

Matrix of Contingencies

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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 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

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I would like to give my heart-felt thanks to Ian Jervis, Simon McIntyre and Andy Thomson for their support and guidance during my time at AUT.

Abstract

This practice based project explores how tacit knowledge serves the creative process of painting by providing a foundation for deciding how to act while painting. Because tacit knowledge is not brought to consciousness, it frees our perceptual processing from having to deal with the mechanics of painting so that attention can be focused on the immediacy of the changing visual conditions.

I am able to depend on this base of knowledge to allow me to pay full attention to the action of painting in the present, and to notice new and emerging possibilities. I examine the interplay of tools and processes, aesthetic and material considerations, subject matter and memory as all these factors relate to tacit consideration, and as they become interpolated into the painting process, and as they fold back into an accumulating base of experience and knowledge.

This interplay between what is the known, and what is emerging as yet-new experience, gives me a place to start examining the question of how painting can remain energised. This project is about understanding the implications and limitations of how I make paintings, how tacit knowledge facilitates this dynamic matrix of contingencies that brings forth the surprising, the unexpected, unplanned and unknown, and about exploring ways to enhance the vitality of my painting practice.

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Introduction

This masters project has been undertaken over two years from 2016-17. It is conducted largely through painting, in an environment removed from the demands of the marketplace, and where I can approach painting as a practice-based form of research. My aim is to rejuvenate my practice, or at least to develop deeper understandings of my method and open up new territory for exploration. I am here open to new possibilities.

The exegesis starts with a discussion of tacit knowledge, as an attribute that I bring to this project from my substantial experience as a painter. It develops an argument for how expertise brought from the past need not become habitual clichéd or enervating, but instead provides grounds for clearing my consciousness of the need to think about familiar practices in painting, so that I am then free to concentrate on different, novel aspects of painting. It is through painting that these aspects will emerge or reveal themselves, so that my approach to research is fundamentally practice-led.

I discuss how a myriad factors, including tools and processes, aesthetic and material considerations, subject matter, filters of visual perception and memory all influence the way painting happens, and so become interpolated into the developing image. My focus is on how knowledge, as an aggregation of experience, comes from painting and is continually folded back into the process of painting. It is embodied as neuromuscular pathways and rhythms, to be drawn on, tacitly. It is knowing that is continually interacting and aggregating, rather than a repository of knowledge. Its agency for me while in the process of painting, is in how it informs intuition, and my decision-making. I discuss how tacit knowledge clears a way forward for the artist to work unencumbered by utilitarian matters, so the perception is also unencumbered and free to notice and respond to new opportunities; possibilities.

Images of my work made during the tenure of this project are included throughout the text, as they serve to illustrate certain points. A chronology (approximate) of images of all works is included towards the end of the document.

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is learnt by the experience of doing, through actively engaging with process; by making. It is acquired by learning, through repetition, through perceptual analysis, feedback, modification and nuanced refinement. It takes time. For example as a painter laying down layers of gesso ground, learns which brush to use, how to load the brush and what direction and pressure of brushstroke to apply. While the principles of such techniques can be transmitted, expertise requires practice; the artist needs to get a feeling for the material nature of gesso. In painting there are innumerable such skills that develop with experience. The painter must decide what painting support is being painted on, and how its material properties affect the absorption and flow of paint. Similarly, experience allows an artist to judge the effect humidity and temperature will have on flow and drying characteristics, or to judge how to make a gesture that will begin at a particular place and stop at another. With experience, these skill are applied without conscious thought; as tacit knowing. These are things that we can do 'automatically'.



Fig.1. Detail of how gesso underpainting influences following layers of paint. Acrylic on board.

Looking closely at how tacit knowledge operates in my practice there seems to be a cyclical movement that happens while painting. Affective responses are prompted from the visual sensation of the changing painting, as I paint. For instance if I respond to the markings produced by layering droplets of gesso onto an area of a painting, I am able to draw on tacit knowledge in order to achieve a similar effect. I can then conceptualise with more clarity and make decisions about how I want to proceed with the painting. I may even decide to develop this new technique into another work.

If I am painting quickly and in more of an 'intuitive' mode, I could be so involved with the work, making decisions quickly and bypass the more conceptual response to what is happening, moving from my affective response straight into making decision after decision relying on my tacit knowledge to take the painting through to completion.

In this way my tacit knowledge clears my mind from technical issues in the work, so I am free to take risks in the painting and allow the new to emerge. I am able to use my tacit knowledge as a foundation to my painting process that enables me to work with freedom and confidence. I am able to work in a variety of paint media, assured in my ability to rectify or change any outcomes I'm not happy with. Being able to approach making paintings without fear of failure is vital to creative practice. To have freedom of expression and the ability to know and how to extend the boundaries of the chosen medium.

Just as a jazz musician learns the foundations of playing the piano or the clarinet before being able to improvise and not 'play by the rules' exactly, none the less creating original compositions. Tacit knowledge allows me to have a sense of trust in the dynamics of the painting and allows me to take risks, to explore the spontaneous and make new discoveries

The construction of the painting remains provisional until the action of painting ceases. In each moment while painting decisions are being made about how to proceed; deciding for example whether to continue with the gesture currently 'in play' or to change it or paint over it, my decision making is informed largely by intuition.

Knowledge of how the paint reacts according to the heat of the day, how water pools on the canvas and creates separations in the paint, the brush marks in the gesso—all these details affect how the painting manifests. This knowledge is gained by intuitively following the process and trusting this process that is influenced by tacit, embodied knowledge and a mix of my perception of the current moment and memory.

Experience with mixing pigments, discerning colour and tonal value, the various physical applications of paint media, knowledge of painting tools, decisions on how media will behave according to various external factors such as temperature, changing paint viscosity and drying times for example. Some of these understandings are based in motor skills, neuro-muscular memory, patterns of breathing, even modes of standing, this could be interpreted as 'embodied knowledge' of the painting process.

I have learnt to control my breathing while painting, particularly when applying long, horizontal brush strokes for example. It is my feeling that this helps me to feel centred and in a sense 'at one' with the energy of the painting, breath helps this connectedness to the process. My breathing changes according to the technique I am using I find. It is different when applying gesso than it is when I am cutting a precise hole into a canvas painting with a sharp blade for instance.



Fig.2. Detail of paint wash using a mix of Chinese ink and gouache on board. Painting from 1993. I still use this technique at certain times.

Tacit knowledge develops over time, takes time, an inherent temporality that is brought to the work of art. In fig 1.[*Pathology*, 1993] for example, the transparency of the paint allows that each layer not only modify the appearance of following layers, but also allows the effect of a palimpsest of indeterminacy, that shows evidence of changing/developing decisions, with no clear sequencing of layers as they combine optically to create an overall visual effect. As these visual qualities emerged during the process of painting, what I know about my decision-making is that the decision criteria were continually changing as I worked, just as the unfolding of new/different experiences were enfolding back into my painting process as tacit knowing.

