

# *Gesturing* the *Grid*

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## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

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

Signed: Caitlyn Manning

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Manning', written in a cursive style.

15<sup>th</sup> January 2021

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I would like to thank Dr Ingrid Boberg and Jeena Shin for their invaluable support throughout this project. I certainly could not have done this without you on my team. Thank you to all the Visual Arts Staff who do remarkable work at AUT; your efforts do not go unnoticed. And to my family and friends, no words are ever enough to acknowledge my appreciation.

## ABSTRACT

This practice-led painting project titled *Gesturing the Grid*, explores the idea of wrestling as it relates to the painting process, and the reception of the painting. The notion of wrestling is multifaceted. Here the term embodies trust and intuition, struggle, duration, maker, observer, canvas, and paint. As a means for a painting to arrive, the project investigates how new sensations can emerge and morph into new possibilities. Tussling between intuitive decisions in and around painting techniques is key to the practice because decision making at an intuitive level allows painting to unfold as a responsive activity. The intuitive nature of the fluid gesture, in relation to the structurally sound grid, creates a counterbalanced companionship within this project, allowing paintings to shift between Smooth Space and Striated Space<sup>1</sup>. Anticipation upsurges awaiting the painting's arrival and re-arrival. This relates to the notions of Affect and Emergence<sup>2</sup>, where our perception is always engaged and ready to transfer sensibility to what is emerging and unfolding before us. In this practice the painting emerges out of the dynamic relationship between myself as the maker, and myself as the receptor, where mindfulness is used to maintain the importance of these two positions. A new power dynamic that I call the *wrestle* materialises when I step back and see it through different eyes. This relationship feeds and sustains the practice by providing the opportunity to generate new relationships between colour, gesture, line, and the grid. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Brian Massumi, Jan Verwoert, and Amy Sillman have proven to be invaluable theorists in this research and will continue to inform my ongoing practice.

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<sup>1</sup>Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 552.

<sup>2</sup> Pippa Sanderson, "Drawn to Paint: Materiality and Transcendence in the Work of Kathy Barry," *Art New Zealand*, Autumn 2011.



Figure 1. Caitlyn Manning, *Picnic Part Two*

## INTRODUCTION

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of The Diagram<sup>3</sup> suggests there is a pre-existing energy inhabiting the canvas. Deleuze deems the canvas as pre-occupied; the raw painting surface possesses its own innate qualities and purpose that set up an initial challenge prior to the application of the paint or other substances. The canvas then, is an arena, an area that invites activity. This is similar to a boxing arena or a football field: without it the event or sport would not be possible, as it is the field and the game that work together to co-create. If we know there are pre-existing constructs that help shape expectations and the nature of the event, then this project sets out to challenge or move further away from said expectations, to unfold new experiences in and keep up the impetus for painting. Deleuze further suggests it is through the process of painting that the pre-existing commotion can begin to be dismantled. To do this calls for action; the substrate asks me to paint through the challenges and gives to come out the *other side*. The *other side* signifies surpassing any preconceived ideas into a territory of intuitive decision-making. Knowing and making aware that the canvas is not blank or empty before I make an initial brush mark, allows for a richness to unfold in the studio once the performing body and tools are invited to begin. The act of painting is an intuitive response to the constructs that exist in the canvas, and it stems from the idea of spending time with the work as a receptor, watching it visually emerge and arrive, and often *keep arriving*.

I work in an intuitive way, pushing and testing my relationship with painting whilst spending time to allow for qualities to emerge, take hold, and reshape any mulling ideas into a new light. This approach to painting is emotional and gestural; feelings and spontaneity that comes from the body and the mind. During making the body and the mind work together in an intuitive and responsive way, creating a community of movements. This allows for complete trust in the process, navigating painting through what resonates. Often this feeling is fully gestural, a natural movement, and other times it is more intentional or striated<sup>4</sup>; linking to traditional visual constructs in painting such as figure, focus, foreground, and background. As my practice progresses, my response and ability to trust strengthens, building a newfound tolerance. I continue to keep challenging this tolerance; I am conscious that any sense of comfort zone ought to be disrupted.

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 552.

As I operate in two positions – the maker, and the observer – I decipher when to switch from one to the other, so as not to collapse the two states into one. One is the experience of the maker, and the other is as the viewer experiencing an art encounter. This double-ended responsibility of making and thinking harnesses the affectual and emotional aspects to making; a body and mind duo that does not end in the studio. There is a corresponding connection between painting and my everyday experience, hence why this has a cyclical impact on how visual languages such as colour, gesture, line, and the grid continue to arrive on and nestle into the substrate. Realising the nature of being engaged in an emergent art encounter allows susceptibility to the varied sensations, before arriving in a current moment with a recently realised visual and affectual state of being.

This methodological approach to painting I term as wrestling, will unfold throughout the course of the text, as each section is paramount to both the making and the thinking. The above ideas and approaches to painting honour the relationship between the body AND<sup>5</sup> the mind and thus bring paintings to life as an unanticipated but welcomed biproduct. Throughout the exegesis I discuss my research in light of contemporary abstract painting. The ideas I unpack are contextually grounded by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of Smooth and Striated Space, Jan Verwoert's notion of Emergence, Brian Massumi's *Politics of Affect*, and Rosalind Krauss' *Grids*. Furthermore, I accompany this text with visual documentation of my paintings that reflect the timeline of the twelve-month project.

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<sup>5</sup> I am using AND in this manner in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the body and the mind.

