Wonder Lux

Kirsten Maree Fitzsimons

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, 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 another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed

7 October 2014

Acknowledgments

A huge *thank-you-thank-you-thank-you* to my supervisors Mon Redmond and Ian Jervis for the long talks and tangents that have helped me take my project further than I could have imagined. I would like sing another string of *thank-you* to my loving family especially Mum, Dad and Joel. Thank you for the: love, support, encouragement, humour and tolerance. Finally thanks to my wonderful peers from the last couple of years, it wouldn't have been a paint party without you all.

Abstract

Wonder Lux is an art project that investigates the problematic relationship between the actual and the ideal, in the context of an attempt to construct a personal reality where these two concepts are one and the same. The approach taken is to create paintings based on or filtered through my internal psychic states, and to bring them together with other found images in order to reinforce this personal construction of reality, where what is external to me will more closely reflect what is internal in me. In doing this, the project investigates how the images we encounter in the world are complexly implicated in our desires, illusions, nostalgia, delusions, fantasies, resentments, and utopian/dystopian confusions. The project is conceived as a response to a complexly changing world that constantly presents new difficulties, with the constant demand to either accede to, or retreat from, external realities.

1. INTRODUCTION

My day begins with the sound of artificial rain—the same rain that suggested I sleep the night before, now encourages me to linger before getting up. My morning routine consists of two coffees in bed while eagerly scrolling through my email accounts, Facebook, Instagram and a handful of daily deal sites. The images flitter before me as I skim my newsfeed, sending wishful thoughts towards an offer that will make my life better – unlimited yoga, all you can eat pizza, a new hair colour. I'm looking for more, I want more; I'm of that generation. Despite these deals never quite reaching my expectations, I remain an optimist.

During my usual 23-minute walk to the studio I'm besieged by images. I glide along Symonds Street passing by café fronts, gig posters, cell phone billboards. Four busses pass me in quick succession each with a different suggestion plastered on their rears: 'New movies', 'All Blacks in your backyard', 'If it ain't broke don't fix it' (which footnotes an opulent Big Mac). I don't find it particularly bothersome; in fact I find it somewhat comforting. I'm provided with a mini escape into the world of possibilities. I focus on one image; a fresh advertising poster depicting light diamond encrusted sand, swaying palm trees and aquamarine glistening waves. It's designed with sheer appeal, to make you go and buy that ticket to go 'somewhere', elsewhere.

Given I now understand Auckland's nickname 'four-seasons-in-a-day' and that it's been raining for over a fortnight, the beach scene appears rather enticing. The image gripping me is an ideal, all the better for being unexamined. Of course I'm a sophisticated spectator, a product of the image-saturated time I live in—and

the fact that I have time on my hands as I walk, I start thinking of that beach. As I do, all these other images come to mind, images of surfing and boardwalk biking flashes to the forefront, heat on my skin, I think of the disjunction between the real and the ideal.
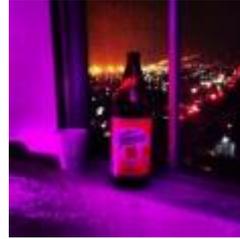
I do realise when I get to that destination, I may not find that image, as it may be a constructed image, and that in reality it may not even exist. I think about the seaside, the sunset and all those romantic notions that then trigger different images, which start rushing in and unsettling the original image, breaking it up essentially into a multiple—until I'm left with a swarm of images that coalesce somehow and have perhaps separated themselves from that original idea. The original beach image is abandoned like a shell; hollow and vacant, the paper-thin façade disintegrates as soon as that Auckland rain hits its sandy print.

This exegesis is divided into two main sections. The first half consists of the ideas and contexts that inform the project, while the second half discusses the methods and strategies employed. Throughout the text there are floating images these are unreferenced images sourced from public profiles on the internet, they represent a myriad of similar images that float in and out of our days.

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2. COLLECTIONS AND CLUBS

I'm the consumer and spectator in my own fantasies. You can dream it you can do it! To be selfish they say, is to look after one's own desires, but really, is that such a bad thing? This seems to me like the way I should be living, that's what consumer society has sold me.

The act of collecting and then presenting images or artefacts is central to this project, as it allows for us to think through how images are dealt with in the world. One way we use images, is as a way of constructing an ideal. We align certain images to different ideals, while relegating other images that don't match these visions. In order to construct around us a sense of an ideal we gather images, like weapons, the images act as armour to protect us from the actuality of our situation. Take as an example a 10 year old girl in the 1990s; her walls plastered with Blue-tacked posters and pages torn from tv-hits, Dolly and Girlfriend magazines (the Spice Girls, Hanson, JTT, Devon Sawa,

5ive…). With schoolbooks covered in highly thoughtful collages of celebrities and pictures from magazines locked into place via clear Duraseal, desk lids, again, reflecting an image drenched world.

I was one of those girls; I carried images of pop singers, teen actors and pretty things everywhere I

went. This act wasn't unusual then, and it's not now either. One might suggest the look of memorabilia is perhaps more sleek now, instead of a desk lid it's the desktop of a laptop, the cover photo on your Facebook profile or the wallpaper of your iPhone. There's something in this act that is inherent within this project.

Wonder Lux investigates the concept that surrounding

yourself with an abundance of certain types of imagery might somehow work as a way of connecting yourself with a certain idea or energy, as perhaps by surrounding myself with celebrities as a tween I was trying to gain my share of stardust.

Could it be possible that by collecting these signs they might be connected, or may even contain an ether or essence that could be absorbed by the person? Perhaps by drenching our environments in these signs we could gain membership to something, or better still, by surrounding ourselves with these images of things - could it bring them into our lives? This project investigates whether by gathering and displaying these signs it could lead to an equivalent experience? Could drenching our experience in images allow the things depicted to find their way into our lives or for us to find ourselves in these depicted environments? In this sense it doesn't matter if you can't afford it, perhaps just by surrounding yourself with such images, the universe will present it.

2.1 SIGNS AND EXPERIENCE

Thinking back to my 10-year-old self, I was never able to select just one poster to put up. This mania covered my walls and excluded any trace of wallpaper underneath. My schoolbooks and desk lid elicited that same excessive aesthetic. The majority of the images were attached to the surface with Blue-tack; the propositional fixing matched my mood by allowing flavours of the month to rise to the surface and be chopped and changed. This method of changing and refreshing is important to this project, as it addresses the problem faced when trying to select one image.
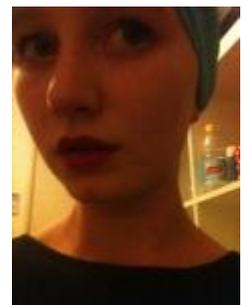
When faced with one image, the mind has a tendency to wander its memory bank in order to reference other images that then come into focus to create context. In this way, images ebb and flow, comparing and competing with each other for the longest staying power. This project is interested in the experience of the dynamic *after image,* of detached images that start swarming in from memory. This active experience is not one of cohesion, and thus as a strategy, this project has taken on an approach of dealing with all of these images as a simultaneous event. Within this system it would be counter-productive to try synthesizing images, to try and elevate one over another. Images want and some even demand your gaze. They're aggressive like that. If they had a voice they may as well be hollering: 'look at me,' '*no,* look at *me,'* 'Look at me *I'm* magenta!' 'No, look at *me,* I'm *passionfruit*!' 'I'm shiny!' The result of Interrelating with a sheer abundance of imagery is of interest to Wonder Lux, along with the possibility of creating a momentary suspension of embodiment?

Images have an ability to trigger memories and feelings. My experiences, like the burger never being as juicy, have taught me to be slightly cautious if not cynical about images. I try to balance an awareness of their image-ness, that they could be too good to be true, but all the while I like to treat myself by indulging in their illusionistic potency, if only for a short escape. What if I put my cynicism aside and suspended my level of disbelief? Perhaps the escape needn't have to be short-lived.

2.2 THE REAL

I carry with me a sense of what I believe to be reality, but I'm aware that this carries with it notions of the ideal. The ideal was used as a form of comfort blanket for explaining the real when I was growing up. *'Things will work out in the end'…*I was fed from an early age the ideals of being safe, loved, stimulated, rewarded, entertained and so on. I had the sense that the world was like this, while these notions can of course be attainable, they are based on ideals. So I'm now left questioning what reality is and how this relates to the ideal and notions of utopian hope.

Subjectively, there is an actual world out there, a world that as hard as I try I cannot manipulate via my internal fantasies. If I get to the checkout and my card declines, I will not be able to wishfully think more funds into my account. The way I perceive my world is dislocated from other certain kinds of realities; my perception of reality is how I perceive the actuality of situations, the limitations. But it is not to say that my perception of reality matches that of others.