While I am painting I often make test pieces; try-outs or experiments on card or a small canvas. These are often where I develop new ways of working with materials and techniques without fear of failure. Here I feel I can play more freely. I also gain practical experience and confidence to take the work forward in different directions. Yet every new painting is also an experiment, and from the experience of painting each work new knowledge folds into memory, and tacit knowing. Often, experience from

these sites of play is brought to larger scale works, and often it is in the translation between scales that surprising, new things happen.



Fig.3. Detail of carborundum paint mix for relief textures. Surface is then sometimes spray-painted.

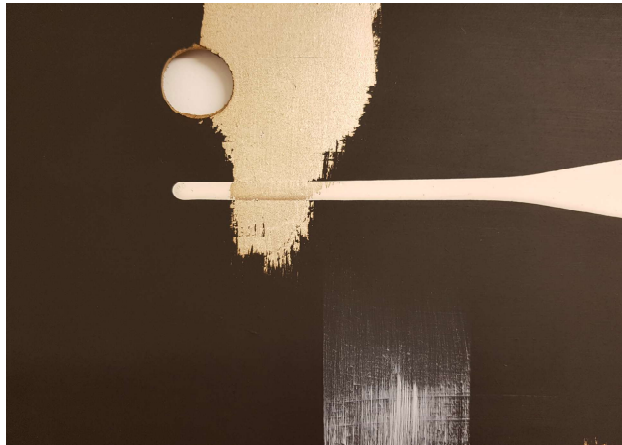


Fig.4. Detail of gesso droplet and silver leaf brushmark on black gesso ground. Hole is drilled through the board surface after painting is complete.



Fig 5. Detail of water removal of paint layer technique, using ink/gouache mix. Spraypaint spots also used.

Artist and theorist Barbara Bolt talks of how images and ideas emerge in the studio, whilst she is in the process of painting. Bolt calls the tacit understanding that comes from learning-through-doing, 'praxical knowledge'. She recounts what glass artist Stephen Proctor said about praxical knowledge:

...use skill with conscious awareness. It is only when you work with your hands that you understand. Until then it is theoretical and although possible, incomprehensible because when the process begins and grows, it reveals something not before conceived.¹

Here Proctor is talking about the experiential nature of tacit knowledge, how as discussed, it is only through 'doing' an activity such as mixing a colour, stretching a canvas that one gains tacit/praxical knowledge of these things.

Praxical, tacit knowledge develops as I paint, experiment with mixtures of colour and modes of application. In this respect tacit knowledge, folds into my painting, just as emerging new qualities and experiences fold into my painting. These indeterminate factors combine in a confluence, of interacting past and present experience. From this interaction new opportunities and possibilities emerge.

Just Looking

At times due to my way of looking, observing the nuanced visual qualities of the world, I develop tired eyes. This began to happen at art school when I realised how I was training myself to look at my environment differently; as an artist. This is now a habitual way of looking at my surroundings, so that I am always looking and processing available visual

¹ Bolt, Barbara. *Heidegger Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers For the Arts*. Page 42. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011. *AUT Library Catalogue, EBSCO host* (accessed October

information. I habitually analyse marks on a wall, smudges on a curtain, and reflect on how such marks or qualities could be painted. Looking, for me is essential to my painting process, both before and after the action of painting starts. Looking as thinking, praxis as (inseparable) looking-thinking.



Fig.
6.



Details of painted surfaces from the general environment. Inspiration for paint techniques.

Tacit Strategy

The role of tacit knowledge is evident in the work of two artists whose work is quite different, but who share some similar tactics within their practice. Howard Hodgkin often takes years to complete a painting. This reflection and concentrated attention over time belies the free and spontaneous appearance of his works. Much of this time is spent just looking at the work, analysing and deciding how to continue. When not working on a painting he tends to turn it inwards to the studio wall. After a fallow period, each is turned back and he looks again to see if a

possibility has emerged in the meantime, so that he can continue painting. The fallow time allows the compost of memory to enrich through other experience and interaction, so that he has new tacit knowing to bring to looking. Hodgkin's praxis includes time spent gazing. He recollects certain factors in this process:

- exactly how a particular brush mark was executed,
- what brush size was used, how flexible the paint bristles were; was it a badger or goat hair brush, for example?
- how much paint was on the brush.
- what mediums were added to the paint used and how much.
- viscosity of paint.
- transparency of certain pigments.
- whether the brush mark was a mix of colour and how the brush was dipped into this colour-mix.
- how dry the layer of paint was, that it was working over.
- knowledge of composition.
- use of complementary colour to create spatial depth.

These nuanced details of the painting process are crucial in the extensive knowledge that Hodgkin is able to draw on, as intuition, and as he is looking, thinking, imagining, and building impetus for his next move.

The sculptor/painter Jessica Stockholder works very differently to Howard Hodgkin yet also draws on tacit knowledge about paint and its physical properties, built from long experience. In *Sailcloth Tears*, for example, we see her understanding and facility with:

- viscosity of paint
- how paint adheres and is applied to different surfaces, textures, what viscosity to use
- How to apply the paint and what tool to use; a spray can or large brush for example, or pour from the tin?
- how different materials fold, hang, curve
- use of colour, knowledge of complementary colour combining to create spatial relationships.....
- knowledge of composition, proportion...'the golden section'

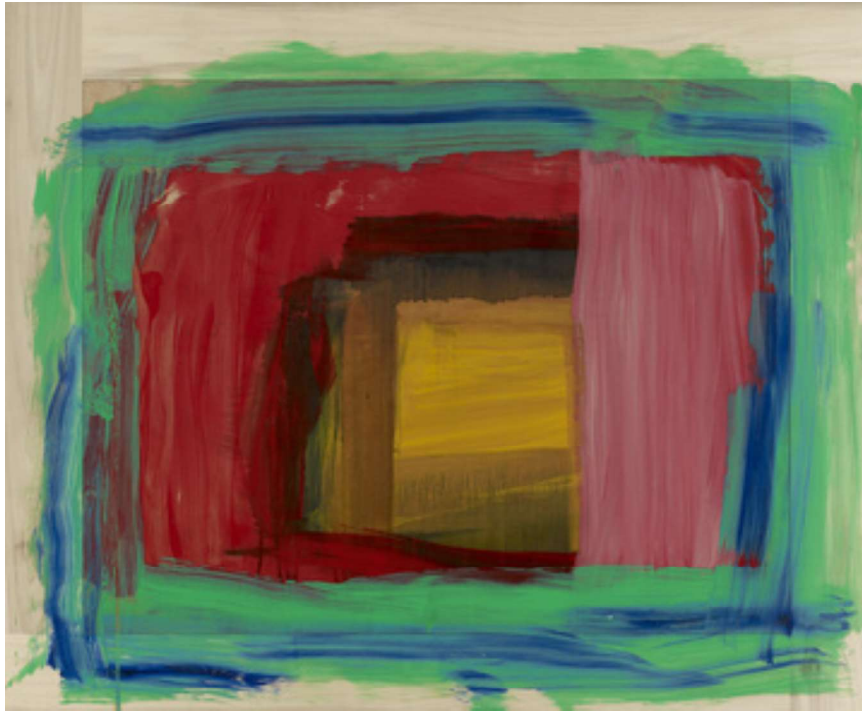


Fig.7. Howard Hodgkin. *For Matisse*, 2007 oil on canvas, 120x190cm.



