

**PEARL SUTCLIFFE**

**RE-CONCEPTUALISING ORNAMENTATION  
WITHIN A FINE ART PAINTING PRACTICE.**

**EXEGESIS SUBMITTED TO MASTER OF ARTS (ART AND DESIGN)  
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
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Re~conceptualising  
Ornamentation  
within a Fine Art  
Painting Practice

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#### ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis project explores the artistic potential for ornamentation by re-conceptualising and re-contextualising it through a fine art painting practice. It seeks to place ornamentation as a valid, viable and contemporary subject and critiques the historical debasement of ornamentation within progressive fine art contexts, in particular the developmental history of western aesthetics. A practice-based research approach is taken using the medium of paint.

## INTRODUCTION

This exegesis supports and assists in contextualising a practical body of paintings produced for exhibition. The relative weighting of elements in this exegesis is 80 percent practice-based work and 20 percent exegesis. This exegesis accompanies an exhibition held at Xspace, Auckland University of Technology, 17th - 23rd March, 2004.

Chapter One outlines definitions related to the word ornamentation and looks at ornamentation's relationship to a contemporary art context as well as an art-historical context. Chapters Two and Three further investigate art critical contexts and their relationship to the denigration of ornamentation. Methodological issues regarding studio practice are discussed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER ONE LOCATING ORNAMENTATION

### 1.1 ORNAMENTATION IN CONTEXT

In a contemporary fine art context the words ornamentation and decoration have been interchangeable and decoration in particular has tended to have had an automatic pejorative overtone. The word decoration often evokes the word “mere” as though the two are inseparably linked. A commonly held assumption in art institutions was that if a work of art had a decorative overtone it was likely to be free from concept and would therefore not be subject to critical analysis. This exegesis re-examines this and other assumptions from a variety of art related perspectives. It includes decoration and other related terms that come under the broader umbrella title of ornamentation.

There is no standard usage or application of the term ornamentation. Ornamentation is contextualised by words that are closely related to it such as embellishment, adornment and decoration. For example, ornamentation on objects can have all of these roles. Each of which has its own subtle differences (it is not necessarily however just about these modalities). Ornamentation implies something solid, lasting and integral to the overall intention of an object.

For the purpose of the exegesis the term *embellishment* is used to imply exaggeration and deceit. Thus there is a sense that the object may not be sufficient or adequate in itself and requires additional glamorising. Any embellishment is added, it seems, as an afterthought.

Whilst beautifying the object, *adornment*, may not be integral to the whole and can be attached to something and taken away.

Likewise *decoration* is closely linked to adornment in that it is seen as something added to and able to be removed. The intention however of decoration is to beautify. The word comes from the Latin ‘decorare’, meaning beauty. For the purposes of this exegesis, ornamentation is used as a conceptual umbrella term which may encompass a range of approaches that are linked to the above synonyms. According to Michael Carter, who wrote extensively about ornamentation, it has a close connection with an object that distinguishes it from the other terms. Carter (1997) discusses how:

The domain of the ornamental requires a host object in order to appear and whilst initially benign, this relationship has the potential to become malignant. Of the four terms; ornament, adornment, embellishment and decoration, ornament signifies the most substantial of the modalities taken up by the supplemental register and suggests a certain degree of physical attachment, or a permanent embedding in its host. Decorate, adorn and embellish imply lesser degrees of physical integration with their host. Here things are hung onto other objects for special occasions, but are capable of being detached from the host when the particular occasion is over. (p.122)

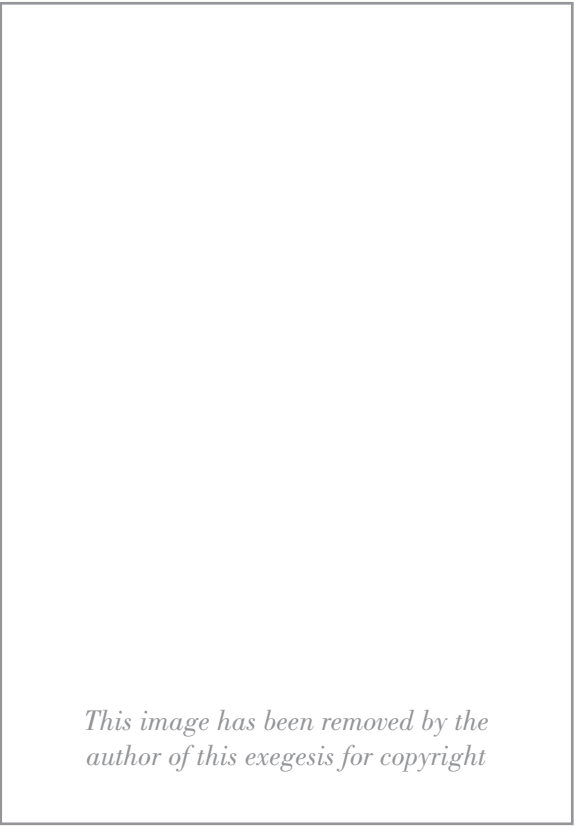
Carter on the one hand is suggesting that ornamentation as a modality is integral to an object and it cannot be removed or separated because it is part of the whole distinguishing ornamentation from mere embellishments, which are deemed the lesser associations because they can be taken away and put back again. On the other hand Carter is referring to ornamentation as parasitic describing the process of ornamentation as possessing what he calls an ‘active transformation’ whereby the host is almost completely obscured from our visibility.

