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PAINT: IT IS PRE-OCCUPATION WITH SPACE

BY

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## SUMMARY

Painting and space are two terms often spoken of concurrently in the critique of painting. Some of the ways that painting has investigated space on and off the picture plane is by developing a pictorial language that manipulates surface, form and matter. Over time investigations into what painting can be has developed a visual language that is able to dip in and out of paintings tradition while persistent investigations into space within painting has allowed individual practice to branch into three-dimensions and perhaps further.

This enquiry begins with the Pre-Renaissance. This is an era within painting's history that is heavily laden with Religious iconography and the beginnings of Western Perspectival painting. Yet some of the paintings of this era are still able to engage me as a viewer physically, mentally and emotionally even now, centuries later. This response raised questions for me regarding the scope of painting's spatial occupation within art practice.

Lucio Fontana's claim that a spatial artwork is not reliant on form uncovers the notion that a spatial artwork should move freely through time and space. A focus on painting in its expanded field reveals how the manipulation of painting's spatial constructs is instrumental in the pursuit of a "truly spatial" artwork. Painting's expansion may have broadened its material and aesthetic possibilities, but at its core, painting has worked within its foundation as a practice that works with the tension between spatial reality and spatial illusion. Exploring this tension reveals how working within a system of contradictions can open a dialogue with the body that elicits affect. This enquiry also considers the implications of affect on an artwork's spatiality and its ability to supersede time and space to become "truly spatial."

The accompanying creative work to this enquiry engages with the notion that painting inherently engages with space. By using acrylic paint without the support of canvas or board, the works are able to engage with the qualities of the medium that bring it to life. These qualities include an exchange of energy in its manipulation, painting's binary existence as a surface for the interplay of reality and illusion, and its reality as matter in a state of flux.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with how painting's spatial constructs might engage the viewer to elicit the *affective dimension*. It is an enquiry tangential to my practice as a painter. My practice has circulated within a struggle to reconcile (or nurture) the incongruent relationship material has with space. I regard painting as a tradition that engages with the activity between spatial concepts by sitting in the privileged position, as a medium that can flirt with both two and three dimensions. This paper will sway between works by modern and contemporary artists who use the spatial tensions set up by painting's history and their chosen materials to affect the viewer and influence their spatial perceptions. I will reconcile my reading of Pre-Renaissance paintings spatiality through the frame of modern and contemporary painting critique. This will reveal that a paintings spatial engagement is embedded in its ability to marry opposing forces to stimulate tension within the work as well as the viewer. I will also examine how these notions have manifested within my own practice.

This investigation into painting and space began in Berlin in 2009 while taking part in an artist residency program in Friedrichshain. Given that the purpose of my trip was to immerse myself in the contemporary art and artists of Berlin, I was surprised to discover that the gallery I spent the most time in was the Pre-Renaissance collection at the Gemaldegalerie. The affect of these paintings, the feeling I gathered while looking at them, was not purely intellectual. It was consuming and held my gaze as well as my mind and body for a substantial amount of time. This struck me because I have always shied away from symbolism within my own practice and I know very little about the symbolism used within biblical painting. What seemed to arrest my focus was an indeterminable tension that had the capability to hold me completely, wavering between different thoughts, places, ideas, memories and feelings. The paintings that held my gaze varied in subject as well as in size, scale and medium. The Madonna and Child, The Crucifixion and other religious icons were equal in their affective hold. I spent a lot of time in this gallery just to be around these paintings, and their influence. It was an influence that I can perhaps only describe as an emotional and sensory space that was somewhat removed from the space I physically inhabited.

The figures were static and rigid, seemingly carved into the picture plane with line and colour, like figures from stone while their faces were placid, empty and languid. I know enough about the bible to know that it festers with tumultuous tales of treachery, violence, desolation and sorrow. These tales, indicated in the faces of the figures in the painting, were not felt in my response. Even within more active, scenic works, there was tranquility beneath the surface of a brawl or the sorrow of a disciple. Tranquility is one term to describe their affect on me, but a range of sensations and feelings, related to my personal experience as well as my expectations of the future, were prominent in my reception of the paintings. My psychophysiological response to these paintings was not linked to my knowledge of what they were representing but it was something beyond this. My response to these Pre-Renaissance paintings surprised and excited me and it is their affect that prompted this investigation.

The primary focus within my practice has been the pursuit of paint and painting as an object. My work seeks to connect with the viewer by sharing their physical space. As such the artists and works that have resonated for me engage with aspects of painting, while also challenging its traditional form. American artists such as Robert Morris (b. America 1931), Eva Hesse (b. Germany 1936) and more contemporary figures like German artist Katharina Grosse (b. Germany 1961) and American Jessica Stockholder (b. America 1959) have been steady figures within my practice. These are artists whose works are aesthetically in opposition to the Pre-Renaissance paintings that were in front of me at the Gemaldegalerie in Berlin. But when faced with Giotto's *Death of the Virgin* ca. 1310 (figure 2), I realized that its affective qualities were like those that I experienced in front of Eva Hesse's *Contingent* 1969 (figure 9) at the National Gallery of Australia. I was surprised that their aesthetic differences and attachment to art critiques that are approximately six hundred and fifty years apart created no difference in their affective impact on me. It is this surprise at my own reading of the work that has been the impetus behind this enquiry.

The comparison between the Pre-Renaissance and Modern practice is not uncommon. While in Berlin in 2009 I saw an exhibition at Gemaldegalerie in Berlin titled *Rothko/Giotto* that drew comparisons to Modernist and Renaissance painting practices. This exhibition contained only three paintings in a small chapel like room, one painting by Mark Rothko *Reds no. 5* 1961 (figure 1) and two paintings by Giotto, *Death of the Virgin* ca. 1310 and his *Crucifixion* ca. 1315 (figure 3). The purpose of the exhibition,

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outlined in the supporting catalogue, was to reinforce connections Rothko pronounced between his own practice and the work of Giotto. As stated in the exhibition description, *"Regarding Giotto, Rothko was especially interested in his ability to organize space and action by means of color, exemplifying the concept of painted "tactility.""*<sup>1</sup> Rothko's interest and dissection of Giotto's paintings were also made reference to in his posthumous book *The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art*, 1940. This book and the exhibition I saw create a bridge between two seemingly disparate eras in art history. The common thread between aspects of modern painting practices and the paintings of the Pre-Renaissance and Renaissance is the desire and ability to manipulate materials on the picture's surface to engage with spatial perceptions, the reality of lived experience and elicit affect.



Figure 1. Mark Rothko, *Red, no. 5* 1961, 117.8 x 160 cm mixed media (tempera, oil and other bindings) on canvas Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie

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1 Description of the exhibition Rothko/Giotto Gemäldegalerie Berlin accessed 08/04/2012  
<http://www.smb.museum/smb/kalender/details.php?objID=21386>

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Figure 2. Giotto di Bondone, *Transitus Mariae (Death of the Virgin)* ca. 1310 75.5 x 179.7cm tempera on panel (poplar) Staatliche Museen zu Berlin



Figure 3. Giotto di  
Bondone  
*Crucifixion* ca.1315/20  
56.4 x 33.7cm tempera  
on panel (poplar)  
Staatliche Museen zu  
Berlin Gemäldegalerie





Figure 4. Duccio di  
Buoninsegna *Madonna and  
Child*, ca.1300 Tempera  
and gold on wood 27.9cm x  
21cm Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

This effort by Pre-Renaissance painters to engage with space and lived experience is evidenced in the writing of Erwin Panofsky. In his essay *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1991), the author credits Duccio and Giotto with closing the gap between the Gothic and Byzantine eras in regards to the representation of space in painting. In Duccio's *Madonna and Child* ca. 1300 (figure 4) and Giotto's *Death of the Virgin* ca.1310 the forms sit right at the picture's surface on top of a gold ground as utilized in Byzantine era however these works are also windows into a space. It is this tendency to show a slice of space that Panofsky claims led the way towards the modern perspectival tradition in painting. He goes on to write that the space that Giotto and Duccio created on the picture surface coincided with a shift in collective societal thought toward the concept of infinity without divine omnipotence at its centre but scientific thought instead: "*An infinity not only prefigured in God, but indeed actually embodied in empirical reality.*"<sup>2</sup> It is Panofsky's view that advancements in pictorial organization to create pictorial space can be linked to lived experience. The artists who lived during this time, when systems of belief were

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<sup>2</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Perspective as Symbolic Form," (Zone Books 1991)

shifting, conveyed that transition within their work. Their experience was communicated and rationalised in materials and within the picture plane for the viewer to experience. Perhaps it was this sense of the infinite and the tension between old and new ways of thinking both on the canvas and off that opened my psychophysiological response to the works.

Throughout this paper, I want to examine painting's relationship to space and the ways that painting, through a dialogue with its tradition and materiality, engages with and manipulates spatial perceptions to affect the viewer. I will focus on painting within its Modernist, Postmodernist and Contemporary sphere to consider how painting and space combine to offer affect. This enquiry will provide an insight into the greater context of my practice, as well as assist in the articulation of its motivation.

I will first consider definitions of painting within the contemporary context. I will do this through a survey of painting's expanded field and by discussing some of the resulting spatial concerns within contemporary practice. This will illustrate the perseverance of painting's self-referentiality. The ongoing production of paintings about painting, and the subsequent development of an extended vocabulary of reference within painting, a phenomenon referred to in Mark Titmarsh's *Shapes of Inhabitation: Painting in the Expanded Field* (2006). Against this backdrop of self-reflexivity found within American Modernism I will consider the role of the subjective within the spatial dialogues of painting. I will discuss this by considering the sculptures of Eva Hesse, *Contingent 1969 and Right After 1969*, and their formal relation to painting. And by also investigating the role that surface and materiality play in spatial experience, I am able to look further into how painting's vocabulary addresses metaphysical concerns, which further informs its spatiality.

Space is a broad term so before going any further, I will take a moment to clarify the definitions of space made reference to within the context of my inquiry. Broadly speaking, within Modernism and after, the dialogue around space continues to revolve around three main notions. The first is depicted space, illusionistic, an interpretation of what we see; the second is a transcendent or an abstract idea of space, the space offered beyond materiality; the third is phenomenological, based on real, lived space, the space

of our direct experience.<sup>3</sup> It is these three notions of space, and their inter-relations within the constructs of painting that I will discuss within modern and contemporary practices.

The paintings that I viewed at the Gemeldagalerie such as Duccio's *Madonna and Child* (figure 1) and Giotto's *Death of the Virgin* (figure 3) have a direct engagement with the three definitions of space mentioned above. Illusion and representation do not dominate my spatial reading of the painting nor does it instruct my feeling. Instead it is the dialogue between the paintings' differing spatial notions and the cohesion of these notions that ultimately create affect. These paintings are socially and culturally guided, and are present in the lives of people in the act of worship. Some paintings are small objects, portable alter pieces painted on both sides; so the viewer has to move around the painted object to see both sides thus, a physical relation to the viewer is present. The gold on the surface of the painting also interacts with the physical space of the viewer by alluring and repelling. The gold paint entices because it is gold, a material of great value, but it also pushes the viewer away and out of the picture surface by reflecting light. The viewer is unable to enter the illusion because the metallic surface has, "*a quality of repelling the eye in the sense that you couldn't penetrate it very well.*"<sup>4</sup> As a result, the viewer is not seduced by the image but instead they move between the illusion that the painting offers and the reality that the gold reinforces. It is not only the figures portrayed that elicit my response, but also my physical engagement with the painting's surface. The work's affect occurs through the simultaneous engagement of my mind, my body and my senses, and the tension between what is seen and what is felt.