Fig.8. Jessica Stockholder. *Sailcloth Tears*, 2009. Acrylic paint and mixed media.

Risk

Much of my understanding of how, in a myriad different circumstances, the subtle aspects and nuanced variations of how particular methods and media react and behave, is built up through experiment and risk. It comes from an initial state of not knowing, and of acting without certainty, and needing to allay fear and overcome risk aversion, and needing to suppress expectation. It requires me to paint, in part, without knowing where painting is going. Tacit knowledge is what I give me the confidence to explore new possibilities, and take leaps of faith. Intuition, with its secret recourse to memory and tacit knowledge, provides a salve for any anxiety I feel when painting in the territory of the unknown. This is the territory that I know, intuitively, to be the source of what will become vital to sustaining impetus in my practice. I read this balancing between fear and confidence into Colin McCahon's work *Am I Scared Boy eh?*.

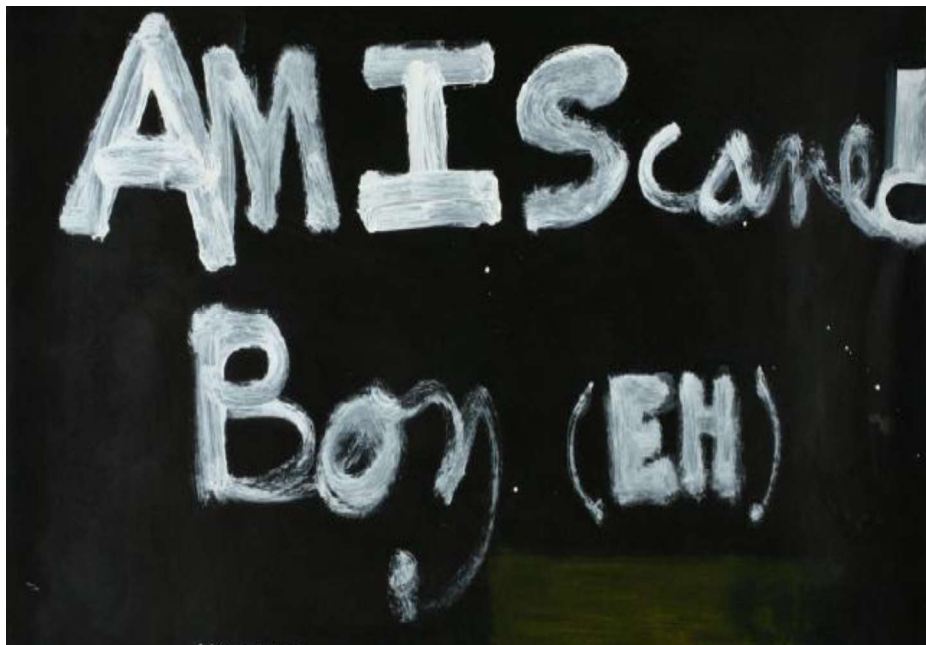


Fig.9. Colin McCahon. *Am I Scared Boy (eh)*, 1976. Acrylic on paper. 73x105cm

Movement, Unfolding, Enfolding

I have no determining strategy of how to plan a painting. Plans and ideas develop and change in a non-linear fashion, as I imagine painting, and as I actually paint. Painting, then, becomes a cycling of transformative possibilities. The blank canvas is not a *tabula rasa*. Despite my efforts to clear anxiety, the white ground is charged with my expectations and with imagined possibilities that come from my past experience. Whatever I do will be informed by that past, by my tacit knowledge. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes how: “the act of painting is always shifting, it is constantly oscillating between a beforehand and an afterward... everything is already on the canvas and in the painter himself, before the act of painting begins.”² I experience this dynamic when I begin a new painting, as information from memory and experience seems to begin making connections and creating plans of its own accord long before I pick up a brush. Ideas for new paintings often germinate as I am working on the current painting, so that the still unprimed canvas for another painting is already becoming pre-loaded with expectations and images. I often feel like a conduit, a facilitator, to these ‘forces’, plans, memories..... always there are relatively preconceived images and aesthetic outcomes in my mind before I step into the studio.

Considering this crowd of information that is in my mind before I begin work, leads me to the philosopher Henri Bergson who describes how layers of memory permeate throughout our lives. He states that our past is always with us, so that a synthesis of the past is woven together with our ever-changing present. In this respect he talks about memory not being a thing but a process; a moving living consciousness that he calls duration. Tacit knowledge is not only fundamental to my practice, it is fundamental to living; to being and becoming me. Bergson’s conception of time and memory relate to how I inform my painting in ways that are

² Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sensation*. 2003

complex, contingent, dynamic, and indeterminate. As for Howard Hodgkin, often it is only sometime after I have finished painting that an origin, or trajectory or 'reading' of my painting emerges to become apparent in me; in my perception. My work is always from my own life experience, and in my own perception. . In this way my painting can be seen to be autobiographical.



Fig. 10. *Pathology*, 1993. 2460x2500mm. Chinese ink and gouache on board.

For example, in my painting titled *Pathology* the large vertical, falling washes of paint create a visual dynamic. It was while I was painting this work that a memory arose from looking at the changing visual conditions. It was as if my body remembered first and then my mind. That was the feeling of falling that triggered a memory of a similar feeling when I nearly drowned as a child. This almost tangible memory came into my consciousness as sensation interacted with memory, in a way that, for me, meshes present and past in what Bergson describes as the duration of time and consciousness.