## CHAPTER ONE: STUDIO INSTINCTS, A METHODOLOGY

This chapter seeks to establish a methodological approach that will describe how the body and the mind operate together. The connection between the body and the mind that I then honour in the studio, allows painting to unfold in an unassuming nature. In this approach, the relationship is built on trust and intuition. To elaborate, I refer to trusting intuition, trusting the body, trusting the mind to inform the body, trusting the body to respond succinctly, or reject the action before the mind translates it into a movement of the body. As mentioned in the Introduction, Deleuze's notion of The Diagram is a key point of research here. Deleuze's philosophy provides a measure for my actions, pre-actions, and non-actions in studio. It can be difficult to convey the experience that is unfolding before the painting unfolds. How do I talk about where to begin, or how to move forward, when I am not entirely certain in the moment? In this respect, Deleuze alludes to a higher power that is "irrational"<sup>6</sup> and "involuntary"<sup>7</sup> when he says:

It is as if the hand assumed an independence and began to be guided by other forces, making marks that no longer depend on either our will or our sight. These almost blind manual marks attest to the intrusion of another world.<sup>8</sup>

Deleuze refers to the marks of the painter as blind manual marks, implying the painter is the co-pilot to a more subconscious driven process that draws on a higher power of intuition and tacit knowledge than we can comprehend in the moment of making. There is a delay in *knowing* what feels right; it is not in the exact moment of action, as that action is indivisible from the next or previous action. Therefore, it is an accumulation of actions, stages and moments of intuitive decision-making that then form an outcome, which I do not know of beforehand. With my body and my mind ceaselessly collaborating, I wrestle with subconscious decisions in the studio. Applying the paint to the substrate *feels* automatic, but as mentioned earlier, there are many givens already present; between myself, the brush, the amount of paint I use, and where my hand decides to enter and re-enter the canvas. The processual act of layering paint allows me to address the givens. The layers stand for an accumulation of intuitive processes and look like aspects of painting that overlap or undercut stages. Therefore, my process does not follow a linear logic, but rather is emergent by nature, answering to its own logic according to what is occurring while painting.

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 70.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 70.



Figure 2. Caitlyn Manning, *Trespass*

Once the canvas is activated, the visual properties of the paint – texture, colour, opacity, translucency – and gesture, are in conversation with one another, manifesting amongst the layers. During these stages, the elements of painting collude and collide, evoking a sense of *I will do this for you, if you do this for me*. This activity is an ongoing process that tests my affect relations and internal responses which guide me through making; I have a sense of direction without imposing future implications. Through a series of on-the-spot decisions, mistakes, challenges and tussles between myself, the paint and the surface, a painting slowly emerges. This is the nature of how painting unfolds in my studio.

Duration is fundamental to this emergent practice. Each painting compresses layers and lengths of time. I abandon and then revisit paintings after weeks have passed, or I spend a whole day wrestling with one painting. In my painting *Trespass* (see Figure 2), glimpses indicate the canvas initially started out an acidic green background with maroon lines on top. The canvas then demanded something else of me, urging me to wrestle with it a bit more; wreck it, muddle with it. I lay some more paint down, blocking most of the image out with a dull metal grey. The sensation of the grey was so blunt that I needed to reply to it with *something* else, though I was not quite sure what at the time. This uncertain urge evolved into a deep sapphire blue. I then fixed a scrap piece of white rectangular paper to the surface, placing it off centre. The blue had a second helping, brushing over the white paper, confusing the boundaries between the attached and the embedded, also confusing the order in which these decisions were made. I complicated things further by spray-painting an irregular fluorescent pink grid on top. I was the co-pilot to these urges and applications of colours and gestures. As a result, the image finally emerged out of this struggle. This is my methodological approach to painting, which is conceptually framed by Jan Verwoert's notion of Emergence, in relation to abstract painter Tomma Abts. Abts' paintings feel durational, and they are. Bob Nickas says of Abts' work

The paintings have many layers or levels, and one can easily imagine, at some point in the distant future, the canvas being X-rayed for forensic art historians to reveal just how many paintings are in the painting.<sup>9</sup>

Nickas illuminates how much paint and process is imbedded within Abts' paintings, re-iterating the idea of wrestling to get to its culminated status, if it is ever even considered final. Abts interest lies in the durational process. When the time comes, we as the viewer are presented with a final form, but

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<sup>9</sup> Bob Nickas, *Painting Abstraction: New Elements in Abstract Painting* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2009), 230.

we must work as the excavator if we want to see more than the topmost layer of paint. For instance, like many of Abts paintings, *Saeben* (see Figure 3) appears sharp, geometric, and formulaic, but close-up there are traces of under paintings, and different degrees of opacity and paint variations; indicative of a history layered behind itself.

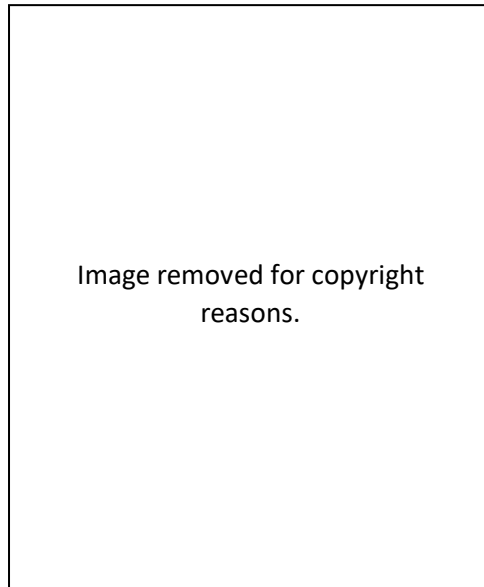


Figure 3. Tomma Abts, *Saeben*

As I engage with Abts' work, I find myself excavating behind the scenes for evidence of previous and further action. I know there is more to be seen and felt; there is time, paint, process, history. It feels archival. This sense of an archive is relational to my paintings. For instance, my painting *Trespass* (see Figure 2) never feels fully arrived, but rather, slowly emerges as I look initially and then revisit it for a second, third, and fourth time, gathering intel that points to more gestures and colours beyond the topmost layer of paint. Emergence allows for a temporal and spatial understanding of painting that exceeds the dimensions of the canvas; qualities and sensations that arrive from and through a painting then have the power to be transversed into everyday experiences and/or other art encounters.

