

**OPTICALITY AND TACTILITY IN SELECTED SOUTH
AFRICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines some ways in which source material is interpreted in still-life painting. These interpretations will be explored from two positions in painting. For my purposes, these positions will be termed opticality and tactility. I will argue that opticality constitutes a privileged approach to painting in Western visual tradition. My general position is in accordance with a specific feminist view which links opticality to certain patriarchal values. I will identify and discuss various ways in which tactility in painting may challenge the primacy of opticality.

Reference will be made to both historical and contemporary painting. All discussion will involve the making and the viewing of the work. Special attention will be given to locating values of opticality and/or tactility in selected still-life paintings by contemporary South African artists - Marion Arnold, Keith Dietrich and Penelope Siqots. I will also discuss these approaches with reference to my practical work.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

Leora Naomi Farber

_____ of _____, 19____.

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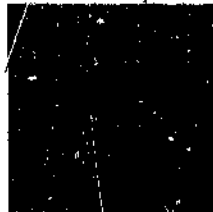
Sincere thanks to my supervisor Penelope Siopis, not only for her guidance in the writing of this dissertation, but also for her longstanding support of my approach to painting. Her support has helped me to realize that aspects of my paintings which have often been considered as 'weaknesses,' are in fact my strengths.

Deep thanks go to Charles Blackbeard, whose immense contribution in the form of emotional support and practical assistance has sustained me throughout the period of this research.

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I dedicate this research to my late aunt, Dora Katz.

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C·O·L·O·U·R
PRESENTATIONS

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PREFATORY NOTE

A first draft of this dissertation was completed after a series of paintings for this research had been executed. The ideas generated by the theory seemed to me to be so rich, multiple and varied that I felt a need to develop these concepts further practically. This accounts for what may be perceived as a radical shift or 'second stage' in my practical work. For me however, this development was not so much a shift as an ongoing, unfolding of the research process, evidence of the relationship between theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

While still-life painting tended to be a predominant concern in my undergraduate years, it was not until I embarked upon this post-graduate study that I became aware of some issues associated with it. Still-life is an anti-heroic genre, historically considered 'lesser' than other classical genres because it deals with the 'commonplace, the ordinary, the trivial.'¹ Still-life, particularly flower painting, has historically been associated with women.² In my own work, still-life offered the potential to create an intimate, domestic environment. The objects I used as reference were usually decorative and had personal significance. I used them as personal metaphors.

My particular brand of still-life painting provoked criticisms which prompted this research. Comments such as 'it has no focus or tension, there's no place to rest the eye, too decorative, not enough form' and words such as 'bitty,' 'knitting' and 'pattern-like' pointed to 'problems' in my approach to painting. These criticisms puzzled me. I began to question some criteria which seem to govern our appreciation and evaluation of artworks. Through this research, I discovered that criteria for these criticisms are rooted in modernist formalism.³ This approach, which I believe privileges opticality, has become naturalized and dominates our appreciation of paintings.

Whilst researching for my proposal, the concerns of the so-called Utopian French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray struck me as particularly appropriate to my needs in painting.⁴ Their fluid, metaphorical and lyrical approach seemed to support what I had been doing, albeit unconsciously, in my painting practice.⁵ Reading their works, as well as other feminist⁶ and postmodernist cultural critics,⁷ helped me to locate the origins of these criticisms.

These writings also affected my structuring of this thesis. I *purposely* interweave multiple discourses, speculative ideas and primary research in its textual fabric.

My research examines two approaches to still-life painting: *opticality* and *tactility*. For my purposes, opticality will be associated with painting in which the discourse of the gaze and mastery of medium are primary. The gaze indicates a vision generally associated with detachment and objectivity. Norman Bryson defines it as "...prolonged, contemplative, yet regarding the field of vision with a certain aloofness and disengagement, across a tranquil interval..."⁸ Mastery of medium involves a kind of control of medium. This is often manifest in illusionistic renderings where the surface is significantly 'smooth.' Traces of autographic mark are minimized so as not to disrupt the plausibility of the illusion. However, mastery may also be associated with modernist formalism. Whilst the latter counters illusionism through assertion of medium (amongst other

things) - it advocates 'heroic' control of expressive zeal and resistant medium.⁹

I will argue that a combination of the gaze and mastery of medium¹⁰ may facilitate a viewing which involves control and possession. However, vision and opticality are not always the same thing. Perception in the visual arts is obviously visual. My argument is that *a specific combination of the gaze and mastery of medium encourages a vision which I term opticality.*

Opticality often valorizes totalizing values such as those of 'presence.' Colin Richards defines presence as "...that which is obvious, a determinable and determinate, framed, 'given'" noting that it may be associated with values such as "...'achieved unity', autonomy, closure, singularity, completeness (totality)..."¹¹ In dominant forms of Western representation¹² 'optically given presence' is privileged and equated with knowledge.¹³ It is likely that modernist formalism's privileging of the eye owes much to this dominance.

Irigaray and Cixous identify presence with phallogocentrism,¹⁴ holding that it structures knowledge in terms congenial to male domination. Generally aligning myself with this position, I will argue that opticality may be identified with patriarchal values. Tactility becomes the 'other' of opticality - a constellation of qualities with the potential to disrupt and challenge opticality's primacy.

The relation between opticality and tactility is not simple. Whilst both are inscribed in and depend on each other, they also differ.¹⁵ In my paintings I foreground tactility. However, I will discuss them (by and large) separately to make dense and complex material more accessible.

The genre of still-life connects these positions. While my emphasis is on contemporary still-life painting, I will refer to historical examples of the still-life genre, particularly the 17th century European tradition. These examples are appropriate to my discussion both thematically and stylistically. Their extreme opticality has a bearing not only on contemporary South African still-life painting - as I shall reveal using examples of Keith Dietrich's work - but on the criteria often used to determine quality in painting. In varying ways, other South African still-life painters such as Marton Arnold and Penelope Siopis present alternative possibilities to this optical tradition. These artists work in ways which acknowledge and challenge values I associate with opticality.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I will review opticality, showing how it has been manifest and valorized in Western visual art in general. In Chapter 3, I shall briefly discuss pictorial conventions of European 17th century still-life painting, making some use of Norman Bryson's writings.¹⁶ I will argue the gaze to be an optical vision which distances artist and viewer¹⁷ from the picture, suppressing the

body within it to produce a 'disjointed' perception. When this gaze is combined with a particular kind of mastery of medium, totalization (pictorial unity)¹⁸ is often emphasized. This may encourage the viewer to perceive the work as a 'given absolute.' Such subject-object organization invites control and possession through sight. While I begin with traditional European still-life conventions to reveal features of opticality, I will go on in Chapter 2 to draw attention to modernist formalism's reification of the eye and advocacy of values of presence.¹⁹

In Chapter 4, I shall indicate some of the challenges to the status of opticality presented by a number of 20th century cultural critics, particularly the feminists already mentioned. These feminists identify the gaze as a male vision. Perception is here inscribed with patriarchal power relations. In their writings, Irigaray and Cixous stress "...tactile/corporeal sensitivities, multiple focused perception..."²⁰ resisting what they term phallogentrism in language. Resistance is proposed through a female speech constructed on what they argue to be the multiple, plural and openended nature of female sexuality. I will attempt to relate these writings to painting practice, while recognizing the difficulties of applying literary criticism to the visual arts.

In Chapter 3 various ways in which tactility involves the body will be explored. I will argue that a combination of some, if not all, of the following qualities assert sensory responses other than sight and may liberate a sense of bodily involvement. These qualities include: specific ways of engagement with the medium (textural articulation) where evidence of work²¹ is declared, an excess of detail and decoration, repetition, fragmentation, indeterminacy and dispersal (the infinite, openended - 'unfocussed,') the 'unfixed,' interaction between the visible and the hidden (interior and exterior space, concealing and revealing.) I will link these with Cixous' 'Imaginary' - a pre-linguistic state of infantile fusion with the mother. In this way, the body shall be considered a site of resistance to opticality.

As Bryson notes, the body has been suppressed in Western visual art. It seems then that assertion of the body, particularly the *female* body, is necessary to resist this suppression. While I am cautious not to promote a body/mind split, in this respect I believe that

"...women have always been forced to exist within the cracks of the ruling structure, experiencing themselves, 'only fragmentarily as waste or excess in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology.'²²

Psychoanalytic views on art are relevant to this discussion. Some of these will be touched on in Chapter 4 to suggest further ways in which a painting may be perceived through assertion and/or suppression of the body.

suppression of the body.

In my primary theoretical research, I shall examine selected works by the three contemporary South African still-life painters already mentioned. Examples of paintings by each artist will be used to determine how my definitions of opticality and tactility may be borne out. Their works appear to represent three different positions in relation to these approaches. Whilst these approaches are never absolute, these artists come close to the extremes of my definitions. Paintings by Siopis will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapters 5 and 6 ~~the~~ three artists will be given attention. Their paintings shall be compared with each other and with my own approach to painting in Chapter 7.

All three artists self-consciously question the tradition of still-life, which generally excludes the human figure. Both Siopis and Dietrich combine the human figure with still-life objects and Arnold combines objects with landscape. Differences between these artist's treatment of this relatively 'unconventional' still-life subject matter will be pointed to. These works will be examined from within a broad discourse. The construction of meaning through processes of production and consumption, the role of discourse in the production of meaning, the artist's intentions²³ and contemporary writings will all be considered.²⁴

I found it easier in my paintings than in my writing to evoke the fluidity characteristic of Cixous' and Irigaray's writing. Perhaps scholarly writing is predicated on the very principles of logicity and linearity their writing challenges. Much as I would have liked to write more poetically or metaphorically, I felt compelled to proceed in a more detached academic style.

However, this style is not without some strategic disruptions. Whilst I will *integrate* the written text and illustrations to support my interaction between the verbal and the visual, inclusion of reproductions of details throughout is intended to *disrupt* the text and reflect my concern with the detail/fragment. Here and there I will shift between different paces of writing style: alternating brisk, concise, factual passages with slower passages of descriptive and speculative detail. In this way and by mixing primary research with discussion of other theoretical concepts now and then, I hope to evoke verbal equivalents for qualities found in the paintings. Occasional repetition of ideas and images is intended to encourage a relatively non-linear reading of the text. Given the complexity and density of the material, some important information is placed in the endnotes. I feel this enriches the main text and is not always subordinate to it. To disrupt the text further, I will use the generic term 'she' to refer to both male and female subjects. However in some instances - e.g. in specific historical cases - the term 'he' (indicated in scare quotes) will be used. In these instances the fact that the subject was assumed to be male is important to my argument. Through

"...pre-conceptual, non-appropriative openness to people and to objects, to the other within and outside them...[to] juxtapos[e] mediation and narrative, literal and fantastic images, past and present, concrete detail and incantatory flow..."²⁵

1. Bryson, N. 'Chardin and the Text of Still-Life' *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 15 No. 1 Autumn 1988-9, pp 228-9.
2. Flower painting, which originated as a branch of still-life painting in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, developed as a common genre for women. Flowers were used as metaphors for morality and mortality. Despite the complexity of their symbolic meanings, these works were accorded secondary status. They were considered as 'intellectually undemanding' and 'suited to women's sensibility!' ((eds.) Parker, R. and Pollock, G. *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* p 54.)
3. Modernism will be predominantly identified with the writings of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. In ch. 2, I will also refer to the writings of Harold Rosenberg. I recognize that although Greenberg's position constitutes a particular - broadly adhered to - aspect of modernism, the latter cannot be so monolithically defined. Predominant writings to which I will refer include Greenberg, C. *Art and Culture*; (ed.) Barcock, G. *The New Art*; Kuspit, D. B. *Clement Greenberg, Art Critic and Poet*; Fried, M. 'Art and Objecthood' (eds.) Philipson, M. and Gudel, P. J. *Aesthetics Today* pp 214-239.
4. The writings of French feminist Julia Kristeva are related to those of Irigaray and Cixous. Kristeva however takes a position less woman-centred than that of the latter feminists. She studies male avant-garde writers, arguing that they have access to a pre-linguistic energy she terms the 'semiotic,' speaking of a "...dialectic between the explosive energies of the semiotic and the structures of official discourse..." whatever the gender. (Jones, A. R. 'Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine' (eds.) Greene, G. and Kahn, C. *Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* p 89.) Interestingly, Kristeva has applied these theories to the visual arts. (See for instance Kristeva, J. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.) Whilst she may have seemed an obvious choice in relation to my concerns, I will discuss the writings of Cixous and Irigaray for the following reasons. They propose a sexually specific relation between women and language, exemplifying how women's "bodily impulses might deform and transform." (Jones, A. R. *Ibid.* p 90. Emphasis my own.) I relate to the way they express a powerful form of body politics in poetic language. Their writings offer the potential to relate this body politics to my own painting practice.
5. This practice includes the artist's involvement, the viewer's position and respective theoretical writings regarding the work.
6. These feminists include Griselda Pollock, Rozika Parker, Mary Kelly and Kate Linker.
7. In particular, these include Owens, C. 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism' (ed.) Foster, H. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* pp 57-82 and authors featured in (ed.) Wallis, B. *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation.*
8. Bryson, N. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* p 94. Foucault refers to the 'clinical gaze' in a historical account of medical innovation in the Classical Age. Scientific experimentation is "...identified with the domain of the careful gaze, and of an empirical vigilance receptive only to the evidence of visible contents. The eye becomes the depository and source of clarity." (Foucault, M. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* p xiii.) Certain feminists refer to an 'erotic gaze'. Mulvey identifies this gaze as an active, mastering look used by the male spectator to 'objectify' woman as passive subject as portrayed within narrative film conventions. (Mulvey, L. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Wallis, B. *Ibid.* pp 361-73.)
9. See further Kelly, M. 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism' Wallis, B. *Ibid.* pp 87-103.
10. Throughout the text, the term 'opticality' will refer to one or both of the titles.
11. Richards, C. P. 'Excess as Transgression: Reducing Surface to Depth in the Still-Life painting of Penelope Siopis.' *Art and Social Change* p 73.
12. Here and in ch. 1 reference to representation will be in accordance with its common definition as visual representation. In ch. 5 certain postmodernist writings which offer a critique of representation will be examined.
13. For an account of how empiricism has influenced Western thinking, see for instance Jay, M. 'In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century Thought' Hoy, D. C. *Foucault: A Critical Reader* pp 175-204. See also his 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' (ed.) Foster, H. *Vision and Visuality* pp 3-29.
14. Defined as the "...structuring of man as the central reference point, of thought, and of the phallus as the symbol of sociocultural authority..." (Jones, A. R. *Ibid.* p 80.)
15. This is perhaps not unlike the contemporary feminist problem of gender. In exploring this issue, writers such as Cixous and Irigaray (amongst others) advocate equality whilst recognizing difference.

16. Regrettably Bryson's most recent book on still-life painting, Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1997, only became available to me after a final draft of this dissertation had been completed. No doubt this book would be pertinent to my research, but due to time restrictions unfortunately had to be omitted.

17. Acknowledging that the terms 'artist' and 'viewer' are not 'fixed' categories.

18. Throughout the text, totalization will be identified with values of presence, as defined by Richards. (Richards, C. F. Ibid.)

19. See Pollock, G. Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art for a historical account of how opticality has been manifest in the visual arts since the Renaissance. Kelly outlines the modernist formalist orientation towards optical values in 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism.' (Kelly, M. Ibid. Parisian.)

20. Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 84.

21. By this I mean evidence of process (autographic mark) through which the work was created.

22. Hewison, R. 'The Body Politic' Future Tense: A New Art For the Nineties p 144. Quotes Irigaray, L. 'This Sex Which Is Not One' (eds.) Marks, E. and de Courtivron, I. New French Feminisms: An Anthology p 104.

23. I will consider the intentions of these artists - as determined from interviews, published and unpublished written material on their work - with respect to the relevance of artistic intention in critical interpretation.

24. As Kelly claims, the reading of an artistic text is always subje^d to "...calculated practices of reviewing, publishing, and exhibiting art for a specific public..." (Kelly, M. Ibid. p 88.)

25. Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 89.

CHAPTER 1

"VISION DISEMBODIED, VISION DECARNALIZED"¹

"...the Gaze takes the body and returns it in altered form, as product but never as production of work; it posits the body only as content, never as source...the eye contemplates the world alone, in severance from the material body of labour: the body is reduced...to its *optical* anatomy..."²

In this Chapter I will explore some features of opticality, showing how these are manifest in Western visual tradition by examining examples of 17th century European still-life painting. This genre seems particularly optical. It encourages extreme subject-object relations between viewer and painting. As Bryson notes

"The power to immobilize...to objectify everything in the visual field belongs to the gaze of still-life...duality and contradiction between subject and object is something [traditional] still-life explores to its outer limit."³

However Bryson cautions that while this is generally the case, inherent in traditional still-life painting is a fundamental ambivalence. The very subject matter of still-life can encourage empathy and identification, as it often depicts food and domesticity - themes of familiarity, warmth, hospitality and nourishment. In spite of many formal characteristics which may distance the viewer, the subject matter of the traditional still-life has the potential to reduce subject-object boundaries. As Bryson comments, the balance between these poles is precarious.⁴ This concept of ambivalence is one which I will elaborate on in this chapter. If we accept Bryson's concept, tactility in paintings is possible.

As explained in my introduction, vision is not synonymous with opticality. However in Western thinking, vision is historically privileged as "...the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and the world."⁵ Ocularcentrism dates back to antiquity. Jane Gallop connects the conceptual realm with vision, as the Greek word 'theoria' is derived from 'theoros' (spectator) and from 'thea' (a viewing).⁶ Historically, vision's superiority is advocated by many theorists. These include Goethe, who pronounces vision as the "noblest sense" as distinguished from the "baser, coarser" sense of touch and Schiller, who claims that the "intellectual" senses of vision and hearing are superior to the "primitive animal senses" that depend on contact with materials.⁷ Hegel champions vision because of its detachment and "theoretical relation to objects"⁸ and Descartes proposes a spectatorial split between a detached, contemplative

subject and object viewed.⁹ Knowledge in Western culture is predicated on difference: to 'know' is to observe an objectified 'other' through sight.

As Martin Jay notes, sight is often considered the 'master sense' of the modern era.¹⁰ He comments that the visual contribution to knowledge - although more metaphorically than literally - is credited with far more importance than any other sense.¹¹ Common English words such as insight, perspective, overview, farsighted etc. testify to this.¹²

In Western culture vision is associated with both religious symbolism and the quest for secular knowledge. The visionary search for illumination is frequently linked with the rhetoric of light and dark. This is illustrated by proverbs such as 'seeing the light' and 'what you see is what you get.' Darkness and the inability to see is often associated with the irrational,¹³ ignorance and evil. Proverbs such as 'ignorance is the night of the mind,' 'if the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch' etc. convey this.

Historically vision is linked with maleness. Sigmund Freud genders this rhetoric of light with the male, darkness with the female. He refers to female sexuality as "...the dark continent" of psychology.¹⁴ As the example of Oedipus demonstrates, the fear of blindness is connected to the fear of castration.¹⁵ Freud considers voyeurism and scopophilia to be a male orientation.¹⁶ This suggests that in Western culture, values associated with vision are not neutral: knowledge, rationality and sanity are gendered as male. It may be assumed that blindness - with its associations of darkness, irrationality and insanity - is its feminine 'other.'

In 17th century Dutch culture, 'true' knowledge is linked to empirical observation.¹⁷ In the physical sciences, the visible world is ordered according to a system of taxonomic classification. The 'scientific' gaze forms a tireless visual exploration whereby the existence of the external world can be 'proved.'¹⁸ Science's task is to seek 'truth' through observation, to present a 'factual,' 'objective' account of appearances. In this case '*seeing is believing.*'

In this culture "...the eye [is] a central means of self-representation and visual experience a central mode of self-consciousness."¹⁹ In Dutch still-life painting, objects are displayed "...not for use, or as a result of it, but for the attentive eye."²⁰ Several writers, specifically Svetlana Alpers, comment on the optical emphasis of these paintings. Alpers points to certain subtle yet noteworthy differences between the Northern (Dutch) and Southern (Italian/Spanish) still-life traditions. I will briefly review those differences which have a bearing on the contemporary still-life paintings to be discussed later. To contextualize her writings, some general points about the development of the

still-life tradition need to be made.

Before the 17th century, still-life motifs were used as subsidiary elements e.g. on mural paintings from the late Hellenistic period, on Greek pottery and in Roman mosaics. Before the Renaissance, still-life motifs formed components of portraits or religious works. The autonomous still-life developed in the 1600's with Spain and Holland becoming the major centres of production.²¹

Alpers argues that the traditions developed in these centres offer different ways of picturing the world.²² In the Southern still-life tradition, the viewer actively looks out at a world as its commanding presence. Man is generally given privilege. In the Dutch approach, the world - assumed to be prior to man - 'is made visible and is seen.'²³ Concern is with mirroring nature 'exactly' and 'unselectively.' Alpers terms Southern art as 'narrative' as opposed to the Dutch art of 'describing.'²⁴

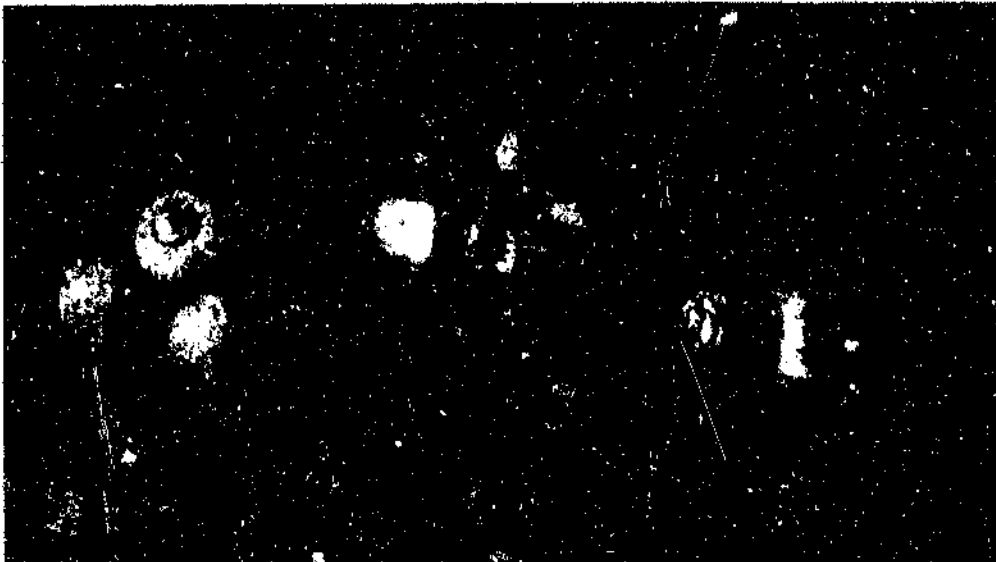


Fig. 1 de Zurbarán, F. Still-Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water (1633.)

Still-Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water²⁵ (de Zurbarán, F. 1633) (Fig. 1) will be used as a typical example of the Southern tradition. This painting epitomizes values I associate with opticality.

Medium is mastered in a way which relies on a 'smooth' surface to create a credible illusion. The

spectator's gaze is not disturbed by what Bryson terms "[t]he work of production..."²⁶ 'He' surveys the scene from a singular, prime viewpoint.²⁷ This viewpoint is enhanced by a single lightsource. Objects are convincingly bound by their relation to one another and by the pictorial frame. At the same time, their self-sufficiency is established through equal spacing between each object and clear figure-ground delineation. This arrangement of forms emphasizes concerns of balance and order. Such symmetry and frontality indicates that the artist is aware of the viewer's presence, suggesting that the scene has been deliberately arranged for 'his' benefit. This 'theatrical' quality emphasizes the viewer's position as commanding subject.



Fig. 2 van Beyeren, A. Still-Life with a Silver Wine Jar and a Reflected Portrait of the Artist (Date uncited.)

Alpers compares this Southern emphasis on control and consequential "...summation or closure"²⁸ with the Dutch use of 'microscopic vision.' This microscopic tendency to display multiple surfaces is linked with Dutch practice of 'opening' objects to make their construction visible, so that knowledge might be gained from empirical observation.²⁹ The external view, inside and/or underside of objects is often shown. A typical example is Still-life with a Silver Wine Jar and a Reflected Portrait of the Artist (van Beyeren, A. Date uncited.) (Fig. 2) Many objects are depicted in comparison to de Zurbaran's emphasis on singularity. The pared lemon - a characteristic Dutch emblem - contrasts with de Zurbaran's depiction of lemons as whole, graspable forms. Meat is also

cut to reveal both outer skin and inner flesh.³⁰

Fragmentation is further suggested by the way light is represented as configurations of marks. This creates multiple 'focal points,' which may invite the viewer's eye to flicker across the surface. Dutch artists deliberately chose to render objects with reflective surfaces such as glass and metal. As the title indicates, the surface of the jug acts as a mirror - reflecting a self-portrait of the artist. He looks at the viewer/himself looking at the painting. Microscopic vision makes differences between the above painting and de Zurbaran's more profound. The surfaces of objects are described with heightened visual attentiveness to detail and texture. The depicted world seems to extend beyond the frame. There is no one point from which to view the work - a factor which Alpers believes makes it anti-theatrical in intent.³¹

However, this microscopic vision is optical: "[e]ach thing exposes multiple surfaces in order to be more fully *present* to the eye."³² This vision may be related to the scientific *gaze*³³ which makes knowledge *visible, known and possessible* i.e. *present* through representation. As no actual *physical* rupture of the surface's mirror-like smoothness occurs, this fragmentation is an illusion - an optical effect - obtained through mastery of medium.

Albeit in differing ways, both Spanish and Dutch paintings stress simulation of appearances. This emphasis on sight may be linked to a philosophy of representation described by Bryson as 'The Natural Attitude.' Bryson argues that an underlying assumption of Western classical tradition is that the painter's goal is to achieve a 'perfect' replication of a pre-existing reality.³⁴ The image is required to approximate an 'Essential Copy' of nature.³⁵ In the attempt to create this 'perfect' replica of what the eye perceives, the painter is required to minimize what Bryson terms "...the body of labour..."³⁶ as indication of the process by which the painting was created would disrupt the plausibility of the illusion.

Bryson notes that in linguistics the term 'deictic' is reserved for "...utterances that contain information concerning the locus of utterance..."³⁷ He states: "[d]eixis is utterance in carnal form and points back directly...to the body of the speaker; [it is] self-reflexive..."³⁸ He proposes that traditional Western oil painting is predicated on the *disavowal* of deictic reference. Suppression of deixis occurs in two ways. The first instance is through use of oil paint as an 'erasive'³⁹ medium. In order to create a foreground-background relation, evidence of surface is initially 'erased' or covered over. Illusionism obscures this 'ground cover.' Such mastery of medium conceals the 'work of production:' "...stroke conceals canvas, as stroke conceals stroke."⁴⁰ Consequently, as in Dutch 17th century paintings,

"Eye, world seen, and picture surface are...elided in a manner that suggests that the world described...is none other than the world perfectly seen...It is as if visual phenomena are...made present without the intervention of a human maker. This is the rightness of the connection made to the eye or to its equivalent, the camera obscura."⁴¹

Secondly, Bryson comments that as a result of such mastery of medium the tense of Western representational painting is aoristic i.e. not in the deictic present of the body.⁴² At no point is the "...durational temporality of performance preserved or respected..."⁴³ allowing paintings produced under the gaze to depict a frozen vision - a world 'fixed' according to the artist's/viewer's perception:

"In the Founding Perception, the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena, contemplates the visual field from a vantage-point outside the mobility of duration, in an eternal moment of disclosed presence; while in the moment of viewing, the viewing subject unites his gaze with the Founding Perception, in a perfect recreation of that first epiphany."⁴⁴

This illusionism produces a painting which may distance the spectator - keeping 'him' physically and mentally 'at arm's length.'⁴⁵ Such looking maintains a distance between subject and object, where the viewing subject

"...looks at things *without* from a field *within* the self, and experiences disconnection...Hence the *morte in nature morte*: there is no living bond between the watcher subject and the objectified field."⁴⁶

Due to its potential for objectification, the gaze may be considered an alienating, voyeuristic⁴⁷ vision, which empowers the viewer to dominate the painting as objectified 'other.'⁴⁸ As mastering subject 'he' is authorized to 'possess' the imaged world through looking.⁴⁹ Bryson terms this "...the vision of the Medusa."⁵⁰ Depicted objects are not only 'actually' lifeless, but are rendered as such through the gaze's power to objectify.

Bryson notes that the gaze of still-life also alienates its viewer in numerous other ways. He comments that these factors combine to make the gaze of still-life potentially the most 'lethal' kind of vision in European painting. Not only does still-life exclude the human subject, giving preference to inanimate objects, it also excludes human values such as narrative. Still-life often deals with that which humanity has disregarded - debris, the insignificant.⁵¹ Bryson argues that the traditional still-life's combination of these 'insults' often makes it a genre which is "...cold, inhuman and fundamentally inhospitable to [its] mastering subject."⁵²

Yet, as I pointed out earlier, despite its potential for objectification, still-life may also invite 'anti-Medusal' vision: a kind of looking where relations between subject and object are redefined so that the duality between them is to an extent overcome. Through its themes of food and domesticity, still-life can return the 'Medusal subject' to the outer world. For instance, still-life depicts familiar, everyday objects, which have not changed over spans of time. The body is dependant on the outer world for existence. Eating creates a break with the objectified world and the body loses its sense of separation from it. Nourishment also implies the ritual of the meal, with its associations of interpersonal interaction. As a voyeuristic 'guest' at the still-life table the spectator may be returned to the social field.⁵³

Optical possession (facilitated by painterly illusionism and the gaze) is correlated by John Berger with actual possession.⁵⁴ He notes that the development of the easel painting tradition (± 1500) corresponds with the rise of the art work as commodity.⁵⁵ This connection between painting and possession is echoed by Clement Greenberg, who defines the easel painting as that which "...cuts the illusion of a box-like cavity into the wall behind it..."⁵⁶ The painting is likened to a fictional window in the wall. This 'window' is generally framed, 'containing' the illusion and reinforcing the status of the painting as a commodity.

Prior to the development of easel painting, paintings were generally commissioned and owned by the state. Large scale works - usually with historical or religious content - spanned the walls of churches and government buildings.⁵⁷ The easel painting, which was generally smaller in scale, developed to suit the needs of the middle-class. These smaller paintings became portable commodities able to enter the market of capitalist exchange.

The relation of optical and actual possession to scale of paintings is a complicated issue. For instance, a painting which is smaller than the body could facilitate physical control or could invite intimacy. Although it is often assumed that distance is necessary for the 'appreciation' of a larger scale work - especially one with perspectival illusionism⁵⁸ - a painting larger than the body could conversely encourage bodily identification, depending on its surface articulation.⁵⁹ A heightened degree of textural articulation may encourage the viewer to look at the surface from a close proximity.

The traditional still-life generally depicts objects which can be possessed in everyday life. With its anti-heroic character, it is well suited to the middle-class domestic environment. Berger notes that owning such paintings serve as an extension and affirmation of their owner's lifestyle and affluence, adding that a more appropriate metaphor for these works than that of the Albertian

'window' is the metaphor of "...a safe let into the wall...in which the visible has been deposited."⁶⁰ Bryson echoes this idea, stating that the still-life table functions as "...an exact barometer of status and wealth."⁶¹ This is epitomized by the Dutch genre of the 'pronk' still-life which generally depicts a meal with delicacies set amongst fine glassware and china. These works are characterized by a show of splendour, ostentation and sumptuousness. They valorize depiction of material surfaces through attention to surface texture and detail. An example is Still-Life with a View of a River (de Heem, J. D. 1646.) (Fig. 3)⁶²

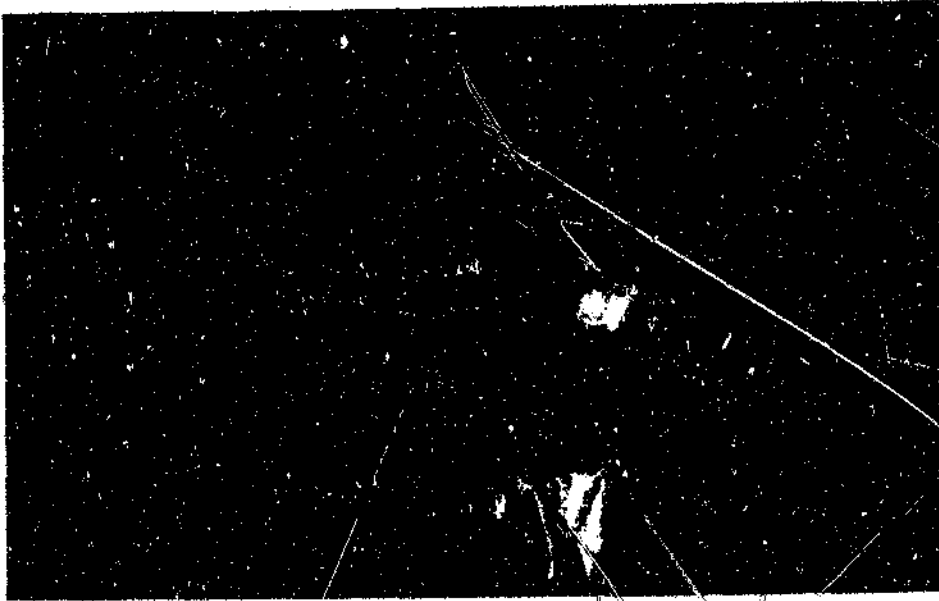


Fig. 3 de Heem, J. D. Still-Life with a View of a River (1646.)

Bryson notes that the still-life of luxury assumes an ambivalent position regarding its subject. On one hand, the viewer who is not part of the class whose affluence is on display is excluded from the scene. On the other, reference to social division is part of this subject's everyday experience. In this way, 'he' may be returned to a world of social relations.⁶³

In this chapter I have tried to link certain features of illusionistic still-life painting - including mastery of medium, presence, the gaze - with possession. In this case, the gaze may be considered a particularly alienating or disembodied vision: a vision which 'cadaverizes life' through objectification. However to say that all paintings produced in this predominantly optical tradition adhere to its logic would be too neat a conjecture. For example, although Rembrandt worked in the Dutch visual tradition, Alpers argues that his use of paint in certain works undermines the power relations particular to this tradition.

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Fig. 4 van Rijn, R. H. The Flayed Ox (1655.)

In The Flayed Ox (1655) (Fig. 4) - an example amongst many - paint is applied as a dense material substance. Surfaces are scumbled and evidence of brushstroke revealed. As Alpers notes, this assertion of medium creates surfaces which "...are...of a maker of pictures who profoundly mistrusted the evidence of sight."⁶⁴ This evidence of sight not only privileges the 'eye' but also the I (ego) of the viewer as mastering subject. As Irigaray states:

"More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at a distance, maintains the distance. In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations...The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality."⁶⁵

1. Bryson, N. Vision and Painting p 95.

2. Ibid. pp 164 and 94. Italics added.

3. Bryson, N. 'Chardin and the Text of Still-Life' Ibid. p 234.

4. Ibid. pp 235-9.

5. Jay, M. 'In the Empire of the Gaze' Ibid. p 176.

6. Gallop, J. The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis p 58.

7. Quoted in Olin, M. 'Validation by Touch in Kandinsky's Early Abstract Art' Critical Inquiry Vol. 16 Autumn 1989, p 161.

