

Discussing the Nature of Painting Through the Poetics of Transaction and Experience

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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ABSTRACT

This research project will explore American philosopher John Dewey's theory of transaction, and Shannon Sullivan's interpretation of Dewey's theory, the 'Transactional Body', and their inherent potential for the making and reception of painting. Dewey stated (Dewey, cited in Sullivan: 1-2) that organisms live as much in processes across and 'through' skins as in processes 'within skins'. Sullivan's 'transactional body' is always in a state of flux, a morphic body in perpetual motion. Within an artistic context this raises the possibility of exploring the theory of transaction as it applies to painting, using the concept of automatic intuitive art practice. Central to this investigation will be direct connection between senses, instincts, intuition, and the painting. Sullivan suggests that truth and wisdom can be pursued through somatic experience. Therefore the process will be explored by an extension of the corporeal body through the physicality of gesture, movement, rhythm, colour, and mark making.

A recurring subtext throughout this investigation will be that of 'duality'; specifically that defined as the struggle between the use of the conscious, critical mind, allowing for the transaction between artist, paint and canvas to occur naturally and intuitively. The conscious mind / intuition duality manifests at various stages during the manufacture and reception of a painting. Whilst the project relies upon automatic and intuitive praxis, conscious

decisions are made regarding the size and shape of the canvas, the medium used, and through reflective analysis of the completed work.

INTRODUCTION

This research project sets out to explore and test ways of reinterpreting key philosophical concepts within a visual format. Within this context I have used theory to question and develop my art practice.

John Dewey's work *The Art of Experience* forms a key critical context, as does Shannon Sullivan's interpretation of Dewey's work in her 'Transactional Body' theory. The key concept which links these theories and theorists are transaction and lived experience.

Central to this investigation is not only the experience of the artist, but also that of the viewer. Both Dewey and Sullivan discuss how life is made up of a series of transactions. I have endeavored therefore, to link this theory into my art practice, whilst noting that there is a transaction from energy to experience, from experience to form (somatic body), from form to experience, from experience to creating form (painting), and from form to viewer experience, through the use of paint. It will also test the notion of communicating through the senses, intuition and subconscious on a transactional level, investigating the possibility of creating a reflective space for viewer experience.

In the discussion on concepts and context I will elaborate and discuss the theories and concepts that this project was founded upon. I will then discuss methods used to investigate the research project, and how they are to be interpreted through process in the chapter headed Methodology and processes. The Documentation chapter will show the development of the works.

At the end of this investigation I will have a body of work that is the result of an extensive inquiry into the above theories and how they have been explored within the context of painting. The format of this research project will be presented as 80% practical and 20% exegesis.

Concepts and Context

Central to this investigation are John Dewey's work *Art of Experience* and the first chapters of Shannon Sullivan's Work *Living Across and Through Skins*. Sullivan suggests 'To think of bodies as transactional, then, is to conceive of bodies and their various environments as co-constituted in a nonviciously circular way'. (Sullivan, 2001., P. 1) This would infer that Sullivan interprets transaction as a continuing cycle. Dewey a priori, described this interaction between organism and environment as 'transaction'. Out of Dewey's concept of transaction, Sullivan coined the phrase 'Transactional Body,' wherein the body is perpetually in a state of transaction from a cellular level up to transacting between other bodies and environment. Sullivan uses the term 'transaction' to describe Dewey's concept of an active and dynamic relationship between things. These things according to Sullivan are co-constitutive of each other (for example there are many various entities, not merely physical things). As used by Dewey and Sullivan, the term 'things' is amorphous; open to a variety of interpretations. However, when explaining her perception of transaction, Sullivan infers that the term things includes all aspects of human existence '... which are different from, though related to, materiality' (Sullivan, 2001., P.2). I will investigate the possibility of extending this concept into my painting practice, acknowledging the transaction between paint – artist – canvas – viewer.

Dewey and Sullivan are pragmatists. Dewey is widely regarded as one of the founders of philosophical pragmatism; Sullivan refers to the necessity of a pragmatic approach. I have used a pragmatic, phenomenological approach in my research project. Merleau Ponty, (1967) described phenomenology as a 'pragmatic investigation' (P.440). The New Penguin English Dictionary (2000., P. 1093) describes pragmatism as a 'philosophical movement asserting that the meaning or truth of a concept depends on its practical consequences'. It also states that 'John Dewey in different ways made pragmatism a theory of truth'. Although Dewey and Sullivan did not describe themselves as phenomenologists, their theories could be described as Phenomenological. Sullivan refers to her work on transactional bodies as having '...a strong phenomenological angle' (Sullivan, 2001., P. 4). With this in mind my investigation will explore the possibility of

using a pragmatic approach to creating a phenomenological painting that overcomes the concept of duality, whilst engaging the artist and viewer on an aesthetic intuitive level thereby creating experience. An overarching concept within phenomenological enquiry is that of lived experience. This is a key concept within my work, both for artist and for viewer. Lived experience in this context includes drawing on or evoking the viewer's own tacit knowledge. Sullivan coins the term 'transactional phenomenology' to describe transactional body theory, and states that it shares in common with other phenomenological enquiry, an emphasis upon lived experience. Phenomenologist Dilthey (Van Manen,1997) describes lived experience as: 'The lived experience is that which is lived by a person at a given time, in a given place. It is pragmatic and implicates the totality of life. It's already there and is part of our awareness' (P.34).

Dilthey's description implies that lived experience colours all aspects of our life, even at an intuitive level. Further to this, Van Manen suggests that we have reflexive knowledge of this and can objectify it in thought and therefore articulate after the fact.

A lived experience does not confront me as something perceived or represented; it is not given to me, but the reality of lived experience is there-for-me because I have reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense. Only in thought does it become objective.

