

Painting: Adventures in a Marginal Aesthetic

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Cover Image; Detail of *Untitled (To Shelve)*

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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, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly stated in the citation). Nor does it contain any material that to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed, Abbey Lyman.

4th October 2018

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Abstract

This project explores how a relationship between consonance and dissonance can operate as a dynamic interplay that is constantly at work during the process of painting. It also explores how this interaction operates as a constantly shifting aesthetic territory that is central to the life of my practice. This comes from questioning how my decision-making processes accommodate incongruent qualities that work together to somehow open up possibilities. The project looks at the relationship between a deeply rooted sense of order, the disruptive qualities that are continually emerging in the painting, and how this dynamic is used positively in the art to prevent the work from falling into a passive state of resolution.

Introduction



Figure 1. *Untitled (Trailing)*

Painting: Adventures in a Marginal Aesthetic is a practice-led project that sustains its own progression through its own research. The dynamic relationship between elements of consonance, order, and structure push the act of painting towards dissonance. Ultimately widening and shifting the aesthetic territory in which this project operates. This ever changing aesthetic territory challenges my own tendencies in making and perceiving art, as well as highlighting my own attraction to both the familiar and unfamiliar. By questioning my inclination towards order and working through the unexamined application of habit, I am able to move the painting process further away from structure and into a space of liminality; across a threshold where my own attitudes towards painting are disrupted and reformed.

This comes out of making, where the act of painting opens up aesthetic relations and began to raise questions in my mind about rethinking the criteria that is used to evaluate the visual qualities while painting. The unexamined way of approaching these new visual qualities would be to deem them as good or bad. The way of approaching these qualities that has developed throughout this project is to accommodate them, as the emerging visual conditions suggest a different logic of aesthetic relations i.e. one that did not fit in comfortably with clear notions of consonance or dissonance. By moving painting away from a realm of deeply rooted order, these qualities of dissonance or disruption introduce new visual experiences into the work. They permit a hiatus in which the artist or spectator can slow down and notice how these qualities help shift the marginal aesthetic wider or reinforce structure that impedes the unfolding



Figure 2. Detail of *Untitled (To Fold)*



Figure 3. *Untitled (To Fold)*

of the work of art. My inclination towards order now operates as a warning. It establishes a baseline from which aesthetic and affectual qualities act as elements of liberation, allowing visual qualities to be responded-to through intuition clearing the preconceptions that accompany process that threaten the project back into order. In this sense, the ideas that this project is concerned with have come out of my own painting and out of examining other artworks.

This text is accompanied by examples of artwork made during this project, illustrations of artwork from *Painting: Adventures in a Marginal Aesthetic* are presented to relative scale and are not in chronological order, instead I draw on these works to illustrate points discussed in my text. A selection of illustrations of paintings made during the current year will be presented at the end of the text. Artwork where the artist's name is not mentioned is my own work; otherwise, full details of all images are provided in the list of figures at the front of the document.



Figure 4. *Untitled #1* 2016

Context

This project arose from reconsidering my painting practice, that through repeatedly drawing on the same source of life and interest had shifted into a state of stasis. These paintings were bright and dramatic and relied on high contrast for high impact. By loosening up and removing the bounds of preconception there was a flexibility in my own consideration of visual elements that I would have deemed in a binary sense ‘good or bad’. This project does not necessarily leave behind the aesthetic qualities present in previous works, but it seeks to examine and understand the process of painting; how painting itself can open up new modes of visual experience and in turn how the adaptability of painting can allow myself to respond in ways that are not habitual.

This scope allows for difference in painting where my decision making process, editing, deleting or changing qualities is held from judgement, the spectator is encouraged to spend time and notice elements of discord rather than removing them or covering them up. Where my past pattern of decision-making concerned the organising of visual qualities within any one image, in relation to a particular framework that risked falling into a fixed aesthetic or genre. This project is about movement and venturing into my own psyche through painting in attempt to clear away tendencies that inhibit the unfolding of new visual experiences. In this sense, tendencies are inclinations, movements influenced by my life experiences and my memories, as “pastnesses opening

onto a future.”¹ Overall, I see this project as an (advance) liberation of my practice from the dangers of habit.²



Figure 5. *Untitled #3* 2016

As an example, in the work *Untitled #3*, flicks of pinks, teals and yellows, travel across the background, though the colours are caught in a net of black. This black acts as a screen, as a curved grid that holds the order of the image together. This grid is a repeated form, an overlying organisational system that prevails within the work. In this respect, the clear rectangle in the centre of the image is either a window, clearing the grid to look into possibilities that operate below or a process yet to be finished. The interaction between pattern and perspective creates a push-pull effect, essentially drawing the eye to a central point of focus, that is then disrupted. These factors contributed to an overall ‘youthful’³ aesthetic. One that emerged from the territory of the familiar, from graphic novels and pop culture. This is a territory that I have come to know very well through painting.

These elements that provided the work with rhythms required a rupture, something that presented a challenge to sustain, exclude or bring into life the qualities that were inhibited by order. The painting process then adapts to this challenge opening up more questions to be followed through painting.

¹ Brian Massumi, *The Autonomy of Affect* in *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (March 1995), 83.

² This advance liberation prevents the maker/spectator from falling into the moment of stasis, if this liberation didn’t happen in advance or if I waited there would be a constant stopping and starting. This operates in a similar way to Deleuze’s *Clearing of Cliché* that clears the way for new experiences.

³ ‘Youthful’ is used here to refer to the movement and potential associated with risk, playfulness, impulsiveness, and freedom from earnest responsibility.

Within this past mode of making where paintings repeatedly fell into a realm of familiarity served as the impetus to break through constraints. The aesthetic relations that this project engaged with no longer served the ongoing development of my investigation yet, these orderly qualities now operate in the background as a framework from which the act of painting moves forward and beyond.



Figure 6. *Untitled (To Float)* 2016

Aesthetics: A Place Oft Seen

This early work was in a state of inertia: my tendency to rely on order and the habitual application of my former experiences of art creation prevented moving on. In reconfiguring my perception of these works, and how habit operates in this project, tendencies act as a warning device, as an edge for decision-making, and as an impetus that contributes to movement. I am engaged in a particular act of individualisation, partly through a creative methodology, and by changing and re-inventing my tendencies. The consonance that comes out of preconceived order enables the act of painting to disrupt and shift my thinking. Similarly, the idea of aesthetics that this project engages with is one that is always shifting, as affective response and conceptual response shift and change, while incorporating the interaction between dissonance and consonance. This shifting is inherent in the concept of aesthetics and is as much about a process as a characteristic of appearance. In this sense, the term ‘aesthetics’ is used in a way that hints at the potential for experimentation and “enunciation that has been silenced by dominant forces of categorisation, semiosis and signification.”⁴

This definition of aesthetics highlights a creative process that breaks away from order, implies an emerging affective power that allows the spectator

⁴ Christoph Brunner, Roberto Nigro, and Gerald Raunig, *Towards a New Aesthetic Paradigm: Ethico-aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Existence in Foucault and Guattari*, RADAR 1, (May 2012). 41



Figure 7. *Untitled (To Melt)*



Figure 8. *Untitled (To Melt)*

to follow intuition, and avoids the limitations of a Kantian definition of aesthetics.⁵ This mode of aesthetics is not about categorising visual experience in terms of beauty or judgements of taste. The notion of categorisation is compatible with consonance, something influenced by memory that operates as a perceptual filter, something that has emerged from memory that we recognise as familiar. The unconsidered approach is to adopt categorisation as fashion or as an influence on taste, which is not useful to this project. Order and perceptual filters are generally personal to an individual, are culturally conditioned, and change with time. The concept of consonance operates in a similar way. Paintings may embody an order that depends on deeply ingrained ideas of beauty that operate in relation to the artist's perception of beauty, taste, knowledge and perceptual filters, but exclude the elements of difference that make for individualisation. The virtue of this consonance allows us to develop semiosis and provides us with a language to talk about the work of art.

