

The articulate surface : painting and the latent image

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The Articulate Surface

Painting and the Latent Image

Chelsea Lehmann

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy



School of Art & Design
Faculty of Art & Design

March 2019

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Abstract

This practice-based research project centres on the retrospective activation of the painted surface using advanced imaging techniques such as X-ray and infrared, combined with physical erasure; a process that exposes latent information and brings together a range of actions that reverse or alter the conventional sequence of oil painting. The methodology for this project employs interdisciplinary research at the intersection of painting and technology, deploying imaging practices associated with art conservation and cultural heritage digitisation. The studio practice responds to selected imaging techniques from these fields, including high-resolution digital scanning and X-ray, which are applied to my own paintings to generate an alternative view of the painted surface. This experimentation informs a body of work including paintings, light-based works, and video projection. Research into the artistic, historical, political, and semiological implications and potentials of iconoclasm as a secular, creative act complements this experimentation. Using an 'atemporal' framework, these theoretical and practical strategies are applied to artworks that quote the forms, content, and sensibilities of Baroque painting. The principal objective of the research is to heighten the aesthetic and affective registers of touch and tactility by exposing and augmenting the material qualities and physical gestures of painting.

This interdisciplinary project reveals how advanced imaging practices and iconoclastic interventions generate alternative understandings of the painted surface beyond those solely dependent on pictorial content and visible material phenomena. Key questions that locate this research in a broader art/technology context are: What are the aesthetic, perceptual and philosophical implications of advanced technologies of reproduction? And, how have these implications affected contemporary art practice? These questions are informed by and expand on theorisation that examines relations between imaging methods, art, and the concept of 'aura,' particularly the work of Walter Benjamin. This project contributes to the field of contemporary painting by investigating a largely unexplored area in which art conservation imaging practices and studio-based painting techniques are synthesised, highlighting relations between material layers, gesture and image, and technology and image production.

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I had the good fortune to be invited into the extraordinary studio of Italian artist Nicola Samori, to interview him about the ideas that drive his internationally renowned practice. Nicola matched his breathtaking skill-set, sincerity and prodigious knowledge of art history with an easy generosity, sharing his insights regarding painting's relationship to time and cultural trajectories. Also, to the collectors and friends who have kindly lent work for my PhD exhibition at UNSW Galleries, and who invested in my work in the first place, I am truly grateful.

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Publications

Parts of this thesis have been disseminated in the form of catalogue essays, blog posts, and presentations, listed below.

Online Blog

C. Lehmann, <https://chelsealehmann.wordpress.com> (various texts and working notes 2014–2018)

Catalogue Essays

C. Lehmann, ‘Iconoclasts’, exh. cat., AirSpace Projects, Sydney, 6–21 February 2015.

C. Lehmann, ‘The Original of Laura’, exh. cat., Interlude Gallery, Sydney, 13–22 August 2015.

C. Lehmann, ‘Artist Statement’, *Archive*, exh. cat., MOP Projects, Sydney, 19 October–13 November 2016.

C. Lehmann, ‘Bad Mannerism’, exh. cat., Galerie pompom, Sydney, 2–27 May 2018.

Presentations

C. Lehmann, ‘The Painted Surface as a Live Field of Data’ presentation, Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University, Japan, 8 July 2015.

C. Lehmann, ‘The Spectral Surface’ presentation, Graduate School of Engineering, Kyoto University, Japan, 13 April 2016.

C. Lehmann, ‘The Articulate Surface’ conference presentation, *IUMRS-ICAM 2017: 15th International Conference on Advanced Materials*, Kyoto, Japan (Advanced Materials Science and Technology for Cultural Assets forum), 27 August–1 September 2017.

Foreword

In 1997, during the third year of my undergraduate degree majoring in painting, I was employing a process of ‘composite imaging’ and combining different stylistic approaches in my painting practice. My supervisor at the time suggested making studies, photographing them, and projecting the images in order to transcribe them onto a larger canvas avoiding the inevitable compositional problems of my haphazard approach to pictorial space. In principle I agreed with his logic, but I was compelled to argue that his suggestion was too deterministic and prevented ‘creative accidents’ which I felt brought vitality to the painted surface (for this reason, I also avoided Photoshop as a compositional aid, which was coming into popular usage at the time). A debate ensued. Standing in front of my work, he said, “...take this painting for example; there are at least ten paintings underneath that no one will see; it’s just wasted effort.” I countered that the apparent inefficiency was just a by-product of what I felt was a necessity: to maintain a lively interaction of images both on and underneath the surface. Suffice it to say, I persisted with my process, intuiting the importance of these hidden layers and thinking at some point, *if only I could X-ray my paintings*.

At the same time, my relationship to images was changing dramatically. Two years earlier, in 1995, the last restrictions regulating the use of the internet to carry commercial traffic were removed, coinciding with my regular access to computers. The ability to retrieve images (especially reproductions of paintings) at the touch of a button meant my appetite for them grew while my attention diminished; I became more interested in the way images were layered, distributed and networked in virtual domains. It was also clear that the labour of painting representationally was at odds with the rate at which I was introducing new images into my work. The ambivalence generated by these circumstances led me to re-paint the surface of my works over and over, using different images sourced from various archives, both analogue and digital. I became habituated to the process of paint oxidisation, marking time in terms of how quickly the paint formed a skin, and therefore to the specific moment when I could either layer more images, or scrape them off. In this light, my consciousness of painting as both a cultural artefact and a historically imprinted, layered, material entity emerged: it was the foundation moment from which this doctoral research has developed.



Figure 1: Chelsea Lehmann, *Artifact*, 2014, oil and resin on linen, 51 x 35cm.

The painting above, *Artifact*, was one of the first experimental artworks completed in this PhD project. I used various images as reference material; some were sourced from my personal archive and others were found online. They were then painted over a pre-existing painting – a time-honoured method employed by artists usually for economic reasons (to recycle a support, or to repurpose an unsuccessful painting). In this case, my intention was to reverse the conventional sequence of painting and find conjunctures of images in the surface by removing layers. The process involved the application of resin to the surface and the partial removal of it by rolling the linen support like a newspaper when the resin had dried. This shattered the surface and resulted in shards of the upper layer coming off, and with it, large areas of painted imagery. The final iteration of the painting was therefore a composite image made from multiple layers. In one sense, I conceived of this action as a form of intimacy through a denial of meaning. This intimacy was predicated on tactile intervention, accident, and an inversion of the subject-object relation: my painting was looking back at me with its changed materiality, broken surface, and hitherto unseen combination of images.

Introduction

The visual text is fundamentally textural, and in many different ways. [...] It is made out of layers and tissues. It contains strata, sediments, and deposits. It is constituted as an imprint, which always leaves behind a trace. A visual text is also textural for the ways in which it can show the patterns of history, in the form of a coating, a 'film', or a stain. One can say that a visual text can even wear its own history, inscribed as an imprint onto its textural surface.¹

The surfaces of easel-based paintings contain multiple layers or strata. One could even say that conventional painting is grounded upon the very existence of a basic substrate and layers of coatings. These strata and their material characteristics form what I refer to throughout this thesis as the artworks' 'articulate surface.' My practice-based research centres on the retrospective activation of the painted surface using advanced imaging techniques and physical erasure. In this context, the surface can be understood as a palimpsest: dense with painterly gesture and layers of material; Baroque² in terms of excessive additions and erasures.³

Throughout this project, the mediation of advanced imaging techniques and the act of erasure serve to reinforce and enhance the manual aspects of painting. While coming into contact with cutting-edge technologies and iconoclastic gestures, my practice-based research remains rooted in the classical techniques of oil painting; the innovation is to continue these techniques, even while changing them.

Methodology

This project employs interdisciplinary methodologies and processes at the intersection of painting, science and technology, deploying imaging practices normally associated with art conservation, cultural heritage digitisation and advanced facsimiles of artworks. Selected imaging techniques from these fields such as X-ray and high-resolution scanning are applied to my own paintings generating an alternative view of the painted surface. The outcome of this experimentation informs a body of new work including paintings, light-based artworks such as Duratran light-boxes (showing X-rays and infrared images of paintings), and video projection.

¹ G. Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2014, p. 5.

² In this thesis I capitalise 'Baroque' in all contexts to create a sense of concurrency between the art movement itself, and the stylistic and conceptual aspects of the Baroque approach.

³ This idea is informed by Christine Buci-Glucksmann's reading of Arnulf Rainer and Anselm Kiefer's work; she states, "This palimpsest is Baroque, at times mannerist, and always aimed at a sort of allegory of remembering: events, codes, materials." See: C. Buci-Glucksmann, 'Palimpsests of the Ungazeable', *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. D. Z. Baker, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2012, p. 105.

The main intention of this interdisciplinary approach is to reveal how advanced imaging practices produce different understandings of the painted surface beyond those that rely on pictorial content and visible material phenomena. In this regard, a more nuanced understanding of materiality and tactility emerges. As such, my research method elides distinctions between the original meaning of aesthetics – *Aisthētikos*, “perceptive by feeling”⁴ – and its modern meaning that pertains to the philosophical aspects of art. Both interpretations apply to my exploration of the empirical and creative possibilities of the artwork’s surface.

This project has evolved through collaboration with laboratories within and beyond the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of New South Wales, including the Bio-medical Imaging Facility and Mark Wainwright Analytical Centre (UNSW), Bureau Veritas: Australia and New Zealand (imaging specialists in industrial testing, inspection and certification),⁵ and an ongoing research alliance with Ide Advanced Imaging laboratory, Kyoto University, who have supported my investigations by providing state-of-the-art scanning equipment and technical support to image paintings with ultra-high-resolution, infrared and X-ray techniques.⁶ I have also undertaken research consultations with Simon Ives of the Art Gallery of New South Wales conservation department, and Artlab Australia. In this thesis, my experimentation within the fields of painting and advanced imaging is contextualised through broader inquiry into art conservation practices and cultural heritage documentation, including particular case studies in painting conservation, 3D diagnostic analysis, and contemporary art.

Theoretical Framework and Chapter Overview

The theoretical framework of this project is underpinned by the desire to make the invisible visible, to ‘lay open’ the painted surface, since a painting’s totality can be regarded as a collection of largely invisible accretions. My intention is to rediscover and acknowledge these accumulations, rather than to merely execute paintings in a one-directional trajectory toward a final ‘presentation layer.’⁷ This operates as a form of sensually driven demystification; one that, however, eschews an overly didactic or clearly circumscribed end, and any claim this may have on revealing objective ‘truths’. The process of exposing latent information in the painted surface is centred on heightening the aesthetic and affective registers of touch and tactility through exposing materiality. This intensification is primarily achieved through the ‘machinic’ gaze of high-resolution digital scanning and X-ray, which reveal and augment the tangible qualities and

⁴ P. Spyer, ‘The Body, Materiality and the Senses’, in C. Tilley, W. Keane et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Material Culture*, Sage Publications, 2006, p. 126.

⁵ This research was carried out at Bureau Veritas, Adelaide, South Australia, for one week in August 2016, with the assistance of Ian Coker, and under the guidance of technician Rene Dumont.

⁶ A selection of my paintings have been imaged using ultra high-resolution digital scanning in both RGB and infrared modes (2015, 2016, 2017) at the Ide Laboratory of Advanced Imaging Technology (Graduate School of Engineering), Kyoto University, Japan.

⁷ The ‘presentation layer’ is a term used in art conservation science to refer to the visible, upper (or final) layer of paintings.

physical gestures of painting. Enhanced views of the surface are then folded back into the manual domain of painting practice by responding to the visual qualities and by-products of advanced technological mediation and visualisation. Processes of erasure are also employed to expose latent information and intensify the tactility of the surface.

In order to contextualise the methodology and concepts outlined above, Chapter One outlines the relationship of subject matter to the theoretical construct of ‘atemporality.’ The chapter discusses Baroque paintings – primarily those depicting Cleopatra and Mary Magdalene – and literature that contextualises notions of the transhistorical and the atemporal in relation to artistic practice. Atemporality is also investigated in the context of the material transformation and re-signification of artworks through both technological mediation and ‘iconoclastic gestures.’ In this chapter I use the literary model of historiographic metafiction to describe how quotation of art historical imagery operates in the studio work. Within this framework, mythological references are counterbalanced with a heightened material presence in paintings through interventions into the surface. Similarly, responding to Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the tragic drama (*Trauerspiel*), I explore how elements of history and materiality can be interwoven with myth to inform the textual and textural nuances of painting. These concepts are considered in the broader context of the ‘historiographic turn’ in contemporary art.

In Chapter Two, the role of the Baroque is further explored and contextualised in terms of its continuing relevance as an artistic form. The main elements of my practice-based research are synthesised and embodied by reference to Baroque subject matter, stylistic elements, and the layering of paint surfaces. Themes explored in relation to the Baroque are: the plurality and materiality of the body, drama and performativity, Baroque emblems, skin/surface, sensuous encountering, poly-dimensionality, and the spectacle of revelation. Using a feminist framework, this chapter outlines a revisionist approach to the Baroque personage through an analysis of my own paintings, as well as the work of artist Cindy Sherman. While a feminist framework operates in an auxiliary way in my theorisation, informing the research to a lesser degree, it is concurrent with my interest in the performative nature of Baroque figuration and a recurring theme in my research of the Baroque personage.

In Chapter Three, iconoclasm (image breaking) is explored as a secular, creative act by investigating its historical and semiological domains in relation to painting. In a practical sense this manifests as a literal ‘breaking’ or disruption of the significations of the image, working with and against the multiplicity of values attributed to paintings. The chapter frames these concerns through a discussion of the thematic aspects of my exhibition *The Original of Laura* (2015), and through a reading of the work of Italian painter Nicola Samorì. Iconoclastic gestures, like advanced imaging techniques, enable a view of the inside of paintings – a visualisation that

engages the experiential and conceptual dimensions of touch, in which the “surface [...] exists as the interface between a possible virtual, projected space and the painting’s material skin – which, at least in principle, is accessible to bodily touch.”⁸

The paradigm of touch encapsulated in the quote above is explored in Chapters Four, Five and Six, in which I frame the painted surface as a ‘haptic interface’, an idea that encompasses notions of tactility, touching, and sensing. To elaborate this idea, I circumscribe key terms and concepts such as ‘the tactile gaze’ and the ‘technological image’. In Chapter Four I posit questions such as: What are the aesthetic and perceptual implications of technologies of reproduction? How has our perception of artworks been informed by these techniques, and in what ways has this influenced contemporary art practice? I respond to these questions with an analysis of the role of touch in viewing and making artworks, examining relations between touch and mark-making, and gazing and beholding, as well as the hedonic, mnemonic and metonymic dimensions of touch.

In Chapter Five, the scholarship of Linda Dalrymple Henderson is examined in relation to the concept of seeing through paintings. Henderson examines how the discovery of X-rays has impacted the perception of surfaces, with a particular focus on how this influenced artistic practices in the early twentieth century, including the work of František Kupka. Using X-rays of paintings as an example, I reinforce how the perceptual model of the tactile gaze elicits a deeper parsing of images, positioning the observer in closer proximity to material and processual trace. This way of seeing is further elaborated in relation to the work of contemporary artists Alejandro Guíjarro, Robert Longo, and Bernhard Sachs who all employ an ‘aesthetics of X-ray’ as a means to explore the potential meanings and implications of the latent image. In Hubert Damisch’s reading of Correggio’s *Jupiter and Io*, the relationship between tactility and spatiality is scrutinised using the semiotic model of ‘cloud,’ which I address in the context of my creative ideation and use of pictorial space in the practice-based research.

Notions of sense hierarchies are surveyed in Chapter Six, looking at ‘tactile proxies’ of artworks as fruitful counterparts to visual observation. In this chapter, I delve into how the role of sight has been analysed by a range of thinkers who have interrogated its dominance, and theorised other models of access to objects. To highlight the essential role of tactility in my practice, I use examples of my studio work to explore the potential of ‘raking light,’ as well as high-resolution imaging and enlargement to reveal the layering and texture of the painted surface.

In the final chapter of the thesis, I investigate the theoretical possibilities of Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura in relation to the technological image, as defined in Chapter Four. The ‘auratic

⁸ B. Donszelmann, ‘Touchscreen’, in R. Fortnum (ed.), *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, vol. 1, no.1, Intellect, 2015, p. 55.

paradigm' is an ambient conceptual framework that unites several aspects of my research such as the reciprocal gaze, temporal fluidity, and latency. In a discussion of advanced facsimiles, I consider auratic permeations and proliferations in relation to advanced reproductions of artworks, technological images and scientific images.

Aura is considered a relatively elastic idea given Benjamin's ambivalent embrace of technology, which he separates into a 'first' and 'second' wave, each operating in different ways in relation to the reproduction. The implications of these differing models are explored in relation to the tactile gaze, in which technological processes pass through surfaces, and surfaces pass through imaging technologies, becoming intensely tactile. The idea that auratic perception can be instigated by the scientific image is examined in the context of a penetrative gaze, evoking the contentious relationship between appearance and truth so fundamental to both science and aesthetics. Lastly, an account of George Didi-Huberman's concept of 'auratic trace' closes Chapter Seven: his reading of Barnett Newman's painting combines Benjamin's spatial metaphors of distance and proximity. This resonates with my research in that the features of aura are brought together with indexical trace.

Throughout this thesis I reference the work of Walter Benjamin, aptly dubbed a "scholar of appearances,"⁹ a label that encompasses his philosophical endeavours regarding history, the image, technology, and perception. Benjamin's emphasis on the technologically mediated reception of artworks and the transhistorical potential of the image¹⁰ echoes my theoretical investigations into painting's relationship to advanced imaging practices, perception, and time, particularly art historical time. Benjamin's concern for the operations of history is also fundamental to my exploration of Baroque style and materiality, reflecting his concern with what artworks "reveal to us about the relationship between the historical era under study and our own historical position."¹¹ Moreover, as Richard Wolin states in relation to Benjamin's 'first' and 'second' technologies (discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis): "in both cases the theoretical adversary was a static, empathetic, historicist relation to the work of art" in which the work of art is positioned "as a dead, lifeless object, sedimented in the historical past, devoid of all

⁹ L. Wieseltier, 'Preface', in W. Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*, H. Arendt (ed.), trans. H. Zohn, Schocken, 2007, p. viii.

¹⁰ Benjamin's "dialectical image" proposed an alternative temporality summarised by Max Pensky as a "new conception of historiography that breaks with previous categories of interpretation, the notion of an image-based historical sensibility as the genuine mode of historical interpretation." See: M. Pensky, 'Method and time: Benjamin's dialectical images,' in D. S. Ferris (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, Cambridge University Press, 2004. For Benjamin's use of the term see: W. Benjamin, 'Awakening', *The Arcades Project*, 462, n2a, 3.

¹¹ M. W. Jennings, 'The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work Of Art', in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*, trans. E. Jephcott, R. Livingstone, H. Eiland, et al., Cambridge, MA, London, England, Harvard University Press, 2008, (p. 9-18), p. 11.

contemporary relevance or now-time.”¹² In my research, adopting Benjamin’s theoretical adversary (the artwork’s historiographic stasis) is key to my exploration of artworks as historically, materially, and aesthetically ‘live’.

My broad concern with the significations and physicality of the painted surface recalls Clement Greenberg’s seminal twentieth-century critical model of modernist painting. Greenberg’s modernism identifies painting’s “ineluctable flatness”¹³ and purity as fundamental attributes distinguishing painting from other disciplines.¹⁴ Though Greenberg ultimately stresses that this is not intended as a complete or instructive theory of aesthetic quality,¹⁵ his ideas regarding the painted surface were widely embraced and influential in maintaining painting’s currency in the mid twentieth century. For example, Greenbergian formalism was pivotal in marking the shift from a concern with perspectival space to that of materiality and the objecthood of painting.

In my theorisation, materiality and the physical status of the painting are privileged, however the surface is considered neither flat or ‘pure’; rather, it is contaminated with both illusionistic depth, (the representation of space and form) and physical depth (paint layers). This deep surface harbours the by-products of processual and chemical/material variances that interact with advanced imaging processes in unique ways and provide a rich surface to ‘undo’ with processes of erasure. In this sense, Greenberg’s earlier theorisation is more in tandem with my thinking; for example, his interest in the “surface texture and tactile qualities”¹⁶ of Jackson Pollock’s paintings, or the way a picture could be “indissolubly one with the pigment, texture, and [...] surface that constituted it as an object” in Cubist *papier collé*.¹⁷ In any case, looking beyond Greenberg’s grand modernist project, the intensification of the painted surface is not realised by means of formal expediency or material specificity in my research, but rather through the capture of

¹² Wolin claims this approach was epitomised by Leopold von Ranke’s historical scholarship. See: R. Wolin, ‘Benjamin’s Materialist Theory of Experience’, *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetic Redemption*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 214.

¹³ C. Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting,’ 1960.

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg’s arguments surrounding the ‘purity’ of painting as hinged on its relationship to two-dimensionality (flatness) were expanded over time. This is clearly summarized by David Green who outlines Greenburg’s expanding critical analysis of the function of surface and ‘flatness’ in modernist painting: “The shift between the two formulations of flatness is clear enough and easily summarized: painting’s physicality yields to its opticality, the literal surface is displaced by pictorial space, texture is divorced from tactility.” See: D. Green, ‘Painting as Aporia’, in J. Harris (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, Liverpool University Press, 2003, p. 81-107.

¹⁵ Clement Greenburg’s famous 1960’s essay on Modernism outlines his manifesto-like approach to the nature and history of pictures while his 1978 postscript refutes the inherent essentialism in these early works of criticism. See: C. Greenburg, ‘Modernist Painting’, <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html>. Accessed 16 March 2017.

¹⁶ C. Greenberg, ‘Review of Exhibitions of Warden Day, Carl Holty and Jackson Pollock’ in J. O’Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 202, as cited in Green, ‘Painting as Aporia’, p. 101.

¹⁷ C. Greenberg, as cited in ‘Review of the exhibition “Collage”’ in O’Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 260, as cited in Green, ‘Painting as Aporia’, p. 101.

excessive gestures/erasures, and through interdisciplinary exchanges between painting and advanced imaging processes. As Richard Shiff explains, “a painting is as capable as sculpture of conveying material resistance to the touch; rather than an idealized planar surface, it becomes a real object occupying space and possessing texture, thickness, density, and weight.”¹⁸

Overall, my approach aims to create a tension between the subjectivity of figurative-gestural painting, and the more detached and penetrative gaze of reverse engineering, using strategies that contest the authority of the painted surface as a site of completion, wholeness, or temporal constancy. The chapters herein therefore cover diverse themes and concepts which emerged in relation to practice-based experimentation. However, my ideas and approach to painting within this project are united in the desire to intensify the surface of paintings. The two main tenets of my research that stem from this intention are interwoven throughout this thesis: the aesthetic and philosophical investigation of imaging methods normally associated with art conservation and cultural heritage digitisation, and the seemingly dichotomous possibilities of image breaking. These research areas are combined to produce something new for the surface of contemporary painting, reframed here as a ‘live field of materiality.’

¹⁸ R. Shiff, ‘Constructing Physicality’, *Art Journal*, vol. 50, 1, 1991, p. 42.

Chapter One: Atemporal Painting

A Discussion of the Subject Matter

In this chapter I discuss my choice of subject matter and its role in the studio work, covering ideas from material transformation to ‘atemporality’ in relation to painting. My project responds to art historical themes and styles from Mannerism through to the Baroque era, a period that roughly encompasses the early sixteenth century through to the late eighteenth century. Within this period, I focus mainly on Baroque paintings by Velazquez, Rembrandt, and Italian Baroque masters Guido Reni and Guido Cagnacci. Both Reni and Cagnacci frequently painted Cleopatra and Mary Magdalene, who were popular subjects of the time, and could be described as ‘composite figures’ in terms of their manifold historical representations across both literature and painting. Mary Magdalene for example, is framed as an amalgamation of women from the four canonical Gospels and apocryphal texts, and a figure repeatedly reinvented throughout history – “from prostitute to sibyl to mystic to celibate nun to passive helpmeet to feminist icon to the matriarch of divinity’s secret dynasty.”¹⁹

Paintings of Mary Magdalene and Cleopatra by Reni and Cagnacci were chosen as primary subjects for the studio research, in part because of the composite character of the figures portrayed, an idea that is reflected in my attention to the compound and constructed nature of the painted surface, and its evocation of a palimpsest.²⁰ I am also interested in the visual and atmospheric characteristics of these Baroque paintings, which highlight the temporal disjuncture between the stasis of the painted image and narrative potentiation (*Potenzierung*²¹). This tension is accentuated by the affected posture and acquiescent attitude of the female figures, whose poses denote a dramatic moment within a narrative, contrasted against the inherent stillness of painting and the fixity of the two-dimensional surface. Importantly, these depictions of Mary Magdalene and Cleopatra also portray ‘touch’, which can be variously understood as gestures of affirmation, penitence and sensual communication within and beyond the allegorical tropes of the artworks.

The material and processual aspects of well-known art historical paintings such as Rembrandt’s *The Syndics* have also informed my research (see Chapter Five). A great deal of Rembrandt’s

¹⁹ J. Carroll, ‘Who Was Mary Magdalene?’ *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 31, 2006. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-mary-magdalene-119565482/>. Accessed 1 February 2018.

²⁰ Palimpsest: a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing, Oxford online dictionary, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/palimpsest>. Accessed June 12, 2018. Note: both the physical and theoretical characteristics of the palimpsest will be explored throughout this thesis.

²¹ The German term *Potenzierung* has been associated with Romanticism and can be understood as a ‘qualitative heightening’. See: T. Vermeulen and R. van den Akker, ‘Notes on Metamodernism,’ *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, vol. 2, 2010. See also, ‘Notes on Metamodernism,’ <http://www.metamodernism.com/2010/08/09/new-romanticism/>. Accessed 10 February 2018.

paintings have been analysed and understood anew through advanced imaging techniques. I chose to respond to analytical studies of *The Syndics* because of the broad range of technical information available through the Rembrandt database²² and the resulting potential for new understandings of the material components and processes behind his paintings. This extends to the new identity the artwork assumes after technical analysis and imaging. Material and processual re-signification is a concept that unites my research into both non-destructive imaging techniques (art conservation) and iconoclasm as ‘creative image breaking’. Both of these approaches centre on the transformation of artworks over time through non-intentional and intentional change. These two tenets of my research sometimes overlap in the field of art conservation when the nature and extent of damage caused to artworks by iconoclasm is analysed using advanced/scientific-imaging practices. Moreover, art conservation is not a neutral act, and as such could be seen as an iconoclastic practice which requires negotiating the role of ethics, value, and meaning in relation to physical and symbolic transformations of art objects.²³

In extreme cases, attempts to ‘restore’ paintings have resulted in significant damage to artworks and cultural heritage, such as the now-famous *Monkey Jesus*: parishioner Cecilia Giménez’ failed restoration attempt on a fresco in the Spanish church Sanctuary of Mercy (Borja, Zaragoza) in 2012. The original mural, *Ecce Homo*, was painted in 1930 by Spanish painter Elías García Martínez, and depicts Jesus crowned with thorns, a typical subject of traditional Catholic art from this period. The ‘restored’ version by Giménez has been labelled *Ecce Mono* (*Behold the Monkey*), a humorous conflation of the painting’s Latin title, *Ecce Homo* (*Behold the Man*), with the Spanish word *mono*, meaning monkey. In an “online rush of global hilarity”²⁴ the event sparked comparisons to the plot of the film *Bean*, starring Rowan Atkinson, in which Mr Bean irrevocably damages a priceless painting from the nineteenth century by the painter James Whistler. BBC journalist Christian Fraser stated that the botched restoration attempt resembled a “crayon sketch of a very hairy monkey in an ill-fitting tunic.”²⁵ While the story is amusing, the bungled restoration ultimately produced a new and considerably more famous cultural icon,

²² The Rembrandt database is a multidisciplinary, inter-institutional research resource on Rembrandt paintings worldwide. It provides unparalleled information including images of paintings that employ a vast array of advanced techniques such as X-ray, infrared photography, transmitted light photography, ultraviolet photography etc. See: <http://www.rembrandtdatabase.org/Rembrandt/>.

²³ The theoretical approach of art conservation can be defined as “the methodological moment in which the object is appreciated in its material form, and its historical and aesthetic ‘duality,’ with a view to transmitting it to the future.” See: C. Brandi, ‘Theory of Restoration, I’, *Historical and Philosophical Issues in Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996, as cited in: T. Malkogeorgou, ‘The Ethics of Conservation Practice: A Look from Within,’ *Conservation Journal*, Spring 2006, Issue 52, Victoria and Albert Museum,

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-52/the-ethics-of-conservation-practice-a-look-from-within/index.html#Ref1>. Accessed 9 May 2018.

²⁴ ‘Ecce mono’, *Financial Times*, 25 August 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/269a80c4-edec-11e1-8d72-00144feab49a>. Accessed 15 February 2015.

²⁵ ‘Spanish fresco restoration botched by amateur’, *BBC News*, 23 August 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19349921>. Accessed 12 March 2015.

highlighting the atemporal re-signification of the artwork through multiple periods of engagement (further discussed in Chapter Three).



Figure 2: Elías García Martínez, *Ecce Homo*, c. 1930, fresco, 50 x 40cm, Santuario de Misericordia Church, Borja. (Left) Image showing some initial flaking of paintwork, 2010. (Centre) The fresco one month prior to the attempted restoration, showing the extent of damage and deterioration, 2012. (Right) The artwork following Giménez's restoration attempt, 2012.

Painting, Quotation and Atemporality

The literary concept of historiographic metafiction²⁶ coined by theorist Linda Hutcheon, has informed my ideas regarding quotation.²⁷ The concept refers to works of fiction that use literary devices of metafiction (where the writer alludes to the artifice or literariness of a work)²⁸ combined with the gravitas of historical situations, styles and figures. Hutcheon points out that this kind of intertextual linking of the past and present is not unique to literature, and can be readily found in painting.²⁹ Like this method, my approach to painting refers to its own operations in a self-conscious manner by borrowing both form and content from art historical paintings with a combination of frank quotation and self-reflexivity (that is, painting about painting). Put another way, the research work appropriates the visual dynamics and drama central to the subject matter and style of the artworks I quote from, while ruminating on the circumstances of making – both in the source paintings and in my own work which responds to them.

²⁶ Historiographic metafiction refers to “well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages.” See: L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London, New York, Routledge, 1988, p. 5.

²⁷ I use the term ‘quotation’ to indicate the use of certain images (or part thereof), colour palettes, and application techniques from selected art historical paintings in my own artworks.

²⁸ This is achieved through parody or by departing from convention. See: ‘Metafiction’ entry, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/metafiction?s=ts>. Accessed 1 May 2017.

²⁹ Hutcheon cites Wendy Steiner’s paper ‘Intertextuality in Painting,’ in which Steiner writes: “It is only by viewing paintings in light of other paintings or works of literature, music and so forth that the ‘missing’ semiotic power of pictorial art can be augmented- which is to say that the power is not missing at all, but merely absent in the conventional account of the structure of art.” See: W. Steiner, ‘Intertextuality in Painting,’ *The American Journal of Semiotics*, Volume 3, Issue 4, 1985, p. 58.

Hutcheon contextualises historiographic metafiction within a postmodern framework; in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she refers to the way postmodernism “establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past. It both installs and then subverts traditional concepts of subjectivity.”³⁰ The action of instituting, and then disbanding stable narrative voices and bodies aligns with my theoretical framework, which is premised on uncovering latent information. In a practical sense this plays out through layering the painted surface in order to ‘undo’ it later. In a conceptual sense, this extends to how new perspectives can emerge through the re-contextualisation of the aesthetic and discursive tropes of selected historical artworks, showing how both painting and art history can operate as “narrated texts.”³¹ By quoting these paintings, I am acknowledging their seductiveness – for example Baroque painting is characterised by visual drama, rich colour, and chiaroscuro effects – however, as a counterpoint to this, I employ a ‘forensic’ approach to surface and an exaggeration of painterly gestures, informed by my research into advanced imaging techniques and iconoclasm.

This method of quotation shifts away from binaries commonly associated with postmodernism, such as irony/sincerity and parody/pastiche, by simultaneously embracing both earnestness and critical detachment.³² In this way, the complexity of addressing the present with the equipment of the past is acknowledged in the quotative form.³³ Hence, on the one hand, the research work openly exemplifies the constructs Baroque³⁴ painting deploys to bring attention to itself and the object of artistic application, while on the other hand it filters these conceits through the circumspect lens of methodological constraints (which ‘undo’ the surface). Like historiographic metafiction, this method aims “to satisfy [...] a desire for ‘worldly’ grounding while at the same time querying the very basis of the authority of that grounding.”³⁵

Amelia Groom in her introduction to *Time* (part of the *Documents of Contemporary Art* series) acknowledges a rising concern in the early twenty-first century with “re-present-ing the past.” She cites previous volumes in the *Documents* series – *The Archive*, *Ruins*, and *Memory* – as an indication of the way artists are consciously embracing obsolete technologies, abandoned places

³⁰ Hutcheon, p. 118.

³¹ Hutcheon, p. 136.

³² J. Saltz, ‘Sincerity and Irony hug it out’, *New York magazine*, 27 May 2010, <http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/66277/>. Accessed 10 February 2018.

³³ I take the position that an ironic or parodic approach to quotation (of art historical imagery) can feel burdened by early postmodern frameworks; by allowing irony and sincerity to ‘coexist’ a greater contextual/conceptual tension between past and present references can exist.

³⁴ While I mainly focus on the tropes of Baroque painting for its sense of movement and drama, I also borrow from Mannerist characteristics of affectation, elongation and distortion.

³⁵ L. Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History’, in P. O'Donnell and R.C. Davis (eds.), *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 5.

and outmoded materials to engage with “the remnants of previous times.”³⁶ Likewise, Dieter Roelstraete (who Groom refers to in her introduction) speculates that the historiographic turn in art is closely related to the crisis of history as an intellectual discipline and academic field of inquiry. Moreover, he indicates that this points to a general disenchantment with the present generated by the bewildering effects of the social, political, and environmental impacts of major world events such as the September 11 terror attacks and the global financial crisis.³⁷ While my research does not reach to the past as a way of mitigating disillusionment with the present, it does set out to acknowledge the particular fragilities that these kinds of events highlight in relation to the body and its cultural inheritances by imaging the human form as if in conflict with painting’s weighty history and assured surfaces. The idea of re-present-ing the past is explored in direct relation to art; the re-enactment of Baroque drama is a means to intensify the surface of paintings and create a tension between past and present. This tension is intended to bring the art historical figure into the contemporary moment “in a flash” – to use Walter Benjamin’s turn of phrase – where, as in Benjamin’s theorisation, perception “favours simultaneity and constellation over continuity, similitude over representation or sign, and the detail or fractionary [...] over the whole.”³⁸

Benjamin’s line of thinking here can be linked to Giorgio Agamben’s interpretation of contemporariness as “a singular relationship with one’s own time”, which, Agamben claims, “adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism.”³⁹ Hence, in this theoretical model contemporariness is “not an indicator of periodisation, but an existential marker.”⁴⁰ The emphasis on experiential descriptors of time recalls Benjamin’s concept of the “dialectical image” in which he claims “the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, [while] the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.”⁴¹ Both points of view seem to suggest that contemporariness is a dynamic emergence of relational perception that dislocates linear time.

An early precedent for artistic quotation that has informed my research is the Mannerists’ appropriative tactics and their divestment of naturalism, which was seen as a reaction to the

³⁶ A. Groom, (ed.) *Time*, Documents of Contemporary Art, Whitechapel Gallery, London, MIT Press, 2013, p. 16.

³⁷ D. Roelstraete, ‘After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings,’ *E-flux Journal*, no. 6, May 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/06/61402/after-the-historiographic-turn-current-findings/>. Accessed 21 February 2018. See also: Roelstraete, ‘The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art’.

³⁸ S. Weigel, ‘The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin’s Image-Based Epistemology and its Preconditions in Visual Arts and Media History,’ trans. C. Smith and C. Kutschbach, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 41, No. 2, Winter 2015, p. 345.

³⁹ G. Agamben, ‘What Is the Contemporary?’ in “*What is an Apparatus?*” and Other Essays, trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 41.

⁴⁰ J. Riley, ‘What is the Contemporary?’, University of Cambridge Contemporary Research Group, 15 March 2013, <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/research/contemporary/?p=257>. Accessed 12 February 2017.

⁴¹ Benjamin, ‘Awakening’ (n2a, 3), *The Arcades Project*, trans H. Eiland & K. McLaughlin, Belknap Press, 2002, p. 462.

aesthetic apotheosis of the High Renaissance. A central theme within Mannerism is the idea of “bella maniera” (beautiful style), which has been theorised as “the modification of nature by skillful abstraction and inner idea” in which various aesthetic qualities are brought together to create something new.⁴² This approach resonates with more recent concepts applied to artistic quotation/mediation such as revision, re-enactment, reproduction, reconstruction, reprogramming and so on, which are rooted in postmodernism’s pluralism and the sampling/recycling of multiple sources.

These catchphrases have continued to appear in well-known texts from around the turn of the twenty-first century such as *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (2002) by French writer and curator Nicolas Bourriaud. *Postproduction* discusses how, since the early 1990’s, an increasing number of artworks have been informed by pre-existing works whereby artists re-exhibit, interpret, reproduce, or use various cultural products or works made by others as an integral part of their artwork. Coming from a slightly different angle, and informing the research in a different way, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1998) by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argues that new visual media achieve their cultural significance by “paying homage to, rivalling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television.”⁴³ Bolter and Grusin use the lens of contemporary media practices to look at the history of this process, and coin the term “remediation” to describe it. They define the dual preoccupations of contemporary media as “the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves,”⁴⁴ and pinpoint moments in the past where this appears to emerge.

Both *Postproduction* and *Remediation* centre on how artists respond to/quote from pre-existing artworks, techniques, media and methods to make new work, covering a spectrum of practices and conceptual strategies that include art historical and institutional critique, and feminist revisionism. Alternatively, these practices may be employed to highlight the mediative and affective exchanges between old and new media and technologies. In both contexts, the means by which this is achieved may be more or less evident, and constitute more or less of the artwork’s formal and conceptual fabric, from “the taking over, into a work of art, of a real object or even an existing work of art”⁴⁵ through to mimicking or repurposing earlier technologies and media with newer ones (and vice versa).

⁴² J. V. Mirollo, *Mannerism and Renaissance Poetry: Concept, Mode, Inner Design*, Yale University Press, 1984, p. 13-14.

⁴³ This phrase appears in the overview of *Remediation: Understanding New Media* appears on the MIT Press website: <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/remediation>. Accessed 15 December 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ S. Wilson and J. Lack, *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms*, London, Tate Publishing, 2008, p. 20-21.

My research takes for granted that these ways of seeing and making artworks (where art says something new by starting with itself) have existed since art was classified such and are deeply inscribed in aesthetics and implicitly understood by artists. As Mieke Bal states, “art is inevitably engaged with what came before it, and that engagement is an active re-working.”⁴⁶ Yet, it appears the effect of this persistent taxonomising of strategies of quotation has triggered an equally robust proliferation of ideas around the temporal elasticity of art history in which concepts of “influence, legacy, causality and stylistic evolution give way to ‘transferals of energy’ across times, in multiple directions at once.”⁴⁷

Exemplifying the so-called ‘historiographic turn’ in art, the atemporal, anachronic and transhistorical are familiar paradigms in the twenty-first century. Such terms position art historical time as a vast ‘internet’ of forms and designations in which tradition is an unfinished agenda, rather than a series of ruins, or something that has been stabilised once and for all. The atemporal perspective restores to past paintings the openness and agency they once had when reanimated with new subjects and fresh implications. In this context, the painted surface can be seen as “a platform, map, or metaphoric screen on which genres intermingle, morph, and collide.”⁴⁸

Artist David Salle writes that atemporality is by no means new, stating, “Most if not all art reaches backward to earlier models in some way; every rupture is also a continuity.”⁴⁹ Salle’s statement appeared in his critique of MoMA’s painting exhibition entitled *Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (2015). In the catalogue essay for the exhibition, the curator Laura Hoptman puts forward the claim that atemporality is a concept that characterises our (Western) cultural moment, suggesting that this is primarily brought about by the internet, where “all eras seem to exist at once.”⁵⁰ She further asserts that atemporality is a “hallmark for our moment in painting, with artists achieving it by reanimating historical styles or recreating a contemporary version of them.”⁵¹ Hoptman’s claims are sweeping, and while there is agency in the idea of painting reckoning with itself on its own terms,⁵² some of her assertions are

⁴⁶ M. Bal, *Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Groom, p. 14. Groom refers to George Kubler’s ideas of ‘energy transfer’ in his study of art history, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, 1962.