(Van Manen, 1997., P. 35)

Within phenomenological inquiry the terms 'lived experience' and 'life world' are explained as experiences and attitudes that are in the world prior to any theories. This relates directly to the intuitive yet reflexive approach taken to explore painting within this project. Both Dewey and Sullivan speak of the lived experience as a vital part of any enquiry or philosophical theory. Dewey states 'The artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object that he is producing that they merge directly into it' (Dewey,1934., P. 589). Dewey further suggests that there can be no experience without an aesthetic value, and that this value allows us to know that we have had an experience. 'Aesthetics cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an aesthetic stamp to be itself an experience' (Dewey, 1934., P. 599). Therefore, aesthetic value brings meaning to

experience. However, it is important to note that aesthetic values are not necessarily uplifting, and may produce either negative or positive experiences. With this in mind I have explored the possibility of bringing this aesthetic value or experience into my painting both for artist and viewer.

Dewey suggests energies interacting on environment cause experience, which creates form. As previously mentioned, these energies are aesthetically received, creating experience. This experience can be physically or intuitively felt, through aesthetic quality. Dewey acknowledges this when he states that 'interaction of environment with organism is the source, direct or indirect, of all experience...' and further comments upon the role that natural rhythms play in generating an aesthetic response (Dewey, 1934., P. 630-631); thus inferring that tacit knowledge also plays a role in aesthetics. Further to this, Dewey's quote arguably suggests that concepts of duality could be seen as those checks, resistances, furtherances that come from environment. According to Sullivan, '... central to transaction is it's undercutting of the Cartesian concept of dualism in organism, in environment, and particularly in humanity (self and world)'. Sullivan also notes that '... transaction rejects the atomism that accompanies such dualism' (Sullivan, 2001., P. 12).

This research project acknowledges the duality that is part of the tension and struggle between intellect and intuition. Within the context of painting this tension between the intuition and the conscious mind is an ongoing struggle and can have a positive or negative effect upon the outcome of an artwork. This research investigates the possibility of finding a balance between these two apparent opposites and how this might be explored within the context of painting. Ex-pat New Zealand artist Max Gimblett said in the 2004 exhibition catalogue of the *The Brush of All Things* that it was his life's work to overcome that duality, in painting. Within this research project I have endeavoured to find an alternative approach to painting, and to re evaluate the way that stress associated with duality in painting may be understood or experienced.

The Bhagavad-Gita (Sproul et al, 1980., P. 191) says that we shall never arrive at peace while we deal with the pairs of opposites. Therein lays the challenge: to shift the paradigm so that it no longer is seen as a restriction. Duality unravelled

is then no longer a contentious issue but becomes a pivotal part of the cycle of life and therefore of art, a motivating factor as necessary for existence as breathing. Working with or overcoming this duality and seeing it as necessary for balance and harmony is a motivating factor for artistic production.

Methods and Approaches

As stated in the abstract, my research project addresses John Dewey's theory of transaction, and Shannon Sullivan's later interpretation of Dewey's theory, and explores how they might be tested within the context of painting. This entails using the gesture, senses and intuition as a vehicle for the work.

I have used the heuristic method for this project because it is the methodology most suited to the way I work. Heuristics is characteristically dependent upon a process of reduction through trial and error and the use of tacit knowledge. It is commonly associated with phenomenological inquiry; reduction being a device used within phenomenological enquiry, as is lived experience. Merleau Ponty, (Van Manen, et al 2008., Phenomenologyonline) described the methodologies used within phenomenological inquiry and writing as '...reductio (the reduction) and the vocatio (the vocative dimension)'. Reduction is defined as '...the spontaneous surge of the life-world' – direct and primitive', whereas Vocatio is defined as '...the vocative power of language to let things speak (in a felt sense; i.e. reflexively).

Tacit knowledge plays a vital role in the intuitive process from which these paintings evolved. Tacit knowledge and reflexivity become a balancing act between working on an intuitive level while still retaining some degree of critical analysis within studio practice. Reflexivity and tacit knowledge are also fundamental to phenomenological enquiry, as stated in the above quote and are part of my everyday artistic practice. My natural way of working is to read, absorb and process information in my head. This method of working is part of my creative process. A more studied analytical approach does not work, I find it too restricting and the resulting works too contrived. This method supports the practice and the theory within my research project. Dewey discussed this rendering down and compression as part of the creative process in regards to nature and the endeavours of the artistic mind: 'Unless there is compression nothing is expressed. The turmoil marks the place where inner impulse and contact with environment, in fact or idea, meet and create a ferment' (Dewey, 1934., P. 614). Dewey's statement describes part of the ritual that imbues my practice. Through this process I come to a point where I become an observer of the physical act of painting

whilst allowing tacit knowledge to come into play. As an observer, the process is reliant upon intuition until either the painting process is complete or there is a break in the intuitive flow, whereupon I have to make a conscious decision as to whether or not the painting is finished, or needs more work to bring it to completion. Tacit knowledge manifests through the rhythmic and mechanical processes that come from experience, including gesture, composition, clarity and harmony of colour. It is only after the physical act of painting that some degree of reflection and critical analysis can occur. Dewey states:

...we can speak of it only after the fact. As soon as we begin to offer a description of the situation we are in, we have exited that situation (by transforming it into an object) and entered on another one. The situation is temporally distant from the current setting. (Jackson et al., 1998, P. 124)

Here Dewey suggests that experience is received on an intuitive aesthetic level, and that when we intellectualise it we have lost the experience and created an idea; i.e. form. Other, more contemporary theorists support Dewey's theory. Lyotard (1994) says that, '...an event cannot be completely articulated or explained by discourse, the reliance of the aesthetic experience always comes into play. What discourse is unable to attend to, the work of art can represent as feeling, sensation, or desire' (P. 5). Lyotard is suggesting that the rational mind is limited, that it can only articulate facts, not the experience. To articulate the experience there has to be an aesthetic value, which is where tacit knowledge, intuition or the emotive factor come to the fore. Lyotard thought the concept of truth is premised on the notion that sensibility and understanding occur before cognition. Within my work, I am attempting to create a visual space wherein intuition and meaning takes place; a space for the viewer to have an aesthetic experience, a space for the viewer to engage with the artwork. Throughout his work *Art as Experience*, Dewey infers that meaning can be found as much in felt experience as in the intellect. This in turn reflects back on the theory of transaction and of lived experience.

