

# **Abstract Painting and the Aesthetics of Moderation**

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## Introduction

The journey of this research began with exploring the notion of invisible space which cannot be perceived by the human eye, and the process of image visualisation expressed through my abstract paintings, which is supported by my theoretical research. *'Invisible Space'*, the title of one of my recent paintings, evokes the notion of a very small space such as a cell or nerve tissues which form part of the human body and have the potential to simultaneously symbolise a cosmological space.

In my practice, I adopt painting as a pertinent method to realise my subjects and motifs. I consider how my painting is situated in contemporary art theory and practice by exploring artists and writers relevant to my underlying concept. I explore how my subject is presented in painting and drawing, and how my research can be developed logically and systematically in response to my practice. In this report, I analyse the three key elements: 1) abstraction that explores macro & micro space; 2) colour experiments and 3) cultural traditions and gesture through Korean Monochrome painting.

In the first section, I introduce two artists, Mark Francis and Terry Winters, who have inspired me. I researched these artists, their creative methods, and the critical debates which surround their work. I am interested in how they have developed abstract elements within their paintings which articulate their interest in scientific subject matter. For my creative practice, I experimented with abstract elements using a variety of mediums that I had not used in my previous practice in order to inculcate the possibilities of change in my work.

In the second section, I present two theorists, John Gage and David Batchelor. I have undertaken an interpretation of their study of colour as a significant element of abstract painting forming my recent practice. The intention is to identify the possibilities of colour as a cultural and psychological visual requisite that provides insights and links between my painting and individual experience. My

experimentation has focused on how colour is represented in the aesthetics of Korean culture and art.

In the third section, I focus on 'gesture' or 'physical intention' to be exposed directly by artists on the basis of Roland Barthes's concept of 'gesture' in Cy Twombly's works. I explain how this subject is explored in my recent practice, inspired by a Korean artist, Lee Ufan, whose approach and interpretation of this concept are very different from that of Western artists. I have experimented with repeated gestural actions in my new paintings which refer to Korean Monochrome painting, '*Dansaekhwa*', demonstrated in a recent solo exhibition at the *Tokyo Gallery*, Tokyo, Japan in 2014. The core of my approach to the gestural concept is to investigate how my painting is connected with the Korean cultural tradition through '*Dansaekhwa*' and raises the question of what is the nature of gesture as perceived from both an 'Eastern' and 'Western' perspective.

As the repeated gestural actions of '*Dansaekhwa*' have become the foundation of a new approach to my work, 'Moderation' in the title of this report has a critical meaning that implies my working processes. It signifies a form of reservation, a passionate yet slow and painstakingly intensive labouring process. I have called this controlled and restrained artistic intention 'the aesthetics of moderation', emphasising the ethics of restraint as shown in Korean culture and monochrome arts. This report aims to clarify the intention of my practice and deliver direction for my final exhibition to complete my doctoral study.

# Autobiographical Context

## Previous educational and creative practice

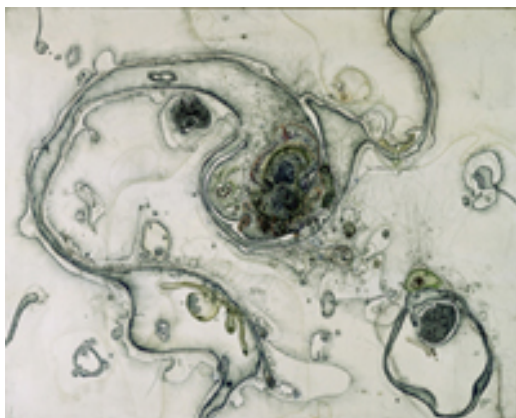
1997-2001 BA in Fine Art, Hongik University

2001-2003 MA painting, Graduate School of Hongik University

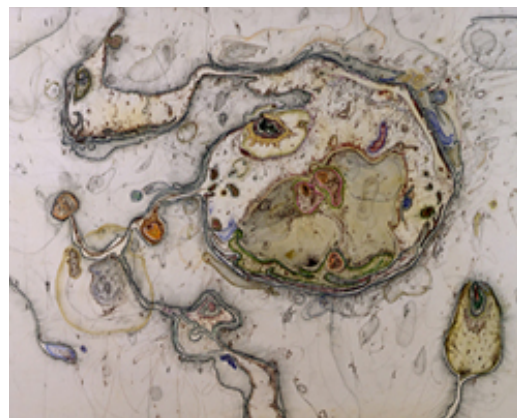
2010-2011 MA in Fine Art, Chelsea College of Fine Art & Design

## BA creative practice and theory (1997-2001)

In the early stages of my work, I sought to answer a fundamental question which was, 'Who am I?' I wanted to find the answer in biology. Science informs me that my body consists of cells, which are minimum units, that join together to form the entirety of my body. However, I soon realised that approaching the task of trying to view my body collectively in such a way, with all of its individual cells, was not possible as each cell in itself consists of an enormous space on a micro level and therefore exists independently. As a result, my concept soon developed towards the biologically small space of cells and nerve tissues, and so I began to experiment with my subject. (Fig. 1, 2)



(Fig. 1) *Another World -Body I* (1999), 91 x 117cm,  
Pencil & Oil-stick on Canvas



(Fig. 2) *Another World -Body II* (2000), 130 x 160cm,  
Pencil & Oil-stick on Canvas

I started my first paintings (Fig. 1) with the theme of 'cells', and attempted to create the illusion of observing cellular tissues and the nervous system through a microscope. Living creatures consist of a whole unit made up of many cells. However, simply synthesising of cells is insufficient for creating an image of the whole. The reason for this is that there are many other factors to consider such as the connection between cells or units which bring them together to form the whole. The idea of the body being more than just a composite of fragments has attracted me and intrigued my interest in both cellular tissues and nervous systems. The relationship between a single unit and the whole has been applied to my practice during which I used a language that explores microscopic elements. The 'whole' represents 'me' and each fragment is the finest part of my make-up. The process of 'finding myself' drew my attention to the physical attributes of my body. An anatomical chart in a science lab, which originally had nothing to do with me, became a personal, topographical map of my body and led me to the microcosm of the internal space that I could not see without help from a microscope. However, I believe that artists in contemporary art use their art to reflect interchanging surrounding circumstances in order to express themselves. These expressions are made possible through sensory or imaginative powers rather than reproductive imitations. This thought led to various ways that I could visualise my subject.

In Biology, the microscopic scale requires our imagination to expand its scale beyond our basic power of sight. Each of the small cells that comprise 'me as a whole' is very tiny in terms of space. Nevertheless, this smallest of spaces contains so many organic elements which humans cannot visualise and perceive with their own eyes that I interpreted it as a huge space. With magnification, a small space becomes a huge space.

There are similarities in form between small and large spaces. For example, the process of cell division or organic movement looks similar to the image of the solar division and expansion or movement of the Galaxy. Therefore, I developed my practice and theories by approaching other academic areas such as physics and philosophy which I examined during my MA course.

## MA creative practice and theory – Seoul and London

### MA in Seoul (2001-2003)

During my MA in Seoul, my paintings gradually transformed into a type of abstract painting to do with space, scale and distance. When we look at something, we can see only a limited part of it. If we approach it, the area which we can see is magnified but it is also more reduced. As we get closer and closer to the object, our scope of vision will be increasingly reduced, but we will also discover many new images. To summarise, my paintings depicted increasingly smaller spatial scenes that became more complex and more abstract. (Fig. 3, 4) I came to add materials such as glass beads and glitter-powder as the medium for my paintings, which I wanted to use as a symbol of huge spaces such as the galaxy as well as small spaces.

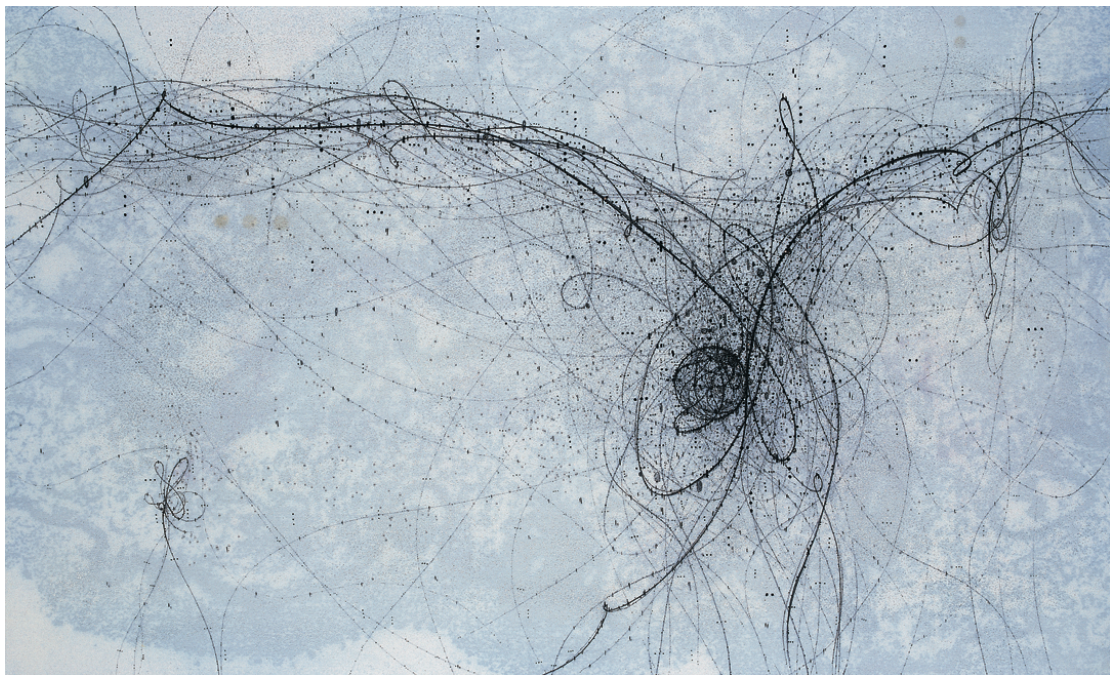


(Fig. 3) *Invisible Space-200104* (2001), 162x 130cm, Mixed Media on Canvas

### **Relevant practice since MA in Seoul (2004-2009)**

Since completing my MA in Seoul, I have spent ten years developing painting within my practice as an *'Invisible Space'*, depicting micro and macro space. As well as having many solo exhibitions, I taught art, and wrote publications about my work and practice. However, I wanted my work to change and to experience more challenging opportunities in the UK. To that end I came to London in 2009 in order to undertake an MA in Fine Art at Chelsea College which I successfully completed.

To develop my practice, I researched many contemporary artists such as Mona Hatoum and Cy Twombly as well as art theories and the studies of other academic fields such as physics and philosophy. Moreover, I participated in a residence programme and collaborated in art projects with various companies including a Global Group, the Hyundai Motor Company in Korea.



(Fig. 4) *Invisible Space-05091* (2005), 97x 162cm, Mixed Media on Canvas



## MA in London (2010-2011)

In my previous paintings, I presented the subject of my practice through a study of biology or physics in which the macro and micro space have similar patterns. At Chelsea College, I discovered a very interesting ancient Hindu philosophy called the '*Upanishads*', which is very similar to the macro and micro space concept. In this school of thought, texts of the Hindu religion are used as inspiration. These convictions have been pivotal to the development of later Indian philosophies and theologies which have been subject to intense scrutiny by modern scholars.

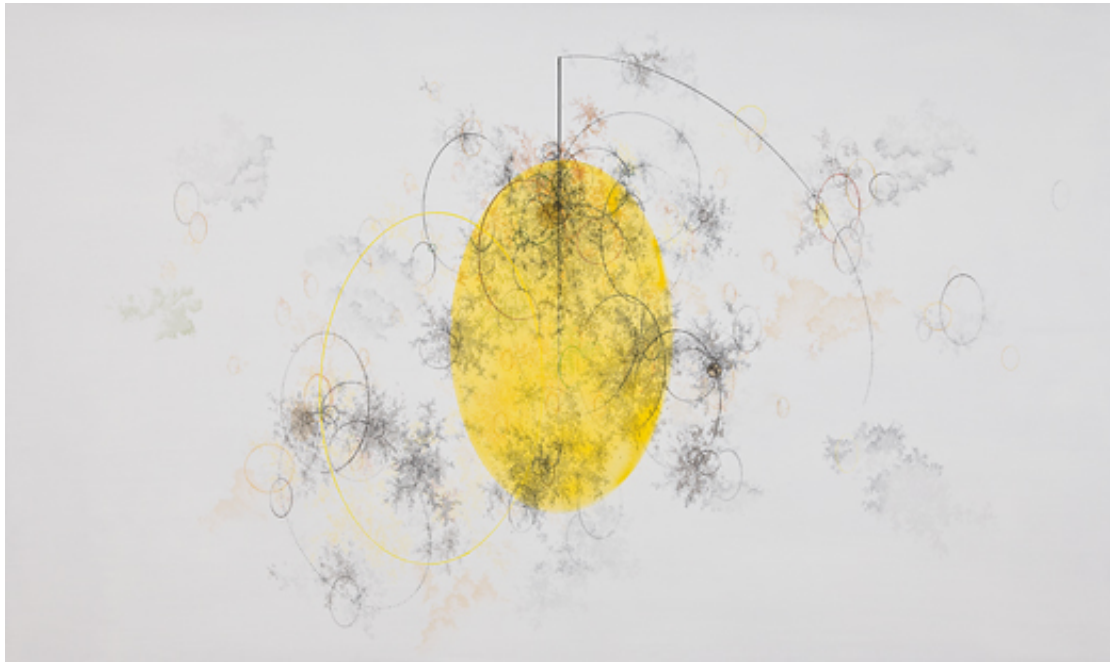
I have long been fascinated by this philosophy, the *Upanishads*, and particularly by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's writing on art and aesthetics. Influenced by Eastern philosophy, he insisted that the 'truth was recognised by the sages of India' (Schopenhauer, 1963) and that art is the practical consequence of this brief aesthetic contemplation as it attempts to depict one's immersion in the world and thus tries to depict the essence or pure ideas of the world.

Schopenhauer also examined the four distinct aspects of experience in the phenomenal world and has been influential in the history of *Phenomenology*. Inspired by his thought on art, I started to research the *Upanishads* to expand the range of my practice.

According to the *Upanishads*, the world is symbolised by two different concepts - one being '*Brahman*' and the other '*Atman*'. 'The *Brahman* indicates the Universal spirit; it is the ultimate and absolute infinite existence and a basic essence of the cosmos. The *Atman* signifies an individual self and the soul of a living creature, in particular that of a human being.' (Olivelle, 2008, p.49) These two fundamental concepts within this hierarchy connect and organise the universe. They permit the *Upanishads* to create 'an integrative vision by identifying a single, comprehensive and fundamental principle which shapes the world'. (Brereton, 1990, p.118)

An intriguing point here is that in ancient India, people believed that the human body has cosmic significance and parts of the body are homologized with cosmic phenomena. In addition, 'a hidden connection or homology was recognised between the ritual sphere and the cosmic sphere.' (Olivelle, 2008 p.53) Ultimately,

the opposite factors are the same thing. I found this to be very similar to my previous approach, whereby two extremely opposite scales demonstrate similar patterns and images of movements or forms. This is perfectly explained by the Upanishads. As a consequence of this research, I developed my practice in a movement towards geometric paintings. (Fig. 5, 6)



(Fig. 5) *Untitled-11021* (2011), 95 x 160cm, Mixed Media on Canvas

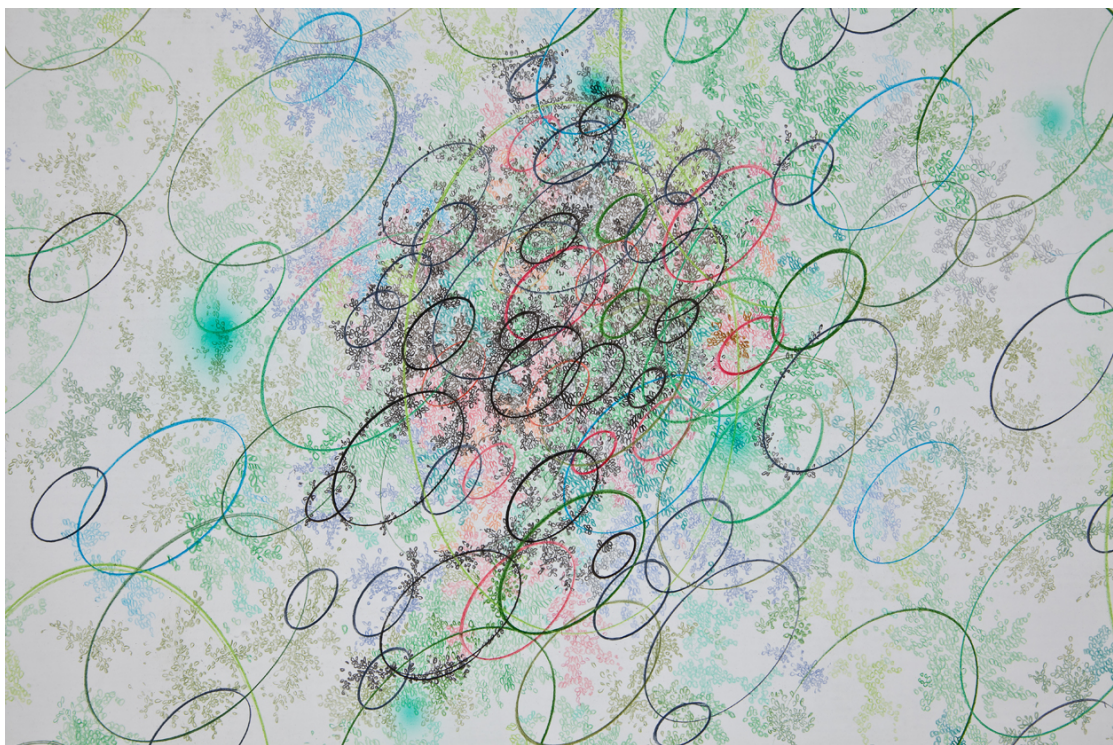
During the exploration in my practice and research, I adopted painterly composition and the two types of geometric and organic forms.

The compositions in my paintings bring together geometric forms such as circles, squares, rectangles and ellipses. They also include organic forms such as grain-like tiny ovals resembling the fractal growth of natural forms, which are at once abstract and organic. Besides, the elements forming the painting symbolise the underlying meaning of the concepts.

In this sense, the geometric forms expressed in painting represent '*Brahman*', whereas the organic forms exposed in background layers symbolise '*Atman*' in regard to the '*Upanishads*' concept. In painterly composition, geometric forms

indicate perfect and unchangeable forms, as if '*Brahman*' means the universal spirit and ultimate and absolute infinite existence. The organic forms in my paintings signify variable, changeable and amorphous forms, just as the '*Atman*' concept stand for individual self or the soul of a living creature which is equally changeable.

In this painting, I enjoyed expressing co-identity or the inevitable possibility between two opposite requisites in relation to its world view, by adopting geometric and organic forms as painterly composition, which means '*Brahman*' and '*Atman*' in terms of the '*Upanishads*' concept. I intended to create these forms on the same surface of my painting that symbolise the concept of '*Brahman*' and '*Atman*' co-existing. (Fig. 5, 6)



(Fig. 6) *Untitled-11061* (2011), 60 x 90cm, Mixed Media on Canvas

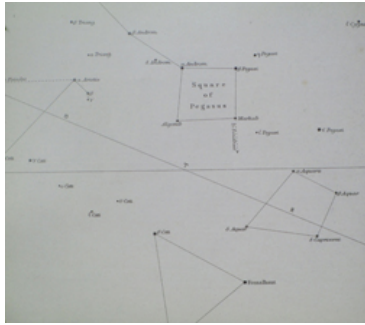
## **Creative Practice and Theory**

### **Abstraction and Exploring Micro & Macro space**

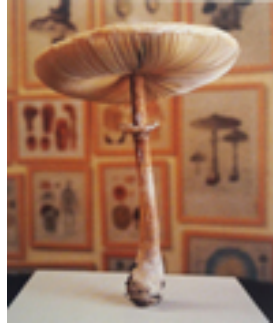
During the course of my doctoral research, my initial subject established throughout my BA and MA studies has been explored in a more theoretical and methodological way. My paintings always represented an abstract landscape that depicted micro and macro space, such as 'cell' and 'nerve system' that organise the human body, or similar images of the movement of the galaxy. These pictorial images were portrayed by abstract methods that use basic painterly elements and elucidated by academic references such as Biology, Physics and Philosophy in relation to my practice. However, reviews, feedback and contemplation on my works opened opportunities for me to take a different approach on my research. I realised my practice should be analysed in the field of contemporary art and theory. I started my research on artists and theorists and obtained a better understanding of my work on the landscape of contemporary arts with regards to my artistic exploration and situation. Amongst many contemporary artists, I chose Mark Francis and Terry Winters in terms of exploring microscopic and macroscopic spaces and their subjects are presented as abstract paintings.

#### **Mark Francis**

From his early energetic and abstract landscape style to more overtly abstract paintings recently I recognise in Mark Francis' works the link to my paintings both in the imagery and methodology used to articulate the subject. The initial motif of my paintings is based upon the notion of 'cells' and it aims to create the illusion of observing cellular tissues and nerve systems through a microscope.



(Fig. 7) Star Maps of Principal Stars



(Fig. 8) Single Parasol



(Fig. 9) Francis' room Interior

Over the last thirty years, Francis's works have had a strong association with science. His abstract paintings have been continually informed by the shapes, patterns and visual qualities found by his interest in mycology.

The collection of natural history, medical and scientific ephemera is his passion. A world of taxidermy, botanical and anatomical illustrations, astrological and terrestrial maps, medical diagrams, scientific models and jars of dried mushrooms have significantly influenced his painting. (Fig. 7, 8, 9)

Growing out of a fascination with natural science begun by exploring his native Northern Ireland, the collection has grown to reflect key areas of his interests: 'fungi, other flora and fauna-notably insects, birds, and eggs-geology and medicine.' (Gould, 2000, p.5)

If I designate his painting as 'landscape', he has discovered 'other landscapes' to explore the motif both within the body and on the deeper microscopic level of the very flora and fauna which inhabited his original landscapes.

