dangerous, sensuous complexity. The angel falls in Wim Wenders’ *Wings of Desire* falls from the black & white spiritual world into our colourful world of desire. A fall from grace perhaps, but one into self knowledge and individuation. In turn Peter Halley seeks to allow “the culture in as much as possible” through his choice of industrial Day-Glo colours and Roll-a-tex paint and states “That act of non-judgemental embrace can flip around to become a critical act.” (Halley, 1992). In taking such a stance Halley reconnects with contemporary popular culture, Minimalism and Pop art while addressing social issues through his work. Perhaps this is too much

for those critics and collectors Halley mentions, many of whom perhaps inhabit the ‘aggressively white’ type of house Batchelor describes in *Chromophobia*’s opening chapter.

My core colour choices have similar characteristics to those of Halley’s with a call upon the industrial and are based on the four process colour printing inks – CMYK – cyan, magenta, yellow and key (black). Working with this colour system in my graphic design work I was familiar in ‘mixing’ these colours on the computer so why not bring them to the painting world? By adopting the process colours of printing (my key is made from Paynes Grey and Burnt Umber) and the industrial fluorescents I quietly and perversely place the unique pieces I make in a quiet dialogue with the world of the industrial, the mass produced and the every man. In becoming aware of the possible social implications of colour (through the work of Halley and Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica) and the potential of turning colour’s perceived frivolity on it’s head (or not) my use of colour changed. Choosing colours intuitively in *Three step* (Fig 24) I found myself not only using fluorescent colours but also taking colour references from the surrounding environment – the blue of the carpet, the green of the rubbish bin and even the silver grey gaffa tape stuck to the floor – all locating the work into it’s environment. In *First steps...* I use a choose a combination of alien colours and those taken from the surroundings. The right hand side of the piece (closest to the window) uses colours from the surrounds – the window frame, the colour of the trees outside, the grey of the buildings opposite and brings external colours into the space (Fig. 39). In contrast the left hand side of the T-wall colours are intuitively combined fluorescents, purples, greens, reds and a rather garish fluorescent pink. The result is a compact complex set of internal shapes, form and colour (Fig. 40).

This saw me establish my system for colour use, or rather a new set of guidelines. I now consciously choose to use colours from the immediate surroundings to place and embed the work into the site, *Engine Room remix - wall drawing* (Fig. 43), or I can introduce alien colours into the space as an act of disruption, *Engine Room remix – untitled cardboard construction* (Fig. 42).



Fig. 39 & 40.
First steps on Fire Island
External (left), internal (right)
Author 2011



Fig. 41.
Engine Room re-mix

Fig. 42.
Engine Room re-mix – cardboard construction
Colours were taken from pots of previously used colours.

Fig. 43.
Engine Room re-mix – wall drawing
Colours (shades of grey) taken from the space.
Author 2011

COLOUR AND SPACE

When colour is no longer submitted to the rectangle, nor to any representation of this rectangle, it tends to “embody” itself; it becomes temporal, it creates its own structure, and the work then becomes the “body of colour”.

(Oiticica, 1960 as cited in Ramírez, Figueiredo and Oiticica, 2007)

Colour, was for the Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica, an essential element of his practice – one which he spent his career exploring, believing it to have it's own internal structure and duration. I use colour to locate my work within space, to disrupt space and to create space within the work itself. *HeadHunters* exploits push/pull colour relationships to create spatial colour play that reveals its peculiar self through prolonged viewing. Colours we expect to recede don't, and when combined with form of the work give the flat wall work an unexpected spatial depth. In *Three step*, depth is achieved through a combination of geometric form and spatial illusion with apparent transparent colour layers enhancing the spatial play.

The wall cannot be conceived of as a surrogate canvas. The wall is not a depiction of a wall. Its “thereness” is immediate and inescapable.

The wall is continuous, its surface turns corners. Therefore, space rather than surface is the support.