The real that is partly imaginary and fantastical is a construction based upon an ideal. This ideal is entirely subjective and manipulated by society and the market place. When the consumer is reluctant to acknowledge reality, (for to desire something superior and more of it), it makes sense that there is a market able to provide these ideals. The comfort blanket that suppressed my insecurities as a child has returned to my adult life, with a new face and operational style. Now it is the media and market place, plating me up ideals, instead of comforting me out of a place of love and protection, they aggravate my insecurities then offer up a sticking plaster through the means product.

To buy into an ideal involves allowing yourself to go into a wilful state of denial about the unattainably of these ideals. There must be a suppression of knowingness in order to hold onto the illusion the ideal can provide. This project is interested in the sensibilities of these states, how the real and the ideal slip in and out of each other, this project also acknowledges the inherent struggle of trying to suppress this tacit knowingness.

2.3 CONSUMER ME

I've taken to online shopping over the past couple of years.
As a student, I realistically can't afford to physically purchase many, if any of the items I drop into my cart, but the experience seems to offer something 'other'. While shopping there is a potentiality that if I wanted to, I could hit "BUY NOW". This offer, this promise of being so close to ownership, allows

a strange slippage between what I know is real and an element of fantasy. As I continue to add items to my shopping cart, I continue to proposition a spin off, of a better life in my head.

Figure 2-1: Laurel Nakadate. Love Hotel (2004). Film Still.[1]

American artist, Laurel Nakadate's practice is located in performance, video, feature film and photography. Her work employs the performance of strangers, often her own body and the interactions and relationships she builds up with strangers via the lens. She becomes at once the playwright, artwork and audience.

Themes in Nakadate's films vary from voyeurism, identity, fantasy and exploitation. In *Love Hotel,* Nakadate explores the juxtaposition of the real and fantasy. Using herself as the main subject, she travels to Japan where she books into a love hotel[2]. Here, the artist is drawn to the idea of a place where you could go for a short escape and be transported into another reality. Nakadate cites: *"I'd always been drawn to the idea of this one-hour time period where you could just go and be in this other world[3]"*. The idea of departing one's own reality in favour of another is appealing and can be linked to Jean Baudrillard's concept of Hyper-reality[4]. Nakadate's videos and photographs activate this threshold. The artist states that her interest is in the in-between: "*I'm interested in that hybrid— the place between the real world and my imagination. There's a friction that's created between the things we imagine and the things that exist[5]*".

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[1] Image Retrieved from: http://www.shanelavalette.com/journal/2007/04/10/laurel-nakadate/
[2] Given the close proximity of living in Japan, Love Hotels allow for bookings of shorter periods of time, generally used as a place for sexual encounters. Love Hotels typically have eccentrically themed rooms.
[3] (Indrisek, 2006)
[4] Hyper–Reality is a construct of reality and fantasy, the construct is so convincing that it blurs the line between real and fantasy, it turns into something of its own.
[5] (Indrisek, 2006)

The notion of a proposition speaks of a proposed plan of action or scheme. I have grown up in a time where I have been encouraged to be both who I am and to be who I want to be. To be who we choose opens up the option of fabrication and in turn suggests a potential level of performance. I see neither of these aspects as a bad thing, both of which talk of being *okay* with being in a state of becoming and a willingness to 'try something on for size', that is, to try before you buy if you will - *Life on Appro[6]!* To me, social media exemplifies this idea; users must perform as 'one-self' by creating an online personal profile. Performance is led by dynamic decision-making, for example, on Facebook, it's the choice of which image to use as your profile picture and accompanying cover photo, or on Instagram, how prolific a user is in uploading photos and the nature of that uploaded imagery. The Internet's transparency and lack of walls or boundaries lends itself to a feeling of infinity—you can be anywhere, everywhere and anyone with the power of Wi-Fi. With my iPhone on one side and my laptop in front of me I feel unstoppable, these devices offer life a greater potentiality for experience. The simple act of changing ones desktop image, ring tone or phone wallpaper seems to add a level of freshness. It seems inevitable that daily experience in real time would falter in comparison to the possibilities of the online environment. The longer I am exposed to these technologies, the more I feel interconnected to these devices, as if they are new limbs. If for example, I forget my iPhone, laptop or (god-forbid) have no Wi-Fi I feel lessened, disembodied somehow.

2.4 SELFIE

When used in social media, photography has the ability to carry a constructed factual reality. These pictorial representations are somewhat stuck between the real and 'wish-it-was'. It is today with the aid of digital technology, more than ever before that photography's level of capturing realism is being questioned. Today's digital technology can deliver images that look identical to those of their predecessor, analogue photographs. This triumph in digital technology leaves room to question the photographs given quality of carrying truth. Cathy Cleland, curator, writer and researcher of new technology and digital culture states:

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[6] To buy on appro is a retail term meaning the customer has the opportunity to try and test out a product for a specified time before paying the buy price.

"We can no longer be sure that 'seeing is believing'. The Digital image combines the transformational interpretive possibilities of the representational forms of drawing and painting with the visual 'reality effect' that we have become accustomed to with the indexical images of photographs, film and video. Digital images present images that look real without necessarily having any direct referent in the physical world[7])".

In this time of uber-connection, the *selfie* seems to epitomize the notion of the provisional, but it does so with poetic whimsy. The *selfie* has become an intrinsic aspect of social media; most social networks require users to provide an image to act as an avatar for the user. The act of trying to select one image to represent oneself in a coherent way is a trying experience. By that I mean how do you pick just one image, elevating it above all other images, in order to produce an after affect that is more coherent and wonderful than you are. Andrew Durbin, poet, artist, writer and contributor for Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine states:*"The selfie has migrated across platforms and is now the most common, if not essential, unit of all social media[8]".* The *selfie* is in itself a poetic device, a term that the Mac dictionary "*helpfully defines as "an imaginative or sensitively emotional style of expression[9]"* Durbin goes on to say: " *I cannot imagine an object more sensitive, more expressive—more reflective, more confessional, too—than the selfie[10]."* For *"To take a selfie is to pause, self-reflect, and express your (emotional) self[11]."*

They say *practice makes perfect*, but somewhere along the way, it became less about representing and more about creativity and self-expression (some might also argue vanity and narcissism), allowing a moment to play and experiment, then breathe in the effect. With everyone practicing self-expression the result was ubiquitous - *selfies* swarming social media. The higher frequency of images being uploaded resulted in an evident shift, emerging in the way we document images of ourselves, and the lives we live. A short shelf life surfaced, an 'it's all about new' attitude. No longer did a singular attitude to self suffice, but a more experimental and ephemeral approach was required. This ephemeral attitude speaks of recognition of the momentary, it allows a glimpse into how the subject felt or wanted to feel. It is as if, through extreme use of technology, we as users

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[7] (Cleland, 2008)
[8] (Durbin)
[9] (Durbin)
[10] (Durbin)
[11] (Durbin)

have accepted the unattainability of capturing ourselves coherently, but have now adopted this technology (our cell-phones, digital cameras and laptops) and fulfilled it with a sense of embodiment. Other than the potentiality of likes and self elation from sharing *selfies*, Durbin raises the question of what users actually gain by performing the *selfie*.

"Selfies suggest—as a practice—formal strategies that speak to the essential struggle to self-image on the web, an inherently weak structure for the formulation (and actualization) of a supposedly coherent self. Do these images temporarily stabilize you[12]?"

This is an interesting point, could the process of creating and sharing self-curated images of self have the ability to fill the subject with a sense of wholeness or coherency and as a result present the subject with a true moment of stability?

Artists Jillian Mayer, Tyler Madsen and Erik Carter are a group of artists who created the website *selfeed.com*. With the by-line *"all selfies all day[13]"* the website *Selfeed* is literally that. Flickering at an erratic and high pace across the screen is a live feed of images that have been hash tagged with the word *selfie* off the website Instagram. A variety of 'image participants' flick across the screen: kittens, teenage girls, men's bare chests, unrelated texts, group photos of families and friends, close ups—there is no sense of discrimination. My screen shots from this website demonstrate the randomness of the images; I don't know what images I've captured until I check my desktop.

It's dizzying to watch. It moves at such a pace I have to try and stabilize myself as a viewer. I try to focus or grasp a hold of one image, but the task is impossible, the images keep rolling over in a blur.