Richard Dyer refers to his painting as follows: 'His paintings consistently achieve the problematic equilibrium of being both monumental and intimate. He teases out the overwhelming and cosmological within the astronomical and invisible.' (Dyer, 2008, p.7)

The forms that are seen under the microscope strongly resonate with biological elements and these appear in my painting but they are used to articulate the surface of painting in purely abstract forms. (Fig. 10)



(Fig. 10) Francis, Migration (2002), Oil, acrylic and resin on canvas, 183 x214 cm

In his work, since the end of 1990, Francis adopted a layering technique to articulate 'blurring' and its contrast to more sharply defined forms. This duality of treatment produced a space that brought to mind the visual index of biological and botanical images from the microscopic world. These biomorphic and abstract images are repeated in the background, or blurred into indistinctness, as if they exist 'beyond' the space or 'behind' the foreground objects.

In the exhibition, '*About Vision: New British Painting in the 1990s*' at the *Museum of Modern Art Oxford* in 1996, Francis stated that:

*The repeated shapes and making that make up the surface of my paintings are suggestive of biological forms and originate from microbiological photography, medical pictures of bacteria, cell and chromosomes as references to the cellular patterns and structure in nature.... Mainly monochromatic, the paintings are carefully built up through thin layers of white, gray and black paint. The paintings lack of colour and*

*blurring and diffusion in some works lend them certain affinities with photographs. The directional blurs and shadows establish a natural rhythm, past random, part order, part slowmotion. For me the blur alludes to a fragile existence and suggests how little we still know about ourselves and our places within the cosmos. (Francis, 1996, p. 21)*

The artist's particular technique of blurring wet paint has been informed by Gerhard Richter who has been exploiting it since the 1960s. The effect is to lend his painting a superficially 'photographic' aura and Richter is evidently aware that it is not so much truth to the source material's actual look that will evoke the photographic, but our assumptions about this type of image. However, Francis employs this technique by combining it with sharply rendered images and he produces a coherent, three-dimensional and stereoscopic space, one in which the elements exist in their own discrete world.



(Fig. 11) Francis, *Migration* (2002), Oil, acrylic and resin on canvas, 183 x 214 cm



(Fig. 12) Francis, *Percolation* (2002), Oil, acrylic and resin on canvas, 214 x 274 cm

The technique and methodology of forming abstract painting with 'blurring' or 'sharp' images had been developed in the middle of 2000s. During this time Francis focused on an abstract illusion of the real through his painting. In his works, for instance, '*Migration*' (Fig. 11) and '*Percolation*' (Fig. 12), he left the works to dry overnight to take the form of actual pools of acrylic paint for painterly elements on the foreground, floating in yet another virtual layer, as if in front of the canvas, but

emphatically re-stating the physicality of the surface of the painting. Made using a variety of colours and media and in a state of liquescent flux, he tended to visual ambiguity and Francis wanted to reference the physical world in a more direct manner than he had in the early landscape paintings. By his de-focused backgrounds full of the blurred ghosts of cellular structure, an uncanny dynamic is set up between the real and the illusory.

Finally, I believe that abstract painting has always had a connection to the spiritual or the 'absolute', from Kandinsky to Abstract Expressionists and up to the present. This relationship to the transcendental is adopted in Francis' work through its focus on abstract forms, although his works began with concrete subject such as images of chromosomes and cells. The original meaning of the source material can be reversed by an artists' creative intention.

*I keep going back to landscape; there are all different types of landscape, one within another within another. The images might look different as you get smaller, smaller and smaller and the landscape changes subtly. It is the same as when you get bigger, bigger and bigger. From the sand on the beach, to sky, to our solar system within our galaxy: then you venture into a whole other solar system.*

*–'Beneath the earth and beyond the star', Mark Francis in conversation with James Peto. (Peto, 2008, p.24)*

## **Terry Winters**

The second artist I investigated is Terry Winters, an American painter, draftsman and printmaker. While Francis's work articulates abstract landscape of biological or astronomical space in his paintings, Winters' works illuminate complex and spatial images constructed by painting's and drawing's phenomenological order and order itself as well as diverse references. Winters focuses more on non-narrative abstractness by the process of painting itself. My works are also formed by certain subjects as a motif but I expose essences of abstract paintings such as spiral lines



and ambiguous marks expressed unconsciously. While the sources of Winters' subject matter can be traced to the natural sciences, architecture, and, more recently, information systems and computer graphics, in fact, what he portrays in his canvas remains obscure and mysterious spatial abstract images. I will summarise what interests me in Winters' work and his methodologies, including the physical process.

'In his work of the 1970s and '80s Winters undertook an investigation of the structures of natural forms. This engagement later extended to preoccupation with process as manifested in architecture, cognitive science, and information technology.' (Weinberg, 2005, p.13) Winters also portrays an individual and rapturous natural world by using organic forms. His work has carried abstract painting into a new ground as a metaphor for his own artistic advance with its high technique and psychological imagery moderated by historical self-consciousness and irony. (Fig. 13)



(Fig. 13) Winters, *Point* (1985)  
Oil on linen, 259 x 175.5cm



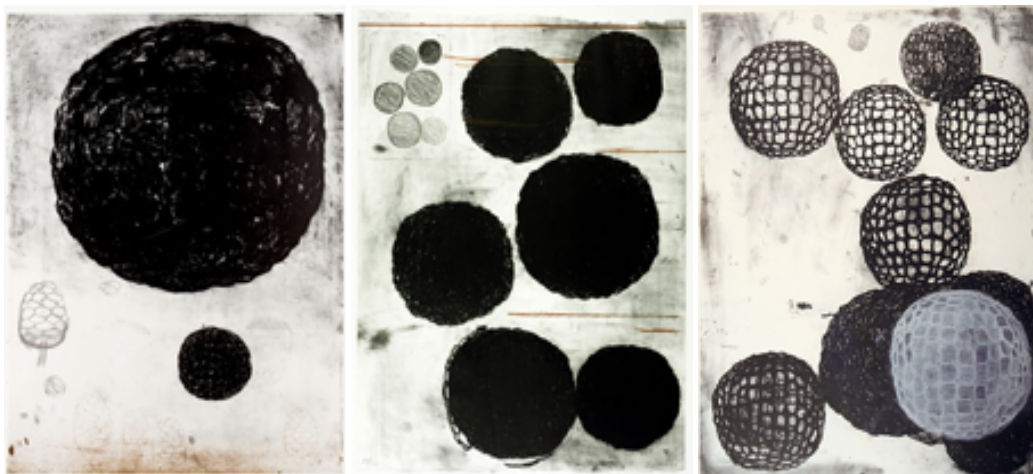
(Fig. 14) Winters, *The Psychological Corporation* (1990)  
Oil on linen, 244 x 335.5 cm

'His unabashed sensuality and attention to process -to gesture and traces of the hand- give his works an undeniably tactile presence and 'presentness' while his fantastic and ambiguous imagery reaches down to the primitive and the primal and 'out to the frontiers of space, astronomy, and science fiction'. (Fig. 14) Though

many references abound in his mixture of the found and imaginary, the recontextualised and purely invented, Winters always returns to one basic impulse: the desire to form-to make paintings, drawing, and prints come into being.’ (Phillips, 1992, p.13)

In Winters’ works, microscopic forms in the natural world were often hugely enlarged, giving them a forceful physical presence. Some of Winters’ earliest prints, for example, the lithographs ‘*Morula I, II, and III*’ (Fig. 15) show spherical masses of fertilized ova at the stage of embryonic growth when more and more segmentation takes place, eventually leading to organic development. However, Winters was not trying to illustrate cell division but rather was thinking about the genesis of complex spaces. The segmented spheres, built mostly in several velvety blacks with greasy French Litho crayons, float in an indeterminate space, while finer materials, such as pencils, are established, near the margins of the sheets.

For Winters, abstract art became a vehicle not for ‘reproducing or investing form but for harnessing forces.’ By utilizing expressive means, ‘data becomes pictorial and spatial’; information and process are the image. (Weinberg, 2005, p.13)



(Fig. 15) Winters, *Morula I, II, III* (1983-4), Three-colour lithograph on paper, 108 x 82 cm

I think that Winters conducts a sensuous materiality of surface combined with cognitive schemata that appeals to the intellect through both theoretical and

hypothetical approaches with the physical experience of mark-making. Therefore, his art involves an astounding array of forms: sinuous, undulating, halting, fluid, and crisp. The surfaces range from delicate rivulets –skeins and pools of ink on various papers – to tangled and thickly impastoed layers of oil on linen. (Fig. 16, 17)

Winters approached the paintings in a strictly abstract manner, building pictures instead of depicting or illustrating something. The forms always come from a specific place, such as diagrams, drawings, photographs, but never function as illustrations.

For Winters, 'painting is a way of thinking. Ideas are created through the manipulation of materials and images – new assemblages of sensations are constructed. Intuition is a method, indeterminate but exacting.' His thought about painting was illuminated by an interview with Adam Fuss in 1997.

'Something is being described through the work itself, through a kind of manual imagination. There are people who can make theoretical constructions.... But I'm painting pictures....I can't step outside that process and construct an objective account of the pictures.... The paintings are.... Projection, they take me places.' (Fuss, 1997, pp. 9, 14)



(Fig. 16) Winters, *Velocity and Amplitude* (1996)  
Oil on linen, 236 x 300cm



(Fig. 17) Winters, *Amplitude* (2000)  
Intaglio in 4 colours on En Tout Cas paper  
135.5 x 110.5 cm (Edi. 45)

Despite his expertise, Winters' works are linked to bodily intuition by technical know-how. I have researched his concept about painting itself and the meaning of its process and these issues I feel are bound up with my practice in terms of intrinsic forms and compositional concerns of abstract painting.

Winters also looks to his art for 'a visualization of actualization of the virtual. . . . an expanded picture of unconscious.' This notion of pictorial unconscious has its complication: on the one hand, painting offers access to the unconscious, the exposure: on the other hand, it brings material extension to whatever area of unconscious it enters. 'What is exposed does not remain untouched, unaltered. Painting invents the unconscious, finding it and making it in a single movement.' (Shiff, 2005, p.19)

I believe that this is a very different ambition for abstract art than of the late Symbolism of Odilon Redon and Wassily Kandinsky or the structured utopianism of Piet Mondrian, all of which have at times interested Winters. It is closer to the diagrammatic abstraction developed by Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and especially to the tradition of *American Abstract Expressionist painting*, to which Winters' often gestural touch relates. In some respects, Winters' trajectory from organic imagery in the early 1980s to complex, more purely abstract webs, in his present work in various two-dimensional media has parallels in the development of *Abstract Expressionist art* such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko.

Lastly, Winters has been interested in the writings of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. For example, Deleuze's metaphor of the '*rhizome*', a plant growth system in which stem like strands spread horizontally but also extend shoots above and roots below. Deleuze uses the '*rhizome*' to exemplify the absence of hierarchy in the contemporary world, where there is no longer a path from God above to humanity below but rather a network within which you may take an infinite number of paths to get from point a to point b. Winters' prints and paintings seem informed by his reading of Deleuze, especially '*The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*', and by looking at the way computer animation can morph space. For example, *Amplitude* (Fig. 17), a large vertical intaglio in four colours, and *Pattern* (2001), a similarly tall

lithograph and digital print consist of interwoven systems of meshwork that build and torque space.

*In this respect Winters' work is connected to the infinitely interconnected realm of cyberspace: at the same time, however, it also echoes a tradition at some variance with the world of the internet: Abstract Expressionist painting. (Rosenthal, 2001, p.29)*

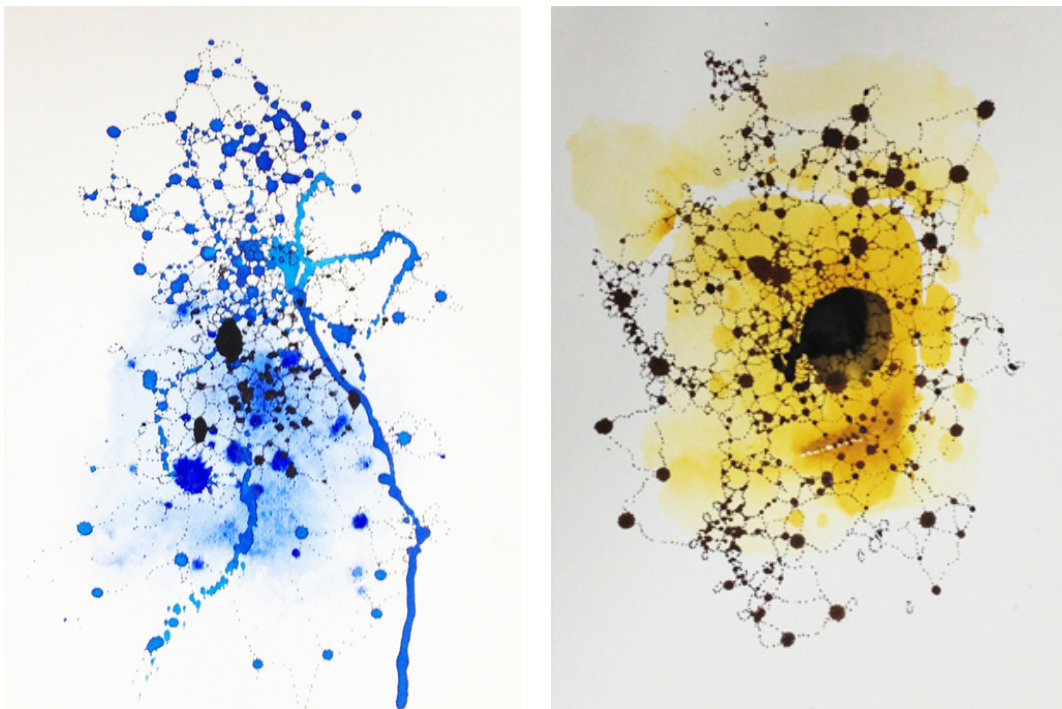
### **Creative practice exploring mediums**

As I stated earlier, my practice initially depicted small biological spaces such as cells or nerve tissues, which form the human body, in the way that Mark Francis and Terry Winters did in their early works. The images portrayed in my paintings may be seen as different scales of 'landscape' that may appear similar to looking through a microscope, images of a galaxy or aerial photographs. This approach is to see the reverse side of the original meaning of objects around me and to create an ambiguity of scale in terms of abstraction. The method of Francis and Winters towards abstraction has had a gradual influence on my work, which has led to a growing interest in 'the abstract' and abstraction itself and to experiment with my practices.

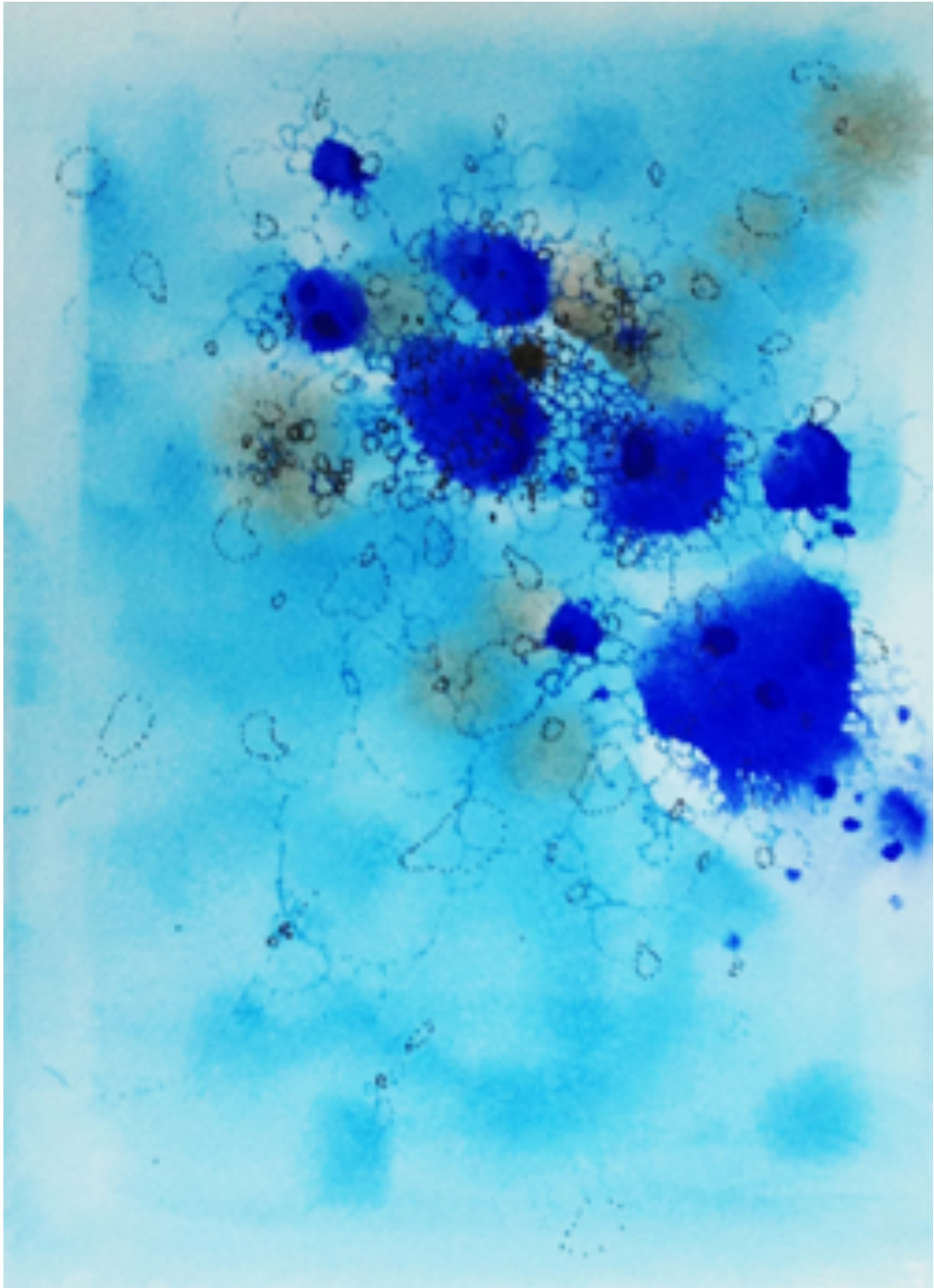
In the first year of this programme, I developed my geometric paintings (Fig. 5, 6). Since the MA course at Chelsea College, I was experimenting with many significant elements such as lines, geometric shapes, patterns, laying and translucent spaces. I was interested in using diverse methods in order to visualise my painting. This was titled as '*Invisible Space*' and used to articulate purely abstract forms in the white surface of my painting, while exploring 'micro and macro' concept in Biology, Physics and Philosophy.

However, I soon realised that I needed fundamental changes in developing my practice. Considering the suggestion by my supervisors, I started to use wet media such as acrylic paints, water colour paints and inks. I also decided to experiment with my subject matter and content through use of these mediums which are unfamiliar to me. I realised that this new experiment could eventually contribute to expanding my practice in the direction of more ambiguous images, translucent colours and blurring through layering.

Untitled-s13001 to 3 are my first paintings where I use wet paint in order to widen the possibilities in my work and to adopt a less prescriptive method. (Fig. 18, 19, 20)



(Fig. 18, 19) *Untitled-s13001, s13004* (2013), Gouache, Acrylic and pen on paper, 33.5cm x 24.5cm



(Fig.20) *Untitled-s13006* (2013), Gouache, Acrylic and pen on paper, 33.5cm x 24.5cm

In the expression of my core concept, I previously focused more on ideal images through a microscope, biology books or outer space. This led my practice to organic images or forms, rather than other possibilities such as 'colour' or 'abstract elements'.

During the preparation of my new paintings (Fig. 18, 19, 20), I collected various images as visual references, which portray my basic concept, in a similar way that Mark Francis has explored. His interest in this approach grew out of a fascination with natural science and began when he started exploring his native Northern Ireland. I found that abstract forms within the natural world enabled me to focus my imagery somewhat differently. I worked with images of mould and spider's webs (Fig. 21, 22) in my new paintings experimenting with wet paint techniques, more complex colour and ambiguous space.



(Fig. 21) image of mould



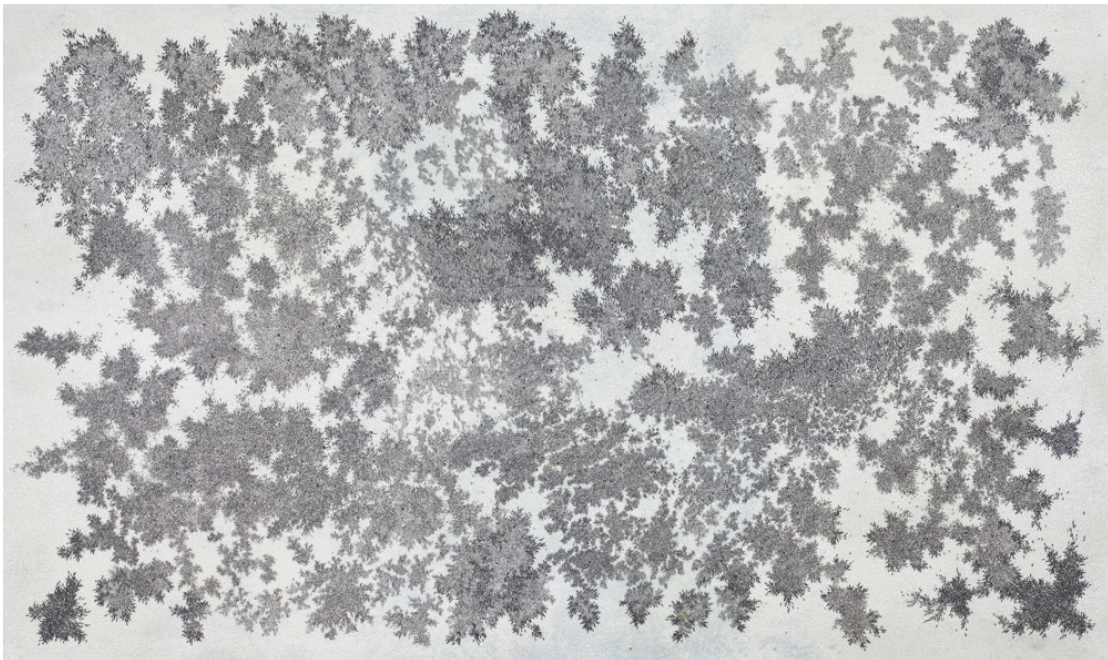
(Fig. 22) spider's web

When I showed these paintings at the first interim show of the doctorate (March 2013), I received many questions from my supervisors and fellow researchers about the source of specific colours and their symbolic import. This experience opened me to a potential new investigation of my use of colours that I could possibly experiment with, still portraying my original subjects of small and big spaces, and exploring abstract elements in my within my practice.