The gesture is therefore pivotal to my work. It gives me a direct response to the painting process and allows for a flow, a rhythm, connecting artist to intuition. This intuitive process is part of the transactional process. The physicality of bodily engagement in

the act of painting can be a form of meditation or experience the physical appearance of the painting bringing forth an act of observation and reflection.

Somaesthetics involves integrating bodily practices into the discipline of philosophy itself such that truth and wisdom are pursued through somatic experience. It literally addresses the body as a source of philosophical truth and wisdom (Sullivan, 2001., P. 112).

Here Sullivan suggests wisdom and truth can be pursued through a cumulation of bodily movement and aesthetic experience, therefore it is a source of philosophic truth and wisdom. This theory can then be translated into the physical act of painting through the aesthetic quality of colour and the bodily engagement of gesture. Within Sullivan's theory and Lyotard's aforementioned suggestion that '...What discourse is unable to attend to, the work of art can represent as feeling, sensation, or desire', lies the possibility for further transaction to the viewer experience.

Dewey's work suggests that life is a series of transactions. I am interested in the term transactional painter to describe gestural painting rather than action painter. Action painting can be described as a direct action between body and canvas, whereas transactional painting is not only a transaction between artist, work and viewer it is also an acknowledgment that all life as we know it from a cellular level up is in a state of transaction, an ever unfolding process, a continuum.

Visual Documentation



Fig 1. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Primal and sand on paper 55 x 68cm



Fig 2. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Primal and sand on paper 55 x 68cm

This practice based research project started with a series of exercises on paper. Initially the mark was a way of mentally making the adjustment from working with a motif to abstract painting. The reason for eliminating the motif was to allow for an intuitive approach without preconceived ideas (refer fig: 1-2, p.10). In an attempt to overcome these obstacles it was important to become conscious of the body, to feel and be aware of my own skin; to experience and engage with the paint and support at a subliminal level. Engaging in the martial art of painting, mark making allowed for an immediate dynamic engagement which required focus and was to test ways of overcoming the rational mind verses intuition / tacit knowledge struggle. Another reason for using mark making as a way into the project was to test ways of expressing the dynamic energies in Dewey's theory. This form of mark making has been used by generations of Japanese and Chinese artists in their efforts to express the life – force. Artists I have referenced in this process include Robert Motherwell and Max Gimblett, both of whom used the dynamism of the mark to cement them in the 'here and now' or the present, engaging in the work at a primal level, a level that was crucial to explore in order to be familiar with and to learn to trust the intuitive process.

The next stage was to introduce colour; colour having an emotive quality which may be a trigger for an intuitive approach to painting.



Fig 3. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 52 x 42 cm



Fig 4. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 50x40cm

With the use of colour I attempted to juxtapose the dynamic energy of the mark within a painted reflective space (refer fig: 3-4, p.11). This juxtaposition of dynamic energy and a reflective, contemplative space was to allow for the mind to reflect without the energy of the mark being too overpowering for example to obtain a balance between mark and reflective space. These early pieces were to enable me to work through the concepts and ideas in this project and to try and make the connection in a visual way; while going through a shift in my own perception. On reflection, trying to juxtapose two seemingly different energies seemed to create more restrictions and close off avenues for further exploration rather than open them.

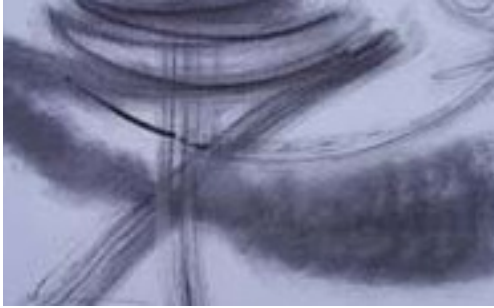


Fig 5. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Charcoal on paper 55 x 68 cm



Fig 6. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Charcoal on paper 55 x 68 cm

In order to strike a balance between the drama and dramatics of mark making and the reflective intuitive response, I researched artists such as Robert Morris, Cy Twombly, Mark Tobey and Jackson Pollock, looking at their approach to art making. These artists are known for their 'hands on' intuitive approach. With in this in mind I started using the blind drawing method of Robert Morris to strengthen my intuitive responses (refer fig: 5-6, P.12). Music was helpful to get into an intuitive rhythm or flow between artist and painting. These drawings are done with eyes closed; I mainly used this method to focus and to trigger automatic responses. It is also good for disengaging from my thought processes, which seem to restrict the intuitive flow. One has to feel one's way around the drawing surface intuitively. These drawings are also part of a series that lead onto the following pieces using the same method with colour and paint (refer fig: 7-8, P.13) on following page.



Fig 7. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic paint on canvas 30 x 33cm



Fig 8. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 30 x 33 cm

With these pieces (refer fig: 7-8, P.13) I start with a set format; the palette and the procedure were predetermined so that I could then allowed the paint to flow with minimum input. At times I used the end of a paintbrush to pull the paint, allowing the colours to bleed into one another. The application of paint was intuitive and the intention was to test the use of colour to draw the eye in and create a quiet contemplative space for the viewer. Although these pieces were successful in the use of the intuitive approach, the method used to execute them has restricted their size, which limits the potential for viewer experience.

Part of my exploration has been to explore different ways of mark making (refer figs: 9-16, P. 14). Instead of a dramatic mark, I tested a fluid gesture, and the colour was applied with a much lighter touch. The paint was diluted to the consistency of watercolour and was dribbled on. The surfaces of some of the paintings were then manipulated to move the paint around. This was done at random to test the effect of such manipulation. This method of working was a way of overcoming the dilemma between intellect and intuition by the use of gesture and bodily movement, noting the transaction between paint body and surface. Painting this way has the same feel about it as executing a blind drawing.