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[12] (Durbin)
[13] (Mayer)

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Figure 2-2[14]   **Figure 2-3**[15]

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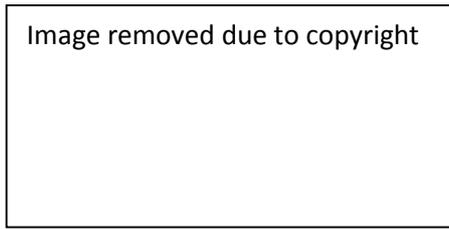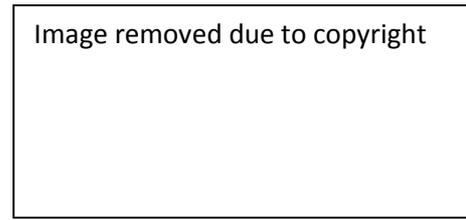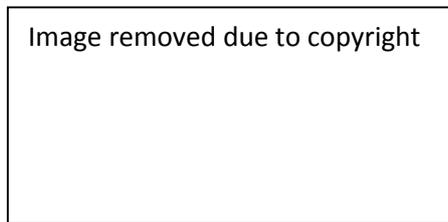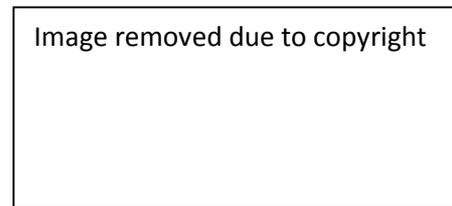
Figure 2-4[16]   **Figure 2-5**[17]

The fragmentary experience is a common investigation in Jillian Mayer's practice, her work explores the "*fragmenting consequences of Internet usage through some of its most ubiquitous media—catchy pop songs, humorous YouTube videos, chat rooms and ephemeral linkages[18]"*. Mayer works in a variety of disciplines such as websites, short films, photography, performances and installation. Her work imitates the state of ephemerality that is so common with Internet based ideas, but she does so in real time and space, which exuberates the pitfalls of trying to achieve technologically conceived singularity.

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[14] Jillian Mayer, Tyler Madsen and Erik Carter. Selfeed.com (2014), Screen shot from the website selfeed.com on 02/10/2014

[15] Jillian Mayer, Tyler Madsen and Erik Carter. Selfeed.com (2014), Screen shot from the website selfeed.com on 02/10/2014

[16] Jillian Mayer, Tyler Madsen and Erik Carter. Selfeed.com (2014), Screen shot from the website selfeed.com on 02/10/2014

[17] Jillian Mayer, Tyler Madsen and Erik Carter. Selfeed.com (2014), Screen shot from the website selfeed.com on 02/10/2014

[18] (SCHULTZ , 2014)

2.5 UTOPIAN DAYDREAMS AND MAKING DREAMS

"Glamour cannot exist without personal social envy being a common and widespread emotion. The industrial society, which has moved towards democracy and then stopped half way, is the ideal society for generating such an emotion. The pursuit of happiness has been acknowledged as a universal right. Yet the existing social conditions make the individual feel powerless. He lives in the contradiction between what he is and what he would like to be. Either he then becomes fully conscious of the contradiction and its causes, and so joins the political struggle for a full democracy which entails, amongst other things, the overflow of capitalism; or else he lives, continually subject to an envy which, compounded with his sense of powerlessness, dissolves into recurrent day-dreams[19]".

Although this quote from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was written in 1972 as a 4-part series of 30 minutes made for TV films, its core value remains relevant in contemporary society and relates to my discussion of the condition of the desire for more. The juxtaposition of two ideas, "*what he is and what he would like to be[20]*," speaks to the dilemma faced by the current collective involved with social media.

The pursuit for happiness and self-improvement is ripe. The best selling self-help book *The Secret[21]* suggests a strategy for actualizing happiness in ones own life by creating a vision board. It's simple really… "*You want a hot body? You want a Bugatti? You want a Maserati? …[22]*" Instead of taking the advice of pop icon Brittany Spears (*You better work b**ch),* rather, *The Secret* suggests you gather a variety of images of elements that literally depict how you would like to see yourself and your life. The following vision board demonstrates the typical aesthetic of the genre, which remarkably resembles my schoolbooks as a tween. I obtained this image through a Google image

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[19] (Davis, 2014)

[20] (Davis, 2014)

[21] *The Secret* has had over 19 million copies sold and translation into 46 languages since its release in 2006. This best-selling self-help book was released as a follow up to an earlier film, which carried the same name. Written by Rhonda Bryne, The Secret utilizes the law of attraction, like attracts like, in order to attract yourself better health, wealth, love and happiness.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Secret_(book).

[22] "*You want a Lamborghini? Sippin' martinis? Look hot in a bikini?*" Lyrics from Britney Spears song *Work B**ch* released in 2013 off her album Britney Jean

search; it is one of thousands of similar boards. On the website the user claimed that "Just About Everything Came True with my 2009 Vision Board[23]", those are some great results!

Image removed due to copyright

24

Through positive visualization and surrounding yourself in potent imagery, *The Secret* claims the universe can return to you, your desires. Maybe this is how you are using social media now? As a virtual and public mood board of how we wish we were. Our obsessive if not ritualistic involvement has saturated the world with images that offer endless models for how to perceive and represent ourselves.

Some may argue Utopia as a straightforward notion, as an idealised society or space. British social philosopher and writer Sir Thomas Moore coined the term *Utopia* in 1516, as the title of his book. Moore's *Utopia* discussed an imaginary and idealised island nation's political system. The title *Utopia* was an amalgamation of the Greek words *'ou* – not; *eu*-good or well; *topos* – place; *ia* – region[25]'. From the terms inception, the word carried contradictory and ambiguous references, simultaneously

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[23] (Ronzoni, 2009)
[24] Image sourced from http://www.cindyronzoni.com/vision-casting-for-2010review-of-2009.html on 02/10/2014
[25] (Johnson, 2012)

good or well and to do with space *yet un-locatable*[26]. Foucault states in his 1967 essay *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* that:

> *"Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces[27]."*

I have come to the conclusion of late, that the future is where I should be. All my present behaviour is pointing to it: my constant to-do lists, social media curation and my increasingly frequent online shopping habit. There, the problems and hassles that permeate my current days will cease to bring me down. Take going to the grocery store as an example, as a student I'm on a budget I'm constantly being forced to make decisions between products in terms of price and quality (I'm aware we all have to do this, but it doesn't lessen the blow). I do my best to buy the highest quality, my mother taught me well, but I have been marginalised into a lesser price bracket. In our current existence this lower price bracket means I have to leave the shop with less: *less* colour, *less* shine, *less* frills. You know I work with what I have; I'm the queen of rocking a tight budget, but I believe I deserve something better than this. I actually want full blooming luminous colour, I want the freshest, and I want the biggest crunch with just the right amount of tang to counter act the sweetness. The future will offer me this. The future will offer difference, but only in terms of things of a similar high quality, there will be no gradient of status, only the best will suffice. To live with such a purpose means its pertinent I suspend my level of disbelief for longer. If I can practice this suspension, then I will have more.

One way in which I practice suspension is through the act of daydreaming, for daydreaming is a highly proactive task. Sociology lecturer at the Bath Spa University and editor of the independent *Heterotopian Studies* website Peter Johnson states…

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[26] (Johnson, 2012)
[27] (Foucault, 1967)

"Day Dreams have the presentiment of what we want, need and lack, what we hope to find. Unlike dreams, they are not repressed or forgotten desires and experiences, they point to real possibilities (1998: xxxii). Day dreams can be escapist and mundane but they also contain a 'proactive' element that can be nurtured and clarified[28]."

As a teenager I went through a phase of relishing bedtime, this time allowed me to remove myself from my current reality and permitted me to enter into a temporal time and space where I was able to customise a positive existence (in my head). In my single bed under the fading florescent green glow of the blue-tacked stars that hovered above me, I would begin my nightly ritual of making dreams. To begin with, I would choose a location for the actions to take place; a sunny shore, a shopping mall, school for example - once the location was established, details of the setting would be finalised. One by one I would resolve such questions as: what time of day, what background sounds are audible? Next, I would move onto my appearance. This whole scenario was probably akin to playing the video game The Sims[29], not that I had experienced that game at this stage of my life. I would focus so explicitly on the details of my curated aspiration that I would inevitably fall into a real dream, only to wake in the morning to the reality of the present day.

Johnson states that …

"The utopic is a non-place and a real place, 'half-fictional and half-real', closed and open, concentrated and dispersed, near and far, present and absent. It is a paradoxical, contradictory space, opposite the everyday[30]".

This window of opportunity I activated as a child may have been an illusion, it may not have even been real. Nevertheless, the more I want, the more I realise it mustn't be real, but rather, an ideal. That's the thing with the present; it has such blaring limitations. In the future, these things will be resolved; the future is plentiful and full of possibilities waiting to be picked upon.

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[28] (Johnson, 2012, pp. 2-3)

[29] *The Sims* is a series of computer games first released for Microsoft windows in February 2000. *The Sims* is open-ended and requires the player to create "virtual people called 'Sims'". The user then has control over their "Sims" and must help nurture their moods and satisfy their desires. Players can either place their Sims in pre-constructed homes or build them themselves" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sims.

[30] (Johnson, 2012, p.6)

2.6 HETEROTOPIAN PROBLEMS

"Heterotopias are not aesthetic spaces and they are not related to failure, or the restrictions, or boundaries of thought. They set themselves in contrast to the upper case 'Utopia', offering a more modest role, but nevertheless, providing an alternative 'reservoir of imagination[31]'".