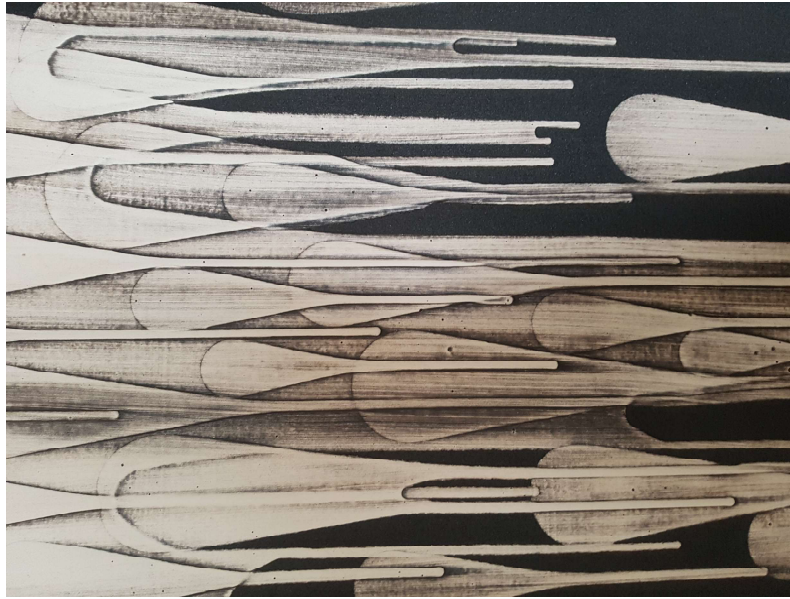


Fig. 11. Detail showing use of gesso droplets over a carborundum base. Droplets are then washed with paint.

Contingency. Chance. Emergence

Given the depth of experience that is brought to painting before a brush or a tube of paint is picked up, I need to remain open and responsive to contingencies suggested by lateral connections and chance happenings as they continually emerge while painting. Remaining in an open or receptive state allows me to take chances in the work, to follow my intuition, and explore fresh approaches in the painting. The poet and academic Stephen Fredman describes this stage of the creative process in this way:

... a positive experience of not understanding occurs in a state characterised by looseness, suppleness, openness, lack of control, inattention, daydreaming, puzzlement. A feeling that certain ineffable thoughts or connections have found expression ³

Fredman's idea of 'not understanding' is compelling for me, especially when translated to situations such as when I do not understand why I chose Phathlo blue over Payne's Grey. While I may not understand this

³ Fredman, Stephen. *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. *AUT Library Catalogue, EBSCO host* (accessed October 5, 2017).

decision, do know it tacitly. I also know how this non attentive, not understanding is a positive dynamic that can lead to a creative state where original and surprising things happen. A 'zone' where ideas are trialled, where chances are taken, so that surprising new things happen that give impetus to my practice. I know that not knowing is the potential, the life, in my practice. As Jessica Stockholder describes: "Now I have this whole array of choices clearly possible from past experience and an imaginary future. It is clear that any one of those, or many of those choices could take one down an equally interesting path and be equally valid."⁴



Fig. 12. Charline Von Heyl. *It's vot is behind me that I am [Krazy Kat]*. 2010. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 187x220cm.

Both Jessica Stockholder and Charline Von Heyl acknowledge this creative state of not knowing when they talk about their process, and how accident plays a key role. Stockholder expresses it in this way:

Yeah, but that is the beauty of painting: it always has a dynamic of its own, which happens through accident. Let's say I start with a

⁴ Westfall, Stephen. "Jessica Stockholder." *Bomb* 41 (Fall 1992). Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1576/jessica-stockholder>.

⁵ Landi, Ann. "Charline von Heyl: Unexpected Collisions." *Art News*, December 16, 2013. Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://www.artnews.com/2013/12/16/charline-von-hey- unexpected-collisions/>

metallic color, because it reminds me of some object I was completely crazy about.....I put that metallic color into the painting — and the moment I do that, something happens. Suddenly that color needs another color. I will run with the painting, like it's a dog on a leash, chasing and almost falling behind it. That is also the space where I forget myself, where painting becomes something that I don't control, neither emotionally nor intellectually.⁵

Von Heyl also explains how “I stumble over something and then I explore that. I push things so that I will stumble into something new. I push things to the point where I have no idea what's going to happen.”⁶

Both artists talk about choices and possibilities when they are painting and both speak as though they are in a state of not really knowing what is going to happen next.

I tend to plan quite a few aspects of my work; the size, the support I am painting on, the initial colour range, for example. However ideas are also brought forward by the process itself as in the work shown in fig. 13, where the process of taking the masking tape off the surface of this work revealed a brownish line in the paintwork. This I perceived as adding a new dimension to the work, and so the marks became part of the final painting. I then consciously used this way of marking the surface in the 2nd panel of the diptych.

The unfolding of my painting is not a linear process. Painting happens and the image emerges as painting happens. Much of what my painting is not planned, and so what happens is often surprising. It is the possibilities that emerge surprisingly that are of particular interest to me. There may be an order to the initial layering of gesso ground and subsequent layers or washes of paint, however if a different decision is

⁷ Landi, Ann. “Charline von Heyl: Unexpected Collisions.” *Art News*, December 16, 2013. Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://www.artnews.com/2013/12/16/charline-von-hey-l-unexpected-collisions/>

⁶ Ibid.

made, these layers or areas on the work can be scrubbed back, painted over, painted out. At every stage in the process decisions are made, changed, gone back on, and developed further in an endless cycle of contingencies.

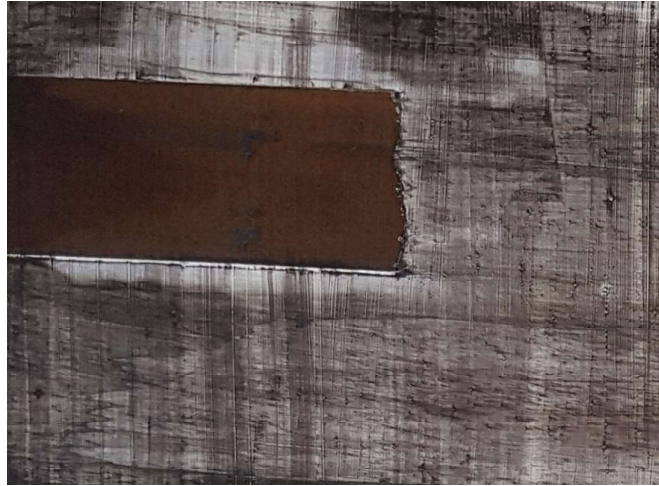


Fig. 13. Detail. Masking marks on gessoed, painted surface. Laser cut Chinese lattice, circle shape.



Fig. 14. Detail. Laser cut Chinese lattice, circle shape.

Tools, Materials, Movement.

There is a simplicity about the painting process that I enjoy. For example, a canvas, acrylic paint, a brush and water is often all I need, and I like to think that within these parameters anything is possible; that a new experience could emerge just as readily from simple and sparse resources, humble origins. However, I often feel compelled to push boundaries, disrupt the given nature of materials, and complicate other aspects of the painted surface. For example, by mixing and exploiting differing physical paint properties, and visually confusing the 2D surface by cuts, drill holes and attachments. This disruption is intended to amplify the sensory potential and the physical nature of the materials/media I use. It is also intended to disrupt my habits of making, thinking, looking, planning, and deciding. I may, for example, use cooking equipment such as a nozzle bottle or rubber spatula as means to apply paint. Generating complexity becomes a way of inviting contingency and unpredictability.



Fig. 15. Some tools I use to apply paint.