⁴⁸ *Museum of Modern Art*, ‘The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World,’ <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1455>. Accessed 20 February 2018.

⁴⁹ D. Salle, ‘Structure Rising: David Salle on “The Forever Now” at MoMA,’ *Artnews*, February 23, 2015. <http://www.artnews.com/2015/02/23/structure-rising-forever-now-at-moma/>. Accessed 2 April 2016.

⁵⁰ In her catalogue essay Laura Hoptman cites a range of influences on her use of the term ‘atemporality’, for in instance, science fiction writers, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Hoptman also references ‘Retromania: Pop Culture’s addiction to It’s own Past’, 2011, by Simon Reynolds, and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff’s ‘Present shock: When Everything Happens Now’, 2013.

⁵¹ *Museum of Modern Art exhibitions*, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1455>. Accessed 2 April 2016.

⁵² What I mean here is that the ‘atemporality’ of the painting Hoptman is concerned with is not driven by nostalgia, pastiche, or derivative appropriation, but rather grapples with itself on largely formal grounds

contentious, such as the idea that atemporality is a “wholly unique phenomenon in Western culture.”⁵³ In a review of *Forever Now*, Jason Farago counters Hoptman’s statement by contending that for most of European art history, art was atemporal, albeit in a different sense; that is, it did not express to viewers anything about its time. He writes that “Art was, by and large, a religious enterprise, and therefore – as the art historian Hans Belting has shown – occupied a divine, atemporal realm removed from human cycles of life and history. Painters of the Renaissance thought of their art as approaching eternal greatness, not speaking for their age.”⁵⁴

In my practice I wrestle with the concept of atemporality in both senses; through quotation and recontextualisation (where art historical painting presents a grab bag of styles), and by referencing those European painting traditions which point to religious and mythological constructs rather than to the everyday fabric of society and its temporally constituted rhythms. By conflating the divine or ‘otherworldly’ aspects of Baroque painting with concepts of desire, touch and carnality, the research paintings offset fictional/mythological constructs with earthly/bodily references through unfolding pictorial spaces and peeled back surfaces. My aim here is to disassemble the allegorical narratives of the quoted paintings while gesturing to the mythic qualities of painting itself – as an object, discourse and historicised practice.

This approach to atemporality is also informed, albeit in a more oblique way, by Benjamin’s literary criticism regarding the Baroque tragic-drama (*Trauerspiel*, or mourning-play).⁵⁵ His investigation into some of the lesser-known German dramatists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries such as Martin Opitz, explores how elements of human history can be interwoven with Baroque stylistic constructions in the modern tragic drama.⁵⁶ This echoes the concept of historiographic metafiction in the sense that narrative drama is produced by layering myth with a kind of ‘naturalism’ using historical references. Benjamin proposes that Baroque tragedy can be distinguished from classical tragedy by its shift from myth into history: “The ‘content [*Gehalt*] and true object’ of the Baroque mourning-play is not, as it is in tragedy, myth but rather historical

without having a specific agenda. This idea is informed by Jason Farago’s point in his review of the exhibition (cited below).

⁵³ L. Hoptman, ‘The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World,’ exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2014, p. 13.

⁵⁴ J. Farago, ‘The Forever Now review: Calling time on the avant garde,’ *The Guardian*, December 13, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/12/the-forever-now-review-calling-time-avant-garde>. Accessed 2 April 2016.

⁵⁵ *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* gives a theoretical overview of the nature of the Baroque art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular the stage-form of the royal martyr dramas called *Trauerspiel*. Benjamin argues that Baroque tragedy was distinguished from classical tragedy by its shift from myth into history.

⁵⁶ Benjamin critiques the prior critical reception of these plays and sets out his own ideas about their meaning and relevance.

life.”⁵⁷ Benjamin’s frequent insistence on the recalibration of artistic form to reflect changing cultural and material settings is also evident in his conception of Baroque allegory whereby temporality becomes something “dynamic, mobile, and fluid.”⁵⁸

In *Trauerspiel* there is however, as in classical forms of tragedy, an absence of psychological depth in the characters depicted, a multitude of, and reliance on theatrical props, and a crude emphasis on violence and suffering.⁵⁹ As discussed in the following chapter, my paintings also rely on ‘props’ and suggestions of violence through image breaking. Props in the context of painting are the formal elements of line, tone, colour and composition, which are used to exaggerate certain pictorial effects, such as a sense of movement. Indications of ‘reality’ (as opposed to myth) come in the guise of materiality: exposed layers of paint and mismatched images that emerge through composite imaging. This counterbalancing of the implicit drama of the Baroque with the distorted material presence of painting reflects Benjamin’s ideas regarding the Baroque tragic form. Christine Buci-Glucksmann describes this tendency/form as “Baroque by reason of its return to figurative elements, all treated ironically, highlighted within a ‘rhetoric’ of the visible.” She states, “Ruins, past architecture, stylistic contamination, exploration of myths and allegories: all speak to this aesthetic of fragmentation, of the lost/recovered, simulated/sublimated body found in Baudelairean and Benjaminean *Trauerspiel*.”⁶⁰ Many of these tensions appear in the conceptual deployment of Baroque form and style in the paintings produced within this project.

⁵⁷ P. Osborne, and M. Charles, ‘Walter Benjamin,’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2015 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/>. Accessed July 28, 2018.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ C. Buci-Glucksmann, p. 105.

Chapter Two: A Baroque Sensibility

In this chapter I outline the theoretical role and aesthetic influence of the Baroque style in my studio practice. The Baroque sensibility has captured the artistic imagination well beyond its beginnings in Rome in the early seventeenth century where it flourished and swiftly pervaded other cultural arenas in Europe. Its continued relevance in contemporary art is perhaps best explained by the timelessness of some of its key attributes such as dramatic contrast, opulent design, and a sense of movement and embellishment. These visually engaging features and their conceptual and affective possibilities have been deployed across various disciplines in the arts, particularly painting.

Recent international contemporary art exhibitions that explore the Baroque style include: *Going for Baroque: 18 contemporary artists fascinated with the Baroque and Rococo* (Baltimore, The Contemporary, The Walters, 1995);⁶¹ *Eine Barocke Party* (Vienna, Kunsthalle Wien, 2001); *Ultra Baroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art* (San Diego, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001); *Ecstasy: Baroque and Beyond* (Brisbane, University of Queensland Art Museum, 2017-2018), and *Sanguine/Bloedrood* (Antwerp, Museum of Modern Art, and Milan, Fondazione Prada, 2018-2019). There is also a wide range of literature that investigates the sustained impact and interest in the Baroque style, (in some contexts theorised as neo-Baroque).⁶² Key proponents of theory concerned with the Baroque are Gilles Deleuze, who in his reading of the work of Leibniz claims “the Baroque can be stretched beyond its precise historical limits,”⁶³ and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, who, in *The Madness Of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics* poetically brings together a range of influences in her discussion of the Baroque paradigm.⁶⁴ Many of Buci-

⁶¹ The phrase ‘going for baroque’ has also been used in titles for museum texts and symposia such as, K. Christiansen, ‘Going for Baroque: Bringing 17th-Century Masters to the Met’, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, v. 62, no. 3 (Winter, 2005), and ‘Going for Baroque: Americans Collect Italian Paintings of the 17th and 18th Centuries’ (symposium), Frick Collection, New York, 2013. https://www.frick.org/research/center/symposia/going_for_baroque_americans_collect_italian_paintings_17th_and_18th_centuries. Accessed 28 November 2017.

⁶² Frequent use of the term ‘Neo-Baroque’ can be traced to a period from the 1970’s to 1990’s. Significantly, it has been used by Christine Buci-Glucksmann in *Madness of Seeing: the Baroque Aesthetic* (1986); Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988); and later by Gregg Lambert *On the (New) Baroque* (2004, revised 2008); Angela Ndalianis *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004); and William Egginton’s *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (Neo) Baroque Aesthetics* (2009).

⁶³ G. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. T. Conley, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 33.

⁶⁴ Buci-Glucksmann’s research into the aesthetics of the perception of the Baroque began with *La Raison Baroque* (1984), and *La Folie du Voir* in 1986. In the English translation *The Madness Of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics* Buci-Glucksmann explains how the book, which followed the 1984 publication of *Baroque Reason*, marked a shift in the research of more than twenty years, from exploring the seventeenth-century Baroque aesthetic to Baudelaire’s modern Baroque (reinterpreted through Walter Benjamin’s work) and finally the contemporary, and the technological neo-Baroque of a global madness of vision (from the author’s preface) in, *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. D. Z. Baker, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2012.

Glucksmann's areas of interest resonate with the methodological, metaphorical and theoretical concerns of my research: for example, ideas around embodied vision, the plurality and materiality of the body, the palimpsest, authorship and erasure, and the decline of the aura.⁶⁵ For Buci-Glucksmann, the layering of the Baroque sign through history is like a palimpsest of epic proportions which "perpetually performs the formal and inventive method of the palimpsest in its taste for enigmas, mottoes, emblems, and allegories, in its stylistic borrowing from the past, and in its penchant for ruins and fragments." In this theoretical context, "the Baroque—with its gold-encrusted forms, tortured and twisted arabesques, chiaroscuro, its taste for emptiness and too-full fullness to the point of ironic or decorative excess—will never cease reinventing or reinterpreting itself."⁶⁶



Figure 3: Guido Reni, *Cleopatra and the Asp*, 1642, oil on canvas, 114.2 x 95cm, housed in The Royal Collection Trust, London, UK.

During his lifetime, Guido Reni's technical virtuosity was particularly identified with images of "suffering female beauty – Magdalens, Lucretias and Cleopatras."⁶⁷ Reni's painting *Cleopatra and the Asp* (fig. 3) depicts the final minutes in the life of the Egyptian Queen, Cleopatra, as she

⁶⁵ From the summary of the book (jacket insert), *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*.

⁶⁶ Buci-Glucksmann, p. 92.

⁶⁷ *Royal Collection trust*, 'Cleopatra and the Asp', <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405338/cleopatra-with-the-asp>. Accessed 24 February 2018.

prepares to commit suicide.⁶⁸ This is the moment “when the asp (which has been smuggled in to Cleopatra in the basket of figs depicted in the background) is about to deliver the lethal bite into her bare breast.”⁶⁹ Reni’s painting is a typical example of the Baroque inclination to emphasise violence, pain, and threat, in a way that associates physical anguish with psychological ecstasy, and the divine with erotic fulfilment.

My first observation of this painting was of the tensile balancing of sumptuously painted drapery with the rigidity and artifice of a staged pose. It also struck me that in order to identify with the protagonist Cleopatra, one had to step into a world of almost bathetic fakery, as if the figure in the painting were performing her own elaborate demise while being completely aware of the sham; the exposed breast and poised asp at her nipple rendering it all the more absurd. Of course, this reading of Reni’s painting is out of step with the time in which the work was made, yet the flagrant artifice with which the subject matter is treated – mirrored in Cleopatra’s apparent self-awareness – has been noted in Irving Lavin’s introduction to Erwin Panofsky’s essay ‘What is Baroque?’ (1934).⁷⁰ Lavin refers to Panofsky’s observation of the underlying dualism of Baroque painting, stating, “The essence and novelty of the Baroque lies precisely in this two-fold reconciliation of forces – an overwhelming feeling of subjective excitement, and an awareness of that feeling.”⁷¹

Panofsky’s essay, developed in the 1930s, was very much concerned with Baroque style – “its character, its geography, and its history.”⁷² In order to demonstrate its nuances, Panofsky projects himself into the Baroque scene. Describing the characters themselves as self-aware, he states “the feeling of Baroque people is (or at least can be in the works of great masters) perfectly genuine, only it does not fill the whole of their souls. They not only feel, but are also aware of their own feelings. While their hearts are quivering with emotion, their consciousness stands apart and ‘knows.’”⁷³ Here, Panofsky identifies in the Baroque personage the ability to witness the machinations of affect, while also producing it. Moreover, this double-edged quality tends to pervade other binary preoccupations such as “emotion and reflection, lust and pain, devoutness and voluptuousness”⁷⁴ which are frequently incorporated into the narratives of Baroque painting,

⁶⁸ As recounted in Plutarch’s *Lives* (a series of biographies of famous men, arranged in tandem to illuminate their common moral virtues or failings), thought to have been written at the beginning of the second century AD. See: J. Romm (ed.), *Plutarch: Lives that Made Greek History*, trans. P. Mensch, Indianapolis, Indiana, Hackett Publishing, 2012, p. vi.

⁶⁹ *Royal Collection trust*, ‘Cleopatra and the Asp’.

⁷⁰ Lavin points out that Panofsky’s essay was originally conceived as a public lecture for a non-specialist audience. See: I. Lavin (ed.), introduction to E. Panofsky’s *Three Essays on Style*, Cambridge MA, London, UK, MIT Press, 1997, p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Lavin, p. 3.

⁷³ E. Panofsky, ‘What is Baroque?’, p. 75. (I use Lavin’s word ‘apart’ rather than Panofsky’s original ‘aloof’ here).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

and double out in the experience of the viewer. Much like my reading of Reni's *Cleopatra and the Asp*, Panofsky sees the protagonist's self-reflexivity echoed in the careful manipulation of an atmosphere of high drama. In my painting, this is emphasised through compositional and painterly significations and appropriation of the carefully modelled "enveloping swirls of convincingly rendered pink drapery."⁷⁵ (fig. 4)

Baroque Emblems

My painting *Exhume* quotes *Cleopatra and the Asp* by playing on the Baroque tropes of swirling fabric and chiaroscuro, both emblems of Baroque-ness.⁷⁶ The use of drapery in the Baroque has been aptly compared to a "proscenium intermediating between the fictive and real worlds," and a device (much like a portal) that engenders an "almost hallucinatory relationship between past and present that is a hallmark of the period."⁷⁷ In my painting, folds of drapery connote an unfolding/unravelling of both narrative and pictorial space; they are placed to dress or undress the picture, not just the people.⁷⁸ Drapery can also imply an erotic overtone via the association with curtains and bedclothes, and the immersive and malleable quality of folds in general. In many sixteenth-century portraits, drapery took on significance as an extension of the grandeur and agency of the protagonist; it could be "irrational and emotional, sensual and allusive, sometimes ridiculous, and not at all practical."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Royal Collection trust, 'Cleopatra and the Asp'.

⁷⁶ M. Bal, 'Baroque Matters,' in H. Hills (ed.), *Rethinking the Baroque*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 184.

⁷⁷ I. Lavin, 'Why Baroque' in *Going for Baroque: Eighteen Contemporary Artists Fascinated with the Baroque and Rococo*, exh. cat., L.G. Corrin & J. Spicer (eds.), The Contemporary and The Walters museums, Baltimore, MD, 1995, p. 5.

⁷⁸ A. Hollander, 'Liberated Draperies' in *Fabric of Vision: Dress and Drapery in Painting*, London, National Gallery Company, 2002, p. 55.

⁷⁹ Hollander, p. 46.



Figure 4: Chelsea Lehmann, *Exhume*, 2015, oil on linen, 103 x 81cm. Image courtesy the artist.

In the inky and nebulous pictorial space of *Exhume* (fig 4.) drapery is “held up entirely by artistic licence” and evokes both time, through its sense of movement; and texture, through the allusive relation of fabric to skin/surface.^{80,81} Unlike Reni’s painting, which relies on an unvarying enamel-like finish,⁸² the textured surface of my painting invokes the hedonic quality of tactility through its unevenness and variation in which the eye “follows the lines and planes, volumes and mirroring surfaces that give access to the object.”⁸³ The irregularity of textures – the fabric’s relative smoothness juxtaposed against peeling paint emphasises both folds of drapery as well as the paint skin itself, insisting on surface as materiality: “the materialism of the fold entails the involvement of the subject within the material experience thus turning surface into skin.”⁸⁴ The

⁸⁰ This recalls Deleuze’s interpretation of the writings of Gottfried Leibniz in “The Fold”, in which “the world is interpreted as a body of infinite folds and surfaces that twist and weave through compressed time and space.” The University of Minnesota Press, <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-fold>. Accessed 14 November 2017. See: G. Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1992.

⁸¹ G. Downey, and M. Taylor, ‘Curtains and Carnality: Processural Seductions in Eighteenth Century Text and Space’, *Imaging: Proceedings of the 27th International SAHANZ Conference*, 2010, p. 124.

⁸² Royal Collection trust (online collection).

⁸³ M. Bal, (discussing a sculpture by Heringa/Van Kalsbeek, *Untitled*, 2007), ‘Baroque Matters,’ p. 191. Bal uses terms indicative of the Baroque, such as “proliferating” and “excessive” in relation to the fold (referencing Deleuze) suggesting a ‘correlativist’ viewpoint that constitutes the subject’s surrender to the object.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

literal fragmentation of the painted body in 'Exhume' interrupts the wholesale consumption/possession of the image in a way that suggests a kind of 'emancipation' of the female figure through the seemingly paradoxical means of 'breaking' – as if the gestural marks and torn surface could leaven the figure, like a broken effigy, through sheer friction. This idea recalls Christine Buci-Glucksmann's description of the Baroque figure as "a plural body, an intensified, polyglot, or polypictorial body, a body sublimated by the coded deregulation of appearances."⁸⁵ In this context, *Exhume* operates as a performative reconfiguration of Reni's Cleopatra (fig. 3), who conversely appears to yield to her painted fate through uniformity of form and surface.

Exhume also explores the 'double-witnessing'⁸⁶ of Baroque painting's fictive conditions, signalled by the vaguely mirrored image of the central figure in the lower half of the painting. This 'reflection' does not directly correspond to the image in the upper half, hinting at the incommensurable 'realities' of Baroque's dualisms, further exemplified in the tension between orchestrated characterisation and sensuous abandon both in the figure's posture and in the gestural application of paint. My interpretation of Baroque painting renders these twin realities compatible through painting techniques and compositional devices. More specifically, my intention is to meet the technical virtuosity of the quoted painting by Reni with the impulsivity and grandiosity of the iconoclastic gesture,⁸⁷ both actions being connected with a certain bravado and spontaneity. This synthesis of ideation and process is epitomised by the painting technique 'bravura' – meaning both "great technical skill and brilliance" and "the display of great daring"⁸⁸ – a stylistic approach (and pictorial attitude) possessing the kind of knowingness and inherent performativity frequently associated with the Baroque period.⁸⁹

In relation to the Baroque sensibility, I am also interested in Benjamin's claim (in his discussion of Goethe's *Elective Affinities*) "that an expressionless moment is constitutive of art, in which the limits of semblance are broached precisely in order to illuminate an artistic truth."⁹⁰ Benjamin says, "only the expressionless completes the work" as a work of art, and it does this by breaking down the false appearance of totality.⁹¹ In this context, art, "at the very limit of its mimetic

⁸⁵ Buci-Glucksmann, *The Madness of Vision*, p. 98.

⁸⁶ The Baroque protagonist witnesses herself 'performing', the viewer witnesses the characters self-witnessing.

⁸⁷ The iconoclastic gesture is defined as 'image-breaking' (erasure, over-painting etc.). This is elaborated in Chapter Three.

⁸⁸ *Dictionary.com*, 'Bravura', <http://www.dictionary.com/>. Accessed 26 February 2018.

⁸⁹ See: P. Gillgren (ed.), *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, London, New York, Routledge, 2017. "In Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome, scholars from different fields of research explore performative aspects of Baroque culture."

⁹⁰ P. Osborne, and M. Charles, 'Walter Benjamin,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2015 Edition, E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/>. Accessed 28 July 2018.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

capacity, draws attention to its construction and in doing so finds the resources to encapsulate a deeper truth.”⁹² My interpretation of Benjamin’s thought in relation to the ‘expressionless’ reflects my earlier point that painting in the Baroque form is always gesturing back to itself: it reaches a point of ‘expressionless-ness’ by becoming stretched in its ability to represent real life and real emotion, and it is at this point that it is potentially, and paradoxically, most expressive. As mentioned previously (and later explored in relation to the iconoclastic gesture), this is where the studio work shifts into a mode of painting about painting in which the tension between mythological allusions and earthly/bodily/material references arrest specific meanings, leaving painting itself to do the conceptual heavy lifting.⁹³

Mieke Bal, in her elaboration of “preposterous history” (*pre + post* ⁹⁴) writes about establishing a coevalness between contemporary subjects and the historical subject through a notion of shared time defined by concerns that are “both of today and of then.”⁹⁵ Bal states, “A Baroque vision integrates an epistemological view, a concept of representation, and an aesthetic, all three of which are anchored in the inseparability of mind and body, form and matter, line and colour, image and discourse, even if none of these are synchronic.”⁹⁶ In a contemporary context, notions of drama, self-possession and performativity reflect what Omar Calabrese has identified as a neo-Baroque “appetite for virtuosity, frantic rhythms, instability, poly-dimensionality, and change”⁹⁷ and what Christine Buci-Glucksmann calls the “flux-image.”⁹⁸

The Baroque sensibility relates to my theoretical framework as it deploys the spectacle of revelation, which resonates with exposing latent phenomena. In the words of Irving Lavin, this Baroque device “has a powerful metaphorical effect” – it expresses “the underlying notion of revelation in the literal sense of removing a veil [...] that suggests the display to the privileged spectator of some mysterious, precious, and previously hidden value.”⁹⁹ Even the pejorative critiques levelled at Baroque painting by the neo-classicists, taken up again in Greenbergian modernism’s emphasis on painting’s ‘purity’, are of value in my research. That is, I embrace the Baroque’s “uncontrolled excesses of form and expression” and its “meretriciously corrupt narration, ornamentation, and sentimentality” (or the “lordly racket of the Baroque”¹⁰⁰) with the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ What I mean here is painting’s processes and materiality as defined within the bounds of this project.

⁹⁴ M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 7. Bal coins this term after Patricia Parker’s “Preposterous Events”, 1992.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Bal uses Caravaggio’s paintings as the case in point.

⁹⁶ M. Bal, ‘Baroque matters’ in H. Hills (ed.), *Rethinking the Baroque*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 188.

⁹⁷ Omar Calabrese’s book, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992), proposes Neo-Baroque as “the prevailing taste.” O. Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, trans. C. Lambert, Princeton, New Jersey and Oxford, UK, Princeton University Press, 1992.

⁹⁸ C. Buci-Glucksmann *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*, trans. D. Z. Baker, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2012, authors preface, p. XVI.

⁹⁹ Lavin, ‘Why Baroque’, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Lavin, p. 6. Lavin cites Panofsky’s phrase “the lordly racket” (of the Baroque).

aim to demonstrate that high drama and sincerity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This is echoed in Susan Sontag's ideas on 'camp', where the world might be seen "not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylisation."¹⁰¹ I see Baroque excess as a potential means to short-circuit painting's link with modernist ideas of purity and reduction,¹⁰² and shift towards an affective framework that privileges 'sensuous encountering'¹⁰³ in the practice and reception of contemporary painting. Within the broader methodology of the research, the opulence and extravagance of the Baroque can also be compared to the surplus information and rich archives of data created through advanced imaging techniques.

Finally, perhaps the most pivotal aspect of the Baroque sensibility, in both content and form, is its performativity; especially how Baroque female bodies 'perform', reflecting the way gendered identity is enacted as a "stylised repetition of acts."¹⁰⁴ Performativity is also present in the action of breaking images, which in turn destabilises the apparent prostration of these painted bodies in order that they not be represented as "inert or passive surfaces on which culture inscribes its meanings."¹⁰⁵ While not all of the paintings produced within the context of this project respond directly to Baroque paintings, they all reference Baroque gestures. In using different kinds of performativity (that of the subject and of the artist) my work aims to retain the drama of Baroque figuration, but also complicate the careful stylisation of the paintings the figures are frequently derived from through an approach to surface and materiality that suggests flux, transformation and poly-dimensionality.

The Performativity of the Baroque Personage

The paintings I am quoting from depict complex female personages rendered at once heroic and 'ornamental' by male painters of the seventeenth century, reflecting a cultural paradigm in which women were generally seen in passive, subservient, or self-sacrificial roles. These personages become elevated, multivalent¹⁰⁶ symbols in Baroque paintings. That is, they reflect and perpetuate various social and religious constructs that render them superior in their relinquished power, or

¹⁰¹ S. Sontag, 'Notes on Camp,' in *Against Interpretation*, New York, Dell, 1967, p. 277.

¹⁰² For example, the position advocated by Clement Greenburg (discussed in the introduction to this thesis).

¹⁰³ The idea of 'sensuous encountering' is informed by Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Greg's text, which outlines the qualities and modalities of affect as "an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities." G. J. Seigworth, and M. Greg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers' in *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ J. Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, December 1988, p. 519.

¹⁰⁵ J. Loxley, *Performativity (The New Critical Idiom)*, London and New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 117. Loxley's chapter 'Being Performative' is informed by Judith Butler's *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*, London and New York, Routledge, 2006.

¹⁰⁶ Historian Mircea Eliade suggested that to restrict a symbol to one frame of reference is tantamount to annihilating it. Cleopatra and Mary Magdalene are multivalent symbols because of their compositeness. In Baroque painting this is acknowledged through the way figures are represented as singular, heroic protagonists, which is at odds with their generally passive or supplicant poses.

noble in their appeal to a ‘higher power’ – namely someone/something outside of the picture’s frame. At the same time, their aforementioned knowingness and performativity is conflated with a palpable sensuality and self-possession, setting up a dialectical tension between power and powerlessness.



Figure 5: (Left) Chelsea Lehmann, *The Snake (after Cagnacci)*, 2018, oil on linen, 207 x 187cm. (Right) *The Snake* installed at Galerie pompom, for the exhibition *Bad Mannerism* (May, 2018) curated by myself. Image courtesy the artist. (Right) Installation image courtesy Docqment.

The circumspection with which I view Reni and Cagnacci’s paintings of figures like Cleopatra and Mary Magdalene arises in a contemporary atmosphere of suspicion around the continued power asymmetry of the male gaze.¹⁰⁷ In my project, this critical lens is turned toward representations of passive and narratively supplicant female bodies painted by male artists, and is underpinned by a general scepticism toward the authority of art history as a text written largely by male historians: a narrative which, at least until the late twentieth century, merely chronicled rather than critiqued representations of the idealised female body and the stylistic choices of the

¹⁰⁷ The Gaze is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Four.

male artists who painted it.^{108, 109} I respond to these circumstances by reframing figures in a way that uses Baroque painting's conceits to point to the very artifice of imagining/imaging the bodies and fates of women through the male gaze. For example, in *The Snake (after Cagnacci)* (fig. 5), Cleopatra is approximately twice human scale, filling the two metre high canvas.¹¹⁰ The underlying grid structure is intended to reference both the compartmentalisation of the picture plane in the process of scanning/X-raying large paintings, and also the rectilinear structure of the canvas, against which the 'action of the mark' becomes more dynamic and a sense of movement and flux is highlighted. My aim is to show how these representations might become less fixed and less stable through disruptive gestures¹¹¹ while still maintaining the essential hallmarks of a Baroque sensibility, including the use of chiaroscuro. In this way, my practice expands the artifice and performativity of the Baroque to operate in ways that are both critical and creative.

In the twentieth century a broad range of artists have used a feminist framework to critique conventional notions of femininity, feminine beauty and feminine identity, especially those constructed through artistic representations and, more broadly, in the media. Artists such as Ewa Partum, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Mary Beth Edelson, Karin Mack, Dotty Attie and Cindy Sherman have addressed these concerns in diverse ways, using approaches such as painting, film and performance to interrogate (both generally and specifically) representations of women that stereotype or sideline women's agency. Both Attie and Sherman have used a feminist revisionist approach to critique art historical paintings and the female archetypes they present. For example, in Cindy Sherman's series *History Portraits*, she carries out "radical transformations of Old Master paintings" by photographing herself in highly staged settings (using drapes, make-up and prostheses) and imitating the kind of poses in which the Old Masters portrayed women.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ For example, both Kenneth Clarke's *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1956), and his famous television series, *Civilisation* present accounts of art history with a "great man" approach, succinctly described by Mary Beard in her review of Clarke's biography by James Stourton. Beard says of *Civilisation*, "Hardly any women got a look-in, and when very occasionally they did, it was not as creative artists or even patrons, but as hostesses, temptresses, Virgin Marys, or something woolly called the "female principle". Almost the only woman credited, briefly, with an independent role was Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer – and, it so happens, the ancestor of one of Clark's long-standing mistresses". M. Beard, 'Kenneth Clark by James Stourton review – Mary Beard on Civilisation without women', *The Guardian*, 1 October, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/01/kenneth-clark-life-art-civilisation-james-stourton-review>, Accessed 5 April 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/01/kenneth-clark-life-art-civilisation-james-stourton-review>. Accessed 5 April 2018.

¹⁰⁹ John Berger displayed strong criticism of Clark's one-dimensional interpretation of the nude. While Berger grants that the nude "is always conventionalized", he also points out that it always relates to a "lived sexuality." In *Ways of Seeing* (1972) he claimed that in the European tradition of the nude, "painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women" elaborating this idea with the now-famous line, "men act and women appear."

¹¹⁰ In Cagnacci's painting *The Death of Cleopatra*, Cleopatra is much closer to human scale, the dimensions of the painting are 95 × 75 cm. See: *Met Museum Art Collection*, *The Death of Cleopatra* <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/670765>. Accessed 8 July 2016.

¹¹¹ This idea is further contextualised in Chapter Three.

¹¹² C. Schneider, Cindy Sherman: *History Portraits: The Rebirth of the Painted Picture after the End of Painting*, Schirmer Mosel, 2012.



Figure 6: Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #183-A*, 1988, 'History portraits', type C photograph, 96.5 x 57.0 cm, Courtesy Cindy Sherman and Metro Pictures Gallery, New York.

Unlike Sherman's photographs, which mock the gravitas of the historic portrait painting using an alternative medium, my work does not parody the paintings I am quoting from, but rather reconfigures them using their own painterly devices. This reorientation maintains sensuous signifiers that are linked to the body (tactility), but rather than ascribe them to the image per se (that is, through suggesting the body's 'availability' through pictorial cues), these corporeal references are instead embedded in my approach to paint, process and surface. What my paintings have in common with Sherman's photographs is the strategic employment of artifice and exaggeration to highlight pictorial space as a hypothetical stage that mirrors the way "certain genres in Western art have traditionally piggybacked the artifice of feminine identity onto the artifice of representation itself."¹¹³

In my paintings based on Mary Magdalene, this sense of artifice is particularly located in the hands of the figures and their expressive gestures, especially those that appear to be self-affirming. That is, the kind of touching which can be read as protective (of exposed flesh); religious – especially when combined with an upward gaze – or purely existential; as if touching a hand to

¹¹³ B. Hinderliter, 'The Multiple Worlds of Cindy Sherman's History Portraits', Essays, *Art Journal of the National Gallery of Victoria*, vol. 44. <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/the-multiple-worlds-of-cindy-shermans-history-portraits-2/>. Accessed 1 February 2018.

the chest could confirm the body as a mortal vessel. Ultimately, the figure gestures to herself within the painting, both literally and figuratively.

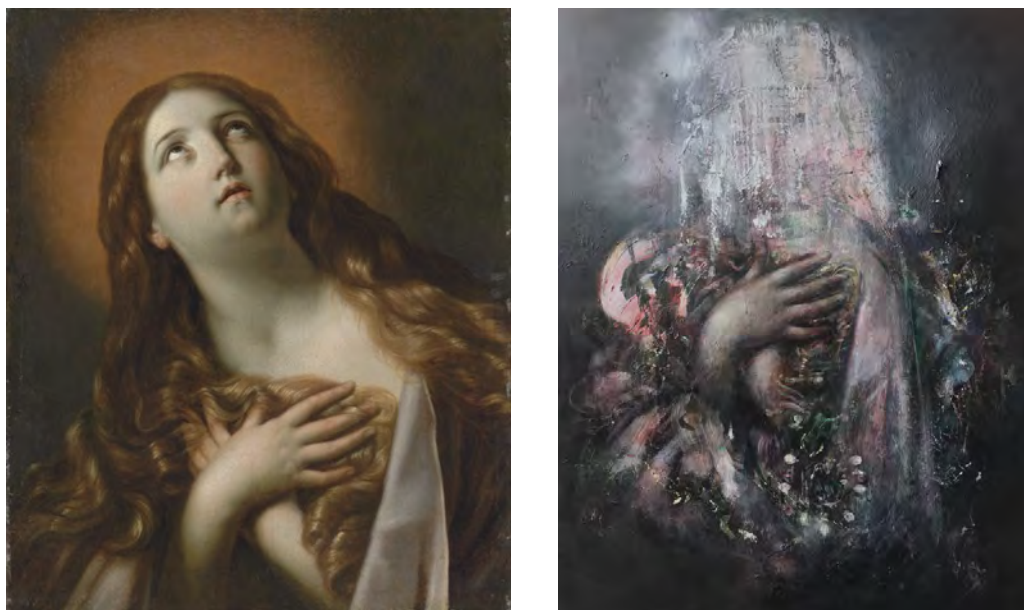


Figure 7: (Left) *The Penitent Mary Magdalene*, attributed to Guido Reni (date unknown), oil on canvas, 68.6 x 57.7cm. (Right) Chelsea Lehmann, *Brisé*, 2015-2016, oil on linen, 72 x 56cm.

In my work *Brisé* (above, right) based on Reni's *The Penitent Mary Magdalene*, I have over-painted the head of the Magdalene to focus attention on the hands and build a textured surface that conceals former layers, including the face. This is intended to de-emphasise the portrait and underscore the artwork's status as a painting. Here, the idea of penitence is linked materially rather than spiritually to repentance via the term *pentimenti*, which refers to an alteration made to a painting, usually evidenced by subtle traces of previous work.

The highly contested idea that Mary Magdalene was a repentant prostitute fostered a dual purpose, both socially and artistically.¹¹⁴ That is, her legend served the twin intentions of “discrediting sexuality in general and disempowering women in particular.”¹¹⁵ In *Brisé*, the under-painted gestures remain partially discernible; the final presentation layer bares them as scars (or ‘regrets’¹¹⁶). Each mark is like a poetic atonement for the compromised position the Magdalene finds herself in by virtue of being an object within a narrative that reflects a chain of power in which Christ and indeed all other men come before her. In my paintings of the Magdalene I am attempting to reinstate her sensuality (as an indicator of self-possession/awareness and agency)

¹¹⁴ J. Carroll, ‘Who Was Mary Magdalene?’, *Smithsonian Magazine*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/who-was-mary-magdalene-119565482/>. Accessed 1 February 2018.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *Pentimenti* can be interpreted to mean ‘regrets’ or ‘small regrets’ referring to mistakes/changes in the process of making the painting.

and emphasise her iconic position through continued engagement with the painted surface, as if I am marking, or ‘tending to’ her changing status as a symbol, rather than a religious icon.



Figure 8: Chelsea Lehmann, *Brisé*, (detail) showing *pentimenti* (surface texture) under the conditions of raking light.

In many Baroque paintings Mary Magdalene is depicted with one or both breasts exposed, heightening her already established vulnerability and pliability as “a manageable, controllable figure,” and an “instrument of propaganda.”¹¹⁷ Anne Hollander has pointed out that in the seventeenth century Mary Magdalene, like Cleopatra,¹¹⁸ was often depicted with one breast revealed, hinting at a kind of sanctified sexual restlessness. Hollander says, “Mary Magdalene is a favourite for this motif. Her naked breast seemed to become one of her saintly attributes, a newly coined image of vulnerability and penitence, superimposed on the established theme of pleasure.”¹¹⁹ In Reni’s painting (fig. 7, left), the Magdalene’s presumably bare breasts¹²⁰ are covered by her flowing hair, whereas in my painting *Brisé* her chest is covered with layers of

¹¹⁷ S. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994, p. 94.

¹¹⁸ Cleopatra was similarly manipulated as a symbol, e.g. Octavian held a centuries-long campaign against the defeated queen labelling her a wanton temptress: “It is less threatening to believe her fatally attractive than fatally intelligent.” See: A. Cohen, ‘How Millennia of Cleopatra Portrayals Reveal Evolving Perceptions of Sex, Women, and Race,’ *Artsy*, May 6, 2018, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-millennia-cleopatra-portrayals-reveal-evolving-perceptions-sex-women-race>. Accessed 12 May 2018. See also: S. Schiff, *Smithsonian magazine*, December 2010, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rehabilitating-cleopatra-70613486/>. Accessed 12 May 2018.

¹¹⁹ Carroll, Who Was Mary Magdalene?

¹²⁰ Anne Hollander discusses how in the seventeenth century, breasts were equally synonymous with fleshly pleasure as spiritual ‘disorder’ and maternal agencies. See: A. Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1993, p. 197-199.

painted gestures. These gestures take shape as a circular garland that darkens at the periphery of the composition¹²¹ forming an alternative protective armature (fig. 7, right; fig. 8).

Paintings of Mary Magdalene provide an ideal vehicle for quotation in that they present an image of a woman who is framed as both laudable and ignoble in her compositeness. Like any cult figure, she is subjected to a spectrum of classifications and representations. As James Carroll suggests, ambiguities surrounding Mary Magdalene's character were compounded across time as her image was enlisted in one power struggle after another, and twisted accordingly.¹²² These varying interpretations and presentations of Mary Magdalene are reflected in a range of painterly responses that point to the equivocal status of figurative¹²³ painting as an enduring, but heavily loaded genre.¹²⁴

As a contemporary genre, figurative painting is encumbered by the sheer volume and intractability of historicised representations of human life and bodies, and the frequent deployment of bodily platitudes. Even in a critical context, the unremitting diagnoses that figurative painting is dead or dying (or has been rehabilitated and is once again more important/vital than ever before) suggests constant challenges to the form.¹²⁵ In a sense, figurative painting is 'functionally burdened' – like Mary Magdalene herself, it is constantly conscripted into ideologies around identity, morality, power and politics. In light of this, my studio research presents images of Mary Magdalene and Cleopatra as symbols – they are bodies that are taken over, or taken up by other forces, demonstrating both their historicity as subjects of art, and the textuality of history.¹²⁶

¹²¹ I. Sapir, 'Blind Suffering: Ribera's Non-Visual Epistemology of Martyrdom', *Open Arts Journal*, Issue 4, Winter 2014 –15, www.openartsjournal.org. Accessed 2 February 2018.

¹²² Carroll, 'Who Was Mary Magdalene?'

¹²³ I use the term figurative broadly to refer to paintings of people, as opposed to the more general definition of figurative which is interchangeable with terms such as "representational", or "representing forms that are recognizably derived from life."

¹²⁴ Numerous publications highlight the continued currency of figurative painting, such as *Painting People*, *Picturing People*, *A Brush with the Real: Figurative painting today*, *Body of Art*, *Bodies of Work*, etc. and exhibitions such as *Dear Painter*, *Paint Me: Painting the Figure Since Late Picabia* (Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthalle Vienna, 2002; Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, 2003); *Paint Made Flesh* (Frist Centre for the Visual Arts, Nashville; The Phillips Collection, Washington DC; Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, NY, 2009); *Nightfall: New Tendencies in Figurative Painting* (MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts, Debrecen, Hungary, 2012-13), *The New Frontiers of Painting* (Fondazione Stelline, Milan, Italy, 2017-18,); *All Too Human: Bacon, Freud And A Century Of Painting Life*, (Tate Britain, London, England, 2018).

¹²⁵ For example, modernism's rejection of history and conservative values (such as realistic depictions of subjects), its tendency toward abstraction, and its emphasis on materials, techniques and processes were particularly unkind to figurative painting, though some painters such as Alice Neel, Chuck Close, Willem de Kooning and Philip Pearlstein continued their engagement with it in the modernist era.