However, my concern with consonance and the reason it acts as a line from which the act of painting moves the spectator away from a state of order, is that the rate of development of consonance is not the same as the speed with which the artist engages with ideas during painting. The artist may have a range of duration with the art materials during making, from seconds where the interaction between painting and the artist is led by sensation. To minutes, hours, or days where interaction may be influenced by preconceived ideas,

⁵ “where the response to an object can be comprehended within one concept and hence one determinate linguistic expression.” Kant, Immanuel, and Werner S. Pluhar. *Critique of judgment*. (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Pub. Co. 1987.) 184.

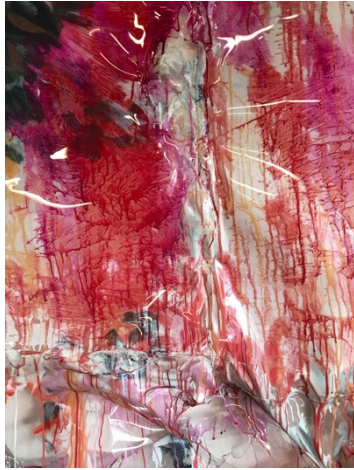


Figure 9. Detail of *Untitled (To Melt)*



Figure 10. Detail of *Untitled (To Melt)*

memory or past experiences. This consonance, while it operates as a warning system, preventing me from working in habitual ways, does not have the vitality needed to keep the project moving forward. However, some elements of consonance persist in a way that is employed in an examined state and not habitually applied. In the work *Untitled (To Melt)*, the use of the rectangular surface (a pictorial plane), the grid-like structure, or an unintentional horizon line, provide a loose guideline that prevents the work from falling into disarray. This structure is enhanced by patterns that arise from the interaction between drips, the lyricism of the red paint flowing over an undulating surface, and the repetition of white marks. Yet, in creating this work, there is a focus on the end experience, the affectual response that the spectator has to the painting and my affectual response (that may, or may not, suppress, alter or reinforce my tendencies). By moving through painting into the marginal space, my tendencies shift; there is a need for structure, but also a desire to clear this from the act of creation. In a sense, this thesis operates oppositely to my practices; writing about my project requires order and structure, and clarifies and creates consonance. Yet, while engaged in the process of painting, there is a desire and a need to clear structure and order away in order for vitality to come forth.

Painting: Adventures in a Marginal Aesthetic, has emerged from a breaking down of the consonance that was preventing the project from providing fresh visual experiences. It has redirected my tendency to create work that does not allow for difference by pushing open the marginal aesthetic and shifting the interaction between the incompatible visual qualities of consonance and dissonance to the point where they collapse. This collapse opens up the



Figure 11. *Untitled (To Crawl)*

spectator's response to the work of art from a singular narrative of already experienced visual qualities, allowing the work to be comprehended in a multiplicity of ways.



Figure 12. *Untitled #2* 2016

Marginal Aesthetic: A Place Not Foreseen

Moving into a territory beyond what I was familiar and comfortable with brought back a sense of vitality that opened up possibility and chances for further questioning. In this sense, project is self-sustaining. Painting leads to painting leads to painting.⁶ The movement away from consonance and into this liminal space on the periphery seems to have been more of a slip than a confident jump, as though the floor beneath me gave way. By removing constraints and allowing the painting process to flow and move forward without constantly referring back to memory, the qualities of difference or things that have not been seen before slip the work further into the unknown. Subsequently the more time spent with the painting and these visual qualities the more these ideas, questions and qualities become attenuated; consonance is re-established, and the process repeats.

My initial experience of *Untitled #2* generated a sense of curiosity. The grid pattern retreating into the centre of the image pulls the spectator into a moment of rich blackness before the dual swirls of blue lift the eye out and into the foreground. This swirl, this bold vital character, was a character that I had met before, and the movement that it asks of the spectator involves a measure of slippage. Yet, in trying to recreate this moment and the accompanying sensation, I was inhibited by my own expectation of bringing it back into order.

⁶ Abbey, Lyman. Dissertation for BA&D(Hons). *Untitled (Exploration)*, 2017.



Figure 13. *Untitled (Crossfade)*

Releasing constraints and allowing the artwork to slip into a *place I have never seen*⁷, allows for a fresh experience of creating and looking. This place operates as a territory of working and the affect associated with this swirl presented itself in places and ways other than those I had experienced before; ways that drew painting into an indeterminate, marginal space. This is a moving aesthetic that allows the motive of painting to be as simple as merely wanting to experiment and see what happens.

The dissolution of order and structure in a painting causes me anxiety in relation to this unknown, unfamiliar quality. When these exciting characters come forth and the vitality that they bring goes beyond consonance, the marginal aesthetic opens up excitement and affective response. Paintings are free to roam through an unknown plane that has no boundaries. This roaming allows the interaction between the materials and the maker to be provisional, in the sense that materials are not bound by consonance or expected to meet a fixed end. Paintings are “never finished, only abandoned”⁸ and are constantly moving away from structure and order, constantly moving into the unknown. When ideas become familiar or are taken as ‘givens’, the fluidity of painting moves thought through a place that focuses on the experience of painting.

This is a territory that grows and is constantly evolving. Painting happens, time is spent with the work of art, and ‘givens’ resurface. This process repeats. The more times it repeats, the larger and more different the territory

⁷ Brian Massumi, “Aesthetics: A Place I’ve Never Seen” in Stephen Zagala, *A Shock to Thought; Expression After Deleuze and Guattari*, (Routledge London 2002), 20

⁸ Raphael Rubinstein, *Provisional Painting*, Art in America, artinamericamagazine.com. (2009)

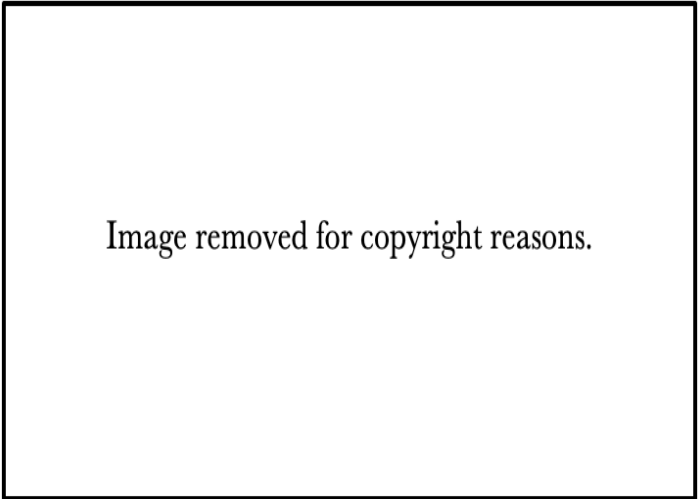


Figure 14. Julian Schnabel, *Maria Callas #2*, oil on velvet. 274x304cm. 1982.