## **1.2 THE NATURE OF ORNAMENTATION**

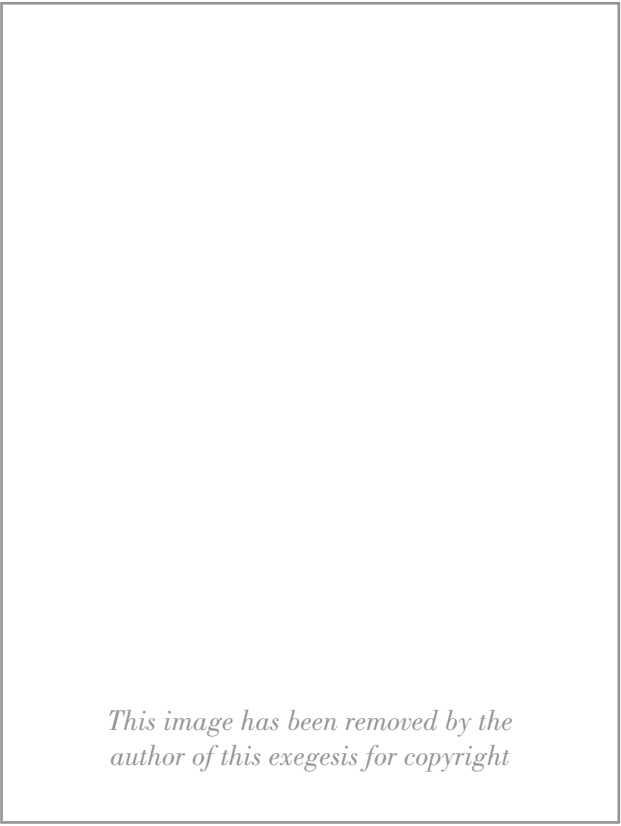
### **1.2.1 Parasitism or mutualism?**

Carter suggests that ornamentation exists because of a dependent relationship with its host, thus implying the negative connotation associated with parasitism. However, the relationship of ornamentation to ‘host’ could be interpreted as more mutualistic or symbiotic. Ornamentation





**Laura Owens**, Untitled, 2001,  
watercolour and pencil on paper, 44 x 30.25.



**Chris Ofili**, 'Prince among thieves with flowers',  
1999, pencil on paper, 29.75 x 22.25.

transforms the host in a mutually beneficial way also and seeks to create a harmonious balance between itself and its host object.

#### **1.2.2 Substrate or surface?**

Ornamentation is the substrate that represents a set of values. For example in a cultural artefact like a church ornamentation relays to the spectator qualities of status, power and meaning that contribute to its highest purpose which is to establish a feeling of being in the presence of God. Ornamentation in this example assumes a very important function, the ability to provide a lightness that from experience evokes a sense of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

We wilfully suspend our disbelief in order to be transported beyond the actual physical reality before us into the additional transcendental reality offered by the appended ornamentation. Ornamentation is not only physical in the way it relates with an object; it represents a conceptual extension of an object. The way we read something is dependent on preconditioned cultural values or filters. Ornamentation can be seen as intrinsic to the substrate, the foundation of the work, and therefore indivisible from the complete meaning and function of the work. Surface and substrate are integral in the wholistic consideration of something as a 'thing in it's self', rather than to be understood as separate components.

### **1.3 ORNAMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART**

Laura Owens and Chris Ofili are part of a group of artists whose work can be seen to legitimise the use of ornamentation and decoration in contemporary art. Laura Hoptman (2002) quotes an unnamed critic stating, with reference to Owens, "A new level of crisis is achieved, as though the work were escaping a conventional paradigm for being understood as art." (p.32). These artists extend existing hierarchies by challenging accepted subject matter for art. Hoptman states:

Owens, Chris Ofili, and Richard Wright recognize their use of ornament as the challenge that it is, and to a certain extent see it not so much as transgressive (as some American painters of the 1970s had) or ironic (like the appropriated patterns of the 1980s painters like Philip Taaffe) but rather as aesthetically or socially ameliorative. They embrace decoration cheerfully but wield it knowingly. (p.31)

Hoptman when using the words “socially ameliorative” to describe the work of these artists may infer that ornamentation is capable of bettering not only an environment but also determines how one might behave in that environment.

#### **1.4 ART/CRAFT CONTEXTS**

Twentieth century art in its exclusion of ornamentation was to some extent following the theoretical foundations that had been laid down in the late nineteenth century by the Arts and Crafts movement when William Morris first embraced the concept of “truth to materials”. The Arts and Crafts movement embraced decorative subjects but unlike the contemporary Art Nouveau movement, decorative subjects were expected to adhere to socialist theories and principals in art and design. Decoration and ornamentation in the Arts and Crafts movement was tolerated as long as it upheld the utopian beliefs that supported the revival of craft and the craftsman. Art Nouveau on the other hand was heavily criticised for its lack of morality and was perceived as superficial in its pursuit of beauty. In Crane’s assessment of Art Nouveau he describes:

...art nouveau a ‘decorative disease’ ...that is, a disease of the surface, a superficiality that had nothing to do with the essential and universal that early Modernism and Arts and Crafts critics and practitioners held in such high regard. (S.K. Tillyard, 1988, p.59)

It is evident from such statements that as long as decoration and ornamentation was considered to be conceptually underpinned then its use could be justified in art and design. Decoration and ornamentation

however became seen as frivolous addition to commodity that could easily be dispensed with; especially with the advent of mass production technologies. The idealism found within the Arts and Crafts movement led to its eventual downfall, removing ornamentation's sanctuary and historical link with art. Art at this point can be seen to separate itself from the constructs of the decorative and the ornamental. Nancy J. Troy (1998) states:

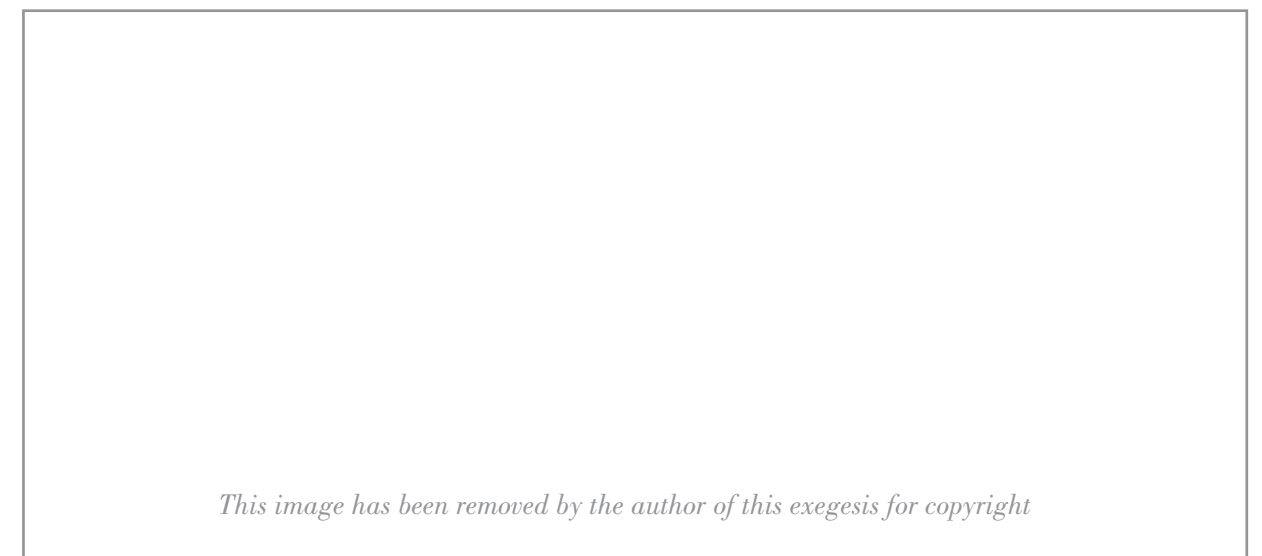
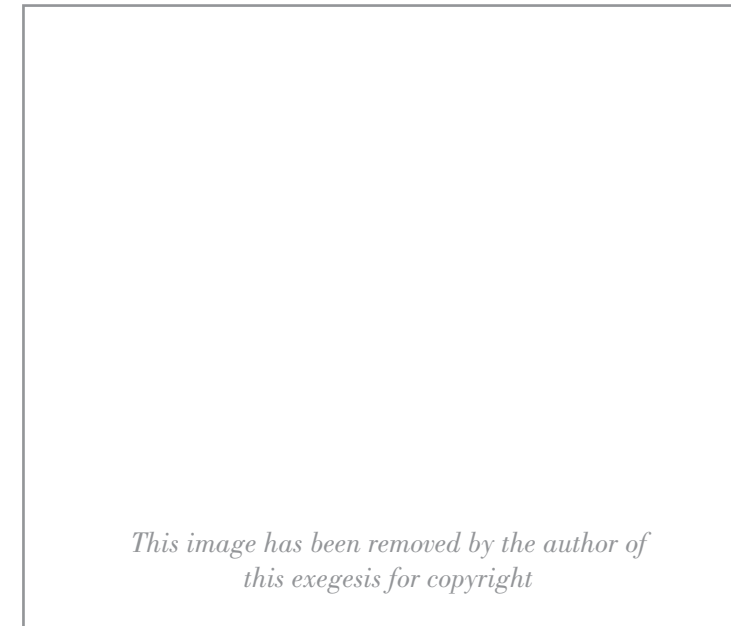
...while decorative art continued to be identified with commerce and the crafts, easel painting enjoyed the stature of an intellectual enterprise that ever since the Renaissance had guaranteed its appropriateness for the fine artist concerned with the expression of profound truths. (p.117)

After the demise of the Arts and Crafts movement the conceptual aspects of a work of craft did not always function as an important element in a work. This meant that craft could be excused for employing elements of decoration and ornamentation. However artists like Henry Matisse and Paul Gauguin who employed elements of symbolist decoration were described as exploring: "...the satisfaction of the senses rather than the engagement of the mind." (Troy, p.117) When talking about Twentieth century art Whitney Chadwick states that, "qualities associated with femininity, such as decorative, precious, miniature, sentimental, amateur have provided a set of negative characteristics against which to measure high art." (Steiner, 2001, p.151)

Concept and context became the reductive focus of art. For example Duchamp's work 'Fountain' (1917) was making an art political statement through exhibiting and recontextualising a readymade object as art object. Here Duchamp refuses to make elitist distinctions of what might be considered art. According to Neal Benzra (1999) "His view was that taste - good or bad - was the 'enemy of art.'" (p.185) A mechanistic response to art is allowed by such approaches with implications for aesthetics and ornamentation.

“In many circles, Duchamp’s ideas were considered exemplary, and his espousal of ready mades, chance, and accident had an enormous effect in fostering the wide spread reaction against beauty.” (p.23)

Twentieth century art came to assume that decoration was incompatible with concept-based art. Post Duchamp decoration was relegated to craft, which was in turn deleted from the category of contemporary art. However, decoration can be found as a concern in minimal works. In Barnett Newman’s work ‘Cathedral’ (1951), the title suggests what the colour confirms. This work intends to invoke a spiritually sublime experience through scale and intensity of colour. The blue references lapis lazuli, a precious stone used symbolically to enrich cathedral altars and interiors. If seen through the right filters decoration and ornamentation can be found even in the most minimal of works. The conceptual underpinning has been stressed in contemporary art. However, this does not exclude the inclusion of decoration as concept, nor the conceptual exploration of decoration as subject matter. Further, the use of decoration, as subject matter appropriate to any conceptual art exploration cannot be excluded.



**Marcel Duchamp**, 'Fountain', 1917.

**Barnett Newman**, 'Cathedra', 1951, oil on canvas.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MODERNISM & ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ORNAMENT

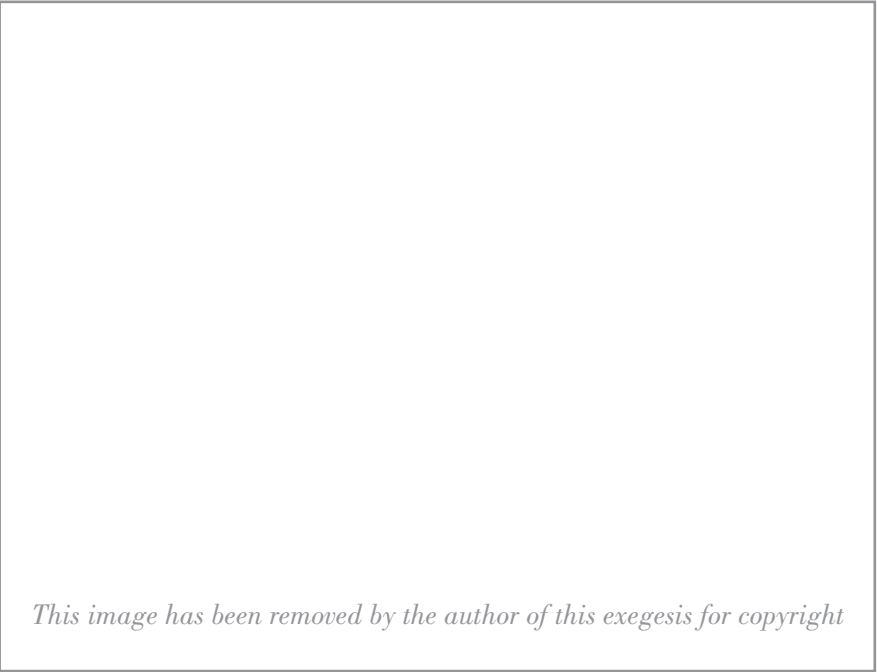
#### 2.1 HIERARCHY AND ATTITUDE

With the rise of modernism western aesthetics was required to undergo a radical upheaval in what was traditionally valued in art and design. Many art forms including ornamentation were considered redundant and inessential to an objects function.