¹²⁶ This concept is informed by Louis Montrose and Stephen Greenblatt's ideas of 'New Historicism'. See: S. Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', whose ideas are engaged with later in the chapter. I am grateful to David Eastwood for drawing my attention to this reference.

Chapter Three: Breaking

Iconoclastic Gestures

In this project, the ‘iconoclastic gesture’ refers to the act of image breaking in a way that presupposes the power of images while suggesting a sceptical attitude to what they may be proposing.¹²⁷ A ‘secular iconoclasm’ suggests an engagement with the material structures of images, as opposed to the external or metaphysical references that icons and images call to mind. In my theorisation, I include the ‘aesthetic canon’ as a kind of image.¹²⁸

In my studio research, images are primarily sourced from art historical paintings which are acted upon in ways intended to destabilise their meaning, or dilute their conclusiveness; an idea informed by Bruno Latour’s proposition that “the more the human hand can be seen as having worked on an image, the weaker is the image’s claim to offer truth.”¹²⁹ At the same time, the labour of building up many layers is valued as an index of bodily gesture and processual trace (discussed later in relation to Benjamin’s theories of aura and trace). The primary aim of using techniques of erasure such as scraping, ‘blurring’ and over-painting is to find new combinations of images¹³⁰ latent in the strata of the surface. This antagonism toward the image is broadly directed at the tropes and assumptions of representation itself; in particular, imagery sourced from Baroque paintings. To approach the painted surface iconoclastically is to toy with the illusions inherent in representation, the assurances of style, and the authority of the painted surface. The rupture of the image through mark-making, the by-products of process, the serendipity of ‘mistakes,’ and the remixing of one’s own oeuvre are all privileged in the quest to break with a straightforward facture and assimilation of images and their meanings.

The iconoclastic gesture is in some ways a destructive act, but it is also, as suggested previously, a form of sensuous demystification – a method of inquiry more probing than damaging. In my studio research, this touch-based search for information is underpinned by the impulse to explore, to risk, to understand and to test the presentation layer of paintings. Moreover, it is intended to work in conjunction with the ‘non-destructive’ investigation of the surface with advanced imaging techniques.

¹²⁷ Painting is linked etymologically to both image and icon: *ikon* (1570’s), meaning ‘image, figure, picture,’ also ‘statue,’ from Latin *icon*. From Greek *eikon*- likeness, image, portrait; image in a mirror; a semblance, phantom image; related to *eikenai* ‘be like, look like’. More poetically, I connect this to the idea that painting has an evolving ‘image’ that is moved forward by ‘breaking’ with tradition.

¹²⁸ The aesthetic canon is often conflated with classical conceptions of beauty (particularly in the renaissance period) and referred to the integration of parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions – especially in the figure.

¹²⁹ B. Latour, *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image-Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, P. Weibel (ed.), Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2002, p. 7.

¹³⁰ In this context, ‘image’ should be understood broadly: brush marks, pattern and erasures are images.

In the previous chapter I discussed a Baroque sensibility and some of the common subjects and stories that draw on this sensibility, focussing on the symbolic aspects of touch/tactility. In this chapter I examine how the iconoclastic gesture enacted on an artwork can act as a metaphor for change or re-signification through tactile engagement. More broadly, I reference Boris Groys' idea that iconoclasm can function as a mechanism of historical innovation by destroying old values and introducing new ones in their place.¹³¹ My discussion is also informed by Bruno Latour's catalogue essay which accompanied the exhibition entitled *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image-Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (ZKM Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2002). The catalogue *Iconoclasm* includes texts from over seventy contributors, including many specialists in the field of iconoclasm and the image, such as Dario Gamboni, Hans Belting, and Boris Groys.

In his summation of the exhibition themes, Latour makes a distinction between iconoclasm as having "a clear intent for the destruction or the demise of an image" and "iconoclasm" as "uncertainty about what is committed when an image – from science, religion or art – is being smashed."¹³² This rationale resonates with my research in that Latour examines both the function and effect of iconoclastic gestures, and suggests that in spite of the passion associated with the iconoclastic act, both the motives and outcomes are not always clear.

In relation to iconoclasm and figuration, I use the concept of 'the fragmented body' as a framework to scaffold ideas around the symbolic and affective aspects of iconoclasm. The chapter ends with an analysis of the work of contemporary painter Nicola Samori¹³³ using another biblical narrative, the story of Doubting Thomas, which, like accounts of Mary Magdalene, employs the emblem of touch. When discussing Samori's work I focus on the role of faith/proof as drivers of desire for substantiation in regard to bodily and painterly materialisation. Like the iconoclastic gesture, ideas around faith can be understood here in the broadest sense as being common to both religious and secular thinking, prompting a way of constructing and conceptualising that is both searching and performative (even ritualistic) in nature.

Iconoclasm has been approached from various angles in a scholarly context, and a diverse body of literature covers its religious, historical, cultural, political, semiological, and aesthetic domains. Hence, by definition, iconoclasm is an expansive field, which can be evidenced by the volume of

¹³¹ B. Groys, 'Iconoclasm as an artistic device: Iconoclastic Strategies in Film', *Art Power*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 2008, p. 68.

¹³² B. Latour, 'What is Iconoclasm? or Is there a world beyond the image wars?', <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/64>. Accessed 14 May 2018.

¹³³ The discussion of Samori's work is informed by an interview I conducted with him in his studio in Bagnacavallo, Italy in September 2017.

research and exhibitions dedicated to the subject.¹³⁴ In my practice-based research, image breaking is framed as a bodily counterpart to the apparatus of advanced imaging practices in order to challenge the authority of the painted surface. In other words, my own physical touch on the surface of paintings is a means to intervene and create ambiguity in the reading of images, while also producing a form of manual ‘data’ that may be visualised and enhanced with advanced techniques. The case studies I have selected in relation to the iconoclastic gesture focus on the idea of sign transformation/re-signification over time through different episodes of engagement; often with very different intentions. In many cases, this continued engagement with the meaning of icons/images augments their status as cultural items, where they become symbols of contestation, transformation and reclamation. In the context of religious and political iconoclasm, Fabio Rambelli and Eric Reinders frame this idea concisely in their essay ‘The Buddha Head at Kōfukuji Temple (Nara, Japan)’. They state:

Iconoclasm is rarely a single act which totally obliterates the object. In the history of iconoclasm, icons have been painted over, defaced with slogans, hung upside-down, had horns attached, thrown in pig sties, beheaded, dragged around streets, buried, and displayed as examples of idolatry or superstition. Icons have been damaged through repeated, devout touching. All of these behaviours are reactions to the icon, whether worshipful or hostile or curatorial or carnivalesque. In many cases, the history of an icon includes repeated and overlapping moments of contestation, appropriation, damage, restoration and amnesia.¹³⁵

In my painting practice, some of the processes outlined in the citation above are brought together: appropriation, restoration and forgetting, are all enacted as part of the drive to embed the materiality of the paintings with conflicting energies.

The Iconoclastic gesture and art

In my research, the iconoclastic action of erasure contravenes the aim of art conservation to ‘preserve,’ activating a kind of relational materiality whereby components of an artwork are rearranged and new meanings can be gleaned from resulting changes to their material and

¹³⁴ Beyond the examples discussed in the thesis, some recent exhibitions, conferences and texts that give an indication of the continued currency of this field are: Dario Gamboni’s research project on “Iconoclasm and Vandalism” at the Getty Research Institute, beginning 7 Sept 2017, which discusses the currency of iconoclasm and vandalism in art research. Gamboni is the author *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (1997). Exhibitions such as: *Iconoclasts: Art out of the Mainstream*, exhibition, Saatchi gallery, 27 September 2017 - 6 March 2018. Recent books: J. Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2016. Journal articles: M. O’Neil, E. Reinders, L. Brubaker, R. Clay, and S. Boldrick, ‘The New Iconoclasm,’ *Material Religion, The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, vol. 10, issue 3, 2014, p. 377-385.
¹³⁵ F. Rambelli and E. Reinders, ‘The Buddha Head at Kōfukuji Temple (Nara, Japan)’ in S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker, R. Clay (eds.), *Striking Images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*, Ashgate, 2013, p. 39-40.

temporal order. Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased De Kooning* (fig. 9) provides an example of this idea in modern art. In this case, the stakes of the iconoclastic gesture are necessarily high because the starting point is another artists' work; the process of re-signification is therefore reliant upon the artistic significance of both the original author of the artwork, and the intervening artist. Rauschenberg's gesture was also 'reversed' through infrared imaging, a process that might also be viewed as iconoclastic in its 'restoration' of de Kooning's original drawing (explored later in the chapter).



Figure 9: Robert Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953)
Traces of drawing media on paper with label and gilded frame,
64.14cm x 55.25cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

“With ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing’ (1953), Rauschenberg set out to discover whether an artwork could be produced entirely through erasure—an act focused on the removal of marks rather than their accumulation.”¹³⁶ Rauschenberg first tried erasing his own drawings but eventually decided that for the experiment to be conceptually rigorous he should start with an artwork that was already artistically significant. In 1953, Rauschenberg approached Willem de Kooning, an artist for whom he had great respect, and asked him for a drawing that he could erase; de Kooning agreed to give him one after some hesitancy, eventually deciding to contribute a drawing “he

¹³⁶ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, overview of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.298>. Accessed 2 August 2015.

would really miss.”¹³⁷ Rauschenberg proceeded to erase the drawing over a period of weeks, using multiple erasers. When he had completed the meticulous and laborious erasure, he and artist Jasper Johns decided to label and frame the work in a way that elevated it to museum artefact, with Johns inscribing the following words below the now-absent de Kooning drawing: “ERASED de KOONING DRAWING, ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG, 1953.”¹³⁸ Rauschenberg said about the work:

I had been working for some time at erasing, with the idea that I wanted to create a work of art by that method ... Not just by deleting certain lines, you understand, but by erasing the whole thing. If it was my own work being erased, then the erasing would only be half the process, and I wanted it to be the whole. Anyway, I realized that it had to be something by someone who everybody agreed was great, and the most logical person for that was de Kooning.¹³⁹

Sarah Roberts, in her discussion of Rauschenberg’s artwork, notes that “The story of how ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing’ came into being is central to its reception and reputation, and cannot be separated from the work itself.”¹⁴⁰ In support of this idea, Roberts refers to Walter Hopps, who claims that an understanding of *Erased de Kooning Drawing* “is inextricably embedded in the viewer’s explicit knowledge of the process of making.”¹⁴¹ The vigorous labour of obliterating an image through erasure, and the resulting sensory satisfaction of removal is something translatable to the viewer in the simplest terms, setting up a basic conflict between the artistic value of the original and the newly ascribed value of its dramatically changed status – its virtual disappearance.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Robert Rauschenberg on “*Erased de Kooning*” [online video] (Rauschenberg recounts the meeting with de Kooning in which he asked for a drawing to erase), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Published 27 April 2010. <http://www.sfmoma.org/video>. Accessed 15 August 2016.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ C. Tomkins, ‘Profiles: Moving Out,’ *The New Yorker*, February 29, 1964, p. 66, as cited in S. Roberts, ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing’, July 2013, <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.298/essay/erased-de-kooning-drawing/#fn-15>. Accessed 6 April 2015.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ W. Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, Houston, Menil Foundation and Houston Fine Art Press, 1991, p. 160, cited in Roberts, ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing.’

¹⁴² Rauschenberg claimed it required several weeks of work and many different types of eraser to rub out the crayon, ink, charcoal and pencil of the original drawing. He said, “in the end it really worked. I liked the result. I felt it was a legitimate work of art, created by the technique of erasing.” See: J. Mundy ‘Drawing Away’, in *The Gallery of Lost Art*, online exhibition, the Tate, <http://galleryoflostart.com/>. Accessed 2 April 2015.



Figure 10: Digitally enhanced infrared scan of Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953), showing traces of the original drawing by Willem de Kooning. Visible light scan: Ben Blackwell, 2010; Infrared scan and processing: Robin D. Myers, 2010. Image courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

In 2010, the San Francisco Museum of Art's Elise S. Haas Conservation Studio created an infrared digital partial reconstruction of the lost image, which highlighted traces of the original de Kooning drawing (fig. 10). In a fortuitous intersection of the two major themes in my research, Rauschenberg's iconoclastic gesture of removing de Kooning's drawing was put under the microscope using infrared imaging, a technique known for its capacity to reveal underdrawings.¹⁴³ The image revealed de Kooning's original drawing, making visible several different images, such as quasi-abstract creatures at the centre and top, and a schematic female figure at the bottom left – typical de Kooning motifs from this period. While the exact characteristics of the drawing could not be precisely determined, this is of little consequence since “the effect of ‘Erased de Kooning

¹⁴³ The main infrared imaging process used in the field of art conservation is Infrared Reflectography (IRR): a “technique for viewing the underdrawing and early paint stages of a painting using cameras equipped with infrared-sensitive detectors. Related to infrared photography, infrared reflectography allows greater penetration of the paint layers by using wavelengths of infrared radiation that are slightly longer than those used in infrared photography. Combined with advanced optics, detectors, and digitization equipment, a clearer image of underlying paint layers and drawing is achieved. See: Art institute Chicago, <http://www.artic.edu/collections/conservation/revealing-picasso-conservation-project/glossary>. Accessed 10 May 2018.

Drawing’ relies much more on the weight of de Kooning’s reputation than it does on the specifics or relative significance of the original artwork he contributed.”¹⁴⁴

‘Image breaking’ in this context suggests a tension between destruction and creation – a cycle of remediation. This re-signification over time contributes to the atemporal or transhistorical dimension of artworks by using gestures of interference and erasure that re-contextualise the intention, materiality, and temporal sequence of the original artwork. In Boris Groys’ book *Art Power* he writes: “there can be no question of ‘ultimately’: history presents itself as a sequence of revaluations of values without any discernible overarching direction.”¹⁴⁵ Rauschenberg’s iconoclastic gesture was aimed at turning art world values upon themselves through the act of erasure. It “established an enduring framework for understanding *Erased de Kooning Drawing* not only as a turning point for Rauschenberg but also as a necessary decalcification of art itself,”¹⁴⁶ emphasising the act of erasure as a conceptual activity aimed not just at a single artwork, but at the elevated status of art itself.

The Fragmented Body

The Tate Britain exhibition *Art Under Attack* (2014) explored how the act of damaging art can spring from various motives.¹⁴⁷ The exhibition examined the history of physical attacks on art in Britain from the sixteenth century to the present and was divided into three main themes reflecting common motivations for damaging or destroying art: namely for religious, political, and aesthetic reasons. The exhibition presented research into some of the underlying agendas of these kinds of assaults through a display of objects, paintings, sculpture and archival material.

¹⁴⁴ Roberts, ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing’.

¹⁴⁵ Groys, 2008, p. 69.

¹⁴⁶ Roberts, ‘Erased de Kooning Drawing’.

¹⁴⁷ *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm*, 2 October 2013 – 5 January 2014 held at the Tate Britain: curated by Tabitha Barber and Dr Stacy Boldrick with Dr Ruth Kenny and Sofia Karamani. See: T. Barber and S. Boldrick (eds.) *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm*, Tate Britain, exh. cat., New York, Harry N. Abrams, 2014.



Figure 11: Detail of the portrait of Henry James O.M. after being damaged by a suffragist, May 1914. Silver gelatin print mounted on card, 25 x 28.3 cm. Image courtesy Royal Academy of Arts, London.

In Jonathan Griffin's essay for *Art Under Attack*, he describes the incident when suffragist Mary Wood took a cleaver to John Singer Sargent's portrait of writer Henry James in 1914. He explains, "The iconoclasm of figurative images is often cited as evidence of society's repressed but deeply rooted belief in the animism of objects – as if to slash a portrait with a knife was to harm the subject itself."¹⁴⁸ Henry James himself admitted to feeling disturbed by Mary Wood's actions, claiming he felt "very scalped and disfigured"¹⁴⁹ (see fig. 11). In a telling conflation of the human body with the body of paint, James' choice of words suggests actual harm suffered by the sitter. In a comparable case of vandalism, the *Rokeby Venus*, Velázquez' famous nude, was slashed by suffragist Mary Richardson (fig. 12). Like Mary Wood she also used a meat cleaver, emphasising the painted body as flesh.¹⁵⁰ In reports of the incident at the time it was clear that both the general public and Mary Richardson herself saw the picture as more than just an artwork, demonstrating how earnestly the iconoclast (and their audiences) take the icon's claims to power. Richardson said, "I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest."¹⁵¹ She added in a 1952 interview that she "didn't like the way men visitors gaped at it

¹⁴⁸ J. Griffin, 'The seeds of destruction,' *Tate Etc*, issue 29, Autumn 2013, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/seeds-destruction>. Accessed 12 April 2015.

¹⁴⁹ H. James, *Letters, Volume 4: 1895-1916*, in L. Edel (ed.), Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 712.

¹⁵⁰ 'National Gallery Outrage,' *The Times*, 11 March 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/33246742/>. Accessed 13 April 2015.

¹⁵¹ 'Miss Richardson's Statement,' *The Times*, 11 March 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/33246742/>. Accessed 12 April 2015.

all day long.”¹⁵² Some journalists framed descriptions of Richardson’s attack in terms of a ‘murder’ (she was nicknamed “Slasher Mary”) and used phrases that invoked injuries inflicted on an actual female body, rather than on a pictorial representation of it.¹⁵³ For instance, an article in *The Times* from 1914 described how the painting sustained a “cruel wound in the neck”, as well as “incisions to the shoulders and back.”¹⁵⁴

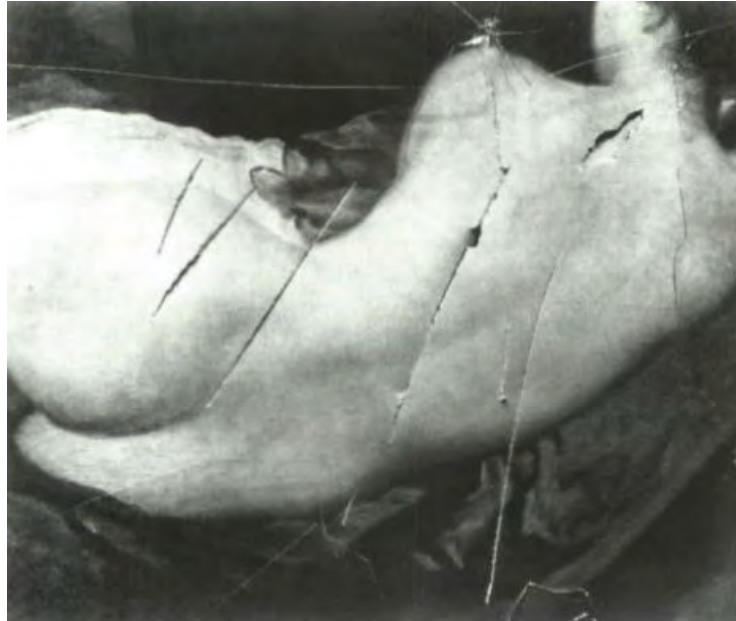


Figure 12: Detail of *The Toilet of Venus* (or, *Rokeby Venus*) by Velázquez showing damage sustained in the attack by suffragette Mary Richardson in 1914, The National Gallery, London.

Art historian Richard Clay proposes that iconoclasm is a form of “sign transformation,” which he defines more specifically as the “moment in ongoing processes of discursive sign transformation that precede, accompany and proceed from moments of physical breaking.”¹⁵⁵ He states that historically, iconoclasts were not mere vandals; rather “they understood art in very sophisticated ways and they used alteration of it as a way of mediating complex power struggles they were deeply passionate about.”¹⁵⁶ In the case of the *Rokeby Venus*, a statement from suffragette activist Annie Hunt sums up this idea when she says, “This picture will have an added value and be of great historical interest, because it has been honoured by the attention of a militant

¹⁵² ‘Interview with Mary Richardson,’ *London Star*, 22 February 1952, in L. Steinberg, ‘Art and Science: Do They Need to be Yoked?’ in S. R. Graubard (ed.), *Art and Science*, Lanham MD, University Press of America, 1986, p. 10.

¹⁵³ *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, http://worldheritage.org/articles/eng/Rokeby_Venus. Accessed March 24, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 11 March 1914, p. 4, and *The Times*, 11 March 1914, p. 9, cited in L. Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality*, Routledge, 1992, p. 38-39.

¹⁵⁵ R. Clay, *Striking Images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*, S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker, R. Clay (eds.), Ashgate Publishing, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Arts at Birmingham*, [online video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUWjx3apm8Y>. Accessed 24 March 2015.

[suffragette].”¹⁵⁷ Both Mary Wood’s attack on the Henry James portrait, and Mary Richardson’s alteration of the *Rokeby Venus*, became banner actions for the Suffragist movement’s “Votes for Women” campaign and left a lasting political and social legacy.

Stacey Boldrick, one of the curators of *Art Under Attack*, and co-editor of several texts on iconoclasm,¹⁵⁸ notes the tangible relationship between bodies, both depicted and real, and power. She states, “The parallels between the meanings for and implications of iconoclastic actions and the body are significant.”¹⁵⁹ Themes of punishment, dismemberment and burial have all been explored in relation to iconoclasm in which “sculptural bodies were often subjected to the same forms of systematic abuse and disempowerment as living bodies were.”¹⁶⁰ Paintings, like bodies, ‘scar’ with inscribed marks; they hold gestures. However, the scars that evidence physical punishment on a painting outdistance real bodies, carrying the act for hundreds of years into future contexts. This speaks to the transformative potential of the iconoclastic gesture; the way it contributes to new meanings through physical interference and repeated episodes of material engagement.

An iconoclastic approach to image making can emerge in contemporary artistic practice despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that “we are a museum going generation who have been brought up to think about art’s value in particular ways.”¹⁶¹ In my project, image breaking as a technique is aimed at dislodging the internal power structure of my own paintings, and the particular holding ground that figurative images have within my practice. Moreover, as mentioned previously, it is a means of revealing hitherto unknown combinations of images in the surface. The visual language of iconoclasm as both constructive and deconstructive brings into focus the haptic claim on the surface of paintings and the sensual possession of the object through ‘breakage.’ The intimacy with material (for example, peeling, pulling and scraping paint) and the physical force of erasure elicit a sense of live-action as a kind of knowing with the body.

Rebecca Schneider, in her discussion of the body as a carrier of memory and a conduit for re-enactment, states: “The resiliently irruptive rub and call of live bodies (like biological machines of affective transmission) insist that physical acts are a means for knowing, bodies are sites for

¹⁵⁷ A. Hunt, ‘The Suffragist,’ 31 July 1914, p. 122, cited in L. Mohamed, ‘Suffragettes: The Political Value of Iconoclastic Acts’ in T. Barber and S. Boldrick (eds.), *Art Under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm*, exh. cat., Tate Publishing, 2013, p. 115.

¹⁵⁸ See for example: S. Boldrick, M. O’Neil et al., ‘In Conversation: The New Iconoclasm,’ *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, April 29, 2015, p. 376-385, and: *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, Ashgate, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ S. Boldrick, preface, in S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker and R. Clay (eds.), *Striking Images, Iconoclasms Past and Present*, Surrey, England, Ashgate, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *Arts at Birmingham*, [online video], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUWjx3apm8Y>. Accessed 24 March 2015.

transmission even if, simultaneously, they are also manipulators of error and forgetting. Bodies engaged in repetition are boisterous articulators [*sic*] of a liveness that just won't quit."¹⁶² Schneider suggests that the body is capable of investing the image with its own lucidity and immediacy.

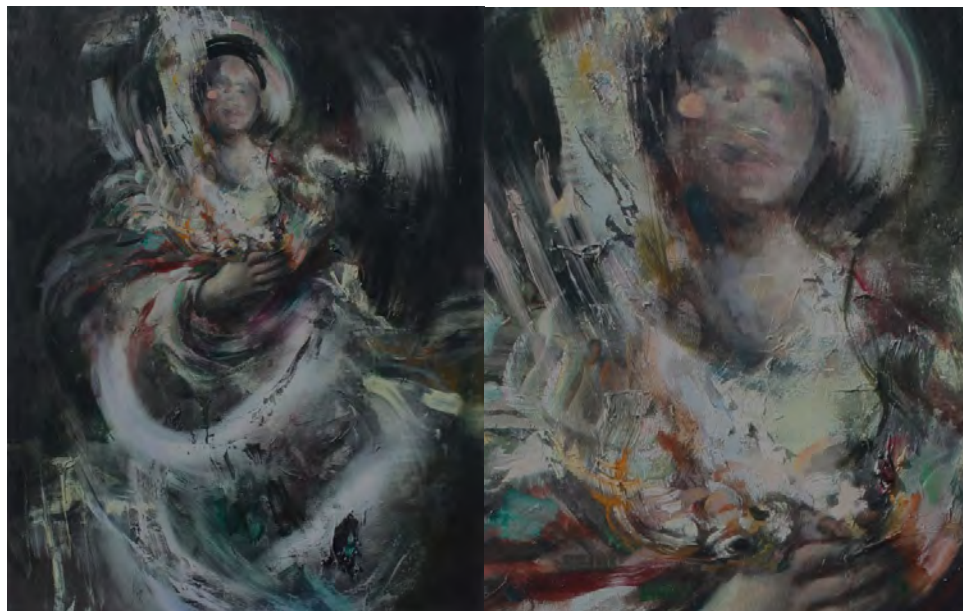


Figure 13: Chelsea Lehmann, *Sondage*, 2015, oil and enamel aerosol on linen, 103 x 81cm. Right: detail. Images courtesy the artist.

My painting *Sondage* (fig. 13) shows hand and finger marks as ‘over-painting’. The physical gesture is intended as a kind of disruptive element in the making process, a “manipulator of error” and “articulator of liveness,” to use Schneider’s aforementioned terms. The finger marks dragged across the surface in close proximity to the portrait (fig. 13, right) underscore bodily gesture by blurring or covering the more technically precise gestures of adherence to the image underneath.

The iconoclastic gesture; in particular aggressive erasures, punctures and over-painting can be seen as a process contributing to the destabilisation of images of the body, challenging habituated readings of these images as legible by their external references. The painted surface can be likened to skin, and paint to flesh, bringing the viewer’s attention to both the artifice of painted bodies and the paradox produced by the mental synthesis of the image with reality (a kind of empathic association with the maimed ‘body’). Emily Braun, in her catalogue essay ‘Skinning the Paint’ which accompanied the exhibition *Paint Made Flesh* (2009) states:

In representing flesh, and with it the human face or naked body, [...] painters free themselves of conventional narrative and force the viewer to pursue the sequence of the artists’ own deep looking and their physical responses with the brush, rag,

¹⁶² R. Schneider, ‘Reenactment and Relative Pain’ in *Performing Remains: Art and war in times of theatrical re-enactment*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p. 38-39.

sponge, paper, and even hands. Making the paint work as flesh, not like it, [...] the canvas becomes a tactile, cutaneous surface, formed by layers of pigment subjected to peeling and surgical cuts and bearing all the organic traces of its making.¹⁶³



Figure 14: (Left) Chelsea Lehmann, *Litera*, 2013-2015, oil on linen on board, 51 x 35cm. (Right) Detail of work in progress. Images courtesy the artist.

Bodies are excessively represented and surveyed for all kinds of reasons. At the same time, the insistent ubiquity of images of the body in mass culture dulls our attention to them, particularly when one considers the homogenising effects of imaging strategies used in advertising. In *Litera* (fig. 14) I explore the question of whether it is possible to trigger ‘empathic’ sensations when the iconoclastic gesture is enacted on a painted body, asking: Do we sense painterly destruction or aggressive interference more acutely because we are perceiving it with our own bodies?

In his essay ‘The Cruel Practice of Art’ (1949), Georges Bataille states: “What attracts us in the destroyed object (in the very moment of destruction) is its power to call into question – and to undermine – the solidity of the subject.”¹⁶⁴ For Bataille, contravention through destruction is a means of disordering the object and by extension the beholder (he claims the sacrifice of the object is “only worthwhile insofar as it disorders us.”) Bataille proposes that “we cannot ourselves (the subject) directly lift the obstacle that ‘separates’ us. But we can, if we lift the obstacle that

¹⁶³ E. Braun, ‘Skinning the Paint,’ in M. W. Scala (ed.) *Paint Made Flesh*, exh. cat., Vanderbilt University Press, p. 29. Exhibition: *Paint Made Flesh*, Frist Art Museum, 23 January – 10 May 2009.

¹⁶⁴ G. Bataille, ‘The Cruel Practice of Art.’ Originally published in *Médecine de France* (June 1949), reprinted in G. Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. XI, Paris, Gallimard, 1988; translated and digitised by Supervert 32C inc., 2003, p. 5.

separates the object (the victim of sacrifice), participate in this denial of separation.”¹⁶⁵ In my studio practice this idea is imagined through the violent touch of the iconoclastic gesture (where the painted body is the ‘victim of sacrifice’) as if gestural interference could lift the obstacle between subject and object to let intensities pass from body to body through “forces of encounter.”¹⁶⁶ In this case, intensities travel from a body painted and erased, to the body of the viewer, eliciting a denial of separation between subject and object.

Echoing Bataille’s contention that destruction and fragmentation can operate as a site for new knowledge, and Boris Groys’ claim that iconoclasm can function as a mechanism of historical innovation, Linda Nochlin’s book, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a metaphor for Modernity* (1994), traces developments in art as they have been expressed in representations of the human figure fragmented, mutilated and fetishised:

The partial image, the “crop”, fragmentation, ruin and mutilation—all expressed nostalgia and grief for the loss of a vanished totality, a utopian wholeness. Often, such feelings were expressed in deliberate destructiveness and this became the new way of seeing: the notion of the modern.¹⁶⁷

These viewpoints work like ‘meta-structures’ that theorise the broken/fragmented body as a metaphor for regeneration. This highlights the methodological and critical potential of the iconoclastic gesture as a means of destabilisation, propelling new ideas. Christine Ross observes, “There is no contemporary art without a fundamental concern for the body.” She says, “while the body is everywhere in its various enactments as bodies, and while it has become a subject of great debate in art discourse, it easily evaporates despite its solidity and mass.”¹⁶⁸ Ross goes on to discuss how body debates centred on the dichotomy between foundationalist objectivism and a nihilistic relativism have informed the production and interpretation of contemporary art. She describes “a dichotomy or tension between the concomitant desire to produce the body as a tangible physicality leading to some truth about the subject and yet, the need to counter, deconstruct or historicise this desire.”¹⁶⁹

In my practice, I investigate this divide in which the body is perceived on the one hand as a physical reality located outside history and untouched by culture, and on the other hand as a construct susceptible to cultural, political and social influences; that is, the iconographic body. I see the iconoclastic gesture enacted on the body as a way to deal with the body as both a construct

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Seigworth and Greg, ‘An inventory of shimmers’, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ From the book summary, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a metaphor for Modernity*, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/31698535>. Accessed 20 January 2015.

¹⁶⁸ C. Ross, ‘The Paradoxical Bodies of Contemporary Art’, in *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, A. Jones (ed.), John Wiley & Sons, 2009, p. 378.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

in constant flux, and a corporeal force made tangible through the physical trace of the artist, inscribed into the solid mass of the painted surface. In my practice, the body as image is positioned at the centre of the destructive act in order to be reclaimed aesthetically, through balancing erasure as ‘abstraction’ with realistic/representational approaches. The process of reclamation individuates the painting, in which the always already composite body is declassified, de-natured and repossessed.

The Original of Laura

In my solo exhibition, *The Original of Laura*, held in 2015 (roughly half way through my PhD), I staged a presentation of paintings exploring the idea of mediation and affect in relation to the iconoclastic gesture enacted on the painted body. The exhibition took its title from Vladimir Nabokov’s last novel *The Original of Laura*, a work of fiction he was writing at the time of his death in 1977 and published posthumously some thirty years later.

The following excerpt from my catalogue essay lays out my intentions for the exhibition in relation to some of the questions Nabokov’s text raises, in particular the metaphoric operations of mediation through erasure and ‘losing the original’ (be that the original image, or the ‘originating’ hand of the author). Marijeta Bozovic, a specialist on the work of Nabokov, speculates that the “real spectres and doubles haunting *The Original of Laura* are Nabokov’s previous novels.”¹⁷⁰ In my research, the idea that previous artistic work haunts present work can be seen in the echoes of layers that reappear in the broken surface. More broadly, the artistic strategy of the iconoclastic gesture is a way to confront the ‘ghosts’ that haunt my own practice: the whole premise of the practice-based PhD is to move on/forward from previous ideas and processes. In the catalogue text, dramatic painterly gestures are conflated with the ‘erotics’ of erasure (echoing Nabokov’s ideas), suggesting that removing, disrupting, or breaking images (and the self) heightens the creative act to such an extent it can be compared with erotic desire.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ M. Bozovic, ‘Love, Death, Nabokov: Looking For *The Original Of Laura*,’ *Nabokov Online Journal*, Vol. V, 2011, p. 1-2.

¹⁷¹ In saying this I would like to eschew Freud’s idea of the “death drive,” rather, I am comparing the intensity of powerful desires in relation to ‘breaking’. The invocation of intense desire is also aimed at registering a kind of outlandish performativity. In *The Original of Laura*, Nabokov is mocking Freud’s idea of the death drive, (he was known to have disliked Freud’s theory). See: Vladimir Nabokov interviewed by Robert Hughes, ‘Why Nabokov Detests Freud’, *The New York Times*, 30 January 1966. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/02/lifetimes/nab-v-freud.html?mcubz=3>. Accessed 15 May 2015.

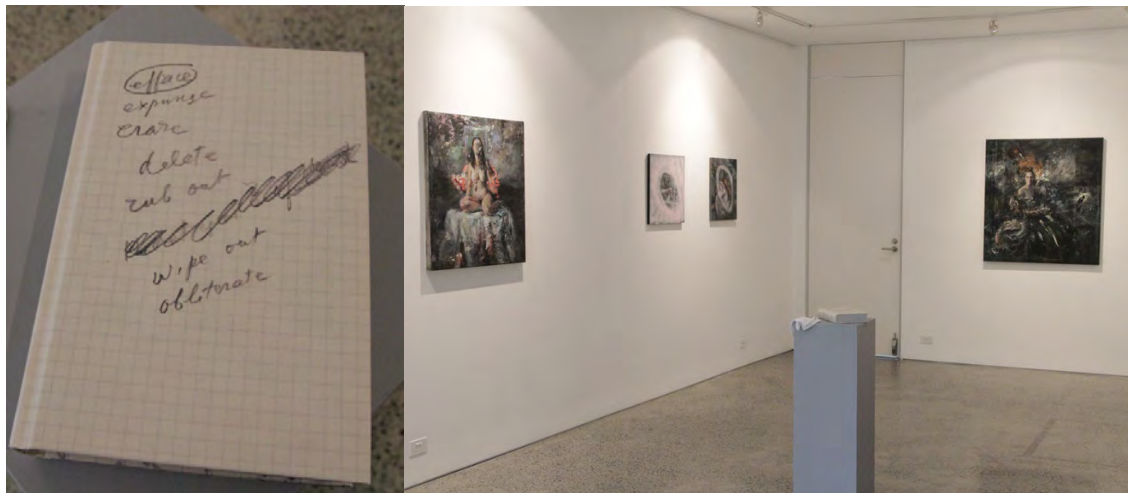


Figure 15: Chelsea Lehmann, *The Original of Laura* Exhibition, Interlude Gallery, Sydney, 13-22 August, 2015. Installation images courtesy the artist and Interlude Gallery.

'The Original of Laura', catalogue essay excerpt (modified for the thesis)

When Vladimir Nabokov died, the novel he was writing was a mere skeleton, a fragmented collection of index cards containing little beyond the basic plot and threads of narrative yet to be fleshed out. “Efface / expunge / erase / delete / rub out / X / wipe out / obliterate,” reads the last index card: “one verb or phrase of annihilation from the list has been quite literally scratched out – and equally absent, as critics will not tire of pointing out, is most of the novel.”¹⁷² This last card was probably instructional; Nabokov was known to be a perfectionist and had made it clear that upon his death, all unfinished work should be destroyed. In any case, the tone of this card certainly suits what remained of the narrative. The story attempts an imaginative exploration of death, where death is an erotic and artistic experience. One of several working titles for the novel was *Dying Is Fun*.¹⁷³

There is no missing it: sex = death. Considering how little there is of Laura, it is astonishing how much of the material is spent reinforcing the cliché: see the “more than masturbatory joy” of self-erasure (139) [...] and the claim that “the process of dying by auto-dissolution afforded the greatest ecstasy known to man.”¹⁷⁴

The story of *The Original of Laura* and its structural fragmentation literally and figuratively allude to the iconoclastic gesture. The many references to erasure and the eponymous protagonist’s elusive original remind us of what is absent or may become so, and this is amplified by the incomplete nature of the book. In *Laura*, Nabokov mocks his own characters as well as the cultural, theoretical and philosophical milieu that he wrote within. Most of all, he mocks himself

¹⁷² Bozovic, p. 1.

¹⁷³ Bozovic, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Bozovic, 2011, p. 6.

– the figure of his own speech, the broader figure of text as a mythogenic construct, even the human figure becomes a metaphor for a kind of literary necrophilia. In the voice of one of the lead characters Philip Wild, (“an enormously corpulent scholar”¹⁷⁵) “I hit upon the art of thinking away my body, my being, mind itself. To think away thought – luxurious suicide, delicious dissolution!”¹⁷⁶

In the paintings brought together in this exhibition, the iconoclastic gesture, underpinned by the twin impulses of seduction and erasure, mocks the image. The so-called ‘bad faith’ of images,¹⁷⁷ their double-dealing as both revealing and deceiving invites the situational scrutiny of the iconoclastic act to radically shift meaning; mobilising relations between material, image and haptic force. The image, having been deliberately maimed and reordered, is teased and tested in its ability to represent. In this exhibition, images of the body are situated at this moving nexus of material, image and haptic interference in order to explore ways in which iconoclasm is affective.

In Nabokov’s novel-within-the-novel (entitled *My Laura*) the character Ivan Vaughan effectively kills his mistress by writing her. There are also “a scattering of minor characters and back stories [that] involve love-murders and love-suicides.”¹⁷⁸ In the artworks for this exhibition, erasure more or less paints the picture and the love-hate-death trajectory of iconoclastic mediation ‘kills the original’. In this process the stamp of authorship shifts away from stylistic tropes and formal sensibilities to the haptic trace as an index of ‘self-erasure’, a step along the road to killing the author.

The iconoclastic gesture enacted on the painted body may elicit a complex affect in the viewer. On the one hand, it violently interferes with an image, metaphorically signifying maiming or death. This may elicit in the viewer sympathy sensations, or feelings of oppression and disempowerment. On the other hand, it points us back to the artifice of image making in all its material and processual liveliness, somewhat of an antidote to those sensations. The iconoclastic gesture also implicates the agency of a more simple critique by exposing the double-dealing of images, particularly ‘stock’ images within an artist’s oeuvre.

In the abovementioned cases, the iconoclastic gesture is seen to have affect, even if it may seem paradoxical, i.e., to feel something in response to ‘nothing’ (if erasure equals death). This may be partly due to the act itself being so loaded and partly because, being affected by an artwork that

¹⁷⁵ S. Marsh, ‘Vladimir Nabokov, his masterpiece and the burning question,’ *The Times*, February 14, 2008. Accessed 12 March 2015.

¹⁷⁶ V. Nabokov, *The Original of Laura*, cited in S. Marsh, 2008.

¹⁷⁷ This idea comes from *Mythologies*, Barthes semiology study on the process of myth creation. R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers, London, Vintage Books, Random House, 1993.

¹⁷⁸ Bozovic, p. 5.

has been physically reduced or moderated over time is to be simultaneously affected by its augmentation through multiple episodes of material engagement.

With such an obvious distortion of content, comes a problematisation of the particular contract between author and reader and this ambiguity informs the paintings in this exhibition: What is there? What was there? What has been taken away? What continues?

[End of catalogue excerpt]

These questions on which the catalogue text ends are philosophical provocations that underscore the temporal inconstancy and semiological uncertainties of the latent image. The following reading of my painting *Threshold* gives an example of these emphases and the methodological aspects of my research. The images of the painting show a ‘before’ and ‘after’ view, and are captioned *Threshold stage 2* (fig. 16) and *Threshold stage 1* (fig. 17) respectively. The final iteration of *Threshold* (fig. 16) is shown first for the purposes of discussion.



