



Wood, D., *Time and Matter*, 2019. Mixed media on canvas

# Rupture and Reparation In Painting

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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 submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

10 October 2019

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## ABSTRACT

This practice-led project explores rupture and reparation in the process of painting whereby material interventions are influenced by the intuitive decisions, or inclinations, arising from the artist's perception of what is happening as she paints - that is, from the interplay between the artist and the painting. In particular it looks at the role of memory in these processes. This interplay brings vision (visual sensation) to interact with past experiences accumulating continuously as memory in order to inform my intuition, the process I use to direct my painting. This continual complicating of the present by the past, and the past by the present constitutes a mode of painting that is both representational but also unfolds in ways that loosen habitual associations. Ultimately, I hope to bring these past experiences to new life in myself and my painting.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS PROJECT

This practice-led project follows three main stages of development taking me from the familiar, through a transitioning period, to finding myself in new painting terrain. The grid format has previously represented the initial diagram (or armature) in my paintings, in providing an organisational framework, visible or not, offering a sense of stability and orientation. Transitioning from that device created a hesitancy and uncertainty in the development of my work initiating an exploration of methods and motifs, including the use of stencils and wall lining paper. This transitional, research phase, came to a close with a pending studio critique. The deadline for this critique was a catalyst in making two spontaneous paintings using my familiar materials but now with altered gesture and movement, and modes of applying and removing paint; bringing me into new painting terrain.

The associated influences and references that are interlinked through this project are somewhat eclectic reflecting an interweaving of the main theme with related interests. Starting with my canvas as the arena in which painting takes place and the work comes into being, I might link this to the anthropological notion of 'human becomings' suggested by Anthropologist Tim Ingold.<sup>1</sup> The canvas as 'being', but in the process of painting it is becoming something other. And, likewise, this research project and the academic environment have affected my sense of being and becoming.

These processes and the interplay of media, experience and intuition, as they relate to my painting processes, are elucidated in the following pages. A departure from predetermined and strategic modes of image-making towards greater fluidity and responsive movement will also be recognised in the processes that follow.

## EXPLICIT CATALYSTS

Two initial catalysts broadly defined the concepts of time and memory as fundamental to this project providing ongoing momentum to its unfolding path:

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, (New York: Routledge., 2015), 117-118, accessed July 10, 2019, ProQuest EBook Central.

*The Imperative to leave the grid:* As the previous year's study drew to a close, I felt an imperative to 'leave the grid'. The grid motif had inhabited my paintings for the previous two years, providing a sense of familiarity and orientation within the picture plane, even though I had begun to destabilise them by fracturing their outlines, or making them spindly and unwieldy, or reducing them to echoes of themselves beneath layers of paint.

Metaphorically the grid also represents the habituated structures and default modes of being and doing. However, since structure is inevitable in life, and in the life of my painting, the imperative to leave the grid, later became a 'critique of the grid'. In my paintings this critique of the grid quickly saw this format reformulated, as other motifs performed similarly while being visually entirely other.

*The 'Cyprus Event' and the Childhood Connection:* At an art show opening shortly before the commencement of this project I experienced an intersection of times, places and states of being that disturbed my perception of the situational reality. Conscious of two states of being; an awareness of the artwork and my immediate surroundings, and simultaneously experiencing a child's feelings from another place and time. Realising it was a (stress-related) dissociative experience, and while attempting to regain my equilibrium, I was also interested in the phenomenon itself which, although lasting only a few hours, resonated for several weeks. The corporeal resonance of this event gave rise to the question, how painting might be an agent to connect the past with the present.

## **RUPTURE & REPARATION IN THE PROCESS OF PAINTING**

The processes in my painting are discussed in relation to work made during this project. My method of painting is an ongoing sequence of additions and subtractions. Comprising a mode of structuring and destructuring as I firstly prepare the canvas with patches of colour or motifs as my 'grid', or armature, amounting to the diagram, a strategy employed by painter Francis Bacon. "The diagram is thus the operative set of asignifying and non-representative lines and zones, line-strokes and color-patches. And the operation of the diagram, its function, says Bacon, is to be 'suggestive'."<sup>2</sup> In my work, this preparation stage provides the ground for layering and manipulations of medium. It is both a random and considered part of my process since the 'cliché', or memory of previous work, remains present to assist me in optimizing new possibilities even through its uncertainty.

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 82-83.

## MEMORY & TIME

Concepts of memory and time are embedded within this project and the multiplicities inherent in the movements of constantly informing, and drawing upon memory, are encapsulated in painted motifs alluding to past events. As Philosopher, Henri Bergson stated “Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it.”<sup>3</sup>

## INTUITION

Intuition is a method I use for making decisions quickly during the process of painting. It is a process whereby experience and knowledge, that has been continuously accumulating and interacting as memory, are brought to interact with what is being perceived in the present as continually changing visual sensation, as the painting evolves. As this happens the brain is streaming images, multiple associations, rhythms and patterns, informed by the past, yet in ways related to what is happening as the painting progresses. This process occurs at the level of affective response, in the sub-conscious, before connecting with signs, language, concepts, or the rationale of linear narrative. Instead multiple, emerging, and changing potentials can be at play simultaneously informing my decision-making quickly, as I paint. This multiplicity of connections enables complex logics to emerge, allowing the possibilities for my painting to remain open, and thereby off-grid. It is a process that inclines towards creativity.

