Painting narrative: the form and place of narrative within astatic medium

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Painting Narrative;

The Form and Place of Narrative within a Static Medium

Katherine Edney
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Katherine Edney

Master of Fine Arts by Research

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Abstract

Within painting, there are numerous possibilities for the ways in which a narrative can be compositionally presented in order to communicate a particular emotion or story. Traditional devices including gesture, facial expression, interaction of figures and symbolism establish foundations within the composition to facilitate a narrative response and formulate questions as to the how, what and why. This formal language may also be considered in addition to other concepts surrounding the term narrative itself. The notion of narrative as something which is fluid also encompasses issues of time, movement, and continuity; ideas which seemingly contradict the static temperament of painting.

How painters have been able to successfully construct elements of narrative in their work, while also capturing a sense of movement or a passage of time is the starting point at which the following research takes shape. When embarking on this project, I realised that there was no definitive text on this subject which specifically analysed the form and composition of pictorial narratives as sole entities. Theoretical discussions surrounding a painting’s formal arrangement have mostly been produced in relation to how they either illustrated or have been adapted from a written source. This paper is intended to examine the structure of narrative paintings from a stand alone visual perspective, and not how they are comparative to a literary source.

Over the course of this investigation, I subsequently found that the methodologies of continuous narrative paintings from the Renaissance echoed certain theoretical concerns within contemporary cinematic narratives. While painting and film maintain a relationship to some degree because they are both visual media, (in reference to colour, tone and symbolism), the most interesting parallel is the depiction of time. This correlation between painting and film, where elements of the narrative are compositionally presented in a non-linear way, has had the most important influence over the production of my work for the exhibition, ‘Hidden Fractures; A Narrative in Time’.

Certain structures within film, such as event ‘order’ and sequencing resonate correspondingly to the stylistic approach sustained within recent work. This ‘jig-saw’ method, presents individual paintings (or canvases) akin to pieces of a story which
have been sliced up, and placed back together out of their ‘chronological’ order. These chosen snippets may represent a scene or emotion, and uphold their own position or viewpoint in relation to another image or painting.

These unmatched sequences of images, similar to the unmatched sequences in film, can disrupt the perception and flow of space, and sense of narrative order. When sequences are viewed out of order, the perception of events within the narrative change. The viewer strives to construct the meaning of the work dependent upon each image’s relationship to another, in turn forming the underlying narrative. Through such ‘story comprehension’, the viewer endeavours to create ‘logical connections among data in order to match general categories of schema’. (Brangian 15)
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Introduction

Painting Narrative: the form and place of narrative within a static medium

A narrative or story is *not* static. It is a series of related events that move from a beginning to an end. Considering a narrative is forever constant and changing, this underlying issue forms the starting point of my research and work as it begins to respond to the following idea;

How does one approach or attempt to produce a pictorial narrative within a static medium such as painting?

The notion of narrative itself, as a representation of something which is seemingly fluid, is challenged conceptually within my MFA work and research. When translated into painting, I am fascinated by the ways in which a narrative’s fluidity, encompassing concepts such as the ordering of events or moments in time, can be disrupted. Is it possible to present several instances of time and place within the one compositional space, and what happens aesthetically when the narrative(s) flow or ‘order’ is disturbed and dissected?

Within the boundaries of painting, an especially permanent and still medium by nature, my body of work explores this issue of aesthetics and the visual representation of narrative. This has been influenced by research into traditional narrative painting from the Italian Renaissance, comparative to contemporary cinema and theory. The methodologies of artists and directors and their approach to the depiction of visual narrative within their work will be examined, and more specifically, I will focus on work in which the figure as subject becomes central to the narrative. The range of formal strategies used by both painters and filmmakers in order to create a narrative path compositionally will be discussed from a visual perspective only. It is not my intention to draw comparisons between literature and art but to show how others have solely approached this subject on a formal level.
It is possible to draw parallels between film theory and concerns of visual representation within the realm of painting because they are both visual media. While there are similar techniques used to convey themes in order to construct a narrative formally, such as symbolism, colour and composition, the main difference between painting and film has revealed itself to be the constraints of movement and time. This contrast, where painting is fixed, while film remains in constant motion throughout its duration because it works in time, has had the most important impact on my work.

The influential text *Story and Space in Renaissance Art: The Rebirth of Continuous Narrative* by Lew Andrews has been significant in relation to the research and theories revolving around my painting. His comprehensive discussion of narrative types has been insightful, and the first chapter of this paper, *Pictorial Narrative*, discusses his research into this area. This includes several narrative ‘types’, including the continuous, simultaneous and mono-scenic methods, and their direct influence on the production of paintings for the exhibition, *Hidden Fractures; A Narrative in Time*.

The mono-scenic method, where each action, gesture and pose of the figure is keyed into one single moment is the most commonly recognised compositional form within contemporary narrative painting. Subsequently, I have been searching for alternative ways to break up this familiar structure. The incorporation of theories realised in film which similarly occur in the continuous narratives of the Renaissance, respond to issues of ‘event’ or image sequencing, and the progression or portrayal of certain, although not distinctive, passages of time.

The paper will begin with a discussion of the formal qualities of narrative painting from the Renaissance or quattrocento period, as they successfully capture several instances of time within the one composition. It will then skip to narrative painters within a modern context. The investigation has been structured in this manner, as I am interested in the particular methodologies used to portray narrative in the former, and how my work is located in relation to the latter. While I acknowledge the vast history of narrative painting in between these periods, I am focusing on examples of pictorial narrative which directly relate to my own theoretical framework.
Chapter One

Pictorial Narrative

The historical function of Pictorial Narrative.

“Since all human actions unfold in time and are carried out in space, men, time and space are the three major challenges which the task of story telling presents to a sculptor or painter.” (Aronberg 2)

George Hanfmann

The significant role of narrative within the Christian Church has been historically established, where cycles of biblical scenes and religious stories functioned as both an educational and instructional tool. These narratives which used “multiple layers of symbolism, and served to instruct illiterate masses of the scripture and faith” (Fontana 42), became a major medium of public communication for Christianity throughout several centuries. The two main views concerning the original function of these religious narratives include;

1. A tradition of communication and delivering messages. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) is credited with the assumption of an illiterate public, for which he believed a picture would be able to provide an appropriate model of action and instruction as well as being universally communicable. (Aronberg 1)

2. The second view is of the opinion that the public were at least semiliterate, and that pictures, in conjunction with the text, could work together in ‘explanatory symbiosis.’ (Aronberg, 1) This view takes into account the public’s ability to interpret the paintings and their meaning.

According to Andrews (94), while Renaissance authors provided little guidance on pictorial narratives in 15th and 16th century texts, Leonardo Da Vinci provided at least one basic guide line that could be learnt from his notebooks and his contemporaries must have thought in similar terms. Da Vinci advises that the most important scene is to be placed in the foreground, while the rest of the action is
settled further back, in accordance with the subject and limits of the setting. He states that in “diminishing by degrees the figures, and the buildings on various degrees and open spaces, you can represent all the events of history.” (Andrews 92) In other words, the most significant information must remain in the foreground. The secondary information, such as figures who are representative of moving from the past or into the future, should be positioned within the background.

Discussions of visual narrative types or storytelling from an art history and theoretical perspective began in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Such debates centered on the figure – its pose, facial expressions, gestures, psychology, and interaction with others. This was mostly focused in relation to Classical Art and illustrations of ancient myths and epics. (Aronberg 1)

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s Laocoön: An Essay on the limits of Painting and Poetry (1766) was the first influential discussion on the topics of semiotics and aesthetics in relation to narrative painting. In Laocoön, Lessing asserts that painting must relinquish the element of time “because its forms and symbols can be combined in space only”, forming the judgement that “two moments or episodes, that is, two moments separate in time, cannot be included in the same picture.” (Andrews 20) Context, time and movement, most explicitly seen in continuous narratives also should not be explored by the painter, and as such, “progressive actions, by the very fact that they are progressive, cannot be considered to be among its subjects” (Andrews 20). Lessing suggests that painting should be limited to the representation of ‘co-existent action’s’, where the figure is presented in a way which specifically symbolises a particular gesture or action itself. Subsequently, Lessing remarks that a painter should not be ‘concerned with temporal succession’ as this would be fooling around or intruding on the literary world. (Andrews 20)

Carl Robert was the first to analyse illustrations directly in Bild und Lied: Archäeologische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Griechischen Heldenlage (1881). Arising from the issues of representation began an interest in episodic sequences, where repeated figures signified more than one moment within a story. This style of
narrative was found to be a common occurrence when analysing artwork especially from the Italian Renaissance. From this, Franz Wickoff in Die Weiner Genesis (1900) first observed three types of solutions to the problems of representing a passage of time in a static medium, and called them narrative modes (Aronberg 2). These modes include the complimentary, isolating and continuous methods. It is this particular approach to compositional space that has reinforced the correspondence between literature and art. Contemporary Art theorist Lew Andrews simplifies these theoretical issues in to two definitive categories, which are mono-scenic and poly-scenic, and will be examined in the chapter on Continuous Narrative.

From a contemporary perspective, there are still limited views and consensus as to the definition and use of the word ‘narrative’ within painting. Some have referred to painters as ‘the thieves of time’ or spatial tricksters, doing “constant battle to overcome the inhibiting limitations of two dimensions and create a variety of modes of circumvention.” (Aronberg 2) Two symposiums on pictorial narrative, held in Chicago, USA in 1955, and Chantilly, France in 1982 based themselves around the relationship between illustration and text and saw no concise conclusion as to the definition of pictorial narrative. However, the Baltimore Symposium, held in 1984, specifically focused on the visual aspects of Pictorial Narrative, and attempted to “differentiate between the capacities of visual images themselves to serve as the text” (Aronberg, 2). Here, the word narrative was used as ‘adjective to modify elements such as poses, expressions and settings’. It was secondly used as a noun to describe each element as a collective whole (Aronberg 2).
The Role of Symbolism and Allegory

Swiss psychologist and psychotherapist, Dr. Carl Gustav Jung, defined symbols as;

"Terms, names or even pictures that may be familiar in daily life, yet possess specific connotations in addition to their conventional and obvious meanings. They imply something vague, hidden, and unknown to us." (Fontana 8)

Dr. Carl Gustav Jung

Symbolism and allegory are an imperative function within visual narratives. As devices, they are manipulated in order to heighten themes, convey a sense of time, or reveal hidden messages. Symbols are employed especially within mono-scenic narratives, as they are used to tell different parts of the story simultaneously within the one work.