Theorist and Painter Amy Sillman sets up another way of thinking about the emergent wrestle in painting. Whilst Verwoert coins the term Emergence, Sillman refers to the similar concept as the Awkwardness. She calls the awkwardness the

intimate and discomfoting process of things changing as they go awry, look uncomfortable, have to be confronted, repaired, or risked, i.e., the process of trying to figure something out

while doing it. I don't know if that's abstraction, but I know it's awkward. Finding a form is building these feelings (in this case dissatisfaction, embarrassment, and doubt) into a substance. This is a very fragile thing to do.<sup>10</sup>

Sillman highlights the significance of awkwardness in abstract painting. It is a process imbedded struggle that forms new trajectories while painting; an unforeseen experience or direction that arrives through the struggle. The *unforeseen* reiterates the idea of emergence; it is not a prerequisite that already exists in the canvas but happens through the processual acts. It seems Sillman is intentionally fighting for the sensations before even fully knowing what those sensations are, as this is exactly when doubt and dissatisfaction flourishes into an unassuming substance. Sillman is conscious of the fragility and risk, and openly facilitates it, as this is where the richest growth stems from in the studio. When I engage with her paintings, I can imagine the physicality of the movements and the physicality of the paint involved in producing a work. Her paintings are not made in one sitting; adding, subtracting, rotating, scraping, rejecting, and re-visiting paintings is key to Sillman's practice. Nickas also tells us

her conclusion is withheld, but only because she doesn't believe that there are neat and tidy endings (her picture-making is, in fact, beautifully complicated and messy); she doesn't know or isn't entirely sure where things are headed.<sup>11</sup>

Here, painting is not a linear protocol, nor does it contain a coherent conclusion. The painting's final state is not of concern. Sillman is not sure when or where the final state will come to the surface, but rather focuses on stages of struggle, intuitive playfulness, and experimentation. Shifting the importance to the process provides a rich foundation for 'messy' decision-making to occur. In my practice, I lay down paint and make on-the-spot decisions whether to add to or subtract more paint from the painting. During this process, some things feel right, and some things do not, either way the painting demands an action, or a decision to stop or wait. Thus, I put feeling into action and follow through with it. The action I take at the time may or may not ruin the painting or lead to a dead-end, but painting this way allows dead-ends to open new passages that were not initially available. My studio houses work in progress paintings that rest until I am ready to make the move. This means a painting of mine may have five layers of paint, but there are weeks between the layers, or it could mean there are three immediate layers of paint, where I worked quickly, tackling it all in one day. The urgency depends on the sensations and urges I am experiencing at the time; is the painting calling for action or rejection? A pause or moment of reflection often provides an answer

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<sup>10</sup> Amy Sillman, "Notes on Awkwardness: Shit Happens" *Frieze*, December 22 2015, 79.

<sup>11</sup> Nickas, 224.

for this. Notions of Emergence, Awkwardness, and Wrestling all point to the idea of painting always being in a state of becoming. Sillman suggests we must not fear discomfort, failure, or dissatisfaction. Discomfort is inevitable, Sillman implies – *why try to escape it*. Thus, I keep dismantling and risking painting behaviours to create new experiences and trajectories for painting to emerge through.

## CHAPTER TWO: TO WRESTLE (WITH COLOUR AND GESTURE)

This chapter will expand on my actions and decision making that occurs in the studio, as it relates to Brian Massumi's theory of Affect; its ability to increase and diminish our power to act. Like everyday life, in the studio I am operating in the immediate and in response to the immediate. For me, there is always a parallel connection between maker and viewer, studio, and life; neither are ever separate or static. I set up a counterbalanced way of painting that facilitates the intermittent arrival of chemical reactions and altering sensations. I start with an empty blank canvas, like most painters. But how do I start? often I forget to address how I start, as it has become habitual. But if I back track, I can flesh out where the habit or approach has stemmed from in the first place. To minimize the apprehension of starting, I concentrate my focus on uncertainty being linked to possibility and the lack of control allowing me to gain control, and vice versa. It means from the outset, there is more to be revealed through painting that I do not yet know, which compels me to search, dig, contemplate, and excavate; doing the hard work to reveal these otherwise unknown experiences. It is imperative to focus on unexpected mistakes and 'one-offs' that cannot be copied and pasted; qualities that emerge out of happenstance. This encourages a way forward.

To expand on wrestling in the context of Affect, Massumi suggests that uncertainty "might force you to find a margin, a manoeuvre you didn't know you had, and couldn't have just thought your way into. It can change you, expand you."<sup>12</sup> Massumi's idea regarding uncertainty sits closely with my intuitive painting process that I refer to as wrestling. Wrestling suggests the process did not arrive or take place with ease. It suggests a sense of discomfort, whilst providing what Massumi calls an area of manoeuvrability. It is an action that calls for an affective response, which could not have been predetermined prior to the action. This links back to the thinking of Amy Sillman on awkwardness; feelings and sensations arrive through a hands-on struggle. As Massumi puts it, the "uncertainty produces an affective change in the situation"<sup>13</sup> and causes the pathway to change direction. Often this change of course is not only beneficiary to the painting, but also to the encounter of the resolved work of art that can only be experienced afterwards.

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect: Navigating Movements; Conversations with Mary Zournazi* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Massumi, 2.