## LINE & HUMANING

Lines go places. Lead the way. Trail along. Peter out. Prescribe contours. Separate and make connections. Line may turn from clarity of direction and purpose to entanglements and confusion, rippling and undulating, forming rhythmic patterns turning into knots. Starting out with purpose, clean edged and deep, then flaring out as indistinct threads fading, trailing off. Lines evenly spaced, as grids, flip, turning under a shape or colour, reappearing, ending suddenly, endlessly.

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 133

In correlating human lives with lines, Ingold explains:

... by comparison to the animal, in whose horizon there is no past or future, only an ever-evolving now, the movement of human life is temporally stretched. Out in front is the 'not yet' of aspiration, bringing up the rear the 'already there' of prehension. At once not yet and already, humans – we might say – are constitutionally ahead of themselves.<sup>4</sup>

He continues, "It is not that humans are becoming rather than being; rather, their becoming is continually overtaking their being."<sup>5</sup> And to the question, "what does it mean to say of lives that they are led?" Ingold proposes "that to lead life is to *lay down a line*." With this association made, line becomes both a visual motif and metaphor in this project.

## IDEAS OF THE GRID

Intending to focus on the interactions within the generative space between the artist and her medium, I immediately encountered the self-imposed limitation of attempting to paint my way forward without the grid format. Previously a primary motif in my painting, being 'gridless' belied the irrational difficulty it posed. Aware that it had become a default strategy, the imperative to 'leave the grid' was viewed in service of enriching my practice by exploring other motifs, arrangements and movements.



Figure 1: Wood, D., *Quadrants 2*, 2018. Masking tape & acrylic on canvas, 760 x 760 mm



Figure 2: Wood, D., *Quadrants 7*, 2018. Masking tape & acrylic on canvas; 900 x 900 mm

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, (New York: Routledge., 2015), 118, accessed July 10, 2019, ProQuest EBook Central.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

*As a Paradoxical Format:* The grid is both, a pragmatic archetype of order and logic, rules and containment, while also providing a supportive framework, scaffolding or platform facilitating movement and expansion.

The grid format held the position of static placeholders in my paintings' composition. Against their supposed regularity and stability, the flowing gestures were the 'other' in the painting's dialogue; having different dynamic values.

*As Conventions in Life:* In the human being the accumulation of experiences, (enculturation), become our filters, our standards and measures, positives and negatives. These may orient and secure us, affording us stability, or some sense of certainty. Alternatively, such experiences may harness and arrest, or undermine and restrict our movements and our sense of agency in the world. These structures, around and within us, are considered as they frame the basis for, and grind the lenses through which we view external and internal phenomena. This asks important questions: Whose grid are we orienting by? Whose rules am I living by?

Such internalised grids, our default patterns and values, some essential for functioning and moving through life and here, in my art practice, my own past experiences, recollected or not, continue to inform and inflect my paintings through the process of intuition.

*As Conventions in Painting:* My early engagement with the grid format was as a restrictive convention, and interventions with mixed media explored ideas of resistance, of bending or breaking the rules, of crossing boundaries and moving beyond imposed limitations. In earlier paintings, for example, it was characteristic of my work that I might leave selected extensions of masking tape dangling outside the support's edges as a mean of redefining the edge of the painting, as well as being a key visual trope in a sequence of work.

This earlier method was a process of opening up or softening the grid, not to remove structure entirely but to question it. It was a critique of what has become structure, with its tendency to concretion, in order to ask new questions by leaning in to the unknown. Its strategy was not directive, nor could it be to eliminate structure but to open to new possibilities. Later, the grid's structure, it's alignments suggesting depth and perspective, became the counterpoint for fluid gesture and colour to move through and play against.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Denny Wood, "Navigating the Picture Plane" (Diss. for BA&D(Hons), Auckland University of Technology, 2018).

Eventually, its form would become almost indiscernible, dissolved beneath layers of paint. But it was still there, and so I knew where I was.

Presently my focus is not so much disrupting painting's conventions but my reliance on particular motifs and formats in painting. This tactic is to encourage flexibility in relation to my practice; a means of remaining open, being aware of the awkward balance between personally appealing formats and becoming entrenched in them.

*On Leaving the Grid:* While acknowledging that some level of planning and preparedness is necessary for painting, my practice had become almost synonymous with the grid format. My initial process, would be laying down a grid, most often with masking tape. The particulars vary, but my essential method was then to disrupt the grid's ideal through arbitrary rearrangements of its layout.

At the outset of this project, surprised by the profound sense of feeling blocked, it was tempting to lock in some 'landing strips' or directional markings with my favoured 5mm green masking tape on the blank surface in front of me; enough to provide some bearings, a sense of 'where' I was. I refrained from doing so since it would have negated the exploratory purpose of this project and, instead, resorted to painting a few loose, figurative works, which did not have the unblocking effect hoped for. Being 'gridless' had me at a loss.



Figure 3: Two 'warm up' sketches

## MOTIF

As much as the grid format was the obvious motif in my paintings, as organisational metaphor and device that maps time and space, other motifs are intrinsic to my painting processes. My methods are also motifs and, repeated in varied combinations, make room for the unpredictable. By applying two or three layers of medium to my canvases, combs then made into the wet surface layer reveal

lower levels of colour alchemized in the process, a sequence in which unpremeditated strokes both rupture and make reparation in forms that are unpredictable.

Gesture is made evident through this method of working back into wet paint with various means of combing striations into the paint. This method requires some haste, putting me in the position of having to trust my intuitive gestures across the picture plane. There is little time for stepping back to check on progress, nor for making considerations of the overall composition as it develops.