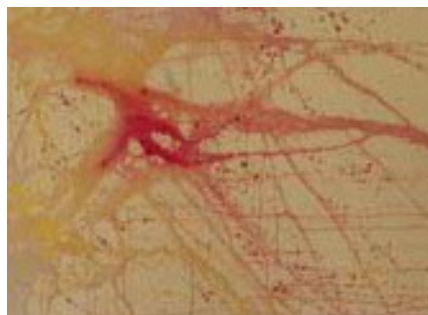


Fig 9. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 50cm x 60cm



Fig 10. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 50cm x 60cm



Fig 11. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 50cm x 60cm



Fig 12. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 50cm x 40cm



Fig 13. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 46cm x 35cm



Fig 14. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 46cm x 35cm



Fig 15. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 23½ cm x 37cm



Fig 16. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 23½ cm x 37cm

After testing different gestures, markmaking and colour on smaller canvases I increased the size of the canvas. This was an attempt to create greater visual impact in order to engage the viewer. The painting in (refer fig: 17, P.16) was layered with pigment and resin, building it up to intensify the potential experience of the colour red. This was to explore the idea of engaging the viewer on a felt intuitive level; the green trace of gesture over an intense colour was to create a feeling of

unease. While this was reasonably successful, the size of the canvas made it a little too decorative; a larger canvas may have made it more engaging for the viewer. The process of building the layers of paint was time-consuming and laboured, not allowing for a spontaneous intuitive application of paint. However, the final gestural overpainting was done intuitively as an automatic drawing, similar to blind drawing in application. The gesture itself was applied more slowly and was therefore more subdued than in previous paintings, which gave it a different energy.



Fig 17. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled* Acrylic, pigment, oil pastel and resin on canvas 65 x 79 cm

The next body of work (refer fig: 18-20, P. 17) was to explore the emotive power of colour, marrying this and the rhythm of gesture with the dynamic power of the mark to explore the possibility of creating an engaging, dynamic painting. Dewey stated that 'Emotions are qualities, of a complex experience that moves and changes. It selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with colour, thereby giving qualitative unity to materials externally disparate and dissimilar. It thus provides unity in and through the varied parts of an experience!' (Jackson, et al 1998., P.11). Although he uses the term 'colour' in an abstract sense, in this statement Dewey infers that through the emotions beings experience, and are aware

of experience. With this in mind I used high-key, intensely hued colour to try to balance the work, so the strength of the mark (dynamic energy, conscious) would not override the colour (emotive/intuitive), with the intention being to evoke an intuitively felt experience. With the intense colour and the strength of the mark these paintings have drama and strength, but are let down by the small size.



Fig 18. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 70cm x 65 cm

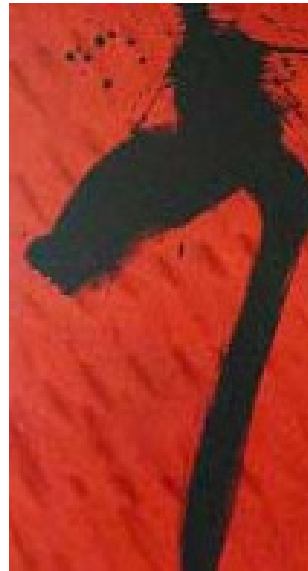


Fig 19. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 70 cm x 65 cm



Fig 20. Sandy Duncan, 2007. *Untitled*
Acrylic on canvas 60cm x 55 cm

Within these paintings, (refer fig: 21-22. P. 18) I was again investigating ways of marrying gesture, colour and mark. The yellow painting is too decorative, which was not my intent. It appears to lack spontaneity; the mono-directional lines making it appear more contrived. The blue painting was built up with layers of paint; blue, green, purple, the translucency of the paint giving it depth. Gesture was intuitive and applied within the first layer of paint. Splashes of red were added to create tension to the surface before applying the final mark. The flatness of the final mark is a contrast to the

translucency of the under paint. Again these paintings are restricted by size, if they were on a larger scale they would have more impact and be less decorative.

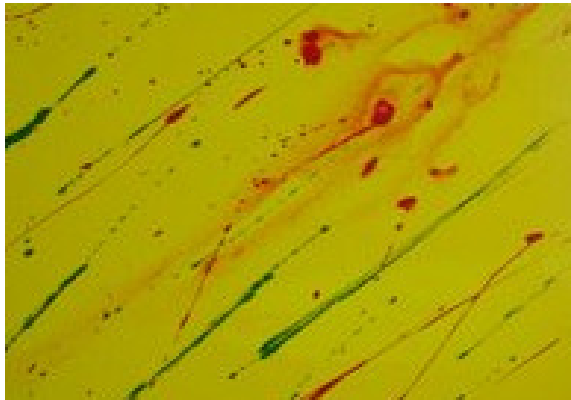


Fig 21. Sandy Duncan, 2007.

Untitled

Acrylic on canvas

65cm x 70cm



Fig 22. Sandy Duncan, 2007.

Untitled

Acrylic on canvas

65cm x 70cm

My research to this point has shown me the need to use large canvases to enable the effective and expansive use of gesture and to explore the idea of bodily engagement. The traditional square/rectangular shape of the canvas has proven to have significant impact upon the way one interacts with the canvas, affecting the way in which one applies the paint. The way in which different gestures are applied can dramatically affect the way in which a painting is interpreted. By experimenting with such techniques as blind, automatic drawing and using dramatic, physical gesture when painting, I have learnt ways of overriding the intellect / intuition duality, thus allowing intuitive painting to take place. I have also learnt that painting process cannot be totally intuitive; that rational, conscious decisions have to be made before and after the application of paint takes place. The use of dramatic gesture was an attempt to explore the potential of applying the 'Transactional Body' theory to painting praxis.

