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SCHOOL OF ART**

**VISUAL ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

'ORGANIC GROWTH AND FORM IN ABSTRACT PAINTING'

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**An Exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University**

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Declaration of Originality:

I, Elizabeth Petz..... (signature and date) hereby declare that the thesis here submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

ABSTRACT

'Organic Growth and Form in Abstract Painting' is the focus of my studio-based doctoral research, resulting in two significant series of paintings, *Organica* and *Streaming*. The accompanying exegesis addresses experiences that are realized within the studio practice, and complements the two series of paintings. In the exegesis I describe the innovative and distinctive painting processes I have developed, and explain my motivation for working this way. I cite the writing of the philosopher of science, Henri Bortoft, in particular his description of 'active' seeing, which I suggest can be understood as a kind of modeling of my processes of making the *Organica* and *Streaming* paintings.

Key to my research has been an investigation into the work of the early Russian avant-garde artist, musician, theorist and teacher, Mikhail Matyushin, who promoted an 'organic' vision of painting during the early years of modernist experimentation, insisting that perception cannot be separated from the body's inherent connection with nature. I discuss how the artists in the Organic studio, led by Matyushin, tested their sensitivity to perceptual and sensory experience with controlled experiments. Philosophically, these artists considered their findings to be congenial with the latest scientific discoveries of their time. Although my paintings are constructed very differently from those of Matyushin, my approach to perception and interpretation of painting is in sympathy with his thinking.

The constructive and perceptual approach I have taken to both series of paintings has been directly influenced by immersion in natural environments. My exegesis provides a detailed account of this working process: how I work with geometric templates for the coordination of colours, and my systematic approach to their application, leading to uncontrived 'organic' extensions in the detail. I discuss my interest in implicit knowledge garnered through perception of colours and the connective fabric underlying surface appearances in nature. I argue that these observations are generative resources for abstract painting, and emphasise the fact that our sensory and thinking bodies are also part of nature.

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INTRODUCTION

In the exploration of 'Organic Growth and Form in Abstract Painting', the focus of my studio-based research over the period of this doctorate, I have developed two significant series of paintings, *Organica* and *Streaming*. While the concerns that have driven this research are in many ways continuous with my past practice, this period of focused study has led to my developing new working processes and immersing myself in philosophical and theoretical texts that have delivered new insights. This process has been vitally enriched by fieldwork.

Chapters One and Two of this Exegesis will describe the innovative and distinctive painting processes I have developed, and will explain my motivation for working this way.

Chapter Three discusses philosopher of science, Henri Bortoft's description of 'active' seeing, that can be understood as a kind of modeling of my processes of making the *Organica* and *Streaming* paintings.

Chapter Four describes my investigation into the work of the Russian avant-garde artist, musician, theorist and teacher, Mikhail Matyushin (1861-1934), who promoted an 'organic' vision of painting during the early years of modernist experimentation. He insisted that perception can not be separated from the body's inherent connection with nature. Although my paintings are constructed very differently from those of Matyushin, in practice, my approach to perception and interpretation is in sympathy with his thinking about 'organic' influences.

This doctoral research reflects the conviction that abstract painting is a philosophical as well as practical pursuit. While my thinking about constructing paintings has been influenced by Minimalism, I resist this stylistic categorization. I have always sought to promote material characteristics as integral to image formation, while my approach to layering of colour media has led to increasing detail that suggests 'organic' associations.

The appearance of these 'organic' details within the logic of my process, has made it essential to examine how and why this has occurred. I see these analogous details as a positive development, derived from careful attention to perception of colours and their employment as integral to matter. My embrace

of 'organic' details reflects a spirit of inclusiveness in a way that I believe brings an empathic and humanistic quality to the structural formality of my processes.

'Organic' concerns in constructive and analytical painting have a history reaching back to the beginning of Modernist experimentation. The implications and potential of this have been largely subsumed in the stylistic divide between what Donald Kuspit has described as the 'mechanicist' and formalist trends, in opposition to expressionist and gestural painting, and by implication, the 'organicist' direction.¹

Kuspit suggests that the seeds of healing were present in some Post-Modernist abstract paintings at the time his argument was originally developed in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, he does not mention individual women, such as Agnes Martin, nor Anne Truitt, whose artworks were built on integration of sensory and psychological influences alongside their rigorous analysis of construction.

When I look closely at this formalist and gestural bifurcation, it seems that pressures to conform to one or other style, work hand-in-hand with critical authority, rather than communicating with the vast audience of contemporary viewers who are interested in all forms of artistic expression. In the twenty-first century, the influence of women artists internationally, cannot be ignored, alongside young artists of both genders who have realised from past history that integration of meaning in practice comes before stylistic formulas.

To understand what has led to those opposing trends when I first made a commitment to abstraction, I began by working with very simple means and an attitude of experimentation. This was a kind of self-teaching, a process whereby I could identify particular issues that were integral to my way of thinking and sensing shape and colour. I was looking for ways to build colour density that was perceptually dimensional, without leaving aside evidence of construction, a practice that I have continued to this day.

¹ Donald Kuspit, "The Abstract Self-Object", in *Abstract art in the late twentieth century*, ed. Frances Colpitt (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 131. The essay was first published in *Abstract Painting of America and Europe*, (Vienna: Galerie nacht St. Stephen, 1988) 41-52.

Researching initiators of early abstraction in this study has been highly instructive. I have found writing by individual artists revealing a depth of enquiry that does not imply a division between sensory impressions and conceptual research, including a deep respect for the natural world. In this doctoral research I have paid special attention to the Russian artist, Mikhail Matyushin, who, with his colleagues in Russia were undisputed innovators of early Modernism. These artists were determined to make a clean break with the traditions of the nineteenth century, to promote the life in art within a new social framework. They were passionate to learn about the latest discoveries in science and to position themselves both as creators and researchers. Their painting practices reflect a firm belief in the biological paradigm.

I work with geometric processes for coordination of colours and take a systematic approach to their application. At the same time, I am attentive to implicit knowledge garnered through perception of colours, and the connective fabric underlying surface appearances in nature. I argue that these observations are generative resources for painting. While I am not suggesting a return to representing 'nature' *per se*, or a retreat into nineteenth century Romanticism, it is vital to consider that our sensory and thinking bodies are also part of nature.

My understanding of 'seeing' and 'knowing' is in accord with Henri Bortoft's description of a dynamic or 'active' way of observing the coming-into-being of objects, how to distinguish them through relations between the parts and how these function within a whole. He calls this proactive way of perception, 'the organizing idea'. Although Bortoft does not discuss painting directly, he refers to condensations of meaning that bring sensory perception and cognition into alignment with active phenomena.²

Naturally, personal sensory and psychological influences are a factor in the choices I make in the studio, and how I interpret them. Frustration with the historically polarized dualisms of Modernism have led some artists to seek an integration of the formal and the organic, and this is the direction my work has taken. While (as described in Chapters 1 and 2) I have consciously developed

² Henri Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature : Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature* (New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1996).

somewhat mechanical processes for paint application that significantly reduce any apparent direct gesture, the *Organica* and *Streaming* paintings are expressive of my deep emotional responses to the natural world.

It has been challenging to translate the complex processes of thinking, experimentation and reflection that have driven the development of this research as a linear progression. All these things interact organically in my work, enmeshed in concurrent 'seeing' and 'knowing' and overlapping in time. In the detailed account that follows, *Organica* and *Streaming* can be seen to model a process of painting, growing in extension out of the logic of their beginnings.

CHAPTER ONE : The *Organica* paintings

This first chapter begins by describing in some detail the processes of fabrication I have developed from late 2009, through 2010 and much of 2011, resulting in the *Organica* series. The second part of chapter one discusses the philosophical and aesthetic underpinnings of this body of work.

Part A : The working process :

I began to prepare for the *Organica* paintings in late 2009, when I spent much time gathering materials, experimenting with technical processes and testing media interactions for flexibility and resilience. While the principles underlying the *Organica* paintings are broadly consistent with my previous work, during this period of research I have experimented with new and distinctive approaches to material construction and the delivery and relations of colour. These materials interactions and colour fluctuations can suggest 'organic' associations, without referring to conventional forms of representation. Memory certainly plays a part, while it is highly filtered. It has also been crucial to my research that I spend time in the local natural environment.

While it is impossible to describe the myriad consecutive actions and decisions involved in making each *Organica* painting, I will describe the characteristic features of my engagement, and illustrate these with details of individual paintings. So much of this work has phenomenological implications, with simultaneous activity occurring in perception, cognition and management of painting materials and processes. As Arthur Zajonc comments, seeing, that is also knowing,

entails far more than the possession of an operational sense organ. Into raw sensations flow things such as memory, imagination, mental habits, feelings, and even our will (in as much as we *attend* to something).³

³ Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 183.

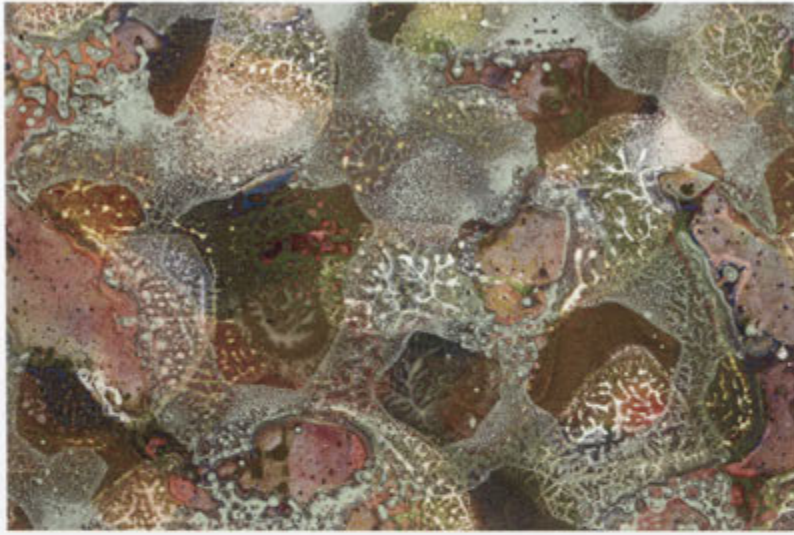


Fig. 1. *Organica #2* detail

Colours are central to my thinking about image formation and how a painting may encourage tangible and empathic responses from viewers. Each separate colour layer in the *Organica* paintings is extruded through a silk-screen prepared with a template of pentagonally-ordered fragments. With an indirect method of paint application like this, colour spacing remains relatively consistent through the whole fabrication process and the colours are enhanced with partial overlaps. Over many layers of transparent and semi-transparent colour, the geometry tends to be subsumed within the fluctuating colour array. I cooperate in a process that is a considered balancing of risk and potential in the fine-tuning of outcomes.

Pentagonal holding patterns :

The pentagonal shapes that act as holding patterns for the *Organica* colour spreads provide spatial flexibility for the colours as dimensional and fluid.

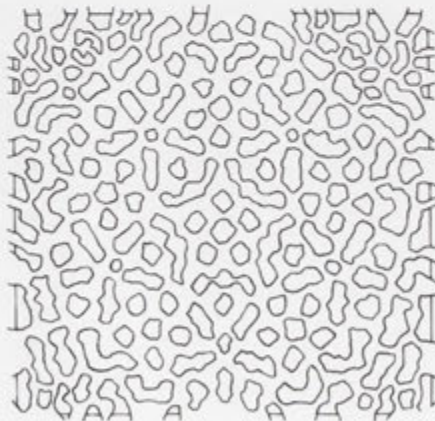


Fig. 2. Pentagonal line drawing, scanned and digitized in Photoshop.

Over the summer in 2010, I prepared a set of eight pentagonal drawings that could be inverted to create sixteen images. Each drawing was divided into small shapes or fragments that extend in five-part coordinates to the right-angled frame. The shapes are all irregular in outline, with rounded rather than angular edges, more organic than geometric in appearance. I took care to ensure that positioning the shapes and their spacing would remain balanced within the overall pentagonal formation. The drawings were then scanned into Photoshop.

The fragments extend in five directions from a centre that is either a single shape or a set of five. All the fragments in extension from the central axis to the edges of the frame are asymmetric in detail, while retaining the spatial order of the whole pentagonal symmetry.

When I apply layers of colour through these variant pentagonal formations, each fragment will partially overlap those beneath. In this way I can enhance the colour range through the transparent overlaps, without losing connection with the primary composition. Symmetric and asymmetric details increase with every colour spread, with small disjunctions that play with friction and dissolve.

Preparation of the boards :

I treat the 'ground' of my paintings, either board or canvas, as integral to the whole painting. For the *Organica* paintings, I looked for a stable and light plywood, knowing from experience that plywood is unstable when affected by water or excessive heat. Taking advice from the Furniture Workshop at the School of Art, I purchased marine-grade, 5-ply sheets, sourced from a company in Sydney that imports Russian birch plywood. I prepared Tasmanian oak stretchers for the backing frames with additional crossbars for stability, and glued them under pressure without nails to the plywood. I made ten large and nine small boards in the Painting Workshop, taking responsibility for all parts of fabrication, so that I know the materials I am working with. The large boards measure 74 x 76 cm and the smaller ones, 48 x 50 cm. I made the small boards to experiment with various procedures. In the event, these also became part of the complete set of paintings.

I decided to indent the first pentagonal image into the 'skin' of the plywood, and initially considered sandblasting. Dave Booth at Plastic Creations in Fyshwick suggested routing the shapes into the plywood, using his computerized industrial router. Preparation for this took some time, because each of the pentagonal drawings had to be translated into vector computer language, and Dave suggested a person to do this. In the event I had to learn a rudimentary level of the vector process to soften the sharp-angled interpretations.



Fig 3a. Vector image



Fig. 3b. Vector image, inverted

As a painting progresses, neither the fragment images, nor the complementary network of gaps (that is the inverted image) will dominate, although they have different functions. I hesitate to call these shapes either positive or negative because they always complement each other in the composition.

Each board was routed to a depth of approximately 2-3 millimetres in a procedure that took close to an hour, and one board was usually routed per session. Dave gave me a reduced rate and I fitted in around other jobs on the router machine.



Fig. 4. Routed plywood board

Back in the studio, I brushed a dilute mixture of rabbit skin glue onto the routed surface of the plywood as a partial sealant. My intention was to fill the shallow indentations with my own mix of rabbit skin gesso, so that additions of acrylic paint would adhere in different ways to both surfaces. Because some of the routed shapes were cut through the outer edges of the board, masking tape was applied around all sides and level with the surface plane, to stop the liquid gesso running off the sides of the board.



Fig. 5. Gessoed board before orbital sanding

For the gesso, I soaked rabbit skin glue in cold water overnight, and then dissolved it by heating below boiling point in a double saucepan. I mixed a runny cream consistency of whiting with the rabbit skin glue, with a small addition of alum to strengthen the mixture. While still warm, I poured the gesso over the whole board surface quickly, spreading the mixture by hand, before it firmed up. I was keen to retain the natural flow of the mixture as it hardened within the routes. When almost dry and the gesso had sunk into and bonded with the routes, I poured a second layer of warm gesso of the same consistency, across the whole surface. The amount of gesso added at this stage was critical; it had to cover the surface of the board and sink into the routes, just enough for the outlines of the routes to show. The best result occurred when the gesso, as it dried, sank slightly towards the middle of each routed shape, meeting with the surface plane at the edges. It was difficult to see this effect until the gesso had dried firm.

When the gesso was dry, I reduced the surface with an orbital sander, till the flat plane of the plywood was exposed. Not until this stage, could I see how well the gesso had dried into each route. What I was looking for, was a slightly uneven, indented surface, and some shapes level with the plywood surface.

Paint media :

Colour relations in practice are never fixed or determined by colour theory. Every addition of colour in these *Organica* paintings has produced a fresh outcome, from the quality of a pigment, its density and dilution, to the medium with which it is combined.

For my Ph.D. research I have continued a preference for permanent, water-based media. I like to mix pigments independently with acrylic mediums to gauge paint consistency for each application. The colour mixing potential of commercial paint is determined by the strength and quality of pigment therein. I achieve greater flexibility by working out density, transparency and light reflection or absorption by mixing the paint ingredients myself. I use various combinations of matte and gloss medium, and sometimes an addition of gel medium for a firm consistency to impress through silk screens. I vary pigment dilution and transparency from one application to the next, depending on the

colour and surface texture of the layers beneath and the shift I want to make in colour relations.

Preparing the silk-screens :

It is important that colours in their physical substance as paint, are integral to image formation in my paintings. The role I have adopted in this research is as facilitator with the materials, devising ways that paint interacts apart from direct interference. Junctures and overlaps of paint influence shape formation and enliven colour contrast. This is where the shaping framework I establish at the beginning becomes significant.

I have previously explored ways to impress acrylic paint through silk-screen mesh, for instance, in the '*nature*' paintings of 1999, and the *Morphic* paintings of 1997. In other groups of paintings on boards, including the *See, Hear, Know* paintings of 2007-2008, I made simple cardboard stencils to apply wet on wet colour shapes that partially merge as they dry. For the *Organica* series, I adapted silk-screen techniques in new ways, to respond to the wood and gesso surfaces.

I wanted to keep the painting activity in my studio on campus, where I could come and go at any time. I also needed to attach the resist images to the screen mesh using facilities at Megalo Print Studio, which meant transporting the screens in my small car. All these factors influenced the size of the paintings. I purchased six custom-made silk screens with light aluminium frames, 110 cm square with a mesh grade of 48T suitable for printing with paint onto fabric. The surface dimensions included the 74 x 76 cm size of the pentagonal templates, plus borders for ease of movement with squeegee and paint.

The modified vector images made for routing were also used for the screen templates. Each image was printed to scale on white bond paper at ANU Print as needed. Because I only had six screens to work with, from time to time I returned to Megalo, cleaned a screen and fixed a new resist image. From now on, I will refer to the pentagonal drawings as templates.

The paper is brushed with clear cooking oil and blotted, so that the white sections become almost transparent, while the black printed parts of the paper

template are light resistant. Using the ultra-violet fixation method, with light-sensitive emulsion coating the screen mesh, the emulsion does not harden where the blackened image resists light penetration, and can be washed out of the screen. What remains for printing is the open mesh of the original black image.

The paint is impressed through silk-screens :

I realized the expressive potential of paint applied through screen mesh onto hard surfaces in the first year of enrolment in the Ph.D. program, while experimenting with painting on clear glass panels in the Glass Workshop. There is no easy contact between fluid mixes of glass pigment and impermeable glass surfaces. Pigment grains in the mixture tend to spread to the edges of the brush marks and every detail of colour distribution shows in the transparent surface when the glass is kiln-fired. I began applying dry glass pigments mixed with a clear flow medium. Usually the screen mesh is positioned slightly raised off the surface, only briefly meeting the glass under pressure from the squeegee. By impressing the pigment mix through the screen, flush with the glass surface, as the screen is lifted off, interesting flow variations appear on the glass surface. Depending on paint liquidity and the size of the mesh, the paint adheres with capillary-like shapes and spreads of fine dots.



Fig 6. Glass pigments kiln-fired onto clear float glass, 2009, detail



Fig. 7. *Organica #8*, detail

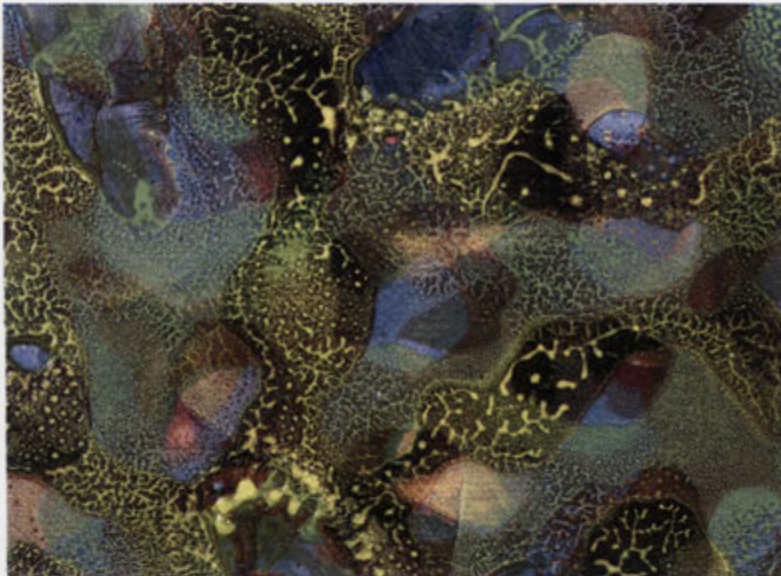


Fig. 8. *Organica #3* detail

I followed a similar practice with the *Organica* paintings, placing the silk-screen flush with the paint surface so that suction occurred when I lifted the screen off. Sometimes paint separated out into tiny dots, depending on the texture of the surface beneath. Alternately, paint separated into networks of capillaries, similar to fractals, and dried securely. In this way, my simple, 'mechanical' actions, influenced by rheological properties in the acrylic medium, extended the physical characteristics of the paint. These capillary networks show physical parallels with connective tissue in 'organic' structures, or affects of inorganic matter under heat and pressure, while the tiny dots of colour attract light

reflection. Sometimes, when I judged that the screened paint consistency would not 'bed' down in the surface, or the chromatic link with colours beneath was too strident, I laid a sheet of clear Perspex onto the still wet paint surface, pressed it down firmly, and quickly lifted it off. This action affected all the wet paint surfaces at once, lifting off excessive paint where I deemed it too thickly applied. Suction in the lift-off also influenced wet paint adhesion, according to the different surfaces beneath.

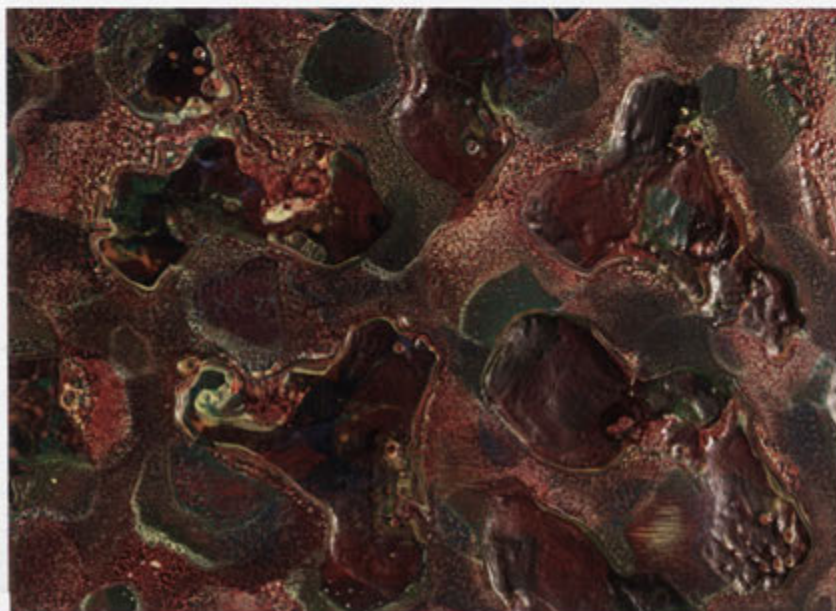


Fig. 9. *Organica #1* detail



Fig. 10. *Organica #10* detail

Every paint application in the *Organica* paintings is affected by the routed shapes in the base boards. As I have previously described, the boards were routed with pentagonal formations and in-filled with gesso. When I placed a silk-screen flush with the paint surface, portions of the gessoed indentations did not make contact. When I applied pressure to the squeegee, some paint passed across the gesso shapes, impressing unevenly or not at all in the indentations. A small amount of paint may bunch up where a routed shape retains a prominent edge. When multiple layers of paint are spread unevenly in these regions, accretions of paint form tiny ridges of colour. These irregular indentations and distinctive paint details are balanced within the whole colour spread, and become illuminated according to the angle of light fall. This innovation has extended the profile of the *Organica* paintings in a way that is consistent with the logic of the process. I suggest that these details of colour and paint fabric can recall both micro and macro sensations of the 'organic'. When the paintings were photographed, I asked for the lighting to be slanted, so that the profile would show up these surface irregularities.

The appearance of each *Organica* painting is regulated by factors that will shift with each additional layer of paint, both merging with and extending the colour array. Details of the coordinating shape become partially obscured in each additional layer. With multiple overlays of colour, irregular balance of symmetric and asymmetric components in the coordinating geometry can also effect partial loss of shape cohesion. Chromatic intensity and medium fluidity alters by degrees as the paint dries. Fragments of a single colour will remain intact and varieties of tint will increase with each succeeding overlay. The measure of transparency or opacity in the paint mix, or an addition of matte or gloss medium, will affect light fall towards absorption or reflection of the surface detail.



Fig 11. *Organica #7* detail



Fig. 12. *Organica #5* detail

Individual colour fragments often appear to project or recede within the colour field in ways that can disrupt chromatic rhythm. All the colour spreads are coordinated structurally, such that I do not try to cover up irregularities in the distribution of each colour. By selecting a different pentagonal template I can prepare colour tints to adjust the chromatic intensity of a discordant spread over several proceeding layers. Adjustments like these are difficult to assess, if not impossible to predict. I simply have to watch what happens and learn from it.

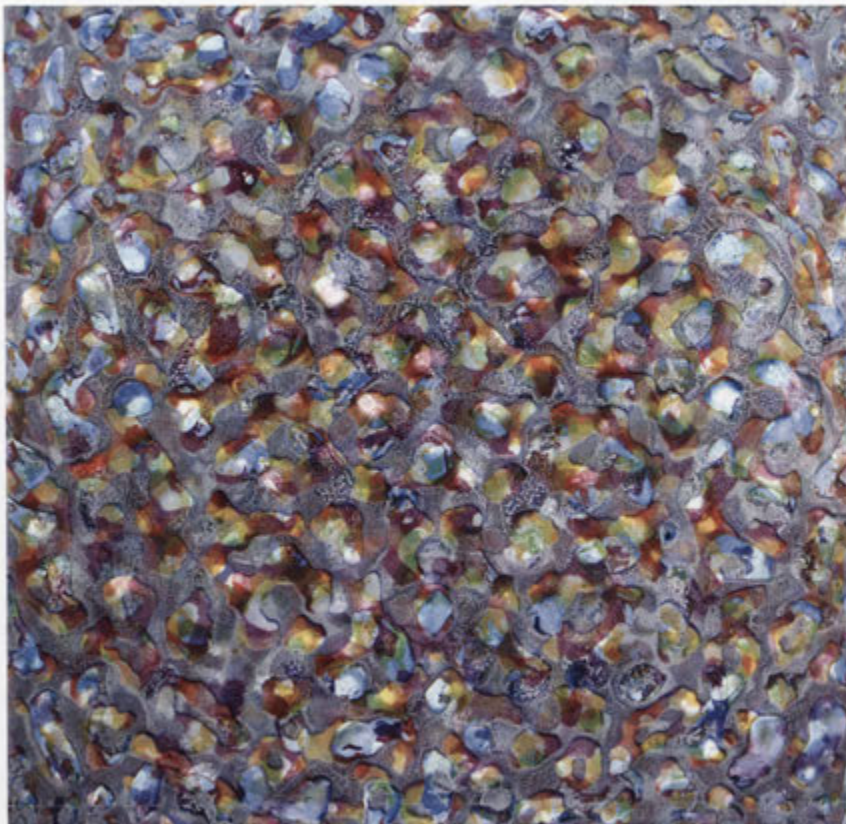


Fig. 13. *Organica #6*, 2010-11.

The pentagonal symmetry embedded in every spread of paint functions as a 'net', so that whatever imbalances occur, a degree of connective unity is always retained in the distribution of fragments. The relative self-similarity of individual shapes and spaces in the pentagonal templates, and the pivotal centre through which each colour spread is rotated, ensures that each colour spread will retain portions of the coordinating shape.

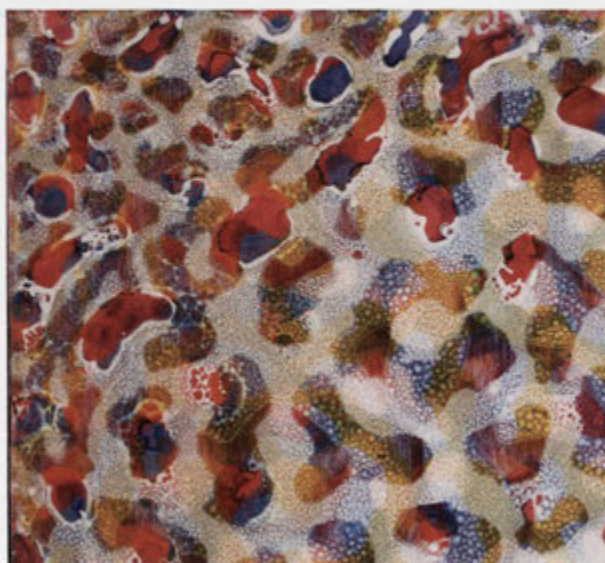


Fig. 14. *Organica B2* detail

Individual shapes in the pentagonal templates reduce in size towards the edges of the frame. Depending on the density of colour layers, a slight curvature appears from the outer edges, becoming more pronounced in some of the *Organica* paintings. As the eyes adjust through the colour array, this layering effect can suggest an oscillatory exchange between depth and the surface plane. Seeing details of paint that trace the order of pentagonal distribution, while partially dissolving or dispersing into tiny points of colour or fractal-like branchlets, can also effect ambiguous spatial shifts. Paradoxically, these paintings are relatively two-dimensional objects, a condition that I seek to subvert by attracting vision towards contemplation of depth within the colour arrays.

During the making of each painting, as the variety of overlaid colour shapes increases, a curious kind of instinctual reflex comes into play, apart from the tangible surfaces that my eyes can see directly. Memory certainly plays a part, both memory of the painting's history, my experience of colour media flexibility, and sensory recollections of colour relations in nature. With each material choice I make, I need to know with all the senses how the painting is growing, almost as if it is part of me.

If my thoughts stray, without realizing it at the time, a disruption may occur. For instance, a fresh choice of paint might suppress the delicate balance of colours beneath and the coordinating network loses definition. This usually happens when I have made an impatient guess about a colour addition, being unable to resolve the question of what comes next. Then I must be clear about what has happened and how to remedy it. Breaks in concentration happen from time to time, whether out of tiredness or distraction. I need to restore connection with the painting in a way that is psychologically determined. I may even dream about it. Eventually I will find a way to return the painting to reciprocal correspondence with my engagement.