(Bochner, 1981 as cited by Stiles, K., & Selz, P. (1996)

In *First steps...* (Fig 44) the change in scale and move on to a freestanding T-wall dramatically alters the space the work inhabits. Colour choice, while still intuitive, is more conscious in bringing the outside in and the insides out. Here colour seduces, luring the viewer into and around the work in order to complete it. The T-wall is positioned just so – aligned with the room's only entrance, the large areas of vibrating red and blue catch the eye. Moving further into the room and closer to the work you glimpse the piece wrapping itself around the T-wall revealing more of itself while simultaneously suggesting much is still hidden enticing the viewer to journey around the work. On reaching the work, the point where the red and blue join provides a visual assault, impossible to look at for any prolonged

length of time, encouraging the choice that needs to be made – to go left or right (echoing the initial choice the game from which this work is derived). Choosing either direction the overlapped games unfold, revealing themselves, as choice is made visible. The viewer moves around the work creating a new space for their own experience and perception of the work.

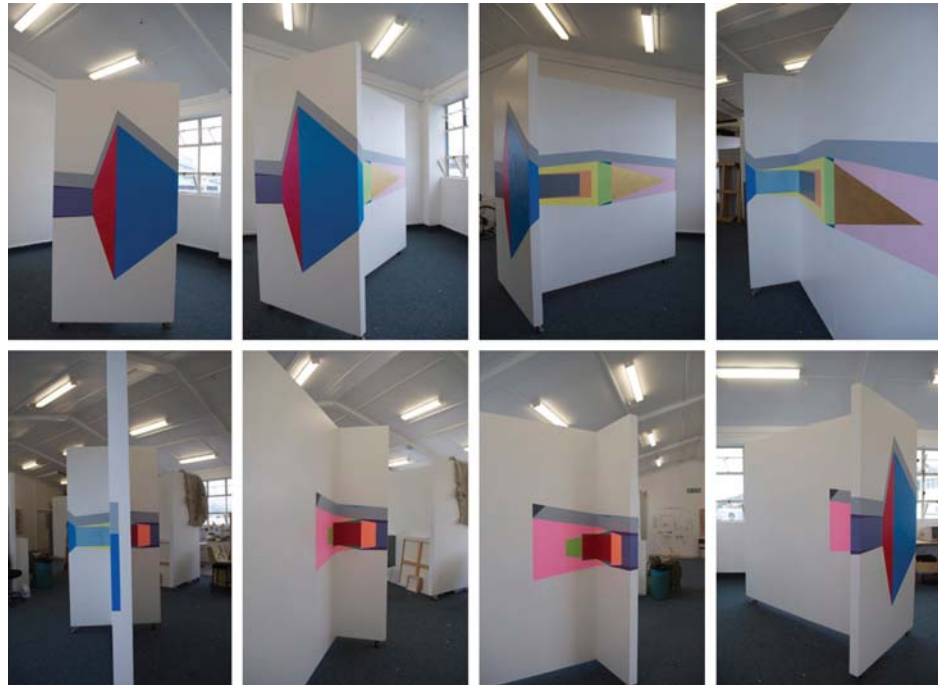


Fig. 44. *First steps on Fire Island*
Lured to move around *First steps...* the work reveals itself.
Author 2011

TIME AND MEMORY

Previously the time of the work, of the recorded game, of the making was folded into the work. In *First steps...* time and memory are made explicit. There is the time it takes the visitor to see the work in its entirety, navigating around the wall, moving through space observing the work play itself out; there is then the memory and spatial dexterity required to picture the work as a whole, to put together the different planes of the wall and the work into a congruent whole; and then there are the overlapping, repeating aspects of the game itself, the remembering of the safe routes in order to avoid the deadly pirates and of course the inevitable repetitious restarts.

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF THE WORK

Memory plays its part not only as the viewer attempts to construct the complete work but also in the recording and remembering of the work once it's gone. Out of necessity (and desire) wall works are often erased sooner or later. This sanding back, painting over and returning the wall to it's original state naturally raises questions around the temporal nature of wall work.

On 3 January, after the exhibition closes, the image will be painted over. It's the same with every wall-painting he makes. They are not meant to last; Wright's point is that all art is mortal. "The fragility of the experience is the hinge for me," he says. It makes the work more like a musical performance, he explains, something that exists in the memory of the creator and the audience, but can't be owned, sold, or carried around. "There's already too much stuff in the world. And it buys you a kind of freedom. Not having [paintings] come back to haunt you is a kind of liberation. You make something, and a month later it is gone." If a handful of his works have lived longer, then it is only because the owners of their host buildings happen not to have painted over them. Mostly, though, they go – such as the installation he made in an empty house in Edinburgh in 2007, a series of dots in arcs on the walls and ceilings, a subtle remapping of the space. "Why has the Sistine Chapel survived? Because we need it. Some things are necessary. But perhaps not as many things as we think."
(Higgins, 2009)