In his essay *The Question Concerning Technology* the philosopher Martin Heidegger questions the instrumentalist ‘means-end’ relationship between humans and tools. For example, how an artist’s degree of control or mastery over their tools and materials allows them to create a highly skilled work of art. Heidegger suggests a co-responsibility between, the artist, their materials and tools and processes. All elements working

together and indebted to each other in a relationship that brings forth the work of art. I know that without my discovery of unusual tools and processes, my practice (my oeuvre) would not have unfolded as it has. For example, the nature of my practice is indebted to Chinese ink, certain brands of gesso and acrylic paint, certain brushes and tools.



Fig. 16. Some more tools I use to apply paint.

I am often looking for an appearance of perfection in the technical execution within my work. This perfection can appear simple, yet hides long experience contributing to the tacit knowledge I draw on in order to achieve it. Simplicity often hides underlying complexity. Technical mastery is wrought out of risk, discovery, and repetition. In much of my painting each mark or brushstroke is considered, in order to achieve a coherent surface with seamless connection of visual qualities. This both a habit that needs (at times) to be cleared, but that also allows nuanced difference to emerge in my work. When in this mode of painting, I build layers of material and colour, over time. Sometimes the work is finished in days, or months, I have even come back to works in later years to complete a layer. I was trained as a printmaker, and this layering has become an integral part of how I think compositionally.

Through such deliberative action, and through poiesis ⁷ where something is brought into being that did not exist before, that I hope to encounter surprise. The artist Derek Whitehead talks of the relationship between poiesis and the sensory embodiments of art making, describing how a potter throwing clay on a wheel brings forth a form out of a shapeless mound.⁷ In the process of its making, a vessel emerges out of the dual connection between the artist's hands and memory, 'handling' and the clay itself.

An artist is not marginal to a work's expressive being. The artist makes a work and is in turn made by it. Something takes place in the exchange between artist and work, for artist and work are instruments one to one another.....here the work of poiesis is also the poiesis of work, the process of making and the thing made.⁸

This knowledge of tools, process and materials is increased and expanded with each painting, this unfolding of experience into the work is thus enfolded back into the duration of memory, and taken back into my practice, which in turn is taken into the next works and so forth in a cyclical dynamic of associations.

I contemplate if it would be possible to value accidents, mistakes to somehow show the thought and technical processing in a painting?

If it is the artist's relationship, indebtedness to the tools of painting that brings forth the work of art, I would like to suggest that this relationship and technical knowledge of process is paramount/crucial to a successfully executed work. Painting that breathes and does not stumble or choke through poor execution. Due to my comparatively traditional training as an artist, where I learnt a wide variety of techniques and media, I have extensive knowledge at my finger-tips and in my memory

⁷ Poiesis is etymologically derived from the ancient Greek term which means 'to make'.

⁸ Whitehead, Derek. H. *Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting Be*. 2003. Accessed October 5, 2017. [https:// www.contempaesthetics.org](https://www.contempaesthetics.org).

banks that serves me well. I have the confidence due to this handleability and deep tacit knowledge to experiment and take risks with media.

Technology

Technology provides one way for me to move beyond familiar ways of working and beyond habitual strategies for making paintings.

Introducing the technology of a laser cutter provided one such means to create an image is by exploring new ways of working. This has moved my practice onto unknown ground. I am a low tech person with just basic computer knowledge, so the digital laser process requires me to work with a technician who can vectorise my images on the computer and operate the machine. Working in this way I am letting go of control of the outcome, when I have no depth of experience with equipment such as the laser cutter. I am uncertain of the outcome when the laser cuts an image into gessoed board, paper or plywood. Not having control is liberating, and I feel my aesthetic reflex loosening as a new sense of 'play', comes into the art-making process. Other technologies offer possibilities that come from amateur use, where unexpected outcomes from unfamiliarity and inept usage can be useful to me.

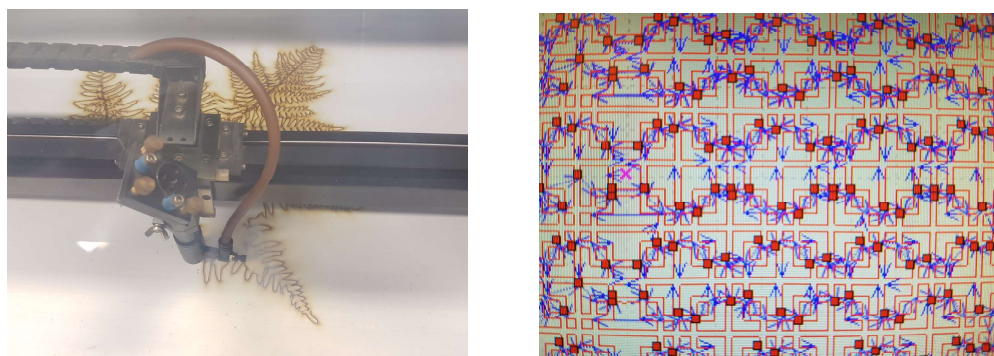


Fig. 17. Showing the process of laser cutting of a fern shape through MDF.
Also how the images to be cut have to be vectorised on the computer, by a technician

Topic, Subject Matter, Theme

The topic, subject matter or theme I work with comes from previous territories of exploration both in art, and in other fields of experience; material, procedural, and conceptual. Sometimes there is a clear continuity between series of work; for example with colour, or materials, or format. At times elements emerge quite unexpectedly, as when a fern leaf motif came into some paintings in 2016. I decided to persist with this motif, despite its over-use as a symbol for New Zealand; perhaps as a subconscious impulse to explore my sense of identity as an Asian New Zealander in aspects of my work. The challenge was to disrupt this habit of symbolic perception, by exploring new conditions and relations for a different way of perceiving.

One of the recurrent themes, I have in my work seems to be working with ideas of binary oppositions and the interplay of black/white, yin-yang, surface/depth, passive/active are among some of the contrasting ideas I work with. I speculate on whether this visual interplay of seemingly opposing elements could be associated with my own personal connection with two cultures; Chinese and Pakeha. I enjoy working with a diptych format, as it reflects these binaries working/negotiating together to form one coherent work. This is reflected in the tension between pictorial elements, as for example I perceive a planar visual field suddenly drop into the narrow chasm of a saw cut or drilled hole. Here the conceptual reading of the work comes from perceptual response to the work, rather than the work being made in response to a preconceived idea.



Fig.18. Experiment with format using painted layers, laser cut shapes, multiple elements



Fig. 19. Detail of first fernleaf stenciled and spraypainted onto *Manifesto* painting.



Fig. 20. Laser cut fernleaf, playing around with stencils and spraypaint

The visual interplay of two elements working as one is shown in the work as the panels of a diptych, or between painting surface and frame that perhaps is not acting as a frame in a traditional sense but just as another element of the painting. One of the recurring opposing visual dynamics is that of aesthetic, painterly harmony juxtaposed with disruptive physical elements such as cuts or holes through the surface of the painted surface.