Part B : The philosophical underpinnings of *Organica*

There have been times when writing this exegesis has been as creatively engaging as work in the studio is; at other moments I have felt enveloped in a morass of words, encircling and overlapping each other and forever expanding in lateral detail. The power of the senses in decision-making affirms that painting is a wordless activity at heart, and a gesture of communion with the world that I inhabit. While writing this account of painting activity, I have realized that to interpret my processes with painting, the text would need to grow exponentially and organically from the inside out.

Experimenting this way, gives the abstract tendencies of my thoughts tangible existence, stimulating me to keep on constructing pictures to see what happens in the engagement. Details of colour in the *Organica* paintings show chromatic ambiguities that tend to shift as one looks at them, and the layered paint configurations are affected by the direction of light fall. In a peculiar way, each painting, as it nears completion, appears familiar to me. This is the phenomenal space of painting activity that I know, and where my projected life with paint becomes manifest.

On colour and painting:

Working with the physical substance of pigment colours for painting, I am restricted to their manufactured capacity for light penetration and medium viscosity. Colours are integral to matter, and how I experience them through light sustains my attraction. I have no formula for balancing colours and shapes, while the network of structural connections in depth that I set up in the *Organica* paintings, is essential for perception of colour activity. When I apply each fresh layer of colour, assessing how it balances in the colour field becomes a practice of looking and looking again, in a visual exchange with colour resonance in depth and breadth.



Fig. 15. *Organica #8* detail

Neither do I work with colour theory, preferring to learn through observation in practice. I mix each colour as I see it, fresh to the task. I am in sympathy with comments on colour by US sculptor, Anne Truitt. Mixing colours for her painted wood columns, she described how each colour tint needed to 'belong' with a shape, rather than choosing it arbitrarily out of personal taste. Assessing precisely what colours were most suitable for each angle of one of her columns implied a 'psychological' vibration. She would need to identify her own position vis-à-vis the formally ambivalent, object sculpture, and to see the work in progress as an object in its own space. This is precisely how I relate each new colour to the admixtures that came before; the choices are practical, knowing the shapes that I am building into the two-dimensional surface, and part perceptual, while always debatable until I have seen the effect in a painting.

When Truitt talked about mixing a colour, it sounded like a ritual activity, at least a focused meditation. She described how she always used a favourite ceramic bowl, and it must be ceramic. This was the detail of her account that most impressed me when I heard her talk in Sydney in the early 1980s, and prompting my own close description of this present research. I recognized in her telling, how careful attention can invoke empathy and rhythm, being both conscious in the activity and in tune with the sculptural presence. Truitt is quoted as saying that her sculptures

stand as I stand; they keep me company.⁴

⁴ Anne Truitt, *Daybook : The Journal of An Artist* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1984) 43.

I understand Truitt's disagreement with the 'minimalist' interpretation for her works. Like Agnes Martin, this critical naming could not account for their presence and colour detail that conveys something of the complexity of human subjectivity, becoming comprehensible in the experience of making them. I am interested in these artists' stance in public: their decision to speak publicly about their personal relationship with the work, in an artistic milieu that insisted on emphasizing the intellectual side of abstract practice.

Arthur Zajonc sheds more light on the physical aspect for understanding colour relations, while acknowledging the perceptual and psychological conditions of seeing. He comments on the dimensional transparency of colours perceived through light.

Once you learn to see the law of color in the colors of the heavens, you will see examples of it everywhere . . . [Physics accounts for a similar if more exact account] colors arise through the "scattering" of light. As a turbid medium light provides innumerable scattering centers, be they molecules in air or a glass prism. From them light is scattered according to strictly mathematical laws . . . Where light meets darkness, colors flash into existence. Colors are, therefore, the offspring of the greatest polarity our universe can offer. . . ⁵

He continues,

If we follow Goethe's pathway into color, we are not led to models of light in terms of waves or particles, but to a perception of those relationships between light and darkness that give rise to colour. ⁶

Zajonc emphasises experiences that are available to any person who looks into pervasive colour phenomena. I personally can find no adequate description for those brief moments when the blueness of the sky above appears colourless, before the colours of the sinking sun spread from the west.

⁵ Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

In the first year of the Ph.D. study, I looked into Paul Cezanne's perceptual development and his responses to colour and shape in the late paintings that, while figurative, acknowledge in perceptual terms the artist as participant in the process of their construction.

As Lawrence Gowing points out:

Throughout 20th century criticism, Cezanne has been associated with the avant-garde, a precursor of modern movements. In post-modernist criticism of the 1970s, Cezanne is understood within the context and possibilities of his own time. His dicta becomes a renewed source for understanding the relationship between his theories and his practice. Cezanne is understood as a 19th century painter, but one who invested his perception of nature in the very materials and process of painting and as such was the precursor of abstract art.⁷

As an abstract painter who places colour at the centre of my practice, I continue to gain insight and encouragement with Cezanne's experiential depth of analysis. Cezanne was also an important precursor for the organic direction in early Modernism realized by Russian artist, Mikhail Matyushin, whose practice I have chosen to examine for this Ph.D. research.

Cezanne offered the practical advice that light facilitates perception; it makes things visible, but is not visible in itself. He envisaged a way to directly express colours as we see them through light, in tangible form for painting. In a letter of July 1904 to Emile Bernard, he wrote,

This is true, without any possible doubt – I am quite positive – an optical sensation is produced in our visual organs which allows us to classify the planes represented by colour sensations as light, half tone or quarter tone.

Light, therefore, does not exist for the painter.⁸

⁷ Lawrence Gowing, "The Logic of Organized Sensations", in *Cezanne, The Late Work*, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977) 56.

⁸ Richard Kendall, ed., *Cezanne by Himself. Drawings, Paintings, Writings* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000) 14.

Cezanne was always a painter of the physical world. His vision was trained in 'the concrete study of nature', with colour as the primary element. He looked for immediate visual impact, with colours that express volume without descriptive edge. His understanding of spatial and tactile sensations communicated through paint, makes him an important precursor for me.

In March 2010, I presented a paper on *The Rocks near the Caves above the Chateau Noir*, 1904, at the ANU School of Art seminar series on the Musee D'Orsay exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings at the National Gallery of Australia. This painting, with its colour and spatial construction, stood out for me. I could imagine Cezanne challenged to make something intelligible of apparent chaos in the view before him, without losing the vitality that was his initial inspiration. This painting succeeds by integrating the primacy of colours with a method of spatial orientation that is reflected through the whole composition. His brushstrokes seek to capture shifting colour relations as they occurred, 'in the moment'. I like to think that Cezanne would have been pleased on completing the 'rocks' painting, as much as he could let himself be, so that a viewer might see what he himself saw while working on it. The painting stimulates me to keep looking through its inter-weavings of brushwork without ever reaching blunt resistance. Following a single colour, I can see just how clearly each patch of paint is situated in the actual space of the vista it describes.

This thinking about colour construction has also led me to revisit Joseph Albers. His writing about colour is always worth examining because he illustrates so clearly how colours react in the immediacy of seeing them. Each of his *Homage to the Square* paintings is an independent work of art and a finely honed experiment with colour interaction. Standing in front of one of these paintings, at first glance it may appear strictly formal. In fact, the appearance of exact measure was worked out individually during its making. Albers dismissed colour theory, commenting that theoretical colour systems may look beautiful in illustration, while the original colour correspondences can only happen once, and under strict controls. In other words, one's intention to demonstrate perfect harmony with a set of juxtaposed colours cannot be formularised. Nor can an illustration of this provide information about specific colour relations as they

appear to sight. Colour harmonies change with every colour mix and every shift of light source and there is no single recipe. The same can be said for colour reproductions of my paintings as they appear in this text. The painting needs to be seen directly to experience its meaning.

The artist, Michael Craig-Martin, who studied under Albers at Yale, wrote,

All Albers's teaching about colour was based on the premise of its inherent instability, and hence its unpredictability . . . Because colour could not be grasped intellectually (or held accurately in the memory), and because every colour situation was both unstable and unique, Albers located the understanding of colour in perception and, in practice, in the quality of perception.⁹

The *Organica* paintings are far less 'classical' than Albers' experiments with dynamic colour relations. I reach a kind of conditional balance with geometry, colour resonance and shape distribution through the multiple sequences of colour layers.



Fig. 16. *Organica #2*, 2010.

⁹ Michael Craig-Martin, *Josef Albers*, (London: South Bank Centre, 1994) 42.

The pentagonal templates described in this chapter, contain many apparent symmetries that are, in fact, broken symmetries. Small irregularities in the spreads of colour media contribute to 'organic' details that emerge within the layered complexity. These 'organic' details further my thinking about perception of 'active' colours as I experience them in the natural environment and in painting.

Visible asymmetry is apparent everywhere in the natural world, whereas at some level there is always a cohesive and unifying principle that is symmetric. Josef Albers understood the meaning of symmetry in a perceptual and relational way, and employed this structural pattern for dynamic colour harmony. Each colour in the *Homage to the Square* paintings is mixed to achieve maximum resonance within the relational balance, acting as a vehicle for colour compatibility and contrast. He wrote:

Besides a balance through color harmony, which is comparable to symmetry, there is equilibrium possible between color tensions, related to a more dynamic asymmetry.¹⁰

Nicholas Fox Weber writes about a coalescence of 'seeing' in moments when Albers recognised completion in a painting.

The mechanics of vision might be firmly based in physics but true seeing transcended reason and led to an awareness of what Albers described as 'the discrepancy between physical fact and psychic effect' – the unpredictable point, beyond words, where all the elements coalesce in . . . a painting which mysteriously and magically attains sublimity.¹¹

In the *Organica* paintings I look for chromatic extension and perceptual depth, with transparent and semi-transparent colour tints. I apply the paint with a succession of pentagonal templates. Volume and proximity in the colour fragments is balanced with the underlying geometry. While an *Organica* painting

¹⁰ Josef Albers, "Chapter XVI, Sub section: 'Harmony'", in *Interaction of Color* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, fifth edition, 1976) 42.

¹¹ Nicholas Fox Weber, 'Forward', in *Homage to the Square Josef Albers*, (Mexico City: Casa Luis Barragan, Editorial RM, and the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 2009) 13-17.

does not move physically, in the making, the materials were far from inert and retain this trace in each detail. How one sees each of these paintings will accord with the conditions of its making, including the influence of light fall that I have built into construction. The symmetry component acts as a pivotal balance for the rhythm of the composition, while irregularities in the colour overlaps can attract the eyes to search through the general colour array to find connective meaning.

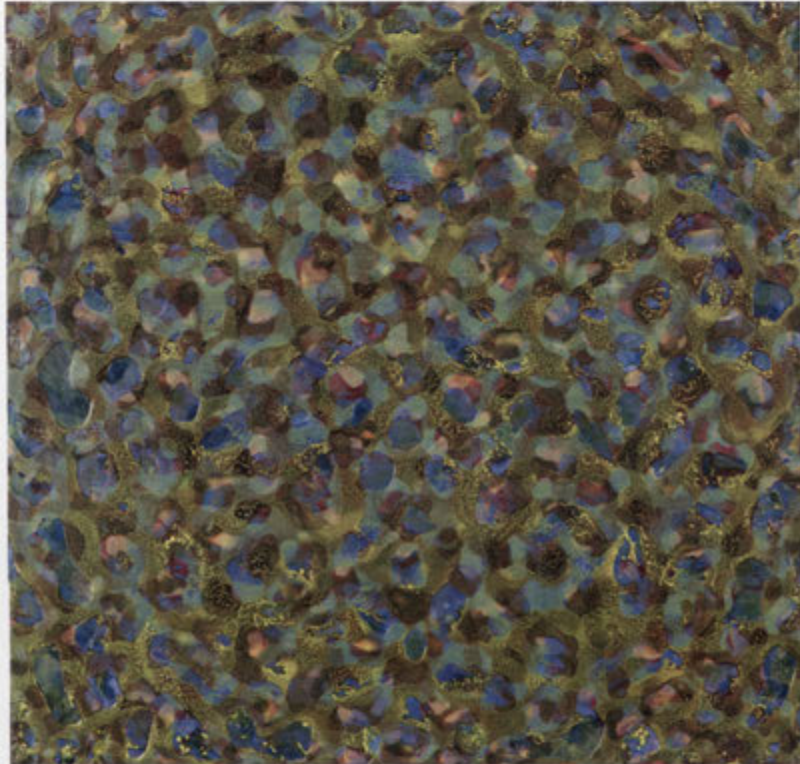


Fig. 17. *Organica #3*, 2010.

I work as facilitator with fluid colour media in the moment, so that characteristics of the materials themselves are participant with the coming to completion of each painting. These chromatic relations cannot be determined in advance, considering the unpredictable nature of the materials in combination and the phenomenological conditions of the process itself. When a painting comes into balance, I can see and know, through the history of the engagement, that there is a binding of the parts from the first marks to the last. This is what Albers meant when he referred to the elements coalescing.

Sensing Space :

I love the apparent random scatter of shapes and colours in nature. I appraise these effects, knowing that there is always an underlying order. Looking into a clear sky, I see a myriad of tiny specks of light curving through space at equal distance, yet each has its own trajectory. I might compare them to a flock of migrating birds that curve and swoop through the air in unison, though here the specks of light appear to fill all of space before my eyes, both equidistant and multi-directional. It may be that no speck returns in my sight as it curves past my seeing, perhaps into endless space (as far as my eyes are concerned). I am both seeing into a spatial dimension that is described by these moving specks of light, as I experience their imprint through the eyes; a repetition with oscillation that attracts my curiosity and contributes to my interest in symmetry principles in painting.

I could resort to describing the gaps in my understanding as a 'mystery': to my way of thinking though, it is as if there is a function and purpose for everything. Why one makes an enquiry, as well as questioning how a thing works can be informative. There is always a context that gives a clue to the answer. Interaction between an artist and her work compares with purposeful activity in any field of human endeavour. In the space between one thing and another, there is a world without words that exists in imagination, and insights waiting to be made tangible. My life is bound up with making paintings. I reach out and function in a world without words through painting. Likewise, ways of being in the world contribute to how I go about making pictures. To use an analogy, I cohabit with the work that I create.



Fig. 18. *Organica B9*, 2011.

I have described how the *Organica* paintings are generated with patterns of repetition and the colours are coordinated with variations of a pentagonal spatial framework. Each colour is applied as a separate layer with partial overlaps, while the spacing of fragments throughout the system contains a degree of self-similarity. I ensure that the coordinating shape is maintained and the paint settles within the range of its material consistency, while retaining traces of the history of its making. Incidental details that show within the process, and without my direct contrivance, suggest 'organic' associations for me.

If I had followed a reductive approach to geometric abstraction, seeking some form of absolute balance, the inspiration that working with materials can provide would be easily overtaken by static colour outcomes. My approach to construction, linking perception with material consistency, allows for a condition that I will call 'stillness and motion'. Minimalist precepts for abstract painting have been useful for looking closely at details of material process, while I could not accept the premise of 'absolute stillness' implied in the Minimalist critique. I work cooperatively with materials to watch what happens and thereby extend my comprehension of them. The Minimalist attribution was troubling for artists like Truitt or Martin, who trusted common sense in the experiential engagement, together with cognitive discernment. At this time, with so many artists exploring

abstraction out of individual experience, the formalist/expressionist critical divide has lost its authority. A bridging critique for me comes directly from the wholeness of nature (as scientist and philosopher, Henri Bortoft describes it), and my observations of living, growing things, their variety and cohesiveness.

Barbara Maria Stafford reminds that,

Biologically and emotionally, human beings are shaped for relating to their shifting surroundings . . . the involuntary stirrings of our five senses testify to the ancient give and take between a corporealized mind and an animate universe. We become aware of thinking only in those kinesthetic moments when we actively bind the sights, savors, sounds, tastes, and textures swirling around us to our inmost, feeling flesh.¹²

Stillness in motion can therefore be understood as consciousness of stability at the centre of gravity in one's body, somewhat like the orientation of Japanese *zazen*, or the aspirations of yoga, arising spontaneously without being fixed; a kind of fluent gap where one becomes vividly attentive to inclusive 'seeing', without agitation or loss of cognitive awareness. I suggest that this relates to *zaum*, formulated by some of the Russian avant-garde artists and writers, and translated as 'zero', or 'nothingness' - not an end in itself, but a pivot for renewal. (See Chapter 4, 'Mikhail Matyushin and the Organic Studio'.) My growth as a painter has been bound up with seeking ways to respond empathically and constructively to paintings that may impart this fluid interplay, and the paintings I have developed for this research are driven by this premise.

Vision :

Experimenting with the physical potential of pigments and acrylic binders and exploring effects of paint media in combination, intense and subtle feelings can be re-imagined and visualized. Flow and deformation in matter of variable consistency can stimulate memories, not necessarily of the appearance of things, but what lies beneath the surface, experiences that can re-affirm one's

¹² Barbara Maria Stafford, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001) 58.

sense of the connective and functional conditions that bind matter into meaningful relationships.

I understand 'active' seeing as experiential and inclusive in the way that it is described by Henri Bortoft, where I am participant and fully conscious, seeing a painting grow out of my engagement with it. I describe this in more detail in Chapter 3. 'Seeing and Knowing', where I discuss Henri Bortoft's description of 'the organizing idea'.

I work with colours in paint as overlapping spreads of fragments. In the late watercolours, even more than the oil paintings, Cezanne followed this viewpoint, translating the eye's fluctuating gaze into transparent colour brush marks overlapping each other to map out the spatial parameters; planar shifts that lead to perception of a depth dimension and encourage a kind of visual immersion within a painting. In addition, Cezanne realized how perception of depth expanding from the centre of visual contact, meant that

the colors continually evoke the efflorescence of rounded surfaces receding towards the outer edges of the frame.¹³

The intensity of engagement I experience while making one of the *Organica* paintings, I hope will also convey the substance of the colour array to an interested viewer. Approaching one of the *Organica* paintings in a relaxed state, scanning through the network of colours, the eyes will adjust automatically to various densities in the spread. If the flux is met as an exchange, colours might appear to shift visibly within a stable framework. With paintings like mine, when light illuminates these surfaces, delineation amongst the colours is comparable to the way light passes through foliage, or arrangements of colour fragments can suggest a pulse of sound. One becomes aware of subliminal conditions in the construction of these paintings that are in part, self-similar, yet variable. Individual shapes and colours in one layer will appear intermittently through the surface and fade into the background in other areas, by the very fact of one's

¹³Lawrence Gowing, "The Logic of Organized Sensations", in *Cezanne: The Late Work*, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977) 58-9.

attention, while each hue has its own capacity for light absorption and illumination.



Fig. 19. *Organica #4*, 2010-11.

Each colour layer in the *Organica* paintings cross-balances with the whole array. In *Organica #4*, for instance, for the final colour application, I applied a transparent, yellow/gold mix of paint through a pentagonal template containing a different yet complementary network of gaps. I chose this transparent, intense hue to lift the chromatic density of areas where multiple layers of paint were constrained into a visually receding brown tone. The yellow/gold colour, where it crossed portions of medium blue, for instance, formed a green tint that modified the projective influence of the cool blue segments. Elsewhere, the yellow/gold tint intensified exposed parts of a red hue, transforming it to orange-brown, like warm earth. Because this yellow/gold colour was mixed to an intense degree, as soon as it was laid down, still wet, I placed a sheet of Perspex across the whole surface, to lift off surplus paint. This had the effect of blending the yellow/gold into the colour field, according to the surfaces it covered. Notably near the top of the picture, where it formed into a capillary network on the surface, attracting light into the picture.

Whether I move around in natural environments, or look intently at a painting, my sensate and cognitive body responds instinctively to structure, depth and relational effects, before reasoned and literal interpretation sets in. The eyes, scanning these surfaces, will involuntarily adjust focus across the variable densities and textures of paint, with a tangible kind of viewing. Contemplating these colour/spatial ambiguities can encourage a subtle collaboration with vision and touch that is almost visceral.

Looking with soft-focused, expansive vision that encompasses the whole painting, also conditions one's body within the enveloping spatiality. Alternately, by employing sharp, focused vision that concentrates on isolating and interpreting details, I become distanced from participatory collaboration with the image. In the latter case, visual information received, tends to separate out details, favouring prior opinion rather than engaging with direct experience. Both ways of seeing are essential to cognition in different circumstances, while paintings like mine are concerned with sharing a connective vision at the pace a viewer chooses to take. As Juhani Pallasmaa suggests, a painting can function as a live entity with whom I converse. He writes:

Vision reveals what the touch already knows. . . The distant and the near are experienced with the same intensity, and they merge into one coherent experience.¹⁴

My approach to construction in the *Organica* paintings may seem a difficult and technically complex way to establish colour relations. Experimenting with materials the way I do, does not allow for an automatic level of security, or expectation of a reliable outcome. The multitude of impressions that is the mobility and intelligence active in vision makes it essential for me to clarify the physical content of a painting with what I see in it as I work; to capture in paint something of the vitality that is constancy and change in all colours as I perceive them.

¹⁴Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses*, (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2005) 42.

I look into each one of the *Organica* paintings and it is not like anything I have made before, while contained within the colours and shapes there are certain preferences that define my choices and thinking about making. I appraise each painting by seeing it dimensionally, in a way that becomes quite intimate. Distance and nearness are comprehended simultaneously, merging into a coherent experience. The underlying measure that connects the parts together turns my ideas into tangible objects. I am not promoting an ideal or perfected method, rather I describe a process of discovery that is continuous.

Shaping perception :

I have described the pentagonal holding patterns for the *Organica* paintings in the first part of this chapter. The shape and order of each colour spread influences, and is influenced by, the whole measure of layers in these paintings. There is no certain formula for assessing colour choices and the sequence of shape variations. I prepare the pentagonal frameworks in advance, and watch and learn from the distribution of colour shapes as they settle in the painting field. I instinctively shift visual focus around and across these surfaces, seeing both patterns of irregularity and connectedness, and surface textures that indicate the binding of materials in depth.



Fig. 20. *Organica* #5 detail

Individual shapes that make up the pentagonal framework are coordinated in a grid pattern, with sets of five shapes around a centre, formations that are both symmetric and asymmetric. The symmetry content acts as a stable pivot for the

layers of colour fragments in all their variety. Exchanges of symmetry with asymmetry occur within the rotational systems of layering. Patterns of variable colour density in the *Organica* paintings, lead a viewer into the spatial arrangement without necessarily identifying the pentagonal formations, or fixating on detail.

Barbara Maria Stafford speculates on how the 'brain-mind' integrates multiple phenomena to create complex images and patterns that appear to make visible the invisible ordering of consciousness. She writes of the potential that can accrue from accessing

modes of visual communication that grapple with bringing all levels of cognition to perceptibility by focusing, aligning, calibrating, and attuning our attentional mechanisms with the moving world. In other words, our painted images are not moving physically, but our perceptual bodies need to be in tune with movement, that is constant movement. This deepening of biological with cultural information, and vice versa, [has the potential to become] a multiplied, even a transformed, object.¹⁵

In the sub-chapter: 'Sensing Space', I describe how the colour layers for the *Organic* paintings are constructed with pentagonal frameworks. By extruding paint through silk-screens, I was able to promote the physical characteristics of the colour media without losing connective unity through the whole image. Paint is dispersed and the colours interact with a degree of immediacy apart from direct intervention. Watching the entwining of deliberation with instinct as these images grow, I begin to identify with patterns of integration in my psychological makeup. I observe how instinctive responses contribute to choices made alongside constructive planning, and the impact of the surrounding environment on my interpretations.

¹⁵ Barbara Maria Stafford, *Echo Objects : The Cognitive Work of Images*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 4.

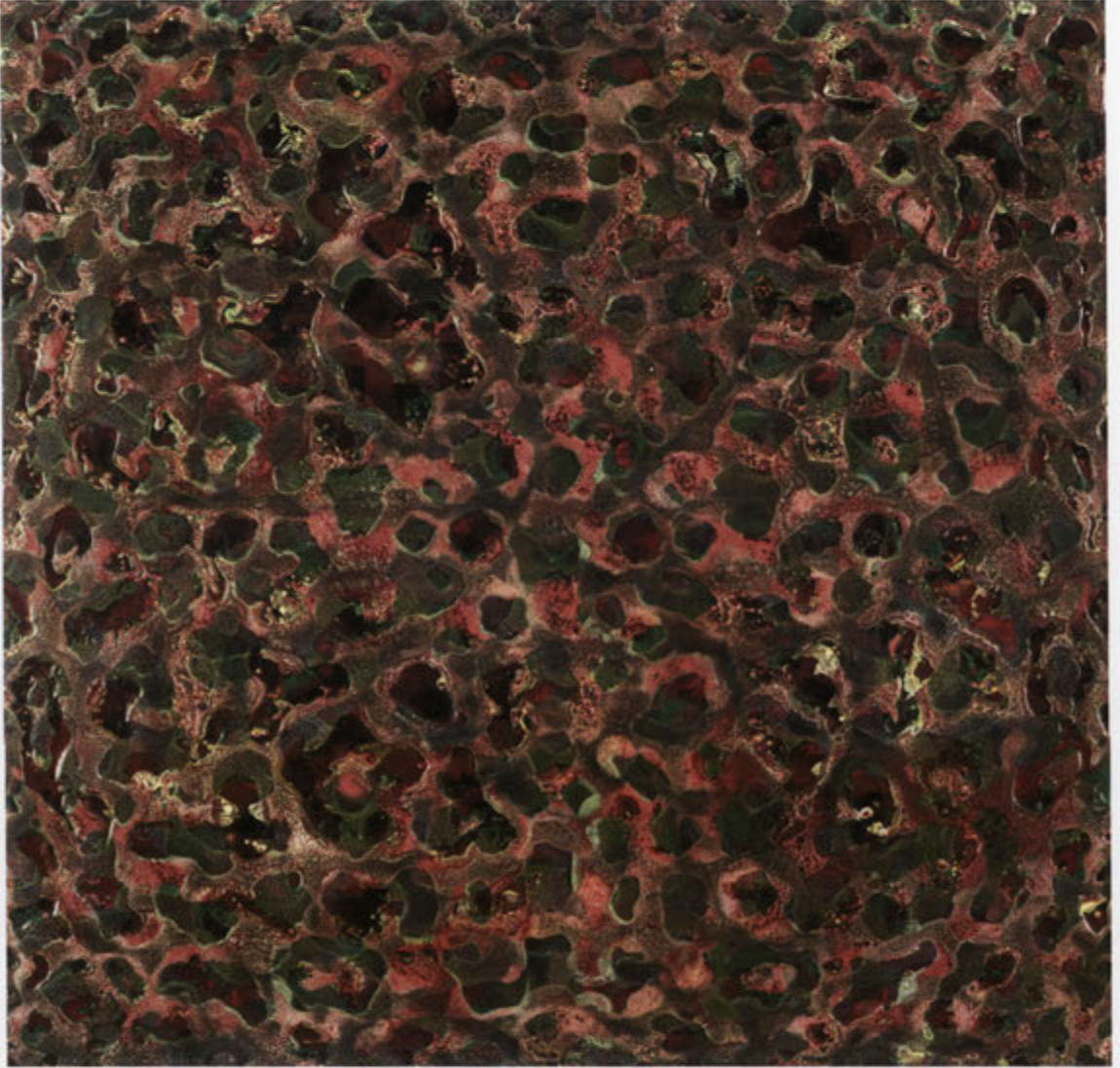


Plate 1. Liz Coats, *Organica #1*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm



Plate 2. Liz Coats, *Organica #2*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

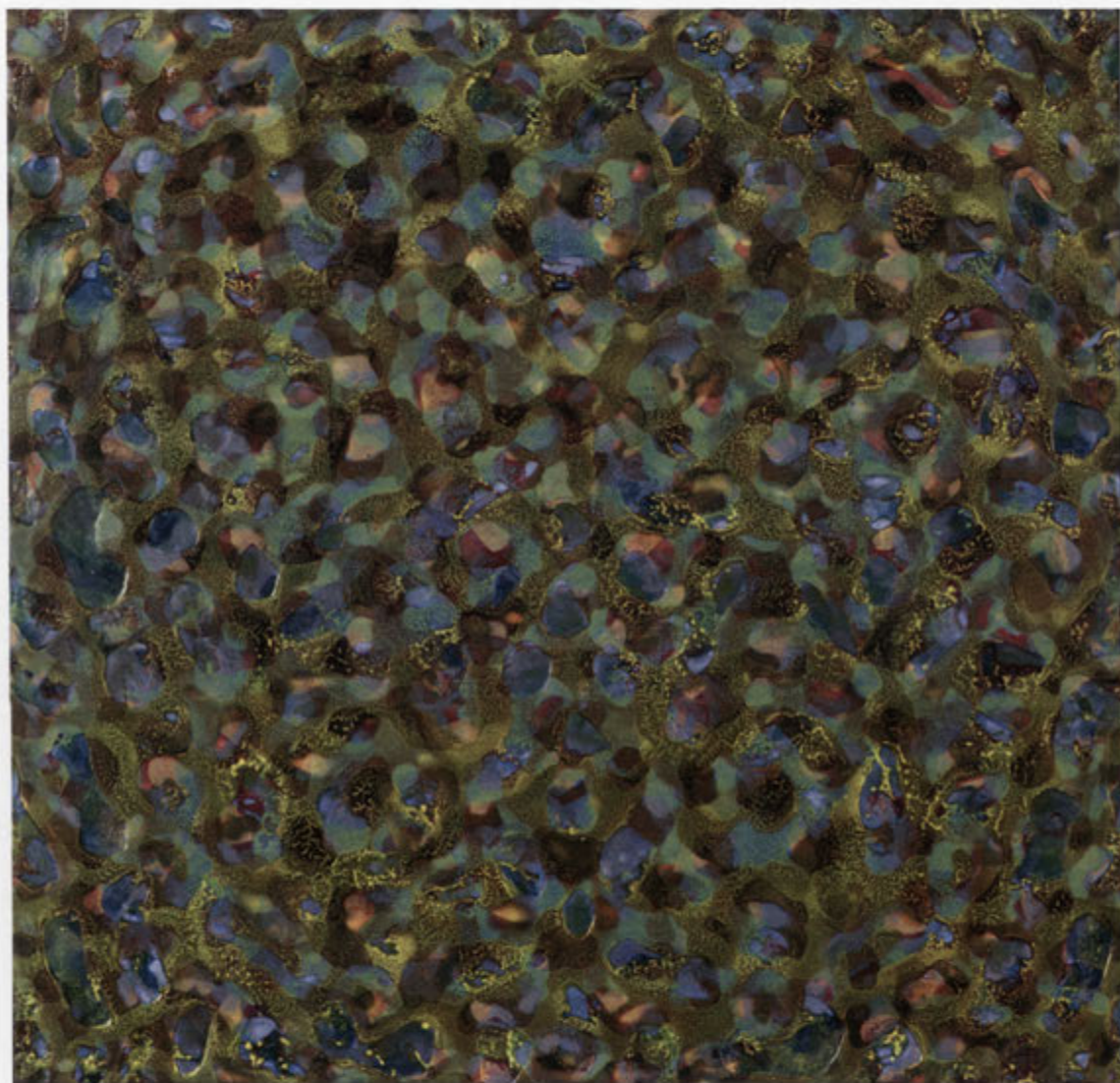


Plate 3. Liz Coats, *Organica #3*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm



Plate 4. Liz Coats, *Organica #4*, 2010-11, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

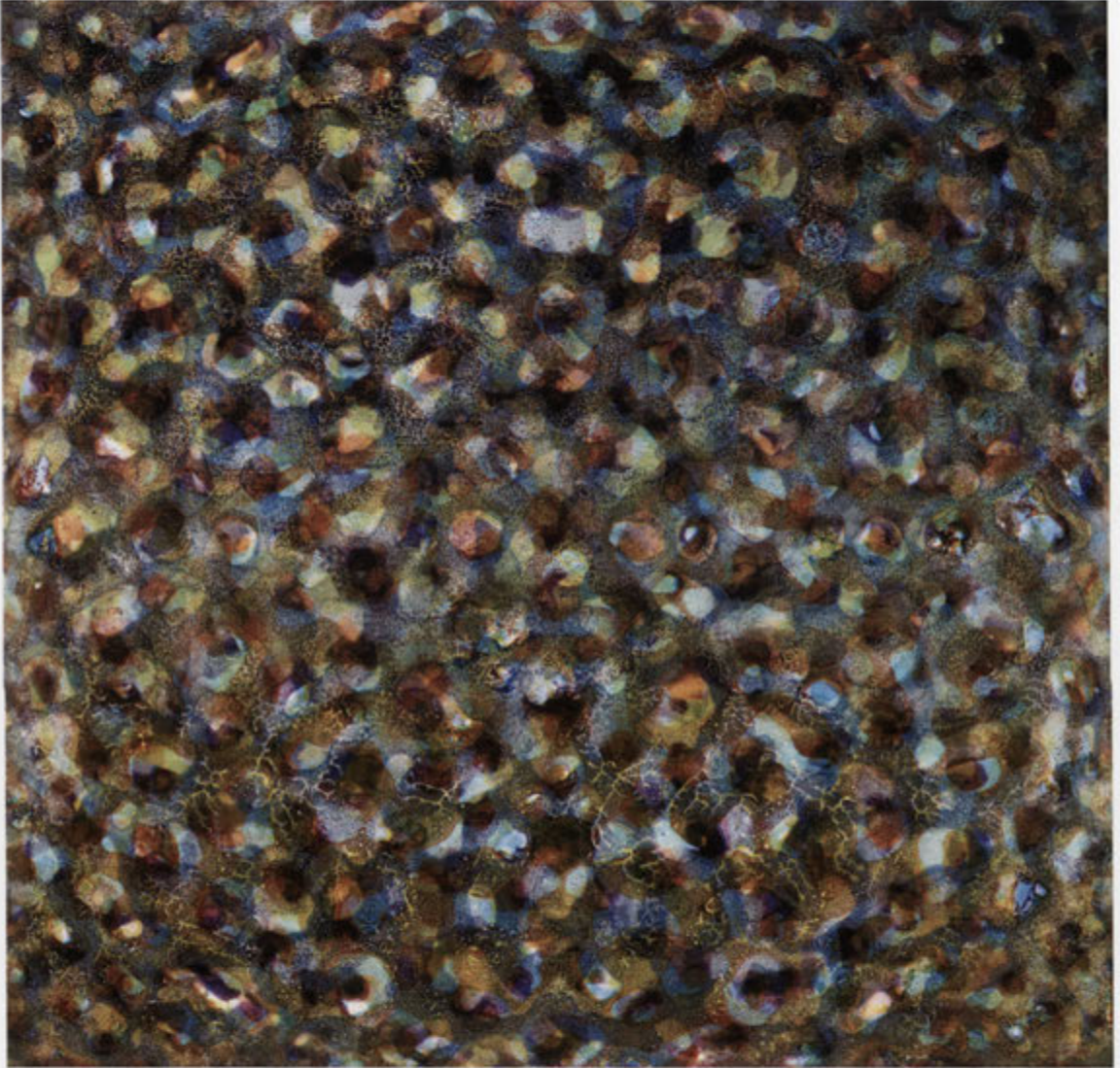


Plate 5. Liz Coats, *Organica #5*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

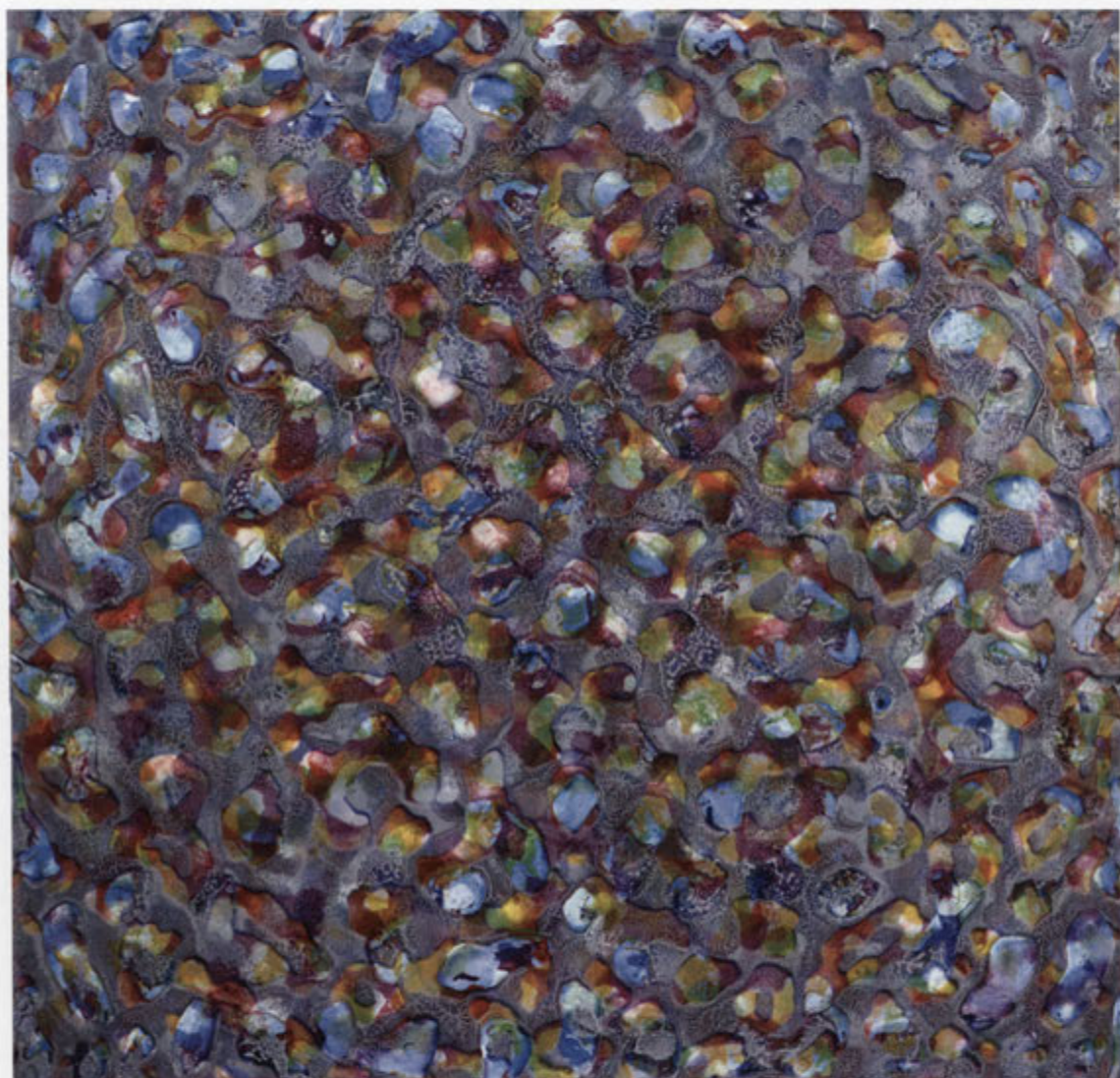


Plate 6. Liz Coats, *Organica #6*, 2010-11, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm



Plate 7. Liz Coats, *Organica #7*, 2010-11, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm



Plate 8. Liz Coats, *Organica #8*, 2010-11, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

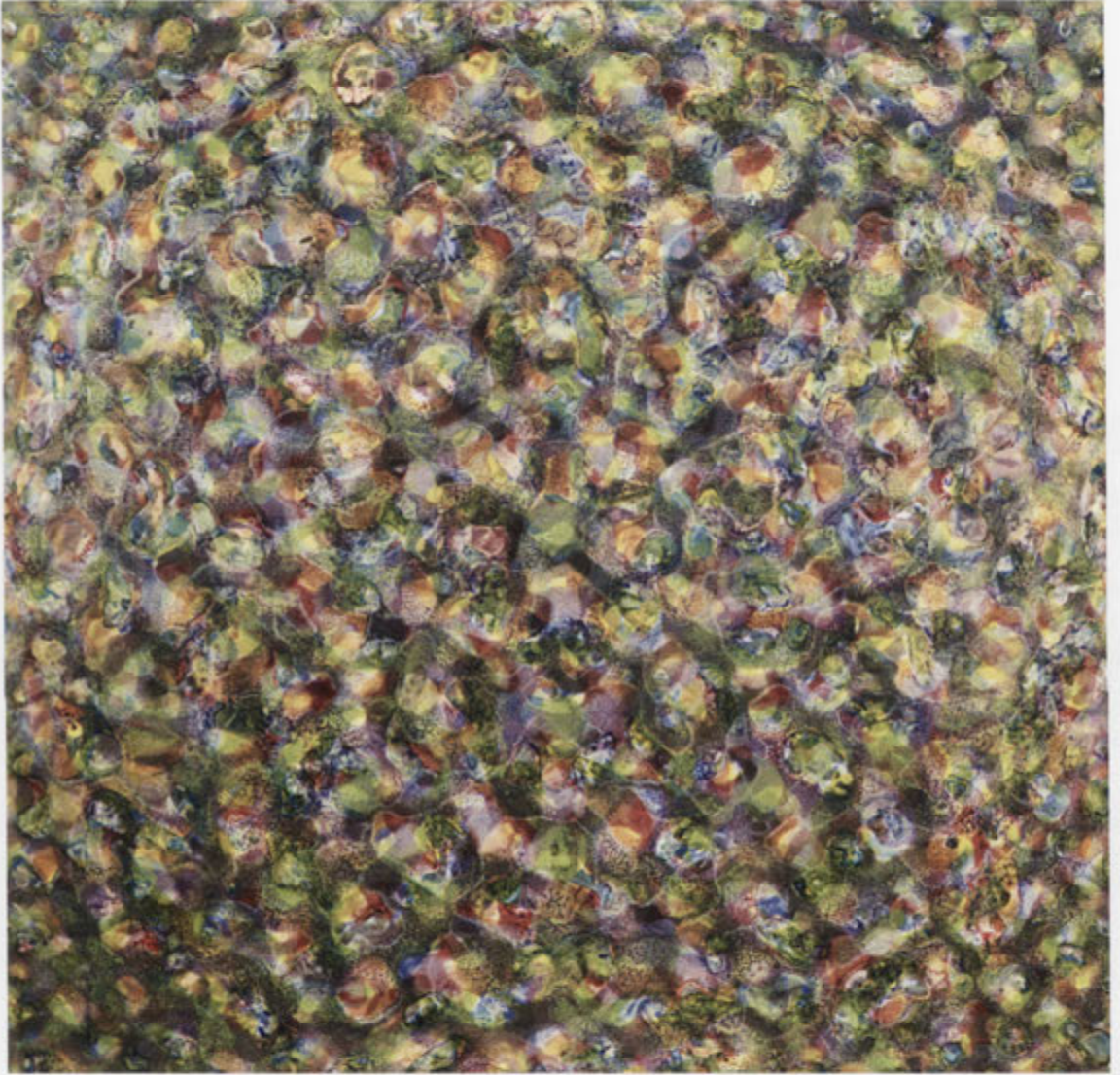


Plate 9. Liz Coats, *Organica #9*, 2011, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

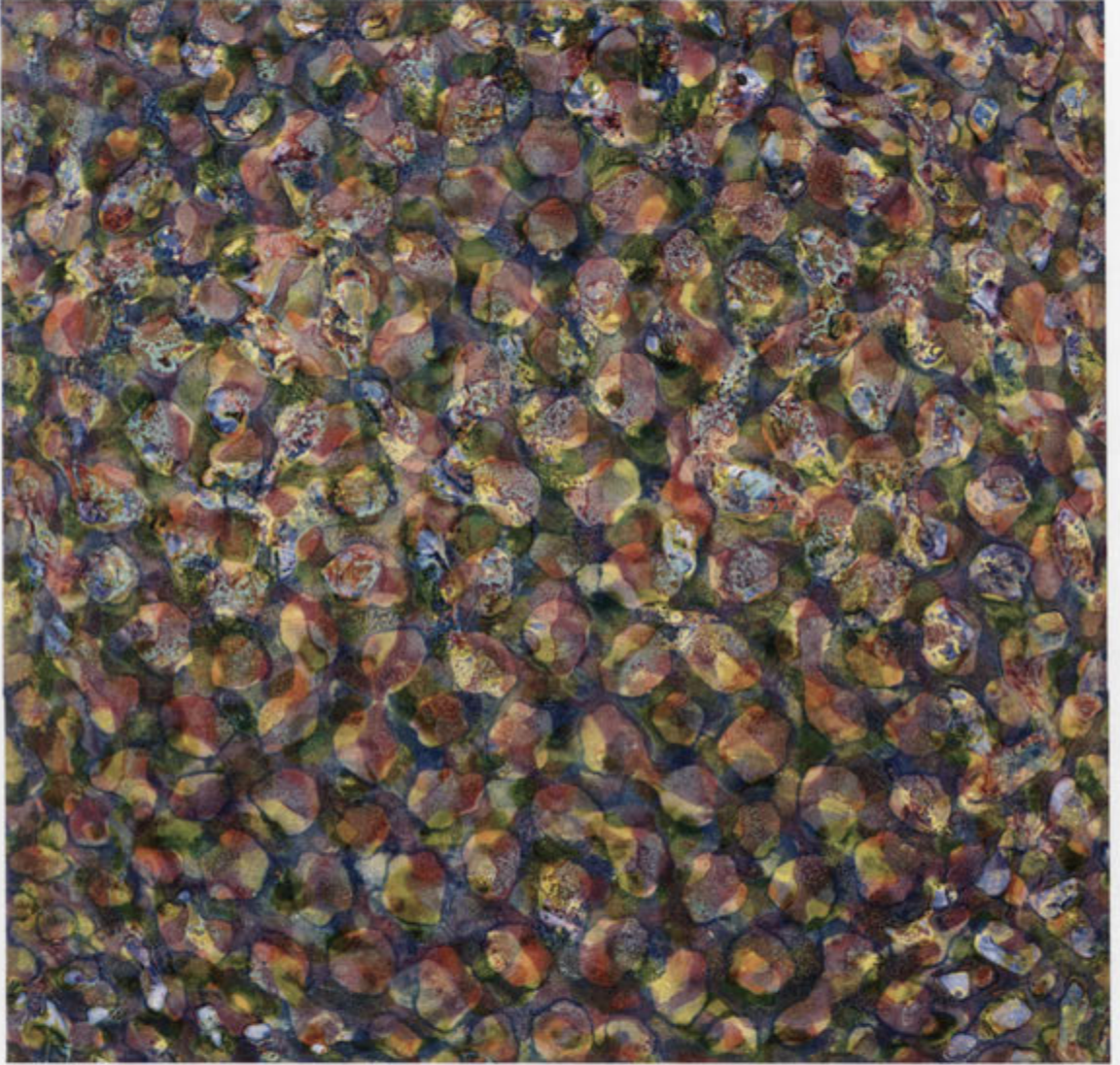


Plate 10. Liz Coats, *Organica #10*, 2011, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm

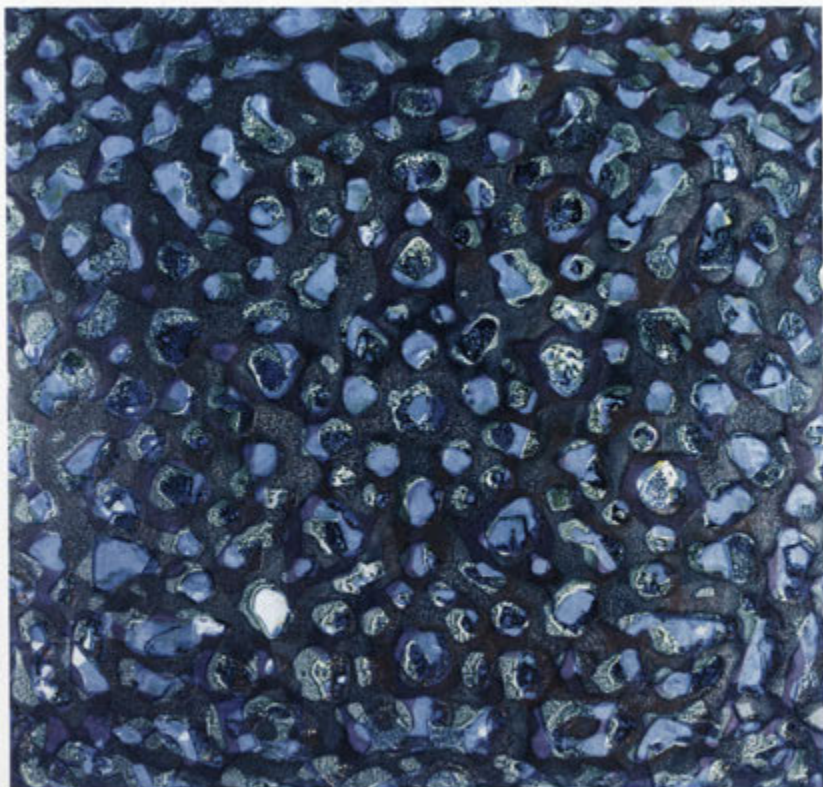


Plate 11. Liz Coats, *Organica B1*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

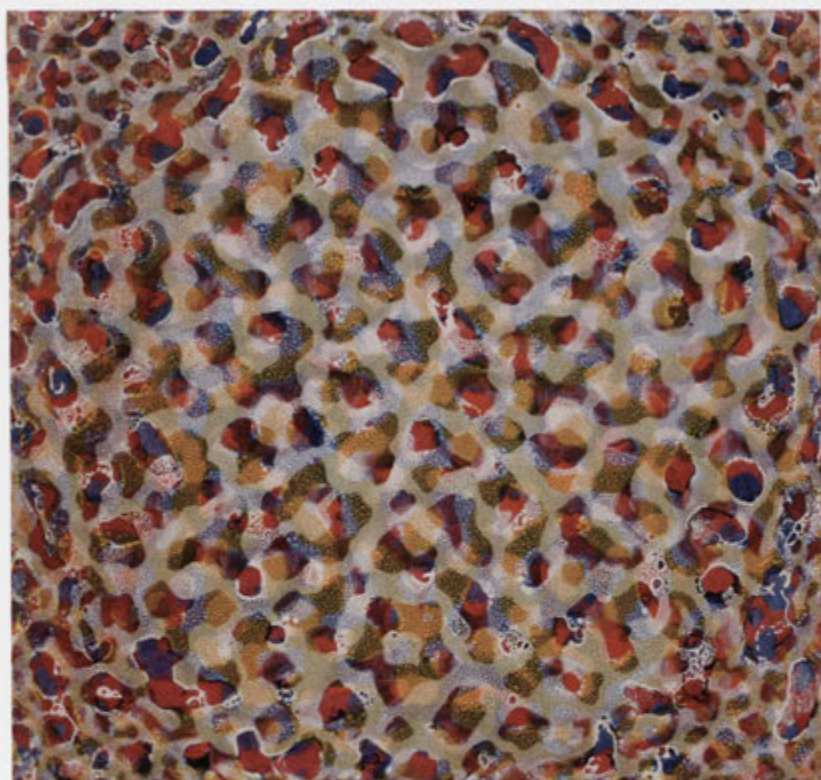


Plate 12. Liz Coats, *Organica B2*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

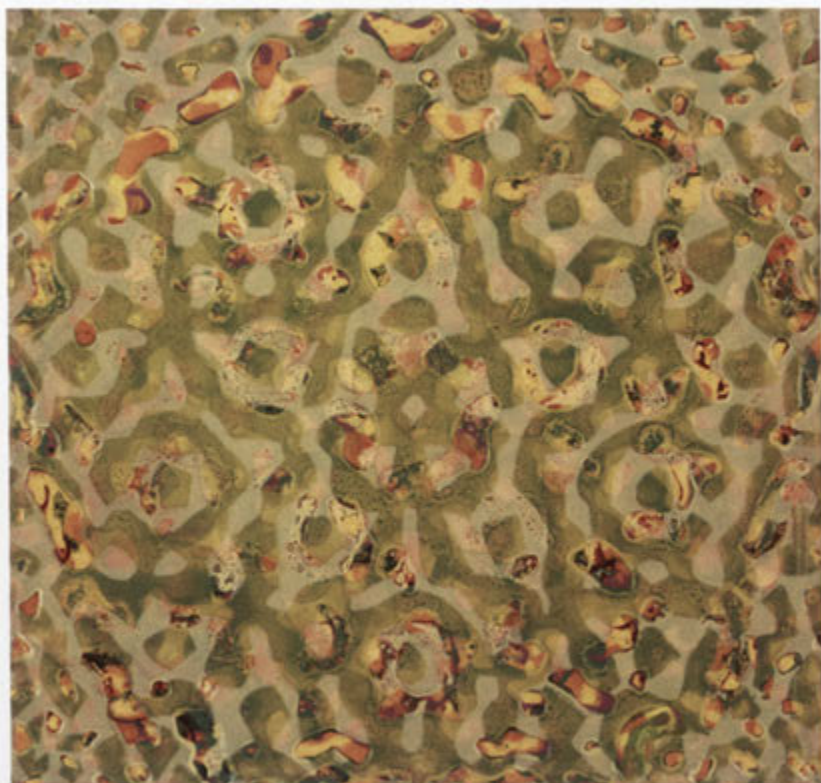


Plate 13. Liz Coats, *Organica B3*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

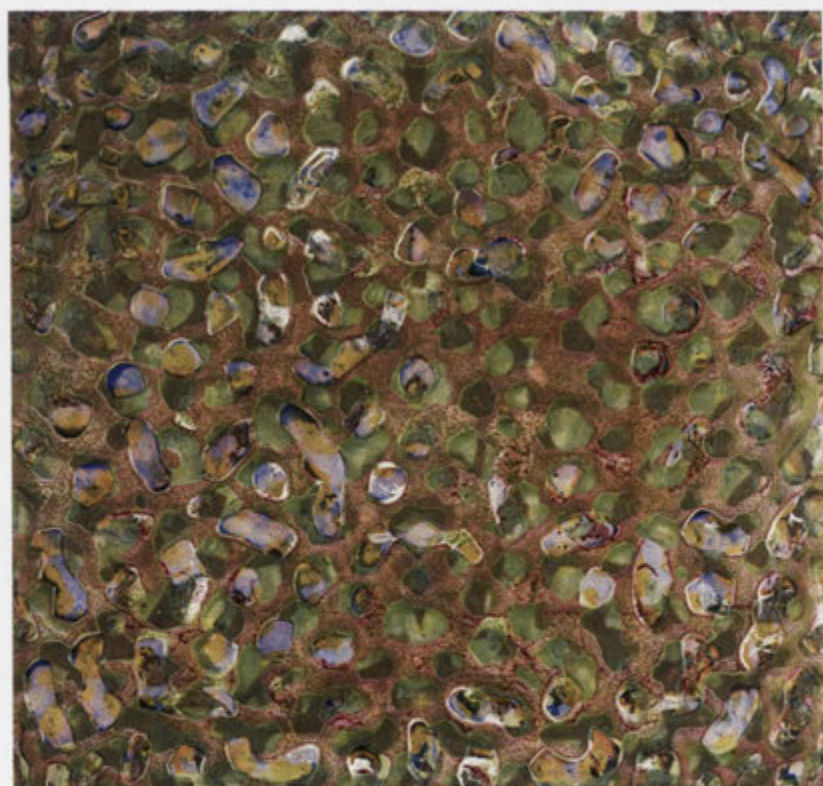


Plate 14. Liz Coats, *Organica B4*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

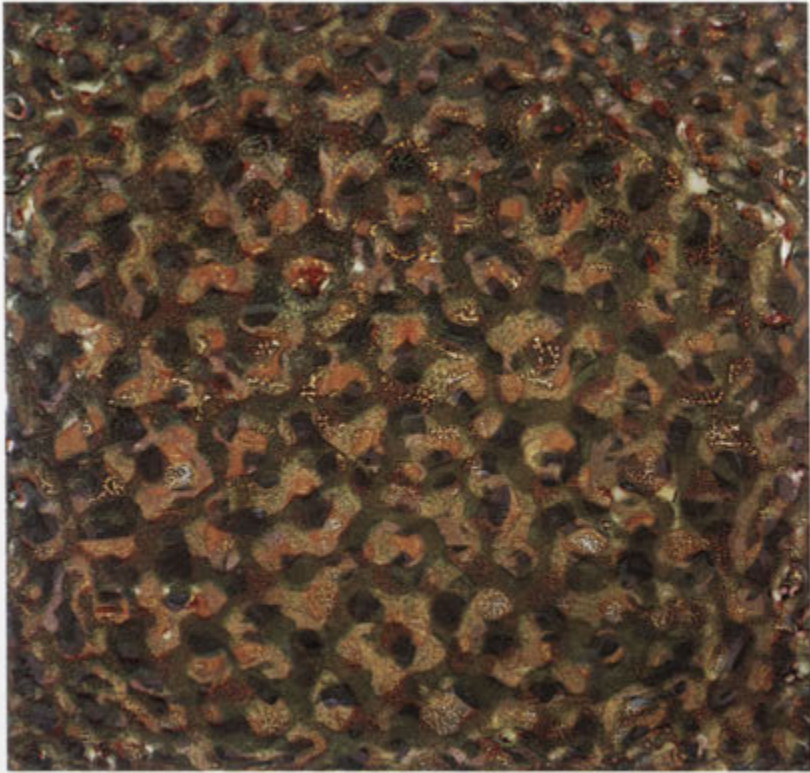


Plate 15. Liz Coats, *Organica B5 2010*, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm



Plate 16. Liz Coats, *Organica B6, 2011*, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

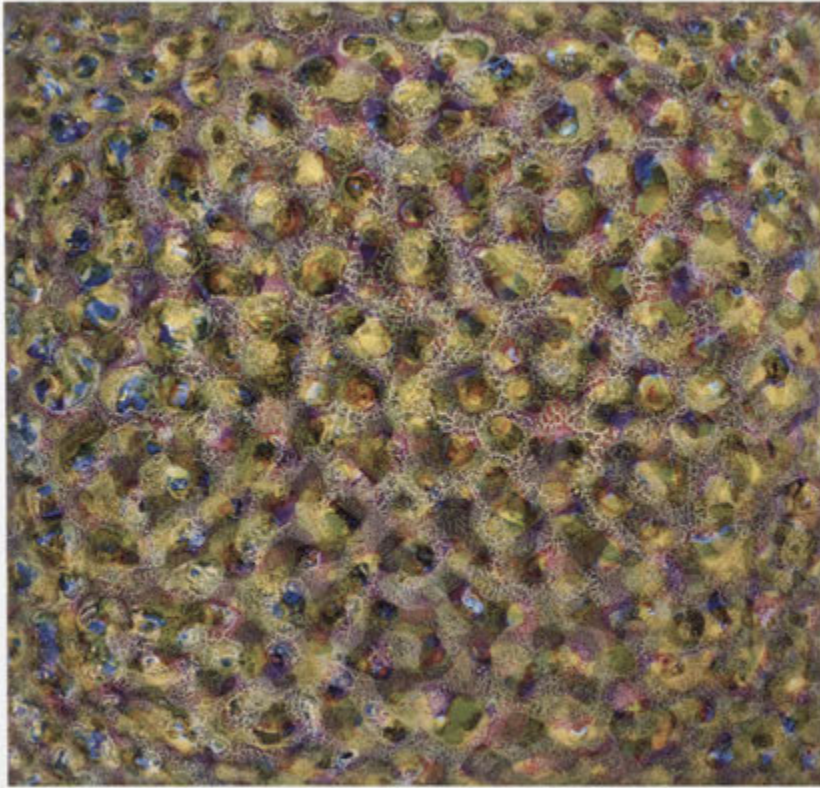


Plate 17. Liz Coats, *Organica B7*, 2011, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

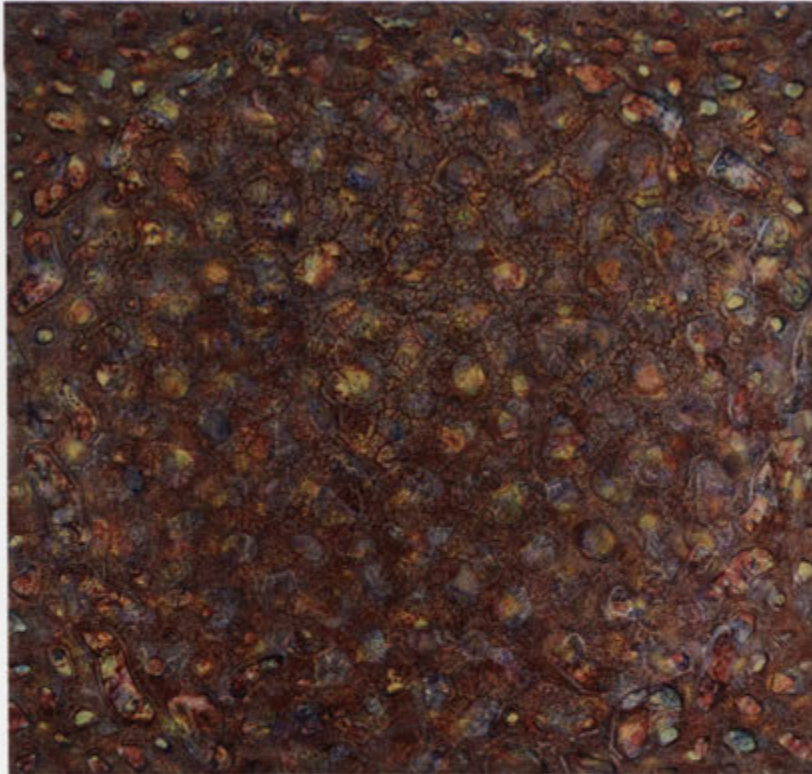


Plate 18. Liz Coats, *Organica B8*, 2011, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm



Plate 19. Liz Coats, *Organica B9*, 2011, acrylic media on board, 48 x 50 cm

CHAPTER TWO : *The Streaming Paintings*

This account of my working process and the ideas that lie behind my reflections on making, addresses the influence of the natural world of growth and form in the construction of the two series of paintings that constitute my Ph.D. research. Experiences of immersion in the landscape and my belonging within it are such that I cannot now do without closeness to the natural environment.