*Stencils and Frottage:* Two new motifs were brought into this project. The first being the use of stencils. My interest in these was dual. The Cyprus stencils encapsulated an essence of time and place with which to interact. Their practical function as prescribed shapes, that could be repeatedly placed and coloured in building up patterned surfaces, meant that random variations within these uniform motifs were achievable.

A second motif emerged after I had unwittingly used the technique in three paintings. Though unaware of it being a motif, other than an efficient mode of applying a final paint layer to my paintings, the result was the frottage effect; the consequence of necessity in keeping the final paint layer wet as long as possible.

In hindsight, it interests me that during this project I have both, stencilled motifs on to the surface of my supports and also, through frottage, brought up to the surface the impression of what is behind the canvas.

My paintings are processes, several stages may be involved and occasionally what eventuates is like nothing I had envisaged. Returning another day, the painting has changed. The paint has dried, daylight sharpens edges of linear forms and activates colours in ways the fluorescent lighting could not. In seeing afresh, and interested anew in the unpremeditated configuring of line, colour and entanglements of both. Concentrations of activity where line, runs through line, rewriting visual scripts, telling new stories. Small textured discs sitting just proud of the surface as bas reliefs. And I am reminded that it is the viewer who continues making the painting through that inexplicably complex interaction between sensation, memory and (re)action. That is, those processes of sensation and affective response connecting with past experiences and memory; minuscule kaleidoscopic movements reconstructing aggregates that, in turn configure what is perceived

## BRINGING PAST AND PRESENT TOGETHER

At the outset of this project and unable to find the flow of creative output I was accustomed to while using the grid format, what remained were the fading tremors of the 'Cyprus event'.

This anomalous episode broke through my present-moment awareness, landing as a concentrated childhood experience loaded with sensation and feelings, confusing my sense of the now; an indication that something from the past was surfacing in me, and thus also in this research project. Its timing also seemed significant; two weeks prior to the start of the academic year. Now, disoriented without my familiar grid template, the way forward appeared to be in engaging memories of that time and place.

*Cyprus Motifs:* Although there had been no specific visual imagery, this event suggested Cyprus in the late 1950s/early 60s. Fragmentary recollections of the time and place surfaced, particularly the military married quarters where my family lived for 3 or so years. Images formed of the prefabricated buildings, their corrugated cladding of asbestos and concrete running the length of the veranda; sharp aromas of flora amplified in the dry heat, the deafening cicadas and swivel-eyed chameleons in the garden, or slick lizards skittering up walls and across ceilings. I remembered too, a large praying mantis struggling with a lizard on the ceiling, except I also wondered if I had appropriated parts of that recall from someone else's memoirs.

Two particular motifs suggested themselves to me; the lovely blossoms of the mimosa trees, soft clusters of fluffy golden balls, and the strangely segmented cones of the cypress trees. I felt inclined to use stencils for these simple icons that now encapsulated 'essence of Cyprus' for me.

Using composites of these stencilled forms, and painting on a roll of wall-lining paper, I made three paintings exploring variations in layout and colour combinations. Omitting elements from the motifs acknowledged the random nature of memory. As pre-scribed shapes, the stencils gave me the freedom to improvise within their limits, and the provisional nature of the process freed me of concerns about paint seepage under the stencil. If anything, it was in keeping with the indeterminate nature, the 'bleed' of memory. The third motif brought into two of these paintings referenced Berengaria Village's characteristic corrugated cladding used on the houses.

Working with the repetitious placements of the images, while making variations to each one, was time-consuming but the repetitions of them became significant. Aware of them as placeholders and signifiers, it became clear that these simple icons, so placed, had become a new grid.



Figure 5: *Cyprus motifs – teal*. Acrylic on wall lining paper, 127 x 55 cm



Figure 4: *Cyprus motifs – flora and corrugations*. Acrylic on wall lining paper, 56 x 99 cm



Figure 6: *Cyprus motifs – flora and corrugations*. Acrylic on wall lining paper, 56 x 228 cm



Figure 7: Working to the 'past' with Cyprus motifs



Figure 8: Stencils

While working with the wall-lining paper, unfurling the roll away from me to my left, it seemed that I was painting my way back to the past, pulling the paper towards me in the present. A question formed: what if I turn the roll in the other direction and work towards my right? The idea was of painting forwards in time; into the future as it were. Feeling a subtle, unexpected shift of internal balance, I repositioned the roll so it would unfurl to my right, as if to paint towards the 'future' while imagining myself standing in the present, in the instant between past and future.

This experience led my research to the Philosopher, Henri Bergson, and an introduction to his concepts of time and memory.<sup>7</sup> Represented as the cone of memory, Bergson explains the complexities of the interactions and movements comprising the idea of the persistence of the past. That is, all our lived experiences become memory through continuous co-operative exchanges from the lived present, informing, updating and adjusting memory. Simultaneously our memory is supporting our lived experience in the present moment, feeding all necessary recollections capable of guiding and supporting us.

After making three paintings based on the Cyprus theme, it felt right to move away from specific references to time and place, as if the moorings there were being relaxed. But still inclined to work with stencils, I moved on to using a template of 7 dots.

Slightly bewildered by some of these processes, which seemed rather like regressive steps, my feeling was to follow through as a consequence of working intuitively rather than following a path towards a pre-imagined end.

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<sup>7</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 152-153

Working with stencils seemed to straddle both although it was difficult to be absolutely clear if this stencil inclination was driven by my programming, as an internalised grid of preference, or whether there was something new to be found by resorting to such clichéd methods. Still, following this thread I, first of all, had the impression that the seven-dot stencils I was using were ‘building blocks’ which made some sense to me. The notion of building blocks here related me to the idea of essential elements or ‘information’ for growth, giving me to feel that previous views I had about my painting processes were being thrown into a blender and atomised, reduced to primary units, and thus signalling the likelihood of something new emerging.

