

FORGET  
ME NOT  
PROVISIONAL PAINTINGS

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# ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'A' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

7 October 2015

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# ABSTRACT

This practice-based project explores how the past is continually brought into interaction with perceptions of the present, in order that significance might become attached to what we see. In this respect, *noticing* is a process of relating sensation to memory, where to notice is to remember selectively. The process of painting, for me, then becomes as much about exploring the past as exploring new possibilities in the present.

This project investigates how painting constitutes a continual formulating of relations between past and present, as a process of paying attention to how the world unfolds in consciousness, in ways that are provisional and contingent on our experience. In particular, the project reflects on how memory loss might affect this unfolding.

# INTRODUCTION



This project investigates the idea that to notice something is to remember, a process where we attend to perception by bringing the past up from memory to interact with the present moment. In doing so we attach significance to this present perception. It is in this process that events become extracted from the continuum of life's flow, to become markers of significance in a retrospective narrative of that living. In this context, painting can be conceived as a process of paying attention, a provisional formulation of relations between past and present.

This process is not paying attention to something that has already been formulated, but a process of questioning, proposing, and testing, out of which a painted image unfolds. Throughout this process of painting from a photograph - of either the recent or distant past - images also emerge internally in order to reconstitute the emerging, evolving self. Here painting is not a representational process, but a bringing forth. In particular, my project explores how memory loss influences this process of emergence.

To inform my practice I have investigated Alberto Giacometti's process of painting in selected portrait studies. Photographs of Giacometti's paintings reveal cycles of emergence in the way he builds an image from fragments of information. We might surmise that a satisfactory 'likeness' of the subject appears to elude the painter. Or alternatively, that he wishes to deny the viewer a clear and definite image. Giacometti's paintings are inscribed between appearance and disappearance. They have an unfinished, shifting and provisional quality. They exist in the present but are grounded in constructing a time which has passed.

Through an analysis of my own painting process, along with that of Giacometti's, I investigate paying attention to certain features in a photograph, and representing these in more detail than other features which remain unresolved in my painting. This creates a provisional form of painting which seeks to engage the viewer's memory in their present moment of looking.

This releases painting from the service of representation. Instead the painting emerges in a continuous provisional state, just as the subject of painting also emerges provisionally in both the artist's and spectator's conception. Lastly I investigate how the artist emerges through the agency of this form of painting.

This research led me to investigate the notion of significance in memory representation in the work of Roland Barthes. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes came to the realisation that no matter how many

times he looked at the photograph of his deceased mother, as he tried to recall her features he would never be able to “*summons them up as a totality*” (Roland Barthes, 1981). I am interested in the loss of details in memory; in the contingency of memory given an incomplete picture.

I also investigate how to address the void of the loss left by the act of forgetting, by focusing on noticing present moments in order to create new memories: painting as a way of being in life.



Figure 1: *Mike* (2015) Acrylic and oil paint and charcoal on linen - 120 x 110 cm

BRINGING THE PAST  
IN TO THE PRESENT

This project finds a foundation in my personal experience of a period of amnesia as a consequence of an accident. However, we all experience forms of memory loss such as those produced by the ageing process. This research project is not solely based on my experience of memory loss, but reflects on my changing perception of memory and its interpretation in my painting practice.

My previous perception of memory was that memory was bound to the past: By living through experiences, a certain amount of perceptual information was perceived. Then a cognitive process was engaged not only to retain this information but also to access, retrieve and reconstruct past experiences.

Sarah Manguso's essay *Ongoingness, the end of a diary* (Manguso, 2015), describes a similar understanding of memories being fixed but also degrading.

“Left alone in time, memories harden into summaries. The originals become almost irretrievable.” (Manguso, 2015)

However, I noticed other processes were also in constant motion; the process of editing and deleting information, and of forgetting. I saw memory as a kind of stock of lived experiences that I could access later on. Although I was also very much aware of what could not be retrieved from certain times in my life due to the period of amnesia.

In this context, my anxiety over the loss of certain memories led me to put in place new systems of memory creation and retrieval. I saw taking notes and photos as preventive processes adopted in order to hold on to as much information as I could. However, this obsessive attitude also prevented me from experiencing the present moment fully, being in a constant pursuit of holding on. By focusing on the past and what I would retain of it, I missed out on living in the present.

This project has engaged me in an more active ‘noticing-photographing-thinking-painting’ process. It has changed my painting practice, from the material and photographs I use and the way in which I paint. It has also changed the way I think about memory and interact with the present.

I look back at my previous paintings and see an attempt at holding on to a perceived past in a representational and controlled manner. I now see memory as an ever-changing, fluid and activated interaction between the past and the present which can never really be set in one visual



Figure 2: 1994 (2014)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood - 100 x 120 cm

narrative. This change of perception has changed my painting process from being largely representational to acting in a more provisional way, standing in for an absent, vague or shifting memory.



Figure 3: 1964 (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood and peg board - 98 x 80 cm

I find similarities in Manguso’s journey of letting go, in keeping detailed daily diary entries in order to capture memories:

“The trouble was that I failed to record so much, I wrote, but how could I have believed that if I tried hard enough, I could remember everything?” (Manguso, 2015)

Her essay describes the shift she has been through and I can relate to this process.<sup>1</sup> The paintings developed through this project are only propositions within a multitude of potentials. They reflect my interaction with the present and with memory through the act of noticing, photographing, thinking and painting.