Historically, they were designed to communicate clearly and unambiguously. While some may constitute a universal power or language, that is specific images and meanings occur in similar forms across cultures, other symbols may possess hidden or more enigmatic meanings. Archetypical symbols were used in stories, myths and legends to express abstract qualities, such as truth and justice, in order to influence human thought and behaviour. Through such allegorical tales, a society could establish and explore its identity, and in this context they were also used as a way of ‘explaining life’s contradictions, or opposing facets of existence.’ (Fontana 26)

Symbolism maintains a different role in a contemporary context. With the intention to communicate private messages and to consciously exploit traditional imagery, it is through metaphors that they require a different interpretation and perspective from the viewer. The use and meaning of a symbol may not be consistent across cultural and religious boundaries, and the response made to a particular image or stimulus may vary according to the viewers own individual history, background, experience and aesthetic.
Continuous Narrative

A continuous narrative refers to;

“Various methods of combining individual scenes, moments, or actions into a unified context of some kind, usually indicated by a frame, or by other similar means.” (Andrews 120)

The expression ‘continuous narrative’ is used as an overall term by Lew Andrews in Story and Space in Renaissance Art to describe specific types of visual narratives produced within the Renaissance or quattrocento period of painting. My work encompasses the specific definitions, terms and categories relating to continuous narrative painting as discussed by Andrews (120-126). A continuous narrative painting or fresco represents compositionally within the one work several passages of time within a unified context. According to Andrews, the term embraces the following types of pictorial imagery and issues under the broad categories of the Mono-scenic, Cyclical and Simultaneous methods;

1. The Mono-scenic method (also described as Isolating);

Is based on a unity of time and place where the main elements of one story are concentrated into one framed scene. Only one action is represented compositionally that signifies most of the story and the preceding or secondary moments are stripped away. All of the elements within the scene are keyed into one single moment. This is the most familiar approach taken in contemporary painting. (Andrews 120)

2. Cyclical method (also described as Continuous);

Involves a series of individual scenes shown together within the same painting, and is associated with Hellenistic or Roman Art. The repetition of actors or figures which form each group of distinct compositions signify that more than one moment is represented. The space for each moment or unit is also regarded as separate from the rest, so the unity of time and place is preserved, however a division between
each scene may not be specific. Each episode is also shown in its own setting or place, and several settings may be included in the same picture. (Andrews 120-1)

3. The *Simultaneous method* (also described as Complimentary);

According to Andrews, Kurt Weitzmann describes the simultaneous method in reference to the art of the archaic period in Greece, where ‘within the limits of a single scene, several actions take place simultaneously and without repetition of any actors’, and ‘the figures are orientated to form one compositional unit, blurring the boundaries between individual actions or episodes.’ (Andrews 120)

While several attempts have been made to produce more precise definitions, these types of pictorial narratives have also been broken down by Andrews into two distinctive categories;

1. *Mono-scenic*; where only one action or episode is represented and every element within the picture is understood in terms of a single moment. This is exemplified in Caravaggio’s *The Cardsharps*.

2. *Continuous or Polyscenic*; narratives in which more than one moment is included in a single, unified context, corresponding to the definitions of the cyclical and simultaneous methods. This is exemplified in *Baptism of Christ* by Pietro Perugino.
Fig. 1

Caravaggio

The Cardsharps

c. 1596
Oil on canvas, 90 x 112 cm
Kimbell Art Museum, Forth Worth
Fig. 2

Pietro Perugino

_Baptism of Christ_

c. 1482

Fresco, 335 x 540 cm
Sistine Chapel, Vatican City
Andrews (126) asserts that his use of ‘continuous narrative’ is specific to visual narratives to describe all apparently paradoxical images in which the passage of time is represented within a unified context. Andrews (126) emphasizes that his study is not concerned with the classification of individual images, but rather with general theoretical concerns. He also suggests that there are instances where the terms continuous narrative, method or style may apply. Andrews (126) illustrates examples of this in the following, where:

1. The temporal flow is immediately obvious or disguised.
2. The spaces of time involved are greatly extended or of brief duration.
3. More than one moment may be included, and
4. If the same actors appear over and over again. Narratives from the Renaissance emphasize a passage of time through the repetition of figures.

Others who have previously attempted to define more detailed categories include Kurtz Weitzmann, Franz Wickoff, Peter von Blanckenhagen and Werman Welliver. Kurt Weitzmann’s Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A study of the Origins and Method of Text Illustration (1947) describes the progression of narrative art and differentiates pictorial types. In reference to the continuous method, Weitzmann also characterizes a narrative cycle as one in which more than one scene is amalgamated within a work and this may include decorative and spatial arrangements (Andrews 121). This was mostly based around research into manuscript illumination, and was written in reference to illustration as being secondary to text. Franz Wickoff in his study Vienna Genesis used the same categories as Andrews, however named them complimentary, isolating and continuous. Peter von Blanckenhagen’s essay Narration in Hellenistic and Roman Art compromises a definition to the cyclical or continuous method, stating a continuous narrative ‘is where events separated in time are shown at the same place, in the same setting’ (Andrews 121), however he also requires that identical persons appear more than once and insists on a unifying background of some kind.

Warman Welliver attempted to refine the broad category of continuous narrative further into two main detailed characteristics;

1. ‘Continuous scenes’
Which are a series of distinct and disconnected scenes, presumably within the same setting, and
2. ‘Continuous actions’
Where images, seemingly simultaneous, ‘show a relatively brief succession of closely related actions.’ (Andrews 123)

Welliver’s definitions of continuous scenes and continuous actions also fit into the direction of what my work is trying to achieve.
Literary and Visual; the Opposing Narratives

"As for disposition, it is necessary that the artist move from section to section following the course of time in the narrative he has undertaken to paint, and so with such propriety that the spectators judge that this affair could not have taken place in any other way than the one he depicted. He should not place later in time what ought to come earlier, nor earlier what should come later, but lay things out in a most ordered fashion, according to the way in which they succeeded one another." (Andrews 77)

Ludovico Dolce

While literary narratives distinguish between the order of occurrence (story time order) and the order of telling (discourse time order); in visual narratives, the ‘distinction between the standard chronological order of events and the way those events are represented can be altogether different.’ (Andrews 77) As many critics have stated, this is the condition of narrative itself, evident in any story or medium which may be chosen.

Visual continuous narratives can be structured in both ways, using a ‘double–time ordering’. This is a combination of both the order of occurrence and the order of telling. According to Andrews (78), ‘the passage of time (unlike other kinds of visual imagery) is made more explicit as more than one moment or episode is represented’. Andrews contends that there are countless possibilities for the way the same basic sequence can be presented, for example starting at the end or in the middle, or in a series of flashbacks. This also maintains a direct relationship to the narrative structure familiar to contemporary cinema. Most importantly, however, it is by altering the sequence of events that these incidents acquire new meanings, both in relation to each other and when set against their original order (Andrews 78).

Subsequently, important issues arise when viewing continuous narrative paintings as there is no standard ‘rule’ or established measure for the way in which such images should be compositionally presented and read by the viewer. Lew Andrews poses the question of whether it is really possible to speak of an ordering of events
that is distinct from the story itself, given the narrative action is seen and not told. Is it relevant that the viewer is able to distinguish one sequence of events from another, given the visual temperament of the narrative itself and without any guide of a written source? Or does this in fact form part of the work itself? Andrews main point is that by altering the sequence of events, the images will acquire new meanings within their new presentation. My current body of work responds to this idea through the combination and order of images.
Exploitation of event sequencing through composition in Continuous Narratives

There is no established measure for the way in which continuous narratives should be compositionally presented and read by the viewer. The standard of left to right and top to bottom, allowing the action to develop across the picture plane realized in some Western imagery is not so standard. A number of continuous narrative paintings from the Renaissance can be read in a combination of different directions that defy specific categorization and exploit the setting and space to their full advantage. As Andrews (79) highlights, such narratives employ compositions where;

1. The story may unfold from side to side as well as in and out of depth.
2. The story may follow a circuitous path throughout the picture plane.
3. The figures can move from one position to the next, as well as place to place (as if acting out each sequence of events). This questions the order of occurrence of each action or event.

As many of these works were altered in accordance with their site specific location, such as a church or cathedral, considerations of an overall larger or formal context automatically changed the way the work was conceived. It is because of the numerous ways in which a continuous narrative can be compositionally thought out and presented individually, there can be no such defining measure or ‘rule’ for the viewer to clearly determine the chronological facts, or the arrangement of the sequence of events. Subsequently, this has an effect on the resolve of the order of occurrence from the sequence of the story presentation, without the use of an accompanying text.