8. Quoted in Owens, C. Ibid. p 70.

9. Jay, M. Ibid.

10. Jay, M. 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' Ibid. p 3.

11. Jay, M. 'In the Empire of the Gaze' Ibid. p 176.

12. It is for this reason that I have tried - as far as possible - to avoid using words such as 'view, observe, see, perspective' etc. in my text. Although these words are commonly used in aesthetic discourse, in the context of my argument they seem inappropriate as I associate them with opticality. When using these words, I do so advisedly, aware of their patriarchal connotations.

13. Foucault discusses how madness in the Classical Age is commonly associated with blindness. See further Foucault, M. Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason Passim.

14. Freud, S. Quoted in Gilman, S. L. 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward and Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature' Critical Inquiry Vol. 12 No. 1 Autumn 1985, p 238.

15. This is referred to by Moi, T. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory p 134.

16. Freud, S. Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality 1905. Passim.

17. This privileging of sight is related to the fact that before the end of the 16th century, Western culture was based on an assumed unity of word and image. Foucault argues that in the Classical Age (c.1650-1800) this unity was broken, leading to the development of a new 'scientific' world view which no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text but "...saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher." (Jay, M. 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' Ibid. p 9. Foucault's theories are quoted in Jay, M. 'In the Empire of the Gaze' Ibid. p 187.)

18. Stafford, B. M. Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account 1760-1840 p 33.

19. Alpers, S. The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century p XXV. The Dutch trust in empirical observation is complicated by the fact that some scholars (e.g. de Jongh) offer a reading of images through emblems. Emblems (such as the pared lemon, curtains, watches, meat etc.) feature throughout traditional European still-life painting, predominantly in Dutch 17th century works. This 'vanitas' tradition was established to imbue the 'lesser' genre of still-life with religious meaning. Depicted objects are considered as "...veils that conceal meaning." (Ibid. p 229.) Such readings counter the view that Dutch art is merely a mirroring of the world. However, Alpers argues that for the Dutch, the observed world was understood in terms of certain 'meanings' which were made accessible through representation.

20. Alpers, S. Ibid. p 95.
21. For a more comprehensive overview of the development of the autonomous still life, see Sterling, C. Still-Life Painting: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century. The development of the Dutch still-life tradition is outlined in de Jongh, E. Still-Life in the Age of Rembrandt. As Bryson notes, the lack of literature available on still-life points to the fact that it remains one of the least acknowledged classical genres. (Bryson, N. Ibid. p 227.)
22. Alpers, S. Ibid. p 45.
23. Ibid. Passim.
24. Ibid.
25. This title varies in the literature. In Jordan, W. B. Spanish Still-Life in the Golden Age 1600-1650, it is referred to as Still-Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Cup of Water. However, in other publications, such as Alpers, S. Ibid., it is referred to as Still-life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose. I will refer to it as Still-life from now on.
26. Bryson, N. Vision and Painting p 92.
27. This relates to the convention of single-point perspective, predominant in European art of the early Renaissance. Based on the perspective theory of Leon Battista Alberti, this perspective enables the viewer's eye to be correlated with the eye of the painter. This system addresses the singular (as opposed to binocular) eye of the spectator/artist directly, centring everything around 'his' monocular viewpoint. (Jay, M. 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' Ibid. p 7.) Such an eye is considered to be "...static, unblinking, and fixated...producing a visual take that was externalized, reduced to 'one point of view,' and disembodied." (Ibid.) The illusion produced from this singular vantage point is seductive. Positioned as the focus of the painting, the artist/spectator assumes a God-like position and may feel empowered to control and 'possess' the scene. 'He' is placed in a privileged position which affirms 'his' status, enabling 'him' to be its 'mastering I/eye.' (See further Berger, J. Ways of Seeing p 16.)
28. Alpers, S. Ibid. p 104.
29. Ibid. p 90.
30. This practice of exposing interior and exterior plays an important part in my work, as well as in the paintings of Marion Arnold and Penelope Stojis. See discussion to follow.
31. See further Alpers, S. Ibid. pp 44-5. Concerning theatricality, Alpers' position is outlined by Michael Ann Holly 'Past Looking' Critical Inquiry Vol. 16 Winter 1990, pp 371-95.
32. Alpers, S. Ibid. p 91. Emphasis added.
33. Scientific discourse is considered by certain feminists to be patriarchal. Irigaray uses a metaphor of the speculum to make this point. The speculum is a concave mirror used by gynaecologists to inspect the interior cavities of the female reproductive organs. Irigaray proposes that in patriarchal discourse, woman is situated outside representation - as the negative of the male subject's specularization. The mirror functions not only to visually penetrate the inside of the vagina, but as a metaphor for man's need to postulate a subject capable of reflecting his own being. Western philosophical discourse presents woman as its own reflector. She becomes not only the 'other,' but specifically man's other: his negative or mirror image. (Moi, T. Sexual Politics pp 129-39.)
34. Bryson, N. Ibid. pp 1-13.
35. According to Bryson, Gombrich offers a challenge to the concept of the Essential Copy with his theory of schemata. Gombrich conceives of painting as a process in which gradual modifications of existing conventions are made, by testing these conventions against empirical observation. (Gombrich, E. H. Art and

Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Presentation Passim.)

36. Bryson, N. Ibid. p 92.
37. Ibid. p 87.
38. Ibid. p 88.
39. The term 'erasive' is ambiguous. Whilst evidence of brushmark is concealed/erased, the surface is also added to.
40. Ibid. p 92. Italics added.
41. Alpers, S. Ibid. pp 29-30.
42. Bryson, N. Ibid. pp 92-4.
43. Ibid. p 92.
44. Ibid. p 94.
45. Siopis, P. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 75.
46. Bryson, N. 'Chardin and the Text of Still-Life' Ibid. pp 233-4.
47. Freud associates scopophilia with the positioning of oneself against another and submitting that other to a distanced and controlling gaze. It can become fixated into voyeurism where sexual satisfaction is derived through watching an objectified other in a controlling sense. (Freud, S. Ibid. Passim.)
48. In both Southern and Northern representations "...composition involves a staging of the scene before the viewer, a spectacular interval or proscenium frame between the subject and the scene." (Bryson, N. Ibid. p 242.) This theatrical structuring establishes the viewer as the focus of the display. Although 'he' may not occupy a single viewpoint, particularly in Dutch paintings, it may be argued that the still-life has been artfully arranged for 'his' benefit. Theatricality may be emphasized by formal devices such as a dramatic 'spotlighting' of objects at a focal point or drapes which appear to have been drawn aside to reveal the scene. Such reorganization of the world before the viewer, when combined with the workings of illusionism and the gaze, emphasizes the viewer's position as voyeur: 'he' is allowed entry into a private domestic space and is offered a privileged position from which to survey the scene.
49. This voyeuristic exchange is only one possible kind of structural relationship between the beholder and artwork. In the literature various, much debated positions are indicated. See for instance Carrier, D. 'Art and its Spectators' Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism Vol. 45 Fall 1986, pp 5-17; Holly, M. A. Ibid. and Fried, M. 'Representing Representation' (ed.) Greenblatt, S. J. Allegory and Representation p 102.
50. Bryson, N. Ibid. pp 229-35.
51. Ibid. pp 228-34.
52. Ibid. p 234. For instance, if familiar subject matter is treated with heightened visual attentiveness, the depicted objects could appear estranged. Such defamiliarization serves to distance and exclude the viewer. This is pertinently illustrated in de Zurbaran's Still-Life, where the visual field is so united, balanced and composed that "...familiar objects seem on the brink of transfiguration, or transubstantiation...Standing at some imminent intersection with the divine, and with eternity, they exactly break with the normally human." (Ibid. p 239.)
53. Ibid. p 238.

54. This concept of possessing that which is imaged is echoed in the pictorial convention of the female nude, as I will show in ch. 5.

55. Berger, J. Ibid. p 88.

56. Greenberg, C. Ibid. p 154.

57. Berger, J. Ibid. p 19.

58. For instance, Fried notes that "[t]he larger the object the more we are forced to keep our distance from it..." He adds that a large scale work threatens to dominate or overwhelm the spectator, thereby denying the possibility of an intimate viewing exchange. (Fried, M. 'Art and Objecthood' Ibid. p 219.)

59. This is evident in the work of the late modernist painter, Mark Rothko. In my own work I attempt to challenge preconceptions concerning large scale works, by creating large paintings which may encourage the viewer to approach and become involved with the surface. See ch. 7.

60. Berger, J. Ibid. p 109. As Berger says, these paintings "...had to be able to demonstrate the desirability of what money could buy. And the visual desirability of what can be bought lies in its tangibility, in how it will reward the touch, the hand, of the owner." (Ibid. p 90.)

61. Bryson, N. Ibid. p 245.

62. Although a preoccupation with material sumptuousness, possession and display characterizes these works, they are paradoxically rendered in a manner which denies the potential materiality of the medium. Alpers and de Jongh suggest that this ambivalence may be related to the vanitas tradition, which ostensibly warns against preoccupation with earthly things. The illusionism of oil paint renderings is likened to the belief that material wealth itself is an illusion. (Alpers, S. Ibid. pp 229-233.)

63. Bryson adds that the still-life of luxury offers a more material vision than for instance, the frugal table of de Zurbaran. In the latter, intense perception results in an image where 'worldliness' is negated in favour of spirituality. Through identification with materiality, the objectified world may be 'returned' to the viewer. (Bryson, N. Ibid. pp 245-6.) He adds that this 'return' is complicated by works such as Still-Life with Nautilus Cup (Kalf, W. 1661) which indicate the influence of expanded travel and trade with foreign lands. Depicted Chinese porcelain and carpets from the Near East testify to a new, merchantilist space imbued with both geographic and financial concerns. This depiction of luxury undermines still-life's portrayal of humanist concerns (such as domesticity and familiarity) replicating these with the depiction of rank and separation. (Ibid. p 247.)

64. Alpers, S. Ibid. p 227.

65. Irigaray, L. Quoted in Owens, C. Ibid. p 70.

CHAPTER 2

THE DISEMBODIED EYE¹¹

"The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may no longer permit sculptural illusion, or trompe-l'oeil...it...must permit *optical illusion*...a strictly pictorial, strictly optical third dimension. Where the Old Masters created an *illusion* of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the *illusion* created by a Modernist is one into which one can *look*, can travel through, only with the eye."¹¹

My discussion thusfar has connected opticality with three-dimensional illusionism. However, the comments that provoked my research arise out of a modernist formalist tradition. While this tradition could be considered as antithetical to illusionism, in this Chapter I will point out that it none the less still privileges opticality, and in so doing, emphasizes phallogocentrism. I will refer to two feminist artists who challenge this phallogocentrism in their work. I use their works as emblems of significant shifts in consciousness - a consciousness often termed a postmodern sensibility. This sensibility figures tactility in ways congenial to my position in this research.

Given that modernism is characterized by a number of different strains, it becomes difficult to define.² However, Greenbergian modernism predominates in the form of the received notions which have influenced the criticism of my work. The focus I spoke of earlier, which is often considered 'lacking' in my work, is frequently conflated in this criticism with Greenberg's pictorial tension. My stress on an undifferentiated surface is similarly considered 'merely decorative, tensionless' and lacking in 'unity.'

However, in addition to these values of unity, focus and tension, modernist discourse figures qualities that are not inconsistent with my definition of tactility. For example, Greenberg advocates that the ideal modernist painting stresses pictorial flatness and dispersal. He notes that when viewing such a work, "[t]he eye has trouble locating central emphases and is...compelled to treat the whole of the surface as a single undifferentiated field of interest."³ Similarly he promotes textural articulation and assertion of material medium. He even encourages a kind of deictic evidence of the artist's body in the exposed brushstroke and gesture, noting that "[c]onnoisseurs of the future may...even find the Old Masters wanting in physical presence, in *corporeality*."⁴

This acknowledgement of the body is echoed in the statements of several other critics and artists of the time. Harold Rosenberg notes how the modernist painter could "...get inside the canvas."⁵ This idea is reiterated by quintessential modernist painter, Jackson Pollock. In a public statement

on his work, Pollock stresses the importance of 'contact' between artist and canvas, commenting that

"I hardly ever stretch my canvas before working. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting. When I am *in* the painting I am not aware of what I'm doing."⁸

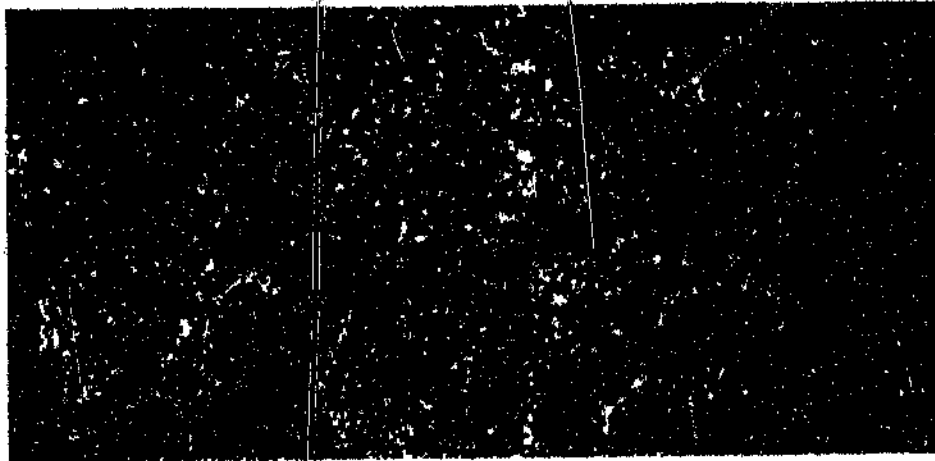


Fig. 5 Pollock, One: Number 31, 1950 (1950.)

Pollock explores further 'contact' with the canvas through differentiated paint application. This includes pouring paint from the tin, applying it with sticks and adding foreign matter to it - creating an extremely material surface. Paintings such as Out of the Web: Number 7 (1949) and One: Number 31, 1950 (1950) (Fig. 5) reflect Greenberg's concept of a 'polyphonic/all over' surface. Greenberg defines this surface as one which is "...knit together of identical or closely similar elements which repeat themselves without marked variation from one edge of the picture to the other."⁷ Hierarchical figure-ground distinctions are minimized. The surface appears as a featureless field of equally stressed marks, dispensing with a 'beginning, middle or end.'⁸

However, it is not *only* this kind of emphasis on materiality that could arguably connect modernism with tactility. Certain modernist painters e.g. Mark Rothko and Helen Frankenthaler (working between 1951-60) 'soak and stain' their canvases with fluid washes of paint. Rothko's work in particular is associative. Stained fields of colour blur; edges 'bleed' into each other. In his writings, Rothko comments on the intimacy between himself and his process.⁹ Frankenthaler creates stained cloth by pouring paint onto unprimed cotton duck. While these paintings assert the flatness of the surface, they also create an ambiguous space by allusion to depth through colour.¹⁰

Considering these selected factors, it may seem that modernism could answer the needs for a tactile approach to painting. However, these 'tactile' qualities are presented for the eye alone and are grounded in a structure of representation which is - as Griselda Pollock puts it - "the celebration of creative masculine individualism."¹¹

According to Greenberg, 'achieved unity,' autonomy, purity and self-referentiality are for purely optical ends. As he says - "...visual art should confine itself to what is given in *visual* experience and make no reference to any other orders of experience."¹² Tenets of self-criticality are to be achieved by using the characteristic methods of each discipline, both to narrow and to "...entrench it more firmly in its area of competence."¹³

Such self-referentiality makes modernist painting concerned with a kind of universality - divorced from its social context and from initial interaction between artist and canvas, the work is assumed to 'speak for itself,' to be pre-eminently pictorially 'given.' That which is depicted is termed 'thing,' as opposed to signification. 'Thing' is a more immediate visual order.¹⁴ Severance from the social world encourages a distanced viewing. This optical preoccupation instates a 'pure' visuality, where eye and picture surface make immediate and rapid contact. The eye becomes disembodied. Its reification gives a self-reflexive, autotelic autonomy to sight. According to Rosalind Krauss this results in a 'technologizing' of the body:

"Vision had...been pared away into a dazzle of pure instantaneity, into an abstract condition with no before and no after. Yet in that very motionless explosion of pure presentness was contained as well vision's connection to its objects, also represented here in its abstract form - as a moment of pure release, of pure transparency, of pure self-knowledge."¹⁵

Greenberg's ideal of unity,¹⁶ is to be achieved through control of 'resistant reality' - both 'outer reality' (depiction of recognizable form) and 'inner reality' (emotion.) Considering the medium as a vehicle for the expression of emotion, he claims that: "[t]o the extent that [the artist] controls the medium he...control[s] his emotion..."¹⁷ To achieve the materialist, decorative 'unity' of the ideal modernist painting, Greenberg advocates a form of 'heroic' mastery of medium.

While autographic mark supplies evidence of bodily processes, of a specific maker and of an 'essential humanness' the artist's subjectivity, individuality and bodily 'presence' is positioned as central in a way that privileges patriarchal values. Mary Kelly argues that the demand for self-referentiality¹⁸ makes autographic mark the primary painterly signifier. The physical properties of the medium largely become the subject of the work and the mark the signifier of 'presence.'

Gestural mark is "...manipulated...to trace a passage, to give evidence of an essentially human action, to mark the subjectivity of the artist in the image itself."¹⁹

Mentioning the body (and its connotations of internal and external space) in his argument, Greenberg notes that

"The picture has now become an entity belonging to the same order of space as our bodies...Pictorial space has lost its 'inside' and become all 'outside.' The spectator can no longer escape into it from the space in which *he himself* stands. If it deceives the eye at all, it is by *optical* rather than pictorial means..."²⁰

These modernist requirements of flatness,²¹ self-criticism, self-definition and self-reference effectively make the painting an 'object.' The taking of these features to extremes in certain minimalist paintings led Michael Fried to coin the phrase 'objecthood.' In minimalist painting, the condition of utter flatness means that all evidence of gesture is eliminated from the work. This raises the question of how authentic presence for these paintings can be determined.²² Fried concludes that size may confer presence. He comments that this presence is theatrical - one which, not unlike the presence of the traditional still-life, simultaneously confronts yet distances the viewer.

Conception of the artist as creator and 'his' mark as signifier of originality²³ draws on the Romantic conception of the artist as hero, as genius. This genius is attributed a heightened sensibility, a visionary capacity to see beyond surface reality and an 'innate' creative ability.²⁴ In critical and economic practices, the figure of the genius is assumed to be male.²⁵ In an expose of the 'genius' myth, Christine Battersby shows that the concept is linked with male sexual energies and with the assumption of a Godlike position.²⁶ In this way, concepts of the hero, the genius and originality may be considered phallogentric. They assert the virility, masculinity and potency of the (male) artist, positioning 'him' as 'master' who wishes to "...transform...the world into a representation, with man as its subject."²⁷ As Owens notes, such mastery functioned to "...legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image."²⁸

As Pollock notes, modernism is not the

"...heroic struggle, for individual expression or the...discipline of purification and stylistic innovation but...a...discourse around [which] the paradoxes and anxieties of masculinity...hysterically and obsessively figures, debases and dismembers the body of woman."²⁹

Further, she comments that it needs recognition as a "...monological masculine discourse..."³⁰ Owens echoes this but does not exclude postmodernism, commenting that both discourses are "...scandalously in-different" to issues of sexual difference.³¹ With its emphasis on totalization (values of 'achieved unity,' 'pure presentness') modernist discourse not only echoes the optical model that underwrites traditional illusionistic renderings, but is phallogocentric through its connection and valorization of the eye and the I - (the male ego.)

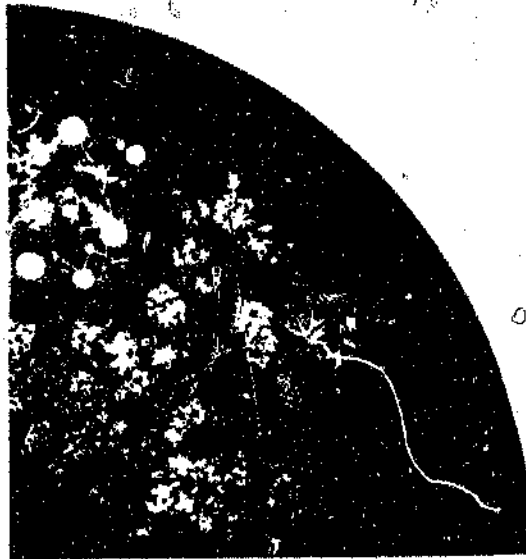


Fig. 6 Shapiro, M. Black Bolero (1980) (Detail, right-hand side) Acrylic, Fabric, Glitter on Canvas.

Certain 1st generation feminist artists³² work in this modernist paradigm, using its values to comment on its patriarchal bias in representation by figuring issues of sexual difference.³³ I will use Miriam Shapiro's work as an emblem in this regard. Shapiro combines the decorative (which as I mentioned, is not inconsistent with modernist discourse) with a return to direct references and figuration. She explores subjects such as female experience, body imagery and/or sexuality, attempting to validate these areas which she believes are relegated an inferior status in the dominant culture.³⁴

In her Black Bolero (1980) (Fig. 6) the fan functions as a female symbol. The work is divided into two halves, creating a sense of the fragment. It combines acrylic paint and fabric collage. The decorative motifs and collage technique refer to a quilting traditions of American women in the 18th and 19th centuries. In this way, Shapiro challenges hierarchical distinctions between 'arts and crafts,' valorizes the body of domestic labour historically considered 'woman's cultural heritage' and challenges conceptions of the decorative as a 'lower' art form commonly associated with women.

This interest in representation, fragmentation, diverse references and craft³⁵ suggests not only a questioning of modernist values but a shift towards what might be loosely termed a 'postmodern sensibility' in which tactility features to some degree. As these concerns are both numerous and controversial, I will indicate only particular ones which indicate tactility and which have the potential to challenge and undermine modernist power relations.³⁶

Postmodernism offers a challenge to fundamental tenets of modernism such as authorship, originality (the concept of the self-possessed 'master artist') authenticity and the 'master narrative.' Jean-Francois Lyotard considers the postmodern condition as one in which the master narrative has lost credibility. He argues that narrative has become "...dispersed into...particles - narrative ones, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, etc..."³⁷ A postmodern vocabulary might include fragmentation and disjunction which defer 'presence.' Notions of intertextuality, parody, allegory and appropriation of images and traditions of the past are interrelated. These continuously defer meaning and concepts of 'purity, autonomy, presence, givenness, totality and originality.'

Drawing on Barthes' conception of the work as text³⁸ and Derridian deconstructive literary criticism in which the sign is not stable, a painting may change from a pre-determined 'given' to conception of the work as text. Here "...the artifact is likely to be treated less as a work in modernist terms - unique, symbolic, visionary - than as a text in a postmodernist sense - 'already written,' allegorical, contingent."³⁹ In this way, the work is contextualized as part of a broader discourse. The status of the viewer changes from spectator - who absorbs preconstituted meanings - to reader, who is required to participate in the construction of meaning.

Many 2nd generation feminist theorists⁴⁰ align themselves with the abovementioned postmodernist critics, being concerned more with "...an interrogation of an unfixed femininity produced in specific systems of signification"⁴¹ than an 'essential feminine.' As with Shapiro's work, I will use Mary Kelly's artistic practice as an emblem of this kind of interrogation. Kelly uses her artwork as a critique of modernism, attempting to expose and deconstruct its ideological constructions in representation.

Kelly employs no direct representations of the female body, stating:

"To use the body of woman, her image or person is not impossible but problematic for feminism. In my work I have tried to cut across the predominant representation of woman as the object of the look in order to question the notion of femininity as a pre-given entity and to foreground instead its social construction as a representation of sexual difference within specific discourses."⁴²

Kelly's Post-Partum Document (1973-79) is an installation which records the first six years of her son's development. In appearance, the installation appears distanced and clinical. Sentimental associations are prevented by not picturing the mother or child. Emotion is deliberately mediated by presenting information in codified form using scripto-visual and 'pseudo-scientific' language. This allows the work to be read as a document i.e. as 'evidence or proof,' presenting motherhood from an informed, authoritative position.

However, Kelly uses this seemingly optical framework in specific ways which challenge modernism's totalizing values. For instance, a concern is to 'unfix' systems of patriarchal representation by showing the reciprocal processes of socialization for both mother and child which determine sexual positioning under patriarchy. Whereas the genius' creative ability is linked to man's sexual status, woman's childbearing role is often identified as her 'natural' sexuality and creativity. As Reg Butler phrases it:

"...can a woman become a vital creative artist without ceasing to be a woman except for purposes of census?...the vitality of a great many female art students derives from frustrated maternity, and most of these, on finding the opportunity to settle down and produce children, will no longer experience a degree of passionate discontent sufficient to drive them constantly towards the labours of creation in other ways."⁴⁵



Fig. 7 Kelly, M. Post-Partum Document (1973) (Detail, Folded Vests) Mixed Media.



Fig. 8 Kelly, M. Post-Partum Document (1976) (Detail, Transitional Object and Diary) Mixed Media.

Kelly turns the concept of genius against itself by making mothering the 'creative content' of her work. Using Lacanian re-readings of Freud, she indicates ways in which motherhood is constructed rather than 'biologically given.' For instance, parallel to the child's processes of separation from the mother, the mother's fantasies of possession and loss are recorded.⁴⁴ As a means of compensation for the loss of the child, the mother appropriates objects associated with the child as fetishes. In contrast to the traditional role of fetishism as a male practice, Kelly's documentation of actual materials - child's vests, comforter fragments, plaster casts of body parts (Figs. 7 and 8) - serve as visual articulations of the mother's desire. With all its obsessive detail, the installation fetishes the child. However, Kelly has reconciled her 'natural capacity' with her work as an artist and the art object replaces the child as fetish.

Kelly states that "[t]here's no single theoretical discourse which is going to offer an explanation for all forms of social relations or for every mode of political practice."⁴⁵ The text presents an interaction of fragments from different discourses: biological experience, feminist, postmodern and poststructuralist linguistic and psychoanalytic discourse. Not being a coherent autobiographical work, the text challenges concepts of originality and authorship.

As Pollock notes "[t]he effect of reconstructing history by means of 'documents' is always one of fissure, fragment, absence."⁴⁶ The viewer - as reader - is invited to actively pursue and produce meaning from the traces offered. This active exchange is supported by use of codes which the viewer is encouraged to decipher. As a text, the work challenges modernist concerns of 'givenness' and 'pure presentness.'

Through these strategies, Kelly ruptures the fabric of modernist discourse. By upsetting the modern belief in principles of unity, singularity and uniqueness, she disrupts the stability of its patriarchal bias in representation. Kelly's exposure of modernism's hidden ideological agenda indicates the possibility of deconstructing its patriarchal forms of representation. She poses a specific kind of textual practice which

"...intervene[s] in the institutions and discourses of art...Political work is done upon those signifying systems and their institutional sites which are shown to be implicated in the oppression of women. By means of these disruptive actions the claims of the signifying systems of our culture...are shattered."⁴⁷

1. Greenberg, C. 'Modernist Painting' The New Art p 107. Emphasis added.
2. I will limit my discussion to artistic practice from after 1945 to the early sixties.
3. Greenberg, C. Art and Culture p 137.
4. Ibid. Emphasis added.
5. Rosenberg, H. Artworks and Packages Passim.
6. Pollock, J. Excerpt from 'My Painting' Possibilities 1 New York: Winter 1947-8, p 79. Quoted in Chipp, H. Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics pp 546-7.
7. Greenberg, C. Ibid. p 155.
8. These limitations were imposed only by the edges of the pictorial format/frame.
9. See for instance Rothko, M. Excerpt from Possibilities 1 p 84. Quoted in Chipp, H. Ibid. p 549.
10. For an outline of Frankenthaler's relation to feminism and modernism, see (eds.) Parker, R. and Pollock, G. Old Mistresses pp 145-50.
11. Pollock, G. Vision and Difference p 159.
12. Greenberg, C. The New Art p 74. Italics added.
13. Ibid. Similarly Fried notes that "...the concept of art...[is] meaningful...only within the individual arts." (Fried, M. 'Art and Objecthood' Ibid. p 230.)
14. Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 76.
15. Krause, R. E. 'The Story of the Eye' New Literary History Vol. 21 No. 2 Winter 1990, p 284.
16. This is to be realized through assertion of 'equivalence' to achieve a materialist, decorative surface. As opposed to the uniform surface of illusionistic representations, the painterly surface is uniform by virtue of its repetitive mark and dissolution of form into overall texture.
17. Kuspit, D. B. Ibid. p 36.
18. This proves an ideal, for as Kelly points out, even the most minimal action/gesture retains a certain residue of figuration. (Kelly, M. Ibid. p 90.)
19. Ibid. p 89.
20. Greenberg, C. Art and Culture p 136. Italics added.
21. Through realization of 'opticality through colour,' complete flatness of the picture plane is not achieved. This term is used by Griselda Pollock to indicate areas which project and recede due to tonal differentiation. (Pollock, G. 'Feminism and Modernism' (eds.) Parker, R. and Pollock, G. Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement pp 107-8.)
22. Fried, M. Ibid. pp 214-39.
23. Challenging autographic mark may seem inconsistent with earlier statements and arguments which I will present later, which imply that the latter is an important aspect of tactility. However, it is specifically in the context of modernism that I challenge its use. As signifier of originality, autographic mark is often used to inscribe power relations between viewer and artwork - relations which insulate the status of the mark as a patriarchal concept.
24. Pollock, G. Ibid. p 83.

25. One of the aspects of the (male) genius is an ability to portray a sense of 'wholeness' and totality i.e. not to get 'caught up' in detail. I will discuss this further in ch. 5.
26. See further Battersby, C. Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics Passim.
27. Owens, C. Ibid. p 66.
28. Ibid. pp 65-6.
29. Pollock, G. Vision and Difference p 159.
30. Ibid. Carol Duncan comments that many representations of the female nude - as used by the Fauves, Cubists, German Expressionists and other modernist artists - which present women as "...powerless, often faceless nudes, and 'passive available flesh' are witnesses to the artist's sexual virility. These women are represented as 'the other,' a race apart, 'in total opposition to all that is civilized and human.'" Duncan, C. 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting' Artforum December 1973, pp 30-9. (Quoted in Gouma-Peterson, T. and Mathews, P. 'The Feminist Critique of Art History' Art Bulletin Vol. LXIX No. 3 September 1987, p 340.) See for instance, de Kooning's Woman series of 1952.
31. Owens, C. Ibid. p 59. In all the modernist literature I read, 'the artist' was consistently gendered as 'male.'
32. Gouma-Peterson and Mathews note that two basic positions co-exist in feminist art criticism and practice today. The first, which they term - 1st generation feminism - has existed from the beginning of the women's movement. This position conceives of woman as a fixed category determined through societal and cultural institutions and at times through the concept of an inherent and biological female nature. The second position - 2nd generation feminism - developed around 1980 and reflects the influence of deconstructive and psychoanalytic methodologies. These feminists consider woman as a constructed category, constantly in process, examined through her representations and ideological constructions in a male system. (Gouma-Peterson, T. and Mathews, P. Ibid. p 346.)
33. Many of these feminist artists are considered part of the 'pattern painters' - a term used by Crane to describe a group of artists who emerged in the late 1970's. These painters use decorative motifs as a primary source of subject matter. (Crane, D. The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World 1940-85 p 59.) These artists create paintings which are primarily "...two-dimensional, nonhierarchical, all-over, a-centric, and amorphic." (Pereault, J. 'Issues in Pattern Painting' Artforum XIV November 1977, p 33.)
34. The separation of the applied arts from the fine arts and an institutional exclusion of women from the latter, may be traced back to the Renaissance. In this split between High and Low art, the applied arts were relegated to an inferior position and deemed as 'woman's work.' (See further (eds.) Parker, R. and Pollock, G. Old Mistresses p 50.)
35. Although the incorporation of multimedia is an important aspect of many postmodern works, it also featured prominently in modernist paintings - as mentioned in relation to Pollock's work.
36. For my purposes, I will consider postmodernism as a product of modernism, a complex of issues which although different to modernism, arises out of and is dependant upon it.
37. Lyotard, J. F. The Postmodern Condition Paris: Minuit, 1979. Quoted in Owens, C. Ibid. p 64.
38. Barthes, R. 'From Work to Text' Wallis, B. Ibid. pp 169-74.
39. Foster, H. Ibid. p X.
40. These include the French feminists, Parker, Pollock and Lisa Tickner.
41. Gouma-Peterson, T. and Mathews, P. Ibid. p 347. This position will be elaborated on in ch. 5.
42. Kelly, M. Post-Partum Document p XVII-111. Other artists, such as Thérèse Outon, reject the portrayal of any recognizable object because of the values of possession and objectification which have been attributed to the practice of looking. (See further Lee, R. 'Resisting Amnesia: Feminism, Painting and Postmodernism' Feminist Review No. 26 1987, p 18.)

43. Butler, R. Comment: 'Frustrated Maternity' Towards another Picture (eds.) Brigatton, A. and Morris, L. p 228.

44. Linker notes that these two factors may be traced to Freud and Lacanian re-readings of Freud. Physical interdependence results in the mother's 'fantasy of union with the child' - a fantasy which represents 'having' the phallus. This is disrupted by a division which occurs through the child's maturation processes and by prohibition of incest under patriarchy. The mother's desire to remain as 'Omnipotent Other' of the pre-Oedipal period results in her difficulty in accepting the child as an autonomous human being. For her, relinquishing the child represents 'the relinquishment of plenitude' and reaffirms her own 'lack.' The mother 'relives' her own Oedipal drama, experiencing castration a second time and her (negative) place in the Symbolic order is reaffirmed. (Linker, K. 'Representation and Sexuality' Wallis, B. Ibid. p 403.)