In addition to the idea of utopia, is that of heterotopia. Heterotopias are a problem for me. "*Foucault describes heterotopias as 'localisable' utopias or 'actually realised' utopias[32]*", which highlights one of the problematic features of a heterotopia. For anything disguising itself under the guise of utopia in this present time is *clearly not* utopia, it's the unpredictable heterotopia, which as persistently as it tries, mustn't be mistaken for the glistening hope of utopia. My biggest fear is once I get to the future and begin lavishly living it up in utopia, it's going to melt down before me, revealing its cheaply made-up face is that of a heterotopia. I live in anticipatory dread of such an event.

Although Foucault never specifically states what a heterotopia *is*, he provides lengthy discussion around what it could be as well as six principles to help define it. The space in which a child's imaginary games take place is a helpful example in conceptualising heterotopias. Foucault suggests that the physical real play area the child inhabits transforms into an imaginary world, allowing the child to move across multiple scenes and times in the space of one game. Foucault cites that there are probably real places in every culture that act as counter sites, where Utopias are staged. Within these sites, other sites within culture are "*simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted[33]*". Foucault describes these places as being outside of all other places, even though they may be physically located in reality, but because of their absolute difference to the other sites they reflect and speak about; Foucault terms them, in contrast to utopias, *heterotopias*.

The heterotopic space has specific qualities, in that initially it must be enacted and in doing so it presents a mirror-like quality. Yet in its reflection, it distorts and refracts, whereby it becomes capable of both inverting images of time and space. Heterotopia can be seen as utopian, yet it questions the utopia it speaks of—it reflects both

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[31] *(Foucault, 1998: 185)* (Johnson, 2012)
[32] (Johnson, 2012)
[33] (Foucault , 1967)

what is real and what is imagined. A fundamental difference between utopias and heterotopias, besides heterotopia's physical location within reality and utopia's lack of location and reality, is to do with time. Heterotopias are able to link past with present while utopias link present with future. *Wonder Lux* is situated somewhere between these two spaces, in order to establish potentiality and a sense of something yet to be determined. The project utilizes images of past and present like the heterotopic space, but it reflects back an aspirational image of what could be yet to come. So in the latter sense, the future orientated aspect of the work and its refusal to be located in the present or past is what links the work with the concept of utopia.

2.6.1 FACEBOOK AS HETEROTOPIA:

Johnson states …

> *"Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and meddle with our sense of interiority. They are somehow out of step and in step at the same time. There is no pure form of heterotopia, but different combinations, different intensities, each reverberating with all the others. In a sense, they do not function fully except in relation to each other[34]".*

In Facebook, profiles and events are constructed through carefully curated images and text. The Facebook profile can be seen as an example of a site where reality slides into something more fantastical. It is here that the term, Heterotopia seems more appropriate. Facebook, although a digital space, lends itself to operate in a Heterotopic way. Facebook is deeply rooted in its connection with ideas of the self, present/past and community.

My interest in the idea of heterotopia first came from connecting the concept of Heterotopia to my experience of Facebook. A couple of summers ago, I reunited with some old school friends. On all accounts, my reflection of the experience was uncomfortable, as I struggled to gain common ground and ease. The photos from that evening were uploaded to Facebook a month after the event. Smiling back from the screen, a group of happy young women, a unified force enjoying a fabulous night out. My Facebook notifications indicated a friend had tagged me in the photos, my participation was unavoidable. By engaging with the photos, I activated the

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[34] (Johnson, 2012, p.15)

Heterotopia, the reflection was an inverted copy of events. It reflected something that in my experience never happened, yet somehow it appeared it did.

3. METHOD

3.1 APPROACH

My method of bringing together an unlikely alliance of images is not to create a heterotopia or utopia, but to explore the darker aspect of their impact on contemporary life. It's a terrifying feeling when you realise that these ideals (through images) are swarming in and building up, and that you can only suppress the knowing for so long. The sensibility I am interested in is how that tacit awareness of the illusion, the denial, the manipulation and the repression of knowing about this situation, can create in us a deeper anxiety. The method employed here is to explore these ideas and sensibilities, not to illustrate them.

Wonder Lux draws together imagery in ways that they don't appear to sit in a fine and relaxed accommodation with each other; rather my intention is that they come together in a way that hints towards a level of anxiety and tension. The images work to aggravate the condition rather than reproduce the condition. By mingling in an uncomfortable alliance with each other, they refer to this potential nightmare. The nightmare is the realisation that it's all an illusion and that one day you may not be able to prolong the fantasy.

3.2 INFLUX

From all directions *Images* saturate my waking life. The channel I overtly connect to the highest influx of images is the Internet. Growing up it was the basic TV screen with channels 1, 2 and 3, now seemingly obsolete and replaced by my 13-inch MacBook screen and the modest screen of my iPhone. Now, given I'm in a WIFI zone, the channels seem infinite. Sleep occasionally offers respite, but more often than not my dreamland is loaded with repressed memories and odd imagery filtered in from my everyday. Walking down grocery aisles, I'm faced by a myriad of advertising images and fancy packages. Perusing the mall, the decked out window displays beckon me into their playground's admittance through purchase. I find no escape from the influx. Consequently as a method, *Wonder Lux* is primarily concerned with working with an abundance of images.

3.3 SCATTERGORIES

I gather images from public profiles on the social networking site Facebook; I call this method of gathering *scattegories.* Typically I seek out a comment on a 'like page' that has a large following, then aimlessly scroll through lists of profiles generated by the 'users who liked this' feature on Facebook. When a profile picture captures my attention, I open it in another tab. I continue this process until I exhaust all available tabs (either on my computer or possible links to look at – whichever comes first). As I gather suitably desirable images[35] I bank them into a pool folder on my desktop. These images are selected out of multitudes; they are neither definitive nor significant. I do my best to select out of the myriad of images available to me. There is no possibility of knowing what would be the optimum image, these are just the images I have caught as they run past.

The pool images appear disparate from one another. However upon further inspection, the images often seem to repeat themselves, not identically, but with enough similarities or commonality that they then generate loose groups, types or further categories.

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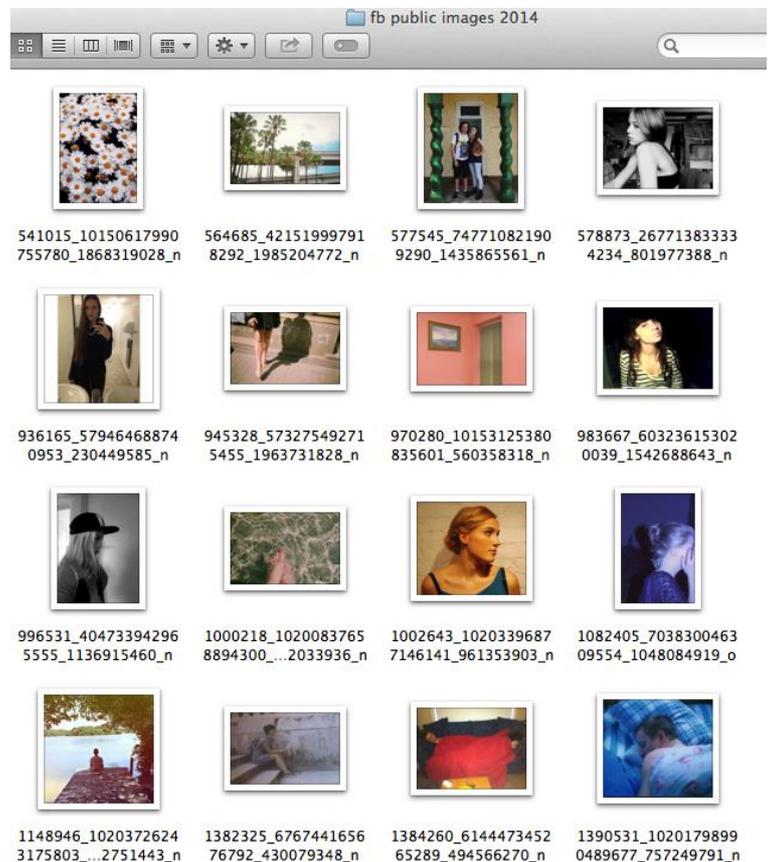
[35] It is worth noting here my criteria for image gathering, when I term an image *suitably desirable* it can be deemed this for a number of reasons. Firstly it has to appeal to my visual taste, things such as colour, high tonal range, framing, images composed in a way that may refer to advertising images or have a level of glamour, something that appears 'fresh'. However the opposite has its appeal also, like the particularly banal. The banal seems to add an admonishing whisper, offering a bias in the work, a whisper of the all too real, everything we as a culture seem to be striving to distance ourselves from.
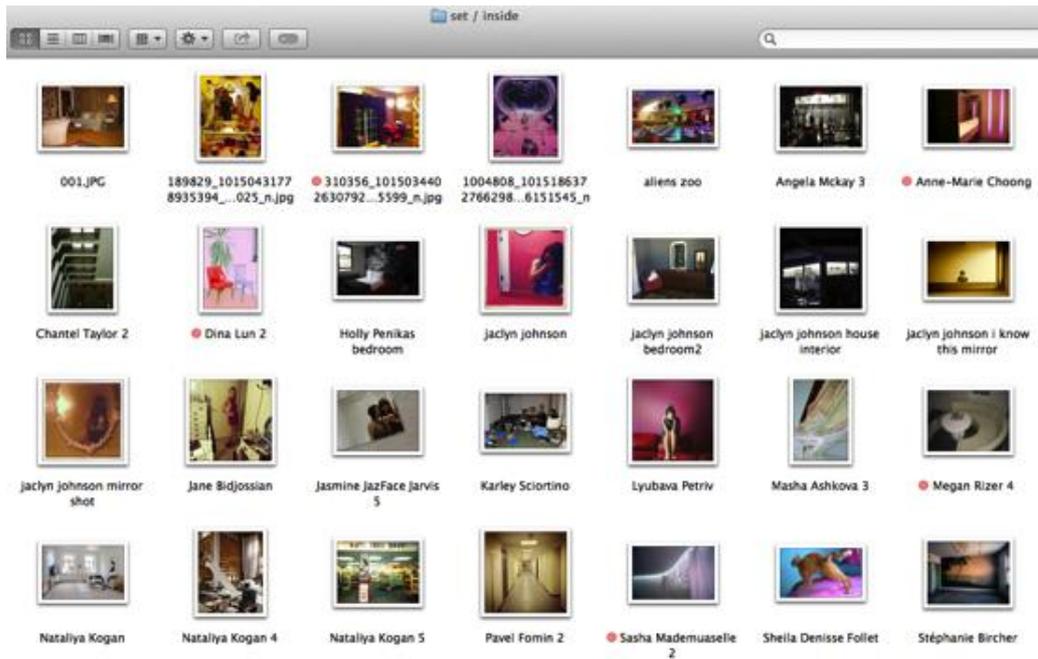
I have been using this approach for a number of years and as a result I have built up a number of categorized folders. Over the years these folders have continued to multiply. Certain subtleties seem to merit their own category and these newer categories act as sub genres. Images can often perform under the guise of multiple themes of categories, so this process in itself seems to be an endless part of the project; categorizing and then questioning what ties the category together before creating more.