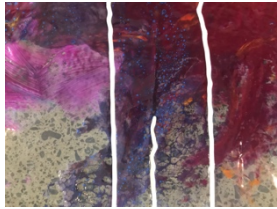


Figure 15. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*



Figure 16. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*

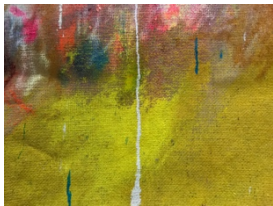


Figure 17. Detail of *Untitled (To Stand)*



Figure 18. Detail of *Untitled (To Shelve)*

becomes. Due to this ever evolving aesthetic and the dependence on the urgency of sensation, paintings can look ‘dashed-off’, tentative, and on the verge of collapse. Simultaneously there is a strange combination of deliberation and indecision.⁹ Qualities seem strange or uncanny¹⁰ and familiar interactions of paint are re-presented in an unfamiliar setting.

For example, in Julian Schnabel’s painting *Maria Callas 2* washes of dark brooding colour, navy blue, black, maroon, and ochre are drawn forward, towards the viewer. The chroma becomes muddier but lighter the closer it is to the surface, opening up questions surrounding the intuitive interaction between the artist and the materials and creating a landscape of the artist’s interaction with the vitality that has come out of paint. Then (presumably) right at the end of the painting process, a splash of white paint has been dripped off-centre. A character that almost seems too bold for the bold surface, one that embodies Joan Miró’s aim to “destroy everything that exists in painting”¹¹. The placement of this character is figurative in the sense that it operates as a representation of a form that is recognisably derived from life;¹² a form indicative of a lively movement of throwing paint on a surface. This white mark becomes a figure detached from figuration and is present in my practice in the

⁹ Roberta Smith, *Art in Review*, New York Times (2006.) p. E37.

¹⁰ This project’s understanding comes from Sigmund Freud’s essay *The Uncanny* (unheimlich) where the uncanny is “the instance when something can be familiar and yet alien at the same time.”

¹¹ Quoted in Anne Umland, *Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting*, (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 2008.) p. 2.

¹² Definition from the Google search *Figurative* <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-ab&q=Dictionary#dobs=figurative>

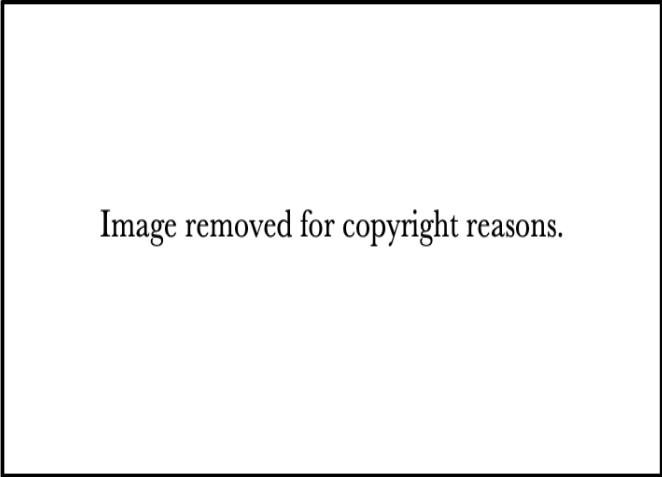


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Figure 19. Amy Sillman, *Shade*. Oil on canvas. 228x203cm. 2010.

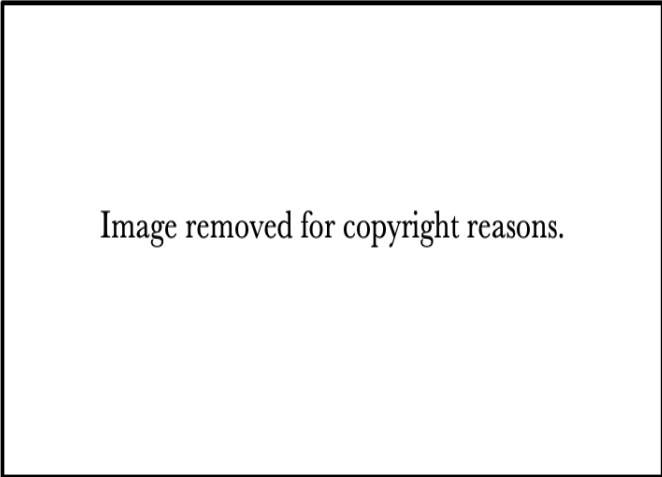


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Figure 20. Judy Millar, *Big Pink Shimmering One*. Acrylic and oil on canvas. 193x284cm. 2002.

paintings *Untitled (To Stand)*, *Untitled (To Hang)*, *Untitled (To Drape)* and *Untitled (To Shelve)*. These paintings all have white drips that operate as figures removed from figuration. At present, this project is not figurative; however, as I proceed, I am looking to explore figuration that is consistent with what I have found during this project. Figures detached from figuration, figures that do not fall back into a singular or a linguistic description.

This movement of figure from figuration highlights the importance of provisionality. Elements, visual qualities, and figures can shift from their supposed points of fixity, eliciting a provisionality that shifts the artist's interaction with the materials to the point where elements of discord are witnessed, questioned, and ultimately allowed to remain. I see this moment of provisional finish in Amy Sillman's painting *Shade*. The painting appears a little odd, the arm of white and green paint seeming to reach out through the orange and grey towards something that has not yet been painted, as though the work was abandoned immediately before something weirdly important happened. It teeters on the edge of whether or not to continue. Would continuing the painting push it into chaos or is the present balance perfect? There is a moment of hesitation as if the painting is waiting for the artist to come back. By contrast, Judy Millar's *Big Pink Shimmering One* seems to push the provisional finish further. The artist's hand has energised the surface, which continues to develop and grow. The painting seems to be an adventure in how things happen, how the paint moves across a surface, how it builds up or spreads out. The painting or moment of finish just happens; when the artist stops, the painting stops, but it is not resolved in a fixed sense.



Figure 21. Detail of *Untitled (Crossfade)*



Figure 22. Detail of *Untitled (To Slip)*

Within this project the point of finish is also provisional; when the painting is pushed to a point that causes frustration or confusion, because there is no way forward, the painting process stops. When the painting is nearly at a point of being discarded, or even when there is a feeling that it is too chaotic or past the point of being redeemable, the act of painting stops. Spending time with these paintings and watching the work unfold, or noticing qualities of dissonance and how they relate to or contrast with my innate tendencies, helps to move my practice on. These qualities of difference help to push open the marginal space in which this practice operates.