Figure 16: Chelsea Lehmann, *Threshold stage 2* (final iteration) 2015, oil on linen, 105 x 96cm. Image courtesy the artist and Ide Advanced Imaging Lab, Kyoto University, Japan.

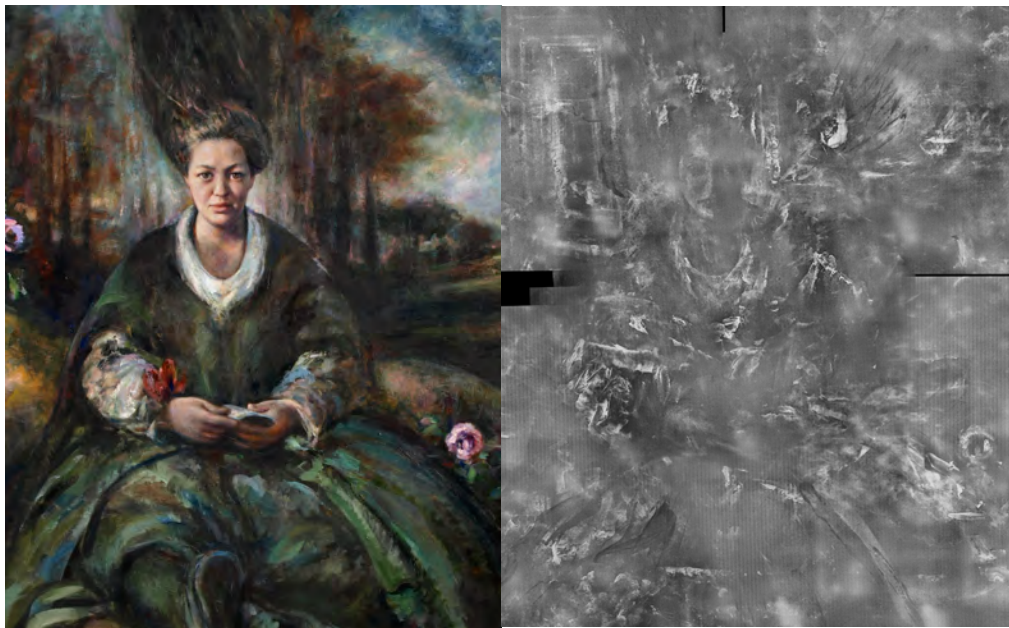


Figure 17: (Left) Chelsea Lehmann, *Threshold stage 1*, 2013, (detail) [original painting], oil on linen, 105 x 96cm. (Right) X-ray of *Threshold*, (detail). Images courtesy the artist and Bureau Veritas, Adelaide, South Australia (X-ray).

Threshold (final iteration, fig. 16) was the centrepiece artwork in *The Original of Laura* exhibition, and was one of the most dramatically transformed paintings throughout the course of its making. Importantly, it was also one of the first paintings of the project, and as such became a testing ground for ideas. I decided to paint over the original version of the painting because I felt it was burdened with conflicting narratives, and over-determined in terms of the surface finish. Interventions on this artwork included a series of over-paintings and erasures such as physical scratching, sanding; as well as chemical processes, which were followed by further additions of imagery.

The X-ray (fig. 17, right) was obtained in 2016, a year after I completed the painting. This decision was based on discussions with art conservators, particularly Helen Weidenhorfer at ArtLab Australia, who suggested that a longer period of oxidation increases the likelihood of paint becoming visible to X-ray. The X-ray of *Threshold* shows elements of the original painting (fig. 17, left) such as the rose on the middle right and the collar of the woman's garment. Some characteristics of the over-painting visible in the final iteration (fig. 16) are also captured in the X-ray, such as the scratch marks on the top right, and the dark, angled marks on the lower left showing where paint layers were corroded with paint stripper – these marks appear due to X-rays penetrating the surface at a greater depth, creating dark patches. The X-ray inscribes detail according to the chemical constituents of the pigments used; hence, images such as the rose (as well as a bird wing, and a doorway) once buried in the surface, are rendered visible in the X-ray due to the heavy metals in the various pigments used to paint these areas. The source images for

the original painting included a photograph of fellow artist Deborah Paauwe ‘grafted’ onto appropriated elements from Velázquez’ *Portrait of Francisco Lezcano* (1643–1645) and *Still Life with Swan and Game before a Country Estate* by Jan Weenix (1685). Therefore, even before the over-painting and erasures (pictured fig. 18), the painting was a composite of both art historical and contemporary sources.



Figure 18: Chelsea Lehmann, images of *Threshold* in progress, showing erasures and over-painting, 2014-2015. Images courtesy the artist.

The protracted course of painterly interference in *Threshold* explores a discontinuous process of destruction and creation in which deliberation and accident co-constitute the surface, creating a palimpsest of fast and slow gestures. This method required balancing strategy against impulse through the contrast of careful tonal modelling and brute erasures. It also necessitated a general understanding of the electromagnetic spectrum, and the elemental properties of pigments to anticipate the kinds of conjunctures that could later be found with X-ray.

The art historical references in *Threshold* were used as a symbolic target for the iconoclastic gesture, as a way to work against the value systems assigned to art historical paintings in museological, institutional, and market-based contexts. Whether in a public or private context, iconoclastic gestures touch on the role of violence and punishment, intentionality and memory, ruins and relics; and describe acts as diverse as mishandling art, as well as covering,

marking, reframing and relocating it.¹⁷⁹ The tension between destruction and creation is intensified when images of the body (both art historical and contemporary) are the focal point. The broken image of the body is attributed a new complexity which parallels the instability of the body as a cultural construct. Over-painting and erasures reveal conjunctures of images, or ‘composite bodies’ within the painted surface, metaphorically signifying the operations of bodily constructs as diverse, provisional, and always live.

Nicola Samorì: Transgressing the Surface

The work of Nicola Samorì contrasts technical virtuosity with dramatic erasures and interventions performed on the image. Like my own work, Samorì quotes from Baroque paintings, particularly the work of Guido Reni (Italian) and Jusepe de Ribera (Spanish)¹⁸⁰ who were active in the early seventeenth century. Ribera was known as a *tenebrist* painter, meaning he employed the use of dramatic chiaroscuro, a popular technique during the Baroque period for ‘spot-lighting’ a scene. Both Reni and Ribera primarily painted religious works, as well as allegorical and mythological subjects.

As previously outlined, symbols and significations often cluster around ‘touch’, and ‘touch me not’ (*Noli me tangere*¹⁸¹) in Baroque narratives, particularly in paintings of Mary Magdalene and Doubting Thomas. The idea that touch is “a sensory instrument for those seeking faith”¹⁸² has been explored in ways that problematise the imperialism of sight/sense hierarchies that traditionally frame touch as base and bodily. In my reading of Samorì’s artwork, touch is a means to validate knowledge and contest/agitate history, encompassing both the re-privileging of touch in the sense hierarchy, and its relegation to the carnal and hedonistic.

Samorì states:

Every well-established language is the embodiment of a ghost that never ceases to push out the shape from within even when its image seems to be complete. I

¹⁷⁹ From the summary of the book (inside jacket), S. Boldrick, L. Brubaker, R. Clay (eds.), *Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present*, Ashgate, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Ribera moved to Rome from Spain in the high Baroque period but identified as Spanish. He was active in other parts of Italy in his mature years.

¹⁸¹ According to the bible passage in John 20:17 *Noli me tangere* (touch me not) is the phrase spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognized him after his resurrection. The biblical scene prompted a wide array of depictions in Christian art from Late Antiquity to the present. In the story Jesus establishes a gap, whereby Mary Magdalene must understand that the only possible way is faith, and that the hands cannot reach the person; “that it is from within, from within only, that we can approach Him.” See: M. Zundel, *Silence, parole de vie*, transcription of a speech given in 1959, ed. Anne Sigier, 1990, p. 129.

¹⁸² E. E. Benay and L.M. Rafanelli, *Faith, Gender and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli me tangere and Doubting Thomas*, Visual Culture in Early Modernity, Ashgate, 2015. The authors also explore the differing representational strategies employed by artists to depict touch, and the ways in which these strategies were shaped by gender, social class, and educational level. See also: E. E. Benay and L.M. Rafanelli (eds.) ‘Touch Me, Touch Me Not’, *Open Arts Journal*, issue 4, Winter 2014 -15, <https://openartsjournal.org/issue-4/>.

reconstruct the outcomes of the trials that have characterised these different seasons and I shake them while their bodies are still soft. None of these actions is an over-painting; each act is a re-writing conducted with after-the-fact wisdom, as if Holbein had made a deal with Appel in Ribera's shadow.¹⁸³

Here Samorì refers to painting, which dominates his oeuvre, a discipline in which he displays the kind of facility that has drawn international attention, recently evidenced by his inclusion in the 54th and 56th Venice Biennales as a representative artist for Italy. Samorì was also included in the aptly titled exhibition, *Iconoclash: The Conflict of Images*, in which a group of artists presented work in dialogue with sculptures, paintings and artefacts dating from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, held at the Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, Italy (2017-18).¹⁸⁴

In Samorì's allusion to painting's "well-established language" he applies a paradoxical metaphor, describing painting as "the embodiment of a ghost". This may point to art history's propensity to shadow all that comes after (living and working in Italy must certainly reinforce the sense of art historical ghosts), but also, that something so enduring as painting is always subject to transformation through hindsight; it "pushes out the shape from within even when its image seems complete" because it is constantly measured by the changing status of culture and of painting itself.

Samorì's statement then shifts to first person and a claim is set out; he states, "I reconstruct the trials that have characterised these different seasons (perhaps 'periods' or 'stages' would be a better translation) and I shake them while their bodies are still soft." This phrase is compelling in the way it refers to a forceful, potentially transgressive act, in which something is intervened with in its still-forming state. Reference is made to shaking the body of the artwork (the human body is thus implied) – an idea that can be equated with activating painting, to continue its life after a much-theorised death, to 'wake it up' to its tropes and conceits, or to snap it out of an immobilised state. In parallel with this idea, in an interview I conducted with the artist, Samorì states that "when you enter a museum, you have the impression of sleeping forms." Taking this analogy further, he says "images are spreading energy when they are under attack; they start existing

¹⁸³ N. Samorì, as cited in *Solo*, Collezione Coppola, No 1, May, MMXI, Vicenza, Italy, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ *Iconoclash: The Conflict of Images* (October 2017– January 2018), Museo di Castelvecchio, Italy. Exhibition summary, translated from the Italian: "The artists traverse the borderline that separates love and obsession for the image from a desire, which is also obsessive, to cancel it. You will find scarred images (Nazgol Ansarinia, Luca Bertolo, Jiri Kolar, Nicola Samorì, Mimmo Jodice), destroyed (Gianni Politi), buffered (Flavio Favelli, Vincenzo Simone), occluded (Jesse Ash, Francesco Carone), fragmented (Matteo Rubbi, Davide Trabucco), denied (Francesco Carone, Ryan Gander, Elad Lassry, Simon Starling), corroded (Paola Angelini, Stefano Arienti, Giulia Cenci, Paolo Gioli, Ketty la Rocca); others use the monochrome or the total absence of elements in answer to an information overload that generates a visual blackout (Alessandro di Pietro, Ryan Gander, Fabio Mauri, Mandla Reuter). Some of the artists involved have made this iconoclastic attitude central to their stylistic and conceptual approach."

again.”¹⁸⁵ This implies that paintings can effectively be resurrected and newly animated through forceful and repeated interventions.

To continue this corporeal metaphor, if the body is a stand-in such as an automaton or a doll, the gesture of interference denotes the curiosity of a child, in which case, shaking something might be a search for signs of life, to see what’s inside, or to ascertain whether the body is simply a vessel, a container of coins for instance, or of more ‘bodies’ (in the case of a Russian doll). A child might take the action further by breaking the doll open (I have witnessed my own child pull out the stuffing of a much-loved soft toy, declaring “but Mummy I was just looking for its heart!”). Another paradox is thus exposed, that of breaching the physical integrity of an object in a quest for further knowledge about the object’s function or proposed truths.

As previously examined, an idea pivotal to many scholars in the field of iconoclasm is that objects are not really destroyed by iconoclastic gestures, but simply transformed, their materiality transmogrified. In any case, one could argue that a reproduction or memory will always continue the image by another means. It can also be reasoned that an image or object is not simply changed, but enhanced through continued encounters – material, theoretical or political.¹⁸⁶ This is the case in the work of Samori; not only does he appropriate images but he contributes to new readings of them through iconoclastic gestures, sometimes over an extended period of time. To repeat his words, “none of these actions is an over-painting; each act is a re-writing conducted with after-the-fact wisdom.”¹⁸⁷

The allusion to both desire and doubt comes into play in Samori’s paintings; he frequently refers to desire and obsession as qualities that mark both his process, and his consumption of images. The desire to know through touch, while not always infused with doubt, can still be understood as a kind of yearning for something tangible and sensuous.

Unless I see in the hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.

(John 20: 25)

Then said he to Thomas, reach here your finger, and behold my hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

(John 20: 27)¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Nicola Samori, interviewed by Chelsea Lehmann in the artist’s studio, Bagnacavallo, Italy, September 29, 2017.

¹⁸⁶ This is a recurring theme in the aforementioned book *Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present*, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Samori, as cited previously.

¹⁸⁸ Bible hub, <http://biblehub.com/john/20-27.htm>. Accessed 10 December 2015.

This episode outlined in the New Testament refers to the apostle Thomas (of Doubting Thomas notoriety) who is searching for proof of Jesus' resurrection and appearance to the other apostles to allay his scepticism.¹⁸⁹ In her essay 'Attacks on Automata and Eviscerated Sculptures', Aura Satz uses this event as a paradigm for investigating how belief is substantiated in regard to objects, using specific historical examples.¹⁹⁰ Her argument pertains to how iconoclastic acts demand a performative response from the object, "be this the evidence of its miraculous powers or the exposure of its debased materiality."¹⁹¹

In a contemporary painting context, I speculate that the same demand for performativity from the painted object applies in the work of Nicola Samorì, in terms of the desire to expose a fragmented materiality. That is, he appears to ask of his own paintings a performance beyond the limits of his understanding in which attacking images is "a physical pleasure and a disaster at the same time."¹⁹² Samorì refers to the process and aftermath of this performance as a kind of "ground zero" and uses terms that signify the drama of the action, as well as his identification with the vulnerability of the painted image. For example, he suggests the iconoclastic gesture is "a tragedy for the equilibrium of images."¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8173>. Accessed 10 December 2015.

¹⁹⁰ A. Satz, 'Attacks on Automata and Eviscerated Sculpture,' in S. Bolderick and R. Clay (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Contested Objects, Contested Terms*, Ashgate, p. 35-36.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² N. Samorì, interview, 2017.

¹⁹³ Ibid.



Figure 19: Nicola Samorì punctures the surface of his painting in a studio visit/interview with Alberto Mattia Martini. Image courtesy the artist and artribunetv.



Figure 20: (Left) Nicola Samorì, *Ligne Robuste*, 2012, oil on wood, 117 x 22 x 38 cm (detail). (Right) *Ligne Robuste*, 2012, oil on wood, 117 x 22 x 38 cm. Images courtesy the artist.

In pursuit of ‘sensual possession’ of the object, Samorì executes an act that exposes the insides of the object, like Barthes’ *punctum*, a piercing moment that sets in motion an awareness of

breakage that, in this case, is shared by both artist and spectator.¹⁹⁴ However, this moment is highly orchestrated by the artist, if not entirely controlled – witness Samori perform a gaping tear with an index finger on a faithful reproduction of an Old Master portrait during a studio visit with Alberto Martini, (fig. 19).¹⁹⁵ Like Doubting Thomas, who explored Christ's wound with his finger, Samori's tactile probing of the surface produces a form of autoptic and 'sensorial gratification', albeit material rather than divine in nature.¹⁹⁶

In Samori's paintings, the mystique and authority of Old Master paintings are both subordinated and enhanced via the dialectical relationship of destruction and creation. The systematic abuse of these images in his work parallels some of the atrocities performed on living bodies in the name of religion and politics. This speaks to the iconographic tendencies of Master paintings, their aggregation into icons and more broadly to how icons create "patterns of cultural realisation, collective perceptions concerning political and social reality as well as their principles of order and structures of power."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Roland Barthes explored the idea of the *punctum* in his book *Camera Lucida* (1980). The book develops the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum* – "studium denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph, punctum denoting the wounding, personally touching detail which establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it." See: <http://www.arts.rpi.edu/~ruiz/AdvancedDigitalImagingSpring2014/Roland%20Barthes.htm>. Accessed 14 August, 2018.

¹⁹⁵ Nicola Samori interviewed by Alberto Martini, *artribunetv*, published 16 February 2013 (See: 6:25 minutes), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRLI5GboG1s>. Accessed 12 August 2015.

¹⁹⁶ This idea is informed by Allie Terry-Fritsch who examines Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* as a metaphor for witnessing and beholding, see: 'Proof in pierced flesh: Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* and the beholder of wounds in early modern Italy' in A. Terry-Fritsch and E. F. Labbie (eds.), *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Ashgate, 2012.

¹⁹⁷ *New Orientations for Democracy in Europe research collective*, 'Project ICONCLASH: Collective Icons and Democratic Governance in Europe,' <http://www.demokratiezentrum.org/index.php?id=257&L=1>. Accessed 10 December 2015.

Chapter Four: Tactility

Painting and the Tactile Gaze

This chapter looks at how advanced imaging techniques, such as X-ray and high-resolution scanning, inform the way artists and audiences perceive artworks and their reproductions. As part of my research, I examine selected case studies of advanced and analytical imaging in the field of cultural heritage and art conservation, and demonstrate how these kinds of techniques and images have influenced the making and perception of artworks. I ask questions such as: What are the aesthetic and perceptual implications of technologies of reproduction? How has our perception of artworks been informed by these techniques, and in what ways has this influenced contemporary art practice? I am interested in how these technologies and their outcomes can interact with, inspire, or even ‘be’ art.

In this chapter, I outline a definition of the ‘technological image’ and the ‘tactile gaze’: terms which help define the process and perception of painting in a way that makes the tactile explicit. I also discuss the relationship between technological images of paintings, and physical paintings as inherently tactile surfaces. These concepts are ultimately expanded through an exploration of the technological image in relation to Walter Benjamin’s aura and trace (Chapter Seven), particularly how this kind of seeing and making finds purchase in the interaction between the haptic and the optic.

The Technological Image

Analytical or ‘advanced’¹⁹⁸ imaging techniques such as high-resolution digital scanning, X-ray, and infrared analysis can expose hitherto unknown combinations of visual detail and material information within the surface of paintings. I use the term advanced imaging in a general sense to refer to techniques that employ state-of-the-art imaging instruments, for example, ultra-high-resolution scanners, and ‘scientific’ techniques (X-ray, infrared, X-ray Fluorescence, multispectral imaging).¹⁹⁹ These techniques are commonly employed in fields such as material science and art conservation. Advanced imaging techniques produce a special order of image that I refer to as a technological image. I distinguish this term from Vilém Flusser’s “technical image”

¹⁹⁸ In a different context Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) is often used to refer to airport aviation security imaging.

¹⁹⁹ X-ray fluorescence (XRF) is a non-destructive analytical technique used to determine the elemental composition of materials. See: www.thermofisher.com/us/en/home/industrial/spectroscopy-elemental-isotope-analysis/spectroscopy-elemental-isotope-analysis-learning-center/elemental-analysis-information/xrf-technology.html. Accessed 12 August 2017. A multispectral image is one that captures image data at specific frequencies across the electromagnetic spectrum. The wavelengths may be separated by filters or by the use of instruments that are sensitive to particular wavelengths, including light from frequencies beyond the visible light range, such as infrared: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multispectral_image. Accessed 2 July 2016.

by specifically focusing on these techniques in relation to painting; however my definition bears some similarity to the category Flusser defines as “technical images made by apparatuses”²⁰⁰ in terms of a concern with the indexical relationship between imaging practices and the specific characteristics of the images they generate.

The technological image, as I define it, makes a distinction between images produced by the technologies outlined above and those produced with standard photographic techniques commonly used in the reproduction of artworks. Technological images of paintings underscore the rich and complex relations between painting, technology, and the way we perceive more generally, especially qualities such as texture and depth. Focusing on this relation elicits a way of understanding the materiality and facture of paintings that can be characterised by an enhanced awareness of tactility and deep surfaces, while also highlighting the unique capacities of advanced imaging and visualisation to amplify this information and transform materiality into data. In my practice I explore ways of seeing and making that are closely aligned with the capacities of advanced imaging techniques as penetrative, analytical and capable of exposing latent information.

The concept of ‘tactile data’ arises in a contemporary setting whereby data can be understood as something tangible that we can both see and interact with in multi-modal ways.²⁰¹ Advanced images of paintings create big data – playfully referred to here as ‘barocco data’²⁰² invoking the idea of excess associated with the late Baroque and Rococo sensibility and unifying the idea of big data with the embellished quality of this historical period of painting. The richness of data in high-resolution images can be re-materialised in different forms, and at large scales in relation to the original, signaling the enhanced visualising capacities of technological imaging.

The technological image presents an alternative view of artworks, possessing a broad range of applications that expand the function of reproductions to operate as simple ‘substitutes.’ These applications include, but are not limited to: art authentication, preservation and conservation; material science research; cultural heritage digitization, and museum display. Advanced imaging is clearly important in these fields due to its capacity to authenticate and accurately document

²⁰⁰ Flusser makes a distinction between traditional/handmade images (analogue), technical images made by apparatuses, and ‘dialogical, interactive’ images (commonly understood as, or associated with digital images), all of which produce meaning in different ways. See: A. Mulder, ‘Meaning and Agency in the Universe of Technical Images,’ <http://www.flusserstudies.net/tags/technical-images>. Accessed 12 August 2017.

²⁰¹ There is a great deal of scholarship in this area, largely beyond the scope of this thesis. For a comprehensive discussion of this idea, see Eva Hornecker discussing ‘multimodal data representation and perception’ (lecture), Royal College of the Arts, London 24 September 2014. <http://tactiledata.net/>. Accessed 20 October 2017.

²⁰² *Barocco* is an alternative term for Baroque. In Italian, *barocco* means bizarre, and in Portuguese it means irregular pearl. I use the terms to imply both Baroque and Rococo styles.

significant artworks and cultural heritage. Extreme weather due to climate change, politically motivated destruction, as well as the impact of cultural tourism, are some of the factors that put vulnerable artefacts and site-based artworks at risk of damage or complete loss. Cutting-edge imaging technologies and archiving processes are capable of capturing these valuable cultural assets by creating large and versatile sets of data from which facsimiles can be produced and reproduced.

Using a transdisciplinary methodology, I explore some of the ways advanced imaging technologies and their outcomes can present, instigate, or even ‘be’ art, responding to selected examples of technological imaging applied to significant historical artworks, and to my own paintings produced as part of this practice-based research project. I argue that the way we perceive artworks and the way we perceive their digital counterparts in the form of technological images has been brought closer together by the capacities of advanced imaging; that is, the detailed and intimate view of paintings, magnified and multiplied by advanced imaging, promotes new understandings of painting through an expanded access to the painted surface. This new proximity of perceptual experience marks a palpable shift in the sensorial relations of touch and vision, in which, to use Jean Baudrillard’s terms, “the whole paradigm of the sensory has changed. The tactility here is not the organic sense of touch: it implies merely an epidermal contiguity of eye and image, the collapse of the aesthetic distance involved in looking.”²⁰³ The epidermal contiguity of eye and image suggests a skin-to-skin-like proximity, and this informs my overall approach to the painted surface.

Gazing and Beholding

What inaugurates touch in a tangible thing is not the production of the absolute untouchable void [...], but rather the capture in a hand of that movement and tempo that ‘effect the forming of tactile phenomena, as light delineates the configuration of a visible surface.’²⁰⁴

In relation to the painted surface, I am concerned with a way of seeing and making that engages a kind of sensory desire combined with a mediated, forensic looking—both from the ‘inside’ as painter, and the ‘outside’ as viewer. The tactile gaze is a term I have coined in order to explore this idea from both perspectives and to hone in on the sensuous production and apprehension of artworks as both direct and technologically mediated experiences. Gazing can be defined in

²⁰³ J. Baudrillard, ‘Xerox and Infinity,’ *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Verso, 1993, p. 55.

²⁰⁴ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, as cited in ‘translator’s preface’ in C. Lefort (ed.), *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis, Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. iv.

qualitative terms as “a long look, usually of a particular kind,”²⁰⁵ invoking the term ‘to behold’ (be+hold)²⁰⁶ suggesting sustained observation, and ‘imagining touching.’

The tactile gaze can be broadly understood as a mode of perceiving characterised by a visceral sense of tactility and texture – even in the absence of actual touch²⁰⁷ – while engendering qualities associated with temporality, authenticity and uniqueness (further discussed in the Chapter Seven of the thesis in relation to Walter Benjamin’s theorisation). These qualities are highlighted through the visualisation of deep texture and gestural/material traces within the artwork’s surface that are embedded over time and rendered visible in the technological image. More specifically, the tactile gaze describes a way of seeing in which the touch of light,²⁰⁸ the touch of the hand, and the stroke of the brush on an artwork’s surface are invoked or displayed in vivid detail through advanced imaging and visualization – imaging that ‘sees’ into, through, or beyond, the artwork’s presentation layer. This way of looking implies a deeper parsing of images by putting the observer in closer proximity to the material and processual aspects of art making.

The ability to retrieve the deeper textural and textual qualities of artworks using advanced imaging techniques and physical erasure is central to my theorisation. By using the term ‘textual’ I am referring to the artwork’s processual narrative, or ‘physical duration’ to use Walter Benjamin’s terminology.²⁰⁹ My research frames the artwork’s textual surface as live with shifting formations – physical/chemical, spatio-temporal and semiotic.

In the context of art discourse and aesthetics ‘the gaze’ generally refers to the standpoint of the viewer in relation to the viewed. As Jennifer Reinhardt states, “contemporary art criticism focuses on how the gaze is used as a vehicle for communication, and how [...] a gaze transmits information and assumptions about the viewer/viewed.”²¹⁰

The gaze is a form of regard that implicates power dynamics between the human subject and objects and takes for granted that perception is not merely passive reception. Theories of the gaze frequently stress the ‘mastery’ of vision over the aesthetic object and tend to refuse the separation

²⁰⁵ Cambridge English dictionary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gaze>. Accessed 10 October 2017.

²⁰⁶ The old English “behealdan” has many relevant connotations, such as “to hold, have, occupy, possess, keep, observe, consider, behold, look at, gaze on, see, signify, avail, effect, take care, beware, restrain, act, behave. It can also mean “to do/perform.” See: <http://www.engyes.com/en/dic-content/behealdan>. Accessed 11 June 2018.

²⁰⁷ Aristotle claimed that “touch has for its object both what is tangible and what is intangible” cited in J. Derrida, *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ See: “The forming of tactile phenomena, as light delineates the configuration of a visible surface” as previously, cited p. 75.

²⁰⁹ This idea is further elaborated in Chapter Seven of the thesis.

²¹⁰ J. Reinhardt, ‘Gaze’, The Chicago School of Media, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/gaze/>. Accessed 19 February 2017.

of desire from pleasure.²¹¹ In this context, desire may be predicated on the existence of an obstacle to gratification, and the impossibility of mastery/domination of the object. In the words of Jacques Lacan “the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object, but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision.”²¹² This suggests that while the gaze may be suffused with desire, mastery can never be fully achieved, because the object’s ‘otherness’ resists control.²¹³

In the context of this project, the object being gazed upon is the painting; its point of resistance is its ‘tactile wholeness’, that is, those aspects that are not fully present to the eye such as hidden textures, or painted marks/gestures that resist straightforward optical understanding, but are instead detected in more subtle, multisensory ways. In a similar vein, Laura Marks proposes that haptic visuality “implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing.”²¹⁴ The tactile gaze applies this reversal to painting, in which access to the sensuous and concealed characteristics of the painted surface stimulates a fuller, more embodied perception that circumvents constructs of optical mastery and forefronts the affective registers of materiality.

The tactile gaze can be distinguished from other theories that contest disinterested aesthetic appreciation – for example feminist theories that deal with the perception and interpretation of art – by replacing image-generated meanings with those that emerge primarily through the visualisation of materiality and artistic process. These meanings privilege the sense of touch in relation to surface, and also the quality of time – the time of making – made visible in the technological image.

The term ‘male gaze’, notably outlined by film theorist Laura Mulvey in her seminal essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ and explored by thinkers such as Tina Chanter (philosophy), and John Berger (art criticism/theory), refers to the framing of objects of visual art in which the viewer is situated in a masculine position of appreciation which reflects systemic patriarchal

²¹¹ C. Korsmeyer, ‘Feminist Aesthetics,’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2017 Edition, E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>. Accessed February 19, 2017.

²¹² J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis*, J. Miller (ed.), trans. A. Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1978, p. 73.

²¹³ Lacan’s ‘gaze’ is based on the claim that the subject loses a degree of autonomy upon realizing that she is a visible object (mirror stage), in which a child encountering a mirror realizes they have an external appearance. Lacan suggests that this effect can also be produced by objects (such as a chair, or in this case, a painting)— the ‘object petit a’ (or object petit autre). See: <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/objectpetita.htm>. Accessed 10 November 2017.

²¹⁴ L. U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 185.

ideologies.²¹⁵ Conversely, the tactile gaze speaks to desire in a sensory way – that is, desire for the immediacy and tangibility of touch as a form of understanding, as opposed to the desire for mastery that underpins the “power asymmetry” of the male gaze.²¹⁶

In relation to artworks, tactile desire is mediated by the cultural and regulatory structures that govern the literal touching of artworks in museum contexts for archival and preservation reasons. This underscores the paradox of touch in relation to paintings – desire is conferred by virtue of the fact that it cannot be satisfied (where physical touch is lacking).²¹⁷ In relation to the technological image, the desire for haptic engagement with artworks may be partially satisfied through tactile signifiers but complicated by the analytic nature of technological/scientific content and visualisation. On the other hand, desire may be prolonged by the dematerialisation of the physical artwork into digital data potentially exhibited and examined via the screen, promoting close-up immersion. For instance, when looking at a very high-resolution image of a painting such as those available through Google Arts & Culture (previously known as Google Art Project)²¹⁸ we are brought closer to the image on the screen. Describing the way our gaze is drawn to the screen’s surface and “strewn across the image,” philosopher Jean Baudrillard deploys a dramaturgical metaphor: “we no longer have the spectator’s distance from the stage – all theatrical conventions are gone.”²¹⁹ The idea that the gaze can be strewn across the image, bridging an implied distance resonates with Laura Marks’ claim that haptic looking “is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.”²²⁰ While Marks contrasts ‘grazing’ with ‘gazing,’ the former still suggests a sustained looking by moving across the whole surface producing an awareness of its totality. Grazing in this context could also imply lightly touching or scraping the surface.

My theorisation hinges on the ambivalence of desire in the act of looking. The tactile gaze allows the kind of covetous, even hedonic²²¹ gaze that was excluded from aesthetic disinterestedness in

²¹⁵ In ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ Laura Mulvey proposes that gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema, constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses. See: L. Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, originally published in *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, p. 6-18.

²¹⁶ R. Sassatelli, ‘Interview with Laura Mulvey: gender, gaze and technology in film culture’, *Theory, Culture & Society Journal*, vol. 28, issue 5, 21 September 2011, p. 123–143.

²¹⁷ In Lacan’s psychoanalytic philosophy, lack (*manqué*) is a concept that is always associated with desire. In Lacan’s seminar ‘*Le transfert*’ (1960–61) he states that ‘lack’ is what causes desire to arise. <http://www.lacan.com/seminars2.htm>. Accessed 19 February 2017.

²¹⁸ Art Project (Google Cultural Institute) features more than 45,000 artworks in high resolution. Some have been photographed in extraordinary detail using super high resolution or ‘gigapixel’ image capturing technology, enabling the viewer to study details of the brushwork and patina beyond what is possible with the naked eye. See: <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/artproject/>. Accessed 26 April 2017.

²¹⁹ Baudrillard, p. 55.

²²⁰ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, p. 162.

²²¹ In their article ‘Tactile Aesthetics: Towards a definition of its characteristics and neural correlates’, Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence state that “the hedonic experience of touch appears to be more intimate, active (requiring the involvement of body movement), and ‘primitive’ than that generated by

seminal aesthetic theories such as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*²²² while also harbouring components of the forensic, sceptical and distanced visual attitude intrinsic to scientific investigation (a kind of disinterestedness with an observational purpose). Put another way, the tactile gaze produces a sense-based intimacy with the object through amplified visualisation, which acknowledges the desire to 'know through touch' – even if that desire is not actually fulfilled. On the other hand, it involves an inherent distancing due to the often deterministic, analytical or scientific function of technological imaging and images. In the case of technological reproductions, this distancing is reinforced by the dematerialisation and mediation of the original artwork into digital data, transforming the physical artwork into a malleable proxy (further explored in Chapter Seven).

visual stimuli. See: A. Gallace & C. Spence, 'Tactile Aesthetics: Towards a Definition of its Characteristics and Neural Correlates', *Social Semiotics*, vol. 21, issue 4, 2011, p. 569-589.

²²² Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) was divided into two main sections, the second of which is the 'Critique of Aesthetic Judgment,' which catalogues "reflective judgments" (the agreeable, the beautiful, the sublime, and the good) primarily in relation to subjectivity.

Chapter Five: Touching

We call the applied paint material a touch because it is the effect of an act of touching; this is a straightforward case of metonymy, with the name of the action or cause—touching a surface to leave a mark—being given to its effect, the mark or ‘touch.’ [Moreover] touch is the tactile sensation the painter actually experiences or the viewer imagines to be associated with making such a mark. Each of these aspects of the experience of painting (both painter’s and viewer’s) is ‘touch.’²²³

Touch and Tactility

Making and encountering marks as ‘traits of touch’ is a fundamental consideration in my research. Deliberate, incidental and accidental gestures are equally significant in the way they convey tactility and suggest an indexical vocabulary of painterly activity. Moreover, the advanced imaging techniques studied and employed in this project do not discriminate between the deliberate and unplanned traces of artistic labour: brushstrokes, accidental stains, erasures, mistakes, and over-painting are equally visible to the selected imaging techniques (explored in greater depth in the following section of this chapter ‘Touch and Seeing Through’). In order to contextualise this research I will give a brief overview of some literature relevant to my investigation of the role of touch in looking at, making, and imaging paintings.

Tactility/touch is associated with immediacy and primacy – ideas that are pivotal to my inquiry in that they underscore the directly physical aspects of painting, both before and after technological mediation. This resonates with the notion of ‘hapticity’ employed by Laura Marks in her study of the sensory aspects of media in which she claims that “a haptic approach might rematerialize our objects of perception, especially now that optical visibility is being refitted as a virtual epistemology for the digital age.”²²⁴ Marks’ aforementioned concept of haptic visibility as a “kind of seeing that uses the eye like an organ of touch”²²⁵ provides a rich basis to explore the role of touch in the perception of artworks – particularly paintings. The idea that objects of perception can be rematerialised using a haptic model is reflected in my methodology for this project; that is, making, imaging, and reimagining paintings by responding to the visual qualities

²²³ Shiff, p. 43.

²²⁴ L. U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, Introduction, p. xiii.

²²⁵ Laura U. Marks develops this concept in the books *The Skin of Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002) in which haptic visibility refers to embodied spectatorship... “[in]the haptic: looking, we touch the object with our eyes [...] I mean it to call up a way of seeing that does not posit a violent distance between the seer and the object, and hence cause pain when the two are brought together. In haptic visibility “the contact can be as gentle as a caress.” See: Laura Marks interview, ‘Haptic Visibility: Touching with the Eyes’, *The Finnish Art Review: Art and Social Space, Framework Journal*, No. 2, 2004, p. 79-82.

of the technological image is ultimately a process of ‘re-surfacing’ (of images, gestures, materiality).

Jennifer Barker observes that theoretical investigation of haptic/multisensory perception has been brought together under the umbrella term “sensuous scholarship”, citing anthropologist Paul Stoller’s term (and the name of his book) as exemplifying this turn. Stoller’s book argues for the importance of understanding the “sensuous epistemologies” of many non-Western societies in order to better understand the societies themselves and what their epistemologies contribute to knowledge. Stoller contends that by embracing the role of the sensuous body in scholarship itself, a balance may be struck between reasoning and feeling. He states: “discussions of the sensuous body require sensuous scholarship in which writers tack between the analytical and the sensible, in which embodied form as well as disembodied logic constitute scholarly argument.”²²⁶

Beyond its methodological implications, ‘sensuous scholarship’ can also be used as an umbrella category for a branch of research bound to art, technology and the perceiving body, which has become a vastly expanded field in the twenty-first century, particularly in new media and film. Thinkers such as Mark B. N. Hansen, Laura U. Marks, Caroline A. Jones, Mark Paterson, Constance Classen, Charles Spence, Alberto Gallace, Vivian Sobchack, Janine Mileaf, Giuliana Bruno, Erkki Huhtamo, Jennifer Barker, Anna Munster, Hans Belting, and Oliver Grau (amongst others) have contributed to this field, exploring themes such as hapticity, multisensory perception and art, tactile aesthetics, tactile data, as well as the broader cultural and affective implications of touch.

Mark Paterson attests that touch is crucial to embodied existence and can be seen to operate in historical and philosophical traditions “as a model of perception in general”²²⁷ in which – to invoke Merleau-Ponty’s critical model – “to see is not merely to be in here and look out there; it is also to haunt the whole sphere of perception.”²²⁸ Similarly Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence explore the concept of an ‘aesthetics of touch’, using the theoretical context that our perceptions (especially the most pleasurable ones) do not occur in isolation, but rather, the senses (vision, audition, olfaction, taste, and touch) are often stimulated concurrently.²²⁹ Gallace and Spence

²²⁶ P. Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship*, Philadelphia, Philadelphia PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. xv.

²²⁷ M. Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 4.

²²⁸ S. Whitney, ‘Affect, Images and Childlike Perception: Self-other Difference in Merleau-Ponty’s Sorbonne Lectures’, *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2012, p. 185–211, <http://phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/phaenex/article/view/3817/2910>. Accessed 5 June 2018.

²²⁹ A. Gallace and C. Spence, ‘Touch in the Museum: Sculpture, Art, Aesthetics, and Visual Impairment’, *In Touch with the Future: The sense of touch from cognitive neuroscience to virtual reality*, Oxford University Press [online],

address an area of research concerned with the importance of touch as a communicative and emotional sense by investigating the hedonic aspects of tactile information processing.

Movement, pressure and proprioception are aspects of touch suggesting contact with a surface, which in turn reciprocates with a 'resist' or 'acting back' underscoring the mutuality of the surface as a touching object, or a two-way exchange.²³⁰ This contact with the surface is underpinned by a basic desire to know, to be brought closer to an understanding of something.²³¹ Movement, touch and the surface's reciprocity are implicated in painting as a fundamentally gestural activity enacted on a substrate, and echoed in the viewing of painting, which arguably reconstitutes gesture in the act of observation – when we look at paintings, we 'inwardly rehearse' the gestures of the painter.²³²

In an email exchange with Patrick Cavanagh from Harvard University, a researcher in visual neuroscience and perception, I inquired about the relation between touch (as painterly gesture) and perception. Specifically, I asked if the viewer/perceiver could reconstruct painterly gesture in the act of observation. He responded, "There is an approach to perception that assumes that part of perceiving an object is an experience of the method of production."²³³ Cavanagh also referred to mirror neurons (Rizzolatti)²³⁴ in which "we understand an action by simulating it," also called embedded cognition.²³⁵ He explains, "you could have implicit mirror neurons where rather than simulating an action that you see, you simulate the action that leaves visible trace, like brushstrokes."²³⁶

Simulating the action that leaves a visible trace is a key concept in the tactile gaze. The idea that we cognitively re-enact painterly gestures as we look at them points to a more penetrating form of regard and apprehension of the object, whereby touch is activated indirectly. This resonates

<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199644469.001.0001/acprof-9780199644469-chapter-12>. Accessed 12 December 2017.