1. Manguso kept a journal for 25 years, which culminated in an 800,000 word long document. In *Ongoingness*, she explores and reflects upon her reasons and motivations for journaling - her obsessive need to document every incident in her life because she was afraid she would forget the details later, and using journaling as a coping mechanism for dealing with low-level anxiety. She also explores her change in writing style with time - her earlier entries were detailed; now they are brief; while she used to write in the past tense, she now uses the present tense. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ongoingness>)



# EVOLVING MEMORIES

I realised that memory is not a fixed or coherent thing, not a bank of information. Instead I now understand memory is always in motion, enriched with a continuous interaction with the present.

As a child I remember my grandmother cooking rice pudding for me. Every time I would go and stay at my grandparents, my grandmother would proudly say: “I made your favourite dessert: rice pudding”. It had become a ritual. I don’t know how many times she cooked it for me or when she started this ritual. But the memory of rice pudding is forever associated with my grandmother and to holidays at my grandparents’ place. Yet, I can’t remember what it tasted like. Or in which one of her bright coloured dishes she served it in. I can’t even remember the last time I had rice pudding.

I call up this memory every time rice pudding is brought to my attention. Each time I bring it up to the present it becomes more and more embedded in my memory and experience. I have come to notice the memory evolving too. It turns out that I actually didn’t really like rice pudding. Maybe I had it too many times or maybe I never really liked it and didn’t want to say. The rice pudding memory is now attached to my grandmother but also to a dislike.

Memories evolve every time we engage with them. This fluid interaction and ever-changing state led me to reconsider how I interpret memories in my painting practice not as a set of images but as provisional statement in a continuum of change, emerging and interacting in a constant flow between the past and the present.

George Perec wrote about the process of engaging memory in the present and noticing the changes in his book *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (Perec & Sturrock, 1997). In 1969 he chose twelve places in Paris (a street, a public square, a circus, an arcade...) where he had either lived or formed an attachment due to particular memories. Each month he wrote two descriptions of a selected place. The first description was supposed to be as neutral as possible, based on observation and written on the spot. The second description was written somewhere else than the place itself. It was written from memory and included all the elements that memory would bring

up about the place, such as events that had taken place or people he had encountered there. Both descriptions were sealed in an envelope. Perec would then ask a photographer to go to the specific place and photograph it as Perec would describe the place to the photographer. The photograph was then printed and without Perec seeing it, placed as well in the sealed envelope. In addition he added artefacts related to the place, such as train tickets or receipts to the envelope.

He repeated these descriptions each year, making sure the description of each place would not be written the same month of the year. He qualified the descriptions as "*time capsules*" (Farr, 2012) and worked on it for twelve years, until each place had been described each month of the year. He explained that he hoped to keep records of his experiences of the places, his memories and of his writing.

Beyond the cataloguing and archiving process, Perec endeavoured to keep what was for him "*accurate*" and "*neutral*" (Farr, 2012) records of moments, places, experiences and memories. However the book only highlights how his perception of the spaces and his perception of the moments were inscribed in an illusionary impartiality.

Each time he would return to the selected place, Perec would entertain the illusion of seeing the place anew. This would create two interactions: first, the past memory drawn up to the present would change with the new experience, and never be the same memory again; the new experience of the same space would add to the previous experience. Secondly, the new experience of the space could not be objective since Perec had encountered the space before and may have noticed things that he may not if he was to experience the space for the first time. The experience Perec conducted highlights that memory is always infiltrating our perception of the present.





Figure 4: 1969 (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood - 100 x 120 cm

# PAYING ATTENTION

First of all, to remember we have to notice things around us. We have to pay attention to the present. Moments are passing, flowing through me until I pay attention. An event would have to indicate that this moment is worth noticing, and narrow my attention on it. By paying attention I would make the moment significant enough to remember it. It can be an arbitrary event or even just a detail that draws my attention, but nevertheless, the moment is now active in my memory.

The opposite is also happening. Most of the moments passing by are not noticed. Nothing draws our attention to it. We are simultaneously engaged in a remembering and forgetting process. Noticing only one thing and dismissing or not noticing others A detail needs to be pointed out to bring significance. A significant detail needs to emerge to activate one's memory. The significance needs to be connected to another previous memory in order to make connections. I experienced this in 2013, when I visited a place I thought I knew well. But with this last visit, my childhood memories of it had changed.

I spent all my school holidays at my grand-parents. They used to live in a little French village called Fresnay-sur-Sarthe. In that village, somewhat medieval looking, there was the ruin of a Middle Age castle perched atop a fortified hill.

The entrance was still intact with its two towers and metal gate. But inside only the ruin of a building remained. Most of the surroundings had been developed as a public park long ago. I remember being a teenager, going to the park with friends, hiding from tourists and dog walkers to smoke cigarettes and fool around.

I walked through the entrance gates many times. Yet I never noticed the engraved plate above the entrance until my most recent visit. Nothing ever made me pay attention to take the time to read it. The park was always associated in my memory as a place to spend lazy afternoons with friends and hide from adults' supervision.