Painting's inherent binary problematic which, exists between reality and its two-dimensional frame, has created a rich dialogue that has persevered throughout centuries within painting's traditional practice as well as throughout its dissemination into a multi-disciplinary practice. The expansion of the painting practice across other mediums, and the inclination of the painter to affect the viewer on a multisensory level with their work, indicates how strong that relationship with space is. While it has often

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3 Miwon Kwon, "Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder's Scenographic Compositions," Grey Room 18(2005).58

4 Frank Stella quote in Anne Rorimer, *New art in the 60s and 70s : redefining reality* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001).16

been the case for artists to discount one spatial notion in the pursuit of another, it is only through the discourse created from their interaction that affect can be heralded.

Anne Rorimer in her introduction to *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (2001) guides the reader through a thorough and compelling reading of differing spatial ideals and handling by artists from 1950s' Abstract Expressionism through to Minimalism. These, Rorimer claims, set the trajectory for Conceptual Art. In her words, that trajectory "took root in the fertile soil laid down by the Abstract Expressionists."<sup>5</sup> It took root through a series of reactions and responses, to previous artworks, by artists, along with concurrent political issues that encouraged social and aesthetic change. Rorimer cites Greenberg's Modernist imperialists view as a springboard. It was Greenberg's notion that, "the work of art be an idealist construct"<sup>6</sup> without cultural or societal "interference," that the impetus behind a work should be its formal qualities alone. Rorimer claims that artists reacted from this position by re-evaluating spatial relationships and material possibilities as well as combining their work with the political, cultural and interpersonal currents of a shifting society. Through her linear account, Rorimer credits painting's modern discourse with space as an indelible presence behind Conceptual Art. She thereby links painting to conceptual constructs and concerns that engage the body (the viewer's and the maker's) as well as investigations into material, form and space.

Meaning in an artwork is further investigated to include what is experienced by the viewer by exploring the writing of Susan Best in her book *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant Garde* (2011). Best considers the work of artists within minimalism and conceptual art by redressing the critical and theoretical denial of expression and the subjective within their aesthetic. Best writes, "The desire to withdraw or withhold feeling inadvertently underscores the question of feeling."<sup>7</sup> Best's investigation focuses on expression in art by discussing the work of artists like Eva Hesse and Brazilian Lygia Clarke (b.1920) whose work elicits a "felt dimension." That is, meaning gathered by what is "felt" by the viewer but not made explicit by the artist.

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5 Rorimer, Anne *New Art in the 60's an 70's: Redefining Reality* 2001.11

6 Ibid.

7 Susan Best, *Visualizing feeling : affect and the feminine avant-garde* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).1

Susan Best describes the affective dimension, or the felt dimension in art as being, “*at once spontaneous and obscure. By this I mean the affective dimension of art may be apprehended or felt fairly immediately, but its meaning is not so readily apparent.*”<sup>8</sup> Within Minimalist art practices the, “*entanglement*”<sup>9</sup> between the viewer and the work of art is often narrowed to only include the viewer’s apprehension of relationships such as its overall shape, and conditions of light and scale.<sup>10</sup> Best contests this established reading of Minimalist works by considering the function of other relationships present in the work. Associative elements such as the work’s materiality and tactility draw from lived experience embedding the work with a “felt” meaning. The acknowledgment of expression within Minimalism is not my goal within this paper, but it is important to establish that affect – the intangible space created by an artist or their work – has remained present within critical dialogues, even when that dialogue encouraged its removal. For the purpose of my research, Best’s position is included because I am considering specifically how painting’s constructs have been employed by artists within Modernism and subsequent eras to create affect and elicit feeling – like my experience of the Pre-Renaissance paintings. By asserting the presence of the abstract or “felt” dimension in art from this era, I am able to navigate freely throughout historical art “movements” and to focus on the spatial implications of each work and its affect while discussing its lineage to painting.

I will examine how pictorial strategies are able to draw a corporeal response by relating the navigation of Hans Hofmann’s *Pre-Dawn* 1960 and the tension of his push and pull pictorial strategy to how we navigate our lived space. Drawing from *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* by Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and her notion that the body is the surface of activity between our internal and external experiences, it is possible to consider how the very premise of pictorial tensions could have a corporeal connection that elicit sensation. This will be followed by the juxtaposition of contemporary German artist Katharina Grosse. Grosse delves further into the corporeal connection created with Hofmann’s *push pull* by making architectural, painterly installations that alter the physical space that the viewer navigates.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fried, *Art and objecthood : essays and reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

From there, I will move on to explore the work *Concetto Spaziale*, Atesse 1959 and spatialist manifestos (1946-1952) of Italian Lucio Fontana (b. Argentina 1899) through the context of Yves Alain Bois' essay, *Qualities (Without)* found in *Formless: A User's Guide* (1993). I will look at how Fontana used absence to upset pre-conceived notions of painting to create an opportunity for the viewer to inhabit a space behind the canvas and to introduce, "*a conceivable space that is not perceivable.*"<sup>11</sup> Bois' essay exemplifies how a disruption in known perception has the ability to de-stabilize the viewer, consequently providing an opportunity for the viewer to question what they "know" therefore presenting the viewer as the subject.

Moving on from Fontana I will look at the role that performance plays within material and spatial investigations by looking at the work of the Japanese Gutai group (active 1954-1972). The Gutai's performative practices merged material with the energy of gesture. By regarding gesture and action as an exchange of energy between themselves and material, they sought to breathe life into matter. With this investigation, I aim to reach a greater understanding of my own processes as well as to unveil aspects of painting's spatial dialogue.

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11 Rorimer, New art in the 60s and 70s : redefining reality.13

## SPACE: ONE, TWO OR THREE

Space, whether pictorial or sculptural, relates to what is physical and tangible. Sculptural space engages with three-dimensions and includes constructed works, reliefs and installations. It is tangible space because it exists within the established understanding of what we know; it is quantifiable, measurable. Pictorial space is tangible because it emulates the established reasoning of the physical space we know. However, this known, quantifiable, physical notion of space present in an artwork is shadowed, or even haloed by an alternative abstract understanding of the term space – its affective dimension.<sup>12</sup>

Martin Heidegger in the 1973 translation of his essay *Art and Space* asks the reader:

*"The sculptured body embodies something. Does it embody space? Is sculpture an occupying of space, a domination of space?"<sup>13</sup>*

In his essay, Heidegger posits that the dialogue between art and space, even when it appears to be declaring something, remains a question. This means that space, its relation to the viewer, its manifestation within the artwork, and the place that it sits within, is continuously under scrutiny and exploration by artists. Heidegger's argument is oriented in sculpture, but the creation of space and its discursive practice within art is not exclusive to sculpture. Painting's tradition is centered in the creation of space on a two-dimensional field. Thus, it too is a fruitful platform from which to engage with spatial discourse. Painting is a spatial practice not only because it creates the illusion of three-dimensions in two-dimensions, but also because painting has the additional ability to use the discourse of its two-dimensionality in three dimensions.

Minimalist art practice, an aesthetic that asserted the spatial relation of objects to a space, is dominated by sculptural practice. However, works within the movement have strong origins with painting's abstract composition and spatial constructs. Take for example the work of artist Robert Morris. Within his writing, Morris asserted that sculpture and painting have entirely different concerns and histories. Morris claimed

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<sup>12</sup> Best, Visualizing feeling : affect and the feminine avant-garde.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Art and Space "(trans. Charles H. Seibert)", " Man and World 6, no. 1 (1973).3

that they differed because painting is associated with illusionism and sculpture has never dealt with illusion, rather replication<sup>14</sup>. Morris' practice comments on painting by examining its object-ness. Morris' work *Untitled* 1969 (figure 5) relates to the tradition of painting by inhabiting its position on the wall. The large piece of felt is rectangular in shape measuring 290cm x 378cm, it is reminiscent of a large, panoramic canvas or one of infamous American Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock's (b. America 1912) mural size gestural paintings. But, where Pollock used gesture in paint to create a subtle layering of matter to create a picture space Morris used cuts to assert the materiality of a surface and the denial of illusion. In this instance, Morris used painting's formal qualities, like gesture and format, to engage with a discourse that investigates the tension between a two-dimensional surface and a three-dimensional form just as Eva Hesse did.



Figure 5. *Untitled*, Robert Morris, 1969 *Felt*, 290cm x 378cm x 140cm National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

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14 Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily : the writings of Robert Morris*, ed. An October Book (Massachusetts, USA: MIT Press, 1993).



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Morris's performance and video *Site* (1964) made with Carolee Schneemann (b. America 1939) is like a painting in motion. The video is a procession of moving compositions made by using large white panels, the bodies of the participants, and the dark stage. *Site* has an indelible connection to painting, not only because of its constant parade of abstract compositions, but also because of its reference to the female nude. Schneemann, pictured in the background (figure 6), poses like Edouard Manet's *Olympia* 1863 (figure 7). The presence of Schneemann's nude figure clearly alludes to these works cementing a connection to painting's history. But, *Site* 1964 and *Untitled* 1969 use aspects of painting to replace illusion and mark on canvas with objects and people to directly engage with the viewer's space. With these works, Morris navigates a discourse that unites illusory space and "real" space within painting.

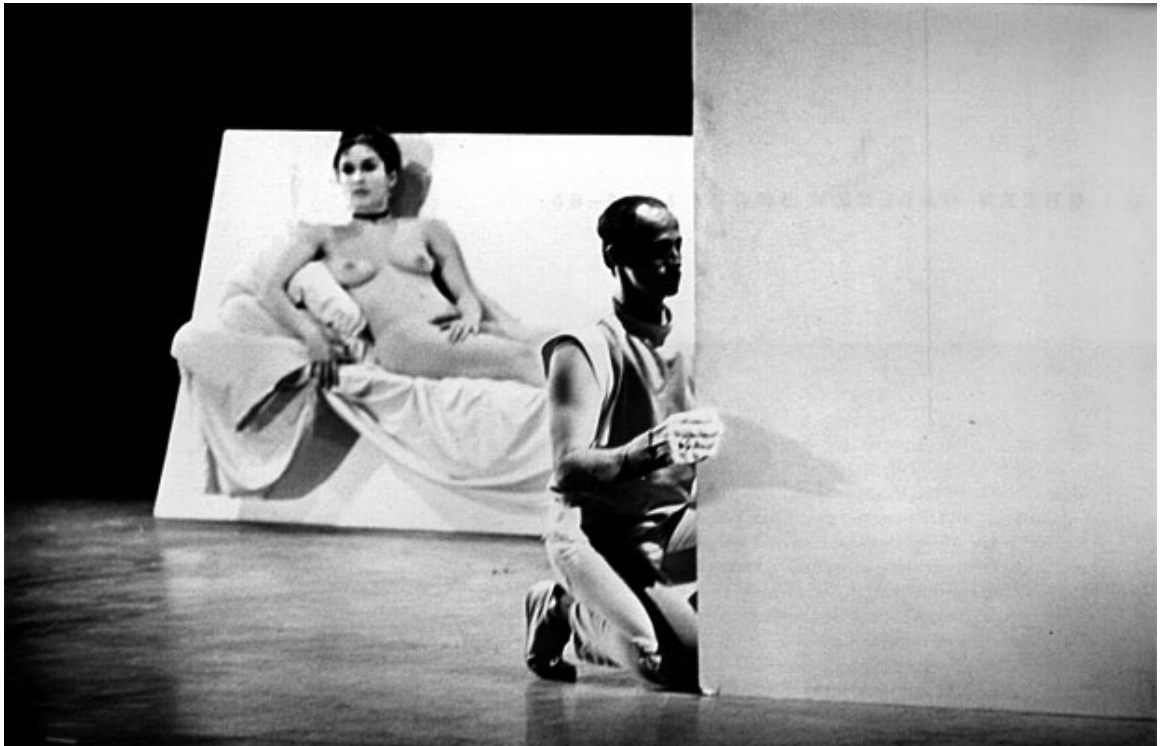


Figure 6. Robert Morris and Carolee Schneeman *Site*, (still from video of performance) 1964, performed at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theatre, New York, USA Photo by Peter Moore from Est. Peter Moore

