

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

Subject[ed] Matter

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AUT 2013

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Let us hold to the appearances; I will formulate purely and simply what I feel and what I see: All seems to take place as if, in this aggregate of images which I call the universe, nothing new could really happen except through the medium of certain particular images, the type of which is furnished me by my body. (Henri Bergson, 1896, p.3)

Introduction: Subjective matter

In some of my more recent work, the implication of painting as a vehicle, through which some external narrative or subject is represented pictorially, has become irrelevant. I am no longer interested in painting as either a medium or process, whose main purpose is to be at the service of pictorially representing content(s), over and above, the act (process-processing) and materiality of paint itself. This is a shift from the employment of paint as a means of picturing real or imagined worlds, to paint applied to enhance or negate a specific form or/and space. This shift in emphasis had occurred on several occasions prior to this thesis, in particular with the *loaded* series of poured resin works dating from 2007 to 2012. This series of poured works has been extended further onto works on paper (2011-2012), on panel (2011-2012), and directly into an environmental context with floor based experimentations (2012).

What has resulted, and continues to do so, is the use of a minimal syntax. This reductive or minimal approach has culminated in two on-going bodies of work, titled: *Dissolve* and *Loaded*. Within these bodies of painted works the paint is simply applied as a veneer of sorts, using forms of paint and lacquer, which would commonly applied as a primer, protective sealer or screen. In

comparison to traditional modes of painting, this application is not there in order to embellish or distract from the material properties of the surface onto which it placed. In the most simplistic of terms, it is paint as primer (ground), or glaze/lacquer (finish).

I have used the 'terms' reductive or minimal in reference to these works, however they differ from the easily associated definitions of minimalists in the 1960s. Even though they appear visually reductive or minimal they are in the most part produced via a process, which is in essence accumulative, and in some cases heavily laboured. Not reductive in nature.

This shift being the case, the question I have endeavoured to ask is why has my practice evolved in such a manner?

What would be the point of what at first appears to be such a reductive painterly activity or process?

What is the nature of the underlying contextual and theoretical concerns that have informed my practice? How, and to what extent, do these concerns inform my current practice? These are the questions that this exegesis will attempt to examine, and contextualise.

The impetus and basis for this questioning is twofold; firstly, it was an exploration of concerns surrounding notions associated with the sublime, and its many iterations. Of particular importance was Rosenblum's (1961) notion of an 'abstract sublime' related to practitioners in the 1960s.

This exploration of an 'abstract sublime' will be extended to encompass a genre/movement that has been referred to, and, in some circumstances defined as 'Process Painting.' This process-based model was associated with British and European artists of the 1990s where the 'act of painting' and its inherent material properties were brought to the fore. A phenomenological, exploration of what constitutes paint, and painting. I felt that at the time that there were many misreadings of this 'process based' work, particularly the placement of it within a Greenbergian 'formalist' model (Greenberg, 1940).

Even though these modalities of thought and practice from the Romantic sublime through to the 'Abstract Sublime and 'Abstract luminists' of the 1990s, may appear to be chronologically and conceptually divergent, what I am interested in understanding is the specific nature their various

'affective' properties. In particular the employment of material contingencies and properties, not in terms an experiencing of the *transcendental* sublime, but more in terms of their differing affective 'intensities,' derived from a position of *immanence*, and potentialities, within a phenomenological context.

What kinds of 'felt' intensities and potentialities can arise in terms of phenomenological encounters with paint or the painted-object?

Therefore this discussion of painting's affective 'potentialities' is not only confined to what is often termed as 'minimal painting,' but to some extent to do with what has been referred to as painting in the 'Zero degree.'

The notions/relationships of 'affect' and 'intensity' that I am here referring to, are those which result from a minimal approach to image-making that was defined by Kirk Varnedoe in his 2003 A.W. Mellon Lecture in Fine Arts, as 'Pictures Of Nothing.'