3.4 DIFFERENT MODES OF REPRESENTATION

Wonder Lux utilises a variety of modes of representation. At the core of the work are painted images and black and white A4 photocopied images. Projected images made by OHP and digital projectors are often utilised a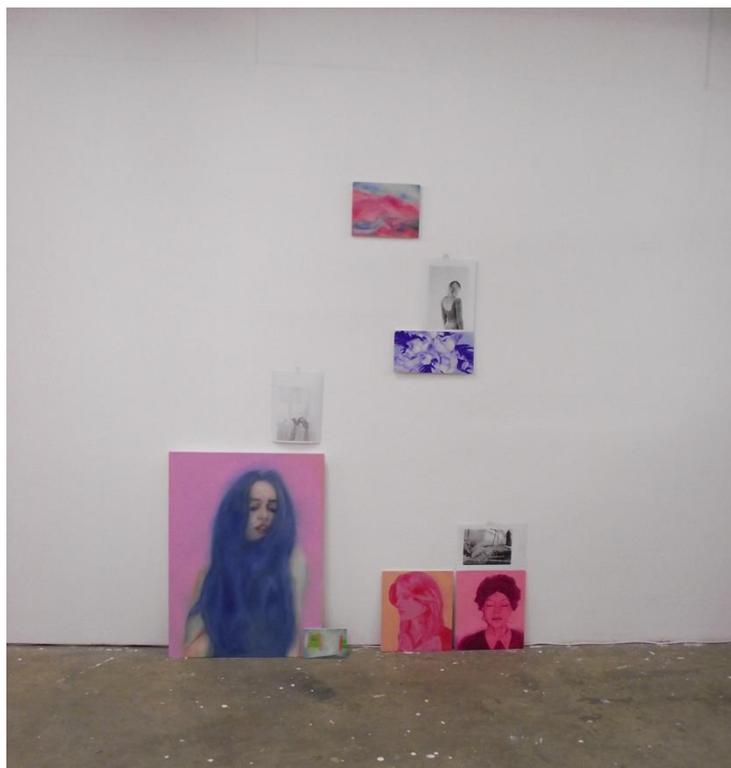s well as seemingly random elements such as swatches, photographs and OHP paper. I will further discuss in more detail my choices in ways to represent within this project.

The photocopy was initially utilized in my studio practice as a fast way of dealing with ideas, for me it was like a preparatory drawing. I was able to quickly test out how the work might feel when certain images were paired or grouped together. At this time, the photocopies acted as source imagery to be translated into paintings, however I found on many occasions through the translation process, that the painting would result into something that felt completely different to the potency of the photocopy, sometimes less than. This offered a way forward in dealing with images, the photocopied image earned itself some status. Photocopies have the ability to act as an echo. When using Facebook, I tend to scroll through images at a high pace, a whirl of colour and shapes flood my newsfeed. It is a common experience to see an image and to remember I have seen an image just like it, but not to be able to remember how to locate it—*or* to forget about an image entirely only to locate it again by chance. This experience has more potential to take place when dealing with the multiple; if I were to work with just paintings of these images, the work would be just paintings about sourced images. Rather by introducing other modes of material/representation into the work, like the photocopied images, it allows the

Figure 3-1: Installation at Sanderson Gallery: Kirsten Fitzsimons. Untitled (2014), Oil and acrylic paintings on hardboard (various sizes), A4 photocopied paper.

25

work to take on greater potential for ways of looking in and out of what we're seeing. This counteracts the original experience, I have when dealing with images online.

Figure 3-2: Kirsten Fitzsimons. Studio install details, Untitled (2014), Oil and acrylic paintings on hardboard various sizes, Data projection and A4 photocopied paper.

In my process, I often attempt to elevate and liberate particular elements of the work with a sense of gravitas. The photocopy was one of these elements; the question of density was asked numerous times in the way of how many elements I installed, and their proximity to each other.

Figure 3-3: Kirsten Fitzsimons. Untitled (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard 300 x 250mm, A4 photocopied paper, gesso and acrylic on hardboard 1200 x 1200mm.

When it was fewer paintings and singular photocopy, the photocopy acted as a type of source image, while in contrast, when there is an abundance of images both painted and photocopied, the ubiquity offered the potential for the photocopied images to take on a more significant role. They become more active and potent.
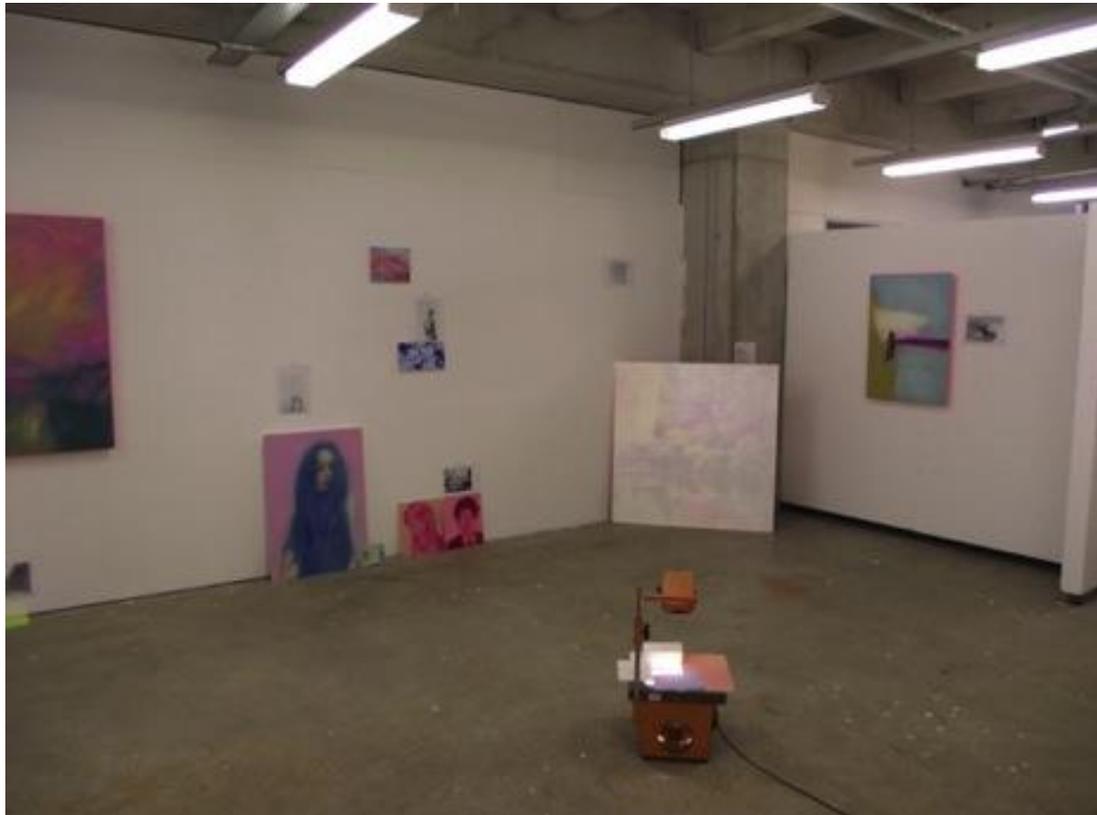

Figure 3-4: Kirsten Fitzsimons. Detail of Talk week installation (2014), Oil and acrylic paintings on various sizes of hardboard, OHP projection, A4 photocopied paper.