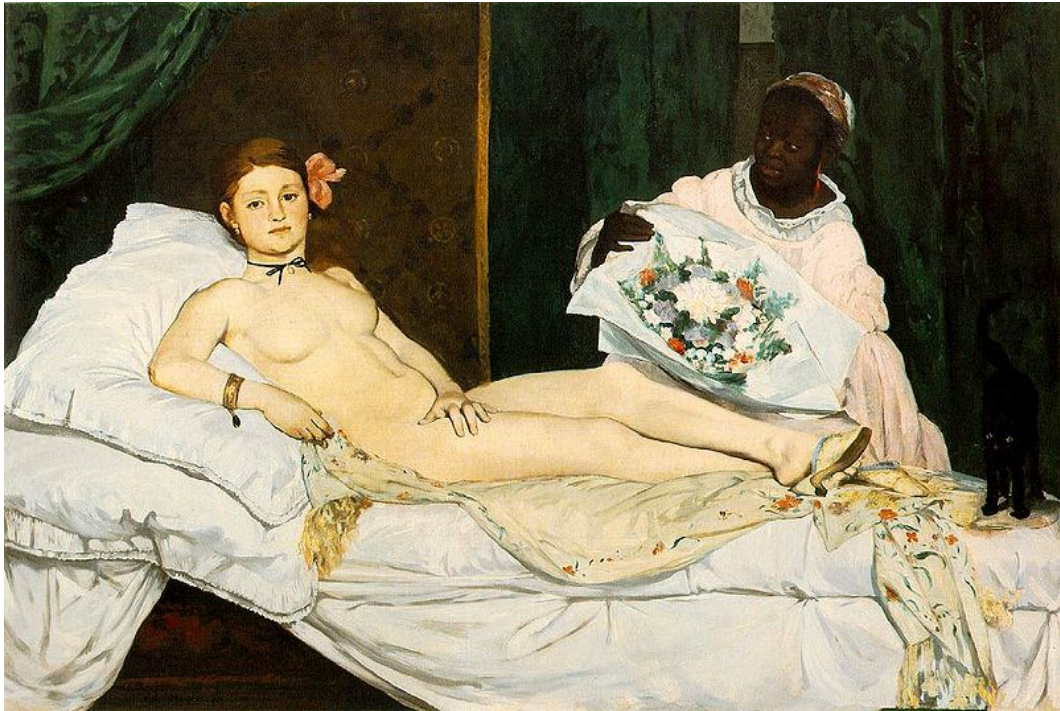


Figure 7. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863 Oil on Canvas, 130.5cm x 190cm Musée D'Orsay, Paris

Painting along with sculpture is a spatial practice. In its purest essence, the very act of transferring real experience (physical, lived space) into two or three dimensions is a spatial practice. Painting manipulates and utilizes notions and interpretations of space. The notion of painting as a “*spatial and spatializing practice*”<sup>15</sup> is outlined in Miwon Kwon’s article *Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder’s Scenographic Compositions* (2005). In her article, Kwon articulates similarities in the spatial investigations of Modern sculptural and painting practices by questioning Rosalind Krauss’s logic in her seminal essay, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979).

Kwon posits, as exemplified by Jessica Stockholder’s practice (figure 8) that the expansion of painting’s field is spatially driven, and should fall under the same umbrella of logic that Krauss uses to undress the expanded field of sculpture. In her essay, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* Krauss states that the expansion of artistic fields is characterized by operating within sets of opposition and non-specificity to medium; however, by going on to indicate that painting would operate under a different set of oppositions to sculpture, Krauss contradicts her own claim. Kwon points out this paradox in Krauss’s logic:

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15 Kwon, “Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder’s Scenographic Compositions.” 57

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*“Yet, does not Krauss’s suggestion imply that a foundational, medium- specific opposition of cultural terms exists through which to map a particular medium’s postmodern expansion—architecture and land- scape for sculpture, uniqueness and reproducibility for painting? It might be commonsensical to situate sculpture in relation to spatial conditions defined by architecture and landscape, but is painting not also a spatial and spatializing practice?”<sup>16</sup>*



Figure 8. Jessica Stockholder *Of Standing Float Roots in Thin Air* 2006 Site installation at PS1 Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.57

Painting, along with sculpture, is concerned with space. Painting is driven by the pursuit of replicating, producing or affecting spatial relationships. Within historical and contemporary painting practice an engagement with space has remained a consistent thread. Whether depicted, real, cultural or abstract, painting has been concerned with impressions of space. I do not wish to re-hash Kwon's argument, but to investigate the affective results of the relationships and tensions shared between these different avenues of spatial inquiry within painting and its expanded field.

Sydney based artist and writer, Mark Titmarsh, follows the trajectory of painting's *expanded field*. In his article *Shapes of Inhabitation: Painting in the Expanded Field* (2006) Titmarsh states that painting practice is no longer dependent on the craft of painting. Maintaining that this is possible simply by interpreting its history and tradition, he writes:

*"Works are identified as painting not on the basis of flatness or canvas or brushwork, but by a hermeneutics of painting: what at an historical moment can be processed as painting."*<sup>17</sup>

From this we know that we can identify an artwork as a painting from its physicality or compositional foundations. Elements within painting's two-dimensional field such as light, shadow, foreground, background, colour, shape and texture – along with its three-dimensional elements like, frame, canvas, material, scale and position, can be denied or manipulated to expand the territory of painting. Titmarsh's rationale also implies that it becomes possible to regard an artwork as a painting if it engages with the metaphysical intentions of its institution. His reasoning allows painting to redress, without temporal or aesthetic hierarchies, what a painting is beyond its materiality. Therefore, the *expanded field of painting* can be the interpretation of intentions, aims and affects within the history of painting as well as its formal attributes. It is possible through these means to consider what painting does and how it does it.

Titmarsh's notion, along with Kwon's assertion of painting's spatiality, reveal that painting is not limited or burdened by its two dimensional tradition. Their compelling

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17 Mark Titmarsh, "Shapes of Inhabitation: Painting in the Expanded Field," *Art Monthly Australia* 189(2006).30

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accounts of the *expanded field of painting* indicate that painting's tradition of illusory space and two-dimensionality has broadened its discursive potential. This suggests that, an engagement with painting's dialogue inherently occupies a spatial dialogue with little limitation to materials and conceptual frameworks. Within its expanded field a painting may assume the forms of performance, video, photography or installation. In this context painting can move between two and three dimensions while expanding and exploring its dialogue with space and composition.

## A MATTER OF SPACE

The spatial dialogue of the expanded field of painting is prominent within the work of Eva Hesse. However Hesse further explored surface and materiality in order to connect to the viewers lived space. Hesse's practice has been considered hard to classify aesthetically as it remained potent emotionally, within Minimalism's cool oeuvre. Hesse's work sits on a border between painting and sculpture that manages a discerning control of differing critical aesthetics. This position enables an engagement with the viewer's physical and emotional space. Rosalind Krauss posits that the expressive power of matter prevalent in Hesse's work is dependent on the critical discourse of 1960s' minimalism, abstract expressionism and the soft sculptures of pop art.<sup>18</sup> This aspect of her work is useful when trying to categorize it, but the affect of her work may also be aligned to her views on life and art. In an interview in 1970 with Cindy Nemser, Hesse is quoted:

*"I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art and an unknown factor of life. For me it is a total image that has to do with me and life. It can't be divorced as an idea or composition or form."*<sup>19</sup>

This implies that for Hesse the work of art should be present within space just as life exists in space. For Hesse, this was only possible by drawing from the "*absurdity*"<sup>20</sup> of contradiction. *Contingent* 1969 (figure 9) hangs within the gallery space, a grouping of eight pieces vertically suspended from the ceiling reaching toward the floor. Each element is made of latex soaked cheesecloth, dipped in fiberglass and hanging perpendicular to the wall. Rosalind Krauss wrote of the work:

*"In those rectilinear stretches of fabric there is an ineluctable reference to the surface and format of painting.....the experience of light and colour that Contingent generates as its condition or ambience, we feel ourselves to be in the affective terrain of painting."*<sup>21</sup>

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18 Cindy Nemser and Mignon Nixon, *Eva Hesse*, October files (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).28

19 Cindy Nemser, "A Interview with Eva Hesse," *Artforum* 8, no. 9 (1970).59

20 Ibid.

21 Nemser and Nixon, *Eva Hesse*.30



The format of its flat planes does recall the traditional format of painting by engaging the viewer with the surface of each panel. The light and colour on the surface of each panel is the result of its materiality and condition as matter not simply painted imagery. The viewer's sensibilities are affected by Hesse's work just as they would be by the Pre-Renaissance painting. The perpendicular position of *Contingent* to the wall reifies its object-ness and asks the viewer to engage with the subtleties of its physicality.

The treatment of the cheesecloth within Hesse's process creates paradoxical associations. The cloth is a loose weave fabric. Its everyday use for wrapping and binding cheese or as bandaging. These banal associations recall the subject matter of pop art. However the cloth also refers to the very support of painting because of its canvas-like base structure of warp and weft. The cloth is soaked in a latex bath that thickens and clogs the pores of the opaque weave like oil paint on canvas. The latex has a skin-like quality. Its plastic nature and the yellow dis-colouration that occurs – deepening over time – only heighten its corporeal connection to the withering and hardening of skin once it leaves the body. The rigidity of the fiberglass counters the flesh-like latex. It creates a hard encasing that is further contradicted by its reminiscence of glass and the moments when it retains the evidence of its liquid state in bubbles and inconsistencies. *Contingent's* surface relates to painting or drawing because it uses the manipulation of incongruent elements over a surface to create an affective spatial plane. Hesse uses the contradictions and juxtapositions of matter as a painter would use contrasting colours and textures.