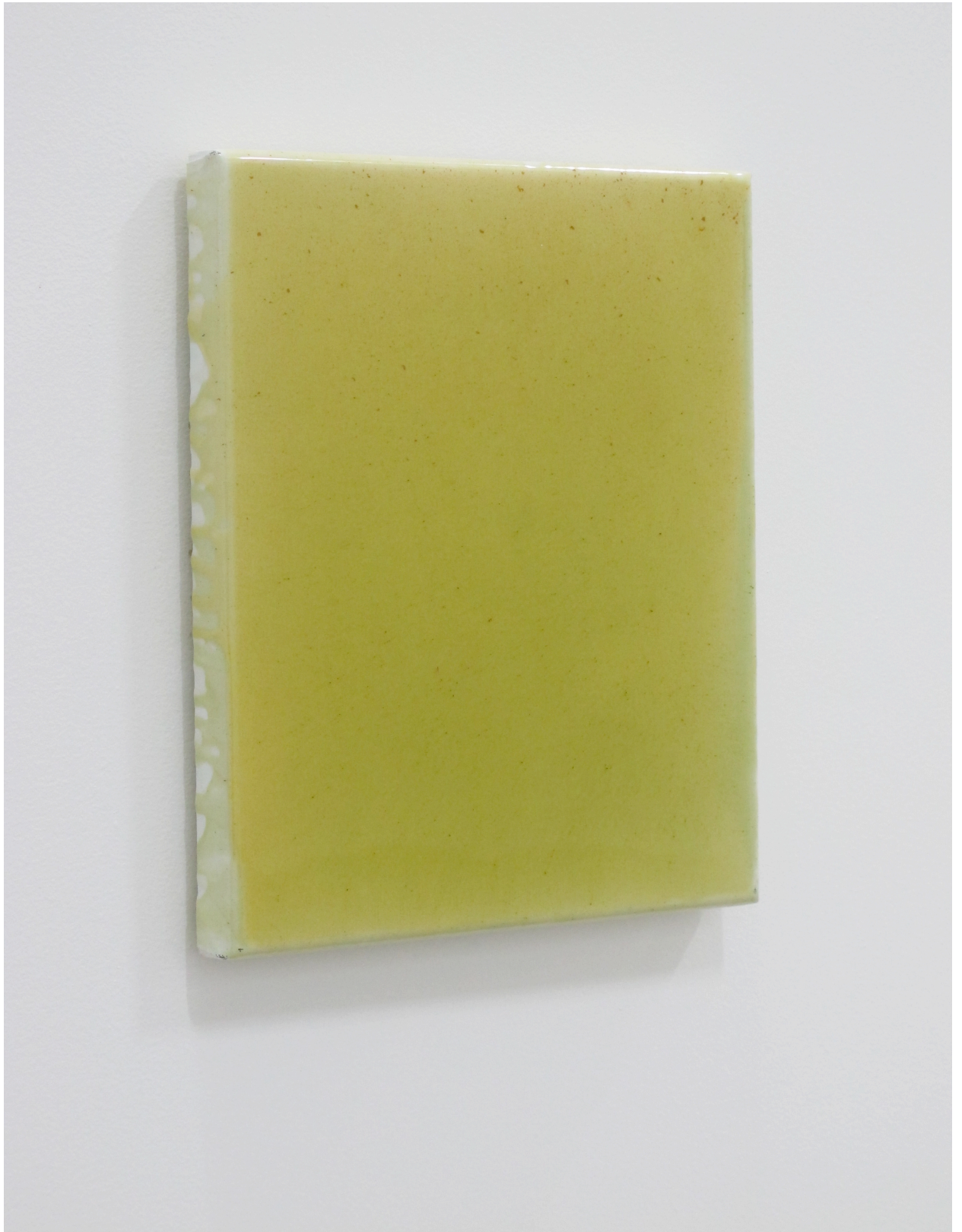
What is the affective nature or potentiality of images, which offer little in the way of any visual (pictorial), or material 'intervention?'

As mentioned earlier the impetus for this exegesis exists from a self-reflexive questioning of my practice from responses and readings of two on-going bodies of painted works, 'Dissolve' and 'Loaded.'

These explorations will involve a focusing, on bringing into existence of the painting/object itself, the site of encounter, and in-turn the affective experience(s) propagated by the two former aspects.



Untitled, (Loaded) Series, Synthetic resin and Pigment on Linen, Jensen Gallery, Sydney 2011



Untitled Synthetic resin and Pigment on Linen, 2011

Light matters / Light touch

A more constructive and appropriate exploration of these 1990s 'processed based' artists was to be found in Morley's (1996) article *Light as Surface* where Morley defines them as "Abstract luminists" (p. 30). Both the essay 'title' and 'term' being borrowed by Morley, from Max Kozloffs (1968) Art 'Forum' article, *Light as Surface*.

In Morley's article, he refers to Kozloffs treatise in which he coins the term "abstract luminism" (p. 30). Morley discusses how in contrast to much of minimal practices at the time, Kozloff encountered a small number of minimally rendered works produced by just a few artists in the late 1960s, which he described as "surreptitiously chromatic" (p. 30) and of having a "luminousplendour" (p. 30). Morely goes on to say that Kozloff felt that the formalist and literalist theories of art practice, then dominant, did not satisfactorily account for the phenomenology of this subtle visual encounter.

In his article Morley sought to use Kozloffs construct of an 'abstract luminism' to critique the practices of a few British artists whose works appeared to embrace these sentiments. Morley referenced the work of the 1990s, such as British artists like Callum Innes, James Hugonin, describing their mode of practice as one that emphasizes "the physical status of their work through various technical strategies," (p. 32) but paradoxically and simultaneously sought to augment a "powerful sense of dematerialisation" (p. 32). The resulting affect, was one of, a sensing of instability, a "slipping of the bounded into the boundless" (p. 32). Although Morley's treatise didn't refer to it (maybe, intentionally so) these passages were steeped in a kind of rhetoric usually associated the conversations around the sublime.

When thinking about these artists practices, which Morley refers to as 'abstract luminists', I became aware of their conscious implementation of specific procedural strategies related to affect, which questioned and allowed for a renegotiation of a seemingly paradoxical divide

between that of immanence and transcendence. According to Morley, “such effects are created to juxtapose the finite object-hood of the work with a simultaneous and paradoxical sense of immateriality and transcendence”(p. 32).