Part of this research has lead me to test different mediums. With this painting (refer fig: 23, P. 19) I tried using a crystal-based medium to see if it would enhance or give an edge to the gesture. The crystals inhibited the flow of paint, which also had the effect of reducing the possibility for an intuitive approach to the application of paint.



Fig 23. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 167cm x 110

I try not to control the process on an intellectual level; however this dragging of the paint across the surface restricted the flow and did not allow for an intuitive element. The colour is warm implying comfort and as such can draw one into it. It has movement and light; however, this is the only success in this particular piece.

This painting (refer fig: 24, P. 21) is an attempt to work with the idea of a continuum as mentioned on page 8. However, for this to work as a continuum, it would need to be longer, to stretch the length of a wall and become a 'walk past' painting such as Colin McCahon's *Necessary Protection*. The gesture is restricted by the format of the canvas; it has the effect of isolating the gesture, effectively cutting it off and denying the concept of the continuum, which had become an important aspect within my research. The flow and rhythm of the gesture, moving the paint freely across the canvas, was important here. Unfortunately the end result was more decorative than meaning making. It should be noted that meaning does not necessarily have to have a rational interpretation. Dewey suggests that meaning may be felt as opposed to

being a product of intellect, therefore showing that experience can be related in a subliminal way; experience being felt rather intellectual: 'There are other meanings that present themselves directly as possessions of objects which are experienced' (Dewey, 1934, P. 616).

The mark in the background supports the final gesture and may appear confronting to the viewer, giving it more impact. The size of the canvas forced a more hands-on approach. Working the paint with one's hands is immediate and can trigger an intuitive approach. I thought that working on longer pieces of canvas would allow for a more continuous and intuitive flow. However, with the final gesture I found that it seemed to lessen the connection on an intuitive level, the gesture being overtly contrived; this being due to the difficulty of the physical action needed to cover and unify the painting.



Fig 24. Sandy Duncan, 2008.

Untitled.

Acrylic on canvas

100cm x 188cm

I started doing mono prints as exercises like the blind drawings, testing the mark and colour (refer fig: 25 P. 22). Upon reflection, I was working in sequence, using intuition in the application of paint and exploring the concept of the continuum. This was in part due to the need to refocus and overcome doubts regarding the mind and intuition struggle, as exemplified in the struggle between control and the need to relinquish control when painting. As an exercise they were successful; they helped me refocus and guided me towards using circular canvases to fully explore the idea of a continuum and bodily experience.



Fig 25. Sandy Duncan, 2008,

Mono prints acrylic on A3 paper

This painting (refer fig: 26, P. 23) was not only to explore the notion of a continuum but also an exploration of mark and gesture within the circle. The circle demanded a different approach to the mark/gesture process. It took me out of my comfort zone and called for another mental shift. The circle itself was representative of the continuum, and the size allowed for the gesture to go right to the edge of the canvas without breaking the sweeping movement. In order to allow

for the intuitive bodily gesture, the whole painting needed to be executed and finished while the paint was still wet. Bernard Frieze said ' To me a painting has to be done quickly to be able to show its process, to be clear, without tricks.' (Ryan: 236) This approach is useful to me as it allows for a more direct, intuitive approach to painting. The painting was worked quickly, allowing for the process to occur automatically and intuitively. I find works accomplished in an intuitive way provide a more engaging experience and are often more successful in gesture and strength than works that are laboured over. The gesture however, is still confined within the circle, which in its own way defies the concept of a continuum.



Fig 26. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

This was going to be a black/grey painting (refer fig: 27,P. 25). I started to mix the colour and work the background mark at the same time. I liked the spatial quality that was occurring, so I stopped mixing. Intuitively, I felt that the space behind the mark created a point of interest. I am unsure how much my subconscious impacted upon the piece, in terms of the interplay between the random factor and the subconscious. The proportions within the final gesture sit well within circle and the eye may be led around the painting, in and out of the painting and engaging the viewer. A weak point is in the line where the paint has run. Accepting fallibility within the work is part of the process of accepting my own work. If the work was perfect – i.e. slick – it may not carry the required intuitive aesthetic qualities capable of conveying felt experience. This piece appears to have aesthetic value and thus is an expression of felt experience; the ground mark is more intuitive and there is more complexity within the juxtaposition of depth and mark. The mono-prints gave me both the opportunity to reflect and provided a new direction, as seen in this and the previous painting in respect to the shape of the canvas in relation to the notion of continuum. The final mark helps to lead viewer to painting. It is an attempt to give access into the painting, as does the open-endedness of the mark at the top and bottom of the piece. For the under-painting I worked the paint with my fingers. The hands-on immediacy within the paint meant that there was no longer anything between the painting process and myself; each is an extension of the other as referred to in discussion on page 20. The calligraphic quality in the work, combined with the shape of the canvas was to represent a continuum. I am aware, however, that the gesture is still confined within the circle there needs to be the illusion of the possibility of gesture or painting to expand beyond the frame.



Fig 27. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

(Fig: 28, P. 26) The brightness of the red works against the mark, with the intention of making the painting more engaging. Both marks are working in relation to the circle; the final mark was applied more confidently than the under-mark. Colour-wise, I was trying to recreate the rich colour (a mix of cadmium red, alizarin and cadmium yellow) achievable in oils, for its emotive quality as experienced by me as a painter. Unfortunately, it does not carry through as well when using acrylic paint. When I realized I was not going to get the colour I wanted, the mark took precedence, the mark having to be more dramatic to carry the colour. The painting still has a meditative quality, even though there is a lot happening in it; this is because the final mark could appear to negate the action.



Fig 28. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in diameter

With the following work (refer fig: 29, P. 27) I have been investigating new ways of using the gesture, wherein I have been applying instead of pulling the gesture out. Pulling the gesture out involves using a very fluid paint and manipulating it, allowing for different textures and application. I have also been working with more subdued colour and have attempted to achieve a more contemplative quality within the painting. My intention is to evoke in the viewer a space for contemplation and reflection. If this is successful it may engage them through the intuitive process. The circle supports my intention to create a more expansive quality in the painting. The juxtaposition of the mark and the ground is intended to represent past and present. My intension with this approach was that they have the intensity and quiet drama needed to evoke a contemplative and reflective space for the viewer.