*Contingent's* fragile material qualities contradict its monumental scale and the permanence associated with sculpture. Hesse merges the institutions of painting and sculpture by engaging in her contemporary aesthetic dialogue, one that was inclined to remove the subjectivity of emotive action and re-action within its aesthetic by the use of industrial processes, materials and repetition.<sup>22</sup> Hesse retained an individualism within her repetitive pieces which challenged the, "authority"<sup>23</sup> of Minimalism, and asserted itself as a negotiation between the physicality of matter and an interaction between established and un-established orders. This excerpt from a catalogue statement by Hesse

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.30-31

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.28

## Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space

in 1969, when she first exhibited *Contingent*, tells of her impulse to question the established aesthetic order:

*"Irregular, edges, six to seven feet long, not painting, not sculpture. It's there though. I remember I wanted to get to non art, non connotive, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non, nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort. From a total other reference point. Is it possible?"*<sup>24</sup>



Figure 9. Eva Hesse  
*Contingent* 1969  
Cheesecloth, latex,  
fiberglass, 350cm x  
630cm x 152.8cm  
National Gallery of  
Australia, Canberra

Hesse wanted her work to be devoid of aesthetic connotations so that the viewer could apprehend it from an alternative position, and by remaining in a point of tension between positions she could achieve an indeterminate equilibrium. Hesse's work *Right After*, 1969 (figure 10), is made of strings of fiberglass suspended from the ceiling in a loose arrangement measuring 152cm x 548cm x 122cm, this work physically occupies an indeterminate space, so that it shares the same living space as the viewer. *Right After* harnesses an empathy with our movement and bodies by occupying the space between

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<sup>24</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York, USA: New York University Press, 1976).165



## Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space

things; due to the work being neither in one place or the other it elicits an empathy with our corporeal state of flux.

The fiberglass and wire strings of *Right After* intermingle with each other seemingly without order, “graceful,” almost, “chaotic”.<sup>25</sup> The entire work seen from a distance looks like a spider web swept away by a slight of hand and caught for a moment mid fall before it hits the ground. The title of the work itself, *Right After*, is indicative of a moment after an event, a movement, an action that occurs right after something else. As a viewer, we are left wondering is something about to happen, or did it just happen. Is this the residue of an event?

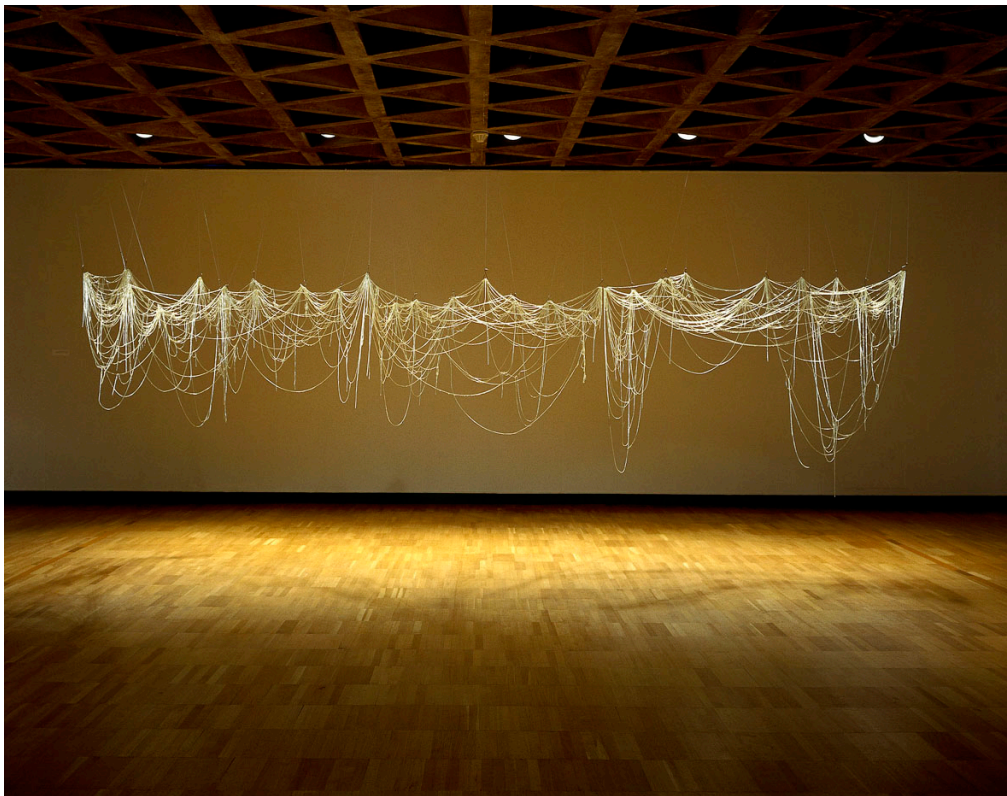


Figure 10. Eva Hesse *Right After* 1969 Fibreglass, 152cm x 548cm x 122cm Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee

Standing beneath the webbed, cloud-like form, there is an expectation of movement. The work is caught between two places. Neither on the ground, nor on the ceiling; it is midair, floating on the border between two spaces. The materials fall victim to their reality as matter evidenced by gravity, drooping, curving strings that sag and fall

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.172

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weighted down by their own physicality. However, *Right After* does not simply appease gravity. At the same time it is defiant, it hovers while its crystalized strands are gently pulled upward toward the ceiling.

The work occupies the gallery space, suspended from the ceiling away from the walls that enclose it. This space is the space between surfaces, a space associated with movement. Objects rest on the floor, and are attached to ceilings and walls, but *Right After* occupies the space that we walk and talk in. By inhabiting our space the work shares a corporeal affinity with the matter of our bodies. *Right After* is a work that does not just occupy the gallery space, it occupies our space, and intensifies the sensations and relationship we have to the work as well as lived space.



Figure 11. Karena Keys *Throw* 2010 Knitted acrylic paint and mohair, installation approximately 400cm x 400cm  
Collection of the artist

My work *Throw*, 2010 (figures 11 and 12) is a large knitted paint and crocheted mohair installation, first exhibited at TCB in Melbourne in 2010 and then at Alaska projects in Sydney in 2012. Like Hesse's *Right After*, my work *Throw* is installed from the ceiling with wire. In its original installation, it covered the four by four meter gallery it was installed in. A larger than life throw rug, it was draped in the gallery as though it were caught in midair - between spaces. *Throw* is comprised of over forty-one, coloured,



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knitted acrylic paint squares each one framed by, and joined together with, crocheted mohair. The acrylic paint was cast in long strips to form a thread, like yarn. This paint yarn was then used just as any ordinary sewing, knitting and weaving fibre would be. Hesse used latex soaked cheesecloth for *Contingent* as a vehicle that reminisced over painting's spatial plane and support. I wanted to use acrylic paint to create the warp and weft of a surface so that the material nature of the paint could reveal its physical contradictions. The paint itself becomes a surface for expression like the emotive surface of *Contingent*. The work shares the space with the viewer, not to dominate it, but to elicit a corporeal exchange between the material and the observer.



Figure 12. *Karena Keys Throw (detail)* 2010

*Throw* relates to domestic crafts and the discourse of the art and craft movement because of its crocheted assemblage. But, rather than, “assert the special value of the hand-rendered object” or, “to return to the discourses of originality and authenticity,”<sup>26</sup> the work seeks to address a region between discourses. Just as Hesse found an individual place for herself between painting and matter, *Throw* engages in a dialectic between the matter of painting and corporeality of domestic objects by calling on paint’s unique plastic qualities to affect lived space. Just as Eva Hesse’s work *Right After* is suspended,

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<sup>26</sup> Jaqueline Milner, “The Baker’s Dozen,” ed. UTS: Gallery (Sydney, NSW: UTS, 2012).

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the choice to suspend my work is to trade in, *"its traditional concern with picturing things in favour of an intense interest in its thingliness, its status as an object."*<sup>27</sup> This decision is not so that paint's object-ness will dominate the work's aesthetic, nor to make a painting purely about painting, but it is an interest in discovering the sensuality of the object through its colour and the individualism of paint as matter.

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<sup>27</sup> Titmarsh, "Shapes of Inhabitation: Painting in the Expanded Field."<sup>27</sup>

## TUG OF WAR

Beyond establishing painting as a spatial practice within its expanded field, it is also important to consider the greater spatial implications of a painting that adheres to the formal aspects of its two dimensional frame. Through the use of painted colour, texture, scale and contrast the viewer's space can be affected beyond the confines of the picture surface. German-American artist Hans Hofmann (b. 1880) believed that the manipulation of oppositional pictorial elements within picture space could mirror the binary elements of our being, in order to elicit affect. Hans Hofmann was a painter and a teacher practicing in post war America. He preached to his students and adhered personally within his practice to a compositional system that successfully activated the two dimensional picture-space. He named his principle *push pull*. Hofmann used the term *push pull* within his teaching and practice to describe the activity within his abstract pictorial system. It is a system that relies on the juxtaposition of oppositional elements such as texture, colour, scale and shape within the picture plane.

Hofmann named his principle *push pull* because it refers to the interplay between rivaling compositional elements. In his work *Pre Dawn* 1960 (figure 13), one colour or shape would dominate, pushing outwards toward the viewer. Concurrently it retreats into the picture space pushed by a rival element, like a heavy lick of paint.

The result of this rivalry is a constant state of motion. The artist would place contradictory elements side by side or at opposite sides of the painting's surface, and this would create a vibration within the picture plane. The words push and pull effectively describe Hofmann's pictorial strategy because they are verbs, actions that if used together in pursuit of the same goal can move forward or backward or up or down infinitely in the same direction. However, when used in opposition to each other their activity is neutralized, neither one coming or going, winning or losing. Their initial meaning is rendered void, and instead a new action is elicited through their battle, a vibration, or constant and subtle pulse.

Creating this vibration, however, was not only a compositional exercise for Hofmann. Beyond being a tool in abstract composition, Hofmann's *push pull* developed a pictorial

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language for the conceptual framework of his work. He believed that his work should mirror his experience and reflections on life and nature. A quote by the artist reads:



Figure 13. Hans Hofmann *Pre-Dawn* 1960 Oil on canvas 183.9cm x 152.8cm National Gallery of Australia. Canberra

*“Life does not exist without movement and movement does not exist without life. Movement is the expression of life. All movements are of a spatial nature. The continuation of movement throughout space is rhythm. Thereby rhythm is the expression of life in space.”<sup>28</sup>*

Hofmann’s aim was for his paintings to transcend their material structure, to be metaphysical insights into his experience of life. The artist’s interest in painting was to relay onto canvas the dynamism of natural forces and systems that we move within, and that move us. Inside the manageable confines of a two-dimensional picture space Hofmann could tackle his experience of the tensions and forces that are uncontrollable and chaotic within his experience of the world.

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Hofmann et al., *Search for the real, and other essays*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1967).66

Hofmann's *push pull* principle was effective at relaying tensions and movements within his experience of life and nature, because a similar tension is the basis for our own physical and metaphysical existence. The way that we navigate and investigate space within our world is through our senses. Vision, touch, sound, taste and smell all receive information from our environment. It is how we distinguish objects, places and people. However, there is no conclusive explanation as to how that information processes psychologically, or how the inextricable interplay between our minds and bodies process the data received from our senses to form our individual living bodies.