At the beginning of my second year, although I started a theoretical research on colour with my new practice, I was focusing more on abstract elements than

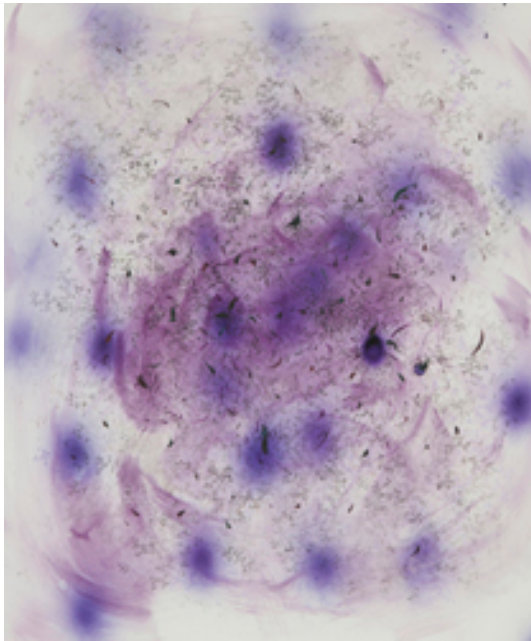


experimenting with colour. (Fig. 23) As my work progressed, there was a marked difference in my new approach from my previous one as a result of my changed view on two worlds with opposite scales -vast and microscopic. I aimed to investigate different ways of understanding and expressing the two extremely opposite worlds through the experiments of amalgamation or synthesis of opposites, which was beyond the simple thought of their dualism.



(Fig. 23) *Invisible Space- image 13039* (2013), Mixed Media on Canvas, 95cm x 160 cm

Unlike my previous paintings that emphasised the paradoxical resemblance of the microscopic world and cosmic space based on my understanding of and interest in images and forms, my painting in *Fig. 23* explores a kind of universal order innate in these opposite worlds, allowing controlled self-generating patterns and using various colours to extend what started with the initial composition. These abstract patterns and changes emerged from working cautiously and delicately with my restrained gesture and colour. The more ambiguous colours in my new paintings shift the work towards more abstract self-generating imagery, reflecting abstract elements such as my painterly intention and gestural brush more strongly. (Fig. 24, 25)



(Fig.24) *Untitled- 13008* (2013)  
Mixed Media on Canvas, 61cm x 51cm



(Fig. 25) *Invisible Space- image14107* (2014)  
Mixed Media on Canvas, 60cm x 50cm

My translucent blurred layers and tiny forms mirror works by Francis who forms his abstract painting with 'blurring' or 'sharp' images; during this time he focused on an abstract illusion of the real through his painting. The process that Terry Winters uses of 'repetition' and 'superposition' is also linked to my abstract multiplication which I use to build upon his concept about painting itself with my new practice in terms of intrinsic attributes of abstract painting.

*Abstraction is based on the idea of the organisation of discrete, specific incidents into more generalized, repeatable patterns. In the visual arts, this has led to the idea that specific visual incidents can be represented by generalised forms, which eventually free themselves from their actual phenomenological source. Abstraction in the visual arts is also based on the idea that interrelationship between parts in a work of art is more important than their individual symbolic identity. As we will see, this emphasis on linguistic relationship is echoed in other areas of twentieth century thought as well. (Peter Halley, 1991, P.139)*

## **Colour Experiments and Cultural traditions**

The second subject that I focused on in my creative practice and research was colour. I believe that colour is the most significant ingredient required for understanding abstract painting in terms of the material of abstraction in my practice. Colour is one of the necessary elements that potentially develops my thoughts and intentions, although my subject began with depicting specific motifs in abstract painting. The struggle to understand the nature of colour, whether physical or psychological and the use of that understanding in the shaping of our environment, has been a major concern during my doctoral research and practice. I have already researched many artists and theorists related to my practice when I was preparing my proposal in the first year. In this section, I would like to analyse two theorists relevant to the study of colour: first, John Gage who investigates colour by various perspectives throughout art history; second, David Batchelor who explores colour in a different way, especially colour as prejudice and misapprehension within Western culture.

### **John Gage**

John Gage (1938~ 2012) was a British art historian of Cambridge University, a scholar specialising in the history of colour. Gage's most significant book, *'Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction'* (1993) is result of more than 30 years' research and reflection.

Aside from other, more formal characteristics, colour has generally seemed to speak to most of us directly and unambiguously. However, I would like to clarify that varied attempts which involve using colours in the visual art field have been a polemical study and the source of active debates among artists and theorists. Gage investigates various meanings of colour and analyses colour itself in art history and other fields such as physics and psychology. I will research subjects

related to my practice, and undertake a diverse range of experiments in order to explore what is exposed by colour, which the artist reveals either intentionally or unconsciously.

Gage insists that the reason some early Modernist artists' paintings moved away from figuration towards abstraction is due to the exploration of colour: Cezanne and Matisse.

In a letter to Bernard of October 1905, Cezanne wrote: 'The sensation of colour which give the light are for me the reason for the abstractions which do not allow me to cover my canvas entirely nor to pursue the delimitation of the objects where their points of contact are fine and delicate: from which it results that my image or picture is incomplete.' (quoted in Gage, 1995, p.211)

Seeing himself as thinking through colour, Matisse was following the imperatives of Van Gogh in 1888 who although he had thought of his colours as 'arbitrary' also felt that they 'follow of their own accord'. Matisse's formulation of a similar idea in an essay on colour towards the end of his life reinforced his own feeling that he was not in control: 'I use the simplest colours, I don't transform them myself, it is the relationships which take charge of them.' (quoted in Gage, 1995, p.211)

Gage also mentions that Matisse's extraordinary sensitivity to this type of psychological effect is again suggested by a story he related about an experience in the chapel he decorated with drawings and stained-glass at Venice in the year around 1950. Recalling the sun filtering through the design of leafage in the windows, Matisse told an interviewer:

*That effect of colour has real power....So much power that, in certain lights, it seems to become a substance. Once when I found myself in the chapel, I saw on the ground a red of such materiality that I had the feeling that the colour was not the effect of light falling through the window, but that it belonged to some substance. This impression was reinforced by a particular circumstance: on the floor in front of me there was some sand in a little pile that the red colour was resting on. That gave the effect of a red*

*powder so magnificent that I have never seen the like in my life. (quoted in Gage, 1995, p.212)*

Through this story, Gage reasons that Matisse's experience must have been a negative after-image because the windows at Venice are glazed entirely with yellow, green and blue; there is no red.

Gage asserts that 'the act of painting moved through a series of psychological adjustments which characterised the new art of process. Many abstract painters in our century have developed this sense of process; it has been perhaps the most lasting contribution of the psychological theory of colour to practice of art.' (Gage, 1995, p.212)

### **David Batchelor**

My supervisor introduced me to an interesting book of David Batchelor, called '*Chromophobia*' and I started additional study on this. I investigated a series of studies and articles which interpret the subject of colour from various angles, and was a great source for me to construe western culture and history. In particular, Batchelor's '*Chromophobia*' attracted me very much because of the exposure to the nature of colour from completely different perspectives. This may be paradox, or a criticism of precedent studies on colour.

David Batchelor (1955~ ) is a Scottish artist, writer and critical cultural theorist. He has shown his works internationally in many exhibitions including the British Art Show. In practice, he began working with colour in his studio since he was 20 years old and has experimented with the nature of colour by taking pigment in his works and making colourful light-box installations. (Fig. 26, 27) He insists that in philosophy, art history, architectural and film theory, a hostility to colour is easily found; it is regarded as less important than line or form. His theory on colour is encapsulated in his book, '*Chromophobia*'.



(Fig. 26) David Batchelor (2009)  
*Spectotem 2*, Steel and aluminum lightboxes,  
 steel supports, acrylic sheets, cable,  
 fluorescent lights, 271 x 58 x 29,5 cm



(Fig. 27) David Batchelor (2003)  
*Brick Lane Remix I*, Shelving Units, found light boxes,  
 fluorescent light, vinyl, acrylic sheet, cable, plugboards  
 204 x 435 x 38 cm

According to his book, colour has also been the object of extreme prejudice in western culture. For the most part, this prejudice has remained unchecked and passed unnoticed, and it is yet all-embracing and generalised until now.

*In the West, since Antiquity, colour has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished and degraded. Generations of philosophers, artists, art historians and cultural theorists of one stripe or another have kept this prejudice alive, warm, fed and groomed. As with prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable. This loathing of colour, this fear of corruption through colour, needs a name: Chromophobia.*  
 (Batchelor, 2000, p.22)

He argues that, 'Chromophobia', a fear of corruption or contamination through colour, has been a cultural phenomenon since Ancient Greek times and this is shown in modern and contemporary manifestations as well as resistance to it in art.

I am interested in his different interpretations of colour in western culture and art history, because this contradicts Gage's assertion that study of colour was necessarily an anthropological matter and the effect of colour has real power and is a significant element. Batchelor suggests how colour fits or fails to fit into the cultural imagination of the West, by exploring such diverse themes as *Melville's 'great white whale'*, *'Le Corbusier's journey to the East'* and the implications of modern artists' experiments with industrial paints and materials. However, he ultimately criticises and denies the prejudice about colour considered as a trifle and a superfluous thing according to *'Chromophobia'*. Also he argues that the illusion of culture without corruption can be acted by enlightenment of *'Chromophobia'*.

In the section of his book, subtitled *'Whitescape'*, he analyses the nature of white colour or whiteness with an explanation of his experience about environments that are surrounded by white colour. According to Batchelor, 'White is...endless, seamless, continuous, empty, uninterrupted, uninterruptable, overlooked, passed by, inconspicuous insignificant.' He also interprets the meaning of 'Pure white' which is certainly a Western issue, holding up as an example, Conrad's *'Heart of Darkness'*.

*Conrad, who analysed the Western problem better than most in his time and better than many in ours, could also recognise a white when he saw one. The imagery in Heart of Darkness is coloured almost exclusively in blacks and whites. ...Conrad's target is the generalization of whiteness and the predicates and prejudices that merge with the term and seem inseparable from it. This generalised whiteness form.... For Conrad, White, like black, like light and like darkness, became a highly complex term.*  
(Batchelor, 2000, p.10-13)

Nevertheless, he asserts that the role of colour in painting is an essential and almost indispensable element, citing Charles Blanc (1813~1882), a critic and colour theorist, although its place is delegated behind the formal characteristics of composition, chiaroscuro and drawing.

*'Colour being that which especially distinguishes painting from the other arts, it is indispensable to the painter.' Blanc appears to have been genuinely uncertain about colour: it shifts from being essential to being dispensable, from being low in the order of nature and representation to being the very essence and uniqueness of painting as an art. But for the most part, Blanc accepted that colour cannot be willed away: the job therefore is to master it by learning its laws and harnessing its unpredictable power: '...let the colourist choose in the harmonies of colour those that seem to conform to his thought.'* (quoted in Batchelor, 2000, p.28)

I have realised that Batchelor's argument that colour has often been treated as corrupting, foreign or superficial in Western culture could be a conditioned response towards Western culture. Colour is linked to cultural tradition of the society, although the nature of colour has been misunderstood or perceived as superficial.

Batchelor's interpretation of colour has had a great effect on the direction of my research and my practice. At the beginning of the second year of the doctorate, I started to experiment more with colour in my practice and expose what is exposed by colour. For this, I investigated the colour of John Gage with examples of modern artists such as Cezanne and Matisse. As my research about colour progressed, along with the study on Batchelor's theory, I considered where the colours expressed in my painting are from and how this is connected with Korean cultural traditions and art forms.

## **Creative Practice and experiments with colour**

### **First experiment:**

With my supervisors' suggestion to be more challenging in my creative practice, I started an exploration of the role of 'colour' with the use of wet paint such as acrylic, rather than my historical use of coloured pencil, pens, oil sticks etc, in order to enlarge the possibilities for change in my work. (Fig. 18, 19, 20) I started the study of colour within my new practice as a theoretical methodology which is directly



reflected by the abstract artists whom I have selected for the doctorate proposal in the first year. The intention was to identify colour as a cultural and psychological visual requisite that provides insights and links between my painting and individual experience. This research helped me to develop the use of new mediums within my practice.



(Fig. 28) *Untitled-13054 (2013)*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 51 cm

Generally, colour is defined as the reflection of artists' conscious or unconscious inner images in the painting. At first, I was concerned about how to be able to

expose and signify 'colour' in my new abstract painting. I have attempted to develop my practice and research with Gage's assertions in mind, which 'colour' is a cause or substance for changing to abstraction and an incredible fruit of an artist's experience, especially for an abstract painter. (Gage, 1995, p.212)

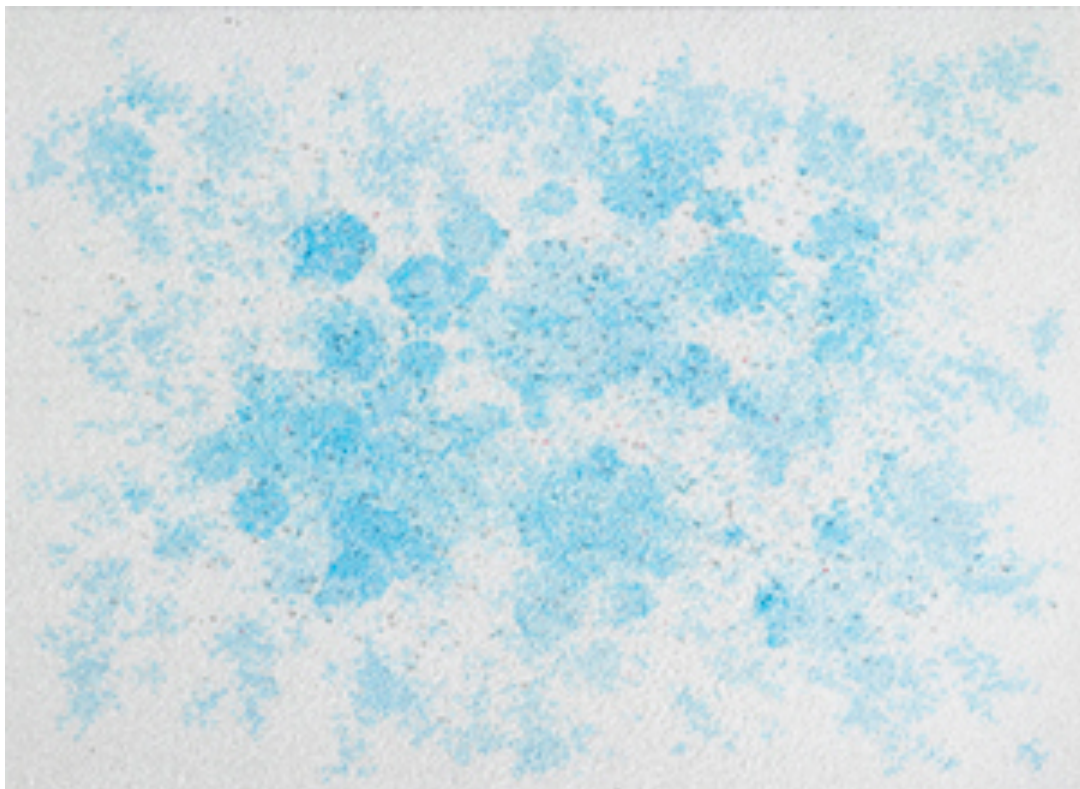
I adopted and experimented the study of colour in my practice in two different ways. (Fig. 28, 29) First, in my new painting (Fig. 28), I wanted to show the nature of colour, or depth of it, and specifically focused on experimenting and exploring the role of 'colour' with the use of wet painting mediums. This also allowed me to expand the possibilities for change in my work. While I used limited colours such as white, black and grey in order to express my initial concept -micro and macro space-, I started to use various colourful acrylic paints, reflecting the image of '*Big bang theory*' or '*Chaos*'. I also repeatedly rubbed and scrubbed the colour tracks with a sponge, while making many blurred layers. I thought that many of the colours expressed in my recent paintings reflected my subject incorporated with my personal gestural brush and track. I believe that this concept and experiment with colour in my practice is connected to Roland Barthes's theme: the concept of undertaking diverse personal experiments in order to explore what is revealed by the artist either intentionally or unconsciously, through colour.

### **Second experiment:**

Secondly, I started to experiment with 'the study of colour' in a different way to the method I mentioned earlier. Following feedback from my supervisory tutorial in my personal studio (on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2014), I realised that developing colour could be a useful formal device to amplify the relationships between drawing and forms in the work. If the relationships began to resonate through colour when viewing, the experience of viewing could become immersive rather than an illustrated one. From the recommendation to start working on a saturated coloured base, I started a series of new paintings. (Fig. 29, 30)



(Fig. 29) *The study of colour* (2014), Mixed Media on Canvas, 24 x 33 cm (60 pieces)



(Fig. 30) *The study of colour* (2014), Mixed Media on Canvas, 24 x 33 cm (one of 60 pieces)

These works consist of a total of 60 painted canvases each with different colours. I intended to be immersive and more abstract as if the colour could be reflected by the diversity of people's viewing experience without a directing function or a concrete illusion. I applied various colours as if they are self-generating abstract patterns on the white surface. Each colour was chosen randomly and adopted

systematically like a colour chart without specific meaning except as a response to each other. This was a new departure for me and when I exhibited this series (Fig. 29, 30) at the showcase exhibition in June, 2014, I received excellent feedbacks from my tutors and colleagues. I was very surprised at their reactions about the colours I used. The European students felt the colours I adopted are very close to the white and whiteness I had used in previous paintings, even though I intended to show various colours. The students commented on the delicate and fragile nature in the works, the restrained beauty. I realised from the experience of making this piece and the feedback that I received is that I use colour as tone. This highlighted to me that I use colour in a very different way that is imbued with my personal and traditional elements of my culture.

Through these paintings, I started to understand how colour can affect moods and emotions as a determinant of human behaviour and how colour is exposed and signified in my new painting. It can be a powerful communication tool and used to signal action, influence mood and cause physiological or psychological reactions. Of course, individual feelings about colour are often deeply personal and rooted in one's own experience or culture. John Gage takes an anthropological approach about colour with a great interest in abstract painters of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He believes that the subject of colour represents and reflects artists' personal and psychological state. On the contrary, Batchelor insists that colour is beyond individual interest and perception of colour in a society may be partly the reason of cultural distort and misunderstanding of the society. Therefore, he believes that the colour should be interpreted through understanding of its cultural interrelationship with the society.

Both theorists share the notion that the interpretation of colour within an art work is an important subject for artists whether it is about personal or inter-personal level. I digested two views as colour is strongly related to an artist's cultural and social background because personal level of experience is intertwined with exposure to the surrounding ethnic environment and tradition of the society. After all, these are coalesced to the state of who he or she is and hugely influences his or her work.

Realisation of the importance of colour from researching these theorists drew me to experiment with colour. 'Colour' became a significant abstract element in my new

paintings in line with the subject of micro and macro space. Particularly, studying Batchelor's '*Chromophobia*' reminded me of the tradition and perception of colours within my own native culture and made me realise that the white colour in particular is deeply related to my own personal experience. Hence, I wanted to find out how the white colour is linked to cultural tradition of the society particularly related to Korea.

I was always fascinated by use of white colour and whiteness as a background across all my works. I used to leave a part of the surface of the canvas white in most of my paintings and it sometimes appeared as translucent space or blurry layering when I completed my painting. I became aware of the fact that this is linked to my personal preference and experience. Even my personal studio, located near London Waterloo station, has a pure white emptiness, like the atmosphere of the space as I have a large white table of four meters length, white ceiling and four white walls that has the feel of a hospital or laboratory. (Fig. 31, 32) As shown in my works (Fig. 29, 30), the white colour looks delicate, transparent and endless as Batchelor's diverse interpretations on white. As I acknowledged the fact that white is strongly linked to my personal and my cultural experience, I soon realised whiteness is deeply rooted in the Korean cultural tradition.



(Fig. 31, 32) My personal studio near London Waterloo station, London SE1 8EQ

For example, the colour of white has represented or been reflected in Korean Culture. Korean people have been called '*the white-clad folk*' for a long time and traditional dress for an ordinary person was usually white clothes until Korean modernisation emerged, which gradually replaced the traditional clothing to western contemporary dress. White colour is also used in the national Korean flag, called '*Teageukgi*', which has a White background as a symbol of 'national people'. (Fig. 33, 34)



(Fig. 33) Korean traditional dress, '*the white-clad folk*'



(Fig. 34) the national Korean flag, '*Teageukgi*'

Consistent use of white colour appeared across many traditional Korean paintings. In the past, or even now, artists of Korean traditional work always have used black ink on the white Korean traditional paper instead of a canvas for their work, either a portrait or a landscape. The white colour often left as a background. (Fig. 35, 36) One of the significant Korean contemporary art movements is '*Dansaekhwa*', meaning 'Monochrome' painting, which rediscovered the legacy and beauty of the traditional aesthetic and technique cleverly using black and white. (Fig. 37)



(Fig. 35) Kim Hongdo (the late of 18c)  
*Wrestling (Ssireum 씨름)*,  
Light-colour on Korean paper, 27 x 22.7 cm



(Fig. 36) Lee Haeung (1883)  
*Ink Orchid (Mukran 墨蘭)*,  
Ink on paper, 90.0 x 27.6 cm



(Fig. 37) Chung Sanghwa (1979), *UNTITLED*, Acrylic on canvas, 33x25cm

In his book *'Chromophobia'* Batchelor explains 'white is clean, clear, healthy, moral, rational, master. ...White, it seems, was everywhere, at least in the minds of Le Corbusier's contemporaries and follower, exemplifying with Theo van Doesburg.' (Batchelor, 2000, p.46). He goes on to say:

*'WHITE is the spritual colour of our times, the clearness which directs all our actions. It is neither grey white nor ivory white, but pure white. WHITE is the colour of modern times, the colour which dissipates a whole era; our era is one of perfection, purity and certitude. WHITE It includes everything. We have superseded both the 'brown' of decadence and classicism and the 'blue' of divisionism, the cult of the blue sky, the gods with green beards and the spectrum. WHITE pure white. (quoted in Batchelor, 2000, pp.46-47)*

As Batchelor insists that colour is linked to cultural tradition of the society, white colour is very important to me. White colour embedded in Korean tradition and culture has always been at the back of my mind whether I am aware of it or not. It is apparent that white remains in my paintings but has been tweaked in a range of modification during my whole working process, for example, making several layers with overlapping images transparently and erasing repetitively. I intended to control and restrain certain marks and narrative images by holding immediacy in expression. In this manner, the nature of the white colour is emphasised. The white is a creation in my paintings rather than a part left over as the aesthetics in Korean traditional culture and art.