Part A : The working process

The *Streaming* paintings follow a similar constructive model to the *Organica* paintings, while their different material foundations have led to divergent outcomes. In *Streaming*, I encourage colour and shape shifts within the physical constraints of paint media and a canvas ground, in combinations that I have not tried before. I work with fragmentary shapes derived from a specific source in nature, while this does not displace analysis of ways I think through connective frameworks.



Fig. 21. *Streaming #3* detail

I need to reconnect often with natural environments, absorbing colours and smells and the feel of surfaces. I find nourishment in places that are relatively undisturbed, being mindful of how we impact on them. I like to get lost for a while; interactive details that I see and enjoy are not usually framed in words. I

enjoy looking at scatters of leaves on a path, and their assemblies in 'perfect' formation when rain has splashed the gravel, or the apparent chaos, yet self-similarity in accumulations of bark strips encircling a eucalypt trunk. Dynamic forces like gravity, temperature and air currents, never static, affect their dispersal. I take observations like these into the studio, but do not try to illustrate them. While the collections of fragments in the *Streaming* paintings may at first appear random, and to an extent they are, I combine layers of paint into formations that bring to attention their associative detail.

The scale and detail in these paintings is also influenced by my body movements in the space of the studio, for instance, the height of ceiling and floor space, the stretch of my working arms and strength for bending and lifting. I find that painting becomes, after all, a matter of incorporating events into the process and resisting stasis. To understand and achieve qualities that I value in painting, I have to work backwards with materials, from contrivance to freefall.

The term 'flow' in painting practice commonly refers to being fully immersed and conscious in a task, where everything else becomes background. Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi theorises that the function of flow

seems to be to induce the organism to grow. Not in the sense of ontogenetic development, or maturation, but in the sense of fulfilling [potential], and then going beyond even those limits.

He suggests that universal recognition of experiences like this may be built into our nervous system. That,

whenever we are fully functioning, involved in a challenging activity that requires all our skills, and more, we feel a sense of great exhilaration.

These feelings of pleasure make us want to repeat the experience, but in so doing, we test our capacity by taking on board even greater skills,

the complexity of adaptation increases, propelled forward by the enjoyment it provides.' He suggests this is a trick of evolution to persuade us to evolve further.¹⁶

My understanding of 'flow' comes with knowledge and ease in practice, and without losing sight of events as they happen. Rather than being coerced in any way, I prefer to make considered decisions. I learn by interacting with paint materials. I also recognize those moments when concentration is overtaken by anticipation; it is easy to move too fast, or I feel a twinge of excitement, sensing that the work is nearing completion, and then overstep a detail. I'm tempted to predict outcomes, decisions might be hasty, and the distinctive 'edge' in concentration becomes blurred. I do not accept the results in such circumstances.



Fig. 22. *Streaming #6* detail

Rather than proceeding from part to whole, or whole to part as a linear progression, each painting grows as I concentrate on bringing all the parts into correspondence. As each layer of paint settles and dries, becoming bound with the painting field, at these moments an experience of recognition unites my initial intention with a sense of fluent continuity.

¹⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick E. Robinson, "Facilitating the Aesthetic Experience", in *The Art of Seeing - An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1990) 367.

I like inventing new ways to spread paint within the painting 'ground'. While I recognize Helen Frankenthaler's achievement with colour staining on large canvases, or the spread of viscous paint across surfaces in the manner of Dale Frank's paintings, in my work, I need to facilitate the spread of paint within applied frameworks that function connectively, to affirm the tactile logic of seeing through my interactions. Perhaps it is body knowledge that comes to mind, the physicality of bones and flesh functioning together, or my interest in underlying connections that support stability and increase in growing things. Nature is, after all, as much a part of our bodies as the wild landscapes.

Sources for the *Streaming* images :

I encountered the original 'found' shapes for the *Streaming paintings* while on an environmental research trip in April 2011, with a group of artist colleagues from the School of Art.¹⁷

At the beginning of the trip, we camped for a couple of days at Alexander's Hut in the Glenbog State Forest, inland from the far South Coast of NSW. The land was hilly and remote from settlement, and had once served as a cattle and sheep station. Regenerating pockets of forest and thick scrub alternated with spreads of indigenous grassland and pristine swamp. I decided to take a long walk after a rugged night of wind and rain, across a flooded creek and up into the hills beyond. Looking for a place to cross, I followed the creek downstream for a short distance to a rocky ledge where I clambered down to a pool below. Strands of foam and tiny bits of detritus stirred up by the pressure of falling water were circulating in the current with a continuous and visible pulse. I watched streaks and tiny whirlpools of bubbles form and re-form, break apart round a protruding rock, or cut by a floating leaf into lateral threads, then gathering speed before releasing through the narrow gap downstream. I knew then, that I was seeing the basis for a new group of paintings.

¹⁷This field research trip, known as 'The Eden Project', was led by Amanda Stuart, Heike Qualitz and Amelia Zeraftis, in support of the Field Studies Program convened by John Reid, Fenner School of Environment & Society, ANU (and now at the School of Art). I stay open to experience on these trips, soaking up impressions rather than making work *in situ*.



Fig. 23. Original digital photo

I took many digital photos to capture these riveting shapes in still motion, while perched at the edge of the pool. My 'frames' were taken from an angle to contain most of the swirling foam, but without much depth of field. In painting terms I had framed sections of a larger field of matter in motion, depending on how these images were realized.

Preparing the templates :

Back in Canberra, I selected and cropped details from the original photos, transferred them to 'greyscale' and adjusted them in Photoshop with strong black and white contrast. Each new image was re-sized and printed on A4 paper, in pairs of positive and inverted images. I stuck rows of these A4 prints across the walls of my small living space, where I could assess shape distribution by looking and looking again in the evenings. With soft eye focus I could glance frequently through each image without focusing on detail. As I became familiar with the characteristics of each fragment spread and spatial disjunctions in the dark and light balance, I made corrections in black pen and deletions with 'whiteout' to strengthen and unify shape definition. The drawings were adjusted, scanned and rescanned many times. A selection of the prepared drawings were then re-sized at 110 x 90 cm and printed at ANU Print Workshop on white bond paper.



Fig. 24a. Detail of foam, cropped and adjusted in Photoshop.

Fig. 24b. The same image, re-drawn, inverted, and re-sized in preparation for transfer to silk-screen.

Paint media :

Both the *Streaming* paintings and the *Organica* paintings were made by employing silk-screens for paint application, while the paint mixes were adapted for the different grounds of canvas or board. With the *Streaming* paintings, paint was prepared to a viscosity suitable for screening four or five screen applications at most, with a different measure of ingredients for each layer. The acrylic paint mixes included binders, matte medium, or small amounts of gloss medium. White acrylic gesso with a small addition of colour was mixed for the first layer to create a resist surface. Initially there was not much colour contrast between each screened layer, while the paint surfaces were distinguished through their different light absorbency and textural variation. In addition, thin washes of Winsor and Newton acrylic paint were applied across the screened shapes with a brush at various stages. Further dilute colour was flicked onto the underside of the canvas to stain through gaps in the paint layers above.

The canvas ground is always part of the whole painting fabric and I cannot, or will not cover over a mistake. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens that a disruption occurs when my mind wanders. In one instance, I was enjoying the rhythm of the activity, and then I spilt a quantity of yellow paint onto the underside of *Streaming #6*. I took a break and left the paint to dry.

In the spirit of the work, where I really did not know where the detail of this new *Streaming* painting would lead beyond the guiding framework, I came to realize that this accidental inclusion could be integrated into the composition. And it did! It also gave me a fresh idea for colour interventions, tested again in #5.

Preparing the silk-screens :

On receiving a residency at Megalo Print Studio, I was able to go ahead with this new group of paintings, starting in May 2011. The residency, titled: *Single State – A Unique Take on the Land*, was purposely framed for artists working across media and using print techniques in response to the natural environment. All the screening was done at Megalo and the rolled canvases were brought back to the studio on campus for further work. The dimensions of these paintings at 109.5 x 88.5 cm, was limited to the largest silk screens with 48T mesh available at Megalo.

As before, the original drawings were transferred to scale on white bond paper at ANU Print, brushed with vegetable oil for light penetration at Megalo, in preparation for UV exposure onto silk-screens. I reserved four large screens over several months, changing the templates from time to time.

Making the paintings :

I prefer to work with spaced colour fragments that allow for a wide range of shape and colour adaptations in the detail. The paint was applied with a silk-screen technique, similar to the *Organica* paintings, while here, every part of the process needed to be re-envisaged for the painting 'ground' of soft canvas. To spread paint in this way, I needed to work with unstretched, unprimed canvas, laid flat on the fabric printing table at Megalo Print Studio. I chose polycotton canvas, its dual fibres being less affected by shrinkage with water-based media than pure cotton canvas would be in the unstretched state. My efforts were focused on embedding the paint within a field of contrast and depth, and I anticipated that the absorbent cotton thread in the canvas weave would be receptive to paint additions soaked through from the underside.



Fig. 25. *Streaming #7* detail

I had two versions of each original drawing to work with, from the paring of each drawing with its inverted form. Unlike the *Organica* paintings, these templates do not contain a central pivot, while their scale allows for top-to-bottom reversals. My plan was to layer the fragment spreads for cross-directional impetus, and bind them into a kind of interlocking unity with diversity.

I began by applying paint through two contrasting screen templates onto raw canvas at Megalo Print Studio, usually working on two or three canvases at each visit. For the first paint layer, I mixed an opaque resist by adding acrylic gesso to the mix, followed by a semi-transparent layer, so that details of the first layer would show through where the second image crossed over. Small gaps to the raw canvas were exposed between the two layers. When dry, the canvases were rolled and taken back to the campus studio, where I brushed a thin layer of porous rabbit skin gesso across the whole surface.



Fig. 26. *Streaming #6* detail

When dry, colour was flicked by hand onto the back of the canvas, spreading into the raw canvas gaps on the topside in spots of colour, mediated by the porous gesso wash. Where this 'bled' colour met with the firm-edges of screened paint fragments, it tended to back up and darken slightly at the edges, as a drop of dilute pigment might do on Chinese paper. These spots of stained colour soaked into raw canvas, contrast with the screen-impressed paint. I spread several colours from the under-side, so that the spots and splashes of colour overlapped and blended with the developing image, creating counterpoints of more intense chroma.

The canvases were taken back to Megalo for screening paint several times as the image developed. The procedure was adapted for each painting, depending on the cross-layered balance of fragment shapes and colour bleeds. The third screened paint layer usually contained a mixture of acrylic medium containing fine pumice to create a slightly raised and absorbent surface. Tints of dilute Winsor and Newton acrylic colour were brushed over these surfaces to selectively highlight, overlap or diffuse hard edges in the screened paint.



Fig. 27. *Streaming #4* detail

I have often painted with a Chinese brush where the edges of fluid colour marks spread from the centre of contact between the brush hairs and canvas surface. With a light and steady touch, each mark will impress from the centre of liquidity, towards resistance at the edges. In this instance, I brushed dilute colour onto the screened fragments fast, and without concern to follow strict outlines. The quality I was looking for was an equal balance of intensity between the colour marks and spaces between. The brushed on tints of colour also sealed the gesso wash between the canvas fibres.



Fig. 28. *Streaming #5* detail

Where streams of bubbles in the original images tapered and broke apart, these details showed up as fractured extensions and pixilated outlines when enlarged in Photoshop. I was able to duplicate some of this detail in the screen resist templates. I could further adjust paint density by varying pressure on the squeegee as paint was extruded through the silk-screen. I was not concerned if the paint spread unevenly, or portions of an image were unevenly impressed into the canvas. Sometimes the paint formed into tiny raised bubbles on the canvas surface when I lifted off the screen, depending on the density of the paint mix, especially when fine pumice medium was included in the mix. These bubbles would disappear as the paint dried, leaving a finely cratered surface that affected the brushwork additions.

Connective unity amongst the fragments is less obvious in these paintings than the symmetric colour arrangements of the *Organica* paintings, while the directional flow in itself provides a degree of unity. I took chances in the preparation of the *Streaming* drawings, not knowing if my efforts, layered as paint, would prove cohesive. The drawings were prepared with many small adjustments over several months, while I continued to work on the *Organica* series. As I became familiar with the irregular detail of these drawings, I could not have predicted how flexible and expressive they would be. In fact, interpreted with paint on a canvas ground, these drawings as screen templates proved extremely resilient to my interactions, and the organizing idea was sustained.

While the *Streaming* paintings progress my thinking about how we individually sense and interpret shape configurations, they also relate to organic and inorganic matter in general, and the often invisible yet substantial energies that influence these.

Part B : The philosophical underpinnings of *Streaming* :

On colour and painting :

Ambient colours in the surroundings, that are also the colours of sensations, tend to shift in hue from one moment to the next according to the manner in which one perceives them.



Fig. 29. *Streaming #3* detail

I like to generate these qualities of changeable colour in my paintings. Patches of colour in sunlight, moonlight, or electric light, with all their various chromatic shifts, attract my attention and curiosity. Likewise, the *Streaming* paintings, with their tangible shapes and colour tints, will shift in appearance according to the conditions in which one looks at them.

Spatial ambiguity :

Ways the eyes seek out detail and one's sensory body seeks to orient in the spatial surround plays an essential role in identifying sameness and difference amongst things in general. I instinctively play with shifts of visual focus around and across surfaces, seeking patterns of irregularity and connectedness, and surface textures that indicate binding with matter beneath. I am looking for dynamic relations amongst materials rather than some kind of ideal surface appearance. Looking at objects and the spaces around them equally, I work

with clusters of colours to emphasize their connectedness and relational variability, without trying to define them.



Fig. 30. *Streaming #4* detail

To develop the perceptual qualities I look for in a painting, if I had tried to represent the original strands of foam with their constant shape changes, I would only be able to depict the event from the viewpoint of past experience. The image would be illustrative, perhaps even symbolic, and the results in paint terms would be descriptive but visually static. With all the observations I make in the natural world, I'm interested in the conditions that influence spatial perception. I look for potential in the substance of paint to respond to my interventions in ways that bring to mind material transformations in general.

Active vision :

At first glance a *Streaming* painting may look like a scatter of fragments, randomly spaced and chaotic, while there is an underlying unity to these shape relations. Irregular networks of gaps and the apparently haphazard overlays of fragments will begin to make sense as a cohesive unit, when one relaxes into looking across the whole spread. In fact, a painter friend on first looking at #3 exclaimed, 'That's not abstraction, it's a pile of leaf litter'! I wasn't bothered by her imaginative response to my abstract painting.



Fig. 31. *Streaming #3* detail

Arthur Zajonc, writing about Goethe's inclusive understanding of perception, argues that

Goethe's method requires a reciprocal enhancement of both natural phenomena and the observing mind. It all begins with wonder . . .¹⁸

Through careful study of illusory experience,

we gain a glimpse of the character of sight, and of the 'ideal,' imaginative power active within it.¹⁹

Zajonc agrees with Goethe's view that each human being is continuously engaging in a process of self-formation. For instance, the ability to see natural patterns in the multiplicity of phenomena is a capacity that is not given at birth, but develops throughout life. He points out that all people, including scientists, rely on a kind of 'seeing' that is apart from analytical reasoning; a capacity for insight that an individual who is schooled through thoughtful experience, may see, while

others, staring at the same phenomena, may never see.

He suggests that,

¹⁸ op. cit. Zajonc, *Catching the Light*, 211-212.

¹⁹Ibid., 198.

not by analytical reasoning alone, are nature's essential patterns discerned and scientific discoveries made.²⁰

People in all walks of life, including artists, have a propensity to enquire into the detail of a particular phenomenon. Any person willing to see and empathise with natural phenomena, for instance, on looking at a tree, might feel the experience and imagine connections that stretch way beyond scientific analysis. Zajonc writes:

Physics may say that this is all a complex electro-magnetic interaction among neighboring cellulose molecules, water, their constituent atoms, and light, but we see neither light waves nor atoms; we see, hear, smell, and feel trees and rainbows. They and we are the familiar objects of consciousness. We care for such things, and to such common things we are willing to give ourselves.²¹

He continues:

Goethe considered the realms of thinking and perceiving as interpenetrating. Perceiving is at once outside and at the center of thinking, and thinking likewise passes through the heart of seeing, and surrounds it.²²

Looking into one of these *Streaming* paintings, its density and texture will be illuminated according to the angle of light between a viewer's body and the painting surface. Gazing across the painting, the eyes will automatically adjust focus to the varied stimuli of colours and shapes within the surface. I invite this sensory and tangible kind of viewing.

²⁰ Ibid., p.204.

²¹ Ibid., p.182-3.

²² Ibid., p.213.



Fig. 32. *Streaming #7* detail

On the one hand, the materials in a *Streaming* painting will not shift, while these paintings will appear mutable according to how one sees them. From an experiential way of seeing, nothing appears flat and nothing is static. Seeing onto surfaces and into spaces, I experience the effects of light on the rods and cones of my eyes, and their automatic signals transferred through the optic nerve into the brain. My intention, in the way I construct these paintings, is to encourage expansive and empathic experiences of seeing. At the same time, I build stability into construction for contemplative viewing.

I realize how much a painting can mirror the extent of one's attention to its making, both consciously and unconsciously, and how content may become empathically projective. Juhani Pallasmaa refers to occasions when we project our emotions into an artwork. He writes:

A curious exchange takes place; we lend the work our emotions . . . [and] Eventually, we meet ourselves in the work.²³

I recognize in Pallasmaa's writing, observations and experiences that have guided my practice. He makes the important point that:

Peripheral vision integrates us with space, while focused vision pushes us out of the space, making us mere spectators.²⁴

²³ Op. cit., Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 66.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 13.

Connectivity :

The coming-into-being of one of these painting, both as a sensory and an analytical experience, relies on coordination of the material components. I am interested in dimensional coherence in embedded pattern structures that encourage visual correspondences and internal reflection. Depth of field in one of my paintings emerges out of an understanding of object relations and attention to underlying consistency amongst the parts, however strange the outcome might appear to linear logic.



Fig. 33. *Streaming #2* detail

With or without a central motif, there is always symmetry with asymmetry in the fragment spreads. My employment of fragments in cross-layers, re-invents and complements Henri Bortoft's description of the 'organising idea' to embody condensations of meaning.²⁵

Historically, there have been few published Modernist women painters whose work conveys a sensibility that is in sympathy with my way of constructing a painting. With Agnes Martin, for instance, I could see a very particular way of

²⁵ Henri Bortoft, "Introduction" & Chapter 2 : "The Organizing Idea in Cognitive Perception", in *The Wholeness of Nature. Goethe's Way toward a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature*, (New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1996) 119-137.

working with materials, in principal not unlike the approach I take now, in so far as material construction is integral to image formation.

Martin offered her succinct view that,

The function of art work is the stimulation of sensibilities, the renewal of memories of moments of perfection.

She warned against stylistic absolutes, advising that

we must surrender the idea that this perfection that we see in the mind or before our eyes is obtainable or attainable. It is really far from us. We are no more capable of having it than the infant who tries to eat it. But our happiness lies in our moments of awareness of it. . .²⁶

I respect the resistant, yet positive way she locates herself as participator with her work in a state of becoming, and her description of those brief 'moments of perfection' when she knows that a painting, with all its fragmentary detail, has settled into balance. Martin's idea of the function of art was grounded in a timeless understanding of art that was meant to stimulate inspiration and awaken all the senses, both for the maker and a viewer. There is no indication of religious zeal in her words or her paintings, while a viewer might experience a sense of reverence for living things in the viewing.

Her prose poem, 'The Untroubled Mind', reveals Martin's thoughts oscillating between likeness of one thing to another and negation of both, a kind of Zen-like dissolution of ego by ego itself. She protests against absolutes. Her quest is for a kind of fullness with stillness; an experience of immediacy that just is and cannot be owned.²⁷ This text was transcribed by Martin's friend, Anne Wilson after conversations with Martin in the summer of 1972. Martin's thoughts reflect her ideas of Japanese and Chinese Buddhism alongside her homegrown, Plains Christian experience. I detect echoes in this poem, of her friendship with painter and scholar of Asian art, Ad Reinhardt, and the Trappist monk and writer, Thomas Merton, Reinhardt's lifelong friend and confidant. Martin was close to

²⁶ Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life", in *Agnes Martin : Writings / Schriften*, ed. Herausgegeben von Dieter Schwarz (Winterthur: Kunstmuseum Winterthur & Edition Cantz, 1992) 68-9.

²⁷ Op. cit., Martin, "The Untroubled Mind", 35-44.

Reinhardt, who supported her professional emergence. The way she expresses ideas also suggests the influence of Merton, who was interested in Buddhist philosophy at the end of his life.

Agnes Martin's paintings display a firm yet gentle optical vibration, tempered by her light touch with materials, so that the experience of 'seeing' is not induced by demonstrations of affect. Her paintings map out gridded spatial rhythms where the paint fabric itself imparts meaning. A viewer becomes aware that Martin is working out of stability and meditative quiet to sustain the logic of these sensorially active visual fields.

Her ability to build sensory allusions out of tactile immediacy, confirmed in my mind early on the association of bodily experience with practice. She combines an attitude of impersonal detachment, while the materials themselves appear 'active', resonating with associations that bringing to mind effects in the organic world. Catherine de Zegher describes this anomaly as,

the gap of pure perception, in which it may or may not be known. A cognitive mapping, the grid in Martin's work assumes the sensory domain of the mind – being of the drawing from – and the language of her associative titles comes to reconnect the unformed with the knowable. .²⁸

Martin refers indirectly to nature in the titles of paintings like *Rain*, or *Flower in the Wind*, or *Starlight*, while her writing states clearly that the paintings are 'anti-nature'. In fact, she preferred to regard them as 'classical'. In the sense that their horizontal/vertical order contains and supports graphic irregularities of surface detail and the paintings are minimalist in constructive terms, Martin's preference for the 'classical' association becomes clear. Amongst her mid-twentieth century critical milieu, she was clearly anxious to distance her paintings from representational associations, while she also directs attention to profound sources in nature that were her personal experience.

²⁸ Catherine de Zegher, *Abstract', 3 X Abstraction : New Methods of Drawing. Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Agnes Martin*, (New York: The Drawing Center, 2005) 24.

Immersive experience :

Landscape architect, Anne Whiston Spirn contends that people of all societies are shaped by landscape; it speaks to us as a form of language through which

the world is organized and living things behave. . . Living in such places one learns to read and tell landscape, to understand connections among seemingly unrelated phenomena . . .

Pointing out how necessary it is at this time to refresh our acquaintance with the landscape and the traditional language of nature, she continues:

Now is a time for telling new tales, for retelling old dilemmas: how to live in the world and preserve it; how to sustain tradition and foster invention; how to promote freedom and cultivate order; how to appreciate the parts and grasp the whole.

Whiston Spirn backs up her argument by quoting, amongst others, anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, who insisted that humans must learn to interpret Nature and the landscape according to how all living things are organized, not just as discrete objects, but in terms of dynamic relations, and

to practice the art of managing complex, living systems.²⁹

Comments like these resonate again and again with contemporary thinkers who are insisting that we redress our relationship with the natural environment.

²⁹ Anne Whiston Spirn, "One with Nature": Landscape, Language, Empathy, and Imagination", in *Landscape Theory*, eds Rachael Ziady DeLue & James Elkins, Vol. 6, The Art Seminar, (New York & London: Routledge, 2008) 60-2.



Fig. 34. *Streaming #5* detail

My own experience confirms that, just wandering in bushland without any particular expectation, I'm often led to experiences that bring to light fresh knowledge, especially if I'm taken by surprise when a situation interrupts familiar habit. In wilderness landscapes, I am within the environment and (nominally) separate in body, becoming viscerally responsive through the senses. The texture and smell of dry bark crackles under-foot, a glint of colours in a raindrop catches my eye, and leaves brush my hair as I walk beneath them. Unfamiliar colours and shapes glimpsed at the periphery of vision catch my attention. The stretch between the near and far of things comes closer to my sensing body. In response, my mind is alert and everything around appears animated as a limitless field in which I belong.

Eco-philosopher, David Abram, writing about immersion in wilderness environments, traces immediate circumstance into correspondence with expansive, philosophical themes. In the process, he illuminates how these tangible moments impress on the mind and inform understanding. His descriptions show subtle comparison with ways that knowledge gained through direct experience, can merge with physical content in a painting.³⁰

Abram's thesis is that we humans exist as part of a living field of matter that is animate and self-organising. For our individual health and the future of

³⁰ David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).

civilization, he warns that we should not retreat from nature into an abstract conception of reality; that personal integration and coherence is dependent on relationship and exchange with natural environments, as much as with our own kind. He writes:

We did not suspect that our instinctive awareness of the winds, the waters, and the soil under-foot provided the necessary ground for all those abstractions, the sole guarantee of their coherence. . . Vast in its analytic and inventive power, modern humanity is crippled by a fear of its own animality, and of the animate earth that sustains us.³¹

Being in natural landscapes and exposed to the elements, coaxes vulnerable feelings to the surface, calling the adaptable body and mind to attention and reflection. Abram does not contradict the need for rational analysis, while he argues for understanding moderated with sensory awareness, keeping us mindful of our humanity and essential fragility.

In the past two years I have participated in several field research trips with a group of artists from the School Art at ANU. These experiences have contributed fresh impetus to my work in the painting studio. I referred earlier in this chapter to an encounter with the source for the images that became the *Streaming* paintings, at a small pool below a waterfall. When I had finished looking into the pool and taking photographs, I crossed over the creek and followed a path uphill. At some distance from our campsite, I decided to turn off the track. It would be easy to get completely lost in this terrain, so I took note of individual tall trees. After walking for some time, I came out onto a spread of open grass. An antlered stag was standing motionless a couple of hundred yards away. I was wearing a crimson red jumper and it saw me first. It just stood there looking, and then it was gone. I moved forward cautiously, but the animal had vanished without any hint of disturbance. Some time later, turning back towards camp, and in no hurry, I decided to take a detour through a clump of bushes and came face to face with two does that leapt away at speed and disappeared.

³¹ Ibid., 67.

After a long day on the road, I had spent most of the previous night in a half sleep, travelling through a continuous panorama of bush landscapes. In my sleeping vision a stag appeared, motionless in the distance. I woke momentarily and as usual, meditated on the significance of an appearance like this. By morning the image was forgotten.

Besides the fact that deer are real, the spectre conjured in my mind's eye, might be perceived as a metaphor for ways that signal ideas and images drop in and out of consciousness, often fleetingly. In wilderness surroundings, defenses against sensory bombardment in the contemporary world soften. Being in natural landscapes does this to me. The full-bodied effect, with heightened sensitivity equates with disciplines like yoga too. Being spacious and alert, perception expands. Unexpected metamorphoses occur, or an insight at the edge of awareness pops into view. When I try to focus it disappears, like the two does that leapt out and disappeared when I blundered into their thicket, or the stag that stared at me, then vanished. Abram writes:

. . . by describing the myriad things as unfolding, animate *beings*, we bring our language back into alignment with the ambiguous and provisional nature of sensory experience itself . . . We cannot experience any entity in its totality, because we are not pure, disembodied minds, but are palpable bodies with our own opacities and limits. We are in *and* of the world, materially embedded . . . and so can come to knowledge only laterally, by crossing paths with other entities and sometimes lingering.³²

Ambiguity is real in life experience, and so is precognition. The mind and the body in concert, must both make sense of and discriminate amongst ideas and substance. In the studio, making paintings, I can set up conditions where unpremeditated events occur. Perhaps not the spectre of an animal, as if from a dream, although sometimes I call a freshly completed painting, a 'little animal' when it appears animate. I perceive substance through colour upon colour, shape across shape, including these ever-present anomalies, resistant to absolutes that are for me the life in painting.

