



Theatre of Painting: a structural exploration of the forming of an image through paint

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or institution of higher learning.

Linda Roche

24 October 2008

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Abstract

This studio-based project explores a method of working that assigns agency to paint and process within the medium of painting. Underpinning this exploration is the notion that process driven making could potentially pose as a performative event. Choreographed yet contingent, the practice investigates the relationship between the potentiality inherent within media and the extent to which this is affected by temporal/ external factors in the determining of outcome. A dialogue between the intentional and the contingent is initiated through a systematic approach that involves manipulation of the constituent elements of paint and the implementation of procedure and protocols as a means to activate conditions of possibility. Central to the research concerns are issues surrounding the ability of media to articulate itself, determine it's own temporality, and of process and content to operate conterminously. The images produced evidence this investigation as both enquiry and consequence.



Section 1 Introduction

This project is about method. The research has taken place with a view to establishing a method of working that assigns agency to paint and process within painting practice. Painting has been explored as a process for developing or unfolding an image: a performance where materials can be considered the principal actors, and where the image's primary concerns are reflexive. The image derives from method and reflects method; the end is an articulation of means. As topic and process, method is both a conceptual and structural foundation for the research.

This exegesis is a profiling of method; a reflection of method as it has developed through the making of work. It has been structured into three sections. The first section provides an introduction to the project. It maps an overview of the concepts that immediately inform the project and which are foundational to the nature of the research. The second section is a chronological visual documentation and commentary of work made within the project. This section focuses on how the research has been approached. It draws on areas of experimentation and discusses key works developed throughout the course of the enquiry. The third section, 'Points of Reflection', details a series of structural, methodological and conceptual positionings about aspects of process that have filtered out of and now attach themselves to the topic.

The idea of a 'lightly-determined' image underpins the project. Structural aspects of process, pigment and ground have been explored and are central to the formation of



the imagery. Within this exploration the artist is not the lead strategist or player but operates as part of a 'collaboration'. Rather than interposing themselves between the concept and the image, in order to make it act in a certain way, the artist sets up systems in order to allow the pigment to perform itself¹. The image is determined by an interaction between elements, all of which can be considered as performers within the painting process. The motivation for this approach comes out of an interest in the idea that matter might have its own logic or disposition, that it might in effect speak for itself, be eloquent in its own right. The idea that materials have a voice within the creative act is a well-accepted notion. Within this act however the artist's voice, through their role as maker and content provider, usually dominates; the artist sits centre stage. The aim of this project has been to give materials a more pre-eminent and active role within the making. This has been explored through process, specifically through the use of systems.

Although systems-based, the enquiry has developed both fluidly and intuitively. The research focuses on a method of working that in varying ways and to varying degrees allows paint to follow its own inclinations. Beyond this the enquiry has shaped itself within the making. Although each image has been formed through systematic strategies rather than moment-to-moment intuitive decision-making the interplay between

¹ The idea of allowing material to evolve of its own volition has its historical precedents in Art Informel, Abstract Expressionism and Process Art. The investigations within this project align more with the thinking around Art Informel and Process Art, in that artists within these movements were more interested in the evocative nature of the potential within materials, which reflects my interest in material as opposed to self-expression.



inherent knowledge, intuition and improvisation has been key to moving the project forward. A heuristic process has been followed as a means to develop and analyse the research. The 'laboratory' offers an analogy, in that observation of phenomena and systematic, experimental strategies have been the primary methods of enquiry. Throughout the project there has been an emphasis on controlling and understanding variables. Paradoxically however, the enquiry has also embraced the idea of the random occurrence or the anomaly. Utilising a systematic method that is open to new discoveries, changes in direction and tangential exploration has been important, as has an acknowledgement that within the project an outcome is not always, and need not be, reproducible. The research is in fact embedded in the idea that it is not reproducible.

The notion of building on experienced knowledge has also been significant. It is only through having developed an innate familiarity with the way certain materials and processes operate and interact that research based critical judgements have been able to be made to disrupt this knowledge. In this project small things matter; each image emerges out of an accumulation of minor events. Structures are set up in order to allow elements to interplay. The intention is that small events can be noticed. Discoveries that may seem fairly insignificant to an observer are often highly significant and are only (if ever) fully understood through an intense and rigorous investigation of each discovery. Knowledge accumulates and is dispersed back into the project. Not as a direct synthesis into the next body of work but through a heuristic impulse that drives



the work forward. Within this approach there is no endpoint, no definitive result, just a sense of continual flow, of the project always being in an exploratory mode.

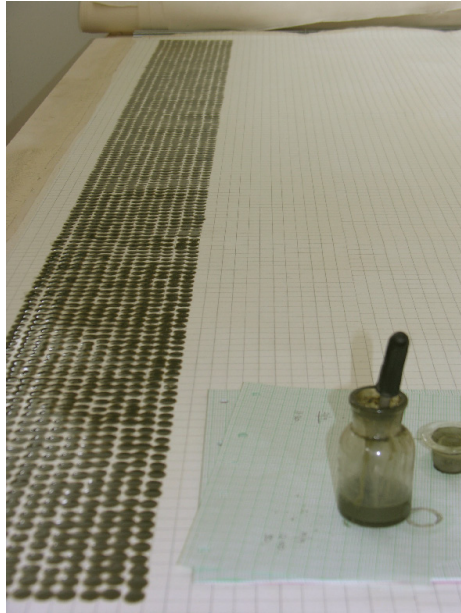
The research, as such, does not pursue a particular argument. It accumulates issues and ways of thinking about the work as it progresses. A series of structural, methodological and conceptual positionings, have emerged throughout the course of the project. These 'points of reflection' articulate notions and responses that have been generated by the work itself and by related research. Cumulative and non hierarchical, they attach contexts to the work and set up a relationship between ideas. This starts to build a complexity, an opening out of sets of relation. As contexts however they are not strategically linked and do not shape a strategic argument. Although evidencing areas of overlap the ideas remain free-associating and are able to be considered independently and in any order.

To strategically tie these ideas back into method would be to assume authorial centrality. The project does not position the artist at the centre. The role of the artist is subsumed under a series of other forces that are brought to the fore in the development of the image. All the structural decision-making is predetermined. When absorbed in process the mode of operation is subconscious, and the making progresses systematically and intuitively. An example here is the awareness that has emerged around the implications of the gravitational pull. Gravity has come to be acknowledged as a key player in the construction of the image. Thinking about how gravity asserts itself in the unfolding of the image illuminates its point of attachment to method. The pigment, of



course, always knew gravity was key – it responds to it – but it is a response based on an interaction. By considering the system and by thinking about how gravity interacts within the system, gravity folds into and becomes part of method.

Method is thus shaped and reshaped by the interactions that occur within the image itself. As the artist withdraws to a role of facilitator and collaborator their responsibility is to provoke rather than dominate, to facilitate without taking over; to observe closely and respond lightly to the exigencies of the system. The ideas and awareness that emerge and accumulate within and around the making, become part of a set of visual relations, forces, actions and motives; structures that drive the work. Each interaction is contingent on factors coming together that cannot be known in advance. The development of the image unfolds as a kind of theatre: a deliberate yet improvisational production where potential and limitation are played out through the physical articulation of pigment across canvas.

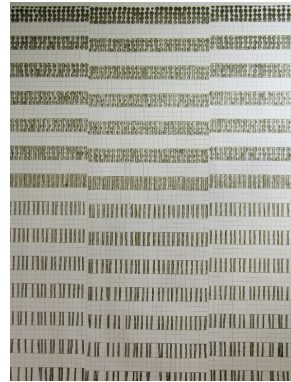


Section 2 Visual documentation and structural approach

Systems and image building

Process either intentionally or consequentially constructs an image. Within this construction materials and systems are inherently linked. There has been a continual testing of paint against process, investigating and trying to understand how they might meet. Paradoxically, I control the paint in order to give it volition. To do this I need to establish a sense of how it responds to and operates within a system. Systems create space between the unfolding image and myself but perhaps more significantly, they facilitate material emergence. Although systems put the emphasis on the thinking that precedes the making of work, I am more interested in their relation to the physical side of the making, in their capacity to mediate between material and form. In terms of my process it's not about how I respond to materials but rather, how materials respond to my system. I establish a set of systems up front; proceed according to these pre-established parameters and then step back to allow paint and process to determine what happens in between. Systems as such enable me to sit slightly outside the making. Philip Galanter proposes Generative Art as an artistic method that inserts an automated system between the artist and artistic expression¹. As a method it seems to explore

¹ "Generative Art refers to any art practice where the artist uses a system, such as a set of natural language rules, a computer program, a machine, or other procedural invention, which is set into motion with some degree of autonomy contributing to or resulting in a completed work of art" (Galanter, 2003, p.4). Galanter suggests that as an art practice Generative Art "has a fuzzy border, and process



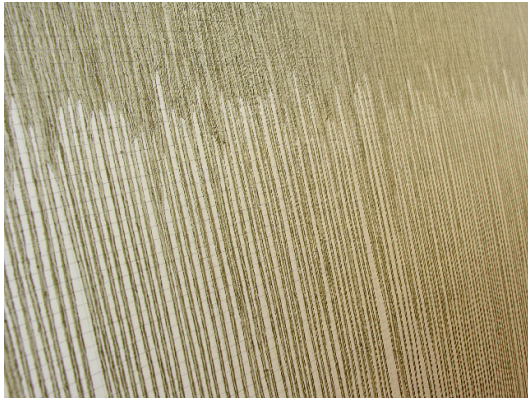
the space between a planned and a provisional approach to art making and accurately reflects the way I use physical and procedural systems to mediate between material and form. Key to the idea of Generative Art is the fact that the artist cedes some degree of control to an external system so they are not making intuitive compositional judgments from one moment to the next throughout the entire construction process. The artist is situated on the edge of the production, as a kind of director or facilitator.

The performance of process

The performative aspect of the practice is bound up in the language of process. Each image evolves as system, material and action. Together they play out an event: the performance of each painting. The production is not overtly performative. Neither material nor artist performs in front of an audience. The studio functions as a theatre of operations and performance: a staged situation where artist, material, gravity and time each perform a role. The temporal dimension of the production emerges as the work unfolds. The action of gravity and maker effects a movement over time. This movement encodes time into the image and determines the sense of performativity within the work.

The formal qualities within the work are therefore as much to do with an inherent rhythm

art is near that border, some on one side, some on the other." Rather than a contemporary update or modern day subset of process art however it seems to mark out some sort of continuum between the controlled and the spontaneous. Control at one end encompasses intentional, systematic methods and spontaneity at the other those more contingent material/process driven approaches.



as with decisions that are made en route. Each body of work develops out of its own set of systems. Within each, process plays a different role within the production. The relationship between process and image making, between the action of material and artist is reinterpreted through the shifts that occur from one investigation to the next. This creates nuance across operations.

Activating and structuring possibility

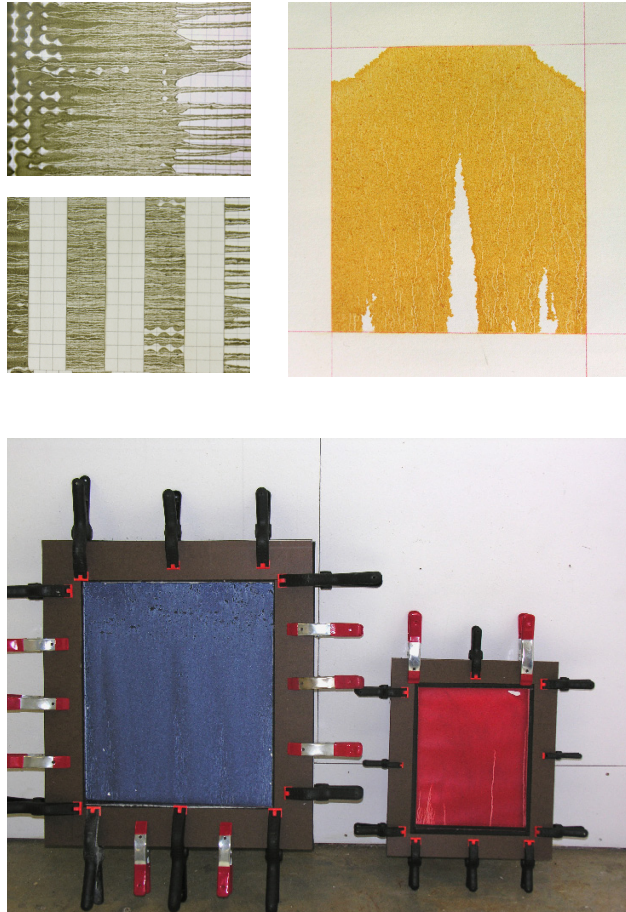
Systems are used to generate, activate and structure 'possibility'. Within this they impose constraints and control variables. Through a focused investigation of systematic ways of applying the pigment and angling the surface in order to mobilise the paint, I have come to understand the intersection between how the pigment behaves and the nature of the dispersal. This has enabled me to introduce procedural systems such as, those used to remove areas of paint (in the *Dispersal Studies* and the *Poured Studies*), pour the pigment onto the image from both sides (*Dispersal Studies*) and physical systems used to structure the pigment in its unfolding (*Pigment Studies* and *Control Panel*).