I can identify with Wright's likening of the work to live musical performance, a one off event that you really had to be there to experience. Like a song with musical notation, a work can (in theory at least) be reproduced elsewhere many times over using the same colours, the same instructions with each rendition being the same but different from the original. LeWitt takes the analogy further, enjoying the idea that, "the same work can exist in two or more places at the same time." Each new performance, each new work is unique, a different work in a different context, space, time. Questions around the nature of the original,

authenticity and the role/death of the author are raised. Today, with the zeroes and ones of the Internet the notion of the copy, the reproduction has taken on a different value. As home taping didn't kill music, the remake or remix of my work doesn't necessarily diminish the value of the original, it can in fact increase it's reputation. Remix culture is alive and well – though this is a conversation to be had at another time.

AMK: Were you the first artist to use the wall with the notion that the work would be done on a temporary basis?

SL: The difference between temporary and permanent is unclear.

(LeWitt, 1995, p109)

While music and performances are often temporary events, wall works, as both Wright and LeWitt acknowledge, need not be with some lasting many years. Such duration (or lack of) changes the nature of the work/performance, or at least affects the way in which we perceive and experience it.

18 HOURS

While having access to a space for only 24 hours it was this short duration that brought the transient aspect of my practice to the fore. The wall drawing *Engine Room work* (Fig. 44 & 45), once made, existed for no longer than 18 hours the majority of which were over a Sunday night when the gallery was closed. The work was probably seen by no more than three people – myself, another artist using the space and I suspect, the cleaner and now the only physical records that exist of the work are the photos. As Wright mentions there is liberation to be found in the fleeting nature of wall works for their decisive removal not only marks the end of the event, the act of erasure creates space (physically, metaphorically and metaphysically) for something new to manifest.

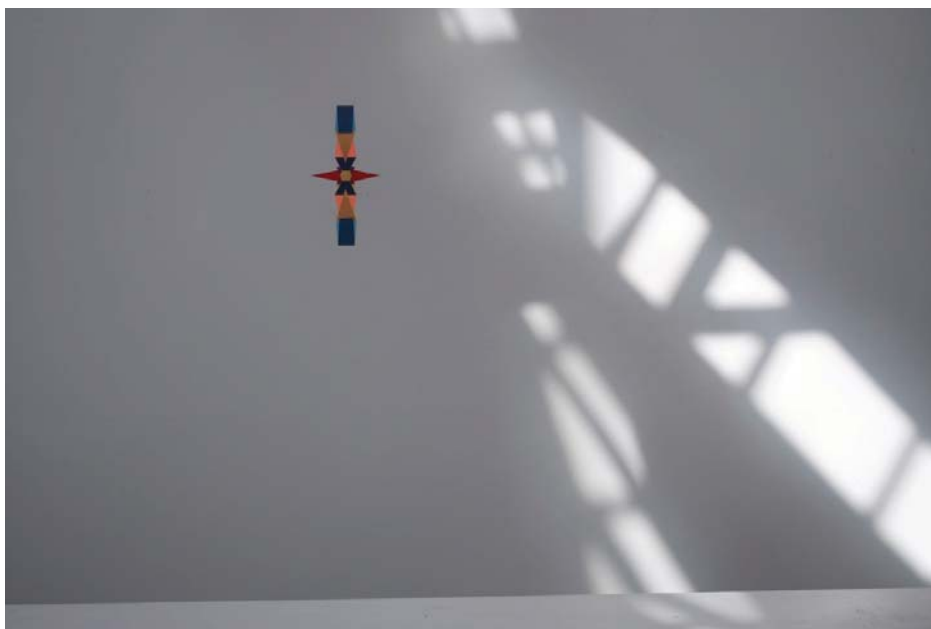


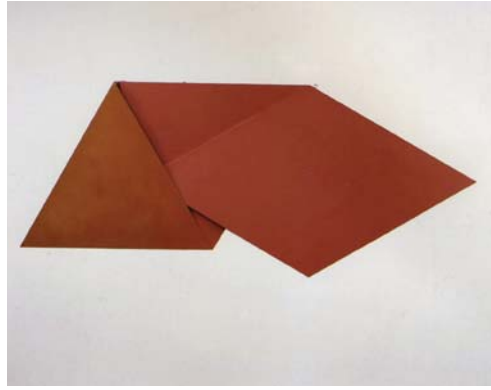
Fig. 45, 46.
Engine Room work
 Acrylic on wall
 Author 2011

Colour and structure are inseparable here, as are space and time.