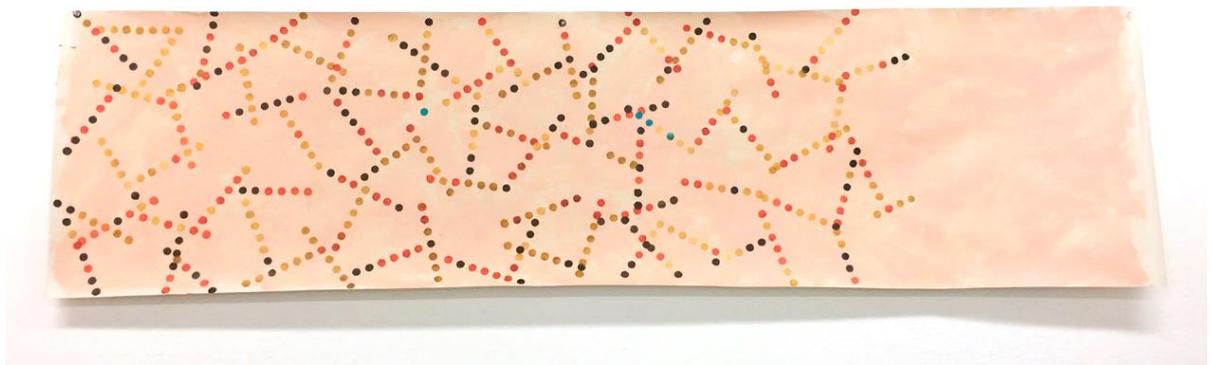


Figure 9: *Building Blocks motifs*, Acrylic on wall lining paper, 56 x 213 cm

The stencil work, using 7 dots and 4 colours, was surprisingly slow and, after several iterations with the building block stencils, this method was feeling more like a brake than an accelerator and I began to reemploy other methods, bringing in texture, glazing, plus layering and revealing of paint layers.



Figure 10: *Building Blocks motifs*, Acrylic on wall lining paper, each approx. 56 x 56 cm  
Explorations of method and media with layering, masking and revealing and applied texture

On the other hand, working with the wall-lining paper encouraged exploration and the freedom to explore provisional approaches and applications, and the randomly cut paper supports lent an immediacy to these paintings.