Systems operate as boundary modifiers. The use of a ruled grid (in the *Dispersal Studies*) utilised the visual language of the diagrammatic in order to regulate the dispersal of pigment across the surface. In recent explorations (*Control Panel*) the grid has become both a visual and physical system. When scored into the surface it provides a physical structure for the pigment to work within.

Top left **Linda Roche**
Dispersal Studies (process - details) 2006

Top right **Linda Roche**
Single Pour Study (Yellow) 2007
Oil and red ballpoint on unstretched canvas 300 x 300mm

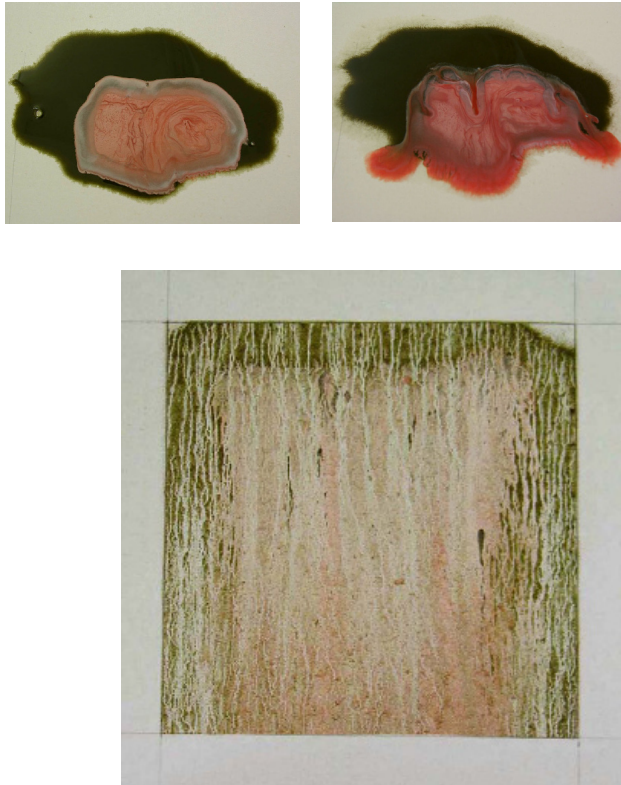
Bottom **Linda Roche**
Clamped painting devices



The grid imposes a structure. Paint and process overlay and start to break down this structure. I found that deleting areas, be it around the edges (in the *Single Pour Studies* and the *Dual Pour Studies*) or bands throughout (*Dispersal Studies*) re-imposes a sense of structure. The paint was unfolding of its own volition within these investigations. This approach required me to reformat the outcome. I started to consider how I might reduce my level of intervention within the process. Rather than imposing a structure post event, might the structure perhaps become part of the event.

The *Pigment Studies* are made with a clamped painting device. As a physical system, this device provides a less interventional way for me to facilitate the movement of pigment across canvas. The mechanism corrals the paint within a structure and increases my ability to productively pour large volumes of paint across the surface. The device is a simple construction. A rigid surface is cut to the same size as the canvas. The canvas and surface are then placed together and an 80mm rubber frame is clamped on top. The frame provides an edge (seal) for the poured paint to pool up against. Two sizes were trialled, a small frame (approximately A4) and another slightly larger than A2. The smaller size did not adequately foreground the material qualities of the pigment. The paint seemed to need more surface to operate within. The larger size provided this but in such a way that it did not position each work as a conclusion, but more as a gesture.

Top **Linda Roche**
Dual Pour Study (process) 2007
Bottom **Linda Roche**
Dual Pour Study (Green/Pink) 2007
Oil and graphite on unstretched canvas 300 x 300mm



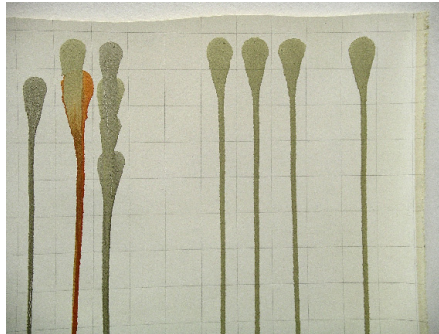
Controlled fluidity; the material aspects

Without systems the idea of allowing paint to compose itself on a surface is difficult to explore. Paint in a tube is inert, silent, under control. To find its voice it needs to be activated. To do this, independent of the artist, it needs to be fluid. Fluid dynamics being what they are this can be problematic. One of the operating criteria within the project has been that the paint must remain on the surface, contained within the 'virtual' world of the image, where it can be considered and reflected upon. Paint, when fluid, has a tendency to want to escape, to overflow this field into the real world. The enquiry, as such, has the potential to dissolve into chaos, to become incoherent². Just as language needs structure to be understood, systems tease a sense of fluency and coherency out of paint. They corral the paint on a surface but at the same time enable it to operate freely in between predetermined structures. Systems control fluidity.

Paint must be able to move freely across a surface in order to articulate itself. I experimented with various artists paints and painting mediums and found that mixing oil paint to a fluid consistency by adding solvent and binder was most suited to the project requirements. This mixture is more slippery and so moves more freely than other products. It also takes longer to dry so has greater potential in terms of image

² OED defines chaos as formless primordial matter; utter confusion, utterly without order or arrangement. Within this project chaos implies lack of structure/ fluency/ intention. A chaotic work is deemed incoherent in that it ceases to signify anything outside of itself. It moves beyond being a work and becomes nothing more than muck/ mess/ dirge. My view on what is a chaotic/ incoherent result, although a potentially aesthetic decision, is more essentially a pragmatic one. Chaos paralyses the enquiry; it leaves no sense of how to move forward.

Top **Linda Roche**
Experimentation (detail) 2006
Bottom **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Grey 1) 2008
Oil on unstretched canvas 645 x 565mm



construction. This mixing process is systematically carried out. For every pigment the ratio between pigment, solvent and binder is the same. I trialled different combinations and established a ratio that seemed to offer the most flexibility and have adhered to this throughout the course of the project. As I started to work with different pigments I found, perhaps most significantly, that every pigment has distinctive properties. Different colours have varying pigment characteristics. The quality of paint and the brand also makes a difference. My ensuing interest in the idiosyncratic nature of pigments became both a structural and conceptual foundation for ongoing exploration.

Although dictated by functionality, the fluid consistency of the paint creates specific characteristics in its usage. The slipperiness of the pigment and the looseness of its quality allows the pigment to physically drain and leave behind the traces of its unfolding. This establishes and emphasizes the fluidity of its nature. The variations in terms of opacity, transparency and granular qualities within the different pigments impact the way the paint interacts with the substrate and resolves on the surface. This unfolding creates expressive qualities, a semblance of spatial perspective that gives play to pictorial readings. This occurs more with some pigments than with others. It seems to be more evident when using transparent pigments. Opaque pigments tend to unfold as solid blocks of colour that sit on the surface. They seem to be more inclined to develop capillary effects as the pigment separates in its movement over the canvas.

A range of pipettes and beakers is used to apply the pigment. These tools facilitate the application of fluid paint onto a surface, as a less directive form of mark-making. They



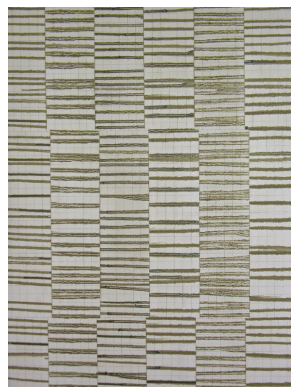
offer varying degrees of control. Using a pipette to apply the paint enables me to regulate the quantity, but more significantly to gain some control over the way the pigment moves across the surface. With a beaker I am still able to measure, and thus regulate the amount of paint, however when I pour the pigment I have less control over the way the paint disperses onto the canvas. The pigment operates more autonomously.

Hardboard and stretched canvas have been explored as supports. Neither was appropriate to the enquiry. I prime the unstretched canvas to an almost paper quality. The surface has more tooth than paper/ less than canvas. This enables the pigment to move freely across the surface but also provides enough surface tension for the paint to gain purchase. The manner in which I prepare the surface also creates an ambiguity. The canvas is often read as paper promoting a temporal/ unfinished quality. The use of unstretched canvas is part of the system, and in effect project coding. It reflects a sense of continual flow and aligns with the process driven nature of my approach.

Operations of colour

In the culminating work for this project in both the *Pigment Studies* and the *Control Panel*, I employ an extensive range of colours. This is not intended as an exploration of chromatic range or colour relationships. The use of colour comes from an interest in exploring and gaining an understanding of the material properties and qualities of different pigments, the subtle variations in terms of how they each operate. Investigations indicated that I needed to either eliminate colour (as in the monochromatic of the

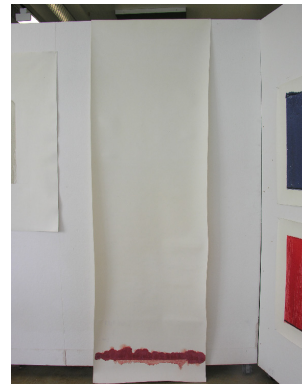
Top **Linda Roche**
Experimentation (detail) 2006
Bottom left **Linda Roche**
Experimentation (detail) 2006
Bottom right **Linda Roche**
Dispersal Study (detail) 2006



Dispersal Studies) or use an indiscriminate and extensive range of colour (as for *the Pigment Studies* and the *Control Panel*). If a colour palette is selected the colours start to operate in a relational way and have the potential to suggest narratives other than intended. For example, in earlier explorations I worked with a range of earthy, natural colours. These works focused on a particular use of systems; and the colour palette became a distraction. It created a heightened sense of the organic within the work and when combined with the use of repetition gave play to notions of ritual. In reducing the palette to a single colour – shade of grey/green (as used in the *Dispersal Studies*), associational readings were neutralised and focus shifted to the use of systems. Consequently, colour relationships that occur in the final exhibition, *Theatre of Painting*, are unplanned or inadvertent in a figurative sense.

Operational mandate and intuitive play

The material responds to an orchestrated system, but within any given system it follows its own inclinations. An operational mandate throughout this project has been to never alter or tamper with the paint outside of my predetermined frameworks. This is important strategically. What is seen on the surface is simply how the paint has responded to a set of controls or to the exigencies of a system. Remaining true to this mandate means I often feel the system pushing up against my own subjectivity, my sense of the way things should be. At times my response to the material would be to refine the surface, firm up the edges, control the bleeds. The mandate is meant to form a collaborative engagement between system and material, an approach that suppresses



the deliberate role of the artist in terms of both expressive intentionality, aesthetic and editorial concerns. Once a system is developed and set in motion there is no editing or rejection. The image gels into its final state with no subsequent authorial intervention. What emerges is what is presented.

Within the reflective phase that sits outside the making there is the sense of an intuitive evolution. Part of my reflective approach that keys into a heuristic line of enquiry has been to use areas of the studio wall dialogically. This provides ways to explore how works, elements of works and/ or experiments might operate in relation to one another. The research approach is tangential rather than linear. It develops conversationally: *"We 'ask' our material 'questions' in a similar way one might ask a person, receiving 'answers' and questioning again...The dialogic procedure is a means to adjust the epistemic structure of the researcher to the structure of the phenomenon and brings it in line with itself"* (Mach, 1980, as cited in Kleining and Witt, 2000, p.3). The synthesis between thinking and making generates knowledge that is fed back into the enquiry. Considering the experimental colour extrapolations for example in relation the *Pigment Studies* and one of the earlier *Dispersal Studies* led me to consider the way this investigation seemed to document the space between these two explorations.