Figure 5: *Fresnay-sur-Sarthe - The fortified hill*



Figure 6: *Fresnay-sur-Sarthe - The castle ruin*



In 2013 I went back to Fresnay-sur-Sarthe. My grandparents had both passed away years ago and I was unable to attend their funerals. So during a trip to France I decided to go one last time to their village. I visited their graves and then took one last walk in the park. I was very aware that this was going to be my last visit to the village. I walked around with a purpose in mind, to embed a few last memories. I found myself paying attention to the village buildings. I paid attention to the feelings and sensations that were present. I was looking for significance.

As I did so many times before, I walked through the gates of the castle entrance. I looked up and noticed the engraved plate and read it. It was dedicated to Ambroise Loré (1396–1446) who was the Captain of the village between 1418 and 1420, and fought against the British as a companion of Joan of Arc. He built that castle.



Figure 7: *Fresnay-sur-Sarthe - The entrance gate*



Figure 8: *Fresnay-sur-Sarthe - The entrance and plate*

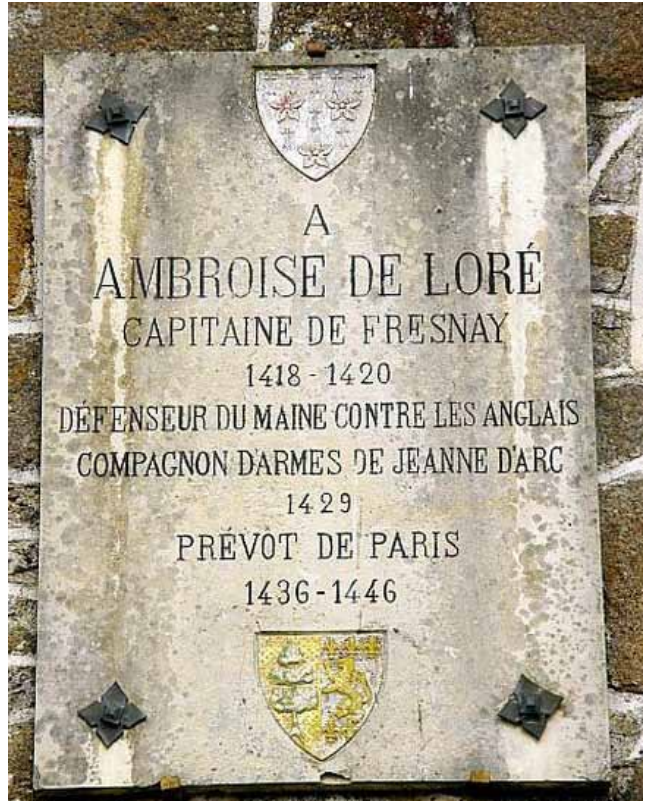


Figure 9: *Fresnay-sur-Sarthe - The engraved plate*

I never noticed that this ruin was 700 years old and so connected to the history of France. The castle at that moment became significant. The memories I had of this place, also became more significant. The historical connections are now embedded in these memories, and I will forever associate them together. There was now a more substantial meaning to this place, attached to my own childhood memories yet beyond my own previous personal meaning and memories.

My world and my understanding of this place expanded because I paid attention to the present. Since photography has always functioned in my engagement with memory I photographed the castle while I walked through the ruins as a way of focusing my attention on this process.



Rainer Maria Rilke, in his novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*<sup>2</sup> describes a similar experience while visiting a place related to his childhood memory.

“I never saw this remarkable house again because when my grandfather died it passed into strangers’ hands. Thus, seeing it now, in a version of my childhood memories, it’s not a building, rather it’s all split up: a room here, a room there, and here a section of passageway that doesn’t link these two rooms but has simply been preserved, a fragment. Similarly it’s all scattered about within me, -- the rooms, the staircases which opened onto the ground floor with such great elaborateness and other narrow circular stairways in whose darkness one travelled like blood through veins; the tower rooms, the high balconies, the unexpected galleries one was urged along from the little entrance door: --all that is still within me and will never cease being within me. It’s as if the image of this house had plunged into me from an infinite height and smashed to pieces on the foundation of my being.” (Rilke, 1949)

Just like Rilke, these memories were embedded in my memory, and were solely related to what I thought it was: memories of lazy afternoons with friends in a park by an old castle. The significance I attached to it was only personal. By revisiting the same castle, the memories took on another significance, a historical one. I only became aware of it years after and only because I paid attention.

Significance, just like memories, evolve and change. We evolve within a continuous interaction between perception, memory, significance and attention.

2. Sole living descendant of his aristocratic family, in his coming-of-age semi-autobiographical diary he reflects on the emergence of childhood memories and its impact on his present.



Figure 10: 3 (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood - 100 x 110 cm

# MEMORY LOSS

There is always loss in perception. We only perceive and remember things that we notice. And those things that we notice are only significant because they are directed by memory. A past memory will guide us to pay attention and engage us to make a connection. We notice the present because of the past.