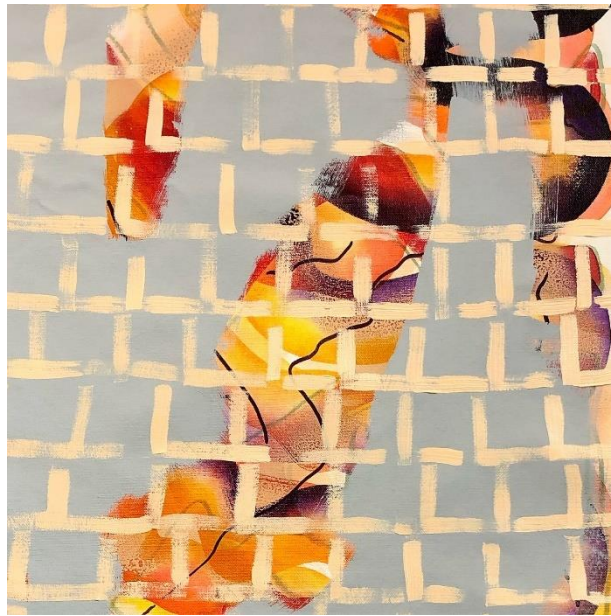


Figure 4. Caitlyn Manning, Detail of *Brickworks*

This can be understood in relation to my use of colour. My strategy for using and selecting colours stem from my own colour theory practiced over the years of working in studio, from my job at Gordon Harris (Art Supply Store), to the deposited colours in my everyday experiences and memory. In my day-to-day life, I am becoming more aware of my surroundings – everyday encounters with and observations of shapes, tones, colours, and grids as they feed into my library of knowledges. I am constantly collecting. Within this context colour theory has stemmed from making which runs parallel with Sillman’s belief that “making creates meaning”<sup>14</sup>. In my practice I challenge my preconceived ideas of colour. For example, colours I thought to be some of my least-favourite (light brown, orange, and grey), are now some of my most well-regarded. Once the painting is finished, my perception of the colours is often transformed; appreciating the significance and seeing them in relation to other compositions shines a new light on the originating perception I once had.

My colour palette surpasses the process of selecting a tube of paint. My use of colour has weight, intent, and the ability to shift our perception particularly when it is in relation to another colour. I am interested in the way a single colour is transformed once it is playing on the field with other (colour) participants. Some come forward, some transcend, some argue, whilst some harmonize, and some

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<sup>14</sup> Amy Sillman, *Amy Sillman: Faux Pas: Selected Writings and Drawings*, ed. Charlotte Houette (After 8 Books, 2020), 14.

vibrate. But this is not information I know beforehand. Once the canvas is activated by colour(s), feelings and sensations arrive, demanding or rejecting attention.



Figure 5. Caitlyn Manning, Detail of *Haze-elnut*

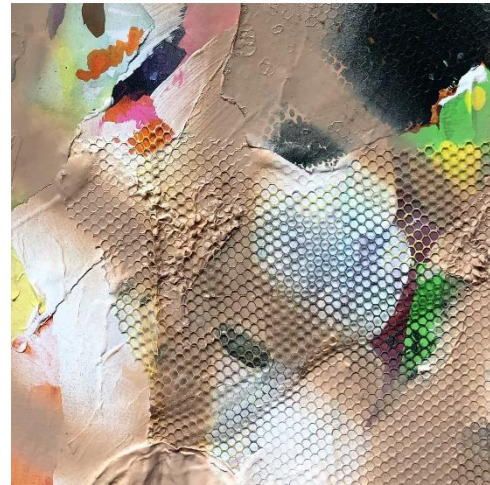


Figure 6. Caitlyn Manning, Detail of *Haze-elnut*

There is a lively essence to the colours and their interactions. Whether I use opaque or translucent colours, smudged, or scrubbed, they radiate their own energy that then impacts the way we perceive the neighbouring colours. Because of these interactions, some paintings feel heavier and some feel lighter. Some colours fuse into one another, whilst others abruptly fight over space. I am particularly interested in using opaque single colours to level out, block or reveal areas of the painting. In the detail images of my painting *Haze-elnut* (see Figure 5 and Figure 6) the light brown spray paint is a neutral colour on its own, but here it is soft, fleshy, and warm, yet confident in the way it rests on top of the assemblage of pinks, greens, yellows, purples, and oranges. In conjunction with colour experimentation, I utilise a gridded pattern to test how foreground and background may be perceived. The inserted mesh coheres with this, providing a pulsating gradient of purples, blues, and greens. The colour is a tool used to disrupt any linear or rational reading.

I keep challenging colour relationships to unlock unusual sensations. In my paintings, the role of colour flips itself in more ways than one. In some of the paintings, the recurrent grey comes forward, as though it was the last layer to go on, and at times, it recedes, allowing the light colours to come forward. As seen in *Brickworks* (see Figure 4), the interaction of grey and light orange enables a testing of boundaries between foreground and background. The painting, and latent colour

sensations I am now experiencing during the role of the viewer, have arrived from this (e)motion of wrestling while I am making.

The materiality and weight of colour is of interest to me because it links to a much broader thinking than visuals and appearances. This approach aligns with Amy Sillman's theoretical stance on colour. Sillman explores the differing *weights* of colour. As stated by Lynne Tillman, Sillman's "remarks on color weigh color on several scales, from the actual weight of the pigments, to her consideration of how color weighs in the imagination and sensibility of painters"<sup>15</sup> Thus, Sillman considers the weight of a single pigment and the weight of a sensibility or experience around a particular colour as key concerns; both *weights* weigh on us differently. Colour can take us emotionally into another world beyond the canvas, and it can also physically ground us.

Katharina Grosse's work is hugely dedicated to exploring possibilities and the expansive nature of colour. Grosse says "I like this anarchic potential of colour. I see it very clearly that colour is actually taking away the boundary of the object, so there is no subject/object relationship anymore".<sup>16</sup> Grosse breaks down the boundary between substances, suggesting colour lives on and seeps through the edges of form; colour becomes form. Grosse's colour is often viewed in scale, not only the amount of colour needed to cover the large sites she works on (buildings, walls, rooms, and galleries), but also the scale of impact on the viewer. It is so important to encounter the work in person, to get a sense of the scale and density of the colour.

Stanley Whitney is renowned for celebrating individual colour characteristics in the form of blocks and grids. He works with a wide range of colours utilising the relational intensities within proximity. Whilst the colours seem to mostly remain in their 'block', different hues and brush marks create differing energies across the paintings. In *Painting Abstraction* Nickas says, "for Whitney, it's not paint that is the material; color is the material. He goes for richness but also wants the color to be matte and to have density."<sup>17</sup> Colour has the agency to take on volume and gravity; we as the viewer can now sense and feel the sizeable weight of the painting in relation to our body.