45. Kelly, M. Quoted in Owens, C. Ibid. p 64.

46. Pollock, G. 'Feminism and Modernism' Ibid. p 98.

47. Ibid. p 96.

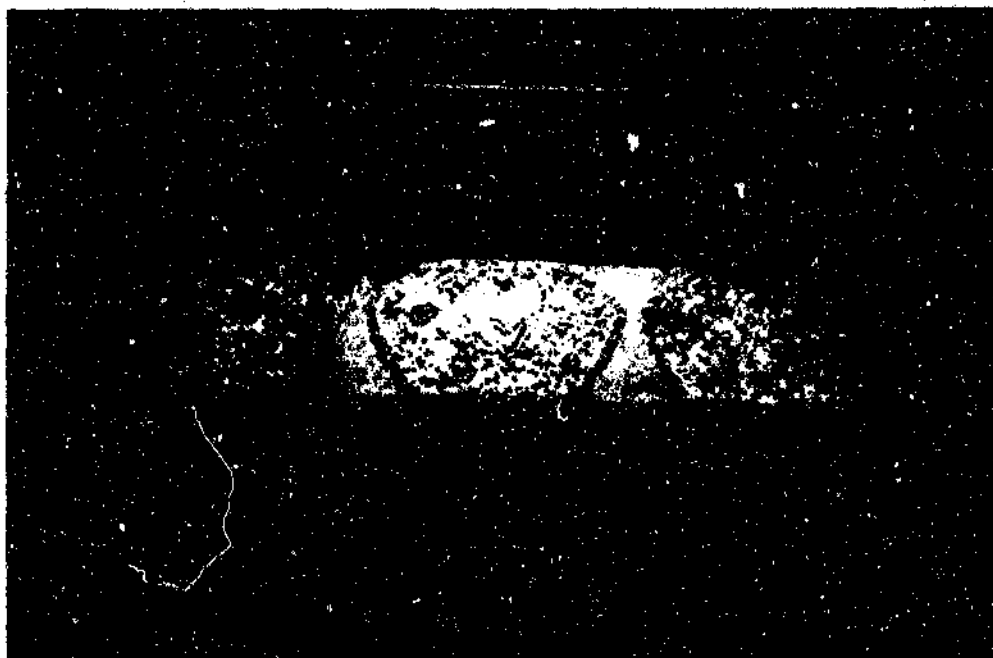


Fig. 9 Siopia, P. Three Lace Cloths (1984.)

Oil on Canvas, 300 x 150 cm.

Collection: The Chase Manhattan Bank.

CHAPTER 3

(RE) - SOURCING THE BODY¹

"To dissolve the Gaze that returns the body to itself in medusal form, we must...try to conceive of form...in dynamic terms, as matter in process...[as] rhythm, the impress on matter of the body's internal energy...the mobility and vibrancy of its somatic rhythms; the body of labour, of material practice."¹

In this Chapter I will explore how tactility in painting liberates a sense of bodily perception. As Bryson notes, such 'carnalized vision' is generally suppressed in Western visual art and culture. My emphasis will be on writings which assert the body, such as those of the French feminists. Though tentatively and provisionally, I wish to draw on the commonly held argument that because language (by which I mean words) is codified, visual images may evoke a more immediate response.² If this is so, I would like to connect this bodily response to Cixous' concept of the Imaginary.

Cixous and Irigaray argue for a form of cultural and political intervention grounded in woman's body. Irigaray associates woman's writing 'style' with fluidity and touch, noting that it "...does not privilege the gaze but takes all figures back to their *tactile* birth."³ This corresponds to Cixous' Imaginary, which she considers the origin of all 'female' writing. The Imaginary represents the bodily drives, rhythms and 'pulsions' experienced by the child in the pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic state of infantile fusion with the mother. Cixous argues that writing which originates from this unconscious awareness expresses the "...endless pleasures of the polymorphously perverse child..."⁴ As the Imaginary is experienced before gender acquisition, writing derived from this state may undermine patriarchal language structures by setting the bodily rhythms of poetry against the linear structures and codified representations of the Symbolic.⁵

If deixis has been suppressed in Western representation, perhaps assertion of the body in the visual arts may be a means of liberation. Janet Wolff's point that "[t]here is every reason...to propose the body as a privileged site of political intervention, precisely because it is the site of repression and possession"⁶ seems particularly pertinent to this exploration. Wolff notes that the body has been "...systematically repressed and marginalized in Western culture, with specific practices, ideologies and discourses controlling and defining the *female* body," adding that "[w]hat is repressed...may threaten to erupt and challenge the established order."⁷

Bearing this in mind, I will consider tactility as opticality's 'other,' as diverse qualities in painting which can release bodily /sensory awareness. In various ways, these qualities all seem to support Irigaray's idea that "[w]oman finds pleasure more in touch than in sight..."⁸ They include: a kind of intimate engagement with the medium,⁹ excessive detail and decoration, repetition, layering, fragmentation, fluidity, indeterminacy and dispersal¹⁰ and ways of concealing and revealing. These qualities will be referred to throughout my argument as tactility. I will attempt to show how they may facilitate non-optical experience.

To do this, I will refer to one of my own works and to a painting by Penelope Siopis. While both Siopis and I work from within the dominant still-life tradition and acknowledge its conventions, we deliberately employ various strategies to undermine the primacy of opticality that has often characterized this tradition.¹¹

Siopis is referred to as a still-life painter.¹² Paintings such as Three Lace Cloths (1984) (Fig. 9) are structured according to traditional still-life conventions. Forms resembling objects (cloths, cakes) are placed on a frontal table ledge. The background is relatively flat. Forms are symmetrically arranged. Tonal contrasts between foreground and background are strong. The composition appears staged. Although these factors appear similar to characteristics of de Zurbaran's work, Siopis has treated the imaged cloths as sites of resistance which are particularly challenging to values of presence.¹³



Fig. 10 Siopis, P. Three Lace Cloths (Detail.)

A significant difference lies in Siopis' treatment of oil paint, which is built up to three-dimensional relief in the part of the painting that depicts cloths. Such elevation of medium disrupts the relative uniformity of the surrounding table and background surfaces. Compared to these 'flat' surfaces, it appears as though a greater degree of physical contact with the medium has occurred in the cloths. Siopis supports this speculation, noting that she used her hands to "...manipulate, pull off and add paint to the surface."¹⁴

The idea of wholeness is constantly evoked and disrupted. Siopis cuts into the excessively built up forms with a palette knife and pulls whole forms off with her hands.¹⁵ This physical fragmentation of the surface "...implies breakage...a part detached, separated, isolated from the whole - an incomplete work."¹⁶ Also, as Richards notes, the fragment (the partial object as image - manifest here in the ruptured whole forms) "...bears the mark of some divisive violation, requires supplementation and... reparation."¹⁷ These forms undermine optically given presence. The surface is further fragmented by perforations and crevices made with instruments (back of a brush, cake icer, spatula, knife.)¹⁸ Despite this rupture of the surface, paint is also added and fractured forms are often restructured, restoring a sense of 'completeness.'¹⁹

Through these *enactments* (building up and cutting into forms, crevicing surfaces and adding paint to the surface) the artist creates the sense that parts of the painting depicting cloth are in a process of becoming, shifting between states of formation and transformation. (Fig. 10) As wholeness is foregrounded, its opposition is raised. Whole or ruptured forms constantly threaten to shift into their 'other.' Dualities are never quite 'cut and dried.'²⁰ In this way, the surface becomes a model "...that is ceaselessly set up and that collapses...[that] extends itself, breaks and starts again..."²¹ yet, ultimately, in this exchange of rupture and restoration "...desire for wholeness remains unrequited."²²

This *active* quality counters the 'fixing' of motion evident in de Zurbaran's painting. In the latter, the term 'still-life' is appropriate to what it describes, yet applied to Siopis' tactile surfaces it seems ironic. Although objects are 'stilled' in representation, excess assertion of medium counters the relative passivity of the surrounding flat spaces.

Attempting to achieve a less organic surface than that of the cloths, the artist 'smooths down' paint in the surrounding areas with a palette knife.²³ In Chapter 1, I referred to Bryson's use of the word 'erasive' to describe application of paint in a way which attempts to suppress traces of labour. Here an attempt is made to produce a surface which although flat, is not seamless. 'Scuffs' left by the palette knife are evident. This appears a deliberate attempt to show signs of process even in a

relatively 'smooth' surface. The external surface also acts as evidence of process in itself.

However, it is in the heavily textured surfaces of the cloths that stages of building up the paint is discernable.²⁴ Here Bryson's idea of deixis is clearly appropriate. Assertion of medium as substance shifts the emphasis deictically back to the sender of the message - the surface refers to and acts as an extension of the painter's body, reading as if in the deictic time of the painting process.

Given the effects of the artist's complex and elaborate layering of paint in the areas which depict cloths, a more immediate response may be evoked in the viewer. The textural quality of the threaded and interwoven paint may invite her to examine the surface from closer physical proximity. The fragmentary nature of the surfaces which depict cloth may evoke a prolonged unconscious desire "...to make whole what has been smashed."²⁵ Speculatively, this fragmentation of the surface may encourage the viewer to experience a sense of the Imaginary - to become 'immersed' into the surface by projecting unconsciously and infinitely *on*/*into* the part-objects it images.

There is also an effect of fragmentation created by reflections of ambient light which break up the three-dimensional surface by cast shadows. Adding to the artist's actual physical fragmentation of the surface with hand and instrument, these reflections rupture surfaces onto which they fall. As opposed to the kind of reflections which *optically* fragment the surfaces of the Dutch still-lives, this rupture is a *physical* one. Painted shadows complicate this concern with fragmentation. This breaking up of the surface makes reading of the painting as a unified whole somewhat difficult. Such dispersed viewing poses an alternative to the synoptic 'taking in' of an immediately coherent image. A dissipated looking is prompted by the articulation of the surface - a form of looking which is shifting, unfixed.

Decorative motifs and details in areas depicting the cloths form microcosmic 'worlds,' which encapsulate the macrocosm. These may enable the viewer "[t]o see a world in a Grain of Sand/And Heaven in a wild flower..."²⁶ Ironically, perhaps this dispersed viewing position may be advantageous: as opposed to a single position from which to take in the entire painting, she is offered the 'privilege' of multiple viewpoints. Her eye may travel around and across the surface, move in and out of crevasses and/or become 'bound up' in subtle shifts between surface and edge.²⁷

Principles of containment, referred to in de Zurbaran's work, are challenged by an 'overflowing'

of paint. There is a sense that paint 'spills out' of the formal, not only into the viewer's space, but mostly in forms that resemble tentacles 'clinging' physically to the table edge. (Fig. 11) There is a quality of things being "out of control."²⁸ These factors may disturb the viewer's ability to dominate and appropriate the image, positing rather the potential for a more active viewing exchange.

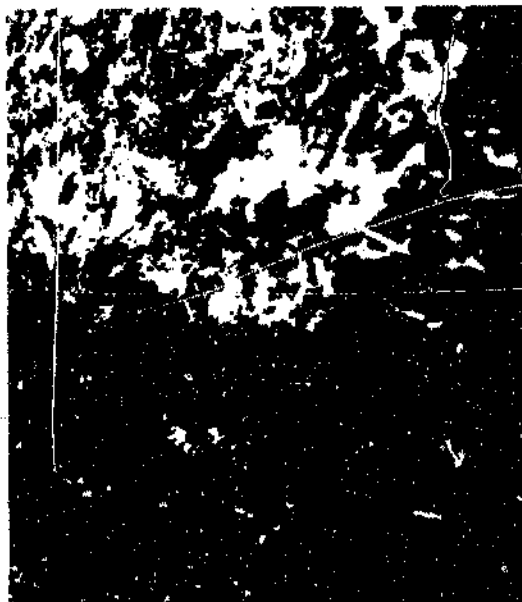


Fig. 11 Siopis, P. Three Lace Cloths (Detail.)

Illusionistic depth is indicated only through lines for the shape of the table which suggest recession. In Chapter 1, I mentioned the common assumption that the viewer needs to 'step back' from a large scale work - especially one with perspectival illusion - in order to 'take it in.' This painting challenges this preconception. Although the painting is large in scale, its tactile surfaces encourage the viewer to examine the areas depicting cloths from a close proximity. The foreground edges of the tablecloths are built up into a dense matrix of material paint. Illusionistic depth is further denied by the relatively unarticulated areas surrounding the table.

Paint as built up material substance tests the limits of the pictorial support, producing simulacrum. Jean Baudrillard defines simulacrum as a substitution of "...signs of the real for the real itself..."²⁹ For instance, the whole green form in the foreground of the centre cloth resembles perhaps a cucumber, a banana, a penis...³⁰ Appearing life-like in scale and physical palpability, it is however - like everything else in the painting - constructed out of paint. Semi-three-dimensional modelling in parts simulates the Dutch use of illusionistic modelling. However the Dutch employ modelling to achieve an optical illusion of volume. In contrast, the simulacra is actually volumetric. Its scale

and tangibility may encourage a sense of bodily identification. Some of the objects project into the viewer's space, possibly inviting the sensation of touch and enabling the viewer to feel that she can 'pick-up' the depicted object.

In the shifting ground of the cloths, the figure - by which I mean the depicted objects - is divested of its traditional role as 'focal point.' Objects are sometimes constructed in shallower relief and are duller in tone than the surrounding face. In this way, their importance seems minimized. The emphasis given to parts of the cloth which touch the edge of the table further decreases their importance. Forms alternatively disintegrate into the surrounding mass or form sharply defined edges. The palpable potential of the medium is exploited for itself (and the associations it may evoke) and/or for the form it may resolve into.

Oil paint is exploited as a viscous, congealing substance. I wish to suggest that further evidence of a more 'carnalized vision' may be found in this use of oil paint, which stresses its potential density and palpability.³¹ This density creates qualities which may act as deictic carriers of meaning, possibly carrying powerful 'reminders' of the body - of its internal organs and/or external skin.³²

As Siopis notes, the three-dimensionality of the oil paint "...evokes associations with other organic matter - flesh, in particular - changing as it does, in time, congealing, forming skins, and losing its juices."³³ Assertion of the medium's materiality may remind the viewer of her own physicality, possibly arousing further associations with the body, such as eroticism, sexuality, mortality. In this way, a particularly 'visceral' response or sense of bodily identification may be evoked.

Perforation of the surface often finds the form of a decorative motif - suggesting for instance, the delicacy of lace. However, these perforations are 'laced' with ambiguity, as the artist deliberately intends them to evoke bodily associations with pubic hair or intestines.³⁴ As Clive van den Berg says: "[t]he comfort of familiarity is embittered by surprising and unsought recognitions and recollections."³⁵ If we accept this connection between the lace cloths and corporeal structures, this visceral response becomes all the more powerful.

In some areas of the painting, the surface appears as if "...bloated with physical substances...hid[ing] unnamed presences, things...pushed from sight...urgent and beneath the surface."³⁶ If we consider the surface as skin, these presences may recall the body, with its external skin which conceals hidden interior structures. In this way, the artist's rupture of the surface is perhaps not unlike rupture into the external skin of the body. Liam Hudson notes that

most people, while acknowledging the hidden presence of internal organs, make no connection between them and the person they serve.³⁷ He adds that this discontinuity between the known and the hidden accounts for a feeling of 'squeamishness' generally experienced when internal organs are exposed.³⁸ Such metaphoric exposure of the body's usually invisible interior may arouse similar feelings of unease and discomfort. Siopis' reference to the visible and invisible recalls Craig Owens' comment that in our culture "...visibility is always on the side of the male, invisibility on the side of the female."³⁹

However, just as the paint is not used "simply [as] a means of illusionistic depiction"⁴⁰ it is also not used exclusively to evoke bodily identification. There is another dimension to the difference between inside and outside. As Siopis says,

"The inside is concealed but changing and the outside is fixed illusionistically. This difference opened for me a conceptual space for a magical, metaphorical investment. Paradoxically what is given to the eye, is not everything. Something else is going on. It is like sympathetic magic."⁴¹

So while the paint hardens and forms a protective 'skin' as it comes into contact with the atmosphere, the complete 'skin' which stretches over the whole built up forms e.g. the 'cucumber-pepils' represents something more than the body for Siopis. The actual physical transformation the drying process causes beneath the skin evokes for her a metaphysical transformation. The material is a site for investment - as van den Berg notes:

"Paint itself becomes the embodiment of emotion and the substitute for gesture as it is made to sweat, is bruised, as it falls, drips or tilts from the canvas...The idea of process, of physical and psychological transmutation is everywhere implicit..."⁴²

By fracturing the surface with hand and instrument, the artist metaphorically enacts the rite of 'cutting into the symbolic body.' The paint often resolves into cake-like forms - objects which point to celebratory rituals and customs. By rupturing their surfaces, she literally enacts the ritual 'cutting of the cake.' Ritual itself evokes associations with customs and rites which are accepted, yet relatively mysterious. Given these factors, the artist speaks of the table surface as resembling a sacrificial altar,⁴³ a site for the "...merging of sensual and spiritual experience - a fusion of secular and religious rituals"⁴⁴ - a site wherein

"Known rites rendered anonymous and innocuous through customs are recharged by an alteration of role and presentation...transformations result in things of no known identity - we are led to recognize feeling without labels."⁴⁵

As opposed to the kind of tactility affected through thickly applied paint evident in Siopis' work, some of my paintings offer an alternative tactile approach. Although I often exploit processes of paint application which allow for physical contact with the medium, the paint is not always asserted as a thick substance. In certain of my paintings, while the surface is flat, texture is articulated. I will call this a 'sign for tactility.' Whilst I will discuss this use of medium in greater detail in Chapter 7, I will indicate significant aspects of it here to demonstrate a different kind of tactile interaction with the surface.

In Delusions of Grandeur (1987) (Fig. 25) a desire for tactility is expressed through a process of applying paint to the surface and then rubbing it off.⁴⁶ Rubbing into areas where paint is layered reveals fragments of underlying surfaces - making evidence of both process and the canvas texture visible. (Fig. 12) I find this 'scrubbed' effect to have associative qualities. For instance, in the area depicting the right hand couch, this effect is combined with flesh-like colour in an attempt to evoke associations with aged/diseased skin or skin with prominent veins and capillaries.

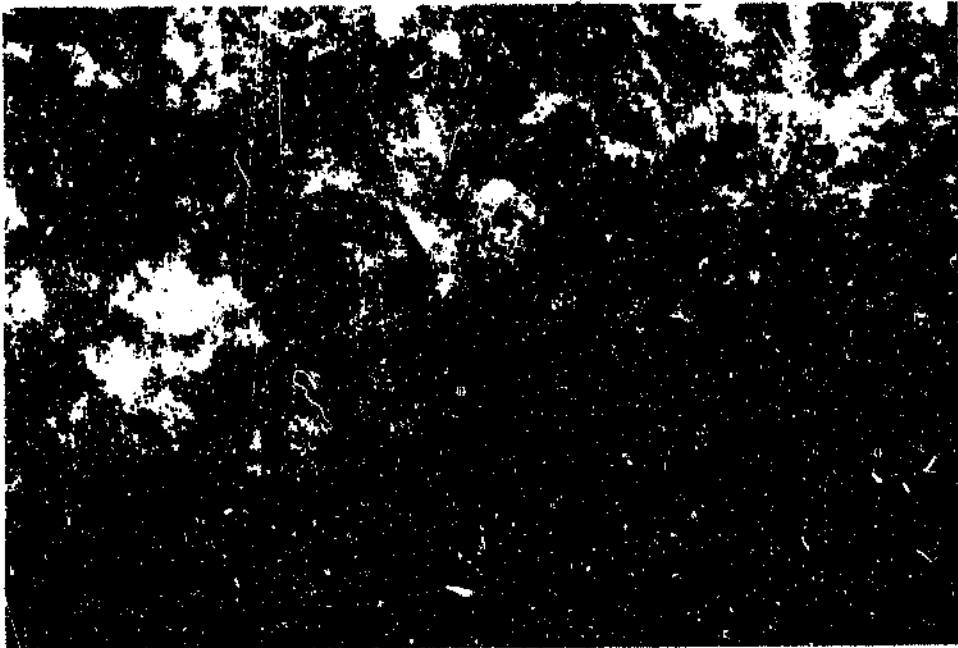


Fig. 12 Farber, L. N. Delusions of Grandeur (Detail)

To create further associative qualities, diverse processes of paint application are exploited. These include staining the canvas with thin glazes and adding large quantities of linseed oil or turpentine to the medium. These processes enhance the medium's ability to flow freely. (Fig. 13) As a consequence of such fluid medium, attention is drawn to the texture of the canvas grain. The weave of the canvas often becomes incorporated into the painterly surface, at times emphasizing the

texture of an imaged form.

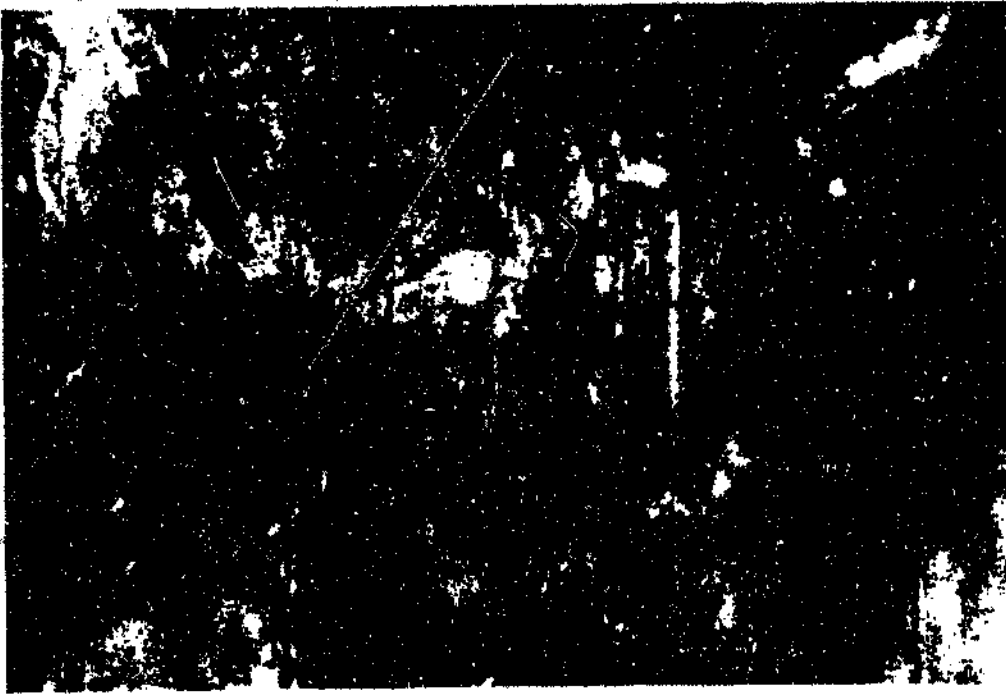


Fig. 13 Farber, L. N. Delusions of Grandeur (Detail.)

These ways of paint application allow me to exploit the expressive potential of the medium. The fluid medium often results in configurations which seem to me viscerally suggestive, possibly conveying associations with bodily fluids.⁴⁷ These signs for tactility, leaving as they do traces of my presence, are a kind of deictic passage. In areas like the depicted carpet, the surface appears as if in a half-formed state; in a process of becoming. Paint drips, resolves into form or remains as material.

Outlines (such as the depicted edges of the carpet and couches) tend to blur and colours appear as if 'bleeding' into one another.⁴⁸ This merging and resolution of outline seems to minimize distance, separation or categorization of forms. Peter Fuller notes that "...the outline represents the world of fact, of separate, touchable, solid objects"⁴⁹ adding that "'to cling to it [is]...surely to protect oneself against the other world, the world of imagination."⁵⁰ In contrast, I wish to create an evocative space, wherein boundaries are transgressed and form

"...never fixes itself in the possible identity of the self to another form. Always *fluid* without forgetting the characteristics of fluids which are so difficult to idealize...resist[ing] and explod[ing] all firmly established forms, figures, ideas, concepts."⁵¹

1. Bryson, N. Vision and Painting p 131.
 2. This issue is much disputed in the literature, primarily by Gombrich and Goodman. (See further Gombrich, E. H. Art and Illusion and Goodman, N. Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols.) Their debate is reviewed in Steiner, W. Image and Code Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1981. For a recent review of this argument, see (eds.) Bryson, N.; Holly, M. A. and Moxley, K. Visual Theory Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
 3. Irigaray, L. Quoted in Moi, T. Ibid. p 145.
 4. Moi, T. Ibid. p 116.
 5. The Symbolic indicates a structure which prescribes society's laws. It is counterposed by Lacan and feminist theorists such as Kristeva and Cixous to the 'semiotic' or 'Imaginary' respectively. (See further Jones, A. R. Ibid. pp 86-7 and Moi, T. Ibid. pp 114-7.)
 6. Wolff, J. 'Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics' Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture p 122. In reviewing the question posed in current feminist literature as to whether the body can be a site of political and cultural protest, Wolff points to some of the fundamental problems associated with this proposition. Some writers have pointed to the pitfalls of essentialism, others note that it is impossible to even conceive of the body outside of discourse. Although I will discuss these arguments in ch. 4, I have noted them here to indicate that the question of feminist body politics is a sensitive issue.
 7. Ibid. Emphasis my own.
 8. Irigaray, L. 'This Sex Which Is Not One' New French Feminisms p 101.
 9. This engagement with the medium may be located from a feminist position. For instance, British feminist artist Alexis Hunter's Passionate Instincts series (1983) exploits a sense of direct involvement with the physical process of painting. She speaks of how such engagement with the medium was for her an autobiographical reference, how it helped her to "...go back to the biological" and to find a way of investing the surface with "...emotional expression." (Hunter, A. Quoted in Nairne, S. State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980's pp 137-41.)
 10. These qualities have been used by some feminist artists as a means of challenging patriarchal forms of representation. Lippard notes that fragments and layering imply an "...antilogical, a...linear approach...common in many women's work." (Lippard, L. R. From the Centre-Feminist Essays on Women's Art p 81.)
 11. As Siopis states: "...I work within this self-same 'aesthetic' tradition using its own values...in an attempt to turn it against itself..." (Siopis, P. Unpublished article on her work, 1988.) Her full statement is quoted in ch. 6.
 12. The artist refers to herself as a still-life painter. See also van den Berg, C. 'Traditions of still-life honoured and violated - Penny Siopis' South African Arts Calendar Vol. 10, No. 3 Summer 1985, p 19; Miles, E. 'kook-ikoo 'n skakule genot' Kalender, Blye tot Beeld 4 August 1983 and Friedman, H. 'Penny puts herself into every picture' Business Day 17 April 1986, p 12.
- I have not dated comments made by Siopis as they occurred during the process of the research which began in 1987 and ended in 1991. Whenever they are reflected, I will cite them as 'In conversation.'
13. Although my comparison may seem to be based on predominantly formal considerations, I wish to stress that this is not so. I will examine Siopis' work from within a wider discourse, taking into account a combination of factors which contribute to my assessment of the work. My conclusions have been arrived at through consideration of all these factors. This is applicable not only in this case, but also in my discussion of works by other contemporary South African still-life painters.
 14. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'
 15. Ibid.
 16. Kritzman, D. 'Preface' to Fragments: Incompletion and Discontinuity New York: New York Literary Forum, 1981. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 73.

17. Richards, C. P. Ibid.
18. Siopis, P. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Richards, C. P. Ibid.
21. Deuze, G. and Guattari, F. On the Line New York: Semiotext(e), 1983 pp 46 and 33. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 77 with reference to Melancholia (Siopis, P. 1986.)
22. Siopis, P. Art 17- '86 Basel Exhibition Catalogue.
23. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'
24. Complicating this premise, it may be argued that through the artist's layering of paint as substance in the areas which depict cloths, preceding layers of process are covered over or 'erased.' Such assertion of paint may allow evidence of process to be both concealed and revealed.
25. Benjamin, W. 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' Illuminations Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1979. Quoted by Siopis, P. Unpublished article on her work, 1988.
26. (To) "...Hold infinity in the palm of your hand/ And eternity in an hour." (Blake, W. Quoted in Schor, N. Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine p 1.)
27. Breaking up of the surface with details recalls the 17th century Dutch use of 'microscopic vision.' However, in Dutch painting, disruption of the surface is optical, facilitating a distanced reading. Here surface disruption is textual and physical, possibly inviting a sense of bodily intimacy with the surface.
28. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'
29. Baudrillard, J. 'The Procession of Simulacra' Wallis, B. Ibid. p 254.
30. Siopis, P. Ibid.
31. Historically a link between oil paint's properties and physicality has been established. Berger notes that oil paint may be considered more substantial than watercolour or tempera. He believes that it is for this reason the Dutch 17th century artists chose oil paint to render the tangibility, texture and solidity of material goods. (Berger, J. Ibid. pp 88-9.) As argued in ch. 1, these Dutch renderings often serve to confirm the materialist principles of possession. Berger comments on Blake's use of watercolour to achieve an intangible or 'spiritual' effect, thereby proposing a connection between oil paint, materiality and secularization. (Ibid. p 93.)
32. Although this kind of painting need not necessarily involve a body/mind split as Bell implies, her use of the term 'visceral' is pertinent. She notes that this term indicates a "...type of painting that does not contrive to appeal to the intellect or the cerebral, but serves to remind the viewer of his/her own body." (Bell, D. M. Representations of the Human Figure: Art, Ideology, Reality p 53.)
33. Siopis, P. Art 17- '86 Basel Exhibition Catalogue.
34. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'
35. van den Berg, C. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Hudson, L. Bodies of Knowledge: The Psychological Significance of the Nude in Art p 10.

38. Piotrowski echoes this idea from a psychological perspective, stating that "[t]here is a great difference in connotation between the normally invisible inside of the body and its exterior. The inside frequently arouses a morbid and anxious curiosity which is keener than the curiosity about the body's exterior." (Piotrowski, Z. A. Perceptanalysis p 349.)

39. Owens, C. Ibid. p 72.

40. Siopis, P. Art 17 - '86 Basel Exhibition Catalogue.

41. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'

42. van den Berg, C. Ibid.

43. Siopis, P. Tributaries - a view of contemporary South African Art Exhibition Catalogue p 40.

44. Ibid.

45. van den Berg, C. Ibid.

46. This technique is common in the work of many Impressionist painters, particularly that of Impressionist artist Pierre Bonnard. (See for instance, Still-Life (Corner of the Table) 1935.) Bonnard uses this 'scrubbed' effect to emphasize surface and assist objecthood. However in these paintings, this effect is used in an attempt to capture the transitory nature of light. In this respect, it is used to achieve a significantly optical effect.

47. This use of the oil paint medium seems to contradict Berger's connections between substantiality of the medium and materiality, thinness and spirituality. I wish to show that thin, fluid medium can also carry corporeal associations. In my painting, I try to evoke these through processes of wetting, soaking and dripping the medium onto the canvas to create certain visceral effects. I will expand on this idea in ch. 7.

48. This blurring of outlines and consequent disruption of distinct figure-ground relations features prominently in Bonnard's paintings. See for instance the abovementioned example.

49. Fuller, P. Art and Psychoanalysis p 134.

50. Milner, M. On Not Being Able to Paint London: Heinemann Educational, p 17. Quoted in Fuller, P. Ibid.

51. Irigaray, L. Quoted in Mol, T. Ibid. p 145.



Fig. 14 Siopia, P. Melanchoia (1986.)

Oil on Canvas, 197.5 x 175.5 cm.

Collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

CHAPTER 4

GIVING PRIVILEGE "NOT TO THE VISUAL, BUT TO THE TOUCH"

"We must move on to the rhetoric of women, one that is anchored in the organism, in the body."²

In this Chapter I will suggest that opticality and tactility, as explored thusfar, are gendered and hierarchical. I will refer to certain psychoanalytic, postmodern and feminist writings to support this suggestion. In various ways these writings stress the body and/or question ocularcentrism. I recognize that it is difficult to relate some of these writings to the visual arts, particularly those of the French literary feminists. However, they *are* appropriate to the painting practice I term tactility. Also, they have given me a particular understanding of my own work. Siopis notes that when working on *Melancholia* (1986) (Fig. 14) the writings of Cixous and Irigaray influenced her greatly.³ I will explore this influence, considering the artist's intention and examining the painting's surface and iconography.⁴

As I indicated in Chapter 1, ocularcentrism has long enjoyed a privileged position in Western tradition. However, historically the sense of touch is not without its defendants. Writing in 1709, George Berkeley contends that the tactile sense offers "...more direct contact with reality..." than "illusory" messages received via optical means.⁵ Followers of Berkeley e.g. Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, expand upon his ideas, stating that touch is "...the only sense which of itself can judge of externality." Psychologist Hermann Helmholtz proposes that a child originally depends upon touch to perceive objects. [He conceives of vision as originating in a series of "...unconscious judgements..." a child learns to make based on knowledge gained from touch. Johan Gottfried Herder considers touch as an artistic advantage over the "...most philosophical..." but "coldest" sense of vision. Margaret Olin notes that by the end of the 18th century opposition between vision and touch had begun to infiltrate artistic discourse.

Jay calls attention to what he terms a 'paradigm shift' in early 20th century French thought in which "...the denigration of vision supplanted its previous celebration."⁶ French intellectuals who have contributed to this interrogation into the 'sinister' power of ocularcentrism include Bataille, Satre, Metz, Althusser, Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault.

Foucault stresses the 19th century appropriation of the gaze as a mechanism of surveillance and power. In the humanist age, sovereign power is replaced by man as 'observed spectator.' In the

newly developed disciplinary institutions (factories, schools, prisons, asylums) surveillance becomes a means of instituting control, indicating a similarly patriarchal form of power relations through sight as discussed in Chapter 1. Foucault identifies the Panopticon as an exemplary example of such ocular domination. With its hidden supervisor watching from a central tower like an omniscient yet invisible God, this 'model' prison typifies the sadistic, tyrannical gaze of an anonymous power.⁷ Wolff adds that with the disappearance of older forms of bodily control such as torture and public spectacle, ocular control also began to operate through a similar form of self-surveillance.⁸

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the body is increasingly brought into discourse and observed by a variety of disciplines. The contemporary re-definition of factors related to the body such as sexuality and illness illustrates this. Mental illnesses associated with women such as hysteria are linked to her body, specifically her reproductive organs. Ocular control becomes a means of oppression, as woman is made the object of pathological scrutiny.⁹ Whilst equating women with nature and the body,¹⁰ these discourses associate men with the more prestigious realms of intellect and culture.¹¹ As Wolff argues, such patrolling and repression of the body points to a general fear of the body's power and potential for transgression. When applied to women, this fear becomes doubly pertinent as they are perceived as being "...closer (too close) to the body compared with men."¹²

I will now examine certain psychoanalytic writings of relevance to art. These present possible alternative approaches for the making and viewing of images. These approaches could encourage tactility.