In 1908, the architect Adolf Loos published a diatribe entitled, ‘Ornament and Crime’ which categorically denigrated the use of ornamentation. Loos wrote, “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from objects of daily use.” (Trilling, 2001, p.186). Loos deems functional design a higher form of culture with ornamentation given little or no place in ‘good design’. It is to be noted however that in his own work he uses ornament found in patterned marble and wood. This is exemplified in his building Looshaus in Vienna. “Loos intended his carefully chosen marble panelling to be the functional equivalent of ornament.” (Trilling, 2001, p.184). Even Loos could not escape from the integral role of ornament in architecture. Le Corbusier wrote in 1925 that “the more cultivated a people becomes, the more decoration disappears.” (Hoptman, 2002, p.31).

#### 2.2 FIGURATION AND ABSTRACTION

The reductionist aesthetics of Loos and Le Corbusier were later reflected in art movements such as Abstract Expressionism. When looking at Abstract Expressionism there is an implied attempt to exclude ornament as a viable subject for art. Ornamentation was seen to belong to what was deemed ‘low art’. Artists involved in Abstract Expressionism were concerned with ‘truths’ in art that were thought to be found in painting. Artists at this time were engaged with the physical processes in painting and the material



**Adolf Loos**, detail of 'Looshaus', showing the marble paneling.



relationship of paint, as it exists on a flat ground. Julian Bell (1999) states that it was painting that “at last nakedly revealed its status as flat marks on a flat surface, the real wall of the canvas which had been concealed by the sham window of illusionism”. (p.196). Abstract Expressionists seemed to be eliminating any reference to ornamentation by eliminating the illusion of space resulting in emphasis on surface and on the physicality of the materials used in a work. Issues of content in Abstract Expressionist painting were undergoing heavy debate in art circles. To have an appearance of design or pattern was thought to be of little consequence to an art critical context.

Suzi Gablik (1984) writes of Clement Greenberg an influential art critic during the movement of Abstract Expressionism:

Greenberg in particular rejected the notion that there is any higher purpose to art, or any ‘spiritual’ point to its production... Only the ‘dictates of the medium’ – pure paint and the flatness of the picture plane – were held to be worth while concerns for painting. The idea of content was taken to be a hindrance and a nuisance, and looking for meaning was a form of philistinism. (p.23)

Greenberg’s extreme utopian minimalist agenda might manifest itself ultimately in deprivation of asceticism.

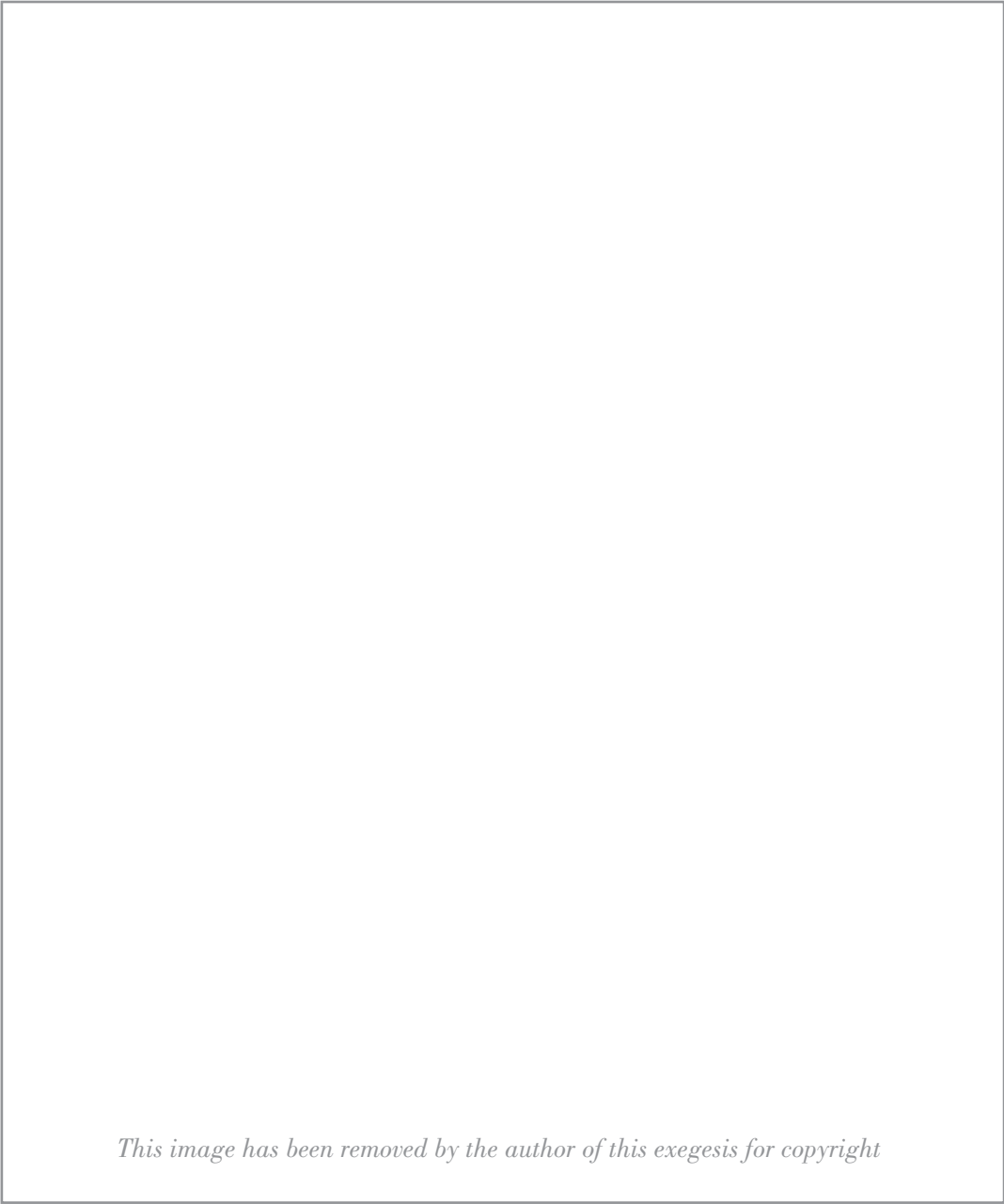
## **2.3 NEWMAN AND SURFACE APPEARANCES**