In my drawing and painting course in school, up until my BA course in Korea, I learned and practiced that I had to illustrate objects as realistically as possible, leaving white background, by repeating and erasing images repeatedly. Not only the experiment with colours based on the research of Gage and Batchelor, but also the very personal experience and cultural background in relation to the white colour made me realise that experiment with colour as a significant element of an abstract painting has resonated in my recent paintings including these traditional techniques and my gestural action.



## **Gesture and Korean Monochrome**

My practice can be also analysed in terms of 'gesture' and the trace of artists' physical action, as well as 'micro & macro concept in abstraction' and 'colour and culture'. My abstract images are portrayed by abstract methods that use basic painterly elements and these abstract methods for my practice are also designated as 'gestural medium'. In this section, I am focused on 'gesture' or 'physical intention' that is exposed directly by artists on the basis of Roland Barthes' concept of 'gesture' in his works, with research on artist, Cy Twombly. I also investigate how this is explored in my recent practice, inspired by Korean artist, Lee Ufan who explores this concept in different ways than Western artists do.

### **Cy Twombly**

Cy Twombly (1928~2011) is an important influence for me in terms of visual methodology. His physical actions as well as his materials inspired me and were applied to my practice. Twombly is an important artist in my practice, especially the notion of artists' unconscious gestures and actions. I wanted to experiment with and understand how the unconscious gestures and actions are exposed and realised in my paintings.

I have found inspiration in the visual form of Twombly's works, although he explores diverse issues in connection to life, spirit or religion through his paintings and drawings. In an interview with Nicholas Serota in 2007, he states that 'he prefers acrylic and pencil to oil, and his favourite medium is pencil rather than wet paint.' He has mentioned that 'he first paints the background and then works on it further; slightly merging the background and surfaces as he believes oil cannot get back into it or make a mess.' (Serota, 2008, p.48)

I believe that the most significant aspect of Twombly's work is the traces of bodily movement. The artist's physical action is shown through his drawing itself. Roland Barthes asserts that what is finally consumed in capitalist society is the individuality of the body. In his *'Writings on Cy Twombly'*, Barthes said that, 'nevertheless, the body transcends its exchange value and that any transactions and any political implications in the world cannot weaken its value.' He also argues that 'what is extreme here is the fact that the body is given without any rewards.' (Szekely, 2006) This suggests the radical nature of drawing's corporeality. In this respect, I am focusing on the concept of 'purity' of painting in itself or 'corporeality' as a new research practice on the doctorate programme.

*The body always escapes beyond the terms of the exchange in which it is involved. None of the commercial systems of the world and no set of political virtues can ever exhaust the body. There is always some extreme point at which the body gives itself for nothing. (Barthes, 1976, p.98)*

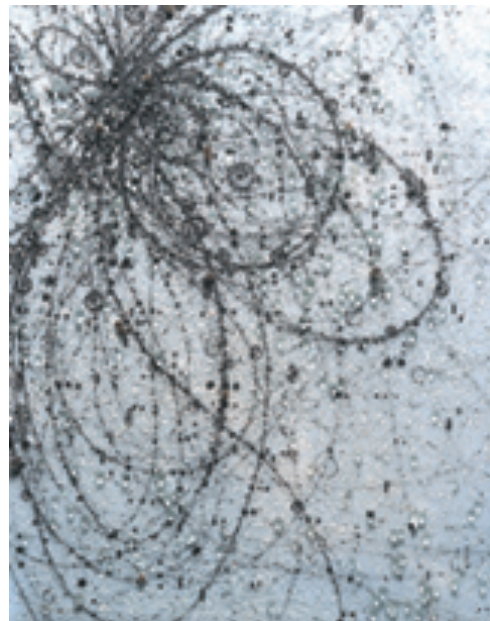
In a similar way to Twombly's understanding of his subject, my painting produces the corporeality remaining of the body. I describe a space, determine grids and place signs in it, but I simultaneously blot it out, getting rid of it in time and space through the overlap of lines. Therefore, when deleting the body without specific consciousness, my painting could be only a record of its trace. (Fig. 39) Although I depict something that has no purpose, no models and no occasions in terms of drawing and the gesture of the body, my drawing's political quality is derived from its objectless gestures as Cy Twombly and Jackson Pollock did. Recording simply an attitude or the body in itself as opposed to merely representing it is one of the key points of their works as well as mine.

A recent cycle of paintings by Cy Twombly, *'Bacchus painting (Fig. 38)'*, was inspired by *the "Iliad"* of Greek literature. In the summer of 2005, when America was once again at war with Iraq, Twombly returned to the pages of the *Iliad* for inspiration to create 8 pictures painted in vermilion colour on the subject of *'Bacchus Raging'*, with the theme of the ecstasy and insanity of the Roman god.

*Bacchus* is also the god of wine, and these works are some of the most liquid of those produced by Twombly, given that they are engorged and overflowing with paint. Cullinan insists, in his criticism of the exhibition catalogue at the *Tate Modern*, that 'red is not only the colour of blood, but also that of wine, as in *Homer's* famous epithet of the '*wine-dark sea*.' Similarly, in an interview with David Sylvester, Twombly himself links imbibing wine with creativity: 'I might have some wine to stimulate a free passage of thought.' (Cullinan, 2008, p.220)



(Fig. 38) Cy Twombly (2005), '*Untitled VII (Bacchus)*'  
Acrylic on canvas, 317.5 x 468.6cm (a part)



(Fig. 39) Kangwook (2012), '*Invisible Space-12029*'  
Mixed Media on canvas, 182 x 262cm (a part)

On the basis of this interview, I would like to insist that the significance of his *Bacchus* painting is a drawing executed in a state of unconsciousness or, what can be described as a mere record of his physical action, as shown in the paintings (Fig. 39), despite a narrative of Twombly's *Bacchus* painting symbolising *Bacchus*' rites which were celebrated by the consumption of raw flesh.

The painting of *Bacchus* is created by an accumulation of drips and splatters towards the bottom of the canvas, which faces the viewer head-on, rather than being allowed to streak vertically down the surface. 'Created in the artist's studio, some of the canvases were folded over on the floor, so paint, still in its liquid state,

poured down and accumulated in the fold between the wall and floor, or the axis between the horizontal and the vertical.’ (Cullinan, 2008, p.220)

During my doctorate course, I purposely experiment with more direct and freer gestures by using the medium of wet paint processes in particular, as in Twombly’s paintings.

## **Roland Barthes**

Roland Barthes (1915 ~ 1980), the French literary theorist, philosopher and linguist, influenced the development of many schools of theory including structuralism, semiotics, social theory and post-structuralism. While his influence is mainly found in these theoretical fields, it is also linked in every field concerned with the representation of information and models of communication, including art, music, and literature.

I investigated the concept of ‘gesture’ or the ‘intention’ of artists in regard to abstract painting, starting from Barthes’s writing on the painting of Cy Twombly. Considering Twombly’s painting in his relation to what constitutes an ‘event’, Barthes criticises Twombly’s works in his essays, *‘Non Multa Sed Multum’* in 1976.

According to Barthes, Twombly tells us that the essence of writing is neither form nor usage but simply ‘gesture’ –the gesture that produces it by allowing it to happen: ‘a garble, almost a smudge, a negligence.’

*Gesture generally is something on the order of the supplement to an act. An act is transitive, its sole purpose is to have an effect upon an object or to achieve a result. However, a gesture in abstract painting could be the undetermined and inexhaustible sum of motives, pulsations and lassitudes that surround the act with an atmosphere (in the astronomical sense of the term). (Barthes, 1976, p.89)*

Barthes insists that gestures produce an addition, a 'supplement' without perhaps really wanting to produce anything at all.

*Twombly is a performer of gestures by definition. He wants to produce an effect, but at the same time he could not care less. And the effects he produces are not necessarily effects that he wanted to produce; they are effects that have rebounded, spilled over and escaped, effects that come back to him full circle and provoke modification, deviation and diminishment of their own traces. Gesture, in fact, abolished the distinction between cause and effect, motivation and target, expression and persuasion. (Barthes, 1976, p.90)*

I am interested in the artists' 'gesture' or physical 'intention' in abstract paintings. Barthes states that 'there is nothing bodily in the sense of lines (no passion, no indolence), nothing but the trace of an analogical operation (a good resemblance, with the subject looking expressive) in Twombly's paintings.' (Barthes, 1976, p.97)

Even when artists represent realistic subject matter, paintings are also traces of their bodily gestures and actions. In Twombly's work these traces are paramount.

*The body always escapes beyond the terms of the exchange in which it is involved. None of the commercial systems of the world and no set of political virtues can ever exhaust the body. There is always some extreme point at which the body gives for nothing. (Barthes, 1976, p.98)*

## **Creative Practice and Lee Ufan's paintings**

### **(My current painting and the impact on my professional practice)**

During my doctorate programme, I have gradually developed research on artists and theories and applied my creative practice, especially, using wet paint and experimenting with colour. In the second year, I was active at my professional practice as an artist having solo exhibitions, teaching, commissions, publications and public art projects, and I used these opportunities to play around with the concept of research in my practice. First of all, the most significant professional

practice was my solo exhibition at *Tokyo gallery* in Tokyo in April, 2014. My practice and research during my doctoral study was reflected very well in the show, and simultaneously the professional practice impacted on my doctoral work. During the preparation of the show, I made significant effort on material investigation and experiment in relation to my research subject. Particularly, exploring more ambiguous colours led my work towards abstract imagery, which reflected my painterly intention and bodily actions more strongly. (Fig. 40) This attempt was drawn from Korean Artist, Lee Ufan's works and Korean Monochrome painting.



(Fig. 40) *Untitled-13056* (2014), Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 51cm,

The *Tokyo Gallery* is the first contemporary art gallery in Tokyo which was founded in 1950, marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010. In 1950-60s, the gallery pioneered the introduction of western avant-garde artists such as Fontana, Yves Klein, Pollock and Hudertwasser to Japan. The gallery also supported experimental projects by Japanese artists, including Jiro Takamatsu, Kazuo Shiraga, Taro Okamoto and *Mono-ha*; all now internationally-renowned. In the 1970s, the gallery began working with Korean artists such as Kim Whanki and Lee Ufan. My exhibition in Tokyo Gallery was the first show of a Korean artist since Lee Ufan's solo Show in 2008. Yamamoto, the director of the gallery intended to find an influencing relationship between my recent paintings and his paintings. He emphasised that my painting have been closely related to Korean contemporary painters such as Lee Ufan even though I used western material such as a canvas and acrylic paint rather than Korean traditional paper and Chinese ink. (Yamamoto, 2014)

Considering Yamamoto's opinion, I began to undertake research on Lee Ufan and his work in order to find out how my painting is linked with his work in terms of an ongoing tradition within Korean abstract paintings.

Lee's early painting series, *From Point* and *From Line* (1972–84) present a minimal, gestural act that induces in the viewer a lived experience of the passing of time and physical (rather than depicted) space. (Fig. 41, 42) When his major retrospective exhibition was held at the *Guggenheim Museum* in New York in 2011, Alexandra Muroe, curator of the museum described Lee's works:

*Lee combines ground mineral pigment with animal-skin glue, traditional to East Asian painting on silk. Restricting his palette to a single colour on a white background. Lee loads his brush with this powdery, crystalline emulsion and, in From Point, marks the canvas with regular dabs from left to right until there is no more colour left. He then repeats this act until rows of gradually fading marks fill the entire canvas. The From Line series pursues a similar systematic approach, moving vertically with single gestural strokes. Lee uses the means of abstract minimalism—seriality, the grid, and monochrome—to alternative ends, emphasizing the gestural mark, the edge, and surface as physical affirmations of existence. (Munroe, 2012)*



(Fig. 41) Lee Ufan, *From Point* (1976)  
Mixed Media on Canvas, 162 x 130 cm



(Fig. 42) Lee Ufan, *From Point* (1978)  
Mixed Media on Canvas, 91 x 73 cm

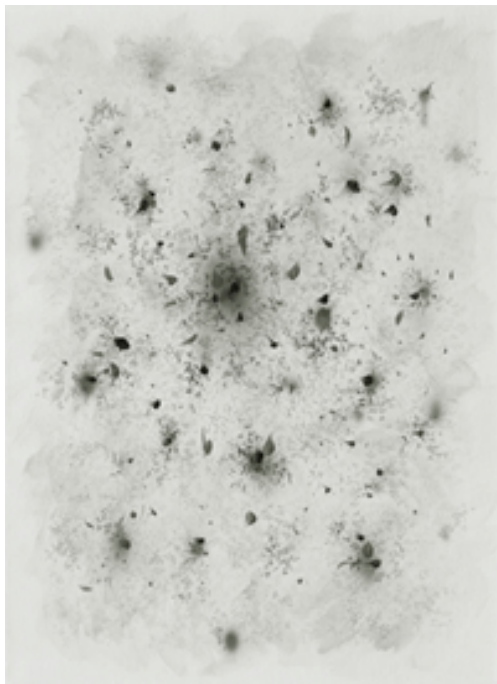
At this point, I realised Lee Ufan's basic concept and Munroe's thought about his works are related to Roland Barthes's ideas that I had already researched. Having investigate the concept of 'gesture' or the 'intention' of artists in regard to abstract painting, which started from my enquiry into Barthes's writing, on the painting of Cy Twombly and my investigation into the subject matter within Lee Ufan and his works. Barthes explained 'intentionality' of artists with the gesture and physical intention by Twombly's work in a western context. While Lee Ufan's intention with gesture is emphasised by repetitive action and records of time's perpetual passage which take into account his personal and professional journey in Korea and Japan.

Whilst preparing my solo exhibition at *Tokyo Gallery*, I particularly was inspired by Lee Ufan who is based in Tokyo and Europe, especially his early paintings, and right away was absorbed in his artworks, presenting my recent paintings that experiment on colour with acrylic wet paint. (Fig. 43, 44) I tried to determine a materiality in itself or corporeality of painting, adopting the concept of *Mono-ha* which rejected western notions of representation, choosing to focus on the



relationships of materials and perceptions rather than an expression to depict something in art.

The more significant reason that I was attracted to Lee's paintings is that they are a pivotal in the development of Korean Monochrome painting known as '*Dansaekhwa*', which offered a fresh approach to abstraction by presenting repetitive gestural marks and bodily records of time's perpetual passage. While Korean monochrome movement was influenced by Lee Ufan's ways in the early of 1970s, 'the affirmation of an artistic gesture' and Korean Monochrome artists' fascination for optical effects were found more concerted and renounced the tyranny of taste and colour. Eventually Korean '*Dansaekhwa*' had become mostly white-colour-based monochrome painting, featuring artists' iterative gestural traces visible. (Fig.44)



(Fig. 43) Lee Kangwook (2014)  
*Untitled-13056*, 61 x 51cm  
Mixed Media on Canvas



(Fig. 44) Lee Ufan (1988)  
*With Wind*, 290 x 218cm  
Oil on Canvas

In my work *Fig. 40 and 43*, I tried to highlight my own techniques through my gestural trace and the process itself, adopting a monochromatic palette as a

foundation for later accretions and the physicality of material used. I experimented with my repeated physical actions such as sprinkling, dropping, spreading wet paints and spraying pigments with an air-brush. To explore my initial subject, this intention was drawn from Lee's repetitive method to investigate abstraction and to discard figuration, following Twombly and Barthes's concept on 'gesture' or the 'intention' of artists in regard to abstract painting. While I have attempted to develop my practice in many different ways during my doctoral study, I have realised that the use of gestural traces is one of many significant abstract elements within my paintings and resonates with my individual experience and process of expression.

However, I have also realised that Lee's thought and method, which is rooted in the Eastern spirit, is fundamentally different from Barthes's concept of 'gesture' and Twombly's works. Lee emphasises that these traces in his work are portrayed as physical affirmations of existence, focusing on the relationships of materials and his perceptions, while Barthes insists that gestures produce a 'supplement' without perhaps really wanting to produce anything at all, highlighting the artists' 'gesture' or physical 'intention' in abstract paintings.

According to Bardaouil, a curator of Alexander Gray Associates, Lee also emphasises materiality, which is intended to intensify the viewer's encounter with the artwork, and consequently, to destroy the traditional hierarchy of power between the artist and the viewer. Joan Kee, author of *contemporary Korean Art: Dansaekhwa* and the urgency of method explains:

*In lieu of schematic whereby the artwork passively transmits the artist's intention to the equally passive view, the artwork is activated only upon the view's sustained engagement with the terms of its material and physical presence.*

*(Joan Kee, 2013)*

The locus of the artistic process shifted from the act of making as a final step of a journey dictated and initiated by the artist, to the viewer's encounter with the artwork's materiality, which resulted in an aesthetic experience of physical and conceptual dimensions. Lee Ufan described this as a desire to show the world

(*seka*) as it is while subverting the hierarchies of signification embedded in Western modernism as a way to provide an alternative outlook on the experience of the world. (quoted in Bardaouil, 2014)

Moreover, Korean Monochrome painting, *Dansaekhwa* is considered vastly different from the characteristics of western Monochrome painting in many ways. In Miseok Koh's article on *Dansaekhwa* exhibition at National Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea, for making *Dansaekhwa* distinctive from Western Monochrome, Visiting Professor Yoon sums up this very clearly, citing Korean artists such as Lee Ufan, Park Seo-bo, Chung Chang-sup, and Ha Chong-hyun (Fig. 45, 46, 47).

*Western monochrome is the result of the logical and rational thought process that is rooted in mathematics and linguistics whereas Korean monochrome takes, in a word, a meditational approach and uses physical actions as a tool to represent the contemplation of the artist. The minimalistic expression of Korean monochrome shows the strong trace, in every stroke of the brush, of the inner conflicts and contemplation of the striving thought process as well as the physical work of an artist, and yet leaves the intense reservation and silence of his or her emotion, unlike western minimalism that deliberately leaves a space empty. Layers and layers of accumulated work is done in Korean monochrome paintings as if for *Dansaekhwa* artists one stroke of black paint is never the same as dozens of strokes of paintings to create a black colour. Korean monochrome paintings go beyond 'visual effect' that is only an outcome of thought process and painting activity. But, they contain the totality of the creation, through diligence and strive throughout the thought process and hundreds of layers of work are reproduced as 'density' and 'texture' in an absolutely reserved manner. This attitude can only be explained by a traditional Korean view of nature in which it is believed in that human is part of the nature and always leave the natural part in lifestyle. Ecological, universal and natural view is always reflected upon Korean monochrome paintings". (quoted in Koh, 2012)*

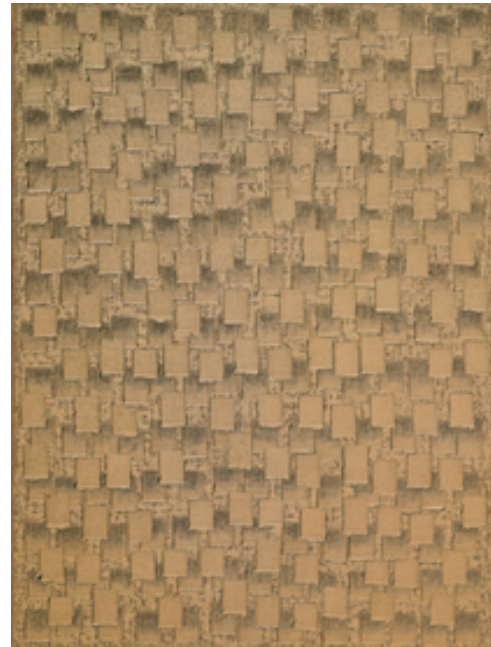
This attitude is shown in the Korean monochrome as an artist and his/her action becomes part of the work because every little brush stroke remains in the painting within the layers and layers of labouring work.



(Fig. 45) Park Seo-Bo (1981), *Ecriture No.43-78-79-81*, pencil, oil on Hempen cloth, 193.5 x 259.5 cm



(Fig. 46) Park Seo-Bo (1992), *Ecriture 료법 No.920307*  
Mixed Media on Korean Paper, 60.7×50 cm



(Fig. 47) Ha Jonghyun (2002), *Conjuntion2002-44*  
on and pushed from back of hemp cloth, 260x194cm

I have searched for inspiration that has become the key to my practice from Korean Monochrome painting, *Dansaekhwa* and Lee Ufan's paintings. I experimented with this and reflected the inspiration onto my latest solo exhibition in Tokyo, 2014. From the research of the concept of gesture, I also had a better understanding of the connection between my painting and Korean cultural tradition through '*Dansaekhwa*'. In my work (Fig. 48), I developed my repeated gestural actions such as sprinkling, dropping, spreading wet paints and spraying pigments, which are my own means of expression and approach to create layers of 'abstract monochrome planes'. I have also attempted to reveal my inner psychological landscapes through physical labour, intensive efforts as Korean monochrome artists did, being amplified by abstract painterly methods. Those landscapes are saturated with the aesthetics of moderation, the void, and maturation as a result of patiently ripening over a long period of time which also reflect aspects of the Korean traditional aesthetic.



(Fig. 48) Lee Kangwook (2014), *Untitled -14006*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 80 x 130 cm

I chose the term 'Moderation' as it collectively condenses the concept appearing in the process of Korean monochrome art, '*Dansaekhwa*'. Signifying the repeated

gestural and labouring actions, the reservation from uncontrolled expression. It represents my working process of not only my repeated gestural actions but also carefully and intentionally chosen and applied abstract techniques. The 'Moderation' means the negotiation of improvisatory expression and is the method to present my subject in my recent paintings and aesthetics of restraint and control. I believe that this Korean traditional aesthetic such as '*Dansaekhwa*' is revealed by my physical measured approach to labour over a long time of endurance. This spirit is related to Korean traditional aesthetic which emphasise the status neither of a hyperbole nor scantiness.

After the research on Barthes, Twombly and Lee Ufan, I developed the intentionality and the matter of gesture while preparing my solo exhibition in Tokyo as explained before. Barthes's concept is applied and reflected to my whole working process. In detail, my painting largely involves several stages achieving ambiguous layers. The first stage is to put a microscopic image resembling magnified cells on canvas. In the second stage, I apply translucent white paint onto the canvas, thereby blurring its imagery. The image, after going through these stages, loses its directness and the canvas is entirely dominated by pastel tones, in fact semi-transparent white tone. The enlarged cell image appears obscure but evidently takes on some organic nuances.

During the next stage, the characteristically lines and tiny marks are drawn on the double-layered surface. These drawings rendered across the whole canvas evoke a tension between convergence and dispersion, immersion and distraction. These sometimes explore as all-over surface of canvas and create thin layers with colour marks and points. The last phase is to scatter a myriad of shiny objects on the tracts of those drawings.