The dualistic forces of our cultural and natural experience culminate within and through our bodies to create our lived experience. Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism* (1994) tackles the polarization between the mind and body, and regards the body as a point of mediation. Grosz considers a separatist attitude towards the mind and body as inadequate for understanding our existence and experience. She asks that instead of investigating each element as a separate entity, dissected and discussed dualistically and hierarchically, we reconsider preconceived notions of the exclusivity of the psyche and soma. She writes that a more thorough understanding of our lived experience would be established through the acknowledgement of both the mind and body, and how each one informs the other. Grosz posits that in order to achieve this we need to rethink the body purely as passive object and the mind as active subject. She suggests that alternatively we should regard the body as a meeting point that harbors these polarized concepts, as a threshold where both elements of our being travel - as a place of interaction between our internal and external being. Grosz writes:

*"....these pairs can be more readily problematized by regarding the body as the threshold or borderline concept that hovers perilously and undecidably at the pivotal point of binary pairs. The body is neither – while also being both – the private or public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined."*<sup>29</sup>

The body is the point between binary pairs in Grosz' description. It is the concept that the body exists as a space, a border between two forces. Grosz wrote that the body is, *"neither – while also being both."* This paradox speaks to the idea that because our lived

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29 E. A. Grosz, *Volatile bodies : toward a corporeal feminism* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1994).23

bodies are comprised of the interaction between dualistic relationships, the body is in the realm of indeterminacy: it is a thing, a place, a space that presents its internality externally and vice versa. The body is composed of oppositional forces associated with the mind and body, such as public/private, inside/outside, self/other.<sup>30</sup> Together these forces combine as movements that navigate our individual existence.

Dualistic relationships are the intrinsic to Hofmann's canvases. His painted surfaces connect to his experience of life because his *push pull* principle shares the same motion and momentum as our experience. The body, in the case of Hofmann's *push pull*, is the picture space. Hofmann's canvas is the borderline, the surface and threshold for binary forces. In pictorial terms and within pictorial space, Hofmann is able to emulate the tension of our bodies in physical space. Bright and dull, rough and smooth, sharp and soft, small and large are compositional elements, binary pairs that Hofmann developed within his pictorial language to create a dialogue with our very existence. The real or physical creates a dialogue with illusory space. Dualistic forces interact on canvas to create a vibrating, pulsating picture space that consistently shifts and moves. We navigate the space that we live in, our physical space that is constantly in flux, through the interaction between the polarities that constitute our being. Sensing, feeling and perceiving deliver contrasting forces that develop an intangible space that hovers on a point of tension between the mind and body. Our living bodies pulse as the place between the dynamism of our internality and externality, while Hofmann's canvases vibrate as the space caught between the conflicting energies generated by the power of his *push pull*.

More than half a century after the inception of Hoffman's pictorial language, engaging a dialogue between our bodies and space continues in painting's trajectory within its *expanded field*. Contemporary German artist Katharina Grosse's practice occupies the pictorial language that Hofmann established in order to deliver installations that pulsate in our physical space. Grosse delivers to the viewer enveloping installations that blur our preconceptions of the architecture of our environment. Grosse creates site-specific abstract painted installations that have a *push pull* relationship with real space and the objects within it. Where Hofmann used contradictory elements made purely of the matter of oil paint, Grosse uses contradictory elements that combine real objects in

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 22



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concrete space of an architectural scale, along with paint, to activate the tension between physical space and another alternative space.



Figure 14. Katharina  
*Grosse Pigmentos Para  
Plantas y Globos 2008*  
Acrylic on balloons, soil,  
wall, floor  
636 cm x 727cm x  
1450cm Site installation  
Artium de Alava, Vitoria  
Gasteiz, Spain

Grosse uses paint to push objects and architecture into the picture surface that she creates, disrupting perceptions of space. As in her work *Pigmentos Para Plantas y Globos* 2008 (figure 14), Grosse uses a spray gun to apply paint over various objects and materials, like mounds of dirt, fiberglass balloons, mattresses and planks of wood, to push the object away from the viewer into the surface of her enveloping painting. The boundaries of the architecture and objects blur as corners, crevices and cornices dissolve into broad, sweeping, mechanical gestures in paint. The paint, applied in an

array of hyper-real colours, combined with the scale of the gesture thrusts away from its surface. The room and the objects within it activate in the same way as Hofmann's picture space on canvas. Grosse herself wrote of her own practice in a self-titled article in 2011:

*"The unity of object and surface dissolves into the concurrence of image and outside world. The coexistence of the imaginary and the material makes for a paradox. Painting is the only place to experience this paradox."*<sup>31</sup>

Elements like the paint application and choice of colour combine with various objects and natural materials in her work to concurrently retract and urge forward, making the viewer's surroundings unstable and uncertain. The paradox that Grosse refers to in her quote is the tension between reality and illusion. The viewer occupies a space, a territory of contradictions, a space that shifts between what is real or known and the illusory surface that the artist creates, a space of continuous subtle motion that pushes and pulls between the tangible and the intangible.

The space that Grosse's work creates is intangible because it occupies a dualistic realm. Illusion and reality are polarities within Grosse's practice; a tension develops from what we think we know and what we see, a tension that places the viewer inside an intangible space. Hofmann's picture space connects to our greater experience of living by being, *"neither – while also being both"*. Similarly Grosse's installations use the principles of constructing an abstract picture space to emphatically reinforce in three dimensions what Hofmann intended to achieve in two dimensions. A catalogue essay from Grosse's 2009 exhibition at the Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin describes the *push pull* of her work as follows:

*"Grosse plays colour areas and their support off against each other so that they appear as two coexisting yet incommensurate systems, and the congruence of objectuality and narrative structure disappears. Illusionism emerges, and it too is fundamental to abstraction."*<sup>32</sup>

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31 Katharina Grosse, "KATHARINA GROSSE," Artforum 2011.342

32 Katharina Grosse, Katja Blomberg, and Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin., Katharina Grosse : shadowbox (Berlin

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Grosse works within the tradition of painting, therefore within the tradition of illusion and space. She uses the frame created by architecture and objects of our everyday, in conjunction with the core foundations of abstract composition injected into painting's history and subsequently its tradition, to balance on the edge of reality and illusion.



Figure 15. Katharina Grosse *Holey Residue* 2006 Acrylic on wall, floor, soil, Styrofoam, boards and canvas, site installation De Appel, Amsterdam, Netherlands

What is real in her work, palpable, is the location and objects, but that location (the physical building) is flattened as her picture plane. The paint, applied with a spray gun, is without physical texture; instead, physical texture is provided by the three-dimensional objects in the room. The inconsistencies in paint application, drips, pooling,

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Köln New York: Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin ; Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König ; Distribution outside Europe, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009).97

hard and soft edges that emerge when the gun moves toward and away from surfaces, create a space that is built on the very foundations of abstract composition – the illusion of space within a two-dimensional field. What is quantifiable in her composition trades its identity to become a part of Grosse's impression of space. Her work exists within the physical space that we know and amongst the objects that we are familiar with, through the perception of our senses; however, she alters the known by submerging objects, walls and ceilings within a tumultuous sea of colour and gesture. Reality disappears and reappears simultaneously. Objects and surfaces transform and are given new context through painting. For example, another of Grosse's works, *Holey Residue*, 2006 (figure 15) installed at De Appel Arts Centre Amsterdam, is made of large canvases, sand, clay and Styrofoam, sprayed over with large swathes of colourful gesture. The large mounds of sand and clay on the floor are displaced. They become textural pictorial elements that border on the line of familiarity and uncertainty. Instead of its usual colour the mounds of sand and clay appear different. They are blue, pink and yellow, but they retain aspects of their familiar sensory qualities like their tactility and the appearance of each individual grain. In the image of the installation (figure 15) a pile of sand and clay is camouflaged by a painterly gesture in bright pink. The gesture and colour over its surface work together to absorb its form as an object. This creates for the viewer a dialogue of knowing, but not knowing – the familiar yet unfamiliar. This is a rhythm that continues throughout Grosse's work. The mind shifts in motion, back and forth, the body and the senses similarly. What we thought we knew about the world sits on the border of pictorial space and real space. Where we felt like observers to the *push pull* of Hofmann's polarities, Grosse breaks down the border to place the viewer in the midst of an unknown space. The viewer's senses and preconceptions are questioned. What is real? What is illusion? In this sense, Grosse's work transcends its materiality to occupy an intangible space. The work is founded in what we know materially and even compositionally, but exceeds comprehension to place the viewer in a realm that pulsates with possibilities. It is a realm that exists because of the movement between spaces. Grosse disrupts tangible notions of space by rebounding those notions within the painterly tradition of illusory space.

This movement or pulsation between illusory space and real space is indicative of my experience of the Pre-Renaissance paintings I viewed at the Gemäldergalerie. The gold used on the surface of Giotto's *Death of the Virgin* ca. 1310 (figure 3) and his *Crucifixion* ca. 1315 (figure 4) sits on top of the picture plane while the images of the figures also sit



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towards the picture surface. The subtle rendering of the figures and drapery assert their presence within the picture plane. They partake, however, in a visual tug of war with the solidity and lusciousness of the gold surface reflecting outward.

Within my own painting practice, the vibration of *push and pull* occurs on the surface of the paint itself. Working with acrylic paint as a material to make three-dimensional works denies the craft of creating an illusory space on canvas. However, this denial of the two dimensional plane, of illusory space, does not negate the notion of painting's core oppositional relationships and the push and pull of its elements.



Figure 16. Karena Keys  
*We'll Float #1* 2011 Acrylic  
soaked tissue paper and  
cotton  
140cm x 50cm x 50cm  
Collection of the artist

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*We'll float #1* 2011 (figures 16 and 17), trades illusory picture space for the dynamism of material and surface tensions. The work is made of paint soaked tissue paper. The paper and paint combine to make a plastic-like material that can be easily handled. Because the paint is applied to the tissue paper while it is on the floor, the poured acrylic paint is so dense at times that the tissue paper support is entirely lost because it is suspended in pools of paint. This method allows the paint and paper to be used like a piece of fabric, so the work's construction is negotiated by sewing and cutting "the fabric" until a form that is simultaneously open and closed, heavy and light is reached.



Figure 17. Karena Keys *We'll Float #1*(detail)2011

*We'll float #1* is reliant on the weight of the acrylic paint and its inconsistent application to assist in the structure of its form. Where the acrylic paint is thick, it is heavy, causing its paper structure to be pulled down by the paint's weight. The paint structure suspended in midair attaches to points from the ceiling. It appears to float. The lightness of the tissue paper crinkles and blows in the breeze, the work moving and changing. *We'll Float #1* is a painting; it is a painting because it is made of paint; it is a painting because it sits relative to the wall as a painting does. However, this painting is inconsistent with the traditional notions of a painting. It moves. It slumps. It shares our space and it has an interior and an exterior. The tears and holes in its structure make its inside appear side to side with its exterior surface. Like Hofmann's *push* and *pull*, the

inside of *We'll Float #1* work pushes and pulls with its exterior and the incongruence of its physicality.

Just as Grosse uses the tradition of abstract pictorial space to create a tension between illusion and reality, the tension within *We'll Float #1* is the paradox resulting from its relation to surface and form. This is because the painted surface becomes the form of the object. In its creation, it is a flat plane on the ground made in an abstract expressionist vein. Then this “traditional” painting is turned inside out, upside-down, cut-up and stitched together to create a space. The pictorial relationships and hierarchies on its surface are in opposition to its actuality as a form, “*Colour space is added to ‘real’ space and ‘real’ things, and competes with them.*”<sup>33</sup> *We'll Float #1* does not upset the perceived notions of actual space on a grand scale, like Grosse, but it does confront established notions of the position and role of a picture space, asserting its physicality and positing its potential for the creation of alternative spatial experiences. It reflects the notion that, “*artists don’t simply discover space, they create it.*”<sup>34</sup>

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33 Ibid. 97

34 Michael Auping and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth., *Declaring space : Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein* (Fort Worth, Tex. Munich ; New York: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth ; Prestel, 2007).139

## PERFORMANCE SPACE

*"The work of art is not eternal; man and his creations exist in time, and where man ends, the infinite continues"*<sup>35</sup>

This quote by Lucio Fontana in his *Technical Manifesto of Spatialism* 1951 demonstrates the artist's belief in the impermanence of matter and material. If an artwork could exist beyond its material frame, it would endure time and space. For Fontana, it was not enough for an artwork to simply occupy space. Fontana wanted his work to move through time and the physical restraints of space. He believed movement and gesture to be the key to transcending material form. Just as Hofmann used canvas as the vibratory field between spaces, Fontana created movements in space that asked the viewer to rely on their sensory and emotional response to his forms for meaning in the work.