For instance, Adrian Stokes applies Kleinian psychoanalytic theories to visual art.¹³ Kleinian psychologist D. W. Winnicott's work focuses on a phase of development, which he terms the 'potential space,' which lies between the 'complete subjectivity' of the infant and more objective perceptions of self in later development. In the former stage, the infant is unaware of herself as a separate, autonomous being. She identifies the breast as part of her own body and sets up a part-object relationship with her mother. As more objective perceptions of self develop, the infant becomes aware of the mother's 'otherness' and can identify her mother as a whole-object. Fuller describes this 'potential space' as characterized by

"...ambivalent feelings about mergeance and separation...of establishing and denying boundaries about what is inside and what is outside, and concerning the whereabouts of limits and a containing skin, so that the infant, while beginning to recognize the autonomy of objects, nonetheless feels 'mixed up in them' in a way in which the

child or adult does not."¹⁴

Stokes proposes two modes of representation in visual art: the 'modelling mode' and 'carving mode.' He associates the latter with Melanie Klein's concept of the 'depressive position' which has to do with the separateness, autonomy and 'otherness' of the object. Alternatively he links the 'modelling mode' to the Kleinian 'paranoid-schizoid position:' to flatness, decoration and failure to establish a separate identity from the mother.¹⁵

Stokes sets up a correlation between the whole-object and pictorial conventions based on principles of symmetry, balance and unity, noting that paintings adhering to conventions such as that of the Nude - as exemplified in Odalisque (Ingres, J. A. D. 1814) are generally viewed as whole objects.¹⁶ I propose that Stoke's promise may also be applicable to the traditional 17th century still-life. These conventions, which I have identified as optical and patriarchal, are usually considered in the 'carving mode.' With their potential for totality, they often establish extensive subject-object relations. This link between the whole-object and totalization connects the part-object and tactility. Features that I have identified with tactility correlate with those of the 'modelling mode.'

Supporting Stokes' argument, Hudson proposes that paintings may function as sites where fissured feelings, such as confusions and ambivalences "concerning the body"¹⁷ may be explored.¹⁸ He argues that conventions which privilege totalization and function as whole-objects deny aspects of the body which may carry disturbing associations such as sexuality, carnality and mortality.¹⁹ With their concern for wholeness and distanced contemplation, these paintings may encourage the viewer to mentally associate the

"...alarming earthly aspects of the body and its functions...with its untidy detail: its pimples, creases, puckers, hairs, blotches. Crucially, a formal treatment of the body encourages in us the denial that these dangerously particular features of the body are in fact there."²⁰

Such emphasis on detail is often found in paintings which may encourage part-object response. Attention to detail may result in a kind of articulation which causes the surface to appear fragmented. Fragmentation may encourage the artist/viewer to unconsciously project onto the part-objects imaged, in an attempt to restore their 'wholeness.' As in Three Lace Cloths, these qualities, as well as a particular kind of engagement with the medium, may facilitate a more involved response to the painting. Phrases such as 'losing oneself in' and 'experiencing a sense of oneness with' the surface come to mind. This suggests a sense of 'immersion' or 'ecstatic fusion,' a loss of boundaries and a dissolution of the ego. These states recall the ambivalent feelings of mergence

and separation experienced by the infant in the state of 'complex subjectivity.'

This state - like Cixous' Imaginary - precedes the construction of subjectivity. Cixous evokes the Imaginary as a nameless space which exists before the Symbolic. It constitutes a pre-Oedipal stage before the child acquires language and thereby the capacity to name itself and objects.²¹ Many postmodern cultural critics and 2nd generation feminists hold that sexual positioning is constructed through interrelating processes by which the infant (physiologically and psychologically unformed at birth) acquires a sense of self and language.²² Freud and Jacques Lacan posit a specific relation between acquisition of gender identity and sight. Both trace its acquisition back to the *sighting* of sexual difference in the pre-Oedipal stage.²³ As Gallop states:

"The privilege of the phallus as presence, the concomitant 'disappearance' of any female genitalia under the phallic order, is based on the privilege of sight over the other senses. The penis, according to Freud, is more visible than what the little girl has. From being more visible, it becomes simply more...superior."²⁴

Lacan designates the phallus as the privileged signifier in society and establishes its possession as a prototype for language under the Symbolic order. The girl-child is relegated to the realm of absence and is represented only as the negative polarity of male positivity. Derridian deconstruction offers a critique of Western philosophical and literary tradition. The latter is based on a 'metaphysics of presence:' man is positioned as the central, privileged reference point around which various hierarchical oppositions (presence/absence, culture/nature, law/chaos) are constructed. Deconstructive criticism aims to dismantle the logic and terms through which such oppositions are structured.²⁵

Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis are used by Cixous and Irigaray in their critique of language which they consider a patriarchal construct. Resistance to phallogocentrism in language is proposed in the form of a female language which asserts the direct experience of the body²⁶ and acknowledges 'jouissance'²⁷ - "...a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure."²⁸ Cixous calls for a feminine writing which originates in the Imaginary and Irigaray advocates a 'feminine language' - both of which "...struggle to undermine the dominant *phallogocentric* logic, split open the closure of binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality."²⁹

Cixous rejects categories of masculine/feminine as they remain encoded in binary logic, speak rather of a 'decenterable libidinal economy' which can be read in writing by a male or a female. It is not necessarily the sex of the author but the kind of writing which determines its gender

description.³⁰ From this she proposes a theory of bisexuality, which is "...multiple, variable and ever-changing, consisting...of the 'non-exclusion either of the difference or of one sex.'"³¹

Irigaray's and Cixous' body politics are based on the claim that women must assert their bodies as a source of writing and self-knowledge. Woman - says Cixous - must "...put herself into the text..."³² drawing on her bodily impulses and psychosomatic specificity:

"Write your self. Your body must be heard...To write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality...giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal."³³

Cixous employs metaphors for the body, frequently referring to maternity and childbirth. She claims that women should assert their bodies as sites of plentitude from which "the desire to write...to live self from within...for the swollen belly, for language, for food"³⁴ may be expressed. Siopis speaks of Melancholia as a text "...written through the body."³⁵ As such, the painting is a site which articulates the fecundity and sexuality of the female body. This is epitomized by a codified representation of a female figure³⁶ depicted in the left-hand side of the upper register. (Fig. 16) (Interestingly, this representation was first seen by the artist on the cover of Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives by Janet Sayers.³⁷ (Fig. 15)) The exterior skin of her stomach is peeled back to expose an infant within, portraying the body as a site of "...multiple physical capacities (gestation, birth, lactation) and of liberatory texts."³⁸



Fig. 15 Spigelius, A. De Formato Foetu (1626.)
(Medical Illustration.)



Fig. 16 Siopis, P. Melancholia
(Detail.)

Illusionistically shown in the numerous re-representations of figures in ecstatic poses, the body's sexuality is metaphorically evoked in the images of shells and cut open ripe fruit. In the shells, an "...interior body secretes and is secreted by the protective exterior."³⁸ Like the body, melons possess a soft, fleshy interior contained in an external skin. With their inner core and outer circumference they may suggest the vagina.⁴⁰ As Siopis notes, these objects "...are extremely libidinal,"⁴¹ serving as articulations of female desire.⁴²

As in Three Lace Cloths, a pre-occupation with skin pervades. This is pertinently shown in the depicted 'emblem' of the pared lemon. (Fig. 17) The artist has built its form into a three-dimensional simulacra by sticking dried paint 'skins' onto the surface.⁴³ Recalling the female figure with her stomach 'peeled open,' the lemon may read as a metaphor for the body, with its soft internal flesh contained in an outer protective skin. Expanding on Siopis' idea that oil paint may carry associations with body and skin, Richards notes that in Melancholia

"A soft centre or interior body protected by a hard skin finds representational correlation in the image of the crab, the crayfish, the tortoise, the shell. Humans, fruit, confection, and so on, have soft skin which like paint hardens, wrinkles and shrivels in time. There is here an unceasing play of the literal, the illusionistic, and the metaphorical."⁴⁴

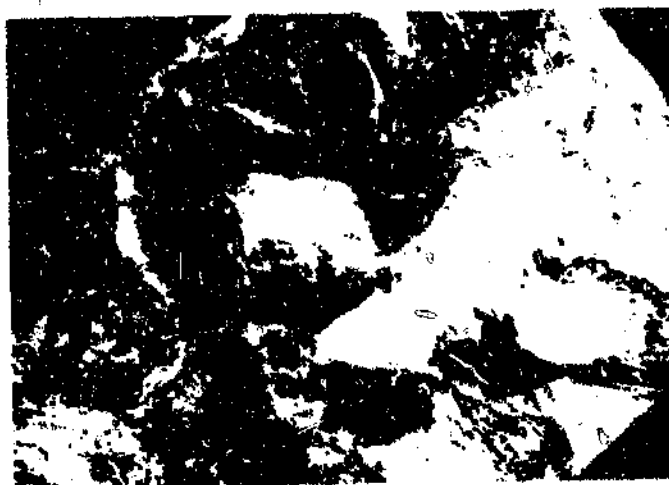


Fig. 17 Siopis, P. Melancholia (Detail.)

Preoccupation with skin (and its connotations of sexuality) is echoed in the depicted monkey. Being stuffed, the monkey is made of nothing but skin. It is also an emblem often used in Dutch 17th century paintings to warn against the 'dangers' of the pleasures of the flesh.⁴⁵ Numerous additional references to interior and exterior forms enhance the general emphasis on skin, stressing its sexual associations. Imagistically, cakes, fruits and embellishments point to sensual, material

pleasure - materially echoed by exploitation of the medium's palpable, sensuous qualities.

Through this use of medium the surface is articulated as a site of the body's plenitude. For instance, although devoid of the figure, in the space between the three elliptical surfaces is a space "...laden with absence."⁴⁸ - "...a positive generic nutritive space, the site for the creation and emergence of sources of nourishment and fulfilment."⁴⁷ In the lower register, through differentiated use of medium, edges alternatively form and dissolve into the surrounding mass - creating a surface "...which is constantly in the process of weaving itself... ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized."⁴⁸

Irigaray conceives of female 'jouissance' as being of a multiple, non-unified, endless nature: "...woman has sex organs just about everywhere...the geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than imagined..."⁴⁹ This multiplicity of woman's pleasure informs her concept of a 'feminine language.' She advocates woman's speech as one which encompasses contradictions, retractions, fluidity, open-endedness and change. For Irigaray, to speak as a woman is "...to reproduce the doubleness, contiguity and fluidity of woman's sexual morphology and the multi-centred libidinal energy that arises from them."⁵⁰ Similarly, in 'écriture feminine' stylistic devices include double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive rather than linear structures and open endings.

Multiplicity, plurality and continuity are features in Melancholia which articulate female jouissance.⁵¹ These concerns are manifest in numerous ways. An interplay between dualities features throughout: figures shift between "...states of ecstasy and pain,"⁵² many of the figures are taken from a tradition that valorized hermaphroditic beauty,⁵³ control and order are subverted by excess, an excess which "...is too much yet not enough."⁵⁴ Fruits are over-ripe, over-abundant cakes and sweets indicate opulence pointing to decay. As in Three Lace Cloths, dualities feature - not as fixed oppositions - but as mobile positions in a fluid state of interchange where "[a]ll verges on collapse into its 'other...'"⁵⁵

This imagistic layering of forms correlates with layering of paint as relief. In the lower register, paint is built up to such a degree that it projects into the viewer's space, contradicting⁵⁶ the sense of infinity alluded to in the upper region. Limitless space is also implied by the 'endless' table and its plethora of depicted objects. In this display, a potentially endless process of iconographic division and fragmentation is depicted.⁵⁷ Such illusionistic depiction of cut open forms correlates with actual paint as material body which is cut into.⁵⁸

Use of multiple light sources further fragments the surface, as depicted cast shadows optically rupture the surfaces upon which they fall. As in Three Lace Cloths, the physical surface is further optically fragmented by light which reflects onto the three-dimensional textures. Depicted mirrors and part or whole images depicted in the painting echo this play of fragmentation. Given the combination of these factors, the surface becomes a manifestation of

"...body without end, without appendage, without principal 'parts'...[of] writing [which] can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours...She lets the other language speak - the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death."⁵⁹

With her proposition that woman 'write through the body' Cixous advocates an erotics of writing derived from the unconscious, pre-Oedipal space of the Imaginary. Similarly, Siopis notes that Roland Barthes' 'jouissance' - "...a radically violent pleasure...which shatters - dissipates, loses - that cultural identity, that ego"⁶⁰ influenced Melancholia.⁶¹ The artist notes that whilst working up paint as substance, she experienced a sense of "...ecstatic bliss..." and recalls feeling "...mesmerized... by" and "...caught up in or entangled with..." the paint surface. This absorption of paint to excess points to a state of being 'out of control:' a state which may be related to the part-object, where there is a sense of dissolution of boundaries between self and other - reminiscent perhaps of the pre-Oedipal state. This state also recalls the dissolution of ego and sense of 'ecstatic fusion' which may be experienced during sex.⁶² As Andrea Dwokin says, in such sexual contact, "[t]here is no physical distance, no self-consciousness, nothing withdrawn or private or alienated, no existence outside physical touch."⁶⁴ As such, the surface of Melancholia is an articulation of desire.⁶⁵

This sense of absorption is iconographically echoed in the imaged figures, which present psychosomatic states of extroversion and introversion in historically sanctioned, conventionalized gestures and poses.⁶⁶ These states range from codified representations of the hysteric to melancholic self-absorption. The latter is embodied in the re-representation of Estrany's 'The Dying Lucretia' in the right-hand foreground.⁶⁷ Another form of self-absorption is evident through autobiographical references which pervade throughout. Siopis refers to the painting as "...inventory of my experience" noting that many depicted objects are personal possessions which "...reflect conscious and unconscious memory and desire."⁶⁸ As Hazel Friedman says

"It becomes evident that every object and allusion is part of Siopis, just as she is part of the painting, literally in the form of a self-portrait, and emotionally. This work - like her other paintings - tell the viewer more about Penny than she herself can reveal."⁶⁹

The artist makes this metaphorical sense of self more conspicuous by including a self-portrait as a mirror reflection. This is not unlike the Dutch artist van Beyeren. Here "...the reflection of the artist stares at the viewer, but her physical reality is absent."⁷⁰ As a reflection, the artist's inclusion of herself is illusory, immaterial. She looks at the viewer/herself from inside/outside the painting but actual bodily presence is never completely declared.

I wish to suggest that Melancholia realizes Cixous' and Irigaray's presentation of language as a site for the articulation of desire in pictorial form. Both painterly and literary texts counter phallogocentric qualities such as the fixed, singular or absolute; linearity, self-possession and unity, attempting to "...reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society."⁷¹

However powerful and appropriate I feel Cixous' and Irigaray's concepts to be to tactile painting practices, there are many theorists who consider their writings problematic. Their biological references and hypothetical connections between textuality, sexuality and the body are much debated. These are often considered idealist and essentialist - bound up in the very system they claim to undermine, contradictory and fatal to constructive political action.⁷²

Wolff has produced a carefully judged assessment of this debate which I think is worth adopting. She notes that there is some agreement among feminists that deconstruction, poststructuralism and postmodernist theory are valuable to feminist analysis and political action, as they destabilize patriarchal orthodoxies and oppose mistaken conceptions of female identity. Yet as she says, it also makes sense for women to mobilize around the social construct of 'woman' as "...modern feminism 'is landed with the identity of woman as an achieved fact of history and epistemology.'⁷³ In Cixous' and Irigaray's body politics, the female body is considered as a product of social histories, relations and discourses - all of which define it and determine its representation. However they also acknowledge that it is experienced by women, albeit as lacking or incomplete. By asserting the experience of women in their currently constituted bodily identities these theorists offer a means of "...simultaneously affirming those identities, questioning their origins and ideological functions, and working towards a non-patriarchal expression of gender and the body."⁷⁴ Perhaps a form of painting which appropriates such a body politics offers an affirmation of female desire in the face of patriarchal values? In ()s way, perhaps 'writing through the body' as Cixous advocates, could allow for the creation of

"A feminine text [which] cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments...in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions,

to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter."⁷³

1. Moi, T. Ibid. p 143.
2. Duras, M. Extract from an interview by Susan Hasserl-Kapit Signs Winter 1975. Quoted in New French Feminisms p 238.
3. Sirois, P. 'In conversation.'
4. Melancholia presents an instance of complete integration between French feminist theory and painting. These connections are outlined by Richards. (Richards, C. P. Ibid. Passim.)
5. The following theorists are quoted in Olin, M. Ibid. pp 160-1.
6. Jay, M. 'In the Empire of the Gaze' Ibid. p 178.
7. See further Jay, M. Ibid. pp 191-2 and Foucault, M. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison Passim.
8. Wolff, J. Ibid. p 125. Foucault argues that this ocular power over the body is related to the needs of bourgeois capitalism - through its construction of subjectivity, its requirement for a reliable workforce and its dependence on the self-regulation of its subjects. This "...docile body" constitutes a stereotype which promotes passivity, receptivity and inactivity. (Foucault, M. Ibid.) As such, political investment in the body is an economic investment: "[i]t is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but...its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection." (Ibid. p 25. Also quoted in Owens, C. 'The Medusa Effect or, The Specular Ruse' Art in America, January 1984, p 100.) As Owens explains, the stereotype's function "...is to reproduce ideological subjects that can be smoothly inserted into existing institutions of government, economy and...sexual identity...Stereotypes treat the body as an object to be held in position, subservience, submission; they disavow agency, dismantle the body as a locus of action and reassemble it as a discontinuous series of gestures and poses..." (Owens, C. Ibid.)
9. See further (eds.) Bernheimer, C. and Kahane, C. In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism Passim.
10. Wolff, J. Ibid. p 126. Wolff notes that this equation of women with the body has its roots in classical thought. Despite Plato's apparent commitment to the equality of the sexes, he believes that women exemplify the failure to value the soul over the body. As she comments, the soul or mind is given privilege over the body, making the significance of women's identification with the body clear.
11. Ormer, S. Quoted in Schor, N. Ibid. p 16.
12. Wolff, J. Ibid. p 126.
13. Stokes, A. D. Reflections on the Nude Passim.
14. Fuller, P. Ibid. p 164. Winnicott's theories are quoted in Fuller. Ibid.
15. Stokes' theories are quoted in Fuller, P. Ibid. p 149. As I tried to show in ch. 1, certain dominant conventions separate subject and object, facilitating more distanced contemplation of the painting. Fuller supports this idea, proposing that paintings produced during and after the Renaissance involve workings of the 'depressive position.' As he comments, technically perspectival space involves a "...literal carving, pushing or cutting back through the surface of the picture plane." (Ibid. p 153.)
16. Perhaps is not co-incidental that the convention of the female nude is rendered in the 'carving mode.' In this way, the depicted woman is set at a distance, objectified. Potential for identification with the subject matter is minimized. Identification is perceived of as frightening, as that which needs to be controlled - pointing to a fear of the (female) body's power.
17. Hudson notes that in addition to the discrepancy between inside and outside, which I mentioned in ch. 3, our perception of the body may demand other such fissured responses. For instance, he comments on the contradiction of a healthy body as having the potential for disease. Also, there exists an "...anatomical confusion..." between the reproductive and excretory organs. These function as expellers of waste, yet represent a site of sexual desire/reproduction. The body may be perceived as inherently 'dangerous' because there is the risk of confusing desire with disgust. Sexual intercourse involves a fusion of inner and outer body and the reproductive organs may

be thought of as internal organs, situated on the outside of our bodies. (Hudson, L. Ibid. p 10.)

18. Ibid. p 12.

19. In many religious doctrines - such as Christianity - flesh is considered a site of sin and corruption. To withstand the temptation of sensual/sexual pleasures and punishment of the body are considered as means toward spiritual progress. Aspects associated with the body's materiality, such as carnality and sexuality, are considered as impure, sinful, debased. A painting which does not deny these aspects of the body could become most disturbing to a viewer influenced by these ideas.

20. Ibid. p 51.

21. See further, Moi, T. Ibid. pp 114-6.

22. See further for instance, Gourma-Pe, J. and Mathews, P. Ibid. p 335.

23. Freud, S. Ibid. Quoted in Linker, K. Ibid. p 395.

24. Gallop, J. Ibid. p 27.

25. In binary logic, each term only achieves significance through its structural relationship to the other -making no point of equality possible. In this system 'meaning' is fully present in the word. Deconstructive thought offers a system of signification - where meaning is constructed through the free play of the signifier. Through a potentially endless process of deferral the next signifier gives 'meaning' to the one which preceded it.

26. References to the female body as a means of challenging patriarchal structures of representation is also found in 1st generation feminism. Here the idea of an innate female essence is accepted. A central question is whether a 'female sensibility' and aesthetic can be determined. Feminist artists and critics pose the possibility of a 'women's art' which can be distinguished from that of men's. (See further Lippard, L. R. Ibid. p 80-90.)

27. Translations of this term in French vary. Jones notes that 'pleasure' is a simple translation. (Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 108.) Quoting Kristeva, Richman describes it as a "...psychoacoustic" order; a state of bliss which is "...sexual, spiritual, physical, conceptual at one and the same time." (Kristeva, J. Ibid. Passim. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 77.)

28. Marks, E. and de Courtyrn, I. Ibid. p 37.

29. Moi, T. Ibid. p 108. *Italics added.*

30. This may seem inconsistent with my discussion, in which I have associated tactility with a female realm. Cixous notes that because writing which she describes as 'female' derives from a pre-linguistic stage, it is not gendered. However, although the Imaginary is equally accessible to men and women, Cixous argues that "...for historical-cultural reasons, it is [predominantly] women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality..." She adds that "[i]n a certain way, 'woman is bisexual'; man...being poised to keep glorious phallic monosexuality in view." (Cixous, H. "The Laugh of the Medusa" New French Feminisms p 254. *Italics added.*)

31. Cixous, H. Quoted in Moi, T. Ibid. p 109. As part of the 'female libidinal economy' Cixous describes a position which she terms 'the Realm of the Gift' as opposed to the male 'Realm of the Proper.' The former is characterized by generosity: woman's capacity to give without thought of return. The Realm of the Proper signifies a link with property - with that which is possessed or appropriated and emphasizes self-identity, self-aggrandizement and dominance. Moi adds that this realm also points to masculine systems of classification, systemization and hierarchization. (Ibid. p 111.)

32. Cixous, H. Quoted in Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 85.

33. Ibid. p 88.

34. Cixous, H. Quoted in Jones, A. R. 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine' (eds.) Newton, J. L. and Gillian Triggs, The Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture p 82.

35. Siopis, P. Ibid.

36. This image is taken from a medical illustration by Adrian Spigelius, De Formato Foetu, Padua (1626.) (Fig. 15.) See pl. 108 Lucie-Smith, E. The Waking Dream London: Thames and Hudson, 1975. (Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 80.)

37. Siopis, P. Ibid., (Sayers, J. Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives London: Tavistock Publications, 1982.)

38. Jones, A. R. Making a Difference p 88.

39. Richards, C. P. Ibid., pp 76-7.

40. This relates to the use of central core/vaginal imagery by certain 1st generation feminist artists. Lippard observes that central core imagery may be associated with Freud's comment that symbolic representations of female genitalia include "...all such objects as share with them the property of enclosing a space or are capable of acting as receptacles such as pits, hollows, and caves." (Freud, S. Quoted in Lippard, L. R. Ibid., p 73.)

41. Siopis, P. Quoted in Friedman, H. Ibid.

42. Given the broader context of Siopis' work, one can speculate that these fruits are intended to be evocative of the vagina. Her earlier work is characterized by cakes which act as symbols for the vagina. An example is Embellishments (1982.)

43. This results in a tension between 'thing' - valorized in modernist formalism - and the predominantly postmodern 'sign.' The materiality and life-like scale of the lemon evokes identification with 'thing' - an immediately perceivable presence. However, the skin of the lemon is actually a skin of paint. Such overendowment of the sign, materially and in terms of signification, imposes a mediatory space which resists immediate perception of meaning.

44. Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 76.

45. Siopis, P. Ibid.

46. van den Berg, C. Ibid.

47. Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 75.

48. Irigaray, L. 'This Sex Which Is Not One' New French Feminisms p 103.

49. Ibid.

50. Jones, A. R. Ibid., p 86.

51. Siopis, P. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. For instance, the figure in the right-hand foreground is based on Michelangelo's Dying Slave (1513.) (Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 76.)

54. Siopis, P. Ibid.

55. Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 73.

56. Irigaray considers contradiction to be a manifestation of female sexuality and bodily drives. As such it forms a means whereby phallogocentrism is challenged. As she notes, "[c]ontradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with ready-made grids; a code prepared in advance." (Irigaray, L. Ibid., p 103.)

57. Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 73.

58. Siopis speaks of how this cutting of the paint surface resembles the cutting of flesh. As paint dries, it coagulates, forming a scar or scab-like 'skin' over the underlying paint. (Siopis, P. Ibid.)

59. Cixous, H. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' New French Feminisms pp 259-60. Also quoted in Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 85.

60. Heath, S. Translator's note to Barthes, R. Image-Music-Text p 9. Also quoted in Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 108.

61. Siopis, P. Ibid. Siopis adds that in particular, Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text strongly informed her work.

62. Ibid.

63. Expanding on this idea, Bell comments that in an intimate relationship we tend to set up a part-object relationship with another person - relating to their attitudes, appropriating their gestures or facial expressions etc. In the act of lovemaking, the physical separateness of another human being may become blurred: parts of the body may take on a certain autonomy or become part-objects. (Bell, D. M. Ibid. p 49.) Dworkin phrases this pertinently: "[s]ometimes, the skin comes off in sex...The body loses its boundaries...with someone and not with someone else, the skin dissolves altogether, and what touches is unspeakably, grotesquely visceral, not inside...time; raw, blood and fat and muscle and bone, unmediated by form or formal limits." (Dworkin, A. Intercourse p 24.)

64. Ibid. pp 24-5.

65. This sense of loss of self during sex raises another ambivalence that may be experienced regarding the body: its capacity for both sex and death. Hudson explores the concept of sexual desire and death as being closely linked in our imagination. (Hudson, L. Ibid. p 56.) Bell supports this idea, proposing that lust may be related to the fear of mortality. As she says, cliché'd descriptions of passion such as 'losing oneself' or 'being out of control' illustrate the ambivalent attitude which may be experienced towards it. Intense passion is desired yet feared, as it carries associations with anonymity and nothingness. These echo our fears of mortality, as well as the feelings which may be experienced if 'immersed' in a more tactile surface. (Bell, D. M. Ibid. p 60.)

66. Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 74.

67. Siopis, P. Ibid.

68. Siopis, P. Quoted in Friedman, H. Ibid.

69. Friedman, H. Ibid.

70. Arnold, M. 'The past echoes in response today' Prekoria News 19 March 1986, p 4.

71. Jones, A. R. Ibid. p 86.

72. See for instance Eckor, G. Feminist Aesthetics p 18; Jones, A. R. Ibid. Passim. and Suleiman R. S. 'Re-Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism' The Female Body in Western Culture p 14.

73. Riley, D. 'Am I That Name' Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988 p 111. Quoted in Wolff, J. Ibid. p 134.

74. Wolff, J. Ibid. p 138.

75. Cixous, H. Ibid. p 258.



Fig. 18 Arnold, M. Divinely Appointed the Property of Ladies (1938.)

Oil on Canvas, 114,5 x 144 cm.

Collection: Pretoria Art Museum.

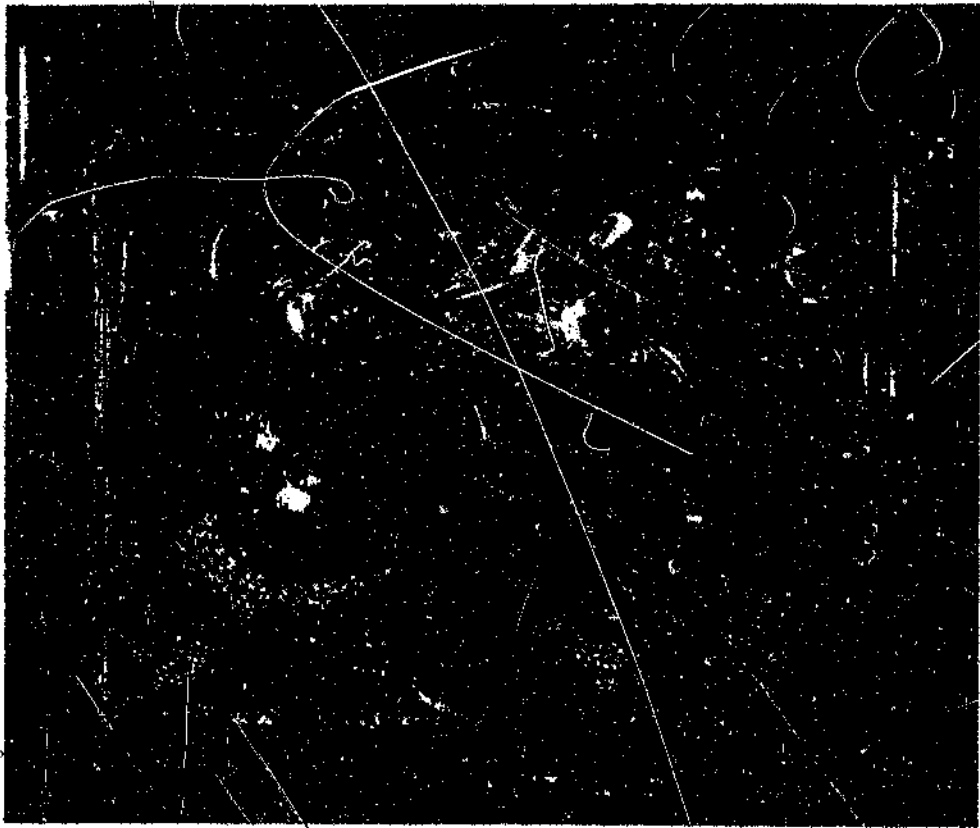


Fig. 19 Arnold, M. The Rose and the Apple have no Political Views (1987.)

Oil on Canvas, 106 x 126 cm.

Collection: Private.

CHAPTER 5

'CONNECTIONS'¹

In the previous Chapter, I positioned Siopis as an artist who appropriates tactility in a conscious effort to disturb and challenge opticality. In the following discussion, I will present Marion Arnold as an artist who seems to shift between opticality and tactility, encompassing neither to a greater degree. As I have already pointed to some significant aspects of Melancholia and because of its extreme tactility, the latter seems an appropriate work to use as a point of reference for my examination of other contemporary still-life painters.

Arnold's 'oeuvre' encompasses a broad spectrum of formal and conceptual concerns. I will refer to two examples - Divinely Appointed the Property of Ladies (1988) (Fig 18)² and The Rose and the Apple have no Political Views (1987) (Fig 19)³ which seem to embody many of these. While I will discuss the former painting with particular reference to the conceptual issues it raises, I will examine the latter referring to both stylistic and iconographic concerns. Although I feel that many of these concerns are equally applicable to Divinely Appointed, for the sake of clarity these have not been indicated. I will rely on you, as reader, to make connections between these two works.

Arnold's still-lives reflect her position as a white woman in Africa with a Western cultural heritage who spent her formative years in Zimbabwe.⁴ Her painting is informed by diverse references, including feminist, literary⁵ and historical⁶ references. These form autobiographical threads throughout her work. As she states:

"What I am doing is making work about myself - about my feminist component, just as I am concerned about my African component or my intellectual component...I want to bring together in my work my own intellectually orientated English upbringing and stylistic heritage and training with the fact that I live in this...powerful and tumultuous environment."⁷

In Divinely Appointed, Arnold's feminist concerns are iconographically apparent.⁸ She notes that this title was derived from a male critic who deemed the still-life genre as 'the divinely appointed property of ladies.' This comment reflects the historically sanctioned belief that the study of the human form requires greater intellectual effort and as such is more 'suitable' subject matter for male artists - whereas the 'minor' genre of still-life is the 'natural' subject matter for women.⁹

Arnold uses this work to comment on the "...panoptical male connoisseur..." in women's

consciousness.¹⁰ i.e. the form of bodily self-surveillance exercised by women in our culture. Berger identifies this, noting that paintings of the nude in Western art imply a male spectator and are constructed for the male gaze.¹¹

"...*men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.*"¹²

In Divinely Appointed, a clay hippo symbolizing woman, is depicted as self-reflecting in the mirror. The title ironically denotes the mirror as woman's 'property,' playing on the tradition of the nude which often uses the mirror as a symbol of women's supposed 'vanity.' Its depiction connived to make woman an accomplice in her own objectification.¹³ Through self-reflection, woman attempts to gain 'insight' into who she is. However the mirror reflects only external appearances and she is able to see herself only as positioned in patriarchal culture. Reflected in the pieces of mirror stuck onto the frame, the viewer is placed in a similarly specular position. Arnold evokes these ideas poetically:

"The looking glass. When woman looked out at the world she knew herself only as man saw her - his image of woman. Only the mirror permitted woman to gaze upon herself, woman seeing woman. And all the time man thought this habit was vanity. No. It was painful introspection, the only way woman had of determining what she really was. And yet the mirror was not a friend; it was mute and answered none of the questions woman posed to it. Between the silent truth of the mirror and the verbal lies of man, where was woman to find herself?"¹⁴

The artist notes that her prolific use of the decorative (evident in the decorated mirror, hippo's floral necklace, decorative cloth/landscape surface, internal and external frame) is intended to acknowledge the decorative elements historically a feature of women's crafts and to counter derisive connotations often associated with these elements.¹⁵ She states:

"I refuse to concede that the decorative is a pejorative term. If [people] wanted to offer an insult they would call your work merely 'decorative.' If somebody calls my work 'decorative' I am pleased rather than insulted. *To give the decorative a loaded pejorative connotation is the product of an ideological attitude to artmaking which is intended to evaluate the image to the status of the pre-conceived intellectual schema.*"¹⁶

This 'preconceived intellectual schema' is outlined by Naomi Schor who points out that since the mid-18th century, the detail is frequently associated with the ornamental - carrying connotations

of effeminacy and decadence and with the everyday.¹⁷ Along with Schor, Ernest Gombrich notes that historically in Western culture, the detail is often regarded with hostility and suspicion. Neo-Classical doctrines of the 18th century, such as Joshua Reynolds' Discourses on Art epitomize this view. For Reynolds, the detail is incompatible with the Sublime and the Ideal. These concepts stress totalization, unity and an absence of particularity. 'Genius' is associated with the comprehension of the whole. Reynolds links detail with nature and deformity, making implicit connections with the pathological. Schor notes that in so doing, he reiterates the sexual stereotypes of Western philosophy, which associate maleness with form, femaleness with formless matter: "...the always imperfect nature which awaits the (male) artist's trained eye to attain the beauty of the Ideal is in the idealist tradition...feminine."¹⁸ Further, Reynolds associates the Sublime with grandeur and uniformity, considering it to be a "...manly, noble, dignified manner..."¹⁹ The 'feminine' detail, with its tendency towards proliferation, excess and the 'picturesque' is thought to fatigue the eye and produce anxiety.²⁰

These views of the detail influenced 19th and 20th century critics. While Greenberg is not necessarily hostile to the decorative, he stresses materialist decorative unity. Here "...every element and every area...[is] equivalent in accent and emphasis."²¹ He notes that without this 'achieved unity' the surface becomes 'tensionless' and 'merely decorative' in a pejorative sense.²²

Arnold's concern with the decorative indicates a link with tactility. I have attempted to show that in Western visual tradition, hierarchical categories of the general/particular, possession/generosity, unity/dispersal and so on have been equated with masculine and feminine polarities. This privileging of patriarchal qualities seems to have given rise to certain 'criteria' for gauging quality in the visual arts. These 'criteria' largely compromise female involvement and pleasure. Through her attempts to acknowledge and valorize tactile concerns, Arnold questions some of these patriarchal values. However, she locates herself as an ambiguous figure between opticality and tactility, noting that:

"I work on levels of ambiguity, bringing both the intellectual ambiguities which are part of my role as an art historian and the actual artmaking or involvement in the creative process...I wouldn't like to locate myself in any one perspective because I think that it restricts the spectator."²³

In many of Arnold's works, an interplay between duality and unity forms an important thread. She says:

"'Connections' forms a key concept in my critical thinking: its not an issue of binary

opposites prioritizing over one another, but trying to locate a way in which one can affirm two apparently contradictory concepts by making the appropriate connections between them..."²⁴

In The Rose objects are used as socio-cultural metaphors. Symbols of a European heritage (lace doileys and roses) are juxtaposed with objects of African origin (Shona headrest, clay pot, guinea fowl.) Cultural dualities are supported by an emphasis on difference e.g. mass-produced Western toys contrast with hand-crafted African artifacts.²⁵

In contrast to the volume of the depicted objects, the area depicting sky is characterized by gestural mark - rendered as a series of flat linear striations. In areas depicting land and cloud formations, marks are interpreted as pattern-like shapes. These are echoed in the painted border and wooden frame. In this way an interplay between illusionism and flatness is set up. This interplay is reflected in Arnold's working processes. Objects are observed from life. Components of the painted landscape are taken from drawings done by the artist *en-situ*.²⁶ "The artist derives information from an already-processed surface, setting the subject matter at a remove and allowing "...initial impulse [to be] transformed and re-formed by will and intuition..."²⁷

Whilst perhaps not as deictically assertive as the mark used by Siopis or myself, Arnold's gestural mark does supply the viewer with information concerning the artist's body as site of the image. In contrast to the illusionistic objects - where evidence of brushmark is minimized and areas of the surface are smooth - the mark revealed in the surrounding spaces is in the deictic present, giving evidence of an essentially human action. Tactility is suggested in this way and in the hand-carved frame. Here some of the depicted forms are repeated three-dimensionally. This intensifies the interplay between dualities of surface and depth, the tangible and the illusory. As in Divinely Appointed, the patterns in both frame and picture are intended to valorize the (debased) decorative and craft traditions historically associated with women.²⁸

The lower register of the surface is significantly 'weightier' than the upper region. Objects are placed in this space and the landscape projects illusionistically towards the viewer, appearing to spill out of the bottom frame. This 'weightedness' suggests a sense of bodily access - the lower register of the painting, like the lower register of the body, becomes a site of support.²⁹

In this painting, as in Divinely Appointed, features such as deictic mark, carved frame, pre-occupation with the decorative and 'weightedness' of the lower region combine to suggest a desire for tactility. However, aspects of her paintings also seem to contradict this desire. For example, The Rose appears a particularly 'executed' or mechanical work - a work which stresses 'the given' in

various ways.