³² Ibid., 71



Fig. 35. *Streaming #6* detail



Plate 20. Liz Coats, *Streaming #1*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 21. Liz Coats, *Streaming #2*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 22. Liz Coats, *Streaming #3*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 23. Liz Coats, *Streaming #4*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 24. Liz Coats, *Streaming #5*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 25. Liz Coats, *Streaming #6*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm



Plate 26. Liz Coats, *Streaming #7*, 2011, acrylic media on canvas, 109.5 x 94 cm

CHAPTER THREE : 'Seeing' & 'Knowing'

My descriptions of making the *Organica* and *Streaming* paintings can be seen as a kind of modeling of philosopher of science, Henri Bortoft's description of an 'active' way of seeing and 'knowing' that addresses condensations of meaning.³³ For an artist like myself, whose paintings are abstract and non-representational, active engagement is about facilitating convergences of materials that will influence the configuration of the whole, developing image. I watch interactions amongst the materials and colours, looking for ways to enhance colour vitality and to increase dimensional impact without compression of the parts. By staging my interventions in the form of single colour layers, with partial shape differentiation in the overlaps, I can see into the constructive process as each application of liquid paint interacts with the paint already laid down.

Without referring to painting, Henri Bortoft distinguishes his interpretation of a composite object from one that begins by defining it. He outlines a dynamic, proactive way of observing the coming-into-being of objects and how they can be distinguished through relations between the parts. He describes this way of seeing things as 'the organizing idea'. He writes:

We take what we see in cognitive perception to be simply material objects which we encounter directly through the senses. But what we take to be material objects are really condensations of meaning.

Bortoft continues:

When we miss the dimension of mind in cognitive perception, we inevitably mistake the nature of ideas. Instead of beginning with the role of the organizing idea which is active in cognitive perception we think of

³³ While a graduate student of quantum physics, Henri Bortoft (1938 -) was introduced to an understanding of wholeness by physicist, David Bohm. Bortoft's interest in processes of cognition and the history of science, lead to his lifelong interest in Goethe's perceptual discoveries, challenging orthodox science. Bortoft proposes an holistic way of seeing objects through active, sensory experience, wherein inter-relatedness is already present in all the parts (or fragments) and each part reveals a different aspect of the whole.

an idea as a mental picture, an image, drawn off or abstracted from our experience . . . ³⁴

Looking into an abstract painting, without narrative or identifiable objects to locate for interpretation, one's regular habit of image recognition has broken down. In my paintings, the shapes that make up the image have been put together so that one perceives a connective whole through relations amongst the parts. The effort and discovery that this entails, where the eyes work to join the 'dots', both across the surface and into the network in depth, draws one into the image.

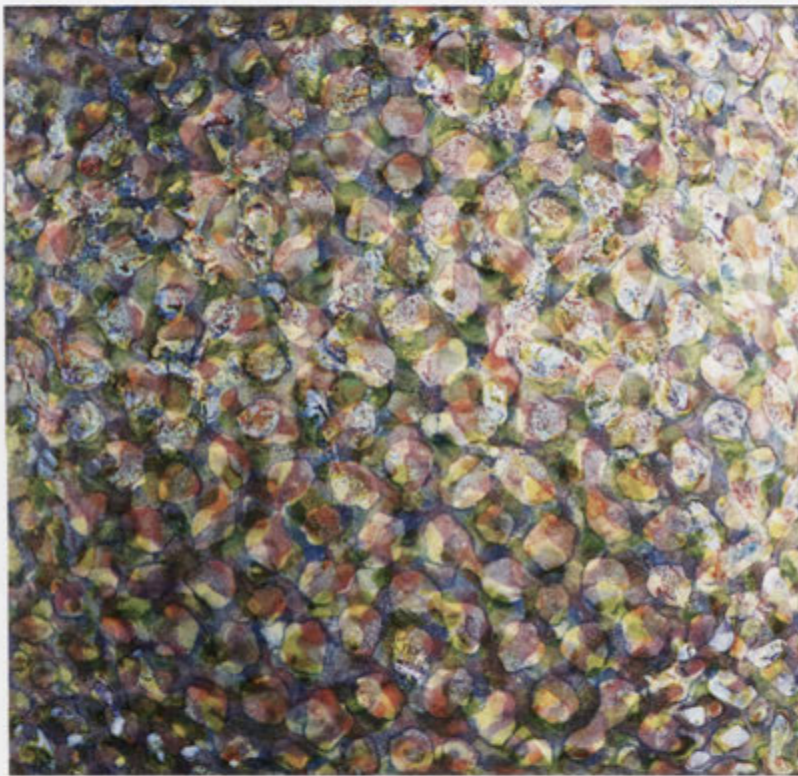


Fig. 36. *Organica #10*, 2011.

Bortoft proposes that growth in understanding can happen more often when a viewpoint meets resistance, or indeed an intuitive reaction needs to be more clearly understood through testing in practice. He suggests that if we take this as a condition to be worked with, one's understanding can be enhanced. He makes the point that Goethe's description of the activity of 'seeing' was widely rejected by the scientific community of his time because he contradicted Isaac Newton's accepted analysis of colour perception. Spurred on by his conviction,

³⁴ Op. cit., Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*, 131-2.

and grounded in experimental observations, Goethe proceeded to describe an alternative approach to direct and active observation. Examining the history of progress in scientific analysis, he came to the conclusion that it is the way of conceiving outcomes that will influence what is seen. He realized that this was why his approach to colour perception was so readily misunderstood and rejected by the scientific community of his day. Until as recently as the 1960s, when the intrinsic historicity of science began to be generally recognized, any account of cognitive perception conceived as a self-entity, was an account that began from the final phase of the process of cognition.³⁵

As Bortoft points out,

. . . we ourselves are part of the process of cognition. We are participants, and not onlookers outside of the process. But also the way that we are participants in the process of cognition is not quite how we imagine it to be. We are participants in a dynamic and genetic way, not in a static and finished way. The inner dynamic of the process of cognition is also an inner dynamic in the process of the self. What this means is that the “self-entity” itself emerges *from* the process of cognition and is not there *as such* beforehand.³⁶

There are important moments in painting activity when I observe cohesion and shape formation that enhances image formation amongst the liquid colour media. Participating with the process, I set up interactions and then do not interfere. As the paint dries, I can watch and learn from what is happening amongst the materials themselves. Not knowing in advance if the most recent addition of paint will enhance colour vitality or sink into the density of the colour spread is worth the uncertainty because, in this way, I can watch and understand the results of my actions and discover new ways to facilitate these interactions. In the *Organica* paintings, fractal-like junctures have emerged at the meeting between two liquid colours. By preparing an uneven painting ‘ground’ that also embeds the shape formation, colour applications will adhere unevenly to the surface. Degrees of transparency and opacity, gloss or matte

³⁵ Ibid., p.124.

³⁶ Ibid, p.123.

surface, adhesion and liquidity, all contribute to structural separation and the visual effect of each paint layer.



Fig. 37. Detail of *Organica* #10, 2011

The illustration below, from Bortoft's book³⁷, shows some similarity with the balancing of shapes and spaces in the fragment templates that I set up for colour distribution in the *Organica* paintings. Dispersal of shapes in the *Streaming* paintings similarly achieve cohesion through their spacing. These fragmentary arrays compare with Bortoft's explanation of how much more there is to know about seeing and cognition, when we seek to join the shapes and gaps between, and in so doing become immersed in active seeing. This also explains how a viewer, on seeing one of the *Streaming* paintings, might imagine it to be a spread of organic shapes.

³⁷ Ibid., p.50



Fig.38. Jackie Bortoft, design of giraffe's head in foliage, ca.1966

The giraffe diagram presents an array of irregular black shapes and associated spaces between. The eyes engage immediately with the sensory aspect of seeing into this apparently chaotic spread. I begin by seeing a collection of fragments, and slowly, as I connect the shapes with their spacing, I become aware that I am looking at a giraffe's head amongst foliage. Bortoft makes the important point that the parts in the image do not shift physically as I distinguish the giraffe shape. I know it to be a giraffe once I have sorted out the parts. I begin to recognise the shaping order with the aid of prior knowledge about what I know a giraffe's head looks like. While I see a design that represents a giraffe, it is not a live beast. The shift in cognition that occurs between the set of irregular black shapes and white spaces, and my recognition of the giraffe head, makes the experience vivid and intelligible.

Bortoft argues that,

The *way* of seeing and *what* is seen cannot be separated – they are two poles of the cognitive experience.³⁸

This is a useful distinction for an abstract painter like myself. I am not seeing a mental picture or an image that is being projected, as this would be to think backwards (as Goethe realized when he knew that Isaac Newton was mistaken).

³⁸ Ibid., 124.

What I am seeing immediately are just static black marks on a piece of paper, and I actively sort them into a recognizable image. Juhani Pallasmaa's 'curious exchange' is now explained in functional detail.³⁹

Bortoft's description of seeing an image shift from one thing to another is the kind of active visual experience in painting that interests me. An abstract painting can become many things as the cognitive mind sifts through the visual array. The phenomenon that I am describing needs to be recognized in its functional detail before ways of facilitating these occurrences can be realized in painting activity. I set up conditions where these possibilities may arise, although I do not control the effect, since to do so would simply be to produce an image that proves a readymade principle.



Fig 39: *Streaming #2*, detail.

From my point of view as the maker of the *Organica* and *Streaming* paintings, separating each colour into fragments and individual layers within the geometric framework, extends the relational capacity of all the colours and enhances their visual potential. This approach agrees with the way Bortoft describes 'wholeness' when it is present in all the parts. In these paintings, one's regular habit of image recognition is broken down. The shapes that make up the image have been organized to increase colour variety, with depth and movement, so

³⁹ Op. cit., Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 66.

that the parts need to be actively comprehended to perceive the whole. This is an experience of viewing that contributes to what an 'organic' abstract painting can be. Facilitating these outcomes is an experience of discovery for me too!

Shifting gaze between outlines and volumes has always been exploited by artists; with relaxation, spontaneous visual adjustments enable further spatial extensions. We do this all the time in visual play with shapes that we already know and recognize.

The difference between sensory input and recognition is difficult to disassemble for the purpose of understanding their function. Bortoft explains this through the experience of 'seeing' the black scatter of fragments in the giraffe drawing. 'Seeing' in this way requires a qualitative shift to distinguish certain shapes from others of a different image value. Bortoft calls this the 'organizing idea'. He describes 'organizing' as the non-sensory factor; it is thinking in 'the mode of coming-into-being', and 'an idea which organizes the sensory stimulus into *seeing* . . . ' This is an 'active' idea, it is not an analysis of appearance.⁴⁰

Bortoft sounds a caution that would be relevant if I tried to illustrate a particular sensation while walking in the bush. I have referred previously to approaching painting construction from the inside out. If I tried to incorporate a sensation from memory directly into one of my paintings, I would become self-consciously absorbed with describing an intangible memory. I would most likely lose contact with the construction of material relations that are essential for image articulation. He writes:

We don't *experience* the sensory factor separately as such, nor do we experience the organizing factor separately as such.[That would be a false dualism.] The *experience* which is cognitive perception is the coalescence of the organizing idea with the sensory factor. . . This coalescence is the experience of *meaning*.⁴¹

While this description underlines my understanding of the interplay of experiential understanding and constructive analysis in abstract painting,

⁴⁰ Ibid. 127-8.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.131.

Bortoft's understanding of perception also suggests to my mind, close parallels with the Russian avant-garde artists, Mikhail Matyushin, who recognized with great clarity how direct seeing before analysis could affect colour relations when transferred to paint. I will address Matyushin's ideas and practice in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR : Mikhail Matyushin and organic painting

A significant aspect of this Ph.D. research is an enquiry into the art and ideas of the Russian avant-garde painter, musician, theorist and teacher, Mikhail Matyushin (1861-1934), who lived and worked in St. Petersburg⁴² in the early decades of the 20th century. Although my paintings are constructed very differently from Matyushin's, I am in sympathy with his organic understanding of perception. The title of the *Organica* paintings acknowledges my interest in his work.

Opportunities to examine Matyushin's work in detail have contributed a sense of historical continuity to some of the more difficult aspects of my experiments with abstract painting. Unraveling Matyushin's ideas through articles and translations of his writing and opportunities to see his paintings in museum storerooms in Northern Greece and Russia during the Ph.D. program, has encouraged me in the articulation of significance in this account of my own studio practice.



Fig. 40. Kasimir Malevich, *Portrait of Mikhail Matyushin*, 1913, oil on canvas, 106.5 x 106.5 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

⁴² In 1914 the name of the city of St. Petersburg was changed to Petrograd, in 1924 to Leningrad, and in 1991 back to St. Petersburg. To save confusion, I will refer to St. Petersburg throughout this text.

Matyushin was a leading interpreter of the organic trend in painting amongst Russian avant-garde artists during the early decades of the twentieth century. He was also a loyal friend and colleague of Kasimir Malevich, collaborating with him and Alexei Kruchenykh on the futurist opera, *Victory Over the Sun* in 1913.



Fig. 41. Mikhail Matyushin, Kasimir Malevich and Alexei Kruchenykh, August 1913. Kruchenykh holds the cover design for his essay, 'The Three', containing the word *zaum* for the first time.

Writing about the opera in 1914, Matyushin explained the goals of contemporary Russian art. How he and his two colleagues were seeking for

complete displacement of planes, displacement of visual relationships, introduction of new concepts of relief and weight, dynamics of form and color.⁴³

Their experiments with language led to the concept of *zaum* (zero or nothingness) that Malevich in particular carried forward in the development of Suprematism. *Zaum* was not an end in itself, however. It was conceived as a pivot for renewal, brimming with creative possibilities that Matyushin also experimented with.

⁴³ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) 273.

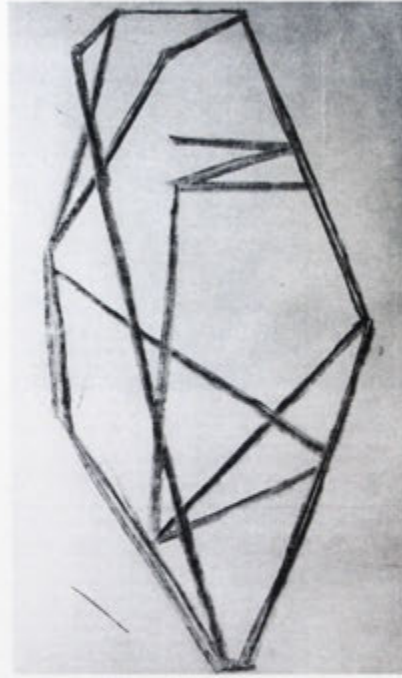


Fig. 42. Mikhail Matyushin, Sketch for Self-Portrait 'Crystal', 1914, charcoal on paper, Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg. I suggest that the 'z' formation near the top, right-hand edge of the drawing, refers to *zaum*.

Matyushin owned a Suprematist painting by Malevich, with a curious title that indicates Malevich's intention for meaningful content in his Suprematist imagery. Paintings like this must have confused, even infuriated many of Malevich's colleagues.



Fig. 43. Kasimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Peasant woman in Two Dimensions, called Red Square*, 1915, oil on canvas, 40.2 x 30.1 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation.

Charlotte Douglas has commented on the

ironic quirk of history that much of the work of the Russian avant-garde became defined as “formalist” because the “fit” was so good between the works of art and the structural principles with which they were analyzed.⁴⁴

In fact the individual studies of Matyushin and his artist colleagues, while they rejected established social, religious and political traditions of their time, made it imperative to reinvent their world as a healthy, functional entity, ideally inclusive of all humanity, the environment – and the cosmos. As Douglas put it, events leading up to, and including the October Revolution of 1917, amplified for the avant-garde artists, writers and musicians of St. Petersburg and Moscow,

a sense of being “children of space”, of being far and afloat but nevertheless connected with all of nature . . .⁴⁵

Like artists in many parts of Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century, Russian avant-garde artists, writers and musicians were avidly seeking information about new developments in science, from crystallography and x-rays, to the substance of matter and energy in physics; the use of glass in architecture, bringing the outside inside and vice versa; while developments in psychology and physiology were increasingly understood in relation to the function of cognition and vision. Metaphysical ideas from East and West were brought into comparative view alongside popular acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution and Russian neovitalism. Matyushin was in contact with Theosophical ideas for a time, and became acquainted with Pyotr Ouspensky in 1912, introducing him to Malevich. Matyushin was also aware of the teachings of the Indian yogi, Swami Vivekananda, and saw reason to meditate with his students to concentrate the flow of ideas in their work.

This search for common links between art and science within the conditions of the revolutionary social environment, instigated

⁴⁴ Charlotte Douglas, “Evolution and the biological metaphor in modern Russian art”, *Art Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Summer (1984) 159-160.

⁴⁵ Charlotte Douglas, “The Universe Inside Out : New Translations of Matyushin and Filonov”, *The Structurist*, No. 15/16, (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1975/6) 72.

a shift in the focus in art from the end result - a completed picture of a static object - to the object in flux and the very process of making . . . ⁴⁶



Fig. 44. Mikhail Matyushin, *Self-Portrait 'Crystal'*, 1917, oil on canvas, 70 x 37.3 cm. Ludwig Museum, Cologne. Formerly in the collection of Alla Povelikhina, St. Petersburg.

Fig. 45. Mikhail Matyushin, *Self-Portrait "Crystal"*, ca. 1919, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 40.5 cm

Matyushin has sometimes been described as a Cubo-Futurist. During the late 1910s he experimented with a small group of unique crystalline and cubic self-portraits, linking the spatial experiments of French Cubism with symbolic references to the permeable human body and transparent faceting in crystals. He soon reached the view, however, that the angular construction and limited colour range of French Analytical Cubism was too mechanical and the Italian Futurists were overly concerned with the appearance of individual objects in their paintings.

⁴⁶ Op. cit., Douglas, "Evolution and the biological metaphor", 153.

He often borrowed ideas from science, while resisting models with an authoritarian construction. In his mind, Darwinian evolutionary science seemed to support a dynamic vision of nature, both organic and inorganic, in continuous evolution. As Douglas has noted,

. . . the biological paradigm had the advantage of combining a well-developed, objective, and scientific system with the immediacy and inconclusiveness of living nature.⁴⁷



Fig. 46. Mikhail Matyushin, *Abstract Composition*, 1920s, watercolour on paper, 30.1 x 30.6 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation.

Matyushin insisted that however radical one's insights and knowledge about content and structure in painting might be, it is wise to consider that our minds and bodies are also part of nature. He was looking for ways to encompass a view of nature that was inclusive. The paintings made in the landscape were not direct copies from nature, nor did he see them as abstractions from nature. He promoted a 'new spatial realism' that grew from observations of colour relations and interpretation of what he described as hidden connections amongst living things.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Douglas, 153.



Fig. 47. Mikhail Matyushin, *Abstract Composition*, ca. 1917, oil on canvas on wood, 37.7 x 64.4 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation.

Belief in the primacy of nature may appear at first glance to be a renewal of the nineteenth century Romantic tradition, while the land as the sacred heritage of all Russians was built into Matyushin's way of thinking. In artistic practice, Matyushin's intention was to 'see' through structures to their internal laws. Convinced that the world is phenomenal and reality is mutable, he advised artists to

move from the surface of the picture to a volumetrical, tactile and colorific construction . . . [because the essence of life] is stretching, protruding, splitting, spinning, receding into the distance and, above all, connecting so miraculously with its environment.⁴⁸

Following from the Darwinian evolutionary model and his personal experiences with perception, Matyushin promoted the view that each person had the inherent capacity for expanding vision. With exercises to increase the sensitivity of the outer edges of the retina, he predicted that it would be possible to extend vision through one-hundred-and-eighty degrees, and to eventually see through the entire three-hundred-and-sixty degrees of the human body simultaneously. Seeing through the whole circumference of the body in this way, involved

⁴⁸ Mikhail Matyushin, "An Artist's Creative Path", (1934) trans. John W. Bowlit, in Alla Povelikhina, "Matyushin's Spatial System", *The Structurist*, No. 15/16, (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1975/1976) 70.

opening up dormant sensory reflexes, from the soles of the feet, through the back of the neck, to the top of the head, likening this to the way a single cell grows through extension in all directions at once. He predicted that, with enduring effort in meditation and with exercises, artists would eventually be able to see into synchronous colour and form where all things are made visible, and to paint 'landscapes from all points of view'.⁴⁹



Fig. 48. Mikhail Matyushin, *Untitled*, 1920s, oil on canvas, 40.3 x 50.3 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Khardzhiev-Chaga Cultural Foundation

Matyushin's belief in human potential for perceiving the multi-dimensional world made sense, considering the effects of growth and seasonal change in nature to be a continuous and ever-changing cycle of movement. Moreover, he had observed how the physiology of the eyes influenced perception. On viewing paintings by Cezanne in a private collection in Moscow, he quickly recognized Cezanne's breakthrough ability to present a factual and perceptual view of the spatial surround. The year after Albert Gleize and Jean Metzinger published *Du Cubisme*, he published a Russian version, liberally expanding on the French artists' representation of space, with his own views on the fourth dimension.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Alla. A. Povelikhina, "Matyushin's Anthropologism : The ZOR-VED System in the Perception of Nature", *Organica : The Non-Objective World of Nature in the Russian Avant Garde of the 20th Century* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1999) 43-7.

⁵⁰ Mikhail Matyushin, "Of the Book by Gleizes and Metzinger *Du Cubisme*", trans. L.D. Henderson, in Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*. Appendix C, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) 368-375. The essay was originally published, St. Petersburg, 10 March 1913, in the third issue of the *Union of Youth* journal.

Like his artist colleagues, he considered it essential to re-frame cultural references from abroad, in the Russian context.

Cezanne's late paintings showed how spatial relations of one thing to another could be connected through his brush method, and how the colour marks, as he applied them, began to conform to a concentric viewpoint. In a letter to Emile Bernard, Cezanne had recorded his observation that vision reached a culminating point, meeting with objects

closest to our eye[s] focus, while] the edges of . . . objects flee towards a centre on our horizon.⁵¹

Matyushin identified with Cezanne's understanding that perception is bound up in a kind of continuous transformation. This made sense according to Matyushin's understanding of the new general relativity theory of curved space/time that could be envisaged in practical terms for painting.



Fig. 49. Mikhail Matyushin, *Landscape (Penetration of the Sphere)*, 1921, watercolour on paper, 50 x 42.5 cm. Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg.

A curious aspect of image formation that has shown up in my *Organica* paintings, more obvious in some than in others, is the manner in which the colour shapes appear to curve around the outer edges of the frame. This has

⁵¹ Paul Cezanne, "Letter to Emile Bernard, Aix, 25 July, 1904", in *Paul Cezanne Letters*, trans. Marguerite Kay, ed. John Rewald (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 5th edition, 1976) 305-6.

happened because individual shapes in the pentagonal templates decrease in size from the centre of the image, and the shapes themselves have rounded contours. There is, however, enough surface detail across the painting plane for simultaneous visual contact with the whole surface.

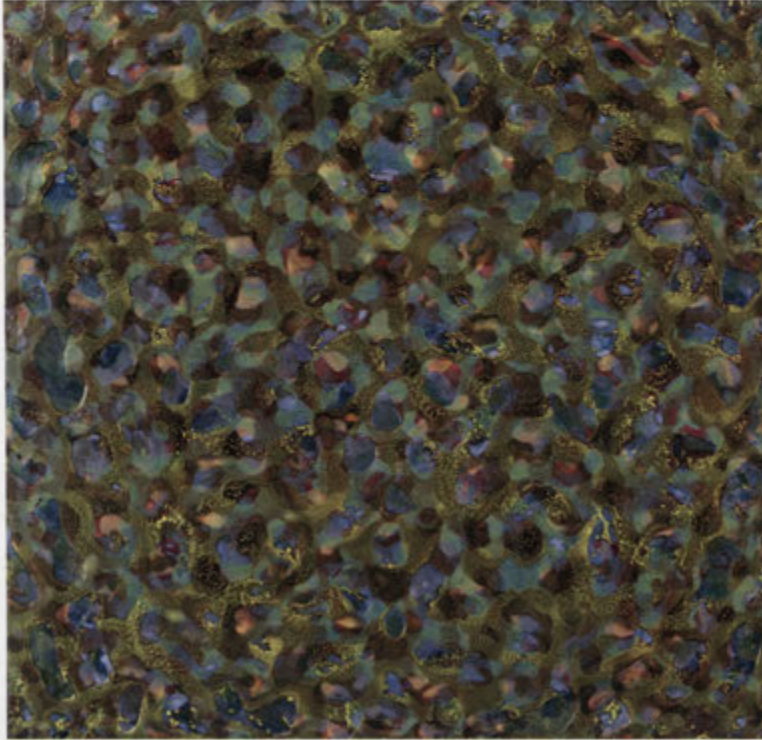


Fig. 50. Liz Coats, *Organica #3*, 2010, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm.

Working with multiple overlays of colour fragments, my purpose is to ensure connective links amongst all the parts, just enough to secure awareness of stability in the colour placements. Like Matyushin, I am interested in presenting colours as fragments, to create linked formations that attract the eyes' gaze around and into spreads of colour. Perception does this, as one is led into active viewing. Like him, I am also interested in satisfying interpretation at a direct, sensory level. My paintings do not remain still to the gaze. (see Chapter 3, 'Seeing' and 'Knowing').

In an essay of 1926, Matyushin recorded a visual exercise where a person, concentrating on two, spaced objects simultaneously, will discover more clearly how vision functions for depth and breadth. For instance, by directing one eye to the wall of the room, and the other through a window, one is exercising the

rods at the periphery of vision, and the walls and partitions of the room will seem like continuous films of visibility.⁵²

In another exercise, Matyushin described making paintings with the left and right hands simultaneously. He claimed that bringing the two-sidedness of the body into functional correspondence by working with both hands at once, his colour studies became more 'spatially saturated' and 'richer in motion'. His description sounds like a kind of stereoscopic viewing; or at least, being conscious of the two eyes' physiological convergence, so that the spatial dimensions of a shape become visible. He wrote:

One must watch strictly that both hands move within the field of view which is quietly in the center of the gaze. The eye should not follow one hand or the other at any time. It sees them moving *simultaneously*. The technique of the left hand will be acquired quickly and the whole general body of the picture will become surprisingly alive and whole.

He points out, that without fixidity,

the eye looking objectively . . . does not see any details and does not pulverize objectness, it sees everything saturated by the full and ideally whole.⁵³

With directions like this, I begin to understand Matyushin's references to training perception for expansive viewing. As I build layers of colour shapes into a painting, I need to sustain connections between all the parts. Rather than working with both hands at once as he suggests, I delegate shape cohesion to the silk-screen templates, and apply each colour as a single action that also embeds the spatial framework. As the transparent layers of colour increase, shape coordinates in each colour layer lose edge definition while retaining chromatic variation. The colours begin to fluctuate within the continuum. Visual focus needs to be guided at the beginning, and as one becomes absorbed in the gaze, seeing through the whole array is effected with soft focus.

⁵² Mikhail Matyushin, "An Artist's Experience of the New Space" (1926), trans. Charlotte Douglas, *The Structurist*, No. 15/16, (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1975/1976) 76.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 76.



Fig. 51. Liz Coats, *Organica #4*, 2010-11, acrylic media on board, 74 x 76 cm.

In Chapter 3, where I outline Henri Bortoft's analysis of active and participatory seeing in extension from the Goethean model, Bortoft sheds light on how scatters of detail are drawn into correspondence in the activity of 'seeing'.⁵⁴

Although I have not located any direct reference to Goethe's ideas in English translations of Matyushin's writing, he and his colleagues were receptive to German philosophy and science. Goethe's writings, including his experiential approach to colour perception, had become widely known through primary sources and newspaper articles amongst the Russian intelligentsia by the middle of the 19th century.⁵⁵

Matyushin's description of the two hands acting in unison with the eyes' function is an interesting reflection on the symmetry component in cognition. Although I haven't followed these experiments as he describes them, I have a keen awareness of how combined forces of symmetry and asymmetry affect all conditions of life. The initial scattered appearance of colours in the *Organica*

⁵⁴ Op.cit., Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., Douglas, "Evolution and the biological metaphor".

paintings contain many details of asymmetry, while symmetry coordinates form a network of links at every level.

Matyushin was an accomplished violinist as well as a painter, and in this respect he was experienced in ways that creative activity becomes more 'spatially saturated' and 'richer in motion' while working with two hands.⁵⁶

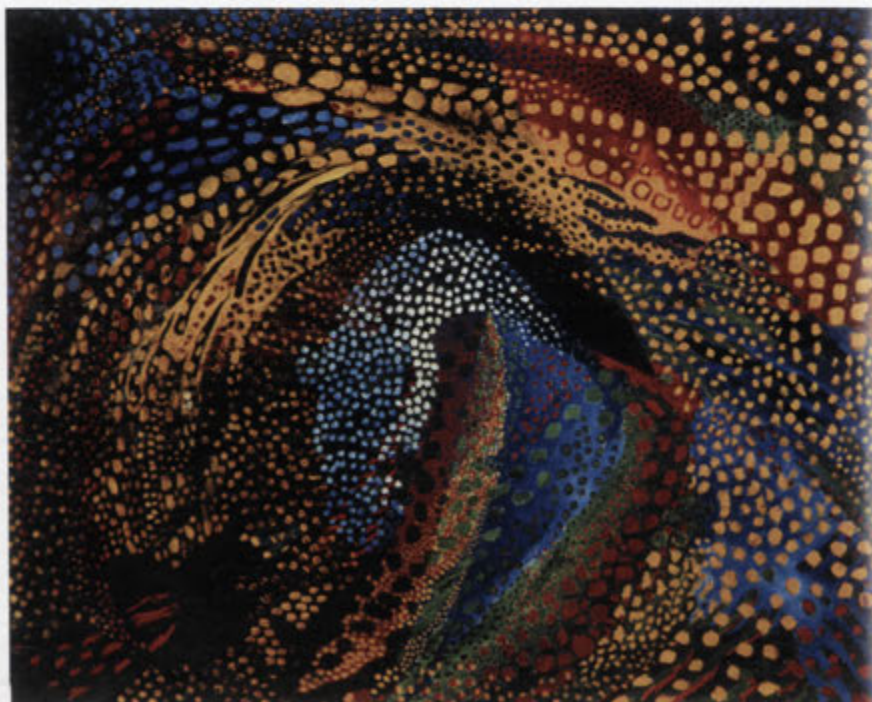


Fig. 52. Mikhail Matyushin, *Painterly Musical Abstraction*, 1918, gouache on cardboard, 51 x 63 cm. Thessaloniki State Museum of Contemporary Art, George Costakis collection.