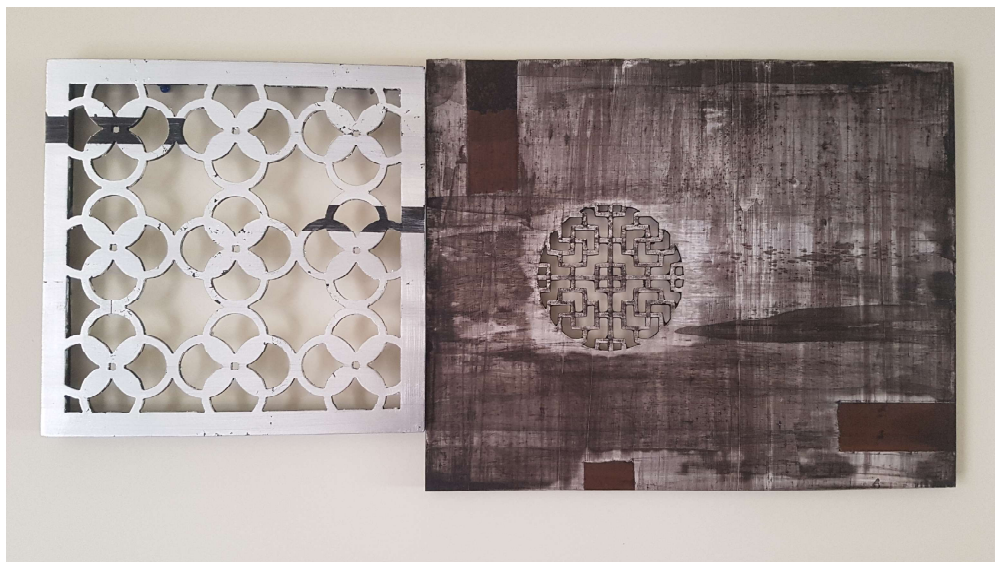


Fig.21. *Untitled*. Acrylic and ink, silver leaf on board. 780x1350cm. Diptych using laser cut through surface of painting.

This 'tension' between binary elements in the paintings creates uncertainty as the binary oppositions are played out on a single painted surface. Contradictions in the paintings such as; beautiful/crude, whole/broken, still/active, black/white, surface/depth have formal and compositional functions but also have a conceptual reading relating to my early Feminist influences of wanting to blur binary systems, intercept aesthetic 'mastery' and authority over techniques and materials. I find an affinity with how Mark Godfrey talks about the painting of Jacqueline Humphries, when he states: "The idea of a place from which to feel a sense of authority as a viewer disintegrates, because it is impossible to orient oneself to any particular point or shape."⁹



Fig.22. Jacqueline Humphries. *Untitled*. Oil on canvas, 270x180cm. 2003.

I am not sure whether I actively want to dis-orientate the viewer to the extent that they ask questions about what they are seeing. Although my work is quite different from Humphries' painting we perhaps share an interest in creating complex and uncertain pictorial depth within the

⁹ Westfall, Stephen. "Jessica Stockholder." *Bomb* 41 (Fall 1992). Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1576/jessica-stockholder>.

painted surface. This is most likely what also draws me to the work of Howard Hodgkin.

Harmony and dissonance

One of the relationships of two elements I examine in my work, is that of harmony and disruption. This visual dynamic can be used as a compositional strategy that can be employed by artists to create energy within the work and draw the viewer's attention into the painted surface. It is this intermingling between opposing visual sensations that can engage the viewer and prompt them to question what they are seeing.

After many years of painting, I have a strong aesthetic inclination towards harmony. I am always aware of balancing my decorous habits with disruptive or challenging aspects in the work, in order to prevent my work falling into the realm of pleasing without challenging; an indecorous and ignominious ending that this project aims to insure against.



Fig.23. *Small Nexus*. 2016. Gesso and silver leaf on board. 68x85cm.
Showing cuts through the frame and painting

Aesthetics

Aesthetic values are culturally conditioned, so that aesthetic response involves a complex interaction of sensory, emotional, intellectual and cultural aspects that are both subjective and general. Jessica Stockholder talks about her experience with aesthetic cliques and their habitual responses:

Some peoples' notion of good taste reinforces a way of understanding the world that supports the world as they want it to be. Things that introduce a new way of thinking, challenge notions of taste are, for some people, wonderful. They like to have the world shook up a little, to have their thinking challenged. Other people don't want that, it offends them.¹⁰

With my work, I sometimes make disruptions simply in order to shake things up. I may, for example, cut through a frame or through the surface of a painting. Aesthetically these operations are disruptive, however they are often held (connect) within a coherent aesthetic composition. I suspect my Eurasian heritage is complicit in this tendency. Possibly also my dislike of cliques, and my feminist inclination to challenge hierarchies and their non-inclusiveness. The aesthetic disruptions provide a shock to perception, or at least introduce unease as a challenge to complacency. When talking about aspects of her work, Jessica Stockholder speaks of how her painting/installation practice began; starting out as a kind of elbowing the art institution, being upset at how art is muffled because it's precious and packaged and placed on a pedestal.¹¹

I do feel like there is a rarefication of art cultivated in the art market that I am not interested in and that I fight against....
...Some peoples' notion of good taste reinforces a way of understanding the world that supports the world as they want it to be. Things that introduce a new way of thinking, challenge

¹⁰ Westfall, Stephen. *Jessica Stockholder*. Bomb 41 (Fall 1992). Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1576/jessica-stockholder>.

notions of taste are, for some people, wonderful. They like to have the world shook up a little, to have their thinking challenged. Other people don't want that, it offends them ¹²

The painting *Nexus VIII* is an example in my work, of such strategies of challenge in play.



Fig.24. Jessica Stockholder. *Kissing the wall*. 1988 mixed media and acrylic paint, 80 x 76cm

The subject matter of the work *Nexus VIII* (fig.3) is indicated by my use of a traditional, heavy black frame which denotes value and prestige. I want to acknowledge the historical legacy of painting, but also interrupt this by only partially gilding the ornate frame, and painting the remainder the same black as the main areas of the work. A faded memory, or gesture to past glories, perhaps. As a further delicate (respectful) desecration, holes are drilled through the surface of the work, and sometimes I cut through

¹² Westfall, Stephen. *Jessica Stockholder*. Bomb 41 (Fall 1992). Accessed October 5, 2017. <http://bombmagazine.org/article/1576/jessica-stockholder>.

the frame. This project is constitutes a metaphorical 'cutting through the frame' of my own practice – not in order to denigrate, but in order to bring new vitality to that practice.