This is a place of liminality that must be explored through further painting and only through painting; a place of transformation where order and material hierarchies are momentarily dissolved,¹³ creating a fluid, malleable situation that reflects the transformative nature of painting¹⁴ and a place of liminal knowledge, of possibility, through which the maker wanders without constraint. Moving this project away from consonance means that the project has employed different strategies to allow for a continual moving away from what I already know. One of these operates as a clearing away of expectations,¹⁵ where the painting process can be intuitive, where ideas are ignored and, instead, sensation and affect can be followed. Paintings in the studio start as a range of provisional materials, materials found or bought that have no obvious

¹³ Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, *Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change* (International Political Anthropology 2009).

¹⁴ Arpad Szakolczai, *Liminality and Experience: Structuring transitory situations and transformative events* (International Political Anthropology 2009) p. 141

¹⁵ This idea is explored later in the text in relation to Gilles Deleuze's *Clearing of Cliché* and the *Diagram*.



Figure 23. Detail of *Untitled (To Slip)*



Figure 24. Detail of *Untitled (To Stand)*

associations to painting; single use plastic tablecloths, window decals, Saran wrap, sacking, PET plastic, household linen, discarded wood. These are sewn or melted together to form a 'Frankenstein' surface. Intuition integrates with the creative process, allowing the artist to paint while following sensation and affectual response. This creation of substrate eases my inclination away from the habit of using premade canvas or paper and focuses on responding to qualities that have emerged on the surface such as ripples or tears in the substrate that have emerged during making.

Moving away from ready-made or expected surfaces has enabled the surface be intertwined with the painted image. Surface does not operate below the image but shifts forward and back, acting both as a coating for the image and a base that the image is worked out from; and sometimes the substrate is squashed between two layers of paint. This helps the substrate to be seen not only as a useful tool for paint to stick to but as a catalyst for painting; paint pools in the folds of the substrate, or layers of substrate stick together, or brushes become caught on nails or glue, and the interaction between substrate and paint helps to give the artwork autonomy. The idea of autonomy is explored in the text *What the Spectator Sees* by Richard Wollheim¹⁶ who raises the idea that from the 20th century substrate has been exposed as an important feature of painting that needs to be considered as something more than just a surface for materials to play on. In order for painting to create a legitimate space for itself, it needs to purge itself of all alien craft and assert its newfound

¹⁶ Richard Wollheim, "The Work of Art as Object" in *Modernism, Criticism, Realism* (Harper & Row, 1984).

independence through purity of form and medium.¹⁷ This purging acts as a clearing of givens from the surface; all elements involved in the painting process directly relate to the slipping into the marginal aesthetic.



Figure 25. Detail of *No title*

This time spent with the substrate acts as a *clearing of cliché*, where the artist actively encounters givens that are associated with the materials, that are as much psychic as physical, in attempt to dissociate and remove them from the artwork. Within this project the givens, the clichés, are the place oft seen, the familiar territory. Though these givens provide a base that the act of painting wanders away from, they become limiting when they are overused. These givens exist as ready-made perceptions about how the process of painting should be carried out, as memories of how things have been done or used in the past. Eventually, when repeatedly used, they become tired and the capacity to open up new possibilities prevents moving forward; they become overworn and clichéd.¹⁸

“It is a mistake to think that the painter works on a white surface... The painter has many things in his head, or around him, in his studio. Now everything he has in his head or around him is already in the canvas, more or less virtually, more or less actually, before he begins his work. They are all present in the canvas as so many images, actual or virtual, so that the painter does not have to cover a blank surface but rather would have to empty it out, clear it, clean it.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Richard Wollheim, “The Work of Art as Object” in *Modernism, Criticism, Realism* (Harper & Row, 1984).

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Ch. 2, *Notes on Figuration in Past Painting* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 71

¹⁹ *ibid*



Figure 26. *Untitled (To Mould)* and *Untitled (To Stand)*

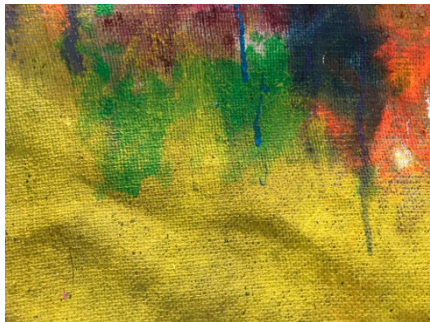


Figure 27. Detail of *Untitled (To Stand)*

In the act of painting, the image goes through multiple states, many different stages of finish, and many possibilities for beginning. During the painting process, the majority of actions and interactions follow intuition, some with mere seconds to consider elements as they emerge through making. There is a fluid interaction between all the elements of memory and perception, moving the artwork through different stages of finish. These stages work through clearing different givens that may have re-established themselves from the substrate. Throughout my painting process, images may be rotated, moved onto the floor, or folded; each interaction with the painted substrate is different, prompting elements that might cause dissonance to lead the work into a new direction.

When these givens are cleared from elements sometimes the quality is led into discord which is seen as an unfolding moment of possibility, for example, the colour yellow in *Untitled (To Stand)*. This yellow is a light Hansa yellow; the same yellow that is used in the work *Untitled (To Mould)*. The way this yellow operates in the two paintings is completely different. In *Untitled (To Stand)*, the yellow is buttery and solid, and bright but not overbearing. Yet, it seems out of place at the bottom of the image; it has a tendency to swamp the floor and slowly creep up the substrate like a vine. This yellow, when first encountered, was too almost yellow, too solid, too difficult to focus on and it did not fit in with the flurry of purples, reds, and whites. Within the studio space, this image was rotated many times, lighting was turned on and off, and the image was moved from the wall onto the floor. In spending time with this yellow, watching it combine with red and green, the yellow became difficult to pin down. The eye automatically moves on from the yellow, up into the flurry



Figure 28. Detail of *Untitled (To Mould)*



Figure 29. Detail of *Untitled (To Stand)*



Figure 30. Detail of *Untitled (To Stand)*

of chroma. Yet, when used in *Untitled (To Mould)* the acidity of this yellow is increased by the introduction of teal blue. The reverse painting technique used in this image means that, at the time of making, this yellow was applied to the surface with the intention to cover the teal, to hide the teal and give the image some chromatic stability. However, in turning the image over the edges where the teal is thin and the yellow is seen below, glows bringing forth a new visual quality that has vitality. (Seen in figure 28)

This time spent with the painting also altered my perception of the colour red. This red is a ‘hard’ colour. A bright red is associated with post boxes, firetrucks and stop signs. Red that is unsympathetic and unaccommodating of other colours, wanting to be noticed. However, when it is used as a backdrop, as a field against which greens and purples play, I find that it comes forward to complement the other colours, if not join in. In these circumstances, its quality is contingent and has been realised through contemplating how this red sits in the field of colour. Opening questions around how the interaction between qualities on this field operate to clear expectations while highlighting the importance of the interplay between looking and making that is balanced. Thus, a colour that I had anticipated would operate in a way that I was familiar with led me to an unexpected place, raising questions that had not been asked before.