Fig 29. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

This colourfield painting (refer fig: 30, P. 28) was also intended to have a contemplative quality. I have used diffused colour to achieve an expansive feeling within the circle, the layering of the paint having implied meaning and may be read intuitively. It was 'hatched' over a weeklong period after applying the ground cover. On this occasion and with the following painting this hatching period seemed to lessen the manifestation of the intellect / intuition duality and thus a greater chance of working intuitively. It allows me time to see and experience the interaction between the colour of the ground and the shape of the canvas, which seems to be an important part of the process. This piece has a different kind

of energy. It is more dynamic and has layers of disquiet, but also has a feeling of lightness about it. This was achieved in the application of the paint.

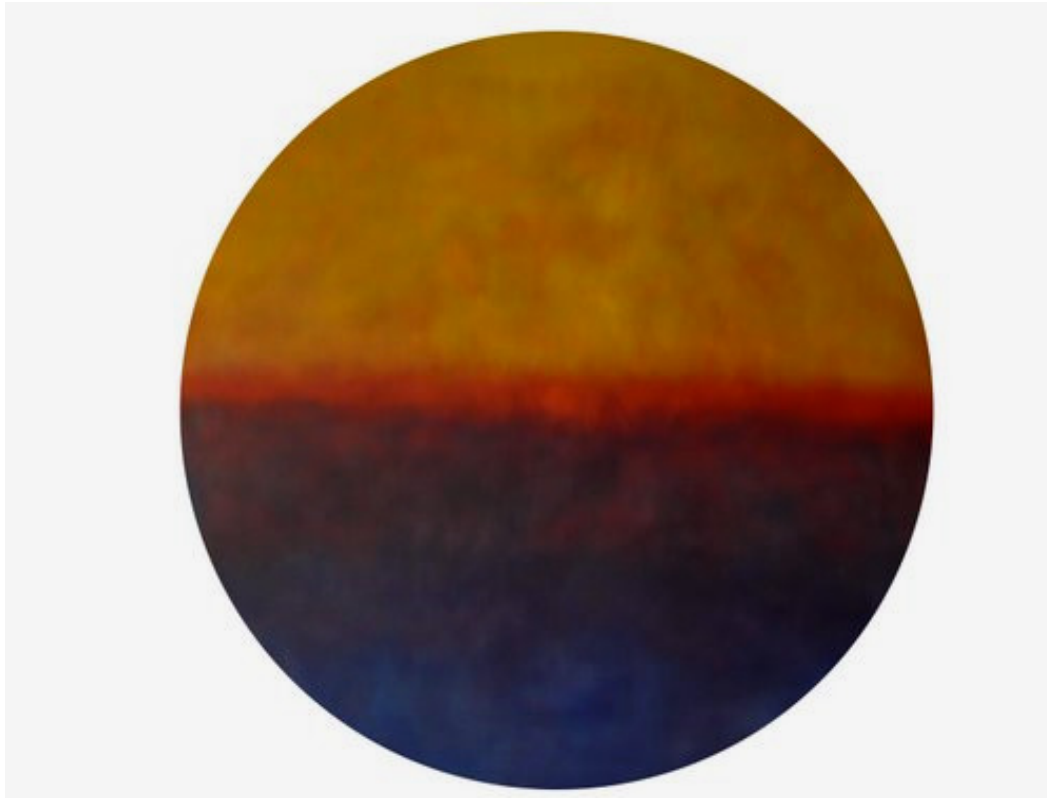


Fig. 30. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

With this piece (refer fig: 31, P. 29) I layered the paint and used a medium marketed as 'Space Gel'. It was supposed to give a holographic effect; however, it doesn't seem to have been very effective. The result was a diffused, sparkling, cloudy effect. I was attempting to achieve simplicity within the painting, the ground of which was done intuitively. Upon reflecting on the painting I decided upon the straight line. This was used to connote infinity, as is the circle; thus, the lines lead back into the circle. I try to avoid straight lines as this indicates conscious input; in this painting, they were definitely an afterthought. Intuition, however, dictated that something more was needed.

This piece denotes a change in my approach. Instead of feeling frustrated at the intuition/intellect dilemma, I have accepted it as part of the process, and thus something I need to work with instead of fighting against. This includes the recognition that part of the process is conscious decision-making; for example, the shape and size of the canvas, and the decision to rework or intensify colour.



Fig 31. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

(refer fig: 32,P. 30) I made the initial mark and then used a traditional building up or layering approach to the application of paint. I have used earth tones to reduce the high colour previously used to start the painting; this was to create the sense of drama. The painting has baroque overtones; for example, the high degree of modelling and the proportions of light to dark (1: 3) create a sense of chiaroscuro. Was it successful? Yes and no. It has a sense of the dramatic and a sense of the cosmos – energy. On the down side: although the initial gesture still shows through the layering of the over-painting, it is too contrived.



Fig 32. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

(refer fig: 33, P.32) The ground paint was an attempt to represent dramatic natural patterns, amorphous cellular worlds within worlds. The patterning of the under painting was dissatisfactory as it had become overly contrived. On reflection I decided to apply a motif. With the decision to add a frame I flattened out the ground colour this was intended to knock the ground back, making the frame bounce out in attempt to make it appear three dimensional. The broken line on the frame gives the impression of the frame not being solid, and thus ephemeral. Metallic paint is reminiscent of old gilt frames. 'Framing': human need to put things in boxes or frame them in order to make them less threatening, as witnessed by western tradition of taxonomies.

This piece started off in the same vein as the others but ended up as something totally different. This could have ended up in a struggle between intuition and rational mind; instead, I just allowed it to evolve, and accept it for what it is.