(Oiticica, 1960)

From my initial paper experiments to the most recent engagements with architecture form has played an important role in my work. My understanding of this has been informed by my own experiments and those of the Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica. Throughout the year the work of Oiticica has been persistently at the edge of my peripheral vision and at times directly in front of me. I was able to experience some of Oiticica's work in the *Point of Contact* show at the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University and found myself compelled to touch, open and explore a *Bólido* work in order to reveal its hidden colours. The video footage of the *Parangolés* captured the spirit of the work that the hanging capes alone lacked – they needed movement. For me, the way in which Oiticica was able to implicate and encourage the viewer to become an integral part of his works stood out.

While Oiticica has been a constant companion, it has not always been an easy relationship. As Ramirez notes, "Oiticica's line of thinking is fascinating while at the same time ungraspable". He frequently oscillated between "rejection of theory and his unwitting tendency towards theorisation" leaving his position at times difficult to comprehend. However in looking at the arc of Oiticica's practice the development progression of his work has a visible logic (Figs. 47 - 55). His move off the canvas plane, off the wall and into space and time saw an increasing engagement and implication of the participant to complete his works. Starting with his experiments and understandings of colour on a metaphysical level, moving off the canvas plane, off the wall and into space (and subsequently time) with the hanging *Bilateral* works where we get to experience both sides of the work hanging in space to the increasingly complex *Nuclei* works, the installation works, the *Bóides* with their colour revealing doors and drawers to the rebellious, revolutionary (and perhaps the pinnacle of his thinking) *Parangolé* capes, providing colour in action, where the individual and colour become embodied as one through movement in space and time. My own work has mirrored this move as it's moved from paper to wall to corner to the



Works by Helio Oiticica

Fig. 47, 48, 49.
Relevo espacial (vermelho) [Spatial relief (red)],
views from different angles 1960

Fig. 50, 51. *Grande Núcleo* [Grand Nucleus],
two views

Overleaf

Fig. 52. *B11 Bólido caixa 09* [B11 Box Bólido 09]
1964

Fig. 53. Hélio Oiticica manipulating his B11 Box
Bólido 09, 1964

Fig. 54. Hélio Oiticica manipulating his B11 Box
Bólido 09, 1964

Fig. 55. Miro de Manguiera with the Po4
Parangolé Cape 01 (1964), c.1964



multiple planes of the T-wall to engaging fully with architectural space in Engine Room re-mix. There has been a quiet conversation going on between me and Oiticica as he has shown me a possible trajectory for my practice with the possibility of painting becoming increasingly integrated with the individual and everyday life.

A SOCIAL SPACE

In being drawn to work of Halley (his use of colour) and Oiticica (the development of his practice and thinking) I've been struck by how both artists placed their work in relation to the society around them. Halley, through his writing and talk of conduits, pipes, isolation and the virtual world while drawing on the work of Foucault and Baudrillard placed his work beyond the purely visual, addressing society at a philosophical level. As Fuchs (2000) notes of Halley's writing, "They (Foucault, Baudrillard) had nothing to do with the artistic instinct of his work, but they helped him to understand and focus his own thinking about art and society." Oiticica was working in a Brazil that had experienced a military regime of 1964 turn into a dictatorship by 1968. It wasn't until 1985 that democracy returned to Brazil. Against this background of political and cultural suppression working in a country marked by poverty Oiticica made work with a desire to engage the individual through his *Bólides*, installation work and *Parangolé* capes. This encouragement of individuals to activate his work through their own free movement and dance, either at artistic Happenings or deep in Brazil's *favelas*, could not fail to be seen as a political act under such a regime.

With such an attraction to their work, I've had to ask of my own practice if there is an underlying social or political intent. My conclusion, is yes, I believe there is and that it is nascent. There are implications of context, of how and where I locate my work, of the associations and readings of the environment itself and of how the work speaks to these; there are associations through colour with the industrial, with potential notions of class, taste and beauty; and there's the paradoxical challenge of my (now decreasing) unease with an overt intellectualisation of my practice. I seek to bring my work increasingly towards the every day, to integrate it into daily life while maintaining and continuing to develop a visual and intellectual rigour.