This act of spending time with a painting operates as an opportunity to question the ways in which I can attune my awareness during the act of perception, highlighting the way in which, through extended perception of the painting, habit attempts to re-establish itself. I also noticed this in my

perception of the colour green, operating at the top of *Untitled (To Stand)*. This green took minutes to reach a point of signification yet, while in the act of painting, there are only seconds for the colour to justify itself. By following intuition, the knowledge that comes out of this liminal space helps me understand how to use these elements differently or usefully; tuning my intuition to qualities that are difficult and challenging in an attempt to add them to the accumulation of knowledge and, in turn, to open further possibilities.



Figure 31. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*



Figure 32. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*

The Work

This section discusses a selection of works made during this project and how through painting the possibility of venturing into the unknown is opened, while referring to key ideas raised at the beginning of this paper. Within painting moments of difference and excitement are pursued in the hope that they will widen the marginal aesthetic that provides new questions and sustain momentum.

Elements that are supposedly undesirable or unintentional keep the work ‘fresh’²⁰ and prevent my perception of the work from becoming tired. Allowing the elements that provide this project with possibility to exist rather than covering them or changing them enables momentum towards new visual experiences, while they also intervene the moment where making might fall into a particular genre of painting. The aesthetic is always shifting alongside affective and conceptual response to the dynamic interplay between consonance and dissonance. This mode of making is as much about a process of movement as a characteristic of appearance.

²⁰ ‘Fresh’ is used here in the sense of a welcome change, something different but not transcendently so.

Untitled (To Slip)

In the exploration of the relationship between two incongruent methodological approaches, this project has gone through different iterations of making that have helped to provide a rupture from perceptual habits. These habits reinforce visual expectations and make it harder for the spectator to follow their own affectual response when developing an understanding of a work of art. Take the example of the colour yellow. The spectator's perception of the pigment is taken from a habitual way of looking and given a new way of thinking about its nature. Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* directed the spectator's perception of the colour yellow out of habit and into affect by shrouding the entire Tate Modern Turbine Hall with golden light. The dark silhouettes of other spectators gave the space elements of the uncanny while each spectator's actions prevented the work from falling into order. This habitual reading of visual qualities acts as a filter through which our experiences are altered and influenced. Much as in Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, the surrounding landscape is given a literal yellow filter.²¹

An attempt is made to clear these filters from the creative process. Paints are used in ways that seem contradictory to their instructions. Hence, acrylic paints are heavily diluted with water or mixed with linseed oil, spray paint was wiped or brushed onto a surface, liquid acrylics were applied over

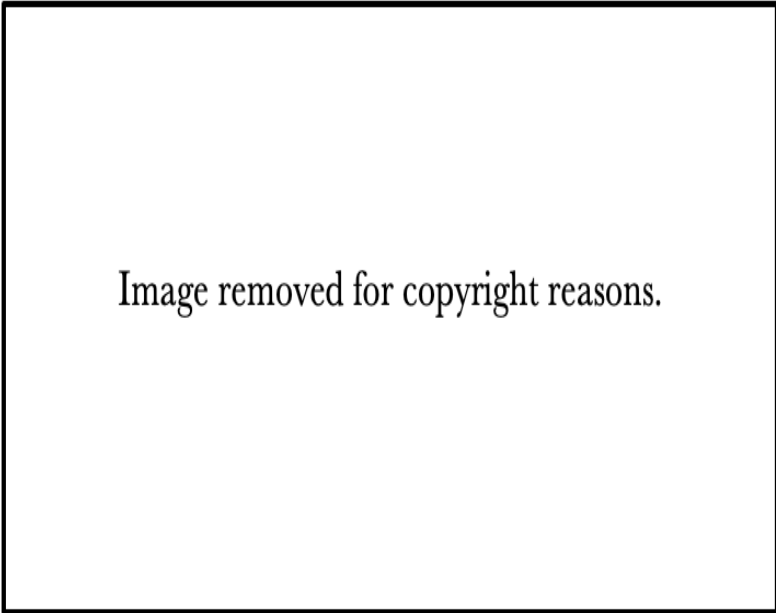


Image removed for copyright reasons.

Figure 33. Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*. Installation in Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. 2003

²¹ *About The Installation: Understanding the Project*. (Tate Modern, London.) 2003, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series/unilever-series-olafur-eliasson-weather-project-0-0>.



Figure 34. *Untitled (To Slip)*



Figure 35. *Untitled (To Slip)*

still-wet oils, and all were applied on substrates that were still in some stage of being built. This allows for a balance between necessity and vitality, between the marginal aesthetic and order, while allowing the life and excitement that comes out of making to suppress any possible referents. This balance is experienced (as both a metaphor and literally) in the work *Untitled (To Slip)*. *Untitled (To Slip)* is made up of two intentional surfaces, one of which is a handmade bound substrate of vinyl, wood, Saran wrap, PVA glue and some nails. This process of finding materials and attempting to form them into a workable shape allows the object to be free of expectations from the very start of the painting process. The second substrate is a PVC plastic tablecloth, a material with no relationship to painting. The final substrate is the surrounding environment in which the substrates might lie or rest. These two intentional substrates were worked-on in tandem; when one work reached the point of utter chaos, where the maker reaches a point where they believe there is no way forward the other painting was worked-on. This process was repeated until I abandoned the work at a point where there was a slight disturbance between the two, where the works were not in conflict, but supporting each other.

The clearing of expectations from the image is also reflected in the presentation of *Untitled (To Slip)*. The presentation of this work supported and mirrored the relationship between the two surfaces; the rigid surface leant against the wall, the loose PVC sheet wedged in-between. This placement led the loose substrate to slump and slip onto the floor, ridges caused by differences in tension caught light and shadows. This use of clear substrate also questions the idea of framing. Where there was unpainted plastic, the floor was visible. The painting sits directly on the floor and changes according to changes in the

environment where it is located. By removing the border from the painting, the chroma can influence the surrounding environment, blurring the separation between the spectator and the work of art.



Figure 36. *Untitled (To Slip) surface one.*



Figure 37. *Detail of Untitled (To Slip)*

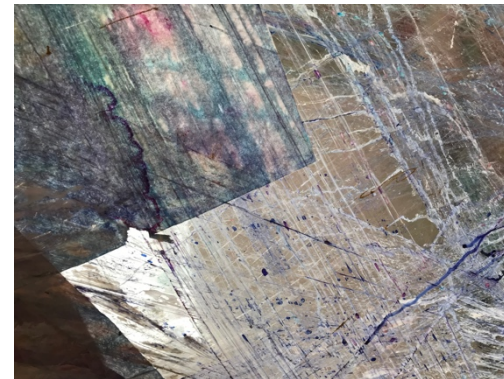


Figure 38. *Detail of Untitled (To Slip)*



Figure 39. *Untitled (To Hang)* and *Untitled (To Drape)*



Figure 40. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*



Figure 41. Detail of *Untitled (To Drape)*

Untitled (To Drape) & Untitled (To Hang)

The complex interaction between colour and light, and the work they demand of the spectator, made me realise that these vital qualities, opening up moments of possibility, were in me as much as in the materials and in the painting. These moments of possibility provide an opportunity to try new ideas and look at the making process differently. This approach is discussed in the text *Politics of Affect* that proposes the idea of these moments of possibility stopping the spectators from referring to or leaning towards Utopian ideals.²² In this regard, the moment of possibility prevents the habitual application of consonance during the act of making. Elements that provide a moment of pause or confusion are allowed to change the course of the painting process and to be pursued. For example, the painting *Untitled (To Hang)* was made using a reverse painting technique on clear PVC plastic. This painting process allows the image to be experienced for the first time during the final stages of installation. In the case of *Untitled (To Hang)*, the painting was rotated clockwise, anti-clockwise, left at an angle on my studio space and the textured surface made glossy and thick by the plastic substrate. Using the same matte white paint as the studio walls, two marks were added and gravity was allowed to draw the drips of white paint across the surface. When this paint dried, it created an interesting contrast between the glossy white surface of the wall showing through the PVC and the new flat white marks.