Top **Linda Roche** Material trials 2006

Middle **Linda Roche**

Intersecting Events 2006

Oil and graphite on unstretched canvas 1050 x 1050mm

Bottom left **Linda Roche**

Disperse and Delete (Yellow) 2006

Oil and graphite on unstretched canvas 1050 x 1050mm

Bottom right **Linda Roche**

Disperse and Delete (Grey) 2006

Oil and graphite on unstretched canvas 1050 x 700mm

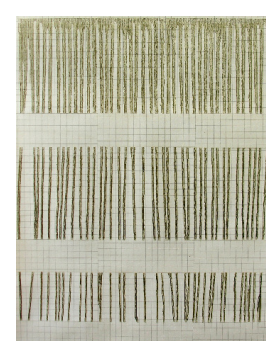
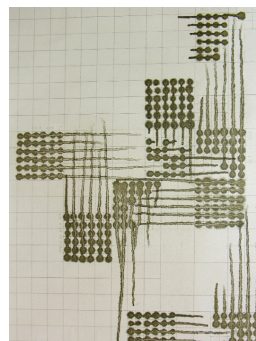
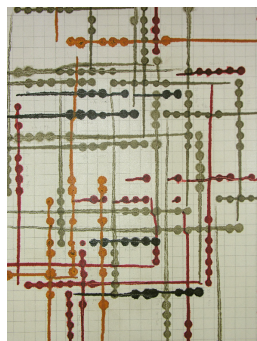
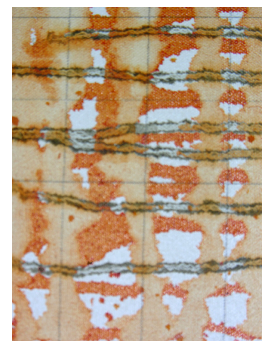
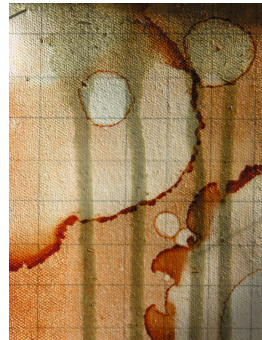
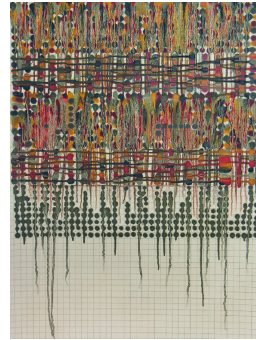


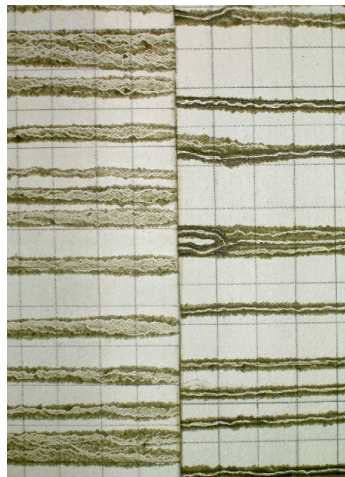
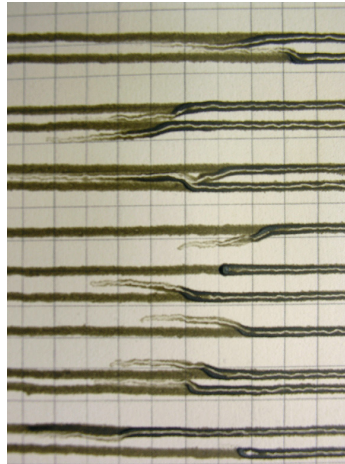
The work

Initial experimentation

In the early stages of the project I experimented with overlaying a range of materials and processes. The key discovery was a tendency for the image to become over processed and over determined; the material quality overrode the process. Systems were used but it was unclear at this stage what role they played in terms of image construction. There was a subsequent sense of material/ system overload. Refining the way I used systems provided a means to counter this aspect. I determined that the way forward was not through adding materials but rather through experimenting with how processes might align with one another on a surface. I established the need to keep systems and their usage simple, and began to work with the idea of 'one act/ one system'. Simplifying my use of systems asserted the material properties of the paint. Each stage is primarily a sub-system which operates discretely within the development of a single work. For example, a system is used to mix the pigment, another to establish operational boundaries and finally one system to apply and/ or remove the paint. The systems are layered to a point, but they are not repeated. There is an immediacy to this process in that one step follows another like a series of intersecting events. This creates a lightness to the work captured for the most through dispersal of paint and accumulative residue.

Linda Roche
Initial experimentation (details) 2006





Dispersal Studies

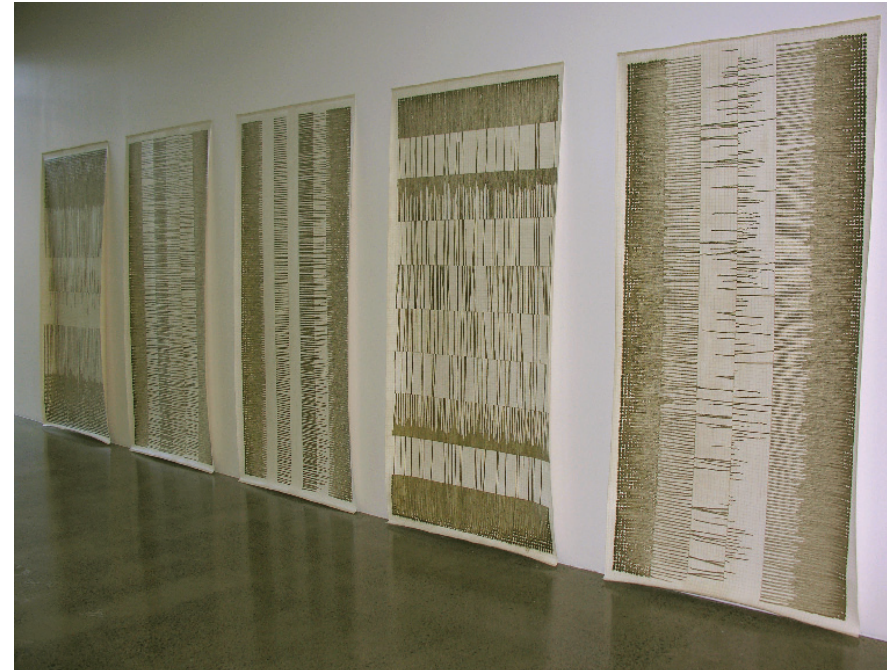
This investigation culminated in ten large works (each 2100mm x 1050mm) that were installed across two floor levels (foyer space).

Within this series, systems were used to structure the movement of paint across a surface, utilising the grid and pipette. The grid, in these works, operates as motif. I essentially control the work on the horizontal (worktable). When I tip the work and it moves towards a vertical position I lose control. Gravity takes over. I think of this process as a kind of controlled fluidity, between the controlling of matter and gravity's natural pulling power. I pre-determine the boundaries and then remove the paint where it overflows these set boundaries. I act as a kind of facilitator, controlling the edges, formatting the work. This relates back to the notion of agency; my role is perhaps akin to that of an agent, to present the paint to the world to be considered and reflected upon. In the *Dispersal Studies* structural aspects of the work shifted the conceptual focus; the sense of disjunction within the way the pigment dispersed in some of the earlier images in the series led to the idea of slipping the grid in later works.

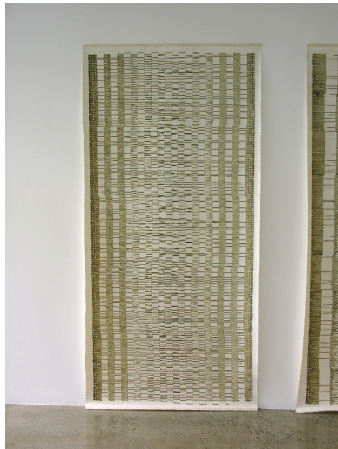
In the *Dispersal Studies* process was used as a means to construct an image. Each work within this series generated out of a complexity of systems. Within each, there is a sense of construction, of time spent in the making. The way sections of work butt up against one another disrupts the sense of fluidity and evidences my moving in and out of the work. My action is more embedded within these images than in some of my other

Left **Linda Roche**
Dispersal Studies (installation – level 1 foyer) 2006

Right **Linda Roche**
Dispersal Studies (installation – level 2 foyer) 2006

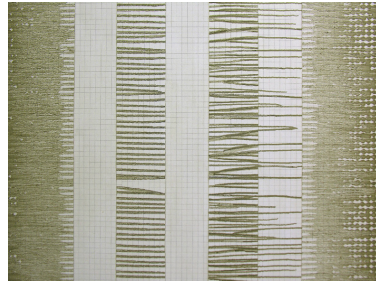


Linda Roche
Dispersal Studies 1-10 2006
Oil and graphite on unstretched canvas Each 2100 x 1050mm



Top **Linda Roche**
Dispersal Studies (detail) 2006

Bottom **Linda Roche**
Banded Pour Study (Green - image and residue) 2007
Oil on unstretched canvas Each 2600 x 700mm



explorations. Each section within the work records a specific period within the production process and captures the conditions of that time. The temporality within these images reflects a loose engagement with the monochrome however the temporal order occurs through an intersecting, rather than a layering of events, a layering of systems not paint.

Poured Studies (Single Pour Studies, Dual Pour Studies, Banded Pour Studies)

The *Dispersal Studies* generated out of a fairly complex set of systems. In the ensuing *Poured Studies* I decided to simplify my use of systems. This involved reducing structural elements (abandoning fully gridded surface) and investigating alternative methods of paint application (pouring onto surface rather than placing via pipette).

The *Banded Pour Studies* were a transitional exploration, between pipette and pouring. In these investigations rather than placing the pigment into the grid I used a larger pipette and ran the paint in a line across the surface. As the surface was inclined the bands of paint converged. The colours mixed and started to operate as a mass, as a block rather than bands of colour. A series of large works (2600x700mm) developed out of this investigation. In these works no paint was removed from the surface. The paint pooled at, and overflowed the edge of the canvas. This led me to consider the residue in terms of performative resolution and evidence of an action.

In the *Single Pour Studies* I began exploring pouring paint directly onto the canvas. In

Top **Linda Roche**

Single Pour Study (Green) 2007

Oil and graphite on canvas 550 x 550mm

Middle **Linda Roche**

Single Pour Study (Red 1) 2007

Oil and graphite on canvas 550 x 600mm

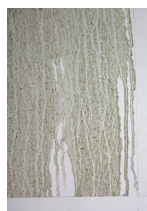
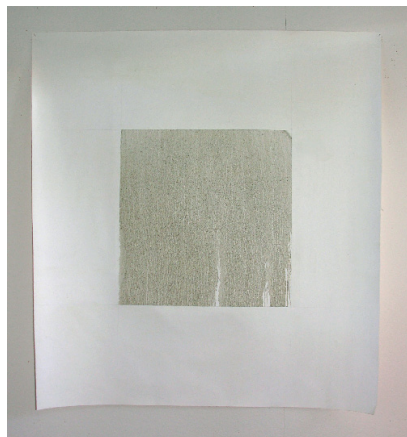
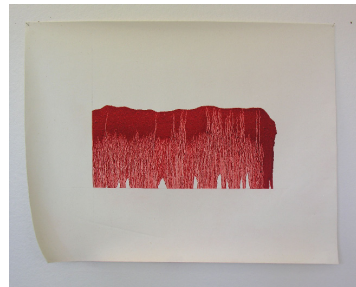
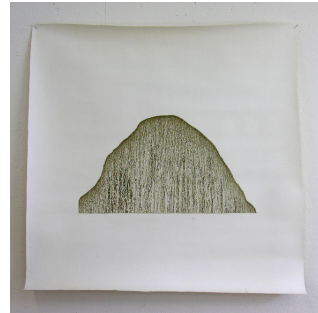
Bottom **Linda Roche**

Single Pour Study (Grey) 2007

Oil and graphite on canvas 1000 x 1000mm

Bottom right **Linda Roche**

Single Pour Study (Grey - details) 2007



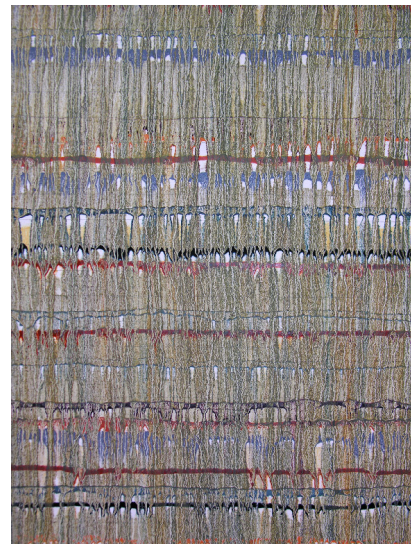
the green pour there is just the one structural intervention across the bottom. I was still working with the gridded cross section, but in this work the paint never reached the side (where I had established boundaries), therefore the paint was not taken off. In the red pour the paint flowed over the left hand side, so was removed down that edge as well as at the bottom. There were a couple of key issues that arose out of these initial explorations: Firstly, the need to consider the way the pour ‘manufactures’ pictorial references. These are not intentional, they just happen. In this instance, the systems create pictorial illusions. Perhaps this is to do with the making, with a facet of the system being indebted to gravity, a natural interaction³. Secondly, reducing structural elements and loosening up of my application system highlighted issues within my process around the notion of control and the relationship between order and chaos within the work. Using the pipette in conjunction with the fully gridded canvas enabled me to work on a larger scale. Without the control of the pipette moving larger volumes of paint across an inclined surface became problematic.