Lucio Fontana used absence and the tradition of illusory space within painting to affect the viewer and link his work to the affective dimension. Lucio Fontana was a self-proclaimed Spatialist artist and instigator of the Spatialist movement. According to the manifestos of the group, if one were to consider oneself a Spatialist, it was essential to move beyond traditional ideas and notions of what an artwork is. The practice of a Spatialist artist should reflect the zeitgeist of the time, not be confined by material boundaries and tradition. Space for Fontana was the merging of time and movement, and as such, the spatialist artwork must reflect the flux and motion of the natural world to truly co-exist with the viewer.

Lucio Fontana believed that no form was spatial, a quote from the artist's Spatialist manifesto exhorts:

*"A form (and in saying a form it is understood that I mean a sculpture or a painting) occupies space.....but this is not a means for the conquest of space.....no form can be spatial."*<sup>36</sup>

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35 Guido Ballo, Lucio Fontana, trans. ILTE (New York, USA: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1971).231

36 Lucio Fontana quote in Anthony White, "TV and Not TV: Lucio Fontana's Luminous Images in Movement," Grey Room 34(2009). 12



## Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space

With this quote, Fontana created a problem for himself. How does an artist make an artwork that has no form? But, he did, “*not dispense with the art object, as his own theory of spatial art had insisted.....Fontana proposed a work in which painting and environment face off against each other.*”<sup>37</sup> By enlisting painting’s form, and, therefore its compositional and illusionistic baggage, Fontana was able to make objects that transcended their material space.

Lucio Fontana’s Cuts are his most renowned works.<sup>38</sup> These works were most often titled *Concetto Spaziale* sometimes with the word *Attesse* following, translated to be *Spatial Conception Expectation*. The title suggests that Fontana regarded each work as an idea of space, and an idea that entices predictions of the unknown beyond the surface of the painting. Fontana’s monochrome Cuts create a tension between real space and the traditional illusory two-dimensional picture plane while providing an entry point into a reality behind its surface.<sup>39</sup>

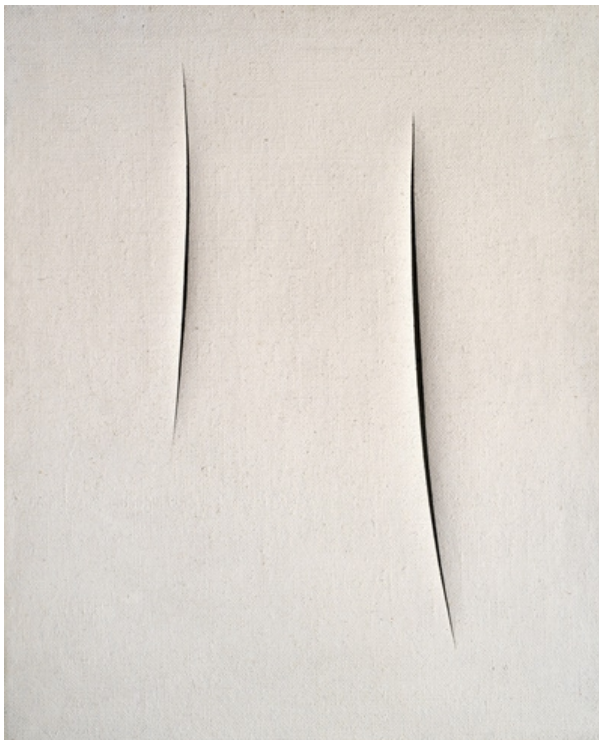


Figure 18. Lucio Fontana  
*Concetto Spaziale, Attesse* 1959  
Water paint on canvas,  
100cm x 81cm Museum of  
modern and contemporary  
art of Trento and Rovereto,  
Italy

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.14

<sup>38</sup> Anthony White, "Industrial Painting's Utopias: Lucio Fontana's "Expectations," October 124(2008).98

<sup>39</sup> Rorimer, New art in the 60s and 70s : redefining reality.13

Fontana discovered the formless within the form when he sliced and perforated his canvases. These works subvert our perception of the traditional painted canvas and as a result he was able to perform his greater artistic goals. When considering a work like *Concetto Spaziale, Attese* 1959 (figure 18) the interplay between reality and illusion is marked. Fontana nurtured that tension to elicit a Spatial experience beyond the surface of the canvas.

Two dark forms on the monochrome surface establish a traditional, painterly, depth of field. The form on the left is smaller, positioned slightly higher and is narrower than the one on the right. These subtleties indicate a pictorial spatial relationship due to our inherent understanding of Western perspectival tradition. The work is on the wall a position that offers a glance into another space – a window or the window of the canvas. Even in its simplicity, one perceives the work's surface as the surface of illusion, an effigy to our surroundings. One attempts to relate what one sees to the rules and guidelines of what one has seen previously.

However, when one recognizes the forms on the surface of the canvas as slits in the fabric's surface a powerful shift happens. The viewer is in a position of uncertainty as to how to read the image. In fact, it is not an image at all. The canvas is not a surface of pictorial illusion it is a doorway into another physical space, but a space that is undefined – a void. Two forms, two seemingly effortless slices in the canvas surface, create an intangible tension as the perforations slip between positive and negative forms. Once the slices in the centre of the canvas establish themselves as emptiness, as nothing, not volume, not matter, but a void, Fontana forces the observer to view emptiness as fullness, as form, and by using our expectations of the painted surface, the form within his work transcends spatial occupation. The traditional painted window is turned on its head because what is real becomes illusion and what is illusion becomes real – a continuous pulse of paradox that intrigues and destabilizes perceptions.

Yves Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss in their book *Formless: a User's Guide* (1997) investigate how the formless is used to disrupt the Modernist binaries of form and content. They suggest that the formless upsets the established reasoning of the Modernist visual space that sought to separate form from content.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cvoro Uros, "The present body, the absent body, and the formless," *Art Journal* 61, no. 4 (2003).55

In *Concetto Spaziale, Attese*, 1959 the subjectivity of the viewer merges with Fontana's painting, his form without form, so that the subject of scrutiny is the viewer in the aftermath of Fontana's disturbed illusion on canvas. Yves Alain Bois writes in *Formless: a User's Guide* (1997) in the chapter *Qualities (Without)*, about the re-orientation experienced by the viewer when confronted with a disruption in the anthropocentric reading of a form:

*"And if the overturned object does not belong to our own bodies? It becomes a kind of black hole in our perception, reminding us that our self-assurance, insofar as it rests only on the solidity of our legs, is in fact rather precarious."*<sup>41</sup>

The form of Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale, Attese* 1959 assumes the guise of a painting, a space for the expression of form, mark and subject. However, the form, mark and subject in Fontana's work are negative impressions, nothing, emptiness. When Fontana's gesture became an absence in the canvas rather than an addition to its surface the viewer's feelings and subjectivity become the subject of the painting. The reflection of the subject in the object was important to Fontana's goal as a Spatialist artist. In Fontana's *Proposal for a Charter* (1946), a "how to" document that was to be distributed to all of the artists associated with the Spatialist movement, he lists criteria that outline what the role and duties of the Spatialist artist are. Listed as number eight in the criteria, Fontana stated that:

*"A Spatial artist no longer imposes a figurative theme upon the spectator, but rather gives him the possibility of creating it for himself by means of the imagination and the emotions that he receives."*<sup>42</sup>

In *Concetto Spaziale, Attese* 1959, Fontana removed illusion, he removed the subject, and he removed the form and figure to make the viewer the subject and to open up the possibilities within painting. The slits in the work have a physical presence on the surface but these marks also allude to something else. Because the work is un-

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41 Rosalind E. Krauss, Yve Alain Bois, and Pompidou Centre Georges, *Formless: a user's guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).170

42 Ballo, Lucio Fontana.208

prescriptive, the spectator must rely on sensory perceptions to gather meaning. The observer's conscious and unconscious mind fills what Bois named the "*black hole*"; their thoughts and feelings are the painting's extended gesture. With this, Fontana's work exists beyond its physicality. The meaning or subject of his work is more than the physicality of a cut gesture on canvas. By replacing the solidity of matter on a surface with the absence of matter, Fontana orchestrates an eternal painting. The void that his cool gesture creates is a space or place that is constantly in flux, changing with the unique condition of each individual observer. It is a movement in time, existing beyond the mortality of material.

The notion that an artwork can move freely through time and space is investigated further in the work of contemporary British-German artist Tino Sehgal (b. England 1976). Sehgal relies only on the viewer's experience of the work to cement its existence. The subject of his performance-based works is the experience of the viewer. The artist creates gestures that interfere with perceptions of the art object and expectations of human interaction. Committed to the immaterial in his work, Sehgal choreographs performances with "interpreters" that disrupt the public's movement through space by involving or creating a spectacle for the viewer.

Two of his works were presented at the Guggenheim New York in 2010, *This Progress*, 2006 and *The Kiss*, 2007 the first taking place on the ramp up from the rotunda and the second in the lobby. *The Kiss* was on loan from the Museum of Modern Art,<sup>43</sup> and it consisted of two "interpreters" writhing around re-enacting embraces from well-known paintings and sculptures, although not specifically mentioned in the exhibition.<sup>44</sup> *The Kiss* created a spectacle and certainly drew a crowd who, before realizing the artifice, felt somewhat uncomfortable; their sensibilities stretched by the somewhat exuberant display of affection taking place before them. However, it is the second work, *This Progress*, that has endured the convolution of time and space since I first encountered it.

*This Progress* relies on the mental and physical participation of the viewer to shape the work. Upon beginning the journey up the Guggenheim's iconic ramp, the visitor is greeted by a young child who asks of you, "what is progress?" While answering the child

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43 Alexander B. D. Kauffman, "Tino Sehgal," *Border Crossings* 29, no. 2 (2010).97

44 Ibid.

politely, to one's best ability when handling such a broad but complex topic, you were lead to another point up the ramp and handed over to a slightly older child. The journey and conversation continued like this up the ramp, and finished with an intellectual exchange on what progress is with an elderly adult. The influence and affect of *This Progress* was the unique encounter and conversation of each individual.

This is how Sehgal's work exists. It exists as a movement, the gesture of a human interaction within the frame of an architectural space. Sehgal does not allow for any material trace of his work to exist. He sells his work, but only by oral agreement, there are no contracts, certificates or written transcripts of his concepts. Upon buying one of his works the museum, gallery or collector cannot hold or produce any reproductions of his work. Most often Sehgal's work is described as a reaction against a market driven society (the art world included) targeted at the production, circulation and sale of goods<sup>45</sup> because its immateriality is its most prominent point of difference.