In order to understand the role and implications that underpinned Kozloff’s notion of a ‘abstract luminism’ and Morley’s reinvestment in it, I followed Morley’s reference to Robert Rosenblum’s (1961) treatise *The Abstract Sublime*, in which he talks of the northern European Romantic movement, a movement whose imperatives were based on the belief that art has the potential to evoke an experience, which in essence is ethically important, and vital. The ambitions of such a movement were to evoke and imbue a consciousness that relates to a transcendental existence. The partial intention of such a movement was the preservation of religious beliefs, via artistic means.

Rosenblum asserts that there was a partial shift 20th Century Abstractionists, such as Kandinsky, and Malevich, who still sought to endorse and sustain religious and spiritual concerns even though they were more aligned with a portrayal of differing transcendental realities/possibilities, rather than specific religious doctrines or narratives. They did so within the context of a society that was becoming increasingly secular.

It was in this context that Kozloff (1968) began to explore the works of artists such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, whom he saw as being outside of, or unaccounted for properly, by the dominant theories of the time.

Theories, that at the time, were proffered as Greenbergian notions of literalism, and formalism, namely purism (Greenberg, 1940).

In Morley’s words, theories that “did not satisfactorily account for the phenomenology of this subtle visual encounter” (Morley, 1996, p. 30).

Both the *Loaded* and *Dissolve* bodies of work that I am contextualizing, are contingent on concerns that related to Kozloff’s (1968) idea of an *Abstract-luminism*, in the sense, that there was a conscious attempt and understanding of the potential, to create disorientating and intense



Untitled (Shallow Depth) Acrylic on Linen, 2012

experience using light. Not a picturing of light, but by the use of oil, and acrylic paint's inherent physical and materially luminescent properties. Inherent viscosity, transparency and translucency, reflective and refractive properties were manipulated, and exploited. Within the *Dissolve* and *Loaded* works, it was and still is my intention through an exploiting of these properties, that the observer is given/afforded an insight or understanding of what constitutes the material makeup of the painting, and how it is constructed, but simultaneously still be conscious that depending on their proximity to the painting that they are potentially vulnerable to a disorienting and ambiguous sensing of the overall effect of the painting. As much as the process appears to be of primary concern, it is not to be seen as an end within itself. This foregrounding of the physical processes, and attribute's, paradoxically only serves to heighten the 'uncanniness' of the resulting optical effects, and the overall affective nature of the paintings. The experience of uncanniness is can be expanded upon through Freud's (1919) theories of the uncanny, or *das unheimliche*; being the opposite of that which is familiar. Freud developed his notion of the Uncanny from the writings of Ernst Jentsch, in particular his essay, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (Jentsch, 1906).

It is relevant to elaborate on Freud's notion of the uncanny, as it relates to a specific kind of feeling, or sensation. A sensation imbued with emotional impulses and qualities.

Up to and until Freud's elaboration on the Uncanny, most discourses around aesthetics had opted to focus on more positive feelings and emotions associated with notions of beauty and the sublime. In contrast, to these generally accepted notions of the beautiful and the sublime, Freud's definition of the uncanny refers to experiences that are *fearful and frightening*. Freud developed his definition of theory of the uncanny, through an amalgamation of psychoanalytic and aesthetic models of thought.

Freud, via his interest in Jentsch's (1906) essay proffered differing nuances and interpretations of meaning for the word *Heimlich*: that which is *known and familiar*. For Freud, *Heimlich* reveals traits/definitions that are also associated with its opposite, *unheimlich*, that which is *unknown*



Subject[ed] Matter (Shallow Depth), Installation detail, AUT, 2013

and unfamiliar. As such, what is *Heimlich*, hence comes to also be *unheimlich* in fact the word *heimlich* is affiliated to two groupings of concepts, without being contradictory. But in saying this they fundamentally still differ greatly.

In essence, Freud is interested in how what is perceived as familiar and agreeable, is also, on the flip side, what is concealed and kept out of sight.

What is important here is how Freud's understanding of *unheimlich* also relates something that is concealed from the *self*. In this sense, the uncanny in the context of my work, reveals not only that which is private and concealed; but that which is hidden not only from others, but also from myself.

As mentioned earlier, for me, it is a foregrounding of the physical processes, and attributes, within my current practice, that paradoxically, serve to heighten the 'uncanniness' of the resulting optical effects, and the overall affective nature of the paintings.

This paradox is central to my practice, as my research has led me to employ a minimal syntax, which highlights the materiality and procedural attributes of the work. Material and procedural attributes, which are in essence, in an unmediated state, a state pertaining to lack or absence.

Attributes, which also, can neither, be fully qualified or quantified by formalist or expressionist remits as asserted by Greenberg (1940), but rather as state or condition that that asserts its being in time, as an 'event.' This is an event that is not easily definable or distinctive, it instead, exists as a question, lingers, suspending the observer in a psychological discourse.