Closing moves

My wall paintings are first and foremost something to look at. The most decisive relationships, those of drawing and color, are internal. At the same time crucial decisions involve placement, size, and orientation. The distance from the bottom of the painting to the floor, for example, is as important to meaning as the edges of the color. These contextual decisions are specific to the time and place of the installation, physical as well as as visual, and attack rather than react to the space.

(Bochner, 1981)

In the end the position of the work could be half of the work for me. In the first instance the work has the possibility to effect or change the way you are drawn through the space it therefore has the potential to reveal the space in an a new aspect.

(Wright, 2011)

My works, like Bochner's are primarily something to look at and with this (as both Wright and Bochner demonstrate) the positioning of the work is vital to how it's read and key in the making of a wall work. Bochner talks of "contextual decisions" that "attack rather than react to the space" yet I see attack as one of several options – responding to a space and the surroundings need not be seen as passive. Thinking of reaction in the way a jujitsu master uses the force and momentum of an attacker against himself rather than taking a confrontational position is more useful in this instance. As Wright (2009) states of his work "My work is like a worn step, it is like a smoke detector, it is even like a picture, but it is more like the space between the letters of words". This is work that can engage with its surrounds in a quiet, assured manner using no more force than is necessary.

A TYRANNICAL BREAKTHROUGH

During a critique with Paul O'Neill and Suzanne Mooney late in October, Suzanne suggested I "start to make work for the spaces you want to

show in". With this in mind when the opportunity to use the Engine Room foyer I jumped at the chance. The foyer is a somewhat idiosyncratic space with a high ceiling, an alcove, a jutting concrete pillar, a glass wall, signage and is one of the types of space I see myself making work for. As Bochner states, "painting done directly on the wall the architecture becomes the boundary, the conforming limit" and this was no different. I sought to engage with the architecture and as is often the case, the 'conforming limits' forced a creative response.

Having previously made a work in the main Engine Room gallery that only three people saw, I chose to rework the piece for the foyer, deploying the same forms and adapting them in response to this new space. I also chose to show a paper piece alongside the wall work as a means to publicly open the conversation between my two main methods of research (Figs. 56 & 57)

Reading the wall work from left to right (as is our tendency in the west) the low starting point acknowledges and counteracts the high ceiling. The interruption of the metal skirting board breaks the connection between wall and ceiling preventing a floor to ceiling riposte. However, the 'bottom anchor' still needed to be close enough to the floor without being too close. Moving round the corner tyrannical diagonal lines move us up and across the wall from bottom anchor to top and back again. Three shades of grey drawn from the surrounds play optical tricks, the just-off-white diagonal line visually changing tone along its length due to the surrounding dark grey shaft and mid grey slither (Fig. 56). Both in their monochrome scheme and form, their lines echo the streams of light that enter this space and that of the main gallery. At the top anchor we find a slightly different form (note the missing point) placed at 30cm above the edge of the alcove effectively bringing this architectural feature into play and activating a dialogue with the cardboard construction work positioned in the recess.

In contrast to the hard edged, mechanistic wall work, it (the cardboard construction) (Fig. 57) feels human in both scale and materiality. It's neither perfect or hard edged instead it's defiantly hand made and brings subtle, softer alien colour drawn from previous works to the monochrome space. Made from the same shapes as the wall piece (the same in fact as in the original *HeadHunters* piece) it shares the same basic DNA as the wall piece, a member of the same family. Reminiscent of a floor plan it provides a different mapping of spaces where the wall drawing wraps itself around