In my opinion, a labelling system or written source detracts from the heavily thought out composition and process of the artist. A visual artwork should be conceived as such; considered in its formal terms and arrangement. This itself provides a narrative path or story, and does not need a set of instructions, because it is presented in visual terms. The meaning and interpretation of the work is also considered by the viewer through judgements made about the relationship of each image in response to another.
Continuous narratives can also be discussed beyond the need to distinguish an order of sequencing and events and can be analysed through their visual manner of presentation. This enables the viewer to recognize a broader range of meanings, and provides an alternative way of understanding. In the Renaissance, continuous narratives manipulated the surface and depth of the picture plane in order to convey relationships between the space and setting formally. According to Andrews (80), this allows (events) or “episodes greatly separated from one another in space, and remote in time, (to) come together on the surface of the image”. Subsequently, episodes which co-exist in the picture plane play an important role in establishing connections and enhance the narrative. These juxtapositions can often divulge what the ‘action itself, or the ordering of events, does not.’ (Andrews 80)

**The deepening of space.**

The deepening of space is an important effect used in visual narratives, as it allows the artist to achieve different formats within a particular setting. Examples of this are given by Andrews, in reference to several versions of the *Banquet of Herod*. In these works, the composition intentionally strengthens the underlying meaning of the story, and the deepening of space can allow:

1. The narrative to be expanded, enabling the artist to re-distribute scenes around the setting. This linking and separating of ‘episodes’ also enlivens the subject and themes portrayed.
2. The artist is also able to centralize the initial scene, and manipulate the narrative without jeopardizing the temporal flow or logic. (Andrews 82)

**The Banquet of Herod**

As highlighted by Lew Andrews, the dramatic potential of continuous narratives can be highlighted in several versions of the biblical story, known as either the *Banquet of Herod* or the *Martyrdom of John the Baptist*. A common theme in the quattrocento or Renaissance period, many artists have approached this story in contrasting ways formally, including a consideration of the order of events and the repetition of the main characters in order to tell the same story. Each painting takes
on a different viewpoint visually, as the organization of the narrative structure changes across each composition and has an effect on the overall mood and meaning of the story in each case. The biblical subject of Salome has also been depicted in numerous ways.

**Benozzo Gozzoli, ‘The Banquet of Herod’ (1461-62)**

Gozzoli’s work represents a continuation of three distinct episodes. Here, the attention is immediately drawn towards the centre where Salome is dancing and entertaining Herod. The viewer’s focus then proceeds left, to the beheading of the Baptist, and then is finally shifted to the background. Salome is repeated a second time, presenting her mother with the head of the Baptist. A sense of time and movement is exemplified through the repetition of Salome, followed by the Baptist and then his head. These isolated scenes are also signified within one work, monoscenically.
Fig. 3

Benozzo Gozzoli

*The Banquet of Herod* (also known as *The dance of Salome*)

1461-62
Tempera on panel, 23.8 x 34.3 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington
The order of events begins with the martyrdom in the foreground, and then follows the subsequent events in the background. The most important aspect of the work is that earlier parts of the story are included, such as Salome’s dance, although this is not immediately apparent. These episodes are shown in the form of sculpture, with vignettes carved in a detailed manner in the framework of the archway inside the work. They are almost like images within images, and represent other parts of the
story which may be missing, within previous scenes or episodes. These images are also moved to a different level of reality, as they effectively become remote in time from the main action.

Fig. 5

Rogier van der Weyden

*The beheading of St. John the Baptist* (detail)  
(also known as *Martyrdom of the Baptist*).

c. 1455  
Oil on oak, 77 x 48cm  
Right wing of the St. John Altarpiece  
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
Fig. 6
Hans Memling

*Martyrdom of the Baptist*

1474-79
Oil on oak panel, 176 x 78.9 cm
Left panel of St. John Altarpiece
Memling Museum, Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges

Here, Salome’s dance is not the main focus and is depicted in the watchtower, further in the background. Although she appears again in the foreground, receiving the head of St. John, his beheading is again central to the main action of the work.
Flashbacks

If it is possible to speak of flashbacks in visual narratives, then the vignettes should be considered in such terms; either as a series or as an extended flashback (Andrews 89). They represent the causal events of the main story, which is the backstory or events leading up to it. Flashbacks are most commonly used and recognized in films, where the previous actions are exposed or revealed to progress to other parts of the story. They can also visually and metaphorically alter the meaning of a story. In Rogier van der Weyden’s 'The beheading of St. John the Baptist', the flashbacks represented by the vignettes help explain the chain of events that lead up to the main scene which starts in the present. The previous events of the story are embedded into a decorative motif within the work and effectively act as hidden clues.
Chapter Two

Modern Narrative Painting

“I think that the moment a number of figures become involved you immediately come on to the story-telling aspect of the relationships between the figures. And that immediately sets up a kind of narrative…”

Francis Bacon

Why is it that you want to avoid telling a story?

David Sylvester

I don’t want to avoid telling a story, but I want very very much to do the thing that Valéry said – to give the sensation without the boredom of it’s conveyance (...)

(Hyman 3)

Francis Bacon

After the Renaissance, the composition and structure of narrative works changed. The depiction of several sacred scenes, themes and mythological subjects was now focused on individual scenes, such as miracles and martyrdoms, isolated actions and individual figures or heads (Andrews 94). While some of these works have a greater dramatic intensity, some of the expressive possibilities may be lost because there are fewer opportunities to convey a narrative sequence within a mono-scenic composition. According to Andrews (94), there may be ‘fewer ways to qualify the main event, to amplify the narrative or to add further information.’

Narrative Painting’s (1979), an exhibition selected by Timothy Hyman, explored the issues and wide range of definitions as to what a narrative work may encompass. In the accompanying exhibition essay, Hyman raises the questions of whether it may be true that ‘literary elements are harmful to painting, or at best irrelevant’, and whether ‘cinema has taken away painting’s traditional story telling function, and
that stillness, existence, and not action, is in fact painting’s special province?’ (Hyman 3) The selection of work grew from his certainty that “the images I’ve loved best in every period of Western Art present a figure, or several figures, caught up in some kind of story, and it was this ‘narrative dimension’ I decided to focus on.’ (Gruetzner 814)

A conclusion that could be drawn from the collection of works curated for the exhibition and summarised by Hyman, is that modern narrative paintings are ‘revealing’. They reveal “personal predicaments, the state of our society (and) about our cultural and psychological perceptions.” (Hyman 4) I have found such themes to be prevalent in the work of 20th Century to present day narrative painters; there is a general focus towards more personal themes and the portrayal of ‘everyday’ subject matter. Opposed to the representation of grander themes which are larger than life, both in scale and moral compass, modern narrative painters often allude to such themes of life, death and love, however intertwine this on a more intimate or personal level, revealing the inner ‘self’ of the artist or person portrayed.

A major difference between Renaissance and modern narrative painting is that it is less frequent that modern narrative paintings are directly representing a written source. The following artists exemplify a strong narrative presence within their work and also deal with more identifiable and contemporary themes, such as the personal, social and political. These themes are not distinctly illustrating, or directly find their origins within a literary source. The work of Max Beckmann, Paula Rego and P.J. Crook will be discussed in reference to their varied approach towards the subjects and themes portrayed, as well as the use of the figure and relationships to time.
Max Beckmann

"Mythology and theatre certainly overlap, since mythic figures often appear on stage and both worlds are characterized by a "double reality": the former is one of historical reality – each myth contains a historical core, be it an event, setting, person or group; on stage, historical reality exists as the actual time of the performance and the reality of actors playing roles.” (Beckmann 59)

Reinhard Spieler

Max Beckmann’s work relies on its use of symbolism to portray his narratives of human relationships and according to Matthew Drutt, Beckmann regarded them as ‘allegories of human existence’ (Beckmann 17), where theatre was portrayed as a metaphor for life. Grand themes of destruction, redemption, suffering, death, love and hope, both literally and metaphorically, overwhelm his large scale canvases where his subjects command compassion from the viewer. The most striking element is the combination of several types of figures and characters, the majority of which are life size; the interaction and relationships between each of them form the basis of the narrative within each triptych.

Born in Germany in 1884, Beckmann’s work is heavily influenced by the effects of both World War 1 and II, and his exodus from Berlin to Amsterdam in 1937. Matthew Drutt describes his complex work as a ‘mosaic of contemporary social criticism and religious or mythical themes, and he increasingly used masked or costumed circus characters as allegorical figures’ (Beckmann 15). Diaries which were transcribed during World War II recall frequent visits to cabarets, carnivals and theatres, and according to Matthew Drutt, on some level these entertaining ‘distractions’ may have offered temporary relief from the terror and devastation of the war, which often formed his underlying subject matter. (Beckmann 15)

Such feelings of anguish and of no relief in sight make an intense proclamation about the state of the world during this time and are expressed in the way the paintings are formulated and structured. The multifaceted compositions are crowded, where figures inhabit each other’s personal spaces. Every corner of the canvas is filled, adding further to the tension and anxiety of the themes portrayed. The
subjects become the main focus; they take up the majority of the canvas, and are split across a common use of triptychs to break up the space. The composition seems to work better with the gaps in between, as it allows the painting to breathe and not be besieged by the subjects, opposed to the mono-scenic approach. The use of the triptych is integral to the arrangement of the narrative itself; chaos is often presented in the side panels and resolves itself by contrasting with the middle panel, providing a balanced view.

The settings in each work also allude to several other places and settings, maintaining an ambiguity within the narrative. Different circumstances and subjects collide without a transition between each object or place, similar to combining several different stories or episodes within the one work. There may also be several readings of the same image, according to how they are interpreted by the viewer.

Max Beckmann’s work depicts a range of human behaviour and social relationships where conflicts of power and oppositions of male and female form many compositions. The portrayal of the lonely human is exposed to humiliation, degradation, torture and ‘violence under the cover of heroism’ as expressed by Reinhard Spieler (Beckmann 72). Again, this cruelty and crisis can be likened to Germany’s social situation during this period in history. The idea of theatre as a metaphor for life captured Beckmann, and according to Spieler, ‘myth and theatre are forms in which reality has been transformed into the pictorial’ (Beckmann 59), where characters such as Kings, Queens and warriors frequent his paintings. The character of the King and the Warrior also undergo a transformation over the course of Beckmann’s body of work. In The Departure, the King is seen as the redeemer of utopian ideals, whereas in The Temptation he is cynically portrayed. Likewise, the Warrior in the former is seen as unpredictable and threatening as his face is covered by the armour, although he is also seen in a protective role, while in the latter, he participates in violence and his heroism disintegrates.
"Ambiguity reveals dualities of feelings as well as states of being. Here stands a man, executioner / fisherman / pirate / nurturer. I say nurturer because the fisherman brings us fish to eat. Is Beckmann, by combining fishing with this violent scene, saying life feeds off death, literally?" (Beckmann 131)

Eric Fischl

Here, concepts such as illusion versus reality in life are subplots to the overall theme of ‘The Departure’. Reinhard Spieler suggests that Beckmann creates an ‘archetypal structure in which civilization and culture are pitted against instinct and
violence.’ (Beckmann 60) Each side panel depicts suffering and figures are tied up distressingly. A fisherman on one side scoops up a singular fish, and on the other a figure beats a large drum. In the centre, a man, or ‘King’ stands with his back turned, as the woman or ‘Queen’ holds her child while staring out blankly beyond the canvas. The centre panel, set outside on a boat in the middle of the ocean, presents a sense of hope, and contrasts the frightening interiors on the opposing panel. The future, it seems, appears in the centre with anticipation realised by the child embracing his mother. The viewer is not given any indication of the sequence of events, of what has come before or after, and it seems the work as a whole is a combination of different experiences.