Untitled (Loaded), Pigmented resin based shellack ink (poured) on 640gsm paper. 2012

Digressions on the Sublime

[Lyotard]Two Lyotard: types of sublime **1. Against: Nostalgic sublime, 2. For: Avant-gardist experimentation (Newman's: The sublime is Now, "Is it happening") Temporality/Duration.**

Lyotard: The 'differend.' Heidegger's 'event'

In viewing my own work(s), and the works of other artists, along-side the experiencing of visual and aural phenomena that I encountered on a daily basis, I began to understand more about what 'attracted' my gaze, but also wanted to understand how and why I was 'affected' by these encounters. In essence, I wanted to understand what constituted my personal sensibilities, and whether, or how, I could strategize within the context of my own practice to further extend these particular concerns and tropes that surprised, confused, and agitated my senses and intellect. I began to come to the realization that I was enticed by work, images, objects and events, which had visually relayed an atmosphere of sparseness and affectivity, imbued with a sense of quietude, or silence. These were sensations that were in a sense almost slippery and sticky at the same time. Fugitive, and yet simultaneously, literal, and, or actual. Through works that where visually sparse or silent I was becoming aware of a 'glitch,' or rupture that inhibited or slowed down any graspable reading of a work as a simple set of significations. It was through trying to understand these concerns that I began to look at works and notions relating to an affective nature of the sublime.

This has taken me on a complex journey through various notions of the sublime from the 'religious' and 'Abstract' through to that of 'technological sublime'. But it is via Lyotard's (1984) argument for a *contemporary* sublime, a sublime that is in a continual state of experimentation, of becoming that I felt some form of resonance. A model, for a sublime, that champions the idea of immanence over that of transcendence. A focusing on the sublime, as a form of 'intensity' as opposed to one of transcendence.'

What is of interest to me here, is that which is of interest to Lyotard (1984) in his essay *An*

Answer to the Question: What Is Postmodernism?, in which he suggests, that even though the sublime has become one of the pivotal modes of regarding an aesthetic engagement in the postmodern era, he wishes to point up two dissimilar types of *aesthetic* of the sublime. Lyotard rehearses Barnett Newman's seminal argument against surrealism's 'nostalgic' sublime. This nostalgic sublime for Lyotard is entrenched in the nostalgia of the late twentieth century. He sees this nostalgic sublimity as a retrospective shifting back to the past, and dismisses this shift as a return which is ultimately, and inevitably conservative; a conservatism, which can be seen, as in being in opposition, to an avant-gardist model of *experimentation*. This is an avant-gardist, archetype that, Lyotard championed not only on a level of experimentation, but because of its non-collusive constitution, and attitude against the logic of the contemporary capitalistic marketplace, and culture. This *nostalgic* sublime that Lyotard refers to, could also be seen as manifest in the in 1980s and 1990s 'neo expressionist' painting and 'postmodern' architecture, both of which relied heavily on quoting past historical constructs and aesthetics. In opposition to this, Lyotard (1948) puts forward as a basis of argument a more dynamic form of sublime, which is manifest in avant-gardist art. This is a sublime, which engages with the 'presentation of the 'unpresentable.' I therefore contend it is in reaction to the 1980s -1990s nostalgic sublime within the context of a capitalist market place, and culture, that the artists who Morley (1996) defines as 'abstract luminists' dealt with notions of a kind presentation of that, which be perceived as unpresentable.

Lyotard (1984) extends this discussion in an essay entitled *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde*. By reworking themes and ideas posited by Newman (1948) in his essay, *The Sublime is Now* [to be specific the difference between a work of art which seeks to be a representation of something outside the work, and conversely a presentation or work which refers only to itself.] In a sense Lyotard's objective has been to combine the ideas of Longinus, Burke and Kant, relating to various conceptions of the sublime. In his book *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* Lyotard (1991) uses a comprehensive reading of Kant's writings to discuss sublimity; he also referenced and embraced Burke's (1958) notions to the immanence of the sublime. Burke like Lyotard frames the sublime as a form of intensification, instead of a form of transcendence.

It is through the Heideggerian (1927) concept of 'event' that Lyotard interprets the 'now' in Newman's the sublime is now. In discussing Newman's 'now' he examines it in terms of its temporality. Lyotard reinterprets or presents these characteristics attributed to Burke's notion of a sublime object as constituting a lack or absence [of light, of form, of clarity], finding, as Burke did, that the sublime is essentially an encounter, where pain and terror converge. A terror, which moreover like Burke also assumed, derives from basic fears related to existence. Fears that ask questions within the context of the 'event', the 'instant', and the 'now' questions such as "what if it doesn't happen?" "What if nothing happens?" "What if nothing happens (to me) ever again?"

Is this the basis of or for the development of a melancholic state? A state of anxiety, of anxious being?