The *Dual Pour Studies* developed as an adjunct to the *Single Pour Studies*. A series of small-scale experimentations were set up in order to explore the variations in the way specific pigments unfold and the implications of combining pigments through the mixing or overlaying of colours. What in fact came to the fore in these works is the way the image seemed to lose pictorial associations with more complex structuring. The

³ The relationship between gravity and the expressionistic is evidenced in Callum Innes’s dissolved paintings and Alexis Harding’s collapsing surfaces. This is discussed further in “*Process and the pictorial*” in Section 3 – Points of Reflection.

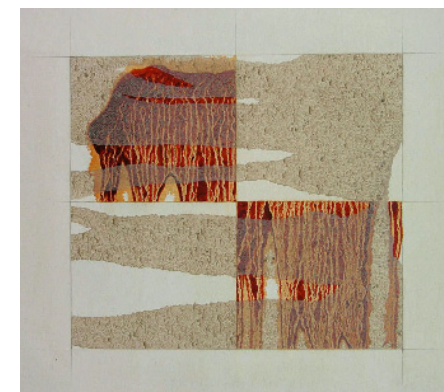
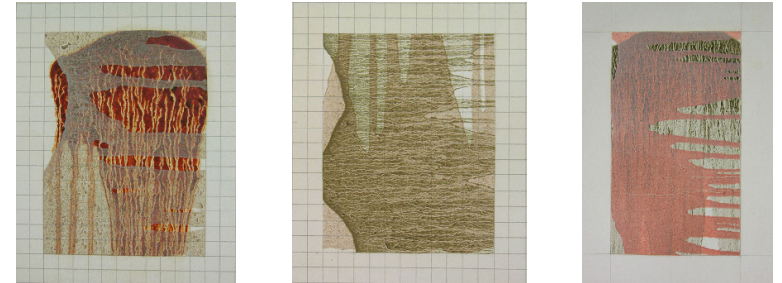
Linda Roche *Banded Pour Studies* 2007

Top left *Banded Pour Study* (process)
 Top middle *Banded Pour Study* (Brown)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 400 x 200mm
 Top right *Banded Pour Study* (residue)
 Bottom left *Banded Pour Studies* (studio)
 Bottom right *Banded Pour Study* (Green - detail)



Linda Roche *Dual Pour Studies* 2007

Top left *Dual Pour Study* (Brown/Grey on grid)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 300 x 250mm
 Top middle *Dual Pour Study* (Grey/Green on grid)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 300 x 270mm
 Top right *Dual Pour Study* (Green/Pink)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 300 x 220mm
 Middle left *Dual Pour Study* (Dark Green/Grey)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 350 x 320mm
 Middle right *Dual Pour Study* (Yellow/Red)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 350 x 320mm
 Bottom *Dual Pour Study* (Brown/Grey)
 Oil and graphite on canvas 400 x 450mm



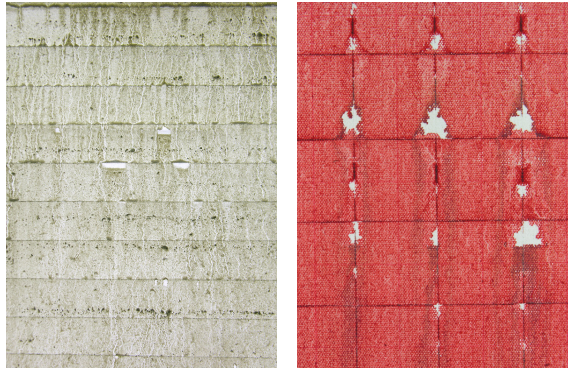
Top left **Linda Roche**
Intervention trial (Green - detail) 2008

Top right **Linda Roche**
Intervention trial (Red - detail) 2008

Middle **Linda Roche**
Colour extrapolation trial (detail) 2008

Bottom **Linda Roche**
Colour extrapolation trial (studio) 2008

Side **Linda Roche**
Jars (4 of 243) 2006-2008



strength of the geometric abstracts the pictorial out of the image. The emphasis shifts to the edges; they become strangely active areas.

Intervention and colour extrapolation trials

The intervention trials, physical interventions applied to a surface, were instigated to explore ways of systematically impacting the movement of paint across canvas. Thread, thumbtacks, incisions were utilised to effect a planned interaction. During these investigations a scored grid revealed it's potential as another facility to corral and capture paint on a surface. This discovery led to the colour extrapolation trials.

The exploratory colour extrapolations were a precursor to the development of the *Control Panel*, which is part of the thesis exhibition. Mixing colours to use with the clamped painting device made me aware that colours get lost within process. I became interested in recording colours before they are mixed into something other, in the stages between use. As well as registering the colour, I wanted to be able to establish a kind of snapshot of the material properties of each pigment. I considered and experimented with doing this through photographing each jar, however this did not give a sense of the inherent qualities of each pigment. Similarly a stroke of pigment on a surface captured the colour, but was too directive. It did not allow the paint to freely articulate itself. The scored grid created a framework for the pigment to operate within outside my control.

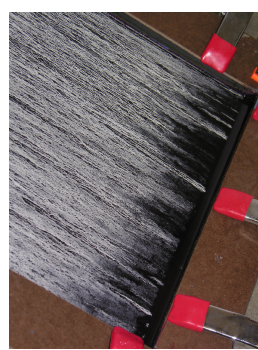
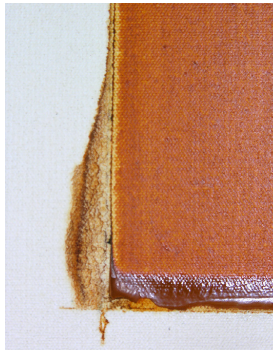
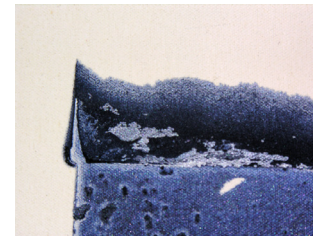
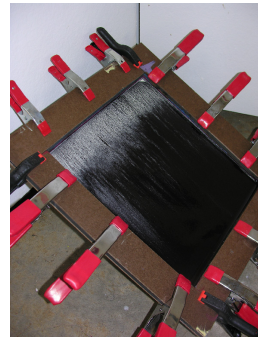
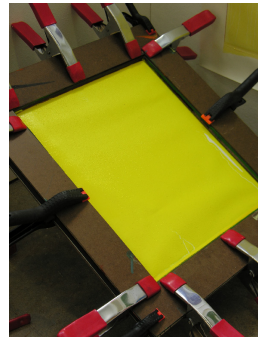
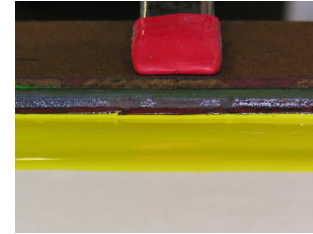
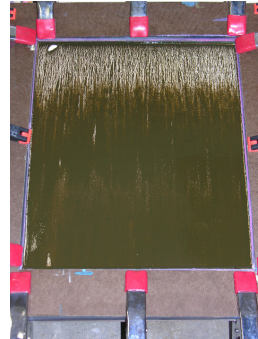
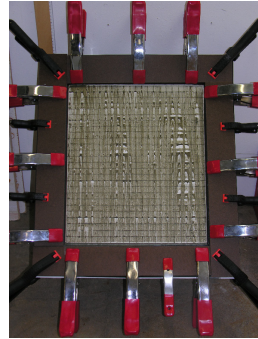
Top **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Red 1) 2008
Oil on canvas 645 x 565mm

Bottom **Linda Roche**
Pigment Studies (process) 2008



***Pigment Studies* (part of the thesis exhibition)**

The *Pigment Studies* unfold with limited intervention. Colours are combined until there is enough to affect a cover of the surface within the frame of the clamped painting device (50ml fluid paint/ 405x485mm surface area). The colours are randomly chosen. The pigment is poured across the top of the construction. The device is then lightly inclined and the paint slowly moves down the surface. I expected the clamped painting device would allow me to retain a sense of external control and therefore an internal lack of control would become more obviously manifest in the work; this did not turn out to be the case. The paint within the framework resolved itself in a dynamic yet surprisingly orderly fashion. A sense of order was established through the structural framing, however there were leakages, points of transgression where paint had broken boundaries. As for the *Poured Studies*, the edges in these works are significant. They indicate a system that is no longer in evidence. In working with this mechanical-type system, I found that it provided a succinct way for me to directly engage with the material properties of paint. This prompted me to introduce colour into my process, not for its chromatic range but for its capacity to activate an increased sense of materiality in the work. A pictorial aspect does assert itself within the unfolding of material but in this series it is less overt than in, for example the *Single Pour Studies*. The structure (clamped frame) counters the pictorial within the image. The *Pigment Studies* document the material qualities of the paint but within them there is greater evidence of an action than in other explorations. I see them as a record of process more than a recording process in themselves. Time and performativity are encoded into these works not through the



Top left **Linda Roche**
Control Panel (detail) 2008
Top right **Linda Roche**
Control Panel (process) 2008
Bottom **Linda Roche**
Control Panel (studio) 2008



making but via the physical articulation of pigment across canvas. In this series scale is created through the multiple. The series builds over time.

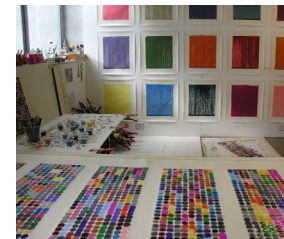
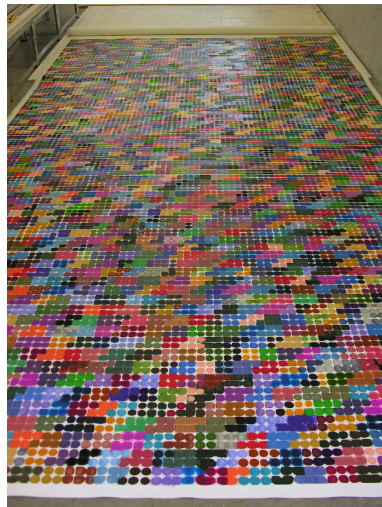
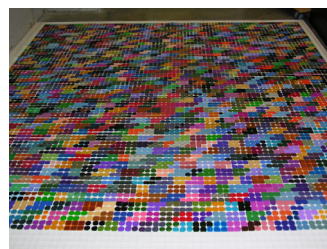
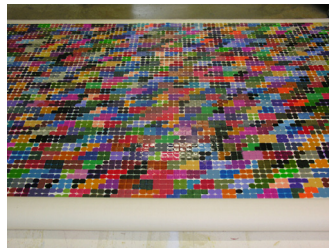
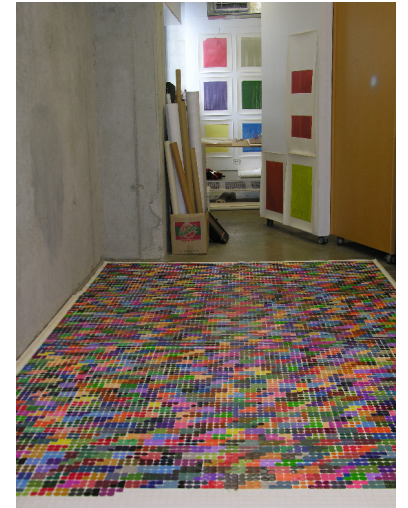
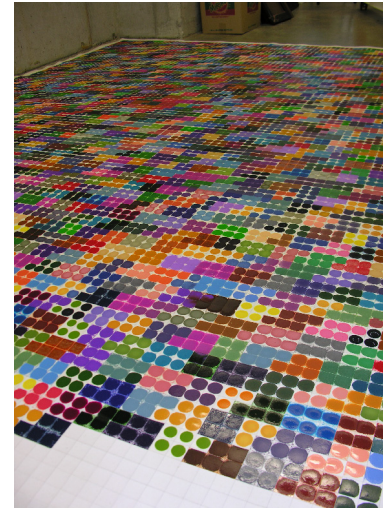
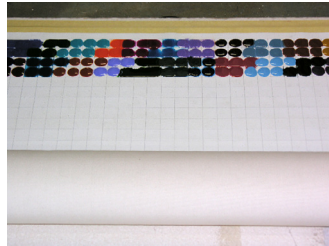
***Control Panel* (part of the thesis exhibition)**

[Every 'active' colour in the studio. Recorded daily. One 10ml pipette per colour.
01 September - 31 October 2008]

The *Control Panel* was a functionally oriented development. The work in actuality is a time-based recording. The image is the by-product of process. Although initially developed in order to archive the movement of colour in studio process, documenting my pigments each day became an important aspect of the method. I generally work with my pigments every day and use them quickly. I found however that after a period of not working in the studio many had congealed or separated and formed a skin on top. I reconstituted these pigments but discovered in using them that some of the colours started to come away from the surface when they dried. In remixing them the ratios I strictly adhere to had come unstuck and the pigments unstable. This was valuable information and as a result I integrated the daily documentation of each pigment into my process. It establishes currency.