²³⁰ Driscoll refers to a kinesthetic sense, or proprioception in her discussion of touching artworks. See: R. Driscoll, 'Aesthetic Touch', *Art and the Senses*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 108.

²³¹ An idea that can be evidenced by the role of tactile-based learning in education, expounded by educators and thinkers such as Viktor Lowenfeld, (1903-1960) who was a pioneer in the field of arts education, and investigated the visual-haptic continuum in the learning process.

²³² J. Paton, 'The art of creating a sense of necessity with paint', *The Australian*, July 15, 2016.

²³³ P. Cavanagh, 'A question regarding perception,' email exchange, June 8, 2016.

²³⁴ Giacomo Rizzolatti is an Italian neurophysiologist. He was senior scientist of the research team that discovered mirror neurons in the frontal and parietal cortex of the macaque monkey. Rizzolatti has written on the topic of mirror neurons and their role in facilitating action understanding (imitation learning).

²³⁵ Embedded and embodied cognition are frequently used interchangeably: "Cognition is embodied when it is deeply dependent upon features of the physical body of an agent, that is, when aspects of the agent's body beyond the brain play a significant causal or physically constitutive role in cognitive processing." See: R. A. Wilson, and L. Foglia, 'Embodied Cognition', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2017 Edition, E. N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/embodied-cognition/>. Accessed 9 November 2017.

²³⁶ P. Cavanagh, email exchange, 8 June 2016.

with Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Henri Wallon's²³⁷ idea of "postural impregnation" (gestures of imitation) in which there is "bodily realization" through witnessing the self/other: Merleau-Ponty describes this as "the power I have to realize with my body gestures that are analogous to those I see."²³⁸ By focusing on the normally tacit role of touch in the production and reception of painting a shift of attention occurs "affirming art as a physical encounter – an experience that is at once visual and tactile."²³⁹ In my approach to painting I aim to accentuate both the corporal aspects of making and the physical existence of the painted object. This strategy is informed by the idea that paintings contain "bodied words, tactile signifiers and gestic acts"²⁴⁰ which accumulate in the surface.

Touch and 'Seeing Through'

The tactile gaze can be understood as an expanded processual and perceptual 'means' – a way of approaching painting that is as much attuned to the imperceptible as to the immediately perceptible characteristics of surfaces. The idea that touch "has for its object the intangible as well as the tangible"²⁴¹ is reflected in the way imperceptible information under the presentation layer²⁴² of paintings is valued and activated: this information, rediscovered with scientific imaging technologies or physical erasure, enhances the sensuous qualities of texture and tactility through a form of 'reverse engineering' or moving through layers into deeper textures. It also characterizes my conceptual and technical process whereby "interiority and exteriority take place together on the surface."²⁴³

²³⁷ Henri Wallon was an influential French child psychologist who examined syncretic sociability, when "the child cannot limit himself to his own life." From Merleau-Ponty's 'The Child's Relation with Others,' *Child Psychology and Pedagogy: The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952*, trans. T. Welsh, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2010, p. 253.

²³⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, 'The child's relations with others' in *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, J. M. Edie (ed.), trans. W. Cobb, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 145.

²³⁹ M. Hall, 'The Anatomy of an Image: Painting in the Digital Age', PhD Thesis, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, 2010, p. 14.

²⁴⁰ I borrow this description of theatre from Rebecca Schneider in 'Judith Butler in My Hands', in E. Armour and S. St. Ville (eds.), *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 247.

²⁴¹ Aristotle, as cited in Derrida, *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 6.

²⁴² As previously mentioned, 'presentation layer' is a term used in art conservation to describe the upper layer of a surface. It is alternatively understood as layer 6 in the seven-layer OSI model of computer networking serving as the data translator for the network.

²⁴³ A. M. Lippit, 'Modes of Avisuality: Psychoanalysis – X-ray – Cinema' in M. del Pilar Blanco, and E. Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, New York, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 260.



Figure 21: Rembrandt, *The Sampling Officials of the Amsterdam Drapers Guild*, 1662, oil on canvas, 191.5 x 279cm. Otherwise known as *The Syndics*, Rijksmuseum.

Rembrandt's painting *The Syndics* (above) was the subject of a study in 2013 in which scientists, conservators and art historians worked together to develop and apply new imaging techniques to the artist's late work.²⁴⁴ The painting was investigated at the Rijksmuseum with a portable X-ray fluorescence scanner and a series of 15 overlapping scans were captured over a period of a few days (fig. 22). The elemental distribution map of lead associated with the pigment Lead White provides information regarding the repositioning of figures in the painting – in many cases, several times (evident in fig. 22(b); fig. 23). These changes reveal an alternative narrative to the one presented when standing in front of the painting. The images that show these modifications reveal the making and remaking of the painting and “offer new information on the much debated order, function and meaning of the changes.”²⁴⁵ These images thus evidence Rembrandt's process, or in the words of theorist Guilian Bruno, “the transformation of matter and the movement of the mind as interrelated phenomena.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ P. Noble, 'What Lies Beneath: The Syndics,' *The Analytical Scientist*, August 2016, <https://theanalyticalscientist.com/issues/0816/what-lies-beneath/>. Accessed 13 November 2017. The outcome of the analysis of *The Syndics* was presented at the *Painting Techniques, History, Materials and Studio Practice: 5th International Symposium*, Rijksmuseum, 18-20 September 2013, and is illustrated in J. Bikker and A. Krekeler, 'Experimental technique: The Paintings', in J. Bikker et al., (eds.) *Rembrandt: The Late Works*, (National Gallery of London), exh. cat, 2014.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ G. Bruno, p. 15.

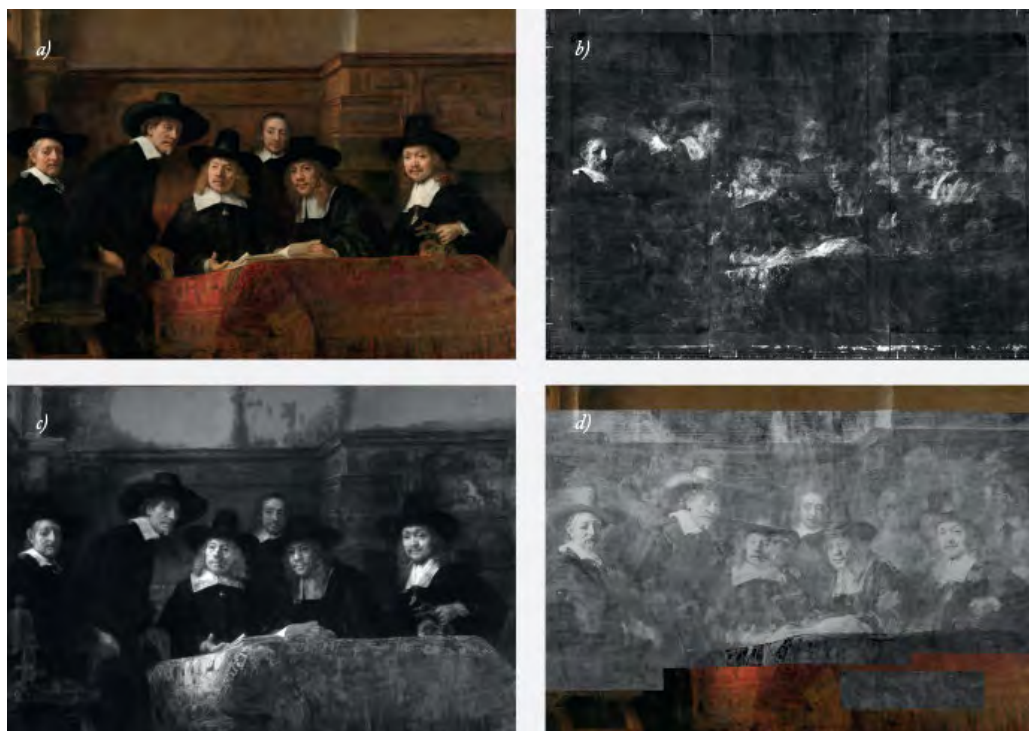


Figure 22: Revealing compositional changes in Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Syndics*, 1662, oil on canvas, 191.5 x 279 cm. Macro-XRF elemental maps: a) visible light, b) X-radiograph, c) IRR (infrared reflectography), d) Pb-L (Lead map). Images courtesy Rijksmuseum conservation department.

Figure 23 (below) shows an X-ray from the mid twentieth century of *The Syndics* produced on X-ray film.²⁴⁷ In this image, the hazy appearance of the figures and the spectral presence of some of their earlier positions contributes to an overall sense of the shifting reality of the painting during the course of its making; a sense of tactility is prompted by the visualisation of multiple layers, pentimenti, and the fabric of textures that form the painting's materiality, right down to the fibres of the canvas.

²⁴⁷ The Rembrandt Database, X-radiography: X-ray film, overall (front), 24 May 1949–24 January 1955, (record number 16902); Rembrandt, *The sampling officials of the Amsterdam drapers guild*, dated 1662, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv./cat. no. SK-C-6, <http://www.rembrandtdatabase.org/Rembrandt/painting/3046/the-sampling-officials-of-the-amsterdam-drapers-guild/document/16902>. Accessed 10 November 2017.



Figure 23: The Rembrandt Database, X-radiography: X-ray film, overall (front), 24 May 1949-24 January 1955, Rembrandt, *The sampling officials of the Amsterdam drapers guild (or The Syndics)*, dated 1662, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In *Reformation I* (fig. 24), I respond to the pictorial decisions Rembrandt made in *The Syndics* by emphasising how these changes are visualised by X-ray. Drawing with charcoal over a print of the X-ray approximately half the scale of the original painting), I reimagine the temporal sequence of *The Syndics* by accentuating some of the former positions of the main protagonists, adding fictional extensions to these ‘ghosts,’ such as hands and collars, as well as incidental marks that index adjustments and gestures built into the painting’s surface.

The ability of X-ray to capture previous times (layers) of the painting resonates with ideas regarding the ‘suprasensible’ and art explored by art historian Linda Dalrymple Henderson. Her research examining how artists of the twentieth century responded to concepts of the fourth dimension and the curved spaces of non-Euclidean geometry²⁴⁸ has been of particular interest in my investigation of pictorial space, in which I engage with the still debated theory that time is the fourth dimension.²⁴⁹ In the context of my research, time as a measurable length can be seen in

²⁴⁸ The Fourth Dimension and non-Euclidean geometry are two concepts of space beyond immediate perception popularised in the twentieth century.

²⁴⁹ In 1908, Hermann Minkowski presented a paper exploring the role of time as the fourth dimension of spacetime (the basis for Einstein’s theories of special and general relativity). “The prevailing view in physics has been that time serves as the fourth dimension of space, an arena represented mathematically as 4D Minkowski spacetime. However, some scientists, including Amrit Sorli and Davide Fisaletti, founders of the Space Life Institute in Slovenia, argue that time exists completely independent from space.” See: L. Zyga, ‘Physicists continue work to abolish time as fourth dimension of space,’ *Phys.org*, 14 April 2012, <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-physicists-abolish-fourth-dimension-space.html#jCp>. Accessed 12 August 2016. See also: ‘Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking: Time Travel’, where Stephen Hawking explains the dimensions of space and time, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPTzT4U3RIU>. Accessed 13 December 2017.

relation to the physical duration of the art object, which contributes to the artwork's aura (Chapter Seven) through visualizing the normally imperceptible history of the painting.



Figure 24: (Left) Studio showing *Reformation I* in progress. Right: Chelsea Lehmann, *Reformation I* (detail), 2017, charcoal and pastel on print of X-ray of Rembrandt's *The Syndics*, on etching paper, 82 x 119cm. Images courtesy the artist.

The visual effect of X-ray as a ghostly document of a painting's shifting reality evokes a conception of space beyond the flat surface of the picture plane and its associated conventions of linear/geometric perspective. X-rays of paintings describe an amorphous black and white pictorial space where inscriptions of materiality and form appear to overlap and multiply in a compendium of marks. This produces a kind of vibratory effect²⁵⁰ and the illusion of continuous depth, recalling Henderson's application of the term "spatial imagination" referring to modern forms of spatial visualisation in art.²⁵¹

Henderson investigates how ideas around vibration, energy fields and the fourth dimension were explored by artists such as Duchamp and the Cubists, for whom scientific findings such as Wilhelm Röntgen's discovery of X-rays (1895) and Henri Becquerel's discovery of radioactivity

²⁵⁰ Much has been written about the vibratory effect of so-called "ether physics." The British scientist Sir William Crookes in his 1898 Presidential Address before the British Association for the Advancement of Science stated that "ether vibrations have powers and attributes equal to any demand – even to the transmission of thought." See: 'Address by Sir William Crookes, President,' Report of the Sixty-Eighth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1898, London, John Murray, 1899, p. 31), in L. D. Henderson, 'Cubism, Futurism, and Ether Physics in the Early Twentieth Century', *Science in Context*, vol. 17, issue 4, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 458. Henderson also points out that the 'vibratory thought transfer' attributed to the ether was important in the art theory and practice of the painters Kandinsky and Kupka, who conceived their abstract canvases "as the source of vibrations meant to resonate in a viewer." (See for example, Henderson's *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, 2002).

²⁵¹ Henderson uses this term to describe the artistic response to forms of space presented by scientific models or technologies such as X-ray. See: L. D. Henderson, 'The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in Twentieth-Century Art and Culture,' *Configurations* 17, no. 1, 2009, p. 131-160. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>. Accessed 6 June 2016.

(1896), triggered new ideas and imagery that were formerly unimaginable. These discoveries demonstrated that “the existence of invisible realms just beyond the reach of the human eye was no longer a matter of mystical or philosophical speculation.”²⁵² Henderson notes that during this period, Occultism practices²⁵³ drew on the latest science to support connections between these developments and their pseudo counterparts; for example, X-rays and spirit photography, radioactivity and alchemy, telegraphy and telepathy, electromagnetism and Magnetism.²⁵⁴ Among several artists who responded to these discoveries, František Kupka was known to be interested in radiography, particularly as a way of approaching tone and form in a new way. In *Planes by Colors* (fig. 25) Kupka filled the canvas with “shining, oblique, crystalline colours” and rendered form as a kind of structural skeleton,²⁵⁵ visualising alternative dimensions through a kind of painterly X-ray vision.²⁵⁶

Planes by Colors is described as an attempt by Kupka to represent the figure’s inner form as an imaginary depiction of the internal structure of the body:

Kupka rendered the figure of his wife, Eugénie, in vivid shades of purple, green, yellow, and blue, devising an innovative modeling technique based on color, not line or shade, that sections her body into tonal planes in such a way that her “inner form” is made visible. This unveiling of the unseen is crucial, for Kupka believed that it is only through the senses, through physical experience, that we can reach an extrasensory, metaphysical dimension and thereafter achieve an intuitive understanding of the universal scheme underlying existence.²⁵⁷

²⁵² Henderson, ‘The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in Twentieth-Century Art and Culture,’ p. 447.

²⁵³ Occultists were concerned with subjects such as extrasensory perception, magic and the paranormal.

²⁵⁴ L. D. Henderson, ‘Cubism, Futurism, and Ether Physics in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Science in Context* vol. 17, issue 4, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 458.

²⁵⁵ R. M. Swiderski, *X-ray Vision: A way of Looking*, Boca Raton, Universal Publishers, 2012, p. 155.

²⁵⁶ B. Alsdorf, ‘František Kupka, *Planes by Colors, Large Nude*’, Guggenheim Collection (online), Guggenheim Museum, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/2391>. Accessed 21 December 2017.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

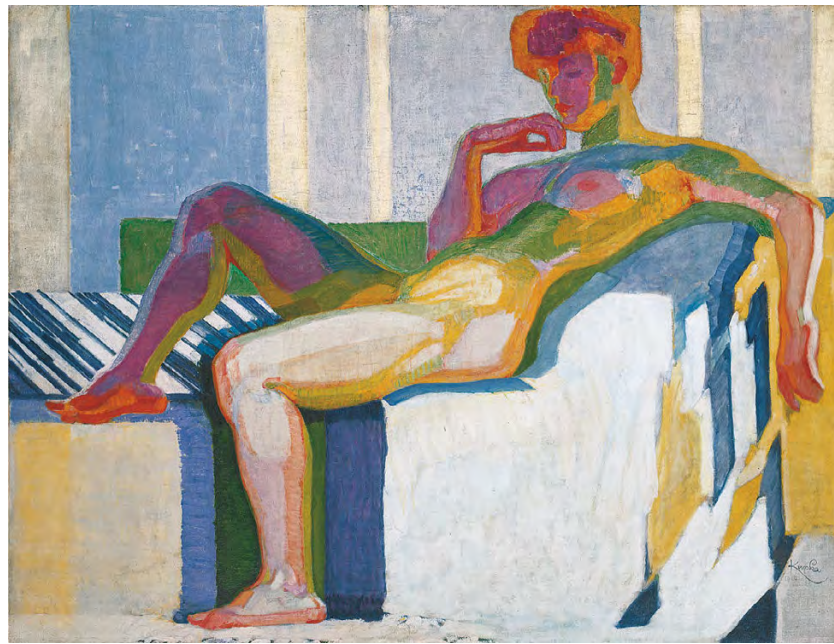


Figure 25: František Kupka, *Planes by Colors (Great Nude)*, 1909–10, oil on canvas, 150.2 x 180.7 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Kupka's idealistic approach to sensory perception outlined in this description, positions the sensorial apparatus as a conduit to an imperceptible or metaphysical realm. This idea is reflected in my concept of the tactile gaze: the visualisation of normally inaccessible information and inner textures expands the conceptual associations of tactility while questioning the outer layer of objects as the central site of meaning.

According to Henderson, the discovery of X-rays in the late nineteenth century was an event that “established unquestionably the relativity of perception and turned the attention of artists away from the visual world towards an invisible, immaterial reality”²⁵⁸ paving the way for diverse conceptions of space. For example, Marcel Duchamp's *Le Roi et la Reine entourés de Nus vites* (fig. 26) suggests a kind of multiplied space and movement in which repetitious forms move in and out, forward and back, defying a sense of internal/external. For artists like Duchamp who were interested in challenging the purely visual apprehension of matter, X-rays provided a direct demonstration of the relativity of perception. However, the existence of, and access to a hitherto unimaginable ‘world’ exposed by X-ray also challenged the romantic idea of the artist possessing sensibilities more highly developed than those of the average person.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ L. D. Henderson, ‘X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists’, *Art Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4, Revising Cubism, Winter, 1988, College Art Association, p. 336.

²⁵⁹ Henderson, ‘X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists’, p. 328. See also: L. D. Henderson, ‘The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in Twentieth-Century Art and Culture,’ *Configurations*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2009, p. 131-160.



Figure 26: Marcel Duchamp, *Le Roi et la Reine entourés de Nus vites* (*The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*), 1912, oil on canvas, 114.6 x 128.9 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Henderson notes that photographers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered X-ray an extension of their medium, one that could visualise a new, uncharted world. For painters and artists in general, X-rays described a super-sensible reality that presented an alternative to the observational analysis of colour and light at the heart of art movements such as Impressionism. For example, the Italian Futurists used X-ray as a kind of justification for their painting.²⁶⁰ Their ‘Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting’ of April 1910 questions the limits of perception: “Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies, since our sharpened and multiplied sensitiveness has already penetrated the obscure manifestations of the medium?” The manifesto continues: “Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to those of the X-rays.”²⁶¹

The Italian Futurists were also interested in multisensory interaction with objects as part of their concern with the aesthetic possibilities of extrasensory perception. For example, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of Futurism, defined *Tattilismo* (the Art of Touch) as an important element of the movement. The aim was to “enhance the sensitivity of skin” which he described as “a mediocre conductor of thought.”²⁶² Marinetti wanted to achieve this through the

²⁶⁰ Henderson, ‘X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists’, p. 326. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776982>. Accessed 27 March 2017.

²⁶¹ Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carra, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, Gino Severini; ‘Manifeste des peintres futuristes’ (1910), in *Les Peintres Futuristes Italiens*, exh. cat., Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune & Cie., 1912, p. 17, cited in Henderson, ‘X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists,’ p. 326.

²⁶² F. Marinetti, ‘Tactilism’ (1921), cited in L. Rainey, C. Poggi, & L. Wittman (eds.), *Futurism: An Anthology*, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 264-269, in *In touch with the future: The sense of touch from*

haptic experience of “tactile boards” or “hand journeys” – artworks made from a range of materials such as sponge, foil and feathers.²⁶³

The extraordinary power of the imperceptible to fuel the imagination and denote the metaphysical realm is perhaps best summed up by writer Clarice Lispector in her book *Água Viva* (1973). She says, “In painting as in music and literature, what is called abstract so often seems to me the figurative of a more delicate and more difficult reality, less visible to the naked eye.”²⁶⁴ Her statement links abstraction as an art form with the invisible aspects of a broader, less known reality; perhaps one associated with dreams, emotions, spirituality and even an afterlife. This is echoed in what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “the existentials of the visible, its dimensions, its non-figurative inner framework.”²⁶⁵

When Wilhelm Röntgen X-rayed his wife Anna Ludwig’s hand, she was purported to have declared, “I have seen my death!”²⁶⁶ This contradiction in terms underscores the incredulity inherent in being confronted with both the spectral vision of one’s own skeleton, and the dissolution of a former understanding of one’s perceptual limits – another kind of death. Moreover, unlike photography, X-rays *inscribe* elements, a process that quite literally reveals the figurative of a more delicate and more difficult reality, less visible to the naked eye. Röntgen himself described this inversion of realities and substance in enigmatic terms, stating: “bodies behave to the X-rays as turbid media to light.”²⁶⁷

For his recent exhibition of prints of X-rays, contemporary photographer Alejandro Guijarro spent approximately four years petitioning some of Europe’s major museums including the Louvre and the Prado for permission to photograph or reproduce existing X-rays of significant historical

cognitive neuroscience to virtual reality, A. Gallace and C. Spence (eds.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 279.

²⁶³ A. Gallace and C. Spence (eds.), *In touch with the future: The sense of touch from cognitive neuroscience to virtual reality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 279.

²⁶⁴ C. Lispector, (quoted from her book *The Foreign Legion*) in the preface to: C. Lispector, *Água Viva*, B. Moser (ed.), trans. S. Tobler, Canada, New York, New Directions, 1973/2012, p. 14.

²⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty defines the invisible as: (1) what is not actually visible, but could be (hidden or in actual aspects of the thing – hidden things, situated 'elsewhere' – 'here' and 'elsewhere') (2) what, relative to the visible, could nevertheless not be seen as a thing (the existentials of the visible, its dimensions, its non-figurative inner framework) (3) What exists only as tactile or kinaesthetically, etc. (4). . . the ‘Cogito’. See: *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968.

²⁶⁶ This oft quoted phrase appears in many texts without a verifiable source. See: B. Colomina, ‘X-screens: Röntgen Architecture’, *E-Flux Journal*, no. 66, October 2015. Colomina cites: A. Hasse, G. Landwehr, E. Umbach, *Röntgen Centennial: X-rays in Natural and Life Sciences*, Singapore, River Edge, NJ, World Scientific, 1997, p. 7-8.

²⁶⁷ W. Röntgen, ‘On a New Kind of Rays,’ *Nature*, 23 January 1896, p. 274–76 (English translation of the 1895 original text ‘*Über eine neue art von strahlen*’, published in the *Sitzungsberichte der Physikalisch-Medizinischen Gesellschaft zu Würzburg*, issue 137, 28 December 1895, p. 132–41), cited in B. Colomina, ‘X-screens: Röntgen Architecture’, *E-Flux Journal*, no. 66, October 2015.

paintings by artists such as Rubens, Delacroix and Goya.²⁶⁸ These images were primarily stored in digital archives for conservation/restoration purposes.²⁶⁹ In many cases, Guijarro spent months researching these archives for the right images, and hours immersed in the bureaucratic process of securing permissions and negotiating copyright to bring the project to fruition.

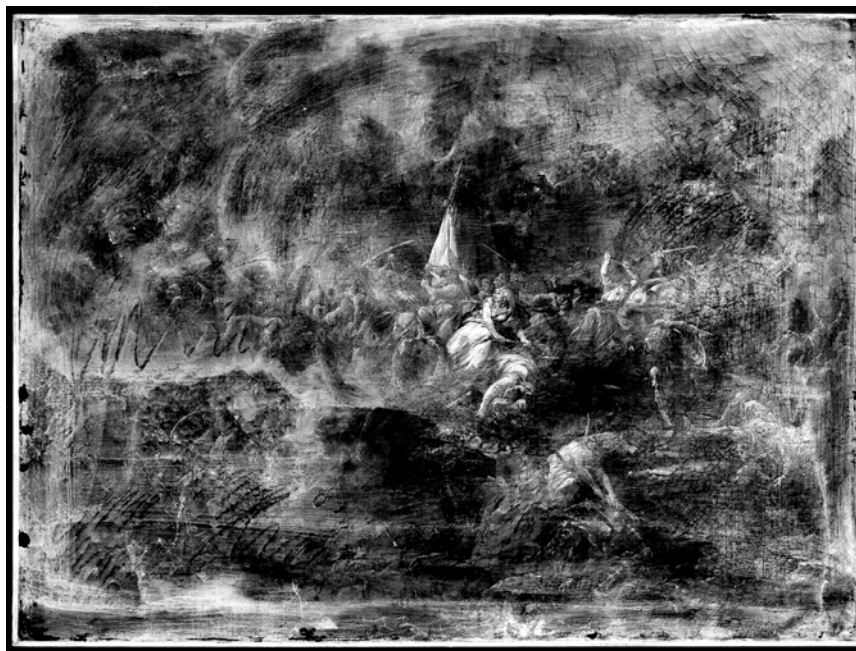


Figure 27: Alejandro Guijarro, 73813 (*Siege of Beauvais in 1472*), 2016, photographic reproduction of X-ray [painting: François Louis Joseph Watteau, *Le siège de Beauvais en 1472*]. Image courtesy the artist and Tristan Hoare Gallery, London.

The resulting exhibition entitled *LEAD* (signifying the interaction of lead-based paints with X-ray) “presents a new body of work that extends Guijarro’s photographic inquiries into the connection between art and science.”²⁷⁰ Guijarro describes his artwork in *LEAD* as embodying a paradox; he says, “as X-rays they belong to the realm of scientific images, objective, possessing an unquestionable scientific truth. Yet, by their visual indeterminacy, they also exist in the subjective world of personal interpretation, the intuitional and emotional.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Alejandro Guijarro interviewed by Chelsea Lehmann, Skype conversation, 23 March 2017.

²⁶⁹ For example, one of the main sources of images Guijarro accessed for his project was the Centre for Research and Restoration of Museums of France (C2RMF), the national research centre in France responsible for the documentation, conservation and restoration of the items held in the collections of more than 1200 museums across France. See: R. Pillay, G. Aitken, D. Pitzalis, C. Lahanier; J. Trant, D. Bearman (eds.), *Archive Visualization and Exploitation at the C2RMF*, International Cultural Heritage Informatics Meeting (ICHIM07) Proceedings, Archives & Museum Informatics, Toronto, 2007, <http://www.archimuse.com/ichim07/papers/pillay/pillay.html>. Accessed 16 June 2018.

²⁷⁰ A. Guijarro, ‘LEAD’ exhibition, 9 March - 28 April 2017, Tristan Hoare gallery, <http://tristanhoaregallery.co.uk/exhibitions/lead/>. Accessed 28 March 2017.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

Guijarro has also expressed his interest in the relationship between photography and ‘truth’, or more precisely photography’s failure to depict truth, reinforcing the idea that what we see is just a very small fraction of reality. Camille Flammarion, who observed the scientific and cultural impact of X-rays at the beginning of the twentieth century, expresses this idea as follows:

The discovery of the Röntgen rays, so inconceivable and so strange in its origins, ought to convince us how very small is the field of our usual observations [...] This is indeed a most eloquent example in favour of the axiom: it is unscientific to assert that realities are stopped by the limit of our knowledge and observation.²⁷²

Flammarion reminds us that X-rays present a complex matrix of the visible and the invisible, affirming the inherent limits of perception. In my artwork *Tenchi* (fig. 28) both visible and hidden information are combined across three different technological images of one painting, presented in a lightbox. The aim of presenting the work in a lightbox is to approximate the viewing conditions of medical X-rays, in turn amplifying the diagnostic character of imaging objects with advanced techniques.

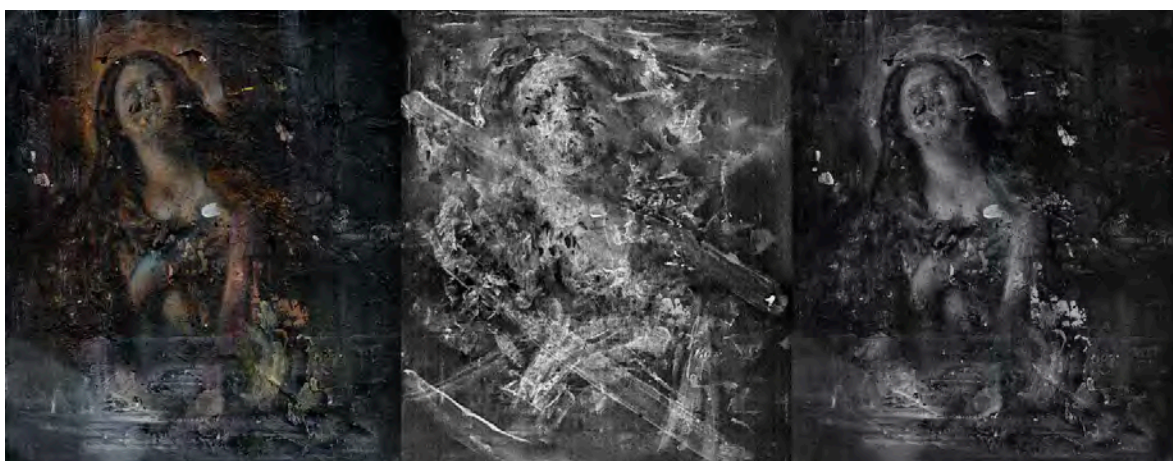


Figure 28: Chelsea Lehmann, *Tenchi* (2011-2016) oil on linen, 24 x 21cm. From Left: Visual light (RGB) digital scan, X-ray, and infrared scan of painting. RGB and Infrared image courtesy the artist and Ide Advanced Imaging Lab, Kyoto University. X-ray image courtesy the artist and Bureau Veritas, Australia and New Zealand.

Both the high-resolution RGB and infrared scans in *Tenchi* (fig. 28) were completed as part of my research at the Ide Advanced Imaging Lab at Kyoto University in 2016. By scanning the painting using both visible and non-visible light, I was attempting to differentiate the layers, and in doing so retrieve former stages of the painting (pentimenti). The X-ray (centre) shows the layers underneath the visible surface in which another portrait, larger in scale, is evident (seen through the vague outline of the hair and eye sockets of the Magdalene). A larger hand is also visible, seen

²⁷² C. Flammarion, *The Unknown (L'inconnu)* [1900], New York and London, Harper & brothers, 1901, p. 11, 14, cited in L. D. Henderson, 'X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists', *Revising Cubism*, *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Winter, 1988, p. 326.

in its former position, bottom centre. Also clearly represented are the oblique stripes that were painted in Cremnitz White (a lead-based pigment), added roughly half way through the painting. I envisaged these stripes appearing to X-ray as a kind of internal ‘cage’ – a metaphor for the locking in of marks and stains that become part of the archive of gestures. The haze of soft marks hints at early depictions of the face and hand, but ultimately these features break down in a mass of foggy shapes that elude recognition.

American artist Robert Longo has produced many large-scale drawings based on X-rays of art historical paintings over recent years. These drawings are part of a larger series of work that broadly reflect Longo’s interest in the ‘unseen’ machinations of science, religion, art and politics. In an exhibition entitled *The Destroyer Cycle* (3 May–17 June 2017), Longo produced two large-scale charcoal drawings based on X-rays of paintings by Titian.



Figure 29: (Left) Titian, *Venus with a Mirror*, c. 1555, oil on canvas, 124.5 x 105.5cm, Andrew W. Mellon Collection. (Right) X-ray of *Venus with a Mirror*. All Images Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Titian’s painting, *Venus with a Mirror* above left, is held in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington where an X-ray of the painting was produced and written about in the early 1970s (above, right).²⁷³ The X-ray helped authenticate the artwork, verifying that it was likely to have been painted entirely by the hand of Titian, indicated by the fact that the canvas was rotated and reused – the original horizontal image depicted a man and a woman in three-quarter-length

²⁷³ In an article entitled ‘Titian’s “Venus with a Mirror,”’ F. R. Shapley attributes the X-ray images of Titian’s painting to Henry Beville and Frank Sullivan saying, “Special thanks are due to Henry Beville and Frank Sullivan for the X-rays, from which Mr. Beville made the excellent montage.” See: F. R. Shapley, ‘Titian’s “Venus with a Mirror,”’ in ‘Studies in the History of Art’, *National Gallery of Art Journal*, Washington DC, Vol. 4 (1971-1972), p. 93-105.

standing side by side (fig. 30).²⁷⁴ The research undertaken established that this bold artistic decision was likely to have been made by Titian himself; thus, it follows that he would have commenced the new composition. It was also the version of the painting that Titian apparently chose to keep for himself, indicating a sense of preference for, or ownership over the work.²⁷⁵



Figure 30: X-ray of *Venus with a Mirror*, showing original iteration of painting in horizontal orientation. Image courtesy the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The press release for the exhibition *The Destroyer Cycle*, describes how Longo's drawings based on Titian's *Venus* and its X-ray demonstrate his interest in the 'hidden truths' that X-rays of master paintings uncover:

Untitled (X-Ray of Venus with a Mirror, 1555, After Titian) portrays an x-ray image of the titular painting that Longo accessed at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The x-ray reveals that the original composition of the painting – a male and female figure, clothed, in embrace – has been altered to focus on a single naked goddess and her reflection. Part of a series of art historical x-ray drawings, these works manifest another, often hidden kind of truth for Longo, while also offering a metaphor for the status and meaning of images in an age of “alternative facts.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ *National Gallery of Art online collection*, “Titian: Venus with a Mirror”, National Gallery of Art, Washington, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/highlights/titian-venus-with-a-mirror.html>. Accessed 10 July 2017.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Press release, *The Destroyer Cycle*, Robert Longo, 3 May – 17 June 2017, Metro Pictures, <http://www.metropictures.com/exhibitions/robert-longo18/press-release>. Accessed 7 October 2017.



Figure 31: (Left) Robert Longo, *Untitled (After Titian, Venus with a Mirror, 1555)*, 2017, Graphite and charcoal on paper, 19.1 x 15.9cm, (MP# RL-D-1617). (Right) Robert Longo, *Untitled (X-Ray of Venus with a Mirror, 1555, After Titian)*, 2016 – 2017, Charcoal on mounted paper, 279.4 x 234.3cm, (MP# RL-D-1612). Images courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures.

Robert Longo exhibited the two works above together, however, the drawing based on Titian's painting is approximately postcard scale (fig. 31, left), while the drawing based on its X-ray is monumental by comparison, at almost three metres high (fig. 31, right). The contrasting scale suggests a conscious magnification and privileging of the concealed over the visible. Olivia Murphy writes about related work in Longo's series of X-ray drawings saying, "we see the brutality of the nails hammered into the stretcher, we see the cracks and the physicality of paint that has decomposed over time, we see the essence of the work as we know it through the obscured details of its under-image." Murphy concludes, "We see the unseen, the internal aura that is held within the painting, visible only through X-ray technology."²⁷⁷ The idea of aura as an internal/embedded phenomenon, hinted at by Murphy in her description of Longo's work, will be discussed further in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Imaging techniques that reach beyond the painted surface or bring it closer through high resolution effectively enable the visualisation of the painting process, expanding our perceptual access to the artwork's history, and therefore to the incidental, accidental and intentional aspects of making paintings. These techniques reveal the effects of time, the nature of history as retrospective, and subvert the values normally associated with the presentation layer of the painting as complete, or final.

²⁷⁷ From the press release for Longo's previous exhibition *Luminous Discontent*, which comprised of related artworks, including drawings based on X-rays of master paintings, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 16 April 2016 - 22 May 2016. The essay by Olivia Murphy accompanied the exhibition catalogue, *Luminous Discontent*, A. Bellavita and Q. Liu (eds.), Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2016.

Tactility and Spatiality

In *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, Hubert Damisch uses a semiotic framework to explore the idea of ‘cloud’ in relation to the work of Correggio. Below, he describes a model for seeing and analysing Correggio’s work:

An analysis cannot possibly proceed simply by a functional division of the painted surface into its constitutive parts, and then by breaking down those parts, in their turn, into the elements of which they are composed. On the contrary, it needs to circumvent the flat surface upon which the image is depicted in order to target the image’s texture and its depth as a painting, striving to recover the levels, or rather the registers, where superposition (or intermeshing) and regulated interplay – if not entanglement – define the pictorial process in its signifying materiality.²⁷⁸

This way of seeing a painting as a fabric of textures that circumvents the flat surface is echoed in the theoretical framework of the tactile gaze. X-ray for instance, ‘finds’ conjunctures of images within the depths of the painted surface, contesting the authority of the two-dimensional plane as the main location of spatial referents (such as linear perspective). Instead, the hidden depths of the surface yield another kind of space – an archive of processes and conjunctures of underlying images.

Damisch’s account of Correggio’s painting (fig. 32) proposes that the characteristic sfumato (smoke-like) brushwork, and textural effects of Correggio’s technical approach negate a sense of solidity and permanence. This nebulous quality is established through the delicate layering of thin coats of paint. Damisch underscores this by referring to Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt’s observation that “the designation of the space, the painting’s substratum and the surface upon which the picture is painted, and all the gradations and nuances of the paintings are expressed by clouds...”²⁷⁹ More broadly, Damisch also uses ‘cloud’ as a general theme or “guiding thread,” in his reading; a kind of analysis that attempts to uncover the “various registers of the pictorial process,” and reveal “their relative organisational role.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ H. Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. J. Lloyd, Stanford University Press, 2002, p. 14.

²⁷⁹ J. Burckhardt, ‘Correggio’s durchhaus subjektive Kunst’ in *Der Cicerone*, vol. 2, as quoted by Damisch, p. 16.

²⁸⁰ Damisch, p. 14.



Figure 32: (Left) Antonio Allegri da Correggio, *Jupiter and Io*, c. 1530, oil on canvas, 163.5 cm × 70.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, Austria. (Right) Correggio, *Jupiter and Io*, detail.

In my research, the ‘relative organisational role’ of processes can be rearranged, or retro-activated through advanced imaging techniques and erasure, a focus that also suggests a cloud-like intermeshing of layers and materialities.

Australian artist Bernhard Sachs has used the amorphousness of X-ray to signify both the mnemonic and metaphysical allusions of pictorial space. His mixed media works from the early 1990s reference X-ray as a “metaphoric effect/affect” suggestive of a forensic and “infinite looking in.”²⁸¹ In a series of works shown at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art as part of his exhibition *Elements* (1993), Sachs presented wall-based works in conjunction with smaller artworks and objects, positioned on the floor in a large-scale installation.²⁸² *World of Ciphers – Or The Whole City (From an X-ray of a painting by the Anonymous Master of Incarceration and the Entombment)* is a drawing depicting a figure (fig. 33, centre right), seemingly caged within bands of white and grey which form a grid pattern through the composition. These lattice-like formations are reminiscent of those that appear in radiographs of paintings, where the wooden backing structure (the cradle²⁸³) is rendered visible to X-ray due to a variation in thickness. Similar

²⁸¹ B. Sachs, email exchange with the author, October 3, 2015.

²⁸² See: Bernhard Sachs, *Elements* (exhibition), 1 July-1 August, 1993, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

²⁸³ Cradles are gridded wooden slats that reinforce and preserve the flat surface of traditional painting panels.

markings can appear where edges of the X-ray imaging area overlap in cases where multiple radiographs are required for a single artwork.²⁸⁴

In Sachs' work grids also index the sprawling metropolises (Melbourne, Vienna, and Jerusalem) that underpin his exploration of the link between a geographical locus and a location in the imagination. Sachs cites Vienna, for example, as a reference to a kind of "central European identity."²⁸⁵ More generally, the gridded surface refers to the process of mapping itself as an attempt to chart "physical and psychological spaces and temporal movements."²⁸⁶



Figure 33: Bernhard Sachs, *World of Ciphers – Or The Whole City (From X-ray of a painting by the Anonymous Master of Incarceration and the Entombment)*, 1992, charcoal, pastel, acrylic on 5 sheets of paper, 300 x 640cm. Image courtesy the artist and NKN Gallery, Melbourne.