²² Brian, Massumi, *Politics of affect; Navigating Movements; Conversation with Mary Zournazi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015) 4



Figure 162. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*



Figure 43. Detail of *Untitled (To Hang)*

One area specifically held my attention, creating a moment in the painting where two drips cross the red and orange surface (figure 42). The flatness of the white provides a moment where the two qualities exist without any conflict yet have a quality that could suggest a build-up of energy, like two opposing characters slightly bumping into one another. This quality may be likened to Jan Verwoert's concept of emergence, where "qualities of a whole cannot be derived from single parts, but can only be explained by the interaction of the parts."²³ The fresh structures and qualities that emerge from this interaction help to shift the moment of uncertainty to an empowering way forward. The painting process is almost guided by "otherworldly" forces through a threshold of potential or "margin of manoeuvrability",²⁴ widening the liminal space in which this project operates.

By removing boundaries, both in the physical art object and in thinking that the work had to fit into expectations, opened up the possibility for the artwork to emerge through multiple stages of finish. Like *Untitled (To Hang)*, *Untitled (To Drape)* was also painted in reverse. The image was painting following intuition before being covered in canary yellow, the image that is presented is different to the initial engagement with the painting materials and thoughts that might have been unconsciously impeding the emergence of the work of art. The two images have qualities that come out of process, but one

²³ Jan Verwoert Emergence: *On the painting of Tomma Abts*, (2005) 41-48
<http://www.davidzwirner.com/resources/34608/TA%20Verwoert%2005.pdf>

²⁴ Brian, Massumi. *Politics of affect; Navigating Movements; Conversation with Mary Zournazi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015) 4



Figure 44. Dona Nelson *March Hare*, synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 210x189cm, 2014.



Figure 45. Dona Nelson *March Hare* (Right), synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 210x189cm, 2014

image is actively worked-on and the other is received;²⁵ One image is the direct outcome of painting and the other is almost a bi-product, something that, in this case, was intentional but not necessarily considered until the surface being actively worked-on was turned over.

Dona Nelson, whose paintings stand independently of the gallery wall, explores this idea. This method of presentation, canvases are shown on metal stands, enables the spectator to walk around the work and engage with the paintings without the influence of the structures of the gallery intruding on the appreciation of the work of art. This idea is expanded in *Untitled (To Drape)*, the painted surface is draped over a purpose-built sawhorse. In watching the interaction between the painted surface in *Untitled (To Hang)* and the gallery wall,²⁶ and considering the independence from the gallery wall in Nelsons *March Hare*, *Untitled (To Drape)* enables the spectator to encounter the work on their own terms. The work was positioned horizontally across the space, with holes cut in the substrate that cause a rupture in perception and allow the spectator to look through the work. Parts of the wooden sawhorse peek through the PVC surface much as the stretcher frame peaks through *March Hare*. The sawhorse holds the painting off the floor, allowing the light to shine through it and project the colour of the work onto the floor. This presentation is also subject to incident lighting. The angle of the work, with one side towards the

²⁵ Dona Nelson, "March Hare" (2014) By Dona Nelson: The Collection; Art Gallery NSW", Artgallery.Nsw.Gov.Au, 2018, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/55.2015.a-b/>.

²⁶ In this case, the gallery wall is the foyer of the visual arts studio but operates as a gallery wall in the sense that it has formalities related to a gallery.

sun catches the light while the other side of the work experiences a diffused light, allows the painting and chroma to be subject to ever-changing light.



Figure 46. *Untitled (To Drape)*



Figure 47. *Detail Untitled (To Drape)*



**Figure 48. *Detail of Untitled (To Drape)*
Laid flat.**



**Figure 49. *Untitled (To Drape)*
another installation.**



Figure 50. *Untitled (To Shelve)*



Figure 51. Detail of *Untitled (To Shelve)*

Untitled (To Shelve) & Future Possibilities

The interaction between painting and incident lighting is seen in the work *Untitled (To Shelve)*. In spending time with the work and watching the daylight change, visual qualities unfolded into the unknown and folded back into consonance. I have noticed how incident lighting changes my perception of chromatic and achromatic qualities; how deep forest greens become light and glowing, how flat pastels catch the sun, and white flashes of sunlight create new marks (ones that are autonomous of the artist's hand and seem to be guided by otherworldly forces).²⁷ This interaction between light and the textures and rhythms that change in nuanced ways has led me to question the ideal presentation for this work. In the studio, during the painting process, this work consisted of separate panels, each roughly the size of an A4 piece of paper. The panels were melted together to form the larger painting and, when brought back into the space, matte metallic vinyl was placed onto them to provide emphasis in the areas where the joins existed.

In the foyer of the visual arts studios there is very little artificial lighting, and the space is subject to dramatic lighting changes depending on the weather and time of day. The ideal presentation space for these works would have to be somewhere similar; an open space with natural lighting and sufficient room for the work to be viewed without interference. Ideally, this would be a space where the work is affected by cloud cover, strong sunlight or the unintentional

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation. Ch.12, The Diagram (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003) p.70

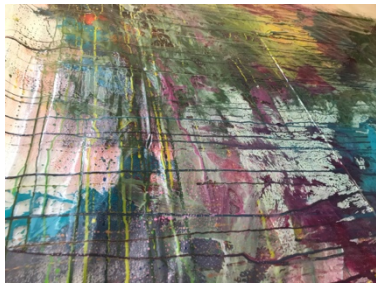


Figure 52. Detail of *Untitled (To Crawl)*



Figure 53. Detail of *Untitled (To Crawl)*



Figure 54. Detail of *Untitled (To Crawl)*

glare of a streetlight, where something surprising can happen that is out of the artist's control.