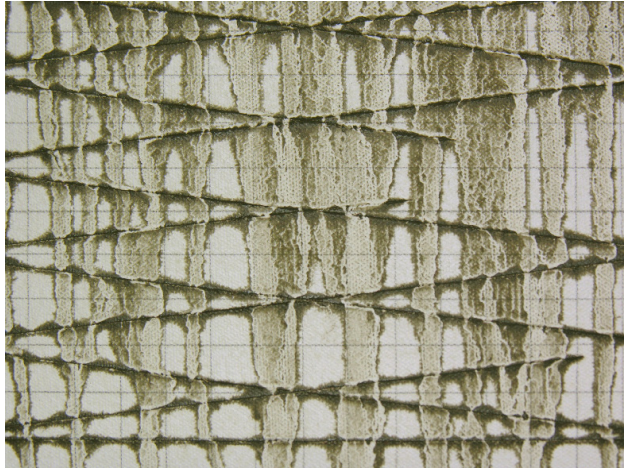
Function dictates the system of application. When placed in blocks it is easier to isolate the subtle variations in the pigment tones and qualities. I use a 10ml pipette to apply the pigment. The number of drops is determined by how much the pipette draws in.

Linda Roche
Control Panel (documentation) 2008





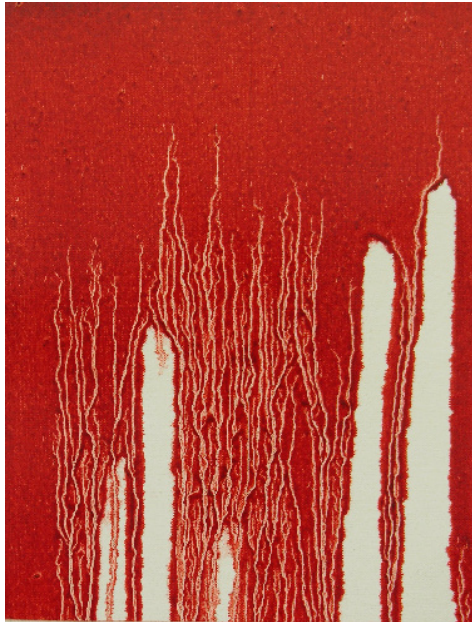
The viscosity and miscibility of the pigment, the amount in the jar and the condition of the pipette creates variations. Colour is non-relational because of process. The pigments are applied in the order they have been left in after working in the studio the day before. The colours are not sorted. The system manifests as irregular blocks of colour that perform either within the confines of the construct (the scored grid) or interact with and overflow these boundaries. As a consequence of this documentation and archival process, an image is constructed over time.



Section 3 Points of Reflection

Images shaped within the making

The enquiry shapes itself within the making. Method, as system, tries to activate and capture what goes on in the intersection between paint and process and in the gap between cause and effect. Formalised acts of painting devolve from systematic requirements rather than aesthetic intention. They play a dual, almost contradictory role within the development of the image. The control that they offer makes it possible to productively explore passing control over to the paint. In providing a means to structure they also capture the effect. This is where intention, and subjectivity enter into the production process. All of the structural decision-making happens beforehand. Immersed in process the making is systematic and intuitive. On completion of process/ performance there is a chance to experiment and modify, an opportunity to make minor adjustments, to alter the structure of future work. The reflection that occurs in these experimental phases between events marks out the space between what might initially be a loosely formed intention and what actually happens en route. It involves thinking about and re-shaping an action whilst in the process of doing. In this sense it is “*improvisational and relies on feeling, response and adjustment*” (Gray and Malins, 2004, p.22). The making at this point is transactional and responsive, action/ reaction: I do/ it does. Schon likens this way of making to conversation, “*a reflective conversation with the materials of a situation*” (Schon, 1983. p.78). An example here is the way the intervention trials led to the development of the scored grid for the *Control Panel*.



Between intention and realisation

The difference between what is intended and what actually happens in the making of a work relates to Duchamp's notion of the personal 'art coefficient' contained within a work: "*The personal 'art coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed*" (Duchamp, 1957). Duchamp's art 'coefficient' then straddles the gap between certainty of execution and uncertainty of outcome¹. Duchamp's idea has relevance on both a structural and conceptual level. Within my practice I see it as encompassing both the conceptual layering that occurs throughout the making and the chance occurrences that can't be anticipated or predicted, for example the strange almost capillary like effects of the paint, which I can plan for but never develop quite the way I might expect. The idea of issues revealing themselves through method has parallels in a section of text by Yve-Alain Bois where he reflects on the role of process in relation to the contextualisation of Robert Ryman's painting: "*By making the artist a kind of engineer that solves a problem of many parameters in his work...the discussion of process in art is refitted to this heuristic mould. The object of this critical discourse then would seem to be: given the solution (the painter's "eureka"), find the problem*" (Bois, 1990, p.216). Although Bois frames the

¹ David Bohm also considers the slippery space between intention and realisation within the making process. He states: "*Rather what usually happens is that the first thing the artist does is only similar in certain ways to what he may have in mind. As in a conversation between two people, he sees the similarity and the difference, and from this perception something further emerges in his next action. Thus something new is continually created that is common to the artist and the material on which he is working*" (Bohm, 1996, p.3).



writing from the position of an outsider looking into a practice and trying to understand it, as a researcher aiming to critically engage on both a practical and theoretical level with issues arising via method in my project, the premise within the text has relevance. Process functions as a filter through which to understand work both inside and outside the making.

Knowing that comes through experience

The image unfolds within an arena of expectation. I bring knowledge to the production but can never fully know the outcome. This knowing however builds through experience. In the space between knowing and not knowing there is a play between intuition, tacit and somatic or haptic knowledge. The idea of experiential knowledge is evident in Heidegger's notion of handling or 'handlability', which pertains to knowledge that comes through our concrete dealings with things in the world and phenomenal experience rather than our abstract thinking about the world. In considering the relationship between material and maker Bachelard also alludes to experiential knowledge through what he refers to as 'tactile observation': "*The hand also has its dreams and it's hypotheses. It helps us to understand matter in its inmost being*" (Bachelard, 1942). This evidences a relation to tacit knowledge but perhaps more to somatic or haptic knowledge. Relevant here is my use of the pipette. I have come to be able to feel the way the paint interacts with the pipette. My aim is to place the pigment on the surface where it then has the potential to move on its own. Although using equivalent mixing ratios there is



considerable variation in terms of viscosity across the range of pigments. In thinking about it I am aware that I unconsciously apply slightly different pressures and use the pipette in slightly different ways for different pigments. This is by no means an exact process – the *Control Panel* evidences this ‘inexactness’. This inherent almost intangible knowingness that seems to accompany knowledge gained through experience is reflected in Alan Janik’s discussion of tacit knowledge, which he proposes, refers to “those aspects of experience which are wholly knowable self-reflectively...but by their very nature are incapable of precise articulation” (Dormer, 1994, p.21).

Systems and subjectivity

Systems provide an objective means to reduce subjective control. Subjectivity however, exists within the systems I set up through the play of intuition and inherent knowledge. Duchamp discusses the idea of unconscious subjectivity in his text, *The Creative Act*, where he coins the term personal ‘art coefficient’ as “a way to try and describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state”. Duchamp suggests that the artist in the creative act goes from intention to realisation through a series of totally subjective reactions, which he proposes, cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on an aesthetic level. Duchamp’s personal ‘art coefficient’ seems to encapsulate the subjectivity that exists within all the working decisions I make within my practice. The intuitive operates as the control within these decisions, a kind of passive subjectivity that straddles the pragmatic and the aesthetic, and which comes through tacit and somatic knowledge. British process painter Alexis Harding reflects this sense



of unconscious subjectivity when, in talking about his process he suggests, *“there is a kind of critical automatism that happens in the studio that I am trying to understand and work through. I trust that one’s sensibility is located somewhere within this, but I am in no rush to find it”* (Harding, 2004).

Intuition as a structural element

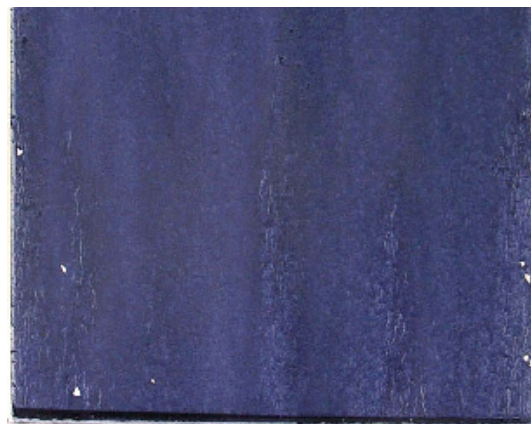
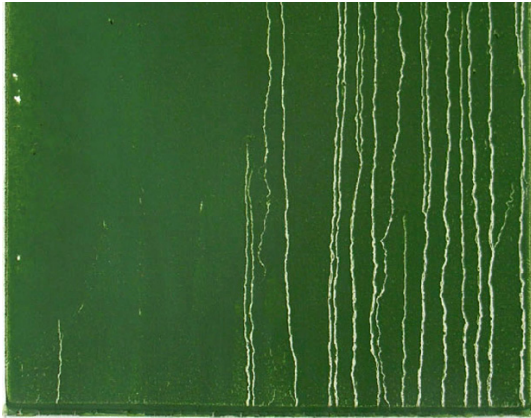
As the project has progressed intuition has become in some way knowable; it operates as a structural element. There are many aspects of process that I no longer consciously think about, which at the beginning of the project were a primary focus. Bridget Riley expresses this well when she talks of how the process of making develops the artist’s power of recognition, which over time enables them to see what they are doing more clearly. Of her own work she asserts: *“What used to be blind intuition is now conscious intuition. I think that intuition in its best form is conscious”* (British Council, 2005, p.98). Perhaps the transition that she refers to is in fact the point where intuition becomes tacit or somatic knowledge. The relationship between intuition and time resonates with ideas discussed by Henri Bergson in his text, *The Creative Mind*, where he describes intuition as a method of *‘thinking in duration’* that reflects the continuous flow of reality. The flow of time as real duration, he suggests, can be experienced only as intuition (Bergson, 1946).



Performing the making

The making is a performance in that it determines an image. The actions of myself and/or the materials within the performance are performative. In referencing these actions, the image engages with the notion of temporality – time and duration. “*Every work of art is the trace of an action, a record of the makers hand*” (Hoffman and Jonas, 2005, p.121). This premise is clearly exemplified in Pollock’s work. The work within this project however deals with material trace and residue, the evidence of an action rather than the action itself. Jane Toney, in *How To Do Things With Drawing*, suggests the need to differentiate between performance and performativity. She uses a theatrical model to posit the idea that performance can be seen as “*an acting out, a representation or mimesis, following some directive and suggests a passive operation where the participant actualises something already determined*”. She draws on J.L.Austin’s text, *How To Do Things With Words*, to contrast the notion of performativity. A ‘performative statement’ is described as referring to itself in the process of its own making and is contrasted with a constative statement. She relates this back to drawing to propose a ‘constative’ drawing as representing or describing mimetically as compared to a ‘performative’ drawing, which can be seen as changing its own terms as it performs itself (Toney, 2005). The performative image is thus contingent on what happens within the making. The sense of performativity is determined by the interaction between system, materials and action over time.