According to Chris Chapman in the catalogue essay for Sachs' exhibition, X-ray imagery also exposes "the symbolic and metaphoric constructions that lie embedded within the history of art."²⁸⁷ Sachs himself describes the weight of art historical painting as "a museum of images you carry around in your head" – he says, "I call these images ghosts. While I may or may not be dealing with painting as a medium in any specific work, I deal with it as an idea. One never leaves the 'ghost' of painting."²⁸⁸ Sachs also refers to condensing materiality in the surface, which can

²⁸⁴ I use the term radiograph interchangeably with X-ray, but here have deliberately employed it to differentiate between a physical radiograph and X-rays.

²⁸⁵ P. Hill, 'X-ray Visions', *The Bulletin*, July 27, 1993, p. 80.

²⁸⁶ C. Chapman, 'Death by Drowning', *Elements*, exh. cat., Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1993.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ B. Sachs, cited in O. Periz, 'A Space of Lostness', *Australian Art Collector*, Issue 38, Oct–Dec 2006, p. 118, as cited in J. McKenzie, 'Conceptual drawing: recent work by Bernhard Sachs, Mike Parr, Greg Creek and Janenne Eaton', 28 January 2010, <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/conceptual-drawing-recent-work-by-bernhard-sachs-mike-parr-greg-creek-and-janenne-eaton>. Accessed 28 October 2017.

be entered into, revealing new associations. In this context, he underscores the expanded spatiality and associative potential of X-ray when he says of his work:

They are not X-rays, or even faux X-rays – but works concerning ‘world-picturing’ using the particular reference of X-rays [...] The compression into one object of a dense materiality and its own ‘transparency’, with all the attendant metonymic chains this may involve, its complicating contiguities, the making visible of the unconscious of the image which transforms its fictional agitations into a type of “realpolitik” of aporetic materialisation. Science is, in this sense entirely subordinated to historicity, merely its surface pretext.²⁸⁹

This statement has many inferences, foremost of which is the transference between states, from the ‘unconscious of the image’ (invoking both the “Optical Unconscious”²⁹⁰ and the image’s unknown depths) to the cryptic materiality of the art object and its own internal systems. Sachs is also highly aware of the role of the body (his own and the viewers) as a mediating entity in these transactions. Within the work itself this is echoed in the ambiguous relationship “between inner and outer selves,”²⁹¹ or figure and non-figure, reflecting the process of transfiguration from the obscured to the discernible, and back again. His deployment of X-ray imagery serves to reinforce this exchange via the inherent optical, bodily and philosophical tensions between exposure and concealment, substance and transparency.

Sachs’ work speaks to the experiential associations of a penetrative gaze, that is, the tendency to associate looking ‘through’ surfaces with forensic or medical interpretations of our own bodies. Seeing through the skin, for instance, can refer to looking through the surface of a painting as well as the cutaneous exterior of the body. As Marcia Pointon writes, “The invention and use of X-ray as a medical technology in the early twentieth century added a new dimension to the experience of seeing one’s own body.” She goes on to quote author Bettyann Kevles: “As a culture we no longer accept surfaces as barriers, but see them instead as smoky scrims through which we know we have access, not just doctors but all of us – patients, poets and passers-by.”²⁹² Pointon continues her argument by claiming that painters such as Francis Bacon and Robert

²⁸⁹ B. Sachs, email exchange with the author, October 3, 2015.

²⁹⁰ In *The Optical Unconscious* (1993), Rosalind Krauss challenges the “vaunted principle of vision itself” in conventional understandings of Modernism. See: R. E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, London and New York, MIT Press, 1993.

²⁹¹ P. Hill, ‘X-ray Visions’, *The Bulletin*, 27 July 1993, p. 80.

²⁹² B. Holtzmann Kevles, *Naked to the Bone: Medical Imaging in the Twentieth Century*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1997, p. 261, cited in M. Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity*, Reaktion Books, London, 2013, p.182.

Rauschenberg were heavily influenced by technologies such as X-ray in their approach to painting.²⁹³

Historically, the unprecedented capacity of X-rays to penetrate opaque objects was presented as a technological attraction to visitors at significant scientific and technological exhibitions in the late nineteenth century, as well as venues such as fairgrounds, public conferences, curiosity museums, and magic theatres evidencing the extraordinary interest in the capacity of X-rays to see through objects.²⁹⁴ Moreover, X-rays inspired a “primal fascination with the act of display”²⁹⁵ reflecting what Jonathan Crary has referred to as the “carnal density” that emerged with the new visual technologies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁹⁶

I aim to engage this primal fascination with the act of display by presenting an X-ray of my painting *Embedded* as a Duratran lightbox alongside the painting itself. This is not intended as an orchestrated revealing of the painting’s substratum, but rather a means to compare the physical qualities of oil paint with its X-ray inscription. In this work, the lead-based pigment Cremnitz White, highly visible to X-ray due to its lead content, was used to paint over a pre-existing painting which depicted the lower half of a figure in a black, red and green dress, and red shoes. The aim was to anticipate how areas of the artwork where very little lead-based pigment was used would appear to X-ray, the strategy being that traces of the original painting would merge together with the over-painted images and abstract markings, forming a combined view of embedded gestures.

²⁹³ M. Pointon, p. 182.

²⁹⁴ See: Y. Tsivian, ‘Media Fantasies and Penetrating Vision: Some Links Between X-rays, the Microscope, and Film’, in: J. E. Bowlt, O. Matich (eds.), *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 89. Also, J. Solveig, ‘Media as modern magic: Early X-ray imaging and cinematography in Sweden,’ *Early Popular Visual Culture Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, p. 24.

²⁹⁵ T. Gunning, “‘Primitive Cinema:’ A Frame Up? Or the Trick’s on Us’, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, Winter 1989, p. 9.

²⁹⁶ J. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992, cited in V. Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 56.

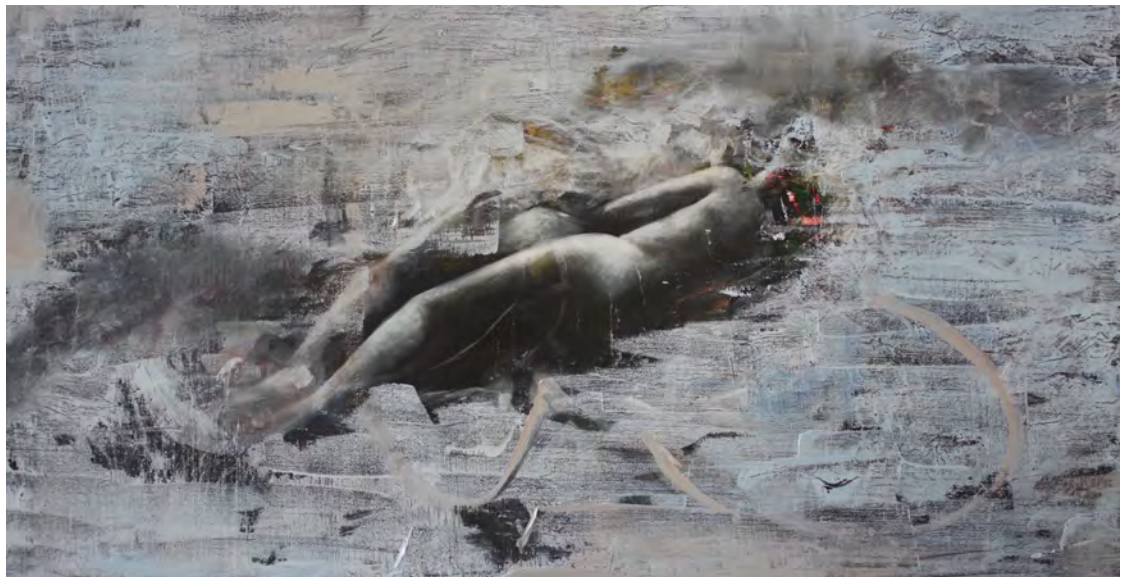


Figure 34: (Above) Chelsea Lehmann, *Embedded*, 2015-2016, oil on linen, 52 x 80cm. (Below) Chelsea Lehmann, *Embedded (X-ray)*, 2016, X-ray of oil painting. Images courtesy the artist and Bureau Veritas, Australia and New Zealand.

In the over-painting (fig. 34, top), two bodies are loosely depicted in diagonal formation, roughly in the centre of the composition, with one being barely visible. The lead-based white pigment (with some Blue and Grey) is used liberally in both the painting of the figures, and in the surrounding slabs of abstract marks that were scraped over the upper weave of the linen. These mostly horizontal marks fill the crevices of the linen, but allow some of the layer underneath to remain. Due to the volume and thickness of the lead paint used in the over-painting, very little information from the original painting shows, however some hazy spots over the legs of the main figure in the X-ray probably indicate the use of Cadmium pigments in parts of the painting underneath, as well as the dark band on the left hand side of the X-ray (approximately a quarter of the way across the image) which shows a division between an object and a plane in the original

painting. The relative 'transparency' of the figures in the X-ray was anticipated, and intended as means to de-emphasise the body; the pattern of marks indicating the presence of Lead White ultimately disguises the figures in a mass of textures. Moreover, to reiterate a point made earlier regarding the work of Bernhard Sachs, the amorphous and atmospheric space of X-ray is visualised as a material corpus.

Chapter Six: Sensing

Touch and Multisensory Perception

Charles Spence in his essay ‘The Multisensory Perception of Touch’ points out that our senses receive correlated information about the same external objects and events. He refers to an extensive body of empirical research that demonstrates that visual, auditory and other sensory cues can all influence tactile perception of the substance properties of haptically explored objects and surfaces.²⁹⁷ In relation to the technological image, I contend that the reverse is also true; haptic experience feeds into visual responses to images, especially when those images reveal obvious signs of depth, texture and layering.²⁹⁸

There is a vast array of literature in fields such as neuroscience and psychology that investigates how perceptual experience is shaped by a multiplicity of complex interactions between sensory modalities. These include numerous case studies on the ways in which multisensory illusions demonstrate the inextricable links between the senses.²⁹⁹ It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into these areas in great depth, however it is interesting to note how this research supports the idea that haptic and optic functions are co-constitutive in perception, an idea that may be traced to late nineteenth-century psychology and the work of Alois Riegl. According to Riegl’s psychology of perception, the eye only perceives coloured planes making the objects of the external world appear to us in ambiguous, disconnected form. For Riegl, definitive knowledge about the enclosed individual unity of single objects is only available through the sense of touch, through repeated perception of impenetrable points and inductive thought. A process of subjective thinking is therefore required to create a coherent picture.³⁰⁰

In a wider context, theoretical investigation advocating a broader sensorial relationship to the image tends to centre on the body itself. For instance, Hans Belting has suggested that “we as

²⁹⁷ Spence’s text is one of many essays on the subject of sensory perception and art brought together in the book *Art and the Senses*. This research supports the general idea of the dominance of vision over other senses while insisting on the powerful interrelationship of multisensory perception. See: C. Spence, ‘The Multisensory Perception of Touch,’ *Art and the Senses*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 85-86.

²⁹⁸ The idea of ‘touch educating vision’ has a relatively long history; the phrase itself is derived from George Berkeley’s ‘An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision’ (2 ed., Dublin, Jeremy Pepyat, 1709) and has been explored in fields as diverse as psychology, philosophy, film studies and new media. I refer where necessary to wider research in scientific fields to assist in the description of human perception in relation to visually perceived depth.

²⁹⁹ An example of a multisensory interaction study is “the rubber hand illusion” which describes a study in which when people see a life-sized rubber model of their hand being touched at the same time as their own hand (hidden from view) they experience the touch on the rubber hand, and often report that the rubber hand feels as if it was their own. See: M. Botvinick, J. Cohen, ‘Rubber hands ‘feel’ touch that eyes see,’ *Nature*, vol. 391, 1998, p. 756.

³⁰⁰ A. Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. R. Winkes, Rome, Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985, cited in C. Hubert, ‘Haptic/Optic,’ Christian Hubert Studio, http://www.christianhubert.com/writings/haptic_optic.html. Accessed 12 March 2017.

living media, are the ‘location of the images’, and not the apparatuses”³⁰¹ reinforcing the premise that “in every cognition of an image, the eyes cannot be separated out as the sole perception organs; rather, the entire body is the perceiving organ.”³⁰² Belting maintains that the image cannot be sanctioned off from the body, whether on a wall, screen or in our heads – images exist in a continuum, they “happen via transmission and perception.”³⁰³ He notes the fact that the German language does not make a distinction between ‘picture’ and ‘image’, thereby connecting mental images and physical artefacts to one another.³⁰⁴ This idea is also important in my research – the tactile gaze does not divorce the physical artwork from its mental simulation because tactility is present in both places.

Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* investigates how the role of sight has been scrutinised in French philosophy by a range of theorists who have questioned its dominance in Western culture.³⁰⁵ Jay examines how vision has been contested or relegated to a supplementary position by those thinkers who have “challenged its allegedly superior capacity to provide access to the world.”³⁰⁶ For example artist Marcel Duchamp disputes what he refers to as ‘retinal’ tendencies in art, claiming that art should be in the service of the mind, as opposed to purely retinal, a proposition that became one of the key antecedents to Conceptual Art.³⁰⁷

Gilles Deleuze refers to the sense of touch in his study of the cinematographic image,³⁰⁸ making reference to Alois Riegl’s “formula for indicating a touching that is specific to the gaze” in his analysis.³⁰⁹ Deleuze states that “it is the whole eye which doubles its optical function by a specifically ‘grabbing’ [haptique] one.”³¹⁰ I suggest that the same operation is engaged in the

³⁰¹ H. Belting, cited in O. Grau, ‘Media Art’s Challenge to Our Societies’, in O. Grau & T. Veigl (eds.), *Imagery in the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA, London, England, MIT Press, 2011, p. 372.

³⁰² Grau, p. 355.

³⁰³ H. Belting, ‘Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 31, Winter 2005, The University of Chicago, p. 303.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ See: M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, 1993.

³⁰⁶ Summary of *Downcast Eyes*, University of California Press, <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520088856>. Accessed 5 July 2017.

³⁰⁷ See: H. H. Arnason and Marla F. Prather, *History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Photography*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998, p. 274.

³⁰⁸ Deleuze refers to Bresson’s film *Pickpocket* postulating that ‘optical’ and ‘sound’ signs cannot be separated from, indeed may be regulated by, ‘tactile’ signs. Deleuze says: “In Bresson, opsigns and sonsigns cannot be separated from genuine tactisigns which perhaps regulate their relations”, in G. Deleuze, ‘Beyond the movement-image’ in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, London, Continuum, 2005, p. 12.

³⁰⁹ Alois Riegl’s *Late Roman Art Industry (Die spätromische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn)*, Vienna, 1901) may be outmoded in many ways, yet Riegl remains relevant as “a scholar who reacts to the Industrial Age and to the particular problems that evolved during this age for the artistic mind, the kind of problems, which have not yet entirely ceased to exist.” See: Forward by translator R. Winkes, p. xii in *Late Roman Art Industry*, Rome, Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985.

³¹⁰ Deleuze, ‘Beyond the movement-image’, p. 12.

process of making and looking at paintings – optical engagement is magnified and intensified by the haptic, especially through its hedonic and mnemonic dimensions – the memory of touch inflects our observations of surfaces.³¹¹

Artist Rosalyn Driscoll describes the role of haptic memory thus: “Even when we are only looking, tactile perception is subliminally implicated in the appreciation of art [...] we draw on our haptic memories of textures, forms, spaces, motion and materials to inform our understanding of what we see.” She says, “We engage haptically when seeing by projecting ourselves into an artwork, by identifying with elements in it, and by attributing movement to what is static.”³¹² Driscoll goes on to describe how the tensions and attitudes of an artwork can be felt in the body, which subliminally mimics these forces.³¹³

In her book *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Jennifer Barker points to James Elkins’ account of the “significant tactility”³¹⁴ of a painting. Here, Elkins proposes a tactility that is not limited to “the intentional and representational aspects of a picture, such as colour, composition, and brushstroke, but also includes extra-textual, even accidental, qualities including scratches or stains on the surface of a painting or print.”³¹⁵ This position is echoed in my theoretical framework, which frames the painted surface as a live field of materiality in which subsurface layers and unplanned gestures are considered equally significant (and equally visible to the imaging techniques which I am employing and responding to).

In *The Logic of Sensation*, Deleuze points to the accidental qualities of the artist Francis Bacon’s process, referring to his irrational, random, and nonillustrative marks as “asignifying traits” and further qualifying them as “traits of sensation.”³¹⁶ Deleuze stresses the uncoupling of marks and gestures from a concern with straightforward representation, stating, “These almost blind marks attest to an intrusion from another world into the visual world of figuration. To a certain extent, they remove the painting from the optical organisation of representation that was already reigning over it and rendering it figurative in advance.”³¹⁷

³¹¹ The term “haptic memory” for example, is defined as the ability to retain impressions of haptically acquired information after the original stimulus is absent. See: A. Dubrowski, H. Carnahan, R. Shih, ‘Evidence for Haptic Memory’, *World Haptics Conference 2009 Proceedings*, p. 145-149, 2009.

³¹² Driscoll, ‘Aesthetic Touch’, p. 114.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ J. Elkins, cited in J. M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2009, p. 24.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ G. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. D. W. Smith, London, New York, Continuum, 2005, p. 71. I owe this reference to a conversation with artist and academic David Eastwood regarding the work of Francis Bacon.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Both Elkins and Deleuze describe the sensuous and concealed aspects of painting in a way that suggests a ‘democratic’ response from the body. In this context, the image is not constructed through any kind of subordination of the hand to the mind’s eye, nor is it a stable thing composed and coded externally. Rather, the image can be seen as a surface that brings together a field of forces “on which an exterior correlate, instead of being copied, is transformed according to the tensive means proper to painting.”³¹⁸

With regard to painting, the role of touch in the tactile gaze provides a means to go beyond the presentation layer and its associated illusionism toward a more tangible and tactile conception of objects and surfaces as compendiums of material data and gestures. This in turn underscores the palpably sensed, yet sometimes hidden characteristics of artworks as opposed to the immediately or superficially visible. It draws attention away from meanings derived from pictorial or image-based content toward those that are instigated by an expanded access to artworks as processual, tactual, and materially stratified objects.³¹⁹

Touching Models

The tactile gaze highlights the specific kind of attention cast upon the surface of artworks facilitated by relatively recent developments in aforementioned imaging techniques, particularly in the area of high resolution multispectral and 3D imaging. In *Alchemy in 3D*, a project conducted by the Visual Computing Lab (ISTI-CNR) in Pisa, Italy, the 3D reconstruction of Jackson Pollock’s painting *Alchemy* promotes a very different, and more tactile way of seeing a well-known and historically significant painting (fig. 35).

³¹⁸ V. Ionescu, ‘Deleuze’s Tensive Notion of Painting in the Light of Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer’, *Deleuze Studies*, Mar 2011, vol. 5, no. 1, *Edinburgh University Press Journals*, p. 53, www.eupjournals.com/dls. Accessed 14 November 2017.

³¹⁹ Clearly not all artworks are ‘stratified’ per se, but conventional paintings usually contain several layers and most easel-based paintings are developed in coats as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In art conservation this is sometimes referred to as ‘stratigraphy’, a term more commonly associated with geology.

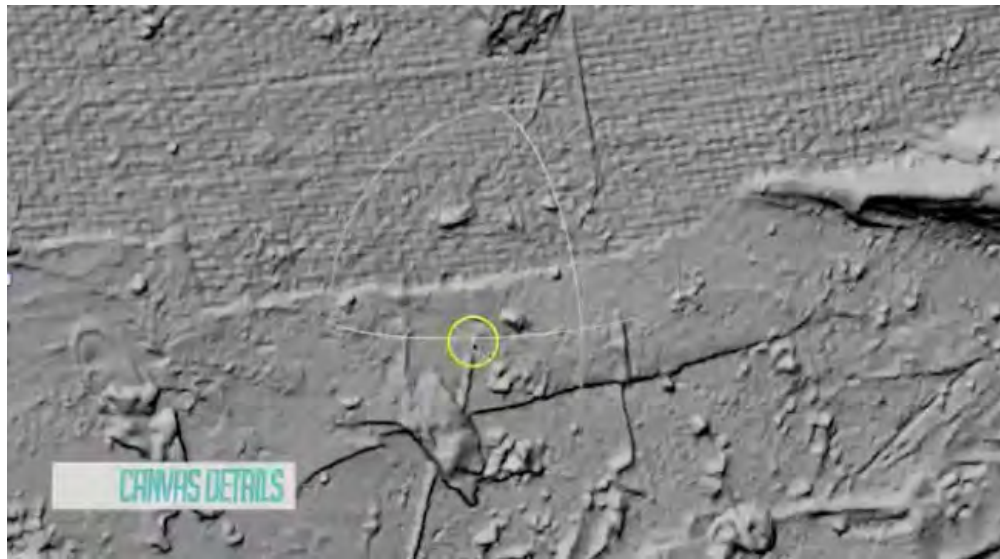


Figure 35: Still from video by the Visual Computing Lab, (ISTI-CNR), *Alchemy in 3D* made to accompany the exhibition at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, 2015 *Alchimia di Jackson Pollock: viaggio all'interno della materia*. Image courtesy the Visual Computing Lab (ISTI-CNR).

In this project the 3D model was used to create an interactive display so that visitors could “navigate the model and access explanations of relevant geometrical details”³²⁰ – the 1:1 scale reproduction giving the public the opportunity to physically interact with the artwork. In relation to the role of interactivity in art, Erkki Huhtamo has pronounced the invitation “Please touch” as the cornerstone of the interactive art aesthetic, echoing Marcel Duchamp’s “Priere du toucher” (prayer of touch).³²¹ Huhtamo claims the very idea of interactive art is intimately linked with the act of touching, which challenges the customary idea of the untouchability of the art object; and places fine art in the same theoretical context as a whole range of other human activities.³²² This emphasises the pivotal role of touch in our experience, whether authorised or not, actuated or implicit.³²³

The idea of the technological image as a ‘malleable proxy’ is exemplified by tactile reproductions of artworks that are designed explicitly for exploration and understanding through physical touching; for example, reproductions that employ various forms of 3D texturing that enable the

³²⁰ M. Callieri et al., ‘Alchemy in 3D: A digitization for a journey through matter,’ *Proceedings of the 2015 Digital Heritage Congress, Vol. 1*, 2015, p. 223-231.

³²¹ E. Huhtamo, ‘Trouble at the Interface, or the Identity Crisis of Interactive Art’, 2004. This text was prepared as a ‘Programmatic Key Text’ for *Refresh! The First International Conference on the Histories of Art, Science and Technology*, <http://pl02.donau-uni.ac.at/jspui/handle/10002/299>. Accessed 29 July 2018.

³²² E. Huhtamo, ‘On Art, Interactivity and Tactility’, <http://www.neme.org/texts/shaken-hands-with-statues>. Accessed 14 July 2017.

³²³ For instance scholarship such as H. Chatterjee, *Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling*, Oxford, UK, Berg Publishers, 2008; and E. Pye, *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts*, University College London Institute of Archaeology Publications, Left Coast Press, 2008, explore the history and educational value of touch in museums, giving an overview of object handling from both historical and scientific perspectives.

visually impaired to experience artworks in museums. In 2015 an exhibition at the Prado museum in Madrid, entitled *Touching the Prado* showcased 3D replicas of paintings so blind visitors could feel selected works of art. According to the Prado's website, the project "allows for the reality of the painting to be perceived in order to mentally recreate it as a whole and thus provide an emotional perception of the work."³²⁴ In addition to the three-dimensional images the exhibition included material such as texts in braille, audio guides and opaque glasses aimed at facilitating the experience for fully sighted visitors.



Figure 36: A blind person feels with her hands a copy of *The gentleman with his hand on his chest* by El Greco at The Prado Museum 10 February 2015 in Madrid. Image courtesy Pablo Blazquez Dominguez, and Getty Images.

The effect of the tactile gaze in these instances (where the role of sight is downgraded or suppressed) both decentres and supplements the art historical agency of the work by bringing the artwork into the present in a way that foregrounds its materiality and dimensionality as opposed to its synchronic representation in the evolution of painting. In other words, it "forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative"³²⁵ (the selective narratives of art history as well as those suggested by pictorial depictions). The painting is framed almost as a specimen, or a model for exploring what is normally inaccessible in a museum context – the artwork's surface – whereby the perceiver can create a 'mental picture' by feeling topographical detail and low relief translations of tonally rendered form (invocating Belting's argument, that mental images and physical artefacts can't be separated). Moreover, as argued previously, these

³²⁴ *Touching the Prado exhibition*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 1 January 2015–18 October 2015. See: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/whats-on/exhibition/hoy-toca-el-prado/29c8c453-ac66-4102-88bd-e6e1d5036ffa>. Accessed 17 November 2017.

³²⁵ Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, p.163.

forms of ‘visualisation’ put the observer in closer proximity to the material and processual aspects of art making, synthesising the image with its mental correlate through textural cues.

Visible Light and the Tactile Gaze

Mieke Bal states, “‘To see the light is a strange expression’: one does not see the light, but the light makes one see.”³²⁶ Here Bal invokes the function of light in perception, and as tonal value in the rendering of form in painting. In order to discuss light’s role in my practice it is important to distinguish between visible light (implicit in all aspects of painting and vision), and other non-visible light of the electromagnetic spectrum, which, paradoxically in my project, is employed as the central mode of ‘visibility.’

Artist and architect James Carpenter writes: “There is a tactility to something which is immaterial ... with light you are dealing with a purely electromagnetic wavelength coming in through the retina, yet it is tactile.” He says, “Your eye tends to interpret light and bring to it some sort of substance which, in reality, is not there.”³²⁷ Light as a substance that is ‘not there’ but nonetheless present is implicated in my painting process. Making paintings that use the effects of texture in conjunction with visible light emerged in response to observing the behaviour of both artificial and natural light on a given paint texture, particularly observing the effects of lighting from various angles, and light that surrounds a surface as an all encompassing ‘frame’. This was informed by my research into art conservation case studies in which raking light – one of the more basic techniques employed in the analysis of paintings – reveals hitherto unknown information about the painted surface.³²⁸

The National Gallery of London’s online glossary defines raking light as “a technique in which a painting is illuminated from one side only, at an oblique angle in relation to its surface.”³²⁹ This is often the first step taken in the conservation of paintings as it reveals the surface texture. Raised paint surfaces facing the light are illuminated, while those facing away create shadows. The amplified appearance of paint texture can easily be seen, photographed or recorded digitally. Conservators use raking light to judge aspects of the condition of a painting, linking the visualisation of painted texture with scientific diagnostics.³³⁰

³²⁶ M. Bal, ‘Dispersing the Image: Vermeer Story,’ in *Looking In: The Art of Viewing*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 65.

³²⁷ J. Carpenter (interview) in L. Mason, S. Poole, P. Sarpaneva and J. Carpenter (eds.), *Architecture Edition*, Blacksburg, Virginia, 2005, p. 5, cited in J. Pallasmaa, ‘Hapticity Vision,’ 9 January 2006, *Architectural Design*, Wiley Online Library, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ad.119/pdf. Accessed 12 October 2017.

³²⁸ Raking light is often used to document uneven tension in a canvas, craquelure, cupping/tenting paint, or warp in a painting or panel support.

³²⁹ National Gallery, London, Glossary, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/raking-light>. Accessed 6 October 2017.

³³⁰ Ibid.

My painting *Veov* (fig. 36) explores the tactile effects of angled lighting through the building up of paint density in a ‘broken colour’ approach (dabs of paint of various scale applied in directional strokes). These cumulative gestures are laid down in selected parts of the painting to catch light in different ways. In this painting, the face and hands of the figure, conventionally treated with delicate tonal modulation, become distorted with textured marks that appear to float in front of the image. The tactile appeal of paint itself is foregrounded, and the subtle effects of cast shadows from exaggerated textures further disrupt the illusionistic logic of the image. In this work, tests were carried out using a range of lighting approaches to achieve different textural and tonal effects.



Figure 37: Chelsea Lehmann, *Veov*, 2016, oil on linen, neon, 30 x 24cm. Right: *Veov* with neon frame. Images courtesy the artist and Docqment.

Experimenting with neon lighting as a surrounding frame/border produced a result similar to raking light³³¹ due to its intensity. This highlighted the thicker touches of paint and made the Cremnitz White pigment subtly glow. The colour green was selected for the neon frame as it attenuates the chroma of the predominant colours in the painting (red, pink, and orange) emphasising texture over colour and its connotations. *Veov* was exhibited as part of my exhibition *Archive* (MOP projects, Sydney, 19 October – 13 November 2016) in which I explored a creative approach to psychophysical colour³³² in order to affect a unified and dramatic perceptual

³³¹ The neon light however is multi-directional as opposed to conventional one-directional raking light.

³³² Psychophysics is a branch of science that investigates the relationship between physical stimuli and the sensations and perceptions they produce. See: G. Gescheider, *Psychophysics: the fundamentals* (3rd ed.), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997, p. ix; and, V. Bruce, P. R. Green, M. A. Georgeson, *Visual*

experience (see installation image, fig. 38).

Archive presented artworks (including a video projection and lightboxes showing X-ray and infrared images of paintings) in a darkened room in which the main source of light was the green-coloured neon frame of *Veov*. By manipulating the lighting conditions the experience of the artworks changed due to the distorted luminance (the intensity of light emitted from a surface), which was altered by using neon light and LED lights to ‘frame’ artworks. My aim was to highlight the artistic potential of the visible, as well as the non-visible sections of the electromagnetic spectrum in both an atmospheric and cohesive way.



Figure 38: Chelsea Lehmann, *Archive*, exhibition installation images, MOP projects, Sydney, October 19–November 13, 2016. Images courtesy the artist, MOP projects, and Docqment.

Tactility and Enlargement

The 4k video *VISIR*³³³ exhibited in *Archive* uses high-resolution digital scans that slowly transition between RGB (visible light) and infrared images of my painting *Window II*. The video was created for a 4k projector for maximum visualisation of detail and is projected on the gallery wall approximately four times the scale of the original painting. The big data necessary to maintain the detail of the original painting at this scale was made possible through ultra-high-resolution scans: *Window II* was imaged at a resolution of more than 750dpi at the Ide Advanced Imaging Laboratory, Kyoto University in 2016. As the human visual system can detect

Perception: physiology, psychology and ecology (3rd ed.), Georgeson MA, Psychology Press, 1996. See also: D. Briggs, ‘Visual Dictionary of Colour’ as part of presentation for *Colour Society of Australia NSW Division International Colour Day exhibit*, National Art School, Sydney, 21 - 24 March 2017. Briggs’ states, “The property of a light or an object that we perceive as its particular colour is a psychophysical property, meaning that it is not simply physical, but involves the perceiver as well as the stimulus in its definition.”

³³³ Named for the conjunction of “VIS” for visual light (RGB) high-resolution digital scan, and “IR” for infrared.

approximately 300dpi, these scans contain information at around double the normal capacity of human vision, hence can only be fully comprehended through enlargement.



Figure 39: (Left) high-resolution digital scan (900 dpi) of painting: Chelsea Lehmann, *Window II*, 2015-2016, oil on linen, 72 x 56cm, (Right) detail showing paint marks at enlarged scale. Images courtesy the artist and Ide Advanced Imaging Laboratory, Kyoto University, Japan.

The intention of *VISIR* is to demonstrate the potential of high-resolution images in terms of large-scale reproductions/re-presentations of artworks, and to underscore subtle shifts in the visualisation of the painting with infrared. The penetration of the surface with infrared light results in parts of the painted image almost disappearing, while other characteristics like the weave of the canvas and under-layers become more visible.³³⁴ Some layers of the imaged painting appear partially or completely transparent, especially in areas where the paint is applied in thinner layers (fig. 40).

³³⁴ Infrared reflectography (IRR) is a technique frequently used to look through paint layers. When the longer wavelengths of infrared radiation penetrate the paint layers, the upper layers appear transparent. The degree of penetration depends on the thickness of the paint, the type of paint used, and the length of the wave of infrared radiation.



Figure 40: Indicating the subtle differences between visible light and infrared, the image above left shows a black and white version of the visible light scan, and the infrared scan (right) – in which a great deal of information is ‘lost’ (and some regained) through certain pigments becoming transparent and layers underneath appearing.



Figure 41: (Left) Infrared high-resolution digital scan (900 dpi) of *Window II*. Images courtesy the artist and Ide Advanced Imaging Laboratory, Kyoto University, Japan. (Right) High-resolution digital scan (900 dpi) of painting: Chelsea Lehmann, *Window II*, 2015-2016, oil on linen, 72 x 56cm.

The enlargement of brushstrokes and their corresponding ‘up-close-ness’ is another means to explore latent tactility in the image. As early as the 1890’s art historian Bernard Berenson noted that the “intimate realization of an object comes to us only when we unconsciously translate our retinal impressions of it into ideated sensations of touch, pressure and grasp – hence the phrase

‘tactile values.’”³³⁵ Tactility can be thought of in terms of proximity to the body: “tactile objects are experienced as being on the body, whereas visual objects are experienced as being located at a distance.”³³⁶ This concept is applied to my work by bringing the physicality of the mark into perceptual focus in a kind of coordinated corporeal metonymy. The enlargement of painterly gesture challenges the traditional material order of brushstrokes as subordinated to the demands of visual illusion.³³⁷ Painted marks that emphasise texture/feel become the new ‘order’ as they detach, though not entirely, from the restraints of illusion in a more strident and visceral tactile expression.

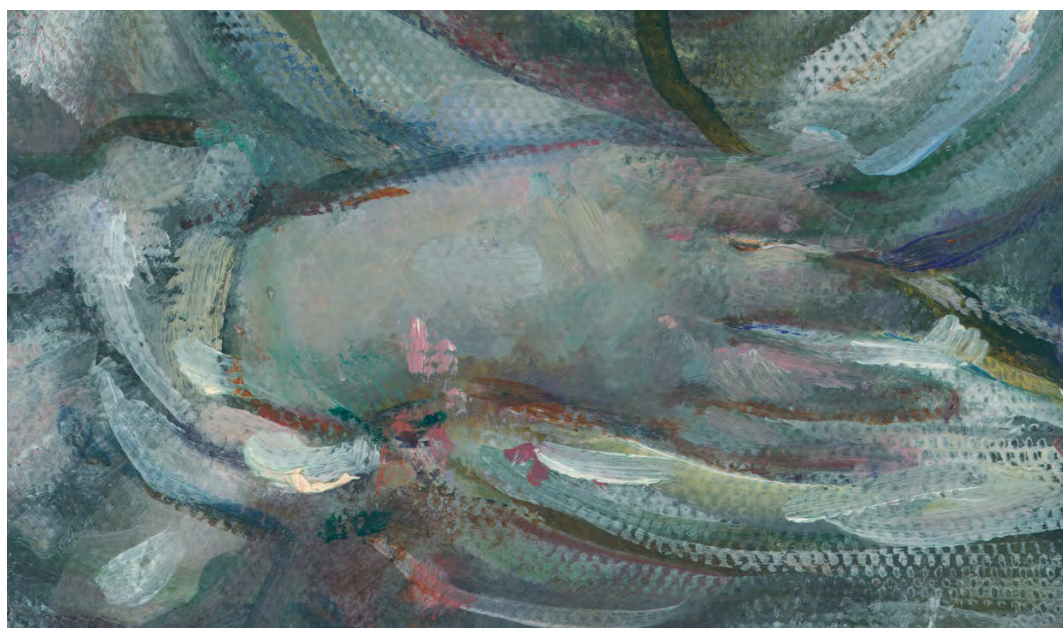


Figure 42: High-resolution digital scan (900 dpi): Chelsea Lehmann, *Window II*, (detail), 2015-2016, oil on linen, 72 x 56cm. Image courtesy the artist and Ide Advanced Imaging Laboratory, Kyoto University, Japan.

Marks are augmented so that they appear separated and less fixed to the image. That is, they index painting (and the body) first, and then optically resolve into form – a hand, a drape, an asp. This approach to mark-making is echoed in David Green’s discussion of painter David Reed’s work in his essay ‘Painting as Aporia’ in which Green discusses the central paradox of Reed’s ‘Brushstroke Paintings’ as both highly illusionistic and simultaneously abstract. He describes this contradiction as an “ambivalence or indeterminacy [that] announces itself with (and within) the

³³⁵ B. Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, London, Phaidon, 1952, p. 94. The four essays contained in this volume were first published separately from 1894 to 1907.

³³⁶ S. Vaishnavi et al., ‘Binding personal and peripersonal space: evidence from tactile extinction’, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 181-189, as cited in F. Bacci, ‘Sculpture and Touch’ *Art and the Senses*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 134.

³³⁷ Shiff, p. 43. Shiff refers to the painter’s touch as a “vehicle for a metonymic exchange between an artist’s or a viewer’s human physicality and the material, constructed physicality of an artwork.”

very surface of the paintings themselves”³³⁸ in which painting is “more than morphology, more than a medium” and definitions such as paint, colour, mark, texture, surface are just as expansive as the “the forms which painting has taken, the material out of which it gets made and the technologies that it employs.”³³⁹

David Reed’s painting (see fig 42.) combines the mechanical and the handmade using actual brushstrokes mixed with ‘simulations’ (stenciled brushstrokes) in a way that has been compared to the Baroque, evoking “curvaceously modelled forms of drapery that typify seventeenth-century Italianate painting”³⁴⁰ Green points out that Reed himself has expressed a strong interest in the Baroque and that his work is often examined using this framework.³⁴¹ As evident in the high-resolution images of my painting *Window II* (fig. 41, fig 42), the amplification of the brushstroke and its movement as a “sinuous arabesque”³⁴² is underpinned by a sense of speed, energy and magnification, and highlights individual brushstrokes as unique and irreproducible, marking out “an imaginary dimension beyond the literal surface of the painting.”³⁴³



Figure 43: David Reed, *Painting #650*, 2003–13/2014–15/2015–16, acrylic, alkyd on polyester, 88.9 x 214.63cm. Image courtesy the artist, and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

High-resolution scans emphasise the indexical qualities of painting, the ‘touch upon touch’ that builds an image. In his essay on touch and painting entitled ‘Constructing Physicality’ Richard Shiff claims, “with touch, experience is multiple, concrete, and proximate – close ‘at hand.’”³⁴⁴ Further illustrating this position through the concept of ‘aesthetic touch’, artist Rosalind Driscoll

³³⁸ D. Green, ‘Painting as Aporia’ In: J. Harris, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, Liverpool University Press, 2003, p. 84.

³³⁹ Green, p. 83.

³⁴⁰ Green, p. 86.

³⁴¹ Green, p. 105 (notes). Green cites examples: M. Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio* and D. Carrier, ‘David Reed: An Abstract Painter in the Age of Postmodernism’ in S Bann and W. Allen (eds.), *Interpreting Contemporary Art*, London, Reaktion Books, 1991.

³⁴² Green, p. 86.

³⁴³ Green, p. 89.

³⁴⁴ Shiff, p. 43.

describes tactile art as “intimate, drawing us into relationship with what we are touching. It is active rather than passive, requiring us to reach out and explore. It grounds the experience in perception rather than concept.” She claims: “Aesthetic touch deepens our knowledge of sensuous reality.”³⁴⁵ The idea of aesthetic touch can be seen in the context of technological images where an intimate understanding of the painted surface is elicited by the amplification of material phenomena, that in turn stimulates the tactile imagination.