Barnett Newman was an artist who embraced the values that were associated with early Abstract Expressionism. Newman’s work appears to be reduced to the kind of minimal content that Greenberg would have approved of. However on closer inspection Newman’s paintings employ colour, form and depth to convey symbolic meaning. For example in his painting ‘Adam’ from 1951-52 David Maclagan (1977) states that “...the rich colour of this example can, incidentally, be connected with the fact that

the Hebrew word adamah means ‘red dirt’ – the earth out of which the first man was made.” (p.41). His work explored the intense relationship between figure and ground and created an element of space and depth through his use of translucent paint. It was typically more common for the many Abstract Expressionists to adopt flat acrylics that emphasized the surface of a painting. These materials supported the rejection of the illusion of space within a painting. Newman excluded any element in a work that he thought had a sense of design or “ornament” because it was thought to be a distraction from the ‘truth’ in painting. When describing Newman’s work using some of Newman’s words Shiff (2002) writes:

The simple low mud walls – usually curvilinear, gently rising from the earth, delimiting yet open ‘ended’ created place, without resorting to theatricality or grandeur. They provided a distinct location but without the sense of design or ‘ornament’ (Newman’s term), which would direct viewers to ponder relationships outside and independent of themselves. (p.101)

It was this type of relation with the materials and physical surface of a painting that inspired decades of artists. The opposing term, ornament, used by Newman when describing his own work, presents a common belief system of that period. Ornamentation as a subject for painting was considered for Newman a hindrance that only served to provide a distraction. He links ornamentation with what in his mind are negative attributes of ‘theatricality’ and ‘grandeur’. There were clearly polarities between what was subject for ‘low art’ and what was subject for ‘high art’.



**Barnett Newman**, 'Adam', 1951-1952, oil on canvas.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ORNAMENT, TRADITION & WOMEN

#### 3.1 THE PATTERN AND DECORATION MOVEMENT

The movement dubbed “Pattern and Decoration” that began in the nineteen seventies in America attempted to redefine subjects that were ornamental. However definitions made during this period in art resulted in a further marginalization of the subject.

Many artists working in this movement were appropriating designs without referencing where they had come from or what they meant in terms of the culture from which they were appropriated. This is a fragmented approach that separated concept from context and raised ethical issues. Whitney Chadwick (1990) states:

More recently, critics have questioned appropriations that are historical and transcultural and universalise as a formal device surface decoration from non-western peoples without regard to its specific origins and meanings. At the same time, many feminists remained divided over whether the attempt to valorise the neglected ‘other’ of high art does not instead perpetuate it as an alternative tradition – a “woman’s tradition.” (p.366)

#### 3.2 WOMEN’S WORK

The tradition of women working with decoration acted as a confining concept in which women’s aesthetic artistry could be minimised. At the same time it fulfilled a neat stereotype of women being preoccupied with trivial pastimes. The pursuit of “fashionable” beauty was seen as contrary to the moral Protestantism where godliness and simplicity went hand in hand.

Bettering one’s environment was widely known to have been a woman’s responsibility after 1860 before which men had been given the role. Adrian Forty (1986) states, “By the late nineteenth century, it was principally women

whose characters were revealed by the choice of furnishing.” (p.105). The role of decorator was a form of expression that represented an individual. However it was fraught with moral responsibilities that became increasingly difficult for women to possibly adhere to. It was perceived as a creative act although governed by fashion and strict social codes at that time. Women were seen to possess ‘natural’ feminine sensibilities associated with beauty and the ornamental. Penny Spark (1995) states:

The cultural stereotype associating women exclusively with fashionable display and its condemnation of feminine culture for its more trivial preoccupations was born in this period. This stereotype of women playing a role in the fashion system, and of men operating in a different sphere, has been enormously influential in defining gender differences and inequalities in this century. (p.44)

### **3.3 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES**

As Ornamentation has been marginalized throughout much of history so too women as beautiful objects have been marginalized. The quality and gesture of pleasing has inevitably been associated with women. Wendy Steiner (2001) when discussing the politics of ornament and beauty as it relates to women, states, “The analogy between women and ornament implies that woman is not only artificial but incomplete. There is no denial of a woman’s humanity so seemingly complimentary as the adjective, ‘ornamental’ ”. (p.69)

Steiner draws our attention toward a reading of ornament that is deeply insidious in western aesthetics since the late nineteenth century. The idea that ornament is inherently artificial remains prevalent in the way many consider it today. Ornament has historically been denigrated, deemed deceitful due to its preoccupation with beauty. This criticism has effectively been directed toward women who, according to Steiner, are intrinsically linked with the construct of ornament.

Although ornamentation in the past suffered historical denigration it is important to recognise that it need not continue to be referenced in this way. A conscious effort must be made in order to rethink the cultural value found

in ornamentation. Until a fresh perspective is taken historical prejudice will continue to prescribe the meaning and value of ornamentation.

### **3.4 CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**

Ornamentation, as a mode of expression continues to suffer scrutiny around its validity in visual culture today even though its use is widespread in our daily lives. In New Zealand ornamentation in art and design education has tended to be marginalised and assumed redundant. Tina A. - Chr. Engles - Schwarzpaul (2003) states “...ornament has been excluded from official discourse, and therefore has also been banned from the curriculum with many current educators holding a negative view of ornament.” (p.199). Engles-Schwarzpaul believes that ornamentation provides important cultural structures that should not be ignored specifically in art and design education.

By critically examining traditional western arts education Engles-Schwarzpaul recognises the hierarchical mode of classification that inherently “...always relies on acts of exclusion.” (p.203). This form of exclusion is unequivocally applied to ornamentation. Ornamentation in western societies was classified as possessing negative attributes associated with undesirable forms of expression. What was termed ‘less civilised’ groups in society were described as being “The working classes and peasants, women, children...” It was believed that these groups shared “...certain characteristics of ornament...” (p.203).

In conclusion Engles-Schwarzpaul discusses the relevance of ornament in our schools today. She states:

...students need to be provided with spaces for exploration where they can freely develop their creativity. No hierarchical classifications ought to hamper that freedom while, at the same time, their creativity ought to be brought into a caring connection with different social and cultural worlds. (p.216)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RE-CONCEPTUALISING ORNAMENTATION METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

My work operates as a voice for a subject that for too long has been critically neglected in art. The work presents an advocacy, an argument for a conceptually-based approach to the topic of ornamentation. The approach invites the viewer to look and think more closely, letting go of previous assumptions. The encouragement to look again at something, whose familiarity is assumed, is subtle. The work is intended to raise questions and issues which cannot be easily resolved within the images themselves.