The, question of the event for Lyotard (1984), is to be seen in the context of discerning what kinds of discourse(s) arise around, not only the type(s) of 'language' we employ, but also that which we are, or feel familiar. These are often language(s) with which we feel relatively comfortable and safe, no matter what the nature of interest may be; whether this is the language specific to a scientific practice, or philosophical discussion, or that of making art. If we are obeying the familiar or habitual 'rules' and constructs, in a manner, which is 'given' in any one of these languages, we are not implicated in the form of temporality of the 'sublime event' that Lyotard is suggesting. If we know what would constitute each consecutive move or decision, or thought, this new move would not offer us the obstacles, which are required to bestow, the lack, the terror [bathos] of the event, that we will inherently arrive at.

It is against these 'safe' formulaic encounters, that Lyotard, sets avant-garde art. When a subject is experiencing the sublime, it is presented with challenges of the unfamiliar. Exposing the subject to phenomenon that emerge and manifest themselves, doing so as something inassimilable, whilst they the interlocutors are concurrently within a normative rational and discursive state. Thus, this is experienced as an underlying question. 'Is it happening?' It is in this context, suggests Lyotard (1984). He also implies that the history of avant-garde art should be understood as having purged what people can easily recognize as art, with each incremental shift of its development. It is through Barnett Newman that this eradication of the mimetic,

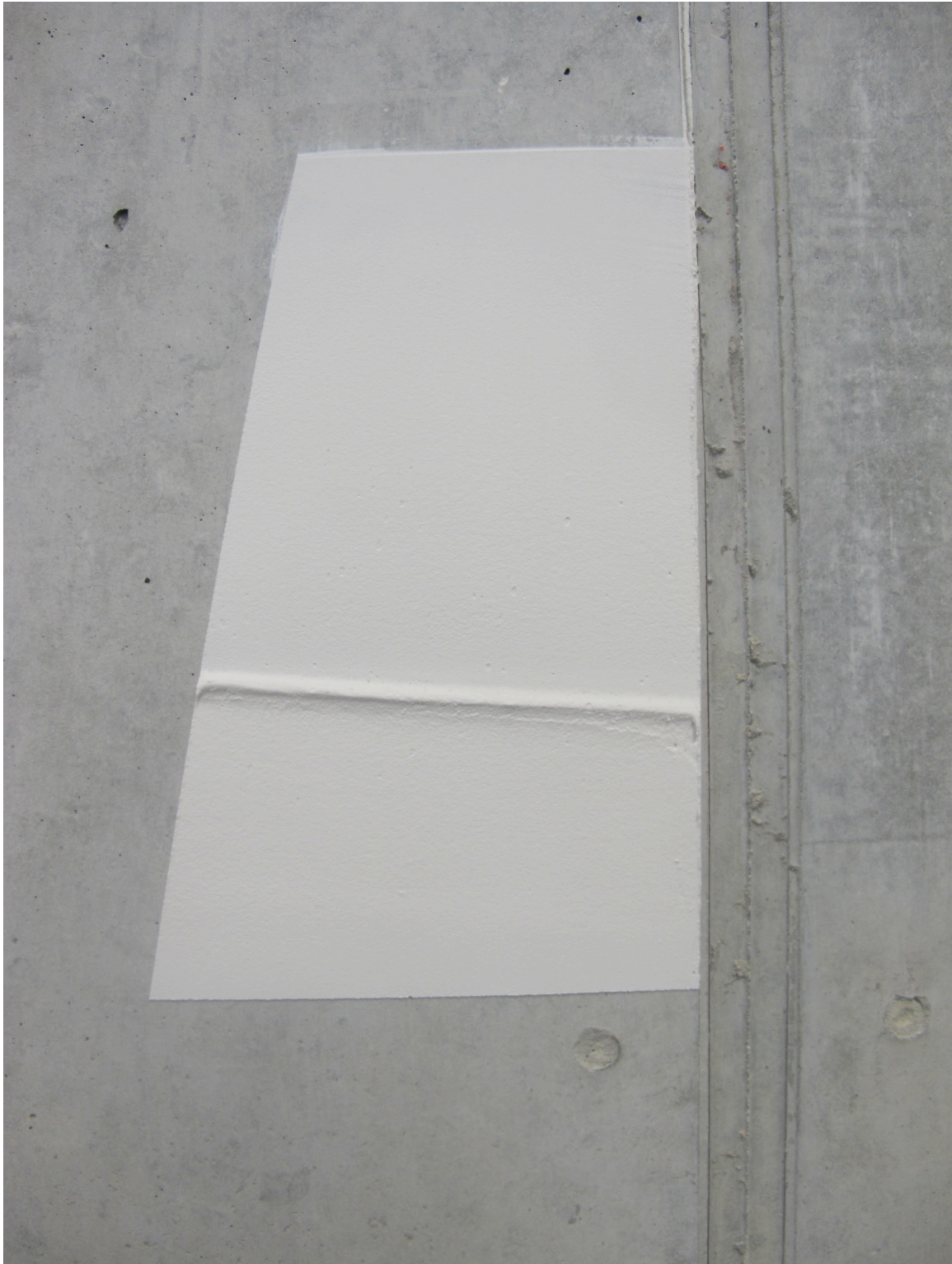


Subject[ed] Matter, Installation detail, *Gib Stopping Plaster* (applied Directly to concrete wall), AUT, 2013

naturalistic representations of object and space within his paintings can be perceived as naturally accompanying the production and encounter of an instant or moment of anxiety. In Newman's instance, large, painted monochromatic fields of colour, were offered in manner in which the rules of art with which people were accustomed to, were negated or denied. Thus they were left with the question, 'Is it happening?' "Will this encounter happen?"