“To write a diary is to make a series of choices about what to omit, what to forget.”  
(Manguso, 2015)

As Manguso wrote, we forget as fast as we encounter present events. To write a diary is to acknowledge that not everything can be remembered because forgetting is an essential part of being in the world. I have constructed my world around the few details I have noticed, but I am now becoming aware of all the possibilities I never noticed, and will never remember, because I never paid attention. Manguso reflects: *“Sometimes I feel a twinge, a memory of youthful promise, and wonder how I got here, of all the places I could have got to.”* (Manguso, 2015)

In some cases it would be more accurate to speak of ‘not remembering’ instead of ‘forgetting’. Not remembering implies we didn’t notice. Forgetting implies that we did notice, but the memory has since become lost. There’s an awareness of loss in the notion of forgetting.

For someone who has experienced memory loss, the awareness of forgetting is vivid. Knowing that something is gone, that it can no longer be brought to the surface can be distressing. Or it can lead to choosing to pay attention, to notice one’s perceptions more, to focus on details, to make conscious connections. In my work I narrow my focus to one detail, largely disregarding what surrounds it. This ‘tunnel vision’ idea is an important notion that has emerged in my recent painting practice, focusing on certain details of personal significance, and leaving other potential details unrendered.





Figure 11: 1972 (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood and peg board - 110 x 86 cm

# MAKING VISUAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Paying attention leads to connections. Paying attention to a little thing like an orange road cone in my studio, can lead to incorporating more orange in to my painting, or months later to notice a person in blue overalls.

I noticed a person in blue overalls in the building lobby one day because the orange road cone attracted my attention. I took a photograph because I thought I could paint it. I noticed it because the student I shared my studio space with this year has worked for months with these orange cones. I noticed his orange cones because I had been using more orange in my paintings.



Figure 12: *Noticing the orange cone (April 2015)*



Figure 13: *Noticing the blue overalls (September 2015)*

All these connections I paid attention to for months – consciously and unconsciously – led me to notice one brief moment months after I started paying attention to the orange cones around me. I noticed the moment I walked in the building and a student in overalls was moving an orange cone. My mind made fast associations. The associations were singular and significant enough that I noticed this moment and I narrowed down my attention to the student in blue overalls. I quickly took a photograph because I noticed the resonance in my memories.

Memories create awareness. That awareness provokes us to pay attention. Then we start noticing and laying down new memories and while recalling the old ones further. Every time we recall it, we create an assemblage of memories and visual recalling. Through this assemblage, we emerge differently each time.

Although Susan Sontag was writing about photographs as evidence in the context of war as a *“trace of something brought before the lens”*, I found this quote extracted from her article relevant in the context of visual memory:

“To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story, but to be able to call up a picture” (Sontag, 2002)

As Sontag put it, memories themselves are experienced as images. I use photography as a medium to pay attention and make memories, but also to paint. My way of photographing my daily life can be obsessive at times. But mostly it allows me to notice the world around me. And like both Manguso and Perec, I realise I am only entertaining the illusion of keeping accurate records. As Manguso confesses:

“I wanted to remember what I could bear to remember and convince myself it was all there was.” (Manguso, 2015)

We all keep arbitrary mementos of moments by taking photographs. We notice the potential of a significant moment and fix it in a snapshot. The images we keep are ‘aide-mémoire’ (memory aids). These images, visual resources supporting and affirming my memory are a constant reminder of my self-emerging in the world. Through these mementos, I am a participant in, as well as a witness to, my interaction with the world.



Figure 14: *Untitled* (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on perspex  
Material experimentation



Figure 15: *Untitled* (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood  
Material experimentation



Figure 16: *Untitled* (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on aluminium  
Material experimentation

# ALBERTO GIACOMETTI



*"Everything must come from drawing"* (Rodari, 2001) declared Alberto Giacometti to his model James Lord during a painting session. The importance of drawing in Giacometti's painting is visible: with each brush stroke he searches, he explores, and he notices the rhythms of the figure in front of him.

Giacometti doesn't illustrate. He doesn't simply represent the subject. He pays attention to selected details. He notices the temporary aspect of his perception. This is reflected in way in which the lines on the canvas move, overlap, disappear and re-emerge between layers of paint. Giacometti's paintings reveal what could be described as cycles of emergence in the way he builds an incomplete image from fragments of information.



Figure 17: *Diego* (1953)- Alberto Giacometti

# PAINTING AS NOTICING

Alberto Giacometti's portraits could be said to signify recurrent attempts at grasping a visual interpretation of people close to him, such as his brother Diego, his wife Annette, his friend the Japanese philosopher Isaku Yanaihara, or his favourite model Caroline.

Instead of illustrating what he saw in front of him, Giacometti aimed to represent them as he perceived them, struggling with the brush marks to find a way to represent what he noticed in the moment. As a result of this process, Giacometti was left with partial and incomplete depictions as propositions. Such an emphasis on the process of drawing or painting is apparent in Giacometti's statement, "*I know what I see only while working*"<sup>3</sup> (Giacometti, Palmer, & Chaussende, 1990). Accordingly, there is a never-ending return to painting in an attempt to capture what has gone unnoticed. This may seem elusive and often impossible to achieve, particularly given his claim that "*I noticed that my vision changed every day*"<sup>4</sup> (Giacometti et al., 1990)



Figure 18: *Annette with a coat* (1964)- Alberto Giacometti



Figure 19: *Caroline* (1965)- Alberto Giacometti

Footnote 3 to 8 : Original quotes - Translation provided by Anne-Sophie Adelys

3. "Je sais ce que je vois qu'en travaillant"

4. "Je me suis aperçu que ma vision changeait tous les jours"

One might speculate on what Giacometti was attempting, but by looking at the paintings it seems that he's noticing and adding marks, noticing further and adding more. He's paying attention and noticing things he hasn't previously noticed in his subject, in the person he thinks he knows who is posing as his model. He's searching. For each little detail he notices, something else next to it is disintegrating.