Painterly Musical Abstraction and its companion painting, were the first paintings I saw by Matyushin 'in the flesh', although I have been interested in his work for many years. In September 2009, I received fieldwork funding from the ANU University to visit half of the original George Costakis collection now in the Thessaloniki State Museum of Contemporary Art, in Northern Greece.

Although the painting is quite small, the coordination of colour fragments is spatially complex and energetic, and it was most likely made while listening to music. Matyushin emphasised connections between sound and colour vibration and he and his students carried out many experiments with colour and sound in the Organic studio. While I have no details of the circumstances in which

⁵⁶ Op. cit., Mikhail Matyushin, "An Artist's Experience of the New Space", 76.

Painterly Musical Abstraction and its companion painting were made, apart from their title and date, there is a similar, if less complex painting composed with colour fragments and made by Ksenia Ender, suggesting that these paintings were made at the same time.

Linked strands of small dots and patches of colour appear out of a darker colour field and curve through the centre of the picture, spreading towards the edges of the frame. Divisions in the contrasting under-layers, map out the compositional volume, giving luminosity and directional impetus to the colour dots.

The painting slowly and surely draws one into its spatial articulation. With its modest proportions and relatively impermanent materials, it remains a fine example of Matyushin's synaesthetic ability to render colour/spatial sensations in paint. Experience as a musician no doubt enhanced his ability to match chromatic colour extensions in fragments with sensations of volume and rolling sound. The arrangement of linked colour fragments bears some comparison with how I convey directional impetus in the *Streaming* paintings. They share an intention towards colour fluctuations within the stability of a coordinated framework.

I have learnt from Matyushin's example that the uncontrived 'organic' flavour of my recent paintings continues a thread in the history of abstract painting that seeks to integrate expressionist colour with coordinated shapes. Matyushin's respect for the natural environment, the perceptual immediacy of his colour experiments at a time of material scarcity, and his analytical approach to understanding perception, I acknowledge as a model of artistic conviction.

While organicist concerns in abstract painting have a history reaching back to the beginning of Modernist experimentation, the implications and potential have been largely subsumed within broad stylistic analysis, from Expressionism to Geometric Abstraction. Now there is a growing revival of interest in tracing organicist detail that underpins many individual artists' processes. Isabel Wunsche, a scholar of Matyushin studies, and Oliver Botar, have recently co-edited a book of essays surveying Biocentrism in Modernism. Their publication investigates ways that attitudes towards 'nature' have influenced early

modernist cultural practice, and have been of concern to individual artists up to the present. Considering painting practice to be a response to the times, the authors remind of present ecological dangers, and the central role of the life sciences, including genetics that are now in a position to define and control our lives.⁵⁷

The fourth dimension and Mikhail Matyushin's painting – *Movement of Colour in Space* :

Matyushin's thinking about expanding perception in the spatial surround, in depth and in breadth, was originally encouraged by the panvitalist interests of his first wife Elena Guro. Later, as he became interested in the spatial fourth dimension, he freely associated his conviction that the human body is inherently connected with all of space, with an art that would transcend historical contingency. He began to systematically test his observations in the landscape during the First World War at his dacha in Finland. Early in the morning and at dusk, he climbed Eagle Mountain to meditate on the 360-degree view and to observe the cyclical appearance of atmospheric colours. During the day he made sketches of these colour and spatial observations. Matyushin grew the conviction from this time that it was possible to significantly enhance one's senses of touch, hearing and sight by developing latent energies in the human body.

⁵⁷ Oliver A.I. Botar and Isabel Wunsche, eds, *Biocentrism and Modernism*, (Surrey, England & Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).



Fig. 53. Mikhail Matyushin, *Dream*, 1918-1919, oil on cardboard, 51 x 57 cm.

He was also coming to terms with the understanding that there is no such thing as a beginning, middle, or end to immersion in space, and how to express this dynamically and tangibly in painting. His speculations on four-dimensional space/time and its conflation with hyperspace philosophy and Indian yogic teaching was a paradoxical stance, since every angle of focus, from one moment to the next, offers a different experience. Matyushin's embrace of a four-dimensional perception of space is now familiar to artists who think about engagement in processes in time and space, while it appeared to the Russians as a revolutionary concept, as much as it was an inevitable consequence of their brief sense of freedom from traditional restraints.

Linda Dalrymple Henderson considers the four-dimensional understanding of time and space favoured by the Russian avant-garde to be more appropriately named 'hyperspace philosophy', 'an idealist, antipositivist stance', that originated in the mid-nineteenth century. She suggests this philosophical approach to space was only convincingly reconciled in the writings of the Russian philosopher and mystic, Pyotr Ouspensky, whom Matyushin had met in St Petersburg in 1912.⁵⁸ Ouspensky was associated with Theosophical groups

⁵⁸ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "The Merging of Time and Space": "The Fourth Dimension" in Russia from Ouspensky to Malevich", *The Structurist* No. 15/16 (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1975/1976) 97.

and was familiar with vedantic and yogic teachings popularized by the Swami Vivekananda. He gave well-attended public lectures in St. Petersburg and was known to visit the Stray Dog café, a meeting place for the avant-garde artists of St. Petersburg.

In *Tertium Organum*, published in Russia in 1911, Ouspensky presented his view of four-dimensional space, borrowing from Charles Howard Hinton's writing and illustrations published later by Claude Bragdon. Ouspensky wrote,

If a multi-colored cube passes through the plane, the plane being will perceive the entire cube and its motion as a change in color of lines lying on the plane.⁵⁹

Matyushin, interpreting Ouspensky, relates this reference to his personal understanding of the permeable body. It also agrees with his rejection of perspectival systems that, in his opinion, had deadened an artist's capacity to expand the periphery of vision, described by him as the 'flowing mass of interlinked parts.'⁶⁰

It should be noted that Matyushin remained keen to clarify vague and mystical ideas about art, and to formulate a new and revolutionary art with a precise and scientifically reasoned view of universal forces and invisible phenomena. He and his avant-garde colleagues soon distanced themselves from fashionable gatherings where occult practices were being investigated. Looking back from the 1920s, Matyushin made a point of separating his interest in the fourth dimension from occultism. He wrote:

Occultism strongly interfered in this matter, [i.e. the fourth dimension] it has now, fortunately, taken its way to Germany.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Pyotr Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum : The Third Canon of Thought, A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, trans. from 2nd ed., Claude Bragdon and Nicolas Bessaroff, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922) 24.

⁶⁰ Mikhail Matyushin, 'The New Spatial Realism. The Artist Experimenting in the Fourth Dimension', 1916-1920, trans. Tatyana A. Schmidt, in *Russian Avant-Garde 1910-1930 The G. Costakis Collection : Theory - Criticism*, ed. Anna Kafetsi, (Athens: The Ministry of Culture, National Gallery, Alexandros Soutzos Museum, & European Cultural Centre of Delphi, 1995) 593.

⁶¹ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983) Footnote 213: 293.

His writing about colour perception during the 1920s is full of references to physical, physiological and psychological principles, interests that he and his colleagues shared with the wider phenomenon of rising modernity in Europe and the US.⁶²

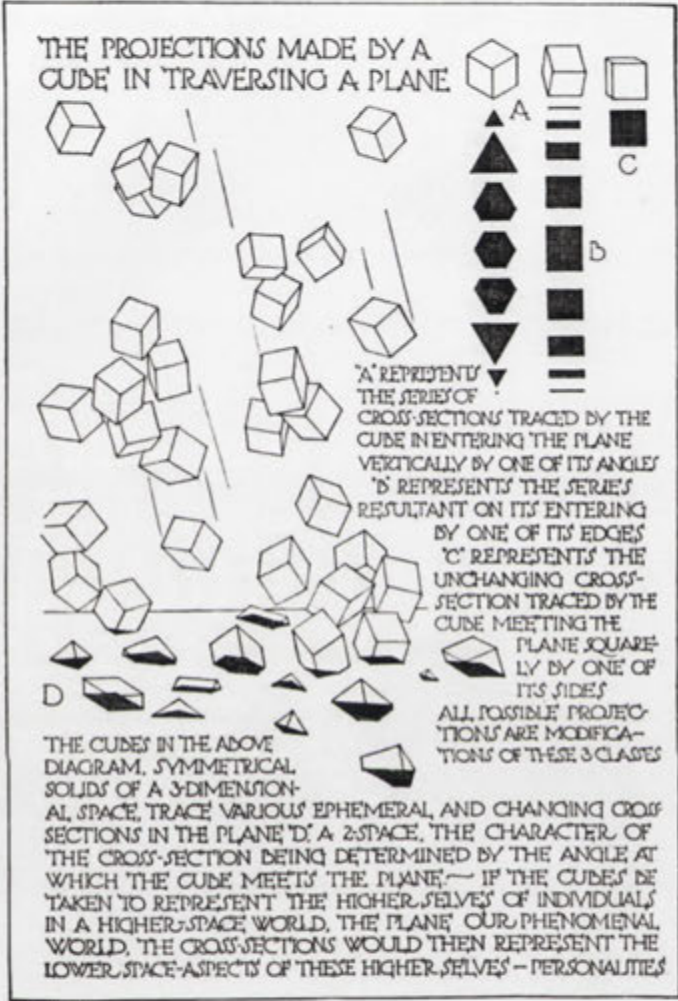


PLATE 30

Fig. 54. Claude Bragdon, Plate 30: 'The Projections made by a Cube in Traversing a Plane. A Primer of Higher Space. The Fourth Dimension to which is added Man The Square. A Higher Space, Parable, Andrew Dakers Limited, 1939.

How to align meaningful content with form is an issue that remains relevant to this day in abstract painting. (I have referred to Donald Kuspit's view of this subject in the Introduction). The sensory component that cannot be entirely dispensed with will always have a personal and psychological component,

⁶² Charlotte Douglas, "Light and Colours : Wilhelm Ostwald and the Russian Avant-Garde", in *Light and Colour in the Russian Avant-Garde. The Costakis Collection from the State Contemporary Art Thessaloniki*, ed. Miltiades Papanikolaou (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2004), 427.

causing many subsequent divisions in abstract debate. In my view, locating a perceptually vibrant, yet stable balance with shape and content can never be absolute or final. These contradictions are visible on close examination of Matyushin's most celebrated painting, *Movement of Colour in Space*, where strands, bands, or ribbons of colour, intended to be seen dimensionally and perpetually mobile, fashion a nexus in space/time.

* * * * *



Fig. 55. Mikhail Matyushin, *Movement of Colour in Space*, ca. 1917-1920, oil on canvas, 124 x 168 cm. Photo by Liz Coats in a storeroom of the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

The painting was in storage when I visited the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg in October 2010. Curator, Olga Musakova, pulled out the wire frame to show *Movement of Colour in Space*, and I could barely contain my excitement.⁶³

⁶³ *Movement of Colour in Space* was exhibited at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington in 1988, in an exhibition titled: "Russian and Soviet Paintings 1900-1930". Charlotte Douglas, *Art in America*, October (1988) 49-57. The painting was recognized as an important work of early Modernism, till then little known in the West. Variouslly dated between 1917 and 1920, Matyushin did not exhibited it until 1923 in the Organic Studio section of the exhibition at GINKhUK, 'Artists of All Tendencies', where it is documented in an installation photograph (see fig. 73). Concurrently, Matyushin published the ZOR-VED ('see-know') manifesto of the Organic Studio.

Racks of paintings filled one wall of a narrow upstairs room looking out onto the palace grounds. When I raised my camera to start taking photos, the shutter button would not function. Olga was amused and I noticed her commenting in Russian, perhaps not in an entirely complimentary manner, to her assistant. My thoughts raced from the consequences of elevated body energy to the vagaries of simultaneity. I needed to sit down for a moment, and was waved into the adjacent room, where I sank into a large, black leather couch. I saw then, that I was surrounded by late figure paintings and a black-on-white square by Kasimir Malevich, Matyushin's friend, resting on the floor against a wall, and hanging in twos and threes across the walls. In a moment of inspiration, I held up the camera and it clicked. It seems that I had almost been jinxed by a combination of daylight flooding the storeroom, and competing halogen lights close above the painting racks. Meantime, Olga had rushed off to find a restorative bar of dark Russian chocolate that she handed to me. Still a little shaky, I proceeded to take snapshots with one hand shading the lens.

There were language difficulties for both of us, while I understood that Olga was keen to emphasise looking rather than taking notes or photographs. She wanted me to understand that I was looking at colours that were physical approximations of 'live' colours experienced in the organic world. She pointed out that the Russian emphasis on 'faktura' (the material characteristics of how a painting is made that imbue meaning) is impossible to assess in illustration.

I noticed that the colours were less strident, the edges between each band of colour more blended, and the brushmarks more visible than illustrations I had seen. The reds in particular were softer, and the blues appeared with a lesser degree of vibrancy than pure cobalt or ultramarine pigment would suggest. I suspect that difficulty obtaining quality artist pigments was the reason for this, since the dating proposed, coincided with the October Revolution. I was told that the French paint company, then called Le Franc, had a shop in St Petersburg till 1917. As an artist, I could understand the intensity of Matyushin's search for colour reciprocity and vibrance, considering the scarcity of materials at his disposal. Olga insisted that the colours move. I noticed that the wider colour bands were interspersed with narrow colour strips that must surely be references to Matyushin's intermediary colour theory.

A linen or jute canvas support is visible at the edges of the painting. White paint covering the ground, top and bottom, appears faintly grey-beige rather than pure white, and I noticed specks of dust and grit. These 'white' areas appear to have been applied with a palette knife, showing raised texture, possibly to overcome low pigment density in the underlayer. There is evidence of over-painting with a better quality white oil paint. The painting is signed M.M. at the lower, right-hand corner.

Brushmarks are clearly visible in the wider colour bands, with some mixing of paint directly onto the surface. White paint blended into the colours of these wide bands makes them appear alternately concave or convex, a shaping device that Matyushin seems to be employing to indicate depth in space as well as directional movement. In 'An Artist's Experience of the New Space', describing the beauty of a landscape foreground that is entirely dependent on immersion in the colours of the whole spatial surround. He wrote,

When you see a fiery sunset and for a moment turn around into the deep blue-violet cold . . . you will recognize and sense that [both sides] act on you at once and not separately. In essence we never see otherwise, we just have not realized it up to now and we think that we see only half way round.⁶⁴

The narrow colour strips in *Movement of Colour in Space*, that suggest Matyushin experimenting with the intermediary colour theory to bind contrasting colours into continuous association, are painted with even, relatively flattened brushstrokes, with one exception. The third band from the top, in a colour that I have identified as alizarin red, merges with dark blue towards the upper right. This painterly device indicates movement from warm to cool, and signaling, as was Matyushin's intention, that the whole colour array comprises a spatial formation stretching towards infinity.

⁶⁴ Op. cit. Matyushin, "An Artist's Experience of the New Space" (1926) 74.

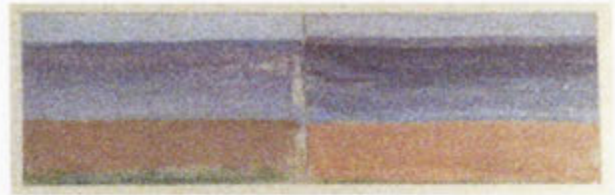


Fig. 56. Mikhail Matyushin, oil sketch on canvas, 1909, 15.5 x 34.5 cm.

Fig. 57. Mikhail Matyushin, tempera on canvas sketch, Gulf of Finland, 1909, Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg. Photo taken by Liz Coats at the Museum.

Several of the wider colour bands remind me of a group of small oil paint sketches on scraps of unstretched linen. Loosely expressed spreads of colour suggesting sand, sea and sky, that Matyushin painted at the Finnish coast, and dated to 1909. Simple colour notations for future work perhaps. I am thinking in particular of the orange/pink/yellow band of uneven spread, and again a blue/mauve/turquoise group of bands, below the yellow-ochre to earth-pink paint spread, divided by a narrow yellow strip.

Matyushin's paintings often seem transitional, neither entirely constructive nor expressionist, neither entirely figurative nor object-less⁶⁵, while containing elements of all of these. I accept the view of art historian, Alla Povelikhina, that Matyushin was not directly abstracting from nature in paintings like *Movement of Colour in Space*, while I have no doubt he was influenced by perceptual experiences originally realised in the environment. While the painting is outstandingly original for its time, the paint method contains illustrative shaping methods as well as conceptual organization.

* * * * *

How to communicate colours in painting as active and dimensional, and sensed organically, became central to Matyushin's activities as a teacher, writer and painter. His influence is clearly evident in the paintings of his students, in

⁶⁵ Charlotte Douglas has suggested "object-less" in preference to the term "non-objective". For the Russians. Douglas records that Kasimir Malevich, Mikhail Matyushin and Alexei Kruchenkh (who together created the 1913 opera, *Victory Over the Sun*), were largely responsible for introducing Russian avant-garde artists to the concept of the object-less world. She notes that the term "objectless" is an accurate translation of Malevich's (and Kandinsky's) word "bespredmetnyi". Translated into English in the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties, the word was both mistranslated and misinterpreted as non-objective, and became confused with 'subjective' for non-representational paintings. Charlotte Douglas, "Colors Without Objects: Russian Color Theories (1908-1932)", *The Structurist*, No. 13/14, (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1973/4), Footnote 1, p.40.

particular the watercolours of the Ender siblings, Maria, Boris, Zsenia and Jurii. By the mid-1920s, he and his students were expressing colour resonance in paint with an extraordinary degree of clarity.

With the hindsight of near on a hundred years of experiments with abstraction, I start with a constructive approach to perceptual inclusiveness, while Matyushin was more direct in his expression of colours for painting. My insights about colour, nevertheless, are sourced in perception of the infinite variety of colours in the surrounding environment.

* * * * *

In 2010, I joined a group of artists on a field research trip from the Australian National University to inland South Australia, travelling south for many hours across flat countryside. I was thinking about how to describe intuitive knowledge that contributes to art practice. Gazing out of the bus window and musing on sensations of stillness in motion, I began to think about Mikhail Matyushin, exploring ways to express the fourth dimension in his paintings. I remembered something he had written, and transcribe it here:

One has to try to see simultaneously everything moving. Then the secret connection of everything alive can be seen: individual motion, which seems headlong at first, will become objectively calm, wholly dependent on the general movement. That which was earlier completely separate, without any connection with what was visible – the automobile speeding along with its happy or bored passengers – with a wide angle of view momentarily loses this personal coloration and is fused into the chain of the visible aspects of one general movement. The usual understanding of speed is strangely destroyed, and the idea of relativity appears completely clear.⁶⁶

I could picture Matyushin sitting quietly in a railway carriage, looking through the window over long stretches of country on the way to the Gulf of Finland. When one's body is relaxed, the eyes tend to receive the view outside as a continuum of slightly blurred, horizontal bands of colour. The same phenomenon appears

⁶⁶ Op. cit., Matyushin, "An Artist's Experience of the New Space" (1926) 75

when taking a photo of moving objects without time lapse (and Matyushin was an avid photographer). For instance, a view of hedgerows, a grassy field and wheat, extending to a line of trees bordering a sky of washed cerulean, rising overhead to cobalt blue. The scene might appear as parallel strips, a bit like an abstract painting. I understood how Matyushin could connect an experience like this with binding concepts of time and motion in his most celebrated painting, *Movement of Colour in Space*. It made sense that simply gazing through the window in a fast-moving train, might combine with a sense of being participant in the moving world, even as the functioning body remains relatively stationary.

Seeing colour :

In a short biographical text, Matyushin recalled a time when he and Elena Guro were living and working together. He wrote:

. . . a startlingly beautiful luminous blueness floated by, surrounded by an amazingly dense lilac tone and the shadow of the bench seemed deeply violet. But as soon as I tried to fix what I saw into something stationary, the spell of the bewitching colours was brutally interrupted. I then understood: in order to achieve an animated colour impression one should never stare hard for a long time, and not accommodate the eyes to the colour, but pass by it and embrace it with a gliding glance – only then it is possible to achieve the most plentiful impression of a principal colour and its complementary. In looking this way, my glance unintentionally starts to embrace and widen its field of vision.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Margareta Tillberg, "Mikhail Matiushin and the Study of Colour", in *Light and Colour in the Russian Avant-Garde. The Costakis Collection from the State Museum of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki*, ed. Miltiades Papanikolaou, (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2004) 473.



Fig. 58. Elena Guro, *Landscape – Martyschkino*, 1905, oil on canvas, 24.8 x 23.8 cm. State Museum of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki, George Costakis Collection.

Vividly imagining himself sitting on a green bench at midday, surrounded by the sunlight and shadow colours of the garden, his words are reminiscent of Guro's painting illustrated here. Matyushin had met Elena Guro in the studio of Yan Tsioglinsky, and the intuitive Guro is believed to have encouraged his passion for nature as the teacher and guide to seeing into depth and breadth. After her untimely death from leukemia in 1913, he kept her memory alive for the rest of his life.



Fig. 59. Mikhail Matyushin, *Pine Trees in the Dunes*, 1910s, tempera and gouache on canvas and cardboard, 37.5 x 54 cm.

At this time, Matyushin often used red to frame dark shapes against brighter light, for instance tree trunks, outlines of leaf canopies against the sky, or the edge of window frames. Red and blue paint were frequently contrasted, suggesting the influence of French Post-Impressionism and Fauvism. In addition, symbolist mannerisms hinted at in paintings like *Pine Trees in the Dunes*, would become increasingly dissolved in the colour studies.

While Matyushin was encouraged to enquire into the vitality that exists in all of nature under Guro's influence, his experience as a professional violinist and composer with synaesthetic ability, would have encouraged him to pursue the sensory domain of colour and sound. In an autobiographical text he wrote about the long stretches of time he would spend in deep concentration before starting a painting, and then, as he began to work, being unable to tolerate interruption.⁶⁸

In early 1923, Kasimir Malevich led a group of teachers and students from the Petrograd Free Art Studios, where Matyushin had been head of the Studio of Spatial Realism, to establish a new school to study the latest movements in art. At the State Institute of Artistic Culture GINKhUK, Matyushin set up the Organic Studio. During the short summer months, he and his students, the Ender siblings, Maria, Boris, Ksenia and Jurii, practiced inclusive seeing in the landscape. Their paintings did not imitate nature. They were experimenting with ways to express through colour, growth, increase and change, what they saw as the organic whole that surrounded them. They made translucent watercolours in the landscape, and oil paintings in the studio that reinvented concepts developed in the field studies.

⁶⁸ Mikhail Matiushin, "The Russian Cubo-Futurists", trans. Nikolai Khardzhiev, in *A Legacy Regained: Nikolai Khardzhiev and the Russian Avant-Garde*, ed. Evgeniia Petrova, (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2002) 174.



Fig. 60. Ksenia Ender, *See/Lake*, 1925, watercolour on paper, 23.9 x 27 cm. State Museum of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki, George Costakis Collection.

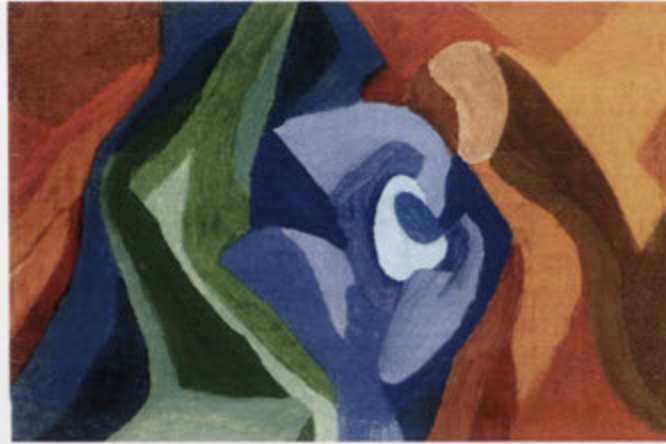


Fig. 61. Ksenia Ender, *Blue Lake*, 1920s, oil on canvas, 29.5 x 43.5 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Their watercolours recorded direct visual impressions, while it was necessary to verify these perceptual experiences with controlled testing. In the Organic Studio, he and his students devised experiments to formally investigate their findings, so that they could be communicated and shared in practical ways. Matyushin emphasised seeing in an inclusive manner, never with a fixed focus. By extending viewing on all sides, a viewer could more easily perceive the light-affected movement of bodies, connecting the perceiver seamlessly with their surroundings.

They studied the physiology of the eyes and devised exercises for muscular flexibility and to increase the activity of the rods. While the cones in the retina of the eyes are more sensitive to detail, including colour differentiation, the rods

are activated by movements at the periphery of vision. In this way, vision could be expanded both horizontally and vertically.⁶⁹

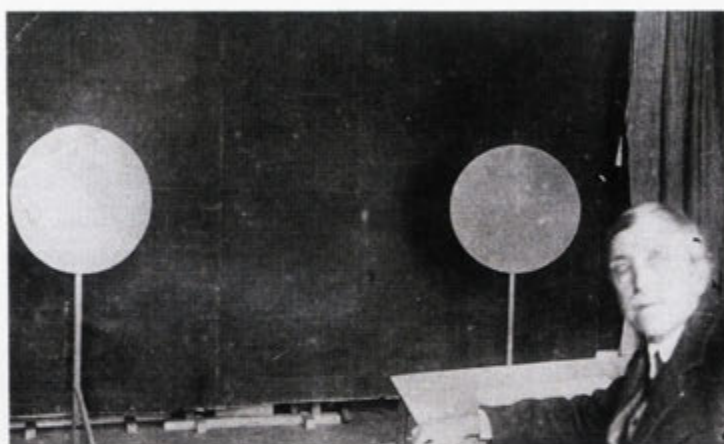


Fig. 62. Matyushin with colour vision experiment in the Organic Studio.

Matyushin was looking to record the maximum resonance in each individual colour for painting purposes, comparable with seeing colours in natural light. He had realized, when observing colours in the landscape, that one's ability to see the substance of individual colours in clusters was diminished perceptually by the strength of dominant colour afterimages. Tests were carried out to explain this phenomenon. In one of the experiments, two cards were painted with contrasting colours and placed on a wall in close proximity. A third colour could be faintly perceived in the space between the two dominant colours. For painting purposes, identifying this additional colour in the space between two contrasting colours, would balance them without diminishing their individual resonance. He called this discovery the 'third intermediary colour', that

permits complex spatial correlations of colours, balances them on a painting surface, [while avoiding the use of chiaroscuro or outlines] and cleanses colours, creating their unusual radiance.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Isabel Wunsche, "Plagiarism, Piracy, or the Application of Science in Russian Avant-Garde Art", paper given at the Second Bi-Annual Conference of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM) (Poznan, Poland: Adam Mickiewicz University, Sept. 9-11, 2010). I thank Dr Anne Stephen for bringing this paper to my notice.

⁷⁰ Alla Povelikhina, "GINKhUK (The State Institute of Art Culture). Department of Organic Culture", in *Organica. Organic. The Non-Objective World of Nature in the Russian Avant-Garde of the 20th Century* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzynska, 1999) 51.

I have referred to intuitively seeking out underlying connections amongst the detail I see and think about in the natural environment, including my habit of spontaneously seeing into gaps between things, and then relating my impressions to the wider surround. Always seeking a balanced viewpoint between one thing and the other, I work slowly in the studio, frequently checking the dynamics in a painting as it progresses. I admire the organic artists' apparent lack of hesitation in placing many contrasting colours in close proximity in their watercolour paintings, without diminishing the vibrancy of each separate colour. According to the written record, colours were approached as live entities, and colour effects were recorded immediately. Without close scrutiny, this approach might be considered an unfathomable mystery of intuition, while I think not. The organic artists trained themselves for relational viewing, dispensing with figurative details, to study colour relations through direct observation, and then guiding their colour choices in painting, so that each colour was balanced and enhanced.

Their intense efforts to see and record colours as they occur naturally, and before secondary interpretation for painting, would have made them acutely aware of the capacity of the colour media they were working with.



Fig. 63. Boris Ender, *Untitled*, ca. 1923-5, watercolour on paper, 35.7 x 27.6 cm.

Perhaps Michael Talbot's description of the blind spot in vision explains how the organic artists' sensitivity to colour associations enabled them to fill this perceptual anomaly with the third intermediary colour, and so avoid clashes or diminishment of one or the other of a pair of strong colours. Talbot writes:

dramatic evidence of the role the mind plays in creating what we see is provided by the eye's so-called blind spot. In the middle of the retina, where the optic nerve connects to the eye, we have a blind spot where there are no photoreceptors . . . The brain artfully fills in the gaps.⁷¹

* * * * *

Half of the original George Costakis collection of Russian avant-garde art is now housed in the Thessaloniki State Museum of Modern Art, in Northern Greece. With the support of fieldwork funding from ANU, in September 2009, I visited the Museum to view paintings by Matyushin and his principle students the Ender siblings. In the Museum vault, I saw just three paintings by Matyushin, the two gouaches titled *Painterly Musical Abstraction* (I have described one of these in the first section of this chapter), and a small abstract oil painting on hessian, with multiple colour brushstrokes in a centrifugal arrangement. Another similar abstract composition was collected by Nikolai Khardzhiev and is illustrated in fig. 47 of this chapter.



Fig. 64. Mikhail Matyushin, *Abstraction*, 1918, oil on canvas, 25.7 x 42.4 cm. Thessaloniki State Museum of Contemporary Art, George Costakis Collection.

⁷¹ Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 163.

More than one hundred watercolours by the Enders' were collected by Costakis from the Ender family, where they had been kept out of sight from the authorities. I had seen illustrations of some of these previously in a publication of the George Costakis collection. Most of them were not signed, so that individual attributions remained uncertain for a time, and jointly attributed to Matyushin, or one or other of the Enders'.⁷² The paintings have since been credited either to Maria, Boris, Ksenia or Jurii Ender, and dated variously in the 1920s. They can, however, be recognized as studies made in cooperation with Matyushin, on expeditions into the landscape from the Studio of Spatial Realism and later, the Organic Studio. While the artists worked collaboratively on issues in common, their individual paintings show interesting perceptual differences. I had the pleasure of looking through folios of these unframed watercolours with curator, Angeliki Charistou.⁷³



Fig. 65. Maria Ender, *Landscape*, ca.1926, watercolour on paper, 21.9 x 28.9 cm.