Forms are repeated as if according to a system. Positioning the headrest and pot on the left and right hand sides of the format respectively divides the pictorial space into dualities. Separation is supported by a dividing 'path' radiating from between the two mountain ranges on either side. Forms imaged on one side are repeated on the other: three apples find repetition in three roses, a guinea fowl and African animal feature in front of the doileys on both sides. Ordering and control over the picture plane may have been facilitated by its relatively small scale.

Hierarchical figure-ground relations are emphasized. As Arnold says: "[t]he crocheted mats control the space within which the form is situated...objects are *entrapped* in a particular spatial environment in a demarcated territory."³⁰ This becomes evident if we compare her use of figure-ground delineation with Siopis' use of these relations in the lower register of Melancholia. In the latter, smoothness of surface and defined outlines alternate with areas of paint which have been built up into relief. Outlines form and dissolve, echoing the life-cycles of birth, growth and decay evoked imagistically.

The Rose has a 'uniformity' about its surface and structure. Objects are frontally presented, as if on display. They are primarily unbroken. Predominantly primary colours are used in a way which separates hues. Illusionistic forms appear generalized, with relatively undifferentiated textures or surface detail. This becomes clearer if we compare it to Siopis' contrasting surfaces in Melancholia, where textures and qualities are infinitely varied through heightened attention to detail and differentiation between smooth and activated surfaces.

These factors combine to support the general sense of 'givenness.' In contrast to Melancholia - in which the artist uses multiple formal and iconographic factors to create a sense of mystery - The Rose seems 'obvious' to the eye. This may be connected to the immediacy of the modernist surface, which assumes the work to be pre-eminently pictorially 'given' - stressing totalizing values of 'pure presentness' and 'achieved unity.'

In The Rose dualities which I have pointed out thusfar³¹ are echoed in the play between closed and open forms. Whole apples, placed on the closed surface of the headrest contrast with the open pot containing roses. The artist notes that for her this interplay refers to a schism between her personal life and public presentation of self.³² She comments that the paper bag, depicted in Divinely Appointed, first interested her for formal reasons, yet through repeated use became a symbol of personal significance. With its reference to interior and exterior space,³³ she intends

it to symbolize the discrepancy between the public and the private.³⁴ This interplay between interior and exterior space also suggests masculine and feminine polarities³⁵ - an association which is supported by the depicted male guinea fowl on the left and female on the right hand side.

Melancholia, like The Rose, is constructed around dualities. However, these dualities suggest

"Repetition, textural articulation, layering, containers and voids, the central vase with its two flowers, the deep tunnel space behind, the 'staged' cutting open below, the relation between open, closed, core, circumference; rigid, soft; singular, multiple; nurture and alienation: and on and on..."³⁶

In addition to the 'bisexuality' of many of the figures, these dualities point to an experience of mobile sexual differentiation. Like Cixous' concept of a multiple, variable and everchanging bisexuality which neither excludes difference nor either sex, dualities are presented "...not fixed in sequence of struggle and expulsion...but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another."³⁷

In Melancholia dualities are never reconciled, Sipsis does not "...annul differences, but stirs them up, pursues them, increases them."³⁸ Arnold however 'fixes' with her use of opposites. The numerous dualities presented in The Rose are reconciled in the pictorial format, in accordance with Arnold's belief that "[e]verything functions because of its antithesis, and in the interval between...the shifting space for action."³⁹ Reconciliation is indicated in the 'solid' space of the landscape which - like the space between the three elliptical surfaces in Melancholia - serves as a positive area of affirmation, in the two depicted toy aeroplanes hovering between headrest and pot and in the placement of a depicted toy soldier in the pathway between the two groups of animals. These all function in the space between the polarities, serving to connect and unite them. Through reconciliation of opposites, pictorial unity is achieved. This 'achieved unity' is emphasized by an ordering of forms to create a 'whole' and by the frame and border which 'contain' the painting.

At first, this painting appeared 'simple' to me - an autobiographical representation of two facets of the self (masculine and feminine) reconciled in an unstable environment of war. Yet conversation with the artist and a more intense exploration of the work has complicated my reading of the painting. In some ways the work seems to concur with Arnold's intentions, yet in other ways, there are contradictions. For instance, the artist states that

"There is never an overt autobiographical manifestation in still-life, there's a lot of

concealment because the objects are metaphorical...nothing is what it seems to be."⁴⁰

However, it may be argued that Arnold's iconography is 'obvious' - these metaphors may be 'easily read.' Even though she uses intertextual references, objects seem to reveal their identities clearly as autobiographical metaphors. The composition appears as if analytically, instrumentally ordered in order to support the 'givenness' of her iconography.

Referring to Melancholia, Siopis also says that "[t]hings are not quite what they seem."⁴¹ She too intends objects to function as autobiographical metaphors,⁴² yet here these seem to operate in a more complex way. Siopis uses postmodernist concerns (intertextuality, parody, allegory and appropriation of historical images and traditions) to challenge 'optically given presence.' Various emblems, which refer to European 17th century still-life traditions, are imaged. As I noted in Chapter 1, some scholars hold that these are used as signs to convey 'hidden meanings.' Here they may be identified with postmodern allegory.⁴³ Not only material matter and imaged form are layered, but also multiple signifying codes and conventions. As Richards notes "[t]here is in pursuing and producing meaning...a sense of action very unlike the contemplative passivity which simply receives a framed imprint of a 'given.'"⁴⁴

From this, we can gauge that Arnold does not invest the surface and iconography to the same degree as Siopis: here "...still-life [becomes] a convention through which personal concerns are put across at a distance."⁴⁵ Although the painting operates on the level of 'the given,' revealment serves primarily to conceal. Modernist concerns of 'givenness,' 'pure presence' and 'achieved unity' are prevalent. Her general approach seems to be 'formalized,' indicating an incongruity with statements suggesting 'intuitive involvement in the creative process.'

Interestingly, Arnold's concern with picturing and reconciling dualities reflects her approach in relation to opticality and tactility. Through frequent references to gender issues, women artists and their works from within a historical context, Arnold shows her sympathy with feminist concerns. Other tactile factors - evident in her use of the decorative, assertion of gestural mark, substantiality of the lower region and tactile carved frame - abound. Perhaps it is in her ability to shift between optical and tactile approaches, rather than through the 'givenness' of her iconography, that the artist realizes her desire "...not to define but to multiply meaning."⁴⁶

1. This title is derived from a one-person exhibition of still-life painting called 'Connections' which Arnold held at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg in 1988.
2. This painting will be referred to as Divinely Appointed from now on.
3. I will refer to the painting as The Rose from now on.
4. These biographical details have a bearing on my assessment of her work in relation to opticality and tactility.
5. Arnold's interest in early 20th century English literature strongly informs her work. The title of this painting is a phrase derived from the writings of Virginia Woolf. (Arnold, M. Interview with the artist, Pretoria: July 1990.)
6. For example, The Burial of Hunga (1988) makes direct historical reference to Courbet's Burial at Ornans. Based on the latter, Arnold's work locates the burial scene in a South African socio-political context. (Ibid.)
7. Arnold, M. Quoted in Korber, R. 'On being a White Artist in Africa' Weekly Mail 19-25 July 1985.
8. Arnold states that she is a "...committed feminist..." and that "[t]here are frequent references to feminist issues and to women artists in almost all my works." (Arnold, M. Interview with the artist. Ibid.)
9. See further (eds.) Parker, R. and Pollock, G. Old Mistresses pp 50-81.
10. Bartky, S. 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power' (eds.) Diamond, I and Quinby, L. Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1988. p 72. Quoted in Wolff, J. Ibid. p 127.
11. This observation has led many 2nd generation feminist artists to question the representation of women's bodies. These artists propose that women's bodies are generally portrayed in ways which represent them as objects for the male gaze and as projections of male desire. Maintaining that gender difference is constructed in the 'scopic field,' these feminists believe that representation is not "...a mimesis of some ultimate reality, but rather a way of reflecting culture's vision of itself. [It] legitimizes culture's dominant ideology, and is therefore inevitably politically motivated. It constructs difference through a re-presentation of preconditioned concepts about gender...that are at the very foundation of our ideology and system of beliefs." (Gouram-Peterson, T. and Mathews, P. Ibid. p 335.)
12. Berger, J. Ibid. p 47. In contemporary and historical representation there are abundant forms in which the apparatus works to constitute the subject as specifically male. These include women's representation in cinema, advertising, fashion models, the media and the tradition of the female nude. The construction of women's identity in these representations is generally that 'man is viewer, woman viewed.' As Mulvey notes: "[I]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle...she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire." (Mulvey, L. Ibid. p 366.)
13. See further Berger, J. Ibid. p 51.
14. Arnold, M. 'Extracts from Diary Entries for Connections' Connections Exhibition Catalogue, 1988.
15. Arnold, M. Interview with the artist. Ibid.
16. Ibid. Italics my own.
17. Schor, N. Ibid. p 4. Schor refers to the detail in both the visual arts and literature, with reference to its relation to gender hierarchization. As historical criticisms and an overview of the detail is broad, I have only referred to selected points. (See further Gombrich, E. H. The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art chs. 1-2 for a history of the decorative in the visual arts.)

18. Schor, N. Ibid. p 16. Privileging of form over detail is considered a sign of artistic virtue in Italian Renaissance paintings. In the split between the Southern and Northern traditions, the more particularist Dutch 17th century tradition is generally considered as 'lesser.' Alpers notes that this privileging of Southern art over the Northern may be attributed to a covert association of the former with the 'feminine' because of its tendency towards detailism. (Alpers, S. Quoted in Schor, N. Ibid.) However, as noted in ch. 1, the Dutch use of detail is located in an optical framework, functioning to make the depicted world more visible and present to the eye.

19. Reynolds, J. Quoted in Schor, N. Ibid. p 20.

20. As Schor notes, the detail may be perceived as 'threatening' because of its tendency to "...subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work...which clearly subordinates the periphery to the centre, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background." (Schor, N. Ibid. p 20.)

21. Greenberg, C. Ibid. p 156.

22. See further Kuspit, D. B. Ibid. pp 57-86.

23. Arnold, M. Ibid. Speaking of her role as an art historian and theoretician, Arnold refers to her position as Senior Lecturer in the Department of History of Art and Fine Arts at UNISA and as an art critic.

24. Ibid.

25. This subject matter has personal significance for Arnold in various ways. Clay objects - such as the guinea fowl - are made by Zimbabwean craftswomen. As handmade artifacts, each has its own identity. They refer to their creators and to both their - and the artist's - place of origin. Further reference to her origin is evident in the landscape fragments of the Nyanga area of Zimbabwe. (Ibid.)

26. Ibid.

27. Skewran, K. 'Encounters' Marion Arnold - Standard Bank Young Artist's Award Winner For Fine Art - Exhibition Catalogue 1984-5. Italics added.

28. Arnold, M. Ibid.

29. This 'weighting' of the lower register is similarly evident in Three Lace Cloths and Melancholia. Siopis often speaks of her paintings in bodily terms, referring to the lower register as a site of support, the middle as a 'stomach area' and of the upper register as being related to the cerebral realm. In this way, she envisions her paintings as related to the human body. (Siopis, P. 'In conversation.')

30. Arnold, M. Ibid. Italics added.

31. Further dualities are reflected in the imaged war toys. As mass produced toys these seem innocuous, yet are intended to function as loaded signs of an uncompromising reality when juxtaposed with organic shapes of apples and flowers.

32. Arnold, M. Ibid.

33. Further references to internal and external space may be found in the hippo, whose internal (interior cavity of her mouth) and external appearance is reflected in the mirror, reflection of the 'outer' landscape and stones in the foreground - a reflection which incorporates the external world of the viewer into the internal picture surface and in the painted border which 'frames' the painting. The painting is framed from both inside and out: by an external sculptural frame and internal border.

34. Arnold, M. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 76.

37. Cixous, H. Quoted in Moi, T. Ibid. p 109.

38. Ibid.

39. Arnold, M. Quoted in Skewran, K. Ibid.

40. Arnold, M. Interview with the artist. Ibid.

41. Siopis, P. Art 17 - '86, Basel Exhibition Catalogue.

42. Ibid.

43. Richards notes that a simply defined "...allegory says one thing and means another." (Fletcher, A. Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1982, p 2. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid., p 74.) He continues that here allegory may be located in the postmodern form: of parody - an "...interest discourse...revising, replaying, inverting and transcontextualizing works of art." (Ibid.)

44. Ibid., p 76.

45. Arnold, M. Ibid.

46. Ibid.



Fig. 20 Dietrich, K. H. Still-Life with Frozen Chicken Legs (1980.)

Tempera and Oil on Canvas, 89,9 x 120 cm.

Collection: Johannesburg Art Gallery.



Fig. 21 Dietrich, K. H. Agnes Bolkanvo and the Nyamisoro (1988.)

Pastel on Paper, 200 x 110 cm (irregular.)

Collection: Private.

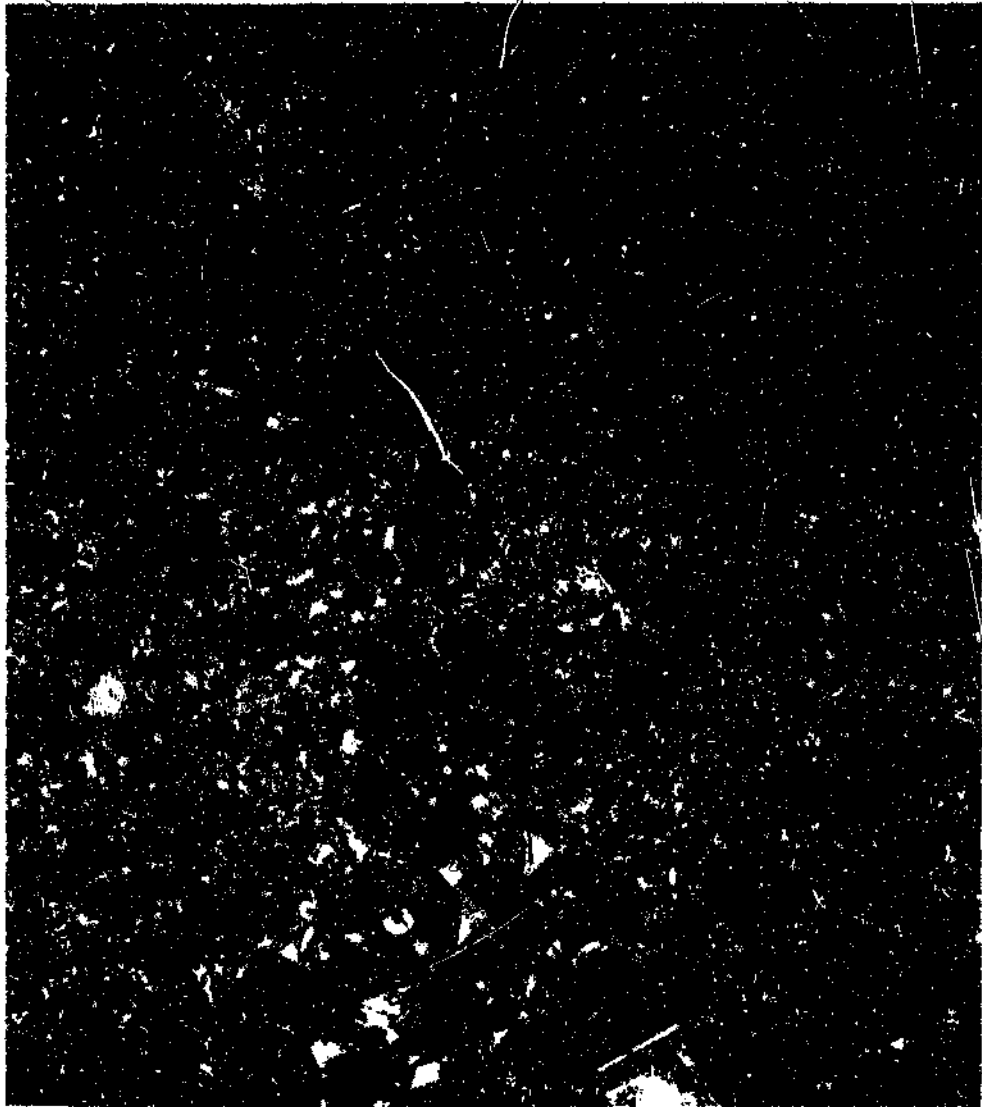


Fig. 22 Siopa, P. Patience on a Monument - 'A History Painting' (1988.)

Oil Paint and Collage, 200 x 180 cm.

Collection: William Humphries Art Gallery, Kimberley.

CHAPTER 6

MASTERY AND MS-TERY

In contrast to the way Arnold appears to shift between positions of opticality and tactility, I would position Keith Dietrich's work as more extremely optical. Cixous' premise, mentioned in Chapter 4, that evidence of a 'masculine' or 'feminine' libidinal economy is not necessarily gender specific seems pertinent to my discussion of his work. Cixous notes that writing by a man may have characteristics of a 'female libidinal economy' and visa versa. Although Dietrich's work is significantly optical, I am not making a necessary connection between opticality and sex. Optical painting may also be produced by a woman.

Dietrich's Still-Life with Frozen Chicken Legs (1980) (Fig. 20)¹ and Agnes Bokanyo and the Nyamisoro (1988) (Fig. 21)² will be used as examples of his work. Whilst the former is a more traditional still-life rendering, Agnes forms part of a series of later pastel drawings in which African men and women are depicted with still-life objects. I have chosen to discuss an example of this series for the following reasons. In these drawings, Dietrich notes that "...still-life imagery and the figure are rendered as if of equal importance."³ Even though worked in pastel, he considers these drawings as paintings because the way in which colour is built up resembles his application of colour in the painting process. For him, the overall 'look' of the surface resembles that of an illusionistic painting.⁴ Further, a painting of this series was exhibited at the Valparaiso Biennial of Art VIII in 1987, which had still-life as its theme.

Like Dietrich's Agnes, Siopis' Patience on a Monument - 'A History Painting' (1988) (Fig. 22)⁵ images the figure together with still-life objects. The latter will be used as a point of comparison to Dietrich's painting of the figure.

Writing about Still-Life in 1983, Dietrich notes that his intention is to

"...alter stereotyped vision and provide a fresh assessment of the 'ordinary'...As a result of the Photo Realistic approach employed, the dialectical tension between subjective and objective realities became clear in the simultaneous heightened sense of illusion and assertion of pictorial flatness."⁶

He goes on to suggest that although surface-depth ambiguity and objective and subjective values are manifest, a primary aim is to present as 'objective' a representation as possible. He attempts to portray objects as "...independent of any meaning or function that we have ascribed to them"⁷

and as "...stripped of their labels...cultural and historical values."⁸ In so doing, he intends to minimize subjective and emotive connotations and realize self-referentiality.⁹

Dietrich aims to achieve this objectivity¹⁰ through photorealism. This approach to painting attempts to approximate photographic reality. Dietrich notes that while the above work was painted from life, there are "...indirect reference[s] to the photographic image..."¹¹ By rendering objects "as accurately as possible," he aims for what he considers as the 'factual truth' of the photograph.¹² The photograph as allegedly 'observed truth' or a 'factual record' is contested by theorists such as John Tagg. Tagg notes that at each stage of the photographic process "...chance effects, purposeful interventions, choices and variations produce meaning."¹³ The photograph constitutes "...the production of a new, specific reality...which becomes meaningful in certain transactions and has real effects, but which cannot refer or be referred to...as truth."¹⁴

For Dietrich, a smooth surface is essential to create a likeness to the photograph.¹⁵ He employs complicated techniques to achieve this. He models forms in egg tempera until the desired plasticity and tonal values are achieved. Thereafter the egg tempera is 'smoothed down' to minimize traces of labour, using oil paint sprayed on with an airbrush.¹⁶

Retrospectively, Dietrich notes that his desire to achieve an 'absolutely' smooth surface was hindered by his preparation of the painting support. The painting was executed on 10 ounce linen canvas prepared with polymer acrylic ground containing marble dust. At no stage was the ground smoothed with sandpaper. This preparation, together with the coarse grained tempera underpainting, presented "...a slightly textured working surface..."¹⁷ He adds that "[a]lthough the underpainting was rendered with sable brushes, a certain degree of brushmark and buildup of paint could not be avoided."¹⁸ In his attempt to create an 'absolutely' smooth surface, even evidence of the texture of the ground support is considered undesirable, much less the subjective connotations which may be conveyed through brushmark.

Like the camera, which never comes into direct contact with the surface it reflects, the mechanism of the airbrush does not make contact with the picture surface. Both mechanisms employ particularly insubstantial elements in producing an image, such as light and air. The degree to which distance and detachment from the surface has occurred becomes clear if compared the simularum in Melancholia.

Surface-depth ambiguity is realized by contrasting objects with crisp edges (the metal flask, edge of the polystyrene box) with forms whose edges are relatively blurred (tablecloth edges, chair legs.)

This interplay indicates the influence of photographic focusing, which 'pulls in' and 'pushes back' all imagery lying on the extensional axis onto a single directional plane.¹⁹ In this photorealistic painting, these edges appear slightly unclear. However such 'unfocusing' is relative to its context. If compared to 'painterly' areas of Melancholia, in which outlines at times dissolve into areas of surrounding ground, Dietrich's 'blurred' edges appear defined.

Dietrich uses airbrush to achieve this 'blurred' effect.²⁰ Although I have suggested that blurring of edges in painting can be a feature of tactility, his association of these effects with a 'subjective consciousness' seems incompatible with my suggestion. The areas in the painting where these effects occur do not disrupt its overall smooth surface. Such totalization allows the surface to read as primarily optical. As in the photograph which 'fixes' the transitory, the still-life is rendered as timeless and static by the uniformity of its surface.

This illusionism may be compared to the single-point perspective of the camera. The viewing subject is positioned as a singular, centred presence, enabling 'him' to control the image. As Kate

Linker notes:

"Based on the *camera obscura* of the Renaissance, photographic representation implies both a framed scene or object and a controlling point of view: through a 'systematic deception,' the single-point perspective in the lens...arranges all information according to the laws of projection which place the subject as geometric point of origin of the scene in an *imaginary relationship* with *real space*...it is the medium's putative transparency that bestows the illusion of naturalness, effacing the image's fabrication under the guise of objectivity."²¹

In Melancholia this perspective - presented in the illusionistic recessional space - is simultaneously challenged by the shifting, multiple viewpoints of the area depicting the table. As I indicated in Chapter 4, multiple examples of fragmentation, numerous light sources which cast an indeterminate number of incongruous shadows and excess manipulation of the surface combine to shift attention away from the whole. A singular vantage point from which to 'take in the work' - facilitated in Dietrich's more synoptic painting - is challenged in both lower and upper lower registers. The eye can barely 'take in' the ongoing space of the lower register and infinite depth implied in the upper. In this way, the illusionism - on one level convincing - is constantly undermined.

In Still-Life blue-green tonalities predominate. Dietrich notes that because of their shorter wavelengths, colours on this cool end of the spectrum produce "...soothing, harmonious effects..." which he believes characterize "...emotional control..." adding that this is particularly evident in the blues which "...point to the realm of the transcendental."²² Colour use is intended to distance the

viewer and deny the material world. In Melancholia the colour red pervades. As Richards points out, in the Book of Revelations "...scarlet is interpreted ambivalently as 'an expression of splendour and lust as well as a sign of the blood shed by saints.'"²⁵ Red can also be identified with ritual, fire and blood, possibly recalling emotional states of passion, violence and excitement.

Meat is depicted in the bottom left-hand corner of the table in Still-Life. With its references to the body, it offers the potential for identificatory responses. However these are precluded by his portrayal of meat as sanitized, wrapped and frozen. In this way, associations with the body are suppressed.²⁴ In Melancholia, reminders of the body are conveyed not only through colour, but also iconographically and through the material surface.

In Still-Life denial of materiality is heightened by emphasis on the insubstantial qualities of light. Figures and ground are illuminated by a singular, static light source. As in Dutch 17th century paintings, reflective surfaces (plastic, metal) are emphasized. When articulated in oil paint, these surfaces "...render...space as luminous by diffusing the represented objects into light substance."²⁵ In Melancholia Siopis has articulated the lower register as a "...obsessive heavy body..." of thick paint. In the upper region, paint is applied "...in translucent iridescent veils and fleeting dashes almost without body..."²⁶ As in The Rose and Three Lace Cloths, such 'weightedness' of the lower region may allow for a sense of bodily access. In contrast, Dietrich's work presents light in the lower region, creating a feeling of insubstantiality. This is emphasized by the structure of the painting. Objects are positioned in the upper register, enhancing the insubstantiality of the lower.

Whatever the meaning attributed to the relative blurring of edges (assertion of pictorial flatness and proposed relation to a more subjective consciousness,) mastery of medium, a 'fixed' system of signification and determinate subject position seem primary. These factors are optical. In contrast to Siopis' excessive processing of material and meaning in Melancholia, which resists the closure of a single 'given' interpretation, the viewer is offered a hypostatized image with the ability to accept the simplicity of a visible 'truth.'

The particularly mediated quality of Dietrich's painting suggests what Bryson describes as "...disembodied vision." The painting is 'present,' offered as a totalized 'whole' for the viewer's gaze. This may allow 'him' to objectify, master and possess the depicted scene. Although Dietrich intended to achieve a heightened degree of objectivity, he unself-consciously invokes all the features of opticality and its implicitly subjective power relations. It is under the guise of allegedly 'objective' empirical observation, that the artist/spectator is empowered as a 'disembodied I/eye.'

In contrast to Still-Life, in Agnes Dietrich intends to manipulate the meaning of the depicted objects in relation to the figure. In so doing, he hopes to subvert the traditional convention of portraiture which, influenced by humanist discourse, positions the figure as central to the painting and considers objects as supportive 'props'.²⁷ He notes that

"[t]he objects are not meant to be subordinate to the figure...they are there to say more about the figure. The figure and still-life [are] both so closely related. I love objects because they're made by people, bought by people and used by people, so in the end they're extensions of people. In this work they operate as extensions of the figure, despite their placement at the figure's feet."²⁸

This painting is executed through several mediatory processes. Dietrich works from a photograph of the human subject i.e. from an already processed surface. The photographic image is projected through an epidiascope onto the paper. Whilst in the epidiascope, covert distortions which occur in the photographing process are 'corrected' in an attempt to approximate 'normal' vision. These impersonal devices set the subject matter at a double removed, allowing for a heightened degree of detachment from the surface.²⁹

Dietrich notes that the sense of distance achieved through use of the airbrush is "...quite vast." He comments that when using pastel, this distance decreases.³⁰ The chalk comes into direct contact with the surface and the artist notes that he experiences a greater degree of physical involvement by rubbing or "judging the pastel with his fingers."³¹ However, although the surface is rendered by more tactile means, its overall 'look' is not dissimilar to Still-Life.

This treatment of the women's body is mechanical and generalized. Physical details (wrinkles, lines) are absent. (This recalls Hudson's association of totalization with the 'whole object' or 'purely optical presence'.) There is an emphasis on totalization throughout. The centrally placed, singular figure is surrounded by objects arranged in a balanced and ordered way. Figure and objects are contained in a wedge-shaped mount which traces the shape of her body. The figure is illusionistically rendered so as to give the effect of tilting forward and out of the format. This illusion is contradicted by the flat mount which reasserts pictorial surface.

In the photograph which Dietrich used as reference, as well as in the painting, the figure is viewed from an elevated position. In Western culture to 'look down upon' - literally or metaphorically - carries associations of 'belittling' the viewed subject. Dietrich comments that he intends this elevated viewpoint to function only as a formal device, to make the viewer unfamiliar with appearances.³² Tilting of the camera to render the figure from an oblique viewpoint is intended

to achieve a similar aim. If the work is hung so that the figure reads as if above the spectator, this elevated viewing position may be countered, as the viewer may be positioned to look up at the figure and she down at the spectator.

Although Dietrich intends to subvert the hierarchical relations between viewer and viewed, certain formal elements place both spectator and artist in precisely the privileged status which the artist aimed to deconstruct.

Combining single-point perspective³³ with an elevated viewpoint subjugates the figure to the viewer's controlling gaze. The mount also facilitates perception of the figure as object. Close cropping of the format and the way the figure is 'held' in the shallow space 'confines' the viewer's attention to a narrow focus, enhancing 'his' ability for possession. This is further stressed by the mediated quality of the surface. The fact that the imaged subject is called an oppressed 'other' in Western culture by virtue of both race and gender, complicates such pictorial objectification.

Such subjugation is not particular to Dietrich's painting. For instance, Tagg notes that the photograph has been used to exercise power relations since the mid-19th century.³⁴ In disciplinary institutions (e.g. the newly developed police force) the documentary photograph is used for identification and record keeping. These photographs constitute a standardized image where the body is "...made object, divided and studied, enclosed in a cellular structure...subjected and made subject."³⁵ Tagg cites examples from the 19th century where documentary photography is deployed in administrative and professional practices e.g. the social sciences of criminology and psychiatry. In these discourses

"The working classes, colonised peoples, the criminal, poor, ill-housed, sick or insane were constituted as the passive...or 'feminised' objects of knowledge and subjected to scrutiny through the rhetoric of photographic documentation."³⁶

Siopis' Patience questions these power relations particular to opticality. Her painting may be compared to Dietrich's Agnes, since both present a single black female figure with still-life objects placed at her feet. The intentions of the artists are also comparable. As Dietrich intends to subvert hierarchization of the figure over objects, so Siopis challenges the conception of history painting - which glorifies man's achievements - as a more sophisticated genre over still-life.³⁷

However, despite these iconographic similarities, Siopis' treatment of this subject matter challenges and subverts a hierarchical viewing structure whereas Dietrich's imposes it. The traditional history painting is generally state authorized, heroic in form and said to be an 'objective' account of

historical events. Siopis uses conventions of this genre, consciously attempting to point to ways in which this convention is inscribed with and reinforces certain forms of prejudice. As she says, conventions of 'high' or 'fine art' are often images which are

"...constructed, sometimes quite artfully. They are thus a matter of convention, not 'nature' or some sort of 'essential identity'. These conventions of representation...are assumed not to be subject to the same prejudices and do not serve the same interests as images from other realms of image making...by virtue of their aesthetic autonomy. I work within this self-same aesthetic tradition using its own values - the effect of the real (illusionism), beauty, skill and the like - in an attempt to turn it against itself and to show that the aesthetic is not exempt from prejudice."³⁹

The 'still-life' part of the picture is comprised of a pile of objects and waste. This includes a skull, a handbag, ornamental fittings, a model of a pregnant womb and broken heart, an open book, a stretched canvas, spectacles, two busts of a black man by Anton van Vouw... These objects are combined with natural waste such as vegetable matter, fruit peelings etc.⁴⁰ Another 'insult' to the history painting genre is that the depicted still-life is comprised of debris. Rather than being 'artfully arranged' for the viewer's benefit, the still-life is compressed into a pile of rubbish.⁴⁰

The central figure is a parodic re-reproduction of a sculpture representing Africa.⁴¹ Its source forms part of an allegorical set of sculptures depicting the large continents (social and topographical) of the colonial world found outside the Musee d'Orsay in Paris.⁴² As the artist points out, although her general bearing may recall quasi-mythical postures (e.g. a frontal pose, monumentality, revealed breast and pseudo-classical drapes) and may be associated with imagery such as Liberty Leading the People, her modest domestic action of peeling a lemon inverts the conception of history painting as a drama of human greatness.⁴³ The 'hero' is a black woman, historically positioned as 'other' in Western culture and relegated to a lower status by virtue of sex and race. Like the land which is considered 'possessible,' so her body is identified as a 'dark continent' under patriarchy.

The single-point perspective used in Agnes is challenged by the receding landscape, which indicates an infinite space limited only by the frame and the illusionism. In contrast to Agnes, where the figure's confinement into a narrow wedge may facilitate possession, here these kinds of power relations are questioned. As in Still-life, the space of the lower region of Agnes is played down. In Patience however, the lower region is articulated as a solid, material area. The landscape becomes progressively more insubstantial as it recedes into depth. In this way, a similar sense of bodily identification as evident in The Rose may be encouraged.