My whole making processes seems neutral and decharacterised due to its lack of directness such as covering photograph images and leaving several layers translucently. I intended that my work is neither abstraction nor figuration and is thought to be a narrative, yet simultaneously a non-narrative. It looks tender yet sometimes cold in terms of its vitality and languidness. I focus on this ambiguity or apparent neutrality, applying Barthes's gestural intention to my practice.

At each stage taken to bring my work to completion, these opposing factors delicately complement one another. Primitiveness provoked by the cell-like forms becomes something urban and civilized. I believe the weight of my subject may be considerably lightened and its atmosphere gradually comes close to ambiguous abstraction, meaning that my work undergoes a process of neutralisation. As the stages I take in creating my painting are regarded as being decisively significant, Moderation can be one of the critical terms used to define my work, inspired and related to Lee Ufan and Korean Monochrome painting, '*Dansaekhwa*'.

## Conclusion

During the Doctorate Programme at UEL, I have attempted to expand my practice in many different ways with the feedback that I have had from my supervisors and contemporaries. From tutorials, seminars and interim shows, I have started to challenge the way I engage with my work and I have investigated unfamiliar mediums while exploring the idea of 'colour', 'gesture' and 'repetition' within my practice.

In my first year I completed the proposal for the doctorate. I reviewed and re-assessed my previous practice over ten years including BA and MA courses in Korea and the UK. I started to study ideas of colour within my new practice as a theoretical methodology through the writing of John Cage and I also explored the use of wet paint in order to create possible new forms within my painting. My first professional practice during the first year was a solo exhibition which was held in *Hada Contemporary* in *Vyner Street* in London in 2012. From audience feedback, which questioned my representation of micro/macro concepts, I learnt that there was an ambiguity which caused a complexity in the viewer's conception of the work presented. At the time I perceived this as a problem, however looking in hindsight, I understood this was the first time that 'moderation' as a critical position was identified within my practice. Subsequently it took the rest of the doctorate programme to understand how it unfolds in my creative working methods.

In my second year, I concentrated on my professional practice as an artist by doing activities such as solo exhibitions at the *Tokyo Gallery*, Tokyo, Japan. Teaching the *Study of Painting* at *Hongik University*, Seoul, Korea. Completing commissions with *Samsung Medical Centre* alongside publications and public art projects. With my supervisors' suggestion, I focused on experimenting with the role of colour and the use of different paint mediums. These experiments included various approaches such as spreading, dropping, and spraying pale coloured acrylic several times to create a blurry translucent base for the piece, and then applying small dark



coloured patches that aimed to float on the surface. From the research on colour of John Gage, my original aim was to identify the possibilities of colour as a cultural and psychological visual requisite that might possibly provide insights and links between my painting and individual experience. However, feedback from my tutors and colleagues with my new colour works helped me realise I use colour as tone. This highlighted to me that I used colour in a very different way that is imbued with my personal and traditional elements of Korean culture and art. What I learnt from this experience was my growing awareness that white played a major role in my work.

One of the main learning experiences of this period was that the success that comes with exhibiting, and my work being collected, makes any change both worrying and exciting. The worry is that the work could be less viable as a desirable object to collect as I engage in challenging my embedded working procedures and attempted to work towards a possible new aesthetic. This question often comes to mind and is still an on-going query for me. What I did decide is that I would use the doctorate experience to make work that pushed me into new potential areas that will continue to inform my practice beyond the programme.

It has been in my final year that I have begun to realise the evolution within the work which had begun with John Gage and progressed through to David Batchelor's theories of white. I have become aware of how white is operating in my latest paintings and how the fragile nature and the restrained elegance in the work is linked for me to Korean moderation in culture and art. This raised awareness coincided with my research into Lee Ufan's paintings and the unpicking of the difference between Western and Eastern attitudes towards gesture. I recently visited an exhibition at the *Lisson Gallery* by Lee Ufan (April 2015) and he says:

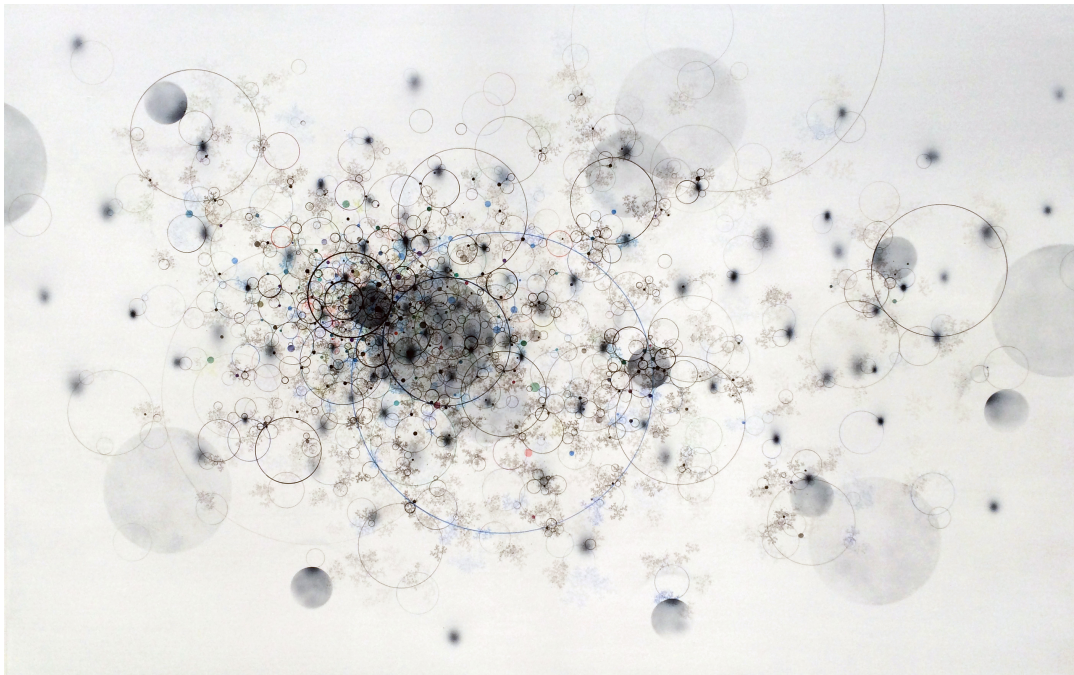
*I am drawn to the concept of infinity. In my case, the definition of infinity is close to the concept of nothingness. This is because the word infinity means limitless expansion of oneself or an unending circle.*  
(quoted in Mudima, 2007)

The exhibition emphasises Ufan's relationship to Gesture, the body, how each brushstroke is applied slowly and in layers, focusing on the 'relationship of materials and perceptions rather than on expression or intervention' (*Lisson Gallery*, 2015). For me Lee Ufan's painting are saturated with the aesthetics of moderation, each repetitive action being ritualistically controlled over a long period of time which reflects his connection to Korean traditional aesthetic.

The doctoral programme has enabled me to deepen my understanding of the possibilities in my creative practice and widened the perspectives of my approach to abstract paintings and the relevant theories that I have engaged with. Through the seminars, tutorials and interim shows, I have received valuable comments and feedback about my works. Experimenting with colour and using wet paint mediums has greatly influenced the direction of my new paintings, allowing for a less prescriptive methodology in the application and analysis of my practice, leading me to uncover and reveal the 'Aesthetics of Moderation'.

## Pre-viva Reflections

### Invisible Space: Exploring micro & macro space



(Fig. 49) Lee Kangwook (2015), *Invisible Space-15019*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 160 x 250cm

'*Invisible Space*', the title of this show, evokes for me the notion of a microscopic space, such as a cell or nerve tissue but which also has the potential to simultaneously symbolise a macroscopic space such as a solar system or galaxy.

This painting (Fig. 49) is one of last works I have made for my Professional Doctorate Viva Exhibition. I intended to adopt and combine my painting experiments with the theoretical research I have undertaken over the past three years, especially my experiments looking at my use of 'colour' and also the idea of 'repeated gesture'. From these experiments, I realised that I use colour as tone rather than colour itself, and my repeated gestural action in my practice is different from the Western concept of 'gesture'. I call the different ways I explore my subject

'moderation' and the whole process of my practice is symbolised by the term 'moderation'.

Eventually, I realised that I use colour as tone due to my interest in drawing, my emotional moderation, and my own cultural tradition. Particularly white is very important to me. White, which is embedded in Korean tradition and culture, has always been at the back of my mind whether I am aware of it or not. It's obvious that white remains in my paintings but has been tweaked in a range of modification during my whole working process, for example, making several layers with overlapping images transparently and erasing repetitively. The white is a creation in my paintings rather than a part left over, in keeping with the aesthetics in Korean traditional culture and art.

I have also experimented with repeated gestural actions in my new paintings, which were inspired by Korean Monochrome painting, '*Dansaekhwa*' and the artist Lee Ufan. I found this approach to be different from the characteristics of Western Monochrome painting. While in the Western context, for example in Cy Twombly's work, there is an emphasis on 'intentionality' of the 'gesture' and physicality, Lee Ufan's intention with 'gesture' is emphasised by repetitive action and records of time's perpetual passage. In particular, Korean gestural action becomes part of the work because every little brush stroke remains in the painting within the layers and layers of labouring work.

## Post-viva Reflections

### Whiteness and moderation

What I learnt during my doctorate was new methodologies that helped me portray my subjects and realise the nature of my practice by clarifying my personal position. I tried to develop and expand my practice in many different ways along with theoretical research. From tutorials, seminars and interim shows, I started to challenge the way I engaged with my practice, especially the experiments with colour and the concept of gesture. After these experiments, I realised that I mainly focused on tones in colour and the repeated gestural action in my practice was different from the Western concept of 'gesture'.

I came see the whole process of my practice, and the different ways I explore my subject are symbolised by the idea of 'moderation'. Eventually, moderation became central to my work. I used moderation as a critical term that defined my work. I also thought that the title of my final report, 'the aesthetic of Moderation', represented my unique position in regard to abstraction in contemporary practice. Although this is not an established term in art theory, moderation was the most appropriate word that encapsulated my personal and cultural tradition that were the source of my work. This may reflect the nature of my personality or a general mood which is close to 'calm and polite'. I believe that my introspective personality was the determinant of my moderate attitude that was embraced metaphorically in my practice.

I also realised that the approach of moderation relates also to my approach to gesture. While in the Western context, for example in Cy Twombly's work, there is an emphasis on 'intentionality' and 'physicality' of the gesture, my gesture takes a quite different approach. Repetitive actions and their records (traces) on a painting occur very slowly over a long period of time. In particular, my controlled gestural brush stroke remains and floats in the painting within the layers and layers of labouring work. Signifying the repeated gestural and labouring actions, as well as

holding back from uncontrolled expression, moderation means the negotiation with improvisatory expression, and is the method to present my subject and my aesthetics of restraint and control.

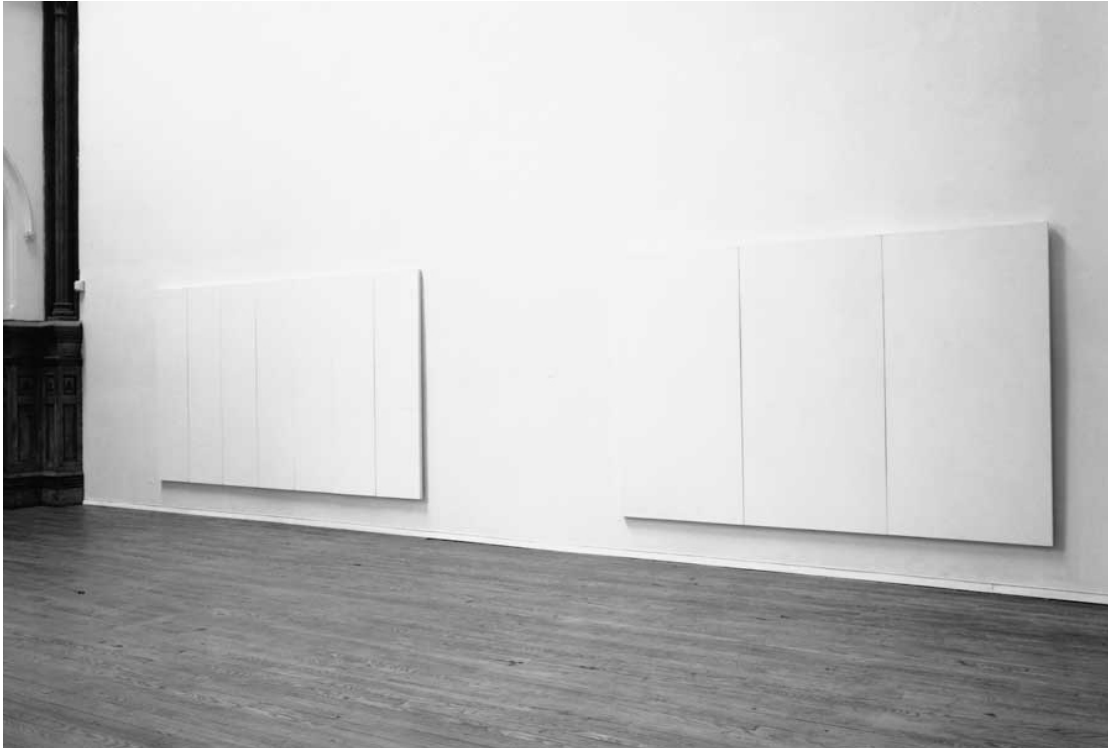
This quality of reservation is related to Korean traditional aesthetic that emphasises the status neither of a hyperbole nor minimalism. In Korean philosophy, 'moderation', taking a middle ground and avoiding extremism, has been a golden rule that built up a unique cultural attitude through its broader interpretation including 'taking a step back', 'take your time', 'rather go the other way round', 'reserve your hasty mind', etc. These attitudes appeared across cultural heritage and in language, such as adages familiar to many Koreans, for example, 'Haste makes waste' or 'The longest way round is the shortest way home'.

In regard to the means of moderation, I realised I used colour in a way that is connected with my personality and traditional elements of my culture. Rather than using the full potential of colour, I mainly used colour as tone. David Batchelor insists that colour is linked to the cultural tradition of a society. I have come to realise that white is very important to me and that the use and meaning of white in my practice within Korean art is very different from its associations and uses in Western art.

In Western art, white is represented as one of the strongest colours in itself. Especially, in monochromatic painting and Minimalism, white has the capacity to mediate. White colour is sometimes used as blank canvas, symbolising 'empty space' or 'emptiness'. For example, Robert Rauschenberg created his '*White Paintings*' (Fig. 50), in the tradition of monochromatic painting, whose purpose was to reduce painting to its most essential nature. They appeared at first to be essentially blank, white canvases.

*Rauschenberg's primary aim was to create a painting that looked untouched by human hands, as though it had simply arrived in the world fully formed and absolutely pure. Considered shocking and even characterized as a cheap swindle when they were first exhibited publicly in 1953, the White Paintings have gradually secured a place in art history*

as important precursors of Minimalism and Conceptualism. Among the most radical aspects of the series is that these works were conceived as remakeable: Rauschenberg viewed them primarily as a concept and allowed for the physical artworks to be repainted and even refabricated from scratch without his direct involvement. (Roberts, 2013)

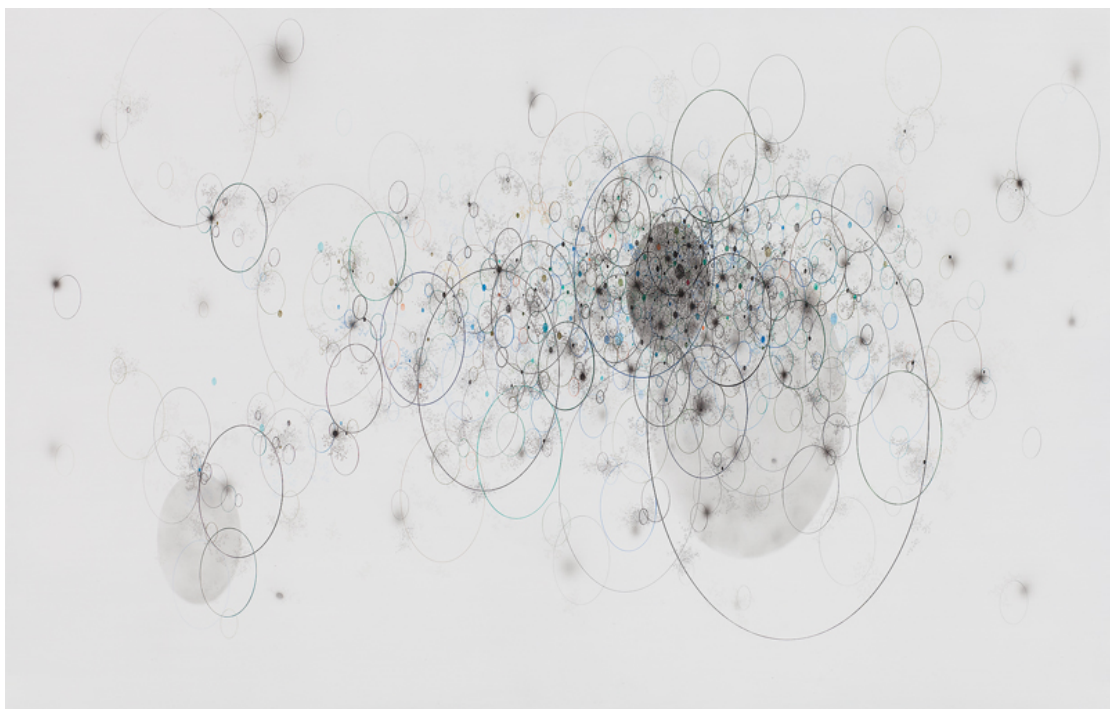


(Fig. 50) Robert Rauschenberg (1951), *White painting* [three panel], latex paint on canvas

By contrast, the white tone of '*Hanji*', Korean traditional paper, is left as a background with translucent layers of brush strokes of Chinese ink. Moreover, the white is emphasised in Korean Monochrome painting, '*Dansackwha*', symbolising the Korean nationality and making many transparent spaces between multiple layers with repetitive gestural brushstrokes. (Fig. 51)



(Fig. 51) Lee Ufan (1951), *With Wind*, oil on canvas, 182 x 227 cm



(Fig. 52) Lee Kangwook (2015), *Invisible Space-15018*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 160 x 250 cm

*Invisible Space* (Fig. 52) is one of the last works I have made for my Professional Doctorate viva exhibition. I had collected an array of plant cell images from science books and also I looked at a range of associated cosmological images that

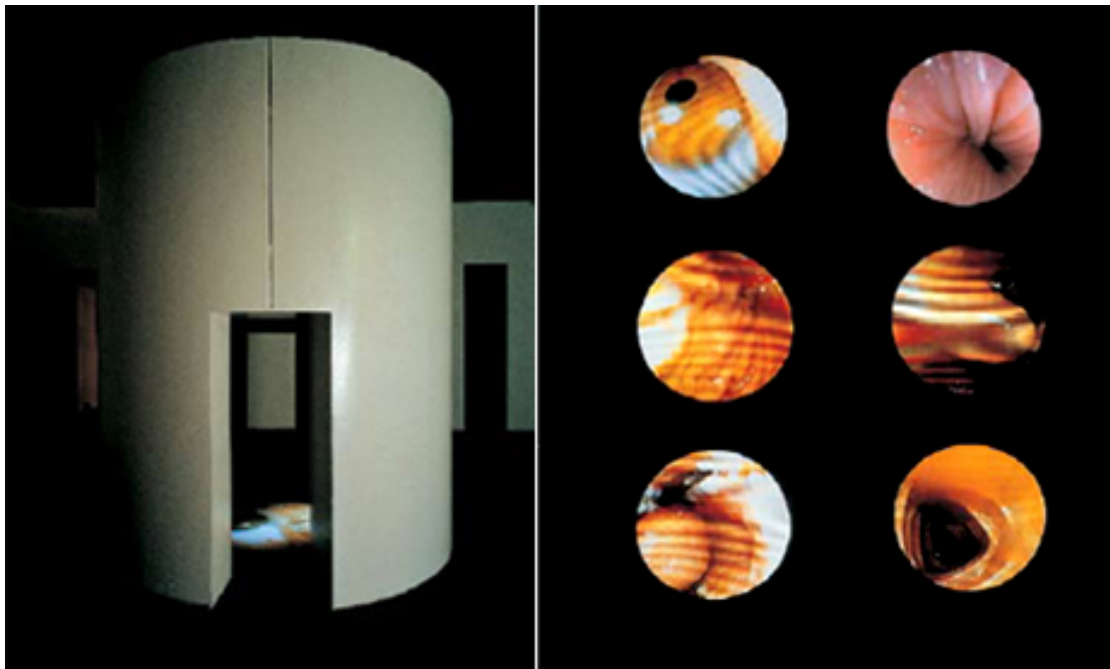


provided the starting point to inform drawings I made in preparation for the painting. This painting went through a process of several stages that for a long time I have used to produce my works. When I started the painting I first coated a blank canvas several times with transparent acrylic mediums to reduce the canvas texture for a smooth finish and I attempted to make a surface that had a deep, and intense empty spatial quality, almost haptic in its underlying essence. After this first series of coatings, I then spread an acrylic pigment with an airbrush over the top to create what I hope will be a blur, as if something exists below the surface. White always existed in my painting as background, and as translucently veiling the image. Then I started to draw on this levelled yet dense surface with coloured pencils. The pencil drawing at times was done very fast without any restrictions. At other times I might work very slowly with very small white stains and minute brush strokes as I started to build different layers within the work, expanding the capacity of the whiteness. The white was deeply embedded in my painting for the whole working process which involved repetitive erasing, layering and veiling, symbolising, for me, an ultimate infinite empty space and the depth of breath.

## Contemporary Practice

Before I came to Britain, I was an established artist in Korea and Japan with more than ten solo exhibitions as well as many diverse art projects. However, I wanted more experience of different parts of the world and came to London. It allowed me to learn about the contemporary European art world. I pushed myself to extend my boundaries and challenge my practice while I was engaged with various research projects and experiences in the UK.

Studying at Chelsea College from 2010 to 2011 helped me learn how my practice could be situated in the contemporary art field. I investigated the different perspectives of paintings and methodologies between Eastern and Western artists regarding how they have reflected their own identities and personalities towards the world and art.



(Fig. 53) Mona Hatoum, *Corps Etranger* (1994), video installation / endoscopies

I started to wonder how I could express my understanding of this difference in my examination of Western artists' exhibitions. Mona Hatoum was the first

artist I studied. She has presented 'myself in me' very vividly using an endoscope in order to explore her body.