⁷² Angelica Zander Rudenstine ed., *Russian Avant-Garde Art : The George Costakis Collection* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981).

⁷³ These differences are described in greater detail in *Organica : New Perception of Nature in the Russian Avant-Gardism of the 20th Century*, curators: Alla Povelikhina, Marina Loshak & Nadya Bukreeva, trans. Tatyana Vecherina (Moscow: Moscow Art Centre, P.R.P. Ltd, 2001)



Fig. 66. Ksenia Ender, *Tarkova Lake*, 1925, watercolour and pencil on paper, 24.2 x 27.4 cm.



Fig. 67. Boris Ender, *Untitled*, 1921, watercolour on paper, 15 x 15 cm.



Fig. 68. Juri Ender, *Untitled*, ca. 1924-6, watercolour on paper, 16.9 x 18.3 cm.

I cannot forget the fresh impact these watercolour compositions impressed on me at the time. I knew that my original attraction to the Organic School was more than just supposition, or attraction to an historical moment. They exhibit an immediacy of touch and fluidity, characteristic of watercolour at its best, and without obvious technique. The colours are fluid, with little or no shading or edge differentiation, while each hue holds its shape. Illustrations do not convey the resonant impact of the colour groupings in all their pigment variety. The curator was aware that I was an abstract painter and a researcher, and she was keen to emphasise the organic artists' desire to verify their perceptual experiences with controlled experiments. Many of these watercolours were examined by conservators from the Getty Foundation, and exhibited at The Solomo R Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1981. I mused about seeing them exhibited in Australia, and the next day Angeliki let me know that the Museum was interested in that possibility.

Folders of these watercolours were kept by the Ender family in secret, so that many paintings of similar subjects are now held together in the Thessaloniki collection. Most of Matyushin's extant paintings, drawings and photographs and an extensive collection of documents remain in Russia, including paintings in the half of the collection that Costakis was obliged to leave with the Tretyakov Gallery and Russian Museum when he left the country. In addition, curator, Alla

Povelikhina who was an enthusiastic supporter of Matyushin and his organic colleagues, collected paintings, watercolours, documents and photographs, including a major collection of original colour charts that are now held in the collection of the Matyushin House Museum, a branch of the Museum of the History of St. Petersburg.



Fig. 69. Mikhail Matyushin, *Landscape (Penetration of the Sphere)*, 1921, watercolour on paper, 50 x 42.5 cm. Matyushin House Museum, St Petersburg.

The colour fragments in *Landscape Penetration of the Sphere*, are an holistic response to earth and sky perceived through the lens of the eyes. The deep blue centre suggests infinite depths of space, perhaps also a response to the 'blind spot' at the centre of the retina. This painting, made a couple of years' later than *Painterly Musical Abstraction*, shows a similar response to colours composed as fragments in circulatory motion.

Matyushin and Guro saw their unified organic viewpoint reflected in trees. He wrote:

Growing ever slender as they recede into the sky, the branches of trees are like bronchial tubes – the basic element of respiration . . . The sacred earth breathes through them, the earth breathes through the sky. The

result is a complete circle of earthly and celestial metabolism. They are the signs of an ulterior life.⁷⁴



Fig. 70. Mikhail Matyushin, *Pine Tree*, early 1920s, watercolour on paper, Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg. Fig. 71. Mikhail Matyushin, *Pine Tree*, early 1920s, watercolour on paper, 20.5 x 15 cm, Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg. Photos taken by Liz Coats.

While these comments might suggest a mystical viewpoint, they are more likely intended as a poetic, bridging metaphor for the growth and vitality in trees and their visible links between earth and sky, a common subject for artists.

Matyushin also turned sections of tree roots and branches into sculpture for exhibition and for teaching purposes, presenting these as perfect examples of how growth generates form from the inside out. The two, modified branches illustrated here were painted with progressively warm and cool hues, according to directional impetus, either towards or away from the eyes' contact.

⁷⁴ Mikhail Matyushin and Elena Guro, "The Sensation of the Fourth Dimension", unpublished manuscript (1912-1913). Cited in Alla Povelikhina, "Matyushin's Spatial System", *The Structurist*, 15/16 (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1975/1976) 67.



Fig. 72. Mikhail Matyushin, *Objects 'Form-Colour'*, 1929-30, tempera on wood. Front: Warm colours on curved and rounded shape, 24.5 x 25.5 x 26 cm. Rear: Cool colours on angular shape, 52x 27x19 cm.

Several landscape watercolours made by Matyushin at Siverskaya, with their contrasting colour outlines, relate to Matyushin's research into the intermediary colours. (I will refer to this colour effect later in the text).



Fig. 73. Mikhail Matyushin, *Siverskaya Landscape*, 1924, watercolour on paper, 22.3 x 27.9 cm. Russian Museum, Graphics Department, St. Petersburg.

In the Organic Studio at GINKhUK, studies with colour and sound were continued systematically. Matyushin formally announced the group's findings into human potential for expansive vision, at a meeting of artists at GINKhUK on 13 April 1923, with a manifesto proclaiming ZOR-VED ('vision' and 'knowledge' – or 'seeing' and 'knowing'). An exhibition of work by Petrograd Painters of All

Tendencies opened in May 1923, including colour charts and paintings by Matyushin and his students. Matyushin's oil painting, *Movement of Colour in Space*, described in the section of this chapter on the fourth dimension, was first exhibited publicly on this occasion (see Fig. 55).

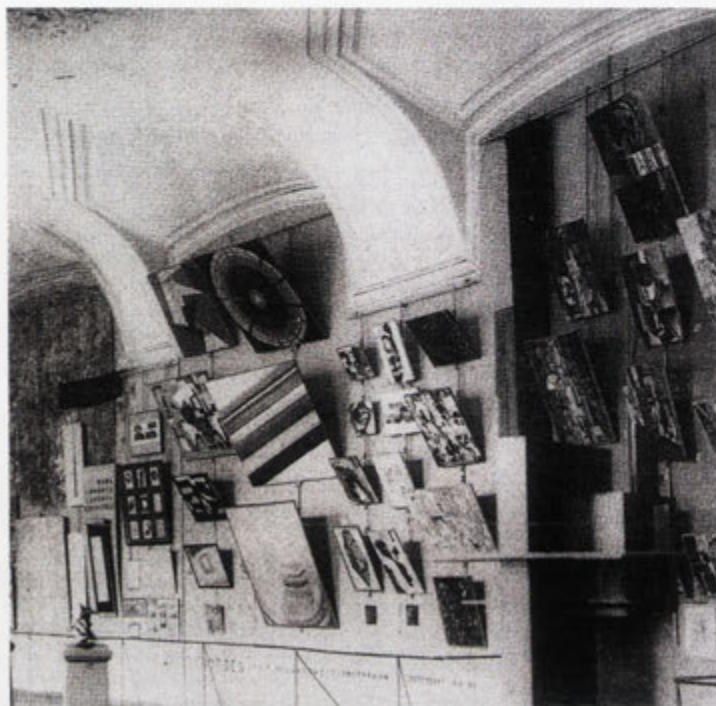


Fig. 74. Photograph, 'Exhibition of Petrograd Painters of All Tendencies, 1918-1923', Academy of Arts, Petrograd, 1923. Paintings by the ZOR-VED artists are on the left side of the wall with Matyushin's oil painting, *Movement of Colour in Space*, at the centre of the group.

Like their avant-garde colleagues, the artists in the Organic Studio studied colour theory, including those of Newtown, Goethe, Chevreul, and Ostwald. Wilhelm Ostwald's book, *Colour Science*, was translated from German into Russian in 1926, but was most likely known to the Russian artists before that time.⁷⁵

Margareta Tillberg, who has made a special study of Matyushin's colour theories, argues that Matyushin's understanding of the process of visual interaction with colour coincided with that of M.E. Chevreul of the Gobelin's factory near Paris, while he was opposed to Ostwald's method of isolating each colour for identification.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Op. cit., Douglas, "Light and Colours", 431.

⁷⁶ Op. cit., Tillberg, "Mikhail Matiushin and the Study of Colour", 474.

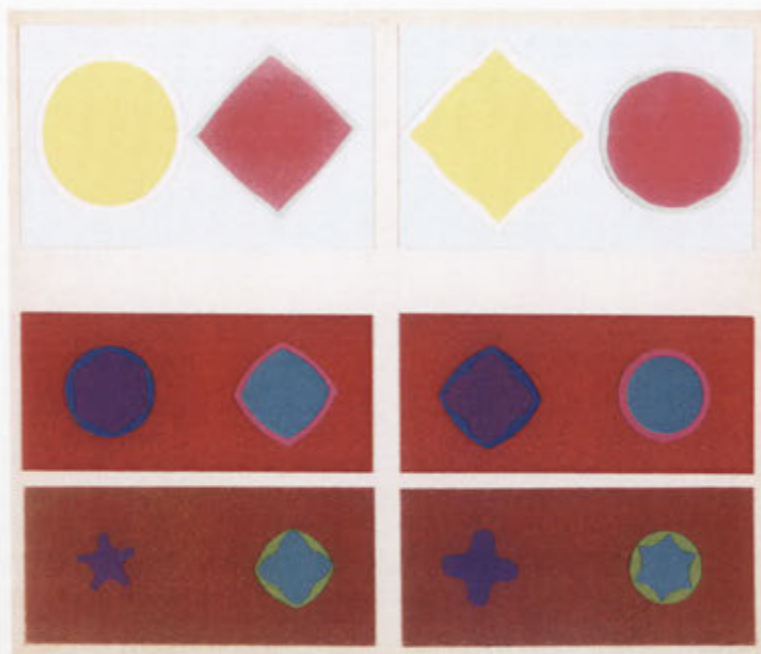


Fig. 75. Maria Ender, 'Colour chart: interaction between colour and form,' 1930s, hand-painted tempera on cut and pasted paper on cardboard, 27x 32cm.

Disagreement with Chevreul on colour classification brings Matyushin closer to Goethe's position. In his view, colour values for artistic purposes related to their pervasiveness, and perceptual changeability. This did not deter Matyushin from creating a version of the colour wheel for teaching purposes, while the Organic Studio artists concentrated on perceiving colours and recording their findings with pigment colours as close to perception as was materially possible.

Experiencing colours with sounds as a musician and as a painter. He wrote:

Sound-noise is a form of ceaseless motion just as colour-light also is. The difference lies in the intensity with which they manifest themselves. Light, with its power, will always extinguish sound. When we isolate light, we begin to hear endless sounds, from the gentlest breezes to the thumping of the blood as it moves around our bodies . . .

predicting that eventually,

as mankind develops, we will, by listening to sound, be able to see colour and form simultaneously.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Mikhail Matyushin, "Concerning Sound and Colour", trans. John Solman, in *Russian Avant-Garde 1910-1930 - The George Costakis Collection : Theory - Criticism*, ed. Anna Kafetsi (Athens: The Ministry of Culture, National Gallery, Alexandros Soutzos Museum, European Culture Centre of Delphi, 1995) 595-596. From a previously unpublished manuscript, 1926-1927 in the Matyushin Archives, No. 656, St. Petersburg.

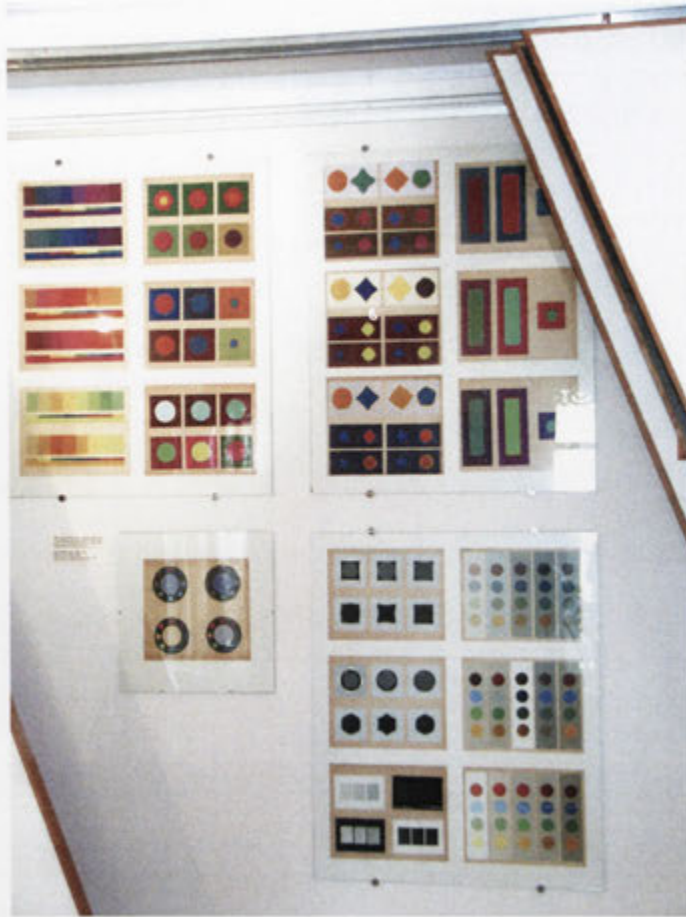


Fig. 76. Hand-painted colour charts, Matyushin House Museum, St. Petersburg. Photo by Liz Coats.

The experimental findings of Matyushin and his students were recorded during the 1920s with numerous hand-painted charts recording sets of colours with explanatory texts intended for interactive use. I viewed a wall of these charts in the Matyushin House Museum in St Petersburg. The gouache colours appear to be of the highest quality, hand-painted on paper, with each shape cut and pasted together, and mounted on white cardboard. The colour discs for instance, consist of three colours, including a narrow band, the 'intermediary colour', between the disc and the background. Each chart records the results of a set of related colour experiments, and each colour tint was mixed as closely as possible to the hues recorded in notebooks from the original perceptual experiments. Where a sound directly influenced a colour sensation, its shape reflects the sound as an expression of volume either angular, indented, or rounded. A viewer is presented with the 'tools' to experience colour interactivity, as close to the original experiments as was physically possible.

Because quality paint pigments were becoming increasingly hard to obtain, Matyushin experimented with the range of paint available, including locating the intermediary colour for dull and dark hues, as seen in the colour samples, Fig. 77. below.



Fig. 77. Colour samples showing the 'third intermediary colour', ca. 1932, tempera on cut and pasted paper, Organic Studio.



Fig. 78. The *Reference Book on Colour* contains four, hand-painted colour tables that fold out.

The handbook of colour titled: *The Laws Governing the Variability of Colour Combinations : A Reference Book on Colour*, summarising the experiments with

colour perception, was published in St. Petersburg in 1932. Matyushin's students hand-painted all thirty charts in every book, so that the colours were recorded true to the original experiments. The handbook was the culmination of the Organic Studio's experiments with colour and perception and the small edition of 400 copies quickly sold out. According to Margareta Tilberg, it became a standard reference in St Petersburg for the use of colours in architectural interiors that is still in use.

Matyushin's experiences with colour resonance, however, went far beyond design. He knew that colours have a direct impact on the senses, affecting a person's well-being and health. Tillberg has studied the Matyushin archive in detail, and reports that Matyushin managed to pass censorship restrictions by only hinting at his worldview. When the book was published in 1932, the Central Committee of the Communist Party were taking measures to centralize art organizations, eventually leading to Socialist Realism becoming the only prescriptive method in all fields of culture. Government Archives of the early avant-garde, including Mikhail Matyushin, did not become readily accessible to researchers outside Russia until the beginning of the 1990s.⁷⁸

Distinguishing colours as they appear to perception, susceptible to change in the conditions in which each person sees them, and according to individual physiological and psychological makeup, agrees with my understanding of colours for painting. Experiencing colour interactions in painting practice is endlessly absorbing, resistant to formal attributions and requiring subtle sensory adjustment. While I do not attempt to transcribe colours directly, experiencing colours in nature remains a guide to potential in the physical pigments of paint. I work with the range of pigment colours available and mix them with the understanding that each colour will appear according to its placement and context. I factor into the mix, degrees of transparency to opacity, liquidity and medium suspension, all of which will alter a colour physically and perceptually according to its placement and the conditions in which one sees it.

⁷⁸ Margareta Tillberg, Ph.D. dissertation: "1920s colour theories of experimental educational institutions in Soviet Russia" (Stockholm: Department of Art History, Stockholm University, 2003). The thesis was published in Swedish, and I have only seen a summary in English.

CONCLUSION :

This doctoral research is concerned with clarifying and recording the emergence of components suggesting 'organic' likeness, in two groups of paintings, *Organica* and *Streaming*. The paintings can be considered as nonfigurative, or abstract compositions. Colour perception and spatial differentiation is first encountered through the sensory body, and I analyse and integrate these sensations in the development of each painting.

My approach to construction throughout the research has been experimental. My knowledge of, and responsibility for cohesion in the development of each painting is always a projection of what I know of sameness and difference culled from experience, and without foregone conclusions about the specific result. The 'organic' associations do not describe these paintings. As Henri Bortoft puts it, ' . . . what we take to be material objects are really condensations of meaning. . . [It makes more sense to begin with an] organizing idea which is active in cognitive perception, [rather than thinking] of an idea as a mental picture, an image, drawn off or abstracted from our experience . . .' ⁷⁹ I build on this understanding in Chapter 3: 'Seeing' and 'Knowing'.

Geometric systems in the *Organica* paintings function as holding patterns for colour spreads that can be seen as perceptually 'active'. These pentagonal formations are not meant to be read symbolically. I look to formal geometries as a guide to colour and spatial parameters within the containment of a painting. At its most basic, each of my pentagonal templates is a two-dimensional, linear formation. In practice, the templates act as embedded holding patterns for multi-layered spreads of colour. Edge definition imparted by the geometry breaks down with multiple paint applications, and the colour array will appear volumetric. I find a certain beauty in the way elements (or in my case, fragments) can be seen to circulate around each other, with a spatial symmetry that is contrasted with asymmetric details.

By comparison, the configurations of fragments that carry directional impetus and spatial differentiation in the *Streaming* paintings were sourced in strands of

⁷⁹ Op. cit., Bortoft, *The Wholeness of Nature*, 131-2.

foam, stirred up and circulating around a pool below a waterfall. I saw inherent order in these strands of foam, both irregular and to an extent self-similar in scale and spatial configuration. At an energetic level, my interest is in the relational effects of shapes like these, that become tangible in the interwoven fabric of colours as paint.

The 'organic' qualities that appear through the layers of colour media in both groups of paintings, are generated through accretions of colour and texture which occur concurrently with each separate paint application, bringing materiality in the paint to the fore. Paradoxically, these lyrical effects are produced by the mechanical process of silk-screening. At a direct, physical level, each paint layer and the convergence of colour hues, informs the 'organic' outcomes.

Avoiding artifice in the facilitation of paint materials has been an important issue in my practical research. I have worked in roundabout ways to avoid this, so that balance with irregularity in the detail is achieved directly through varieties of paint adhesion. I typically relate 'artifice' to self-conscious interference with the paint applications after the event. When the connective framework becomes obscured, I rely on the shaping templates to restore visible balance in the proceeding layers.

I recognize colour always conjoined with matter, so that there is no aspect of colour media or texture in my paintings that is not bound up with construction. This is why I emphasise not interfering with a layer of colour, once it is laid down in the painting field. Applying one colour per layer of paint, as a single action, sets up conditions for the emergence of 'organic' details. With close attention, one can see that each painting is a 'built' environment for seeing into active colour relations.

Creating abstract paintings that are sensorially active *and* formally balanced has been an important concern of individual artists since the beginning of Modernism. Evidence of perceptual enquiry and material cohesion, I understand to be an essential cultural link between past and present in the tradition of painting of all kinds, and especially for painting that is not literal.

Artists such as Agnes Martin, Josef Albers and Anne Truitt, have been significant for my research in the ways they integrate ideas with substance. Looking at their work and reading their personal writing, I have learnt more than theory can offer, and confirmation that engagement with painting practice grows out of participation with the materials of paint as a process of discovery. Rather than demonstrating ready-made principles, each painting in its detail, becomes a picture that I have not seen before, while its configuration is complete *and* familiar. The 'active' quality that I refer to in colour construction situates perception of stability with colour volatility, attracting the gaze into colour shifts and material eruptions that are nevertheless supported within the embedded networks.

My research into the work of Mikhail Matyushin builds on personal observation of the nature of perception and interpretation of environmental influences. I am drawn to gaps in the historical record for painting. Very little of Matyushin's work and ideas was known in the West before the early 1990s when Soviet archives became accessible. I encountered Matyushin's colour experiments in the mid-1970s, when the first translations into English, with commentary by John E. Bowlit and his students, were published in the Canadian journal, *The Structurist*, and I became a subscriber to the journal.⁸⁰

While organic (and inorganic) implications for artwork were of concern to many of the early Russian avant-garde artists, this interest quickly dropped below the horizon of significance for Western scholars of Modernism because it seemed to contradict Cubo-Futurist and Constructivist indications for the future directions. Personal perceptions and concern for meaningful content were discounted in the drive for analytical formalism.

Matyushin is important to me for his refusal to separate sensations sourced in the environment from careful analysis of perceptual and constructive outcomes. His descriptions of sensory perception and the permeable body are sometimes dismissed as personal idiosyncrasy, without considering the exertion of artists in the Organic Studio, led by Matyushin, to test their sensitivity to perceptual and sensory experiences with controlled experiments. Philosophically, he and his

⁸⁰ *The Structurist*, 13/14, 15/16 (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1973/1974, 1975/1976).

students considered their experimental outcomes to be equivalent to the latest scientific discoveries of their time. Rather than ascribing a spiritual notion of exclusive knowledge to Matyushin's belief in whole body perception, his writing shares an holistic and practical framework for fresh perceptual and cognitive experiments in colour painting. His ideas about expansive and whole body perception were carefully examined and documented. In the contemporary context for experimental artists and scientific investigations into perception, I consider his views to be reasonable and practical.

I recognize the cyclical conditions of the world around with implications for creative activity, my body functions this way, as do nature's 'forces' of growth and change. Each and everything at the atomic level has rhythm and cohesion. Matyushin related his sense of immersion in space/time to the fourth dimension, part of the modernist experiment, and so difficult to express in painting. His promotion of curved rather than straight lines for imaging, invites comparison with the vastness of the earth's globe, or our eyes' function in encompassing the visual surround. Expressed in my relatively two-dimensional paintings, this becomes the symmetry component, always in concert with asymmetry. Stillness that may be understood as the opposite of motion, in reality is part of the same, sensed through balance in the human body and perceived as a condition within all things. A way of perception sometimes understood as primordial, and a place of being that is undifferentiated. Matyushin promoted meditation for internal stability in the midst of fluctuating experience, together with visual exercises, so that relaxed and expanded perception could become meaningful in painting activity, or any other activity.

This exegetical account of doctoral research addresses experiences that become realized within the practice. It is a tale that can only be partially told in words, while I have tried to keep the text alive to shared meaning. In my descriptions of process, on occasion, I tell of events at other times and other places that engage with echoic experience. The ideas expressed here, complement the two series of paintings, *Organica* and *Streaming* that are the principal outcome of my research. I assert that there is no end in sight to potential for discovery therein.

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Wunsche, Isabel, "Living Crystals: The Roots of Mikhail Matyushin's Spatial Realism." *The Structurist*, no. 49-50. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan (2009-2010) 51-7.

_____. "Plagiarism, Piracy, or the Application of Science in Russian Avant-Garde Art." Paper for 'High and Low', Second bi-annual conference of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM). Poznan, Poland: Adam Mickiewicz University, Sept. 9-11, 2010.

_____. "Organic visions and biological models in Russian avant-garde art" 127-152. Edited by Oliver A.I. Botar, and Isabel Wunsche. In *Biocentrism and Modernism*. Surrey England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011.

_____. "Seeing Sound – Hearing Colour: The Synaesthetic Experience in Russian Avant-Garde Art" 81-106. Edited by Charlotte De Mille. *Music and Modernism, c. 1849-1950*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

Zajonc, Arthur, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Zhadova, Larissa A. *Malevich Suprematism and Revolution in Russian Art 1910-1930*. Translated by Alexander Lieven. London: Thames & Hudson, first English edition, 1982.

CURRICULUM VITAE

STUDY:

- 2009-2012 Ph.D. Research, Australian National University, Canberra.
1993-1997 College of Fine Arts, University of NSW. Master of Fine Arts, Research (Hons. Class 1).
1977 Melbourne State College, Diploma of Education
1966-1968 Elam School of Fine Art, University of Auckland, Diploma of Fine Art

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS:

Allens Arthur Robinson, Sydney; Artbank; Art Gallery of NSW; Auckland City Art Gallery; Australian Embassy, Beijing; Bathurst Regional Art Gallery; BP Collection; Bundanon Trust; Campbelltown City Art Gallery; Cruthers Foundation, Perth; Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ; Federal Court of Australia, Canberra; Glasmuseet, Ebeltoft, Denmark;; Myer collection of Art of the Eighties @ National Gallery of Victoria; Law Commission, Wellington, NZ; Macquarie Group Collection; Max Watters Collection; Melbourne University; National Bank of New Zealand, Wellington; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Newcastle Art Gallery, NSW; New England Regional Art Museum, NSW; New Parliament House, Canberra; Queensland Art Gallery; Redlands Westpac Art Collection; Christchurch City Art Gallery, NZ; Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ; Shell Collection of Contemporary Australian Art; University of Sydney Union; University of Technology Sydney; University of Western Sydney; Victoria University, Wellington, NZ.

AWARDS:

- 2011 EASS Patrons Graduate Scholarship, ANU
Winsor & Newton art materials scholarship
2009 University Research Scholarship, Australian National University, Canberra
2004 Merit Award, Wanganui Arts Review, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
2003 Lilian Ida Smith Acquisitive Award, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
2002 Westpac Redlands Art Prize, Sydney
Special Jury Prize, 2002 Wallace Art Awards, Auckland, NZ
1999 Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant, New York, USA
1994 Australian post-graduate award, MFA Research, COFA, University of NSW, Sydney
1992 Development Grant, Visual Arts/Crafts Board, Australia
1989 Artist's Fellowship, Visual Arts/Crafts Board, Australia
1986 Studio & Material Costs, Visual Arts Board, Australia
1983 Studio & Material Costs, Visual Arts Board, Australia
1981 Assistance towards an exhibition, Visual Arts Board, Australia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2012 School of Art Gallery, ANU, Ph.D. graduation exhibition
2011 Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
2008 *See, Hear, Know* series, Utopia Art Sydney

- Selected paintings from *See, Hear, Know* series, Tivoli Gallery, Waiheke Island, NZ
- 2006 *Strata*, Utopia Art Sydney
- 2004 *Liquid Light*, Utopia Art Sydney
- 2003 Lilian Ida Smith Acquisitive Award exhibition, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
New Paintings, Utopia Art Sydney (paintings & glass)
New Work : paintings & glass, Studio Gallery, Te Tuhi-The Mark, Manukau City, NZ
- 2002 Paintings & glass, X Space, Auckland University of Technology, NZ
Paintings, Quay Gallery, Whanganui Community Polytechnic, NZ
- 2001 *Shifting Geometries*, Hocken Library Gallery, Dunedin, NZ (paintings & glass)
Shifting Geometries, The Physics Room, Christchurch, NZ (paintings & glass)
- 2000 *Shifting Geometries*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ. (paintings & glass)
- 1998 Installation of paintings & glass, Art Gallery of NSW, Level 2
The Sieve, Nets & Everything, Creation Gallery, Beijing
Morphic paintings, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1997 *Returning* series, glass, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1996 *Lattice* paintings, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1995 *Lattice paintings*, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ
- 1994 *Knot paintings*, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1993 Selected paintings, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
Works on Paper, Brooker Gallery, Wellington
- 1992 *Cicadas*, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1991 *Magnetism*, Syme/Dodson Gallery, Sydney
Magnetism, Brooker Gallery, Wellington
- 1990 *The Fisherwoman & the Gardener*, Syme/Dodson Gallery, Sydney
- 1989 *Growing paintings*, Syme/Dodson Gallery, Sydney
- 1987 *Growing Paintings*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
- 1986 *Soundings*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
- 1985 *Bridges*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
- 1984 *Dark water, flowing light*, Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
- 1983 *Avago*, Sydney
- 1981 *Kores*, David Reids' Gallery, Sydney
- 1978 *Chameleons & Tapestries*, Gallery Data, Auckland, NZ
Chameleons & Tapestries, Riverina College of Advanced Education, Wagga Wagga
- 1977 *Chameleons*, George Paton Gallery, Melbourne University Union

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2012 Abstraction 11, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
Word of mouth: encounters with abstract painting, curator: Mark Bayly, Canberra Museum and Gallery
Paperworks, Utopia Art Sydney
Abstraction, Utopia Art Sydney
- 2011 *Mallee, [Maeli] : Art from Arid Places*, School of Art Gallery, ANU, Canberra