I experienced this incident lighting in my studio space, where chromatic values tonally change throughout the painting process. The interaction of chroma with perception is an interest that I have followed since creating work that has this 'youthful' aesthetic. Colour is a phenomenon that sits outside of the human realm with its own life force. Chromatic qualities have been harnessed by man and recreated, but their essence is something that defies control. A phenomenon with pleasure that surpasses discursiveness, "the pleasure of coloris slips away from linguistic determination."²⁸ When thinking about this comment and the interaction that I have with chroma, I am reminded of an experience of colour described by Paul Cézanne:

*"Shut your eyes, wait, think of nothing. Now, open them ... one sees nothing but a great coloured undulation. What then? An irradiation and glory of colour. This is what a picture should give us ... an abyss in which the eye is lost, a secret germination, a coloured state of grace ... lose consciousness. Descend with the painter into the dim tangled roots of things, and rise again from them in colours, be steeped in the light of them."*²⁹

This interaction with chroma brings the spectator to a place of liminal knowledge, a space with knowledge not yet learnt, creating multiple iterations

²⁸ Jacqueline Lichtenstein *The Eloquence of Colour: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age* (University of California Press, 1993) 194

²⁹ Joachim Gasquet and Paul Cézanne, *Joachim Gasquet's Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

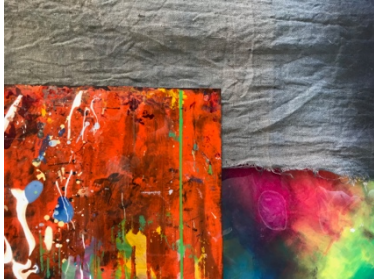


Figure 55. Collage of different surfaces



Figure 56. Testing neon powders



Figure 57. Fold detail of Untitled (To Shelve)

of an experience that are seemingly different, fresh, and new. This excitement is reminiscent of a ‘child-like’ encounter with chroma, one described by Dave Hickey in the text *Air Guitar: Essays on Art*. Hickey states that “what we wanted to *see*, however, was that wall of vibrant, moving colour, so we could experience the momentary redemption of its ahistorical, extra linguistic, sensual embrace — that instantaneous, ravishing intimation of paradise that confirmed our lives at that moment.”³⁰ He is referring to an experience of chroma that informs the spectators’ affectual response; an experience that “goes up and down like the tide, or maybe storms and crests like a wave”.³¹ This comment is what I would like to experience for the final installation of this project, an undulating wall of colour and texture, cascading down a space, across floors, hanging from ceilings, tucked in corners, hidden in stairwells; something that is unpredictable, uncanny, not quite right. Something that would require the spectator to spend time with the work and experience the shifting aesthetic, or to create their own territory of understanding.

I wish for the spectator to be lost in an experience of colour that provokes a fresh interaction with painting and, hopefully, recurring thoughts or visits to the work. I wish for *Painting: Adventures in a Marginal Aesthetic* to lead me further away from what I know, towards experiences I have not yet seen.

³⁰ Dave Hickey, *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy Ch.4: Pontormo’s Rainbow* (Los Angeles, California: Art Issues Press, 2006).

³¹ Brian, Massumi. *Politics of affect; Navigating Movements*; conversation with Mary Zournazi (Cambridge: Polity, 2015) 4



Figure 58. *Untitled (Serendipity)*



Figure 59. *Testing PET plastic*

Conclusion

This project through painting sustains life that opens up further questions for future exploration. Questions that bring forth new visual qualities that move the practice through and beyond what I already know. This ongoing exploration and what it demands of me as a spectator evolves with the progression of painting, and with the ever changing aesthetic territory. The dynamic interplay between consonance and dissonance is constantly considered and navigated during the process of painting. Having undertaken this research there is a sense that while this project is an exploration of painting, it is also an examination of my own psychological response to art and artmaking methodologies. Qualities that emerge during painting that may have been explored habitually or almost unconsciously fixed the aesthetic to one unmovable state, in order to loosen this up and bring back movement these habits, tendencies had to be worked on in myself as much as in the painting. Ultimately, the qualities of dissonance (the uncanny, disorder, the over-excited or the too calm) that emerged from painting and from removing bounds are vital qualities that allow this project to continue. The future of this project will continue to explore and challenge the personal tendencies that remain unexamined. Questioning how and why they operate and if they benefit the unfolding of this project. This project is continually renewing, discovering and uncovering opportunities to sustain excitement and shift the aesthetic territory.

Painting leads to painting leads to painting leads to painting.³²

³² Abbey, Lyman. Dissertation for BA&D(Hons). *Untitled (Exploration)* 2017

Visual Documentation

The following is a represented selection of works made during the project and are presented in approximate chronological order.



No Title.
Acrylic on paper, mesh, plastic and balsa wood.
120x160cm
March 2018.



No Title.
Ink on cotton, reclaimed wood frame.
130x140cm
March 2018.



Untitled (Crossfade)
Acrylic on PVC plastic mesh and wooden fiber.
150x120cm
March 2018.



Untitled (Green)
Acrylic on PVC plastic.
120x150cm
March 2018.



Untitled (Serendipity)
Acrylic on PVC plastic.
120x130cm
March 2018.



No Title
Acrylic on PVC plastic, cotton and
reclaimed wood.
170x200cm
March 2018.



Untitled (To Slip) Surface one.
Acrylic on PVC plastic, vinyl and reclaimed
wood.
170x140cm
April 2018.



Untitled (To Slip) Surface two.
Acrylic on PVC plastic.
150x120cm
April 2018.



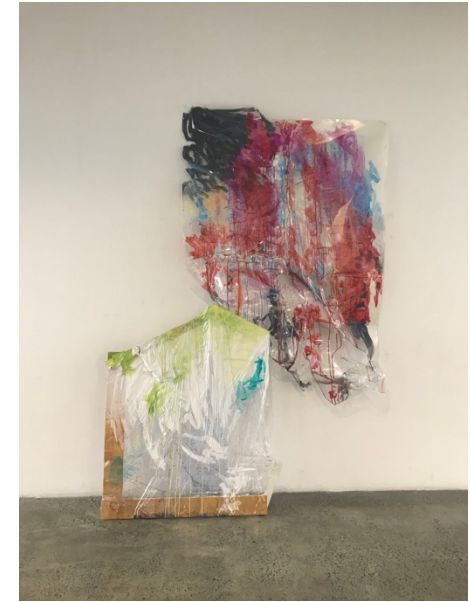
Untitled (To Slip)
Acrylic on PVC plastic and reclaimed wood.
200x140x150cm
April 2018.



Untitled (To Melt)
Acrylic on PET plastic
150x130cm
May 2018.



Untitled (To Wrap)
Acrylic on PVC plastic and reclaimed wood.
120x130cm
May 2018.



Untitled (To Lean)
Acrylic on PVC, PET plastic and reclaimed
wood.
220x180x40cm
May 2018.



No Title
Acrylic on PVC and PVA
130x150cm
June 2018.



Untitled (To Crawl)
Acrylic on PVC
130x400cm
June 2018.



Untitled (To Grid)
Acrylic on PVC
130x400cm
July 2018.



Untitled (To Hang)
Acrylic on PVC plastic.
150x120cm
July 2018.



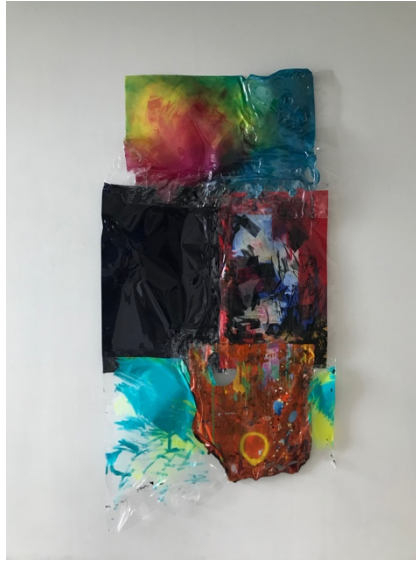
Untitled (To Drape)
Acrylic on PVC plastic.
150x120x60cm
July 2018.