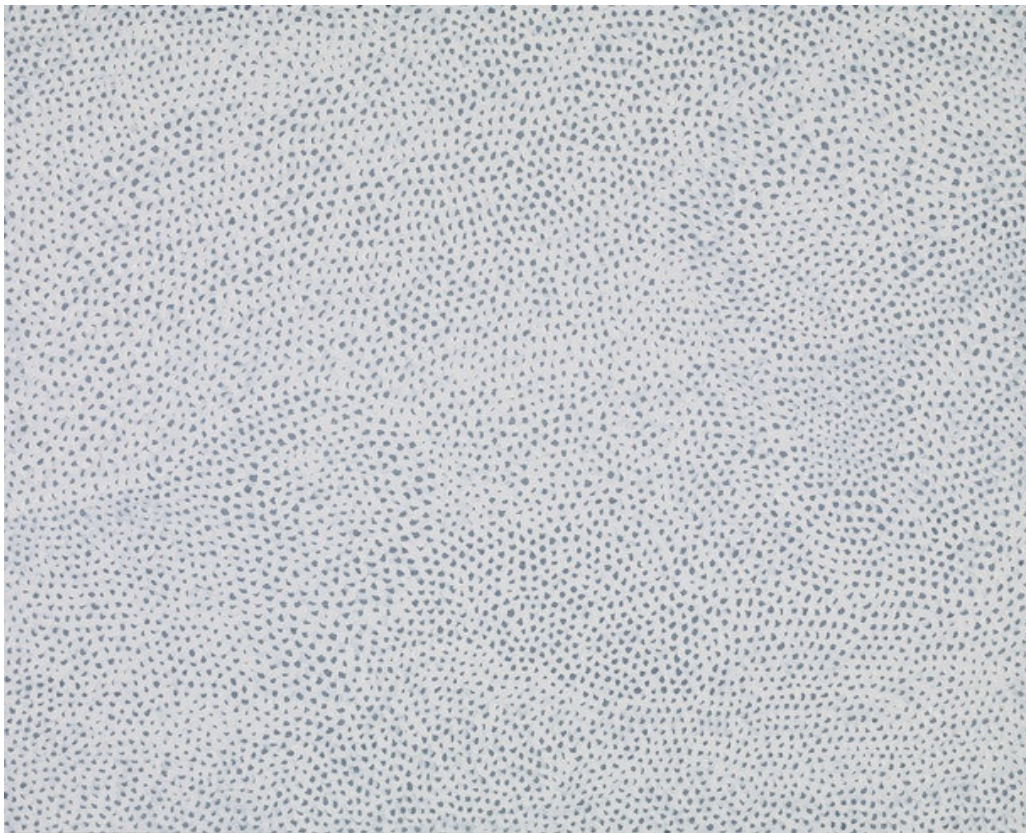
Hatoum shows the audiences that a part of the body could be used as material for art by enlarging small spaces such as organs, tissues or hairs through her video installations and sculptures. This idea of using a small space of her body as the subject of Hatoum's work appears to be similar to the approach I have taken in my work. However, I was very surprised by her video installation works, '*Corps Etranger*' (in 1994) at the Whitechapel gallery in 2011 because Mona Hatoum's work had such a huge impact on me as if I had to face 'me in myself' and created a sense of uncanny experience. (Fig. 53)

I noticed that the 'abject art' articulated in Western language might have been seen as aggressive, or even detested, by the Eastern tradition. This direct and unfamiliar style of Western art sometimes was difficult to comprehend and made me extremely uncomfortable. I realised that the ways of expression between Western and Eastern art have a bigger gap than I had ever imagined. This profound difference of approach between Western and Eastern art somehow made my paintings seem moderate, calm and even polite.

After my graduation from Chelsea in 2011, I undertook two solo exhibitions in London in 2012 as well as art collaborations with a company and some commissions. My solo exhibitions at *Asia House*, international non-profit space in Cavendish Avenue, and *Hada Contemporary Gallery* in Vyner Street were events where I became more aware of the influence of my cultural background as an international Korean artist. From feedback from the audience at the shows, I realised that my moderate Eastern way of expression is reflected in my painting which showed a calm and polite mood combined with a delicate and fragile nature. At that time, I also realised that I needed to adopt and combine the style and technique of Western artists as it opened me up to the arena of international and contemporary art. Around that time, I was accepted by University of East London onto the doctorate programme.

During my doctorate, I tried to develop and expand my practice in many different ways along my research into western contemporary artists and theories. In parallel

with this, my primary concern as an international artist was to develop and extend my practice into the contemporary art world. I learnt critical thinking especially with regard to my own practice in relation to contemporary art such as many the major retrospective exhibitions in London by Yayoi Kusama, Lee Ufan and Agnes Martin among others. Despite the fact that I have been living in London for almost five years, the ideas of underlying 'personality' and 'identity' are always in my practice and it became clear for me to see where my work is situated in, and related to, the Western and contemporary art arenas.



(Fig. 54) Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Nets* (2012), Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas, 130 x 162 cm

At the exhibition of Yayoi Kusama at Tate in 2012, I saw her '*infinity Net*' paintings (Fig. 54), made up of carefully repeated arcs of paint built up into large patterns. I was very engaged by her paintings and installations because of the fact that her works always reflected her identity as an 'outsider' in many contexts – as a female artist in a male-dominated society; as a Japanese person in the Western art world; and as a victim of her own neurotic and obsessional symptoms. I investigated how

her interests are explored and her personal identity, is exposed in her works. I was surprised by the notion that we have a similar approach, especially with her concern with an Asian viewpoint and *Upanishad* concept that I already researched before as a philosophical approach.

*In the Asian view of the cosmos — in particular, the ancient Indian cosmology of the Vedic period — the fundamental principle of the universe involves that of Brahman, enveloping the entire cosmos, and Atman, the self, with the two connected by an invisible energy; while the unification of Brahman and Atman allows an escape from reincarnation and the endless cycle of life and death. This is an idea widely accepted by Brahmanism, Hinduism and the Jains. In Buddhism, however, though the idea of reincarnation and escape from its cycle by attaining nirvana is accepted, the Buddha stressed the cosmic connectedness of all things as causal interdependence, or pratītyasamutpāda. This way of thinking, which views human existence, consciously or unconsciously, as one part of the whole of creation believes in an invisible connectedness or relationship of cause and effect, and could also be described as the spatial concept underlying everything Eastern. (Kataoka, 2011)*

I become aware that this can be related to my recent developments on theoretical research about western artists and the art field. Across her paintings, similar technique appears such as white base monochromatic paintings and repeated small gestural brush strokes. This technique is seemingly found in many oriental paintings and may be regarded as a uniquely Eastern style. Ever since I started my doctorate programme and professional work in the UK, I always had a sense of difficulty in which I was so much aware of the difference and unfamiliarity of Western art from the traditional art I grew up with. This sense of conflict drove me to try harder to discover my own way.

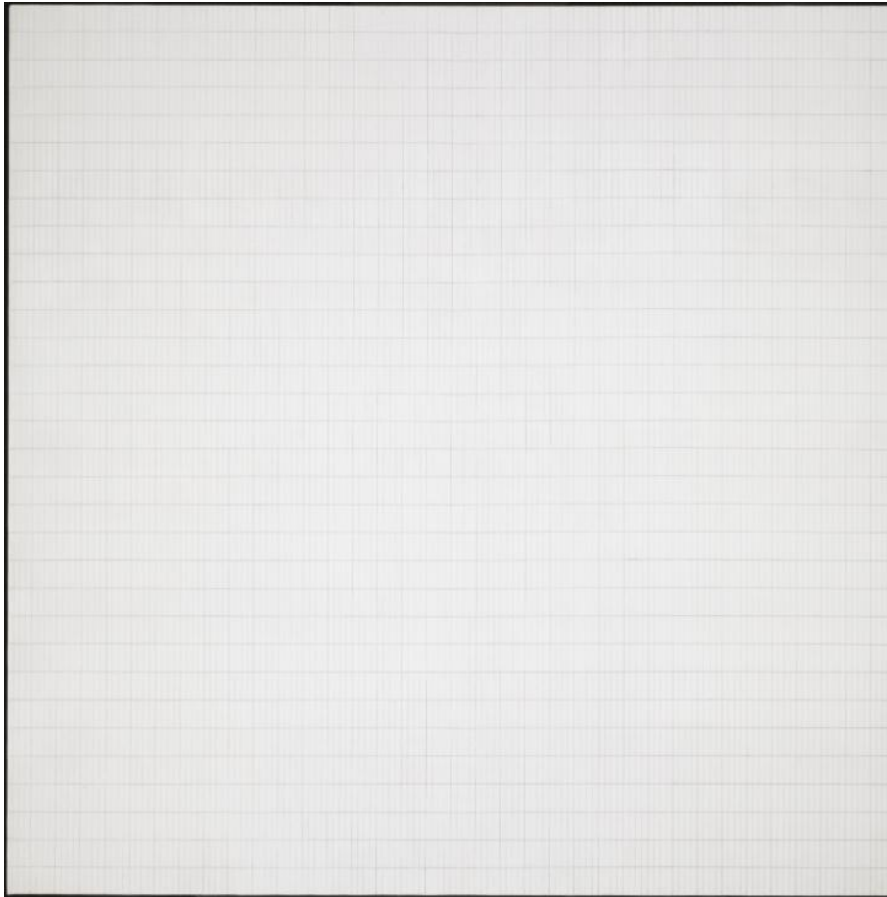
I believe this effort has led me to discover my own style that is unique yet rooted in my culture which I found from my research on Lee Ufan and Korean monochrome painting, *Dansaekhwa*. I attempted to experiment with different Korean ways in my recent paintings and this was demonstrated in my exhibition at the *Tokyo Gallery* in

Tokyo in 2014, inspired by Lee Ufan and his painting, especially, Lee Ufan's solo exhibition at the *Lisson Gallery* in London in May in 2015. In regard to his most recent series of *Dialogue* paintings and watercolours, the curator of *Lisson Gallery* explained:

His recent works are economically composed of singular sweeps of paint, each built up over an extended period of time through an accretion of smaller stroke. The brush gradually unloads, the mark lightening towards immateriality as he drags it across the surface of canvas or paper, each repetition being ritualistically controlled by Lee's held breath. (Lisson Gallery, 2015)

I realised that Lee Ufan uses his own ways of expression to explore his subject such as 'emptiness' or 'infinity'. I also become conscious of my different ways of appreciating an infinite world through the minute part of my inner self, rather than through the external features of the surroundings.

Most recently, I saw Agnes Martin's exhibition at the Tate Modern. I was fully engaged by her evocative paintings, especially delicate abstract painting marked out in subtle pencil lines and pale colour washes. I found that her journey from experiments with biomorphic forms towards formal abstraction was related to the working process I have experimented with. Moreover, simple geometric forms such as squares, rectangles and circles as well as a range of linear marks and dots were repeated across the surface and this method is similar to that of Korean Monochrome paintings.



(Fig. 55) Agnes Martin, *Morning* (1965), Acrylic paint and graphite on canvas, 182 x 182 cm

In *Morning*, (Fig. 55) Martin pencilled the grid in graphite or coloured pencil on painted canvases, blurring the distinction between painting and drawing. She used small amounts of painting and her pencilled lines are fine, assuming a subtle unevenness. (Tate Modern, 2015)

Martin's silent painting with fine lines and subtly nuanced surface have a similar atmosphere with a surface of translucent layers to my recent paintings. According to the Exhibition leaflet, these are seen to convey a contemplative quality, indicating Martin's interest in East Asian philosophy and spirituality.

What does painting highlight in contemporary art? Through my research, I realised that contemporary paintings especially abstract ones have diverse elements which deeply relate to the artists' personal and cultural experience. Whether its content is

concrete or not, an abstract painterly space is where potential images and events take place.

Looking back now at how I have used colour and experimented with repeated gestural actions, such as sprinkling, dropping, spreading wet paint and spraying pigments etc, I have come to realise that this is why I wanted to take part in the Professional Doctorate programme. I realise now I wanted to challenge my old habits and approach to my working process, which would not have happened without this experience. I have aimed to push the boundaries of my practice and to confront and investigate what informs my working process while taking this journey of discovery in the contemporary art world.



## **Professional Practice (2012-2015)**

### **Solo exhibitions**

*2014, Minimum vs. Maximum, Art Centre White Block, Korea, Paintings.*

Mainly 20 super size paintings will be exhibited. (4~5 meter length paintings)

*2014, Invisible Space, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, Paintings*

My latest abstract colour field paintings will be exhibited. Tokyo gallery is the leading contemporary gallery in Tokyo and works with many contemporary museums.

*2013, Invisible Space, Art On Gallery, Singapore*

Over 40 paintings were exhibited and almost works were sold.

2012, New painting of Lee kangwook, Asia House, London, UK

This exhibition was organised by Asia House where is an international non profit institute in London and 15 large paintings were exhibited.

2012, Untiled Paintings, Hada Contemporary, London, UK

The large painting of eight metres and wall drawing.

### **Joint exhibitions**

2015, Lee Kangwook & Kim Byungjoo Exhibition, Gallery Lina, Seoul

My six latest abstract paintings will be exhibited with another Korean artist.

2012, Lee Kang-wook & Jeong Kuri Exhibition, GALLERY MANO, Seoul

My new eleven paintings were shown with another artist from Korea.

## **Selected Group exhibitions**

2015, Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

The largest international showcases of Asian contemporary art and this is organised by director of Art Basel. Nine paintings were exhibited.

2014, Thank you 20 x 20, Gallery Mano, Seoul, Korea, Paintings

Six paintings were exhibited with eleven artists from Korea.

2014, Power of Five Young Artists

Two large paintings were exhibited with five emerging artists of Korea.

2014, Asia Hotel Art Fair Hong Kong, Marco Polo Hongkong Hotel, Hongkong

International Art Fair: Four paintings were exhibited with twenty four artists from Korea.

2014, Showcase, AVA Gallery, London

Interim Show: Six small painting were exhibited in University.

2014, Mano's Collection, Gallery Mano, Seoul

Collection Show of Mano Gallery: Two paintings were collected and exhibited.

2014, Korea and Japan Contemporary Art Exhibition, Gallery Kubota, Tokyo

Exchange Exhibition of Korea-Japan Artists: One painting was exhibited.

2014, Ode to youth, Hongik Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea

Korea-China Young Artists Exhibition: Two paintings were exhibited with forty artists

2014, Korea International Art Fair(KIAF), Coex Hall, Seoul

International Art Fair: Five paintings were exhibited with a large number of artists from over one hundred international galleries.

2014 Before Becoming Renowned, Gallery Mano, Seoul

Two large paintings before being Established as an artist were exhibited.

2014 Sarangbang(Library · Reception Room), Art Space Laheen, Seoul

With the concept of Korean Traditional space, one large painting.

2014 Seoul Art Show, Coex Hall, Seoul

International Art Fair: Five paintings were exhibited and two paintings were sold.

2013, Surface, Chelsea Futurespace, London

Two paintings were exhibited with seven artists, alumni from Chelsea College.

2013, Lee kangwook & Space, Space Mui Mui, Seoul, Korea, Installation

Installation: one thousand small paintings were exhibited.

2013, Showcase, AVA Gallery, London

Interim Show: Six small painting were exhibited in University.

2013, Korea International Art Fair, Coex hall, Seoul, Korea, Paintings

International Art fair: One large painting was shown.

2013, Generation, Hongik Museum of Art, Seoul, Korea, Paintings

Two paintings were exhibited with twenty four artists from Korea.

2012, R.E.D(Reality Equals Dream), Art On Gallery, Singapore

Four paintings were exhibited with twenty artists from abroad.

2012, An Exhibition of Korean Contemporary Art, Moorhouse Gallery, London

Four paintings were exhibited with six artists from Korea.

2012, Korean Collective Milan, Barbara Frigerio Contemporary Art, Milan, Italy

Eleven paintings were exhibited with five artists from Korea.

## **Commissions**

2014, Korea East-West Power co., Lt., Ulsan, Korea

A Lagre Painitng over twenty metres was installed in the main lobby.

2014, LS Industrial Systems Co. Lid., Seoul, Korea

Two large paintings over three metres were installed in the main lobby.

2014, Hyodoro Senior Care Centre, seoul, Korea

Three big paintings were installed in the centre.

2012, SamSung Hotel, Geoge, Gyeongsangnamdo, Korea

A large painting over three metres was installed in the main lobby.

2012, Samsung Medical Center, Seoul, Korea

One painting was installed in the Health Promotion Centre.

## **Collections**

2015, LS Industrial Systems Co. Lid., Korea

Two big paintings were collected by LS Industrial Systems Co. Lid.

2014, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea

One Lagre painting were collected by this contemporary museum.

*2014, Art Centre White Block, Korea*

*One Paintings* were collected by this Contemporary Museum.

2014, Severance Hospital, Seoul, Korea.

Ninety small paintings were collected by this hospital.

2014, Ulsan District Court, Ulsan, Korea

Two big paintings were collected by Ulsan District Court.

2013, Kasco, Korea

Twenty paintings were collected by Global Kasco Group.

## **Teaching**

2014, BA Special Lecture –Artist talk, Ducksung Women University, Korea

2014, BA & MA Drawing and painting, Hongik University, Korea

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## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1: My works during the doctorate (selected)**

**Appendix 2: Installation shots of exhibitions (selected)**

**Appendix 3: Private view cards and leaflets (selected)**

**Appendix 4: The Final Show for Viva (selected)**

## Appendix 1: My works during the doctorate (selected)

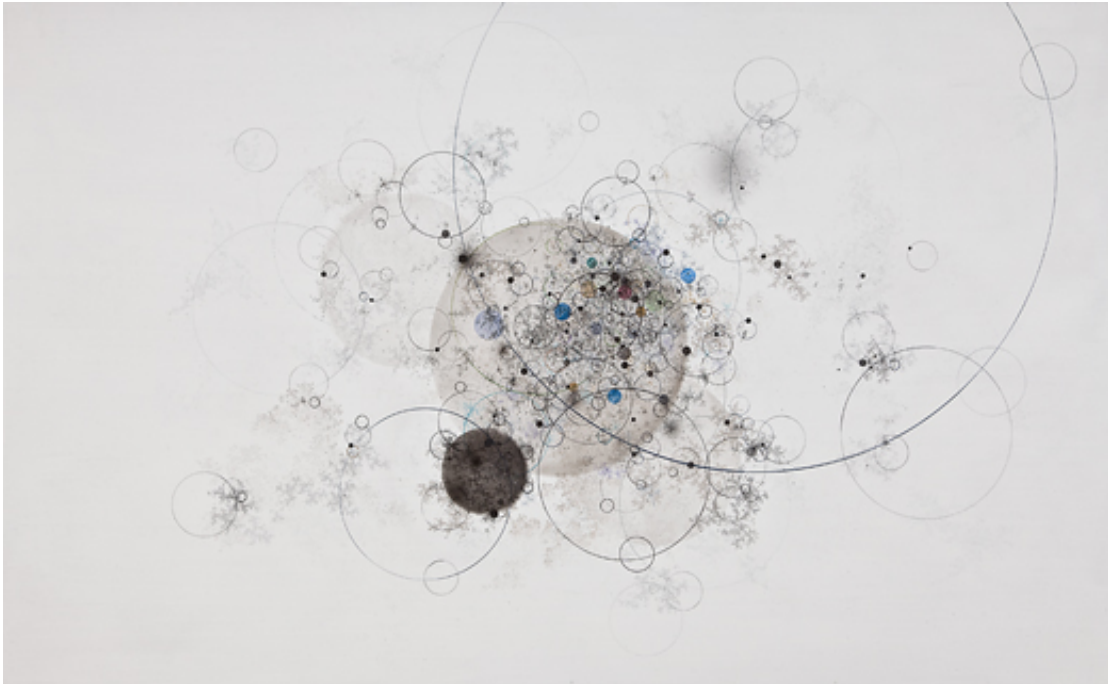
### Year 1



(Fig. 56) Untitled-12031, 95 x 160cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2012



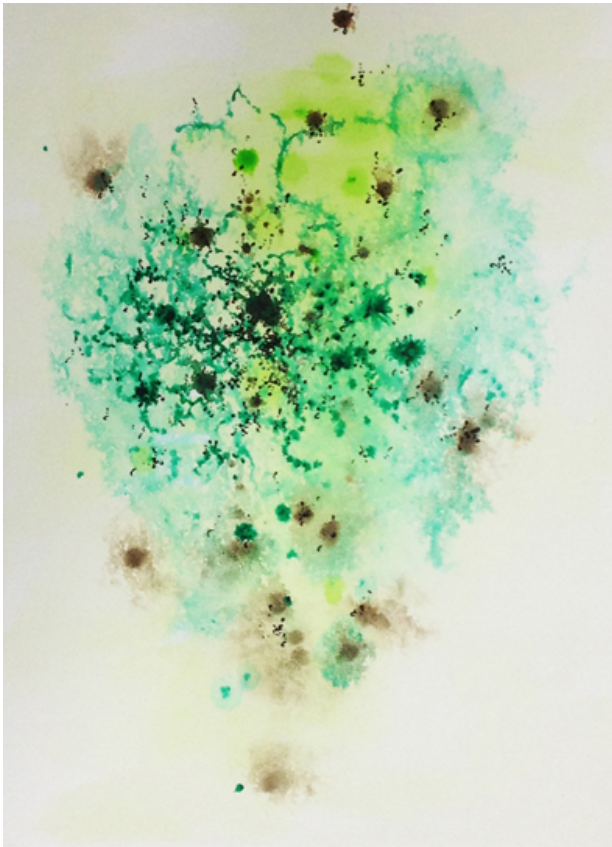
(Fig. 57) Detail/ Untitled-12031, 2012



(Fig. 58) Untitled-12051, 80 x 130cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2012