Before my dependency on the Internet, I learnt things through reading books. My shoulders understood the weight of books. My hands understood that either at the very start or the end of the book, the odd angle would cause the pages to try and evade my grasp. My photocopy credit understood the perils of trying to print those peculiarly larger than A3 page spread books. I grew up understanding the book as a form, much as I have grown to understand the photocopier. The photocopied image is one I recognise, years of office work and study have gifted me this. The photocopied image becomes another identity for image; it comes with capabilities and limitations. An understood truth of the photocopied image is its limitations. The photocopier restricts you to print only at a certain size; it means the image can only be proportionally printed to the size it allows you to. The images I use are not printed to their original size; instead they're printed as large as the photocopier allows me to. This is an

understood quality of the photocopied image. I'm stuck within the current capacity/ potential/ limitations of the black and white photocopied image.

3.5 REFRESH: FLEXIBLE PROPOSALS

Looking on the bright side and seeing the silver linings—that's the attitude I strive to take. I try to see things (situations, people, experiences…) for their potential, to downplay the doubt and to play upon the positive. This approach to life is mimicked by my social media profile and my art making. You rarely see a negative status update or a poorly composed profile pic on Facebook, as a site to communicate only the positive will suffice. The Facebook profile has become a testing ground for 'self'; it allows users to try things on for size. To use social media in this way means the user must adopt a propositional nature and acceptance and be championing of change. It's all about being the best you can be, while being aware that the best is yet to come. My approach to making art mimics this attitude; I approach my studio practice by creating a body of work that is in an ongoing state of change in responsive dialogue with what has happened before. *Wonder Lux* is progressive, its not a case of making one body of work then rejecting the old in order to deal with a new idea, rather, when dealing with making work I continue to build and change upon what I have. It mimics the way I travel the Internet.

In the making of work, I am not attempting to contrive a commonality, or coherent narrative. Rather it is the potential that I'm working towards, the images have the ability to open up a world of potential through their potency. I am interested in the varying possibilities that could occur as the installation shimmies[36] and changes. To make new work, new utterances, the installation moves through intuitive placements: this could go here… this could sit on its side … what would happen if I projected onto this? Pieces move in and out of storage, being refreshed and revitalised by their placement within the installation environment.

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[36] To shimmy in my vocabulary means to move things around according to mood and impulse.

Figure 3-6: Kirsten Fitzsimons. Installation view (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 860x 612mm and A4 photocopied paper.

Relationships between images always remain provisional, as they are never intended to be at a point of stasis. A way of dealing with the images is to search for links. Once the painting of the legs (Figure 3-1) sat on its side, the purple line from the painting flowed into the photocopied river sitting to its right. The painted blue flowers (In figure 3-5) mimicked the curves of the small of the young women's back as the shadows of the flowers matched the creases in her dress. This is one of their games, mimicking each other; flowing in and out of each other's picture frames. Once you relax your eyes these visual games make themselves rather apparent.

Figure 3-5 Kirsten Fitzsimons. Installation view: *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 400x 200mm and A4 Photocopied paper.

Images can take you somewhere else. As another example there is a photocopy of a blossom tree on my studio wall – the photographers cropping or perhaps the cropping from the photocopier, resulted in the stem of the tree being cropped out of the image, this loss of original content

and context lends the tree to take on other suggestive forms: *I'm a cloud!* Once you start viewing images with a looser less literal gaze, you can draw comparisons between images and find repeated motifs and patterns, much like spectatorship on the internet where images are often re-contextualised due to the way they are represented.

Installation is used as a way of constructing space so that the images appear to interact with each other while creating qualities that are inclusively dynamic, provisional, tentative, and in a constant state of flux. Through dealing with multiple registers of imagery, I've come to appreciate the removed and unstable nature of imagery. Images have the ability to open up a world of possibilities and associations. Using the example of a set or a stage for a show here, the images don't necessarily amalgamate into a cohesive set; rather they act as a pile of related and random things that people have brought to the set to argue for place and relationship within the show. That is, in this process … *this could relate with this, and then to that, this and this could go together*... their relationship is deliberately provisional, incomplete and dynamic. The images perform in the eye of the spectator, they ask for comparisons and linkages to be made. The images both receive and emit, playing with the idea of chance and suggestion[37]. Random thoughts and images bring you in and out of different levels of cognition and consciousness. Gaps are produced through these momentarily triggered flights here both the flight and the gap leave us with things that are potentially dislocated.
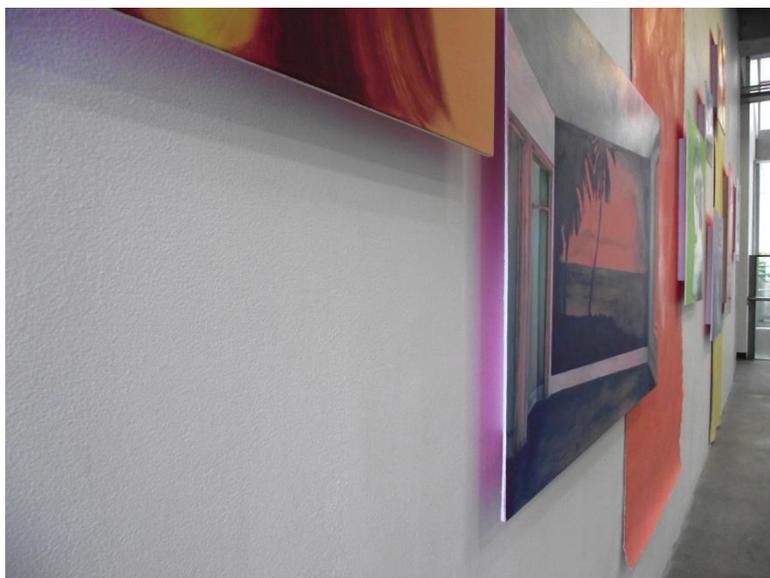

Figure 3-7 Kirsten Fitzsimons. Installation detail *Untitled* (2013), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200x 1200mm

Wonder Lux intends to appeal and attract. Drenched in cheery colours and an electric pink glow that peeps behind the back of the larger panels and lush images, the installation points towards a world we're not living in. There is a quiet hum of tension that reverberates through the work, like the dull

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[37] Similar to being in conversation with another person, when your mind suddenly wanders away and you are actively thinking about the cauliflower you picked up for 90 cents and whether you're in the mood for mac cheese and cauliflower for dinner tonight.

churning of anxiety in the pit of the stomach. *Wonder Lux* draws upon the tacit awareness that the way we are living could all be an illusion. This project seeks to niggle at the denial, the manipulation and the repression of this silent knowingness.

Elements of the work appear brittle, for example, the paintings sit on thin wafer-like supports hovering from the wall, and the paintings themselves seem to have rejected the real in order to achieve a hallucinatory state. In the peripheral, there are reminders of the real, admonishing us to calm down, to settle our speed, however everything sits in close succession to each other, seemingly rubbing each other the wrong way. Specifically, the intent is to create installations that don't appear to be in the first instance provisional, but the longer the time spent looking, the elements start to gently falter, appearing insecure and a little brittle. My Mac dictionary provides the definition of *insecure* as something *"not firm or fixed; liable to give way or break"* and the term *brittle*, as something "*appearing decisive or cheerful but unstable or nervous within".* Both of these terms communicate the perils one must grapple with in order to suspend their level of disbelief, to muffle the doubt, so they can continue to live in a state of utopian hope. One must attempt to permanently paint on a bright face and naively reject doubt in order to suspend reality. The suspension itself is always teetering and thus the wonderful world of *Wonder Lux* remains in a state of flux.