There is evidence in all the works of an investment of time that translates into a sense of devotion. The work draws inspiration and pays homage to generations of women for whom artistic endeavours of all natures are moments of solace. My process can be viewed as a meditation and a contemplation of the subject of ornamentation.

##### 4.1.1 Introductory Commentary

The Wallflower series one, two and three were developed as part of my studio practice in 2002.

The series of works titled 'Allover one-directional', 'Indiennes' and 'Arborescent' were produced for a group exhibition at Auckland University of Technology.

The works 'Birds in Yellow' and 'Birds' were part of my developmental studio practice at the beginning of 2003.

The last series of works are part of a larger body of work that has been

exhibited in my final show at Xspace Gallery, Auckland University of Technology, March 2004.



## Developmental Work



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Wallflower one',  
2002, acrylic paint on canvas,  
40 x 54".



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Wallflower two',  
2002, acrylic paint on canvas,  
40 x 54".



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Wallflower three',  
2002, acrylic paint on canvas,  
40 x 54".

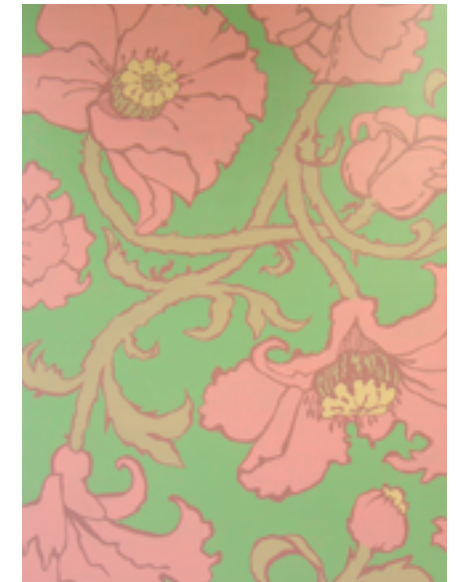
As a body of work Wallflower one, two and three demonstrate dry brush stroke work in the final layers which creates an antique patina that evokes ideas of nostalgia and romance that in later works become counter to my intentions for the subject of ornamentation.



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Allover one-directional', 2002, acrylic paint on canvas, 40 x 54".



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Indiennes', 2002, acrylic paint on canvas, 40 x 54".



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Arborescent', 2002, acrylic paint on canvas, 40 x 54".

As in previous works (Wallflower series) these paintings do not allow for the spectator to see any form of repetition. The treatment of the pattern is now made to appear flat and graphic denoting a movement away from nostalgia.



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Birds in yellow', 2003, acrylic paint on canvas, 25.5 x 25.5cm.

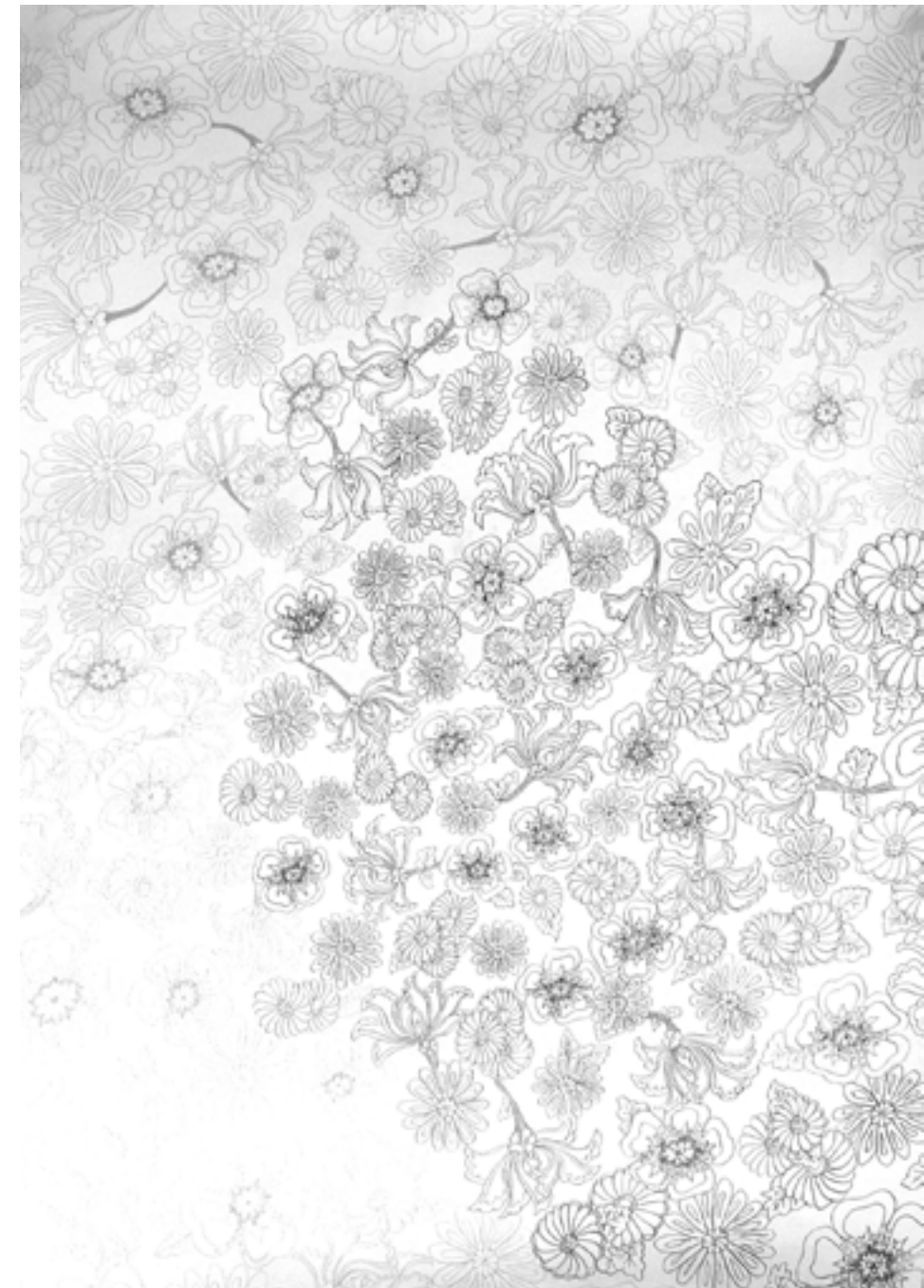


**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Birds', 2003, acrylic paint on paper, A1.

'Birds in yellow' and 'Birds' begin to explore repetition and viewer expectation in the subject of ornamentation.