An equally important aspect of my practice is gesture, particularly how it is created through the active body. Gesture becomes an experience. I am interested in how gesture can operate as a

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<sup>15</sup> Sillman, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Art21, "Katharina Grosse: Painting with Color," April 17, 2015, video, 4:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBfPMGS7XPo>.

<sup>17</sup> Nickas, 162.

navigation system that folds, twists, interrupts, seeps, and guides. Essentially, gesture is connected to movement; it is a subtle time stamp of the action and when repeated, one that can also indicate a much larger picture or action that lives beyond the parameters of the canvas. Gesture in this way lives on beyond the encounter. This thinking is linked to my experience of engaging with Judy Millar's painting *Untitled* exhibited at Gow Langsford Gallery in August 2020 (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Judy Millar, *Untitled* (Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery and the artist)

The feeling of the gesture stayed with me long after I left the gallery. This feeling entices me to engage with Millar's painting again and again, as though I cannot digest the complexities of the gesture in a single encounter. In Millar's painting, the gestures interweave and cross paths until the whole canvas is covered. The brushstrokes and sweeping gestures transported me into another realm; they uplifted me, and I lost all sense of gravity. This rhythmic ride is complimented by a colour palette of pinks, purples, and a small amount of soft blue. Due to the scale, the sizeable gesture guides me through the painting, sometimes jolting and twisting, but nevertheless, moving. Millar's choice of colours and gestures have agency; it is the strategy and the content. Here, gesture takes us for a ride, articulating a pathway that keeps on reshaping itself through the course of painting.



Figure 8. Caitlyn Manning, *Puncture*

My painting *Puncture* (see Figure 8), highlights the process embedded in the painting, disclosing what took place behind the scenes. In *Puncture*, the viewer can track the movements of my hand down and around the canvas, identifying where the brushstroke ends, as the excess sap green paint seeps down the canvas. The marks made here are indexical to the hand and the nervous system; they sit exposed in their raw state as all the jolts, wobbles, and gaps in the brushstroke come to the forefront. It is not descriptive of a gesture, but rather *is* gesture. This is comparable to Millar's brushstrokes; we can see where more paint has built up, indicating a fresh application to the brush, as much as we can see where she jolts her hand or moves her body in another direction.

Gesture is multifaceted. My toolkit is a collection of visual languages and motifs such as organic forms, line drawings, colour relationships, degrees of opacity, and mixed media, including the application of paint medium. Gesture is also the way I apply and form these visual languages, for example, layering, blocking, removing, smudging, spraying, and scraping. My approaches reflect my everyday experiences that offer me an intensity of affect.

I am interested in how my gesture begins and where it leads to. Line drawings have become a dominant gestural mark I apply to the canvas. Each work exhibits a different quality, colour, and degree of line. The lines are not necessarily representational, figurative, or descriptive, but the resurfacing of them feels rich rather than repetitive. Across a series of paintings, this thread is reiterated in different disguises. Often, I use line to weave in and out of the layers. We then know that there is more to it, creating an in-focus element that appears and disappears beneath the forms. Another scenario is when I echo or mimic a line in another area of the painting. This creates a rhythm; a latent response to the gesture that came before. There are multiple ways of gesturing line; whether it is spray painted or a hand-drawn outline, there is a suggestion of a bodily action that took place and a sense of guidance through the language of the line.



Figure 9. Caitlyn Manning, *Landfall*

Aligned with this thinking, Painter Stella Corkery repeats or echoes gestures, and thus they become a part of her toolkit. Amid Corkery's large-scale painting *Theme for a Science Fiction Vampire Breath on Breathing*, close ups (see Figure 10 and Figure 11) indicate a repetitive use of finger-tapping and fan mark-making across the one canvas. These marks come from the body; an authentic representation of paint being transferred to the canvas using the body and the tools instinctively employed by the artist. Here, the reiteration of a mark is also rich rather than repetitive. Corkery celebrates happenstance and intuitive mark-making. This approach creates a subtle vibration across the canvas. The painting carries a rhythmic sense of gestural happenstance and intention, messing with its own chronology.



Figure 10 & Figure 11. Stella Corkery,  
*Detail of Theme for a Science Fiction Vampire Breath on Breathing*

In my practice, colour and gesture converse with one another to create conversations between foreground, middle ground, and background. The middle ground is typically an area of transition between foreground and background, but that role is shifted onto colour and gesture; they now guide the viewer in and out, around or across the canvas. The painting is never fixed or fully arrived, but rather, with the complex arrival of gestures, the connectivity and associations continue as an always and already becoming, occurring *within* the work and over the duration of *engaging* with the work.

## CHAPTER THREE: GESTURING THE GRID

Smooth space is filled by events or haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties. It is haptic, rather than optical perception. Whereas in the striated forms organize a matter, in the smooth materials signal forces and serve as symptoms for them. It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties.<sup>18</sup>

This practice led research is theoretically informed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of Smooth Space and Striated Space. I refer to this section as *Gesturing the Grid*, as it combines a fluid term (gesturing) with a structural term (grid), which is connected to the idea of Smooth Space and Striated Space orientations. For example, striated space is strict, organised, ordered and mapped. Whereas smooth space is quite the opposite – open, intuitive, instinctive, and fluid. Deleuze and Guattari say that “the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space.”<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's theory suggests that the spaces work collaboratively to offer us a way to experience the world. They rely on one another in a cyclical manner. Without this relationship and balance, there is risk of falling into too much order, or too much disorder.

So how does smooth and striated space operate in the studio? I move between structural and intuitive methods. The way I move is active, intuitive, back-and-forth, and in the moment. Here, the nature of my approach to painting leans towards the idea of smooth space, where freeform is encouraged to arrive *through* painting. The striation then, that I use to counterbalance this emergent and fluid approach, is to apply painting devices from my toolkit such as lines, colour, gesture, and more specifically, the grid. I employ these devices in a spontaneous manner as I learn to navigate between smooth and striated space *during* painting. What is key is that they operate together to create new ideas and affect relations.