The landscape is constructed from historical representations of South African history, taken from current history text-books.⁴⁶ They include depictions of missionaries, Boers, black warriors, British settlers, redcoats, wild-life, battle-scenes etc. However, Siopis notes that these illustrations present a stereotyped, prejudiced record of South Africa's history from a dominant, white patriarchal perspective.⁴⁵

Both immediacy and distance is evident in the use of medium. As Dietrich employs mechanical means to produce a mediated image, so Siopis uses a mechanical process (photocopying) to render the illustrations. In so doing, she intends to draw attention to the fact that these illustrations are 'constructed' representations, not 'objective' or 'transparent' reflections of reality.⁴⁶ Ironically this interest in mediation still finds a tactile form - precoded imagery is used in a way which is consistent with my definition of tactility. The photocopies are stuck down and painted over. Sticking paper onto the surface suggests a more involved handling of the medium, which is echoed in the assertion of gestural mark. This mark conceals and reveals the given representations. The manipulation to which Siopis subjects the original representations works to empty them of their resonance, significance and authoritative claim to meaning. In this case, repetition debases their original meaning into cliché.⁴⁷ She subverts the 'heroic actions' of the historical narrative, rendering them as decorative motif. 'History [literally] repeats itself'⁴⁸ in decorative motifs across the surface.

in both Agnes and Patience, the space surrounding the figure is composed of repeated motifs/images. However, these motifs manifest significant differences in treatment. In Dietrich's work, motifs are systematically, singularly rendered⁴⁹ stressing order and control. These motifs contain the space behind the figure, increasing its shallowness by asserting pictorial flatness - a factor which may facilitate possession. Siopis uses decorative motifs in a layered, seemingly random and chaotic way, creating a surface which stresses non-hierarchical principles of formlessness and multiplicity. Mechanical re-representation of images is used to create an excessive layering of detail and decorative motif. This excess of detail draws attention away from the whole, allowing for a response to the picture which is not related to possession. By combining prolific use of the decorative with illusionistic representation, Siopis undermines the unified and monolithic values clearly asserted in Agnes, commenting on the power relations which these values generally inscribe. As Sue Williamson says,

"By using the tradition of Western painting with illusionism as its dominant mode, then subverting or deconstructing it, Siopis focusses our attention on the prejudicial ways the 'other' - blacks, females, exotics, etc. - have so frequently been (mis)represented in that tradition."⁵⁰

In many ways, Dietrich's rendering of the female appears to exemplify such (mis) representation: she is presented as the objectified 'other,' as a 'still life.' Not unlike the colonizers and colonized land of which Siopis speaks, the female body becomes a 'colonized terrain' subject to mastery and control. By working within the dominant optical tradition of the history painting genre, Siopis turns its values against itself to show that "...it is not only the representation of politics that is an issue, but the politics of representation as well..."⁵¹

After examining these paintings and talking to the artists, an underlying premise which I seem to be left with is the idea of the surface as site of investments. Arnold appears to use her paintings as sites for the expression of personal concerns, yet articulates these in a way which conceals insight into her private persona. The surface is treated 'mechanically' with little emotional investment, both iconologically and formally. Dietrich deliberately attempts to deny subjective investment into the surface, consciously employing mediatory techniques and devices which impose a barrier between himself and the surface. In Melancholia Siopis combines use of the surface as a site of material and imagistic investment with mediation imposed by an overdetermining of the sign. The artist shifts from the involvement which occurs through processes of enactment to a distancing of herself from subject and image. As Richards says

"This excessive multiple processing of material and meaning resists any division between mental and manual labour, not unrelated to the opposition of the optical/tactile opposition. There is a powerful incorporation of eye...mind's eye, hand, and body. This incorporation recognizes working with (com)pliant material enables the register of memory, touch, detached observation, interior ebbs and flows, the passage of time, habit and estrangement."⁵²

It is perhaps in Three Lace Cloths that investment into the surface is particularly evident. Here immediacy, direct engagement with the paint and a sense of absorption induced through enactment combine, resulting in a surface in which the artist

"...lays herself bare...she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body...she *inscribes* what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking."⁵³

1. This painting will be referred to as Still-Life from now on.
2. I will refer to the painting as Agnes from now on.
3. Dietrich, K. H. Interview with the artist. Johannesburg: July, 1990.
4. Ibid. I will refer to the work as a painting in accordance with his definition.
5. To be referred to as Patience from now on.
6. Dietrich, K. H. The Ordinary and Mysterious Painted Image Summary.
7. Ibid. p 16.
8. Dietrich, K. H. Interview with the artist. Ibid.
9. As Pollock notes, because the Realist text denies evidence of process it "...offers itself as merely a picture of the world which does not depend for its sense on any other texts, references or information." (Pollock, G. Vision and Difference p 171.)
10. He does concede however that "...there exists no such thing as absolute subjectivity or absolute objectivity..." (Dietrich, K. H. The Ordinary and Mysterious Painted Image p 78.) In retrospect, he concedes that to render objects as 'devoid' of meaning is an impossibility, adding that he intended rather to avoid giving objects an overt symbolic meaning so that they could, to an extent, be read as forms in themselves. (Dietrich, K. H. Interview with the artist. Ibid.)
11. Dietrich, K. H. The Ordinary and Mysterious Painted Image p 55.
12. This relates back to the 17th century trust in empirical observation as evidence of 'scientific' or 'true' knowledge.
13. Tagg, J. The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories p 4.
14. Ibid.
15. Tagg explains the relationship between Realist modes of representation and the photograph as follows: "Realism offers a fixity in which the signifier is treated as if it were identical with a pre-existent signified, and in which the reader's role is purely that of consumer. It is this realist mode with which we are confronted when we look at the photograph as evidence. In Realism...it is the product that is stressed and production that is repressed. The complex codes by which Realism is constituted appear of no account...Production is entirely elided." (Ibid. p 99.)
16. Dietrich, K. H. Ibid. p 58.
17. Ibid. p 62.
18. Ibid.
19. Dietrich, K. H. Interview with the artist. Ibid.
20. Dietrich, K. H. The Mysterious and Ordinary Painted Image p 61.
21. Linker, K. Ibid. p 407.
22. Iuen, J. The Elements of Color (simplified and condensed by Birren, F.) New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970 p 88. Quoted by Dietrich, K. H. Ibid. p 54.
23. Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 73.

24. Arnold has also painted several works which image chicken legs. (See for instance It is Futile to Attempt to Picnic in Eden (1988.)) She depicts meat in a particularly 'illustrative' way: the chicken is 'mechanically' rendered with little investment into the medium or surface. In this way, potentially disturbing 'corporeal' associations are similarly minimized.

25. Dietrich, K. H. Ibid. p 34.

26. Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 75.

27. Dietrich, K. H. Interview with the artist. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. This process of looking through mechanical apparatuses recalls the Dutch use of the camera obscura. The latter device is devised as an aid to the eye: as a 'scientific' means of observing more 'accurately' and 'objectively.'

30. Ibid. Dietrich adds that one of the reasons he stopped using airbrush was because he "hated" the objectivity and distance it facilitates.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Bell comments that the camera, like certain paintings, can serve to recreate the experience of the voyeur, but with advantages in this respect. Although both may employ single-point perspective, the speed of the camera can produce 'instances of reality' making an 'unfolding of the scene' (as realized in the cinema) possible. The reproductibility of the photographic image, as well as the fact that television and cinema can reach a large audience, results in the possibility of addressing many 'voyeurs' simultaneously. (Bell, D. M. Ibid. p 31.)

34. Tagg, J. Ibid. pp 11-2.

35. Ibid. p 76.

36. Ibid.

37. Traditionally, history painting more or less idealizes the human figure, structuring its narrative around the significance of man's actions. By incorporating the 'minor' genre of still-life into a 'history painting,' Siopis subverts these hierarchical distinctions, simultaneously elevating the status of still-life and debasing the privileged position of history painting.

38. Siopis, P. Unpublished article on her work.

39. Ibid.

40. This refuse indicates the trappings of a materialistic civilization with possessive inclinations, evident in their acquisition of possessions and colonization of the land.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'

45. Siopis, P. Unpublished article on her work.

46. Siopis, P. 'In conversation.'

47. This is evident in the work of the pattern painters, mentioned in ch. 2. Immediate recognition of their content is often hindered by decontextualization and repetition. Motifs are often dissociated from their original source and recontextualized as subject matter of the work. In this way, the meaning of the motif may be eroded and the design 'de-signed.' Repetition further disengages control of context, allowing forms to lose their individual meaning and read as motifs. This is evident in Warhol's use of repeated images. Here emotionally laden content (car wrecks, electric chairs) is repeated in a pattern-like manner. The picture reads as a pattern and its subject as motif. Through repetition, the content's impact is degraded and trivialized. (Goldin, A. 'Patterns, Grids and Painting' Artforum Vol. XIV September 1975, p 51.)

48. Siopis, P. Ibid.

49. This way of ordering motifs pertains to Goldin's definition that the crucial determinant of pattern is "...the constancy of the *interval* between motifs..." Goldin also notes that "[t]he fundamental structure of pattern is the grid..." (Goldin, A. Ibid. pp 50-1.) This ordered and symmetrical arrangement of motif and interval seemingly concurs with Gombrich's premise that "...pleasure in control is inseparable from the rise of decorative art." (Gombrich, E. H. A Sense of Order p 13.) Gombrich holds that *man's* mental makeup favours simplicity, both in the perception and making of pattern, proposing that examples of his "...innate desire... for "...rationality and a sense of order" may be found in the repeated configurations of motifs based on an internal structure of regularity, balance and symmetry. These views of the decorative indicate values which I have associated with opticality. In this way, it appears the decorative is not automatically tactile. Its tactility depends on the way in which the surface is articulated. (*Italics added.*)

50. Williamson, S. Resistance Art in South Africa pp 20-2.

51. Siopis, P. Quoted in Williamson, S. Ibid.

52. Richards, C. F. Ibid. p 76.

53. Circus, H. 'The Laugh of the Madonnas' New French Feminisms p 251.



Fig. 23 Farber, L. N. Not All Mechanical Beasts are Calendar Beasts (1987.)

Oil on Canvas, 122 x 203 cm.

Collection: The artist.



Fig. 23 Farber, L. N. Not All Mechanical Beasts are Calendar Beasts (1987.)

Oil on Canvas, 122 x 203 cm.

Collection: The artist.

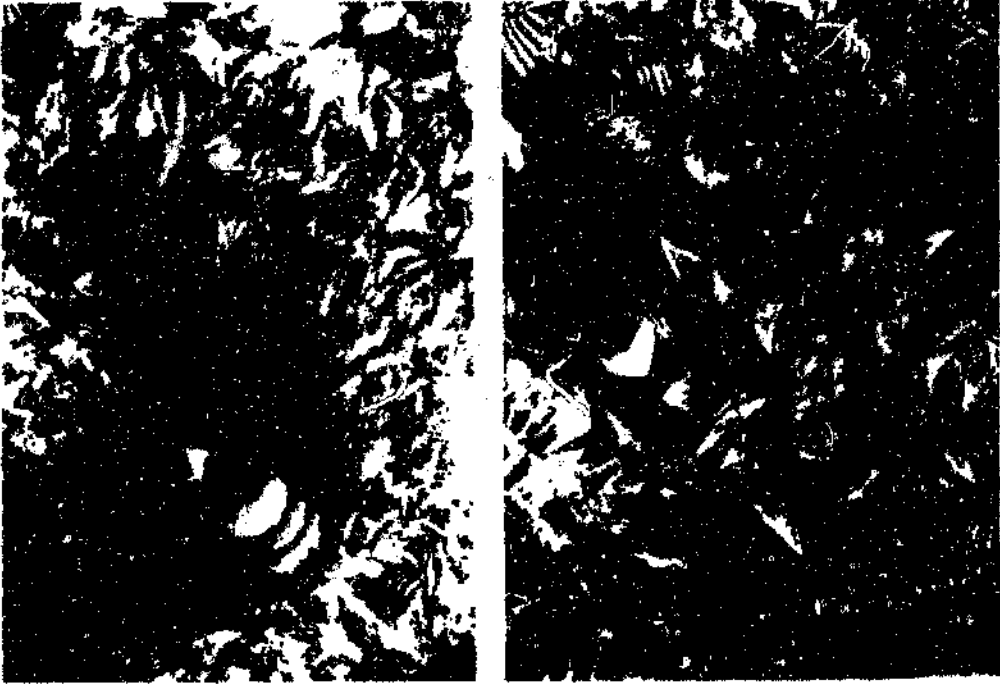


Fig. 23a Farber, L. N. Not All Mechanical Beasts are Calendar Beasts
(Details.)

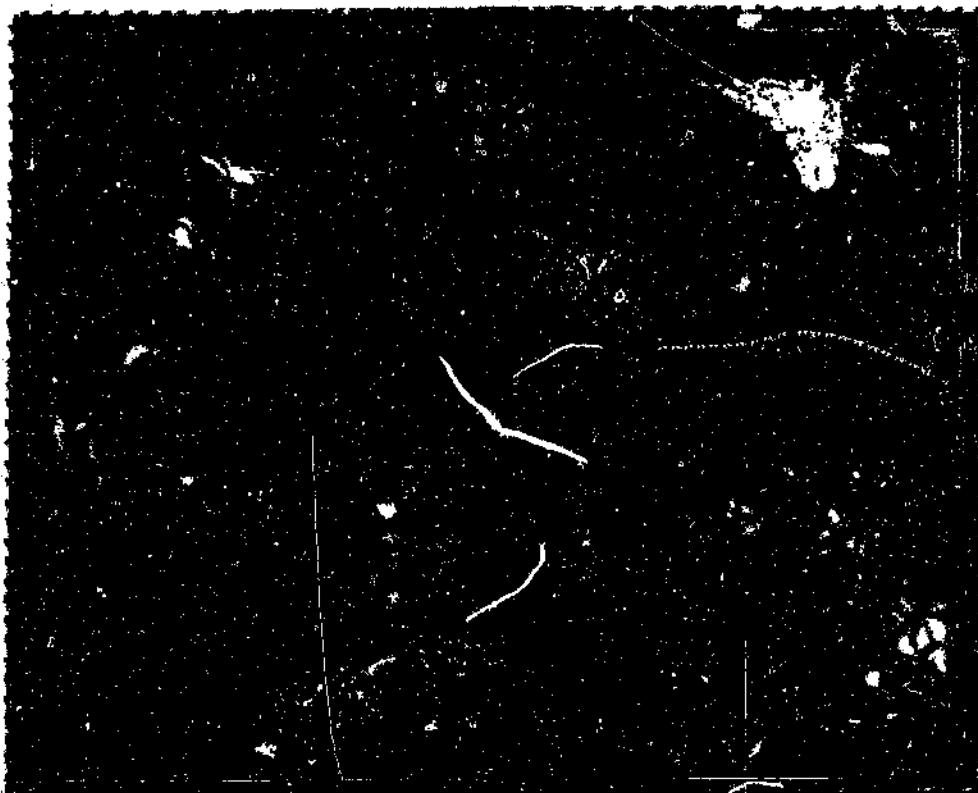


Fig. 24 Furber, L. N. This Mortal Coil (1987.)

Oil on Canvas, 129 x 158 cm.

Collection: The artist.

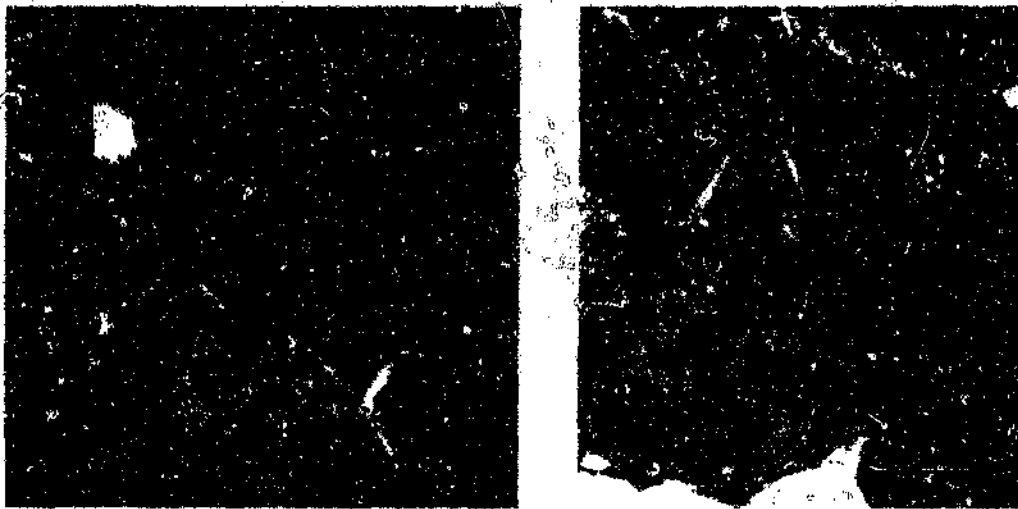


Fig. 24a Farber, L. N. This Mortal Coil
(Detail and Reference Material - Medical Illustration.)

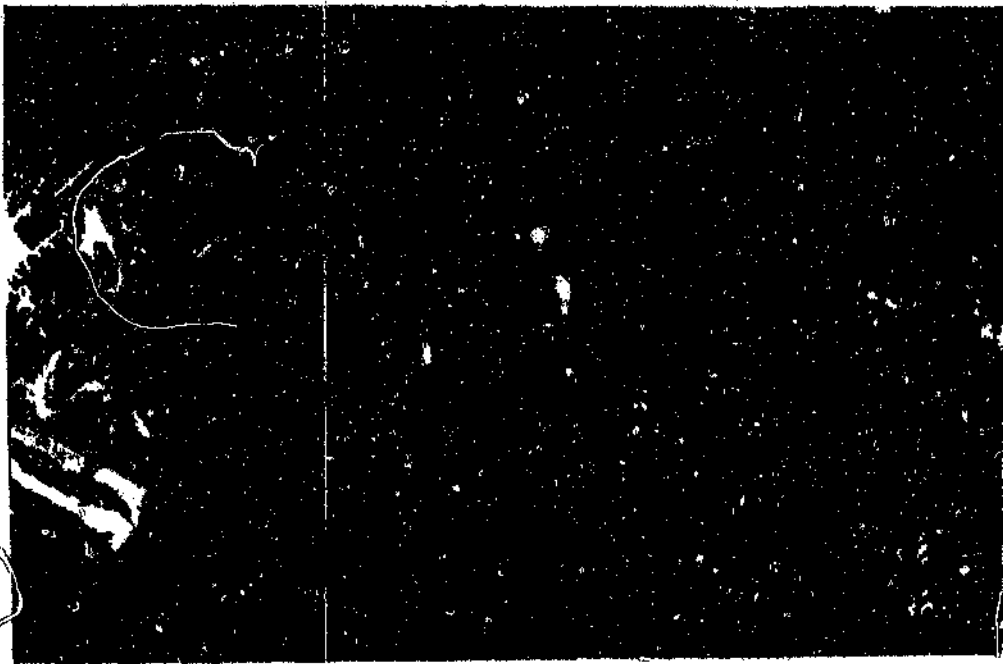


Fig. 25 Faber, L. N. Delusions of Grandeur (1987.)

Oil on Canvas, 122 x 186 cm.

Collection: The artist.



Fig. 25a Farber, L. N. Dolomites of Grandeur
(Details.)

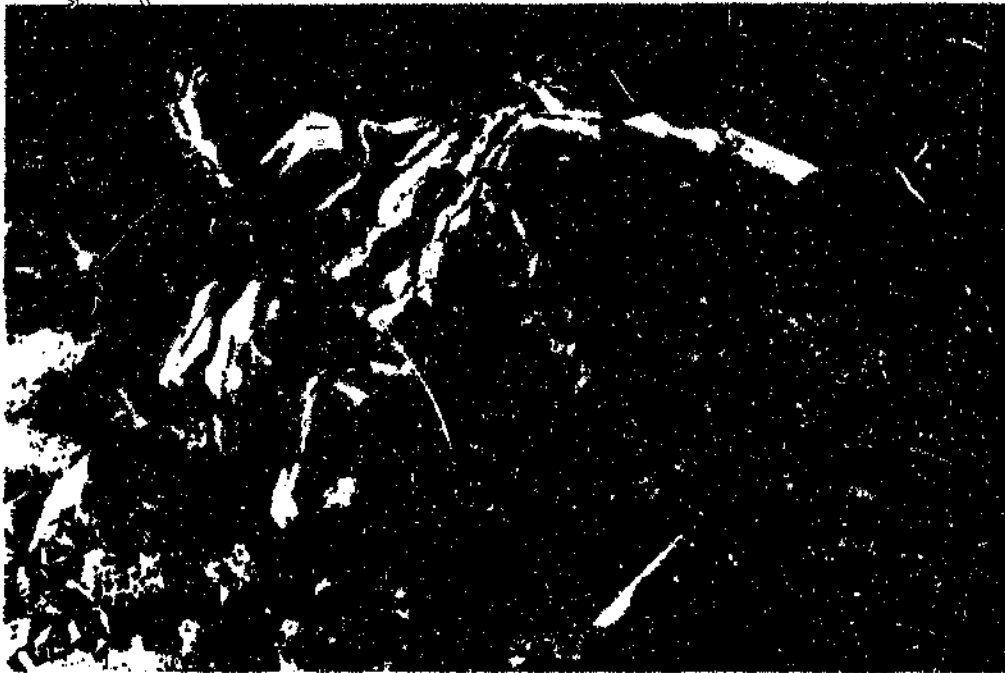


Fig. 26 Farber, L. N. It Is Not Known If My Body Is Fish or Flesh
(1987-91.) Oil on Canvas, 105 x 154 cm.

Collection: The artist.



Fig. 26a Farber, L. N. It Is Not Known If My Body Is Fish or Flesh
(Details.)



Fig. 27 Ferber, L. Abandoning the Ornamental Garden (1988.)

Oil on Canvas, 129 x 159 cm.

Collection: The artist.



Fig. 28 Farber, L. N. Bruins: 'The Natural Masterpiece' (1988.)

Oil on Canvas, 127 x 102 cm.

Collection: Mr C. J. Blackbeard.



Fig. 29 Farber, L. N. Eye-Desire (1989.)

Oil on Canvas, 125 x 100 cm.

Collection: The artist.

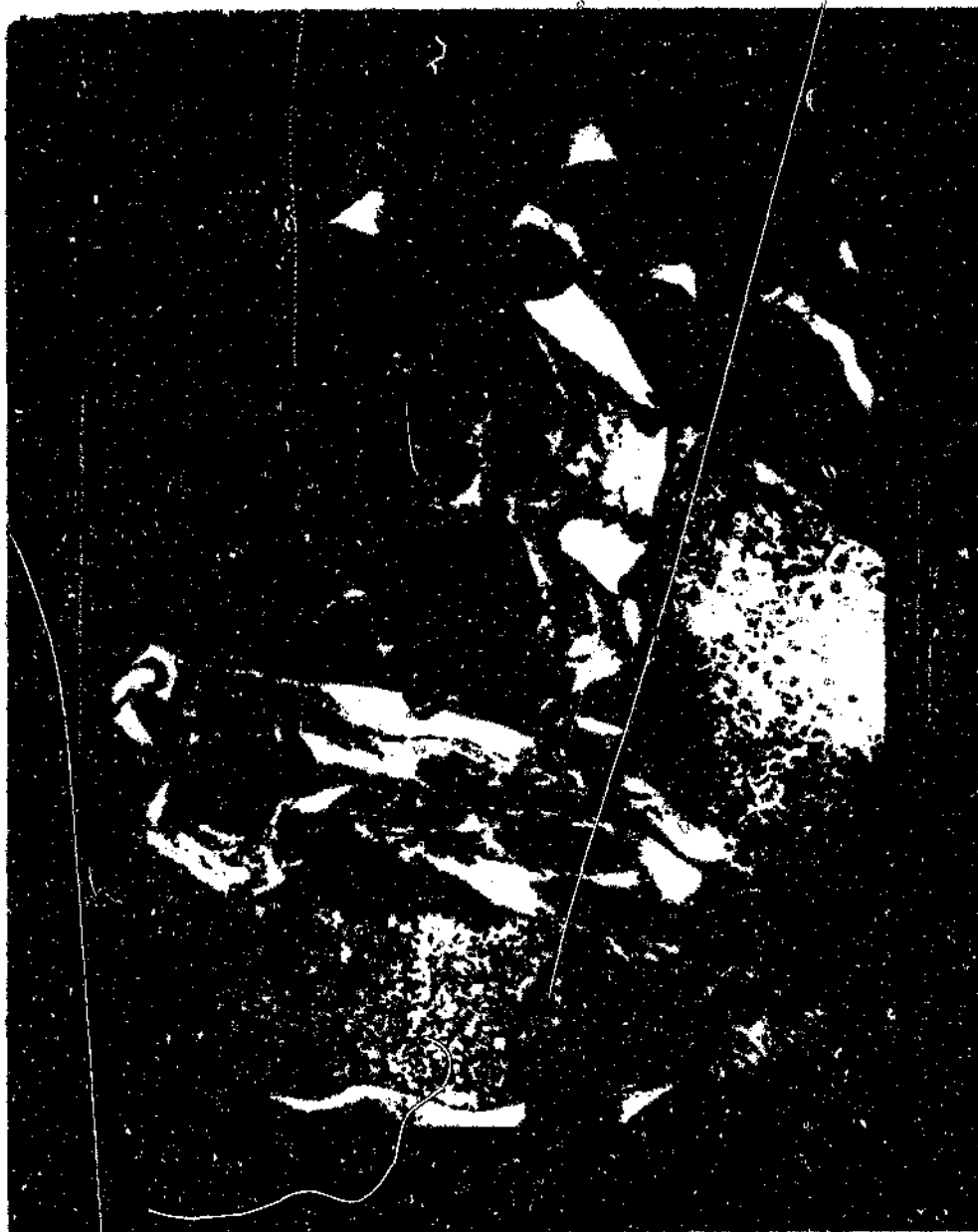


Fig. 30 Farber, L. N. Fruits of Dispassionate Flesh (1989-91.)

Oil on Canvas, 96 x 77 cm.

Collection: The artist.



Fig. 31 Farber, L. N. Offering at Arm's Length (1989-91.)

Oil on Canvas, 87 x 68 cm.

Collection: The artist.

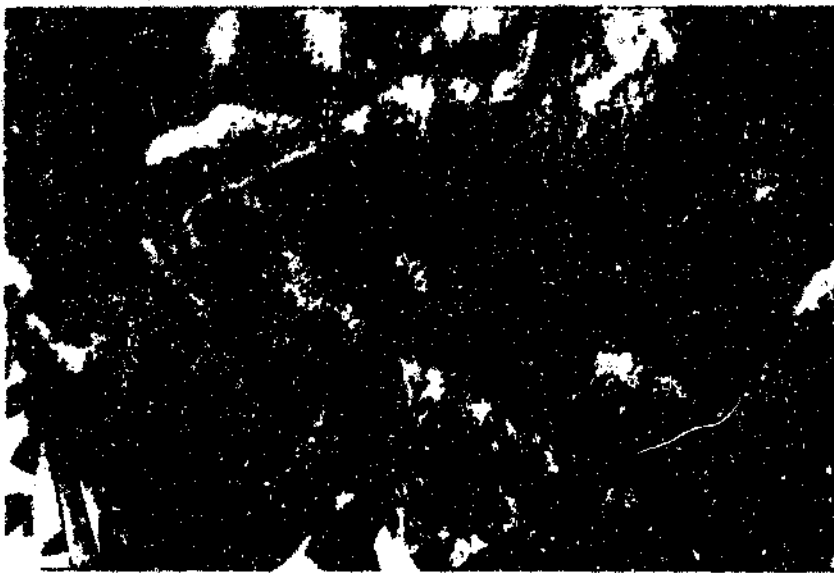
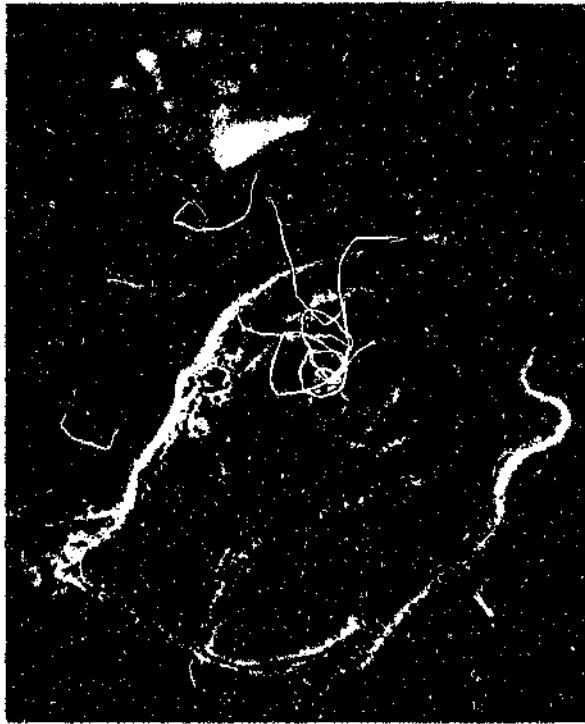


Fig. 31e Farber, I. N. Offering at Arm's Length
(Detail and Reference Material - Medical Illustration.)

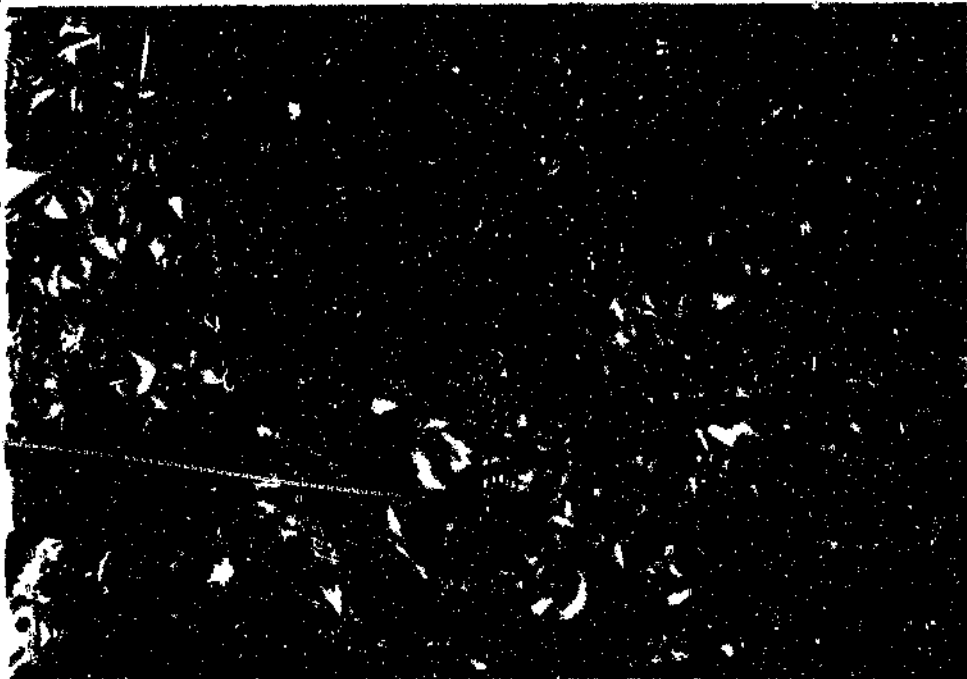


Fig. 32 Farber, L. N. Voyage into the Interior (1989.)

Oil on Canvas, 175 x 256 cm.

Collection: The artist.

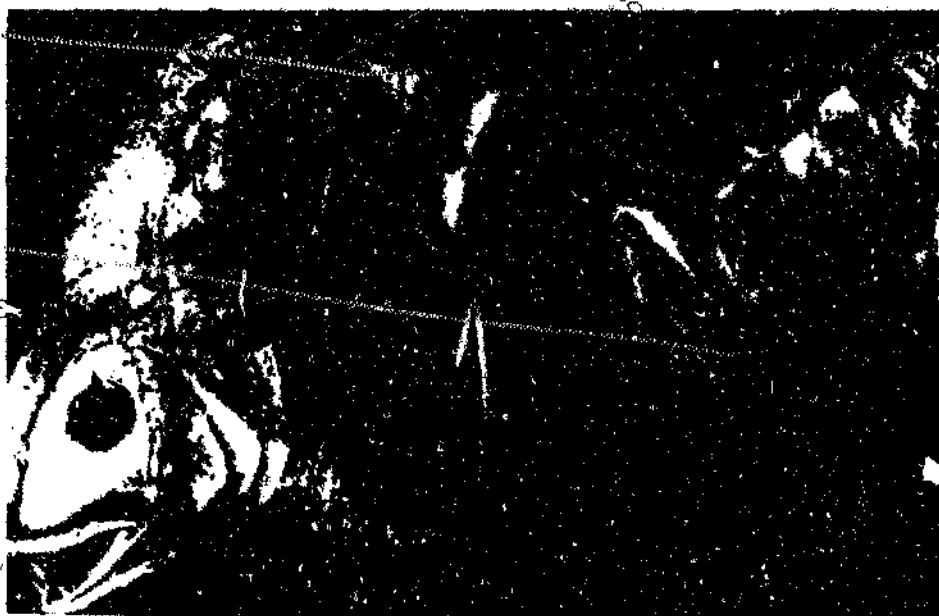


Fig. 32a Fisher, L. N. Voyage into the Interior
(Details.)