In 'Birds' the composition appears to have been stretched and spacing between forms gradually changes toward the top of the image. Colour begins to disappear leaving the eye to fill in the blank spaces that now merge with the background.





**Pearl Sutcliffe**, 'Allover packed', 2003, pencil on paper, A1.

'Allover packed', demonstrates a change in scale and density of pattern. The motifs seem to be repetitive but each unit (flower) is subtly different from the next.



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, (detail) 'Allover packed', 2003, acrylic paint on canvas, 40 x 54".



**Pearl Sutcliffe**, (detail) 'Allover tossed', 2004, acrylic paint on canvas, 40 x 54".

In 'Allover packed' tonally the lines are similar to the background colour and a central focal bouquet is suspended in a mass of floral formation.

In 'Allover tossed' the lines fade as well as the colour. My intention here is to deconstruct pattern showing what would happen when line disappears and colour disappears - pattern is now unpredictable and discordant.



Views of **Pearl Sutcliffe's** work in the group exhibition 'Preamble' in Xspace at Auckland University of Technology, 2002.

#### **4.1.3 Everyday contexts**

Like fine art painting wallpaper is most commonly seen on walls; and unlike fine art painting wallpaper is often overlooked. The works' subject, flat two-dimensional pattern, actively reflects the function of wallpaper. Wallpaper is the arras, the covering of a wall, disguising and transforming the original surface. It reveals itself in its concealment of what lies behind. The subject of wallpaper is in itself contentious because it references the surface nature of a painting as a form of decoration. Therefore, as a subject, wallpaper when painted remains very aware of its surface. Throughout history wallpaper was chosen over paint to create texture and interest on a wall. Unlike actual wallpaper, patterns are given permanence when processed through the tools of the artist. A greater integration can occur between the subject and its environment when both the wall and a work surface are made up of paint.

#### **4.1.4 Issues of repetition**

Repetition and regularity in the subject of wallpaper provides a predictability, which ensures a sense of security. Symmetrical and secure pattern designs have the desired effect of creating a low-stress environment. But what happens when pattern is compressed or it changes in colour? Through changing selected variables in a repeated unit (motif) the work becomes inconsistent with repetition. For example the spectator might expect a mechanistic repetition of pattern associated with wallpaper design however in looking closer he/she will see instead that all lines are hand rendered and that what looks to be constant formations is organic and unpredictable. As well the spectator might observe that pattern at times takes over from the substrate, its repetition and unpredictability producing a disquieting effect. By deliberately distorting pattern a disruption can occur in the predictability of design.

When looking at the work a spectator, if in front of the works long enough, could begin to trace surfaces as though they might spot the difference. The spectator is invited to question their expectation of rhythm through its very disruption. When physically surrounded by the patterns in the work that reference wallpaper, depending on the nature of a design, a spectator could become overwhelmed by this interior space. The work acknowledges the two worlds of painting and printing. It makes critical commentary on the idea of painting as mimetic. The printed image is even and consistent. There is sameness. Wallpaper typically employs pattern and continuous repetition, which visually breaks with any singular viewpoint when reading the image. The space in wallpaper is shallow even when it applies effects of illusionism.

#### **4.1.5 Issues of scale**

The scale of a work can change the perceptions of its audience. Pattern derived from fabric and wallpaper is immediately removed from its domestic space with even the smallest enlargement of the overall design. A transformation can exist and the spectator is encouraged to look closely at details that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Through the magnification of a pattern, ornamentation seems to go under a microscope as though it were an infectious disease suggesting the presence of a form of cancer where cells mutate sabotaging and subverting the body. Ornamentation is often associated with excess and therefore by enlarging it, filling an entire space with it, this value judgment is reinforced.

### **4.2 THE LANGUAGE OF PRESENTATION**

#### **4.2.1 The gallery space**

The plain, unadorned white gallery wall while loaded with politics and history symbolises the notion of an abstracted and idealised space. (Brian O'Doherty, 1976). It references the notion of the ideal because it is not



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#### **4.1.5 Issues of scale**

The scale of a work can change the perceptions of its audience. Pattern derived from fabric and wallpaper is immediately removed from its domestic space with even the smallest enlargement of the overall design. A transformation can exist and the spectator is encouraged to look closely at details that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Through the magnification of a pattern, ornamentation seems to go under a microscope as though it were an infectious disease suggesting the presence of a form of cancer where cells mutate sabotaging and subverting the body. Ornamentation is often associated with excess and therefore by enlarging it, filling an entire space with it, this value judgment is reinforced.

### **4.2 THE LANGUAGE OF PRESENTATION**

#### **4.2.1 The gallery space**

The plain, unadorned white gallery wall while loaded with politics and history symbolises the notion of an abstracted and idealised space. (Brian O'Doherty, 1976). It references the notion of the ideal because it is not

attached to actual mundane realities. It aims to provide a clear space through which art is viewed in a clear way by the spectator. There are no domestic objects or signs (skirting board or architrave) to lead us away from the work. The gallery 'Room 103' is an example of a gallery that questions the convention of the white cube gallery. It is a space that is a living area (office) rather than a rarefied alien body that is completely abstracted from space. The space for the final exhibition is Xspace a gallery located at Auckland University of Technology that has been specifically chosen for its ambivalence as a gallery. It is a space that is adjacent to a large stairwell and it opens out into a foyer. It alludes to the values found in the modernist ideal but does not strictly adhere to them.

In opposition to this idealised environment my images present ornamentation as a subject for fine art thereby disrupting this convention. The works placed low on the wall exist between two conventions. Instead of this being a domestic environment, where one might expect to see wallpaper patterns, the space is suspended from the spectator's familiar reality and there is an uncomfortable juxtaposition; a point of tension with the work and its association with the walls of the gallery. The spectator is reminded of a more immediate reality, which is triggered by a white austere space that affirms and frames the modernist convention that is the white gallery.

#### **4.2.2 Viewing strategy**

In work from a previous exhibition there has been a deliberate strategy involving an ambiguous relationship between the work and its position on the gallery wall. Work was hung low to the ground as though it sat within a space that was not entirely comfortable. In addition to creating a certain dissonance for the spectator exhibiting work in this way can assist with referencing a domestic sphere within which the subject would be most commonly located. Lowering works closer to the floor meant

engaging differently with the world. This deliberately declares the tension between a 'high art' context, (the gallery) and the context of the domestic. The ambiguous positioning of the works emphasises their ambivalent relationship to the gallery.