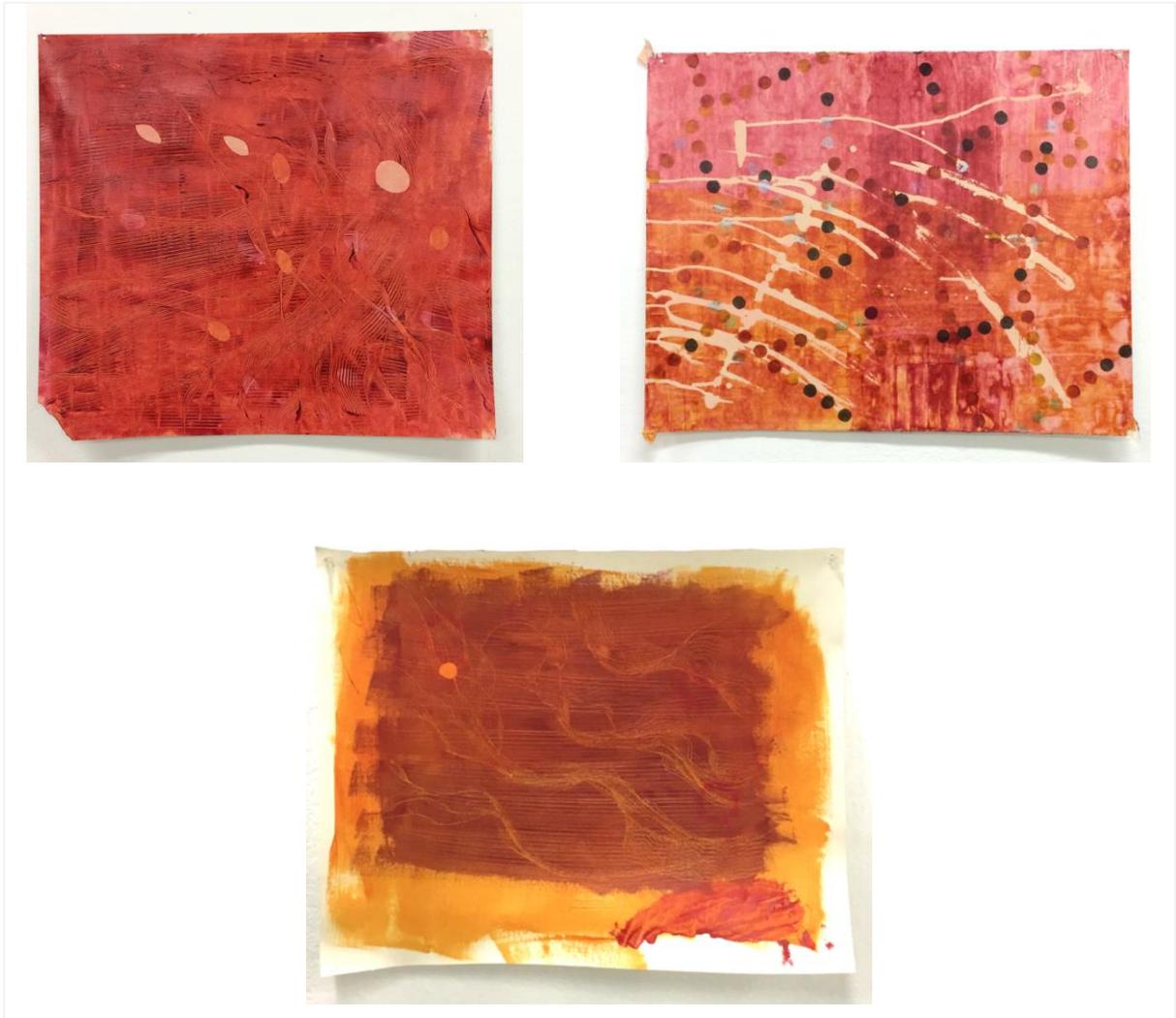


Figure 11: Explorations of method and media with layering, masking and revealing, and applied texture



Figure 12: Explorations of method and media with layering, revealing and applied texture

## TRANSITIONING

The time factor pressed in with the necessity to produce some resolved work for an upcoming critique. Thus spurred, I spontaneously made two paintings distinctly unlike my previous work on canvas. While using some familiar methods, such as combing into wet paint, masking and revealing using contact paper cut-outs, the gestural arrangements were no longer responding to or interacting with the grid format as in my former paintings. These movements comprised a new fluidity, responding to and becoming concentrations of activity in themselves.



Figure 13: Wood, D., *Catalysis*, 2019.  
Mixed media on canvas, 910 x 607 mm



Figure 14: Wood, D., *Confluences*, 2019.  
Acrylic on canvas, 910 x 607 mm

As if nudged sideways into another painting zone, there was now a fresh delicacy in the finely combed lines flowing through the picture plane. Time's constraints had triggered a small 'evolutionary shift' in my painting processes; a transitional point signalling new possibilities for exploration and growth.

Not all is new, however, there remains an implicit grid in painting, the edge of the picture plane itself. Whatever shape, the edge of a canvas operates as a form of spatial mapping. So, questioning myself now as to whether I have actually 'left the grid' in my work, I am having to admit, not really.

Metaphorically, grids persist, too, and the questions remain: Whose are they? What are they achieving? And, how do they affect my 'becoming'; are they permitting or restraining?

## MANIFEST/ING



Figure 15: Wood, D., *Manifest*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 1200 mm

Relaxing the linear movements and treatment of the painted layers in *Manifest*, all together brought a fresh suite of possibilities to my compositions. I mention here, though, that a first attempt in transferring these revised methods to a larger canvas did not work well. And, as I was unable to resolve that painting, I put it to one side. Although 'doubtful' paintings are a valid part of a practice, particularly at new junctures, it was a disappointing start.

Learning from this experience and, since stretching canvases takes time, I altered the order of my processes by not pre-stretching them but, instead, taping and stapling them to the studio walls, painting on them in this fixed position. Although this poses the problem of being unable to move the painting around while in process, it was more time-efficient to only stretch paintings that worked for me, a valid consideration at this juncture of exploring new methods. This revised order of working also gave rise to a new motif that has great value for me, visually and metaphorically, the frottage motif.

Being disorientated by *Manifest*, I left it on the wall for a few weeks. It was like nothing I had painted before. I was not sure that I liked it. I did not know if I should like it, or whether it was totally overdone. There was new movement and colour that seemed almost reckless to me. I had painted my underlayers with similar colours and techniques to my *Quadrants* series from the previous year but then brought in greater transparency to my surface layer and less restrained linear gestures. These gestures became more random, sporadic and multidirectional, with new rhythms and velocities, and the combed lines themselves no longer of one kind. And entirely unforeseen, the frottage effect picking up the texture of the wall, and soon adopted as a strategic motif in this sequence of paintings. New painting terrain indeed.

*Manifest*, emanating heat, light and movement, solar flares, cosmic activities of varying potential, intensity and reach. The catalyses and confluences of streaming forms, converging and transforming, erasing and renewing. Currents pulling threads aside, and colour pulsing outwards vitalising space beyond itself. And the seam, the gift of the gloriously uneven repair to the studio walls.

Qualities that infer time and materiality are visible, suggestions of age and wear in the mottled surface. Focussing in on overall tone and effect, tracing lines, and colour mutations imposed by the final paint layer, coming to mind were images of seraphim from the early Italian Renaissance. Grasping that train of thought, I sought to remember such a painting, or paintings, from that era and, almost simultaneously, indistinct recollections of frescoes from any number of historical sites flicked through my thoughts, all referencing time-etched, deteriorating painted surfaces.

And, it took a while to recognise it, but there it was, the seam now imported into my painting, reminding me of the 'Cyprus event' I experienced at the beginning of the year, now as the 'time split'. That I did not connect the two until weeks later was not surprising, my interest was in the visual qualities lent by the frottage, and I was grateful for the seam's obvious presence as a painterly device that might suggest many things to the viewer. How often does the painter have certain views and ideas about what she is painting, or conceptualising, and how often does the painting 'speak back' something of its own, sometimes profound? Now I could also see references to Berengaria village building materials, patinas and panel joints. A split, a joint, a seam. Many possible allusions.

Other viewers will see differently, of course, their perception filtered through their memories and associations. These paintings are not illustrative, they are not narratives, but they are about aesthetics and affective response, and recognising the connection between the 'Cyprus event' and the seam was palpably felt, by which I discerned that subliminal links were being made.