Fig 33. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

With this piece (refer fig: 34, P. 34) I explored the possibilities inherent in a low-key palette, monotone work and a different gesture. Instead of long sweeping movements, I have used short, rhythmic brush strokes and applied the final mark after they had dried. The final mark was disappointing as it is flat and has no impact; although with the gesture beneath, the viewer can imagine that the work extends beyond the frame. The monotone palette allows the viewer to experience the colour to create his or her own impressions. It is implicit rather than explicit, leaving a contemplative space for the viewer, rather than making a statement. I have noticed that on occasions, the high-key palette can tend to be

read or to suggest a narrative or narrative content. This could be because it is more confronting and therefore demands more from the viewer. This piece is a more sombre piece, as I didn't have the same energy levels that I usually approach a painting with. When painting, I usually feel my way from start to finish; feel being the operative word. The colour triggered the background mark. Unfortunately, my energy levels hadn't risen before the final mark. When I am less excited or excitable, my energy is more contained, (working intuitively makes one more aware of ones physicality); the colours are more contemplative, the marks less dynamic. This relates back to my theory, in that I am working on an intuitive level, being aware of my mental and physical presence, movement and rhythms. This piece is a more honest painting, as it relates to my own experience as a painter both on a physical and an emotive level. It does not have the dynamic mark that I enjoy, but it has its own different kind of energy, as exemplified in the overall patterning and the quiet quality of the colour. In order to keep the painting honest, it has to reflect ones shifting states of awareness. It has to be fluid, inviting the viewer into a space where they can contemplate/reflect.

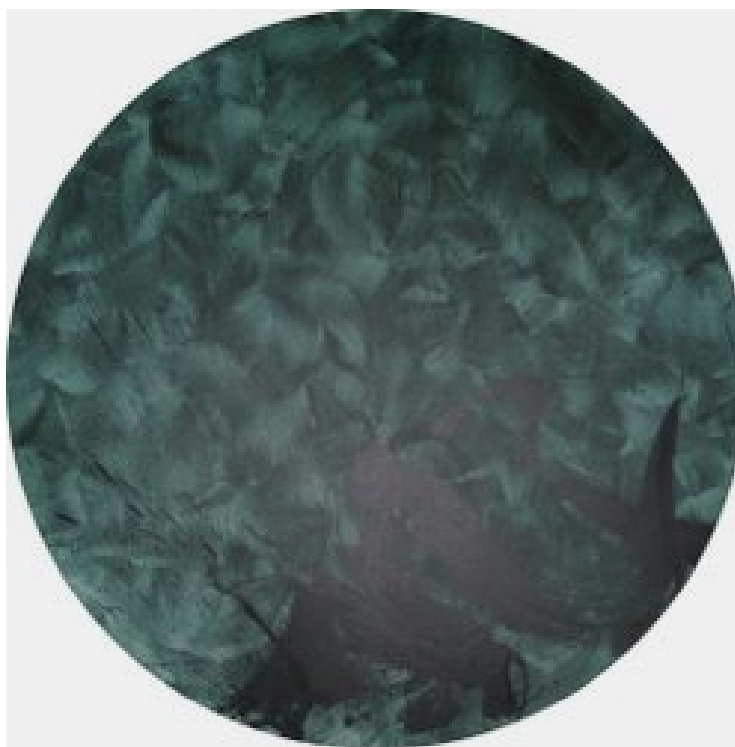


Fig 34. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on canvas 110cm in Diameter

The following paintings (refer fig: 35-36, P. 35/36) are an attempt to engage the viewer on an intuitive level. I have attempted to convey a sense of mystery and control (application of paint). The gesture in these paintings is subtler, the background and foreground of the painting no longer separate. There is a latent power and implied strength and movement. It also allows for a contemplative space for the viewer. The colour is the trigger for the aesthetic experience; it is an implicit rather than explicit signpost, requiring the viewer to draw upon his or her own experience and resources to react to the artwork. The aesthetic experience in this context is vitally important, acting as a bridge between artist, painting and viewer. In terms of my investigation they all show a way for further exploration. In this piece and the following one, the weave of the canvas is showing, giving texture to the paintings. It also flattens them out, giving a feeling of expansion. Theory and practice are starting to come together in a more focused way, interlinking both

conceptually and practically. I have been investigating the possibility of overcoming the struggle (duality) that occurs with the rational critical mind, allowing for the transaction between artist, paint and canvas to occur naturally and intuitively. There have been varying degrees of success. At this point in the research practice the key seems to play the roll of observer and try to disengage with the process of painting.



Fig 35. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic and oil on Canvas 110 in Diameter



Fig 36. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110 in diameter

My intention with this painting was to create a Black painting (refer fig: 37, P. 37). However, when applying the under-paint I used a rhythmic action, liking what was happening I then continued to work intuitively covering the whole painting with rhythmic gesture. This piece suggests a different kind of energy to other works in the series; while they had an underlying energy; this work had a surface energy. It is more dynamic and has layers of disquiet, yet I feel it also has a quality of lightness about it. This was an intuitive attempt to capture energies; evoke a feeling of energy and enquiry; it may also have a quiet uneasiness about it, of impending action. It has spatial qualities, of being earthy but not of the earth. There is an Asiatic feel to it, reminiscent of Taoist portrayals of clouds, rain, and

changing seasons. This was not a conscious intention; however, evoking a feeling of felt experience is in keeping with this project.



Fig 37. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter

(Refer fig: 38, P. 38) Here I have used the same brushwork as the grey one seen on the previous page. The brush strokes across the dribble marks are used to break up what is happening with the under-mark in an attempt to give it a sense of mystery; it has a floating feeling about it. The fluidity of the paint and movement were intended to give the painting depth.