What I would suggest here is that this instant or moment of anxiety is one that incites a space of 'self- reflexive contemplation' in the observer. According to Lyotard (1984) what we encounter when we are faced with the 'event,' which is unfamiliar, is the unspeakable; the unspeakable, being that which is 'beyond' any familiar schema or discourse known to us. This unspeakable is an irruption within the order of a known or given language. It is when the capabilities of the systems of language (discourse), as we know them, are exceeded; that the unspeakable is realised, and it is this, which Lyotard defines and names the "differend" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 3).

For Lyotard, it is this differend that provides a productive and restorative territory of potentiality. Not only can it provide a space from which the new or latent can arise, but it can also be seen as the space between two supposedly irreconcilable orders of discourse, a space within which difference is produced. For Lyotard (1984), this temporality of avant-garde art also plays an underlying ethical role. This ethical position can be understood in two contexts, first; in terms of the 'untranslatability' of a singular form of language, and how *can* a conversation take place between two differing forms of language. Lyotard is concerned about how we can potentially discuss these differences (distinctions). In his book *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, (Lyotard, 1988), he reflects upon how, the divisions derived from differing forms of language, between different peoples or groups of people can be overcome or reconciled. It is in this context that Lyotard posits the 'sublime' and its relevance, because it involves such a juncture between divisions of difference, against the borders of what can be said, with that, which is to us un (re) presentable.



Subject[ed] Matter, Installation detail, *Gib Stopping Plaster* (applied Directly to concrete wall), AUT, 2013



Subject[ed] Matter, Installation detail, *Gib Stopping Plaster* (applied Directly to concrete wall), AUT, 2013

Secondly, and of equal importance to Lyotard is the manner in which 'machines of global capitalism' and its 'culture industries' promote an order of the same, which Lyotard suggests, not only threatens avant-gardist experimentation, but in doing so readdresses it as 'novelty.' A novelty, which can be sold, and resold under many guises of the market based logic of capitalism. This produces trans-avant-gardist remodeling of the sublime into what Lyotard refers to as the "nostalgic" sublime (Lyotard, 1984, p. 81).

What appeals to me, is how Lyotard, positioned and championed [modernist] avant-gardist ideals of 'experimentation' as a central constituent within the sublime, and not the persisting models of the early-eighteenth-century Neoclassicists and/or the 1980s 'neo-abstract expressionists'. In returning to such models, Lyotard felt the sublime was once again entering back into a stable system of representation. This stable formulaic system of representation would however lack the ability or potential to present us with the unrepresentable. The sublime experience here is compromised, as it is contingent on the ungraspable, and the unrepresentable. For Lyotard, it is this market based commercial sphere, which has the potential and drive to denigrate art into the formulaic. It is in this sense, that Lyotard is supporting and analysing the importance of Newman's 'Now' of the sublime 'event' in relation to the current conditions of capitalism; conditions which I still perceive as being prevalent within contemporary western society.



Subject[ed] Matter, (experimental work) Installation view, (Poured synthetic resin, applied Directly to concrete floor), AUT, 2013

Shallow depth (Blankness)

Via Gilbert-Rolfe's (1999) book, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, I would like to extend this discussion of the ungraspable and the unspeakable. This extension will take form by briefly discussing Lyotard's (1984) 'ungraspable' in the context of notions around 'nothingness' via Gilberts Rolfe's concepts of 'blankness' as a signifier.'

In his teatise on beauty and the sublime, Gilbert-Rolfe suggests that Kant and Burke's, relationship to beauty and the sublime were tinged with a morality that could only be experieced on a human scale.

What Gilbert-Rolfe is interested in, is that which constitutes differences between *beauty* and the *sublime*. In doing so, he questions their coexistence, and reliance upon each other within both historical and contemporary contexts.

Gilbert-Rolfe (1996) posits that the relationship between beauty and the sublime is no longer to be found in nature as proposed by Burke and Kant in the eighteenth century, but in a 20th century context exists in relation to our 'experiencing' of technology. Gilbert-Rolfe posits, that these assumptions are not longer applicable within a twentieth century context, and need to be readdressed. When describing this paradigm shift Gilbert-Rolfe has appropriated the term "techno-sublime"(p. 14).

What is of interest to me here in his questioning of and speculations about notions of *beauty* and its differential relationship to the *sublime*, is "in how things look and what that implies" (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p.14). In other words an investigation into what, in a contemporary context, may constitute an aesthetic of the sublime.. He was concerned here with the potential relationships that appear to exist between painting and the technology of the time "which has the possibility of an artificial intelligence as its implicit goal" (p. 14). Here Gilbert-Rolfe is referring to how painting's materiality and surface has been compared in more recent years, to that of the photographic surface or video screen.