# TAKING TIME

## IMPRESSIONS I



Figure 16: Wood, D., *Impressions I*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 900 x 900 mm

In this painting, the frottage effect has the self-referential implications of bringing impressions of the past visibly into the present, as if modifying the present moment. Put another way, in bringing colour and gesture together with the frottage, the present infused with the past is represented.

Stretching this canvas emphasised the glitches in the paintwork, introducing a new provisionality to my work. Spending time with *Impressions I*, revealed something else new to my paintings, a quiet simplicity. There is movement and history in the layers and lines, but it is unfussed, undemanding, its signals soft. It demonstrated one of the joys of painting in these modes; in keeping my processes exploratory it is surprising what emerges. Here, shadows of a life lived just below the surface are suggested. And, on the surface, its patina implies time and weathering.

I've long thought that painting is a strange exercise and, in trying to understand the appeal, relate it now to wanting to see what happens. What happens if I paint this line here, over this colour there? What will be revealed if I scrape through here? Where is that line taking me? How did I arrive at that

colour? Similarly, I have heard that authors write novels in order to find out what happens, and who plays what role, even having to create new characters where gaps in the story line appear. So is painting an uncovering process, a process of making visible the invisible, and bringing into being a 'something' that would not be except for the artist's participation.

Other notions are of the canvas as a membrane between worlds, an analogy that curator Allan Smith uses in his catalogue foreword to the exhibition *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show*, "Painting has always occupied a space between the material and the ideal, the sensible and the immaterial, in a way that no other art form quite has. A painting is like a membrane, access-panel, hinge, skylight, fairy fabric, and dream screen. It's a type of trapdoor between the real and the posited, the real and the imaginary, here and elsewhere."<sup>8</sup>

Thus putting into words my thoughts while sitting with *Impressions I*, it also occurred to me that here was material evidence of my presence in the studio at that time; a painting that tilts ". . . between here/and not-here, not-this/not-that," again using Smith's words.<sup>9</sup> The dual significance is in the material recording of my working processes in that time and space, and its imprint upon me afforded through making work in its proximity. Entirely unlike photographing the site, I took the imprint off that wall directly, physically bringing it into my painting composition as the primary component.

Parallels could be made to taking brass rubbings of some medieval notary in any number of churches across Western Europe. But here, it is a recording of my past, a functional past, a site of creativity, a site of becomings.

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<sup>8</sup> Allan Smith, "Little by Little, Soon a Rich Cloth: Painting Everywhere and Everytime," in *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show*, ed. Clare McIntosh (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2016). 32

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

In a discussion around this time, mention was made of Johannes Vermeer's painting of *The Kitchen Maid*. On retrieving the image, what actually arrested my attention was the wall behind her.<sup>10</sup> The rendering of light on its materiality, emphasising its utility, the holes and dints, the nail, the effects and detritus of its function and sympathetic correlation between the (role of the) Milkmaid and her surrounds. And, I am not sure why that was so impacting. But what matters to me is that it did engage my attention and why that questions lingers with me.



Figure 17: Johannes Vermeer. *The Milkmaid*, c.1660. Oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  
<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/artists/johannes-vermeer/objects#/SK-A-2344,0>

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<sup>10</sup> Johannes Vermeer, *The Milkmaid*, c.1660, Oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,  
<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/artists/johannes-vermeer/objects#/SK-A-2344,0>

## ROUGH RED



Figure 18: Wood, D., *Rough Red*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 1200 mm

I remember my first taste of wine; it was in Cyprus. A red. A red that looked like a rich syrup. I also remember being told I wouldn't like it. And, its sour bite did feel like an assault to my young palate. But thinking that I must have got the taste wrong somehow because it 'looked' so delicious, I tried again, cautiously. But it was still dismally disappointing.

Re-imagining that scenario now I can understand why that tiny event retains an association with Cyprus. Those conflicting messages and perhaps unanswerable questions: my perception and anticipation of the pleasure that red liquid held for me; the caution I heard from my mother, and then the actual taste, disproving the anticipated pleasure my visual senses had relayed to me while confirming the auditory warning.

*Rough Red* isn't actually about wine though. It is not about any thing in particular but informed by all my experiences from the past, interacting with the present during the process of painting. I was

thinking colour, motif, gesture, wondering how I might make opportunity for something new to manifest in this painting. I remembered that little episode after the painting was finished, while sitting with it, looking, feeling my way into it, and initially disappointed to have smothered everything with red. And, perhaps that was a link in bringing that memory to the surface. A red that linked to disappointment.

But in that field of red I was drawn to what remained to be seen of blue discs linking me to ideas of archaeology of site, of a life, where scratches in the paint are journeys taken, traversing, backtracking and re-crossings of paths trodden, worn into the ground. Or engravings left for others to discern.



Figure 19a & 18b: Wood, D., *Rough Red*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas (Details)

Vestiges of earlier activity appear settled into the painting's topography. And, just as our memories influence the present, here too, palimpsests, blurred shadows of 'art-effects' are still evident through the painting's surface. After my earlier judgements of OK, not OK, it was slowly unfolding revealing qualities not apparent at first. It is a slow painting, with heat.

Now It speaks to me of time's mark on matter, of history and place. Marks made, then and now. A slow-release view with all that memory brings to the image filling it out. Themes lifted into consciousness, linking up to something I read once, or watched, or heard. Swirls of references, abstract thoughts and remembered experiences. Bytes of memory passing through the mind in quickest succession, or the memories that come fully to consciousness bringing narrative, facts and feelings, filling out the painting.