The right hand panel indulges in violence and slavery, whilst torturous scenes are illustrated on the left. The middle panel, a majestic image of freedom, provides the only relief. Here, the grandeur of the King and the Warrior as they stand tall in the foreground oversee and protect the woman (or the Queen) in the centre of the boat. The King wears cool blue, to signify intellect and rationality, and in turn distinguishes himself from the Warrior who is clothed in rich cadmium red, the colour of fire, passion, emotion and instinct (Beckmann 60). Whilst the King frees the net of fish, an act considered merciful and one of redemption, the Warrior grasps a large fish in his domineering stance.

Beckmann uses private mythology across all his works, with a recurring, personal symbol being the fish. While a fish is seen universally as a symbol of fertility and life, on other occasions it has phallic overtones as well as symbolizing the soul. (Lackner 88) ‘The Departure’ was described in a letter by one of Beckmann’s patrons, Lilly von Schnitzler, who recalls the artist explaining his work;

"On the right hand side you can see yourself trying to find your way in the darkness... dragging along tied to you, as a part of yourself, the corpse of your memories, of your wrongs and failures, the murder everyone commits at some time of his life – you can never free yourself of your past, you have to carry that corpse while Life plays the drum.” (Lackner 88)
Fig. 8

Max Beckmann

Versuchung (Temptation)

1936 -7
Oil on canvas, Triptych, centre panel 78 3/4 X 67"; side panels each 85 X 39 3/8"
Bayerische Staatsgemaldesammlungen, Munich
‘Versuchung (Temptation)’ (1936-7)

“Today, fate appears as an elevator boy.” (Beckmann 61)

Max Beckmann

In ‘Temptation’, the young men are the protagonists around which the main action unfolds and develops. The depiction of the male servant is submissive, his role is to receive orders, observe and be a conformist. Again, through the influence of war and the current state of affairs at the time, the figure of the male servant alluded by Reinhard Spieler to a ‘faceless public, whose role is not always as harmless as it may appear.’ (Beckmann 61) He gains his self importance and identity through his uniform, as he leads a woman on a leash in a doglike position past another woman who is perched in a human sized cage. The woman in the cage this time is trapped and nurses a weasel instead of a child, a symbol of shamelessness and immorality. In contrast to ‘The Departure’, the Warrior this time is not the protector or leader he was before but rather the destroyer of life, as shown within the left hand panel.
Paula Rego

"The juxtaposition in the stories of events from different times, and the frequent reference to the past in relation to the present shows a preoccupation with the way people confront changed situations with equipment or attitudes appropriate to an earlier time... (She) is commenting on the existence of the past in the present, not simply glorifying a past time.” (Tate 34)

Victor Willing

"In keeping with the most enthralling story-tellers, she sabotages the 'once upon a time' of conventional narrative temporality with a disruptive sense of the present. This present tense hinders the lulling potential of narrative 'pastness', ruffling it's smooth and seamless linearity. Narrative is, for Paula Rego, more than the detached telling of a story: it is the provision of a containing environment where contradictions are held, rather than suppressed, and where various versions of the self are enacted.” (Tate 43)

Ruth Rosengarten

Born in Portugal, 1935, Paula Rego studied at the Slade School of Art in London, before permanently moving to London with her husband, artist Victor Willing, in 1976. According to Willing (Tate 34), the most persistent themes that occur throughout Rego’s work are of domination and time passed. These concepts may be engaged in reaction to a particular event or emotion and take an aggressive form towards authority heads or overriding family figures. Nostalgia is also frequently infused with the present; her paintings reveal a familiarity of time which expands from her childhood up until the very present. Rego frequently confuses stories from a variety of different origins and presents a physical story in response to a particular emotion or feeling. At times, Rego uses well known literary figures from nursery rhymes, where their identities may retain an ambiguity and take on new personalities or personas. Other influences include fairy tales, films, plays, religious stories and fables, as well as ‘real life’ newspaper and media stories.
The personal and highly complex themes often challenge commonly held moral opinions in relation to violence, revenge, love, seduction, temptation and punishment. Power struggles in relationships, between both sexes and the family are constantly examined, as well as references to political and controlling figures which provide a commentary on her homeland. An element of fear also alludes to the dictatorships and colonialism in Portugal during this period, and fragments of several influences, whether consciously or not, is entwined within her work.

Women feature predominately throughout Rego’s body of work and are portrayed throughout the generations; as children, sisters, daughters, mothers and grandmothers. In some instances they are symbolic of a life journey (and may allude to Rego’s own life), while in other cases they become the protagonist around which the main action of the narrative is centred. Interestingly, the actions of these women are dominant and have the upper hand over their male counterparts who are portrayed as seemingly oblivious to their situation. The female is also signified in a more powerful position, where she is more ‘knowing’ of what is about to happen, adding to the familiar sinister undertones distinctive to Rego’s work. According to Victor Willing, Paula’s ‘girls are both a memory and presentiment.’ (McEwen 301)

“*I’m interested in how an outer form or gesture or expression relates to an inner state.*” (Tate 74)

Paula Rego

Rego often places her subjects in a domestic realm where family and relationships between characters are explored. While the reliance upon gesture, facial expression and interaction with others remains the primary focus in order to communicate the narrative, a high level of ambiguity is also maintained throughout. Often the figures are contemplating an act in which they are about to partake, or reflecting on something which has just taken place. Rego enhances their social and physical interaction with disturbing connotations and she is not afraid to portray the darker side of people and their humanity. This tension and trepidation manifests itself in her subjects where she is generally more sympathetic towards the female characters. Rego is also constantly at ‘play’ with her audience and the characters in
which she creates. According to Fiona Bradley, she seeks ‘to tie us into the pictures as they are made, to implicate us in the fate of their characters.’ (Tate 32)

Figures often have their faces turned or hidden away from the viewer, which is suggestive of secrecy as well as hiding the motives for their actions. In ‘The Family’ (1988), the girl stands with her back towards the audience and her face is mostly concealed in shadow. Her eyes are picked up by the light and sustain a menacing mood and presence. Rego also uses props and objects which are devised as clues in order to add further depth to the narrative. A specific ambience is engaged within her canvases, where the mood and emotion set the tone for the themes surrounding the narrative. She is not trying to re-enact a particular story, (she is influenced by several stories or emotions), but rather evokes a narrative in response to the physical actions set by her characters.

Compositionally, the figures are keyed into one single moment or action monoscenically over the one canvas, however, they may signify a combination of the beginning or aftermath of a set of events which has led to their current situation or temperament. Several instances of time or moments are recognized across each work; sometimes they may be solitary figures, and in other circumstances several characters are depicted. In most cases, they are encompassed or overwhelmed by the place or setting in which they are portrayed. The background is limited which enables the focus to be directly toward the subjects, offering Rego a more contemplative space for the figures to exist. This also contrasts the stylistic approach of Max Beckmann, where his figures anxiously overwhelm their space.
Fig. 9

Paula Rego

The Maids

1987
Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4 cm x 243.9 cm
Saatchi Collection, London
“The matter for Paula often concerns domination, or rebellion and domination; or freedom and repression; suffocation and escape. In these dramas her sympathy for the protagonists is ambivalent and wavering.” (McEwen 301)

Victor Willing

‘The Maids’ (1987)

‘The Maids’ refers to the true story of the Papin sisters who murdered the wife and daughter of a rich man for whom they worked in Paris in the early 1930’s. The title and themes of the work are based on the play of the same name by Jean Genet. As stated by Fiona Bradley, the seemingly unpremeditated crime is re-enacted by Rego, as she ‘plays on the ambivalence of the central relationships in the drama.’ (Tate 12) With ominous and disturbing undertones, the themes which are highlighted include the seizing of power, mutiny, insubordination, and murder.

Similar to ‘The Family’, the poses of the female characters maintain a double ambiguity and can be read on two levels; this includes their domestic and caring responsibilities for which they were employed, and becomes confused with their aggressive disposition as they perform behind the mother’s back. With her hand firmly placed on the back of the mother’s neck, the maid in the centre of the work at first seems to attend to her employer dutifully. However, her officious stance with her legs wide apart and assertive hand on hip parallels the characteristics usually associated with the male. With her head down, the mother is oblivious to what is happening behind her and the viewer is made more aware of the unfolding and alarming situation. In the background, the daughter raises her arms as if reaching out for a hug, however her arms are limp and her head is buried deeply in the chest of the second maid. While she is being smothered, her head is forcibly held down under the maid’s chin. The maid’s eyes dart back across to the mother as she keeps watch and firmly holds the helpless girl in place. The wild boar in the bottom right hand corner adds to the belligerence and mayhem. His teeth and jaw wide open increase the underlying ferocious intensity of the work.
Fig. 10

Paula Rego

The Family

1988
Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4cm x 213.4cm
Saatchi Collection, London
“Complicated sequence of relationships is articulated through a series of recognisable images into a potential, rather than pre-existing narrative, one the viewer must assemble for themselves.” (Tate 12)

Fiona Bradley

‘The Family’ (1988)

In ‘The Family’, Rego challenges the stereotypical, dominant role of the male as an authority figure as the female characters take over his usual domain. The subordination of the male or the father is also seen as another way of repressing the oppressor. The eldest female (who is portrayed as either a mother or sister) kneels above the father, aggressively clutching his wrist while smothering his face with her left arm. She casts her gaze innocently towards the viewer with a sickly pink ribbon placed amiably in her hair. Her wide eyes look knowingly, and her lips are pursed to form a wry smile. The shadow cast across her face, and upon the other figures within the room signify that something more sinister is at play through their actions. The younger female, (either daughter or sister) forces herself in front of the father and seizes his jacket as if she is about to undress him. As they fixate their eyes on each other, he seems completely helpless and screws up his face, as if making muffled screams underneath the arm that holds him in place.