4. CONCLUSION

This project has explored how a collective involvement with social media, which has become obsessive if not ritualistic, has saturated our world with mediated images that offer endless models for how we might perceive and represent ourselves. While absorbed in the opportunities and seduced by the excesses that recent technologies have brought, such as the Internet, I indulge knowingly and willingly in the illusory reality they offer. I have adapted to this, so that my daily life seems now to offer limitless possibilities, without consequence. I am lost to the power of this seduction.

As an art project *Wonder Lux* has investigated this problematic relationship between the actual and the ideal, as I attempt through art to construct a personal reality where the actual and the ideal are one and the same. The images are endless, and I imagine endless mediations that could be pursued, unless I manage some other means to accommodate a changing world.

5. APENDECIES

My Exhibition site presented some definitive features to work with. For example the space was topped with a prominent metal grate, I liked how this was reminiscent to the grates you would find in gallery or museum archive rooms to store works on. This provided a correlation with the idea of collections and that of memorabilia in a more domestic sense. The layout of the space (three walls and floor) created a closed in area. The space allowed for the work to be installed from the ground up to the grates and everywhere in between.
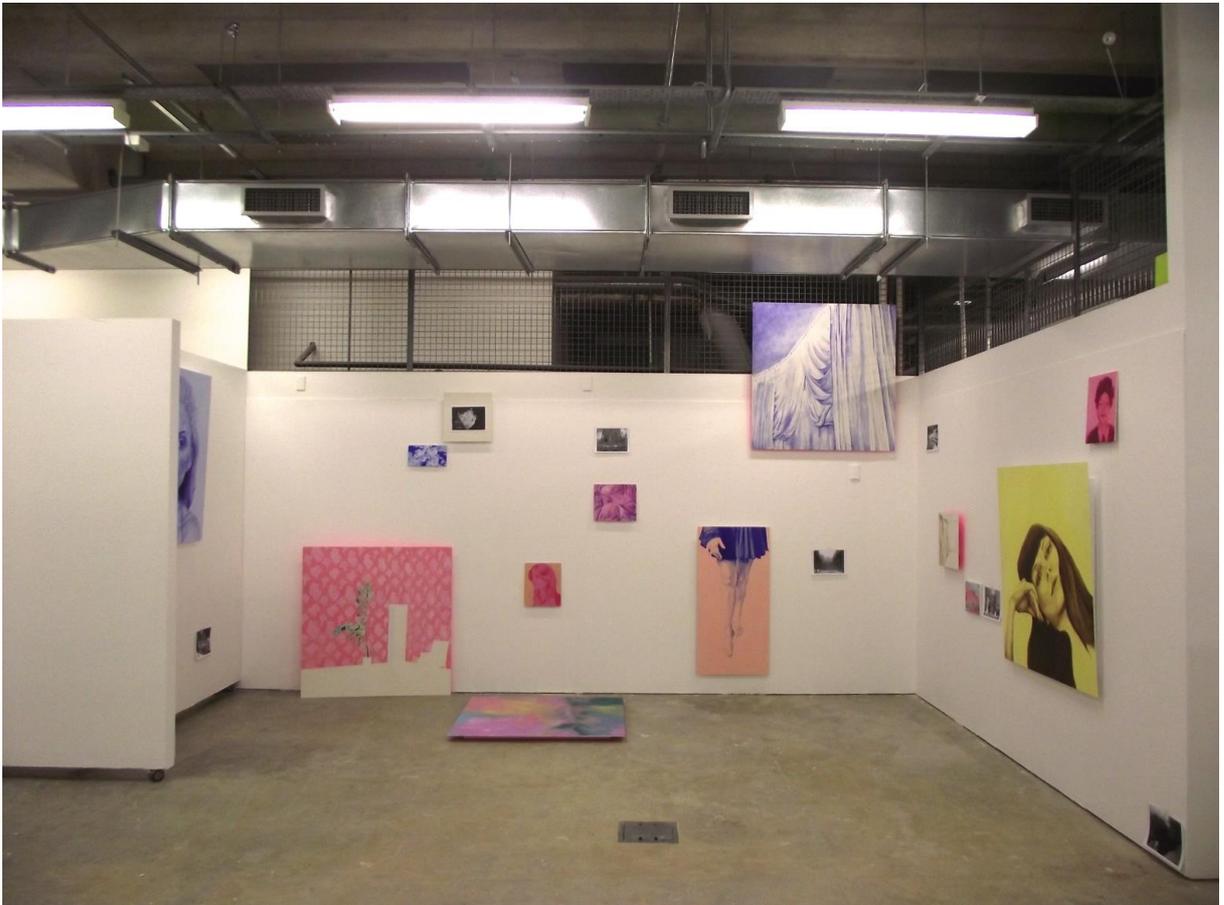

Figure 5-1 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Wonder Lux* (2014), Installation View, Oil and Acrylic Paintings on hardboard, paper photocopies and masking tape.

Figure 5-2 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Wonder Lux* (2013)*,* Installation View, Oil and Acrylic Paintings on hardboard, paper photocopies and masking tape.
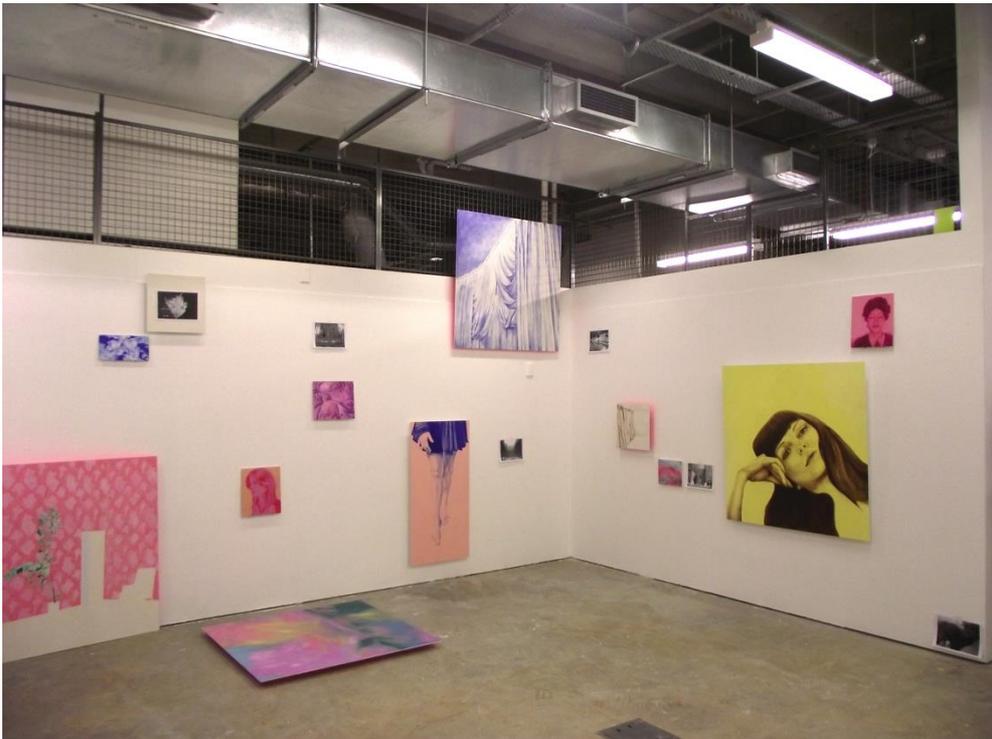

Figure 5-3 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Wonder Lux* (2014)*,* Installation View, Oil and Acrylic Paintings on hardboard, paper photocopies and masking tape.

Figure 5-4 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Wonder Lux* (2014) Installation detail.