As briefly mentioned above, the grid plays a significant role in my paintings. Grids are evidently a part of the painting, but what do they signify? What are the functions and implications of the grid? Piet Mondrian's founding of the grid as a modernist emblem<sup>20</sup> provides a formal construct for my practice. Today, the role and representation of the grid in painting has shifted, allowing my work to sit within the realm of structurally opened notions of the grid. Within my painting practice, my

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<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 557.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 552.

<sup>20</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” no. 9, (Summer, 1979), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778321?seq=1>.

understanding of the grid fluctuates between a temporal, affectual and structural belief. More specifically, I understand the grid as a means of representing the cross connection between smooth and striated space.

The moment before the grid is introduced is difficult to navigate. The unstructured pictorial space is agitated, as it never lets us fully fixate on one area. So, the grid is often applied later in the processual act, in response to a loose and emergent composition. Therefore, the grid operates as an ordering system, a balancing act or negotiation between smooth and striated space orientations. There is the sense of order that the grid is associated with and can be used to measure against. The grid accentuates the smooth space (its counterpart). Without the grid it is a totally different work, and with the grid everything is changed. Even when it is ordered or *striated*, the painting flips again; there is no singular reading. The two spaces weave in and out of one another, which is key to encountering the emerging qualities of the painting.

Krauss' theoretical text *Grids* represents the grid's varying positions – one being flat and geometricized, the “anti-real”<sup>21</sup>, the other being temporal, pointing to the expansive: exceeding the limitations of the canvas into the ‘real’. This runs parallel to the concept of smooth and striated space. Whilst Mondrian celebrated both readings of the grid, my practice highlights the limitless possibilities it has to offer. For instance, I also employ the grid as a gesture. It is a tool, a motif, a device I draw on when bringing paintings to life. It morphs, reforms, and re-emerges, painting after painting. Gesture is what allows, determines, or challenges the shifts it takes.

In my paintings, the grid presents a variety of visual readings. Using line, colour, and gesture, I create countless grids in the form of spray painted, hand-painted, glued, and subtracted (i.e., masking out a negative grid). The grids also vary in thickness, opacity, translucency, and consistency. An example of consistency is the grid might appear dense and precise, or warped and disjointed. However, any form the grid takes on is accepted in this practice. The next move I make determines if it will stay or be covered over, suggesting the grid is another palpable layer that is key to the processual act of painting. The impulse to create a grid is often stronger than the thought of planning to make a grid. Therefore, sometimes I do not know a grid is approaching, until the moment my hand and the gesture of the grid consumes the canvas. Thus, there is a strong connection between intuition and striation.

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<sup>21</sup> Krauss, 51.



Figure 12. Caitlyn Manning, *Tear*

The grids have different degrees of demarcation. A painted grid or a gridded painting has endless readings including, but not limited to, initial, transient, and final. On one hand, looking up close there is a sense of intimacy and expansiveness, and on the other hand, from afar, there is a sense of order and systems as this is when we see the frequency and entirety of the grid. The flexibility of the grid means the painting can challenge its own structure. In my practice there is a consciousness and intellectualisation of this use of the grid. I keep employing *and* challenging ways I use the grid to prompt new sensations and possibilities for the next painting.



Figure 13. Emma McIntyre, *Net*



Figure 14. Emma McIntyre, *Grid (black dots)*

Emma McIntyre frequently employs grids within her painting practice. The nature of McIntyre's grids varies from painting to painting, closely resembling the endless functions of the grid in my practice. This suggests there is a strong rationale for painting in this way. Her recent work *Net* (see Figure 13) is of a modest scale, yet energetic and vivacious. The softly painted grid reminds us there is a safe place to rest our eyes before taking a second helping of the intense yellows, purples, and greens. The painting also includes a tangible grid; the fixed mesh, which juts over the edge of the canvas. This creates an additional vibration within the complex work, whilst at the same time situates us back in the real world as we can recognise where this mesh material might have come from (a laundry bag, a fence, or a net curtain). Note that the grid does not expand across the whole painting, though it still holds its *place* in the painting amongst the gestural brush marks and interactions of colour. In the top left corner and the centre of the painting the grid gravitates to a more loose and confident form, breaking the structure of itself. This voices integrity. We might think there is not enough paint, but the loosely or subtly drawn grid is presenting a new performance of materiality.

The subtlety, in relation to the other complexities happening in the image, changes the nature of itself and its host, halting us in our assumptions.

Like McIntyre, some of my paintings have a less distinguishable grid. In *Tear* (see Figure 12), the subtle blue line-grid arrives as an after-image. The grid politely rests behind the scenes whilst the combination of the dull metal grey and intense fluorescent pink initially perform and converse. After time, the painting unravels and becomes more digestible. This is when subtle qualities emerge and evidently change course, flipping the role of foreground, middle ground, and background. When the grid is imbedded in the canvas, rather than the final mark on top, it makes other layers more palpable. This use of the grid opens the centre of the painting, in between the layers, suggesting a space that is there but not quite tangible. We know it exists in its entirety; we just cannot see it yet.

In some of my paintings the grid operates as a lens in the sense that we look through it. I use translucent grids to invite a gaze into the space beyond the topmost layer of paint, providing a sense of guidance without imposing on the encounter. Emma McIntyre's *Grid (Black Dots)* (see Figure 14) is made up of soft, washy red checkers that give us a way to move in and out of the gestured painting. The checker pattern appears to diminish off into the distance, and on a slight lean, suggesting the painting lives on, both in distance and dimension. The intentional perspectival grid permits the colours and gestures to be active and undulate in and around the painting. This allows the experience of the gesture to occur in a similar manner to Judy Millar's work; there is a device used to guide us in and around the canvas in conjunction with other painted complexities that diffuse in and out of space.