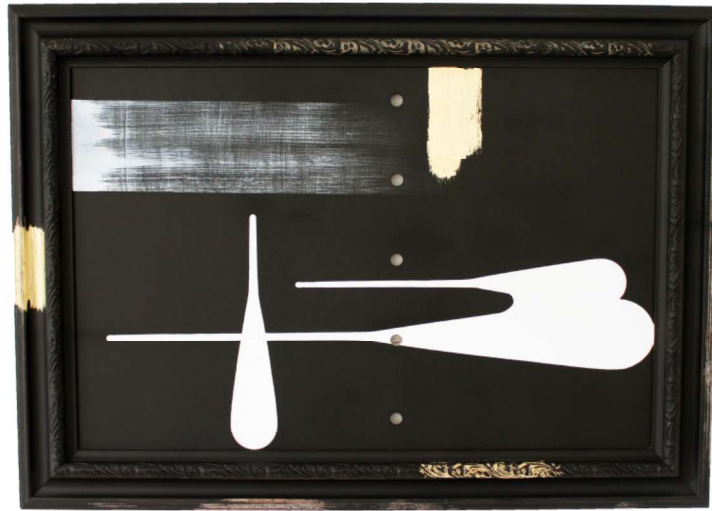


Fig.25. *Nexus VIII* 2016 Gesso, gold leaf and acrylic on board. 85x120cm.
Showing how holes cut through surface of the painting become compositional elements, yet have implied conceptual aspects.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the complex matrix of contingencies through which my paintings emerge, it now seems clear how important the cycle of tacit knowledge is to my practice: how tacit knowledge accumulates through hands on experience with materials and tools. As this tacit praxical knowledge develops it continually folds back into my methodology and gives me confidence to take risks and explore new ground in painting.

The durational interplay, movement of life experience, memory, materials, processes and how they relate to subject matter and the aesthetic nature of the work I make is now clearer. I am still compelled to explore aesthetic harmonies in painting, but also to push against habit, and to build a more informed, nuanced and challenging approach into my practice.

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Appendix

Chronology of Works 2016-2017



Fig. 26. "Nostalgia" acrylic, gesso, Chinese ink, gold leaf on board, 2016. 95 x 105cm.



Fig. 27. "Small Nexus II" acrylic, Chinese ink, gold leaf, spraypaint on board, 2016. 85 x 100cm.

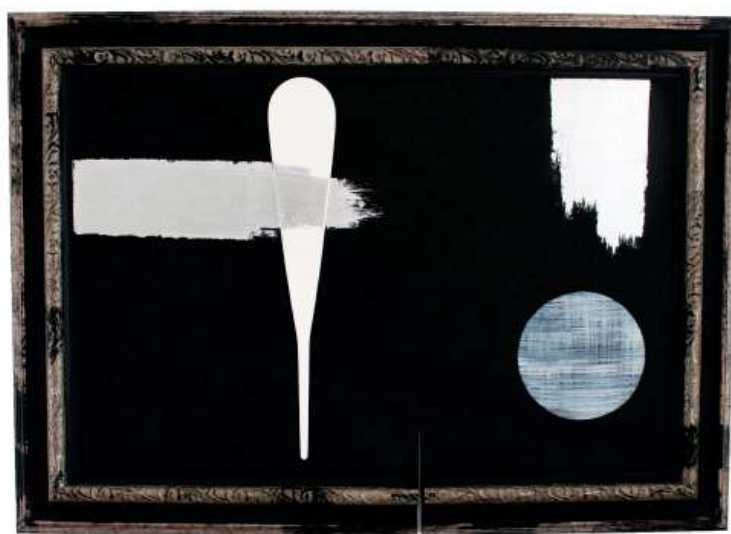


Fig. 28. "Nexus III" acrylic, gesso, silver leaf on board. June 2016. 85 x 120cm.



Fig. 29. "1850" acrylic, Chinese ink, gold leaf, spray-paint on board. 2007-2016 85 x 100cm.



Fig. 30. "Manifesto" acrylic, gold leaf and spray-paint on board. May 2016. 207 x 105cm
First time I used a fern leaf stencil in work.



Fig. 31. "Only Love Can Hurt Like This" acrylic, Chinese ink on board, laser shape. June 2016. 195 x 169cm.



Fig. 32. "Y + Y" found screen, acrylic paint, gesso, laser-cut shapes. September 2017. 80 x 50cm.

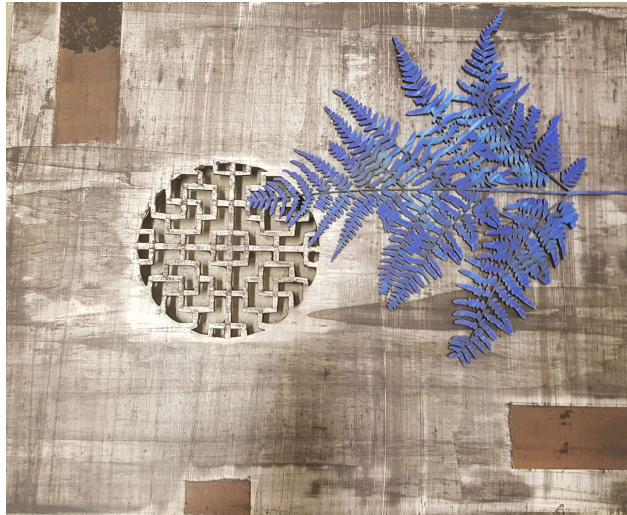


Fig. 33. "Untitled" acrylic, gesso, laser-cut shapes on board. August 2017. 78 x 65cm.

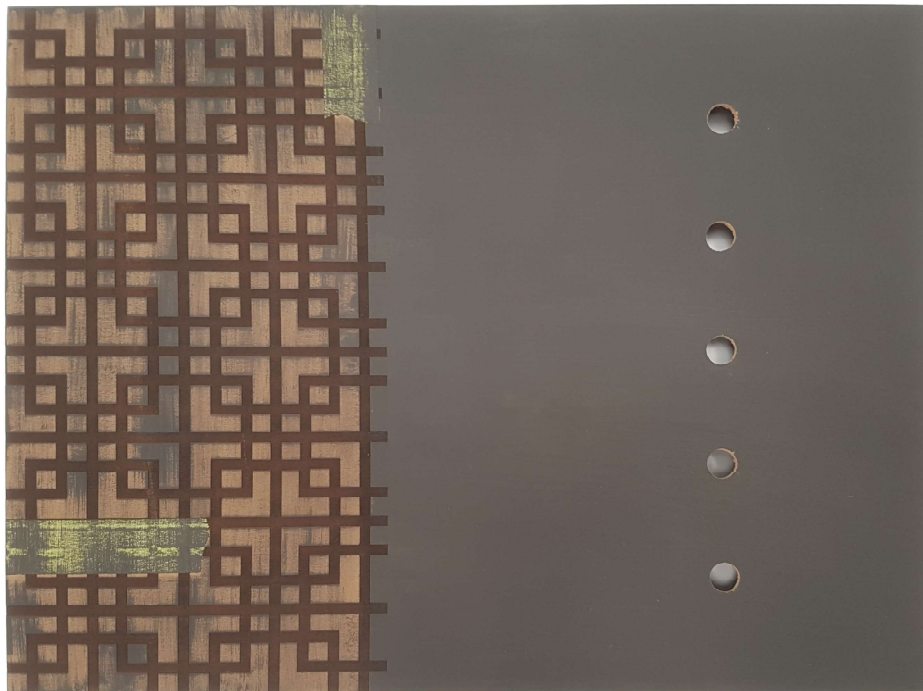


Fig. 34. "Lattice Black" black gesso, tape, laser engraving. Drilled hole. September 2017. 95 x 78cm.