The girl who stands in the far room clenches her fists together, as if rubbing her hands together in glee as though everything is going according to plan. Her strong shadow stretching across the floor reinforces her unwavering stance and enjoyment of being a spectator at the unfolding event. In the background, the reversal of the typical roles between the sexes is reinforced on the door of the cabinet. The depicted bird with its long neck leers over the fox and reaches with its beak into the fox’s mouth. Generally, the fox would be seen as the more domineering and forceful predator, however in this work, is portrayed as the weaker animal.
Fig. 11

Paula Rego

*The Policeman’s Daughter*

1987
Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4cm x 152.4cm
Saatchi Collection, London
"In denying us the plenitude of narrative closure in favour of fragmentary exclusion, these paintings are – almost cinematographically – as much ‘about’ what they omit as about what they include." (Tate 71)

Ruth Rosengarten

**The Policeman’s Daughter** (1987)

In *The Policeman’s Daughter*, the solitary figure of the daughter is haunted by the presence of her father who is represented figuratively by the policeman's boot. Although he is physically absent, his existence as an authority figure, as both policeman and father, is realised in the forceful and dominant diagonal position of the boot. This is also echoed by the harsh shadow it casts upon the floor. While the daughters face is cast downwards and lips are pursed together, her head remains upright and strong. The viewer wonders whether she is happy or has been forced to do this chore. The rough and violent way she is cleaning the boot raises questions as to the true nature of their relationship, and may be a commentary on father / daughter roles.
Fig. 12

Paula Rego

*The Dance*

1988
Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4 x 274.3cm
Tate Gallery Collection, UK

*The Dance* is one of the most explicit examples of Rego’s work which reveals a metaphoric movement throughout time. This change in time is represented across several generations, and is symbolised by the child, mother and grandmother. In each case, this may refer to the girls developmental stages (maybe even Rego’s), and is suggestive of a celebration of life. There is a sense of timelessness as the men and women hold hands, and their dresses float effortlessly in the breeze. The sombre blues across the background, in the sky, the sea, and the grass also underline an overall reflective mood under the moonlight.
P.J Crook

Pamela Crook is a figurative artist, born in England in 1945. Her work has been described as idiosyncratic, and maintains an undeniable surrealist quality, peculiar in both its appearance and subject matter. Her work is also immediately recognisable through the inclusion of the frame as forming part of the painting. The composition is painted over the edge of the frame, and almost disappears into the work itself. The size and scale of her work also changes dramatically, some being as small as four square inches, while others are as large as four by five feet. The colours mostly used in her work are quite melancholy and whimsical, with various tones of blues, greys and pinks. The dramatic use of shadows is cleverly inserted to enhance a feeling of uneasiness toward the narrative and its subjects. The colours have been described as “unvarnished, flat, almost faded, which adds to the strange, timeless atmosphere.” (Lister 99) Crook is better known for her depiction of crowds, and despite their claustrophobic feeling, manages to translate a variety of personalities into each of her subjects.

'Time and Time Again' (1981)

In this work, Crook depicts two figures, a man and a woman, as well as a dog, set within the simple interior of a room. A dresser with a mirrored headboard sits within the middle and reflects opposing angles in the room, drawing on several instances of time, and revealing at least seven different positions of the same woman. The mood of the work is slightly disturbing as each of their faces display the same ominous emotion of something that is yet to happen. The dog seems to stand alert, facing the door, with its tail held high in the air, hoping for change. The tension created is achieved through the complex composition and inclusion of mirrors which expose the different angles of poses and faces which otherwise would have remained hidden.
Fig. 13

P.J Crook

*Time and Time Again*

1981
Acrylic on canvas, 36” x 48”
Private Collection
‘Time Piece’

‘Time Piece’ echoes the compositional structure found in ‘Time and Time Again’. Here, Crook has used a similar interior setting for the work, with the addition of another door on the left hand side which increases the fluid movement throughout the room. The elegant woman who walks the Dalmatian in the centre is repeated at least four times, reinforcing the awareness that several consecutive moments in time are represented. The woman begins her journey in several frieze frames, possibly beginning from the right hand side corridor. She then walks across the room in the centre and finally leaves down the corridor on the left hand side. The dog is also repeated in both works, although this time is controlled by a leash. One of the most curious features of Time Piece, and that which specifically refers to the title, are the portraits of the men hanging around the room. Each one seems to simultaneously mimic the other, as well as substituting the actions of the clock, fixed at the back of the room. As their hands dangle the pendulums beneath their frames, it is also another reminder of the passing of time. Adding to the eccentricity of the piece, bold colours such as purple, green and a warm pinkish red, as well as the lighting and shadows, dominate the work.
Fig. 14

P.J. Crook

*Time Piece*

(date unspecified)
Acrylic on wood, 29 x 36 inches.
Brian Sinfield Gallery, England
Chapter Three

Narrative and Film

Painting versus Film

Parallels can be drawn between continuous narratives from the Renaissance and contemporary, commercial cinema in terms of their reliance upon a literary source. The literary source in contemporary cinema can be seen in terms of a film script which is later materialized, in contrast to the continuous narratives of the Renaissance, which found their basis in religious texts. The development of each story and the way in which the composition has been assembled is visually comparative in a general sense; events or episodes can be substituted for scenes, stills, close ups and flashbacks, which all physically resemble arrangements found within continuous narrative works of the Renaissance. The way particular events can be edited in a film, or presented by an artist within a painted scene, can control the order of information or continuity of images, thereby altering the narrative and how it is to be perceived by the viewer.

The main distinction between the two visual media is the construction of time, and how this is presented compositionally. Painting is essentially static and has to manipulate and control techniques to compensate for this lack of movement to portray a specific passage of time. In contrast, while film is time based, it also has a restriction of time in order to convey a narrative. Therefore, the two media use similar techniques visually to create a sense of dialogue with the viewer or audience. There is a parallel between the function of objects and motifs as well as formal techniques, such as tone colour, mood and symbols and their role in establishing hidden messages and themes within the narrative. Colours, lighting and tone provide an immediate impact on the emotional dialogue, and are the most important aesthetics in film, like painting. This is exemplified by director, Peter Greenaway, who uses contradicting hues to explain what is being represented, or to emphasize a particular emotion or mood.
Continuity

“A way of organizing spatial and temporal data into a cause-effect chain of events, with beginning, middle and end, that embodies a judgement about the nature of events as well as demonstrates how it is possible to know, hence narrate events.”

(Edward Brangian)

“The fact that two sequences follow each other on screen does not indicate in itself that they should be understood as following each other in time.”

(Arnheim)

“Precisely a confusion of consecutiveness and consequence, what comes after (as) what (something) is caused by.”

(Roland Barthes)

Many temporal situations are created and judged through the juxtapositions of spatial fragments from different shots. The viewer’s interpretation depends crucially on judgements made about the cause, time and space which are represented in the film. An object, for example, may be presented in turn for something else, and demonstrates a close connection between creating metaphors and discovering causes.

Unmatched sequences, similar to the unmatched images and canvases in my work, also disrupt the perception and flow of space, and narrative order. When sequences are viewed out of order, the perception of events of the narrative change. The viewer tries to construct meaning of the work through a narrative, and each image’s relationship to another, which is what I am trying to achieve. Through such ‘story
comprehension’, the viewer ‘strives to create ‘logical connections among data in order to match general categories of schema.’ (Brangian 15)

The most standard narrative structure recognized in film uses four principles of ‘causal’ reasoning (Brangian 40):

1. A cause must not precede an effect.
2. An effect can not work backward in time to create a cause.
3. Certain patterns of repetition among events make a causal connection more likely.
4. A prior event which is temporally or spatially more approximate to the outcome than others are more likely to be the cause of the outcome.

Quentin Tarrantino exploits this reasoning most notably in *Pulp Fiction*. Another way of constructing narrative compositionally in film is through the selection and arrangement of scenes or through the exclusion or emphasis of certain shots.

**Directors**

Peter Greenaway and Quentin Tarrantino are directors who exude a specific individuality and technique which are applied to their films in order to create unique and stylized narratives. Objects, settings, colours and motifs are frequently and explicitly manipulated in the work of Greenaway, to ensure the viewer is aware of the situations and events unfolding and to strengthen the recurring themes. Tarrantino’s influence is related directly to the structure and time sequencing of his films. A discussion of the overall, common elements associated with each director will be presented, and specific films will be briefly examined, relating to similar themes and issues revolving around my work.
Quentin Tarrantino

"Do you consider omission part of the art of screenwriting? Is what you leave out as crucial as what you leave in?"