Although, when considering the immateriality of Sehgal's practice in relation to that of Fontana's spatial gesture, it is possible to read *This Progress* as a large orchestrated spatial gesture. The gesture disrupts the viewer's expectation of the art institution and the artwork. No longer a passive spectator,<sup>46</sup> Sehgal's performances place the viewer at centre stage. His orchestrated performance is a movement in time like so many encounters experienced each day, but this time we are asked to reflect on that relationship, give it value and to let the experience it provokes exist eternally in space. By denying the trace of material, the form of Sehgal's work merges harmoniously with content. Both are experienced as a simultaneous encounter. The fact that the encounter is presented within the frame of a gallery or museum offers the viewer a space ready for the contemplation of that encounter, and it offers the enduring resonance of its meaning to permeate the viewer's memory and lived space.

The ephemeral condition of gesture explored by Fontana and Sehgal can be shared with materials. By removing acrylic paint from the support of a surface, the paint continues

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45 Exhibition description from the Guggenheim New York "Tino Sehgal," accessed 09/04/2012

[www.guggenheim.org/new-york/exhibitions/past/exhibit/3305](http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/exhibitions/past/exhibit/3305)

46 Ibid.

its movement over time. My work *Believer#1*, 2011 (figure 19) is, “brought to life”<sup>47</sup> by exposing the vulnerabilities of the material. The work is an enclosed woven structure made out acrylic paint cast into strings. The process of making the strings is devoid of expression, reliant instead on the methodical and unpredictable process of simply squeezing the paint out of the tube. Once the paint dries the acrylic strings are woven around a wire frame held taught by rocks. The process of weaving is a slow and repetitive, performance-like process, controlled from its conception as an idea as well as in the time and care taken in its delivery. The dried paint and its woven form are the result of a methodical action. This control is countered by subtleties of the paint’s viscosity (in the squeezing) when wet as well as its fragility when dry. The unpredictability of acrylic paint’s materiality when used without support pervades the final work with an element of chance. The strands of paint buckle under their own weight because of its material density, but although it is dense, the paint is also fragile and can snap when under too much pressure. For acrylic paint to exist with its weaknesses and strengths on display allows gesture to amalgamate with matter in a way that breathes life into the material.

The Japanese collective The Gutai Group, formed in 1954 and dissolved in 1972 with the death of one of its co-founders Jiro Yoshihara (b. Japan 1905), engaged with their materials and the notions of chance and gesture to make their works. The Gutai’s performances and actions are attributed with the accolade of being the precursors to the *Happenings* in New York of the 1960’s, pre-empting the work of American painter and performance artist Alan Kaprow (b. USA 1927).<sup>48</sup> The Gutai are most noted for their elaborate actions and performances that exemplified the ambiguity between violence and whimsy through a struggle with materials,<sup>49</sup> as illustrated by Sabura Murakami’s (b. Japan 1925) *Paper Breakthrough*, 1956 (figure 20) in which the artist pushes through a paper screen. This struggle with materials is also evident in Kazuo Shiraga’s (b. Japan 1924) performance *Struggle with Clay*, 1955 (figure 21) that harnesses an interaction with the material by the artist plunging his semi naked body into a pile of clay and

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47 Kee, Joan Situating a Singular Kind of ‘Action’: Early Gutai Painting, 1954 -1957 Oxford Art Journal Vol. 26 No. 2 2003.136

48 J. Roberts, "PAINTING AS PERFORMANCE + THE JAPANESE GUTAI GROUP," Art in America 80, no. 5 (1992).

49 Joan Kee, "Situating a Singular Kind of 'Action' : Early Gutai Painting, 1954 - 1957," Oxford Art Journal 26, no. 2 (2003).133

## Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space

wrestling with it. Shiraga, “saw the clay as having a life or spirit of its own with which he had to do battle.”<sup>50</sup>



Figure 19. Karena Keys  
*Believer #1*, 2011 Woven acrylic paint,  
wire and found rocks,  
300cm x 120cm x 180cm  
Collection of the artist

This exchange between the body and the material also appeared in the paintings by artists in the group. Shozo Shimamoto (b. Japan 1928) would create paintings by throwing bottles of paint on the canvas or paper laid out on the floor (figure 22). Within this process, there is an ambiguity between control and freedom; the artist controls aspects of the work like the colour and scale but then the paint forms a mark as the result of a fervent action. The paint is informed by the artist's action but ultimately falls wherever it may land.

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50 Roberts, "PAINTING AS PERFORMANCE + THE JAPANESE GUTAI GROUP."

Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 20. Saburo Murakami  
*Paper Breakthrough* 1956  
Performed at the second  
Gutai Art Exhibition, Ohara,  
Kaikan, Tokyo



Figure 21. Kazuo Shiraga *Challenging Mud* 1955 Performed at the first Gutai Art Exhibition, Ohara, Kaikan,  
Tokyo





Figure 22. Shozo Shimamoto  
*Making a painting by throwing  
bottles of paint* 1956 Performed  
at the second Gutai Art  
Exhibition, Ohara, Kaikan,  
Tokyo

In 2006 I made a series of paintings for which I stretched folded piles of dry acrylic paint around a Perspex support. *Painting with Holes (Blue)* (figure 23) indicates a struggle with my material, relying on my strength and energy combined with the unpredictable subtleties of the dry paint to create the form. These works had to be executed quickly. The lump of dry paint would be warmed in the sun or with a heater until it was suitably malleable. Once it could easily be manipulated there was a small window of opportunity to stretch it onto the Perspex. Adding to the pressure is the fact that once the acrylic cooled down on the Perspex surface it was stuck, for good, leaving no room for adjustments. I set myself up to do battle with the acrylic paint; the gestures associated with painting are always in liquid terms, splatter, spill, brushstroke, drip, in its wet form the acrylic paint gives little resistance. Intensifying my output of energy when maneuvering the paint was a way of extracting its material nature.

Shimamoto's energy of execution allows the paint the freedom to react to the drive of its own viscosity enabling it to have a life of its own, if only briefly. I allowed the paint that freedom when I poured it, and then again after it dried. But, because of its stable support once I had finished interacting with the paint, once the action was over, the painting was

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more like a documentation of the moment of life. In an article on early Gutai painting in 2003, Joan Kee writes:

*“Early Gutai paintings that relied on pouring, smashing, or throwing paint thus resembled a flurry of exclamation points on canvas, an apt metaphor as the paintings were sudden, intense, but short lived. They brought material to life, but the resuscitation period was but momentary.”*<sup>51</sup>

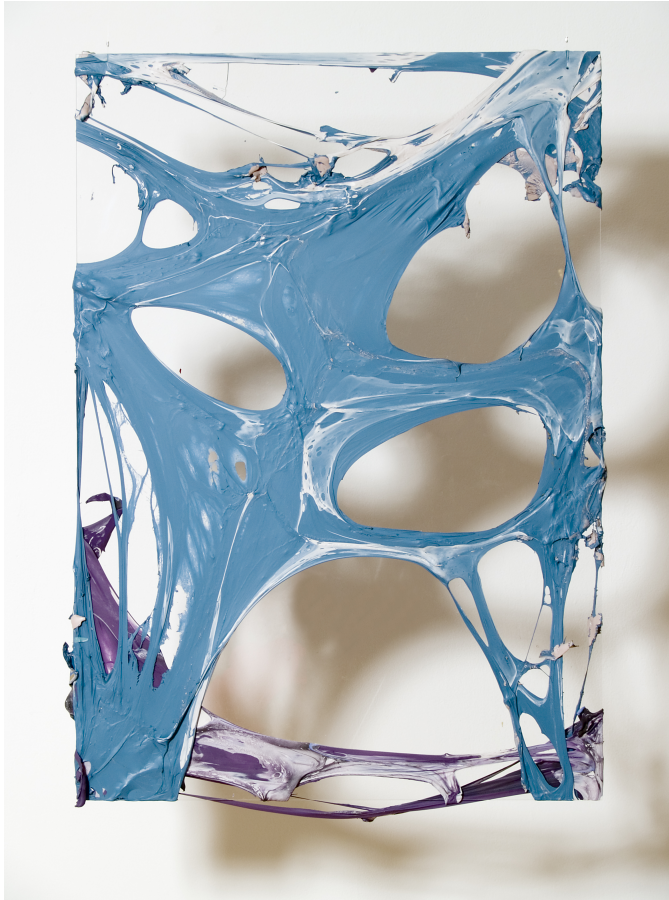


Figure 23. Karena  
*Keys Painting with  
Holes (blue)* 2006  
Stretched acrylic  
paint on Perspex,  
100cm x 70cm  
Collection of the artist

*Believer#1* is a steady exchange of energy between the acrylic paint and gesture. The complete removal of a surface support lengthens the paint’s “resuscitation”, and also slows it down. The process of squeezing the acrylic paint into strips and weaving is slow, much slower than the furious actions of the Gutai, but nevertheless an action, or even a performance. There is a reciprocal passing of energy while squeezing the paint strings, while manipulating the material in its dry state, and again while struggling with the “misuse” of the acrylic paint. The Gutai artist’s resuscitation of paint was momentary. By

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<sup>51</sup> Kee, “Situating a Singular Kind of ‘Action’: Early Gutai Painting, 1954 - 1957.”

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slowing down my action and the removal of a canvas support, the paint is given a longer life. Its strengths and frailties as a material continue in movement over time, when it slumps, tears or collapses. The paint's continual motion and the ability for the work to change when installed in different locations means that it is not hindered by its material form. It is able to evolve and change through space and time.

## CONCLUSION

This enquiry was guided by the affect of many of the Pre-Renaissance paintings that I saw in Europe, and more recently in Canberra. It was an enquiry not into what those paintings made me “feel”, but rather how a painting could engage the “felt dimension,” especially a painting so locked in painting’s tradition. This investigation has revealed that the “felt dimension” and an artwork’s spatiality share cause and affect.

Before taking on this research, I now admit, I had a narrow outlook on how painting could engage with space. The works I made were three-dimensional objects that could sit in space away from the wall so they could occupy the same space as the viewer, but as this research has uncovered, this is not the extent of creating a spatial artwork. My discovery can be best illustrated by Lucio Fontana’s manifestos, when he announced that objects and forms are impotent within spatial dialogues. Fontana claimed that, “*A form (..)occupies space...but this is not a means for the conquest of space...no form can be spatial.*”<sup>52</sup>

The painting of the *Madonna and Child* (Duccio di Buoninsegna, ca. 1300) is a spatial artwork. It is spatial because its gesture is eternal, because the work affects the viewer beyond a material encounter. Tino Sehgal’s work, *This Progress*, after it has been seen, exists within memory and experience, as a gesture through time, the affect of the work leaving a lasting impression on the viewer regardless of its immateriality. Although it has a static physicality, the *Madonna and Child* exists as a gesture and a moment in time, like Sehgal’s work, through its affect. The painting, its depicted forms, its materiality, physical presence and other spatial qualities amalgamate to create the affective dimension, revealing that affect is the cohesion of all the qualities within our experience of space as well as the quality that makes an artwork truly spatial.