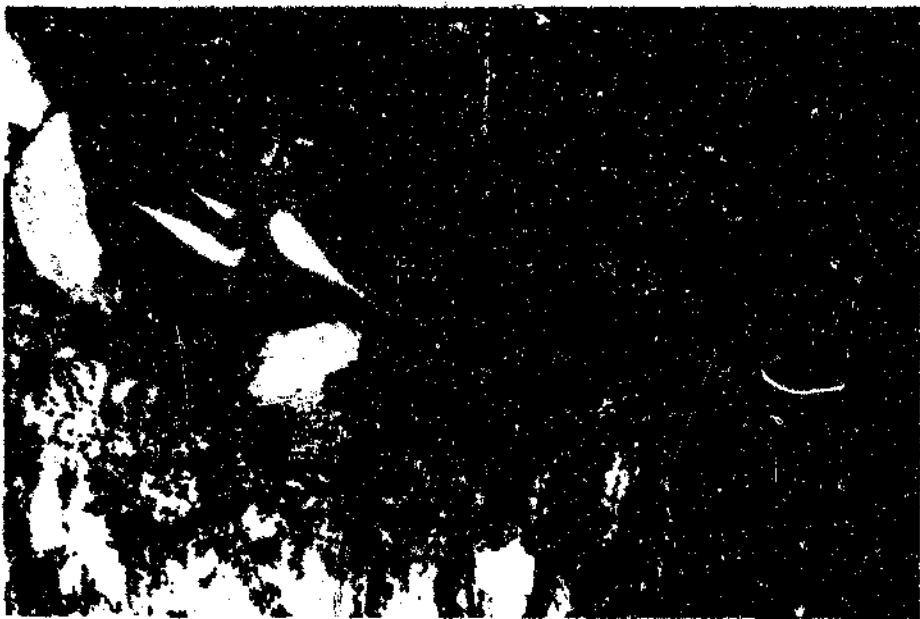
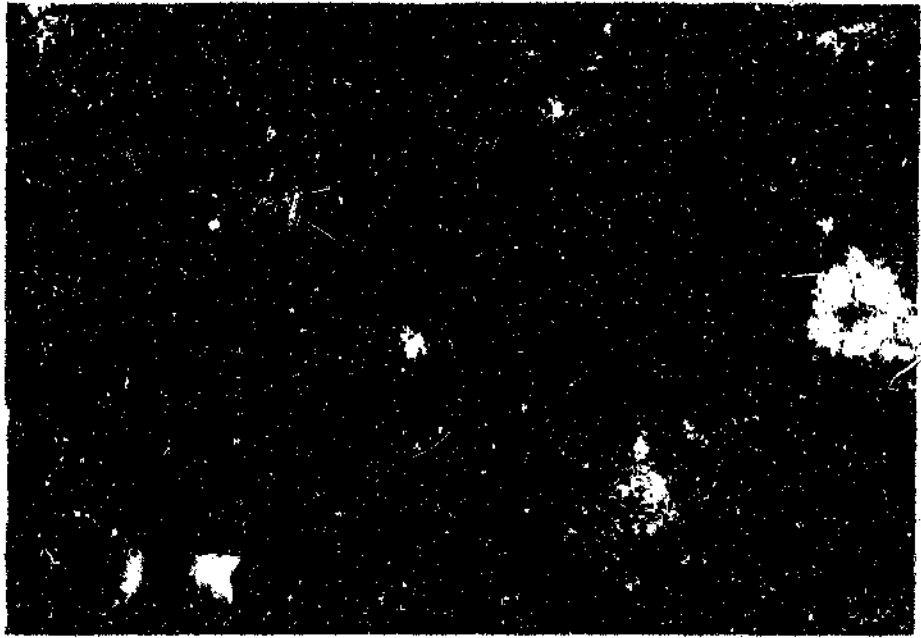


Fig. 32b Farber, L. N. Voyage into the Interior
(Details.)

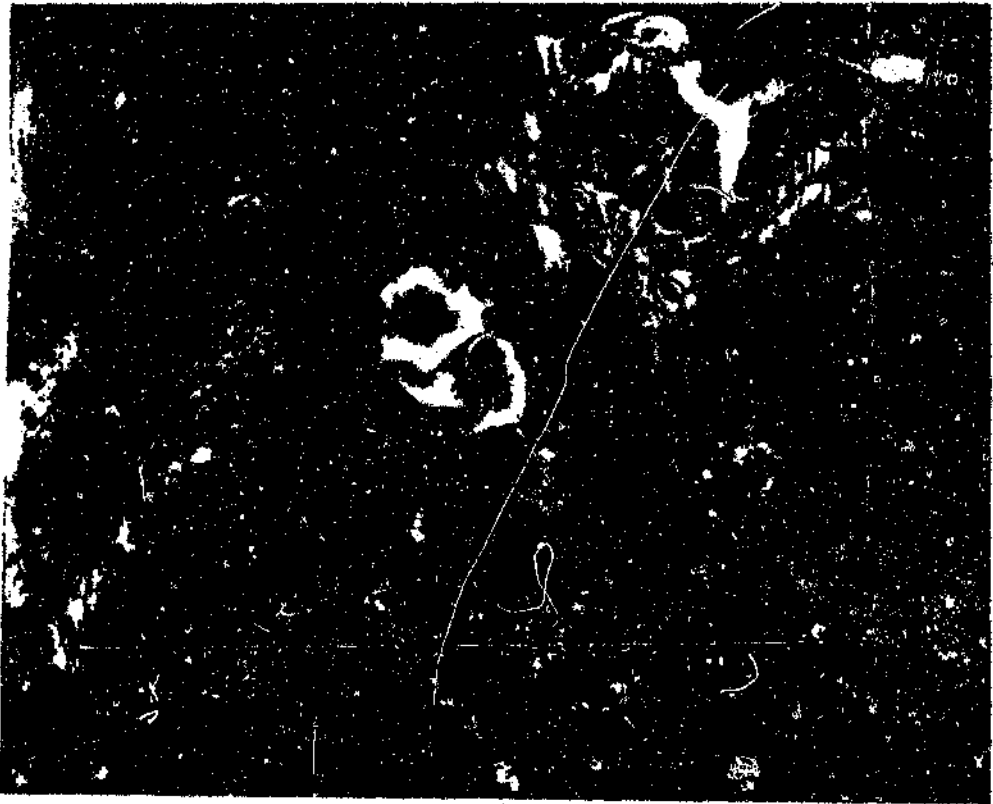


Fig. 33 Farbo, L. N. Caked in Visceral Terrain (1989.)

Oil on Canvas, 129 x 159 cm.

Collection: The Pretoria Technikon.

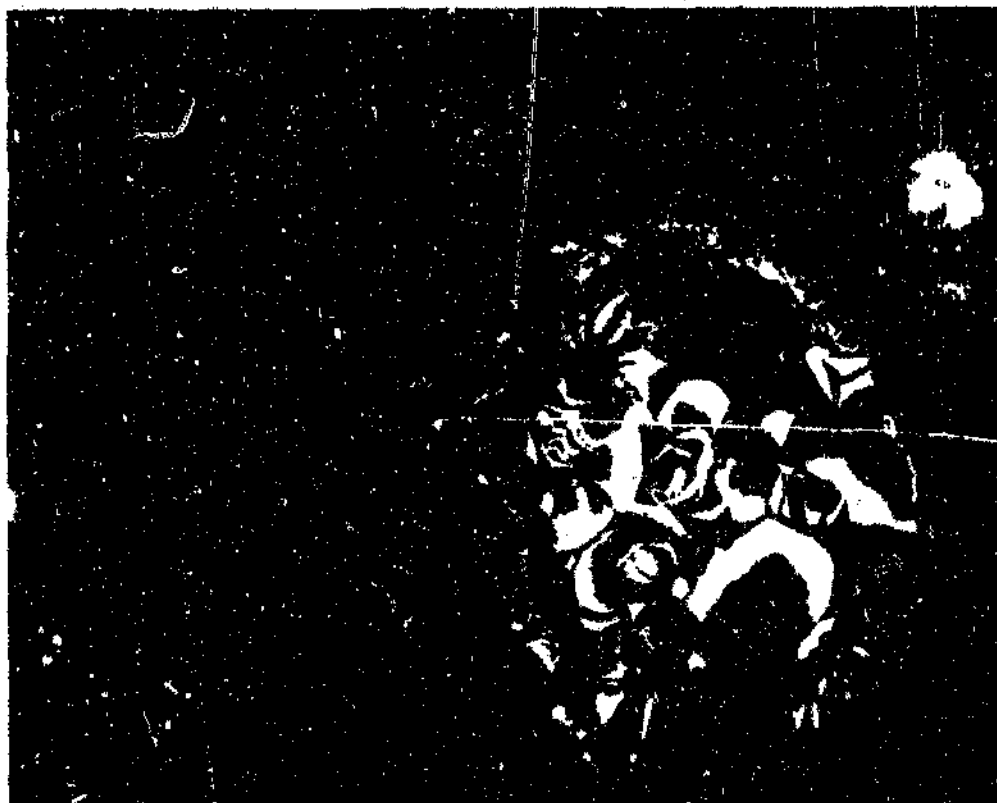


Fig. 34 Farber, L. N. And Once not Hidden, but Forbidden (1989-91.)

Oil on Canvas, 61 x 76 cm.

Collection: The artist.

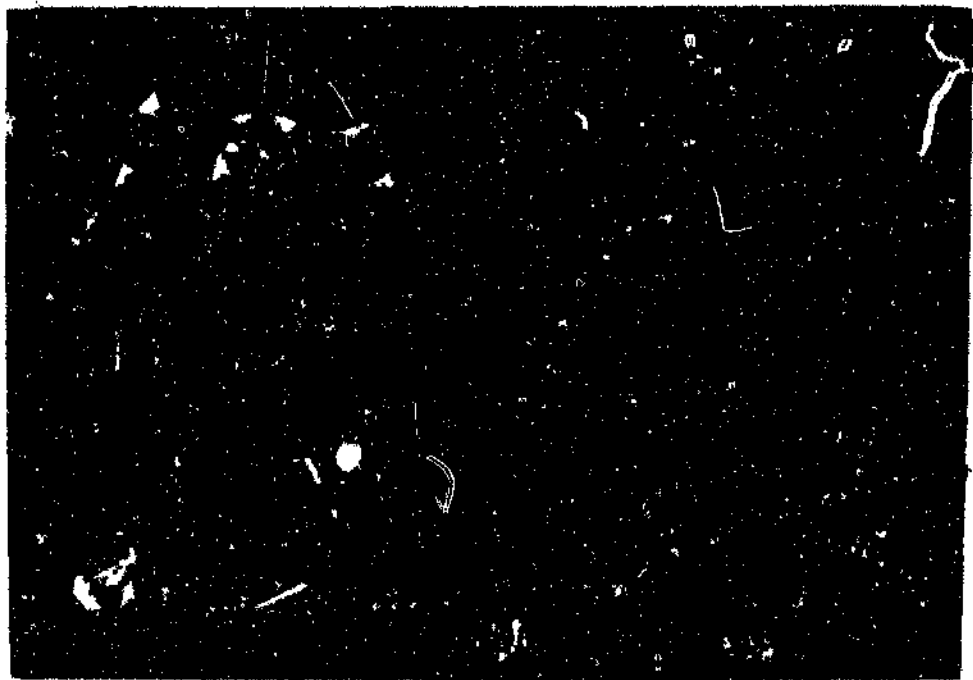


Fig. 35 Farber, L. N. Trails of Matter, Strata of Mind (1990-91.)

Found Objects, Fabric, Plastic and Oil Paint on Canvas, 144 x 200 x 35 cm.

Collection: The artist.

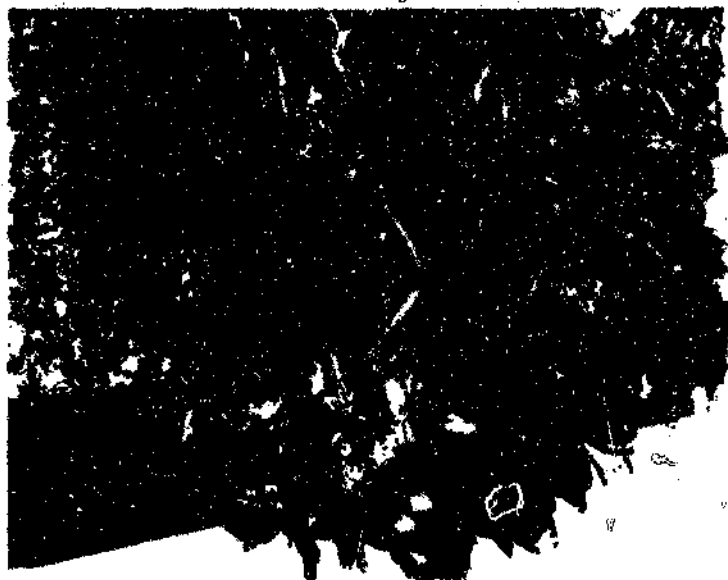


Fig. 35a Ferber, I. N. Trails of Matter, Strata of Mind
(Details.)

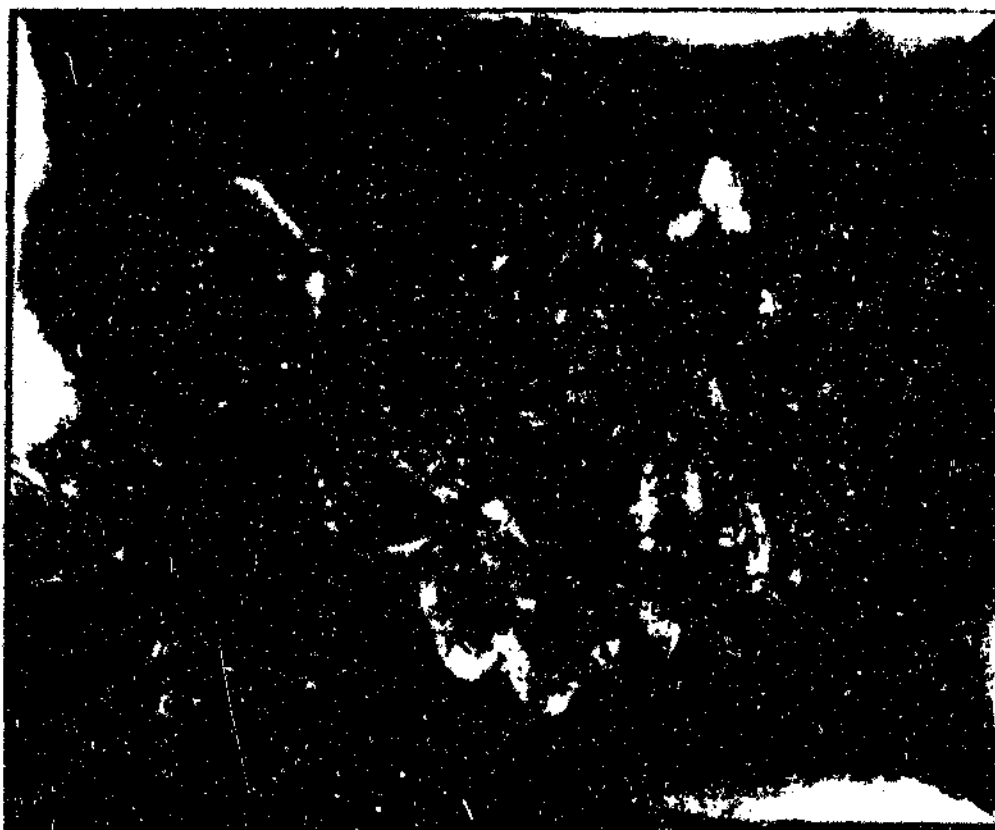


Fig. 36 Farber, L. N. Shred Me Like a Skin (1990-91.)

Found Objects, Fabric, Plastic and Oil Paint on Canvas, 76 x 91 x 10 cm.

Collection: The artist.

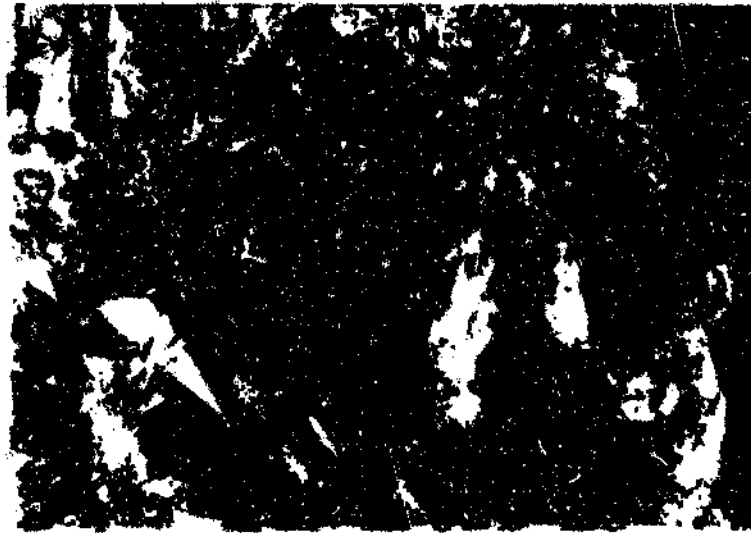


Fig. 36a Farber, L. N. Shred Me Like a Skin
(Details.)



Fig. 37 Farber, L. N. Material Reflections of Pyreus and Partheneus
(1990-91.) Found Objects, Fabric, Plastic and Oil Paint on Canvas,
144 x 69 x 41 cm.
Collection: The artist.



Fig. 37a Ferber, L. N. Material Reflections of Perovskite and Phosphates
(Details.)

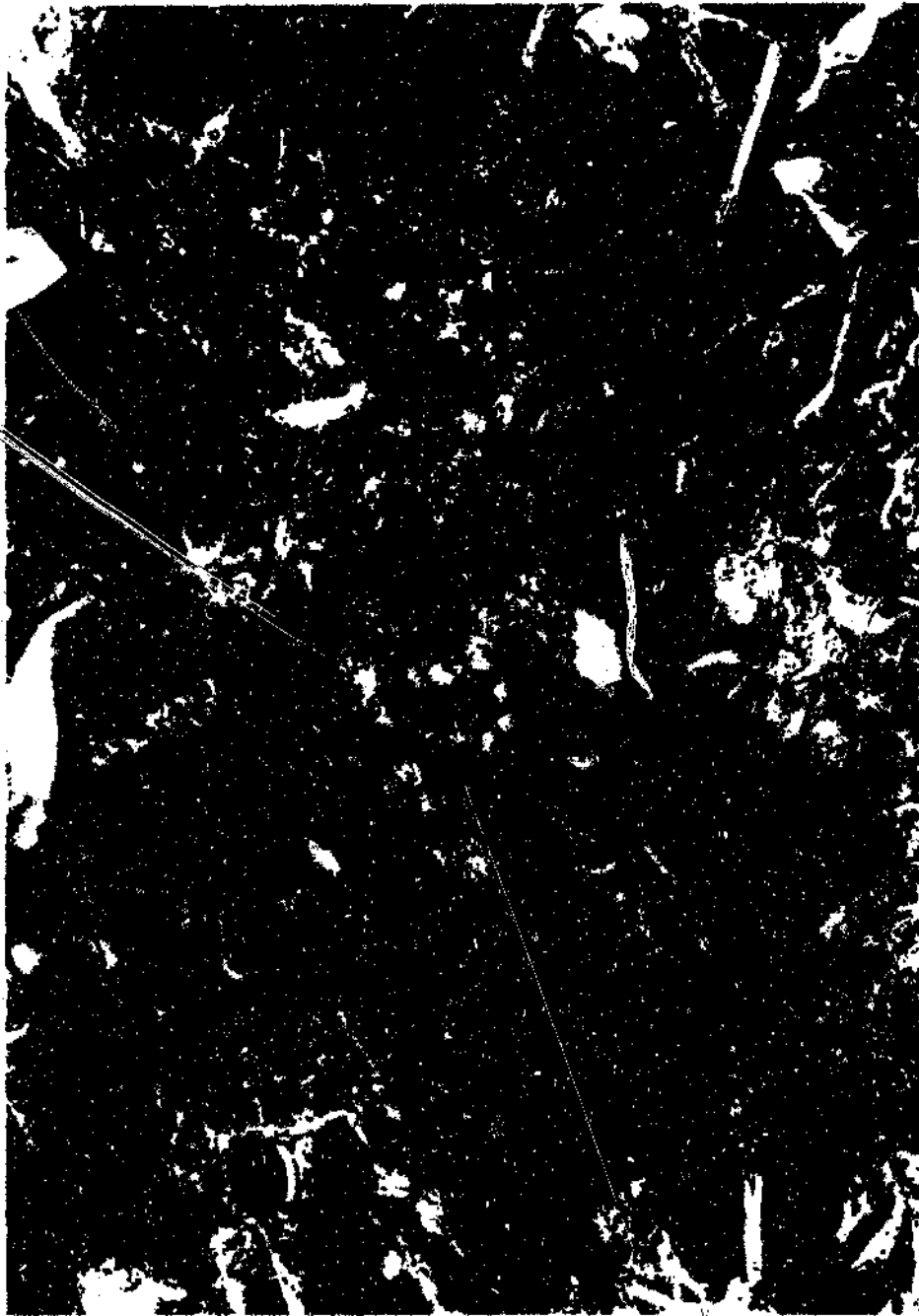


Fig. 37b Farber, L. N. Material Reflections of Pegasus and Phosphorus
(Detail.)



Fig. 38 Farber, L. N. Stilled Life with Viscera and Vine (1991.)
Found Objects, Fabric, Plastic and Oil Paint on Canvas, 133 x 164 x 26 cm.
Collection: The artist.



Fig. 39 Farber, L. N. Forbidding Fruits Know No Bounds... (1991.)
Found Objects, Fabric, Plastic and Oil Paint on Canvas, 142 x 217 x 100 cm.
Collection: The artist.



Fig. 39a Parber, L. N. Forbidding Fruits Know No Bounds
(Details.)

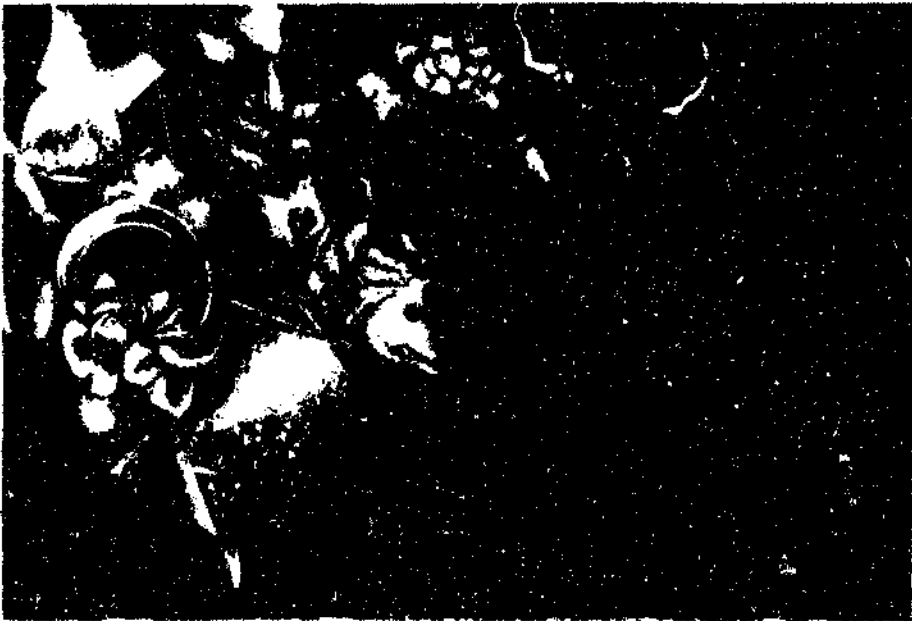


Fig. 39b Farber, L. N. Forbidding Fruits Know No Bounds
(Details.)

CHAPTER 7

"MORE BODY, HENCE MORE WRITING"

"Text: my body - shot through with streams of song;...what touches you, the equivocal that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body..."¹²

This research has been an enriching experience, as it has enabled me to integrate my theory and my practice in ways which were not possible before. Whilst some of the ideas involved in this research had to some degree been explored in my undergraduate years, I was then not sufficiently conscious of the complexity of the material or the reasons for my involvement.

Those features of my undergraduate paintings which are now significant include an interest in the decorative and an obsession with surface and material. The fact that these paintings were called still-lives was predominantly due to the references I used. However these references had less to do with the still-life genre as such, than with my desire for intimacy with the surface.

As the research unfolded, I became fascinated with the complexities of the still-life genre. This was realized in different ways, my later works embodying these concerns more profoundly. While my readings were generally stimulating in this respect, it was Bryson's article 'Chardin and the Text of Still-Life,' - in which he examines still-life conventions - which particularly influenced my thinking.

In the early stages of the research, I felt a strong identification with Cixous' and Irigaray's writings. I was struck by how closely their concerns in writing paralleled my interests in painting. Even though this connection between theory and practice increased as the research developed, my paintings do not simply 'illustrate' the theory. While my early connections with the French feminist's ideas now seem somewhat literal (depicting the body with meat) I realize that this was necessary for the research to progress. This early stage facilitated my later involvement, which was more evocative of their writings - more fluid, lyrical and metaphorical. As still-life became more meaningful to me in my later paintings, so I felt Irigaray's and Cixous' influence to be more integrated into my painting. I was able to 'work through' my concerns of questioning opticality in what I feel to be a more appropriate way.

I struggled with the problem of opticality. Since opticality and tactility are contingent on each other, I was aware all the time that while it was necessary for optical qualities to be part of my paintings, these could not be too much of a feature. I was able to deal with this issue with the help of the French feminist's writings, in particular their premise that "...the attack on phallogentrism must come from within...we can only destroy the mythical and mystifying constructions of patriarchy by using its own weapons. We have no others."³

I found it quite difficult writing about my own work. Separating sufficiently from the material is not easy. After much contemplation, I decided that a straightforward approach which stresses references and process would be best - as these inevitably reveal my deeper concerns. I hope that my preceding chapters have set up an adequate framework for the reception of my works. In my discussion, I will concentrate on only a few works. These represent *clips* to late stages of the research, reflecting my major shifts. Every now and then, I will refer to another painting to reveal other related concerns.

The paintings I will discuss are Abandoning the Ornamental Garden (1988)⁴, Caked in Visceral Terrain (1989)⁵ and Stilled Life with Viscera and Vine (1991).⁶ The shifts these paintings demonstrate are significantly evident in my use of medium. This moves from working with oil paint in thin washes to use of thick paint, finally developing into mixed media three-dimensional relief. As new processes/ideas developed, I often reworked certain earlier paintings.

ABANDONING THE ORNAMENTAL GARDEN (1988)

In this painting, I used traditional still-life objects as reference. I observed these from life. I wished to stress differences between organic surfaces (meat, cloths and mollusca) and mechanical objects with smooth surfaces (metal dish and plastic flowers.) I wanted these man-made surfaces to suggest a foreignness to the body.

In those areas of the painting depicting meat, tablecloth and mollusca, I explored various ways of producing what I would now term a 'sign for tactility.' (Fig. 40) For example, my approach to the rendering of the cloth was initially to 'map out' this area onto the canvas in diluted glazes and washes. These were rubbed onto the canvas with rags or sponges. Saturated colour permeated the canvas. In this way, the 'graininess' of its weave was accentuated. To enhance this effect, I used canvas with a particularly rough weave and did not sand the surface between coats of primer.

Thereafter, I drew over this stained area with oil pastels - discovering that by tripping solvent over

these drawn marks, I could cause the pigment to blur. I also dipped textured fabrics (e.g. hessian and lace) into paint and printed these onto the surface. I often worked into the wet paint with a dry brush to increase textural effects. The large amounts of solvent added to the surface created a 'drip and run' look which, when dried, retained a wet appearance - as if still in the process of being completed. Dry paint was frequently rubbed or scraped off the surface. As mentioned in Chapter 3, underlying processes were made discernable in this way. Selected forms and motifs were articulated in opaque paint. I glazed over some of these, only to cover certain of the glazed marks with opaque paint again. All the while I identified this layering process with that of concealing and revealing.

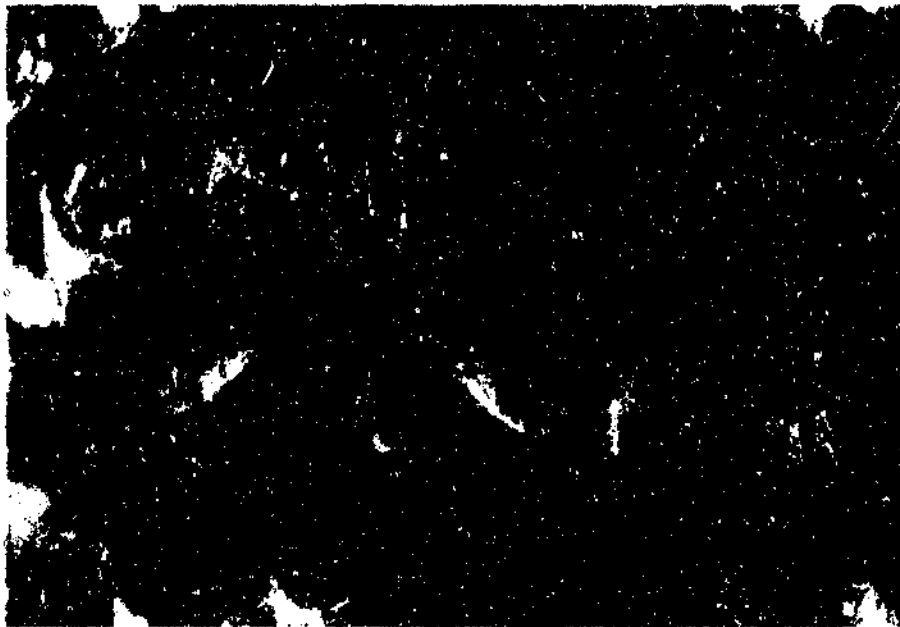


Fig. 40 Farber, L. N. Abandoning the Ornamental Garden (Detail.)

During these processes, chance and accident played an important role. At times the fluid medium 'pooled,' and created random configurations. Drawing on a stream of consciousness, I would read into these configurations to identify forms they suggested. This process reminded me of Leonardo da Vinci's well-known quote, in which he describes his own discovery of this technique:

"It is not to be despised, in my opinion, if, after gazing fixedly at the spot on the wall, the coals in the grate, the clouds, the flowing stream, if one remembers some of their aspects; and if you look at them carefully you will discover some quite admirable inventions. Of these...the painter may take full advantage, to compose battles of animals and of men, of landscapes or monsters, of devils and other fantastic things which bring you honour."



Fig. 41 Ernst, M. Europe after the Rain (1940-42.) (Details.)

This quote inspired the 'frottage' technique used by Surrealist artist Max Ernst. Ernst made drawings by taking pencil rubbings from textured surfaces (leaves, linen, wood, thread etc.) He re-organized these transposed textures in a new context according to the associations they aroused. Comparing this process to the Surrealist practice of 'automatic writing,' Ernst notes that these drawings occurred "...through a series of suggestions and transmutations that offered themselves spontaneously - in the manner of that which passes for hypnagogic visions..."⁹ For Ernst - as for many Surrealists - this associative process was derived from the Rorschach and Holtzman Inkblot psychological testing techniques. These tests propose that through exposure to ambiguous stimuli, responses may be evoked. Data gained from these responses, verbally articulated by the patient, is used to reveal specific personality traits.¹⁰ This associative technique also influenced Ernst's paintings of the late 1920's and 1930's. In many of these, he used a 'sign for tactility.' He exploited the associative potential of the medium by allowing it to drip and flow freely. A pertinent example is Europe after the Rain (1940-2.) (Fig. 41)

By working in a similar way, I experienced a heightened degree of physical engagement with the medium. I often touched both paint and surface with my hands whilst rubbing, staining and soaking the canvas. Since these tactile traces were of my hands and of the textured transfers, they became indexical signs - signs which register a deictic presence. In this way, these surfaces declared the 'time' of process and evoked "...the memory of things underneath..."¹¹ This kind of surface reminded me of a fresco, where peeling paint reveals traces of the painting's history.

These techniques became highly evocative for me as they aroused many visceral associations with the body's aqueous interior. The dripping paint suggested bodily fluids and discharges such as blood, mucus, tears, semen or milk. (Fig. 42) At times, I resolved the fluid medium into a decorative motif. The interlinking systems of these motifs seemed suggestive of the visceral qualities found in meat or skin (e.g. networking systems of veins and capillaries.)¹²



Fig. 42 Farber, L. N. Abandoning the Ornamental Garden (Detail.)

This liquid process reminded me of Irigaray's mimicry of the patriarchal equation of woman and fluids. She associates woman with the "...life-giving sea...the source of blood, milk and amniotic fluid..."¹³ noting that both woman's language and fluids are "...continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductive, diffusible..."¹⁴ Similarly, for Cixous water is a feminine element. She equates the Imaginary with Lacanian' water imagery. It is in this space that her vision of female writing originates: a space wherein her "...speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world...a space in which all difference has been abolished."¹⁵

I used colour to enhance these associations. While the metal dish is cold-grey blue (to suggest a

sense of lifelessness,) the tablecloth and meat were realized in warmer reds, browns and yellows. As I worked the meat from life, it decayed (dried, shrivelled, grew deeper and more tainted in colour.) This decayed quality affected my depiction - my painting process corresponded to changes that occurred in the meat.¹⁶

In Chapter 4, I proposed a link between the part-object and tactility. I arrived at this connection through experiences in my own work. Working in these tactile ways increased my absorption with my medium. I felt 'as one' with the painting surface. I connected the articulation of the fluid medium, merging of outlines and colour, with this loss of boundaries between myself and my medium.

The fragment and detail were part of this experience. As I defined forms and edges, so I encouraged the medium to drip and run. This set up an interplay between reconstruction and disintegration and created a sense of endless continuity. Parts of the picture depicting cloth became a complex matrix of motifs, marks, drips and stains. In these areas (more than others) I indulged my interest in the detail. Rather than being 'anxiety producing' or 'fatiguing' (as Reynolds claims) my *knitting of the paint*, interweaving of *bits* and creation of *pattern-like* formations became a source of pleasure, which evoked a desire "...only [to] keep going, without ever inscribing contours..."¹⁷ In retrospect, I feel that this sense of infinite pleasure to be related to Cixous' concept of female 'jouissance' - to the limitless sense of 'ecstatic fusion' which may be experienced during sex or in the state of the Imaginary.

When I introduced sharply defined contours (edge of the dish, petals of flowers) into this formless field, I experienced an ambiguity not unlike I understand Winnicott's 'potential space' to be. This experience led me to explore how I could heighten such ambivalence. I attempted to do this by working according to principles of *similarity* rather than *difference*, using qualities which I would now identify as indeterminacy and dispersal. For instance, I emphasized close tonal values. The grey-blue of the dish is of a similar tone to the green-grey of the 'background.' Rather than treating the area depicting cloth as negative space, I tried to make it a dense matrix of interlacing decorative motif and texture. In this area, marks and decorative motifs dissolved, colours 'bled' into one another and edges disintegrated and appeared to flow out of the format. Using multiple view points, I tried to create a surface in which there is no *one* area where the eye may rest. The numerous, indeterminate lightsources were used to enhance this dispersed effect.

Combining these tactile qualities, I tried to create an equivocal kind of space where definitions between figure and ground, surface and depth, inner and outer space, subject and object were fused

and con-fused. I felt an intense desire to move up to and about this surface, to "...move...into a painted world where nothing is locked by line and everything exists in a boundless and plenitudinous state of transformation and becoming."¹⁸

CAKED IN VISCERAL TERRAIN (1989)

At the time of painting the above work, I was at a particular point in my research where I needed to allude to the body in quite an emphatic way. I grappled with various ways of showing the body. In some paintings (e.g. Eye-Desire (1989)) I depicted the body fairly literally. This had its problems. As I indicated in Chapter 2, representation of the female body is a sensitive issue in feminist discourse. Later I tried to deal with this issue by using medical illustrations as reference. The 'meat' in Caked was taken from a photograph of the internal body documented in a medical atlas. (Fig. 43) It showed a cross-section of a human thigh. Layers of the body from inner bone marrow to outer flesh were revealed.



Fig. 43 Reference Material - Medical Illustration.

I worked from this precoded representation as well as objects rendered from life. Although I was interested in the idea of a mediation, I found the photograph difficult to work from. Its quality of scrutiny, smoothness of surface and lighting heightened objectification of the subject. Eventually I found it necessary to set aside the photograph and use actual meat as reference. I needed a more direct interaction with my subject.