I utilise the grid as a way of intuitively mapping and ordering the boundless activity I have laid down beforehand. During making there is a sense of hidden rules and laws I am guided by. As it is perceived, the gridded paintings float between smooth and striated space orientations that increase and decrease in intensities.

## CONCLUSION

As I wrestle with the innate qualities that pre-exist in the unpainted canvas, I take steps, intuitively, to reject and renew painting approaches. This is in attempt to rupture what I already know in painting and in my everyday life, as this is where the enticement to continue painting lies. The method of wrestling holds great value to the practice; I embrace and gain better understanding of conflict, as the emergent painting keeps transforming the nature of itself and triggering unfolding sensations. The act of painting and the way painting is activated release affective and sensual understandings. These new sensations morph and drive the next move in painting. Duration is multifaceted in this project. Different durations of time, both immediate and prolonged, allow paintings to recharge themselves over time(s) and keep performing differently during different orientations and encounters.

Colour and gesture are the essence of painting. Colour relationships arrive from affectual responses and everyday encounters. Whether the colours work together in harmony or dispute, they resonate, and thus contain the power to linger further than the canvas parameters, crossing the threshold between an art encounter and everyday life. Gesture then, is my absolute connection to the canvas. It is the method, the movement and the body language that lands on a substrate. Moreover, it is the individual marks that together make up a painting, confidently consuming the canvas. It is me, it is the painting, and the interaction between us; singular, composed, and collective. Each gesture comes out of a movement that is not governed by preconceived notions, but rather reveals itself authentically.

Throughout this project I have understood the benefit of employing the grid to counterbalance smooth space and striated space, as this allows me to keep pushing the limits of the canvas parameters. The striation of the grid allows me to intuitively balance between smooth space (the void) and striated space (structure and order). The countless employed grids – small, expansive, hazy, defined, broken, and vibrant – create an ongoing conversation with the fluidity of the gesture. Wrestling with colour, line, gesture, and the grid is cyclical, yet escapes repetition.

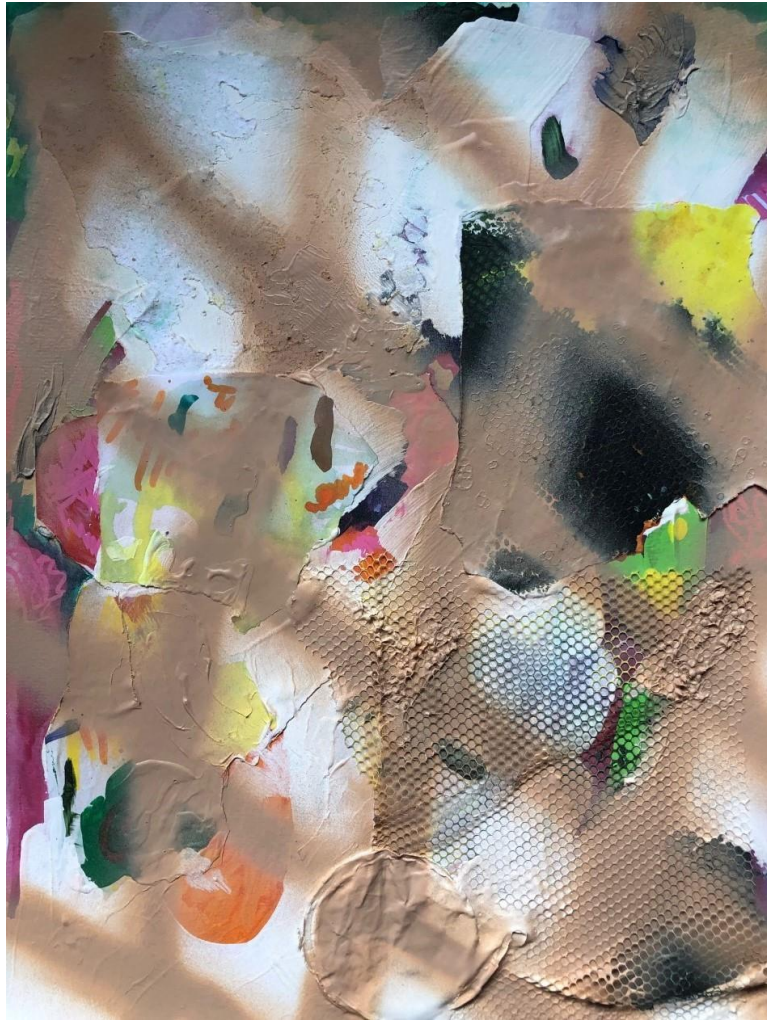


Figure 15. Caitlyn Manning, *Haze-elnut*

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# VISUAL DOCUMENTATION



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

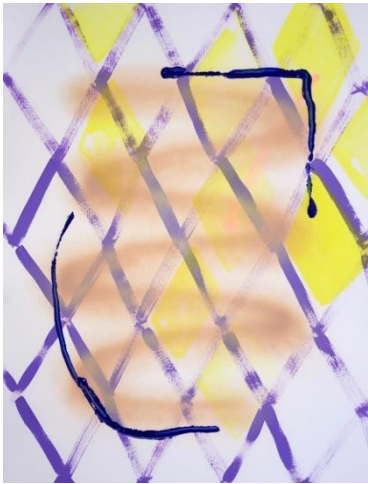


Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41

## APPENDIX

### VISUAL DOCUMENTATION OF EXHIBITION

St Paul Street Gallery Three, AUT, Auckland - February 2021

My final installation comprised of nine paintings, all relatively similar in scale. Of the nine paintings, three are on paper and six are on canvas. The paintings are made using acrylic paint, flashe, spray paint, collage, and paint pen. The selection of work is a mixture of early and recent paintings. The installation process ran true to my painting process, the *wrestle*, where I add, subtract, reject, and rotate.