Graham Fuller

I completely think so. To me, it even applies to the way you frame a shot. What you don’t see in the frame is as important as what you do see. Some people like to show everything. They don’t want the audience to have a second guess at anything; it’s all there." (Peary 55)

Quentin Tarrantino

Quentin Tarrantino’s films, namely *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), dramatically reorganized the typical cinematic narrative structures familiar to the early 90’s. Pulp Fiction in particular was significant because it gave the audience a new role and perspective in regard to their viewing experience; at any one point in the film, they do not receive the whole story until the film is viewed in its entirety. According to Tarrantino, “If you were to walk out of the theatre after the first hour of Pulp Fiction, you really wouldn’t have experienced the movie, because the movie you see an hour later is a much different movie. And the last twenty minutes is much different to that.” (Peary 110)

Fig. 15
Quentin Tarrantino

*Pulp Fiction*

1994
Miramax Films © Miramax / Everett Collection
Pulp Fiction (1994)

Pulp Fiction is based around three classic Hollywood scenarios, influenced by the 'hardboiled' crime fiction of the post World War II era in America. Written by Tarrantino and Roger Avery, Pulp Fiction is 'a strictly regimented, tripartite anthology of overdone pulp premises with a modern twist.' (Barnes, Hearne 118) The premise of the narrative revolves around several character groups; the boxer (Butch) who gets knocked out of the ring and his girlfriend (Fabienne), the Hit man (Vincent Vega) who is required to look after the boss's wife (Mia), and the two thieves (Pumpkin) and (Honey Bunny). It was Tarrantino’s aim to give these character roles more recognition than they would normally be given, and over the course of the film explain how their stories intertwine in a non-linear way.

"I guess what I am always trying to do is use the structures that I see in novels and apply them to cinema. A novelist thinks nothing of starting in the middle of a story... If a story would be more dramatically engaging if you told it from the beginning, or the end, then I'd tell it that way. But the glory is in pulling it off my way.” (Peary 53)

Quentin Tarrantino

This approach of giving answers first and providing questions later effectively reordered the telling of events so that Pulp Fiction was presented as a combination of sequences or scenes out of order. The straightforward beginning, middle and end format was intentionally recreated in order to strengthen the overall narrative of the film. Many critics have suggested that the film would not have the same volatile effect if it was reworked chronologically, and while the narrative itself would remain the same, “the emotional impact through the relay of events would change and alter the expressive possibilities of the film.” (Huntley, Phillips, chap 16). The interpretation or way in which the events are to be perceived would also change and render themselves less intriguing.

Fiona A. Villella explores the notion of progressive narratives in her essay, Circular Narratives: Highlights of Popular Cinema in the 90’s. Here, Villella (1) states that Pulp Fiction is able to "subvert the conventional notions of time and logic, (while
remaining) a highly engaging and genuinely intriguing cinematic experience.”
Similar to a domino effect, the construction and re-editing of Pulp Fiction in a non-linear way, accentuates how one event or character has been influenced by another, and directly highlights the intentions of each character within a particular situation. The audience also plays a more active role in trying to connect and form relationships between each scene, establishing the impact of the narrative further.
In *Reservoir Dogs*, the story is also made more fascinating as the viewer never sees the main event or action, other than the preceding and resulting stages. The narrative focuses on the themes of loyalty, friendship, betrayal and violence between an assembly of criminals who have regrouped after a diamond heist and have collective suspicions of one another. There is constant dialogue about a ‘heist’ which is about to happen, then has just taken place. While the audience slowly receives some of the build up to the story, the main action is never portrayed. In my opinion, it is Tarrantino’s intention that the heist scene is left out in order to a produce greater emotional impact. As Tarrantino stated above, sometimes this can be more effective than simply reciting or regurgitating all the information and spoon feeding the audience. In some cases, it is more interesting to leave clues, or allude to certain situations in order to allow the viewer to make up their own mind.
Peter Greenaway

"Even those not fond of Peter Greenaway find it necessary to cite; his diversity (author, painter, art historian) and taxonomical brilliance (games with numbers, alphabets), painterly tableaux, filmic homage’s, literary illusions, and his unconventional narratives.” (Lawrence 2)

Amy Lawrence

"It is more interesting for me to talk to a painting historian or an art critic... because my terms and attitudes are rooted in what (they) know and have studied. My ambition has always been to try and bring out that sort of language, those criteria, that vocabulary, those processes into cinema – and not ivory tower cinema – but mainstream cinema.” (Woods 11)

Peter Greenaway

"I wanted to make film’s that were not illustrations of already existing text, or slaves to a plot... I wanted to make a cinema of idea’s, not plots and to try and use the same aesthetics as painting, which has always paid great attention to formal devices of structure, composition and framing, and insisted on attention to metaphor. Since film is not painting – and not simply because one moves and the other doesn’t – I wanted to explore their connections and differences – stretching the formal interests into questions of editing, pacing, studying the formal properties of time intervals, repetitions, variations on a theme, and so on.” (Woods 18)

Peter Greenaway

Peter Greenaway’s films reference an incredible range of themes and subjects, from theories on history and art, to satires of greed, sin and consumption. His background as an author, painter and art historian has had an enormous impact on his work, where metaphors and paradoxes are constantly at play. Symbolism, as
well as colour, is also heavily used throughout to structure a narrative path. It is difficult to pinpoint one particular central metaphor to each film because they are to be seen as a combination of several overlapping allegorical metaphors. They intertwine simultaneously throughout each film, and include thematic characterizations of painters, writers, architects and chefs, as well as scientific and rationalized figures, such as scholars. Alternately, Greenaway borrows technically from painting in order to tell stories, and so his films are intensely rich both visually and stylistically.

His complex use of references has been likened to a passion for encyclopaedias, where he “wants to make films that rationally represent all the world in one place.” (Lawrence 2) As Greenaway explains, “My movies are sections of this world encyclopaedia” and the encyclopaedia is seen as both an organizational strategy as well as philosophical stance (Lawrence 2). His narratives reveal a juxtaposition of several visual styles, montage, homage, and allegory, and as such, are richly loaded both as a visual object and theoretical subject. This has led to Greenaway being described as an ‘intellectual exhibitionist’ and ‘cultural carnivore.’ (Lawrence 3) The meaning of his films in a general sense is obscure, and their interpretation proves problematic to decipher. For this reason, it has been suggested that Greenaway is interested in the differing ways that the audience may interpret his films, and he likes to play on this.

According to Amy Lawrence (5), Greenaway bestows a criticism upon his figurative representation of the ‘artist’ as well as the portrayal of female characters, where they share a ‘social powerlessness.’ These characters are only ‘valued for what they can produce to the glory and amusement of the patriarchy (...) corrupted by political regimes, subjected to unsolicited patronage, implicated in a chain of patriarchal authority, and they must learn to negotiate a hostile world in order to survive” (Lawrence, 5). Greenaway is also critical of human failings and parodies characters in their search for chance and opportunity.
The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover (1989)

"In his lust for material possessions, the Thief shows no appreciation for the Cook’s cuisine or for His Wife’s love, so she turns to Michael, who knows how to be a true Lover. Jealous, the thief has Michael killed, whereupon the Wife, in devotion to her Lover, has the Cook cook Michael’s dead body, forces the thief to eat of it, then shoots him for his cannibalism. Thus, in a very “moral ending” suited to a "parable or fable”, the Thief’s excessive appetites prove to be his own undoing.” (Keesey 83)

Douglas Keesey

In the film, the characters are metaphoric embodiments of the themes they portray. Individually, they provide a commentary on themselves, both through their actions and as a representation of their metaphor. In a narrative structure similar to a fable, the characters, according to Douglas Keesey (83) are “representative of certain vices and certain virtues…Richard the Cook is Art, Spica the Thief is Greed, Georgina the Wife is Love and Michael the Lover is Knowledge.” In an intriguing approach to creating narrative, the characters through allegory mimic their given vice or virtue and proceed throughout the film to make judgements about this on a deeper level, questioning morals and the raw fragility of life. This is presented in a circular way over the course of the film, where the ending scene sums up the course of events and in turn serves the Thief a taste of his own medicine.

While the values and ideologies of all the characters come into question by the end of the film – they all sink as low as the thief himself in their revenge, the human personification of the allegorical themes provides an interesting alternative view to the usual expectations associated with each character. As well as this, the film offers a unique contrast to the familiar depiction of themes and the way in which they are conventionally presented.

According to Keesey (84);

"The wife’s overdone revenge provokes a moral nausea, instilling doubt about the ethics of killing the Thief and about the efficacy of using evil to eliminate evil."
The rich visual quality of the film reinforces the powerful themes signified by the characters, and the ‘colour coded rooms of Greenaway’s set mark the various transformations of the food.’ (Kessey 86) The colours used in each setting are symbolic of the characters emotions and actions as they each represent human embodiments of the different vices and virtues they enact. The green kitchen alludes to an Eden or paradise for the lovers, whereas the red dining room is ‘carnivorous and violent, where food is consumed.’ (Keesey 86) The bright white lights and surroundings of the bathroom stalls are symbolic of a kind of contradictory ‘heaven’, where the Wife and her Lover meet for the first time. The low point of humanity and basic human instinct is presented in a raw and grotesque fashion, however, is so heavily stylized that it renders itself beautiful. The restaurant, kitchen and bathroom set the scene for all basics of human needs and survival. Chance, opportunity and greed are seized by all characters who each in turn manipulate one another.

Another aspect of colour symbolism is strongly signified by the chromatic change of the clothes worn by Spica and Georgina as they move across each room. The colour of the costumes they adorn provides continuity as they directly match the colour of the interiors they are surrounded by at any particular time, with the exception of Georgina’s nudity. The Cook, however, remains in his white uniform which symbolizes the virtue of his profession, and the Lover remains in brown in reference to knowledge and literature. (Keesey 87)
Fig. 17

Peter Greenaway

The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and her Lover.

1989
© Miramax

Fig. 18

Peter Greenaway

The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover.

1989
© Miramax
Chapter Four

My Work

The occurrence of narrative in film and my practice

These are the following issues in film which have similar concerns within my practice;

1. Story Comprehension and continuity; the audience is not aware of what particular stage of the narrative they are presented with, and this may be a combination of cause and effect sequences or actions. The viewer creates logical connections of the story through questions of how or why?

2. How to interpret events which have no causal connection, and yet are presented as though they are connected significantly in some way. The viewer must evaluate and give meaning to the temporal relationships in response to the sequences given. The link that is formed by the viewer of an artwork or film, and the way in which images are connected forms the narrative itself.

3. There is no specific synchronicity of time. This is represented in the way the paintings are situated together (similar to film stills). Images from different time or places are linked together, where the narrative may be sliced up or positioned in different sequences. The viewer is not necessarily receiving the whole picture, but rather snippets of a story, or a series of continuous actions.