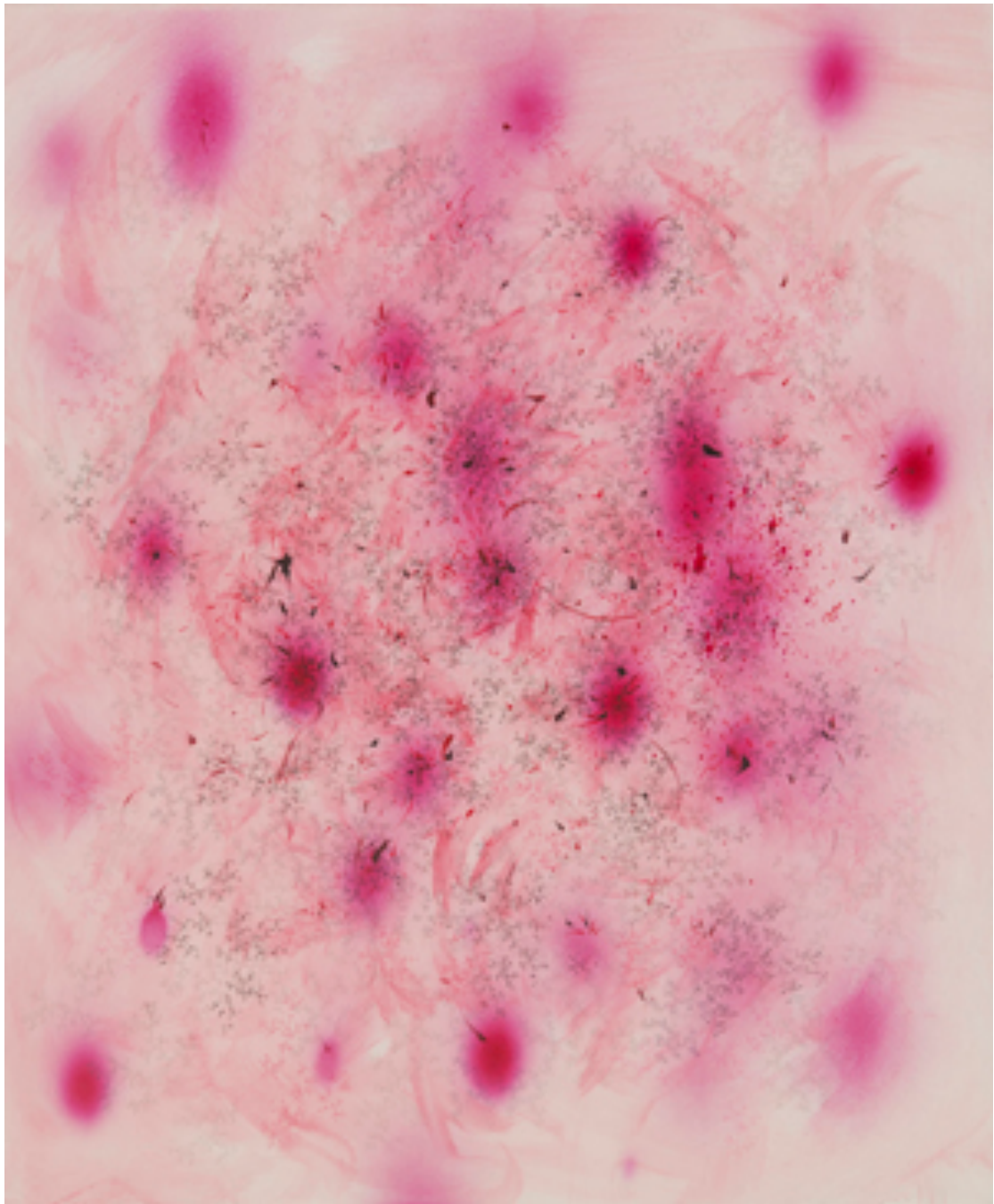
(Fig. 59) Untitled-12032, 95 x 160cm, Mixed Media on Canvas , 2012



(Fig. 60) Untitled-13004, 33 x 124cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2013

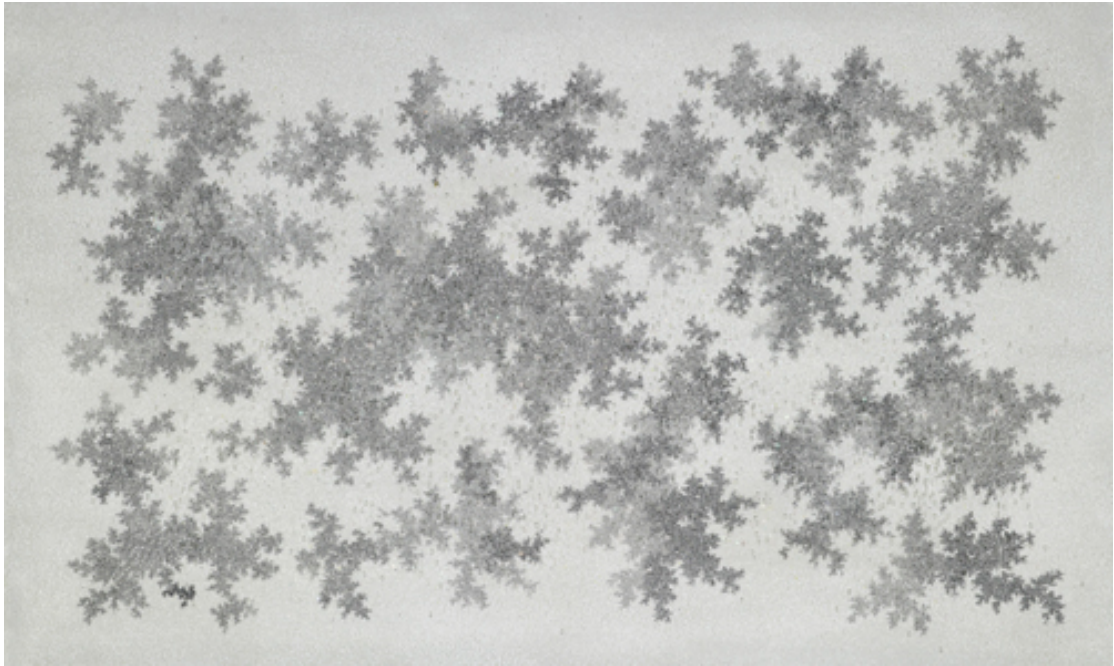


(Fig. 61, 62) Untitled-13005, 13006, 33 x 124cm, Mixed Media on Canvas , 2013

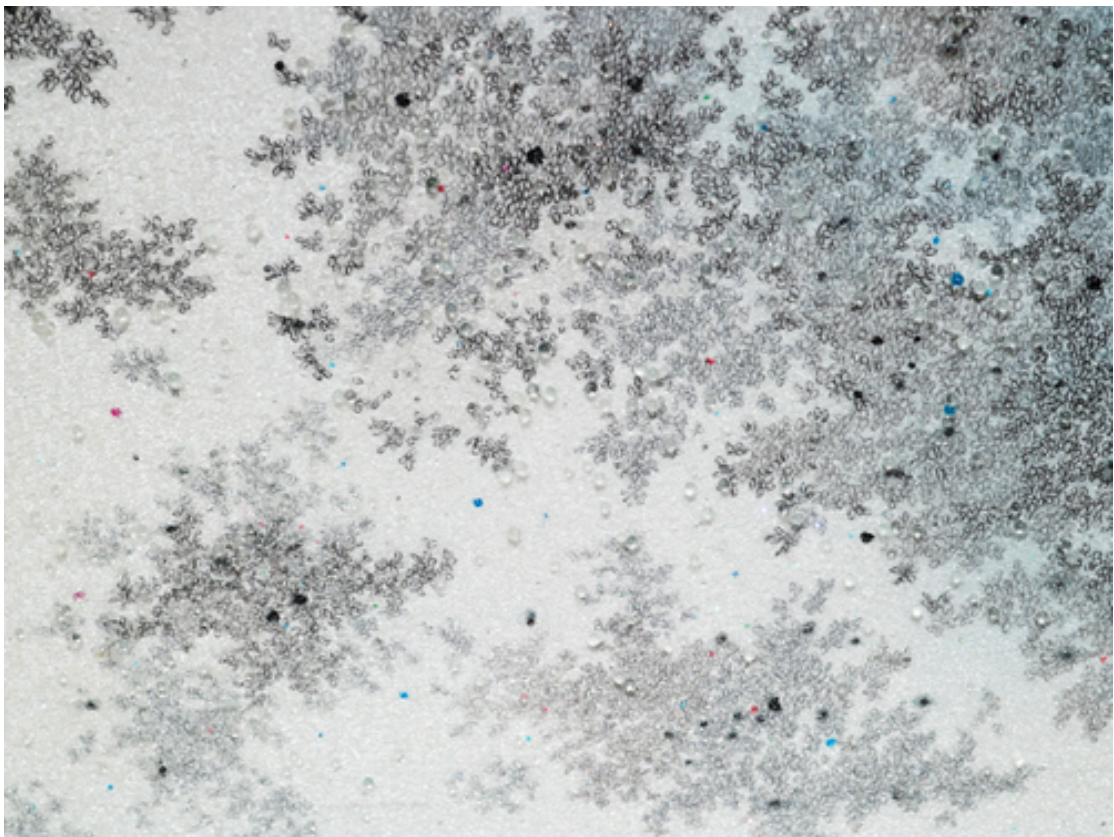


(Fig. 63) Untitled-13007, 61 x 51cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2013

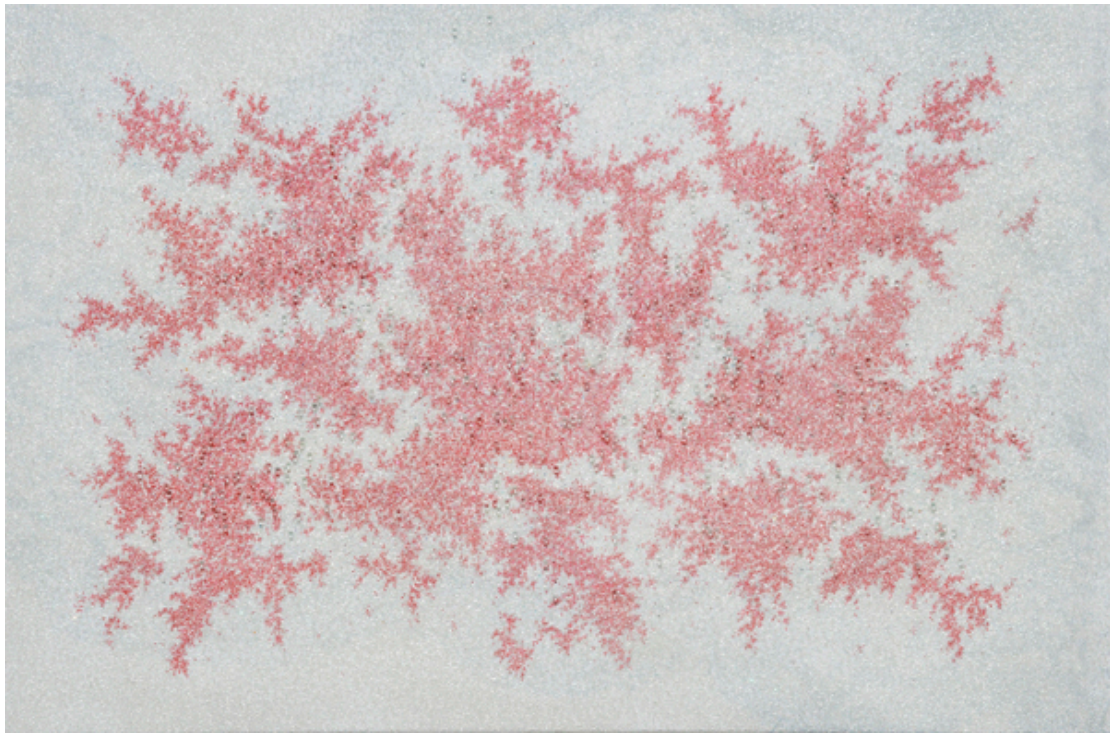
**Year 2, 3**



(Fig. 64) Invisible Space-Image 140231, Mixed Media on Canvas, 97 x 162cm, 2014



(Fig. 58) Detail (Invisible Space-Image 140231)

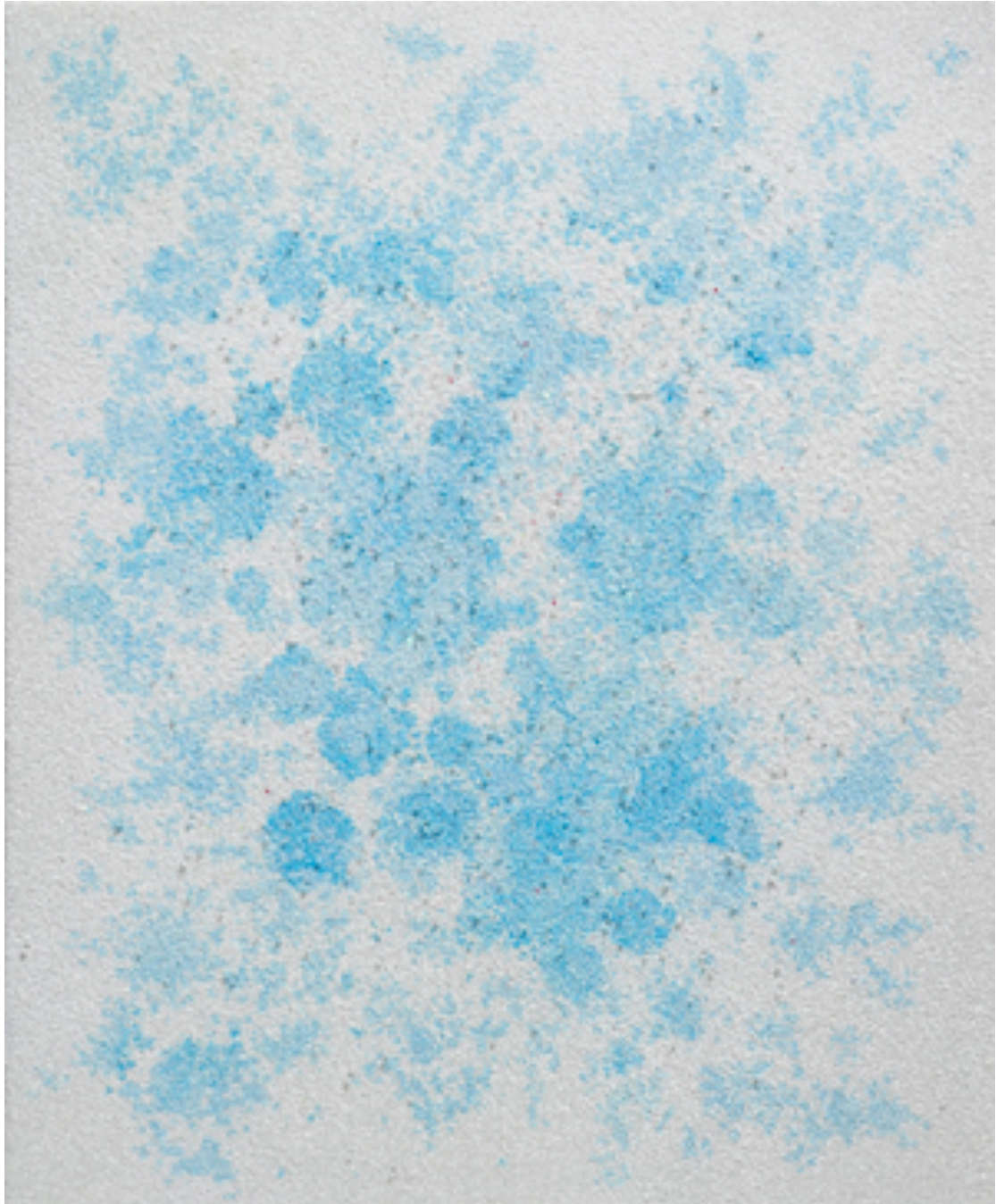


(Fig. 65) Invisible Space-Image 14001, Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 91cm, 2014



(Fig. 66) Detail (Invisible Space-Image 14001)





(Fig. 67) Invisible Space-Image 14105, Mixed Media on Canvas, 50 x 60cm, 2014



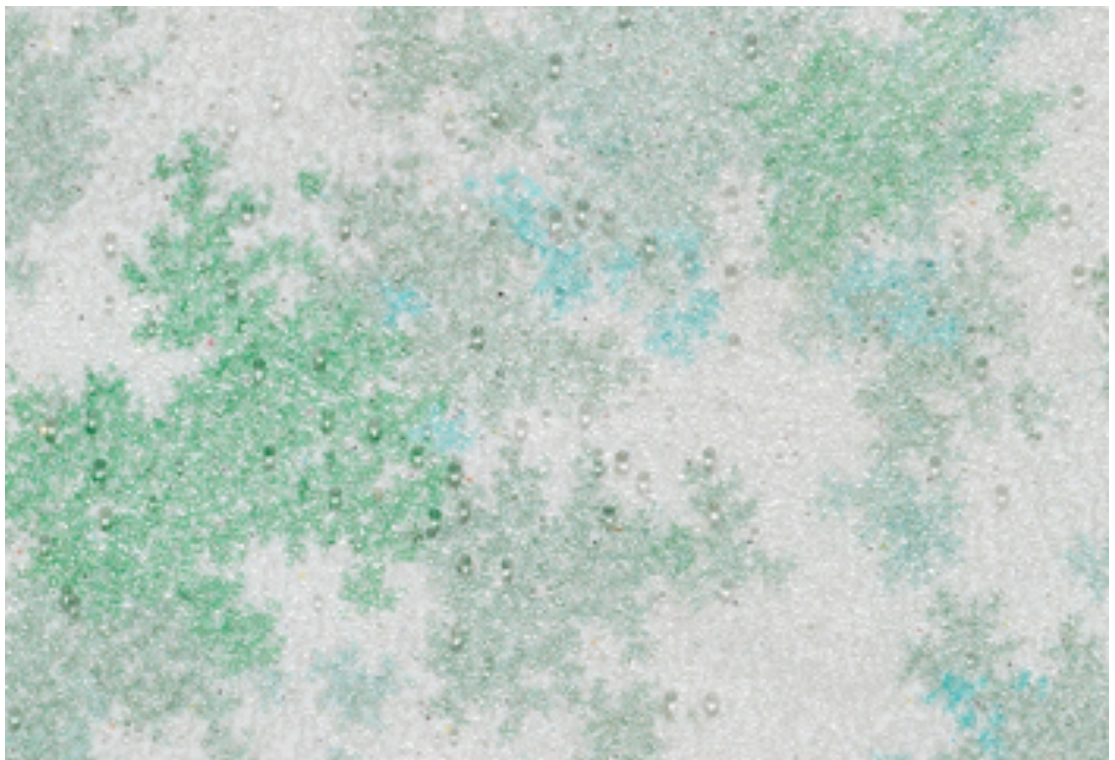
(Fig. 68) Invisible Space-Image 14109, Mixed Media on Canvas, 97 x 162cm, 2014



(Fig. 69) Detail (Invisible Space-Image 14109)



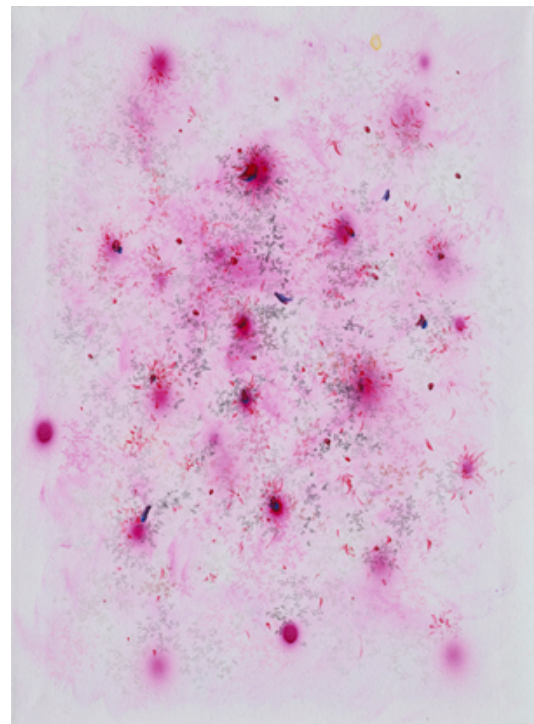
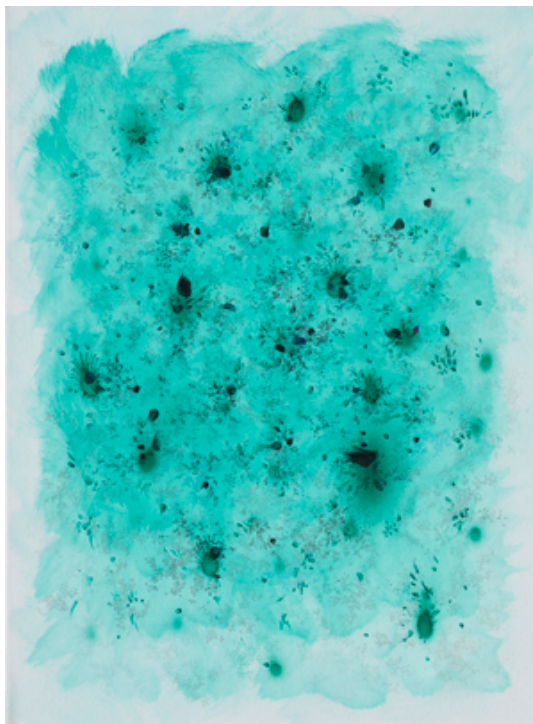
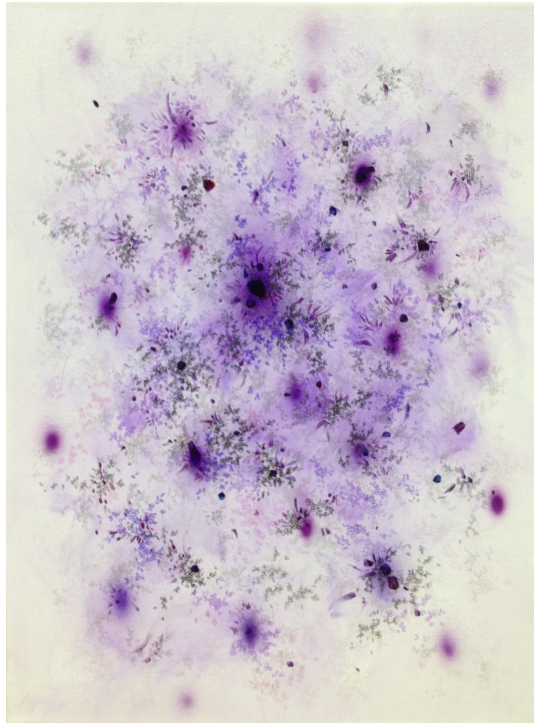
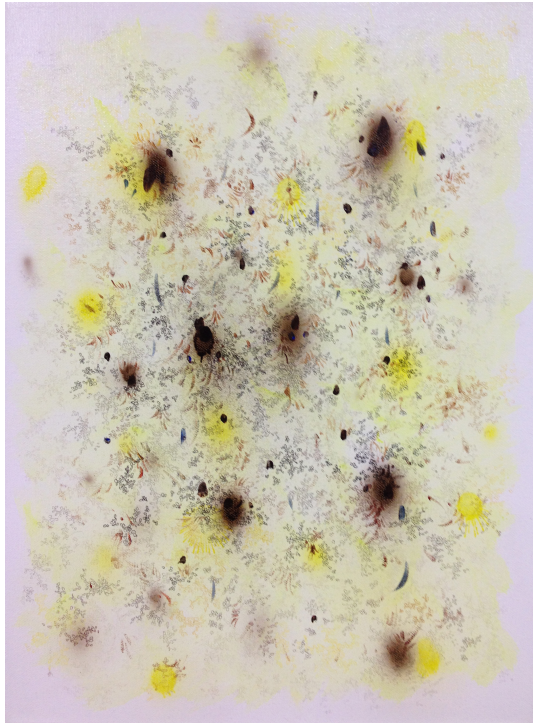
(Fig. 70) Invisible Space-Image 14113, Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 91cm, 2014