Top **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Green 1 - detail) 2008
Bottom **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Blue 1 - detail) 2008



Emergence

Process emphasises working methods. It denotes the actions or events by which something comes into being. My process sets paint in motion to determine its own outcome. There is a sense of emergence or revealing that occurs outside of myself as the work develops. Heidegger's notion of aesthetic revealing, what he refers to as poiesis, has relevance in relation to the idea of unfolding an image. Poiesis stems from the Greek understanding of presencing as bringing forth or unconcealment. It is characterised by an emergent quality rather than knowing in advance and involves a certain openness before what is. Mediating my role in the making creates a sense of 'opening up the image to the world'. Although the image emerges within an arena of expectation there are always surprises. This sense of openness resonates with ideas put forward by John Rajchman in his essay, *Another View of Abstraction*. Rajchman suggests that the world of abstraction seems to have been reopened, which has led to the need for another view of what it might be to think abstractly. For this he looks to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze². Deleuze's concern is not how forms are extracted from or realized in things, but under what conditions something new or singular can be produced 'outside' them. He views abstraction in philosophy as more 'empiricist', more 'immanentist', more 'experiential' and abstraction in art as more 'chaotic' or 'formless'.

² Deleuze's approach signals a shift from the modernist view of abstraction as a process of extracting pure or essential forms toward an abstraction that is founded on, to quote Deleuze "*an impure mixing and mixing up, prior to forms, a reassemblage that moves toward and outside rather than a purification that turns up to essential ideas, or in toward the constitutive forms of the medium*" (Rajchman, 1995.)

Top **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Orange 1 - detail) 2008

Bottom **Linda Roche**
Pigment Study (Orange 2 - detail) 2008



Creating situations in which potentiality becomes an active agent in a work seems to be implied within his thinking. I relate it as such to processes I use that impact my ability to control, that allow for the advent of chance. Deleuze's notion of the chaotic and the formless is reflected in the unpredictability of what happens within this space once these conditions are activated.

The image unfolding

Systems are set up to control but there is a point where the image takes on a life of its own. It responds to a situation, a set of circumstances and starts to express itself. This poietic unfolding occurs through the interaction between process, material and environment. The image unfolds as a response to, and may be seen as an articulation of, the interaction between system, pigment, canvas, gravity, sun, temperature and the time that it takes for the image to unfold. When considered within the context of creative practice a poietic unfolding of material points to a methodological orientation where the artist gives up some degree of control and accepts what the material dynamically reveals itself to be, rather than what their intentions for it might be. As such it engages with issues surrounding aesthetic form and content. Derek Whitehead in his text, *Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting Be*, suggests that poiesis may be seen to engage and question what has been called in the Western aesthetical tradition '*the metaphysics of the creative will*'. He quotes Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who proposes that in contrast to this tradition what the ancient Greeks intended by the term was very different: "*the heart of poiesis had nothing to do with the exercise of a will and*

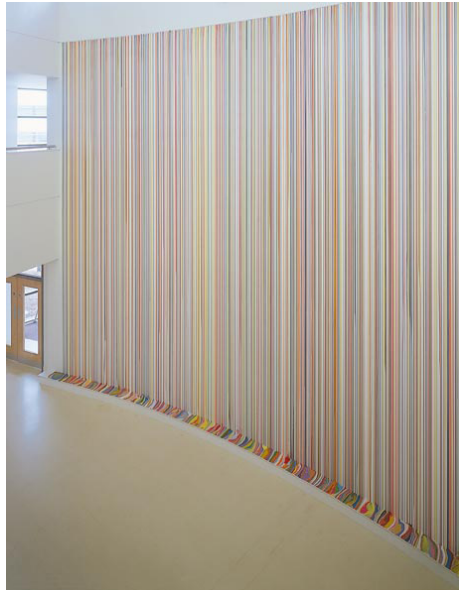


everything to do with 'the production of aletheia', with 'unveiling', and with the opening of a world for humankind's being and action...a making known which produces or leads things into presence...." (Agamben, 1999, as cited in Whitehead, undated, p.2).

Formal and formless

Within my practice I am partly in and partly out of control. The system admits of contingency and is dependent on a temporality that attenuates its formal logic; the logic of relations is tempered by the flux of process. This dilution of authorial control has implications in terms of the formal meaning within a work. Ewen McDonald in discussing Callum Innes's work suggests, "*Innes' incorporation and subversion of the conventions of abstract painting is apparent in the way he explores the volatility of materials and the possibility created by process. While attesting to the enduring appeal of abstraction, his approach undermines the formal precision often associated with it*" (McDonald, 2007). When considering image construction, this sense of collision between the formal and the formless, points to an almost collaborative evolvment. Within *Formless: A Users Guide*, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss reflect on the "*structural cunning inherent within the formless*", locating it within practice as an operational tool. Tracing the persistence of the formless within the history of modernism they argue that it is, however, a notion that has been repressed in the interest of privileging formal mastery (Bois and Krauss, 1997). Evident here is a relation to authorship. The formless seems to imply a material emergence or evolution that operates outside of the artist's decision-making, and could be seen to feed into a way of thinking that reframes the creative process in

Top **Ian Davenport**
Warwick Wall Painting (Pale Grey) 2004
Acrylic paints on plasterboard 762 x 1067cm
Bottom Detail of above



terms of agency rather than mastery. This relates back to the notion of ‘bringing forth’ or poiesis. As opposed to an ordering and mastery over what is, poiesis is the bringing forth of something out of itself.

The ‘gelling’ of the image

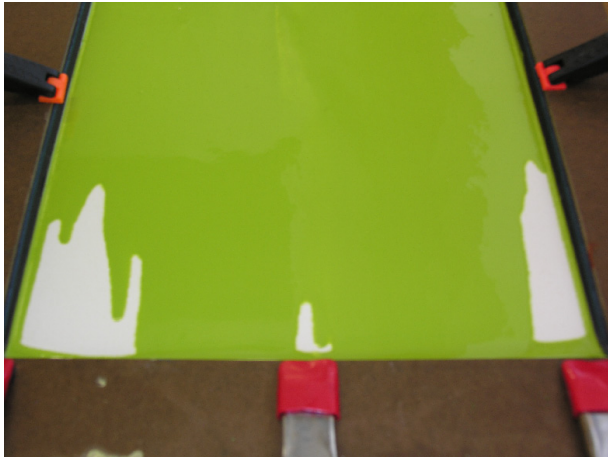
The image presented is static, it refers to past performative actions. The systematic removal of sections and/ or areas of pigment (in both *Dispersal Studies* and *Poured Studies*) results in a kind of ‘cutting off’ of the pigment. This creates a sense of ‘freeze framing’ or capturing a once active moment. By contrast, the use of a physical system in recent explorations, such as the clamped painting device used for the *Pigment Studies*, effects a ‘gelling’ of the image. The device is inclined and the pigment meanders its way down the surface. The pigment that does not attach itself to the canvas pools along the bottom edge of the frame and slowly stabilises: a dynamic stasis rather than an instantaneous cutting off or freezing. The paintings evidence the consolidation of pigment into a ‘gelled’ image. The idea of a ‘gelled’ image is useful to consider in relation to Alexis Harding’s paintings where the gravitating paint is discussed as “*a live moment seeping ever downward*” (O’Reilly, 2005, p.26). This sense of performative resolution is evident to a greater or lesser extent in the work of the painters I have researched. It derives from their procedural approaches, but also from the sense of organic movement in the work, which creates the temporal dimension within the image. When considering Alexis Harding’s and Torie Begg’s work where the paint escapes the edge of the canvas and then settles/ solidifies, Callum Innes’s dissolved paintings or



Ian Davenport's poured lines that pool on the floor as they hit the bottom, there is a strong sense of an event that resolves itself beyond the actions of the artist.

The evidential act; an artefact of process.

The visual artwork is typically artefactual. As a lead in to her discussion of Alexis Harding's painting *Slump/Fear*, Sally O'Reilly considers that the painting rather than the process almost always, eventually emerges as the site of the art. In theory however, the object might she suggests, be seen as secondary, as a documentary artefact of an action; "*the painting is flagged up as painted, as past tense, as evidence*". It is within this context that she goes on to frame Harding's work suggesting that his collapsing paintings could be seen as a literal extrapolation of this phenomenon; "*the prolonged event extends beyond the performative actions of the artist into the collapsing of pigment*" (O'Reilly, 2005, p.26). The idea of image creation as a process that extends beyond the artists actions and intention resonates with Deleuze's philosophy of ontology, specifically the notion of 'becoming'. The movement and change that occurs as pigment disperses across a surface or as an image builds over time comes through an interaction between external factors and forces, each of which plays a role in how the image unfolds. Things and states, Deleuze proposes, are products of becoming. He discusses 'becoming' in terms of a confluence of forces that move through every event. For Deleuze becoming is "*neither merely an attribute of, nor an intermediary between*



events, but a characteristic of the very production of events” (Stagoll, 2005, p.21). The paint is bound up in this becoming. As it flows over the surface it leaves behind traces. These traces suggest an absence in that they point to something that has previously occurred, an action or a body that is no longer present, a force that has moved through the event. Deleuze’s event expresses the productive potential inherent in forces of all kinds. For Deleuze “*events carry no determinate outcome, but only new possibilities, representing a moment at which new forces might be brought to bear*” (Stagoll, 2005, p.88).

A site of production and potential

The image is a site of production. It is also a site of potential. Locating intention and subjectivity within production processes opens the work up to its own potentiality. As the production gathers an internal momentum the image takes on a life of its own. This is where I have no control, when fluid dynamics, gravity and chance all take over. Often when I leave the studio for the day the paint is still working its way across the canvas. When I come back the next day there is always a sense of curiosity around what has happened overnight. Each image resolves in a slightly different way. All eventually find their lowest potential energy state and stabilise. The image that unfolds has more to do with potential and causality than it does with aesthetic or formal qualities. In saying that, order is always implicit in the outcome. The use of systematic strategies to control variables and impose constraints means that the image defaults to a visual order. Procedural order creates a visual order; an aesthetic of method that articulates the



formality, temporality and flux of process.

Roles and responsibility

In a 'collaborative' production authorship becomes a negotiated and shared ground. To give materials a more pre-eminent, autonomous role in a developing image requires a corresponding restaging of the artists role within the creative act. Formal acts operate alongside and draw from a material outcome rather than dominate and override. Barbara Bolt uses Heidegger's thinking to open up a related set of ideas in her book, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. Heidegger challenges the contemporary instrumental understanding of the human/ tool relationship, which positions the artist's materials, tools and processes of production as simply a means to an end. He proposes, instead, a relationship of co-responsibility and indebtedness that positions the artist as one part of the creative process. Although linked to notions of control and order, within my practice systems enable me to sit slightly outside the making, to step back and let the material emerge in whatever way it might. The image-making process evolves in a collaborative or, to follow Heidegger's line of thinking, a co-responsible way³.

³ Within her book Bolt positions representationalism as "a system of thought that fixes the world as an object and resource for human subjects" (Bolt, 2004, p. 12). She does not discuss representation in terms of realism or figuration, as an outcome, but positions it rather as a mode of thinking and a relationship to the world that involves a will to fixity and mastery. Abstraction may, as such, be as representationalist as realism. Working with Heidegger's essay *The Question Concerning Technology* she refigures the relations of artistic practice in order to present a counter-representational understanding of art whereby "the work of art is no longer an object for a subject; the relationship between the artist, object, materials and processes is no longer one of mastery and all elements are responsible for the emergence of art" (Bolt, 2004, p.9).