Fig. 35. "Interplay Diptych" acrylic and laser engraving on board. 2017. 95 x 78cm.



Fig. 36. "Lattice Pink" acrylic and laser cutting on board. 46 x 61cm.

Final Presentation

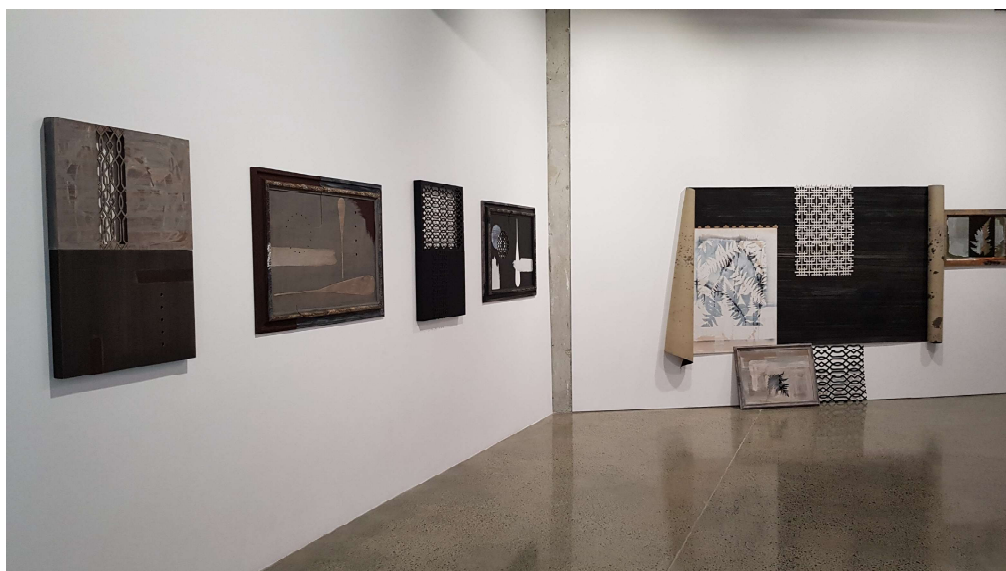


Fig. 37. Installation view.



Fig. 38. Installation view.



Fig. 39. "Contingency" mixed media. c. 320 x 240cm.



Fig. 40. "Matrix" acrylic and laser-cut shapes on board. 46 x 61cm.



Fig. 41. "Diptych Interplay" acrylic and laser engraving on board. 46 x 61cm.

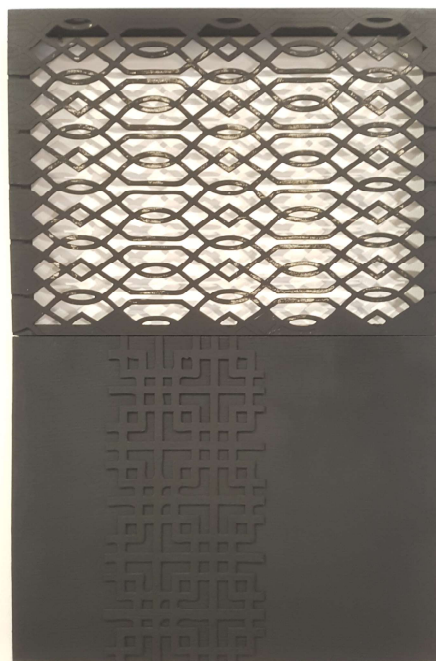


Fig. 42. "Nexus Diptych" acrylic, carborundum on board. 91 x 61cm.



Fig. 43. "Nexus Beige" acrylic, gold & silver leaf, gesso on board.
2016-2017. 85 x 120 cm.

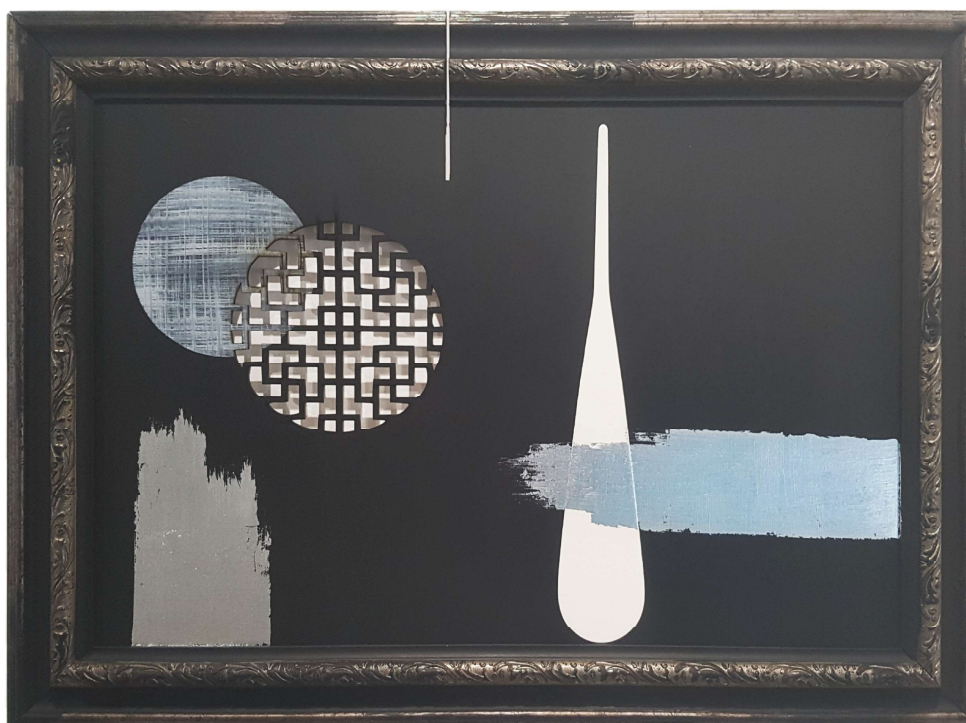


Fig. 44. "Laser Nexus" acrylic, silver leaf, gesso on board. 78 x 110cm.