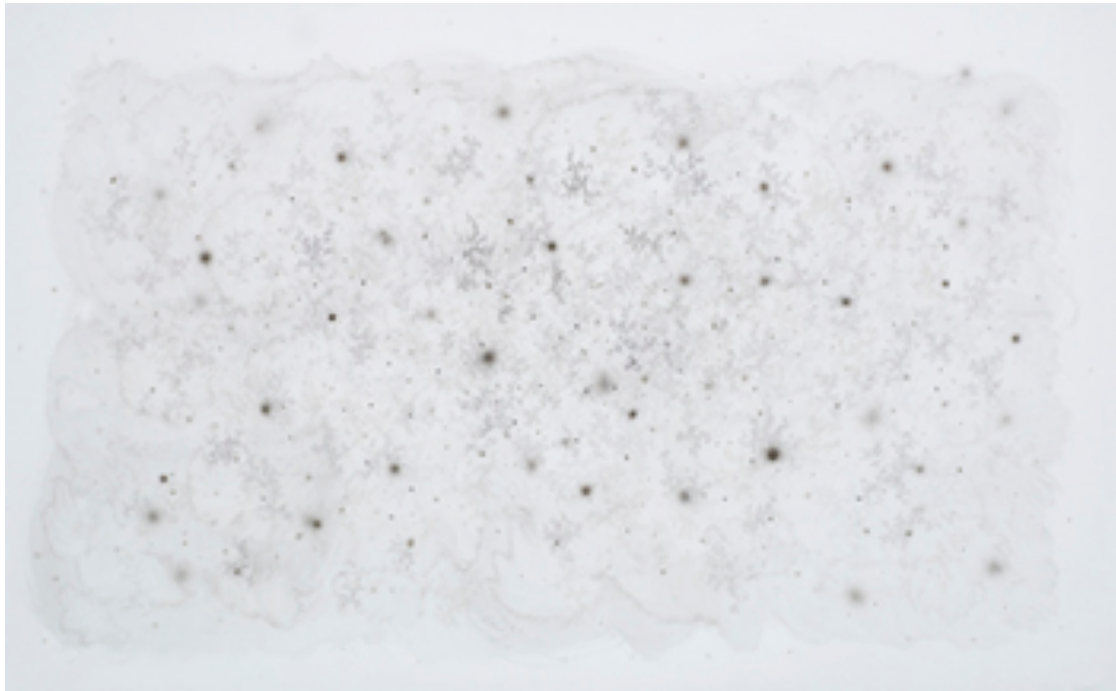
(Fig. 71) Detail (Invisible Space-Image 14113)



(Fig. 72) Untitled-15058, Mixed Media on canvas, 41 x 31cm, 2013



(Fig. 73, 74, 75, 76) Untitled-15053/ 13055/ 13047/ 13056, Mixed Media on canvas, 41 x 31cm, 2013



(Fig. 77) Untitled-14006, Mixed Media on canvas, 80 x 130cm, 2014



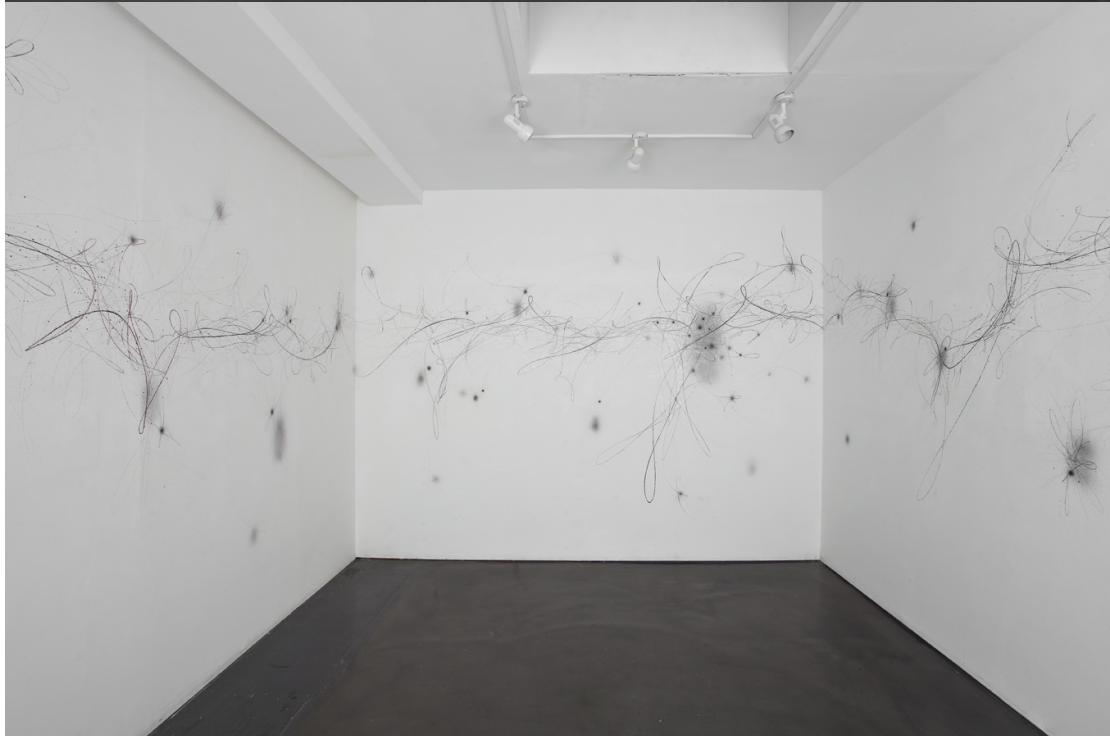
(Fig. 78) Untitled-14007, Mixed Media on canvas, 80 x 130cm, 2014

## Appendix 2: Installation shots of exhibitions (selected)

\* Solo Exhibition at Hada Contemporary in Vyner Street in London  
2012.10.4 – 2012. 10. 26 (Fig. 79, 80)



(Fig. 79)



(Fig. 80)



**\* Solo Exhibition at Art On Gallery in Singapore  
2013.12. 9 – 2013. 12. 20 (Fig. 81, 82)**



(Fig. 81)



(Fig. 82)

**\* Solo Exhibition at Art Centre Whiteblock in Heyri Art Valley in Korea  
2014. 2. 28 – 2012. 4. 27 (Fig. 83, 84, 85, 86)**



(Fig. 83)



(Fig. 84)



(Fig. 85)



(Fig. 86)

**\* Solo Exhibition at Tokyo Gallery in Tokyo, Japan  
2014. 4. 5 – 2014. 4. 26 (Fig. 87, 88, 89, 90)**



(Fig. 87)



(Fig. 88)



(Fig. 89)



(Fig. 90)

**\* Interim Show of second year at AVA gallery of UEL in London  
2014. 3. 3 – 2014. 3. 28 (Fig. 91)**



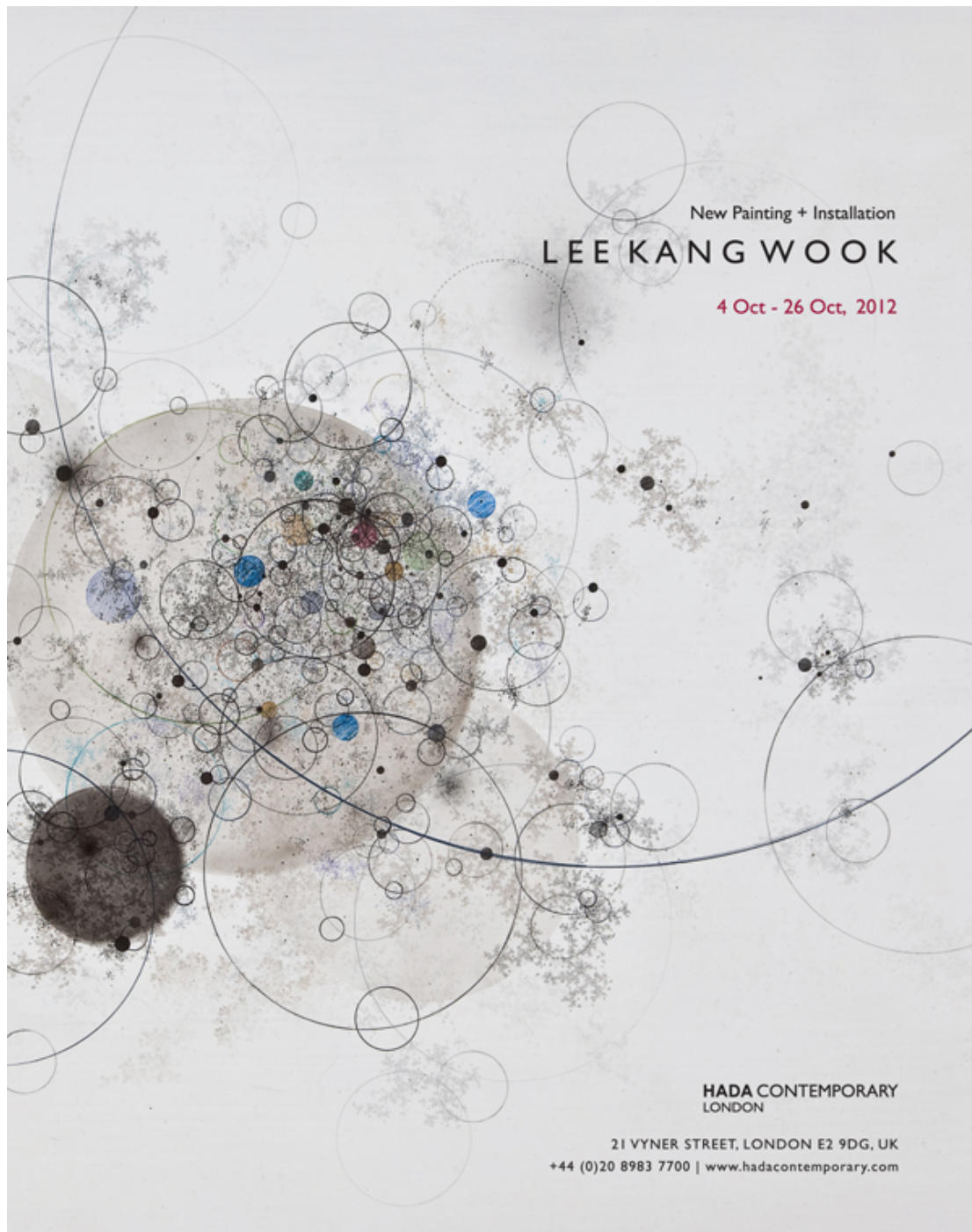
(Fig. 91)

**\* Showcase of second year at AVA gallery of UEL in London  
2014. 7. 1 – 2014. 7. 14 (Fig. 92)**



(Fig. 92)

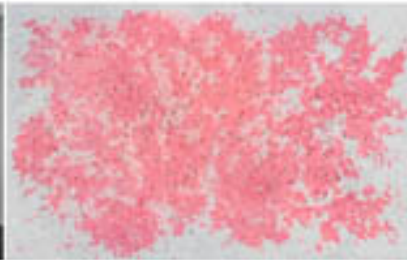
### Appendix 3: Private view cards and leaflets (selected)



(Fig. 93) Solo Exhibition at Hada Contemporary in Vyner Street in London  
2012.10.4 – 2012. 10. 26



Invisible Space – 2002, Mixed Media on Canvas, 61 x 91cm, 2002



## LEE KANG WOOK

Organized by artOn

### SOLO EXHIBITION - INVISIBLE SPACE

2013.12.9 – 2013.12.20

Lee Kang Wook has bachelor degree majoring in Fine Art and Art studies at College of Art, Hong Ik University in Korea. He also received Master degree in Modern Fine Art at the same university. He moved to London 5 years ago and studied MA Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art and Design. Currently, he is studying PhD at the University of East London and working as an artist simultaneously.

His first exhibition titled "Invisible Space" won a prize at the exhibition supporting contest of KEPCO Plaza Gallery and it was his first step to start his career as an artist. He attracted public attention by being awarded the grand prize at the 24th Joong Ang Fine Art Prize in 2002 and "Dong-A Fine Art Prize" at the Dong-A Fine Art Contest. Especially, he became the youngest artist who has been awarded "Grand Prize" at the biggest Fine Art contest in Korea.

His works are already possessed by many museums in Korea (Ho-Am Art Museum, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul Museum of Art), governmental institution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and public institution (Samsung Medical Centre, Hyundai Motor Company, LS Industrial System Company, LG Fashion Company, Kyowon Group, KASCO etc) as well as private collectors.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

OPENING HOURS 10am - 6pm

TEL 6611-8577

EMAIL [artongallery@gmail.com](mailto:artongallery@gmail.com)

ADDRESS 26 Farrer Rd, Hampton Bldg

Lobby B #03-02 Sutton Place

Singapore 268830

#### ARTIST DAY

2013.12.14 11am - 6pm

Artist talk will be held at 2pm.

Finger food and tea will be served all day.

Kindly RSVP by 11th December 2013

*For further information, please find the attached PDF file below.*

(Fig. 94) Solo Exhibition at Art On Gallery in Singapore  
2013.12. 9 – 2013. 12. 20





(Fig. 95) Solo Exhibition at Art Centre Whiteblock in Heyri Art Valley in Korea  
2014. 2. 28 – 2012. 4. 27



POST CARD

イ・ガンウク個展『Invisible Space』  
Lee Kangwook Solo Exhibition: Invisible Space

2014.4.5 (sat) - 4.26 (sat)

オープニングレセプション Opening reception

2014.4.5 (sat) 16:00-18:00

アーティストトーク Artist talk

2014.4.5 (sat) 19:00-19:00

観覧時間 一般 11:00 - 19:00 土 11:00 - 17:00

休館日 日、月、祭日

Gallery hours

Tuesday - Holiday 11:00 - 19:00

Saturday 11:00 - 17:00

Closed on Sundays, Mondays and holidays

東京画廊 BTAP

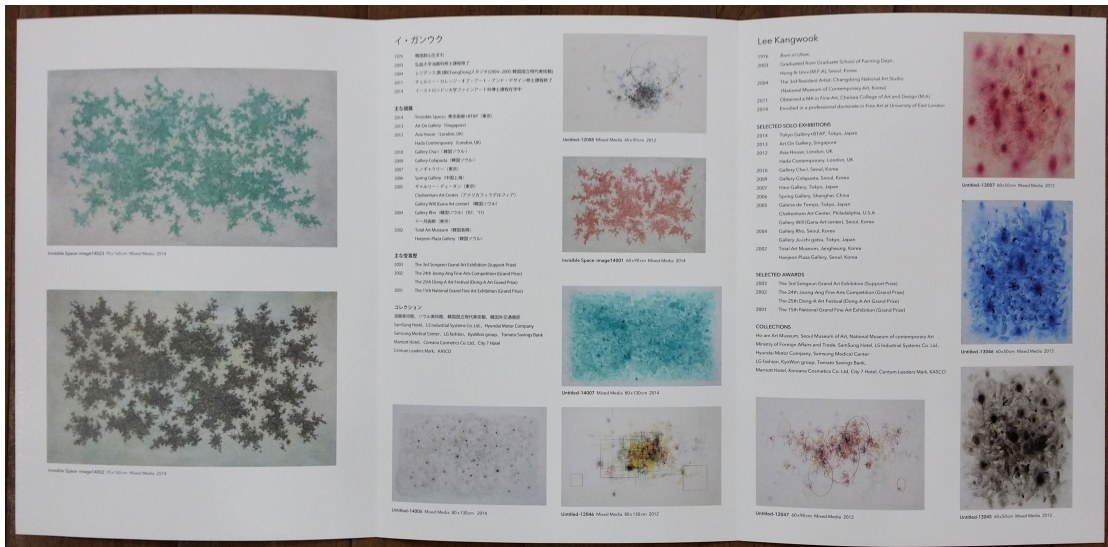
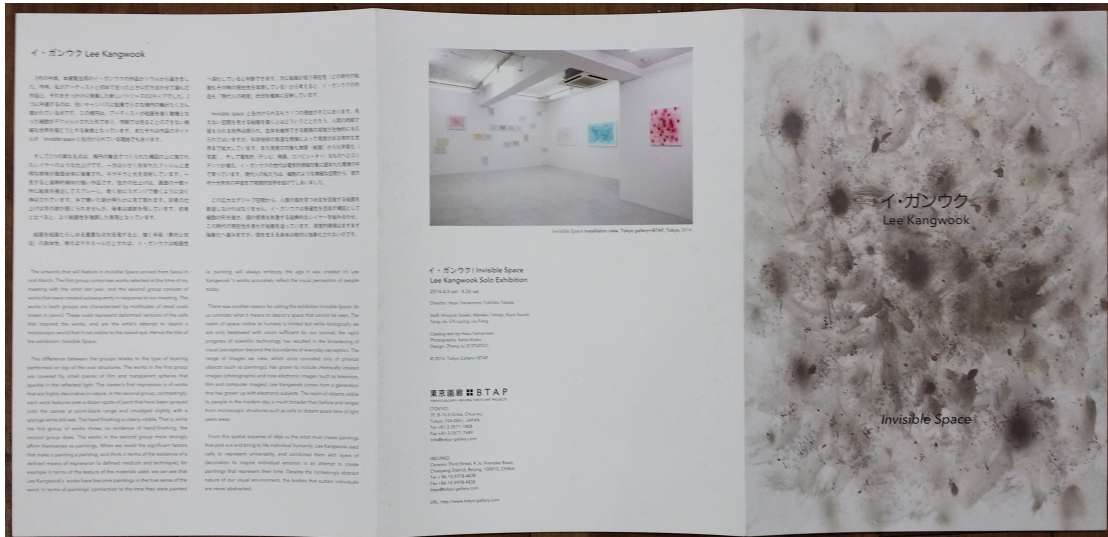
TOKYO GALLERY + BTAP TOKYO ART PRODUCTS

〒104-0041 東京都中央区銀座8-10-8, 7F

TEL 03-5561-1888 / FAX 03-5571-7888

www.tokyo-gallery.com / info@tokyo-gallery.com

Artist: Invisible Space (img: 1480)(2014)  
0.75 x 0.75 m (縦横: 横 x 縦) x 1.91 cm



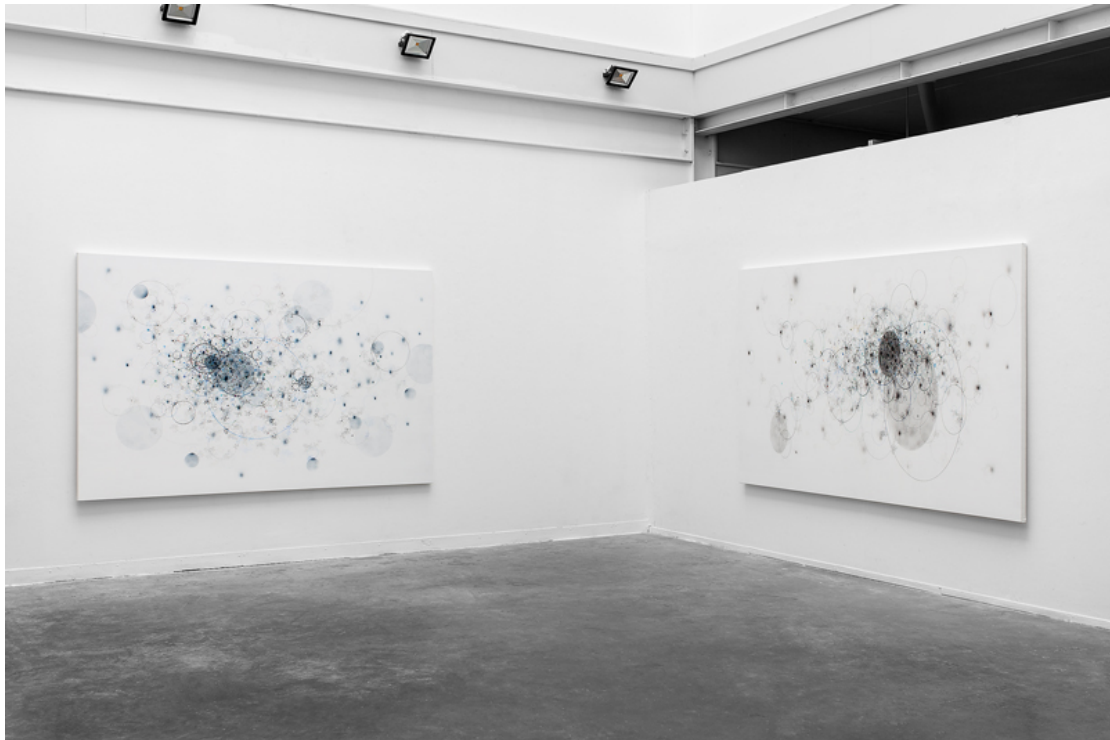
(Fig. 96, 97) Solo Exhibition at Tokyo Gallery in Tokyo, Japan  
2014. 4. 5 - 2014. 4. 26



(Fig. 98) Art Stage in Singapore (Art Fair)  
2015. 1. 22 – 2015. 1. 25



#### Appendix 4: The Final Show for Viva (selected)



(Fig. 100) The Final Show for Viva / 2015. 6. 19 – 2015. 6. 22



(Fig. 101) The Final Show for Viva / 2015. 6. 19 – 2015. 6. 22



(Fig. 102) The Final Show for Viva / 2015. 6. 19 – 2015. 6. 22



(Fig. 103) The Final Show for Viva / 2015. 6. 19 – 2015. 6. 22