It is within painting's relationship to other objects and media that Gilbert-Rolfe makes this assertion that beauty and the sublime are now manifest in contemporary culture by way of technology and electronics.

What is of importance to Gilbert-Rolfe's reading is that the sublime is identified not only with the idea, but also of the 'image' of technology:

It is in the blank face of the technological that one finds immediacy as a hyper accelerated duration, the almost-instantaneity of the electronic, duration invisible to the naked eye—and in that I am defining blankness as a surface both continuous and uninterrupted. (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p. 109)



Subject[ed] Matter, Installation detail, *Gib Stopping Plaster* (applied Directly to concrete wall), AUT, 2013

Here, Gilbert-Rolfe suggests that it is this image, or surface, of technology itself, i.e. the television screen or the photographic surface and its inherent 'thinness' 'plasticity', that potentially affords it the ability to assimilate most content into a seamless event. He describes this seamlessness as being akin to a skin of sorts, because of its even surface texture, its limitlessness, its lack of incidentals, and in its blankness. Likened to a television or computer screen, even when it is turned off.

For Gilbert-Rolfe, the effect of this technological objects and media has to varying degrees has directly, and indirectly to impacted not only on the ways paintings are now made, but also received. As with Lyotard, Gilbert-Rolfe sees Barnett Newman as a key exponent of the post-modern, contemporary sublime. Both see characteristics of the techno-sublime evident, in his work resulting from the painting processes and materials employed by Newman, but also in the way in which his paintings as objects and surfaces could be seen to be comparable, particularly to those of surfaces relating other, technological objects of that era. Compared to conventional notions of what constituted painting such 'gesture' and expressionist tropes, Newman's processes resulted in an predominantly even surface texture , a lack of or minimising of incidentals. This in turn implied an overallness to the composition, a sense of limitlessness, boundlessness, and ultimately a blankness.

Blankness has been theorized only in terms of that to which it gives way, so that blankness is defined as a space without incident, its temporal equivalent time without change (inflection or interruption), i.e., time without incident. This is to define blankness as that which, lacking incidentals, becomes in works of art and other visual signs, itself incidental but, in that, is still fundamental to what is incidental to it. Absolute silence, absolute depth, become conditions for all that doesn't so much replace them as occur in their place. (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p. 110)

Its obviation of incident and potential "obviation of the human" (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p. 137), in the sense of the hand being present as a part of its making, paradoxically had the potential to invoke a sense of terror via its limitlessness and incomprehensibility, in that it refers to the blankness of the technological. This limitlessness or boundlessness is not sensed or perceived

due to its reliance on a transcendental or metaphysical referencing or experiencing of the work, but in its then unconventional reliance on the contingences of its own materiality; contingencies that are inherently 'ungraspable' in that they exceed a conventional or habitualised language, and/or readings.

I feel that for both Lyotard and Gilbert-Rolfe, the sublime's power is in its potential for exceeding meaning. In other words, its ability to be active not passive, when collision of two different languages and temporalities collide, creating a blankness; that which is ungraspable, unspeakable. An, unspeakable referred to earlier in Lyotard's, idea of the 'differend', as being an irruption of, and into, the order of a known, or given language. "a sublime found not in the presence of the forest but in the presentness stimulated by the computer, not in the temporality of nature but in the simultaneity of the electronic" (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p.80); a techno-sublime.

Blankness" may be read "as an imposed of anything good to look at which is also the sign of seriousness in too much contemporary art. If that be blankness then it is blankness as the absence of material as pleasurable stimulus, pleasure in misery, and as such, it is structurally analogous to silence, and if you like to depth. (Gilbert-Rolfe, 1999, p. 111)

Gilbert-Rolfe (1999) continues "the image of blankness" (p. 111) within the techno sublime; now understood, or experienced "as a new place, a detached zone of origination for the inherently ungrounded suspended in absence which is to say the absence of any other sign" (p. 111).

With many of the *Loaded* paintings, I have intentionally employed traditional painting supports (wooden stretchers) and (canvas) as ground, because of their historical and conventional significations. These supporting materials are then overlaid, with a resin that has specific physical and aesthetic properties, which are in contrast not only to the support, but the conventionally used oil and acrylic paints associated with painting. As the layers of resin are poured, there is no obvious trace of the hand in its making, or to tools associated with the hand such as brushes pallet knives. Alongside this, the resin is self-levelling, and as such, apart from shifts in the hue and chromatic properties that form part of the image, there is little in the way

that signifies any form of subjective gestural or expressive posturing. All of the materials employed in some sense create an image in and of themselves. Each successive pour in a sense entombs the previous pour, but due to its translucency, simultaneously reveals the former applications. The manner in which the partially coloured resin forms an image is due to do the contingencies of the substrate (support and canvas). The surface texture transparency and reflective and refractive nature of the resin has a plasticity, that echo's the continuous, seamless, 'techno-surface' of the video screen that Gilbert-Rolfe (1999) refers to in his chapter, *Cabbages, Raspberries, and video's Thin Brightness*; a surface related to the video screen, a technological surface that Gilbert-Rolfe describes as a "surface without depth" a "thinness." (p. 15). It is a visual quality that I refer to as a 'shallow depth.' Blankness.