4. Symbols, tone and colour help illustrate the mood.

5. A frieze frame of the narrative in painting is similar to a film still.
Subsequent questions which have arisen in relation to the above;

1. Is it possible to show several sequences of a story simultaneously? Is there also a way to capture all the different elements of a story within the one work without revealing the ‘whole story’?

2. Can the work embody different parts of events – such as the cause and effect – while not portraying them in any specific *chronological* order? The viewer is not aware of what particular stage is being viewed – the cause, effect, or somewhere in between. An alternative way is to show different parts of a story put together, where the whole picture is a combination of sequences out of order.

3. Can the work portray a continual and open-ended narrative, with no specific closure or specified storyline? My work does not directly depict a specific ‘event’ or *what* has happened, but rather questions arise as to *how* this person has been affected or what by. Most images are based on an emotional experience and are symbolic of this, representing figuratively a period of time to form the basis of the narrative. They do not directly duplicate any specific event, however are presented as an amalgamation of several poignant experiences.
The Conception of Time

"Events (which are) separated in time are shown at the same place in the same setting..." (Andrews 121)

Peter von Blanckenhagen

While it is common for visual narratives to be concerned with conveying a specific passage of time and ordering of events, my work reacts against a familiar unity of time and place. It is presented as a combination of several instances of time and place. There is a sense of displacement of time across each image, and when they are presented within the context of a whole work, the images render themselves as a combination of individual narratives from differing time frames and places. This movement or passing of time is realised both literally and metaphorically in the two interactive works, ‘In the days that followed... (the agonies of waiting for time)’, and ‘The dawn of a new mourning’. Each painting becomes it's own piece of the puzzle, sequence or viewpoint set among a larger story or context, and maintain a relationship somehow to another through it’s setting, physicality, repetition of ‘character’, and the for mentioned issues.

The passing of time is also signified within the moveable pieces of these interactive works both physically and metaphorically, where the very act of manually turning the images is representative of the movement of time. The viewer is able to change the overall order or sequence of the images both individually, or alter the arrangement of the entire composition in several ways.

As a visual montage of images within the context of one work, each painting is representative of several instances of time and place individually. Each painting is analogous to sections of a story which have been sliced up and compositionally put back together, as each image develops it's own sequence or viewpoint set amongst a larger story or context. The viewer is unaware of the precise relationship between each image and what came before or after, although would gain a sense of this movement of passing through time whether it is from the symbols chosen, or images and seasons represented. The selection and combination of images also evoke a narrative response, as the viewer may try to
piece together ‘clues’, as to why certain images are paired together. Such questions raised by the viewer as to what each figure is being affected by is essentially the basis of the narrative, and their interpretation of the work has an affect on the overall meaning.

A sense of movement within the narrative is revealed most explicitly in ‘The dawn of a new mourning’, where the change of relationships of each figure is exposed through their actions, and offers alternative viewpoints within the one composition. This tension is revealed physically and metaphorically through colour symbolism.
“The movements of the soul are made known by the movements of the body.”
(Tate 64)

Alberti

“The problem we all have, when confronting those presences emerging from the darkness in our lives, is how to describe them. The truth to which some may be asked to testify, banal facts about rape and slaughter, are simple by comparison. This more shady truth is complicated by our need to make sense of what we perceive – to give it a form which we ourselves are satisfied is true, which form in turn may even make sense to others – that would be a bonus, but the priority is always our own understanding. Testimony is secondary and if a painter is asked what he means – what he really means, by a painting, his answer, if he made one, might still leave us unsatisfied. His understanding is unlikely to have reached an explicable form – in so many words, and may never do so, but a sense of unease has been confronted, which the image has encapsulated, leaving him or her with the feeling that the matter has been settled.” (McEwen 301)

Victor Willing

My body of work is not a completed, or ‘finished’ story, however it aims to convey snippets of certain ‘events’ or actions within a non-conclusive time frame. The figures portrayed are each representative of being situated at a cross-road, searching for questions or answers, or being emotionally affected by something which is beyond their control. It was not my intention to regurgitate a direct summarization of a set of events, however, I wanted to show the immediate impact of something which has just occurred or is about to take place; the quieter moments, resulting in a combination of the before, middle and after. I also wanted to portray the sense of an immediate impact, as if this ‘thing’ or event has just happened, or the viewer is in the middle of watching something that is unfolding or about to happen. Subsequently, the work has no ‘closure’ or specified ‘ending’ –
it is a continual and open ended narrative. This sense of movement, time and change is contrasted in each of the works.

Each painting is a fragment or frieze frame of a story which has been segmented and then put back together, like a jigsaw with missing pieces. The structure of the narrative in 'Departures' can be likened to a series of individual canvases which retain their own position or viewpoint in relation to one another. When one is introduced or taken away, it can change both the overall aesthetic and meaning of the work. This fragmentation of visual information is important as the viewers attention is continually shifted from one character, image or frame to the next. Similar to the cinematic structure familiar to Tarrantino’s Pulp Fiction, the viewer follows their way around the work, trying to construct how each element fits in together; in turn creating the structure of the narrative.

Some pieces of the puzzle are left unexplained, literally represented by a number of the panels left blank or fading into black or white, implying to the viewer to make their own connections of the narrative, and explain what is missing. In ‘Departures’, the pieces are presented on the wall, with large spaces surrounding and in between. There is an immediacy and focus toward the figures and very little background detail is exposed.

Each individual work captures elements of a personal narrative, where the main recurring theme is that of the breakdown and disintegration of personal relationships over a period of time. The fragile themes associated with this include betrayal, deceit, forgiveness, determination, hope, suspicion, anxiety and redemption. This is also captured in the body language as the figures do not directly face one another, they are unaware of each other and only the viewer can see the entirety of the ‘scene’ or composition. Family members, as well as myself, are used throughout all of the works, and the narrative is set in relation to the breakdown of my parent’s marriage over a period of time. While aspects of this have been painful, the symbols used throughout the works reference this and retain personal and hidden meanings. My sisters are used as the main female subjects across all of the work, and they embody certain characteristics of the themes I have chosen to portray.
My work is playing on two levels of symbolism so that it can be read on both a
personal and objective level (as allegory). The paintings explore the use of some
universal symbols; while at the same time maintain a double personal meaning.
They are also used in their traditional form, as a way of conveying parts of the
narrative which cannot be expressed in any other way, (in it’s entirety) or
reinforce what is already shown. While ambiguous, the motivations of the figures
and parts of the story which may be missing are also realized symbolically
throughout the work.

This may occur on different levels, from the choice of playing cards, which only
reveal the king and queen, to the porcelain duck which is held affectionately,
(although disturbingly) between two hands. I have found that the extremities, the
hands and feet, retain unique expressive qualities, and are repeated several times.
Feet have been described as ‘bear(ing) the marks of the path taken, for good or ill’
(Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 399). In one of the paintings, feet are portrayed
submerged in a bowl of ice. They refer to the tense, coldness of emotion and the
effect of harsh decisions which are to be made. The ice is also suggestive of
cleansing and redemption after it melts and turns into water, while the blue cloth
refers to a meditative state.

Two of the flowers portrayed are roses and daisies. A rose is widely recognized as
being a symbol of love, the heart and soul. The stem of a dying rose is depicted in
one painting underneath a girl’s toes as if it is about to be crushed, although is
stopped by the thorns, as a reminder to tread carefully. In the other painting, the
right foot is reluctant to step onto the rose itself, and hovers above. Daisies are
held tightly under the chin of a girl, almost in a protective way as a sign of hope
and anticipation of better things to come. The welsh love spoon depicted in a panel
in ‘In the days...’ is reflective of a solitary state.

The shade of white is overtly used in ‘The dawn of a new mourning’ in the blank
canvases of the interactive work. Here, it is associated with the blanks of the story,
as well as a passage or journey. Kandinsky described the shade ‘white (as acting)
upon our souls like absolute silence’ (Chevalier, 1106). The colours of the ribbons
in this work also retain symbolic meaning. The lime green simultaneously refers to
life and themes of jealousy. This is also combined with two other ribbons of pink
and blue. The blue is represented twice, through the smaller ribbon gripped in the
palm of the girl, which is pulled and tied to the male’s foot. It is also crushed in the male’s hand below, however is a much larger ribbon. In both cases, the blue refers to contemplation. The pink, which is almost a diluted or faded red, alludes to love, fire and passion in traditional terms.
Compositionally Speaking

"Each repetition is not truly itself, but a continuing series of variations. And each one has to be different because it’s older and more experienced than the last one. You will understand then that I repeat with variations. It’s to be certain that I know what I’m watching. Is that not as it should be? I think so. I enjoy a comprehension of things.” (Woods 32)

Peter Greenaway

I wanted to try and maximise the dramatic potential of the narrative, by dissecting the images, and show them from different angles. Similar to the way that *Pulp Fiction* works theoretically, I am suggesting that my work would not have the same emotional impact if it was presented in a mono-scenic view, with the use of one canvas. I find the snippets of images or paintings a more interesting way of approaching and constructing a narrative, as they are more intense individually, and as a whole their arrangement is more enigmatic.

If the same images were compositionally re-created in a mono-scenic manner, they would potentially have a different emotional impact in reference to the conveyance of certain images and symbols. This same emotional intensity would not be as successful within the limits of a single canvas or the representation of a single place.

While ‘The dawn of a new mourning’, actually portrays a sense of familiarity or unity of place and setting in contrast to the other works, the change of action and facial expression of the figures is a more explicit representation of a passage of time. The inclusion of several instances of actions and slight variations of repetition directly convey this sense of change over time.

Collapsed within the one work, the passage of time and a sense of movement and place are combined to create a greater emotional impact and narrative response. In ‘The dawn of a new mourning’, the discreet and not so subtle variations across each of the images, where some parts of the body are slightly out of place or made larger in comparison to the rest add to this apprehension. This alludes to different themes on a metaphorical level to highlight the raw tension and anxiety experienced by the figures.
'In the days that followed... (the agonies of waiting for time)' (2005-7)

Oil on plywood boards.