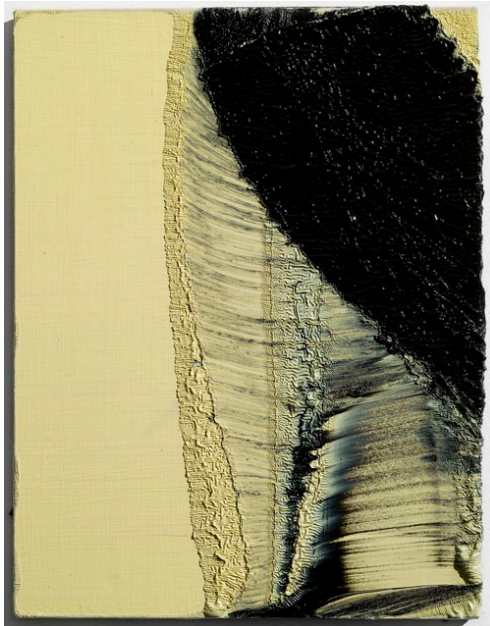
Top **Jim Lambie**
Plaza 2005
Enamel paint and plastic bags Dimensions variable
Bottom Detail of above



Ian Davenport echoes the notion of collaboration within an autonomous art practice. When discussing the production of his poured paintings he suggests: *“I use materials and work with gravity and other natural phenomena to make my paintings – sometimes I feel I am more of a sculptor than a painter, dictating to the material and simultaneously working with it. The meaning and the making become completely entwined”* (Davenport, 2006, p.W7). Davenport’s approach allows for an amplification of the role pigment plays in determining the image; how the pigment unfolds and gels into its final state. Paint performs a similar role in Scottish artist Jim Lambie’s work, *Plaza*. The work however, operates under a different premise. Lambie’s modus operandi is to paint by other means. He fills plastic bags with paint and hangs them formally in a line on a wall. The paint slowly seeps out through a small hole in the bottom of the bag, runs down the wall and pools on the floor. The material performs itself within the making, however the idea of making paintings without using a paintbrush reflects his interest in expanding the parameters that define space and form.

Degrees of intervention and withdrawal

I am interested in the idea of a lightly determined image but determined nonetheless. In some explorations I have limited control over the unfolding of the image and therefore I am much more removed from its history. In others I am more implicated in the outcome. Alexis Harding’s practice is relevant when considering degrees of intervention. Harding creates his paintings by applying layer upon layer of enamel paint to the point



that the surface eventually starts to collapse under its own weight. Within his paintings gravity is a key player, although Harding strongly influences the way gravity asserts itself within the image. Whereas I control the edges and potentially format the paint in its unfolding, I never actually tamper with the material itself outside established frameworks. Harding intervenes a lot within process. He manipulates the surface by pulling, pushing, squeezing, peeling the paint away. His are very physical interventions that significantly impact the complexity of the outcome. The layering of systems potentially increases the level of complexity in a work. My involvement in the construction of the image emphasises the systematic. I am insinuated within the image through systems. Where I am less involved in the construction, the sense of materiality seems to override the systematic within the work. This is evidenced when considering the *Pigment Studies* in relation to the *Control Panel*. The complexity within each *Pigment Study* comes through the pigment. There is still a material complexity within the *Control Panel*, however the notion of the systematic is more dominant. When I install the *Pigment Studies* in a grid format this enforces the systematic within the work. The role of materials is amplified, it seems, in direct relation to the degree to which my input is withdrawn.

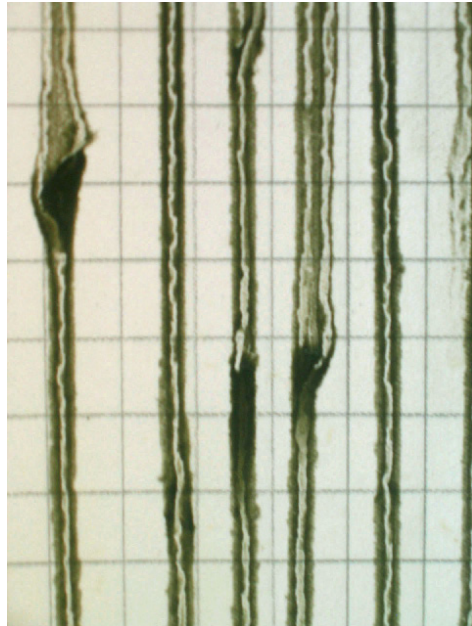
Choreographed yet contingent

The development of the image is 'choreographed yet contingent'. This positioning reflects both the dilution of subjectivity that occurs throughout the production and the prescribed yet indeterminate nature of the approach. It reflects the idea of setting up



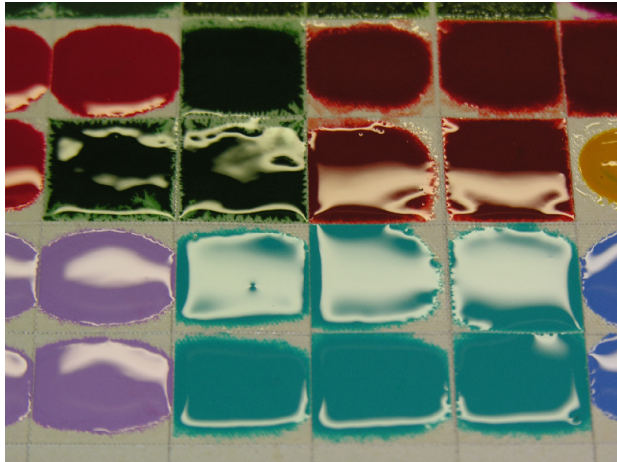
controls in order to lose control. Alexis Harding, in discussing his process reflects: “*I realise that I am controlling these paintings as I have set them up but I set them up not knowing what to do with them. They need to take responsibility and have a role in their own making. After all the movement and (expressive) gesture is not made by myself, but by the product of the sliding of the grid away from it’s anchorage as it is pushed or as gravity takes hold*” (Harding, 2004). Systems internalise chance within the developing image. They establish temporal boundaries, points in time between which something might happen. In so doing systems activate what is referred to in the project as ‘conditions of possibility’. These conditions create a platform for pigment to unfold in its own way, in its own time outside my decision-making. Systems are set up and the image then unfolds as an interplay between intentional and unintended or chance events. The production, although choreographed, remains contingent⁴.

⁴ Contingency implies something incidental to something else, that is, it is possible but not certain to occur – it points to the potential for chance encounters. Chance implies a lack of intention and has a more direct relation to the accidental. It is the slide of my sleeve across the paint as I lean across a work, the paint I inadvertently knock across a surface. Contingency is a more constructed/ intended category. Pamela Lee articulates this distinction in the catalogue text *Some Kinds of Duration: The Temporality of Drawing as Process Art* where she discusses process art’s relationship to the contingent. She suggests that chance must be properly defined as contingent when it comes about through conditions set up in advance by the artist, in that “*it explicitly points to conditions, however uncertain, which presage accidental events without suggesting an immediate causal relation to them*”. She draws on Richard Rorty’s formulation on the contingency of language, which suggests that the truth is ‘made and not found’ to highlight this connection (Lee, 1999, p.47). The notion of being made and not found reflects an approach where chance is factored into the outcome rather than occurring without pre-planning or intention.



Element of chance

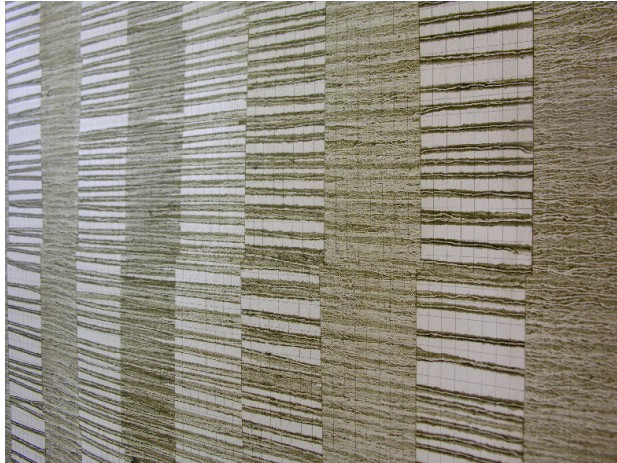
Chance and process are often linked in art. The notion of chance within a work extends questions around the artist's subjectivity or intentionality within that work and somehow lets the 'unpredictability' of the real world in. The role chance plays in the production of an image connects ideas around painting, performance and event. Internalising chance in the making allows the material content to merge with the context of performance. The image evolves as an open, participatory system consisting of maker, materials, tools and procedures all operating within a structure that responds to both the input of the 'participants' and the conditions of the context. The context is the world at large. It encompasses the weather, the slubs or irregularities on the surface of the canvas, the way I go about making on the day. All these things impact on the outcome of the image and cannot be predicted in advance. The random occurrences within the unfolding image are representative of what I see as an externally delivered performativity, that which the world literally does deliver. To quote Sally O'Reilly, the works are perhaps reflective of "*the moment at which the canvas itself becomes the register of reality to be considered, rather than the illusory space depicted upon it; when the represented is usurped by the actual*" (O'Reilly, 2005, 26). This notion of 'the world getting in' bears a relation to Andrew Bogle's discussion in his article, *Chance in Art*. Bogle borrows from Rauschenberg to propose indeterminate art as being fundamentally concerned with process; "*the artist acts in the gap between art and life*". He states that one can think of the "*realism of indeterminate art or the fundamental realism of process*", suggesting



that the desire to pursue a more natural and unconscious art, which is consistent with the indeterminate flux of life, has led artists to devise “*a variety of objective techniques for diluting subjective control*” (Bogle, 1981).

Between order and chaos

The dilution of control is evident in Phillip Galanter’s discussion of Generative Art. Generative Art, by definition, involves the artist releasing partial or total control to an external system. Within my practice the interaction between systems and forces determines the way pigment unfolds on a surface. The logic of relations that comes through the use of systems is disrupted by the volatility of materials and the flux of process. Within his discussion of complexity Galanter draws on ideas discussed by John Casti in his book, *Complexification: Explaining a Paradoxical World Through the Science of Surprise*, Casti suggests that in contrast to chaos theory, complexity theory is less concerned with establishing the inescapability of ‘determinate chaos’ than with what he terms ‘the science of surprise’. Falling between order and chaos, he talks of the moment of complexity as being the point at which self-organising systems emerge to create new patterns of coherence and structures of relation (Casti, 1994). The sense of an image settling somewhere between order and chaos is evident within most of my enquiries. The *Control Panel* is a good example of this – although the scored grid creates a physical boundary, the fact that there are hundreds of blobs of fluid pigment sitting on a surface at any given time means that the process is tenuous. The pigments



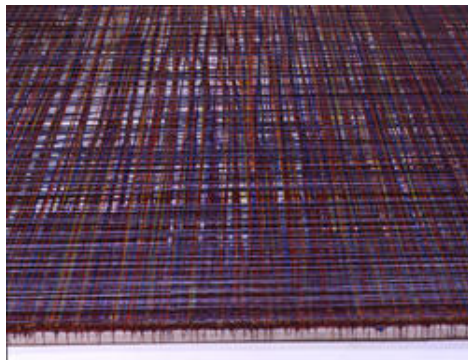
seem to have an inner logic but it is a volatile logic. An inadvertent nudge of the surface disrupts the equilibrium and in turn, the sense of logic. There is a point within the process where the work exists on the edge of chaos.

Effective complexity

When considering systems and sensibility, the notion of complexity is relevant. Galanter suggests that for contemporary systems-based artists, “*the real action is the complex in-between realm of partial order and partial disorder*”. His sense that structure and complexity increase somewhere between the extremes of order and disorder leads to the consideration of what he terms ‘effective complexity’. Although Galanter positions complexity as an aesthetic consideration, within this project complexity has perhaps more relevance as a procedural consideration. It very much links into the idea of always being partly in and partly out of control. Within a systematic approach there is the potential to systematise the life out of both work and process. As such it’s important for me to retain a sense of uncertainty/ the unexpected in both the finished work and the making. Within the work this is evidenced through allowing the paint to do its own thing. In terms of the process it comes through the slippage that occurs between systems and explorations and through varying the degrees of intervention within works. In conceptual art the artist devises systems and follows them absolutely allowing them to become, as Sol Lewitt suggests, the machine that makes the art. Like the paint that I work with my systems are fluid. They flow through the project so that there is flexibility to allow images to unfold with limited input on my part, or for the outcome to be more heavily

Top **Torie Begg**
'Apparently' Abstract NNN 01 and 02 1999
Enamel on canvas

Bottom **Torie Begg**
'Apparently' Abstract Series (detail)



orchestrated. Varying my level of physical interaction and control elicits a movement in terms of the relationship between process and action across different bodies of work. It also keeps the exploration fluid and alive and gives me the operational complexity that I require within the making.