There were four main stages in this painting: the Resene 'wax flower' base layer, over which were placed disc forms of Ultramarine Blue and Nickel Azo Gold mixed with interference paints; 2<sup>nd</sup> stage. Overpainted then with a Nickel Azo Gold and Pyrrole Orange layer with fine meandering scratches crossing and running through one another, comprising a gentle, shifting unity; 3<sup>rd</sup> stage. It could have been left at that stage but not having the depth hoped for, and in repeating the second phase, I began to see a future for this painting; 4<sup>th</sup> stage. A final overlay of Alizarin Crimson and Nickel Azo Gold was applied and more heavily scored taking those markings back down to the base layer; 5<sup>th</sup> stage. A painting with history, of itself.

# AESTHETIC CONVENTIONS

## TIME AND MATTER

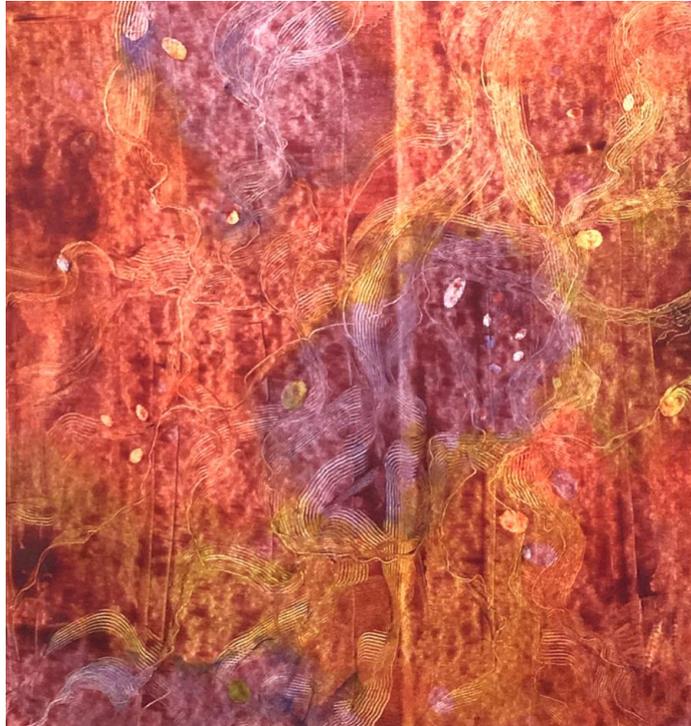


Figure 20: Wood, D., *Time and Matter*, 2019. Mixed media on canvas, 950 x 900 mm

In *Time and Matter*, I reintroduced small shapes of contact paper, placing and repositioning these leaving traces of their origins in the base layer of paint, then becoming small foci of nuanced colour, changing and being changed in their transfer and painted overlays. And raked lines, finding pathways through the painting's landscape, gentle trickles and streams seeking paths of least resistance, responsive meanderings, and assertive, determined tracks with places to go.

I remember having a certain anxiety about beauty in this painting, thinking it to be so. The disquiet stemmed from some peculiar convention I held about 'beautiful' paintings: interesting good, but beauty seemed a cliché. A dilemma for me, and contradictory, bearing in mind the numbers of painters who make beautiful work. However, I do also consider *Time and Matter* to be visually interesting since I am surprised, particularly through the frottage, in the unpredictable effects it generates, such that it works well in holding my attention.

In an abstract for a recent Symposium held by the Politico-Aesthetics Research Centre (PARC), academic and writer, Luke Smythe addresses some of this 'beauty' dilemma for me. Though written in the context of painters avoiding the politicising of their work, he speaks to my concerns. He writes, "Conventionally enough, I think of an aesthetic attitude toward a painting as one that allows the viewer to attend as fully as possible to the painting's aesthetic attributes, undistracted by other considerations."<sup>11</sup> Two of his suggestions to this end are:

. . . to paint with enough abstraction that obvious social references are kept at bay.  
The second is to make one's work as decorative and complex as possible – decorative to enhance its sensuous appeal, complex to enhance its cognitive appeal, while also limiting its predictability, the two together making the work potentially more aesthetically absorbing than either would in isolation.<sup>12</sup>

Smythe is also the author of the book, *Gretchen Albrecht: From Gesture to Geometry*, a survey of the artist's work, whose paintings, I suggest, fall within the 'beautiful and interesting' categories. Well known for her paintings using the hemisphere form, the artist's search for a new shaped format in the late 1980s drew her to "the idea of 'completing the hemisphere's curve, a gesture that would sever its connection to the ground beneath it, allowing it to 'float' free on the wall."<sup>13</sup> Interesting aspects of Albrecht's thinking was to bring the hemisphere into completion, in the form of the oval. And, while she continues to use the hemisphere format, she also 'leaves her grid' by integrating it into a new form (or armature) in terms of the oval, a form that allowed a more feminine encompassing of her imagery.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, developments in this project have reconfigured my grid formats folding them into new gestures and motifs while their function remains to both stabilize and allow new possibilities going forwards.

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<sup>11</sup> Luke Smythe, "A Thin Blue Line, the Sheer Opacity of Pigment, and Fairy Villages: Insulating Painting from Politics against Stiff Odds (abstract for paper presented at the Politico-Aesthetics Research Centre (PARC) Symposium, Auckland, July 26-27, 2019), accessed October 6, 2019, <https://parc.auckland.ac.nz/complete-paper-abstracts/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Luke Smythe, *Gretchen Albrecht: Between Gesture and Geometry* (Massey University Press, 2019). 166

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## GREY MATTER



Figure 21: Wood, D., *Grey Matter*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1250 x 1200 mm

Painting *Grey Matter* was an exploration with colour. My preferred colour for surface layers lies in the Nickel Azo Gold to Alizarin Crimson range, but keen to try other colour combinations, I created a blue/grey overlay.