As previously discussed, terms such as ‘primitive’ and ‘carnal’ are frequently used in relation to touch.³⁴⁶ These bodily terms are often associated with baser instincts, a sensual ‘being in the world’ that can be related to painterly concerns such as the role of intuition or instinct in the application of paint, and the bodily involvement with the stuff itself, its oiliness, viscosity, and lustre. The reciprocity of touch, the dissolution of divisions between self and the other, and the reflexivity of the subject through the merging of touch and vision (or the “reversibility of body and world”³⁴⁷) are ways of thinking that underscore both the intimacy and revelatory aspects of touch.³⁴⁸

Australian artist Camille Hannah frames her work in a similar way, suggesting an ‘erotics of painting’ can emerge through the seductive qualities of paint and the associated allure of interactivity in order to “engage the viewer immediately in a tactile participation, close and yet distancing at the threshold of vision and touch.”³⁴⁹ Hannah’s work looks at painting through the lens of technology, with a focus on the painted surface and the analogous sensuality of the touch screen (and the action of swiping). She describes her work as “embedded in twenty-first century gestural abstraction while conceptually vested in digital and screen technologies.”³⁵⁰ Her paintings respond to the screen-paradigm through ideas of painting as object/surface and concepts

³⁴⁵ R. Driscoll, cited in A. Gallace, and C. Spence ‘Tactile aesthetics: Towards a definition of its characteristics and neural correlates’, *Social Semiotics*, vol. 21, issue 4, p. 569-589, September 2011, p. 571.

³⁴⁶ Heinrich Wölfflin saw touch as more ‘primitive’ than vision (*Principles of Art History*, 1915) suggesting a lack of sophistication. However, the ‘primitive’ is often associated with baser instincts, a sensual ‘being in the world’ in which touch is central. This can be related to painterly concerns such as the role of intuition or gestural ‘instinct’.

³⁴⁷ C. Halberg, ‘The Tangible Invisible: Irigaray’s Phenomenological Critique of Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of the Flesh’ in A. F. Aarø and J. Servan (eds.), *Environment, Embodiment and Gender*, Bergen, Hermes Text, 2011, p. 113.

³⁴⁸ For instance Luce Irigaray’s approach to erotics underscores a female oriented position elicited by the breaking down of boundaries enabled by touch: “Irigaray famously maintained that folds and concavities like the labia produce locations of contact, sites of perpetual stimulation, that signal the breakdown of self/other, subject/object, and gender oppositions.” See: J. A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade*, London, University Press of New England, 2010, p. 10.

³⁴⁹ From the artist’s website. See <http://camillehannah.com/page/about>. Accessed 21 July 2017.

³⁵⁰ C. Hannah, *ibid*.

of interactivity as a virtual form of tactility”³⁵¹ recalling Guilian Bruno’s ideas regarding the “modern surface condition” in which she notes “how façades are becoming virtual screens.”³⁵²



Figure 44: Camille Hannah, *Bella donna*, 2014, oil on convex Perspex, 40cm diameter. Image courtesy the artist and Arterreal Gallery, Sydney.

Hannah describes her interest in “traversing the paradox between the prohibition of touch in relation to digital technology and art” and an erotics of painting.³⁵³ This concept foregrounds painterly gesture and movement as a sliding action across a smooth surface (Perspex), which in turn can be seen as overtly sensuous. However due to the transposal of the painting to the reverse side of the Perspex there is a sense of unattainability. Hannah’s paintings are therefore contained, like specimens, conveying a sense of sensuality “yet with an underlying intimation of remove; of ‘...touch me, touch me not.’”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ C. Hannah, *ibid.*

³⁵² From the summary of the book: *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media*, University of Chicago Press, <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo17089730.html>. Accessed 2 April 2016.

³⁵³ C. Hannah, *ibid.*

³⁵⁴ B. Dowse, ‘Heroine’ (Camille Hannah exhibition), exh. cat., Arterreal gallery, 5-29 March 2014.



Figure 45: Chelsea Lehmann, *Redux*, 2016, oil on acrylic disc, LED lights (blue, turquoise, red, white), 30cm diameter x 2cm (depth/thickness). Images courtesy the artist.

In my painting on acrylic entitled *Redux* (fig. 45), the use of LED lights around the edge of the disc illuminates the painting from within and intensifies the sense of space between the painted marks. In this work there is a painting on the front and back of the acrylic surface. The way the two paintings on either side of the disc interact with the light produces the final effect of spatial depth. The coloured LED lights (changeable between red, green, blue, violet) produces different levels of clarity (nearness/farness) in the marks and, like Hannah's painting, there is an amplification of painterly touch offset by its inaccessibility: the marks appear suspended within the surface. This responds to the way high-resolution scans of paintings augment and 'optically separate' painted marks, reinforcing a sense of surface stratification. In my work, painting on both sides of a thick, transparent surface solicits a penetrative vision by splicing together different 'planes' of the painting. Looking through the surface animates the painted marks and invokes the interactivity of the touch screen.

The paintings of Paul Cézanne have been theorised in terms of an erotics of painting via the transformation of material qualities. This is contextualised by Aruna D'Souza as an eroticisation of the medium itself in which paint qualities such as liquidity, oiliness, contour, and paint's meeting with the resistance of the canvas can be understood as "perceptually erogenous."³⁵⁵ In 'Cézanne: Words and Deeds', Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss cite Cézanne's letter to friend and painter Emile Bernard in which he says that one must "penetrate what is before oneself."³⁵⁶ Bois and Krauss state:

³⁵⁵ See: A. D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers: Biography and the Erotics of Paint*, Penn State Press, 1999.

³⁵⁶ Cezanne to Emile Bernard, May 26, 1904, in *Letters*, p. 304 (translation altered), cited in Y. Bois, 'Cezanne: Words and Deeds', trans. R. E. Krauss, *October*, Vol. 84, Spring, 1998, p. 37.

If we relate this saying (with all the erotic connotations it implies) to the sense of touch, we change register and perhaps we approach more precisely what Cézanne wanted to attempt, namely to splice vision and touch together at the very moment when the two sensory fields were in the process of splitting apart: in some way to invent a tactile vision.³⁵⁷

Richard Shiff's scholarship on touch in relation to the work of Cézanne defines three main aspects of touch in relation to painting: firstly, touch as the indexical gesture of depositing a mark as an imprint/impression; second, as the metonymic quality of the applied paint mark itself (as a visible form) and third; as Shiff states: "touch is the tactile sensation the painter actually experiences or the viewer imagines to be associated with making such a mark. Each of these aspects of the experience of painting (both painter's and viewer's) is 'touch.'"³⁵⁸

The tactile gaze calls attention to the bodily transaction between the viewer and the object. That is, the awareness of any object can induce an awareness of being an object. However, the tactile gaze can also be understood in terms of how it communicates information about the thing viewed, and its contiguous relationship with the 'view' of the apparatus that made it possible. That is, technological imaging allows us to see what is ordinarily inaccessible to the naked eye, and in turn this information allows us to perceive or conceptualise an artwork's surface and materiality in a deeper, more palpable way.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Shiff, p. 43 (as cited previously).

Chapter Seven: Aura and the Latent Image

What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye – while resting on a summer afternoon – a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch.³⁵⁹

This final chapter of the thesis outlines the concept of aura, which provides an ambient conceptual framework throughout this practice-based project in the sense that many of the ideas explored converge in the various facets of the auratic paradigm. Aura draws attention to the characteristics and implications of the gaze as a perceptual structure which mediates between subject and object, and which operates as an apparatus in both senses of the word, as (1) the technical equipment or machinery needed for a particular activity or purpose and (2) the complex structure of a particular organization or system. Put another way, the apparatus is both the interface between technology and art, and a ‘way of seeing,’ noticing, and framing information.³⁶⁰

The concept of aura has been taken up by many theorists since Walter Benjamin first used the term in the 1930’s to describe a form of perceptual experience.³⁶¹ My research intersects with ideas concerning the auratic paradigm in contemporary art, underpinned by an exploration of how the technological image promotes a form of perception uniquely attuned to the artwork’s duration, sensorial acuity, and trace.³⁶² Benjamin’s theoretical investigations into aura, especially those set out in his seminal essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’³⁶³

³⁵⁹ W. Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,’ (Second Version) as reproduced in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*, trans. E. Jephcott, R. Livingstone, H. Eiland, et al., Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 23.

³⁶⁰ This phrase is intended to evoke the critical theory of John Berger in his seminal work, *Ways of Seeing*. The idea of ‘noticing’ is also important here, to point to the act of identifying the ‘underneath’ (the latent image) as a meaningful subject.

³⁶¹ According to Miriam Hansen, Benjamin’s first use of the term appears in an unpublished report on one of his hashish experiments, dated March 1930. See: Walter Benjamin, ‘Protocols of Drug Experiments,’ *On Hashish*, trans. H. Eiland et al., Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 2006, p. 58, in M. B. Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ *Critical Inquiry*, No. 34, Winter 2008. Hansen describes how in Benjamin’s work, “aura describes a cluster of meanings and relations that appear [...] in various configurations and not always under its own name.” including the more common understanding of aura as a kind of ether, substance, or halo that might surround something, p. 340.

³⁶² Benjamin’s emphasis on the duration of the artwork is largely interpreted as interchangeable with ‘permanence’, however my theorisation focuses on duration as the ‘life’ of the artwork.

³⁶³ For the most part, I refer to the second version of Benjamin’s essay which Benjamin himself considered the ‘master version’ – ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’ (written 1935-36, and unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime) as reproduced in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*. Occasionally, I also refer to Hannah Arendt’s translation from the 1935 essay: ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ trans H. Zohn, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York, Schocken Books, 1969. For a detailed description of the trajectory of ‘The Work of Art’ essay see: ‘Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art,’ in M.W. Jennings, *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*, p. 42-43 (notes).

(hereafter referred to as ‘The Work of Art’ essay) contextualise current discourse around the relationship between art, perception and technologies of reproduction, and anticipate the turn toward ideas of mediated embodiment.³⁶⁴ Throughout this chapter I will refer to a more linear trajectory in Benjamin’s dialectic thought where appropriate, but have otherwise taken a leaf out of his book by investigating aura through a constellated or non-linear approach to history, whereby Benjamin’s ideas are debated alongside those they put into lively effect. In particular, I refer to Miriam Bratu Hansen’s scholarship on Benjamin’s aura, which covers a wide range of his work and reveals connections across his various implementations of the concept. Towards the end of the chapter I bring the concept of ‘auratic trace’ into play, an idea that unites both my emphasis on processual and material trace and the iconoclastic gesture. In this context, image breaking is another form of trace in which the human hand is employed to deflect or ‘ambiguate’ pictorial meaning.

In many cases, the deployment of new interpretations of Benjamin’s work were a response to rapid changes in media and technologies of reproduction – some of which are discussed in this thesis. Technological images of artworks can be seen as malleable proxies, part of a material flow³⁶⁵ whereby the original is the antecedent of a constellation of replications that initiate various experiential responses. In light of this proposition, the questions that frame my research assume two things; that the sensory systems of our bodies are impacted by technological innovations (reconfiguring our sense of seeing, touch, and tactility)³⁶⁶ and, that “technologically mediated or produced art today may be discussed in terms of its auratic here and now.”³⁶⁷ In the digital age, what is the artwork’s aura contingent upon? Are the advanced capacities of technological imaging and visualisation now capable of ‘migrating’ aura or, in Sarah Kenderdine’s words, ‘proliferating’ aura³⁶⁸ by the same means that seemingly produced the philosophical problem in the first place (that is, technology)? If so, how do technological images expand the aura of the artwork?

³⁶⁴ L. Koepnick, ‘Benjamin in the Age of New Media,’ *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. R.J. Goebel, Rochester, New York, Camden House, 2009, p. 119.

³⁶⁵ In Boris Groys book *In the Flow*, he suggests that techniques of mechanical reproduction give us objects without aura, while digital production can generate aura without objects, transforming all its materials into vanishing markers of the transitory present (from the summary of the book, see: <https://www.versobooks.com/books/2090-in-the-flow>). Groys says, “As an artwork’s existing material support decays and dissolves, the work can be copied and placed on a different material support – for example, as a digitalized image accessible on the Internet”, B. Groys, *In the flow*, London, New York, Verso, 2016, p. 35 (e-pub).

³⁶⁶ Koepnick, ‘Benjamin in the Age of New Media’, p. 115.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ See for example: S. Kenderdine, ‘How will museums of the future look?’ *TEDxGateway 2013*, published 11 Apr 2014; ‘Deep Mapping to Data Sculpting: Inside Omnispatial Archives’, *eResearch Australasia 2015*, published 6 November 2015; ‘New technologies bring cultural heritage to life’ *AARNet interview*, 15 December 2015; ‘Art and Experiential Design, ANGSW, 28 May 2016; ‘The Digital Masterpiece’, *The World Economic Forum*, published 19 February 2016.

In 'The Work of Art' essay, aura refers to a certain kind of aesthetic presence of art, its culturally sanctioned authority as a unique and original object with a specific manifestation in time and space. Within the conditions of modernity this authority was threatened by techniques of mass reproduction. Moreover, Benjamin presents this as a tension between the qualities of uniqueness and authenticity in the original; and society's desire to "get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."³⁶⁹ This tension between the auratic and 'non-auratic' (aesthetic originality vs infinite reproduction³⁷⁰) underpinned Benjamin's attempt "to determine the effect of the work of art once its power of consecration has been eliminated."³⁷¹ It also anticipated a future in which the artwork's function and society's sensorial apprehension of artworks would dramatically change.

In this chapter, I am addressing Benjamin's ideas by investigating the relationship between two of his explorations in regard to aesthetic experience: aura and trace. This multifaceted aesthetic experience, which I propose is available in the technological reproduction, is characterised by a simultaneous comprehension of distance (aura) and proximity (trace), Benjamin's spatial metaphors that are key to his theorisation of aesthetic experience, and which are intrinsically connected to his explorations of a disjunctive temporality.³⁷²

Aura and the Technological Image

Technological images of artworks, as defined in this thesis, expose processual, elemental, and textural information within the surface. These images are in themselves unique, but also reinforce the original artwork's singularity. On the other hand, technological images can shift the artwork's meaning away from its original "presence in time and space," and corresponding "ritual value" by retrieving information that potentially casts doubt on the artwork's place in tradition.³⁷³ For instance, the revelation of a former composition underneath a painting's surface can prove it was created by the hand of another artist, changing the artwork's place in the art historical canon, and correspondingly, its reception.

³⁶⁹ W. Benjamin, 'Work of Art' essay, (ed.) H. Arendt, p. 225.

³⁷⁰ L. Koepnick, p. 114.

³⁷¹ W. Benjamin, 'Theory of Distraction', in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*, trans. E. Jephcott, R. Livingstone, H. Eiland, et al., Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 56-57 (the editors point out "this fragment is associated with the composition of the second version of *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1935-1936)").

³⁷² The term 'disjunctive temporality' is borrowed from Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura', p. 347. Hansen refers to the disjunctive possibilities of experience in modernity and in Benjamin's aura model as "the sudden and fleeting disruption of linear time, its uncanny linkage of past and future—and the concomitant dislocation of the subject are articulated through, rather than in mere opposition to, the technological media."

³⁷³ Benjamin discusses ritual as the location of the artwork's "use value" ('Work of Art' essay, ed. H. Arendt, p. 225), but within the artwork itself, different meanings can be uncovered over time that make this "use value" fluctuate.

Benjamin considers the artwork's history, including changes in its physical condition, a major factor in its unique existence and stresses that these traces "can only be revealed through physical and chemical analyses which it is impossible to perform on a reproduction."³⁷⁴ But what of the images that reveal these traces? That is, the technological image of a painting is a reproduction of a kind, yet unlike a standard photographic reproduction, which merely reproduces the presentation layer, it can reveal the painting as an archive of processual and material changes (pentimenti), enhancing an understanding of the artwork's duration – "the testimony to the history that it has experienced"³⁷⁵ as an object.

Benjamin's theoretical exploration of the reproduction was informed by the work of artist and theorist László Moholy-Nagy.³⁷⁶ In the essay 'Production-Reproduction' (1922) which predates Benjamin's artwork essay by more than ten years, Moholy-Nagy proposes "a necessary relationship between technology, media, and the development of the human sensorium."³⁷⁷ He points to the energising function of new technology/media, stating, "art attempts to create new relationships between familiar and as yet unfamiliar data, optical, acoustic, or whatever, and forces us to take it all in through our sensory equipment."³⁷⁸ This perpetually renewing relationship between familiar and as yet unfamiliar data is reflected in my research methodology, which aims to find resonances (both theoretical and material) between visible and latent imagery through technological instrumentation and physical erasure.

Moholy-Nagy describes reproductions as "the mimetic replication of an extant external reality" (or a repetition of existing relationships³⁷⁹) whereas a 'production' is "those types of art practices that employ technology to actively create new relationships."³⁸⁰ In this typology, Moholy-Nagy invokes an understanding of a production as 'event', that is, an ongoing point of dynamism and mutual productivity between art and technology. In contrast, the 'reproduction' only replicates an "external reality" – its inner dimension is ignored. In the production (or "productive creativity"

³⁷⁴ Benjamin, 'Work of Art' essay, p. 220.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 221

³⁷⁶ "For Benjamin, Moholy-Nagy's theorization of the variously reciprocal relationships among technological change, the production of new media forms, and the development of the human sensorium was particularly important." See: M.W. Jennings, editor's introduction, *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*.

³⁷⁷ 'The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art,' in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. E. Jephcott, R. Livingstone, H. Eiland, et al., Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 11.

³⁷⁸ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 'Production-Reproduction', in C. Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989, p. 79-82, cited in 'The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art', p. 11.

³⁷⁹ L. Moholy-Nagy, 'Production Reproduction' in *Painting, Photography, Film*, trans. J. Seligman, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1987, p. 30.

³⁸⁰ M. W. Jennings, 'The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art', p. 11. See also: M. W. Jennings, 'Agriculture, Industry, and the Birth of the Photo-Essay in the Late Weimar Republic', *October*, vol. 93, Summer 2000, p. 23-56.

as Moholy-Nagy puts it³⁸¹) technological instrumentation operates as prosthesis: “an extension of the range and power of the human visual apparatus,”³⁸² the possibilities of which can be exploited through human manipulation. Moholy-Nagy states that “We may regard astronomical, X-ray and lightning photographs all as forerunners of this type of composition”³⁸³ in which phenomena (such as non-visible light) can open up an expanded means of visualization in the hands of the artist.

Technological imaging such as high-resolution digital scanning, 3D laser scanning and analytical imaging techniques³⁸⁴ employing non-visible light are capable of retrieving and recording information in diverse ways, in unprecedented detail, resulting in exceptional quality, multispectral images of artworks. Like Moholy-Nagy’s ‘productions,’ these images are not photographic reproductions; rather they are complex digital surrogates containing versatile sets of data that can re-present information beyond the capabilities of both standard camera-based techniques and the human visual system. In this way, the non-material image operates as an archive or repository with wide-ranging potential for re-materialisation.

Benjamin highlights the role of the apparatus in his theorisation of sound reproduction. He states that “technological reproduction had not only reached a standard that permit[s] it to turn all traditional works of art into its objects, subjecting their effects to profound changes, but had also captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.”³⁸⁵ Advanced/analytic imaging techniques can be seen in a similar light, whereby the work of art becomes an object of technological process, resulting in a functional/affective shift that highlights the artistry of techniques of replication.

In order to explore the role of advanced facsimiles of artworks, I will discuss a project that demonstrates the extraordinary range of processes used in their manufacture, and the changing reception of these cultural heritage replications. In 2006, the Musée du Louvre reached an agreement with cultural foundation Fondazione Giorgio Cini and granted Factum Arte (a so-called digital mediation company³⁸⁶) access to record Paulo Veronese's painting *The Wedding at*

³⁸¹ L. Moholy-Nagy, ‘Production Reproduction’, p. 30.

³⁸² M. Jennings, ‘The Production, Reproduction, and Reception of the Work of Art’, p. 11.

³⁸³ Jennings, p. 31.

³⁸⁴ Analytical imaging refers to the technique of extracting information from images using pattern recognition and data mining. Analytical imaging differs from conventional imaging used in cultural heritage by extracting and assigning numerical values to the image information providing unprecedented control of colour accuracy, among other features. The technique provides ultra-high resolutions and high colour fidelity that are not achievable with traditional camera techniques. See LUXLAB ‘Advanced Analytic Scanning’, UNSW Art & Design, Sydney, <http://www.niea.unsw.edu.au/research/projects/luxlab-advanced-analytic-scanning>. Accessed 2 July 2016.

³⁸⁵ W. Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility’, trans. M.W. Jennings, in *Grey Room*, vol. 39, Spring 2010, p. 11–37, Grey Room, Inc. and MIT Press, p. 13.

³⁸⁶ Factum Arte is a company based in Madrid, London and Milan, consisting of a team of artists, technicians and conservators “dedicated to digital mediation - both in the production of works for

Cana (1563) for the creation of a 1:1 scale facsimile that would be placed on the original site (fig. 46). The passage of text below by director of Factum Arte Adam Lowe gives an overview of the project:

On September 11th, 2007 a copy of Veronese's famous painting [*Wedding at Cana*] was unveiled in its original position on the end wall of the Palladian refectory on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. The copy [...] is an exact facsimile of the painting in its current condition in the Musée du Louvre. The facsimile, even though it has been produced through the intermediary of digital techniques, appears as a painting on canvas, with such attention to detail that you can see the brush marks, the different reflectivity of the surface and the horizontal cuts that Napoleon's orderlies had to make in order to tear the painting from the wall, strip by strip, before rolling it like a carpet and sending it as a war booty to Paris in 1797—a cultural rape very much in the mind of all Venetians, and one of the reasons for the emotional response that many had in front of the painting—it is also an important factor in the extraordinary press interest that followed the unveiling.³⁸⁷

contemporary artists and in the production of facsimiles as part of a coherent approach to preservation and dissemination.” <http://www.factum-arte.com/aboutus>. Accessed July 16, 2018. See also: <https://vimeo.com/7313651>. Accessed 24 April 2017.

³⁸⁷ A. Lowe, ‘Returning “Les Noces de Cana,”’ January 2008, Factum Arte, <http://www.factum-arte.com/pag/537/Returning-quot-Les-Noces-de-Cana-quot-by-Paolo-Caliari>. Accessed 14 July 2018. See also: A. Lowe, ‘Returning Veronese's *The Wedding at Cana* to Venice: some issues concerning originality and repatriation,’ in J. Anderson (ed.), *Crossing cultures: conflict, migration and convergence: the proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art*, Miegunyah Press, Imprint of Melbourne University Publications, 2009.



Figure 46: Facsimile of Veronese's *The Wedding Feast at Cana* replicated by Factum Arte, installed at the Palladian refectory, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice. Image courtesy Factum Arte and Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

In their essay exploring the philosophical potential of the facsimile, Adam Lowe³⁸⁸ and philosopher Bruno Latour investigate the idea of “the migration of the aura.”³⁸⁹ They propose aura as something fluid, capable of migrating from the original to the copy via advanced technological reproduction. This process, they claim, redefines what originality means in relation to artworks. Lowe and Latour state: “facsimiles, especially those relying on complex (digital) techniques, are the most fruitful way to explore the original and even to help redefine what originality actually is.”³⁹⁰

In ‘The Migration of the Aura’ essay, *The Wedding Feast at Cana*³⁹¹ facsimile is the focus of a reexamination of the status and function of the original, elaborated through an analysis of its shifting relationship to the copy: “the obsession for pinpointing originality increases

³⁸⁸ Director of Factum Arte Adam Lowe is a self-proclaimed copyist. He states, “What we are doing is a form of archaeology ... we explore the surface of things. Our scanners and the technology we have developed allow us to see the surface as the eye sees it, but also some of what lies beneath,” in ‘Meet the Master of Reproduction’ *Christies magazine*, Fine Art: Interview, 9 November 2015, <https://www.christies.com/features/Master-of-reproduction-Adam-Lowe-and-Factum-Arte-6776-1.aspx>. Accessed 13 July 2018.

³⁸⁹ B. Latour, A. Lowe, ‘The Migration of the Aura - or How to Explore the Original Through Its Facsimiles’ in T. Bartscherer and R. Coover (eds), *Switching Codes. Thinking Through Digital Technology in the Humanities and the Arts*, University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 275-297.

³⁹⁰ Latour and Lowe, p. 5. For another comprehensive discussion of the copy see: C. Forberg and P. W. Stockhammer, ‘The Transformative Power of the Copy: A Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Approach’, *Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality*, vol. 2, Heidelberg University Publishing, 2017.

³⁹¹ Also known more simply as *The Wedding at Cana*.

proportionally with the availability and accessibility of more and more copies of better and better quality.”³⁹² In a critique of the seemingly sacrosanct status of original artworks, Lowe claims “we have this weird obsession with the original, as though it were static and immortal, even though we know that, like everything else, it journeys through time.”³⁹³ He proposes that originality is grounded in the trajectory of the object, stating, “It is not a fixed state of being but a process which changes and deepens with time. The importance of the work of art is revealed in its ability to reflect the changing ideas and values that condition both its appearance and the ways we respond to it.”³⁹⁴ Central to this argument is the quality of the copy: Lowe suggests that ‘cloning’ culture (a clone being a good facsimile) “is a process of copying that exists for the purposes of studying and deepening understanding – a process of verification not one of falsification.” Furthermore, the success of the copy is measured on a certain verisimilitude of experience informed by the re-presentation context; “if one first engages with the space and then starts to unravel the history and transformations of the painting, then the facsimile has succeeded.”³⁹⁵

Resituating the facsimile of *The Wedding at Cana* was a process of repatriation from the Louvre back to Venice (where it was originally torn off the refectory wall as war booty in 1797), reclaiming the artwork’s first site, and with it the original determinants of experience, such as the lighting, and height of the painting. In the Louvre, Veronese’s *The Wedding at Cana* is shown at standard picture height, approximately eighty centimetres from the floor in “uniform zenithal light,” whereas in Palladio’s refectory (its original site), the facsimile is shown at a “height that makes sense in the room” which maintains the logic and dramatic tension of the complex, theatrical composition.³⁹⁶ Moreover, in the refectory the artwork is “delicately lit by the natural light from huge East and West windows. Here in its original setting the light at about 5pm on a summer evening coincides exactly with the light and shadow in the painting.”³⁹⁷ In the Louvre, the original painting has an ornate gilt frame, however the facsimile is unframed and fits the wall of the refectory edge to edge so that the “Palladio’s architecture merges with Veronese’s painted architecture giving to the refectory of the Benedictine monks such a trompe l’oeil depth of vision that you do not stand still in front of it.”³⁹⁸

Boris Groys states, “Art documentation, which by definition consists of images and texts that are reproducible, acquires through the installation an aura of the original, the living, the historical.” He asserts: “in the installation the documentation gains a site—the here and now of a historical

³⁹² Ibid, p. 4.

³⁹³ A. Lowe, cited in, D. Zalewski, ‘The Factory of Fakes,’ *The New Yorker*, December 28, 2016, p. 69.

³⁹⁴ A. Lowe, ‘Returning “Les Noces de Cana,”’ January 2008, *Factum Arte* website, <http://www.factum-arte.com/pag/537/Returning-quot-Les-Noces-de-Cana-quot-by-Paolo-Caliari>. Accessed 14 July 2018.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

event... If reproduction makes copies out of originals, installation makes originals out of copies.”³⁹⁹ This idea is exemplified in the *The Wedding of Cana* facsimile’s full circle journey back to its first site, recreating the atmosphere of its original viewing conditions. In this case, the technological reproduction augments the original through its shift from a reliance on ritual value (the museological setting), to that of relations; temporal, spatial and material: “the real phenomenon to be accounted for is not the punctual delineation of one version divorced from the rest of its copies, but the whole assemblage made up of one—or several—original(s) *together with* the retinue of its continually re-written biography. It is not a case of ‘either or’ but of ‘and, and.’”⁴⁰⁰ This idea is echoed by Lutz Koepnick, who describes the multiplicity of technological mediation as “structured by a logic of addition rather than one of mutual exclusion or contestation, by a conjunctive “and” rather than a combative “either/or.”⁴⁰¹

The technological images of Veronese’s *The Wedding at Cana* used to produce its facsimile were also at the heart of other “productions” (to invoke Moholo-Nagy’s idea of the distributed agency of the technological image), such as an exhibition that opened in conjunction with the unveiling of the facsimile: *The Miracle of Cana: Originality through re-production*, which travelled to various institutions across Europe. The exhibition was designed and curated by the Giorgio Cini Foundation Institute of Art History together with Factum Arte, and demonstrated “the various stages in the creation of the facsimile through videos, images, [...] and the presence of some of the instruments used to make the facsimile, such as the 3-D scanner, [...] the tiles used for the surface testing, and samples employed in colour comparisons.”⁴⁰²

In an associated event entitled *The Wedding at Cana: A Vision by Peter Greenaway*, the eponymous British filmmaker used technological images of Veronese’s painting in a “50-minute digital extravaganza of light, sound, theatrical illusion and formal dissection.” The multimedia presentation was “projected onto and around a full-scale replica of ‘The Wedding at Cana,’ Paolo Veronese’s immense and revered landmark of Western painting.”⁴⁰³ Art critic Roberta Smith describes Greenaway’s interpretation of the painting as a “formal and spatial parsing of the image, its figures, hefty architectural setting and deep vista.”⁴⁰⁴ Greenaway’s presentation and other satellite events stemming from the re-installation of the facsimile, as well as the facsimile itself,

³⁹⁹ B. Groys, ‘Topology of the Aura’ in *Art Power*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2008, p. 64.

⁴⁰⁰ Latour and Lowe, ‘The Migration of the Aura – or How to Explore the Original Through Its Facsimiles’, p. 4.

⁴⁰¹ L. Koepnick, ‘Benjamin in the Age of New Media,’ in R. J. Goebel (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, Rochester, New York, Camden house, 2009, p. 114.

⁴⁰² ‘The Miracle of Cana: Originality through re-production’ (Inauguration of the exhibition: Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore), Conferences and Exhibitions, *Lettera da San Giorgio Paolo Caliari*, Fondazione Giorgio Cini programme, p. 7.

⁴⁰³ R. Smith, ‘In Venice, Peter Greenaway Takes Veronese’s Figures Out to Play’, Art and Design editorial, *The New York Times*, 21 June 2009.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

embody Maholo-Nagy's concept of the "production" as the deployment of techniques that create new relationships between technology, media, and the human sensorium. As Smith explains in relation to Greenaway's production: "instead of the usual art-history-lecture spoon-feeding of information, you have the illusion of seeing and thinking for yourself with heightened powers."⁴⁰⁵

The facsimile of *The Wedding at Cana*, having regained its original site, seems to refute one of Benjamin's main claims that "even in the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence at the place at which it is to be found."⁴⁰⁶ In an expanded concept of space and time, the artwork's 'existence at the place at which it is to be found' could include the facsimile's installation at the original site; while being 'found' there is to newly discover the artwork's "powers of consecration."⁴⁰⁷ Technological images of artworks produced through advanced imaging return a sense of 'time' (the artwork's history) and therefore aura to the dematerialised artwork through sheer quality and multiplicity of data. When rematerialised with cutting-edge replication techniques, copies of improbable accuracy and artistry are produced. Instead of extinguishing an artwork's aura, these processes transform it from one materiality to another to form a new presence or 'auratic assembly,' distributing attention across both the original artwork and its technological proxy so that neither one is superior to the other.

Benjamin's Technologies

The 'Work of Art' essay links the concept of aura to the status of the artwork in the western tradition, whereby aura is a perceptual phenomenon, and not a property of the artwork per se. In this sense, aura is a relatively elastic idea, evidenced by the different theoretical registers in which Benjamin deploys it.⁴⁰⁸ Benjamin's work, while historically specific, allows space to explore the differing implications of technology for aura through the distinctions of a 'first' (regulatory) and 'second' (potentially emancipating) technological paradigm.⁴⁰⁹ In Benjamin's words, "the first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at an interplay between

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art' essay, trans. M.W. Jennings.

⁴⁰⁷ W. Benjamin, 'Theory of Distraction', in M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin (eds.), *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings On Media*, p. 56-57.

⁴⁰⁸ Perhaps this idea is best summed up by professor of German studies Gerhard Richter who says, "In Benjamin's thinking, there can be no concept of aura that is not always already traversed by its own blind spots." See: G. Richter 'Adorno and the Excessive Politics of Aura' in *Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura & ICI Field Notes 5: The Manual of Lost Ideas*, ed. L. Patt, Los Angeles, The Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2001, p. 25-36. Moreover, Benjamin uses the concept of aura to serve polemical critique of theosophy and political motivation: See, for instance, Miriam Hansen's essay 'Benjamin's Aura.' Hansen refers to Benjamin "being torn between the extremes of revolutionary avant-gardism and elegiac mourning for beautiful semblance—in light of the notion's multiple, philosophically and politically incongruous genealogies", p. 338-339.

⁴⁰⁹ P. Osborne and M. Charles, 'Walter Benjamin,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2015 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/>. Accessed 10 November 2016.

nature and humanity. The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay.”⁴¹⁰ Benjamin’s comparison of different technologies is typical of his dialectical tendency – what he makes clear however, is that he sees technology as a vital interface between nature and society, and art as a kind of provisional medium through which this interaction plays out. The perpetually changing and dynamic relationship between art and technology is unsurprisingly a persistent theme for theorists and artists – as Krzysztof Ziarek explains, “the recurring preoccupation of ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility’ is the changing function of art with regard to the growing influence of technology on everyday life as well as on artistic production.”⁴¹¹

In Benjamin’s model, technology is not positioned as an agent of good or bad, but rather as a kind of expanded apparatus through which certain things are made possible whilst others are potentially liquidated (though not necessarily for good).⁴¹² This definition suggests the artwork’s aura is not always imperiled by technological mediation, because perception is not merely physiological, it “changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence.”⁴¹³ This allows for society’s “new modes of apperception and adaptation”⁴¹⁴ to technological potentiality and therefore to the conditions of aura’s existence. This sentiment is affirmed by the opening epigraph in the ‘Work of Art’ essay by poet and philosopher Paul Valéry, the last sentence of which claims, “We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.”⁴¹⁵ In this exemplar, art is placed in a reciprocal exchange with technology – it absorbs and refracts its ‘visionary’ qualities; moreover, the reception of art is recalibrated to society’s changed sensory perception. As Susan Buck-Morss has expressed, Benjamin “demands of art a difficult task, that is to undo the alienation of the corporeal sensorium, to restore the instinctual power of the human bodily senses for the sake of humanity’s self-preservation, and to do this, not by avoiding the new technologies, but by passing through them.”⁴¹⁶ This idea resonates with my concept of the tactile

⁴¹⁰ W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, p. 107-108.

⁴¹¹ K. Ziarek, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Electronic Mutability’ in A. Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and Art*, Continuum, New York, 2005, p. 210.

⁴¹² As suggested by J. McCole, Benjamin’s model contains “the paradox of an antiinstrumental affirmation of technology.” See: J. McCole, *Walter Benjamin And the Antinomies of Tradition*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 182.

⁴¹³ W. Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ (1936) in *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*, (third version) ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 222.

⁴¹⁴ Hansen, p. 338.

⁴¹⁵ P. Valéry, ‘The Conquest of Ubiquity’ in *Aesthetics*, trans. R. Manheim, Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series, New York, 1964, p. 225, as cited in Benjamin, *The Work of Art in The Age of its Technological Reproducibility*.

⁴¹⁶ Buck-Morss interprets the last passages of *The Work of Art* essay in which Benjamin explores the function of aesthetics in relation to political mobilisation in war times. See: S. Buck-Morss, ‘Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered’, *October*, vol. 62, 1992, p. 3-41.

gaze, in which technological processes pass through surfaces, and surfaces pass through imaging technologies, becoming intensely tactile and tangible to the perceiving subject.

Technological Images as ‘Scientific Images’

The technological image can be understood as a ‘scientific image’ in that it often contains or visualises valuable scientific information, such as the whereabouts of heavy metals in a painting, which can identify certain paint pigments; or, in the case of X-ray, a previous version of a painting, concealed in the surface. The kind of looking directed at technological reproductions is comparable to gazing at a scientific image; it is a form of regard that is curious, penetrating and invokes the contentious relationship between appearance and truth so fundamental to both science and aesthetics.



Figure 47: Anglo-Netherlandish workshop *King Henry VIII* c1535–c1540 (left) and with insert of false colour synchrotron-sourced X-ray fluorescence data map (right). Images courtesy Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Australian Synchrotron.

To give an example of a ‘scientific image’ in the context of art conservation, the image above right shows an X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) image of the painting *Henry VIII* (Art Gallery of New South Wales collection) in which elements such as lead, iron and copper are colour assigned, creating an elemental map. To create this highly detailed map, the painting was imaged at the Australian Synchrotron on the XRF beamline.⁴¹⁷ *Henry VIII* underwent technical examination using high-definition XRF to ascertain the painting’s authorship and likely connection to a group

⁴¹⁷ The Australian Synchrotron is a particle accelerator capable of producing very intense light, which is divided into ‘beamlines’ for various imaging purposes. *Henry VIII* was mapped on the X-ray fluorescence microscopy beamline of the synchrotron. XRF is an X-ray and also a fluorescence map in which certain elements can be colour assigned (to fluoresce particular colours) assisting in identifying pigments in paints.

of similar portraits in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the Society of Antiquaries.⁴¹⁸ The high resolution obtainable with the synchrotron source revealed previously obscured features such as the original position of the king's little finger (fig. 47 right), providing insight into the painting's making and 'remaking' in previous conservation attempts.⁴¹⁹ After restoration the painting was imaged at the University of New South Wales Art and Design (LUXLAB) using a scanner developed at Ide Advanced Imaging Laboratory (fig 48).



Figure 48: *Henry VIII*, (post restoration) during imaging at LUXLAB, UNSW Art & Design. Photo: Chelsea Lehmann.

Horst Bredekamp states: “Scientific images are like scientific objects, specimens, and so on, that, when made the object of systematic interest, are invested with an aura not unlike that attributed to works of art.”⁴²⁰ In this context, a technological reproduction of an artwork can be understood as a ‘scientific image,’ potentially taking on the unique aesthetic qualities of the original work of art as “an object of systematic interest.” As proposed throughout this thesis, the ‘artfulness’ of advanced techniques used to record and reproduce information contributes to this, in effect producing not just a copy of the original, but a new kind of image with its own aesthetic agency. Additionally, the scientific image sparks a more immediate comparison to painting. For example,

⁴¹⁸ P. Dredge, S. Ives, D. L. Howard et al., ‘Mapping Henry: Synchrotron-sourced X-ray fluorescence mapping and ultra- high-definition scanning of an early Tudor portrait of Henry VIII’, *Applied Physics A: Materials Science & Processing*, Springer, vol. 121, issue 3, 2015, p. 789 – 800.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ H. Bredekamp, ‘Darwins Korallen: Die frühen Evolutionsdiagramme und die Tradition der Naturgeschichte’ (Berlin, Wagenbach, 2005), p. 11; ‘Sobald sie Naturdinge vom Menschen erfasst werden, bewegen sie sich grenzüberschreitend in der Trennzone zwischen Naturbilde und Kunstwerk,’ cited in K. Moxey, *Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn*, in *Visual Time: The Image In History*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2013, p. 65.

an XRF map (like the one produced for *Henry VIII*) with its brightly coloured hues resembles a Pop Art screenprint – even down to the way forms are compartmentalised into areas of flat, unmodulated colour, substituted for natural colours (think of Andy Warhol’s prints of Marilyn Monroe for example).

The imaging of *Henry VIII* with advanced technologies not only provided necessary information for conservators, it also produced data that formed the basis of an exhibition aimed at an ‘inside experience’ of the painting (*Henry VR*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, 12 May–9 Sep 2018). The exhibition “gave rise to the Gallery’s first conservation science exhibit and first dedicated virtual reality display”⁴²¹ and was advertised as an invitation to “journey deep inside a Tudor painting to explore the hidden life of a king’s portrait, and the workshop of the artists who created it,” pointing to the exhibition’s potential for immersive experience and informative engagement. Like Mahlo-Nagy’s “productions” the media presentation and restored painting exhibited as part of in *Henry VR* highlights “the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged.”⁴²² This can be contrasted with a comparatively contemplative reception of the artwork, had it just been returned for conventional display in the gallery as a newly restored, albeit static collection object.