Installation of *Untitled (To Hang)* and *Untitled (To Drape)*
July 2018.



Untitled (To Stand)
Acrylic and oil on hessian.
120x 200cm
August 2018.



Untitled (To Mould)
Acrylic on PET plastic.
150x200cm
August 2018.



Installation of *Untitled (To Mould)* and *Untitled (To Stand)*
August 2018.



Untitled (To Shelve)
Acrylic and polyurethane on PET plastic.
160x160cm
September 2018.



No Title
Acrylic and polyurethane on PET plastic.
170x190cm
October 2018.

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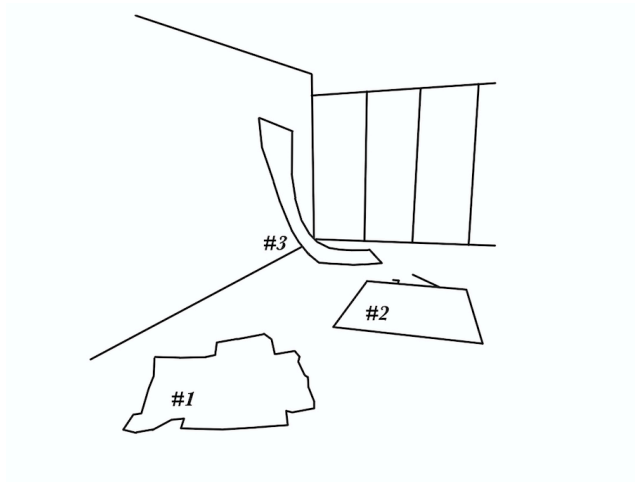
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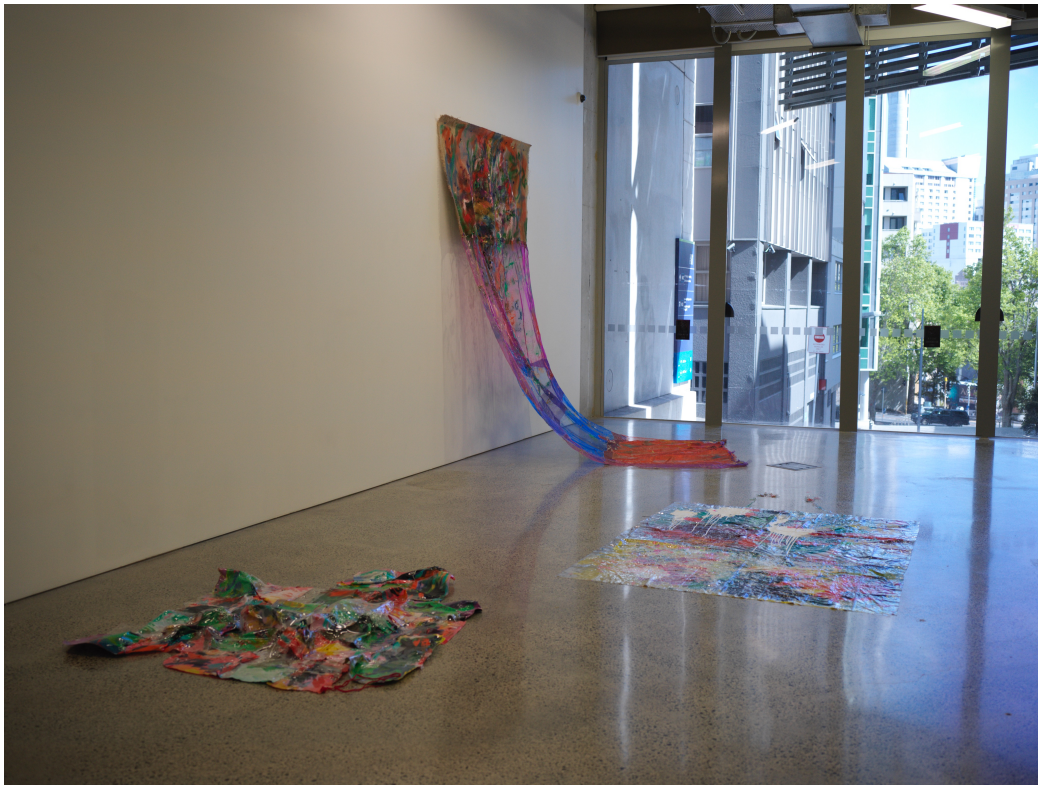
FINAL EXHIBITION

The three works are titled *at a Slight Angle...* (#1, #2, #3)

#1; Acrylic and polyurethane on PET plastic. 160x160cm. October 2018.

#2; Acrylic and Oil on sheets of PVC plastic layered and sewn together. 170x180cm. October 2018.

#3 Oil on fabric. 200x420cm. October 2018.



At A Slight Angle #1

Acrylic and polyurethane on PET plastic.

160x160cm.

October 2018.

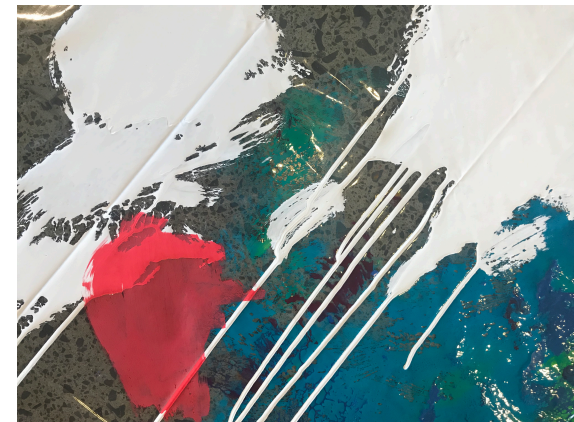
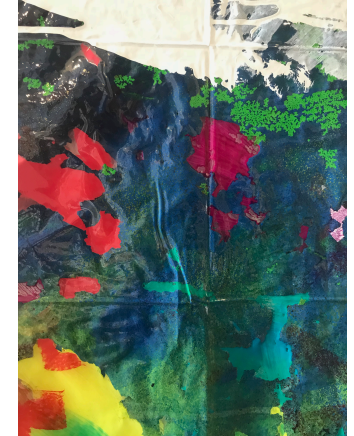
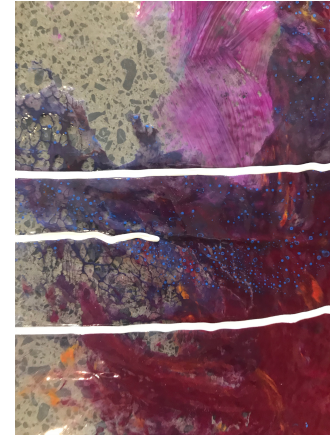


At A Slight Angle #2

Acrylic and Oil on sheets of PVC plastic.

170x180cm.

October 2018.



At A Slight Angle #3

Oil on fabric. 200x420cm.

October 2018.