- Far Enough: Aesthetic Responses to The Far South Coast NSW*, Bega Valley Regional Gallery, NSW
 East-African Famine Fundraiser, Megalo Print Studio & Gallery & CARE Australia
Single State – A Unique Take on the Land, Megalo Print Studio Gallery, Canberra
Expression of Intent – work in progress from an environmental field study at Calperum Station, South Australia, foyer gallery, School of Art, ANU
 'Straight Up', The Annual Megalo members' exhibition, Megalo Print Studio & Gallery, Canberra
 AAA Australian Abstraction, Utopia Art Sydney
- 2010 *Engaging Visions : Your place in fine art*, Curator John Reid, ANU School of Art Gallery, with illustrated catalogue
Museum III, Utopia Art Sydney
This Way Up, three exhibitions on abstraction, curators: Ruth Waller & Peter Maloney, School of Art Gallery ANU, M16 & ANCA Galleries, Canberra
- 2009 *Pinned and Framed* – works on paper, Utopia Art Sydney
 Phoenix Prize exhibition, ANU School of Art Gallery, Canberra
Engaging Visions: A Benalla Field Study, Benalla Art Gallery, Vic.
Abstraction 8, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
 The 23rd Annual Packsaddle selling exhibition, New England Regional Art Museum, NSW
 Korean International Art Fair, CO-EX, Korea
- 2008 *Pairs of Paintings*, Utopia Art Sydney
Foresight: Work from the University of Sydney Union Art Collection, curator: Connie Tornatore-Loong, Sydney University Art Gallery
Paperwork: works on paper from the Bundanon Artist in Residence collection, Shoalhaven City Art Centre, Nowra
Shaping Perspectives: Sydney College of the Arts Alumni, current postgraduate students and staff of the Glass Studio, curator: Lee Mathers, Horus & Deloris Contemporary Art Space, Sydney
Fragile Absolute, Delmar Art Gallery, Curator: Brad Buckley, Sydney
Australian Abstraction, Utopia Art Sydney
 Gallerie Tam Tam, Curator: Margriet Janszen, Tam Tam Festival, Leiden, Netherlands
- 2007 *Turning 20*, Utopia Art Sydney
Three Abstract Painters: Liz Coats, Helen Eager, Peter Maloney, Utopia Art Sydney
 Norsewood Contemporary Art Award exhibition, Hastings, NZ
Space Between Words, Brown's Cows Art Projects, Gosford, NSW
- 2006 *Bits and Pieces*, Utopia Art Sydney
Wanganui Exposed, Percy Thomson Gallery, Stratford, NZ
 Mosman Art Prize exhibition, Sydney
 Melbourne Art Fair, Utopia Art Sydney Gallery, Melbourne
 Whanganui Artists Showcase Exhibition, Community Art Centre, Whanganui, NZ
- 2005 Paddington Art Prize exhibition, Marlene Antico Fine Arts, Sydney
2005 The Year in Art, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
From Big Things, Little things Grow, Utopia Art Sydney

- Sydney v. Melbourne*, Silvershot Gallery, Melbourne (in association with Utopia Art Sydney)
- Dawn Light*, in association with 'Dawn Light' International Symposium, Gosford Regional Art Gallery, Gosford, NSW
- Hazelhurst Art Award exhibition for Art on Paper, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery, Sydney
- Wanganui Arts Review, Merit Award, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
- A Matter of Substance*, 26 leading New Zealand Glass Artists, Kensington Gallery, Adelaide
- Abstraction 4*, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
- Norsewear Art Award 2005, Hawkes Bay Exhibition Centre, Hastings, NZ
- House of Dowse*, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ
- Blue*, Glasmuseet, Ebeltoft, Denmark
- New Ideas 2005*, Utopia Art Sydney
- So you Wanna be a Rock'n'Roll Star*. Australian Painting from the NGV Shell Collection, toured by the National Gallery of Victoria to Wangaratta Exhibitions Gallery; McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park & Hamilton Art Gallery, Vic.
- Museum II*, Utopia Art Sydney
- NZ Society of Artists in Glass, members exhibition, Kensington Gallery, Adelaide, SA
- 2004 Dowse Foundation Auction, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, NZ
- Recent Acquisitions, Christchurch City Art Gallery, Christchurch, NZ
- Wanganui Arts Review, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui. Merit Award
- Gallery Dalgleish, Wanganui, NZ
- Abstracting the Collection*, curators: Zara Stanhope & Kendrah Morgan, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
- Melbourne Art Fair 2004, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
- Southern Exposure: A Survey of New Zealand Glass*, curators: Grace Cochrane & Angela Lassig. Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui; Objectspace, Auckland, NZ; Glasmuseet, Ebeltoft, Denmark
- 2003 *Significant Tilt: Art and the Horizon of Meaning*, curator: Rod Pattenden, Macquarie University, Sydney
- Hidden Treasures*, Campbelltown City Art Gallery, NSW
- The Wonder of Water*, Unesco year of water. Curator: Teresa Gooden, Community Arts Centre, Wanganui, NZ
- Mosman Prize exhibition, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney
- 2002 *A Silver Lining & a New Beginning*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
- Redlands Westpac Art Prize Exhibition, curator: Felicity Fenner, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney
- The Year in Review, Utopia Art Sydney
- Wallace Art Awards, Auckland War Memorial Museum & Massey University, Wellington Campus, NZ (Special Jury Award)
- Good Vibrations: The Legacy of Op Art in Australia*, curator: Zara Stanhope, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
- Melbourne Art Fair 2002, Royal Exhibition Buildings, Melbourne
- Solstice*, Utopia Art Sydney
- Liz Coats & Eva Heimer*, curator: Nick Vickers, Sir Herman Black Gallery, University of Sydney Union

- 2001 *Travellers*, Te Wa Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
The Immaculate Perception, curator: Paul Hansen, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North, NZ
Liz Coats & Eva Heimer, curator: Nick Vickers, Equrna Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Intersections of Art and Science, in conjunction with ISIS-Symmetry Art & Science Congress, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, Sydney
Leaping Boundaries: A century of New Zealand artists in Australia, curator: Sue Gardiner, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney
New Work, Janne Land Gallery, Wellington, NZ
Dans le jardin des beaux arts, site specific installation in the ARS aemula naturae gallery, curators: Sonja van Kerkhoff, Jacqueline Wassen, Sen McGlenn. (glass), Leiden, Netherlands
- 2000 *Door-to-door*: selected artists explore the concepts and connotations of the door. Curator: Rhoda Fowler, Fisher Gallery, Manukau City, NZ (glass)
 Seoul International Communication Design Exhibition, Korea (digital images of glass)
The Numbers Game: Art and Mathematics, curator: Zara Stanhope, Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University, Wellington, NZ
Meeting Lines: Margaret Roberts and Liz Coats, Otago Polytechnic Art School, Dunedin, NZ
Who Am I, curator: Paul Rayner, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
Idea and Influence, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
Expatriates II, Te Wa Gallery, Wanganui, NZ
- 1999 *Silver*, Curator: Nick Waterlow, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
Primary Colours: Red, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1998 Australian Watercolour Institute, Contemporary Invitational '98, curator: Jo Holder, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
After the Masters 1993-7, selected work. Curators: Jennifer Hardy & Nick Waterlow, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
Optics, Curator: Nick Vickers, Sir Herman Black Gallery, University of Sydney Union
Co-Existence: Australian Artists Against Racism, Hogarth Galleries, Sydney.
Primary Colours: Blue, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
 Eco Poetics Symposium, Synapse Art Initiatives, Somersby, NSW.
- 1997 Art-Inter-Change, Exhibition in conjunction with 2nd IAAH Pacific Rim Conference on Adolescent Health, Bondi Pavilion Gallery, Sydney
AAAR! WIK Jigsaw, Conference for Reconciliation, Melbourne, 18-26 May
AAAR! Message Sticks, Field of Dreams, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney
Drawing on the Diaphanous (glass artists in association with Ausglass Conference) Michael Nagy Gallery, Sydney
- 1996 *Skirting Abstraction: Twelve Women Abstract Painters*, Curator: John Hurrell, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, NZ
Unavailable Space, Curator: Suzanne Bartos, Performance Space, Sydney
 Mosman Art Prize exhibition, Sydney

- ARTSEA Internet Exhibition & Auction for the Coral Reef Research Inst.
Works from Stock, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ
- 1995 *Paper*, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
Australian Contemporary Painting, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
Ironsides: exhibition & auction for New England Art Gallery, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney
Minima:Maxima, Liz Coats, Jim Croke, Jon Plapp. Curator: Nick Vickers, Sir Herman Black Gallery, Sydney University Union
Bathurst Art Purchase exhibition, Bathurst Regional Gallery, NSW
Horst Kiechle, Margaret Roberts & Liz Coats, Parliament House Gallery, Sydney. (Exhibition linked to Chimera Symposium, a Synapse Art Initiatives event)
D.O.T.S. – Door Open Table Set (a Synapse event), The Performance Space Gallery, Sydney
Traces: Aberdeen to – from Sydney, curator: Adrian Hall (a Synapse event with post-graduate students from Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen), Sydney & Aberdeen, 10 Sept.
Girls! Girls! Girls! Annandale Galleries, Sydney & Orange Regional Gallery, NSW
- 1994 *Town & Gown*, Victoria University Collection, Wellington, NZ
Three artists: Liz Coats, Esther Morgan Leigh, Geoff Thornley, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ
Circle, Line, Square: Aspects of Geometry, curator: Sioux Garside, Campbelltown City Art Gallery. (Touring: Newcastle, Albury, New England Regional Art Galleries)
Contemporary Australian Paintings: Works from the Allen, Allen & Hemsley Collection, curator: Ewen McDonald. Melbourne International Festival, Victorian Arts Centre, Vic.
Going Public: Ideas for Transforming Public Space, Annandale Galleries, Sydney
- 1993 *Works on paper*, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, and Solander Galleries, Canberra
Shift, Performance Space, Sydney
Thought Painting, Curator: Scott Redford, Michael Milburn Gallery, Brisbane
- 1992 *The New Metaphysic*, curator: Felicity Fenner, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
29 Ways, Visual Arts staff from the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, Campbelltown City Art Gallery, NSW
- 1991 *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminist Art*, curator: Sally Couacaud, Artspace @ Pier 4/5, Sydney
The Drawing Show, Syme/Dodson Gallery, Sydney
Abstract Paintings, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ
Fine & Decorative, David Jones Art Gallery, Sydney
- 1990 *Abstraction*, Curator: Victoria Lynn, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
Tokyo Connection: Twelve Australian Artists, Heineken Village Exhibition Centre, Tokyo
The Radiant Core, Liz Coats, Leah McKinnon, Lee Friedlander, curator: Terence Maloon, David Jones Art Gallery, Sydney
Works on Paper, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ

- 1989 *Modern Australian Paintings*, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
Australian Watercolours, Drawings, Prints, 1935-1989, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
Inside the Greenhouse, Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 *Maiden Voyage*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- 1986 *Structures of Necessity*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney
Surface for Reflexion, curator: Tony Bond, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
- 1985 *The Subject of Painting*, curator: Paul McGillick, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
In Visible Pursuit, curator: Merylyn Fairskye, Artspace, Sydney
Acquisitions, Newcastle Regional Art Gallery, NSW
- 1984 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1983 *Perspecta*, curator: Bernice Murphy, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
Artspace Special Event, Curator: Judy Annear, Artspace, Sydney
Golden Age Gallery, Ballarat
- 1982 *From the Inside Out*, Women & Arts Festival, Sydney
- 1981 *Ten Years After*, Ewing & George Paton Galleries, Melbourne University Union, Vic.
Group show, Coventry Gallery, Sydney
Women's Art at Work: A mobile exhibition of women's art on tour, Victoria
Apmira, Artists for Aboriginal Land Rights, Sydney
Watercolour Show, David Reids' Gallery, Sydney
- 1980 Capital Permanent Invitation Exhibition, Geelong Art Gallery, Vic.
University of NSW Art Exhibition, Sydney
- 1979 Women's Electoral Lobby Exhibition, Niagara Gallery, Melbourne
- 1978 *The Map Show*, Ewing & George Paton Galleries, Melbourne University Union, Vic.
Wagga Wagga Annual Invitation Exhibition, Wagga Wagga, NSW
- 1977 The Women's Show, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, SA
Self Images, La Trobe University, Melbourne
- 1975/6 International Women Artists' Slide Exhibition, The Ford Foundation, New York
- 1973 *Twenty Women Artists*, Auckland Society of Arts Galleries, Auckland, NZ

CURATORIAL PROJECT:

- 2001 'Fertile Ground: An artist looks at McCahon', Hocken Library Gallery, Dunedin, NZ. (with catalogue essay)

ARTIST RESIDENCIES:

- 2012 Artist-in-residence, Megalo Print Studio & Gallery, Canberra
- 2011 'Single State – A Unique Take on the Land', Megalo Print Studio + Gallery, Canberra
- 2007 Sydney College of the Arts, Glass Studio
Hymie Sherman Studio, Bundanon Trust, Shoalhaven, NSW
- 2006 Ourimbah Campus of Newcastle University School of Art, NSW
- 2005 The Gunnery @ Artspace, NSW Ministry for the Arts Residency, Sydney.
- 2000 Eastern Institute of Technology, Hawkes Bay, NZ.
- 1999 Rita Angus Studio, Wellington, New Zealand.
- 1998 Asialink Residency, Beijing Art Academy, Beijing, China.
- 1996 Artist Residency, School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin.

Artist Residency, School of Art, Univ. of Canterbury, Christchurch, NZ.
1987 Tokyo Studio, Visual Arts Board.

REVIEWS:

- 2008 Basil Holmes, 'Arts Review', *Gulf News*, Waiheke Island, Auckland, NZ.
(solo exhibition at Tivoli Gallery, Waiheke Island, NZ)
- 2002 Anne Loxley (The Redlands Westpac Art Prize), *Sydney Morning Herald*,
October
- 2001 Liz Coats & Eva Heimer, Equrna Gallery, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Courtney Kidd (Intersections of Art & Science, Ivan Dougherty Gallery,
COFA, University of NSW) *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 June
Paul Field, (solo exhibition: Shifting Geometries and curated exhibition:
Fertile Ground: An artist looks at McCahon, Hocken Library Gallery,
Dunedin) *Otago Daily Times*, 5 April
- 1998 Nicky Combs, (solo exhibition: Creation Gallery, Beijing) Illus. with
Chinese text, *Art Life Magazine*, July, Beijing
Review of solo exhibition, Creation Gallery, Beijing, *Zhongguo Yishu Bao*
(Art Paper), Beijing, 3 July
Brief reviews: *China Daily*: Exhibitions, 29 June & 4 July; *Youth Daily*
(illus.) 23 June; *Beijing Weekend*: Art, 27 June, 3 July
- 1997 Bruce James, (solo exhibition, glass: Annandale Galleries) review:
Sydney Morning Herald, 7 February
Joanna Mendelssohn, (solo exhibition, Annandale Galleries) Review: Liz
Coats, Painting with Glass, *The Australian*, Arts on Friday 31 January
Allan Smith, 'Skirting Abstraction: Scepticism and Sensibility', *Art New
Zealand*, No. 82, Autumn 1997, pp.35-39 (illus.)
- 1996 Bruce James, (solo exhibition: Annandale Galleries), Review: *Sydney
Morning Herald*, 21 June
Paul McGillick, *Australian Financial Review* (solo exhibition: Annandale
Galleries), 28 June
- 1995 Stephen Cain, *Evening Post*, Wellington (solo exhibition: Brooker
Gallery) 25 November
Felicity Fenner, *Sydney Morning Herald* (Minima:Maxima) 21 April.
- 1994 Stephen Cain, *Evening Post*, Wellington (Liz Coats, Esther Morgan Leigh,
Geoff Thornley at Brooker Gallery) 3 December
Elwyn Lynn, *Australian Weekend* (solo exhibition, Annandale Galleries)
11-12 June
Felicity Fenner, *Sydney Morning Herald* (Circle, Line, Square.
Campbelltown, Newcastle, Albury, New England Galleries, NSW), Sept.
- 1993 Natalie King, *Art and Text*, September 1992
Lynette Fern, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition: Annandale
Galleries) 3 July
Julie Ewington, *Art & Text* No. 41 (Frames of Reference)
Stephen Cain, *The Evening Post*, Wellington (Luise Fong – Pathology;
Liz Coats – works on paper, Brooker Gallery, Wellington) 19 June
- 1992 Bronwyn Watson, *Sydney Morning Herald* (The New Metaphysic, Ivan
Dougherty Gallery, Sydney) 4 Dec.
- 1991 Meredith Morse, The Politics of Metaphor, *Eyeline* No.17 Summer,
(Frames of Reference)

- Rob Taylor, *The Dominion*, Wellington (Abstract Paintings, Brooker Gallery) 30 January
- Stephen Cain, *Evening Post*, Wellington (Geoff Thornley, Liz Coats and Mervyn Williams, Brooker Gallery, Wellington) 12 February
- 1990 Joel Perron, *Japan Times*, (Tokyo Connection: Twelve Australian Artists) Tokyo, 10 June
- Rodney O'Brien, *Japan Times Colour Supplement* (illus.) (Tokyo Connection: Twelve Australian Artists) Tokyo, 9 July
- Elwyn Lynn, *Weekend Australian* (Abstraction AGNSW), 9/10 June
- Elwyn Lynn, *Weekend Australian* (solo exhibition: Syme/Dodson Gallery) 7/8 July
- Bronwyn Watson, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition: Syme/Dodson Gallery) 29 June
- John Hawke, *Art Monthly* No.33, August (solo exhibition: Syme/Dodson Gallery)
- Christopher Allen, *Sydney Morning Herald* (The Radiant Core, David Jones Gallery) 21 July
- 1989 John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition: Syme/Dodson Gallery) 1 April
- Jacques Delaruelle, *Sydney Review* No. 11, April (solo exhibition: Syme/Dodson Gallery)
- 1988 Bronwyn Watson, *Sydney Morning Herald* (group exhibition, Maiden Voyage: First Draft) 22 Jan.
- Bronwyn Watson, *Sydney Morning Herald* (group exhibition, Structures of Necessity, First Draft) 30 Sept.
- 1986 Terence Maloon, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 29 March
- Elwyn Lynn, *Australian* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 5 April,
- Susanna Short, *Daily Telegraph* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 27 March
- Joanna Mendelssohn, *Art Network*, Winter/Spring (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery)
- John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Critic's Choice, 27 December
- John McDonald, *Sydney Morning Herald* (group exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW) 6 December
- 1985 Terence Maloon, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 19 April
- Susanna Short, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 3 May
- Terence Maloon, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Critic's Choice, December
- 1984 Terence Maloon, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition, Garry Anderson Gallery) 21 April
- 1981 Nancy Borlase, *Sydney Morning Herald* (solo exhibition, David Reids' Gallery) 16 May
- Elwyn Lynn, *Australian* (solo exhibition, David Reids' Gallery) 9 May
- Exhibition commentary, *Art & Australia*, Summer 1981
- 1978 Gordon H. Brown, *Auckland Star* (solo exhibition, Gallery Data) Auckland Arts Festival, 5 April
- Mary Eagle, *The Age* (group exhibition: The Map Show, Ewing & George Paton Gallery) 17 May

1977 Mary Eagle, *The Age* (solo exhibition, Ewing & George Paton Gallery) 16 November

PUBLICATIONS:

- 2011 *Megablah* : A series of ideas, print posters, Megalo Print Studio & Gallery
- 2010 Artist's statement and colour image in group exhibition catalogue: *This Way Up*. Three exhibitions of abstract paintings, curated by Ruth Waller and Peter Maloney; Essays: Laura Murray Cree & Ruth Waller, School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra. Exhibition venues: M16 Gallery, School of Art Gallery and ANCA Gallery, Canberra
Artist's statement with colour image in publication: *Engaging Visions : Engaging Artists with the Community about the Environment*, curators & editors: John Reid, Rod Lamberts, Carolyn Young, Charles Tambiah, Australian National University, Canberra. (In association with *Engaging Visions*, an environmental project in the Murray Darling Basin
Catalogue: *Art Inspiring Education – Celebrating 15 Years*, Redlands Westpac Art Prize. Curator: Lindy Lee, Redlands Sydney Church of England Co-Educational Grammar School
- 2009 Catalogue for group exhibition: *Abstraction 8*, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
Catalogue for group exhibition: *Engaging Visions: A Benalla Field Study*, Coorinator: John Reid, Benalla Art Gallery, Victoria
- 2008 *Contemporary Art Studio*, (eds.) Yang Wei & Shao Qi, Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, China
- 2006 Interview with Julie Karabenick, USA, in *Geoform*, international abstract artists' website: www.Geoform.net
- 2005 *Australian Contemporary Painting: The Classic Works of 42 Excellent Artists*, (ed.) Jingzhe-ji, Shanghai People's fine Arts Publishing House, Shanghai, China, pp. 20-21
Catalogue for exhibition: *Dawn Light*, International Contemporary Art Exhibition and Symposium, curators: Neil Berecny-Brown and Juliet Fowler-Smith, Gosford Reginal Gallery, NSW
- 2004 Paper presented at Symmetry: Art and Science Tihany Congress, Hungary: 'Colour is structure in abstract painting', *Journal of the International Society for the Iterdisciplinary Study of Symmetry (ISIS-Symmetry)*, 2004 / 1-4, pp.34-7
Catalogue for group exhibition: *Southern Exposure : A survey of New Zealand Glass*, essay by Grace Cochrane, with artist's statements, Glasmuseet, Ebeltoft, Denmark
Grace Cochrane, 'Southern Exposure, New Zealand', *Neues Glas/New Glass*, Germany & USA, Fall, p.20-7
- 2003 Bridie Lonie, catalogue essay: 'Analogical Machines', for solo exhibition: *Liz Coats: New Paintings*, Utopia Art Sydney
Derek March: Dark Waters, catalogue essay by Liz Coats, Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland, NZ
Catalogue for group exhibition: *Significant Tilt: Art and the Horizon of Meaning*, curator: Rod Pattenden, Macquarie University, Sydney
- 2002 Catalogue for group exhibition: *Good Vibrations: the legacy of 'Op' Art in Australia*, curator: Zara Stanhope, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

- Andrew Paul Wood, 'Shifting Geometries: Liz Coats', Review of solo exhibition, *Physics Room Annual 2001*, The Physics Room Trust, Christchurch
- Points of View: University of Technology Sydney Art Collection*, (ed.), Ewen McDonald, University of Technology Sydney 2002
- 2001 Paper presented at ISIS-Symmetry: Art & Science Sydney Congress, 'Shifting Geometries: Dimensional Colour in Abstract Painting', University of NSW, Sydney, 7-14 July. Published in: *Symmetry: Art and Science Quarterly*, 2001/1-2, pp.46-9
- Bridie Lonie, 'Liz Coats: Holding Patterns', *Art New Zealand*, No. 98, Autumn
- Catalogue for group exhibition: *Intersections of Art and Science*, in association with ISIS-Symmetry Art & Science Congress, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, Sydney. Curator: Felicity Fenner, essay: Anna Munster
- Fertile Ground: An artist looks at McCahon*. Liz Coats writes and curates on Colin McCahon for an exhibition at the Hocken Library Gallery, Dunedin, NZ
- 'Liz Coats: Notes from China', in: *Arts Dialogue*, Journal of the Ba'hai organisation, No. 54, February
- 2000 Zara Stanhope, curator's essay in association with group exhibition: *The Numbers Game: Art and Mathematics*, Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University, Wellington, NZ
- Liz Coats, essay: 'Inside Painting', for exhibition, *Meeting Lines: Margaret Roberts & Liz Coats*, Otago Polytechnic Art School, Dunedin.
- D'Arcy Dalzell, 'Liz Coats: Shifting Geometries', *Sarjeant Gallery Newsletter*, March/April/May 2000
- 1999 Artist's essay: 'Liz Coats, (Aspiring to) The Great Wide Open: Notes on China', in: *Australian Asian Arts Society Journal*, Vol. 8 No.1 March 1999
- 1998 Artist's statement in catalogue: *The Sieve, Nets & Everything*, solo exhibition: Creation Gallery, Beijing
- Artist's statement: *Morphic Paintings*, for solo exhibition, Annandale Galleries, Sydney.
- 1997 Photo-documentation & catalogue report in: Japan Foundation: International Forum. Symposium: Artist-in-residence program - Weighing up the options, celebrating 100 years of Australia-Japan Friendship. Co-ordinator: Emiko Namikawa, Tokyo, 4 Feb.
- 1996 Sue Ford & Ben Ford, *Faces 1976-1996*, women artists participate in a film on four screens to encore the original *Faces* 16mm film of 1976. Interview with Charmain Smith, *Otago Daily Times*, Dunedin, NZ, (3 Sept.)
- 1995 Bruce James, catalogue essay: *In the Congregations, the paintings of Liz Coats*, for solo exhibition, Brooker Gallery, Wellington, NZ
- Liz Coats, catalogue essay on the work of Margaret Roberts, for group exhibition of installation artists, The Viaduct Project, Sydney
- Catalogue: *The Shell Collection of Contemporary Australian Painting*. Curator: Robert Lindsay, Melbourne (illus.)

- 1994 Sioux Garside & Jenny Zimmer, catalogue essays for group exhibition: *Circle, Line, Square: Aspects of Geometry*, Campbelltown City Art Gallery (illus.)
- 1993 Catalogue: Works from the Allen, Allen & Hemsley Collection, Melbourne International Festival, Victorian Arts Centre, curator: Ewen McDonald, (illus.)
Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists*, 2nd edition, Craftsman House, Sydney (illus.)
Catalogue for solo exhibition: selected paintings, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne
- 1992 Brigitte Carcenac de Torne, 'Colours that fan out subjectivity', in: *Binocular*, Vol.2, Moët et Chandon, Sydney, (ed.) Ewen McDonald
Sandy Kirby, *Sight Lines: Women's Art & Feminist Perspectives in Australia*, Craftsman House (illus.)
Catalogue for group exhibition: *The New Metaphysic*, curator, Felicity Fenner, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, Sydney
Cover illustration: 'The Fisherwoman and the Gardener: The Heart', in: *Study Design booklet for Languages other than English*, Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Board, Melbourne
Magnetism painting illustrated in *New Zealand Art Diary*, Wellington 1993, GP. Publishing
Interview with Nigel Hoffman, in *Transforming Art* journal, Sydney
- 1991 Ewen McDonald, 'Liz Coats: A Body of Work', in: *Art New Zealand*, Sept. Artist's statement with images, in catalogue for group exhibition: *Frames of Reference: Aspects of Feminist Art*, curator: Sally Couacaud, Pier 4/5, Sydney (in association with *Dissonance*, Australian contemporary women's art)
- 1990 Victoria Lynn, Catalogue essay for group exhibition: *Abstraction*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney (illus.)
Terence Maloon, chapter: 'Commitment to Abstraction', in: *Contemporary Australian Painting*, (ed.) Eileen Chanin, Craftsman House, Sydney.
Sabrina Achilles, 'Tokyo Connection', In *From Australia: Contemporary Art & Craft*, No. 2, Australia Council publication
Terence Maloon, Catalogue essay for group exhibition, Liz Coats, Leah McKinnon & Lee Friedlander, *The Radiant Core*, David Jones Gallery, Sydney
Catalogue statement for group exhibition: *Tokyo Connection: Twelve Australian artists in Tokyo*, Visual Arts Board, Australia Council
Max Germaine, (ed.) *Artists & Galleries of Australia & New Zealand*, Craftsman House (illus.)
- 1989 Catalogue essay for exhibition of drawings by Leah Mackinnon, First Draft Gallery, Sydney
Joanna Mendelssohn, 'The Vision Splendid', in: *The Bulletin*, 24 October
- 1988 Catalogue statement for group exhibition of women artists: *Structures of Necessity*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney
- 1987 'Liz Coats: Artist's Diary', in: *Arts Monthly* journal, December
Takaki Hasegawa, 'Stillness and Motion through using Japanese paper as material', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November
Interview with Graham Wicks, in: *Australian Embassy Bulletin*, Tokyo, January

- Interview with staff reporter, in Tokyo Shimbun, Tokyo, 14 March
 Interview with Yoko Matsuda, in *Bijutsu Techo*, Contemporary Art Magazine, Tokyo, July, p.249
- 1986 Tony Bond, catalogue essay for group exhibition: *Surface for Reflexion*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney & touring Regional NSW Galleries
- 1985 Paul McGillick, catalogue essay for group exhibition: *The Subject of Painting*, Art Gallery of New South Wales
 Catalogue essay: Ingrid Perez & Gary Sangster, for group exhibition: *In Visible Pursuit*, Artspace, Sydney
- 1981 Janine Burke, 'Bringing it all back home: Thoughts on recent abstract painting' in: *Art & Australia*, Vol.18, p.370-4
- 1976 Participation in Sue Ford's 16mm film: *Faces*

SEMINARS, CONFERENCES:

- 2010 Paper on Mikhail Matyushin, The Art Association of Australia & New Zealand Conference, Adelaide
 Forum: Russian avant-garde artist, Mikhail Matyushin and the 'organic' strand of abstraction, School of Art, Australian National University, Canberra
 Symposium for the Painting Studio, School of Art, ANU: 'Paul Cezanne and the painting: *Rocks near the caves above the Chateau Noir*, ca. 1904'. In association with 'Masterpieces from Paris: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cezanne & beyond. Post-Impressionism from the Musee D'Orsay, Paris, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
 'Some Thoughts on Painting,' Symposium for *This Way Up*, three exhibitions on abstraction, M16 Gallery, Canberra, convened by the Painting Studio, ANU, Canberra
- 2005 Paper: 'On making paintings,' *Dawn Light* Symposium, Ourimbah Campus of Newcastle University: (In association with *Dawn Light* exhibition, Gosford Regional Gallery, NSW)
- 2004 Paper given at Symmetry: Art and Science International Congress, Tihany & Budapest, Hungary
- 2002 Seminar (in association with solo exhibition at X Space), School of Art & Design, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, NZ
- 2001 Paper given at ISIS-Symmetry: Art & Science Sydney International Congress, University of NSW, Sydney
- 1999 Guest lecture in the *Korero mo toi* series, collaboration between the Auckland Institute of Technology and Auckland City Art Gallery, NZ
- 1998 Forum: *Tradition & Innovation*, Australian Watercolour Institute, S.H. Evin Gallery, Sydney
 Paper by Liz Coats, presented by Prof. Liz Ashburn, 'Finding Simplicity: Engagement with painting as a living exchange.' ISIS 4th International Congress on Art and Science, The Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa, Israel
- 1997 Colloquium 'On Painting,' organised by Victoria Lynn, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
 'Finding Simplicity: Engagement with painting as a living exchange', Paper presented at *Intersections '97 Conference* (in association with *Perspecta*, Art Gallery of NSW)

- 1996 Colloquium on contemporary women artists: Liz Coats, Noelene Lucas & Kate Briscoe. Conference on Religion, Literature & the Arts, Sancta Sophia College, Sydney University
- 1991 Weekend Forum, 'Speaking for Ourselves: Eight women artists,' in association with *Dissonance* programme, Art Gallery of NSW, NSW
- 1990 Paper presented at Symposium in association with exhibition: *Tokyo Connection: Twelve Australian Artists*, Tokyo
Presentation at 11th Australia/Japan joint seminar, organised by the Australia/Japan Foundation, Hachioji, Japan