The exceptional access to the historical context of *Henry VIII* is underscored by the exhibition summary, which reflects links made between the artwork’s maker(s) and materials in the research undertaken to conserve the painting:

A network of information has been visualised so that you can investigate Henry’s world. Through the wonders of particle accelerators and scanning electron microscopes, virtual objects and elemental maps, the painting’s materials start to reveal the artwork’s social and historical context, allowing unprecedented insights into a work that emerged at the very birth of modern portrait painting.⁴²³

Andrew Yip, who collaborated with experts from the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Australian Synchrotron for the project, states: “These experimental imaging techniques allowed us to communicate important scientific and artistic discoveries to new audiences by bringing

⁴²¹ L. Mavros, ‘Henry VIII emerges from the shadows for new exhibition,’ 23 May 2018, <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/art-architecture-design/henry-viii-emerges-shadows-new-exhibition>. Accessed 3 July 2018.

⁴²² S. Greenblatt, ‘Resonance and Wonder’, in I. Karp and S.D Lavine (eds.), conference proceedings of *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, p. 42.

⁴²³ *Henry VR*, AGNSW exhibitions, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/henry-vr/>. Accessed 3 July 2018.

history to life in a tangible way. The exhibition demonstrates the important role that collecting institutions play in preserving and interpreting cultural histories.”⁴²⁴



Figure 49: *Henry VIII*, circa 1540, XRF image showing elements lead and iron. Image courtesy the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and the Australian Synchrotron.

Further reinforcing the idea of the scientific image as art, XRF images of Rembrandt's painting *Portrait of Dr Ephraim Bueno* (1646-1647) were presented by Sydney artist Janet Laurence as part of her exhibition of artwork entitled *The Matter of the Masters*, which responded to a larger exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales: *Rembrandt and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum* (11 November 2017 – 18 February 2018). Laurence's work was inspired by research and scientific analysis undertaken by conservators on selected paintings in the Rijksmuseum.⁴²⁵ Her response to this research took the form of an artistic interpretation of the palette of Rembrandt and other Dutch masters. The installation included objects sourced from natural history collections, such as raw pigments and binders commonly found in paintings, and these substances were presented “like scientific experiments or specimens in a ‘cabinet of curiosity.’”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ A. Yip, in L. Mavros, ‘Henry VIII emerges from the shadows for new exhibition,’ 23 May, 2018, <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/art-architecture-design/henry-viii-emerges-shadows-new-exhibition>. Accessed 3 July 2018.

⁴²⁵ ‘Janet Laurence: The matter of the masters’, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/janet-laurence/>, Accessed 20 December 2017.

⁴²⁶ Janet Laurence website, ‘Wunderkammer: Matter of the Masters’, <http://www.janetlaurence.com/matter-of-the-masters/>. Accessed 21 July 2018.

In *The Matter of the Masters*, as in many of her previous exhibitions, Laurence's arrangement of objects in a *wunderkammer* (literally, wonder chamber) invokes Stephen Greenblatt's idea of 'wonder' as an intense or "enchanted looking."⁴²⁷ Greenblatt elaborates the concept of wonder as the "power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention"⁴²⁸ reflecting Bredekamp's aforementioned claim that a scientific image (as an object of systematic interest) can be invested with a certain distinctiveness akin to aura.

Painting conservation, especially the study of artists' materials and their origins, has been a long-term interest for Laurence. She states, "this will be an invaluable contribution in both revealing the work of conservationists and also giving access to the public of the hidden history within a painting."⁴²⁹ In Laurence's project the latency of the hidden past and the forensic quality of scientific images is integrated into the final iteration of the artwork, much like the 'detective' work of art conservationists. In an interview with Andrew Yip touching on the exhibition concept in relation to her broader practice, Laurence says, "History is laden with so many layers of activity and that's why in this period we can't just look at it [...] for what it is, [...] we have to see into it and see its ramifications." She further explains: "we can now see into all this matter and see where it comes from."⁴³⁰

Laurence's project marks her ongoing interest in art conservation, which began in the 1980s when she met fellow Australian Petria Noble – now the Rijksmuseum's head of conservation – at the New York studio school. Noble at the time was a post-graduate student in art history and conservation at New York University and trained at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.⁴³¹ In 2002, Laurence was invited by Noble to spend time in the conservation department of the Mauritshuis in The Hague, where "she became fascinated with the hidden histories of Dutch paintings and understood the potential of conservation techniques to renew our readings of art objects."⁴³² Laurence states, "People place a painting into the context of its historical times [...] That's great, but to do it scientifically is really important, too."⁴³³

⁴²⁷ Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', p. 49.

⁴²⁸ Greenblatt, p. 42.

⁴²⁹ J. Laurence, as cited in, 'Janet Laurence: The matter of the masters', <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/janet-laurence/>. Accessed 20 December 2018.

⁴³⁰ A. Yip, 'Interview with Janet Laurence: The Matter of the Masters', *Look Magazine*, Art Gallery Society of NSW, February 2018.

⁴³¹ J. Laurence, 'Artist Talk: The Matter of the Masters', Saturday 11 November 2017, Art Gallery of New South Wales. See also: Petria Noble, professional profile, Rijksmuseum, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/organisation/organisation-chart/conservation-department/petria-noble>. Accessed 31 July 2018.

⁴³² Yip, 'Interview with Janet Laurence: The Matter of the Masters', 2018.

⁴³³ Ibid.

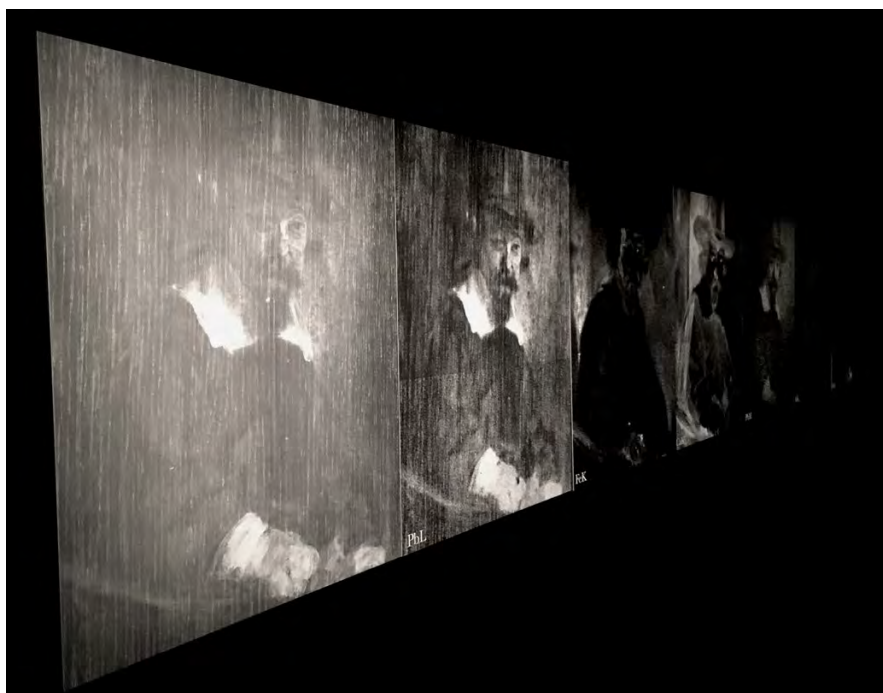


Figure 50: Janet Laurence, *Mapping X-ray Fluorescence* (detail), 2017, ultra-chrome pigment on archival cotton rag. Image courtesy the artist and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: Chelsea Lehmann, September 2017.

In viewing the exhibition *The Matter of the Masters*, it was clear that a certain gravitas and authority was given to the ‘science’ within the images. With minimal mediation, the XRF images are highly aesthetic, and the reference to the “fluctuating areas of white” connects the formal qualities of the works with technical information. The wall label for Laurence’s artwork *Mapping X-ray Fluorescence* (fig. 50) reads:

In *Mapping X-ray Fluorescence*, Janet Laurence has transformed a by-product of conservation analysis into a hauntingly beautiful work of art. The sequence of ghostly black and white images in this work are derived from X-ray fluorescence (XRF) readings of Rembrandt’s painting *Portrait of Dr Ephraim Bueno* [...] This cutting-edge technology is used by conservators to determine the elemental and chemical make-up of paintings, so that they can gain an insight into the artist’s use of materials. The fluctuating areas of white in each image represent the various elements found within the work’s paint layers such as iron, calcium, lead, potassium and mercury.⁴³⁴

This description highlights the allure that surrounds these images and their revelation of an alternative reality, somewhat remote from the sanctified and historicised artwork, and

⁴³⁴ Wall-label for the artwork *Mapping X-ray Fluorescence* by Janet Laurence, 2017, ultra-chrome pigment on archival cotton rag, AGNSW.

contemporised through new museological frameworks. Like the work of Alejandro Guijarro, discussed in Chapter Five, Laurence presents a scientific image as art, rematerialising the digital image as an artwork by transferring it to a traditional print surface (cotton rag paper). *Mapping X-ray Fluorescence* is elevated to the status of art as “an image of systematic interest” (recalling Bredekamp’s statement) in which the scientific image, especially one that visualises information normally beyond human access, is invested with an aura “not unlike that attributed to works of art”⁴³⁵ in its many layers of meaning and intrinsic aesthetic qualities. In contrast to this, the artworks produced in my practice-based research respond to the technological image by highlighting the special capabilities of the techniques that produced them. The ways in which these techniques reveal latent images and textures is highlighted via artistic responses that include the exaggeration of textures and physical gestures in artworks (over-painting/drawing and erasure); experiments with lighting and image enlargement (4K video); and reinventing the temporal sequence of paintings (drawing over X-rays of paintings).

Aura and Trace

Benjamin’s friend, philosopher Theodor Adorno, suggested that the concept of aura might be more clearly elaborated by stretching it to encompass “the trace of a forgotten human [element] in the thing, that is, of reified human labour.”⁴³⁶ If this were so, processual human activity, reified in the artwork, could be opened up to the tactile gaze via the propensity of the technological image to amplify it—to bring each mark into focus including ‘mistakes’ (the extra-textual, even accidental, qualities including scratches or stains as traces of human activity).⁴³⁷ These marks visually index artistic processes in which the viewer can, as stated previously, ‘inwardly rehearse’ the gestures of the painter.

In this context, the tactile gaze as I have theorised it, gains traction in Miriam Hansen’s reading of Benjamin’s aura in relation to the portrait photograph. Hansen highlights Benjamin’s philosophical iteration of aura as a ‘medium’ which names “a particular structure of vision (though one not limited to the visual)” [...] “aura implies a phenomenal structure that enables the manifestation of the gaze, inevitably refracted and disjunctive, and shapes its potential meanings.”⁴³⁸ The idea that the gaze can ‘leap across’ time brings Benjamin’s work on photography together with his later explorations of aura. Hansen states: “we can see how the seemingly distinct sense of aura Benjamin develops in ‘Little History of Photography’ folds into

⁴³⁵ H. Bredekamp, cited in K. Moxey, *Visual Studies and the Iconic Turn*, in *Visual Time: The Image In History*.

⁴³⁶ M. B. Hansen, ‘Aura: The Appropriation of a Concept’, in *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*, London, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2012, p. 110.

⁴³⁷ J. Elkins, as previously cited in Chapter Six: Touch and Multisensory Perception.

⁴³⁸ Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura’, p. 342-343. Hansen points out that Benjamin is referring to medium as an “in-between substance or agency—such as language, writing, thinking, memory—that mediates and constitutes meaning.”

the later definition of aura as the experience of investing a phenomenon with the ability to return the gaze”⁴³⁹ What is of particular interest in my research is how this reciprocal relationship between subject and object relates to the idea of perceptibility as ‘attentiveness’.⁴⁴⁰ This applies to the ability of the technological image to direct our attention to the tangible/tactile elements of a painting by ‘structuring’ the gaze as if the object were looking back, thereby mirroring the materiality of the sensing body.

According to Hansen, trace is one of those concepts in Benjamin that can have antithetical meanings; she observes, trace is both rejected as “the fetishizing signature of the bourgeois interior” but “valorized as a mark of an epic culture—and its implied renewal in modern literature and film—that links art with material production and tactical, habitual perception.”⁴⁴¹ Though Benjamin insists on certain qualities of aura that cannot be elicited by human trace, (“The tree and the bush that are endowed [with an answering gaze] are not made by human hands”⁴⁴²), in some contexts aura and trace appear to intersect with regard to human presence; a certain “logic of the trace” underpins Benjamin’s explorations of long-standing/habitual material interaction between humans and objects or spaces: “experience that inscribes itself as long [repetitive] practice.”⁴⁴³

In any case, framing aura in terms of distance and trace in terms of proximity does not preclude the kind of experience that Benjamin refers to when he invokes aura as something like a reverberating echo, or mysterious perceptual shadow: “a strange weave of space and time: the unique apparition or semblance of a distance, however near it may be.”⁴⁴⁴ In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin compares aura and trace as if they were different sides of same experiential coin: “Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be” while aura is “the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth.” He elaborates, “In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.”⁴⁴⁵ According to Hansen, Benjamin appropriates German philosopher Ludwig Klages’ account of the polarity of nearness and distance to theorise “the epochal reconfiguration and

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, p. 338, cited in Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura.’ Hansen explains that Benjamin invokes Novalis in this phrase to “back up his definition of auratic experience as the expectation that the gaze will be returned” (Benjamin was apparently fascinated by the deliberate blurring of subject and object in this phrase). See: Hansen, ‘Aura: The Appropriation of a Concept,’ p. 110.

⁴⁴¹ M. B. Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ p. 340. Hansen references W. Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller’ (1936), trans. Zohn, *Selected Writings* 3, p. 149.

⁴⁴² W. Benjamin, *Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondences 1928–1940*, ed. H. Lonitz, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, p. 322, p. 327, as cited in M. B. Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ p. 346.

⁴⁴³ Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ p. 340–341.

⁴⁴⁴ There are many similar translations of this short phrase, this one is cited in Didi-Huberman, ‘The Supposition of The Aura: The Now, The Then, And Modernity,’ p. 12–13.

⁴⁴⁵ W. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, p. 447, as cited in Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ p. 340.

interpenetration of “body space and image space” that he discerned in the mass-based media of advertising and cinema, the modern urban habitat, and the experiments of the surrealists.”⁴⁴⁶

In this paradigm, the ‘far image’ and ‘near object’ are conflated: a quality that, as discussed previously, is inherent in the technological image. This combination of proximity and distance is also the ‘perceptual scaffolding’ of the tactile gaze: a sense of remoteness and elusiveness associated with the auratic, and at the same time, the closeness of trace, (close enough to touch, close enough to see another’s touch). In the tactile gaze, Benjamin’s “valorization of nearness and tactility as a key experiential parameter”⁴⁴⁷ informs my appropriation of the combined features of ‘beautiful semblance’ (aura) with the tangible visualisation of process/matter made available in the technological image (trace).

In *The Supposition Of The Aura*, Georges Didi-Huberman develops a reading of the artwork *Onement, I*, (1948) by Barnett Newman, in which aura and trace are united. Aura becomes modified and transformed by incorporating the dynamic labour of artistic process and the “voluntary traces of the procedure.”⁴⁴⁸ He states:

We must therefore articulate two apparently incommensurate orders. And the point of articulation between these two orders may lie – our second hypothesis – in the dynamic of labour, in the process of making art. We must seek to understand how a Newman painting supposes – implies, slips underneath, enfolds in its fashion – the question of the aura. *How* it manoeuvres the ‘image-making substance’ in order to impose itself on the gaze, to foment desire. *How* it thus becomes ‘that of which our eyes will never have their fill.’⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ Hansen, ‘Benjamin’s Aura,’ p. 367. Hansen cites Benjamin’s *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 217.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ G. Didi-Huberman, ‘The Supposition of The Aura: The Now, the Then, and Modernity’, in A Benjamin (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and History*, London, New York, Continuum, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁹ Didi-Huberman, p. 6-7.



Figure 51: Barnett Newman, *Onement, I*, 1948, oil on canvas and oil on masking tape on canvas, 69.2 x 41.2 cm. Image courtesy Barnett Newman Foundation and MoMA.

In his discussion of Newman's work above, Didi-Huberman uses the concept of the 'subjectile' as both 'substrate' (its literal meaning in French), and theoretically, as a framework to analyse relations between subject and object.⁴⁵⁰ Didi-Huberman describes how Newman rejected specific themes in his work "in favour of a reflection on the procedural relation that, in the act of painting, unites the words 'subject' and 'matter.'" Furthermore, "His grammatical definition of painting amounts to conceiving artistic labour dialectically, in terms of a three-way relationship among subject, matter, and subjectile"⁴⁵¹ This three way relationship is echoed in the methodology and theoretical framework deployed in my project: the subjectile (the substrate, the palimpsest) is both the artwork's articulate surface and the site of an attempt to efface the artist, or at least to channel the hand of the artist through procedures which modify it and then multiply/amplify those modifications.

⁴⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, in a reading of the work of French poet and dramatist Antonin Artaud argues that the subjectile, like Benjamin's 'image dialectics', is a tensely inscribed conflict between different forces built into layers – "inscribed in the surface and the undersurface." (translator's preface, p. xii). Derrida states, "Subjectile, the word or the thing, can take the place of the subject or of the object – being neither one nor the other." See: J. Derrida, 'To unsense the Subjectile,' J. Derrida and P. Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. M. A. Caws, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 1998, p. 61.

⁴⁵¹ Didi-Huberman, p. 17.

Didi-Huberman considers the tension between auratic images of the past, in which their making was often disguised, and the modern image, in which the trace of procedure (and the gaze's proximity to it) produces aura in a different way:

Because auratic images of the past are in fact often [...] objects made in such a way that people will believe that they are not made 'by the hand of man.' In them aura *imposes itself* to the degree that the image-making procedure remains secret, miraculous, beyond reach. With *Onement, I*, in contrast [...] the aura comes into being, is *supposed*, through the gaze's proximity to a procedural trace as simple as it is productive, as effective as it is ambiguous. In this type of artwork, trace and aura are no longer separated [...] we can even recognize the work as an unprecedented combination [...] an *auratic trace*.⁴⁵²

The traces of process, of changes, of repeated contact with the surface, can all contribute to an object's 'resonance' over time. The iconoclastic gesture, like the indices of process, can produce this resonance (auratic trace) through marks, defacement and other kinds of contestation that 'undo' or destabilise the surface/subjectile.

In his discussion of resonance, Stephen Greenblatt refers to the marks that artworks and artifacts carry over time. He states:

Then, too, there are the marks on the artifacts themselves: attempts to scratch out or deface the image of the devil in numerous late-medieval and Renaissance paintings, the concealing of the genitals in sculptured and painted figures, the iconoclastic smashing of human or divine representations, the evidence of cutting or reshaping to fit a new frame or purpose, and the cracks, scorch marks, or broken-off noses that indifferently record the grand disasters of history and the random accidents of trivial incompetence. Even these accidents—the marks of a literal fragility—can have their resonance.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Greenblatt, 1991, p. 44.



Figure 52: Chelsea Lehmann, *Circle*, 2015, oil, enamel on board, 61 x 46cm. Image courtesy the artist.

In the artwork above, *Circle* (fig. 52), this sense of resonance (auratic trace) is elicited through repeated gestures of interference, a reflection of the kinds of cracks and openings that can appear in artworks as they age and are exposed to different atmospheric conditions. *Circle* embodies the main conceptual tenets that underpin my investigation of both aura and the iconoclastic gesture: the work began with an appropriation of a painting by Jean-Honoré Fragonard *Girl Holding a Dove*, which was painted onto a ‘found’ artwork (an abstract painting inherited from another artist) already encrusted with layers. For every collection of marks that adhered to the original image, I responded with an erasure (in the form of scratches, wiping, or over-painting), a process that took place over a period of approximately eighteen months. The intuitive, even impulsive drive behind this method was ultimately a means to augment the materiality of the painting and to bury or obscure information for potential retrieval. The final iteration of the painting is imbued with ‘auratic trace,’ an attempt to present to the viewer a “kind of dialectic of place”— to use Didi-Huberman’s words – a perceptual framework which is “close/distant, in front of/inside, tactile/optical, appearing/disappearing, open/closed, hollowed out/saturated.”⁴⁵⁴

Through my discussion of aura and the technological image it can be seen that advanced imaging practices and iconoclastic interventions generate alternative understandings of the painted surface beyond those solely dependent on pictorial content and visible material phenomena. In relation to

⁴⁵⁴ Didi-Huberman, p. 14.

the technological image, the transference of aura from the original to the reproduction, or more precisely the movement between them, is seen to occur via the matrix of relations that are instigated by the technological reproduction/re-presentation process. These aspects expand Benjamin's concept of aura by resituating the artwork in a "tissue of time and space" without compromising its physical complexity, or in Benjamin's words— the object's "ability to look back at us."⁴⁵⁵ As Lutz Koepnick states "in our era of ubiquitous digital screens, interfaces, and technological mediations we instead have come to see the auratic and the post-auratic in an open relationship of supplementariness and coexistence, a non-climactic give-and-take."⁴⁵⁶

Benjamin calls the weakening of aura 'a salutary estrangement,'⁴⁵⁷ an idea that suggests a dual negotiation of an encounter, one that is both advancing and distancing. Salutary estrangement also implies a useful impartiality or new freedom of the object beyond its dependence on a certain type of access. In the context of 'distance' from the artwork, this may be interpreted today as a kind of productive mediation, whereby a new presence or 'auratic assembly' is formed; that is, one that is not solely reliant on tradition, or conventional ideas of materiality and human access. While the limitations of facsimiles can still be debated, in their amplification of the tactile, tangible, and unseen aspects of paintings, technological images offer forms of visualisation and aesthetic influence in which to see artworks "without taming their dynamic and durational capacities."⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura,' p. 339.

⁴⁵⁶ Koepnick, p. 114.

⁴⁵⁷ W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Howard Eiland & Michael W. Jennings (eds.), Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1991–98, p. 518.

⁴⁵⁸ A. Groom, 'Permanent Collection: Time and the Politics of Preservation at the Ōtsuka Museum of Art', *E-flux Journal*, no. 78, December 2016.

Conclusion

During this practice-based project, my interactions with the surface of artworks have been shaped by a sense of doubt regarding the authority of the visible exterior or presentation layer of paintings. This doubt drives my argument that latency activates feelings of desire, curiosity and wonder⁴⁵⁹ by stimulating the mnemonic and hedonic aspects of touch and tactility. The articulate surface is thus characterised throughout this thesis by concepts of burial and retrieval; forms of layering and material contingency that produce variability and instability. These techniques in which “interiority and exteriority take place together on the surface”⁴⁶⁰ are foregrounded in my inquiry as both methodological tools and artistic outcomes. At the intersection of technological imaging practices and painting, in the empirical and tactile dimensions of this research, the live field of materiality of the painted surface presents agential connections between the body, time, technology and touch.

Beginning with interactions between light (electromagnetic energy) and surfaces, my various experiments with advanced imaging techniques have revealed how the surfaces of paintings can be understood as a fabric of textures in lively relation. In a remarkable testament to a painting’s ability to interact with light, densely layered surfaces are capable of bending it, much like a lens.⁴⁶¹ This compelling phenomenon has informed my ideation regarding the artwork’s surface, which, as I have argued throughout this thesis, operates as a porous interface in which exchanges of physical, perceptual and conceptual processes take place.

The use of art historical quotation in this project has provided a vehicle to interrogate the idea of painting as an enduring and adaptable tradition in which the past and present are intertextually linked. As outlined in Chapter One, the concept of atemporality unifies my investigation of a range of ideas and processes including: the ‘composite figure’, the material and processual re-signification of broken images, and the idea of temporal disjuncture which occurs in the tension amid historical and contemporary references, and between narrative trajectories and the stasis of the painted image. I argue that appropriating/quoting the visual and conceptual dynamics of Baroque paintings, while dismantling and reflecting on their making, brings the art historical image into the present. Conceptually, this demonstrates how new perspectives can emerge

⁴⁵⁹ The term ‘wonder’ suggests both awe and inquiry, calling to mind Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of wonder as “the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention” – see discussion of Greenblatt’s wonder in relation to the scientific image and aura – Chapter Seven: Technological Images as Scientific Images.

⁴⁶⁰ Lippit, p. 260.

⁴⁶¹ This is effectively the refractive index (RI) of the painted surface; RI identifies how and to what degree transparent layers of paint and varnish (coatings) bend light.

through the re-contextualisation of the aesthetic and discursive tropes of selected historical artworks.

Via an atemporal framework, my practice-based research contributes to the continued relevance of the Baroque sensibility which I contextualise in relation to the recent historiographic turn in contemporary art.⁴⁶² My research demonstrates how this sensibility is embodied in the palimpsest of the painted surface through the deployment of excessive erasures and additions. The Baroque style is also referenced through the performativity of both the painted bodies within my artworks and the artist's body, creating dramatic gestures that are later 're-enacted' through tactile modes, and in the amplified domain of the technological image. The opulence and abundance associated with the Baroque is further exemplified in the rich sources of data furnished by technological images, which provide the central means of exploring and testing ideas in the studio research. In Chapter Two, under the heading 'The Performativity of the Baroque Personage', I propose that the Baroque setting, with its dramatic chiaroscuro, operates like a spotlight stage that mirrors the way Western art genres have traditionally grafted constructs of feminine identity onto the artifice of representation itself. This forms the basis for creative interventions which 'undo' these constructs by imaging (and imagining) the female form as if in conflict with painting's weighty history and stable surfaces.

Throughout this practice-based research I have engaged with iconoclasm as 'creative image breaking', exploring the material constitution of images, as opposed to the external or metaphysical references icons call to mind. Image breaking is a complementary means of contesting illusions associated with depth, spatiality and the authority of the painted surface, corresponding to advanced image practices as both penetrative and illuminating. I argue that the iconoclastic gesture acts as an agent of change and re-signification by means of tactile and 'deconstructive' interactions with images. Through a reading of my own work and an analysis of the paintings of Nicola Samori, ideas of transgression, infiltration, and skin/surface are explored in a way that conflates bodies of paint with the human body. Moreover, the iconographic tendencies of paintings are scrutinised, showing how their aggregation into historical icons operates as a metaphor for broader patterns of cultural realisation.

Chapters Four, Five and Six centre on tactility, which, over time, became the lynchpin of my theorisation as I responded to developments in the studio. Throughout these chapters, I present my findings on the influence of advanced imaging practices on both sensory perception and artistic practice, responding to questions that engage discourses around the haptic apprehension

⁴⁶² As defined by D. Roelstraete, who asserts that this phenomenon can be evidenced through contemporary artists' "obsession with archiving, forgetfulness, memoirs and memorials, nostalgia, oblivion, re-enactment, remembrance, reminiscence, retrospection—in short, with the past" (see discussion in this thesis: Chapter One: Painting, Quotation and Atemporality).

of artworks. I devised the terms ‘technological image’ and ‘tactile gaze’ to explain and connect theoretical ideas to artistic outcomes in my own practice as well as the work of other contemporary artists such as Bernhard Sachs and Robert Longo. These terms are unpacked in ways that demonstrate how advanced imaging technologies and their effects can interact with, inspire, or even be art.

Linda Dalrymple’s scholarship investigating how new imaging techniques affected the spatial imagination of early twentieth-century artists provided a base from which I have extrapolated key ideas and literature around tactility, latency and ‘seeing through’. These ideas and theoretical models challenge conventional sense hierarchies in which sight is privileged, offering a new taxonomy of perceptual access to objects, in which vision is just a part. My research contributes to this literature by scrutinising the role of touch and tactility in the perception of artworks and their technological reproductions. My principal claim is that the deeper parsing of images generated by technological imaging/images puts the observer in closer proximity to the material and processual aspects of art making, thereby stimulating a fuller engagement with artworks.

Chapter Seven of my thesis expands Benjamin’s investigations into auratic perception through my interpretation of his spatial metaphors of ‘proximal’ trace, and ‘distant’ aura as two sides of the (same) perceptual experience of artworks. While in some contexts Benjamin overlaps concepts of trace and aura so that their meanings are interdependent and enmeshed, he also frames them in sharp contrast in his unfinished philosophical opus *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940). In *Arcades*, Benjamin asserts that in the trace we gain possession of the thing while in the aura it takes possession of us. My claim is that both of these relations (between subject and object) can co-exist in the tactile gaze, which responds to the capacity of the technological image to unlock perceptual access to human trace and the artwork’s history in ways that encompass both touch and vision.

As outlined in my introduction, the theories of Walter Benjamin have been influential in many aspects of my research and therefore feature prominently in this thesis. The fact that Benjamin’s work was produced in the early part of the twentieth century (almost one hundred years ago) never ceases to induce in me both admiration and awe in light of his extraordinary intuition. His agile thinking has guided my ideation in a way that brings together (his) prescient foresight with current insights into the shifting relations between art, technology and individual/collective modes of perception. Benjamin’s fulsome embrace of dialectical nuance and fortuity underpins my thinking about auratic perception, which, as previously mentioned, is identified in ways akin to the tactile gaze. Benjamin’s study of the operations of history as an open and dynamic field, alive in, and to, the present has also influenced my research. In useful and often surprising ways, Benjamin’s voice seemed to accompany moments in the studio research in which I was constantly reminded

of the economy of attention in the act of painting and looking. Retracing, over-painting, and observing textures to habitually reframe an object (as if to keep it alive, or live) are indicative of my inquiry into the potential of the artwork's surface: the speculative nature of these acts were validated through my engagement with the work of Walter Benjamin.

In my research I have honoured classical painting techniques while also expanding them through interdisciplinary exchanges with art conservation and cultural heritage digitisation practices. The aesthetic and philosophical potential of these methods have been rigorously explored, expanding the surface of contemporary painting to convey materiality and spatiality in new and enriched ways. The paintings produced in this project therefore demonstrate an unusual intimacy with surface materialities, which were touched, torn, and returned to with new insights in the wake of various processes which involved looking into their material skins. My engagement with the field of art conservation science as a diagnostic and forensic discipline provided a counterpoint to the impulsive and intuitive drive to over-paint, erase and rearrange surfaces. However, both ways of uncovering the surface were driven by the idea of reverse engineering, and moving back and forth in time.

The work produced within this practice-based project draws attention away from meanings derived from pictorial or image-based content toward those that are instigated by an expanded access to artworks as processual, tactile, and materially stratified objects. My project shows how latent images can amplify the tactility of the painted surface and proliferate the auratic potential of artworks in the malleable proxy of the technological image. In this context materiality is not just a question of material substance, but of the “substance of material relations.”⁴⁶³

My research has taken me into world-class laboratories, including the Ide Advanced Imaging Lab, and the recently opened EPICentre⁴⁶⁴ at UNSW Art & Design where important work is being done in cultural heritage digitisation and visualisation research respectively. However, at the heart of this project is my deep and abiding investment in the process and materiality of painting. My research upholds the idea that the humble technology of painting on canvas belies surfaces rich in sensorial complexity and hidden agencies which heighten the aesthetic and affective registers of tactility, drawing on the powerful instinct to touch in order to know.

⁴⁶³ Bruno, p. 2.

⁴⁶⁴ Expanded Perception & Interaction Centre.



Figure 52: Chelsea Lehmann, *Circle*, 2015, oil, enamel on board, 61 x 46cm: installed in a derelict room on an abandoned floor of a Sydney CBD building, 2016. Image courtesy the artist and Docqment.

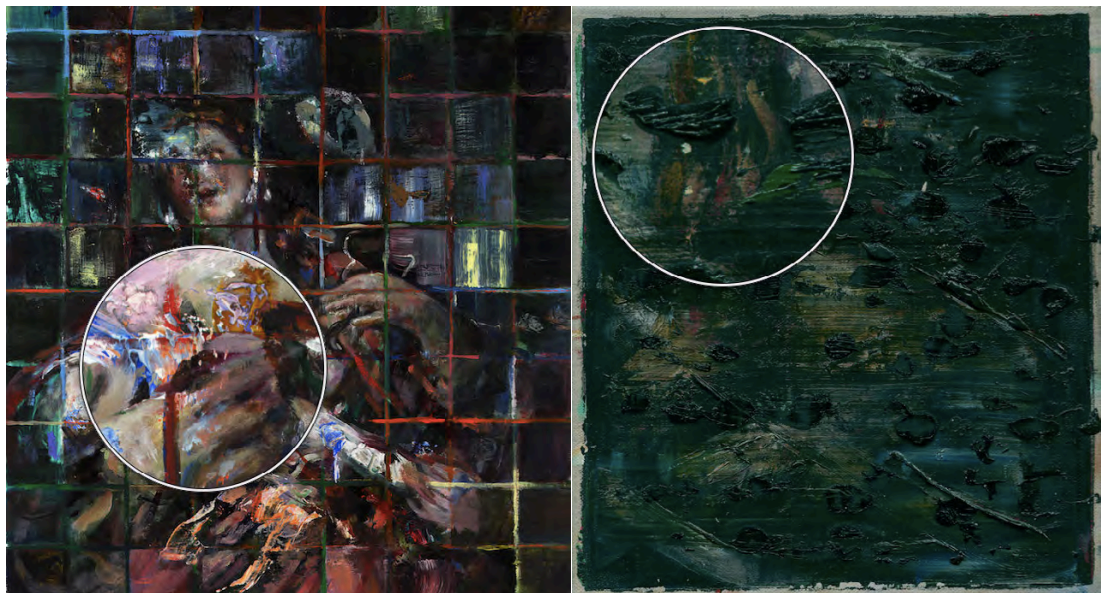


Figure 53: Experiments with magnifier tool on high-resolution scans of paintings showing paint texture details. Images courtesy Ide Advanced Laboratory and the artist.

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Appendix

Documentation of PhD exhibition

Chelsea Lehmann: The Articulate Surface

UNSW Galleries, 29 September - 3 November 2018

<https://artdesign.unsw.edu.au/unsw-galleries/chelsea-lehmann-articulate-surface>

Exhibition Blurb

This exhibition centres on the retrospective activation of the painted surface using advanced imaging techniques such as X-ray and infrared, combined with physical erasure; a process that exposes latent information and brings together a range of actions that reverse or alter the conventional sequence of oil painting. Lehmann's body of work, including paintings and light-based artworks, synthesises art conservation imaging practices with painting techniques to explore how an artwork's materiality and process can be exposed and augmented to enhance the aesthetic and affective registers of tactility.



Figure 54: Chelsea Lehmann, The Articulate Surface (29 September - 3 November 2018), installation view, UNSW Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Docqment Photography.



Figure 55: Chelsea Lehmann, *The Articulate Surface* (29 September - 3 November 2018), installation view, UNSW Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Docqment Photography.

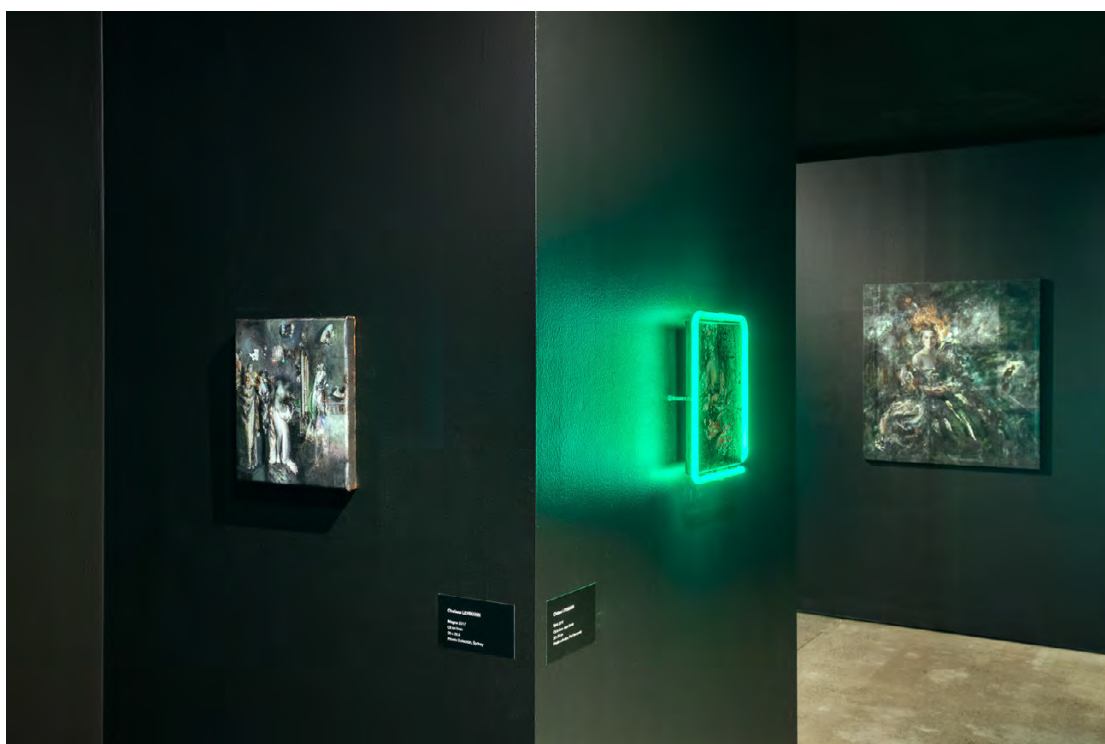


Figure 56: Chelsea Lehmann, *The Articulate Surface* (29 September - 3 November 2018), installation view, UNSW Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Docqment Photography.

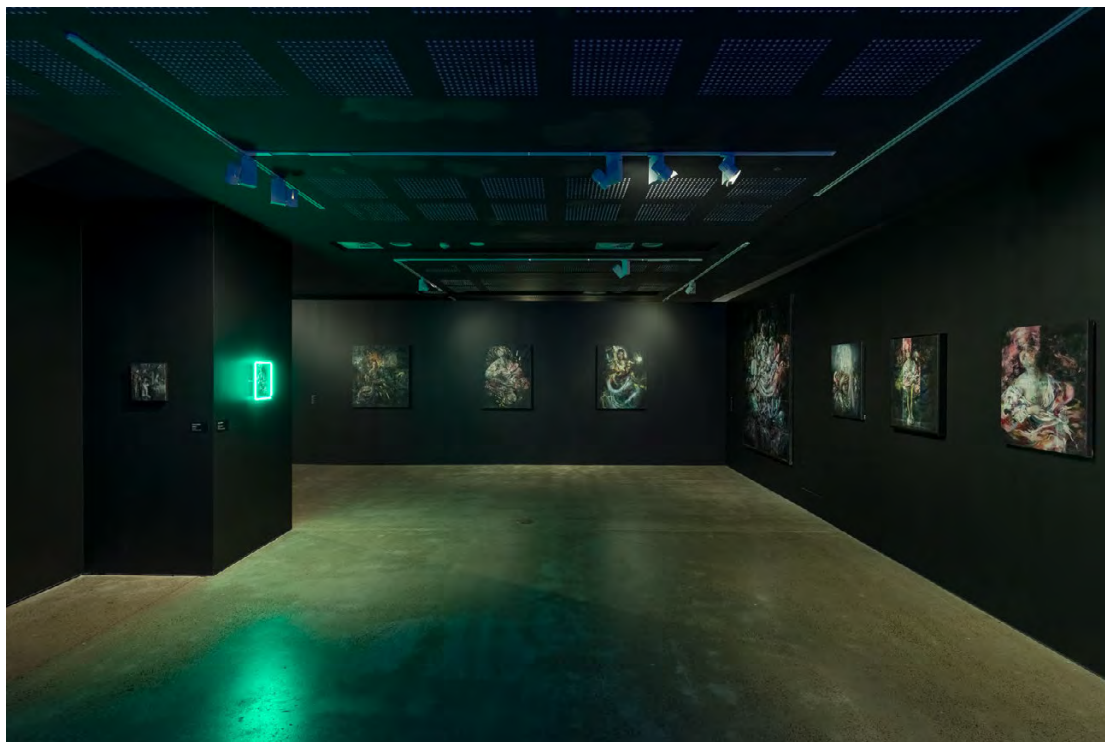


Figure 57: Chelsea Lehmann, *The Articulate Surface* (29 September - 3 November 2018), installation view, UNSW Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Docqment Photography.



Figure 58: Chelsea Lehmann, *The Articulate Surface* (29 September - 3 November 2018), installation view, UNSW Galleries, Sydney. Photograph: Docqment Photography.