Having painted colour and motif in the lower strata similar to those in *Time and Matter* and *Manifest*, the blue/grey overpainting had an entirely other effect. Whereas the tones in these previous paintings mellowed under, and into, their russet overlay, this blue/grey surface layer created a sharp, acidic tone, and a grey-green unfamiliar in my paintings. It also exaggerated the embossed disc motifs in the mid layer, defining their outline and bringing them into sharper focus.

These colour combinations challenged my sensibilities, making this another of my paintings that required, of me, time and curiosity.

## CONCLUSION

Painting takes time. It draws on time. And the painter's past inhabits her work, inevitably.

Having a better understanding now of what this project has been about, the notion of rupture and reparation as a persisting dynamic in my painting also illustrates the process of memory in its incessant accumulation and reorganisation responding to events in the present. And, using intuition as a method in my practice, the symbiosis between the artist and her media has given rise to some extraordinary painterly surprises.

Particularly graphic was the split/join/seam that emerged in the later paintings and which I eventually perceived as alluding to the 'Cyprus event'; its unexpected entry into my work appearing to endorse my engagement with the Cyprus theme in which the surface layer of paint also became a healing balm.

Memories of ruptures in the past may then be reconstructed as a reframing of the 'grid'; seeing and doing things differently in life and art, constituting a reparation as the past is enfolded into the present, adjusted and carried forward, endlessly. A motif replicated in my painting.

Life is a task, played out in time. And, in the duration of this project, inexplicable and unexpected 'pointers' and synchronicities have affirmed my path. Beyond the facilities of intuition, I acknowledge a Life Force holding me to this task:

This mysterious power urging us to live, to keep looking for our path is ruthless. It is energy we are afraid we lose contact with when we fall into depression, or when anxiety attacks us with panic that the animal root impulse, the root stem of us, has been cut off. This power to make something of our experience, to generate response to the new, to perceive the new coming in, to give way to excitement about having our response to our experience, to have our own original thought, or arrive at our unique pattern of feeling, our own tempo of breathing, this power enlivens us.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Unshuttered Heart: Opening to Aliveness/Deadness in the Self* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). 46-47

## VISUAL DOCUMENTATION - CHRONOLOGICAL

The List of Figures (page ii) follows the general chronological order in which the paintings were made. For this reason, they have not been duplicated here.

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# APPENDIX

## FINAL EXHIBITION

The following pages comprise the visual documentation for the MVA Graduating Exhibition 2019, at St Paul Street Gallery, Auckland.

The four paintings exhibited demonstrate various combinations of motif and method that became incorporated into my practice during this research project. Two of these paintings were completed after this exegesis was submitted for examination and therefore some detail is given regarding these works.



Figure 22: Installation view of final exhibition



Figure 23: *Manifest and Details*





Figure 24: *Impressions I*



Figure 25: Installation view: *Manifest & Impressions I*

## FINAL PAINTINGS

After submitting this exegesis for examination, and with a few days remaining before installation began, I took the opportunity to complete two more paintings.

***M-LBS***: Concurrently working on *M-Subcurrents*, I began this painting feeling inclined to bring my 'building blocks' stencils back into play. This time for less explicit results. Instead, purposing to leave only subtle traces, slight hints of their presence in the painting's origins, or base layer. Almost imperceptibly tinting the acrylic medium with colour and an occasional dab of interference paint, what eventually remained to be seen might simply be the tiny concentrations of paint that collected against the stencil's contours, and questionable tinges of colour.

I also returned the contact paper cut-outs, placing and replacing them between paint layers. And finally, floaty, unhurried combings to tumble lazily through the frottaged surface. *M-LBS* affords the viewer ambiguous forms and subtle colour shifts.



Figure 26: Wood, D., *M-LBS*, 2019. Mixed media on canvas, 900 x 900 mm



Figure 27: Some steps in the process of painting *M-LBS*

***M-Subcurrents***: At this endpoint of the thesis year, we relocated to reduced studio spaces to accommodate the end-of-year shuffle of exhibiting and departing students. As a result a, now, favoured motif, ‘the seam’ was no longer available to me.\* Instead, to complete *M-Subcurrents*, I sought to heighten the differentiation between the middle and surface layers by creating the mid-layer in the form of low-relief tracts of medium with touches of interference paint. Then, scoring these with short, tight lines to generate vibration, rhythm and movement. The surface paint layer was then also combed into with slower, meandering, exploratory gestures.

The resulting textural relief reveals the influence of the mid-layer on the surface layer as those final combed gestures negotiated intersecting pathways across and through the tracks and troughs previously laid down. This gave rise to a visual reciprocity, with the original ground still very much part of the dialogue. The light source and position of the viewer, in relation to the picture plane, finally determine the sites activated within the painting.



Figure 28: Wood, D., *M-Subcurrents*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 1200 mm



Figure 29: Details of *M-Subcurrents*

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\* A repair of the studio wall panels frottaged into some paintings. See paintings: 1. *Manifest*, and 2. *Impressions I*.



Figure 30: Gallery view during exhibition



Figure 31: Installation view during exhibition

## THE FINAL EXHIBITION PAINTINGS:

#1 *Manifest*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 1200 mm

#2 *Impressions I*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 900 x 900 mm

#3 *M-LBS*, 2019. Mixed media on canvas, 900 x 900 mm

#4 *M-Subcurrents*, 2019. Acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 1200 mm