Figure 5-5 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and Acrylic paint on hard board, 1200mm x 1200mm
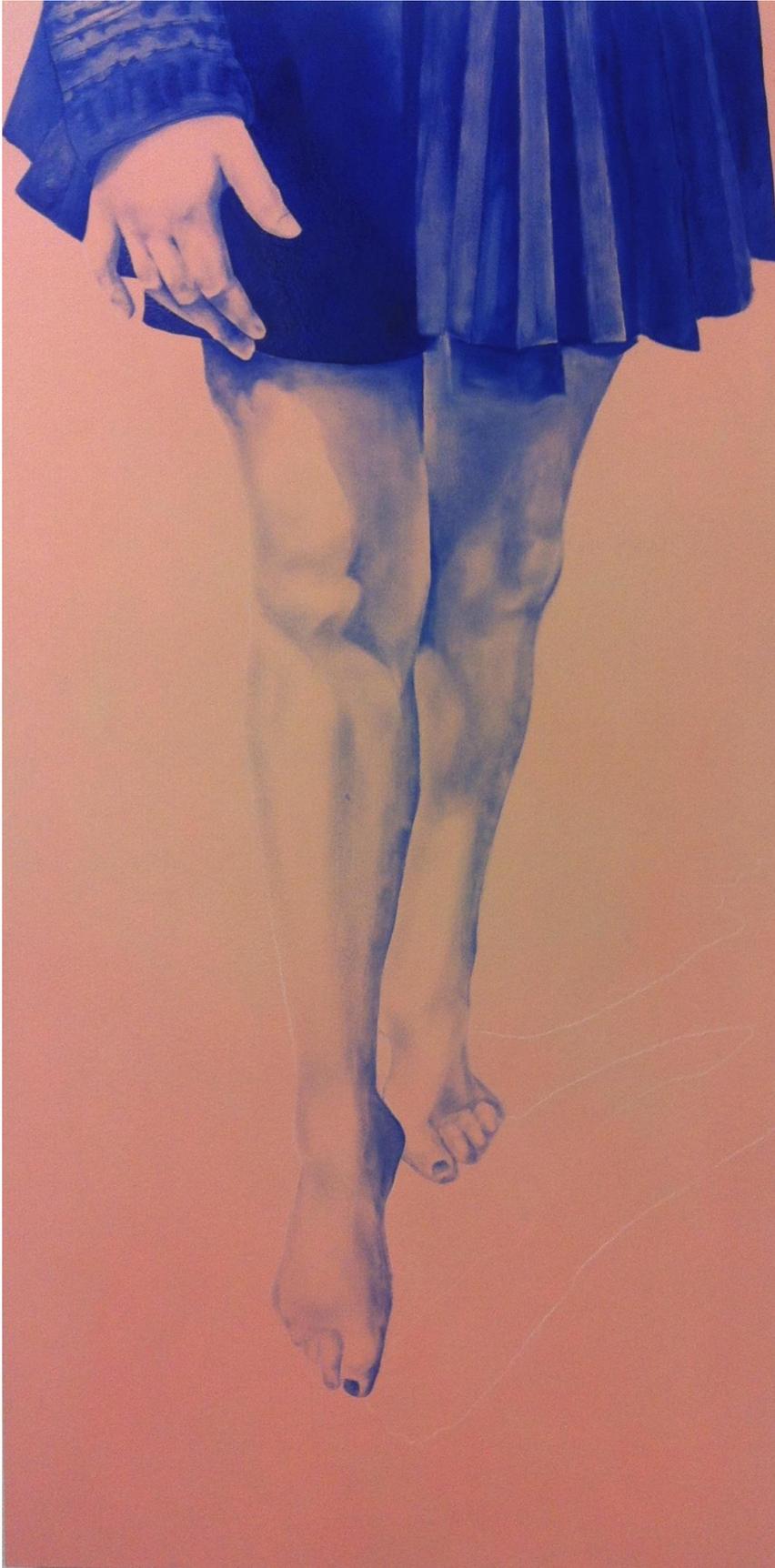
Figure 5-6 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and Acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200mm x 600mm

Figure 5-7 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and Acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200mm x 1200mm

Figure 5-8 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200x 1200mm

Figure 5-9 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200x 1200mm

Figure 5-11 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 400x 200mm

Figure 5-10 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 300 x 250mm

Figure 5-12 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 300x 210mm

Figure 5-13 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 175 x 125mm
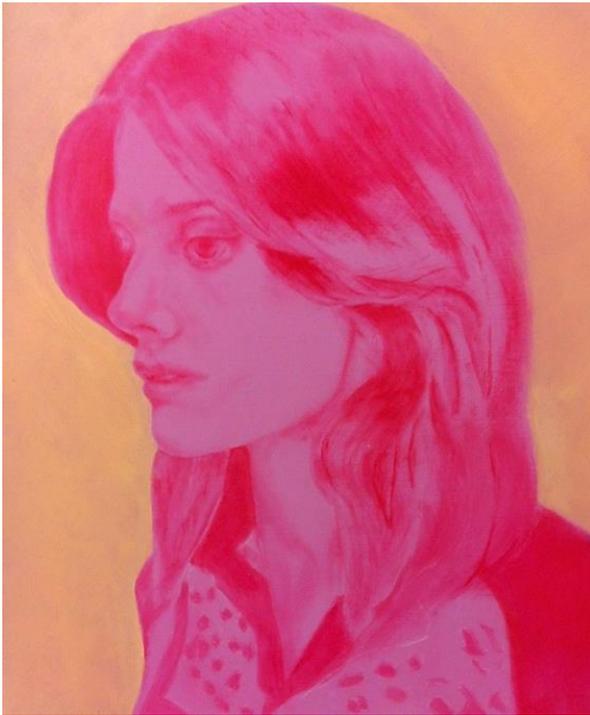
Figure 5-14 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 400x 400mm
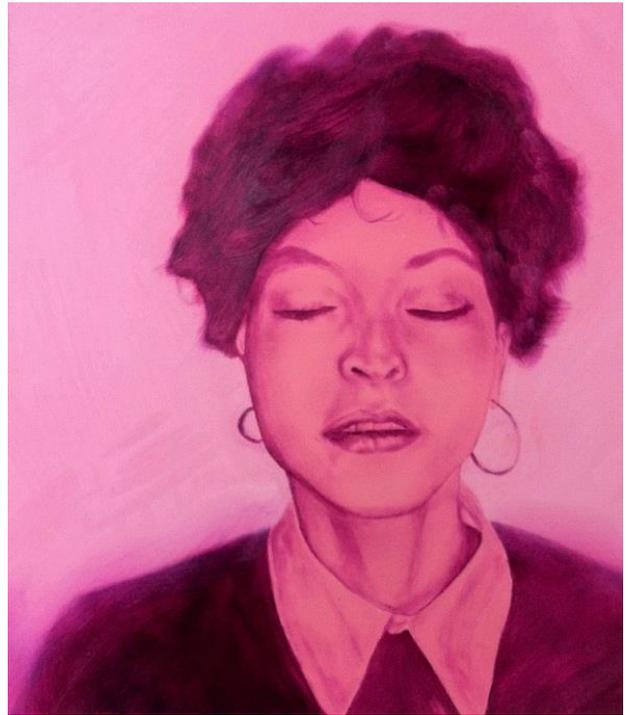

Figure 5-15 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014) Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 400x 400mm

Figure 5-16 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled (detail) (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 860x 612mm*

Figure 5-17 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014) Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard. 400x 400mm

Figure 5-18 Kirsten Fitzsimons. *Untitled* (2014), Oil and acrylic paint on hardboard, 860x 612mm
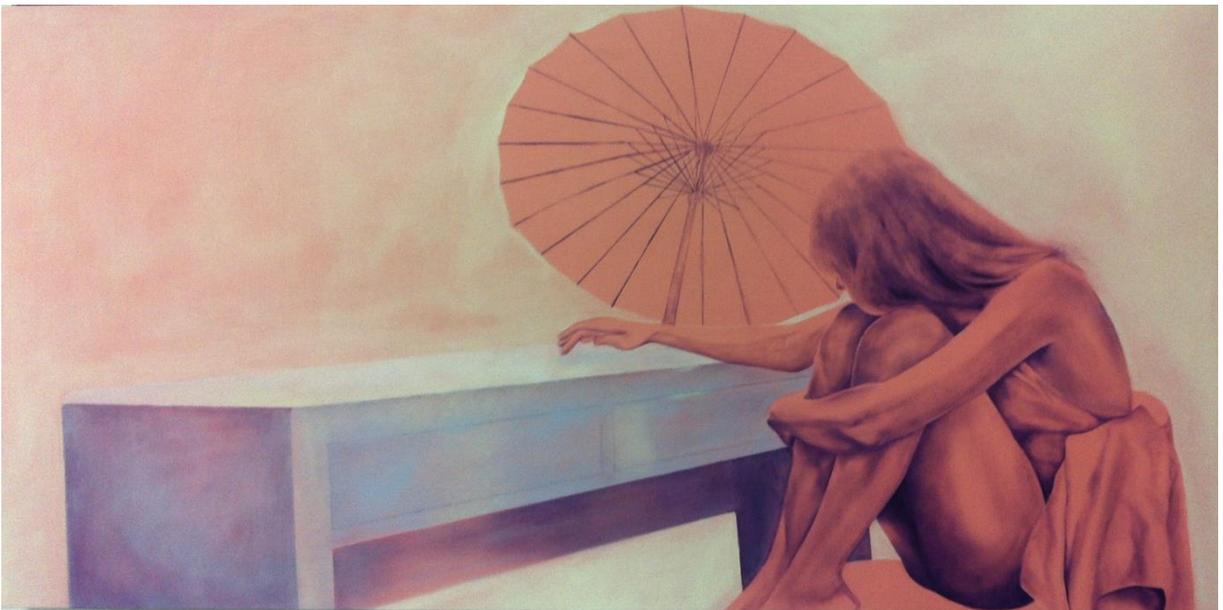

Figure 5-19 Kirsten Fitzsimons. Untitled (2014), Oil and Acrylic paint on hardboard, 1200mm x 600mm

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