The language of process

Systems convey data; form as information. The image signifies the conditions of itself as constructed by its own making. The relationship between process and information is reflected in David Ryan's discussion of the work in *Vivid*, an exhibition that Torie Begg was part of. Ryan considers how a range of works within the exhibition evidence the use of a particular technique, where the manipulation of the material is both "*clearly visible and equally retrievable as process*" (Ryan, 2002, p.2). Begg suggests that she is creating authorless work, and that the viewer is placed in the ultimate position as interpreter. She describes her paintings as producing a material object with no illusionistic residue referring exclusively to the relationships of its own process. She states this is done "*not to present the viewer with a process puzzle to solve but to construct an 'active viewer' who checks imaginary associations of what the painting might be against the material fact of the work*" (Finch, 1996, p.1). Begg's position is interesting to consider in relation to Yve-Alain Bois's questioning of the role of process in the contextualisation of Robert Ryman's painting, specifically the reception of Ryman's work as a 'mere' artefact of process. Ryman approaches painting from the point of

Top **Robert Ryman**
Installation (52nd Venice Biennale 2007)

Bottom **Robert Ryman**
Series #13 (White) 2004
Oil on canvas 42 x 42 inches



view of working with the basic possibilities of the medium: *“His investigations are not in quest of a transcendent essence but are revelations of process and everything that impinges upon its materialisation in the viewers space”* (Kertess, 1996). Based on the process narrative implicit in his work, what we should see in Ryman’s paintings then, Bois suggests, is simply a *“reflection of the process of its creation”*. Bois stresses that it is not that this approach does not interest him, or that he gets no aesthetic pleasure from finding out how process is implicated in the painting but, he reflects, *“does this mean that Ryman’s is a world without qualities? That the White of ‘Empire’ is not, to our senses, brilliant, hovering, vibrating, and materially dense, ‘before’ it is seen as a ‘product?’ before, that, is we could possibly worry about how it was produced”* (Bois, 1990, p.216). Visual qualities elicit an initial sensory response, which precedes and perhaps comes to inform the analytic in the viewing of a work.

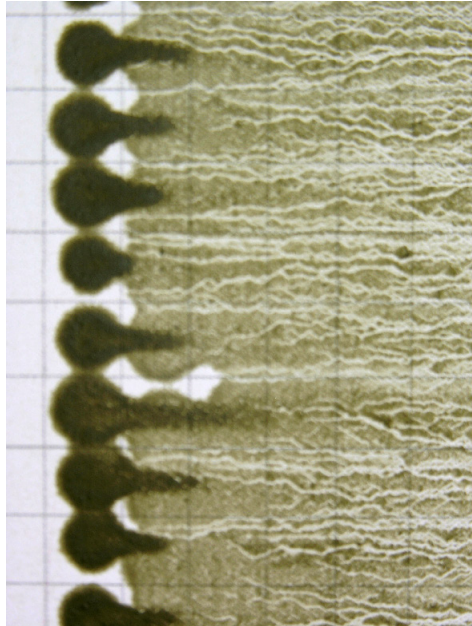
Process and the pictorial

The pour, in its unfolding, ‘manufactures’ pictorial elements. This prompts a consideration of the relationship between process and representation. The pictorial emerges via an interaction between paint and process. Associations that develop do so outside of my intention. Process art emphasises working methods, but within contemporary art of this tradition where figurative elements creep into the work as in, for example Callum Innes’s dissolving forms or Alexis Harding’s collapsing paintings, the focus of process painting becomes muddled. Although produced systematically, paintings by



both Harding and Innes have an expressionistic quality. This is perhaps due to the play between the structured and the organic, to the fact that their production is in some way indebted to gravity, a natural and autonomous process that essentially takes place outside the artist's control. This expressionistic quality (perhaps what Beggs discusses as illusionistic residue) gives play to imaginative readings. The use of structure, process and materiality sets up a physical encounter between work and viewer. The viewer is constantly referred back to the material surface of the work and a relationship forms between their reading of the physical process, materiality and associative readings that they might make in an attempt to assign meaning to the work. Content as such, shifts out of the image into the cognitive process of the viewer. Form, as information, is open to interpretation. Like Begg, Innes structures information to produce an active viewer. Unlike Begg, he works with the ambiguity that often accompanies a process approach. Innes talks of how he allows the process of dissolving to undermine and erode any supposition on the viewer's part that his work will be clear-cut in either structure or meaning⁵. The invention that people then bring to the work takes the viewer back to the ambiguity that is in the work, to the way it is made and the way it can be read. "*Painting is not just about the image*", he suggests, "*it goes down to structure and materiality too*" (Innes, 2006, p. 77).

⁵ The embrace of associative readings perhaps indicates the artist's rejection of this type of paintings modernist origins. Certainly Innes, whilst acknowledging the influence of modernist artists (specifically Barnett Newman) does not view his paintings as formal or abstract exercises and cites modernism as having no contextual relevance to his work. Begg's work, by contrast, is often discussed in relation to modernism.



Reality of process

“Process visualised both the actual conduct of materials and the behaviours of artists in their studios” (Stiles, 1996. p 577). The image and outcome is not illusionistic. It does not describe and is not abstracted from something. It is something. Process deals with material activated events. The images in my practice evidence procedure. The same forces that act on other forms out in the world also act on the paint in the images. The interactions within this unfolding create material and visual qualities, which in the first instance potentially give play to associative/ imaginative readings. The viewer needs to investigate further to establish the validity of their initial reading. This is perhaps what Torie Begg prompts the viewer to do through her use of the word ‘apparently’ in her titling. Begg uses a simple computer generated ‘score’ to determine the paint application. Translucent layers of different coloured paint are sequentially applied resulting in a final colour, which is the product of all the traces beneath it. She then titles her paintings according to the final layer ‘*Apparently Red*’, ‘*Apparently Yellow*’ etc. Begg encourages the viewer to establish the reality of what they are looking at. Her sense of the reality of process is reflected in her title ‘*Apparently Abstract*’. There are parallels here to Ryman. He states: *“There is a lot of meaning but not what we usually think of as meaning. The painting has no meaning outside of what it is...the lines are real, the shadows are real...the experience is real...I don’t think of my painting as abstract because I don’t abstract from anything. It’s involved with real visual aspects of what you are looking at...real space, the room itself, real light, real surface”* (Ryman, 2007,



p.142). Making and viewing are reflexive events. What emerges and suggests itself in the making and viewing becomes part of the reality of the image. As Begg suggests, *"It is through the cracks that you see things"* (Begg, 2000, cited in Carr-Harris, 2002).

Constructing an active viewer

Emphasis on process and systems signalled a way of making and thinking that set the stage for contemporary acknowledgement of art as a viewer oriented activity. The idea that the creative act is not performed by the artist alone was initiated by Duchamp: *"...the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act"* (Duchamp, 1957). An exploration of process opens up questions around where the knowledge content of a work might lie. Paintings are generally developed as things rather than happenings. As such they are ontologically independent of their maker. Anna Pakes suggests that this implies that knowledge content resides in what the artist does not what they produce. She argues instead for the artwork itself as the embodiment of knowledge, a knowledge that is she proposes, shared in the viewers encounter with the work (Pakes, 2004). In the catalogue essay, *'real' / reflexive / art*, Brian Muller proposes the reflexive artwork as being at once object and procedure⁶. *"In the reflex-*

⁶ Muller discusses the work in this exhibition as New Modernism. Rather than using reflexivity in reference to the object, in the sense of the object being self-referential, *"form as content, form as subject"*, he uses reflexivity to refer to the viewer as subject with the *"painting functioning as a mirror"*. (Muller, 1997)



ive artwork the 'art object' is not transparent, the viewer is constantly referred back to the material surface of the work, in other words the work is 'non-illusionistic'...thus the reflexiveness is inculcated into the art event...content is reversed out of the ontological component and into the epistemological component as a conceptual construct of the viewer" (Muller, 1997). The phenomenon that prompts the viewer to react critically to an artwork is, Duchamp suggests, comparable to "*a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of esthetic osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble*" (Duchamp, 1957). Process articulates the actions of both artist and material. It operates as a filter through which to view and understand a work. The viewer deconstructs the image to construct meaning. The image emerges within a continuum of responsibility that starts with the artist, flows through the work and ends with the viewer.

Section 4 **Final installation: *Theatre of Painting***

The thesis exhibition includes two key works: the *Pigment Studies* and *Control Panel*.

Pigment Studies

54 images. Each 645 x 565mm. Hung three deep in a grid format (200mm spacing horizontal/ 100mm vertical) spanning a fifteen-metre wall. The installation emphasises process and the mechanical. The decision to hang the images like paint swatches homogenises and decentres the subjectivity of individual works and mechanises the viewing process. Closer observation reveals individuality, the reading creating a relationship between the sensory and the analytic.

Control Panel

6540 x 2100mm. Installed on the floor elevated (200mm) on concrete blocks. Installing this work on the floor establishes the relation of the floor to the 'real' world as distinct from the abstract world of the white cube. The installation recognises the way the work was made (on the floor) and reflects the functionality and documentary nature of the work. As such I considered presenting the work on a worktable but I saw this as too linked to the action/ process. The work is a documentation. Laying the work out flat reflects the archival process through its reference to the museum drawer. The concrete blocks are utilitarian and pragmatic. Workaday and readily available they acknowledge the functional nature of the process.

Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008



Left **Linda Roche**
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Pigment Studies (view left to right)

Right **Linda Roche**
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Pigment Studies (view right to left)



Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Pigment Studies (top row of installation)



Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Pigment Studies (middle row of installation)



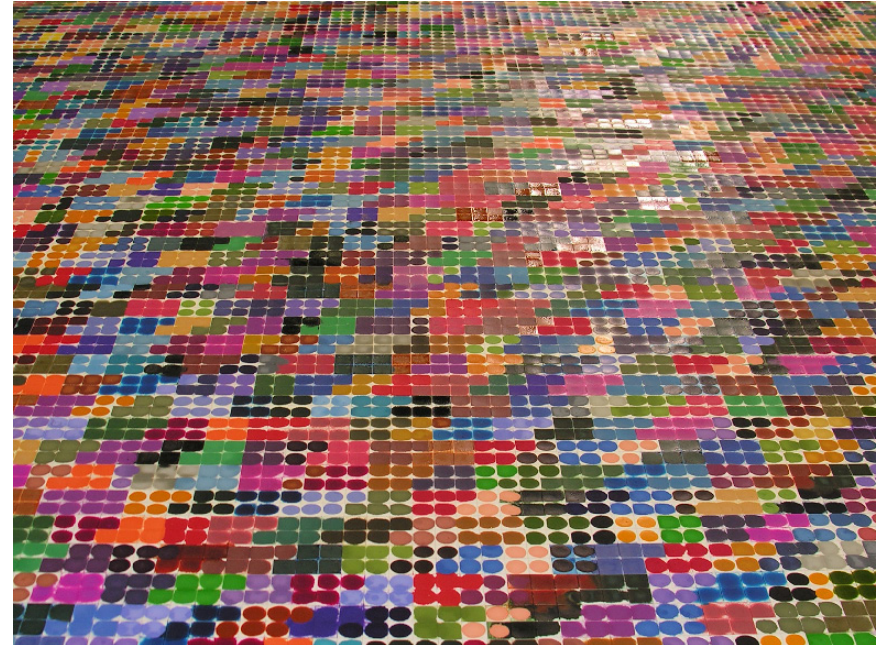
Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Pigment Studies (bottom row of installation)



Left Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Control Panel and *Pigment Studies* (details)



Left Linda Roche
Final Installation: *Theatre of Painting* 2008
Control Panel (details)





Section 5 **Concluding commentary**

Paint is evocative. This project however, does not set out to give paint elevated status in a materialist sense. It simply considers and explores an alternative premise through which to circumscribe matter, that involves a rethinking of the notion of agency within the creative act. The project is about possibility, potential, small discoveries. It makes no claims and offers no conclusions. However, amidst the process and procedure is the sense that if one pushes up against a natural urge to control matter, looks closely and treads lightly, things can and do happen, which suggest that paint has a resonance that might go beyond the artists intentions. Working from the premise that matter might think, that paint might speak, that it might be eloquent in its own right, allows for the possibility that the image might be somehow imbued with its own form of subjectivity, its own internal reality. The expressive gesture within the work is made not by me but by the paint itself as it meanders its way across the surface. I find myself, on considering this expression, ascribing almost sentient qualities to matter: certainly my observations to date point to the fact that red is unruly, completely out of control, blue is quieter and tends to keep to itself (unless mixed with certain reds) and yellow is predictably unpredictable. There is obviously a rational and 'scientific' reason for these observations that has to do with the material structure of the pigment; how finely it is ground, the quality of the paint used, etc. Conceptually I acknowledge these things, and process the information, then proceed to bring an imaginative reading alongside. Nothing, of course gets made without process or intent. The paint needs me if it is to make itself



heard, perform in its own right. Each image unfolds as a kind of theatre: a scripted yet spontaneous performance where roles are played out in a systematic yet responsive manner. Within the production it certainly feels like paint has a voice.

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