Fig 38. Sandy Duncan, 2008. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter

Conclusion:

Within this research project I have endeavored to test ways of reinterpreting key philosophical concepts within a visual format. I have used theory to question and help develop my art practice. I have tested ways of using Dewey's 'Theory of Transaction' and Sullivan's 'Transactional Body Theory', itself a development of Dewey's theory, within my art practice. Within this context I have explored the possibility of transaction as it applies to painting, using the concept of automatic intuitive art practice. I have attempted to interpret the Transactional Body theory through the flow and rhythm of gesture, colour and the concept of a continuum. The circular canvas was ultimately decided upon to help interpret the concept of continuum. It has been challenging to attempt to work in an intuitive, unpredetermined way, as it called for a different approach to the application of paint. It has also raised the issue of 'duality'; specifically that of the struggle between the use of the conscious, critical mind and intuition, which allows for the transaction between artist, paint and canvas to occur naturally and intuitively. I have attempted to overcome these issues by exploring different approaches to the application of paint and the use of gesture and markmaking. I have discovered that the physicality of gesture and markmaking help the direct link into the intuitive process. This process continues until there is a break in the flow, whereupon the conscious mind steps forward, allowing time for reflection. Conscious decisions about size, medium and colour have to be established before the painting process take place. Further to this I have found that there is less resistance if I consciously put myself in the role of an observer and allow the senses to trigger the intuitive response. In addition, a larger canvas allows for greater bodily engagement than would be possible if a smaller canvas were to be used.

This conclusion will be in two parts. The final addition will be inserted after the completion of the final body of work.

Final Exhibition and Conclusion

Having had the time to reflect on and complete the body of work for examination over the last two months, I consider that the research has been successful on two levels. On a personal level, I have succeeded in developing a way of painting that works clearly and comfortably within my own philosophy. It has been interesting to watch the mind/body duality quiet down and become part of the process; an extension rather than an unsettling tension. When making the final pieces for examination, I became aware that even though because of the very nature of the project I have at times been unsure of the outcome, I am now at last at the beginning of my journey.

The second level of success concerns my wish to engage the viewer on an aesthetic level rather than an on an intellectual level. Although this study has not been done on a large scale the results so far have been encouraging. Various paintings were hung alongside work by other artists over the summer period in a private house that had a lot of people either staying or passing through. Because there is usually a lot of art around the house, the visitors were not surprised; nor did they inquire as to whom the artist was. Those who did comment made such remarks as, 'I find that painting disturbing'; 'That reminds me of'; 'That painting makes me feel.....' All comments were from a direct emotive response and are indicative of a successful outcome.



Fig 39. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter



Fig 40. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter



Fig 41. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter



Fig 42. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter



Fig 43. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter

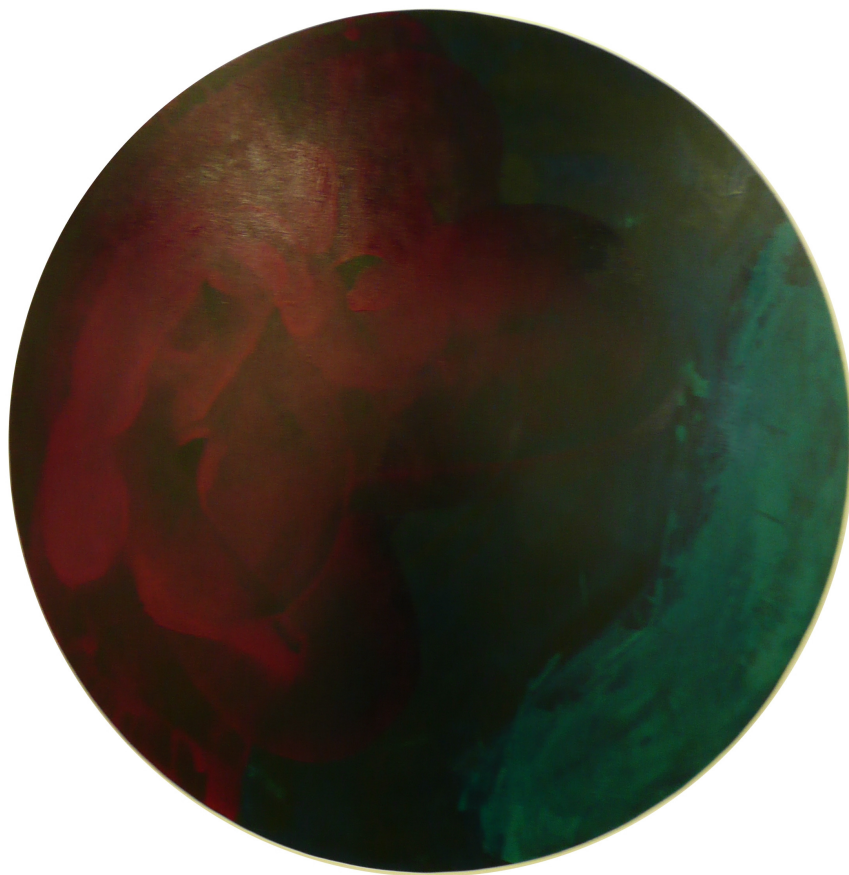


Fig 44. Sandy Duncan, 2009. *Untitled* Acrylic on Canvas 110cm in Diameter

Exhibition Space

My intention with this exhibition was not so much to create a cohesive show but rather to let each piece be and create it's own experience. I therefore created separate spaces so each piece could be experienced without the influence of the other. I chose not to have neither labels nor titles as this could influence the way the viewer interpreted the work. It was important that the pieces be experience rather than read on an intellectual level.



Fig 45. Exhibition space. Left-facing wall. 2009



Fig 46. Exhibition space. Corner of left and back wall. 2009



Fig 47. Exhibition space. Looking back towards entrance. 2009



Fig 48. Exhibition space. Looking back towards entrance. 2009



Fig 49. Exhibition space. Corner of back and right wall. 2009



Fig 50. Exhibition space. Looking back towards entrance. 2009



Fig 51. Exhibition space. Back wall from entrance. 2009



Fig 52. Exhibition space. Left wall towards back wall. 2009

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