In this inexhaustible quest, he said *"the closer one gets, the more it goes away"*<sup>5</sup> (Giacometti et al., 1990). This demanding research pursuit pushes Giacometti to destroy his work or to leave it unfinished in a perpetual state of metamorphosis. Giacometti's drawing exercises are a necessary means to see the never-ending possibilities of perceiving the present. His lines never really define the subject and never really bring the viewer any certainty. They suggest perspective, and offer provisional descriptions. They appear hesitant and constantly mutating. As Dupin et. al. asserts:

"In multiplying possibilities of appearing, Giacometti let the object in an uncertain becoming, in its anxious mobility"<sup>6</sup> (Dupin, Ashbery, & Evenson, 2003)

Young professor from the Osaka University, Isaku Yanaihara, came to Paris in 1954 to study philosophy. He became a model for Giacometti from 1956 to 1961. Giacometti was fascinated by Yanaihara's face which was a departure from his circle of family models. Giacometti applied



Figure 20: Alberto Giacometti and his model Isaku Yanaihara (1960) - Photograph James Lord - Foundation Switzerland

5. "Plus on s'approche, plus la chose s'éloigne."

6. "En multipliant ses possibilités de paraître, Giacometti laisse l'objet à son devenir incertain, à sa mobilité anxieuse."





Figure 21: *Isaku Yanaihara I* (1956)- Alberto Giacometti

himself to a new challenge; rendering his smooth and impenetrable face on which he says he has no “*grip*” (Giacometti et al., 1990). Yanaihara told the tale of long posing sessions. The discouragement of Giacometti was evident: “*The more it was going, the more it disappeared. The day of his [Yanaihara’s] departure I told him: if I draw one more line the canvas will completely self-collapse*”<sup>7</sup> (Giacometti et al., 1990)

This portrait is a figure on the edge of disappearance. Through the brush marks the background emerges, imposing on the body. Between appearance and disappearance, we can read the model. The brush marks come back again and again to indicate the subject’s head without ever fixing a definite line.

7. “Et plus ça allait et plus il disparaissait. Le jour de son départ je lui ai dit : « Si je fais encore un trait, la toile s’abolit complètement.”

# PROVISIONAL STATE

From 1960 Caroline posed for Giacometti. He met the young woman in a bar in Montparnasse in October 1959. In a fleeting moment, a casual encounter in bar, he noticed something in her. And for six years, Caroline sat on the same chair for Giacometti. He produced twenty portraits of her and one bust sculpture. He left most of her portraits unfinished, like many of his paintings, always susceptible to return to work on it, as if one day he could definitively render her complete figure.

As many of Giacometti's painting, *Caroline en larmes* (see image on following page) testifies to a stubborn, persistent grasping toward the ephemeral, between appearance and disappearance, in constant emergence, becoming and yet not fully there.

Giacometti explored the dimension of the body and the impossibility of fully representing what he saw. His paintings are inscribed between appearance and disappearance, where the body is transient, holding everything, every memory, and yet stays impenetrable. He often expressed his frustrated and illusory attempts to fix on the canvas a body that is constantly emerging in front of him and the precariousness of the perception.

These fascinating marks operate as an oscillation between contradictory fields; the powerless attempt at fixing a crumbling vision on the edge of figuration, and a force which brings the apparition forward, a presence operating within its own space, emerging and yet disappearing at once.

"Sylvester compared the process of revision evident in Giacometti's paintings and sculptures, to the process of developing an argument. One puts forward a thesis, becomes aware of the opposing view, tries to incorporate that view, and so finds a new balance. *"Each day's work [for Giacometti]", Sylvester wrote, "seemed an attempt to reconcile the contradictions between what had been got so far and what emerged as he went on looking."*<sup>11</sup> (Sylvester, 1997)

11. <http://www.tate.org.uk/>



Figure 22: *Caroline en larmes*<sup>8</sup> (1962)- Alberto Giacometti

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORIES

In *Camera Lucida* (Roland Barthes, 1981), Roland Barthes explores the ideas of Punctum and Studium, as well as the idea of significance of photographs as 'aide-mémoire'.

The studium refers to the range of meanings available and obvious to everyone – the first reading level of an image. What we clearly see in the image and can understand at a glance. What the image is first telling us. The studium is the recognition and perception mechanism we engage with while looking. Many people looking at the same image will come up with a very similar first reading.

In the case of the image below, which I took on a walk in Waiheke Island, we can clearly see an old metal gate with concrete pillar. The number '58' suggests the entrance of a property. But the bush behind is preventing us from seeing any house.