This research has further revealed that there are few aesthetic guidelines when inhabiting a dialogue with space. One common thread shared between the works discussed is painting’s continued dialogue with the tension between real experience, real space, and picture space and illusion to create affect. The dialogue between reality and

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52 White, “TV and Not TV: Lucio Fontana’s Luminous Images in Movement.”<sup>12</sup>

illusion is a privilege of the painting tradition because of its two-dimensional heritage. It was uncovered by this enquiry that the way that artists use that tradition has evolved. What seems to have persevered is the tension that those polarities ensue and their integral role in a work's spatiality, and therefore its affect. Hans Hofmann's painting *Pre-Dawn* is a two-dimensional plane that offers an illusion of space. That illusory experience interacts with reality through the assertion of the paint's tactility and the movement of *push pull*. Katharina Grosse on the other hand uses the language created by painting's pictorial space to absorb our reality into an illusory space in order to unsettle the viewer through the transformation of our established spatial reasoning.

It seems that for a work to affect the viewer an artist must balance the opposition of reality and illusion so that the work is a field where polarities co-exist and interact. When considering the body as the meeting place for the psyche and soma as Elizabeth Grosz did, comparisons can be made with an artwork. A possible connection is discovered when relating the dynamics of the picture plane to her investigation. Grosz' notion that the body navigates our lived space as the place of interaction between our external and internal experience reveals a commonality shared between our lived bodies and how the interaction of reality and illusion within an artwork navigates a spatial dialogue. This view makes it possible to consider how a work of art becomes the "body" for notions of our spatial experience: real, depicted and metaphysical, it allows for their interaction. This implies that the interplay between spatial notions means that an artwork, like the body, "*is neither while also being both*"<sup>53</sup> and so connects to our greater experience of being.

This oppositional relationship and its importance to an engagement with space and affect is further established by its ability to involve the subjectivity of the viewer. Eva Hesse believed that contradiction allowed for an independence from established reference points as well as established forms, and regarded this oppositional dynamic as "*non, nothing.*" Hesse used contradictory elements inherent to her material as well as her dialogue with painting and sculpture to simultaneously create forms that in effect are free from their form, while simultaneously adhering to established aesthetic languages. This simultaneous freedom and appeasement of aesthetics allows for an encounter with her work that transcends the purely intellectual and becomes visceral.

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53 Grosz, *Volatile bodies : toward a corporeal feminism*.<sup>23</sup>

When looking at Lucio Fontana's form without form in relation to Bois' essay *Qualities (Without)* it is possible to consider the importance that the *non* plays in a work's spatial engagement. A visceral encounter places the viewer at center stage by opening questions of perception and knowledge, so the work exists both in the viewer's conscious and subconscious. This establishes the work as spatial because it is a gesture unencumbered by time or space or its impermanence as matter. As a result, the encounter with, and impact of, the work remains present and exists regardless of the world's relentless state of flux.

The Pre-Renaissance paintings I viewed in Germany demanded that I redress my assumptions of painting and what I perceived as limitations of the pictorial condition. The spatial constructs set up by painting – its premise as an illusory space, its position on a wall and its surface relationship to the viewer – are elements of a painting's two-dimensionality, but are also elements of its three-dimensional manifestation. Although aesthetically painting may make a departure from canvas and rendered brushstroke, its dialogue with space continues to rotate within the same fundamental framework. The Madonna and Child engage with the spatial constructs formalized within painting to create a cohesive and affective impression within space, just as the works of Katharina Grosse or Eva Hesse do.

*We will never disappear?* is the studio component of the Master of Fine Art. This series of works consists of five sculptural paintings that are grouped together within the gallery. Each work is made of acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread and suspended from the ceiling centrally positioned within the gallery space. *We will never disappear?* solidifies the outcomes of my research by engaging with the oppositional forces of binary pairs. It is my intention that this engagement unlocks the *affective dimension*, and, therefore establishes the spatiality of the artwork.

After writing my paper there were reoccurring words that were circling around my head. Words like – there were words like tension, contradiction, body, internal, external, nothing, non, material, real and illusion. It is these words that have infiltrated and informed the resulting creative works.

When beginning to make these works, I felt it conceited to assume that I could make truly spatial work, works that would incite an affect on a viewer. After all I cannot control what people see or what people think, and as my research revealed, it is the internal dialogue of the viewer, the dialogue that is triggered by an artwork, that is of the utmost importance in a spatial practice. But what I did feel that I could do was engage with those words, those characteristics that through my research and analysis of other artists work seemed to open up to me the affective dimension and an artwork's spatiality.

Body. Contradiction. The body does inform my work, both in regards to scale and sometimes its form. *We will never disappear?* is a series of works that allude to the physical human form but do not replicate it. Each artwork could be described as resembling a figure in mid gesture or engaged in movement, or even clothing or fabric revealing the shape of what it once contained. However, like my previous works that I have discussed in this paper it is not my intention for these works to "look" like anything. They are not modeled on existing objects or people hoping to replicate the world. That is not to say that I am adverse to associations being made. In fact that is my hope. I do not feel that I should dictate what my work means; instead these works hope to invite an individual reading. The physicality of these works are informed by the body, but I do not intend for them to be attached to it. Instead, their relationship to the body offers a tangible point that the work can be engaged with.

The form of a figure is hinted to in the work *We will never disappear? (rose gold)* 2012 (figure 25), but is left unfinished. It stands tall slightly taller than the average viewer but is relative in scale to the body. A single rectangular piece of tissue and acrylic paint reaches down towards the ground like a leg. On the right side of the work half way up there is an outstretched piece of paint that is suspended like an arm reaching out while at its top there is a blue section of paint that comes out at a right angle from the gold surface as though it were a hood or shroud. These phrases and terms like body, arm and shroud serve as ways to describe the work but because they only allude to a form that connection to the body simultaneously falls away because it is incomplete. Like Hesse's work *Contingent* 1969 and *Right After* 1969 it is this contradiction that can create the freedom for work to be "non", "nothing". In being a form that cannot be inextricably recognized or linked to something from lived experience the artwork can be anything.



Internal. External. These two words combine to manifest in their meeting place. Surface. Surface is the meeting of the internal and external. For human beings that meeting place is our bodies and specifically skin. For an artwork, that meeting place is its surface. More than ever before, when making *We will never disappear?*, I was considering surface, and it was because of my interaction with the Pre-Renaissance paintings. Each work in this series is made either using acrylic paint on its own or combined with tissue paper. When I use tissue paper with paint I completely soak the paper in the acrylic paint so that it becomes a flexible, strengthened “fabric” like material that retains the features that I enjoy when working with paint three dimensionally. This choice of material allows me the maximum amount of flexibility when manipulating the painted surface and does not interfere with the qualities of the paint that I wish to exploit. By creating a “fabric” like material to make a three-dimensional form, I am at once celebrating and denying that surface. I make a painting that I will subsequently cut up and rearrange, and then allow that painted surface to inform the final form that the work takes. *We will never disappear (pearl white)* 2012 (figure 26) is the only work in the series that is made only of one piece of acrylic paint that has been sewn with darts and pleats to create its form. It is a flat surface that is lifted up and manipulated to become a form that has an interior and exterior that share the same surface. The painting is the surface and the form.

Material. Real. Illusion. Material and materiality is perhaps one of the most important characteristics of how an artwork can engage with space. Materiality informs the tactile encounter which can link immediately to lived experience through how something feels and where you have felt it before, while the tension between what is real and illusion opens that perception up for questioning. I use metallic paints a lot within my practice and it is especially prevalent within *We will never disappear?* Within this series of works I use metallic paints because of its link to the work of the Pre-Renaissance and the implied value that it imbues as well as the reasons already discussed in this paper like its ability to continually pull the viewer’s gaze back to the surface. But my use of metallic paint is also important when considering how reality and illusion interact. By using gold and silver and variations between, as in the piece *We will never disappear? (pearl)* 2012 (figure 27), a struggle is encountered. The methods I engage when using my chosen materials results in their inevitably draping and folding in an organic fashion. As well as this the acrylic paint and tissue sags and tears making the work seem fragile and ephemeral. By using colours and finishes that replicate metal it is possible for these seemingly transient works to simultaneously give the impression of strength and

longevity or even to give the impression of archaeological finds. Materials are the real and tangible aspect of the work, but how those materials interact with reality and illusion inform potential readings of the work by linking it to lived experience.

Tension. Non. Nothing. One of the most important characteristics in creating a spatial artwork as evidenced by this research is tension. I arrived at the resulting five forms, by creating the acrylic or acrylic and tissue paper “fabric” first in large sheets. I would then hang it up in my studio and move it and maneuver it until a form began to emerge. I would let the materials guide me. However, just as described with the work of the Gutai Group, this becomes a balancing act between the artist’s intention and the materials inherent qualities. *We will never disappear? (silver)* 2012 (figure 28) was a work that I particularly struggled with. I would sew it together and it would tear; I would hang it up and it would droop unexpectedly, I would fold it and turn it and struggle with it until a balance was reached. This was a physical battle between my intention and the behavior of the material. But beyond the physical tension within an artworks creation, it has become clear that it is the tension created between its binary pairing of elements that ultimately informs its affect and spatiality. When these pairings are simultaneously evident and then negated by its counter element, a tension is created in the work. The artwork reverberates within a field of being and not being, relying on the viewer to join the dots and be offered the space for individual reading and experience. This individual reading is essentially its affect. The interplay between real and illusion, material and immaterial, internal and external, strength and fragility are just some of the elements that an artwork can engage, but most importantly it is what happens when they meet that affects its spatiality.

As I mentioned above, I felt it was contrived to set about to make work that hopes to elicit affect and influence the space of the viewer. That has not changed. I can, however hope to make work that is non that is nothing by simultaneously drawing on elements then crossing each one out to create forms that allow space for the viewer to exist in and around it.

The works I have made during this research period have made a subtle but important shift. Until now, I have unwaveringly considered paint the focus of my practice, and have not allowed for that focus to shift. This research has loosened that standpoint through the recurring theme of equilibrium. That in order to engage with space a work’s

physicality or object-ness must be balanced simultaneously with the negation of those elements. Reflecting on the works discussed in this paper each artist has used the nuance of binary pairs to affect the space of the viewer. The affective dimension may, “*be felt fairly immediately*”<sup>54</sup> but that immediate response is only possible by a subtle interplay of oppositional forces, like Eva Hesse’s material juxtapositions, or Hoffman’s use of colour, texture and shape. The variety of works examined tells of the flexibility within oppositional dialogues. What has been consistent is that the tension that results from those oppositions, whether material or conceptual, is able to incite an engagement with the viewer’s lived space affirming painting as inherently a, “*spatial and spatializing*”<sup>55</sup> practice. The question is no longer, how can that painting engage with space? It is now what affect does that painting have on my space?

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54 Best, Visualizing feeling : affect and the feminine avant-garde.7

55 Kwon, "Promiscuity of Space: Some Thoughts on Jessica Stockholder's Scenographic Compositions."57

Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 24. *We Will Never Disappear?* (Installation) 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread



Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 25. *We Will Never Disappear?* (rose gold) 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread 227cm x 43cm x 50cm Collection of the artist



Figure 26. *We Will Never Disappear (pearl white)* 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread 120cm x 30cm x 25cm Harris Hobbs Collection



Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 27. *We Will Never Disappear? (pearl)* 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread 95cm x 50cm x 50cm Collection of the artist



Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 28. *We Will Never Disappear?* (silver) 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread 160cm x 52cm x 50cm Collection of the artist

Paint: It is Preoccupation with Space



Figure 29. *We Will Never Disappear? (rose)* 2012 Acrylic paint, tissue paper and cotton thread 138cm x 50cm  
55cm Collection of the artist



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