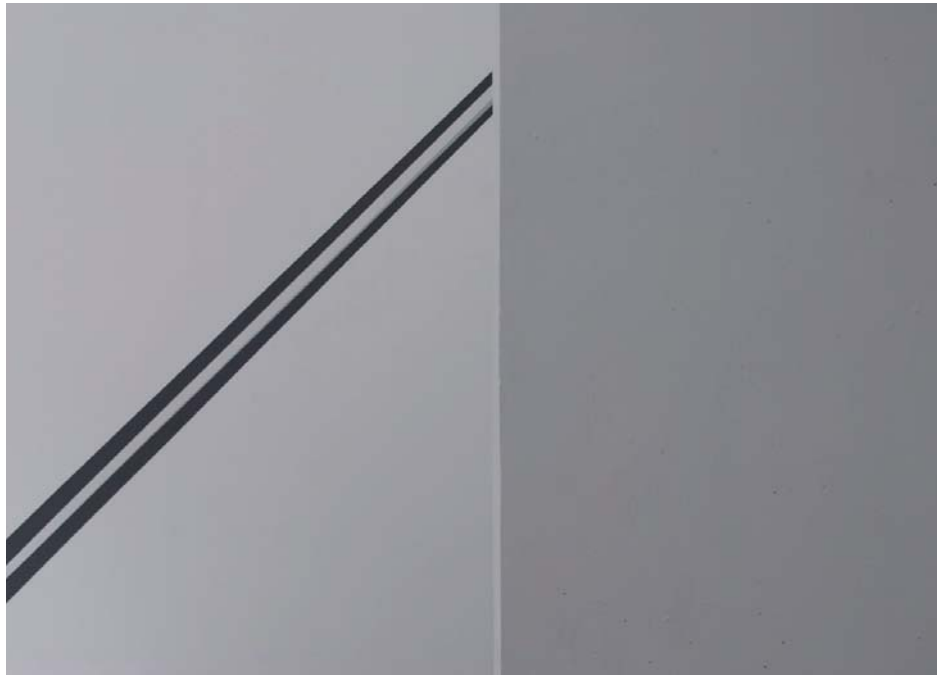


Fig. 56.
Engine Room remix - Wall drawing detail
acrylic wall drawing

Fig. 57.
Engine Room remix - Construction piece
acrylic on card
Author 2011

three walls this is a three dimensional object standing proud from the wall yet also talking to the language of painting. It's position in the alcove points the eye back to the top anchor of the wall drawing completing and continuing the conversation loop.

These two pieces, *Engine Room re-mix*, successfully embody many of the concerns of my research – the deployment of a sustainable system across different sites; an exploration and response to several types of space – conceptually and physically, and a continued exploration in the role of colour in locating a work in space.

TOWARDS THE END GAME

At the time of writing I have yet to create my work for the final exam/show. While I am yet to negotiate the nature of the space I will have in the main Engine Room I can share my intention for this final work.

With the final work I plan to make I want to connect the Engine Room foyer with the Engine Room Gallery space. I plan to continue my engagement with the architectural reality and limitations of the space while working with the quite unique quality of natural light. Through adapting and redrawing the foyer wall work to the larger space, I'll continue my exploration of deploying the same system across different sites while creating a resonance between the two spaces and works. The new work will speak to the falling shafts of light while embedding itself into the architecture through a precise use of local colour. With both diagonals visible from the entrance to the Engine Room there will be an amplification of the conversation initiated by the foyer piece – a literal doubling – while visibly connecting the gallery and the foyer. If space allows two cardboard pieces, sharper than the original, painted in similar but different colours will also be present, the second hidden from initial view. Like a piece of music being reinterpreted or a game book being replayed it's the same story but slightly different, listening for a second time providing the chance to perceive different qualities of the same conversation, allowing for a new appreciation of the works and the space they inhabit.

As the Masters academic year and this chapter of my adventure draws to a close I find myself incredibly pleased with the twists and turns of the journey I've taken. In the last 12 months I've made work, a lot of work. In following my making I've developed a sustainable method for my practice, one I can deploy across a huge variety of sites. With it I can explore formal concerns of colour, space, form and time as I engage with architectural space through the language of painting. And as Halley recognised of his early cell work, I can, if I choose, read and find myself, my psychological and emotional states, within my work. I've struggled with and overcome my distrust of the academic and academia – or acafuckindemia as I recently coined it. I now comfortably locate myself and my practice within this world after having first hand experience of the depth, breadth and opportunity it brings, so much so I see myself continuing to write and produce parallel texts as integral part of my practice. In the fourth and final critique the response to the Engine Room foyer piece (*Engine Room remix*) was incredibly positive. A tangible validation of my progress. In short, it's been a bloody good year.

Looking to the future, and to use a chess phrase for the moment when a move is made that has never before been played in recorded chess history, I see myself going 'off book' within my own practice as I begin to locate my non-objective work within the everyday through mining my daily routine for sources of data and colour while continuing my engagement with architectural spaces and site. Six months in Sydney will bring new environments, visual stimuli and the opportunity for new routines – different travel routes, living locations, coffee shops – all rich with possibility. A new adventure begins.

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