Figure 23: Gate on Waiheke Island



The punctum on the other hand inspires a private meaning, one that is referring to memory associations, personal connections. This level of reading is more personal and each person looking at the same image would make different associations based on different past memories being drawn up. Each person would notice different details and perceive and interpret it based on their personal experience.

In the context of this image again, I am quite intrigued by the concrete frame of the gate. It's low. It has an unusual shape. Certainly not usual for New Zealand. I make an association with some Japanese gates I have seen in the past. I also notice the contrast between the care taken to make the concrete frame and the custom made cast iron door against the poor care taken to paint the number '58' with the paint dripping. But also because I come from an art background, the paint dripping becomes of interest for me.

The punctum becomes apparent once I start noticing and paying attention to what I see and therefore start making memory connections.

By taking photographs I fix moments, but mostly I pay attention and focus on more meaningful details. By focusing on a detail and by fixing the image in a photograph I enter in to a process of memorising as well as bringing up memories to the present and therefore create a web of meaningful personal connections.

A few years ago, I started painting from my own family photographs. I wanted to fill the void of missing memories. I was painting the people I should be able to remember and yet couldn't do so.

When I ran out of material I started using found photographs, mostly of unknown people, paying attention to them, wondering who they were and what they were doing at the time they were photographed. I found my interaction with these unknown people was strangely similar to the photographs of the people I was supposed to know and remember. Yet I discovered I wasn't filling the gaps in my memory loss. I was searching, but not noticing. I was hoping for a trigger to bring up lost memories, but I wasn't making connections in the present.



Figure 24: *My grand-parents (circa 1955)*



Figure 25: *Found photograph (not dated)*

This project has evolved in to me using my own recent photographs. I take a lot of photographs on a daily basis. I photograph everything and anything: people crossing my path on the street - whom I may never see again, a book cover to remember what I want to read, Crown Lynn coffee cups in an op-shop because I like the colour, the light and shadow on a paper napkin, a wood texture or a ray of light, a man with sunglasses in the middle of a crowd. The following pages present some of these personal photos.

Shifting from using found photographs to using my own recent photographs has highlighted that process of 'noticing-photographing-thinking-painting' in which I have engaged myself actively this year.



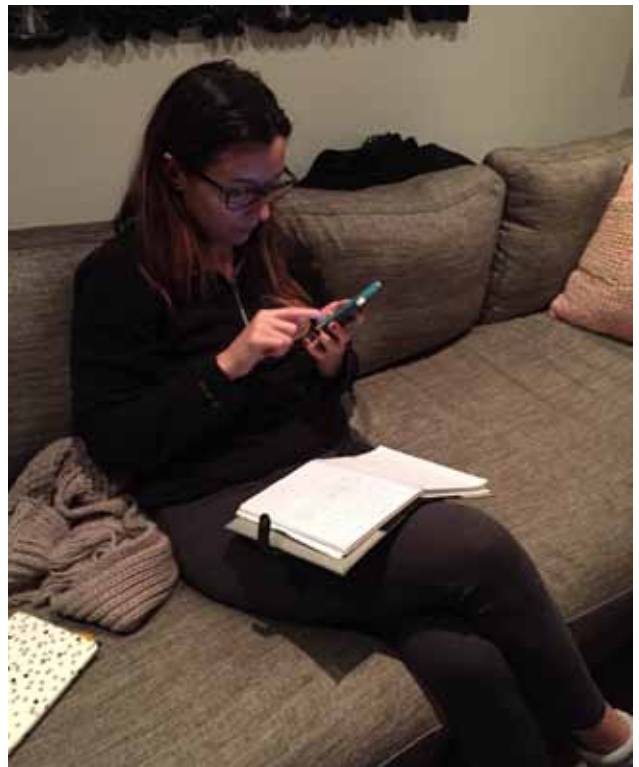


Figure 26 to 29: *Personal photographs*



Figure 30 to 33: *Personal photographs*



Figure 34 to 37: *Personal photographs*





Figure 38 to 41: *Personal photographs*

# AIDE MEMOIRE

*Camera Lucida* (Roland Barthes, 1981) was neither a work of theoretical strictness nor a history or sociology essay on photography. Instead, it was personal, even sentimental. In 48 short chapters Barthes wasn't looking for the semiotics of photography but for the sentimental significance of photographs, the perception and the emotions we attach to them.

*Camera Lucida* is a book about love, grief and memories, written as a direct response to the loss of his mother in 1977, and shadowed by the *Mourning diary* (R. Barthes & Howard, 2010) that he had begun to keep after her death. Having lost Henriette, with whom he had lived most of his life, he goes looking for her amongst old photographs. The face he finds is not quite hers, even if objectively she looks like herself. At last, he discovers her true likeness, the “*air*” that he remembers, in a picture of Henriette aged five (Dillon, 2011), taken in a winter garden in 1898<sup>9</sup>. In narrative terms, it is quite an emotional and important moment, however, Barthes never shows us the photograph: “*I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the “ordinary.”*” (Roland Barthes, 1981)

Barthes assumed there was no point in showing this photograph of Henriette to the reader. The photograph was the trigger Roland Barthes needed to call up past memories of his mother to the present. What did he see in this photograph that wasn't present in the others? Perhaps he needed this photograph to aid in remembering the smell of her hair, the softness of her skin when she would put her hand in his, the sound of her voice, the smell of her perfume... things which cannot be transcribed in a photograph and yet could have surfaced for Barthes in response to viewing it. With this photograph, Roland Barthes was able to not only affirm the past, but bring it to the present.