In this work, most of the paintings are attached to freestanding and interactive structures, while the others are hung on corresponding walls.

This series of disparate images are linked through their combination and sense of place, in which isolated actions are exposed. While they are presented as though they are related somehow, a clear resolution to their exact relationship is not given. Their meaning is collectively conceived through their formal arrangement. A consistent time frame is only ambiguously implied, and the relay of events is similar to a visual record which highlights only certain parts of a narrative.

This is realised across each image, as they individually signify several instances of time and place, both interior and exterior, night and day, aspiring to a journey like depiction of change and growth over an extended period of time. Weathered down surfaces portray a state of mind, and this emotional tension of anxiety and a search for hope is realised symbolically over each image. This uneasiness is shown in the scratching of paint and peeling of surfaces, as well as the aesthetic of the images in which some become blurred and slightly out of focus. The girl’s face also changes over the course of each image, and the needle and thread simultaneously refer to searching, sewing the course of one’s life, and attempting to mend certain irreparable damages.
Fig. 19

Katherine Edney

*In the days that followed...(the agonies of waiting for time)* (detail)

Oil on plywood board
Each panel, 25 x 51.5 cm
Fig. 20
Fig. 21
Fig. 23
‘The dawn of a new mourning’ (2007)

Oil on canvas, attached to MDF boards.

Peter von Blanckenhagen’s definition of a continuous narrative, where ‘events (which are) separated in time are shown at the same place in the same setting’ (Andrews 121) is descriptive of both ‘The dawn of a new mourning’ and ‘In the days that followed…(the agonies of waiting for time)’. This larger interactive work is composed of several individually painted canvases attached to MDF boards and divided onto a grid like structure. While the painting is generally mono-scenic in it’s overall visual appearance and as a whole uses one main scene, action and set of characters, it then becomes a continuous or poly-scenic narrative, as each section of the painting can be manually turned by the viewer in order to reveal another part of the story (or different expression or pose of each character). This aims to blur the boundaries between individual actions or episodes, and each image is a depiction of separate sequences within the one work.

‘The dawn of a new mourning’ is also a direct interpretation of continuous narrative from a contemporary perspective. It relates to Warman Welliver’s description of ‘continuous actions’, where images ‘show a relatively brief succession of closely related actions’ (Andrews 123). This interactive structure uniquely shows varying degrees of ‘event’ order to highlight different parts of the same story. As each image can be turned, it reveals a slightly different movement of each figure depicted. This may be the beginning, middle, end or somewhere in between and is presented as a combination of each. Many of the images are white or fading, making reference to parts of the story which have been left out. The numerous combinations of images which are placed together can also change the overall aesthetic of the work. For example, a head may change position slightly, and the blank images intentionally block out some of the sequences of the narrative.

To add to an overall feeling of disjointedness, like the narrative itself, each image does not accurately match up to the other images, and may be slightly out of place or enlarged. There are also some extreme close ups, which also make reference to film, intensely heightening the emotions of the character portrayed.

The following is an example of how the sequence of images can be changed in order to create a different composition.
Fig. 24

Katherine Edney

*The dawn of a new mourning*

(Detail) Selected images
Oil on canvas on board
Each panel 25 x 51.5 cm
'Departures' (2005-2007)

Oil on canvas, various dimensions

'Departures' is composed of several small, multiple sized canvases, which has a formation similar to that of a jigsaw puzzle which has been taken apart. Each canvas is also representative of time and place, incorporating disparate actions into the same story visually as one cohesive image. Spread across the surface of the wall, the spaces in between the canvases allude to parts of the story which may be missing, equally suggestive to the viewer to fill in the 'gaps' of the narrative.

This work uses space in a way that enables the subjects or 'figures' to be experienced from slightly different viewpoints. Each image may be slightly out of proportion in relation to the next, and individual body parts, which are somewhat larger or smaller, add to an overall feeling of disjointedness. The figure or body part of each image seems to take up the entire canvas, as only the most important foreground detail is included. The background in some cases is especially ambiguous, and not much is revealed or very specific. The work focuses more on the figures, and their personal narrative, and less on the setting, which is intended to be disguised or mislead the origins of the work.

The following are selected images from the work.
Fig. 25

Katherine Edney

Departures

Oil on canvas
41 x 56 cm

Fig. 26 (below: 30 x 35.4 cm)
Fig. 27
Oil on canvas
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Fig. 28
Oil on canvas
35 x 27.8 cm
Fig. 29
Oil on canvas
32 x 51 cm

Fig. 30
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 50.5 cm
Fig. 31
Oil on canvas
41 x 51 cm

Fig. 32
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 45.5 cm
Afterword

It has been my aim to present an alternative insight into visual narratives that employ unfamiliar or unconventional compositions and structures. While it is not my intention to conclude or formulate a precise definition as to what makes a painting a work of narrative, I trust that all of the examples given, from Renaissance continuous narratives through to the directors and modern painters, all provide distinctive perspectives on the subject. The unique stylistic and compositional structures in the work of Max Beckmann, Paula Rego and P.J. Crook provide alternative ways of presenting a passage of time within a static medium and typify the endless potential of narrative painting. Likewise, the directors Quentin Tarrantino and Peter Greenaway mirror these theoretical concerns, primarily of composition and aesthetics, within their films.

Conversely, what can be learnt from the artists discussed within this paper is that narrative paintings, to varying degrees, share common attributes. These physical characteristics correspond to a consideration of formal issues, including space, setting, and may include a representation of figures in relation to the events or themes portrayed. A narrative can also be portrayed directly through the actions of the figure or subjects, and through facial expression, gesture and symbolism.

From a contemporary perspective, narrative painting has evolved in many forms as a description of an action, event, or emotion. In the case of my own work, it may also be an indefinite combination of each. Narrative painting has changed over the course of time where the use of more personal themes is prevalent. It can also be influenced from a variety of sources and styles. A narrative can also be communicated and compositionally constructed in several ways, highlighting the important role of the viewer. The viewer’s active role in establishing the connections between images, and their emotive response can form the basis of the story itself on an interpretive level. Questions as to who, what and why are all formed by the person who engages with the work.
Parallels can be made between the subject of my work and the events which have occurred in my own personal life during this project. The beginning of my Masters research was influenced by the course of events before, during, and in the aftermath of my parent’s separation. This affected my approach to both the way the paintings were formed and constructed aesthetically and metaphorically, and also in relation to its symbolism and subject matter. In hindsight, this manifested in my work subconsciously, where I was able to depict emotions in response to what I was going through during this period. In retrospect, this has been a cathartic experience.

The exhibition ‘Hidden Fractures: A Narrative in Time’, is presented in an ambiguous way. While it is not an exact literal portrayal of the subject’s, in retrospect, I realise that I have tried to disguise this particular narrative through the methodologies undertaken, almost in a secretive way. This way of working allows the subjects and themes to remain personal, as only snippets of events are revealed and left open for interpretation. The work is equally as much about what is omitted, remaining hidden, and what is shown.

In the future, I can imagine the possibilities of the interactive work, with the assistance of other media, to become more like sculptural paintings, or even moveable by itself with the use of a timer. This would facilitate different stages and time sequences, by allowing the paintings to rotate at various intervals, changing the order and combination of images numerous times over.

Finally, the value of undertaking this project is that I have stumbled across a technique which has enabled me to freely express myself in my work while remaining elusive at the same time. This has furthered both my understanding of stylistic approaches and communication of narrative within my work.

"The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves, they find their own order ... the continuous thread of revelation.”

(Cameron 11)

Eudora Welty
List of Illustrations

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Fig. 3 Gozzoli, Benozzo. The Banquet of Herod. 1461-62 Tempera on panel, 23.8 x 34.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington. Web Gallery of Art. Ed. Emil Kren and Daniel Marx. Nov. 29 2007 <http://www.wga.hu/framese.html?/bio/g/gozzoli/biograph.html>


Fig. 7 Beckmann, Max. The Departure (Abfahrt). 1932-33. Oil on canvas, Triptych, centre panel 84 3/4" X 45 3/8"; side panels each 84 3/4 X 39 1/4". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 1999 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New
Fig. 8 Beckmann, Max. *Versuchung (Temptation).* 1936-37. Oil on canvas, Triptych, centre panel 78 3/4 X 67”; side panels each 85 X 39 3/8”.
<http://www.artchive.com/galleries/beckmann/beckmann.html>

Fig. 9 Rego, Paula. *The Maids.* 1987. Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4cm x 243.9 cm. Saatchi Collection, London. © All rights reserved. The Saatchi Gallery. Feb. 6 2008
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Fig. 10 Rego, Paula. *The Family.* 1988. Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4cm x 213.4cm. Saatchi Collection, London. © All rights reserved. The Saatchi Gallery. Feb. 6 2008
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Fig. 11 Rego, Paula. *The Policeman’s Daughter.* 1987. Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4cm x 152.4cm. Saatchi Collection, London. © All rights reserved. The Saatchi Gallery. Feb. 6 2008
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Fig. 12 Rego, Paula. *The Dance.* 1988. Acrylic on paper on canvas, 213.4 x 274.3cm. Tate Gallery Collection, UK. © Paula Rego. Tate Online. Feb. 6 2008
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Fig. 15  Tarrantino, Quentin, dir.  **Pulp Fiction.**  1994.  Miramax Films.  © Miramax /  
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Fig. 16  Tarrantino, Quentin, dir.  **Reservoir Dogs.**  1992.  Miramax Films.  © Miramax.  
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Fig’s. 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23  Edney, Katherine.  **In the days that followed...(the  
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cm.  © Katherine Edney.
Fig. 24 Edney, Katherine. *The dawn of a new mourning.* 2007 – 8. Oil on canvas, attached to MDF boards. Each panel 25 x 51.5 cm. © Katherine Edney.

Fig’s. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 and 32 Edney, Katherine. *Departures.* 2005 – 7. Oil on canvas. Various Dimensions. © Katherine Edney
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