#### **4.2.3 Exhibition: 'Wallflower'**

The exhibition, 'Wallflower', is based on juxtaposing mutually incompatible patterns so as to make the reading of a work potentially an experience that will raise questions and issues. Patterns converse or confront when positioned alongside each other and can have an appearance of fighting for space, threatening to spread over the surface of a gallery. This reflects negative ideas of ornamentations function as a parasite that threatens to destabilize its host's integrity. The work explores tensions between expected harmony (beauty), found in ornament and its disjunction with its context, which is that of the austere modernist tradition found in a white cube gallery space.

Due to the art historical rejection of ornamentation the subject in this body of work is arranged to reference the tripartite altarpiece and associated values of hierarchies that already exist for pattern in other cultures. In this body of work there is a hierarchical approach seen in the works installation. The works themselves consist of nine panels in three sets of three. An elevation occurs when these works are presented in sets of three because they are referencing the notion of a triptych which is found historically in altarpieces. Pattern thus, becomes elevated and is iconised, the everyday becomes substantiated.

The gallery acts as a mirror to this concept because it too forms a triptych in its physical configuration and in a sense is also a place of sanctuary. The central wall is framed by the two sidewalls. Bold floral works weigh

down either side of the gallery. There is a sense of ceremony or ritual in this installation. The way in which they are placed with each other affects individual works and how the works operate as a collective. Emphasis is on creating rhythmical and undulating patterned works that the spectator's eye can trace.

Each pattern's lines are clearly visible and an underlying structure is revealed through a deconstructive approach to the design. The spectator's familiarity with pattern is questioned. These patterns do not appear to be mechanically reproduced many times over. Because the subject is often viewed as commonplace to an everyday environment our eyes could assume we have seen the entire pattern without really seeing its detail. Here the spectator is invited to see and dissect pattern piece by piece as though it were a specimen under a microscope. With the underlying structure of interlocking lines revealed the spectator is perhaps taken back to a point when the original author made their first draft in gouache. The author inevitably becomes invisible when pattern is reproduced in large quantities in mechanistic ways. Through re-contextualising pattern in this way the spectator is invited to see an every day subject in a formalised way. By re-appreciating what is all around us these works lead the viewer to re-examine the past as well as the present.

#### **4.2.4 Further directions**

My next body of work will explore pattern on a larger scale. The work will consist of separate panels, that when positioned together make up the larger whole. These works will be site specific as they will cover an entire gallery wall. The colours in this body of work will be soft and muted and tonally similar to each other. These future works explore flat and dispassionate tonal discordance between each colour. They will be under the umbrella title 'Conversational', consisting of the categories of people, animals,

feathers, bows and others. (Susan Meller and Joost Elffers, 1991, p.247).

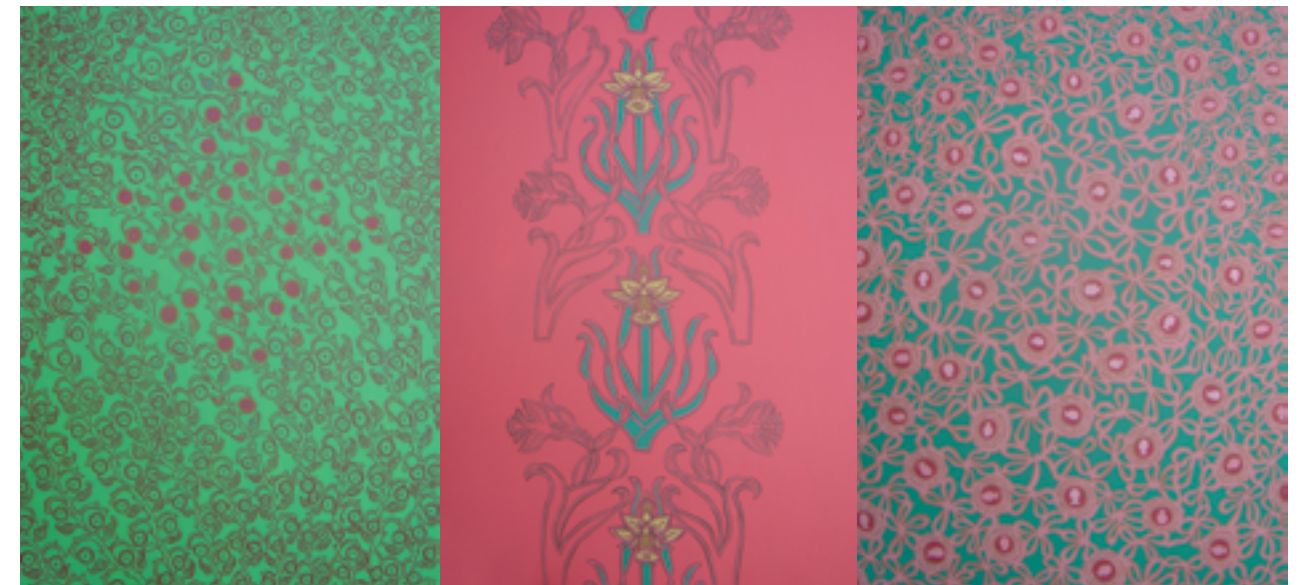
#### **4.2.5 CONCLUSION**

This exegesis endeavors to provide a window through which we can experience a new awareness of a subject often overlooked not only in an early twentieth century context but also a contemporary context.

Ornamentation through this exegesis has now been positioned as a valid, viable and contemporary subject of painting. The historical debasement of ornamentation has been analysed and critiqued thus breathing new life into a subject often historically overlooked by western aesthetics in a fine art context.



View of **Pearl Sutcliffe's** work in the solo exhibition 'Wallflower' in Xspace at Auckland University of Technology, 2004.



**Stripes, serpentine**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".

**Arts and Crafts: daffodil**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".

**Cameo layout,**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".





**Allover tossed**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".

**Allover set**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".

**Belle époque**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54".





**Allover packed**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54”.

**Conversational: birds**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54”.

**Allover one directional: roses**  
2004, acrylic paint on  
canvas, 40x54”.

## ENDNOTES

### Chapter one

1. For example in the fan vaulting in the King's College Chapel in Cambridge the structure appears as ornamentation and the effect according to James Trilling (2001) "works wonders in dematerialising the roof." (p.68).

*This image has been removed by the author of this exegesis for copyright*

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