Barthes saw this photograph as insignificant to the readers of *Camera Lucida*. Yet Henriette kept emerging in Barthes' present, beyond her death because a photograph triggered details of her that he had perceived and retained.

9. In the journal entry that recounts this discovery, Barthes simply notes: “*Je pleure.*” (“I’m crying”)

# SIGNIFICANCE

Vivian Dorothy Maier was an unknown American street photographer who recently made media headlines when her vast collection of photographs<sup>10</sup> was auctioned in 2007<sup>11</sup>. Maier worked as a nanny for forty years in Chicago, pursuing photography in her spare time. Most of her films were not developed. She never exhibited or published her photographs during her life time. Her photographs were primarily of people in the street and architecture. Maier's photographs are black and white casual shots of passers-by caught in transient moments *"that nonetheless possess an underlying gravity and emotion"* (O'Donnell, 2010).

Her photographs are a demonstration of the process of paying attention. She was looking, finding something that would grab her attention and take a photograph. Her intention was never to show her photographs. She just collected moments, capturing them on film, and for most of them, never



Figure 42: *Chicago, IL* (not dated)- Vivian Maier  
VM19XXW03208-02-MC  
the Maloof Collection



Figure 43: *March 31, 1966. Chicago, IL* (1966)- Vivian Maier  
VM1966W01174-04-MC  
the Maloof Collection

10. More than 150,000 photographs

11. Maier failed to keep up payments on storage space she had rented on Chicago's North Side. The content was auctioned two years before her death



printed them, so she didn't appear to reflect on her photographs later on. She only engaged in a process of paying attention and attempting to capture these moments on film. I try to apply this mode of photography in my visual research for potential paintings.

I see a connection between Vivian Maier's photographs and the photographs I take. I take photographs to pay attention to all the things that I could miss out on. Because I have experienced memory loss I know how this void feels. I take photographs to make sure I do not miss out on the little things I would not otherwise notice and immediately forget. I also take photographs to notice and to engage my memory by paying attention. I take photographs of anything without looking for significance. I may find significance later on if I decide to paint it. Maybe noticing that one red chair in the café amongst all the black chairs will become significant later on. And I wonder if that students seated across the room from me noticed the red chair too.



Figure 44: *Personal photograph*

I do not take photographs to look at them again and again or to remember someone. I do not take photographs to frame them and display them. Rather they are an 'aide-mémoire' that I may or may not use in the future. I just quickly take a picture of a little detail, unnoticeable, unimportant. I take a record of it in order to pay attention.

The paintings I produce based on these photographs are not illustrations of those photographic moments. I could take a photograph and copy it in paint, describing it as faithfully as possible. Instead I choose to interpret it, to pay attention further, to notice even more while I paint, focusing on one point, one element, one area. Paying special attention to details, to the fold, to the tension, to the body emerging through the clothing.

I am noticing, paying attention, thinking and painting.



Figure 45: 1970 (2015)- Acrylic and oil paint on plywood and peg board - 100 x 100 cm



Figure 46: *Untitled* (2015)- Oil paint on draft film - 21 x 29.7 cm  
Material experimentation

# PAINTING

# NOTICING THE PRESENT

For my paintings, I use photographs from daily unnoticeable moments, moments that I will most likely forget and not remember because they are unnoticeable. I would not pay attention to these moments unless I was to take a photo, review it, and translate it into paintings. These moments then come into my world, emerge as not necessarily significant. By doing so I start to form new connections and new memories. I pay attention and I became aware of these mundane moments emerging in my world.

Susan Sontag stated that photographs can support memory and provide visual proofs:

*"Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it."* (Sontag, 1979) In this context photographs can be considered as 'aide-mémoire'. However, photographs also have their limitations and are only showing one angle of an event from one view point. Sontag acknowledged the lack of *"truth"* or *"veracity"* in photographs, even though a photograph can appear less subjective than a painting:

"While a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency. But despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth. Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience."  
(Sontag, 1979)

I am not attempting to capture any truth in the moments I photograph. I use photography as a visual support, a photographic reminder of something I have noticed, something that may not have much significance later on but could also become more significant as time passes and I keep noticing similar events and start making memory connections.



Figure 47: *My photograph*

The photographs are a starting point for the paintings. When I return to a photograph, I bring the moment of its capture to the present. The memories attached to the event, which are more than what is encapsulated in the photograph are brought up to the surface. I think. I paint. I notice. I make new connections.

I also become aware of all the things I have failed to notice in that first moment of photographing. It was kind of glance look. While painting, I selectively look at things, just as the memory process is selective.



I choose to show in my paintings things that would otherwise go unnoticed. I think about the connections, the rhythm of things, the flow of drapery, and the crease in the bed sheets, the light on a certain spot, the body appearing and disappearing...

The further the painting develops, the more I notice what I wouldn't usually. I educate my memory to notice the unnoticeable. It is about noticing other things than the ones we are programmed to notice. It is about paying attention to little things in the present.