In both Abandoning and Caked I felt a strong desire to make the generally invisible, unknown interior body visible or 'open to sight':¹⁹ to expose that which is concealed beneath the skin.²⁰ I wished to depict the body as flayed (Fig. 44) - as stripped of its protective skin, to suggest a sense of public exposure by alluding to or imaging raw flesh and viscera. (Fig 45)²¹

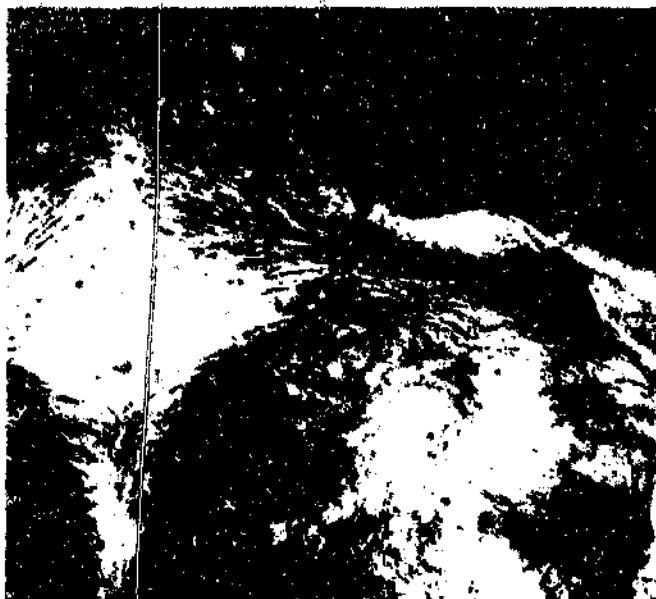


Fig. 44 Reference Material - Medical Illustration.

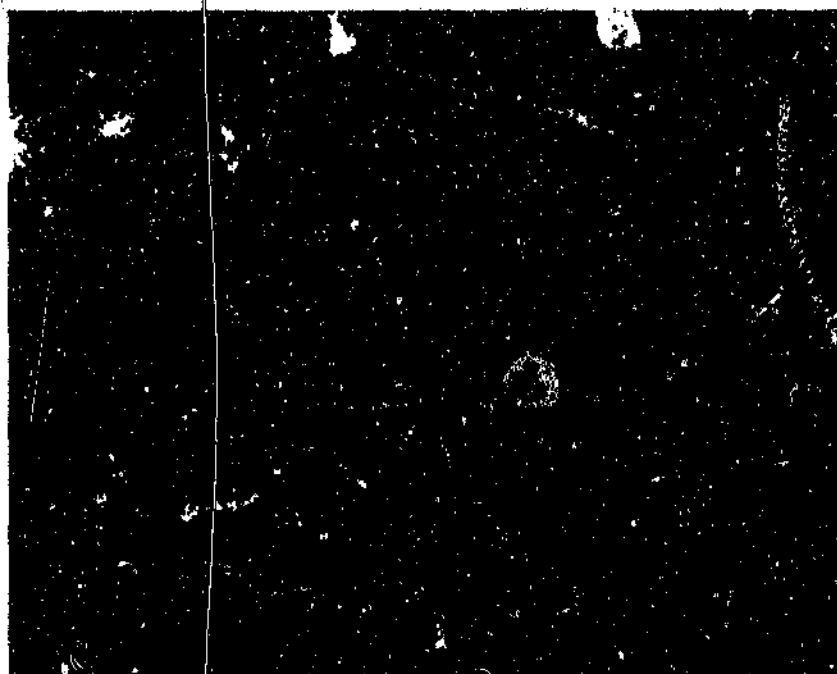


Fig. 45 Reference Material - Medical Illustration.

In retrospect, I have discovered that this desire may be related to part and whole object perception. As Dworkin notes,

"The skin is a line of demarcation, a periphery...separating the outside from the inside. It is what one sees and what one covers up; it shows and it conceals; it hides what is inside. The skin is separation, individuality, the basis for corporeal privacy and also the point of contact for everything outside the self."²²

Having read Dworkin's words at the time, for me skin represented autonomy, separateness, containment. I associated it with the external, the visible. Although the body may be bereft of clothing, the skin affords a degree of concealment. Much of the interior body (blood, plasma) is fluid in nature, as opposed to the skin which encloses these masses in its boundaries. By rupturing the painted surface, I attempted to arouse a sense of the part-object, to evoke associations with the internal, formless, limitless and undefined.

I realize now that by trying to evoke such part-object perception, I unconsciously attempted to make paintings which would *assert* certain repressed bodily desires and fears. My paintings could be contrasted with paintings which may be perceived as whole-objects and which, according to Hudson, deny ambivalent and/or frightening associations with the body. As I noted in Chapter 3, exposure of the body's interior usually arouses various powerful responses - ranging from a sense of discomfort and disgust to anxious curiosity.²³ For me, looking at depicted meat and flesh evoked identification with extreme physical or emotional states such as pain, vulnerability, fear of anonymity²⁴ and mortality.²⁵

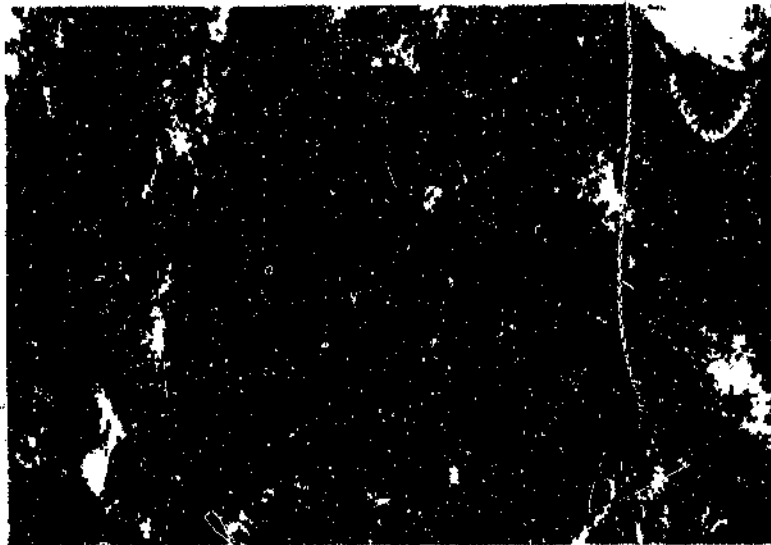


Fig. 46 Farber, L. N. Caked in Visceral Terrain (Detail.)

I tried to show this 'visceral' response by my use of medium. In the area depicting cloth, paint was applied as a thick, material substance. (Fig. 46) I equated its physicality with aspects of the body such as carnality, sexuality and mortality. This encrusted surface was created by sticking dried paint 'skins' peeled off a palette onto the canvas, as Siopis stuck paint 'skins' onto the surface to create three-dimensional forms (lemon, protea) in Melancholia. These formed an underlying textural ground, which for me evoked associations with human skin - the folds of drapery resembled folds of flesh.

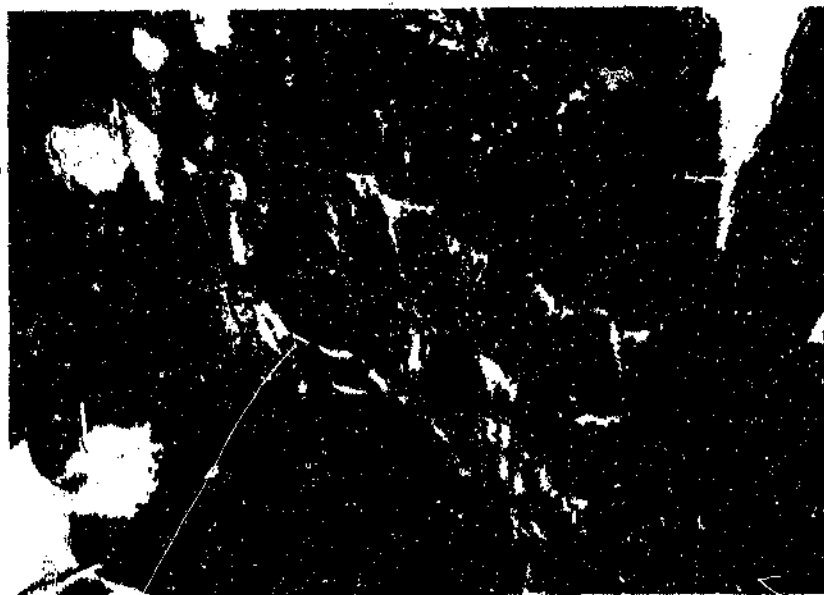


Fig. 47 Farber, L.N. Caked in Visceral Terrain (Detail.)

In the area depicting the 'meat,' I used glazes and thin opaque medium. (Fig. 47) I added large amounts of linseed oil and liquin to the surface to suggest fatty deposits in the body. As in Abandoning, these textile means of paint application were 'played off' against areas of the painting which asserted the kind of smoothness I have associated with traditional illusionistic renderings. I complicated illusion and actuality (areas of paint.) This made it difficult to distinguish between illusionistically rendered folds of drapery and 'folds' created by paint 'skins.' The decorative patterns and protea motifs of the depicted cloth became subsumed into the material matrix. Rather than being external ornamentation, these decorative motifs implied structures on or beneath the skin e.g. veins, protrusions, scars, swellings and blemishes. As opposed to its meaning being eroded through repetition,²⁶ the decorative became a site of investment.

Speaking about the decorative quality of Siopis' work, van den Berg notes that the surface gains value as a response to beauty, [and] is held because that response...is...contradicted

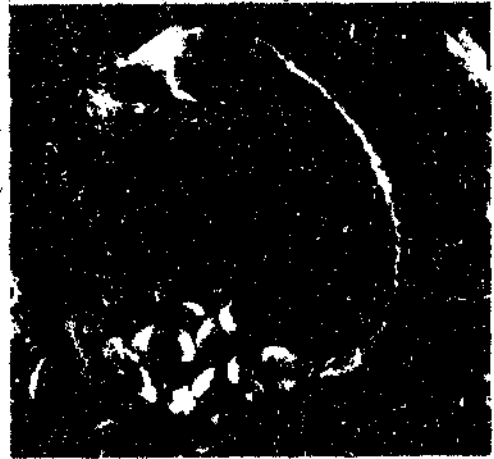
through a closer examination of surface and image."²⁷ With my use of the decorative, I tried to evoke a similarly ambivalent response. On one hand, I responded to the richness and 'beauty' of the embellished surface. However, by imbuing this surface with visceral connotations, I felt a certain degree of 'morbid fascination.' As in Siopis' painting, the apparent accessibility of the surface seemed only to intensify its "...sullied innocence."²⁸

STILLED LIFE WITH VISCERA AND VINE (1991)

This painting reflects my latest interests. Traditional still-life conventions, particularly those of the Dutch, were a significant influence. I found the writings of Alpers and Bryson to be particularly relevant in this regard. Bryson's narration of the well-known 5th century Greek fable of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius was an important prompt for this painting. Zeuxis painted grapes that were so 'lifelike' that the birds were said to have pecked at them. Parrhasius however, went one step further by painting a curtain across the picture which deceived even Zeuxis.²⁹ This story reveals the historical interest in optical concerns of mastery of medium and the creation of a plausible illusion.

I deliberately used characteristic subject matter of the Dutch 17th century tradition - flowers, fruit, crayfish, receptacles. I also referred to features (an unarticulated background, emblems, gilded frame with the title and date engraved on a metal plate) to register this dominant convention. My articulation of this traditional subject matter however took many forms. I combined various media, including: *actual natural objects* (shells of crayfish, crab and prawns, bones, flowers, fruit, fabric, paper) *actual imitations of some of these objects* (flowers, crayfish, fruit) which were painted over, *self-made constructions which simulate both of the above* (the fish shaped dish) (Fig. 48) and *flat, painted illusionistic representations* (bowl containing grapes, roses, bottles.) (Fig. 49) I stuck these onto the canvas and onto each other with acrylic extender. By combining imitation objects (mostly plastic) which are man-made and foreign to the body with natural objects, I distinguished and confused their identities. It became difficult to tell (without very close observation) the difference between an actual object that was painted over, illusionistically depicted or simulated.

In Abandoning and Stilled ideas associated with the paradox of the term 'still-life' were explored. As in the French '*nature morte*,' meat is literally 'dead life.' In Stilled this found correlation in the actual decayed organic matter (dried process, roses, fruits, aloe, fish, crayfish and crab shells.) By using plastic replicas of these (flowers, fishes, fruit) I attempted to ironically comment on the above and heighten their associations with death. Further, as Richards notes, the simulacrum poses a 'threat' of "stricken 'dead things shamming life painted and repainted."³⁰



Figs. 48 and 49 Farber, L. N. Stilled Life with Viscera and Vine (Details.)

The process of gathering my material involved a physicality which extended beyond depiction of the objects. I collected crayfish shells, fish and meat bones from as diverse places as beaches and restaurants. I dried these in the sun and oven.³¹ Bryson's idea that still-life often depicts 'waste and debris' seemed relevant to my collection and use of this material. He notes that, particularly in the trompe l'oeil tradition

"Things present themselves...as abandoned by human attention...They busy themselves with detritus of every kind - scraps, husks, peelings, the fraying and discolouration of paper...Things are given over to disuse."³²

One of my concerns was to comment on this idea of still-life as a genre which depicts the 'trivial.' I wanted my 'debris' to be re-cycled in a way which makes an issue of repetition.³³ Many of the objects e.g. plastic roses, dried fruits etc. had been my references for earlier paintings (plastic wreath and mollusca in Abandoning, protea and plastic lilies in Caked.) I found it interesting to repeat these same objects as medium. I also repeated some objects in various forms. Depicted grapes were echoed in multiple bunches of plastic grapes, the central dried fish found correlation in a painted representation. (Fig. 50) I now realize that although objects were 'present' in their physical actuality, these pictorial 'turning backs' became a way of breaking the threshold of the given, of positing a network of excessive reflexivity. In retrospect, it occurs to me that this may be related to a Cixous' evocation of "[a] woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardour..." which she invokes to "smash...yokes and censors...[and] articulate the profusion of meanings which run through it in every direction..."³⁴



Fig. 50 Farber, L. N. Stilled Life with Viscera and Vine (Detail.)

This idea of debris or waste was further realized through use of a photograph of a cross section of a human stomach as reference for the table. (Fig. 51) Working three-dimensionally offered a more satisfying way of translating the photograph. Not only did the textured surfaces of lace, hessian and cotton waste which I used to build up the surface evoke visual equivalents for visceral intestines, but my processes of threading and weaving these materials became enactments of the repeated, churning movement of intestinal organs. In this way, the surface seemed to evoke a sensuous materiality, turning and re-turning on itself.

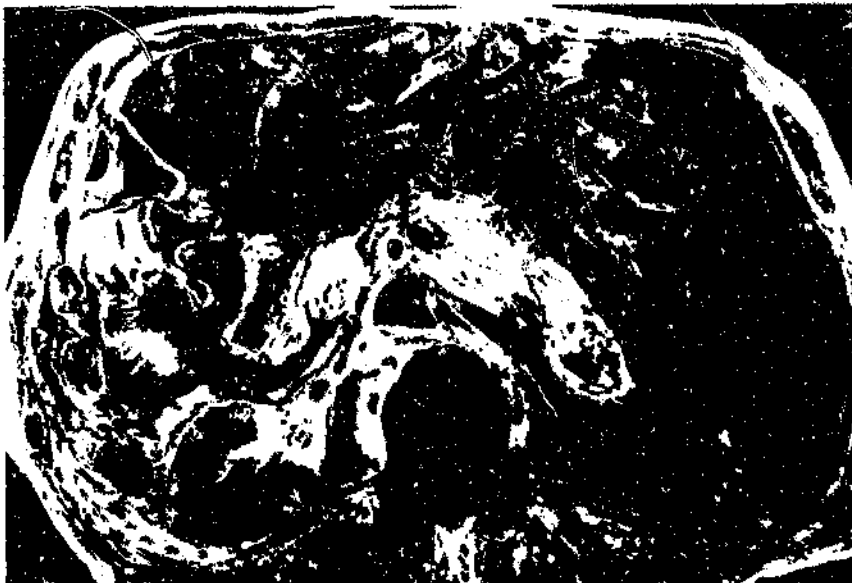
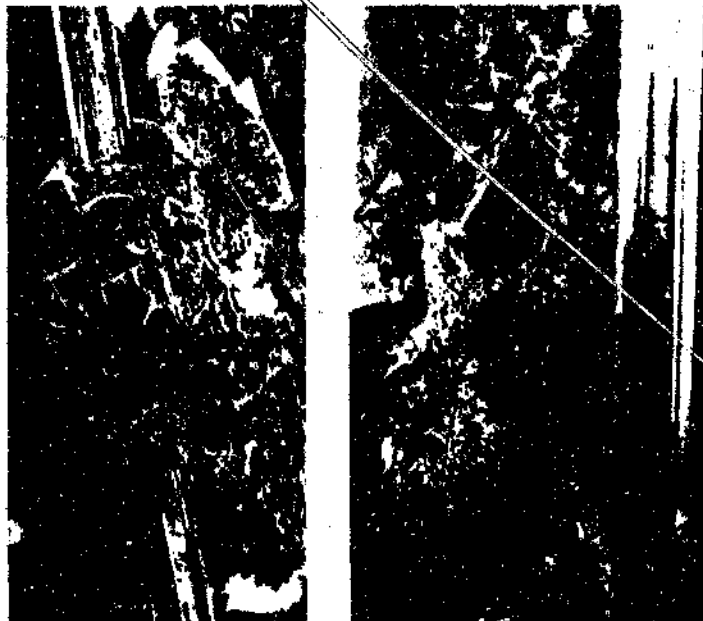


Fig. 51 Reference Material - Medical Illustration.

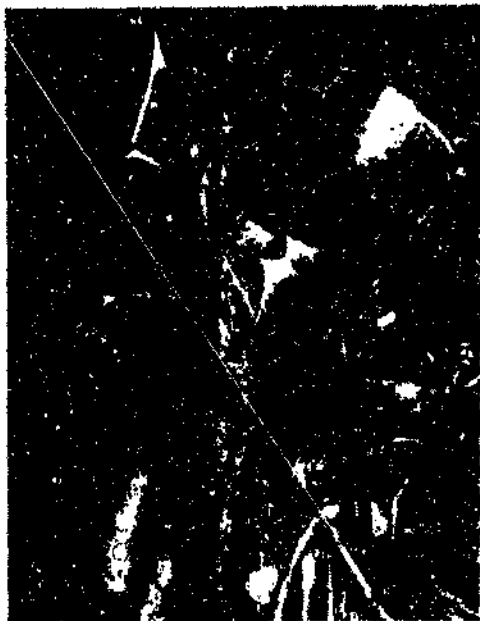
I realized my interest in skin here through use of tissuepaper. In its thinness, transparency and tendency to wrinkle and crease, it evoked the appearance of wrinkled skin. Layers of built up tissuepaper came to resemble layers of skin tissue. Like skin, which hides an interior body, so the layers of tissuepaper hinted at the objects veiled beneath their surfaces. These layers were often 'peeled' off the surface in the way that skin can be flayed off the body. To heighten these visceral associations, I painted over the surfaces with predominantly flesh and blood-like colour. Acrylic extender too seemed to enhance these visceral suggestions. When dry, the extender took on a shiny, viscous appearance. Coating the surfaces of objects with it heightened their likeness to the congealed viscosity of internal matter.

Working in this way, I experienced an intense intimacy with the objects and fabric as I interwove, threaded, stroked and manipulated them with my hands.³⁵ This additive process was a pleasurable experience. The variety of surface textures to be painted over and responded to made for an involved and 'limitless' process which I now feel may be likened Irigaray's and Cixous' concept of female 'jouissance' - which is of an "...infinite and mobile complexity..."³⁶

This infinite quality was accentuated by the extreme way in which the objects projected into my own body space (Fig. 53) I wanted them to appear as if 'growing' out of, around and under the frame. (Fig. 52)



Figs. 52 and 53 Farber, L. N. Stilled Life with Viscera and Vase (Details.)



Figs. 54 Farber, L. N. Trails of Matter,
Strata of Mind (Detail.)



Fig. 55 Farber, L. N. Forbidding Fruits
Know No Bounds... (Detail.)

This breaking the limits of the frame occurred in other works such as Trails of Matter, Strata of Mind (1990-91) (Fig. 35) and Forbidding Fruits Know No Bounds... (1991.) (Fig. 39) In the former, I repeated forms depicted in the painting onto the frame three-dimensionally and illusionistically. This became a way of tampering with the 'wholeness' of the frame and heightening continuity between inside and outside. (Fig. 54) In the latter, I built up objects and fabric forming the pictorial carpet to the point where they literally 'spill out' of the format and suggested an 'actual' carpet. This matrix extended one metre onto the floor. (Fig. 55) In this respect, Cixous' words capture the feeling which I wished to express:

"...I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs...I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst...with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames..."⁵⁷

This feeling of being 'inside' the painting was enhanced by the physicality of the building up process. I had to crawl under, move around or above the surface in order to attach objects or paint over surfaces in inaccessible places. As objects and fabric were added to the surface, so the painting grew heavier. Moving the painting became increasingly difficult. I finally attached it to the wall. The lower register of the painting was positioned in direct relation to my own stomach area. This part of the painting became more substantially built up than the upper part. This however

was not only a practical consideration but related to my foregrounding of tactility.

The same concepts of flux, as realized in my earlier paintings, were encouraged here in three-dimensional form. Working three-dimensionally created a layered surface, an actual decorative matrix which has spaces into which I could put my hands. Here concealing and revealing took on a slightly different quality to Abandoning. Actual objects were embedded in the surface and covered over to varying degrees.³⁸

This concealing and revealing was emphasized by use of multiple, incongruous and indeterminate light sources. As in Melancholia, the three-dimensional objects cast actual shadows and reflected light. In Stilled the plasticized sheen of the acrylic extender enhanced their facility for reflection. Shadows and reflections fragmented surfaces. The 'actual' shadows I painted in divided surfaces further. Thinking back, it seems to me that this play of reflection, fragmentation and excess - which continually concealed and revealed - created "...a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, (an immense astral space not organized around any one star that's any more of a star than the others."³⁹

Fragmentation was experienced in other ways. Fragments of porcelain were illusionistically depicted and actually inserted into the material surface. To insert these fragments, I often cut into this surface with a knife or tore it open with my hands. In this way, hidden surfaces and objects were revealed. For me, these lacerations suggested enactments of rupturing the body.

In Material Reflections of Perseus and Parnhasius (1990-91) (Fig. 37) my interest in the fragment was explored in a different way. Layers of 'flesh' were built up with cotton waste and covered with tissuepaper. I then pierced these 'flesh' surfaces with sharp fragments of actual mirrors. Within these layers, I embedded fragments of body casts, as well as traditional still-life objects (dried pomegranates, plastic birds and grapes.) (Fig. 57) The mirrors reflected the flesh/body casts and objects. Fragments of mirrors reflected and fragmented each other. An imaged pomegranate and bird - illusionistically painted in the centre of the format - became an illusion in a mirror fragment.

Examples of the Spanish 17th century still-life tradition e.g. Still-Life with Fruits and Birds (van der Haenen, J. 1623) (Fig. 56) - as well as the myths of Perseus, which I read in Owens' article 'The Medusa Effect or, The Specular Ruse,' and the myth of Phariassius mentioned earlier - were important influences for this painting. Perseus' appropriation of Medusa's gaze, which had the power to suspend movement and arrest it, forms the principal theme of the former myth. He accomplished this by means of a ruse. Using his shield as a mirror, he reflected the deadly gaze

back on Medusa, whereupon she was turned to stone.

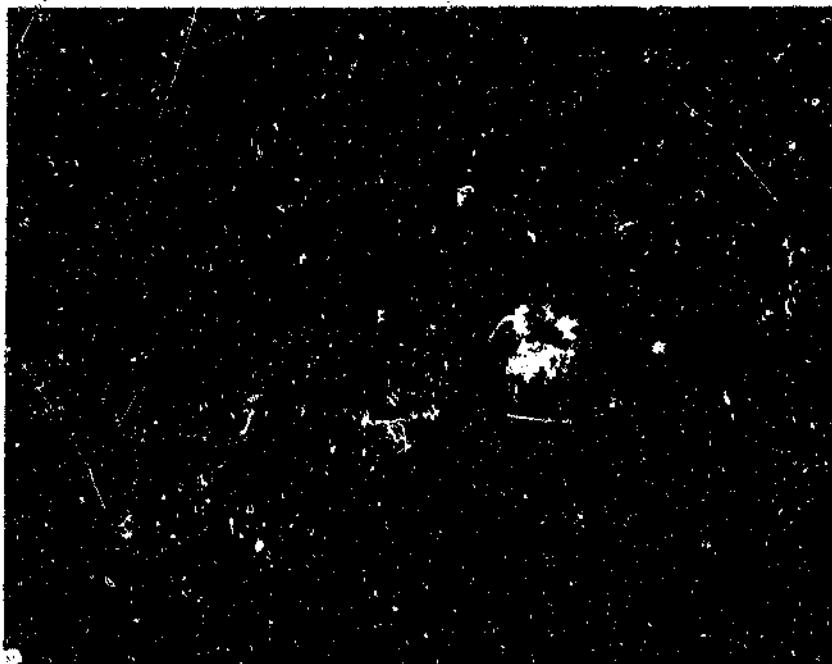


Fig. 56 van der Hamen, J. Still-life with Fruits and Birds (1623.)



Fig. 57 Farber, L. N. Material Reflections of Perseus and Parthasius (Detail.)

As Owens notes, here "...vision bends back on itself to produce its own imprint." He describes this as a "...relation of identity between seer and seen: the immediacy of this link makes the relationship of Medusa with her image indexical..."⁴⁰ By working with the mirror, I tried to set up a similar situation. My image or the viewer's is inevitably reflected in the mirrors in the painting. Being fragments, these mirrors break up reflections. As symbolically indicated in Divinely Appointed, the artist/viewer looks at herself looking at the painting i.e. *self-reflects*. I wished to include myself/viewer into the painting, albeit in an incorporeal way - not unlike the Dutch artist van Beyeren. As with Siopis' inclusion of herself as a depicted mirror reflection in Melancholia, illusion of bodily presence is evident but its *actuality* is not quite declared.

In both this painting and Stilled, I interwove lace and ribbon over the surface. This suggested a breaching of surfaces. This process may be likened to the psychoanalytic concept of 'suture' derived from surgical terminology, meaning to join two lips of a wound.⁴¹ For me, this also recalled Irigaray's premise that woman's sexuality is of a multiple, endless nature because her sex "...is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus, within herself she is already two...who stimulate each other."⁴²

My initial sense of identification with the fluidity of Cixous' and Irigaray's writing style and their concern with a body politics, developed into a deep involvement which opened up many rich insights for me. A particularly pertinent one was that of the Imaginary. The Imaginary became a powerful means of enriching my painting practice. Drawing on its all encompassing physical and mental absorption and bodily investment encouraged a way of working which affirmed female desire, and in so doing, helped me to create work which I now feel disrupts patriarchal forms of representation. Irigaray's premise of 'joining of two lips' becomes emblematic of my kind of resistance to the politics of sight in painting. In addition to Cixous' Imaginary, my joining of theory and practice has liberated a 'jouissance,' which I feel to be a primary feature of tactility. In this way, I have come to consider my paintings as expressions of a liberated female sexuality, in which

"...we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking."⁴³

1. Cixous, H. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' New French Feminisms p 257.
2. Ibid. p 252.
3. Mei, T. Ibid. p 198. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid. p 76.
4. To be referred to as Abandoning from now on.
5. This painting will be referred to as Caked from now on.
6. To be referred to as Salled from now on.
7. This accounts for the dating system I have used in some of my paintings, which indicates a time span of some years.
8. da Vinci, L. Excerpt from Treatise on Painting Quoted in Chipp, H. Ibid. p 428.
9. Ernst, M. 'On Frottage, 1936' Quoted in Chipp, H. Ibid. p 429.
10. Interestingly, these tests propose a link between tactility (its link with texture) and touch. Gradations of colour may cause the shading to appear textured or filmlike. Responses to these qualities are identified as 'texture responses' and are usually verbalized with words such as 'rough, soft, furry' etc. Psychologist E. Hill, states that focus on tactual surface elements points to a need for physical gratification and contact interaction. (Hill, E. F. The Holtzman Inkblot Technique p 71.) Beck and Molish (psychologists quoted in Hill, E. F. Ibid.) suggest that anxiety caused by the texture of the blot is related to deprivation of basic human contact and the defensive strategy articulated is passive dependant longing. These psychologists contend that texture responses are concomitant with a sensed rejection and deprivation usually rooted in frustrated physical needs in early childhood.
11. van den Berg, C. Ibid.
12. This layering of medium and mark contrasts with use of the decorative as a two-dimensional repeated motif in the 'background.' Here I tried to exploit the decorative's associative potential in a different way. This surface may read as wall-paper with a rose motif or perhaps as a barbed-wire structure.
13. Mei, T. Ibid. p 142.
14. Irigaray, L. Quoted in Mei, T. Ibid. p 142.
15. Mei, T. Ibid. p 117.
16. For instance, the meat acquired a blueish tinge over a few hours. This was worked in, over the initial warmer tones.
17. Cixous, H. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' New French Feminisms p 259.
18. Fuller, P. Ibid. p 142. Fuller uses these words to describe the work of the American Abstract Expressionist painter, Robert Rauschenberg. I have taken the liberty of applying them to my own work, as they evoke the feeling which I experienced pertinently.
19. Although this seemingly relates back to the Dutch practice of opening objects (meat, fish, fruit and so on) there is also a crucial difference. The Dutch employed microscopic vision in order to make the construction of objects visible to the eye. However, my intention indicates a devalorization of sight in its desire to penetrate below surface appearances. The pictorial surface was intended to disrupt that which is obvious to the eye.
20. I was also interested in doing this - albeit in different ways - in Voyage into the Interior (Fig. 32) and Forbidding Fruits Know no Bounds... (Fig. 39.) In these works, I used a torn chair as a metaphor for the body. I wanted its internal wooden frame to recall the human skeleton and the surrounding foam rubber and padding to evoke fat and muscle. Its leather covering may resemble an outer skin. In this way, a wounded body with marks exposed is alluded to.

21. This recalls Stoppis' allusions to the interior and exterior body in Three Lace Cloths.
22. Dworkin, A. Ibid, p 25.
23. Hudson, L. Ibid, p 10.
24. As Bell notes, whereas skin may be removed from the body (flayed, peeled off) flesh is the body. When it is separated from the bone, the body is reduced to 'meat.' The concept of mortality and the potential anonymity of ourselves as 'meat' is a particularly deep-seated fear concerning the body. (Bell, D. M. Ibid, p 57.)
25. Flesh may be identified as a basic metaphor for mortality. In the Dutch 17th century emblematic tradition, meat and other victuals were used as allegories of mortality and morality. As Bell points out, this awareness of flesh may be traced back to the Judeo-Christian 'myth' of the fall of man. The flesh as metaphor for mortality indicates man's corruptibility and fragility in contrast to the spiritual ideal. In 20th century Existentialist thought, links between flesh and mortality are reasserted. This conception of man's existence proposes the body as 'meat or decaying flesh.' (Ibid, pp 55-7.)
26. In Eye-Desire, actual meat was reduced to a two-dimensional motif which described a wallpaper surface. The 'loaded' content of the subject became eroded and the meat began to read as a 'decorative' motif. Juxtapositioning of subject matter generally considered as 'trivial' or 'loaded' was echoed throughout these paintings, for instance in the incongruous combination of a plastic toy fish with an amputated body part (Caked.)
27. van den Berg, C. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Bryson, N. Vision and Painting p 1.
30. Nabokov, V. Quoted in Hutchison, L. Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox New York: Methuen, 1984. Quoted in Richards, C. P. Ibid, pp 76 and 80. Further, in Abandoning and Caked the imaged flowers were often symbols of death e.g. arum lilies and wreaths. These links with mortality were supported by use of the term which: 'fixed' the depicted flowers in time and space.
31. As these objects had contained *actual flesh*, it was necessary to fumigate the completed paintings to ensure against insects.
32. Bryson, N. 'Chardin and the Text of Still-Life' Ibid, p 229.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid, p 256.
35. This recalls Stoppis' use of her hands to build up three-dimensional forms in Melancholia and Three Lace Cloths. I was advised to wear gloves whilst working with the acrylic extender due to potentially harmful chemicals it contains. However, I found wearing even thin surgical gloves disturbing as they imposed a barrier between my hand and the material, precluding the sense of direct contact with medium. I combined this tactile experience with some use of instruments (a knife, modelling tools, paintbrush.) As mentioned earlier, the simulacrum may encourage the sense of touch, due to its palpability and life-like scale. Whilst working on this surface, I experienced a similar sense of physical identification. This was heightened by the fact that, in addition to my simulacra, many objects were 'actual.' I felt encouraged to pick up the objects and feel their texture.
36. Cixous, H. Ibid, p 256.
37. Ibid, p 246.
38. Numerous examples of interior and exterior space are echoed throughout. Like Stoppis' depiction of fruits, tortoise shell, crab, cakes etc. in Melancholia, which metaphorically suggest the internal and external body with implicit sexual connotations, I wanted the actual crayfish, crab and prawn shells to be evocative of the body's external skin.

39. Ibid. p 239.

40. Owens, C. 'The Medusal Effect or. The Specular Ruse' Ibid. p 101.

41. Ibid. p 104.

42. Hignsey, L. Quoted in Mol. T. p 143.

43. Cixous, H. Ibid. p 248.

CONCLUDING NOTE

"What is a piece of research? To find out, we would need to have some idea of what a 'result' is. What is it that one finds? What is it that one wants to find? *What is missing?*...from the moment a piece of research concerns the text, the research itself becomes the work, production: to it, any 'result' is literally *im-pertinent*."¹

Barthes' premise of research being a process of inquiry, of searching, seems particularly applicable to my investigation. I feel my research to have been an explorative journey. It has provided me not with conclusions but with a number of questions - questions which enrich my understanding of my painting and its relation to discursive practice.

My research began by exploring dominant forms of perception, with a view to identifying alternative ways of experiencing painting. Tactility provided me with the tools to challenge the patriarchal biases inscribed in these dominant perceptions. Irigaray's and Cixous' writings were invaluable in this regard.

I pointed out that tactility has figured in poststructuralist, postmodern and feminist discourse in ways that offer a challenge to opticality. This questioning of opticality in the literature has provided me with support for my exploration in painting. This support and recent reception of my work (which has generally been more nurturing and positive) has strengthened my commitment to my position, and has led me to realize that those comments previously directed at my work do not necessarily indicate faults, but may equally point to its most positive characteristics. This realization leaves me with a wish to exploit my 'strengths' further, inducing in me the desire to carry on and on...

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