It is how this "blank face" in Gilbert-Rolfe's critique of contemporary painting, this seamless uninterrupted appearance surfaces of technological, impacts on new notions of the sublime, but also how it impacts on *duration* in art and in particular immediacy (the hyper accelerated). What Gilbert-Rolfe talks of here, for me, relates to, Newman's (1948) assertion of what is being questioned by the observer "Is it happening? Will it happen?" and is in essence what Lyotard (1984) would refer to as the *event*.

Due to the refractive nature and lustre of the resins I have employed, the surface appears to reflect, absorb and emit light simultaneously; everything that conventional painting materials wouldn't do. For here, there is a sensing that oscillates between one of an *excess* and *lack*; between, differing levels of *intensity*, of knowing and not knowing. That which, in a literalist sense speaks, or *communicates*, and that which is *unspeakable, or untranslatable*.



Untitled Resin on canvas, synthetic poured resin (Installation view). Talk Week, AUT, 2012

Nothingness and Anxiety

In the introduction I posited my interest in visual phenomenon that are, for the sake of ease and efficiency, often described as being minimal or reductive; not only in their manufacturing or coming into existence, but ultimately, in 'appearance.' A sparseness that could be read as being, on the one hand, economical or harmonious, through to its antithesis as just simply empty or lacking, eliciting a listlessness, or dissatisfaction, ennui. A *differend*. Between being of an aesthetic (stimulating) and an anesthetic (senseless).

In Kosoi's (2005) article *Mark Rothko: Nothingness Made Visible*, she notes that nothingness appears frequently in writings about twentieth century art, and asks "how can we perceive nothingness or know what it is?" (p. 21). Kosoi continues on to say that "everywhere we look we can see, feel think or sense something, If we shut our eyes and ears, we can always sense our heartbeat" (p. 21). Kosoi follows these observations up with "no matter how much we try not to think about anything at all, we will still be aware of our own existence" (p. 21).

What is of interest in Kosoi's introduction to Rothko's practice, is firstly that if there is no such thing as nothingness, 'why' and 'how' do various artists desire and attempt to represent it.

Kosoi endeavours to answer her own questions by relating *nothingness* to the (Kantian) sublime, "it is not a state in which we are absorbed in the world, nor is one of either self-forgetfulness or a shattered consciousness" (p. 27). In short, there is no sense of delight. Instead, there arises, an 'anxiety' in which "entities in the world recede from us and we cannot get hold of them, leaving us with only our own being (p. 30).

Kosoi, points out via Heidegger (1927) that nothingness is not a "non being" (p. 22), or a "negation" (p. 22), of all the entities of the world which only "come into 'existence' via the human consciousness" (p. 21). Kosoi suggests that Heidegger "assumes the existence of nothingness from the outset, arguing that although we cannot grasp nothingness, we nonetheless, when anxious, have an experience of it" (p. 21). Kosoi goes on suggest that Heidegger argues this position "because any being is infinite, nothingness forms beings and as such is a prerequisite for everything that is" (p. 30). In its simplest reading, the essence of Heidegger's nothingness is both

a negation and affirmation of all existing beings, as the confines of what is “imposed on all beings” (p. 22).

For Heidegger, this sense of nothingness is not that which comes ultimately with death, but that which is this impending sense of nothingness [self], and which is part of our everyday awareness of being, and hence forms and shapes our consciousness

If the impossibility of being [death], is as Heidegger (1927) suggests that which constitutes our being, and paradoxically what negates it, our awareness [sense] of being is inherently, that of an anxious being.

Heidegger also suggests that apart from a few occasional moments in which we are aware that it is nothingness that informs and constitutes our being, that for the most part knowledge of this is repressed.

On this subject Kosoi states “in anxiety, when all beings slip away from our grasp, we face our own mortality, since the world and its entities can no longer impart any meaning to our existence” (p. 23). What Kosoi is expressing here is that nothingness is not disclosed through anxiety as experience [being] or an object or even as a “negation of all beings” (p. 22), but that “nothingness” is a “slipping away of the whole” a slippage from all objects, and encounters and their associated meanings, which perhaps, could constitute the world in which we exist .

Within the course of my conceptually based explorations, there was a practical exploration of a variety non painterly materials, and their relation to site. These interventions/installations addressed the primary concerns regarding the sublime, blankness, nothingness, and their affective qualities or potentialities within an aesthetic context. The difference being that their origins and applications are associated with that of an industrial context and usage. My research and employment of these materials was extended beyond a traditional painterly frame. These explorations still offered an affective contemplative space but in relation to a broader context of the of the actual environment in which they were encountered. In this sense these works unlike the paintings were not so much as site specific, but site responsive. Conceived and constructed to a greater extent in the locations in which they are encountered and perceived.

All of the works whether they were products of traditional painting processes, or were poured and/or applied directly to an aspect of the viewing environment employing industrial materials displayed to a greater extent aspects of their composition and construction. Much of the later works also embodied a sense of quietude and contemplation. A melancholic silence.



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