Figure 48: *Mike* (2015) Acrylic and oil paint and charcoal on linen - 120 x 110 cm

# SELF EMERGENCE

By paying attention to the world around me, I interact with my memory. This is a process of continuous emergence. I apply this process of emergence in my painting process.

This project has made me address the surface and material of my painting. I recently started painting on raw unprimed linen<sup>12</sup>. Linen is inscribed in the painting tradition. Cennino D'Andrea Cennini provides lengthy descriptions of painting processes, methods and the use of linen in his painting manual written in 1437 for Medieval artists. (Cennini & Thompson, 1933) The usual process at that time was to stretch linen over boards and then prime it. The visible brown colour of the fibre provides a foundation and shows the 'memory' of the material which has been through its own refinement process.

Leaving the canvas un-stretched is also a choice. The paintings are not produced with an intention of being housed in a classical and finished frame. The paintings can collapse at any time, can be left unresolved, can be abandoned or can lead me to start another.

With a particular attention at not falling within illustration, I focus on establishing an interaction between the painting process and the memory process. The painting unfolds as the subject matter emerges while I interact with my memories. It is a dynamic collaboration where I, the painter, emerge as well. When I stop painting, I have changed. Through the act of noticing, painting and drawing memories in to the present, my perception itself is changing.

The paint washes in the background, the charcoal, the drawing lines visible, the transparencies in the paint layers and the focus on selected details, are all evidence of a provisional painting process. The inability to retrieve fully the image, but the possibility of letting a body form appear through painted details, is to me a similar process as the one Roland Barthes experienced while looking at photograph of 'Henriette aged five'; connections are emerging.

12. Raw linen is not "factory primed", however, in order to seal the painting surface, I have used transparent size.



Figure 49: *Lego boy* (2015) Acrylic and charcoal on linen - 110 x 140 cm (in progress)

I notice the presence of the body, visible as a colour field, and allow an interaction with the elements surrounding it. The painting becomes itself a moment of time where I only notice certain things. And moments are constantly emerging differently. The painting is just one proposition within many.

I am thinking about the provisional quality of the image and of the canvas. It is fluid. It could move, it could shift. I present one version of it, but there could be a multitude. Each time I notice something different; be intrigued by a different tension in a different detail. I could interpret the photographed moment differently, I could take a different path each moment, choosing to notice or not, remembering or not or perhaps forgetting. Each time the outcome would be different and I would emerge differently through this process.

I choose to focus on one detail while the rest is on the verge of appearing as well as disappearing. The painting is in a fragile equilibrium between painted details and rough sketch, allowing a process of constant construction. I choose to leave it as a proposition. I could choose to return to it or not.

In that context the painting is not an illustration of a photograph or a moment - it is a provisional moment of what I noticed in a moment. The painting emerges through my memories connections, the painting process and the living experience of remembering. Because I continuously emerge and change with every return to the painting, it emerges in an unpredictable and unplanned way.

Like Manguso, I become aware of time and my self-emergence through each lived moment, past and present; *"Then I came to understand that the forgotten moments are the price of continued participation in life, a force indifferent to time."* (Manguso, 2015)

The moment has passed. I am aware of the time passing while I paint. I bring up the past in the present while I'm painting. I become aware of all the things I missed in that short moment. While looking at the photograph, I notice more, more than what I would have noticed in that fragment of time when I was living that moment. I also bring up memories of that moment. I merge the memories of that moment with the visible 'evidences' on the photograph. While I paint I also draw from other memories, I make connections. And I add new ones by living through this moment of painting. I'm activating past memories by noticing the present and adding new ones in an activated painting process.



Figure 50: *Becky* (2015) Acrylic and oil paint and charcoal on linen - 110 x 120 cm (in progress)



# CONCLUSION

We constitute a world through the agency and interaction of perception and memory. We interact with the world, interpret it and build on memories based on what we have previously noticed. The world as we understand it emerges through this interaction and interpretation mechanism. As a consequence we emerge through looking at things, through visual and sensory perception, through our dynamic interaction and intervention with the world.

This interaction builds memories. We lay down memories as experiences, as notions acquired and reusable to further understand the world around us. We continuously draw from these memories and past experiences and bring up the past in the present. This mechanism helps us make sense of the present, connecting and noticing new experiences, and creating new memories attached to past ones. This process develops a web of connections across time and shapes our emergence as human being in the world.

I actively engage in this perception interaction where the present draws from the past. The process of painting, for me, then becomes as much about exploring the past as exploring new possibilities in the present.

I notice. I photograph. I pay attention. I make connections. I paint. I emerge. Continuously.

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# APPENDIX



Master exhibition (November 2015)  
St Paul Street Gallery - Auckland University of Technology





*Colby* (2015)

Charcoal, acrylic and oil paint on Belgium linen un-stretched - W. 1.26m x H. 1.41m





*Unknown* (2015)

Charcoal, acrylic and oil paint on Belgium linen un-stretched - W. 1.46m x H. 1.71m



*Mike* (2015)

Charcoal, acrylic and oil paint on Belgium linen un-stretched - W. 1.46m x H. 1.12m



*Sebastien* (2015)

Charcoal, acrylic and oil paint on Belgium linen un-stretched - W. 2.08 x H. 1.77m















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