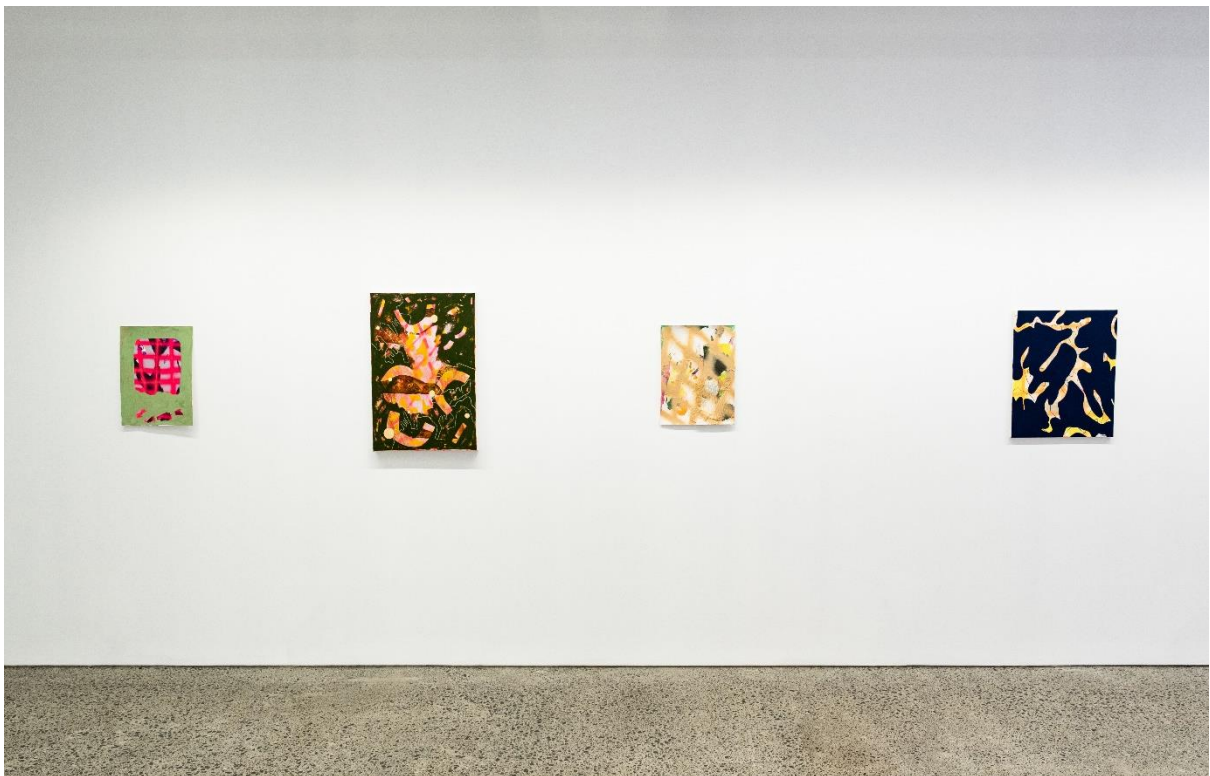
I chose to begin with *Interference* (pictured first) which lived singularly on the first left-hand side wall, and end with *Velvet* (pictured last) which was the fourth painting hanging on the third wall, on the far right-hand side. These two paintings, being the newest additions to this project made in January this year (2021), obtain a richness in sensation and colour and are quietly confident in their differences; they have the capacity to stand on their own whilst also operating as bookends for the overall exhibition. Whilst the viewer might be directed to view the right-hand side first, interestingly this does not 'mess' with the chronology of the work, as my painting process is not linear. Left to right or right to left, this body of work maintains a consistent thread of colour, gesture, line, and grids.



*Interference*, Acrylic on Canvas, 610 mm x 457mm (January 2021)



Installation view, *Gesturing the Grid*



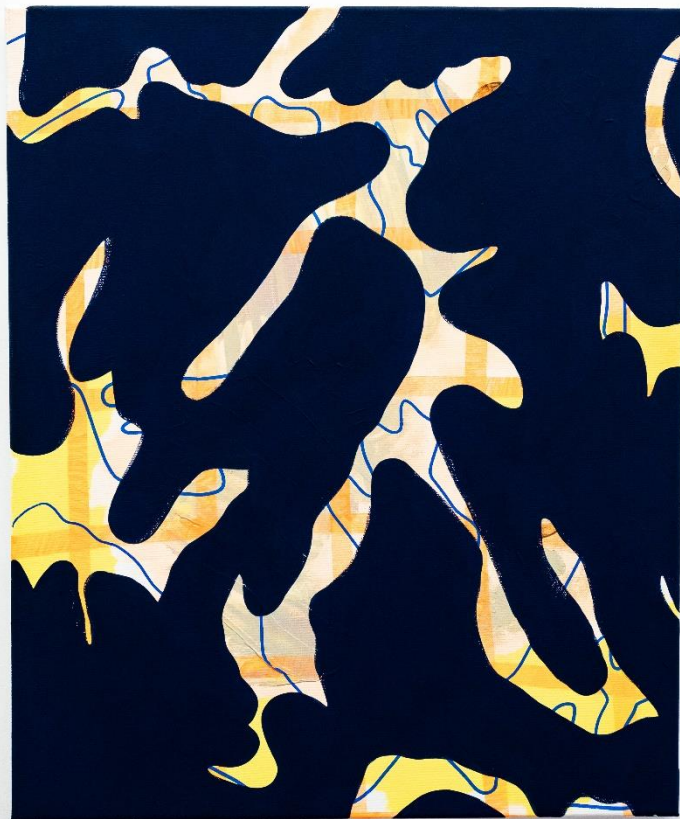
Installation view, *Gesturing the Grid*



*Mars*, Acrylic on Canvas, 762 x 609mm (January 2021)



*Synchronized Swimming*, Acrylic and Flashe on Canvas, 762 x 609mm (January 2021)



*Velvet*, Acrylic and Flashe on Canvas, 610 mm x 457mm (January 2021)